



Christian Science Plaza Revitalization Project
CAC Working Meeting #7
Tuesday, August 4, 2009
Location: Christian Science Publishing House Building

CAC Attendees:

Tom Aucella, Belvedere Condo Association
Mark Cataudella, Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO)
Christian Coffin, Hilton Hotel Boston Back Bay
Sybil CooperKing, Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay (NABB)
Marie Fukuda, Fenway Civic Association
Eric Georgi, Resident of St. Germain Street
Meg Mainzer-Cohen, Back Bay Association
Joanne McKenna, Fenway Community Development Corporation (Fenway CDC)
Craig Nicholson, American Planning Association (APA) – Massachusetts Chapter
Lee Steele, St. Botolph Neighborhood Association
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)
Ryan Higginson, Resident of the South End
Donald Margotta, Church Park Apartments

Ex-Officio Attendees:

Massachusetts State Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz
Massachusetts State Representative Byron Rushing
Elizabeth Corcoran-Hunt, Office of Representative Rushing

City of Boston Attendees:

Heather Campisano, BRA
Nicole Larsen, BRA
Randi Lathrop, BRA
Kevin Morrison, BRA
Inés Palmarin, BRA
Lauren Shurtleff, BRA

Church Team Attendees:

Barbara Burley, The First Church of Christ, Scientist
Harley Gates, The First Church of Christ, Scientist
Bob Herlinger, The First Church of Christ, Scientist
Debbi Lawrence, The First Church of Christ, Scientist
Bob Ryan, ML Strategies

Members of the Public:

Maura Burke, NABB
Ned Eames, Tenacity
David Holtzman, Fenway CDC
Tim Horn, Fenway Neighbor
Shirley Kressel, NABB
Marc Laderman, Fenway Neighbor
Richard Orareo, Fenway Neighbor
Christine Piontek, Boston Preservation Alliance
Bill Richardson, Fenway Civic Association
Donald Sheehan, IBEW Local 103
Barbara Simons, SUN
Jonathan Smith, KV Associates
Bill Whitney, Berklee College of Music
Jackie Yessian, NABB

Meeting Summary

On Tuesday, August 4, 2009, the seventh working session of the Christian Science Plaza Revitalization Project Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) was called to order at approximately 6:00 p.m. in the Christian Science Publishing House Building by Inés Palmarin, BRA Senior Planner.

Inés began the meeting by announcing the selection of Sybil CooperKing, NABB, and George Thrush, Boston Society of Architects, as co-chairs of the CAC.

Inés then noted that at the previous meeting, there had been questions about the history of the site. Kevin Morrison, General Counsel at the BRA, was therefore present to discuss the site's history.

Kevin began by stating that he had been asked to give a brief overview of the relationship between the Fenway Urban Renewal Plan (FURP) and Chapter 121A as they apply to the site. He stated that the FURP was approved by the BRA in 1965 and federal funding was approved two years later in 1967. He added that there were three subareas: the "Symphony Area," the "Museum Area" and the "Medical Centre Area" within the overall FURP project areas. In 1966, a Chapter 121A project was approved for the Christian Science Plaza area and specific controls were set; therefore, while the Plaza was officially part of the urban renewal area (*i.e.*, the Symphony Area), the Chapter 121A controls covered the Plaza. Kevin noted, however, that the Chapter 121A controls over the site expired two years ago, so they no longer exist.

Kevin continued, mentioning that most of the disposition parcels (*i.e.*, impacted properties under the urban renewal plan) were owned by the Church Realty Trust, and not acquired by the BRA. He added that eminent domain power still existed, and that it was possible to enter into an agreement with the Church Realty Trust, if accepted by the BRA with additional controls, which would function essentially like a Land Disposition Agreement.

Kevin said that the urban renewal plan has been extended until 2015, and noted that the plaza remains in the scheme, but reiterated that the Chapter 121A designation has expired.

