

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

Subject: Harvard Square Design Committee (HSDC) – Meeting #9

Date, Time & Place: May 1, 2003, 6:30 PM – 8:30 PM
Cambridge Savings Bank

Present:

HSDC Members:

Sean Peirce	Nelson Goddard	Rohit Chopra
Susan Rogers	John DiGiovanni	Irene Goodman
Hugh Russell	Robert Banker	Mohsen Kurd

Public:

David Spiller	Chris Lutes	Peggy Kutcher
Mary Tonouger	Ernie Kerwin	Frank Duehay
Gursen Ergin	Kate Meyer	Don Himmelsbach
Brian Culver	Thomas Mikelson	Larry Brahman

City of Cambridge:

Susan Glazer (CDD)	Kathy Watkins (CDD)	Sue Clippinger (TP&T)
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*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*

1. WELCOME (Kathy Watkins)

- Kathy welcomed the attendees and reviewed the agenda for the evening. After a review of the upcoming Community Meeting, the focus of the meeting will be on Church Street.
- Upcoming Harvard Square Design Committee Meetings
 - ◆ May 15, 2003 – Community Meeting.
 - ◆ June 19, 2003 – Committee Meeting to discuss materials.

2. May 15, 2003 Community Meeting (Kathy Watkins)

- **MAY 15TH** 6:30 – 9:00 P.M.
- Have 2 posters for each committee member. Please help us get the word out to people. We will be doing a mailing, press release, posting it on our website, will be at Mayfair this weekend, etc. But word of mouth is probably the best advertisement.
- Staff people will facilitate the small breakout groups and committee members will **take notes and report back**. This seemed to work well last time.

- **Agenda**

- Welcome – Background on Design Project
- Project Schedule – finish design fall / winter 2003. Construction fall 2004.
- Update on Transportation Alternatives – Brattle Street, Church Street, Basic Improvements.
- Conceptual Plaza Designs – Lampoon Plaza, Wordsworth Triangle, Eliot Plaza.
- Breakout Groups – Get input from the public on all of the various elements of the project.
- Reporting Back

3. **Church Street (Kathy)**

The handout has 3 drawings – the committee's current recommendations (**Committee's Preferred**), a revised alternative based on meetings with the First Parish Church (**Revised Alternative**) and a new proposal from the Church (**Church's Proposal**). There has been a strong desire from the beginning of this project to substantially improve the pedestrian environment on Church Street. Sidewalks all along Church Street are narrow given the amount of pedestrian activity. The sidewalk between Mass and Palmer in front of the movie theater is the narrowest.

A good way to summarize the issues on Church Street is to think about the **5 desires on Church Street** – 2 travel lanes, 2 parking lanes and a wider sidewalk. We can pick any 4 of these, but not all 5. When we first discussed this, the proposal was to make Church Street 1-way in order to widen the sidewalks. The Committee was split on the 1-way proposal. Following the November community meeting, the Committee decided to keep Church Street 2-way and widen the sidewalks by removing parking. The Committee evaluated removing the parking the entire length of the street and also just between Mass and Palmer. The majority preference was for removing parking in just the 1 block and to focus on spot improvements for the remaining sidewalks. Spot improvements include tree grates, optimizing location of street furniture and improving the conditions of the sidewalks.

The first drawing is what the committee supported at the February 2003 meeting (**Committee's Preferred**). It removes parking in the 1 block section of Church Street. All of the parking is on the south side of the street because of the need to maintain the taxi / loading zone. At the February meeting, the First Parish Church expressed concerns about the loss of parking on the north side of Church Street. Since that meeting, I have met 3 or 4 times with representatives of the Church. The goal has been to develop an alternative plan that widens the sidewalk, maintains the loading / taxi zone and addresses their concerns about impacts to parking.

The second drawing is the **Revised Alternative**. It shifts the parking to the north side of the street after the loading / taxi zone. It provides 1 fewer parking spaces than the original alternatives and is a reasonable alternative that attempts to balance all of the various competing needs for space on Church Street.

The third drawing is a proposal from the First Parish Church (**Church's Proposal**). The goal of this design is to accommodate all of the uses on Church Street – 2 travel lanes and 2 parking lanes – and widen the sidewalk. The goal is admirable – to do everything and give up nothing. However, city staff and consultants have reviewed this alternative and do not support it as a viable alternative for 2 main reasons. First, it is keeping all of the existing uses of Church Street at the Mass Ave intersection and narrowing the street over 2'. This intersection provides loading for large vehicles and accommodates a lot of turning movements. This end of the street is slightly wider than the rest of the street, but this end also has more activity than the rest of the street. You do not stand at this intersection and think that there is excess roadway width. The second reason why we do not support this as a viable alternative is that it widens the sidewalk by less than 3'. This is not a significant improvement. If we are going to widen the sidewalk it should provide a noticeable and substantial improvement for

pedestrians. The goal has been to make a substantial improvement to the pedestrian environment. Widening the sidewalk to 8' is better than today, but is not a significant improvement. The sidewalk at Johnson Gate, which feels narrow and we receive frequent complaints about, is 10' wide.

