



## Building a Better Brookline

**Economic Development  
Advisory Board**  
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Marilyn Newman  
Alden Raine  
Harold Simansky  
Donald A. Warner  
Derrick Choi

### **Meeting Minutes: June 9, 2014**

#### **Attendees:**

*EDAB Members Present:* Bob Sperber, Ken Lewis, Paul Saner, Don Warner, Harold Simansky, Anne Meyers, Tom Nally, Susan Houston

*Members Absent:* Derrick Choi, Al Raine, Marilyn Newman, Cliff Brown

*Guests:* Erin Gallentine, Director of Parks and Open space; Antonia Bellalta, and Karin Drider, Bellalta 3 Design; David Reznikow, Regus; Rony Shapiro, Jewish Venture Mentoring Service; Lisa Wasserman Silvan, WorkShop.

*Economic Development Division:* Kara Brewton

### **1. Hickey Triangle – Presentation, discussion on Landscape Design Options for area between Washington and Harvard Streets in Brookline Village (a.k.a. Harvard Square):**

- Kara Brewton reminded EDAB that the budget vote for Commercial Area streetscape contracts requires approval by Selectmen and EDAB; they had approved Bellalta 3's design contract for this space last year, and Town Meeting had approved \$65,000 for construction in Fiscal Year 2015. The Hickey Triangle design and construction is a partnership with Economic Development and the Department of Public Works - Parks & Open Space Division. Tonight's presentation will show optional proposed designs for Hickey Triangle prepared by Bellalta 3 Design.
- Although not needing a vote tonight, Kara asked for feedback so that the team could move forward with a design, working towards construction drawings. Kara anticipated coming back to EDAB later this summer/ early fall with final drawings, and then again prior to signing a construction contract.
- Specifically, Kara asked for feedback on:
  - (i) which of the plans to be presented were preferred;
  - (ii) a preference on various bench options to be presented; and
  - (iii) feedback on how important it was to keep the clock, which was installed in the early 80s with federal funding and would cost \$10-\$15,000 to fix (out of a \$65,000 budget and \$5,000 donation by Brookline Bank).

- Kara noted that redoing the triangle was an identified project in the 2003 Commercial Areas Streetscape Plan, although no specific plans had yet been developed for the space.
- Erin Gallentine introduced herself and Antonia Bellalta, and then Antonia began the presentation of the design options.
- Antonia reviewed historical photos of the area, including the current building in 1907, which at the time had what looked like a metal awning surrounding the building, bringing pedestrian scale to the area adjacent to the building. The photos over time also showed a trough and then water fountain for horses directly in front of the building.
- Antonia noted through photographs and site diagrams the large amount of visual clutter present today, including multiple street signage, bus stop signs, the very large Town seal artifact, the clock, street lights, traffic lights, bollards, and the Frances Hickey memorial plaque.
- Antonia stated that the goals of the project are to
  - Eliminate the visual clutter and provide simplicity and organization to the triangle
  - Improve the ease of pedestrian flow
  - Contribute to the vibrancy of Brookline Village
  - Provide a visually attractive, welcoming and safe space
  - Ensure that the design is sustainable and maintainable
  - Integrate the historic aspect of Brookline Village with the contemporary lifestyle of the community
  - Development a space that creates a visual connection to Brookline Village
  - Provide a site design that is within budget
- In all the designs, the Town seal is proposed to be removed from the site, and the Frances Hickey memorial plaque would remain.
- The A-series of designs (A-1 and A-2) organized the space to allow people to move back and forth easily through the site. The A-2 variation had one less tree at the point of the triangle, and in its place proposed keeping the clock. The A-series proposed two additional street trees, and three trees interior to the sidewalks.
- The B-series of designs were more of a “grove”, where additional street trees were not proposed, but 6 trees with a more compact form (such as ginkgo or cherries) would be interior to the street sidewalks. This compact form would provide a more “cozy” feel to pedestrians while in the space. Unlike the other designs, B-3 had two different seating types: one parallel and close to the building looking into the plaza, and another, free-form seating style to allow for more social interactions. In the B-3 design, the parallel benches were removed, allowing people to move more freely through the space, not directing their flow east-west across the plaza space.

