



JOSH ZAKIM
BOSTON CITY COUNCILOR
DISTRICT 8

August 8, 2019

Brian Golden
Boston Planning & Development Agency
Boston, MA 02201

Dear Director Golden:

I write today in support of the proposed development for Parcel 12 in the Back Bay.

The proponents have engaged in a diligent and cooperative community review process. This has resulted in broad support for the proposal. Furthermore, this collaborative process has led to improvements in the original design. The final proposal before you includes improvements to accessibility, safety, and our civic space. These will be beneficial to the immediate neighborhood and to our greater Boston community.

If approved this proposed project will result in contributions \$4,645,380 to the city's Neighborhood Housing Trust and \$930,190 to the Neighborhood Jobs Trust. The housing contribution is especially important as we continue to address the growing need for affordable housing in Boston.

Beyond these important financial benefits, infrastructure improvements include reconfiguring the intersection of Newbury Street and Massachusetts Avenue to improve conditions for the countless pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers who pass through on a daily basis. This and other public realm improvements around the development site will transform the area, making it more accessible and safer for everyone.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Josh Zakim

Citizens Advisory Committee and Impact Advisory Group for Air Rights Parcels 12, 13 & 15

August 15, 2019

Brian Golden, Director
Boston Planning & Development Agency
One City Hall Square
Boston, MA 02201

Dear Director Golden,

The Citizens Advisory Committee / Impact Advisory Group for Parcel 12 has reviewed the development plan proposed by Samuels & Associates to build a mixed-use project that includes an 18-story office tower on Boylston and Massachusetts Avenue and an 11-story hotel/residential building at Massachusetts Avenue and Newbury, situated above a retail business component occupying portions of the first and second floors. The CAC takes this opportunity to provide the Boston Planning and Development Agency with its feedback on the Parcel 12 proposal.

Design Evolution

The design of the project has evolved significantly since early filings, thanks in large part to community input and the Samuels & Associates' overarching and creative response to that input. All members of the CAC and many commenters from the community lauded Samuels & Associates for their immediate and direct response to concerns from the neighborhood, and there is some comfort over the fact that, in every area they could, the team pushed the envelope to improve the project.

For instance, with concerns expressed about the impacts of greenhouse gases on the environment, the project team sought a higher level of LEED certification, pushed for energy efficient systems that are better than code, and designed an all-electric heat pump system for the hotel component. In response to a sense that the view down Newbury Street toward the west would be walled off by the hotel building, the team slenderized the architecture, creating additional sky-views. The team seized upon a comment from a CAC member from Fenway Studios about losing the view of the sun setting over the Mass. Turnpike by creating a new 28,000 square foot public open space. The architecture of the building has evolved, due to some concern about solar glare, comments about the building's color, and the building's shape; the current design incorporates this input. Samuels & Associates also took to heart the fact that this project is the first view that those travelling east on the Mass. Pike will have of Back Bay, and the dramatic cantilever structure, surrounding greenspace, and welcoming overlook park will be certain to draw additional interest.

Project Impacts

During its review of the Proposed Project, the CAC identified a number of areas of impact which its members feel have not yet been resolved. The CAC has requested, and

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the BPDA and the developer have committed to, an ongoing dialogue between the CAC and the developer to be facilitated by the BPDA focused on the following issues: (a) wind impacts on the south side of Boylston Street; (b) exterior materials selection; (c) public realm design; and (d) post-occupancy traffic monitoring focused on shared ride curb usage and left turns in and out of the project's single vehicular point of access.

Specifically, the CAC identifies the following concerns:

