

Joint Meeting of Transportation Committees Meeting on March 19, 2025

DRAFT Meeting Notes

Attendees

- Members in attendance: Richard Freierman, Randy Stern, Muna El Taha, Denise Haynes, Camille Jonlin, Scott Kilcoyne, Vanessa Nwankwo, Leah Pickett, Sandy Goldberg, Robin Bonner, Debby Galef, Alexandra Hallowell, Kevin Leckey, Xander Mitchell, Logan Reed, Janet Stein, Pete Septoff, David Rangaviz, Omriqui Thomas, Clyve Lawrence, Ian Hatch, Matthew Kramer, Keisha Greaves, Andrew Zhou, Matt Martin, Annalisa Bhatia, Miles Robinson
- Members absent: Amy Flax, Gregory Carey-Medlock, Martha Birnbaum, Mark A. Boswell, Michael Burke, Guido Cuperus, John P. Ellersick, Amy Flax, Diane Gray, Alison Harris, Eitan Normand, Carola Voelker, Ling Zeng, Jesus Armenta, John Leo, Thomas Marsh, Michael McGowan, Bernhard Nickel, Sean Peirce, Jeannine Powers, Maryann Quinn, Jenine Turner-Trauring, Devin Chausse, Jim Gascoigne, Bill McAvinney, Jackson Moore-Otto, Katherine Rafferty, Arthur Strang, Melissa Zampitella, Craig Tateronis, Sandhya Ramakrishnan, Patrick Delaney, Nick Lessin, Matthew Mccominskey
- City staff: Nick Schmidt (CDD), Quinn Murphy (CDD), Stephen Meuse (TPT), Jerry Friedman (DPW), Suzannah Bigolin (CDD), Melissa Miguel (DPW)
- Visitors: Carl Wilson, Heather Hoffman, Kasey Owen, Marc Levy

Announcements

- April 1st there will be a new department: Cambridge Department of Transportation
 - TP&T, which includes Streets Management and Parking Management divisions, will expand to include a Transportation Planning Division composed of CDD Transportation Planning staff.
 - Transportation Committees will shift over as well
 - More information to come from the City
- Linear Park Redesign Bids = April
- Grand Junction Path to Community Path Design Study = Spring

Citywide Urban Design Guidelines (Suzannah Bigolin, CDD)

- Project Team
 - CDD runs, with strong participation from DPW/Transportation Department/Cambridge Arts/CHC/Commission for Persons with Disabilities
 - Consultant team: OverUnder/Gehl/Kleinfelder/KMDG/Noble Wickersham
- Design Guidelines

- Design statements and recommendations intended to assist developers, architects, property and business owners as they develop new projects, as well as to inform public work
- Built on community values, set expectations, intended to encourage better quality design of buildings, open spaces, and streetscapes
- Guidelines cannot change zoning land uses/dimensional requirements/force design/impose strict limitations
- History of Work
 - Reviewed guidelines from 48 different places from US and world
 - Reviewed existing City plans, policies and guidelines
 - Public meetings and key stakeholders review
 - Bi-weekly meetings with staff from 2022 – 2024
 - Existing conditions review (Citywide)
 - Field work in late September 2022
 - Three key goals:
 - Design excellence
 - Equity
 - Sustainability (resilience perhaps to be added)
- Operationalization of Goals:
 - Inviting
 - Eclectic
 - Contextual
 - Connected
 - Adaptable
 - Healthy
- Context & Site
 - Guidelines for layouts of new streets and blocks, relationship between new buildings, neighboring buildings, and open spaces
 - Walkable & Coherent Neighborhoods
 - Inclusive Neighborhoods
 - Sustainable Development
 - Guidelines for integrating into the existing contexts so as to create a cohesive whole.
 - Create coherent, permeable, walkable blocks
 - Design buildings that spatially define streets & open spaces (3D outdoor rooms)
 - Access, Circulation, Connectivity
 - Link pedestrian-priority spaces
 - Incorporate pedestrian paths
 - Provide variety and interest for pedestrians
 - Integrate design best practices
 - Orient pedestrian entrances to front streets
 - Frequent entrances to buildings & storefronts
 - Site ped entrances in locations accessible to transit/crosswalks
 - Support transit use via interventions like benches/bus shelters/etc

- Bicycle Facilities
 - Provide adequate facilities (separate lanes, multi-use paths, in locations identified in the City bicycle plan)
 - Long-term weatherproof storage
 - Short-term bike parking in convenient and visible locations
 - Identify bike share locations early in design process
- Building
 - Well-Designed Buildings
 - Rich facades, active ground floors, blend or stand out
 - Welcoming Buildings
 - Mixed uses, engaging facades, accessible design
 - Sustainable Buildings
 - Prioritize environmental sustainability and resilience
- Open Space
 - City's "living rooms" enriched by landscape design, activities taking place in them, and the buildings that frame them.
- Streetscape
 - Places for People and Public Life
 - Streetscape for all: accessible, comfortable, safe, and enjoyable by all via wide, clear, safe sidewalks with durable surfaces, accessible seating, and interesting features
 - Resilient streetscapes
 - Streetscape Experience
 - Corridor Streets – arteries connecting neighborhoods (mixed-use destinations/citywide importance)
 - Neighborhood Main Streets – eclectic mix of residences, small businesses, and services
 - Residential Streets – residential fabric, providing a safe and delightful environment for residents
 - People First Sidewalks
 - Continuous + well-connected
 - Widths relating to anticipated level of pedestrian activity
 - Clear, unobstructed Pedestrian Zones
 - Planting/furnishing zones if possible
 - Provide frontage zones when possible on corridor and neighborhood main streets
 - Green Streetscapes
 - Protect and preserve existing street trees
 - Design sidewalks to support large-canopy tree growth
 - Plant new street trees
 - Ensure trees and plants do not impede intersection sightlines
 - Use DPW planting standards/species, etc
 - Provide green infrastructure in the planting/furnishing zone
 - Paving Materials