- The hardscape shown for all the designs was a combination of concrete patterning and concrete pavers with butt joints, meeting ADA requirements.
- Antonia also showed various types of proposed bench types and drought-tolerant perennial planting that could be used in any of the designs, and would provide year-round interest and color.
- Antonia also mentioned the unattractive color of the street lights, but noted that would need to be changed for the entire area (what I was saying that in order to change the light color the entire fixture needs to be replaced. It can not be modified to accept a new light source of a different color) (separate from this project). One member in the audience echoed this sentiment.

***Questions/Comments, grouped by topic:***

Overall Design:

Don Warner questioned whether any of the designs met the goals stated at the beginning of the presentation; why did so many of the designs force pedestrian flow if one of the objectives was to allow for more pedestrian flow through the site? Antonia showed how all the designs were more permeable for pedestrian flow than current conditions, especially Scheme B-3. Ken Lewis noted that much of the visual clutter would probably remain for any of the designs, although it was difficult to know for sure without seeing a rendering.

Ken Lewis was concerned that the proposed tree canopy in the B-series was too dense and would block the Brookline Bank signage, although Antonia showed in photographs that the signage was blocked now by the trees, both in the winter and in full leaf. Several members of the audience preferred the idea of a denser tree canopy and wanted this space to look “green” and “cozy.”

Doug Rodman (owner of the building adjacent to Hickey Triangle) voiced an opinion that the design was based on an unrealistic attitude that this space could ever become more “lunch” friendly, and was concerned that seating would always continue to only attract “panhandlers.” Although he was glad to see improvement of the space in front of his building, he thought it should be more for pedestrians walking through, but less seating. Several members of the audience strongly disagreed with Doug, and voiced a strong desire for a place for people to rest as they walked in Brookline Village. Antonia stated that the goal is intended to provide transitional seating for people that might be waiting for the bus, a friend or on a quick break. The design does not suggest that this is intended to serve as an outdoor café, which would be unrealistic given the size, location and perimeter conditions of the space.

Ken Lewis and Doug Rodman felt the design looked like there was not enough funding available in the current budget. Don Warner’s recommendation was to simplify the design; he thought the design was maybe too ambitious for this tiny space. Don was also skeptical of testing the new grate and planter materials at this site. For example, Don suggested using one type of paver, only 5-6 elements for the entire design, and to leave room to walk around. A couple audience members

echoed this sentiment by stating that the design should not be to “create a gateway for cars”, but rather a “simple park, with simple amenities for pedestrians.” Several audience members also thought the space should still be “special,” “distinct without relying on the clock”, “more simple”, “protected area in this intensely busy corner”, and definitely with seating. Erin Gallentine and Antonia Bellalta agreed that this triangle should not be misrepresented as a “gateway” to Brookline or the Village. But, that the project was more focused on place-making and creating a sense of place at this location within Brookline that helped to anchor the commercial area.

Tom Nally liked the design response to pedestrian desire lines, but suggested that may not be the only thing that should drive the shape of the space. For example, seating could be a variety of types and alignments, for social seating or not.

Ruth Ann Schneider suggested that the two bus stops could use a bus shelter, and that perhaps this space could include a bus shelter. Don Warner liked that idea as well. A couple audience members did not think the space should read as “just a bus shelter”, although Don thought a well-designed bus shelter could be integrated well into the design, could be creative (e.g., including solar panels, for example). Tom Nally strongly disagreed, and did not think a bus shelter should be added to the design for this space, even if it was well designed. Abby Swaine suggested that bus shelters be moved outside of this discussion, and taken up by the Public Transportation Advisory Committee (PTAC).

