

5th Advisory Group Meeting Notes

Meeting Date: August 3, 2009

Current Date: August 12, 2009

Project: Harrison Albany Corridor/South End Strategic Plan

Prepared By: T. Maistros / Reviewed by Larry Bluestone & David Lee

Subject: Advisory Group Session #5

Attendees: Randi Lathrop, Carlos Montañez, Marie Mercurio, Alexa Pinard, Jacob Wiggins, David Lee, Larry Bluestone, and Tom Maistros
Advisory Group members (per sign-in sheet; contact BRA staff for listing)

1. This was the fifth meeting for the Harrison Albany Strategic Plan Advisory Group held at Franklin House in the South End. This was a morning meeting convened at 8:15am.
2. Next meeting tentatively set for September 16, 2009 at 6:15 pm.
3. Marie Mercurio called the meeting to order. She noted that a walking tour was held last week and was well received. It was decided a follow-up tour should be held of the BackStreets and Medical sub-areas.
4. The Sept 16 meeting will focus on transportation (existing conditions for the entire study area), and there will be a summary of urban design implications for each sub-area.
5. Jim Fitzgerald, Transportation planner for the BRA and Bill Conroy BTM had been advising on these issues and will be present at the session.
6. Two main agenda items presented included an analysis of the existing urban design structure of the BackStreets and the Medical sub-areas and a review of (study) draft goals and objectives – David Lee moderated.

Existing Character & Urban Design Framework of New York Streets and SOWA sub-areas Discussion:

David Lee reviewed the existing character and urban design framework for the New York Streets and SOWA sub-areas.

7. David Lee requested input on items that might have been missed noting that urban design diagrams are meant to be broad-brush generalizations that give an overview rather than focus on specific parcels or buildings.
8. Presentation started with the BackStreets sub-area generally bounded by Malden, Harrison, E Canton and the BioSquare access road.
9. BackStreets sub-area is characterized by industrial loft buildings and several large surface parking lots. The Flower Exchange site is of different scale and character.
10. Noted that Harrison Avenue is evolving into a different fabric characterized by - red brick buildings of moderate height establishing a continuous street wall.

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11. Daytime/Nighttime diagram was reviewed.
12. Noted that the Pine Village Preschool was about to open - Spanish is the primary language.
13. Noted that there are a lot of artist lofts in this area too that are open extended hours - primarily on Wareham and Albany - these should be noted should be diagrammed.
14. Other omissions include South End Pita, Biandokas (sp) and Sedia Furniture.
15. Visual Gateways - Where the combination of building massing and the character of the streetscape at very specific points create a palpable visual sense of entering a discrete subarea. Such gateway conditions offer opportunities to amplify special character/conditions.
16. Visual Cues - Cathedral Housing towers, Cathedral Complex, New Bio Lab.
17. Edges - Hard edge - change in both scale and building type - Cathedral Housing, E. Canton (different use), Union Park, west side of Albany (soft line), Medical Sub-area edge.
18. Street Typologies - Blvd Streets, Washington/Malden, streets of varying use, frontages - Harrison Ave.
19. Medical sub-area bounded by Mass Ave, the Mass Ave Connector, East Canton and Harrison Avenue.
20. David Lee noted that there are only a few buildings and sites in play in this sub-area.
21. Daytime nighttime uses diagram was reviewed - retail uses not noted were the Dunkin Donuts and another café internal to the BMC campus. The Group decided to not add these uses to the daytime/nighttime activity diagram.
22. There are a few shops on Harrison Ave (Blunch), but some are even vacant or appear to be marginal.
23. Gateways - Particular note was made of the open views from Worchester Sq created by the demolition of original BCH buildings.
24. Edge Definition - East Canton residential, Harrison Ave Residential, Flower market / Bio Sq. edge, E Brookline, Mass Ave Connector.
25. Issue of an access street to Mass Ave. connector was raised - alignment is extension E Concord St. Another proposed access is from a ramp built by garage but not opened. Curb cut was proposed but still in review.
26. New Market Business Association is a strong supporter of the access road proposal.
27. A connection for the parking garage to frontage road was planned - ramps built but not open.
28. Another transportation item to discuss is the Harbor Walk Bike Path under the viaduct and behind Flower Exchange and Jacobson properties - hold for the next meeting.
29. AG member felt that all of new construction on Albany was very big in scale – David Lee noted that there was a distinction between the Medical sub-area buildings and the buildings within the corridor in the other sub-areas.

