

Uphams Corner Public Meeting 11.19.20 Comments and Questions from Chat and Recording

Commercial Space

I would love to know more about “affordable” commercial space. What would that look like in the district? I would love to know before I make a decision to stay or go.

The creation of affordable commercial space is foundational to the concept of development without displacement. If the proposal includes commercial space, the space should meaningfully demonstrate how it contributes to the Arts and Innovation District. Selected proponents will be expected to work with the City, DSNI and Upham’s Corner Main Streets to help identify commercial tenants that are highly desired by the neighborhood. The pathways to create affordable commercial space are not as clear as the pathways for affordable housing, which have dedicated state and municipal subsidies. There are some tools that a developer might be able to use, including tax incentive financing (TIFs) which are tax incentives; we are looking for proposals to offer creative ways to create affordable commercial space. We have incorporated the community’s strong desire for affordable commercial space into the RFP documents by recommending that commercial spaces be under 300 sq ft. This guideline encourages smaller businesses that complement the Arts and Innovation district, rather than larger chain retailers.

For the commercial building, is it possible to push more healthy businesses there, like a juice bar or salad bar, or a blank space for social gatherings?

Yes, some of these kinds of uses are ones that people have discussed in community meetings and are in the RFP ; we hope to see them in the proposals.

Are we planning to support existing businesses that are already there through the different renovation processes?

Supporting existing businesses is core to our strategy of development without displacement and the Upham’s Corner Main Streets has been represented on the WAG and through the community outreach process at every step of the way. We are definitely open to existing businesses, in alignment with the community’s vision for business mix, as a component of the eventual development.

Affordable Housing

With all these developments happening in the area in the upcoming years, I noticed that artist housing is the top of the list instead of affordable housing that is open to the public. Will this project have affordable housing?

Yes, a successful response must deliver permanently affordable housing that serves the Upham's Corner community and promotes a mixed-income neighborhood.

Do you know approximately how many affordable housing units would be developed on land currently owned by the City? And what would be the income requirements for the units that are developed?

We don't know how many. It will depend on the proposals submitted in response to the RFP. Through the community process, it has been very clear that we need units that are truly affordable for the people who live in the community.

Site 1 - 555-559 Columbia Road

What happened to including the building between the Strand Theater and the Bank of America (555 Columbia Road) that is owned by the Uphams Corner Health Center?

At this time, the Uphams Corner Health Center is not formally participating in the City's RFP, but we welcome them to partner with a development team if they are interested in being involved in the future development.

For Site 1, what is happening with Cushing Ave? I support it being part of the project, just curious. Can we keep Cushing Ave open by building an arch over the street?

Yes, the RFP states that the building configuration should allow for a grade-level extension of Cushing Avenue through the site to Columbia Road for a pedestrian connection, while allowing for infrequent loading access to the Strand.

Site 2 - 568A-572 Columbia Road

How many parking spaces are currently at DSNI's CB Building? Is there any requirement for parking there that can be used for Strand events?

There are approximately 20-25 parking spaces located in the surface lot behind the building. While there is no requirement for Strand parking at this site- the community has expressed a strong desire for a supply of parking that is close to the Strand.

Sustainability and Green Space

Is there a requirement that these developments meet LEED certification and include public green space? / How green will these buildings be? Will there be solar elements?

The RFP requires proposed projects to support the community's and City of Boston's Carbon Free, Climate Resilient, and Healthy Community goals including the 2019 Carbon Free Boston report and DND's Zero Emission Buildings guidebook for affordable housing projects. Proposed projects should include resilient building and site strategies to eliminate, reduce, and mitigate potential impacts of climate change, such as greenhouse gas reduction, reduction of heat exposure and heat retention, stormwater and flooding mitigation, and sheltering in place. Developments must also achieve and surpass the United States Green Building Council's ("USGBC") requirements for LEED Platinum and LEED Zero with a minimum requirement of achieving LEED Gold utilizing the most appropriate LEED rating system. Projects should seek USGBC certification and should be registered upon tentative designation and certified by the USGBC within one year of construction completion.

Regarding green space, the only real green space in Upham's Corner is the North Burial Ground, which needs to be made more porous and accessible to the community. We need to bring the Parks Dept. along and plan improved access to the Burial Ground with the community. There have been discussions about connecting Upham's Corner to the Emerald Necklace in a better way. As these projects move forward and as part of our next steps we will arrange a community meeting to focus on green space.

