

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

Subject: Harvard Square Design Committee (HSDC) – Meeting 13

Date, Time & Place: December 18, 2003, 6:30 PM – 8:30 PM
Cambridge Savings Bank

HSDC Members:

Mohsen Kurd	Susan Rogers	Jinny Nathans
Irene Goodman	Nathalie Beauvais	Hugh Russell
Sean Peirce	Doug Berman	Nelson Goddard

Public:

George Kelso	Karen Carmean	David Peterson
Mike Hansen	Doane Perry	Ian Simmons
Peggy Kutcher	Flora Hollinger	

City of Cambridge:

Susanne Rasmussen (CDD)	Susan Glazer (CDD)
Kathy Watkins (CDD)	Sarah Burks (CHC)

*CDD = Community Development
Department*

*CPD = Commission for Persons
with Disabilities*

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

*CHC = Cambridge Historical
Commission*

Consultant Team:

Jerry Friedman (TAMS Consultants, Inc.)
Cynthia Smith (Halvorson Design Partnership)

1. WELCOME and UPDATE (Susanne Rasmussen)

Susanne welcomed the attendees and reviewed the agenda for the evening, which will include the following:

- Materials Plan
- Newspaper Boxes
- Street Furniture
- Planting Plan

Upcoming Meetings:

- January 15th meeting will be the beginning of prioritization. It is a very important part of this effort. We are developing plans for a large area. It is critical to decide which improvements progress into final design over the spring / summer. Anticipate that this will be discussed in January and continue into February.

- The February 19th regular meeting falls within school vacation week. We could meet February 12 (conflicts with Disability Commission) or February 26 (conflicts with Pedestrian Committee). Kathy will send around a sign up sheet for your preference. She will also call the remaining committee members.

Updates:

- Jody Pinto: Jody was in town on December 10 and 11. She met with a group of committee members, Harvard representatives, a group of businesses, Harvard Square Defense Fund (HSDF), city staff and consultants. People were very positive about her presentation.
- She is planning on coming back to town in February and April. She has been commissioned by the Harvard Office for the Arts as an artist in residence. She will be meeting informally with students over dinner, doing a site visit with students and then a formal community presentation about her work as a public artist, Palmer Street and her approach to her work. We will invite all committee members to the public presentation.
- Her conceptual plans involved banners, using the Coop bridge as a positive element, through lighting and possible projection of visuals. She will focus on bringing light into the street.
- Comments from Committee members who attended the presentations:
 - Very positive response. The HSDF meeting went very well.
 - Maintenance may be an issue with some of the concepts, such as the projections.
 - Feeling was that her general concept would be the same even if more funding were available, so her designs will be a matter of degree.
 - Particularly liked the lighting ideas.
 - Some concern that concepts are too night-oriented – what about the daytime?
 - Consider an effort to link the end of Palmer Street with DeGuglielmo Plaza somehow.

2. MATERIALS PLAN (Kathy Watkins)

- The materials plan was previously discussed at the June 19th and November 20th meetings.
- At the last meeting there were mostly favorable reviews on crosswalk treatments, the wire-cut brick areas, and the concept of the Reduced Vibration Zone (RVZ).
- People were positive about the north / south connections which were provided, but there was interest in exploring further east – west connections. Specific ideas included extending the RVZ eastward on Mass Ave, and/or providing additional wire cut brick on east – west connections such as Mt. Auburn Street.
- We took a closer look at the overall plan, and would like to review our approach:
 - Mount Auburn Street: The sidewalk is generally too narrow for a RVZ. It is also the historic Gold Coast area, where it is important to keep older materials such as molded brick, which match better with the brick buildings. So this section remains as molded brick, which is an accessible material.
 - Ladder streets – Linden and Plympton: This is part of the “Gold Coast” and also the original grid street network for Harvard Square. We therefore wanted to maintain historic materials. In order to improve pedestrian conditions on Plympton and Linden, we are focussing on lighting locations, reducing or eliminating parking meters, etc. to improve sidewalk conditions.

