



**Christian Science Plaza Revitalization Project
CAC Working Meeting #22**

Wednesday, June 5, 2013

Location: Christian Science Publishing House Building

CAC Attendees:

Sybil CooperKing, Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay (NABB)
Meg Mainzer-Cohen, Back Bay Association
Donald Margotta, Church Park Apartments
Larry Peters, Belvedere Condo Association
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:

Kelly Brilliant, Fenway Alliance
Vanessa Calderon-Rosado, Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (IBA)
Mark Cataudella, Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO)
Ryan Higginson, Resident of the South End
Joanne McKenna, Fenway Community Development Corporation (Fenway CDC)
Craig Nicholson, American Planning Association (APA) – Massachusetts Chapter
Bill Richardson, Fenway Civic Association (FCA)

Ex-Officio Attendees:

Boston City Councillor Tito Jackson
Massachusetts State Representative Byron Rushing
Elizabeth Corcoran-Hunt, Office of Representative Rushing
Johanna Sena, Office of Boston City Councillor Michael Ross

City of Boston Attendees:

Shaina Aubourg, Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services
David Carlson, BRA
Casey Hines, BRA
Lara Merida, BRA
Kairos Shen, BRA
Lauren Shurtleff, BRA

Church Team Attendees:

Harley Gates, The First Church of Christ, Scientist
Bob Herlinger, The First Church of Christ, Scientist
Bob Ryan, ML Strategies

Development Team Attendees:

Peggy Briggs, Epsilon Associates
Harry Cobb, Pei Cobb Freed & Partners
Peter Diana, Carpenter & Company

Dick Friedman, Carpenter & Company
Gary Johnson, Cambridge 7 Associates

Members of the Public:

Greg Galer, Boston Preservation Alliance
Lucille Taitt, Church Member

Meeting Summary

On Wednesday, June 5, 2013, the twenty-second 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 Lauren Shurtleff, BRA Senior Planner.

After a round of introductions, Lauren thanked the group for committing to remain on the CAC as the project enters the Article 80 Development Review phase and the group formally becomes the Impact Advisory Group (IAG) for the project(s). She introduced Casey Hines, BRA, as the Project Manager who will manage the Article 80 Development Review Process.

The group last met in May 2011 to review the Draft Planned Development Area Master Plan (PDA Master Plan) proposed by the Church Team, which was approved later that year. Since then, the Church Team has gone through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process and selected a master developer, Carpenter & Company, for the Belvidere and Dalton Street sites.

Lauren noted that throughout the two-year CAC process, the group provided critical feedback, and allowed the Church Team to arrive at a better-crafted Master Plan in the end. The Church Team was granted approval in the PDA Master Plan for 950,000-SF of development, which would allow the site to become self-sustaining, while also funding the revitalization of the Christian Science Plaza and public realm around the site.

Next, Lauren turned the meeting over to the Church Team, represented by Bob Herlinger, who provided an overview of the Church Team's internal process over the last two years. In the summer of 2012, Beacon Capital Partners signed a Master Lease for 99 years with the Church to manage 177 Huntington Avenue. In the fall of 2012, all of the functions within the Sunday School Building (known now as Reflection Hall) were relocated to the Mother Church. Additionally, the Church signed a 3-year agreement with a third party to manage the plaza garage, which was then outfitted with an automated system. Work also began with the Boston Landmarks Commission (BLC) to find an appropriate approach for taking care of the modernist concrete found all over the Plaza.

Bob noted that the Revitalization Plaza Project will proceed on a separate track from the Belvidere and Dalton Street sites development. He added that the Church Team is currently interviewing landscape architecture firms to start that process, which will also be reviewed as part of its own Article 80 review process.

The Church Team's primary focus in the past two years has been the release of the RFP for the Belvidere and Dalton Street sites. In the summer of 2012, the Church received 7 formal proposals after meeting with 62 interested parties; they then shortlisted 3 teams. The proposals were evaluated by the following criteria: team composition, qualifications, and experience; respect for the design guidelines; economics; parking plan; certainty of closure; and financing. The Development Team chosen for the site is Carpenter & Company, with Pritzker Realty Group as the residential partner. The architects chosen are Henry (Harry) Cobb of Pei Cobb Freed & Partners, in collaboration with Cambridge Seven Associates.

Bob added that the Church decided to sell rather than lease the property. He also noted that the Development Team had come up with a better plan to utilize the existing parking more efficiently, which will require collaboration moving forward but will result in a better parking program.

Next, Bob turned the meeting over to Dick Friedman, the President and CEO of Carpenter & Company, who thanked the Church for their support and the CAC for their efforts towards the completed Master Plan. Dick then provided a brief review of his firm and the overall Development Team. He stated that the project will involve three real estate components: a mid-rise tower with rental housing, and a high-rise tower with a full-service hotel with condominiums above. The entire project will be serviced by valet parking.

