

Minutes of the Mid Cambridge Neighborhood Conservation District Commission

December 2, 2002 Cambridge Senior Ctr., 806 Mass. Ave. 6:00 PM

Members present: Ms. Osler, Mr. Cohen, Mr. Moos, Ms. Perrault, Ms. Berg

Staff present: Ms. Zimmerman

Members of the Public: see attached list

For Public Meeting

Mr. Moos called the meeting to order at 6:05; he introduced the Commission and welcomed the public.

1. Informational Presentation: Cambridge Public Library expansion project, 449 Broadway. By Alan Burne, Project Director for the Library's Expansion Project

Mr. Moos welcomed Mr. Burne and Richard Rossi, Deputy City Manager and asked for their presentation.

Mr. Rossi said the city has been working hard on this project since the last time he and Mr. Burne met with the Commission; he said they have paid attention to the public comments they have heard, they have thought seriously about those comments and worked with their consultants to address the issues raised in the various public meetings that have taken place. He said there have been many small and large group meetings and at least three public meetings. He said the presentation reflects the results of those meetings.

Mr. Burne presented power point slides of the project. Mr. Burne reported that there was a public meeting following the last Commission presentation at which concerns were raised about the scheme M4 (the "far east" scheme) and in response, the city had asked the consultants to prepare additional alternatives. He said three more alternates had been studied: M5, with a four-story building to the east; M6, with the M4 massing swung forward toward Broadway; and M7, with the existing library moved forward to Broadway and a new extension built to the rear. He said the consensus of the Design Advisory Committee was that a four-story building was too difficult to operate, so M5 was eliminated from further study; he said the other three alternatives were looked at in greater detail. He said the original M4 scheme allowed for good operations and a good park solution but he said in restudying the proposals, they had updated the scheme to move the ramp and garage adjacent to the high school off Broadway to address concerns

about Ellery Street traffic that abutters raised with the original M4 siting. He said the modified scheme 4 would require the demolition of half of the current high school parking by demolishing the tennis courts along with the garage below. He said three re-configured tennis courts would be rebuilt on grade and roughly 100 replacement spaces would be constructed in the new underground garage in front of the existing Library. He said the scheme honored the original intent to keep Joan Lorenz Park open and level, it re-landscaped the park as a whole, opened a new park area at the high school (with the demolition of the 1967 library wing) and provided a new view corridor to Cambridge Street. He said the architecture team was very positive about the modified scheme 4 and the DAC had almost-unanimously recommended it.

Mr. Burne showed a photo of the model and said the high school had raised objections to the ramp location but he had asked school committee members and personnel to look at the site, on which the ramp location had been staked out. He said the pedestrian paths would be improved with the removal of a long wall that currently divides the high school and library locations; he said the pedestrian numbers and patterns were being studied and the city believed they would be able to demonstrate that the ramp could improve pedestrian safety.

Mr. Burne said scheme M6 brought the expanded library out toward Broadway but left the garage and tennis court at their current status. He said scheme M6 divided the site into two parks and complicated pedestrian pathways. He said scheme M7 moved the current library building forward to Broadway and created a side entrance and ramp. He said this was the scheme favored by neighbors but neither the DAC or the school supported it. He said the relocated library and its new construction would create a barrier with the school and divide the park. He said the cost of the move had been estimated from \$2 million to \$10 million and that he thought it would actually cost between \$5 and \$8 million. He said there was also some question whether the building could be insured through the move.

Mr. Burne said that the DAC had concluded, based on the study of the further alternatives, that scheme M4 as modified with the ramp would be recommended. He said the tot lot and drop-off arrangements needed to be made, and would be developed along with traffic calming measures for Broadway. He said it was proposed to re-signal the

street from Ellery to Felton streets, adding drop-off areas and revising the MBTA bus stops. He said it was important to improve pedestrian safety generally in that location.

Mr. Moos thanked Mr. Burne and commended him also for the web site, which Mr. Moos said was very helpful and allowed one to study the various proposals in detail. He said a Boston Globe article had projected moving costs at \$8-10 million and asked Mr. Burne to explain the estimates.

