



**River Street Reconstruction
Working Group Meeting**



Tuesday, April 23, 2019 Revised 6/27/19

6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

Manning Apartments 1st Floor
237 Franklin Street – Community Room

ATTENDEES

Working Group Members	City Staff	Public
Patrick Barrett	Patrick Baxter – TP&T	Mark Boswell
Daniel Beaulieu	Bill Deignan - CDD	Bill Dupe
Sienna Berry	Jerry Friedman - DPW	Frank Gutoski
Sai Boddupalli	Lillian Hsu – Cambridge Arts	Cathy Hoffman
Valerie Bonds	Susanne Rasmussen - CDD	Judith Nathans
Matthew Ciborowski	Justin Schreiber - CDD	Frank Stone
Gabriel Cira	Rach Tanenhaus - CCPD	Robert Winters
Abby Duker	Tegin Teich - CDD	John Zinky
Sam Gebru	Wendell Joseph – CPD	
Melissa Greene		
Kai Long	Consultants	
Randy Stern	Christi Apicella	
Christopher Tassone	Arthur Bonney	
Annie Tuan	Rich Halvorson	
Oliver Turner	Rick Plenge	
Not here:	Natalie Raffol	
Andrew Tarsy Founder	Cynthia Smith	
Neil Rodriguez	Peter Stidman	

Key:

CCPD = Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities

CPD = Cambridge Police Department

CDD = Community Development Department

DPW = Public Works

TP&T = Traffic Parking & Transportation

MEETING SUMMARY

The following is a meeting summary of the Working Group Meeting #3 for the City of Cambridge's River Street Reconstruction. For more information see Cambridgema.gov/riverstreet.

1. Welcome and Logistics

The meeting presentation was initiated by Tegin Teich, Transportation Planner for the City of Cambridge, with a review of dates for upcoming meetings and activities, rules for the Working Group, and the meeting location. Moving forward, she said, substitution representatives will not be allowed to sit at the table for Working Group members. When asked, Working Group members did not raise any concerns with the existing locations for Working Group or public meetings.

2. Wrapping up Issues and Opportunities

Pete Stidman of HDR led the discussion of issues and opportunities. There have been multiple venues used to collect public input thus far: Working Group meetings, online comments, emails, calls, stakeholder interviews, focus groups regarding Carl Barron Plaza, and the first public meeting. Still to come are subsequent public meetings, Working Group meetings, and days of engagement. The comments so far have been collected in two categories. Those that are broad, and those that are specific to a certain location on the corridor.

Moving forward beyond existing conditions and into a shared vision involves turning issues and opportunities into goals. This means distinguishing broad, corridor wide issues from location-specific issues and recording them in a way that can be used for design. Bus delay was provided as an example of a broad issue, while sightline and visibility issues were given as a location-specific example. Broad issues were collected in a list, and location specific issues were collected on a summary map.

The Working Group was asked to divide into two groups to discuss potential themes and goals based on comments received at the public meeting on the community input map. Each group was given a community input map of half of the River Street corridor with comments written on it (from the Public Meeting) to review. Groups were asked to read the public comments and identify where they agree and disagree on existing or new themes. A summary of the report-back from each group was provided by Tegin Teich and Justin Schreiber of the City of Cambridge, and described below

Group Activity Report Back:

Comments WG members agreed with	Related Existing Themes/Goals
More lighting corridor wide	Improve safety/lower speeds
Speeding, need to narrow road, concern about truck traffic	
Need for traffic calming/safety	
Poor sight lines at intersections	
Improve access to Hoyt Field, emphasize entrance	Improve accessibility, Enhance public space
Add curb bumpouts	
Add crosswalks to Kinnaird/Tubman Square Area	Improve safety/lower speeds, Enhance public space
Need a consistent feel throughout corridor	Enhance public space
Need for programming, events, and public space	
Enhance aesthetics corridor wide	
Introduce programming for Carl Barron Plaza	
Address/reconfigure green/plaza* space at Franklin St/River St/Western Ave to help calm traffic and avoid confusion	Improve safety/lower speeds, enhance public space, Make transportation/movement of people more efficient
Improve/consolidate bus stops, add curb bumpouts for bus stops	Make transportation/movement of people more efficient, Improve accessibility
Add protected bike lane	Improve safety/lower speeds, Make transportation/movement of people more efficient

