



Christian Science Plaza Revitalization Project
CAC Working Meeting #4
Monday, April 27, 2009
Location: Christian Science Publishing House Building

CAC Attendees:

Tom Aucella, Belvedere Condo Association
Kelly Brilliant, Fenway Alliance
Mark Cataudella, Boston Symphony Orchestra
Christian Coffin, Hilton Hotel Boston Back Bay
Sybil CooperKing, Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay (NABB)
Marie Fukuda, Fenway Civic Association
Eric Georgi, Resident of St. Germain Street
Ryan Higginson, Resident of the South End
Meg Mainzer-Cohen, Back Bay Association
Donald Margotta, Church Park Apartments
Joanne McKenna, Fenway Community Development Corporation (Fenway CDC)
Craig Nicholson, American Planning Association (APA) – Massachusetts Chapter
Robert Wright, Symphony United Neighbors (SUN)

Ex-Officio Attendees:

Massachusetts State Representative Byron Rushing
Elizabeth Corcoran-Hunt, Office of Representative Rushing
Johanna Sena, Office of Boston City Council President Michael Ross

City of Boston Attendees:

Heather Campisano, BRA
Randi Lathrop, BRA
Inés Palmarin, BRA
Ted Schwartzberg, BRA
Rodney Sinclair, BRA

Church Team Attendees:

Barbara Burley, The First Church of Christ, Scientist
Harley Gates, The First Church of Christ, Scientist
Bob Herlinger, The First Church of Christ, Scientist
Debbi Lawrence, The First Church of Christ, Scientist
Bob Ryan, ML Strategies

Members of the Public:

C. Bronj, Resident
William Chin, MIT Student
David Fixler, Boston Society of Architects
David Holtzman, Fenway CDC
Ellen Shortell, NABB
Barbara Simons, SUN

Meeting Summary

On Monday, April 27, 2009 the fourth working session of the Christian Science Plaza Revitalization Project Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) was called to order at approximately 6:15 p.m. in the Christian Science Publishing House Building by Inés Palmarin, BRA Senior Planner.

Inés welcomed attendees to the meeting and recognized two new members of the CAC: Christian Coffin, General Manager of the Boston Back Bay Hilton Hotel and Eric Georgi, representing St. Germain Street. She added that the Boston Society of Architects will have a representative on the CAC, beginning with the following meeting.

Inés asked if CAC members had any questions, which they did not. She next stated that the group needed to select co-chairs. Two members had expressed interest: Sybil CooperKing, NABB, and Ryan Higginson, Resident of the South End. Sybil and Ryan next stated their reasons for seeking the position of co-chair.

Inés asked if the group prefers to confirm the two as co-chairs at this time, or if they prefer to wait. Marie Fukuda, Fenway Civic Association, stated that she is pleased that neighborhood residents are interested in the co-chair positions. Based on input from CAC members, Inés stated that she will hold off the final confirmation of Sybil and Ryan as co-chairs until the next CAC meeting.

Next, the First Church of Christ, Scientist staff gave a PowerPoint presentation (available on the BRA's project website: <http://www.bostonredevelopmentauthority.org/Planning/PlanningInitsIndividual.asp?action=ViewInit&InitID=143>) on general goals and approaches to revitalization of the Plaza.

Following the presentation, the Church staff offered another opportunity for CAC members to tour the site.

Questions and comments raised in response to the presentation included:

- A CAC member if the drawings in the presentation showed one reflecting pool with a bridge or two separate pools. The presenters responded that the ultimate goal is to have it read as a single pool, but that would actually be two separate pools that could be crossed between at grade.
- Kelly Brilliant, Fenway Alliance, asked if it is necessary to break up the reflecting pool in that manner to create a walkway. The presenters responded that the break is mainly to allow people to have direct access from Huntington Avenue to the Mother Church. The extent of the changes still needs to be studied.
- Marie Fukuda stated that members of the Fenway Civic Association had concerns about open space and the reflecting pool. She asked what the agreement for maintenance was at the time of urban renewal. Was there a time when it was considered that the City would maintain it? Randi Lathrop, BRA Deputy Director of Community Planning, stated that this was not the case as the reflecting pool is on private property.
- Marie next stated that a personal concern of hers is that the act of moving the planters and benches to Huntington Avenue could make them lose their sense of peace. The presenters replied that the idea is to replace these hard surfaces with softer ones and allow people to move through the site more easily.

- Robert Wright, SUN, inquired about the impact of the reflecting pool cut-through on the optical effect of it being a single continuous pool. Specifically, he asked if the cut-through could be hidden so it would not be seen when viewed from either end. The presenters replied that the issue he raised is important. The plan would seek to preserve the sense of a single pool, while also serving the important goal of having a direct welcome and access for the front door of the Mother Church.
- Sybil CooperKing stated that looking at redeveloping the reflecting pool is positive. She added they may want to look at infinity edges and also look at improved sustainability and groundwater management.
- Other CAC members added that on hot days there is an optical illusion of the pavement being a reflecting pool and that they like the idea of pathway leading directly to the Mother Church.
- Christian Coffin stated that developing behind Dalton Street is a good way to allow development while protecting open space. He then asked if there were tax implications with moving private tenants into church buildings. The presenters responded that the net of it will likely be positive for the City's tax rolls.
- Ryan Higginson asked if the new development would be for Church or private uses. The presenters responded that it will be for private uses. They are not sure yet if it will be office or residential use.
- Several CAC members asked what the implications were for the Boston Landmarks Commission (BLC) process. Inés responded that the BRA will continue to coordinate with BLC. Randi added that the BRA has done the same thing on many projects in the past.
- Kelly Brilliant stated that she has mixed feelings about bringing active uses to the reflecting pool, including ice skating. She stated that she wonders about the spiritual aspect of it being active. The presenters replied that it sits empty for five to six months per year, and to have site dormant does not make sense. There will also be spaces for quiet, contemplative reflection in the winter. Currently in the summer it is very active, with kids and families using the fountain.
- Joanne McKenna, Fenway CDC, inquired about the total new square footage. The presenters responded that it is something they are working through, but it will likely be more than what is available to them as-of-right.
- Several CAC members asked if the BRA has a larger vision for all the development going on in the neighborhood. Inés replied that there are several planning processes similar to this one that the BRA is running concurrently for different projects in the area. Randi added that BRA Project Managers and Planners meet internally on a regular basis to coordinate these planning efforts.

The meeting was then adjourned.