

# The West End Museum

150 STANIFORD STREET, SUITE 7, BOSTON, MA 02114

November 23, 2013

John Fitzgerald, Senior Project Manager  
Boston Redevelopment Authority  
City Hall Plaza  
Boston, MA 02210

**RE: West End Place Condominium 5 (The Old West End Housing Corporation/OWEHC, the Publishers of West Ender Newsletter and the Directors of the West End Museum, Incorporated) Comments on the Expanded Project Notification Form (EPNF) Submitted on September 6, 2013 by Delaware North Companies in Partnership with Boston Properties for the Redevelopment of the Former Boston Garden Site on Causeway Street**

Dear Mr. Fitzgerald:

The following are comments and concerns on the above by the directors of the Old West End Housing Corporation (OWEHC), the publishers of West Ender Newsletter and the directors of the West End Museum, Incorporated. Our comments are based on a review of the September 6, 2013 Expanded Project Notification Form (EPNF), as well as two community meetings with the developers before the EPNF and after.

The OWEHC in its capacity as a Community Development Corporation (CDC) was the community partner and one of the developers of West End Place located at 150 Staniford Street. It was originally made up of former West Enders who were relocated as a result of urban renewal and the 1957 West End Redevelopment Plan. The OWEHC mission was to develop and secure affordable family housing and return West Enders to the neighborhood from which they were relocated, as well as insure the historical and cultural continuity of the neighborhood. The West Ender Newsletter has been published for almost thirty years and has strived to preserve the history and culture of the West End. Both organizations predate the West End Museum and have been instrumental in its founding, development and sustainability. All three entities operate at Suite 7 & 9 located on the street level of West End Place on the Lomasney Way side of the building.

These comments are intended to reflect the consistent mission of the above organizations and strive to provide the City of Boston, its residents and its visitors a contextual understanding of the development of an important downtown neighborhood from its days as a cow pasture, rope manufactory and mill pond, to it being an important transportation hub, entertainment and residential community. We would hope that the goal of all participants in this Project strive for sustainable development into the future while preserving a high quality of life for all.

Comments and Concerns:

## **Chapter 1**

### ***1.4 Public Benefits***

We feel the EPNF lacks a comprehensive *Public Benefits* overview. The *Urban Design Benefits* are vague and skewed toward entertainment. While residents and other neighborhood entities acknowledge North Station as an entertainment area, it is not an 'entertainment hub'. It is and was a transportation area where trains, boats, trollies, etc. traversed and terminated long before the Boston Garden was built. It is also a residential area where famed art collector Bernard Berenson grew up on Nashua Street and Hollywood producer Joseph E. Levine grew up on Billerica Street, both adjacent to North Station. The expansion of the neighborhood as residential area and the Project's residential component is not clearly defined in the *Economic Benefits*: Will the affordable units be onsite? What is meant by linkage funds? Daycare is mentioned, but will family housing be a part of the Project? Regarding *Environmental Benefits*; those listed will certainly be a positive, but how will the increase in car traffic and service vehicle cuing affect the area? All limousine, taxi, buses, etc. will be increased most often dropping commuters off at curbside, in turn stalling traffic and increasing vehicles standing. How will this be mitigated? Will the traffic cones go away?

We also believe that smaller units of housing and towers will adversely affect the surrounding demographic, consequently creating a more transient neighborhood and pushing prices beyond affordable as well as beyond the reach of family - these impacts must be further discussed.

The type of onsite retail was mentioned at meetings, but was not clearly outlined in the EPNF. Will the developer standby their promise to bring a supermarket? How will the Project help activate retail in the Bulfinch Triangle?

## ***1.6 Public Participation***

The Old West End Housing Corporation (OWEHC), the West Ender Newsletter and the West End Museum, Incorporated would like to be acknowledged as public participants in the process along with the other organizations mentioned in 1.6. Additionally, we would like to see a notification placed in the West Ender Newsletter regarding any future public meetings concerning this development, so as to welcome former West Enders who supports the mission of our organizations and who may like to participate in the process.

