

January 26, 2010: Hyde Park Planning & Rezoning Advisory Group Working Session

Advisory Group: Barbara Baxter, Vic Carrara, Gene Clegg, Cuthbert Downey, Ken Fields, Barbara Hamilton, Steve Roller, Nancy Savelle-Thimble, Ann Lee, Bob Vance (Rob Villegas & Jay Paget – not present)

Consultants: Carole Schlessinger (CSS), Mike Davis (Bergmeyer)

BRA: Marie Mercurio, Ted Schwartzberg, Derek Valentine (Intern)

****PLEASE READ THESE NOTES IN TANDEM WITH VIEWING THE POWER POINT PRESENTATION FROM THE JANUARY 26, 2010 ADVISORY GROUP MEETING(<http://www.bostonredevelopmentauthority.org/Planning/PlanningInitsIndividual.asp?action=ViewInit&InitID=136>)**

Introduction (BRA): Marie stated that the Group would be going into follow-up discussions on several “opportunity sites”. She noted that the Stop and Shop “opportunity site” has been taken off the table for future discussion as we heard push back from the December 17, 2009 meeting to pursue any kind of residential concepts at this time. The night’s agenda includes conceptual streetscape improvements for lower Hyde Park Avenue, in addition to transit-oriented development conceptual plans for the Fairmount Commuter Rail station (with higher densities than what was shown at the December 17, 2009 meeting). Disclaimer: These are concept ideas ONLY - these are not proposals on the table. The purpose of the discussion of concepts for future redevelopment is to solicit feedback from the Advisory Group regarding height, density and design so we can propose realistic ideas for when we get into the rezoning. Carole and Marie have begun to investigate the DND parcels in Hyde Park (22 acres) and how they might be rezoned. Mike will continue his discussion about Cleary and Logan Squares historic heights and densities (we heard 4 stories were too high by several Advisory Group members at the December 17, 2009 meeting). He has several concept build-out scenarios to show the Group.

Lower Hyde Park Avenue Streetscape Improvement Suggestions:

Carole: We want to look at open space and traffic issues. One thing we talked about was the stretch of Hyde Park Avenue south of Cleary Square by Personalized Fitness and Grandma’s Coffee Cake. The parcels there are very narrow with railroad tracks next to them. This is where we formerly talked about an industrial artists incubator. We can talk about streetscape improvements in this stretch of Hyde Park Avenue approximately between Reservation Road (north) and Milton Street (south). We took photos and measured to see how much space we have to work with - overall about 50’. There could be 8’ of sidewalk with period lighting and street trees and a 5’ bike lane. The chain link fence could be replaced and might eventually be a landscaped buffer. Note: all are on the existing public right-of-way, and are *not* recommendations for improvements to private property. (She shows several renderings of the improvements and the Advisory Group is receptive).

AG: Are we discussing the height of the buildings here?

Carole: We are not suggesting any new buildings on this stretch at this time because the existing buildings are located on narrow and potentially difficult parcels (in addition to being private

property) to work with any redevelopment scheme. We're just suggesting ways to make the existing fabric in this stretch of lower Hyde Park Avenue to become more aesthetically pleasing to either the pedestrian or driver.

Fairmount Commuter Rail Transit-Oriented-Development concept:

Carole: The feeling last time was that you all wanted to see more density from what we originally proposed (for comparison and contrast). We were trying to not overshadow the existing 3-family houses.

Concept A- we didn't change it, because it's not the best plan to have a door on the train platform.

Concept B- Bigger buildings moved back a little with courtyards in front of it. One building with parking at grade, retail then 3 residential. FAR of 0.93. To increase the FAR, we raised this building to 6 stories; townhouses stayed the same, so we added more structured parking. These are not real designs; we are just trying to visualize the density and the zoning that would support what you want to see.

Concept C- added a landscaped street in the middle with all buildings facing it. Max of 5 stories, FAR of .51. The center street is a nice design but constrains the size of the buildings. 67 residential units. We looked at increasing them to 4-story townhouses and a 6-story townhouse building with 2 levels of parking. 113 units of housing with FAR of .83. Low for a transit oriented site.

AG: Not impressed with 8 floors (6-story townhouse with 2 levels of parking). But having more residential density will help the existing retail in the Squares (Nott Street: there are people interested in developing up to 5 floors).

Carole: the corner is the prime site. Fairly low use now except for the building where they make T shirts.

AG: This is privately-owned land.

Carole: Yes. Remember that we are just looking at the zoning. Nothing is advocating the city purchasing privately-owned land for a redevelopment proposal.

