

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

Subject: Harvard Square Design Committee (HSDC) – Meeting #11

Date, Time & Place: September 18, 2003, 6.30 PM – 8.15 PM
Cambridge Saving Bank

Present:

HSDC Members:

Alex Sagan
Sean Peirce
Susan Rogers
Mary Parkin
Doug Berman

Bill Bibbins
Nelson Goddard
John DiGiovanni
Robert Banker
Nelson Goddard

Nathalie Beauvais
Rohit Chopra
Irene Goodman

Public:

Mike Hansen
Jonathan Miller

Marilyn Wellons
David Spiller

George Kelso

City of Cambridge:

Susan Glazer (CDD)
Susanne Rasmussen (CDD)
Kathy Watkins (CDD)
Cara Seiderman (CDD)

Lisa Peterson (DPW)
Owen O'Riordan (DPW)
George Fernandes (CED)
Jeff Parenti (TP&T)

Sarah Burks (CHC)
Haftor Yngvason (CAC)
Michael Muehe (CPD)

CAC = Cambridge Arts Council

CED = Cambridge Electrical Department

CDD = Community Development Department

CHC = Cambridge Historical Commission

CPD = Commission for Persons with Disabilities

DPW = Department of Public Works

TP&T = Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department

Consultant Team:

Adam Kibbe (Ripman Lighting Consultants)

Pranisa Boonkham (Halvorson Design Partnership)

1. **Welcome (Susanne Rasmussen)**

Susanne welcomed the attendees and reviewed the agenda for the evening, which will include a discussion of the walking tours, presentation by public artist Jody Pinto and a presentation of the lighting toolbox.

Susanne reviewed the status of the Brattle / Mason / Ash intersection improvements. The design of the improvements has been finalized and approved by the Historical Commission. Construction is scheduled to begin in the fall of 2003 or spring of 2004.

Susanne reviewed the status of the request by the First Parish Church to revisit the design of Church Street. As requested by the Church, the Committee was sent a package of background information regarding the design of Church Street including the petition that was submitted. Committee members were polled to determine if the Committee would like to revisit the design of Church Street. The majority of Committee members did not support revisiting the design of Church Street as a compromise solution had already been reached.

2. **Walking Tour (Kathy Watkins)**

Kathy reviewed the two walking tours that have taken place – August 21st and before tonight's meeting. The tours focused on different sidewalk materials in the Square (wire-cut brick, molded brick, concrete, and asphalt) and their affect on the comfort of pedestrians who use wheelchairs. Committee members and staff were able to use wheelchairs to experience the various materials.

(Michael Muehe, Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities)

- ?? Most people on the Committee have traveled on different materials using a wheelchair in order to experience the effect of vibrations.
- ?? It is important to understand that many people who use wheelchairs have neurological disabilities which affect muscles and spinal cord. Long term exposure to vibrations can lead to muscle fatigue and back pain.
- ?? Neurological disabilities often involve dysfunction of the bladder. Vibrations can be particularly problematic, causing the need to go to bathroom every time they travel through a sidewalk with vibrations.

(Kathy Watkins)

Kathy reviewed the key issues discussed at the joint meeting with the Disabilities Commission and Pedestrian Committee that was held on September 11th.

- ?? Sidewalk materials are particularly important on narrow sidewalks, where there is limited width that prevents someone in a wheelchair from being able to go around a defect in the sidewalk.
- ?? Concerns were raised about the granite strip – slipperiness and amount of sidewalk space that it takes up.

Comments:

- ?? Agree about granite strips. Encourage design team to look at small details like this.
- ?? Did not feel differences between wire-cut brick and asphalt. They were all bumpy. Some new asphalt is better, while old asphalt (i.e. at Charles Hotel) could be as bad as brick.
- ?? Should not be too traditional since most people cannot even tell the difference between wire-cut and old bricks. Should try to balance if new materials are functionally better.
- ?? Paying attention to the details during construction is also important.
- ?? Trees are another factor that cause problems for sidewalks.
- ?? Both brick and concrete need maintenance. Should pick materials that are appropriate with the character of Harvard Square and then focus on the maintenance issues.
- ?? Interested to see each material when covered by ice. This is also a very important consideration.
- ?? Hope to see some materials like wire-cut brick that still give the character of Harvard Square and create less vibration. However, it needs to be installed properly and well maintained. Should consider spending the budget on good installation and maintenance.
- ?? Some utility pipes stick up and obstruct sidewalks. The city needs to make sure that public sidewalks are clear.
- ?? Very interesting experience about slope & cross slope, which have major affects on wheelchair users. The slope of the sidewalk can direct you in directions you do not want to go (i.e. street). Walkers do not experience this problem.

