

2017-01-26

Alewife Working Group #6

Committee Attendees

Eric Grunebaum, Mark DiOrio, William Ahern, Jennifer Gilbert, John DiGiovanni, Doug Brown, Catherine Connolly, Margaret Drury, Karen Dumaine, James Butler

Staff / Consultant Present

Staff: Melissa Peters, Stuart Dash, Wendell Joseph, Luke Mich, Gary Chan, Susanne Rasmussen, Stephanie Groll, Kathy Watkins, Suzannah Bigolin, John Buldoc

Utile: Tim Love, Meera Deean, Kennan Lagreze

Committee Members Absent

Tom Ragno, Geoff Wood, Sam Stern

28 members from the public

Meeting Overview

- Consultant presentation of the Alewife Planning Scenarios for the Quadrangle (available [here](#)).

Committee Discussion Comments

- What is the distinction between the existing and pipeline housing data and does the total yield reflect these numbers?
 - The pipeline includes projects that are within the CDD development pipeline and projects that are currently under discussion.
- Can you explain the location of the pedestrian bridge?
 - The location illustrated is the ideal location for placing a commuter rail station in conjunction with the pedestrian bridge. It also allows for the necessary accessibility ramps to get you up and across the tracks.
- Where's the higher density?
 - The dashed red line near the tracks is where higher density may make sense (see slide 36).
- Will the bioswale system be used for storing water or getting water out of the system?
 - The bioswales are for temporary storage and part of a stormwater mitigation system to address localized flooding. We have made allowances in the planning for a network, but have not gotten into the details yet. We are still cross-comparing pervious and impervious surfaces.
- We've talked a lot about how water enters the neighborhood, but we also need to discuss how water leaves the area.
- Within the high rise overlay district, you are not showing any residential high rises.
 - Our analysis shows that the market is currently not building residential high-rise construction due to higher building costs.
- Is there an option for residential over industrial?
 - Residential can't sit over industrial for a series of reasons, but primarily because building code restricts this combination.
- Are there other variations of mixed-use such as commercial and residential?

- Our next step will likely result in a more complex mixed-use scenario. The use mix will be explored on a site by site basis because it's difficult to create certain use-mixes within one building. Building construction and leasing constrain which use types are viable within the same building.
- Why are you designing residential to 70' high and commercial to 85' high?
 - Building code allows for wood framed residential construction up to 70' high. To recover the cost of residential high-rise construction, developers would need to build significantly higher. The building code is different for commercial, and 85' already works well in the Cambridge market. We can explain this in more detail in the next Alewife Working Group presentation.
- One of the benefits of the industrial scenario is that it creates low-barrier to entry jobs.
- Can you clarify what you mean when you say that some scenarios do not generate enough real estate value for public benefits?
 - When density and FAR increase, the project can financially contribute more towards public benefits such as the bike-ped bridge. In each scenario, we are evaluating the tipping point for public benefit cross-subsidization.
- Freight rail may be valuable to introduce if future land use combinations lean towards an industrial district.
 - The current industrial business profile does not likely support new freight lines. It is, therefore, unlikely the mixed-use industrial scenario can cover the investment cost in freight rail.
- You mentioned diagonal truck parking as an alternative to large truck aprons behind industrial buildings. The City of New York utilizes diagonal off street parking. There may be a mixture of loading dock spaces that allow trucks to back up on certain streets to minimize apron and surface parking area behind buildings.
 - We are going to look into this in more detail in the next phase. We will specifically study how panel and city truck use at the majority of the loading bays can reduce the number of spots dedicated to semi-trucks. This is a tradeoff in leasing flexibility we need to discuss in more detail with the City.
- What is the planning time horizon for the scenarios?
 - We presented a 100% buildout, but it is extremely unlikely we will reach full build-out by 2030. It is important to analyze the complete results generated by the scenarios and provides a better platform to judge the resultant sense of place. It's an absorption rate question. We're interested in getting your feedback on the ultimate impacts and visions so that we can narrow down to a single scheme with a more careful analysis.
- Right now the housing configuration is very uniform, but if we see development unfolding over a certain amount of time then we don't have to plan in the same way with the same degree of uniformity.
 - You can't predict when the market will come rushing in and make everything homogenous. Rather than delaying the market, the regulations can control the results. The longer the full neighborhood built-out occurs, the more variety results. How to leverage time is an important issue.
- This methodology of scenario generation is a helpful starting point. I can project further variation in each scenario. I'm interested in the low-barrier to entry jobs discussion, and I'm a big fan of form-based zoning. Studying how zoning facilitates the creation of this job type is important.
- A big challenge is weaving together Cambridge Highlands with the Quadrangle while maintaining a buffer. It's unfortunate the plan can't connect them directly, but I understand the challenges associated with this change. The real advantage presented in the scenarios is that there are still pedestrian links between the two neighborhoods.

