



*A call to action to make Roslindale Boston's most walkable neighborhood.*

March 5, 2019

BY EMAIL ONLY (Brian.Golden@boston.gov)

Mr. Brian Golden, Director  
Boston Planning & Development Agency (BPDA)  
Boston City Hall, One City Hall Square, 9th Floor  
Boston, MA 02201

Att'n: Ms. Aisling Kerr, Project Manager (Aisling.Kerr@Boston.gov)

**RE: Support Letter - Roxbury Preparatory Charter School (361 Belgrade Avenue)**

Dear Mr. Golden and Ms. Kerr:

I write on behalf of WalkUP Roslindale to comment in support of the proposed Roxbury Preparatory Charter High School Development at 361 Belgrade Avenue in Roslindale, and to urge BPDA to work cooperatively with the school's developers, BTB, the MBTA, and the Commonwealth, to insure that this welcome addition to our neighborhood be built and designed to be as walkable and transit accessible as possible.

As described in more detail in the footer of this letter, WalkUP Roslindale's overarching goal is to foster "Walkable Urban Places." In particular, we believe we can make Roslindale the most walkable neighborhood in all of Boston, full of active, dynamic, and safe streets. Implemented properly, we believe Roxbury Prep advances this vision.<sup>1</sup>

Belgrade Avenue has the potential to be a vibrant and accessible mixed-use corridor connecting the Roslindale and West Roxbury neighborhoods, and especially the Main Street business districts of both. This potential will not be realized, however, in the presence of vacant or abandoned lots, as well as auto-centric uses such as the Clay Auto Center that currently sits at and badly underutilizes this location. Activating this location with a school will change the character of the area for the better, and yield tangible benefits in the form of increased foot traffic (from both students and staff) to neighboring businesses in both West Roxbury and Roslindale. It is primarily for this reason that we support the project.

We note that much of the controversy and opposition to the project has involved transportation and parking issues. We believe rather than serving as a justification to oppose this project (or further diminish its scale), these concerns present an opportunity and an important reminder of the need to better coordinate transportation planning with land use decisions. In particular, the

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<sup>1</sup> Note that as our group focuses on walkability, particularly as it relates to transportation and development, we take no position with respect to education policy or various other ongoing debates involving charter schools.

development of Roxbury Prep must go hand in hand with transportation improvements that will benefit not only the students and staff of the school, but the entire community. These improvements should include two key components:

- (1) **A comprehensive “[complete streets](#)” re-design of Belgrade Avenue.** We see this approach as entirely consistent with the City’s [Vision Zero](#) efforts. A full redesign should make Belgrade a safe and welcoming street for pedestrians, cyclists, and mass transit users, as well as drivers. These improvements could include a protected bicycle lane (two-way cycle track) along much or all of the road; spacious sidewalks with ample greenery and other placemaking amenities; as well as improved geometry at intersections and pedestrian crossings to improve safety for all users.

**Particular attention should be given to providing for a safe pedestrian crossing across Belgrade Avenue at Anawan Avenue;** this is a key crossing point for reaching the Bellevue Commuter Rail Station as well as the bus stop on Belgrade Avenue. We should not have to wait for a pedestrian death or serious injury to occur to justify improvements.

- (2) **Improved service by the MBTA commuter rail Needham Line.** The morning rush hour commuter rail trains through Roslindale are currently well over capacity, making for an uncomfortable experience that is deterring use of the commuter rail instead of encouraging it. Roxbury Prep commuter rail users will generally be using the train for a “reverse commute” and thus will not exacerbate overcrowding on the trains, but the influx of new users justifies better levels of service for the entire neighborhood. We accordingly strongly advocate for the addition of stops at Bellevue on all outbound trains in the morning and inbound trains in the afternoon peak periods. Moreover, there is plainly more than adequate demand for another peak-time train, particularly in the morning. In addition to the schedule adjustments necessary to coordinate with the school day, the MBTA should be pushed to add an additional inbound/outbound run in the 7am-9am weekday time block.

We understand that the school has committed to providing MBTA passes to all employees of the school, in addition to the students who typically receive such passes as a matter of course. The Small Project Review Application, dated January 8, 2019, mentions “transit pass subsidies” for staff and also “consideration of a subsidy for MBTA passes for full-time employees” during construction. We believe it is important that these subsidies--both for construction workers as well as all employees of the school when built--be made a condition of approval of the project, and that they be sufficient to completely cover the cost of all such passes.

Finally, we understand the data strongly support the notion that the vast majority of students and many faculty will commute to the school by means other than driving, most notably by mass transit, but also by foot and bicycle. For the mass transit option to work, however, it is absolutely critical that the school and the MBTA synchronize their respective schedules, for morning and

afternoon trips, as well as for students **and** staff who will need to arrive at the school earlier. We urge all the stakeholders in this project, at both the city and state level, to coordinate early and often to make sure this happens.<sup>2</sup>

Sincerely,



Adam Rosi-Kessel, 36 Taft Hill Terrace

On behalf of the WalkUP Roslindale Steering Committee, including:

Ricardo R. Austrich, 843 South Street	Mandana Moshtaghi, 12 Arborough Road
Lisa Beatman, 180 Mount Hope Street	Robert Orthman, 31 Mendelssohn Street, #2
Rachel Blumberg, 15 Newburg Street #2	Rebecca Phillips, 10 Tappan Street
Ben Bruno, 27 Colgate Road	Adam Rogoff, 28 Ashfield Street
Lucy Bullock-Sieger, 33 Brookdale Street	Rachele Rosi-Kessel, 36 Taft Hill Terrace
Steve Gag, 631 South Street	Mark Tedrow, 169 Sycamore Street, #1
Liz Graham-Meredith, 6 Crandall Street	Mark Theiss, 55 Prospect Avenue
Matthew Lawlor, 15 Basto Terrace	Greg Tobin, 1 Sheldon Street
Margaux Leonard, 35 Harding Road	Nick Ward, 35 Harding Road
Sarah Kurpiel Lee, 65 Cornell Street	Alan Wright, 98 Birch Street

Cc: Timothy McCarthy, City Councilor – District 5  
Andrea Campbell, City Councilor - District 4  
Matt O'Malley, City Councilor - District 6  
Michelle Wu, City Councilor – At-Large  
Annisssa Essaibi-George, City Councilor – At-Large  
Michael Flaherty, City Councilor – At-Large  
Althea Garrison, City Councilor – At-Large  
Joseph Coppinger, Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services - Roslindale

*About WalkUP Roslindale:*

*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 1,000 additional supporters and allies including residents, business owners, local leaders, as well as other nonprofits and community groups. More information about WalkUP Roslindale and our initiatives can be found at [walkuproslindale.org](http://walkuproslindale.org).*

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<sup>2</sup> Just by way of example and comparison, the morning inbound Needham commuter rail (train #602) comes just a few minutes too late for Forest Hills, Roslindale, and West Roxbury students to easily reach Boston Latin School by the start of the school day. Even a slight delay on the train results in late arrivals. If the train schedule were moved back a few minutes, or the school day start slightly later, the Needham line would become a practical and efficient way for students to get to that school. It is imperative that we achieve better coordination in situations like this to get more value out of our existing infrastructure and service.