

**River Road Study Committee
Zoning Subcommittee
July 11, 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

Subcommittee Members Present: Ben Franco, Steve Heikin, Hugh Mattison, Marilyn Newman, Linda Olson Pehlke, Bill Reyelt and Daniel Weingart
Subcommittee Members Absent: Yvette Johnson, Dick Benka, Mariah Nobrega
Staff: Andy Martineau
Guests: Several members of the public and two industrial district business owners were present
Materials: Agenda, draft minutes, sidewalk width PowerPoint and draft zoning language supplemental handout
Committee members met from 7:00 pm to 10:30 pm

Andy Martineau opened the meeting by providing the audience with an update on the ongoing conversations between the town and Claremont regarding additional off-site improvements Claremont is proposing to make immediately adjacent to their site.

1. Review and Approve Minutes

- Minutes from March 28, 2016 were approved as amended.

2. Public Comment:

- Brookline Ice and Coal Owner, Alice Signore: I feel as though I should be able to redevelop my property under the overlay zoning without having to acquire other properties to meet the proposed minimum lot size requirement. The overlay zone should protect the existing businesses and allow them to stay in the event a friendly developer comes along. The ground floor businesses should service the neighborhood.
- *Andy Martineau: The Committee has done extensive analysis surrounding the financial feasibility of the uses we want to incentivize and structural feasibility of the required buildings as it relates to ramps for parking. Based on those analyses, which included the limitations imposed by the flood zone it is unlikely that just the ice and coal parcel could be redeveloped in a way that would be financially viable within the height limitations imposed by the overlay zoning or in a way where the parking ramps would work. If a plan exists that shows a viable building the meets all of the proposed zoning criteria on just the ice and coal site, the Committee would like to see it.*

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- George White: What if one of the existing property owners does not sell their property?
- *Andy Martineau: The draft zoning is written such that parcel assembly is required for a developer to take advantage of the overlay zoning.*
- Renee Holsovsky: The developer has not acknowledged that there is a community on Village Way. We need to understand more about the traffic impacts of future development in this area.
- Rob Daves: Development in Brookline is difficult. Red Cab is an example of that where the design was great for White Place and not so good on Route 9. It's a blank box that is not pleasant to walk by. Wider sidewalks here would be great. Height is not as big a factor as design.
- *Andy Martineau: The Committee continues to push Claremont to improve their proposed massing and to create wider sidewalks on Washington Street. The Committee and public need to be careful not to create zoning that is overly prescriptive here and limits design flexibility here. There also needs to be an understanding that if the height is limited, there is less flexibility with the massing and also a risk of precluding the project all together, which has other implications. If we arbitrarily zone for a shorter height, it's not as if the mass/rooms just go away, rather they are relocated to another part of the site creating more of the block massing nobody likes.*
- Arlene Mattison: Don't over upzone this area. We should have a say in what is acceptable in this area and what is financially viable. The Homewood Suites on the Arlington/Cambridge line is a more attractive building. The zoning should reflect the community.
- *Ben Franco: The Committee has given clear directives to Claremont to revise their massing and as a result they have cut out a lot of building bulk. We also continue to push them on the issue of sidewalks along Washington Street. There are tradeoffs and the Committee is trying to thread the needle to balance them.*
- Steve Heikin: Let's not forget that the developer changed architects following feedback from the Committee. 110' for a portion of the site is not out of context for the area and it provides for flexibility in balancing the height of the rest of the building on the site. Other members of our Committee conducted financial analysis that was reviewed by an independent consultant hired by the town.

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3. Review and Discussion of Public Benefits and the Public Realm

- Andy Martineau gave a brief presentation on different sidewalk widths in town, primarily in Coolidge Corner to help provide some context for the ongoing discussion about sidewalk widths in the Emerald Island district.
- Andy also presented concepts of what the phased improvement to the surrounding area might look like as different projects come forward.
- Andy stated that phased improvement and necking down of River Road is likely what will occur in part because some of those improvements will be funded by 1% of hard construction dollars. Andy also stated that he does not believe that necking down the road, eliminating parking and closing curb cuts is the right thing to do in the immediate future given the operational characteristics of the existing businesses. Additionally, those businesses which are primarily car-based do not match the vision the RRSC has articulated for this area.
- Andy also presented a site plan showing the relationship between the proposed hotel foot print, hotel cantilever, existing sidewalk and the proposed sidewalk and cycle track after Gateway East is completed. Andy stated that the Committee has emphasized the importance of sidewalks from the very beginning and has continued to push Claremont to create a wider sidewalk on Washington Street, which is challenging in part because of the cycle track that will be constructed as part of Gateway East and also because Claremont has indicated that they are only able to push the first floor of their building in so far. Creating wider sidewalks is especially challenging at the pinch point near the corner of River Road.

