

JP Centre and South Street Corridor Transportation and Streetscape Action Plan

Community Meeting

Wednesday, July 15, 2009

Location: Curtis Hall, 20 South Street

Advisory Group Members Present (7): Samantha Brea (Hyde Square Task Force), Michael Epp (JP Centre and South Main Streets), John P. Iappini (Jamaica Pond Association), Sylvia Toruno (JPNDC), Michael Reiskind, (JP neighborhood Council Public Service Committee), Jennifer B. Mehigan (Hyde Square Resident) Lauren Ockene, (JP Bikes, Bikes not Bombs),

NOTES:

First Q&A/Discussion Session:

John Iappini (AG member) mentioned that he is troubled by the curb extensions and how they plan to integrate buses. He added that they had not anticipated the speed of this project because of the new stimulus money. He is not convinced that they will work and wondered where curb extensions have been successful on similar streets.

Vineet Gupta (BTD) replied that it is a little bit of a "chicken and egg" situation. However, he mentioned that two things are working in their favor. Firstly, they are using the same consultants, and secondly, they will be able to focus on curb extensions at specific locations early on in the process to make sure that everyone is comfortable with the locations.

A member of the public asked what the project limits are.

Vineet Gupta replied that they are working from Forest Hills to Jackson Square. However, there is already some existing work in the area which they must take as a "given" and work in between these plans.

Michael Epp (AG member) asked if they could look at asphalt mock up of the curb extensions. He mentioned that this could possibly clarify how these would work.

Vineet Gupta said that this could be done.

John Iappini mentioned that cars can't always go around buses.

Jim Fitzgerald, BRA mentioned that they would not do curb extensions in places where one could not pull around the buses.

A member of the public asked if the curb extensions would extend farther than a parked car.

Vineet Gupta replied that they would not, but that they could all talk about the details of this matter later.

Second Q&A/Discussion Session:

Lauren Ockene (AG member) commented that she would like to see people who are not currently committed to biking to start. She mentioned that this may require education or possibly even physical barriers to driving. She also expressed a desire to create places clearly meant for bicyclists, because currently many people are afraid to bike in some places.

John Iappini mentioned an "ugly obstruction" plaguing the neighborhood: rusted MBTA poles. He mentioned that Jamaica Plain is the only "town" in Boston that still has these eyesores and that this might be an opportunity to tell the MBTA to get rid of them.

Gretchen Von Grossmann (Van Grossmann & Company) asked if she could expand that thought to include visual clutter in general, and the public agreed.

Michael Reiskind (AG member) agreed that there is too much visual clutter. He mentioned that in some European cities they hang streetlights from wires over the streets, eliminating the need for poles. He added that it is therefore also easier to remove snow in winter. He mentioned that eliminating all of the streetlight poles really does change the look of the street and he was not sure that the neighborhood would want such a dramatic change.

A member of the public brought up the subject of billboards and wanted to be sure that they would be addresses.

Another member of the public brought up the subject of street trees, which are currently missing and would be great to have.

Gretchen Von Grossman commented that in her opinion, the area is green, but the corridors are not. Lauren Ockene echoed that sentiment.

Michael Epp mentioned that earlier they had determined where the residential and retail areas and that in the residential areas he wanted London Plane trees because they are urban, cheap, and survive well. In retail areas he said that he preferred "retail scale trees" such as the Linden tree which has small, see-through leaves. He went on to say that the street lighting is currently "over scale" to the buildings, but places like Mass Ave in Cambridge do street lighting well. He concluded by saying that he wants good street lighting and trees in scale with the area.

Brian, Bartsch & Radner Design staff member agreed that London Plane trees were good ones to consider.

A member of the public said that she was interested in the subject of pole-less lighting as well, but that she did like the double acorn streetlights, which contribute to a more traditional, quaint appearance.

Another member of the public mentioned that she was not interested in having no poles at all, but rather wants poles that create a warmth and character for the neighborhood. She added that Westport Connecticut has lighting that she likes.

Lauren Ockene said that, in returning to the subject of clutter, she feels that the wall shelters for the MBTA deserve discussion. She mentioned that some are well-designed but that others feel unsafe because they block sightlines, especially one near HiLo where many elderly people go. She commented that uncluttered sightlines are important.

Lauren went on to say that she wanted to disagree with the earlier statement about London Plane trees because she thinks it is more important to have trees that contribute to diversity and quality of life. She said that she wants trees that are beneficial to people *and* birds. She mentioned a small town in Colorado where they had a contest among retailers to create the most beautiful tree pit, which is something that could be considered here, where there is little care given to the street trees they have.

