CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
HARVARD SQUARE DESIGN PROJECT
MEETING NOTES

Subject: **Harvard Square Design Committee (HSDC) – Meeting #7**

Date, Time & Place: February 13, 2003, 6:30 PM – 8:30 PM
Cambridge Savings Bank

Present:

HSDC Members:

Mohsen Kurd	Bill Bibbins	Nelson Goddard
Alex Sagan	Hugh Russell	Nathalie Beauvais
Sean Peirce	Nelson Goddard	Rohit Chopra
Susan Rogers	John DiGiovanni	Don Crane
Doug Berman	Robert Banker	

City of Cambridge:

Susan Glazer (CDD)	Cara Seiderman (CDD)	Charles Sullivan (CHC)
Susanne Rasmussen (CDD)	Sue Clippinger (TP&T)	Sarah Burks (CHC)
Kathy Watkins (CDD)	Jeff Parenti (TP&T)	Roger Boothe (CDD)

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:
Jim Winn (Edwards and Kelcey)

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

Susanne welcomed the attendees and reviewed the agenda for the evening – the Lampoon Building, Church Street and Brattle Street. The goal is to have a quick discussion on the Lampoon Building design. If we need to have a longer discussion we can take it up at a future meeting. The bulk of the meeting will be spent on Church Street and Brattle Street. Two alternatives for Church Street were mailed out to the committee prior to the meeting. We would love to come to consensus on Church Street and Brattle Street as well, but if that is not possible, we would like to at least narrow the range of alternatives. We could then bring them before the larger community at the May Community Meeting.

Susanne also gave a couple of updates:

- The MBTA has removed the graffiti on the glass at the MBTA headhouse in front of the Cambridge Savings Bank.
- There will be a Porter Square Community Meeting on February 26th.
- Upcoming Harvard Square Meetings
    - March 20th – Committee Meeting (Continued Brattle Street discussion.)
    - April – No Committee Meeting
    - May – Community Meeting. We will want to have a committee meeting early in the month to prepare for the Community Meeting.

2. **LAMPOON BUILKDING (Katherine Watkins)**

At the last meeting there was overall support for the pedestrian improvements provided by the island design, but some concerns were expressed about the loss of parking and some of the design details.

The conversion of angled parking to parallel parking loses 9 parking spaces on Mt. Auburn Street. By reducing the length of the tour-bus area and by adding 2 spaces along the enlarged Lampoon Island, the **net loss of parking can be reduced to 3 parking spaces**. Since the last meeting, city staff have evaluated adding parking on Plympton Street between Mt. Auburn Street and Memorial Drive. There is currently parking only on the east side of the street. Often times there are Harvard vans loading and unloading on the west side of the street. Adding parking and loading zones along the west side of Plympton Street will make the street function better and will also make up for the loss of parking on Mt. Auburn Street.

Lampoon Building Comments and Questions – (Committee)
(Note: City/Consultant team comments/responses are in italics)

- Support design.
- Ditto.
- The Square will be destroyed. You have made it like everything else. Need to look at the design in the wider context.
- Adds to the area – does not subtract.
- Alex Sagan met with people from Hillel House who cross Mt. Auburn Street at that location several times a day and they are strongly in favor of the plan. They support the pedestrian improvements.
- Also consider planting street trees in front of Claverly Hall.
- The design enhances pedestrian crossings. Maybe you could come up with something more creative, but it is good enough for now.
- This design helps define the street.
- Special places need to be preserved. But the expanse of pavement is not special. This is a step in the right direction.
- What about adding to the curbline on the north side of Mt. Auburn Street instead of creating this new island. *(This was discussed at the last meeting. This alternative was rejected because of concerns regarding the historical context of Bow and Mt. Auburn streets and also because of significant drainage issues.)*
- Strongly favor this design. It cuts down on the sea of asphalt that is currently there. And it maintains the connection between the cow-path and the turnpike.
- Would prefer to keep angled parking, but o.k. with island design. The planting area should not be constructed with a seating wall. I would not like to see people sitting there, would prefer a separate bench.
- This is such a great idea! It is good to prevent the vehicular move from Linden to Holyoke Place. But don't make it too nice. It will just be ruined by vandals.
- The design may be incomplete but it is great.
- In favor of design.
- Not a big fan of islands. They are not good uses of spaces. It would be better to have the area connected to something.

