

Eastern Cambridge Kendall Square Open Space Planning Committee

July 11th, 2013

Summarized meeting notes

Committee members present: Alexandra Lee, Carole Bellew, Charlie Marquardt, Christine Dunn, Christopher Perkins, Conrad Crawford, Daniel Norman, David Small, Lara Gordon, Patrick Magee, Rose Billeci, Sam Valentine, Sujit Sitole, Susan Morgan, Thayer Donham, Victoria Farr

Staff present: Taha Jennings, Stuart Dash, Paul Ryder

Paul Ryder, the Director of Recreation for the City of Cambridge, discussed how recreation needs are approached and met throughout the City. For the new park at Rogers Street in particular it is important to determine what recreational uses are even appropriate for the site given its overall size and dimensions. Request to use parks and open spaces for organized recreational activities are reviewed by the City which takes several factors into consideration including the type of use, availability, and priority for youth and school activities. The summer season typically features less use. Parks and open spaces that are designed and or intended to be passive spaces are not generally considered for recreational programming. Mr. Ryder felt that the neighborhood had a relatively adequate amount of active space, but the amount of requests are always high in East Cambridge because the City as a whole is below what is generally recognized as normal standards for open space. In response to a question regarding if there are any use requests that can't be met, it was answered that Rugby is sometimes hard to accommodate because it should only happen on artificial turf, there have also been some cricket requests. Potential users are usually encouraged to use Danehy Park because it's staffed.

A question was asked about how the state might share the burden of recreational programming of open space. Magazine Beach was noted as a good example of partnering with the State. It was also pointed out that the City will try to develop partnerships with neighborhood groups. Other types of organized activities in the parks can also be very nice, such as family movies or other events which the Arts Council will sometimes organize. It was pointed out that there has been some success with that type of programming at the Rose Kennedy Greenway in Boston. The increasing importance of this type of programming was also discussed during the Kendall Square Central Square (K2C2) Planning Study.

Someone commented that the open space should benefit both the community and employees in the area, and that ways to integrate employees should be considered.

There was a question on how the fees for recreational uses are used. Staff answered that some of the funds go back into the recreation programs and some go to the City's general fund.

Another question was asked if there was enough parking to support recreational uses at Rogers? It was pointed out that many other recreational fields in Cambridge don't have off street parking available either.

The new open space at Rogers Street represents an exciting opportunity, but it is important to move forward when thinking about the nature of use there, because it is likely that adult sport leagues and other informal sports activities will begin to take place there. Mr. Ryder stated that he hopes to be able to provide for some active uses for kids as part of this planning process, because currently, the only

soccer facilities for the neighborhood are located at Gold Star Mothers Park and at Ahern Field. He added that these types of uses could also be temporary.

Open Space Visioning Exercise

Committee members were next asked to take a few minutes and visualize their favorite open space experience or experiences, anywhere, at any time in their lives, share their thoughts with the person next to them, and then with the group.

Favorite open space experiences:

- Variety of activities – Portland, OR
- Small dog park – South End, Boston
- Un-programmed open space between road and river cafes – London, UK
- Neighborhood park, swimming, picnic tables
- Informal network of trails and pathways
- Lakeside swimming and boating at grandparent's house
- The meadow in Prospect Park in Brooklyn, NY which is screened from the hustle bustle of the city
- Halibut Point – Rockport
- De-activated quarry and trails, which lead to an ocean vista
- Boston Public Gardens pathways, water and history
- Central Park in NYC, where it feels like you step into something different
- Public Art, Mill Park, MIT campus
- Open spaces with music and stages
- Playing basketball
- Lakeside areas, Golden Gate Park paths and trails with nice reveals
- Martha's Vineyard path to beach
- Art sculptures - Oslo
- St. Paul's Street in Brookline, fenced in dog area and other uses
- Washington D.C. pathways, journey through different settings

Cambridge Open Space System

Stuart Dash, the Director of Community Planning, for the City of Cambridge gave a presentation on the City of Cambridge Open Space System, including information on how its planned, categorized, how priorities for open space are determined, as well as the future direction of open space planning in the City.

Kendall Square Open Space Survey

Taha Jennings, from the Community Development Department, summarized the results of the Kendall Square Open Space Survey, which was a random telephone survey of 234 households conducted by Opinion Dynamics Corporation in the summer of 2012. It was explained that surveys such as this can help provide information on current open space use, as well as the open space features and opportunities that people wanted for the area. Some general responses from the survey:

- Respondents enjoyed open spaces that involved water;
- The favorite open space in Cambridge noted was the Charles River;
- The favorite open spaces in Kendall Square are the Broad Canal and the walkway between Binney Street and Broadway;
- Top reason for liking Kendall Square open spaces is restaurant and food options available nearby. According to survey respondents the most desired additional activities for Kendall Square are:
- Outdoor performances

- Sitting and relaxing
- Walking
- Informal socializing
- Outdoor dining

Committee discussion

There was a question asked about the budget for tree planting. It was noted that there is a tree planting budget and that it may be a good idea to have the City Arborist present information to the group. A meeting attendee added that with additional buses running along the Longfellow Bridge over the next few years, air quality concerns and trees become more important.

The Committee was also informed that the perimeter fence had recently been removed from the Rogers Street open space. Someone suggested that now that the park is open dog bags or garbage bins should be placed there. It was countered that introducing garbage bins may actually bring more garbage.

Staff introduced an idea regarding a public art / public participation project for the open space based on the work of artist Candy Chang. The concept is that a large, visible, chalkboard, with available pieces of chalk, would be erected at the site with a phrase such as “I would like this space to be...” at the top. Users of the space, neighbors, and any passerby would be invited to write down whatever came to mind in response to the question. Committee member’s comments are summarized below:

- The framing of the discussion is important, particularly what is asked, and how it is asked.
- Why limit the chalkboard idea to only the open space at Rogers Street? Is it possible to put one in every park in the study area or even install it with wheels so that it can move from one location to another?
- Great way to communicate with the community, and give the community an opportunity to respond
- The results should be displayed on the project website
- Would it be possible to coordinate with a food truck to install something similar on the vehicle?
- May not capture what people are actually doing at the park
- Should expand on the idea and include signage about what’s happening with the open space planning process and also provide an opportunity to log what you did at the park
- Should include a kiosk with information

Someone suggested surveying Kendall Square Association members about open space use in the area and particularly at the new Rogers Street open space. A meeting attendee suggested incorporating infrastructure opportunities and connections to spaces as part of the process. Another meeting attendee mentioned a design workshop they are involved with which works on similar issues. A committee member pointed out that they had seen the work of this particular design studio and that it is excellent. Someone mentioned that they will create a tweet asking for pictures of people using the new open space. Staff stated that the next meeting will be scheduled for sometime in September.