- a) Wind: The project design must be further refined to minimize the wind impact to the south side of Boylston Street across from the project, a block occupied by sidewalk cafes where residents enjoy dining outside during many months of the year. The wind studies incorporated into the Draft Project Impact Report showed that while all modeled spots along this stretch are comfortable for sitting or standing under current mean annual wind conditions, most become comfortable only for walking or "uncomfortable" under the build condition, which the CAC considers unacceptable. The impact will be particularly felt during shoulder spring and fall seasons. At the last CAC meeting on August 5th, the developer stated further examination was underway, including changes based on the installation of trees on Boylston Street. The CAC believes that wind impacts at this location are an essential priority, and would like to be updated on all new findings.
- b) Materials: Throughout the Article 80 review process, the architecture, massing and project programming has evolved significantly. The CAC would like to be informed as the developer chooses specific materials, and any changes that could be considered through the BPDA final review.
- c) Public Realm: The developer and their design team have worked hard to address the character and design of the urban spaces between the buildings and their relationship to surrounding streets. The CAC would like to be assured that there is design excellence in the public realm and a great deal of attention is given to the landscape, lighting and ground plane going forward. The multi-story plaza open space should be designed so that it serves the elderly and handicapped, and limits skateboard activity that puts those populations at risk of conflict.
- d) Post-Occupancy Traffic Monitoring: While the developer has been very receptive to incorporating feedback from the CAC on transportation design, members of the CAC remain concerned about potential conflicts in and around the project site, including:
 - o Massachusetts Avenue conflicts between bicyclists, bus users and other pedestrians
 - o Conflicts created by shared ride drivers using curb space other than the designated pick-up/drop-off zones
 - o Conflicts created when vehicles entering and existing the singular vehicle point of access on Boylston Street attempt to make left turns and worsen conditions in an already congested block. The developer has explored and committed to hiring a paid detail during rush hour to ensure that traffic

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does not back up due to this additional new traffic (including vehicles that exit the project turning left on Boylston and have to make a right onto Mass. Ave.)

The CAC would like to work with BTM and the developer to monitor these areas of concern following occupancy of the project.

Community Benefits / Mitigation

Benefits to the community as an outcome of this project are numerous. The project will “fill in” the area now cut off by the Massachusetts Turnpike. The design will incorporate handicapped access for the MBTA Green line, and open access to and improve the underground tunnel. Massachusetts Avenue sidewalks will be expanded, and protected bike lanes and improved bus access will improve access for all users. The project will enable the relocation of a westbound on-ramp to the Massachusetts Turnpike to further down Newbury Street, further away from the busy intersection of Newbury and Massachusetts Avenue, and street crossings will be made safer, due to the widening of sidewalks and the narrowing of intersections.

As part of its community benefits package, the developer has made financial commitments to various neighborhood park-related initiatives including design, programming, and beautification efforts for nearby Symphony Park, Charlesgate Park, the Commonwealth Avenue Mall, and Boylston Street. These contributions are appropriate and recognize both the benefits these nearby greenspaces provide to the Project’s users and the impact that those users will have on those spaces. The proponent has also committed to funding a study of transportation and public realm improvements to be made to the south side of Boylston Street adjacent to the project. This study will help identify much needed improvements to expand the capacity of the street to accommodate pedestrians, including the mobility impaired, traversing the project’s front doorstep.

Finally, although it is outside the scope of the project’s mitigation commitments, the CAC strongly requests that the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) work with Keolis to replace the fencing that is located between Ipswich Street and the rail line adjacent to the Turnpike. We believe that, as a beneficiary of the proceeds from all Air Rights development in the Fenway and Back Bay, MassDOT is long-overdue to address the eyesore and bring the fence into a good state of repair.

Comments on Public Process

The CAC / IAG has spent more than eight years reviewing the Turnpike air rights proposals, advising MassDOT on developer selection and advising the BPDA on project impacts. The CAC commends Samuels & Associates for their cooperation, responsiveness to community concerns, and creative rethinking of the project’s relationship to the public realm.

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However, the CAC has grave concerns about the manner in which the BPDA organized the public process during the final stages of the Parcel 12 review. CAC members were not consulted for their availability to attend meetings, nor given adequate time to respond to newly received information. CAC members did not feel they were given sufficient opportunity to suggest community benefits and discuss those with the developer and the BPDA. CAC members did not have the chance to discuss specific aspects of the proposed hotel use of the Newbury/Mass Avenue tower, because the use was not finalized as a hotel (vs. residential) until just prior to the BPDA Board meeting. The final review felt rushed and the CAC believes the BPDA did a disservice to the CAC members and the public by pushing things forward in this manner. The CAC would like to see a commitment from the BPDA towards a more respectful interchange with the CAC in all future Turnpike air rights meetings and review processes.

Conclusion

The CAC for Parcel 12 is in support of the project as presented by Samuels & Associates, and looks forward to a continued role in reviewing wind impacts, materials selection, public realm design, and traffic impacts.

Sincerely,

Fritz Casselman

Meg Mainzer-Cohen

Kathleen Brill

Steve Wolf

Gil Strickler

David Gamble

Brian Doherty

David Lapin

Brandon Beatty

Mia Jean-Sicard

Teri Malo