

AMENDED MINUTES

BOSTON CIVIC DESIGN COMMISSION

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

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

The Chair, Andrea Leers (AL), 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, January 19, in the BOSTON HERALD.

The first item was the approval of the January 8, 2019 Monthly Meeting Minutes, and the Design Committee Minutes from meetings on January 16 and 22. A motion was made, seconded, and it was duly **VOTED: To approve the January 8, 16, 22, 2019 BCDC Meeting Minutes.**

Votes were passed for signature. The next item was a report from the Review Committee on the **Dot Block Notice of Project Change (NPC)**. The project is located in the Glover's Corner neighborhood of Dorchester on the block bounded by Dorchester Avenue, Hancock, Pleasant, and Greenmount streets. Since being reviewed and approved by the BCDC in 2016, the project has been sold to a new developer who has brought on a new architect and made changes to the proposal, adding residential units and square footage. The project is currently at 414,000 SF, well over the BCDC review threshold of 100,000 SF. Review is recommended. As such, it was moved, seconded, and

VOTED: That the Commission review the schematic design for the proposed Dot Block Project on the block bounded by Dorchester Avenue, and Hancock, Pleasant, and Greenmount streets, in Dorchester's Glover's Corner neighborhood.

The next item was a report from the Review Committee on the **45 Townsend** project. This Roxbury neighborhood project was initially reviewed by the commission in 2017 and has since been revised, losing around 80,000 SF of area. The developer has additionally hired a new architecture firm, Cube3. The project is currently at around 300,000 SF, well over the BCDC review threshold of 100,000 SF. Review was recommended.

VOTED: That the Commission review the revised schematic design for the proposed 45 Townsend Street Project on the former Radius Hospital site in the Roxbury neighborhood.

The next item was a report from the Review Committee on the **Kenmore Hotels** project. The Commission saw a previous version of this proposal in May 2018. At that time the proposal included a second hotel on the site behind the Hotel Buckminster. The revised proposal is for a single hotel and reconfiguration of the west side of Kenmore Square. At 220,000 SF the project is well over the 100,000 SF BCDC review threshold and a new vote to review was subsequently recommended. It was moved, seconded, and

VOTED: That the Commission review the schematic design for the proposed Kenmore Square Hotel project at the intersection of Beacon Street and Commonwealth Avenue in the Fenway neighborhood.

The next item was a report from the Review Committee on the **115 Winthrop Square** project. This project was reviewed in multiple meetings beginning in 2017, and was approved by the Commission in May 2018. The vote included a proviso that the project return to the commission for further review and approval of the Great Hall and Winthrop Square designs. The proponents are here to show the evolved design, so review was recommended. It was then moved, seconded, and

VOTED: That the Commission review the schematic design for the Great Hall and Winthrop Square Proper proposed 115 Winthrop Square Project on the Winthrop Square garage site bounded by Federal and Devonshire streets in the Downtown Financial District.

The next item on the agenda was a report from the Design Committee on the **41 Lagrange** project. Jay Szmansky, TAT: The project is about 50% affordable, with the majority of those units qualifying as deeply affordable. Throughout the BCDC process, comments have focused on the pedestrian experience, particularly with the notch abutting the adjacent planned development. Through committee, the façade along the ground plane as well as the lobby sequence have been revised. The material palette has evolved to be lighter at the recommendation of the Commission.

Deneen Crosby (DC): I think the revisions offer a great improvement, particularly with the new infilled corner. Interior lighting will be important for creating an enhanced public realm.

Andrea Leers (AL): It's amazing that you've tucked in such a compact and useful program on a challenging site. This is a good looking mid-block building. The generosity of the windows on the ground floor will make a difference.

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

VOTED: That the Commission recommend approval of the schematic design for the proposed 41 Lagrange Street project in Downtown Boston.

Next on the agenda was the Design Committee report from **1241 Boylston Street** project.

Harry Wheeler, Group One Partners: This project was under review with the Commission about a year ago, and as a result of budget considerations we have revised the program. In its current condition, the site hosts a gas station with a shared alley to the that abuts the Boston Arts Academy school. The alley will be reconstructed as part of this project. In response to feedback with the former proposal, the building has been realigned, reduced, and reconfigured to respond to existing datum lines along Boylston and Ipswich Streets. A 6.5ft I "super bay" projects over the pedestrian realm to account for lost interior area, their form offering a modern interpretation to more traditional bays found in the Fenway neighborhood. The façade design has been simplified in form and material.

William Rawn (WR): I'm not convinced that this revision conforms with our recommendation to align with the street wall, given that a 6.5ft projection visually extends beyond the existing street wall. We need to see some views down Boylston Street to understand if the notch you've included is enough.

