

Harvard Allston Task Force
Meeting Minutes
Monday, July 9, 2007
Honan Allston Library
6:30 p.m.

I. Attendance:

Harvard Allston Task Force

Paul Berkeley
John Bruno
Cathi Campbell
Rita DiGesse
Brian Gibbons
Mike Hanlon
Millie Hollum McLaughlin
Harry Mattison
Ray Mellone, Chair
Brent Whelan

Harvard University

Harris Band
Will Donham
Peggy Hayes
Alison Reinhardt
Kathy Spiegelman
Dennis Swinford

City of Boston

Gerald Autler, Boston Redevelopment Authority
Linda Kowalcky, Boston Redevelopment Authority
Bill Conroy, Boston Transportation Department

Harvard Allston Task Force chair Ray Mellone began the meeting at 6:40 p.m. and said the agenda of meeting was to discuss the review process for the Draft Project Impact Report (DPIR) for the Harvard Allston Science Complex. Ray said he thought the review should be done through a prioritized sequence with the issues that have the most impact on the quality of life of the neighborhood being addressed first, such as construction mitigation, truck routes and construction worker parking.

Ray suggested weekly meetings be held in an effort to try to meet the September 10, 2007 deadline for the 75 day comment period for the DPIR. He said the Task Force needs to put forth a concentrated effort to do all it can to review the document so that if at the end of the comment period the Task Force feels it has not had enough time to thoroughly review the document it can justifiably ask for an extension.

Ray said the review of the eight sections in the DPIR should be prioritized and he proposed the following schedule:

- Monday, July 16th: Transportation access agreement and construction impacts
- Wednesday, July 25th: Project description and environmental protection
- Followed by urban design and sustainability the next week
- Followed by historic resources and infrastructure the next week

He said the discussion on community benefits should come later because unless the project is moving forward the community benefits associated with the project aren't going to be put forth. He said there will be ample time to finalize community benefits even after the comment period ends.

Brent Whelan responded to Ray's suggestions-

- The increase in the number of meetings will reduce the effectiveness of the Task Force because discussion will move at an accelerated pace but be less thorough. More meetings would result in more meetings being missed by Task Force members and would be a service to Harvard and a disservice to the community.
- The Task Force membership is not represented by a resident of Charlesview and Charlesview residents are going to feel the largest burden from the construction. There is an urgent need to engage in discussions with the Charlesview residents and the Charlesview Board. The DPIR doesn't address any of the concerns that Charlesview residents submitted to the BRA.
- Harvard hasn't offered anything in terms of community benefits and this shouldn't be left up in the air until the project is approved.

Ray responded there doesn't need to be explicit meetings for just the Charlesview residents because they are always invited to all of the meetings. He said the attendance of Task Force members at every meeting is never going to be perfect and the Task Force can work through it.

Millie Hollum McLaughlin- Increasing the number of meetings is also dependent on the community's feelings and how the community perceives it. She said she wasn't opposed to more meetings as long as people understand that all the Task Force members aren't going to be able to make every single meeting.

Mike Hanlon- More meetings might allow for more dialogue to continue as a group. He asked if Harvard would be able to respond to questions raised during the meetings on a timely basis. If so, he said it would be a lot better than having to wait 2-4 weeks to get an answer and the Task Force could be better served by weekly meetings.

Cathi Campbell- If the meetings are going to be every week, then the meeting minutes need to be circulated within 48 hours of when the meeting is finished so that no one falls behind if they have to miss a meeting. A better method needs to be established so that questions and comments can be answered quickly.

Brian Gibbons- Not crazy about meeting every week. He would like some reassurance from Harvard and the BRA that the comment period will be extended if the Task Force puts forth the effort to meet every week and is still not done with its review by the end of the comment period.

Ray said he thought the Task Force should put forth the effort and only ask for an extension if it was absolutely necessary. He said that he would expect that an extension would be granted if needed.

Gerald Autler clarified the BRA is not authorized to grant an extension of the comment period as mandated by the statutory timeframe requirements. He said Harvard can extend the timeframe if it wants to but deadlines are in place so that it can be a finite process.

Cathi Campbell asked if Harvard would commit to extending the comment period if the Task Force didn't feel like it had adequate time to review the document.

Kathy Spiegelman- Harvard cannot give the Task Force an answer at this time. Harvard wants to support the community and Task Force's efforts to increase the number of meetings and be responsive to their questions and comments. Harvard has extended the comment period for the project during the earlier stages of the Article 80 process as well as suspended the comment periods for the proposed Harvard University Art Museums Allston Art Center and the Institutional Master Plan (IMP) for the 50 year Master Plan. Harvard agreed to the previous extensions because it hoped that through that extended time and further discussion the community was able to find out more information about the project and get their questions answered so that it would be more familiar with the project by the time the DPIR was filed. Harvard's desire and urgency to break ground on the project by the end of the year leaves very little room in the schedule to extend the comment period. At this time Harvard is not willing to say that the statutory comment period is inadequate. After a month or so the request for an extension can be revisited.

