

**ROUNDTABLE/WORKING MEETING  
To discuss the Master Plan**

**DATE** Monday, June 8, 2015

**TIME** 5:43 PM

**LOCATION** Sullivan Chamber

**PURPOSE** Roundtable/working meeting between City Council

**ATTENDEES** Mayor Maher, Vice Mayor Benzan, Councillor Carlone, Councillor Cheung, Councillor Mazen, Councillor McGovern, Councillor Simmons, Councillor Toomey, Richard Rossi, City Manager, Lisa Peterson, Deputy City Manager, Lee Gianetti, Director of Communications and Community Relations, Executive Department, Taha Jennings, Assistant to the City Manager, Iram Farooq, Acting Assistant City Manager for Community Development Department, Stuart Dash, Director of Community Planning, CDD, Chris Cotter, Director of Housing, CDD, Bill Deignan, Transportation Planner, CDD, Ellen Semonoff, Assistant City Manager for Human Services, Janice Alger, Assistant Director for Administration, Human Services, Owen O’Riordan, Public Works Commissioner, Kathy Watkins, City Engineer, Joseph Barr, Director, Traffic, Parking and Transportation, Paula Crane, City Clerk’s Office and Donna P. Lopez, City Clerk.

**OTHER ATTENDEES** Planning Board members: Louis J. Bacci, Jr., Chair, Catherine Connolly Preston, Vice Chair, Ted Cohen, Hugh Russell and Tom Sieniewicz; Charles Teague 23 Edmunds Street, Tom Stohlman, 19 Channing Street, Carol O’Hare, 172 Magazine Street, Robert Winters, 366 Broadway, Sarah Kennedy, Director of Government Affairs, Chamber of Commerce, Elaine DeRosa, Director, CEOC, James Williamson, 1000 Jackson Place, Hasson Rashid, 820 Mass. Avenue, Heather Hoffman and Mark Jacquith, 213 Hurley Street, Nancy Ryan, 4 Ashburton Place, Patrick Barrett, 234 Broadway, Lee Farris, John Hawkinson, 84 Mass. Avenue, Mark Levy and Sara Feijo.

**DISCUSSION SUMMARY**

Mayor Maher opened the meeting at 5:43 pm and announced the purpose. He announced that the meeting is not being publicly audio or visually recorded, there is no public comment and no votes will

be taken. He welcomed the members of the Planning Board, public and city personnel. He introduced Iram Farooq, Assistant City Manager for Community Development Department, for a brief overview of where things stand followed by dialogue.

Ms. Farooq stated that she will not go into a lot of detail on the content because she is hoping that people have had a chance to review the RFQ. She stated that last week it was posted on the city's website with deadline of June 25, 2015. This morning there was pre-proposal conference with a good turnout and the idea is that once the city has proposals, the Designer Selection Committee will come up with a short list and those teams will do public presentation with the goal that in July/August they will have proposal reviewed and the contract awarded so that the public piece of the city-wide planning process will begin in the fall.

Ms. Farooq stated that they set up the project review special permit so that structure was set up with design guidelines. She stated that it is time to look at the city as a whole. In the interim, there have been a lot of area-specific studies. She stated that the process that they would like to engage in is different than previous city-wide processes. She stated that in this version they hope to look at things such as infrastructure, diversity and equity, how to bring a larger set of people to the table to think about what we want the city to be in the future. The second phase of Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment will be concluded soon. This will help when thinking about how Cambridge can be a resilient community. The Community Needs Assessment will interface closely with that. She stated that in the RFQ there is a list of ongoing programs in the city that will inform the city. She stated that in the RFQ, one of the things worth pointing out on pages 4, 5, 6, are key topic areas that will be addressed. On page 7 there is a series of cross-cutting topics that will be threaded through the thinking such as social equity and diversity, robust economy, character and community services. She stated that recognizing more and more that a city does not function alone and we have to interface with regional organizations will be part of the process. Two themes that jump out: data driven process that will inform work going forward and a strong public engagement process that goes beyond what is typically done to reach those that are not able to come to meetings or difficulty engaging in the typical processes. They want to bring a host of tools rather than just one to engage people. She stated that at the pre-proposal conference, they asked "How do you define success?" The answer is to get many people involved in the process.