It was decided that the materials plans would be revised to reflect the Committee's comments. The revised plan will be reviewed at the next committee meeting.

3. Palmer Street and Jody Pinto, Artist

Kathy Watkins

Kathy reviewed the connection between the Harvard Square Design project and the 1% for Art Program. The intent is to have the artist involved in the overall design of Palmer Street. She will be member of the design team. The result will not be a stand alone piece of art, but rather an integral part of the street design.

Hafthor Hyngvason, Cambridge Art Council

Hafthor discussed the artist selection process and gave a brief introduction to Jody Pinto's background and experience. The Arts Council worked with a subcommittee of the Harvard Square Design Committee, city staff and consultants to select Jody Pinto as the public artist for the Harvard Square project.

Jody is an internationally known artist who has works through out the country and in Japan. She came to the area in July to talk with the design team and Historic Commission, as well as spend time in the area with residents and to collect information. The slides she is presenting today are of her works from different places, such as California and Japan. This is just to show the "approach" of her design, but at this point it is still too soon to have a proposal for Palmer Street.

Jody Pinto, Artist

Jody described her approach to public art and gave a slide presentation of some of her work.

- ?? There are 3 elements that create "Public Art"
 - o *Connection* is the essence
 - o *Collaboration* is the mechanism
 - o *Public Interaction* will make it come to life
- ?? City always has street life. No matter whether big or small streets, they are like "*drama*".
- ?? Public Art is "*site specific*". We deal and work with what we find in a specific location. The works shown in the slides are from very different places. They are showing the ideas and how an artist thinks about a situation.

Summary from slides:

- ?? *Lighting*: Using both sunlight and artificial light. Focus on the effects of lighting on different materials.
- ?? Think about the art and how it is experienced both in the day and at night
- ?? Public (users) interaction is very important. The art should respond to their nature and activities.
- ?? Budget and maintenance are also considerations.
- ?? Look at small details, such as different materials (i.e. to reduce cost use different color sand to create stripe paving – *Promenade in Santa Monica*)
- ?? Take every day life & activities and make them "*a surprise*" (i.e. *San Antonio Convention Center*, service bridge in the lobby; *Public toilets on Santa Monica beach*, with colorful fiberglass roof)

Some ideas about Palmer Street

Palmer Street is an extraordinary street in the city. It is like a "hyphen" between Church and Brattle (traditional streets). But it is more on the back side and now quite lifeless. However, there is tremendous potential for Palmer Street to bring the entire community together and to bring "new life" to the Square.

Questions & Comments:

- ?? 50 years ago, Palmer was a very exciting street. There were smaller buildings on both sides with many shops and small businesses. It really had sidewalk life.
Response: (Jody) That is like being a "theater street". And it could happen again.
- ?? There are also other places and some amenities in Harvard Square (i.e. Winthrop Street, bus-stop at Eliot St., way-finding maps and signs). These could get some ideas too. Is Jody limited to Palmer Street?

Answer: Jody will be focusing only on Palmer Street. With the budget we have, Palmer Street is a good site, since it is limited enough to make a significant impact with the budget we have. It also has great potential to be a really exciting project. We will be looking at other parts of the Square, but not as part of Jody's effort.

- ?? As Palmer is the 'connecting street', it is interesting to see what the affect could be on Church and Brattle Street.
- ?? Some materials shown in the slides (i.e. concrete with different color aggregate) could be explored as alternative materials used for Harvard Square.
- ?? Palmer Street could inspire both public and private owners to consider bringing art to the Square as well.

4. **Lighting**

(Susanne) With the money we have, we are not going to change lighting for the entire Square. However, we still want to develop a long-term master plan, which needs input from the committee and public.

(Adam Kibbe - Ripman Lighting Consultants) This is an introduction about lighting that will help everyone understand all the lighting types currently used in the Square.

Intent of Lighting Study

- ?? **Improve Image:** Harvard Square has such a unique character. Improvement of the lighting can help enhancing the image of the Square. Lighting is not only used for safety, but also to create beauty for that place. However this does not mean we are lighting up everything. The light trespass and light pollution (sky glow) are also issues that need to be considered.
- ?? **Maintain Simplicity:** Look for something simple that can reinforce image of the Square. This simplicity will also help navigate people when they are traveling in the Square. Choose easily maintainable fixtures. Saving energy is another issue that needs to be addressed and discussed.

Guiding Considerations

Use the fixture types already in use to keep the unique character of the Square. However, this place has such a rich environment that it cannot be only one type of light (i.e. acorn everywhere). In order to keep the variation and different zones in the Square, we need at least 2-3 types of light fixtures.

Fixture Types

There are 2 fundamental types of light fixture. They have different characteristics, not better or worse, and both work well in the Square.

