



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

Jan 31, 2025

BY ELECTRONIC MAIL ONLY  
Boston Planning Department  
One City Hall Plaza, 9th Floor  
Boston, Massachusetts 02201  
Attention: Planner II Eileen Michaud ([eileen.michaud@boston.gov](mailto:eileen.michaud@boston.gov))

Dear Members of the Planning Team,

WalkUP Roslindale is pleased to express strong support and offer feedback on the Roslindale Squares and Streets Small Area Plan. As an organization dedicated to promoting walkability, livability, and equitable development in Roslindale, we appreciate the comprehensive approach taken in the development of this plan. We would like to highlight several aspects that we particularly support and believe will greatly benefit our community, as well as areas where we have concerns.

## Land Use

We are excited to see "Community Vision 2" in the Emerging Land Use Visions section. The acknowledgment of a sizable constituency for significant upzoning and housing growth throughout Roslindale, not just in the commercial core, is commendable. The proposed 6-7 story buildings in the heart of the Square are a fantastic vision. These buildings will activate our local businesses with hundreds of new patrons who can travel by foot to visit their favorite shops and services.

We are excited to see the expansion of the public realm and opportunities to improve walkability, especially with a shared Poplar Street, a through block on Taft Court (currently the Village Market parking lot between South Street and

Corinth Street), and an improved and safer intersection at Alexander the Great Park on Belgrade Avenue.

The provision of wider sidewalks, more greenery, and permeable surfaces, plazas, and outdoor seating areas is an underrated aspect of the new zoning districts that will follow on the Plan. These features will enhance the public realm as parcels redevelop.

The consideration of more multifamily housing on streets like Robert, Firth, and Florence is a step in the right direction. While we would prefer to see small multifamily zoning extended throughout the neighborhood, this shows a willingness to consider rezoning beyond the commercial core.

However, we are disappointed with the Plan's failure to rezone most residential areas within the Plan's coverage to allow for greater housing density. Most residential streets around the Square will not be rezoned under the Squares + Streets initiative. Instead, it appears that they'll be addressed with more modest zoning initiatives like Neighborhood Housing.

We appreciate that the Planning Department is trying to strike a balance between competing community visions. However, we strongly disagree with lowering our ambitions for residential street rezoning. Boston is short of tens of thousands of homes, and lower-density areas adjacent to strong commercial transit-rich areas like Roslindale Square are among the best, most equitable places to target more housing.

Leaving residential rezoning up to the Neighborhood Housing Initiative is problematic for two main reasons:

1. Its timeline doesn't match the urgency of the moment. Only large properties (60' wide or more) have a target timeline of "2025." Most parcels in Roslindale and throughout the city won't be affected by this first phase. Medium and smaller residential properties likely won't be rezoned until 2026 or later. We need to do more, and we need to do it faster.
2. Its scope is extremely modest. Any future residential rezoning will "reflect existing built patterns" and "affirm existing scale," i.e., bring

existing buildings into conformance with zoning rather than allowing increased density to accommodate more new residents who desperately seek housing opportunities. This retroactive approach is not enough. We need a proactive approach to thicken up everywhere, especially in lower-density, high-demand residential areas.

We encourage the Planning Department to revisit the idea of rezoning residential areas in the final Small Area Plan for Roslindale Square.

## Design Framework

We have concerns about the prescriptive nature of the Design Guidelines and the potential impact on development costs. The Design Guidelines call for creative sensitivity toward culturally, historically, or architecturally significant sites and breaking up the massing of new buildings with upper story setbacks. Mandating creative sensitivity and upper story setbacks can significantly increase construction and maintenance costs, reduce occupiable space, and limit housing supply. While the intention is to enhance the aesthetic and environmental quality of developments, these requirements may have unintended consequences that outweigh their benefits. We should avoid enforcing subjective aesthetic preferences through regulation. We are also concerned about the planned inventory of Roslindale's "potentially historic" structures and how this might be used to delay or block worthwhile redevelopment.

## Housing & Real Estate

We support developing housing on the Taft Hill parking lot, but strongly recommend refining and implementing the Roslindale Square Parking and Curb Access Plan before beginning the public process for development. Moving forward without performing due diligence around parking not only threatens the success of these particular recommendations, but also risks fueling negative community perspectives on the larger Squares + Streets initiative.

Squares + Streets has provided a unique opportunity for coordination between City departments, yet this seems to be missing in the approach to the

parking plan. It is critical that parking plan implementation be prioritized and not remain on hold or far down the queue for years while city-wide parking metering systems are slowly rolled out.

