

Several questions have come up during the discussions at the Concord Alewife Study Committee meetings and at public meetings for the study. The following is an attempt to provide answers to those questions.

Process

1. *What is the goal of the Concord-Alewife Planning Study?*

The Citywide growth management process focused on issues of future density and traffic growth, the need for more housing, including affordable units, and opportunities for public review of large projects. The ensuing rezoning adopted by the City Council in 2001 resulted in zoning changes that lowered density in commercial districts, encouraged the development of housing, took steps to reduce future traffic growth in the City, and instituted citywide project review for large projects. Following the Citywide rezoning, parts of the City, such as Eastern Cambridge and Concord-Alewife, were identified as areas that required a finer grained planning analysis as they represented commercially zoned areas with significant remaining development potential.

The Concord-Alewife Planning Study, begun in February 2003, aims to create a vision for the study area and to develop tools and recommendations to achieve that vision. This project will be guided by an advisory committee appointed by the City Manager in December 2002. Key planning issues to be addressed by this study include the appropriate mix of uses, including housing, industry, possible City uses, and open space; access and traffic; the character of future development; and needed zoning changes to accomplish study goals.

2. *How is this planning effort being coordinated with the work that other City committees and departments are doing in the area?*

Ongoing City efforts that affect the study area include stormwater improvements and sewer separation and the Tri-Community Working Group (with Arlington and Belmont) to address flooding. The recently completed Fresh Pond Master Plan, coordination with the MDC on the Alewife Reservation master plan, and Fresh Pond Parkway improvements also relate to the Study Area. Project staff is coordinating with staff from the Department of Public Works, City Manager's office, and other Community Development Department (CDD) staff who are involved in these other City efforts to ensure overall consistency.

3. *There is a concern about how the traffic and environmental issues of the larger region affect this area. To what extent will there be coordination with neighboring areas/municipalities?*

Many of the traffic issues that affect the study area are regional in nature owing to its location on several major regional travel corridors. This study, while recognizing the importance of the regional traffic, will focus on local interventions to improve the transportation system, particularly for pedestrians and bicycles. Improving access to transit is also emerging as a key goal of the Committee, in order to encourage people to use modes other than auto to get to and from the site.

Environmental issues in the area were addressed by the recently completed Fresh Pond Master Plan and the MDC master plan for the Alewife Reservation. The ongoing stormwater improvements and the Tri-Community Working Group address flooding issues that also involve Belmont and Arlington. The focus of the Concord – Alewife Planning Study is land use and urban design, informed by transportation and environmental considerations. CDD is coordinating with the Department of Public Works and other City departments to ensure that the recommendations emerging from the Concord Alewife Planning Study are consistent with these other efforts. This study will work to incorporate appropriate guidelines that help achieve transportation and stormwater management goals for the area.

4. *There have been a number of past planning studies in the Alewife area that have not succeeded. How is this study different?*

The Alewife area has been the subject of a number of planning efforts in the past. A detailed urban design study was conducted for the area over 20 years ago resulting in the Alewife Revitalization: Alewife Urban Design Study Phase II (1979). Zoning resulting from this process has partially guided development in the Quadrangle and Triangle. A June 1981 study established this part of the City as the Alewife Commercial Area Revitalization District as part of the City's strategy to revitalize and strengthen its commercial base. This was to be spurred by the then ongoing extension of the MBTA Red Line and construction of Alewife station as well as other infrastructure improvements.

The Alewife master planning process, 1991-93, was designed to be consistent with the City's growth policy document Toward a Sustainable Future. This resulted in the draft master plan entitled Alewife: A Plan for Sustainable Development (March 1994). The recommendations of this study were not adopted and the matter was deferred for future study. The Citywide rezoning of 2001 reduced commercial FARs by approximately 25% in much of the study area, reduced parking ratios, and created a project review provision for large projects.

The Citywide growth management study and rezoning recognized that the Concord-Alewife area is one of the parts of the City with significant remaining development potential. This set the stage for the more fine-grained look at the area that we are currently engaged in. It is a goal of this study that working with the Committee and the public, through public meetings, the final recommendations will be not only visionary, but also practical, and represent a balance among a variety of interests.

5. *How does this process work? What will happen to the Committee's recommendations?*

The Concord-Alewife Planning Study Committee represents a diverse range of interests in the study area -- residents, property owners, and business representatives. The Committee will work together with consultants and staff to develop zoning and non-zoning recommendations that help achieve the goals and vision identified during the process. The Committee's work will be informed both by Committee discussion and by hearing from the public at community meetings.

