

2017-06-08

Alewife Working Group #9

Working Group Attendees

Eric Grunebaum, John DiGiovanni, James Butler, Margaret Drury, Catherine Connolly, Sam Stern, Doug Brown.

Staff / Consultant Present

Staff: Stuart Dash, Melissa Peters, Susanne Rasmussen, Stephanie Groll, Gary Chan, Wendell Joseph

Utile: Tim Love, Meera Deean, Kennan Lagreze

Working Group Members Absent

Karen Dumaine, Jennifer Gilbert, Geoff Wood, Mark DiOrio, William Ahern, Tom Ragno.

Approximately twenty members of the public present.

Meeting overview

Tim Love presented the vision and the initial scenarios for the Shopping Center area of Alewife. Presentation is available [here](#).

Working Group Discussion

- A Working Group member asked about the other existing businesses, such as the wine store. How would those be accommodated within the plan, and why does the plan only move Whole Foods? The consultant responded that Whole Foods is the largest store to accommodate and having an anchor grocery store is important for this area. The other smaller stores might be relocated or possibly displaced,
- City staff added that the primary goal is to make this a better neighborhood. With this plan, this could be a walkable shopping center and neighborhood. With this street network, it would feel safe for walking, bicycling, older people, and children.
- A member commented that creating place happens through overall neighborhood change, not by parcel. Walkability is key. There should be more walkable paths between the Quadrangle and the Shopping Center, and the street network in the Quadrangle should be more like what is being proposed for the Shopping Center. The consultant added that there are two key connections between the Quadrangle and the Shopping Center: parallel to the tracks and where the existing light on the Parkway is. For connections to the Quadrangle, the off-street route next to the tracks might be more critical than getting across the parkway at the signal.
- The consultant suggested that an underpass underneath the parkway, closer to the Shopping Center plaza, might be possible, but this would require studying the grade change.

- City staff added that the City tries not to do underpasses or overpasses except where necessary, such as at Yerxa Road. Underpasses and overpasses can be challenges for safety as well as accessibility. This option, though, would be going straight through at grade, where the bridge berms up.
- A Working Group member asked whether the team had considered a parking garage on top of the Whole Foods, and asked what will be the impacts of the new residents on traffic on Concord Ave. The three crosswalks on Concord Ave already slow down traffic, and new residents and crossings might further impact traffic.
- Another member commented that there is a strong desire line to jaywalk from Trader Joe's to Whole Foods today. This plan will strengthen this desire line across Alewife Brook Parkway. The crosswalks are not the problem, the cars are the problem.
- A member asked whether it would be possible to create a bridge to Whole Foods over the highway. The consultant responded that a bridge over the highway would not be possible. The street connection under the bridge, along the tracks, is a critical connection and will likely remain so.
- Another Working Group member recalled an MIT class from a few years ago that suggested creating a new datum at the level of the bridge, with a full parking deck below, then bridging over the tracks. Connectivity is critical, and some of these are feasible and others aren't. The connection from Fawcett St to Sherman Street is all MBTA land so it seems quite logical and doable. Terminal Road is very important, but maybe that road could align with the traffic light so it could be a four-way light.
- A member commented that another important consideration is the movie theater, which many people love.
- Some members commented that the open space proposed for the shopping center is too small. With this density, there should be more open space to support the residential. One member suggested, why don't we permit more height and create more open space. The consultant replied that with two large open spaces (Danehy Park and Fresh Pond Reservation) in close proximity to the shopping center, pocket parks might be more appropriate for this space than a large central open space. City staff said that North Point had a 20% open space requirement for the district, and that an increase to a proportion like that might be more appropriate for this area.
- Another member said that the open space in the plan is not well located. Against the parkway is not a viable location because it is against gridlock or speeding cars.
- A member suggested that the shopping center might benefit from smaller pocket parks or hardscaped plazas.
- A member asked about whether the retail was meant to serve the whole district and how the main streets in the Quadrangle and the Shopping Center would differ. The consultant said there are different visions for the main streets of the Quadrangle and the Shopping Center. The retail proposed for the main street in the Quadrangle would be primarily showrooms and shops associated with the industrial uses, with neighborhood amenity retail. The Quadrangle main street intersects the diagonal park, which connects you to the Shopping Center. This is a complementary type of retail to the Shopping Center retail.
- A Working Group member urged the City to enlarge the study area to show the whole area subject to flooding. He supports building over the whole site and building a large park that extends over the rails or over the highway. He also stated that most of the

discussions about traffic focus on cars, but w people walking and biking are slowed down by the cars and lack of street connectivity. The consultant said that an additional 4-6 feet addresses many of the flooding in the Quadrangle. There is little flooding in the Shopping Center area.

- A Working Group member said that the reason we're doing this planning is because of a lot of discontent right now about traffic. What are the opportunities we can do now to start to address these issues, as we wait for the longer-term redevelopment of the area? Regarding addressing regional traffic, another member asked whether we should consider a commuter rail stop or bus rapid transit.
- A Working Group member asked, would it be possible to move the whole Shopping Center program to the Quadrangle area, and then put only residential on the current Shopping Center site? The consultant said that would be very challenging given existing buildings.
- A Working Group member said that Assembly Row should not necessarily be considered the ideal model. Assembly does not feel like a real neighborhood, nor does University Park. "Lifestyle Centers" rarely feel like livable neighborhoods. There is one City Market in Atlanta is lively and feels like a neighborhood—it's one of the few ones that work—and might be a precedent for Alewife.
- A Working Group member asked whether we could improve the connection from Rindge Towers to the Shopping Center. There is no bus that goes from Concord Ave to Alewife. A bus from the T to Concord Ave would go by the Shopping Center. City staff said that this had been studied previously but was not currently in plans. Another member said a bridge would greatly increase connectivity from the T to Quadrangle and to the Shopping Center, and suggested a ped/bike elevated roadway connecting these places.

Public Comments

- A member of the public commented that there are a lot of great ideas in this plan but the most spirited conversations are about mobility. What about other ideas to connect neighborhoods, such as building over the tracks from the proposed Whole Foods site to Rindge Towers. The consultant responded that air-rights projects are difficult to realize. Even higher value sites in Boston have not successfully been developed if dependent on air rights.
- Another member of the public commented that Assembly Square is not a desirable place to be, and parking is difficult there.
- Some others commented that the uses and street network were exciting, but there was shared concern about traffic and increasing connectivity.