



Christian Science Plaza Revitalization Project
CAC Working Meeting #19
Monday, September 13, 2010
Location: Christian Science Publishing House Building

CAC Attendees:

Tom Aucella, Belvedere Condo Association
Kelly Brilliant, Fenway Alliance
Mark Cataudella, Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO)
Christian Coffin, Hilton Hotel Boston Back Bay
Sybil CooperKing, Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay (NABB)
Donald Margotta, Church Park Apartments
Joanne McKenna, Fenway Community Development Corporation (Fenway CDC)
Lee Steele, St. Botolph Neighborhood Association (SBNA)
George Thrush, Boston Society of Architects (BSA)
Robert Wright, Symphony United Neighbors (SUN)

CAC Members Not in Attendance:

Vanessa Calderon-Rosado, Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (IBA)
Ryan Higginson, Resident of the South End
Meg Mainzer-Cohen, Back Bay Association
Craig Nicholson, American Planning Association (APA) – Massachusetts Chapter
Bill Richardson, Fenway Civic Association (FCA)

Ex-Officio Attendees:

Massachusetts State Representative Byron Rushing
Elizabeth Corcoran-Hunt, Office of Representative Rushing

City of Boston Attendees:

Heather Campisano, BRA
Inés Palmarin, BRA
Lauren Shurtleff, BRA

Members of the Public:

Donald Sheehan, IBEW Local #103
Caline Watkins, Fenway CDC

Meeting Summary

On Monday, September 13, 2010, the nineteenth working session of the Christian Science Plaza Revitalization Project Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) was called to order at approximately 8:10 a.m. in the Christian Science Publishing House Building by Inés Palmarin, BRA Senior Planner. This meeting was called in order to allow the CAC to have an open discussion together for the entirety of the session.

Open Discussion

- Sybil CooperKing, CAC Co-Chair and NABB: Why was the comment letter from the Abbey Group not sent out to the CAC sooner?
- Inés Palmarin: The letter was addressed to Director John Palmieri at the BRA. It is an oversight not to have shared it with the CAC, however.
- Sybil CooperKing: Their letter raised some good points, including how the modification of the underground garages will affect the foundations of buildings along St. Germain Street. What about protection of the other buildings that are in close proximity to the new towers?
- George Thrush, CAC Co-Chair and BSA: In any urban setting, you must have written legal protection, bonds, insurance, etc. to safeguard against potential damage. We should be explicit that this is a concern, and the Church should address this.
- George Thrush: We have two issues to review today: to identify performance criteria expected from the Church, and to review the development proposal comments. The idea that the Church is going to respond to comments in this setting is farcical; the presentation at the last meeting with respect to the Reflecting Pool was infantile and offensive. From an architectural standpoint, the BSA opinion would be not to cut the Reflecting Pool. The idea from the video in the presentation was that there is some massive issue that necessitates a crossing of the Pool at that one location. Additionally, the statement about the Church and BLC disagreements would result in the Church taking the BLC to the Supreme Court for religious reasons is troubling. Overall, the proposal is a rational and reasonable one. But there should at least be a grown-up response to our comments.
- Sybil CooperKing: We need to discuss process, ground level changes, and overall bulk of the buildings. Should we start with process?
- Joanne McKenna, Fenway CDC: Is there a way to put all of this in context?
- Sybil CooperKing: The BRA has prepared a timeline (which was then passed around). The comment letter – can be one – or more than one has a suggested deadline of October 1st.
- Lee Steele, SBNA: Many of the groups and people who issued these comment letters are represented by organizations on the CAC. The level of concern collectively expressed in these letters – it is amazing to me that we got this far and these issues, for some reason – that are so fervently felt – did not come out earlier. It's very disturbing, and I feel that we may have wasted our time. I do not know what to do with these comments; does this become our letter, since these letters represent the collective voice?
- Joanne McKenna: This was a very non-combative process. We heard the same financial presentation four times.
- Sybil CooperKing: And yet no financial data was ever disclosed. The numbers that the calculations were based on seem random, as there was no backup data presented.
- George Thrush: There are two approaches to our task – one is to serve as evaluators in lieu of enforced as-of-right zoning in the City. I advocate that we should be focused on public issues at the ground level, where it will impact all of us. The other issue is that we do not want to create a precedent that is undesirable. To the extent that I would argue that the comments are not

representative, I would say that some of us care more deeply about one side of those issues than the other.

