



River Street Reconstruction
 Working Group Meeting
 Tuesday, January 29, 2019
 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM
 Manning Apartments 1st Floor
 237 Franklin Street – Community Room



ATTENDEES

Working Group Members	City Staff	Public
Daniel Beaulieu	Patrick Baxter – TP&T	Amy Almeida
Seanna Berry	Bill Deignan - CDD	Norma Barrett
Sai Boddupalli	Jerry Friedman - DPW	Bill Boetten
Valerie Bonds	Susanne Rasmussen - CDD	Mark Boswell
Mark Boswelt (for Randy Stern)	Justin Schreiber - CDD	Elizabeth Doran
Matthew Ciborowski	Rachel Tanenhaus - CCPD	Wes Edwards
Abby Duker	Tegin Teich - CDD	Gerd Ericsson
Julie Halpwin (for Gabriel Cira)	Kathy Watkins - DPW	Sid Ericsson
Melissa Greene	Bill Simmons - CPD	Nelson Gelarchi
Kai Long	Frank Gutoski - CPD	John Goodman
Andrew Tarsy		Veronica King
Christopher Tassone	Consultants	Kristi Marklen
Annie Tuan	Christi Apicella	Cindy Marsh
Olivia Turner	Arthur Bonney	Debra Morris
	Rich Houghton	Johnny Rivera
	Rick Plenge	Roy Russell
	Natalie Raffol	Allan Sadum
	Peter Stidman	Emmet Sheldon
		Carolyn Shipley
		Andy Smith
		Frank Stone
		Huy Mai Views
		James Williamson
		J. Willson
		Christina Winter

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 #1 for the City of Cambridge's River Street Reconstruction Project. For more information see Cambridgema.gov/riverstreet.

1. Introductions

The meeting was initiated by Kathy Watkins, City Engineer; Susanne Rasmussen, Director of Environmental and Transportation Planning; and Jerry Friedman, Supervising Engineer for the City of Cambridge. Tegin Teich, Transportation Planner for the City, introduced herself as the Community Development Department project lead and asked Working group members to introduce themselves and relationship to the project area.

2. Scope & Schedule

Jerry Friedman reviewed the project scope and schedule. The project limits include all of River Street from Memorial Drive to the south and Central Square to the north, as well as Carl Barron Plaza, the bus bays off Magazine Street. Blackstone Street is also included for subsurface reasons. Portions of the intersecting side streets 50-100 ft. from River Street are also included, as is typical for this type of project. Changes to the north side of the Carl Barron plaza/curb line are not included, but that could be a City project in the future. The project limits are identified on slide 8 of the meeting presentation and are available at Cambridgema.gov/riverstreet.



Figure 1 Project Limits for River Street Reconstruction

The Tubman Square area, including the side streets Pleasant Street and Kinnaird Street, was discussed as a location with current challenges related to traffic flow and an opportunity to improve pedestrian space. Jerry confirmed with the Working Group that Tubman Square is the preferred name for this space.

Jerry stated that the underlying purpose of and motivation for the project is infrastructure renewal. River Street is a major utility corridor, and this hidden infrastructure is in need of repair to relieve drainage and flooding issues, (which also impact the Charles River) as well as to upgrade systems which are upwards of a century old in some cases. This project has both a subsurface and surface scope:

- The subsurface scope includes tree/soil condition, City-owned utilities such as water, sewers and drains, and provides an opportunity for private utilities, including gas, phone and communications companies, to upgrade their infrastructure.
- The surface scope includes sidewalks, crosswalks, ramps, tree canopy, bus stops, public art, flex space (curbside space often used for loading, parking), vehicular travel lanes and bicycle facilities.

Western Avenue was referenced as an example of a recent project with major subsurface and surface improvements, as it is the companion to River Street. Jerry noted that a primary difference between the two corridors, is that the available right of way on River Street is significantly narrower than on Western Ave.

The project scope also includes urban design, with a goal to make the corridor an inclusive and enjoyable space for everyone.

Jerry then reviewed the design process, which includes:

- Collecting data and identifying issues. There will be extensive technical data collection (transportation counts, parking studies, crash analyses, inspection of underground utilities, tree condition assessments) as well as Community-focused data collection through the Working Group and Public Meetings, online and written comments, site walks, attendance by project staff at community events, etc.
- Establishing a vision for what the community wants River Street to be. The project includes four public meetings to gather community goals, ideas, and aspirations in addition to the many Working Group meetings
- Completing the detailed design and construction documents after developing and analyzing design alternatives and identifying a preferred design concept

It was stressed that this will be a community driven process at every step. The expected design project timeline extends to mid-2020. A charrette focusing on the design of Carl Barron Plaza is planned for Spring 2019. Construction is expected to start in the latter half of 2020 or early 2021 and last into 2022.

