

2017-01-18

Envision Cambridge Advisory Committee #4

Committee Attendees

Ruth Allen, Josh Gerber, Frank Gerratana, Bill Kane, Joe Maguire, Alexandra Offiong, Ebi Poweigha, Ruth Ryals, Tom Stohlman, Robert Winters, Zeyneb Magavi, Zuleka Queen-Postell

Staff / Consultant Present

Staff: Gary Chan, Stuart Dash, Iram Farooq, Luke Mich, Melissa Peters, Susanne Rasmussen, Kathy Watkins, Chris Cotter

Utile: Meera Deean, Kennan Lagreze, Tim Love

Committee Members Absent

Marlinia Antoine, Naia Aubourg, Jeff Kiryk, Risa Mednick, Tom Sieniewicz, Bethany Stevens, Dennis Swinford, Matt Wallace

Seventeen members from the public

Meeting Overview

- Presentation from the consultant on the Alewife Planning progress ([available here](#)).

Committee Feedback

- Is a special easement necessary to implement the stormwater system illustrated in the scenarios?
 - Some of the proposed changes could be addressed through zoning, but others need to be addressed via other regulatory mechanisms.
- Are there any scenarios where the bridge is located further west and would that change the outcome of planning in the Quadrangle?
 - Moving the bridge would shift the narrative and quality of place, but would not impact the metric totals we are displaying in this presentation.
 - The current bridge design allows for a commuter rail connection, so the location of the bridge is less flexible. The location shown in the plan is the optimal location.
- What is the current district FAR (floor area ratio) in Alewife?
 - We analyzed the existing but felt that it's a false comparison because of the legacy buildings that do not represent the current development trend.
- I think about the existing legacy business, and I wonder how they fit into the scenarios. What are we losing and what are we gaining compared to Alewife's current configuration? Scenario planning is a great way to plan, but our community needs those types of [existing] places. By using this planning method, we may forget these places. We need to figure out how to make these types of spaces feasible.
 - A next step could be determining the rules that might require those types of business to change. The industrial scenario specifically has this the highest flexibility for this kind of opportunity. We could implement this through zoning, bonuses, or other regulatory items.
 - The industrial scenario addresses the need to retain the existing manufacturing businesses in the city and provide low barrier to entry jobs. There are trade-offs that need to be considered, however. Change will be likely to occur more slowly, for example.
- There is a reason why there is a legacy in the Quadrangle. To ignore this legacy and not take stock of what we have is a mistake. We need to make comparisons to the existing context.
- I'm sure there are important reasons for the bridge's proposed location, but it's extremely close to the existing bridge. If you're going to build a new bridge it should be built at the dead end of Cambridge Park Drive. This reinforces the plan and enlivens Cambridge Park Drive.

- Do we view quad development as inevitable? Is the intention to promote development or is to manage the development that is inevitable?
 - HR&A is our economic and real estate development advisor. After interviewing developers, they think that development is inevitable in the Quadrangle. It's already moving towards redevelopment if you look at the east end of the Quadrangle and the Triangle. There's a chicken and egg situation with the bike/ped bridge that potentially slows or speeds up development while also incentivizing different types of development. Access to the T will affect the quality and type of development built in the Quadrangle.
 - We talked a lot about this in the Concord-Alewife Plan. Regionally, there is a certain value and responsibility to development in relation to the MBTA. The City doesn't want to be irresponsible to either the residents or the region. We value responsible development.
- Can you describe the changes from the Alewife Revitalization Plan to the Concord-Alewife Plan to today's study?
 - One of the big issues is proactively responding to flooding. We thought very carefully about a system that has a hierarchy of streets. It's important to create hierarchy in Alewife in the form of a framework at a neighborhood-appropriate scale. We think the neighborhood needs a sense of place and identity. We now have the tools through this analysis to know what the tipping point is to pay for some public amenities such as the bridge. There is fiscal realism in the scenarios.
- Were people thinking about infrastructure costs being covered by development cost in the Alewife Revitalization Plan?
- The plan should incorporate places for the community to gather, have performances, and worship.
 - Yes, absolutely. Since this is all privately owned, we haven't gotten to the point in the study yet where we are discussing regulatory mechanisms for increasing gather space. We're trying to find a sweet spot where the value proposition works for the social aspirations, the City at large, and the property owners.
- I'm curious about the revenue and fiscal impact of the scenarios. The idea of making Alewife look like Central Square is an incredible amount of redevelopment. What other public amenities are we able to get at higher densities?
 - The difference between the Quadrangle and Central Square is that the value capture happens when you change the rules. It's harder on a project-by-project basis because the value is predetermined. Knowing the tipping point and pushing the market is important.
 - How would you find this tipping point to reach more public benefit?
 - One of the next steps is trying to look at a smaller piece of the quadrangle to be able to demonstrate how some trade-offs occur when you change the variables. For example, in Kendall Square, we added development capacity which allowed for more affordable housing than baseline inclusionary zoning and developer contribution of \$10 per square foot of space to public benefits (transit, public space, programming, workforce training). One could conceive a similar type of outcome in Alewife.
 - There's an overall tax revenue base that the City cares about in terms of providing City services. As you dial one value up and one down it affects the City's ability to balance the current tax rate.
- Have you looked into the Cambridge Highlands area? What do the residents want to see in the Quadrangle?
- When we start talking about industrial scenarios, it affects our bottom line in Cambridge, but we need these locations somewhere in Cambridge. Industrial development needs large parcels, which are available in Alewife. Industrial businesses are where the working man's jobs are located and where functional things happen in Cambridge. This is one of the last locations for these places in Cambridge.
- If an industrial district is appropriate for the Quadrangle, the traffic patterns are going to remain the same. The bike path is definitely good for transit, but trucks and deliveries need to be addressed. There's currently traffic congestions, and these problems will still occur in these scenarios.

