

March 17, 2017

Philip Cohen
Boston Planning & Development Agency
One City Hall Square
Boston, MA 02201

By Email

Re: Comments relating to 1000 Boylston Street Scoping Determination

Dear Mr. Cohen:

I am a member of and co-chair of the 1000 Boylston Street IAG, and I fully support the IAG comment letter that you received yesterday. In the instant letter, and speaking as an individual, not on behalf of the IAG, I would like to supplement and/or stress the importance of certain of the IAG comments.

Wind

The IAG, (in the 4th or 5th paragraph [depending how you count] under “Wind”) states that, “Another member expressed an ongoing concern that the BPDA continues to accept wind studies using a methodology that has never been validated for these purposes.” The potential wind impact of this project, particularly with Parcels 12 and 13 coming along, and even more particularly with the Parcel 12 developer intending to build a two-story row of retail establishments adjacent to the east side of the Massachusetts Avenue bridge. It would be a shame if the project were built based on “acceptable” wind studies only to find out that, once built, actual wind was higher in all the wrong places. When I ask developers or architects if their wind consultant has ever validated the accuracy of the predictions, the typical response is a casual “I assume so” or “I think so” or, “let me find out.” But with those whom I have pursued for an answer, the answer is always no. We don’t even know what the error bars are on the predictions. If for a given measurement point the result is +/- 5%, then in most cases the result is useful to characterize only the most extreme categories of the BPDA’s wind scale:

Dangerous > 27 mph
Uncomfortable for Walking > 19 and ≤ 27 mph
Comfortable for Walking > 15 and ≤ 19 mph
Comfortable for Standing > 12 and ≤ 15 mph
Comfortable for Sitting < 12 mph

There must be some way to improve the confidence level so that these studies are worthwhile.

The East Tower

The new IAG comment letter notes (bottom of page 2) that some IAG members “asked whether the need for a second tower could be revisited, and wondered whether an analysis might show

that the East Tower may not be financially essential to completely cover the Turnpike and train tracks below. Access to the Proponent's financial model for the Project would be needed to complete that analysis." When the Weiner team was asked why the project had grown so dramatically, the answer was (a) area construction costs have risen dramatically and (b) the cost of the decking (including associated upgrades) necessary to incorporate the Prudential Parcel into the project far exceeded the cost of decking Parcel 15 alone. Mr. Weiner also suggested to the effect that since projects downtown are being allowed extra height, this project may warrant extra height as well. Weiner Ventures has declined thus far to disclose financial information to support these assertions, which is why some IAG members have asked for it again.

There are practical observations that support the feasibility of eliminating the East Tower:

- The East Tower provides almost all the new square footage in the project.
- The West Tower has approximately the same GSF as did the originally proposed tower, yet it is over 160 feet taller.
- Adding 160' to the West Tower height, without adding GSF, and redesigning the West Tower to include a novel twist, *has* to be more expensive than the 2012 version. We submit that the costs of that extra height should be factored into the equation.
- We have not received a detailed explanation of the cause of the increased construction costs due to the addition of the Prudential Parcel, but we expect that a lighter build to support a less intensive use will not involve quite as much complexity as the current proposal.
- We have not seen the assumptions and data the proponent relied on to estimate rising costs of construction.

And what about filling the Hole? We should explore other options.

- The easiest and probably least expensive would be to build a wall perhaps two stories high, all the way around the Hole. The wall could be sound-damping, as you see on highways that back up to a residential area. The wall could be made attractive if designed and executed artistically. Walking past the hole would no longer be miserable for pedestrians.
- Several people have suggested decking it over to support a small park. One would expect that decking to support a park would be less expensive and less complicated than doing it to support a 24-story building. And using the new techniques such as those being employed in the Hudson Yards to build airborne parks could also reduce cost. The park could be an amenity for the immediate neighborhood, including the thousands of students new residents, and it would not be unreasonable to ask the institutions and developers creating this demand to bear some of the cost.

All of this is to say that requiring the proponent to disclose relevant financial data is reasonable, and studying the option under the low- or no-build scenarios is warranted. Several IAG members have worked under confidentiality agreements throughout their professional lives, and there is no reason why the proponent would be harmed by this proposal.

View Corridors

The IAG has requested a view of the Project from the North side of Boylston on the approximate lot line between the fire station and the former police station (now the architectural college). This is important because the two stations are historically important and will contribute to our collective understanding of the effect of the Project on these buildings.

“Boncore Amendment”

It has been exceedingly difficult for residents and even representatives to get clear answers as to the reasons and effects of possibly changing the conveyance from a 99-year lease to fee simple. We want as much warning as possible should this proposal be reintroduced. Thus I request that NABB the CAC/IAG be notified immediately in the event the Proponent, BPDA, City of Boston, MassDOT, the Turnpike Authority or any other state or municipal agency learns that any legislation is being promoted that would change the ownership rights of Parcel 15 from a 99-year lease.

Government Assistance

The Proponent states that it is not seeking a government subsidy for the Project, for which we are grateful. I suggest the BPDA require disclosure of any other government assistance, including but not limited to tax breaks, air rights over Cambria Street, or extension of subterranean or surface rights to the Proponent to increase the aggregate parcel size to one acre. If so, the value of such assistance should be disclosed.

I hope that the BPDA will honor my requests. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss any of this with BPDA personnel before coping determinations are made.

With kind regards,



Fritz Casselman