



COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING FOR TROLLEY SQUARE AND SHERIDAN SQUARE



*North Cambridge Stabilization Committee
Cambridge Community Development Department
June 1995*

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For a full list of those who participated in the workshops or meetings held during the study process, see Appendix I.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 3

TROLLEY SQUARE - ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES 5

I. TROLLEY SQUARE - TRAFFIC, PARKING AND TRANSPORTATION 7

II. TROLLEY SQUARE - TROLLEY YARD SITE - RESIDENTIAL USE 10

III. TROLLEY SQUARE - COMMERCIAL USE 13

IV. TROLLEY SQUARE - URBAN DESIGN, OPEN SPACE AND ZONING 15

V. HISTORIC ENHANCEMENTS IN TROLLEY SQUARE 17

SHERIDAN SQUARE - ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES 18

I. SHERIDAN SQUARE - TRAFFIC, PARKING AND TRANSPORTATION 20

II. SHERIDAN SQUARE - RESIDENTIAL USE 22

III. SHERIDAN SQUARE - COMMERCIAL USE 24

IV. SHERIDAN SQUARE - URBAN DESIGN, OPEN SPACE AND ZONING 25

V. HISTORIC ENHANCEMENTS IN SHERIDAN SQUARE 27

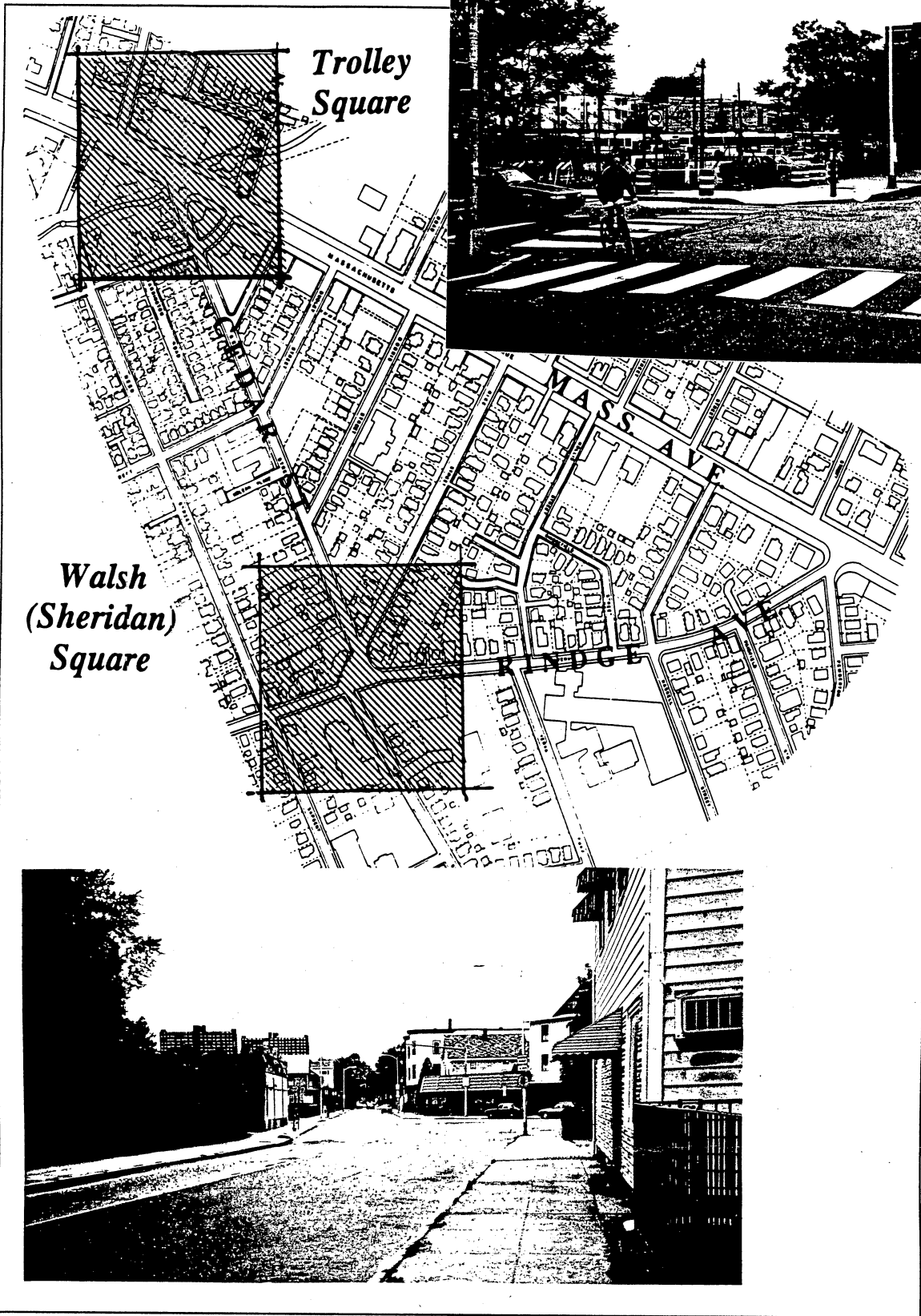
Appendix I - Additional Participants 29

Introduction

Though seemingly lacking in visual prominence, Trolley and Sheridan Square are in fact key areas with respect to the future development of North Cambridge. Their location puts them at the corners of the old 18th century ox pasture formed originally by Massachusetts Avenue, Rindge Avenue and Cedar Street. While neither square is presently the site of enormous activity, this study will explore the important roles that each square should play in the area's future. These squares are also wholly within the neighborhood, unlike Porter Square, which is shared by other neighborhoods in Cambridge and Somerville. Planning for these squares presents a unique opportunity for North Cambridge residents to address not only concerns related to these locations, but also an opportunity to influence the future character of these neighborhoods.

The comprehensive planning of Trolley and Sheridan Square was a recommendation of the 1991 North Cambridge Neighborhood Study and was later requested by the North Cambridge Stabilization Committee (NCSC) in 1992. In 1986, the Trolley Square area was included as part of the North Massachusetts Avenue Urban Design/Land Use Study by Wallace, Floyd, Associates in 1986. This study led to the establishment of the North Massachusetts Avenue Overlay District in the City of Cambridge Zoning Ordinance, and to the rezoning of much of North Massachusetts Avenue. The recommendation of the Neighborhood Study and the NCSC to look at both Trolley and Sheridan Square in greater depth was in effect the next logical step with regard to these earlier efforts. In the winter of 1993, the Community Development Department (CDD) and (NCSC) initiated a comprehensive planning process.

After a series of initial meetings and the creation of the Subcommittee for the Comprehensive Planning of Trolley Square and Sheridan Square (the Subcommittee), a public meeting was held to solicit community comment, ideas and a vision for the squares. During 1993 and the spring of 1994 the Sub-committee and CDD, working with the participation of numerous residents and businesspeople, met to discuss the issues concerning each square and to make recommendations addressing areas of concern. This report will discuss those issues and recommendations which resulted from that process.



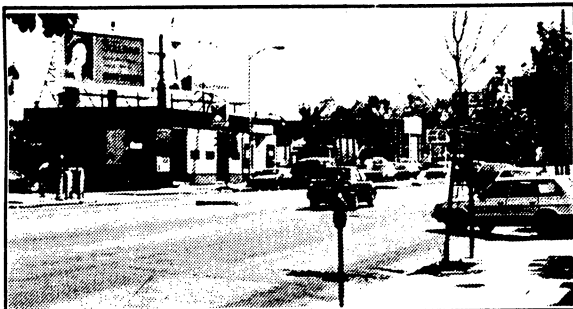
Trolley Square and Sheridan Square - Study Areas

Trolley Square - Issues and Perspectives

The Trolley Square area is defined in the North Massachusetts Avenue Urban Design/Land Use Study as extending along Massachusetts Avenue from Shea Road to Washburn Avenue. It is still best known as the site of the trolley barns that formerly provided space for storage and repair of the areas earliest streetcars. Originally dominated by cattle related industries, the area along Massachusetts Avenue extending in either direction from the trolley barns has seen a variety of uses over time. Nevertheless it has rarely established a strong commercial or residential identity. Possible transfer of the furthestmost triangular parcel (see map - Trolley Site) from the MBTA to the City of Cambridge presents the North Cambridge community with an opportunity, however, to make recommendations as to the ultimate disposition of this parcel with an eye towards a range of benefits to the neighborhood.

Unfortunately, the potential development of the Trolley site is impaired due to unknown levels of hazardous waste in the soil. Although the MBTA had arranged to sell the land for a nominal amount to the City of Cambridge in exchange for land taken during the Alewife T station construction, the City, finding itself unable to ascertain the level of hazardous waste on the site, was unwilling to assume ownership. As was discussed early and often in the meetings for this process, the possibility of developing this site must be preceded by the resolution of the hazardous waste/ownership issues still outstanding. The uses discussed for this site in this report are intended to encourage the ultimate cleanup and full utilization of the site.

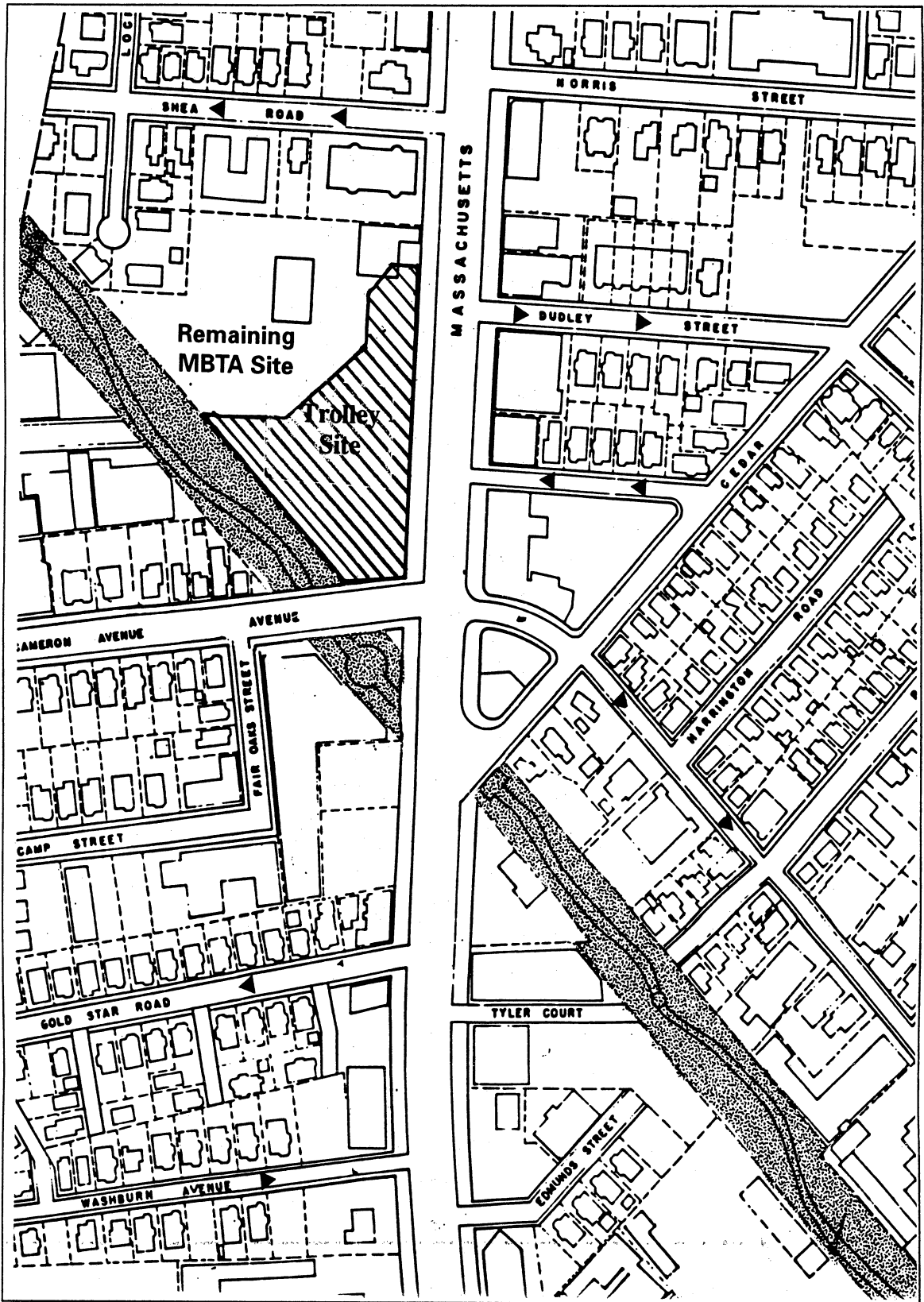
Against this backdrop of uncertainty concerning the ultimate disposition of ownership the Sub-committee solicited recommendations for the square.