- Cambridge Highlands shouldn't be connected vehicularly, but ped/bike permeability through the buffer is necessary.
- Presenting the trade-offs in a matrix is a helpful discussion point. The environment row in the matrix discusses both district flood and district energy. Are you treating them as two separate strategies?
 - These are two distinct issues with differing viability and concerns. District energy is viable in scenarios with high energy projections. The issue is an important part of the tradeoff discussion.
- It is important to note district energy is a positive solution, but that higher energy consumption is not an advantage.
- The mixed-use industrial scenario is very intriguing. It's way too early to comment on which scenario I prefer, but I'm skeptical of the mixed-use industrial scenario because it's reliant on bigger parcels. The reality of land ownership has to be suspended to achieve this scenario. A column should be added to the trade-off matrix that rates the scenarios on their feasibility.
 - In the mixed-use residential scenario few parcels need to be aggregated. In the mixed-use commercial scenario, we strategically placed office buildings within existing large parcels. This industrial prototype relies on high land aggregation. The next step is to study an industrial prototype that relies on less land aggregation and is still realistic for the market (1.3 FAR). We wanted your feedback before refining the scenarios further.
- Thinking about the initial assumptions and the recent development mix; we've had an unusual development timeline in Alewife. There are a lot of people who believe we need housing, but there's already been a lot of housing development in Alewife. Do our development projects need to account for a timeline longer than the last ten years?
 - The expressed interest in housing stems from the regional housing shortage. There's the assumption from our consultants that Alewife can absorb the amount of housing illustrated in our scenarios. Due to the demand levels, the City of Cambridge can balance the development mix to reflect Cambridge-specific issues such as types of neighborhoods, jobs, balancing the tax base. Since we won't hit the regional absorption limits, this gives Cambridge freedom.
- What is the baseline? What are we assuming is captured if anything is built in the Quadrangle?
 - The baseline doesn't quite generate enough value to cross-subsidize the bridge and the new street grid. Increasing density to a FAR of 1.5–2.0 produces more subsidies than the baseline scenario.
- The City should consider partially funding the bridge with a bond or other financing source. We should not evaluate the scenarios on the viability of the bridge.
 - Balancing funding should be part of a robust discussion with the City. It's important to know where the tipping point for cross-subsidization sits, so bonds are available for other purposes.
- About the high-bay industrial scenario; I think most people do not want to see semi-trucks in this area. The idea of introducing this use mix is intriguing if it is a small district of maker space, like Propenzi Way in Somerville. A lot of makerspaces don't require semis. I'm glad you're going to look into a strategy for high bay industrial that follows the dense urban brewery type rather than the suburban industrial park type.
 - We've been working with two industrial developers on other studies, and they're eager to get new industrial space in the city because there is high demand. The commercial space on floors two through three cross-subsidizes the development cost of the industrial space. The City will look into other industrial prototypes that minimize large trucks and work on smaller parcels.

- The green park triangles need to be compared to other green spaces we know for scale. They currently seem like leftovers, but they might be large.
 - We can do this for the next presentation.
- I really like exploring the line between the mixed-use commercial scenario and the mixed-use industrial scenario. Keeping the industrial use mix while subsidizing the bridge with commercial space is important. The bridge is make or break for this area, and I want to see realistic scenarios that facilitate the bridge construction.
- I really like the "A/B" street component and having the raised walkways along the "A" streets because it integrates business entries into the streetscape. It reminds me of walking along the Seine in Paris and the interesting breakdown of space when the water is high and low.

