

**River Street Reconstruction  
Working Group Meeting #11**



Thursday, May 6, 2021

5:30 PM – 7:00 PM

Zoom

**ATTENDEES**

<b>Working Group Members</b>	<b>Consultants</b>	<b>Public (Continued)</b>
Gabriel Cira	Cynthia Smith, Halvorson	Rachel Dowley
Matthew Ciborowski	Bryan Jereb, Halvorson	Sean Lowe
Saul Tannenbaum	Rich Houghton, Halvorson	Nm Macneil
Sam Gebru	Natalie Raffol, McMahan	Stephanie Lucia
Melissa Greene	Christi Apicella, McMahan	Tamar Schapiro
Annie Tuan	Rick Plenge, HDR	Gavin Lund
Patrick Barrett	Arthur Bonney, HDR	Ryan Grams
Abby Duker	Chris Smee, HDR	Petru Sofio
Daniel Beaulieu		Paul Lyons
	<b>Public</b>	Jacqueline Berthet
<b>Not here:</b>	Taryn Johnson	Robert Guptill
Sienna Berry	Judith Nathans	Oliva Mobayed
Valerie Bonds	Lisa Lebovici	Larry Kim
Abby Duker	Jess Sheehan	Barry Abel
Kai Long	Carol Greenwood	Gerard Babakian
Randy Stern	Allison Crump	Al-Laro Dhanji
Andrew Tarsy	Henry Johnson	John Pelletier
Christopher Tassone	James Williamson	Ben Rifkin
Olivia Turner	Donna Socha	Eitan Normand
	Jackie Jones	Sharon Miller
<b>City Staff</b>	Rick Gosselin	
Patrick Baxter – TP&T	John Goodman	
Suzannah Bigolin, CDD	Tony Eng	
Bill Deignan - CDD	David Sears	
Jerry Friedman - DPW	Joan Karp	
Susanne Rasmussen, CDD	Amy Jarvis	
Andy Reker - CDD	Ritsuko Tahoe	
Rachel Tanenhaus - CCPD	Ana Hurka	
Kathy Watkins - DPW	Margery Davies	
Craig Uram - Arts	Emmet Sheehan	

**Key:** CCPD = Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities; DPW = Public Works;  
CDD = Community Development Department; TP&T = Traffic Parking & Transportation

## MEETING SUMMARY

The following is a meeting summary of the Working Group Meeting #11 for the City of Cambridge's River Street Reconstruction. For more information see [Cambridgema.gov/riverstreet](https://www.cambridgema.gov/riverstreet).

### Welcome and Overview

Andy Reker, Transit Planner, City of Cambridge, initiated the meeting by reviewing remote participation instructions. Working Group members were able to show video and asked to use the "raise hand" button to speak. Members of the public were instructed to submit questions in writing via the Q&A panel, which would be addressed during the public comment period.

### Project Status and Schedule

Jerry Friedman, Supervising Engineer, City of Cambridge, continued the presentation by providing an overview of the meeting agenda and project timeline. The feedback from this meeting will be used to advance the design to 100% for both the corridor and Carl Barron Plaza. The next public meeting is tentatively planned for June and will focus on the Carl Barron Plaza design. A final public meeting will be held, likely in September, to show the public the final designs for both the corridor and plaza. The project will be bid around October with construction anticipated for 2021-2023.

Bill Deignan, Transportation Program Manager, City of Cambridge, continued by reviewing the meeting goals, which included viewing key themes from the virtual open house, providing an update on the corridor design refinements, reviewing the Tubman Square final design, and presenting and discussing the proposed design concepts for Car Barron Plaza.

### Corridor Design Feedback Recap | Key Themes

As a follow up to the virtual open house held in November 2020, Bill presented that there were over 1,000 page views and about 100 total comments. Public feedback showed support for a variety of elements including the separated bike lane, new signals, and shorter crosswalks. Bill then showed a corridor map of specific locations with comments and where modifications were made, such as to the curb uses, landscaping and trees, and crossing configurations.

Patrick Baxter, Engineering Manager, City of Cambridge, walked through modifications to the River Street corridor design made near Tubman Square, including adjustments to crosswalk alignments to better meet pedestrian desire lines and addition of Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFBs) to the unsignalized crosswalks at Pleasant Street and Kinnaird Street.