Cathi Campbell- Harvard representatives in attendance at the meetings can never make final decisions and always have to filter decisions back through the University. If the Task Force is going to be called upon to make decisions on the spot at the Task Force meetings then Harvard representatives need to be able to have the authority to also make decisions at the meetings.

John Bruno- Will Harvard be able to respond to the Task Force as quickly as we need? Will Harvard be forthright and identify issues that it's not going to negotiate on so that the Task Force doesn't dwell on them and can move to other issues? The community is going to look to the Task Force to support or not support the project and this is going to be based on the next 75 days of discussion. There is an opportunity now to encourage Harvard to make changes to the project and we're going to need Harvard to respond quickly. When the Task Force is on record, can we support or not support the project with provisos?

Gerald Autler- There is no reason why the Task Force members can't vote with provisos, but it would be best to keep the process as simple as possible, identify any issues that need work, and try to resolve them to the satisfaction of the majority by the end of the comment period. Ultimately the decision is going to come down to the BRA Board and the Boston Zoning Commission, which are the decision-making bodies, rather than the Task Force, which is an advisory body.

Ray Mellone said that for the review process of One Western Avenue the community review body used their comments to the BRA to express its provisos and they didn't have to give a definitive yes or no answer.

Ray Mellone and Harry Mattison discussed whether the 75 day comment period should be used as a time to negotiate back and forth with Harvard or used as a time for the community to analyze the DPIR without Harvard's presence and come up with a list of questions and concerns for all of the issues and then at the end of the comment period submit it to Harvard. Ray said the two couldn't be separated and it should be an ongoing process. He said this was the time to make the project better and get more answers from Harvard and negotiations may or may not happen during this time period but it will be a give and take from both sides. Harry said he didn't feel there was enough time in Ray's proposed schedule for presentations, questions to Harvard, responses from Harvard, and time to revisit the issues again. Harry passed out his proposed schedule topics to the Task Force members and said there are at least 16 topics that should have at least one meeting devoted to discuss it.

Harry Mattison asked about the public amenities and retail plans for the project and said the DPIR is vague and only says a retail study is being conducted. He said the community should know things like the hours of operation of the retail in the building, if it's going to be accessible, useable, etc. and this information is critical to review of the project. Kathy Spiegelman confirmed Harvard was conducting a retail study for all of Barry's Corner and the appropriate kinds of tenants for the building, but said there are no retail tenants for the building yet and it is unlikely there will be until the building is almost finished.

Audience member Paul Alford asked for clarification from the Task Force if it had followed up on the unanimous vote at the last Task Force meeting to ask Harvard for an official extension of the comment period. Harry Mattison said the Task Force had voted to request additional time if it was needed to allow the Task Force to review the document. Mike Hanlon said the problem was that at the time of the meeting a lot of Task Force members had just received the DPIR so they decided to look through the document before making an official request. Paul Alford said the Task Force should demand the BRA extend the comment period just as the Article 80 process had been altered to allow Harvard to submit an amendment to its master plan before the 50 year master plan. He also said Harvard should not be at any of the meetings during the review of the DPIR.

Gerald Autler said the DPIR is for one project and is part of a bigger endeavor but the review during the comment period should be focused on the building. Gerald said that,

to date, a lot of time has already been invested during the Task Force meetings on the review of this project but that it's typical that certain things aren't fully answered until later. Harry's questions are valid, but DPIRs are not the forum where those issues get dealt with in any kind of detail. There can be a discussion about the overall parameters of the retail program, and certain commitments can even be made, but it shouldn't be expected that the DPIR would answer all the questions that Harry is posing. Gerald gave two examples of projects at Northeastern and Suffolk University where the Task Force process and community benefits discussions led to certain broad commitments around retail during the review of the building, but not detailed answers to the things like hours of operation and other issues that can only be resolved when tenants are signed.

An audience member said the DPIR is Harvard's response to the scoping determination that was issued by the BRA and community members could use the scoping determination as a way to pinpoint issues that Harvard should clarify and respond to. Gerald Autler agreed this was a good starting point to review the DPIR but also said there are certain key issues in the DPIR that the community is going to be more focused on as opposed to some of the things that are really the purview of city agencies, e.g. water and sewer infrastructure capacity.

Harry Mattison said the review of this project and the master plan is not typical and is the most unique situation of any development project in the country.

Harry Mattison said the DPIR has a lot of surprises in it such as the bike path behind Charlesview from Western Avenue to North Harvard Street, the bend in the alignment of Stadium Way and a lack of commitment of community benefits from Harvard. Harry said the community couldn't focus on just this project when Harvard's properties on Western Avenue are still vacant. He said the review of the project needs to establish whether it is going to start to revitalize the neighborhood.

Ray Mellone suggested that if the Task Force wanted to hold Harvard to benchmarks it could begin with reviewing the DPIR and seeing if it is adequate or not. He said so far everything in the process has been going in accordance with the mandatory regulations. Ray turned the meeting over to representatives from Harvard to get some brief updates.

