

**CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
HARVARD SQUARE DESIGN PROJECT
MEETING NOTES**

Subject: Harvard Square Design Committee (HSDC) – Meeting #1

Date, Time & Place: April 18, 2002, 6:30 PM – 8:30 PM
Cambridge Savings Bank

Present:

HSDC Members:

Mohsen Kurd	Doug Berman	Nelson Goddard
Alex Sagan	Mary Parkin	John DiGiovanni
Irene Goodman	Bill Bibbins	Rohit Chopra
Sean Peirce	Jinny Nathans	Nathalie Beauvais
Susan Rogers	Hugh Russell	

Public:

Elizabeth Kline	Mary Ben Bonham	Rosalie Christiana
Michael Halle	Adam Horst	David Loutzenheiser
Holly Bogle	Steve Kaiser	J. Bernard Denis
Mike Hansen		

City of Cambridge:

Susan Glazer (CDD)	Cara Seiderman (CDD)	Jeff Parenti (TP&T)
Susanne Rasmussen (CDD)	Roger Boothe (CDD)	Charlie Sullivan (CHC)
Kathy Watkins (CDD)	Lisa Peterson (DPW)	Michael Muehe (CPD)
	Sue Clippinger (TP&T)	Hafthor Yngvason (Arts)

*CDD = Community Development
Department*

DPW = Department of Public Works

*TP&T = Traffic, Parking and
Transportation Department*

*CHC = Cambridge Historical
Commission*

*CPD = Commission for Persons
with Disabilities*

Consultant Team:

Jerry Friedman (TAMS Consultants, Inc.)	Rod Emery (Edwards and Kelcey)
Cynthia Smith (The Halvorson Company)	

1. INTRODUCTIONS AND COMMITTEE PROCESS (Susanne Rasmussen)

Observations on Harvard Square. Susanne welcomed the attendees and introduced City and Consultant staff. She asked each member of the Committee to introduce themselves and to briefly describe their favorite things about Harvard Square (HS).

Background of the Committee members may generally be characterized as follows:

- Residents, both long and short-time
- Owners of residential and commercial property
- Business owners, both long and short-time
- Persons employed in HS

- Design professionals (architects, planners)
- Members of City Pedestrian Committee; Bicycle Committee; Planning Board; Harvard Square Advisory Committee; Harvard Square Defense Fund; Cambridge Historical Commission
- Harvard University Planning and Real Estate staff
- Undergraduate Student
- Parents of small children; parents of disabled children

Aspects of HS which people like may generally be characterized as follows:

- Liveliness; movement of people; high level of activity and energy; vibrancy
- European style and feel; urbanity
- Unique character; diversity; eclecticism
- Ever-changing nature
- Walkability
- Safe and welcoming feel
- Sense of history; living connections to 17th Century
- Interesting for all modes (walk, bike, vehicle) and at all times (day, night, weekday, weekend)
- Source of entertainment; after-school activity
- Familiarity of faces; "small-town" feel
- Mixed uses
- Physical scale and texture of buildings

Other Observations:

- There are challenges in making HS easy to use
- It is important to maintain HS's overall uniqueness, as well as the uniqueness of individual subareas of HS
- HS is a destination for national and international visitors
- HS needs to be cared for
- Physical texture needs the most work
- Cooperation with Harvard University on use of physical space should be explored

Committee Selection. Susanne explained how the Committee was selected, and the process to be followed for the Project. There were 60 applications made for membership on the Committee. The City chose people representing a variety of interests and backgrounds (as summarized above). The initial conceptual planning process will last one year.

Consensus Building. Susanne distributed a handout with some notes on consensus building. The City expects that a lot of passion and knowledge will be brought out during the course of the Project, and the City wants the process to be one of consensus building, informed by technical information and toolboxes which will be provided by city staff and the Consultant Team. It is not expected that all members of the Committee will agree 100% all of the time. It is also not the City's intention to hold individual elements of the plan up to a vote by the Committee. Rather, general agreement is sought on the plan so that the Community Development Department can advise the City Manager on the recommended course(s) of action. It is hoped that individual members of the Committee who have experience in consensus building will be able to assist in this effort.

