

Volpe Working Group Meeting – Notes

May 10, 2017

- Attending:
 - Working Group Members: Steve LaMaster, Esther Hanig, Kathy Born, Gerald O’Leary, Hugh Russell
 - City: Iram Farooq, Stuart Dash, Daniel Wolf, Suzannah Bigolin, Erik Thorkildsen, Councillor Dennis Carlone
 - MIT: Steve Marsh, David Manfredi, Sarah Gallop, Anthony Galluccio
- Erik - presentation distilling conversations into vision and principles
- Discussion
 - Presentation was a really nice distillation of our ideas
 - No one right way to organize the site; probably several ways that are best, some that are better, and some that aren't very good
 - Really like the Rockefeller Center and the Rotterdam Plaza - both had verticality to them - interesting to add that dimension and not limit the public realm to the ground plane
 - Last time was struck by sustainability conversation and how we should be building for the future - should we include that somewhere?
 - Stuart: We expect it to be woven in, working with Susanne and her team; If there's something in particular that stood out, please mention it
 - Iram: Some will be requirements; talking about energy efficiency or responding to future impacts of climate change like flooding - won't be optional
 - Erik: Also impacts facades and roofs (energy efficiency, photovoltaics...)
 - Preference for smaller spaces rather than large: lend themselves to community, interaction, connection
 - The large open area shown could be broken up into a series of smaller spaces
 - Principles are good; quite soft in a number of areas, which is appropriate for this stage of the process
 - The goals of creating European scaled spaces and walls will be difficult with the scale of buildings likely to be proposed; probably nearly an impossible challenge given what will be proposed
 - A couple of the principles didn't seem quite right - find some spaces that are bordered by tall buildings as precedents – may not be local examples - need to get small buildings next to open spaces
 - Rockefeller has the sunken space, Hancock Tower is similar
 - Open space should be as large and concentrated as possible to make an exclamation point – to create a dramatic space
 - Maybe you need some smaller open spaces too; issue of height may be a problem
 - Some of these buildings seem pretty massive
 - Not ready to take as given that we need to build to a certain amount; question of how much is Cambridge willing to tolerate in exchange for benefits to the city
 - How does the first scheme solve the challenge of putting the square into Kendall Square? Not compelling to me in solving this problem - creating an urban room or European Square is not achieved here
 - Squares need to be surrounded by streets, which invite people into the space
 - Want to avoid the feeling of canyonization surrounding open spaces, not feeling very comfortable that feel dark, cold, windy; not sure we've solved that yet

- Regarding retail connections - connection with broad canal - really important; will be double loaded; pulling that vector into the site is a big opportunity; otherwise concerned it will be difficult to pull people into site; what's going to draw people into the site – we should be very clear about that
- Evolving nature of open space is as public as possible, and an enclosed community facility is important and its location and relationship with the open space might be synergistic
- People will look at the bulk and density and ask what is the public benefit; we should be very clear on what that is
- Where is the "civic space"?
- Regarding massing, stuck on the notion of having some variety on the ground plane; where could this go below grade?
- Massing of commercial buildings is generic - scheme doesn't show tall slender buildings
- Broad Institute manages to sort of break up the bulk
- David Manfredi – presentation (linked at <http://volpe.mit.edu>)
- Discussion
 - Favor schemes 2 and 3 - better solve that challenge of putting a square in Kendall Square and creating an open space that leverages the open area of surrounding streets; invites the public in -democratizing the spaces; making that corner the center of Kendall Square
 - 1.5 acres feels like enough to feel substantial and a gathering place and leaves enough to provide breathing space in a different part of the site
 - Diagonal of Scheme 3 is interesting kind of like Broadway in NY breaks the grid - a little uncomfortable but also creative and innovative; maybe unresolved, but maybe there's a way that can work
 - I walk down 3rd Street daily; the pedestrian, car, and bike desire line is really 3rd Street; not confident that 5th Street is as much a desire line; the people of East Cambridge may be upset if 5th Street opened up to traffic
 - Scheme 1 feels too private, corporate and not inviting
 - Retail – double loaded retail is important. Thinking of Bryant Park in NY - kiosks draw people in, but don't feel permanent; tables, restaurants, small scale retail, part marketplace, part restaurant - would be really successful
 - The 1-2 story building at the top corner on 3rd Street in 2nd scheme could well accommodate a civic space - would make 3rd Square people very happy; public will feel part of a wonderful gem of a public space
 - Likes scheme 2 because it starts to make an exclamation point; the corner at Broadway and 3rd feels very public; pictures walking by tech square (in scheme 1) - private lawn
 - Intrigued by scheme 3 - sense of going through; could learn to like parts of it; the corner space will lead to the internal spaces; can image foot traffic coming in from T stop
 - Likes scheme 1; and idea of making a wider open space gateway from 3rd street – important to be wider than just sidewalk; Don't like what happens to the open space when you shrink the space to the west, especially next to tall buildings in Scheme 2
 - The edge south of Broadway is dead edge – need to accept this
 - Watermark building is live edge; maybe Broad Canal extension draws you in during colder months somehow - a galleria, or covered space
 - What's the right balance? I might think 20% of open space on corner and 80% in internal area – how much is needed on 3rd to make it really happen and feel cool

