



January 8, 2013

Gerald Autler
Boston Redevelopment Authority
One City Hall Square
Boston, MA 02201-1007

RE: Barry's Corner Residential and Retail Commons Project
Expanded Project Notification Form
Submitted Pursuant to Article 80 of the Boston Zoning Code

Dear Mr. Autler:

WalkBoston has reviewed the EENF for the Barry's Corner Residential and Retail Commons Project in Allston. This project is a first step in a major redevelopment of the surroundings of the intersection of North Harvard Street and Western Avenue, and thus will set the stage for many additional improvements in the vicinity. Our comments reflect the aspects of the proposal that most affect pedestrians, as these components are likely to play an important role in the way in which the project functions and relates to its surroundings.

- The area is planned to become the principal focus of North Allston
Preliminary plans for this site are generally following the consensus presented in the 2005 North Allston Strategic Framework for planning and in Harvard's Institutional Master Plan from 2012. Both plans call for intensive retail and other development at the intersection. The site of this proposal is but one of several sites that will comprise the North Allston activities. Considering only the north side of Western Avenue, plans call for 200,000 square feet at the Charlesview site, 45,000 square feet on the site of this proposal, and, on the arena site, 60,000 square feet for the arena and 140,000 square feet for the office/retail structure that encloses the basketball court. *This totals 445,000 square feet altogether – a number that suggests a need for intensive analysis of the vehicular and foot traffic that will be utilizing all of the sites, including the one that is currently being analyzed.* Any proposal for a center that will include at least 400,000 square feet should provide for carefully-considered pedestrian interconnections between its parts.
- The proposed basketball arena/office building
The Institutional Master Plan of the Allston campus recently distributed by Harvard introduces a combination of a 3,000-seat basketball arena and 140,000 square feet of retail/office/residences on land immediately north of the project site. The arena will attract many people to games during the basketball season, and perhaps, depending on uses of the facility, in other months as well. What it means in terms of future pedestrian or vehicular traffic is not at all clear from this EENF. The scale of the arena project warrants consideration of its effects on this site. For example, retail activities on the proposed site might benefit from consideration of additional retail on the street level under the arena to make the retail functions of the intersection more prominent.

- The sidewalk in front of the arena

The arena site is nearly a mile from Harvard Square. People coming to the area will be largely on foot (they will be discouraged from driving because of the paucity of nearby parking spaces). Large numbers of people will be attracted to the basketball arena for games and perhaps for other uses that may be scheduled there, but the volume of visitors has not been described in the EPNF. Many people will walk from Harvard Square, the Yard and from residence halls north of the river, and most will arrive via the west side of North Harvard Street. These walkers should be provided with a very wide sidewalk along the full length of North Harvard Street (currently shown as a wide sidewalk in front of the existing building but not along the stadium or this development proposal). We would recommend that it be wider than the standard 10' – 12' width for multi-use paths, something on the order of 20' would be appropriate.
- Extending the sidewalk to the south

A wide sidewalk along North Harvard Street should not end at the arena, but should provide access to the intersection of Western Avenue and the North Allston activity center. This wide sidewalk would pass directly along the North Harvard street side of this project, and connect to the 45,000 square feet of retail activities that occupy most of the ground floor of this proposal.
- The Charlesview site

This site on the northeast corner of the intersection of North Harvard and Western has been planned for retail activity and some residential or office development. The current plan estimates 200,000 square feet for the building complex. Access between sites will take place at the intersection, where crosswalks should be redesigned to more directly connect the two sites.
- The parks at the North Allston Center

Two potential sites for parks touch directly on the intersection. The existing grove of trees in front of the Charlesview development and the triangle occupied by the gas station are potential assets to the retail center and should be further developed as landmarks within this center. Either of the two sites could become intensively used by walkers as outdoor spaces to get fresh air, to sit, to read or have a picnic. Pedestrian access to either or both of the sites should be carefully considered as a part of developing the network of sidewalks and street crossings.
- Crosswalk redesign

The layout of the existing crosswalks at the intersection of North Harvard Street and Western Avenue maximizes the crossing distances for walkers because all the crosswalks have been laid out as diagonals. This layout makes pedestrian crossings unnecessarily long and require walkers to stay in the street longer than they would if the crosswalks were perpendicular to the streets they cross. One example on Western Avenue shows that the existing crosswalk is nearly 80 feet long, while a perpendicular crossing would be approximately half that length. As part of the intersection improvements associated with this project, crosswalks should be redesigned for the safety of pedestrians. Removal of the refuge island on the Charlesview corner should also be considered as part of the project's efforts to improve the North Harvard Street/Western Avenue intersection.
- A new pedestrian crosswalk on North Harvard Street

