

Harvard Square Kiosk and Plaza Working Group Meeting

Thursday, March 15th, 2018

- Attendees
 - Working Group: Bertil Jean-Chronberg, Tom Lucey, John DiGiovanni, Frank Kramer, Peter Kroon, Robyn Culbertson, Daniel Andrew Schofield-Bodt, Abra Berkowitz, Ken Taylor, Janet Si-Ming Lee, Abhishek Syal
 - Staff: Stuart Dash, Daniel Wolf, Kathy Watkins
 - Halvorson Design (landscape architecture consultant): Cynthia Smith, Bryan Jereb
 - Touloukian Touloukian, Inc. (architectural consultant): Theodore Touloukian, Jared Ramsdell
- Intro
 - Public meeting upcoming
- Presentation: Distillation of vision and operational considerations (Stuart Dash)
 - Working Group discussion:
 - Operational goals
 - The vision refers to broader community ideas and the goals refer to news and visitor information – this is too specific/commercial for the goals
 - We should strive for the fourth goal (the Kiosk being financially self-sufficient) but not sure we should have that as a given
 - Don't think we had agreed to financial self-sufficiency as a given
 - Haven't heard a consistent voice on whether use can involve commercial elements – do we have consensus?
 - Who would run the operation?
 - Proposed Kiosk uses
 - Not convinced of sufficient interest in coffee use
 - Coffee use has been discussed but no consensus
 - Lots of coffee in Harvard Square but not a lot of public space – the Kiosk should be used as public space, with no coffee provision
 - Maybe we could swap daily and temporary uses proposed on the slide
 - There should be a “walk in” quality – (semi) permanent uses would draw people in a different (complementary) way to temporary uses and would sustain a certain amount of activity
 - Library is good space for some of these uses – it takes a lot of work to maintain print magazines sales; don't think you need magazines
 - Should add “and more” to the uses to indicate these aren't limited and final
 - Proposed Plaza uses
 - Plaza and Kiosk should be integrated – unclogging an artery
 - History of Cambridge could be more emphasized – perhaps including boards describing history of Harvard Square, etc.; what's special about this place ought to be highlighted

- What form would that take?
 - Winthrop Park was the original center of Harvard Square and there's signage there noting that
- Operations and governance
 - Why wouldn't city attempt to hire someone directly?
 - Stuart Dash – City has found there are things it does well and not so well; sometimes the City does try to do something on its own but often looks outside the City seeking greater capacity/efficiencies
 - Kathy Watkins – City isn't typically as nimble as a private operator might be; economy of scale with the organization
 - Could an advisory committee select the operator?
 - Stuart – a couple of Working Group members participated in the selection of the architect for this project
 - Composition of the advisory committee?
 - Is this model based on other things the City does?
 - Stuart – parallels in other cities and also the Foundry project
 - Suggest to City to provide money for a trust to support operations
 - When does the process end?
 - Stuart – hoping to finish up by end of spring
 - Can RFP for operator be available for comment?
 - Stuart – similar to past processes
 - Kathy – after use recommendations there will be lots of design work, including fair amount of permitting and coordination with MBTA
- Presentation: Plaza design approach (Halvorson)
 - Working Group discussion:
 - Reality is taxi use is declining, so space along Plaza for taxis is obsolete
 - Kathy – space could evolve into ride-hailing pickup/drop-off zone
 - Still a crunch point near Starbucks – should open up other areas for pedestrians
 - Kathy – City has spent a fair amount of time looking at traffic volumes for super crosswalk project; less about volume than queueing capacity constraints
 - What are the barriers to adding trees in other places? (Insufficient depth for roots above MBTA infrastructure)
 - It's a question of roots – why not put upside down trees like at Mass MOCA
 - Cynthia Smith – look at this as baseline diagram rather than finished design
 - How does the seating capacity in the diagram compare to capacity today?
 - Cynthia – this would add about 50% to existing seating
 - Taxi and ride-hail pickup might feel too cluttered
 - Tree canopy can be above tables and chairs

