



**River Street Reconstruction
Working Group Meeting #7**



**Tuesday, October 22, 2019
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM
Manning Apartments 1st Floor
237 Franklin Street – Community Room**

ATTENDEES

Working Group Members	City Staff	Public
Patrick Barrett	Patrick Baxter – TP&T	Jackie Jones
Daniel Beaulieu	Bill Deignan - CDD	Adam Patten
Sienna Berry	Jerry Friedman - DPW	Pastor Johnson
Matthew Ciborowski	Lillian Hsu – Cambridge Arts	Larry Kun
Gabriel Cira	Khalil Mogassabi - CDD	Saul Pills
Abby Duker	Susanne Rasmussen - CDD	Frank Stone
Melissa Greene	Andy Reker - CDD	Jonathan Anjaria
Kai Long	Rachel Tanenhaus - CCPD	John Goodman
Andrew Tarsy	Kathy Watkins - DPW	Michael Monestime
Saul Tannenbaum		Daniel Wolf
Randy Stern	Consultants	Ann Couran
Christopher Tassone	Christi Apicella	
Oliver Turner	Arthur Bonney	
Not here:	Rich Houghton	
Sai Boddupalli	Rosie Jaswal	
Valerie Bonds	Rick Plenge	
Sam Gebru	Natalie Raffol	
Annie Tuan	Cynthia Smith	
	Peter Stidman	

Key:
CCPD = Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities
CPD = Cambridge Police Department
CDD = Community Development Department
DPW = Public Works
TP&T = Traffic Parking & Transportation

MEETING SUMMARY

The following is a meeting summary of the Working Group Meeting #7 for the City of Cambridge's River Street Reconstruction. For more information see Cambridgema.gov/riverstreet.

1. Welcome and Overview

The meeting was initiated by Bill Deignan, Transportation Program Manager with the City of Cambridge. Bill welcomed Ritsuko Taho, the artist who completed the existing public art in Carl Barron Plaza (visiting from Japan). Bill reviewed the agenda for the meeting, the first half of which was devoted to break-out sessions to collect comments on the draft corridor concept presented at the last Working Group meeting.

The next meeting will be a public meeting on November 19th. This meeting will focus on the corridor concepts from Memorial Drive to Auburn Street (detailed at the 6th Working Group meeting). Bill noted that the Carl Barron Plaza area will not be included at the public meeting. The City and project team are looking to obtain additional feedback from Working Group members and area stakeholders prior to sharing in a public format.

Bill then provided a brief review of design goals, options considered by the project team generated from the public process, the concepts shown at the last meeting, and a summary of benefits for pedestrian safety and comfort.

2. Break-out for Comments on Draft Corridor Concept (Memorial Drive to Auburn Street)

Pete Stidman from HDR led the break-out group activity. Four stations were set up for Working Group members to circulate and provide comments on the draft corridor concept at the following locations: Memorial Drive to Putnam Avenue, Putnam Avenue to Howard Street/Kelly Road, Howard Street/Kelly Road to Auburn Street, Howard/Kelly to Auburn Street Option B, and Tubman Square options. Working Group members and the public attendees recorded comments on red sticky notes for dislikes and green sticky notes for likes. A summary (not verbatim) of comments written on sticky notes at each station is provided below:

Feedback on Option A for the River Street Corridor – between Memorial Drive and Putnam Avenue (Including Option A-1 where noted)

Support for:

- Separation of pedestrian and bikes in Option A Memorial Drive to Putnam Avenue (4)
- New pedestrian crossings of River Street (4)
- Preserving trees
- Exclusive signal at Putnam Avenue
- Addition of Bluebikes Station near Blackstone Street
- New buffers (tree pit zones) at Memorial Drive to Putnam Avenue section
- Full signal at Kelly Road/Howard Street
- Floating bus stop at Kelly Road/Howard Street

- Activation zone at Coast Café
- Bump-out at Montague Street to mark entry to Hoyt Field
- Bus Lane
- Auburn Street intersection treatment (inhibiting left hand turns onto River Street)
- Activation zone at Pleasant Street

Modification Considerations:

