



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

March 29, 2018

BY ELECTRONIC MAIL ONLY (marguerite.cramer@boston.gov)

Housing Innovation Lab
City of Boston
Boston City Hall
Boston, MA

Attention: Marguerite Cramer

**RE: Comment Letter
Request for Interest – Housing with Public Assets**

Dear Ms. Cramer:

I write on behalf of WalkUP Roslindale to offer an unofficial response to your Request for Information concerning Housing with Public Assets. The development of mixed-use structures within Roslindale Village listed in the Request for Interest, with specific emphasis on the Taft Hill Municipal Lot, is of great interest to us. We are very excited about the possibility of more commercial space and housing in the core of Roslindale. We urge the city to put the Taft Hill Municipal Lot on the top of the list of sites that could be developed through a Request for Proposals, whether as a part of the relocation of existing public assets or independently.

By way of background, WalkUP Roslindale, which takes its name from the international movement to foster “Walkable Urban Places,” is a collaborative group of residents dedicated to making Roslindale the most walkable neighborhood in Boston. We advocate for a dynamic, livable streetscape and we support positive changes to our public and private built environment that strengthen walkability and other forms of active mobility as means toward better personal and public health, safety, social capital, economic development, and environmental sustainability. We are led by a steering group of about 25 residents and have over 500 additional supporters. More information about WalkUP Roslindale and our initiatives can be found at walkuproslindale.org. We recognize that no single group of people can be said to speak for our entire neighborhood – instead, please take these comments as representing the collective, specific viewpoint of our steering group members (some of whom are indicated below) and offering what we see as the analysis that results from our mission and principles. We also think our support for the development of these sites will facilitate broader community receptivity during public vetting.

Over the past few years we have commented in support of various projects, including 20 Taft Hill Park (19 units), 874-878 South Street (9 units), 32 Cummins (9 units), and 4281 Washington Street (12 units) and, though it was before our organization was formed, many of us spoke out personally in favor of Parkside on Adams (43 units). We supported all of these developments because we think

these projects largely advance our aim of making Roslindale a more dynamic, walkable urban landscape. Density in these locations has the clear benefit of increasing foot traffic, supporting the local businesses (which have long suffered from limited daytime patrons), augmenting the pedestrian experience and providing much needed housing in an area with high proximity to a public transportation network (even though it is a network in great need of improved service in part as a result of increased demand and utilization).

We note, however, that density is not an end in and of itself. Rather, done properly, density is a means to achieve our vision of a vibrant, safe, and walkable neighborhood with more housing options for people who want to live here. For that reason, we do not support high-density developments that fail to advance our core mission. In each of the projects we've weighed in, we've commented in ways we think the projects can be improved. For example, we've encouraged developers of each of these projects to make investments in the pedestrian landscape outside their buildings, consider a wider range of unit sizes, reduce the number of parking spaces, incorporate bike infrastructure, and provide free public transportation passes as well as credits toward car-sharing for new residents (e.g. ZipCar or Lyft). We have also successfully pushed developers to alter massing by adding articulation of building envelopes in order to end up with a more attractive building. Our pushing for these incremental improvements reflects our belief that **density successfully adds to neighborhoods when it is integrated with streetscape and mobility improvements.**

While our efforts (and those of allied organizations) with individual developers have generally yielded marginal improvements in walkability, we are very concerned that the City and the Commonwealth are not doing enough to insure transportation planning keeps up with development. This concern cannot possibly be addressed on a "one-off", project-by-project basis. We anticipate tens of thousands of new residents moving to Boston in the coming years, hundreds, if not thousands, of whom will reside in Roslindale. We should welcome these new residents seeking opportunity with open arms, but we cannot welcome thousands or tens of thousands of new cars into our neighborhoods. **To this end, it is imperative that the City do more to enable those who seek a car-free or car-light lifestyle to do so.** There are many Bostonians—both old and new—who would much prefer to get around with a combination of walking, biking, taking the T, and the occasional ZipCar or TNC/taxi ride. Yet major gaps in these options currently make these alternatives impractical for many. Once someone has paid the large sunk cost of private car ownership, it is often rational for that person to maximize utilization of the car since it's already paid for and offers convenience when compared to unpredictable and sometimes inefficient and unsafe more public modes of transport. This dynamic needs to change: as we move further into the 21st century, our neighborhoods need to be built (and rebuilt) for people, not cars. We see our neighborhood of Roslindale as an ideal Ground Zero for this long-needed transition to a modern city. We implore the city to take the leadership necessary to ensure this happens.

