



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

October 11, 2019

BY ELECTRONIC MAIL ONLY (michael.a.sinatra@boston.gov)
Boston Planning and Development Agency
One City Hall Square, 9th Floor
Boston, Massachusetts 02201
Attention: Michael Sinatra, Project Manager

RE: 780 American Legion Highway Proposed Project

Dear Mr. Sinatra:

I am writing in reference to the proposed development at 780 American Legion Highway, the site of the Home for Little Wanderers. We believe that The Home for Little Wanderers' mission to provide access to physical and mental health services alongside other supports for at-risk youth and families is critically important. We also believe that adding to the supply of area housing is a necessary step to slow the skyrocketing housing costs and displacement of residents from our growing neighborhood. The proposed project would support The Home for Little Wanderers by providing them with upgraded and expanded facilities, while adding much needed housing to the neighborhood. Additionally, it would eliminate large street-side parking lots and replace them with much more pedestrian-friendly landscaping and greenspace more appropriate for the American Legion Highway corridor, a greenbelt protected parkway in the city.

This project has the potential to be a great collaboration between The Home For Little Wanderers, the developer (Alinea Capital Partners, LLC), and the neighborhood. We feel that, if done correctly, it will be beneficial to all parties involved. The developer has shown his intention to be a good partner with the neighborhood on this project by listening to concerns and submitting a proposal that takes them into account. In particular, the proposed building was designed to taper as it approached neighboring homes to match their height, and embraced the greenbelt protection by including the addition of many trees and street side greenspace.

With all that in mind, we are generally supportive of the project as proposed and feel that it would be a valuable addition to our neighborhood. Having attended the community meetings regarding this project, hearing the concerns of neighbors and remarks of the development team, we did want to comment specifically on a few aspects of the project that we feel could be refined to augment its positive impact on the American Legion corridor.

- **Number of Units/Number of Affordable Units** – This is a large site (around 2.5 acres) located between and in close proximity to a multifamily zoned section containing a much larger 11 story development and, a section zoned “community commercial district” of American Legion Highway. Because of this location and, because of the scale of nearby buildings, we feel that the size and number of units proposed in this project is appropriate. Additionally, because this project does not require existing housing to be removed, no current residents would be forced out of their homes to make way for this project. Considering the current housing crisis in our city, we feel that it is especially important to focus our support on infill development which does not eliminate existing rental units.

Currently, the developer has committed to providing 22 units of housing within the building that will be given to The Home For Little Wanderers. Our understanding is that he has requested that the city to allow him to use these units to fulfil the affordable housing requirement for the neighboring residential building. However, we feel that the developer should commit to meeting the city's affordable housing requirements within the residential building, in addition to, and separate from, any housing that The Home For Little Wanderers decides they require within their building in support of their mission.

- **Parking** – The residential project includes one space for each unit (93 spaces), with overflow parking allowed in the garage attached to The Home For Little Wanderers building (which includes an additional 59 parking spaces for use by The Home). Given the current transit options in the area, car ownership may be necessary for many residents. However, considering that providing additional off-street parking increases the cost of much needed housing, we feel that the proposed number of spaces is an acceptable compromise. Additionally, the developer has stated that he would use surface lots within our neighborhood to meet any additional parking requirements. We feel that any areas that may be taken for additional parking could be better used as green spaces or for additional infill housing.
- **Transit Alternatives** – In order to ensure the success of the proposed parking levels, it is crucial for residents to have access to alternative modes of transit. The immediate area includes two bus lines (14 and 30), along with easy access to the Orange Line via the 32 bus, and the Fairmount Line via the 30 bus. The proposal identifies Blue Bikes and transit access as ways to help ease the demand for parking in this development, and includes offering a location for Blue Bikes onsite, in addition to the developer offering space for secure personal bicycle storage. With a city-led investigation into the redesign of American Legion Highway pending, we ask that the developer commit to supporting the establishment of no parking zones in front of their facility in order to assist with the establishment of protected bicycle lanes, or bus priority lanes along American Legion Highway in order to make these alternatives more viable. Because this corridor is currently underserved by transit, and multiple projects have been proposed that would increase density, we feel it is imperative that the City work with the MBTA to improve service levels, so that people who are seeking choices other than individual car travel have a practical option to do so. In addition to this, we would like the developer to commit to providing space for car share services (such as Zipcar). We feel that these services offer a good alternative to private vehicle ownership, or for access to supplementary vehicles when necessary, and can play an important role in reducing the demand for parking spaces.
- **Pedestrian Access** – The proposed project eliminates the existing surface parking, replacing it with garage parking within the building, and allowing for additional greenspace along the roadway. Additionally, it outlines a plan to bring the sidewalks on site up to modern standards. We think pedestrian access is of utmost importance, and is currently in need of improvements in this area. This site will be one of the first to be redeveloped on American Legion Highway since it was designated with greenbelt protection. With that in mind, we hope that the developer will rise to the challenge and set the standard for the kind of pedestrian-friendly development that should be done along this corridor going forward. Currently the project includes landscaped green space in front of the building. We ask that the developer commit to allowing public access to these areas and include more pedestrian-friendly design elements such as expanded sidewalks and benches, in order to help the American Legion corridor become a more walkable area. With all that in mind, we feel that arranging

the vehicular access points in a manner that allows for the preservation of the existing street side trees, while minimizing the loss of green space to driveways should be a priority. It is our understanding that the developer has not yet come up with a feasible design that satisfies the Boston Planning and Development Agency without eliminating some of the existing street side trees. We ask that the developer, along with the BPDA, commit to finding a solution that maximizes pedestrian safety and greenspace, without necessitating the removal of existing street trees.

- **Sustainable Design** – The developer is required to construct the buildings to the minimum required by the city’s sustainable design standards and has committed to do so. This project will provide The Home For Little Wanderers with a modern climate controlled building, and with the addition of central air conditioning and other modern amenities, their utility use could increase substantially. The Home is a nonprofit that is providing a public good and is largely reliant on public funding in order to function. In order to mitigate the potential for increased utility use and costs, they should be provided with a building that will exceed the city’s green building requirements. In particular, we believe it is important that they are provided with a solar array to offset the increased electric use associated with a modern climate-controlled building. We encourage the developer to work with The Home to find the most environmentally, and economically sustainable solution possible.

In closing, we would like to restate our support for this project. Providing assistance for youth and families is of the utmost importance. The Home For Little Wanderers is a valuable member of our community and this project will allow them to expand the quality and scope of their services. Additionally, we understand that in a city with a rapidly expanding population and economic growth, it is important to meet the demand for housing with new units so that existing residents are not priced out of our neighborhoods.

Thank you for your time,

Margaux Leonard
Nick Ward

Residents 35 Harding Road, Roslindale, on behalf of the WalkUP Roslindale Steering Group

Ricardo Austrich, Resident @ 843 South 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
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 @ 21 Conway Rd, Roslindale

Marc Theiss, Resident @ 55 Prospect Avenue, Roslindale
Greg Tobin, Resident @ 1 Sheldon St, 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 below) resulting from our mission and principles.

Copy to:

Mr. Joseph Coppinger, Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Services (joseph.coppinger@boston.gov)
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