

# Volpe Working Group Meeting – Notes

March 2, 2017, Cambridge Police Department

- Attending (VWG/staff): Steve LaMasters, Hugh Russell., Jerry O’Leary, Esther Hanig, Kathy Born, Brian Dacey, Peter Crawley, Erik Thorkildsen, Suzannah Bigolin, Stuart Dash, Daniel Wolf, Jeff Roberts, Iram Farooq
- MIT Presentation: Preliminary site approach
- Reactions and questions from VWG:
  - Were there other iterations of the site plan? How did MIT arrive at this approach?
  - What was the thinking about where open space should be located?
  - Would the connections shown be open to cars or just pedestrians?
  - How much Gross Floor Area in proposal? Too much for site?
  - Value in site permeability, connection to surroundings; concern for connecting to The Port and Wellington-Harrington
  - How would bikes be accommodated in this scheme? How will it address transportation issues in general?
  - What types of community use would MIT incorporate into the plan to pull the community and different demographics into the site, beyond retail? Try to avoid an exclusively corporate feel, look at STEAM programs, recreation, etc.
  - What are some examples of developments of this size that have succeeded? What are some of the interesting things that have been done? How have they been received?
  - How to avoid canyonization feel when you drive in, like in the Seaport? If open space is in the middle, it's more incidental rather than making a statement.
  - What's the market demanding for the residential component (e.g., unit mix, rental/condo)?
  - What kind of uses would we see in commercial spaces (e.g., lab/office)?
  - Are there any site constraints, such as utilities, that we should be aware of?
- MIT Responses:
  - Site approach
    - New Volpe building to be sited at northwest corner. The project must preserve the existing building until the new building is completed.
    - Setbacks are required for security purposes, but want site to feel open, permeable for pedestrians.
    - Open space location meant to strengthen Fifth St. connection, provide continuous street frontage along Third St.
    - Opportunity to surround the open space with active uses.
    - Volpe building will involve transportation testing equipment on first floor – requiring setbacks.
    - Existing utilities that will be needed to keep the Volpe building operating are biggest constraint.
    - Putting a lot of thought into the retail component
      - Desire for more critical mass of activity and double-loaded retail
      - Drawing inspiration from Rose Kennedy Greenway
      - Edges of green space could vary in feel

- Community space
  - Haven't discussed in specifics
  - Spaces for entertainment and community meeting
  - Want the place to be active at night
- Character of the connections
  - Undefined so far
  - Looked at Bethesda Row - closed to streets
  - Thinking about Broad Canal connection
  - Could be woonerfs (shared pedestrian priority streets)
- Commercial and residential etc.
  - Don't know what the mix of lab/office/etc. is; depends on market
  - Opportunity for flexible range of housing - no definite amount
- Permeability
  - North-south is easy, east- west is more difficult
  - Regarding connection to northwest - open to how to create that permeability
- Additional VWG Comments
  - Community/open space
    - Relevant precedent for community space: District Hall. Gathering space, subsidized by City of Boston; became hub of activity; gave away about 2/3 of room rent to generate a certain kind of activity; popular place to gather or present an idea; very permeable design
      - MIT: great micro example; opportunity of open space bleeding into the commercial space and vice versa. This could occur across the site and break down the perimeter
      - MIT: opportunity to create a civic ground plane
    - Combination of Volpe setback / open space with other large primary open space creates a (perhaps maximally) large space
    - Consider more open space along Broad Canal connection, drawing activity from edges into the site – synergy of vibrancy and activity
    - North Point is a good example where a wider sidewalk with a double row of trees provides a green connection
    - Potential for good sun exposure at southeast corner, rather than surrounding it with tall buildings on the site
    - Substantial open space could be flexible
    - Large open space in center emphasizes 5<sup>th</sup> Street axis
    - Open space faces Broadway; nice gesture to community
    - Could this serve as the “square” in Kendall Square?
    - Define the goals of the open space first, then site it
    - Creating a destination for families
  - Transportation
    - Buses face challenges in this area
  - Site planning
    - North-south axis is positive
    - How do we integrate and invite everyone in?

- Housing
  - Opportunity for faculty housing?
  - Who would develop and manage the housing?
  - Concerned about space for families in the city
  - Want to establish a community of people there
- Councilor Cheung Comments
  - Eager to work with the VWG
  - Consideration of what the City should ask of the GSA; some federal buildings are quite cold and don't fit in
  - Discussion of timing, coordination with City Council, and logistics
  - This is a rare and important planning opportunity
  - Consideration of what it's going to look and feel like; articulate the vision and urban design
  - Aim for something responsive and reflective of the community, but also something "epic"
  - Under aggressive, optimistic timeline – hoping by end of year
- VWG comments
  - Want clear parameters for input – schedule, agendas, notes, recommendations for next meeting.
  - Try to integrate with neighborhood level processes
  - Have enough time for public comment
  - Have flexible meeting times
  - Clarify what decisions the VWG will need to make
- Draft Principles Document
  - General agreement from VWG
- Public comment
  - We can have something great if we meet ambition
  - We should aim to better represent the Cambridge community; encourage MIT to push into community and get more participation
  - Please minimize the traffic going into neighborhoods, entire site should be walkable
  - Create family friendly environment; 3+ bedrooms
  - Opposed to taking out median at 5th - live in EC, don't want more traffic through. Look at CRA study of Binney Street
  - Could the canal be re-extended?
  - Curious about power supply - don't want wall like Verizon structure
  - Make space for Eversource on site – incentive to be in a building, not the neighborhood
  - Encourage GSA to build as far west as possible to maintain contiguous open space
  - Will the new Volpe building be presented to the Planning Board (even if not binding due to federal project)?
  - Think creatively about type of open space - test different options as development is phased
  - Preserve the large trees on the site
  - Crucial phrase on principles sheet: "enduring sense of place"
  - Don't make buildings too enormous