



Charlestown Preservation Society
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December 1, 2020

Mr. Raul Duverge:

The Charlestown Preservation Society is a nonprofit organization with a 53-year history of working to protect Charlestown's culture, architecture and built environment. The current Board includes architects, designers, urban planners, lawyers, realtors, and sociologists with experience in development and planning and a strong commitment to serving the Charlestown community.

First, we thank you and your colleagues at the BDPA for your leadership and advocacy for Boston, particularly Charlestown, and the City's commitment to the redevelopment of the Bunker Hill Housing Development. We are excited about the prospects. The new public green spaces, "festival street," the commercial space, and community center are much needed assets for all residences of Charlestown and beyond. The existing housing is outdated, well past its useful life, and no longer provides safe housing equitable with other such projects through the City. The four-year delay in the project and current process has exceeded the patience of many, but this project will change the fabric of the Charlestown community and the neighborhood for generations. It has to be right!

The concept of a mixed-income, mixed-use development that ties together the old neighborhood, the Newtown development, the Navy Yard, and the Little Mystic's open space and recreation while adding open space and community space is the answer, and that is something we all support.

And the current plan proposed by Leggatt McCall and Joseph Corcoran Companies is an improvement over the initial plan from 2016. But, in our opinion, it misses the mark in the following ways:

- We do not support a development that segregates families into all-affordable buildings. That said, we do understand evidence shows this approach benefits elderly and disabled populations.
- The residential buildings located adjacent to the Tobin Bridge provide sub-par housing. Units facing the bridge will not be able to open windows for fresh air without exposure to noise and traffic pollution.



- The goal of the overall Master Plan is to inform the future build out of the site. The current plan lacks a clear design approach to the building sites outside of Phase One. We should be able to understand how all structures fit into the larger master plan, and how the master plan fits into the surrounding neighborhood. Without that framework, there is no guarantee that future phases will adhere to the design and programming principles discussed and required by the community and review authorities. The developer has not provided enough detail to inform a framework.
- The massing and urban plan of the proposed buildings creates a perceived division between the main fabric of Charlestown, the project area, and Newtown. While we understand the benefits of a nominal increase in building heights, this development is proposed for the middle of the neighborhood and not an edge, and it is significantly out of scale with the surroundings with the exception of the “exception” buildings—the High School and the elderly community on Bunker Hill Street.
 - The massing, height and design of the buildings is foreign to the rest of the town and this differentiator will isolate the development from the surrounding neighborhood. A plan that increases housing units by 245% (and correlating resident population), building heights by 357%, and Floor Area Ratio by 50% does not knit a neighborhood together.
 - Building height and the number of units per entry predicts public safety and crime rate. With the large size of each building and number of people who share a communal space (such as lobbies, stairways and corridors), it is more difficult for people to identify and associate with those spaces. It is easier for outsiders to gain access to and linger in the interior areas of buildings shared by 100 families than it is in a building shared by 6 to 12. This poses potential safety risks.
 - Building size has a statistically significant and causal relationship to resident’s behavior. Use of public areas and social interaction with neighbors is negatively affected as building size increases, while a fear of crime, community instability, and turnover and vacancy rates go up.
 - Most sidewalks throughout the development front empty facades of buildings. This is not inviting or safe.
 - The “festival street” is poorly placed amongst residential buildings. A “festival street” strategically placed on Monument Street amongst restaurants and retail would support the concept of knitting the community into its surroundings.
- One of the greatest assets of Charlestown and improvements in the community in the last 20 years has been the elevation of the quality of our elementary schools. Families that once fled to the suburbs are making a commitment to stay and raise their families in Charlestown if they can find appropriate housing stock. In the existing housing, there are larger units with multiple generations of families living together. The planned unit sizes for the affordable units does not allow for multiple generations to live together easily and the market rate units to get the unit “count” are too small. There is not the opportunity to retain residents in these units as their families grow. Effectively, this will result in a transient community, as young families will rapidly outgrow the available options for housing and families with school-age children will have few options other than to leave. This also means that most children in the development will be from low-income households, which results in stigmatization.
- The quest for passive house ratings is commendable, but we cannot ignore the devastation to the environment that the demolition of the buildings and the removal of mature trees will cause. The loss of the embodied



energy in the existing buildings, the millions of tons of debris added to the landfills, and the energy required to manufacture and transport new building materials is not a concession we should carelessly support. On average, it takes 80 years for a new energy-efficient building to make up for these impacts. We do not see the benefit of the cost for testing to qualify for passive house ratings and would rather that money be put towards an urban nursery or deconstruction in exchange for demolition. Passive house principals should be utilized, but the certification is not required.

We are not experts in affordable housing, but we would like to hear from social planners as to the risks posed by the current plan. We are concerned that the project details proposed will continue to stigmatize the residents in the “affordable only buildings,” both by the outside world and by the residents themselves. The apathy that comes with stigmatization leads to neglect and withdrawal, first on the part of the residents, then by housing management, and finally by the municipal agencies that service the development. This is evident in the condition of the property today, and it cannot happen again. We need assurances from the city and state that they will provide the resources that it will take to support a plan to avoid repeating past mistakes.

We also call on the City to provide the resources to improve the living conditions for the residents in the BHHD and the larger neighborhood *today*. We need solutions for the neighborhood’s existing problems before we begin to build and compound them.

We greatly appreciate your consideration of our comments and thoughts and are happy to meet with you further. We all want what is best for the residents of the BHHD and the whole Charlestown community.

All our best,

The Charlestown Preservation Society Board of Trustees

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Amanda C. Zettel". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Amanda Zettel
President, Board of Trustees
Charlestown Preservation Society