Mr. Burne said two building moving companies had been contacted. He said one had estimated \$1.8-2.5 million to move the building and the other had estimated \$10 million; he said a 1994 estimate on moving costs had been \$5-6 million, so he felt it was prudent to assume the larger figures would be more likely to be correct. Mr. Moos asked if cost were no object, would it have been more attractive to move the building? Mr. Burne said from a historical standpoint, moving the building forward had real strengths and Charles Sullivan had thought it was good because it preserved so much. Practically speaking, he said, cost is an issue, but he agreed with DAC comments that this scheme would break up the park, would physically and symbolically separate the high school from the park, and would hide the expansion and essentially relegate it to the status of "just another addition". He said the Mass. Historical Commission and the Cambridge Historical Commission would both be looking at the presentation this week and would make their comments known.

Mr. Rossi said it was important to the high school that the wall between the two buildings come down and that if the building were moved forward it would create a new barrier. Susan Flannery, the library director, said that developing handicapped access in the complex would likely require developing a new entrance, not reusing the existing entrance; she said scheme M7 is somewhat misleading because it looks as though the existing entrance is the main entrance, when in fact the main entrance would most likely have to be on the side. She said the existing entrance is hard to see now and with scheme 7, it would still be hard to see on the side of a new building.

Mr. Moos asked about concerns that the old building not be minimized in the expansion; he asked if there were guidelines on how to ensure that the old building was not trivialized in these schemes. He said he was concerned that the schemes would overwhelm the old building.

Mr. Rossi said it is a “piece of art” for the designers to work up from a 30K square foot building to a 100K square foot building and that the designers are paying a lot of attention to the old building. He said the old building would be enhanced by removing the 1967 wing and re-exposing the west elevation, which had been quite prominent when Irving Street still cut through the block. Mr. Rossi said it is not clear now where the library is from Cambridge Street and opening the view would emphasize the old building.

Ms. Flannery added that a number of area libraries have successfully added large new wings to historically significant smaller buildings and urged the Commission to view those designs; she mentioned Natick, Waltham and Quincy, saying the Quincy example is a historic H. H. Richardson design. Mr. Rossi said they have learned how difficult it is to respect the old building, maintain the open space, welcome the high school, and not encumber the neighbors with traffic, but that they have worked hard to achieve a balance among those demands and that they have gotten much closer to that goal.

Mr. Cohen said the neighbors want to preserve the park but if the neighbors preferred scheme M7, the park would be bifurcated; he asked why that scheme might be preferred by neighbors. Mr. Rossi said he believed there were distinctions between those who saw the site as a whole as a park and those who were primarily concerned with Joan Lorenz Park. He said the beeches would not be touched and that any trees removed would be replaced at a substantial caliper. Mr. Cohen asked if neighbors had heard this; Mr. Rossi said yes. Mr. Burne said neighbors have over time come to see the area shown with a dotted line on the site plan as the limit beyond which no development could take place and the design team has respected that. Mr. Rossi said the DAC is a 17-20 member citizen group and that 14 of the members had voted in favor of modified scheme 4; he said there was one committee member, who was also a member of the School Committee, who had withheld his vote. He said if one canvassed Cambridge broadly, one would find every possible opinion, but the consensus at the last DAC meeting was that the public comments had been heard and that the best that could be done had been done to address the concerns raised.

Mr. Moos asked why the ramp was located near to the high school. Mr. Burne said there was a concern that the ramp would be an anomaly in the center of the park. Mr. Moos mentioned the Cambridge Hospital ramp, which was reasonably graceful on

that site. Mr. Burne said the ramp location allowed the Trowbridge Street driveway to be removed and provided for drop off space on Broadway as well as below grade. Mr. Cohen asked the footprint of the underground parking garage; Mr. Burne indicated the location proposed in front of the existing library and said there was a possibility of additional high school parking below the current 1967 wing. Mr. Cohen said he presumed all the trees in that location would be removed. Mr. Burne said they believed a small copper beech in the location could be transplanted, but that the trees, which included some nice specimen trees as well as a large number of less-desirable Norway maples, would be removed. Mr. Rossi and Mr. Burne assured the Commission that trees of a good caliper would be installed and that the budget for landscaping is substantial and will not be short-changed.

Ms. Osler asked if the length of the driveway ramp was accurate and if it could be shortened. Mr. Rossi said the traffic consultants and Traffic & Parking prefer a longer ramp with a large level area at the sidewalk for safety. Mr. Burne said the ramp needs to be slightly longer so as to provide the 4' of soil cover necessary for landscaping over the garage. He also emphasized that both the ramp and its walls will be designed to discourage or prevent skateboarding.

