

Forest Hills Improvement Initiative

Fourth Community Meeting – May 31, 2007 Meeting Notes

The following notes begin with the meeting summary from the end of the 4th community meeting on May 31st and are followed by notes from the small group discussions. NOTE: Parcels U, V, and W were NOT discussed in the full group summary after the group report.

MEETING SUMMARY

MBTA STATION PARKING LOT:

- Need more information on housing affordability
- Would like 25%-75% of new residential units to be for a mix of incomes earners
- Provide programmed open space – maintained by private owner
- Include youth service spaces
- Youth-oriented businesses
- Need more photos of current conditions
- Need information on the impact of affordable housing on existing property values
- More trees and preserve existing trees
- Desire more community uses

FITZGERALD PARKING LOT:

- Limit the heights of buildings
- Maintain views of existing residents on Court House Hill
- Provide good views for all income levels – not just market-rate housing
- Manage existing parking
- Provide family housing
- Find an affordable housing percentage that will keep residents in the area and allow for new residents of different income levels

ARBORWAY YARD:

- 25%-75% affordable housing (lower to upper ends of the percentage of housing that would be designated for affordable units)
- Washington St. to become lively with gathering spaces and performing arts
- Indoor recreation space needed
- Promotion of local ownership
- Require integrated design for higher sustainability & green building outcomes
- Better parking support
- Good buffer between the MBTA yard and commercial and residential uses
- Greater density to street
- Need to think about the reality of parking demand 0.5 - 0.7 (max.) spaces / unit may be low
- Affordability of housing needs to match the neighborhood need
- What does 75% affordable housing look like?
- Match the ratio of affordable housing to income average

- Caution on “market value” of existing; maintain market value for existing home owners
- Clarify levels of affordability
- Need more time at community meetings and better data

INDIVIDUAL GROUP DISCUSSION NOTES

ARBORWAY YARD PARCEL

USE:

- Affordable housing units should be spread across all parcels
- Include “rent-to-own” as a housing option
- Affordability of housing - % range of number of units per site
 - 70-75% (for all left out of market)
 - 50% everywhere (rental and owner)
 - 25-30% (to stay in line with the area)
 - 25-30% (to allow for “better buildings”)
- Strong street edge – good design
- Include uses to extend hours of operation to increase safety/activity
- Businesses should have a “public gathering” feel
- Park space, tot lot, restaurant, library, grocery store are all needed
- Include youth / adult indoor recreation facility (YMCA)
- Put commercial building over surface lot to mitigate noise from Arborway Yard T facility
- Provide support for local businesses

DESIGN:

- Design should upgrade/improve the neighborhood
- Housing should integrate/connect Burnett St. and Brookley Rd. physically and architecturally
- Designs are too blocky (Beacon Street in Brookline is a good model)
- Include a strong landscape program for Washington St. edge and Gateway

TRANSPORTATION:

- Concern that increased density means increased traffic
- Provide a traffic signal at new street
- Encourage “non-car” forms of transportation
- Parking at street level ok if street edge is activated

SUSTAINABILITY:

- Require green buildings & LEED (Leadership in Environmental and Energy Design)

PRIVATE PARKING LOT (FITZGERALD)

USE:

- Mix of uses that will support all populations – very important to draw younger population whether to public or retail uses
- Residential on the corner is not the right use – corner is more suited for commercial

- Community uses need to be considered despite lack of public funds available – this would be a great location for a community center
- Need hard use like movie theatre (smaller scale) that isn't reliant on views or windows
- Housing against Orchard Hill Rd. part of the site rather than Casey Overpass part of the site.
- Housing for different incomes – different types of housing (apt/row house/studio-3bedrooms)
- Affordable housing is less than 60% (i.e. 10% less than 60% BMI and 5% less than 120% BMI). Less affordable housing units, but broader range of affordability
- New housing should consist of more owned units than rental units for stability
- 24-hour uses to increase safety
- Potential retail uses: gym, house wares and clothing
- Childcare facility

DESIGN:

- Need more street furniture: trashcans, benches, lighting on both Morton & Hyde Park Ave.
- Make space under Casey Overpass more usable and attractive; figure out creative uses for the space, or at least mitigate the negatives
- Trees can mitigate sound – increase setback for larger trees and break up façades along Morton St. to help with noise
- Sidewalk improvements (with sustainable materials such as recycled tires, if possible)
- Building should possibly be higher than 5 stories on north part of site (against Casey Overpass)
- Guidelines should be focused on goals such as quality, innovative design, and healthy housing instead of specific materials
- Smaller units would increase affordability - instead of 1-3 bedrooms, 0-3 bedrooms

TRANSPORTATION:

- Bicycle storage and parking indoors
- Commercial-only parking spaces/areas
- .5-.75 cars per unit should be the maximum which is consistent with BTM Boston 2000 Plan
- Include shared car spaces (not necessarily Zipcar)
- Provide more parking and less thru traffic

SUSTAINABILITY:

- Recycling
- Sidewalk improvements are done with recycled and permeable materials
- Sustainable design of buildings
- More trees/ green streetscapes - required (ex: require one tree per unit of housing)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS/QUESTIONS:

- Bring new people to Forest Hills or support existing residents? Examine tradeoffs.
- Safety when walking through the site - what design interventions and uses can help with this?