At the end of the process, the Committee will forward its recommendations to the City Manager. Zoning recommendations will go to the Planning Board for their review. The Planning Board may make additional modifications to the proposed zoning

recommendations. The Planning Board will forward to the City Council a set of proposed changes to the Zoning Ordinance. Zoning changes can only be adopted by an affirmative vote of the City Council. Non-zoning recommendations, such as those pertaining to transportation or open space, will be forwarded to the City Manager to be considered for inclusion in the City's work plan. Although each of these groups gives carefully considers recommendations emerging from a Committee, the specifics of final actions may be different from the specifics of the recommendations.

6. *How will public comment be included in this process?*

Public (community) meetings are the primary opportunity for the Committee to receive public input. There will be three public meetings during Phase I of the project. In addition, similar to most City Committee processes, Concord-Alewife Planning Study Committee meetings have a 10-15 minute public comment period at the end of each meeting. Additional comments/material may be submitted in written form either at the meeting or by sending them directly to CDD.

Transportation

7. *How will the study address traffic in the area?*

The goal of this study is to review future development allowed in the Study Area (including amount, location, and mix of uses), to create guidelines to influence the nature of development that is expected, and to ensure that development is sensitive to current conditions and goals for the area. Emerging goals include creating of a sense of place and a pleasant and walkable public realm, creating desired connections, minimizing transportation impacts, and making future development more sensitive to environmental and hydrological considerations. The study will work to balance all these goals, including transportation, to shape future development in the Study Area.

Development potential in the area could be reconfigured to be more sensitive to transit proximity -- allowing greater density close to transit and reducing it further away. Additionally, since various land uses have different trip-generation characteristics, reconfiguring the allowed mix of uses and providing incentives for low-trip generating uses could be another strategy to address transportation concerns.

The Citywide rezoning of 2001 reduced the commercial development capacity of much this area by approximately 25%. This is expected to significantly reduce the potential traffic growth compared to what would have been possible under zoning prior to Citywide. The Concord-Alewife Planning Study will also incorporate this goal of reducing future traffic growth.

8. *What can be done about traffic congestion on the Alewife Brook Parkway and the rotaries?*

The Alewife Brook and Fresh Pond Parkways and the rotaries are part of the east-west corridor connecting the western suburbs to Boston along Route 2 as well as part of the Route 16 corridor. Because of this, a large component of the traffic on the Parkways is regional in nature and is passing through the study area, having neither origin nor destination within the

area. Therefore, actions within the study area are unlikely to significantly impact the overall magnitude of the traffic volumes. The primary way to reduce traffic volume would be through very significant expansion of the regional transit infrastructure to serve communities well beyond Belmont and Arlington to the west and communities along Route 16. Short of such major regional changes, which are not controlled by the City, this study will take a closer look at the road network with respect to the following:

- the system is processing traffic efficiently,
- the network is designed to provide a safe and pleasant pedestrian and bicycle environment,
- access between Alewife Station as well as bus routes and other transit facilities, and all parts of the study area is made as convenient as possible to increase the convenience of using transit, and
- reasonable efforts are made to mitigate traffic impacts of new development.

9. *Do the rotaries create traffic problems on Fresh Pond and Alewife Brook Parkways?*

Congestion on the parkways was reviewed as part of the Fresh Pond Parkway Reconstruction project. Although the Alewife and Concord Ave. rotaries slightly delay vehicles, the primary delay is at either end of the corridor, at the signalized intersections of Route 2 & 16 and at Huron Avenue. The MDC decided to maintain and upgrade the rotaries at these locations because they process more traffic than a signalized intersection, with less delay for vehicles.

10. *How does the planning propose to address traffic concerns on Blanchard Road? Is it possible to reduce the extent to which the roadway is used as a cut-through?*

The Concord-Alewife Planning Study will address all areas in the study area, including Blanchard Road. Blanchard Road serves as a component of the regional transportation network, lying on the north-south desire line for Route 2 traffic. Diverting traffic from Blanchard is difficult as it would inevitably place it on a similar parallel street. Given that, however, recommendations will be devised to address the character of Blanchard Road and enhance the pedestrian environment and safety. This could include reducing the speed of traffic (traffic calming) and enhancing walkability. The intersection of Blanchard Rd./Colby St. will be analyzed to determine if improvements there could indicate the residential nature of the street. Any recommendations for this intersection will require coordination with Belmont since part of Blanchard Rd. and all of Colby St. are within Belmont. Additional data collection and analysis are being conducted to clarify issues about the operation of Blanchard Rd. and the Blanchard Rd./Concord Ave. intersection.

