

Beacon Hill Committee for Housing with Public Assets

c/o Beacon Hill Civic Association, 74 Joy Street, Boston, MA 02114
617-227-1922

March 22, 2018

To the Mayor's Housing Innovation Lab:

We applaud the Walsh Administration for the leadership role it has taken to generate new affordable housing options throughout the city, and are enthusiastic about the Housing Innovation Lab's concept of co-developing city assets with mixed-income housing.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to suggest two city assets in our neighborhood for your consideration:

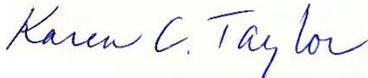
West End Branch Library, 151 Cambridge Street

Engine 4/Ladder 24 Fire Station, 200 Cambridge Street

Toward that end, we are pleased to submit the enclosed Beacon Hill Response to Request for Information, Housing with Public Assets.

We will be pleased to meet with you and to provide further information.

Very truly yours,



Karen Cord Taylor



Suzanne Besser



John Achatz

Submitted by email to
Marguerite Cramer (marguerite.cramer@boston.gov)

Housing with Public Assets

Beacon Hill Response to Request for Information

March 22, 2018

West End Branch Library, 151 Cambridge Street

Engine 4/Ladder 24 Fire Station, 200 Cambridge Street

Introduce yourself

We are a group of long-time residents of Beacon Hill, a neighborhood with a long history of creating affordable housing, raising money to support it and maintaining it in good condition.

Several of us have guided or contributed to efforts that created affordable housing at the old Peter Faneuil School, now known as Peter Faneuil House on South Russell Street, and the Joy Street Residences, designed for AIDS victims along Joy Street. We were also involved in the creation and preservation of affordable housing at Beacon House, at the corner of Joy and Myrtle streets.

We were involved in the redevelopment of 250 Cambridge Street, an old Massachusetts General Hospital garage that the Beacon Hill Civic Association and its partners converted into affordable housing with retail space at street level.

We are submitting a proposal because we have a history of creating affordable housing on Beacon Hill with strong neighborhood support. We are particularly interested now, when housing costs in the downtown area are high enough to prevent even middle-class families from owning or renting here.

We believe that all neighborhoods should be mixed in income as well as in race, national origin, sexual orientation and life style. We had despaired because we thought that all the city's surplus buildings were exhausted in our neighborhood.

But with the city's call to re-think city property, we realize we have two properties that fit the criteria for redevelopment. We offer them for your consideration.

We have had an eye on these sites and their development potential for many years. In 1991, the Boston Redevelopment Authority in collaboration with the Cambridge Street Community Development Corporation published *The Cambridge Street Plan*, which called for replacement of the Fire Station, Library and other one and two story buildings with four to six story buildings with public or retail uses on the ground floor and residences or offices above. Many of the then-underdeveloped properties have been redeveloped consistently with that Plan.

In 2009, the Beacon Hill Civic Association published *A Plan for the Neighborhood*¹ addressing six aspirations. Aspiration 4 is that “[f]amilies of all ages and financial capacities thrive” and has the specific goal to “[s]upport the development of a broader range of housing options on Beacon Hill and nearby.”

The short time span you’ve given us to make this proposal means that the plans are rudimentary, but we have consulted with various stakeholders on Cambridge Street and in the neighborhood. The Beacon Hill Civic Association Board of Directors have voted unanimously to support this effort.

¹ Available at http://www.bhcivic.org/uploads/5/4/1/9/54197411/plan_for_the_-_neighborhood_2013.pdf

Tell Us Where

Both the West End Library at 150 Cambridge Street and the Cambridge Street Fire Station at 200 Cambridge Street are located within a few minutes walk of most of the downtown on Cambridge Street between the West End and the Beacon Hill Historic District. Both properties are on your Primary Assets list.

The Library site is the larger of the two. It is on the north side of Cambridge Street between Charles River Plaza's nine-story office building and the Harrison Gray Otis house, designed in 1796 by Charles Bulfinch and that now serves as a museum and the headquarters of Historic New England. The Library is a one-story building constructed in the early 1960s as part of the West End Urban Renewal Project that destroyed the old West End and built Charles River Park and Charles River Plaza.

