



Regular Board Meeting of the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority

Wednesday, September 20, 2023 at 5:30 p.m.

Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023, this public meeting was conducted in remote format with remote participation options.

APPROVED Meeting Minutes

Meeting Files

- [Notice and Agenda](#)
- [Draft Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the CRA Board on August 23, 2023](#)
- [Email received on 9/15 from East Cambridge Open Space Committee regarding the substation plaza.](#)
- [Staff Program Report](#)
- [Financial Report as of July 31, 2023](#)
- [Community Room proposal for 355 Main Street](#)
- [Sasaki - Galaxy Park Approval for Future Phases](#)

Presentations and Handouts

- [Presentation on Affordable Ground Floor Space Program](#)
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Opening Statement

At 5:30 p.m., Ellen Shore, CRA Operations Director, said that Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023, this public meeting will be conducted remotely with remote participation options at the start of this meeting, and possibly at other times during the meeting, at the discretion of the chair. The meeting is also viewable live on Facebook by going to CRA's Facebook at www.facebook.com/CambridgeCRA. She then explained how to provide public comment. Comments on Facebook cannot be entered into public comment and cannot be responded to by the CRA. Reading materials can be found on the CRA's next meeting webpage. This meeting was recorded, including all video, audio, and QA messages.

Call Roll

Board Chair Kathleen Born called the regular meeting of the CRA Board. A roll call of members and the Executive Director was taken.

Vice Chair Conrad Crawford – present
Treasurer Christopher Bator – absent, will be arriving later
Asst. Treasurer Barry Zevin – present
Executive Director, Tom Evans – present

There was a quorum of 3 of the 5-member Board so the meeting proceeded. CRA staff members were also present. Ms. Born said that all votes will be taken by roll call, as this is a remote meeting, and that Mr. Evans will repeat the responses.

Public Comment

Stephen Kaiser had technical difficulties offering his comments remotely. Ms. Born offered to keep the comment period open to allow Mr. Kaiser another opportunity.

Minutes

1. Motion: To accept the minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Board on August 23, 2023

No comments were offered.

A motion was moved to accept the minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Board on August 23, 2023 and place them on file. A roll call was taken by Mr. Evans.

Chris Bator – absent

Kathy Born – yes

Conrad Crawford – yes

Barry Zevin – yes

The motion carried.

Communications

2. Email received on 9.16.93 from the East Cambridge Open Space Committee regarding the substation plaza.

Ms. Born thanked Rhonda Massie for the thoughtful comments.

3. Written communications received since the publication of this meeting notice.

No other communications were received.

A motion was moved by Mr. Zevin to place the email from the East Cambridge Open Space Committee on file. A roll call was taken by Mr. Evans.

Chris Bator – absent

Kathy Born – yes

Conrad Crawford – yes

Barry Zevin – yes

The motion carried.

Administrative Actions

4. Staff Program Report

Kyle Vangel, Director of Projects and Planning, summarized the staff report in the Board packet.

Mr. Zevin noted that the bus shelter location, mentioned in the last item of the staff report, is actually on the northwest corner of Ames and Main Street. Mr. Vangel will edit the report accordingly.

Mr. Kaiser requested to comment but continued to have technical difficulties.

Responding to Ms. Born's question, Mr. Vangel said that the design review meeting on October 4 will be fully remote and start at 5:30 p.m.

5. Monthly Financial Report

Gardy Laurent, Director of Finance and Operations, summarized the 2023 financial report as of July 31. Looking at the consolidated statement of activities, which is the first table on page two, the total operating revenue was \$2.3 million for rental and investment income. The year-to-date budget is a negative \$39 million because the CRA has not yet received the proceeds from the sales of development rights. The actual expenses were \$2.3 million, \$1.2 million lower than the budgeted because staff positions were still being filled. CRA loan forgiveness, as well as depreciation expenses for the 99 Bishop Allen building and equipment, are recorded in Net Other Expenses. Overall, the CRA activity shows a positive change of \$75,000, which is the total revenue of \$2.39 million minus the total expense of \$2.3 million.

