
MEMO

TO: CAMBRIDGE PLANNING BOARD

FROM: CAMBRIDGE PEDESTRIAN COMMITTEE

SUBJECT: PB-368, MIT VOLPE REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT

DATE: MARCH 31, 2021

Dear Members of the Cambridge Planning Board:

We are writing regarding the MIT Volpe Redevelopment Plan, specifically the amended proposal released February/March 2021, and appreciate your consideration of our comments.

The committee has reviewed the proposal and has appreciated the opportunities provided to discuss with MITIMCo and other stakeholders. We are particularly enthusiastic about the promise of a pedestrian and non-motor-vehicle-focused shared street on Broad Canal Way. This could become an interesting, functional, and safe outdoor space, as well as provide the city and its partners a blueprint to develop similar innovative spaces in the future.

As currently presented, the design for Broad Canal Way proposes a focus on pedestrians and cyclists without explicitly or implicitly forbidding or deterring motor vehicles. We acknowledge that MITIMCo has stated that the retail occupants have expressed a desire to retain direct access to curbside passenger drop-off, but highlight that in other shared street examples we know of – and in particular, Winthrop Street in Harvard Square -- the storefronts actually preferred to preclude motor vehicle traffic in favor of a more pedestrian-friendly street.

We would like to offer the follow comments for consideration, in the hopes of maximizing the chances of Broad Canal Way being viewed as a safe space for pedestrians of all ages and abilities to walk freely:

- We emphasize the idea that the right design will encourage the right use
- Solid-structure diversions, such as large planters (in a solid material like concrete), may slow the flow of cars that travel Broad Canal Way by encouraging a zig-zag rather than a straight-line path
- For pedestrians entering Broad Canal Way from the east side, a visual path through to Kendall Way would encourage pedestrian use as a through-route, rather than appearing like a dead end. Currently, the community center blocks the visual line down Broad Canal Way
- For motorists entering Broad Canal Way, there should be as many cues as reasonable to indicate that Broad Canal Way is not a car-priority zone. The entrances to the space for vehicles provide the strongest opportunity to inform drivers of the restrictions

With these ideas in mind, we look forward to seeing the successful implementation of this new type of shared space in Cambridge. As with the physical entrance to the street itself, the intent of the shared street, and its focus on pedestrian and cyclist comfort and safety should be clear from its first use. We appreciate the steps that MITIMCo and its partners have taken in this regard and are eager to follow subsequent iterations of this vision.