- ?? **Acorn:** 16' decorative pole with bright globe, light goes out everywhere, light source can be seen from above ground. The up lighting can be mitigated with internal louvers --- take 20% of lost light back to ground. Acorns also come in a double fixture known as the double acorn, which provides twice as much light, is visually strong, and can be distracting.
- ?? **Cobrahead:** lamp is inside a housing (or box) and cannot be seen from above the ground. Full cutoff, none of the light goes straight up to the sky, not glary from distance, but hard to look at from below.

Lighting types (for street lighting)

- ?? **High Pressure Sodium:** Orange color, friendly on brick, very popular for streetlight as it lasts long and is inexpensive. Most cobrahead lights are this type
- ?? **Metal Halide:** White/blue color, shows more colors (i.e. for clothes, signage, cars, etc), does not last as long and costs more for maintenance. This is used in some of the acorns.

Scale

- ?? The acorns are shorter than the cobras. If we want to replace cobraheads with acorns, we well need a lot more poles in order to give a similar amount of light.
- ?? Size of the fixture base is also important. Although the cobrahead is a tall fixture, the concrete base is only 10" wide, while an acorn, as it is designed, has an 18" base. This needs to be considered since it has a significant impact on sidewalk width. This is particularly important on streets with narrow sidewalks like Plympton Street.

Other concerns

- ?? Light fixtures mounted on building walls where the sidewalk width is too narrow. This would require a lot of coordination between the city and building owners. It is the issue of liability as we cannot guarantee that private owners will keep operating these lights all the time. However, there is still a possibility, e.g. with Harvard buildings (i.e. some of the ladder streets along Mt. Auburn).
- ?? Adam reviewed the existing conditions plan of lighting in Harvard Square. This plan shows different light fixtures used in throughout the Square. For example, Mass Ave. has a lot of double acorns along both sides. Single acorns are also used in the Square.
- ?? Although the budget we have is definitely not enough to change every light in Harvard Square, it is important that the changes will make sense with the context of the entire Square.

Questions & Comments:

- ?? Concern about dark sky issue and energy saving.
- ?? What is the scope of work for lighting? Is the City creating this master plan for future change?
(Susanne) Based on the financial resource, we cannot afford to change lighting for the entire project area. The master plan will help decide where the money should be spent. (Adam) Economically, it is not feasible to change lighting independently of roadway and sidewalk work. Every light pole has an underground base and electrical conduits, which means the road and sidewalks have to be reconstructed for lighting installation. Thus, only where we are doing major infrastructure mitigation on roadways, would we do lighting improvements.
- ?? Land use and zoning are important when choosing lighting type. Re: safety issue, for example in a non-retail zone where it is not so crowded, streetlights should help provide face recognition.
Answer: Both of these lights (acorn and cobrahead) are not very good with face recognition. They are actually too tall for pedestrian scale, especially cobrahead. An option would be to make them even shorter (as done in Central Square). Also need to consider the issue of street trees in which the light can get lost. Most people also look at cobraheads as roadway lights and feel like it should not be in Harvard Square. In fact, it is the matter of scale and height that make it a 'roadway light'. But functionally, it works well and is used everywhere as pedestrian light. We should not characterize it, but rather focus on what it does and if it fits in each zone.
- ?? Is there a chance to look at other types of light poles other than the existing ones?
Answer: Yes. As long as we look at an appropriate range of sizes, some practical maintenance issues, and historic considerations, we can explore other types that function the same way as those existing fixtures. In order for the City to properly maintain the lights over time, we cannot have too many different types of lights in the city. Each light requires spare poles, bases, fixtures, bulbs, etc.
- ?? Should also look at traffic lights (looks, styles, color, etc.)
- ?? Scale and height of poles give different feeling and styles. They really emphasize different zones. (i.e. Mass Ave. with double acorn vs. Church Street with cobrahead).

Public Comments:

Some clarification from **Mike Hansen** (Member of New England Light Pollution Advisory Group and International Dark Sky Associations)

- ?? **Dark sky:** means good lighting design with appropriate light levels, thereby reducing glare, increasing security, reducing uplighting, and reducing wasted energy. "More light" is not necessarily better.
- ?? **Cobrahead:** We are lucky that most cobraheads in Harvard Square are full cutoff, but there are other kinds that are not like this and they are being used on some parts of Mass Ave.
- ?? It is possible to get an acorn with the lamp mounted in the housing on top. This will become full cutoff.
- ?? Using louvers for acorns will make a huge difference.
- ?? For visibility of faces, sideways lighting is better than down lighting especially for crosswalks.
- ?? In some places, streetlight is reduced to half brightness after 2 am. That would help save energy as well as money.