

Issues of height and capacity dominated the West End Branch Library affordable housing reconstruction project at the sixth public meeting held by the city on October 26.

With slightly over 60 attendees, the meeting was moderated by Joe Backer, the Senior Housing Development Officer with the Department of Neighborhood Development (DND) and by Priscilla Foley, Director of Neighborhood Services for the Boston Public Library.

The reconstruction on the Beacon Hill Liibrary will include redesigning the building to accommodate the public library on the first floor, with affordable, income- based housing rentals above. The exact layout of the building, the number of units, the height and aesthetic design, will be determined in the future.

Many attendees expressed concern over the library’s accessibility during construction. Foley noted that although the library would not be able to accommodate all normal services during the months- long period, they would still conduct community outreach programs and services.

A strong point of contention was whether the housing would be built with the intention of housing as many people as possible or creating as many units as possible.

One resident in attendance commented, “I enthusiastically support the creation of income- qualified family housing on Cambridge Street. I think there is a real need for family housing, relative to the rest of the city, the project area is disproportionately supplied with single occupant housing... I think if we open the conversation and talk about housing as many people as we can, it’s very different than talking about creating as many units as we can.”

According to the city, the West End Library “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.”

A Request for Proposals (RFP) will be released before the end of this year.

Whether there would be another public meeting to review a draft RFP was left unanswered by Backer but was strongly supported by resident attendees.

“I think there are some sensitivities that the neighborhood has and that nonspecialists have that may not be quite as obvious if you are sitting in the seat of a housing office,” an attendee noted. “We will take this input seriously and folks should expect more about that soon,” Backer replied.

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