- Ladder Streets – Dunster: In terms of providing north south connections on the ladder streets, Dunster is the most commercial street and also is the least steep street. We therefore propose to add an RVZ on the east side of the street.
- The remaining ladder street sidewalks would remain molded brick.
- Mass Ave: We evaluated Mass Ave between Church and Garden Streets. This is one of the most historic areas in the City (adjacent to the burial ground, etc.) so we felt it was important to keep older materials (i.e.molded brick). We also evaluated the Mass. Ave. east – west connection, and extended the RVZ from Holyoke Street to Plympton Street. At Plympton Street a concrete sidewalk begins, so this would form a logical connection eastward.
- Curb extensions at JFK / Mt. Auburn: We have changed these so that all four corners will follow the Mt. Auburn pattern (i.e. molded brick) for consistency.

3. COMMITTEE DISCUSSION OF MATERIALS PLAN (Committee)

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

We would like for this to be the final discussion about materials. This is the third full discussion about materials – in addition to the 2 walking tours held during the summer. City staff from CDD, Historical, and Disabilities Commission have met extensively to work out these changes. We have what we believe to be a good plan that attempts to take into account all of the various interests.

- Wire-cut brick seems so much better for accessibility – is there really that much of an aesthetic difference from molded?
There is significant difference from historic point-of-view, especially in areas that haven't changed much over the years, such as Gold Coast and Harvard Yard.
- Compromise seems reasonable, but like wire-cut wherever possible.
One positive outgrowth of this process, is that the City will adopt wire-cut brick as the City-wide standard.
- The compromises are too evident in the final plan. Differences in materials will show everywhere – especially where concrete RVZ is surrounded by molded brick. Not good aesthetically, and hard to believe it satisfies historic goals either. If wire-cut brick is to be used everywhere else in City, than it is evident that Harvard Square will be less accessible. Suggest using wire-cut and install it well to reduce vibration. Aesthetics would benefit.
- Will molded brick adjacent to RVZ mix-up the maintenance? Doesn't seem to make sense systematically.
- Don't think it will look good, but can't see how to avoid it. Dawes Island is not a good example of a de-facto RVZ, since the large brick island changes the impact.
- Compromise (molded with RVZ) is bad way to go. Use wire-cut everywhere unless high historic importance.
- There are 2 ways to compromise: Have a little bit of everything; or have the best solution for any particular area.

4. NEWSPAPER BOXES (Kathy Watkins)

General Intro to Street Furniture Issues: With all of the discussions tonight – whether on newspaper boxes, street furniture, or plantings, and also with the continuing discussions on lighting – the goal is to create a framework. We want to develop “standards”, typical details, etc.

We are not looking to determine detailed locations for the various elements. That is much more appropriate to do when we have defined the areas where we are moving forward with final design, and have a detailed survey. So for instance when we discuss benches. We want to talk about the type of bench, but not the locations. Locations are very site specific and require detailed survey in order to do appropriately.

Newspaper Boxes: The City has a newsrack ordinance and DPW oversees its implementation. Three years ago there were 1,300 newspaper boxes in City. When DPW hired a full-time staff member to enforce the regulations, he began by removing unauthorized and abandoned boxes, leading to an immediate reduction in the number of boxes. The City also began enforcing fees (\$200 per year application and \$10 per box per year) and strict requirements for locations, which led to another round of reductions. There are now 705 boxes in the City, representing 23 individual publications.

The City tries to stay very much on top of this issue. For example, the publication Editorial Humor has gone out of business. We are the only City that has removed their boxes. If you go to Boston, Somerville, Arlington, you will still see their boxes. Another example is the age and condition of the boxes. The Cambridge Chronicle and Tab boxes are all brand new, replacing old boxes which had been out there for years. At first the Tab didn't replace their boxes when they were required to do so, so DPW removed them all. The Tab then replaced all their boxes. As you can see, enforcement of the ordinance requires quite a bit of negotiating and handholding with the publishers.

Options for Harvard Square:

- Status Quo: Continue same approach as today, i.e. keep things orderly, and make sure that the boxes are not abandoned, etc.
- Corrals: Examples from Washington, DC. Publishers are generally o.k. with it. They get to maintain their individual boxes. It can be positive for the public space – the boxes don't move as the corral very clearly defines where they are suppose to be.
- Condos: We have limited ability under our ordinance to implement condos (examples from Lexington, MA) and there are First Amendment and Freedom of Speech issues. Additional issues include:
 - The free publications want a level playing field with the paid publications, so need to ensure enough space for all and work out fair fee structure.
 - Modular units often include advertising. Publications don't want competing and contrary advertising on boxes that are associated with them.
 - City would likely need to maintain units (graffiti, coin mechanisms, etc)
 - Expansion potential: If we do not have space for a new publication, we greatly increase our risk of lawsuit.

