



River Road Study Committee May 18, 2016

MEETING NOTES

Committee Members
Select Chair Ben Franco
Dick Benka
Alan Christ
Chris Dempsey
Steve Heikin
Brian Hochleutner
Yvette Johnson
Ken Lewis
Wendy Machmuller
Hugh Mattison
Tom Nally
Marilyn Newman
Mariah Nobrega
Charles Osborne
Linda Pehlke
Bill Reyelt
Daniel Weingart

Committee Members Present: Ben Franco, Dick Benka, Alan Christ, Ken Lewis, Wendy Machmuller, Tom Nally, Mariah Nobrega, Linda Olson Pehlke, Bill Reyelt, Steve Heikin, Daniel Weingart

Hugh Mattison, Chris Dempsey, Brian Hochleutner, Yvette Johnson, Marilyn Newman, Charles Osborne

Staff: Andy Martineau

Guests: *The Town's Real Estate Financial Consultant, Pam McKinney and several residents were present*

Committee members met from 7:00pm to 10:00 pm

Materials: *agenda, draft minutes, Pam McKinney Preliminary Analysis Powerpoint, Andy Martineau Decision Points Powerpoint*

Ben Franco opened the meeting by welcoming Pam McKinney and reminding the Committee that Pam has spent the last few weeks analyzing the mix of uses and massing envelope the Committee voted to try and stay within.

Andy Martineau stated that the other goal for the evening is for the Committee to discuss a number of key decision points related to zoning criteria for parking, height, massing and public benefits.

1. Review and Approve Meeting Minutes

- The minutes from 5/4/16 were approved as amended.

2. Review and discussion with Pam McKinney, Financial Consultant for the Town, regarding preliminary analysis of potential redevelopment scenarios

General Analysis and Hotel Discussion:

- Pam McKinney stated that she reviewed the most recent version of the Claremont proposal and the discussion draft pro formas the Committee has developed around some of proposed uses and scale the Committee has been modeling.
- Pam stated that the pro formas developed by the Committee were "spot on" with respect to the assumptions surrounding the anticipated costs of development and the scale required to incentivize redevelopment of the other parcels in the district.

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- Pam stated that her analysis was also based on the context and physical constraints of the site and that matching some of the proposed uses to this site is challenging.
- Pam stated that medical and general office are unlikely uses given the physical constraints of the site and some of the surrounding competition for medical office, however, they should not be taken out of consideration for the overlay zoning.
- Pam stated that the market for select service hotels is much stronger than the market for full service hotels, which are typically found in an urban core, and boutique hotels that are often adaptive reuses of existing buildings.
- Pam stated that an appropriate parking ratio for a hotel in this area is likely within the .3 to .5 per room range depending on proximity to the urban core and that going below .4 spaces per room would be risky at 25 Washington Street.
- Pam stated that Claremont's proposal is the right brand, location and room number for a select service hotel product.
- Pam stated that a companion hotel on the sites next to Claremont's proposal may be a logical use given that the Committee has been exploring utilizing shared ramp access for both properties.

Committee Questions/Comments:

- Is it typical for a hotel like this to have all of the parking inside the building?
- *Pam – The parking needs to be on site. There needs to be some ownership/control over the parking supply to satisfy the lenders financing the project. The pending garage that is part of the Children's Hospital development across the street could serve as a great safety valve if there are additional parking demand beyond the supply. The zoning might include provisions for shared parking and other options to secure parking through other means.*
- Is it typical for a select service hotel to reduce their parking needs by utilizing valet service?
- *Pam – Valet service is not commonly offered with select service hotels. It is more common with full service and in some cases boutique hotels that offer more amenities and serve different clientele for functions and events. They are able to charge more for all of those services and usually pass the cost onto guests. As it relates to this project, the zoning should allow for alternative approaches to parking versus requiring them.*
- The residences at Village Way often rent surplus parking spaces out to non-residents.
- *Pam - The Coolidge Corner Marriott parking ratio would be the same as what Claremont is proposing (.4 per room) if the developer had not been required to replace the surface parking spaces that were on the lot. My advice to the Committee is not to think only in terms of the number of room keys or parking*

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spaces, but to think about the form/mass of the building that is reasonable for development to happen and that is also acceptable to the community. Medical office is not only a challenging use for any of these sites, it is also more parking intensive. Again do not rule it out given the proximity to the LMA, but consider how some of the other uses you are exploring have lesser parking impacts.

