

Harvard Allston Task Force
Meeting Minutes
Monday, May 8th, 2006
Honan-Allston Library
6:30 p.m.

I. Attendance:

Harvard Allston Task Force

Paul Berkeley
Cathy Campbell
John Cusack
Rita DiGesse
Brian Gibbons
Michael Hanlon
Millie Hollum McLaughlin
Harry Mattison
Ray Mellone
Tim Norton

Boston Redevelopment Authority

Linda Kowalcky

Boston Transportation Department

Adam Shulman

Harvard University

Harris Band
Will Donham
Gary Hammer
Kevin McCluskey
Alison Reinhardt

Linda Kowalcky called the meeting to order at approximately 6:35 p.m. and said that she was filling in for Gerald Autler while he was on vacation. Linda informed the Task Force that Harvard submitted its Institutional Master Plan Notification Form (IMPNF) to the BRA on April 28th. The submission of the IMPNF initiates the process to amend Harvard's Institutional Master Plan (IMP) to accommodate Harvard's proposed first science complex and arts/culture projects. Hard copies of the IMPNF were mailed to all of the Task Force members and copies are available at the Honan-Allston Library and the BRA offices in City Hall for the public to review. It is also available on Harvard's web site at www.allston.harvard.edu.

Linda proposed that the date of the next Task Force meeting, May 24, 2006, be the date for a public meeting to discuss the IMPNF and she asked Ray Mellone if he was comfortable with this decision. The Task Force agreed to have the Public Meeting from 6:00-7:30 p.m. on May 24th followed by the Task Force meeting beginning at 7:30 p.m. Linda said that the deadline for public comment submissions on the IMPNF is June 2, 2006 and the BRA will issue its Scoping Determination on June 15, 2006.

Linda passed out a list of proposed agenda items for future task force meetings and said that the BRA will start to phase progress reports into the meeting as well as bring City representatives to meetings when their expertise and experience is pertinent to the topic being discussed. Millie Hollum McLaughlin suggested that discussion of the proposed agenda topics should take place over the course of several Task Force meetings to allow for members to contribute to the discussion and provide their feedback even if they miss a meeting. Linda agreed and said that all of the topics proposed will be continuously discussed and are not limited to discussion on their proposed meeting date. Linda turned the meeting over to Harris Band from Harvard's Allston Development Group to discuss transportation issues.

Harris said that transportation is one of the most important issues to Harvard in developing their Master Plan and that it is one of the strongest issues where Harvard and the neighborhood share aligned interests. Two issues Harvard is concerned with when it comes to transportation in Allston are the transportation connection between Cambridge, Allston and the LMA and access to and from the Allston area in general. Harris described North Allston as an island encompassed by the Charles River, Soldiers Field Road and the Mass turnpike. The dynamics of the area are defined and a lot of the transportation problems have to do with the confinement of the area. Harris began his presentation by sharing Harvard's understanding and analysis of the current transportation conditions in Allston.

Pedestrian Conditions: The main arteries are not pedestrian friendly and the sidewalks are in poor condition. The streets are made up of large impenetrable blocks of mostly commercial property creating a hostile environment for pedestrians. The core streets are highly trafficked roads with poor signal phasing and the streets lack furniture for pedestrian use. The Larz Anderson Bridge and Western Ave. are not very hospitable to pedestrians. The situation is not much different for bicyclist, especially because the Weeks Bridge is not ADA accessible.

Traffic Conditions: A lot of the congestion and traffic problems are a result of the regional traffic going through Allston rather than a result of the traffic produced by the residents of the community. Traffic problems also result from the geography and confinement of the area, the presence of the turnpike ramps, and the fact that trucks are not allowed to drive on Soldier's Field Road.

Parking: Parking is in the neighborhood and in front of stores and retail. Within the area that Harvard has designated for its Phase 1 of development there currently are approximately 1,200 parking spots. Harvard does not foresee a major transportation impact as a result of the first science building. Most of the parking spaces that currently exists on the ground will be reused and the existing inventory is larger than what is needed for the first science building. In the long run there will be real impacts to the existing traffic and neighborhood but it will be relatively small. North Harvard St. is one of the few places in the city where people can actually park for free and walk to transit.

Transit: Existing shuttle service in the area is not extensive. The MBTA bus service in North Allston is adequate but there is not rapid transit or commuter rail access into the community.

Harris asked the Task Force for comments and feedback on Harvard's assessment of the current transportation conditions within the neighborhood. Ray asked if Harris could find out the number of on-street parking spots on North Harvard St. and Mike asked whether the parking spots on that street were patrolled.

Harry commented that the issue of parking shortages within the neighborhood core should also be addressed in the long-term. He also said that Lincoln Street is one of the most dangerous streets within the neighborhood because a lot of cars try to avoid the traffic and cut through this street. Harris agreed that the issue of cut-through traffic is important to address and that there are ways you can direct traffic to prevent cars from cutting through side streets.

Ray wondered whether or not truck traffic should be permitted in the neighborhood core. He asked for an assessment of the regional traffic patterns to determine what must be changed to create safety for pedestrians and improve the quality of life for the neighborhood. Harris agreed and said that a delicate balance has to be achieved to improve the way the street system works without inviting more traffic.

