

Minutes

Boylston Street Corridor Study Committee

June 2, 2021 6:00PM – Public Forum #1
Held remotely via Zoom

Committee members (in attendance noted by Y/N):

John VanScoyoc, Chair	Y	Wendy Friedman	Y	Tom Nally	Y
Rachna Balakrishna	Y	Joe Gaudino	Y	Carlos Ridruejo	Y
Deborah Brown	N	Wendy Machmuller	Y	Mark Zarrillo	Y

Staff present: Kara Brewton, Polly Selkoe, Todd Kirrane, Amrtia Acharya

Meeting materials included: agenda; powerpoint by Committee 6-2-21; Jamboard with question prompts and sticky note answers by attendees (attached here); Q&A (attached here); Chat (attached here).

Guests included: Arlene Mattison, Abby Swaine, Amie Buchman, Amy Emmert, Anne Lusk, Ashley Castle, Barbara Cone, Ben Hellerstein, Bobbi Kaplan, Charles Osborne, Christine Lau, Cindy Elias de Koster, CYNTHIA drake, David Pollak, Diane Sokal, Edith Brickman, Emily Jacobsen, Frances Shedd-Fisher, Hannah Pressler, Hollis Kahn, Holly, Hugh Mattison, Isabel Etkin, Jeff Cook, Joan Lancourt, John Dempsey, John Motsis, Karen Van Kennen, Linda Sapol, Margaret Connell, Mark Lewis, Martha Davis, Maureen Danahy, Michael Glover, Michael Weintraub, Nicholas Fazah, Patricia Herzog, Paul Saner, Randolph Meiklejohn, Raul Fernandez, Robert Daves, Roberta Strongin, Scott Englander, STAN KLEBANER, Susan Kaplan, susan Rothstein, Tad Campion, Ted Berk, Udayan Das, William Kantor, William Salomon, Zoraida Fernandez

John VanScoyoc opened the meeting, noting that it was being held remotely on the Zoom platform due to COVID, and after checking that all participants' audio/video were working well, and Kara announced that the meeting was being recorded.

Presentation

John VanScoyoc introduced the Committee and noted that the corridor is a special place already undergoing change, and that it could be even more special. For example, the Committee has had some fruitful conversations with property owners, and there is a lot of interest in seeing change happen for the better. On June 9th there will be a second forum, with more emphasis on the design of Boylston Street itself. After reviewing the evening's agenda, he noted that now is the time where the Committee's work and ideas are not fully cooked, a perfect time to check in with the larger community. Finally, he explained that participation could be through the chat feature, the Q&A feature, individual verbal public comment, and Google jam board – all optional based on the audience's comfort level.

Wendy Machmuller gave a brief overview of previous planning processes and the geographic bounds of the Corridor, from Brington Road to Pearl Street. Recently the scope was expanded to

include 10 Brookline Place as well as the Brookline Housing Authority off of Walnut and High Streets. In the committee's interviews with property owners and developers, they expressed a great interest in learning about what the community would like to see there. One of the main objectives that came out of the previous visioning process was to see a corridor that is less car centric. Additionally, the Select Board wanted to make sure the committee was taking into account some town goals such as increased opportunities for housing, new businesses and growth of commercial property tax.

Wendy Friedman presented findings of the Community Survey and information from some of the interviews from business owners. While participation was robust, it was skewed to those 50 years and above and towards homeowners. Strengths included access to Brookline Village, public transportation, and the larger Boston area. Weaknesses were most associated with traffic, noise, and poor pedestrian accommodation. Walkability is highly valued but not considered good enough in its current state. People wanted to see additional locally owned business in the corridor. In open ended comments, related to housing development, people were interested in mixed-use development. People also indicated that they didn't necessarily want to see preservation or "maintenance" of the current neighborhood character, but rather change such as beautification projects, trees, amenities, local businesses, etc. While 54% of comments in the weaknesses were related to the highway feel of Boylston, it wasn't so much about reducing traffic as it was about improving the pedestrian environment. 83% of all the respondent would like to see the footbridge rebuilt. One thing that was interesting with the property owner conversations is that most didn't see retail businesses as particularly viable, except for perhaps on Cypress and or Washington & High Streets.

