



River Road Study Committee June 13, 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, Tom Nally, Linda Olson Pehlke, Bill Reyelt, Steve Heikin, Hugh Mattison, Brian Hochleutner, Yvette Johnson, Charles Osborne, Chris Dempsey, Wendy Machmuller, Daniel Weingart

Committee Members Absent: Ken Lewis, Mariah Nobrega, Marilyn Newman
Staff: Andy Martineau

Guests: Consultant to the Town, Pam McKinney and several members of the public were present.

Committee members met from 7:00 pm to 10:30 pm

Materials: agenda, draft minutes, draft zoning document, progress update powerpoint developed by Andy Martineau

1. Review and Approve Meeting Minutes

- The minutes from 6/1/16 were approved as amended.

2. Recap of Committee Work to Date

- Andy Martineau gave a presentation updating members of the public on the progress the Committee has made to date as well as how the RRSC came to be formed.
- Andy observed that the Town's Comprehensive Plan outlines several recommendations specific to Route 9, including the creation of district plans as a mechanism for implementing the overarching comp plan vision, goals and objectives.
- Andy stated that in the summer of 2014, he was approached by a Brookline resident that co-teaches a land use planning practicum course at MIT's graduate school of Urban Studies and Planning about conducting an assessment of Route 9 east.
- Andy stated that at the time, Brookline Place was moving forward, construction at Red Cab had begun and the Gateway East Intersection improvements would be starting soon. Therefore, staff had been discussing potential infill development opportunities for the rest of the area. The students were commissioned to help lead a community visioning study during the fall '15

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semester that was focused on the infill redevelopment potential of Route 9 east. The process included outreach to residents, businesses and property owners as well as two well attended public meetings to present findings and to solicit feedback from the public.

- Several recommendations emerged from the visioning process including the identification of the industrial district as a potential catalyst site for redevelopment as well as recommendations to create an overlay zone that incentivizes and allows for mixed-use redevelopment at the larger scale than is currently permitted under baseline zoning.
- Andy noted that the student team lacked a real estate financial expert and that the students acknowledged both in their presentations and in their final report that additional analysis and refinement of their recommendations is needed.
- Andy stated that during the visioning process, 25 Washington Street (former Gulf Station) was purchased by Claremont Company who is proposing to build a hotel. The comp plans, MIT visioning study, along with the purchase of 25 Washington Street all served as the impetus for creating the River Road study Committee which is charged with establishing zoning overlay criteria for the industrial district.
- Andy gave an overview of the constraints the Committee has observed during their work including, small parcels, a mid-block storm water easement, the discovery that River Road is parkland protected by article 97, and that the northern end of the district is in the FEMA flood zone
- Andy gave an overview of the opportunities the Committee has observed during their work including, implementing a district plan, including elements of the comp plan, strengthening connections with surrounding neighborhoods, creating a gateway to the town (uses, architecture, scale, visual cues), enhancing pedestrian amenities, creating new types of housing for our two fastest growing demographics, generating additional tax revenue
- Andy stated that there needs to be enough financial incentive for the existing property owners to want to do something else with their properties and that the zoning parameters need to be structured to create those incentives and for the types of projects the Community would like to see happen. Nobody is going to knock down a 2-3 story building to build a 4 story building.
- Andy gave a brief overview of the massing options the Committee has been exploring observing that the massing option the Committee voted to explore

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further is effectively the minimum size for any of the uses they have been exploring to be viable.

- Andy gave an overview of some of the key zoning parameters currently included in the draft zoning including minimum lot size, uses, and sidewalk widths and also discussed how those parameters are used to trigger the overlay zoning.
- Andy outlined the next steps for the Committee over the course of the next two months including finalizing the draft zoning and submitting a warrant article for November town meeting.

3. Presentation and Discussion of Analysis by Pam McKinney, Real Estate Consultant for the Town:

- Pam summarized the presentation she gave to the Committee at a public meeting on May 18, including her analysis of the market and financial feasibility of the uses the Committee has been exploring within the.
- Pam noted that this site is an ideal location for a hotel and that the flag, size and type of hotel proposed by Claremont are typical.
- Pam stated that a companion hotel next to the Claremont proposal is a potential use that the Committee initially was not considering, but is something she is starting to see more of in the hotel market and something the Committee should consider as a potential use.
- Pam stated that there is a strong market for hotel and micro unit residential developments in this area and that this location affords some great opportunities for those types of projects given the location and access to transit.
- Pam stated that the market and this area is not sufficient for a lot of ground floor retail, but that a destination restaurant, small café and/or small convenience store could be viable if located next to a hotel and some of the other uses the Committee has been exploring.
- Pam stated that because of the challenges of fitting parking (even at a reduced number) on this site that the uses the Committee has been exploring require somewhere between 6-8 story buildings in order for projects to be viable.
- Pam stated that reduced parking requirements are viable in this location because of the access to transit and because of the uses being explored are less parking intensive.
- Pam cautioned the Committee about imposing parking requirements that were overly restrictive for Senior Housing as doing so would limit the market. 55 year olds have different parking needs than older people that perhaps no longer have a car.

