

Trolley Square Committee Meeting #3
Thursday, April 4, 2002, 6:30 PM
North Cambridge Senior Center

Committee Members Present

Tom Buffet (TB)
Eric Grunebaum (EG)
Ruthann Rudel (RR)
Bill Hubner (BH)
George McCray (GM)
Leslie Dell'Elce-Grinley (LDG)
Helen Kukuk (HK)

City Staff

Susan Glazer
Stuart Dash
Iram Farooq
Chris Cotter
Rebecca Sozanski

Consultant Presenter

Dennis Carlone

Stuart Dash introduced Dennis Carlone, an architect/ urban designer who will be working with the committee to develop design concepts for potential uses on the site. Susan Glazer gave an update on the status of the Community Preservation Act Committee, which has a public meeting scheduled for April 23rd in order to gather input before beginning the allocation process.

Mr. Carlone described how most of his work is in Cambridge and Boston, but he has also worked in Chelsea and Lawrence. He showed slides of specific projects, to allow the committee to get a better understanding of the type of work he does.

Mr. Carlone then showed slides of the Trolley Square area, and discussed observations and site opportunities, including:

- The undeveloped Trolley Square site is a gap in the streetscape.
- Retail development in this section of Mass Ave is on the other side of the street.
- Redevelopment of the site could make this portion of Mass Ave feel more intimate.
- Linear Park is an asset and Trolley Square project could provide linkages. Could continue a sense of open space on Cameron Ave.
- More entryways could make the park safer (Bryant Park in NYC as example). Could have paths cutting through site from Mass Ave to Cameron.
- Redevelopment of the site could increase pedestrian traffic over the years, making retail more viable.

Mr. Carlone then commented on some of the issues raised by committee members at previous meetings:

- Site could be an effective focal point, but would need to include buildings, paths and some active uses to fulfill this potential.
- Davis Square may be a big destination, but this site has some advantages (especially natural light orientation, and its location in a natural meeting place).
- In thinking about retail, should be thinking about what might be missing in the neighborhood (general store? pharmacy?)
- Most successful open spaces have some sort of guardian (such as housing). In one study of parks in NYC, a key element was food.
- Would want to provide screening from the remaining MBTA trolley yard.

- Design should acknowledge link to Linear Park. There should be pathways through the site (could have gates with locks, could have planted edge on Cameron.)
- Has concerns about first floor housing. Retail adds liveliness, but affordable housing developers cannot easily secure funding to construct retail space. It can be difficult to establish retail in newly constructed buildings because rents are so high.
- While some are concerned about the transience of affordable renters, in his opinion, they might be so grateful for housing they will stay.
- A skating area is a high-maintenance use.
- Vendors might be called street theatre- this works best in denser areas.
- Site could have trees, gardens, seating (most likely along edges). Could have a sculpture that tells a story (gave a German example). Probably not playground.
- Any use is likely to require some parking onsite. Housing is actually low on the intensity scale. Structured parking is very expensive to develop.
- Will incorporate a bus shelter.

Committee members raised the following issues:

- Wants to make sure that future development is well-integrated into the neighborhood and adheres to North Mass Ave. overlay district guidelines. This part of Cambridge has assets lacking in Harvard or Porter Square. (GM)
- Park could include many uses, but should have open space to provide relief for the eyes (EG)
- Because Linear Park provides open space, any open space should be connected to other uses (GM)
- The neighborhood is craving something new, but they need to work out the details of what that should be (TB)
- Housing, without retail, might make any open space seem uninviting to the public (LDG)
- Would like to see a sculpture or relief that reflect historic activities in the area (horse-drawn trolleys, brickyards, and stockyards) (GM)
- Any use should link into transportation (EG)
- MBTA is moving to universal accessibility of trolleys (GM, HK)
- Is now leaning toward open space for the site, with a community center roofed with sod and parking underground (Martha Older did not attend the meeting, but sent this comment through other members)
- Would like to have more visual aids for this process to frame discussion (TB)
- Sees retail as public benefit if it supports other uses (EG)
- Feels Lechmere Canal is successful without housing (EG)
- Does not see crime as a concern in this location (EG)
- Lechmere Canal gives the appearance of being a private space (RR)
- Would like to know whether the City will only provide upfront funding, or will fund ongoing program expenses (RR)
- Wants to strengthen link between different sides of Mass Ave (BH)
- Davis Square at the intersection of Holland and Linear Park has plaza with housing and retail that is always lively. Might be a good example for this project. (BH)

- Wouldn't like parks exclusively, but a portion. People need to adopt site, like Washington Square Park in NYC. Whatever happens there should be a magnet, like a community center. (GM)
- People in the neighborhood should feel welcome. (LDG)
- Presentation has been very informative; helped her to see the value of a retail component. (HK)
- Potential for ground floor to be a space for members of the City government and administration to hold community meetings. (GM)

When asked about the timeframe for the environmental assessment, Mr. Dash responded that we will have information next month. Any clean up will be the responsibility of the City. He then opened the discussion to public comment.

Michael Brandon asked whether Mr. Carlone had worked with the Porter Square project [he did work with early schemes]. He also asked again about the definition of public benefit. He and others requested a copy of the agreement with the MBTA.

Carolyn Mieth stated that this site presents an opportunity to create housing for very low-income households (below 30% of median income). In this area, 80% of median income is very high.

Mr. Dash announced that the committee will meet again on May 2nd with Mr. Carlone.