Mr. Moos asked whether the various options would differ in how long they would require the library to be closed. Mr. Burne said he doesn't yet know how long the closure will be; he said one of the next steps is to determine how to accommodate teacher and contractor parking during construction. He said they are looking at doing the garage first with heavy construction and excavation done in the summer to avoid some of the conflicts with the school's use of the site. Mr. Rossi said it was always part of the plan to relocate the library function, possibly at multiple sites, but hopefully at one site. He said the library will operate. Ms. Flannery said this type of project is done once in a century and she wants the decisions to be based on what gives the city the best library, not the best short term solution. Mr. Burne said all 3 revised schemes as well as the original 4 take essentially the same amount of time.

Mr. Moos asked the plan for program space below grade. Mr. Burne said they have continually heard that the expansion space should be maximized below grade and minimized above; he said the mechanical spaces and meeting rooms and as much

program space as possible will be below grade, but they won't and don't want to sacrifice program areas that should be above grade.

Mr. Cohen said his biggest concern is how a connection is made between the old and a new building. He wondered if the two structures could be made more separate at the ground level, perhaps connected with glazed construction at the second story. He asked if this had been considered. Mr. Burne said it had, especially with regard to the historic implications, but he said a major concern is accounting for the various grade changes in the floor levels of the old building, which complicate the connection. Mr. Rossi said he is eager to see how the designers handle this issue and said all options are open. Ms. Flannery said the Arlington library addition has handled this well; she said the designers have been directed not to mothball the old building. Ms. Flannery said a negative example is the Malden library, where the old building is so separate that it is now only open a few hours a week because it cannot be staffed from the new library.

Mr. Moos asked if seismic reinforcements would be needed in the old building; Mr. Burne said yes, the structural engineers and Ann Beha's office are doing that design. He said he did not know how inconspicuous it will be, but he thought it could be done well.

Mr. Moos asked if it would be helpful to the public to list the successful library additions in nearby communities on the web site. Ms. Flannery said it would be possible and she could provide a recommended list of libraries to look at. Mr. Burne said Ann Beha's office has been looking at precedents for connections as well. The images of some buildings in London, Denmark and Boston were shown. The Commission favored the Danish image, which showed a new building connected to an old building with a glazed roof over the gap.

Mr. Cohen asked if any thought had been given the materials or style of the new building. Mr. Rossi said it was too early for them to have done that. Mr. Cohen said he kept thinking the new building should have a lot of glazing and that the Commission sometimes encounters an assumption from applicants that they (the Commission) will prefer a traditional appearance. Ms. Flannery said in effect the old library has a cloistered feeling, somewhat cut off from the outside, while with the new library, it is hoped people will have the sense that they are in a park space and be aware of the outside

location. Mr. Cohen said he believed a design that stood along and was very glassy would be appropriate and that it would be better not to mimic or replicate the old building.

Mr. Moos asked why a building taller than three stories was not felt to be acceptable. Ms. Flannery said staff people are needed for each level, that security concerns increase, and that it becomes harder for people to find what they are looking for. She said buildings over three stories also require a larger percentage of their floor space to be devoted to circulation and thus are programmatically less efficient.

Mr. Cohen said he is intrigued by the possibility of glassing over the connection between the old and new buildings.

Mr. Rossi said that prior to the 1977 additions, all high school graduations had been held in the park amphitheatre at the War Memorial and that it was hoped that new park space for such a function might be developed at the 1967 library addition.

Ms. Perrault said one of Cambridge's architectural characteristics is its organic nature. She said she wished to see the new building appear as a natural extension of the old. She agreed that the architects engaged are capable of achieving that kind of addition. She said she understood how appealing moving the building forward would be for preservationists but she said she also believed it was important to allow a more imaginative approach to carry the new design ahead.

Mr. Cohen said it seemed clear that the Commission did not want to see any diminishment of the east elevation at a new building and that the elevation had to be preserved, whether or not it was covered. He said that elevation could not be lost.

Mr. Moos asked about the status of existing parking, given the desire for a 200-space garage. Mr. Burne said that at this stage they believed they would replace the 100 spaces that would be lost by the demolition of the garage below the tennis courts, replace the 34 surface spaces currently at the Library, and add roughly 70 spaces for both projected Library demand and additional teacher parking. Mr. Rossi reminded the Commission that the high school is not occupied 18 weeks out of the year.

