



WalkBoston

June 14, 2006

Mark Maloney, Director
Boston Redevelopment Authority
One City Hall Plaza
Boston, MA 02114

RE: Final Project Impact Report
Hayward Place

Dear Director Maloney:

WalkBoston has reviewed the Final Project Impact Report of the Hayward Place Project and suggests that additional attention be given to sidewalks and pedestrian access to the building. The Project is located where Downtown Crossing meets Chinatown, and its sidewalks will be an important element of downtown Boston's pedestrian environment. Walkability (including smooth walking surfaces), continuity of the pedestrian network and an attractive pedestrian environment are important to enhancing this important part of downtown. Our comments are organized according to the streets that surround the site.

Washington Street

We have looked at the relationship of the building to Washington Street with respect to street and sidewalk widths, building lines, existing retail character, proposed building uses and access points, and transit access. From Government Center to Chinatown, Washington Street's sidewalks are moderately wide and do not have street trees or benches. Where sitting areas and landscaping exist, as at School, Franklin and Summer Streets, they are set back from the walking zone along the street edge. In locations with high foot traffic, extra sidewalk width and partially closed streets (e.g., in front of the Filene's building), there are also kiosks and vendors selling merchandise on the walkway.

The west side of Washington Street (facing the Hayward Place site) has recently-constructed sidewalks abutting new high rise structures with revised building lines. This side of the street is particularly interesting because of the entertainment uses in historic buildings – the Paramount and the Modern Theaters and the Opera House (in various levels of use) face the project site. While there are no trees or street furniture, there is an occasional large freestanding sign with advertisements and maps on the sidewalk. The sidewalk design and construction here appears to be in concert with the remainder of the street as it passes through downtown.

This generalized design framework for Washington Street provides a context which the Hayward Place proposal should continue. We suggest the following:

- Sidewalk width – Sidewalks along Washington Street should not be less than 12-15 feet wide, with a minimum clear walking zone of at least 8 feet.
- Street furniture – Trees, benches, signs or other landscaping features should not intrude into the walking zone or interfere with pedestrian circulation.
- Commercial sidewalk uses - If kiosks or vendors are located in the sidewalk, additional sidewalk width is essential.

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- Street width – Washington Street adjacent to this site varies considerably in pavement width. It would be interesting and advantageous to the site and to the city to explore rebuilding the street along this site to the narrower standard width that exists north of the site. This reconstruction could provide room for an expanded sidewalk that would allow for a continuous 12-15 foot sidewalk along the street edge of the site, while allowing irregular areas at the front of the building to accommodate sitting areas or perhaps a sidewalk café, similar to the lively atmosphere in the area north of here.
- Curb cuts – The proposal appears to include a vehicle drop-off area as a pull-out of approximately 60 feet along the face of the project on Washington Street. We see no reason why a drop-off area should be provided at this location and oppose its intrusion into the sidewalk.
- Intersection of Hayward Place and Washington Street – This intersection has been identified as the visual and spatial “center” of density for both existing and new buildings surrounding the Ritz-Carlton Towers and as a “gateway” to the Theater District. This designation suggests the need for careful design and management of pedestrian traffic in the area. A concentration of pedestrian activities at this corner of the site should be expected to follow construction. To handle this traffic, the intersection may need to be signaled, especially if the street is not narrowed. If Washington Street cannot be narrowed, we recommend a bulb-out for pedestrian street-crossing safety at the northeast corner of Washington Street and Hayward Place.
- Intersection of Washington Street and Avenue de Lafayette – The report mentions defining an intersection “gateway” at this location, but does not explain what that may mean for pedestrians.
- Public transit access – Generous space for pedestrian access to the possible MBTA headhouse should be maintained.
- Retail character - The Hayward Place proposal has street levels designated for retail/commercial uses. Although the uses of the street/retail level of the building are unknown, it is useful to remember that the street will ultimately function as a continuation of the downtown business district, perhaps related to the historic theaters across the street. We hope that the retail spaces will contribute to the future revitalization of the Downtown Crossing shopping district through generous scale, design and details.

Avenue de Lafayette

The sidewalk fronting the north side of the site along Avenue de Lafayette is considerably wider (20-25 feet) than the other sidewalks around the site. The sidewalk on the opposite side of Avenue de Lafayette is narrow and does not currently have active retail uses. The proposed Hayward Place building appears to have only one doorway onto the sidewalk. This does not make the avenue a lively pedestrian street, but perhaps offers the chance to use the relatively quiet ambience to accommodate uses that are less appropriate for the frontage along Washington Street.

The wide sidewalk along Avenue de Lafayette should be used to enhance street life and add value to the Hayward Place project by including public seating, an outdoor restaurant area, or space for display of sculpture or a fountain. Any seating, landscaping or display areas should be located behind the sidewalk band fronting Avenue de Lafayette. A double row of trees or trellised vines would provide extra summer shade for sitters or walkers.

Hayward Place

The treatment of Hayward Place shown in the plans is quite problematic for pedestrians. This frontage of the site promises to be busy because of vehicle access for both residents and merchants. It is already a service street for the structures on the opposite side of the street.

- Street direction – The design of vehicular activities on this street suggests that a decision has been reached that Hayward Place will operate as a one-way street from Washington Street to the Harrison Avenue Extension. Yet the report suggests that alternatives that rely on two-way operation are still in play. WalkBoston has analyzed the impacts on pedestrians as though it will operate as a one-way street.
- Sidewalk width and continuity, parking garage access, and loading area – The current design shows no sidewalk along much of this frontage due to the porte cochere, garage and service entrances. Continuous sidewalks, at a level grade (vehicles should ramp up and over the sidewalk) should be provided along Hayward Place to provide the public and the building's owners and occupants with a pleasant and safe pedestrian environment on Hayward Place. The current design shows very wide curb cuts that would make the project side of the street unsafe for pedestrians. Among the details that need to be addressed are:
 - The dimensions of the porte cochere would seem to be sized as two cars wide and three cars long, but without provision for pedestrians.
 - The building has loading bays/dumpsters between the porte-cochere and the Harrison Avenue Extension that may interfere with pedestrian passage. Trucks should not extend onto the sidewalk when they are using the bay.
 - Warning signals alerting pedestrian of exiting cars will be an important safety feature where cars are exiting the garage.
 - Curb radii should be tight on both sides of all curb ramps serving vehicle entries and exits for the building to ensure that vehicles drive very slowly across the sidewalk.

Harrison Avenue Extension

The Harrison Avenue Extension appears to function primarily as a service road for this and other sites. Despite this role, adequate sidewalk width is an essential attribute for continuity of pedestrian passage along this frontage of the site. We recommend a minimum width of 8 feet for this frontage.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this Final Project Impact Report. WalkBoston makes our recommendations with the knowledge that the Hayward Place developer cares deeply about public and pedestrian spaces, and in the hope that our suggestions fall on receptive ears. Please feel free to contact us for clarification or additional comments, and let us know how our recommendations will be addressed.

Sincerely

Wendy Landman
Executive Director

Cc Anthony Pangaro, Millennium Hayward, LLC