

MINUTES

BOSTON CIVIC DESIGN COMMISSION

The meeting of the Boston Civic Design Commission was held on Tuesday, June 4, 2019, starting in Room #900, Boston City Hall, and beginning at 5:19 p.m.

Members in attendance were: Deneen Crosby, Linda Eastley, Eric Höweler, Andrea Leers, David Manfredi, Paul McDonough, William Rawn, and Kirk Sykes. Absent were David Hacin, Mikyoung Kim, Anne-Marie Lubenau. Elizabeth Stifel, Executive Director of the Commission, was present. Representatives of the BSA attended. Corey Zehngebot, Alexa Pinard, Meera Deean, 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 Sunday, May 19, in the BOSTON HERALD.

The first item on the agenda was the approval of the revised April 2, 2019 and May 7, 2019 Monthly Meeting Minutes and the Design Committee Minutes from meetings on May 7, 14, and 28. A motion was made, seconded, and it was duly

VOTED: To approve the revised April 2 and the May 7, 14, 21, and 28, 2019 BCDC Meeting Minutes.

Votes were passed for signature. Next was a request that the Boston Planning & Development Agency's Office of General Counsel be authorized to respond on behalf of the BCDC to the Open Meeting Law Complaint filed by Mr. Colman Herman on May 31, 2019. Sean Nehill, an attorney with the BPDA, presented the complaint, which alleges that the BCDC violated the Open Meeting Law by "(1) '[t]he 2019 minutes of the meetings of the Design Committee have not been approved in a timely manner, i.e., 'within the next three public body meetings or within 30 days, which is later, unless the public body can show good cause for further delay'; (2) '[t]he minutes lack sufficient detail'; and (3) '[i]t is not clear that a quorum is present.'" Upon authorization for the Office of General Counsel to respond to the complaint, the Office of General Counsel will assemble all appropriate documents and materials, answer the allegations, and make recommendations for any remedial actions and respond in writing to the complainants and the Attorney General. It was moved, seconded, and

VOTED: That the Boston Planning & Development Agency's Office of General Counsel be, and hereby is, authorized to respond on behalf of the Boston Civic Design Commission and its Design Committee to the Open Meeting Law Complaint filed on May 31, 2019 by filing an answer with the complainants and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Office of the Attorney General and to take all related actions necessary to respond to such complaint.

The next item was a report from the Review Committee on the **282-308 Bremen Street** project. The Project Site is across from the Bremen Street Community Park (East Boston Greenway) and within a short walk to the MBTA's Blue Line Airport Subway Station. The project is proposed at 125,000 SF and includes 165 apartments with 2,000 SF of live/work space on the ground floor provided as artist's lofts and 2,000 SF of ground floor retail space. 68 parking spaces are provided (a .41 parking ratio). The building varies from 5-6 stories in height. There is an Interim Planning Overlay District in place in East Boston, meaning that all projects are assessed for agreement with the ongoing PLAN: East Boston. The project surpasses the BCDC review threshold of 100,000 SF; review was recommended. As such, it was moved, seconded, and

VOTED: That the Commission review the schematic design for the proposed 282-308 Bremen Street mixed-use project in the East Boston neighborhood.

The next item on the agenda was a report from the Design Committee on the **Motor Mart Garage Project**.

Phillip Casey, CBT Architects: The proposed project is a 28-story residential project: a new 20 story tower atop the existing Motor Mart Garage containing 220 residential units. Comments from Design Committee in January focused on the façade design, detail on proposed ground floor storefronts and lobby, and location/expression of the separate rental and condo lobbies. Since then, the façade concept has been revised to emphasize verticality, as presented at Design Committee. Stone-like material pilasters go up the tower, and the pilasters become more slender as they go up the building so that the blackened windows become the primary read at the top. The pilasters decrease as the floor plate decreases. There were comments at Design Committee about the curve vs. point at the tower's corner; we went with curved glass that help the tower read more as more slender. The existing storefront design has been modified for a more rigid, uniform design with one prominent lobby for both the rental and condo units covered with a transparent canopy. Church Street will be tabled between Statler Park to prioritize and improve the pedestrian experience.

Carl Frushour, CRJA: Major changes from January include a 3' wide striped buffer zone with a dedicated bike lane on the south side of Stuart Street. Framework of streetscape includes an 18" accent paver along 2' 4" furnishing zone, a 8' concrete sidewalk, and a façade frontage paver. Parallel parking on the North side of Stuart will be removed, but there will be no dimensional changes along Stuart Street.

William Rawn (WR): This was a strong scheme when originally presented, and these changes have made it even stronger. This is an exciting addition to the neighborhood in need of this kind of density.

Kirk Sykes (KS): The rounding of the edges and narrowed profile are helpful in this scheme.

Linda Eastley (LE): I appreciate the changes. Initially we were concerned that the design felt fragmented. Now, with the pilasters traveling the height of the building and the simplification of the base are handsome.

