

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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To: City of Cambridge Planning Board
City of Cambridge Board of Zoning Appeals
From: Central Square Advisory Committee
Date: 10/1/2020
Re:

The Central Square Advisory Committee (the "Committee") met on Tuesday, September 22, 2020 to discuss the River Street Reconstruction project, and receive an update on the Central Square BID's work to date. There were no projects for review this month.

This meeting was conducted pursuant to the provisions of Section 20.300 of the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance. The Committee is appointed by the City Manager to undertake all large project reviews of variances and special permits for activities within the Central Square Overlay District (the "District"), and to monitor the progress of the Central Square Non-Zoning Recommendations of the 2013 K2C2 Study (the "Study").

* * *

The meeting minutes from the Committee meeting are summarized below. Public comment was taken after each topic was discussed by committee members.

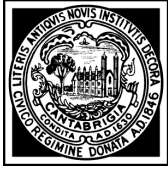
Topic 1: River Street Reconstruction Planning and Design Update (6:07)

Presented by: Jerry Friedman, DPW; Bill Deignan, CDD; and Andrew Reker, CDD

The presentation gave an overview of planning and design work completed to date by the River Street team and their consultants. The presentation reviewed the future configuration of River St including separate cycle track, one-way single travel lane and a dedicated bus lane. New trees and sidewalks are included in the reconstruction. Additionally, the team presented alternatives for Carol Barron Plaza, as well as recommended circulation patterns for bus drop-off at Central Square at the River Street/Green Street stop.

- **Question:** For new trees along River St. Is the plan to do drywells as they did on Western Ave?
 - Yes. Tree planting will include soil full length of the block.
- **Question:** Is there enough space on River St for large vehicles? How much flexibility is there to accommodate rubbish trucks? What will the regulations be to accommodate people who need to use the bus lane to pass vehicles stopped in the single travel lane?
 - The team will figure out what the regulations are for passing in the bus lane if there are obstructions.
- **Question:** What will be the gateway treatments for the corridor?
 - No set plan yet. Heavy planting or something structural. Still thinking about it.
 - There isn't a great opportunity for big structural gateway elements, but there is an opportunity for more landscaping and trees. Makes an effect that this is an entryway off the Pike into a neighborhood. The team is considering some paving treatments to make more of a gateway. Cambridge doesn't have gateways at any other entry points.
- **Question:** Carl Barron Plaza. What is the plan for layovers for busses? Where will they stop?

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- They are making a layover spot on River Street between Franklin and Magazine; and on Green St before the stop.
- **Comment:** Happy to see the idea of vendors on Carl Barron Plaza.
- **Comment:** Concern with the placement of bike lanes that seem to cut through the plaza. Happiest if bikes were as close to the roadway as possible, instead of cutting through the plaza. Wants more contiguous plaza space for gathering.
 - Understands concern. The proposed layout leaves just enough space for the bus stop.
- **Comment:** Support for the idea of including more outdoor seating on Carl Barron Plaza.
- **Question:** Will this team be back for another presentation?
 - Probably not. Please stay tuned to the public process. Presentation will be available online, opportunities for input online.
- **Question:** How do you guarantee that the landscaping will be included in the final design when landscaping is frequently cut because of budget shortfalls?
 - The team does not expect to have to make those kinds of cuts. Hasn't been DPW's experience in the past.
- **Question:** Who is the Landscape Architect for the River Street project?
 - Halvorson. The same firm that designed the new Western Ave.
- **Comment:** Making pedestrians go through the seating space is less comfortable. Prefers the first option for the Tubman Sq plaza proposal.
- **Comment:** Second committee member agrees with statement above. Prefers first design option for Tubman Sq. Underwhelmed with the proposals for Carl Barron Plaza. Looks like a corporate office park. Deserves to be more of a gathering place. Big gestures and sculptural elements.
- **Question:** Will the project attempt to keep existing trees on Carl Barron Plaza?
 - Keeping a couple of the larger trees, replant some in other locations throughout the city.
- **Question:** Carl Barron Plaza feels like the heart of Central Sq. Is there a way to include technology to publicize events and happenings in the square?
 - Definitely. We they want to find a way to incorporate.
- **Question:** What is going to happen to the unhoused community that uses Carl Barron Plaza? What happens during construction? Where will people go? Could become an issue in the neighborhood or Lafayette Sq if people are displaced from CBP.
 - There will be a large discussion on the construction phase. Discuss impacts on all users, including the unhoused.
- **Question:** Have they thought of changing the paving around Carl Barron Plaza to signify the transition into the space.
 - The team probably won't raise the plaza because we need access to the bus users.
 - Pavers are difficult to maintain and costly, so they are trending away from special paving under vehicles.

