

**CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
HARVARD SQUARE DESIGN PROJECT
MEETING NOTES**

Subject: Harvard Square Design Committee (HSDC) – Meeting #8

Date, Time & Place: March 20, 2003, 6:30 PM – 8:30 PM
Cambridge Savings Bank

Present:

HSDC Members:

Jinny Nathans	Bill Bibbins	Nelson Goddard
Alex Sagan	Hugh Russell	Nathalie Beauvais
Sean Peirce	Nelson Goddard	Rohit Chopra
Susan Rogers	John DiGiovanni	Irene Goodman
Mary Parkin	Robert Banker	

Public:

Jonathan Poorvu	Jo Solet	Gerry Swislow
Bill Poorvu	Gail Roberts	David Loutzenheiser
Mike Hansen	Mary Tonouagat	Michael Halle
Jim Smith	David Spiller	Ed Mank
Jason Waleyán	Jacqueline Brown	Don Himmelsbach
John Burckardt	Peggy Kutcher	

City of Cambridge:

Susan Glazer (CDD)	Kathy Watkins (CDD)	Jeff Parenti (TP&T)
Susanne Rasmussen (CDD)	Cara Seiderman (CDD)	Sarah Burks (CHC)

*CDD = Community Development
Department*

*TP&T = Traffic, Parking and
Transportation Department*

*CPD = Commission for Persons with
Disabilities*

*CAC = Cambridge Arts Council
CHC = Cambridge Historical
Commission*

Consultant Team:

Jim Winn (Edwards and Kelcey)	Rod Emery (Edwards and Kelcey)
-------------------------------	--------------------------------

1. WELCOME (Susanne Rasmussen)

- Susanne welcomed the attendees and reviewed the agenda for the evening. After a quick update on the project, the focus of the meeting will be on Brattle Street.
- Upcoming Harvard Square Design Committee Meetings
 - ◆ May 1, 2003 – Prep for Community Meeting.
 - ◆ May 15, 2003 – Community Meeting.
 - ◆ June 19, 2003 – Committee Meeting to discuss materials.
- **Church Street.** Staff has met with the First Parish Church and is developing a revised alternative for Church Street that seeks to address their concerns regarding the loss of parking adjacent to the church. The revised alternative will be reviewed at the May 1st meeting.
- **Committee Process.** Before we begin the discussion tonight I would like to talk a little bit about the committee process. I think we have had a great committee process. We have come to consensus on a number of very positive improvements:

Meeting Notes

March 20, 2003

Page 1 of 9

1. Bike and pedestrian connection through Flagstaff Park
2. Wider sidewalk on Church Street at the movie theater
3. Super crosswalk at Out of Town News
4. Missing bike connection from Mass Ave (from Central Square) to Brattle Street (westbound)
5. Adding missing crosswalks
6. Plaza improvements at Wordsworth Triangle and Eliot Plaza
7. Lampoon building improvements.

We have made a number of important decisions regarding transportation / circulation improvements and plazas fairly quickly and now we are left with the more difficult one of Brattle Street. We are going to review in detail the pros and cons and traffic projections with all of the Brattle Street alternatives, have committee discussion, hear from the public and then get a recommendation from the committee.

We believe that we need to wrap up the Brattle Street conversations tonight. We have all spent a lot of time thinking through all of these issues. It is our sense that there is not information that is missing or a viable alternative for Brattle Street that would provide more pros and fewer cons that has not been considered. It is important that we continue to move the design process along. There are good improvements that we want to make and there are also basic infrastructure issues that need to be addressed such as the sidewalks on JFK Street.

Our goal, as we discussed at the first committee meeting, is to get consensus on the alternatives. If we do not reach consensus on Brattle Street, we will not make major changes to the street. We cannot make Brattle Street 2-way or install a contra-flow bicycle facility without strong support from this committee. If we do not reach consensus, we will summarize our discussions at the community meeting and let people know the process that has occurred around this issue, but we will not make major changes to Brattle Street.