KS: I would encourage you to continue to cultivate this park as a series of green spaces that link to the Boston Common.

Andrea Leers (AL): Restored clarity of the ground floor and proud residential entrance are great gestures to the public nature of this context.

Greg Gaylor, Boston Preservation Alliance: We support this project and look forward to continuing to work with the project team.

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

VOTED: That the Commission recommends approval of the schematic design for the proposed Motor Mart Garage project in the Midtown Cultural District.

The next item on the agenda was the Design Committee Presentation of **Seaport Square Parcel P**. Eric Höweler, William Rawn, and Kirk Sykes were recused.

Yanni Tpsisis, WS Development: Through the review process, we were asked to clarify the relationship of the building massing and building envelope, study views of the building from around the neighborhood, clarify the organizational hierarchy of the façade design. We have done a series of studies on the material setbacks along the façade; because the streets surrounding the building are so wide, an additional 5' material setback does not read prominently.

Tom Lewis, Morris Adjmi Architects: The façade patterning relates to the historic buildings of Fort Point. We have revised the storefront design and improved the relation of the Summer Steps to better serve commercial retail and the pedestrian experience.

AL: So, in summary, you've studied further setbacks and decided against them. You changed the Congress Street corner with a new truss. You have modified the stairs.

David Manfredi (DM): Is the truss structural?

Tom: The truss is not really structural, but we wanted to resolve the corner with a single chevron expression.

AL: It feels like you went through the exercise of studying the façade material depth and the setback of the tower without any intention to pursue it, but the studies you've shown have proven to us that you need to pursue this change in setback.

Corey Zehngebot, BPDA Urban Design: Working with BPDA staff will likely not achieve a different result. Staff agrees with the preference for the setback, but it has been expressed by the proponent that this is an impossibility.

Hearing no public comment, a motion was made to recommend approval with proviso. The motion was seconded, and

VOTED: That the Commission recommends approval of the schematic design for the proposed Seaport Square Parcel P and Summer Steps project in the Seaport Square PDA and in the South Boston Waterfront district with two provisos: that the base at the air-rights portion is set back as previously shown, and that the proponent continues to look at setting the tower back to 10' as shown this evening.

AL: It's a beautiful project. Keep working

William Rawn and Eric Howeler return. David Manfredi was recused. Kirk Sykes left the meeting. The next report from Design Committee was the **Dock Square Garage** project.

BK Boley, Stantec Architects: Major improvements have been made since the last Design Committee presentation. One structural column comes down to meet the park, as shown in the large scale model we brought. Color and texture of materials were to blend with existing buildings on North Street. The entrance lobby is centered on the Haymarket view corridor from Hanover. North Street façade is activated to compliment the use of the hotel and retail spaces across the street. The base along the Greenway side of the building is primarily glass.

Bob Corney, landscape architect at Stantec: We've studied landscape materials in the vicinity of this project. We tried to incorporate materials from the Greenway and Quincy Market through planters, lighting, and seating. The focal point of the pocket park will be a water feature with seating that we intend to maintain for a 4-season interest.

BK Boley: We were asked to study the lighting of the garage. We spoke with the garage lighting and interior design consultant. Their idea is to have subdued lighting inside the building so that there is no view of the garage through the perforated metal skin. We were asked by BPDA Transportation team to eliminate the vehicle drop off zone at the corner of the building, and as a result the building nose is more refined and public space made larger.

LE: You've been incredibly responsive and creative with these solutions. Some of the highlights center around North Street and the axial relationship of the design here. Seeing the model in the context of the citywide model last week really made me realize this is still too tall. It's beautiful and I wish it could be brought to the ground.

Deneen Crosby (DC): I went out and walked the area of this project. I am appreciative of this design. I still want something a little shorter.

WR: I echo the appreciation for the design changes. This is a trade off that needs to balance the history of this area, the first commercial district in Boston. I hesitate that approval of this project will reflect poorly on the BCDC in the future to residents of the North End and visitors to Boston.

Eric Höweler (EH): Architects have done a great job of showing us how to make a building more responsive to its context. This will back and frame the greenway, and its contribution to the greenway seems to be one of its best urbanistic qualities. I think this is a net positive, and an improvement to the existing condition.

Natalia Escobar, former resident of the North End: I used to work in Downtown and walk from the North End to State Street along Surface Road. Because of safety concerns, I used to take a rideshare car home to avoid this area at night. As a pedestrian, this project significantly improves the condition of the area. As a millennial, I appreciate the architecture and modernity of this project.

Greg Gaylor, Boston Preservation Alliance: This project is simply too big for the area. I recognize we are all tired of this project and we are tempted to approve this because it's better. But consider if this is right for the civic good.

