

River Street Reconstruction
Working Group Meeting #12
Wednesday, November 17, 2021
5:30 PM – 7:00 PM
Zoom



ATTENDEES

Working Group Members	City Staff	Public
Daniel Beaulieu	Bill Deignan - CDD	Paul Lyons
Valerie Bonds	Jerry Friedman - DPW	Judith Nathans
Gabriel Cira	Andy Reker - CDD	Norma Jackson
Abby Duker	Charlie Creagh - CDD	Nick Patel
Melissa Greene	Lillian Hsu - Arts	Army Jarvis
Randy Stern	Kathy Watkins - DPW	Eitan Normand
Christopher Tassone	Susanne Rasmussen - CDD	Carolyn Edelstein
Saul Tannenbaum	Suzannah Bigolin - CDD	Kim H
	Craig Uram - Arts	Melissa Dullea
	Rachel Tanenhaus - CCPD	David Sears
Not here:	Hilary Zelson - Arts	Rory Russell
Patrick Barrett	Ellen Coppinger - DPW	Allison Crump
Sienna Berry		David Carlson
Matthew Ciborowski	Project Artist	Emmet Sheehan
Sam Gebru	Ritsuko Tahoe	Danny Wilmot
Kai Long		Jeanne Koopman
Olivia Turner	Consultant Design Team	Lisa Lebovivi
Annie Tuan	Tom Roach, HDR	Ian Henneberger
	Arthur Bonney, HDR	Cindy Marsh
	Christopher Smee, HDR	John Chute
	Bryan Jereb, Halvorson	Jane Carbone
	Rich Houghton, Halvorson	Mike Snight
	Natalie Raffol, McMahan	Ann Cowan
	Christi Apicella, McMahan	Faria Afreen
	Molly Hunker - SPORTS	V Saijwani
		Drew Kane
		Raymond Hayhurst
		Joseph Poirier

Key: CCPD = Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities; DPW = Public Works; CDD = Community Development Department; TP&T = Traffic Parking & Transportation

MEETING SUMMARY

The following is a meeting summary of the Working Group Meeting #12 for the City of Cambridge's River Street Reconstruction. For more information see [Cambridgema.gov/riverstreet](https://www.cambridgema.gov/riverstreet).

Welcome and Overview

Andy Reker, Transit Planner, City of Cambridge, initiated the meeting by reviewing remote participation instructions. He stated that the purpose of the meeting is to facilitate conversation among Working Group members, who were able to show video and use the "raise hand" button to speak. Members of the public were instructed to submit questions in writing via the Q&A panel, which the project team would address as able during the meeting and during the public comment period.

Bill Deignan, Transportation Program Manager, City of Cambridge continued by welcoming everyone to the meeting. He noted that City staff from multiple departments were in attendance, including the Community Development Department, Department of Public Works, Traffic Department, Arts Council, and members of the Design Team were also in attendance. Meeting objectives included sharing a project update, presenting the final design for Carl Barron Plaza, and wrapping-up the Working group process. The City expects to wrap-up the project design in the next couple months and put the project out to bid following a public meeting in Winter 2022. This is likely the final Working Group meeting as the City does not anticipate any new material following this meeting.

Project Status

Bill reviewed the community engagement completed as part of the project, which included interviews, walking tours, public meetings, Working Group meetings, and other stakeholder meetings. The design was developed as the City received feedback from the public. The fourth public meeting held in June was the most recent meeting, which focused on Carl Barron Plaza preliminary design. Key comments heard by the City were public support for the ribbon design and ensuring that the plaza serves all users including the unhoused community in a place that is safe and attractive.

Carl Barron Plaza Final Design

Bryan Jereb, Landscape Architect on the Project Design Team, presented the final design for Carl Barron Plaza. He reviewed the shared design goals developed for the project, site analysis and constraints, and urban design guidance provided by representatives from the City's Urban Design Team, the Central Square Business Improvement District (BID), Holmes Building (which abuts Carl Barron Plaza), and the Central Square Baptist Church.

