

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

Subject: Harvard Square Design Committee (HSDC) – Meeting #3

Date, Time & Place: September 19, 2002, 6:30 PM – 8:30 PM
Cambridge Savings Bank

HSDC Members:

Mohsen Kurd	Wyllis Bibbins	Rohit Chopra
Alex Sagan	Jinny Nathans	Robert Banker
Irene Goodman	Hugh Russell	Don Crane
Sean Peirce	Nelson Goddard	
Susan Rogers	John DiGiovanni	

Public:

David Loutzenheiser	Ronald Lee Fleming
Mike Halle	Adam Horst

City of Cambridge:

Susan Glazer (CDD)	Cara Seiderman (CDD)	Sarah Burks (CHC)
Susanne Rasmussen (CDD)	Sue Clippinger (TP&T)	
Kathy Watkins (CDD)	Jeff Parenti (TP&T)	

*CDD = Community Development
Department*

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

*CHC = Cambridge Historical
Commission*

Consultant Team:

Jerry Friedman (TAMS Consultants, Inc.)	Rod Emery (Edwards and Kelcey)
Jim Winn (Edwards and Kelcey)	

1. WELCOME (Susanne Rasmussen)

Susanne welcomed the attendees and reviewed the agenda for the evening, which will focus on potential circulation changes in the Project Area.

2. WALKING TOURS AND SHORT-TERM IMPROVEMENTS (Kathy Watkins)

Kathy provided a summary of the July and August walking tours. There was a good turnout for the tours, and people were able to focus on the key issues and begin brainstorming potential solutions. It was also a good opportunity for people to visit Flagstaff Park. One key issue which came out of the tours was a pedestrian desire line between Harvard Yard (near Lehman Hall) across Mass Ave at the tip of the Out-of-Town peninsula.

Kathy also reviewed the status of short-term improvements. The Cambridge Street tunnel has been washed, and this has helped lighting levels. Grass at Winthrop Park has been installed,

and trees will be planted in the empty tree pits at Brattle Square in the fall. A contract for painting the street lights, signal poles and utility boxes is scheduled to be out soon.

Questions and Answers.

Q. : Will new Brattle Square trees at Bertucci's be irrigated?

A. : This has been discussed, but is not being included in the short term improvements because of the amount of the existing brick plaza that would have to be ripped up to install the irrigation.

3. POTENTIAL CIRCULATION CHANGES

Introduction. Susanne Rasmussen reiterated the overall goals of the project: Provide key bicycle connections, missing pedestrian crossings, accessibility, and general improvements to the infrastructure. The City has a responsibility to provide safe facilities for all users of the street, and is committed to encouraging people to bike, walk, and use the MBTA.

During the last 3 months, city and consultant staff have developed and analyzed potential changes to the circulation patterns. Making circulation changes is an option – it is not required as a goal in itself. The potential changes to be presented address some of the transportation issues identified to date. The goal is to explain the changes to the Committee, and hear the Committee's thoughts on pros and cons of each idea.

Outcome of Meeting. Some of the alternatives to be presented are complex. It is not expected that all issues will be resolved at this time, but it would be great if there could be some consensus or direction on some of the issues.

General Approach. Kathy Watkins explained that the general approach taken was to see if the various alternatives would work for all users of the Square. Different types of intersection control were explored (stop signs vs. signals); traffic volumes and motorist delays were checked; as well as circulation patterns and the feasibility of construction (vis-à-vis underground structures, etc.).

Only circulation changes are being presented tonight. These do not include other, more localized improvements to intersection geometry (example, Freedom Square near Lampoon Building) that do not impact overall circulation. These will be discussed later in the process.

The alternatives are intended to be schematic only, and present the basic roadway layout (i.e. number of travel lanes required to be functional). Discussion of what to do with "extra" on-road or off-road space (i.e. bike lanes, loading zones, parking, sidewalks, plantings) will be discussed later in the process, although in some instances, conceptual ideas are indicated on the plans.

Handouts have been provided which show the proposed changes, as well as comment sheets that can be used to supplement the discussion that will be held after the presentation.

Rod Emery reviewed the "top 10" list distributed at the previous meeting, and the overall list of issues. Specific alternatives were then presented as follows:

Church Street

- Option is to make Church Street 1-way; with direction to be dependent on some of the other potential changes in the HS.
- Allows sidewalks to be widened approx. 4 feet, alleviating congestion caused by high pedestrian activity and narrow sidewalks; providing shorter crossing distances; and improving accessibility for all users.
- Reduces volume of vehicular traffic on Church Street.

- Plan shows some initial thoughts on curb use, curb extensions, etc. As Kathy stated earlier, these are conceptual only.

Flagstaff Park Connections

- Option is to provide alternative route for cyclists and pedestrians between Harvard Square and points north.
- For cyclists, this is an alternative to riding on Peabody Street, or on sidewalk over tunnel.
- For pedestrians, the connection would provide a much more direct way northward, particularly for those destined for east side of Mass Ave. Avoids crossing and recrossing to/from Cambridge Common at Garden Street, Thousand Islands, etc.
- Opens up space that is currently underutilized.
- Thousand Islands end of connection presents design challenges with the bus tunnel.

