

City of Cambridge

O-16
IN CITY COUNCIL
November 3, 2003

VICE MAYOR DAVIS

ORDERED: That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to confer with the Assistant City Manager for Community Development to provide the City Council with a zoning analysis of the Massachusetts Avenue corridor from Cambridge Common to Porter Square; and be it further

ORDERED: That the City Manager be further requested to ensure that the planning process include the community with a community meeting.

In City Council November 3, 2003
Adopted by the affirmative vote of nine members.
Attest:- D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk

A true copy;

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "D. Margaret Drury".

ATTEST:-

D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk

The Agassiz Working Group includes representatives from The Agassiz Committee on Impacts of Development (ACID) along with representatives from the city and Harvard. This group has been meeting since November of 2002 to discuss Harvard's proposed development in the North Yard and the university's early discussions on the future of the Harvard Law School campus area including areas along Mass. Ave. on both sides of Everett Street (the parking garage and the retail block across Everett) and between Mellen and Wendell (the old Holiday Inn, now North Hall). During this time, two members of ACID have also worked to document and examine the full length of Mass. Ave. from the Common to Porter Square, and have produced a document with photos, physical description and use of each building along the avenue.

II. Supporting Small Businesses

The Mass Ave. retail corridor consists of small shops and restaurants, generally serving the adjacent neighborhoods. The character of this corridor is one of diverse and small-scale retail stores. From recent neighborhood study meetings, residents have indicated that they like the commercial corridor and want to keep it small scale and neighborhood friendly.

Small businesses need support to be competitive and to succeed in the long run. The Economic Development Division of CDD has a number of active programs to support small businesses. In addition to one-on-one counseling for small business owners and operators, the Division provides matching grants of up to \$35,000 for façade improvements to commercial storefronts. Qualifying project improvements may include restoration of architectural details, well-proportioned signage and lighting, better windows and doors, and other elements designed to unify and enhance the building's first floor façade. In addition the Signage and Lighting Program provides matching grants of up to \$3,500 to merchants for lighting and signage improvements to their retail establishments. Current participants along Mass. Ave. include Passage to India, the Cambridge Music Center, the Porterhouse Pub, among others.

The Best Retail Practices Program helps business owners learn the latest and best techniques to improve their interior store designs, marketing, and operations. Free workshops are individual in-store consultations are offered to retailers and restaurants. Topics include window displays, store layout, visual merchandising, marketing, and customer service. Small grants are available for in-store improvements for qualified business owners. Eight business owners have participated in the Best Retail Practices program in this area, including Tibet Arts, Gypsy Moon, Mind's Eye Yarn, among others.

III. Porter Square Air Rights

On June 4, 2003 the MBTA issued an invitation to bid for an 85-year lease of land and air rights over the Porter Square Station and the tracks extending up Somerville Avenue to Roseland Street. The total parcel is approximately 50,375 square feet, with approximately 32,375 s.f. in Cambridge and 18,000 in Somerville. The MBTA received two responses to the RFP, one from Lesley University and one from Oaktree Green LLC. The neighborhood has had a presentation of the Oaktree proposal.

The City has successfully worked with the Porter Square Neighbors on recent projects, and will work with the neighborhood as proposals are developed. As the proposed Oaktree project is greater than 50,000 square feet, if it proceeds it will fall under the Article 19.000 requirements of the zoning ordinance for Planning Board Special Permit traffic and urban design review. Depending on the design of the actual project, Planning Board review under the North Massachusetts Avenue Overlay District may also be required.

IV. Mass Ave Streetscape Improvements

No significant construction work is currently planned for Mass. Ave. between Harvard and Porter Squares; generally such larger scale changes are planned to take in conjunction with needed subsurface construction. (Some more limited spot repairs to the roadway may be needed from time to time.)

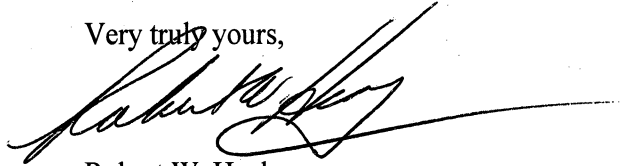
V. Next Steps

City staff will continue to work with the Agassiz Working Group and Lesley University to discuss and monitor the future of institutionally owned property along Mass. Ave. including review of the Harvard Law School Feasibility Study and the Lesley University Master Plan. Both institutions have indicated that they will meet with the community to present the findings of these reports.

