

MINUTES
BOSTON CIVIC DESIGN COMMISSION

The meeting of the Boston Civic Design Commission was held on Tuesday, September 7, 2021 and was held virtually via Zoom to ensure the safety of the public, staff members, and the BPDA Board Members during the COVID-19 pandemic, and beginning at 5:00 p.m. Members in attendance were Deneen Crosby, Linda Eastley, David Hacin, Eric Höweler, Mikyoung Kim, Kathy Kottaridis, Anne-Marie Lubeanu, Andrea Leers, Mimi Garza Love, David Manfredi, William Rawn, Kirk Sykes. Absent was Jonathan Evans. Elizabeth Stifel, Executive Director of the Commission, was present. Representatives of the BSA attended. Meghan Richard and Adam Johnson were present for the BPDA.

The Chair, Andrea Leers, announced that this was the meeting of the Boston Civic Design Commission that meets the first Tuesday of every month and welcomed all persons interested in attending. She added thanks to the Commissioners for the contribution of their time to the betterment of the City and its Public Realm. This hearing was duly advertised on August 8, 2021, in the BOSTON HERALD.

The first item was the approval of the August 3, 2021 Monthly Meeting Minutes, and the Design Committee Minutes from meetings on August 10, August 17, and August 24. A motion was made, seconded, and it was duly

VOTED: To approve the August 3, August 10, August 17, and August 24 BCDC Meeting Minutes.

Votes were passed for signature. The next item was a report from the Review Committee on the Nubian Square Ascends project. Review is recommended. It was moved, seconded, and

VOTED: That the Commission review the schematic design for the proposed Nubian Square Ascends project in the Roxbury neighborhood.

The Commission moved into Votes of Recommendation for projects from Design Committee. The first presentation was for **Boston Medical Center Institutional Masterplan**. Kirk Sykes was recused.

Richard Kobus presented on behalf of Boston Medical Center: Since 2020, the plan has been amended to eliminate the Ramp Site (Parcel H), to change the use for 10 Stoughton Street to Clinical Research at increased size, and to allow for the adaptive reuse of the Collamore and Old Evans buildings for Market Rate and Affordable Housing Units. Previously, the Commission had asked BMC to clarify the overall campus and urban design approach, and the proponents presented developments to the project since then, and received comments from the Commission.

Anne-Marie Lubenau: We were impressed with the effort the team made to recognize and value the green space on the campus.

Linda Eastley: Agreed with Anne-Marie's comment about open space and connections throughout the campus. The challenge is that 10 Stoughton St continues to feel very big for the site, and would hope to see more axons. Even though the alley is owned wholly by BMC, it has the potential to be celebrated as a major axis.

Richard Kobus: We hoped to show that the Stoughton St alley does not contribute to the connectivity on campus – it's a backwater and no longer an active street. It is definitively a service area, and institutions need service areas.

William Rawn: Whether it's a service area or not, the building at 10 Stoughton felt squeezed into that site. It would have been nice to see the improvements you made to the problem, and we aren't being shown what we talked about at the Design Committee meeting.

Richard Kobus: We aren't designing the building at this stage. It might be tight, but it meets very real needs that BMC feels are important.

Anne-Marie Lubenau: You had previously shown images demonstrating the impact from the street.

Elizabeth Stiffel: Could you share the presentation from the last Design Committee?

Richard Kobus: Presented select slides from the August 17th presentation to the BCDC Design Committee. There are dumpsters occupying the street and very few windows looking out into the open space.

Andrea Leers: I'm still concerned about the width and height of the 10 Stoughton Building. What are the dimensions of the light wells? I'm concerned we didn't see any alternative options or a further understanding of how you reached this conclusion. Maybe a taller height and thinner footprint would be feasible.

Richard Kobus: Shrinking the floorplate would make the program less functional. The other option is to look for another site on campus.

Andrea Leers: I still feel there was very little exploration.

Elizabeth Stifel: Many of the Commissioners who were present at Design Committee and responded positively are not present.

Anne-Marie Lubenau: I'm confused about the comments of the Commission. I understand the concerns.

Kristi Dowd: We aren't yet designing the building.

William Rawn: We recognize that, but even from an Urban Design standpoint, we have concerns. It's a really tough site, but there has to be some other way for dealing with it.

David Manfredi: I saw this with Anne-Marie in Design Committee. In order to achieve the full program, you need to create more floors. I don't disagree that we didn't see other alternatives looking at a longer, thinner building. This is an Institutional Master Plan and not an Article 80 project, so those options are still possible.

Andrea Leers: We are approving this width and this height.

Elizabeth Stifel: You are giving the Hospital an entitlement to a particular width and height, but they could come back with a different form.

William Rawn: Is it possible to ask the Proponents to show us other options for the Research Center on the Campus?

Elizabeth Stifel: I am the BPDA staff reviewer. We supported this proposal because it is considerate of community concerns about another site. This site has very little impact on the surrounding context. It's a very internal project that can be shaped more and crafted more to meet concerns, but as a part of the city, it seems like a strong proposal.