Tom Nally then reviewed constraints and opportunities for the corridor, which were similar to the survey results already discussed. Preliminary recommendations are broken down into three categories:

- 1) Preserve – for example the Madris residential building at the corner of Cypress & Boylston, street trees adjacent to Dunkin Donuts and Cameron Street as well as the Old Lincoln School site, and also on street parking especially for residents that have no driveway or other vehicular access. Strategies for these goals include revised design guidelines.
- 2) Enhance – business storefronts along with a greater amount of more flexible façade loan funds - - and an opening up of the blank wall along the Old Lincoln School. Additionally, perhaps making it easier to do some infill development on the eastern end, e.g., no special permits.

Kara then reviewed the Google Jamboard so that participants could respond to questions about what they had heard to date. In the meantime, individual members of the audience were also called upon. Abby Swaine noted that the Mobil gas station was still a neighborhood asset for residents, especially since filling stations downtown were becoming so rare. Charles Osborne noted that the corridor was still very much divided by the street itself and the pedestrian environment cannot be more livable unless the corridor stops being dominated by cars. He is also interested in looking at potential catalysts for change in the corridor. Ben Hellerstein noted the two nearby transit stations and shared bike systems, and that connections to those systems would be interesting to hear more about. Anne Lusk would like someone to look at every single location that additional trees could be planted along the corridor, on both public and private properties. Scott Englander was interested in reducing vehicular traffic.

Then, Tom Nally continued with the third category Transform – including changes to the street cross section of Boylston Street, such as wider sidewalks, adding trees intermittently between parking spaces, adding a bicycle lane, easier north-south pedestrian connections, etc. Toole Design will be presenting refined concepts at the second forum on June 9th. On private properties, the Committee is looking for ways to disincentivize the continuation of auto-related properties in the corridor, widened setbacks to support a modified streetscape, and added tree canopy and open space. Key sites where additional housing and commercial development could be sited include the property behind the Madris building, the Mobil gas station site in combination with the two adjacent properties to the north, and the Dunkin Donuts and Valvoline sites together. This would likely require some ability to build denser than one-story commercial buildings, for example. At the eastern end of the site, the owners of 10 Brookline Place have indicated laboratory use at 10 Brookline Place. Specifically, the Committee has communicated with the owners of 10 Brookline Place what pedestrian and streetscape functions they wanted to see with any redevelopment of the 10 Brookline Place site. Additionally, the Brookline Housing Authority are looking at adding housing units on their property between High & Juniper Streets.

Returning to the western corridor of the site, Tom noted that the Committee was studying a transition in height from the existing height of the Madris building stepping down to the adjacent residential properties. At the Mobil gas station site, there is opportunity to add more density, but concern about a narrow/ canyon effect on Cypress if we don't also include significant, 25' setbacks from the curb. That setback could be stretched all the way down to Smythe Street. 3D modeling is underway to better understand what recommendations should be made.

Finally, Tom mentioned Site Plan Review as an administrative tool that the Committee is considering adding at the same time as any zoning changes. Site Plan Review has been recommended in the past as a helpful way to require tree canopy standards for the entire Town, including this corridor. This recommendation has also been discussed through the Urban Forestry Master Plan process.

Kara Brewton then reviewed additional questions available on the Google Jamboard and called on additional audience participation. Tad Champion noted that there was lots of opportunity, but limited space, and that parking spaces could block some of the opportunities for bike lanes, pedestrians, and trees. Jeff Cook reflected that one of the key factors here is figuring out how to get people out of cars and into the green line and bus routes that we have.

Kara Brewton then summarized the anticipated timeline over the summer, including many public meetings prior to the zoning warrant close around early September. Additionally, some of the infrastructure recommendations would continue on with DPW and MassDot in the years to come. Larger redevelopments such as 10 Brookline Place and the Brookline Housing Authority sites would not likely happen for several years to come.

John VanScoyoc then concluded the meeting by thanking everyone for their participation, encouraging people to talk with their neighbors and sign up for meeting notifications over the summer, follow information posted on the Committee's website, etc.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 7:30 pm.