Opportunity for Public Comment. Non-committee members are encouraged to attend the Committee meetings, and there will be opportunity for public comment on agenda items at the end of each Committee meeting. In addition, large-scale public meetings will also be held as part of the process.

2. SCOPE AND SCHEDULE OF PROJECT (Kathy Watkins)

Relationship between Polishing the Trophy (PTT) and the Harvard Square Design Project. The PTT study, which was prepared by HS businesses and institutions, provided a lot of the drive for the current Project. PTT did a great job at inventorying existing physical conditions and also identified basic infrastructure recommendations related to elements such as sidewalks, crosswalks and lighting. The City then saw an opportunity for a broader look at HS. Specifically, if significant infrastructure investments are to be made in HS and streets and sidewalks are to be torn up, then the City wants to make sure that things are put back together again in the best way that will optimize safety and comfort level for all users – pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers. The focus of the Committee process will be to determine what that “best way” is.

Conceptual Plan Area and Core Area. The Project will develop a conceptual plan for a large physical area (delineated on handouts). The area needed to be large enough so that if circulation changes are proposed, their full impact can be assessed. Following the development of the overall conceptual plan, a much smaller “core area” will be defined, and construction in the core area would represent the first phase of improvements. Over time, additional improvements in the larger area, based on the conceptual plan, would be made on a phased basis.

Scope of Improvements. The Project will include transportation improvements (all modes), as well infrastructure improvements (roadway, sidewalk, lighting, landscaping, street furniture, signage, etc.)

Excluded Elements. This infrastructure project will not address types of businesses, density, zoning, social issues such as homelessness, etc. A separate list of issues relating to these items will be kept as they are raised, and these comments will be forwarded to the appropriate parties.

Meeting Schedule. Kathy distributed a handout with the proposed schedule of meetings. The proposed topics to be discussed at each meeting are listed on the schedule. The City has budgeted for six meetings involving the Consultant team over the next year. If that schedule does not provide enough opportunity for discussion, then additional meetings (on the “off” months) may be held between the Committee and the city staff without the consultants.

Questions and Answers.

Q. Will meeting notes be distributed to the Committee?

A. Yes, notes will be distributed prior to each meeting, as well as other materials for pre-meeting review.

3. SLIDE PRESENTATION (Charlie Sullivan)

Historical Overview. Charlie Sullivan presented a slideshow focusing on the development of the public ways and streets in HS. Key points which were highlighted include the following:

- The hilltop grid plan of 1630 (when the village was the capital of Massachusetts) survives in the form of the “ladder” streets (JFK, Dunster, Holyoke, Linden, Plympton) as well as Winthrop and South Streets; Bow, Arrow and Mass Ave south of Harvard Yard.
- The curve of Brattle and Eliot Streets between Harvard Square and JFK Street, follows, and is an historical link to, the former creek which flowed in this alignment.

