

DESIGN ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING #3

Cambridge Public Library Main Library Expansion Project Phase 2

Tobin School
June 10, 2003

These meeting notes record the Design Advisory Committee (DAC) meeting held on June 10 at the Tobin School. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss landscape issues that would influence the site design. The following questions guided the discussion:

A. Existing Conditions

1. Who uses the site and how do they use it?
2. What would be the ideal qualities of the future CPL site?
3. What are the special existing qualities of the CPL site?
4. What are the qualities of the existing site that need to be improved?

B. Site Design Opportunities and Challenges

1. What additional uses could be accommodated with the new site condition?
2. How should the site design respond to the expanded Library and the Cambridge Rindge and Latin School?
3. How should the existing site program (tot lot, pedestrian walks, seating areas, high school entrance areas and circulation, passive and active recreation) respond to the new site condition?
4. How should the site's boundaries (Cambridge Street, Ellery Street and Broadway) influence its new use and character?
5. What will make the site, as a legible whole, feel connected to the context of the immediate neighborhood?

The DAC's comments are as follows:

A. Existing Conditions

1. The park offers a variety of unstructured and informal uses.
2. Sometimes there is a sense of “you don't belong.” The new site should:
Have visual cues that invite users in, provide welcoming experiences,
and accommodate park uses year-round.
3. There is a lack of civic nature – Could the relationship of disparate
elements of park be improved?
4. The space does not read as an important place.
5. There is a need to improve views into the spaces and improve clarity of
spaces within the site.
6. There is a lack of park definition.
7. The library park should feel like an important place.
8. Unify the site.
9. There is a lack of sense of connection between the high school, the
library, and the park. The wall at the high school separates the high
school from the library and the park.
10. It does not feel like a welcoming open space for everyone – overgrown
trees and the driveway contribute to this feeling.
11. Can we have a better-executed tot lot?
12. The high school students should feel welcome to use the park.
13. Make areas of refuge/destination within park.
14. Provide lots of places to sit.
15. The “straight” lines that exist within the park could be improved.
16. What will the access to the library be like? It should be an
inviting/welcoming experience to go to the library.
17. Access through the site is very important.

18. We should determine if the existing number of trees on site is appropriate.
19. The steps by tennis courts: Could the steps in this area be re-thought?
20. The edges of the site should be enhanced or have some sort of border.
21. The existing overgrown park character has overtaken the civic nature of the library.
22. The design of the library park is too tightly wound- could the new site be more relaxed and natural?
23. Accumulation of trees and monuments in the library park is “cluttered” and was not well thought out.
24. Perhaps we should let go of scattered elements of old building.
25. The seating capacity for park should accommodate “special events.”
26. Older users are overlooked in the existing conditions– maybe add places to read that would better accommodate older users?
27. Library should accommodate the homeless.
28. The objects of memory: Could the existing objects could be better integrated into the design so they make more sense.
29. Joan Lorentz Park is not inviting to young people.
30. Should the “rules” of Joan Lorentz Park be reconsidered?
31. The park should not “exclude” certain people or uses.
32. Consider providing “seats” at the tennis courts to watch matches.
33. Safety should be a primary concern in making the entrance to the new garage.
34. The park should be an extension of the neighborhood.
35. The park should be a blend between residential and park uses.
36. Create more open space and continuity.
37. The new design should honor and build on park traditions of Cambridge.
38. The Park character could be like Harvard Divinity and Fairchild courtyard.

39. At the high school, the wall provides seating. We should figure out how many seats it provides now.
40. The path design should be reconsidered.
41. This is one park – the whole thing is the larger park.
42. Encourage interaction between users. Do not put up barriers.
43. Provide sun, shade, texture and views through trees to sunny spots.
44. It's a problem now – high school students congregate at entrance to high school.
45. The high school has visual cues that discourage inclusion into the entire site, such as the wall.
46. The existing road cuts the site in half and creates two separate parks; it does not feel like a civic space.
47. There is a lack of a sense of importance as a civic space.
48. What is a civic place?
49. The wall at the high school parking lot presents major obstacles to creating a unified park.
50. The park should allow kids of all ages to play, how can they be better included?
51. Provide a larger or better tot lot, there is an important link between the library and the tot lot.
52. The park should be an extension of the library for students.
53. Provide meandering paths, not just stark, straight ones.
54. People want destination places for all kinds of sitting and open spaces.
55. Provide passive and active uses.
56. Provide safe inviting access at all times of the year.
57. Is the quantity of trees important?
58. Are there special individual trees?
59. There should be no barriers at the Ellery street edge.
60. The park has to overcome the notion of “library as a sole destination.”

61. The landscape character should be made interesting by various planting densities.
62. The landscape is currently overgrown and cluttered.
63. The new design should start from scratch.
64. There are too many trees currently in front of the library blocking views to the library and confusing the civic presence of the library, high school, and park.
65. Should the high school wall be removed?
66. Provide outdoor space for public ceremonies and concerts, because it helps to build community pride.
67. The high school wall functions as a big bench – if it's removed, what will replace it?
68. The history of the school and library: They accumulate history and become linked with the residential neighborhood.
69. The existing parking lot is a “scar.”
70. The new design should seize the opportunity to create a sweeping and unified site.
71. Provide a promenade through the park that connects the site with the adjacent context.
72. The park is public, yes, but, more importantly, it is a *community* park.
73. Park is not civic in the same way as a typical Boston landmark.
74. Materials can make a difference in the attractiveness of park elements.
75. Remember that landscape influences behavior.
76. When students are given a quality space, their behavior becomes more respectful.
77. A civic place must be democratic.
78. Joan Lorentz Park is the entire site, encompassing all of the different spaces within the park.

B. Site Design Opportunities and Challenges

1. Remember to address people sitting inside library looking out – the relationship between library and park should be visual as well as spatial.
2. It should be clear that the library is at this site – how can we improve the civic presence and library signage?
3. Details are important in terms of how the landscape presents its civic nature.
4. Skateboard and noise – the park should not be skateboard-friendly.
5. Make it a good space for bicycles – provide places to store bicycles.
6. The path between bridge and high school – provide clear views and a logical walk layout.
7. Skateboarding presents concerns about how site furniture is detailed.
8. The existing Joan Lorentz Park excludes people.
9. Young adults are trying to define their own space – what is their relationship to the park?
10. A public space should accommodate all users.
11. Provide a variety of spaces, i.e.. reading a book under a tree.
12. Allow for larger events on site: Anything related to movies or library reading groups.
13. When you are in the existing library building, it feels insular; you don't know where you are. Could this be improved with the new design?
14. Seeing the library building is important.
15. Signage can be helpful – details make a big difference.
16. Expand the tot lot to accommodate older children in the playground.
17. Discourage skateboarding through design.
18. What is the role of desire paths to circulation?
19. Make bench spaces that resist “other” uses.

20. Design the park so that it encourages high school students to use the whole park.
21. Make special places that are private but fit into the whole.
22. Coordinate the design to accommodate larger gatherings.
23. Establish a sense of place from within the library so there is a better interchange between the inside/outside.
24. Invite teens to share their thoughts.