

Trolley Square Committee Meeting
Thursday, October 17, 2002
6:30 PM
Fitzgerald School Cafeteria
70 Rindge Avenue

Attendance:

Committee Members

Tom Buffett
Cara Cheyette
John Danehy
Eric Grunebaum
Bill Hubner
Helen Kukuk
George McCray
Martha Older
Ruthann Rudel

Staff

Susan Glazer
Stuart Dash
Darcy Jameson
Iram Farooq
Chris Cotter
Rebecca Sozanski

Architect/ Urban Design Consultant

Dennis Carlone

Members of the Public

37 people signed the attendance sheet

Introduction:

The meeting began with a brief introduction by Stuart Dash, during which he reviewed the draft framework and the design concepts that had been discussed at previous meetings. Dennis Carlone then presented the most recent design concept, which had been developed in response to feedback at the previous month's committee meeting. This latest concept created a connection to Linear Park, and increased the amount of open space. The concept has an active ground floor with housing on upper floors, both of which help to create oversight of the park. The latest version of the Draft Framework for Recommendations as well as all design concepts presented are posted on the Trolley Square website:

<http://www.ci.cambridge.ma.us/~CDD/commpplan/neighplan/trolley/index.html>.

Following these introductory remarks, there was a period for public comment.

Public Comment:

Steve McCabe, 21 Orchard Street, stated concern about open space along Mass Ave. creating a hangout for drug-dealing, especially in the latest design scenario (which blocks off the open space from Mass Ave.). He stated that, while Mass Ave has lost many trees in the past, a small postage-stamp park will not fix this problem. He sees Holyoke Center and Davis Square as well-used because they are defined by stores.

David Bass, 23 Norris Street, feels this neighborhood is a great place to live because there are so many stores, restaurants, and other locations within walking distance. He is concerned about the loss of retail along Mass Ave. He believes that it is important to ensure diversity of household size by not only creating one and two-bedroom units, but also larger, family-size units. He likes the latest design concept. He would prioritize the need for retail and/ or community use on the

first floor. He is not concerned with the size of the open space, but rather the overall use of that space.

Cliff Boehmer, 48A Rice Street, feels that the latest design scenario is the best design scenario. He feels it creates the best hope for a safe, useful green space. He thinks that it makes sense to put housing on the site because that is what is across from it.

Michael Brandon, 27 Seven Pines, introduced himself as a member of the North Cambridge Stabilization Committee and a member of the past Trolley Square/ Sheridan Square Committee. He sees the design concepts that have been presented as large, dense, subsidized housing projects. He feels there is a lot of information that has not been sufficiently discussed, such as the future of the adjacent MBTA lot, omissions in the environmental assessment related to asbestos, the previous Mass Ave. study, and cohousing. He also feels a traffic study must be completed.

KT Mernin, 14 Rice Street, Chairperson of North Cambridge Artists Cooperative (NoCa), spoke on behalf of her organization. She brought a letter for Committee members, describing how NoCa members had voted at their September meeting to endorse office and meeting space on the Trolley Square site. As a group, they have found restrictions on available community space in the area to be challenging. NoCa is willing to enter into a maintenance agreement with the City.

Paul Norman, would like to see actual building designs, and believes that the City can do something nice on the site without spending a lot of money.

Rhea LaSage, 20 Alberta Terrace, is still concerned that the number of units on the site is too high. She agrees with the need for community space, and would like to see more detail added to the recommendations.

Kate Wall, 24 Alberta Terrace, is concerned about the number of units and the number of bedrooms in the units. She wonders what kind of retail would go in, and how this would affect parking (both in the daytime and in the evening).

Dave Barker, 57 Cameron Ave, likes the latest design scenario. He had been concerned about having a park on the corner of Cameron and Mass Ave., and feels that the location next to Linear Park is preferable because it is less noisy and is a good gathering space. He is familiar with the MBTA's plans for their trolley yard, and these will not impact the City's site.

Moustafa Elmaghraby, 2410 Mass Ave., is concerned about the language in the deed. He would like affordable housing and retail to be offered to Cambridge businesses.