- Other wide sweeping corners, such as at Brattle Square, are Colonial-era artifacts of where travelers and animal-drawn vehicles literally “cut the corners” over the years.
- Following the construction of bridge connections to Boston (1793) private toll roads were developed. These straight turnpikes (Cambridge Street, Broadway, Harvard Street, Mass Ave, parts of Mt. Auburn Street) were overlaid on the original street grid, resulting in wide open intersections (Quincy Square, Freedom Square).
- Surface transit development (horsecars, electric streetcars) resulted in the grading and paving of streets. By the 1920’s, streets in the core of HS were largely curbed, paved, lighted, and had sidewalks. Streets outside the core, however, were still more informal (unpaved, no curbs or sidewalks).
- Historically, what is today considered HS “proper” (Out of Town News and MBTA entrance) wasn’t really the heart of the historic village. This area became a major trolley transfer station, however, and in 1912 became the terminus of the Cambridge Subway (Red Line).
- The configuration around the Subway headhouse has been in continuous flux. For a long time there were no curbs at all, and passengers boarded cars in the roadway. The original subway headhouse was demolished in 1927, and replaced by what is today the Out of Town structure. The present configuration (one-way Mass Ave; the “pit”; enlarged pedestrian area replacing the Mass Ave/Brattle Street connection) dates to the 1980’s Red Line Extension. Ditto for the present Brattle Square configuration, including the two-level plaza replacing the roadway in front of Bertucci’s.
- Many of the HS urban design features (“Washington Globe” light fixtures; granite bollards; characteristic sidewalk edge detailing, etc.) also date from the Red Line Extension. On side streets, these features abruptly end, since this was the limit of the Federally-funded Red Line project.
- History has resulted in a variety of eras represented in HS, and a “cookie-cutter” approach to urban design should be avoided in this Project. Examples:
 - Brattle Square building facades are from 1930’s
 - Church Street – was a back alley, and present configuration with narrow sidewalks dates from widening the road by slicing through an existing building in the 1920’s
 - Palmer Street – present look dates from the 1960’s when the Coop expanded.
 - Winthrop Street – closest to original 17th century appearance, with historic retaining wall and other features. Also has overhead utils, etc. and needs special attention.
 - Gold Coast (Mt. Auburn Street) – wide intersection at Lampoon (Freedom Square) dates from development of the turnpikes over the old street grid.
 - Historic physical elements: include granite curbing with original tool-marks; granite catch basin covers (how to reconcile with ADA requirements?), etc.

4. IDENTIFICATION AND DISCUSSION OF PROBLEM LOCATIONS

Opportunities. Cynthia Smith presented an overview of opportunities in Harvard Square related to the physical design of pedestrian areas. Existing conditions of sidewalks, plazas and landscape areas will be documented and analyzed, and priorities for improvements will be set. HS is a vibrant, dynamic place. Many spaces work well, but others are tired. An example of a space transformed, is Quincy Square. Working with the City, Harvard University, an artist, and the community, a sea of pavement was transformed into a small park, and ped and bike conditions were improved, while maintaining vehicle moves. Good example of integrated approach to streetscape design.

Issues Identified to Date. Jerry Friedman reviewed (see hand-out) some of the pedestrian, bicycle and vehicle issues which have been identified to date through the PTT study, City staff comments, etc. Slides were used to illustrate some of the specific problem locations.

Discussion and Identification of Additional Issues. The Committee was asked to provide additional areas of concern – what works well, what does not work well, what general observations have been made while walking, cycling, or driving in HS? (The comments listed below include those discussed at the meeting, as well as written comments received from the Cambridge Pedestrian Committee and Bicycle Committee.) Some of the comments are complementary and others are contradictory. Things that work well for one committee member do not necessarily work well for another.