2. Review of Brattle Street Alternatives (Kathy Watkins and Jim Winn)

The lack of inbound bike access on Brattle Street between Mason and Eliot was identified early on in the committee process as a transportation issue. Brattle Street is an attractive route for cyclists coming into and through Harvard Square from the west. It is a more comfortable street to bike on than Mt. Auburn Street or Garden Street. Cyclists traveling eastbound on Brattle Street can either

- ◆ go to Harvard Square via Hilliard and Mt. Auburn or
- ◆ continue on Brattle to Mason, at which point they are faced with two alternatives
 - traveling the wrong way on Brattle Street or
 - using Mason to Garden to Mass Ave.

The City has a strong policy of encouraging cycling, walking and transit as alternatives to driving. Staff devote significant time and effort on improving conditions for cycling throughout the city and encouraging people to bike. It has been the City's strong desire to find a way to legally accommodate cyclists on Brattle Street.

Through this committee process a number of alternatives have been developed for providing bicycle accommodation on Brattle Street. The ones that we are discussing tonight are the ones that have the best potential for working. Staff and consultants have looked at many other alternatives, but they were not brought forward to the committee because they did not meet basic criteria regarding safety, traffic impacts, simplicity, etc.

The traffic numbers for all of the alternatives are projections. The actual traffic volume may be higher or lower. This is not an exact science. Engineering judgment is used, but there is a level of uncertainty with any projection. Volume projections on higher volume roads

and for through traffic tend to be reasonably accurate. The parking loops and local destination trips, however, do not necessarily follow a "logical" pattern and are more difficult to estimate.

Kathy and Jim reviewed the summary handout of the 5 Brattle Street alternatives (Attachment 1) and the Detailed Traffic Information (Attachment 2).

Brattle Street Alternatives (between Mason and Eliot)

1. Contra-Flow Bicycle Facility
2. 2-way Brattle
3. 2-way Brattle from Mason to Church

~~4. 2-way Brattle from Appian to Eliot~~

Additional information regarding the alternatives not covered in the handouts:

Contra-flow Alternatives: City staff has met several times with the Bike Committee to review the various alternatives and particularly the contra-flow bicycle facility. After carefully evaluating many alternatives, the Bike Committee has not found a contra-flow bike facility that they can support on Brattle Street due to the nature of the street and the potential conflicts with vehicles and pedestrians.

Additional Alternative Considered: In the discussion with the Bike Committee a new hybrid alternative was discussed and has been evaluated. The alternative would allow 2-way traffic on all of Brattle Street, but force incoming traffic to turn right at Hilliard. The goal is to provide 2-way traffic while reducing the attractiveness of Brattle Street as a through route. The traffic volumes associated with this alternative are hard to estimate, but eastbound traffic would be forced on to Hilliard. Drivers coming in on Brattle looking for parking would likely continue to look for parking on Brattle and then be forced down Hilliard. In addition, drop off for the theater would directly impact Hilliard Street. We have discussed this with city staff and consultants and do not view this as a viable alternative because of the potential traffic impacts on Hilliard and the complexity of the traffic patterns.

3. Brattle Street Discussion (Committee)

- ◆ Mt. Auburn Street is a dangerous street. It is risky to encourage cyclists to ride on Mt. Auburn Street. The Metro recently reported a pedestrian fatality on Mt. Auburn Street. (*After the meeting, staff determined that the pedestrian fatality was on Mt. Auburn Street west of Brattle Street near the Star Market. Details were not available as the accident is still under investigation.*)
- ◆ The "Do Nothing" alternative should be called the "Do Something". 2-way Brattle is too big a change. The Brattle / Eliot intersection will be very problematic. Educate cyclists to use Hawthorne, Willard or Sparks streets. Use the bike lane, provide signage and enforcement.
- ◆ This is a political decision. 2-way Brattle is best for cyclists, but we have to be ready to fight. Concerned about increasing traffic on Church Street. The contra-flow bike lane would provide access and we could reach consensus.
- ◆ The hybrids (2-way from Mason to Church and 2-way from Appian to Eliot) should be eliminated. The contra-flow does not work if the Bicycle Committee does not support it. Then we are left with 2-way Brattle or the Do-Nothing / Do-Something. Support the 2-way, but concerned about pedestrians at the Eliot / Brattle intersection. Not convinced that it will work for pedestrians.

