

**MELROSE BOARD OF APPEALS
MEETING MINUTES
Public Hearing
Wednesday, June 18, 2025
7:30 p.m.
Remote Meeting**

Present:

David Roache
Bryan Thorp
Benjamin Rosenberg
Daniel Gelormini
Jeffery Ugino
Chris Coughlin

Absent: Raj Singh

Staff Present: Maya Noviski, Senior Planner and Adam Forrester, Assistant Planner

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 pm.

Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2025, this meeting was conducted via remote participation. Specific information and the general guidelines for remote participation by members of the public and/or parties with a right and/or requirement to attend this meeting were found on the City of Melrose's website, at www.cityofmelrose.org/remote-meetings. No in-person attendance of members of the public was permitted, but every effort was made to ensure that the public could adequately access the proceedings in real time, or in the event that we are unable to do so, on the mmtv3.org website an audio or video recording, transcript, or other comprehensive record of proceedings was posted as soon as possible after the meeting. A link was also available on www.cityofmelrose.org.

Application materials were posted to the City's website: www.cityofmelrose.org/board-appeals.

CASES BEFORE THE BOARD

25 002 – 199-201 Essex Street (continued public hearing) –

The application of Carroll Essex LLC for a Comprehensive Permit pursuant to M.G.L. c.40B, s. 21 for an approx. 44,060 sf, 5-story mixed-use building with approx. 1,400 sf of commercial space, 50 residential units, of which 13 will be affordable as is required and regulated under the law, and 22 parking spaces at 199-201 Essex Street, Melrose, MA, on a lot of land containing 16,136 sf and shown on Assessor's Map C8 0 12 & C8 0 14. Exemptions per statute are claimed for: Melrose Zoning Ordinance §235-6.2 & -6.3 for dimensional regulations including floor area ratio, maximum height/stories, front yard setback, maximum building coverage, and projections into required setbacks, §235-11.1, -11.2 & -11.5 for off-street parking spaces, bicycle parking spaces, parking space dimensions, aisle width, and driveway width, §235-9.3 for landscaping and screening requirements, & §235-5.2 for permitted principal use in the BB-1 zoning district.

Robert Bell, Attorney, appeared before the Board to request to continue the case to July 9th.

By roll call the Board voted 5-0, to grant a continuance to the hearing on July 9, 2025. Voting Members included Benjamin Rosenberg, Jeffery Ugino, Chris Coughlin, Bryan Thorp, and David Roache.

Documents: ZBA Application materials, case 25-002

25 010 – 554-556 Franklin Street-

The application of Melrose Highlands Development LLC for a Comprehensive Permit pursuant to M.G.L. c.40B, s. 21 for an approx. 82,204 sf, 5-story residential building with 60 residential units, of which 15 will be affordable as is required and regulated under the law, and 45 parking spaces at 554-556 Franklin Street, Melrose, MA, on a lot of land containing 25,468 sf and shown on Assessor's Map B12 0 61-63. Exemptions per statute are claimed for Melrose Zoning Ordinance §235-6.2 & 6.3 for dimensional regulations including front yard setback, side yard setback, rear yard setback, maximum height/stories, maximum building coverage, minimum open space requirements, and projections into required setbacks, §235-11.1, -11.2, -11.5, & -11.6 for off-street parking spaces, bicycle parking spaces, parking space dimensions and regulations, loading zone dimensions, parking in the front yard setback, pervious pavement requirements, §235-3.2.6, & -3.2.8 for site plan review and revision to approved plans requirements, & §235-5.1, & -5.2 for applicability of use regulations and permitted principal use in the UR-A zoning district. Exemptions per statute are also claimed for Street & Sidewalks Code c. 202 and the Melrose Board of Appeals Comp Permit Rules.

Sean and Laura Szekely, Applicants, Rich Williams, Civil Engineer, Donnie Garrity, Architect, and Daniel Dumais, Traffic Engineer, appeared before the Board to present the case.

Sean and Laura Szekely provided an overview of the project. The overview included the following:

- The project consists of a 60-unit residential building with 15 of the units being affordable.
- The site is well served by public transit with Melrose Highlands MBTA Commuter Rail stop 500 feet away and a 131-bus route stop directly in front of the property.
- 3 of the units will be Group 2 accessible and the remaining 57 units will be Group 1 adaptable.
- The on-site amenities include a 45-space covered parking garage on the ground floor, 42 indoor bike parking spaces, a rooftop common patio area, a mail/package room, and a trash room.
- Vehicular access to the site will be through the municipal lot.

- They will apply for an easement from City Council for the access to be off of the municipal lot and grant an easement to the City for the proposed improvements of constructing four public parking spaces and a loading dock that straddles the private land and municipal lot.
- They noted they are proposing a rich unit mix and unbundled parking spaces to attract a diverse population of residents.
- They explained that they incorporated feedback from City staff and abutters that attended community meetings in their proposed design.
- Proposed off-site improvements including traffic calming measures, pedestrian safety improvements, and new signage for Belmont Place.

