

2017-07-27

**Alewife Working Group #11**

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Committee Attendees

John DiGiovanni, Catherine Connolly, Margaret Drury, James Butler, Eric Grunebaum

Staff / Consultant Present

**Staff:** Stuart Dash, Melissa Peters, Gary Chan, Cassie Arnaud, Stephanie Groll

**Utile:** Tim Love, Kennan Lagreze, Nupoor Monani

Committee Members Absent

Doug Brown, Geoff Wood, Jennifer Gilbert, Karen Dumaine, Margaret Gadon, Mark DiOrion, Sam Stern, Tom Ragno, William Ahern

Eleven members of the public present.

**Meeting overview**

Tim Love presented the overall vision integrating Alewife into the citywide mobility and open space network and proposed development scenarios for specific sub-districts beyond the Quadrangle. The presentation is available [here](#).

**Committee Discussion**

**Alewife framework**

- Members responded positively to the vision for the overall open space network in Alewife. They strongly felt that the ped-bike bridge across the tracks should also be included in this long term vision. They also suggested looking at the potential of transforming the former clay mine tunnel into a bike path, and looking at another connection from Blair Pond to Alewife Brook across the tracks to strengthen the overall network.
- A member noted that the pedestrian path created on Fern Street does not have a landing across the street when it ends in Danehy Park. They mentioned an inclined dirt path that is created along a desire line extending into the park from this point, and recommended this be paved as a permanent path. Members also noted that the road proposed to the south of Danehy Park cuts through an ongoing construction site and recommended realigning it to go around the parcels at the end of Bay Street Road.
  - The consultant team responded that they would look at possibilities to strengthen connections between the new network and Danehy Park.
- Members want to know how cars exit the Fresh Pond Mall with the new street network, and how pedestrian circulation would change.
  - The consultant team responded that they would drive south on the new main street and make a right to exit onto the Parkway. They further explained that pedestrian connections would remain the same but are improved and made safer as part of the proposal.
- One member noted that there would be about 7,000 new jobs added in the Quadrangle, and the Triangle would see a similar number after complete buildout. He felt this made a strong argument for a commuter rail station and asked the City to take a lead in advocating for this. He is hopeful

that after a decade of public lobbying maybe this would be realized, and felt that Envision Cambridge was the appropriate avenue to initiate this effort.

- The consultant team responded that they would find out from the economic development and real estate consultants whether this jobs ratio could support a new station.
- A committee member noted that there has been a huge amount of value added to the City's tax base through a recent land deal with large investors in Alewife. They asked if this could be allocated to constructing the ped-bike bridge across the tracks.
- One member noted that the proposal seems very aspirational and asked how the City plans to implement it. She noted that many key improvements depend on the City actively paying for them directly, which historically has not been the approach, or relying on developers volunteering their land. She further noted that some of the ideas have been proposed in past plans but not yet implemented. In recent memory, the community was disappointed by the misrepresentation of the scale of open spaces in the proposal and what was eventually presented in the zoning petition for Volpe, and asked the City how this could be avoided for Alewife.
  - The consultant team responded that they are relatively optimistic about the scale, types, and mix of assumed development because it has been carefully calibrated to consider current market conditions. The way to ensure implementation along these lines is through tighter land regulations and targeted investments in public realm. They also noted that the specificity of the larger vision works better for advocacy, garnering support among the community, and pursuing new private development to align with it.
- One member asked if TIFs would be a viable way to fund desired public improvements like the bridge. Members also asked about the amount of funds needed for these improvements like the bridge, commuter rail station, new parks, without which they felt the discussion of implementation was too abstract.
  - The consultant team responded that there is a strong perception of segregating City resources that come with a discussion of TIFs. Even if it was a viable mechanism, it would need a strong political justification and support from the City Council.
  - City staff also noted that TIFs require an upfront investment and bet that development will follow and future taxes would pay off the loan.

### **Open space network**

- Members supported the vision and noted that Cambridge has a unique potential in terms of open space and public realm. There are a lot of large open spaces, so the focus should be on strengthening the connections between them. They noted that Grand Junction presents great potential for such a connection from Allston to Somerville.
- Another member observed that even with the new open space network in Alewife, it seemed disconnected from the rest of the city when seen on the citywide map. They asked that the team look at providing more connections and making the shopping center a node in connecting Alewife outward.
- Members would like to see bike infrastructure strengthened along the connection from Fresh Pond to the river.
  - The consultant team agreed and said that such discussions help set priorities and hierarchies for the open space network.

**Public comment**

- One person noted that the green space along the river was very scant, and asked what this plan could do to widen it.
  - The consultant team identified the challenges as arterial roads and limited funding from the DCR. They instead suggested focusing on the quality of frontage along the river.
- Another person asked about the potential for a pedestrian bridge from Allston to Cambridgeport.
  - City staff agreed that this was a good opportunity but noted it comes with challenges, some of which the City has studied as part of the Waterfront Plan.
- Another person noticed that the mid-block connections were not shown as green spaces in the overall vision. She asked for these to be clearly identified, and for the team to study their stormwater retention potential.
  - The consultant team agreed that this should be shown on the plans, but not as public open space, rather as a part of a permeable surface map.
- One person was worried about the balance between buildings and vegetation. He noted that the Quadrangle was planned for much lower density to mitigate the effects of development in the triangle, but the industrial-commercial type of development increases this.
  - The consultant team mentioned that these issues would be addressed in the next phase of planning in coordination with the Climate Preparedness and Resilience Plan.
  - They further said that the development density is not much higher than what was planned but allows the City to achieve a number of economic development objectives as well.
- One person expressed concerns about the area around Jerry's Pond. He noted it cannot be capped because of flood concerns, and asked how it could be made usable in the future.
- Another person strongly felt that with the amount of additional population estimated for this area the City has an obligation to create new public infrastructure like playgrounds, neighborhood parks and libraries.
- One person asked how people within the quadrangle would be transported around. He asked that the City participate in expanding capabilities of TMA to support new densities. He further added that adjacent neighborhoods are not well served by public transportation and this would limit the impact of the shopping center.
- A representative of the Huron Village Business Association expressed concerns about retaining small businesses in light of new retail in Alewife.
- Another member asked to see the traffic impacts of 9,000 new jobs.
  - The consultant team responded this would be covered in the September meeting.