- ◆ The hybrids don't do much. Strongly support 2-way Brattle. The increase in traffic on Brattle is not that much and traffic will decrease on Garden and Mass. Ave.
- ◆ The hybrids are non-starters. We haven't seen the total affect of traffic. Increased bicycle traffic also counts as traffic and will affect the pedestrian environment. Support the Do Nothing / Do Something alternative.
- ◆ The conventional street pattern is best. The contra-flow and the hybrids are confusing. The faster the vehicle and the less human effort, the farther you can ask it to go. The more personal effort involved in travel, the more direct the route should be.
- ◆ The traffic analysis presented tonight is helpful and the effort is appreciated. The raised intersections are great. Traffic calming is an important element of a 2-way Brattle Street. If we can not come to consensus on the 2-way, we should continue to look at the contra-flow alternative.
- ◆ Most concerned about pedestrians, so I cannot support 2-way because of the negative impacts on the Brattle / Eliot intersection. Brattle Street is currently an attractive route for cyclists. However, once you change the traffic and allow 2-way traffic, it will feel less safe. There will be more vehicles in both "outer Brattle" and Brattle between Mason and Eliot.
- ◆ The hybrids are off the table. The only two viable alternatives are the contra-flow or the Do Nothing. The contra-flow is preferable. It is the most creative approach and is better for pedestrians.
- ◆ Given the ground rules of having to come to consensus, we are doomed to accept the Do Nothing. You cannot adopt new traffic plans with a group of non-traffic engineers if we have to agree on making significant change. We will never be able to do it. It is sad that this is the rule. If this was the case in the past, we would never have made the changes in 1967. 2-way streets are a great opportunity. We had a way of improving the Brattle / Eliot intersection and we turned it down – 2-way JFK. Every street should be 2-way. Provide maximum movement.
- ◆ Opposed to changing the nature of Brattle Street by adding additional traffic volume. It is a leisurely, quiet backwater street that is unusual in the Square. There are more walkers than cyclists. It is a magnet for people walking to the Square. It may have become like this by accident, but would not want to see it change. Opposed to 2-way Brattle.
- ◆ There could be an alternative 6 – allow through traffic at Mason Street, but provide signage to indicate that it is for local traffic only. This would provide 2-way Brattle, while limiting the increase in traffic volumes. Unsure how effective it would be, but we should try it.
- ◆ Agree with earlier statements regarding the ground rules of consensus. It is hard to reach consensus if you know there will not be a change. This is a body that provides recommendations. This sounds like polling the majority. The decision process needs to be more open ended. We are looking at things in a piece meal approach. We are making incremental changes and not looking at the impacts of the decisions.
- Concerned about Brattle / Eliot intersection for pedestrians. It is not ideal now and we may make it worse by adding more traffic. The hybrids add no value. Concerned about safety of cyclists through the Square. We are about to lose an opportunity to improve safety and conditions for cyclists. This is a very subjective decision. We are trading perceived quality of Brattle Street and safety of cyclists. This may be an o.k. trade off.
- ◆ Would like to see creative shared street solution for Brattle Street. But if that is not possible, people could live with 2-way Brattle as long as traffic calming were implemented. Include the forced turn into Mason to keep traffic volumes low. Don't favor contra-flow because of the conflicts with pedestrians.

