

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

Subject: Harvard Square Design Committee (HSDC) – Meeting 6

Date, Time & Place: January 16, 2003, 6:30 PM – 8:30 PM
Cambridge Savings Bank

Present:

HSDC Members:

Mohsen Kurd	Susan Rogers	Nelson Goddard
Alex Sagan	Doug Berman	John DiGiovanni
Irene Goodman	Bill Bibbins	Robert Banker
Sean Peirce	Hugh Russell	

City of Cambridge:

Susan Glazer (CDD)	Sue Clippinger (TP&T)	Roger Booth (CDD)
Susanne Rasmussen (CDD)	Jeff Parenti (TP&T)	Carolyn Thompson (CPD)
Kathy Watkins (CDD)	Sarah Burks (CHC)	Hafthor Yngvason (CAC)

*CDD = Community Development
Department*

*CPD = Commission for Persons with
Disabilities*

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

CAC = Cambridge Arts Council

*CHC = Cambridge Historical
Commission*

Consultant Team:

Jerry Friedman (TAMS Consultants, Inc.)

Cynthia Smith (Halvorson Design Partnership)

1. WELCOME AND SUMMARY OF DECEMBER COMMITTEE MEETING (Susanne Rasmussen)

Susanne welcomed the attendees and reviewed the agenda for the evening, which will include a slide presentation on the Urban Design Toolbox, and specific alternatives for design of several plaza areas.

Susanne reviewed the progress that the Committee made at the December 21 meeting. The following decisions were made at that time:

- Flagstaff Park – design development should proceed.
- Basic Improvements – design development should proceed.
- 2-way JFK/ 2-Way Eliot – tabled.
- Brattle and Church Streets - did not come to closure, but developed the following list of additional information and next steps, to be discussed at the February meeting:
 - 2-way Brattle – provide additional information on the following:
 - ❑ Loading zones.
 - ❑ Berkeley Street – develop protection plan and meet with residents.

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- ❑ 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. Can Church Street handle the additional volume? Could it later be changed to 2-way all the way to Eliot?
- Church Street – keep 2 way traffic. Provide alternatives for widening sidewalks by removing varying amounts of parking.

2. URBAN DESIGN TOOLBOX (Roger Boothe)

Roger Boothe presented a slide-show on the Urban Design Toolbox showing examples of urban design techniques implemented within Harvard Square during the last 25 years. Key points included the following:

- Urban Design “Tools” include landscape elements (trees, plantings, etc) and streetscape elements (street furniture, paving materials etc.)
- Key milestones in the recent evolution of Harvard Square, include:
 - 1978 – Harvard Square Overlay District established - 1st step towards formally recognizing the Square as a “special place”.
 - 1982 – Charles Square construction; and height of MBTA Red Line construction – established the look of the Square which exists today (major revisions to Harvard and Brattle Squares, and Charles Square)
 - 1986 – Revised Overlay District – recognized that the Square was not a single place and that the design of public and private projects should be reviewed in terms of the following subdistricts:
 1. Harvard Square (MBTA / Out-of-Town News area)
 2. Quincy Square (Mass Ave/Quincy Street)
 3. Gold Coast (Mt. Auburn Street / Lagoon area)
 4. JFK Street/Winthrop Street/Winthrop Park
 5. Brattle Street/Brattle Square
 6. Charles Square (Eliot/Bennett area)
- Key characteristics of the various subdistricts over the last 25 years include:
 1. Harvard Square: Red line changed MBTA headhouse area from an island to a peninsula. Area became more pedestrian-oriented. Design subject to constraints of underground MBTA tunnels and station roof.
 2. Quincy Square: Redesign of this area organized a formerly confusing intersection, which had large pavement areas. Design provided for improved pedestrian crossings and incorporated art as a major component.
 3. Gold Coast: Area in front of the Lagoon Building is a large expanse of asphalt. The curb extension at Bow and Arrow works well, as does the pedestrian walkway through the Church property.
 4. JFK/Winthrop: Restoration of Winthrop Square Park restored the sidewalk area on JFK Street which had been usurped by street widening. The park was very little used, in part due to pathways, which went from “nowhere to nowhere”. Renovation of the park and pathways was very successful. Today it is a very utilized public space.
 5. Brattle Square: Works well, especially DeGuglielmo Plaza, despite level changes which were the result of a survey error.
 6. Charles Square: Old MTA car-barns area. Radical transformation from industrial area at edge of Harvard Square. Provides connection to the Charles River; new post-office is more pedestrian friendly; examples of developers working together to create pedestrian connection between Brattle Street and Mt. Auburn Street (Harvest Restaurant, BrattleTheatre passageway).
- Overall legacy of Red Line project: Special areas of paving, lighting, bollards, etc.