Victor Bragna, North End/Waterfront Residents' Association: The developer will not lose money with a no-build option. Please vote to disapprove the project

Dave Kadish, resident: A no-build condition to leave a void on the greenway and poor condition would be wrong. The architects have done everything you've requested. Motor Mart added a tower to a historic

structure. Parcel P was approved for meeting the zoning guidelines. This project accomplishes both of these requests.

Rebecca McKinnetz, Rose Kennedy Greenway Conservancy: Echoing Eric Höweler's comments, the garage is deadening to its surrounding streetscape.

AL: This has taken a lot of thought and care. This was a long time coming to bring it into conformance with the existing guidelines; I respect that you've made the effort. In the context of the city model it feels large. There are underlying issues for us to think about: any new project in this location would offer good pedestrian improvements, so that aside, my approach is to think about this from the view of the guidelines that DO exist for the Greenway and the City. The Greenway Guidelines and recommended zoning for this parcel were created from the perspective of the Greenway as we've previously discussed. I'm of the view that while personally I might be more comfortable with a lower building, the development of the design, the public realm improvements, and the compliance with City guidelines should be honored. I'm thinking ahead along the road; future proposals along the Greenway will want to push the bounds. As the first of projects to come, this project respects the city-backed guidelines and has worked hard to do so. I believe this project is enlivening and strengthening for the Greenway.

LE: Use this as a catalyst for stitching old with new. Transparent edges create activity on the street. With no further comments, a motion was made to disapprove the project because of height; commissioners expressed a design for the building to return in the 80-100' range. The motion was seconded, but lacked to votes for approval.

Then, a motion was made to recommend approval with conditions: that the team further work with BPDA to improve the project's relationship to its context and provide courtesy informational presentation with BCDC at a later date. Additionally, that design continue to seek ways to minimize (perceived) height (goal of desired 80-100' target) and develop façade design more fully in screened and metal panel areas for quality and depth. This motion was seconded, but did not have enough votes to pass.

Not passed.

AL: Given that those present are unable to move forward with a vote, we will offer a split vote to the BPDA Board.

Eric Höweler left. David Manfredi returned. Before the next project presentation, Meera Deean, Senior Urban Designer at the BPDA, gave an overview of PLAN: East Boston and context for development along Bremen Street. In response to rapidly expanding development pressure, the BPDA is in the process of rewriting neighborhood zoning for the entire East Boston neighborhood. Recommendations have not yet been established, but residential pressure suggests that increased height and density will be needed to accommodate growth in strategic portions of the neighborhood.

Alexa Pinard, Urban Designer at the BPDA, offered brief overview of staff review processes for **282-308 Bremen Street** to this point. The BPDA has asked the proponent to look at breaking up height and massing – it is huge and out of scale with the surrounding neighborhood. This block has a lot of missing edges and this project will set the tone for future development. The project is in the middle of a key neighborhood connector directly across from Airport Station and Bremen Street Park. This has not yet been identified as an area that would become denser, but it will be an area of focus/study in PLAN: East Boston process.

Eric Robinson, Architect at RODE Architects, presented **282-308 Bremen Street**: This project combines a few adjacent parcels that currently contain automotive uses. Consistent height of 3 stories surrounding the project. Our project has a pattern of step backs and vertical change in height to reduce and break up the massing. The street will be activated with retail, leasing, lobby, amenity, and live work space at ground. At the rear, a green space will buffer abutting residential properties.

AL: Trying to understand if this will be a one-off in scale of length and height.

DM: There's a lot to like here. I appreciate how you've tried to break the paradigm and do something different. I'd like to know more about how you've created the roofscape design. I was surprised that you've brought parking to the perimeter of the building at the ground floor; I'm not sure this is a good use of street frontage to pedestrians.

LE: I applaud that there is density proposed here. The corner of Bremen and Brooks is opened up, which strengthens this connection to the T station and Greenway. I'd like to understand more about the context of the block. What does the buffer of housing to the rear feel like? Don't want it to be a wall. I want to know more about materials—they seem deep/dark.

AL: If you could make it read more like 3 buildings with an intermediate scale that would be an improvement.

DC: Though the planning study is not far along, I'd like to understand how this relates to all of Bremen Street (future speculative development sites?).

There was no public comment. The project will continue in design committee.

The last item on the agenda was the presentation of updates on the **Dot Block** project in Dorchester. William Rawn left.

James Gray, Stantec: Updates to the project include further development of Hancock Street. We've added a layer of texture and depth to the Hancock building façade.

AL: Contrast of coloring has always struck me as too strong. This updated design now reads as a very horizontal building. Consider toning down the contrast.

There being no further items for discussion, a motion was made to adjourn, and the meeting was duly adjourned at 8:18 p.m. The next regular meeting of the Boston Civic Design Commission was scheduled for July 9, 2019. The recording of the June 4, 2019 Boston Civic Design Commission meeting was digitized and is available at the Boston Planning and Development Agency.