



**Christian Science Plaza Revitalization Project  
CAC Working Meeting #20**

**Tuesday, October 5, 2010**

**Location: Christian Science Publishing House Building**

**CAC Attendees:**

Tom Aucella, Belvedere Condo Association  
Mark Cataudella, Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO)  
Christian Coffin, Hilton Hotel Boston Back Bay  
Sybil CooperKing, Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay (NABB)  
Meg Mainzer-Cohen, Back Bay Association  
Donald Margotta, Church Park Apartments  
Bill Richardson, Fenway Civic Association (FCA)  
Lee Steele, St. Botolph Neighborhood Association (SBNA)  
George Thrush, Boston Society of Architects (BSA)  
Robert Wright, Symphony United Neighbors (SUN)

**CAC Members Not in Attendance:**

Kelly Brilliant, Fenway Alliance  
Vanessa Calderon-Rosado, Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (IBA)  
Ryan Higginson, Resident of the South End  
Joanne McKenna, Fenway Community Development Corporation (Fenway CDC)  
Craig Nicholson, American Planning Association (APA) – Massachusetts Chapter

**Ex-Officio Attendees:**

Massachusetts State Representative Byron Rushing  
Boston City Councilor Chuck Turner  
Patrick Beaudry, Office of Massachusetts State Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz  
Elizabeth Corcoran-Hunt, Office of Representative Rushing

**City of Boston Attendees:**

Heather Campisano, BRA  
David Carlson, BRA  
Lauren Shurtleff, BRA

**Members of the Public:**

Susan Ashbrook, NABB  
Sarah Kelly, Boston Preservation Alliance (BPA)  
Shirley Kressel, NABB  
MK Merelice, Tech Center at Tent City  
Lucille Taitt, Church Member  
Caline Watkins, Fenway CDC  
Bill Whitney, Berklee College of Music

## **Meeting Summary**

On Tuesday, October 5, 2010, the twentieth working session of the Christian Science Plaza Revitalization Project Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) was called to order at approximately 8:05 a.m. in the Christian Science Publishing House Building by Lauren Shurtleff, BRA Planner.

This meeting was called in order to allow the CAC to have an open discussion together regarding their joint comment letter on the Draft Plan Document to be submitted to the Church.

Before moving on to the CAC's discussion, however, the Church Team, represented by Bob Herlinger and Barbara Burley, addressed a few topics that had been raised by the CAC at the previous working session, held on September 13, 2010.

### 1. Proposed Reflecting Pool Crossing – Are handrails required?

Bob indicated that railings would not be required since the rebuilt pool will only be 6-12" deep, and railings would only be required if the pool was 24" or more deep. Additionally, a curb guard along the edge of the pool will not be required. Before moving on to the next item, Bob responded to a comment from the CAC and said that the Church also supports maintaining the feeling of the continuity of the plane of water and has explored infinity edge options for the pool crossing.

### 2. St. Germain Street

Bob showed a quick video of the existing conditions along St. Germain Street moving towards the Belvidere/Dalton Street sites. He then showed some SketchUp model "snapshots" showing the impacts of the massing of the proposed buildings on the pedestrian line of sight when walking down St. Germain Street.

### 3. Concerns relating to St. Germain Street raised by the Abbey Group

Barbara used the following handout to review the concerns expressed about St. Germain Street:

#### **Consideration to Supporting the Character of St. Germain Street**

As part of the Plaza Revitalization Project, two new buildings are proposed on Belvidere and Dalton Streets, adjacent to one end of St. Germain Street. From the beginning, consideration in the planning has included respect for the special environment of this residential neighborhood.

The Church team has met with the street's owners, The Abbey Group, on several occasions to share evolving plans and to receive input about the Plaza Revitalization Project: in February 2009, June 2009, March 2010, and April 2010. At the last meeting, improvements to the plans -- addressing issues raised by them and also by the CAC -- were shared.

Below are comments about issues raised in The Abbey Group's March 18 letter.