Clarification questions were heard from several Working Group Members:

- Annie Tuan: Concerned about the number of RRFBs – having four at the Kinnaird Street intersection seems like a lot of signaling. It seems as though RRFBs in Central Square make the area more car-centric with people waiting for cars to pass before crossing, when cars should be yielding to pedestrians.
  - Bill responded that there was a lot of internal discussion about the number of RRFBs. It was decided to keep two crosswalks with RRFBs at Kinnaird Street because it is a school route. The one crossing at Pleasant Street lines up with

Western Avenue. The City will observe how driver yielding behavior differs at the two locations.

- Sam Gebru: What is the City hearing from residents in the Pleasant Place area due to the closure?
  - Patrick Baxter responded that the Traffic Department has not heard anything.
- Patrick then responded to a related question from the Q&A panel regarding if Kinnaird Street will remain two-way north of River Street. In observations, most prior problems on Kinnaird Street in this location have been reduced due to the closure, including reducing cut through traffic. Kinnaird Street now functions better as a two-way street with low volumes in both directions.
- Matthew Ciborowski: The neighbors love the closure. The volume on Kinnaird Street has definitely gone down and it is working great as two-way street. Do RRFBs make sound when pressed?
  - Patrick responded that yes, there is an audible tone for those with visual disabilities. The audio message “yellow lights flashing” is repeated twice. The audio tone and volume can be adjusted so it is not heard by neighbors regularly.
- Sam Gebru: How many parking spots will be lost due to new curb-cuts? Are there one or two crosswalks on River Street at Pleasant Street?
  - Bill responded that there is one crosswalk at Pleasant Street. The other white lines are shark’s teeth (yield bars) to warn drivers that a pedestrian crossing is coming up and where vehicles should be yielding.
  - The City will make information on parking available after the meeting for those that request it.
- Patrick Barrett: What do the colors represent in the bump out area (west of Pleasant Street)?
  - Jerry responded that the green area represents grass and the dark area around that is a brick edge similar to that on Western Avenue to break up the concrete.

## **Tubman Square Design**

Bryan Jereb, Landscape Architect on the Project Team, presented the proposed design for Tubman Square based on guidance and feedback received throughout the design process. Design elements include a bike lane along River Street separated from the pedestrian circulation space by a landscaped buffer, enhanced bus stop, a sculptural bench on the southern end of plaza to help unify the elongated space, playful seating elements centered within the plaza, a centrally located Ritsuko art element, and the Tubman plaque at eastern end of plaza near Cottage Street.

Bryan shared perspective renderings of both daytime and nighttime lighting to illustrate these design elements.

Clarification questions were heard from several Working Group Members:

- Sam Gebru: What is Ritsuko Art?
  - Bryan responded that the Ritsuko Art is comprised of a two-sided sculptural feature with seating elements in three locations along the River Street corridor. Bill added that Ritsuko is the artist that completed the existing art in Carl Barron Plaza “Dream Sequence.” The Arts Council asked if she would re-envision this art for this project, the result of which is three art elements that incorporate small benches along the corridor.
  
- Sam Gebru: Will there be arm rests on the benches? Could children contribute to sidewalk poetry or art along the corridor?
  - Jerry responded that the City can reach out to groups and incorporate children’s art or sidewalk poetry along the corridor. Bill later commented that the City can look into a mix of seating with and without arm rests and backs.
  
- Patrick Barrett: This design is gorgeous, but there are not currently commercial uses nearby – are you assuming there will be more pedestrian traffic and that people are longing for more seating options in this zone? Why is there such a long bench at this spot?
  - Bill responded that the City heard from the Women’s Center that they would like a place to go and sit, but they are not expecting the bench to be full of people. The length of the bench is mainly a design feature to create a unifying element and tie the design together.
  
- Melissa Greene: This looks great. I love the lighting and under bench lighting, and love the bench. If there are arm rests, they should be spaced apart to not create defensive architecture. This is nicer than I imaged it being.
  - Bill responded that the City will talk about arm rests. Providing some seating with backs and some arm rests may be good.
  
