

## **What's the Plan? Panel: Introduction to the Planning Team Meeting Summary**

**February 11, 2016 \* 6:00 – 8:00 PM**

**Cambridge Public Library – Main Branch, Cambridge MA**

### **Welcome and Overview**

This is the first of a series of panels and public engagement components of the Envision Cambridge project. Envision Cambridge is a public process to develop a plan for a livable, sustainable, and equitable city. With input from those who live, work, study, and play in our city, Envision Cambridge will create a shared vision for the future of Cambridge. The plan will result in recommendations on a broad range of topics such as housing, mobility, economic opportunity, urban form, and climate and the environment. For more about the project and for presentations from this panel, visit: [www.cambridgema.gov/citywideplan](http://www.cambridgema.gov/citywideplan)

Stuart Dash, Director of Community Planning for the City of Cambridge, welcomed community members (see attendees who signed in on the last page of this summary) and said that the planning process will ramp up in March with the appointment of Advisory Committees, further public meetings and other on-the-ground outreach. The purpose of this panel was to introduce some key members of the project consulting team to the public.

Tim Love, Utile principal and Envision Cambridge lead, introduced himself and the other members of the consultant team. He underscored the importance of beginning the public component of the plan by introducing the team members to outline their main thoughts about the plan and engage with attendee questions.

### **Project Overview: Tim Love**

Mr. Love provided a brief explanation of the Envision Cambridge process. He reviewed the many consultants working with Utile, the primary project and planning and urban design lead and Interboro Partners, the community engagement lead. These additional groups include an array of planning, analysis, engagement, and facilitation team members.

The planning process is designed to:

- Establish a comprehensive, shared vision for Cambridge
- Create an inclusive citywide discussion that engages a broad spectrum of voices, especially those traditionally not at the table
- Achieve an integrated perspective on key city policy decisions about energy, climate change, mobility, and growth management
- Plan for growth and change based on shared priorities.

The planning process will build on existing city initiatives, studies, and plans, such as the Getting to Net Zero Taskforce, outcomes from Cambridge Conversations, and the Inclusionary Housing Study. The planning team will consider Cambridge from the physical and policy standpoints, evaluating features including walkability and regional

land use patterns, as well as demographic and cultural standpoints, looking at aspects such as areas to target in the public engagement process to reach underrepresented groups.

The project will include three phases:

- *Research and Vision (2016)*: research and listening to community members about important issues and concerns, and working with the community to develop a vision, as well as a focused study on Alewife
- *Scenarios Development (2017)*: development of scenarios based on visioning and research, and engagement efforts to help inform residents' choices
- *Refining the Plan (2018)*: creation of the final Envision Cambridge Plan

Comments and questions from community members in attendance covered a few clarifying questions.

### **Community Engagement Overview: Dan D'Oca**

Dan D'Oca, Interboro Partners and community engagement lead, introduced himself and the public engagement component of the planning processes. The planning team will include community input throughout the process and seek feedback from diverse audiences. Mr. D'Oca encouraged attendees to use the meeting's suggestion box to suggest Cambridge groups to contact or which might like to provide feedback.

In order to capture a wide variety of community members, the public engagement process will be supported by an array of tools and forums, including panel discussions such as this one, public workshops, focus groups, a mobile engagement station, street engagement teams, a quarterly newspaper, and a website. The team is still refining the engagement tools, including the website and social media strategy. In addition, large public meetings will provide childcare, translation services, and refreshments to community members to help make participation more accessible.

### **Housing Market Analysis: Kevin Hively**

Kevin Hively, Ninigret Partners and economic and housing consultant introduced himself, sharing his own experience navigating some of the challenges he understands personally about Cambridge housing costs and transportation.

The Envision Cambridge plan will address housing, employment, and the economy, all major issues for the city. Cambridge is part of and impacted by the larger region. The number and types of jobs located in Cambridge compared to the resident workforce population puts pressure on the city's housing stock. As housing prices increase, some low-wage workers are being pushed to live outside of the city, creating an accessibility issue. Mr. Hively noted that achieving affordable housing at a general level always means that supply and demand must be balanced, which will entail weighing benefits and costs of multiple policy options.

