

12.17.09 Hyde Park Planning/Rezoning Advisory Group Meeting @ 6:30 PM

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

City Staff: Bill Conroy (BTD)

Consultants: Carole Schlessinger (CSS), Mike Davis (Bergmeyer), Kathy Kottaridis (Historic Boston, Inc.), Jeff Gonyeau (Historic Boston, Inc.)

Marie talked in more detail about 3 high profile “opportunity sites” (Cleary/Logan Squares), Fairmount commuter rail station and the Stop and Shop warehouse site. It was suggested to the Advisory Group (“AG”) that a thorough discussion of all three sites might not be possible in one meeting.

Mike Davis Presentation: Suggested he was conducting more a working session and not a presentation. He looked at the goals and objectives from the planning process thus far and also looked at the comments from the community-at-large. His concepts mainly focused on Cleary/Logan Squares (“opportunity sites”) and potential neighborhood gateways, the MBTA parking lots, and signage.

He used the Sketch-Up program to show the concept models, and also met with Historic Boston, Inc. and documented all of the historic buildings that we don’t want to impact negatively with a redevelopment concept.

Mike suggested that the Squares would benefit, in his professional opinion with more density and mixed uses (see PDF presentation online from the 12/17/09 meeting).

Bergmeyer then modeled historic buildings that are gone based on input and research from Historic Boston, Inc.(the old A & P, the old bank building, the hotel on Fairmount, and the Kennedy Building). The point to this demonstration was that there were a lot of multi-story buildings in the Squares historically.

The question is does the community want the same historic density in conjunction with preserving historic integrity?

From the bridge looking east into the 100% corner of Cleary Square, Mike visualizes more density on the River Street corner where Papas Gino’s is. Concept plan showed a four-story building (current zoning currently only allows 3 stories). Is this what the community wants to see in Cleary Square?

One of the AG members suggested that Hyde Park (the Squares) couldn’t handle more traffic from the added density.

Bergmeyer response: One of the implications of density is more traffic.

CSS response: The consultant team can go back and look at traffic implications by running any concept ideas past McMahan Associates (transportation sub-consultant), but now, just want to see how added height looks and what is the response of the AG.

AG: If it was residential, what would people do for parking?

Bergmeyer: This AG could explore different parking ratios per housing unit. Can do less required parking for Transit Oriented Development (TOD). Are there opportunities for structured parking?

AG: When buildings go away, does zoning go with them? What is the underlying zoning?

BRA Response: Zoning stays in place even when buildings are demolished. New buildings have to conform to the zoning in place at the current time. Underlying zoning for Cleary/Logan Square is L-1 and B-1 (Local and General Business Zoning Sub-districts). FAR = 1.0 and Heights are 3 stories.

With new uses and new residents, people will have cars, sometimes 2-3 cars. Even if you reduce required parking, the reality is that people will need parking.

An easy first step is to work with the folks at BTD/PWD to re-signal some of the lights in the Squares.

Mike showed another 3-4 story concept building across from Bank of America near River and Maple Streets. Does it encroach too much on the church?

AG: Someone thought that the subject building by the church was always 1 story.

Mike asks if River Street becomes mainly a street with 3-story buildings.

AG: Someone suggested that River Street with 2-story buildings is better. Can't create surface parking in the parking freeze zones downtown, so can surface parking be eliminated in HP (via zoning)?

BRA Response: Yes, surface parking can be limited in the permitted use chart in the new zoning code ("accessory parking" as a use can be "permitted", allowed "conditionally" or "forbidden").

Bergmeyer: The Way building and Everett Theatre are approximately 45 feet high. The bank can build at the same height and match the cornice line.

AG discussion points: Logan Square is one of the more aesthetic areas that HP has. Is the community going to short-change themselves by limiting heights so it's not profitable for a developer?

Bergmeyer response: There are ways of doing it via zoning variances.

Bergmeyer: A good place for higher density is near the Auto Zone – entering Cleary Square from the north. In the concept plan provided, Mike showed the height set back to transition to area of Victorian homes. Four story total in height, but the second to fourth floors are set back further than the first floor. The second to fourth floors are set back because lot frontage wider than 60 feet wouldn't be appropriate for residential in Hyde Park if all four floors have the same setback. BRA: The Ginger Park restaurant (1375 Washington Street) in the South End uses this type of setback. This particular site is further removed from the center of Cleary Square, so there would be no effect on the character of the Square.

AG: A limiting factor of density is loss of open/green space. Need more open space to hang out. But HP has more open space than anywhere else in city, so do we need it in commercial area(s)?

Look at Post Office Square as a model where there is structured below-ground parking with post office square (green/public space) above it. Possible to do this on Hyde park Ave?