3. Working Group Overview

Tegin Teich led a discussion of the logistics and role of the Working Group. This project, like all City projects, has its own process that builds on past community engagement in the City and existing policies and plans. There will be Working Group meetings generally on the 4th Tuesday of every month, with the exception of March, September, December, and April 2020, when Public Meetings will occur instead. Specific dates for each Working Group meeting were provided, but are subject to change: 1/29, 2/26, 4/23, 5/28, 6/25, 7/23, 8/27, 10/22, 11/19. Materials advertising each meeting will be posted two weeks in advance and materials reviewed during meetings will be posted on the project website following the meeting. The

public engagement process will also include public walks, participation in other city events, online tools, and surveys, providing multiple ways to engage with the project.

The Working Group was appointed by the City Manager, and is intended to include a range of perspectives, such as people who use River Street in different ways, have different community connections, and bring varying backgrounds and perspectives. The process will be a two-way conversation between the Working Group and City Staff, who provide technical expertise and focus on balancing diverse needs within a limited amount of space. The City and Working Group will walk through project needs together, figuring out how to balance them in a way that goes beyond discussions of individual preferences. Discussion of transportation needs will be framed by how people move and travel, rather than distinct modes like walking, biking, transit, and driving, since most people do not travel in only one way.

Guidelines for the Working Group include keeping an open mind, respecting others, reading the agenda and materials before each meeting, staying on schedule, and letting others be heard. A Working Group member added that phones should be turned off and side conversations limited. Members of the public in attendance are encouraged to talk to City staff immediately before or after meetings to be respectful of everyone's time and to keep meetings on track. Public comment will typically be held for 10 minutes at the end of each meeting if time allows.

Tegin then reviewed steps in the design process:

- Identify Issues
- Establish Vision
- Complete Design
- Implement

The City will work to identify issues and opportunities in a “design neutral” way. A comment was received that the design process is not linear, with the City agreeing that it is an iterative process and they will circle back to readdress issues as the project moves forward.

There will be up to three public walks open to anyone, with Working Group members encouraged to attend. Each walk will be topic focused to attract different groups of people, as was done for the Western Avenue project.

4. City Policies and Past Planning

Tegin provided a brief overview of the City's policies and past planning efforts. There is a large amount of existing information, which the City will build on and supplement in this effort. Tegin stated that River Street is many things – an infrastructure spine, a regional roadway, a retail district, a neighborhood street, a place to be, a front yard – and existing policies and plans relate to all of these aspects. First she described overarching policies, then discussed plans in categories including: climate and environment, open space and health, transportation, infrastructure, and other ongoing planning.

A question was asked about the availability of the planning and policies discussed. All of the reports, policies, and plans referenced in the presentation are available online and searchable, although some are in progress and therefore final reports are not yet available. For

convenience, a list of reports and policies with links will be posted on the website following the meeting. The City will use the website to post resources like this on the “Documents” tab. The PowerPoint presentation for this meeting will also be posted. Working Group members can also email Tegin or Jerry with questions or requests for information. Their email addresses are included in the presentation.

A question was asked about if the bike lane on River Street would be torn up. The City responded that the entire roadway will be torn up to be reconstructed based on the design produced out of this process. Trees will be protected as needed, but all paving and sidewalk materials will be replaced in the new design.

Another question was asked about how the impacts of the Interstate 90 Interchange project in Allston will be incorporated into this project. There will be on-going coordination between the two projects, with representatives from the MBTA present in the current meeting.

5. Icebreaker

Pete Stidman, Transportation Planner for HDR, led the Working Group in an ice breaker activity, where each member was instructed to state something they like and something they would like to fix about River Street. Large maps were provided to record input. Common dislikes included the safety of roadway crossings, underutilized/underprogramed public space, noise from traffic, amount of truck traffic and speeding cars. Common likes were the character of the street, connections between the Charles River and Central Square, unique businesses and architectural elements, and tree canopy.