Could public rooftop green space be an option for the library and proposed development sites?

Yes, we can add language to the RFP encouraging use of the rooftops for public green space.

Are you conceptually including the North Burial Ground? It is our only green space in Uphams Corner, but is currently blighted with billboards and a solid wall on the Stoughton Street side. Enslaved persons are buried there and deserve a memorial that could be linked to the arts district.

We raised the need for access to the North Burial Ground early on in the process, and we have talked with the Parks Dept about that. There is a need to have a conversation about the burial ground and start that process.

I'm curious if there will be any sort of "gateway" component similar to the Clapp Pear in Edward Everett Square that can tie Upham's Corner to the history from the Native Lands (perhaps in consultation with the Wampanoag and Nipmuc) through early America all the way through when the State House stables were there through to the present. My grandfather learned to swim in what is now the Children's Library and watched them build the Strand.

This is a wonderful idea that we would love to see included in responses to these RFPs.

Diversity and Inclusion

How can artists or people from the community get jobs or actually be hired in the community? / Will contracting with Black - and woman-owned businesses be a priority? / How will the City ensure that minorities are hired for these developments?

The RFPs support the City's goal to create Good Jobs for people in the Upham's Corner community and prevent displacement. The RFPs approach this goal in a few ways:

- The RFP includes language requiring the Good Jobs Standards, which require all short term and permanent jobs on the parcel to meet certain standards around wages, stable shifts, hiring of local residents, people of color, and women, the percent of workers who are full time, and benefits.
- One of the evaluation criteria that will be used to evaluate the proposals will be diversity and inclusion, which looks at the proposal's plan to advance M/WBEs in all aspects of the development from ownership and financing to design and construction and operations. In accordance with the 2019 Executive Order on Equity in Procurement, this is a critical component of our review.
- It is a passion for Mayor Walsh and for Chief Barros to ensure that people of color have equal access to the construction jobs that these developments will generate. The Boston Residents Jobs Policy requires at least 40% minorities, 51% local, and 12% women and the City monitors compliance.

The Strand Theatre

The diagram in slide 7 indicated that the bottom of Cushing Have will be closed and included in the development. I understand that this may create access problems for the Strand Theatre. Please explain.

The RFP specifies that loading and access to the Strand Theatre must be maintained and improved, in order to enhance theatre operations.

Are there plans for smaller performance space (100-200 person audiences) as part of the Arts & Innovation District? Also, our chamber music group has been honored to use St. Mary's Church as a performance space, but I am wondering about parking to make it more usable.

We discussed many scenarios in community meetings regarding whether there should be changes to the interior of the Strand and heard from the community that preserving the main area of the historic interior is important. There are other spaces in the building that can be altered to allow for uses like black box spaces.

Small performance spaces are possible in other buildings within the Upham's Corner district. They all don't have to be in the Strand Theatre proper.

Is there a commitment to preserving the historic interior of the Strand?

Yes, we have heard loud and clear from the community that it is important to preserve that space, while allowing for a new operator to make improvements to accommodate advances in technology, as well as adapt portions of the theatre to comply with building and accessibility regulations.

Will the Strand be public or private?

The Strand will remain publicly owned. The RFP is looking for an operator to run operations and programs, but the theater will continue to be publicly owned. The specific entity (a private entity or a nonprofit) depends on the RFP responses. The City will have oversight over programming and operations to ensure it meets the vision of the community.

The Library

Do we know what is planned for the site of the current library location?

No, it has not been determined what will happen to the space inside the Municipal building..

When will we actually see a new library built at Upham's Corner?

The City is currently in negotiations to acquire the site for the new Upham's Corner library. After acquisition, the design process may be about a year before construction will commence.

Can you talk briefly about why we cannot have a mixed use library?/ Explain more about what "municipal use only" means for the library. Prior conversations considered housing above the library.

Earlier in the community planning process, we discussed housing being located above the library. There are a number of challenges that unfortunately make this infeasible. These

include: the challenge of mixing public money with private funds; and the method of acquisition of the Library parcel.

