

Notes of the February 7, 2011 Berklee IMP Task Force Meeting

6:00 – 8:00 PM

Boston Public Library

Glass Orientation Room

Attendance

Members Present: Susan Ashbrook, Co-Chair; Karla Rideout, Co-Chair; Kelly Brilliant, Tim Horn, Valerie Hunt, Gail Korn, Randy Kreie, Meg Mainzer-Cohen, Richard Pendleton, Barbara Brooks Simons, Ellen Shortell

Elected Officials Present: City Councilor Michael Ross, State Representative Marty Walz

Other Attendees: Gerald Autler, BRA; David Carlson, BRA; Clifford Gayley, William Rawn Associates; James McCoy, Berklee; William Whitney, Berklee; Rebecca Blum, Berklee

Minutes

Susan Ashbrook called the meeting to order at approximately 6:05 p.m.

Bill Whitney thanked the Task Force members for their continued participation and introduced David Grissino of Goody Clancy to present the requested massing studies for a hypothetical 15-story building at the Crossroads.

Mr. Grissino first presented a map diagram showing zones in which Berklee would be likely to investigate further opportunities for building student housing in response to Rep. Rushing's request at the prior meeting. The largest of these zones was on outer Boylston Street, between the current campus and Fenway Park. Rep. Walz asked if this study was meant to assume one building with 400 beds, suggesting that Rep. Rushing's request from the last meeting had indicated multiple buildings. Mr. Grissino responded that multiple sites would mean additional property acquisition and cost, less efficient building operation, and more sites taken off tax rolls. Mr. Whitney agreed that Berklee's preference would be for a single site with 400 beds.

Rep. Walz suggested that Berklee think more broadly about where it might build. Mr. Autler asked if she had specific areas in mind, and Rep. Walz suggested the eastern and further western parts of Boylston Street.

Mr. Grissino then presented the massing studies for a 15-story Crossroads. The first massing featured a 25-foot-wide air shaft in the middle of the building to preserve a double-loaded corridor, creating room conditions that would be unacceptable for student living, though permissible by code. This massing also did not accommodate the program.

The second option set back the tower slightly from the base, though this massing precluded the placement of student bedrooms on a double-loaded corridor. There are rooms all around the outside of the floorplate, but this resulted in a large amount of space in the center of the floorplate not being available for student bedrooms. Because of this inefficiency, this massing only achieves 325 beds in 15 stories.

The third massing shows a C-shaped scheme, which allows the advantage of a lot of exterior, but brings a tremendous amount of mass on top of the base. This option presents a long building face on Mass Ave, and the building evidences a substantial presence to Boylston Street pedestrians.

Ms. Rideout pointed out that the views presented include all of the proposed Air Rights massings, only one of which has an active proposal.

Mr. Grissino continued by showing examples of other buildings from the area, including 222 Berkeley and 500 Boylston as examples of structures having the kind of setbacks Berklee is proposing.

Ms. Brilliant and Ms. Rideout expressed appreciation for being shown the options for the massing in this manner.

David Carlson addressed the group to point out that massing should allow access to light and air from the street not only via direct sunlight, but also daylight and “percentage of sky” to avoid the “canyonization” of Boylston Street. He also emphasized the importance of avoiding the creation of a wall along Mass Ave as well.

Mr. Autler also pointed out that the historic facades at the site, if preserved, can be better articulated without a lot of mass sitting on top of them.

Rep. Walz expressed a preference for the massing of Option C and the similar appearance of the Renaissance School.

Ms. Brilliant asked if anything can be done with the building materials to allow something more “light-filled” than dark and heavy, citing Brookline as a location with low buildings, but dark, heavy brick. Mr. Carlson said that materials are factored into daylight analysis, but not shadow analysis.

Randy Kreie pointed out that the Renaissance School building receives light on its face after 10:30 in the morning, whereas the face of the Crossroads building get light until later. The adverse impact he saw from the massing diagrams was on Massachusetts Avenue and the historic facades. He stated that he might prefer removal of the facades with the C-shaped proposal.

Barbara Brooks Simons said she found all the massing studies to be “hulking.” She said she was a little far in asking for the building to go down to 15 stories, because it will be

located on a commercial corner. While keeping 168 to 15 stories is fine, maybe the Crossroads could be 20. The massings shown in the new studies wouldn't be pleasant.

Ms. Hunt said she doesn't think 4 stories will make a lot of difference. She supports the plans as they are.

Ms. Rideout said she would be okay with 800 beds total, whether or not 450 were allocated to the crossroads. She said she thinks Berklee should buy the building on the corner of Boylston and Hemenway. Mr. Pendleton and Ms. Hunt pointed out that said building currently contains condominiums. Mr. Whitney pointed out that this conversation perfectly illustrates the problems Berklee has had looking at sites that don't involve further incursion into the neighborhood.

Rep. Walz asked how "incursion into the neighborhood" is defined. Mr. Whitney responded that the clear direction from many around the table and the BRA has been to avoid residential neighborhoods and instead look at locations like Stuart and Dartmouth Street, which did not ultimately work for the college.

