

Notes

Urban Design and Local Businesses Public Walk

River Street Reconstruction

Date: Tuesday, June 11, 2019

Location: Starting at Carl Barron Plaza at 6pm and ending at Memorial Drive Gateway at 8pm

Project Team Attendees: Tegin Teich, Jerry Friedman, Rick Plenge, Pete Stidman, Cynthia Smith, Rich Houghton, Chien-Yu Lin, Suzannah Bigolin, Wendell Joseph,

Public Attendees: ___?__ Jay, Abby Osei-Duker, Isabel Parkey, Naomi Roswell, Sandy Suh, Olivia Turner, Arianna Turner, (Mother and daughter--names?), Robert Winters, James Williamson

General Comments Received:

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- Consider repaving all of Jay Street from River Street to north of Western Avenue
- Consider wayfinding opportunities for transit customers and pedestrians in addition to people who bike along corridor
- Similar to what was done on Western Avenue, consider how to engage neighborhood businesses, possibly through informal visits. One working group member asked about outreach to business owners, and suggested there be an effort to reach them all.
- Request for more trash barrels

Location-Specific Comments Received:

1) Central Square

1a) Carl Barron Plaza

- Request for a swing, slide or something for kids in the plaza
- Commenter likes street trees and flowers
- Public art was hard to notice:
 - Appreciate reuse of original materials, but
 - Brick foundation makes it blend in with surroundings
 - Most never knew the meaning of the existing art
 - One commenter said they appreciated it because people can see their own words there 20+ years later
 - Lillian Hsu commented that we can consider using it again either in this location, or relocate and reassemble along the River Street Corridor.
 - Lillian Hsu also mentioned the artist's desire to incorporate ceramics to add more color.
- One commenter said they appreciate that people hang out here now, said she feels comfortable (she's new to the neighborhood however) and another commenter said she felt very uncomfortable.
- Commenter said that the seating arrangement isolates the center facing seats, which makes it less social
- Consider how to activate space
- Commenter suggested that public art could work better if it were closer together
- Commenter suggested tables with game table surfaces suggested (chess/checkers)

- The sidewalk edge along the Plaza at Western Avenue/River Street is very crowded at rush hour time when the redline subway lets out.
 - The group discussed the outdoor public restroom across the street (Portland Loo). No commenter seemed to want another restroom at Carl Barron Plaza given the cost and infrastructure requirements.
- 1b) MBTA Busway
- Garbage cans and bus shelter on Green Street and in Magazine Street busway create pinch points for people walking.
 - Commenter suggested a more open design for shelter for narrow sidewalks
 - Commenter says they don't like amount of advertising on the Green Street shelters, which leads to closed in feeling on sidewalk
 - Commenter says there's no "Real time signage" and little wayfinding information to explain when a bus is coming, what happens for last bus on each route, including what happens with the last buses late at night.
 - Commenter expresses confusion about where to catch which bus, (consider ways to improve bus wayfinding and route information.)
 - Bus stop crowding is a large issue
- 2) River Street/Western Avenue Split
- 2a) Sidewalk near Church between Green Street and Franklin Street
- Commenters noticed that bike lane is dropped in this section, some suggested that the sidewalk space is wide enough to accommodate it. Staff talked about multiple ways in which the roadway and sidewalk space could be used for people walking, biking, and taking transit.
 - Several commenters agreed that the bench seating that is currently right next to the River Street curb edge is not comfortable and poorly used.
 - Several commenters complained about maintenance of church property
 - Commenter noted that Central Square BID is due to be approved but only extends to Green St.
- 2b) VFW Memorial
- Several people talked about the VFW Memorial "Park" or green space in the median of River Street and Western Avenue. Consultants noted it was not activated. Commenters said they did not consider it a park and that isn't serving any purpose they could name. There were no suggestions from members of the public to activate it. Commenters did say that they liked the trees and greenery
- 3) Western Avenue
- 3a) James Cronin Park
- Consultant said this park was a good example of what small parks like Tubman Square could be like on River.
 - Commenters liked the rain garden area.
 - There were mixed reactions to the Community Interpretive Sculpture.
 - The HVAC units on the roof of the municipal building on the north side of Western Avenue at Green Street create a lot of noise – comment that noise is a central issue in entire project but especially at this location.
- 3b) Raised intersection at Pleasant Street
- People liked the raised intersection treatment.
 - Here the tour took a detour from scheduled route and went to Auburn Street. Two commenters discussed and noted the need for traffic calming on River Street at this location.
 - Someone also commented on the narrow sidewalks on this stretch of River Street between Auburn Street and Pleasant Street.
- 4) Pleasant St. / Tubman Sq.
- 4a) Pleasant Street in front of the "Flatiron Building"
- Commenters said they like this building's architecture.
 - Lillian Hsu notes this area could be considered for public art.

