

# The Boston Globe

## Developer selected for \$330 million Back Bay project

Landmark envisioned for space over Pike

By **Dan Adams**

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The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation on Monday selected a Miami company to develop a Back Bay site along Boylston Street into a \$330 million mixed-use complex.

Peebles Corp. was chosen over two rival bidders to develop Parcel 13, a rectangle of state-owned air rights at the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Boylston Street that stretches over the Massachusetts Turnpike. Peebles now needs to win both state and city approvals to move ahead with the project.

The proposed development, designed by Handel Architects of New York and about a block long, would include a 156-room hotel, 88 condominiums, 138 parking spaces, community areas, and 26,000 square feet of retail space. The building's footprint would stretch from Mass. Ave. to Dillon's Restaurant & Bar on Boylston Street and would feature a distinctive squiggle shape.

The project, dubbed Viola Back Bay as an homage to the adjacent Berklee College of Music, would be Peebles's first in Boston. Tawan Davis, the president of Peebles, said the ambition is for the project to become a landmark that would stitch together the Berklee and Fenway communities and the Newbury Street retail corridor.

"We're very excited to have the opportunity to lead a game-changing development in the Back Bay and Fenway neighborhoods of Boston," Davis said.

If approved, the development would be one of the most significant changes to the Back Bay in years, transforming an empty stretch near the Hynes Convention Center stop on the MBTA's Green Line. The block features little more than a fence overlooking the Pike and a long-disused, padlocked entrance to the MBTA station. Peebles' contract with the state requires it to overhaul the subway station and make it accessible to riders with disabilities.

The development is not a sure thing yet: Neighborhood groups have promised to scrutinize any plans for the site, and air-rights parcels often come with financial and

construction headaches, as evidenced by the failed Columbus Center project. That development, which was intended to straddle the Pike and link the South End with the Back Bay, was a 13-year-long debacle, which, under the weight of the last recession, imploded in 2010.

Davis said his company is confident it can win city and state approvals and finish the Boylston Street project. “We’ve been successful in completing infrastructure-related developments around the country,” Davis said. “We understand how the numbers work and we can execute.”

Peebles has developed many large projects, including the Royal Palm Hotel in Miami Beach and 10 G Street, a 280,000-square-foot office building near Union Station in Washington, D.C.