

Alewife Working Group Meeting #14
April 12, 2018
Notes

Committee Attendees

William Ahern, Doug Brown, James Butler, Catherine Connolly, John DiGiovanni, Mark DiOrio, Margaret Drury, Margaret Gadon, Eric Grunebaum, Melissa Zampitella

Meeting Summary

Susanne Rasmussen presented the Critical Sums methodology, impacts, and proposed mobility strategy. The Critical Sums analysis shows that three additional intersections exceed the critical sums threshold under the proposed zoning, due primarily to the increased commercial development in the Quad. She described several strategies, including (but not limited to) low parking maximums, enhanced TDM, improved transit, and improved infrastructure connections, to reduce the auto mode share to a level that would result in no new intersections exceeding the Critical Sums threshold.

See the meeting presentation [here](#).

Working Group Discussion

- There was a discussion about the timeline for design and construction of the bike/ped bridge between the Alewife Quadrangle and Triangle.
 - The City stated the current plan is to start construction in 6-7 years contingent on development happening. Assuming even pace of development, bridge would be constructed at 40% buildout. Assuming no reduction in employee mode share, the first new intersection to exceed the critical sums threshold occurs sometime after 40% buildout.
 - One member suggested the City should commit to a date for bridge completion, so that developers will build with the expectation that it will be there.
 - One member asked if development already in Alewife is accounted for in the 40% buildout trigger for bridge construction. Staff clarified 40% refers to new development buildout, the level at which critical sums are exceeded using current mode splits. (Changing mode split could help to not exceed critical sums.) Staff noted bridge timing is based on design and other items in the capital budget.
 - One member asked when the 3-year design process would start. City staff said it would start three years ahead of when construction would start. Several members felt this was too long a wait.
 - One member asked if the design process takes three years. Staff replied yes and clarified this is based on the state's approval schedule.
 - City staff said design funding is a substantial sum. They clarified for the working group that the design is only at an early conceptual stage right now, that there has been no engineering yet.
 - One members said the bridge should be shown on the maps. Staff clarified all graphics are being edited to include the bridge.
 - Staff clarified the bridge rights-of-way have not been acquired for the Quadrangle side's landing.
 - City staff noted the pedestrian bridge is on the capital planning schedule as early as it can be given the city's other capital commitments. They asked the working group if there still support for the proposed plan and the level of development, given the concerns about the timing of infrastructure?
 - Several members expressed their support for the plan without caveat.
 - Several members responded with overall agreement with the plan, but a request to "push it further," with suggestions such as moving up the bridge schedule, including a fee for residential development, increasing the fee level.
 - One member wants to see the city do more and faster transportation and climate resiliency infrastructure.

- There was a discussion about the commuter rail station.
 - One member said the area is ready for commuter rail service, suggesting a TIGER grant application. They pointed to timing of Boston Landing's construction as a model.
 - One member asked if the bridge design is coordinated with future rail platforms. Staff said the designs are compatible, and rail station design could begin whenever it is funded.
 - One member said the city should be more aggressive in lobbying the state to develop a station at Alewife.
 - Staff clarified that the City is not committing to build the station, and that the City has been advocating for it for 20 years. They said the land use plan will help make the case that demand is there.

- There was a discussion about parking requirements:
 - City staff noted the importance of lower parking maximums to reduce traffic. One member asked if this would hold back development. Staff responded that many projects in Cambridge have these requirements and that the concern is more about consistency across developments.
 - One member said charging for parking would increase their business costs, as they would have to pay employee parking. Staff said the intention is to move cost burden to end user (employee not employer), and that PTDM requires building owners to report this annually.
 - One member suggested talking soon with property owners and developers and communicate that the new density allowed under revised zoning is the "carrot" that should be used to get private funds. City staff said PTDM plans always include "carrots and sticks" and that charging for parking is the most effective method.
 - One member supported the parking requirement recommendation, including charging end users. They said drivers should be charged by the day and offered a transit subsidy.

- There was a discussion about the development fee.
 - One member asked how much the commercial development fee would raise. City staff said there will be \$12 million for transportation improvements at 60% buildout, only including new developments not in the permitting process yet.
 - One member asked if the development fee applies to residential development. Staff clarified the fee is only on commercial development, because employee auto trips are causing the traffic problems.
 - Another member said the development fee should apply to residential as well, since they will not cause zero auto trips. They suggested making the fee proportional to new trips.
 - Staff said that is a possibility, but added this would run counter to City's housing policy.
 - One member said they liked development fees if spent in the district, but that has not historically been the case.
 - One member suggested increasing the proposed fee.
 - One member stated the development fee should include a subsidy for shuttle usage.

- Other comments from the working group:
 - One member was concerned that the overall strategy is to allow traffic to get worse, then stabilize it there. They said people feel it's already too bad and we should make it better than it is today.
 - One member noted there were three actions related to Alewife at the Joint Working Group meeting in March: to connect Alewife Square, to study urban rail, and to increase commercial development. They said there won't be demand for rail if parking is available at low cost.
 - One member stated the frustration felt by Wheeler Street residents with current T access. Staff said a connection through Terminal Road is potential nearer-term solution.
 - One member said the regional transportation approach is still lacking, suggesting transit out to Route 128.
 - One member suggested incentivizing early development, either by creating a fee schedule that increases over time or by decreasing development rights over time.

Public Comment

- City Councilor Jan Deveraux gave several notes:
 - She said transit needs to be the carrot which precedes development and creates demand.
 - She said today's workers want to commute by transit, bike, walk. If that's our aspiration we need to provide the transit.
 - She agreed Cambridge should reduce the residential parking ratio to .5 and charge the development fee.
 - She noted critical sums don't include some of the intersections.
 - She said we may not be providing enough housing since it's mostly in the shopping center which may not happen by 2030.
 - She noted that huge development pressure in other parts of the city and region drives traffic in Alewife, yet another reason why we should fast-track infrastructure improvements.
 - She also noted the bridge gets more expensive the longer we wait.
- One member of the public said the bridge renderings should show where the bridge will actually go. They also asked if the City can use the parking garage in the triangle to forego the elevator. Staff clarified there is no elevator in the triangle, only ramps. That member of the public said charging for parking is a good idea, but may be difficult as historically it has been free.
- One member of the public suggested placing signals at Spinelli Place and Smith Place. They also asked about the public facility requirements to serve new population?
- Another member of public seconded the consideration of public facilities. They said the development fee should pay for facilities beyond the bridge, and therefore should be increased. They also suggested the bridge carry traffic beyond bikes and pedestrians, at least up to small electric vehicles like golf carts.
- One member of the public (a Wheeler Street resident) supported the bridge's inclusion in the plan, and also stated interest in bus improvements.

Next Steps

May 10th will be the next Alewife Working Group meeting, where the final zoning proposal will be presented. May 16th will be a public meeting to review the full plan.