4. Public Comments

- ◆ Against 2-way. Respect all of the information that the City has pulled together, but this is a crazy quilt of streets. Every action has an equal and opposite reaction. You have a focused group that can make significant improvements in cleanliness, crosswalk,

- lights, etc. Don't allow yourselves to become fragmented and fail to get important improvements implemented.
- ◆ 2-way Brattle Street will attract truck traffic from Fresh Pond during rush hour.
 - ◆ If Brattle Street becomes 2-way it will become like Mt. Auburn Street. It will be noisy and lose that special sense of place. Brattle and Church should be pedestrian streets. There is an option 7 – keep 1-way traffic, but allow bicycle traffic through without providing a designated space. Opposed to 2-way Brattle, but 2-way JFK would be o.k.
 - ◆ The number one concern for cyclists in Harvard Square is getting into the Square from the west. We need to accommodate them in a way that is safe for them and others. Provide clear and legal ways to get to shops, schools and other locations. 40-50% of residential streets would love to have the volume of traffic on Brattle Street. The proposed 2-way volumes are reasonable for a commercial street, particularly when combined with effective traffic calming.
 - ◆ I would love to have a contra-flow alternative that worked. In theory it is the ideal compromise. But, I can't recommend it. 2-way is a much better design. I encourage the committee to keep an open mind.
 - ◆ Support idea of better pedestrian life. Funneling increased traffic down Brattle Street is not good for pedestrians. I bike. My son and my husband both bike. But you do not see cyclists in bad weather. It does not make sense to provide accommodation for April. What about commercial vehicles and snow? Maybe you could make it a single lane in 1 direction. Raised devices and curb extensions are less historical. If you want to make improvements, fix the potholes, make our streets work, make signs readable. Don't fix something that isn't broken.
 - ◆ The numbers are probably wrong. 2-way Brattle would divert traffic from Hawthorne.
 - ◆ I live at 60 Brattle Street which is the only apartment building on this section of Brattle Street. The tenants signed a petition and more than half are against 2-way traffic. 2-way traffic will bring more noise and pollution. Why should so many people be inconvenienced to accommodate so few cyclists who have other alternatives?
 - ◆ As representative of Cambridge Center for Adult Education at 42 and 56 Brattle, I have serious concerns about the safety of students and pedestrians. Doubling the traffic on Brattle Street will not be better for pedestrians. I ride my bike to work. I choose legal routes and don't ride on the sidewalk. The minor rerouting of cyclists is a small price to pay. Brattle Street should not be 2-way.
 - ◆ I support Option 7 – 1-way Brattle for cars, 2-way for cyclists without special facility. This is done in other countries and works well.
 - ◆ Kathy Watkins responded that city staff did evaluate whether the idea of Option 7 (1-way Brattle for cars, 2-way for cyclists without special facility) would work on Brattle Street. The examples of where this has been done in other areas are on much narrower streets, more like Palmer or Winthrop. Staff and consultants do not view this as a viable alternative for Brattle Street.
 - ◆ The queue on Brattle at Eliot will destroy this world class square. 2-way Brattle is not an improvement for Cambridge. Would like to find a way to accommodate cyclists. Calling the alternative routing the "Do Nothing" is a disservice.
 - ◆ Fully support the redesign of Brattle Street into a two-way street with appropriate traffic-calming devices installed to moderate traffic speed. It will make it possible for cyclists to enter and exit a major access road to Harvard Square, an objective consistent with the City's Vehicle Trip Reduction Ordinance.
 - ◆ Support the maximum amount of pedestrian space in Harvard Square – the more area closed to traffic entirely, the better. To the extent that a 2-way Brattle Street enhances pedestrian zones, I'm all for it.
 - ◆ 2-way Brattle will bring big trucks and dense car use onto the street, which is most heavily used by people on foot.

