



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

April 8, 2021

BY ELECTRONIC MAIL ONLY (caitlin.coppinger@boston.gov)

Boston Planning & Development Agency

One City Hall Square, 9th Floor

Boston, Massachusetts 02201

Attention: Caitlin Coppinger, Project Manager

RE: 59-63 BELGRADE AVENUE, ROSLINDALE – SMALL PROJECT REVIEW

Dear Caitlin:

Please accept the following comments on behalf of WalkUP Roslindale with respect to the proposed rental residential development at 59-63 Belgrade Avenue (the “Proposed Project”). As set forth in the Small Project Review application, this is a residential development project, located on the edge of Roslindale Square, and providing thirty-one (31) units of needed housing, including four (4) income-restricted units under the BPDA’s Inclusionary Development Policy (“IDP”). **WalkUP Roslindale generally supports the Proposed Project.** As a guiding principle, we are in favor of the production of 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. In this letter, we have the following comments and suggestions, which some of our members also voiced in person at the recent community meeting on March 31st. Our comments intend to emphasize the importance of addressing both the future of transportation and the need for more affordable housing in every development project that our city considers.

1. Transportation and Parking

At twenty-two (22) parking spaces, the Proposed Project contains a parking ratio below 1:1, which we applaud. The Proposed Project is well-situated to minimize onsite parking and car use by residents. The location is directly next to the Roslindale Village commuter rail station and along multiple bus



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

routes, a short trip to Forest Hills. Belgrade Avenue has bike lanes making it easily accessible for bicycle commuters. These sustainable transportation features all make this Proposed Project a transit-oriented project that should limit the on-site parking as much as possible. We commend the developer for agreeing to uncouple parking from unit costs, ensuring only those occupants who need parking have to pay for it. We also appreciate the ample onsite bicycle storage that will be part of the project. We continue to encourage the developer to seek ways to further reduce parking on site as much as possible.

2. Housing Affordability

We would like to see the developer increase the number of income-restricted units at the Proposed Project. Currently, the Proposed Project will meet the minimum requirement of four income-restricted units under the City's IDP mandate (13% of the total units on site). While we are happy to see any income-restricted units come online in a neighborhood in desperate need of them, we strongly encourage the developer and BPDA to work to increase the number provided. We believe cost savings may be available from further reducing the available parking and/or increasing the overall number of units onsite to make this feasible.

3. Mitigation Item - Crosswalk at Belgrade Avenue and Robert Street

As part of mitigation, and to improve the safety of residents of the Proposed Project and surrounding neighborhood, we propose the developer work with the BPDA and Boston Transportation Department (BTD) to fund and install safety measures at the nearby crosswalk at Belgrade Avenue and Robert Street, located adjacent to the Roslindale Village commuter rail station and directly in front of St. Nectarios Church and the Cooperative Bank. Specifically, we envision flashing rapid beacons to alert motorists to pedestrians seeking to cross at Belgrade Avenue there. Additionally, we envision curb bump outs at each end of the crosswalk to make pedestrians more visible to motorists. That crosswalk has a high level of pedestrian traffic to and from the commuter rail station, Roslindale Square, the church, and other points of interest. Enhancing the safety of that crosswalk for pedestrians would greatly benefit occupants of this building and the overall walkability of the site and Square.



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

4. Green Building

The Proposed Project is below the Large Project Review threshold and is only technically required to meet building code-based energy efficiency and green building requirements. However, the BPDA should require the Proposed Project to exceed those limited 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 need to be far more efficient in their use of energy. The Proposed Project should be a “net zero” building (energy used equals the amount of energy generated by the building on an annual basis). A BPDA-approved proposed 14-unit residential addition to Roslindale Hardware (at 4407 Washington St - just a mile away from the Proposed Project) is an excellent example of how to use solar and energy efficient techniques and materials to create a structure that is close to or better than net zero.

The Commonwealth is decarbonizing the grid rapidly, so investing in electric and renewable infrastructure in the Proposed Project is critical to avoid erecting a building that will emit more CO₂ for decades to come. We assert that:

- All appliances should be electric.
- Heating and cooling should be provided by either ground- or air-sourced heat pumps. Utility incentives and tax credits (such as SMART, the Solar Massachusetts Renewable Target) can help reduce the cost.
- Solar panels should be included in the design. Other developments in the area have considered retrofitting their buildings only to give up due to the logistical hurdles of dividing up costs and benefits amongst multiple units, as well as the significant cost of modifying an existing structure (versus including solar from the start).
- Each parking space should have access to an electric vehicle charging station. At a minimum, dark conduit should be installed next to each space so that adding charging stations could be accomplished with minimum expense in the future.

After the Proposed Project is built, it will be too late to implement these energy efficiency measures that could easily be incorporated at the design phase.



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

5. Design

We wish to highlight and applaud the overall design of the building. In particular, we note and appreciate the intent and efforts made by the architect and development team to incorporate higher-end materials like brick that are common throughout surrounding buildings in Roslindale Square and in the funeral home to be replaced onsite. While aesthetics should always take a back seat to the need to house people, we wish to highlight this very intentional design that will fit in nicely at this important gateway to Roslindale Square.

In closing, **we wish to reiterate our overall support for the Proposed Project**, while especially emphasizing our call to both reduce the off-street parking ratio and increase the number of units onsite in order to maximize the number of IDP units.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert P. Orthman", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Robert P. Orthman

Chair, Housing and Development Committee and Board of Directors Member

Resident @ 112 Roslindale Avenue, #1, Roslindale, on behalf of the WalkUP Roslindale Board

About WalkUP Roslindale

WalkUP Roslindale, which takes its name from the international movement to foster “Walkable Urban Places,” is a non-profit organization of residents and local 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 a board of directors 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 and opinions of our board resulting from our mission and principles.