

Harvard Square Kiosk and Plaza Working Group – Notes

Wednesday, December 13th, 2017, 6:30 – 8:30 P.M.

- Attendees:
 - Working Group: Frank Kramer, Ken Taylor, Mary Flynn, John DiGiovanni, Peter Kroon, Abra Berkowitz, Daniel Andrew Schofield-Bodt, Tim Hyde, Janet Si-Ming Lee, Robyn Culbertson, Abhishek Syal
 - Staff: Daniel Wolf, Stuart Dash, Kathy Watkins, Charlie Sullivan
 - Project for Public Spaces (consultant): Meg Walker
- Presentation (Meg Walker)
 - Review of goals + one additional goal: “increase the joy of being in Harvard Square for all types of people” (John Shapiro)
 - Frequent concepts mentioned in Call for Ideas, etc. (approximate):
 - Current users
 - Future users
 - Kiosk uses
 - Plaza uses
 - Summary of results from Working Group survey on Call for Ideas Proposals
 - Survey:
 - Working Group members were given a survey which included the following prompts (for each prompt, the participant would select from the list of 33 proposals from the Call for Ideas):
 - Please select your five favorite ideas overall.
 - Please select up to five of your favorite ideas for the Kiosk.
 - Please select up to five of your favorite ideas for programming.
 - Please select up to five of your favorite ideas for physical improvements or amenities.
 - A summary graphic illustrating the 3 proposals with the most total votes (or a greater number of proposals in some cases due to ties) for each of the four above prompts was included in the presentation and will be posted on the project webpage.
 - Discussion
 - Ideas showing up in multiple columns shouldn’t be interpreted as having more weight necessarily
 - This grouping of proposals doesn’t precisely represent the Working Group’s priorities – staff will take care to frame these results in the appropriate context
 - Will there be opportunity for public input on these schemes between meetings? Staff will look at opportunities to do that.
 - Presentation of a series of conceptual schemes for Kiosk and Plaza
 - Intro
 - Caveat about the feasibility of various ideas involving MBTA – it would likely be less feasible to move the Kiosk or rebuild MBTA headhouse in

short term, but Working Group could make recommendations for medium/long term

- Opportunities to enhance the connection between inside and outside of the Kiosk
- Opportunities for activation of edges of Kiosk
- Kiosk schemes:
 - 1: “Open and flexible”
 - Accommodating a variety of functions that change over time
 - Uses can spill out – expanding the sphere of influence of the Kiosk through elements like news racks, information, etc.
 - Input suggests there probably would need to be some staff
 - Discussion:
 - Suggestion: teaser history museum – not a proper museum or visitor center
 - Precedent: Provincetown space – very compact space with some essential / teaser information
 - If there’s a table in center, should be movable
 - Precedent: The New Stand (concept/brand in New York City) – modular, flexible, shifting set of parts that sells a changing set of goods, inspired by classic newsstands
 - 2: “Flex space with visitors information”
 - Flex space could have news/events, art space, small performance space
 - Discussion:
 - Tradeoff between having something permanent as a familiar beacon vs. having everything flexible to accommodate more flexible pop up activities or uses
 - Visitor from out of town (touristy) vs more recurring/regular visitors may have slightly different information needs
 - Kiosk is not isolated from Plaza – it’s all connected. Regular visitors probably not seeking information – they know the area. Instead, Kiosk should have rotating changing uses that bring newness and excitement to the space
 - Don’t subdivide the Kiosk – that would be trying to create a building inside an already small building
 - 3: “Two Kiosks”
 - At one point in the past, you could walk through the Kiosk without opening doors
 - Could create an open passage through the Kiosk with glass on each side of the interior passageway
 - Discussion:

- Cutting up the space presents lots of issues – too congested
 - Could you add doors all around exterior of Kiosk?
 - That would present issues for historic preservation – can only have doors on some sides
 - Could have sliding doors for interior passageway concept to alleviate congestion for
 - Interior should be as open and versatile as possible
 - Supportive of visitor centers in general but not sure that's what belongs here. People use existing info booth to ask things like where bathrooms are or for other basic navigation – about 5 minutes apart
 - 4: “Outdoor vending and indoor visitor information”
 - Food is one of the key things that bring people together; despite this use not being that highly weighted on the survey responses and input so far; could have large impact even if something very small
 - Discussion:
 - We explore a barista cart – similar element in South Station
 - Pop up food could be interesting – temporary vs. permanent
- Plaza schemes
 - Halvorson study shows a larger open level space than currently exists which could offer more opportunities for programming (events, performance, or other activities)
 - Area around Kiosk is informed by what's inside it – spilling out
 - Games in current Pit area could synergize with Smith Center chess / seating area – could be different games
 - Performance with stage – people gathering in center of plaza – if popular enough, people could go around (following primary circulation paths)
 - Temporary stage could be moved around to different spots in the Plaza
 - Programming concepts:
 - Performance (doesn't necessarily need stage) – where are best places for performance and seating?
 - Art exhibits – could be temporary, interactive, incorporate seating
 - Food vending – could be temporary
 - Provision of services, possibly relating to homelessness
 - Amenities:
 - Screens – indoors/outdoors; touch screen with information about what's around you