Cathy asked whether Harvard has been working with the city of Cambridge to address traffic solutions. Cathy said that part of the traffic on North Harvard St. going from Barry's corner into Cambridge is a result of the bottleneck that occurs on the Cambridge side of the river. Cathy suggested that the way to alleviate some of the traffic is to work in conjunction with Cambridge and the state.

Mike asked whether Harvard has completed any pedestrian studies analyzing who walks to and from Cambridge to Allston and common issues that occur during the walk. Harris said that part of improving the pedestrian experience is to create retail and places of interest along pedestrian routes. Another option is to narrow streets so that it is easier for pedestrians to cross. Ray asked how practical it was to change street widths without changing how traffic flows. Harris noted that in Harvard Square the presence of pedestrians helps to calm traffic.

Harris began the second part of his presentation to discuss the transportation improvements that Harvard would like to address and implement. Harvard's goal is to have a positive impact on transportation management and improve the overall transportation dynamic of the area.

Pedestrian system: Pedestrian movement is one of the primary issues that Harvard is concerned with. Harvard's vision for new streetscapes includes incorporating generous landscaping, dedicated bike lanes and transit lanes, and animated streets. For example, one idea is to create "wings" on the Larz Anderson Bridge to create dedicated pedestrians pathways and distance pedestrians from the traffic.

Traffic management and parking: Harris noted that in the short term, the first science building will have minimal impact on transportation conditions in the neighborhood, due partly to the fact that users of the building have different peak hours than the peak activity in the neighborhood.

In the longer term, Harvard would like to bring cars in and out of the campus zone without impacting the neighborhood. One example being proposed is the Windom Street bypass, located between the southern edge of the first science complex and Cambridge Street. Another example

proposed is creating a parking garage directly off the turnpike and/or a garage located where Harvard's athletic fields are, which would be accessed directly from Soldier's Field Road. The objective of these garages is to intercept the traffic before it goes in to the neighborhood and encourage people to walk to the campus. Harvard's current thinking is that all of the parking garages will be underground. Harris showed a map displaying several possible location options for parking garages. The question was raised as to whether the parking garages being proposed would be for Harvard parking only. Harris said that while it has not been thoroughly discussed yet, he suspects that the garages would operate similarly to how many of Harvard's garages operate now. Due to public parking regulations that require different permitting and zoning restrictions Harvard would not be creating parking garages solely for public uses. However, he thought that for certain situations Harvard's parking garages might be available for public uses. Ray asked for the total number of parking spaces being proposed. Harris clarified that the garages being shown as part of the presentation are potential locations for garages and that Harvard is not proposing to construct all of them. Millie asked how it would be feasible to put parking underground when the majority of that land is marsh land. Harris said that it is possible to do and there are ways it can be done to control the water flow.

Transit: One of Harvard's main goals is to develop dedicated shuttle lanes on the Larz Anderson and Weeks bridges. This would allow for transit improvements including a new undergraduate shuttle system; shuttle services from science facilities in Allston, to the Red line, and to science facilities in Cambridge; and new shuttle services from Allston to the Longwood Medical Area. Long-term transit improvements (11-20 years from now) include the creation of "West Station," which would be a commuter rail station on the existing Framingham commuter rail line. The location of "West Station" would be north of the turnpike and west of the CSX rail yards. Access to "West Station" would be directly from the turnpike. To coincide with this, a commuter shuttle from "West Station" to Harvard's Allston campus is being proposed along with an Allston commuter shuttle from Allston into Cambridge. The goal of the proposed "West Station" would be to keep cars from going in to the core of the neighborhood and to serve as a multi-modal station.

The MBTA and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation have been talking about the creation of the "Urban Ring" which is a proposed circumferential transit system around the city that currently does not include the Allston Landing area. Harvard would like to propose the idea of extending the "Urban Ring" into Allston because of Harvard's future development plans. This could result in the creation of a "Life Sciences Necklace" connecting science facilities in Allston, BU and the Longwood Medical Area. Due to Boston's growing economic dependence on the life sciences field, Harvard believes this could be a win-win situation for a lot of constituents.

Harris turned the meeting over to Adam Shulman. Adam said that as a part of the scoping process for Harvard's IMP, the Boston Transportation Department (BTD) will be asking Harvard to provide specific details on its proposed transportation improvements and that the BTD's scoping questions will be based on the comments and feedback provided by the Task Force. BTD will be looking at how Harvard addresses public transportation, parking, transit priority corridors, pedestrian/bicycle networks, and truck routes. Adam said that Harvard already has a good start on all of the things that BTD will be asking during the scoping process.

Adam said that the BTD is aware of the issues surrounding the on-street parking on North Harvard St. and Western Ave. Adam said that there are short-term solutions that can be implemented to help alleviate some of the problems associated with the parking such as monitoring the parking turnover; providing priority to Allston residents and discouraging people from outside the area from parking in those spots; and addressing the traffic flow on North Harvard St. and Western Ave. The BTD is currently engaged in internal meetings studying the on-street parking in all of Allston-Brighton. Ray asked whether the BTD was using a computer program to look at the traffic issues in Allston-Brighton and asked whether the Task Force could see the models being used. Harris said that Harvard has built an extensive traffic model and analysis and will likely share in with the Task Force in the near future.

John Cusack made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from April 24th. Rita seconded the motion and the minutes were approved. The meeting adjourned at 8:35 p.m.