Harris Band said that in coordination with the Task Force interim-landscape sub-committee Harvard has undertaken an interim-landscape improvement program. The following projects have been completed in the last few weeks:

- Painting began at the three Algonquin buildings on Monday, July 2nd and is now completed.
- This week buildings around the former CCF building (176 Lincoln, 55 Antwerp and 108 Holton) will begin to be painted. CCF windows will be painted and the windows along Everett Street will have historic photos placed in them.
- The area behind the Charlesbank Cleaners has been cleaned up.
- 67 birch trees have been planed on Western Avenue and another 20 or so are still to be planted.
- Wood planters will be built and bamboo hedges planted next week.

- The fence on Cambridge Street that was hit by a car will be repaired.
- As requested, the clean up of the Smith Field perimeter will happen prior to the placement of the anemometer.
- Website updates regarding this program of improvements are coming soon.

Audience member Paul Alford asked if there was an update on the Citgo property. Harris said at this time Harvard does not own the property.

There was discussion about whether the area behind the Charlesbank Cleaners site had really been cleaned up as Harris had mentioned and Harry Mattison presented a picture that was taken at 5:30 p.m. that evening that showed it had not. Harris apologized and said the information he had must have been wrong but in any case it will be cleaned up.

The suggestion was made for Harvard to paint all sides of the buildings it was repainting, not just the face of the buildings.

Will Donham gave an update on the proposed anemometer that Harvard would like to put up in its athletic fields to collect wind data.

- The device is battery powered; there is no current running through it.
- To service the device there is a hinge in the pole and guy-wires are pulled down.
- It is very thin pole with thin wires so it is not tempting to climb.
- There are no moving parts on the device until 40-50 feet up in the air so it is relatively safe and won't be harmful to children or animals.
- There will be one blinking red light at the top of it per FAA regulations and Harvard has alerted WBZ so its helicopters know of its presence.
- There are no plans for it to provide cell phone service. It is a temporary device and will come down after 12-18 months.

Harry Mattison asked what Harvard's time frame is for installing it. Will said Harvard understood the Task Force's request to clean up the area around Smith Field before installing it and hopes to install it this summer. Harry asked if the Task Force could vote whether the Smith Field area was cleaned up before it is installed. Kathy said that Harvard would give the Task Force a chance to verify that the area has been cleaned up before Harvard installs it. Gerald said once Harvard has taken measures to meet the Task Force's request, the permitting can be done very quickly and he asked whether anyone had any objections to him starting the permitting process once he received word from Ray Mellone that the Task Force was satisfied. No objections were made.

The Studdert family, residents on the corner of Hopedale and Windom Street, brought up a complaint that at 2:00 a.m. a compressor was being used to line Rotterdam Street and was very loud. They asked that painting not be done during off-hours. They also said that Harvard representatives dropped off two bait boxes on the Sears property behind their house and they were worried why they had two and if it would attract additional rodents to their property. Mrs. Studdert said workmen also started taking pictures of their house and were not helpful when they asked them who they were and what they were doing.

Harris Band said that once Harvard's construction mitigation program is officially launched, community members will have a phone number that they can call to get access to someone immediately to find out more information about the situation.

Harry Mattison asked for a response from Harvard in writing regarding who was conducting the painting on Rotterdam Street at 2:00 a.m.

Audience member Tim McHale commented:

- Harvard filed the DPIR right around the holiday, an inconvenient time for the neighborhood to review the document during the summer.
- Harvard should hire a stenographer to take the meeting minutes. This would result in accurate, verbatim minutes, nothing would be lost from the discussion and they could be issued right away.
- Harvard should be held accountable. Every day it is late with the meeting minutes or is late in responding to a question, the comment period should be extended by another day.

Gerald Autler said the meetings could be recorded and the goal would be to produce the meeting summary within 48 hours of the meeting.

Harry Mattison said community members should receive fliers about what is going on and information should be posted on the construction bulletin boards and on a website.

Mike Hanlon said the information from the interim-landscape project should also be communicated and put on a web site. He also said the neighborhood already has an existing rodent problem.

Kathy Spiegelman said that at past community meetings on construction mitigation Ken Johnson from Harvard announced that a company had been hired to do an assessment of the current rodent situation. Kathy said that Harvard has a whole construction mitigation program planned with a large communications component.

Audience member Joyce Radnor said the chain link fence that has been put up behind 100 Windom Street/Rotterdam Street is covering up the construction mitigation bulletin board there. Joyce asked for an update on the WGBH properties. She said she saw workers pulling up shrubs along Western Avenue. Kathy and Will said they would look into what is going on and get more information.

Audience member Alex Selvig said Charlesview residents have submitted comment letters to the BRA in different languages. He said many of the comment letters expressed that their voices were not being heard because of the language barrier. He asked Harvard to address all of the letters that were submitted to the BRA and asked that the DPIR be translated into Spanish.

Ray Mellone ended the meeting at approximately 8:30 p.m.