AL: At the time of this presentation several months ago, I felt that the ground floor setback was a partial response. We previously were concerned with the relationship of the hotel to the adjacent houses, and this design seemed to ease those concerns.

WR: These revisions are well done, but it strikes me still that the issue of the street wall is still an important issue. I don't feel we've gotten full explication of the design history.

Corey Zehngebot, BPDA Urban Design, clarified that the BPDA's concerns regarding the building's alignment had more to do with the adjacent residential buildings and less with the primary drag of Boylston Street.

Mikyoung Kim (MK): I want to recommend you more carefully consider and represent the underside of overhang along Boylston Street.

After some discussion, the Commissioners suggested that the project team return following the last item on the meeting agenda to present a comprehensive history of the design. The Commission would hold their vote at that time.

The next item was a report from the Design Committee on the **1507 VFW Parkway (The Parkway Apartments)** project.

Dr. Abed Benzina, SK+I Architects: Following our second Design Committee meeting, we were asked to reevaluate the massing for a portion of Building A to show more restraint, to architecturally/visually separate Building A with a 'hyphen'; we have done so by removing 4 units at this connection and created a transparent amenity space at this link. In elevation, you will see the revised simplicity in the design. An entrance has been added to the western most portion of the building.

Eric Höweler (EH): I appreciate the massing moves, but I think the fabric/façade of the infill piece is. This interstitial piece should read differently.

Benzina: This element is fairly recent, and I think the treatment will continue to evolve in conversation with staff. We aspire to make the material more transparent.

Anne-Marie Lubeanu (AML): I think we still struggling to see and understand the cues for building entries. The courtyards to the rear of the project are so welcoming, and I would like to see some of that language incorporated in lively residential entrances.

AL: The comments that we are hearing here, which are new comments, respond to a need for clarity of building entrance. This project has been responsive to the issues that have been raised already. You can work with BPDA staff to improve upon these new comments.

VOTED: That the Commission approve the schematic design for the Parkway Apartments project at 1507 VFW Parkway in the West Roxbury neighborhood, contingent that the proponent continue to work with BPDA staff to resolve these new comments from the Commission.

Next on the agenda was the presentation for the **Dot Block Notice of Project Change**.

Prior to the presentation, Phillip Hu, a BPDA Planner, presented information regarding the ongoing PLAN: Glover's Corner initiative: So far, the BPDA has hosted 13 workshops and 4 deep dive sessions on a wide variety of topics. The neighborhood's existing conditions are unfriendly for pedestrians. We've heard that participants envision a mixed-use neighborhood, with Dot Ave acting as a retail corridor, networked parks, and improved street connections.

Lewis Kraft, Stantec Architects: Project changes include increased open space through a below-grade garage, right-sizing retail, increased unit count, and redesigned pedestrian realm. The highlight from an urban design perspective is the below grade parking garage; 450 spaces have been relocated underground to unlock significant open space onsite. Setbacks at site edges have been increased for a larger buffer to unit entries. This project will strengthen Dorchester Ave's identity as a retail street, as the existing condition of the site becomes industrial/parking. Doubling setback on Greenmount for ground level unit access. Continuing bay articulation common in the existing neighborhood. The project includes a shared park space and amenity deck for the series of buildings.

Doug Jones, Leblanc Jones Landscape Architects: As Lewis described, the generous setbacks allow us to create large furnishing zones, a 6ft pedestrian zone, and generous café zone on Hancock and Dorchester streets. Residential units are separated from the sidewalk with landscape buffers. Central plaza at the project interior for traffic calming. The urban green acts as a central lawn across the two-way drive.

WR: I appreciate that you have not radically changed the scheme, and have instead refined and improved the edges. If you were able to pull back the 5th and 6th floors long Greenmount Street I believe it would radically improve the effort you've made to integrate the project design with the existing neighborhood character.

MK: The landscape is greatly improved, and I appreciate the detail you've offered in this presentation. I have some questions about the scale at the lawn that I believe we can discuss at Design Committee.

DC: Do you think that the one-way street on Dot Ave will act as a cut through? I am concerned that there will be too much traffic on this street.

AL: Simplifying the two Dot Ave buildings and clarifying the circulation is a big improvement. That said, there is a relative sameness of the facades. You have a relatively neutral language that has lost some of the lively character from your initial proposal. The crossing of the road in from Hancock is difficult; this is not a central plaza in the way you envision, but a driving way. This connection needs to be understood as a paved plaza, not a space for people to linger. We had lots of discussion about the one-way connection on Dorchester before and I still have questions about this. The address of all of these buildings will be

inside your block and I think it's important to understand how a visitor comes and finds their way in this project.

EH: Dot Ave acts as the most public face. Consider the character of these two facades as a gateway. How does the architecture face Dot Ave and turn the corner? Clarifying these architectural gestures will be important.

