

Construction Mitigation Meeting

Monday, May 14, 2007

Honan Allston Library

6:00 p.m.

Harvard Allston Task Force Members

John Cusack, Meeting Chair
Mike Hanlon
Millie Hollum McLaughlin
Harry Mattison
Ray Mellone, Chair, Harvard Allston Task Force
Brent Whelan

Harvard University

Phil Coleman, Turner Construction- Construction Manager for the Science Complex
Chris Conklin, VHB- Traffic consultant
Will Donham
Peggy Hayes
Ken Johnson
Ed LaFlore, CSL- Construction Mitigation Team
Kevin McCluskey
Kelly McQueeney
Allison Nichols
Dave Raszmann
Alison Reinhardt
James Royce, Steven Stimpson and Associates- Landscape consultant

City of Boston

Gerald Autler, Boston Redevelopment Authority
Representative Mike Moran

Task Force member John Cusack started the meeting around 6:15 p.m.

Task Force member Harry Mattison asked Harvard representatives if there was a handout for the meeting because at the last Task Force meeting he thought the request was clear that Harvard should provide handouts and materials in advance so community members can have time to review and digest the information. Task Force member Brent Whelan suggested the meeting be adjourned in the absence of handouts and advance materials. Harry Mattison asked how the community and Harvard could work together cooperatively if Harvard didn't provide information in advance.

Ken Johnson said Harvard sent advance materials on tonight's construction mitigation fencing presentation to Gerald Autler on Friday May 11th to distribute to the Task Force members [the materials were distributed in advance of the meeting]. He apologized that Harvard didn't share any of tonight's construction traffic presentation in advance but Harvard's consultants were working on the presentation right up to the start of this meeting. Ken said that the message that got back to him after the last Task Force meeting

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was the request that Harvard provide materials in advance. He apologized for not having any handouts but said that he wasn't aware that handouts were also requested for this meeting.

Task Force member John Cusack said he thought the understanding was that Harvard would share as much information as it had in advance even if it was up until the last minute. John thought this request was made very clear. He said materials should be distributed more widely to the community not just the Task Force members. John said that Harvard should understand that at tonight's meeting people are going to just take in the information and listen rather than respond. John said for the meeting on roadways it is absolutely necessary to have information in advance and handouts.

Harry Mattison said distributing the information a day or two in advance is still not sufficient and should be distributed 5-10 days in advance. Hard copies of the information should also be left at the library for people who don't have access to the internet.

Community member Paul Alford suggested the meeting be adjourned.

John Cusack said at the last construction mitigation meeting (March 28, 2007) there were a lot of unanswered questions. He said he personally felt like he still needed to hear the information to be presented tonight but he didn't feel people would be able to provide comments on it tonight and should be able to take the information home to think about it.

Gerald Autler, Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), said the request the Task Force made to Harvard was clear and is a reasonable expectation. He said the point of these meetings though is also to get the information and the community shouldn't feel like it has to respond right away because there are plenty of opportunities to respond and provide feedback to the discussion. He said he anticipated Harvard would do its best to honor these requests but said just because the information isn't circulated in advance doesn't mean the meetings are useless.

Harry Mattison said he wasn't saying the meetings were useless but that it could be a better use of everyone's time if the information was circulated in advance and people were given the option to prepare. He expected that the neighborhood would be treated more fairly by Harvard.

Ken Johnson introduced several members from Harvard's Allston Development Group and consultant teams including: Peggy Hayes, Allston Development Group; Allison Nichols, Allston Development Group; Will Donham, Allston Development Group; Alison Reinhardt, Allston Development Group; Ed LaFlore, construction mitigation consultant; Kelly McQueeney, Harvard Environmental Health and Safety department; James Royce, landscape consultant; Chris Conklin, transportation consultant; and Phil Coleman, construction manager for the first science project. Ken said tonight's meeting was going to address two follow up items from the last construction mitigation meeting: construction site fencing and construction traffic.

Jim Royce, Steven Stimpson and Associates, said his team has been analyzing the construction site for the proposed science complex and is in the process of developing landscaping, fencing and lighting options for different sections of the site based on the various view points of the site from the neighborhood. As a result, the buffer options tend to be different for each side of the site. He said he was here tonight to get the community's feedback to this initial analysis.