Additionally, the parking survey which informed the Roslindale Square Parking and Curb Access Plan does not reflect today's reality. The parking study was conducted in October 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic, the study was published in March 2022, and the parking plan was updated in March 2023. The implementation timeline suggests late 2026/2027 at the earliest. A new parking survey should be conducted that includes more side streets surrounding Roslindale Square, reviews parking turnover, and surveys customers in addition to business owners. Establishing new norms around parking and curb access and getting the Roslindale community accustomed to them will help the Taft Hill lot public process go much more smoothly.

We recommend:

- An updated parking study
- A more aggressive timeline for implementation
- A post-implementation report of the parking management plan, like the [Centre Street road diet report](#)
- Adding some if-then statements to the Plan sequencing parking and curb access implementation before starting the public process for development of the Taft Hill lot
- Establishing a firm agreement with the MBTA for parking in the Roslindale Village train station lots
- Enforcement of the unmetered parking
- Long-term - we need paid permit parking

## Small Business

The plan's encouragement of flexible entertainment spaces will contribute to the cultural vibrancy of Roslindale. We also support development of a citywide tracking system for commercial vacancies, along with programs that assist existing or start-up businesses in filling these spaces. Furthermore, we support expanding marketing outreach for the Legacy Business Program with hard copy and translated materials to boost community participation and

providing digital marketing support for brick-and-mortar businesses to broaden their customer base.

Researching the feasibility of limiting store size or types through zoning to support small businesses is worth exploring. Systematically tracking commercial vacancies is also a necessary tool to assess the effectiveness of our land use policies.

However, we believe that asking real estate developments to make additional donations to business support organizations is excessive. Developments that go through the Article 80 development review process (the threshold is 10+ units, or 20,000+ square feet) will be asked to donate to local business support organizations. Taken in isolation, this proposal seems sensible. But larger developments will already support local businesses by building out the ground floor active use spaces required for Squares + Streets districts S3 and above. Additionally, the City's upcoming anti-displacement plan will require at least 6 months advanced notice of any displacement and is contemplating requiring developers to provide financial assistance for displaced businesses. Under the proposed revisions to the Article 80 development review process, projects would be subject to a standardized formula-based public benefit contribution. Support for local businesses should be funded in a predictable manner through the City's operating budget rather than on an ad-hoc basis dependent on future development.

## Arts & Culture

The proposal to issue "location-specific entertainment licenses" to streamline the approval process for public events is much needed. Organizing public events currently requires navigating a cumbersome and time-intensive process, which discourages potential organizers.

We are excited about the high potential Poplar Street has for cultural activation and knitting together Adams Park with the rest of Roslindale Square.

We are also enthusiastic about additional initiatives that will further establish Roslindale Square as a vibrant cultural hub and celebrate our cultural

diversity, bringing art into our everyday lives and fostering a greater sense of connection and pride among residents.

## Transportation & Public Realm

We strongly endorse the recommendations to enhance the neighborhood's transportation infrastructure and public spaces. Restoring two-way Washington Street presents numerous benefits, including increased pedestrian safety, expanded open space at Adams Park, simplified bus routing, and the conversion of Poplar into a shared street.

We strongly support recommendations to add and improve amenities and crosswalks at bus stops, the redesign of dangerous intersections on Belgrade Avenue and Washington Street, and the reversing of the one-way directions of Bexley and Firth, to prioritize pedestrian safety.

The Plan did not make any mention of integration with future segments of the Roslindale Gateway Path terminating at the Roslindale Village train station. The first phase of this project (on Arboretum Rd, about a mile north of Roslindale Square) is nearly complete. Anticipating the Gateway Path's future phases in this Plan would help extend the Southwest Corridor and bring people to and from Roslindale Square on an entirely off-street shared path.

Prioritizing shade and cooling in the Square is crucial for mitigating urban heat. While the Plan emphasizes street trees, it is important to consider modern shade structures as a short-to-medium term solution.

Adding a children's play area to Adams Park is a wonderful idea as much of the park area is currently underused. Additionally, investing in pathways, seating, and shade at Healy and Fallon fields would be valuable improvements. A water fountain at Fallon Field is also necessary for convenience and health and safety.

In closing, we deeply appreciate the efforts of the Planning Department and all stakeholders involved in the Roslindale Squares and Streets Small Area Plan. The proposed recommendations to accommodate more density and improve transportation and the pedestrian experience will greatly enhance our community's livability and accessibility. Thank you for considering our comments and concerns.

Sincerely,

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 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](http://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 above) resulting from our mission and principles.

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