Age Restricted Housing Discussion:

- Pam stated that the market for senior housing products is strong as more people are retiring and want to live in areas with amenities. The study area offers proximity to transit, the LMA, and a commercial area all of which make it an attractive location.
- Pam cautioned the Committee against crafting the zoning such that it would limit age restricted projects to only a portion of the age restricted market such as only those over 62 or for very specific redevelopment products.
- Pam stated that parking requirements for age restricted projects will vary as those around 55 are likely still driving and may want a place to store their car versus an older demographic that may not have a car and therefore will not need parking. Pam stated that depending on the target demographic a ratio of 0.5 - 1.0 would work in this area.

Micro Unit/Co-Work Space Discussion:

- Pam stated that micro unit and live work developments are attractive for developers and consumers as the dollars per SF allow for scale that is buildable while providing a reasonable cost to consumers.
- Pam stated that there are likely few other locations where this kind of project would work given its proximity to transit and Brookline Village.
- Pam stated that a parking ratio of .5 spaces per unit would be sufficient given the likelihood that the people that would choose to live in such a small space likely may not have a car. Offering zipcar, bike parking and bike sharing could help lessen required parking.
- A Co-working space, or maker-space on the ground floor could be an attractive amenity to the micro-unit residences above.

Ground Floor Retail Discussion:

- Pam stated that generic ground floor retail would likely be challenging in this area as it is removed from the Brookline Village commercial district and there are few synergies with the surrounding uses.
- Pam stated that a destination restaurant, café or small convenience store are more likely to locate here with some success.
- Pam stated that any retail would likely want to be oriented closer to the hotel and shared work spaces.

Committee Questions/Comments:

- Would a destination restaurant or small café really work here?

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- *Pam – Yes, think of La Morra as an example or a café servicing the hotel and co-work space. The hotel is the anchor that unlocks the potential for these other sites and uses. There are synergies between hotels and smaller residential units and age restricted developments. The hotel enhances the chances of redevelopment on the other sites.*
- How would the parking for a destination restaurant work in this area?
- *Pam – The key for that use is being able to provide proximate parking, again think of La Morra which has no parking and is thriving. My advice at it relates to the zoning is to again allow for shared parking between uses at a reasonable ratio.*
- What is the synergy between the LMA and the different hotel products in the area, could another hotel realistically locate here?
- *Pam – I could easily see another smaller hotel locating next to 25 Washington Street, perhaps something like a limited service hotel that has different format, but not necessarily a more intensive parking requirement.*
- How does the on-street parking that is often empty factor into this analysis?
- *Pam- Available on-street parking satisfy the need for short term temporary parking for some retail and related uses.*
- Is a first floor height of 15' reasonable?
- *Pam - It would be unusual to see a first floor height below 15' given the uses you have mixed uses you have been exploring. 15' allows for greater flexibility.*
- This is a high visibility area. The public aspect of maker/artists spaces goes well here.
- What kind of incentives can we offer for the specific uses we have been exploring?
- *Pam – Washington Street is the logical location for height and density given the surrounding buildings and that it is workable on the parcel. The Committee has some ability to decide where/how to shift the massing.*
- Should parking count as part of the FAR?
- *Pam – If you count parking in FAR you force developers to go higher up. This Committee has been taking more of a form-based approach to zoning. Counting parking in FAR may force taller heights beyond what is acceptable. FAR zoning gives a less predictable outcome. It would be better to decide on a building form that is acceptable.*
- Is 175 rooms the “sweet spot” for the hotel and would the project no longer be viable with fewer rooms?
- *Pam – 175 is the sweet spot in terms of the typical number of rooms for this kind of hotel. There is likely a range where the hotel is a viable project, but we are talking +/-10 keys.*
- The height of the hotel seems too tall and there is not enough open space
- *Pam – One way to encourage more open spaces is to allow for taller thinner buildings. Buildings that are shorter and fatter do not necessarily equate to having more open space.*

3. Discussion of Preliminary Zoning Criteria

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- Prior to beginning a discussion of the preliminary zoning criteria, Andy Martineau clarified an earlier statement from Pam McKinney related to the impacts on potential development as a result of the FEMA 100 year flood zone. Andy stated that the small town-owned parcel and a portion of the Brookline Ice and Coal site that does not currently have a building on it have limited redevelopment potential as they cannot be substantially built upon without compensating for the lost volume of floodwater storage that would be displaced with new ground floor construction in areas that currently have no building on them.
- Andy stated that parcels in the flood zone that currently have buildings on them can be redeveloped on the ground floor.

