

# Harvard Square Kiosk and Plaza Working Group – Notes

Thursday, June 29, 6:30 – 8:30 P.M.

- Attendees:
  - Working Group: Peter Kroon, Mary Flynn, Frank Kramer, Kenneth Taylor, Timothy Hyde, Sarah Rosenkrantz, Janet Si-Ming Lee, Daniel Andrew Schofield-Bodt, Abra Berkowitz, Tom Lucey, Bertil Jean-Chronberg, John DiGiovanni, Robyn Culbertson, Abhishek Syal
  - Staff: Iram Farooq, Stuart Dash, Daniel Wolf, Charlie Sullivan
- Stuart Dash: introduction
  - Update: we are very close to completing process for selecting consultant, will be on board for next meeting
  - Continuing to work with DPW to develop RFP for architectural services for the renovation/restoration of the Kiosk
  - We will be putting out RFP for public comment
  - One or two members of the Working Group could be part of the process
  - This work will address what key changes will need to be made to the Kiosk – on the whole, likely to look much the same
- Discussion: observations of Kiosk and Plaza; surprises and patterns
  - On rainy afternoon, people stood under awnings
  - Operation of Kiosk is messy and sloppy - delivery boxes, bins; stuff in windows is not very imaginative
  - Feels like there's no reason for me to be there; not peaceful or relaxing; would rather hang out in the Brattle Square area
  - Activities around tourism were very active on both days I was there
  - Plaza feels very disjointed; we should unify what the Plaza and Kiosk do
  - Tables and chairs in The Point are nice and pretty but no one sits there
  - The Square is disjointed
  - Kiosk is crammed to max with stuff, unattractive
  - The Harvard Square Business Association does good job with upkeep, but the Plaza is nonetheless unpleasant
  - It must be hard to keep furniture looking good but didn't look like a welcoming place
  - I was looking at how many people are there and know where to go vs not; much of the traffic through the Plaza is locals – they know where they're going; the share of tourists was relatively low
  - The Pit was filled with construction workers in morning and filled with people playing chess later on; fluctuation and high use
  - Lack of separateness from surroundings; Plaza feels too open/exposed
  - Different subcultures using Plaza; around subway entrance a younger crowd
  - Clear directionality and path in crosswalk to and from Harvard Yard
  - 80% of Trademark Tours customers come May to October
  - Noticed a lot of tours
  - Plaza users were very diverse in every way
  - People didn't "obey" the space – were sitting on ledges and steps etc.
  - Messiness of the Kiosk kind of fits with how people use the space – a beautiful mess
  - Not enough bike racks – had to park near Pete's Coffee
  - Taxi drivers hang out in Plaza – but didn't see a single person use them for several hours
  - Kiosk is very small

- In morning, a ton of people move through the Plaza
- Crosswalk to yard is also popular path
- Plaza will have to accommodate the volumes of people moving through
- The Plaza is empty of soul; cars coming from every direction – feels like a dead rotary; needs to be a plaza, a place where people meet, discuss, etc.
- Plaza looks like the subway station underneath
- The Point is used a fair amount
- Kiosk is not as engaged with the life of the Plaza; the space should be open and engaged
- We need to be realistic about size of Kiosk
- We should keep some of the funkiness of the space
- We should open it up and make it more accessible visually
- What do people use the space for? 1. Moving through – we need to make sure people can still travel through; 2. Place to hang out – chess, lunch, sitting on seat walls (many "undefined" seating areas – informal seating arrangements); 3. Place for business
- Expected to see more City information on services, etc.
- Struck that people were smoking – maybe should designate non smoking zones
- Discussion: share what you imagine the Kiosk and Plaza could be
  - Welcome center for people to see history of the area
  - Interactive elements – old and new – augmented reality and virtual reality showing how the Kiosk was built
  - Outside of Kiosk we could have booths with services; focus on providing services to marginalized communities
  - Cambridge Office for Tourism operates the information booth – constraint is size
  - Welcome center – technology and human element – nod to history of Kiosk/Plaza
  - Kiosk should make anyone's trip to Harvard Square more memorable
  - Activity/use in Kiosk could change each hour, day, month, season
  - Think of Plaza as Winthrop Park (fewer trees and no grass) but really a gathering place
  - Limited public space
  - Should help tourists and independent businesses – showing wares without selling, social service and cultural agencies
  - Holiday season – free gift wrapping; accepting donations to group offering that; free hot chocolate
  - Kiosk should be open, clear, and visible; someone should be curating the space
  - Fewer and fewer people are buying the print offered there
  - Should have ambassadors there, ~\$150,000 to staff annually
  - Zip-line at Rose Kennedy Greenway – very memorable
  - In Europe, notion of Plaza is to permit people to meet and engage 12 months a year
  - Should be organic; public place with mission and management structures; no dedication other than to be public place; should let things happen naturally in it; we can establish this mission and management structures; can't impose what's going on in it
  - Beauty of it is that it's a civic space, should retain that character
  - Should manage it in a way not to think we'll come up with one solution – should experiment and be willing to fail with some experiments
  - Keep it civic, manage it, find out what works
  - The idea of incorporating some element of history might be nice
  - Priorities – would City need to make money off this?
  - Should be a place that provides services to people – cup of water, charge phone
  - Supports flexibility

