

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

Subject: Harvard Square Design Committee (HSDC) – Meeting #5

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

Present:

HSDC Members:

Mohsen Kurd	Doug Berman	John DiGiovanni
Alex Sagan	Mary Parkin	Rohit Chopra
Sean Peirce	Bill Bibbins	Robert Banker
Nathalie Beauvais	Hugh Russell	Jinny Nathans

Public:

Janet Garfield	Mike Hansen	Bhupesh Patel
Gail Robert	George Kelso	Dianne Cormier
Ernest Kirwan	Steve Miller	Jeff McKenzie
Paul Heintz	Doane Perry	Karen Carmean
Michael Halle		

City of Cambridge:

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

*CDD = Community Development
Department*

*CPD = Commission for Persons
with Disabilities*

*DPW = Department of Public
Works*

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

*CHC = Cambridge Historical
Commission*

Consultant Team:

No Consultants Present

1. WELCOME (Susanne Rasmussen)

Susanne welcomed the attendees and reviewed the agenda for the evening, which focuses on reviewing comments from the November 21, 2002 Community Meeting and coming to consensus on the circulation alternatives.

The November 21st Community Meeting was well attended (over 100 people) and was a very positive way to begin the public phase of the project. People listened to the

Meeting Notes

December 19, 2002

Page 1 of 12

presentation, understood the various alternatives and provided thoughtful comments. In many ways the community's comments mirrored the committee's regarding the various circulation changes, which gives us a sense that the committee's discussions have been on target.

We heard some general comments that we were not thinking big enough. We should be closing streets to traffic and creating more pedestrian areas. We also heard that we are considering too many changes. The Square works well and we should basically leave well enough alone. We also heard a number of detailed comments about providing bus shelters, restrooms, loading zones, etc. We are keeping track of all of those comments and will attempt to address as many of them as possible as the detail design work progresses. We are not going to review those in detail here tonight.

The purpose of tonight's meeting is to come to consensus on as many of the circulation alternatives as possible. On the back of your agenda is a revised copy of the schedule for the project. We want to keep the design process moving and begin discussing design alternatives for the various plazas in January. We want to move onto discussion about the "non-traffic" improvements.

2. SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY MEETING (Kathy Watkins)

Kathy reviewed the comments from the community meeting on the various circulation alternatives.

Flagstaff Park

Overall everyone was very positive. There were some questions about how the connections would work, but people were positive about the concept. A frequent comment was, "great idea, now make it work!" I think we can make this work. It will require some detail engineering, but we can continue working on that. **Given the previous committee discussions and the community discussion, we recommend that the committee give us the go ahead and we continue working out all of the details.**

Basic Improvements

There was strong support from the community meeting for these improvements. Several people talked about how these improvements address many of the ideas that they brought with them to the meeting. You could see people shake their head in agreement as these improvements were described.

One area of concern that came up under the Basic Improvements and also with the other options is removing signals and using all-way stops. People had concerns about how the all-way stops would work. Would they force people to jockey for position? How would they affect pedestrians? **Given the number of questions and the complexity of the issue, we recommend that we leave the discussion about intersection controls (signals vs. stop signs) for a later meeting.** The signal vs. stop sign decisions does not affect the design of the intersections. We can continue to move forward with the streetscape improvements and finalize the intersection control later.

Given the previous committee discussions and the community discussion, we recommend that the committee give us the go ahead and we continue to work out the details of the design. We also propose that we come back to the

committee or a subgroup of the committee later to focus on the signal vs. stop sign issue.

2-Way JFK / 2-Way Eliot

This discussion very much mirrored the committee's conversations. Some people thought it was an interesting idea and supported 2-way streets, but there was a fair amount of concern about the magnitude of the change vs. the benefits. People also expressed concern about pulling traffic away from the major parking lots.

In summary, the support appeared to be weak while the opposition appeared strong. We do not believe that the support is there for what is perceived as a dramatic change. **We recommend eliminating the 2-Way JFK / 2-Way Eliot alternative from further consideration.**

Outer Brattle

There was a lot of discussion and no consensus about 2-way Brattle Street. More of the breakout groups were positive than negative about 2-way Brattle Street. There was interest in providing a bicycle connection and making Brattle Street function as a normal 2-way street. But, a number of people expressed concerns about increasing the traffic on Brattle Street. People do not want to see Brattle Street become a major thoroughfare into the city.

One of the difficult things about 2-way Brattle Street is that people visualize it attracting a lot of traffic. Many of the conversation at the Community Meeting were similar to the ones that we all had the first time we went through this alternative. Remember that the general public did not have the opportunity to look at the computer model and consider in great detail how 2-way Brattle Street would function.