*"green/plaza" was used interchangeably to describe this location

Comments where not every WG member agreed

- Working members did not tend to agree on the desired outcomes related to parking and parking regulations. Goals varied from providing more parking for businesses (i.e. Coast Café), converting parking to residential parking, and removing on-street parking.
- Should River Street be closed to motorized traffic on Sunday for events?
- No consistent design approaches or goals surfaced for Carl Barron Plaza – conversation tended to focus around needs for people and the environment, which sometimes could be considered conflicting.

Potential New Themes Needed that Address:

- Improving Air quality/public health – related to traffic, increasing the tree canopy/adding trees, and preserving big trees/the existing tree canopy.
- Creating an enjoyable, attractive, and beautiful space
- Enhancing wayfinding and corridor legibility – clarify where people should be. Create a contextual feel and sense of arrival to River Street.
- Designing for resiliency/preparedness for climate change
- Improving public/personal safety in addition to traffic safety
- Activating public space for all people. Embrace the opportunity for open space to support/enhance local businesses.
- Incorporating creative/playful design – for example, unique and colorful treatments like rainbow crosswalks

Other Ideas

- Left side bike facility could create less conflicts with vehicles

3. Emerging Design Goals

Following the group activity report back, Pete led the group in developing design goals. The themes developed by the Working Group in past meetings and through the public input were translated into proposed one-word goals/outcomes: Safe, Accessible, Enjoyable, Thriving, and Multimodal. Themes were revised based on comments from the public meeting and existing City policies and planning. The “Accessible” goal will be changed to “Inclusive” based on public comments.

Several comments were heard from Working Group members:

- How the City will handle construction impacts on businesses? Jerry Friedman, Cambridge DPW, responded by referencing the Inman Square Safety Improvement Project where the City was proactive in developing the Inman Square Loyalty Program to help businesses during construction. The City will also look at what worked on Western Avenue.

Safe

- Should include improving public/personal safety in response to concerns expressed about Carl Barron Plaza.

Inclusive

- One working group member questioned the use of the word “inclusive.” Suggested accessibility may work better, but staff responded that inclusive tends to be the preferred terminology.

Enjoyable

- One working group member suggested that “Enjoyable” as a goal is vague and could be rephrased to “Useable” or “Useful.”
- One working group member asked if sidewalk poetry and other similar initiatives could be part of River Street. Jerry Friedman responded that these could be considered in the urban design. There will also be opportunities to think about improved seating and signage. Rick Plenge of HDR added that the goals contribute to creating a sense of arrival and making a consistent feel of arrival to a neighborhood.
- One working group member commented that the Enjoyable goal incorporates some environmental elements, such as trees and plantings.
- One working group member asked for a definition of microclimate. Pete responded that it is the climate right around a small space, for example, a heat-island effect in a heavily paved area.
- One working group member asked what is meant by “add interest and open up edges.” Pete responded that the edges of the street, being long and uniform at the Memorial Drive end, contribute to the car-centric feeling of the section. Interest can be added to these areas to help create a consistent neighborhood feel and even scale.
- Opening up edges could also fit under inclusive and thriving. The enjoyable theme should include aspects more like activating public space and preserving trees.
- A working group member noted that filling in shops on Memorial Drive end of the corridor will help give people a reason to travel up and down the street.
- A working group member suggested that “Healthy” could be added to this list, as it relates to the environmental/tree element, but is not necessarily enjoyable. Resilient is another alternative that is less human-centric.
- Working group members note that there were many public comments about Hoyt Field. It is important to highlight what is fun and enjoyable about the neighborhood and emphasize existing assets. Members suggested adding an environmental/public health goal in addition to Enjoyable.

