



WalkBoston

June 1, 2011

Chairman and Members  
Public Improvement Commission  
City of Boston  
Boston City Hall  
Boston 02201

Re: PIC hearing June 2, 2011 re petition of Parish Café for Seasonal Outdoor Café,  
Tremont Street, Boston

Dear Commissioners:

In September 2010, a proposal from the Parish Café to cut down two shade trees on Tremont Street in order to have an outdoor café was considered at a hearing chaired by Greg Mosman, Tree Warden of the Boston Parks Department. The Parish Café argued that without removing the trees, it would be able to install only 6 tables; the Parks Department stated that “the city’s intentions have never been to implement the [outdoor café] program at the expense of the city’s infrastructure.” The permit request was denied.

WalkBoston, in considering Parish Café’s current request believes that, while a pleasant amenity, an outdoor café also should not unduly interfere with the intended purpose and function of the City’s infrastructure, namely an adequate sidewalk walking right-of-way for its pedestrians. It is our hope that in this case, the relevant city agencies—the Public Works Department, the Boston Transportation Department and the Disability Commission—will be equally strong in support of its walkers, especially in light of the City’s recently created “Complete Streets” guidelines.

The current City sidewalk in the area of the proposed café is roughly 12 feet wide, but narrows to 8 feet adjacent to the retained street trees in 4-foot tree pits. The Parish Café proposal for a 13-table café would narrow that right-of-way to 3 feet and 3.8 feet in several places, requiring pedestrians to zig-zag through the café area.

WalkBoston requests that this design be altered to provide at least a 4-foot clear walking right-of-way. This could be achieved by moving the fence in the area east of the Service Entrance slightly inward toward the restaurant, plus placing the one-foot wide planter boxes inside the fence. There could also be a fence without planters, as at other South End outdoor cafes. The area here for the café would be slightly narrower, but still possible.

We believe our request is supported by several guidelines. The Massachusetts Highway Department’s 2006 [Project Development and Design Guide](#) specifies in Section

5-14 that the minimum width for a sidewalk is 5 feet excluding the width of the curb. It allows for a 3-foot clear width to bypass occasional obstructions and mentions as examples a traffic control box and traffic signal pole, implying that narrow widths are allowed if there are unavoidable fixed objects, not optional café planter boxes.

The City of Boston's guidance for sidewalk cafes requires "no less than four (4) feet of sidewalk" between the tree grates and the side of the café and reserves the right to require more than 4 feet.

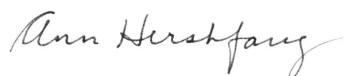
On a visit to the site to check measurements in the plan (and finding them slightly smaller— 12-feet at the western end rather than 12' 8"), I also noticed that the café currently has a very nice wide-open window area and was curious how it would be with tables right up to it. Also, how it would be for the building's residents to walk through the café to enter/exit their residence through the door marked "gate" on the plan. A third question is how the umbrellas shown in the western section of the plan will interact with passing walkers.

The 3/14/11 letter of support submitted by Rebecca Wettemann, president of the Claremont Neighborhood Association, comes as a surprise. I have been a CNA member for decades and on their email notification list, yet received no notice of a public meeting to consider this application. Therefore, it is not clear to me that the letter reflects neighborhood feeling.

In conclusion, WalkBoston requests that the PIC require at least a 4-foot wide public sidewalk right-of-way through this area. If you have any doubts or questions, please postpone the decision until you have visited the site.

We regret we are not able to express our concerns in person at tomorrow's hearing, but we thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Ann Hershfang  
WalkBoston Board Member

Cc: Transportation Commissioner Thomas Tinlin  
Chris Hart, Institute for Human Centered Design