Committee Preferred Scenarios with Conditions

- I'm not convinced by the proportions of the mixed-use residential or mixed-use commercial scenarios. I prefer having some industrial parcels in all of the scenarios. From my standpoint, the chosen scenario should pass the test of financing the bridge within the scheme.
- I want to point out that the mixed-use residential cross-subsidizes the bridge. I'm intrigued by the mixed-use industrial scenario's potential to keep different kinds of jobs in Cambridge with smaller footprints.
- I prefer the mixed-use industrial and mixed-use commercial scenarios. Both scenarios keep new residential units from being built in the flood plain.
- What's the developer appetite for these different scenarios? Do you think these are highly possible?
 - We think about the relative viability of these as we work with our real estate consultant, HR&A. Cambridge has a lot of value for both the commercial and residential real estate markets. The industrial scenario is trickier because there are not a lot of industrial developers. The high land value requires cross-subsidy via upper floor commercial, and it is likely more marketing, and a concerted economic development effort from the City will be necessary since the market is less willing to come to Alewife.
- The Triangle and the Quadrangle are set up like two city states. I would like someone to erase the ped/bike bridge and come up with the plan to fully connect those areas. If you're looking 50 years down the road, we should try to connect these neighborhoods rather than treat them separately. We should also discourage the creation of development walls along the railroad tracks.
 - The reality is that its continuous private property and mostly finished along the rail edge. Our methodology is to show an achievable 100% vision through a pragmatic lens. The bridge location is determined by the restrictions created by the existing building constraints.
- It's important to remember that all of the shown parcels are under private ownership.
- Technically they renegotiated the easement for the bridge with the developer to allow for the bridge.
- There is an owner-occupied building renovated five years ago in the triangle of green space you are showing in the plans. There is also a commercial condo building where a new road is proposed, and it is unlikely 22 Fawcett Street will be residential. The team needs to dig down to the actual owners and determine their actual intent. Many of the people in this district do what they want regardless of zoning.
- Mixed-use commercial strikes me as too intensive. There's little room between all of the buildings, which is a similar concern in areas like Fort Point now. The mixed-use industrial scenario is intriguing because it provides a home for the existing businesses people like and use. Supporting

a suburban industrial model is not intriguing. Rather than having an entire industrial district, one smaller preservation area may suffice.

- Putting a 200' height overlay over certain properties effectively puts existing businesses out of business because their land is way too valuable.
 - The first phase of development could provide new space for the legacy businesses before their property redevelops in a later phase. Individual actors can drastically change industrial areas in ways that are less predictable compared to residential and commercial districts. When we refine the scenarios into one preferred direction, we will drill into the propensity for change at the parcel level. It's important to fully project the results of a new zoning overlay to evaluate what could result.
- All of the previous planning processes made unfulfilled promises. I want to see the ped/bike bridge, the bike path and the best transit options for the area fulfilled in any scenario. The scenario that is most transit-oriented and eases traffic congestion is best.
- I prefer a balance between all three types, $\frac{1}{3}$ commercial, $\frac{1}{3}$ residential, and $\frac{1}{3}$ industrial fabrication space. I like the idea that we could allow existing businesses to continue and that smaller industrial spaces can provide lower barrier to entry jobs. This model could appeal to breweries and smaller scale businesses. The City should contribute a percentage of the bridge cost.
- I prefer the mixed-use industrial scenario, but it relies on the most amount of land aggregation which makes it the least plausible of the scenarios. I like the concept of having a place for fabrication businesses and leveraging the commercial value to facilitate that but the more big parcels and owners are involved, the less feasible the scenario appears. On the flip side, the mixed-use residential scenario seems most likely.
- To get any of the public benefits that were promised in the past, it will require some level of eminent domain because there are users that won't leave.
 - The zoning can affect the land value, which, in turn, affects owners. If property values are sorted out, and there were robust regulations over time, development would move towards the plan. It's fine if the business sticks around because that is how you get variety.
- If public benefits, like the park, are predicated on aggregation or are located in areas of significant investment they are likely to require eminent domain. We've all waited many years for this to happen. The Triangle shows that development could happen fast.
- I like the combination of the mixed-use residential and the mixed-use industrial scenarios. I have a hard time with mixed-use commercial scenario because we've heard over and over again about the traffic problems. This scenario will generate the most trips.
- In this meeting, people are talking about different types of industrial development. There's an obvious need for innovative space for tenants that can't pay Kendall Square rents. There's nowhere for those tenants to go anymore and this type of industrial development could serve this regional demand. There's a lot of young businesses in the Quadrangle, and I would like to see how we can build off of this existing tenant base.
- The green spaces in the scenarios don't have a texture yet. We're missing community space such as a center or square at the end of the bridge.
 - For the next meeting, we will look into current ownership where there is proposed public space and also show a scale comparison to other existing open spaces for reference and review the application of zoning to these spaces.
- We are holding a Public Workshop on February 8th. We will schedule the next working group as a deeper dive into the data and impacts associated with the scenarios. This will facilitate a conversation about one hybrid scenario.

