

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

Subject: Harvard Square Design Committee (HSDC) – Meeting #14

Date, Time & Place: January 15, 2004, 6:30 PM – 8:30 PM
Cambridge Savings Bank

Present:

HSDC Members:

Mohsen Kurd
Irene Goodman
Sean Peirce

Susan Rogers
Hugh Russell
Nelson Goddard

John DiGiovanni
Rohit Chopra
Robert Banker

City of Cambridge

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

Roger Boothe (CDD)
Charles Sullivan (CHC)
Sarah Burks (CHC)

Carolyn Thompson (CPD)
Owen O’Riordan (DPW)
Jeff Parenti (TP&T)

*CDD = Community Development
Department*

DPW = Department of Public Works

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

*CHC = Cambridge Historical
Commission*

*CPD = Cambridge Commission for
Persons with Disabilities*

Consultant Team:

Jerry Friedman (Earth Tech)

1. WELCOME and UPDATE (Kathy Watkins)

Kathy welcomed the attendees and reviewed the agenda for the evening (see attached).

Upcoming Meetings:

- February 12th – continue prioritization discussions (moved up one week due to school vacation schedule).
- March 18th – regular meeting date.

Agenda:

- Majority of the meeting will be reviewing the cost estimate and going through an initial prioritization of improvements.
- Prioritization is a very important part of this effort. We are developing a master plan for a large area. The cost to implement the entire master plan is over \$13 million. Therefore, it is critical to decide which improvements are constructed with the \$3.5 million that the City has budgeted for construction.

2. MATERIALS PLAN (Kathy Watkins)

- The materials discussion tonight will focus on sidewalk materials.
- Materials have been discussed at the June, November and December meetings, and were the focus of the 2 walking / wheeling tours conducted during the summer.
- By November, a plan had been developed which received mostly favorable comments from the Committee.
- There was interest in exploring further east – west connections which would offer reduced vibrations, so additional reduced vibration zones (RVZ) and/or wire cut brick were considered. Specifically:
 - Mount Auburn Street: The sidewalk is too narrow for a RVZ and it is the Gold Coast area. It was felt important to keep older materials (molded brick) which would match in better with the brick buildings.
 - Mass Ave between Church and Garden: This is one of the most historic areas in the City, and it was felt important to keep older materials (molded brick).
 - Mass. Ave: We extended the RVZ from Holyoke to Plympton – it then matches into existing concrete sidewalk continuing eastward.
- At the December 18th meeting, the committee expressed concern that the plan was starting to read like a compromise plan, not a coherent plan.
- A question was raised whether more wire cut brick would be a better alternative than the RVZ. The walking / wheeling tours indicated that wire cut brick is substantially better than molded brick. Wire cut brick would provide a better surface for the entire sidewalk area, not just the narrow concrete area that would be provided in the RVZ alternative. In addition, minimizing changes in materials would minimize potential for differential settlement and improve the aesthetics.
- City staff met to review the committee's comments, and developed a new proposal. The majority of the areas previously proposed for RVZ would be wire cut brick instead. This would significantly improve the entire sidewalk area over today's molded brick. It would also be a more seamless / less visible improvement.
- The proposed RVZ would be maintained on the east side of Dunster Street, which is the most commercial of the "ladder" streets connecting Mass Ave. to Mt. Auburn Street (and also has the gentlest grade).
- City staff (CDD, DPW, Historical and staff to Disabilities Commission) believes this is a good plan that addresses the concerns we have heard from all of the different constituencies. It represents a good workable solution that provides significant accessibility improvements over current conditions.
- We presented this proposal to the Disability Commission last week. There was a lot of discussion on the merits of wire cut brick vs. RVZ. The Disability Commission understands all of the conversations that we have had and all of the different interests,

however, given the need for Universal Design in this highly used public space, the Commission feels that function should be more highly valued than aesthetics.

