

WORCESTER SQUARE AREA NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

George Stergios, President

c/o 35 Worcester Square, Boston, Massachusetts 02118

October 14, 2009

Ms. Maria Faria, Assistant Director of Housing
Boston Redevelopment Authority
Boston City Hall
One City Hall Square, 9th Floor
Boston, MA 02201-1007

RE: 691 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE SMALL PROJECT REVIEW
Comments on the Proposed Urbanica Condominium Development

Dear Ms. Faria:

The Worcester Square Area Neighborhood Association (WSANA) and the development team for the proposed new resident construction at 691 Massachusetts Avenue have had an ongoing and constructive dialogue relating to this project. Following earlier presentations to WSANA's Development Committee, Kamran Zahedi of Urbanica Inc., the developer, and Urbanica's architects attended WSANA's monthly meeting on July 28, 2009, to present and discuss a significantly changed façade. WSANA's comments on these revisions were compiled in a letter dated August 3, 2009 that was sent directly to Mr. Zahedi (*attached herewith for your reference*). A copy of this letter was transmitted to the South End Landmark District Commission (SELDC) prior to an advisory review session at SELDC's August 4, 2009 hearing. A WSANA representative also provided public comment at that hearing.

Several WSANA Board members and residents of our neighborhood attended the Boston Redevelopment Authority's (BRA) September 30, 2009 Public Information Meeting held pursuant to the Article 80 Small Projects Review process. At that meeting, the development team presented more detailed information than previously provided relating to the project's program and evolving design. Residents and Board members reiterated previous comments (contained in WSANA's 8/3/09 letter) and offered new comments. By and large, most comments related to enhancing the building's design and aesthetics. Our overarching concerns are that this large building is 1) too monolithic in appearance and 2) not sufficiently contextual to the adjoining built fabric. The comments below enumerate our salient concerns about the proposed development and provides specific suggestions to address them.

Shadow Study – Provide a shadow study to enable the BRA, community gardeners and residents to determine that the project will have negligible adverse impact on the Northampton Community Garden.

Materiality/Colors – Carefully consider the color and panelization of the terra cotta rain-screen, such that this façade layer relates more directly to the masonry palette of the South End which primarily includes red brick, limestone, brownstone (sandstone) and grey granite elements. On the Mass. Ave. façade, the recessed metal panel and glazing layer requires additional study of the proposed metal, color, and panelization at the opaque sections and color at the fenestration frames. Suggested alternatives to the current design include: 1) providing a greater contrast in color between the terra cotta rain-screen and the metal panels (such metal colors perhaps derived from the many hues of slate, oxidized copper or oxidized lead; 2) providing semi-gloss black at window frames and mullions; 3) significantly increasing the amount of glazing (clear glass) within the recessed, metal paneled layer; and 4) carrying through this same language to the metal clad penthouse level.

Architectural Articulation/Rhythm/Detail – Provide stronger architectural elements and details to help articulate the parcel rhythm and the rich detailing of the historic South End fabric. By doing so, this will break down the still too monolithic nature of the proposed building. It will help it better relate to the architectural layers, depths and undulations that are part of the South End's and immediate neighbors built fabric, which are distinguished by bow-fronts, raised stairs, iron work, recessed and canopied entries, wooden/metal oriels, cornices, mansard roofs and dormers. At the September 30 meeting, the development team indicated that it was incorporating additional (decorative) detailing that would provide greater contrast to the façade as it rises from street level to cornice line. However, as these details were not presented, we are very interested in reviewing them and being afforded the opportunity to provide further comment. Additionally, for the front elevation and the metal/glazing layer, WSANA encourages the architects to strengthen the entry canopies, recess the ground floor street entries, provide modern

notions of the oriel (with occupiable and protruding glazed spaces above some of the canopied entries or elsewhere) and/or glazed, oriel-like, rectilinear protrusions (single or multiple floor height) from the metal/glazing façade layer. These might be orchestrated at the façade in either a whimsical or more programmatically derived geometry but we believe that introducing this element at limited, selective locations could greatly contribute to mitigating the monolithic appearance and recalling that this structure is an amalgamation of 6 former and distinct parcels.

