

City of Cambridge

MEETING

ROUNDTABLE MEETING

Town/gown discussion with Planning Board

DATE

May 19, 2003

5:56 P.M.

PRESIDING OFFICER

Mayor Sullivan

PRESENT

Mayor Sullivan, Vice Mayor Davis, Councillors Davis, Decker, Maher, Murphy, Reeves, and Toomey

Absent: Councillor Simmons

Also present were City Clerk D. Margaret Drury, Deputy City Clerk Donna P. Lopez, and Sandra Albano City Council Assistant

Planning Board Members present: Thomas Anninger, Chair, Hugh Russell, William Tibbs, Florrie Darwin, Pamela Winters, Larissa Brown

City Administrative Staff present: Robert W. Healy, City Manager, Richard Rossi, Deputy City Manager, Don Drisdell, City Solicitor, Beth Rubenstein, Assistant City Manager for Community Development; Susan Glazer, Deputy Director of the Community Development Department (CDD), Les Barber, Director of Land Use and Zoning, CDD, Roger Booth, Director of Urban Design, CDD, Stuart Dash, Director of Community and Neighborhood Planning, Liza Payden, Zoning and Land Use Project Planner, Cliff Cook, Director of Information Management, CDD and Katherine Rafferty, Mayor's Chief of Staff.

See attached summary of discussion points

AJOURNMENT

8:20 P.M., on motion of Councillor Toomey

SUMMARY OF ISSUES AND QUESTIONS

The meeting began with short presentations by the Planning Board. The presentations were based on the material submitted by the Planning Board and attached to this summary. Thereafter there was a general discussion of this material by the members of the City Council, the members of the Planning Board and the City administrative staff. The following issues and questions came from the presentations and discussions:

- The differences between the roles of the City Council and the Planning Board are not always completely clear. There are gray areas even for the experts, and especially for the public.
- There should be regular meetings of the City Council and the Planning Board and planning staff. Consider a change in the City Council rules to establish these meetings.
- Specific examples of master plans for university cities. What different forms do they take? What processes work well?
- Any consideration of a master plan process has to include consideration of the effects of our Plan E government.
- Another aspect of Plan E: several different “thought centers” and little communication among them.
- The City Council and the Planning Board agree that there is a need for more specific information from the universities. In addition to the specifics contained in the attached material submitted by the Planning Board, other information needed includes: information on the trends over time in the square footage per student in student housing, graduate and undergraduate.
- Planning vs. Zoning: Does the City do enough planning in addition to zoning?
- Differences in City Council and Planning Board goals in zoning amendments?
- Difference in City Council and Planning Board goals in non-zoning planning?

- Should the Planning Board and City Council have joint hearings/discussions of the Town/Gown reports?
- As detailed in the attached Planning Board material, there should be changes and improvements in the Town/ Gown reports, many in the area of more specific information about the institutions' future plans and needs and more specific data and data trends.
- What is the role of the public in Planning Board proceedings?
- It was suggested that CDD consider having a scaled model of the city with removable models of all Cambridge buildings so that it would be possible to get a real sense of the impact of a particular proposed development on the surrounding area. It was also suggested that it would be helpful to be able to see the potential build out allowed under the present zoning. Most residents would be quite surprised to see the height and density that could be added as of right.
- It was suggested that the Planning Board's report and the issues raised in this discussion be considered more fully by the Government Operations Committee

Town/Gown Relations
Planning Board Notes for Round Table Discussion with City Council
May 19, 2003

I. The Planning Board role in town-gown relations.

The Planning Board currently considers institutional issues in several contexts:

- Special permits for specific projects.
- Annual review of town/gown reports submitted by institutions.
- Institution or city-sponsored planning processes for specific areas, which can be a prelude to proposals for zoning changes or establishment of planning and design guidelines (e.g. Hammond edge zoning).
- Advisory opinions to the City Council on zoning changes that affect institutions.

II. What we have observed about town-gown planning processes .

Some of the ingredients of the more successful planning processes, such as the Hammond Street rezoning with design guidelines, include the following

- Mutual recognition of the legitimacy of both neighborhood and institutional interests.
- Institutional willingness to share information about anticipated future needs and to be proactive in creating guidelines with neighborhood input before proposing specific development projects.
- A single group with high local participation and legitimacy representing neighborhood interests
- Understanding of citywide goals as a framework for negotiating achievement of institutional and neighborhood goals
- Maintenance of a comfortable environment for expression of diverse opinions
- Effective leadership on all sides

To the extent that we could find ways to systematically incorporate these characteristics, and others that could be identified, into the process for dealing with institutional land use issues, it would be valuable for neighborhoods, institutions, and the City as a whole.

III. Consider strengthening the town-gown process with stronger master plans.

The Board feels that our process has gotten better over the last few years, but it would be improved if the master planning aspect were more fully developed. There are a number of steps that may help us achieve the benefits of a more detailed master plan like those in Boston, while keeping the very strong review process that we have recently enacted through Article 19 Project Review. (Attached is a memo entitled "Institutional Review," which compares the processes in Boston and Cambridge.)

