



**River Street Reconstruction  
Working Group Meeting**



**Tuesday, May 28, 2019  
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM  
Manning Apartments 1st Floor  
237 Franklin Street – Community Room**

**ATTENDEES**

<b>Working Group Members</b>	<b>City Staff</b>	<b>Public</b>
Patrick Barrett	Jerry Friedman - DPW	Frank Stone
Daniel Beaulieu	Frank Gutoski - CPD	Varl Le
Sienna Berry	Lillian Hsu – Cambridge Arts	
Valerie Bonds	Khalil Mogassabi - CDD	
Gabriel Cira	Susanne Rasmussen - CDD	
Abby Duker	Rach Tanenhaus - CCPD	
Sam Gebru	Tegin Teich - CDD	
Melissa Greene	Kathy Watkins - DPW	
Randy Stern		
Christopher Tassone	<b>Consultants</b>	
Annie Tuan	Christi Apicella	
<b>Not here:</b>	Arthur Bonney	
Andrew Tarsy	Rich Houghton	
Neil Rodriguez	Natalie Raffol	
Sai Boddupalli	Cynthia Smith	
Matthew Ciborowski	Peter Stidman	
Kai Long		
Oliver Turner		

**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 #4 for the City of Cambridge's River Street Reconstruction Project. For more information see [Cambridgema.gov/riverstreet](http://Cambridgema.gov/riverstreet).

### 1. Welcome and Logistics

The meeting was initiated by Tegin Teich, Transportation Planner for the City of Cambridge, with a review of dates for upcoming meetings and activities. The next working group meetings will be Wednesday July 17 and Tuesday August 27 (note that since this meeting the August meeting has subsequently been cancelled). Other spring and summer activities include outreach at Riverfest, the Carl Barron existing conditions open house, urban design site walk, and Carl Barron Plaza design charrette. Additional information is available on the project website.

### 2. Introduction to Urban Design and Streetscape Design

Cynthia Smith and Rich Houghton of Halvorson Design Partnership led the discussion of urban design as it relates to the streetscape and an urban design toolbox. Urban design is defined as the design of and understanding of urban space at different scales. For a street corridor, it is the physical setting of the street and considerations like sun orientation, light, air, noise, exhaust, safety and comfort of users, and how people use the space. The part of urban design focusing on street corridors is often called streetscape design.

Cynthia provided an overview of the existing streetscape along River Street. River Street is primarily 50-foot wide from building-face to building-face, with buildings close to the sidewalk. The streetscape is influenced by tree size, building height, and setbacks. Cynthia provided two examples to compare scale: a more human scale environment at Harvard Square and a more vehicular scale environment at Alewife Brook Parkway. The task for River Street is to balance human scale qualities, while accommodating transportation demands (walking, cycling, taking public transit, and other vehicles) in the context that the street serves a role both as a regional roadway, transit corridor, and neighborhood street.

Urban design takeaways identified by the project team include that River Street has a mix of characteristics, the character is more vehicle oriented at Memorial Drive and more human scaled north of Putnam Avenue, and there are a high number of pedestrians at Central Square. The Working Group was asked to provide additional comments/take aways for River Street. Comments included:

- Consider retail business activity and implications to the street if businesses were to leave.
- Work with businesses to make sure they will use additional public space that could be provided, such as parklets and outdoor seating.

- There is a lot of pedestrian and bicycle activity at the Memorial Drive end with people walking to the park and Whole Foods and people who bike coming off the path. The scale of design needs to accommodate this.

### **3. Streetscape Design Toolbox**

A living toolbox of streetscape design elements was presented by Cynthia. Many tools are focused on the curbside and how to allocate space in what is referred to as the “flex zone”, where you often find parking, loading, or other potential uses such as expanding the sidewalk, creating a separated bicycle lane, or even providing travel lanes for buses or vehicles. The complete list of tools is provided in the presentation posted on the website, and generally includes:

- The sidewalk, which is comprised of the pedestrian walking zone and furnishing zone.
- Street elements like curb extensions/bump outs and raised crossings.
- Site furnishings like seating to help foster interaction and social gathering, as well as bike racks, Bluebikes share stations, waste receptacles, planter pots, information kiosks, utility cabinets, and lighting.
- Other elements including play features, experiential and fun art, signage and wayfinding, historic and cultural connections, small public spaces like pocket parks, connections to existing parks, bus shelters and signage, and public facilities.

The working group was asked what other tools they’d like to see in the toolbox as this is a living document that evolve during this process. Individual comments from working group members include:

- Public art
- Separated bicycle lanes, as they contribute to aesthetic elements. Tegin noted that there will also be a mobility toolbox reviewed at the next Working Group meeting that will include separated bicycle facilities.
- Consideration of naming, for example, River Street could be renamed to River Walk Street to make people think of it at a more human scale. This can be related to wayfinding and branding.
- Electric vehicle charging stations. Tegin and Jerry Friedman noted the on-going New Mobility study in Cambridge, which includes some consideration of how to expand electric vehicle charging in the city.

### **4. Public Art**

Lillian Hsu of the Cambridge Arts Council reviewed the history of public art in Cambridge, which began with the Public Art Ordinance in 1979. The existing public art in Carl Barron Plaza was commissioned in 1995 and created by Ritsuko Taho. Ritsuko sought to capture the multiculturalism of Central Square and incorporated people’s handwritten dreams in the cylindrical design. Looking forward, Ritsuko is interested in repurposing the art in Carl Barron Plaza potentially in the plaza and along the length of River Street.

