



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

July 30, 2019

BY ELECTRONIC MAIL ONLY (Ebony.DaRosa@boston.gov)
Boston Planning & Development Agency
One City Hall Square, 9th Floor
Boston, Massachusetts 02201
Attention: Ebony DaRosa, Project Manager

RE: 11 Taft Hill Terrace, ROSLINDALE – SMALL PROJECT REVIEW

Dear Ms. DaRosa:

Please accept the following comments on behalf of WalkUP Roslindale with respect to the proposed residential development at 11 Taft Hill Terrace in Roslindale (the “**Proposed Project**”). As set forth in the Small Project Review application, this will be a consequential development project, located 200 yards from the Roslindale Village Commuter Rail Station and even closer to multiple bus routes on Washington Street that connect directly to the Orange Line, and containing, as proposed, 16 housing units, 14 off-street parking spaces and 16 bicycle parking spaces in a four-story building with a mix of 1, 2 and 3 bedroom units.

We generally support the Proposed Project. We favor new housing in our neighborhood, city, and region as an integral part of the required response to our surging population and housing affordability crisis resulting from decades of underbuilding and inequitable patterns of development and housing availability. However, we offer the following concerns and comments intended to emphasize the imperative to adopt a greener approach to building in order to prepare for the climate change emergency, and also to address the future of transportation and the need for more affordable housing in every development project that our city considers.

Before addressing each of these issues in turn, we observe that historically, when developers proposed large condominium projects in Boston neighborhoods, they were often “bargained down” by the neighbors, who would push for fewer units, less height, and more off-street parking spaces, thus (1) reducing the developer’s ability to make a profit; (2) constraining the growth of much-needed housing; and (3) inducing more demand for cars by virtue of the extra parking spots. Indeed, our experience is that developers often proposed extra large structures, knowing they would have to give up some units to appease neighbors. By contrast, today we see more and more Bostonians have become acutely aware of the housing and transportation crises, and we have found many supporters in Roslindale specifically who are sensitive to these issues. Thus, while a project like this might have sacrificed profitability in the past by reducing scale and increasing parking, in view of the decreased pressure to do so today, there should be more room in the budget to address more pressing concerns, particularly in the areas of energy efficiency and affordability for lower-income families.

1. Green Building

Although the Proposed Project is below the Large Project Review threshold and is technically required to meet only building code-based energy efficiency and green building requirements (albeit at the city’s “Stretch Code” level, which produces a 10% improvement over the otherwise applicable standards), the BPDA should require the Proposed Project to exceed those standards and approach **Net Zero/Zero Plus/LEED Gold-Platinum standards**. If our city is truly serious about preparing for and attempting to mitigate the climate crisis, all new buildings will

need to be much more efficient in their use of energy. There is no more time to wait to start this effort on a citywide basis, and we would like to see this happen in this neighborhood now. To help offset electrical use, we suggest that the proponent investigate the possibility of adding additional photovoltaic panels to this project as well as on the adjacent Greater Roslindale Medical and Dental Center. Rent from the roof panels could provide needed income for the center and the generated electricity.

We also recommend considering using air-sourced heat pumps for heating/cooling. While the operating cost in heating mode is likely still higher than gas in this climate, the total capital cost might be less than the total for gas heat (especially high efficiency) + electric air conditioning, so the levelized cost difference won't be as great. There are some utility incentives and tax credits (such as SMART, the Solar Massachusetts Renewable Target) that can help reduce the cost. The Commonwealth is decarbonizing the grid rapidly, so investing in electric infrastructure now rather than locking in higher CO₂ emissions for two decades with gas infrastructure is better to help meet longer term climate change goals.

We note that once this project is built, it will be too late to implement many energy efficiency measures that could easily be incorporated at the design and build phase. We have seen other condominium developments in the area (indeed, on this street) consider retrofitting their buildings to add photovoltaic panels only to give up due to the logistical hurdles of dividing up costs and benefits amongst multiple units, as well as the significantly higher cost of modifying an existing structure versus including solar from the start. In short, we only have one shot to get this right, and the BPDA should push developers to seize every opportunity to do so.

