



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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September 2, 1997

To: Robert W. Healy, City Manager

From: Susan Schlesinger, Asst. City Manager, CDD

Subject: Response to Council Orders #165 and #166 dated 8/4/97
#165 RE: REPORT ON THE COMPLETION OF
IMPROVEMENTS TO CENTRAL SQUARE and

#166 RE: REPORT ON PLANTING TREES IN SHALLOW
CONTAINERS THROUGHOUT THE CITY

#165 RE: COMPLETION OF CENTRAL SQUARE IMPROVEMENTS

The improvements to Central Square will be substantially complete by the end of September. There have been a number of delays, as is always the case in a project of this scope and complexity, and a certain amount of "fine tuning" still needs to be accomplished. Fortunately, the majority of the work items have been completed, and people are already enjoying the improved sense of Mass Ave as a place for people rather than just for cars. Currently, the artist Ritsuko Taho is overseeing the installation of the brass cylinders and glass block towers that carry inscriptions of "dreams" for the future of Central Square. She worked extensively with the community, first in review of her concept and subsequently in gathering the "dreams" during last year's World's Fair to inscribe on the art. It is hoped that this artwork will be completed in time for unveiling at this year's World's Fair on September 21.

At the time of this writing, the following pieces of work still need attention by the City's contractor, D'Allessandro Corp.: assisting in the art installation, final adjustments to the new lighting system and removal of the old system, installation of glass roofs for the bus shelters and the walkway structure, replacement of dead trees, and miscellaneous other "punch list" work including brick paving repairs. The City's Public Works Department is supplementing the contractor's work by repairing walkway surfaces outside the

contractor's designated work area, and by doing tree pruning under the supervision of the City Arborist.

The Central Square Improvements Committee met today and decided that they would like to wait until the project is 100% complete before having a celebration. The Committee is considering holding the event in the fall, which could also coincide with the hoped-for installation of holidays lights being designed by the artist Ross Miller, and being paid for by the Central Square Business Association with assistance from the City.

The landscaping work in Central Square has been largely completed, including a total of 168 new trees as well as many other smaller plantings. As for the question of the maturity of trees, many of them are actually larger and more mature than the 20 trees that were planted in Quincy Square; however, the 5 smaller golden rain trees for Carl Barron plaza were carefully chosen to be able to adapt to difficult planting conditions, and to grow into larger trees over time. Please see the attached August 12 memorandum from Steve Carr, architect for the project, for more details on these issues; in addition, the response to Order #166 (please see below) deals with related questions.

In regard to comparing the landscaping to Quincy Square, it is important to note that all of the street trees and the Carl Barron Plaza work in Central Square had to be fit into very constrained existing situations, while Quincy Square was basically created as a completely new space where no plazas or sidewalks had existed before. There is one major sewer line located under Quincy Square, but it affects one defined location rather than the entire site. Quincy Square was conceived by the Quincy Square Committee and the landscape architect (The Halvorson Company) as a quieter, garden-like space on the edge between the neighborhood and Harvard Square, while the Central Square Improvements Committee and the landscape architect sought to create a much more active and bustling space needing more paved areas for the intense circulation and gathering of people that takes place in Central Square.

#166 RE: TREES IN SHALLOW PLANTERS

The question is raised as to what type of tree planting is possible in shallow planters. This relates to a larger issue of what are acceptable conditions in which to plant trees; clearly, the best condition is rich, pollution-free soil such as in the middle of a park and the worst condition is in a shallow planter, subject to urban wear and tear, and with a mass of utility lines underneath such as at Carl Barron Plaza in Central Square. The decision was made to risk planting trees at Carl Barron Plaza because of the desire to have as much green as can be sustained; with proper maintenance of the irrigation system that was installed and with natural rainfall, these trees should become more full next year, with golden blossoms in mid-summer, and should grow much larger over the next few years. These points are elaborated in the attached memorandum from Carr, Lynch and Sandell.

The point is also made that there are successful tree plantings in planters at Charles Square. These are, indeed, very handsome trees; however, their history and the conditions in which they thrive are completely different from the reality of Carl Barron Plaza. First

of all, when they were planted, they were young trees, not dissimilar in size from the trees that have just been planted at Carl Barron Plaza. However, the Charles Square trees were planted 12 years ago, so they have had many years to grow into their planters.

Secondly, the planters at Charles Square are not shallow; they are twice as deep (about four feet) than was possible to provide at Carl Barron Plaza (about two feet), given the need to maintain all of the utility lines underneath. In fact, there was a technical question as to whether any landscaping should have been placed on the Plaza, since it is completely full of major utility lines just underneath the paved surface. Since there was such a strong desire on the part of the community to have landscaping in this area, the decision was made to select and install trees that would have the maximum chance of success in these necessarily shallow planters.