## **Chapter 6**

We would like to see Chapter 6 (*Urban Design*) expanded more in light of the role that Boston Garden plays in the area.

While we consider the Garden a local partner and support many of their endeavors, especially their housing of the Sports Museum of New England and its mission with regard to sports history, we would like to know that they will support other historical and cultural pursuits in the area as they expand. As we have come to experience during the players' strikes of the past, a community comprised of a homogenized sports related industry will and can hurt the wider community. Diversity in the Urban Design will insure economic prosperity.

We would also like to see a more collaborative pursuit in that regard especially as it has to do with transportation history, the history of entertainment, the history of the Bulfinch Triangle and its architecture, as well as the West End.

***6.2 The site's history as a 'northern portal' actually predates the stated opening of North Union Station by 100-years.*** It was actually the construction of important infrastructure; the Charles River Bridge (Charlestown) c.1786, the Canal Bridge (Craigie) c.1808, the Warren Bridge c.1828 along with the opening of the Middlesex Canal c.1803 which initiated the development of the area as a transportation hub, as well as a residential and commercial community. This should be corrected to reflect an important aspect of the history of the area prior to North Union Station.

In light of the above, the development of the Boston Garden site should complement existing historical and cultural endeavors to bring into the consciousness of residents, visitors and commuters the rich history of the area. We believe the developers are

prepared to do this on a number of levels and would like for them to consider some of those suggested below.

The City and the BRA have not pushed for this from previous developers, nor have they established or implemented an Urban Design plan to do so. Signage and sculptural elements to date have been paltry and obscure; often overshadowed by neon lights, sports bars, ticket agencies, street advertising, etc. The Bulfinch Triangle has been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1986, yet very little is known about it. Six mills operated on the opposite ends of Causeway Street producing the town's first source of sustainable energy from the Mill Pond prior to 1800. One of the America's first circuses operated not at the Boston Garden, but 100-years prior at the American Amphitheater on Portland and Traverse Streets (c.1830).

**Suggestions:**

- a)** The owners and developers of the Project should support the endeavors of local historical and cultural organizations, those whose mission is to collect, preserve and interpret the history and culture of the West End and the abutting areas which affected its evolution as a neighborhood.
- b)** The owners and developers of the Project should not encourage or support proposals to change the names of streets in any way from their current historical reference.
- c)** The Urban Design should work to capture the diversity of the area and its evolution. Street banners in the future should not be dominated by sports or entertainment related endeavors; this should be supported by the Delaware North Companies, Boston Properties and the Boston Garden.
- d)** Memorials to sport figures are great, but more artistic interpretations should be encouraged (e.g. Claes Oldenburg's 101' *Bat Column* in Chicago).
- e)** Hotel lobbies should be encouraged to consider some display elements of non-sport historical content (e.g. Leventhal maps in the lobby of the Boston Harbor Hotel at Rowe's Wharf).
- f)** Transit lobbies should be encouraged to consider some display elements of non-sport historical and/or cultural content (e.g. *Street Seats* project by the Design Museum and *Harborwalk* at Atlantic Wharf).

g) While excavating and digging the foundation of the Project the developer should be cognoscente of unearthing potential material culture and consider turning it over to a historical repository like the West End Museum.

h) A neighborhood ad hoc committee should be started to discuss the above; perhaps involving local community members (Richard J. Bertman CBT architect and artist, Duane Lucia West End Museum Curator, Sean Solley NESAD/Suffolk University Associate Professor of Interior Design, Christopher Hart, The Institute for Human Centered Design (IHCD), etc.).

## **Chapter 7**

***7.2 The Project will have no direct effect on historical or archaeological resources.*** We disagree with the phrasing of this statement because there are immediate and other potential impacts on the historical resources; be they direct, or indirect. The height of the new buildings, along with other tall buildings proposed in the area, will overwhelm the scale of the Bulfinch Triangle and its historic buildings, some of which are on Causeway Street. While any improvement of the current streetscape is welcomed, the developers must consider any and all impacts on the neighborhoods historic resources.

