



River Road Study Committee July 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, Alan Christ, Tom Nally, Linda Olson Pehlke, Bill Reyelt, Steve Heikin, Charles Osborne, Chris Dempsey, Wendy Machmuller, Daniel Weingart, Ken Lewis, Marilyn Newman

Committee Members Absent: Mariah Nobrega, Brian Hochleutner, Yvette Johnson, Hugh Mattison, Dick Benka

Staff: Andy Martineau

Guests: several members of the public were present.

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

Materials: agenda, draft minutes, draft zoning language handout, Claremont sidewalk powerpoint, shadow study and massing powerpoint.

Ben Franco opened the meeting with several remarks surrounding the progress the Committee has made and the discussions the Committee will be taking up this evening.

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 site and other potential public benefits and commitments associated with the Claremont project Claremont is proposing to make immediately adjacent to their site. Andy also presented an image of the updated massing model showing what a building at the northern end of the district might look like. Andy also presented the shadow studies for all buildings being modeled in the district.

Questions/Comments Related to Shadows:

- The shadows do not appear to reach the roof line of the Village Way residences which indicates that there are likely minimal impacts given the yards are already well shaded via a 6' fence and mature trees.
- None of the 3 hotel massing options has a greater impact on the park than the other.
- It would be helpful to know which shadows are new and which shadows are currently being cast by the Brook House and other taller buildings in the area.
- Roof top mechanical shadows should be accounted for.

1. Review and Approve Meeting Minutes

- The minutes from 6/27/16 were approved as amended.

River Road Study Committee

July 13, 2016

2. Public Comment

- Scott Englander: The Emerald Necklace is an important amenity. The buildings should relate to it as a valuable area. The pedestrian experience should be enhanced via trees, improving wait times. All of these things impact property values. The public realm in this area, as it is currently, does not support the high quality uses we wish to attract.
- Susan Rothstein: I am concerned about the canonization of Route 9. I am also concerned that the hotel building will have the same negative visual impacts as the hotel at 111 Boylston Street. The proposed hotel is too tall. The height of the Brook House only works because it is set back and has greenery around it. We should not be trying to make the zoning fit for Claremont. I am not opposed to a hotel on the site, it should just be smaller and perhaps a different brand.
- *Ben Franco: The Committee's financial analysis both internally and independently has shown that the size of the hotel and other buildings being modeled for the district are the minimum size for the projects to be viable. As far as the aesthetics of the building, your feedback is appreciated and you should continue to offer it to the DAT and Planning Board should the hotel or any other project move forward.*
- *Tom Nally: We need to keep in mind that the hotel has not been designed. We have seen massing images only. The Audi site is an example of a project that has been designed with great detail and to the brand's standards, which were not acceptable and are now being revised. We are not at that stage with the hotel as it still needs to be designed. We should not conflate the 25 Washington Street proposal with Red Cab. There is a process for the design to be vetted via a DAT and Planning Board.*
- Village Way Tenant: Will any of the buildings further north in the district go above 85'? Some shadows might be nice as we are not allowed to turn on our air condition units for a portion of the year.
- Charles Osborne: The Emerald Necklace and public realm are important amenities next to this district. This also happens to be probably the weakest link in the Necklace. This process is an opportunity to fix that.

River Road Study Committee

July 13, 2016

- Susan Knight: This part of the Emerald Necklace is a jewel. I am concerned about shadows on the park and traffic on River Road.

3. Continued Discussion of Draft Zoning Criteria:

Height Discussion:

- Andy Martineau reviewed the different hotel massing options. Andy stated that the RRSC might express a preference for one or more of the massing options under consideration, but ultimately the zoning will likely only allow taller heights for a portion of the lot. Being more prescriptive than that would likely limit flexibility in design.

Committee Questions/Comments:

- Allowing the proposed hotel to go up to 110' for a portion of the site allows the developer to have more flexibility in how the mass is articulated. Alan also stated that 110' is not out of context for the area as there are buildings that are taller and shorter.
- Could the zoning steer Claremont towards 1 or 2 of the preferred options while also providing relief for an alternative option?
- If the zoning is written too tightly, it will limit flexibility on where the massing goes.
- We should not mix and match the options and try to write zoning for that.
- The financial analyses done by Pam McKinney showed that in order for the project to be viable this is the size of building that is required. It's not just about the height it's about the efficiency of the design and program.
- Height is a relative term and context matters. Height of 110' for a portion of the lot is not out of context here.
- The hotel would not canyonize Rt 9. The closest point from the Brook House to the road is 200'.
- What is there now is certainly not the gateway people would like to see. A hotel would be an active use that would not go dark at night.
- Where do the design guidelines fit into all of this?
- Andy Martineau: The architecture subcommittee is working to refine design guidelines. Part of those guidelines will be included in the zoning amendment text and other elements will become part of a companion document provided as a recommendation to the Planning Board and the future Design Advisory Team.

