

Re: Proposed Mirak Project at 1165R Massachusetts Avenue

Dear Mr. Klein, and members of the Zoning Board of Appeals:

I'm writing to you about the proposed Mirak 40B project at 1165R Massachusetts Avenue, the industrially zoned mill building complex behind Mirak Hyundai. Please add my comments to the record for the meeting on this subject scheduled for Tuesday, January 5, 2021.

The Town recently commissioned a study of our industrial and commercial districts, undertaken by Harriman and RKG Associates. Their recommendations for these districts emphasize light manufacturing, office space, breweries, maker spaces, artists' work spaces, etc., all indicated as fostering economic development. Limited residential use has only been mentioned in minuscule footnotes.

Contrary to the overall recommendations of the study, the Mirak project proposes a solely residential development, with approximately 32 affordable units, exempted from most input from the Town by its 40B status. The addition of any affordable housing is a boon to the town, of course. But it means driving a stake into the heart of the largest remaining industrial district in Arlington. This project will mean the end of the current commercial and light industrial use at that location, and will create an island of housing surrounded by business uses. Given the reluctance of industrial concerns to abut residential neighborhoods, it's not hard to imagine the pressures to eventually convert the rest of the parcels to residential use, as well.

We should mourn the loss of an opportunity to create something truly innovative for Arlington and surrounding communities.

The Mirak Innovation Park is that in name only. Imagine if it were that in reality, and this project were the beginning of a re-thinking of the entire block of parcels, with light industrial and commercial uses, artists' live-work spaces, restaurants, small retail businesses, a boutique hotel, perhaps a performance space. Imagine including a small museum/learning space to showcase the history of the mills and other, earlier businesses in Arlington, and also provide a link to Arlington's section of the Battle Road, a prime tourism draw waiting to be brought to life. Imagine looking at this location through a different lens, leveraging its location on the Mass. Ave. bus line and the Bike Path, its quick access to Rt. 2 and the Red Line, and its ample room for parking and a variety of structures.

Imagine something along the lines of these developments:

Charles River Speedway
<https://charlesriverspeedway.com>

The Brewery in Jamaica Plain
<https://jpndc.org/brewery/>

1 Westinghouse Plaza in Hyde Park
[http://www.thewestinghouselofts.com/TheWestinghouseLofts/Businesses at Westinghouse.html](http://www.thewestinghouselofts.com/TheWestinghouseLofts/Businesses_at_Westinghouse.html)

P & G Boston
<https://boston.pglocations.com>

Or imagine this site as a life sciences campus, such as Lexington, Waltham, Watertown and other communities are welcoming:

The Linx in Watertown

<https://www.linxwatertown.com/toc.cfm>

Multiple locations

<http://kingstreetproperties.com>

The Miraks have a long-standing relationship with Arlington, including many philanthropic acts that have benefited the town over the years. This site presents great opportunities for them, which could also offer much more for our town than does the current proposal.

— Has anyone in our Department of Planning and Community Development discussed alternatives with the Miraks?

The buildings currently hold a mix of artists and small businesses.

— What is the plan for their relocation?

Again, the Economic Analysis of Industrial Zoning Districts only recommends limited residential conversion in industrial districts, and only as part of mixed-use structures.

— What kinds of protections will the Town require for the remaining surrounding areas to prevent their conversion to residential use?

In sum, it's a shame to sacrifice this prime spot to solely residential use. The Analysis found that 93% of Arlington residents who work commute out of town to their jobs. Arlington is becoming a sleepy and very expensive bedroom community, while other communities around us are thinking creatively and transforming under-utilized sites into hubs that provide the kinds of amenities and jobs that enrich their residents' lives, draw visitors, and revitalize their faded business districts.

We can and should aim much higher.

I'd appreciate hearing discussion of my questions at Tuesday night's meeting. Thank you for your attention to this issue, and best wishes to all for a healthy, happy New Year.

Sincerely,
Wynelle Evans

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