

Feedback on Conceptual Proposal by Boston Properties re:
Development Proposal for 133 Boston Post Road, Weston

From the Weston Housing Partnership and Weston Affordable Housing Trust

October 17, 2016

The Weston Housing Partnership (“HP”) and Weston Affordable Housing Trust (“HT”) met jointly with representatives of Boston Properties (“BP”) on September 13, 2016 to review conceptual plans for the potential development of additional office space, rental housing and an inter-modal transportation facility on the property located at 133 Boston Post Road. The HP and HT continued discussion of the merits and impacts of the proposed development at its September 19th, 2016, September 28th, and October 17th, 2016 meetings.

Recognizing that the proposal is still in conceptual form, and desiring to be included in future review of the final proposal, and in particular the rental housing component of the development, we (the HP and HT) offer the following preliminary comments and feedback. To the extent that Boston Properties is able to respond to, and incorporate elements of the items below, the HP and HT anticipate being generally supportive of the development proposal.

1. DENSITY

While the HP and the HT support a multi-family rental housing development at the 133 Boston Post Road site, we feel the proposed 350-375 units is too dense for single development, and the number of units should be reduced to mitigate community impact.

This project provides an opportunity to bring much needed affordable housing to Weston, allowing individuals and families to integrate into the Weston Community Fabric and also provide housing choices for Weston seniors who may want to remain in Weston but desire an alternative to a single family home. Additionally, the project would result in increased tax revenues for the Town. Furthermore, at this density, these rental units would more than satisfy the State-defined goal of having 10% of Weston’s housing being deemed “affordable”, thereby placing future zoning and housing developments under local control by offering Weston “safe harbor” protections against unfriendly Chapter 40B developments for several years, perhaps until 2030.

* Approved by a vote of the Weston Affordable Housing Trust and Weston Housing Partnership at a joint meeting held on October 17, 2016.

The project does have several challenges related to the difficult and limited means of accessing the site, anticipated significant negative impacts on traffic congestion affecting roads in the vicinity of the project, as well as radiating along Route 117, Church Street, the Town Center, and Route 20 and the Route 20/128 interchange. Legitimate concerns relating to the anticipated burdens on the school system have been voiced. There are also potential negative visual impacts to neighboring properties depending on the heights and massing of the buildings, as well as potentially significant burdens on Town services.

The HP and the HT supports increasing affordable housing opportunities in Weston, and strives to achieve the goal of 10% affordable housing in Weston to be included on the State's Subsidized Housing Inventory. However, it is also critical that the inevitable burdens and impacts that flow from a project of this size, on the roads, the viewscape, and the schools and other Town services are minimized and mitigated to the greatest extent possible. Traffic and municipal impact studies are required to better understand how the varied and significant community impacts will be mitigated.

In sum, we remain interested and willing to consider a project that meets the Town's goals of reaching a 10% affordable housing, which based on demographic projects would be approximately 280 units. However, ~~but will need~~BP will need to provide detailed studies with respect to access, traffic impacts, and municipal impacts, before we are able to fully evaluate and support a project at this site (see below).

2. ACCESS

BP's conceptual plans show several potential access routes to and from the site, each posing their own challenges.

We have grave concerns about both the Church Street access route (over the railway bed) and the Transfer Station access route, due to the impacts on neighbors/abutters and significant impacts on traffic congestion. As has been described, we all know from personal experience that the Church Street corridor is presently jammed for extended periods each weekday. Any additional load of traffic will pose serious issues. The Waltham access route may also pose challenges, but appears to be a viable option. We would need to see more by way of traffic data to confirm this impression.

We urge BP to explore alternatives: 1) multiple access points, 2) reach out to Biogen to consider whether there is a way to create a new access route from Route 20 (the yellow dashed line on your conceptual plans), 3) look into whether Biogen would allow Weston Public School Bus access only across its access road out to Route 20, and 4) look into feasibility of proposing a designated off-ramp to a newly configured Route 20/128 rotary to provide access to the site.

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3. AFFORDABLE HOUSING

BP's conceptual plans do not state an affordability level for the project. Chapter 40B would allow for either 20% of units at 50% Area Median Income (AMI) or 25% of units at 80% AMI.

Due to our significant needs for "affordable" housing units, and our desire to offer more units (as opposed to less), we strongly prefer a proposal which provides for *at the very least* 25% of units at 80% AMI.

We also strongly encourage BP to consider providing more than the minimum 25% restricted units, including the possibility of BP providing so-called "work-force" housing for tenants earning more than 80% AMI (up to 150% AMI).

4. UNIT MIX/BEDROOM COUNT

BP's conceptual plans do not yet specify unit sizes (specifically bedroom count). State and Federal law will require a minimum number of 3 bedroom units (~10%), and a minimum units that are accessible (ADA - "handicapped" accessible).

Weston has a need for both family-friendly rental housing (due to the current market "pricing-out" young families) as well as elder-friendly housing (where we have the greatest documented need among current residents for additional rental housing). Weston's Housing Production Plan (HPP), as approved by the Selectmen, notes Weston's demographic trends necessitating a substantial increase in elderly housing given the projected increase in Weston's elderly population from 18% today to 28% by 2030. As with all towns, Weston aspires to balance its demographics, and an appropriate increase in affordable family housing would help achieve that goal. The HPP pegs Weston's housing needs mix at 40% elderly and 60% family.

We encourage BP to provide for a healthy mix of studio, 1, 2 and 3 bedroom units, to provide for as much housing diversity as possible. We also encourage BP to provide for all units to be adaptable to allow for accessible features, as may be needed by individual residents.

5. AMENITIES

BP's conceptual plan mentions offering amenities such as park/open space, a pool, a playground.

In order to meet the needs of what we hope to be a diverse population, we urge BP to include park space/open space with seating, playground space, walking paths, bike stations, as well as common inside space for residents to gather. We also urge BP to consider ways to provide transportation for residents, connecting residents to local transportation routes.

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6. MUNICIPAL IMPACTS

BP's conceptual plan does not yet provide information to the Town about the impacts of the proposal on municipal services, such as Fire, Police, Public Works, and the Weston Public Schools.

We expect BP to reach out to the relevant Town departments and committees, and produce detailed municipal impact studies, so that we can evaluate the impacts of this large project on our Town's services and resources. We ask that BP provide a marketing analysis with respect to likely demographic profile of tenants to assist us in anticipating municipal needs to support the population.

[We also ask that BP consider phasing development over several years in order to allow the Town the time to accommodate the additional residents and school-children, to alleviate the impacts on the community and our municipal departments.]

7. COMMUNICATION

We greatly appreciate your efforts in reaching out to us and others in Town during your preliminary planning phase, and encourage you to continue to do so throughout the process. As you are aware, a project of this size will engender significant interest and uncertainty from the community. We urge BP to understand the impacts this development will have on the town and have them in hand while presenting the plan to stakeholders and the greater public. Getting ahead of rumors and misinformation may be this development's greatest near-term hurdle. A project of this size, which will increase on the town's population by a significant percentage, dictates the need for BP to provide, in the near term, detailed traffic and municipal impact studies in order for the stakeholders to evaluate the project and how the impacts on the community can be mitigated. If we, as members of the affordable housing community, are able to become persuaded that the positives far outweigh the negatives, then we will be able to support and advocate for the project. Thank you.

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