River Road Study Committee July 13, 2016

- Could the building be setback more and perhaps made taller?
- A taller building that is setback more would not necessarily mean the building would still be viable. The floor plates would likely be less efficient.
- *Claremont VP, Elias Patoucheas: The site is already inefficient. We essentially have dual massing where it is possible to get double loaded corridors, but it's challenging. If we go up taller, there are other requirements for elevators and circulation that would make the building even more inefficient, plus we may lose the ability to build the ramps in a way that we could connect to a neighboring structure.*
- The zoning isn't just about the hotel. We are also talking about incentivizing other uses elsewhere in the district.
- How will the zoning ensure that the buildings in the rest of the district are articulated/setback?
- Claremont's counsel, Jennifer Dopazo Gilbert stated that a development agreement between the Town and the developer could be used to specify in advance some design-oriented special permit conditions that would be acceptable to the developer.
- We should also acknowledge that the Committee has received feedback from the public via our meetings and email that there is some concern about 110'. I think it is fine for a portion of the lot, but certainly not the entire site.
- I think the outcome at Red Cab is commendable considering the design of the other proposed buildings that did not move forward. That area of Rt. 9 was a non-man's land where cars dominate the form of the neighborhood. This is an opportunity to take a form-based approach that will be informed by the uses.
- What we have before us are a series of hotel templates where all of the building program and parking match up.
- Design is more important than height. I am comfortable with the height especially on Washington Street as it is not out of context so long as it comes with additional benefits. I am concerned about the sidewalk on Washington Street.
- Could the 110' portion be less than 60% of the lot?
- *Claremont VP, Elias Patoucheas: It's possible that the taller mass will not cover 60% of the lot. However, we have not fully designed the building yet so 60% gives us flexibility to design any of the three options we have been showing.*
- I am concerned that all of the massing will be on Washington Street and we would be creating another Red Cab scenario.

River Road Study Committee July 13, 2016

- Keep in mind Red Cab is approx. 250' long. The longest wall for the proposed hotel here is closer to 130'.
- How do make sure the height is reasonably constrained?
- The difference in height between 75' and 85' is negligible.
- *Andy Martineau: The zoning could impose lot coverage caps for taller heights for the hotel as well as the other sites in the district.*

Ben Franco asked a motion to vote on the following draft zoning language. Tom Nally motioned to approve. Ken Lewis seconded the motion. The Committee voted 13-0 with two abstentions to approve the following language:

- a. *Additional height may be granted up to 110' for principal uses 8 (hotel) and 8A (limited service hotel) only on lots within X feet of Washington Street for no more than 60% of the lot area.*

Ben Franco asked a motion to vote on the following draft zoning language. Ken Lewis motioned to approve. Charles Osborn seconded the motion. The Committee voted 10-1 with one abstention to approve the following language:

- b. *Additional height may be granted up to 85' for principal uses 8 (hotel) and 8A (limited service hotel).*

Following the votes, several committee members requested that staff further refine the language to ensure that mid-building heights for the proposed hotel area and upper floor heights for the buildings in the rest of the district are limited only to a certain amount of the lot area.

Discussion of Sidewalk Widths:

- Andy Martineau stated that the zoning subcommittee met on Monday, July 11 to discuss sidewalk widths and voted minimum sidewalk widths for Brookline Ave and River Road, but did not vote a minimum width for Washington Street because what Claremont is showing in their plans was not acceptable. Andy stated that he had a conversation with Claremont requesting that they increase the width to 12'.
- Claremont VP, Elias Patoucheas gave a presentation showing the existing sidewalk widths vs. what they are proposing. The existing average width surrounding the site is 7'-3". They are proposing to create sidewalks where the average width is 14'-6". The

River Road Study Committee July 13, 2016

pinch point at the corner of River Road is challenging. We are able to inset the corner of the building so the minimum sidewalk width at that point is 8'. 59' or 25% of the Washington Street sidewalk will be less than 10'.

Committee Questions/Comments:

- Why can't you change the floor configuration and cantilever the first floor more than it already is? Can you pull in the second and third floors also?
- *Project Architect, Marc Rogers: If we cantilever even further we would need to put in structural columns and it would likely impact the layout of the upper floors. If we pull the second and third floors in, it changes the parking ramping and it does not work.*
- Insetting the corner at River Road seems like a workable solution that addresses the issue. Don't forget that there is a 5' cycle track plus another 4' after that between the first lane of travel. So you have anywhere from 16' to 20' feet between cars and the building.
- I am not convinced that you cannot set the building in further.
- *Claremont VP, Elias Patoucheas: If we set the building in any further, the parking ramps do not work. We just cannot do it.*
- *Project Architect, Mark Rogers: We would also lose somewhere around 20% of the parking spaces.*
- Sidewalk Widths are also an issue because of the type of street tree.
- *Claremont VP, Elias Patoucheas: The sidewalk is not the only issue, there are utility lines that run right under/near where we are proposing to plant trees so that is another limiting factor. The utilities are shallow and therefore we can really only plant columnner trees.*
- Sidewalks are more of an issue at the northern end of the district where the sites taper.
- We asked Claremont to make the sidewalks wider and they responded that they were able to get to 8' at the pinch point which seems reasonable so long as it is only that limited area.
- So there is no way of changing the hotel ramps so the building can be moved and the sidewalk on Washington Street widened?
- *Claremont VP, Elias Patoucheas: We just cannot do it. We cannot make the building so complicated that it is cost prohibitive to build it.*

River Road Study Committee
July 13, 2016

Ben Franco asked a motion to vote on the following draft zoning language. Tom Nally motioned to approve. Ken Lewis seconded the motion. The Committee voted 10-1 with one abstention that the minimum sidewalk width for Brookline Ave and River Road shall be 12' and that the minimum width for Washington Street shall be 10' and that the minimum width may be reduced to no less than 8' only on River Road and Washington Street and only in limited areas where infeasibility of meeting the minimum sidewalk width requirement is demonstrated.

The Committee requested that staff update the language to reflect the vote and conditions under which a special permit to reduce the sidewalk width may be granted.