Discussion and key points:

Within the construction site, existing buildings that will remain will be incorporated and used as part of the construction site fencing/buffer.

The chain link fence behind Windom Street and in between the Sears foundation slab will remain while Harvard does the initial site enabling.

An audience member asked how deep the Sears foundation is. Ken Johnson said Harvard still needs to do an assessment of the Sears foundation slab.

Paul Alford expressed concern that the existing chain linked fence would be the only thing between his home and the Sears site during the slab demolition work. He said it will expose their homes to the work being done and the rats that will come out from under the slab.

Construction worker parking will be at the site of the former Sears building.

An audience member asked what the access is to the construction worker parking. Is it the existing Dedham Parish road? Ken Johnson said yes, it is that existing road (also called Amboy Street). At the last meeting it was discussed that a barrier would be built closing off access from Amboy Street to Windom Street.

Brent Whelan said this site for construction worker parking is completely unacceptable. Harvard should put the parking on Harvard-owned land that is not near the residential portion of the neighborhood. It is very offensive that Harvard would even consider this location. This sends out a red flag to the community. Brent made an urgent request that parking not be located at the Sears site.

Another audience member expressed his support for Brent's comments.

The location of the construction site will require that the current MBTA bus stop located on Western Ave. be relocated west towards the VW car dealership.

Harvard is not charging the construction workers for parking.

The suggestion was made that Harvard should consider using the empty WGBH lot across Western Avenue for construction worker parking.

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Gerald Autler pointed out that site is also adjacent to a residential portion of the neighborhood, namely the Charlesview apartments, and that use of that site would put construction parking right next to those residences.

Ken Johnson said Harvard needs a significant amount of construction worker parking to deliver this project. In January we heard loud and clear from the neighborhood that Harvard needs to provide enough parking for the construction workers to keep them from parking on the neighborhood streets.

Brent Whelan said there are multiple sites on Harvard's property that have been completely unexplored that can be used for construction worker parking. He asked if Harvard would commit to looking at other sites. He said it's unbelievable that Harvard hasn't looked at a significant alternative that's much better for the neighborhood.

Ken Johnson said Harvard would look into it.

An audience member said 800 cars in his backyard is unacceptable. He said Harvard should come back when it is ready to submit a reasonable proposal to the neighborhood.

Audience member Alex Selvig said he couldn't believe what he was hearing at this meeting. He cited the February 9th letter that Harvard sent to Ray Mellone and said none of these questions have really been answered.

John Cusack asked that priority be given to direct abutters to provide questions and comments.

An audience member who lives on the end of Hopedale Street said there doesn't seem to be much leeway between the edge of her yard and the construction site and said now Genzyme is also doing construction. She said she might as well move.

Harry Mattison asked how buildings in the Longwood medical area are constructed with other buildings around and hardly any space. He asked where construction workers park for construction jobs like that.

Ed Laflore said that on construction jobs like that the construction workers are often left on their own to find parking and often end up parking on residential streets or take public transportation.

Gerald said he could invite representatives from the Boston Transportation Department (BTD) to a future meeting to address these questions more specifically. He said in those cases sometimes the streets have to be shut down and construction workers rely on public transportation. Gerald said it had been made very clear by the Task Force that Harvard should provide free parking for its construction workers and provide appropriate buffers to the neighborhood.

Ray Mellone suggested Harvard work out an agreement with CSX to provide construction worker parking on some of their land, specifically, where the trucks are parked along the edge of Western Avenue now. The community does not want Harvard to use Allston as its back door.

Ken Johnson said that Harvard would like to try and gain access to the CSX land.

Kevin McCluskey said this wasn't the first time that Harvard has shown construction worker parking located on the Sears site. He said Harvard has heard the community's concerns and is trying to address them. He said the community asked for a location where Harvard can police and regulate construction worker parking and Harvard has established an area where it can do this and provide intended buffers. He said he heard what the community was saying and he would take it back to his colleagues to look at the options.

Audience Member (Joyce Radnor) said the situation between Harvard and CSX always comes up and Harvard always says it is working with CSX but the community wonders if this is really the case. She said that even if Harvard could get the rights to 1/10th of an acre of the land, it that would help to alleviate pressure on the neighborhood.