A final distinction is that the Charles Square planters are on top of a parking garage, which presents some technical challenges (e.g., the planters are now leaking into the Charles Square garage), but which is much less problematic than having trees on top of water lines, gas lines, electric lines, telephone lines, etc. The Charles Square courtyard where these trees are located is also a relatively sheltered environment conducive to healthy tree growth, and not subject to the wear and tear of the more urban space adjacent to very heavy vehicular traffic and air pollution that is Carl Barron Plaza.

In summary, Carl Barron Plaza has a designed landscape, with attractively paved spaces, new light fixtures, golden rain trees, interesting grasses, and an intriguing artwork that is just now being integrated into the plaza. This new design will become even more appealing as the plants in the plaza mature and as the broader Central Square setting becomes more green in coming years, with all of the dozens of new trees adjusting to their new home.

CARR, LYNCH AND SANDELL, INC.

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August 12, 1997

To: Susan Schlesinger
Assistant City Manager for Community Development

From: Steve Carr

Subject: City Council Orders of August 4, 1997 re. Central Square

I am writing to respond to concerns raised about landscaping in Central Square, specifically at Carl Barron Plaza. As I understand it, the Council's concern is both that the planting is not complete and also that it is insufficient compared, say, to Quincy Square.

The incompleteness of the planting is due to a mix-up at the nursery that was supplying the plants to the landscaping contractor. Many of the plantings selected for the raised planters were no longer available at reliable nurseries (or any nurseries) by June. We confirmed this by making a number of calls ourselves.

To deal with this problem, we have selected substitute plantings that are available and rearranged the layout to accommodate them. This planting is now completed.

As to the sufficiency of the planting scheme, I offer the following thoughts:

- The plaza was designed in collaboration with the artist, Ritsuko Taho, with very substantial input from the Central Square Committee over half a dozen meetings.
- The area under the plaza is laced with major utilities, making tree planting out of pedestrian movement areas impossible, except in raised planters.
- The size and shape of the planters is a result of recycling all existing granite from the previous planters; the design is intended to allow for the very heavy pedestrian movement at the edges of the plaza, to create a variety of sitting areas, and to provide a small open gathering space at the center.
- Quincy Square, by contrast, is designed as a place to pass through and look at rather than as a gathering place, which allows for most of the area to be planted.
- The Carl Barron Plaza tree choice--the "golden rain" tree--was also the result of substantial discussion of alternatives and was chosen because of its open structure, resistance to air pollution, relatively light foliage providing dappled shade, and profuse golden blossoms coming in July when other things are not blooming.
- Since trees have difficulty in the limited space of planters, they must be planted at a size that will allow them to adapt to their conditions as they mature; under these conditions, larger trees may make an initial show and then not survive.

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CARR, LYNCH AND SANDELL, INC.

Ms. Susan Schlesinger

August 4, 1997

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In addition to problems with planting, other key elements of the final design--the three round brick and glass block towers on which the community "dreams" will be displayed--have not yet been installed. As I understand it, this is because of time required to fabricate the special curved brick that is required.

It is unfortunate that all of the elements of the plaza have not yet come together. This is a source of frustration for the artist, ourselves and, I'm sure, many others. We anticipate substantial completion of the plaza by the end of August or early September. The final effect will only be achieved as the trees mature and begin to shade the plaza. When planting in difficult urban conditions, long term quality requires time to be realized.



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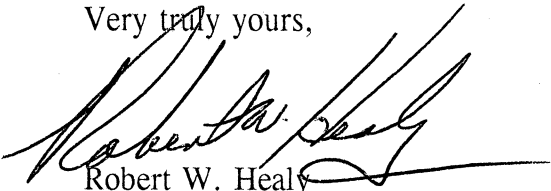
RICHARD C. ROSSI
Deputy City Manager

September 8, 1997

To The Honorable, The City Council:

Please find attached a response to Awaiting Report Item No. 20, regarding a report on the completion of improvements to Central Square and Awaiting Report Item No. 29, regarding a report on planting trees in shallow containers throughout the City, received from Assistant City Manager for Community Development Susan Schlesinger.

Very truly yours,



Robert W. Healy
City Manager

RWH/mec
attachment

Consent Agenda #9

S-533

Relative to Awaiting Report Item Number Twenty, regarding a report on the completion of improvements to Central Square and Awaiting Report Item Number Twenty-nine, regarding a report on planting trees in shallow containers throughout the City.

In City Council September 8, 1997.

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