

January 18, 2022

Providence City Hall
25 Dorrance Street, Room 310
Providence, RI 02903

VIA E-MAIL

Dear Councilman Goncalves:

Thank you for your letter of January 11, 2022 relating to the development proposals for Parcel 2. We appreciate the input you shared and the continuing input of your constituents.

Over the course of the review process for the three Parcel 2 proposals, the Commission has encouraged developers to actively engage with the community, and the developers have given numerous presentations to various community and stakeholder groups. In response to feedback received in these meetings and from the Commission's consultants, the developers were given an opportunity to revise their proposals prior to the Commission's selection of preferred developer. While all three developers did make changes, it is important to note that the project has not yet entered design review, where additional design changes would be expected and encouraged.

The selection of a preferred developer is the first step in the Commission's process and is followed by a two-step design review. At both stages of design review, the public will have opportunity to review and comment on the project designs. The Commission's design review panel also plays a central role in the design review process, providing input from design professionals for the Commission to consider. The current members of the Commission's design review panel are Craig Barton, University Architect and professor at Brown; Emily Vogler, a landscape architect and professor at the Rhode Island School of Design; and Jack Ryan, a respected Rhode Island architect. If any of the three current applicants for the development of Parcel 2 are selected, the public will have these additional opportunities to provide input.

It is important to also note that by law the Rhode Island State Historic Preservation Officer is required to review and approve development plans for every 195 District parcel prior to the Commission granting a project final plan approval.

To be responsive to the concerns raised in your letter, the staff and I will recommend several actions to the Commission:

1. That the Commission undertake a parking study, analyzing existing parking conditions surrounding Commission land on the east side and the impact of the proposed development.

2. If the Commission elects to move forward with one of the three proposals for the development of Parcel 2, that certain conditions be included in the designation:
 - a. The selected developer shall make further revisions to building massing and elevations to better interface with College Hill and Fox Point neighborhoods. Among the possibilities:
 - Step down building height along Dollar Street and South Main
 - Maximize the ability of the easement to break down the massing
 - Enhance prominence of South Main/Dollar Street elevations so they do not read as the “back” of the building
 - Explore material choices to help bring down the scale of the buildings, including increasing transparency, incorporating visually lighter materials at the top of the buildings and heavier materials at the bottom, etc.
 - Provide more detail on proposed parking plan for residents and visitors to the project, informed by the Commission’s parking study
 - b. The selected developer shall be required to submit a shadow study as part of their concept plan application
3. Following designation, the Commission will require the developer to meet with Commission’s design review panel to provide feedback on how to best incorporate the above conditions into the design and enhance green space in the project, keeping in mind that there is a new 7-acre park across the street. The Commission will also encourage the developer to meet with parcel abutters to better understand concerns relative to project design and massing.

You may be aware that Senator Zurier directed a letter to us on the development review process for Parcel 2. A response to that letter is attached for your reference.

Very truly yours,



Robert C. Davis
Chair

Cc:

Sandra Smith, I-195 Redevelopment District Commission
Barrett Bready, I-195 Redevelopment District Commission
Michael McNally, I-195 Redevelopment District Commission
Marc Crisafulli, I-195 Redevelopment District Commission
Stefan Pryor, I-195 Redevelopment District Commission
Bonnie Nickerson, I-195 Redevelopment District Commission

The Honorable Governor Daniel J. McKee

State Representative Christopher Blazejewski, District 2
State Representative Edith Ajello, District 1

State Senator, Tiara Mack, District 6
State Senator, Samuel Zurier, District 3

January 18, 2022

Rhode Island State House
Room 122
Providence, RI 02903

VIA E-MAIL

Dear Senator Zurier:

Thank you for your thoughtful letter on the Commission's process for selecting a developer of Parcel 2. We think that it might be helpful to you and your constituents if we explained important design review process that follows after a developer is selected.

We appreciate your reference to the Providence Zoning Ordinance and the review process that the City follows. Historically, by virtue of the provisions of the original enabling legislation establishing the Commission, projects developed on the Commission's land were subject to the City's Zoning Ordinance. In 2019, the General Assembly amended the statute, eliminating the application of the City's Zoning Ordinance to the Commission's land and directing the Commission to adopt a zoning-like set of controls called a "development plan." After a months long process, in which the Commission involved the City Planning Department, State Historic Preservation Officer, and the public, the Commission adopted its Development Plan in May 2020.

On the east side, the bulk and dimensional standards of the Development Plan are quite similar to the City's Zoning Ordinance. The maximum height under each is 6 stories. Under the City's Zoning Ordinance, Parcel 2 would be in the C-2 zone and the East Side Overlay District. The height limitation by right is 4 stories with projects qualifying for an incentive bonus of up to two stories if a project includes at least one of certain features. All of the proposals before the Commission include several of these features and would, if controlled by the City's Zoning Ordinance, be eligible for a height limitation of 6 stories. We spoke with the City Planning Department after we received your letter and confirmed our understanding of the City's Zoning Ordinance was correct.

The selection of a preferred developer is the first step in the Commission's process and is followed by design review. Because of the change to the Commission's enabling act, Commission projects no longer have access to the City's design review process. To provide a comparable function, the Development Plan establishes a two phase design review process like the City – concept and final plan review. At both stages, the public will have opportunity to review and comment on the project designs. The Commission's design review panel, which plays a review role similar to the City's Downtown Design Review Committee, also plays a central role in the design review process, providing input from design professionals for the Commission to consider. The

current members of that Commission’s design review panel are Craig Barton, University Architect and professor at Brown; Emily Vogler, a landscape architect and professor at the Rhode Island School of Design; and Jack Ryan, a respected Rhode Island architect. If any of the three current applicants for the development of Parcel 2 are selected, the public will have these additional opportunities to provide input.

It is important to also note that by law the Rhode Island State Historic Preservation Officer is required to review and approve development plans for every 195 District parcel prior to the Commission granting a project final plan approval.

To be responsive to the other issues raised in your letter and that of Councilman Goncalves, the staff and I will recommend several actions to the Commission:

1. That the Commission undertake a parking study, analyzing existing parking conditions surrounding Commission land on the east side and the impact of the proposed development.
2. If the Commission elects to move forward with one of the three proposals for the development of Parcel 2, that certain conditions be included in the designation:
 - a. The selected developer shall make further revisions to building massing and elevations to better interface with College Hill and Fox Point neighborhoods. Among the possibilities:
 - Step down building height along Dollar Street and South Main
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 - Provide more detail on proposed parking plan for residents and visitors to the project, informed by the Commission’s parking study
 - b. The selected developer shall be required to submit a shadow study as part of their concept plan application

3. Following designation, the Commission will require the developer to meet with Commission's design review panel to provide feedback on how to best incorporate the above conditions into the design and enhance green space in the project, keeping in mind that there is a new 7-acre park across the street. The Commission will also encourage the developer to meet with parcel abutters to better understand concerns relative to project design and massing.

You may be aware that Councilman Goncalves directed a letter to us including input from his constituents. A response to that letter is attached for your reference.

Very truly yours,



Robert C. Davis
Chair

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