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- Pam reminded the Committee that the proposed parking garage across the street at Brookline Place is not a viable solution to accommodate all of the parking for the district because it is not yet built and the project is currently delayed. The garage, does offer the potential for a safety valve in the future if necessary.
- Pam encouraged the Committee to think about the building form they would like to see and not to focus solely on the number of rooms for the proposed hotel. Consider setbacks on upper floors, massing, materials etc.

Committee Comments/Questions:

- What was the process for deciding any building should be over 80?
- *Andy Martineau – This is the process. The Committee has not voted on any height increase or other zoning criteria yet.*
- Can the rooms be smaller?
- *Pam McKinney- No. The hotel brands set their requirements for room size, amenities etc.*
- Could we eliminate parking in the district all together and locate it in the Brookline Place garage?
- *Pam McKinney – The future presence of a garage at Brookline Place does not preclude parking from being built in this district. It does make it easier because it is another reason you can have lower parking ratios.*
- Ken's pro forma looked at Medical Office of approximately 85' for the middle building. Are the other uses we have been exploring, which have lower parking requirements and potentially lower floor to floor heights viable at a lower height?
- *Pam McKinney – Whether you are talking senior housing, micro units, co-work space or any of the other uses you have been considering for the balance of the site, you are still dealing with massing that includes 1-2 levels of parking sandwiched between the ground floor and the upper floor uses. All of those scenarios necessitate a building in the 6-8 story range in order for them to be worthwhile.*

Public Comment:

- Rob Daves: These are small parcels. There should be incentives for shared parking. I wonder if the town could build and own the parking so there is only one ramp?
- *Andy Martineau stated that it is unlikely that the Town is going to acquire the necessary properties and finance the construction of a parking garage. Andy also*

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stated that the existing zoning allows for the construction of a parking garage and that if that was a viable option, someone would have built it already. Andy also noted that the Committee does not want to incentivize someone to build a standalone parking garage.

- Abby Swain: Did Pam's analysis surrounding the parking ratios for micro units and Sr. Housing account for the proximity to public transit?
- Pam McKinney – *Yes my analysis accounted for proximity to transit. We did some comparison analyses between this location and similar uses located above Park Street Station and the Brighton/Cambridge Area. This location does not offer the same quality access to transit as Park Street does, but it is better than the Brighton/Cambridge area where you might see ratios closer to .75. With respect to the hotel, the parking ratio is not just about location, it's also about the ability to get the project financed.*
- John Bassett: I like the concept of the easement as a public park space and the use of the sky plane zoning concept to minimize shadow impacts on Village Way and the Park.
- Renee Holzosky: The hotel options all appear to be a bit large to me. Has anyone done any analysis of the environmental impacts of development in this area?
- Andy Martineau stated that the Committee conducted a site walk very early in the process with Town Conservation Agent Tom Brady to understand the limitations of redeveloping any of these sites. Andy stated that because much of the district is already developed, that it can be redeveloped. Andy also stated that any project will have to meet state and local requirements and there are considerations for developers to take into account, but that none explicitly preclude redevelopment from happening.
- Frances Shedd Fischer: Do micro units typically attract single parents with one child?
- Pam McKinney: *There is not enough experience in the marketplace to say with great certainty who the typical occupant is. Micro units seem to largely appeal to single tenant households.*
- Frances Shedd Fischer: Could we push developers to target seniors for micro units?
- Pam McKinney: *Apartment style living is best targeted to age restricted markets. Micro units are not sufficiently tested to really say if they will work for seniors or not.*
- Frances Shedd Fischer: Could you describe the second hotel you referenced?

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- *Pam McKinney: The hotel market is starting to see dual brand projects with select service hotels like the one Claremont is proposing next to extended stay hotels like the Homewood Suites. They often share back of the house functions, amenities and parking. I believe that the Committee is exploring a shared ramp scenario with Claremont for the neighboring building, which would make a lot of sense.*
- Arlene Mattison: The size of the Brook House should not be used to measure an appropriate size for the hotel. I would like to understand what makes Brookline unique for this kind of hotel and whether or not we are potentially giving up something by allowing a hotel of the proposed size here versus another use.
- Pam McKinney: The land price is not the driving force behind the size of the hotel. Rather operational characteristics are driving the size of the hotel in terms of the number of rooms and amenities required.
- Faith Michaels: The hotel is too big for the site and should not be compared to the Brook House. The existing businesses should be more involved in the discussion.
- Alice Signore Owner of Brookline Ice and Coal: We understand the desire to make progress in this area and do not want to stand in the way of the Town. We would like to work with the town, but want to make sure that we do not replace ugly with ugly. We want this area to be better than it is.
- Merelice: The Washington Street sidewalk needs to be wide enough so that pedestrians have separation from cyclists. Even with the cycle track, bikes are quiet and can surprise you. This project should enhance the Emerald Necklace
- Tom Nally: The Architecture Subcommittee is working on design guidelines so that future development of the area has a visual connection with the surroundings.