Our estimate that the traffic on Brattle Street would double is a conservative estimate. Every time we have conversations with people about how much traffic will use Brattle Street, we go back and revisit the numbers and try to determine who is going to be using 2-way Brattle. It will function as a normal 2-way city street. It will have more traffic than Church Street but less than Mt. Auburn Street. It will remain a very active street with a lot of friction – cyclists, pedestrians, parking and loading. All of these activities will work to keep the speeds low and also prevent it from being an overly attractive route into and through the Square.

I would summarize the Community Meeting by saying that there was some support for 2-way Brattle Street and also some concern about attracting too much traffic. One concern that was raised at the community meeting that we had not heard before is the potential impact of 2-way Brattle Street on **Berkeley Street**. Many residents of Berkeley Street have expressed concern that drivers will use Berkeley Street as a cut-through – Concord / Craigie / Berkeley / Phillips Place / Mason / Brattle – to avoid traffic signals. Part of me thinks that this is a lot of turns and that not many drivers would do this. However, I also understand that because Berkeley Street is a quiet residential street, any increase in traffic will be noticeable and obviously of concern to residents. If the committee would like to see 2-way Brattle Street, but is concerned about the potential impacts to Berkeley Street, we can work with the residents of Berkeley Street to protect the street by modifying the one-way street pattern.

Since the Community Meeting, Susanne, Jim Winn, John DiGiovanni and I have met with 2 commercial property owners on Brattle Street. They are both very concerned / opposed to converting Brattle Street into a 2-way street. Their main concerns are about impacts to pedestrians, increasing traffic on Brattle Street, disrupting the loading and reducing traffic through the heart of the Square by bringing drivers directly into the Square rather than making them use Garden / Mass. / Brattle. As you all know, the City has a policy of encouraging cycling. We want to make it safe and desirable to bike in the city. Brattle Street is a major desire line for cyclists that is currently not accommodated. The 2 property owners believe that cyclists can and should seek other legal routes into the Square. They do not support making a major change on Brattle Street to accommodate cyclists.

At this point, we do not have a clear recommendation on Brattle Street. At the last Committee Meeting, there was majority support for 2-way Brattle Street. The Community Meeting showed some support and also concerns about increased traffic on Brattle Street and also cut-through traffic on Berkeley Street.

Church Street

The comments from the Community Meeting very much mirrored the Committee's previous discussions. **There was strong agreement that something needs to be done to improve pedestrian conditions on Church Street, but there was no consensus on what exactly should be done.** There was concern that making Church Street 1-way eliminates a useful loop for visitors and also makes the street pattern more confusing for drivers. There was more willingness to impact parking than to change Church Street to 1-way. There was support that the spot improvements address the worst spots on the street and it is o.k. if that means removing some of the parking.

At the Community Meeting there were some comments that we should consider a shared street design for Church Street. Since then, we have met with the Bicycle and Pedestrian Committees to discuss the potential of a shared street on Church Street. After much research and discussion, it is our conclusion that Palmer and Winthrop streets are better streets to begin the City's experience with shared streets. Both of these streets have low traffic volumes, are fairly short in length, the sidewalks cannot be made to be ADA accessible and they do not have metered parking. We believe that these streets can both be great examples of shared streets in Cambridge, which could lead to consideration of other shared streets in the future. We will not be considering a shared street for Church Street.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT (Susanne Rasmussen)

Normally we hear comments from the members of the public at the end of the meeting. Since we would like to make decisions tonight, we will hear from people now.

Flagstaff Park

- No comments.

Basic Improvements

- No comments.

2-Way JFK Street / 2-Way Eliot Street

- Support 2-way system for JFK Street. Focus on the 2-way streets and then worry about formalized parking zones for bicycles and cars.
- Support 2-way. Makes it easier to get through the Square.

2-Way Brattle Street

- 2-way Brattle Street will ruin the Square. Creates too much heavy traffic. Dangerous to pedestrians and creates a problem for Berkeley Street, which currently has speeding traffic. This will create bumper-to-bumper traffic on Berkeley Street by providing a stop light free route to the river.
- Concern about increased traffic on 2-way Brattle. At lunchtime Brattle Street is a quiet place for people to walk.
- Increased traffic on Berkeley Street will negatively affect the people that walk, bike and run on the street. It is heavily used by pedestrians because it is a nice quiet street.

Church Street

- A one-way street would leave room for MBTA drop off, loading and pedestrians. Make street 1-way and widen sidewalk on the theater side of the street.

Meeting Notes

December 19, 2002

Page 5 of 12

General

- Montreal provides lively underground space with light wells.
- Memorial Drive closure is a draw for pedestrians. We should be looking to provide open spaces free from traffic. Create pedestrian only areas and close streets to traffic.
- Protect trees from bicycle parking.
- Show concerns for people in the infrastructure design. Need to slow things down.
- Harvard Square needs a grocery store.
- Signage is abysmal. Everyone is driving around lost. Provide better signage to parking areas.
- Need more bus routes to use the tunnel. Why can't you board the 66 in the tunnel? Need seats in the warm areas of the tunnel.
- Generally hate curb extensions.
- Move on-street parking to an underground facility to strengthen pedestrian environment.

4. COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

Flagstaff Park

Susanne asked Committee members if everyone is o.k. giving staff the go ahead on this alternative. We will continue to work on the details of how to make all of the improvements work and addressing the detailed comments that the public and the committee have made.

A committee member stated that it was hard to evaluate the benefits of alternatives without a sense of the cost. Susanne and Kathy explained that the focus of this discussion is to determine what should be included in the conceptual plan. Once we have developed the conceptual plan for the entire project area, we will prioritize improvements based on benefits and cost. The higher priority improvements will be constructed first.

Conclusion: Flagstaff Park will be included in the conceptual plan. Staff and consultants will continue to work on the detailed design of Flagstaff Park.

Basic Improvements

Susanne asked Committee members if everyone is o.k. giving staff the go ahead on this alternative. We will continue to work on the details of how to make all of the improvements work and addressing the detailed comments that the public and the committee have made. We propose that we have a future discussion about the signals vs. all-way stops. The intersection controls do not affect the physical layout of the streets and sidewalks.

Conclusion: The Basic Improvements will be included in the conceptual plan. Staff and consultants will continue to work on the detailed design of the Basic Improvements. The Committee will have additional discussions about the use of curb areas and intersection controls (signals vs. stop signs).

2-Way JFK / 2-Way Eliot

Susanne summarized that staff do not believe that there is enough support to move forward with this option. She asked the Committee if everyone was o.k. with this

conclusion. The committee had a lot of discussion about the pros and cons of 2-way JFK / 2-way Eliot.

Committee Discussion

- ◆ Support for the 2-way street system. Would not describe the support as weak.
- ◆ People liked the idea in principle. It provides some benefits, but there were concerns about loading. A lot of people were sitting on the fence. There was not sufficient support to implement.
- ◆ The support was weak and the opposition was strong.
- ◆ Strong supporter of this alternative. Do not kill this alternative now. We should continue to work on resolving the loading issue.
- ◆ People do not see the benefits. We should not move forward with this alternative.
- ◆ Will create a pedestrian disaster.
- ◆ There were more no's than yes'. If you did make JFK 2-way, the scope of the project would have to extend to Memorial Drive.
- ◆ Basic Improvements deal with the biggest issues. 2-way JFK / 2-way Eliot does not provide enough additional benefit.
- ◆ Biggest issue of concern is loading. We need to address the loading issues before we eliminate this alternative.
- ◆ Prefer 2-way streets with parking. 1-way streets are not quiet, they become too highway like. However, 2-way JFK Street is a huge change. If there is not sufficient support, do not move forward with this. There is not a strong constituency for the change. And there is always a constituency for status quo. We would have to devote our lives to getting this implemented and it is not worth it.
- ◆ There is no improvement for Eliot Street. There will be resistance to this change.
- ◆ There is some merit to this change, but don't feel strongly. Support deferring decision on this alternative.
- ◆ Unclear if 2-way JFK / 2-way Eliot is better or worse for pedestrians.
- ◆ The benefits are too uncertain / vague and the general resistance is too strong. People do not perceive it as something that needs to be fixed.
- ◆ Replace the cobra head lights with acorns and you will see a dramatic change in the character of the street.

Conclusion: 2-way JFK / 2-way Eliot alternative is not a high priority and there is strong opposition to this change. We will not continue to carry this alternative along. It will be tabled for now. If at the end of the design process, there are concerns that have not been addressed, the 2-way JFK / 2-way Eliot alternative can be revisited.

2-Way Brattle Street

Susanne summarized that there was not consensus on this alternative.

Committee Discussion

- ◆ Community meeting changed my opinion on this alternative. Now support keeping it 1-way. It is the nicest part of the Square – less traffic, less busy. Provide contra-flow bike lane if you have to. Cyclists should be allowed to use Brattle Street.
- ◆ Brattle Street isn't broken, don't fix it.