Other cities with a similar high demand for housing, including San Francisco and Portland, Oregon, are working on policies for housing cost and creating mixed

downtown developments during housing transitions. Cambridge will be able to draw on the work they do.

Community members in attendance provided several comments, including:

- Part of Cambridge's housing problem stems from large financial flows into real estate due to its internationalization.
- High-rise housing, above eight stories or so, can be anti-family.
- Vancouver's housing model presents a possible approach with low-rises for families and high-rises for the elderly and other groups.
- The team should analyze Cambridge's workforce numbers using complex modeling to show regional issues related to Boston and the transit system.
- Many residents have left the city due to rising housing costs. This has also reduced the number of children who live in Cambridge.
- In addition to residential renters, local retailers are also facing rising rental costs and might be pushed out of the city. This needs to be considered, especially since residents highly value access to local retailers.
- There is a need to improve the MBTA and work towards other measures to reduce car traffic and improve the quality of life.

**Mobility: Lisa Jacobson**

Lisa Jacobson, Nelson\Nygaard senior associate and transportation lead, stated the goal of working on transportation problems holistically to create an integrated transportation system for Cambridge. The team will collect and analyze existing plans, data, and stories of success and advocacy, conduct outreach to understand the community's choices and priorities, consider different mobility scales and articulate tradeoffs and key issues, and develop key priorities that will inform the overall planning process. Throughout the process, the team will look for best practices from an array of other cities and would appreciate suggestions of good examples.

The team will consider transportation from regional and citywide, neighborhood, and corridor perspectives. The process will take many forms of transportation into account, including automobiles, public transport, and walking as well as related issues, such as curbside prioritization. The team has not defined project goals yet.

Community members in attendance provided several comments and questions, including:

- The Cambridge Transit Strategic Plan should be included in the team's analysis.
- The Green Line needs to be considered in the planning process in addition to the Red Line. The MBTA changed the bus routes entering Lechmere, reducing service to East Cambridge. This needs to be studied.
- How will the team manage the tension between improving automobile transport and applying demand management to reduce the number of cars in the city? *Ms. Jacobson replied that the goal is to reduce the number of people driving private vehicles, and options, like car sharing, could also still play a role. Cambridge also needs to consider that other areas in the region may have different ideologies around these issues, and thus, consider what role Cambridge can play*

*in the broader region in terms of leadership, lobbying, and partnership with other municipalities.*

### **Sustainability and Resilience: Ariella Maron**

Ariella Maron, BuroHappold principal and sustainability and resilience lead, laid out the firm's approach to help cities achieve ambitious sustainability and resiliency goals: define the vision, prioritize strategies, and develop the roadmap. The team will start by aligning existing plans and collecting community input; then, it will use multiple-criteria analysis to understand how best to achieve goals around issues, such as, equity, greenhouse gas reduction, and affordability; and finally, the team will develop an approach that ensures sustainability is connected to other areas of the plan, leads to ready implementation, and positions Cambridge as a sustainability leader.

Community members in attendance provided several comments and questions, including:

- Cambridge has a historical legacy, including many houses, which need protection.
- The Net Zero Plan is only a small step towards reducing greenhouse gases. The city needs to start encouraging the construction of advanced, net zero buildings.
- Climate change will entail uncertain impacts, and planning efforts need to account for this to ensure unexpected problems do not arise.
- How will the planning process model climate change over time, as done in the Climate Vulnerability Assessment? *Ms. Maron noted that BuroHappold is part of the team working on the Climate Vulnerability Assessment, so coordination should be relatively seamless. The team will also need to study existing climate action work and communicate with others to understand changing climate impacts.*

### **Discussion Among Panelists and With the Audience**

Mr. Love and Mr. Hively discussed the nature of future development in Cambridge. It is currently not realistic for everyone who works in Cambridge to live in the city, and the imbalance has direct implications on housing and mobility. Given Cambridge's limited raw, undeveloped land, vertical development might be the only option, but if this is the case, careful consideration will need to be given to where and how best to develop vertically. Cambridge will have to consider how much of a vertical city it wants to become to allow for increased growth, improved walkability, and affordable housing.