- The scenarios are not judgments of the legacy buildings. We're realistic about how land value and use may change over time due to real estate pressure and opportunity.
- I understand these regulations would apply to new businesses. Timewise, what are you predicting? I'm worried the interim will host a hodgepodge of businesses 4' off the ground with older buildings on grade.
 - We think it's unlikely to fully redevelop by 2030 and are planning for 40-50% turnover. The incrementalism of the flood protection is difficult with existing buildings and will be addressed in more detail in the next planning phase.
 - Because this is all privately owned, the change that occurs will happen incrementally. We have to figure out how to manage those intermittent situations, and we are addressing it in the next phase.
- Building variety is good, and I fear the presence of a lot of monolithic similarly scaled buildings. Height and density can bring pedestrian density if you're strategic about where you place building density. Having height variety with key high rises can create more interest and extract more public benefits. We could achieve more open space by placing density in fewer areas rather than spreading it equally around the Quadrangle.
- It's likely a lot of the industrial uses ended up in the Quadrangle because of known flooding concerns.
- Central Square is a valid example of good urban form. It's difficult for Alewife to benefit from a form change that looks more like Central Square because the area is isolated from other parts of the City. The parcel sizes hamper the ideal characteristics that contribute to a neighborhood atmosphere. I like the idea of building more residential, but going the industrial-commercial route may make more sense because of the lack of pedestrian/car access to the rest of Cambridge.
- Form-based zoning can force variety through the market. It's an available tool.
- I hear a lot of really great ideas with details that need to be flushed out. As a landowner in the Quadrangle, we have 90,000 square feet of space, but we can't necessarily progress because we can't accomplish everything we want without City input. Three landowners own a big chunk of the Eastern Quadrangle, and we are all interested in discussing the ideas in this presentation with the City. The existing landowners are receptive to kicking off the plan with a big chunk of development.

Public Comments

- I second the idea of varying building heights and density, particularly if it enhances common and shared space. These public amenity spaces don't have to be big spaces.
- In regards to the high-bay industrial space, if you look at some of the Greentown Labs/Aeronaut examples the truck aprons are smaller. We should look at these development models rather ones that utilize semi-trucks. Residents don't want these types of trucks in their neighborhoods.
- How do we get more community spaces, especially if we tip residential? We may need schools, library, and other City services if the Quadrangle becomes primarily residential and these scenarios are not currently supplying these services. This point makes me think we should tip more commercial.
- I love hearing that we need a firestarter project, such as the one Bill mentioned because I have concerns with the interim. At this point, the presentation does not discuss the area beyond the rotary even though it will be impacted by this Plan.
- Can the models show when the tipping point will occur to get the necessary infrastructure? If so, at what point in the build-out does the infrastructure become viable?
- There are also municipal needs in the Quadrangle such as a location for DPW.
- The Plan is presented as a top-down approach. Is there a way to work with the preexisting owners to fit their properties into the model? There might be positive factors associated with the existing programs that are not quantified.
 - A next step is to look into the preexisting assets. The scenarios presented today are not proposals but tests of what future development may generate. Embracing important businesses can be part of this story as well.
 - We went through a similar exercise in the Concord-Alewife Plan and made zoning changes to try to address this topic. Similar to the Concord-Alewife Plan, we don't want to

make existing businesses leave Alewife and instead are trying to guide the inevitable future development.

- How much would the pedestrian bridge cost?
 - If it gets built in the short to medium term the bridge will cost \$25-\$30 million.
- There's not enough community benefit for people that are in this area. We may need to utilize bonds for some public amenities and then use money captured from development for amenities that are ineligible for bonds.
- In regards to Bill's comment about larger owners approximate to each other: Once a clear direction is established by Envision Cambridge and the Alewife Working Group, the City should consider a PUD. The PUD may say, in "X" amount of acreage we want a school, road, two commercial buildings, et cetera. The owners of the acreage can then come up with their own plan, and the City can ensure the value is captured and shared by all of the landowners. Sharing land value is the problem with any of the scenarios.
 - If you can get a couple of property owners, incentivized by code, perhaps, to see value in an amenity, we can all benefit. We need to study if there is a way through land use regulation to incentivize shared value capture since the Quadrangle is mostly under private ownership.