- Some areas not affected yet by any recent projects, e.g. Church Street.

3. PLAZA DESIGNS

Introduction - (Kathy Watkins)

- Kathy noted that the Basic Improvements design is being developed with a more detailed look at lane arrangements, curb usage, parking, loading zones, bike lanes, etc. As we take a closer look at each location, we have started to identify where we can add bike lanes, parking and loading zones. Each time the Committee looks at these areas, they will note more detail being added to the plans.
- Tonight we are focusing on 4 specific plaza areas because they are the ones that we have heard the most comments about and the ones that have the most potential for improvement. They are Eliot Square, Brattle Square, the Pit and the Lagoon Building.
- Other areas already work well, like DeGuglielmo Plaza. As we move forward with the plan, we are not proposing significant changes at such locations. We would look at the ramps, sidewalk conditions, plantings and lighting, but not major design changes.
- Other areas have limited space and physical constraints like the area in front of 1 Brattle Square (EMS). It is a fairly tight area that has vents for the tunnel that cannot be relocated and also a utility bank under the sidewalk. It does not lend itself to major changes.
- We have looked at the intended usage of the plazas, how they are actually used, needs that were identified by this group in the beginning of this process and comments from the larger community meeting. You will see many of those ideas included in these drawings.

Brattle Square / Eliot Square Alternatives - (Cynthia Smith)

- The Basic Improvements provide opportunities to improve the Brattle Square and Eliot Square plazas. Concerns heard to date include:
 - The **Brattle Sq. Island** (triangle island at Wordsworth Books) is underused, in part due to being surrounded by traffic. Even so, this island has potential to be an important connecting point for various pedestrian movements. The Basic Improvements include several new crosswalks, a reduced island and narrowed roadways, and additional sidewalk space added adjacent to Wordsworth Books.
 - **Eliot Square** seems disorganized in terms of its various functions, including the MBTA bus stop, bike parking, and as a landscaped connection to the River. The space also suffers from poor aesthetics of the adjacent exposed parking garage.
- Two design alternatives have been developed, both of which work with the Basic Improvements:
 - A. Essentially improving what is already there.**
 - Adds perimeter sidewalks to the **Brattle Square island**, but maintains a small central plaza for gathering, sitting, performances, etc. Provides an appropriate setting for the existing artwork in the island; locating it within a paved pedestrian area, rather than in a landscaped area.
 - At **Eliot Square**, the connection to the River is strengthened through the addition of gateway elements, and plantings are rearranged to improve the functioning of the bus stop area. Special signage or kiosks could be provided to provide information, and additional seating is provided. A single row of covered bicycle parking is provided at the rear of the Plaza, as well as plantings to screen the garage.

B. More significant reconfiguration.

- At **Brattle Square Island**, a larger central gathering area is provided in lieu of the perimeter sidewalks. All crosswalks have direct access to the Central area, which can serve as a pedestrian crossroads. All pedestrian desire lines can be directly addressed.
- At **Eliot Square**, the connection to the River is further reinforced by providing a walkway/tree allee which is aligned with the existing pedestrian connection to JFK Park on the south side of Bennett Street. A centralized bus shelter is also provided, and the bicycle parking at the rear of the Plaza is broken-up into smaller niches, surrounded by screen plantings. The bicycle parking would be covered.

Brattle Square/Eliot Square Comments and Questions – (Committee)

(Note: City/Consultant team comments/responses are in italics)

