



West End Branch Library (Housing With Public Assets)

Draft development objectives for combining a new library branch with high-quality affordable housing.

October 2022

The following draft development objectives will form the basis of a forthcoming Request for Proposals (RFP) for a mixed-use development at the current site of the West End Library, which will include a new ground-floor space for the library and multiple floors of primarily income-restricted, affordable housing above. The objectives that are laid out below are the result of input and discussion gathered during a months-long participatory community process between a multi-disciplinary City of Boston team and residents of the West End and Beacon Hill. The Mayor's Office of Housing (MOH) is seeking any additional comments on these objectives before proceeding to draft the RFP for the development project.

Please share any comments or questions with Joe Backer, Senior Development Officer, at: 617-635-0226 or joseph.backer@boston.gov

More information on this project can be found at:

<https://www.boston.gov/buildinghousing/west-end-library-housing-public-assets>

Draft Development Objectives

Deliver a First-Class Library

The City's primary goal is to build a library branch that offers world-class services in a beautiful landmark for the neighborhood. The library should have a strong street presence, enhancing the street fabric and serving as a gathering place on Cambridge Street. The design of the branch exterior should draw attention to the library and hold its own amidst the other large buildings on the street and the housing above it. The entrance, stairs and elevators for the housing in the building should be distanced from the entrance to the library to give each component a distinct identity. The library's street frontage should include an outdoor area that combines landscaped open space and seating to be welcoming, accessible and connect the library to the active, urban street life of the area.



The current library is undersized for its programming needs, and proposals should include approximately 17,500 gross square feet of space for the library. It is important that the library has plenty of natural light deep into its large floor plan, possibly through high windows or a clerestory.

The full West End Branch Programming Study can be found here:

<https://www.bpl.org/west-end-project/>

Maximize the Breadth and Depth of Affordable Rental Housing

The special combination of a library with housing on this site makes rental housing the best fit, as it helps ensure a productive management relationship between the housing management entity and the City and Boston Public Library.

Community members have expressed a strong preference for projects which can exceed minimum affordability standards, and applicants should maximize the proportion of income-restricted, affordable units created. Developments which can achieve deeper levels of affordability and/or a higher percentage of income-restricted housing are preferred. Preference will also be given to projects that include affordability at many income levels (e.g. 30%, 40%, 50%, 60%, 80%, 100% of Area Median Income), to meet the needs of different residents, with as many units available for low- and extremely low-income households as is feasible¹. This income gradient will also help to affirmatively further fair housing in the area, which is currently underweighted towards households of color compared to the City as a whole.²

Community conversation has indicated a willingness to consider proposals that include a relatively small proportion of units that are unrestricted and/or restricted at workforce housing levels (e.g., 120% of AMI), if this helps enhance the public benefits of the proposal or can deliver a cross-subsidy to deeply affordable housing. However, at minimum, a majority of overall units must be income-restricted according to the guidelines above.

¹ The Mayor's Office of Housing (MOH) requires that any project receiving City subsidy must guarantee that at least 40% of the overall units are income-restricted. This includes restricting 10% of the overall units as homeless set-aside units at 30% or less of Area Median Income (AMI), and 10% of the overall units at 50% or less of AMI.

² The Housing and Household Composition Community Profile for this site, as provided as part of the BPDA's Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Assessment tool, can be found [here](#). Data comparing the immediate surrounding area to the City as a whole throughout these draft development objectives can be found in that report.



Partner with the Boston Housing Authority to Add Deeply Affordable Units

This site presents a rare opportunity to partner with the Boston Housing Authority (BHA) to deliver additional deeply-affordable units thanks to a dedicated rental income subsidy, which could expand and deepen the affordable housing available to residents. Boston is approximately 2,500 units below its “Faircloth Limit,” the maximum number of federal public housing units for which Boston can receive subsidy, as set by a 1999 federal law that capped the amount of federal public housing in each city. This project, which will be co-located with another public asset (the West End library) and sits in a neighborhood context appropriate for higher-density development, is an opportunity to include new “Faircloth units” as a portion of the overall housing development. These units could in turn be converted to HUD’s Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) program, to secure a higher rate of subsidy, and this subsidy could be used as a means to achieving deeper affordability in the overall unit mix of the proposal. This would align with the BHA’s commitment to affirmatively furthering fair housing, as currently only 1% of local households utilize housing vouchers, compared to 4.7% citywide.

In order to ensure that a significant percentage of the overall housing units on this site are deeply affordable to Boston’s lower-income residents, the BHA is prepared to make the Faircloth subsidy available for a qualified proposal. Because of the possible use of Faircloth-to-RAD subsidy, and given high demand city-wide for Section 8 vouchers, the City and BHA do not anticipate making Project-Based Vouchers available for this project.

Please contact [TBD] for more information. The Boston Housing Authority (BHA) will maintain sole discretion for the review and award of application for subsidy, subject to final HUD approval.

Provide Housing for a Variety of Household Types

Throughout the community process, there has been strong support in particular for both senior housing and family-friendly housing. This site may be a particularly good fit for families, as children will greatly benefit from the resources offered at the library branch, and only 9.8% of households in the immediate area currently have children under age 18, as compared to 22.4% citywide. Proposals should include unit sizes ranging from studios to 3 bedrooms to meet the needs of different households. Proposals should specify what resident services will be available to serve those living in the building.

