

2017-08-23

**Envision Cambridge Advisory Committee #9**

---

**Committee Attendees**

Alexandra Offiong, Josh Gerber, Tom Stohlman, Robert Winters, Ruth Allen, Ruth Ryals, Zeyneb Magavi

**Staff / Consultant Present**

**Staff:** Iram Farooq, Melissa Peters, Stuart Dash, Gary Chan

**Utile:** Tim Love, Nupoor Monani, John McCartin

**Committee Members Absent**

Bethany Stevens, Bill Kane, Dennis Swinford, Ebi Poweigha, Frank Gerratana, Jeff Kiryk, Joseph Maguire, Marlinia Antoine, Matthew Wallace, Naia Aubourg, Risa Mednick, Tom Sieniewicz, Zuleka Queen-Postell

Seven members of the public present.

**Meeting overview**

Tim Love presented an overview of the Envision Cambridge process and summarized the role of the Advisory Committee thus far. Thereafter, John McCartin led a facilitated discussion to review community interaction goals, strategies, and actions. The presentation is available [here](#).

**Committee Discussion**

- Members wanted to know how community interaction and the topics it covers fit within the scope of a master plan, noting that from the material presented, only the citywide amenities map relates to their idea of master planning.
  - City staff responded that as comprehensive plans evolve and become more community and social sustainability focused, topics such as Community Interaction have come to be included. This topic was included in the scope of the plan as “Social Cohesion” but was later renamed as “Community Interaction” based on feedback from the public.
  - Consultant team responded that Envision Cambridge makes a departure from traditional master planning to focus more strongly on goal-based citywide planning. Community engagement from the listening and visioning phases in year one of the plan also drew these topics out very strongly.
- One member identified the dramatic increase in transiency as the biggest factor affecting community interaction, and related this to the type of housing that is being developed.
- Another member pointed out safety and security of housing should be included as a missing topic.
  - Consultant team clarified that issues pertinent to this were being covered more deeply in the housing working group.
- One member identified proximity of community resources, diversity of built form, and presence of “third places” (cafes, nail salons, squares, etc.) relative to residential density as an enabling factor for community interaction, noting that traditional zoning restricts these functions from being developed in residential neighborhoods.
  - The consultant team suggested adding a “third places” zone or overlay district which would allow such functions.

- Members asked about the role of universities and large businesses in encouraging community interaction, particularly with respect to daycare and early childhood development. They would like to see strategies developed to enable this.

### **Goals, strategies and actions discussion**

Members made suggestions of topics to add to the goals, and strategies within each goal as noted below.

#### **Inclusion of diversity**

- Members asked to include clear language in the goal statement about enabling people to interact and participate across a diverse set of groups.  
Suggestions for new strategies or actions were -
- Develop programs that encourage cross-cutting among diverse groups of residents, for example playgrounds near senior centers.
- Create a culture of respect of diversity.
- Encourage a diversity of incomes in each neighborhood so schools are mixed.
- Promote avenues to gather and share knowledge of community resources such as neighborhood-wide mailing lists, which are open and accessible by all.

#### **Social cohesion and social capital**

- Members thought that the neighborhood is too large a spatial unit by which to evaluate the presence of social capital, they suggested it should be looked at across a group of blocks, or a “micro-neighborhood.” They supported existing City efforts like the Block Party Program which encourages interaction at the “micro-neighborhood” scale.
- Members also noted recent instances where common concerns were instrumental in bringing the community together, such as the development of the Inman Square and Harvard Square Neighborhood Associations.
- Members asked to amend the goal language to “...values and spaces that and grow social capital...”

Suggestions for new strategies or actions were -

- Encourage sports leagues in the City to promote social cohesion.
- Mention openness as a factor of Cambridge that attracts people to the city.
- Address the role of built form in affecting social cohesion. Regulate elements of the built form that deter from social cohesion such as high-rise buildings and tall fences.

#### **Civic engagement**

Suggestions for new strategies or actions were -

- Promote indoor spaces for public gathering and expression.
- Actively support Neighborhood Associations.
- Develop flexibility in existing and new branch libraries to serve as community meeting and gathering spaces.
- Encourage civic engagement around shared interests and activities, and independent of political agendas.

#### **Healthy living**

Suggestions for new strategies or actions were -

- Connect parks and places where people gather through a cohesive and memorable network.
- Encourage wild parks, natural habitats, urban agriculture, and community gardens

- Develop the riverfront as a destination with active uses and programs like the Memorial Drive closings.
- Expand usable spaces into the river through public docks.
- Increase the number of beds and shelters available to opioid users.
- Rehabilitate reuse churches and other physically obsolete structures to provide these services.
- Develop human services programs that go into neighborhoods and perform health checks.

### **Learning and play**

- Members would like the emphasis of this topic to be on entertainment and enrichment rather than public health.  
Suggestions for new strategies or actions were -
- Develop a calendar of public events in the city which supports listings from universities, arts organizations, businesses, social clubs, etc. as a single-point resource for people of all ages.
- Encourage co-location of programs for kids and adolescents with adults.

### **Art and expression in public life**

- Suggestions for new strategies or actions were -
- Encourage more spontaneity in the public realm.
- Relax restrictions on noise, large gatherings which impede street entertainment.
- Attract artists and performers from outside the city through events like Porch Fest, Danehy Park Jazz Festival.
- Celebrate city traditions through events like Fluff Fest (in Somerville.)
- Create mechanisms to provide funding to conduct activities that encourage festivals, block parties, cultural celebrations.

### **Public comment**

- Some members seconded an earlier suggestion about expanding the presence of public libraries and reimagining them as social gathering spaces with amenities like free Wi-Fi.
- Members would like businesses and institutions to create flexible space in their facilities to allow alternative uses, and asked that the City look into mechanisms to incentivize this.
- Members pointed out the role of healthy trees in supporting the vibrancy of neighborhoods and public life along the street. They asked that the City encourage this of private developers and invest in it themselves.
- One member commented on the privatization of art in the city and wanted to see the City encourage public art programs to reinforce art as an expression of public and community life.
- One member asked the planning team to reference the goals derived from the Diversity Inclusion Workshop conducted by City Council.
- Another member mentioned the Tobin School as an opportunity for creating a new public space in West Cambridge.
- One member suggested looking at creating a cricket ground to serve the large South Asian community in the city.
- One member suggested creating institutions such as a city newspaper and Cambridge history museum to celebrate the city's life and past.