Thriving

- Create spaces that encourage people to stay and spend money. The Coast Café tried to have outdoor seating but the sidewalk is too narrow. People likely only park 5-10 minutes and then leave, because the current outdoor environment does not encourage them to stay. Elements like tables and seating will help businesses thrive by providing a reason for outsiders to come and spend extended time on River Street. A working group member suggesting rethinking the intended use of parking spaces.
- One working group member commented that the goal should be to create spaces that encourage people to stay and build community, not just “spending money.”

Multimodal

- A working group member asked what “regulating parking” means. Right now the unregulated parking on River Street allows someone to park up to 24 hours. Parking could be regulated to be resident only, meters, or short-term parking. Jerry Friedman responded that the City will work to more closely to identify existing needs related to parking and use of curb space.
- A working group member asked if bus delay reduction includes adding transit priority signals. Tegin responded that the City will look at multiple ways to improve bus service and add dedicated bus space. Transit signal priority is one of the tools the City will look at and explain at the next mobility focused meeting.

Additional Comments

- A working group member asked to consider “Lasting” as a goal – building something to last.
 - Another working group member suggested that “Resilient” could also be used
- A working group member re-emphasized the previous comment that the Enjoyable goal sounds vague, and would prefer a goal of beautiful or attractive. The goal should be to add beauty through trees, public art, etc. and enjoyable does not capture the visual experience.

4. Introducing the River Street Design Toolbox

Tegin introduced the concept of the design toolbox, which is a collection of ideas/ways to address the identified issues and opportunities. It will be a living document that serves as a guide to have an iterative design conversation. For example, the toolbox includes multiple traffic calming methods that could help to meet the “Safe” goal. The toolbox will be reviewed in depth at the next meeting.

5. Introducing Design Challenges

Tegin reviewed the major design challenge areas for the project. These are areas where there is a lot of competing/diverse needs in one space, for example: Carl Barron Plaza, Tubman

Square, and the gateway from Memorial Drive to River Street. There will be a workshop process to work through finding a balance between or prioritizing among these needs.

6. Carl Barron Plaza Existing Conditions and Design Charette Events Preview

Dates for these events are targeted in May and June, but these are subject to change based on rain. The final schedule and rain dates will be posted on the project website. Phase 1 of the charrette will be very interactive and focus on existing conditions and people's use of and perception of the space. Phase 2 will be longer design workshops. (Dates for Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the charrette shown in the presentation have since changed to June 5 and June 8 for Phase 1 and September 14 and September 17 for Phase 2.)

7. Public Comments

- A Working Group member asked about outreach to the people experiencing homelessness, stating that people should be asked what they need directly. Their needs cannot be assumed without direct communication. Tegin responded that the City has been considering this and is open to suggested improvements. The Project for Public Spaces (PPS) has been meeting with providers of social services and health and human services to determine how to reach unhoused populations. The City understands that talking to proxies alone instead of the community itself is not sufficient. Pete added that the project team has started to talk to services and people experiencing addiction as well. It is a goal of early interviews for PPS to set up focus groups with these communities. Days of engagement on the square may also be an avenue to communicate with them.
- A Working Group member noted that that charrette will take place after students leave for the year, and asked if students are included in the process. Tegin responded that students are included in the overarching process, but timing for the charrette does not target students. Data collection is being done before university students leave. Other outreach is planned to reach younger students at the Moore Youth Center which will host pizza dinners and include similar activities to the charrette style exercise. (Note that since this meeting, dates for the charette has been changed to September).

8. Next Steps

Working Group members were asked to add all summer meeting dates to their calendars. The next meeting on Tuesday, May 28th will be a "101" on Traffic and Urban Design Issues and Tools. (Traffic discussion has since been moved to Working Group Meeting #5 in July).