In summary, if we are to consider condos it needs to be a in a very defensible area, such as an historic district or other location where we highly value the aesthetic benefits; or in an area of high pedestrian volumes where sidewalk space is limited.

5. STREET FURNITURE (Cynthia Smith)

As Kathy mentioned, the City has a number of standard elements, such as benches and trash receptacles, which makes it easier to stock and maintain these items

- Standard Benches: Harvard Square has a number of the city standard metal ribbon benches. There are also a number of wood and iron benches, which were originally installed as part of the Red Line extension, and were recently replaced.
- Custom Seating: In special areas, such as Quincy Square, custom seating has been used. Quincy Sq. started with wood benches, but maintenance issues and concerns about people gathering led to a change to individual metal chairs. Winthrop Park also has custom wood benches, which the abutting businesses help maintain.
- Proposed Seating: We want to work with the existing standard vocabulary as much as possible (i.e. City standard, or Red Line type). There would still be the possibility of custom design at special areas (such as the reconfigured Lampoon Plaza) where new furniture could be developed as part of the detailed design.
- Standard Trash Receptacles: The City standard is black metal ribbon type. The City is moving towards providing a dome top to limit the amount of household rubbish deposited. There is also a side door which allows the barrel to be removed easier and the interior of the barrel can then be steam cleaned and fallen trash can be removed.
- Recycling Bins: These are a variation on the City standard, with a design developed by the Arts Council.

Q. What about bicycle parking?

A. This tends to be a more site-specific issue. The City standard is the post-and-ring. When there are special conditions, are the need to accommodate a large number of bikes in one place, a special design can be introduced.

Q. What about bus shelters?

A. We will continue to look at this. Many areas have limited sidewalk space making shelters impractical. The Eliot Plaza plan does call for a bus shelter at this heavily used bus stop.

6. PLANTING PLAN AND DETAILS (Cynthia Smith)

The Square gets a lot of its overall character from the large open spaces at its edges (i.e. from Harvard Yard, Cambridge, the Charles River Reservation, etc). Within the Square itself, the most vibrant and healthy plantings are generally concentrated at the Plazas and larger open-spaces. Trees with large root-zone areas tend to do best. There are also certain specific species which are more tolerant of urban conditions than others (example – honey locust). There are a number of different planting conditions in the Square today (see attached), including:

- At-grade without tree grate: An example would be Church Street. The tree pit, however, can become a trip hazard, and the trees do not tend to do that well due to soil compaction, lack of air and water, the small size of the pits, dogs, etc.
- Tree Grates: On narrow sidewalks tree grates can help with accessibility. However, the grates can become a trip-hazard themselves as they become impacted and dislocated by tree roots. The City has temporarily removed a number of them, and plans to reinstall them. Some trees do well in grates (Dunster Street, for example).
- Raised Planters: Raising planting areas even 6-inches can provide a great benefit. In Brattle Square, for example, trees in raised planters are doing well even with the underground subway tunnel in close proximity below. Raised planters can also double as

seating, such as at the circular planters in front of the Coop. Raised planters provide more soil for trees, the roots do not get trampled by pedestrians, etc. However there are limited areas where we have the space to do this type of treatment.

- Trees on Private Space (in lawn areas): As mentioned previously, these trees have a significant positive impact on the public spaces in Harvard Square. They have additional area to grow in because they are generally not boxed into a 4' by 4' tree pit. In some locations that is much more appropriate than taking up limited sidewalk space with public plantings.

Overall Approach. It is not possible without detailed survey to define such specifics as species of trees and locations. That will depend on planting conditions, sidewalk width, utility conflicts, etc. What we are trying to develop at this level of planning is an overall framework, including standards of plantings, that can be used in final design stage.

We feel that quality - not quantity - of planting should be emphasized. Rather than trying to squeeze in trees everywhere, we want to provide good growing environment for trees and other plantings. This would include providing irrigation to planting areas where feasible. It's not great to provide a lot of street trees that can't thrive.