Councillor Mazen stated that he had great conversation with Somerville City Manager about their process and they precede Cambridge. They did a lot of things right. He stated that he learned that they had a 60-member steering committee with 60 stakeholder meetings that were resident driven. He stated that they got a great outcome from the assistance of the residents. He stated that people believed in the process and started to defend the process and joining in a collaborative solution. There was less disagreement and the increase in discussion and opportunities steamrolled the differences. He stated that Massachusetts is not like California in terms of how a comprehensive plan in leverage. Somerville is trying to follow that and he feels that Cambridge should do the same. He stated that in terms of Planning Board relationship works, he believes that Somerville is much different. He stated that the Mayor has allowed the Planning Board to control the developers. He stated that Somerville pushes back and does formative regional place making. He stated that he imagines that the Planning Board is understaffed. He thinks there is a lot more staff time in Somerville in setting the tone. They have had two height variances in two years. Their zoning sets the tone. When the City of Cambridge has zoning that is cohesive we can use that to hold developers to task. He stated that when they did their comprehensive planning process, they were the prime

consultants themselves. He stated that it is probably not an idea to farm out the prime consultant. They benefitted greatly from it. They were surprised at how well they grew their own bench strength. He asked how many planners the city has. Ms. Farooq stated that there are 35 planners across the various disciplines. Councillor Mazen stated that it will help to assign a certain number of planners per neighborhood. He stated that way they can get to know the players and engage a larger number of residents as well as learning the issues of the neighborhood. This could create parallel tracking in the future. He stated that it is important to bring in the experts who dig in as a layperson to help create solutions. He stated that he only picked things up that Somerville is doing that other cities have done successfully as well. He stated that there is a lot that we can do but they created an unbelievable new era in that city.

Ms. Farooq stated that by putting out the RFQ they are on a path to hire a team of consultants to help. All large projects in Cambridge in the last 10-15 years that the city has worked with consultant teams that bring multi-disciplinary skills to the table. The City of Cambridge is very much immersed in the process and engaged. She stated that the City wants to learn from good examples that exist in other communities so they have looked at some of the models and they researched other plans. She stated that the City is also looking at models from other communities and are trying to pull the positives from these plans. Mr. Rossi stated that he supports the Master Plan fully. He stated that this is a different form of government. He stated that the Planning Board has its own authority. He stated that the City Manager is not allowed to tell the Planning Board what to do. The Planning Board maximizes the staff of the city. He agreed that not only have we heard good things to look at in Somerville and other places in the country. He stated that Cambridge also includes residents in a big way. They are being listened to and will continue to be part of the process. He stated that he wants this to happen with a lot of input and excitement. Councillor Mazen stated that he would be remiss if he did not thank everyone who came together to make the Master Plan possible. He stated that he understands the difference between the forms of government but he thinks that Somerville's Planning Board is similar to that of Cambridge. He stated that he does not think that anyone would argue that the Planning Board should be controlled. He stated that the Planning Board has a large role to play. He stated that in Somerville it seems that their zoning is so strict that it is the City setting the course on zoning and not any individual project. Mr. Rossi stated that the day the housing went up in Alewife, everyone cheered. As it has evolved, that may not be the case. He stated that he heard clearly that it would be advantageous for the Planning Board if the staff was able to interpret some of the things that the residents have asked for. He stated that when Councillor Mazen suggests a planner to each neighborhood, there are housing specialists, energy specialists, in Community Development. The plan is that we may have teams that will include neighborhood planners, housing, environmental, DHSP, urban design, landscape.

Ms. Farooq stated that there are neighborhood planners assigned to neighborhoods. They have multiple neighborhoods assigned to them. They are the first point of contact when people in the neighborhoods have issues. She stated that she did want to mention the idea of the multi-lingual charrette are a good idea. She stated that there has been the sense that if someone is asking for a Special Permit they are asking for something extraordinary. After the last city-wide planning process, zoning was adopted that stated that a developer must come to the Planning Board for a special permit.

Councillor Mazen stated that when talking about involvement in shaping the discussion, he was hearing about the Somerville process about the shaping of tradeoffs. He stated that it is important to

think about tradeoffs as opposed to wins/losses. He stated that for that level of tradeoff shaping, the City can do that on the fly and that is the part that is tricky.

Councillor Mazon felt that the City does need neighborhood planners for each neighborhood and multi-lingual charrettes.

Ted Cohen stated that the City's zoning ordinance allows things to happen as-of-right. He stated that developments that are done as-of right the Planning Board does not get to say anything about it. He stated that the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance states that anything different or unusual has to go to Special Permit. The Planning Board relies on staff to go through a proposal with a developer in great detail so when it comes before the Planning Board it complies with the city ordinance. They rely on staff to give the Planning Board information but they are not mandating decisions. The Planning Board is in the process of mandating a community process so as to ensure that developers have met with the community before they come before the Planning Board. He stated that the Planning Board does not grant variances. He stated that the Planning Board members come from various neighborhoods in the city. He stated that it is remarkable when they sit down as a group to work things out that they reach agreement because they have the idea that it is the entire city that has to benefit. The idea of having a staff person who is knowledgeable about each neighborhood is valuable but the problem is that it is great to hear about everyone wanting housing but oftentimes it is heard, "not in my neighborhood".