#### **Urban Design**

- ◆ Because a key objective of the Revitalization Project is to maintain open space, it was decided that future development would need to be concentrated on specific locations on edges of the Plaza (rather than being spread out) and would need to be taller than what is currently allowed as-of-right.

- ◆ Care has been given to the siting of the proposed development on Belvidere and Dalton Streets so as to minimize disruption to the residential buildings and residents on St. Germain Street and to improve the pedestrian experience in the area.
- ◆ Changes in the plans for the Belvidere/Dalton development have occurred in response to The Abbey Group's concerns and the comments raised during the CAC/public review process. These changes have resulted in improvements with respect to St. Germain Street, including:
  - The initial plan for one large monolithic building over both sites was changed to two buildings, allowing for an improved ground plane treatment and an opening between the two buildings that would provide light and visibility for the St. Germain and Clearway Street residential neighborhoods.
  - Further the two buildings provide a better opportunity for a step-down or transition in building height from the taller buildings at the Prudential Center across Belvidere Street to the surrounding neighborhoods.
  - The loading dock and entrance to a new underground garage were moved from the Dalton Street opening between the two buildings to the side of the high-rise facing the Colonnade Building (101 Belvidere) – removing those functions from the immediate vicinity of Dalton and St. Germain Streets.
  - Likewise the primary gateway for pedestrians and vehicles into St. Germain Street remains as currently configured and visually clear and accessible.
- ◆ The development of the Belvidere/Dalton site is expected to improve the pedestrian experience along these streets and bring welcomed pedestrian activity – all of which will benefit St. Germain Street and other nearby residents.

#### **Construction**

- ◆ All urban construction requires that appropriate actions be taken to minimize risk to nearby structures in accordance with building code requirements.
- ◆ Contractor(s) will develop appropriate dewatering/groundwater strategies to avoid foundational settlement in the neighborhood and will be required to comply with all city new-construction codes relating to noise, dust, environmental issues, traffic, public safety and other aspects.

#### **Traffic**

- ◆ Under the proposed plans, traffic circulation in the vicinity of Belvidere Street, Dalton Street, St. Germain Street, and Clearway Street will be improved.
- ◆ As noted above, the “gateway” to St. Germain will remain as currently configured and visually clear and accessible.
- ◆ The planned Clearway Street extension to Belvidere Street will help relieve traffic on Dalton and St. Germain Streets.
- ◆ Traffic studies of the project show that the volume in the area will increase somewhat, but the projections are within acceptable standards for the city.

#### **Shadow Impacts**

- ◆ Shadow studies indicate very little impact on St. Germain Street (see summary in Plan Document pages 83 - 96).
- ◆ These have been shared with The Abbey Group.
- ◆ Our understanding is that this is no longer a concern.

At the conclusion of Bob and Barbara's brief presentation, the meeting was turned over to the CAC for an open discussion.

#### Open Discussion

- George Thrush, CAC Co-Chair and BSA: A draft CAC comment letter was circulated last night via email. The letter is based on written feedback from three CAC members, and the notes from the last meeting.