Ms. Rideout inquired about the possibility of rehabilitating 98 Hemenway for additional housing. Mr. Whitney responded that several elected officials and Fenway residents have expressed a desire for the building's eventual disposition to community housing. Berklee believes it is offering a responsible proposal that fulfills two-thirds of its expressed need, entirely on college-owned properties, while addressing urban design concerns.

Mr. Pendleton expressed support for the possible acquisition by Berklee of the property adjacent to 168 Mass Ave, 186 Mass Ave, a building currently leased by Berklee from an affiliate of the Christian Science Church. He said he was also pleased to see that Turnpike Air Rights proposals were still an option for the future.

Ms. Simons asked how much height would have to come off the proposal to keep all shadows off the Commonwealth Mall. Mr. Grissino responded that seven stories would have to be removed.

Ms. Rideout expressed concern about setting a precedent for tall buildings in locations not included in the Civic Vision, in a neighborhood that used to be much more residential. Mr. Horn responded that the Fenway now contains institutional presences on all its residential streets, and that the more opportunities they have to free up housing, the more people will live here. He said that residents would feel a lot more comfortable if a cap on enrollment were to be in effect. Ms. Simons agreed that she sensed tacit agreement of the task force on that aspect of Ms. Rideout's proposal.

Mr. Whitney said that such an agreement is worth discussing, but that the likelihood of Berklee having 2,000 additional students is remote. Precision can't be guaranteed, but an arrangement could be made to include a little flexibility.

Rep. Walz referred to the private enrollment contract between Suffolk University and the Beacon Hill Civic Association, and pointed out that Suffolk is not currently upholding its end of the agreement. They are using the Holiday Inn to accommodate student overflow. She noted that Mr. Whitney, current Berklee president Roger Brown, or others may not be around to keep those promises, and that the possible addition of 200 graduate students added to her nervousness.

Ms. Brilliant also pointed out that having kids “sprayed throughout the city” dilutes their educational experience. Ms. Shortell agreed, and commented that she feels like Berklee is suffering from the misdeeds of other institutions that came before.

Rep. Walz said that enrollment caps should use leveling mechanisms to account for bigger or smaller years, and that the point in the year at which enrollment is measured can affect the outcome. Mr. Whitney agreed and said Berklee would like to talk about such a leveling mechanism and built-in flexibility.

Ms. Korn commented that another issue is that this building is one of four corners at the Crossroads intersection – the impact is really on the whole area, but it is difficult to discern through big brown massing diagrams. Mr. Whitney responded that Berklee has tried in the IMP to lay out some possible massings from the Civic Vision. Rep. Walz commented that the Parcel 13 proposal is consistent with the Civic Vision and set back in part from the street, and that she would try to get an electronic version of the rendering. Ms. Korn expressed concern about the Parcel 13 building’s design and functionality, particularly with respect to the adjacent alley.

Mr. Autler reminded the group that Berklee plans to file its IMP ASAP, followed by a 60-day review and comment period. Discussion of the Crossroads will be part of the review, and Berklee can make changes over the course of the review, or later on.

Mr. Whitney informed the group that the target filing date would be in mid-February, and that Task Force members would be receiving drafts of the Transportation and Historic Resources chapters in advance.

Ms. Mainzer-Cohen asked if the Task Force had copies of its last letter to the BRA so they could review its topics and areas of agreement, though it did not include anything about 168 Mass Ave.

Ms. Korn asked if, since the Crossroads is in such a major area, anyone has approached the MBTA to improve the related public transportation facilities. Rep. Walz responded that the T is in preliminary stages of redesign of the Hynes station for accessibility, including a public meeting soon to be scheduled. This redesign does not include the bus stop on the other side of the street.

The T is also currently holding public meetings regarding the #1 bus route. The BRA has asked Berklee to look creatively at pedestrian and bicycle improvements. Mr. Horn

pointed out the present set by the Otherside Café, where the business was able to obtain an entire parking spot dedicated to bicycle parking – enough for about 12 bikes.

Councilor Ross reminded the group of his concern about trying to eliminate too many units from the Crossroads, and brought up the possibility of a height trade between the Crossroads and 168 projects. Mr. Autler responded that while there is still a diversity of opinion, there are urban design concerns about making the heights of those buildings too similar. Ms. Simons also commented that she thought the Task Force was mostly united on the 168 proposal as it stands. Ms. Rideout said that if she were going to “lose” on the Crossroads, she wouldn’t mind having 168 be a bit shorter.

Rep. Walz requested some additional examples of metal exteriors so that the Task Force could come to an informed opinion on the facades. Mr. Autler recommended looking at Atelier 505 and the Boston Center for the Arts, though they are not direct analogies.

The Task Force scheduled two additional meetings during the comment period:

Monday, March 14, 2011
6:00-8:00 PM

Monday, April 4, 2011
6:00-8:00 PM

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Submitted by Rebecca Blum