- ◆ There is not a problem on Brattle Street. The problem is elsewhere. We may be able to help Mason Street or Garden Street by making Brattle Street 2-way.
- ◆ Enjoy the piece and quiet of Story Street. Do not want to see heavy trucks using Brattle Street. Provide contra-flow bike lane.
- ◆ Do not like contra-flow bike lane. It is frightening. The Berkeley Street concerns are legitimate and have to be addressed. If Berkeley Street can be addressed, I am in favor of 2-way Brattle Street. 2-way Streets provide a better streetscape and balance out the traffic flow.
- ◆ From the historic perspective Brattle Street is a beautiful street, but as you approach Ash Street it is unattractive. 2-way Brattle Street would be an improvement.
- ◆ Sympathetic to cyclists concerns, but 2-way Brattle Street is not an improvement for pedestrians.
- ◆ Support 2-way Brattle Street, but need to talk more about the impacts. The main problem is a bike problem. Do not increase traffic on Berkeley Street.
- ◆ 2-way Brattle Street causes more problems than it resolves. The Berkeley Street concerns are valid. Remember when Brattle Street was 2-way. The character of the street has changed and 2-way will not work. It is not worth the change. Incremental changes are more important. The big changes are not worth the risk.
- ◆ Intrigued with the idea, but want to focus on what we can get community agreement on. 2-way Brattle Street all the way to Eliot would hurt DeGuglielmo Plaza and the pedestrian experience.
- ◆ Strongly in favor of 2-way. The arguments against it are not based on facts. They are based on fears of change. Do proper planning and don't negatively impact Berkeley Street, but implement 2-way Brattle.
- ◆ Can solve Berkeley Street problem. Make Brattle 2-way to Church, just don't make it too easy for drivers to use Brattle Street to get through the Square.
- ◆ In favor of 2-way Brattle. It provides a very important connection for cyclists.
- ◆ Uncomfortable with contra-flow bike lane. Intersections will be very difficult. Creates conflicts between pedestrians and cyclists. Does not meet criteria of predictability. Provide normal 2-way city street.

Conclusion: There is not consensus on 2-way Brattle Street. City staff and consultants will look at the list of items below and come back to the Committee with the additional information.

- ◆ Loading zones
- ◆ Berkeley Street
- ◆ Pedestrian safety – impacts of additional volume and 2-way street
- ◆ Potential increase in truck traffic
- ◆ 2-way all the way to Eliot Street
- ◆ 2-way to Church Street. Can Church Street handle the additional volume? Could it later be changed to 2-way all the way to Eliot Street?

Church Street

Committee Discussion

- ◆ Something has to be done. If we can't do a shared street, remove entire length of parking and widen sidewalks.
- ◆ Could give up parking.

- ◆ The entire length of the street is inadequate. Lose some parking and add as much in other locations. Keep the street 2-way.
- ◆ Keep it 2-way and widen sidewalk from Palmer to Mass. Ave. adjacent to theater.
- ◆ Provide wide enough sidewalk on both sides for it to be pleasant. Get rid of parking. Keep 2-way. Concerned about ending 2-way Brattle at Church. Add parking wherever we are narrowing the roadway.
- ◆ Widen the sidewalk and lose some parking.
- ◆ Sidewalk needs to be improved for pedestrians. Remove parking.
- ◆ Not sure if 1-way or losing parking is better. Giving up parking to widen sidewalk makes it is easy to understand the trade-offs.
- ◆ Don't have enough information. It is too connected to what we do on Palmer Street. 1-way does not seem wise.
- ◆ Keep it 2-way and implement spot improvements. Remove parking at theater. Some sidewalks are wide enough.
- ◆ Improve sidewalk at the theater and at Border Café.
- ◆ Keep 2-way.
- ◆ Something has to give for pedestrians. Keep 2-way. Eliminate parking. Remove trees and street furniture.

Conclusion: Church Street will remain 2-way. City staff and consultants will develop 2 plans for improving Church Street sidewalks and keeping 2-way traffic. One plan will remove one entire side of parking. The other plan will remove parking in the critical areas of the street.

5. **NEXT STEPS (Susanne Rasmussen)**

1% for Art Program

The City of Cambridge has a 1% for Art program. All capital projects funded by the City allocate 1% of the budget to public art. An artist is hired to work with the design team. The **role of the artist** varies from project to project. The artist can create a **stand alone** piece of art or work with the design team to **add interest to the details** of a project. Some initial thoughts for artist involvement include the design of **Flagstaff Park and the shared street on Palmer Street**. An artist could work with the design team on the paving patterns, lighting and other details to create an interesting space that invites people into it.

We need 3 to 5 volunteers to sit on a subcommittee to select an artist for the Harvard Square project. The volunteers would participate in the interviews of 3 artists. We would expect a total of 2-3 meetings. **Jinny Nathans, John DiGiovanni, Susan Rogers and Mohsen Kurd volunteered for the art subcommittee.**

January 16, 2003 Committee Meeting

The next committee meeting, January 16, 2002, will focus on plaza designs. Based on the comments we heard from people at the first committee meeting we will bring initial designs of the plaza areas to the meeting.

25% Conceptual Plan

In addition to the circulation alternatives that we have all been discussing, we are working on developing the **25% conceptual plan** for the entire project area. We are

looking at where we can fit bike lanes through the Square, curb extensions at crosswalks, etc. We will bring this plan to the committee in the spring.