

2016-11-17

Envision Cambridge Advisory Committee #3

Committee Attendees

Frank Gerratana, Tom Stohlman, Ruth Allen, Tom Sieniewicz, Josh Gerber, Ebi Poweigha, Robert Winters, Zeyneb Magavi, Alexandra Offiong, Ruth Ryals, Zuleka Queen-Postell, Risa Mednick,

Staff / Consultants Present

Staff Iram Farooq, Stuart Dash, Melissa Peters

Utile Nupoor Monani, John McCartin, Kennan Lagreze

Committee Members Absent

Bethany Stevens, Jeff Kiryk, Naia Aubourg, Dennis Swinford, Bill Kane, Marlinia Antoine, Matt Wallace, Joe Maguire

Committee feedback

- Advisory Committee members did not feel that the statistic that car volumes have remained stable with growth was accurate. The experience is that traffic is getting worse.
- People are moving away from car ownership – what will that mean for the future right of way?
- Many neighborhoods in Cambridge have residents with kids and cars but are losing parking spots. Not everyone is giving up their cars and moving towards bikes.
- It will be a win-win for all when people that don't "need" cars shift to other modes since the roads will open up for those that do drive. Working group members felt that Cambridge should accommodate all mobility choices.
- According to the city, there has been a slow and gradual process of rebalancing the right of way over the years.
- Some working group members suggested looking at Europe for examples of best practices while others felt that Cambridge is not Europe and should not try to emulate it.
- Cambridge is continuing to be a diverse place, but not enough family housing is being constructed.
- The middle class is disappearing.
- The Advisory Committee discussed that small unit sizes and rental housing contribute to a transient population. However, most residents start in Cambridge as renters and many stay. Do you get a different outcome with larger units?
- Age diversity in 1950s was incredible, this can be influenced by a diverse built form. How can Cambridge build housing that is aimed at being affordable for the middle class and minorities?
- Problem is that land value is too high; answer is to reduce it, but that is politically problematic. Are there zoning or other mechanisms to preserve large family units; can we have more income restricted units?
- Fundamental question this plan must answer is when are we done making affordable housing? 20%? 25%?
- Middle income inclusionary pilot program was not as successful as thought since people may have preferred to buy a non-restricted unit in another city than stay in Cambridge in a restricted unit.

- Neighboring cities and towns are doing good things, people need to start thinking of “Greater Cambridge.” The affordable housing crisis is a regional problem and thus requires a regional solution.
- More affordable units increase market rate pricing which drives out middle class further. There is a regional supply and demand problem. Can we have conversations about affordable models for middle income housing like co-ops? What are some precedents? Costs and benefits?
- The internet economy is a threat to local businesses as well as real estate prices. Cambridge has been aggressive in regulating local businesses (i.e. polystyrene and bag ordinances), but these regulations do not apply to online trade. Value of being sustainable is great, but it hurts local businesses. Can we regulate on non-brick and mortar businesses that sell to Cambridge? Council should slow down on regulations on businesses, and the City should help advertise local businesses.
- What is the obligation of the universities to house their students and large companies to hire/train residents for jobs?
- Should the city exempt ground floor retail to subsidize lower rents for retail?
- There is anecdotal evidence where local developers are losing money on their ground floor units to attract retail that adds value to overall development.
- Is there potential to use the Charles River to absorb flood water?
- Need to work with the Charles River Watershed to learn how best to shape urban development to protect our water quality
- Redevelopment is an opportunity to clean sites through remediation
- City needs to continue to invest in youth programs, including athletics. Cambridge is family friendly because the community is cohesive and neighbors are supportive.
- How are kids with special needs being included into the life of the City?
- How do we make sure all students enter high school at the same level?
- There is a vast number of resources and programs offered by universities, but communication of information is poorly advertised. There needs to be a central website for learning opportunities.

Public comment

- Need more data in this group to understand changing demographics.
- Youth is not well represented on the Committee.
- Barry Bluestone’s Greater Boston Housing Report card comes out on Jan 29th; perhaps a good resource for the group.
- Conversation is richer than the presentation. Most of the stuff is not new.
- How will the Advisory Committee be used during the next phase? Concern that the committee is not asked to do substantive work. Committee is willing to have homework assignments and want to see things in draft form.
- The next phase moves from high level visioning to scenario development and recommendations. The Advisory Committee will be critical in revising scenarios and developing recommendations. Four topic-specific working groups on housing, economy, mobility, and climate and environment will commence in January. Advisory Committee members were asked to volunteer to serve on one of the working groups. The working groups will develop topic-specific recommendations for consideration by the Advisory Committee.