



WalkBoston

December 12, 2007

Jay Rourke
Boston Redevelopment Authority
Boston City Hall, 9th Floor
Boston, MA 02201

RE: Comments on the Project Notification Form for Bulfinch Triangle Parcel 1

Dear Mr. Rourke:

We are pleased to offer comments on the PNF for Parcel 1 in the Bulfinch Triangle, which proposes an 11-story building of mixed uses including 14,910 square feet of retail on the ground floor, a 142 – space parking garage and 283 rental-housing units. The project is to be constructed primarily on air rights above the Central Artery and is immediately adjacent to the MBTA North Station stop on the Green and Orange Lines. The site abuts the principal walkway of the Rose Kennedy Greenway, constructed as an element of the CA/T Project.

Walking to and from the site

As might be expected at such a transit-rich location, the pedestrian share of trips is estimated at 65-70% of daily and peak hour residential trips, and 36-69% for retail/restaurant trips. Overall, the project adds only a small percent of trips in the area.

The site and the Rose Kennedy Greenway

We applaud the proponent's efforts in designing the Beverly Street frontage of the building. This frontage is especially important as Beverly Street is projected to be the principal walking connection between Causeway Street and the Greenway - a walk that includes a stunning view of the Zakim Bridge. To integrate this walk with the Greenway, it has been provided with wide sidewalks and space for retail shops and sidewalk cafes. Beverly Street will also be lined with on-street parking which will provide walkers with a sense of protection from traffic.

Visual improvements

We applaud the proponent's efforts to make the building visually interesting. These efforts will benefit pedestrians passing the site – particularly on Beverly Street. The building will have a variety of facade materials (at least 3 different types), and proposed differences of heights and massing break up perceived bulkiness of the building. This variety of materials will be carried down to ground level, with the differential of massing visible to pedestrians on adjacent sidewalks as well as from a distance.

Service and transit access

Haverhill Street is the focus for service entrances to the building. Service entrances for the Avenir Building across Haverhill Street will be facing the service entrances on Parcel 1. This means that the Haverhill Street may be somewhat less attractive as a walking route than Beverly Street. However, it is important to remember that transit access is focused on Haverhill Street and on both ends of the block there are major access points to the MBTA Superstation for the Orange and Green Lines. At the Causeway Street end of the block, there is an underground tunnel that connects to the North Station commuter rail station. All these transit access points will be goals for pedestrians walking on the four sides of this block.

The proposed “porte-cochere”

A major access point into the building and some of the retail sites will take place in a 2-story “porte-cochere” under the building at mid-block. This access will provide weather-protected access for pedestrians, for all the vehicles parking in the building and for pickup and drop-off of passengers. The porte-cochere, in effect an interior street, raises the question of design at either end where it crosses the sidewalk of both Beverly and Haverhill Streets. Sidewalks in both locations must be level for the safety of pedestrians. A warning signal for exiting vehicles may also be appropriate. The details of this design will be important for pedestrian safety and comfort.

Street safety

We have several questions about ensuring pedestrian safety in this area. Only one new signal is to be added in the vicinity of the project - at Beverly Street and Valenti Way. Based on the level of traffic in the area and the analysis presented in the PNF, it is not clear whether traffic control measures may be necessary elsewhere to allow pedestrians to cross safely.

- First, icons signifying jaywalking are shown under existing pedestrian conditions (2007) along Causeway Street between Friend and Washington Streets (Figs. 2-9 and 2-10.) We assume there is jaywalking in this section of Causeway Street because there is currently only one signalized intersection - at Haverhill/Accolon Way and Causeway. This suggests the reason for the jaywalking may be a lack of available, well-marked and safe street crossing locations.
- Second, a relatively high level of service (LOS B) is estimated for future pedestrians using the signalized intersection at Haverhill Street, suggesting that the signalization of this intersection is of significant benefit to pedestrians crossing at that location.
- Third, the levels of service at other pedestrian crossing locations on Causeway Street may need to be improved because of this project and neighboring developments. Three street crossings on Causeway Street are used for access to North Station and Boston Garden: Causeway Street and Haverhill Street/Accolon Way; Causeway Street and Canal Street; and Causeway Street and Friend Street. As planned only one of the three (at Causeway Street and Haverhill Street/Accolon Way) has a signal, which results in LOS B for pedestrians. The two others (Canal and Causeway Streets, and Friend and Causeway Streets) carry as many pedestrians and are estimated at LOS F. This suggests that pedestrian crossing improvements may be needed.

The Boston Crossroads Initiative

The proponent has expressed a willingness to work with the City’s Boston Crossroads Initiative along Causeway Street, but it is unclear how this is to be done.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this PNF. Please feel free to contact us for clarification or additional comments.

Sincerely,

Wendy Landman
Executive Director