The Mayor’s Office of Housing’s Design Guidelines can be found here:

<https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/file/2022/08/13-MOH-Design-Standards.pdf>



Synergy with the Otis House

To the east of the site is the First Harrison Gray Otis House, a National Historic Landmark. Built in 1795–96, it was designed by Charles Bulfinch and built for Massachusetts politician Harrison Gray Otis and his wife Sally Foster Otis. It is one of the earliest three-story brick houses that came to represent the Federal style of architecture and the complex represents some of the last remaining historic buildings of the West End. The Otis House complex is owned by nonprofit Historic New England, and comprises the 1796 mansion and two connected 19th-century row houses. It currently serves as a historic house museum, library and archives, and public programming site. Historic New England is engaged in its own ambitious planning project to reimagine the Otis House complex as a civic and cultural anchor in the community, and welcomes collaboration in this effort.

Applicants are encouraged to consider opportunities to collaborate with Historic New England to create a shared cultural district or shared educational experience between the Otis House and the library branch.

Please contact Vin Cipolla, Historic New England President and CEO, for more information about Otis House, Historic New England, and planned future improvements at that site: VCipolla@HistoricNewEngland.org

Match Density and Height to Street Context

The scale, density and height of the project should match the context of Cambridge Street and the surrounding buildings, especially those that share the northern side of the street with the branch library. Many of the taller buildings near the library are as tall as 80 or 100 feet. Careful consideration to shading should be given to the neighboring Otis House, which is 45 feet tall. Given the surrounding context on Cambridge Street, it is expected that a developer will seek a variance to allow the building to exceed the 65 foot height limit.

Include Programmable Open Space for Residents

Open space that is accessible, attractive, and inviting to residents is required in City-funded affordable housing, and programmable open space at this development, such as a roof deck above the library, has been raised by the community as an important amenity. This open space should be accessible to all housing residents and distinct from open space supporting the library branch. This residential open space should be mindful of and correspond to what is appropriate for the different categories of residents that will live in the building.



City Land Ownership

The land will remain under City ownership, with the housing operator entering into a long-term lease agreement with the City of Boston. Each component of the building – library and residential – will be contained within a separate condominium entity of the overall structure. To the extent that some of the residential units are new public housing/RAD units, as described above, ownership may be shared with the BHA accordingly.

Additional Key City Goals

Proposals should also incorporate the following:

- **W/MBE Inclusion:** Proposals must reflect the extent to which the Developer/Development Team plans to include meaningful participation of W/MBEs and/or individuals in the following activity areas: Construction, Design, Development, Financing, Operations and Ownership. Special emphasis should be made to ensure that maximum opportunities are afforded to local, small and disadvantaged businesses, as well as people of color and women, in the areas of job creation and training, business development and the procurement of goods, services, and construction services in association with construction projects.
- **Universal Design Principles:** MOH sees the application of universal design principles as an important way to plan for the long-term livability of dwellings over the lifetime of residents as well as increasing the number available to the residents of the City of Boston with specific needs. MOH favors projects that seek to broadly apply the principles of universal design and the potential for adaptability across all aspects of building design. In particular MOH asks developers to focus on creating standardized bathroom and kitchen layouts that can work for both accessible units and units that are not specifically required to be accessible. MOH requires a minimum of 10% of units, rounded up, to be fully accessible, a higher proportion than the federally-required 5%. MOH also encourages all projects to exceed the minimum accessibility requirements, including adding features of Group 2 Dwelling Units into all units in consultation with MOH design staff. The mostly older housing stock of the surrounding area contributes to the fact that only 9.5% of local households include a member with a disability, compared to 22.7% citywide, and community conversation noted that many local seniors are forced to choose between leaving the area for accessible housing features or staying put in



inappropriate housing – so accessibility features across the entire building design will be important to delivering housing that best serves this neighborhood.

- **Zero Emission Buildings:** In recognition of the large impact of the built environment on carbon emissions, and the City's goal to be a carbon neutral city by 2050, all new MOH construction must be designed based on a CO2 target budget of 0.7-1.1 tons/person/year, or 1800kWh per person annually, and must use electricity and on-site photovoltaics as the sole (or primary) fuel source. This target relates to the residential portion of a mixed use and multifamily projects, but the City of Boston has also set ambitious goals for carbon-neutral municipal buildings that will apply to the new library branch on this site. Development proposals are to follow the Zero Emissions Building (ZEB) requirements outlined in the Design Standards and must include a preliminary Net Zero Strategy as part of the design submission.

The Mayor's Office of Housing's Guidebook for Zero Emissions Buildings can be found here: <https://bit.ly/MOHZEB>

- **High Labor Standards:** This site will involve vertical construction on land that will remain under City ownership. Depending on the funding source, developers may be expected to adhere to Davis-Bacon prevailing wage standards. All projects funded by MOH must also meet or exceed the construction employment standards of the Boston Residents Jobs Policy: at least 50 percent of the total work hours in each trade must go to Boston residents, at least 25 percent of the total employee work hours in each trade must go to people of color, and at least 10 percent of the total employee work hours in each trade must go to women.