Mayor David Maher’s Red Ribbon Commission on the Delights and Concerns of Central Square

Co-Chaired by
Councilor Kenneth E. Reeves and
Deputy City Manager Richard C. Rossi

urban design/planning study for the central and kendall square area
Planning for Central Square... your thoughts... your ideas
Agenda

• Overview
  — Understanding the opportunity
  — What we’ve seen and heard
  — Making it happen: planning process
• Discussion: Central Square...now and in the future
• Report-backs and summary
UNDERSTANDING THE OPPORTUNITY

Finding the synergies between creating community and competing in the 21st century
The right time and place: “demographics are destiny”

• The region’s diversified households need a variety of housing choices
  – More than half of all households in the region are singles and couples—double the proportion of 10 years ago
  – Family households still have an important place ... though they have dropped to under 25% of total
• These trends will dominate housing and neighborhood choices for 15-25 years
America faces a long-term shortage of innovation workers

- 25-34-year olds were no more likely than the rest of the population to want to live in or near a downtown 20 years ago.
- Today they are 33% more likely.
- "Creative workers" in this age range are 53% more likely.
Changing demographics are changing values that shape our living environment

1950s to 1990s:
- Golf courses
- Large backyards
- Homogeneity
- Escape from work

2000s:
- Main Streets
- “Social places”
- Diversity
- Live near work
- Social and environmental responsibility

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Changing technologies offer opportunities to improve our natural environment.
SHAPING A CENTRAL SQUARE VISION

• Opportunities
• Precedents
• Preliminary urban design ideas
Opportunity: Revive Central Square as the heart of a diverse community

- Celebrate its identity as one of the most diverse places around.
- Enrich the mix of uses with more housing, retail, arts.
- Create a more complete destination for more people.
- Improve connections to surrounding neighborhoods.
- Capitalize on transit connections.
- Build on groundwork of the Red Ribbon Commission.
Opportunity: Transform Main Street into a place of community connections

- Front door of a mixed-use neighborhood
- Expanded range of housing choices
- Walkable place connecting Central Square to Kendall
- ...and to adjacent neighborhoods (Area 4, Mid-Cambridge, Cambridgeport)
- ...and to MIT
Precedent: Downtown Asheville, NC
Precedent: Washington, DC—U Street, Columbia Heights, Eastern Market
Urban design: Vitality, community
Urban design: Vitality, community
Central Square: What we’ve heard and seen

• “Cambridge’s downtown”
• One of the region’s most diverse places—and celebrated for it
• An important transportation hub: Red Line, buses, shuttles, bikes, walking, driving
• Retail space is mostly full—but key vacancies and blank banks make it feel less so
• Lafayette Square has come alive with outdoor events and unique restaurants
• Generous sidewalk space needs more active use
• Research activities want to be near the vibrancy of Central Square
• Opportunity to add housing, retail and/or other uses at a range of scales in and around the square
Our next steps: analysis

- Diagram strategic locations for housing, retail, research.
- Test buildout scenarios based on public input and Committee discussions.
- Understand the demographic profile of residents, workers and visitors.
- **Transportation assessment**
  - Pedestrian and bicycle improvements; neighborhood connections
  - Red Line/bus capacity and other transit issues
  - Assess trip generation and parking needs; opportunities for improved utilization of existing parking?
- **Retail study** — what is Central Square’s distinct niche, considering Kendall, Harvard, Inman Squares, etc.?
- Draft design guidelines — keeping the square active, pedestrian-scaled.
- Map open spaces — Which are succeeding? Which need improvements to reach their full potential? What others are needed?
- Evaluate existing zoning against current and future objectives.
- Show how Central can be a sustainability model.
Pending zoning petitions: informing criteria for places of community

Novartis

MIT

Forest City
Key development criteria areas highlighted by pending development proposals

- Land use
- Height and massing
- Support for the pedestrian environment
- Transportation and parking
- Sustainability
- Open space
Novartis

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Forest City

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Discussion exercise: Central Square...now and in the future

Overview questions:
• What must be preserved?
• What’s appropriate for change?
• What are your priorities?
• Who should be at the table?

...and focus on nine topics
Topics for discussion

• **Identity:**
  What has Central Square been? What is it now? What should it be? Is there a single Central Square?

• **Public space(s):**
  How are they experienced? How could they be experienced? Where are the most appealing examples? What are future needs?

• **Sidewalks (including street furniture and lighting):**
  How well do these work currently? Are changes needed?
Topics for discussion

- **Housing:**
  What is the current mix? Can or should that mix be modified/expanded? Amount? Diversity? Other?

- **Transportation and neighborhood connections:**
  Are those connections comfortable for people walking, cycling, using transit, driving? Do they make the right connections? Can they be made more convenient? More comfortable? How?
Topics for discussion

- Retail and restaurants
  What does Central Square have enough of?
  What should it have more of?

- Arts, culture, and entertainment
  What do we have? What’s missing?
Topics for discussion

- **Sustainability**
  How can actions in Central Square lead to more environmentally sustainable design, planning and living? For individual buildings and for the square overall?

- **Cleanliness and safety:**
  What do you think are key issues?
Next steps

• Red Ribbon Commission recommendations
• Assemble steering committee
• Steering committee and public meeting series in autumn to shape the plan
• Coordinate with Kendall Square planning
• Complete plan by late 2011
For more information:

www2.cambridgema.gov/ cdd/ cp/ zng/ k2c2/ index.html