- Durable, low-maintenance and available materials
- High contrast materials and tactile paving to highlight hazard areas and differentiate “zones”
- Select materials based on context/character of streetscape
 - Meet City standards
 - Vary from standards for unique areas
- Consistent materials/color/finish
- Consider opportunities to integrate art, learning, playful elements
- Pedestrian-Scaled Lighting
 - Regular intervals for fixtures
 - Coordinate planting with light source placement
 - Select fixtures based on context and character of streetscape
 - City standards
 - Vary for unique locations
 - Coordinate pole and fixture design with other street furniture
- Comfortable & Welcoming Furnishings
 - Prioritize street furnishings on busy walking streets
 - Locate on curbside edge, within planting/furnishing zone
 - Arrange furnishings in coordination with trees and street lighting
 - Keep predictable locations for furnishings
 - Study site-specific conditions
 - City standard
 - Vary when warranted
 - Maintain consistent design palette
- Bicycle Parking
 - Meet regulations
 - Provide adequate parking along corridors – particularly commercial areas
 - Racks within Planting/Furnishing Zone
 - Ensure access not blocked
 - Coordinate bike racks with other furnishings
 - Consider use of creative/artistic racks
 - Provide bike share locations as needed
- Bus Shelters
 - Coordinate w/ staff on bus shelter needs/plans/locations
 - Prioritize safety visibility and accessibility
 - Co-locate with other street furniture when possible
 - Consider opportunities for creative/unique shelter designs
- Next Steps
 - Draft is presently out in public
 - Completion scheduled for mid to late April
 - Zoning updates coming (though no timeline)
 - Guidelines = living document

Questions from Committee Members

- Do urban design guidelines affirm a specific preference for bike infrastructure?
 - As of now, no. Our design approach is case-by-case, informed by research and Level of Comfort analysis in the Bicycle Plan.
 - The City wants to promote safety via many policies and design considerations – hard to say that this or that configuration is superior, because specific factors influence the optimal approach.
- Overarching question – once this is accepted, what power does it have? Also, quick aside, wayfinding & signage wasn't addressed here but I was interested!
 - No time to incorporate into this particular presentation – sorry! To answer your first question, we will use this as our rubric for assessing projects and working with the Planning Board on reviewing projects. Part of the process is that developers need to respond to intent. We are open to creative approaches, but the guidelines are meant to have teeth – part of the urban design objectives in the zoning ordinance, and projects that go through the Planning Board. Smaller projects wouldn't have this applied directly to them procedurally, though.
- Do the design guidelines cover design that would discourage cars from driving unsafely or to mitigate vehicle noise?
 - We broadly talk about the furnishing and planting zones as a buffer to pedestrians (from vehicles) we don't have guidelines related to that. We could expand upon those issues though. Artistic racks that follow City guidelines can also be successfully integrated!
 - The Urban Design Guidelines are more applicable at the parcel/block scale, and the issues being raised here are more of a corridor question that requires a whole suite of analysis and design guidance beyond the scope of the guidelines. That is why this doesn't address that in the way you've raised it. That said, the speed and volume of traffic is absolutely a real-world variable in pedestrian/biking comfort.
- Have open street projects been considered by the City at all? Can we encourage that type of planning on a longer-term basis?
- Are there broader guidelines on artistic bike racks as well as bike racks that fit a variety of bike sizes/designs? Does Cambridge have a stance on hostile street design? To the extent feasible, it would be great to affirmatively push back against hostile elements (spikes, etc.) A stronger stance would be helpful.
 - There is a Council Policy on hostile architecture, and we do mention that in our OS section
- Organic experience of streets evolving over time (little library, different awnings/etc) are great. Uniformity is less interesting to me! So, I appreciate the flexibility of allowing different kinds of things to happen next to each other. The other note I want to mention is a comment I hear frequently re: bricks on sidewalks – is there a way to seal bricks better to make it easier for wheelchairs to roll?
 - DPW standards tend to govern us on how to install brick. We also talk about age-friendly benches, but if you have any specific ideas or guidelines that would be great.
 - There is a conference tomorrow about this and there actually are state guidelines to work with already.

- Downlighting to prevent light pollution?
 - We do take this into account! Dark sky compliant and shielded fixtures consistent with City standards that doesn't under or over-light.

Public Comment

- City administration may reject specific locations for the commercial bus shelters. How about we articulate a preference for non-commercial bus shelters? The ones around Harvard Yard are decent precedents. Whenever possible there should be separation between pedestrians and cyclists.
 - There are limitations on who provides these, but we also design site-specific shelters at times. There are options to do things differently.
- I think that what I want to talk about most is wayfinding. It's an important urban design issue. Buildings should be designed to help us figure out where we are without spending a lot of time, especially people on wheels! Too many buildings are designed without reference to zoning-compliant signage. The Planning Board has refused to look at this. This type of thing should be in design guidelines. Lighting is also important! Lights shouldn't blind people, but they need to show you where you're going. I am sure bicyclists are blinded just the way the rest of us are when lights are too bright and poorly-aimed.