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## Residents eye more changes to plan for hotel, apartments, retail, restaurant, offices in Cleveland Circle

Posted by Matt Rocheleau April 4, 2013 05:24 PM

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(Boston Development Group)

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

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Most residents at a community meeting Wednesday said they want to see more changes made, particularly to address traffic-related concerns, before approval is given to a developer's proposal to build a hotel, upscale apartments, offices, and space for retail, restaurant and parking in a five-story building in Cleveland Circle.

Boston Development Group unveiled its latest plans after making a second round of revisions to the proposal it first presented nearly two years ago.

The 234,550-square-foot, mixed-use building would be constructed across 2.5 acres of property, replacing an Applebee's restaurant on one site in Boston's Brighton neighborhood and the abandoned Circle Cinema on an abutting parcel that straddles the Brighton-Brookline border.

Approval is needed from both the city of Boston and the town of Brookline, because the project overlaps both municipalities.

In the latest plan, measures have been added that, according to studies, would improve traffic at the Cleveland Circle intersection, according to John Meunier, project manager for Boston Development Group.

Another one of the most significant changes was redesigning the building's exterior to try to make it match other buildings in that area. There is also more prominent signs for the building's hotel.

The edge of the building closest to the intersection has been designed so that instead of coming to right-angle like a point, the building's corner is more gradual and includes a section that faces the intersection.

At Wednesday's meeting in the Alexander Hamilton School in Brighton, those changes seemed to resolve prior concern from residents about the building's look and its orientation to the intersection. And, some area residents spoke to say they support the latest proposal.

But, many said they still have serious concern over potential traffic impacts from the project and expressed skepticism over the validity of traffic studies presented by the developer.

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Mary Cronin, a resident member of a city-appointed impact advisory group, said that while the new plans may allow for better flow of vehicles, she is worried about how quickly and safely pedestrians and cyclists will be able to navigate the busy intersection of Beacon Street and Chestnut Hill Avenue.

“You have prioritized getting vehicles through Cleveland Circle,” she told members of the development team at the meeting, adding later that, in the traffic analysis: “You’re not showing us the real impact.”

Another member of the advisory group, resident Eva Webster, was one of several people who voiced particular concern over the building’s inclusion of medical office use, which many feared might draw a significant amount of traffic and people who need to park.

“We don’t oppose the project per say, but we want it to be a project that will really enhance our neighborhood,” Webster [said by phone recently](#). “We are counting on this project to bring some long-term residents to this area. We all want something good to happen here.”

“It’s just not properly designed,” she added. But, she still holds some hope. “It’s not so impossible to make it work,” she said.

One particular group, residents of the 112-unit Waterworks at Chestnut Hill luxury condominium complex next door, expressed opposition to a specific component of the project that would have hotel guests exit the proposed development by driving on an access road that cuts through the Waterworks complex.

An existing easement gives the proposed development property the legal right to use that road without owning it.

Meunier has said that studies show the hotel traffic would be lighter than when the access road was used by the cinema that closed at the site in 2008, about a year after the Waterworks complex opened. The developer is also proposing to add signage to encourage motorists to drive slowly and safely along the access road.

But, condo residents, including Ken Stein, maintain that the project’s use of that road would pose traffic and safety hazards and would decrease their value of their properties.

Referring to the overall project, he said that while some improvements have been made, the overall plan is “unacceptable.”

“We feel the planning is going in the right direction, but it’s not ready for primetime,” Stein said.

He said neighbors are so invested in sharing their input about the project because the prominence of the site gives it the potential to become a “gateway” to Boston.

“It’s a one-shot deal,” Stein said. “If we mess it up, we won’t get another chance.”

The project manager said he and other members of the development team are well aware of what’s at stake.

“People have told me ‘John, all you want is the most dense project to make the most money. You don’t care what happens here,’” said Meunier. “But, we’re going to invest in excess of \$80 million into this project, and we don’t want a project that fails at an intersection that fails.”

Meunier said the developer has worked to address all concerns. But, he said some parts of the project have not been changed because studies and analysis done simply show the developer’s proposal makes the most sense.

He said that city officials now support the latest proposal, including aspects that have drawn criticism in the past.

The project manager said the building’s density is consistent with most others in Cleveland Circle and some nearby buildings are more than twice as dense as the proposed project.

He also said studies show mitigation efforts proposed with the project would actually improve traffic.

The proposal calls for fixes to the operation and timing of a signal that allows MBTA trolleys to cut through part of the intersection to access a rail yard; reassigning some traffic lanes; lengthening some left-hand turn lanes and reprogramming the sequence and timing of intersection’s traffic lights, he said.

But, many residents continue to worry that projected impacts from the project – namely concerning traffic and parking – are based on flawed data and analysis.

Meunier and his development team repeatedly emphasized that their studies are accurate.

In the latest plan, the building would be about 2,000 square feet smaller than the prior plan.

The proposed number of Hilton Garden Inn hotel rooms is now 196, which is 15 more than the prior plan.

The number of proposed residential units is 74, down from 82. That change in particular has allowed the developer to make the building about one story shorter along an edge that abuts Cassidy Playground.

The amount of medical office space is now 18,000 square feet, down by about 1,000 square feet. There would be 14,200 square feet of ground-floor retail and restaurant space, the same amount as previously proposed.

There would be 126 garage parking spaces and 77 other spots in a surface lot behind the building, which is 15 and 10 fewer spots, respectively.

The building's courtyard area, where vehicles enter to park or pickup and drop-off hotel guests, has been made larger.

The project was substantially [revised once](#) already.

The developer, in line with requests from the community, changed the hotel brand, added underground parking, worked to develop the project across both sites instead of separately and replaced a large amount of office space with housing.

The building would now cost the developer about \$80 million to build, about \$5 million more than prior plans, Meunier said.

Contingent on getting approval from both Boston and Brookline officials, the project would take about 18 months to build.

The developer had hoped previously to start construction by this spring 2013. Meunier said that the developer now hopes to start in the fall.

The public comment period for the approval process in Boston is scheduled to close on Tuesday, April 30.

Comments can be e-mailed to [erico.lopez.bra@cityofboston.gov](mailto:erico.lopez.bra@cityofboston.gov) or mailed to: Erico Lopez, Boston Redevelopment Authority, One City Hall Square, 9th Floor, Boston, MA 02201.

To see a copy of the latest proposal, a 1,230-page detailed project plan filed with the Boston Redevelopment Authority on March 13, [click here](#).

To read prior coverage of the proposal, [click here](#).

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