Andrea Leers: I agree, and that is its strongest point. My concern is it's a lot of not very good space. The light is not there. I would urge the team to do everything they can to give as much space as possible to the proposed building, possibly by making it a little taller and a little narrower.

Linda Eastley: I'm persuaded by the street views, which show how little of the new building will be visible. We've added provisos and clauses to approvals before, and that could work this time.

William Rawn: I agree with that proposal.

Krisit Dowd: Is the approval based on the total square footage?

Andrea Leers: Yes.

Hearing no public comment, a motion was made, it was moved, seconded, and

VOTED: That the BCDC recommend approval for the Boston Medical Center Institutional Masterplan in the South End neighborhood, contingent on the Proponent working with BPDA staff to further develop and maximize the distance between the new building and the existing building to admit more light and air.

The next project was 24 Erisson Street, Neponset Wharf. Kirk Sykes was recused. Kevin Deabler of RODE Architects and Drew Stangel of OJB presented on behalf of the project.

Kevin Deabler: This project was the result of years of community input and development. We were given direction from the Commission on material tectonics and contextual connections, and we have addressed resilience and sustainability.

Drew Stangel: Since the last Design Committee meeting, we've prioritized the pedestrian zone and focused on connections to surrounding buildings. We looked at the tonal qualities of the hardscape, and added moveable planters, and we made the design of the water's edge more wholistic.

Kevin Deabler: We've also adjusted materials and scale to match the pedestrian scale. We are committed to meeting the Passive House criteria.

Deneen Crosby: This site is between the Neponset River Greenway and the Harborwalk. Because of community concerns, the Harborwalk filters through the neighborhood. Is your intention that this design is part of that regional system? Right now it reads like it's not. What's the intention of all of these open spaces relative to the regional open space system?

Kevin Deabler: Years ago, we thought of "destination" open space. The neighborhood corrected our thinking. This design is not about a large open space with lots of activation, but we like to think that this is naturally connected to the riverway. There is a diversity of spaces. Our intention is that you would find this space off of that trail, and you would know there is a neighborhood circuit to get you there.

Commissioner Deneen Crosby: How does the topography work?

Kevin Deabler: All of the entrances at the Arrival Plaza are at grade. We've tried to be intentional about grade changes where they occur.

Commissioner Mikyoung Kim: I appreciate the refinements that the team has made. I think it's a great project that will transform the neighborhood. Thank you for being so responsive.

Commissioner Mimi Love: You've been super receptive. The side elevations have really improved. The qualities of the glass can help affect the perception of the buildings as commercial vs. residential.

Commissioner Andrea Leers: The site continues to need its own planning effort. This is a thoughtful effort to transform an area that needs work. I look forward to seeing it built.

The motion was moved, seconded, and it was duly

VOTED: That the Commission recommend approval of 24 Ericsson Street, Neponset Wharf in the Dorchester neighborhood.

Willow Baker Development was presented next. Nidhi John from PCA presented.

Nidhi John, PCA: The comments have predominantly been about scale and the focus of our design. We have looked closely at the scale of the buildings, the FAR, the open space around the buildings, streets and street trees, and program changes. Building off of a specific Commissioner's comment, we have tried to make the project a "family of buildings." We simplified the landscape plan. At every building, we asked what is the program, and what is the streetscape like.

Commissioner Anne-Marie Lubenau: This project has made a lot of progress since the initial presentation. You've done a lot to negotiate the challenges of the site and create a sense of place, especially for pedestrians. You've done a good job of simplifying and addressing equity. The entrance to Building 3 could still use a little more thought.

Commissioner David Manfredi: The reduction in Building 1 makes the building feel more appropriate for its site. On Building 3 the setback fits the site. These two simple moves make the open space feel more generous. It's a better project.

Commissioner Linda Eastley: The project has a gateway presence. You feel like you're entering a residential neighborhood. It feels like a pedestrian realm. The streets are very narrow, which moves the focus to the pedestrian.

Commissioner Kirk Sykes: You've done a good job of bridging to the smaller buildings around the site.

Commissioner Andrea Leers: These are thoughtful changes and I appreciate it.

A motion was made, seconded, and

VOTED: That the Commission recommend approval for Willow Baker Development in the Dorchester Neighborhood.

The Commission moved to project presentations, the first being for **Nubian Square Ascends** in the Roxbury neighborhood. Commissioner Kathy Kottaridis was recused.

Meghan Richard: Introduced the project on behalf of the BPDA. It is a response to a BPDA RFP. The BPDA has spent a lot of time working with the Proponent to address open space, public realm, and the complicated mixed-use. There is a small amount of residential, a culinary marketplace, a parking garage, a cultural hall, and a lab.

Richard Taylor and Tamara Roy presented the project.

Richard Taylor: Right now, the square shuts down early. You can't get a sandwich! There's very little art, culture, or commercial space to support the community. The proposed mix of programs is a way we can support the community.

Nick Brooks: We expect to see a number of projects coming online in the area in the future.