Public Comments

- Owners in the Wheeler Street Reservoir Lofts: We are in favor of neighborhoods with a sprinkling of all three scenarios. Our biggest concerns are resolving the traffic and transit issues and streamlining traffic.
- I've seen industrial used for innovation centers, Greentown Labs, and wind energy. When I see the group talk about industrial space, I think about how small startups can gain access to industrial spaces with smaller footprints.
- A homeowner on Wheeler: When you have business-centered design versus a residential-centered design different neighborhood qualities emerge. If I walk out my door and am surrounded by industrial development, I don't necessarily want the smells, lighting, and barren streets associated. A middle choice would lead to a better type of neighborhood and a better culture.
- In addition to the bioswales, the committee should evaluate if new green spaces will take some of the attendance pressure off of Fresh Pond. We specifically need a space dedicated to dogs so that children can enjoy Fresh Pond.
- The streets are at a breaking point, so traffic impacts should be carefully considered in this location. A careful look into road capacity and the impact of the Scenarios is necessary.
- Consider whether the health impact of this traffic is worth the tradeoff for the bridge.
- Under the environment metrics section of the presentation, I don't see the percentage of open space per scenario listed. We need to understand the impacts of the Quadrangle on the heat island effect. We need more than interstitial green spaces, primarily to alleviate demand on Fresh Pond.
- The green space should be for the public rather than placed within the development. This will build a valuable sense of place.
- It is important to study how the scenarios impact the surrounding residential neighborhoods.
- I prefer the mixed-use industrial scenario because it adds the fewest cars and keeps residents out of the floodplain. There's an opportunity to create a program for affordable innovation space, similar to the affordable housing program, for this district. I question building within a known flood zone, but the mixed-use industrial scenario is the right approach if we are going to build within this zone.
- It's great to look at the Quadrangle, but we haven't looked at the impacts on Concord Avenue, and this artery is already at capacity. The ped/bike bridge may help alleviate addition traffic, but the surrounding neighborhoods will still have to go through this gauntlet.
- It would be helpful to add the population implications to the summary chart. We can understand the public facilities and traffic demands better with this information.
- If you're looking for the kind of tenants likely to occupy the mixed-use industrial scenario, look at the pattern of startups that are coming out of the local institutions over the last five years. Speaking with industrial realtors and researching this group of businesses will identify the real characteristics and the size demands necessary in this scenario.

Misc. Business

- Eric Grunebaum presented a non-city proposal for a new Jerry's Pond education kiosk funded by a Forward Fund Grant. The kiosk would tell the history of the site, specifically its environmental history, and project the effects of climate change on the Pond. It will also act as a placemaking gesture near the Alewife MBTA headhouse. Contact Eric with questions at eric.grunebaum@gmail.com.