- Dislike of short merge zone on Option A-1
- Dislike shared use path on River Street in Option A-1
- Cycletrack needs at least 5 feet
- Potential noise generation from Riverside Pizza at night if activation zone is built
- New crossings need “protection” (RRFB or raised are not indicated)

New ideas:

- One way out for Whole Foods Driveway
- Leading Pedestrian Interval for bikes at Putnam Avenue

Feedback on Option B for the River Street Corridor – between Rockwell Street and Kinnaird Street

- Support parking (against Option B) comments: 4
- Support removal of parking (for Option B) comments: 3

Feedback on Option A for Tubman Square (Close Pleasant Street)

Comments in support of Option A: 5, Comments against Option A: 0

Support for:

- Left from Pleasant Street to Kinnaird Street likely slows people down

Modification Considerations

- Add RRFB at Kinnaird Street crossing
- Worried about cut through traffic on Pleasant Street (Tubman Square)
- Care taker/Uber (ride hailing) drop off for women’s center (public comment)
- No outlet for cyclist heading north on Pleasant Street

Other:

- This building (former Keezer’s Clothing at 40 River Street) is being rented and renovated
- Food truck/farmer’s market opportunity here?
- Set speed limit to 10mph
- Does chicane opportunity in Tubman Square work for emergency vehicle needs?

Feedback on Option A for Tubman Square (Close Kinnaird Street)

Comments in support of Option B: 2, Comments against Option B: 0

Support for:

- Narrowing crossing distances & squaring corners (2)

Modifications

- Add a bike crossing at Pleasant Street

- Consider how Tubman Square relates to the former River Gods building (future restaurant space)

Other:

- Developer of new office building may negate need to activate the space

3. Review of Carl Barron Public Input & Observations

Wendell Joseph, Neighborhood Planner with City of Cambridge, resumed the presentation by providing an overview of the public engagement process related to Carl Barron Plaza. Although Carl Barron Plaza is part of the River Street project, it is a process within a process and warrants special outreach and attention, as well as coordination with the MBTA. Outreach has included the existing conditions open house, an outdoor day of engagement, interviews with community members, an online public input map, and an online public survey.

The idea of Carl Barron Plaza as an outdoor living room emerged from the public engagement process. An outdoor living room serves as an opportunity for people to come together and interact with each other. Carl Barron Plaza is unique because it serves this purpose for a specific group of people on a regular basis. Carl Barron Plaza is also unique because it is a transit node for several MBTA bus routes and the MBTA Red Line.

Wendell reviewed a series of observations of from Carl Barron Plaza:

- Passers-through and “regulars”—people who hang out all day, were observed coexisting easily along Massachusetts Avenue between Prospect Street and City Hall Lawn, where regulars and others often congregate in small groups
- Regulars congregate in much larger groups in the center of Carl Barron Plaza (also known as “the circle”). The circle was designed as an amphitheater and when people occupy it, it may appear as though they “own it.” Experiences are shared because it is a circle.
- Although there is a lot of passers-through in this area, it is mainly on the edges, with little pedestrian traffic through “the circle.”
- There is a lower proportion of women and young children in Carl Barron Plaza, whereas City Hall lawn has a more equal gender split and more children.
- Many people were observed leaning on the edges of the plaza, against fences and bollards, indicating a natural propensity of people to want to be on the outside looking in.

A Working Group member questioned why this part of the process is taking longer than originally planned. Bill responded that a lot has been happening with River Street itself and there is no reason to rush the Carl Barron Plaza process. Another Working Group member requested to devote more time to Carl Barron Plaza. Jerry Friedman, Supervising Engineering with the City of Cambridge, added that the plaza process is still linked to River Street, but there is no pressure to rush it and more time will be spent on it.

Another Working Group member commented that there are competing interests between not harming vulnerable people who need a public living room and changing the space to accommodate more people, particularly women and children. It was suggested that the Working Group approach the City Manager with the need for a solution for the segment of the population dependent on social services, which cannot be solved by street planning. Wendell responded that this speaks to how challenging it is to plan for Carl Barron Plaza. The process will take into account the surrounding context and how the plaza fits into other public spaces in Central Square. The City has been intentional about speaking with people familiar with the social issues, as they expand beyond the physical aspects of Carl Barron Plaza.

