

**Notes of the March 14, 2011 Berklee IMP/168 Massachusetts Avenue PNF  
Public Meeting and Berklee 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**

**Introduction**

Gerald Autler called the meeting to order at 6:15 p.m. He reminded the group that Berklee has simultaneously filed an Institutional Master Plan and a Project Notification Form for 168 Massachusetts Avenue; both are available electronically at [www.berklee.edu/taskforce](http://www.berklee.edu/taskforce). Those who would like hard copies may contact Mr. Autler at [Gerald.Autler.bra@cityofboston.gov](mailto:Gerald.Autler.bra@cityofboston.gov).

Mr. Autler described the process to date. Planning started several years ago, and Berklee filed an Institutional Master Plan (IMP) Notification Form in January of 2009. Mr. Autler then responded with a Scoping Determination explaining the information that would be required in an IMP. Berklee continued to meet with and solicit feedback from the Task Force, adding the property at 168 Massachusetts Avenue to the proposed projects in the IMP. The recently filed IMP responds to the questions posed in Scoping Determination. Approval of the IMP would give Berklee a basic zoning envelope for height, density, and use of the projects; the IMP does not necessarily go into detail about the design of the buildings, Mr. Autler explained. The PNF contains detailed descriptions and analyses of the proposed project at 168 Massachusetts Avenue.

The 60-day public comment period on these documents ends April 19; comments can be submitted to Mr. Autler. At the end of the comment period, the BRA will

determine if the questions and issues raised have been responded to adequately. If so, the IMP could be brought to the BRA Board in May for consideration.

Typically, the comment period in this process is followed by the filing of a Draft Project Impact Report. Instead, Berklee has filed an Expanded Project Notification Form (PNF) that is intended to contain all the information needed to approve the project. If the information and analyses provided are sufficient, there is a provision in Article 80 to waive further review before going to the BRA Board and then the Zoning Commission.

### Background

David Grissino of Goody Clancy Associates presented the IMP. He has been working with Berklee on its master planning process since 2006. Berklee's campus is primarily located in the Fenway and Back Bay around the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Boylston Street, surrounded by transit and important cultural institutions. Berklee has a combination of owned and leased properties; only one of the buildings on campus was designed for its current uses. Every other building was designed for a different purpose and retrofitted to accommodate the needs of the college. The Master Plan represents a concerted effort to match campus needs with appropriate facilities, and requires looking at existing facilities in different ways.

- Academic space; becoming state-of-the-art especially with technology
- New performance space to connect better to surrounding community
- Student housing: of 4,000 students, Berklee only houses 800 and would like to house 2,000 (50% of overall enrollment)
- Administrative/office space

Berklee would ideally focus new growth and presence in the vicinity of the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Boylston Street, and gather supporting functions nearby along those two streets. Because student housing is such a large issue, Berklee intended to locate sites for housing within a reasonable walking distance of that core.

- 168 Mass Ave, site acquired in 2009 – mixed-use, including student housing
- 161-171 Mass Ave, existing buildings to be substantially rehabilitated with an addition to the west
- Berklee Crossroads – mixed-use, including world-class performance space, student life, residence hall

### Berklee Crossroads

The Berklee Crossroads proposal would provide space for 450 new student beds. The existing buildings currently house the Berklee Performance Center (BPC), so it would need to be replaced and upgraded in the new facility. The current BPC shape is too long and narrow, inhibiting performance capabilities. Berklee intends for a large indoor space to be open to the public wrapping around Massachusetts Avenue

and Boylston Street at the ground floor. The building will also contain student life spaces including a fitness center. The current buildings present challenges and a “hole” in the streetscape; this project presents an opportunity to improve that area.

Mr. Grissino displayed a graphic showing the Crossroads massing concepts:

- Transitional height from points east
- Lower portion/podium is set on a scale to be directly related to existing buildings and future planned development on air rights parcels.
- Residential tower is deeply set back from the street

### 168 Massachusetts Avenue

Clifford Gayley of William Rawn Associates presented some basic information about the proposal. The site is located between Belvidere and Saint Germain Streets on the east side of Massachusetts Avenue. The mixed-use program for the space includes 350 new beds, a dining hall with 400 seats, music technology space in the basement, ground-floor retail, and support spaces for the rest of the building. There are two architectural goals: to make this a Berklee building, and to do it in a way that connects with the pedestrian street fabric.

Plans also include improvement to the adjacent Berklee property at 150 Massachusetts Avenue, including removal of the ground-floor addition to the Belvidere Street elevation of the building, creating a more open entry and sidewalk on Belvidere Street. The design of 168 also includes an additional five feet of sidewalk along Massachusetts Avenue to allow for easier pedestrian travel and a nicer frontage for the retail space on the ground floor.

