



Longfellow
Area
Neighborhood
Association, Inc.

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July 6, 2021

Ms. Morgan McDaniel, Senior Project Manager
Boston Planning & Development Agency
Boston City Hall
Boston, MA 02201

Sent via Email

RE: 104 Walter Street, Roslindale Developer Proposals

Dear Ms. McDaniel:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the submitted developer proposals to develop four units of affordable home ownership at 104 Walter Street. The Longfellow Area Neighborhood Association (LANA) finds the proposal submitted by Habitat for Humanity of Greater Boston (Habitat) to be the superior proposal. We strongly urge you, the Evaluation Committee, and the Boston Planning and Development Agency to take all needed steps to designate Habitat for Humanity of Greater Boston as the developer for four affordable home ownership opportunities at 104 Walter.

More specifically, LANA finds that the Habitat for Humanity of Greater Boston's proposal is more responsive to the selection criteria contained in the RFP than the proposal submitted by Norfolk Design & Construction (Norfolk). We are concerned that Norfolk made no apparent effort to become acquainted with the 104 Walter site or neighborhood concerns prior to submittal. The Norfolk proposal appears to more a qualifications-style submittal, rather than a fully-conceived development proposal tailored to 104 Walter as requested in the BPDA Request for Proposal documents for 104 Walter.

Developer Experience and Capacity. Habitat has more on-point experience in creating and building affordable home ownership projects, including experience in Boston neighborhoods. Habitat's proposal included an entire development team that was named and specific to the 104 Walter Street opportunity. Norfolk provided a listing of vendors, and did not demonstrate a fully conceived proposal with identified team members. During the interview Norfolk indicated that would be forthcoming, if designated. We would like to know who the development team is at the time of designation, not just a list of possible partners. Both proposals provided an approximate time frame and delivery schedule, with Habitat taking slightly longer. As a neighborhood association, LANA can live with the longer proposed time frame outlined by Habitat, given the stronger history and track record of affordable home ownership and capacity demonstrated in the response. In addition, the schedule in Norfolk's proposal includes a MEPA review, which appears unnecessary and perhaps indicates a lack of understanding of the specifics of the 104 Walter Street project (or a mistaken cut'n'paste job).

Strength of Development Plan. The Habitat proposal indicates that the four new affordable home-ownership units will be for persons who are 65% to 80% of Area Median Income (AMI). Norfolk's proposal indicates that they will target households that are 100% of AMI. Habitat has a stronger proposal providing affordable home ownership for lower income households than Norfolk. Advancing equity is one of LANA's goals for this project. Targeting persons who have incomes that are 65% to 80% AMI per the Habitat

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proposal more fully addresses LANA's equity goals (as well as City policy) than the 100% AMI target in the Norfolk proposal.

The Habitat proposal offers a mix of unit sizes and types (as requested in the RFP), including a handicap-accessible unit. This mix of home ownership opportunities is attractive and highly advantageous. Norfolk's proposal had three 3-bedroom units and retention of the existing single family. The Norfolk proposal did not detail a floor plan or specific treatment of the existing single family. The Norfolk narrative merely stated it would be 4 bedrooms, with 2.5 baths. The Norfolk proposal lacks sufficient detail.

Strength of Design Plan. Habitat has well-conceived development proposal that addresses many, if not all, of the issues identified in the RFP. The proposed Habitat development plan for both vertical construction and the landscape advance the goals and design concepts articulated in the RFP. The Norfolk plan falls short. There appears to be little consideration of landscape issues. This is a serious omission, since it ignores a key contextual feature of the 104 Walter Street project, namely the Roslindale Wetlands.

The building massing at the rear of the lot is huge and generated objections and comments from nearby abutters. Norfolk's comments at the public presentation regarding elevation changes in the land will make the 3-family less intrusive appearing are not supported by Norfolk's own documentation. The elevation drawing shown by Norfolk does not depict any grade changes. There are no existing three-family structures in this area of Walter Street and amongst the abutters to the Roslindale Wetlands. The proposed 3-family is not only out-of-scale, to the neighborhood, it is not context-sensitive. It will be highly visible from the Roslindale Wetlands and no buffer or green wall was proposed by Norfolk. Norfolk's proposal did not address the critical edges of the plan as to neighbors and the Roslindale Wetlands. No details were offered, as requested in the RFP. These are serious omissions and shortcomings of their design plan.

Furthermore, Norfolk offered no strategies for light intrusion from parked car headlights, a concern of direct abutters.

Resilient Development, Carbon Neutral and Green Building Design. A major focus of our neighborhood's efforts advocate for the 104-108 Walter Street project has been climate resiliency. This includes creating net-zero energy affordable home ownership opportunities. The Habitat proposal addresses the operating costs of housing (after development) for new homeowners, and approaches net-zero energy with the use of solar panels and a heat-pump. The addition of trees helps mitigate extreme summer heat. The Norfolk proposal does not address net-zero energy or energy conservation.

The Habitat proposal appears to be highly advantageous as to resiliency, carbon neutrality and green building design. The Norfolk proposal does not address these critical issues. As a consequence, the Norfolk proposal is not advantageous.

Financial Capacity, Price Proposal and Development Cost Feasibility. Since the financial issues were not part of the publicly released proposals, LANA cannot comment as to criteria 5 and 6 at this time.

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Diversity & Inclusion Plan. As a certified Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) and Veterans-Business (VBE), Norfolk appears to have the stronger response as to Diversity and Inclusion. Norfolk clearly has a history of working with other MBE firms. Norfolk provided a list of certified MBE and some WBE firms as part of their proposal. What was missing from the proposal, as well as the presentation, was who – which MBE and WBE firms – are part of the team, the firm’s role and credentials. It was notable that the firms enumerated in Norfolk’s slide deck during the public presentations include all MBE firms, but no WBEs. The RFP clearly requested inclusion of MBE and WBE firms.

Habitat’s Diversity & Inclusion Plan is more aspirational. The staffing of Habitat’s team, as well as its partners is racially, ethnically diverse, as well as diverse by gender. Habitat, however, did not appear to include certified MBE or WBE firms as part of their submission.

Development without Displacement. Both proposals noted that the developers are committed to no displacement and commented that there are no residents currently living at 104 Walter. The Habitat proposal mentions support of new homeowners following development, so as to avoid future displacement. This commitment by Habitat to ongoing support for new lower-income, first-time homeowners is very attractive and welcomed by LANA. This commitment of continuing support for new homeowners demonstrates a commitment to development without displacement today as well as for the future on the part of Habitat.

In short, LANA finds the Habitat for Humanity of Greater Boston the best fit for the 104 Walter Street project. We urge BPDA to select Habitat as the developer of the four affordable housing units at 104 Walter.

Sincerely yours,

LONGFELLOW AREA NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION



By: Kathleen McCabe, FAICP
President

cc: Council President O’Malley
Councilor Ricardo Arroyo, District 6
Councilor Andrea Campbell, District 4
Councilor Anissa Essaibi-George, At-Large
Councilor Mike Flaherty, At-Large
Councilor Julia Mejia, At-Large
Councilor Michelle Wu, At-Large