

March 9, 2010: Hyde Park Planning & Rezoning Advisory Group Working Session #8

Advisory Group: Barbara Baxter, Vic Carrara, Gene Clegg, Barbara Hamilton, Steve Roller, Nancy Savelle-Thimble, Ann Lee, Bob Vance, Rob Villegas, Jay Paget (Cuthbert Downey – not present)

Consultants: Carole Schlessinger (CSS), Mike Davis (Bergmeyer)

BRA: Marie Mercurio, Ted Schwartzberg, Derek Valentine (Intern)

****PLEASE READ THESE NOTES IN TANDEM WITH VIEWING THE POWER POINT PRESENTATION FROM THE MARCH 9, 2010 ADVISORY GROUP MEETING(http://www.bostonredevelopmentauthority.org/pdf/PlanningPublications/Hyde%20Park%20AG%20Presentation_3.9.10_complete.pdf)**

Meeting started at 6:40 PM

Marie: Begins by stating that the discussion of ideas and concepts for the purpose of tonight's meeting are not actual development proposals on the table. Mike Davis will show some ideas for the Hyde Park commuter lot and Post Office plaza. Carole and I have looked at some DND lots in the community (21 acres in Hyde Park). We are coordinating with DND in making recommendations on uses for these lots, most specifically open space. We want to talk more about residential issues since we have been covering industrial and commercial so much. Marie asked the AG if they felt ready for a community meeting soon.

AG: We should sit and talk amongst ourselves about how we would synthesize the information we've been given and present it to the public. This communication cannot be done in an email format alone. Perhaps a next Advisory Group meeting can be a facilitated and structured discussion amongst the AG members to be followed by a community meeting.

Hyde Park Commuter Rail and Post Office Parking Lot

Mike: We want to get feedback about what they would like to see done in the parking lot behind the post office/commuter rail lot. Roadway into parking lot is not well-defined. Small park along west side of the lot has potential. The buildings in front of the lot are historic. Public realm needs to be wrapped into the lot behind the building (streetscape). The train stop could be moved closer to the commercial district (if we can do that). We want to get people out of the train station and into the commercial district. The park might be developed into a larger hardscaped place for civic activity. The back side of the buildings could be refaced. Main portion of the park could be an impromptu performance space. Local Hyde Park businesses could advertise on the train shelter.

AG: You did not draw any height on the post office building (it may be a different topic). Also, when you come back from downtown on the train, your car will be on the other side. We still need stairs to the bridge because people will not want to walk that far to cross the tracks.

Mike: The grade currently falls off after the existing park, but it could be extended into a larger level space. Regarding the other lot, between Hyde Park AV, River ST and Harvard AV:

Winthrop ST is S-shaped, snaking through the existing parking lots. I suggest we do two loops and two crossing zones with flexible space in the middle in the place of the former Winthrop Street. You could leave a spot in the middle of the lot that could house a farmers market. You are not losing parking, we could just reconfigure so the center of the lot can be multi use.

AG: In the past, we spoke about a parking structure here and a gathering place similar to what you have proposed. The park space you have proposed is somewhat modest (not unlike Roslindale Square, Adams Park)

Mike: The way that this lot is pitched, it would allow you to do structured parking. Keeping parking on site is good, but structured parking may not be necessary.

AG: On Saturdays and Sundays, the parking we have is not at capacity. Enforcing the two-hour parking helps. This is an example of ideas we need to synthesize.

Mike: Historic Boston is interested in one of the rear basement spaces with tin ceilings. At the Tedeschi's if we were to shift the entrance away from being a side entrance, it would be more of a public realm. On that block of River Street, awning, signs and plants could give the back of the buildings that face the parking lot more of a "front" look. Shift the dumpsters away from the back of the building into dumpster enclosures located in the parking lot. How does a retailer run a store with two fronts? If there is a market in the rear, it will work. I'm showing a build-out on the front of the hardware store building to make it flush with existing buildings.

AG: Is there going to be a fight with the retailers to get them to open the back of the stores?

Mike: Often the public investment has to take place first (enhanced streetscape in the rear of the post office building). Landowners (working together) need to get behind this idea in order for it to work.

