

Harvard Square Kiosk and Plaza Working Group – Notes

Thursday, May 11, 6:30 – 8:30 P.M.

- Attendees
 - Staff: Stuart Dash, Iram Farooq, Daniel Wolf, Kathy Watkins, Charlie Sullivan
 - Working Group members: Abra Berkowitz, Robyn Culbertson, Ankita Deshpande, John DiGiovanni, Mary Flynn, Timothy Hyde, Bertil Jean-Chronberg, Frank Kramer, Peter Kroon, Janet Si-Ming Lee, Thomas Lucey, Sohail Nasir, Sarah Rosenkrantz, Daniel Andrew Schofield-Bodt, Abhishek Syal, Kenneth Taylor
- Iram Farooq: introduction
- Daniel Wolf: ground rules
- Working Group members: introductions
- Charlie Sullivan – Historical Commission presentation
- Stuart Dash – Community Development Department presentation
- Kathy Watkins – Department of Public Works presentation
- Discussion (indented comments from staff)
 - Can we have an overview of everything else going on along perimeter? Holyoke Center, Abbot Building, Coop, and Bank of America...
 - What's directly below Kiosk? Tracks?
 - Space, MBTA
 - Request for info on traffic in area – impacts how you feel in the space
 - Interested in taxi stand; would be helpful to explore where else taxi stand could be
 - Food trucks would be really nice – could be in taxi stand
 - Two taxi stands – one on opposite side of street – do we need both?
 - Likes flow of the DPW proposed design of plaza; how it will function as place to dispense information – maybe technology, screens, etc.
 - Will we have input on design on elevator shaft?
 - Already approved by HC and out to bid
 - Will taxis exist in 5 years?
 - Would love for Charlie to go into the history of landmarking of the Kiosk?
 - Charlie – original roof and masonry are essentially “sacred” – stuff around them – openings etc. are open to discussion; use TBD; nothing associated with the newsstand has to be kept from Historical Commission point of view
 - Is there a study of the flow of cars around the SQ?
 - What if reduced by a lane from 3 to 2
 - How high does the masonry go above the granite?
 - Varies
 - Do we have a survey of the reason why people are coming across the street – what's their intention / destination?
 - Establish how the plaza is currently being used; This area as well as others are in the process of transformation – what's going on in these areas? Should aim for aesthetic compatibility with surroundings
 - Are ADA requirements taken into account in renderings of the Plaza?
 - Yes

- Interested in flow of traffic
- How is City planning on making area more friendly to bikes?
- Are there any ideas that are specifically off the table?
 - Moving the building is order of mag more costly, for instance
- Square can be precarious for bikes
- Grade changes in Plaza is difficult with kids or bikes
- Important to establish who is part of the “broader public” we will try to engage – expanding the pool of who the public is
- Because use and design are related – we hope to have input on design
- MBTA elevator – does that project impact accessibility?
 - Would all be flat around there
- Would love to see different options for the levelling of the space
- Other configurations; how do different options affect ped traffic flows? Fluidity
- Defining different stakeholders – getting input on what the public wants the use to be
 - Intention is to have three public meetings – first early in process to inform process; will talk next meeting about suggestions for outreach and the meeting; will inform the Working Group about the public’s thoughts and ideas about the desired uses, etc.
- Information on scope and constraints; process; timeline, end product, recommendation to City Manager
 - Will aim to make a recommendation that’s a consensus from this group – broad agreement; intention is in 6-8 month period come out with recommendations to City Manager that involve use and governance, maintenance, etc.
- Masonry – not on all faces
- Opportunity to comment on the elevator question – there was a public process
- Timeframe – is 6-8 a fixed timeline?
 - Can’t promise, but on paper that’s our hope; hope to get something out before next meeting that lays out some more of the schedule
- How many can occupy the space at one time; number of people in plaza – if filled for event, how many people would that be?
- What’s permitted or constrained – can building be open 24 hours (because of ordinances or neighbors)?
- Happy to help bring in youth population voices; clients at shelter – for many of them this is their spot
- This is one of busiest areas for foot traffic
 - We interviewed many people who suggested people who could come to the committee as visitors for specific sessions to bring additional perspectives
- We have 11 years of data on general flow of traffic
- Recommendation process to City Manager – is there a preference for ideal timeline for how long intervention changes take? Holyoke Center construction to end late 2017
- Is there preference for where this goes in terms of governance and timeline?
 - Priority is figuring out what’s the right project/outcome; then will figure out the exact timing and logistics
 - We’re not in the situation where we don’t have any funding associated

- Is it possible to expand on the structure?
 - We have looked at tiny addition for an air conditioner – so generally no expansion
- Interested to hear what other peoples’ proposals were and maybe we could cluster the ideas....
- Should it meet certain objectives in terms of giving back / community development; boost tourism and business activity? Want to make it green; charging phones? Epicenter for values as Cambridge? Meet broader goals?
 - Intention is not necessarily to go into proposals just yet
 - Homework for next meeting – think about additional ideas or requests
- 24 hour operation – HSQ lighting has been changed in last year – old halogens have been swapped for LEDs – important to experience the square through different times of day; new street lighting deemphasizes the buildings themselves
 - Key part of homework – go experience square in different times
- Any lighting studies?
- Approach regarding homeless?
 - Generally Cambridge policy is that we’re welcoming for everyone
 - Trying to make places welcoming place for as broad a group of people as possible
- “Lighter Quicker Cheaper” interventions – bringing more people makes it feel safer; tables and chairs
- Many places cater to one or two groups; Harvard Square is incredibly diverse and this should be maintained
- Harvard Square Business Association (HSBA) with assistance from Harvard cleans the tables etc.
- Any current uses of Square that we don’t want in the future?
 - Good food for thought for homework
- Is City willing to do Lighter Quicker Cheaper interventions that might not involve the building but programming outside?
 - Possibly; could discuss that
- Would be nice to understand better who does maintain the programming and seating and other maintenance?
 - Currently City maintains and HSBA takes care of tables and chairs
- How did this process emerge?
 - The lease renewal prompts the discussion
- Any prohibition on building another building on the plaza?
 - Zoning constraints and Historical Commission would need to deem it appropriate
- Plaza is in a Business B district
- Is there a way to use some of the \$600,000 to start on restoring the building?
- How will next round of community meetings be different from prior workshops?
 - Broader space, broader outreach, Working Group will also inform this and be informed by it

- We tried to make the group represent diverse constituencies to represent as broad as possible a variety of viewpoints; community meetings will expand further
 - Questions about who are users now... some of that info is known; would be great to have all of us go and observe and could have a “site meeting” and do a mini analysis; consultant will do more comprehensive analysis
 - Question about quick tactical interventions – absolutely; opportunity to try out simple ideas; would be great to try things like putting flower pots etc.
- Public Comment
 - Finds Galante rendering concept inappropriate regarding brick
 - Some brick on other side that’s retained
 - Lighting – would like original lamps from 1928 recreated
 - Since there’s a landmark study, appears current tenant to be for another year... there’s a lot of sidewalk clutter and blocked windows that are contrary to the transparency discussed in the historical presentation – could Historical Commission intervene?
 - We’re not the landlord – much of that is inside (no jurisdiction) or maintenance related or non permanent
 - Question about conservation district study; cylindrical elevator – will that go before public review? A lot of the details in Galante rendering from the original Kiosk are taken away
 - Broader area is being “sanitized” and worry about losing character, turning into Times Square with lighting etc.
 - Consultant selection is key – community members... why did only two consultants qualify? The two firms are headed by white men – should be more diverse
 - One of the finalists is Project for Public Spaces, which participated in early part of the process; process should be clean slate; Working Group should have input
 - Anything being learned yet in landmark study or memorial tree?
 - Was not aware there was public process for the MBTA elevator; wish there could be more input into the full holistic plaza including elevator
 - Could have a designed space that’s retractable could be interesting to explore; public trust model considered for the space
 - We should look at why people don’t use the plaza; bringing in ideas from outside Cambridge
 - Is natural landscaping possible?
 - HSBA never had a contract with PPS
 - Any possibility that the headhouse could be changed by MBTA? Could this group make recommendations or suggestions about the exterior of the headhouse? As well as the landing area below ground?