- Sybil CooperKing: NABB is concerned about shadows on the tree-lined St. Germain Street.
- Lee Steele: The shadow and traffic impacts are very moderate, according to the data.
- Sybil CooperKing: Large buildings would change the whole character of the street. It is a shame that St. Germain Street has not had a representative that has attended all of these meetings.
- Christian Coffin, Hilton Hotel Boston Back Bay: We're going in circles, I disagree with that. The pros and cons have been voiced at this table, on both sides. How do we move on? I don't see us coming to a consensus.
- George Thrush: The worst thing for us to do would be to write ten separate comment letters. It will be better to have one or two sets of thought. We don't want to force a letter of consensus where there is not one. One letter could be about specific performance evaluation, and we will see if the Church does not respond. The other would be about specific development aspects, with regard to why the bulk is threatening and why people do not support it. For example, We don't want a 500' tall sheer face coming down onto Belvidere Street, this will create wind conditions that are greatly unfavorable.
- Kelly Brilliant, FCA: We cannot clearly all support the bulk and massing letter since we diverge, but this performance criteria letter we could all agree on. We will need the City's support and guidance on this letter, since the BRA has weight on this issue. With respect to the crossing of the pool, I always thought this was an issue for the wider community.
- George Thrush: I have not heard anyone argue in favor of the crossing other than the Church. There is a desire by the public for a crossing, but yet there is another argument in the interest of preserving the beauty of the pool. Nobody argues against the shortening of the pool.
- Representative Byron Rushing: The Sunday School Building will lose the view of floating in the water from the other end, which some have brought up.
- George Thrush: There are ways to address that, however, with good urban design. Also, you do not want to make the pool so shallow that it loses the glass-like appearance. That is something we can address, and expect to see a result from, rather than a change to the bulk.
- Donald Margotta, Church Park Apartments: The memorial in Oklahoma City is very shallow, yet looks glassy.
- Representative Rushing: The Reflecting Pool that exists today is heavy and uses a lot of water. What we should try to do is come up with a consensus letter; we just have not done it yet, but it will show us what the consensus is. And then we can decide how we want to present the competing opinions. When a non-profit says they want to build a building to attain a particular task it is not unusual, however, we want to know that the formula being used is reasonable. We need to see the budget.
- George Thrush: if you think that is how the public decision on this should be made, then yes that should be revealed, but I disagree.
- Tom Aucella, Belvedere Condo Association: No one here made the argument that this is wrong since they are a non-profit.

- Robert Wright, SUN: The inflexibility from the Church is my biggest concern at this point. We need some more rationale for the number.
- Representative Rushing: This is why we must write down what we want, so that it is clear that we are asking for this.
- Lee Steele: The Church will say they have given us what they know up to this point. It is within the purview of this committee to say one more time, we want more information.
- Sybil CooperKing: They have given us one part of the equation: how much it costs to maintain the Plaza. But we do not have how much its operating expenses are.
- Kelly Brilliant: We rarely ask this of private developers; the Church has been more forthcoming, so we should keep this in mind.
- Joanne McKenna: What if we ask for a different scheme?
- Lauren Shurtleff, BRA Planner: A different, "as-of-right" scheme was presented, showing the Reflecting Pool area and the Plaza covered with smaller buildings.
- George Thrush: Also there is the issue that at BLC meeting, the Church stated that if the BLC challenges them, they will take the issue to the Courts.
- Donald Margotta: Is there a basic amount of revenue per square foot that is achievable?
- George Thrush: There is, but it changes with the economy, so you cannot really estimate accurately. We need to be careful what we wish for. This could spread to other non-profit groups around the City. What I have always liked about this project is that it proposes to build tall buildings right where they should be built.
- Lee Steele: Can we get some direction from the Chairs?
- George Thrush: We can draft something.
- Sybil CooperKing: We need to hear around the table some more.
- George Thrush: Who is in favor of crossing the pool? If public interest side is in favor, that is one thing. But who would use the crossing?
- Sybil CooperKing: **The consensus is that shortening the pool at the Sunday School Building end by roughly 20' is alright as long as the illusion is maintained that the Sunday School Building is floating.**
- Tom Aucella: Would the crossing have railings for preventing children from entering the Pool?
- Representative Rushing: The crossing at the Mother Church entrance – this argument is valid for a church to express.
- George Thrush: True, but we must decide the public interest here? Is it the Church or the general public?
- Sybil CooperKing: How is a 500' tall building in the public interest?
- George Thrush: It brings more population into the city, the city is growing, it maintains the public space.
- Tom Aucella: The distinction is if you believe it is truly public space.
- Representative Rushing: The public must pay respect to the public space that exists today.
- George Thrush: It does not matter what the original architect intended, or what the Church intended, but what matters is how the people use it and care for it.
- Lee Steele: It will be more expensive to rebuild it with a crossing – the fact that they want to do this is clearly important to them.