Pedestrian Issues/Comments to Date

1. **Church Street** sidewalks too narrow for high ped volumes & movie theatre ped traffic. Make it a woonerf? Widen sidewalk?
2. Sidewalks at **Nini's and Greenhouse** too narrow – tough for wheelchairs – bollards add to problem.
3. Improve accessibility to MBTA and to building entrances.
4. Vehicles fail to yield at **Brattle Sq.** crosswalks.
5. Crossing from **Eliot Square** island to WordsWorth has poor sightlines.
6. Crosswalk at **Wordsworth** is most (or least) respected crosswalk in HS
7. Additional crosswalk needed across **Eliot Street at Winthrop**
8. Additional crossing at **Eliot/Winthrop** not a good idea.
9. Street furniture can be used to direct peds to correct crossing locations.
10. Island at **Eliot Square** has only narrow walking strip on Brattle Street side.
11. Cars park on **Winthrop Street** sidewalks.
12. Crosswalk at **Mass Ave/Remington** is not respected – vehicle speeds are high in this straight, 1-way section of **Mass Ave** after breaking free of congestion in the 2-way section.
13. Need more crosswalks across **Brattle at Appian, Story and James.**
14. **Brattle/Mason:** Vehicles make “rolling” stop – don't yield to peds.
15. Ped crossings at **JFK/Eliot** are too long due to wide intersection. Peds jaywalk here and also cross between parked cars when traffic is congested.
16. No crosswalk on north leg of **JFK/Eliot** intersection.
17. Vehicles fail to yield at **Johnston Gate** crosswalks, even when signal ahead is red.
18. Crossing at **Garden/Mass Ave** is difficult.
19. Ped crossing at **Coop** is very successful and enjoyable. The high volume of peds gives a sense of empowerment, and the Red Line-era layout helps direct and concentrate peds. This crossing is also a comfortable length.
20. Countdown signals are a good idea and have made a big difference. Can they also show time remaining until next ped phase?
21. Crossing from **Curious George across Brattle** is not respected. Vehicles rush through yellow light at Coop crossing, and then speed down **Brattle Street.**
22. Ped crossings which are direct and obvious are more successful than ones with multiple direction choices and islands.
23. Movement from Harvard River Houses to Harvard Yard is difficult when classes change – sidewalks on **Dunster, Plympton** are too narrow for high ped volumes.
24. **Mt. Auburn** hard to cross near Holyoke, Linden.
25. **Freedom Square** (Mt. Auburn at Lagoon building) too wide open, tough for high volume of peds to and from Lowell House.
26. Peds jaywalk on **Mt. Auburn** between Holyoke Center and Banks Street. Vehicles don't respect crosswalks.
27. Haphazard bike parking creates constrictions for peds on already narrow sidewalks.
28. Tree grates create poor conditions for peds.

29. Usable sidewalk width often reduced due to condition of sidewalk (tree roots, sections in bad repair, obstructions, parked bikes)
30. Cobblestones are tough to walk on, yet aesthetically pleasing - need to balance somehow.
31. **JFK/Memorial Drive** crossings should be studied.
32. **Sullivan Square** signal timing poor for peds. Displays "Don't Walk" even when no vehicle conflicts. Good candidate for audible signal also, since configuration is tough for vision-impaired. Intersection hard to cross. New "no left" turn from Mt. Auburn to Mass Ave has helped.
33. Peds cross randomly at **Quincy Square**.
34. **Quincy Street and Broadway**: Peds don't wait for signal (even after recent re-timing).
35. Cars turning right from **Harvard St. onto Prescott Street** can't see peds due to cars parked too close to corner.
36. All legal crossing points at intersections should have marked crosswalks. Don't delete crosswalks at one-way streets to accommodate entering/exiting traffic.
37. Consider "part-time" Woonerf treatments (ex., after 6:00 pm on **Church Street** to accommodate theatre crowds). May be OK for movie-theatre peds to be in streets certain times, rather than permanent sidewalk widening.
38. Parking can generally be found by circling. Disabled parking, however, is hard to find.
39. Need better pedestrian links to the **River**.
40. Establish and publicize alternative pedestrian routes through HS (back ways, alleys, cut-thrus, etc.)
41. Improve brick surface on top of the **Cambridge Street underpass**.