What additional comments, opportunities, or constraints need to be ADDED to what you've already heard

Feel free to add comments to others' thoughts

Will Salomon - ///
 Brook House resident (part-time for almost 20 years, and yes, a taxpayer) /// Completely missing from this are the short blocks of Washington St. This was supposedly addressed by the ...

... long ago East Gateway Study. Since then, the "renovation" of Brookline Place has become a "fait accompli". /// In the process, we have lost 3 restaurants (Skipjack, Soup Shop, and Bertucci's, 2 mini-marts, 1 ATM)

... and several small business, and one gas station. /// In return, we have one new Restaurant, and one vacant space at 2 Brookline (9,700 sq ft as "Retail/Restaurant). The residents of the Brook House (BH)

...some 740+ units with (arguably 2 residents)/unit = 1,480 "disfranchised". A fair number of BH residents have been there since it was built, and now are in their 70-90's and now face a "service/food..."

"desert" within a safe, easily walkable distance (aka - across the street). /// Walking under the Riverway Overpass to the South Huntington "business district" is not safe for many, including elders, which: 1. is poorly lit,

and 2. in Winter is frequently icy and poorly plowed. /// Certainly the services offered in Village itself have "not" changed, particularly in terms of restaurants. /// Bottom line, these lower 2 blocks of Route 9, though

not "Boylston St." are very much part of this corridor. /// Please address this...

Interesting idea for Lincoln School development using the wall along Street

Can this neighborhood handle increased density? Isn't it already one of the most dense parts of Brookline? Given the transit problems already, why are we talking about trying to add people here?

When I suggested trees, the trees were to be in locations in addition to the side of the road. There are large parking lots by some of the properties and these could have trees....

...The parking areas could have Silva cells or structural soil under the hardscape so the trees thrive. I believe patrons would be pleased to walk or drive into a parking area that had trees.

Committee's response to Homewood Suites blocking their first floor from the sidewalk view so that vitality of streetscape is sacrificed? One way to widen sidewalk is visually and hotel could have...

... plants year-round inside windows that give life to Boylston St.

Need to think about whether Longwood Medical Area is an enhancement or hindrance --

Given the proximity to both BHS and Old Lincoln, why are we not talking more about how to make this corridor friendly for our youth?

What are ways to reduce traffic in this corridor?

By calling it a "corridor", does that put all the emphasis on how people pass through/along it ... rather than on how much we need to improve how people cross it, especially pedestrians?

I worry that the Cyprus/Boylston intersection will no longer be a human scale, especially with the very large HS building. 4-6 stories is pretty tall, casting a shadow around the whole area.

A consideration for new residential buildings might be to create street businesses (e.g. restaurants) on the ground level with access to 'backyard' courtyards.

Copy of Q&A function in Zoom

1, "How would you differentiate your study from those that have gone before, including the recent MIT study. Conversely, what are some commonalities between your study and those prior like MIT's."~ Anonymous Attendee.

Answer: "If there is no response to your question during the presentation, feel free to send me your email address and we will respond.", "the MIT study was very complete but the recommendations expressed either planners, professional values. we are hoping that community values will be expressed to aid in decisions to recommend"

2, Will the slides be available for download soon?, Scott Englander, senglander1@gmail.com,

Answer: "Scott, I'm sure Kara will post them online very soon, but we can also share via email with attendees right after the meeting."

3, do you have a copy of the presentation? I missed the first part of the meeting, Emily Jacobsen, emily.jac@gmail.com,

Answer: "Yes, we can share after the meeting"