Open area of the Square



Downtown image of some of the square.



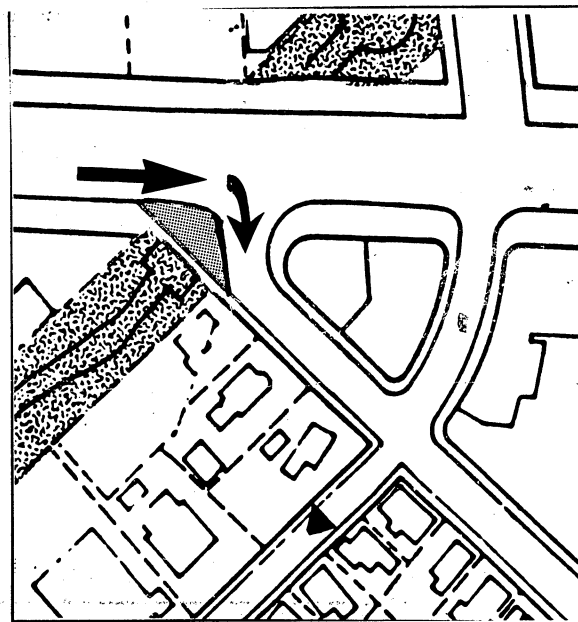
Trolley Square - Study Area

I. Trolley Square - Traffic, Parking and Transportation - The most important goal identified by participants was to make Trolley Square more pedestrian-oriented, with supporting private and public uses. The following recommendations were made (see map following page, for "Traffic, Parking & Transportation Issues" A & B):

- A. Improve Pedestrian safety - The number of allowed vehicular turns at the intersections affecting Trolley Square combined with the normal difficulty of crossing four lanes of traffic creates particular difficulty for pedestrians.
1. Improve all crosswalks (e.g. "zebra" striping);
 2. Improve the crosswalk at Dudley St. and Massachusetts Avenue;
 3. Improve Linear Park crossing signs;
 4. Improve sidewalk lighting;
 5. Repair sidewalks around Trolley Yard site;
 6. Add warning signs for bicyclists to be alert for pedestrians, esp. elderly and children.
- B. Improve the Connection to Linear Park - While this park is an outstanding amenity to the area, it is easy to miss as one travels through Trolley Square
1. Increase the visibility of the Linear Park crossing of Massachusetts Avenue without encouraging inappropriate and random pedestrian crossing (e.g. stripes that delineate where the park crosses but are clearly not pedestrian crossing markings).
 2. encourage more intergroup participation (e.g. bikes and pedestrians) to plan for more efficient multiple uses.
- C. Improve Traffic Safety - Numerous traffic and safety issues were discussed during these meetings.

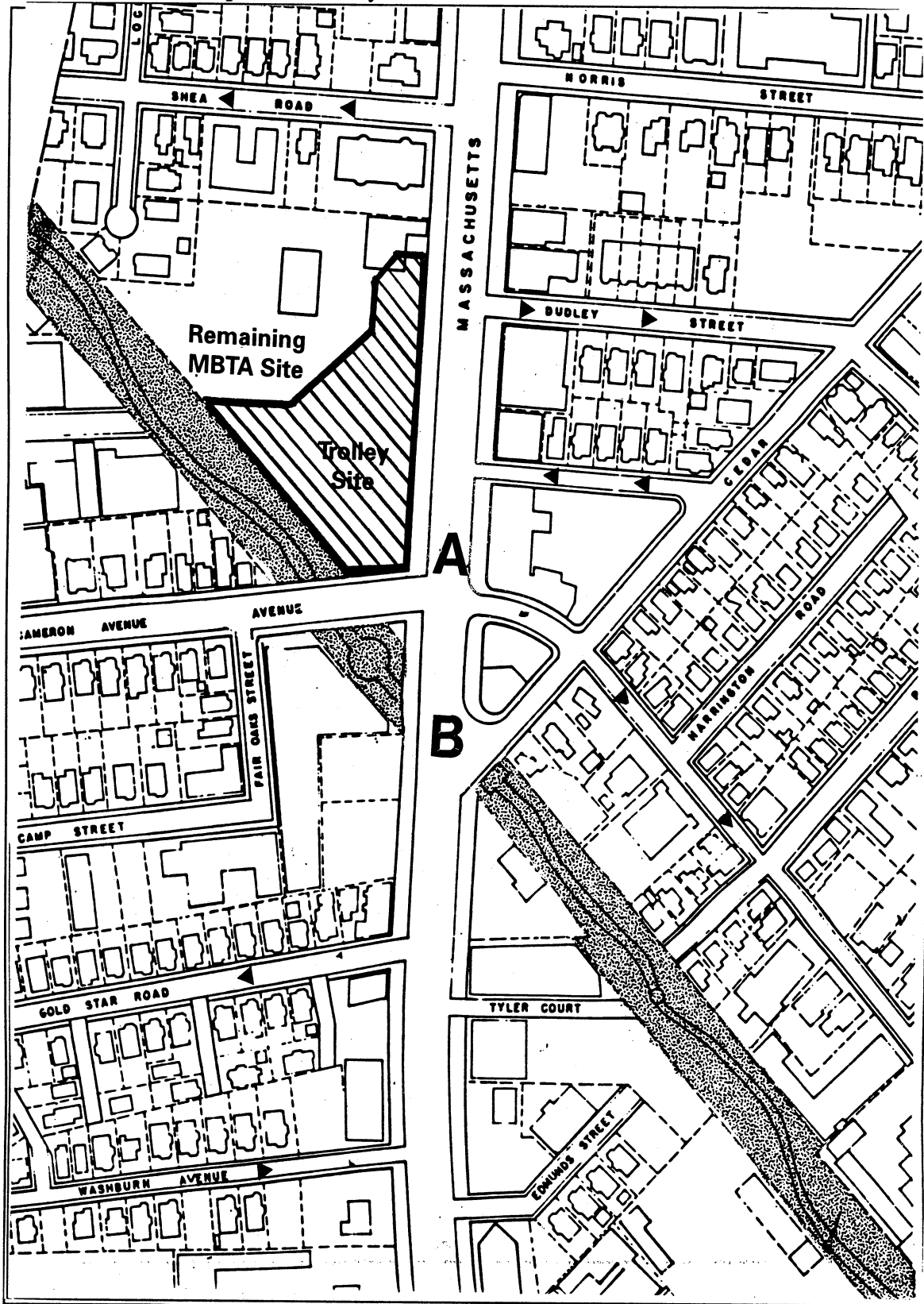
Observations:

1. Drivers proceeding north on Massachusetts Avenue have their vision blocked by overgrowth when turning onto Cameron Avenue;
2. The left turn onto Cameron Avenue from Massachusetts Avenue is difficult;
3. The right turn from Cedar onto Massachusetts Avenue is difficult;
4. Traffic safety while entering or exiting driveways between Trolley Square and Clarendon Street is impaired.
5. The volume of through traffic onto Goldstar Road is excessive.



Right turn from Mass. Ave. to Cedar Street

6. Vehicles making right turns onto Cedar from Massachusetts Avenue are hazardous to pedestrian/bicycle traffic at this intersection.



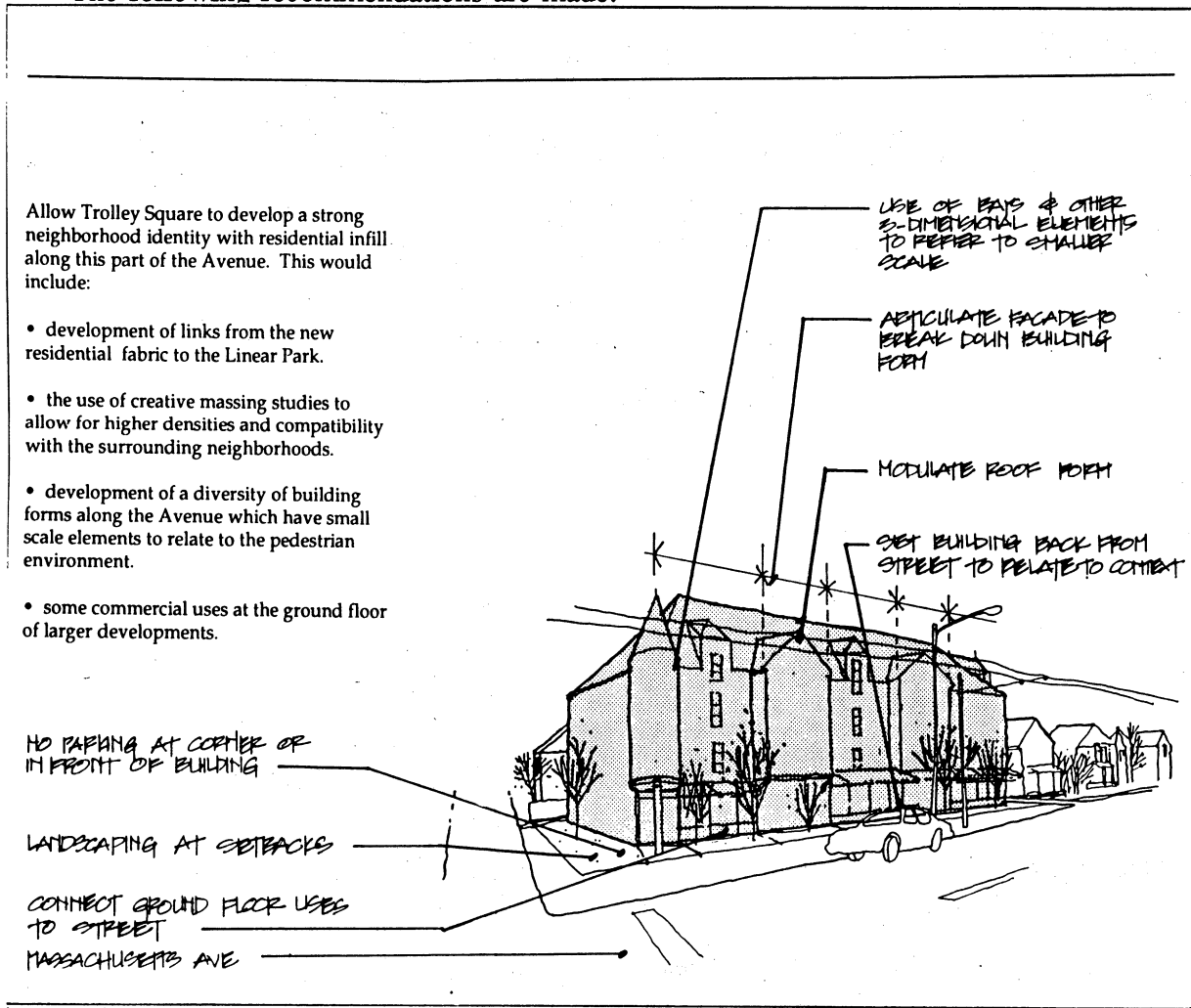
Traffic, Parking & Transportation Issues