11. *Has the addition of bike lanes to Concord Ave created traffic backup at the intersection of Blanchard Road and Concord Avenue?*

With the addition of the bike lane, the configuration of the Concord Avenue and Blanchard Road intersection was not changed. There are still three lanes approaching Blanchard Road, beginning at Sancta Maria; one left turn lane, one through lane, and one right turn lane. The capacity of the intersection was not greatly impacted by the bike lane; what changed was the storage for vehicles waiting to get through the signal. The same number of vehicles in the queue feels worse for commuters because they are stopped in traffic farther back on Concord Avenue. While this seems like a longer wait, if the signal can process waiting vehicles in a

single cycle, efficiency of the intersection is maintained. During this study, traffic engineers will consider whether improvements could be made to the signal timing of the Concord/Blanchard intersection to facilitate traffic flow at peak hours.

12. Why not get rid of the bike lane or move it to the south side of Concord Ave. and off road along Fresh Pond Reservation?

The option of a two-way bike path along Concord Avenue separated from the sidewalk has previously been evaluated by CDD. Removing the bike lanes from Concord Avenue would allow an additional travel lane to be installed on Concord Avenue. However, this would have several negative impacts on cyclists and on the Fresh Pond Reservation.

- The path would likely come within 100' of Blacks Nook and would therefore require Conservation Commission approval because of the potential impacts to the bank and bordering vegetative wetland. Blacks Nook is a sensitive habitat area and the Fresh Pond Master Plan recommends a vegetated buffer adjacent to Concord Avenue.
- It would be inconvenient for cyclists traveling on the proposed path to access the housing or businesses located along the north side of Concord Avenue since the only signalized crossing to the Quadrangle is at Moulton Street.
- The path would require the removal of undergrowth and existing trees in the reservation, including some specimen trees and an historical Olmsted grove of trees at the northeast corner of Fairway 5. These currently provide a visual and acoustical screen for Fresh Pond Reservation from the Concord Avenue traffic.

13. What are the options for an at-grade crossing between the Triangle and the Quadrangle?

For safety reasons, at-grade crossings of railroad tracks are not recommended and not supported by the MBTA.

14. What are the options for a vehicular connection between the Triangle and the Quadrangle?

A vehicular connection between the Triangle and Quadrangle would provide a direct connection for Route 2 traffic in and out of the Quadrangle (similar to the Alewife station garage) without using the Alewife Brook Parkway, thereby enhancing vehicular access and reducing some trips (existing and new) on the Parkway. A concern with creating a vehicular connection is that it could open up a short-cut route between the Parkway and Concord Avenue that could be attractive for trips to destinations within and beyond the study area. The implications of this potential connection will be looked at as part of the planning study.

15. What are the options for a pedestrian connection between the Triangle and the Quadrangle?

A pedestrian and bicycle connection between the Quadrangle and Triangle would significantly enhance transit (Red Line and regional bus) accessibility for the Quadrangle. Such a crossing would involve high capital cost and would require an easement from MBTA over the railroad right-of-way. One way to expedite the creation of such a connection might be to look for participation from future development in the area that would benefit from such a crossing.

16. *What are the options for a commuter rail stop in Concord-Alewife?*

The idea of a Commuter rail stop in Alewife has come up a number of times in the past. The issues that MBTA typically considers in determining whether a new stop should be introduced on a line are:

- The impact of a new stop on the whole line – additional time a stop would add to a route – and possible resultant loss of ridership
- Number of potential new riders that would be served by the creation of the stop
- Cost per rider

In past analyses, the MBTA has found that the potential new ridership for a commuter rail stop in the Concord-Alewife area was insufficient to justify time delays and cost of a new stop.

This Committee may choose to once again raise the issue for MBTA consideration, especially given that the Committee's recommendations may result in a different use mix that might increase the potential new ridership.

Environment

17. *There is a concern that flooding will only be made worse with new development.*

Currently, a large percentage of the study area is hardscaped and impermeable – buildings, streets, parking lots, paving – leading to a great deal of surface runoff. A key strategy to address flooding concerns is to reduce surface runoff by increasing permeability and/or retaining stormwater on site for a period of time. In many ways, redevelopment is the best way to address flooding problems, as redevelopment of the currently hardscaped areas could be required to be more responsive to stormwater concerns. Increasing the percentage of pervious surfaces in the Quadrangle would allow more water to recharge back into the ground and reduce the volume and rate of runoff. We envisage that this planning process will recommend guidelines for stormwater quality and quantity through use of best management practices.

18. *Historically, some streams in the area were filled in and diverted into culverts and pipes. Can we bring these streams back to the surface?*

Bringing streams out of pipes and back to the surface, called daylighting, should be done very judiciously. In areas such as the Quadrangle, where much of the land is paved and surface runoff levels are high, daylighting culverted streams runs the risk of increasing flooding.