Mr. Rossi stated that the city has done this before. There has been plan after plan with many discussions. You can say the same for energy, open space, police safety, adaptation, health and human services. There is a lot that will be incorporated into the plan with data that other communities maybe did not have. He stated that this is not going to be something where the city will cut back to save money. They will then leave a plan for future Planning Boards to be able to reference. He stated that it is important to address how the plan gets updated.

Councillor McGovern stated that in terms of the idea of the neighborhood planners, he can see pros and cons. He stated that having someone who is familiar with the players and the neighborhood would be a plus but he likes that when he attends community meetings Mr. Dash is always there. He stated that it would be important that communication was strong among the neighborhood planners. In terms of the key planning initiatives, he stated that he does not see the Early Childhood Task Force included. Ms. Farooq stated that it is on page 23. Councillor McGovern thanked the Community Development Department for inclusion of that. He stated that there was a lot of talk about "We don't trust Community Development Department and the Planning Board." If we can look back and say that the process was sound, inclusive and fair, it makes it easier to defend the plan when there are things in the plan that people do not like. He stated that having someone from the outside will give people some relief or feeling that this will be done fairly. He suggested that the weekends have to be included in the process. He stated that if this is truly a city-wide plan, everyone must be included. He thanked the Community Development Department for its hard work. Ms. Farooq stated that almost all of the things that Councillor McGovern pointed out are also the objective of the city.

Councillor Carlone stated that there are many good things in the RFQ. He stated that the policy order that was eventually put together by the Mayor and himself said a planning urban design study. He stated that there are elements but he felt that after reading it today, a lot of it is submerged. He stated that we have to go beyond a 3-D model to really convey the spirit of a place. He stated that

historically what Councillor Mazen stated was more like it was in the 70s and 80s. He noted that many of the teams were urban designers and were based on detailed city plans. He stated that for critical areas such as Alewife, it is more than just a strategy that does not have much meat to it. He stated that there is something about working with someone on the payroll versus a consultant. Mr. Rossi stated that it may be a recommendation in the city wide plan that when you do a study then you employ a lot of the things that you just described or are you asking if that should be the process for the citywide plan. Councillor Carlone stated that East Cambridge was called a miracle project and part of it was a relationship that normally does not happen with a full-time outside consultant. Ms. Farooq stated that the range of people that are in the room are going to be deeply immersed in the plan. It will not be a standalone plan. She stated that CDD will be taking ownership and shepherding it through to ensure that it does not die out after the consultants leave. Mr. Rossi stated that he can think of two examples (Goody Clancy in East Cambridge and housing on Western Avenue and the River) wherein the residents distrusted the model. In those two projects, they went to outside consulting firms. That is how they evolved. It was not that the city said they wanted to drop the model as there was a lot of community push. Councillor Carlone stated that time can develop trust.

Councillor Carlone asked how the City Council will be involved. Ms. Farooq stated that the City Council will be updated twice per year with any additional updates as necessary. Councillor Carlone stated that there is some overlap in policy and he looks forward to discussions and input. He stated that areas near abutting neighborhoods may want different expertise than that of a commercial district. He stated that the City might want that breadth of expertise on the team. He stated that another element of Somerville is the neighborhood retail district scale. He stated that usually planning studies have to go through urban design phase to understand implications. He stated that he expects some zoning alteration.

Councillor Cheung stated that it would be interesting to hear from staff who lives in Somerville what they think of their process. He stated that they have gotten away with a lot that would not fly in Cambridge. He stated that we have to be careful when looking at a place such as Somerville who enjoys a lot of the overflow of what was originally created in Cambridge. He stated that this is an ambitious undertaking but he worries about the things that are not being done while this is being done.

Stuart Dash stated that it would behoove the city to do a close read of the Somerville process. He stated that they want actual recommendations for the Planning Board and City Council for projects. He stated that Cambridge is twice as dense as Somerville in the daytime.

Ted Cohen stated that what is interesting about the Somerville plan is that Davis and Union Square are excellent examples of transit development. He stated that it has developed tremendously. He stated that Somerville has been authorizing more restaurants, bars and entertainment district. They are now working with the fact that transit is coming to Union Square. Cambridge is living with the fact that it has existing transit. That is what we are seeing in Central and Kendall Squares. That was also the plan for Alewife. He stated that the Planning Board needs planners to aide in their work.

