

# ROSLINDALE NEIGHBORHOOD STRATEGIC • PLAN

## **Community Meeting**

Thursday, November 30, 2006

6:30PM– 8:30PM

Sacred Heart School

## **Present:**

13 Advisory Group Members

Members of the Public

Alison Felix, BRA

Sue Kim, BRA

Lee Blasi, Director of Constituent Services, Councilor Consalvo

Frank Johnson, BTM

Dave McNulty, Office of Neighborhood Services

Chris Riale, CSS

Paul Bakis, Vollmer Associates

## *Presenters:*

Carole Schlessinger, CSS

Adel Foz, Vollmer Associates

Approximate Number of Attendees: 74

## **Opening Remarks**

Wayne Beitler welcomed attending members of the public and introduced Carole Schlessinger (CSS), Adel Foz (Vollmer Associates), and Sue Kim from the Boston Redevelopment Authority.

## **Presentation:**

- Project Introductions, Schedule & Recap
- Vision Summary
- Market Analysis
- Site Alternatives
- Traffic & Parking

The presentation will be made available as a .pdf file on the Roslindale Neighborhood Strategic Plan website: <http://www.cssboston.com/projects/roslindale/index.htm>

## Questions/Comments & Answers

**Comment:** Resident commented that the village boundaries chosen as part of the traffic analysis have changed since the last public presentation. The northern village boundary used to extend out to Healy Field. Now it extends only to Murray Hill Rd.

Resident believes that the traffic simulation shown during the presentation does not reflect real world conditions (on Washington St. in particular). People coming from Hyde Park, Milton, Mattapan and other points south create significant cut through traffic on Washington St. and create congestion worse than what was shown.

**Response:** Traffic counts to update baseline at additional locations could be discussed with the Advisory Group.

**Question:** Resident asked Adel if he had conducted traffic analysis at problem intersections along Beech St.

**Answer:** Adel stated that intersections along Beech St. were not studied due to Advisory Group focus on the Square. He said that at the latter half of the meeting residents would be given the opportunity to list other problem intersections/congested streets within Roslindale that should be studied.

**Comment:** Resident announced that public meetings about Forest Hills have been held in Jamaica Plain regarding neighborhood issues and that it is important that Roslindale residents attend.

**Question:** Resident believed that the traffic simulation did not reflect real world conditions on Robert St. Resident has “never seen traffic flow through the Square like that,” and questioned the accuracy of the model.

**Answer:** Adel said the data used to run the model are based on very recent traffic counts and added that the simulation was designed to illustrate the average number of trips in the peak hours only.

**Comment:** Resident commented that school buses create significant problems in the Square, far worse than what was depicted in the traffic simulation.

**Response to comment:** Adel said that the simulation reflects average peak hour traffic counts and that the buses were counted during the peak hours.

**Question:** Another resident added that, since the installation of the Charlie Ticket machines on MBTA buses, boarding takes longer than previously and asked if the simulation took that into account.

**Answer:** Adel said that the traffic counts were done within the last several weeks and so this was most likely reflected in the counts.

**Question:** A resident asked if the consultants are exploring the feasibility of closing portions of Corinth and Poplar St. in the Square and converting them into a pedestrian mall. In addition, have the consultants explored looking at changing Washington St. into a two way road through the Square.

**Answer:** The traffic analysis can look at changing Washington St. to a two-way through the Square and closing Corinth St. and Poplar St.

**Question:** Resident feels that the Roslindale Public Library needs improvement and asked if the consultants explored the feasibility of expanding the library onto the adjacent vacant gas station parcel.

**Answer:** Carole said expansion or relocation of the library has been looked at and that many alternative site plans for the expansion/rebuilding of the library onto adjacent parcels with a retail and/or residential component have been drawn. Carole added that it is very unlikely a private developer would expand/rebuild the library. The density a developer would need to make the development worth their while is far beyond what the zoning in Roslindale Square permits. Carole said that the Roslindale Neighborhood Strategic Plan could include expansion/relocation of the library as a neighborhood priority to encourage city funding for the project.