Transition from Adjacent Bowfront Structures – Consider design alternatives that improve the transition from the extant bow-front buildings at the north side of the building. The building's design should itself, directly incorporate the transition from the different heights and front-elevation styles found in the existing lower, bow-front buildings to the north and the higher, flat-front buildings to the south. One design solution to this might be to have a lower cornice line on the north end of the building by eliminating a single storey (top) of the terra cotta rain-screen layer on one or more of the northerly vertical bays (possibly to a point above the main building entry), thereby revealing only the metal/glazing layer. This would provide a better reference to the sloped slate roofs of the adjacent building row to the north. Again, this will also serve to break down the monolithic Mass Ave façade.

WSANA understands the challenge of designing a new building that in-fills existing buildings of very different styles and scales. We also appreciate the opportunity to comment and consult with City review agencies and the development team. We strongly believe that the above suggestions will greatly enhance the design of the building. WSANA will be pleased to support a high quality design of a contemporary sensibility that respects and reflects, but does not mimic, the South End's Victorian fabric. We are confident that this development team is capable of a thoughtful, dynamic and sensitive design. As such, we have high expectations of them and of City review agencies to ensure this. We will be living with this building long after it is built and want it to be an unqualified asset to the neighborhood. We look forward to reviewing a final design iteration that addresses our concerns, comments and ideas, so that we can give this development our unqualified support.

Respectfully,



William Smith
WSANA Executive Board Member

Encl: WSANA Comments to K. Zahedi on proposed 691 Mass Ave development dated Aug 3, 2009

CC: K. Zahedi, Urbanica Inc
Studio Luz, Design Consultant
South End Landmark District Commission
WSANA Executive Board

WORCESTER SQUARE AREA NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

George Stergios, President

c/o 35 Worcester Square, Boston, Massachusetts 02118

August 3, 2009

Kamran Zahedi
Urbanica, Inc.
142 Berkeley Street, Suite 402
Boston, MA 02116

RE: Proposed Residences on 691 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, MA

Dear Mr. Zahedi:

Thank you for appearing with your architect, Anthony Piermarini of Studio Luz, before the Worcester Square Area Neighborhood Association (WSANA) on July 28th, 2009 to discuss your revised plans for the condominium building on the empty lot at 691 Massachusetts Avenue.

The membership had an opportunity after your departure that evening to discuss your proposal. We found it a great improvement over all of the earlier iterations you have presented to us formally or informally during the last two years. Your willingness to engage with WSANA during this long period, and your record of successful projects in Boston and the South End give us the fullest confidence that the final design will be a pleasing addition to our neighborhood. Therefore, we voted unanimously to support this project, with some reservations, noted below:

- Careful attention needs to be paid to the colors of the masonry, terra cotta, metal panels, and window frames. Many of the members thought a greater contrast in color might make the building both more distinctive and more consonant with the architectural context. In particular, there were widely held concerns about the proposed bronze/brown color for the windows and metal work, relative to the color of the terra cotta panels.
- While we are comfortable with a modernist building, we believe that a greater amount of ornamentation/detailing will help better establish this as a residential building that relates to the surrounding context.
- There should be a bolder articulation of both the main entry and the façades of the first-floor units. Architectural elements at the recessed entries of the townhouse units (such as additional entry canopies) could help maintain the rhythm and pedestrian scale of the street expressed in the stoops of the adjoining buildings and break the verticality of the façade and the monolithic mass of what is a very large building.
- Because of the lack of drawings, we are unsure of what is being proposed for the rear façade. The materials should be consistent in quality, color, and architectural expression with those selected for the front façade. The design should thus acknowledge the high visibility of the rear façade, given its size and location adjacent to open space along

Northhampton Street. Further, because the building backs directly onto the Northampton Community Garden, we request that the surface parking spaces be screened with fencing or gates.

- We also have some concerns about access and parking. We are happy to see that the developer has incorporated underground parking into his design. However, we think it is worth noting that the thirty parking spaces proposed is in excess of what is required under the City's zoning code. Moreover, if the vehicles access/egress via Trask Street, as it appears, the street may not have the required turning radii once the proposed new driveway entrance to the underground garage is extended out from behind the new building. We ask that the appropriate expertise within the City's Transportation Department evaluate this concern and whether the traffic from and to these spaces will negatively impact traffic operations and pedestrian safety on Harrison Avenue and Trask Street. Further, to promote alternatives to private car ownership, we request that the developer be required to both designate some parking spaces for Zipcars and install bicycle racks.

Based on our understanding, you will need approval from the South End Landmarks Commission and the Zoning Board of Appeal. As may be useful, feel free to provide a copy of this letter to those bodies.

Do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely yours,

George Stergios, President, WSANA

cc: WSANA Executive Board