Gretchen Van Grossmann mentioned that what Lauren was describing in Colorado is almost like a form of public art, which could potentially be good here.

A member of the public raised a concern about the effect these changes will have on side streets. She mentioned that cut-through traffic on some streets, for example Dunster, has already risen significantly.

Ralph DeNisco (McMahon) agreed that that is something they should look at, and will.

John Iappini mentioned that it might also be an opportunity to improve the monument and make it safer by expanding the sidewalk around it and eliminating parking. He added that there should be safer ways to cross to the monument.

Michael Epp mentioned that he would like a diagram of what he is calling LEO's, named after the child that was hit by a police car. He said that he would like the diagram to show continuous curb levels (similar to Church and Mass Ave in Cambridge). He added that he would like to see buffered ramps at perpendicular cross streets in order to slow traffic and indicate that this is a residential area; this would also increase accessibility for the handicapped and strollers.

He went on to say that he would like to see another diagram to show the opportunity to replace historic density. He mentioned that there are several one story buildings of retail which could become two or three stories with residential space above. He stated that this could be a time to address future population growth.

He also agreed that it would be good to improve safety around the monument and that there are some amazing resources of historic importance.

A member of the public added that around the monument the street is too wide, and so maybe there is an opportunity to make a green meeting area, as there is no green space on Centre Street right now.

Lauren Ockene added that she had been thinking the same thing. She said that she would like a continuous sidewalk as well as minimum pavement and maximum green space.

A member of the public mentioned that while he believes the relationship between cars and pedestrians is getting better, the relationship between bikes and cars is less resolved. He asked to see a diagram of major bike routes and places where there could be clear signage to indicate them. He also mentioned that it is important that bicyclists know how to behave on the road.

He continued that, similarly, buses often block traffic and have inadequate turn signals, so it would be good to have buses get out of traffic and have *clear* signals.

Another member of the public mentioned that there are some things which are important to preserve, including the murals on Centre Street. He said that these could even be enhanced with more, since they represent the area's heritage.

An additional member of the public commented on the need to create a vision for parking on Centre Street, as it is currently a problem which could potentially get bigger. She said that she was not averse to displacing or moving parking.

Gretchen Van Grossmann then asked if there is legislation about bikes in traffic. A member of the public replied that yes, police can ticket bicyclists and that bicyclists should follow the same rules as motorists.

A member of the public said that to expand on the subject of the murals, there should be interpretive signage that respects the cultural history.

Vineet Gupta then asked if anyone would be opposed to closing street traffic on a nice summer evening to allow people to stroll without cars. Lauren Ockene responded that that would be great.

Michael Reiskind stated that he has worked to improve Centre Street for awhile because he doesn't believe it works as well as it could. He said that it does work because of its economic vitality but that the actual street has problems that affect bikes, transit, cars, and pedestrians (especially the pedestrians, who are treated as second class).

He went on to say that the pedestrian and bicycle interactions are problematic and transit is disordered. He mentioned that there is lots of through traffic which shouldn't be on the street, however larger problems in the area funnel into this street, so they will need to get rid of traffic clutter.

He continued on, mentioning that while people have been discussing "car nodes," he would like to look at pedestrian nodes and wondered if there is a way to improve the pedestrian quality of the area by creating these.

A member of the public added that closing Centre Street occasionally is a great idea, except that the issue of traffic may be a hindrance because there are few ways to get

on to another major street, so this would need to be analyzed well. She also mentioned that she hopes the plans include bike lanes on Centre Street, to which Vineet Gupta replied that this is indeed a goal.

She then went on to say that it currently functions as a roundabout but pedestrian access is an issue. She said that they should consider a way to design a roundabout so that pedestrians can easily cross.

Vineet Gupta agreed that they could look into that and Ralph DeNisco added that roundabouts have been successful elsewhere.

A member of the public stated that sidewalks become functionally narrower in winter because of the snow, so that is something important to consider.

Lauren Ockene mentioned that she found it encouraging that no one wants to add parking and that all discussion points in the directions of cars not being that most important element of this process. She added that she does not want to necessarily “increase supply” as had been mentioned in the presentation because she believes that “if you build it, they will come.” She also brought up a study that was done in Toronto where they surveyed store owners, residents and others to see what would change their ways of getting to the area, and that included decreasing parking and adding bike lanes.

Vineet mentioned that they should begin to wrap up the discussion so they could quickly get through the last part of the presentation.

Community members were encouraged to add to the comments by talking directly with the consultants after the meeting. The consultant team will compile tonight comments and share them with the Advisory Group and the community.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:20pm.

