



# River Road Study Committee Public Hearing June 27, 2016

## HEARING 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, Bill Reyelt, Steve Heikin, Hugh Mattison, Brian Hochleutner, Yvette Johnson, Charles Osborne, Chris Dempsey, Wendy Machmuller, Daniel Weingart, Ken Lewis, Mariah Nobrega, Marilyn Newman

*Committee Members Absent:* Tom Nally, Chris Dempsey, Linda Olson Pehlke  
*Staff:* Andy Martineau

*Guests:* Elias Patoucheas, Joe Geller, Steve Tierney, Jennifer Dopazo Gilbert, Marc Rogers and several members of the public were present.

*Committee members met from 7:00 pm to 9:30 pm*

*Materials:* agenda, Committee progress update, massing, and draft zoning overview powerpoint developed by Andy Martineau, financial analysis powerpoint developed by Ken Lewis, hotel massing overview developed by Cambridge 7 Architects

Ben Franco opened the hearing by welcoming everyone and reviewing the agenda for the evening. Ben stated that there likely will be questions related to the ongoing Gateway East project and Emerald Necklace Crossing that is already under construction. Ben stated that the Committee is aware of these projects and that the focus for the evening will be on the work of the River Road Study Committee.

### 1. Process Overview

- 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

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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 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 whom is charged with establishing zoning overlay criteria for the industrial district.
- Andy reviewed some of the guiding principles that the RRSC has used to guide their work, including an emphasis on enhancing the public realm. Andy stated that the Committee has been exploring a number of concepts some of which are related to Complete Streets as a means of making the area more pedestrian friendly.
- 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

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**2. Massing Study Review:**

- Alan Christ provided an overview of the different massing options the Architecture and Full Committee has explored to date.

Massing Model A:

- Alan stated that early massing models were a first attempt to illustrate what future development might look like and was also an attempt to employ the “sky plane” concept used at Red Cab as a means of minimizing shadow impacts on Village Way and the Park
- Alan stated that the Committee expressed a desire not to have “buildings on stilts,” which meant trying to find a way for structured parking to work above the first floor
- The earlier massing model did not work programmatically because the parking ramps are not feasible as the building are not wide enough to accommodate the parking ramps needed for structured parking.
- The Committee also did not prefer the early massing model because it created too many curb cuts for vehicles which is not ideal from a pedestrian standpoint.

Massing Model B (bookend scenario):

- This was another early attempt by the Architecture Subcommittee to illustrate what future development might look like in the district.
- This scenario was not desirable for the same reasons as the previous option and because it was felt by the committee that the northern end was not an appropriate place for so much height.

Massing Model C (bridge scenario):

- This option was developed in recognition that accommodating structured parking (even a minimum amount) is a challenge and that one possible solution would be to bridge parking across the easement.
- This option could be feasible, but the Committee did not favor it because it covered the easement area that is envisioned to be an open air public space and it also prompted more mass on the street edge creating more of a canyon effect which the Committee also did not favor.

Massing Model D (Committee Voted Option)

- This option shows the Vet and Swanson sites assembled as one site and all of the buildings north of the easement assembled as one site.

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- The difference between this option and the last is that it eliminates the bridge across the easement.
- The Committee voted this preliminary massing envelope for the purposes of the analysis conducted by the Town's real estate financial consultant. The Committee asked the consultant to further analyze whether or not some or all of the uses the Committee has been exploring are feasible within this envelope, if it could be smaller or needed to be larger.
- Alan stated that since the Committee has learned more about the limited buildable area at the northern end of the site as a result of the flood zone, that the massing needs to be further refined to illustrate what a cantilevered structure may look like.
- Alan reviewed a revised massing option showing what a building at the northern end of the district might look like if nothing was built in the flood zone. This option is likely not financially feasible as there is not enough square footage.

**3. Review of Financial Feasibility Analysis**

- Ken Lewis provided an overview of the financial feasibility analysis the Financial Feasibility Subcommittee completed to date.
- Ken observed that the district has many positive aspects including location, proximity to transit and the Longwood Medical Area.
- Ken also observed that the district has many challenges including small parcels, the storm water easement, multiple property owners and the fact that there are existing businesses generating revenue that would need to find an alternative location if they were to move.
- Ken walked the audience through a typical four step analysis typically completed by a developer to determine the feasibility of redevelopment for a parcel and what type of building would be required to achieve the desired return on investment.
- Ken stated that the Financial Subcommittee made some assumptions about how much of a premium to assign to the different land values. For the purposes of discussion, the subcommittee assumed a 150% premium would be required to incentivize a property owner to want to do something else with their property and that the resulting value reflected the average per square foot value of some recent transactions in the area.
- Ken reviewed how this analysis was completed for some of the different uses the Committee has been exploring including age restricted housing and ground floor retail.
- Ken stated that the analysis completed by the Committee revealed that an age restrict housing development may be feasible on the site, but that the pro forma is tight. Ken also stated that the Town's real estate consultant Pam McKinney further examined the

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feasibility of age restricted housing as well as the other uses the Committee has been exploring including micro units, hotel and co-work/live work space.