4. Discussion and possible preliminary votes on Draft Zoning Concepts:

- Ben Franco stated that in order for the Committee to continue to make progress and to host a public hearing before the summer season begins, that the Committee needs to begin discussing some of the key zoning criteria in greater detail including how the overlay zone will regulate parking, whether or not FAR will be used as a measure of scale and what the height limitations will be for the district.
- Andy Martineau stated that staff needs this direction from the Committee in order to continue to refine the draft zoning document and so he can put together a presentation for a public hearing at the end of the month.

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- Linda Pehlke stated that FAR is not a predictable means of regulating scale as different uses have different floor height requirements. Additionally, developers feel entitled to the maximum FAR allowable, which does not always equate to an attractive design or better building.
- Dick Benka stated that FAR has been used as a tool in our existing zoning to protect more traditional residential abutters from neighbors that might otherwise overbuild. This area has a different context so the traditional FAR approach may not apply here.
- Several Committee members reiterated their desire to take a form-based approach towards regulating the scale of future buildings in this district and that using FAR is not a preferred method of accomplishing that goal.
- Ben Franco called for a straw vote not to use FAR to regulate the scale of future buildings and for the Committee to authorize staff to further refine the draft zoning document so that FAR is not included.

VOTED: The Committee members present voted unanimously not to use FAR to regulate the scale of future buildings and for the Committee to authorize staff to further refine the draft zoning document so that FAR is not included.

- Andy Martineau introduced parking as the next topic of discussion observing that if the zoning is not going to use FAR as a metric to regulate the size of future buildings, that it will not be possible to regulate parking by counting it an FAR calculation.
- Andy stated that the draft zoning currently reflects all of the ways the Committee has discussed potentially regulating parking including employing a district cap on the total number of parking spaces, using minimum ratios and maximum ratios
- Andy reminded the Committee of the critical discussion point surrounding the importance of having some parking regulation so that both the town and developers have some control and some predictability over parking supply for a project.
- Several Committee members stated that they did not approve of having a number of parking spaces for the district because doing so may preclude future developments if one project builds all of the allowable spaces.
- The Committee asked for Clarification on how the proposed maximum of 220 spaces was calculated.

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- Andy Martineau stated that the 220 number includes the projected number of unit for the age restricted, micro unit and hotel models multiplied by the lower parking ratios suggested by Pam plus a 20% buffer to account for some of the more parking intensive uses the Committee has been exploring.
- Several Committee members reiterated their concerns about a district maximum and suggested that the zoning proposal not use it as a tool to regulate parking.
- Andy Martineau stated that the Committee identified early on in the process that there is an opportunity to employ reduced parking requirements in an area that is rich with transit and because the Committee is considering uses that are not as parking intensive.
- Andy stated that regardless of the measure the Committee decides to use to regulate parking in the zoning that the ratio needs to be grounded in real numbers and analysis and that both Ken and Pam have advanced some possible solutions in that regard.
- Several Committee members stated that developers do not want to build more parking than is necessary and that using parking maximums is a logical solution for ensuring that parking is not overbuilt, especially if FAR is not going to be used.
- Ben Franco stated that he does not necessarily disagree with the use of maximums, but would like the zoning to include language that provides for some flexibility so that certain uses are not effectively precluded from happening because they may need slightly more parking.
- Several Committee members stated that they are comfortable with using the proposed minimum parking ratios as maximums and that they would not preclude development from occurring.
- Andy Martineau noted that additional discussion surrounding flexibility for parking for certain uses is needed, especially in the absence of certain committee members.
- Dick Benka stated that taking the minimum ratios and calling them maximums may be wrong handed.

Ben Franco called for a straw vote to eliminate the proposed district cap on the number of parking spaces, to use parking maximums by use instead of minimums by use and to authorize staff to edit the draft zoning document to reflect these changes.

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VOTED: The Committee members present voted 12-0 with one abstention to eliminate the proposed district cap on the number of parking spaces, to use the ratios specified in the current draft of the zoning as parking maximums by use and to authorize staff to edit the draft zoning document to reflect these changes.

Andy stated that he wanted the committee to vote on the proposed heights.

Linda Olson Pehlke stated that she was not yet prepared to vote on heights because the committee had not yet seen shadow studies that would inform the committee about shadow impacts, including how high up on the buildings the shadows would come, especially for the Village Way development.

Several committee members also expressed concerns about voting on height now and that the hour was getting very late.

MEETING ADJOURNED