- Prepare for town-gown sessions with a scoping process to outline specific questions the Board would like the institutions to address.
- Ensure that there is literally a plan (a drawing) that is updated each year, with a way to track changes clearly. Similarly, ensure that data is also consistently gathered and that changing trends are identifiable.
- Make a link between the town-gown reporting and the Project Review cases, and thereby clarify the context of proposed buildings.
- Annually analyze the cumulative effects of institutional activities

IV. Consider additional points of information relative to 2003 reports.

The following list conveys Planning Board comments on the reports of each institution, and indicates other parts of the reports that may be of interest to the Council or other city departments. The areas of concern include:

- Major development plans.
- Impacts of these plans that require city study or action.
- Areas of campus or land holdings that we would like to be subject to more planning.

Harvard University

- Does Harvard have specific numeric targets for quantity of housing for each type of affiliate, especially in Riverside?
- Harvard should do a planning study of potential infill dorm sites in the River dorm area - goal is to pull undergrads back from DeWolfe St. housing and use that for grad students and other affiliates.
- Harvard should provide more detailed planning information on the North Yard areas: current and proposed FAR, open space, building sites (including infills), needs of academic users, current status of potential building projects.
- Are there plans for the Radcliffe Institute buildings on Concord Ave.? There may be several real estate implications of recent merger between Harvard and Radcliffe.
- Harvard should do an analysis of built density of institutionally- owned parcels in the two blocks east of Quincy St. Is a downzoning to C2 or C2A necessary to preserve character of these areas?
- We regret that the Council did not approve the CGIS tunnel. It is unfortunate when multiple public reviews and permits have contrary outcomes. Perhaps this could be avoided with a more thorough master planning process in which all concerns get on the table earlier in the process?
- What is the plan for Smithsonian staff who will be moving out of Porter Exchange in 2005?

- Is some of the "leased to 3rd Party" housing on map restricted to affiliates? If so, it should show as institutional, or is map trying to indicate ground floor use? Need to develop color code to show this.
- What impacts will the future development in Allston have on Cambridge?
- Only 28% of Cambridge Grad students are housed on campus, 35% in private facilities in Cambridge. If institutional goal is 50%, what is the Cambridge share? Should be trying to concentrate on filling this gap, even if housing ends up in Allston.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

- Provide information on building projects earlier, before designs are well advanced.
- Is there a master plan for Cambridgeport land between Sidney St. and main campus? Identify any plans, noting sites, density and uses, and schedule. Is housing still proposed in this area?
- What are possible development sites between Mass Ave. and Main St. - north campus area? Right now there is a lot of MIT "Investment" property in the area, some with significant development potential.
- Note that graduate student population is growing - 25% increase since 1981, averaging 65 per year. Need to have a housing program of at least this quantity.

Lesley University

- Lesley should prepare a draft of its planning goals for the Board to review. The University acquired 815 Somerville Ave., and will have control of 2nd floor of Porter Exchange when lease expires in 2005. We understand that the University is doing a master plan process in 2003 to look at utilization of these facilities.
- One important part of MP process is looking at integrating the Art Institute of Boston, currently in Kenmore Square with Cambridge functions - will they move to Cambridge? Other than that, not a lot of growth is planned in Cambridge. Growth is planning in off-campus degree programs.

Cambridge College

- The Board encourages the College to see themselves as a Central Square institution. Although there are no stated plans for future growth in Cambridge, the growth of the student population could mean growth of the physical plant. The College leased part of 80 Prospect St, several blocks north of Central Square, which is a good location because of the availability of parking and the possibility of some subway use.

- As a "commuter" institution for adults with day jobs, operating principally in the early evening hours, parking is highest impact. The College should present its campus-wide PTDM plan that was referred to in presentation. The Board is concerned about impacts from leased facilities in residential neighborhoods.

Here is an outline of my discussion point:

The Reports:

While the Town/Gown reports have definitely improved over my 9 years on the board, they frequently emphasize the institution's "internal" issues and not the "external" community issues. The data presented is helpful and should continue to be a significant part of the report. In addition to the data, the institutions can include more information which specifically explore the following:

1. Trends in the Data
2. Interface issues between the Institution and the Community
3. Specific attention to "whole campus/institution" key planning issues including:
 - Property Ownership
 - Building Height
 - FAR
 - Open Space/Landscape
 - Public/community access
 - Traffic and Parking
 - Service related issues
 - Attitudes towards/contributions to the city streets and public ways
4. Community relations/interactions – particularly as they relate to adjacent neighborhoods.
 - What worked well in the in the past year
 - What did work as well as had planned
 - What projects our issues will require special attention next year
5. Their Short, Medium and Long Range planning goals

Our Review:

As we discuss and review the reports we should specifically address:

1. Trends in their data and how they reflect stated goals
2. Specific campus issues that have community impacts
3. Collective issues that effect/link more than one institution
4. Projects (recent and anticipated) that require broader planning attention.