Lampoon Building Wrap-Up and Next Steps – (Susanne Rasmussen)
There is strong support for the island design. We will continue to move forward with the design of this area and will incorporate ideas from the committee as we go along.

Encourage committee members to let us know if you have any additional specific thoughts for improving on this design.

3. **<u>Church Street</u>** – (Kathy Watkins)
At the December meeting the committee decided to **keep Church Street 2-way** and to widen the sidewalks by removing varying amounts of parking. Two alternatives for removing parking have been developed. These were mailed to the committee prior to tonight's meeting.

Currently Church Street is 2 travel lanes and 2 parking lanes. The sidewalks vary between 5' and 9.5' with the narrowest section of sidewalk in front of the movie theater.

Alternative A would remove parking along the north side of Church Street between Mass. Ave and Palmer Street for a **net loss of 7 parking spaces**. The parking was removed on the north side of the street because of the desire to keep the taxi and loading zone on the south side of the street. **The sidewalk in front of the movie theater would be widened from 5' to 11.75'.**

Alternative B would remove 1 side of parking the entire length of Church Street for a **net loss of 16 parking spaces**. In addition to the sidewalk widening described in Alternative A, **both sides of the sidewalk** between Palmer and Brattle streets would be **widened approximately 3'**.

<u>Church Street Comments and Questions</u> – (Committee)
(Note: City/Consultant team comments/responses are in italics)

- Prefer Alternative A.
- Prefer Alternative B.
- Prefer A. The narrowest section of sidewalk is at the movie theater. The additional 9 parking spaces are too many to lose.
- Prefer A. Alternative B removes too much parking. The movie theater sidewalk needs the help.
- Prefer A. Parking next to pedestrians can provide a good buffer and make the sidewalk space work better.
- Prefer A. Philosophically like B, but it requires removing too much parking. Reality is that A is better.
- Prefer B. There is not enough space for pedestrians and this seems like a reasonable sacrifice.
- Prefer A. ADA issues mean that B is better. But I would rather be on a narrow sidewalk with parking as a buffer, so I prefer A.
- Prefer B, but o.k. with A. This is a tough one. Alternative A provides a nice minimum improvement., but B provides wider sidewalks. If pedestrian traffic increases, the wider sidewalk would be nicer.
- Prefer A. O.k. with losing the 7 parking spaces.
- Prefer A. Much prefer A. Wider sidewalks next to traffic may not be great for pedestrians and removing all of the parking will increase the speeds of traffic. Need to consider First Parish Church. They currently have dedicated parking.
- Prefer B. Conceptually want to provide benefits for pedestrians.
- Prefer A. Provide smaller bumpout at Border Café and pick up a little parking. Also, the loading zone (LZ) at Harnett's could be LZ 7-10 a.m. and then parking. The LZ / Taxi on the south side should remain loading all the time.
- Prefer A. Remove the obstructions along the rest of the sidewalk to make it work better for pedestrians.
- Prefer A. The pedestrian experience does not improve enough under B to justify the additional loss of parking. Why do taxis have to be on Church Street? *(The taxi area*

on Church Street is a feeder to the taxi stand around the corner. If the taxi area is removed on Church Street, taxis will extend along Mass. Ave and block the travel lane. This area is used consistently by cabs.)

- Prefer A.
- Can parking spaces be cut into the wide sidewalk on Mass. Ave. in front of the church?
- Can a pedestrian drop off be provided at the church?
- The sidewalk is wide on the south side of Church Street at the corner of Mass. Ave. Can you cut into this area of the sidewalk for a drop off zone?

Church Street Wrap-Up and Next Steps – (Susanne Rasmussen)
The majority preference is for Alternative A – remove parking between Mass. Ave and Palmer Street. We will do our best to improve the rest of the sidewalk as we move along with the design. We will look at the location of the newspaper boxes along the street, investigate tree grates, look for opportunities elsewhere in the Square to make up for the lost parking and consult with the church regarding the loss of parking.

4. BRATTLE STREET (Katherine Watkins)

We have looked at a number of different ways to address the bicycle desire line on Brattle Street. This is a major desire line for cyclists traveling into and through Harvard Square from the west. The City is committed to encouraging cycling throughout the city.