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30. It was noted that the Medical sub-area was represented by City, County, State and Boston University institutions - clarification that "BioSquare" were BU related health facilities.
31. Noted that Health Care for the Homeless recently opened. It includes an emergency room and some beds, and is located in the former morgue.
32. Noted that the South Block owned by Public Health Commission was under discussion for redevelopment.
33. Discussed the special qualities of Mass Ave. - could be considered a south end edge as well as special node.
34. Members requested an update of BU-BioSquare Master Plan - Copies will be made available.
35. Members favored the Reuse of older Medical Campus buildings (when possible) - it was noted that a primary mission for the Medical Center Institutions is caretaker for health needs of disadvantaged.
36. Medical Institutions are looking to develop more housing for medical students.
37. New market Business Association agreed with the approach that encouraged putting the higher massing of future development toward the highway creating a visual and acoustic barrier to the residential South End.
38. BUMC has 9000 employees, is a major employer in the city – a vibrant area of the city.
39. Current development in the BMC is for outpatient services - funding already on place before bond crisis so construction is advancing.
40. BioSquare is recognized as an incubator space world wide.
41. David Lee suggested that the treatment of Washington Street offers the greatest potential for thematically unifying for each of the (very discrete) corridor neighborhoods.

Goals and Objectives Discussion: David Lee reviewed the goals and objectives summarized from the issues and opportunities exercise conducted with the Advisory Group in the previous two meetings.

42. Any guidelines should recognize the importance of connections between the sub-areas - these provide continuity throughout the South End.
43. Bike activity - need to acknowledge bike traffic, but BackStreets business operations should retain priority. An option might be to distinguish between streets that are more conducive to bicycle traffic ("bike safe zones") and those streets (particularly in the BackStreets sub-area) in which bikers need to "proceed with caution".
44. Relative to minimizing conflicts - direct future development to streets where those activities already happen - i.e., if there are already a row of loading docks on the street, direct businesses there and discourage residential use.
45. It was noted that relative to clustering of commercial activity, the Main Streets program is trying to coordinate loading zones on Washington - similar approach might be used in the BackStreets sub-area.
46. Goal #3 under "Urban Design" topic - need to adjust wording so it does not give such focus to "historic" "Build upon the eclectic commercial and industrial character of the study area" (to be re-worded).

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47. Not suggesting historic preservation - maybe antiquity preservation? Possibly just remove "historic"? The point is not to inhibit new architectural forms but to insure contextual compatibility.
48. Balance needed to "keep Boston looking like Boston" where it exists - don't want to lose uniqueness.
49. Is historic more a reflection of level of detailing - historic tends to give of character - don't want to make guidelines that force historic restoration.
50. Was suggested that the historic district protection area be adjusted to allow for greater height along the highway edge - reevaluate height to protect the neighborhood but allow more job creation, etc.
51. An example of benefits of loosening the controls was seen in the community review of the Dover Street residence - Developer was allowed to push envelope yet remain in character with the neighborhood.
52. Item missing from the Goals and Objectives is addressing street functions (possibly add to Transportation goals?). Does not talk about other street functions and servicing such as trash handling. A plan is also needed to address valet parking issues and building servicing.
53. On Housing - diversity of housing types suggested. Should encourage multiple densities -including a mix of scales and heights.
54. B. Walsh suggested the meeting note acknowledge the thoughtful letter prepared by the (?) condo Association.
55. Members noted that take out and purchasing of prepared foods continues to grow in popularity - need to address related functions - takeout food establishments and dog walkers have a lot to do with the improved quality of life in the South End.
56. #1 under Commercial use was primarily related to BackStreets to address where residential and non-residential uses can be in conflict - need to address.
57. Should note where existing zoning allows residential uses as of right for the next walking tour - BRA noted that residential is allowed in BackStreets sub-area.
58. Under Commercial/retail/office there was no note of other non-retail uses.
59. #1 - incubator spaces are the backbone on South End development they are often more flexible and accommodating of innovative start up uses and not as demanding of resources - need to be conscious of these spaces and not exclude.
60. Why are there distinctions among goals for some sub-areas? Shouldn't all goals apply to all sub-areas? Team was targeting where special intervention was required - trying to focus on issues of particular concern on a sub-area basis. This was more a matter of emphasis and not meant to be exclusive.
61. Also targeting areas that will see more development.
62. Address cultural and artistic opportunities for the New York Streets sub-area, particularly given that sub-area's proximity to Theatre District and Tremont Street - Support that kind of space there.

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63. Washington Gateway project proposed music rehearsal space plus theatre storage.
64. Films and documentary space also proposed (needed).
65. Guidelines should address what type of industrial use is compatible with BackStreets sub-area. This suggests that heavy industry and manufacturing would not be allowed or appropriate, even in the BackStreets sub-area.
66. Should the planning study propose a boundary for the medical sub-area? Staff responded that any development that the Medical sub-area is proposing is listed in their 10-year Institutional Master Plan.
67. AG needs to get the latest edition of the BUMC Institutional Master Plan.
68. The transportation meeting agenda must be structured such that the focus is not just on parking.