In this vein, while we welcome a major development at the Taft Hill Lot – and very much hope it will rise to the top of the city's list of potential new sites – we urge the city to consider the "public assets" it seeks to combine with housing to be those that relate to the city's transportation network and the increase in public and park spaces. We think that for the increase of density to add meaningfully to our neighborhood and to gain wide community support rests squarely upon

simultaneous infrastructure improvements many of which the City can achieve on its own, the rest of which it should be able to advance in collaboration with the Commonwealth. These include:

1. Full implementation of the Arboretum Gate Path in the next two years, providing a safe and attractive walk/bike route between Roslindale Village and Forest Hills while also improving access to the Arboretum for Roslindale's economically and racially diverse residents;
2. True and permanent Bus Rapid Transit along Washington Street between at least Roslindale Village and Forest Hills, as well as related improvements to bus service such as greater frequency on off-peak periods;
3. Improved parking management for Roslindale Village, including:
 - a. demand pricing for city spaces;
 - b. a bar against any new residents of a building on the Tafthill site obtaining street parking stickers;
 - c. significantly limiting any additional off-street parking on the Tafthill site – the already congested area around the central business district (which increasingly experiences gridlock during the day) would benefit significantly from more people living nearby, but would suffer if each of those new residents brings another car;
 - d. increase in the area requiring parking permits along with an increase in the cost for the permits, the revenue of which should be made available exclusively for streetscape improvements in Roslindale.
4. Complete street redesign for all of Roslindale Village with a focus on pedestrian and bike improvements;
5. Making Roslindale a Zone 1A commuter rail stop (which we recognize is not in the direct control of the city but must be a priority).

As a matter of massing design, we think developers ought to be encouraged to consider set-backs in upper levels in taller projects.

We also encourage the city to consider that any projects in Roslindale Village also include a sizeable amount of new commercial office space because in combination with housing it will increase urban vitality more hours of the day.

We very much appreciate your careful consideration of our comments and would be happy to discuss any questions you may have on them.

Sincerely yours,

Adam D. Rogoff, Resident @ 28 Ashfield Street, Roslindale, on behalf of
the WalkUP Roslindale Steering Group, including:

Ricardo R. Austrich, Resident @ 843 South Street, Roslindale
Lisa Beatman, Resident @ 180 Mount Hope Street, Roslindale
Steve Gag, Resident @ 631 South Street, Roslindale
Matt Lawlor, Resident, 15 Basto Terrace

Liz Graham-Meredith, Resident @ 6 Crandall Street, Roslindale
Mandana Moshtaghi, Resident @ 12 Arborough Road, Roslindale
Robert Orthman, Resident @ 69 Walter Street, Roslindale
Adam Rosi-Kessel, Resident @ 36 Taft Hill Terrace, Roslindale
Rachele Rosi-Kessel, Resident @ 36 Taft Hill Terrace, Roslindale
Mark Tedrow, Resident @ 169 Sycamore Street, Apt. 1, Roslindale
Greg Tobin, Resident @ 1 Sheldon Street, Roslindale
Alan Wright, Resident @ 98 Birch Street, Roslindale
Rick Yoder, Resident @ 180 Mount Hope Street, Roslindale

Copy to:

Mr. Daniel Murphy, Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services
City Councilor Tim McCarthy
City Councilor Michelle Wu
City Councilor Ayanna Pressley
City Councilor Michael F. Flaherty
City Councilor Annissa Essaibi-George
City Councilor Andrea Campbell
City Councilor Matt O'Malley