

Minutes

Urban Design & Massing Subcommittee

May 25, 2021 12:30 PM

Held remotely via Zoom

Subcommittee members (in attendance noted by Y/N):

John VanScoyoc, Chair	Y	Tom Nally	Y
Joe Gaudino	Y	Carlos Ridruejo	N
Deborah Brown	Y	Mark Zarrillo	Y
Wendy Friedman	N		

Staff present: Kara Brewton

Guests: Jennifer Gilbert, anonymous call-in listener

Meeting materials included: Agenda for 5/25/21 meeting; Presentation from Mark Zarrillo (5/25/21) including “Summary of Investigations.jpg” – overlay of existing land use with 10 proposed subdistricts.

Kara Brewton opened the meeting remotely via Zoom, noting that the meeting was being held remotely due to COVID and was being recorded. She had asked Mark to share specific recommendations for the eastern part of the corridor (east of Homewood Suites and the Old Lincoln School).

Mark Zarrillo presented a slide illustrating 10 potential subdistricts for the corridor. He noted that he was thinking about the variety of existing uses and the sky plane concept established for the Davis Path district, and thought that in order to spur development in areas 8 and 9 [east of Homewood Suites and VIP Tires & Service at 128 Boylston St.], that a zoning envelope could be established that within any uses would be permitted as of right, independent of FAR. Additionally, he thought that guidelines could be established for each of the 10 subdistricts.

John VanScoyoc thanked Mark for this work, noting that it was very helpful to think of these 10 different subdistricts separately, as we could think of some parts of the corridor where change is not necessarily as called for as others.

Deborah Brown liked that this concept responded to her earlier comment of trying to streamline the permitting so that it doesn't have to take three to five years. Combined with significant changes to Boylston Street, this would make a real difference. What if Boylston Street just permitted three stories along the whole eastern part of the corridor? She asked what the Cameron Street neighborhood thought of all the existing development occurring in the Cameron Street neighborhood.

Joe Gaudino said that there were likely different opinions and that there would be both negative

and positive impacts. For example, he was glad that housing would be replacing what was a gravel parking lot.

Tom Nally added that during the visioning study a couple years ago, there was discussion that maybe even some locations abutting Walnut Street, that even four stories might be acceptable. But more importantly was how close the new development might be to their property lines, as some of the Walnut Street buildings are also very close to their rear property line. He also added that going up to as much as 5 or 6 stories near Cypress Street might be OK.

Kara Brewton noted that one of the abutters to the muffler shop had noted at an earlier meeting that he was open to some height, but only if there were significant setback from their existing homes. Once significant setback were taken into account, that site is likely not going to see significant change or additional housing, which is OK when we look at the whole corridor other locations where housing could be added appropriately.

Carlos Ridruejo also liked the idea of as-of-right form-based zoning for the eastern part of the corridor. However, he was still hoping that the Committee could incentivize a change of use from auto and industrial uses in the corridor to something else, especially as the Committee is contemplating complete street designs for Boylston Street that would transform the area from highway into a street.

Following further discussion, Carlos suggested that the corridor should be set up so that one has an expectation of either paying an exorbitant amount of money to park or you get used to taking public transportation. Kara Brewton wondered whether that would also be combined with no parking requirement; Carlos agreed. Tom Nally wasn't sure that we could get down to zero parking for residential uses, but agreed it should be minimized.

John VanScoyoc noted that although some properties like the car dealership and UHaul were not likely to change in the near future (independent of Committee actions), that there could be a nice "island of serenity" where traffic is narrowed down to one lane at the Old Lincoln School and park, and then perhaps seeing significant change in the subdistricts labeled 8, 9, and 10.

Joe Gaudino noted that the Town had the most autonomy with its own properties at the park and Old Lincoln School. In addition to the footbridge and park, but the School itself – it seems like there is that very underused wall with big garage doors – could there be a way to make that area more of a destination itself, to encourage foot traffic and improve the streetscape.

Deborah Brown reminded everyone to think about more affordable housing for the corridor as well. Kara and Deborah talked about potentially only permitting more buildable area if there were a higher percentage of affordable units, but neither knew to what extent that would actually be financially feasible.

Carlos Ridruejo thought that transformation would be very likely if we can successfully transform the design of Boylston Street – it could all be very pleasant, and very valuable.

Kara Brewton then gave an overview of the speakers lined up for the public forum: John VanScoyoc, Tom Nally, Wendy Machmuller, and Wendy Friedman. Everyone agreed that the Committee had not yet decided on any specific zoning proposals, but that it would be good to preview some of the proposed development infill ideas for the smaller sites such as the Madris site, Mobil site west of Boylston Place, and the Valvoline – Dunkin’ Donuts sites. Tom noted that we should ask the community about heights and parking in the forum.

Additionally, Kara Brewton noted that even though the Committee was starting to think about what might be appropriate at 10 Brookline Place, there were not likely going to be any recommendations for Fall Town Meeting. However, we might want to include any adjustments needed for the Brookline Housing Authority concepts.

Mark Zarrillo thought it would be helpful to categorize comments at the public forum into improved streetscape, housing, commercial and sustainability.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 1:40 pm.