

**North Massachusetts Avenue Improvement Study**  
**Public Meeting #1 2/25/10**  
**Meeting Comments Summarized and Grouped by Topic Area**

General topic areas based on meeting comments:

- Supporting **retail**
- Appropriate **scale and density** along the avenue
- Enhancing the **pedestrian environment**
- Additional amenities for **bicyclists**
- Additional **street trees and landscaping**
- Creating an identity for **Trolley Square**
- Addressing **traffic flow** and safety issues
- Protecting the **historic character** of the avenue

**Supporting Retail**

- There was support for encouraging locally owned and neighborhood focused retail along Massachusetts Avenue, especially at the ground floor.
- Appreciation for the mix of uses along the avenue, the existing charm, and unique stores as well as for the existing clusters of retail, such as near Haskell Lights and Pemberton Market.
- Other specific retail locations that had a favorable response were: Singabellas, China Fair, Verna's, Frank's Steakhouse, City Paint, and several ethnic shops.
- There was overall concern with the amount and look of vacant storefronts along the avenue, as well as the redevelopment of retail into large residential uses.
- Some feeling that the type of retail desired requires a certain level of residential density to be viable.
- There was also a suggestion that a better pedestrian environment and bicycle amenities would help support and encourage neighborhood focused ground floor retail.
- Different points were made about whether retail rents made it harder to accommodate small independent businesses or if they are currently at a level that allowed some of the smaller "funky" shops to locate in the area.
- There was an interest in using existing city programs to help improve facades and help market some of the existing small businesses on the avenue.

- There was support for allowing eating establishments to have outdoor seating particularly during the warmer months.
- For the most part, chain establishments were discouraged, it was noted that they feature a more suburban design and look, and seem to cater to people that are only passing through the neighborhood. Although a point was also made that the Dunkin Donuts served as a place for neighbors to meet each other.
- There were suggestions to encourage businesses to put any trash on the street in barrels and to enforce other existing rules such as those regarding lighting (after hours) and signage.
- Types of retail suggested for the avenue included: Restaurants, clothing store, shoe stores, bookstore, bakery, coffee shop, cafes w outdoor seating (especially in Trolley Square area), entertainment (possibly extend from Davis Square entertainment zone), music cabaret, small affordable grocery store, museum, kid friendly establishments.

### **Scale /Density**

- There were different opinions about the height, scale, uses, and design of the buildings on Mass Avenue.
- There were several favorable responses to the Henderson Carriage building.
- Concerns were noted regarding buildings right up to the sidewalk, visual clutter and a lack of coherent identity on the avenue.
- Some concern was expressed about "canyonization" on the avenue and the preference for the open layout, but there were also opinions that 4 to 5 stories seemed appropriate.
- It was pointed out that heights could be more of an issue when combined with bad building design.
- Some felt that development on the avenue should be based on transit, for example rental units that don't allow parking permits.
- There were opinions that some of the larger condominium developments (e.g. Trolley Square) don't fit in with the neighborhood, and that the density bonus given to residential uses has an adverse effect on physical environment here.
- There was a suggestion to encourage sensible building on top of existing retail and also avoid examples of retail sticking out in front of residential buildings.

- There were a few comments regarding the Marino's restaurant site and support for reusing the site into another restaurant or similar type of use. Parking was noted as a concern for restaurants in general.
- The abandoned gas station at Magoun Street was noted as a currently unattractive site.
- There were some suggestions for artist housing and studios, family housing, a variety of in law apartments, and a balance between renters and owners. Although a concern was also brought up about why residential uses didn't seem to be adding additional street activity.
- There was a suggestion to locate neighborhood and community serving uses in vacant buildings.

### **Enhancing the Pedestrian Environment**

- A number of comments praised Massachusetts Avenue's overall location, layout, scale, public transit and proximity to both Davis and Porter Squares, which makes it a walkable stretch.
- There was a comment about the desire for wider sidewalks.
- There was a suggestion that buildings should be built to a pedestrian scale.
- Street maintenance was noted as important.

### **Additional Bicycle Amenities**

- It was noted that bicycling is currently very challenging along the avenue.
- It was also stated that many bicyclists currently use the avenue as a kind of artery.
- There was some desire expressed to reduce the automobile focus and provide additional bicycle features such as bikes lanes, bike racks, and other amenities to make biking less intimidating along the avenue.

### **Additional Street Trees and Landscaping**

- Street trees were frequently noted as an opportunity for improvement and as a good value which could also provide much needed shade especially on sections of the avenue that can get very hot and unpleasant to walk along.
- There was an overall feeling expressed that there is currently a lack of adequate healthy street trees along Mass Avenue, and that the existing trees are not uniformly distributed, and often die when not maintained.
- The importance of tree maintenance was mentioned several times.
- It was suggested that a large tree canopy can help support retail aesthetically and by making it more comfortable to walk along the avenue.
- There was general support for the idea of pocket parks along the avenue, and enhancing existing parks such as Linear Park with additional signage and seating.
- It was mentioned that this portion of Mass Avenue was an entrance to Cambridge but appeared neglected and was in need of more greenery. Ideas included flowering pots on light poles, landscaping or low plantings on the median, additional planting and greenery in front of buildings, and small plantings and flowers around trees.

### **Creating an Identity for Trolley Square**

- There was an interest in creating more of an identity for Trolley Square and making the area into more of a destination.
- There were several comments about perceived issues at Trolley Square Park including homelessness, litter, and safety.
- The current Linear Park crossing of Mass. Avenue was also noted as an issue.

### **Traffic Flow**

- There were different opinions regarding the median strip, including: that it added to safety on the avenue, but also on the contrary, that if removed there would be more space for other street improvements.

- Automobile speeding was a concern expressed in several of the group discussions.
- There was an observation that automobile traffic on Mass. Avenue seemed generated from neighboring towns.
- There were some suggestions to facilitate legal automobile U-turns on Massachusetts Avenue, possibly through time limits on U turn restrictions or better signage of alternative routes.
- Suggested signage improvements included better way finding signs to existing bicycle paths and to Alewife, and Do Not Block Intersection signs at needed locations.
- The amount of curb cuts leading to parking lots and garages along the avenue were mentioned as an issue.
- It was noted that there seemed to be a lack of handicapped parking on the street.
- Other streetscape issues brought up in discussions:
  - timing of certain traffic signals
  - graffiti issues
  - safety issues
  - lack of pedestrian scaled street lighting
  - apparent increase in noise from subway service and airlines in the area

### **Protecting the Historic Character**

- There was an appreciation for the historical character and structures on the avenue, especially regarding some of the well maintained historic homes and churches.
- There was a suggestion for more protection for certain historical structures as well as installing historic markers where appropriate.