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June 1, 2012

William Tuttle, Director
Office of Real Estate Development
Massachusetts Department of Transportation
State Transportation Building
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116

Re: DOT Parcel 9 Development Proposals
Comments from Beacon Hill Civic Association

Dear Mr. Tuttle,

Since 1922, the Beacon Hill Civic Association has strived to enhance and protect the quality of life for residents of Beacon Hill. Accordingly, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on the four development proposals received by DOT in response to the RFP for Parcel 9.

Members of our organization have attended many meetings related to Parcels 7 and 9 over the past few years, with renewed interest since the reorganized DOT assumed direct control. We are familiar with the existing physical and operational aspects of the Blackstone Block market area and the excellent study undertaken by Project for Public Spaces (PPS) for the BRA, and have, on many occasions, discussed the project with our neighbors in the West End, Downtown North, North End and Waterfront. Many of us have used the pushcart market on a regular basis for decades.

At the outset, we wish to emphasize the goals set out in the RFP:

- That any proposed building be compatible in character with its surroundings
- That the use of the property reinforce the market uses of the district
- That foot traffic be attracted to the Greenway
- That the operating conditions for the Haymarket Pushcart vendors be improved
- That the project be expeditiously undertaken and completed.

To these we would add the following significant goals:

- That the use not constitute a significant tourist attraction since "while tourists would expect to be drawn to a public market, they can also have a destructive impact."

74 Joy Street

Boston

MA 02114

Tel: 617.227.1922

Fax: 617.227.7959

email:
info@bhccivic.org

website:
www.bhccivic.org

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- That the ground floor provide “fresh food at accessible prices” in a market hall consistent with the recommendations of PPS : “basic fresh foods–meats, fish and produce–in a simpler, utilitarian style complementing the historic Blackstone Block merchants and outdoor Haymarket vendors.”
- That the district (Parcel 7, Parcel 9, Blackstone Street and its south side) be considered as an integrated whole architecturally and operationally while respecting the distinct functionality of each element.
- That a governing body for the district, with representation of residents from the surrounding neighborhoods, be established to ensure long term fidelity to the mission.

In our ninety years of experience as a neighborhood organization, and from the 1950’s within a National Historic District, we are accustomed to consider development issues in a time frame of generations, and therefore to understand that the architecture which we accept now will long outlast us and our progeny. In this context, nothing less than the most rigorous standards of authenticity, integrity and excellence of design are admissible.

We are also very much aware of how the unique locally-based attributes of the restored Faneuil Hall Markets brought forth by Rouse and Thompson have given way to the tourism-oriented nationally-branded tourist destination of today. It is vitally important that the Blackstone Market District be protected against such erosion. Not only do we hope for careful selection of a developer now, we urge aggressive control of the functionality of the food markets for Boston area residents through lease agreements, management directives and ongoing oversight.

The following is a summary of our comments with respect to each proposal:

The Boston Museum

We find little to support the concept of this proposed institution as an integral part of a district the purpose of which is to provide a wide range of food choices to ordinary citizens. It is an avowed tourist destination which will attract a clientele (estimated at 400,000 visitors/year) already engaged in touring the Freedom Trail or scoping out Faneuil Hall Marketplace, together with bus-loads of others intent on souvenirs. Its design violates the most significant of the RFP Design Guidelines and would disarrange many push-cart vendors. Its presence in this most historic block of the City would constitute an inauthentic intrusion. We would prefer to see the Boston Museum on another site where it would be less likely to compete with authentic historical sites on the Freedom Trail for the attention and spending of Boston visitors.

Haymarket Square Hotel – Normandy R. E. Partners

The presence of a mid-scale mid-price hotel, as presented, will ensure that activity and security is maintained 24/7, while the provision of a generous landscaped passage through mid-block

from the Greenway to Blackstone Street will enhance that relationship. Ample provision for public access and available community spaces are valuable contributions to the surrounding communities, and Haymarket Pushcart operation will remain in a minimally disrupted traditional format. The nature of the food offerings within the market hall portion of the project requires clarification so as not to compete directly with those of the Boston Public Market at Parcel 7.

Regrettably, the architectural formulation of this proposal leaves much to be desired. The forms are undisciplined and fragmented, while the applied terra cotta fins destroy all sense of human scale and, from most points of view, will render the mass as an undifferentiated monolithic block, absolutely at odds with the architectural tradition which is to be respected.

Market Square – Upton + Partners

The primary program of residential accommodation is entirely appropriate and much needed as relief for the burgeoning North End. Overall planning is based on an understanding of the need to bring the district together holistically, and attention has been paid to the relationships with Parcel 7, Blackstone Street, Hanover Street and the North End. A full commitment to the required Blackstone Street market improvements differentiates this proposal from the others.

The “Eataly” concept for the first and second floor, continuing onto the lower roof deck, constitutes a destination attraction for tourists, and as such, conflicts with the primary mission of the district. The proponents have described this concept as a “gateway connection with Quincy Market” and “an anchor attraction for 20 million visitors”. In New York, Eataly was named one of the top five destinations by the New York Times and is attracting 20,000 visitors and 3,000 diners per day. This concept, explicitly acknowledges the longstanding influence of the North End and its history while promoting stylized competition. It may also prevent the desired mid-block pedestrian connection of the Greenway to Blackstone Street.

The design of the project fails to attain the integrity and simplicity which so defines the character of its surroundings, and might have been located anywhere in a contemporary mixed-use development. The length of the residential block along Blackstone Street blocks potentially valuable views; fewer units or greater height might be considered to reduce this negative impact.

Blackstone Market – Cresset & DeNormandie

This is a distinguished design, decisively superior to other proposals in recognizing and employing the authentic character, scale and materials of the historic neighborhood. The modest footprint of the residential block permits a clear and well-proportioned distinction of the masses and protects a valued view into the district from the North End. The proportions

and scale of the Market level provide a positive pedestrian experience to both the Greenway and Blackstone Street.

The residential use is appropriate, as noted above, and need not be limited to the 50 units proposed. The design is of a strength and integrity that would actually benefit from additional height, so that 70 units might well be planned.

However, we have serious concern about the proposed creation of a substantial dining destination on this site, extending the tourist attraction offerings of Quincy Market onto Blackstone Street. The three proposed restaurants are modeled on the recent and highly successful Liberty Wharf “destination dining” project. If density of dining capacity comparable to Liberty Wharf were created at Blackstone Market, the restaurants would have roughly 1200 seats. Such competition with nearby restaurants, both in the North End and Quincy Market, as well as the increase in demands on Parcel 7 parking while the HPA market is active, seem ill-advised.

Conclusion

We recommend that the selection committee consider the most effective features of proposed uses, planning and designs – those which most contribute to the mission of the district as an market area serving residents and workers, consonant with its historical setting and activities– and negotiate modifications to whichever proposal is selected so as to optimize its contribution to the mission and goals.

Respectfully,



Stephen Young, Chairman
Beacon Hill Civic Association

CC:

Representative Marty Walz
Representative Aaron Michlewitz
Secretary Richard Davey, MassDOT
John Romano, MassDOT
Councilor Michael Ross
Councilor Sal LaMattina
Shaina Aubourg, Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Services
Peter Meade, Director, BRA
Kairos Shen, Chief Planner, BRA
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