

Transit Advisory Committee November 2024 Meeting Minutes

Attendance

Members **Present** (7) Arthur Strang, Carl Rothenhaus, Melissa Zampitella, Peter Septoff, Katherine Rafferty, Devin Chausse, Jackson Moore-Otto

Absent (3) Bill McAvinney, Jim Gascoigne, Makayla Comas

City staff (3) Andrew Reker, Nika Lea Tomicic, Melissa Peters

Others (21) Tara Kamal Ahmadi, 20 members of the public (19 virtual, 1 in person).

Note: CDD = Community Development Department; TPT = Traffic Parking and Transportation Department; MBTA = Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority; TSP = Transit Signal Priority; BNRD = Bus Network Redesign; BRT = Bus Rapid Transit.

Welcome and meeting summary approval

Nika Lea Tomicic (NLT) began the hybrid meeting at 6:01PM by welcoming members of the Transit Advisory Committee (TAC), members of the public and presenters. NLT gave a tour of the virtual space for people joining by application and telephone and shared ground rules for virtual and in-person meeting participation.

Carl Rothenhaus then conducted a roll call of the members of the TAC – 7 members were present, 3 were absent. He then conducted a roll call of the meeting notes for September 2024. The committee unanimously approved the September meeting notes.

Presentation: Alewife Area Planning

AR and city staff presented on urban planning in the Alewife area.

AR provided an overview of the area then turned the meeting over to city staff for specifics on the different sections of the Alewife area.

City staff began by explaining that the redevelopment of the Alewife area comes from the 2016 Envision Cambridge plan. She then provided a sample of projects currently under development in the area.

Quadrangle:

- In 2023 the city put a moratorium on commercial development to allow for time to develop a plan to create a mixed-use district in the area. Goals for this mixed-use area include it being connected to greenspace such as Danehy park, as well as the creation of new pocket parks.
- The quadrangle redevelopment will include:
 - o 40% housing
 - o Require commercial developers to pay into a fund for affordable housing.

- Building height would be higher closer to the Fitchburg Line tracks and get shorter closer to Cambridge Highlands
- Some sort of bridge or tunnel that would connect the area by Iggy's to the Alewife Triangle – this would, according to the developer Health Peak, be funded through PUD infrastructure funds.
- City staff shared a theoretical map of what redevelopment of the Quadrangle could look like

Alewife MBTA Station

- The city wants the station access road to be rebuilt – the city wants to rebuild the undercrossing for pedestrians, bikes, and busses
- MassDOT is looking to replace the bridge that goes over the part of the Alewife MBTA station that consists of the platforms for the Red Line – the bridge that connects Route 2 with Rindge Ave. MassDOT expects to begin construction in September 2025.
- The MBTA is looking to find a developer to rebuild Alewife Station. The rebuilding of Alewife is seen as a priority for the MBTA. The MBTA wants to create better multi-modal connections, better bus connections, improve parking facilities such as adding EV chargers, increase accessibility, and update the station.
 - So far, the MBTA has put out a request for proposal – they are looking for the best partner to collaborate with the MBTA and the City of Cambridge to create a station that is best for the community

IQHQ

- The IQHQ development includes the construction of dedicated bus lanes, widening the undercrossing, construction of a traffic signal, and for IQHQ to create a blue bike station by the Russell Field headhouse.
- IQHQ also plans to upgrade the headhouse, plaza, as well as making Jerry's Pond a destination/park for Cambridge residents to use.