Bryan then reviewed the previous design options presented and considered. The Project Design Team moved forward with the ribbon design option due to the strong support for it from both the Working Group and community. The ribbon is an architectural element creating a

continuous thread connecting and unifying the Green Street Plaza area with the Carl Barron Plaza. The updated plaza design elements incorporate community feedback, including the creation of a safe, activated space; protocols for maintenance such as graffiti coating; maximizing tree planting for shading opportunities; using lighting both within the ribbon and throughout the plaza to create a safe, bright and vibrant atmosphere; providing a balance of fixed and flexible seating with and without bench backs and arm rests; wind and shade protection at bus shelters; real-time bus information on shelters and a planned community kiosk; a bold, dynamic design to reflect the local identity of Central Square; and enabling the ribbon art to be periodically re-envisioned to provide a timeless element.

Lillian Hsu, Cambridge Arts Council, provided an overview of what is envisioned for artwork on the Ribbon, which will involve commissioning an artist. She explained that the appeal of the Ribbon is that it makes a bold artistic statement and connects one end of the plaza to the other. It is important to retain that quality, but also have the ability to periodically change the graphic design so that it can respond to how the community evolves. The anticipated artwork design would help to discourage and camouflage people drawing on it or scratching it.

Lillian invited anyone interested in the artist selection process to reach out to the City, as the process has not yet begun. After the initial screening of submissions, the City pays finalists to develop a proposal and a larger group of stakeholders then reviews those proposals and selects the artist.

Bryan then handed the presentation over to Molly Hunker of SPORTS, a design studio based in Syracuse, New York. SPORTS was selected to be collaborators with the design team because of their experience in developing and constructing vibrant projects in the public realm including previous work that served as a precedent for the Carl Barron ribbon concept. Molly explained the potential of the ribbon design to help bring people together and create a vibrant social environment in the plaza. The ribbon design will be systematized, unifying the two plazas so they are understood and experienced as one seamless space. SPORTS collaborated with the team to advance the initial design and provided feedback to simplify the geometry and harmonize the structure's form.

Bryan continued by showing the current plaza site plan, which includes a few enhancements since previously shown to the public and Working Group. The design includes a separated bicycle lane, two bus shelters on the Green Street Plaza end, extended lengths of the ribbon structure to strengthen gateways into the plaza, and platform seating elements to balance the type of seating provided.

Bryan showed rendered perspective views of the plaza, which illustrated how tree planting opportunities are maximized and additional outdoor gathering opportunities are provided. The rendered perspective views showed the ribbon with different colors because the intent is for it to be covered in custom artwork developed through the artist selection process and as such the color is to be a considered a placeholder for the design. Additional updates include the introduction of more color into the movable furnishings to make the space more vibrant, a perforated metal panel within the ribbon with backlighting to augment the pedestrian scale

lighting and extend usage hours of the plaza into the evening, and adjustment of the ribbon alignment to create a powerful gateway moment facing Massachusetts Avenue.

Bryan then showed images that peeled the exterior skin of the ribbon unveil the core steel structure of the ribbon and explained how the structure would be durable and maintainable, as this was a primary concern heard in community feedback. The structural core will allow the sections of the ribbon exterior skin and lighting elements to be swapped out for maintenance. He then provided additional details on the type and balance of seating provided along the ribbon. Seating may incorporate USB and/or electrical outlets embedded within the armrests to facilitate charging of mobile devices and the like.

This section of the presentation closed with a discussion of the changes to existing and proposed seating. Bryan showed a table depicting the comparison of seating provided between the existing plaza and proposed plaza. Overall, there is a net increase in seating and more seating will be provided that is movable and flexible. The movable furniture will be designed to allow for flexibility in seating arrangements, including wheelchair access to tables, while discouraging excessive movement which could result in accessible paths being obstructed, etc. The movable chairs will be secured to the movable tables using discreet cables attached to D-rings strategically placed on the furniture legs.