- The Disabilities Commission made the following formal recommendation:
 - *“The Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities strongly recommends that the Harvard Square Design employ a total concrete sidewalk surface. This complies with Universal Design principles. Moreover, in view of the budgeted \$3.5 million and current cost estimate of \$10 million for the project, and that a totally concrete solution is one-third the cost of brick, this is a more cost effective solution.”*
- The Historical Commission reiterated that since the Square is on the National Register of Historic Places, any material changes would have to be acceptable to the Commission, and that a well-laid brick walk would meet the Federal accessibility standards. Having all concrete sidewalks in the Square would be a hard-sell to both the Cambridge and Massachusetts Historical Commissions.
- Kathy relayed Michael Muehe’s, staff person to the Disability Commission, thoughts that if accessibility and cost were the only issues, then concrete would clearly be the answer, but in a complex project area like Harvard Square, wire-cut brick can be a reasonable alternative.

3. COMMITTEE DISCUSSION OF MATERIALS PLAN (Committee)

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

- Didn’t the Central Square project establish a new standard (concrete sidewalk with brick edging)?
Harvard Square has much more complicated conditions, such as varying sidewalk widths and back-edge conditions, etc. Plus Central Square had traditionally had concrete walks, so the brick was actually an addition.
- Did not think wire-cut brick would be acceptable to the Historical Commission.
Commission does not have an issue with wire-cut in areas which were most recently reconstructed as part of the MBTA red-line extension. These materials are only 18-20 years old, i.e. not historic brick. On other streets, such as Church Street (most recently widened in the 1920’s), the historic material is actually concrete.
- Support new plan, but would prefer brick sidewalks on Church Street.
- Agree with Historical Commission. Would there be cost advantage to replacing additional areas of molded brick with wire-cut?
Cost difference between the two types of bricks is relatively insignificant.
- Support plan, but torn on opinion, especially if concrete really is much more accessible than brick.
- Suggest finding additional areas where concrete could be used for full sidewalk width.
- Torn, especially on ladder streets. Experience riding in wheelchair on the summer tour says that concrete really is much smoother, but understand the need to compromise.
- Like current plan. It is important to keep Church Street concrete.
- Preferred earlier compromise plan and would prefer more concrete.
- Concerned about color of wire-cut brick – has the technology come far enough to ensure good match with historic materials?
City staff and consultants spent a significant amount of time with a brick representative choosing samples of wire cut brick that provide good variations in color.

Summary: City staff appreciates all of the time and effort everyone has spent on this very complicated issue. City staff will finalize the materials plan showing the additional areas of wire cut brick.

4. COST ESTIMATE (Kathy Watkins and Jerry Friedman)

- As mentioned earlier, we have identified \$13 million for the entire master plan. We have a \$3.5 million budget. We need to begin prioritizing which improvements should move forward.
- Jerry is going to go through a sample cost estimate to give people a better understanding of what is involved in the costs. When you see the numbers, I think you will be quite surprised at how much “basic infrastructure” improvements cost.
- The costs that you see are the total cost to construct each project. The costs include standard contingencies as follows:
 - Design Contingency: We are early in the design phase – we do not have survey.
 - Construction contingency – during construction unexpected conditions arise.
 - Construction oversight.
- All of the above are included in the cost estimate. Which means – we are providing a realistic picture of the amount of work that can be done for \$3.5 million.
- Jerry reviewed a sample cost estimate for the section of JFK Street between Memorial Drive and Eliot Street.
 - Most items are basic infrastructure (paving, drainage, sidewalks, etc.) – not optional and not gold plating.
 - Lighting is one big ticket item that provides benefits, but does not have to be done to replace the sidewalks and roadways. Lighting tends to be a more stand alone improvement in the sense that the roadways and sidewalks can be constructed with or without lighting improvements. However, generally lighting wouldn't be done independent of the roadway and sidewalk improvements.
- A map and spreadsheet indicating street-by-street construction costs was distributed. Kathy went over each street to identify which items were assumed to be included.