A community member pointed out an entry to the U.S. Department's Smart City Challenge to develop carbon-free, personal mass transit, which could solve density and other development challenges. Mr. Love said that the team would likely provide the public with a clearinghouse of good development proposals, such as Smart Cities and the West Station Grand Junction Proposal.

Mr. Love then asked the audience for questions and comments. Two community members noted that the team should ensure its newsletter is readable and that it uses non-technical terms when engaging with the public.

Others asked that the team publically raise “red flags” if development projects already underway could be unsustainable before the completion of the plan in three years. Mr. Love noted that the Alewife study would allow the team to quickly answer fundamental questions around place-making and neighborhood-building. The team will also select topics for public workshops and panels that prioritize the community’s issues in a way that is responsive to on the ground timing issues. Another community member added that, while the team is starting with Alewife, East Cambridge is undergoing vast re/development, with construction especially of the Volpe parcel. Mr. Love responded that the team will both look at the implications of decisions that have already been made and work with city staff to plan how it can involve itself in ongoing processes.

A community member noted that much of the city’s housing is unsustainable and needs to be updated, but it is difficult to make physical changes to housing given the difficult local regulations. The plan needs to consider how to improve the housing stock to improve neighborhoods.

In response to a question about anticipated inclusionary zoning percentages (the percent of required affordable housing in any housing development), the team noted that Cambridge should keep Boston’s inclusionary zoning percentages in mind when considering its own policies to be most effective and benefit both cities, as there are regional implications. As an example, Rhode Island is building multiple affordable housing units, and there is local concern that this will actually serve to alleviate Boston’s housing shortage, not its own. Another community member agreed that regional issues need to be identified and tackled.

A community member raised the need to identify development opportunities and pointed to the example of nonprofits building small-scale affordable housing units. Mr. Love noted Cambridge’s diverse housing stock and the need to create an inventory of houses to better distinguish among them. Completing a housing analysis will allow the city to steer developers under a broad policy to encourage density in appropriate commercial and transit-accessible areas and discourage one-off developments, as substantial housing stock will require replacement over the next two decades.

A community member recommended encouraging urban agriculture in the final Envision Cambridge plan, possibly through requiring new buildings to have planting areas. The team noted that urban agriculture can be encouraged through regulation (e.g., allowing residents to raise chickens) or organizing community gardens and other collective enterprises, which requires a nonprofit partner. The team intends to work with existing nonprofits in the area on urban agriculture. A community member suggested City Sprouts as a potential partner.

A community member said that low-income residents need information to understand the difference between federal and state low-income housing polices. Another

community member added that the planning team needs to reach out to Cambridge's homeless population.

A community member asked if the team would prioritize wealth or public health. The team answered that they are not mutually exclusive, with increased wealth often allowing for better public health, but between the two, public health is the priority. The team will examine how to channel growth for social good and look at how best to leverage investments by private entities.

In response to a community member question, Mr. Love explained that the team would factor aging into the planning efforts. Particularly in the transportation discussion, the team will consider combinations of technology, infrastructure (including verticality), and policies to make places more friendly for the aging baby boomer population. In addition, they noted that such solutions often improve quality of life for everyone. Finally, they mentioned that an older population owns much of the city's housing stock, and that means at some point there could be a transition of ownership, which will have policy and other implications for the city.

The Envision Cambridge planning process will be ramping up in March with the appointment of the Envision Cambridge Advisory Committee, Envision Alewife Working Group, and the Engagement and Communications Working Group. There will also be additional meetings and events for the public later this spring.

**Meeting Participants**

**Participants**

Viola Augustin  
Tergun Austin  
William Barry  
Diane Beck  
Jessica Bitely  
Laura Bluestone  
Kelley Braun  
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# ENVISION CAMBRIDGE

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