With a Whole Foods Market and CVS next door, this site is ideal for housing. Banks and other services are nearby. A Star supermarket is scheduled for Causeway Street about four blocks away. This location is between the Charles/MGH Red Line Station and the Bowdoin Blue Line Station, as well as commuter rail and the Green Line within a 10 minute walk. Many services lie within a few minutes walk and residents would have easy access to jobs throughout much of the city.

The Fire Station is on the south side of Cambridge Street between Joy and South Russell streets.

It too is ideally located for families or the elderly without cars. Located across from Charles River Plaza, its advantages are similar to the West End Library site across the street. It is within a five-minute walk of both Charles/MGH and the Bowdoin Street MBTA stations. It is across from the Whole Foods Market and a CVS, and is near a Rite-Aid store also. Within four blocks will be a Star supermarket planned for a large development on Causeway Street.

Project Concept

Cambridge Street has undergone welcome and appealing development over the last 20 years.

The Boston Redevelopment Authority's *The Cambridge Street Plan* recommended "replacing buildings which do not contribute to the character of the street and filling in vacant sites." Redeveloping both sites with a combination of new housing and new or refurbished public facilities will fulfill both housing and urban design goals.

We support your goal of 30/30/30 low-income, middle-income and market-rate units. Such mixed-income means a building is not identified as belonging to one income group as opposed to another. Moreover, it allows a few market-rate units to subsidize other units.

West End Branch Library site

The West End Branch Library at 151 Cambridge Street is located on 22,210 square feet of land. The existing library building has a floor area of 7,781 square feet². The Library is a one story building located next to a nine-story office building on one side and a four-story historic mansion on the other.



West End Branch Library

We envision a new five- to eight-story building with the library occupying the first floor and residential units on upper floors.

The first floor façade will be architecturally distinguished – perhaps stately or whimsical in design – to express its civic importance and to

² Source: Boston Assessing Online.

differentiate it from the residential use on upper floors and the retail storefronts elsewhere on the street.

Current zoning allows a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 5³ and a height of 65 feet⁴. With an FAR of 5, the as-of-right floor area is 111,500 square feet. If the Library's space requirements are equal to the space it now occupies, there is a development potential of 103,000 square feet for residential use. That would produce 50 to 100 units, depending on unit size. Most likely the number of units will be somewhere in the middle of that range.

The ability to fully develop this site is constrained by the maximum height limit and the need to set the building back from the nine-story office building to the west. The building setback is unavoidable. Careful consideration should be given to seeking permission to exceed 65 feet in height, perhaps with setbacks from the street line and eastern lot line for higher floors.

No off-street parking is required in this zoning district. Some indoor parking may be required to satisfy the Library's requirements and the marketing of market-rate residential units.

The site location, abutting an urban renewal-era mid-rise office building on one side and one of Boston's most significant historic residences on the other, built in 1796 by Charles Bulfinch, suggests no obvious architectural style for the new building. We consider selection of an architect and extensive consultation with interested government agencies and abutters to be an above-average consideration to be addressed at an early stage.

Engine 4/Ladder 24 Fire Station

The Fire Station site at 200 Cambridge Street has 11,351 square⁵ feet of land and the existing fire station has a floor area of 15,290 square feet⁶. In comparison to the surrounding area, the site is underdeveloped.

³ Zoning Code Article 47A Section 5-1(a) provides a base FAR of 4 and an increase to 5 if the ground floor use is a preferred use (which the Library is) and the design is subject to review pursuant to Article 80 Large Project Review.

⁴ In most zoning districts, the as-of-right height would be approximately 95 feet based on special rules in Articles 2A and 16 applicable to lots adjoining existing buildings which exceed the base height limit. The nine-story office building to the west we estimate to be 110 feet tall. The special rules are not applicable in the Cambridge Street North District.

⁵ The Boston Fire Department "Assets for Consideration for Co-development" states the lot area as 14,193 square feet. This may not reflect the removal of 2,841 square feet when the city conveyed a portion of the site in 2007 to Hill House for use as a nursery school playground. See deed recorded in Suffolk Deeds Book 42638, Page 239.

