



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

October 12, 2022

BY ELECTRONIC MAIL ONLY (quinn.w.valcich@boston.gov)

Boston Planning & Development Agency

One City Hall Square, 9th Floor

Boston, Massachusetts 02201

Attention: Quinn Valcich, Project Manager

RE: 361 BELGRADE AVENUE, ROSLINDALE – LARGE PROJECT REVIEW

Dear Mr. Valcich:

Please accept the following comments on behalf of WalkUP Roslindale with respect to the proposed rental residential development at 361 Belgrade Avenue (the “Proposed Project”). As set forth in the Large Project Review application, this is a residential development project located in Roslindale, and providing one hundred and twenty-four (124) units of needed housing, including eighteen (18) 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 growing 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 public meeting on September 28th. Additionally, three of our board members (Matthew Lawlor, Robert Orthman, and Kathryn Ostrofsky) serve on the project Impact Advisory Group. 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 eighty-six (86) parking spaces, the Proposed Project provides 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 Bellevue commuter rail station and along multiple bus 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 to avoid inducing demand for more privately-owned vehicles. We commend the plan for ample onsite bicycle storage and proposing to add a BlueBikes station nearby. We encourage the developer and BPDA to work with the MBTA to situate the BlueBikes station at the nearby commuter rail station. Overall, we 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 barely exceed the minimum requirement of sixteen (16) 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, and do credit the developer with adding two additional income-restricted units above the IDP minimum, 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, including adding another floor to the building if necessary, to make this feasible.

3. Mitigation Item - WR Parkway & Belgrade Ave/Anawan Ave & Belgrade Ave

As part of mitigation, and to improve the safety of residents of the Proposed Project and surrounding neighborhood, we strongly encourage the developer to continue to work with the BPDA, Boston Transportation Department (BTD), and Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to rethink the intersection at West Roxbury Parkway and Belgrade Avenue. This is a notorious intersection that creates a literal and figurative barrier between West Roxbury and Roslindale. We strongly urge the respective agencies and developer to work to make the intersection welcoming and safe for pedestrians and cyclists, and to create a real connection between the West Roxbury Main Street district and Roslindale Village Main Street district.

Relatedly, we commend the developer for proposing to reconfigure the nearby intersection of Anawan Avenue and Belgrade Avenue. The excessive width of this intersection encourages drivers to turn at higher speeds, increasing the risk of serious injuries to pedestrians crossing the street as well as other road users. We especially note that this intersection carries higher pedestrian demand in the

morning and evening rush hours for individuals going to and from the commuter rail station. We envision new crosswalks with flashing rapid beacons to alert motor vehicle drivers to pedestrians seeking to cross at Belgrade Avenue there. Additionally, we want to see curb bump outs at each end of, ideally, a raised crosswalk to make pedestrians more visible to motorists and reduce illegal speeding. We appreciate the developer making note of this in their plans and look forward to working with the respective agencies on this important street configuration change.

4. Green Building

We applaud the developer for proactively planning to meet Net Zero/Zero Plus/LEED Gold-Platinum standards with the Proposed Project. 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 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 commend the developer for proposing the following measures and suggest others below to further enhance the building's green footprint:

- All appliances will be electric.
- Heating and cooling will be provided by heat pumps.
- Solar panels should be included in the design.
- 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.

Overall, we commend the developer for the proactive green building and net zero standards they plan to undertake and encourage going further.

5. Design and Size

We believe a building of this size is appropriate at this site. The most direct abutter to the site is a multi-story residential building. Further, the site is abutted on two other sides by railroad tracks and the Parkway, respectively. As noted above, we believe the building could in fact add another story, particularly if it would facilitate an increase in overall units and income-restricted units onsite. From a design perspective, we recognize the developer has created setbacks to the building height to break down the massing at certain points. We express no opinion on the necessity of that measure but wish to acknowledge the developer's efforts to mitigate the building's impact size-wise.

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,



Robert P. Orthman

Chair, Housing and Development Committee and Board of Directors Member
Resident @ Roslindale, on behalf of the WalkUP Roslindale Board

Cc: Councilor Ricardo Arroyo, District 5
Councilor Kendra Lara, District 6
Councilor Michael Flaherty, At-Large
Councilor Ruthzee Louijeune, At-Large
Councilor Julia Mejia, At-Large
Councilor Erin Murphy, At-Large
Representative Edward Coppinger, 10th Suffolk district
Senator Michael Rush, Norfolk and Suffolk district
Uju Onochie, Roslindale ONS liaison
Jake Lacey, West Roxbury ONS liaison

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.