The library's regular community process is a much more top-down process and not as transparent compared to what we are used to in this neighborhood. What are your thoughts regarding how we can blend the two community processes?

There will be community meetings where the Library will present, and the conversation will be focused on the library. The library design process will come in front of the community, and will be integrated into the broader Arts & Innovation District conversations. As articulated in Imagine Boston 2030, the Upham's Corner Implementation Process is a model for development without displacement and robust community engagement is essential to achieving the vision of the enhanced neighborhood.

How can I get involved in the library planning and design conversations ?

The Boston Public Library will announce the community process related to design. The design process will take about a year, so there will be many opportunities for the community to participate and provide input. Both DSNI and the Library team will be involved in outreach to ensure community members have access.

Process Questions

What is the WAG?

The WAG stands for Working Advisory Group, which is a City-appointed advisory group for this process and includes residents, business owners, advocates and other community stakeholders who have been meeting regularly throughout the process to help shape the content of public meetings and review community feedback. Several members of the WAG participated in previous planning initiatives, including the FIPI (Fairmount Indigo Planning Initiative) and bring continuity to the process, connecting planning with implementation.

What is a demonstration project plan (regarding Site 1)?

A demonstration project plan is the legal mechanism that allows the Boston Planning & Development Agency (BPDA) to acquire 559 Columbia and combine it with the parcel/building located at 555 Columbia Road- so that the city, through the BPDA can issue the RFP for Site 1. The BPDA Board will vote to approve the Demonstration Project Plan at their December 17 board meeting.

Will the WAG/ public review committee only review responses to the RFPs issued by the BPDA and the City? Will the DNI RFP be part of that review process? Will the library be part of that review process? What oversight will the WAG have over the library and DNI process?

The WAG will participate in the review of the City/BPDA and DSNI/DNI proposals. The RFP process has and will continue to include representation across many city departments and agencies, including BPL, DND, OED, ONS, Arts & Culture, BPDA, BTM, and IB2030. While DSNI/DNI Selection Committee and their Board have final say over whom they select as the developer of their parcel, the WAG and the City will work in close collaboration.

How are representatives of the WAG selected? Are the decision makers representative of the community's respective ethnic groups? The people staffing this meeting are not representative of the community or Black and Brown artists.

The WAG members were recommended by community members. If you would like to join the WAG, please email Andrew Grace (andrew.grace@boston.gov) with some information about yourself. Recommendations are brought in front of the Mayor for appointment. We look for a balance of diversity and representation and anticipate adding some new WAG representatives from the artist, entrepreneur and business community to fill some seats that were recently vacated.

How has the community been informed of this initiative or community process? The artist community in Boston has not been sufficiently informed and involved in this process. How can people who have not yet been involved in the process get involved going forward?

Since late 2017, the City has worked closely with our partners DSNI, and through the WAG ,has held a number of community meetings, workshops, and events focused on the Arts and Innovation district and preparing for the RFPs. Pre-pandemic- we collectively conducted outreach through many ways, including posters, door knocking, social media, online, through traditional media such as newspapers and radio, and word of mouth. Since the pandemic began, we acknowledge that we have had very little outreach and community engagement- and recently shifted to virtual engagement. Under these circumstances we have to do a better job of reaching out and connecting people. We look forward to continuing these conversations in partnership with you and the artist community.. There is still a long journey ahead to make this vision a reality.

This initiative needs to be slowed down. The country is in the middle of a pandemic and a civil rights war. Community members may not have time to sufficiently be involved in this process over the holidays. We are fighting to remain present in this neighborhood, and we are concerned that the RFP is being moved forward for political reasons to benefit specific people while not actually benefiting the Black and Brown artists, residents and entrepreneurs who live here. The City arts commission doesn't have enough black representation to understand the arts community in Boston sufficiently.

There is no developer who has been selected, and we mean it when we say that this project--this entire effort is about development without displacement-- is for artists, for local residents, and for the community, about keeping these opportunities local, and maintaining affordability for artists and for commercial space. Getting the RFPs out- is only the first step in the conversation around potential development. DSNI/DNI's and then the BPDA and City RFPs will go out in January or February of 2021. We are holding this meeting because we want to be held accountable and we expect you to hold us accountable.

The WAG used to be more transparent and the public could attend meetings. Are WAG meetings now "locked"?