The dining will be located on the second and third floors, designed to incorporate “caf show” student performances, including a balcony for concert viewing from the second level.

Above the dining are 12 levels of housing with double-height lounges joining every other floor together. The zoning height of the building is ~195’; podium is 65’. This includes 16 stories plus a penthouse at the top.

### Questions

Hugh Gelch introduced himself as the owner of 11 Belvidere Street, the property adjacent to the east of 168 Massachusetts Avenue. The building is a typical 4-story Back Bay bow front primarily home to professionals. He raised several concerns about the project proposal.

- It’s not clear what the eastern elevation of the building will look like.
- Concern about the Berklee “beach” and student activity/smoking moving around the corner onto Belvidere street.
- The loading dock is immediately adjacent to 11 Belvidere.
- Four parking spaces are being removed on Belvidere Street.

- Concern about further rental of spaces on Belvidere Street for loading and move-in.
- By as-of-right zoning, the site could go 45 feet up with an FAR of 2, while 11 Belvidere is 50 feet tall. With Large Project Review, 75 feet with FAR of 4. Looked like the shadow studies implied that the entire building could be in shadow. With design, how might that be minimized?
- In the sound studies, the closest sound monitor was a quarter of the way down St. Cecilia Street. More detail is needed on the sound effects at 11 Belvidere.

Mr. Autler requested that Mr. Gelch submit a comment letter with his concerns.

Mr. Gayley pointed out that the pedestrian width of the sidewalk on the other side of Belvidere would be set back as well.

A resident at 149 Massachusetts Avenue said he shared Mr. Gelch's concerns. He also pointed out that the aerial perspective was intended to make the building look smaller in relation to its neighborhood context. Ms. Rideout pointed out that the neighborhood is also a residential neighborhood; Church Park, Carillon building, Edgerly Road apartments. Mr. Horn responded that that is why there is a push to get students into dormitory housing.

Rosaria Salerno, a resident of 149 Massachusetts Avenue, commented that dormitories could be farther away from campus, rather than having the "bookends" proposed at the Crossroads and 168 Massachusetts Avenue. She also expressed concern about the density of students in the neighborhood, and commented that in the past, Berklee has occupied buildings that already existed in the neighborhood context (including the recent example of 7 Haviland Street). Her opinion is that the proposed building is out of place in the neighborhood and will significantly change it.

Mr. Whitney thanked the speakers and asked to respond to several of the concerns.

- Re: loading and deliveries, Berklee is moving the dining hall across the street from 150 Mass Ave, so there will not be a significant increase in the number of deliveries to that area. The college is also creating indoor loading as opposed to curbside.
- Parking spaces to be removed are metered spaces, not resident spaces.
- Move-in would be on Massachusetts Avenue, not Belvidere.
- We appreciate that there are many residential properties; it is also quite a commercial street as well. We understand the concerns. To the point of changing the character of the neighborhood – right now, all the students who live in this dormitory presently go to Berklee. Plan to keep enrollment in the 4,000 range. 350 of the students would be in this location overnight, but during the day, there would be roughly the same population at this location.
- Trying to respond to city policy of creating student housing and have been working with the Task Force for four years. Berklee has looked at many sites

adjacent to and farther away from Berklee. These are the two properties we control that would be appropriate for dormitories.

An audience member asked: what are the consequences of these properties becoming tax-exempt? Mr. Autler responded that all three properties are currently owned by Berklee, and thus already are tax-exempt. The alternative would be the consequences of building less on these sites and then acquiring currently taxable properties.

Rep. Walz followed up on Mr. Gelch's earlier comment about the eastern façade. She had asked at an earlier Task Force meeting that 168 Massachusetts Avenue be designed to consider all four sides. She asked to see a west-facing elevation. Mr. Gayley responded that Berklee has shown at elevational views from all four sides at three prior Task Force meetings. There is a notch that goes up the eastern side of the building specially designed to help the appearance on that side. The fourth floor has glass wrapping around all four sides, including along Belvidere. This elevation is available in graphics 12.1-3 and 12.1-4 in the Project Notification Form.

An audience member asked if the dining hall would be a public space, since it would be visible and inviting from the street. Mr. Whitney said that yes, the Berklee dining hall is now and is planned to remain open to the public, including for student performances.

An audience member asked if Berklee is planning to provide window treatments for the students. She was concerned with the way windows have been used by students in the past. Mr. Gayley responded that yes, Berklee will provide them, and that at one of the firm's Northeastern project had even more glass without any problems to date. Berklee is investigating whether there's some translucent zone of the glass that would allow daylight but some privacy.

