

**MELROSE PLANNING BOARD
ZONING SUBCOMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
Tuesday, February 4, 2014
7:00 PM**

Basement Conference Room, Basement Level, City Hall, 562 Main Street

PRESENT: Anne DeSouza-Ward, Paul King, and Carla Morelli

ABSENT: Sharon Petrillo

Denise Gaffey, Director and City Planner, Adam Duchesneau, Assistant Planning Director, Zoning Board of Appeals member James Bradley, and Manisha Bewtra from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council were present.

The meeting was called to order at 7:15 PM by Ms. DeSouza-Ward.

Tremont Street/Essex Street Rezoning

Mr. Duchesneau began by recapping some items from the previous Zoning Subcommittee meeting. He pointed out that the Table of Uses for the BC district had been updated based upon the discussion at the last Subcommittee meeting. Mr. Duchesneau then began to review the proposed changes to the Table of Dimensional and Density Regulations for the BC district which were recommended by the Commuter Rail Corridor Plan. Mr. Bradley stated that he thought a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 1.5 in this district would make for awkward building forms because there would still not be enough FAR to take advantage of the lot sizes. Ms. DeSouza-Ward suggested perhaps reducing the minimum lot size for the district. Ms. Morelli agreed and thought this would give a property owner more development potential at their property, especially for smaller lot sizes. She also suggested perhaps waiving the minimum lot size requirement for lots under a certain square footage in the BC districts. Ms. Morelli then asked what the average lot size of parcels was in the entire City of Melrose. Planning Staff noted that this was a good question but that they did not have that information.

Ms. DeSouza-Ward asked what use a developer could get out of a skinny or narrow building, which may be the one of the few possible styles if they did not increase the FAR for the district further. Mr. Bradley inquired as to what size lot a developer would need to be able to construct a 4 story building with an FAR restriction of 1.5. Ms. Gaffey noted that the Subcommittee may need to consider increasing the FAR for the district beyond 1.5. Ms. DeSouza Ward indicated that she thought it would be worthwhile to consider a larger FAR figure.

The Subcommittee then had conversation regarding footnote # 5 in the Table of Dimensional and Density Regulations which would require the minimum lot area to be increased by 1,000 square feet for each dwelling unit proposed in a mixed use development. The Subcommittee reached consensus that they thought this footnote should be removed from the BC district as well as from the BA/BA-1 district. Mr. Bradley then asked why the proposed maximum setback was 10 feet and not even less. Conversation regarding streetscapes then ensued and Alderman Robert Boisselle, who was in attendance, pointed out that sometimes tables and chairs from businesses along Main Street intrude out onto the sidewalk. He added that a slightly larger setback would help to keep these outdoor amenities on private property while still maintaining the existing accessible width of the public sidewalk. Mr. Bradley indicated that he was advocating for having only a 5 foot maximum setback dimension. Ms. Morelli stated that she would like to see the indoor and outdoor spaces of businesses merge into one another. Consensus was then reached to reduce the maximum setback requirement to 5 feet.

Ms. Morelli then asked what the 5% open space requirement would potentially look like if one of the parcels in the BC district were to be redeveloped. She noted that many of the properties in the downtown have virtually no open space and the structures work well in that area. Ms. DeSouza-Ward stated that she thought this regulation was worthwhile as it would encourage property owners to incorporate open space into their developments. Alderman Boisselle pointed out that many of the areas behind the buildings in the downtown are paved and used for parking. Mr. Bradley indicated that he felt the 5% open space requirement was necessary for the larger lots in the BC districts and Ms. Gaffey stated that she thought the 5% requirement was a reasonable allotment. Ms. Morelli asked if perhaps the open space requirement should be increased for smaller size lots in the BC districts. Mr. King asked what 5% of open space on a property would add to a development and wondered if a developer would be creating the open space only because they were required. He questioned if requiring such a small amount of open space would even be worthwhile. Ms. DeSouza-Ward pointed out that the entire lot cannot be covered with a structure if they wanted to take advantage of the proposed increased height and FAR in the district. Ms. Morelli stated that if the Subcommittee really wanted open space to be created on redeveloped parcels that they could incentivize it. Mr. Bradley added that these areas are fairly dense but he did not think a 5% open space requirement was too onerous. Mr. King wondered if they could vary the required amount of open space based upon lot size. Ultimately, consensus was reached to keep the minimum open space requirement at 5% of the lot area.

Ms. DeSouza-Ward then suggested that the Subcommittee raise the proposed FAR in the BC districts from 1.5 to 2.0, but examine modeling for what building types might be constructed if this regulation was implemented. Mr. Bradley added that he felt studying models which displayed what building forms could be created under the proposed regulations was very important. Mr. Duchesneau asked if the proposed regulations would help to allow for the recreation of structures that currently exist in the BC districts that were preferred by the Subcommittee. Ms. Morelli noted that the Subcommittee will likely get some push back on the proposed zoning changes for some of the areas but the modeling will help people to visualize the impacts of the regulations. Mr. King noted that proper controls need to be in place to help regulate growth.

Alderman Boisselle asked if the Subcommittee was considering only allowing large scale commercial spaces on the ground floor. Mr. King indicated that this was not the case. Mr. King continued on to point out that even if a building footprint is larger, it could have multiple storefront spaces on the ground floor. Mr. Boisselle noted that Stearns & Hill on Main Street is expanding upward and eliminating the residential spaces that were once above their first floor dining area. He stated that potential new venues will likely need a significant amount of floor space, at least around 5,000 square feet, to accommodate their use. Ms. Gaffey stated that 5,000 square feet was a relatively small amount of floor area. Mr. King noted that there are some small parcels that are next to each other that could easily be combined in the BC districts to form larger sized project sites.

Ms. DeSouza-Ward stated that she thought they should extend the BC district eastward along Franklin Street to Ashland Street and move the residential properties nearby into the adjacent UR-B district. Ms. Gaffey noted that she thought it would be fine to leave the church at the corner of Franklin Street and Ashland Street out of the BC district. She also noted that it might be best to keep the residential properties in the area within their existing zoning districts. The Subcommittee then reached consensus that only the commercial building between the existing BC district and the Melrose Highlands Congregational Church would be included in the expanded BC district in the Highlands.

The Subcommittee's conversation then turned towards the Wyoming Commuter Rail station area as it was suggested that it might make sense to have a BC district around this station as well. Ms. Gaffey pointed out that the Wyoming station area is currently zoned BA-1 which has very similar regulations to the BC

district. Ms. DeSouza-Ward stated that she thought it made sense to create an additional BC district around the Wyoming Commuter Rail station while relabeling the BC districts near Oak Grove and the Melrose-Wakefield border different zoning districts. Ms. Morelli asked if there had been any interest from a larger developer about the Hunt's Photo & Video property and Ms. Gaffey indicated there had not been.

Planning Staff then raised the topic of a proposed zoning change to Sections 235-65 and 235-66 which would add the BB zone to the existing provision which allows an Applicant to seek Special Permit approval to construct multi-family housing in a non-residentially zoned area. Currently this type of Special Permit can only be applied for in the BB-1 and BA-1 zones and therefore the Tremont Street BB zone is not included in this provision. Ms. Gaffey noted that Planning Staff is already leaning towards recommending allowing multi-family dwellings as a permitted use in the overlay district that would be implemented in the Tremont Street/Essex Street area. She continued on to note that a potential developer of the Knight-Harrison property has approached the City about building a multi-family dwelling structure at the site. This developer had originally thought they could apply Section 235-65 of the zoning ordinance to the property but it was determined by the Building Commissioner that it could not.

Ms. Morelli stated that she was supportive of this small proposed zoning change. Ms. DeSouza-Ward pointed out that a multi-family use in this area would still be subject to a Special Permit and a Design Review permit as part of the regulations. Ms. Gaffey added that Planning Staff would also like to look at lowering the maximum allowable height the Planning Board can permit at their discretion as specified in Section 235-66. Ms. DeSouza-Ward then stated that it seemed fairly simple to add the BB zone to Section 235-65 and that she had spoken to Planning Staff about making this particular zoning change a separate process from the zoning changes that were being discussed for the entire Tremont Street/Essex Street corridor area. Mr. King asked if this change was primarily administrative and he said if it was, then there was no reason to hold up moving the proposed change forward.

Alderman Boisselle then asked for clarification about how the existing zoning currently reads and Ms. Gaffey provided that clarification. Ms. Morelli noted that her only concern about lowering the maximum permitted height the Planning Board could allow as part of the Design Review Permit was that the Tremont Street BB zone is an area where additional permitted height might make sense. She noted that a developer may want to take advantage of the natural screening that is provided by the height of the elevated Commuter Rail tracks which shield the Tremont Street parcels from the residential neighborhoods to the west. Ms. Morelli continued on to note that there are not many areas in the City where residents would be comfortable with significant building height but this might be one of those few locations. Mr. King asked what was the tallest building in the City and Alderman Boisselle indicated that it was the Melrose Towers. Planning Staff then noted that determining the parking requirements for the BC districts still needed to be decided to continue to move the rezoning process forward.

The Subcommittee then set their next meeting date for Wednesday, February 19, 2014 at 7:00 PM.

Documents: - BC Zoning District – Table of Uses (Updated)
 - BC Zoning District – Table of Dimensional and Density Regulations (Updated)
 - Draft Zoning Map for New BC District around the Wyoming Commuter Rail Station

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 PM.