2. Off-Street Parking

At 14 spaces, the Proposed Project has a parking ratio of 1:0.88 which we feel is reasonable but could be lower and still meet residents' needs. Zero off-street parking projects have recently been allowed in Roslindale Square (most recently, the Wallpaper City project at the corner of Poplar and South a few hundred feet from the proposed site), and, as noted above, this location 200 yards from the Roslindale Village Station commuter rail stop, from bus stops serviced by a dozen bus routes and within 250 yards of a neighborhood supermarket. The Proposed Project is likewise minutes away from the start of the Southwest Corridor Bicycle Path, which is a major thoroughfare for cycling commuters.¹ All of these sustainable transportation options are complemented by several nearby ZipCar locations and easy access to rideshare services along with two Bluebikes bikeshare stations in Roslindale Square. Note that the [MAPC Perfect Fit Parking Study](#), released 7/24/19, suggests that a ratio of less than 1:0.7 would be appropriate.²

In light of these ample amenities, excessive parking will undeniably waste resources and induce car ownership and car use, moving our neighborhood and our city away from the mode shift and greenhouse gas and other air pollution reduction goals to which we have committed in GoBoston 2030 and Climate Ready Boston. By devoting more real estate to parking, we practically guarantee more cars in the neighborhood. By contrast, reducing off-street parking will have direct positive implications on affordability.

¹ A City of Boston survey counted an average of well over 2,000 cyclists per day on this path in 2017; the number has surely grown since then with the completion of the cycling improvements at Forest Hills as part of the Casey/Arborway project. See <https://www.boston.gov/departments/boston-bikes/bike-data/2017-boston-bicycle-counts>.

² See <https://perfectfitparking.mapc.org/>

If some off-street parking spaces within the Proposed Project can be dedicated carshare (such as Zipcar) spaces the need for parking spaces can be reduced. If carshare spaces cannot be added within the garage, then perhaps the Proposed Project in cooperation with BPDA could sponsor additional carshare spaces within the adjacent municipal parking lot on Taft Hill while using the vacated space for either additional bike parking or space for an affordable unit.

By unbundling parking spaces from units and charging market rates for parking spaces, vehicle use can be discouraged. By contrast, if the parking spaces remained bundled with the units, car-free families will be less likely to live in this development since they would be paying a premium for an amenity they do not need. Likewise, providing free MBTA passes to tenants will encourage transit ridership as was done at the nearly adjacent 20 Taft Hill Park.

With available parking thus reduced to below a 1 to 1 ratio, the Proposed Project is an especially appropriate project on which to un-bundle the parking from the units, so that households that do not need off-street parking can avoid that cost instead of having it included in their unit regardless, while families that need an individually-owned vehicle for career, family, or other reasons will have the option to pay for a place to put it.

We also think it is important that the units in this development **not** be granted the right to obtain residential parking permits, and we urge BPDA to work with BTM to make sure this happens. While our neighborhood and the Boston area are in dire need of more housing, there is absolutely no need for more cars. Ultimately, the City needs to update its parking policies for the 21st century—including by limiting the supply and charging for residential parking permits. But until that happens, we need to take steps to insure that every large-density development like this doesn't bring along with unlimited free car storage on public land in the form of residential permits. These free permits provably induce demand for cars, and the Roslindale neighborhood should not be forced to absorb that traffic and pollution impact. Moreover, Taft Hill Terrace is a short, dead-end street with no adjacent blocks of “overflow” parking—if units in the Proposed Project were eligible for free residential permits, parking from these units alone could overwhelm the entire street.

3. Bicycle Parking

The Proposed Project is close to bicycle lanes on Washington Street, bike paths in the Arnold Arboretum, the Southwest Corridor Park/Pierre Lallement bike path and the future Roslindale Gateway path making biking to work/school, errands, and leisure a safer and more attractive option. We recommend a minimum bike parking ratio of 1 space per each bedroom. Additionally, the spaces must be usable by people of all abilities, so that a portion of the spaces must be usable without needing to lift the bike. Space needs to both accommodate traditional bicycles as well as cargo bikes such as longtails, bakfiets, and box bikes. With e-bikes becoming more available and commonplace, we recommend that bike charging stations be built to allow tenants to charge their e-bikes. An e-cargo bike can replace an automobile for a large number of trips and since two large cargo bikes can fit within one car parking space, they are space efficient. In order for people to ride bikes, the bikes must be usable. We therefore recommend that a bike repair station with bicycle pump be included in the garage. Since visitors who arrive by bike may not need secure, overnight bike storage, we recommend that at least two bike racks be included near the building entrance per BTM guidelines.