Alternatives Previously Discussed

1. Sidewalk side contra-flow
2. 2-way Brattle
3. 2-way Brattle to Church – contra-flow bike facility from Church to Eliot

New Combination

4. Mason to Appian 1-way with contra-flow bike facility, then 2-way from Appian to Eliot

"Do Nothing" – Alternative Routing

5. Alternative bicycle route Hawthorne to Mt. Auburn Street

Sidewalk side contra-flow

When the Committee first discussed Brattle Street (September and October) and the desire to accommodate cyclists, alternatives for a contra-flow bicycle lane and 2-way Brattle Street were considered. There was some support for the contra-flow design, but concerns were raised about the conflicts between cyclists and pedestrians and between cyclists and motorists at intersections.

2-Way Brattle

Prior to the November 21, 2002 Community meeting, the preference of the committee was 2-way Brattle Street. It is **straightforward, easily understandable** solution by all users. Creates / restores logical 2-way street pattern. Traffic volume increases from 300 to 550 vehicles per hour in the afternoon peak hour. This traffic is predominantly traffic that is removed from the Mason / Garden / Mass / Brattle loop. The traffic would use 2-way Brattle Street as a direct route thereby crossing over fewer crosswalks.

At the November community meeting, there was **some support** for 2-way Brattle, but also **some concerns** were raised about the amount of traffic that would be generated on Brattle Street and the potential impacts on **Berkeley Street.**

At the December Committee meeting the comments from the community meeting were discussed and the Committee did not reach a consensus on 2-way Brattle Street. We agreed to come back to you with additional information on a number of issues.

Loading Zones – Loading zones would be provided on Brattle Street. If a truck double parks, drivers will have to enter the on coming lane to go around them. We will be looking at implementing more 7-10 a.m. loading zones. After 10 a.m. the spaces are available as meter parking. This would provide additional space for loading in the morning. We will be meeting with businesses to discuss their loading needs. We can provide better loading zones for businesses, but we will not be able to accommodate all of the loading in the exact location where drivers want it to be. Regardless of what alternative is implemented on Brattle Street, we will likely have some level of illegal parking.

Berkeley Street – At the November community meeting and the December Committee meeting we heard concerns about the impacts of 2-way Brattle Street on Berkeley Street. The Concord / Craigie / Berkeley / Phillips Place / Mason / Brattle cut-through allows drivers to avoid a total of 6 signals.

Jeff Parenti and Katherine Watkins met with residents of Berkeley Street to discuss the 2-way Brattle Street alternative. Berkeley Street residents at the meeting were unanimously **opposed to 2-way Brattle.** They wanted to make sure that people understand that they are concerned about the impacts of **increased vehicular volume on Brattle Street as well as the impacts on Berkeley Street.** They do not believe it is a positive change. We discussed several alternatives for addressing the potential cut-through on Berkeley Street including making Berkeley Street one-way from Phillips Place to Craigie Street. They are **concerned about being locked in** between the Sheraton Commander and BB&N and do not support making Berkeley Street one-way. Another option that was raised at the meeting was the idea of prohibiting left turns from Mason Street onto Brattle Street.

Pedestrian Safety (Impacts of additional traffic and 2-way street) – The additional volume on Brattle Street would mean that there are fewer gaps in traffic for pedestrians to cross the street. With the additional traffic, there will be less than 10 vehicles per minute on Brattle Street, during the peak hours. The traffic would remain slow and pedestrian safety would be a priority. Traffic calming measures such as raised intersections and curb extensions would be included in the design of 2-way Brattle Street to ensure slow speeds and pedestrian safety.

Vehicular Volumes – Peak hour vehicular volumes on Brattle Street would increase from 300 vehicles per hour to 550 vehicles per hour. The 2-way Brattle Street volume would be between the current volumes of Church Street and Mt. Auburn Street.

- Church Street 300 vehicles per hour
- 2-Way Brattle Street 550 vehicles per hour
- Mt. Auburn at Eliot 620 vehicles per hour

The queue on Brattle Street during the peak hour would typically vary between 0 and 20 vehicles. The queue would regularly clear up as the signal at Out of Town News provides gaps in the Eliot Street traffic, which allows vehicles to exit Brattle

Street. It would not be a continuous queue of cars. During off peak hours, the queue would be shorter.

