



The “paces pole” at the Roslindale Farmers Market.

WalkUP Roslindale

A Call to Action to Make Roszie the Most Walkable Neighborhood in Boston

BY EMAIL ONLY

September 10, 2015

Mr. Christopher Tracy, Project Manager
Boston Redevelopment Authority
One City Hall Square, 9th Floor
Boston, MA 02201
Email: christopher.tracy@boston.gov

RE: Small Project Review Application for 100 Weld Street – Filed August 8, 2015

Dear Chris:

I write on behalf of WalkUP Roslindale to comment on the referenced small project review application (the “**Application**”).

Taking our name from the idea that “Walkable Urban Places” are the future of where people want to live, work, and play in and around Boston, WalkUP Roslindale is a collaborative group of Roslindale residents informally founded in June of this year to make our neighborhood the most walkable neighborhood in Boston by advocating for and supporting positive changes in the public and private built environment. In just two months, we have built up a core group of about 30 people, along with almost 200 supporters. More information about WalkUP Roslindale and our initiatives can be found at www.walkuproslindale.org.

The project set forth in the Application is a 17-unit residential condominium in a single 4-story building with 28 accessory parking spaces on the ground level (18 structured, 10 outside) with primary pedestrian access from Weld Street and vehicular and additional pedestrian access from Centre Street, and an accessory office/workout room space fronting on Centre Street (the “**Proposed Project**”). The Application describes the Proposed Project as being in compliance with

the applicable zoning under the West Roxbury Neighborhood District of the Boston Zoning Code (the “**Code**”) and includes a letter from the Inspectional Services Department to that effect, so no zoning relief is required. The city’s Inclusionary Development Policy accordingly does not apply, and the developer has proposed all market-rate, 2-bedroom/2-bath units.

On balance, WalkUP Roslindale supports the Proposed Project and urges the BRA to approve the Application pursuant to Article 80E of the Code. As we discuss further below, there are several aspects that could be significantly improved, and we hope the BRA will work with the developer and the relevant city departments to address the issues we raise. We are well aware that the site is a long-defunct service/gas station (formerly known as “Weld American”) and that cleanup of the site due to contamination from its prior use was previously undertaken and completed. It is several years past time for this site to be redeveloped.

In addition, we support the city’s efforts in seeking to appropriately accommodate the, in our view, welcome increase in population that is currently underway throughout Boston, including Roslindale, and is forecast to continue through 2030 and beyond. In short, the need for new housing units in our city is acute. While we appreciate that accommodating new neighbors in existing neighborhoods such as ours should be approached thoughtfully, WalkUP Roslindale advocates for welcoming them and the vitality they bring to our neighborhood.

WalkUP Roslindale’s expression of support for the Proposed Project comes with the following comments and suggestions for improving the Proposed Project and the immediate vicinity:

1. Missed Retail Opportunity.

The site of the Proposed Project is zoned Neighborhood Shopping, or NS, a zoning subdistrict that allows and is in some ways intended to foster mixed retail and residential use. While we understand and witnessed that there was resistance from certain project neighbors against retail use at this location, the fact remains that all residential use will prevent this location from realizing its full potential and helping to anchor the Weld/Centre node, which is a walkable neighborhood commercial amenity. As additional mixed-use zoned properties are redeveloped here and around Roslindale, there will be a need to avoid this kind of slow-motion loss of easily accessible commercial activity.

2. Landscaping and Activating the Weld and Centre Frontages.

The site’s location, at a northern gateway to Roslindale and with close adjacency to the Arnold Arboretum and the Roslindale Wetlands also calls for careful consideration of both landscaping and activation of the street frontage (especially in light of the missed retail opportunity). The adjacency to important neighborhood green spaces calls for a comprehensive landscaping approach and plan on both Weld and Centre streets, while the lack of an active retail frontage on Centre Street calls for street furniture – perhaps benches or tables – to be incorporated to encourage people to linger. We appreciate the concept of continuing the stone wall on Weld Street and want to make sure it is clear that the shorter section of stone wall that will

shield the surface parking on Centre Street will be of the same high quality (the wall appears on the conceptual renderings but is not apparently shown on the landscaping plan). Surface parking on this frontage is problematic on its own – the screening here needs to be more than bushes and some mulch and we are confident that the developer is aware of this.