- Ken stated that the analyses completed by Pam confirmed that the building envelope that the Committee has been modeling is about the minimum required for any of the uses being explored to be viable.
- Ken reviewed the impact eliminating a portion of the building at the northern end of the district has on financial feasibility, observing that the building is not financially feasible and that the Committee will need to refine the massing model to accommodate a building that is both structurally and financially feasible in the flood zone.

**4. Review of Draft Zoning Criteria**

- Andy gave an overview of some of the key zoning elements 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 stated that the draft zoning also has several other requirements including, but not limited to public benefit contributions, street trees, site plan review and building design guidance.
- Andy stated that the Architecture subcommittee is working on design guidelines some of which will be included in the zoning, while others will become part of a companion design guideline document. Andy stated that the Committee wants to ensure that any future building is of superior design, but if the zoning and guideline requirements are too prescriptive, they will limit flexibility for creative design and project review.

**5. Presentation of 25 Washington Street Hotel Proposal by Claremont Company**

- Claremont Company President, Elias Patoucheas stated that the project architects have worked hard to respond to feedback received from the Committee on the building massing, streetscape and first floor.
- Elias stated that the proposed first floor program for the hotel includes active uses on all three sides of the building fronting a public street
- Elias stated that they have been working to clean up the site and that they are excited about their project which they anticipate will generate an additional \$1.5M in annual tax revenue.
- Project Manager, Joe Geller provided an overview of the hotel site plan including vehicle circulation and proposed streetscape improvements. Joe also reviewed the sidewalk widths on all sides of the project, noting that a portion of the sidewalk on Washington

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Street becomes narrower as the Town is in the process of designing a cycle track as part of the Gateway East intersection project.

- Project Architects, Marc Rogers reviewed the evolution of the hotel massing options.
- Mark Rogers stated that they have four different options for where the taller massing could be located on the site, each of which has their pros and cons from an urban design perspective as well as impacts on the park and surrounding neighborhood.

**6. Public Comments/Questions**

- Rob Daves: I would like to know more about the anticipated traffic patterns and impacts on congestion. I also wonder if the Town could build a garage and have parking on just one site.
- *Andy Martineau: Parking garage is a use that is already allowed in this district. The Committee is not exploring the potential of constructing a municipally-owned garage in this district and it is not a use the Committee is seeking to encourage a private developer to build either. It is also unknown where the town would identify funding for a garage project.*
- Dick Benka: We have already heard from multiple sources, that developers do not build more parking than they need so a dedicated garage may not even be necessary.
- Tommy Vitolo: I like the form-based approach towards regulating the size of buildings and that the Committee is considering using parking maximums instead of minimums. This process is a positive step towards writing new zoning.
- Dan Lyons: The height of the hotel should be reduced along Brookline Ave. I like how the building steps down.
- Jeff Ferris (Jamaica Plain resident and Owner of Furious Bill's Bikes): This is an opportunity to restore a portion of the Emerald Necklace Park. The ramps to the Jamaica Way should both be closed, River Road should be made one way and traffic circulation should be reconfigured.
- Arlene Mattison: The zoning talks about max lot coverage % for the taller portions of buildings. The Brookline Place project had open space requirements and I do not see that similar requirements are being used here. The Brook House should not be used as a frame of reference for determining the appropriate height for the hotel.
- Sara Freeman, of Jamaica Plain: This area is the skinniest part of the Emerald Necklace. This is an opportunity to show that Brookline cares about the Necklace and an opportunity to really improve the area.

