

Brookline Community Workshop #2: Site Selection Criteria Summary of Results

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Summary

The purpose of the second of four community workshops for the Housing Production Plan (HPP) project was to solicit input from participants on site selection criteria and to provide an opportunity for participants to learn about affordable housing. Through prior focus group discussions, the consultant team identified fifteen draft site selection criteria in three categories-- proximity, neighborhood characteristics, and site characteristics. The results of this workshop will enable the consultant team to identify potential sites for development of affordable housing in Brookline. This will provide focus for the third community workshop about site selection on June 1.

The Workshop 2 participants were, on the whole, very supportive of affordable housing development and were interested to see increased density and mixed-use development. Also, affordable housing production took precedence over open space protection with this group. Some important themes emerged:

Protect neighborhood character through good design: There is support for density and height increases but good design is critical to maintain the feel and integrity of neighborhoods.

Zoning changes: Increasing density or developing mixed-use sites in South Brookline, and developing housing with lesser parking requirements, all bump up against Brookline's current zoning by-laws. The process of choosing sites and developing housing must also address changing zoning by-laws.

North and South Brookline: Housing type, zoning, and scale are distinct in these general areas of town and multi-family/mixed-use buildings will need to be sensitive to the different context of specific neighborhoods within these larger areas. Uniform site selection criteria may not work *across* town and may need to be tailored to types of neighborhoods.

Workshop Design

The workshop took place on Monday, April 25, 2016 at the Pierce School in Brookline. Fourteen people attended. The purpose of the workshop was to engage Brookline community members in an interactive process that both informs and solicits ideas. The main objectives of the forum were the following:

- Information: A presentation and printed hand-outs gave participants an introduction to and review of what Affordable Housing is, who it serves and how the state regulates and encourages its production.
- Public input: Participants worked in small discussion groups to consider and comment on the draft site selection criteria.

Methods

The workshop consisted of a presentation and digital group polling in addition to small group discussions. To start, participants gathered in the auditorium to participate in an interactive presentation by consultants Jennifer Goldson and Judi Barrett. This presentation included digital group polling as well as information about the Housing Production Plan and affordable housing needs. The participants then moved into the cafeteria and broke out into small groups of three or four with a consultant team member facilitating each discussion group. The groups considered each site selection criterion and determined if each was Very Important, Somewhat Important, Not Important, or No Opinion. Groups could also add their own criteria if they chose to. Finally, group facilitators presented the results of their discussions to the entire group at the close of the workshop. Brief summaries of the results of each exercise are provided below with detailed summaries attached.

Digital Group Polling

Group polling enables workshop organizers to get a picture of who participants are, what their connection to affordable housing is, and how familiar they are with housing issues. As part of a series of workshops, the questions allow organizers to see if the demographics of the attendees are changing across the workshops. and with a series of workshops. In addition, polling shows participants where they fit in the demographic composition of the community.

The digital group polling exercise consisted of five questions. The results show that the majority of workshop participants live in Brookline, moved there between 1970-89, and own their own homes. The majority of participants are affiliated with Brookline in an official capacity, as employees, Town meeting members or members of Town boards or committees. Asked about their reason for attending the workshop, sixty-three percent identified one reason: to advocate for production and preservation of affordable housing. The remainder were there to learn more about the project or to ensure the protection of neighborhood integrity.

Small Group Discussions

Summary Site Selection Criteria Comments

Proximity

The proximity criteria related to increasing walkability and reduction of traffic and parking needs received the most affirmative response.

1. **Transit:** *Within 10-minute walk (1/2 mile) of public transit (including bus stops).*

Very Important. Proximity to transit is important because it can help to reduce traffic congestion and the need for parking. Transit has benefits to a range of generational groups—families, seniors and commuting workers though it was noted that a half-mile walk can be too far for many seniors. One group remarked that the Green Line and MBTA bus are not equivalent in terms of service and ease of use.

2. Affordable Housing: *Not within 5-minute walk (1/4 mile) of 50+ units of affordable housing.*

Not Important. Participants commented that they do not want to see a “concentration” of affordable housing. Others were puzzled by the “50+ units” component of the criterion. Where are the 50+ units, and would any new development contain 50+ units of affordable housing?

