

BLACKSTONE/FRANKLIN SQUARE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

Minutes for its meeting of November 13, 2018

D4 Police Station Community Room,
650 Harrison Avenue, Boston, MA 02118

Convened at 7:05 PM

Welcome and Announcements: 7:05 PM

BFSNA co-president Toni Crothall welcomed attendees and made a few brief announcements about upcoming events.

Record Keeping: 7:08 PM

Matt Mues gave the Treasurer's Report: The BFSNA operating balance is \$7,993.23. The Scholarship Fund account balance is \$30,554.00. The Friends of Blackstone and Franklin Squares account balance is \$22,138.88.

Scholarship Committee: 7:10 PM

Andrew Parthum invited anyone interested to volunteer for this year's scholarship fund effort. Opportunities exist both for working on the fundraiser itself and interviewing those applying for grants.

Proposed Redevelopment of The Hotel Alexandra: 7:15 PM

Appearing on behalf of developers TCR Development and JB Ventures, architect Vickie Alani and attorney Marc LaCasse made a presentation on, and took questions about, their clients' proposed redevelopment of the long-neglected Hotel Alexandra building at the corner of Washington Street and Massachusetts Avenue.

LaCasse explained that the project will be subject to the Boston Planning & Development Agency's large project review, but they have not yet filed formally with BPDA and are in the process of community outreach. They have found a big public appetite for restoring this building.

Alani said TCR/JBV is an experienced development team with a record of redeveloping historic buildings in Boston with great designs.

The proposal is for a 150 key boutique hotel, a use that community residents have indicated they support, according to Alani. 150 keys is the minimum size that most hotel operators will consider operating and the smallest that will allow the economics of the project to work. The existing Hotel Alexandra, which is subject to South End Landmark District and Roxbury overlay zoning, has been vacant for 30 years except for some uses on the first floor and has suffered substantial water and fire damage. The interior is not salvageable, and the plan is to build a new structure inside while maintaining and restoring the existing exterior, which is of a distinctive High Gothic Victorian design. The new structure would be 12 floors at 143 feet of height, set back from the existing facade, which is 65 feet tall. Alani explained that the exterior appearance of the new part of the building is yet to be determined and the renditions she showed were only illustrative of some possibilities. The first floor will contain a restaurant at the corner with Mass. Ave., and the hotel entry will be on Washington Street. The sidewalk being very wide, they are proposing an outdoor seating area. They propose to move the existing T bus stop away from the corner and slightly down Washington Street, a change that residents have said they support.

Questions were taken. In response:

The hotel is expected to be priced around \$250 a night.

The developer said it has a signed P & S and a firm commitment from the current owner to sell. They hope to start construction in 2019 and open in 2021.

A number of attendees at the meeting spoke supportively of the proposal, calling it a positive for the neighborhood, and expressed the hope it would be permitted and constructed. No one voiced opposition or concern.

The Square Dog: 7:35 PM

Joe Schutt reported that Boston Animal Control had appeared at Blackstone Square four times over the past week and a half, apparently in response to some unknown person(s) calling to report off-leash dogs (not any actual incident of a problem with dog behavior or interaction with people). This is unusual as in the past Animal Control appearances have typically occurred only where there has been an actual incident. While it is any resident's right to call Animal Control, Joe expressed the hope that where a dog concern or issue exists, people seek to work it out by contacting Square Dog, or Friends of the Squares or BFSNA as conduits to the community of dog owners in the Squares. The vast majority of dog owners are responsible and want to do the right thing, including policing any problems that do arise.

Friends of the Squares

7:35 PM

Matt Mues reported that the Boston Parks Department recently informed us that three of the elm trees in Franklin Square will need to be removed due to Dutch Elm disease. Other trees in the square are also afflicted but should be recoverable with treatment. Friends has money to pay for the treatment and is working with the Parks Department on this.

Matt also showed some laminated signs BFSNA has produced with reminders about how residents should and should not put out their curbside trash so as to minimize messes and rodent issues, which is an ongoing problem. These are available for posting around the neighborhood.

Proposed 633 Tremont Street Marijuana Dispensary:

7:50 PM

Geoff Reilinger of Compassionate Organics, LLC and his permitting attorney Mike Ross made a presentation on, and took questions about, Compassionate Organics' proposal for a medical marijuana dispensary and probable adult use retail store to be located at 633 Tremont Street (on the north side of the street near the corner of West Canton).

Ross related that Geoff became involved in this business as a multiple sclerosis patient who found medical marijuana to be a life-altering therapy for his own condition. Compassionate Organics is already permitted for a Newbury Street location. They recently partnered with a national firm, Green Thumb Industries, to bolster their financial resources and strengthen their ability to execute their business plan, including a cultivation facility in Fitchburg.

Three words describe the proposal for 633 Tremont Street, according to Ross: Local (because Reilinger and Compassionate Organics are rooted in Boston); Boutique (because the facility is small at 1,200 SF and would be built out to a high standard); and Neighborhood (because the store would serve and benefit its neighbors).

Compassionate Organics is currently applying solely to operate as a medical marijuana dispensary. It anticipates applying for an adult use license sometime subsequent to six months after opening, but when and whether that happens would depend on events and there are a variety of scenarios. Compassionate Organics has committed that if it seeks an adult use license, it will go back through the full review and approval process.

Ross highlighted some expected parameters and terms of operation for the proposed location, including:

- Hours of operation to be 10 AM to 8 PM

- 300-350 patients a day anticipated, with a typical visit lasting 10 to 15 minutes
- No depictions of marijuana on exterior
- Interior finished akin to an Apple store, with the front area used to screen and validate patrons before they are allowed to enter the sales area
- No use of the rear alley, which is a private alley
- The head of Kroll's Boston office has been retained as security consultant

Ross explained that Boston imposes a ½ mile buffer zone between any two cannabis businesses and said this puts 633 Tremont Street into direct competition with 591 Albany Street for approval, with the City of Boston to decide. Compassionate Organics hopes to prevail on the basis of offering the better proposal. He showed a map highlighting places in the South End and environs from which they had secured expressions of support or non-opposition from a business, resident or group.

Compassionate Organics says it has made a number of commitments to mitigation and/or community benefits, including (among others):

- No single marijuana cigarettes to be sold
- Social consumption will never be permitted, regardless of possible future permitting regimes
- Compassionate Organics will fully fund Washington Gateway's Clean Streets projects for a period of at least five years (described as an approximately \$40K commitment)
- Compassionate Organics will commit \$5,000 per year to maintaining Tremont St. pedestrian crosswalk yield signs
- Preferential hiring for local residents

Questions were taken. In response:

Ross and Reilinger said it was "very likely" that Compassionate Organics would seek an adult use license once the facility was open. This is because they expect medical marijuana patients generally to migrate to recreational stores.

Ross acknowledged that 633 Tremont Street's zoning made cannabis a forbidden use but characterized this as a byproduct of "antiquated" zoning and suggested the proposal was a valid local service as provided for in the code.

Ross admitted that one abutter was in definite opposition to their proposal. Asked its identity, he said the abutter was the Pilot Block neighborhood association. He said Pilot Block had held a vote which went against Compassionate Organics after they attended a meeting notwithstanding that, according to him, the process did not seem fair and they felt as if they had "showed up to an execution." Reilinger said their proposal had met with positive responses from many attendees at a WSANA meeting.

In an email following their presentation at our meeting (but not at the meeting), Ross said Compassionate Organics was desirous that BFSNA offer a letter of non-opposition to its proposal.

Adjourned at 8:20 PM.

Elected officials or their representatives in attendance:

Faiza Sharif, Office of Neighborhood Services, City of Boston