



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

BY EMAIL ONLY

November 6, 2015

Mr. Edward McGuire, Project Manager
Boston Redevelopment Authority
One City Hall Square, 9th Floor
Boston, MA 02201
Email: edward.mcguire@boston.gov

RE: Small Project Review Application for 20 Taft Hill Park, Roslindale – Filed October 7, 2015

Dear Mr. McGuire:

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

WalkUP Roslindale, which takes its name from the international movement to foster “Walkable Urban Places,” is a collaborative group of residents informally founded in June of this year to make Roslindale the most walkable neighborhood in Boston. We advocate for a dynamic, livable neighborhood and streetscape. And, we support positive changes to our public and private built environment that strengthen walkability as a means toward better public health, safety, social capital, economic development and environmental sustainability. In our first four months we have already built up a core group of about 30 people and almost 300 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, specific viewpoint of our steering group members (indicated below) and offering what we see as the analysis that results from [our mission and principles statements](#).

The project set forth in the Application is a 19-unit residential condominium in two buildings (a 4-story 13-unit building, and a 3-story 6-unit building) with 19 accessory parking spaces on the ground level (13 structured and 6 outside) with vehicular and pedestrian access from Taft Hill Park (the “**Proposed Project**”). The Application describes the Proposed Project as requiring several variances from the use, parking, and dimensional standards applicable to the 2F-5000 residential subdistrict zoning under the Roslindale Neighborhood District of the Boston Zoning Code (the “**Code**”). The city’s Inclusionary Development Policy (“**IDP**”) applies, and the developer has proposed the minimum number of affordable units under the policy (3 units).

WalkUP Roslindale supports the Proposed Project and urges the BRA to approve the Application pursuant to Article 80E of the Code along with the conditions specified in this letter. We do so especially in light of the increase in population that is currently underway throughout Boston, including Roslindale, and is forecast to continue through 2030 and beyond. The need for new housing units in our city is acute: the lack of new housing at all price levels has driven up rents and made homeownership in the city increasingly unattainable for the middle class, which results in decreased socioeconomic diversity, longer and more difficult commutes (with a commensurate increase in traffic, pollution, and casualties from crashes), and a drag on the economy as employers struggle to find workers. While we appreciate that accommodating new neighbors in existing neighborhoods such as ours can be challenging and should be approached thoughtfully, WalkUP Roslindale advocates for welcoming newcomers and the vitality they bring to our neighborhood.

WalkUP Roslindale's support for the Proposed Project comes with the following comments and suggestions for improving the Proposed Project and our neighborhood:

- In concept, this is a project that fits well within WalkUP Roslindale's principles. The location is immediately adjacent to Roslindale Square, and thus walkable to its services, restaurants, shops, and transit options (both MBTA commuter rail and bus service), providing a benefit to the new residents who will own and occupy these units, while simultaneously providing a new base of customers for businesses in the square, which benefits all Roslindale residents. The design and program appear to make good use of that high level of walkability.
- As noted above, the Proposed Project barely meets the minimum number of affordable units—three—required by the IDP. We think this Proposed Project can and should do better by providing two additional affordable or workforce units for a total of five. In view of the disproportionate impact of the housing crisis on lower-income and middle-income families, we think the City/BRA should be requiring more affordable and workforce units in every substantial project.
- We agree with the Proposed Project's 1-to-1 parking ratio. In order to accommodate a variety of parking needs, we recommend that purchasers of the units not be required to purchase a parking space as part and parcel of their unit, a strategy known as "unbundling" the parking from the units.¹ This would allow those unit owners that do not need a parking space to sell their parking space to those that want the amenity of two parking spaces. This would bring down the cost of a unit and make the units that much more affordable to those for whom an additional \$10-20,000 in costs could be prohibitive. We need to maintain a diverse community and keep our housing affordable. Also we should all bear in mind that some unit purchasers

¹ See, for example, this link from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council website about unbundling of parking, including an example in Boston: <http://www.mapc.org/resources/parking-toolkit/strategies-topic/unbundled-parking>.

may not even have a vehicle and do not desire to own one. We are convinced that demographic, lifestyle, and technology changes over the past few decades, which have only accelerated in the last several years, support a policy move away from a high preference for individually-owned automobiles.

- Similarly, the developer's decision to include secure bicycle parking and car-sharing credits shows a refreshing willingness to engage on encouraging active transportation in our neighborhood. We believe these amenities will be very attractive to people looking to buy homes in Roslindale, and are essential complements to the 1-to-1 parking ratio proposed for the Proposed Project. Both the bicycle parking and car-sharing credit proposals should be made conditions of the Authority's approval. We see these proposals as very much in agreement with the Boston Transportation Department's recently released draft vision for GoBoston 2030, especially the "health" section. On this point, we note that demand for alternatives to private car ownership such as Uber and ZipCar appear to have shot up in Roslindale. Supply, particularly of ZipCar vehicles, is not keeping up. Anecdotal evidence shows that it is now frequently difficult to reserve such a vehicle at the neighborhood's locations on short notice. As the population grows and more people seek to live in car-free or single-car households, it is imperative that the City do everything in its power to make this possible, including working with ZipCar and other providers to insure an adequate supply of car-sharing options.²
- All new development that smartly leverages our neighborhood's existing active transportation assets should be thinking about ways to concretely support their improvement and expansion. To this end, we propose that the Authority condition approval for the Proposed Project on the developer's financial support for the Roslindale Arboretum Gateway Path. This proposed path would provide a much-needed greenway link between the Roslindale Village MBTA commuter rail stop and the Forest Hills Orange Line station and the Southwest Corridor Path, via a "straight shot" grade-level path in the section of the Arboretum adjacent the commuter rail tracks and linking to the proposed extension of the existing Blackwell Path southward. We have had multiple discussions with the developer with respect to this proposed path, and the developer has expressed willingness to help fund a feasibility study. This sort of improvement to our active transportation infrastructure is critical to accommodating more residents and increasing the vitality of the square without exacerbating traffic and parking issues. We think every new development should be encouraged to support such efforts.

² Likewise, the City should use all available tools to push the MBTA commuter rail to bring the fare from Roslindale in line with other stops within Boston as on the Fairmount Line. This development is steps away from the commuter rail stop, and a more equitable fare structure will strongly incentivize car-free and 1-car families to live here.

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 everyone.

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,



Matt Lawlor

Resident @ 15 Basto Terrace, Roslindale, on behalf of
WalkUP Roslindale Steering Group, including

Ricardo Austrich, Resident @ 843 South Street, Roslindale
Steve Gag, Resident @ 631 South Street, Roslindale
Sarah Kurpiel Lee, Resident @ 65 Cornell Street, Roslindale
Robert Orthman, Resident @ 69 Walter Street, 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
Greg Tobin, Resident @ 1 Sheldon Street, Roslindale
Alan Wright, Resident @ 98 Birch Street, Roslindale

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