4, "Will Salomon - Brook House resident (part-time for almost 20 years, and yes, a taxpayer) Completely missing from this are the short blocks of Washington St. This was supposedly addressed by the long ago East Gateway Study. Since then, the "renovation" of Brookline Place has become a "fait accompli". In the process, we have lost 3 restaurants (Skipjack, Soup Shop, and Bertucci's, 2 mini-marts, 1 ATM) and several small business, and one gas station. In return, we have one new Restaurant, and one vacant space at 2 Brookline (9,700 sq ft as "Retail/Restaurant). The residents of the Brook House (BH), some 740+ units with (arguably 2 residents/unit = 1,480 residents have been "disenfranchised"). A fair number of BH residents have been there since it was built, and now are in their 70-90's and now face a "service/food desert" within a safe, easily walkable distance (aka - across the street). Walking under the Riverway Overpass to the South Huntington "business district" is not safe for many, including ...", William Salomon, wsalomon@clinical-metrics.com

5, "... which: 1. is poorly lit, and 2. in Winter is frequently icy and poorly plowed. Certainly the services offered in Village itself have *not* changed, particularly in terms of restaurants. Bottom line, these lower 2 blocks of Route 9, though not "Boylston St." are very much part of this corridor. Please address this...", William Salomon, wsalomon@clinical-metrics.com,

Answer: "Thank you for this input/feedback. The 'corridor' as such was already defined for this committee (that is, what area our work pertains to). But we will discuss whether we can also include the area you're suggesting, as we did the public housing complex and 10 Boylston."

6, Will the June 9 presentation be a repeat of this one or will it be an extension of this conversation?, Robert Daves, robdaves@rcn.com,

Answer: "The June 9th will be a repeat of much of this, but will also include a presentation from Tool Design group, who has put some initial design concepts together."

7, "For consideration: Any new residential housing might reserve the ground level for businesses (e.g. restaurants) with access to courtyards (for dining perhaps), away from the noise of the street.", Cindy Elias de Koster, eliasdekoster@gmail.com

Copy of Chat function in Zoom

17:55:09 From Todd Kirrane to Panelists : My pleasure. Listening in on my ride home before Town Meeting

18:11:18 From Mark Lewis to Everyone : Note: only the middle span of the Davis Path footbridge has been removed. This is less than one third of the original structure.

18:12:49 From Abby Swaine to Panelists : What was that bit about "third"...?

18:12:56 From Susan Kaplan to Panelists : More housing- more cars, more traffic

18:13:05 From polly selkoe to Panelists : The Development Committee studied this part of the Boylston Corridor in 1990. Polly Selkoe

18:14:33 From a mattison to Panelists : to see Climate Action Plan. Would like to also see Open Space Plan and elements like Green Corridors and urban forest enhancement in planning for this area.

18:15:33 From Abby Swaine to Everyone : Gosh, what does it take to get the businesses to respond? 4% is poor.

18:15:53 From Susan Kaplan to Panelists : The traffic pattern has created havoc and dangerous crossing for people and cars

18:16:24 From Scott Englander to Panelists : Given the skewed demographics of respondents, it will be interesting to look at differences in responses across segments.

18:18:25 From Amy Emmert to Everyone : That's what we are seeing. Strentht

18:20:04 From Wendy Machmuller to Scott Englander, All Panelists : This is something we can probably extract from the survey results

18:23:57 From Wendy Machmuller to Abby Swaine, All Panelists : Abby the low response from the survey may in part be due to the many individual interviews we have been holding. Those have been rich with feedback.

18:25:26 From Abby Swaine to Panelists : Kara's "Maybe the slides are advancing spontaneously because they're on a timer. On the toolbar for the file, select Transitions, and look to the far right. Under Advance Slide, make sure "On Mouse Click" is selected.

18:30:43 From Abby Swaine to Panelists : Oh great-- thanks!

18:33:06 From Kara Brewton to Everyone :
https://jamboard.google.com/d/1JtOjXdfVyXNSQeU8pNGHxaeT08hBpJASwSxlNN5Cn_k/viewer?f=0

18:36:01 From Frances Shedd-Fisher to Panelists : It is noticeable to me that there is no mention of Longwood Medical Area either as an asset or a hindrance to improvement.

18:37:36 From Linda Sapol to Panelists : I think a uniform tree cover along this corridor would help to unify the space - who would pay for this? Thanks!

18:39:33 From Wendy Fridman to Panelists : Frances, you are right that no one mentioned LWMA other than to say that the corridor provided access to that area. It's not officially in the corridor, so that might be why. Instead people commented on the corridor being an asset in that it provided easy access to that area.