Organized by General Topic

Transportation

- More people would bicycle – particularly those that aren’t commuters and used to riding with traffic – if they felt safer. A physical separation is needed between cars and bicycles.
- The relationship between cars and pedestrians has improved over the years but the relationship between bicycle and cars still need work; as does the relationship between buses and cars. The actions of both buses and bicycles are difficult to predict for drivers. Bicyclists generally don’t follow the rules of the road. The turn signals on buses are inadequate for their purpose.
- Recent legislation and increased fines should help reduce cars stopped or double parked in bus stops and, if enforced, reduce violations by bicyclists.

- Cut-through traffic on residential streets has increased dramatically the past few years.
- Trucks that are not allowed on the Jamaica Way and Riverway use Centre Street and South Street as a bypass route.
- The World's Fair in Hyde Square shuts down the street for the festival.
- Closing Centre or South streets would disrupt traffic, rather consider closing side streets.
- The economic vitality is the strength of the corridor but bikes, cars, transit and pedestrians have problems. Pedestrians are treated as second class.
- There are a lot of school buses around 2:30 and 3:00 that create traffic problems.
- The corridor doesn't have any pedestrian nodes, just vehicular nodes. Look at examples like Brookline Village and Coolidge Corner.
- There are few (any?) alternate routes that are not through residential streets.
- Bicycle lanes are preferred over shared lanes. This is the City's policy as well as the neighborhood's preference.
- A roundabout is a possibility for Monument Square. Newer designs for roundabouts (as opposed to rotaries) have been successful in creating a good pedestrian environment in other locations.

Open Space/Greenspace

Key green spaces to link and enhance:

- Agassiz Arboleda
- Curtis Hall
- Monument
- Mary Curley School across street
- Alchemist , Hyde Square
- Blessed Sacrament's new development
- Day Street, Boston Natural Areas Network park
- Jefferson Field

Parking

- More parking should not be an assumed goal; rather, better management of parking resources.
- Opportunities for additional off-street parking could reduce some of the congestion along the corridor.

Street Trees

- Jamaica Plain is green until you get to Centre Street. There are few trees in the retail areas.
- Use London Plain trees in the residential areas at 30-foot spacing. This provides a substantial green frontage. In commercial districts use Linden trees which have a lighter, more open, character. Pear trees are another option.
- Trees should support bird habitat.

Street Furniture

- European cities hang lights from wires that are attached to buildings on either side of the street. This reduces clutter on the street and places the fixtures over the street – where the light needs to be.
- Street lighting should be lower. Shorter poles would bring the scale of the fixtures more in keeping with the buildings. Coordinate with tree spacing.
- If lights without poles are not possible, use a traditional looking fixture like the double acorn.
- **Pedestrian Ideas and Issues**
- Raise the crosswalk on side streets to create a continuous sidewalk along the corridor. This would emphasize the pedestrian route and signal cars to slow down.
- Wall bus shelters, in certain locations such as next to the Hi-Lo, can block critical views because of the advertising on the end panels. Blocked views reduce the feeling of safety and security.
- Use a continuous curb similar to Church Street in Cambridge. This will provide a physical barrier to cars, better access for pedestrians and utilize the principles of Universal Design.
- Monument Square is difficult to get to and surrounded by too much asphalt. Reclaiming space around the monument from the street would establish a more dignified setting and shorten crosswalks.

Clutter

- The legacy of MBTA poles run from Huntington Avenue to Forest Hills. They clutter the sidewalk and need to be removed.
- Newspaper boxes also cause clutter
- No billboards

Other Places to Look

- Westport, Connecticut is a good example of a well done streetscape. Cos Cob, CT is possibly another good model.
- A town in Colorado sponsored a competition between business for the best street tree care which created a vibrant series of healthy trees and well-decorated sidewalks.
- A study of a retail area on Bloor Street in Toronto by the Clean Air Partnership explored how people actually traveled to shop, to determine what the impact may be if parking was reduced to accommodate a parking lane. Lauren mentioned that such a retail study may be useful as part of Centre-South Streets, and that a couple of the CAC members would volunteer, also Main Streets.

Residential Opportunities

- In order to allow the residential base of the area to grow, consider residences over the existing one-story commercial buildings along the corridor. Use a setback for the upper floors.
- Consider the long-term reuse of the gas stations sites along the corridor for additional residential uses.

Culture and History

- There are four national register building in the neighborhood.
- The murals along the corridor are an important representation of the culture of the neighborhood and should be preserved and enhanced.
- The cultural history of the neighborhood can be brought out.
- There is an existing farmers' market at Bank of America lot, with space for one family's stand/farm. A new farmer's market is being organized at Stony Brook T station.
- More opportunities for public art should encouraged, possibly an "Art Trail"