Recommendations

1. Make the left turn from Massachusetts Avenue onto Cameron Ave. easier, by increasing the green arrow interval.
 2. Make the right turn onto Massachusetts Avenue from Cedar Street easier; consider using public land at the corner to improve the angle of this turn.
 3. Reduce through traffic onto Goldstar Road.
 4. Increase the enforcement of the "No Right Turn on Red" regulation at this intersection, and increase the difficulty for making fast right turns onto Cedar from Massachusetts Avenue by changing the configuration of the turn (see detail. This will also improve pedestrian crossing safety at this intersection.
 5. Increase enforcement of No Parking areas to improve visibility at all side streets exiting and entering onto Mass. Ave.
- D. Include Public Review in Roadway Changes - Changes in neighborhood roadways most often have impacts on a variety of neighborhood activities and are more likely to be well considered if informed by neighborhood comment. Any substantial changes made by the City to the layout of the roadways in these areas, (such as changes in lane number, Linear Park crossing, turning lanes or new signals) which are not safety related should be subject to community review. Particular concern should be paid to the concern of abutters.



II. Trolley Square - Trolley Yard Site - Residential Use - The Trolley Yard site will, because of its prominent location, establish an important housing segment in North Cambridge, and therefore will be important for its example beyond its size. Any housing on this site will also be important to the success of small retail in the square. The following recommendations are made:

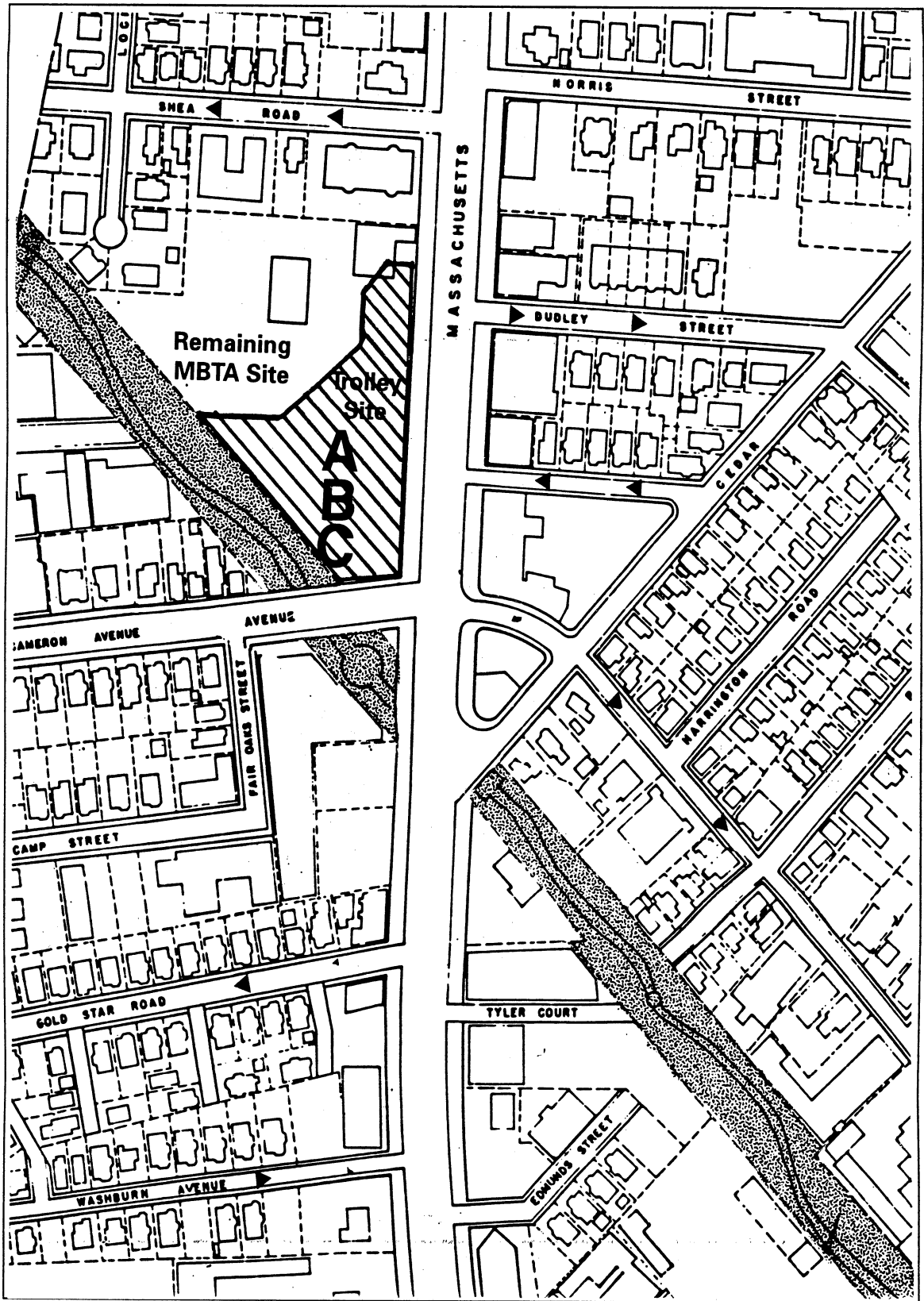


Development Strategy - Trolley Square Site

A. Housing types. The trolley square site is large enough to allow for a variety or mix of housing types, some of which may not be practical on smaller sites. These include:

1. mixed income;
2. age grouping;
3. alternative living arrangements:
 - a. congregate housing;
 - b. co-housing;
4. variety of tenures:

a. rental;	c. co-operative
b. ownership;	d. rent-to-own



Residential Use Issues - Trolley Square

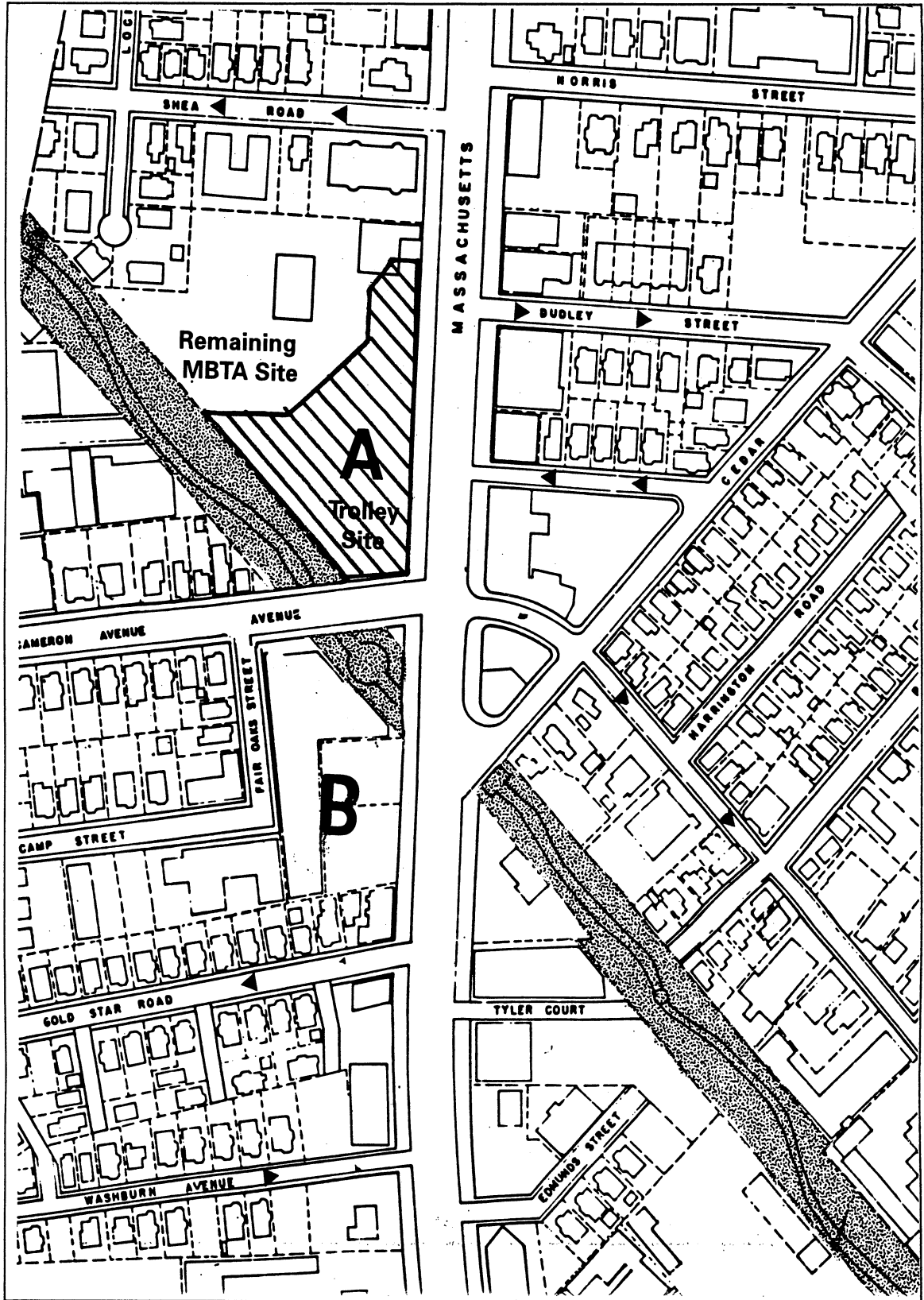
- B. Hazardous waste remediation. The Trolley Yard site may require substantial hazardous waste remediation for residential use. While full utilization of the site is a critical element for the development of Trolley Square, the Committee recognizes that a range of uses may be more appropriate given the potential for hazardous waste. The Committee recommends that discussions be initiated with the MBTA to determine hazardous waste remediation requirements.
- C. Community Meeting Room The North Cambridge neighborhood would benefit appreciably from a medium sized community building similar to the Newtowne Club of decades past. While space is available at locations elsewhere in North Cambridge (Gately Shelter, Senior Center), there is no prominent location dedicated specifically for community use on Massachusetts Avenue.
Recommendation:
Set aside a portion of any new building for use as a mid-size community meeting room. This might be accomplished by creating a community space as an amenity to a residential or mixed use.
- D. Interim Actions - While the Subcommittee recommends immediate steps be taken to resolve the hazardous waste issues on the site, there are a number of interim actions which would represent significant improvement for those who live and work in this area, including:
1. Regular clean up of rubbish and debris which accumulates in this lot;
 2. Do not allow unauthorized parking of passenger or construction vehicles;
 3. Improve the appearance of the lot through basic landscaping along the edges of the lot, and with a new fence.