Furthermore, there is the opportunity during the annual Town Gown report process to discuss and make recommendations to the institutions regarding their plans for the Mass. Ave. corridor.

Clearly there is a great deal of change occurring and anticipated in this part of the city. The city has been and will continue to be involved in working in all of these areas: business support and commercial district revitalization, institutional master planning, Porter Square streetscape improvements, and the MBTA's RFP for air rights development. CDD has committed to attend a public meeting of the Porter Square Neighbors Association (scheduled for October 28) to discuss development issues in Porter Square. CDD will describe project review design criteria under Article 19 of the zoning ordinance, which would apply to any large project in the air rights area. At that meeting, staff will also discuss with PSNA current zoning parameters for Porter Square (e.g. allowed uses, heights, density), recent changes to zoning such as those adopted in the citywide process, and will assess with the group whether additional changes are warranted. It is our understanding that the MBTA, Oaktree and Lesley University will also make presentations on October 28.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert W. Healy', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Robert W. Healy
City Manager

RWH/mec



14.

CITY OF CAMBRIDGE • EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

Robert W. Healy, City Manager Richard C. Rossi, Deputy City Manager

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October 20, 2003

To the Honorable, the City Council:

In response to Awaiting Report Item Number 03-87, regarding the planning process for Massachusetts Avenue from the Cambridge Common north to Porter Square, Assistant City Manager for Community Development Beth Rubenstein reports the following:

I. Planning Efforts

Recent planning efforts along Massachusetts Avenue from Cambridge Common to Porter Square have included the Agassiz neighborhood study (April 2003), Neighborhood Nine Study Update and the Porter Square Roadway Improvement Project. Current planning processes in this area include the ongoing Agassiz Working Group, the recently started Porter Square Air Rights public discussions, and the Lesley University Master Plan process.

Within the past year, extensive public process occurred during both the Neighborhood 9 Update and Agassiz neighborhood study. In these efforts, neighborhood participants and city staff worked together to develop recommendations regarding zoning, urban design, housing, open space, and economic development.

The Agassiz Neighborhood Study made recommendations for a transition buffer zone where the C2-A district (Lesley University) abuts the neighborhood. The study also emphasized the need to support neighborhood-friendly retail along Mass. Ave. and stressed the importance of communication with the Agassiz neighborhood on recommended retail uses. The committee also indicated its support for Harvard's established practice of leasing at reduced rents to retail tenants.

The original 1995 Neighborhood Nine Study made recommendations on improving the Porter Square Shopping Center, improving the streetscape along Mass. Ave, and maintaining neighborhood retail along Mass. Ave. The Neighborhood Nine Study Update will include a similar recommendation for Mass. Ave., improved streetscape and maintaining the mix of retail stores.

In addition to neighborhood studies and updates, there has been extensive public process over several years around the proposed roadway and pedestrian improvements in Porter Square. Working with a citizen advisory committee, city staff has developed a plan that will include enhanced signal operations to allow safer pedestrian crossings of the streets, a left turn onto Mass. Ave. from the shopping center, and urban design improvements such as trees, benches, lighting, plantings, and an expanded public plaza. Pedestrian enhancements allow people to have a better experience in commercial centers and contribute to the economic development of the area.

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Consent Agenda #14

Transmitting communication from
Robert W. Healy, City Manager,
relative to **Awaiting Report Item
Number 03-87**, regarding the planning
process for Massachusetts Avenue
from the Cambridge Common north to
Porter Square.

In City Council October 20, 2003

**CHARTER RIGHT EXERCISED
BY VICE MAYOR DAVIS.**

In City Council October 27, 2003

**TABLED ON MOTION OF VICE
MAYOR DAVIS.**

In City Council November 3, 2003

**PLACED ON FILE
ORDER ADOPTED
SEE ORDER #16**