

Trolley Square Open Space
Public Meeting #1 Notes
May 11, 2006
Burns Apartments Community Room

On May 11, 2006, the City of Cambridge Community Development Department (CDD) held the first public meeting to discuss new public open space at the Trolley Square site in North Cambridge. The new park will be created as part of the redevelopment of the former MBTA trolley yard site located on Massachusetts Avenue and Cameron Avenue.

Approximately 27 residents attended the meeting. City staff present included Stuart Dash, Director of Community Planning in CDD, Chris Cotter Director of Housing in CDD, Rob Steck the Parks Designer for CDD, Taha Jennings, a Neighborhood Planner in CDD, Zoe Weinrobe a Housing Planner in CDD, and Jane Demoulas from the Public Works Department.

After introductions of staff, Chris Cotter gave a brief update on the construction currently underway at the site and the anticipated schedule.

Planning Process

Taha Jennings presented information on the park planning process in the City and in particular, the different roles played by staff designing the park and neighbors/residents that will be the future users of the park.

In summary:

Neighbors/ residents/ users provide important information on:

- Neighborhood open space needs and preferences
- Desired future uses of the park (active vs. passive features; target age group)
- How existing nearby open space is used
- Feedback and preferences on preliminary and concept designs

City staff provide experience and knowledge concerning:

- Planning and maintenance
 - Examples and experience with certain park features.
 - Other information on limitations to design and scope of project
- Meeting facilitation
 - Ground rules
 - Positive communication environment
 - Try to take into account community needs
- Final design

Design Criteria

Rob Steck then presented design criteria used to plan for new public open space at a site such as this one:

- A successful park design creates a gathering place for community activities (not just a path to somewhere else)
- The new park should feel open and welcoming; accessible to everyone; a public space.
- The new park should be an urban oasis in an otherwise very active location.
- The new park should be unique to itself and yet feel like a logical extension of the existing park (Linear).
- The existing park (Linear) has it's own visual character or "language" that needs to be respected.
- Introduce naturalizing materials and plantings to create calming, tranquil and peaceful surroundings.
- The new park should be dynamic, interesting, stimulating, and beautiful.

Public Comments

After the staff presentations meeting attendees had an opportunity to offer suggestions, and comments on the design and use of the new park as well as open space needs and preferences in the neighborhood.

There was a general consensus that it will be very important for the new park to feel open and welcoming to the public. There was significant interest in making the park a destination, and a gathering or meeting place for neighborhood residents. Someone pointed out that the park will be adjacent to two busy streets, and achieving a feeling of openness could be challenging. It was mentioned that the park should not feel like the front yard to the new retail establishment, which will be located next to it. However, someone also stated that the park should work with the community space that will be located above the retail, possibly with tables and benches. It was further pointed out that during discussions of the Trolley Square Study Committee, there was a desire to see the retail use and open space work in a coordinated fashion and complement each other.

Meeting attendees had questions about the size and layout of the site. Also, how slopes associated with underground utilities of the building being constructed will affect the park, and fire department access requirements to the site. It was suggested that any slopes on site should be used in a creative way.

There was concern expressed regarding pedestrian safety in the vicinity of the new park, especially due to its proximity to Massachusetts Avenue and Cameron Avenue. It was noted the location of the park makes it challenging for pedestrians. Also, that traffic impacts and the continuation of Linear Park should be considered in the design. Someone stated that the Northbound and Southbound traffic lights on Massachusetts Avenue should be timed so that they work together. Other ideas included the addition of bicycle racks, a clearer bike path, and an improved bus shelter

There was agreement that the park should complement Linear Park, but that it should encourage more passive uses, and any new features should reflect that. It was noted by several attendees that there are already open space resources that are geared toward younger children in the area, and there is a need for open space facilities in the neighborhood that focused on older residents. Someone mentioned an exercise area, which, could complement Linear Park, and also provide fitness opportunities for seniors. Furthermore, despite the proximity to Linear Park, the new park should not encourage people to cut through either on foot, by bicycle, or rollerblade, rather it might make a good turn around location.

There were a number of requests for shade trees and attractive plantings. Someone mentioned the possibility of a community flowerbed. Other features that were suggested at the meeting were comfortable benches, a bulletin board, a water fountain and or feature, and lighting.

Several people mentioned a desire for visual features that help to identify the new park. Examples included art pieces, visual markers that note the history of the site, outdoor banners as part of the community space, and or other features that will make the park a destination and bring residents together.