



NORTH END / WATERFRONT NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCIL

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August 22, 2022

Christine Araujo, Chairwoman
Zoning Board of Appeals for the City of Boston
1010 Massachusetts Avenue, 5th Floor
Boston, MA 02118

RE: BOA-1337499, Address: 40-42 Cross Street Ward 3 (the “Cross Street Hotel Project”)

Dear Chairwoman Araujo:

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to express the OPPOSITION of the North End Waterfront Council (NEWNC) to the Zoning Board of Appeals awarding variances and other zoning relief to the Cross Street Hotel Project at the August 23, 2022 hearing or at any other time before the project has come before NEWNC for a formal presentation and vote as part of the usual community process. This opposition is the result of a vote conducted in executive session as a result of the project proponent’s failure to bring the matter before us for a public vote. It would be a terrible precedent and bad policy for the ZBA to approve a project of such scope and impact to the residents of the North End without following the usual community process.

For background, NEWNC was established as part of a program by the City of Boston by the Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Services in an effort to increase communication between the neighborhoods and City departments and agencies. The Council program is organized to provide structured participation in the City’s decisions affecting land use, development, delivery of services and the quality of life in a particular neighborhood. Through this process, a

partnership has been created between the neighborhood residents and the City of Boston to maximize the ability of NEWNC to participate fully as an advisory board in municipal affairs.

A primary role in NEWNC's mission is to review projects for which an applicant has applied to the ZBA for a variance or permit in a public setting and inform the ZBA in an advisory capacity whether the project has the support or opposition of the Council, as a democratically elected body within the neighborhood. NEWNC holds monthly meetings in a setting convenient for North End residents to attend (more recently virtually), which gives both the proponents and residents ample time to express their views on the impact of a given project in greater detail than the ZBA is able to afford at its meetings. While the ZBA is in no way bound by the advisory positions provided by NEWNC, its consideration of the community feedback contained in those positions is of crucial importance. It has been my experience that the Office of Neighborhood Services and the ZBA have considered a project proponent's appearance before NEWNC to be an absolute prerequisite to its granting zoning relief in projects involving the North End, especially before the awarding of variances.

The Cross Street project, if approved, would be the largest approved development in the North End in recent memory. It has been the subject of public interest among North End residents for a lengthy period of time. If approved, the project will have a substantial impact on the North End and the quality of life of its residents.

The project will impact traffic along a major artery in the North End. Cross Street is the primary means for a large segment of the North End leading into Charlestown, the West End and I-93 North and also leads to access points to Storrow Drive. During rush hour and at other times, Cross Street is already frequently subject to gridlock and standstill traffic. The proponent of the Cross Street Hotel Project proposes to use Cross Street for its deliveries and drop-off/pick-up and check-in locations with no proposed traffic mitigation, and a proposed narrowing of existing traffic lanes. It is highly likely that the construction of a massive hotel on that location will exacerbate an already difficult traffic situation.

The proposed hotel abuts Cuttillo Park, which has been the subject of recent City grants and neighborhood beautification efforts. It also abuts the Rose Kennedy Greenway, which is a treasured local resource. The hotel structure will increase shadows cast on both parks and create a massive structure dominating the views from Cuttillo Park.

The proposed structure abuts numerous residential units and will impact residents' views and access to light and air. Numerous residents have expressed strong opposition to the project because of the impact they expect that it will have on their quality of life. I expect that you will hear testimony from some of these residents but will not have enough time to hear from all who wish to speak. At NEWNC meetings, we do our best to allow each resident to have his or her voice heard and considered before we provide feedback to the ZBA.

The proposal calls for a variance allowing the proponents to construct a building that is more than double the permissible FAR under zoning, which is far more massive than almost any other building in the North End. It calls for a variance from the height restriction, which historically NEWNC and the ZBA very rarely support. The proposal contains a roof deck, on which commercial dining would occur. Because of the likely intrusion on neighbors in the form of noise and visual obstruction resulting from roof decks, NEWNC has historically heavily scrutinized any variance proposals including a roof deck and listened closely to the concerns of abutters regarding such proposals.

There is no doubt that there would be beneficial impacts from the project. However, the proponent's refusal to formally present to NEWNC has prevented us from considering those and weighing them against the negative impacts mentioned above. We strongly believe that The ZBA would have benefited from the community process following its natural course so that it could have had NEWNC's input as a representative body much closer to those who will be impacted by the project.

There is no reason that this project could not have been presented to NEWNC so we could vote our support or opposition. NEWNC has been very accommodating to the proponents of the project and provided them with time at two separate meetings to give informal presentations to the residents of the neighborhood before final plans and a zoning application was ready. However, we made it clear to them that although we were happy to allow them to present informally, they would need to come before us formally for a council vote once the application to you was pending. It is our understanding that the project has substantially changed from what they had preliminarily presented to us. We remain open to considering the project if the proponents follow the usual process and present it to us at a future meeting.

The proponents have made no effort to contact us to put the project on our agenda. Had they done so, we would have made it a priority to schedule them. The refusal to present the final plans to us and obtain a vote of the Council is extremely disrespectful to the North End Community. That disrespect causes us further concern as to the responsiveness that they will show to the community to address future issues that will predictably arise in the future if the hotel is constructed.

Until and unless the proponents fully participate in the community process, NEWNC OPPOSES the Cross Street Hotel Project.

Please contact me at NEWNCBoston@gmail.com or via mobile phone at 802-598-4520 with any questions and/or concerns. Thank you.

Sincerely,

By: 
Joel E. Faller
President, NEWNC

cc: Mayor Michelle Wu
Senator Lydia Edwards
Representative Aaron Michlewitz
Councilor Gabriela Coletta
Councilor Michael Flaherty
Councilor Julia Mejia
Councilor Ruthzee Louijeune
Councilor Erin Murphy
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