AG: Has anyone informed the land owners?

Carole: It's not necessary at this time as this is not an official development proposal. We will likely show some of these concepts at a subsequent community meeting in the next month or two after we get an idea of what the AG wants. These meetings are also published and open to the public. In addition, those particular land owners are welcome to these Advisory Group working sessions.

AG: Is a 3-story townhouse for one family?

Carole: Sometimes they are stacked, sometimes they are one family. Average unit sizes are 1,200 sf. My sense is that the AG is comfortable with 3 to 5 stories but not 9.

AG: Do we have a street view model (elevations)?

Carole: No but we can do it (for the next meeting).

Commercial District Mixed-Use/3-Story Photo Examples:

Carole: Provided examples of 1-2-story mixed-use commercial districts with some 3-story infill. In Lexington, there are mostly 1-2 stories with a newer 3-story building blended in. (She shows image from the PowerPoint presentation, and the AG likes this example). It is a good example of 3-story infill in a 2-story area. She spoke with the Town Planner in Lexington. Three stories and mixed-use were not allowed when they started, but it has been really well received. It has a FAR close to 3.0. The community is happy with the building. The residential units are selling well.

The next is Newton Centre. Three-story mixed-use next to 1 and 2 stories. This is on Beacon Street. Newton Highlands: 1, 2 and 3 stories work well.

AG: The new 1-story retail/commercial in Newton Centre is a good example of residential (the existing building next door) attracting new retail. With the 3-D modeling we saw last time, an AG member is now pushing towards the higher buildings while others are not. Greater heights on both sides of the street can make you have a feeling of being in a canyon, given the width of River Street.

Carole: Chances are you will not have 3-story buildings across from each other. Many buildings will remain as they are. And it will happen over time. We can look at the context after a few 3-story buildings are built. The one in Lexington works well because the 3rd floor is gabled. It is 36', low for a 3-story building. Requiring variegated roof lines and gables can make it less intrusive. We can make these recommendations in the new zoning's design guidelines and the project would likely undergo required design review at the BRA anyway.

AG: The Fairmount corridor is the only place with 3 stories across from each other. Seeing these images makes it more palatable.

Carole: Again, we can add design stipulations if they are going up to 3 stories.

AG: Have we given up on having 4 stories? An AG member does not want to end the discussion on 3+ story buildings. The design of the building is important too. In the South End, there are 4-story buildings that look good because of their design.

Mike: There are places in Hyde Park where 3 stories make sense, even 4 or 5. If we had the width of Blue Hill Avenue, we could do 6 stories, but Hyde Park Avenue is too narrow. We don't want to ruin the suburban feel people like about Hyde Park. He has looked at a few sites

more closely to see if 3-story residential is feasible. Buildings identified as green (on the 3-D model) are historic resources. There are a lot of them. And there are a lot of small parcels not feasible for development. This means that Cleary Square will not become all 4-5 story buildings. We looked at 3 stories at Papa Gino's and where the department store used to be. If we take the corner of River and Maple, that can be 3 stories. A new building where Bank of America is could be 3 stories. If we did extra density in 3 places around the historic buildings, would it work together? I think we decided it can improve the building. Then Logan Square. The Union Building, the theatre and infill on the bank parking lots can accept some density. The historic buildings in the Squares used to be higher. The development concepts for Logan Square originally shown in the last Advisory Group meeting seemed more feasible to people. This next concept looks south down Hyde Park Avenue towards Cleary Square at Dunkin Donuts. We think a lot of residential development can happen here. We are looking at 4 stories here. We couldn't feasibly build 4 stories at Dunkin' Donuts - too small of a parcel.

Mike then presents his "idea matrix". He took issues and opportunities from the June '09 community meeting, included the draft vision and goals, and put them into a matrix. From the community meeting, there was a heightened interest in mixed-use and more density in the commercial district on Hyde Park Avenue. There is/was a uniform interest in creating gateways. He looked at streetscape improvements, storefronts and signage.

The first site is where Papa Gino's and Family Dollar are. If the whole site is used in preparing a concept, it is 80,000 sf. Sixty feet is the optimal depth for a residential apartment style building. One-hundred and twenty feet is optimal for a retail store. The retail spaces we have now (Family Dollar) are huge, and may not be the type of retail space you want. We could put 60 spaces on the back of that parcel and add 50,000 sf of commercial space. It's not just about the FAR, but also about the lot coverage. If we can assemble a parcel big enough and provide parking we can accommodate a FAR of up to 3.0. We can get 48 residential units and the site is self-contained. Things begin to work when we give a developer the FAR to make it a feasible project, limit lot coverage and require the parking on site.

