

Blessed Sacrament CAC
Monday, July 31, 2006
DRAFT Notes

CAC Members Present: Rafael Benzan, Clara Garcia, Fernando Mercedes, Damaris Pimentel, Michael Reiskind, Jennifer Spencer, Carmen Velazquez, Sylvia Villar, BRA: Ines Soto, Randi Lathrop, Jonathan Greeley, Heather Campisano, Lance Campbell; DND: David West; BTD: ONS: Leslie Delaney-Hawkins, BTD: Frank Johnson, Office of Rep. Sanchez: Andrea Martinez, JPND: Lizbeth Heyer, Kalila Barnett, Maria Mulkeen; New Atlantic Corp.: Peter Roth

Welcome and Introductions: Ines Soto (BRA) welcomed the group and reminded everyone that the first part of the meeting would be the CAC and the BRA only. She then asked for CAC feedback on the August 26th Public Meeting.

Clara Garcia (CAC) thought the meeting was well attended and a lot of good quotes were asked. It came across loud and clear that zoning, parking and density are issues that need to be examined. There also seems to still be some confusion regarding the affordable units as well as priority for JP residents

Randi Lathrop (BRA) clarified that affordable units cannot be reserved for JP residents and must be open to all Boston residents. Though process will focus on making sure the surrounding community is made fully aware of all opportunities associated with this site.

Michael Reiskind (CAC) felt that there is a clear density issue as well. He was also surprised at the number of complaints regarding the mixed-use building.

Clara (CAC) addressed the issue of open space for children and felt that this was a citywide issue that the development would not be able to solve.

Damaris Pimentel (CAC) stated that the green space on the site did not link to the rest of the community and was not very welcoming. She would also like to know about the size of the community space. Finally, she felt that there was still no guarantee that the 4 affordable units would be included in the Church.

Ines (BRA) stated that the JPND architect would be coming during the second hour to address some of those issues. This meeting is designed as a working meeting and that the youth and community space issues would be on tap for discussion. Ines then introduced a Chart of the project that would attempt to allow the CAC members to put some issues to rest and cue up what still needed to be discussed.

Clara (CAC) felt overwhelmed after the scooping meeting with the information and the number of city agencies.

Jennifer Spencer (CAC) felt that it was important to go around the room with this chart to see where everyone was at. Ines (CAC) agreed and began to do that.

Blessed Sacrament Review of Issues

Convent:

Carmen Velazquez (CAC) is concerned with maintaining the historical aspects of the building. Michael Cannizzo (BRA) replied that the entire Blessed Sacrament complex is going to go through the Landmarks Commission, so they will have to petition to make any changes to the building exteriors. This information would be in the Landmarks filing.

There was also some clarification that five parking spots would be reserved for Pine Street Inn staff. The zoning for the convent's use would be resolved with the map amendment.

Church:

Damaris (CAC) asked about the affordable units and Jennifer (CAC) asked about the community space.

Ines (BRA) reiterated that Landmarks would cover the exterior of the Church. She also proposed asking about parking for the community space.

Michael (CAC) asked about parking for the community space and wanted to hear more about the idea of the public using extra parking during a snow emergency.

Cheverus:

Damaris (CAC) asked what is going to happen with this building.

Michael (CAC) asked about possible ideas.

Carmen (CAC) stated that they have a prospective tenant that will allow the Compass School to rent the first floor.

The group debated the overall uses of the building. Michael (CAC) notes that they have proposed a number of uses and actually dismissed some of these ideas.

Fernando Mercedes (CAC) reminded that group that some of those additional uses were suggestions from the CAC.

Clara (CAC) stated that they brought the uses to the BRA for discussion.

Damaris (CAC) stated that the developers have outlined their possible uses to the CAC.

Ines (BRA) felt it would be important to summarize this discussion to the JPND as well as the accompanying parking issues of the building. The developer needs to have a firm response to this question.

Carmen (CAC) has a problem with the Cheverus issue so far. She felt it was necessary for the developer to present their desired use to the group and it was not something that the CAC should have to figure out.

Mixed Use Building:

Damaris (CAC) felt there might be too much retail space and suggested lowering the number of units in the building. Additionally, what kind of business would blend into Creighton Street?

Michael (CAC) asked about reducing the number of units or reducing the height.

Damaris (CAC) felt that the building is massive due to its design, but could be better integrated into the community.