Catherine Connolly Preston, Vice Chair Planning Board, stated that as much as both staffs give recommendations, Somerville staff presents the Planning Board with a written decision before it comes to the Planning Board. She stated that the staff in Cambridge do not box the Planning Board in. She stated that it is give and take between two systems. She stated that the conversations and the

robust discussion does not happen in Somerville. She stated that each city is well-served by the form of government that they have chosen. She stated that she is pleased that discussions take place in Cambridge.

Councillor Toomey stated that his understanding is that the Board of Alderman did not pass any zoning after five years of work. Mr. Dash stated that zoning changes were not made part of the process. Councillor Toomey stated his understanding that all work was done by Somerville city staff. Councillor Toomey asked if the development in Union Square has been paid for by the developer. Mr. Dash stated that outside consultant has been hired for Union Square. Councillor Toomey stated that after five years of work the Board of Alderman has sent this back.

Mr. Rossi stated that we all agree that the Mayor of Somerville has done great things in the city. He stated that Cambridge is in a different place than Somerville. He stated that we can learn from the processes but it should not be Cambridge vs. Somerville. Councillor Toomey stated that he agrees with the City Manager but they do envy the City of Cambridge. He stated his concern with the cost of outside consultants and asked the possible cost. Mr. Rossi stated it may be around \$2 million dollars.

Councillor Mazen stated that the idea is to pick out the highlights and ideology of Somerville's approach. He stated that he is sure that they will make their way through the political side of this. There is some end game involved. He stated that he is pointing out the ideological approach. He stated that this was a full resident-led process and Cambridge is capable of that as well. He stated that when you build trust it pays dividends down the line. He stated that Cambridge can find a way to do this and create a safe space for the process and the participants. Ms. Farooq stated that the greatest strength in the Somerville plan is the public participation component.

Councillor Mazen stated that we can learn from the marketing and messaging initiative that took place in Somerville. Ms. Farooq stated that every city process has followed the same process. Councillor Mazen stated that there is a difference about what is done and what is perceived. He stated that the city has to cop to the fact that we perceive Cambridge planners in a negative way. It is important to make it clear to people that this is not how we are operating. He stated that people on the outside make accusations and if we do not educate them about the process, we are losing out on the good things that we are doing.

Councillor Cheung stated that there are a lot of people in the city that are happy to live in Cambridge. Councillor Mazen stated that there are disagreements amongst the City Council. He agrees with the mantra of outreach, decide, announce and implement. He stated that the point is that Somerville got great benefit from popularizing that they do this. Mr. Rossi stated that you can find people to say nasty things about any profession. He stated that Cambridge tries to have people who have what they say count. That will not satisfy everyone in the city. Broad brush statements need to be corrected. Mr. Rossi stated that these are delicate discussions. Councillor Mazen stated that he would like to celebrate the fact that Cambridge is doing things the right way. Mr. Rossi stated that Cambridge does not do as much as public relations as Somerville does. He stated that Cambridge must do more but there are a lot of things that are involved in a good process. Mr. Rossi stated that this is a process that involves a team with everyone having a voice.

Councillor McGovern stated that there are two things that might help Cambridge's process. He stated that there needs to be more updates, even if they are not extensive. He stated that when there is a

void in information that void gets filled with speculation. He added that the other part is that we have to be clear about what are the deliverables that we are really looking for. He stated that the current City Council has talked about playgrounds, building, Volpe and the Master Plan. The Master Plan must cover everything or must let people know what is expected out of the process. He does not want people to be let down. This is why the process is so important.

Councillor Carlone stated that as it relates to placemaking, when he speaks about urban design it is really about placemaking. He stated that the shape of buildings and activities is all about bringing public spaces to life. This is not just by way of retail.

Vice Mayor Benzan stated that he does not want Cambridge to be like Somerville. He stated that recently he walked around neighborhoods in Roxbury and Dorchester. He went to the Seaport in Boston. There are no low-income people living in the development at the Seaport. You are seeing segregation in Boston. He stated that people of low income are living among people of wealth in the City of Cambridge. He stated that all stakeholders need to be part of the process. He stated that it would be helpful to focus on models and unseen development. He stated that it is helpful to know exactly where we can build because we are running out of land. He wants to emphasize how great the city is and start the conversation there.