No public meetings are locked. The public can attend any WAG meeting. The WAG has not been meeting recently because of the pandemic and because the City has been trying to arrange the purchase of the Library site. We have in the past asked prospective developers to not attend some WAG meetings -- as we were discussing language/the text of the RFP, and

did not want any one developer to have special access. The public is welcome to attend all WAG and community meetings.

Arts and Innovation District

Why is there no mention of the Fairmount Innovation Lab, which is a leading organization for the artists and creative industry entrepreneurs in Upham's Corner?

The Fairmount Innovation Lab has been and will continue to be an important part of the Upham's Corner Arts and Innovation ecosystem. The organizations and locations that have been identified have been so because of their relationship to the parcels. A successful Arts and Innovation District will engage all of these critical institutions

The Humphreys Street Studios complex is reported to be for sale and potentially at risk of being developed- , which seems like a big loss for the Arts and Innovation District. Has there been any, or could there be any, help from the City to try to keep that space as affordable artists studios?

The City's Office Arts & Culture has been working closely with artists in the studios to explore a number of options for maintaining the studios, including supporting the hiring of a real estate consultant who will help the artists explore their options for purchasing the building.

Would artists that live in the area have first priority over the new artist spaces?

Yes, the goal is to support local artists, creative businesses, and creative entrepreneurs.

In the context of the RFP, does the word "artist" mean music or just visual arts such as painters?

It refers to all types of artists, cultural organizers, and creative workers, including those working in music, visual artists, and literary artists. For example, we recently helped a poet buy a condo in Boston. For artist housing specifically, you must complete the City's Artist Housing Certification (available here:

<https://www.boston.gov/departments/arts-and-culture/artist-housing-certification>).

How can the City ensure that investment in arts and culture benefits the Black and Brown artists currently in Upham's Corner/Dorchester who are not currently getting the support they need and are facing displacement?

The purpose of the RFP is to create affordable residential and commercial spaces that will prevent the displacement of artists in the area. Community feedback is also captured in the RFP, which includes the goal of enhancing the Strand's historic role as a place for Black artists and entrepreneurs and programming that reflects the diversity of Upham's Corner.

I am a musician, and my younger colleagues can't stay in Boston and are moving to places like Providence. I'm worried that Upham's Corner will become unaffordable. What are we doing to face that as a whole city?

Affordable housing needs to be built everywhere, and that's exactly what we're trying to do here, and a portion of the affordable housing will be specifically for artists.

Is the RFP arts related or just housing and commercial? I'm not clear how this is connected to the Arts and Innovation district.

The goals of the RFP are to support the Arts & Innovation district by identifying an operator for the Strand theater, creating affordable commercial space that will support the Arts & Innovation district (like maker space, space for creative entrepreneurs, etc), and providing affordable housing that includes live-work space for artists.

Will Black and Brown artists who have lived in the neighborhood for over three years get priority in housing? That is the only way to prevent displacement.

There are several challenges to implementing those criteria. Legally, we cannot restrict housing for only Black and Brown residents. But we want to do our best to shape the policy goals of the RFP to meet the needs of black and brown artists in the neighborhood as much as possible.

Other Developments

What is the plan for the Fox Hall (554-562 Columbia Road)? In Spring 2020, Fox Hall was sold to a new owner. The development team plans to preserve the existing Fox Hall, and construct new affordable and workforce housing on the empty lot behind the building. The new owner has been working closely with the existing commercial and residential tenants.

Has the Masonic Hall/Columbia Square Building (578 Columbia Road) owner budged on selling or allowing use of that building?

As far as we know, the owner is not interested in selling.

Roxbury Dudley Station project is artist-living only. It is a nice project, but I don't know why it's artist-only.

If this question is referring to the Nubian Square Ascends proposal submitted for the Blair Lot in Nubian Square, the proposal includes mainly commercial uses but also includes 15 units of artist live-work housing.

How do we get a list of all of the buildings that are for sale in Upham's Corner?

The City tries to stay informed about what is for sale in the area, but we don't have a comprehensive list. We know that building that contains the CVS /Brother's Supermarket, the two buildings at the end of Virginia Street, and the Leon Electric Building may be for sale. If you talk to commercial real estate brokers, you may learn more.