



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

831 Massachusetts Avenue, 2nd Fl., Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139
Telephone: 617 349 4683 TTY: 617 349 6112 Fax: 617-349-6165
E-mail: histcomm@cambridgema.gov URL: <http://www.cambridgema.gov/Historic>



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Date: January 23, 2023
To: Cambridge Planning Board
From: Charles Sullivan, Executive Director, Historical Commission
Allison A. Crosbie, Preservation Administrator, Historical Commission
Re: **PB-364, Lechmere Canal Park**

In December 2020 the Historical Commission received a citizen petition requesting that a landmark designation study be initiated for Lechmere Canal Park. At a public hearing in February 2021 the Commission declined to accept the petition on the grounds that it was premature, given the uncertain state of the proposed project, but recognized the significance of the park as one of landscape architect Carol R. Johnson's most notable public projects in Cambridge. Commission staff has participated in the subsequent review process with the Canal Park Advisory Committee and Community Development Department staff.

Carol Johnson's design for Lechmere Canal Park centered on a dual circulation system – one for the upper area to access the surrounding development, and one for bringing people to the waterfront. The landscape now features a mature tree canopy along with various plantings utilizing mostly New England vegetation. Johnson's design successfully integrated green spaces, seating/site furniture, a play area, artwork, and a gazebo structure that contained interpretive panels depicting the area's 19th century industrial past.

The proposed park improvements by IBI Placemaking preserves or restores several character-defining features of the original design, such as the gazebo with new interpretive panels; the circulation system, including the brick paving at the upper level; artwork; fountain lighting; and the Great Lawn space.

In general, the Historical Commission always supports efforts to comply with current codes, improve accessibility and safety, and enhance and update children's play opportunities. In reviewing the application materials submitted to the Planning Board, Commission staff offers the following comments.

- Furnishings. The application refers to "seating updates" which is unclear. The existing site furniture at Gerry's Landing and waterfront edge should be restored to maintain Johnson's "heavy-duty, muscular, 19th century, industrial site furniture" (<https://www.tclf.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/Johnson-Carol-Transcript.pdf>).
- Vegetation. The designers should refer to Johnson's original planting plans when specifying plant material. Although it is too early in the process to commit to specific plants, more information on types and quantities of seasonal plantings would be helpful.

- Lighting fixtures. The proposed fixtures are appropriate to the site, but consideration of the color temperature is important. Staying within the lower warm Kelvin range is preferable to higher temperatures which emit a harsher cold light.
- Path materials. While Johnson's original design called for permeable materials for the canal-side path, this may not be consistent with current codes and practices. A replacement material should replicate the red color of the original stone dust.

CHC staff will continue to monitor design developments, but we see no issues with the current design that would warrant reconsideration of the Commission's 2021 decision against a landmark designation study.