Dick then introduced the group to Harry Cobb of Pei Cobb Freed & Partners, who most Bostonians know as the lead designer of the John Hancock Tower, one of the City's most iconic structures. Harry then recalled presenting that tower's plan to a similar citizens group 45 years ago in the same neighborhood. He discussed his familiarity with the site, noting that he has spent the greater part of his career thinking about architecture in Boston, with this site (the Christian Science Complex) being one that has particularly stood out in his mind. He described the triangle site for the high-rise tower as a microcosm of the larger triangle of the Christian Science Complex, with the Mother Church in the center, which he noted was unique to any American city. Harry explained his desire for the new tower to respond to that unique condition.

He continued by noting that in essence, tall buildings are self-centered, and designers must therefore be conscious of the visual message that is delivered. The Belvidere and Dalton Street sites participate in two worlds – that of the Christian Science Complex and that of the Prudential Center. Harry explained that he began with the framework provided by the Master Plan, with a discussion of the appropriate uses for the site. While working within the height outlined in the Master Plan, the hexagonal shape of the high-rise building came into question. A hexagon is compact and close to a circle, which is the most self-centered shape of all. The design was then adjusted to become a softened triangle, which occupies the same site and basic floor area. The high-rise tower needs to be a part of the cluster that joins it – expressing the geometry of the Christian Science Complex, but yet connected to the High Spine.

Kairos Shen, the City's Chief Planner, then discussed the BRA's initial thoughts on the modification to the design of the high-rise tower, which he realized was a revelation with

regard to the site's geometry. This revelation, in turn, raised the issue of revisiting the three sites across the complex, and questioned whether this was the smartest strategy. The site should not compete with the Prudential Center, and the hexagonal form of the tower was almost too related to the 111 Huntington Avenue tower. Moreover, the relationship of the third mid-rise development site on Huntington Avenue to the Sunday School Building, Horticulture Hall, and Symphony Hall had been called into question several times, by members of the general public as well as from the preservation community. At the same time, the BRA knew that the Church needed the density outlined in the PDA Master Plan to support the publicly accessible spaces on the property in the long-term. Kairos also explained his desire to see the side of the Sunday School Building that fronts Huntington Avenue activated in some way.

Therefore, the Development Team was asked by the BRA's Urban Design Department to pursue additional studies, to see what would happen if the density from the Sunday School site was moved to the other site. Kairos stated that this request originated purely because the Development Team included a brilliant architect, whose involvement with the original site's development made for a unique opportunity.

The result is a newly designed high-rise tower that rises to 691 feet and truly reflects the geometry of the entire Complex, yet elegantly fits into the High Spine. Kairos explained that there are a number of benefits that emerge from this modification, which will be delved into more detail in future CAC meetings, but indicated the BRA and the Mayor's desire for the concept to be presented to the CAC in order for them to weigh in on this important change to the configuration.

The meeting was then turned over to the CAC for questions and comments.

CAC Comments

- Sybil CooperKing, CAC Co-Chair and NABB, asked Harry Cobb directly what he believed the right height for the building to be, seeing as that the impetus for greater height came from the BRA. Harry responded that he did not believe that there was an absolute "right" height for any building, but noted that when talking about buildings over 500 feet in height, the most important component of the building is the experience of it from the pedestrian's point of view, and added that this has been his primary preoccupation as an architect. He noted that the point at which the building actually stops is relatively insignificant in comparison. From a distance, tall buildings tend to have more of an impact; as you get further away, buildings become part of the Image of the City. Harry elaborated on this concept, explaining the importance of a building relating to the mass of the city, which brought the building's design into a discussion about proportions. He stated his belief that 111 Huntington Avenue is too low, and that the high-rise building he has designed should be taller than 111 Huntington Avenue, but lower than the Prudential Tower. Harry also mentioned the pairing of the Prudential and Hancock Towers as being complete architectural opposites that thrive off of one another – and both have become emblems of Boston now. This building should not approach them in height for that reason.
- In a follow-up comment, Sybil expressed appreciation for the contextual appropriateness of the building's triangular shape. Harry explained his rationale

further, commenting that that an unmodified triangle would be too sharp, which resulted in a softened triangle. The fact that this site is a triangle within a greater order of triangles is incredibly lucky and can only be described as an accident of history. At the same time, the building also represents a quality that the Prudential Center Complex needs, and should complete the complex nicely, without being too isolated.