- Small forms of kiosks/maps – can take lots of different forms (nice one with glass – artistic/transparent)
 - Wayfinding elements
- Seating:
 - Tables and chairs
 - Could have hammocks, swings, rocking chairs, lounge – could be temporary
 - Could come along with library, DJ, other uses
 - Artist designed
 - Could be spectacle of itself
- Phone charging:
 - Could be combined with seating
 - Could be solar powered
- Shade:
 - Umbrellas
 - Awning at headhouse
 - Tensile structure
 - Iconic looking umbrellas
 - Cover of stage
- Pavilions:
 - Maybe not enough room but could be an art object and shade structure if designed sensitively
- Lighting:
 - Fun lighting options
 - Suspended, festoon lighting
- Other:
 - Fire pit – making smores, whimsical
- Discussion
 - Likes open concept
 - Likes visitor information concept
 - Black box theaters are open space and what we bring into it brings it to life, but the space is constantly evolving
 - Needs to have a visitor information element, ideally with some technology element and staffing
 - Doesn't use cab stand so would prefer expanding plaza
 - Don't know about the bonfire idea
 - Creating better flow
 - Likes removing taxi stand and creating more space over there
 - Could draw crosswalks to direct flow or find more ways to direct flow
 - Visitors center is key
 - Clearing some of the clutter in the plaza to open it up
 - Digital interactive news displays, panels – modern and density of content; QR code scanning to take info with you away

- Visitor information is too much the starting point for the thinking – it's an issue; Kiosk is a resource; the more it's used for visitor information, the less it's for residents; prefer that it's one piece of a larger puzzle
- Information area in 4th site scheme could make sense
- Could put info down in subway station
- Could open up south side – more connecting to where people are gathering (main large area) – could have performance inside that engages with that area
- The space is primarily visitors
- If we're demolishing the visitor booth, would be important to incorporate a visitor information component
- Likes the accessibility of the plaza approaches
- Tourists go where guides go
- Likes scheme 1A – open/flexible
- Could the taxi area shift to ridesharing area; otherwise likes removing taxi lane
- Performance space on steps on back of headhouse – good efficient use of compact space
- Maintain bike racks
- Technology and forward thinking elements – celebrates Cambridge innovation
- Artists are feeling the squeeze – could draw people too (inside/outside)
- Do visitors come because of the tours or vice versa?
- Likes half flexible and half relatively permanent
- In PB, strong support for homeless – could offer packages out of Kiosk
- Helpful to have measurements – how much space is there for different elements like food trucks or carts
- Likes the elevations as shown in Halvorson study
- Secondary seating along the change in elevation
- Safety – vehicles – can design area along Mass Ave that does some secondary seating
- Keep taxi area but allow for some spilling out
- Think of this like some of the other public spaces in Harvard Square – but smaller; should be as versatile or transparent as possible
- Opposed to any sale of any product
- To Janet's point – we can have local businesses promote their wares
- Against idea of more technology because it'll change so quickly, but could
- Should have some ambassadors there, actually talking to people, roving around, cleaning the plaza...
- Arranged for 52 homeless folks to get eye exams and get glasses in the Square
- On an economic basis that will make this work – there's over 900 SF of commercial signage in the Plaza/Kiosk – all will go away (despite MBTA losing significant revenue) – should have 3 signs, 25 SF apiece – on top of Kiosk. Some days it just says "voter registration" and could also promote a business in the square. This would pay for ambassadors
- Likes ambassador idea with iPad – experienced that at the subway in London Olympics – really works
- Could use subway area a bit more, clean up bathrooms

- Space should be open and flexible – likes 1A best
- Visitor information could be in there but should remain flexible and able to tuck away when needed
- Likes the separation but presents issues
- Likes idea of food, could use taxi stand for food trucks, only going to be eating so many seasons of the year
- Need to declutter the plaza – get rid of the pit, taxi stands, acorn lights, info booth
- Could cover over the headhouse, shouldn't have advertisement
- Every scheme should be evaluated in terms of restoration and preservation – some of the ones with divisions don't adhere to the spirit of it
- Shouldn't have too much clutter against the edge of the Kiosk wall
- Visitor center and history use are favorites
- Ambassador idea is good
- Competition for tea cozy around the headhouse
- Likes scheme 1A best – open and flexible
- Food café – does that present issues for historic angle
- Visitor center is great but why can't information about the City could synergize with that and could have greater weight
- Shade, extensible installations, art installations
- A primary use of the plaza is the circulation
- Could move the crosswalks to shift the point area
- Likes stage
- If we do the right thing, we'll get more people here and they'll stay longer
- Stage could happen outdoors in warmer months and inside in colder
- Food is important
- Canopy and umbrellas – attracts from farther away, pops
- Having food trucks along taxi stand is good idea
- Opening kiosk to south side is important – making that connection
- Putting info elements outside takes burden off the inside
- Should allow for evolving of technological elements
- Don't like the garden idea
- Subtle elements that guide flow
- Currently ordinance that there's no pop up food – but you can have artists – allowed to sell wares there; lots of the businesses in the square who pay rents wouldn't like seeing pop up or permanent food in Plaza/Kiosk
- Vending / selling wares from local businesses could easily happen year round
- Stuart Dash: We'll talk about governance etc. next time
- Charlie Sullivan: Council designated the Kiosk as a landmark on Monday; we'll post the report from that on the website
- Public Comment
 - Wanted to engage with MBTA on redoing headhouse
 - We should seize this moment – tell the T we'll pay for it
 - Never suggested we move the headhouse – proposed we move the Kiosk to the current headhouse location; we've moved historic buildings before

- Likes open plan but needs constant curation otherwise will stagnate
- Should think about circulation holistically in relation to seating location
- Should maintain some of the taxi function
- Building uses along edge – could PPS talk to Starbucks etc to see if there are possibilities there – inside/outside – more open windows
- Should think about making this relevant for both visitors and residents
- Advocate replacing the T headhouse – could install seating with existing headhouse
- Winthrop Park, Brattle Square, etc – if popular performer there, could present safety hazard
- If program for one population could displace other population – shouldn't hose the whole space for one program – should stay fluid – don't over-program
- Our history isn't everywhere else in the world – the history would bring residents back – could have a lot of depth with a strong flat screen use