

WORCESTER SQUARE AREA NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

Morris Tansky, President

30 Worcester Square #5, Boston, MA 02118

May 14, 2009

Boston Redevelopment Authority
Attn: John F. Palmieri, Director
One City Hall Square
Boston, MA 02201

**RE: 9 EAST SPRINGFIELD STREET
Proposed Residential Development**

Attention: Ms. Maria Faria

Dear Ms. Faria:

The Architect and Owner for the proposed development at 9 East Springfield Street (South End) presented plans for a residential in-fill project to the attending members of the Worcester Square Area Neighborhood Association (WSANA) at our monthly meeting on April 28, 2009. The proposed development is located adjacent the historic Porter Houses, one lot in from the southwest corner of East Springfield and Washington Streets. This is a “pork chop” lot with narrow frontage onto Washington Street; however, most of the developable area fronts on East Springfield Street.

While WSANA membership supports the developer’s intent to construct residential condominiums on this parcel, an appropriate use for what is presently an asphalt surface parking lot, we can *not* support the development as currently proposed. This summarizes the more significant concerns raised at our meeting:

1) Building Height/Scale

- The apparent height of the proposed building is scaled to that permitted by the zoning along the Washington Street corridor, rather than being respectful of the East Springfield Street building fabric, with lower heights.
- The proposed building height will deprive relatively narrow East Springfield Street and nearby residences of sunlight, uncharacteristic of those buildings respectful of existing heights and set-backs.
- WSANA members suggested lowering floor-ceiling heights within the proposed building units, especially the upper floors (consistent with traditional South End row houses with graduated floor heights), to help reduce overall building height without losing square footage.

2) Open Space Provision

- The proposed building footprint consumes virtually the whole of the available parcel, leaving only a narrow paved surface devoted to parking, and a narrow utility access, both of which are impervious.
- The proposed roof deck is limited to less than half the available surface.

3) Front-Yard and Rear-Yard Set-Backs

- The proposed Front Yard set-back is minimal, irregular, and does not align with the typical landscaped back-of-sidewalk to building face setback found on East Springfield Street.
- The proposed building does not allow for any Rear-Yard Set-Back, rather the building massing extends to the parcel line.

4) Historic Porter House Context

- No acknowledgment of the architecturally and historically significant, Federal-era Porter Houses is offered by the proposed, adjacent development.
- The proposed East Springfield Street residential building is nearly 2.5 times the height (and mass) of the abutting Porter Houses, presenting an abrupt architectural profile that both shadows and marginalizes its historic neighbor.
- Suggestions by WSANA members included: a) reducing the proposed building height; b) considering such strategies as terracing (stair-stepping) upper floors away from the Porter Houses; and c) providing a side-yard set-back against the Porter Houses (a property line not clearly delineated in the presentation) and at which buffering balconies or patios might be considered.

5) Parking Configuration/Circulation

- WSANA members questioned the exclusion from FAR (floor area ratio) calculations the entirety of the ground level entry and parking facilities, thereby permitting massing potentially inconsistent with the historic South End fabric.
- Parking Circulation/Configurations for those spaces reliant on the Washington Street egress, appear contrived, tight, conflicting and ultimately not functional; these would include the tandem/parallel spaces deeded to Porter Houses residents, as well as the proposed, ground level, angled spaces for 9 East Springfield Street. By architect's own admission, access to and from the parking spaces directly onto Washington Street will require drivers to either back into the space or back out onto Washington Street because there is insufficient room on-site to turn a vehicle around. This condition is unacceptable.
- WSANA urges further exploration of viable parking solutions, possibly including a) meeting, rather than exceeding, off-street parking minimums; b) arranging for off-site parking; c) seeking zoning relief to reduce off-street parking spaces below the required amount; d) providing safe and functional parking circulation/configuration that relies more on traditional, alley-access, rather than so heavily dependent on the Washington Street sidewalk crossing; and d) going back to the

previous owner's proposal, looking at a partially sub-surface parking facility, requiring limited excavation.

- It is imperative, however, that safe and functional spaces are provided on the developer's parcel per existing, deeded easements granted to Porter Houses Owners (perhaps demanding a legal reading on the number and locations)

6) Architectural Merit

- The ground level is largely parking, an unusual and valuable assignment of potential living space.
- Parking could be slightly below surface grade, while living space could be slightly above, typical of the South End, and aligning better horizontally with living levels of neighboring structures (the elevator block can still work).
- The apparent application at East Springfield Street of a limited, historic and rhythmic façade on a clearly new and massive building block behind, presents an awkward and contrived collage – two distinct architectural languages, the one mimicking the old, while not acknowledging the new; the building and its façade should be a single, coherent thought, respectful of the South End massing and fabric but not mimicking.
- Windows at the upper floors of the proposed structure are over-scaled, likely the result of floor-to-ceiling heights atypical of the South End at upper levels.

WSANA truly appreciates the BRA's consideration of our concerns with the proposed development at 9 East Springfield Street. Again, while we want to support this residential project, we cannot as it is presently proposed. We urge serious reconsideration by the developer of those issues outlined above. We would invite the developer to present again to WSANA, with the hope of securing the organization's and the neighborhood's support.

Respectfully yours,

Morris Tansky, President

**Worcester Square Area
Neighborhood Association**