Access to the proposed arena and to the site of this proposal will require pedestrian access across North Harvard Street. This is particularly important for people arriving by northbound transit, currently served by bus stops at the north and south ends of

the Charlesview site. The existing pedestrian crosswalk at Western Avenue may need to be supplemented by an additional crosswalk at the intersection of North Harvard Street and Smith Field Drive Extension, which is more than 500 feet from Western Avenue, suggesting that a new crosswalk at that location would be convenient and well used. It is made particularly important because it does not make sense to have a crosswalk at Grove Street, because the distance between Western and Grove is very short.

Uses of land within the site

The relatively small size of the site and the need for specific services results in relatively constrained pedestrian access.

- Vehicle uses
Almost one-quarter of the parcel will be devoted to vehicle access and surface parking because of the proposed new streets. Vehicular access to the site is one-way northbound from Western Ave. on Smith Field Drive, and two-way on Grove Street between Smith Field Drive and North Harvard Street. The description of vehicular access needs (particularly on-site loading and unloading requirements) implies that a further extension of Smith Field Drive will be constructed soon – perhaps in conjunction with this project, to allow full site access in- and out-bound from its intersection with North Harvard Street. Three streets are to be devoted to providing access to a 2.74 acre site. This may be excessive, unless they are necessary to serve the proposed arena, either temporarily or permanently
- Parking on the site
The proposal calls for 180 below-grade parking spaces and 41 surface private spaces, making a total of 221 spaces on-site. These spaces will serve the 325 residences proposed for the site, and potentially some of the retail uses as well. A question remains of whether the underground parking could be reached from Smith Field Drive rather than Grove Street, which seems destined to be degraded by many auto-oriented uses.
- New on-site street – Grove Street
Grove Street is primarily a service street designed to provide truck access to the buildings, access to the below grade garage, and 23 surface parking space. The EPNF does not discuss whether service for the arena (potentially including loading/unloading access for trucks and access to underground parking) will also be provided on the street. The combination of service uses could compromise the character of the street and the street-facing residential units as well. In terms of pedestrian use, Grove Street was designated as a “pedestrian trail” in the university’s Institutional Master Plan. This suggests continuity between Charlesview and Smith Field via Grove Street, which would need a crosswalk located midway between Western Avenue and the Smith Field Drive Extension. Such a crossing – likely to be unsignalized – could be dangerous for pedestrians and drivers alike.
- A bulky arena as a neighbor
Depending on its design, the proposed arena may loom dramatically over the site of the current proposal. The project design for this site actually calls for residential units along Grove Street, along with an irregularly shaped sidewalk and major vehicular access for loading and parking. While the vehicular portions of the proposal for this side of the site are not affected by the neighboring arena, the residential units may well be. Although the dimensions of the proposed arena are unknown, its height may

reach more than half of the proposed dwellings on the proposal's site. The prospect of a looming building also affects the proposed sidewalk, where vehicular impacts are major, and where proposed street trees or wider sidewalks will do little to mitigate the impacts of a large building.

- New on-site street – Smith Field Drive and Smith Field Drive Extension
Smith Field Drive and its extension have been designed as a major service way for both this project and the proposed basketball arena. It may have operating difficulties when the arena is in use. A convergence of vehicles and pedestrians would be expected, and traffic control on either has not been discussed.
- Open space
Roughly 3,600 square feet of the site's land has been designated as street-level open space. The two parcels are located at the two corners of the buildings – one facing N. Harvard Street and the other on Western Avenue – and both serve to enhance the entrances to the residences. Additional open space of about 8,000 square feet is provided on the second level above the retail uses, and will only be accessible to residents of the site.
- Sidewalks
Sidewalks surround the buildings on all sides and are of irregular widths to accommodate building entrances, potential sidewalk cafes, retail entrances and the vehicular entrances to the building. The proposal for a wide sidewalk on the west side of North Harvard Street suggests the possibility of an overhanging building or a street-level colonnade.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this important project. Please feel free to contact WalkBoston with questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Bob Sloane
Senior Project Manager