



Christian Science Plaza Revitalization Project
CAC Working Meeting #10
Wednesday, October 28, 2009
Location: Christian Science Publishing House Building

CAC Attendees:

Tom Aucella, Belvedere Condo Association
Kelly Brilliant, Fenway Alliance
Mark Cataudella, Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO)
Sybil CooperKing, Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay (NABB)
Christian Coffin, Hilton Hotel Boston Back Bay
Ryan Higginson, Resident of the South End
Donald Margotta, Church Park Apartments
Craig Nicholson, American Planning Association (APA) – Massachusetts Chapter
George Thrush, Boston Society of Architects (BSA)
Robert Wright, Symphony United Neighbors (SUN)

CAC Members Not in Attendance:

Vanessa Calderon-Rosado, Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (IBA)
Marie Fukuda, Fenway Civic Association (FCA)
Eric Georgi, Resident of St. Germain Street
Meg Mainzer-Cohen, Back Bay Association
Joanne McKenna, Fenway Community Development Corporation (Fenway CDC)
Lee Steele, St. Botolph Neighborhood Association (SBNA)

Ex-Officio Attendees:

Massachusetts State Representative Byron Rushing
Elizabeth Corcoran-Hunt, Office of Massachusetts State Representative Byron Rushing
Johanna Sena, Office of Boston City Council President Michael Ross
Michelle Snyder, Office of Boston City Council President Michael Ross

City of Boston Attendees:

Heather Campisano, BRA
David Carlson, BRA
Inés Palmarin, BRA
Lauren Shurtleff, BRA

Church Team Attendees:

Barbara Burley, The First Church of Christ, Scientist
Jennifer Carr, The First Church of Christ, Scientist
Harley Gates, The First Church of Christ, Scientist
Bob Herlinger, The First Church of Christ, Scientist
Debbi Lawrence, The First Church of Christ, Scientist
Bob Ryan, ML Strategies

Members of the Public:

Don Carlson, NABB

Romin Kaelif, Fenway CDC

Shirley Kressel, NABB

Marc Laderman

MK Merelice, Tech Center at Tent City

Lucille Taitt

Donald Sheehan, IBEW Local 103

Group Perspectives

- Christian Coffin, Hilton Hotel Boston Back Bay: No agenda per se, representing the business community. From a business/hospitality standpoint: the Christian Science Plaza is a recognized landmark. Proposed construction on Belvidere Street seems to fit, has the potential to improve the streetscape. Goals: protect and enhance the Plaza; limit development that would negatively impact the Plaza.
- Tom Aucella, Belvedere Condo Association: Too much time spent at beginning of CAC process on first two objectives: landscaping and reflecting pool. Need to spend more time and effort on understanding where the buildings will be built. Area that could be a big win: development of areas adjacent to the Church *i.e.*, redesign of Belvidere/Dalton Street area. Same should be done along Huntington Avenue. Underpass will never have a defined streetscape; if eliminated, you would increase sidewalk width and be able to make it more attractive. City/BRA/Church/Symphony should discuss. From perspective of Belvedere Condos – we want Church to remain successful, don't want them to have any financial problems. We would like to see pro formas explaining rationale behind 950,000-SF required development.
- Robert Wright, SUN: Agree we have had a good intro but still feel as though we are still getting started. Need to go back one step and clarify scope, both of the project, and the CAC as a whole. Need to be clear what is within CAC's purview. Don't think we can second guess the Church's financial plan; we are not in a position to revisit their budget or financial plan. We have been given an assignment to come up with the best possible way to raise additional money. Also do not think we should look at parcels under long-term lease, *i.e.*, the Midtown Hotel. We cannot plan for the future of those projects. Whatever we do decide, we need to take into account the impact on the surrounding neighborhoods. Also do not think it is appropriate to linger too long on the social injustices of development in the past. We all agree the Church has been an excellent neighbor, that this is an example of a great private-public cooperation. Lastly, if there are going to be separate sub-groups holding meetings, we ask that they be clearly defined and report back to the wider committee, so that we know what has transpired. Not adverse to having more frequent meetings if that is what is necessary. At this pace, we have a long way to go.
- Craig Nicholson, APA – Massachusetts Chapter: Take a short- and long-term view. Planning document will ultimately be the Master Plan that the Church will use not only for the short-term capital projects, but for long-term as well. Could be used to describe enhancements in future. Also important to look at enhancement opportunities for existing site. Also enhance communal experience on-site. Sustainability from an economic and social perspective important as well.
- Mark Cataudella, BSO: BSO and the Church have been neighbors for over 100 years. Desire to maintain beautiful aesthetics. Understand financial concern and burden to