#### Seating:

Don Warner noted that for any of the benches, not only were backs important, but also arms – to help people when they were ready to leave the bench. He also suggested that adding arms in the middle of a length of bench also could help multiple parties feel comfortable sitting more closely together. Edie Brickman agreed.

Tom Nally liked the idea of the star-shape, more free form seat, but probably not the right design for this space.

Many audience members expressed a general preference for seating in this area. Phillip Kramer of 84 Davis Ave – suggested that the site needed to feel like a special place.

Jennifer Pieszak – Asked if anything was going to be done about the light pole and light source. She also added that the when initially visually encountering the heart of Brookline Village it would be beneficial if it were green.

#### Plantings:

Antonia Bellalta noted that if the design moved forward with the ginkos, they would be specified to be 3.5” caliper, 15-18’ tall, and 7’ clearance to the first branch. Although both the ginkos and cherry trees would work well in the B/Grove series, Don strongly preferred the ginkos over the cherry trees, mostly because he was concerned the cherries were not as robust and only flowered a couple weeks a year, whereas the branching form of the ginkos would be interesting year-round. Don strongly felt that the trees should be chosen based on those species that have proved to last (e.g., honey locust, ginko). He also asked that in the future, drawings

– even if just in plan view – should be shown with how the tree canopy might look for the first 5-10 years, not fully mature as shown in the drawings.

Don thought the interior planters in the A-series took up a lot of space, and suggested that the planting should be planter free – just come up out of the ground. Don was weary of smaller planting areas in these spaces, noting a planting effort along Chestnut Hill Avenue had disappeared over time, so capital funding should not be spent on such items.

#### Next Steps:

Towards the end, Kara again asked EDAB for specific feedback, noting that she had heard conflicting advice from EDAB members: more or less seating? clock or no clock? Ken Lewis responded, “less seating, more funding.” Other EDAB members did not respond, and no consensus was made.

Anne Meyers suggested scheduling a site walk as part of the next meeting.

## **2. Shared Work Space**

- Anne Meyers and Harold Simansky introduced the three guests with different shared work space models starting in Brookline: Regus, Jewish Venture Mentoring Service (JVMS), and WorkShop.
- Rony Shapiro of JVMS – non-profit mentoring service, based on MIT’s venture mentoring service model, where professors help students and other professors with patents and inventions. MIT has a grant to start this model with other colleges, and is also working with other countries to stem the brain drain. JVMS mentors both startups and ongoing businesses. They had 50 applications, and are working with 20 of those businesses in groups. Most of their businesses are in the retail, high tech, biotech sectors. They operate out of Kehillath Israel now, but are separate from the Congregation. They are looking to expand to larger space, but have a next-to-zero budget. Rony feels that being in a dense, commercial area is good. Rony feels very strongly that shared work space mentoring programs needs to be at the forefront of EDAB’s priorities.
- Lisa Wasserman Sivan is an interior designer and currently works out of her house. She has been networking with other home-based businesses interested in sharing a more public workspace. Most of them are women, and most have established businesses that allow them to have flexible work times. Because commercial space is so expensive, it is difficult to finance a shared workspace model that is supported on project-based work, which can be cyclical (compared to more steady cash flow occupations such as therapists). She noted that she worked on a specific location with Don Warner, but the projected revenue was not enough to win a bid for purchasing the building. Although Regus has conference space, she would like a model where different people can be working next to each other in a less corporate environment; she also didn’t

think working within a church/synagogue space was the right environment for her work. With regards to location, working near home is important, but zoning makes it more difficult to have clients in residential homes legally. Lisa is also looking at using the Teen Center temporarily in the morning and mid-day hours, but realizes this makes it difficult for them to program other special events. Lisa is now interested in a more club model, with fewer private individual spaces and common space where invited guests might have access (like clients or special speakers), but the space would not be generally open to the public. They need about 6,000 – 10,000 square feet. Lisa also explained that she is working with WorkBar in developing this concept, although they are not interested in opening a WorkBar in Brookline without a twist in the feel and operation. For example, WorkBar has affiliated presence in Hingham, Providence, and Framingham [called “Outerspaces”, such as Innovation FSU]. Lisa is working towards a WorkBar-affiliated “WorkShop” in Brookline.

