

City of Cambridge

The Traffic and Transportation Committee conducted a public hearing on Tuesday, July 19, 1994 beginning at 6:06 p. m. in the Sullivan Chamber, City Hall.

Councillor Jonathan S. Myers, Chair of the above referenced committee convened the hearing and stated that the purpose of this date's proceedings was to update and discuss the planned traffic and transportation improvements for the city focusing on Massachusetts Avenue, LaFayette Square, the Waverly Connector and other related matters.

Present at the hearing were: Councillor Francis H. Duehay, Deputy City Manager Richard C. Rossi, Acting Assistant City Manager for Community Development Susan Schlesinger, Acting Traffic and Parking Director Lauren Preston, Director of the Environmental Programs Elizabeth Epstein, Deputy Public Works Commissioner Steven White, Deputy City Clerk John E. Flynn, Chief Project Planner Richard Easler and Associate Planner Stuart Dash.

To begin the discussion, Councillor Myers outlined the format of the hearing to be followed:

- 1) Presentation by the City Manager and designated City Staff
- 2) Neighborhood Perspective
- 3) Committee Discussion
- 4) Open Discussion and Public Comment.

Councillor Myers noted that the projects to be undertaken from Central Square to the East represented a major commitment of federal, state and city funds. He further characterized these projects as an opportunity or as a crisis. The opportunity being traffic and roadway improvements, the crisis calling for a level of cooperation by pulling together the different elements -- city, neighborhood and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He further acknowledged that the City administration has worked diligently to put the plans before the City Council and the community.

At this time the Chair recognized Mr. Rossi for his presentation.

Mr. Rossi thanked the Committee for affording the City administration the opportunity to continue the dialogue on the proposed projects with the community. He stated that the proposed roadway and traffic plans would be a real benefit to the neighborhood. He spoke of previous meetings held with State officials regarding Massachusetts Avenue and stated that meetings would be held in the fall of 1994 to continue the planning process. He stated that the City is trying to establish a goal by which traffic would be moved east of Brookline Street thus allowing this street to become more residential in character. He also stated that the City is committed to reducing vehicular trips and bicycles are an alternative being studied. He concluded by stating that a key ingredient in this process is the need for appropriate citizen

City of Cambridge

- 2 -

participation to advise the city.

At this time Ms. Epstein reviewed the various Cambridgeport Roadway Improvement Maps with those assembled. She stated that the objectives were:

- 1) to discourage thru traffic on residential streets;
- 2) improve public safety;
- 3) provide physical improvements; and
- 4) improve residential character.

She spoke of the federal funding mechanism by which dollars are passed through the Commonwealth for approved projects. The approved projects are contained in the Transportation Improvement Program 1995-1997 (TIP). She stated that Massachusetts Avenue is in the TIP and programmed at three million dollars. With regards to funding for Sidney to Waverly the State is now willing to fund but Brookline Street is not programmed. She also noted that under the TIP the city bears the costs of design and right of way. (These costs are included in the Mitigation Agreement with the Commonwealth).

At this time Ms. Schlesinger commented on the plans for Brookline Street. She noted that in the fall of 1994, seventy-seven residential units are to be readied and occupied at the University Park site. She noted that there is an eighteen person Central Square Improvements Committee and the City's allocation of one million dollars in this effort. She also stated that this Committee would be reviewing the Lafayette Square Project.

Upon conclusion of the City's presentation, Councillor Myers recognized Mr. William Cavellini, 158 Brookline Street, to begin the Neighborhood Perspective Section of the hearing.

Mr. Cavellini stated that the origins of the Cambridgeport Roadway Improvements began with the former Simplex Site. He provided an historical overview of that site dating back to the late 1970's and 1980's. He spoke of the rush hour traffic influx on the neighborhood that would be caused by the two million square foot of new use when it came on line. He stated that the LaFayette Square realignment would not impact on the Cambridgeport neighborhood but the Waverly Connector would impact all of Cambridgeport. He questioned why the Waverly Connector Project was not considered the priority by the City.

Ms. Geneva Malenfant, 75 Henry Street, spoke of her experiences with the Inner-Belt Project some thirty-two years ago. She stated that LaFayette Square should be left for last as it acts as a magnet drawing traffic down Sidney Street. She echoed Mr. Cavellini's concern with regard to the priority not placed on the Waverly Connector. She also concurred that

City of Cambridge

- 3 -

improvements are needed to make Brookline Street more residential in character.

Mr. Robert Boulrice, 54 Soden Street, and President Central Square Neighborhood Coalition spoke of his organization's effort in asserting pedestrian rights and safety in the Square. He spoke of the Community Development written Request for proposal for the Central Square enhancements and the profound sense of excitement that has been generated.

At this time, Mr. O. Robert Simha, Director, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Planning, addressed the Committee and stated the University's commitment and willingness to be an active player in the planning process. (A copy is attached).

At this time Councillor Duehay congratulated the Chair for beginning the review of these projects. He inquired if the City was ready to get into the details and specifics of how the traffic would be diverted.

In response Mr. Rossi stated conceptually the City was ready but the design has not been done.

Councillor Duehay then inquired of the steps that need to be taken to make the Waverly Connector a reality.

In response Ms. Epstein stated that it is the City's number one priority and the city has been attempting to move it along as quickly as possible with design work being done in the upcoming months.

Councillor Myers noted that although each project is unique in nature and separate but collectively they are interrelated. He stated his desire to work with the advisory committees on these projects. He then requested a response or comment to Mr. Cavellini's inquiry regarding the Waverly Connector.