Bicycle Issues/Comments to Date

1. Often tough to reach consensus on bicycle-related issues.
2. Not enough bicycle parking.
3. Bike racks near T entrance on **Church Street** have been vandalized.
4. No delineated bike route from HS northward to **Mass Ave.** or westward to **Concord Avenue**.
5. Consider bike paths within **Flagstaff Park**.
6. One-way segment of **Brattle Street** requires detour or "wrong-way" riding
7. One-way street pattern in HS requires circuitous routes
8. **Cambridge Street tunnel** uncomfortable for bikes. Patch holes, restripe paint, post speed limits, install directional signs, decrease traffic speeds, restripe eastbound tunnel entrance to provide more space for cyclists and improve lighting.
9. Too much bike riding on sidewalks. Make places for bikes in the roadway instead, and enforce the "no riding on sidewalks" regulations.
10. Need to enforce "wrong-way" riding.
11. Random bike crossings at **Quincy Square**, and wrong-way riding on **Quincy Street**. Consider contra-flow bike lane on Quincy Street.
12. Consider contra-flow bike lanes on some of the little one-way streets such as **Plympton, Dunster, Holyoke, Mill, Winthrop and South**.
13. Garden Street impossible for cyclists.
14. Add bikelane on westbound **Peabody Street**, for cyclists travelling westbound on Mass. Ave.
15. Travelling from Porter Square, the **light at Garden Street** is uncomfortable. 3 travel lanes – unsure of who is turning.
16. **Cobbles in the bus pullout area north of Johnson Gate** make it difficult for cyclists to ride along with traffic. Consider narrowing cobbles.
17. Improve **curb ramp north of Johnson Gate** to allow easier access for cyclists.

Vehicle Issues/Comments to Date

1. Lane alignment confusing at **Bennett/Eliot**. People turn wrong-way onto Eliot.
2. Hard to make left turn from **JFK Street onto Memorial Drive**. Can left-turn signal be added?
3. Not good idea to restrict vehicle access onto **Palmer and Winthrop Streets**.
4. Merge at **Mt. Auburn Street** in front of Tower Records is confusing – who has right-of-way?
5. Vehicles consistently trapped in **Thousand Islands, and Out-Of-Town** intersections during red-phase.
6. Number of merging **Mass Ave and JFK** lanes at Out-of-Town is unbalanced.
7. Right-of-way at **Eliot/Mt. Auburn** is confusing. Mt. Auburn traffic often stops, and Eliot traffic takes advantage and proceeds instead of vice-versa. (Mt. Auburn has right-of-way, Eliot has the Stop sign)
8. Insufficient loading zones.
9. **Freedom Square** (near Lampooon building): traffic illegally enters **Holyoke Place from Linden Street**.
10. On-street parking is important – not only for businesses, but also creates buffer for pedestrians – don't want it to feel like Kendall Square.
11. Double-parking is a problem.
12. Commercial parking is too high-priced.
13. One-way street pattern in HS requires circuitous routes.
14. HS has a mix of through and local traffic.
15. Should make it easier for transit buses to get through HS.
16. Need better, more uniform signage.

Infrastructure/Landscape/Urban Design Comments to Date

1. Inadequate lighting on the **“ladder” streets** between Mt. Auburn and Mass Ave.
2. Inadequate lighting in many locations.
3. Materials should be selected with maintenance in mind. (Ex. brick crosswalks are often patched later with asphalt – shoddy looking and uneven.
4. Improve material detailing to promote longevity (bricks shouldn't migrate, etc.)
5. Other historic cities combine old and new treatments (e.g. Paris). Consider for HS.
6. Signage is important, it delivers a message to people using HS. In addition to the message, also look at how the signage is mounted. Present forest of signs is confusing.
7. **Mass Ave** sidewalk width varies between Quincy Square and Holyoke Street.
8. Red Line-era handicap ramps should be replaced. Side slopes are too steep, and granite has become polished and slippery.
9. **Winthrop Square** ground surface is tired, and represents a questionable historic pattern. More benches needed.
10. **The “pit”** should be redesigned to be less disconnected from HS
11. Trees in grates are in bad condition.
12. Trash receptacles, although not that old, are in poor condition. Covers are missing, and openings in covers were too small anyway.
13. Placement of trash receptacles inconsistent – too many in some places; too few in others.
14. Newspaper boxes – can City give box owners guidelines for maintenance and cleanliness?
15. Need more seating, outdoor eating, plazas. Many open spaces are simply utilitarian.
16. HS is tired and dirty.
17. Provide planters, like in Davis Square, Somerville.
18. Consider micro-climates in landscape design.
19. Designs should not only consider movement, but also users of HS at rest.