Tim Murphy, 10 Richard Ave., was on the 2525 Mass Ave./ Churchill Ave. Committee. He feels that the latest design scenario is the best yet, but is concerned with the density of housing. He feels that 2525 Mass Ave., with 12 units, is too dense. He is concerned that there is already too much low-income housing in the neighborhood., and feel that any housing on the site should be ownership (not rental), preferably townhouses. He cites parking as a major concern, and wonders if the police station or VFW could be used for community space.

Ron Slater, 20 Shea Road, described the difficult parking situation in the neighborhood, especially the overflow from 2353 Mass Ave. and retail establishments that operate in the evening. He believes that the City should do a nighttime parking survey and that one parking space per unit seems insufficient.

Nina Schwartzchild, 28 Camp Street, is pleased with the direction the Committee has gone in, and likes that the latest design scenario faces Mass Ave. She feels the project should be mixed-income with a significant market-rate component. She is concerned about parking, and feels a recommendation of two spaces per unit is appropriate. If a choice must be made, she favors parking over open space.

Ron Jackson, 18 Camp Street, stated parking as an issue, and said that employees of Rounder Records have difficulty finding parking.

Kevin Yearwood, 15 Cameron Ave., stated that parking and traffic are issues of concern, and if there is going to be a parking garage on the site then there should be careful consideration given to the placement of entrances and exits.

Jen Fuchel, 70 Dudley Street #3, a NoCa artist, presented a letter to the Committee that she had written. She likes the latest design scenario, and would like to see a bandstand incorporated. She would also like consideration to be given to encouraging smaller, more energy-efficient cars.

Roy Bercaw, 474 Broadway, expressed concern about potential drug sales behind the building depicted in the latest design scenario. He sees the problem with parking overflow as lying with the Board of Zoning Appeals and the Planning Board, and he encouraged neighbors to comment to these boards as they review projects.

Amin Ahmad, 25 Cameron Ave., encouraged the placement of a large parking garage under the entire site (which he estimates could have 70 spaces).

Ronnie Millar, 31 Jackson Street, stated his hope that benches and a water fountain will be included in the outdoor space. He hopes that this space will be accessible to the bike path and will not feel like a backyard for the housing. He would also like better signs to help those on the bike path cross Mass Ave. He supports a community space for NoCa or a technology center, as well as the inclusion of 3-bedroom units for families.

Committee Discussion

General Discussion:

Martha Older cited the following as concerns of hers and other neighbors:

- Any new retail should not compete with existing retail [note: other Committee members disagreed with this assertion];
- The “Community Space” section of the report should be strengthened;

- The “Site Planning and Design Section” of the report should mention that this site was formerly a Civil War encampment, Camp Cameron;
- Language should be incorporated about bus stop safety and safe crossing of Linear Park;
- There should be a strengthening of the language about retail or community uses on the first floor;
- The public benefit should be extended;
- The City should look at the parking situation of MBTA employees on the adjacent site;
- Gas utilities are likely be located underneath the site and could impede construction [Note: Stuart Dash indicated that any development would go through standard engineering evaluations before construction.];
- The location of the MBTA Red Line tunnel might be problematic in terms of drainage and construction. [Note: Stuart Dash indicated that the Red Line goes under Linear Park, not the Trolley Square site.]

Tom Buffett said that while NoCa is mentioned in the draft, he would like to strengthen the language because of the commitment they have made to manage the community space. He also requested that there be a written public comment period once the Committee completes its recommendations.

Open Space:

George McCray expressed concerns that a large open space will not be used, and prefers indoor community space. He stated that there is a need for a sitting area right on Mass Ave. for those waiting for the bus. In order to get ideas for improving Linear Park, he suggested that the Committee look at the bike path in Arlington and Belmont or the path along the Jamaica Way (where there is an exercise course). The Committee should also look at historical elements related to the site.

Cara Cheyette likes the latest design scenario, but is uncertain about having the open space in the rear. She would like any site improvements to address access to Linear Park (at present there is not even a sidewalk cut there).

Ruthann Rudel commented that the latest design concept seems protected from noise, but also might have drawbacks related to safety and the connection to Mass Ave.

Tom Buffett likes the idea of bi-directional retail.

Martha Older cited a preference for design concept A in that evening’s draft document [subsequently renamed design concept B in a later draft], but with underground parking. She is skeptical about the latest scenario not connecting to Mass Ave.

