



September 15, 2008

Tai Young Lim  
Boston Redevelopment Authority  
One City Hall Square  
Boston, MA 02201-1007

RE: Comments on the Draft Project Impact Report for the Parcel 24 project

Dear Mr. Lim:

WalkBoston is pleased to offer comments on the Parcel 24 project in Boston. The project is an admirable effort to maximize the addition of housing to the Chinatown neighborhood on a difficult site left when a highway ramp was relocated. It has been designed to provide a transition between the Big Dig project at the edge of the Chinatown community and the neighborhood. It provides a maximum amount of affordable housing – both for rental and purchase. It has a central park, which, though small, adds considerably to the appeal of the project and its potential use by the neighborhood. It provides community meeting spaces that will be much used because of their location next to the central open space.

We note that the majority of trips generated by the project will be by walkers and transit riders (who are walkers too). Sidewalks are provided around the perimeter of the site, except where a significantly large highway ramp precludes walking. Most entrances to the buildings are located on Hudson Street; with one major entry also planned for the relatively narrow site frontage on Kneeland Street. Street trees are added to give a note of greenery at the perimeter of the site. The principal large building faces the Rose Kennedy Greenway and will be a highly visible termination of the parklands of the Greenway.

We also appreciate the developer's willingness to meet with WalkBoston to discuss the project and provide us with a detailed understanding of how the project will affect pedestrians.

#### General Comment

WalkBoston encourages a minimum of a 5' wide clear walking zones for all sidewalks. The clear walking paths on the sidewalks of the Rose Kennedy Greenway, just across Kneeland Street, range from 8' to 11'. Experience shows that narrower walkways do not provide the space that pedestrians need for passing one another. In this project, many sidewalks barely meet these minimums, yet projections show that most project trips will be made on foot, or on foot with connections to transit. We hope that wider sidewalks can be eked out from the very tight site dimensions. Detailed comments on this issue are provided below.

The sidewalk along Hudson Street - between Kneeland Street and the loading dock/entrance into the upper parking tray This portion of the sidewalk is 10' wide. Six trees are located in this walkway, and will have tree grates to allow for watering and trunk growth. Choice of the size of the tree grates is critical. Frequently, these grates are 4' in width. With a 6 inch setback

at the curb, the tree grates will reduce the clear walking width of the sidewalk to 5'6" in width.

- Will a relatively high volume of pedestrians use this portion of Hudson Street, where many of the building entrances are located? We do not consider a 5'6" wide sidewalk sufficient for relatively high walking volumes.

The sidewalk along Hudson Street - between the loading dock/entrance into the upper parking tray and the southern end of the project This portion of the sidewalk is primarily 8' wide, becoming a bit wider in front of the central open space. Along most of the frontage, the 8' width is measured from the curb to the planters in front of the residential structures. If tree grates and trees are introduced into this section, the clear width for walking could be reduced to an unsatisfactory 4' width.

- Could rectangular tree grates of 6' x 2', placed with the long dimension next to the curb, be introduced to provide for 5'6" width of clear distance for pedestrians, and is a 5'6" wide sidewalk sufficient in this location? If long narrow tree pits are to be used, it is important to consider providing structural subsoil to allow the tree roots to expand under sidewalks increasing their strength and health.
- If a rectangular tree grate results in trees located a bit closer to the curb, are there choices of trees that could be planted here that grow primarily upward to avoid interference with truck clearance or other street traffic?
- If rectangular tree grates of 6' x 2' are not feasible, is there any way to enlarge the clear walking width by moving the tree planting area to merge with the planting areas located in front of each of the residential units?

The sidewalk along Hudson Street – in front of the central open space This portion of the sidewalk is also 8' wide, widening to 10' at the southern end, near an entrance to the green space. This amount of space is probably adequate for pedestrian movement, but might be improved.

- Would it be possible to continue the row of street trees inside the open space in this segment? Shade along the entire edge of Hudson Street might be a worthy goal.
- If space permits, could a few benches be added inside the edge of the green area to encourage local people to sit, chat, and meet others?

The sidewalk along Albany Street In contrast with the other perimeter sidewalks, those along Albany Street are relatively spacious. From Kneeland Street most of the way to the South Station Connector, the sidewalk varies from 11' to 16'. Street trees and tree grates in this area of the customary 4' square dimensions would reduce the sidewalk clear width to 7' to 12'. These widths appear to be sufficient for most pedestrian ways where high traffic volumes are not expected. Nearer the South Station Connector, the sidewalk along Kneeland Street is 8' wide, without any street trees. This width is quite satisfactory for this segment, where pedestrian volumes are likely to be restrained.

### Crosswalks

Crosswalks should be located at all intersecting streets on both sides of the site. If there is a likely pedestrian crossing that is needed midblock crosswalks should be added there as well. The project indicates crosswalks on Albany Street and on the South Station Connector. No crosswalks are indicated on Hudson Street, where the greatest concentration of pedestrians

is likely. Crosswalks reduce the reasons for jaywalking – defined as crossing the street at locations where there is no crosswalk. Crosswalks would have the effect of recognizing the needs of pedestrians on local streets – especially in a close-knit neighborhood such as Chinatown.

- Would it be possible for crosswalks to be added along Hudson Street? Can the proponent specify locations to be included in construction plans?

#### Wind

There are only a few areas where projected winds around the project may not be satisfactory for pedestrians. It is important that sitting areas along the street or in the central open space be sufficiently protected to allow for comfortable sitting and not just brisk walking.

#### Street Lighting and Furniture

WalkBoston encourages developers to work with the city on street light pole locations to minimize the amount of space taken from walking zones. WalkBoston also discourages a clutter of street furniture, sometimes placed without concern for pedestrian flow. This could include the placement of signal boxes, benches, signs, newspaper boxes, and parking meters. These details should be carefully worked out as the project moves forward.

#### Parking

WalkBoston also encourages on-street parking to use as few parking meters as possible (for example by using the new efficient single meters on the block with receipts as on Newbury Street which significantly eliminate curbside clutter). In this project, it appears that parking does not now exist nor will it be added to the east side of Hudson Street. If parking is added WalkBoston suggests that further analysis of its impact on Hudson Street pedestrians be undertaken.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this project. Please let us know if there are further details we might provide.

Sincerely,

Wendy Landman  
Executive Director

Robert Sloane  
Senior Planner