Donnie Garrity provided an overview of the architectural plans, which included the following:

- The ground level consists of 45-space parking garage, bike room, trash room, mail/package room, and residential lobby entryway. Pedestrian access will be through the main entrance along Franklin Street and the side entrance accessible from the municipal lot. Vehicles access the site through the municipal lot.
- There is a deep setback along the front which allows for additional landscaping that offers screening along Franklin Street.
- A semipublic seating area directly behind the bus stop on Franklin Street is proposed at the corner of the site along Franklin Street and the municipal lot.
- The proposed location for the transformer is in the back corner of the site abutting the municipal lot.
- Floors 2-5 will have a mix of studio, one-bedroom, two-bedroom, and three-bedroom units. On the second floor there will be a common rooftop patio area. All units will either have a balcony or access to the common rooftop patio or roof deck.
- The fifth floor will be set back to reduce massing. Fourth floor will have a strong cornice line.
- Brick masonry materials will be used based on existing building on site.
- Ground level parking garage will be open and have metal mesh screening.
- The rear of the property will have landscape screening and a new fence.
- A neighborhood height study was shown showing the 4th floor cornice line is similar to existing buildings in the Highlands neighborhood.

Daniel Dumais provided an overview of the traffic study, which included the following:

- Study included vehicle and pedestrian use data along Franklin Street, Belmont Street, Melrose Street, and Belmont Place, as well as the major intersections in proximity to the site.
- Study focused on peak commute hours.

- Access to the site via the municipal lot leads to less congestion along Franklin Street.
- Other recently approved projects and their impact of area traffic included in the study. All projects together brought 1% yearly traffic growth over seven years.
- Site is well served by public transit. High reliance on alternative transit according to census data.
- To help reduce vehicle speed along Franklin Street and improve pedestrian safety, developers will work with City to implement driver feedback radar sign, rapid flashing beacon (RRFB), raised crosswalk at Franklin and Greenwood Street, and install additional signage and pavement markings.

Rich Williams provided an overview of the civil plans, which included the following:

- The existing conditions cause the stormwater to discharge from the site to the municipal lot. Stormwater management system is located under building. Surface runoff to municipal lot will be reduced by 50% with new proposed system.
- Trash pickup will happen in the proposed loading area of the municipal lot.
- An existing utility pole will need to be moved, and the wires will be relocated underground to feed the proposed transformer.

Board Members had the following questions/comments for the Applicant and the rest of the development team. Answers are indicated underneath the question.:

- The proposed improvements to mitigate traffic speed and improve pedestrian safety will be done at the developer's cost?
 - Yes, the developer will cover the cost.
- How are you going to stage the construction? Will the staging be in the municipal lot?
 - No, it will not be in the municipal lot. An updated construction management plan will be submitted indicating where staging will occur.
- If trash pick up is happening in municipal lot, who will be responsible for keeping the lot clean? Developers should commit to maintenance plans for the lot.
 - No trash containers will be located on lot. Department Head meeting covered various responsibilities for municipal lot area. Responsibility of maintenance of lot will be explored during the easement negotiations.
- Will the entrance to the municipal lot remain one-way? Will the exit be through Melrose Street?
 - Yes
- Is there proposed signage for navigating the lot?
 - Yes, there is a plan for improving signage to make it clear for drivers.
- One Board Member wants more clarity on the use of the municipal lot and is looking forward to the site visit to get more context on the use.
- What is the need for 5 floors over 4 floors?

- The proposed building is less dense than other recently approved projects in the area. Five floors allow for more units and they are including a variety of unit sizes.
- Some Members suggested this would be an ideal site for ground floor commercial space.
- Members were supportive of the design, especially the use of brick masonry and the quality of materials used.
- When were the traffic readings taken?
 - Thursday April 17, 2025, and Wednesday April 30, 2025.

The Board received several written comments before the hearing and heard several public comments during the meeting. Jack and David Norcross, 91 West Highland Ave, Patty Barrett, 569 Franklin Street, Marta Lee-Perriard, 569 Franklin Street, Thomas Perriard, 569 Franklin Street, Maria Alamonty, 28 Belmont Street, and Councilor Karamcheti, had the following comments and questions:

- The public voiced concern over:
 - Proposed project does not fit within character of neighborhood
 - Impact on traffic and parking
 - Impact on quality of life for area residents
 - Scale of project- too many units and stories
 - Pedestrian safety issues
 - Public transit is not reliable in area. New residents will need cars.
 - City services will be overburdened by this large project
 - Structure is too large and will block abutters' sunlight
 - Using public resources for access to the site (municipal lot) for private gain. Any access/egress should take place within the boundaries of the project site to the street
 - Impact of delivery and trash trucks on local traffic
 - Intersections closest to project cannot handle an increase in traffic. They need to be redesigned
 - A commercial space should be considered to bring in revenue for the City.
 - Safety concerns of increased traffic on Melrose Street due to the proximity to the Roosevelt School and the Middle/High Schools
- Comments in support included:
 - Applicants have met with direct abutters and are committed to making improvements to the area that benefits the community.
 - Appreciated the effort made by the developers to incorporate feedback from the community meetings into updated design
 - The proposed traffic calming and pedestrian safety measures are an important addition to the project.

By roll call the Board voted 5-0, to schedule a site visit for two dates: Wednesday June 25, 2025 at 5pm and Tuesday July 8, 2025 at 5pm to accommodate all members schedules, and also continue the case to July 16, 2025.

Documents:

ZBA Application 25-010

Architectural Plans 5.16.25

Civil Plans 4.21.25

Traffic Study 5.21.25

OTHER BUSINESS

Next Meeting

The next meetings are scheduled for July 9, 2025.

The meeting adjourned at 9:35 pm.