

MINUTES

BOSTON CIVIC DESIGN COMMISSION

The meeting of the Boston Civic Design Commission was held on Tuesday, August 6, 2019, starting in Room #900, Boston City Hall, and beginning at 5:15 p.m.

Members in attendance were: Deneen Crosby, Linda Eastley, David Hacin, Eric Höweler, Mikyoung Kim, Andrea Leers, Anne-Marie Lubenau, Paul McDonough, and William Rawn. Absent were David Manfredi and Kirk Sykes. Elizabeth Stifel, Executive Director of the Commission, was present. Representatives of the BSA attended. Lauren Shurtleff, Corey Zehngebot, and Natalie Punzak were present for the BPDA.

The Chair, Andrea Leers, announced that this was the meeting of the Boston Civic Design Commission that meets the first Tuesday of every month and welcomed all persons interested in attending. She added thanks to the Commissioners for the contribution of their time to the betterment of the City and its Public Realm. This hearing was duly advertised on Saturday July 20, in the BOSTON HERALD.

The first item was the approval of the amended February 4, 2019 and the July 9, 2019 Monthly Meeting Minutes, as well as the Design Committee Minutes from July 16, 23, and July 30, 2019 and Site Tour Minutes from July 24 and August 1, 2019. A motion was made, seconded, and it was duly

VOTED: To approve the Amended February 4, 2019 Monthly Meeting, July 9, 2019 Monthly Meeting, July 16, 23, and 30, 2019 Design Committee, and July 24 and August 1 Site Tour BCDC Meeting Minutes.

Votes were passed for signature. The next item was a report from the Review Committee on the **1515 Commonwealth Avenue**. The proposed project includes the demolition of an existing vacant hospital building to construct a new, approximately 340,000 SF residential building containing approximately 175 rental units and approximately 155 condominium units for a total of 330 units. The project navigates a significant grade change across a hill and intends to connect with a network of existing open spaces. Well over the 100,000 SF BCDC review threshold, a new vote to review was recommended. It was moved, seconded, and

VOTED: That the Commission review the schematic design for the proposed 1515 Commonwealth Ave project in the Brighton neighborhood.

The report from Review Committee for the **125 Lincoln Street** project was next. Adjacent to the I-93 on-ramp at Lincoln Street and the Greenway, the proposed project intends to replace an existing building with a new, approximately 625,000 SF office building with retail and publicly accessible ground floor uses. This part of Boston, the Leather District, has not had much active planning recently and is outside the boundary of the ongoing PLAN: Downtown, but the site was included in the Greenway District Planning Study and Guidelines, which were adopted in 2010. The project exceeds the threshold for review and will have a significant impact on the public realm; review was recommended. It was duly moved, seconded, and

VOTED: That the Commission review the schematic design for the proposed 125 Lincoln Street project in the Leather District neighborhood.

The next item on the agenda was an informational presentation of the planned **Boston City Hall Plaza Renovations**. Kate Tooke, Associate Principal of Landscape Architecture at Sasaki, gave the presentation: The plaza has been Boston's place to gather for 50 years, but its interim condition is expansive and underutilized. Over the course of several years, the City has temporarily activated the plaza with interventions like a beer garden, playscapes, and faux lawn, but the plaza is challenged by

inadequate infrastructure, issues of human scale and comfort, loading, and visibility. The design team posed with redesigning and constructing City Hall plaza is currently in schematic design with an intensive public engagement process. This is part of the Rethink City Hall Masterplan, which was completed from 2015-2017. Stakeholders and constituents include MBTA, public employees, historic preservation community, youth, arts community, etc, and have shaped the design and program of the future plaza through numerous outreach events and outlets. The plaza aims to reinvigorate the civic heart of Boston with a welcoming and civic front yard, a flexible and accommodating event venue, a model for sustainability and resilience, and a renewed cultural and architectural legacy. Specific program drivers of the design include a speakers' corner, one large event space (10,000-12,000 people), multiple smaller gathering spaces, green infrastructure, an accessible pathway across the plaza, and play space for all ages. (A series of proposed versus existing images were presented). The vision for the plaza is very green and open while still preserving important views, recycling materials, respecting the architecture, and bringing life back to this important civic heart.

