

River Road Study Committee
March 2, 2016
MEETING NOTES



Committee Members

Select Chair Ben Franco
Dick Benka
Alan Christ
Chris Dempsey
Steve Heikin
Brian Hochleitner
Yvette Johnson
Ken Lewis
Wendy Machmuller
Hugh Mattison
Tom Nally
Marilyn Newman
Mariah Nobrega
Charles Osborne
Linda Pehlke
Bill Reyelt
Daniel Weingart

Committee Members Present: Ben Franco, Dick Benka, Alan Christ, Chris Dempsey, Steve Heikin, Brian Hochleitner, Yvette Johnson, Ken Lewis, Wendy Machmuller, Hugh Mattison, Tom Nally, Marilyn Newman, Mariah Nobrega, Charles Osborne, Linda Olson Pehlke, Bill Reyelt

Staff: Andy Martineau

Guests: Several residents were present

Committee members met from 7:00 to 9:15 pm

Materials: Upcoming infrastructure improvement powerpoint, Complete Streets Overview powerpoint, draft minutes, agenda

1. Presentation of Upcoming Infrastructure Improvements

- Andy Martineau provided an overview of the approved Emerald Necklace Crossing (ENC) plan and preliminary 25% design plan for the Gateway East intersection improvements. Andy noted that the ENC is starting construction this spring and the Planning and Public Works are ramping up to submit a revised 25% design plan to MassDOT following the addition of enhanced bike and pedestrian accommodations.
- Andy stated that the Industrial zone is the next puzzle piece and that it will be important that the hotel and any future projects are integrated with projects that are already in the pipeline.

ENC Crossing Overview:

- Creates dedicated bike path where existing path turns to dirt on the Pond Ave side of Route 9
- Brings Jamaica Way off ramp to a "T" with Pond Ave as a natural traffic calming measure
- Bike path continues across Route 9 through two pedestrian activated signals that are coordinated with the other signals at major intersections

Gateway East Overview:

- The project was born out of the Comprehensive Plan and Public Realm Plan which sought to improve the functionality and pedestrian experience across Route 9

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- The project reached 25% design threshold, however, changing design standards at the state level as well the desire to add additional bike accommodations at the local level prompted the addition of cycle tracks from approximately the town border to the Washington St intersection
- The project also includes reconfiguring the jug handle around the fire station so that it aligns with Pearl St., enhanced signalization, floating bus stops and improved landing spaces for pedestrians

Questions Comments:

- When are these projects going to start?
- The ENC is anticipated to start construction this spring ending in December. Gateway East is on the State Transportation Improvement Plan for next fiscal year so the project is anticipated to go out to BID this December with construction starting in the spring/fall.
- Is the double right hand turn lane into Brookline Village being reduced to one? -Yes
- Are the signals going to be coordinated so each light communicates with the other? - Yes

2. Review and Discussion of Public Realm Vision and Potential Implementation Strategies

- Andy Martineau stated that many of the desired public realm improvements the Committee has been discussing fall under the umbrella of Complete Streets. There may be some opportunities to make simple improvements like continuing the cycle track where the existing curb cuts for 25 Washington Street currently prohibit it. Andy asked Linda Olson Pehlke to give an overview of Complete Streets elements as a means of helping the Committee further refine a menu of public benefits, some of which could be incorporated into the overlay zoning.

Complete Streets Overview:

- Linda Olson Pehlke gave an overview of Complete Streets concepts and some potential improvements that could be incorporated into the overlay zoning to create wider sidewalks, street scape elements, ground floor use and design parameters and other enhanced bike and pedestrian accommodations
- Andy stated that he has spoken with Transportation Director Todd Kirrane about some of these concepts and that some may be feasible, but there are tradeoffs like loss of on street parking, which could in turn impact the viability of some of the proposed uses.

Questions/Comments:

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- One idea that the architecture subcommittee is exploring is imposing front and side yard setbacks, which could be a means of creating space between buildings and maintaining visual and/or physical penetrations through the district.
- A setback at the corner of Washington St. and Brookline Ave. might minimize the impact of the hotel
- It is important that we get sidewalks right, but we also need to be mindful of the impact that has on the feasibility of a project
- There are other ways to enliven the streetscape like, minimizing the distance between doorways and incentivizing ground floor retail and encouraging storage and back office space to go on upper floors
- Street trees should be a priority
- We need to keep in mind that it is beyond the scope of this Committee to redesign the roadway. The purpose of the presentation is to illustrate some of the concepts the Committee has been discussing with respect to desired public realm improvements
- Requiring sidewalks that are too wide may also preclude development from happening
- This is already a tight site; we need to be mindful to not create zoning that makes floor plates so inefficient that nothing can be built.
- This is preliminary discussion about potential public realm improvements. More analysis is needed to better understand the tradeoffs between getting some of the things we want and allowing for a project to be feasible in order to attain those things
- If we want foot traffic in and around the area, we need to create a street scape that has space for people and makes walking enjoyable.

3. Discussion of Site walk Observations

- Andy Martineau asked the Committee to share their observations from the site walk held on the previous Friday.
- The walk really gave us a sense of how constrained the site is and what some of the environmental concerns are
- Any developer including Claremont will have a Licensed Site Professional (LSP) review the site conditions. That person is obligated to report certain findings to the state and the Developer is required to deal with them
- It would be helpful to have more info regarding the environmental issues we should be mindful of
- Ultimately, remediation and mitigation of environmental issues will be up to a developer and their engineers
- We need to be mindful of shadow impacts on Village Way especially on the Brookline Ice and Coal side of the district
- Could River Road become one way as a means of creating more green space, calming traffic and possibly creating a shared street?
- It is clear that some of the existing businesses have not been good neighbors

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- The MIT study is a good starting point for some of the possible massing options, but more financial analysis is needed
- The height of the hotel is still an issue for me. It does not serve as a gateway
- A taller structure on 25 Washington Street defines the corner and does signal that you have arrived somewhere. We currently do not have that sense of arrival with what is presently in the district.
- Wider sidewalks will help taller masses seem less imposing

4. Review and Approve Minutes

- Minutes from February 3 were approved as amended