Our Goals:

Our goal should be to use the town gown reports and discourse to provide a better Institutional planning context which will assist us as we deal with the specific projects and zoning issues that routinely come before use.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

Zoning of institutions in Cambridge and Boston is governed by different legislation. Cambridge is governed by MGL Ch. 40A whiles Boston is governed by special legislation. The following is a comparison of the two approaches to institutional planning.

I. What legislative frameworks affect institutional planning in Boston and Cambridge?

- i. Boston has home rule legislation adopted in 1956, which governs their zoning.
- ii. In Boston, institutions have no as-of-right zoning in most parts of the city. They obtain zoning rights through completion of an institutional master plan.
- iii. In Cambridge, legislation has created Institutional Overlay Districts as a way to limit institutional development in low-density residential districts, and
- iv. Project Review Special Permit (Article 19) requires review of institutional buildings over 50,000 sq. ft. (within 100 feet of a public right of way).
- v. New home rule legislation may be required to initiate an Institutional Master Plan requirement in Cambridge.

II. What is the difference between Cambridge Project Review and Boston's Institutional Master Plan requirement?

Boston

- i. Institutions have to create a master plan if they want to do any development over threshold (20,000 sq. feet for new construction).
- ii. Institutions required to do a 4-5 year projection, and encouraged to provide a vision for 10 years. The Allston/Brighton area requires a 5 year projection with plan renewal to be initiated at the end of four years. Institutional Master Plan includes:
 - Information on future buildings, locations, sizes, heights...
 - Biannual reporting requirement to list components of the plan that have been accomplished
 - Significant public process for master plan approval – institutions work with community task forces, BRA public hearing, Zoning Commission public hearing.
- iii. Master plans are “scoped” by BRA staff to include the City’s long-term concerns.
- iv. Each building over threshold (generally 50,000 sq. ft.) goes through large project review at BRA (staff and Board) but only for consistency of individual buildings with the approved Master Plan; there is no discretionary special permit as in Cambridge.
- v. Master Plan must be amended if plans change, a new building is required, or plans for a building change significantly from the master plan.

Cambridge

- i. Institutions required to complete annual Town-Gown report
 - Town-Gown report contains data on number of students, general future building plans, etc.
 - Public hearing held at Planning Board; no formal approval.
- ii. No requirement of inclusion in Town-Gown report to proceed with individual building projects.
- iii. Institutional buildings over established thresholds (generally 50,000 sq. ft. within 100 feet of a public right of way) subject to project review special permit (Article 19). This includes traffic review, urban design review, and compliance with design guidelines. Traffic study is required only if 150 parking spaces are added or if 250 spaces are relocated.

Master Planning as a Partnership

For several years the Planning Board and other city agencies have expressed a strong interest in having the universities engage in a master planning process, similar to those adopted in other university-rich cities across the country. To date this has not happened in Cambridge. Part of the reason may be that in the current regulatory framework the universities might anticipate serious problems and few advantages for them in a master planning process.

If the city wants to adopt effective institutional master planning, it should have answers to certain questions: What would be the advantage for the institutions of engaging in this process? What incentives are there for the institutions to be full-fledged partners in this endeavor? How can the city make this process fair—even attractive—to the institutions, and support their participation in it (as opposed to simply demanding it)? How can misunderstanding about the “rules” (that is, the process, including the applicable standards for granting permits and zoning relief), which has in the past led to conflicts between the institutions and community groups, be avoided through a revised process that would be premised on master planning?

Responses to these questions might include procedures such as:

- Consolidating the permitting process in a way that would allow all interested parties to participate and engage *with each other*, thus avoiding an arduous series of meetings that often results in one group (university, neighborhood group, or City entity) feeling either that it hasn’t been listened to or that there was some emerging level of agreement which is capsized at the very end of the process, without a clear explanation of why the earlier approval (or disapproval) was disregarded. Elements of the PUD and Comprehensive Special Permit processes might be adapted to develop such a comprehensive institutional review process.
- When a significant issue (development of a particular area, rezoning, etc.) arises in connection with a university’s master plan or intention to proceed with specific development pursuant to an approved master plan, the City Council would meet with the regulatory boards involved in the issue, as well as other City personnel that seem appropriate, to share concerns and information and make sure that all City entities involved understand the perspectives of the others, as well as of the university and community members.

These are not specific proposals endorsed by the Planning Board, but simply *types* of process changes that might be adopted to encourage more transparency and clarity in connection with university planning and development. The goals of this kind of change would be to create more incentive for the universities to participate fully in master planning; and to set out clearly the standards by which institutional development is allowed or disallowed, so that City agencies would be working in concert with the same goals, and participants in the process would be better informed about the “rules of the game”; and to maximize consistency and fairness in the permitting process.

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