Linda Eastley (LE): Right now, there is no place to for visitors or users to sit and stay, but this proposal has spaces for the public to comfortably exist in a group of 3, 50, or 1,000. In its current form, the plaza lacks scale and has underutilized corners. As you've opened the northeastern corner, it would be lovely to access the internal mezzanine plaza from another location.

Anne-Marie Lubenau (AML): There is so much conversation about planning and development in the city. It would be wonderful to provide an educational interpretation in the landscape or play scape about building history in the city.

Deneen Crosby (DC): Right now there is a visual connection from Congress Street into the Plaza. I'm concerned that it seems this plan changes the experience and connection, and it seems to feel more closed. I have concerns about whether or not the playground belongs in this space, in terms of program and in closing a connection. I don't want this playground to be fenced in but it borders a busy vehicular street (Congress Street).

David Hacin (DH): This was a wonderful presentation. I'm intrigued by the idea that the pavilion becomes a place of civic outreach, not just a space to host events. It would be wonderful to educate the city here and serve as a kind of museum to the City of Boston. I was wondering what kind of effect inside of the North entry could help make wayfinding the public experience in the building better.

Christine Dunn, Principal at Sasaki: We are thinking about the success the city already has with internal and external lighting. We are exploring ways to expand lighting as a means to activate the most public programs in the building.

Eric Höweler (EH): I wonder if you have a theory about why the interventions to this point have not been effective. My theory is that the design is not so bad, but that the space is unprogrammed. How will this design succeed and be transformative enough?

Kate Tooke: Previous interventions have been piecemeal; this will be a full transformation of the plaza. Because this 8-acre plaza was built in 1968 and never touched, it is in need basic of infrastructure updates. This is a chance to think holistically about the program.

Andrea Leers (AL): Accessibility is one of the biggest challenges for the plaza and I think the ways you've connected the plaza are great. One of the continuing concerns is the visible openness of Hanover Street as an extension. I appreciate Deneen's comment about the importance of visibility. The sense of visual and historic connection from Hanover Street in this design seems weak.

The next item was a report from the Design Committee on the **Parcel 12 MassDOT Turnpike Air Rights** project.

Kevin Lennon, Elkus Manfredi: The focus at the most recent committee meeting was the shaping the two building massing, the western façade view from the pike (need to simplify), and the character of the upper and lower level public plazas. We have reduced the diagonal width of the office building and added relief and shape to the Boylston Street façade through a redesigned building core. We've worked with the Commission to create a more transparent base of the residential building. The base has been simplified from the west; we've removed columns and quieted the plaza overhang on the Mass Pike. The plaza has been the transformative space in the project.

Keith LeBlanc, LeBlanc Jones Landscape architects: We've carved out the interior of the plaza space to allow flexibility from seating to performance in the plaza space. We heard many comments about increasing views and access to the overlook park, and in turn we've enlarged and opened up the flexible

seating space. The lower plaza offers an urban civic access from the street while the upper plaza is greener, given its ability to accommodate tree pits, and focused on views. We are still developing the visually green retaining wall system along the Mass Pike.

Mikyoung Kim (MK): We've seen this project improve through the design committee process, and at the most recent meeting we felt the plaza and views were more open. These changes are successful.

DC: The lower plaza has transformed from a space for circulation to a generous public gateway.

DH: It's exciting to see the changes, and this offers an important public destination at the nexus of Boylston and Newbury where neighborhoods transition.

William Rawn (WR): The unique shaping of each building is strong. The buildings complement each other well.

Hearing no public comment, a motion was made, seconded and:

VOTED: That the Commission recommend approval of the schematic design for the proposed Parcel 12 project in the Fenway neighborhood.

The next item was a report from the Design Committee on the **12-28 Lansdowne Street** project.

Chuck Izzo, DAIQ: This project has three components: the renovation and expansion of Fenway Park's bleacher section, renovations to the existing Fenway Garage, and the construction of a 5,400 person capacity performance venue at the corner of Lansdowne and Ipswich. The major issues in work with the Commission were the streetscape regarding consistent material palette and pedestrian use, as well as façade design in relation to existing Fenway Park structure. We've increased the size of the plaza at the theater's entry to improve queueing conditions by pulling back the nose of the building. We are proposing to reconstruct the existing brick façade to best transition the brick garage building into the new theater.