- We had talked about making this the center of Kendall Square, so schemes 2 and 3 are compelling, but scheme 1 maintains north-south connection into MIT better and creates a more inviting space
- From Area 4 perspective, if green spaces are over on the corner, it's not very inviting; the neighborhood is still far away so maybe hard to draw us in, but the spaces farther to the west might be more inviting
- Extending retail activity along broad canal direction could be nice
- Prefer scheme 1 then 2 from the neighborhood perspective; 1 - placement of tall building avoids shading the main space; 2 - like the main space, imagines would be well activated
- Compromise in scheme 2 feels crowded out – like not compromising flow of people through site
- Balance of scheme 1 and 2 - How confident would Manfredi be of making a great active space at corner of Broadway and 3rd in scheme 1?
- Imaging ground floor as extension of open space throughout the site
- Large opportunity to make a really successful 2 sided retail in scheme 1; What if put a building to abut north side of Broad Canal extension (occupying north half of corner park in scheme 2)
- Stuck on Erik's scheme 3A; feels loss of 2 sided retail from canal – it's intimate and can relate to each other
- Like idea of something that answers Point Park; Erik had enchanting renderings
- Scheme 3A is a striking idea; would be good to achieve Broad canal connection without creating a canyon
- During lunch, people sitting outside in Broad Canal area - wide, sunny area; Not sure retail activity would succeed in same way in scheme 1 across 3rd street
- In 50 years when climate heats up, our prioritization of sun may shift
- If canal extension is 75-foot wide and buildings are 200-foot tall, it won't be a nice space
- Retail connector should be partially enclosed/indoors (extension of Broad Canal)
- Some angles (diagonals) through buildings could accommodate some additional desire lines (connecting to 6th Street Connector and Wellington-Harrington)
- Scheme 2 - expect all retail on Broad Canal east of 3rd to be food on both sides; Hopes for there to be more than just food west of 3rd – Shoemaker, hardware store, stationary shop, small grocery store - a nice concentration along these narrower spaces
- Won't compete with Cambridgeside Galleria. MIT is trying to get a grocer and CVS in its NoMA and SoMa projects
- Double loaded corridors like in Bethesda can be pretty intimate and successful retail
- Confident about scheme 1; less confident about less contiguous retail areas as in schemes 2 and 3
- Iram: working with a retail strategy consultant broadly in Cambridge - soon to complete and present findings/recommendations
- Stuart: to what extent is the core of the new Volpe site going to feel “on the way home” from the Red Line
- Suzannah: how should buildings relate to the 6th Street Connector
- Important to keep it pleasant and safe feeling
- Manfredi - very conscious of the existing trees; offset from center line of trees at least 15 feet (along 6th)
- In scheme 1 thinking of having retail along 5th?

- Steve M: On east side; Maybe an entertainment venue across park with activated outdoor space; Synergy between water, park, civic space, entertainment all in a line
- When we changed up the front lawn of City Hall - people really use it
- Also need mezzanine retail for nail salons, dry bars -services millennials use
- More pre-made food options like Pret-a Manager would be good
- South Carolina - people were still outdoors; innovations: open roof restaurants, busy at lunch and evening; innovative shading - trellisses and umbrellas, will manage shade part; In warm climates even - gravitate toward festival type places (with sun) and create constructed shade
- Public comment
 - Regarding park size: important to remember when city has large park we cut it up into small features anyway
 - How long can we put off decision about which scheme? Likes corner in scheme 3 – show as less green space to show plazas and squares
 - CRA should use leverage to push Boston Properties about what Marriott passageway could and will look like with improvements
 - Experiment as buildings are built and put off site planning decision and experiment
 - Regarding covered space – could utilize technology to add coverings that respond to weather, or potentially add in 30 years
 - Eversource and transformers are not an impenetrable block - should consider how we could move them, even though not directly within MIT's power
 - Not totally buying into the program approach, making it hard to go along with these decisions; Question proportion of commercial to residential, and of open space to building - should be more residential and open
 - Open space on 3rd and Broadway should be smaller
 - Likes diagonal, could be through buildings
 - Blank open spaces drawn in green - please develop what the programming and kinds of activities you're imagining – different activation occurs in different shaped places
 - Kendal Square did actually have a location (at Galaxy Park)
 - Concerned that southerly face of Volpe could be parking garage and would frame open space in Scheme 1
 - Rooftops are mostly underutilized - rooftop open spaces and balconies should not be counted against GFA
 - Would like to see more skyline planning; shapes and lighting
 - Carlone
 - Needs building edges to frame and create intimate open spaces
 - Dislike 3rd scheme – tries to do everything for everybody but retail needs to be contiguous, maybe a restaurant; these edges are not going to be retail; leftover spaces are oozing into each other
 - Strongest edges are 3rd Street and Broad Canal extension in scheme 1 and thinks the open space can work
 - Likes the idea of defining the tops of, or enclosing the Broad Canal extension
 - Sees logic of space at corner (in scheme 2) but where do you replace the building?
 - Coming around primacy of space in scheme 1
 - We need to look at this from eye level view - great tool to look around; perspective that Erik showed is the real view

- Number of stepbacks and façade treatment is essential to making it feel warm and inviting, instead of slick
- Should feel distinctive and like New England and of this place, and still be innovative
- Community space could be on western part of main space (corner of a commercial building) and a public pavilion in the open space in scheme 1