- Would be great to have a used book pop up
- Could provide very light fare – muffins and coffee
- In Gloucester there's a walking tour along the water
- What are the parameters? Does City need to make a buck?
  - Stuart – wouldn't need to make every dollar back but if there's a way to offset some costs, it's worth thinking about
- Should become multifaceted use
- Shouldn't plug in one business in there and hope it's there for 30 years
- Many businesses would love a couple of hours paying to use the space
- Kiosk as time capsule – a place of collective memory; capture news from different time periods; print out headlines from different times; submit a selfie to be displayed; charge phones with an interesting sculpture; answer questions projected on a wall and people could learn about other people and times; scrapbooking; projecting answers onto walls and people could see memories
- Could hold something like a Harvard Square chocolate festival – restaurants participating could offer something with chocolate; or participating restaurants could offer something related to a historical idea
- Kiosk should feel more permeable – seeing through it so it doesn't feel too enclosed
- Feels claustrophobic inside – should open it up
- Criteria: should be a place that a resident in Cambridge would want to go there more than once
- Cultural production – airbrush painter; buskers; radio stations – live performance or broadcast for a period of time
- A curated multiuse space
- Concerned about smallness of it – we could expand the virtual footprint of it – hear something outside from inside; not air conditioned so you can open windows
- Meld retractable awnings into the building – so you could have portion of building protecting from rain
- Emulate a European market hall – Kiosk could be a structure where people bring their wares to sell
- The floor could tell you you're at the center (the Kiosk as center of Plaza / Harvard Square)
- Could have lots of things on wheels moving about
- Importance of flow; must keep plaza as method to go through
- Should represent the City as a whole – featuring history of the community; possible partnership with the historical society
- Don't think we need a newsstand
- Center of Kiosk should be clearly visible from a distance
- Should have some light refreshments and a place to sit
- Should be curated, maybe by the City, maybe by an organization
- Three groups of interest – tourists, people who love and live in the Square, and rest of City
- Kiosk should become destination – not permanent one
- Coffee bar
- Little book club meeting – once a month gathering – hour during lunchtime
- Evening could be targeted more toward cultural uses and daytime is more toward food
- Opportunity to share memories
- Flow in Plaza needs to be managed more; area to spill over into

- Opportunity for great economic impact – could make millions of dollars of tourist income; example of Freedom trail in Boston – modest project but big impact; we could do some kind of historical trail through Harvard Square
- Kiosk isn't quite "iconic" today, but could make it truly iconic; what if you showed the global temperature on top of the Kiosk to signify state of global warming
- Gloucester also has a Freedom Trail style element
- Lawn on D – fun solar powered swings
- History of city – in City Hall there's a map display showing when first buildings developed in Cambridge
- Reflections in Kiosk glass could impact people driving and biking
- Highlighting "The Harvard Square / Cambridge that I remember" – bricks on pathway could have chronological facts about city; could have a barcode you could scan
- District hall – 200 people exercising with boom box; tai chi
- Public comment
  - Too much advertising in Plaza
  - We should be considerate of the vulnerable population that occupies the space
  - 18 wheelers parked in front of Kiosk for CVS – ten trash barrels out front of CVS
  - Could Working Group ask MBTA to hold off on elevator project so we can see if it fits our approach?
  - Sheldon Cohen (founder of Out of Town News) should come and talk about the history of the newsstand
  - Crosswalks and signals could be incorporated somehow
  - Would be nice to be able to buy a newspaper and coffee and sit and look out the window
  - Coffee stand on wheels – small business opportunity; or a nosh
  - History – an exhibition space could be collapsible and come out at times
  - Historical designation study of Kiosk would hopefully loop into this conversation
  - A lot of overlap between the ideas; could the City consider a field trip to some local places: Rose Kennedy Greenway, Freedom Trail, Gloucester; getting to know each other informally
  - Event to discuss the Kiosk on Saturday
  - Love thinking about innovation like High Line – thinking creatively, outside the box
  - Should have somewhere to buy some newspapers
  - Picking up a cup of coffee and maybe a muffin
  - Curating space is important – space inside and outside should be curated, maybe advised by a board
  - Historic primacy of this space
  - Likes multiuse idea
  - Liked the idea of historic preservation of Kiosk in current form and not making entirely transparent
  - Should consider pedestrian circulation through Kiosk
  - Public toilet could be in Kiosk
  - Consider pushcarts – portability
  - Food or drink, maybe a distinctive kind of vendor
  - Availability of newspapers in some way; and accessing news around the world with internet kiosks
  - Tourist info booth – use should have been inside Kiosk; don't like the ads plastered on the booth

- Vehicular traffic detracted from experience
- Should add in greenery, mature trees
- There should be a place to buy magazines in Harvard Square