3. Services: *Within 10-minute walk (1/2 mile) of shopping, restaurants, or services.*

Very Important. This criterion emphasizes walkability and lends itself to housing development for a range of ages and abilities. However, participants commented that a half-mile can be too far for seniors so this may impact for whom housing is targeted.

4. Open Space: *Within 10-minute walk (1/2 mile) of parks, playgrounds, or other public open space.*

Somewhat Important. This criterion re-enforces walkability and a reduction in car dependence. It was noted that ½ mile proximity to open space exists virtually all over Brookline so this wouldn’t be a challenging criterion to fulfill and maybe not useful to apply it.

5. Public Schools: *Within ¼ mile of 2+ local school district boundaries to allow for redistricting to respond to changing enrollment patterns.*

Not Important. Participants recognize that public school overcrowding and building the ninth school are currently key topics in Brookline but also that the development of housing cannot too closely adhere to the resolution of these key issues. It is too difficult to predict when and where and how many families with school age children will come to Brookline. It was noted that the town can control the influx of families by producing only small, non-family sized units.

Neighborhood Characteristics

Design is the most important criterion—how can new development enhance neighborhood character even if size and scale are different than the existing?

6. Form: *Comparable form (size and scale) of buildings in immediate neighborhood (1/4 mile).*

Very Important. This is a very important consideration. One group commented that a quarter-mile is too large an area and that immediate neighborhood context is critical. Others noted that

design is the most critical element and that size and scale are less important when good design is used. Additionally, design should not necessarily mimic historical architecture within a neighborhood but should complement and enhance the surrounding neighborhood through interesting design.

7. Use: *Comparable use-multi-unit and/or mixed use- in immediate neighborhood (1/4 mile).*

Somewhat Important. It is important to preserve and protect mixed-use and multifamily neighborhoods. Compatible use is more important than comparable.

8. Zoning/Permitting: *Multi-unit and/or mixed-use permitted by right or by special permit in current zoning district.*

Somewhat Important. Brookline should change zoning to enable more mixed use and multi-unit development. It is not efficient to do mixed use only where it is currently permitted.

Site Characteristics

Participants support development on underutilized sites and surface parking lots, in addition to reuse of historic or large buildings. Groups were mindful of the negative community response generated by any attempt to develop on open space.

9. Underutilized: *Previously developed, underutilized sites.*

Very Important. Especially important to develop residential above single-story commercial.

10. Historic: *Historic resources with opportunity for preservation and reuse (not demolition).*

Somewhat Important. This can support the protection of neighborhood integrity and there are good examples of reuse like St. Aidan's, for example though some historic buildings might be less well suited to housing.

11. Parking lots: *Surface parking lots (public or private ownership).*

Very Important. These are prime sites for re-development and this criterion received a lot of positive response. This criterion raises the issue of Brookline's parking regulations and their impact on housing development. When developing a surface parking lot, how will the town address the issue of loss of parking for commercial and retail and the required parking for housing units? Below grade parking is expensive, at grade parking can be dangerous. Can zoning by-laws socially engineer less dependency on cars? This is an important avenue to pursue but has associated issues that should be considered concurrently with housing production.

12. Adaptive reuse: *Larger houses with opportunity for rehab and reuse for multi-unit conversion (not demolition).*

Somewhat Important. Re-use of larger houses would allow for development of a variety of housing types, like SROs or micro-units. This flexibility is appealing. Well-designed additions can add density and units with minimal impact on neighborhood character.

13. Neighborhood open space: *Minimal value as open space or buffer areas for residential neighborhoods.*

Somewhat Important. This criterion got a mixed response. Some groups felt that any available space should be open to development and others felt that protection of open space of any size or type was important and that dedicated open space should be protected. It was noted that buffer zones or setbacks are important in siting development and reducing the effect of shadows.

14. Environmental resources: *Minimal impact on natural/environmental features such as rock outcroppings, water resources, etc.*

Very Important. In the rush to develop, there is a negative impact on natural features that may be overlooked or ignored by developers.

15. Open space: *Not identified as priority for open space protection or natural resource/environmental value.*

Somewhat Important. Again, groups did not prioritize open space too much but appreciate that for the community as a whole, open space protection is an important issue. The digital polling results reflect that in this workshop group there were more advocates for affordable housing and fewer for open space protection.