Several working group members asked questions regarding the proposed design:

- Saul Tannenbaum: Will there be Wi-Fi in the plaza? This is of public concern related to digital equity issues. Will there be power plugs to charge cell phones?
 - ▷ **Bill responded** that this is a possibility. They have been talking to City's IT Department and there may be potential to locate Wi-Fi at the police substation, although the extent of coverage is unclear so they are looking at additional options as well. It is something the City will explore further. There are USB outlets for cell phone charging integrated into the armrest of the seating, but they are not general plugs. (*Note: After the meeting, the City committed to further investigating the provision of general-purpose power outlets which could be used by the public in the Plaza*).
- Andy read a question from a Working Group member in the Q&A asking if there is any truth that the Plaza will provide showers and needle receptacles in addition to the toilet facilities that already exist. If this is true, who will be responsible for monitoring and cleanup?
 - ▷ **Bill responded** that there will be a sharps container maintained by the Central Square BID. There are no plans for a shower.
- Saul Tannenbaum: Cigarette disposal facilities were recently removed from the plaza. Are they coming back with the new design? They are not used or maintained.
 - ▷ **Bill responded** that the City will look into this as they haven't talked about it yet.

- Abby Duker: What type of bike rack will be used in the plaza?
 - ▷ **Bill responded** that the type has not yet been selected, but it will meet City standards.

Andy continued by discussing transit wayfinding in the plaza. The feedback heard from the public engagement and Working Group process indicated the project should better support transit riders by providing more wayfinding. The project team coordinated with the MBTA Wayfinding group to identify locations for wayfinding signage for the bus shelters themselves and for connecting between the bus terminal in Carl Barron Plaza and the Red Line headhouses. Signage was developed for a bus berth system, which is clearer and more consistent than standard signage used at most bus stops. Andy showed signage that is proposed for the backs of bus shelters to help with identification and naming of stops and to provide more information. Key wayfinding locations were shown in yellow dots, with an example of the signage design on the lower right of the slide.

Andy then discussed the transit shelter design, which is intended to match the rest of the plaza design. A key feature of the shelter design is protection from rain, wind, sun, and other weather elements. The shelters are larger than the existing space at the stops today. The amount of space will accommodate pre-pandemic rider volume as well as new riders from increased demand on Green Street as a result of the Route 47 routing change.

The shelter on River Street will include an attached operators booth to provide space for MBTA operators and supervisors. This will replace the current booth at the Plaza.

The shelter on Green Street opposite Magazine Street has covered seating, additional enhanced lighting, space for the MBTA's new fare vending machines and real-time transit information screens, and trash and recycling receptacles. The design of the second shelter on Green Street is still in process, but it will be larger than the current shelters and provide more wind, rain, and sun protection for riders. The expanded shelter is needed to support the additional rider demand stemming from the Route 47 modifications previously presented to the Working Group. Bill added that they are still working out various elements of the transit shelter design and accommodations with the MBTA.

Working Group Discussion

Bill facilitated the discussion to hear feedback on plaza design presented.

- Melissa Greene: This is really exciting. The ribbon is a really cool design and the changes and refinements have been really good. It is moving in the right direction. I really love the density of perforations and light in evenings.
- Gabriel Cira: I'm excited about the ribbon. With details filled in and fleshed out, the materiality of the new ribbon is really strong and its own system, while the building

behind it is deeply ugly. I want the ribbon to be more bombastic and exciting – more wiggle/loud expression, such as a loop-de-loop, or more spirit.

- ▷ **Bill responded** that we will look, but City is probably not doing any major revisions to the shape of the ribbon. There will be a great opportunity for creating this experience/feeling in selecting the artist to work on design. Send the City a note if you want to be involved in artist selection process.
- Randy Stern: I like the wayfinding signs for the T. Will there be any bicycle wayfinding signs? The bike lane doesn't continue onto Prospect Street and so it would be helpful to have signage indicating how someone should get to Inman Square rather than go up Prospect Street.
 - ▷ **Bill responded** that this was addressed a little bit and is a great idea. The bike facility does end, but we will take this up as we look at final documents. The City's Five-Year Plan includes the redesign of the rest of Massachusetts Ave. in Central Square, and wayfinding will come up in those discussions as well. The City is also undertaking the development of urban design standards, which should address wayfinding in general.
- Abby Duker: I echo everyone's support; I really like it. Is there a way for bus shelters directly under the ribbon to be in better conversation with ribbon? I'm anxious that the fun and excitement of ribbon will be lost/in competition underneath ribbon.
 - ▷ **Bill responded** that we will talk about that as the design moves forward.