4. Bus Terminal Area Update & Discussion

Andy Reker, Transportation Planner with City of Cambridge, reviewed options for the bus terminal area so that the Working Group can provide feedback at the next meeting. Andy noted that there are several givens for the design, with many of them creating challenges to providing within the same design alternatives based on the complexity and tradeoffs required. The primary drivers of the design among these challenges were: maintaining layover space for MBTA routes 83, 91, and 47; trying to expand the public realm, and at the same time provide a separated bicycle lane. Doing all three things together is a difficult challenge.

Andy reviewed existing bus operations in Central Square today. The CT1 was eliminated in September 2019 to devote more resources to the Route 1, and an upcoming change to Route 64 is extending it to Kendall Square/MIT all day, not just during the peak.

To understand design options, a toolbox approach was used with the following tools:

1. Distribution of Bus Layovers

A layover is the time when a bus parks for 5-10 minutes to offer the driver a break and allow for flex in the bus scheduling at the end of one trip and the start of the next. In Central Square currently all layover locations are at the same spot as the bus stop in the bus terminal area. There is an opportunity to move the layover locations outside of the bus stop area to improve the space available for transit activity and simplify the bus passengers understanding of which buses are in service and ones that are laying over. Limitations to bus layovers are that they must be designed so that buses can pass and get around each other and so that buses serving different routes can operate independently. Impacts of moving bus layover locations include noise and emissions, lack of visibility for MBTA supervisor station and potential changes to curb lines or parking regulations. Two spots as noted below were highlighted for potential future layover locations (it was noted that community and rider feedback would be needed to explore these potential locations):

- (1) **Magazine Street between Franklin and Green Streets, in front of the Church Corner apartments at 10 Magazine Street.** This location would require changes to the parking regulations and enough space for two buses (the 83 and 91) to park for short layover times. Currently these buses layover in the busway next to the Star Variety store.

- (2) **River Street between Franklin and Green Streets, next to the First Baptist Church.** This would also imply some minor changes to bus routes, having them turn left at Franklin Street to River Street instead of to Magazine Street as they do today. This change would have some curb relocation, but no parking impacts.

Several comments were raised by Working Group members:

- How is separating a bus stop from a bus layover an efficient use of space? Andy responded that it provides an opportunity to modify the bus stop area to create more space, since less space is needed without the layover.
- It is confusing to have a bus layover within a bus stop because the bus could be waiting or about to start a trip. Separating them would be clearer for the rider.
- The sidewalk and separated seating area by the First Baptist Church along River Street serves as a pedestrian gateway into Central Square. It does not make sense to remove it but rather identify opportunities to enhance it.

2. Bus Route Changes

Andy continued by explaining that bus routing and layovers can impact how much space is needed for different buses. Subtle changes, notably at Carl Barron Plaza and on Massachusetts Avenue, can create better bus stop waiting areas, provide better accessibility for people with disabilities, potentially result in faster service, and optimize potential transfers. However, creating new bus stop routes and layovers can impact abutters, especially on streets without existing bus service.

For example, Route 47 provides a connection between Ruggles Station, Roxbury, the Longwood Medical Area, Boston University, and Central Square. Today there are difficulties with the current 47 layover space on Massachusetts Avenue, as Route 1 is unable to pull to the curb while Route 47 is laying over, and there are also conflicts with commercial loading, ride hailing, and the bicycle lane.

One option the City is evaluating for Route 47 is relocating the last stop to Pearl Street, creating a layover space on Green Street between Pearl Street and Magazine Street, and relocating the first stop to Green Street at Magazine Street, although a stop on Franklin Street could also work. By making the last stop on Route 47 on Green Street at Pearl Street, the distance to the Red Line entrance could increase from 250 feet to 350 feet, or roughly 425 feet to the elevator entrance.

Several comments were raised by Working Group members:

- Could Route 47 be routed down Magazine Street? – Andy responded that the permanent routing of Route 47 is down Pearl Street.
- The new mixed-use development that is replacing Sleepy's Mattress will provide a pedestrian walkway, which could provide an opportunity for a better connection to Central Square. Another member of the public noted that the walkway would not be

public, but the idea to have development provide additional pedestrian connections could generally work. [NOTE: The City's project team is working to verify what the developer's plans are.]