maintain this space. Streetscape development by Symphony to be addressed in a future meeting. Shading by Horticultural Hall and Sunday School would have been a concern, but it doesn't appear this will be an issue. Also, access to underground garage is important, as BSO uses it for event parking. Bus parking also needed, as patrons from around the state come to the Symphony via bus.

- Ryan Higginson, Resident of the South End: Primary concern is preservation of the site as part of the community. Preservation in moderation. Building an increased presence along the site while preserving openness and community inclusion. Draw people into site and not close them out. Don't want to block people out. The Church is a welcome neighbor, and we would like to see them realigned as a more active community member, perhaps through community, retail or office space. Green space should be preserved to the extent possible. Additional concern about social/cultural impact – how to use the space in a more active manner by the community.
- Don Margotta, Church Park Apartments: Concern that plans not obstruct the open view Church Park Apartments has of the Plaza, and none of the plans presented thus far present any problems. Understand financial motivations of Church; not sure that the CAC needs to know.
- Massachusetts State Representative Byron Rushing: Agree with original premise that gets us here - economic sustainability in order to maintain public aspects of the site. Important to explore. Concern about site, in that this community has an opportunity to engage in separate from the sustainability goal. If the Church had economic sustainability now, there would still be issues with the site that the community could comment on. Support idea of Church using real estate for obtaining economic sustainability. Community universally likes the open space, have ideas on how it could be improved, but sustaining the open space is very important. Both of these things have us interested in Huntington Avenue – this represents the least successful aspect of the original plan. Appropriate for us to think about long-range suggestions, *i.e.*, the Midtown Hotel parcel. Possibility of Huntington Avenue edge site being another building is important – and size of it.
- Kelly Brilliant, Fenway Alliance: Church is a great community member. The Childrens Fountain is an amazing community benefit; busloads of kids come, few public amenities do such a great job. This is a majestic site, hard to believe this was accomplished. Our goal is to be stewards of the site. Agree with what has been said about Huntington Avenue, is there any way to open up edge? Improve streetscape along underpass. When we think about public uses for the Church space, we need to keep in mind that this is a church. Reflecting pool offers a great site for spirituality and reflection. Must be careful when thinking about public uses on-site.
- Joanne McKenna, Fenway CDC (via email): My concerns are basically the ones we laid out at our residents' meeting, plus very real worries about the impact of traffic, air quality, groundwater, and what the potential economic benefits will be to the neighborhood and City. I also feel strongly that the affordable housing and small businesses were lost in the neighborhood and should somehow be brought back, the former through direct development of units either on-site or in the Fenway; the latter thru subsidized/affordable commercial space. I am also formally requesting kind of documentation on the financial model that the Church has based this request on. I also am requesting that the CAC receive info about the community benefits promised by Berklee as part of their Institutional Master Plan (IMP) agreement.