Public Comment

Questions submitted via Q&A box and answered live during the meeting

- Will conduit be installed along River Street that can be used later to pull fiber? Since utilities are underground on River Street it would be good to have some conduit available for private as well as city-owned fiber.
 - ▷ **Jerry Friedman, Supervising Engineer, Cambridge Department of Public Works, responded** that as of now, the City does not proactively install fiber, companies install fiber. At the moment, there is no plan to install it as space is constrained underground. (*Note: A post-meeting clarification: The design does include a spare conduit the length of River Street, which will be available for future fiber or other telecommunications use.*)
- Have you got agreement from Holmes Building owner to make the changes seemingly planned? Planters instead of wall-fence? Could you explain the wisdom of this change in this edge?

- ▷ **Bill responded** that we are in discussion with Holmes building management and they asked if the City has any suggestions for ways to improve the plaza at the entryway or how it communicates with the larger plaza. The City has shown them ideas and they are taking a look, but there is no particular agreement. The Holmes building owns the property and it's up to them. We will try to make the space work together and provide things for their tenants to enjoy.
- Is the proposal for an alternative route for the 47 Bus definitively rejected now?
 - ▷ **Andy responded** that the MBTA Route 47 bus can't make the turn from Green Street to River Street, and the routing that makes most sense is for it to make a left onto Magazine Street from Green Street after starting its route at the new Green Street shelter location. The MBTA heard from residents through an outreach process, evaluated options, and feels like this option down Magazine Street makes the most sense and is planning to use that route going forward.
- Are the small basins for the trees realistic? Does this relate to the type of trees being planned? It's a small point, but most of the current trees on River Street and Western Avenue are kind of mess at their bases - weeds, roots, trash.
- Could you repeat what was said about trees, more carefully? (Existing trees removed?)
 - ▷ **Jerry responded** that the trees are represented on the plan by smaller squares than you are used to seeing on the street today. There will be a whole system of sand-based structural planting soil, drip irrigation, and aeration, extending below plaza, providing a greater amount of soil than you see on the surface. The benefit of this is more usable plaza space for other uses. There are 8 existing trees in raised planters, which are an impediment to the plaza working the way people want it to. There will be about 24 new trees throughout the plaza. We will be removing those trees and look at opportunities to transplant some or all of 8 existing trees elsewhere in the City.
- Will a recording of this meeting be posted? Would like to hear responses to questions in Q&A but may have to leave before you evidently will be getting to non-appointed public.
 - ▷ **Bill responded** that Working Group meetings are not recorded, as is the case with most held using Zoom or not. People are invited to send an email to riverstreet@cambridgema.gov with questions related to the project and we will get back to you directly.

Questions submitted via Q&A box with a written response

- At times of work going on do you guys provide signs for businesses that are open during construction?

- ▷ Yes, the City will meet with each business ahead of time, find out any special needs (deliveries etc.), and promote use of local businesses during construction.
- Consider making the ribbon lighting interactive or controllable. When there are musical performances in the square it might be nice to have some of the lighting synchronized with their music. Not that we want to turn Central Square into a disco, but a subtle interaction (e.g., intensity or color changing) might be nice.
 - ▷ Great suggestion.
- Fiber is a utility, if we don't put conduit in now while we have the opportunity then it is almost certain that the street will need to be dug up again to put it in later. Please reconsider the decision not to include this in the project.
 - ▷ A spare conduit for future fiber or communications use will be installed the length of River Street as part of the project.
- Time to consider renaming the Plaza... Would be a good opportunity for public engagement-participation!
 - ▷ This requires an act of City Council should members of the public wish to submit suggestions.

Next Steps

Bill continued by stating that the presentation and meeting summary will be posted on the project website (Cambridgema.gov/riverstreet) to allow people to look at the images on their own time. This is anticipated to be the last Working Group meeting. The City will investigate providing Wi-Fi in the plaza, bike wayfinding signs, the relationship of bus shelters to the plaza, and the artist selection process. The whole team thanks Working group members and members of the public for helping us by guiding the design, providing suggestions, attending meetings, and being flexible with the shift to online meetings because of the pandemic. The time and effort involved by all is much appreciated.