The design of the taller towers seems somewhat flush with the street (600-feet straight up from the sidewalk) and may be less of an impact if stepped back. While the architects explained a break in the surfacing consistent with the height of buildings across Causeway Street, we would like to have seen a better designed architectural model which would perhaps demonstrate the interrelatedness of both sides of Causeway Street.

***7.3.1 & 7.3.2 Due to the overall density and proximity of the buildings, throughout the year much of the area is in shadow...*** The additional shadows cast by the Project will take a significant amount of the remaining light away from the Bulfinch Triangle and to the rear of the Boston Garden known as West End Park (*The Greatest Neighborhood...*). We would like to see this mitigated with some green open space with public access; perhaps in the form of landscape and benches on the edges of the project or rooftop gardens with views of the Bulfinch Triangle, Custom House, etc.

**7.4** While there may not be any immediate archaeological resources above ground, the development site is on made land, most of which came from Pemberton Hill (c1831). There are also former historically significant transportation sites (Middlesex Canal

extension, the Boston and Maine and the Fitchburg Railroads) which existed there prior. Additionally, because the Project is on land made from a former tidal estuary, there may be potential archaeological findings as a consequence of the process of 'wharfing out' employed to make land not part of a planned land making project. We would like to see the following suggestion considered:

g) While excavating and digging the foundation of the Project the developer should be cognoscente of unearthing potential material culture and consider turning it over to a historical repository like the West End Museum.

In conclusion, the West End Neighborhood is about to undergo a radical change, not dissimilar to urban renewal. We will have a 'New North Station' area. It is therefore important to consider the social impacts to a much larger extent than were considered then. This is not only about 'shovels in the ground'! Tall buildings in such close proximity to residential neighborhoods will have a long lasting effect. Open space will be lost; therefore it will need to be created in an imaginative way. Public space will need to reach a broader audience than the sports fan. It is not about being better than the old Causeway Street with its dark 'EL' running through it and the waves of street people; it's about a 'crossroad' connecting the City, the waterfront, Beacon Hill, the West End and the North End to Downtown – it's about connecting its people.

The decisions we make with regard to this Project and others being proposed in the area will resonate for centuries. Let's get it right and not rush it through if there's not a true consensus.

West End Place Condominium 5 (The Old West End Housing Corporation/OWEHC, the Publishers of West Ender Newsletter and the Directors of the West End Museum, Incorporated) support this project with reservation and hope that the above comments are taken into consideration and help the Project be the best that it can be for the community as a whole.

Sincerely,

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Jim Campano, President  
Old West End Housing Corporation  
(OWEHC)

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Jim Campano, Publisher  
West Ender Newsletter

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Duane Lucia, Executive Director  
The West End Museum, Incorporated

Cc: Peter Meade, David Carlson, Lauren Shurtleff & Jonathan Greeley of the Boston  
Redevelopment Authority  
Thomas Tinlin and Vineet Gupta of the Boston Transportation Department  
Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services Community Liason Nicole Leo  
District City Councilors Sal LaMattina and Michael Ross  
City Councilor at Large John Connolly  
State Representatives Jay Livingstone & Aaron Michlewitz and State Senator Anthony  
Petrucci  
West End Place Managing Board President James Nugent  
West End Civic Association President Marlene Meyer  
West End Council  
DNA President Louise Fackert and Executive Director Robert O'Brien  
West End Community Center President Martha Maguire  
Mr. Harry Collings

The West End Museum is a neighborhood museum dedicated to the collection,  
preservation and interpretation of the history and culture of the West End of Boston.  
The Museum acknowledges its role as an educational institution and a trustee of  
significant material culture.

The West End Museum fulfills its mission by providing exhibits to the public on a  
regular basis, by providing access to its collections for research, by providing a resource  
to the West End Neighborhood for historical and cultural interests. It involves the  
public in its mission through outreach programming, neighborhood events, and  
educational programming in the school systems, thereby increasing and sustaining the  
public's appreciation of an important American urban neighborhood from the  
seventeenth century to the present time.