An audience member noted that she had heard that this project went to the Boston Civic Design Commission. She was wondering how much the design might change based on the comments they made. Mr. Gayley responded that the BCDC were very supportive of the project and very interested in how we developed the podium and streetscape, and how the double-height lounges might evolve into a place where music could happen. They were supportive of the design that we had presented. We're currently looking at stone and metal as a cladding material and they encouraged us to go towards the metal.

Ellen Shortell mentioned the elevation showing the back of the building showing no windows where the kitchen mechanicals are. Mr. Gayley responded that indeed there was one windowless floor on that side which houses program not appropriate for windows. Rep. Walz agreed that looking out at a blank wall 10 feet away would be unpleasant for the residents at 11 Belvidere Street. Mr. Gayley countered that perhaps a bedroom window wouldn't want to be looking right into a kitchen

window. There being no further public comments, Mr. Autler closed the public meeting.

### **Task Force Meeting**

Mr. Autler reminded the Task Force that comments on the IMP are due by April 19, ideally in a PDF attached to an e-mail, but all forms of submission are acceptable.

Ms. Rideout commented that this is a crucial period and urged other comments to be brought forward during the meeting. She asked Mr. Autler how often comments have any meaningful effect on the Article 80 process. Mr. Autler responded that they have a dramatic effect, and that he hopes everyone on the Berklee Task Force feels like after four years their feedback has had an impact. Things like the loading and building design on Belvidere Street are taken very seriously and will continue to be addressed throughout this review period, at the end of which will be a BRA board meeting, likely in May. Berklee has a goal of opening this building in Fall 2013 and so needs approval this spring or summer. Mr. Autler pointed out that if at the end of the comment period there are major concerns and little or no public support for the IMP, in that case the BRA would re-evaluate the appropriateness of a board hearing.

Ms. Ashbrook on behalf of the Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay had asked for some supplemental information. With regards to the shadow studies, NABB is concerned about the shadow on the mall and would like to see the specific effects of the Crossroads without the inclusion of the unbuilt projects. Mr. Grissino responded that there is already no overlap with other unbuilt projects in those particular shadow studies in the IMP, and that December 21 is the worst-case scenario with the shadow falling on the mall for an hour and a half in the morning. He pointed out that most of this shadow falls on inaccessible areas to pedestrians, so really the focus should be on the effects on people walking in the area.

### 168 Massachusetts Avenue Design Update

Mr. Gayley showed the existing west elevation of the proposed project. Berklee is considering both stone and metal as façade material for the residential tower. The stone, as the Task Force has seen before, is a warm buff with a range of tones and a coursing pattern that is horizontal and varied.

Mr. Gayley also showed new and larger images of other metal facades. This material is given a permanent color and refracts light. It does have some tonal variation. The Boston Civic Design Commission urged Berklee to try to use this material; the college is currently studying whether the budget could accommodate it. The Neiman Marcus building in Natick, MA, which was constructed with this façade material and some variation in the metal color. As the photos displayed, the light reflection is more subtle than one would expect.

Ms. Ashbrook asked if the material holds up over time. Mr. Gayley responded that it is stainless steel, and the Neiman Marcus building has been up for 4 or 5 years without noticeable aging. Berklee also plans to have punched windows; 168 Mass Ave will have to be constructed to a higher standard than the Neiman Marcus building.

Rep. Walz asked if there was another view that has windows. There isn't; Mr. Gayley responded that Berklee will have to find appropriate solutions to the technical issues associated with windows.

Mr. Kreie asked about the appearance of the window frames. Mr. Gayley responded that the frames would likely be aluminum in a color sympathetic to the stainless color.

### Discussion

Ms. Rideout asked about NABB's request for supplemental information. Mr. Whitney responded to the question about the effects of removing unbuilt projects from the wind studies. Berklee has gotten a letter from its technical consultant on the matter. The consultant's conclusion is that without the other projects conditions are a little better at the site of the Berklee projects; generally impacts are localized. Prevailing winds are from the northwest, and these other buildings are located to the east and the south and have little effect on these properties.

Mr. Whitney also acknowledged that NABB had asked for graphics showing both the zoning and overall heights of the buildings; Berklee will send that information along with the requested shadow studies.

Mr. Grissino pointed out that for the Crossroads, we have assumed a 20' mechanical height that has been part of all of the analyses. Ms. Rideout asked if that meant the building would be two stories higher. Mr. Autler explained to the group that zoning height doesn't include mechanicals, so additional height is not occupiable floor space, and that every analysis shown to date has included the height of the mechanicals.