- Saul Tannenbaum: I love this, it looks gorgeous. Are there plans for putting Wi-Fi here and if not why?
  - Bill responded that this hasn’t come up, but the City can ask about the plan for public Wi-Fi in these types of spaces.

### **Carl Barron Plaza Design**

Bill continued the presentation by reviewing the shared design goals for Carl Barron Plaza. Bryan then reviewed design givens for the plaza. Over the last six months the Project Team received a lot of feedback from the City’s internal Urban Design Team, Central Square Business Improvement District (BID), and other stakeholders. In addition to this guidance, there are a number of underground utilities and other site constraints that dictate where elements can be placed in the plaza. The design team looked at precedents for materials and ways to provide unity in the plaza. The need for a lighting or sculptural element to unite both

ends of the plaza was a primary focus of the design. The design team developed two options to address design guidance, givens, and constraints. Both options introduce a robust tree canopy (only a difference of two trees between the proposed options), repetitive lighting elements, textured pavement surfaces, fixed & flexible furnishings, and simple custom bus shelters to complement the design.

**Option A: Sculptural Ribbon:** This option unifies both ends of the plaza with a sculptural element. Three bus stops are provided, with a bike lane through the center of the space and room for both pedestrian circulation and gathering. The sculptural element sweeps up to provide room for seating, as well as shaded gathering areas. The two bus shelters at the western end of the plaza anchor the space and create a gateway. A lean rail element helps separate the pedestrian and bicycle circulation zones. The Mass. Ave. end of the plaza is very dynamic, with a mix of flexible seating and platform seating that could also function as a stage for programmable space. There is under-lighting in the sculpture feature and post lighting to activate the space at night.

**Option B: Complementary Structures:** This option introduces a pergola structure at the Mass. Ave. end to relate to the bus shelters at the other end. There are lighting elements along the River Street pedestrian circulation route to provide a ribbon of continuity, as well as flexible seating, lean rails, and sculptural light poles similar to Option A. The pergola provides shade, a small stage element, and space definition at the Mass. Ave. end of the plaza. The bus shelters at the western end frame access to the plaza. The light columns are a strong visual element at night, in addition to light provided via dark sky friendly down lighting provided in the Mass. Ave. end of the plaza. There is potential to add a sculptural element in this option, shown by the graffiti heart. This could incorporate neighborhood information, signage, or the Carl Barron plaque.

## Working Group Discussion

Bill continued by outlining a few check-in questions for Working Group members to consider during the discussion.

- Patrick Barrett: Does the ribbon structure have lighting in it? When I was first part of Central Square Business Association (CSBA), it was almost impossible to program Carl Barron Plaza due to power, layout, and flow of space. Option A addresses all of these questions and allows programming of area. The CSBA may be able to address some logistics. I love the first option. The second option seems more stoic, less like Central Square. I love all the trees.
  - Bill responded that yes, the ribbon structure has the ability to integrate lighting. The BID has really been wanting programmable space.
- Melissa Green: Option A is so great. This feature speaks to the Central Square Arts District by creating an iconic moment in the square. Are all items shown here in the budget or will this be budgeted down?
  - Bill responded that the City does not have a final cost estimate for the element, but designers have started to look at it from structural and cost standpoint and think it is something we can do. We would not show it if it were not something we could likely do.

- Gabe Cira: The purplish - blue squiggle is cool and gives a strong sense of identity in the City. Have there been efforts or negotiations with the Holmes Building to better integrate and open up their courtyard space? The structure looks like HVAC ducting – can it be expanded to create a stronger presence and more cover/shade? Around the corner there is the MBTA station entry and graffiti alley, which is painted steel with colored glass and provides a strong identity. It is great that this space will have its own identity, but could they be in dialogue?
  - Bill responded that the Holmes Building is active in the BID and they are open to changing the fence. They are working on what that might look like.
- Saul Tannenbaum: I love Option A and like the purple color, and agree with Gabe in wanting more of it. Value engineering this into a purple stripe of paint would be a tragedy. Wayfinding signage is also important and I would love to see a rendering of what this looks like in the winter with snow.
  - Bill responded that we are not at the stage of wayfinding yet. We will share something more detailed when we settle on one design. The color is not final; it is good to be getting feedback and hearing a positive reaction to the color. We are trying to find something fun and timeless that people feel positive about.
- Sam Gebru: I also endorse Option A. I am assuming these are not standard MBTA bus shelters? Will they have heating for all seasons? As mentioned with Tubman Plaza – I support back supports or arm rests at seating for the elderly community. Carl Barron Plaza is frequented by the elderly in the neighborhood. I would love for the seating to be colored – pink or yellow. I really like heart structure and graffiti element, but also want a screen to provide welcome message. I like the trees and performance space. Could the structure change colors?
  - Bill responded that these will be custom bus shelters. The LED lights in the plaza will be programmable and may be able to change colors.