General Comments/Observations/Suggestions/Questions

1. How can issues be prioritized to resonate with the most stakeholders?
2. Beyond signage, how can behavior be forced into compliance? Much random aggressive behavior by peds, bikes, drivers.
3. Consider innovative and cooperative use of private property (i.e. lighting mounted on buildings; artwork on blank walls or security grates (ex. Coop or Harnett's))
4. The one-way street patterns are a significant issue for vehicle and bike modes
5. Coordination should be sought with Harvard University. Harvard might be able to accommodate some transportation functions on its' property.
6. Project focus should be on improvement, not redesign.
7. Improvements should keep HS identity intact – “evolutionary, not revolutionary”.
8. Don't homogenize - maintain variety.
9. There are many competing interests in HS (ex., parking vs. widened sidewalks on Church Street).
10. Consider “part-time” Woonerfs.
11. Woonerfs are a good idea – but need life. Don't deaden streets.
12. Consider Church Street as a low-speed (5mph street) or Woonerf.
13. Consider traffic calming (but not in random ways). Send message that HS is a slow-speed zone.
14. Can parts of HS be closed to traffic?
15. Freedom Square good candidate for traffic calming.
16. Develop bypass route **so** traffic could get from Mass Ave to Memorial Drive without going through heart of HS

5. NEXT STEPS -- Short Term Improvements (Kathy Watkins)

The discussion of short term improvements was cut short at the meeting, due to a lack of time. Listed below is additional information.

City staff would like to address as many of the issues that are raised by the Committee as possible. It is our hope that some of the issues can be addressed quickly and not have to wait for the larger construction project. We will be implementing short term improvements over the next six months. The goal is to focus attention on the Square and make improvements that can have a noticeable impact. While wanting to make improvements, we also want to minimize any duplication of efforts. We do not want to construct something now that will have to be reconstructed when the improvement project is constructed. Therefore, the short term improvements will focus primarily on maintenance type activities.

Completed

Over the last couple of months a number of improvements have been made in Harvard Square.

- The Electrical Department has replaced approximately 90 globes in the street lighting fixtures. The new globes replaced yellowed and / or cracked globes and allow additional light to reach the street and sidewalk areas.
- The Department of Public Works has replaced the 16 wood benches throughout the Square with new wood benches.
- The Traffic Department has installed countdown pedestrian signals at the main crosswalk at Out of Town News. The countdown signal lets pedestrians know the amount of time remaining to cross the street. The signal was also upgraded to include an audible indication of the pedestrian phase.
- The State has replaced missing Route 2A signs, which provide directions for following Mass Ave / 2A through Harvard Square.
- Curb extensions were constructed by developers at two locations in Harvard Square; over a year ago a curb extension was constructed at the Reed block (in front of

Abercrombie and Fitch) and more recently a curb extension was constructed at Mount Auburn Street (in front of the Post Office).

Upcoming

Over the next several months, city staff will be working to implement additional short term improvements. Several ideas have been raised and are currently being evaluated – signal timing improvements to enhance pedestrian crossings, landscaping improvements at DeGuglielmo Plaza, landscaping improvements in the triangle plaza between Wordsworth and Tweeter, and repainting the light poles. City staff are in the process of determining what short term improvements make sense to implement. If Committee members have any additional ideas about short term improvements, please let Katherine Watkins know.

6. PUBLIC COMMENT

1. Traffic consultants often rely too much on the Highway Capacity Manual (HCM) and on AASHTO design standards. May not be open to innovative ideas.
2. Traffic signals in HS should be on 50-second cycle, not 100 seconds. Will give more time for peds.
3. Certain streets are “acceleration chutes” (ex. Mass Ave from Putnam of Quincy; Brattle Street; Cambridge Street tunnel)
4. Public restrooms should be provided in HS.
5. In Netherlands, Woonerfs do away with sidewalks entirely.
6. Signage, restrooms, respect for micro-neighborhoods are important.
7. Lighting should be designed to reduce light glare.
8. Designs should be sustainable.