5. Committee Discussion and Recommendations

- ◆ Traffic calming is a great idea, but the street should remain 1-way. Support "Do Nothing / Do Something".
- ◆ Do not want increased traffic on Brattle Street. Support "Do Nothing / Do Something".
- ◆ Pedestrians are the most important element of Brattle Street. Support "Do Nothing / Do Something".
- ◆ I would like to see the "Do Nothing / Do Something" alternative amended to keep the possibility of looking further at the contra-flow alternatives. This would mean that there would be no change on Brattle Street unless an acceptable contra-flow can be found. I support 2-way Brattle.
- ◆ Support the modified "Do Nothing / Do Something", as long as the contra-flow alternatives are looked at offline. This committee has a lot of things that need to be addressed.
- ◆ Feel like we're set up. If I could be assured that traffic would not increase, I would support 2-way Brattle. But area residents and businesses are not convinced.
- ◆ Support 2-way, but we won't be able to do it. "Do Nothing / Do Something" is a failure. It does not address the problem. If we can't provide access for cyclists then we should widen the sidewalk. O.k. with looking at contra-flow.
- ◆ Support 2-way with intimidation to thru traffic. The current bicycle experience is horrendous. 2-way Brattle works.
- ◆ Support "Do Nothing", but keep possibility of contra-flow alternative on the table.
- ◆ There are pros and cons to all of the alternatives. I do not have a basis for not believing the traffic numbers. 2-way Brattle provides benefits on other streets. Want good pedestrian quality of experience on Brattle and throughout the Square.
- ◆ 2-way is simple solution. Provides parking, accommodation for cyclists and will keep traffic slow. Provides an improvement for wider area. It is not just a spot improvement.
- ◆ Support 2-way Brattle because of benefits for bicycle travelers, benefits of sharing the traffic burden with other routes into the Square and benefits of a two way street with pedestrians and cars passing and interacting.

6. Wrap Up (Susanne Rasmussen)

Since we are not able to come to an agreement, we will not be providing a recommendation for changes on Brattle Street. We will provide signage for cyclists from Brattle Street to Harvard Square via Hawthorne and Mt. Auburn streets. In the absence of a recommendation, we will not be implementing major changes to Brattle Street. We will not make major physical changes that would prohibit changes to Brattle Street in the future, but changes will not occur as part of this process. The concept of a contra-flow bike lane on Brattle Street has been studied extensively and a design that the Bike Committee, city staff and consultants can support has not been found. It is unlikely that another design will develop that can be supported. However, if a design for a contra-flow facility is identified that can be supported, a proposal would be entertained.

There were a number of comments tonight expressing concerns about the consensus-based process. I encourage you all to share with us your preferences regarding the decision-making process for the committee. I spend much of my time involved in processes just like this one and am very interested in ways of improving them. There have been processes where a committee makes a recommendation and then the City does something else. There have been processes where the majority rules. There have also been processes where the committee is undecided and the City decides what to do. These types of processes have all been criticized. The consensus process is one that we believe works better. But if you have thoughts or ideas, please share them with Kathy or myself. We are committed to continually making improvements to our community process and welcome your input.

ATTACHMENT 1

Summary of Brattle Street Alternatives – Descriptions, Pros and Cons

1. Contra-Flow Bicycle Facility

Description: Provides a designated facility for cyclists traveling eastbound on Brattle Street.

Pros:

- Provides bicycle access without any changes to vehicular circulation patterns.

Cons:

- City staff met with the Bicycle Committee and they did not support a contra-flow bicycle facility on Brattle Street due to the nature of the street and the potential conflicts with vehicles and pedestrians.

2. 2-way Brattle

Description: Provides 2-way traffic on Brattle Street the entire length of the street between Mason and Eliot.

Pros:

- Provides easy direct bike access through a simple and understandable approach that is strongly supported by the Bicycle Committee.
- Reconnects historic 2-way street pattern.
- Simplifies vehicular access from outer Brattle Street into the Square.
- Reduces volume of traffic on Mason / Garden / Mass / Brattle loop including several critical pedestrian crossings.

Cons:

- Increases traffic on Brattle Street. Provides fewer gaps for pedestrians to cross the street, but traffic calming would ensure that speeds remain slow.
- Potential for increasing truck traffic on Brattle Street.
- Increases traffic on Appian Way and across the heavy pedestrian crossing along Garden Street at Appian Way.
- Potential for creating new cut-through routes. Prohibiting left turns from Mason to Brattle would eliminate the Berkeley Street cut-through, but potential remains for creating other routes such as Craigie Street.

