

Pedestrian Committee 2010-03-25

Helen Rose, Kobena Bonney, Sean Peirce, Amanda Trombley, Rona Gregory, Stephen Keen , Joe Rose

City Staff: Rosalie Anders, Taha Jennings

Visitors: Pete Kane, Andrea Yoder.

Agenda:

Introductions, Minutes, Agenda Review

North Mass Ave project discussion with Taha Jennings

Report of Project Review subcommittee

Updates: Bridges, Legislation, Police Flyer

Schools & Walking

Break

Discussion of Outreach: new ideas? new approaches?

Subcommittees

No changes to February minutes.

Taha Jennings, neighborhood planner in Community Development Department:

Looking for ways to improve character of North Mass Ave, from Beech Street to Arlington line. Not anticipating major street reconstruction. Looking at planning related changes. Improve character of stretch of avenue. Strategies to support retail environment. Maybe change zoning & design guidelines. Streetscape improvements: planting, street trees (big interest in street trees, "low hanging fruit"). Encourage facade improvement.

Had first community meeting in February with many good comments. Interest in supporting retail, make sure there is appropriate scale along avenue. People want good pedestrian & bicycle environment, which can help support neighborhood-based small scale retail. Contributes to overall safety, makes it more pleasant experience.

The city is trying to schedule next community meeting, probably the very end of April.

Much discussion about street trees. Road can be hot in summer, street trees would help. Maintenance is not always good on existing street trees.

Interest to create more of an identity for Trolley Square area.

Comments about addressing traffic flow. Improved wayfinding signage to direct people to Linear Park. Make it clear where people can make legal U-Turns. Appreciation for older, historic buildings along the avenue.

CDD will take comments, talk to neighborhood groups, civic groups (e.g. pedestrian committee), city staff.

Alewife Brook Parkway is like a "wall" to discourage people from walking north of Trolley Square.

Vice Chair Peirce said that it's interesting to compare North Mass Ave to East Arlington. Davis Square influences North Mass Ave area, no comparable magnet in Arlington. Bike Path also takes some pedestrian traffic away from Mass Ave.

Member Gregory thinks some of the retail (auto shops) is historical, and there are remnants of when Arlington was a dry town.

Some restaurants would like outdoor seating, but city ordinance requires dining establishments to add additional parking spaces, which many small places can't do.

Chairperson Trombley suggested the idea of a retail condo. Rents in Harvard Square are very high. Davis Square has lower rents but no availability. Cambridge does not have a retail condo policy.

Member Gregory suggested holding events in Trolley Square. Including signs to bring people in from Davis.

Vice Chair Peirce says handful of meters on Mass Ave, but side streets are meters only. Jennings said meters are rarely used. Some parts of Somerville have two hour parking limit in resident areas for non residents.

Shared parking for small establishments (difficult due to insurance liability). Climate committee looking to shift parking policies to improve efficiencies. Perhaps promote parking at Alewife and take T?

Chair Trombley says not enough pedestrian crossings along Mass Ave. Vice Chair Peirce suggests working with North Cambridge Catholic High School.

Project Review Subcommittee: Member Helen Rose gave update from the Project Review meeting.

Updates: No update on DCR/Mass Highway bridges. There is a consortium of groups including WalkBoston that have been looking at the Longfellow Bridge and really want to remove travel lanes (which aren't necessary for traffic), giving the T a bit more space, putting in bike lanes, making sidewalks much much wider. Make the "salt & pepper shakers" nice overlooks with benches, etc. 70% of traffic over Longfellow is on the T.

Vice Chair Peirce said policy issued by federal Secretary of Transportation LaHood says that any project with federal money must consider non-motorized vehicle options plus pedestrians.

Legislation: reducing speed limit in urban areas. Sits in House Ways & Means committee. Last session it never got voted on by the entire legislature. There doesn't seem to be any real opposition to it. Vice Chair Peirce will contact his rep again, who is a co-sponsor of bill.

Police Flyer: Anders sent the police a reminder, but they have nothing for us yet.

"Best Shovelled Block in Cambridge" award. Post Office wants to do it starting next fall. Awards ceremony at Post Office on 26 March at 9am. Chair Trombley points out there is no incentive for award.

Schools & Walking: Member Keen brought up two issues related to it. Kindergarten flyer was put out that has a school bus on it belching out fumes. Could we encourage the school department to have a more pedestrian friendly graphic?

Second issue: Middle School proposal. City has stepped back and looked at schools in holistic way. Rather than have a single middle school, look at all schools. Could affect low performing schools.

City has "school choice" system. If they turn one or more walkable school into a middle school, those walkers would then be forced to choose a more distant option.

Vice Chair Peirce worried about Pedestrian Committee jumping into this issue that is so fraught with parental strong opinions. We could point out that school based traffic adds to congestion and air quality issues. Starting kids walking early is good for their health. Motor vehicle crashes are a leading cause of death.

Member Gregory asked if there are a good number of parents who make choice based on walkability/distance. Some people don't have choice on where they live.

Certain percentage of kids who walk to schools. Some of those schools function more as neighborhood schools than drawing from everywhere in the city.

Member Keen will draft a letter and circulate it.

Discussion of Outreach: City Smart didn't get the sort of results in Cambridgeport that they expected (3.8% mode shift, Portland had 9-10% shift). Higher percentage of people walking to work here than anywhere else in the country. Also very high percentage of transit users.

City Smart next in North Cambridge where transit options are not as good. Mode share is rather different. More car ownership.

Events in Cambridgeport did not draw many participants, but weather was poor. In North Cambridge, consider piggybacking on existing events. Summer in the City by Arts

Council. StoryWalk by Library. North Cambridge Artist Open Studios. City would like ideas for places to have a table.

What other kinds of activities/initiatives that could grab residents' imagination that could get them out there & start walking?

Could pre-survey ask about perceptions of transportation? Could we transform opinions? Measure knowledge ("what is the bus that goes down North Mass Ave?")

WalkBoston, instead of trying to get people to a community meeting, is doing on-street polling (e.g. street furniture). Stop people on the street as a way to reach people who are reluctant to go to a meeting.

When people fill in their requests from packets, see if they have particular questions on how to get to a particular place.

Green Streets initiative has "10 routes in 2010".

Member Bonney asked if there's any way for people to find out what bus routes are near them. If a new resident doesn't know they are very near a bus, and don't know how to find that information, they might be inclined to drive.

Chair Trombley suggests a walking map with time distances from Pemberton Market to Peabody School and other points

Somebody emailed Chair Trombley through Cambridgewalks website, they create web portals to increase walking.

[We decided to postpone Subcommittees due to low attendance]

Golden Shoes: Discussion about current program and alternatives, such as a celebration of walking in the city, or a walk the length of Mass. Ave. Decided we should stick with the program for this year, and think about a possible fresh approach for next year.

Anders still gets inquiries about the tree well cleanup in north Cambridge.