- Marie Fukuda, FCA (via email): FCA supports a development plan that conforms with current zoning regulations, respects urban design, and contributes to positive neighborhood impact. FCA supports a plan that involves the plaza, however, should development be sought outside of the plaza, requests that the entire context of property be addressed. We realize that the Church is not required to have an Institutional Master Plan, however, given the rationale for development of 950,000-SF based on economic need, feel that the Church must be responsible for comprehensive planning and not require a single parcel to absorb the brunt of development. Without addressing holdings collectively and making larger plans (not just as-of-right projections), proposals of what is 'enough' development is not one that should be supported by the abutting neighborhoods. The use of the development is important- we should know whether this will be a long term ground lease or an ownership lease. FCA supports a project that would bring community benefit, including residential and retail use. FCA has traditionally supported mixed-use development. Taxable use is important, as is disclosure of the use of development by the developer. If Northeastern or another university is the intended user of the development, we have concerns about IMP agreements that have been made with our community. FCA supports existing zoning and urban renewal guidelines that should serve to direct development. If an area is zoned for residential use, we would want that development to be residential. Urban Renewal specified Massachusetts Avenue for business development, and the Church sold these parcels to Berklee for their campus development. That should not mean that a block of residential buildings on Belvidere Street should bear the consequences of that decision. FCA would support the addressing of development along both sides of Huntington Avenue including improvements to the roadway that would increase pedestrian flow and connectivity. FCA is aware that development on these parcels may involve loss of designated open space. We would request that loss of public open space through development be addressed through funding of the especially compromised open space in the Fenway, and particularly historic park space that is not funded through educational and institutional private/public partnership funds.
- Lee Steele, SBNA (via email): We encourage the Church to consider tower building designs on the Belvidere site that are as low as possible and impose the least impact on the adjoining St. Germain and Clearway Street residential areas. While we realize that the Midtown Hotel site is not in the current scope of Plaza redevelopment, SBNA would strongly prefer that the Church make a commitment *now* to later propose a building on the Midtown Hotel site that is lower than but certainly doesn't exceed the as-of-right height that current zoning would permit (which is 115 feet – same height as Colonnade Hotel and Greenhouse Apartments). Further, if the Church sells/leases the Midtown site to a private developer, the Church would agree to put this height restriction in the sale/lease agreement. We would really like to reduce the idle bus parking on Huntington Ave. We highly support some sort of year-round pedestrian access across the reflecting pool area from Cumberland St. to the Mother Church. The set of tree bosques that currently line the Huntington perimeter s/b preserved to the maximum extent possible. If this set of trees must be replaced due to age or ground infrastructure deterioration, we request that trees of a similar type be used. The new building that occupies the Sunday School corner should minimally reduce the Huntington tree bosques and be as low as possible. This favors the "L-shaped" wrap-around massing concept presented today. Going further w/ this "L-shaped" concept, the area encompassing the Sunday School, Horticultural Hall, and driveway in between offers an exciting architectural

challenge to successfully integrate 3 historically distinctive designs in a new building. We encourage the Church to consider building designs to incorporate these 3 structures, thereby enlarging the new building footprint and reducing the height requirement. We believe the result will be as forward thinking and distinctive as the original Plaza concept of 30+ years ago.

- George Thrush, BSA: Very helpful to have people make specific comments about the concrete choices we face. Need to distinguish between means and ends: sustainable techniques, etc. vs. buildings/streetscapes/public spaces that result. Do not want to confuse those. Want to see better site connections: we can do better in the near- and long-term on Huntington Avenue. When it comes to the issue of finances, the real issue here is if we suppress the profitability of projects enough, let us not be surprised if they turn out to not be of such good quality. Public benefits can accrue from the viability of these projects. If we want things to be constantly smaller, then the chips of the game will be reduced. No problem with height at Belvidere/Dalton Street site, as opposed to the Huntington Avenue site. Desire to preserve core open space on Plaza. Edge connections must be strengthened. Difficult challenge of keeping Plaza's contemplative nature vs. Huntington Avenue activation.
- Sybil CooperKing, NABB: Request a presentation of a new plan that conforms to current zoning regulations, per FAR, height, etc. A project that looks at both sides of the Huntington Avenue corridor. Maintain the fabric of the plaza, the existing core of open space, with the utmost respect given to maintaining Belvidere Street's existing zoning guidelines. There is a reason that a protection zone was given to this small area. Ask that all development be applicable to property taxes. Ask that Church provide financial documentation, since they are asking to go beyond zoning.

Open Discussion

- Representative Rushing: Coordination between this CAC and the Berklee Task Force would be good.
- Don Margotta: The process would benefit from the discussion of the inclusion of both sides of Huntington Avenue.
- George Thrush: Reminder that this is a committee that recommends and reviews.
- Tom Aucella: Buses along Huntington Avenue are a hindrance.
- Kelly Brilliant: I sit on a number of these CACs, now that we have the BRA at the table, this is a great opportunity to make general recommendations to the City.
- Sybil CooperKing: This is a case where the proponent owns property on both sides of the street (Huntington Avenue).
- Don Margotta: Envision the other side of Huntington Avenue as a separate project.
- Robert Wright: Anything we recommend should take into consideration future development. How can we make the whole neighborhood better?
- George Thrush: The resulting planning document should result in three or four action items/recommendations for the other side of Huntington Avenue.
- Craig Nicholson: I envision a Master Plan document that brings all of this together, in a holistic approach that can be applied beyond the boundaries of the site, a 50-year plan for the Plaza.
- George Thrush: It is true that Church owns property along both sides of Huntington Avenue, but they do not own what is in between (*i.e.*, the street itself), which is potentially more critical.