Public Comment (6:54pm)

James Williamson (JW), member of the public

- JW - Takes 87 bus every day. If 47 is going to be relocated off Mass Ave, that's a distance for people who are transferring. Has there been research into who and how many people would be impacted by moving the stop? Can they share any data they have on rider counts and demographics?



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- The project team do have data for number of boardings and transfers. They worked with the MBTA to analyze the data and craft the proposed changes. They have access to the demographics of riders by route, but not by stop. The team is also working with the Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities.
- The team can share what data they have.
- JW – The 47 Bus serves people who live in the LBJ apartments.
- JW – Concerned about conflicts between bicyclists and pedestrians on Carl Barron Plaza. Would like to know the dimensions of the waiting area.

Topic 2: Central Square Business Improvement District Planning and Activation during COVID-19 (7:13pm)

Presented by: Michael Monestime, Executive Director, Central Square BID

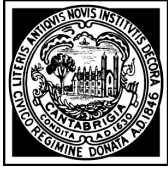
The presentation gave an overview of the recent work by the BID in the past year and in particular the efforts of the Central Square BID Ambassadors, who maintain the appearance of the square and help visitors or residents. In addition, Michael presented the recent Starlight Square project, which is a multi-functional community space that serves as a venue for performances and markets. Accommodations for COVID-19 and social distancing requirements have been successfully implemented. Michael also reviewed the work that the BID has done with retailers and restaurants to help weather the impacts of COVID-19 including setting up outdoor dining space and potential for retailers to do pop-up retail outside. Plans for winter operations are in place, as well, such as securing heat lamps.

- **Question:** What is the capacity in Starlight Square? Was it altered because of the Governor's recent order?
 - The capacity of the space is 250 without any restrictions. Under current order they're limited to 50 people. The BID is working on a livestream function so people can watch the events at Starlight remotely.
- Additional comments/questions
 - Two committee members commend Michael and the BID for all their hard work.
 - Michael shares that the BID will be hosting an ambassador appreciation week in October.

Public Comment (7:40pm)

James Williamson (JW), member of the public
Michael Monestime (MM), ED, Central Square BID

- JW - The BID had to lay off some people in the pandemic. Are they looking to hire more people? Can you speak to the relationship with Block By Block. How can we make Central Square feel safer?
 - MM – The BID did have to let two staff go during the beginning of the pandemic. They were offered their jobs back, but both declined. The BID is fully staffed now.
 - MM – The BID does have a good relationship with Block by Block. They are under contract to manage the staff. MM wants to bring those services in-house.
 - MM – The feeling of safety is something he is concerned about. They are working with the police to enforce no trespassing, better sidewalk



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management to remove obstructions. The BID does have safety ambassadors, but they are armed with walkie talkies. Looking to extend ambassador hours, from 6am-8pm all the way to midnight.

- Robert Winters (RW), a committee member, asks about how the BID is helping businesses survive through the winter/
 - MM - For restaurants they were able to provide materials. Worked with local architects to draw up the plans to get the outdoor seating approved. Thinking about winterization. Maybe pods? For most it is just helping people navigate the existing services, grants, and programs. Helped Teddy's Shoes with a website. Brookline Lunch was denied their outdoor seating.
- Chris Sol Gully (CSG), a committee member, shares that restaurant Craigie on Main could use some help. Maybe the BID could help with some murals?
 - MM - Trying to get some quicker propane permitting with the fire dept for heaters. Au Bon Pain will be leased through the BID to be a Daily Table grocer.
- MM – "Popportunity" event at Starlight this Saturday 11-4pm. Retailers and small businesses farmer's market style.

Finished (7:58pm)

Committee Members Present

- Robert Winters
- Joel Altstein
- Esther Haning
- Michael Monestime
- Chris Sol Gully
- Tahir Kapoor

Submitted on behalf of the Committee,

Drew Kane, Land Use Planner / Lev McCarthy, Community Planning
Community Development Department