**Question:** Resident asked why mixed use development was not explored for the Ashmont parcel in the alternative redevelopment site plans presented.

**Answer:** Carole said that much of the Ashmont parcel contains dramatic topography which severely limits the amount of developable lot area. Because of the limited space, mixed use development may not be the most appropriate use for the site.

**Question:** A resident commented that many people going to the post office in the Square have no where to park. The resident asked if the consultants had taken that into account in their alternative redevelopment site plans for the gas station and funeral home site.

**Answer:** Carole said that in most of their redevelopment alternatives for the gas station and funeral home site they had provided more retail parking spaces than required by zoning. The excess spaces could potentially be used by library and/or post office users.

**Question:** A resident asked if parking garages have been looked at as potential parking solution in the Square.

**Answer:** Carole said it was not looked at but will be if that is the neighborhood's desire.

**Question:** A resident asked if there was a map of city-owned property in Roslindale.

**Answer:** The Boston Department of Neighborhood Development will produce the map and it will be posted on the project website.

**Question:** A resident asked if the sites have to be rezoned to allow for the proposed alternative redevelopment site plans.

**Answer:** Carole said the current zoning allows the proposed uses (retail and/or residential, and, in most cases, the proposed density). Some dimensional requirements would have to be changed. Limiting allowable uses could be considered to reduce the number of auto-related issues in the future.

**Question:** A resident asked if the entire block between Cummins Highway and Poplar Street in the Square would need to be cleared in order for the site to be developed.

**Answer:** Carole said no, the parcels may be developed singularly. How the block redevelops is largely the decision of the individual private owners of the parcels.

**Question:** A resident asked: if the owner of the gas station parcel decides to develop just that parcel, what is the likelihood they would be able to develop at a higher density to provide all of the residential units proposed in the alternative redevelopment site plans.

**Answer:** Carole said that the rezoning should discourage the granting of variances. There is no reason to think that the owner of one parcel would be allowed to develop the same number of residential units that here are shown for the entire block. She added that it is important to have looked at what people would like to see on the Square site to ensure that the new zoning supports that type of development.

**Question:** A resident asks what would prevent a developer from proposing an 18-story building in Roslindale.

**Answer:** Carole said that a developer can propose whatever he/she wants, but the likelihood they would be permitted to build an 18-story building in Roslindale is highly unlikely, given that the height would be significantly higher than anything in the Square or what is currently being contemplated for the new zoning.

**Question:** In response to Carole's comment that many residential areas in Roslindale are currently developed at a higher density than allowed by existing zoning regulations - a resident asks if there is a history of disregard for zoning in Roslindale.

**Answer:** Carole said no, most of the residential buildings in Roslindale were built before the current zoning (1950's) - which explains why so many do not wholly comply with existing zoning regulations.

**Comment:** A resident said she did not want the rezoning to make her home "illegal" (not conforming to new zoning standards).

**Response:** Carole said that rezoning isn't retroactive and that it only affects future development, unless someone wants to build a significant addition to their existing home.

**Question:** A resident asked if the consultant team can make any guarantees on how many variances could be granted under the rezoning.

**Answer:** Carole said no, the Zoning Board of Appeals is an independent body. Having new zoning should make the granting of variances less likely.

---

### **Questions for Smaller Groups**

At this point, participants met in small group to discuss residential zoning and other issues. Each group was given a large poster illustrating existing zoning densities (available on website). The following comments were recorded at these smaller group discussions.