III. Trolley Square - Commercial Use - The commercial strength of Northern Mass. Ave. has waned since its transition from cattle related business to streetcar suburb. Trolley Square, however, as the longstanding site of the trolley car barns, has played an important role in the public life of North Cambridge. As the crossing point of the railroad line (now Linear Park) on Massachusetts Avenue, this location can be seen as having the potential to become a commercially vibrant location.

A. Complementary commercial. Since commercial development at Trolley Square is not well established, it is important to recognize the critical role that any development of the Trolley site will play in determining the quality of commercial activity in the square. While the committee does not foresee or encourage the establishment of a major commercial area at Trolley Square, commercial uses which will complement existing businesses would be a valuable addition to the area. This Committee therefore makes the following recommendations:

1. The trolley square site should complement existing commercial space in the area rather than adding significant commercial space to the square;
2. Discourage late night activities. Ensure that safety and residential compatibility issues are addressed before development occurs;
3. Allow only low-impact early evening activities, e.g. ice cream parlor, neighborhood restaurant; not bars or night clubs.
4. Establish a more consistent commercial area along Massachusetts Avenue with space for edge activities on the street;
5. Consider a portion of any commercial building for a community use, such as a mid-size meeting room. This might be accomplished by:
 - a. creating an evening community space which also functions daily as a commercial use area; or,
 - b. an outdoor plaza which also could function as an outdoor meeting area.
6. During any development planning, specifically identify existing parking capacity as well as projected needs.
7. Require any open or public space component of a private development to be linked to the Linear Park.
8. A police service center (currently under consideration) would support both the community and commercial strengthening of the square.

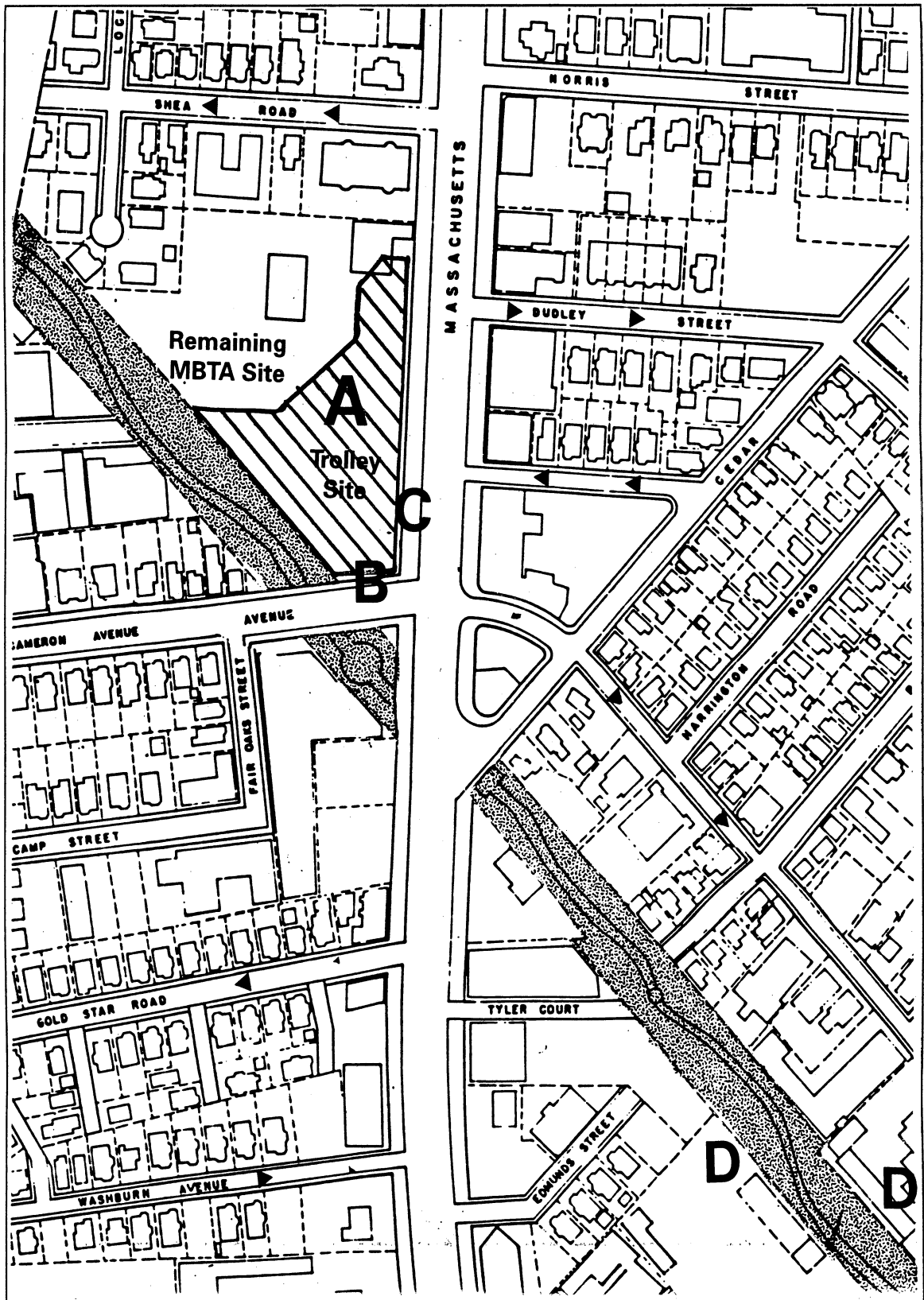
B. Consider the site at 2431 Mass. Ave. (former Middlesex Building) as an important potential development site in the square



Trolley Square - Commercial Area

IV. **Urban Design, Open Space and Zoning** Presently Trolley Square is an automobile dominated area which creates incompatibilities with other transportation modes, such as bicycles and pedestrians. Although Linear Park crosses Massachusetts Ave. here, no clear urban design exists to improve the use and enjoyment of the square for any of these users. The development of the Trolley Yard Site has the potential to either increase the existing automobile oriented character or to redirect its character toward a more pedestrian oriented community area, through the improvement of bicycle access, and the establishment of a complementary urban design direction for public and private facilities. Development should be consistent with the North Massachusetts Avenue Guidelines (as incorporated into the City of Cambridge Zoning Ordinance). This Committee therefore makes the following recommendations:

- A. **Provide a Mix of Uses** A mix of commercial, residential and institutional uses at this location would serve the community as a lively central focus, and support commercial establishments which could strengthen the square's pedestrian aspect.
- B. **Integrate Linear Park** For any development of the Trolley Yard site, make the edge along Massachusetts Avenue and the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Cameron a continuation/complement to Linear Park, with trees, sitting areas, etc. Improve the connection of Linear Park to Massachusetts Avenue with:
 - 1. better visual linkages (such as brick surfacing) and;
 - 2. better pedestrian and bicycle access.
- C. **Support Pedestrian Activity** The primary advantages of increasing pedestrian activity include greater safety, ability to support neighborhood businesses and support for an improved residential/commercial balance. Increase the pedestrian "friendliness" of the square, by:
 - 1. adding street trees and flowers to the streetscape;
 - 2. adding benches at specific locations around the square.
 - 3. encouraging the use of awnings on stores;
- D. **Rezone the Industrial A-1 zoning district** which extends from Massachusetts Avenue to Clifton St. on both sides of the park to be consistent with surrounding uses.