- In response to a comment from Don Margotta, Church Park Apartments, Kairos agreed that the corner of the site by the Sunday School Building still needs to be transformed. He noted that the density outlined in the PDA Master Plan (250,000-SF and 291 feet) is likely far too much, but added that additional study will be required to determine just how much is needed. Kairos also recalled the initial discussions the Church had with Araldo Cossutta, the original architect of the complex, who indicated that he was not convinced that this site was a viable development site for a building of that size.
- George Thrush, CAC Co-Chair and BSA, commented that he would confine his remarks at the moment to the transfer of the development density from the Sunday School site to the high-rise tower. He expressed his support for pursuing a means to energize the portion of Huntington Avenue by the Sunday School Building in the future, but also reiterated his previously raised concerns about casting a shadow on the site's biggest public amenity, the Reflecting Pool (which the mid-rise building on that site would have done). The sanctity of the pool was the one topic that the entire CAC had agreed on in the past. George added that his lowest concern was to venerate the concrete modernism of the Sunday School Building, and noted that the transfer of density makes the high-rise tower a better building and casts no shadow on the pool, which is an excellent trade-off in the public interest.
- In response to a question from Meg Mainzer-Cohen, Back Bay Association, regarding the Huntington Avenue underpass and how it bears responsibility for much of the lack of the street's vitality, Kairos replied that the City could explore its removal. *Note:* It was later determined that the State will also have to be engaged.
- In a follow-up question, Meg Mainzer-Cohen asked how to frame a tall building that is both self-centered and friendly at the same time. Harry replied that the reshaping of the high-rise tower from a hexagon to a triangle was deliberately done, in order to make the building more of a participant in the surrounding context and to make its unique geometry explicit on the skyline. In order to make the building friendly, the experience on the ground plane is of primal importance and will be explained in detail at a future meeting. He noted that it is fortunate that there is a small park space at the base of the building. Furthermore, he added that the interplay between the ground plane and the building must be modulated, unlike at the Hancock Tower, which was deliberately unmodulated out of a concern for Trinity Church in Copley Square. Here, the proximity to the St. Germain Street neighborhood makes for a unique juxtaposition, another relationship that requires a careful modulation. The way that the building is organized is very important – the lower register of the building (representing approximately the first 70 feet) will contain public spaces and become a 21st century evolution of the historic Back Bay scale.

- In response to a question from Meg Mainzer-Cohen regarding the proposed crossing through the Reflecting Pool, Kairos replied that the concept still needs to be discussed further, as part of the review process for the Plaza Revitalization Project.
- In a follow-up comment, George Thrush added that the experience of the Reflecting Pool must be maintained.
- Lee Steele, SBNA, stated that the concept of transferring the massing from the Huntington Avenue site to the high-rise tower is an interesting one. He recalled that there had been discussions in the past of referencing the Symphony Plaza Towers as a precedents for the height of the building proposed adjacent to the Sunday School Building, and that eventually, the group's conversations evolved to accept this concept. Lee added that a building on that site would really turn that section of the neighborhood around and to give up on that challenge is compelling, but leaves the group wondering what will happen there at that site. Kairos responded that the site would relieve the third building's necessity of supporting the Plaza's revitalization and would make the decision of what to place there an elective one. In effect, it allows the Revitalization Project to move forward sooner, and allows the City, Church, and CAC to be much more selective about what will ultimately be placed next to the Sunday School Building.
- Robert Wright, SUN, agreed with Kairos and Lee and noted that this opportunity would give the Church, the CAC, and the City more options about how to activate that section of the Plaza in the future.
- In response to a question from Sybil CooperKing, Kairos responded that the PDA Master Plan will need to be amended as part of this process, and a discussion around what density should remain for the Huntington Avenue site still needs to be held. One possibility would be to finalize the massing for the Belvidere and Dalton Street sites, but to not specify what density belongs on the Huntington Avenue site at this point, but rather leave it open as a future discussion topic for the community.
- Representative Byron Rushing stated that this was a great presentation, but noted that this was the first time the CAC was seeing this scheme and there are a good number of CAC members not present. He also commended the idea of possibly eliminating the Huntington Avenue underpass, indicating that this was something that would merit future study, and also suggested that the Church could possibly add this to the list of public benefits associated with the project. Kairos responded that the square footage in the PDA Master Plan was based on the number (950,000-SF) calculated by the Church Team needed to fund the Plaza Revitalization Project and maintain the space in perpetuity. If the public benefits associated with the project were expanded to include the removal of the underpass, the Church would need to add more square footage to that number, which is an entirely new conversation. He added that it would be worthwhile to explore removing the underpass, but that it should proceed independently from the other process. The CAC could continue to meet with a dual purpose of reviewing the development of the Belvidere and Dalton Street sites and also explore the additional density required to fund the Huntington Avenue improvements.

- George Thrush stated that the urban design issues along Huntington Avenue are significant and are linked to a greater neighborhood framework that extends from Copley Square to Northeastern University.

The majority of the CAC members present indicated that they were supportive of the new massing concept.

There were no public comments.

Lauren then provided the CAC with a tentative timeline outlining the process moving forward, noting that the CAC/IAG would continue to meet over the summer:

2013 Tentative Timeline – as of June 5, 2013

Week of June 10 th	Carpenter & Company to File Letter of Intent with the BRA
Week of June 24 th	CAC/IAG Meeting #23
Week of July 1 st or 8 th	Carpenter & Company to File PDA Master Plan Amendment/Development Plan/Project Notification Form (45 day public comment period commences)
Week of July 15 th or 22 nd	Joint CAC/IAG/Public Meeting: Review of PDA Master Plan Amendment/Development Plan/Project Notification Form
Fall 2013	Anticipated Approvals: BRA Board and Boston Zoning Commission
Beyond	Plaza Revitalization Project led by the Church Team
	Boston Landmarks Commission (BLC) Review, as needed

The next meeting will focus on more of the public realm and architectural details of the proposed buildings for the Belvidere and Dalton Street sites.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:50 a.m.