

Beacon Hill Committee for Housing with Public Assets

FAQ

March 23, 2018

In response to a public request by the City, we submitted a proposal for redevelopment of the West End Branch Library at 151 Cambridge Street and the Engine 4/Ladder 24 Fire Station at 200 Cambridge Street, to add housing above the public facilities.

What is the proposal about?

The Mayor's Housing Innovation Lab in the City's Office of New Urban Mechanics issued an RFI (Request for Information) seeking proposals to co-develop housing on City-owned properties. They call this "Housing with Public Assets". The deadline for submissions was March 23, 2018. The City website stated:

We are working to increase housing affordability, by testing innovative housing models and accelerating the pace of innovation in the housing sector.

Could building housing on top of — or next to — City buildings, such as libraries and community centers, benefit our communities?

Cities in the U.S. and around the world have begun co-developing housing and public assets. This type of effort can bring down costs and benefit communities.

Our hypothesis? By asking for input on where and how we might co-locate housing and public assets, we'll get a better understanding of what we can do in Boston.

We will review Request for Information proposals this spring. Stay tuned, results will be coming soon!

The RFI listed 117 City-owned properties for consideration, including the fire station and library on Cambridge Street.

Who wrote the response?

Karen Cord Taylor, Suzanne Besser and John Achatz. We are long time Beacon Hill residents. Karen Cord Taylor was the founder of the BEACON HILL TIMES and its publisher from 1995 to 2008, and the chair of the Cambridge Street Study Committee that advocated for the redesign and landscaping of Cambridge Street, which the City did by 2007. Suzanne Besser is the president of the Beacon Hill Civic Association (BHCA). John Achatz is past chair of BHCA. For purposes of the proposal, we called ourselves a committee.

What is the proposal?

The proposal is to replace the library with a five to eight story building, with the library on the first floor and residential units above, and to replace or build around the fire station with a four or five story building having the fire department on the lower floors and residential units above.

The City suggests that one-third of the housing should be affordable by low-income households, one-third by middle income and one third market-rate.

We see a particular need in the neighborhood for larger apartments for families with children, smaller units for older residents who would like to downsize from large homes (and too many stairs), apartments for young professionals and apartments for people with disabilities.

Are there plans we can see?

No. The City did not provide detailed dimensions on any of the sites nor any specifications for the renovated or replaced public facilities to be included. Our proposal has a narrative description of what might be developed based on zoning regulations, past planning studies and experience with past housing development on Beacon Hill.

What happens next?

The Housing Innovations Lab will evaluate the ideas that it receives. The City will then decide whether to offer any of the properties for development. If it does so, the process is likely to be a public bidding process of some sort. It is unlikely that the City will be able to offer more than a handful of the 117 properties on its list at any one time.

When will the City decide about the properties on Beacon Hill?

We don't know. It could be soon or years from now or never.

Can I join the committee?

The initial task of submitting a proposal to the City is completed. *If* the City decides to move forward with development of these parcels, there will be a need for more people.

Role of BHCA

The board of directors of BHCA voted unanimously to support the idea of new housing on the library and fire station sites. The BHCA, however, was not involved in submitting our proposal. The committee is solely responsible for the content of the proposal.

If the City proceeds to offer the library or fire station for development, we expect that BHCA will take an interest.

More info?

Copies of the proposal and this FAQ are available at www.beaconhillhousing.com.

Comments?

Send comments and concerns to beaconhillhousing@gmail.com.