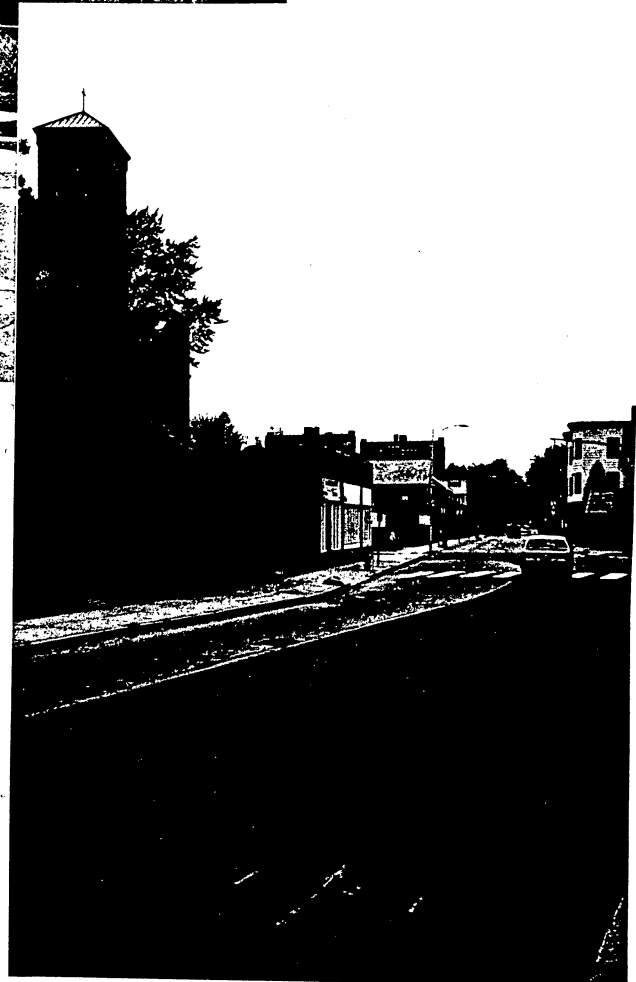


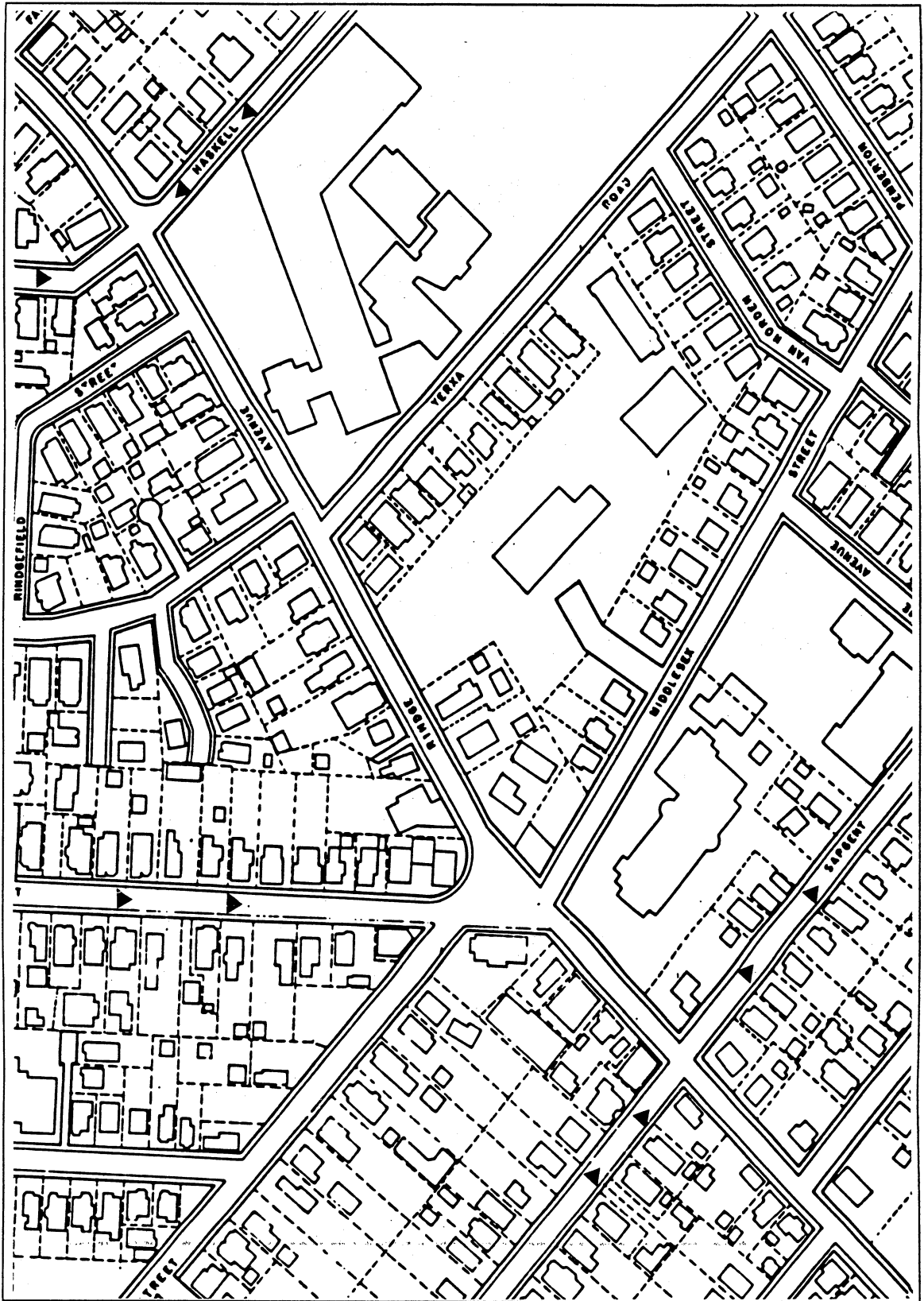
Trolley Square - Urban Design, Open Space & Zoning

- V. Historic Enhancements to Trolley Square** - Northern Massachusetts Avenue, as a portion of the famous route for William Dawes' warning to the colonists of the British Army's advance, and the site (now Pemberton Market) of the 1st Colonial Army Field Hospital, is certainly a strong candidate for historic enhancement. The local history of Cambridge and North Cambridge should be better represented at Trolley Square.
- A. Use the Trolley Yard development for historic enhancement. There are many ways a development at the Trolley Yard site may be used as a vehicle to convey the history of the square, integrating, where possible, into public and private development, for example: historic panels/friezes on building exteriors depicting its former use as the areas most fertile farmland, tanneries and carriage factories, blacksmith shops and civil war encampment.
- B. Encourage the adoption of historical motifs in the design of retail or residential development.
- C. Connect Trolley Square to the rest of North Cambridge by developing a walking tour system of historical markers connected to the rest of the neighborhood and the city as a whole.
1. The existing markers in North Cambridge along Massachusetts Avenue which could be used for such a foot trail include:
 - a. Cooper-Davenport Tavern, 1991 Massachusetts Avenue
 - b. Porter's Cattle Market Hotel, 1974 Massachusetts Avenue (lost, replacement scheduled)
 - c. Porter Square History Station at Porter Station Plaza
 - d. Battle Road granite marker installed about 1880 at 2156 Massachusetts Avenue
 2. The markers which are planned for installation by the Historical Commission in the Trolley Square area include:
 - a. Cambridge Poor Farm, 45 Matignon Avenue
 - b. Camp Cameron, Massachusetts and Cameron Avenue
 - c. Second Town Poorhouse, Harvey Street at Cedar Street
 - d. Streetcar Barns, 2369 Massachusetts Avenue
 - e. Newtowne Club, 5 Davenport Street
 - f. Tannery Brook, Churchill Street and Muller Avenue
 - g. Walden Street Cattle Tunnel, Walden Street at B&M Railroad.
 - h. Watson's Corner, Massachusetts Avenue and Russell Street
 - i. Trotting Park, corner Dudley Street and Cedar Street
 - j. Rand Estate, Massachusetts Avenue at Porter Square Shopping Center

Sheridan Square - Issues and Perspectives

Sheridan Square (also known as Walsh Square) is the neighborhood square of North Cambridge, immortalized as Barry's Corner by the late U.S. House Speaker Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill. While not on Massachusetts Avenue, it has become the second most heavily traversed area of North Cambridge. Despite this fact, its commercial viability has remained impaired. Sheridan Square is contained within the largest residential area of North Cambridge, and has, over the years, been the site of small neighborhood stores and gathering places. Most recently, however, Sheridan Square finds itself perched somewhat uncomfortably as a neighborhood square with "big time" traffic. Along with a marked increase in institutional use it is this conflict and the desire to see it function more safely for neighborhood residents and for pedestrians and automobiles travelling through the square which drew it to the Subcommittee's attention. In short, its character as a neighborhood square needs to be enhanced.





Sheridan Square - Study Area

I. Sheridan Square - Traffic, Parking and Transportation Sheridan Square presents a consistent picture of speeding cars, undefined traffic patterns and increasing traffic volumes from small institutions in the neighborhood, including the M.E. Fitzgerald School, the Muscular Therapy Institute (leasing from St. Johns), St. John's School and the Notre Dame Church and school (presently serving as the temporary home of the Haggerty School). Additionally, truck traffic going to and from Portland Stoneware adds heavily laden eighteen wheeled trucks to the traffic mix 24 hours per day. Parking, as elsewhere in much of Cambridge, is in short supply. The net result of these problems are diminished pedestrian and auto safety; parking shortage conflicts; noise; and, gridlock at rush hour. The Sub-committee therefore makes the following recommendations:

A. Reduce cut-through traffic during the a.m. and p.m. rush hour. Re-time the light at Sherman Street to reduce the length of the green interval on Rindge Ave.

B. Increase pedestrian safety:

1. Install a full traffic signal with pedestrian walk signals in Sheridan Square, which would:
 - a. reduce the attractiveness of cutting through Sheridan Square for auto traffic; and,
 - b. add to pedestrian safety.
2. Install crosswalk stanchions or signs that read "State Law-Yield to Pedestrians in Crosswalk";
3. Increase police enforcement and improve visibility entering and driving through the square;
4. Use a change in surface (texture, stripes) to alert traffic entering/exiting the square.

C. Reduce traffic on Cedar Street and Harvey Street:

1. Make the turn onto Cedar and Harvey Street from Massachusetts Avenue less attractive;
2. Consider reducing the traffic on Harvey Street during rush hours, by limiting access during rush hours;
3. Increase the enforcement of the "No Right Turn on Red" regulation at this intersection, and increase the difficulty for making fast right turns on to Cedar from Massachusetts Avenue by changing the configuration of the turn.

D. Reduce speeding on Rindge Avenue and Cedar Street:

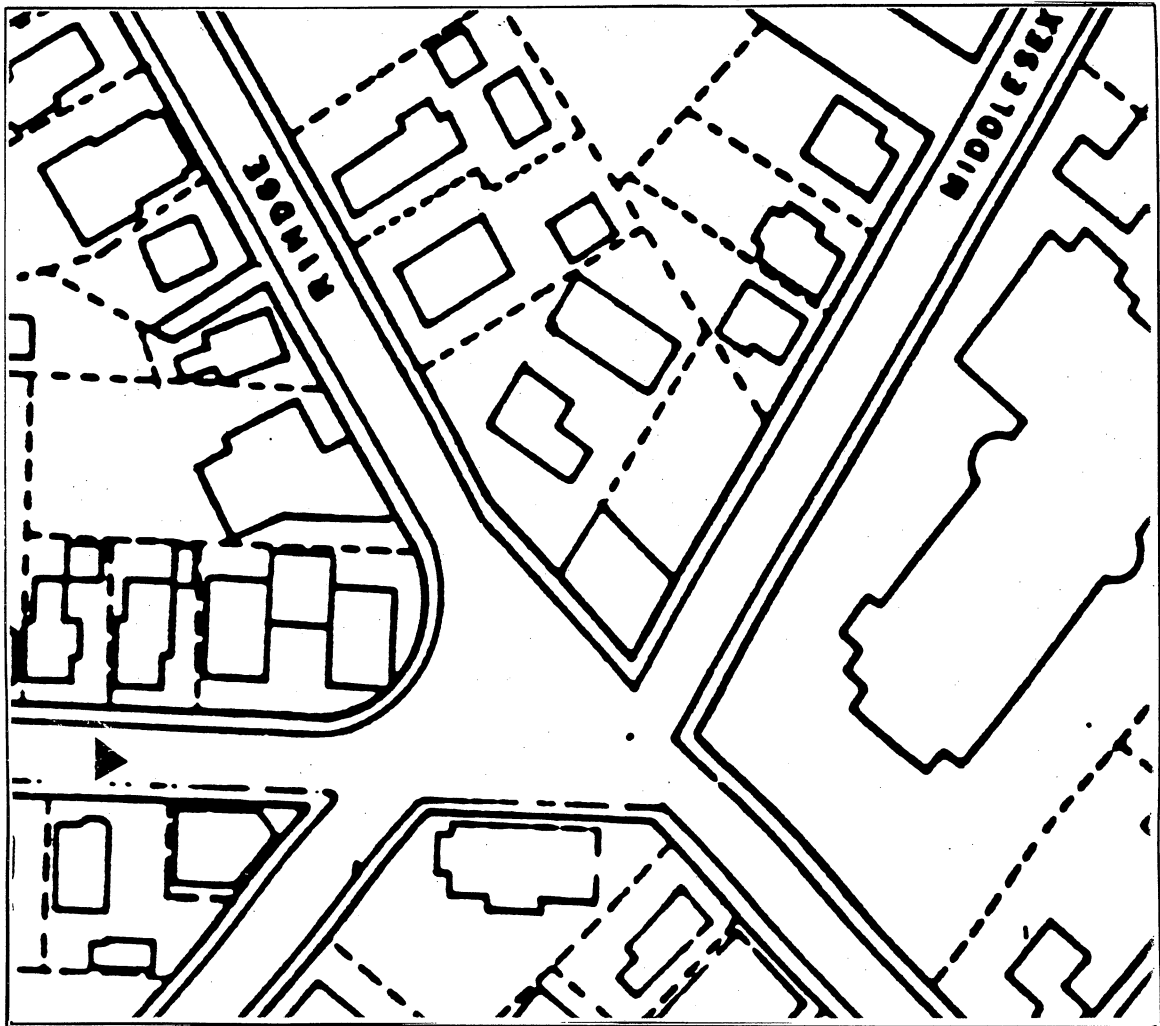
1. Increase police enforcement of speed limits;
2. reduce the speed limit on Cedar Street from 30 to 25 mph;
3. Increase the length along Rindge Ave. which is designated as a school zone, and reduce the speed limit during school hours.

