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The city of Boston is saying no to fake brick, a job-killer and a bad idea for our neighborhoods - by Chuck Raso

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The city of Boston's architectural identity is undeniably characterized by brick. The rich texture and substance of hand laid brick created by generations of bricklayers and their apprentices defines not only individual structures, but it also encompasses and helps to define entire neighborhoods.

Compatibility with the architectural nature of their surrounding neighborhoods is a fundamental requirement of the Boston Planning and Development process for all new proposed developments. In Boston, the surrounding architecture is generally masonry. To achieve design approval, developer's architects will often design an exterior that will appear to include brick. Renderings of these development plans can be misleading if it is not made clear the method of installation of the proposed facades.

This creates a challenge for the approving agencies and stakeholders. Without specific assurances that the buildings will be built using laid-in-place masonry, these stakeholders may not realize they are in fact approving a design that will be built using what are commonly referred to as prefabricated faux brick panels. These panels do not deliver the product or community benefit which meets the goals of the stakeholders.

Real estate developers who propose the use of these faux brick panels are delivering a product that is meant to look like brick – though it rarely does. These panels are stained with red dye or coatings in an effort to imitate authentic brickwork. At the same time they are outsourcing jobs to manufacturing facilities that churn out 'fake brick' panels that look bad, cost more, hurt the environment, and are job-killers.

The factories where these cheap, fake panels are created are not subject to City of Boston safety standards or inspections – and they typically do not pay livable wages. These manufacturing facilities are often operated outside of the U.S. or owned by companies from outside the U.S. who don't care about the impact their artificial materials have on the environment or in our neighborhoods.

In fact, when imitation or fake brick panels are installed on new construction, rather than utilizing authentic laid-in-place masonry with real bricks, carbon emissions go up, leading to more pollution, more asthma, and more negative impacts from global warming.

At the end of the day, the utilization of faux brick panels instead of authentic Boston-based,

laid-in-place masonry results in the outsourcing of jobs. Every time a developer uses faux brick panels, work that could and should be done in Boston is being done outside the city and sometimes outside the country in places that have lower standards not just for wages and benefits but often for worker safety.

We all want construction in Boston to generate good jobs – jobs that can sustain a family and give local workers a better future. The use of faux brick panels does the exact opposite, denying local workers key pathways to the middle class. It's a bad idea and it's a job-killer. We are asking elected officials, impact advisory boards, and other stakeholders to say no to the usage of these materials and no to the outsourcing effect that they create.

Together, we can ensure Boston retains the good jobs that result from building in ways that are better for our economy and better for local workers.

Chuck Raso is president of Bricklayers & Allie Craftsmen Union Local 3, Boston, Mass.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540