Carmen (CAC) stated that the developers created four possible designs based on the Landmarks Commission. She still feels that this building is unacceptable and creates a wall between the site and the community.

Damaris (CAC) felt that depended on design.

Rafael Benzan (CAC) stated that someone will always be unhappy and that there needs to be a middle ground with residents.

Fernando (CAC) pointed out the model. The building does not seem gigantic and is almost the same height as surrounding buildings. The colors are a problem and the presentation is difficult.

Much discussion of this issue ensued back and forth.

Rafael (CAC) felt that once the overall housing number had been decreased it was inappropriate to increase it. That type of back and forth is bad.

Carmen (CAC) stated that people are still upset with the size and massing of this building. This process if the beginning and the CAC has been convened to discuss the PNF.

Rafael (CAC) replied that while last week was the first official public meeting, it is not the first time this process has been discussed and brought before the community. Many of the changes to the project have been made as a result of community opinion on the project and this building.

Carmen (CAC) replied that some felt uncomfortable in previous community meetings.

Damaris (CAC) felt that the CAC needed to focus on objectivity and this process was why the CAC was created. This is not just about Creighton or Sunnyside because the project will have a large impact on Jamaica Plain as a whole. It is important to develop the best project possible.

Clara (CAC) felt that was well said and suggested moving on.

Rectory:

Damaris (CAC) asked for an explanation of the rectory parking issues.

Compass School:

Michael (CAC) had questions about the longevity of the school and what their long-term plans were.

Ines (BRA) brought up the Compass School parking and how that would impact the site.

Creighton Street:

Carmen (CAC) asked if the Creighton condos would have basements.

A discussion ensued around underground parking, open space, and affordability. Damaris (CAC) asked about the affordability of the Creighton Street condos.

Ines (BRA) suggested wrapping up this portion of the meeting and urged putting these questions to the JPND.

Michael (CAC) asked about the green core of the site and how it will work. Parking and trash removal are also tied to this. It is still an ideal and does not feel real.

Ines (BRA) felt that this was another issue to be addressed with the JPND.

Ines (BRA) introduced a meeting schedule for the coming months, including meetings for the Landmarks Commission and the Boston Civic Design Commission. This information is intended to help frame the discussion going forward. A DRAFT tentative schedule was distributed.

Michael (CAC) asked if the Cheverus is independent of this. Lance Campbell (BRA) replied that it was and depending on the map amendment and final use, it could end up before the Zoning Board of Appeal.

Clara (CAC) felt that there was a need to discuss zoning soon because it frames the discussion about many aspects of the project.

Carmen (CAC) agreed that everything depends on zoning.

Jennifer (CAC) felt that a zoning only meeting should be the CAC's next meeting.

Michael (BRA) introduced the Boston Civic Design Commission and told the CAC that the commission will look at the project this week and then send it to a joint sub-committee with the Landmarks Commission. BCDC will focus on big picture issues with the site.

Ines (BRA) brought up the subject of DND funding for the affordable units in the Church. David West (DND) stated that he was reluctant to formally comment. Ines (BRA) told the CAC that they should determine a course of action for the possibility that the city will not fund those units.

Jennifer (CAC) asked when the CAC would formally know if the units had been approved or rejected. David (DND) felt an answer would be known in 7-10 days.

Ines briefly ran through a project pipeline for JP listing project locations and the overall number of units.

After a five-minute break, the meeting resumed

Discussion with Development Team

Ines (BRA) stated that the JPNDC had brought their transportation consultant and their architect to the meeting. As a result, she urged making the last part of the meeting a “working session”.

Damaris (CAC) asked for details about the community space in the Church.

Lizbeth Heyer (JPNDC) stated that it is located in the front part of the Church and is approximately 1,000 square feet. Mitch (Architect) added that it was approximately 2.5 times larger than the room the group was currently in. Lizbeth (JPNDC) stated that the room will have restrooms and will be entered through double doors.

Damaris (CAC) asked about ensuring that the room was accessible to all, not just the Church condos. Lizbeth (JPNDC) replied that the space will not be accessible from inside the Church and will have a separate entrance/exit for use by everyone. It is carved off as if it is its own condo and is similar to other community spaces this development team has designed.

Mitch (Architect) stated that the room was designed so that the most public entrance of the building was used and intended to create an active plaza in front of the Church. You cannot get into the community space from the housing part of the Church.