- Meg Mainzer-Cohen, Back Bay Association: It is an excellent letter; it is articulate, hits on the points, and puts the issues on the table. I feel like, however, there have been some modifications to the plan since they first put it on the table – certainly with regard to the massings.
- George Thrush: Yes, but the modifications made were not based on feedback from this group. The changes resulted from market conditions; they were not about urban design, wind, the sewer line that would separate the continuous parking, or anything this committee specifically has brought up.
- Meg Mainzer-Cohen: I would challenge us then to say what we think they should have done; I do not feel that our tone should be bitter.
- Sybil CooperKing, CAC Co-Chair and NABB: The letter does say what we think should be done.
- Lee Steele, SBNA: I think it sets the wrong tone unintentionally. It says that they did not listen to us.
- George Thrush: As we spend our 20th two-hour session, because we have had a responsible entity (*i.e.*, The Church) aware of the importance of this place – they are not proposing anything that is not the best place for real estate development.
- Meg Mainzer-Cohen: What are we hoping to accomplish by setting that tone?
- George Thrush: We do not have to; there has been a sense of exasperation about this lengthy process and its inefficacy. There is room for improvement in the City to this process.
- Lee Steele: Maybe it is a good project in total, that needed some tweaking (not major) – therefore this involved process perhaps was slightly overkill – on a project that did not have all that many options to begin with.
- George Thrush: When we did suggest modest issues, they were not modified. For example: when they had a sheer face on the tallest building, prior to changing the massing – they did not explore any massing alternatives. The bullet points addressing the streetscape are where our focus should be, as it is where everyone in this meeting will ultimately experience the site.
- Sybil CooperKing: We made some cogent arguments about where the Reflecting Pool should terminate.
- George Thrush: It depends on how you perceive our review here – I am surprised there was not more interaction – particularly with respect to site connections.
- Lee Steele: To go on record, I would propose that the fourth paragraph be deleted in its entirety.
- Christian Coffin, Hilton Hotel Boston Back Bay: The Church has discussed certain topics – though they have not made changes so far as to include the Midtown Hotel, or present different massings, etc.
- Sybil CooperKing: I have not heard, with the exception of NABB, people coming out against the 500' height, however, I have heard voices in opposition to the Church's lack of inclusion of the Midtown Hotel site in the plan.
- Christian Coffin: There has been resistance – but I don't think we should portray it as ugly.
- Lee Steele: The fourth paragraph is more damaging than successful.
- Representative Byron Rushing: There is another tone question – I do not think this letter is meant to be a continuation of the discussion. The letter should be,

for example, that as a CAC we recommend that the boundaries of the site be modified. There will be a response to this letter by the Church, which will be reflected in the Plan.

- Meg Mainzer-Cohen: I think that the language around the Reflecting Pool is the strongest.
- George Thrush: And as a group, we are in total agreement about the Reflecting Pool.
- Tom Aucella, Belvedere Condo Association: Early on in the process, we discussed dividing the Pool.
- George Thrush: I think that the conclusion at the last meeting is the best. The specific performance criteria must be outlined.
- Meg Mainzer-Cohen: What is our criteria though? Should we specify further than we already have?
- Sybil CooperKing: One criteria that should be included is that the Sunday School has the appearance of floating from the other end of the Pool.
- Christian Coffin: It depends on what side you are standing.
- Sybil CooperKing: If nobody likes the idea of breaking up the reflecting pool then why are we saying in the letter that it's okay?
- Representative Rushing: I do not have a problem with being able to walk across the Pool – but it is all about the design. Similarly, even though I am in favor of shortening the pool, I do not think we should shorten it if it means that we will lose the illusion of the pool floating. (Several people agreed.)
- Robert Wright, SUN: It may be something that cannot be done – if it comes to building the building (on Huntington Avenue) and shortening the pool, or not building the building...
- George Thrush: I will add something to the letter about this perspective being important to a person standing at the ground level.
- Representative Rushing: It will not matter to anyone that is not standing at the ground level.
- George Thrush: On height and bulk, I tried to articulate financial necessity – and brought up the issue of the Midtown Hotel.
- Meg Mainzer-Cohen: I think what we are talking about is seeing a line that indicates the relationship between the 950,000-SF and the Midtown Hotel site.
- Representative Rushing: From my understanding, the amount of development on the site they have proposed will be sufficient to maintain the open space into the future. Regarding other sites, they have other goals elsewhere, which do not factor into the Plaza's future. I still think that the boundary was put in the wrong place.
- Meg Mainzer-Cohen: I thought that they said the opposite. I would say that in asking for greater financial detail, we should be very clear about the exact information that we are looking for. We asked earlier, and information was provided, and we were not satisfied with it because we were not more specific.
- Christian Coffin: Perhaps it would be worthwhile to ask an independent third party to evaluate? I thought they took the full as-of-right value of the Midtown Hotel into their considerations for the future. What if we were to say something to the affect, of maintaining that this is the case in the future – a solid assumption that the Midtown Hotel will be developed to its as-of-right potential – but no further.

