

Trolley Square Committee Meeting Notes
Thursday, September 12, 2002
6:30- 9 PM
North Cambridge Senior Center
2050 Massachusetts Avenue

Attendance:

Members

Bill Hubner (BH)
Helen Kukuk (HK)
George McCray (GM)
John Danehy (JD)
Eric Grunebaum (EG)
Martha Older (MO)
Cara Cheyette (CC)
Ruthann Rudel (RR)
Tom Buffett (TB)

Staff

Susan Glazer
Stuart Dash
Darcy Jameson
Iram Farooq
Rebecca Sozanski

Architect/ Urban Design Consultant

Dennis Carlone

Members of the Public

29 people signed the attendance sheet

Stuart Dash began the meeting by giving an overview of the Trolley Square process and the agenda for this evening's meeting. Susan Glazer then began a review of the open space section of the draft framework for recommendations that had been circulated to the committee previously. Members discussed the amount of open space that they felt was appropriate for the site. Comments were as follows:

- 70-90 % feels appropriate. Open space has been a significant part of the committee and community's comments, whereas a building has not. (EG)
- 30- 90% feels appropriate. It would be helpful to have more images of what the site could look like with more open space. (TB)
- Any amount of open space over 25% is undesirable. A facility is preferable to open space. (GM)
- Because the site is only 37,000 feet, any open space over 25% makes a building difficult. Also, year-round use is limited for open space. (JD)
- The site should be 10% community center and 90% open space. The potential for lots of future construction on Mass Ave makes open space important on this site. (MO)
- More than 30-40 % open space might be difficult to enliven. A recent article by about University Park cited this problem (from *The Boston Globe*, Sept. 8 2002, by Anthony Flint). (CC)
- 30% open space seems ideal. The idea of incorporating historical elements is a good one. A community center is preferable to retail. (HK)
- The amount of open space needs to be tied to the overall design. 30% seems about right. However, there should be no residential on the first floor. Connection to Linear Park and incorporation of historical elements will enhance the site. (BH)

The following edits were suggested to the open space section of the draft framework:

- Add language about historical elements to the second bullet. (CC)
- Add language about a pavilion or performance area. (EG)

- Focus on greenery and the connection to Linear Park. (MO)
- Say something about creating an attractive destination point at the end of the trolley line. (GM)

The committee then began discussion about the housing:

- Housing should be mixed-income, covering the full range within the affordable category. It seems like this housing will serve a citywide public benefit, whereas ground floor retail would serve a neighborhood benefit. (CC)
- Thirty units, or as few as will accommodate underground parking, seems reasonable. (HK)
- Housing should be mixed-income and should be ownership (not rental). The final recommendation will depend on what else is on the site. The scale should be in keeping with the North Cambridge neighborhood. (GM)
- This should be a mixed-income, mixed-use development with 20-units or less. The recommendations should reinforce the importance of first floor retail. (BH)
- Twenty units, with mixed-income and mixed-use, seems appropriate on the site. It could be integrated into the neighborhood. The City should invest in this project to ensure that it is small, mixed-use, and has underground parking. (RR)
- The first floor of this development should have retail. There should be elderly housing, underground parking, and open space in the rear section of the lot. Mixed-income housing should be a second choice if elderly housing is not possible. (JD)
- The City should fund underground parking as an investment in the overall site (not as part of the housing). This avoids the tactic of using underground parking as an excuse for greater numbers of tenants. Ten to twenty units of mixed-income is preferable. (EG)
- The site should have a low number of mixed-income units, with below grade parking and balconies overlooking open space. There should be a mix of rental and ownership, because each group has a different type of motivation. The City should put money into the development, because new money is now available for housing, open space, and historic preservation [through Community Preservation Act]. Without underground parking, the neighborhood will be very unhappy. Because outside funding sources will often not allow residency restrictions, City money should be used to develop the housing in order to enable preference to be given to local residents. (MO)

When asked about what range of units they would be interested in, the following discussion took place:

- There should be an upper limit set. (GM)
- 55 units seems like too many; 20 seems good. It does not appear that less than 20 units will offer significant gains in open space. (RR)
- If parking is underground, more housing could be accommodated. (CC)
- There should be a recognition that the committee does not depend solely on housing to create liveliness on the site. More input from the community on this issue seems necessary. (EG)
- The standard for townhouses is a density of 12 units per acre; for this reason, the site should have 9 units. (MO)
- The site should not be overburdened with housing. A majority of the committee feels that housing does not enliven streets and should be on the second floor and above.

