

**2017-11-16**

**Alewife Working Group  
Meeting #12**

Committee Attendees

Tom Ragno, Eric Grunebaum, Sam Stern, Margaret Drury, James Butler, William Ahern, Mark DiOrio

Staff / Consultant Present

Staff: John Bolduc, Melissa Peters, Stuart Dash, Wendell Joseph, Gary Chan, Cassie Arnaud  
Utile: Tim Love, Kennan Lagrèze  
Kleinfelder: Nathalie Beauvais

Committee Members Absent

Karen Dumaine, Geoff Wood, Jennifer Gilbert, John DiGiovanni, Doug Brown, Catherine Connolly

Approximately twenty members from the public.

Meeting Overview

- Presentation from John Bolduc on the Climate Change Preparedness and Resiliency (CCPR) plan and Utile on resiliency and zoning recommendations for the Alewife area.

Committee Comments on CCPR draft plan

- A working group member noted that there are surface parking lots that flood regularly and asked how the city distinguishes between retrofit and new buildings?
  - New buildings are easier to address upfront. Wet or dry floodproofing and raising utilities are appropriate retrofitting strategies.
- A working group member said that the City should study the impacts of strategies on neighboring parcels. For example, during Hurricane Sandy, some homes were surrounded by sandbags and directed more water onto neighboring properties.
- A working group member stated that to reduce the heat island effect, the introduction of a water feature that provides both community activity and local cooling should be considered.
  - One of the strategies in the resilience category is thinking about outdoor thermal comfort. As it gets hotter, there will be stretches of days where the ambient air temperatures are increasingly uncomfortable. There are strategies around cooling and shading for outdoor thermal comfort in CCPR.
- A working group member noted that there is a lot of asphalt in the Quadrangle that makes it difficult to impact temperatures.
  - We have maps of air temperature for the area plus a tree canopy map. The CCPR team has looked at correlations between tree canopy and temperature. We think we can come up with temperature reduction estimates if we add a certain number of trees. The next stage is to create a plan that specifies quantities, costs, and tools available for implementation.
- A working group member commented that the strategies focus more on increasing tree canopy than removing asphalt.
  - The CCPR model looks at the effects of cool roofs, tree canopies, and reduced pavement individually. The next step is to combine the strategies in one model.

- A working group member stated that neighborhoods are seriously under-canopied. An inventory of locations where trees can be supported should be incorporated because trees are unevenly distributed across the City.
  - The upcoming Urban Forest Master Plan will address this citywide. This will be led by DPW with CDD support. We already completed the first urban canopy assessment; citywide we have a 30% tree canopy, and we have a technical maximum canopy of 65%. It's not likely we can reach the maximum value, but we will aim to increase canopy citywide.
- Jerry's Pond may have some stormwater retention potential, and there is a lot of impervious surfaces with potential for removal north of Jerry's Pond. The Working Group understands that further environmental testing is necessary to make this site viable.
- A working group member asked how the City would characterize DCR's willingness to be a partner on increasing tree canopy? Areas along the Parkways were well planted, but many trees are dead.
  - DCR gave us background information to explain the watershed and dam functionality in CCPR. We recognize that DCR is under-resourced.
- A working group member noted that the biggest challenges are existing buildings and infrastructure. When you look at other areas that may be in worse shape such as Los Angeles, are there programs in place to incent property owners to address these issues?
  - There are some regulatory and funding programs. We haven't seen a program that functions well in relation to retrofitting buildings yet.
- A working group member asked how the area will function without road access during flood events?
  - The modeling has probabilities. For precipitation, we looked at the 10 and 100-year events. Therefore, the probability of road flooding is based on those percentages of 1% or 10%. The precipitation data does not have the granularity of the storm surge data where projections can go to 0.1%.
  - CCPR tried to develop projections to determine if existing assets and neighborhoods are at risk. The modeling indicates that the duration of flooding is relatively short, probably on the order of a day. This assumes the Amelia Earhart Dam functions as designed in terms of pumping water to the harbor.
  - Public Works is distributing a brochure with strategies to strengthen houses for flooding. Sometimes the strategies are relatively simple such as protecting a bulkhead.

### **Discussion on Envision Cambridge Alewife Zoning and Implementation**

- A working group member noted that the proposed zoning did not discuss maximum FARs. FAR is important to include because 21<sup>st</sup>-century technology is allowing higher floor to floors.
  - One of the consultant team's recommendations is to set maximums by floors and not by heights so that developers create ample floor to floor rather than compressing as many floors as possible. Utile developed a similar model of zoning within Boston but at the end of the day FAR was added as a cap. We haven't internally decided about whether to include a FAR cap. Density under current zoning matches our proposed district average when tested.
- A working group member noted that to provide the necessary sidewalks and elevated platform you must get into the private property. It sounds like a taking. The plan should increase sidewalks, but it cannot put zoning in place that is overly difficult for developers to achieve.
  - Roads are placed along existing property lines so that they don't negatively impact parcels. This creates value with a better "address" on private property.