AML: I would challenge you to consider color and material texture that might reference the existing rich architectural character in Dorchester.

WR: It would help us to understand the intersection of Pleasant Street and Hancock in Design Committee.

The **45 Townsend** project presentation was next.

Brian O'Connor, Cube3: The project is located in the Washington Park sub-neighborhood in Roxbury. The existing site contains a hospital. The most prominent element of the site is a ~40ft (irregular) grade change. The current proposal is much more responsive to the neighborhood character, with reduced building height (from 8 to 5 stories) and visual breaks. We tried to break down the larger building blocks with amenity spaces and breaks in the massing. Parking has been pushed below grade where possible. Perspective views and elevations are compared to existing and previously proposed schemes in the presentation. The landscape strategy is focused on the entry plaza and the rhythms that correspond to surrounding residential buildings. We explored a vehicular connection from Townsend through to Dennison street, but the grade change renders this close to impossible. Our hope is to increase pedestrian permeability on site.

MK: The project would benefit from pedestrian porosity. It would be nice if your landscape architect could come to Design Committee.

DC: We need a better understanding of what's public/etc. Townsend Street is helped by the curve of the street. I appreciate that you've pulled back at the edges. I want to make sure that the team is prepared for the excavation you've proposed on such a rocky site.

AL: I remember the prior's scheme and the challenges presented by the site. This proposal feels massive to me. I think you need to step back and think more about your massing strategy. I think this site requires a series of smaller buildings. Think of this as a series of layers with increased porosity. This proposal feels more related to the existing hospital than the surrounding neighborhood.

MK: The central landscape, too, feels quite large. They may be a way to step and separate this area. Jed Hresko from IAG, following the distribution of a long letter: If the hospital had never developed, this project would be a series of residential Victorian buildings and a few small multi-family buildings. The density is far too high for this neighborhood. The community has been put off by this project because it proposes all all market-rate units with off-site affordable units. We are opposed to the lack of access on the site; we want pedestrians to come through this site.

Charles Colfield, carpenters union: The carpenters union has some major concerns about who may be selected to work on this project. We would appreciate it if you look into the history of the contractors on the list to do this job. The neighborhood is not supportive of this project.

AL: Thank you for your comments. We will definitely take these into account

The next project presentation was for the revised **Kenmore Hotel** project.

Jeff Speck presented the history of Kenmore Square: When presented with the challenge of this primarily vehicular square, I looked to examples like Times Square and the work done by Jannette Sadik-Kahn to turn a vehicular fork into a space for people.

The team presented a 5-minute video explaining the approach to the redesign and new traffic configuration for Kendall Square. The video is embedded in the presentation found online.

We don't take it lightly that we are proposing a major change to one of Boston's most important streets
Gary Hilderbrand: This proposal would increase the area of public realm in Kenmore Square from 9,000 to 32,000 SF. The site plan is in its early phases, but we can see a significantly enlarged public realm and plaza that corresponds to a transparent ground floor plane. The site is a flat-iron shape, ripe for an iconic building.

Jeanne Gang: Our idea for the architecture was to introduce bay windows that blend three massing tiers together. The architecture comes down to meet the plaza, becoming transparent at the base to encourage an urban fluidity between inside and outside. The bottom 4 floors are more public in nature, with a lobby, restaurant, meeting space, and fitness center. The interior of the hotel would be a central

atrium to bring down light and provide structure; we hope to further develop this space in the future. I've been excited about the ways these bays turn the corner and offer visual interest on every side. There is no back and the project is sculptural.

WR: What is the relationship of the corner of the building; how much does it enter the alignment of the sidewalk and the inbound east-bound vehicular lane? Is there a reason you would not have moved it back?

Hildebrandt: The site is constrained by utilities and the T below. The building footprint represented in this proposal is the most viable based on the infrastructure below.

AML: I understand the challenges of this intersection, but I'm concerned that this becomes more of an island than the heart of a public square.

DC: Comm Ave and Beacon Street are experiences in the entry sequence to Boston. If you were coming to a plaza with roads around it it would work as a diagram, but you are capturing the edge of a building with a linear space.

MK: The traffic question is a big one that we can take to Design Committee, particularly around game times and events at Fenway. The inability to take a right turn at this intersection would radically alter the experience and circulation of driving and I'm not yet convinced that this would work. The building you've proposed is a really interesting architectural feature. This is an opportunity to think about Kenmore Square holistically.

AL: This gives a real pedestrian place to the square and much shorter crossing paths. I'm not sure the end of Comm Ave is the right solution, but this is worth trying to figure out.

EH: This is obviously a figure building, and it's an opportunity to create a landmark.

Resident in the next door building: What would allow this project to go forward? This is massive...