*Note: Some groups did not record answers for all questions.*

#### **1. S-.5 Zone**

**Do you like the existing character of these districts? (Do you feel that this is an appropriate density for some residential neighborhoods? Do you think the setbacks and height limits are reasonable? What changes would you like to see?)**

##### *GROUP 1*

- Retain existing character in terms of:
  - Number of units
  - Setbacks
  - Lot size
  - Footprint
  - Open space
- Rezoning should reflect current situation

##### *GROUP 2*

- Nice
- No additions to houses
- Increase side setback

##### *GROUP 3*

- Maximize green space as much as possible

*GROUP 6*

- Nice one family units with yards

*GROUP 7*

- Eldon St. seems too suburban (only one family homes) but side setback (10') is too narrow

**2. R-.5 Zone**

**Do you like the existing character of these districts? (Do you feel that this is an appropriate density for some residential neighborhoods? Do you think the setbacks and height limits are reasonable? What changes would you like to see?)**

*GROUP 2*

- Increase side lot area between house and property line
- Keep backyards 40'
- Siting of a house
  - Keep uniform
  - Avoid small homes on large lots
- Two parking spaces/household
- More yard space – green areas
- More trees
- No more density
- No additions (no attic-to-apartment conversions)

*GROUP 3*

- Don't change
- Provide 1.5 – 2 off-street parking spaces/household

*GROUP 4*

- Like existing character
- Building in Square would affect life
- MBTA should take responsibly for the care of their property

*GROUP 5*

- Street character, structure placement, density all seem appropriate
- New construction should reflect existing characteristic

*GROUP 7*

- Eastbourne St. looks good
  - Front setback is OK (20')
  - Side setback (10') is too narrow

### 3. R-.8 Zone

**Do you like the existing character of these districts? (Do you feel that this is an appropriate density for some residential neighborhoods? Do you think the setbacks and height limits are reasonable? What changes would you like to see?)**

#### *GROUP 2*

- Maximum 3 stories (unlike 4040 development)
- The “lollipop” houses on Washington St. near 4040 are out of scale and too close to one another.
- Two off-street parking spaces/household
- More trees, green space
- No more density

#### *GROUP 3*

- Don't change
- Look at parking
- No habitable space above 35'
- No conversion of attic space

#### *GROUP 4*

- No more buildings
- No more density

#### *GROUP 5*

- Minimize density
- More small businesses
- Less light industry

#### *GROUP 7*

- Too dense
- 4,000 – 5,000 s.f. is a good lot size – larger lots are too suburban for Roslindale

### 4. How do you think the existing IPOD is working?

#### *GROUP 1*

- It doesn't seem to have been applied at the recent development at Clifftondale St.

#### *GROUP 5*

- One person in the group had experience with it and thought it was working

*GROUP 8*

- Working fine
- Like the notification required for neighbors

*GROUP 9*

- Too many variances being granted while IPOD in effect

**5. Are there particular new or old developments that are good examples of what you like or think could have been different in terms of character, scale or density?**

*GROUP 1*

- New Clifftondale St. development
  - Too big
- New development at Blooms & Green St./Washington St.
  - Good scale
  - Appropriate for Washington St.

*GROUP 3*

- Washington St. plans are good
- “Hancock Village – W. Roxbury”

*GROUP 5*

- New Clifftondale St. development seems appropriate in scale but appears too big because of its placement on the hill. The colors are too institutional.
- Weld St. /Robken Rd. area is nice
- Delano park

*GROUP 7*

- New development on Farquhar St. was constructed behind another house – far too crowded and no fire safety access
- 40 Coniston Rd. is taller than zoning allows – but didn’t need a variance
- 52 Selwyn St. – conversion from 2 – 3 family, most of the yard paved for parking, much is built on stilts, terrible development

*GROUP 8*

- Comfortable with residential development built over the past few years

*GROUP 9*

- Farquhar Street
  - someone was allowed to build a house, replacing a garage, on the same lot as an existing three-family house
- 200 block of Roslindale Avenue:
  - Houses with in-the-basement garages facing the street (something not seen in most of Roslindale until relatively recently). This suburban house design is not compatible with 1890's to 1930's house styles dominant in Roslindale.