The second table is the statement of activities for Bishop Allen. The total revenue was \$406,000 for rental income, which is \$12,000 higher than initially projected for revenue. This building is fully rented with nine office leases. The year-to-date actual expense is \$418,000, which is \$45,000 higher than budgeted. The Net Other Expense line item includes \$145,000 for building depreciation and \$20,000 for equipment depreciation as per accounting standards. The net asset is negative \$11,000.

The third table is the statement of activities for the Foundry. The income is about \$422,000, which is \$73,000 less than budgeted. This is due to the unleased third floor space for most of the year. The expenses are \$699,000, which is \$110,000 more than budgeted. Overall, the change in net assets is negative \$276,000.

At the bottom of page two, the statement of financial position shows CRA's liquidity is \$32.2 million in cash/cash equivalent and investments. Adding the \$13.1 million in restricted funds, \$39.4 million in net assets, and the \$75,000 in change in net assets, the total net position is \$52.6 million.

On page three, there are two charts. The top chart shows the actual expenses against the yearly budget. The CRA is within budget. The pie chart illustrates all the CRA's project expenditures, the larger ones being the Foundry and Bishop Allen Drive. Page four shows the CRA's balance sheet with a total net assets and liabilities of \$59.9 million.

Staff continue to research and evaluate investment opportunities that align with the CRA mission as well as the strategic plan. Reporting standards regarding the depreciation expense for leases and taxes are maintained. Mr. Laurent said that he is working on enhancing the monthly financial report. Other government accounting software suitable for CRA operating activities is being researched.

Mr. Evans said that the OPEB liability does not show up on this report. The auditors will be reporting to the Board next month. A strategy to significantly reduce that liability will be discussed.

Ms. Born asked for more information regarding the Property Taxes item. Mr. Laurent explained that the City charges the CRA property taxes for the Foundry and he will be addressing this with the City.

Another attempt to hear from Stephen Kaiser was unsuccessful.

Projects and Programs

6. 355 Main Street Community Room

Alexandra Levering, CRA Senior Project Manager, said that Boston Properties (BXP) wants to adapt the retail space adjacent to the public lobby, which used to be the old Bailey & Sage restaurant, to a public gathering/meeting space. Catalina Padilla, BXP Senior Project Manager, will present BXP's designs and programming goals in this space, which they are calling the Pioneer Room. BXP designs will also include a history wall and a large scale model of the Kendall area. She added that an approval vote from the CRA Board is needed to change the use from retail space to office space. A recommended motion is in the agenda.

Ms. Padilla said that the Pioneer Room will be 2,521 square feet located off of Pioneer Way located within 355 Main Street and will offer a place for people to gather for community events, conferences, workshops, trainings, and investor and tenant pitches. It can also open up to the public atrium for larger events. She described the proposed floor plan which allows the space to be divided into two spaces. There will be flexible furniture, two projectors, and other amenities. Exact designs are still being finalized.

Mr. Zevin said that MIT's Media Lab had an impressive model of Kendall Square and they might be interested in having a public facing location for it.

Mr. Bator arrived at the meeting.

Ms. Born asked if the space was exclusive to BXP or whether it has public accessibility. Ms. Padilla confirmed that it would definitely be open to the public. The space will be offered to all local BXP tenants. There will be a reservation system. Ms. Born started a discussion regarding this space compared to that of Bailey and Sage's. Ms. Born asked whether this proposal is due to a need of BXP's or whether it is too difficult to attract a new retail operation. Ms. Padilla said it was a combination and is a need expressed by BXP tenants.

There were no other comments.

A motion was moved by Mr. Crawford approving the change in use for 2,521 SF of ground floor space from retail to office to facilitate the creation of a community room within 355 Main Street (formerly Five Cambridge Center) within Parcel Four of the Kendall Square Urban Redevelopment Plan. A roll call was taken by Mr. Evans.

Kathy Born – yes

Conrad Crawford – yes

Barry Zevin – yes

Chris Bator – yes

The motion carried.

In response to Ms. Born, Ms. Padilla confirmed that the space will have the capacity for hybrid remote meetings.