I don't think HP will get to the point that it can afford a large underground parking structure. Also, if it isn't "manned", it will become an incubator for crime. Quincy (and Jamaica Plain center) put municipal parking behind all buildings. HP could hide a lot of parking.

How grand should our vision be?

Bergmeyer: Zoning needs to respond to how grand our vision is. The consultant team can look at places where structured parking would work (like near commuter rail), so don't limit the vision to what is feasible now and don't make success of downtown contingent on feasibility of structure parking.

AG: Larger green area on that parking lot in Cleary and open up stores to the greenspace. There is open space near the post office now, the little triangle. Would be good if it were expanded.

BRA response: Remember that the open space doesn't have to be green – could be a hardscapes urban plaza, for example.

AG: Not proposing making the entire parking lot green space.

Resident response: That parking lot is the heart of the area-MIT students showed this in their work.

Bergmeyer: Can have one parking deck above grade and a couple below- not a looming parking lot.

AG: 3 stories may be too much. They can all accept at least 2 stories.

AG: A structured parking behind the police station is also something to consider.

BRA: Was that 4 story setback building (the Auto Zone building) showing to be a "gateway" into Cleary?

Bergmeyer: It's a candidate. New development on that site would be an indicator that someone is entering into a commercial district.

AG: Noted that they are not sure about 2 vs. 3 stories in the Squares due to the need for parking that 3 stories would require.

CSS: Are 4-story buildings out of the question?

AG: A Member said that they were not categorically against 4-story buildings, but in some areas, they are inappropriate. They preferred to not go any higher than 2 stories.

The choice may be 3 stories or no changes from the existing character. Zoning for 2 stories may be futile for developers to pursue. Some people like semi-suburban, 2 stories.

Bergmeyer: How relevant is historic height to people living there now?

AG response: Not very.

HP Ave. towards Forest Hills and near Fairmount Ave. can take some density.

Townsend's building is one of the more recent successes in HP – the single-family houses next to it are not appropriately sited. Development could have been denser there (due to proximity to commuter rail).

AG: When scaling out the concept models, can the density and amount of apartments added be projected?

CSS: Yes - not building by building, but by magnitude. This exercise was done one-dimensionally, but the consultant team can tell you density and number of cars that a new development would bring based on height. Realize that each building will go through Article 80 design review and public process with the BRA. Height can be proposed with each application, but will be finalized only through a thorough Article 80 public process. The Article 80 process would involve the approved design (aesthetics) and shed light on increased traffic volume due to new development.

BRA: Article 80 (from the Boston Zoning Code) and Chapter 91 (Mass General Law that governs Waterways) are not part of the HP rezoning process – would be a separate process.

BRA: In Roslindale Square, when rezoned, resulted in a FAR of 2.0 and a reduced parking requirement for any mixed-use development (due to proximity to transit in the Square).

Bergmeyer: The public may want softer, hand-drawn pictures over SketchUp.

BRA: Proposing density in the Squares suggests that density (which may come with more traffic) wouldn't spread into lower-density more "suburban" residential areas that want to remain lower-density.

CSS: Based on discussions from the last meeting (11/17/09), Providence Street won't change in use, but the consultant team can recommend designating one street solely for truck traffic. MBTA cleanup of Readville Yards will take at least 2 more years and the MBTA will then likely issue an RFP for redevelopment.

CSS: Fairmount station site. Looked at industrial uses up to Walter St. If this is redeveloped, the neighboring site (warehouse for Hebrew Rehab) would probably rezone. Because Fairmount Street is higher in elevation, can have one level of parking with retail at grade.

Scheme A - 1 parking space per unit, FAR of 1.1, current is 1, not increasing very much. The consultant team wanted to create a solid streetwall but it is on railroad.

Scheme B- have small greenspaces where residences look in on instead of train tracks. Nice views towards river (3 story townhouses) New green space on corner is gateway to Logan Square. Everyone wants commercial space on corner. Somewhat of a tough commercial site, Fairmount av has steep slope and adjacent to tracks. Plaza would make it more of a destination. Need commercial floor to be at grade with Fairmount St. One level of below ground parking (50 spaces) one level of retail then 3 levels of townhouses. 122 residential units, 14,00 sf of retail FAR .96.

Scheme C- Introduce new street lengthwise down middle. Wouldn't face rack, but central street. Ground floor retail facing Fairmount. 67 residential units, FAR of .67.

AG- right near train station, good place for parking without jamming parking. And I think density should be higher than below 1 to take advantage of the train station.

Can we take this site and learn from the Fairmount CDC Collaborative planning process? (Earlier plan was Goody Clancy report of 2006 TOD all down Fairmount Line.) Newer concept plans (3) were completed by Arturo Vasquez (SAS / Design) for the Lewis Chemical site via charettes.

