

North Mass Ave Improvement Study
Public Meeting #5 12/9/10
Meeting Comments

The fifth public meeting for the North Massachusetts Avenue Improvement Study was held on Thursday December 9, 2010 in the Peabody Elementary School Auditorium. The meeting began with a brief recap of the study process and an overview of the discussions at the previous meeting. Meeting attendees then shared comments on the study recommendations and proposed zoning approaches. The meeting comments are summarized below and grouped generally by category.

Non-Zoning Recommendations

- Support efforts to place a bus shelter at Cottage Park Avenue to help serve residents of Burns Apartments.
- Every inbound bus stop should have a shelter.
- Other non zoning strategies should be explored to improve the former auto site at Magoun Street and Massachusetts Avenue.
- Will Somerville's Porter Square process impact this North Mass Ave. Improvement Study?
- Do Arlington's proposed changes on Massachusetts Avenue affect what the City is proposing for the Avenue? Will they affect traffic in Cambridge?
- The entire Avenue should be looked at for opportunities for more metered spaces.
- The City should consider establishing a Farmer's Market on the Danehy building parking lot.

BA2 Zoning District Boundaries

- Is the Henderson Carriage building historical? Could it be converted to housing? It seems that is could be profitable for a developer to convert the building to residential.
- If the Henderson Carriage building won't likely change, what is the downside to rezoning the site?
- Is it possible to rezone the rear parking lot portion of the Henderson Carriage site to Residence B similar to what was done at the Danehy building at Trolley Square?
- Rezoning of the Henderson Carriage site should be pursued because it will not change the current use.

- Why does the zoning approach for Trolley Square propose a Residence C2B zone rather than Residence B zone or Special District 2 zone?
- Is C2B Spot zoning?
- The Trolley Square site shouldn't be entirely residential.
- Why isn't it appropriate to have retail at the MBTA yard in Trolley Square?
- There are other acceptable uses at the Trolley Square site.
- The Fox Zoning Petition currently before the City should be endorsed through this process.

Zoning to Facilitate Outdoor Seating

- What are the requirements for public sidewalk space when providing outdoor seating?
- If there is no cost to businesses to use the sidewalk they are essentially getting free additional seating.
- Potential conflicts need to be considered, for example, between bikes on the sidewalk and restaurant servers.
- Protected bike lanes on Mass Avenue should be considered with the outdoor seating discussion.
- Outdoor seating would be a positive for the Avenue.
- Would outdoor seating discussions include the sides, roof and other areas of the building or site?

Encourage Ground Floor Retail through Zoning

- What does it take to support retail here?
- Do developers generally try to use the maximum FAR allowed on a site?
- Why would the City be concerned with making sure that retail is viable?
- Do restaurants affect the viability of a retail area?
- If retail includes restaurants will the exhaust vents have to be located within the building?
- The approach shown won't address the type of developers that are along Avenue realistically.

- The incentive approach shown is too timid for the type of development that exists on the Avenue; would rather have a requirement for retail.
- If the City is willing to provide an incentive for ground floor retail it seems contradictory to resist a requirement for retail.
- If retail is required in new developments the discussion moves from if retail is viable to what kind of retail is viable.
- Residents want a vibrant retail environment, why not require it?
- Retail works on Massachusetts Avenue and should be preserved.
- Don't think that incentives are enough to encourage retail. The Main Streets North Cambridge group rejects that approach. There is some agreement on other issues.
- The North Cambridge Stabilization Committee endorses the Main Streets North Cambridge proposal, with limits on density.
- This issue should be considered in a historical context. This has been a vibrant district, and the neighborhood is becoming denser. There is room for additional residential uses off of the Avenue.
- Transportation in the neighborhood is a plus. Flexibility and diversity is important.
- It is okay to have dentist and other types of office uses on a retail focused street.
- Any building built without retail will be there for many years and affecting the character of the street.
- Neighborhood is not looking to pioneer new retail only to preserve retail uses already there.
- It's okay if particular site doesn't change as long as the retail use is preserved.
- It is stressful for a community to go thru this type of process repeatedly after expressing desires.
- A possible easier approach would be to revise the Massachusetts Avenue Overlay District and prohibit residential uses on ground floor.
- Has the idea of a Business Improvement District been discussed?
- Is there a Façade Improvement Program available for businesses?
- The City's Economic Development Division should do more on the Avenue here.
- There are some programs where art is used to rejuvenate blocks and empty retail spaces.
- There should be a plan on how to distribute retail space along the corridor so that it can be successful.

- Why doesn't the approach include a bonus for office uses also?
- City policy has already deadened parts of the Avenue.
- The City should consider an Inclusionary Retail program similar to the housing program, but opposed to giving the Planning Board discretion.
- Need to consider parking as part of discussions.
- City should invest in a small parking lot, similar to the one in Inman Square.
- Parking is still important because many of the businesses in the area rely on people who are driving from outside of the neighborhood.
- When will the discussions at the Planning Board take place?