7. Galaxy Park Landscape Design Services

Cecelia Cobb, CRA Project Planner, said that work on a Galaxy Park design began a few years ago with a streetscape report for the Kendall Square Urban Renewal Area. The report was published in 2022 and focused on Broadway, Main, and Third Streets. This was considered phases one, two, and three of the current Sasaki contract. As the eastern side of Galaxy Park is owned by the CRA, staff shepherded this project forward to make some streetscape and park impacts that were discussed in the earlier report.

Phase four is the concept design alternatives phase for this contract. Tonight, staff is seeking approval to take the concept designs that have been identified as front runners and move them towards 25% design. This will eventually be followed by 75% and 100%, which would be construction documents that are ready to go out to bid.

Ms. Cobb gave an overview of the concept phase, starting with the existing conditions on the ground. She specifically noted the northern sidewalk edge along Galaxy Park which needs extra attention because of the pedestrian movement and a pinch point on the sidewalk. She showed a short video of the area looking at Main Street where it merges with Broadway during the peak traffic time of 5:30 p.m. She then discussed the concept design process which focused first on identifying the overall goals for this project and then continued with various external stakeholder consultations. She added that fair amount of feedback has been received.

Ms. Cobb spoke about the alternative options for the park space. She explained why "The Grove" option is being recommended.

Ms. Cobb then discussed the streetscape design selection process, which was a more challenging decision to make. She described the pros and cons of the two original alternatives, which included a post-separated bike lane and a curb-separated cycle track. The Modified cycle track alternative gives more space to the bicycle lane, maintains the current sidewalk width, and adds greenery, while still maintaining width for any emergency vehicles. Although this is a more expensive option, it offers better protection and improved conditions for walking and bicycling in this area.

Ms. Cobb said that after undergoing a fair amount of the conceptual design process, staff is ready to move towards the 25% design. The streetscape will need further refinement in future design reviews.

Mr. Zevin said that he is liking this less and less. Mr. Zevin said that it is embarrassing if the other notorious pinch point on the right path heading towards Third Street remains, after spending \$140,000 on something that doesn't necessarily need fixing. He is less convinced that the other pinch point is an actual problem. People queue up to cross the street, not to enter that area of the sidewalk. He said that he is rankled by the notion that clearance for emergency vehicles is merely a "perceived" issue; it's quite real. He is also not sure that the beveled curb is a

wonderful He is also concerned about the planting strips, as they could block the driver's line of vision when coming off Main Street to merge onto Broadway. He asked what is accomplished by taking the space out of the tree/lawn zone for two-foot islands of flowers.

Ms. Cobb said that the pinch point along the bike lane on the western edge of Galaxy Park is on the property that is owned by Boston Properties and is unfortunately outside the scope of this project. Mr. Zevin said that based on standards applied elsewhere in Cambridge, bicycle advocates would say that this bicycle lane should be abandoned altogether because that situation is so hazardous. That bike lane has other difficulties as well, as one needs to cut across a pedestrian zone just to enter it from Main Street.

Mr. Evans said that staff will revisit the issue with Mike O'Hearn in BXP's property management office. The problem is redesigning without triggering an OSHA redesign of the fountain pump station. He added that the counterflow lane was put in by the bike people at the insistence of CDD's bicycle design team to resolve the issue. There was a discussion regarding the creation of that bike lane.

Ms. Cobb said that the Steve Engler, the Sasaki consultant on this project, is present to answer any questions.

In response to Ms. Born, Mr. Evans confirmed that the obstruction is due to a big stone block around an air vent shaft. This feeds into the underground pump station that runs the water fountain. Ms. Born agreed that it is extremely awkward and is surprised that people haven't run into it either on foot or on bicycles. She didn't feel that it needs to be part of this scope of work, although she agrees with the need to fix it. It's been that way for a while and she has confidence that at some point, it can be fixed or amended. She didn't agree with Mr. Zevin's thought about this being an inadequate design. She is going to stay neutral on the issue of emergency vehicles because she defers to other people who have come to CRA meetings who live in the neighborhood who expressed a lot of concern about emergency vehicles being able to get through a traffic jam. It's an important piece of the project because the public has spoken out about it. She asked if the bicycle lane across the Longfellow Bridge has flexible posts so that cars or emergency vehicles can get through if needed. Mr. Evans confirmed that there are flex-posts. Ms. Born liked that the recommended alternative allows emergency vehicles to get past traffic

Mr. Crawford said he is optimistic about the solution versus what exists now.