JFK Street / Eliot Street

- This is a somewhat complex alternative, which incorporates a number of individual improvements as well as overall circulation changes.
- Some of the individual elements can be broken out and implemented separately from the overall scheme.
- Basic option is to change JFK Street to 2-way traffic for it's entire length (from Out of Town News to Charles River); and to also make Eliot Street 2-way from JFK Street to Brattle Street.
- Provides direct connection to motorists and cyclists between Porter Square and Memorial Drive.
- Provides direct connection to motorists and cyclists between Memorial Drive and Brattle and Mt. Auburn Streets.
- Adds southbound bicycle connection from Mass Ave (Central Square) to Brattle Street, via facility at tip of Out of Town News island.
- "Super Crosswalk" at Out of Town news addresses pedestrian desire line between Harvard Yard and Fleet Bank area.
- Allows reduction in number of lanes at Out-of-Town, alleviating the present northbound merge issue.
- Allows reduction in number of Brattle Street lanes and also in the Brattle Street volumes and speeds between JFK and Eliot Streets.
- Eliminates U-turn at Curious George, which can be problematic for pedestrians.
- Geometric changes at Brattle Square reduce confusion at Eliot/Mt. Auburn intersection.
- Restores Eliot Street to historic alignment; and reduces confusion at Eliot/Bennett intersection.
- Removes signal at Bennett, providing more pedestrian crossing opportunity. Eliminates the need for pedestrian to wait for the signal to change, thereby reducing pedestrian delay.
- Straightens out "kink" in Mt. Auburn alignment between Brattle and JFK.
- Simplifies turns at JFK/Eliot intersection and provides better operation of bus stop on JFK at Kennedy School
- Allows for improved timing of entire JFK signal system.
- Provides missing crosswalks at a number of locations.
- Provides expanded "non-travel" areas at Out-of-Town; Brattle Street, Brattle Square, etc – potential for expanded sidewalk, landscape, loading zones, parking, bicycle facilities, or other uses.

Brattle Street

Jerry Friedman presented three alternatives for Brattle Street west of Brattle Square.

Existing Conditions

- The one-way (westbound) section of Brattle Street is an attractive route for eastbound cyclists from West Cambridge, Watertown, Belmont, etc. Cycling is very comfortable on Brattle Street, compared with Mt. Auburn (which is narrow, has heavy traffic volumes and buses, which has a difficult intersection with Fresh Pond Parkway) or Garden Street (which is very narrow and busy).
- Brattle Street is currently 40 feet wide curb to curb with two westbound travel lanes and two parking lanes.

Off-Road Contra Flow Cycle Track

- This option removes one travel lane, and narrows the roadway to 31 feet.
- Adds a westbound on-road bike lane, and an eastbound “cycle-track” at sidewalk level.
- Parking is maintained as is.
- Cycle track is separated from sidewalk by the existing tree zone.
- Potential issues with snow. Would have to be cleared separately from either road or sidewalk, and may collect snow from road-plowing operations.
- Side street intersections (Hilliard, Story, Church) would need attention to make sure motorists look for contra-flow cyclists.
- Intersections also need attention to make sure cyclists yield to pedestrians.

Angle Parking with On-Road Contra-Flow Lane

- Removes one travel lane and shifts all parking to one side of street. Use of angle parking will maintain approximately the same number of spaces as at present.
- Provides on-street contra-flow bike lane.
- Snow clearance of bike facility becomes easier.
- Eliminates conflicts between bikes and car doors in both directions
- May attract illegal vehicle stopping/parking on the contra-flow lane.
- Angle parked vehicles will overhang the sidewalk – sidewalk would be widened slightly to partly mitigate this.

2-Way Street

- Makes Brattle one travel lane and one parking lane in each direction.
- Lane widths similar to existing street.
- Directly addresses “missing link” for westbound cyclists.
- Operates as a typical 2-way street – easy to understand for all modes.
- Cyclists would share wide travel lane with vehicles.
- Provides additional circulation opportunities for vehicles – could be helpful if 1-way Church Street is implemented.
- Traffic on Brattle would approximately double. Works from a traffic perspective, but would change operation of the street.

4. DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL CIRCULATION CHANGES (Committee)

General Comments/Questions:

- Q. *Are all of the ideas presented tonight feasible?*
A. Yes – initial traffic modeling and analysis has been done in order to verify basic feasibility of all the circulation changes presented.

- Q. *What specific problems are being addressed by the various circulation changes? It would seem that most issues discussed to date would not require circulation changes.*
- A. The intent is for each proposed change to address one or more of the specific issues identified to date (as illustrated in the Issues Maps distributed at the last meeting).