Carole: In Lexington Center, it works like this and the street life is not negatively impacted on the storefront side.

AG: That doesn't include any space behind the Lowney Building.

Mike: No, privately-owned.

AG: Zoning can have signage requirements back here because it would become a public right of way.

Fairmount Commuter Rail Station designs

Carole: Concept B2 had a 9-story building on the corner and 6-story double loaded corridor buildings behind it. Ground floor of the 9-story is retail with residential above. The group felt that approaching the building from the bridge, the building was too large. We then proposed a smaller building in place of the 9-story providing an opening between it and existing residential

buildings. These drawings (street view elevations) were in response for a request to see what the buildings would look like.

AG: The buildings are still too big. (5 stories total with 4 stories above grade). A building of this size may encourage a developer to add more parking in between.

Ralph DeNisco: Our charge is to do the transportation component of the master plan. We already did an existing conditions presentation in July 2009. Accessibility is mainly what we want to talk about. Transportation cannot be seen in isolation, but in relation to other community goals. At a master plan level, we set broad guidelines for improvements. We suggest goals based on comments made. Talking about improving non-auto mode share. Hyde Park has the highest auto dependence in the city. 83% auto share. 7% transit and 9% walk are low. Some strategies to deal with this: concentrate new development near transit and existing density, provide greater services in the neighborhood, improve public transit system, create better bike/ped connections, changing zoning to encourage mixed use.

Suggested Transportation Goals For This Planning Process: (Ralph DeNisco - McMahon)

- Character and operations of major corridors: The City of Boston is developing Complete Streets Criteria. Minimums for bike lanes, sidewalks, street trees, streets not just for cars. We would like to compare some main streets in Hyde Park to this criteria. Need to involve DCR who owns a lot of the roadways.

- Define Truck Movements: There is still a lot of industrial land, but the movement of trucks servicing these uses impacts the area. Work with BTM and MassDOT on that. Need to protect the residential areas from truck traffic. Because trucks aren't allowed on parkways they find other routes.

- Public Transit Improvements: We cannot change policy on commuter rail pricing, but we can make recommendations. \$1.70 v. \$4.25 for Zone 1. Some people are looking at the commuter rail and the possibility of using it as subway service (more frequent, more stops). We are also looking at bus routes for higher level treatment to integrate it into surrounding land uses.

- Transportation Impacts of Developments: look at zoning and parcels with potential for development build out. What will development in Cleary and Logan Squares mean for traffic and parking. We are looking at the boundaries of the Main Streets District and near the commuter rail. We will establish a baseline of existing conditions. Get a sense of what is pass through traffic and how do existing uses relate? What are the implications of the build out and how does it compare to current uses? We will then make recommendations based on potential development. By the next meeting a good part of the analysis will be done. It is a simple planning analysis, not on a parcel by parcel basis.

AG: A lot of this is a prerequisite for answering some of our other questions.

Carole: We will look at the analysis first as three story buildings and what would then be the impact of five stories (even if only on a few parcels).

AG: We might want to look at different scenarios of density before next meeting.

Carole: We actually need to provide more information next week so you can make these decisions on density.

AG: Also need to consider the price of parking in the commuter rail lots, people are parking on the side streets because it is expensive to park.

Ralph: Mixed uses may be a suggestion in order to minimize parking requirement. Also, mixed uses have staggered peak times. Our baseline would be existing square footage with a certain occupancy rate. We can use general traffic data for those uses and compare it to observed reality. We have some traffic information now.