Tamara Roy: This whole area has been going through a community master plan for years. Our project aligns with all of the goals of the community and the plan. We wanted to create an assemblage of forms that respond to the scale of the buildings and streets around the site. The design team has been inspired by the history of Nubia, and the use of weaving and threading.

Shauna Gillies-Smith: We came to the idea that art starts the party. We're looking at this in terms of programs, the painting of the walls, the furniture, murals, painted streets, food halls and performance spaces, and more. There are three distinctive open spaces: Nubian Plaza; the Artist's Way, which connects to the adjacent development; and a third on the other side of the building.

Nick Brooks: We'll be in conversation with the Arts Commission about a various amount of ways the community is well established with regards to nearly every blank façade we'll have.

Shauna Gillies-Smith: We intend to improve the streetscape. We're working with BTM to bring the streetscape up to Complete Streets Standards.

Tamara Roy: We're envisioning a tremendously vibrant space, with music, drinking, a bar, dancing, etc.

Shauna Gillies-Smith: The adjacent project is being developed as microhousing, and the grade of their loading dock will help marry their project with ours, allowing food vendors from the adjacent project and artists' shops from ours to bracket the Artist Way space, spanned by artistic light elements.

Nick Brooks: We're trying to be responsive to the existing scale with materiality. Some buildings are stars, some are more subdued.

Tamara Roy: We have a 300 car parking garage that is nestled into the center of the site and is partially screened. We're talking to the BPDA about wrapping it with art for further screening.

Nick Brooks: The notion that there's not a lot going on with the square now can't be understated. We're hoping to bring light and life to the location. We're hoping that successful artists in the community can help share their wisdom.

Shauna Gillies-Smith: Along Eustis Street, we're creating an "Art Yard." This can be a real test lab for different types of performance art and digital art as a way of enlivening the space.

Nick Brooks: Along Washington Street, we'll have anchor tenants, and the form "ascends."

Tamara Roy presented an animated fly-through of the project.

Andrea Leers: How do you drive into the parking garage?

Tamara Roy: Off Eustis Street. No curb cuts off Washington or Harrison.

Commissioner David Manfredi: This is a great project. You've configured the spaces phenomenally, with a lot of objects in the way. I wonder about the parking garage. I know it needs to be as simple

and as affordable as possible. You've got almost a zero-lot line along the garage. I'd love to see some sections from Washington to Harrison to see the three buildings. What can you do with the parking garage?

Commissioner Linda Eastley: It's an interesting kaleidoscope of spaces. You can see this development in many different ways depending on how you're approaching. Eustis Street has an amazing anchor with the Artists Lab, but I'm concerned the project feels "back door" along this edge. Also, I'm a little concerned that Nubian Square feels visually cut off from Washington Street. I like the idea that it becomes very visually accessible.

Shauna Gillies-Smith: We want to balance keeping the existing trees and opening the square. We've been working with BFIT on programming and open space, we can be more specific in Design Committee.

Richard Taylor: Eustis Street is not just backdoor now, it's nothing. In Design Committee, you'll see this is a significantly enlivened pathway.

Commissioner Deneen Crosby: Washington Street is very crowded in the afternoon. Some of these streets being quieter is not necessarily a bad thing. Where is the respite in the neighborhood? Totally on board with Artist Way, the staircase to Harrison could be really nice. Is there enough space for pedestrian activity? Appreciate the integration of art from the get-go.

Commissioner Andrea Leers: I really like the connections with other buildings. The other great success is the Artist Housing/Artist Lab edge. The Washington Edge wants a lot of study. There's a rhythm of existing and new buildings, and they feel like they aren't talking to each other. Look at the Ferdinand Building for clues. What about the ground floor of the Artist Lab?

Nick Brooks: Historically, there might not be opportunities for some programs. There are a lot of uses in the Artist Lab. We might put the "dirtiest" art on the bottom, and as you ascend it gets lighter (digital media, etc.).

Commissioner Mimi Love: I'm struggling with how big the garage looks. How is the parking metric being thought of? Also, the Nubian Market & Lab will not get a lot of light on the ground floor.

Richard Taylor: Every meeting on Nubian Square focuses on parking. Everybody around the square needs parking.

Commissioner Anne-Marie Lubenau: I'd like to get a better understand of the assemblage of forms in relation to the surrounding scales. The rooftop deck of the Bowling Building is an important amenity, how does this project affect their views?

Commissioner Andrea Leers: At Design Committee, let's zoom out in 3D.

Commissioner Mikyoung Kim: The landscape looks vibrant. It would be great to understand the scale. In Design Committee, bring a diagram of what could happen in Nubian Square.

The project will continue in design committee.

The Commissioners concluded by planning possible walking tours of development sites around Boston.

There being no further items for discussion, a motion was made to adjourn, and the meeting was duly adjourned at 7:41 p.m. The next regular meeting of the Boston Civic Design Commission was scheduled for October 5, 2021. The recording of the September 7, 2021 Boston Civic Design Commission meeting was digitized and is available at the Boston Redevelopment Authority.