In summary, there are 5 desires – 2 travel lanes, 2 parking lanes and wider sidewalks. We can pick any 4. At the beginning of this project we spoke about all of the competing interest for space in the Square. It is what makes Harvard Square such a great place. There is all of this different activity going on. But it is also what makes it so challenging to make these types of improvements. There is just not enough space for everything to happen.

4. Committee Discussion

- Can we narrow the sidewalk on the Church side? This would allow the south side sidewalk to be widened without narrowing the roadway.
- It is important that we provide real change on the sidewalk. The Revised Alternative is a good compromise.
- Church's Proposal is fair and makes sense. Gain loading at the Church, lose a couple of feet of sidewalk on south side.
- Revised Alternative meets the Church's goals. Most of the pedestrian traffic is on the theater side. The painted bumpouts and loading zone will provide de facto loading.
- Don't want to lose these important improvements. Make the first 1 or 2 parking spaces into drop off zone and the Revised Alternative works.
- It is important to provide improvements on the theater side. More people prefer to walk there.
- Prefer Committee's Preferred alternative. We should not lose more parking than is necessary and parking should all be on the south side of the street.
- Church Street has been at the top of the pedestrian committee's concerns. The original focus was on improving the entire length of Church Street. I do not support Church's Alternative. We have already compromised a lot. It would be better to have all of the parking on the south side of the street (Committee' Preferred) but support Revised Alternative as a compromise.
- Parking would be better all on the south side of the street, but that is difficult for the Church. Make the transitions out of cobble stones. I am in favor of giving up parking spaces to provide a loading / drop off zone.
- Provide loading zones at meters in the morning (7-10 a.m.) like JFK Street.
- The widening of the sidewalk on the south side is not solely for the benefit of the theater, but rather for making the pedestrian walkway friendlier. I prefer Committee's Preferred Alternative, but would support the Alternative Plan as I believe this will accommodate various needs.

5. Community Comments

- There is a myth about the pedestrian traffic on Church Street. Do not assume that the heavy pedestrian traffic is on the south side of the street. Shorten the time on the meters so that more people have an opportunity to park. Need to provide handicap drop off zones, where handicap people can get in and out of cars. For fairness, the clergy spots should be eliminated.
- Drop off spots do not need to be specially set aside for use by people with handicaps. They should be available to everyone.
- Appreciate work that the committee is doing. I remember when the entrance of the theater was on Mass Ave. There was no hearing to have it moved. Inspectional Services just approved it. It never should have been moved. It has created a fire safety situation. The problem is cramping the activities of the Church for the benefit of the theater. The Church does not deserved to be pushed away. Church activities are different than commercial activities. I am not sure that I know what the answers are.
- The entrance to the theater use to be in the lobby of our building on Mass Ave. It has been over 30 years since the two buildings were in common ownership.

- The First Parish Church is making a meeting house for the Square. We truly want to be a focal point of community activity. Continues to be increased usage of the church.
- Church Street should be made 1-way to widen the sidewalks.
- I am with Cambridge 1 on the north side of the street. It is important to have more loading zones. There are many deliveries that happen on Church Street. The morning loading zone is a great idea. Prefer Revised Alternative, but should consider 1-way traffic on Church Street.
- Rather than make a decision here tonight, why not set up a sub-meeting with Church Street abutters? *(Tonight's "decision" is a recommendation that will be presented at the May 15th meeting for further input from the broader community. The comments from the community meeting will affect the final design of Church Street. In regards to setting up a separate process, we have a responsibility to respect this process. The Harvard Square Design Committee was appointed by the City Manager to oversee the development of the Harvard Square Design. Setting up additional side processes is not in the spirit of this process. Discussions need to occur within the larger framework of the project. All of the interests represented on this committee need to be considered – pedestrians, cyclists, businesses, residents, historical, etc.)*

6. Committee Decision

- Committee's Preferred
- Committee's Preferred
- Revised Alternative

7. Wrap Up (Kathy Watkins)

The Revised Alternative will be presented at the May 15th community meeting as the committee's recommendation. There will be an opportunity at the meeting for the public to give input on all of the elements of the project.