- Craig Nicholson: A recommendation to the BRA that could result from this CAC is to establish a streetscape committee that focuses on improvements to Huntington Avenue.
- Robert Wright: An overview of the existing Symphony streetscape project would be helpful.
- Mark Cataudella: Need to have a presentation on this from BTB.
- Christian Coffin: It could be interesting to explore the issue of financial review. If the development stays within existing zoning, then perhaps the financials are none of our business. If looking for relief, then perhaps they should document how they need this relief.
- George Thrush: I am more interested in what we are going to get out of this project. What is the project that the Church needs to build in order to give us exactly what we want and have articulated, in terms of public benefits? Less interested in mechanics. Clearly there is a difference of opinions on this matter.

Public Comment

- Mark Laderman: Regarding existing zoning – keep in mind Church recently sold a property to Berklee, which gives us an idea of how much development rights are worth here. Mark quantified this at \$30 million and said that we need to determine why we would give the Church \$30 million in development rights.
- Merelice, South End Tech Center at Tent City: Could not help but notice that two Fenway groups made reference to affordable housing and mixed uses. Someone else commented not to look back at what happened in the past. My perspective is this is an opportunity to correct some of what has happened in the past.
- Debbi Lawrence, First Church of Christ, Scientist: It should be noted that the Berklee Task Force meeting materials are on their website (<http://www.berklee.edu/taskforce/default.html>), take a look at their planning document – just to become familiar with where they are in the planning process.
- Shirley Kressel, NABB: Uneasy about approach that we are looking for how much relief to give based on how much money the opponent needs. At Board of Appeal, prohibited from presenting financial hardship as a criteria. We should look to see what development that the proponent wants and would also serve the public interest, within existing zoning. Skeptical of public-private partnerships. Lawful zoning is without overlays.
- George Thrush: What is considered lawful on this site is much more open to discussion since you have the opportunity to be more flexible, to do something more analogous to an IMP.
- Sybil CooperKing: Zoning relief in the form of exceptions to Article 41, pursuant to Article 6A, is not available. Sybil also said that Article 41 specifically said that PDAs were not allowed in this area and read from it.
- George Thrush: We are advising the BRA on what we think appropriate development is on this site.
- Robert Wright: What is our scope, what are our limitations?
- Representative Rushing: Need to see as-of-right.
- Sybil CooperKing: At the beginning of this process she did not know very much about zoning so she read Articles 41, 80 and 6A and that they were very clear about what the allowed heights were and that exceptions could not be made in the specific areas proposed. She asked how the answers as-of-right and zoning means nothing in this city and we can really do anything we want could be valid legal or ethical answers.

- George Thrush: City consciously down-zoned itself, owing to urban renewal. This was a way to get more control back – so that anything that happened had to get some relief. As-of-right means almost nothing in this City – compared to other cities. Think it is important for us to articulate what is in the public interest here. In a perfect world you would have a zoning code that was in line with contemporary development, it has not been that way in Boston for a long time.
- Kelly Brilliant: The Church did show us what they could do as-of-right early on in this process. Forget about the financials, but look at what the public would lose if they were to go with as-of-right. Perhaps that is a more concrete way to go at this. Kelly also said that if we demanded as-of-right, we wouldn't need these CAC's and Shirley Kressel responded That's not right; there are alternative ways to build out as-of-right. The proponent should bring us three lawful schemes, presented in drawings and models that are visually appealing, not the usual lumps of clay labeled the "squat, ugly" alternative to the "slim, elegant" towers.
- Sybil CooperKing: We have not seen anything lawful yet. There is room along Huntington Avenue that would conform to current zoning.