

Volpe Working Group Meeting – Notes

May 3, 2017, Cambridge Police Department

- Attending:
 - Volpe Working Group: Steve LaMaster, Kathy Born, Esther Hanig, Hugh Russell, Gerald O’Leary, Peter Crawley, Brian Dacey, Chris Barr
 - City staff: Jeff Roberts, Daniel Wolf, Joe Barr, Susanne Rasmussen, Chris Cotter, Erik Thorkildsen (consultant); Councilman Dennis Carlone
 - MIT: Sarah Gallop, Steve Marsh, Hunter Kass, Kathryn Brown, David Manfredi, Anthony Galluccio
- Jeff - introduction
- Sarah Gallop - quick update from MIT – held Wellington-Harrington meeting and 303 Third St. meeting; starting to see some consistency in input

Climate, Energy, and the Environment

- Jeff - presentation
- Discussion
 - This is an opportunity to look at larger issues before you design an individual building; Site plan / street layout provides more of an opportunity than we normally have
 - How should these affect our thinking? Should we pick and choose which of these are important? Will all of these become city requirements over the next few years?
 - Overlap with what we discussed; open space can double as water management vehicle; civic space can provide shelter, resources in time of emergency
 - Energy use - heat gain, building efficiency - most relevant issues not much opportunities for energy generation, harder to do solar with high-rise buildings
 - Appalled by number of glass curtain wall buildings coming to Planning Board – seems like inefficient design
 - As temp gets higher, energy use goes up in AC use and also that energy use makes it hotter outside - vicious cycle
 - MIT - opportunity to utilize technology to be energy efficient - see Greentown Labs in Somerville
 - MIT has lofty goals, but this may be different because it is a commercial (non-campus) development
 - What are the tradeoffs between these different goals?
 - Projects may hit multiple goals - open spaces that work well when they’re dry and wet - absorption
 - District type energy systems can promote energy efficiency and resilience, because they can keep running if power goes out - integrated systems
 - What are the LEED triggers in Net Zero Action Plan? (LEED gold with 6 energy points for large buildings; next step contemplated is going to 19 points)
 - Any reason why any of the projects done individually or collectively on this site would not follow the Net Zero recommendations?
 - MIT and Harvard have district energy plans - an integrated system that is connected to buildings - more efficient

Transportation

- Jeff - presentation
- Discussion
 - Grand Junction Path - frustration with DOT - they don't have the money to create transit but won't allow for a path; would be a transformative transit project
 - Parking - the tenants place a high value on the parking; if it were up to me, I would have a lower parking requirement
 - You do hear stories from employees who live far away complaining about parking, given Red line reliability is not great - companies use "coaches" (coach buses) to supplement transit for employees
 - Volpe is the biggest development project in the recent times in the region? – Tips the equation for transit
 - Cambridge and Boston will gain population and more people will be commuting from closer in, parking will increasingly be an "executive perk"
 - Won't be a lot of space for people to have cars - we should pay a lot of attention to how people get around without cars
 - Making people feel the economic cost of parking is part of City's approach to managing traffic demand
 - Half of the surface area of the Volpe site is parking now
 - People have had a motto in E Cambridge: infrastructure first, development second
 - Transportation is crucial
 - We hear from employees all the time: Getting here by car is a disaster, is the City considering the infrastructure necessary to manage all of this new development?
 - Only way to improve the situation is to improve the situation districtwide; strategies to get people who drive to not do so
 - DOT is committing 100s of M of \$ to replace the Red Line cars, which will expand capacity – given timing, those new cars will come around when these buildings come online - fragility and capacity issues should get better - question of how fast
 - Shuttles - over 31 routes (anywhere from 6-12 per day per route) - coaches, etc. - MIT, Biogen, EZRide - is there a way to increase the efficiency of all of this? Would be nice if these were consolidated - that should be looked at in this planning process - optimizing the system
 - Don't think self driving cars will offset issue of traffic, but could impact traffic
 - Concern - ridehailing leading to big increase in driving - easy, cheap, quick – also studies from areas other than Cambridge show a big chunk of those trips are taken out of transit; if results in Cambridge are like elsewhere, up to 20% of people riding here would come from transit
 - Drop off and pick up is an issue for ridehailing vehicles as well
 - Ability to enforce the behavior we want is limited with ridehailing; state has taken regulatory authority but no plans to do enforcement; from parking perspective - hard to enforce against short term parking
 - Evidence initially that disproportionate crashes with bikes coming from ridehailing
 - Ridehailing is both an opportunity and a threat
 - PTDM ordinance provides other mechanisms to reduce driving

