

# BOSTON

Martin J. Walsh, Mayor

December 7, 2015

Ms. Teresa Polhemus  
Boston Redevelopment Authority  
One City Hall Square  
Boston, MA 02201

RE: 201-205 South Huntington Avenue, adjacent to the Jamaicaway and Olmsted Park

Dear Ms. Polhemus;

This letter is written in response to the Article 80 review of the proposed development at 201-205 South Huntington Avenue, which is adjacent to the Jamaicaway and Olmsted Park in the Emerald Necklace. The comments in this letter are not restricted to the dimensional limitations of *Municipal Code Section 7-4* which will be reviewed at a future hearing by the Parks Commission. This review addresses potential impacts of the project on public open space.

## Project Description

The proposed development will have approximately 167 units total, with 110 units in the Goddard House, and 57 units in a new building to be constructed on the site. The project will include a mix of unit sizes from studios to two bedrooms. Parking will be provided for 83 cars, with 15 surface spaces along South Huntington, and seven spaces overlooking the Jamaicaway.

The proposed height of the building is not clear from the PNF, and will be discussed below.

A steeply sloped ledge along the Jamaicaway is shown on the plans as open space. A 45' setback from the property line on the Jamaicaway is designated as a "tree preservation zone." A rooftop patio will overlook the Jamaicaway and Olmsted Park. Two sets of private stairs lead directly from the buildings on the north and south ends of the site, down to the sidewalk of the Jamaicaway, with gates at the property line.

## The Jamaicaway

The site is bounded on one side by the Jamaicaway, with 470' of frontage on that parkway. The Emerald Necklace Conservancy describes parkways as such:

"Parkways are an integral part of Olmsted's design of the Emerald Necklace. Originally laid out as carriage roads, the parkways were intended as pleasure routes following the meanderings of the Muddy River, connecting the parks from the Back Bay Fens in the heart of the city to the more rural Franklin Park. Although the parkways have become major commuter routes, they continue to provide scenic glimpses into the parks and a more verdant experience for drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians. The parkways need to be protected and preserved as part of, and within the Olmsted park system, and not be allowed to be dramatically altered."



**Boston Parks and Recreation Department**

1010 Massachusetts Ave., Boston, MA 02118 / Tel.: 617-635-4505 / Fax: 617-635-3173

## **Municipal Code and Zoning**

The project is not currently designed in accordance with Municipal Code Section 7-4.10 which has a height limit of 70' above the Jamaica way, nor is it designed in accordance with the existing *Neighborhood Institutional* zoning which has a height limit of 45' above South Huntington.

The project has been designed in accordance with the *South Huntington Avenue Framework for Future Development Review* that was adopted by the BRA in 2013, and in concurrence with a current effort to rezone the corridor and codify those guidelines.

## **Municipal Code Section 7-4**

This property is within 100' of the Jamaica way and Olmsted Park and development of this site is subject to the approval of the Parks Commission under Municipal Code Sections 7-4.10 and 7-4.11. This review will consider impacts to the adjacent open space, including but not limited to height, massing, grading, drainage, stormwater, shadows, site design, landscaping, etc.

## **Jamaicaway GPOD**

This project is in the Jamaica way Greenbelt Protection Overlay District (GPOD) and will require a recommendation of approval from the Parks Commission prior to a conditional use permit. This review includes traffic, parking, landscaping treatment that ensures the natural and aesthetic quality of the GPOD, and provision that building design be compatible with the neighborhood.

## **Height and Massing**

As noted above, the project is not currently designed in accordance with Municipal Code Section 7-4.10 which restricts building heights to 70' above the sidewalk at the Jamaica way.

It is not clear how tall the proposed project will be. The PNF includes floor plans that show the two buildings as four and five stories in height. However, the PNF also includes Table 1.3 which says that the proposed project will be six stories in height. No dimensions are provided in the PNF for the height of the buildings, though it is understood that the new building will exceed 70' height from the Jamaica way. An addition on the Goddard House will also exceed 70'.

This project is designed in accordance with proposed rezoning which would allow buildings that are "six stories high" without providing dimensions. If the six story height is codified without being quantified by a dimension - a reasonable estimation is that it would allow heights of about 80' (not including roof top appurtenances), as measured from South Huntington Avenue, which would be about 120' above the Jamaica way at this site. It is assumed that the project will seek six stories height, which could impact the experience from the Jamaica way and Olmsted Park.