Kevin McCluskey said this is a situation that can't easily be resolved. He acknowledged and understood what the community was asking and said Harvard would continue to look into what options exist.

Harry Mattison said Harvard should have known in the first place that parking construction workers cars right in peoples' backyards is not an acceptable location.

Ken Johnson explained that the entire construction site area that will be fenced/buffered is going to take some time to finalize. It is likely that entire area won't be complete or need to be completed until spring 2008. Prior to that time temporary fencing and buffer options will exist within the construction site area.

Harry Mattison asked what Harvard's timeline is for groundbreaking.

Gerald Autler said the earliest Harvard could be approved for this project is September 2007.

Brent Whelan asked about using the current Comcast site for construction worker parking. He said it looks like that site could hold 800 cars.

Ken Johnson said this area was intended to be used for sub-contractors and supervisors parking. Representative Moran said the plan has to be careful to protect the residents on Kingsley and Rena Street. Ken acknowledged this and said Harvard has been working with those residents to develop a traffic plan.

An audience member suggested Harvard use its athletic fields for construction worker parking and asked where Harvard allows cars to park during the lacrosse games. Kevin McCluskey said Harvard does use its athletic fields and parking lots on the Business School campus for special event parking when there is a minimal crowd.

Harry Mattison asked Harvard to provide its parking plan for Harvard's commencement so the Task Force could review it. Kevin McCluskey said he would be happy to provide this information.

Jim Royce continued with his presentation on construction site fencing and buffers.

Where possible there will be landscape buffers in addition to fencing.

One fencing option is fencing with a residential scale and feel.

Planting and landscaping will be mixed in with existing plantings.

Ray Mellone asked if the landscaping buffers done now will have a connection to the landscaping for the first science complex or future science build out. Jim Royce said where possible they are looking at the opportunity to do permanent landscaping. The area on Travis Street is probably an area where this could be done. There will also be places along the site that will be temporary. The plantings will be consistent with New England trees.

What is the set back on Travis Street from the curve to the fence?

Ken Johnson said this set back already exists and Harvard is proposing to add additional landscape buffers.

Which building on Western Avenue is going to be used for the reception area for construction workers? (Joyce Radnor)

Ken Johnson said 114 Western Avenue is being used for the reception area.

Harry Mattison asked what the set back is of the construction fence from Western Avenue. Ken Johnson said the fence will be right to the edge of the property line for the construction zone. Harry asked if it would be possible for the fence line to be pushed back further into the site at some point during construction and if temporary or permanent landscaping could be done on Western Avenue. Phil Coleman, Turner Construction, said the fence line couldn't be pushed back further because the foundation wall for the building is going to be right up to the edge of the construction zone line (this is different from the set back of the science building from Western Avenue when the building is completed). He said typically landscaping and sidewalk improvements are not done until the end of the project and can also depend on the time of the year the project finishes.

Harry Mattison asked that a future version of this presentation reflect the different stages of construction. He said that any temporary landscaping that can be done in this zone on Western Avenue instead of just a long straight wall would be better.

Audience Member Alex Selvig asked if the sidewalks on Western Avenue will remain open during construction. Ken Johnson said yes, the majority of the time the sidewalks will remain open. He said there may be times during the construction period when we have to move pedestrians away from the demolition activities but the sidewalks will reopen at the end of the day when that activity is complete. Ed LaFlore agreed that keeping the sidewalks open during construction is feasible.

Ken Johnson said there is an option to have fencing on Western Avenue that is between 8 feet and 12 feet tall and asked the community to think about the scale.

An audience member who lives on Hopedale Street at Seattle Street asked why there wasn't an option for more landscape buffers in the zone referenced as zone 4 in the presentation. She said that the first floors of those houses are actually raised up from the ground level and the second floor looks beyond and over the science complex site. She asked what the height of the proposed fence would be and if more significant and permanent landscaping could be added. Ken Johnson said Harvard would look into this.

Harry Mattison asked whether the fencing around the construction site would come down as soon as the back side of the building is complete. Ken Johnson said that he thought it would come down but it could be in place for up to 5-10 years.

Jim Royce suggested that more permanent landscape buffers could be installed in the Windom Street zone.

An audience member suggested that dense trees could help visually and also help drown out noise from construction vehicles.

