

ROSLINDALE NEIGHBORHOOD STRATEGIC • PLAN

Advisory Group Meeting
Tuesday, February 13, 2007
6:30PM – 8:30pm
Stony Brook Commons

Present:

9 Advisory Group Members
Alison Felix, BRA
Sue Kim, BRA
Frank Johnson, BTD
Dave McNulty, Office of Neighborhood Services
Lee Blasi, Director of Constituent Services, Councilor Consalvo
Carole Schlessinger, CSS
Chris Riale, CSS

Number of attendees: 16

I. Opening Remarks

Wayne Beitler announced that several Advisory Group (AG) members met over the weekend to discuss goals for the next community meeting and that a summary of the discussion was e-mailed to AG members. Wayne asked if there were any questions regarding the discussion.

Members agreed to discuss this issue later on in the meeting.

Sue Kim described the handouts distributed by the BRA to AG members prior to the start of the meeting. The handouts include background information regarding variance exemptions in residential zoning and sustainability.

II. Follow-up Residential Zoning Discussion/Parking, Carole Schlessinger, CSS

Carole stated that the following main residential zoning issues will be discussed:

1. Alternative zoning options to address existing nonconforming parcels
 - Retain existing zoning regulations; and
 - Change the existing zoning regulations to reduce the number of nonconforming parcels

2. Residential parking ratio
3. Exemption from ZBA process for minor property modifications
4. Height regulations

An AG member said that Roslindale residents like the neighborhood's existing character and do not want to change it.

Carole responded by saying that changing minimum lot sizes, for example, would make a high percentage of lots conforming and that this would not change the character of Roslindale.

An AG member asked why they should consider reducing the minimum lot size. Carole responded by saying that reducing the minimum lot size to reflect existing lot size composition would make many of the numerous existing nonconforming lots conforming and it would allow property owners to develop homes consistent with existing homes and parcel sizes.

An AG member pointed out that the existing undeveloped lots provide open space for the neighborhood.

An AG member felt that it is important to convey the existing level of nonconformity in the new zoning. He said that he would like to have some confidence that the ZBA will follow the community's vision in the new zoning code.

Dave McNulty commented that neighbors also provide input to the ZBA.

An AG member responded by saying that if the ZBA relies on input from neighbors to come to a decision on a case, then the ZBA is not doing its job.

Dave said that neighbor input is one source of information the ZBA uses to inform their decision.

Lee Blasi said that several people that attended prior community meetings voiced concerns regarding private property owners subdividing their residential lots into lots smaller than the required minimum lot size, ultimately resulting in the loss of private open space. This results in the degradation of Roslindale's physical character.

An AG member said that they would like new zoning that protects the community. He said that rezoning to match what's there will "lower the bar" in terms of dimensional regulations (e.g. lowering the minimum lot size requirements).

Sue said that the BRA and the consultants have looked at lowering the minimum lot size requirement, and after discussions with AG members, it is understood that this alternative

may be problematic. The BRA is continuing to explore recommendations for preserving open space such as increasing side setback requirements and introducing lot coverage maximums and useable open space minimums.

Sue said that the new zoning text can be written to allow alterations to existing homes while disallowing occupancy expansions, as is seen in the South End zoning text example handed out to AG members at the start of the meeting.

An AG member commented that that may not necessarily prevent illegal occupancy expansions, such as converting a basement into a rentable unit.

Dave said that a preexisting nonconformity may not necessarily preclude the granting of a variance.

An AG member said that enforcement is a major issue here and across the state. The member felt that Roslindale should have stricter design standards and would like this to be addressed in the new zoning.

Lee said that design review under the IPOD have made a significant difference in the design of new development. This is due in part to submitters recognizing that they cannot “get away” with bad design and cheap materials under the IPOD regulations.

Lee commented that strict design review regulations, like those found in the IPOD, can be written into the new zoning.

Dave said he has seen less badly designed projects as long as the IPOD has been in effect.

One AG member said that reducing minimum lot sizes would make it easier to develop affordable housing.

Carole reminded AG members that affordable housing is discussed in the draft plan as moderately priced housing, not low income housing.

An AG member asked what triggers a neighborhood meeting regarding a proposed, as-of-right residential development under the IPOD. Sue responded by saying that the BRA notifies abutters (within 300 feet) by mail. Landowners/developers are encouraged to engage the public and hold meetings if the project has a significant visual impact.

Sue then reminded the AG members of the four main residential zoning items to be addressed:

- Minimum lot size
- Dimensional regulations
- Parking ratio
- Building heights

The AG reached a consensus that the members do not want minimum lot sizes to be changed.

An AG member said that the South End zoning text example described earlier is exactly what he would like to see in Roslindale's new zoning. The member also commented that many times variances are not sought by landowners that want to upgrade their home simply because of the hardship the variance process causes.

An AG member asked if all members would agree on having a design review process written into the new zoning for projects requiring a variance. Carole and Sue explained that that process is in the existing zoning. It was then asked if a design review process for "as-of-right" projects is feasible. Sue responded that although design review of "as-of-right" projects occurs under the new IPOD, it is not clear how that can happen as part of the permanent zoning. She will examine options.

Carole said that design guidelines will be written and incorporated into the strategic plan.

Sue said the BRA and consultants will conduct more research regarding design guidelines and will determine an acceptable level of detail. She then requested the discussion be shifted to parking ratios.

Frank Johnson said that 2.0 parking spaces per residential unit would be a rational residential parking ratio to incorporate into the new zoning (as was considered to be appropriate by AG members and members of the public). Sue and Frank said that the ratio can be listed as a maximum.

Dave said that listing the residential parking ratio as a maximum implies that the developer may provide less than 2.0 parking spaces per residential unit, which may be problematic and not in line with the community's desire. Sue said that the BRA and BTD will conduct further research on this issue.

Carole then discussed residential building height requirements. She asked all AG members if they find the following residential height maximums to be acceptable:

- 1 & 2 family subdistricts: 2.5 stories and 35 feet
- 3 & multifamily subdistricts: 3 stories and 35 feet

AG members generally agreed that these height maximums are acceptable for residential subdistricts.

An AG member asked for someone to explain the details regarding the 2.5 story and 35 foot height requirement. The half story includes habitable space above the second floor and below the roof (attic space). The building height refers to the vertical distance from grade to the top of the highest point of the roof beams of a flat roof, or the mean level of the highest gable or of the slope of the hip roof.

Dave said that lot grade and peaked roofs make houses look taller and more dominant than they really are.

An AG member pointed out that this requirement would likely “flatten” the design of peaked roofs, which are very common in Roslindale.

An AG member commented that the 35 foot requirement should refer to the height of a roof’s peak.

An AG member asked if it is required that a residential building be a maximum of 2.5 stories *or* 35 feet tall or a maximum of 2.5 stories *and* 35 feet tall.

Dave confirmed that the residential height maximum should read as 2.5 stories *and* 35 feet tall.

III. Open Space Discussion, Carole Schlessinger, CSS

DRAFT Open Space Recommendations

Carole explained that the key recommendation is to rezone all publicly owned open spaces as open space subdistricts so they are permanently protected (e.g. Urban Wild Open Space (OS-UW) Subdistricts, Parkland Open Space (OS-P) Subdistricts, etc.). Carole recommended that privately owned open space be designated as Conservation Protection Subdistricts (CPS). Carole presented a map that identified existing open space in the IPOD and recommended open space zoning subdistricts for each (see DRAFT Recommended Open Space Zoning Subdistricts in 2.13.07 Presentation Boards - available on the project website). Other recommendations included improving railroad pedestrian underpasses along Belgrade Avenue. An AG member commented that the underpass near the Roslindale Square MBTA commuter rail station is well-used and would benefit from improvements. The member suggested that funds be devoted to this underpass before other less-used underpasses along Belgrade Avenue.

The Southwest Garden Club operates a community garden on several parcels of land at the northeast corner of the Rowe Street/Cummins Highway intersection on land owned by the MBTA. A deed restriction on the property which allows the garden club to operate will expire in 2011. The Boston Natural Areas Network (BNAN) has expressed an interest in trying to protect the garden in perpetuity and considers the garden “at risk” because it is only temporarily protected. It is recommended that representatives from the City of Boston Environment Department, BPRD, DND, Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Services, the Boston Redevelopment Authority, the MBTA and BNAN work together to develop a long-term plan for preserving this community garden. In the short-term, it is recommended that it be determined if the garden meets the criteria for designation as a Conservation Preservation Subdistrict (CPS) with the designation being changed to Open Space-Community Garden (OS-CG) if a long-term solution of transferring the land to a non-profit entity can be achieved.

Carole said that nothing is being recommended for the Weld Hill parcel because an Institutional Master Planning process occurring simultaneously with the Roslindale Neighborhood Strategic Planning process will determine the appropriate zoning designation. Once identified by the IMP process, the recommendation for Weld Hill will be incorporated into the Roslindale plan.

An AG member added that if a recommendation for Weld Hill has not been announced by the end of the Roslindale planning process, AG members will make a recommendation.

An AG member said that some neighbors of the Boundary I Urban Wild do not want its ownership transferred from the City to the State. They believe that the property would suffer from lack of maintenance, as evidenced by surrounding unkempt state-owned properties.

IV. Commercial Zoning Discussion, Carole Schlessinger, CSS

DRAFT Recommended Business Zoning Subdistricts

Carole presented a map showing existing and recommended business zoning subdistricts in the IPOD (see DRAFT Recommended Business Zoning Subdistricts in 2.13.07 Presentation Boards - available on the project website).

The four existing business zoning subdistricts are:

1. L - .5
2. L - 1
3. B - 1
4. B - 2

The three recommended business zoning subdistricts are:

1. Community Commercial Subdistrict
2. Neighborhood Shopping Subdistrict
3. Local Convenience Subdistrict

She commented that the recommended business zoning subdistricts are based on existing boundaries with some revision to exclude as many existing residential buildings as possible without significantly fragmenting the business zoning subdistrict. This will result in a better defined business district.

Carole then discussed commercial issues within the Square (existing business zoning subdistricts B - 1 and B - 2). The existing commercial development in the B - 1 and B - 2 subdistricts generally reflects existing density regulations. The existing on-site parking requirements prevent most future development in the Square from having a Floor Area

Ratio (FAR) greater than 1. Generally, the existing B -1 and B – 2 zoning subdistrict boundaries and density regulations will most likely remain the same.

Carole referenced a suggestion made by Pam McKinney to raise the FAR in the B – 1 subdistrict from 1.0 to 1.5 if a proposed project has a mixed use component. “Incentivizing” developers by offering a density bonus may lead to more retail/residential mixed use development in the Square. On-site parking will still limit the FAR on all but the largest parcels.

Carole suggested that store owners should be organized to discuss the feasibility and potential for parking meters, and dedicated employee parking areas within the Square to help alleviate the perceived parking shortage. Roslindale Village Main Streets may be the appropriate entity too facilitate this discussion.

An AG members asked if there is a community where installing meters has positively impacted a commercial street or business center.

Sue responded by saying meters were recently installed in the South End and have generally been successful.

An AG member suggested that residential development within the Square should have a lower parking ratio. Carole suggested that a ratio of 1.5 parking spaces per residential unit might be more appropriate in the Square.

Lee said that new mixed use development on Washington Street, at the intersection of Lee Hill Road and Washington Street, has one parking space per residential unit. The small parking lot for residents is located off site across the street. Most of the residents have more than one car, and park on the street.

Responding to a past suggestion, Carole said that light industrial uses such as woodworking should be considered for the business zoning subdistricts on Hyde Park Avenue, providing they are not noxious uses.

An AG member asked if Local Convenience Subdistricts allow mixed use development. Carole confirmed that they do.

It was suggested that the light industrial district at the northern end of Washington Street be changed to mixed use if the Forest Hills study results in similar rezoning.

V. Urban Design intro

Urban design recommendations will include design guidelines, streetscape improvements, recommended commercial and residential street cross sections, and guidelines for protecting historic resources.

Carole briefly presented a board showing several photosimulations in Roslindale Square of streetscape improvements on Washington Street and Cummins Highway (see DRAFT Urban Design Recommendations in *2.13.07 Presentation Boards* - available on the project website). Carole recommended that banners be placed on the regularly placed streetlights on Washington Street and Cummins Highway and that flower baskets be placed on the street lights around the Square. This would improve the pedestrian and driving experience and enhance the major gateways into Roslindale.

Carole said that Roslindale has many historic resources that will play a significant role in design guidelines.

VI. Preparation for the next community meeting/other follow-up issues

Sue said that the next community meeting will most likely be held at the end of March.

Carole said that there will be much to cover at the meeting, including the presentation of the draft plan.

Sue said that a draft plan should be made available to members of the public a few weeks before the community meeting so they have time to review it.