

Trolley Square Open Space
Public Meeting #2 Notes
October 10, 2006
Burns Apartments Community Room

On October 10, 2006 the City of Cambridge Community Development Department (CDD) held the second public meeting to discuss the new public open space at the Trolley Square site in North Cambridge. Approximately 17 residents attended the meeting. City staff present included: Stuart Dash, Director of Community Planning in CDD, Rob Steck, Parks Designer for CDD, Taha Jennings a Neighborhood Planner with CDD, and Lillian Hsu, Director of Public Art and Exhibitions in the Arts Council.

Taha Jennings provided a brief recap of the first public meeting and summarized what residents had to say about the new open space in regards to neighborhood open space needs and preferences, as well as desired uses and features at the new park:

- The park should feel open and welcoming while still recognizing that it is on a busy street.
- The park should be a destination as well as a meeting and gathering place for residents.
- The park should complement Linear Park but encourage more passive uses
- The space should not serve as a cut through route for bicyclists, rollerbladers, or joggers.
- There should be features that encourage passive uses such as tables and benches
- There should be features that help identify the site like historic markers, artwork or banners.
- Some other specific features mentioned were shade trees, attractive plantings, a community bulletin board, lighting, and a water fountain.

Rob Steck then presented a power point slide show of the proposed concept plan for the new park. The concept plan was based on comments received at the first public meeting, as well as coordination between divisions of CDD and with other City departments on the most effective way to provide utilities and coordinating with traffic calming and pedestrian and bicycle improvements that are planned for the area. As part of the presentation, Rob reiterated the thought process in designing a park of this size, in a location such as this one, in the context of surrounding and nearby open space, new housing construction, planned intersection improvements, and ADA access Fire Department access.

The improvements were described in terms of the three somewhat distinct areas of the new public space: 1) The new park and plaza area, 2) the connecting path to Linear Park and 3) Linear Park improvements.

The presentation consisted of examples of features that were planned to be included in the new park and that were based on comments heard at the first meeting:

New park /plaza area

- Shade trees in park and new street trees along Mass. Ave. (Pin Oaks & Ginkgo).
- Partially enclosed urban plaza that is open and airy and yet offers some feeling of separation from Mass. Ave.
- Curved, open, and airy, sculptural fence, designed in collaboration with the CAC to provide innovative screening from Mass Ave. using the 1% for the Arts Program.
- A large perennial planting display maintained yearly with some annuals featuring ornamental blue grasses; blue delphinium, salvia, veronica.
- Sitting rocks at different heights at edges of the plaza space.
- Durable furniture with comfortable seats (hard wood).
- Tables with Game boards.
- New park lighting.
- Seating at Cameron Avenue.
- Bike racks.
- Park identification banners off of new building.
- Access to the community space through courtyard.

The connecting path to Linear Park

- Several gathering spots for people along edges of site.
- Glider benches.
- New stairs leading down to Linear Park.
- Park identification sign and new lighting.
- Sloping/undulating path with brick border.
- Rose garden display on embankment.

Improvements to Linear Park

- Tables and seating in two areas.
- Restored trolley wheels display with historical information.
- Warm up station/ play equipment.
- Buffer plantings.
- Entryway improvements
- New raised crosswalk across Cameron Avenue.
- Drinking fountain.
- Bike racks.
- Fire Dept. access to buildings.
- Access to courtyard

After the presentation, meeting attendees asked questions and offered comments on the proposed plan. Residents were generally supportive of the proposed plan. There were some specific questions and comments regarding the fence and artwork, trees, benches, the banners, and other various issues on the park layout and design, which are summarized below:

It was pointed out that the park is relatively small. There was a question about the proposed links and possible expansion into the courtyard of the housing development. Staff responded that the courtyard design had been finalized and was part of the housing construction.

Someone else asked whether the improvements would continue along and across Cameron Avenue. It was noted that cross walk and bike lane improvements planned for Massachusetts Avenue and Cameron Avenue are being completed through a separate process. A meeting attendee also wanted some clarification on any crosswalk improvements that would be part of the renovation. In response, it was explained that the ramps at the corner of Cameron and Massachusetts Avenues were being redone as part of the housing project construction.

It was mentioned by a meeting attendee that there might be elderly concerns with the surfacing in the park, and why asphalt was chosen. Staff stated in response that the pavement materials were standard, and in compliance with ADA requirements for accessibility. Also, that the combination of concrete, brick pavers and asphalt with a brick border were chosen for both aesthetics and functionality. The pavers for instance are used to denote places of rest, or interest along the main path, concrete is used on the sidewalks along Cameron and Massachusetts Avenues and the asphalt with brick border is used along connecting paths through the interior of the new park.

Someone stated that they were concerned about health effects associated with the MBTA buses idling nearby. It was answered that the use of electric vehicles by the MBTA should address any exhaust concerns.

It was asked how adaptable the park design was for the anticipated inclusion of retail, and if it was possible to subdivide the retail space. Staff pointed out that the developer of the housing development Homeowners Rehab Inc. (HRI) is actively seeking a tenant to occupy and use this space in a way that would meet neighborhood expectations (for a coffee shop, ice cream parlor, etc.).

A meeting attendee asked if the park banner design was a separate process, and if the design had already been selected. The park banner process was undertaken by HRI. The banners were also featured in the presentation of the concept plan for the open space earlier in the meeting.

There were several questions regarding the trees at the site including what types of trees are included in the plan, what are their sizes, and how would they be irrigated? It was answered that thirteen new Ginkgo, eight Pin Oak, and three Birch Clumps of 3-3-1/2" inch caliper would be located at the new park and watered through an automatic irrigation system to be installed as part of the renovation. A question was asked if any mature trees were going to be removed as part of the renovations. Staff indicated that some trees would need to be removed in order to provide access to a planned stairway (required by

the Cambridge Fire Dept.), allow additional light from an existing light source, as well as to remove a damaged tree overhanging a planned piece of play equipment. It was added that pruning of all trees to remain would proceed as a normal part of the park renovation process. Someone suggested that the plaza area might be suitable for Christmas tree sales.

There was a question on whether the park furniture would be bolted in place. To which staff responded affirmatively. Another meeting attendee wanted to know how many benches would be included and what their capacity was. It was pointed out that the benches in Davis Square are a good example. The number of new benches was noted on the plan. It was also explained that the intent is to use a combination of steel for durability and hardwood on the seats only for comfort.

There was a significant amount of interest in the proposed fence / public art component of the park. Someone wanted to know what the idea was behind the fence, and if there were any additional drawings or models of it, also if there would be a neighborhood meeting regarding the art specifically. Lillian Hsu along with CDD staff explained the intent of the artwork: to provide separation from activity on Massachusetts Avenue, while still being inviting and welcoming as a feature of the park design. The artist selection process and the 1% for the arts program were also reviewed for meeting attendees. It was asked how open the fence would feel, the material used, and how far it would extend. It was noted that the fence is intended to feel very open, and the material will be perforated stainless steel, about 26'ft.in length. A meeting attendee stated that they liked how the art was incorporated into the park design.

After public comment and concluding that there was a general consensus on the design, city staff explained the next steps in the process. Bid documents and construction drawings would be completed in the following weeks followed by the project being put out to bid. Construction is anticipated to begin sometime in the spring (2007), and last for approximately 4-6months.