- What are gateway elements? *(Examples at JFK Park include the vertical posts at path entries, but could also be fences, plantings, etc.)*
- Would bus shelter as shown accommodate all users? *(There are over 500 boardings per day at Eliot Square, spread throughout the day.)*
- Don't retailers prefer not to have trees planted in front of their businesses – unlike what the plans show at Charlie's Kitchen area? *(It is possible to select species which are lighter and lacier, which allows visibility. Also, trees would be pruned up 7-ft or so to preserve pedestrian and vehicular sightlines.)*
- Like Scheme "B". Like larger Central Island at Brattle; and idea of carrying double-row of trees across Eliot. Existing allee to JFK Park is good example.
- Like "B" for breaking up the bike parking - less visually obtrusive.
- Bus shelter is good idea – Central Square shelters are a possible example. Consider even more shelters.
- What are the explicit trade-offs being made between bike parking and other uses at Eliot?
- Covered bike parking is good idea.
- Brattle Island: Like "B" –more comfortable for peds to be in middle, rather than on edges.
- All sightlines must be tested for pedestrian safety – especially at unsignalized intersections. Try to tighten intersections more, if possible.
- Can Bennett/Eliot crosswalk be rotated to be tighter? Would be trade-off vs. aligning with existing allee to JFK Park.
- Think signal might still be needed at Eliot/Bennett.
- Like loading zone created in front of Tweeter.
- Prefer "A" – like edge walkways at Brattle Island.
- Use outside edges of Brattle Island now, but "B" would be OK if was easy to pass through middle from all directions.
- Like idea of more trees at Eliot – feels desolate now.
- Signage/wayfinding needs to be part of overall plan – not random at Plaza locations only.
- Need to check slopes at Wordsworth and at Brattle Island – it's awkward at present.
- Like mini-plaza created at Charlie's Kitchen area. This area could be a lot livelier. Consider seating there.

Brattle Square / Eliot Square Wrap-Up and Next Steps – (Susanne Rasmussen)

There seems to be lots of support for Scheme "B". The design will be advanced on this alternative, and an additional look will be taken at bicycle parking, and at tightening the intersection to shorten the crosswalks.

Out-of-Town News / The Pit - Background – (Kathy Watkins)

- The Pit Report
 - An inter-jurisdictional group has been working on a report to the City Manager and City Council regarding a number of issues related to the “Pit” and the “Pit kids”. The report is not finalized but I would like to summarize the general sense of what is in it. This is not intended to be a full discussion about all of the social issues occurring in the Square, but rather a brief background on some of the issues.
 - The inter-jurisdictional group looked at the street youth in Harvard Square. Who are they and why do they choose to use the Pit. What draws street youth to Harvard Square? – public transportation hub, availability of medical / social services and the sense of community.
 - Report looks at whether the Pit kids pose a threat. Does the Pit create an unsafe environment for the pit kids, and other people that use the Pit? Overall Harvard Square, including the Pit, is a relatively safe place. The area is very visible, has a lot of foot traffic and is well patrolled by the Police.

- Architectural Design of The Pit
 - Should / can the Pit be filled in or closed?
 - Redesign of the Pit would be major undertaking. There are a number of complicated grading issues. Roger talked briefly about the fact that the Pit is the roof of the MBTA station. In addition to that it connects to Mass Ave, JFK, MBTA headhouse, sidewalk in front of Cambridge Savings Bank, Out of Town News, elevator, kiosk, etc. It has to meet all of those points. It is a very complicated grading plan.
 - People have talked about filling in the Pit. The reality is that the Pit is not artificially low. It is lower than Mass Ave, but it connects at grade (no steps) with the sidewalk in front of Cambridge Savings Bank. From there it steps down to the MBTA headhouse.

- Relation of Harvard Square Design Process to Pit Issues
 - The common sentiment shared by all of the people involved in the report (Police, social service providers, Community Development, DPW) is that if the pit kids are relocated, they would tend to gravitate towards less visible areas, which would be less safe for them and potentially others.
 - We are not recommending major changes to the Pit. We are showing improvements – bench, pay phones, bicycle and pedestrian circulation, etc, but not major changes to the area.
 - Through this design process, we have heard concerns about graffiti at the headhouse, condition of MBTA sign on the back of the headhouse, excessive number of payphones, gully at the headhouse bench, pedestrian congestion at the bank. And we have a number of design changes that address these concerns. The MBTA maintenance issues were communicated to the MBTA this morning at the City’s regular coordination meeting with MBTA staff.

Out-of-Town News / The Pit - Design Ideas – (Cynthia Smith)

- One of the problems of this area is pedestrian congestion due to constrained space. Worst examples are adjacent to the MBTA headhouse, where effective pedestrian width is as little as 8 feet next to the buildings. Another example is the sidewalk in front of Nini’s. Also, in front of Out-of-Town News.
- In addition to these fixed constraints, street furniture, such as newsboxes, act as additional obstacles.
- The Basic Improvements attempt to address these issues. The sidewalk in front of Out-of-Town would be widened to about 20 feet (roughly double what it is now). The sidewalk at Nini’s would also be widened, to about 22 feet.