Church Street

- Don't see how required circulation through the Square can be maintained with this scheme.
- Rather than 1-way, consider removing parking spaces in front of Movie Theatre to gain additional sidewalk space where it's needed. These spaces could be replicated elsewhere. Do not feel that sidewalk between Palmer and Brattle is too narrow.
- Concerned about access to the parking lot. Consider leaving 2-way west of Palmer; and 1-way between Palmer and Mass Ave.
- Disagree that pedestrian congestion is only a problem near the movie theater. Entire sidewalk needs to be widened.
- Hard to comment without knowing which direction Church Street would flow.
- If one-way westbound, will reduce volume at Out-of-Town intersection.
- Do not see advantage of having street be eastbound only.

Flagstaff Park Connections

- Seems to be a "no-brainer" – good idea in general.
- Improves connection between Harvard and Porter Squares for cyclists and pedestrians.
- Routing cyclists from street, to off-road facility, and then back to street complicates cyclist and motorist expectations, and transitions would be hard to make.
- Cyclists must dismount at Thousand Islands intersection.
- Must be signed, marked, and signaled well for safety.
- If there is really no feasible on-road solution in this segment, than this seems to be the best option.
- It will be awkward for cyclists to use the crosswalks.
- Pedestrians will also benefit from this new connection.
- Concerned that a single path for pedestrians and cyclists through the park will be too wide – consider some secondary, meandering paths for pedestrians.
- Flagstaff Park is a large space – would be good location for non-Harvard University events, art shows, etc. if landscaped properly.

JFK Street / Eliot Street

General Comment by City Staff: Committee should keep in mind that there are several elements of this overall scheme that can be separated out and implemented on a stand-alone basis if need be.

- There are many businesses on JFK Street. Concern that only one travel lane and one parking lane each way will make it very difficult for commercial loading.
- It is easier for pedestrians to only have to look one-way rather than two-ways. The downgrade towards the river (on JFK) also helps pedestrians see approaching vehicles.
- When pedestrians have to cross 2-lanes of traffic moving the same way, there is a danger that even if one lane stops for the pedestrian, the second lane may not,

causing a crash. This situation, known as double jeopardy, can cause serious crashes.

- Can bikes be comfortably accommodated on JFK Street? What are exact dimensions?
- Bikes will have more room in the new 2-way segment, than in the existing segment between Eliot and the River, due to the new segment having 1-travel and 1-parking lane, rather than 2-travel lanes.
- Two-way streets improve the cityscape. Multi-lane 1-way streets have more of a “highway” feel.
- Too many turns will slow down movement through Square.
- Traffic will be slowed, and aggressive drivers will behave dangerously at intersections.
- Existing perceived “highway” feel is due to treatment (i.e. cobra-head lights, etc.). This can be alleviated through urban design/landscaping.
- Vehicles waiting to pull into parking spaces will block traffic.
- Scheme is impractical and makes circulation too complex.
- “Super-crosswalk” at Out of Town News is a good feature.
- Would southbound Eliot Street traffic become backed-up?
- Since left from JFK to Mt. Auburn would be prohibited, those missing the Brattle-Mt. Auburn “jug handle” would most likely turn right onto Winthrop Street to circle around. This would be bad for Winthrop.
- Woonerf treatment on Winthrop would help discourage the above move, and people could circle back via Eliot instead. More appropriate.
- 2-Way Eliot would primarily benefit those entering HS from West Cambridge.
- This scheme would slow traffic, but overall flow would suffer.
- Fixing the northbound merge at Out of Town News is a good feature.
- Clarity of lane moves at JFK/Eliot intersection is a good feature.
- Doesn’t HS work pretty well now? This scheme has more change than needed.
- Left-turn at Curious George is not a problem for pedestrians – vehicles are often afraid to move at all when they see pedestrians there.
- Geometric improvement at Eliot/Mt. Auburn intersection is a good feature.
- Consider doing 2-way Eliot and leaving 1-way JFK.
- This scheme provides many pedestrian improvements on Brattle Street by virtue of diverting vehicles onto JFK.
- Combining this scheme with 2-way Brattle; 2-way Eliot and leaving 2-way Church provides good circulation throughout the Square.
- Would be helpful to compare 2-way JFK to other streets of similar scale and character.
- Overall slowing of traffic is a good feature. May slow Brattle Street traffic also, since roadway width will be reduced.
- Consider two-way Mass Ave in front of Straus and Lehman Halls.

Conclusion (Susanne Rasmussen): This concept will be discussed again at the next meeting, at which the City and Consultant staff will:

- a) Address the specific concerns expressed tonight.
- b) Provide a “no circulation change” alternative that includes as many of the individual features shown in this alternative as possible. This will make it easier to evaluate the potential benefits of 2-way JFK Street.

Brattle Street

Note: Alternatives discussed below are abbreviated as follows:

— *Cycle track*: 1-way street with off-road contra-flow cycle track

- Consider 2-way Brattle, but disallow direct vehicular access at Mason Street. Allow cyclists to enter, but not motor vehicles.
- Consider contra-flow bike lane on Dunster Street between Mt. Auburn and Winthrop. This would give southbound bicycles an alternative to the congested part of 2-way JFK between Mass. Ave and Winthrop.
- 2-Way JFK is a good idea. 2-Way Brattle will attract too much traffic into the Square. It's nice and quiet now.
- Angle parking is an interesting idea – it's innovative – very “Cambridge”.