- Centre St. and Weld St. townhouses are example of design that fits the neighborhood character
- “Big box” four-unit residence at the intersection of Hewlett and Selwyn Streets
  - Concerns about variances and about
  - Concerns about enforcing architectural design standards so that new houses and additions/changes to existing houses respect the style of homes in the neighborhood.
- House on Congreve Street
  - Not conforming to existing house styles on the street

**6. Are there particular streets that are good examples of what you like or don’t like in terms of character, scale or density?**

*GROUP 1*

- Keep a good variety of residential – single, two and three family homes
- Larger residential developments should be avoided.

*GROUP 3*

- Keep main streets more dense
- Preserve one, two, and three family character on side streets
- Zeller St.
- Murray Hill Rd
- South St.
- Cotton St.
- Fairview St.

*GROUP 6*

- Travel is less in Weld St./Robken Rd. – nice
- Delano Park

**7. What intersections do you think are particularly congested?**

*GROUP 1*

- Corinth St. & Washington St.
- Belgrade Ave., Robert St. & Corinth St.

*GROUP 2*

- Rowe St. & Cummins Hway
- Hyde Park Ave. & Canterbury St.
- Hyde Park Ave. & Cummins Hway
- Poplar St. & Metropolitan Ave.
- Washington St. & Metropolitan Ave.

- Washington St. & W. Roxbury Pkway (dangerous traffic lane configuration – two lefts, one straight)

*GROUP 3*

- Beech St., Washington St. & Walworth St.
- Florence St. & Cummins Hway
- Timing of lights at Walter St. & Robert St.

*GROUP 4*

- Corinth St. & Washington St. (treacherous for motorists & pedestrians)

*GROUP 5*

- Beech St., Washington St. & Walworth St.
- Florence St. – parking is not enforced near Healy Field
- Roslindale Square streets – light timing issues

*GROUP 6*

- Rowe St. & Cummins Hway
- Washington St. & Beech St.
- Washington St. & Kittredge St.
- Want designated truck routes
- Too many large trucks on Sycamore St., Rowe St.

*GROUP 7*

- Weld St. & Walter St.
- Centre St. & Walter St.
- Basile St., Murray Hill Rd., Bexley Rd., & Firth Rd. should be studied more
- Simulation doesn't reflect reality
- Washington St. from Beech St. to Square is congested

*GROUP 8*

- Walter St. in AM is congested, school buses a large problem
- Robert St. into the Square is congested

*Circled on zoning map as problem intersections:*

- Corinth St., Poplar St. & Washington St.
- Metropolitan Ave. & Washington St.
- Metropolitan Ave. & Poplar St.
- Fairview St. & South Conway St.

**8. Are there particular areas where parking is particularly difficult?**

*GROUP 1*

- Post Office
- Community center
- Library

*GROUP 4*

- Post office
- Library

*GROUP 5*

- Roslindale Square
- Commuters may be parking in the Taft Hill lot during the week
- Post office
- Library

*GROUP 6*

- Roslindale Village
- Rowe St., Seymour St.
- Stelman Rd., Firth Rd.

*GROUP 8*

- Need more parking spaces in the Square
- Need more parking on “my” residential street

**9. Are there specific improvements that would encourage you to walk, bike or use transit more often (for example, new sidewalks on specific streets)?**

*GROUP 1*

- Sunday transit service
- Concentrate on improvements for pedestrians and bicyclists
- Safer crosswalks
- More street trees
- Better regulation of existing traffic lanes
- Don't place bike lanes adjacent to parked cars

*GROUP 2*

- Improve Washington St. from Healy Field to Forest Hills – difficult to bicycle

*GROUP 4*

- Safe bike route to Boston and to hospitals

*GROUP 5*

- Extend MBTA Orangeline to Dedham Mall
- Provide bike lanes on Washington, Belgrade, American Legion and Hyde Park Ave

*GROUP 7*

- Bike lanes should be developed where possible

*GROUP 8*

- Enhance pedestrian realm
- More bike lanes

*GROUP 9*

- More and well placed bike racks in the Square

**10. Other comments?**

*GROUP 2*

- Provide two off-street parking spaces/household
- More trees
- Uniform building heights
- Maintain character
- No more density
- Put in two green arrow signals on Poplar for motorists traveling onto Washington Street or across Washington to Poplar. Install red arrows.