Mr. Moos asked if there would be some point at which the park would be lost to construction staging. Mr. Burne said yes there will be an issue, that irrigation needs to be added to Joan Lorenz Park and that the demolition of the garage will affect the park. Mr.

Rossi said they will try to keep the park “live” during construction, perhaps by shuttling contractors in from a remote location. Mr. Moos said there is an assumption that the park will be lost for 5 years during construction. Mr. Burne showed where the excavation would occur, which is largely in front of the existing library and at the site of the extension by the tennis courts; he said the construction will affect the whole site to some extent but that they are planning to keep the park open as much as possible

Mr. Moos asked what the project timeline was. Mr. Burne said at the end of that week, they would try to make a decision on the massing and that they hoped to begin schematic design in January. Mr. Moos said he was concerned about the timing of the decision on the footprint. Mr. Burne said at this point, 8 possible locations have been presented, that there are unknowns, such as the Mass. Historical Commission response, but they need to know now that the Mid Cambridge NCD Commission is comfortable with the footprint or whether there are serious objections to M4. He said since October, M4 and M7 have been looked at in depth. Ms. Zimmerman said the Commission needed to understand that there has been a great deal of public process to date.

Mr. Moos and Mr. Cohen said they wished to have a public hearing on the site and massing proposal so that the public has input and that the Commission can affirm a direction for the project. Mr. Burne said they could begin to go forward with schematic work and have a hearing at that point. Ms. Perrault said she was unwilling to come down on one side or another without a formal vote. Mr. Burne suggested they come back in January with the M4, which is their preferred scheme, in concept. Mr. Cohen said it was his sense that at least some of the Commission wanted to see more on the M7 concept as a historic preservation alternative. Ms. Perrault said she thinks M7 is the obvious first choice for historic preservation but said M4 could also work. Mr. Cohen said the Commission could schedule a public hearing for January on a more articulated version of M4. Ms. Zimmerman said it is standard for the Commission to request that applicants apply for the project that the applicant finds most suitable and for applicants to make their case for the appropriateness of their desired project to the Commission.

Mr. Cohen asked how other regulatory bodies interacted with this project. Mr. Burne said the Mid Cambridge Commission, the Mass. Historical Commission and the Board of Zoning Appeal have formal regulatory review over the project, but the

Cambridge Historical Commission, Design Advisory Committee, and School Committee are advisors only. (Ms. Osler exited the meeting.) Mr. Moos said he had thought the project was exempt from BZA review; Mr. Rossi explained that the use was exempted, but that the dimensional requirements of the underlying zoning still apply so the BZA and Planning Board would both have a review (the Planning Board under the Large Project review rules) and that, of course, the City Council would have to approve appropriations.

Mr. Cohen asked if the DAC would attend in January. Mr. Rossi said they would lead off with the DAC report in January. Mr. Burne explained the DAC will make a formal report to the City Manager and they would bring that report to the Commission in January. Mr. Moos asked Mr. Rossi to spell out the decision process. Mr. Rossi said the City Manager will make the ultimate decision on the design to be pursued, with the DAC recommendation in mind.

Mr. Moos asked if anyone of the public wished to comment. John Gintell, West Street, said he was a DAC member and that the Committee had considered four paramount goals: that the design had to work for the library, for the high school, for historic preservation and for the park; he said scheme 4 was the best in the DAC view because it fit all of those requirements best.

Mr. Moos thanked everyone for their input.

2. MC-2279: 17 Ellsworth Avenue: For review of non-binding Certificate of Appropriateness to install two new windows on rear elevation at third floor. By Maureen O'Connell.

Ms. Zimmerman asked the Commission to recall the work approved at this address a few months ago and to remember that the rear elevation was distantly visible over the roof of the garage abutting on Dana Street; she said Ms. O'Connell now wanted to add windows on the rear elevation. There were no questions. Mr. Cohen moved approval and Ms. Berg seconded the motion, which passed 4-0.

3. Minutes

Ms. Perrault asked to add "subject to binding review" on page 3 and to add "trust the process" to page 2. With those additions, Mr. Cohen moved approval of the November minutes; Ms. Berg seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:35 P.M.

Members of the Public

Pam Groleau	Ann Beha Architects
Pamela Fox	21 Ellsworth Ave
John Gintell	9 West St
Richard Rossi	City Hall
Mathew Stymeist	William Rawn Assoc.
(Alan Burne	CPL)
(Susan Flannery	CPL)
(Maureen O'Connell	17 Ellsworth)