With underground parking there could be up to 30 units, without underground parking there could only be 20 units. However, the language for the retail and community space recommendations will affect the housing recommendations. More public input seems necessary. (BH)

There was then a period of public comment:

- North Cambridge has too much of the City's affordable housing already, and this site should be for any use besides housing. This site should be for complete public use, such as satellite City offices (to pay bills), a police substation, or retail. Maybe City offices in another part of Cambridge can be converted to affordable housing, and this site can be made into City offices (in order to better distribute the City's affordable housing). (Robert Winkauskus)
- The type of guidelines that are being produced will be useful to the designer. Any open space should be linked to Linear Park. Retail should have extensive underground parking. The environmental report did not contain anything alarming. The water table is at a good level for underground parking. The numbers that the Committee has discussed (10-30 units) seems good. (Cliff Boehmer)
- The importance of the linkage to Linear Park should be emphasized. The housing should be 15-20 units, 50% affordable and 50% market rate, with 1.5 to 2.0 parking spaces per unit. A community center seems like a good idea, as does retail along Mass Ave. As a developer, it seems possible to have underground parking while remaining within a cost guideline of \$240,000 per unit. (Nina Schwartzchild)
- CDD has not responded adequately to neighborhood concerns. There should be more public meetings and the public should be supplied more materials that have been available to the committee. It seems like the substantive part of this process was held during the summer. Perhaps there should be a Saturday meeting. The issue of underground parking needs to be pinned down. A traffic study should be conducted. There is a need to increase the parking available for residents, local businesses, and MBTA employees. There should be more than one parking space per unit. Twenty units is too many for this site. There should be further public involvement and a written comment period. Public benefit should be extended to be in perpetuity. (Michael Brandon)
- The committee should insist that the limit on the public benefit clause be waived. Thought should be given to children and North Cambridge Arts (NoCa). NoCa was supposed to get a space at the VFW, and should get one here. The historical commission is putting together historical signs, one of which will commemorate Camp Cameron. (Richard Clarey)
- The newest design concept presented looks good. A safe crossing should be created at Linear Park. The City should buy existing units throughout the city in order to reduce the density of affordable housing. Affordable housing is not a community benefit. The density of North Cambridge should not be increased. Zero to 20 units should be the maximum on this site. (Shannon Hember)
- The neighborhood needs parking for businesses. It is important to look at traffic, as they did in the previous Trolley Square Study. Any retail on the site should have day or early evening use. Housing will not enliven the site or the neighborhood. There is

a need for retail, community use, and park space. Parking is already a problem. Affordable housing should not be on this site. (Kate Wall)

- It is good that the committee is discussing ideas other than affordable housing. The process should be slowed down. This is a discussion about broad concepts, not specific designs. The lower end of the number of housing units being discussed is preferable. (Richard LaSage)
- Underground parking is very important, especially to support retail. Mixed-income housing is preferable for this site. It is good that the Committee is looking at a fewer units for the site. (Rhea LaSage)
- Underground parking, first floor retail, and open space located near Linear Park are all desirable on this site. (John Hixon)
- There seems to be a great deal of consensus about certain items, especially that there be no housing on the first floor, no surface parking, and no more than 20 units, and that any open space be tied into Linear Park. (David Bass)
- A recently formed community centered design organization would like to put together presentation for the committee. (Dave Barker)
- It is important to address quality of life issues for those who already live in North Cambridge. A public building (especially for children, NoCa, and the Center for Families of North Cambridge) is preferable to affordable housing. (Donrey Toth)
- Nothing should be done on the site to drive the existing businesses out. Local businesses should be informed of recommendations. Artist space on the site is a good idea. It is good that the Committee is leaning away from a large number of units. (Moustafa Elmaghraby)

After some discussion, the committee decided it would like to have another meeting with a similar format to this one (time for committee discussion and public comment) that is well publicized.