Carole: DND owned land. I have looked at some parcels with Marie. We want to see if there are sites suitable for open space. Subarea 1: 30 is a large one (2.5 acres) steep behind buildings with bad access. Preserved with open space zoning. Most unbuilt parcels are steep and rocky. One parcel is on West St is an Urban Wild and was most worthy of protecting and already is. Open space zoning can be used to designate specific use of the open space. It currently has a sign with really small print. Beechmont Terrace parcel also isn't buildable. Manila St Parcel looks wet and is on a paper st, not buildable or good for a garden. Parcel on Sprague St is in the industrial area and mainly good for industrial use for one of its neighbors. We looked at several parcels on Weston St., off of Turtle Pond Parkway another rocky, steep site. Parcel 44 is on West St, large parcel over 2 acres, priority parcel for the greenway. Boston Conservation Commission owns it. 54 and 65 are the back yard for existing parcels and is steep and no access. Beautiful view of the river from the West St parcel and should continue to be protected. Small parcel on Walnut St was coded as Commercial because it borders commercial. It is bordered by commuter rail and industrial and is not a usable parcel. Fences go up around these parcels so that people do not dump on them. Corner of Belnel Rd is a nice site for community garden or a potential housing lot. Between Tacoma and Safford Sts this lot is almost an acre in size, but is completely hidden so not much potential for recreation or development. Many owners have already fenced in DND land as their own. Alpine Village has 2 really steep parcels. Parcels on Pinewood St near new development are good for a housing site. Not many good parcels for community garden search. Belnel is it.

We haven't talked about residential much. Inventory and preservation of historic stock, unit size diversity for family friendliness, affordability (city requires 15% over certain size to be affordable) In the master plan this would be addressed in policy. Homeownership programs are already offered by the city and the plan will encourage these programs, want to make sure that there are good rental and ownership opportunities. We looked at existing development and whether it is conforming. 67% of existing parcel sizes are non conforming lots under the current regulations. 11% gross sq ft is too large, 53% lot size is too small. 26% exceed number of units allowed. The non conformity is spread across every neighborhood. It is more complicated for people to make changed to their houses on a non conforming lot. To make them conforming we would have to increase density in all neighborhoods, this is not acceptable to the AG.

We can have a minimum open space requirement to avoid pavement of the front yard. Also limits on what you can consider “driveway”. We will draft design guidelines for residential neighborhoods.

Marie: As of right design review is also being considered. As it is currently implemented in other neighborhood, design review is required for all projects with 750 sq ft of new or renovation, even when the project is otherwise allowed (as of right) by the zoning code. This process involves notification to abutters, and a comment period for abutters to submit comments to the BRA design review team. The proponent then meets with a BRA architect and planner to tweak and refine the design, if necessary, before building permits are issued.

Ted: An example of a neighborhood where there is currently no required design review with as-of-right projects is Mission Hill. Recently, an as-of-right development was built and the garage door was placed right on street level. This is something we want to try to avoid. With required as-of-right design review, this may have been avoided. Even though the BRA cannot stop such developments that are allowed as of right by the zoning code, trained architects and designers reviewing projects can add some expertise.

Carole: We want to make sure that the new zoning will accommodate for mixed uses and live/work space. We’ll need to look at off-street parking requirements for residential uses. We can also consider open space requirements for one’s property. We can limit how many cars someone is parking on their property by limiting how much pavement is allowed there (vs. grass or other pervious surface).

AG: What guidelines are there for home daycares in residential areas? Last year, there were 76 in Hyde Park certified by the Commonwealth and there is not much we can do about it. The nuisance is parking and high speed traffic and even a bus service. The location of the former Serrino’s could potentially be a daycare.

Marie: We can address where they are located, their parking requirements and perhaps maximum number of children to attend in the forthcoming zoning regulations. The bulk of home daycare regulations are governed by the Commonwealth.

Audience: Parkways in Hyde Park do accommodate truck traffic. Also, the use of common shared driveways (tandem parking) is a problem. I think we should stop this practice.

Audience: Most people have two cars in Hyde Park. If you provide new housing, you will need to require 2 parking spaces per unit. Also, if you start bringing in inexpensive “high-rises”, you will detract from the value of our (single-family) homes.

Carole: We are not increasing the density that much. The only density that we are suggesting is in and around the Squares, and especially the commuter rail stations.

Audience: I would like to see Cleary Square like I remember it, like how Roslindale Square is now. We should have more to offer the people traveling on the trains in and out of Cleary/Logan Squares (whether they are residents or people passing through).

Audience: Can we require that food be served with alcohol? No, but this is regulated by the Commonwealth

Marie: We can regulate hours of operation and whether an establishment has entertainment in the zoning regulations). We can also have some control over fast food restaurants in the zoning (whether there is a drive-through and where they are located).

Adjourned at 8:32 PM