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City explores development planning for S. Huntington Ave. corridor in Jamaica Plain

Posted by Matt Rocheleau October 18, 2012 09:00 AM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Boston Redevelopment Authority officials are preparing to review two major development proposals along an about quarter-mile stretch of South Huntington Avenue in Jamaica Plain, a spokeswoman for the city agency said this week.

The two proposals to construct large buildings at 161 S. Huntington Ave. and 105A S. Huntington Ave. were introduced to the city in the spring and have drawn some opposition, mainly over the size of the projects and the affordability of the housing.

And, a nursing home at 201 S. Huntington Ave. recently closed, prompting speculation and concern that the property may also be poised for significant change.

Some residents have suggested the redevelopment authority, which oversees all sizeable development in the city, hold off on reviewing the two projects so the

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sizeable development in the city, hold on on reviewing the two projects so the agency can conduct a planning study or rezone the area.

The authority's spokeswoman Susan Elsbree said this week the city agency is now looking at ways to plan ahead for development in that area, especially regarding the issues of transportation and building density, heights and uses.

"We need to figure out what makes sense for this corridor," Elsbree said.

She said the method the authority might take to conduct that additional planning has not yet been determined. But, she said that the authority does not want a broader, more collective planning effort to delay development.

"We don't want projects to have to stop," Elsbree said.

Planning studies typically take at least one year to complete. They can then be followed by a rezoning process, which usually takes another year or more.

"Projects can still move forward," as we plan for development in the area, she said. "We've done this in other parts of the city."

The proposal for 161 S. Huntington Ave. is scheduled to go for a vote of approval before the Boston Redevelopment Authority's board on Thursday. The board meeting is set to start at 5:30 p.m. at City Hall.

Elsbree acknowledge that the authority's latest stance on planning for the S. Huntington Avenue area is a shift from [previous statements](#) made by the authority. Earlier this summer, the agency said it planned to rely on its customary, project-specific approval process to evaluate the development proposals in that area.

"As more projects have come to light, we've taken a step back," she said. "It has the director's [Peter Meade's] attention and he's talking to the planning department about," how the different projects relate to each other.

She said Meade recently visited the area and looked at the sites where development has been proposed.

Elsbree said the authority director wants to make sure proper planning is done regarding key areas such as: transportation and traffic; whether the development's heights, densities are consistent and make sense for the area; and

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development's heights densities are consistent and make sense for the area; and whether the uses are appropriate, including the potential need for more retail nearby if new housing is built.

The strip of South Huntington Avenue is part of a broad section of Jamaica Plain that was last rezoned nearly two decades ago. The city formally adopted the current zoning on Sept. 7, 1993.

Development along South Huntington Avenue

At 161 South Huntington, a developer is [proposing](#) to demolish a 98-year-old special education school building to construct a residential building with about 196 units and around 156 parking spaces. The Home for Little Wanderers, which operated its well-known [Knight Children's Center](#) on that a 3.5-acre property, [recently relocated](#) some programming and services from the center to a larger campus it owns in Walpole.

At 105A South Huntington, another developer is [proposing](#) to clear a 1.1-acre wooded lot to construct a 195-unit residential building that would stand about 12 stories tall in front and between four and five stories tall in the back. The 202,450-square foot structure would include some ground-floor retail and 176 garaged parking spaces.

At 201 South Huntington, next door to the Knight Children's Center, sits an 85-year-old building that houses the Goddard House Skilled Nursing and Rehabilitation Center. That [nonprofit's board](#) closed the facility in [early September](#). The board has said it has not yet considered what it may do with the two-acre property that the city has assessed as being worth \$6.1 million.

At 150 South Huntington, the opposite side of the busy roadway, the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center campus [began building](#) a five-story, 500-space parking garage. The 129,600 square-foot structure is expected to be completed next spring or summer.

At 81 South Huntington, a 39-room boutique hotel opened this summer. Construction of that building began about two years before at the site of the former Pond View Nursing Home, which closed in 2008, according to the [Jamaica Plain Gazette](#).

At 125 South Huntington is the 47,000 square-foot AstraZeneca Hope Lodge

Center, which opened in fall 2008. The facility offers free temporary homes in 40 suites to cancer patients and their families. It is directly south of the [North American Indian Center of Boston](#), which is abutted to the north by 105A S. Huntington Ave.

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