CSS: They have looked at both (Goody/Clancy & SAS/Design efforts).

AG: Lots of wasted industrial space between the warehouses and Fairmount Ave. I agree density is low for a TOD site. Very narrow and not very flexible.

CSS: Webster St is a nice residential area and not good for truck traffic.

AG: Increasing economic development in commercial district benefits from having more people living in the area.

Any plans for a light rail service on the same tracks (won't be light rail)? Or more frequent service (yes)? Indigo Line - adding more stops and frequency to the commuter rail.

Director of SWBCDC: Advocated for more frequent service and different fare structure. You are limited with what you can do with heavy rail as far as frequency and expansion. Issues with backups at South Station and size of the cars as far as increasing service.

AG: Construction can insulate sound from commuter rail.

SWBCDC: It is critical to get some level of density, need density for vision to work. Need enough people to support uses.

AG: In looking at parking structures, may be best to have several dispersed and not just one big one.

Resident: Existing restaurants hurt because of lack of parking. City needs to identify lots which can be used as parking. Most units in my neighborhood have 3 cars per unit. Once the zoning is changed, it may be too late to identify lots for parking. Resident's street has been congested for the past 10 years. Why are we advocating for more people in HP?

CSS: Stop and Shop parcel. They looked at just the Boston side; aware that the other side of parcel is in Dedham. Makes sense for a residential use.

Scheme A- continue existing residential grid into the area. 230-240 units

Scheme B- blocks dies out now, need other half, so we finish blocks with same size as other blocks with open space through middle and higher density; 550-560 units

Scheme C- put new street separate from rest of neighborhood, larger green space and more density in the center. 450-460 units

Scheme D- finish blocks out and people can come in on Meadow road and boulevard with density concentrated on this 480-490

Scheme E- buffer it from existing neighborhood with greenspace, blocks aren't continuous. Greenspace in middle and lower density as you work out from greenspace. 520-530

Access, buffer, density center of each plan. Need about 1,000 units to make it worthwhile for a developer. Also have Dedham side to work with. Can talk McMahon Associates traffic consultant on the project who can run some numbers. At 500 units, same amount of vehicle trips as when Stop and Shop was at capacity, but peak hours and quality of trips are different.

Should we let people filter through neighborhood streets? Some advantages to let them filter out.

CSS: This will go through a major Article 80 review with a designated Impact Advisory Group (IAG). We need to, at least, set zoning at a point where someone will want to come in and discuss options. Options need to be open enough if you don't want a warehouse there forever.

AG: Former proposal several years ago attempted to put 1,800 housing units in there. Neighborhood receives water source from behind the site. The neighborhood before was adamant that they didn't want 1,800 units of homes.

CSS: In these new concepts, we are talking about a mix of housing types; singles, townhouses, duplexes, 5-6 story apartment buildings, etc.

AG: What we are proposing now is almost a 1/3 of the units proposed previously, but the reality is that you won't get a developer who can turn a profit with so few units on such a large site.

AG: Seems it would make sense to extend streets already there and knitting them together. Hypothetical. You would get more neighborhood resistance from people already there. They would not be located on a dead end anymore if streets were extended – and some residents probably like that.

500 units over 8 blocks is basically what is there, just a larger neighborhood, it makes sense. Traffic is mainly on Meadow Road.

CSS: Want to come up with parameters for what density and units are allowed.

AG: is this another contaminated property? If we screen it from the neighborhood, does it have to be a residential use? What are the tax implications of going residential? We don't have that information.

It would be great to attract some business but I can see us getting overloaded with existing sf in neighborhood of residential

The Ride and school buses are parking there. Things in there are jobs and don't interfere with the neighborhood.

CSS: Currently I-2 residential use forbidden can we allow residential and industrial to go either way in future? Less likely someone will redevelop this as industrial if they tear the buildings down. No zone that is industrial commercial and residential.

AG: Why didn't scenarios show other uses?

CSS: We already know what industrial looks like – it's already there. And, we were also working with the proposal from years ago, which was residential.

BRA: Mixed uses and creative economy uses might be appropriate if the neighborhood is supportive and can handle the traffic. When rezoning, can start with a base permitted-use chart and tailor it to what neighborhood wants.

Resident: Rejected any option to extend roads. Need to use Meadow Road to access the site, and it will be a traffic jam in rush hour if too much development is proposed. HP is losing light industrial, there is a need for it and it works there. We need some in Boston

BRA- Supports an industrial base. Artist live-work space is and can continue to be allowed on this parcel and would be a good buffer use between residential and industrial uses.

Resident: Didn't want to see it totally given up to residential - need some industry.

AG: There is more space in that area to be used for industrial. Artist lofts might be too expensive for the area. People are leaving light industrial and we already have too much. Need a Plan B and C.