Questions and comments raised in response to Kevin's overview included:

- George Thrush asked how the urban renewal plan's extension to 2015 is different from the Chapter 121A controls that have expired. Kevin replied that the Chapter 121A project is discretionary with the BRA and that no changes can be made without BRA approval. He added that the plaza is still within the urban renewal plan's boundaries, however.
- Massachusetts State Representative Byron Rushing then asked if the Chapter 121A designation had expired for any specific reason. Kevin replied that the expiration date was established at the start.
- Lee Steele, St. Botolph Neighborhood Association, stated that it sounds as if there are still some restrictions in terms of what was intended for the urban renewal plan and wanted to know if there were some broad conceptual guidelines. Kevin responded, stating that the urban renewal plan inserted controls on every disposition parcel, except for the Chapter 121A parts. Kevin added that everyone should keep in mind that in the past, urban renewal plans were financed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), but that is no longer the case.
- Joanne McKenna, Fenway CDC, asked what this means for the CAC in terms of hurdles, etc. Kevin replied that the project team is waiting for the planning process to end and then they will see where they are in terms of what will need to be done. The urban renewal plan, therefore, may or may not have an effect on the plaza revitalization project.
- In response to a question from Representative Rushing, Kevin replied that the BRA no longer owns any land in the area.
- Sybil CooperKing then asked if the Church Park Apartments were connected to the Church at all. Barbara Burley of the Church Team answered that the Church does not own Church Park, but it does have the right to buy the property in the year 2092, many decades in the future..
- Sybil CooperKing then stated that urban renewal is a complex matter that can be looked at positively or negatively, but that the Christian Science Plaza project appeared to be an example of urban renewal done well, and so it should not be thought of as a negative thing.
- Joanne McKenna asked if there were any commitments made to replace housing units that were lost, specifically affordable ones. Kevin replied that Symphony East and West were fully subsidized. Barbara Burley added that during the development of the Christian Science Plaza in the 1960s-70s, 512 units were removed and that the Church was responsible for the creation of 1,234 new housing units, of which 43% were affordable. She said that of the 404 units at Symphony East and West, 100% were affordable, while 25% (or 127 of the 508 units) at Church Park Apartments were initially designated affordable.
- Marie Fukuda, Fenway Civic Association, asked if the CAC members could be given a binder with copies of all of the meeting notes and other relevant documents. Inés indicated that this will be done.
- Sybil CooperKing asked about the site's zoning and whether they could discuss it further at the next meeting. Barbara Burley mentioned that the zoning was discussed at the April 27th CAC meeting, and that the presentation is available on the BRA website.
- Meg Mainzer-Cohen, Back Bay Association, added that she would also want to understand how the zoning applies to their discussions and project.
- Marie Fukuda mentioned that the scope of the project and the zoning's complexity has made her concerned. She added that they are looking at just under 1 million square feet of development, but not talking about all of the Church's property holdings. She stated that she wants to be part of a responsible process and therefore wants to see the scope

increased to include those other properties, rather than see a separate process for other holdings once those leases are up.

- George Thrush stated that he would like to focus on articulating performance criteria for each site, which he feels is more important than building footprints. He said that it is important to be clear on what the CAC wants to see and to get at that early. He added that he believes that redefining the scope is less important than thinking of good outcomes so that the CAC can figure out how to get there.
- Meg Mainzer-Cohen then asked how this project was different than an Institutional Master Plan (IMP). Randi Lathrop, BRA Deputy Director of Community Planning, replied that in order to have an IMP, the Church would have to be a degree-granting body. She added that the BRA establishes a CAC so that there can be a full public process, which is important for this project.
- Sybil CooperKing then added that Marie Fukuda's comment touched on the fact that there is a lot of development going on in the area and that they might want to know more about adjacent projects. Randi mentioned that they did present other projects that were filed and that the BRA planners and project managers do meet internally so that they can communicate about what everyone is doing.
- Robert Wright, SUN, stated that the CAC should focus on this specific area already in play and Lee Steele agreed, saying that he was not sure if it is in the scope of the CAC to comment on a project that has not even been conceived yet. Lee added that he would not want to see the committee diverted from the project at hand.
- Joanne McKenna added that she saw economic sustainability as a main goal for the Church and so it seems that if there is other land that will come into play in the short term and be changed, then that has an impact on what they are looking at today.
- Meg Mainzer-Cohen stated that they could also ask for a promise for improvements for the future and that they could advocate for those improvements.
- George Thrush mentioned that they could ask the Church to include thoughts for the future in a massing model.
- Barbara Burley replied that the Church sees the plaza as their home and that the other properties where they have an interest are very different, as they are commercial and separate entities. She said that they want the focus of this CAC to be on the 14.5 acres presented as part of the plaza revitalization project. She added that they have made assumptions for financial planning purposes, and noted that the future development of the Midtown Hotel within zoning allowances has been factored into their financial forecasting.
- George Thrush then asked if they could include the presumed buildout under zoning for the Midtown Hotel. Randi agreed that the Church can add this to the massing model to show the zoning buildout.
- Public Comments:
 - Marc Laderman inquired about the relevance of a court case, *Jones vs. Lynn*. Kevin replied that it went to the Federal Appeals Court and was sent back to District Court and settled on procedural grounds. He added that it does not have any life to it anymore.
 - Richard Orareo wanted to know if the Church participated in any payments in lieu of taxes (PILOT). Harley Gates of the Church Team said that the Church does not make PILOT payments, but pays taxes on all of its properties leased to commercial tenants. He also noted that future development on the site will likely result in increased taxes paid to the city.