*GROUP 3*

- No large retail stores
- Keep the Square the way it is
- Provide parking at Lil Peach/School
- More green space
- Lighting that avoids light pollution
- Trash improvement
- Beautifying the square – brick sidewalks

*GROUP 4*

- Variances too common
- Robert St. – new buildings in over congested area
- Two off-street parking spaces/dwelling
- Listen to neighborhood concerns
- More downtown greenspace & playgrounds
- Library needs improvement
- Density still a concern

#### *GROUP 5*

- Question validity of conducting traffic study pre/post holiday
- Two off-street parking spaces/household would keep streets more accessible and encouraging for pedestrians to use
- Be mindful of developers buying multiple contiguous lots and consolidating for high density development
- No major chains in the Square

#### *GROUP 6*

- Want designated truck routes
- Too many large trucks on Sycamore, Rowe St.

#### *GROUP 7*

- Should have two parking spaces/household
- More affordable housing for middle/low incomes
- Less on-street parking and more off-street – provide garages or lots instead so bike lanes and travel lanes can be wider
- Better city oversight and enforcement of building codes and structural engineering standards
- ZBA must enforce zoning
- Want someone from ZBA to be at next community meeting

#### *GROUP 8*

- Fridays in the Square (especially afternoons) are “brutal”
- MBTA buses don’t always pull up to the curbs and therefore block traffic
- MBTA substation has no historical value
- If it could be reused (apartments) then keep it
- Don’t like idea of residential units mixed with commercial property in the Square
- Concerned about traffic mixed use development may bring
- Don’t like commercial space built at back of sidewalk for parcel between MBTA substation and library
- No problem with parking in the Square
- Require greenspace on every block
- Moved to Roslindale because of walkability – don’t really need a car
- Preserve character of Roslindale by not allowing residential developments of more than four stories
- Would like to see larger lot requirements for houses
- Like the general direction that things are going in Roslindale

#### *GROUP 9*

- Traffic on Washington Street (inbound to Forest Hills) can back up at times as far (from Roslindale Square) as Beech Street.
- 1.5 off-street parking spaces per housing unit is not an adequate parking allowance; 2 off-street parking spaces per unit should be the minimum

amount of parking required.

- Want the number of off-street parking spaces required per unit to reflect accurately the expected number of driving age residents in a unit
- Some residents park car(s) on the street and virtually never move the parked car. Also, some residents manage to take up multiple spaces through their creative approach to parking
- People park on sidewalks, which interferes with a pedestrian's ability to walk on the sidewalk. Boston Police Department actually responds to calls about such illegal parking.
- Object to "shoehorning" houses onto lots
- ZBA grants variances for anything anywhere
- Control permitted heights of buildings - two stories plus attic as the allowable height
- Wondering if zoning code should be modified to reflect the reality of what exists today.
- Want the ZBA to grant fewer variances.
- Two family homes in single family zone - acknowledge and control it
- Preserve open space
- Desire for design guidelines - something that would respect existing styles of homes in the area while allowing something more than just replication of existing house designs.
- Allow for an architectural review of new projects
- Plans for library site are too dense
- Do something with the T Building (some people like the building and would regret seeing it torn down, but people were not adamant that the building remain as is.
- Concern about traffic and parking issues associated with residential development on the block from library to T Building.
- Like retail on the first floor
- Retain existing neighborhood density
- Establish maximum height allowed (three stories - as above, two stories and attic)
- People like the neighborhood convenience stores (L-1 zones) but want more attractive window grates
- Signage controls are appropriate.
- Character of Roslindale is "about right"
- Landscaping standards and green space requirements are desirable
- Concern about non-profit to private land transactions, such as sale of church properties, and lack of control over what happens to the lots involved (churches built to support local congregations who walked to services are sold either to congregations with no roots in the community creating traffic and parking issues or to developers who want to build more densely than neighborhood zoning permits).