4. Housing Affordability

As a rough cut, assuming a standard parking space takes up about 162 square feet (9' x 18'), a reduction of even just five (5) spaces would allow for an additional 810 square feet of living area. We would expect that area to be split into 1 additional unit, which we would recommend be added to the affordable unit count or be used to reduce the AMI to be truly affordable to residents of Roslindale. We also note that community members from the Housing Justice task force of Roslindale is for Everyone (“RISE”) spoke at the community meeting and were particularly focused on increasing both the percentage of affordable units in the Proposed Project and the level of affordability offered beyond what the IDP would otherwise require (13% of total units and 70% of area median income). We support RISE Housing Justice on both of these requests. The Proposed Project is located in a part of our neighborhood where household incomes are lower than average and competition for scarce and increasingly expensive housing (there has been almost no new housing constructed in this area for the last several decades) is displacing our most vulnerable neighbors. We can and should do more as a city to make sure that everyone who wants to make their home here is able to do so.

5. Roslindale Gateway Path/Blackwell Path Extension and Arboretum Road

In order to help reduce parking burden, the developer should be required to assist financially with ongoing efforts around the Roslindale Gateway Path (<http://walkuproslindale.org/gateway>) as this will be a significant amenity for residents of the development and the broader surrounding neighborhood. A significant contribution for this effort would be an excellent way for this Proposed Project to bring value and increased accessibility to its own backyard immediately. We propose a contribution of \$25,000 for the Proposed Project.

In closing, we wish to reiterate our overall support for the Proposed Project, while especially emphasizing our call to reduce the off-street parking count and repurpose the space saved to increase the number and level of affordability for the affordable units. Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Mark Tedrow

Resident @ 21 Conway Road, Roslindale, on behalf of the WalkUP Roslindale Steering Group

Ricardo Austrich, Resident @ 843 South Street, Roslindale
Lisa Beatman, Resident @ 180 Mount Hope Street, Roslindale
Rachel Blumberg, Resident @ 15 Newburg Street, Apt. 2, Roslindale
Benjamin Bruno, Resident @ 27 Colgate Road, Roslindale
Lucy Bullock-Sieger, Resident @ 33 Brookdale Street, Roslindale
Steve Gag, Resident @ 631 South Street, Roslindale
Liz Graham-Meredith, Resident @ 6 Crandall Street, Roslindale
Matthew Lawlor, Resident @ 15 Basto Terrace, Roslindale
Margaux Leonard, Resident @ 35 Harding Road, Roslindale
Mandana Moshtaghi, Resident @ 12 Arborough Road, Roslindale
Robert Orthman, Resident @ 31 Mendelssohn Street, #2, Roslindale
Rebecca Phillips, Resident @ 10 Tappan Street, Roslindale
Adam Rogoff, Resident @ 28 Ashfield Street, Roslindale
Adam Rosi-Kessel, Resident @ 36 Taft Hill Terrace, Roslindale
Rachele Rosi-Kessel, Resident @ 36 Taft Hill Terrace, Roslindale
Laura Smeaton, Resident @ 61 Cornell Street, Roslindale

Mark Tedrow, Resident @ 169 Sycamore Street, Apt. 1, Roslindale
Marc Theiss, Resident @ 55 Prospect Avenue, Roslindale
Greg Tobin, Resident @ 1 Sheldon Street, Roslindale
Nick Ward, Resident @ 35 Harding Road, Roslindale
Alan Wright, Resident @ 98 Birch Street, 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 thirty residents and have nearly 1,000 additional supporters. More information about WalkUP Roslindale and our initiatives can be found at www.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 support of our steering group members (indicated above) resulting from our mission and principles.

Copy to:

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