Then Mike looked at the property adjacent to the Way Building in Logan Square. The site has 2 access points which makes it more feasible. This parcel is approximately 30,000 s.f. Forty parking spaces on the back of the site, 12,500 sf commercial space on the 1st floor, and 24 residential units (3 stories). This would be a 4-story building but with a small footprint. This is small but feasible. Fifty percent lot coverage makes mixed-use development work.

The next concept is on Hyde Park Avenue at the parcels between Dunkin Donuts and the commuter rail tracks. For reference, there is an Auto Zone on the site. We could assemble 45,000 sf, put 130 parking spaces below grade, add 28,000 sf of commercial at grade and add 4 stories of residential (72 units). Parking would be accessed from Clay Street, not Hyde Park Avenue. If the parcel is big enough with 2 access points and limited lot coverage, those can be the drivers. This is a FAR of 3.0.

AG: You aren't proposing this density all down Hyde Park Avenue. If we can park cars on site and get services off of the main street, it can work. What happens to existing buildings and businesses?

Mike: We're not asking anyone to leave. We just want to think about rezoning so the owners may consider redevelopment in the future.

AG: We don't want to scare away potential developers and redevelopment opportunities.

Mike: We want to make redevelopment feasible for the developer, but an important clarification to continue to note is that the BRA and the community will always be able to provide input toward its design amongst other things required as per the Article 80 Small Project or Large Project review. Giving a developer an FAR of 2.5 or 3 will make it worthwhile.

Carole: Remember: more people in the Squares will make them livelier. This density that Mike is suggesting better supports the retail mix that you like and was recommended in the recent Retail Market Study completed in April 2009.

Mike: The problem with the Post Office Site is the limited ability to park for a residential site. The lower level should be retail space.

AG: Historically, businesses in Hyde Park had a front and back door with parking which allowed more people to come and shop. The old grocery store was like that.

Mike: Having 48 people living there (the Papa Gino's 3-story concept) will probably suggest a push for more attractive storefronts in direct vicinity.

Gateway Discussion:

Mike: He identified where a few of the entry zones into Hyde Park are. He picked 3 of them. The first one he showed was at the bridge at River and Business Streets. Coming from Roslindale, you can come this way. The train station is on the right with a landscaped island looking towards the bridge. We recommend a premium pavement pallet and antique light poles showing entrance to business district. We also want to add some monument (gateway) signs. The traffic island on Gordon Street is neglected now. We could do a monument sign there and a landscaped area on the southwest of Gordon. The light poles could have banner hardware. The billboard goes away. The bridge stays the same.

The next proposed gateway was by the Dunkin Donuts, on Hyde Park Avenue headed south at Clay Street. There are good light fixtures there now. The MBTA right-of-way is on the left-hand side and Dunkin Donuts is on the right. There could be shared parking access off of Clay Street to the parking structure I suggested in the concept. Again, I would propose monument signs and the premium pavement pallet with the pendant lights. There is a corner on the Dunkin Donuts lot that could have a monument sign. The residential concept that I mentioned earlier is opposite Dunkin Donuts on Hyde Park Avenue. Hyde Park Main Streets may have some money and programming to provide some of these gateway signs if it's in the Main Streets District.

AG: Do you think the train track will limit the development of residential on that site.

Mike: It's a select market. There is a good landscape buffer, the concept that I suggest is not right on the tracks. You can double-pane the windows. Less than half of the buildings face the train.

AG: With newer-built construction, you may not even hear the trains passing. A Member suggests that the gateway should be further north, but also feels like the proposed gateway Mike suggests works at Clay Street with the concept idea. The Victorian houses south of this site should be showcased.

Public (Main Streets Member): There is a lot of discussion over where the borders are for Hyde Park Main Streets. As an organization, we have been more flexible. We have looked down as far as Personal Fitness (south) and Del Rock (north). I may expect the gateway to be between here and where the sign is now at Del Rock, maybe at West Street. Hyde Park Main Streets wants to support business even if it's not right in the Squares.

Mike: Final gateway concept: this is Hyde Park Avenue (south) and Dana Avenue, near Most Precious Blood School.

AG: The City's Public Works Dept has already proposed something in this area. Unsure of the timeline for implementation.

Mike: There is more pavement there than you need. Consider a traffic island (similar to PWD's plan formerly unveiled to community at end of 2008). Add antique poles and a monument in the island and street trees. There is no landscaping at this time. Premium pavement and the banner hardware. Same pallet as in the other gateways. The light poles with the banners are real important. Where is the district entrance from Fairmount Avenue? At Truman Highway? Do we want one coming from River St into Logan at the YMCA/Walnut?

