2014 Retrospective
Thoughts from my 35-year career

Cambridge
Seems to be a Verb

J. Roger Boothe
Director of Urban Design (1979-2014)
In his 1970 book *I Seem To Be a Verb*, R. Buckminster Fuller wrote:

“I live on Earth at present, and I don't know what I am.

I know that I am not a category.
I am not a thing—a noun.

I seem to be a verb, an evolutionary process—an integral function of the universe.”
Here on Spaceship Earth, we want to connect to our Water!

Cambridge Seems to be a Verb
Create flexible, multi-purpose plans with vision for liveability

- Excellent buildings and urban settings
- Diverse population in good housing
- Reduce auto dependency
- Healthy economic base with vital and distinctive retail

(See Toward a Sustainable Future: Cambridge Growth Policy Document)
Reflect upon transformation

1960 Cambridge: economically depressed, tough housing market

2014 Cambridge: world biotech center, challenging housing market
Think about Cambridge

- 6.25 sq mi
- 100,000 residents, 150,000 workers & students
- Harvard and MIT, 100 other institutions
- 6,700 subsidized of 41,000 total units
- One house just sold for $10 million
- 1 M sq ft developed each of last 20 years

Cambridge Seems to be a Verb
Let us reason together!

Citizens

Developers

City Council

The Administration

The Planning Board

Cambridge Seems to be a Verb
Let us urban design together!

Envision
Negotiate
Connect

Cambridge Seems to be a Verb
Envision~Negotiate~Connect

1: East Cambridge Riverfront

3: North Point

4: Alewife to Harvard

5: Central Square to Kendall Square

2: Cambridgeport
Deliberate with the Planning Board

Incredibly devoted volunteers

Following City Council’s lead, with Staff assistance, they help guide the vision

The Special Permit a crucial tool

Envision~Negotiate~Connect
Rezone with Vision

Prior to 1979:

No height limits in higher density districts

No housing allowed in former industrial districts

No parking maximum

No review process

Envision~Negotiate~Connect
1st Special Permit in 1979; 290th coming up

Envision~Negotiate~Connect
1: East Cambridge Riverfront

Envision ~ Negotiate ~ Connect
Envision new mixed-use district

Negotiate 800 units of housing, 1 M sq ft of retail and of office

Connect 10 Acres of new open space

Envision~Negotiate~Connect
Negotiate, sometimes for many years!
Please take our zoning seriously: Keep to 120-foot height limit, negotiate materials, get housing instead of office
Create great open space system

4 parks totaling about 10 acres
Envision~Negotiate~Connect

2: Cambridgeport
Cambridgeport
1979-2004

Envision transition from Simplex to University Park

Negotiate housing: 674 units / 200 affordable

Connect with new 100,000 sq ft open space

Envision ~ Negotiate ~ Connect
Key Agreements (instead of Special Permits!)

1. Design Review
2. Housing Plan
3. Traffic Mitigation
4. Infrastructure
1. Agreement for Design Review

Use Patterns and General Plan

Open Spaces and Streetscape

Building Heights

The Building Wall

Parking and Circulation
Create great open space system

100,000 sq ft total required, 50,000 sq ft in one space
Design Guidelines

Require well-articulated facades, base, middle, & top
2. Housing Plan

• 400 units required with 25% affordable

• Some new, some reuse of industrial

• Mostly along neighborhood edge, some in rest of project
Green, glassy housing contrasts with red brick surroundings
Area south of Pacific used to be home for Pat’s Tow
Change continues south of Pacific
3. Agreement for Traffic Mitigation

Became a model for Citywide mitigation effort

• Encourage flex time
• Limit trip generation
• Promote use of transit
4. Infrastructure Agreement

Outlines cost sharing

• Some public spaces, such as Lafayette Sq

• Streets & sidewalks
Create Lafayette Sq/
Jill Brown-Rhone Park
North Point
1988-present

Envision
reclaiming the
Lost Half Mile

Negotiate Zakim,
open space,
re zoning for
private works

Connect people to
the new North
Point

Envision~Negotiate~Connect
Negotiate rezoning in 1988
(EF and Museum Towers were pioneers)
Connect people to the Lost Half Mile

New Charles River Basin, Zakim Bridge (opens 2003) result from City lawsuit opposing Scheme Z
Envision structure for North Point (2001)
ECaPS plan emphasizes connections
Reorient open space, suggest mix of uses (2003)

2.2M sq ft commercial, 2700 units of housing, 10 acres of parkland
Envision new district connected to its region
Now add active center, more height in exchange for better open space (2013)
Connect walk from Gilmore Bridge down to central park
Connect EF’s new building to new ped/bike bridge and upcoming skatepark
New ped/bike bridge opens new horizons!
Alewife to Harvard

Envision growth around transit nodes

Negotiate station designs, linear connector, Danehy Park

Connect west to east

Envision~Negotiate~Connect
Alewife

Balance traffic concerns with need for housing
Porter Square

With new MBTA Station, expand retail and presence of Lesley
Harvard Square
Guide evolution of buildings
and open spaces
Redefine the heart of the Square
Connect people to the River through former car barns site
Charles Square
PUD SP #2 and
Kennedy School
Build atop an MBTA bus tunnel, build atop an MBTA transformer!
Invent a new square at Quincy
Quincy Square
Connect a neglected historical open space to its urban setting
Winthrop Square
5: Central Square to Kendall Square

Envision~Negotiate~Connect
C2 to K2

Envision each square as unique

Negotiate the amount and types of growth

Connect each to the other, connect to the river

Envision~Negotiate~Connect
Central Square
1979-1999
Wider sidewalks facilitate outdoor dining
Novartis saves NECCO from becoming dead “telecom hotel”
Novartis addition picks up on outdoor dining scene from Central Square
Novartis expands again, to other side of Mass Ave, with ground floor retail
Envision new infill that acknowledges its Mass Ave setting
Forest City building for Takeda to continue better pedestrian environments

How to make a biotech building also a Central Square building?
Refresh urban renewal effort
(“Cambridge Center” or “Kendall Square?”)
Build housing (finally) in the heart of Kendall!
The “Other” Kendall Square: Convert brownfield into mixed-use, on 10 acres (SP #141 1999)

465 housing units

.8 M sq ft biotech

70,000 sq ft open space
Reach higher LEED Standards
Housing comes to Kendall Square!
The coming together of decades of work
MIT to add housing at Broad Canal Way
Try to find a more direct way to the River
Broad Canal Way has a future!
Alexandria work with neighbors to create more great new parks
Imagine an urban Binney Street with great open space connections.
Imagine all of Kendall Square/East Cambridge with great open space connections
Imagine all the actors in Kendall working together
Please urban design together!

Envision
Negotiate
Connect

Cambridge Seems to be a Verb
Envision

A Cambridge that retains its liveability
Negotiate

With respect for different points of view
Connect

So that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts
Thanks for letting me be on your team!

I will enjoy seeing your work... (while I sip my Beaujolais and nibble my brie...)

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