AL: We have seen many iterations throughout this process and they've been helpful in the evolution of this design. The way you've negotiated the transition between old and new is clever.

DH: I know how hard you've worked to improve the transition between buildings. There were many subtle changes and I know the site is very constrained, but I think these changes are well worth it.

LE: I want to commend you on the studies you've done. The best contribution to the surrounding area will be completing the block, and you've carefully considered the user experience at all sides of the building.

Hearing no public comment, it was moved, seconded and:

VOTED: That the Commission recommend approval of the schematic design for 12-28 Lansdowne Street bounded by Fenway Park, Lansdowne and Ipswich Street in the Fenway neighborhood.

The first project presentation to the Commission for review was **1515 Commonwealth Avenue** in the Brighton neighborhood.

Eric Robinson, RODE Architects: This project is located at a crossroads in the city off a primary connector. This used to be the tallest point in Boston, as the site is located on a hill. We propose two residential buildings, one for rental and one for ownership, in order to break up the scale of the building and open more of the site to the landscape. We are studying how to create public connections to overlook the park. The ground plane was the first move made to shape the massing. Then, we created a low bar and lower typology to localize the height and density to solve the programmatic division between the rental and ownership residences. Exterior roof decks have been added. The building responds to contextual axis and shadow impacts with angled and pulled back facades. Grading has been a challenge, and part of the building's placement on site is a result of pedestrian access.

David Hacin: A model will be important, especially to help us understand the street conditions along Commonwealth Avenue that lead here. I tend to think of Commonwealth Avenue as a two-sided boulevard and I'm not sure what the condition is like here. I'm struggling with the idea of height at this location, particularly atop a hill. This is a big urban moment in an area that currently feels more visually open to the sky. This feels tall.

Deneen Crosby: I'm not sure I understand the relationship of this project to Commonwealth Avenue, so please clarify this in subcommittee.

Anne-Marie Lubeanu: You've described this site as bound by a smaller grain neighborhood. This scale feels much larger than the residential scale around it and I'm concerned with the contrast of scale and texture between what exists and what you propose. I'm interested in better understanding this project's footprint in addition to the height.

Linda Eastley: I'm trying to sort out the siting of the building. I think it's beautiful, but it seems the stairs and ramps could be eliminating by front the street for a consistent street wall along Commonwealth Avenue. I would like to understand the logic of the recessed building and its location on the site.

Eric Höweler: I think a site section would be helpful. This has an opportunity to become a new landmark in the neighborhood; that comes with its own responsibility.

Mikyong Kim: Grading can offer an opportunity for interesting landscape. This feels like a wall of housing with a very urban gesture in the tower, and the landscape does not seem to facilitate a usable space for families who may live here.

Andrea Leers: I'd like to see other massing configurations of the same program. I'm not convinced this is the best disposition of volume.

The project will continue in design committee.

The next project on the agenda was **125 Lincoln Street** in the Leather District.

Corey Zehngbot, Senior Urban Designer/Architect with the BPDA, offered context of the project's ongoing review: There has been quite a lot of discussion in City Hall and among the public. The project team will need to respond to detailed feedback from city staff, the public, and the Boston Civic Design Commission, and it is likely this project will evolve to be quite different in the future. Internally, UD staff has focused on the ground floor plan and transportation circulation around the project. The project proposed significant height in a district with a 100' height limit, and we have concerns about associated environmental impacts. We have expressed a desire to right-size a project with public realm benefits in conjunction with the Lincoln Street triangle. Some of the benefits discussed with the proponent include the Leather District Park. We are also concerned with the loss of vital ground floor existing tenants.

Mark McGowan, Oxford Properties Group: The site currently houses a 3-story garage with retail on the ground floor and office space atop. We have been the long-term owner-operator of this site and are looking to redevelop the site.

Tim Love, Utile: There is an alley that currently runs against the John F. Fitzgerald ramp. The proposal is an office building. Its adjacency to South Station and the Pike (including major commuter bus route across the street) enable this to be a great transit oriented development. The site lends itself to a viable commercial floorplate because of its size.

Todd Duncan, Gensler: We propose a 24-story office tower with a 22.5 FAR. We recognize that this project sits within the Leather District, but feel this site serves to transition into Boston's dense and tall Financial District. We're studying materiality and the language of the building itself as a system of grids that evoke a texture. Every office floor has an outdoor space to break down the scale of the building.