- Tom Aucella: Also aren't they shrinking the pool by 20' in order to make it easier for people to get around?
- Kelly Brilliant: Also, we must consider their worshippers from around the world who come to the site – perhaps it was a mistake to portray in the video that this is a major problem to be addressed by the public here in Boston.
- Tom Aucella: We agree it is okay to want this – the group agrees that this is a reasonable request.
- Sybil CooperKing: **The consensus is that everyone wants to keep the pool visually unimpeded.**
- Mark Cataudella, BSO: Architecturally, why are designers against a crossing – can this not be done from a design point of view?
- George Thrush: My peers doubt that the purity that exists today and is so desirable can be maintained with the introduction of a crossing. We can establish a very clear performance criteria for this – that the visual continuity of the reflecting pool must be maintained. There could be a tunnel underneath for people to cross that way.
- Consensus: **The visual integrity of the Reflecting Pool must be maintained – the continuity of the reflected plane that exists now is what the public values most – a potential crossing must maintain this quality.**
- Lee Steele: The height is driven by economic necessity on behalf of the Church. Location of the tall buildings is about the best on the site. It is the “back of the house” and they have done a respectable job on the recontouring. There is important sewerage infrastructure to be considered. I am glad that there are two buildings proposed here rather than one. Currently, it is a commercial area now, with the two major hotels backing up onto a small residential enclave. They have made the best of a difficult situation if you really believe in the 950,000-SF number.
- Mark Cataudella: **The consensus is that this is the best place for density – not necessarily on the number – but in general.**
- Robert Wright: The biggest concern now for me is the wind factor.
- George Thrush: Let's put that in the performance criteria section.
- Joanne McKenna: My concern is that in terms of community impacts, the only concern that has been stated is to maintain the plaza. The idea that there will be development is not really addressed – the concepts that would improve the space (*i.e.*, good urban design, mix of uses, jobs, etc.) are not presented as an argument for this.
- George Thrush: Dalton and Belvidere Streets will be greatly improved by this project.
- Joanne McKenna: But won't the area be like Boylston Street backed up onto St. Germain Street?
- George Thrush: Not necessarily.
- Sybil CooperKing: A park could improve the space as well.
- George Thrush: From an urban design standpoint, this project will achieve a better ground plane, which is a benefit to the wider community. They've been pretty careful about this, especially considering the small size of the site. It is perfectly reasonable to ask for perspectives from St. Germain Street showing the

loading dock location – it would be very helpful to see a mock up from the ground plane.

- Mark Cataudella: Our concerns should be outlined.
- Kelly Brilliant: Specific concerns on a short list can be prepared now, and then answers can be provided. We can also ask to have one person answer the questions succinctly, rather than three people over a long presentation.
- Sybil CooperKing: We need to have another meeting to talk about this more.
- Mark Cataudella: It will be helpful to start that meeting with a list of bullet points.
- George Thrush: Sybil and I can work on a draft so there is something we can respond to.
- Sybil CooperKing: Can you each send us information – germane points that you want to see covered?
- George Thrush: We can organize it by three categories: 1) Bulk and scope 2) The Reflecting Pool and 3) Streetscape.
- Joanne McKenna: What about that grid that we put together?
- Inés Palmarin: It is available on the project website.
- Heather Campisano, BRA: We will also send over the Article 80 performance criteria so everyone can review them and see what will be addressed during the development review process.

The next CAC meeting will be held on Tuesday, October 5, 2010 at 8:00 a.m. in the Christian Science Publishing House Building, 210 Massachusetts Avenue (enter at the Christian Science Monitor entrance).