

# Concord-Alewife Planning Study

## Meeting Notes: June 7, 2003 Community Meeting

---

**Committee:** Peg Callahan, Pat Goddard, Mitch Goldstein, Hom Sack, Ann Tennis, Doug Brugge

**City Staff:** Iram Farooq, Taha Jennings, Stuart Dash, Susan Glazer

**Consultants:** David Dixon, Ron Mallis, Herb Nolan, Liz Langley, David Black, Pam McKinney

---

### **Welcome and Background**

The Concord Alewife Planning Study is a follow-up to the citywide zoning initiative, and an attempt to look more thoroughly at areas in need of additional consideration. A great deal of interest was generated from within the Planning Board, residents in the community, property owners, as well as from throughout the city, which revealed the need to examine the area in more detail. The decision was made to take a proactive approach to the area during the present slow economic period. The committee members consist of a mix of residents, business, and property owners in the study area, and the monthly committee meetings are open to the public.

### **Discussion of Process**

The Concord Alewife Planning Study is a chance to plan for the future of Concord Alewife before the development pressures of the next economic boom emerge. This study represents an opportunity to channel future development toward a more community-friendly design than would occur without adequate planning ahead of time. The goal of this meeting is to receive input on how to shape a vision for the area.

There were some comments from meeting attendees regarding the comparison of this process to the process for Trolley Square and its corresponding final recommendations. Someone also asked about the affect the Concord-Alewife Planning Study will have on the larger region, and how communities in the surrounding region might be represented in the process.

City staff answered that the Trolley Square project was a plan for development of a City whereas the Concord-Alewife study will focus on a long term vision for the Study Area and identify zoning and non-zoning recommendations to bring that vision to fruition. The Concord-Alewife Study Committee members include residents, property owners and representatives of businesses and institutions within the Study Area. This is a model that is followed for most City Committees. Input from a broader group is received through public meetings and through public comment at Committee meetings.

There were additional questions regarding the geographic scope of the project, representation from neighboring towns, why the meeting format included breaking into small groups, and finally, how can people that were not able to attend the meeting be informed of the project and kept up to date.

In response, the need for a regional perspective of the project was recognized. It was also explained that breaking up into smaller groups was intended to allow an opportunity for all attendees to provide input. Meeting notes and project information is available on the Cambridge City website, and fliers are distributed throughout the community before meetings. The back of the agenda has space for public comment and contact information for project staff. Written comments can always be sent to CDD.

### **Discussion of Issues**

#### **TRANSPORTATION:**

- Concerns expressed at previous meetings included traffic congestion, safety issues, limited transit accessibility, and barriers.
- The transportation toolbox: Provide more options to get from one place to another, safety always being a primary concern.
- Safety/ traffic calming - in particular for Blanchard Road.

- Emerging transportation guiding principles: reducing anticipated trip growth, balancing the transportation environment, and addressing safety issues.

#### ENVIRONMENT:

- Flooding occurs as a result of impervious surfaces and necessitates paying close attention to affects on the quality, quantity and rate of water run-off.
- Different types of open space can play a role in solving environmental problems. The role of architecture is important as well. Some “green buildings”, for example, can reduce runoff and incorporate filtration systems.

#### EXISTING ZONING:

- Medium density residential zones exist in the Highlands and higher density is allowed elsewhere in the study area.

#### EMERGING DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES:

- Improve the public realm;
- Improve connections;
- Avoid vehicular connection between the “Quadrangle” and the Highlands;
- Make respectful transitions with existing neighborhoods;
- Locate higher density near transit;
- Create social, environmental and economic value;
- Positively affect the water quality and environment.

Two possible conceptual approaches are under discussion – one with a connection to the Alewife T station, and one without. Topics to consider during the planning exercise are possible opportunities for connections—vehicular as well as pedestrian and bicycle—and perhaps an enjoyable public realm centering on water.

