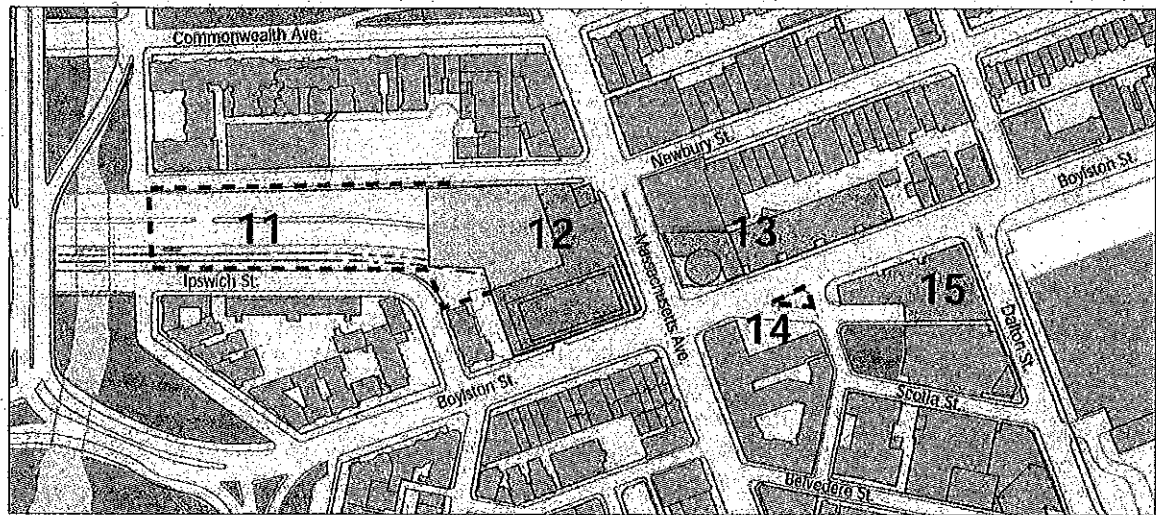


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Turnpike parcels 12 to 15 are up for development.

Key Air Rights Pike Parcels Are Coming Back in Play

by **Scott Van Voorhis**

Developers eager to build over a key Back Bay stretch of the Massachusetts Turnpike are about to get a chance to pitch their air-rights proposals after years of delays.

State and city officials will soon begin evaluating an array of com-

peting housing, office and retail projects that would deck over the Turnpike by Massachusetts Avenue and Boylston Street, according to Richard Nangle, a spokesperson for the Massachusetts Department of Transportation.

"There has been renewed interest by some of the project propo-

nents to begin the designation and development process," wrote Nangle in an e-mail.

The pending review comes roughly two years after the state Department of Transportation shut down bidding on Back Bay air-rights parcels 12 to 15 following the implosion of the \$800

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Parcels

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million Columbus Center project and a then-souring real estate market. However, the uptick in the economy has apparently sparked a wave of development interest in the parcels, prompting state and city officials to take action.

The Boston Architectural College (BAC) has been one of the most vocal proponents so far, having teamed up with housing developer Trinity Financial.

The college and the developer have floated plans for a \$120 million air-rights project on parcel 13. Under preliminary plans floated by BAC and Trinity, the project starts off at the corner of Mass Ave. and Boylston with an 11-story, 84-unit condo high-rise, dropping to six stories as it stretches along Boylston, according to Kenan Bigby, project manager for Trinity Financial. BAC plans to put 84 housing units, or enough for nearly 200 students, in the lower slung, six-story section, Bigby said.

Also circling the air-rights sites is another development group led by Steve Weiner, who built the Mandarin Oriental hotel and condo tower.

However, other developers have also submitted plans, Nangle indicated.

In fact, all the parcels, except for Parcel 13, have more than one proposal. The plans are a mix of office, housing and retail uses.

"There are numerous proposals," Nangle wrote, declining to provide more details. "One site only has one bidder and the other sites have more than one, so

there will be a competition."

The next step is up to the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), which is fielding nominations for an 11-member citizens advisory committee (CAC). Mayor Thomas Menino will make the selections, with a panel potentially in place in about a month, said Randi Lathrop, deputy director for community planning at the BRA.

The committee is likely to focus initially on the proposal for parcel 13, she said.

The CAC will offer recommendations on which developers to pick, but the final choice will be made by state transportation officials in consultation with the mayor, according to a copy of the selection guidelines provided by the BRA.

The decision to move forward with the Back Bay air-rights proposals represents a shift by state transportation officials.

Peter O'Connor, the state Department of Transportation's real estate chief, had previously expressed caution about new air-rights plans after the failure of Columbus Center.

O'Connor said he preferred to see John Rosenthal get started with his plan to build a residential and parking complex over the pike near Fenway Park before proceeding with other air-rights proposals.

While Rosenthal is still trying to line up financing for his project, his plans are fully permitted by state and city officials. So there may not be that much left for O'Connor and other transportation officials to do there, according to state Rep. Marty Walz.

"He has the capacity now to move on it," Walz said. "Trinity Financial appears to be the next one up."