5. INITIAL PRIORITIZATION OF IMPROVEMENTS (Kathy and Committee)

- Kathy explained that the Committee would have 10-15 minutes to review the cost information, and then would do a “dot exercise”. The goal was to get a sense from the committee about what the priorities are for the \$3.5 million. In addition to the committee, the members of the public in attendance are invited to participate.
- The Committee was reminded that the \$3.5 million is for infrastructure and not just the “fun” big change items.
- City staff had gone through this exact same exercise earlier in the week. It was a difficult and frustrating exercise. There are a lot of basic infrastructure priorities and also some really great changes that are part of this master plan. It is not possible to fund all of them and hard choices have to be made. Tonight is a first step, and this will be an iterative process. Some streets may be broken up differently depending on people's comments. The input obtained tonight will be combined with the City staff prioritization as we move forward.

- Dot exercise specifics:
 - Every person has \$3.5 million to spend. Once you have identified the projects you would fund, place your dot on the improvements (one map for the Committee, one map for the public).
 - On the back of the sheet is a place to list the next couple of projects that you really wanted to fund, but couldn't. There is also a place for comments. These comments will be incorporated into the iterative prioritization process.
 - On the sheets, Flagstaff Park and the Brattle / Mason Intersection are listed. This is because the City is moving forward with these improvements outside of the \$3.5 million. We will be applying for grant funding for Flagstaff Park. Brattle / Mason is moving forward this spring with upcoming roadway work on Brattle Street west of Mason.
 - Also on the sheets are 2 items that have costs associated with them:
 - *Miscellaneous improvements* are listed because, when we have identified the improvements that will be funded, there are going to be some spot sidewalk repairs, handicap ramps, signage, landscaping improvements, etc. that need to be incorporated. We need to be able to handle those.
 - *JFK Street between Memorial Drive and Eliot Street*. The amount of traffic – vehicular and pedestrian – that use this section of roadway and its current condition, make this a high priority for the City. We do not believe that we can do a \$3.5 million project in Harvard Square and not address this section of JFK. So, we have included a minimum build JFK on the sheet – for a total cost of \$650,000. This does not include the lighting. If you want lighting you should prioritize an additional \$300,000 on your sheet. If you don't prioritize lighting, do not put a dot on JFK Street. If you do want to prioritize lighting, put a dot on JFK Street.

- Committee Comments and Questions:
(Note: City/Consultant team comments/responses are in italics)
 - The \$3.5 million amount which the City has budgeted, came as a result of the Polishing the Trophy Study, which envisioned a somewhat different set of proposed improvements. So the Committee and the public should continue to lobby the City for additional funds in the future.
 - It might make sense to group the prioritized selections into logical areas rather than try to spread it around the entire Square.
 - Might make sense to prioritize a set of incoherent or marginal projects – this would force the City to add additional funding.
 - Does Harvard University represent a possible source of additional funding?
 - Do not agree that JFK Street should come out of the \$3.5 million – this is basic City infrastructure.
The Harvard Square project was always envisioned to have a large component of basic infrastructure. The \$3.5 million is city funding that in part have to be used to address some of the basic infrastructure issues in the Square. To put this in perspective, the City has an annual budget of about \$2 million for streets and sidewalks for the entire city.
 - In addition to this exercise, we should also be prioritizing the remainder of the proposed improvements outside of the basic \$3.5 million.

6. PUBLIC COMMENT

- This was a very useful exercise.
- Would like to prioritize safer pedestrian crossings at Lampoon, Out-of-Town, Johnston Gate, Upper Brattle.
- Consider work on DeWolfe Street also – it has poor pavement like Mt. Auburn.
- If JFK is done, should do right up to Mt. Auburn – there are poor sidewalks on the east side.
- Eliot Plaza is in poor condition.
- Outer Mt. Auburn, between Plympton and Putnam towards Central Square, should be high priority – lack of crosswalks here, and would get more bang for the buck.

7. WRAP-UP AND NEXT STEPS (Kathy Watkins)

The next Committee meeting will be on February 12 when we will continue the prioritization process and follow-up on the lighting plan.

We are planning an open-house following the prioritization process and the completion of the materials and lighting plans.