3. 2-way Brattle from Mason to Church – contra-flow bike facility from Church to Eliot

Description: Provides 2-way traffic on Brattle Street, but just to Church Street to limit the attractiveness of Brattle Street as a through street.

Pros:

- Provides bike access in preferred 2-way approach for the majority of the street.

- Limits the amount of increased traffic on Brattle Street.

Cons:

- Requires contra-flow bicycle facility between Church Street and Eliot Street. City staff met with the Bicycle Committee and they did not support a contra-flow bicycle facility on Brattle Street due to the nature of the street and the potential conflicts with vehicles and pedestrians.
- Increases traffic on Brattle Street.
- Increases traffic on Church Street.

4. 2-way Brattle from Appian to Eliot – contra-flow bike facility from Mason to Appian

Description: Provides 2-way traffic on Brattle Street after Appian Way to limit the attractiveness of Brattle Street as a through street.

Pros:

- Provides bike access in preferred 2-way approach for more than half of the street.
- Limits the amount of increased traffic on Brattle Street.

Cons:

- Wherever street directions change there is a risk of altering traffic patterns on the first intersecting street. In this instance, that would be Appian Way and Hilliard Street.
- Increases traffic on Appian Way and the heavy pedestrian crossing along Garden Street at Appian Way.
- Requires contra-flow lane between Church Street and Eliot Street. City staff met with the Bicycle Committee and they did not support a contra-flow bicycle facility on Brattle Street due to the nature of the street and the potential conflicts with vehicles and pedestrians.
- Increases traffic on Brattle Street.

5. “Do Nothing” – Alternative Bicycle Route

Description: Sign a bike route from Brattle Street to Mount Auburn Street via Hawthorne Street.

Pros:

- Provides information to cyclists about preferred routing to Harvard Square.
- Does not require circulation changes. Does not impact traffic volumes.

Cons:

- Does not provide accommodation for cyclists on Brattle Street east of Mason Street.
- Provides less direct route for cyclists and may not decrease wrong way cycling on Brattle Street.
- Cyclists will have to use Mt. Auburn Street which has higher volumes of traffic than Brattle Street.

ATTACHMENT 2

Brattle Street Alternatives

Detailed Traffic Information -- Afternoon Peak Hour Volumes

	Total Estimated Volume (Change From Existing)			
	Existing * 1-way Brattle	2-way Brattle **	2-way Brattle ** Mason to Church	2-way Brattle ** Appian to Eliot
Appian Way	135	235 (+100)	135 (+0)	285 (+150)
Brattle Street @ James Street	285	485 (+200)	385	265 (-20)
Brattle Street East of Church Street	290	560 (+270)	290 (+0)	475 (+185)
Brattle Street @ Wordsworth	1220	1020 (-200)	1220 (+0)	1070 (-150)
Church Street	295	250 (-45)	410 (+115)	295 (+0)
Eliot Street @ Triangle Island	550	530 (-20)	550 (+0)	570 (+20)
Garden Street @ Mass. Ave.	1960	1715 (-245)	1845 (-115)	1810 (-150)
Hilliard Street	115	130 (+15)	130 (+15)	130 (+15)
Mason Street	810			
2-Way Mass. Ave. @ tip of Out-of-Town News	2360	2160 (-200)	2360 (+0)	2210 (-150)
Mount Auburn Street	620	550 (-70)	620 (+0)	585 (-35)
Story Street	135	115 (-20)	135 (+0)	115 (-20)

Notes:

All alternatives assume no left turn from Mason Street onto Brattle Street.

* The volumes shown for the existing conditions are based on actual traffic counts.

** The volumes shown for the alternatives are estimates. The actual volumes may be higher or lower.

The traffic impacts associated with parking loops and smaller streets are especially hard to estimate.