Ms. Epstein stated that at the time the City was able to advance Massachusetts Avenue and LaFayette Square. The State would not commit funding for the Waverly Connector. But over time the City has made changes thus now allowing for eligibility of funding. The change made allowed for a change in the functional classification of roadways.

Mr. Cavellini requested a clarification on why the State would not fund it.

Ms. Epstein, in response, stated that the State is not the only authority to approve a change. It also requires a federal review process. Basically it could not keep up with the time frame.

Mr. Cavellini inquired of the cost for LaFayette Square.

City of Cambridge

- 4 -

In response Mr. Easler stated three million dollars for right-of-way and one million dollars for construction.

At this time Councillor Myers opened the floor for Public Comment.

Mr. Jack Dobson, Forest City Development, stated that the projects should be a win-win situation. He stated that he was encouraged and grateful by the City's efforts and would like to participate in the process.

Mr. Dan Geer, 180 Chestnut Street, stated his mistrust of the Massachusetts Highway Department and his displeasure with their role in the design and acquisition stages of these projects. He inquired if thought had been given to the side effects of the problems being solved.

Mr. Steve Kaiser, 191 Hamilton Street, provided the Committee with his assessment of the pluses and minuses of the total project. Listed as pluses were:

- 1) opportunity to make LaFayette Square a better place - landscaping
- 2) a good initiative - bicycles on Massachusetts Avenue
- 3) will reduce speeding on Massachusetts Avenue
- 4) will reduce some traffic on Pearl and Brookline Streets, etc.

Listed as minuses were:

- 1) loss of forty to fifty metered parking spaces on Massachusetts Avenue
- 2) better alternative design - LaFayette Square
- 3) where does diverted traffic go
- 4) concerned with the rush of the project by the City and the State.

Ms. Nancy Woods, 4 Hastings Square, stated the need for the City to become more bicycle friendly. She also noted that her enthusiasm is cautioned due to the funding not in place until 1997.

City of Cambridge

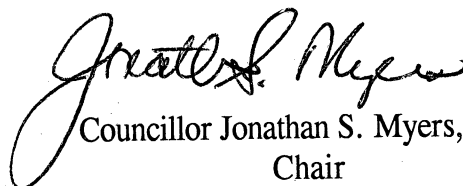
- 5 -

Ms. Muriel Brown stated that better enforcement of the speed limit on Pearl Street is needed.

Councillor Myers thanked all for their attendance and participation in the hearing. He further stated that it was an excellent meeting and that the Committee will consult with the City administration, community and local institutions about next steps.

The hearing was adjourned at eight o'clock and six minutes p. m.

For the Committee,



Councillor Jonathan S. Myers,
Chair

071994.traffandtranscomreport

Remarks prepared by O. R. Simha, Director - MIT Planning Office

Tuesday, July 19, 1994

Thank you Councillor Myers for the opportunity to share our views on traffic and transportation improvements proposed for our part of the City.

Transportation Projects and Economic Development

1. It is exciting to see so many important projects moving through the planning process with a real sense of promise that they will be implemented. This is a good sign for the City. Infrastructure improvements are critical to economic development. MIT wants to play a helpful role in local, state, and national economic development, and our joint and separate efforts - with the many other parties critical to achieving actual implementation - can only enhance the City's economic health.

Desire to Facilitate Additional Transportation Options in the City

2. MIT is an active supporter of creating as many transportation options in the City as are possible. New bus routes, assigning higher priority for bicycles, additional recognition of pedestrian needs and safety are objectives toward which we have spent considerable energy. We are delighted that we can move beyond objectives, and be at the point of rolling up our sleeves, along with our neighbors and our colleagues at the City, State, and advocacy groups, to work out the details and the rough edges of the projects currently on the table and begin to realize the fruit of many years of laboring on the part of the people in this room.

MIT Commitment to Constructive Participation

3. We recognize that it is difficult to move from general concepts, to plans, to design, to actual construction. Many obstacles arise, views vary, unanticipated problems emerge, budgets are challenged, conditions change, long-held assumptions are proved not valid, and on and on. MIT is familiar with these problems on our own projects. However, just because of that familiarity, we also know that the way to scale these obstacles is to commit to constructive participation in finding solutions to all the challenges out there.

4.

- We are deeply concerned about improving traffic safety on the streets that surround the Campus. We are currently engaged with the MDC and City Officials in the development of a safer and more effective intersection at Massachusetts Avenue and Memorial Drive.
- We are working closely with the City on the development of the Massachusetts Avenue Lafayette Square proposal to insure that pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers are all fairly served by the improvements that are proposed.
- We are working hard with the City, the MBTA, and other employers in Cambridge to encourage the introduction of

circumferential bus service that should attract many who now drive into this area to public transportation.

- Many transportation issues under consideration affect our communities in different ways and we would welcome the opportunity to participate in a City-sponsored advisory group that could address transportation issues in an open and creative fashion. We have achieved some important common goals using a similar process in the past and we believe it can be helpful now and in the future.

In closing, we want to express MIT's commitment to our constructive participation in helping to nurture these projects so that they can move from where they are today to actual pavement, granite, trees, lighting, buses on the right-of-way, and all the other improvements that will come from our collaborative efforts.

2.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

S-346

Traffic and Transportation Committee
Report for a hearing held on July 19,
1994 regarding planned traffic and
transportation improvements for the city
focusing on Mass. Ave., LaFayette Square
and Waverly Connector.

In City Council,

August 1, 1994

8/1/94

Report accepted
Placed on file