2-way Brattle Street just to Church (2-way between Mason and Church streets, then 1-way with a contra-flow bike lane between Church and Eliot streets)

If 2-way Brattle ends at Church Street, we estimate that Church Street traffic would increase from 300 vehicles per hour to 410. Instead of 5 vehicles per minute you would see 7 vehicles per minute.

2-way to Church then later changed to 2-way all the way to Eliot.

If Brattle Street was constructed as a 2-way street to Church Street, could it later be changed to 2-way all the way to Eliot Street? If 2-way Brattle Street ended at Church Street, we would provide a contra-flow bike facility between Church Street and Eliot. Extending 2-way Brattle from Church to Eliot would require the removal of the contra-flow bike facility as well as the reconstruction of the "EMS" corner. So, yes it could be done, but it would require construction.

New Combination (1-way with contra-flow bicycle facility from Mason to Appian, then 2-way from Appian to Eliot)

Since our last meeting, we have been discussing all of the possible alternatives that we can think of to determine if there is an alternative for Brattle Street that addresses the desire lines of cyclists and also as many of the concerns that have been raised as possible. The New Combination Alternative provides a contra-flow bike lane with 1-way traffic between Mason and Appian. Then Brattle Street would be 2-way between Appian and Eliot. This provides 2-way traffic in a portion of the street. It would limit the amount of additional traffic that would use Brattle Street. In addition, the contra-flow bike lane is provided in the section of the street with the fewest pedestrian and vehicular conflicts.

"Do Nothing" – Alternative Route

Bike route would be signed from Brattle Street into Harvard Square via Hawthorne and Mt. Auburn Street. This alternative does not affect vehicular traffic flow. It also does not do much for cyclists coming in from the west. It gives information about the last street to use to get to Mt. Auburn, but does not address the desire of cyclists to use Brattle Street, which is a more direct route in to the Square. It is unclear if cyclists will really use the alternative route.

All of the options for Brattle Street have pros and cons that need to be carefully evaluated.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT (Including written comments.)

- Concerned about 2-way Brattle and the impact to pedestrians. Introducing 2-way traffic at Elliot Street will cause mass confusion at that intersection.
- Mornings before 9 a.m., Brattle Street is a village. It is a nice peaceful place. Introducing heavy traffic will destroy it. We should keep it friendly for pedestrians.
- Strongly support two-way Brattle Street proposal. It is the only workable solution I have seen for providing safe bicycle accommodations into Harvard Square. If the two-way design is coupled with traffic calming, it could produce a situation that would benefit motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians. If the average motor vehicle speed can be kept in the vicinity of 20 mph, shared lane use by motor vehicles and bicycles would succeed. Concerns that the two-way proposal will have negative traffic impacts should be addressed by turn prohibitions or other traffic measures.
- The contra-flow alternatives would not be appropriate for this application, because the contra-flow bikers would not be anticipated by many of the high volume of pedestrians crossing the street, nor by the motorists on side streets. Contra-flow bike lanes at this time would be best used in locations with low volumes of bikes, pedestrians and motorists,

and where there is either no parking next to the contra-flow bike lane, or parking turnover is very low.

- Opposed to making Brattle Street two-way. It will result in significantly increased car traffic on Berkeley Street and in particular traffic of a high speed sort. This will be a real loss to the groups you're trying to help: bicyclists and pedestrians, who right now use Berkeley Street as a pleasant year-round route to and from the Square.
- Changing Brattle Street to two-way will completely change the character of the area with significantly more traffic. This will in turn make it much more difficult to change it to a shared street in the future, as it would be more of thoroughfare.
- Recommend that Brattle Street remain one-way. Install curb extensions at Church Street and other intersections. Reduce the travel lanes to 1 lane and allow contra-flow bicycle travel.
- Brattle Street should remain one way as it is presently for safety reasons and to maintain the historical integrity of the adjacent residential areas.
- Traffic flow directions on Berkeley Street and Phillips Place should not change.
- Ideal view of Harvard Square is that Mass Ave and several blocks around it would be made into a permanent pedestrian zone. Traffic would be routed through the underground bus station, which would be reconfigured for this purpose. Prefer a people-oriented Harvard square even if it means inconvenience to drivers, parkers, and businesses. Close all of Palmer Street permanently except to delivery trucks for businesses on that street. Close permanently all of Winthrop Street to the west of JFK Street. Close JFK Street and the bridge on summer Sundays to extend the Mem Drive pedestrian zone into Harvard Square.
- The sidewalks on Church Street should be significantly wider. Either one lane of traffic should be removed – allowing only one-way traffic. Or most parking spaces on one side should be eliminated.
- The loss of parking on Church Street adjacent to the First Parish Church is a serious concern for the Church.
- A drop-off zone for MBTA on Church Street needs to be provided.

