

Trolley Square Committee Meeting #4
Thursday, May 2, 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)
Martha Older (MO)
John Danehy (JD)
Cara Cheyette (CC)

City Staff

Susan Glazer
Stuart Dash
Iram Farooq
Chris Cotter
Rebecca Sozanski

Consultant Presenter

Dennis Carlone

Stuart Dash opened the meeting by giving committee members a chance to comment on the April 4 meeting notes. Both George McCray and Martha Older clarified some of their comments from April 4 (these are reflected in updates to the notes, available on the Trolley Square website: <http://www.ci.cambridge.ma.us/~CDD/commplan/neighplan/trolley/index.html>).

Dennis Carlone showed a series of slides with examples of affordable housing that utilize good urban design. He then presented a plan of what a private developer would probably do in order to maximize the number of units. This plan had most of the open space devoted to surface parking, with the remaining open space being private. Mr. Carlone then showed a second potential site plan with some paths to Linear Park, a parking area behind the buildings, and a plaza for public open space on the corner of Mass Ave. and Cameron.

While some found it helpful to have the impact of surface parking clearly shown, in the discussion that followed there was a sense of disappointment expressed by committee members. Major concerns included feelings that:

- The process was being rushed, rather than allowing time to do more conceptual planning.
- The plans presented did not express the range of ideas for potential uses discussed by the committee at previous meetings.
- There is too much of a focus on housing in the plans presented.

Overall, members expressed a desire to see a range of scenarios that show a variety of uses. It is particularly important to members that the amount of public open space is increased (most likely through the incorporation of an underground parking facility).

Bill Hubner described one alternative scenario, which increased the size of public plaza on the corner of Mass Ave. and Cameron Ave. shown in Mr. Carlone's second scenario by relocating one of the buildings and putting parking on the ground floor (screened from Mass Ave. by a strip of retail). Other members endorsed this as a scenario they wished to be further explored.

Committee members also raised the following more detailed points:

- Quality materials should be used in the project. (MO)
- Taller buildings should be closer to the existing tall building on Mass Ave, not Cameron Ave. (MO)
- Townhouses might not make sense in the context of the neighborhood. (MO)
- There is a need to provide facilities that are accessible to persons with disabilities. (MO)
- This project could provide space for a variety of uses (nursing homes, congregate housing, owner-occupied, rental, and retail). (GM)
- It is important to adhere to the Mass Ave Overlay District Guidelines. (GM)
- The site would benefit from a historical/ participation component. (GM)
- The committee could consider incorporating energy efficient building practices as part of their recommendations. These practices might also make the project eligible for certain grants and funding sources. (GM)
- Because this site is small, it might be difficult to have many different uses. Would like to explore the idea of a commercial use for the site. (JD)
- While a builder might see the development of structured parking as having a high opportunity cost, it seems that the City has to use a different method of accounting. For the public, loss of open space might present a greater opportunity cost. (RR)
- This project is an opportunity to bring together a diverse group of participants and to look for a variety of funding sources. (GM)

When asked about the public benefit clause, Susan Glazer explained that it was initially driven by concern that the City might sell the property to a developer who could then redevelop the site for a windfall profit. A copy of the deed and initial agreement between the City and the MBTA was given to those present.

Mr. Dash stated that staff would go back and research the potential challenges and benefits of certain ideas the committee had discussed, to allow for more informed recommendations. He also asked Dennis to go back and examine other design scenarios that incorporate more open space.

There was then an opportunity for public comment.

Joe Joseph complimented the committee on their willingness to find creative alternatives for the site, despite what he sees as a narrow agenda on the part of the City. He expressed a desire to see this project really maximize Linear Park as a resource. He stated his belief that North Cambridge is saturated with affordable housing.

Michael Brandon also complimented the committee on its work thus far. He asked for more information about the constraints that will affect the outcome of this process. He expressed concern about how comprehensive permits could increase the density of this site. He also advocated for the incorporation of affordable retail and the preservation of mature trees.