Potential Carl Barron Plaza Future Design Considerations

Andy continued the presentation by showing the design opportunities for Carl Barron Plaza and the bus terminal area when combining routing options with layover locations. Four potential plaza options were shown in a matrix. Three of the four options entail two plaza areas split by a busway connecting Magazine and River Streets (similar to the existing condition, but with only one busway), and one that creates a single expanded plaza that many noted was shaped like a "bow-tie."

Wendell transitioned into what these configurations may mean for the use of Carl Barron Plaza. Two presentation boards provided site comparisons of Carl Barron Plaza with other public space locations in the City such as Lafayette Square, Harvard Square, Quincy Square, and Galaxy Park. Public space is designed with the context in mind and balancing spaces across neighborhoods to accommodate as many people and uses as possible.

Bubble diagrams were shown to illustrate the current uses in Carl Barron Plaza today. The middle of the plaza currently houses more long term staying, while the edges house more short term staying. Arrows identified how people move through the space.

In the future, if one bus layover is relocated, the area can be tied together better, which provides an opportunity for people to more safely cross the plaza. The goal is maintain some existing uses in Carl Barron Plaza, but allocate them more effectively throughout the space. Options were shown for a scenario with and without the busway, and how spaces for short-term staying, long-term saying, activation, art, and amenities could be allocated. The option without the busway would create a more cohesive space, but require a bus layover on the edge of River Street. Both options will make the area safer by reducing conflicts between modes and the opportunity to improve wayfinding and how people interface with transit.

Green Street Bus/Bikeway

Patrick Baxter, Engineering Manager with the City of Cambridge, continued the presentation by highlighting the challenges on Green Street. Green Street's intersections with River Street and Magazine Street are only 50-feet apart creating a variety of conflicts. There is minimal room for vehicles to wait on Green Street between the two intersections, so vehicles in this short segment often block Green Street traffic. Additionally, there is low compliance with the Green Street stop sign at Magazine Street when vehicles see the upcoming green signal at River Street. It is also difficult for large vehicles to make the right hand turn from Green Street onto River Street.

Patrick discussed a new Green Street Bus/Bikeway as an optional toolbox item. This would require converting Franklin Street to two-way to serve diverted traffic. The spacing of blocks on Franklin Street is more conducive to cars stacking up at the intersection with River Street. This option still needs to be studied as part of a detailed traffic model to understand operations, where signalization would be required, and impacts to parking and bus layover locations. It would also require important input from abutters, riders, and the MBTA.

5. Comments

Bill transitioned the meeting to an open comment period for the Working Group. The following comments and questions were raised by Working Group members and the public:

Working Group Comment

- Really like the connected bow-tie space for Carl Barron Plaza, but dislike the layover space in front of the First Baptist Church, as the area is a gateway into Central Square and should not be blocked by buses.
 - Agree with previous comment.
 - Agree with previous comment. Has consideration been given to a layover at Green Street?
 - **Bill responded** yes, for other routes, but the City can look at other locations for a layover aside from in front of the church.
- Agree with the bow-tie concept, but creating two zones could also serve more of the population in a comfortable way.
 - **Jerry responded** that the bow-tie concept only works with a bus layover on River Street.
 - **Bill added** that they City will go back and look at options to minimize the impact next to the church and create a larger pedestrian space.
- If long-term staying is pushed to the side, it could be a louder experience for those people. It seems counterintuitive to assume long-term staying people will want to be pushed to the side, where they would be alongside traffic and bikers.
- Agree with previous comment. If long-term staying is spilt up as shown it might move closer to the church steps. If the bus layover is moved to the church area as well, it is moving the existing congestion to an even smaller space. There also needs to be consideration given to a buffer space around the church to preserve it as a sanctuary space (NOTE: this was a comment from a member of the public).
- The bow-tie shape does not mean the existing Carl Barron Plaza has to be reconfigured. The Circle doesn't necessarily need to be changed, but support the creation of new space. The bus layover next to the church needs to be rethought.
 - **Jerry responded** that there are a series of technical slides that show routing and why the layover space in this location makes the bow-tie concept work.
- The Carl Barron Plaza designs in relation to the rest of the River Street corridor need to be shown. The Working Group needs to see the missing gap from Auburn Street to Central Square. Generally against traffic islands that require crossing and isolated spaces, but the busway today creates a transit focal spot that is easy to direct people to, especially from the Red Line to buses. De-emphasizing the busway by putting it off to the side in Central Square is a missed opportunity.
- The park in between River Street and Western Avenue (VFW Memorial Park) is nice but no one uses it. This area could be moved to in front of the church to block River Street off so that vehicles have to take a left and provide more pedestrian space.