Resident at 566 Commonwealth Ave: This project is completely out of scale with the neighborhood.

Anne Susan, architect + research: You need to do a biometric analysis to support your claims that this is improving the project realm. There are many sun and wind issues with your public space located to the North of the building.

The next item on the agenda was the project presentation for the Great Hall and Winthrop Square park for **115 Winthrop Square** project.

Blake Middleton, Handel Architects: We were here in May with the approval of the building. At the time, approval was contingent upon review of the project's public spaces. The Great Hall is an interior public space that serves to connect Winthrop Square on Devonshire with Federal Street. The space will be fully accessible and open ~18 hours a day. Gentle slope is used to navigate the grade change with a ramp and stepped seating. There will be a mezzanine level with two multi-purpose spaces that overlook the hall. We plan to have interactive motion technology/art throughout the space, tailored to the time of day and year. The decorative ceiling serves as a visual connector, sound absorber, and hiding of mechanical equipment. The space will be able to host versatile events.

Shauna Gillies-Smith, Ground Inc. landscape architects: Millennium Partners has been claiming space for pedestrians downtown: Shopper's Park, the Tontine Crescent, and now Winthrop Square. The idea for the square began with a water well and ripples. We plan to table top the pedestrian crossing to the Great Hall, slope walkways, and center on a water feature in the square.

Jane McBary, lighting consultant: We are creating an outdoor room by anchoring the lighting in the surrounding architecture, highlighting the furniture.

DC: The square no longer feels so connected to the alley, I think in part because of the pavement. Think of the square as a 3-sided space, it feels like a back and a front.

AL: How will the interior passageway respond to environmental conditions? Will it be open to the outside?

WR: Is this the first time we've seen the steps inside the building? I'd be curious where the genesis of the seated ramp began.

AML: It'd be great for a brief recap of evolution in design committee.

DC: How and what is the permanent solution for Tontine Crescent as part of this series?

MK: The plaza is beautiful. You might look more closely at the crosswalks.

Following the presentation of 115 Winthrop Square, the **1241 Boylston Street** project returned with details previously requested by the Commission.

Harry Wheeler presented the evolution of design history, focusing on the building setbacks through presentations from last year. The sidewalk dimension increasingly responded to Commissioner comments. The design and setbacks respond with no projection adjacent to the existing residential building and more commercialized architecture on Boylston. He presented many views from around the site. The team explored color palettes, and decided with Commission's recommendation to simplify the material palette. Through Design Committee, the design introduced a notch to receive street wall alignment on Boylston and Ipswich.

AL: I'm struck that these design changes came in small steps, that this was incremental. Finally, in the last presentation we reached a consensus that these adjustments would suffice.

EH: Seeing this for the first time, there are a lot of moves in the building massing. I'd say clarify, simplify. What's grounded? Floating? Attached? I think there are a few too many setbacks. The project got more complex as it evolved.

DC: I saw this with the initial monthly meeting. Looking at the setback issue, I'm comfortable the park side has been addressed. I'm not convinced that from the West on Boylston. We haven't seen a distant view.

EH: You're pulling lines off a context that isn't that good. We need a great building, not a building that is an extension of its context. I'm a little worried that the building designs itself because of its context.

AML: I want to acknowledge the work you've done to respond to a lot of small comments with a lot of small moves. What is it that makes this building recognizable as a place or program?

WR: I continue to believe that this is an important moment in the city: where Boylston street hits the Fenway. It's something that should be done with care. I turn this back to my colleagues. A year ago, these questions were our way of trying to address some of the larger issues.

AL: The discussion has broadened from the simple matter of alignment to the quality of the architecture itself. It began bolder and got nibbled away in response to our comments. It's less bold and less holistic than when you started. We can decide to look at these elements again (setbacks + architecture as a whole), or we can make our contingent approval with further working with BPDA staff. This may be the price of waiting 11 months. We want to see a whole series of elevations with or without the setback, and views from further down Boylston.

Corey Zehngenbot, BPDA Urban Design: Sometimes, design by committee gets watered down. Getting board approval is not the end of the design review process and we will continue to work with the team with your comments and critique in mind. With that, it was moved, seconded and

VOTED: That the Commission recommends approval of the schematic design for the Fenway Hotel Project at 1241 Boylston Street at the corner of Ipswich Street, in the West Fenway Neighborhood District contingent on studying the facade and setbacks with BPDA staff and then a presentation to the full Commission.

There being no further items for discussion, a motion was made to adjourn, and the meeting was duly adjourned at 10:10 p.m. The next regular meeting of the Boston Civic Design Commission was scheduled for March 5, 2019. The recording of the February 5, 2019 Boston Civic Design Commission meeting was digitized and is available at the Boston Redevelopment Authority.