- Additional space would also be created for pedestrians and bicycles to circulate at the north end of the Out-of-Town peninsula, near the existing sculpture.
- There might also be ways to subtly reconfigure some of the existing MBTA plaza areas. An example would be the possible addition of terraced seating on the sloping back of the MBTA headhouse. Structural changes like this would be subject to approval by the MBTA, who will be concerned about the structural and waterproofing integrity of their facilities.
- Street furniture will also be considered in detail, including the possible elimination of some of the many pay phones, consolidation of newsboxes, etc.

Out-of-Town News / The Pit Comments and Questions – (Committee)

(Note: City/Consultant team comments/responses are in italics)

- Consider better lighting of the “gully” between the headhouse and the adjacent commercial building. Maybe lights mounted on top of headhouse.
- Make sure trucks can still turn left at Curious George, with the proposed curb extension there.
- Leave place for police cruisers to park – they do so now at the head of JFK Street.
- Does Nini’s sidewalk widening impact people drop-off and pick-up activity?
- Can a police booth be added at front of Out-of-Town News?
- Will existing granite MBTA-era bollards be replicated at the new sidewalk edges? *(It is our expectation that the bollards would remain in the areas where they currently are located. We are not proposing to extend them to other areas in the Square.)*
- Ped signal phases will need to be coordinated for the Lehman Hall crosswalk – Super Crosswalk combination to work. Concerned since these vehicular approaches are planned to be alternating to alleviate merge problem.
- This area lacks a central focal point (easily ID’d meeting place, landmark, etc.) Can one be included in the design?
- Like the widened sidewalks, but concerned that not enough Kiss-and-Ride drop-off areas are provided in the Square. These need to be well-marked and enforced.
- Presently too much clutter here. Elimination of payphone is a good start. Can tourist kiosk be eliminated or combined with MBTA elevator structure?
- Kiosk is well-used and necessary. Don’t eliminate.
- OK to eliminate some clutter, but don’t sanitize.
- Design of bike move from JFK to Brattle needs to be resolved. Lots of operational concerns. Concern it won’t work, or it won’t be implemented because of objections from other modes.
- There is no place for traffic coming from Central Square to drop-off at Harvard Square. Can existing taxi stand be used for this?
- Pit Area is cluttered – yet barren. The brick pitched roof at the rear of the headhouse is an eyesore. Need integrated design.
- Newsboxes are litter traps and eyesores.
- Tourist booth lacks a sign. Consider directional signage on elevator, rather than advertising. *(One possibility to maintain MBTA revenue would be a business-sponsored map)*
- MBTA has been unresponsive on maintenance issues here. *(The City has regular meetings with the MBTA and can keep these issues on the agenda.)*
- Drugs are sold in The Pit – don’t agree that it’s a “low-crime” area.
- Can taxi stand be moved (Holyoke Street; Holyoke Center)?
- Want better understanding of MBTA jurisdiction/process.
- Wheelchair access difficult south of Out-of-Town, due to bollards, etc.
- Consider seating cantilevered from back of headhouse, with passageway beneath.
- Need more room to watch performances.

- How can we ensure that Out-of-Town News and Nini's don't spill onto the widened sidewalks?
- Is sidewalk widening possible right at former Tastee corner (JFK Street)?
- Can pit floor be sloped to eliminate one or two steps? Would improve accessibility/discourage loitering.
- Consider routing bikes around end of peninsula, rather than across as proposed.
- Are public toilets being considered? (*Public Health Dept. is presently looking at this issue Citywide. Expense is an issue, as is desirability of having advertising. The Wall system used in Boston requires free-standing ad panels in addition to ads on toilets. Also, in Harvard Square, the depth of the MBTA tunnels is an additional constraint on siting toilets.*)

Out-of-Town News / The Pit - Wrap-Up and Next Steps – (Susanne Rasmussen)

We will continue to advance the design of this area and consider the various ideas expressed tonight.