E. Assist Portland Stoneware in the relocation of their business, and:

1. Enforce all traffic regulations currently in effect for trucks;
2. Establish limits on truck travel during the time period from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m.

F. Improve Sheridan Square Configuration The Committee further submits the following criteria for Sheridan Square Reconfiguration. Any change in the roadway should:

1. Strengthen Rindge Ave. residential quality, by:
 - a. increasing pedestrian crossing safety;
 - b. reducing the volume of traffic;
 - c. reducing the speed of traffic;
 - d. increasing the utilization of public transportation.
2. Support neighborhood business, by:
 - a. accounting for business parking needs;
 - b. increasing pedestrian safety throughout the square;
3. Rationalize school and church related traffic, including morning and afternoon bus/parent traffic;
4. Increase the parking if consistent with existing City Ordinances, and consider the relative impact on parking for existing areas of business
5. Develop a more workable plan for snow plowing and removal.



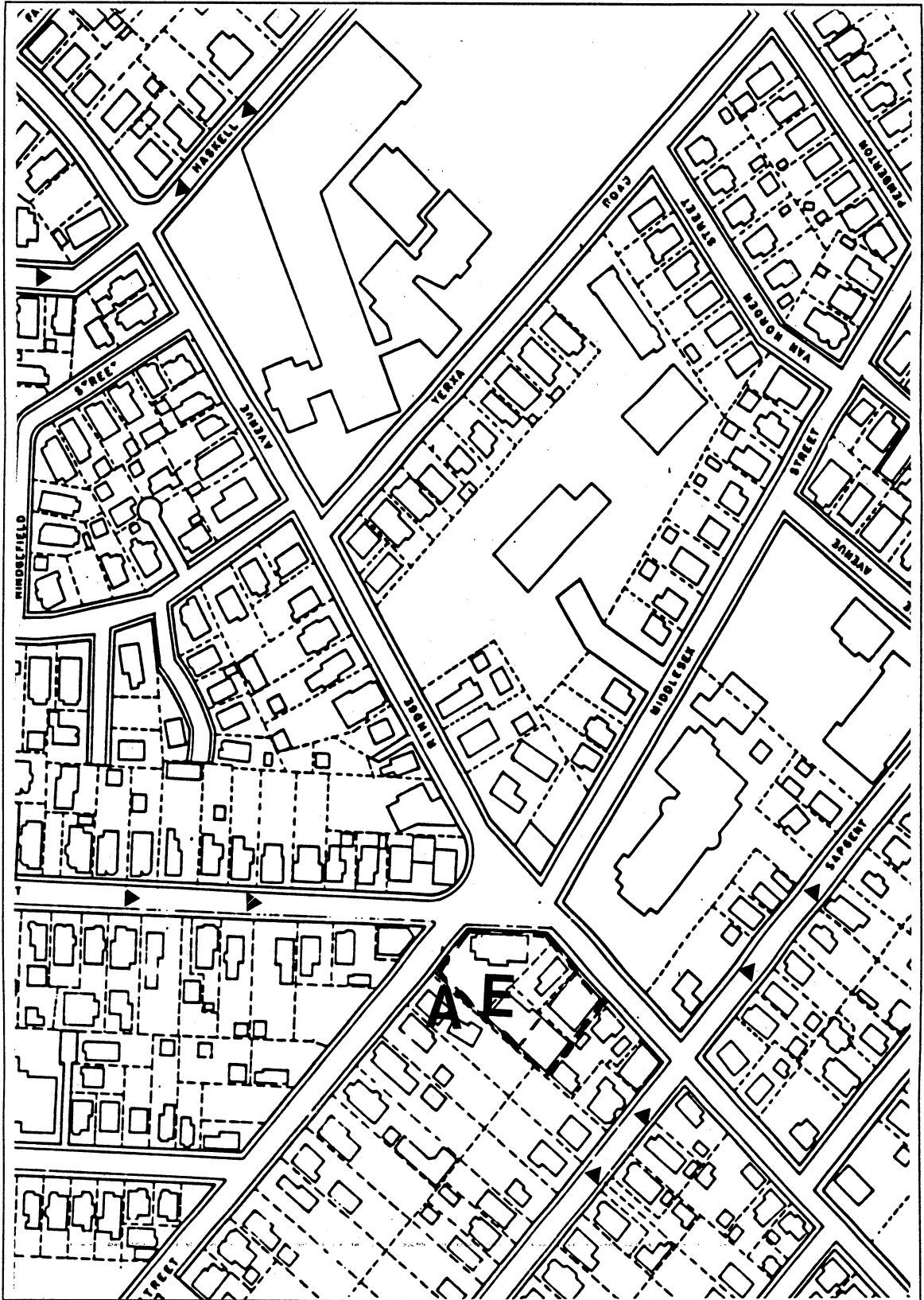
Intersection Diagram - Sheridan Square

II. Sheridan Square - Residential Use - The Sheridan Square area really is surrounded by a well established residential neighborhood, whose residents brought much of the interest for improving the square to this comprehensive study. There was one notably unique issue for residential use during the work of this Sub-committee - a pair of seriously dilapidated buildings at 63-63R Cedar Street. These buildings had been eyesores for years, and they became a public health hazard due to raccoon infestation. With the building now demolished, the importance of the use and design of any development on this lot to the image of Sheridan Square compels the Sub-committee to make special recommendations regarding this relatively small lot. The 63-63R Cedar St. site should be considered a significant site for residential development for the following reasons:

- the parcel, deep with narrow street frontage, resembling the typical 18th century farm lot shape, is the same as many of the lots in the area. This has prompted many concerns about separate development of the rear portion.
Therefore;
 - such development, since it affects a significant visual open space of the rear of these lots, may set an important precedent.
 - as this lot is adjacent to the commercial area of Sheridan Square, it will affect the visual and residential feel of the square.
 - the history of the lot and the subsequent demolition of the deteriorating buildings, makes this a development of wider concern to the neighborhood.

This Committee therefore makes the following recommendations:

- A. Support High quality development. In the development of the 63-63R Cedar Street lot encourage a high quality design to promote long-term ownership;
- B. Give preference to North Cambridge families in need of affordable housing;
- C. Balance the need for cost effectiveness with the issues noted above, in particular the potential value of developing the rear of the lot against the potential amenity of spacious backyards throughout the wider neighborhood;
- D. Consider architectural configurations that enhance and blend historically with adjoining structures.

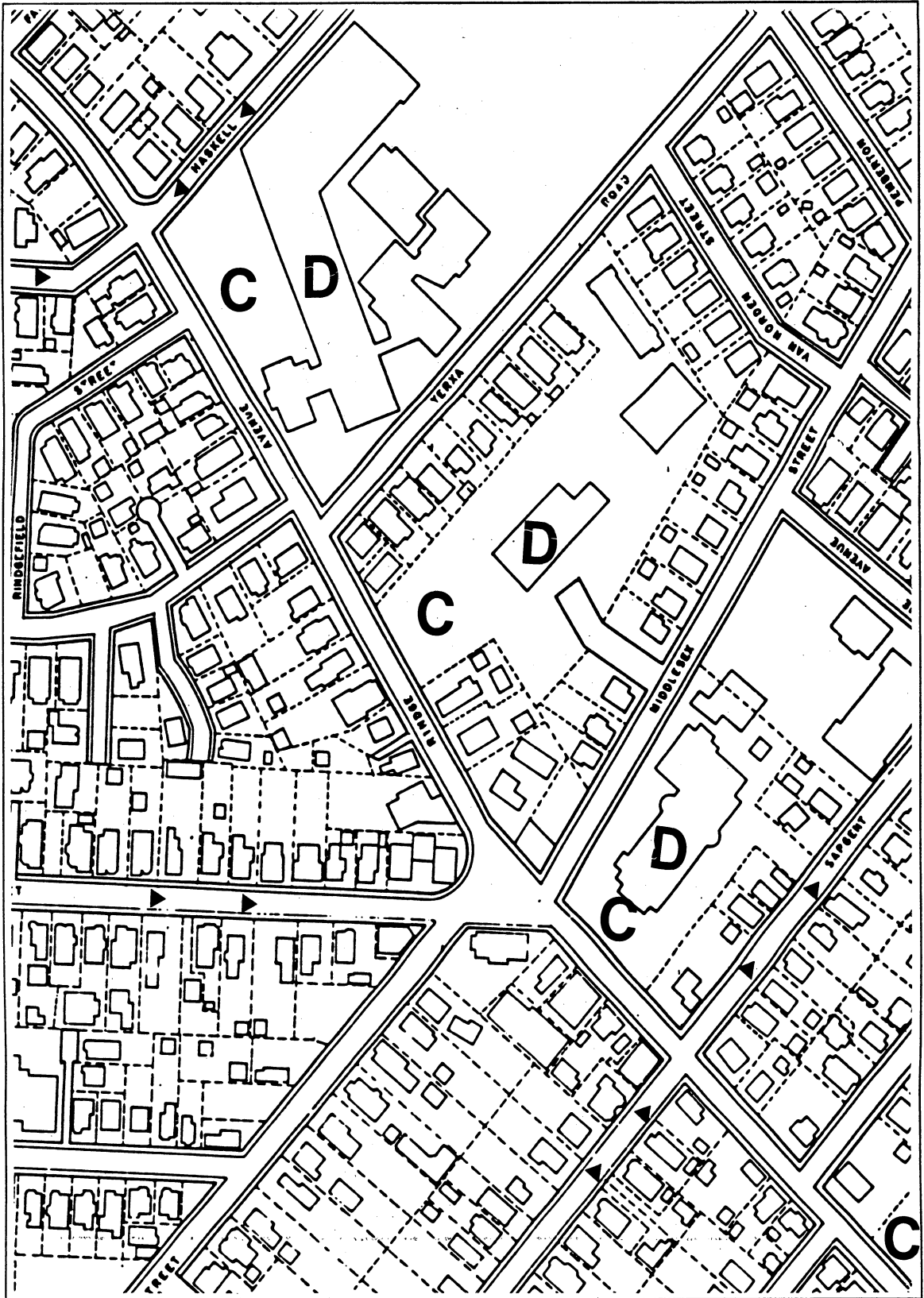


Sheridan Square - Residential & Commercial Recommendations

- III. Sheridan Square - Commercial Use** Sheridan Square is presently a mixed use area with a weak commercial component, traffic and pedestrian safety problems, and little parking. Sheridan Square **could** have a stronger neighborhood commercial presence, with proper attention given to improved parking, traffic and pedestrian use. This Committee therefore makes the following recommendations:
- A. Support Small Businesses Work with the Community Development Department to assist property owners to support appropriate neighborhood business (e.g. small bakery, convenience store) location into this area. e.g. develop an RFP for business location in Sheridan Square.
 - B. Maintain Restriction on Fast Food Do not allow "fast food" restaurants, e.g. "luncheonette" - yes, "McDonalds" - no.
 - C. Restrict Automobile Oriented Businesses - Given the very significant vehicular limitations and the already busy intersection of Sheridan Square, auto-oriented businesses or other businesses which increase destination traffic should be discouraged.
 - D. Do not allow uses which have significant late night activity - The proximity of residences surrounding Sheridan Square make it likely that businesses requiring late night operation would cause unwelcome disturbances to many residents.
 - E. Maintain the current Business A-1 and Residential B zoning districts. - The Sub-Committee considered the idea of expanding the Business A-1 to surrounding parcels in the square. While this would be consistent with some of the present uses (which are now non-conforming), the committee did not want to establish additional commercial area here which might add to traffic and safety problems.