- David Reznikow from Regus grew up in Brookline, and is now working towards an official opening of a Regus office above Trader Joe’s by the end of this month. Regus is a 25-year old company, traded on the London Stock Exchange. The owner of the building (Roberta Sydney) approached them about six years ago, knowing that they could lease it for a longer term (15 years) at top dollar. They are about 20% occupied now, and have a goal to be 30-40% occupied by opening. Most of their renters are therapists, attorneys, and a couple internet-based businesses. They also have one 4-person company transferring their lease from a Regus office in Boston (three of the people live in Brookline). It takes about \$750,000 to develop and start a new office location, so this is a big investment for Regus. Although nationally they have a corporate presence, they have been thinking about rebranding this location as more like a Cambridge Innovation Center. While their office is ideal for project managers that need to be in the area for 3-6 months at a time, most of their business is from local residents.

### ***Questions/Comments, grouped by topic:***

#### Why Shared Workspace is Important in Brookline

Rony noted that retail is struggling and shared workspace has the opportunity to bring in dense numbers of workers in smaller spaces. These employees tend to spend money at lunch, etc. in commercial areas. This concept is taking off elsewhere, and he would like to see it in Brookline.

Harold Simansky noted that the JVMS/MIT model tends to attract entrepreneurs with businesses that are more likely to grow and stay in Brookline (whereas sole practitioners and the Regus model are more likely to have non-growing business models). He also noted that start-ups like his own company like the accordion space for businesses that grow and contract throughout the year, and he agreed that

the other entrepreneurs he sees in the Cambridge Innovation District love to spend money at lunch – especially the doctors.

David Micley (TMM and resident in Precinct 10), noted that there is also a large group of young adults moving back to their parents' house, working on start-ups in their parents' house. Brookline should be working to encourage these start-ups to stay in Brookline as they grow. [David referred to Mike Burnstein's Janji company as an example – recall that David was an Econ. Dev. intern with us!]

#### Barriers to Shared Workspace in Brookline

- In addition to the high cost of commercial space, Lisa expressed frustration that some landlords keep their storefronts vacant, sometimes for more than a year, waiting for a higher rent agreement in lieu of a lower paying tenant in the short-term.
- Transportation: the green line is not the red line, but could be touted more while it gets improved. EDAB members also pointed to Bridj as a potential help with this, a private bus service starting up, connecting Coolidge Corner to Kendall Square.
- Don suggested that Lisa be more open to smaller, less finished spaces. He thought she should reconsider spaces like KI to get started – to build a track record and then look for a more suitable space.

### **3. Development Updates**

- **Red Cab:** Claremont is looking to break ground in three weeks!
- **Circle Cinema:** Another public comment period in Boston ends tomorrow, and a BRA vote could be as early as June 19th.
- **Brookline Place:** Boston Children's Hospital is gearing up to meet with Planning/Building this week or next to begin their Special Permit process. Ken Lewis noted that EDAB will need to take the initiative in countering some of the statements made at Town Meeting with regards to parking – for example, people are still using Kendall Square as an example even though there is NO medical office being developed there. Paul Saner noted that citizens will want a robust TDM plan.

### **4. Misc./New Business:**

- Potential topics for further discussion at next meeting: Site visit for Hickey Triangle scheduled for 6:30 at the next regularly scheduled EDAB meeting, July 7th – meet at Triangle. Other topics for June EDAB meeting could include: Bridj, Green Line improvements and plans, next commercial development site.

**Meeting adjourned.**