Carole: If they are gateways, we want them in commercial areas.

AG: Are they pedestrian or vehicle gateways?

Mike: Both, but mainly vehicle. Do we want to move the Clay Street gateway further north on Hyde Park Avenue?

AG: We are happy with this concept at Clay Street and Hyde Park Avenue.

Mike may explore locations for 2-3 more gateways for the next AG meeting.

Signage and storefronts:

Mike: We can adopt signage regulations under the new zoning. We would first want to restore any important architectural features of the building façade. We would want consistent architectural sign bands and uniform lighting. Limits on size of the signage (total sign area in square feet shall not exceed the sign frontage multiplied by 2). No exposed conduit. The signs should mention the name of the store - don't need addresses and phone numbers, email

addresses, etc. Can add some signage on the windows at pedestrian scale, but we need to limit opaque advertising. The current code allows for up to 30% of signage being opaque, but it is in excess of that now within the Squares for many businesses. We want to encourage views and transparency into the stores. Between 2 and 8' above ground is where signs are allowed on windows. If it were a 3-story building, you may want to encourage blade signs and awnings. You can prohibit signage on the awnings. Small pedestrian-oriented signs like we saw in the Newton Centre commercial district photos.

AG: Continuity is a good thing to see. Need teeth in zoning enforcement to promote better signage.

Mike: There are features unique to Hyde Park (i.e., color of brick, historic structures). We want to connect to these features through the signage.

AG: This conversation can go on beyond signage. Uniform trash cans and magazine racks. The South End and Harvard Square (Main Streets?) sponsors and regulates these items. Regulating magazine and newspaper racks may be a free speech issue. We can check with the City's Department of Public Works (DPW). Louisville or Cincinnati has some regulations on the paper boxes.

Marie: Those items are hard to regulate with zoning, but we can make recommendations in the strategic plan for someone to take up responsibility for these items.

Department of Neighborhood Development (DND) properties in Hyde Park:

Carole: The Department of Neighborhood Development (DND) owns a number of parcels in Hyde Park. Many are from foreclosure procedures. DND wants to get them back into good use (i.e., open space or housing/commercial development). They might also sell them to adjacent land owners ("yard sales"). We have a map of all the DND parcels in Hyde Park. The blue lots are buildable in residential neighborhoods. The red ones are commercial sites. Often the business next to it will buy it because they are too small for a new larger-scale development. They also have large sites and parcels identified as being good for open space (or not good for anything else). Wetlands maybe could be taken over by the Boston Conservation Commission (BCC). Small residential parcels might be developed with housing mind. Some of the open space parcels may be logical sites for community gardens. A non-profit may take them over and coordinate a community garden. Some we are already looking at in the Fairmount Greenway Initiative (CDC Collaborative which includes SWBCDC). There is a large parcel on Beech Street, near Sherrin Woods off of Austin Street in north central Hyde Park. We aren't sure what it looks like but we plan to visit some of these sites soon. Some parcels can become playgrounds or maybe Urban Wilds (Department of Parks and Recreation) worthy of protection. We will put the map of these parcels on the website for you look at. We would like your input as to how we might recommend treating these DND parcels when we get to the rezoning.

Carole: There are 4 acres along Dana Street and Fairmount Avenue. If there is an unbuildable site like the rock formations near Del Rock, it may be a DND property. We may want to rezone

these as open space. If you see parcels in your neighborhood check them out in detail and talk to us about what might be a good way to categorize them for the rezoning.

Michael Glavin (BRA, attending as HP resident): How much of the discussion of individual parcels would happen in this process as opposed to the DND process?

Carole: We won't come up with a recommendation for every DND parcel. DND will still also go through their regular disposition process (also an open community process).

AG: A Community Development Corporation (CDC) Collaborative (which includes Hyde Park's Southwest Boston CDC) is looking at vacant land near commuter rail tracks. We have a charette coming up on 2/24/10. It's down to 8 prioritized parcels (from 80) which can be open and recreational green space.

Michael Glavin: The discussion becomes more intense about these parcels as residents get involved at the neighborhood level.

Carole: The goal of the AG is to get an idea of what their neighbors want. We want to know about issues people feel strongly about. On the 24th of February, there is a charette on the possible conversion of these DND parcels along the commuter rail into parkland.

Marie: This map will be on the web. We might want to provide close ups of some places for the next meeting. We will go over the River-Business Streets "opportunity site" next time.