

River Street Reconstruction

Carl Barron Plaza - Virtual Open House

Thursday, June 16, 2021 – Wednesday, June 30, 2021



Summary of Comments

As part of the City of Cambridge's River Street Reconstruction Project, project staff hosted a virtual open house as a main public engagement activity. This virtual open house focused on preferred concept designs for Carl Barron Plaza located within Central Square. The Virtual Open House included a video presentation focusing on the proposed concepts with survey questions to gather feedback (Virtual Open House URL: <http://bit.ly/CBPOpenHouse>).

Project staff supplemented the online event with a live Question and Answer Public Information Session held using Zoom webinar. The feedback forms on the Virtual Open House were available from June 16 to June 30, 2021 and the recorded video will remain available for a longer period of time. For more information, visit the project website at the following URL: www.CambridgeMA.gov/RiverStreet.

Visitor Statistics

The following are visitor statistics captured by the Virtual Open House and hosting platforms.

Devices

Desktop	142
Mobile	109
Tablet	6

Sources

Direct	166
Facebook	49
Cambridgeday.com	25
Twitter	12
Google	5
E-mail newsletter	1

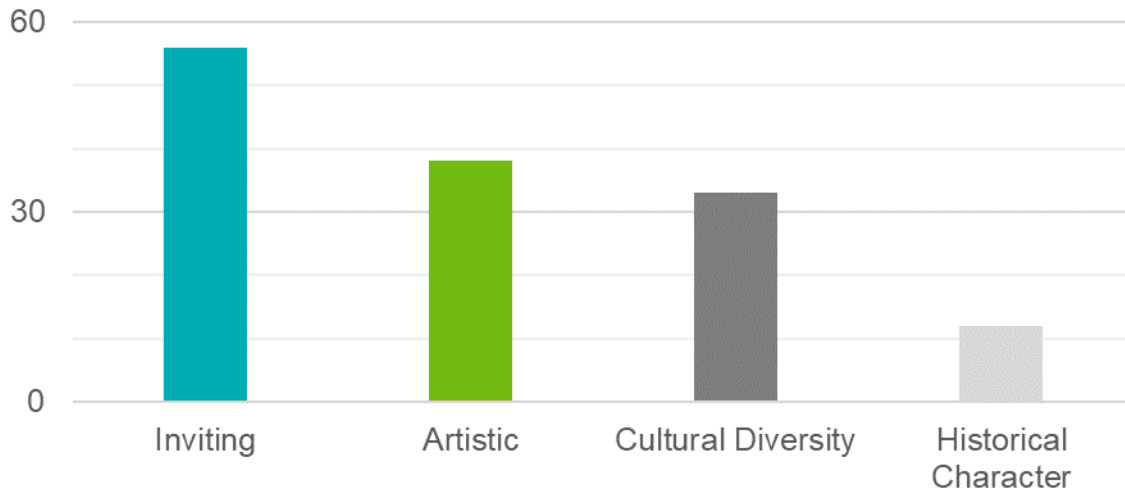
Total Virtual Open House Visitors: 257

Total Video Views: 692

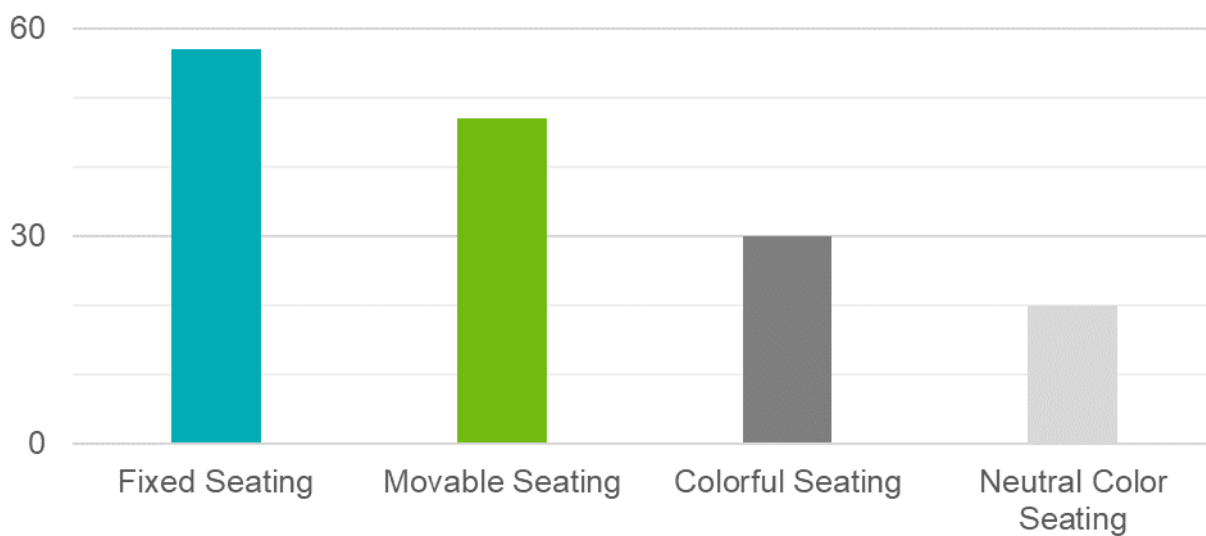
Design Feature Preferences

Included in the survey forms, the City asked questions on plaza characteristics, seating, and public information to visitors in order to understand preferences for different design features. The questions and results of their responses by commenters are shown below.

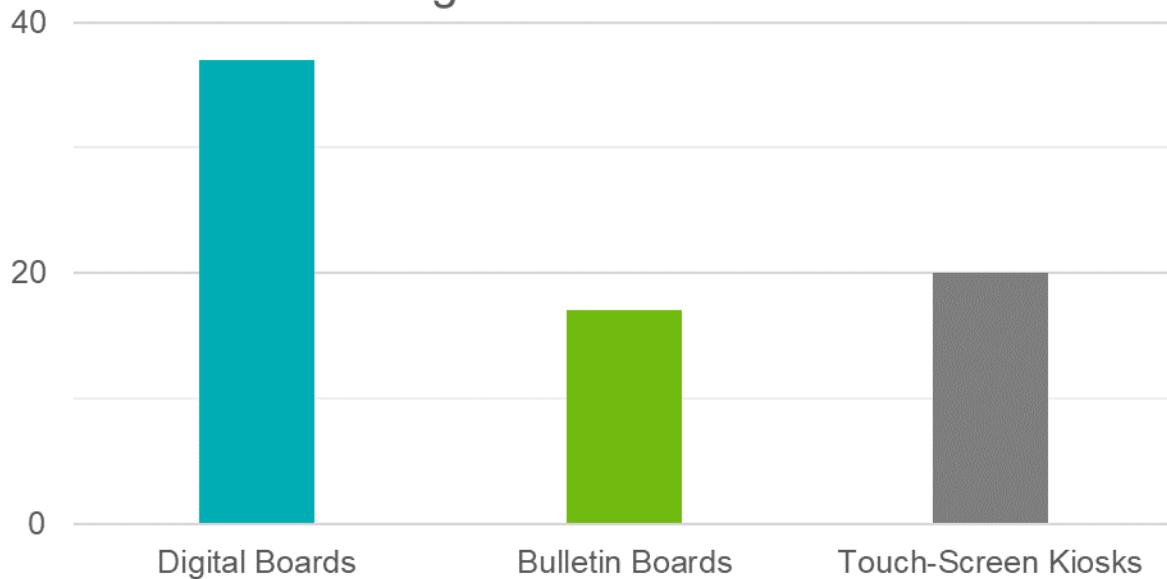
Which **plaza characteristics** do you want to see in Carl Barron Plaza?



Which **seating feature(s)** do you think are most important to include in the redesigned Carl Barron Plaza?



Which information feature(s) do you think are most important to include in the redesigned Carl Barron Plaza?