Eric Grunebaum echoed this preference for then-design concept A with underground parking. He favors a creating connection to Mass Ave. and feels there is a need to provide open space as a relief from the density on this portion of Mass Ave. He would like to address both the housing density and parking issues associated with the design scenarios. He would also like to see the

language about the Linear Park crossing amplified. He requested that the Committee be able to view any past plans for the area.

Helen Kukuk likes the latest design scenarios, and favors two parking spaces per unit (and the renting out of excess parking).

Bill Hubner had always imagined this site having a plaza more than a park. He feels the latest design scenario has potential, and that a large portal to Mass Ave might provide an effective link. It might be difficult to do bi-directional retail, but it would be nice. Maybe the building could be pulled back from the corner a bit. He also supports 2 parking spaces per unit.

During this discussion, Martha Older suggested that the 30% minimum of open space in the draft recommendations was too low, while George McCray said that the 50% maximum was too high. Eric Grunebaum and Tom Buffett suggested that the upper part of the range be raised.

Parking:

George McCray does not see open space competing with parking, if as much parking as possible is put underground. People or businesses in the neighborhood could be allowed to rent, lease, or buy spaces.

Stuart Dash noted that a large underground parking area would be very expensive.

Dennis Carlone noted that this expense would be further increased if there were to be trees on the site (because the garage would have to be sunk deeper), and if those not living in the housing on-site were able to park in the garage (because of management expenses). The entry and exit ramp would also have to be re-evaluated if there was to be a larger amount of parking on the site.

Eric Grunebaum stated his belief that the City should consider the parking to be an investment in the site, not as part of the housing (thus using City rather than outside funds). He stated that the Committee would like to see a decrease in the number of units and below-grade parking.

Martha Older noted that the fact the City acquired the site without any cost and that the Community Preservation Act had been approved. She believes that these facts indicate that the City has sufficient funds to invest in the Trolley Square site. She also noted that this project is meant to be the focal point of the community, and should be invested in.

John Danehy pointed out that despite those facts, funding is an issue with every project. He suggested that a recommendation of parking above and below ground might be necessary.

Cara Cheyette said that having 2 parking spaces per unit might require some sort of trade off with other amenities. She suggested that the Committee could recommend the maximum number of parking spaces that could be accommodated.

Housing:

Bill Hubner noted that, while the majority of those present thought parking was vital, no majority had voted for affordable housing on the site. He prefers artists' cooperative living spaces. It

should be made clear in the recommendations that if housing is to occur, it must be mixed-income and not too dense.

Committee members asked how the number of units in each design scenario was determined. Dennis Carlone stated that he used a rough estimate of 1200 square foot, 2 bedroom units, which he divided into the gross floor area of each building. This estimate assumes that there will be some larger and some smaller units.

Martha Older stressed the need for apartments accessible to the disabled.

Eric Grunebaum stated concerns about omissions in the notes from the Sept. 12 meeting related to the number of units suggested by various speaker [note: these notes, available on the Trolley Square website, have been edited to address some of these concerns.] He wondered whether the Committee had given the developer license to do the maximum of 20-30 units on the site, which he feels is still too many units for this location.

Martha Older stated that cohousing might be desirable at this location and should form part of the recommendations.

Tom Buffett suggested the following from the housing recommendations: 12- 15 units with surface parking, 20-25 units with below-grade parking, and two parking spaces per residential unit. The Committee reached consensus on those numbers.

Ruthanne Rudel supported this slight reduction in the number of housing units recommended, but stated that she has mixed feelings about increasing the number of parking spaces.

Cara Cheyette stated that she prefers a higher number of units, and cited the Henderson Carriage Building as a successful building. While 2353 Mass Ave. feels overwhelming, the Henderson Building does not. It is more about the perception of density than about the actual density. She is willing to accept a higher density if there is an active ground floor. She thinks of the affordable housing component of the project as part of the public benefit. She does not feel that the Committee needs to wait for all the changes that could happen on Mass Ave, but that this project should set the tone for what is to come.

George McCray indicated concern about having more affordable housing in the neighborhood, and suggested that the recommendations be changed to call for a diversity of housing instead. He called for good design in keeping with the scale of the neighborhood for any development.

Conclusion:

Stuart Dash closed the meeting, and noted that the next meeting would be for continued Committee discussion.