#### **Questions for Clarification of the Presentation:**

Questions were raised regarding the possibility of locating a new MBTA commuter rail stop in the study area, and whether a connection between the Triangle and Quadrangle areas should be pedestrian or vehicular. It was explained that the MBTA has looked at a potential new stop in the area and has not classified it as a high priority. Hence it is not likely to get funded in the near future (next ten years). The nature of a potential connection between the Triangle and Quadrangle has not determined and should be a part of the small group discussions.

#### **Small Group Workshops & Presentations:**

A large map of the study area as well as blocks of varying sizes representing different building types, and land uses were provided to each group.

Each group was asked to think about and discuss:

- What land uses they’d like to see and where
- What types of heights and densities and where those should go
- Where and how important connections should be made

The blocks and map were used to create 3-dimensional displays of the study area based on the discussions of the small groups. The key themes that emerged from each of the working groups are highlighted below. Additional information can be gleaned by viewing photographs of the group models/diagrams:

#### **Group 1**

1. Reinforce open space and buffer areas between the Highlands and the Quadrangle, and between the rail line and the Quadrangle.
2. Moderate scale of housing along Concord Avenue.
3. Create a series of open spaces within the Quadrangle.

4. Make a useful connection between Quadrangle and Triangle without creating additional traffic.
5. Locate higher density along Alewife Brook Parkway, including the redevelopment of shopping centers to include mixed use, and exploring the redevelopment potential of the electric infrastructure.
6. Consider possibilities in the short and long terms.

#### **Group 2**

1. Create a connection between the Alewife T station and the Quadrangle without general vehicular access: or, terminate the access before Concord Avenue to discourage cut-through traffic (e.g. people mover/shuttle)
2. Create a linear open space incorporating a stormwater treatment facility, such as a detention pond, within the Quadrangle.
3. Housing near Cambridge Highlands, in ways that minimize additions to traffic; potentially include a mix of retail and other uses with the housing.

#### **Group 3**

1. Buffer the Highlands.
2. Reduce the amount of paving within the Quadrangle by utilizing green spaces, particularly in proximity of the Highlands.
3. Incorporate water treatment features in the open space in Quadrangle.
4. Create a pedestrian connection between the Triangle and Quadrangle allowing access from the Highlands, too. Make sure vehicles are not allowed.
5. Reduce the block sizes in Quadrangle.
6. Focus new development closer to the Alewife T station.
7. Enhance walkability throughout the Study Area.
8. Introduce retail within the Quadrangle
9. Expand the parking garage at the T station, with discount parking for employees within the study area, and attractive pedestrian connections to the station.
10. Preserve the Fresh Pond path for pedestrians.

#### **Group 4**

1. More transit options and improvements in the study area, including new shuttle/van services and MBTA improvements
2. More transportation connections within the study area
3. Encourage a mix of land uses, including more housing and "small focused" open spaces
4. Appropriate scale for new development, especially adjacent to the Highlands neighborhood.

#### **Group 5**

1. Create connections between Alewife and Fresh Pond Reservations, both pedestrian/bicycle and water (long term).
2. Create a green buffer between the Highlands and Triangle/Quadrangle that connects Blair Pond and Rafferty Park,
3. Create and support public access to Blair Pond and improve the quality of the water there.
4. Encourage walking from the Highlands to Fresh Pond Shopping Center along Fresh Pond, while continuing to protect this environmental resource.
5. Create a pedestrian connection to Cambridge Highlands via a "boulevard."
6. Locate lower buildings at the neighborhood's edge; larger buildings that are well designed with green open space should be clustered in the Quadrangle within walking distance to the T.
7. Development should be low-impact and bring improvements for drainage. Green space should function to help the water situation.

8. A connection should be for pedestrians, bicyclists and shuttles, but prohibit general car use.
9. Encourage residential development, offering opportunities for co-housing and affordable ownership, and locating this development near parks.
10. Create a connection from Rindge Avenue (Fresh Pond Apartments, and Jefferson Park) to the shopping center and Danehy Park and to other green space areas.