Jennifer (CAC) asked what it was going to look like as well as how the space will work. Will there be a user fee? Who would control access? Lizbeth (JPNDC) replied that the maintenance of the site would be responsibility of the ground lease organization. Kalila Barnett (JPNDC) added that a fee structure had not yet been determined.

Peter Roth (NADC) stated that the up-front development cost is absorbed in the project and maintenance should not be too expensive.

Ines (BRA) brought up the topic of green space.

Mitch (Architect) explained the overall strategy of the project. The goal is to create an active Centre Street with setbacks to highlight the plaza in the front of the site. A green core is incorporated in to the site and an important tree was maintained at the request of the community. There will be a tot lot play area and a handicapped lift to access the community space. The green space is centered on a “meandering path” through the open space.

Jennifer (CAC) talked about parking and green space.

Mitch (Architect) stated that there is a small wall to separate the two, as well as wheel stops. The “meandering path” is curbed.

Rafael (CAC) asked about trash pick-up and service vehicles. The development team responded that the intended mixed-use building users are small scale and will probably not need 18-wheelers or semis for deliveries. They anticipate early morning delivery hours. The trash compactors are stored in the building and trucks will access them in the rear of the building.

Michael (CAC) asked if this was for all buildings. Peter (NADC) replied that it was just for the mixed-use building. The other buildings will have exterior dumpsters.

Michael (BRA) stated that the BRA would have issues around entering the site and better pedestrian access. The external dumpsters are also a problem.

Peter (BADC) replied that it would cost to put them underground.

Damaris (CAC) brought up the fence at the front of the site. She likes the fence but feels that it creates sense of separation for the site and implies private property. Mitch (Architect) felt that this design was more inviting than previously.

Damaris (CAC) still felt that the fence made the green core seem uninviting and the fence implied privacy. It does not seem like the green core is open to the neighborhood.

Peter (NADC) stated that the development team is trying to maintain the history of the site by merging old and new.

Damaris (CAC) reiterated her point about the fence.

Lizbeth (JPND) suggested further exploration of the topic. Landmarks will also weigh in.

Ines (BRA) noted that it was after 8PM and suggested a few more questions be asked.

Rafael (CAC) notes the proximity of the tot lot to a parking area as well as concern about trash pickup and possible backing in of trash trucks.

Mitch (Architect) stated that the trucks need to be backed in.

Rafael (CAC) asked if they were really considering backing trucks into an area near where children would be playing. Mitch (Architect) stated that the trash pickup would be scheduled at a non-busy time.

Carmen (CAC) spoke about the accessibility issue and felt that the L-shaped mixed-use building acts as a wall to the community. Other possibilities need to be explored for this building.

Peter (NADC) stated that this is an issue about retail. There is a tradeoff about a retail storefront versus a smaller building. No retail could be much more open.

Carmen (CAC) referred to a MIT study with more open space. More things need to be done to facilitate access.

Fernando (CAC) stated that the mixed-use building needs to incorporate better colors and focus on appearance. He is ok with the size of the building, but the corner does not seem to match up with the Church.

Mitch (Architect) stated that the design is similar to a French building. Also, this is not a finished building and he understood the design review process. They will try to listen to community thoughts.

Lizbeth (JPND) stated that at this point, the development team feels committed to the size and use of the buildings.

Michael (BRA) stated that there would be a separate discussion on design. Some of the issues and questions will be further discussed through BCDC.

Jennifer (CAC) wanted to know more about the BTM suggestions after the scoping session.

Frank Johnson (BTM) stated that the BTM would make comments/suggestions based on the proposal. For example, they will likely comment on the two-way curb cut so close to an intersection. Also, JP traffic enforcement changes are forthcoming. Traffic people will need to examine traffic readings to discuss early morning parking restrictions.

The JPND Transportation Consultant thinks a truck would have a hard time making a turn on Creighton Street. They have successfully completed projects backing in 25-foot trucks, sometimes even bigger. A parking spot might have to be eliminated.

Jennifer (CAC) also asked about Sunnyside Street as an access point. The Consultant explained how his figures were developed and felt that there was already a great deal of activity around the site currently and that there would not be a significant volume change.

Carmen (CAC) explained how she felt that was incorrect and that congestion on Centre Street would force greater amounts of traffic onto Sunnyside.

The Consultant broke down the number of vehicle trips per hour during rush hour and possible use scenarios.

Carmen (CAC) did not want further congestion or speeding on her street.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:25pm. The next meeting will be August 14th at 6pm. Location to be determined.

