

DESIGN REVIEW MEETING No. 3

Main Library Expansion Project

The third Design Advisory Committee meeting was held in Sakey Hall at the Main Library, 449 Broadway on Thursday evening, September 12, 2002. It opened at 6:05 pm.

Members present were Janet Axelrod, Eric Bird, Roger Boothe, Carla Bosco, Ruth Butler, Ted Carpenter, Alex Duval, Beth Gibb, John Gintell, Arlyne Jackson, Emily Norris, Jim Roosevelt, Jr., Hugh Russel, Charles Sullivan, and co-chairs Rich Rossi and Alan Burne.

Alan started with an explanation of how the night's meeting would run, what the objectives for the evening were, and briefly explained that the project was only at its very beginning stages of the design process - trying to find the best location for the project massing - and that there would be many opportunities for public comment from now until the design process is completed. He said that the space program was complete, approved, and posted to the Library's web site (<http://www.ci.cambridge.ma.us>). Also, a project summary booklet has been started, the first copies of which were furnished to the City Council for their review last week, and that the booklet would be updated periodically and would be posted to the web with hard copies being available at the Main Library and all the Branches.

The next meeting was announced to be (a continuation of this meeting) next Thursday, the 19th of September, at 6:00pm, at the Senior Center across from City Hall.

The substantive part of the design presentation was begun by Cliff Gayley, from William Rawn Associates, who showed a brief video of the Library site and described the various opportunities as well as the challenges/constraints that exist for the design effort. Bill Rawn then expressed the importance of these Committee meetings to a successful design process, and noted specifically that tonight's focus was not upon architectural design but rather only the massing of design elements on the site. Pamela Hawkes, from Ann Beha Architects, summarized the "design objectives" that were delineated by the Committee at its last meeting. Then Cliff returned and presented the four (4) massing schemes developed to date considering the program, the "design objectives" and, as discussed earlier, the existing site opportunities and difficulties. He described each alternative with board-mounted presentation material as well as wooden site models.

After the four schemes were presented, the Committee was invited to leave their seats to more closely observe the individual models and have clarified any questions they had concerning any of the different massing approaches.

When the Committee returned to their seats, Cliff asked each member to discuss her or his preferred alternative indicating each of their comparative strengths and weaknesses.

The following is my attempt to summarize their comments:

Scheme #1 / "west"

. *positive* comments: none

. *negative*:

. doesn't like what it does to CRLS; is a barrier / a disconnection between library and school

. eliminates the possible connection between Broadway and Cambridge Streets

- . creates a canyon effect between the two buildings
- . separates the school from the park
- . dwarfs the historic building

Scheme #2 / "center"

- . *positive*: preserves the historic center
- . *negative*:
 - . programmatically difficult
 - . loss of street connection
 - . a "mess"
 - . too many compromises
 - . "crowded"
 - . a programming "nightmare"

Scheme #3 / "east"

- . *positive*:
 - . workable
 - . restores connection
 - . entrances are marvelous urban spaces
 - . true neighborhood space
 - . good sight lines
 - . rational
- . *negative*:
 - . a lot of height; scared by it and its "canyon" effect with CRLS
 - . operationally and functionally difficult (four stories)
 - . problematic scale to lower buildings around it
 - . sight lines from high school's rear classrooms and Ellery St.

Scheme #4 / "far east"

- . *positive*:
 - . most workable; best all-round resolution
 - . (preserves) street connections; "view corridor" is great
 - . enhances the front

- . clean lines; more legible
- . clarity of organization
- . exciting, and fabulous step forward - best design approach of the whole complex
- . likes creation of “Irving Way”
- . best benefit for preservation; best for Ellery Street sight lines
- . inviting, with pleasant scale
- . nice atmosphere in front and surrounding areas
- . realignment of tennis courts works well with the urban scheme
- . dropping level of tennis courts and removing ugly garage vent openings are both beneficial to Ellery St. site lines and neighbors
- . seems rational
- . Tot Lot placement on street side good
- . scale feels good - more open and inviting
- . would be improved by wrapping 2-story element around to Ellery elevation
- . *negative:*
- . creates “canyon effect” between addition and CRLS
- . dwarfs the existing historic building / buries the Sakey Hall addition
- . rear could become “airless”
- . back needs significant work for an “outdoor room”
- . a challenge for preservation

Due to the time, it was decided to stop the Design Advisory Committee part of the meeting and open the remainder of the evening to Public comment. It was announced that the Committee meeting would be continued on next Thursday evening at 6:00 pm at the Senior Center across the street from City Hall.

Public comments were noted:

- . Record of the project, meeting notes etc. should be available at the Library
- . The park today is not in very good shape; it would be good to remove retaining wall and enhance the main entrance of the High School
- . People want to hear about green space and trees
- . Concern was raised for those folks who use the park and might be uncomfortable doing their activities outside the Library’s front windows; wants to keep sense of the “park” and not just

become the Library's "front lawn"

. Would like to see "overlay" of existing conditions to compare area statistics for each- green vs paving, etc.?

. Thinks #4 is best and should consider building right up to rear of school building

. Cambridge St. frontage should also be welcoming

. Concern about ramp and straightening Trowbridge - creation of pedestrian hazard site should be tested w/ "Safety by Design" principles

. Would it be possible to do away with Trowbridge and bring in traffic from Ellery?

. Concern for oak trees on Cambridge St. side of CRLS "bridge"; need to keep balance between civic open space and neighborhood space; concern about being able to plant over the garage; likes scheme #3; alley in #4 becomes dead space

. Project team should talk with the school kids to get their feelings - spec. about 'Irving Way'; concern for Tot Lot moving far away and onto street (for traffic and safety)

. Concern that 'Irving Way' will open up (negative) views of traffic; can more program space be below ground?

. Concern with amount of construction going on...need to coordinate with Harvard project

. Thinks 'Irving Way' is unattractive and unromantic

The meeting finished at approximately 9:00 pm.