3. Weld/Centre Intersection Needs More Attention.

While we appreciate the efforts evident in the Application on making the Weld/Centre intersection work better for all users, the proposal in the Application falls short of what can and should be done to better accommodate walking, bicycling, and bus transit use at this intersection and more effectively slow traffic to speeds that are safer for all users, including those in motor vehicles. Given the location near the Arnold Arboretum, this intersection is also an important part of the link for those on foot or bicycle coming from the west to access the Arboretum. Specifically, we advocate for an intervention at this intersection that

- (a) improves both the northbound and southbound sides of Centre Street (not just the northbound side) on the southerly side of the intersection;
- (b) provides for 10-foot wide vehicle travel lanes consistent with Boston's Complete Streets Guide's provision about Neighborhood Connector streets such as Centre Street, instead of the 11-foot wide vehicle lanes currently proposed; and
- (c) uses the additional 3 feet in width to widen the center median by 3 feet while also extending the curb at the opposite corner to further reduce the crossing distance.

We would also recommend that the sidewalk at the Proposed Project's curb cut as well as at the curb cut opposite the site on Centre Street be fully articulated as a sidewalk (not paved as if it were part of the driveway) and that the bike lanes on both sides be blocked in with green paint to highlight their locations. The attached sketch is intended to illustrate our proposal with respect to the intersection. We would be happy to discuss this further with the BRA, the developer, and/or other city agencies. Please let us know if there is any interest in doing so.

4. Open, Data-driven, and Innovative Discussion of Off-Street Parking.

The initial discussion and resistance of some neighbors to including retail use in the Proposed Project in the pre-filing meetings appeared to have been driven in large part by perceptions that there is a current parking shortage in the immediate area and that any increase in activity at this site will necessarily contribute to this shortage. Statements were also made at the meetings that households in each of the units in the Proposed Project would have at least two vehicles, such that there would be insufficient parking within the Proposed Project's site and so additional vehicles would be parked on the adjacent streets. While experience teaches that these

perceptions are often expressed in the community review process, they are seldom backed up by or challenged through actual data. The result is that anecdote and subjective perceptions control by default. No one – not the party expressing the perceived concern over parking, not the developer responding that they are just providing what the Zoning Code requires, not the BRA or any other representative of the city – seems to have any publicly-available information on what the trends in vehicle ownership and off-street and on-street parking usage have been in Roslindale, whether we have a management problem or a supply problem with our parking resources, and whether progressive concepts such as shared parking among uses will ever enter the discussion. Furthermore, it is time to seriously consider the “unbundling” of off-street parking from residential units in development projects going forward. Simply adding the spaces to each unit for “free” creates an incentive to own a vehicle when that choice might otherwise not be made. The lock-step provision of off-street parking tends to increase motor vehicle traffic, take up valuable space that could be devoted to other, more productive uses, and drive up the cost of housing to provide an “amenity” that the residents may not need now and most likely will need less in the future as improvements in urban transportation such as internet-based ride hailing and self-driving cars drastically reduce the need for parking. WalkUP Roslindale believes the time has come to have this discussion and is calling upon all stakeholders in our neighborhood to join us as we seek solutions to this oft-cited concern.

In closing, we wish to reiterate our support for the Proposed Project and our commitment to making our neighborhood more walkable by collaborating with our neighbors to produce better outcomes for all stakeholders. Thank you.

Sincerely yours,



Matt Lawlor
Resident @ 15 Basto Terrace, Roslindale, on behalf of
WalkUP Roslindale

Copy to:

Ms. Christine Galatis, Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Services (christine.galatis@boston.gov)
City Councilor Matt O’Malley (matthew.omalley@boston.gov)
City Councilor Michelle Wu (michelle.wu@boston.gov)
Ms. Stefanie Seskin, Active Transportation Director, BTB (stefanie.seskin@boston.gov)

Attachment

Sketch Plan showing WalkUP Roslindale Proposal for Weld/Centre Intersection