Additional Criteria

The following are additional criteria groups identified:

- Prioritize sites in South Brookline that lend themselves to mixed-use. Look for opportunities to develop small commercial areas in South Brookline.
- Minimize the transit and service proximity criteria in South Brookline. Either develop housing for seniors who may not be able to avail themselves of these services or develop housing around commercial areas and encourage future expansion of transit to these areas.
- Identify Town-owned sites that could support a mix of Town offices and housing.
- Prioritize smart growth.
- Prioritize upgrades at Rte. 9 and Coolidge Corner.
- Identify a minimum lot size (10,000 SF?).

Appendix 1: Small Group Discussion

In groups of 4-5, including a consultant team facilitator, participants discussed and ranked the following fifteen site selection criteria.

Site Selection Criteria	Table Group			
	A	B	C	D
Proximity				
Within 10-minute walk (1/2 mile) of public transit (including bus stops).	SI	VI	VI/SI	VI
Not within 5-minute walk (1/4 mile) of 50+ units of affordable housing.	NI	NA	NI	SI/NI
Within 10-minute walk (1/2 mile) of shopping, restaurants, or services.	VI	SI	VI/SI	VI
Within 10-minute walk (1/2 mile) of parks, playgrounds, or other public open space.	SI	SI	SI	VI
Within ¼ mile of 2+ local school district boundaries to allow for redistricting to respond to changing enrollment patterns.	NO	NI	NO	NI/NO
Neighborhood Characteristics				
Comparable form (size and scale) of buildings in immediate neighborhood (1/4 mile).	VI	SI/VI	SI	VI
Comparable use-multi-unit and/or mixed use- in immediate neighborhood (1/4 mile).	SI	SI	NI	NI
Multi-unit and/or mixed-use permitted by right or by special permit in current zoning district.	VI	SI	NA	NI
Site Characteristics				
Previously developed, underutilized sites.	VI	VI	VI/SI	VI
Historic resources with opportunity for preservation and reuse (not demolition).	SI	VI	SI	SI
Surface parking lots (public or private ownership).	VI	VI	VI	VI
Larger houses with opportunity for rehab and reuse for multi-unit conversion (not demolition).	SI	SI	SI	SI/NI
Minimal value as open space or buffer areas for residential neighborhoods.	SI	SI	VI	NI
Minimal impact on natural/environmental features such as rock outcroppings, water resources, etc.	VI	SI	VI	NI
Not identified as priority for open space protection or natural resource/environmental value.	SI	SI	VI	SI

VI = Very Important; SI = Somewhat Important; NI = Not Important; NO = No Opinion; NA = Not Answered

Appendix 2: Transcript of Comments

Site Selection Criteria

Proximity

Within 10-minute walk (1/2 mile) of public transit (including bus stops).

- Table A Look at other areas for density
Traffic amelioration
- Table B Not all transit is equal
It matters more for seniors than families
Reduces need for car use/ownership, perhaps parking requirements under zoning
- Table C Important for many age groups
- Table D ¼ mile even better

Not within 5-minute walk (1/4 mile) of 50+ units of affordable housing.

Table A	Don't concentrate
Table B	Preferable to distribute so it "doesn't stand out"- "even distribution" Makes no sense as stated
Table C	Need flexibility in our urban compact town, at least in much of it
Table D	Don't want large clusters of 50+ units concentrated in one area 40B-80% market rate, 20% affordable=?really affordable development?

Within 10-minute walk (1/2 mile) of shopping, restaurants, or services.

Table A	Walkability should be town-wide goal for all residential New development should be in mixed use
Table B	Related to <i>who</i> we are serving Criteria are too "crude"
Table C	Important for many age groups
Table D	Keeping pedestrian zone/district AGE FRIENDLY

Within 10-minute walk (1/2 mile) of parks, playgrounds, or other public open space.

Table A	N/A
Table B	Virtually any place in N. Brookline meets this criterion
Table C	N/A
Table D	Quality of life Promoting transit oriented community

Within ¼ mile of 2+ local school district boundaries to allow for redistricting to respond to changing enrollment patterns.

Table A N/A

Table B	Too difficult to predict
Table C	Too many variables
Table D	If middle school built, changes walking to school/transportation for home buyers/families

Neighborhood Characteristics

Comparable form (size and scale) of buildings in immediate neighborhood (1/4 mile).