MBTA STATION PARKING LOT

USE:

- Include retail space that is attractive to youths (like computer center)

- Preserve commuter parking on this site and consider Fitzgerald spots that are being lost
- Add secure bike parking for commuters (lockers type rather than rack type)
- Concern over driveway off of Hyde Park Ave. – consider access to garage from Ukraine Way and Washington St. in addition to Hype Park Ave. entrance
- 15% affordable may be too low
- Concern about parking lot security at night
- Local retail: pharmacies and food markets
- More affordable housing and more information on what affordable means
- Enough open space and some should be programmed for specific uses
- Maintain the connection to the Arboretum
- Provide enough open space for a farmers’ market, artist’ booths or small outdoor concert area
- Open space should be built and maintained by the developer, but programmed by a community organization

DESIGN

- Ensure enough height on the south end of site to have enough parking for MBTA requirements
- Keep in mind the relationship of building heights and the MBTA
- Buildings should be short enough so that clock tower is visible
- Preserve mature trees if possible
- Larger set backs are preferable
- Design of parking garage is important: do not want it to look like a parking lot
- Housing should be designed to attract public transit users

TRANSPORTATION:

- Improve existing traffic conditions
- Provide Zipcar spaces
- Spill over parking should be considered
- Number of parking spots and housing units is too low? Commuter parking can be shared at night with residential parking
- Provide below-grade parking

SUSTAINABILITY:

- Include a Green roof design
- Explore a community green space on the roof of a garage

MBTA PARCELS V & W

USE:

- Developer to (improve and) maintain open space for the public
- Poor site for open space due to access and location – might not get a lot of use
- Consider community gardens
- Bike path to connect to South West corridor
- Senior housing could alleviate traffic impacts
- Need is most severe at the lower end of income scale - targets should be calibrated to existing demographic

- Affordable housing as highest priority
- Which side of Washington St. should the bike path be located on? Maybe both, but definitely a connection to the Arboretum.
- “Active uses” for first floor
- Focus on pedestrian access as much as bicycle access (crosswalks)
- Market MHFA/T’s “Take the T Home” mortgage

DESIGN:

- Heights of buildings facing each other across the street should compliment one another
- Wood construction might be more contextual for smaller buildings
- Curb cut should be as far away from intersection as possible (separate place for delivery if necessary)
- Should 3-story height limit be relaxed? – different opinions amongst group
- Specific building materials are less important than the quality and outcome

TRANSPORTATION:

- Commerce and congestion in an already busy area
- Parking may need to be adjusted to specific use
- Concerns about parking/traffic

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS/QUESTIONS:

- Questions about sustainability
- Costs associated with a pedestrian bridge - how much it would cost to move, relocate, and refurbish
- Questions and concerns about the number and mix of units – need more information to make an informed recommendation
- What is the TOD demographic? Mixed opinions about pushing for more affordability.

MBTA PARCEL U

USE:

- Overall, no consensus of how much affordable housing there should be
- More than minimum of affordable housing (130-160% owner BMI and 100-125% renter BMI).
- Housing access to low-income population
- Lower percentage of Boston Median Income (BMI) for housing – needs government subsidies
- Low income housing does not mean lower quality housing – quality and affordability are not mutually exclusive
- Existing residents are not displaced with the creation of new housing
- Existing home values don’t go down with new development/housing
- Need for public agencies to support quality/affordability issues
- 168 units too many. Reduce height from five stories to decrease number of units
- Incorporate non-profit/ co-op ownership into new housing
- General support for 50% affordability but not full agreement amongst group
- Create three bedroom units for families

- Create a use to support the 3,361 housing units/existing residents now in Forest Hills
- Small grocery store like a Trader Joe's
- Keep as much open/green space as possible and preserve the feel of open/green space
- Youth services are needed
- Retail businesses that attract youth – bookstores, cafes, etc.
- A grocery store located further from the Forest Hills station would be a better fit for the area
- Local conveniences to cut down on auto traffic/use – encourage foot/public transit usage

DESIGN:

- Use good design to hide amount of residential units and density
- Keep existing trees and equally plant new trees around the site
- Set buildings further back from street for an on-road bike lane, trees, and open space
- Omit on-street parking and add bike lane and wide pedestrian area

TRANSPORTATION:

- Center communities around public transit
- Local conveniences to cut down on auto traffic/use – encourage foot/public transit usage
- Zipcar spaces
- Strong connection to Forest Hills T station

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS AND QUESTIONS:

- Is more affordable housing feasible?
- Community has power to get what we want – we haven't looked into others' plans
- Are there subsidies (gov't) for green design?
- What would happen if we didn't put any housing and just businesses and commercial (grocery store)?
- Break out group structure needs more time
- It's hard to evaluate the reality of number of units and space for businesses – are there ways to demonstrate this?
- 3-D imagery looks like too much