- **Jerry responded** that the park was acquired by the City for the purpose of open space under Article 97, so significantly changing the space would require votes by the state legislature.
- **Kathy Watkins, City Engineer, added** that there are significant trees in this location which provide a public benefit.
- The Central Square Business Association recently led charrettes and put plans together for Carl Barron Plaza. Right now it is impossible to hold events in this space – it needs a complete redo.
 - **Bill responded** that the City is looking at the previous efforts completed in Carl Barron Plaza.
- The City should find a simple way to show the impacts of each option, using terms such as high, medium, low, for the presentation of these ideas at a public meeting to help create a clear connection between trade-offs with different options.
- Has the First Baptist Church been involved in the process?
 - **Bill responded** that the City is in touch with the police department, which is in touch with the Church.
 - Additionally, the current pastor identified himself as a member of the public present at the meeting.
- The traffic on River Street is so bad some bus drivers will let people out on the road at Carl Barron Plaza to avoid additional waiting in the traffic signal cycle. Is there a way to codify this so that people are not stuck on the bus?
- Like the idea of keeping the transit hub as a transit hub and not scattering the on/off points for buses around the neighborhood. 300-feet of walking is a lot for some people
 - **Rachel Tanenhaus, ADA coordinator for the City of Cambridge, agreed** as this is an access issue.
- In favor of consolidating public space because it will allow for a more diverse use of spaces. It seems like there is a greater use for the open space in front of the church than for the bus layover. A more park-like space would be preferred.
- The existing layout of the bus stops is confusing, especially for people from out of town. Like the rerouting ideas, but there needs to be much more attention to connectivity and intensive signage so people know where to go.
- The bus dispersion across the area is an access issue. It is very hard to tell which bus is which and to navigate the many stops providing service in different directions. This is also an issue for tourists.
- The community has been discussing topics like wayfinding since the C2 process and it still does not exist. There has been no effort to put signs up – anyone new can't figure out the system. Obvious bus shelters also matter a lot.

Public Comment

- Wayfinding is absolutely necessary, as all of Central Square is essentially a transit stop. The church is an important aspect of the community and needs to be connected to

Central Square. This is also a cultural district so cultural programming, public art, and gateway opportunities must be addressed in the next meeting.

- Magazine Street is very congested. There is parking across from the church corner. A parked bus in this location would create problems for bicycles and vehicles turning left. Having a bus pull in area on River Street makes sense, but the layover is problematic for everyone.
 - **Wes Edwards from the MBTA added** that there is a big difference between a bus layover and a bus stop. The MBTA tries to get bus stop pairs as close as possible to each other; however, to make this work bus layovers need to be a bit further away to avoid having an operational impact. It is already a struggle for buses to get through this area. There are trade-offs to improving service for the community.
- Central Square has a disproportionate number of social services and cross town buses. The City needs to consider a better way to make it all work in this quadrant.
- Concern about walking additional distances to get to buses from Central Square. Massachusetts Avenue is a more interesting place to wait for a bus than a side street.
- Could the space on Massachusetts Avenue in front of the Red Line head house be used for a bus stop? This is a loading zone, but could potentially be used as a layover. Wes added that it is used as an extra layover space today. There are several layover locations being considered as part of the design which were not shown today.

6. Next Steps

Bill concluded the meeting by reminding the Working Group that more options and trade-offs for Carl Barron Plaza will be shown at the next Working Group meeting. The public meeting date of November 19th should be held and the City will send out a notice confirming the location.