

Minutes

Boylston Street Corridor Study Committee

August 9, 2021 12:00PM

Held remotely via Zoom

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

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

Staff & consultants present: Kara Brewton

Meeting materials included: agenda

Guests included: Charles Osborne, Lisa Soltani, Danny Danesh, Jennifer Dopazo Gilbert, Jonathan Klein, Paul Saner, Deane Coady, Kimberley Richardson, Arran French, Fred Perry

John VanScoyoc opened the meeting, noting that it was being held remotely on the Zoom platform due to COVID, and after checking that all participants' audio/video were working well, and Kara announced that the meeting was being recorded.

Thinking Big

John noted that today Deborah Brown will challenge the group to “Think Big” with three questions:

1. How different do we want the street to look in 20-50 years?
2. How does our zoning accommodate this change?
3. What do we do along this stretch of Boylston as a template for redesigning Brookline and bringing Brookline into the future?

Deborah Brown shared a variety of ideas with the group in a written document prior to the meeting and reviewed those ideas/recommendations in a verbal presentation. Highlights from her presentation are below:

- Identified need to make permitting more efficient, perhaps creating a “one-stop permitting” system. Acknowledged that this is not the purview of this Committee, but still relevant as the Bulfinch development [proposed at 10 Brookline Place] is, for the most part, perceived as a model project.
- For this project, it is essential to establish anchors so the corridor can become dynamic and iconic. We need to think bigger than a 2.0-2.5 FAR – are there additional financing or density bonuses for affordable housing, etc.? Can we create a multi-family district along the corridor? The Mobil and Audi sites could support multifamily development and higher Floor Area Ratio (FAR), as well as green space.
- Assert that the Town should consider use of eminent domain for sites, such as the UHaul, which are not interested in building to the “highest/best use” (i.e. FAR of 4.0+). The group did not reach consensus on the use of eminent domain as an appropriate idea.
- While the Brookline Housing Authority provides low income housing, there are many other housing needs to be met by the private market or other nonprofits
- Need to ensure that the development meets and exceeds ADA accessibility guidelines

- Incorporate the Old Lincoln School into a community center (existing in the Town but not sufficient: teen & senior center)
- The lack of income diversity along the corridor and among abutters is an issue in developing an inclusive proposal. Concerns about change should not preclude a true transformation of the site.

Conversation with the Committee Included:

Meeting the Committee’s Charge/Mission (Zoning vs. Planning):

- General consensus that there is some conflating of zoning and planning in this work/conversation. Zoning defined as a regulatory tool (a result of legislation to regulate health, safety, and welfare of development), while Planning (in this case an area plan) defines values and direction. In a plan, we think about how many units per acre, not per parcel. Does the group need to step back and create a “Plan” or can the group proceed with the zoning recommendations?
- This Committee is intended to be a planning exercise. Identified need for visual tools (do not need to be formal/professionally designed) to see how this work could be codified.
- Consideration of a sub-committee tasked with aligning Town resources and getting Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) more involved in this process. No consensus reached.
- While the Committee’s mission does mention housing, it doesn’t get specific about exact number of additional housing. “Improve Streetscape Housing – Especially for households between 100% and 120% Area Median Income, which may include preservation of existing housing stock. Strategies to increase housing rental and ownership opportunities for historically excluded populations in Town, particularly African-American and Hispanic families...”

Need for a Planning Process (Corridor & Town-Wide):

- We can’t control parking on a State road – but we can plan for what the streetscape could look like and bring MassDOT along in the coming years
- Unclear data on how much housing and commercial can be absorbed by the Corridor, and where that development should specifically be centralized
- While parcels like UHaul and Audi have made it clear they’re not looking to redevelop in the next few years, a Planning process could be beneficial to guide those sites as they navigate business, change and development along the corridor in the next 20-50 years.
- Discussion of how the Corridor could benefit from State and other funding (ex. ARPA). Outstanding need to identify relevant funding sources and associated deadlines.
- General consensus that this work need to feel “integrated” into larger planning efforts. Lack of Comprehensive Plan since 2006 makes this difficult and the Precinct Plans are minimally used.

Notes on Development:

- Potentially open to higher FAR on certain sites. General acknowledgement that specific zoning is actually more restrictive to conversation about the vision for density along the corridor
- Some outstanding concerns about 10 Brookline Place from neighbors, but feel that density is OK
- Discussion included acknowledgement that the narrowness of many parcels along the corridor makes larger development difficult, and that while it’s good to look at the larger corridor, there are some sites that are more ideal for dramatic increases in density (ex. Cypress & Boylston)

There was a general acknowledgement that this work will not be ready for fall 2021 Town Meeting. Given later timeline, the group seems to be interested in proposed two options at the Spring 2021 Town Meeting:

1. Short-Term: Present specific zoning proposals to Spring Town Meeting and identify intended outcomes from these changes.
2. Long-Term: Create a vision for the Corridor that can incorporate a future Town Master Plan and the Housing Production Plan.

Conversation with the Attendees Included:

- Charles Osborne: Posed the question of whether we are being too general. While integrated planning is needed, there is a need for a strong basis to make development decision (especially related to circulation & mobility). Discussion of immediate versus visionary possibilities and establish a clear set of criteria for decision making.

Closing

John VanScoyoc closed the meeting and noted that tonight's input would be considered in developing future agendas.

**Meeting adjourned at approximately 1:16 pm.