- Commenters agreed that pedestrian bump-outs/curb extensions here could make it a nicer place to be, improve pedestrian visibility and could create a shorter pedestrian crossing.
- One commenter requested removing the existing parking space right at the intersection of River and Pleasant that impedes pedestrian visibility.

4c) Park at Tubman Square

- Lillian Hsu noted the possible 19th Amendment Art location at Tubman. (One of 5 locations being considered.)
- One commenter requested a food vendor at this location, or “hot dog truck”.
- Commenters asked about the current closure of Kinnaird St. Many approved but one was concerned it would impede school access for Amigo School. (The Street is currently closed down to provide construction staging for a nearby infrastructure project the city is undertaking.)
- Commenter requested taller trees that you can see and be under.
- Commenters noted that the space and use of streets would be affected by use in the former Keezer’s space.
- Comment was made that Jay Street should be resurfaced/repaved for people who bike.

5) Howard to Rockwell Street

5a) Howard Street

- Some commenters said Howard Street is too narrow for two-way traffic. One said that parking should be removed to make way for more traffic as it gets very congested during rush hour. Staff pointed out that wider, more open streets can encourage people to drive at higher speeds.
- A commenter suggested special pavement treatments for the entire intersection to create a sense of place there.
- Commenters appreciated nice architecture.
- One person noted that people walking want to cross from Blackstone Street to Whole Foods.
- Commenters did not like the billboard located on the south side of River Street in this vicinity.

5b) Rockwell Street

- Commenters suggested that the Coast Café could benefit from truck loading and/or café seating

6) Hoyt Field

- A commenter suggested that wayfinding signage leading from River Street to Hoyt Field is needed for pedestrians, even though the main parking areas are off Western Avenue and Montague Street.
- Commenters suggested pedestrian pavement treatments so it feels more like a shared street (woonerf).

7) Putnam Avenue

- Commenters bited drainage issues/ponding on northeast corner adjacent to Riverside Pizza (A Riverside Pizza staff member told one participant on the walk that this was their number one issue)
- A commenter suggested considering this location as an opportunity for a community gateway treatment, such as an arch with the name of the neighborhood on it.
- Commenters suggested a need for additional street trees.
- A commenter mentioned that the afternoon gridlock of Putnam Street a problem.
- Wendell Joseph of CDD compared this area to other parts of River Street and commented about how buildings form a frame to the overall street. He also made a comment about how when buildings do not have their front doors or porches on the street, it creates a negative perception.
- CDD staff mentioned that the new mid-rise housing currently under construction will face onto Putnam Street not River Street.

8) Riverside Press Park

- Consultants suggested that streetscape should include street trees to create a vertical edge.
- Consultant suggests pulling Riverside Press Park edge into sidewalk to create more buffer, similar to Cronin Park along Western Avenue—positive response from participants.
- Comment that nobody plays near the park edge, and wondering if the playground fence should be expanded. Wendell from CDD explained the thinking around playground fences and their standards.
- Suggestion from Lillian Hsu to consider incorporating skateboard play features along edge of Riverside Press Park edge (consider wave feature to tie into water element).
- A commenter suggested adding a Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon at Blackstone Street to facilitate crossing over to Whole Foods.
- A commenter suggested widening and adding pavement markings to the Whole Foods entrance.

9) Memorial Drive Gateway

- Commenters suggested gateway treatments and streetscape design to help let people know that they have arrived into a neighborhood context.
- It was noted that DCR design project for Phase 3 Memorial Drive may result in intersection improvements.

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