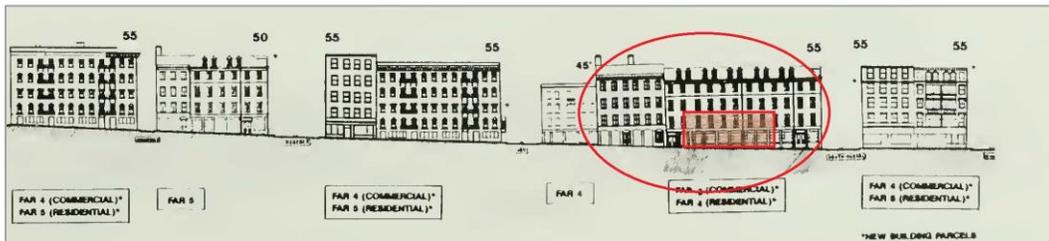
⁶ Source: Boston Fire Department "Assets for Consideration for Co-development", 2018. Assessing records show a floor area of 10,257 sf.



Existing Fire Station, 200 Cambridge Street.

We envision a new five-story building either replacing or built around the existing station. The result in either case will be a fire station at the ground level and part of the second floor, with residential units on upper floors.

A five-story building on the entire width of the site is consistent with the City's long-term planning objective for Cambridge Street which has been to redevelop underutilized parcels with four to six story buildings having retail ground floor uses and offices or residences above. The image below is from the BRA's 1990 *The Cambridge Street Plan*, which shows a pair of buildings, four and five stories in height, as the recommended redevelopment of the Fire Station parcel.



Source: Boston Redevelopment Authority, *The Cambridge Street Plan* (1991), Fire Station Site circled. The red rectangle shows approximate location of the fire station within a new building.

The fire station will be naturally distinctive given its large doors and visible fire trucks. We have in mind the fire station at 125 Purchase Street as a good example of a fire station located within and visually distinct from a larger building⁷.

⁷ We have not consulted with the Fire Department as to whether the 125 Purchase Street design is viewed favorably.

The existing surface parking on the site will be enclosed in the new building, which will be constructed over the entire width of the site.

Provision will be made for the pedestrian easement across the site that provides access for the adjacent nursery school to its playground behind the Fire Station.

We envision a building with approximately 35,000 square feet of residential use on upper floors, in a building up to 65 feet in height as permitted by the Zoning code. This floor area will produce 17 to 35 residential units, depending on unit size. Most likely the number of units will be somewhere in the middle of that range.

As with other infill developments, traditional masonry of the styles depicted below is appropriate for the redeveloped Fire Station.



275 Cambridge Street



100 Cambridge Street



326 Cambridge Street

Residential Program

Our neighborhood urgently needs four specific types of housing: two- and three-bedroom units for young families with children; smaller units for older residents who desire to downsize from large homes; one- and two-bedroom units for young professionals working downtown and at nearby hospitals, colleges and tech firms; and units for people with mobility and vision disabilities. Both rental and ownership units are needed.

Your RFI suggests that housing should target a 30/30/30 mix among low-income, moderate-income and market-rate units. We support a mixed income development and would be pleased to have a somewhat higher mix of low-income units given the existing housing stock on Beacon Hill and the West End.

Final decisions on income mix will be made after consultation with city officials and detailed financial modelling. Either or both buildings can be rental or condominium. They need not have the same ownership plan or income mix.

Municipal facilities tenure

We anticipate that the Fire Department might prefer ownership of the fire station as a condominium unit in the larger building. The Library's different needs might best be served with a long-term triple net lease with extension options.

Condominium ownership, space leases, ground leases and air rights grants are all possibilities.

Conceptual Designs and Drawings

We have no drawings for either building at this stage. These are constrained sites with very high programmatic goals. We will want more detail on the program requirements of the city departments and on site conditions before producing conceptual designs.

We trust that our narratives for both buildings and the images of other Cambridge Street infill buildings that will inform the Fire Station design provide information on the concepts we have in mind.

Management and Operational Responsibilities

If designated as developer for these projects, we will form a nonprofit corporation, as has been done for prior projects, to serve as sponsor and to refine the projects' parameters.

Given our civic values and the sensitivities regarding any development of these two sites, we anticipate conducting an active public process prior to the schematic design phase, so that the interest of public officials, abutters, historic preservation advocates and the community are identified and addressed in early-stage design rather than as reactions to concerns discovered after the design is set.

After a development program is established, the nonprofit sponsor will, in coordination with the Department of Neighborhood Development, issue a Request For Proposals and select a development partner to carry out the final design, permitting, construction and marketing of the project. It is quite possible that there will be different development partners for the two projects.

Developers who have undertaken similar projects on Beacon Hill in which we have had an interest include The Community Builders, Rogerson Communities, Keen Development Corporation and Abrams Management

Company. We expect to select development partners of similar experience and stature.

Upon completion, each property will be managed by a qualified property manager.

Financial Back-of-the-Envelope Projections and Key Assumptions

Our back-of-the-envelope projections are that the total development cost of the redeveloping the Library site will be \$40 to \$50 million and that the total development cost of redeveloping the Fire Station site will be \$15 to \$25 million.

Anticipated financing will include all of the applicable sources of funding for similar projects (depending on whether a project is rental or ownership), including construction and permanent mortgages, Low Income Housing Tax Credit equity investment, DIP and IDP funding from other projects seeking off-site housing creation, MassHousing workforce housing funds, government agency subordinate loans, and condominium unit sales proceeds.

Key assumptions are:

- Site acquisition from the City will be for nominal consideration.
- Construction contracting will not be subject to municipal procurement laws.
- The project will provide shell space for the library and the Fire Department; the City will provide build out and fit up. Our objective is to provide the shell space at no cost to the City, if possible.
- There are no hazardous materials to remediate.
- The City will cover all temporary relocation costs for the library and fire station.
- The floor areas required by the library and fire station will be similar to what they currently occupy.
- The City can define its facilities program requirements in detail at the outset, so that no redesign after schematic design is required.
- If any zoning relief is required, it is readily available.
- The West End Urban Renewal Plan will be amended to permit the proposed redevelopment⁸.

⁸ The Library site is designated "Parcel C" in the West End Urban Renewal Area. Allowed uses are a library or inclusion in the adjoining shopping center. There may be height limitations based on an assumption of the library use.

Other Considerations

(a) Differentiation of city services from housing: The Library will be visually differentiated because it will occupy the entire ground floor street front, except for the entrance to the residential lobby. Appropriate signage for the Library will be provided.

The Fire Station will be visually differentiated by its large overhead doors and by signage. The fire station at 125 Purchase Street is an example of successful differentiation of a fire station in a larger structure.

(b) Design compatibility. Given proximity to the Beacon Hill Architectural District and the Otis House, the proposed projects will be subject to multiple design reviews and must be sensitive to nearby buildings. In addition, new buildings must conform to the design guidelines of the Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA), which call for street wall continuity.

(c) Affordability. As described above, our initial objective is for an income mix of one third to units to be affordable by low-income households, one-third by middle-income households and one third market-rate units. The mix may evolve after further market studies and conversations with the Department of Neighborhood Development as to specific needs for housing downtown.

(d) Parking. The two sites are close to places of employment downtown, at MGH and in Kendall Square. They are within walking distance of shops and services. They are proximate to public transportation. Accordingly, on-site parking for residents will be minimized. On-site parking for library and fire department personnel will be defined as part of the city's programmatic requirements.

(e) Green space. The Fire Station site has no green space now and will have none after development. The Library now has a modest landscaped front yard. The new building for that site will conform to the zero setback dictated by street wall continuity. Green roofs will be considered for both buildings. There two nearby playgrounds, the landscaped areas of the West End and the Esplanade, all within a few minutes walk from these sites.

(f) Preservation of historic assets. While surrounded by historic structures, neither of these sites is historic. Designs will be subject to review by the Beacon Hill Architectural Commission, the Boston Planning & Development Agency, the Boston Landmarks Commission and the Massachusetts Historical Commission, as applicable.

In selecting architects, experience with development in historic neighborhoods will be an important criterion.