In addition to these questions, the project team asked visitors to state a preferred balance of programmable versus fixed space for the plaza. Respondents were given a scale of 1 to 8, with 1 indicating all programmable space and 8 indicating all fixed space. The average of all responses came to 4.67, which is almost evenly split between the two plaza configuration categories.

Comment Themes

The majority of the survey consisted of open-ended questions about the plaza and proposed design concepts. The open-ended comments, as well as any questions received, are grouped and summarized into categories below. The number of comments is indicated in parenthesis. Comment categories are listed below by order from most frequent category to least.

1. Aesthetics (52 comments)

The majority of comments were about the aesthetics of the ribbon sculpture. Many visitors to the Virtual Open House liked the unique and unifying nature of the ribbon sculpture, in addition to the ability to switch out the designs periodically. Some commenters saw the ribbon sculpture as intrusive and out of place. For those commenting on the complementary structures concept, most found it to be too generic and not exciting enough. Some, however, did think that the more subdued nature of the complementary structures concept would be more timeless.

2. Landscaping & Lighting (20 comments)

There was strong support about the under-lighting on the ribbon sculpture, specifically how subtle it would be under the arches and benches. There was concern, however, about there not being enough greenery and trees included in the designs.

3. Unhoused People (12 comments)

Many commenters mentioned that the plaza is currently home to a large number of unhoused people. Some visitors expressed concerns about the plaza acting as an inviting and safe space if the unhoused community remains. On the other hand, many commenters mentioned the unhoused community because they were concerned that they would be displaced as a result of this project.

4. Weather Resistance (12 comments)

Many commenters expressed concern about whether the bus shelters would provide sufficient shelter from weather (in both the sunny summer months and rainy winter months). For this reason, commenters mentioned that they liked the shade provided by the pergola in the complementary structures concept.

5. Infrastructure & Traffic Flow (8 comments)

Commenters expressed opinions about where bike parking would be, and safety concerns if cyclists and pedestrians were not adequately separated. Commenters asked to expand the available space in the plaza and improve safety of traffic flow as much as possible. Commenters did like the fact that there were dedicated bike lanes.

6. Graffiti & Maintenance (8 comments)

Commenters expressed concern about the ribbon sculpture's susceptibility to graffiti and mentioned that it could be an inviting canvas. Additionally, there were questions maintaining moveable furniture and how to prevent it from being scattered around the plaza.

7. Furniture (7 comments)

Commenters expressed concern about moveable furniture and suggested that there be more fixed seating. This concern was tied to the thought that flexible chairs will lead to a more insular and less inviting space.

8. Safety (5 comments)

These commenters expressed concerns about the potential for people to climb the ribbon sculpture and jump off of it. Many currently feel unsafe in the plaza and are concerned about people sitting on the sculpture above them.

9. Finances (4 comments)

A few commenters were concerned about the cost of the ribbon sculpture and that it might not be a good use of budget.

10. Accessibility (3 comments)

Commenters expressed concern about the types of seating available, suggesting that there be options with arm rests and backs. There was also concern about the risk of having movable seating, as it can be left in walkways, jeopardizing accessibility for people with disabilities, especially those who are blind.

11. Wayfinding & Information (3 comments)

Commenters shared suggestions for real-time transit signage at the bus shelters. Additionally, one commenter recommended using wayfinding tools similar to those used in Somerville's Union Square.

12. Programming (2 comments)

There was interest in whether or not the new plaza would allow for food vendors and easy load-in for events like farmers markets.

13. Integration with Surrounding Areas (2 comments)

Visitors were curious about how the design would integrate with nearby public areas and paths. One commenter suggested that the plans for Carl Barron Plaza should work in tandem with plans for the streetscape along Massachusetts Avenue between the plaza and Pearl Street.

Next Steps

- Given the comments received surrounding accessibility concerns, the design team will look into solutions for moveable furniture that can still be limited to areas outside of walkways.
- To address concerns about potential graffiti on the ribbon sculpture, the design team will look into graffiti resistant paint or sealants for the sculpture.
- The design team will look into modifications to the plaza to better support microclimate concerns.