

Eastern Cambridge Kendall Square Open Space Planning Committee
March 18, 2014
Summarized Meeting Notes

Committee members present: Conrad Crawford, Carole Bellew, Alexandra Lee, Charlie Marquardt, Michelle Lower, Daniel Norman, David Small, Victoria Farr, Susan Morgan, Thayer Donham, Christopher Perkins, Lara Gordon, Christine Dunn.

Staff present: Taha Jennings, Stuart Dash, Jeff Roberts, Yuna Kim

Consultants: Donald Stastny and Jennifer Mannhard of STASTNY: Architect, Steven Cecil, of the Cecil Group

Taha Jennings welcomed the group and introduced Donald Stastny and Jennifer Mannhard of STASTNY: Architect. The practice had been hired as a consultant to serve as the Competition Coordinator for the ECKOS planning process. Taha stated that the competition is intended to help attract a wide range of planning and design firms and to encourage new thinking regarding not only open space design but also the overall public realm, connections, programming, and place making. He also noted that Don has over three decades of experience working on complex open space issues, and has managed over 46 national and international design competitions. It was added that Don and his team will be working closely with the Study Committee over the next several months and throughout the planning and competition process.

A committee member asked why the open space planning and design competition planned for the study process would look to attract national or international firms that may not be as familiar with the area as firms that are locally based. It was noted in response that there will be mechanisms built into the process to address those types of concerns such as the composition of the teams, the composition and charge given to the Competition Jury, as well as briefings and reviews throughout the competition. It was added that one of the first steps is to create a competition manual which provides a clear roadmap for participants moving forward including rules, regulations, and criteria.

Competition 101

Donald Stastny stated that in a typical design competition the outcome is usually an iconic “thing” such as buildings, landscape, etc. This situation and competition is different in that it is intended to come up with ideas for creating a “system” that will help the City design future public spaces.

He added that there are two important anchors to the process which will need to be determined: 1) defining the problem and 2) the end product. He then presented an overview of the competition process including a powerpoint presentation titled Competition 101.

Some key points from the presentation:

- Previous open space and public space competitions were showcased including the City Arch River 2015 in Saint Louis MO, National Mall in Washington D.C., Vancouver Community Connector in Vancouver WA, and Waller Creek Conservancy, in Austin TX.
- The design foundation should: 1) include clear goals and expectations 2) build on efforts to date 3) establish design principles and objectives 4) lead to a well crafted problem statement
- Competitions typically involve a three stage process:
 - 1) Portfolio – At this stage looking for information about design leaders, thinking and approach, not necessarily just landscape architects depending on how the group wants to define the problem statement;

- 2) Qualifications – The design leaders choose a team to surround themselves with;
- 3) Design concept – Project is picked, awarded, and realized;

The competition should initially call for a portfolio of very specific information regarding biography of the team leader, resume, design intent, and experiences. The process would include interviews with the competition jury as well.

The competition jurors (proposing 5 in this process) should include recognized experts in diverse fields, with unquestionable experience and integrity. The competition manager will serve as a non-voting facilitator to ensure all jurors have an equal voice.

It is very important to conduct a very transparent process and build public understanding of the competition by including opportunities to participate at each stage through public events, presentations, and other interactions. It was added that design competitions can be very educational if they are allowed to function in that way, by showcasing different approaches to a problem, and understanding the final product and how it evolved.

At the end of the process, there should be public events to showcase all of the entries, including things like a Meet Your Designer Night, public exhibits, and submittals on the project website.

Questions and discussion:

Jury selection seems like a critical piece. For example, how will jurors be selected so that there is not bias towards architects?

The jury should be selected based on professions and interests. It is important to look for people who are well informed and well rounded. They should also be able to collaborate well together. Five is a good number of jurors with possibly one alternate. The Study Committee can discuss disciplines that should be reflected on the jury at the next meeting.

What makes this process more complicated than previous competitions such as the National Mall?

This process is dealing with ideas at a high level, things like connections between open spaces. A lot of what makes cities great are the spaces in between other things. Defining the entire network here will set the stage for great designs.

Will the jury be local?

There can be local representation but a broader perspective should be included as well.

How much of the process takes place within Cambridge?

Any activities associated with the process will happen within Cambridge.

It seems that eliminating teams at an early stage could be a huge disadvantage for some good designers. Is it possible to have eliminations happen later in the process so that more firms can submit an actual design?

It is important that teams can execute the project and that the plans can be implemented. In this situation we are looking for a concept, rather than a built thing, so it will be important to be able to guide teams through the criteria throughout the process. We can think carefully about what is asked for in the first stage. In the past, the statement of design intent can be very revealing in terms of where a firm is coming from. The jury can also be instructed to look for a range of qualities on the teams and new ways of thinking.

The final project should be something feasible that the City is going to be able to build and maintain. Longevity and legacy should be considered.

What is the appropriate messaging for the public, since this is a new type of process for the city? How do we get the public involved?

Part of the Study Committee's role is to understand who the audience is and the best ways to reach out. There will be larger public meetings as part of the process. It will be important to be specific about the objectives and actively keep the public involved.

You can get more ideas in an open competition when teams are not eliminated. Final plans should be buildable and not overly expensive or whimsical. The City has many firms and talents, is it possible that we are drowning out locals by opening the project internationally?

Some local firms are also internationally recognized. It is felt that the process will help generate some new and creative ideas than might otherwise be proposed.

Could we require that one of the teams selected is local?

It's a good idea to have a diverse selection of teams but also important to be careful about how *local* is defined.

How will information about the competition be dispersed and advertised to potential teams?

We typically use electronic media, national professional organizations, and contact lists from past competitions, as well as local publicity and notifications.

What do the final submissions for the competition consist of?

The Study Committee will help define that. In the past, final submissions have included presentation boards and accompanying reports. The final submissions should also be tailored to the audience for the process.

How much time is spent on each of the stages?

A general estimate would be: June - project is launched; September - teams would be selected; December – public exhibitions and team presentations.

Would extending the amount of time allotted to the first stage address concerns about being too exclusive and allow more ideas?

It is going to be important to be able to interact with the teams submitting final plans and make sure that the plans are feasible. That opportunity is lost in a simple open competition.

What is stage 4 or the final outcome for the winning plan? Will there be an opportunity for the winning team to take their plan a step further?

Currently, the idea is to use the final plan for the open space system, and implement it through the future design and construction of the individual open spaces.

There should be a clear idea about when the parks and open spaces in question can actually be used, which will be very important for people to understand. There should be some programming options in the interim as well. Examples of how competitions have worked for other places also need to be effectively communicated.