Councillor Cheung stated that when it comes to zoning, under the last three projects the number has been higher than that in the code. He stated that when a developer comes to the City Council with an up-zoning this is an opportunity to get more for the City. He asked who this plays out in negotiations. Ms. Farooq stated that when the City Council gets zoning petitions that are sponsored by developer, two things happen. When there are proposals for public benefits over and above what exists in the zoning in the rest of the city it ends up serving as a frame of reference for the City Council. She stated that there are situations where perhaps there is not a recent planning study and somebody is coming in fresh. A city wide plan in that case would be valuable. That will be a valuable piece here.

Councillor Cheung asked if the Planning Board has thoughts or concerns. He questioned the price tag for an outside consultant and asked if it is worth it to the city. Mr. Rossi stated that the city has a lot of detailed plans in the city. He stated that there is a lot of information with a lot of work that will be transformed. He stated that he believes this is a good exercise. The city is developing a plan that encompassed many different ideas and suggestions and that comes with a price tag. He stated that \$2 million dollars may be a low number. As each idea is incorporated, it is important to remember that it does not come free.

Councillor Toomey stated that he is scared with the price tag. He stated that if Somerville can do it in-house, he does not see why Cambridge cannot do so. Mr. Rossi stated that a lot of staff is being used from various departments but the magnitude that has been suggested as to what needs to happen, this is a big, big endeavor.

Ms. Farooq stated that when looking at Somerville plan, the result is a series of here is what you need to do next. They were not specific recommendations because if it was specific there would be more disagreement among people. She stated that Cambridge will be getting the value that we pay for. Councillor Toomey asked for a copy of Somerville's plan. Ms. Farooq stated that she would provide that information to Councillor Toomey.

Hugh Russell stated that Cambridge has done a great deal of planning. He stated that the criticism that the Planning Board is receiving is because it is following the plan in place. He stated that it was a surprise to the city that the Alewife plan of 1980 had no results. There was a framework set up and none of it happened. Now things are happening. This planning process is different than the Somerville process because the list of recommendations of that study are already happening in Cambridge. He stated that everything needs to be looked at because there are sweeping things that none of the plans looked at such as climate change. He stated that the Zoning Ordinance in 1975 had 71 pages. Now there are several hundred more pages which are the result of plans. He stated that \$2 million to him is a reasonable investment to get things right.

Councillor Simmons stated that the most important piece is the level of community engagement. She stated that it is important that we deliver on this. She stated that it is important to find someone who gets Cambridge and its nuances. She stated that Cambridge has an extraordinary resource in 22 CityView. She asked if any of the community conversations were taped. She stated that there are going to people who turn on the television and participate in that way. She stated that community engagement teams focus on low to moderate households. She would also like to see historical archives to use the information in the future.

Vice Mayor Benzan stated that he would rather spend some money on encouraging and engaging the public by offering some sort of stipend. He stated that this could be done in conjunction with a learning experience.

Mayor Maher stated that to the uninformed person, can you tell him what the Master Plan is all about, what is the vision and what is it that it will accomplish. Mr. Rossi stated that he would hope that they could engage the entire community to develop a plan to create the kind of community you want to live in along with all the programs and how they impact residents and how they fit into a plan.

Ms. Farooq stated that she thinks this is opportunity to work with a full spectrum of the Cambridge community to come up with a vision for Cambridge to ensure that we are a livable, sustainable, just and equitable city looking to the future and then come up with actionable recommendations on policies, infrastructures changes and regulatory framework to get the city to that vision.

Mayor Maher asked when talking about Alewife area in the beginning of the process, do you envision that there may be zoning recommendations in year 1 so the implementation of those changes are taking place prior to the completion of the plan. Is that the case in other areas of low hanging fruit? Ms. Farooq stated that in year one, if they are taking on the Alewife Study, it is hard to envision the ability to take on other areas at that level of detail but it could be looked at in year two.

Mr. Rossi added that this may mean in terms of city project that longstanding plans for city projects may be altered. He stated that it will be worse to delay and it must be started.

Councillor Mazen stated that Cambridge is a great city. He stated that it is important to learn from other cities to ensure that we are reaching to a higher level of service. He stated that Cambridge still has great potential.

Ms. Farooq stated that regarding data, one of the companion pieces to the process is that already being worked on is the star rating system. It is a system that has been developed by a consortium that has become its own non-profit. They have signed up to be in their leadership academy.

**ADJOURNMENT**

On motion of Councillor McGovern the meeting adjourned at 7:48 p.m.

**A TRUE COPY:**

**ATTEST:-**

**Donna P. Lopez, City Clerk**

*A list of documents and other exhibits used at the meeting:*

*Communication dated June 4, 2015 addressed to City Manager Rossi from Iram Farooq on the Citywide Planning (ATTACHMENT A) which contains a link for the RFQ*