

Eastern Cambridge Kendall Square Open Space Planning Committee
September 24th, 2013
Summarized meeting notes

Committee members present: Alexandra Lee, Carole Bellew, Christine Dunn, Christopher Perkins, Conrad Crawford, Daniel Norman, David Small, Lara Gordon, Patrick Magee, Rose Billeci, Sam Valentine, Michelle Lower, Susan Morgan, Thayer Donham, Victoria Farr

Staff present: Taha Jennings, Stuart Dash, Jeff Roberts

Park and Playground Design Principles

Stuart Dash, Director of Community Planning for the City of Cambridge, spoke briefly about the key principles that guide the design of parks and playgrounds throughout the City:

To build community

To build great places

To design parks for everyone

To balance passive and active spaces

To integrate the natural environment

Healthy Parks and Playgrounds

Jeff Roberts, Project Planner with the City of Cambridge Community Development Department discussed the Healthy Parks and Playgrounds Initiative in the City. Particularly, why healthy play is considered important, how the City plans for play, and how it fits with the future vision for parks playgrounds and the public realm.

There was a question asked on how a decision is made on whether to fence in play areas or leave them open. Another committee member noted new innovative thinking regarding the integration of different activities, such as off leash dogs and other uses, in the same space effectively. It was noted that there will be an exposition on play through the Cambridge Arts Council.

K2C2 Open Space Concepts

Iram Farooq, Deputy Director for Community Development, discussed the open space concepts that came out of the Kendall Square Central Square (K2C2) Planning Study. She noted that the study recommended the formation of the East Cambridge Kendall Square Open Space Planning Committee. Some important ideas that came out of the K2C2 process were planning for public spaces, considering how development interfaces with public and open spaces, and how to facilitate more active streets. A meeting attendee mentioned that the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority (CRA) and Boston Properties are intending to redesign the walkway through the lobby of the Marriot Hotel and will be seeking public input.

Committee Discussion - Open Space Network

The Committee shared their thoughts on the open space network in the area, and what types of things should be addressed in the planning process. Frequently mentioned during the discussion were: connections, especially for bicyclists and pedestrians; way-finding; improved communications and promotions; creative use of spaces and programming, and public art.

There was a comment that a connected public realm is key, and in particular: connections to the river are critical; as well as connections to neighborhoods through the Volpe site. Someone pointed out that noise emanating from the Volpe Center should be addressed.

It was added that creating a network should involve reimagining what the area has in place already: Gardens and courtyards; roof gardens; parks; plazas. Also important are programming, outdoor seating, and public art. Promenades should take connections one step further with perhaps storytelling and history. Active sidewalks and thinking about the manner in which buildings connect to public spaces.

A committee member noted that it will be interesting to see how the projects that are already planned and underway will help create a sense of place and identity in the area and added that one remaining challenge will be how to link them all. There was a suggestion to better integrate MIT spaces. It was stated that there is a lot of development potential at the Volpe site, and that there should be guidelines in place. There was a suggestion to track how the Rogers Street open space is used currently.

Way-finding strategies were also suggested as being important to consider and as a way reinforce a sense of place and improve accessibility. One current issue in the area is the lack of ability for many to identify where Kendall Square or MIT are. It was added that way-finding and place-making are useful to inform and guide people to nearby features and attractions such as the river, MIT, and even the roof garden. Someone also suggested that concepts for the rooftop garden sign should be reviewed.

It was stated that it is important to think about what Kendall Square is. Strategies might include lighting as a way-finding tool. There was a suggestion to highlight the historical route of the Canal, and combine with way-finding strategies. The Committee was informed that there is a process underway regarding lighting of the median in Kendall Square. Other ideas included whimsical colorful banners, the use of trees, important visual cues, as well as exploring other measures which could be more intuitive and not necessarily informational. The Committee was informed that the Kendall Square Association recently created a Kendall Square walking map, which also included information on attractions and history of the area.

Suggestions were made for more functional uses for public spaces, for example, closing off streets for bikes, some kind of bicycle facility or riding circuit around the open spaces, and providing opportunities for residents and workers in the area to interact. It was added that bicycle and pedestrian connections in the area should be easier with less barriers. Changes to the streetscape should also be considered as part of the process. A comment was made about the possibility of pedestrian access through the Volpe Center. Connections to the Cambridge Street area and businesses were also noted as being important to consider.

A question was asked if there has been any discussion of temporary open space events (e.g. Riverbend Park). In Davis Square there was a process that converted a parking lot into park as a demonstration project. Several committee members felt that there should be public art in the area. The Constellation Center was mentioned as a good step in the right direction, but the art is not very interactive. The "Play Me I'm Yours" public art exhibit featuring playable pianos placed throughout the metro area, was noted as an example of an important experiment in public space use.

Someone felt that the City can do better on promoting programming and events, also that the possibility of updated year round signage should be explored. One example mentioned was the concept of a

mobile phone application which would inform people about what's happening around the area, similar to one in place in New York City.

There should be data and analysis on neighborhood demographics, including the number of young children in the neighborhood to help understand and plan for programming options. A committee member also mentioned that it is important to communicate with cooperate neighbors in the area.

Summary of Public Comments

Way-finding is important.

There are currently issues with pedestrian and bicycle conflicts on sidewalks in the area.

There should be more transportation, and functionality discussion.

Process should also consider indoor spaces that are public – e.g. Marriot Hotel lobby.

A large playing field for is needed in the eastern side of the city. Currently, every playing field in the area is heavily used by residents and workers.

There should be small play spaces, even within Rogers Street Park.

There should be more information on plans underway in area, including pending and approved projects.

There should be another walking tour of open spaces in the area.

Process should consider how the city is accounting for climate change issues.

Stormwater management is an important eco-district idea. Plan should incorporate stormwater features.

The chalkboard idea (mentioned at previous meeting) should include a web address to allow comments online.