High Rail Tunnel

- Currently the MBTA has very limited access to the Red Line tunnels north of South Boston, the MBTA intends to build an access tunnel at Alewife so that maintenance and construction vehicles can have better access to the tunnels.
- The tunnel will enable the MBTA to more easily keep the Red Line in a state of good repair. The design phase will go through 2025 and construction will begin in 2026.
- AR shared a map of where the MBTA proposes to dig the tunnel

Fitchburg Line

- Alewife Commuter Rail demand study
 - Originates in a bond bill
 - It will study ridership estimates for a theoretical commuter rail station at alewife
 - Study duration: 6-9 Months.
- AR then shared a map of all the proposed walking paths in the area, especially around Danehy Park and the Fitchburg Line.
- Design Phase for the Fitchburg Line crossing (most likely a bridge) – will begin in 2025

AR then proposed a Question for TAC members: What do you think Cambridge residents, workers and students want to hear about? What formats may work for community engagement? Member answers and discussion are as follows, city responses are in italics:

- One member of the TAC encouraged the city to talk to MBTA personnel and riders who work or commute through Alewife Station. He proposed that the city focus on community outreach by way of targeting user groups rather than community constituencies.
- Another member of the TAC suggested that the city look to Wonderland Station as a basis for what a redesign of Alewife could look like. The member was also happy about the direction of the quadrangle redevelopment. As a former student at Fayerweather Street School, he lamented the lack of sidewalks in the area. He suggested Fayerweather Street School as a group to talk to as well as the businesses in the area along Spinelli Place. He also stressed the importance of the paths that parallel the Fitchburg Line and wanted to see more constructed, especially on the Quadrangle side.
- The member asked: What is the role of brownfields development in the Quadrangle area?
 - o *Developers in this area expect to develop on contaminated soil. Areas like this usually become safer after redevelopment. Brownfields development is something that makes building in Cambridge expensive. Developers take this cost into account.*

A member of the TAC stressed that the non-vehicular infrastructure in the redevelopment should be completed before the construction of housing and businesses as it encourages people to get out of their car and walk/use transit.

Another member of the TAC asked about the feasibility of a see-click-fix type feedback system for gathering public opinion on the Alewife area.

- *The city would rather have one webpage for people to look to for information. A feedback system with comments, and the ability for users to reply to comments would be a lot to handle due to the need for moderation.*

A member of the TAC suggested the city reach out to Neville Manor and Sancta Maria

Presentation: City and TAC project updates

Nika Lea Tomicic (NLT) presented upcoming meetings for the TAC, including:

- Next meeting will be joint meeting – November 13th
 - o Will discuss flexible parking corridors – flexibility about off-street parking, and the CSO.
- December 5th 2024 will be next TAC meeting
 - o This meeting will include orientation and will welcome new members. The next TAC term starts in January.

NLT presented updates to several projects in the city including:

- Concord Ave – TSP still in development
- River Street/Central square bus terminal ongoing
- Circulation change – Broadway to become one-way for vehicle traffic from Galileo Galilei Way to Ames Street. Broadway will still be two-way for biking.
- A new bus shelter will be built in Kendall Square in spring 2025.

- There will be new bus amenities for several bus stops in East Cambridge.
- Net Zero Transportation Plan – comments on it should be sent to Stephanie Groll by November 13th.

NLT presented updates on MBTA projects:

- Red Line closure starts on the 18th of November
- December 15th BNRD Phase 1
 - o MBTA engagement events at Harvard Station and Cambridge libraries in the coming months

Public comment

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

- One member of the public asked about storm water in the Alewife area
- A member of the public suggested the city reach out to media outlets such as Cambridge Day to advertise the redevelopment of the Alewife area.
- A member of the public was concerned/baffled that the city of Cambridge was not pushing the MBTA enough to follow environmental laws, especially around the digging of the access tunnel near Linear Park as there is heavily contaminated soil in this area.
 - o *The city will happily push the MBTA to follow asbestos/ ground contaminant regulations.*
- A member of the public was unhappy that the MBTA notified the city about the access tunnel when they were already 75% through the design phase. She hopes the city will be a leader in green development and preserving access to greenspace in the area.
- A final member of the public asked what ways the MBTA is working with the city on the Alewife area
 - o *The MBTA has been working with Cambridge in the area. The city will also create a working group to focus on the Alewife area and will provide more ways for people to make comments on how Alewife is developed.*

The meeting was adjourned at 7:20PM

Version Information

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Approval: