

stossLANDSCAPEURBANISM

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09 December 2009

PUBLIC MEETING COMMENTS

PROJECT: **Thoreau Path Improvements**
STOSS PROJECT #: BRA0901

MEETING DATE: **02 December 2009**
MEETING LOCATION: Shriner's Hospital Auditorium

The meeting was held to introduce the project consultants, the project schedule, the existing conditions analysis and historical context of the path to the public and to engage comments and feedback. Chris Reed of Stoss presented the project followed by a question and answer period. The following is a summary of the comments made during the question and answer session.

ACCESS/PATH WIDTH

- Some felt truck traffic should be baned from the path and signs should be placed at the two vehicular access points signaling that the path is a pedestrian way; one person felt landscape contractors should be allowed access;
- Question about changes in width to the path proposed in the master planning process; these are being reconsidered; the project has to maintain emergency access with Fire Department and will meet with Boston Fire Department as part of this project; the path has always been a means of egress for the Fire Department (this is why it was constructed) and there are no known complaints regarding width;
- Fire Department requirements will be verified as part of this project;
- Question as to whether fire access can be accommodated without disturbing underground network of utilities; the answer is yes;
- Concern was expressed for narrowing the path, especially in places of peak commuter traffic; there is no intent to narrow the path in these locations;
- Vehicular access will still be required for snow removal and for the police who patrol the area at night;
- Vehicular access by emergency vehicles would include police, fire and snow; All others should request authorization from the Boston Public Works Department and should indicate why access is required; Currently unauthorized vehicles, including contractors, are accessing the path and are likely causing damage (asphalt patches, broken concrete left unrepaired and other impacts);

SAFETY

- Security for those walking at night is very important; visibility is key and there is a preference for low shrubs and plantings;
- The path is well-used by children and seniors and the safety of the surface is paramount; the surface needs to be ADA accessible; bricks are not desirable;

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- It was noted that there will be two (2) Boston Police Department blue call boxes included with this project; the locations have yet to be determined and depend on the requirements of the boxes themselves;

PROPERTY OWNERSHIP/ABUTTORS

- Question as to how many of the gathering places referred to in the presentation would be on private property; the answer is that all work associated with this project will be in the city-owned easement area;
- Question as to whether this project would take into consideration that Equity plans to tear down the garden garage in the future; the answer is that Equity has not filed any plans with the city to date; that this project is going forward and will have to be considered as existing work when/if the garage work happens; that said, there are plans to sit down with all of the property owners and/or representatives to discuss the improvements to Thoreau Path project;
- Question as to whether the owners of the Pace & Sons building have been approached for a contribution to the project due to the drainage improvements that will take place in front of their building; the answer is that no formal outreach has been made but, as stated above, there are plans to meet with all of the adjacent property owners and/or representatives;
- There was a question as to whether there was any way to get more space for the path from adjacent properties; the answer is that the easement area will not be expanded at this time;
- It was noted that work done by Equity has caused water to be shed onto the public path; this will be investigated; no one should be doing unauthorized work that impacts the easement area; this includes encroachment into the easement area, which occurs with the play area near Whittier;

HISTORY

- The presentation referred to the southernmost entry of Thoreau Path at Wm. Cardinal O'Connell Way as the "Beacon Hill Entrance", which was not well received by the public in attendance; Stoss used this name for identification purposes; this name did not come from the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) and the name will be changed;
- Concern was expressed for including reference to the historic West End streets as part of the interpretive elements of the project, as well as a desire to express what is unique about the current neighborhood and not the past; others appreciated the historic reference;

PROGRAM

- The oval in the node between Whittier Place and the Villas used to be filled with water;
- There is a desire to accommodate more spaces for children's play; there was an idea to include a sign to the playground located across Storrow Drive along the esplanade;
- Some expressed interest in a backless bench while others liked the idea of benches with backs; keeping people from sleeping on benches at night and providing a way for benches to be patrolled in some way (like the ones on adjacent properties) is desired; a suggestion was made to look at benches currently being installed in other Boston public spaces and evaluate how they work;
- Desire to keep Thoreau Path quiet and neighborhood-like; and to discourage noise, especially at night;

SIGNAGE

- There was a need expressed for regulatory signage; Regulatory signage is part of the scope of this and will be included at pertinent places along the path;

SURFACING

- Hard rubber surfacing, as seen in Chicago, was mentioned as a potential low cost high durable material; the stamped paver that was previously proposed was brought up and this paver may not

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meet the requirements of the accessibility board; the project will look at a range of surfacing options which will be discussed at a subsequent public meeting;

VEGETATION

- High shrubs in general, and particularly at the oval between Whittier Place and the Villas and in front of the synagogue, obscure the path, and limit views;
- Concern was expressed about the trees in the path obscuring the path lighting; Stoss mentioned that this will be addressed with selective pruning as part of this project;

DRAINAGE

- Desire to improve drainage to prevent ice build-up in winter;
- Question as to whether the drainage issues are being exacerbated by clogged drains; this will be investigated;
- It was mentioned that stormwater collects over the existing trench drain at the Pace & Sons building; the Consultant's civil engineer has begun to investigate the problem and potential solutions;

SCHEDULE + BUDGET

- The West End Community Center (WECC) is concerned about construction coinciding with their annual Children's Festival in August; efforts will be made to stage construction to best accommodate the festival and the WECC should make the BRA aware of when and how the festival operates (which spaces are needed when and how the operations are staged);
- There was a comment that this project started a few years back and then was put on hold and a question as to whether this would happen again; the answer is that a masterplan phase took place with discussion and recommendations, and now the project has moved into the design phase; the project has funding and the city is committed to seeing it through; the city has \$1.5 million for design, construction and contingency;
- Question as to whether the budget is enough to redo the whole path; project is more of an enhancement than a wholesale renovation; will spend the money to get the greatest impact; will be a unified improvement and will not appear like patchwork, but the areas that are working will be left as working and those that are not will be addressed;

NEXT STEPS

- Put the presentation on-line at the BRA website;
- Incorporate feedback and start to look at design options that will be shared with the public at the next public meeting in mid January;
- Coordinate next public meeting with the community – January 12-14, 2009;

These Meeting Notes are submitted by STOSS. Please contact **Jill Desimini** with any corrections or additions. If no corrections or additions are received within (10) working days of distribution, the content will be assumed to be agreed upon by all parties.

END OF MEETING SUMMARY