

ZONING COMMISSION, CITY OF BOSTON

MINUTES

Wednesday, April 5, 2000

Room 900, City Hall, Boston

Attendance

Commissioners

Robert L. Marr, Chairman Building Trade Employers' Association	Present
Robert L. Fondren Boston Society of Architects	Present
John H. Bean Greater Boston Massachusetts Labor Council AFL/CIO	Absent
James C. Clark Mayor's Selection	Present
William Tarlow Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay	Present
Denise Doyle Mayor's Selection	Present
Ralph Cooper Franklin Field South Neighborhood Association	Present
M. Pat Tierney Greater Boston Real Estate Board	Present
Enerio Barros Mayor's Selection	Absent
Jill Hatton Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce	Present
Vacancy Neighborhood Association	

Staff

Linda M. Haar Advisor to the Commission	Present
Jeffrey M. Hampton Secretary to the Commission	Present

PUBLIC HEARINGS

Mr. Marr called the meeting to order at 9:03 and opened the public hearing on Map Amendment Application No. 428 and a petition for approval of Wentworth Institute of Technology Institutional Master Plan (IMP).

The following spoke in favor of the petition:

Linda Haar – BRA

Larry Brophy – Project Manager, BRA

Bill McCarthy – legal counsel representing Wentworth

Ms. Haar presented the petition to the Commission and introduced Project Manager, Larry Brophy. Mr. Brophy gave a brief overview of the IMP and community review processes. He stated that there was no community opposition to the IMP. Mr. Brophy introduced Bill McCarthy.

Mr. McCarthy stated that this IMP is the result of over two years worth of work with the City and the community. He briefly gives an outline of what the IMP seeks to accomplish. He stated that Wentworth is requesting that those properties not currently zoned “IS” (Institutional Subdistrict), have the “IMP” overlay designation. He stated that there have been numerous public meetings and that the Plan enjoys great support from the community. He stated that there is also an increase in scholarships for City of Boston students as well as for the residents of the nearby housing projects. Mr. McCarthy also stated that many concessions have been made to the immediate community, e.g. – making surface parking available for Boston Housing Authority (BHA) tenants.

Commissioner Clark asked how many additional scholarships will be made available and would they be available to the BHA tenants.

Mr. McCarthy stated that there would be an additional four (4) scholarships available and if they were residents of the nearby projects, then they would be available for those individuals. Mr. McCarthy also stated that Wentworth was working with neighborhood groups to establish training and educational initiatives.

Commissioner Clark asked if the City of Boston Jobs Plan was to be used for the construction of the projects mentioned within the IMP.

Mr. McCarthy said yes.

Commissioner Tarlow asked how many local students have used the scholarships.

Mr. McCarthy did not have an exact number.

Mr. Marr declared the petitioner’s case closed at 9:21.

There was no opposition.

Mr. Marr declared the hearing closed at 9:21 and stated that the matter would be taken under advisement.

Mr. Fondren requested a recess from the public hearings and asked if the Commission could take up the matter with respect to Map Amendment Application No. 428 and a petition for approval of the Wentworth Institute of Technology Institutional Master Plan (IMP). There was no objection to this request.

Mr. Fondren made a motion to adopt Map Amendment Application No. 428 and approve the Wentworth Institute of Technology Institutional Master Plan as proposed. Mr. Clark seconded the motion. Mr. Marr put the motion to vote:

Yeas: 8

Ms. Hatton, Mr. Tarlow, Mr. Marr, Mr. Fondren, Mr. Clark, Mr. Cooper, Ms. Tierney, Ms. Doyle.

Nays: 0

The motion was declared carried.

Mr. Marr opened the public hearing on Map Amendment Application No. 430 at 9:30.

The following spoke in favor of the petition:

Linda Haar – BRA

Susan Hannon – Project manager, BRA

Tony Pangaro – Millennium Partners

Blake Middleton

June McCourt – delegate of Park Plaza CAC, resident of 16 Piedmont St.

Dean Johnson – Park Plaza CAC

Paula Devereaux – Rubin and Rudman, representing the Four Seasons

Ms. Haar gave an overview of what was being asked of the Commission and she introduced Project Manager Susan Hannon to go over the specifics of the case.

