

ENVISION CAMBRIDGE

2017-10-25

Envision Cambridge Advisory Committee #11

Committee Attendees

Alexandra Offiong, Robert Winters, Ruth Allen, Tom Stohlman, Zeyneb Magavi

Staff / Consultant Present

Staff: Stuart Dash, Melissa Peters, Gary Chan

Utile: Tim Love, Nupoor Monani

Richard Burck Associates: Richard Burck, Sam Valentine

Committee Members Absent

Bethany Stevens, Bill Kane, Ebi Poweigha, Frank Gerratana, Jeff Kiryk, Jon Alvarez, Josh Gerber, Joseph Maguire, Marlinia Antoine, Matthew Wallace, Naia Aubourg, Risa Mednick, Ruth Ryals, Tom Sieniewicz, Zuleka Queen-Postell

Six members of the public present.

Meeting overview

Tim Love presented existing conditions and goals for citywide open space and draft recommendations for improving connectivity between existing large open spaces. The presentation is available [here](#).

Committee Discussion

- Members thought that the goals did not adequately address conditions of Cambridge's open spaces and focus only on connections between them. They would like to also add goals about creating new open space in general, and especially through private development.
- Referring to open space studies that have already been conducted, a member asked the team to look through the recommendations and try to identify why projects have not been implemented. They appreciated the focus on creating a system of open space, and were excited about the possibility of a safe network that would allow kids and teens to bike through without supervision.
- Members encouraged the team to work with non-profit and community organizations that could help program existing open spaces for year-round and all-age activities.
- Members wanted to see recommendations to make privately owned public spaces truly public, by enhancing visibility and providing clear public access.
- Members suggested implementing a system of land valuation to imagine the soil as a usable resource.
 - Another member seconded this idea, saying this would promote the preservation of trees or require compensation from developers that could grow the tree canopy.
 - The consultant team responded that redevelopment can also aid in the expansion of the tree canopy through the right regulations, as is being proposed for Alewife.
- Members asked if the recommendations for improvements to Harvard Street and Garden Street would impact parking or vehicular access to these streets.
 - The consultant team responded that recommendations could include improvements such as tree canopy or sidewalk conditions, but the right of way would remain unchanged.
 - Another member suggested making Harvard Street and Garden Street "slow streets" by imposing a speed limit of 20 mph.

ENVISION CAMBRIDGE

- Members supported the idea of creating a bike-pedestrian connection behind the Museum of Science, noting it is consistent with the history of the land bridge. They pointed the consultant team to a couple of past efforts to make this connection. They recommended that the team build on these efforts and re-engage the owners of the garage rather than proposing new bridges at this location.
 - The consultant team responded that proposing a new bridge may propel the investigation of less expensive options as well, such as connections around the back of the Museum of Science, floating docks, or boardwalks. The City should take a strong position on pushing this forward.
- One member raised a concern about the connection proposed through the Volpe site, noting they might no longer be possible since they're not required in the zoning.
 - Another member responded that they were surprised to see that the recommendations of the Bike Vision Plan, which at the time was floated as an aspirational plan, be considered as if they were set in stone.
 - City staff responded that as long the broad idea gets community buy-in, the details would still have to be worked out in later planning stages. For example, a connection to Grand Junction through the Volpe site is not necessarily contingent on the size and location of the open space shown.
 - The consultant team responded that the plan serves to build advocacy, and becomes a record of collective memory and consensus.
- A member asked if connections through the Volpe site would have accommodations for parking and vehicles, so everyone could enjoy these amenities.
 - The consultant team responded that the details of this plan and site are outside the scope of Envision Cambridge and being worked out through a separate process.
- A member asked if there were plans to have water taxis at Broad Canal. They noted that many different advocacy groups are fighting for the road right-of-way, but the waterways are largely unclaimed.
 - The consultant team supported the idea, but noted it would be difficult to make a case for such a system. Unlike the Boston Harbor, the Charles River doesn't have many population or jobs nodes to create the demand for water transportation.
- Some members were opposed to creating cycle tracks through Cambridge Cemetery. They were open to the idea of allowing bicycles on certain routes, if access was restricted and easy to manage. A member provided some historic context and mentioned that the proposed cycle track on Coolidge Ave was originally a path abutting Mt. Auburn Cemetery.
- A member asked the team to consider the possibility of creating a bridge or tunnel near Danehy Park, noting that the connection across Sherman Street was too far off the network.
- One member felt that including conceptual ideas like the path through cemeteries on the same plan as concrete and higher priority proposals like the Grand Junction distract from the implementation of the latter. They identified the Grand Junction Railroad and connections from Alewife T to Fresh Pond as the top priorities of this plan.
- One member suggested activating the space below unutilized bridges with public art and develop them as nodes in the open space network.
- Members saw an opportunity to use the open space network as programed pathways that could operate like Boston's Freedom Trail and provide historical information about the spaces it threads together.
- Committee members were asked to map additional connections that should be considered a part of the open space network. They included connection from Harvard Square to the Charles River, Garden Street to the Harvard T, Watertown Greenway to Willow Ave (through Mt. Auburn Cemetery), crossing across Alewife Brook Parkway to Fresh Pond Mall, and Fresh Pond to Alewife Brook Reservation (along Blair Pond)

ENVISION CAMBRIDGE

Public comment

- An attendee commented that the plan doesn't address how to expand open space resources in underserved communities. They would like the team to understand the city's open spaces based on the types, programs, and users.
- Members asked for more detail about the proposals for Harvard Street and Garden Street.
- One member felt that the diagonal park and path system in the Alewife Quadrangle was not adequate for the neighborhood. They supported the Lakeview-Coolidge St connection but pointed out that the directionality of a new cycling route will need more thought as Lakeview is one way for half its length. They also pointed out that the character of Garden Street is not uniform throughout its length, noting that traffic calming techniques may have to be used to make it pedestrian and bicycle friendly.
- A member shared a historical proposal for a rail crossing over the Fitchburg Line near the Jefferson Homes. They asked the team to also pay close attention to the needs of pedestrians and not only bicyclists.
 - City staff pointed out to one such crossing that was recently built – the Yerxa Road tunnel was expensive and posed implementation challenges while working with the MBTA but was pursued because the City saw value in creating access at that location. If other such proposals arise they must be weighed considering the cost and relative value created.