

Meeting Notes: Trolley Square Committee Meeting # 2
March 7, 2002, 6:30 PM
North Cambridge Senior Center

Committee Members

Present

Tom Buffet (TB)
Cara Cheyette (CC)
Leslie Dell'Elce-Grinley
(LDG)
Eric Grunebaum (EG)
Bill Hubner (BH)

Helen Kukuk (HK)
Martha Older (MO)
Ruthann Rudel (RR)
John Danehy (JD)
George McCray (GM)

Staff Present

Susan Glazer
Stuart Dash
Iram Farooq
Chris Cotter
Rebecca Sozanski

Continued Discussion of Site Issues

The meeting opened with those committee members who were not present the previous month having an opportunity to raise issues and ask questions about this process. The following issues were raised (initials in parentheses indicate speaker):

- Could affordable housing built on this site give preference to local residents? (MO)
- Sees potential for a community center (with practice rooms, space for classes, ping pong table, revolving art gallery) (MO)
- Prefers low heights (MO)
- Pedestrian access is important (MO)
- Would like to see some open space/ greenery (MO)
- Does not support retail center in neighborhood (MO)
- Feels neighborhood needs pharmacy (MO)
- Trolley Square could become a location for public events (MO)
- Is concerned that increasing density will increase the need for parking (MO)
- Wants to be certain that any new use on site does not exacerbate recent flooding in neighborhood basements (MO)
- Trolley Square has the potential to be an anchor for the neighborhood (GM)
- Has concerns about the scale of development in North Cambridge (GM)
- There is potential for the site to reflect the diverse history of the area (especially through an art or museum component) (GM)
- Middle-income housing would help provide stability for the neighborhood (GM)
- Site could provide affordable leasing opportunities for businesses (GM)

Housing

• Chris Cotter, Project Planner with the City's Housing Division, gave a presentation that addressed the following questions:

- What is affordable housing?
- What is the Cambridge housing market?
- What are City-sponsored housing programs?
- What is non-profit affordable housing development

The major focus of the presentation was the significant gap between what people can afford to pay and the cost of rental and ownership units in the City. The committee received a handout about these topics.

• Committee discussion on affordable housing

- Assuming a regularly shaped lot, 62 units of housing would be allowed on the Trolley Square site. However, the conditions of the site and its uses will determine the actual number.
- Family-sized units generally cost the City between \$250,000 and \$290,000. Acquisition costs generally account for at least 30% of the total cost, depending on the condition of the units acquired (in some cases acquisition is a much higher percentage of the total cost).
- The redevelopment of Trolley Square is a chance to create a vibrant mix of uses. Perhaps some of these uses could provide revenue to support an affordable component.

Open Space

- Stuart Dash then gave a presentation about open space based on the information in the Green Ribbon Report. The major points of this presentation included:
 - The purpose of the Green Ribbon Report is to establish priorities for the acquisition of different types of parks throughout the City
 - The recommendations of the Green Ribbon Open Space Committee are based upon population density, open space per capita, incidences of poverty, and the concentration of children in an area.
 - While all of Cambridge is in need of more open space, the Trolley Square area was not identified as a priority area for acquisition.
- Committee discussion
 - It was noted that opportunities to create new open space are rare, and should taken advantage of when they arise
 - The site's location next to Linear Park could support the Green Ribbon Report's recommendation to acquire contiguous parcels of open space
- Community Preservation Act (CPA)
 - In a previous meeting, the committee had asked for more information on the CPA.
 - Participants were given a handout with general information about the CPA.
 - Susan Glazer informed those present that the City Manager was forming a CPA committee and expected that committee to meet in the next week. Local CPA funds will be matched by the State. The Council will hold hearings on the CPA.

Other Issues

- How the Committee's recommendations will be used
 - Concern was expressed that the City Manager asked that the committee give a strong consideration for affordable housing from the beginning.
 - The City Manager will consider any recommendations from the committee very seriously.
 - City staff will try to ensure that any recommendations the committee makes are feasible.
 - The committee may be able to look at problems differently than those who are under political constraints.
 - Some committee members urged outreach to the larger community to make recommendations that meet the needs of a broad range of neighborhood residents and build a base of support for recommendations
- Public Benefits Clause
 - It seems unlikely that intensive retail uses will be permitted, but retail that somehow benefited residents of the development might be permissible.
- Environmental Assessment

- Concern about this site is no higher than for any urban parcel that had been put to a mechanical/ industrial use in the past. The results of the assessment will help to guide the location of uses on the site.

Mr. Dash stated that the next committee meeting will take place April 4, the focus of which will be site issues. He then opened the public comment section of the meeting.

Public Comment

Joe Joseph stated that the committee should not feel concerned about limitations, but should act in interest of the community. He recommended having the “public benefits” clause of the deed and the environmental assessment clarified right away. He commented that the site seemed in an ideal location to provide a benefit to the elderly.

Michael Brandon complimented committee on their work thus far, and warned them to beware of hidden agendas on the part of the City. He encouraged the committee to build a strong, community-driven consensus. He would like the committee to discuss the issue of comprehensive permits.