6. <u>BRATTLE STREET COMMITTEE DISCUSSION</u>

- This is a complex issue. Seems like we will need another meeting. We can not make Berkeley Street one-way, if the residents oppose it. Can left turns be prohibited from Mason onto Brattle?
- Cyclists play an important role in decreasing vehicular congestion in the City. 2-way is easily intelligible. The contra-flow design for all of the street or for just part of the street is a more complicated design.
- Intrigued by new alternative. Creative approach. Reduces the number of intersections and high traffic areas for the contra-flow bike lane. Haven't seen a contra-flow design that looks safe and maintainable. 2-way is best for cyclists. Would like to see traffic volumes for the various alternatives. How much less traffic does the new alternative bring to Brattle Street than 2-way Brattle?
- 2-way with traffic calming and bike access is straight forward. Don't see how adding 250 cars in the worst hour changes the character of the street. That works out to 1 extra car every 15 seconds. This does not change the character of the street. Keep speeds down, prevent left turn from Mason to Brattle. Act rationally and make improvements. If 2-way doesn't work out it can be fixed, but I believe it will work.
- It is important to make improvements, but I am not in favor of 2-way Brattle. This is low on the priority list. It is important that we focus on improving the public plaza areas in the Square.
- Things can be done to make improvements for cyclists (signage, striping, etc.), without making such a dramatic change as 2-way Brattle Street. It is o.k. if Brattle Street is not completely convenient for cyclists. Not all streets in Harvard Square have to be totally

convenient for all users. Some streets are not convenient for drivers and Brattle Street may not be convenient for cyclists.

- Based on the information, Brattle Street should be 2-way. Not sure that it will hurt character of the street. 1-way streets tend to increase speeds.
- At 9:00 a.m. all of Harvard Square is a village. 2-way Brattle is more pedestrian friendly. It is easier to see who is coming at you.
- We want to encourage cyclists, which 2-way Brattle Street will do.
- Would entertain compromise alternative. If there is any place along Brattle that a contra-flow bike lane would work, it is Mason to Hilliard. The Berkeley Street concerns can be addressed by prohibiting the left turn from Mason onto Brattle.
- 1-way feels better. Traffic flows remain light and we have the opportunity for the contra-flow facility in the street.
- Berkeley Street issue can be resolved by prohibiting the left turn from Mason onto Brattle Street.
- The compromise does not feel good. Do all or nothing. 2-way Brattle provides additional benefits; decreased speeds, increased pedestrian safety.
- Brattle Street is a major thoroughfare and should carry it's burden. This would lessen the burden on Mt. Auburn Street and other streets.
- Oppose 2-way all the way – it might change character of the street. The cycle track concept is cool but it could be hard to maintain.
- Prefer the "Do Nothing" alternative. Provide signage at Sparks, Williard and Hawthorne. Direct cyclist to turn and use Mt. Auburn Street.
- 2-way is first choice. Contra-flow will decrease pedestrian safety.
- Against 2-way. Live near the square. Brattle Street is a quiet, pedestrian oriented place for residents. Any increase in traffic will be a detriment to Brattle Street.
- Cyclists are an important user group. If there is no better alternative, do the contra-flow. Can do 2-way, but do not impact Berkeley Street.
- Brattle Street should stay one-way.

Brattle Street Wrap-Up and Next Steps – (Susanne Rasmussen)

There is not consensus on Brattle Street. We will discuss this again at the March 20th committee meeting. Prior to that meeting we will do the following:

- Investigate alternatives for prohibiting the left turn from Mason onto Brattle.
- Work with the bike committee to discuss the best contra-flow bike lane from Mason to Eliot.
- Work with the bike committee to discuss the best contra-flow bike lane from Mason to Appian.
- Provide information about the traffic volumes for the new hybrid alternative.
- Provide information about traffic calming on Brattle Street.

The Committee should send suggestions for more creative ideas for Brattle Street to Kathy Watkins at kwatkins@ci.cambridge.ma.us.