

Mass Ave Planning Study (MAPS) - Working Group

10/10/24

MAPS – The theme of the evening was to help identify, “How is North Mass Ave different than South of Porter Square?”

The working group focused on the four themes of the planning process to date

- More of a Neighborhood and Destination,
- More Inviting,
- Easier to Get Around, and
- More Housing Options.

They elaborated on each to define North Mass Ave; its character; what it offers to residents and visitors; and how the physical form might be improved.

Each member of the group and the audience members are identified.

More of a Neighborhood and Destination

- Michael Rome:
 - Pemberton Farms is holding events to draw nearby residents, and St Johns church has held events for many years. Aside from those two places, not many places can hold events or have.
 - Excited to see Porter Square books moving and hopes that brings activity to the Lesley Building.
 - What can we do to compel businesses to stay open, as we see many closing?
 - What can we do to keep tenants in place to reduce issues of vacancy?
 - What can be done from a legal perspective?
- Sharmil Modi: Most landlords with ground floor space want tenants. They shouldn't necessarily be punished for not being able to fill the spaces with tenants and rent at a certain rate.
- Neheet Trivedi:
 - Is there a way from a zoning perspective that we can require a ground level use?
 - How can we help landlords with finding tenants? This is where a business association could be helpful.
- Camilla Elvis: Really difficult to require ground floor retail everywhere. How can we find other uses?
- Michael Rome: Worked on Mass Ave overlay and wrote in the ground floor requirement, but now sees that it is difficult.
- Ruth Ryals: Mass Ave Overlay requires active use, not just retail.
- Sharmil Modi:
 - Should be a carrot approach rather than a stick.
 - Economic reality is that retail is very risky for a landlord. Property owner needs to be incentivized to do it.
- Josiah Bonsey:
 - There are limitations to what the city can do to help small businesses.

- Would love to have a business district/association for this area. City could help with trash, recycling and compost.
- Ruth Ryals:
 - Food block could be a point of interest
 - Consider making something of this. Could be a cultural footprint to build on.
- Ruth Ryals: Seems like there are a lot of families in South of Porter, too. Not just North Mass Ave.
- Michael Rome: Lives on Gold Star Rd and sees a lot of families in his part of NMA

More Inviting

- Michael Rome: Loves the idea of bocce ball courts at Clarendon.
- Neheet Trivedi: Big part of Alewife Brook Reservation that doesn't get used along Alewife Brook
- Camilla Elvis: What can be used as a temporary public space along Mass Ave?
- Polly Carpenter:
 - Rindge is an active intersection to consider
 - Magoon near Alewife Brook investment area
- Neheet Trivedi:
 - Bike path at Mass Ave - Those open spaces should be highlighted as spaces.
 - Jack's Gas - feels like one large, massive curb cut

Easier to Get Around

- Michael Rome: Flashing signals should be placed on Mass Ave at intersections for safer pedestrian crossings.
- Josiah Bonsey: Rindge Ave - Chester St - both connections to Davis Square / Gateway to Davis. Might be worth highlighting/amplifying.

More Housing Options

- Ruth Ryals: North Mass Ave should be considered to be higher if that is the area where housing opportunity exists.
- Neheet Trivedi: Maybe north of Trolley Square should be considered differently in terms of scale.
- Michael Rome: Neheet's idea makes sense. Would also like to see if we could have a zoning primer for the Working Group.
- Ruth Ryals: Would love to see the shopping center parking lot become a park and then fill in development where the current shopping center buildings are located.

Public Comment:

- Gordon Moore
 - What kind of avenue and adjacent neighborhoods do we want in years to come?
 - How much of a difference does it make to build more units and lower cost? Have not found research that says more units will make housing more affordable for everyone. And who do we want to attract?
 - What do we mean by more of a neighborhood and a destination?
 - Who does the change serve? If there is vacancy, why are we encouraging more businesses?
- James Williamson

- The key problem to the lack of small retail is not lack of people, but the condition of the road, which feels like a highway. It doesn't feel walkable.
- How do you mitigate this thoroughfare dimension?
- Consider major public space improvements at the intersection near the Alewife Path
- People are told that the market forces will determine what we can build, and that seems questionable
- We should have the urban form that we desire