

Transit Advisory Committee

March 2022

Abbreviated meeting summary

Attendance

Members

Present (10) Saul Tannenbaum, Peter Septoff, Casey Berg, Carl Rothenhaus, Katherine Rafferty, Sylvia Parsons, Kristiana Lachiusa, Devin Chausse, Matthew Coogan, Bill McAvinney

Absent (6) John Attanucci (Chair), Arthur Strang, Kelley Brown, Melissa Zampitella, Jackson Moore-Otto, Jim Gascoigne

City staff (5)

Andrew Reker, Kelsey Tustin, Sarah Scott, Jeff Roberts (CDD); Adam Shulman (TPT)

Others (13)

Olivia Mobayed (MBTA); 12 members of the public

Note: CDD = Community Development Department; TPT = Traffic Parking and Transportation Department; MBTA = Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority

Welcome and committee introductions

Andy Reker (AR) began the virtual meeting at 5:30 PM by welcoming members of the TAC, members of the public and presenters. AR gave a tour of the virtual space for people joining by application and telephone and shared some ground rules for virtual meeting participation. Kelsey Tustin (KT) then conducted a roll call of the members of the Transit Advisory Committee – 10 members were present, 6 were absent. The committee then approved the meeting minutes for the January orientation and February 2022 meeting.

TAC Officer Election

AR began the meeting by holding the TAC Officer Election. After sharing the Statements of Interest, AR asked committee members to confirm the Chair, John Attanucci, and Vice Chair, Kristiana Lachiusa. The TAC confirmed these positions unanimously with 8 votes.

The TAC is looking to fill the Secretary position in the coming months.

Presentation: Zoning 101

AR then introduced Sara Scott (SS), Associate Zoning Planner, and Jeff Roberts (JR), Zoning and Development Director. Sara gave a presentation about the basics of zoning and the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance.

Zoning Basics

- Zoning is a legal tool used to regulate land use.

- Zoning regulation includes type of use, size and scale of buildings, and intensity of use.
- Zoning regulation does not include features like land ownership, business operations, construction methods, and matters subject to state regulation.
- Two 'parts' of zoning: Ordinance and Map
- Allowed Uses
 - Table of Use Regulations provides the codes for zoning districts and establishment categories.
 - Categories in the table include - Yes (allowed as of right), SP (requires a BZA special permit), No (this use is prohibited), PB (requires a Planning Board special permit).
- Development Controls set the size and shape of a building, and where it can be located on a lot
- Transportation
 - Transportation Impact Studies (TIS) are required by zoning for projects above a certain size. All modes of transportation are assessed.
 - Parking and Transportation Demand Management (PTDM) is a separate municipal ordinance, but a TIS can include related measures as mitigation efforts.

Development Project Review

- 'As-Of-Right' is designated when a development complies with all zoning standards. However, most development still needs a building permit.
- Discretionary Approvals in Massachusetts include Special Permits and Variances
 - Special Permit: Allowed by Zoning Ordinance, requires public hearing, subject to legal appeal, normally granted if requirements are met.
 - Variance: Not allowed by Zoning Ordinance, requires public hearing, subject to legal appeal, normally not granted unless there are unique circumstances.
- Zoning Review Boards can grant special permits
 - Planning Board (PB): Grants specific special permits and mostly responsible for 'bonus' and 'review' special permits.
 - Board of Zoning Appeals (BZA): Grants specific special permits and mostly responsible for 'relief' special permits.
- Zoning Advisory Committees are required by the Zoning Ordinance. These committees focus on special permit and variance applications.
 - Central Square Advisory Committee (CSAC)
 - Harvard Square Advisory Committee (HSAC)
- General Types of Special Permits
 - Bonus: Allows additional development above a certain standard. Usually approved if it meets specific planning objectives or provides public benefits.
 - Review: Assesses impacts of development that are above a certain threshold. Usually approved if it meets general planning objectives and mitigate impacts.
 - Relief: Waive or modify specific standards in the Zoning Ordinance. Approved if site-specific factors are a constraint and impacts are mitigated.
- Project Review Special Permit (Article 19) is required for most developments over 50,000 square feet. The review includes:

- Transportation Impacts (reviews all modes of travel), which require mitigation based on TIS.
- Urban Design based on the Citywide Urban Design objectives.
- Advisory Reviews
 - Affordable Housing Overlay (AHO): Reviewed by the planning board for residential development built to serve households earning up to 100% area median income (AMI).
 - Large Project Review: Reviewed by staff and public for proposals in Areas of Special Planning Concern.
- Citywide Urban Design Objectives provide guidance to property owners, staff, and public on form and character of development. The objectives of the City should be served by the development. Objectives prioritize bike and pedestrian-friendly design.
- Other Zoning Considerations
 - Bicycle Parking.
 - Vehicle parking reduction, which includes MBTA transit station proximity.
 - Projects should not impose substantial impacts on traffic.

Planning Board Process

- Pre-Application Process includes community engagement and connecting with City staff.
- Planning Board Review includes a Public Hearing to present their project to the Planning Board, followed by Planning Board Action to approve or deny a special permit.
- The Committee's participation and involvement ranges depending on the project. The committee can set rules and expectation for how they want to provide input.

TAC members asked the following questions. City staff responses are below the question in italic text.

- What percentage of development proposals must be reviewed by the planning board?
 - *Most new development is generally large-scale, which must be reviewed by the board.*
- In Somerville, most of the buildings are non-compliant with Somerville's Zoning Ordinance. Do the buildings in Cambridge pose a similar situation?
 - *It depends on the conformance item. Certain items, like height, do conform in most of the City. Other features, like setback requirements, are often non-conforming since they were built before the requirements were in place.*
- TAC members often wonder about the process for City staff coming up with mitigation ideas. When would be the best time for the TAC to offer their ideas, and how?
 - *The best way to get involved is to go to the special permit meetings. Applicants are required to hold meetings and send notices for those meetings.*
 - *The planning board relies heavily on Traffic and Parking to offer transportation mitigation packages, so new ideas should be brought to them.*
- A comment was made concerning the Zoning Ordinance requirement to add parking spaces. This increases cars on the road.
 - *The City is working on looking at how we regulate parking more broadly. This includes what kind of parking is required, allowed, where it is located, how it can be used, etc. A lot of community engagement is taking place around this.*

- *The Zoning Ordinance is an evolving document. It's constantly under review and changing based on the City's goals and policies.*

Public Comment

AR opened a short comment period for members of the public.

- One commentor expressed concern about amount of development in East Cambridge. The population will increase because of this new development. How do those factors contribute to the decisions that are made on transportation? For example, how is new development associated with the First and Second Street Study?
 - *There have been previous studies that involve residents living in the area. There's also ongoing community planning in place.*
 - *The Community Planning team does long-range planning studies to look at future growth and transportation. These feed into planning recommendations which get incorporated into the zoning. This ultimately informs new zoning regulations and amendments. The next presentation will explain further.*

Discussion: Transportation Impact Study (TIS) Update

AR then introduced Adam Shulman (AS) who is a Transportation Planner from the Traffic and Parking Department. AS gave a presentation on an ongoing project to update the TIS guidelines. AS explained that the purpose of this presentation is to inform the TAC and gather feedback from the committee on how the City should modify the TIS guidelines.

- **TIS + Zoning**
 - TIS is a requirement in the Zoning Ordinance to determine potential transportation impacts. The goal is to avoid or mitigate negative impacts.
 - TIS is required for projects that meet certain expected impact thresholds.
- TIS reviews current transportation conditions and estimates new trips that a project will create for all modes. It also evaluates impacts that new trips will have.
- **TIS Process**
 - Analyze existing transportation condition in the area.
 - Estimate the number of new trips by all modes of travel. The larger the project, the more expected trips.
 - Assess the Build Condition, which combines the estimated new trips with the existing trips.
 - Consider other projects proposed in the area or region, as well as general growth rate.
 - Study and evaluate the Future Transportation Condition, which includes all of these features.
- **5 TIS Impact Indicator thresholds**, as specified in the Zoning. If any of these are exceeded, it may cause substantial adverse impact on City traffic.
 1. Project Vehicle Trip Generation: How many new daily and peak hour vehicle trips will be generated?
 2. Change in level of service (LOS) at study area intersections: Will the project cause intersections to degrade in rush hour LOS?
 3. Increased volume of trips on residential streets: Will the project add more vehicle trips on residential streets?

4. Increased length on vehicle queues at intersections: Will the average number of vehicle queues at rush hours increase at intersections?
 5. Lack of sufficient pedestrian and bike facilities: Pedestrian LOS, safe pedestrian facilities, safe bike facilities.
- Currently transit impacts are simply evaluated and described.
 - Opportunities for changes to the TIS guidelines:
 - Add a transit-specific criteria
 - Modify existing criteria
 - Ideas for potential transit metrics and thresholds:
 - Number of peak hour transit trips
 - Transit utilization (capacity impact)
 - Access to transit
 - New vehicle trips on bus delay / reliability
 - Yes/No policy question (MBTA pass subsidy)

AR opened the discussion to the TAC members. Committee Members asked the following questions:

- What is the MBTA's role in a TIS?
 - *The City coordinates with the MBTA on a TIS. The MBTA provides information on existing conditions and assists with studies for new trips.*
- How does this information connect to the Bus Network Redesign?
 - *This process evaluates transit impact. The Bus Network Redesign involves higher level planning.*
 - *It's up to the MBTA to respond. The developer is responsible for analyzing and providing the required information. The MBTA has their own standards. We can plan to discuss how the MBTA makes those decisions and how the TAC can influence the process.*
- A suggestion was offered to reframe new trips made by non-car modes as a positive feature. When more trips are considered a negative, it gives a lot of bias toward existing conditions and makes housing unaffordable. A growing population is important to ensure that Cambridge is affordable.
- When looking at transit impact, there seems to be a lot of focus on rush hour. However, this priority is specific to the type of establishment. Can we consider transit impact based on the building use?
- Can the City require information on how much a developer profits from a project? This may help to leverage requiring new public amenities.
 - *This can be difficult because it is private information, and the developers are reluctant to share.*
- There should be transparency in the use of transportation mitigation funds. This should be something the City tracks and posts in order to understand how the money is used.
- The City has goals around transit and mode shift, which should be expressed directly in the TIS. The question should be asked, 'is the city meeting its goals with this project?'
- When will the City do an equity analysis of transit benefits? Transit benefits, like free MBTA passes, should go to people in need instead of people who can afford to pay for those benefits themselves.

- *The existing traffic studies already incorporate the City's goals. Traffic studies require an analysis for mode shift to consider the maximum parking. However, the study doesn't put forth the specific criteria for meeting mode shift goals.*

AR reiterated that the TAC should provide additional feedback by contacting AS. This project will continue over the coming weeks.

Public comment

There were no public comments during this comment period.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:23 PM

Version Information

Draft: 3/9/2021 KT + AR

Approval: 4/7/2022 Unanimously with 9 votes