## **Public Comment**

Bill and Andy facilitated questions submitted by public attendees through the Q&A panel in Zoom, grouping similar questions by topic:

### ***Tubman Square***

- I am a resident of Pleasant Place. I don't enjoy that the closing has created a dumping ground for garbage, etc. Who is responsible for keeping that area clean while we wait for the finished park?
  - Jerry responded that the Department of Public Works (DPW) is responsible for maintenance and look into the current work zone area to make sure it is being maintained to City standards.
- When you mention cherry trees, will these be real fruit trees?
  - Bryan responded that the trees are just ornamental flowering cherry trees.

- Will side street crossings be raised?
  - Jerry responded yes, like on Western Avenue.
- It looks like Pleasant Street gets very narrow as it passes through Tubman Square. Discouraging people from driving in the park is good, but what route do you propose for people driving up Pleasant Street?
  - Bill responded that drivers from Pleasant Street will have to turn right at River Street and get over to the general travel lane through the bus lane to continue left onto Pleasant Street.
- Will Kinnaird between River & Western be converted to one way? Kinnaird closed vs. one-way.
  - Bill responded that as stated earlier, Kinnaird will remain two-way. With the closure of Pleasant Place volumes are expected to decrease.

### **Carl Barron Plaza**

- Is the bus shelter going to be a standard MBTA bus structure or will it be a custom creative elementary bus structure?
  - Previously addressed.
- Why isn't there more fixed seating with backing? Many of the elderly Manning Apartment residents need restful seating with back support.
  - Previously addressed.
- For the flexible seating, who will manage it? And what can be done to make this a space for all four seasons?
  - Bill responded that the City is talking to the BID, and the Holmes Building offered to potentially maintain it. This is a topic that will be answered based on further conversations. Jerry added that the City will talk to residents of the Manning Apartment who use the plaza.
- How close to the corner would that art element be (in Carl Barron Plaza)?
  - Bryan responded that it would be near the MBTA head house along Mass. Ave.
- What is the plan to accommodate daily users of the Plaza whilst the renovation proceeds?
  - Jerry responded that they are not at that point yet. The City will start to talk to social service agencies and identify how to accommodate people during construction.
- Will there be bicycle racks in Carl Barron Plaza?
  - Bill responded that there will be, but we are not at that stage of design yet.
- Snow accumulation on that structure would be interesting. Can it withstand our winter/ extended winters?
  - Bill responded that the design team will look at winter conditions.
- Is anyone keeping track of increases in air quality problems from trucks stopped for traffic? My comment is just...looks good! Thanks for your hard work!
  - Bill responded that a detailed traffic model using VISSIM was completed on River Street to analyze the reduction from two lanes to one. Trip times will be roughly the same, so there is not expected to be much changed in air quality.

- Sam Gebru, Working Group member: What is the blue thing where the bus stops currently are on Green Street?
  - Bryan responded that it is a placeholder for a linear bus shelter along the Holmes Building, which will be a simpler version of the other shelters. It is designed to be longer than the current shelters, and the sidewalk would also be widened as much as possible.

## **Next Steps**

Bill concluded the meeting by noting that City staff are available to address specific questions about the corridor. Project questions can be directed to Jerry Friedman ([jfriedman@cambridgema.gov](mailto:jfriedman@cambridgema.gov)) and Bill Deignan ([wdeignan@cambridgema.gov](mailto:wdeignan@cambridgema.gov)). The public next meeting will likely be in June to discuss Carl Barron Plaza with another public meeting in September to discuss the corridor and plaza before the project goes out to bid later in the fall. Tonight's presentation will be posted to the project website.