IV. Sheridan Square - Urban Design, Open Space and Zoning Sheridan Square has succumbed partially, over the years, to the pressures of increasing traffic and random commercial development. The qualities which make a neighborhood square still visible, however, may yet be lost through inattention to urban design, and by not capitalizing on open space and zoning changes that can still be made. To direct those changes so that Sheridan Square may develop favorably as more of a neighborhood square rather than a traffic thoroughfare, the Sub-committee recommends the following considerations:

- A. Increase the pedestrian "friendliness" of the square. Though mostly pedestrian in character, Sheridan Square has become dominated by through traffic of automobiles and trucks, making the area confusing and somewhat hazardous to pedestrians and automobiles alike. Therefore:
 - 1. Encourage the use of awnings on stores;
 - 2. Add street trees and flowers to the streetscape without compromising the visual safety of the square for automobiles.
 - 3. Do not add seating areas.
- B. Reconfiguration Changes to the configuration of the intersection, and the addition of commercial space have the potential of supporting the existing character of the square or redirecting its character toward a more pedestrian friendly neighborhood area. Therefore:
 - 1. Change the texture of the street in the square to make drivers aware that they are entering a pedestrian zone.
 - 2. Make changes to the configuration of the square as previously noted in Section I.F. - Transportation.
- C. Maintain Open Space Around Square - Sheridan Square currently is at the center of an unusual urban design configuration of private and public open spaces resulting from the front yards of numerous institutional uses along Rindge Avenue, including the M.E. Fitzgerald School, the Muscular Therapy Institute, the Notre Dame Church, and the Cemetery. These uses are not currently protected as open space, yet they represent an open space amenity to the community. Provide for the continuation of the open spaces along Rindge Avenue through zoning or incentives to secure the benefit of the open space in the Sheridan Square area.
- D. Conduct a Public Works Survey - The sidewalk and feeder street system should be reassessed. Visual amenities such as the Fitzgerald School and the Cemetery should be maintained.
- E. Improve Institutional Coordination - Increase the involvement and coordination of the many institutions which surround Sheridan Square with neighborhoods groups to create a common vision.



Sheridan Square - Urban Design, Open Space & Zoning

V. Sheridan Square - Historic Enhancements The many layers of North Cambridge's rich history should be revealed and utilized to complement any revitalization. The square itself had been the point of intersection of several significant access ways for over three centuries. During those years Sheridan Square had been the touchpoint for the area's oldest cemetery, the City's only trotting track, common pasturage for the City's draught animals and the gathering place for a former U.S. House Speaker's boyhood acquaintances. It has always hosted a variety of unique activities ancillary to the development of the City of Cambridge.

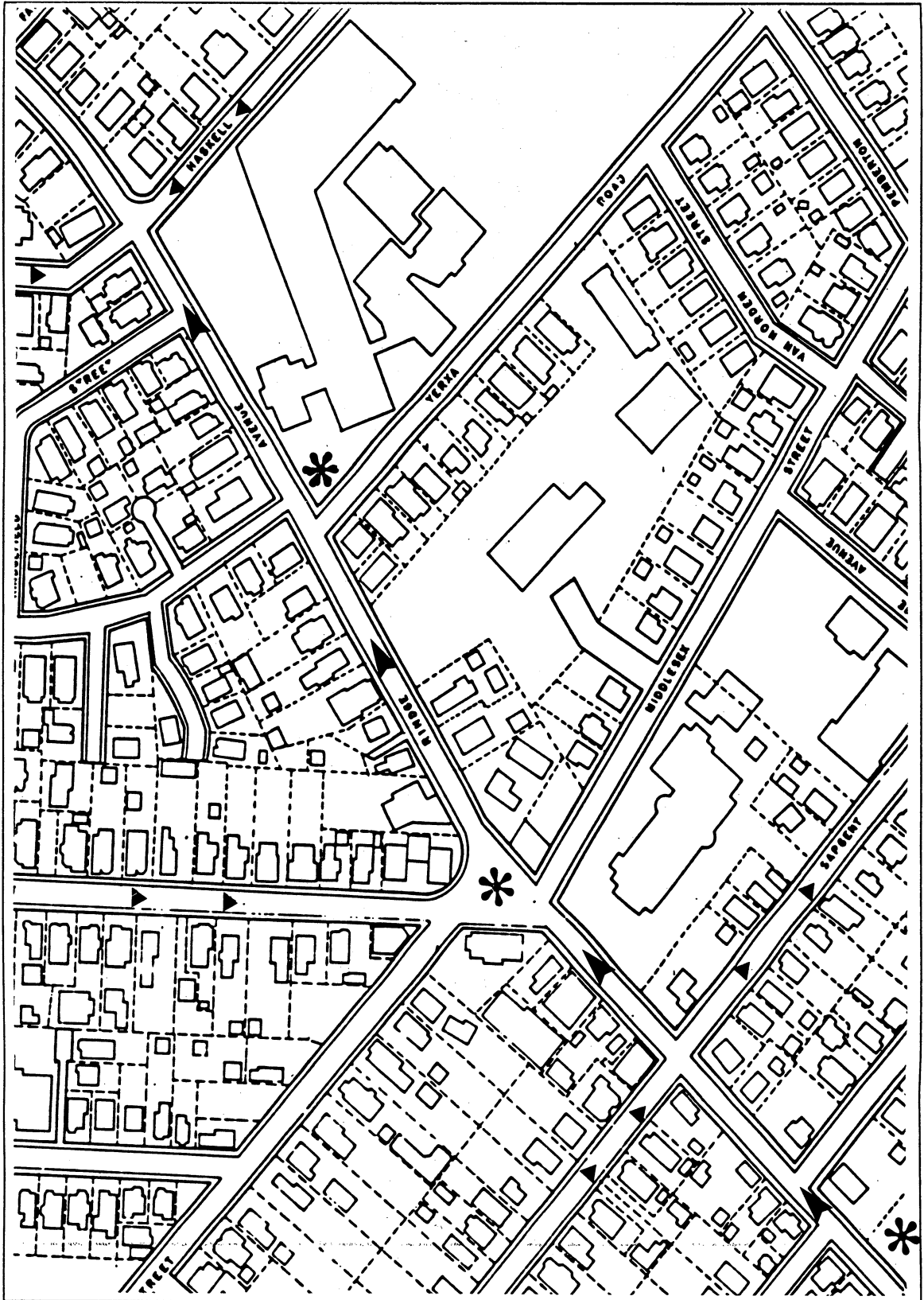
Recently, the City's Historical Commission, with the funding of the North Cambridge Stabilization Committee, has approved the manufacture of a number of "blue markers," the collective purpose of which is to lay the basis for a local historical foot trail. With its historical identity as a crossroads for a variety of activities over a period of time, Sheridan Square would make an excellent secondary orientation point for the proposed foot trail. Such a designation would aid small businesses as well as reinforce the pedestrian environment.

The existing markers in Sheridan Square which could be used for such a foot trail include:

1. Abraham Watson House, 181 Sherman Street
2. Barry's Corner, Rindge Avenue at Rice Street
3. Kidder-Sargent House, 146 Rindge Avenue
4. Brick Manufacturing, Rindge Avenue at Jefferson Park

The markers which are planned for installation by the Historical Commission in the Sheridan Square area include:

1. Brick Manufacturing, Jerry's Pit at Russell Field



Sheridan Square - Historic Enhancements

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Appendix I - Additional Participants

Kate & Andy Andres
Themis Borretos
Lawrence Burke
Peter & Serafina Cignetti
Richard Clarey
Carol & Joe Costello
Katie Cusack
Ed & Nancy Cyr
John Danehy
Susan Dillard &
Josiah Hoffman
Frank Duehay
Ricardo Dumont
Jean Gibtz Flynn
Frameworks/K. Swaim
Dottie Giacobbe
Joe Grassi
Sarah Gruppe
Linda Guerrier
Marie Guzell
Rebecca Hall
Alice Harrington
Rene Herman
Laura Hudet
Jerry Howard
Michael Impastato
Harry Johnston
Steve Kaiser
Len Katz
Malcolm Kaufman
Patricia Kinsman
Carole Lee
Thomas Lingner
Jed Lowry
Ed Macaskill
Janet & Gavin Malenfant
Berj Manoushagian
Richard Marino
Joan Martin
Kate Mattes
Margaret McCaffrey
George McCray
Christine McEly
Jim McGrail
Shirley & Frank McGrail
Don & Dorothy McMath

Jim McSweeney
James Matory
G. Moree
Bill Moriarity
Robert Morse
Harold Nahigian
Martha Older
Bill O'Hearn
Charles Pave
Eran Ranch
K. Randel/M. Dunn-Estey
Sheila Russell
Mary Russell
James F. Simpson
Mallory Slate
Esther & John Splaine
Susan Sullivan
Verna's Donuts
Tom Weed
Leonard Whaley
Garret Wohl
John Yearwood
Kevin Yearwood
Dick Yorke

City of Cambridge

The Housing and Community Development Committee held a public meeting on March 25, 1997, beginning at 6:10 p.m. in the Sullivan Chamber for the purpose of receiving a report on issues relating to the comprehensive planning for Trolley Square and Sheridan Square.

Present at the hearing were Councillor Francis H. Duehay, Chair of the Committee, Vice Mayor Kathleen L. Born, Councillor Henrietta Davis, Councillor Anthony D. Galluccio, Councillor Michael A. Sullivan, Councillor Katherine Triantafillou, and City Clerk D. Margaret Drury. Also present were Susan Schlesinger, Assistant City Manager for Community Development; Steve White, Deputy Commissioner of Public Works; and Stuart Dash, Neighborhood Planning Director, Community Development Department.

Councillor Duehay convened the hearing and explained the purpose. Ms. Schlesinger provided some background and planning history for this area. Between 1990 and 1995 residents and staff of the Community Development Department worked together to come up with a wide range of recommendations regarding Trolley Square and Sheridan Square. Now with the sewer work there is a potential of laying the groundwork for achievement of some of these goals.

Ms. Schlesinger introduced Stuart Dash, and Mr. Dash described the planning process that resulted in the 1995 "Comprehensive Planning for Trolley Square and Sheridan Square." (Attachment A). Mr. Dash then outlined the major recommendations of the report. He described the City's negotiations with the MBTA in which the city has attempted to procure this site, in accord with its previous agreement with the MBTA in which the MBTA agreed to deed some of this site to the City for nominal cost in exchange for city land it used in the construction of the Alewife T station. The MBTA has refused to take any responsibility for any hazardous material on the site, or to allow the City to assess the potential risk and expense of cleanup, so the City still does not own the site. The study committee looked at uses for the Trolley Square MBTA site, in the event that the City could obtain it from the MBTA. Mr. Dash presented a slide show of the area. He noted the report's concern with the intersection of Linear Park and Massachusetts Avenue. Cars have no perception that at Massachusetts Avenue there is a Linear Park crossing. He said that Linear Park and the Trolley square site were the main focus for the study group.