18:42:54 From Kara Brewton to Everyone : Reposting from Wendy Friedman to all attendees: Frances, you are right that no one mentioned LWMA other than to say that the corridor provided access to that area. It's not

officially in the corridor, so that might be why. Instead people commented on the corridor being an asset in that it provided easy access to that area.

18:43:54 From Wendy Machmuller to Linda Sapol, All Panelists : Linda you may be aware of the Town's Urban Tree Canopy Master Plan. This Corridor potential has been discussed briefly within that context but it would be useful to revisit where Boylston sits within that plan.

18:44:55 From Wendy Machmuller to Linda Sapol, All Panelists : One of the biggest challenges (and opportunities?) is that we will need to work with MassDOT.

18:45:17 From Wendy Fridman to Everyone : And please add your questions / comments to the Jam Board if we run out of time to have you speak.

18:45:57 From Linda Sapol to Panelists : Happy to lend a hand if as a committee participant should that be appropriate ☺

18:47:43 From Susan Kaplan to Everyone : Barrett trees

18:49:54 From Abby Swaine to Everyone : It would be great to encourage (or require??) any rental housing development/redevelopment in the corridor to include MORE than 6 units, since that's the threshold for state standards kicking in to mandate that at least one unit built as accessible be included, and that the rest of the units be adaptable. Brookline really lacks housing that is accessible to those who use wheelchairs. I think many of my fellow residents must not know how downsizing development costs us equity credibility in terms of accessible housing.

18:52:04 From Susan Kaplan to Everyone : Is this the meeting to address the traffic pattern that has been created as a result of the gateway changes- IE- no left turn into the Brook house going west. Traffic has increased as a result of having to go up 2 lights to make a left and go around the fire station and deal with another light. It could take 10 minutes longer to get back to the BH. It doesn't make sense -

18:53:30 From Susan Kaplan to Everyone : The BH is the largest property in the area and attention should be paid

18:53:46 From John Motsis to Panelists : It would be great to restore the Madis

building. But the corner CypressSt. and route 9 looks like the auto mile now with the car lifts at Herb Chambers

18:53:48 From Wendy Machmuller to Susan Kaplan, All Panelists : Hi Susan, the Gateway East project is outside of the scope of this Committee, however, I do know from Todd Kirrane that the signaling is not yet complete.

18:54:06 From Susan Kaplan to Everyone : Thank you

18:54:46 From Wendy Machmuller to Susan Kaplan, All Panelists : The Transportation Dept and Transportation Board will continue to take comment about the Gateway East project. I encourage you to send an email about your observations!

18:55:04 From Susan Kaplan to Everyone : Will do

18:56:56 From Susan Kaplan to Everyone : Where are you going to put all the added cars that would be on the road?

18:57:36 From Susan Kaplan to Everyone : How dense do we want this area to be-

18:58:06 From Susan Kaplan to Everyone : BTW- what about adding car charging stations

18:59:25 From Bobbi Kaplan to Panelists : I live on Cameron Street and I would like to see the sidewalk widened along with trees planted between

Homewood Suites and Cameron. I walk there daily and it could be more attractive and appealing.

19:00:41 From Scott Englander to Everyone : Apologies, I need to run to Town Meeting. Will try to watch the rest on video once posted!

19:01:53 From Carlos Ridruejo to Panelists : Fyi! town meeting is delayed because of a fire alarm

19:02:08 From Carlos Ridruejo to Everyone : Fyi! town meeting is delayed because of a fire alarm

19:02:24 From Wendy Fridman to Panelists : Disgruntled TMMs taking matters into their own hands!

19:02:26 From Wendy Machmuller to Panelists : oh thanks for heads up... that works well for us

19:02:28 From William Salomon to Everyone : Wendy... Thanks for your noting my Question Re: BH and the 2 Brookline "problem".

19:03:21 From Abby Swaine to Everyone : Hmmm! regarding the Audy site, if you re-zone to allow greater massing, aren't you giving the parcel a development potential that no sane current owner could resist cashing in on? I'm not saying you're wrong, but there may be a cost for some of us sooner than later.