- Sybil CooperKing: Regarding zoning, while the development is cited within logical areas, these logical areas are specially protected within the zoning code.
- George Thrush: Are you saying that we should insist that the building not be taller than 75'?
- Sybil CooperKing: I understand why the St. Botolph neighborhood sees the Midtown Hotel site as important, as it abuts their neighborhood, but the 500' tower is right near the Back Bay, and to me this is an unreasonable amount on a site adjacent to a picturesque residential street (St. Germain Street).
- George Thrush: There are also looming hotels and office complexes nearby in the Prudential Center, though. A minority opinion can be written expressing this desire, however.
- George Thrush: As an architect, it will be much harder to make the stepbacks relative to wind comfort on the massing as proposed; the older massing would have made this easier.
- Meg Mainzer-Cohen: The corner of Huntington Avenue and Belvidere Street by the Administration Building (*Note: this building is now known as 177 Huntington Avenue*) is brutal with regard to wind levels.
- George Thrush: I will add something to the letter regarding wind levels. It is very hard to be specific at this point since they have only presented a massing model. And I do think the proposed massing is better in this final iteration than previously. The ground plane around the buildings on St. Germain Street is far better – you are not looking at loading docks, for instance.
- Tom Aucella: Didn't the CAC have something to do with this?
- George Thrush: Yes, you're right, the ground plane improvement in this location was made at the suggestion of the CAC.
- Meg Mainzer-Cohen: Bus parking along Huntington Avenue is critical to business in the City. At this time, there literally is nowhere else for them to go – and we would lose out terribly by abandoning them.
- George Thrush: From the perspective of this site, though, they are horrible.
- Christian Coffin: It was mentioned earlier that the City is looking for other locations.
- Representative Rushing: My read on this is that they cannot answer this in the next two years, but chances are they will have an answer in five years, and that might be just right on time. It would be wrong to talk about enlivening Huntington Avenue and not mention this.
- Mark Cataudella, BSO: We should mention that we agree and understand that there should be a loading and unloading place, but that we are against the parking. Should we also mention the Huntington Avenue building to point #2?
- Sybil CooperKing: Regarding transparency/canopy?
- Christian Coffin: Also, the impact of the construction – special attention and care should be paid.
- Callie Watkins, Fenway CDC (attending on behalf of Joanne McKenna, Fenway CDC): Should we add bullets rather than paragraph structure – to be more concise?
- Robert Wright: We should keep a positive tone.
- Meg Mainzer-Cohen: The best improvements to many of these developments often come from input from the community, in my experience.

- George Thrush: The ground plane has been improved as a result of our comments.
- Robert Wright: Can we thank the Church for gathering us together?
- Meg Mainzer-Cohen: They did respond to everything we asked regarding information.
- George Thrush: They made a thoughtfully conscious proposal from the start.
- Sybil CooperKing: At the beginning of this meeting, they responded to our requests for information.
- George Thrush: I will add these comments today to the letter, and circulate it to everyone. We will need to have everyone's sign-off in order for their name to be added to the letter.

#### Public Comments

- Shirley Kressel, NABB: The CAC letter's tone should be more factual.
- Sarah Kelly, BPA: The BPA is in agreement with the CAC's direction; we did not go so far as to say this plan should not happen, and yet we do not see the design challenges as insignificant. We submitted a letter with conditional language, *i.e.*, "The Church will explore...", etc. which the CAC may find useful. As part of the potential landmarking of the site, there is language that the BPA and DOCOMOMO drafted that tried to take a more positive approach.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Lauren stated that they will be in touch with the CAC once it is time for the next meeting to be scheduled. In the meantime, once the CAC's letter has been submitted to the Church, it will also be posted to the BRA's project website.