



April 11, 2011

Gerald Autler
Boston Redevelopment Authority
One City Hall Square
Boston, MA 02201-1007

Re: Northeastern University IMP Renewal / Extension & 5th Amendment (GrandMarc at Northeastern)

Dear Mr. Autler:

Fenway Civic Association (FCA) is the Fenway's only volunteer organization that accepts no public or developer funds. Our mission is to promote a safe and vital neighborhood that serves the interest of our residents. FCA appreciates the opportunity to comment on Northeastern University's requested Institutional Master Plan renewal and extension as well as the 5th amendment to the IMP (GrandMarc at Northeastern). The Fenway Civic Association strongly supports the expansion of Northeastern University's on campus student housing at the YMCA site as part of the renewal and extension of the amended institutional master plan.

In the Fenway the abundance of students in off campus housing creates an unhealthy market aberration. Students are willing to pay high rent in spite of poor property maintenance, thereby monopolizing housing stock that would otherwise be available to other demographics. With such a lucrative rental market, investors with vast leverage easily outbid prospective owner occupants for the few units that come up for sale. Real homeownership opportunities are greatly constricted in the Fenway in spite of the large number of people who would like to purchase a home here. Constructing dormitories will relieve some of the pressure on housing stock and offer more opportunities to professionals and families to live in the neighborhood.

While it is troubling that the YMCA and Northeastern could not work out a better interim facilities plan for local membership, the temporary disruption to twenty seven hundred members of the YMCA is preferable to the continuous impacts and disruption caused by thousands of students occupying residential units in the Fenway and surrounding neighborhoods. In the end, the deal will provide the YMCA with sufficient funds to renovate and improve the Huntington Avenue complex to meet the needs of their membership through the next century.

The location of the proposed dormitory directly abutting the current campus in a non-residential zone is favorable, as is the temporary gain of property taxes the City will enjoy on this previously tax-free site. Its location on a service street will minimize the impact of students on nearby residential areas while bringing street activity to an area that can be forlorn after hours. Keeping students between Massachusetts Avenue, Huntington Avenue, Ruggles Street, and the abutting Orange Line corridor minimizes impacts to the surrounding neighborhoods. It is preferable that future dormitory development remain within this envelope.

The proposed tower's setback behind the historic Huntington Avenue facade and the preservation of the Hastings wing at the YMCA is a massive improvement over the previous iteration of the GrandMarc project. The location, height, and massing of the tower is acceptable in that view corridor, with wind and shadow impacts avoiding parkland or residential areas. The reduction of height, and more importantly width, has significantly decreased the impacts on the neighborhood and the YMCA complex in comparison to the previous proposal.

Despite the public focus on the YMCA as a historic neighborhood institution, little attention has been paid publicly to the immediate abutter, Jordan Hall. Special care must be taken to avoid any damage to the acoustic masterpiece, Jordan Hall, or to any of the practice rooms and facilities of the New England Conservatory. This vital part of the Fenway Cultural District and highly respected neighborhood institution should not endure disruptions to its performance and teaching activities while dormitory construction is underway.

Though we are pleased that Northeastern will be honoring its agreement to end the practice of master leasing residential units for students, there are concerns regarding the expansion of leased properties for office and academic purposes under the extended and amended IMP. The continued expansion of classroom space through leasing off campus properties by Northeastern -- before satisfying targets for the construction of student housing -- is counter productive. Classroom space limitations act as a soft cap against unlimited institutional expansion, and limiting the expansion of classroom space until housing exists for the current student population must be a mandatory clause in future iterations of Northeastern University's Institutional Master Plan.

We prefer that the Forsyth Institute site does not become a long term lease after ten years. Preferably the MFA would occupy and completely restore that historic structure for a public use or accessory facility rather than allowing Northeastern or any other entity to continue to operate it as a laboratory facility.

Sincerely,



Bill Richardson
President, Fenway Civic Association