- A working group member noted that they were surprised the industrial area is not allowed to go to 125-ft.
  - Heights were limited to decrease traffic impacts on the Parkways and Concord Avenue.
- A working group member noted that the proposed parking requirements (like Kendall Square) would be difficult without better connectivity. If some of these connections were in place, we could hold the developer to these proposed parking standards.
- A working group member noted that we can allow taller buildings if we have better infrastructure, like the bridge. Instead of using special permits to generate infrastructure, the City can implement the infrastructure, so heights can increase. I want the City to invest in this area.
- A working group member noted that if someone had estimated how many people would use the Minuteman Trail it would have never been built. There's a series of complaints as to why we shouldn't build the bridge and the numbers never work initially. If we introduce a commuter rail stop, people are going to start developing patterns of transit that rely on this stop. There are a lot of reasons as to why we should do this now, and if we don't include the stop and bridge in this plan, it will never happen. It may be a 5–10-year plan and may require the City lobbying hard with the MBTA to get the stop. Alewife will produce a massive amount of value for the City and access to transit is imperative. They do recognize there could be private contributions to the implementation, but there needs to be necessary leadership from the City. They don't know what the exact mechanism is but if you could construct 45% more buildings, you could use this as a funding tool.
- A working group member would like the city to consider tax increment financing.
  - There is a characterization that the City is opposed to TIFs and this is not the case.
- A working group member noted that one of the big issues that withstand in Alewife is that we consistently see a bridge in past planning processes, but we do not see on-the-ground implementation. We want real mechanisms to drive the bridge.
- A working group member noted that to show the bridge in plans for decades and not build one says that it's not a city priority.
- A working group member stated that the zoning shows special permit heights. Is there a lower as of right amount?
  - As of right heights are still to be determined after discussion with this group.
- A working group member commented that we are building a lot of residential with no ground floor active uses to serve the residential.
  - We propose retail along Wilson Road and in the Shopping Center as the neighborhood retail centers.
- A working group member stated that if we think that within a few years there could be a market for taller buildings we should discuss this possibility now.
  - We are allowing higher heights, but developers must earn increases through trade-offs.
  - The heights illustrated are representative of public feedback.

### **Public Comments**

- A member of the public said they are unclear of how the menu/checklist interacts with these additional height bonuses. When will there be specific proposals?
  - We're working with the other Envision working groups on these issues because there are many incentives to balance. It's conceptually structured and will refine over time.
- A member of the public said that they see more and more split construction types which could lead to higher building heights.
  - Under state code, 70-feet or greater requires high-rise construction building code.

- A member of the public asked where the ground floor starts in our analysis since there is a requirement for a 4-foot plinth? This sounds like a taking if the flood plain is elevated.
  - We considered that taking in our analysis. The code measures from the ground.
- A member of the public noted that most of this development would be wood construction which is vulnerable to fires. They are concerned about the durability of this construction system and facilitating this construction type.
- A member of the public noted that when the City of Boston finished the overlay districts for Fenway, Boston did an in-depth economic development value analysis and tried to balance or match it with public space benefits. They encouraged the City to understand the economics and negotiate the requirements. It underlies why some of the asks for infrastructure are reasonable compared to economic value.
  - We did a net revenue analysis, and it's been very present in our discussions.
- A member of the public said they don't think the special permit is a strong method for building development and review. Additionally, we need big canopy trees, not the small ones to combat the heat.
- A member of the public raised the issue of existing uses. They applauded the team for coming up with a more interesting mix of uses and encouraged an effort to identify public spaces within the neighborhood. They don't see why the Fayerweather School is removed. Public gathering spaces are an important part of a resiliency plan.
  - Development projects above a certain height might have to provide community space within the project.
- A member of the public said we must get most of the utility lines underground. Also, if we are talking about 125-ft tall buildings, then the shadow implications point towards greater open space requirements that are linked to that size.
- A member of the public said that they had to work hard as abutters to get 55 Wheeler Street to acknowledge that they needed to support a connection between Terminal Road and Wheeler. They don't think we can assume these private owners will fall in line with our suggestions.
- A member of the public mentioned that the Wheeler Street project is going to the Planning Board. It's clearly not going to be built as an "A Street." They are curious how the greenway interacts with the A Street plinth. There is still an issue with how trucks access these places. Additionally, the parking comparisons to Kendall Square are not accurate, and they doubt how it will work. The transportation issues must be solved first.
  - Full transportation impacts and critical sums analysis will be discussed at the December meeting.