Ms. Hannon gives a brief history of the parcels involved and the development of the Park Plaza area. She stated that there is support of the Park Plaza Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC). Ms. Hannon introduces Tony Pangaro to give some details about the proposed development.

Mr. Pangaro spoke about the final completion of the Park Plaza development. The proposed development is for a 125 room hotel, 200 unit condominiums with 275 underground parking spaces – a 400K, 17 story structure. This proposal will provide for 24 hour activity on the site. He stated that the commitments to the community include approximately \$1.25 million in an affordable housing program, and linkage donations of \$100,000.

Commissioner Marr asked if there were to separate projects that were going to be developed. If so, why the one petition?

Ms. Hannon said that there were going to be two projects. It is a contiguous urban renewal area, but she said that she saw no problem with coming forward with two petitions.

Commissioner Fondren asked what he reasoning was behind the one petition.

Ms. Haar stated that from a planning perspective they are related and that it made sense to bring them forward on one petition. She said that there was no technical reason, it just made sense to do it that way.

Blake Middleton explains the intent and design of the structure as an urban transition between the surrounding landscape and the Boston Common/Public Garden.

Commissioner Clark asked whether there was federal or private funds being invested.

Mr. Pangaro stated that it was private money only.

Commissioner Marr asked whether this was a Millennium Development.

Mr. Pangaro stated that it was.

Judy McCourt spoke in favor of the petition and read a letter of support for the development on behalf of the Bay Village Neighborhood Association.

Dean Johnson spoke in favor of the petition.

Paula Devereaux spoke in favor of the petition, representing the Four Seasons and stated that the Four Seasons asks that the "U*" designation be extended to the public plaza as shown on the petition.

Mr. Marr declared the petitioner's case closed at 10:01.

There was no opposition.

Mr. Marr declared the hearing closed at 10:01 and stated that the matter would be taken under advisement.

Mr. Fondren requested a recess from the public hearings and asked if the Commission could take up the matter with respect to Map Amendment Application No. 430. There was no objection to this request.

Mr. Fondren made a motion to adopt Map Amendment Application No. 430 as proposed. Mr. Clark seconded the motion. Mr. Marr put the motion to vote:

Yeas: 8

Ms. Hatton, Mr. Tarlow, Mr. Marr, Mr. Fondren, Mr. Clark, Mr. Cooper, Ms. Tierney, Ms. Doyle.

Nays: 0

The motion was declared carried.

Commissioner Hatton left the meeting at 10:05 AM.

Mr. Marr opened the public hearing on Map Amendment Application No. 429 at 10:14.

The following spoke in favor of the petition:

Linda Haar – BRA
Susan Hannon – Project Manager, BRA
Susan Tracey – President of Boston Strategies
John Connolly – Sawyer Enterprises
Bill Rawn – Rawn Architects
Julie Purnell – Vice President of Loews
Tom Perkins – 33 Melrose Street, Bay Village
Councilor James Kelly (on behalf of Councils. Roache, Flaherty, Murphy and Davis-Mullen)

Ms. Haar introduced Susan Hannon to give an overview of the proposed petition. Ms. Hannon stated that the map amendment would allow a hotel to be built on what is now a parking lot.

Susan Tracey spoke in favor of the petition. Ms. Tracey submitted two (2) documents for the record.

John Connolly spoke in favor of the petition and introduced Bill Rawn to explain the project.

Mr. Rawn gave a detailed description of the proposed project. He also explained the models and renderings to the Commissioners. He stated that this proposal initiates a 24 hour presence in the neighborhood. Traffic is consolidated on-site, to take traffic off of the streets, more particularly the neighborhood. The building is 300 feet in height with a glass façade. Because of the height of the building, it needs to be slender.

Commissioner Cooper asked about the design of the canopy.

Mr. Rawn stated that it would be 30 feet in height so as to create a brighter public space.

Julie Purnell spoke in favor of the petition and passed out two (2) documents to the Commission for the record. She gave a brief history of Loews and the proposed project. She explained the Loews “Good Neighbors Policy” as a policy which works with the local neighborhood groups on a number of levels.

Commissioner Marr asked that since Loews was investing the equity, what was the role of Sawyer enterprises?

Mr. Connolly stated that Sawyer owns the parking lot and are the developer for the project. They will continue to own the property.

Mr. Marr asked if a contractor had been selected.

