

Minutes

Urban Design & Massing Subcommittee

April 23, 2021 1:00 PM

Held remotely via Zoom

Subcommittee members (in attendance noted by Y/N):

John VanScoyoc, Chair	Y	Tom Nally	Y
Joe Gaudino	Y	Carlos Ridruejo	Y
Deborah Brown	Y	Mark Zarrillo	Y
Wendy Friedman	Y		

Staff present: Kara Brewton

Meeting materials included: “Conceptual sketches for Boylston Place” (K. Brewton, 4-23-21)

Kara Brewton reviewed a concept for the three parcels between Cypress Street and Boylston Place, including parking infrastructure that could likely be partially open air, accessed from the back of Boylston Place, upstream of the existing residential garage entrance.. She reviewed the desire to keep sight lines from the existing condo buildings, driving the idea of two separate building masses. She also looked at the minimum distance between the existing Boylston Place condos as 45’, and using that as a reference of minimum distance between the existing condo buildings and any new buildings. Finally, she noted the idea of trying to keep a significant setback from the corner of Boylston & Cypress Street (28’ from Boylston Street curb), as the existing Madris building was not likely to change, and with the all-direction pedestrian signal, it would be nice to have a significant pedestrian refuge at this corner of the intersection.

She had at an earlier meeting proposed a height between 40 and 63 feet and FAR of 1.6, and the Subcommittee had recommended going higher to five or six stories, and to consider connecting the buildings on the first two stories. Kara showed an updated sketch, which could be a FAR of about 3.0, and could either be a residential building of about 64 units or an option where the first two floors were office or retail (40,000 sq. ft.) and then approximately 41 residential units in the upper floors. Setbacks from Cypress Street would occur at the 3rd floor and 6th floor, and from Boylston Place on the 6th floor. A third iteration is 59 units and 20,000 sq. ft. of retail/office on the ground floor, with the northern massing limited to five stories, approximately lining up with the historic brick building that was raised on Cypress Street. Upon request of the Subcommittee, Kara did look at potentially keeping the gas station but not the auto repair shop, however, access to underground gas tanks wrap around the site, making that scenario not likely.

Subcommittee members discussed the importance of having pedestrian access to the building from Boylston and Cypress, and the idea of screening the vertical dropoff between Cypress and the alleyway below. They also discussed how the 20 Boylston Street redevelopment has very little sidewalk width, and that they liked the wider building setbacks proposed here. Carlos noted that with wider public ways, careful design needs to consider space between different users – he was especially disappointed with the railings recently put in between the cycle track and

pedestrian path near the bus stop. Kara suggested we could do a cross-section showing this site compared to the pedestrian feeling at 2/4 Brookline Place.

Kara then showed a study of the Valvoline/ Dunkin' Donuts site. She took Carlos' earlier suggestion that the tree canopy area facing Cameron Street be viewable from Route 9, and connecting that open space through where there is a parking lot today. This concept also shows an additional three-family building on the eastern corner of the site, acting as a bookend to the 1-3 family stretch of the existing neighborhood. The proposed sketch contemplates parking access from the western edge of the site, with a 15' minimum sidewalk/ tree canopy zone along Boylston Street. This study results in a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of about 2.0, with approximately 26 housing units and 18 parking space, with a small amount (2,200 sq. ft.) of retail on the ground floor. This example would be six floors over a parking level partially open to the air.

Joe Gaudino wasn't certain that having a through-view between Cameron and Boylston Street was beneficial; that having a building block the noise would be helpful. Kara then showed a second concept of two building massings with only 30' in between. This could possibly include office/ medical office condos (e.g., attorneys, psychologists, etc.), given the small 6,000 sq. ft. floorplate; however, even then the parcel isn't deep enough to accommodate the parking likely needed for a primarily commercial site. Tom Nally agreed that primarily residential uses here probably made sense. The big takeaway here is that the existing zoning is 1.0, and that the site could handle a FAR of 2.0. However, Subcommittee members noted that six floors may need to step down to less floors in the northern part of the lot.

John VanScoyoc noted that any redevelopment here should require the preservation of the open space closest to Cameron Street, and Carlos Ridruejo noted that the additional FAR should only be permitted closest to Boylston Street. Kara also thought that showing what a redevelopment could look like under the existing zoning, including tree canopy removal, would be an important analysis for everyone to understand.

Mark Zarrillo noted that in addition to affordable housing units, it would be interested to see if there was a way of providing more affordable office space, like for architects or other sole practitioners. Wendy Friedman added that this concept could be utilized for public-facing small business as well.

Subcommittee members noted that such an open space might be more of a pass-through pocket park than a programmed park like at the end of Cameron Street.

Kara then reviewed work that Tom Nally showed earlier for the Madris site, where an appropriate FAR may be between 2 and 2.7.

Kara then showed the massing proposed by the MIT student study, and although in the text they proposed a FAR of 2.0, the actual building mass was likely closer to 1.4, and even then was likely taller than residents on Walnut Street would accept, given the closeness of the existing and proposed building massing. She believed a FAR of closer to 1.2 would be the maximum that would work well here.

Looking at the whole corridor, Kara noted that she thought the Subcommittee should consider:

- Changing the Industrial district where condos are to the adjacent CAM use (same FAR)
- The Madris site and the 9th grade academy building site possibly going from L-0.5 to G-2.0
- Possibly allowing FAR up to 3.0 for the Madris site and Boylston Place parcels, adjacent to Cypress Street.

Kara noted that additional study was still needed east of Boylston Playground and the Old Lincoln School. Carlos agreed that portion especially needed to be studied in section.

Carlos also noted that any new building in this corridor should likely be fossil fuel free.

Deborah Brown offered that she would ask an architect on the BIC Board to look at a concept for their property and possibly including either adjacent parcel up to three stories.

Mark Zarrillo noted that for Boylston Street itself, he envisions in the middle a median with landscaping as the more residential nature of the corridor.

Meeting adjourned.