David Hacin: I've received many calls and letters about this project. I'm alarmed by this proposal, and the model does not help the case. We must be really careful when we introduce tall buildings into a tight context. This interrupts a scale of low, fine-grain buildings and will cast shadow on the public realm all summer long. We recently reviewed the Dock Square Garage project, and in doing so we used the BPDA Greenway District Planning Study Use and Development Guidelines. This project falls under the purview of those same guidelines, which designated this site as a 100' maximum height to be consistent with its district.

Paul McDonough: It's hard to imagine a program of benefits that would reasonably warrant this height and density.

Anne-Marie Lubenau: This model shows that the building creates a massive wall between a continuous district. We recognize the need to add density to our cities, but at what cost?

Eric Howeler: I live and work in the Leather District, and this neighborhood is different from the rest of Boston. There is unique community and retail in the Leather District, though it lacks residential amenities. It would be nice to see development that contributes to the neighborhood holistically and improves

barriers like connection across Surface Road. If change is coming, I hope it's the best possible change we can get. You have a challenge to do better. The existing building is a dynamic urban building, successfully holding a mix of uses. This site has the responsibility to activate and improve the neighborhood beyond its property line. The Leather District is fragile. New development needs to improve this urban neighborhood.

Deneen Crosby: The proposed open space feels dark and dingy. Would it make more sense to add open space to Beach Street, an important connecting corridor? This project is too tall and I have a sense it will cast continuous shadow on Chinatown Park.

Linda Eastley: It will be critical to understand how pedestrians will connect and be better knit into this plan. Beach Street must be done well as it is the only connection from the Leather District through Chinatown.

David Hacin: The elephant in the room is the size of the building. I'm not prepared to see this in subcommittee at this scale, which is more than three times the size of the zoning. I am hoping that a lot more work happens with constituents and the city before we begin discussing the details of loading dock location or ground floor program.

Andrea Leers: (Reading from the Greenway Guidelines for the Lincoln Street Garage Site): "3 Lincoln Street Garage Site - 80' height at street edges to align with adjacent buildings, 100' maximum, to align with 66 Lincoln Street, or as limited by shadow impacts on the parks, with a 10' setback. Concentrate active ground floor uses at the Beach Street Crossroads intersection. Mitigate the negative impacts on the pedestrian realm created by the I-93 on-ramp. Consider building over portions of it to bring active uses closer to Surface Artery." This site was designated at this height because it is part of the fabric of both Leather District and Chinatown. I think of this as one neighborhood, artificially divided by the Surface Level artery. This proposal becomes a massive wall between the two communities. We were guided by these Greenway Guidelines in our lengthy and recent review for Dock Square, and we must begin with these guidelines as we consider this project.

Larry Rosenblum, member of the public: I was part of the 1979 group that first went to the ZBA to get permission for residences in the Leather District. This neighborhood had died. We needed to ask if we were going to tear down a neighborhood simply because it was next to a train station. Do we want the Leather District to continue to exist or not? Only the BPDA and BCDC can say 'we value having a district of historic character.' The other problem is the building's use: office buildings are deadly to neighborhoods. They don't bring the 24/7 investment necessary to vibrant cities. This project is a Hail Mary proposal from the developer. If this is approved there are other sites in the neighborhood that could go the same way.

Dave Seeley, resident of LD and former architect: The LD and Chinatown have been working together on urban design issues for many years despite the differences in our demographics and needs.

Katherine Freidman, IAG member and resident: It's easy to get lost in the details. The height, the scale, and the use are completely wrong for the neighborhood.

VOTED: That the Commission not review 125 Lincoln Street at this time but that the proponent work with BPDA staff for further consideration and large-scale revisions. The results of that represented process are to be presented at a BCDC Monthly Meeting prior to further review in subcommittee.

There being no further items for discussion, a motion was made to adjourn, and the meeting was duly adjourned at 8:05 p.m. The next regular meeting of the Boston Civic Design Commission was scheduled for September 2, 2019. The recording of the August 6, 2019 Boston Civic Design Commission meeting was digitized and is available at the Boston Planning and Development Agency.