Lampoon Building Alternatives - (Jerry Friedman/Cynthia Smith)

- A number of comments were received about the section of Mt. Auburn Street near the Lampoon Building (where Bow Street diverges). There is an excessive amount of asphalt and few marked crosswalks. These conditions, combined with the high volume of pedestrian traffic between Harvard Yard and the River Houses, make this a disorganized area with lots of random pedestrian and vehicular movements.
- An initial idea that we had would have reduced the amount of pavement to the maximum extent feasible in a more or less straight-forward transportation-oriented approach. This alternative would have squared-off the intersection to address pedestrian crossing concerns. However, it creates a large plaza area in front of the dorms, and has significant grading issues. In addition, it is strongly opposed by the Historical Commission staff. The Lampoon building was located and designed because of the layout of Bow and Mt. Auburn Street. This alternative does not respect this significant historic and architectural context.
- So, in working together with the various City departments, the island alternative was developed which allows the context of the building to be maintained and addresses the pedestrian desire lines.
- The new island is not large enough to be a significant "park" space, nor would this necessarily be desirable at this location. Instead, it can serve as a framing element for the Lampoon building, through the use of low-level plantings, lighting, furniture, etc.
- The conversion of the existing angled parking to parallel parking reduces the number of parking spaces in the Holyoke-to-Linden block from 17 to 8 (lose 9 spaces). However, the net parking loss can be reduced to 3 spaces within the entire Holyoke-to-Plympton segment. This is achieved by converting some of the existing tour-bus parking on the south side of Mt. Auburn St. to public parking (add 4 spaces); and by taking advantage of the increased curb-length gained by the enlargement of the Lampoon island (add 2 spaces). In addition, as we are looking at various areas throughout the Square, we will continue to look at adding parking where it makes sense. For example, at the other locations we have discussed tonight, we are adding 3 parking spaces at Charlie's Kitchen and several loading spaces along Mt. Auburn Street between Eliot and JFK Street.

Lampoon Building Comments and Questions – (Committee)

(Note: City/Consultant team comments/responses are in italics)

- Would bench shown on small island encourage pick-ups and drop-offs?
- Consider raised planters that can double as seating.
- Like angled-parking – adds "small town" feel.
- The proposed alt. will change the feel of the area (although it is somewhat shabby now)

- Are two travel lanes needed on Mt. Auburn? *(Yes, this has been confirmed.)*
- Concerned about any loss of parking.
- Like alternative, preserve sightlines through use of low plantings.
- Consider Edwardian details (fence, etc.) to reflect Gold Coast architecture.
- Consider adding parking to the small island (Bow Street side). Make it a parking station – not a park.
- Consider low-scale lighting.
- Sidewalk on north side between Holyoke and Linden is very hot in the summer – is there room to widen sidewalk and add trees?
- Main pedestrian desire line is Lowell House to Linden Street. Can crossing to north side of driveway be added? *(Would need to be separate from driveway - more parking impacts)*
- Consider widening north side of small island to accommodate informal crossings to driveway.
- Is direct crossing to Lampoon possible from small island? *(No, this was looked at but does not work with the traffic coming from Linden to Mt. Auburn Street.)*
- Can visual node be added at end of Linden Street, other than a bench?
- Consider lighting that frames the Mt. Auburn/Bow divergence.
- Too many variables – want to see more alternatives.
- Concerned about illegal crossing from southwest Holyoke Place corner to Linden.
- Add curb extensions at east side of Linden/Bow.
- Is signal needed at Holyoke Place for crossing safety?
- Like angled parking – area is not broke so don't fix it.
- If island is not large enough, will it be a hazard?

Lampoon Building - Wrap-Up and Next Steps – (Susanne Rasmussen)

There is concern about parking and some of the design details, but overall support for the pedestrian improvements provided by the scheme. We will continue to develop this alternative.

4. PUBLIC COMMENT

- Ped flow in Lampoon area is diagonal – instead of 2 crosswalks at Linden, add crosswalks at Holyoke and Plympton.
- Don't enlarge Lampoon island – just add new island.
- Remove pay phones from Out-of-Town area – private developers are presently removing them from hotels.
- Bikes have difficulty on right side of Mass Ave approaching Out-of-Town from Central Square (buses, etc.), any way to get them to the left?
- Can peninsula at Out-of-Town be smaller rather than larger? Instead of enlarging curbed portion, protect an area with bollards for bikes and peds to pass through.
- Concerned about bus stop at Eliot Sq. conflicting with bike lane. Can bikes be on left?

5. NEXT STEPS (Susanne Rasmussen)

Because of conflicts with school vacation, the next Committee meeting will be on **February 13, 2003**. This meeting will focus on continuing the Brattle and Church discussions.

Subsequent meeting: March 20, 2003 – to discuss materials. April 17, 2003 is a tentative date for continued discussions, and May is tentative for the next Community Meeting.