Further, the proposed project will have a floor area ratio of 2.0 which would be an increase from 1.0 allowed under current zoning. The views from within Olmsted Park and along Jamaica way could be dramatically impacted by the proposed height and massing of this project.

The proponent states in the PNF that it is assumed that the Parks Commission will grant relief for the project which exceeds the height dimensions regulated by Section 7.4-11. The Parks Commission will need to make this determination, as to whether it will approve a building that exceeds the height limitations along one of the city's historic parkways and adjacent to the Emerald Necklace, a Boston Landmark that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

### **Grading, Drainage and Stormwater**

The proposed project should provide detailed information about grading, drainage and stormwater management during the Article 80 review. The site slopes towards the Jamaicaway and includes a steep ledge. The grading, drainage and stormwater management all have potential to impact the Emerald Necklace and need to be fully assessed at the earliest stages of review.

### **Usable Onsite Open Space**

The current zoning for this site is *Neighborhood Institutional*, which does not have a requirement for usable onsite open space. The proposed rezoning also does not appear to have a requirement for usable onsite open space. By way of discussion, the *Jamaica Plain Neighborhood District Zoning* requires 100 sf minimum usable open space per dwelling unit for multi-family use.

It is unclear how much usable open space will be provided for the residents of this project. Fifteen of the units will have patios or balconies, and there will be a rooftop patio overlooking the Jamaicaway and Olmsted Park. A landscaped buffer is shown along South Huntington. Open space is designated in the 45' setback which includes a steep ledge along the Jamaicaway.

The proponent should indicate how it will meet the open space needs of its residents that cannot be met in the adjacent public open space - including uses such as formal seating areas, play structures for children, outdoor grills and site furnishings. A dog recreation space should also be provided onsite. These accommodations will minimize impacts on nearby public open space.

BPRD suggests that the proponent consider the creation of a conservation restriction on the 45' setback of mostly unbuildable ledge that is designated as a tree preservation zone.

### **Connections**

The *South Huntington Avenue Framework for Future Development Review* calls for a physical connection at the south end of the site between South Huntington and the Emerald Necklace. BPRD is of the opinion that this connection should be publicly accessible.

The PNF describes two sets of private stairs which are shown leading directly from the buildings on the north and south ends of the site, down to the sidewalk of the Jamaicaway. Gates are shown at the property line. This project will not provide public access as designed.

The Parks Commission would require that this proposed access to the Jamaicaway be approved and licensed by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) prior to its review.

## **Views**

The *South Huntington Avenue Framework for Future Development Review* includes conceptual visual connections between Olmsted Park and the project site. BPRD has not yet evaluated the recommendations for these visual connections, but requests that the proposed project be reviewed in terms of view corridor opportunities that exist from Olmsted Park.

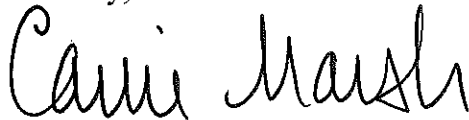
## **Shadows**

The shadow impact analysis indicates that the heights of the buildings will cast new shadow on the Jamaicaaway and Olmsted Park at least during the six month period of September to March. This is a significant impact and needs to be further analyzed and assessed.

## **Conclusion**

Thank you for your consideration of the above. BPRD looks forward to working with the BRA and the proponent to resolve these matters. Please contact me if you have questions at 617-961-3074 or [carrie.marsh@boston.gov](mailto:carrie.marsh@boston.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carrie Marsh". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Carrie" and last name "Marsh" clearly distinguishable.

Carrie Marsh, Executive Secretary  
Boston Parks and Recreation Commission

cc: Christopher Cook, Commissioner, Boston Parks and Recreation Department  
Liza Meyer, Chief Landscape Architect, Boston Parks and Recreation Department  
Maura Zlody, Senior Environmental Policy Analyst, Boston Environment Department  
Jonathan Greeley, Director of Development Review, Boston Redevelopment Authority  
Phil Cohen, Project Manager, Boston Redevelopment Authority