



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

We Need a New Zoning Board of Appeal

Open Letter to Mayor Wu from WalkUP Roslindale

WalkUP Roslindale calls on Mayor Michelle Wu to appoint new members to the City of Boston Zoning Board of Appeal.

The Zoning Board of Appeal (ZBA) membership is fundamentally opposed to the Mayor's climate, transit, and housing justice agenda. In the past few months, the ZBA has rejected multiple new 4-story residential buildings proposed on Washington Street in or near Roslindale Square. This area has many existing 4-story buildings, is served by almost a dozen bus routes with dedicated rush hour lanes, and is less than a mile from the Forest Hills MBTA Station. In these rejections, ZBA members primarily insisted on additional car parking over more affordable units or improved commercial spaces for local businesses. These sorts of ZBA decisions are crippling the mayor's stated agenda to incentivize developers to build affordable, mixed-use, transit-friendly projects in our neighborhood and across the city of Boston.

Forcing developers to dedicate more space to car storage exacerbates the housing crisis, makes new housing more expensive, and harms our community. Insisting on excessive off-street parking in new developments already well served by transit reduces the total possible number of housing units and particularly the number of income-restricted units built. In the most egregious recent example, we saw the ZBA reject a development at 4198 Washington Street which far exceeded the City's mandated goals for income-restricted housing on site and would have provided new spaces to multiple small businesses owned by Asian-American proprietors. ZBA members wanted parking to replace both housing and commercial space on site. We have seen similar reasoning in other recent denials by the ZBA in Roslindale including, but not limited to, proposals at 4164 Washington Street and just last week at 4025 Washington Street. Some ZBA members demanded more parking on site and rejected the projects as too dense, an implausible assertion in a corridor full of similar three and four-story buildings.

These ZBA decisions are harming Roslindale, a neighborhood in desperate need of new housing. As active residents of this community, we have watched as housing prices and rents have continued to skyrocket in our neighborhood and across the city. We have participated in community processes for each of these proposed developments, attended meetings, submitted comment letters, and testified in support. These proposals have garnered strong support from the Boston Planning and Development Agency, local elected officials, and organizations. Nevertheless, all this work comes to a crashing halt once these proposals reach the ZBA. The ZBA is acting outside its scope, enforcing its own self-made transportation policy prioritizing vehicles over people, and at times seemingly acting with the individual interests of some members in mind. To that last point, we note that the ZBA chairwoman lives in Roslindale and has repeatedly voiced opposition to projects in Roslindale Square that, in her opinion, may adversely affect parking for unspecified members of the community. At this point, we cannot help but question these decisions and at times the motivations behind them.

The current decision-making process in this city for most development proposals is untenable. Rejection of such urgently needed mixed-use developments elevates the needs of cars above the needs of Boston's residents -- a 20th century view of development and the city that is out of step with the needs of today. By forcing developers to go back to the drawing board to add more parking to projects, we are sending the message that cars, and their associated human health, environmental, and social problems, still dominate over many more critical human priorities, most notably housing for people.

Mayor Wu has the power to appoint new members to the ZBA immediately, subject to City Council confirmation. Eleven of the thirteen members, including the chairwoman, are holdover appointments on expired terms from the prior mayoral administrations. While we understand the city has many pressing needs, surely the creation of new, transit-friendly housing must be high on that list. **To that end, we call on Mayor Wu to nominate a new slate of ZBA members to the City Council who take a more holistic view of the city, understand its changing needs, and do not prioritize vehicle storage over homes for people.**

Our current zoning regimen is fundamentally at odds with the needs of our city and neighborhood. The overly restrictive zoning effectively forces everything through a zoning relief process that is tilted toward preserving the status quo at a moment in time when the status quo desperately needs to be changed, especially as it relates to our relationship with individual motor vehicle use and ownership. Meanwhile, the cost of housing continues to skyrocket. We not only need a new ZBA, we need new zoning rules that facilitate by right the development of new, transit-friendly, and more affordable housing. We know and respect that the Mayor and city are undertaking a review of development processes and seeking a new Director of Planning for the city. While we support those efforts, we firmly believe a change in the makeup of the ZBA cannot wait for these processes to finish. **Mayor Wu needs to act now to appoint new ZBA members who support her housing agenda and that of the voters who handed her a strong mandate to change the status quo in Boston.**

WalkUP Roslindale Board of Directors

About WalkUP Roslindale:

WalkUP Roslindale, which takes its name from the international movement to foster “Walkable Urban Places,” is a collaborative group of Roslindale residents and business owners 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 our board of directors and have over five hundred additional supporters. More information about WalkUP Roslindale and our initiatives can be found at walkuproslindale.org.