Mr. Connolly stated that Turner Construction was the contractor. He also stated that the John Tish (President of Loews) is committed to the “Welfare to Work” program – where Loews hires those receiving welfare support. In addition, the employment office will be opened in Chinatown. There will also be funds allocated to improving green space in the Bay Village neighborhood.

Commissioner Clark stated that Loews should not only look at the immediate communities, but also other ethnic and neighborhood groups.

Tom Perkins spoke in favor of the petition. He stated that there was some opposition to the petition, but anything is better than a parking lot.

There was detailed discussion regarding the removal of the surface parking and the creation of underground parking.

Commissioner Marr asked how many spaces would be taken away and how many would be introduced.

Mr. Connolly stated that there would 130 below-grade spaces on two levels.

Commissioner Fondren stated that it looked like “dead parking.”

Mr. Connolly stated that it was all-valet parking with mechanical vehicle stackers.

Commissioner Cooper asked how many vehicles could be stacked.

Mr. Connolly stated that there would be one on top of another. He also stated that this method is being used quite a bit throughout the City.

Mr. Marr declared the Petitioner’s case closed at 10:57.

The following spoke in opposition to the petition:

Leonard Phillips – Planning Committee of the Bay Village Neighborhood Association
Cheryl Blaine – Keegan, Werlin & Pabian, LLP
Janice Loux - President of Hotel, Restaurant, Institutional Employees and Bartenders Union (Local 26)

Leonard Phillips spoke in opposition to the petition. He stated that his concerns are the elimination of the parking lot (now public), the traffic and congestion associated with Stuart Street, the height of the building, and several legal issues (agreements, notification and “blighted areas”). He also stated that no input from the community has been incorporated in the development plans and states for the record that the Bay Village Neighborhood Association is opposed to the petition.

Cheryl Blaine spoke in opposition to the petition. She stated that issues concerning the Hotel, Restaurant, Institutional Employees and Bartenders Union are traffic, height and density of the building. She submitted one (1) document for the record. She asks that the Commission delay action until all issues with the BRA have been addressed.

Commissioner Marr asked if she had any time frame in mind.

Ms. Blaine said that they are working on it.

Commissioner Fondren asked why the hotel union was opposed to a hotel project.

Ms. Blaine stated that there were community concerns.

Commissioner Fondren asked if the project was negatively impacting the union members.

Ms. Blaine said “yes.”

Janice Loux spoke in opposition to the petition. She stated that she challenges Loews’ “Welfare to Work” program. She stated that good jobs, wages and benefits are not created through this program. These need to be equal to the standards that Loews’ competitors have set.

Commissioner Marr asked if the union has estimated how many jobs would be created.

Ms. Loux stated that it would be several hundred.

Commissioner Fondren asked that if there was an agreement between Loews and the hotel union, would the union be opposed to the project?

Ms. Loux stated “no.”

Commissioner Doyle asked Ms. Loux if she believed that the union could move forward with Loews.

Ms. Loux stated that the union does have a willingness to move forward.

Councilor Kelly stated that he would like to see this project move forward and completed, but urged to have all issues resolved with the union. He also stated that he was speaking on behalf of Councilors Roache, Flaherty, Murphy and Davis-Mullen.

Commissioner Marr gave a brief review of the issues for Councilor Kelly and stated that he too would like to see all issues settled.

Mr. Marr declared the Opposition's case closed at 11:23.

There was discussion among the Commissioners with respect to the best course of action.

Mr. Marr declared the hearing closed at 11:30.

Mr. Fondren stated that he would like to schedule a business meeting to take this issue up again. He stated that he would not have ample time to discuss the issues on this day and that he was pressed for time.

There was discussion to determine a day for the Business Meeting. A date of April 26th was agreed upon, beginning at 9:00 AM.

Mr. Fondren made a motion to delay the vote on Map Amendment Application No. 429 until the Commission's Business Meeting scheduled for April 26th. Mr. Clark seconded the motion. Mr. Marr put the motion to vote:

Yeas: 7

Mr. Tarlow, Mr. Marr, Mr. Fondren, Mr. Clark, Mr. Cooper, Ms. Tierney, Ms. Doyle.

Nays: 0

The motion was declared carried.

Mr. Marr adjourned the meeting at 11:35 AM.