- Andy Martineau stated that now that the Committee has a sense of the scale and viability of the uses they have been exploring, that the group needs to begin discussing specific zoning criteria related to parking, height, public benefits and treatments to River Road.

River Road Treatments:

- Andy gave a brief overview of some of the options the Committee has been discussing related to making the street one way, narrowing it down and incorporating more trees and landscaping.
- Andy stated that the traffic study done during the planning phase for the Emerald Necklace Crossing showed significantly more vehicle trips heading north during peak hours.
- Andy stated that as part of the Emerald Necklace Crossing project that the off ramp from the Riverway will be closed at the northern end of River Road.
- Andy suggested that given the volume of trips going north on River Road, the need to preserve some reasonable circulation and access for both the existing businesses and prospective future developments that narrowing down River Road versus making it one way may be a more practical solution.

Committee Comments/Questions:

- What about making the easement an extension of Pearl Street?
- That idea is in conflict with the public realm vision the Committee has been discussing.
- The easement is for a storm water pipe. The Town would likely have to modify the conditions surrounding the easement to also include building a road which could be challenging legally and logistically.

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- The left turn from Brookline Ave into the hotel parking entrance seems impractical. Keeping River Road one way and requiring cars to circulate around seems more logical.
- River Road is an important release valve for traffic in this area.
- The 320 north bound trips are likely cut-through traffic. I don't have a problem with the light traffic going to and from businesses, but we should try to discourage the cut-through traffic through narrowing and slowing traffic.

Public Realm Discussion:

- Andy Martineau stated that there is a clear preference to soften the edges of the proposed hotel via street trees and landscaping, wider sidewalks etc.
- Andy stated that those are all items that can be incorporated into the zoning, however, the Committee need to consider the impacts the cycle track that is now part of the Gateway East intersection improvements will have on landscaping and sidewalk widths along Washington Street.
- Andy stated that between the driving lane buffer, and cycle track there will already be a substantial distance between pedestrians and vehicles along Washington Street.
- Andy also stated that the Committee has been discussing setback requirements and that an alternative approach to setbacks could be as simple as requiring them only as necessary to achieve the desired uniform sidewalk widths for the district.

Committee Questions/Comments:

- Could the cycle track be narrowed to allow for more sidewalk?
- *Andy- Cycle tracks typically have a standard width.*
- A 4' buffer between the cycle track and vehicle lane seems like a lot.

Parking Discussion

- Andy Martineau stated that the Committee has heard from Pam that many of the uses that we have been exploring could be viable with lower parking requirements on this site.
- Andy stated that having a minimum for specific uses while employing an overall cap is one option for making sure that some parking is available for the projects while not building too much.

Committee Questions/Comments:

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- Several Committee members expressed a preference for no minimum parking requirement.
- Several Committee members expressed a preference for having minimums for specific uses, but that having a maximum for the district could be dangerous for potential future developments.
- What about not having any parking requirement min or max?
- Andy – Not having any parking requirement could be challenging as there is no predictability for a developer or the town with respect to what the right amount of parking may be. This not only could be challenging to pass through town meeting it also puts more of the onus on the Planning Board and ZBA to do more robust site plan review.
- The Planning Board may not be the most appropriate body to determine the right amount of parking for projects. When major impact projects come in, we require a traffic study and there are some firms more reputable than others, but the Planning Board may not be the right Board to decide on what the right ratio is.
- If parking is included in the FAR than there should not be artificial parking requirements. The town should not substitute its judgement for that of the marketplace.
- If there are no parking requirements and the result is not enough supply, there is a concern about spill out into the surrounding neighborhoods.
- Max parking is a means to make sure the area does not become a parking garage.
- Having parking regulations makes sense; we just need to make sure they are flexible enough so they do not prohibit development.

Public Comments/Questions:

- What would the form of the other uses the Committee has been exploring look like on the hotel site?
- The Committee needs to make sure that any redevelopment here adds vitality to the neighborhood.