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- Renee Holazowsky: I live on Kent Street. There will be impacts on the Village Way tenants and those impacts should be acknowledged.
- Faith Michaels: The existing businesses have not been a big enough part of this process. I spoke with the owner of Brookline Ice and Coal. Their business earns hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. There is no way they are going to sell their business for such a small amount. Additionally, many of these businesses are thriving and will likely remain there for the foreseeable future. If the hotel gets built, we will have a tall building next to what is there now until the next redevelopment comes along.
- *Ben Franco: The existing businesses have been contact about this process and receive the email notifications about Committee meetings.*
- *Andy Martineau: Many of the Town's elected officials, Boards and Committees have been strongly encouraging the Town to begin taking a proactive approach towards planning for future redevelopments. In addition to examining the proposed hotel, the Committee is also taking a proactive approach towards shaping the redevelopment of the neighboring parcels. The Committee is trying to position the Town to get out ahead of a developer, which is something that the town is rarely able to do.*
- Susan Knight, President of the Emerald Necklace Conservancy: I would like to see shadow studies during March and September when the shadows are more likely to cover portions of the park.
- Ashley Hodson, Executive Director of the Shambhala Center: I came tonight after learning about the meeting and I wanted to introduce myself to everyone. We are exciting about the improvements being proposed for the area.
- Anne Lusk: There should be more emphasis on planning for bikes, including bike parking. I like the form-based approach the Committee is taking, but I do not like the massing. The Emerald Necklace is like a bike highway.
- Mark Tetro of Roslindale: The Committee is doing a great job. I like the concept of the easement as a public space. This is an opportunity to improve the bike connections from the necklace to the Muddy River path.
- Angela Hyatt: Initially, I liked the third hotel massing option because it creates a street wall. Options 1, 2 and 3 are all favorable in terms of density and scale. I would like to see how the proposed sidewalk widths compare with other parts of town so there is some reference point.
- Ruthanne Schneider: Can you explain the drop off area for the hotel? Is there going to be enough parking? I would like public works to verify that an engineering analysis has been done for the intersections that are already failing.

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- John Bassett: I like the idea of creating housing for ages 55+. The height of the hotel should be pushed away from Brookline Place. Residential parking ratios could be lower because of the garage that will be built in the future. Could River Road be blocked off so it is not a through street?
- Wendy McMillian: I live at Village Way and I feel like I have been left out of this process. We are going to be surrounded by big buildings.
- *Yvette Johnson: I am the President of the Village Way Tenant's Association and I am also on the Committee. We have weekly meetings where we discuss this project regularly. You have my email and know how to reach me about this project.*
- Abby Swain: I like that the Committee is proposing to use parking maximums. This is a transit rich area. The sidewalk widths being explored are wide enough to accommodate bus shelters according to the MBTA bus station design guidelines.
- Merelice: I am getting used to the idea of height; we just need to manage it. I think the zoning should be called the Emerald Island as a reminder to people about the importance of this area. I prefer option 3 for the hotel. I hope zoning includes provisions for additional public benefits besides street trees and wider sidewalks.
- Jon Davis: We are witnessing the erosion of our tax base through 40Bs and other projects. I do not believe this would be a good site for senior housing.
- Maureen Coffey: I was excited about the Red Cab hotel until it was completed and I saw the outcome. I would like to know more about who the target market is for the hotel and where or not the restaurant will be open to the public.
- *Andy Martineau: The hotel on the former Red Cab site was designed according to very specific zoning criteria that did limit the flexibility for how to break up the mass on Boylston Street and also where the rooftop mechanical penthouse could be located. The architecture subcommittee is aware of the concerns about massing and is working to advance design guidelines for future buildings in this area. However, the Committee does not want to be overly prescriptive and risk putting the Planning Board and project DAT in another position where there is limited flexibility for creative designs.*
- *Elias Patoucheas: We anticipate our customers to be those going to the Longwood Medical Area. The restaurant will offer paid breakfast and dinner open to the public. Right now the average room rate for a Hilton Garden Inn in the Boston area is in the mid-\$200 range.*
- Erica Key: I live on Netherlands Road. This project came up several times at a recent neighborhood meeting. We are excited that the Town is trying to be proactive improving this area. We would love to see a gelato shop instead of more hospital space.

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No building should be taller than the Brook House and green building concepts should be used.

- Scott Englander: Designing for parking is like the tail wagging the dog. This is a transit-rich area so parking maximums are a good thing. When too much parking is built, the town is losing tax revenue. Not allowing for enough parking to be built may make a project infeasible, but we should not be designing for cars.
- Hugh Mattison: Would people like to see something similar to a Kurkman's market built here?
- Frances Shedd Fischer: I prefer hotel massing option number 2 because it provides for better sight lines.
- Charles Osborne: The Emerland Necklace has been a constant reference point for the Committee. The Committee has opted not to take a more traditional zoning approach because of the unique characteristics of this area.

**MEETING ADJOURNED**