- Bike racks – too cluttered or could they accommodate more bikes? Look for more opportunities for bike parking capacity – maybe relate more closely to headhouse (to transfer between biking and the T)
 - These sketches are very valuable; could be useful to extend the rendering to Smith Center to see how it all ties together
 - Likes the sculptures / pop up art as long as they don't interfere with flow; experiment with more bike parking capacity
 - The renderings make it seem like there's more space than there really is
 - Helpful to see the different functions, flexibility; as long as there's space for visitor info it would be okay to remove visitor booth
 - Remember this is a piece of a much larger district; opportunities to put tables and chairs at Deguglielmo Plaza too
 - Consider sculptural bike racks; expand concept of digital news – place for interactive functions, ticker functions like in Times Square
 - Possibility to move crossings to open up more seating near north of Kiosk
- Presentation: Conceptual use options (Touloukian)
 - Working Group discussion:
 - Digital glass idea is effective especially on north and south (not using for other things)
 - Not much browsing space for history or news
 - If there are counters facing out, would you need space on inside for vending?
 - Likes sliding doors – open up the Kiosk
 - Not sold on advertisement but understands desire to offset costs
 - A bench that folds into the interior wall of the Kiosk option could fold away at the end of the day
 - Why not put visitor info on north and news on south and use folding door on east side – concert would draw people on both sides
 - Depicted visitor information use may be too small to call a visitor information center – would need to have staff there and be bigger; loves how open and flowing it feels otherwise
 - The renderings look really nice aesthetically
 - Nice to have places to sit in the building
 - Tables and chairs if not chained up might get lost
 - Inventory (packing and storing) takes up space; might be too much in one space
 - Nothing should be fixed – roll in and out is okay – otherwise limits access and permeability (even fixed benches)
 - News is not essential, the history of the place is really about public space
 - Signs – should be tasteful and civic, with limited advertising; three signs that are 25 SF each
 - Shouldn't have anything sold here
 - Digital displays would be useful – likes on north and south
 - Likes the more porous looking with glass and digital news
 - Simplifying is nicer – making it a little museum with historical info and news; doesn't like all the social activities

- Likes option E – sliding doors and windows on west and east
 - The building is old – play up historic character of the area
 - Digital displays – information displays could move to exterior for wayfinding; saves space, more accessible to general audience
 - Exterior could announce current events around Harvard Square and interior could have more of a historical focus
- Public comment
 - The more public open space and civic use is best; anything fixed (newspapers, etc.) might get in the way
 - Liked idea of moving crosswalk; adding to bike racks; digital on north and south; might hurt flow if whole front is operable
 - Program an occasional event inside the Kiosk – calligrapher comes in for an event – no commerce in the building but could do events (Bob Slate Stationer); display window in Kiosk leading passersby to shop down the road; nervous about large business wheeling in paying below market rent – unfair
 - This is a conservation district – small area; over programmed; losing essence and integrity of building itself; digital displays read like billboards or advertising; the area is being choked; some of the programming could be transferred to Palmer St (dead space)
 - Existing use is 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year – what happens in bad weather, during winter, at night?
 - Visitor info and news feels like an afterthought – would love to see renderings showing people interacting with visitor info and news
 - Could you move some of the walls out to the cornice line to expand the space?
 - Community space, shouldn't be selling anything – promote businesses, don't compete with them; tables, chairs, and flowers have had a tremendous impact on the space – tourists, local employees have lunch; great space with great potential; needs to be maintained – needs ambassadors; Cambridge Savings Bank has partnered with the Harvard Square Business Association to help with stewardship
 - Less is more – if any specific use is too permanent, it might age out; most flexibility is best; keep open to new uses
 - The Kiosk is a gateway to Harvard Square; must provide information in the Square; in a way it's a community center – would have been a perfect space to give out food for Chinese New Year events; needs advertising to offset costs; it's been 6 years, let's get it done
 - Preserve as an open space; print news is not too significant – will be obsolete soon; don't need coffee in there; Club Passim could have an artist there on Thursdays; festivals could start here; love using glass and windows
 - Out of Town News provided people with newspapers from all around world – now that's an obsolete use; keeping that alive doesn't make sense; waste of time and use – shouldn't be a daily use of the space; Harvard Square Business Association has been around for 100 years, has a 3 person staff, could be good fit for the operator
 - Likes open public space, transparency, should be pretty nimble; Harvard Square Business Association has proven itself as being good stewards of the Square; would be a good place for community groups to interface with the community

- Minister of First Parish Church is very interested in public use; church is just starting big visioning process to connect the church to the rest of the square
- High foot traffic, epicenter; there should not be any sole proprietorship – no coffee or print news – can get that elsewhere; City should be thinking about covering costs – digital boards on top of roof should be considered to take advantage of car traffic (advertising); likes digital glass doors; stewardship – should consider a group fully committed to the square and understands the business and residential community of the square
- Kiosk could provide opportunities for CRLS students – they speak many languages, could talk to tourists as ambassadors
- People shouldn't be afraid of a vending situation if done sensitively and if partnered with local businesses; RFP should be brought to Working Group for review before put out, looking at things like how advisory committee will work with operator, who will make decisions, spelling that out ahead of time; how are people going to want to use the Plaza space – should think about how it's used now; likes existing adventure of navigating up and down; redesign plaza – berm on northern end and contacts southern edge of Kiosk – could we open that part up?; clustering some objects in corners should be considered; digital wall should be on north side; board games are already happening in Smith Center Plaza