Mr. Dash said that some of the goals of the study may be achievable as part of the sewer project work. He added that at the same time, the state Highway Department is doing a project to extend the bicycle path from Arlington through Somerville, and this may provide an opportunity for additional improvements.

Councillor Duehay then invited Steve White, Deputy Commissioner of Public Works, to describe the sewer separation project for North Massachusetts Avenue. Mr. White explained that the sewer separation project in Cambridge is part of a larger project to clean up the harbor and the Charles River. The biggest problem in Cambridge is the combined sewer overflows, which mean that in wet weather storm water combines with waste water and discharges into the Charles River.

Mr. White stated that Cambridge has received a \$12.5 million grant to do sewer separation. This provides an opportunity to solve some problems such as that of the Alewife River, which backed up and flowed backwards through the pipes during the heavy October rains.

Mr. White said that the North Massachusetts Avenue project goes from Porter Square to Alewife. The schedule calls for a planning and design phase through April, 1998, then bids in April 1998, with construction to start in July 1998 and goes through 2000. Mr. White said that these dates are required by the court order. He said that this is the opportunity to make the urban design and traffic calming improvements that require curb line alteration. Mr. White said that the City has just hired the design consultants for this planning phase. There is a public workshop scheduled for April 9 at 7:00 p.m. at the Fitzgerald School, the first of several workshops. This planning and design phase is supposed to identify problems and issues. For example, it is important to pay close attention to the crown of the road and the flow of the water.

Councillor Duehay then invited questions.

Councillor Galluccio asked whether the City has communicated with residents and businesses regarding the schedule. Mr. White said that the City wants to distribute the information widely over the next few weeks and months. Councillor Galluccio said that a lot of people are worried about the next storm and urged wide dissemination of information about this project and the improvements that it will make to water conditions during storms.

Peter Cignetti, 5 Theriault Court, emphasized the importance of notifying businesses and residents and recommended an individual canvas of the businesses. He asked whether the combined sewer overflow (CSO) project affects the water mains, and Mr. White said that it does not; however, in conjunction with opening the streets for the sewer project, water mains are being replaced in many places.

Mr. Cignetti said that there are inadequate water mains on Massachusetts Avenue near Cedar Street and urged correction during this project. He also stated that he hopes that there will be development on the Trolley Square lot at some time and that the CSO project will anticipate such development.

Carolyn Mieth, member of the Planning Board, stated that the neighborhood has long looked forward to North Massachusetts Avenue improvements. Now the time is here. The process is not clear. She urged Mr. White to visit a North Cambridge Stabilization meeting and to meet with other neighborhood groups. She noted the median strip issue.

Steve White said that it is important to realize that this is a sewer separation project. Right now there is no extra money for street enhancements. To do all of the urban design contemplated would cost several additional million dollars.

Ms. Mieth recommended that this be clarified to keep neighborhood expectations in line with what is possible.

Ms. Mieth said that the Trolley Square/Sheridan Square process is a model for neighborhood planning. She described the process, which was a two year process, and was the best working relationship that she has seen between the neighborhood and Community Development staff. She particularly commended Stuart Dash and Kathy Leman.

Kathy Leman, Cambridge, spoke in favor of additional sharing of information. She noted that during the construction period the residents will be experiencing worse conditions than those that currently exist, and she urged the City to keep in touch with residents about the final benefits, and why the project is worth the problems it will create in the interim. Ms. Leman asked whether Department of Public Works is doing the entire project. Mr. White said that many design consultants and contractors will be involved. There will also be MWRA audits.

Mr. White said that this is the very beginning of the process. The first workshop with the community has been scheduled; there will be several more. It is essential that the community be involved and well-informed. The City negotiated vigorously with the MWRA to include adequate funding for the community process. He said that he welcomes feedback on how the community process is going.

Councillor Triantafillou asked what the City is going to do, other than dig up the streets and put them back. What will change other than a few bump outs?

Steve White said that a few bump outs could be quite a significant change. For example, if the median must be dug up, and then it can be put back in a fashion that enhances urban design, that will be an accomplishment.

Stuart Dash said that at one point there was \$ 1 million TIP money allocated by the state for Massachusetts Avenue improvements. The state drew back those funds along with the railroad safety funds. Cambridge was able to get the railroad money back and is trying to get the TIP funding for Massachusetts Avenue reinstated.

Ms. Mieth asked how the costs of the Cambridge Street improvements have been funded. Mr. White said that the Water Department did the water main replacement. There is not yet funding for complete street replacement.

Mr. Dash said that there was a long interview process to choose design consultants for this project. The overall contractor is the Maguire Group. Tams will do the traffic engineering consulting and Halvorson company and Cecil and Rizvy are the landscape architect consultants. SEA Consultants, Inc. will do construction staging, traffic management and other construction details.

Joe Joseph, 20 Columbus Avenue, stated that the area of the planning process is relatively small and the goals seem achievable. He asked about the start/end dates. Mr. White said construction will begin in July 1998. The scheduled completion date is late summer of 2000. There is another piece of the project, the flotables control, with a completion date of 2001 by court order.

Mr. Joseph recommended using the North Cambridge News to disseminate information and noted that the paper could use the money. He then asked what devices will be used to stop backup for Alewife Brook. Mr. White said they are looking at an end-line device that only allows one-way flow. It is a sturdy, tested reliable device.

Mr. Joseph asked where the residual overflow will go if not back up the pipes. Will it go back on the flood plain? He encouraged careful thought. He also suggested mailing any notices of meetings, etc. to the participants of the study, who are listed in the report.

Mr. Joseph then urged resolution of the Trolley Square site issues, because there are proposals for housing that are too dense for where they are presently proposed.

Mr. Dash reviewed the negotiations with the MBTA in which the MBTA was seeking to evade responsibility for hazardous waste on the site and would not even allow the City to test the site. He said that the City is looking at the federal "Brownfields" legislation that addresses these liability issues. Ms. Schlesinger said that there is also a proposed state "Brownfields" legislation.

Ms. Schlesinger said that litigation is another possibility.

Ms. Schlesinger said that there is also a vacant lot on Cedar Street that has been mentioned as a possible site for affordable housing. Preliminary zoning studies are being done. Nothing would happen without extensive discussion with the neighborhood.

Mr. Joseph noted the proximity to the Cedar Street site of the Center for Families, which may need play space in the future.

Mr. Joseph also raised the issue of downzoning the IA zone on both sides of Linear Park and the issue of historical markers. He also noted the need for interim landscaping at the Trolley Square site.

Ms. Schlesinger asked whether the landscaping was contemplated for the City land or the MBTA land and Councillor Duehay responded that both need landscaping attention.

Mr. Joseph said the virtue of the plan is that it is small and modest. The problem is that it will be overwhelmed by larger development pressures, which will lead to institutional expansion, e.g., schools. There should be a master plan.

Vice Mayor Born said that she hopes the City has learned from past projects such as the sewer reconstruction on Sherman Street, which went on and on and disrupted businesses. She asked whether those problems will be avoided in this project.

Mr. White said that since that time \$12 million of sewer separation has been completed in business areas, without the problems of Sherman Street. The City has learned more from each project. There is now very strict guidance for construction limits. For example, he wouldn't allow Saturday utility work. There is a construction meeting every Monday at 9 a.m. to deal swiftly with these issues. In response to a question from Vice Mayor Born, Mr. White said that there will be a hotline number to call if there are problems with the construction.

Vice Mayor Born noted the difficulty with the narrow timeframe in which property owners must make decisions about whether to get new tie-in and gas lines. Residents need assistance in making these decisions. The other decisions that have to be made relate to traffic calming. It is important to avoid the kind of problem that arose in Quincy Square. It is important to identify as early as possible the places where curb re-alignments may happen. For example, the curbs at Porter Square near the MBTA station need attention. There should be a meeting with neighbors at almost every intersection.

Vice Mayor Born then said that Washington DC has a much better detail for handicap ramps. The ramp crown continues out into the road to eliminate the slush puddle at the juncture between the street and ramp. She also urged a better specification for the concrete for sidewalks. It is crumbling and it is a bad color.

Vice Mayor Born then asked about trees. Mr. White said there is no money for trees. Ms. Mieth suggested asking the businesses to contribute.

Councillor Duehay said that it is not enough to distribute flyers to business. A letter should go to every owner; ideally, there should be follow up with a flyer. It is not difficult to visit each business.

Councillor Duehay asked about the state TIP money. Ms. Schlesinger said that this project was in the TIP funding list a year ago. Then the state took out North Massachusetts Avenue, and the railroad project and a Concord Avenue project and put them on the supplemental TIP list, where funding is unlikely. Cambridge is working to get the projects put back on the TIP funding list. Ms. Schlesinger said that she is hopeful, particularly with regard to the Porter Square portion.

Councillor Duehay noted that communities all over the state are upset because money is being taken back to fund the Central Artery.

Councillor Duehay encouraged having a total plan for all of Massachusetts Avenue and asked if such a plan exists. Ms. Schlesinger said that such a plan does not presently exist. The City is hoping that some of this will come about through this project.

Councillor Duehay said that much more than the sewer project needs to be done.

Ms. Schlesinger said that Mr. White has done a wonderful job of including additional elements in the sewer projects that have been done throughout the city. The first thing to do is to get the visioning process underway. There will be a final vision of North Massachusetts Avenue although there may not be money to implement it.

Councillor Duehay said he wants to see the overall plan "wagging" the sewer project and not the sewer project "wagging" the overall plan.

Councillor Triantafillou said that her understanding was that this will not be a project of the scope and magnitude of Central Square. It is important to be clear.

Ms. Schlesinger agreed. She emphasized that this is a Department of Public Works process. The Community Development Department will take the lead on Porter Square. Ms. Schlesinger said that the plan is likely to deal with some curb extensions, some changes to the median. It may identify some traffic improvements at intersections, some signal timing improvements. It may well be that lighting will be mentioned, but the project will not get to the level of street furniture.

Councillor Duehay said that it is important to have an overall plan.

Mr. Dash said that he believe that much of this will happen.

Mr. White said that he expects that neighborhood will say this is what we want, and the Department of Public Works will have to say this is what we can do now with the money available.

Councillor Triantafillou said it is important to be clear. People are expecting what happened in Central Square.

Councillor Davis asked whether this will be a full plan or a partial plan.

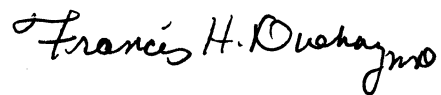
Ms. Schlesinger said that this is a physical plan and a traffic project and plan. It is not a zoning or business development plan.

Councillor Duehay requested a follow up memo with a description of what is planned.

Councillor Triantafillou asked what will happen with the study report on Trolley Square and Sheridan Square. Ms. Schlesinger said that all the consultants have copies. In all capital planning discussions the goals of this plan they will come up. This sewer project is one opportunity for implementation.

Councillor Duehay thanked all those present for their attendance. The meeting was adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

For the Committee,



Councillor Francis H. Duehay
Chair

Committee Report #2

5-212

110

A report was received from the Housing and Community Development Committee, for a meeting held on March 26, 1997, for the purpose of receiving a report on issues relating to the comprehensive planning for Trolley Square and Sheridan Square.

In City Council April 14, 1997

*Report
Accepted*

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