Housing

- Jeff - presentation

- Discussion
 - Housing is important to sustainability - will take strain off, so people can walk to work etc
 - How do we do middle income housing?
 - Always concerned we make sure we're trying to attract families to Cambridge; families are what make up the fabric of the community
 - City tried expanding middle income rental units through inclusionary-like zoning in Kendall Square, experience so far is not incredible demand for them
 - In comparison - low and moderate income households have more applications for inclusionary
 - Heard that rents were too high at middle-income level (30% of income)
 - Another approach is to add a lot of supply - hope that affects the market to reduce cost, particularly in older stock; you could see the converse on that.- incredible demand on existing units
 - Just updated inclusionary policy; studies showed dramatic change in demographics in income, particularly at moderate and middle income
 - Middle income people have more options, mobility, can look at value
 - Not enough examples of middle-income housing to draw conclusions – possibly more interest in limited equity vs. rental at that income level?
 - Overall, market is rising beyond what people can afford - cost burdening affecting people at higher and higher incomes
 - Need for 3 bedroom units? Very few being created in the market
 - In terms of predicted household formation, will see increasing demand for larger units for larger households, multifamily developers will start to respond to that – already starting to see some of that in market
 - Desire for more homeownership – but hard to regulate in the market because hard to control whether condos are owner-occupied or rented
 - A lot of rental created recently, before that was a lot of condo development, but many leased up as rental
 - How does the specter of Airbnb fit in?
 - Were more federal and state subsidies for homeownership. Public funding for affordable homeownership also low
 - Is Kendall a family friendly location? Doesn't have that sense of neighborhood, lot of traffic, not a lot of open space; many younger workers, a lot of the middle management who have children, they choose elsewhere
 - Difficult to know what decisions families will make; cognizant that the neighborhood will change; seeing more families living in denser housing and towers, many families would be happy to be anywhere in city, not leave school system – survey of recent properties showed about 30% of market-rate units had kids, almost all in 2+ bedroom units
 - So many children on Cambridgepark Drive; it's becoming a transportation challenge to get them to schools
 - City survey on quality of life, going back many years, very high satisfaction among people living in Cambridge - if people could stay here, they would
 - Enrollment at schools drops off significantly around 5th grade or so, growing families
 - NYC wouldn't on paper sound so attractive but families live there
 - Kids add a lot to the experience of a city – a lot of kids in 303 Third Street courtyard after 5pm

- Taking a serious look at optimizing built environment to attract families; look at Vancouver examples - feasible to design portion of units to adequately serve needs of families with children
- A lot of people moving into the city with children are people of foreign origin, accustomed to living in urban areas

Public Comment

- Dennis Carlone: Ordinance Committee looking to this committee for main recommendations - hope you get to that point so we can discuss alternative site plans and massing locations; we've told MIT to make this work it has to be a superb urban design; I've seen early work from Manfredi and Erik that starts to get at that; will be design guidelines with this petition; meet almost every week with MIT and hope they all come together
- Jeff - Have had discussions of urban design, which will come back; the following meeting with be synthesis
- Carlone - Land uses, activities that make sense from Working Group perspective; MIT wants active retail presence; street grid going through; not feel like a campus but not heavily congested city area; Planning Board will be active participant in this
- Is it unrealistic to elicit proposals from developer themselves?
- Stuart - will meet the main concepts; establish principles of site planning and permeability and connection and intend to weave back in
- Carlone - Could have 500 kids in this area - that's an elementary school; Connections to CRA, Boston Properties on west edge;
- Our job is to be clear about what our priorities are, MIT will modify project based on input, could complete our feedback process in short amount of time
- Was my sense that this group could be an organizing group for all the offshoot conversations, would recommend that the group stay constituted into a phase two
- Carlone - agree
- Role of this group has been to reaffirm earlier planning efforts, haven't seen anything so far that leads us to think there should be a radical change in course