The following lists the “likes” and “needs for improvement” stated by the Working Group members:

Like	Needs Improvement
Pedestrian crossing timing at Putnam Avenue and River Street allowing pedestrians to cross diagonally.	Speeding/fast moving traffic from Memorial Drive onto River Street
Construction workers on the Western Avenue project were kind and friendly	Visibility of upcoming signals (e.g. signals at Howard Street and Kelly Street are visible from further down River St) incentivizes cars to speed to make green lights
Bike lane on River Street	Water ponding in bike lane (north of Putnam Avenue) Uncomfortable/unsafe biking conditions

Presence of crosswalk at Franklin Street	Condition of crosswalk near Franklin Street - it is unsignalized and difficult to cross
Scale of housing and general feel of the street	Drivers use one-way streets the wrong way, particularly Auburn Street
Existing tree canopy	Crossing at Pleasant Street is difficult, especially at night, particularly on the north side of the street. The crossing is long and people choose to cross illegally at the shorter desire line.
Combination of one and two-way streets create a navigable system for residents so they don't have to travel long blocks to exit the neighborhood	Congestion at all times from Franklin Street and Green Street up to Mass Avenue
Diversity of the street in terms of businesses, people, and ages	Tubman Square is not usable green space. Difficult to sit in or use, often there is trash.
Unique ground floor retail signs and awnings. For example, the barber shop.	Heavy truck traffic, especially at night. Idling of trucks at Whole Foods.
Tubman Square/ area around River Street and Pleasant Street.	Issues with safety in public spaces - not enough lighting at Riverside Press Park, underutilized VFW Memorial Park (the large grassed island between Franklin and Green Streets) with lack of amenities and landscaping, may encourage illegal activity.
Plaza outside of First Baptist Church (as an opportunity, but it is currently underutilized)	Many different uses along River Street lead to inconsistent or insufficient snow removal, especially at Enterprise Car Rental and at the church.
The street provides access to Charles River	Hoyt Field is not very accessible
Green space in neighborhood: Hoyt Field, River Press Park, VFW Memorial Park	Increasing height of fences, particularly at new development
Public restroom in Central Square across from Carl Barron Plaza	Neighborhood schools create school bus traffic and child pedestrian activity, especially at River and Putnam
Use of River Street for community activities, such as Caribbean Festival	

6. Questions & Comments

Following the Working Group's likes and dislikes, the discussion was opened to the audience at large. Comments from the public are summarized below:

- Many drivers use River Street only to get from Memorial Drive to Central Square and do not care that this is an urban area. Speeding is a major concern.
- The extra unused lane/hatched off area on River Street when entering from Memorial Drive may cause drivers to think they are still on a highway. This is also an area of concern for crashes.
- The large billboard publicizing charter schools is very obnoxious.
- The visibility of the traffic signal at Kelly Street from Putnam Avenue encourages drivers to speed to make a green light.
- Speeding at Howard Street, Kelly Street is an issue, especially at night.
- More crosswalks are needed along the corridor, especially at Pleasant Street.
- Worn out lane markings on River Street when coming from Memorial Drive are not clear and cause driver confusion, making merging difficult.
- Other construction projects in the area, such as on the project on Cottage Street and Lopez Street, should be coordinated with this project. The City responded that these projects will be coordinated.
- It is difficult to push a stroller on River Street and side streets due to narrow sidewalks and tree obstructions.
- The flatiron building at River Street and Pleasant Street is liked, but generally the space between Pleasant Street and River Street is not pleasant. The social history of the corridor should be tied to the built environment history.
- Speeding and the amount of heavy vehicle traffic and hazardous cargo vehicles is an issue. Previously there was a HALT campaign on the corridor (Humans Against Loud Trucks) to prohibit truck traffic between 6:00 PM and 6:00 AM.
- A question was raised about the possibility of a protected bike lane like on Western Avenue or considerations for bus rapid transit (BRT). The City responded that River Street is not as wide as Western Avenue and only has parking on one side. A protected bike lane is a goal, but the right-of-way is narrow and this is something that will have to be worked through. Bus routes on River Street feed into the node at Carl Barron Plaza, where buses experience delays and other challenges related to congestion. Bus circulation will be examined to better serve people.
- Driving at River Street and Pleasant Street is confusing.
- Bus stop idling at bus bays in Central Square is a problem for bus traffic.
- Signage and wayfinding is confusing at Carl Barron Plaza and the bus terminal area, with riders unsure which side of the street to wait on. The waiting area is not used to the full extent possible.

7. Next Steps

Tegin wrapped up the meeting by providing an overview of the public outreach tools that the City anticipates using for the project, including:

- Project Wikimap where the public will be able to drop points and provide feedback in a Google Maps format.
- Project website that contains a project introduction, option to sign up for the email list, and comment form. Working Group members are already on the email list. The project website URL is Cambridgema.gov/riverstreet

The next meeting will be held on February 26th and will review the history of River Street, adapting goals to the project context, existing conditions, and a preview of the Carl Barron Plaza design charrette. The City will share a more detailed plan about meetings moving forward. The intent is to have all meetings at the Manning Apartments. The meeting was ended on time at 8:00 PM with City staff available to answer additional questions individually.