John Cusack asked for clarification about whether the only thing to protect the Windom Street neighbors when the Sears slab is demolished is the existing chain linked fence. John suggested that a rat problem might result from the demolition and the fence might not be enough protection. Ken Johnson said the second fence at the edge of the buffer zone would probably not go up until the Sears site was ready to be used for parking. Ken also said that Harvard needs to still study the demolition methodology that will need to be used for the demolition of the Sears slab.

Ken Johnson said that Harvard will hire geo-technical engineers to study the potential vibration impacts from construction and establish a zone of influence. Prior to any work being done, anyone within that zone of influence can have the hired consultant do a survey of their property to have a visual record.

An audience member suggested that home owners should be given the choice of who does the survey. Ed LaFlore said the geo-technical team hires the survey consultant and they are independent from Harvard. He said residents can look at the DVD and read through the report and if they have any discrepancies it can be discussed before any work starts.

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Harry Mattison said that in a gesture of good will to the community, Harvard should replace the existing chain linked fence behind Windom Street with a 10 foot high, thick, solid fence and bury it 2-3 feet down in the ground. He asked if Harvard would have the analysis of the Sears slab completed before the next community meeting.

Ken Johnson apologized that the analysis of the Sears slab isn't completed yet but assured the community that Harvard is working on this. He said that probably within the next month Harvard would have more information.

Joyce Radnor asked how many holes would need to be made in the Sears slab to do the analysis. Phil Coleman said about 5-10 holes.

An audience member said people in the neighborhood didn't want the construction worker parking at that location.

An audience member said Harvard was asked almost a year ago to work with CSX to gain access to that land and no effort has been made by Harvard to contact CSX. He asked for a progress report from Harvard on its negotiations with CSX.

An audience member asked whether the demolition of the slab and existing buildings would involve dust and hazardous materials.

Ken Johnson said that there will be extensive dust monitoring at the construction site and a pre-construction assessment will be completed. All of this is governed by strict regulations.

Audience member (Joyce Radnor) asked if the environmental assessment would be completed before 100 Windom Street is taken down. Ken said yes. He said that permits are required by the state for the abatement of regulated materials and Harvard will likely apply for these permits in June. Once the building is determined to be clean and free of regulated materials then Harvard can apply to the City for a demolition permit.

Joyce Radnor asked when demolition would take place. Ken said Institutional Recycling Network would be out in early June. In mid-June there will be renovated material removal and in mid-July demolition.

Joyce Radnor asked if the community would be notified when these materials were being removed and when the buildings were being demolished.

Ed LaFlore said the community would be notified and there are strict communications protocols in place as part of the construction mitigation plan. He said Harvard is enforcing a much higher standard than normal contractors do.

An audience member asked for clarification about Harvard planting mature trees vs. non-mature trees. He said the community doesn't want to wait 15-20 years for the trees to

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mature. He said Harvard should plant mature trees in the community as it does on its own campus.

Jim Royce said from a purely planting perspective it is better to plant non-mature trees and let them grow then to immediately plant mature trees.

Jim Royce finished his presentation by saying that it's in his company's scope of work to also think about the lighting options for the construction site so that it is safe but not so bright that it disturbs the abutting residences.

John Cusack said that since there were only 15 minutes left it wouldn't be appropriate to begin the traffic presentation. He asked if Harvard could post the traffic presentation on its web site and leave hard copies at the library in advance of the next Task Force meeting.

Gerald Autler said it would be a slightly ambitious agenda to talk about construction traffic and Harvard's traffic analysis for the science complex at the next Task Force meeting but thought the topics were similar enough that it could work.

Harry Mattison said that given the opposition to using the Sears site for construction worker parking, it wasn't worth the community's time to talk about the construction traffic plan until Harvard presented viable location options for construction worker parking. He said first Harvard needs to figure out where the cars are going to park.

John Cusack agreed but said at the same time he was still anxious to receive the raw data from Harvard about the number of cars/workers related to the construction. Ken Johnson said that the presentation was about the data and not necessarily the parking location so it would still be applicable for Harvard to present the information.

Brent Whelan said the conversation is always going to turn to the CSX land and why Harvard isn't using that land.

John Cusack closed the meeting at 7:50 p.m.