Lillian was asked to clarify the role of the working group in selecting public art, to which she responded that the City is informed by the public when selecting artists. The City maintains a slide registry open to all working artists. For projects like River Street, if a new artist were to be

selected, typically the City would first put out a request for qualifications. There may be an emphasis on local artists for specific projects, depending on the budget.

The working group was asked about their vision for public art on River Street, with individual comments including:

- Interest in multiple and local artists to provide art for multiple spaces along the street.
- Interest in color and greenery throughout the length of the corridor.
- The existing art lacks color, contrast, and vibrancy. Several members mentioned that it goes unnoticed.
- Lillian was asked how public art has changed over the past 25 years. She responded that there have been huge changes, with the field broadened to include anything. In particular, socially interactive art and temporary public art is popular.
- Support for murals like that of the Central Square Business Association, and sidewalk poetry. It was also noted the existing murals are beautiful but miss addressing the “who” is in the neighborhood.
- Opportunity to engage students from neighborhood schools and the Community Arts Center.
- Interest in temporary art that changes every few years up and down the street. The Greenway in Boston was reference as an example.
- Interest in combining local and international artists.
- Interest in incorporating history. This led to a discussion regarding replicating the bronze markers set into seating on Western Avenue, and the need to make clear whose history is being displayed. Several members expressed interest in showing a more personal history, or identifying key pivot points for society that might be outside of the traditional historic markers.

Following the working group discussion Kathy Watkins, City Engineer, explained that the City has established a committee responsible for commissioning a piece of public art to memorialize the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passing of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment, which gave women suffrage. The committee has narrowed down potential locations to five, two of which are on River Street – at Tubman Square and Riverside Press Park. A comment from a working group member was raised to make sure that the piece speaks to the full history of the suffrage movement, as the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment granted suffrage to some women but many in the population were still barred from voting.

## **5. Streetscape Dot Exercise**

Christi Apicella, Project Manager with McMahan Associates, introduced a group exercise, asking working group members to react to precedent images on urban design elements. Working group members placed a green dot on images they really liked, yellow dot on images they were just ok with or neutral on, and red dot on images they disliked. Key points from the facilitated discussions for the three breakout groups are summarized below:

### Group 1:

- Create a neighborhood feel to draw people in. Focus on elements like lighting and the particular style of outdoor seating. Bright seating is less appealing, as it may appear too corporate/professional or likely to bring in outsiders.
  - A comment was made to recognize the people who have already been a part of River Street, for example those that contributed to the existing Carl Barron Plaza public art. This generation and history should not be lost or thrown away. Focus attention on blending together the present and past.
- Create unexpected moments – for example, water play favored over traditional playground equipment
- Emphasize a usable, not monumental scale
- Create landscaping that engages people and does not act as a barrier
- Increase wayfinding, for example, to Hoyt Field
- Would like to see change in sidewalk material away from brick in Cambridge

### Group 2:

- Favor colorful outdoor seating with informal flow
- Dislike wide sidewalks – would like to create narrow/intimate spaces
- Favor environmental elements like permeable pavement, solar panels, solar sidewalks
- Context matters – street elements like lighting should reflect the street context
- Include trash receptacles and doggie bag facilities in public parks
- Favor historic markers
- Include features that define a space as unique – furniture that creates an atmosphere and distinct location

### Group 3:

- Include play elements
- Provide shading
- Favor an integrative space, not stark and standard, especially with mixed materials
- Favor public art and history that captures the full spectrum. For example, start with Native American History or even before that to geologic times
- Create an inviting space through softer, rounded edges and materials
- Dislike boring and less green spaces with small trees

## 6. Public Comments

Additional comments were made by the public and working group members regarding urban design elements discussed throughout the meeting. Individual comments include:

- The community living on River Street 50 years ago is now gone except for Saturdays and Sundays related to religious services. These people should be kept in mind as they will be part of the community that is being planned for.
- Doggie bag receptacles are needed for people with disabilities who have guide dogs. Businesses have stopped providing outdoor trash cans, which presents an access issue. It is advised to place trash receptacles in convenient and accessible locations for all.
- Make sure to include all perspectives in the women's suffrage art project, not just those of upper class women. It is important to be honest about the suffrage movement only applying to white women, and suffrage did not come for others until later, and others are still waiting.
- A working group member asked about the accessibility of brick for wheel chairs. Kathy Watkins responded that over the years there have been changes in sidewalk materials. Overall, concrete is the best material for accessibility, though brick design has changed and wire cut brick set on asphalt is better for accessibility than previously built brick sidewalks. The City has started using a brick edging strip with concrete walking surface, for example on Main Street and Broadway. It was noted brick sidewalks are also not great for the visually impaired depending on how they are maintained and where tree roots are located.
- Consider Tubman Square as a spot for live/pop-up street performing. This will help bring life to River Street and pull the activity of Central Square down River Street. Existing restaurants are struggling to pull people down and to connect to the vitality in Central Square.
- A pop-up satellite to the farmer's market could be an option for Tubman Square to help bring in activity from the other side of Mass Ave. There was also support for pop-up food vendors and food trucks.
- Public art along Riverside Press Park should set the tone for Cambridge for someone driving into Cambridge or passing through.
- There are no trash or recycling receptacles on Memorial Drive, but there should be.
- A question regarding the use of grills in Riverside Press Park was raised to help bring people into the area. Kathy Watkins responded that public parks like Danehy allow grilling as they have dedicated staff, though it is a good conversation to have for the future.

## **7. Next Steps**

Tegin wrapped up the meeting by asking working group members to keep asking questions and bringing up issues they are interested in as the process continues. The project website has all of the materials from each meeting. The next key upcoming event in the Carl Barron Plaza open house on Wednesday, June 5th 2019. Tegin asked that working group members take printed flyers for this event and help distribute them to the community.