5. COMMITTEE DISCUSSION (Committee)

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

Newspaper Boxes

- Condos are awful looking. Might be better if painted black. *Condos in Harvard Square would be black.*
- Corrals might be tough for all publications to fit in.
- Like the status quo – seems to be working.
- Like the visual variety which exists today.
- Individual boxes are easier for owners to maintain. With condos, City must maintain so there might be a lack of accountability.
- Condos look too regimented.
- Recommend raising fees. Should be high enough to pay for enforcement, but low enough to allow for the free publications.
- Keep spending money on enforcement.
- Fees should be indexed yearly to cost of enforcement, etc.
- Consider condo boxes for Holyoke Center – 20 boxes exist there at present.
- Set fees in Harvard Square higher (based on more desirable location).
- Corrals don't add anything – they are over-designed. Prefer existing system.
- Like condo idea (if black) – too visually cluttered with all the different boxes.
- What are some of the limitations placed on locations?

Ordinance is very specific about where newspaper boxes can be located. For example:

- *18" – 24" from curb and must face the sidewalk.*
- *Not within 5' of any marked or unmarked crosswalk or handicap ramp.*
- *Not within 5' of any fire hydrant, fire call box, mail box, telephone booth, curb return of a driveway, traffic control signal or traffic sign or bicycle rack.*
- *Not within 5' ahead or 15' to the rear of bus stop, taxi stand, HP space, unless approved. Cannot abut a public school.*

Street Furniture

- Like the black metal benches. Standardization is important for most areas, then can punctuate with custom designs at special areas.
- Wood benches are OK since many of them are new, but would replace with metal as they wear out.
- Trash receptacles need better maintenance. The dome tops often disappear.
- Is security an issue with the dome tops?
- Benches and trash receptacles work together as a family. Too many types of furniture creates visual noise.
- Like the current metal standards. Visually calming.
- Find more locations for trash receptacles. (example – Mt. Auburn)
- Don't like dome lids – they are not cleaned.
- Prefer benches to chairs.
- Like the wood benches, but don't mind idea of a single standard.

Plantings

- Trees should be the highest priority. Need to search out places, and make places (curb extensions, etc.) Inman Square is a good example, also Dunster Street.
- Rather see fewer trees, but with better infrastructure such as more soil and irrigation.
- Agree fewer – but better maintained – trees is desirable.
- Provide more trees where they are presently doing well.
- Need irrigation
- Put more trees in wide areas (example Eliot/Bennett, Lampoon Plaza)
- Like raised planters – gives ability to sit under the tree in the shade.
The large mulched areas in raised planters can be seen as a visual blight, but with irrigation there could be understory plantings or flowers added.

5A. WRAP-UP (Susanne)

Sense of Committee seems to be as follows:

- Newspaper boxes: Condos have issues, but may be worth looking at in a few specific locations. Otherwise, status quo seems to be preferred. City should investigate the fee structure, both in terms of indexing to inflation, and indexing to “value” of the particular location. However, should still be inclusive of free publications.
- Street furniture: City-standard black ribbon metal furniture is acceptable.
- Plantings: Support for tree plantings in Harvard Square, but agree that the emphasis should be on quality and maintenance of the plantings, not just the quantity.

6. PUBLIC COMMENT

Materials

- Support RVZ versus wire-cut. Like the way the plan has developed.
- RVZ gives accessibility to the greatest number of people.
- Adaptive Environments has developed presentation on pedestrian design issues – City should review it.
- Plan compromises on some historic issues (newsboxes, etc) but not others (molded brick and accessible sidewalk treatments).
- Other cities (Oakland, Madison) have found ways to be more open-minded on accessibility issues.

Newspaper Boxes, Street Furniture and Plantings

- Provide some backless benches, so people have choice of facing street or retail.
- Are tree grates possible for narrow rectangular pits?
Yes. This is what we are proposing on Church Street, for example. They also need to be ADA compliant.
- Trees seem to be a very specific issue, rather than Master Plan.
- Condo boxes send wrong message – uniqueness is important to the Square. Prefer status quo over condo boxes or corrals.
- Like variety of seating types. Some people like backs, for example, but not everyone. Same with arm-rests.
- Some cities incorporate art into the tree-grate design.
- Provide space at each end of seats so that someone in wheelchair can pull-up even.

7. WRAP-UP AND NEXT STEPS (Susanne Rasmussen)

The next Committee meeting will be on January 15 when we will begin the prioritization process.

We are also trying to schedule a February meeting around school vacation, and will have an open-house following the prioritization process.