Ms. Mainzer-Cohen asked if Berklee is planning on covering the mechanicals. There will be an enclosed mechanical floor, and on the upper floor the outdoor equipment will be behind a screen wall. Some concern about one of the Northeastern buildings looking like an "unmade bed."

Ms. Ashbrook was wondering if there was another round of feedback and document production at this point. Mr. Autler responded that this process is typical, and if issues can be addressed within the expanded PNF process, they should be. Not necessarily sending Berklee back to do a Draft Project Impact Report.

Ms. Brilliant asked if the Task Force is working on a joint letter, since the comments are due soon. Mr. Autler suggested that while the Task Force might not all share a unanimous opinion, it can present different opinions, whether each person submits their own letter or each member contributes to a single letter.

Ms. Rideout said she thinks it is important to present some larger unified opinions, perhaps with some dissents. Ms. Mainzer-Cohen responded that it's important to have enough balance; there's a lot of support for Berklee's projects but the meetings usually focus on the concerns. Ms. Hunt asked if individuals could send e-mails with their opinions, and Ms. Shortell said she would be willing to take people's drafts and synthesize them.

Ms. Simons inquired if the removal of the façade addition at 150 Mass Ave would happen concurrently with the construction of 168 Mass Ave. Mr. Whitney responded that plans are not yet confirmed, but that he hopes it can be done by the time 168 opens.

Mr. Pendleton asked when Berklee first occupied 150 Mass Ave, and that he didn't recall the building looking like that when the hotel was there. Mr. Whitney responded that Berklee may have put the granite around it, but older photographs indicate that there was an external structure predating Berklee. Ms. Mainzer-Cohen commented that the Back Bay Association may have some historical photos of the building.

Mr. Pendleton commented that Berklee has been pretty supportive of small businesses, and asked if the college would try to bring back the current tenants at 168 Mass Ave after construction. Mr. Whitney responded that Berklee hasn't formulated a specific strategy at this time.

The discussion was opened to further questions from the audience.

*What is Berklee's current system of meal plans, and what are its plans for the future dining hall?*

Mr. Whitney responded that current dining hall has approximately 250 seats and uses an "All You Care to Eat" system. The new dining hall would have 400 seats, but would use the same meal plans, which would be available to resident and non-resident students. The dining hall is open to the public, and non-affiliates can pay a fixed amount for each meal. There may be some cash sales during caf shows.

*Currently, does Berklee not have its own dormitory?*

Mr. Whitney responded that Berklee has three dormitories currently: 98 Hemenway Street (100 beds), 150 Massachusetts Avenue (400 beds), and 270 Commonwealth Avenue (250 beds). One of the goals stated in the master plan is to add 1,200 beds to the existing 800 or so. The proposed IMP projects achieve two-thirds of that goal.

*Are there residential buildings that Berklee does not own with high-density student occupancy?*

The attendees did not know the answer to this question.

Mr. Pendleton asked if anyone had heard from residents of Saint Germain Street. Mr. Autler said that none of the recommended contacts had been interested, and that it is generally difficult to get participation from those residents since they are mostly rental tenants.

Ms. Ashbrook expressed surprise to be hearing from Belvidere Street so late, and wondered if the Task Force could do a better job of outreach.

The Task Force agreed on the following next steps:

- Ms. Shortell will take the original comment letter and collect up-to-date comments from Task Force members.
- Ms. Rideout, Ms. Ashbrook, and Ms. Shortell will draft a comment letter.
- Berklee will respond to the informational requests from NABB, including mechanical height measurements, wind comments, and shadow studies.

*What does the language on page 5-38 regarding for-profit and non-profit use mean?*

Mr. Whitney responded that in the future, it is possible that Berklee will use a model similar to Northeastern's and partner with a developer to build a dormitory. He said that Berklee has no intention of creating a loophole and that the language is not meant for Berklee to sell property for another use. Berklee will work with the legal staff at the BRA to achieve the desired flexibility in some revised language.

Rep. Walz suggested that the next Task Force meeting include discussion of the questions raised at this meeting, and that if comment letters have been received by April 4 it would be helpful to see those as well.

An audience member commented that with regards to the wind, he expected that the BRA should ultimately be the evaluator of the analyses, and that the conversation about any technical issues should not be between the Task Force and the developer. The BRA provided input to create the wind study model.

**Next meeting:** Monday, April 4  
6:00-8:00 PM, Glass Orientation Room, Boston Public Library (Copley)

*Submitted by Rebecca Blum*