19:07:17 From Wendy Machmuller to Bobbi Kaplan, All Panelists : Thank you Bobbi for this suggestion.

19:07:22 From William Salomon to Everyone : Kara - Thanks for the "nod". This also resulted in an increase in the "heat island" effect. Fortunately, the renovation of the Riverway area helps with this.

19:07:56 From William Salomon to Everyone : Also - kudos to adding trees along the corridor.

19:09:09 From Hannah Pressler to Everyone : Remember that the traffic signals have to provide adequate time for elderly residents to cross Rte 9 - lacking at the BrookHouse crossing to reach the Hilton garden and its restaurant. It is dangerous.

19:10:03 From Susan Kaplan to Everyone : Hannah- thank you for bringing this issue up

19:10:06 From William Salomon to Everyone : As it is, parking along the corridor as always been "iffy".. Better one side of "safe parking" with good clearance to the lanes than what we have now.

19:11:20 From Nicholas Fazah to Panelists : Parking is a major concern to East Coast Divers. We've been an est. business at our location since 1974. Our business is 100% reliant on close parking for our clients with heavy equipment.

19:11:44 From Wendy Fridman to Everyone : Thanks for that, Hannah. We are talking about if/how to provide more crosswalks at more convenient locations, but we will also discuss crossing times at lights.

19:12:13 From Wendy Machmuller to Nicholas Fazah, All Panelists : Thank you, Nic. You are one of the constituents I am certain that John was referring to.

19:12:28 From Abby Swaine to Everyone : I confess that after even more decades of process than we've spent on this exercise, the Gateway East streetscape at the NETA intersection is a bit of a disappointment. The vast paved area, multiple lanes striped for different car movements, and gently curved rather than sharp corners (which allow for faster vehicle turns) communicate a very pedestrian-hostile vibe. Let's avoid doing that again! Todd Kirrane and Bill Smith can tell us what to watch out for if you open the Pandora's Box that is MassHighway.

19:13:17 From William Salomon to Everyone : John - this requires some rethinking of left turns on Rt 9 - particularly at Cypress St. and having "protected" left turns.

19:15:03 From William Salomon to Everyone : Please clarify "NETA" intersection...

19:15:44 From Wendy Machmuller to William Salomon, All Panelists : NETA intersection is Washington/Boylston/High St

19:16:02 From Frances Shedd-Fisher to Panelists : Has the Committee considered the impact of the Transportation Board's wish to add a dedicated bus lane to the corridor?

19:17:12 From Wendy Machmuller to Frances Shedd-Fisher, All Panelists : Hi Frances. Yes. Our consultant Toole Design is integrating this bus lane into their proposed design

19:17:17 From Abby Swaine to Everyone : "NETA" intersection is where Washington, Boylston and High come together.

19:18:14 From Frances Shedd-Fisher to Panelists : I agree with Jeff Cook's question.

19:21:00 From Roberta Strongin to Panelists : I am concerned what any slowing down of traffic will do to the auto congestion with the morning commute, which was already very bad before COVID

19:23:00 From Carlos Ridruejo to Panelists : Town meeting is back

19:23:08 From Susan Kaplan to Everyone : You can't get away from the fact that people drive on rte 9 to go in or out of Boston. It is not a street, it has become a highway

19:27:49 From Abby Swaine to Everyone : Thank you for doing this outreach! It was a good idea to post signs about these meetings at Emerson Garden, to reach some who don't pay attention to neighborhood google group emails.

19:28:50 From Frances Shedd-Fisher to Panelists : Kara is a great resource; we are lucky to have her.

19:28:56 From a mattison to Panelists : Absolutely agree, John. Brookline is lucky to have Kara

19:29:22 From Kara Brewton to Frances Shedd-Fisher, All Panelists : You have so much grace, Frances - thank you!

19:29:44 From Kara Brewton to Everyone : Kara Brewton email: kbrewton@brooklinema.gov

19:41:16 From susan rothstein to Panelists : Help! I have a black screen w/ kara's name on it but I can't get on meeting?