- o Barbara Simons asked how leasing to non-profits (such as Northeastern University) impacts taxes. Harley said the Church does not pay taxes on space leased to non-profits who use the space for charitable purposes, but does pay taxes on property leased to commercial tenants.

Recognizing that the meeting was behind schedule, Ines then suggested to the co-chairs that they let the Church Team begin their presentation, to which Sybil and George agreed.

Barbara Burley began by saying that the Church had alternate plans to show for the pedestrian path across the reflecting pool, and if time permitted, additional thoughts on the new building at the corner of Huntington Avenue. [Note: this item was deferred to the next session because of time constraints.] She mentioned that their third topic was to present a timetable for the CAC moving forward.

Bob Herlinger said that based on comments, the Church began to look at different ideas for the pedestrian path to cross the reflecting pool. He mentioned that the original alternative depicted a crossing that went in line with The Mother Church, while a second alternative would make a diagonal cut across, resulting in a more urban connection. He added that there is sufficient "landing" space to perform this change, and noted that it would not compromise any of the Church's other goals. Bob emphasized the importance of leading to The Mother Church and the concept of having a "landing" point on each side of the path.

Questions and comments in response to the Church Team's presentation are summarized below:

- Lee Steele said that this appeared to be a big improvement, and added that it could be a very pleasant space.
- Marie Fukuda asked how that would affect the ability to use part of the pool as an ice skating rink. Bob Herlinger replied that there would still be ample room for a large skating rink.
- George Thrush added that while he thought this second alternative was indeed an improvement, he did not understand the resistance to reasserting the Norway Street alignment and width across the reflecting pool.
- George Thrush mentioned that these little choices ultimately have a big impact and that he would like to see perspective views of these alternatives.
- Bob Herlinger commented that there is still a lot of detailed study to be done, but conceptually the Church wishes to retain a contemplative space with seating, while allowing for movement across the reflecting pool.
- Mark Cataudella, Boston Symphony Orchestra, asked if some of the points in the diagrams could be softened, and Bob Herlinger mentioned that these details will be worked out later on in the process.
- Representative Rushing said that he liked the new design and that it looked very "South-Endy," where you look down the street and see a steeple at the end of a view corridor.

Barbara Burley then passed around a tentative work calendar for the CAC. The calendar included topics to address in future meetings through December 2009. Comments from the CAC included:

- Sybil CooperKing noted that at the next meeting, items for the agenda should include the discussion of the building on Huntington Avenue, as well as a quick zoning lesson by the BRA.
- Representative Rushing mentioned that they would also need time for topics which they want to re-visit.
- Joanne McKenna added that there might be a need to meet past the end of the year. Barbara Burley suggested that they could meet more often or even meet for two hours each session, rather than just one and a half hours.

It was agreed that the co-chairs would meet with the BRA to make these scheduling adjustments. The meeting was then adjourned at 7:35pm.