Committee Questions/Comments:

- The plans for Gateway East are at the 25% design phase. If the Emerald Island zoning and planning were integrated, we might be able to create a better solution.
- *Ben Franco: The Gateway East project is outside the purview of this Committee. That project is already delayed and we will not risk delaying it further by trying to redesign it through this process.*
- The RRSC process will be finished and the hotel may be close to completion by the time Gateway East moves forward. Since we do not know what the final design of Gateway East will look like, it could also be problematic for us to try and integrate the two projects.
- I am not convinced that the best Claremont can do is a 10' sidewalk at the pinch point. We are trying to create a place that is comfortable for people to walk.
- Does there have to be a traditional sidewalk on River Road or could it blend into the Roadway and Emerald Necklace creating more of a shared use street?

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- *Andy Martineau: I do not know if Public Works would require that there be a curb for the sidewalk. It is something we could explore. There would need to be some kind of definition of sidewalk or at least how it is to be measured included in the zoning as we are proposing to use it as a proxy for setbacks.*
- Having no curb is appealing, but there would need to be bollards. We should continue to press Claremont on the pinch point. I had stated previously that they could perhaps inset that corner of the building providing some relief at the narrowest part of the sidewalk. Doing so may also enhance their proposed café/amenity space.
- This is supposed to be a model for Route 9 and a 10 foot sidewalk is not adequate for this context. I also wonder if they could setback the upper floors to allow for more space for a tree canopy.
- Stepping the first three floors back is something that is worth exploring, but it would likely impact the geometry of their parking and may not be possible.
- The sidewalk they are showing is just too narrow. It should be a uniform 12' across Washington Street.
- *Andy Martineau: I will discuss each of these issues with Claremont and remind them that the Committee asked them to explore setting in the corner of the building at the pinch point. I will also relay to them that the Committee wants to see a 12' sidewalk on Washington Street. However, the Committee should be prepared for them to finally state that they either are unable or unwilling to push the first floor of their building.*
- Given the position they are in, don't they have to do what we say for sidewalks?
- *Andy Martineau: The Committee has made a lot of progress working with Claremont to refine the massing of their building and in the area of sidewalks. They have been amenable to all of our requests and my sense is that they will begin to push back. There are a number of similar as well as diverging interests in this process and it is in the Town's best interest to keep Claremont at the negotiation table versus pushing them into a situation where they may build a 40B instead of a hotel. A very similar scenario is playing out as we speak on the other end of Route 9 at 1180 Boylston Street where a commercial building that needed a zoning change was proposed and there was no support for it so the developer has filed for a 40B. Keeping Claremont at the table is a means of retaining some control over what happens on their site as well as the other potential development sites in the district. The Committee and the public needs to be aware of what a potential alternative development might entail.*
- Isn't the town in the process of creating a housing production plan?

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- The housing production plan will not on its own stop developers from filing 40B applications. It takes approximately a year for the State to certify the HPP and then the Town actually needs to build affordable units.

Continued Discussion of Sidewalks:

- Andy Martineau stated that the draft zoning includes language allowing for the width of a sidewalk to be reduced via special permit for limited areas. The width of a sidewalk is not just an issue for the hotel on Washington Street; there are also implications for future building at the northeast end of the site where the parcels are narrower. Based on what we have been modeling a 12' sidewalk may not be feasible. If no relief is available through the zoning we may unintentionally preclude a project from moving forward on that site. Additionally, requiring a special permit for reduced sidewalks is a means of retaining control over how much and where sidewalks are reduced.

Committee Questions/Comments:

- The Committee further discussed the desired sidewalk width for Brookline Ave, Washington Street and River Road. The Committee advised staff to speak with Claremont about achieving a uniform 12' sidewalk on Washington Street. The Committee agreed that a 12' minimum is acceptable for Brookline Ave and River Road. The Committee agreed that no relief for a narrower sidewalk on Brookline Ave should be granted.

Committee Discussion of 1% of Hard Construction Cost Language:

- Andy Martineau stated that the language is adapted from similar language used in other overlay zones. Andy stated that the language should be flexible enough so that allows for the use of those dollars to be maximized especially where the Parks and Open Space Division has the ability to match dollars specifically for trees.
- Several Committee members expressed a desire to ensure that the money is spent in the immediate area of the Emerald Island and not just on roadway improvements as part of Gateway East.
- The Committee directed staff to revise the language accordingly.

MEETING ADJOURNED: