

Notes from Planning and Rezoning Roslindale Advisory Group Meeting
Tuesday, March 7, 2006 6:30 p.m. At Greater Boston Medical and Dental Center

Advisory Group Members Present

Wayne, Beth Co-chairs

Gina, Mark, Fred, Rich, Kim, Sister Nancy, Walter, Shannon, Evan, Jon, Jennifer,

Also attending

Jansi Chandler, Kristy Daniels, Lee Blasi

Carole Schlessinger, Crosby | Schlessinger | Smallridge LLC (CSS) (BRA Consultants for Project), Principal in Charge and Project Manager

Adel Foz, Vollmer Associates LLP, Transportation Advisor to CSS for Project

Janice Williams, Director, Roslindale Village Main Street

Next meeting(s):

Outreach Task Force (Beth, Mark, Jennifer), Saturday, March 11, 2006 at 8:30 a.m. at Emack & Bolio

Public (Community) Meeting, Thursday, March 30, 2006, Community Center Cellar

Agenda Item I (Opening Remarks)

Everyone introduced themselves, this time for the benefit of the consultants.

Agenda Item II (Update on Action Items from the January 18, 2006 Working Session)

Agenda Item IIa (Information obtained from other groups)

Wayne summarized a conversation he had with Ray Mellone, a leader in a BRA-run planning project in North Allston (one of two contacts Jansi had provided to Wayne; the second contact had not returned calls). Advice offered by Ray:

Be pragmatic – whatever is proposed should be practical, “doable”;

Identify explicit benchmarks for implementation of proposals so that a fair assessment of progress or lack of progress can be made;

Be as open and public as possible to eliminate the ability of anyone to say they did not know about or did not have the opportunity to participate in undertaking;

Use church bulletins along with any other available means to publicize meetings.

Agenda Item IIb (Questions regarding the Board of Appeals table)

(This refers to the spreadsheet, prepared for members' use only and mailed out to Advisory Group members by Kristy prior to the meeting showing projects in our IPOD area, the BRA recommendations for them, and Board of Appeals decisions on the projects.)

Some discussion about need for ability to monitor projects ongoing in the future as one of the tools to ensure people know what's happening and know that zoning and other laws and regulations are being enforced.

Noted that this issue is citywide and systemic, not unique to Roslindale or to our IPOD.

Noted that Kristy assembled this information specifically for the Advisory Group and did so by cutting and pasting material from other sources (i.e., there is no computer-based administrative system for tracking these projects from start to finish).

Agenda Item IIc (Tax-exempt properties list)

List of tax-exempt parcels assembled by Kristy (at request of member) distributed, with caveat that some state-owned parcels may have been missed.

List requested as something to consider in discussing what happens to these properties when they change hands and/or purpose.

Agenda Item III (Crosby | Schlessinger | Smallridge) (Henceforth known as CSS)

(Presentation by Carole Schlessinger, Principal in Charge and Project Manager, CSS with assistance from Adel Foz of Vollmer Associates LLP, one of the subcontractor firms working on project with CSS)

Agenda Item IIIa (Introduction)

Carole introduced herself and Adel. She also distributed the project schedule established by CSS and BRA.

Agenda Item IIIa-1 (Scope of project)

Project will produce a master plan for Roslindale and zoning regulation(s) for Roslindale that will replace IPOD. To do this, project will include:

Assessing current situation (existing conditions) in Roslindale to confirm known and identify any additional key issues;

Conducting community meetings at key points for reaction to and ideas about key issues, ways to address the issues, etc.; **Collect data on land use, urban design, ownership, density, etc.**

Create a neighborhood vision.

Developing alternative ways to address key issues;

Developing pragmatic plans to address issues and providing tools for implementation of the plans (not clear what tools Carole has in mind);

Drafting, and finalizing, a master plan for Roslindale;

Drafting zoning language to replace IPOD.

Agenda Item IIIa-2 (Initial observations)

Roslindale's a great neighborhood. Everyone likes it.

Fortunate to have an active Main Street organization.

Some obvious development opportunities – the vacant gas station next to the library, the T building, the former Ashmont Discount.

There are approximately 250 historic buildings in Roslindale.

Initial issues (most are elaborated on below):

Development/redevelopment challenges;

Traffic and parking;

Preservation of open space and green space;

Process to generate support for plans and zoning proposal.

Agenda Item IIIa-3 (Key issues)

Development/redevelopment challenges:

What should be done with the major parcels (gas station, T building, Ashmont)?

Density **and scale:**

Look at large development and small development potential as well as infill development.

Larger parcel activity (not clear what this note means)?

Infill development in residential areas may be making people feel crowded and make density seem much too high.

Is education a need on this issue – do we need to explain to people what densities are reasonable, what densities already exist in Roslindale?

Economic development:

Pam McKinney will talk about real issues affecting development – she'll be a reality check helping to figure out what's possible and what's not feasible.

What do we need to do to get developers to provide what we want where we want it?

How do we balance new development against existing interests?

Retail:

How do we maintain existing businesses?

People don't want too many chain stores.

How do we get new retail into the area?

How do we get commercial property owners to keep their properties attractive to retail businesses?

Institutional:

How do we make institutional development fit into the community?

Institutional expansion should be compatible with what is actually happening in the neighborhood.

Traffic and parking:

People can't find parking spaces – how do we help them realize where there are spaces?

Is it realistic and feasible to use the MBTA parking lot during off-peak hours?

There is a great need for better parking signage.

Traffic – where are the hot spots that require analysis?

What parking ratios are appropriate for new development?

What kind of pedestrian improvements make sense and can be accomplished?

Urban design – preserving and enhancing the features (historical, in terms of density and open space, etc.) that make Roslindale attractive **as well as maintaining views to “landmarks”**.

Zoning law

Overall:

What's realistic in zoning changes and in plans from economic and political perspectives?

What do we need to do to get buy-in from everyone – community, property owners, renters, businesses, and political establishment?

Agenda Item IIIb (Timeline)

Copy of project schedule distributed to all attendees (as previously noted in Agenda Item IIIa). Schedule includes four public (community) meetings and roughly monthly meetings with Advisory Group.

Advisory Group meeting dates have to remain flexible – their scheduling will depend on progress on tasks that produce the material the meeting should consider.

Some Advisory Group working sessions or community meetings may be added to the schedule.

Agenda Item IIIc (Strategy)

CSS will set up a web site for the project. Their work products will be accessible through the web site, **including presentations, calendars, and project status.**

Wayne asked whether or not CSS intended to accept comments through the web site. Carole is going to consider whether or not doing so would work well for this effort.

However, this function is not part of the advertised scope of services.

Agenda Item IIIc-1 (Public involvement)

There was discussion about the public comment process including at least the following points:

Transparency during the planning project and its meetings, and by the City and its agencies, is desirable.

It is important to somehow acknowledge all comments and ideas.

CSS could produce eye-catching project posters for business district/Main Streets Office windows and library. **These could include posters with an executive summary of the process.**

It is also important to try to constrain the open-endedness of comments. For example, offering periodic online surveys asking questions on specific issues or alternative ways of addressing issues might provide a way to obtain focused insight into community positions.

CSS plans to hold stakeholder meetings which will be reported back to the group.

Lee will provide lists of church groups, neighborhood groups and other contacts for expanded outreach.

There is a possibility that a community meeting or workshop could be held on a Saturday.

Agenda Item IIIc-2 (Coordination with other planning efforts)

There are task forces not affiliated with this planning effort at work on various issues and there are, or may be, studies and papers prepared outside this project. The work of the task forces and the studies and papers should be considered in the course of this project.

Identified explicitly:

MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning Study done for Roslindale Village Main Street (available online at <http://www.roslindale.net/MITSpring222005.htm>).

Carole feels that there is good information in this study upon which to build.

Wentworth Study – planning and/or design project involving Wentworth Institute of Technology faculty & students may be done this fall, probably focusing on physical planning and urban design.

Arboretum Task Force – there has been some kind of contact between this task force and BRA; Carter Wilkie is contact for the task force.

Wetlands Task Force (web site apparently at <http://members.aol.com/roslwetlands/rwtfhome.htm>).

Agenda Item IIIc-3 (Site-specific focus areas)

This item was intended to talk about specific sites that might be appropriate targets of CSS' attention during this project.

Lee Blasi mentioned the need to identify specific parcels of land that might be explicitly identified as under the protection of a Conservation Overlay District (a COD? - how appropriate in Massachusetts) in zoning regulations.

Also, someone said that this project should not forget American Legion Highway and Hyde Park Avenue areas.

More mixed use on Hyde Park Avenue and American Legion Highway.

Carole offered some examples of site-specific areas CSS is considering (Belgrade Avenue and its empty store fronts; Washington Street outside the square) to illustrate the target for this item – areas that should be points of attention/focus within the overall plan. Offered up for consideration:

Centre Street in the institutional area, particularly regarding traffic;

Lower Washington Street (from Healy Field toward Forest Hills) – traffic, density, variances; Hyde Park Avenue;

Walworth to Centre Street along Belgrade and Walworth.

Protection of wetlands.

American Legion Highway (Lee briefly went over planned improvements to this road, including changes at the major intersection with Cummins Highway, now planned thanks to funding from NStar (their penance for tearing up the road to install a high capacity electrical distribution system)). **Additional planned improvements include: the widening of the traffic islands, tree planting, designated right and left turn signals, sidewalk improvements, and upgraded lighting.**

The need for real teeth in zoning law (someone used the example of violation of conservation land protections).

Wayne mentioned the related issue of variances being granted without apparent justification for the variance.

Enforcement issues - Even with teeth in zoning law, enforcement still matters.

Lee and Kristy observed that we need to look at where enforcement, codes, and zoning diverge and, in doing so, fail to reinforce each other, creating (some of the) enforcement issues.

Additional zoning comments:

Fred suggested the use of specific language in zoning to target storefront as well as write design guidelines into zoning for the Main Streets program. He also mentioned that commercial areas along Belgrade Avenue could be rezoned for residential in order for housing development to thrive.

Wayne posed a question about the type of zoning that could encourage redevelopment of blighted areas. Pam McKinney can address this in her market analysis – different uses for different areas. He also mentioned that the new (updated) zoning is likely to reduce the number of variances granted but this planning process needs to address the City's regulatory and enforcement policies and practices in addition to updating the zoning code. Jansi concurred with the statement about variances since the number of variances have been reduced in other rezoned areas.

It has been suggested that Rick Shaklik, Deputy Director of Zoning at the BRA join us at an upcoming meeting to explain the limitations of zoning regulations.

Agenda Item IIIc-4 (Implementation)

Agenda Item III d (Preparations for the March 30, 2006 Community Meeting)

What does CSS want from the first community meeting?

The opportunity to explain the project (again?) to interested members of the community.

Expand the key issues list as a prelude to developing a vision (the desired outcome of complete implementation of a master plan and zoning law changes?).

Do an overview presentation.

Break into groups for further discussion.

Not entirely clear who's running these groups – there may be a need for Advisory Group members to help with this task, although no one talked about prepping members to do so.

(How do we solicit as wide an array of opinions as possible?)

Agenda Item IV (Action Items for the next Working Session)

- Planning for March 30 community meeting.
- Publicly advertising the March 30 meeting and trying to get press coverage (Transcript, Bulletin, and Globe City Weekly section?).
- Formation of public outreach group. (This is actually done – Mark, Beth, and Jennifer are scheduled to meet on Saturday, March 11; Walter may join them)
- **Request interpretation services for the advertisement, flyer and the meeting.**
- Walter agreed, once the meeting date is firm and he has the flyer or e-mail announcing the meeting, to contact Cable TV for Boston to see if they are interested in taping parts of March 30 meeting for broadcast on local Boston public access (?) channel(s).
- Carole asked that one or more members take her on a walking tour of the square in the near future. Wayne agreed to do that (I thought Walter expressed an interest in joining them), perhaps on a Saturday morning soon.