Table A	Scale can affect traffic loading Density OK Setbacks to allow landscaping Add onto existing house <i>Good design</i>
Table B	¼ mile is too large a circle Immediate context is critical
Table C	Wrong sized buildings will be out of place and will cause opposition
Table D	Diversity/architectural design integrating styles in buildings helps avoid unsightly development

Comparable use-multi-unit and/or mixed use- in immediate neighborhood (1/4 mile).

Table A	Create “neighborhood” areas
Table B	Immediate context is critical Some things can be game changers
Table C	If there is good design
Table D	If you already have mixed use in existing retail, having more not really important

Multi-unit and/or mixed-use permitted by right or by special permit in current zoning district.

Table A	“?”
Table B	We should keep an open mind about opportunities-not limit to what is now permitted Willing to see more mixed use Promising sites are on the margins-not in the middle of a residential neighborhood
Table C	If well built/designed, then zoning could be changed, shouldn’t be constrained by existing zoning
Table D	N/A

Site Characteristics

Previously developed, underutilized sites.

Table A	Add stories to one story stores
Table B	Especially 1-story commercial strips Many have size area for parking but with concern for adjacent residential
Table C	N/A
Table D	Takes care of “underutilized” areas

Historic resources with opportunity for preservation and reuse (not demolition).

Table A	OK churches
Table B	N/A
Table C	Religious properties-several opportunities like St. Aidan’s, but not only churches
Table D	Historic character of Brookline Not for developing mixed use housing exclusively

Surface parking lots (public or private ownership).

Table A	Replicate old with new demands
Table B	Public lots like Kent and Webster Esp. Webster St lot in Coolidge Corner
Table C	N/A
Table D	Serves retail/services/public

Larger houses with opportunity for rehab and reuse for multi-unit conversion (not demolition).

Table A	With additions
Table B	Pine St Inn examples are useful, but many more sites seem unlikely-special uses Unlikely to create large scale development
Table C	Keep the parking
Table D	Creates opps for different types of housing

Minimal value as open space or buffer areas for residential neighborhoods.

Table A	Setbacks or large expanse
Table B	<i>No</i> development on <i>dedicated</i> open space
Table C	Green space is important for health
Table D	Anything that can be found that's suitable should be considered

Minimal impact on natural/environmental features such as rock outcroppings, water resources, etc.

- Table A N/A
- Table B Allandale Farm an interesting question
Preserve all?
- Table C Taking away green space will have huge opposition
- Table D Same as previous

Not identified as priority for open space protection or natural resource/environmental value.

- Table A N/A
- Table B Same for Pine Manor
- Table C N/A
- Table D Always important consideration but flexibility/open mind to discussion = good

Appendix 3: Digital Group Polling Results

Session Name

New Session 4-25-2016, 7-28 PM

Date Created

4/25/2016 5:59:38 PM

Active Participants

14

Total Participants

14

Average Score

0.00%

Questions

6

Results by Question

1. Do you . . . (Multiple Choice)

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
Live in Brookline	81.82%	9
Work in Brookline	18.18%	2
Own property in Brookline but do not live or work here	0.00%	0
Other	0.00%	0
Totals	100%	11

2. Are you . . . (Multiple Choice)

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
A Town Meeting Member	20.00%	2
Member of a town board or committee (not a TM Member)	50.00%	5
Town Employee	10.00%	1
Other	20.00%	2
Totals	100%	10

3. What is your primary purpose for being here tonight? (Multiple Choice)

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
Advocate for affordable housing production & preservation	63.64%	7
Ensure protection of neighborhood integrity	18.18%	2
Ensure protection of open space/natural resources	0.00%	0
Ensure vitality of commercial areas	0.00%	0
Gather information/learn about the project	18.18%	2
Other	0.00%	0
Totals	100%	11

4. When did you move to Brookline? (Multiple Choice)

	Responses	
	Percent	Count
2010 or later	8.33%	1
1990-2009	33.33%	4
1970-1989	50.00%	6
Prior to 1970	0.00%	0
I don't live here	8.33%	1
Totals	100%	12

5. Do you own or rent your home? (Multiple Choice)

Responses		
	Percent	Count
Own	83.33%	10
Rent	16.67%	2
N/A	0.00%	0
Totals	100%	12