Mr. Bator said that after seeing the video, he is worried about signing off on a design that has a potential for a bicycle-car incident. He suggested that there be flashing lights or some other warning if a bicycle is within 10 or 15 yards of that point. Ms. Cobb said that the plans are to put an elevated crosswalk at this section, which would force cars to slow down at this point. Currently, cars are able to roll straight through the existing crosswalk.. Another suggestion would be to change the angle of the intersection to line up a bit more perpendicular to Broadway, to give drivers a better sight line looking left towards the bike lanes and sidewalk. These are things that can be explored in the 25% design. Mr. Evans added that there will be more review by the City's traffic engineering and DPW who are also concerned about these things.

A motion was moved by Mr. Crawford, authorizing the Executive Director to enter into the next phase of the contract with Sasaki Design to advance streetscape and park improvements at Galaxy Park. A roll call was taken by Mr. Evans.

Chris Bator – yes

Kathy Born – yes

Conrad Crawford – yes

Barry Zevin – no

The motion carried.

Mr. Evans said that staff will continue to bring updates to the Board as the design progresses. In order to resolve these issues, Mr. Engler and his team need to keep moving forward. Mr. Evan relayed a question in the chat about the length of the raised bike lane proposed. Ms. Cobb said that she didn't have the exact measurement but pointed to the area on the map, beginning at the crosswalk just after the intersection and continuing until Main Street merges with Broadway. Mr. Evans guessed that it's about 120 feet. Extending the raised track can be explored.

8. Presentation on Affordable Ground Floor Space Program

Mr. Vangel said that the CRA's Strategic Plan was developed during the past two years and adopted this past spring. During that time, CRA staff and Board members have had numerous in-depth conversations with various stakeholders throughout the community about the City's needs and how the CRA can be proactively involved in meeting those needs within the contours of its mission, the staff skill set, and the CRA's function as a real estate entity. One priority that was highlighted for research and investigation in the strategic plan was the notion of affordable ground floor space or commercial anti-displacement strategies. This is an issue that is gaining prominence nationally and locally in terms of its emphasis within economic development and in real estate circles.

The CRA has stepped into this space with 99 Bishop Allen by providing affordable office space for nonprofits. This presentation will focus on preservation and incubation opportunities for ground-floor tenants. Joshua Croom, CRA Project Planner, has been researching this issue since he started at the CRA two and a half months ago. Mr. Vangel said that there is a gap in Cambridge as it relates to anti-displacement strategies for commercial real estate ownership.

Mr. Croom said that he has been researching the acute need for affordable commercial space, particularly at the intersection of anti-displacement strategies for BIPOC, immigrant, and/or asset poverty-aligned small businesses and entrepreneurship. His research looked at particular models happening at different times, at different scales, and at different places within Massachusetts, within Greater Boston, and nationally. Legacy businesses that have been around for decades and serving the community are finding it difficult to remain in place, as neighborhood demographics change. Mr. Croom said that the CRA could assist with real estate ownership and development. He then described several models accomplishing this in various cities. Mr. Croom spoke about long-term community wealth-building via community land trusts (CLT), limited equity cooperatives, and community investment trusts, and gave examples of these. Mr. Croom explained next steps for the CRA.

Ms. Born said that this fits the mission of the CRA. The challenge is the area's expensive real estate market. She noted that places with ground floor availability would also accommodate housing above to a certain height.

Mr. Crawford noted that he looks forward to talking about this further.

Mr. Bator said that this is within CRA's wheelhouse and he is looking forward to pursuing this endeavor.

Mr. Zevin agreed and added that the CRA should focus on the real estate but use City resources to deal with the other important aspects.

Ms. Born suggested looking at stretches of retail within Cambridge that are under-utilized and storefronts that have been vacant since COVID. She noted that the City is looking at using vacant ground floor retail for some pre-K facilities.

Mr. Evans said that staff would first look at East Cambridge. Discussions with the City regarding this subject spun off of the planning efforts for Cambridge Street, which is seen as a corridor that could face a lot of transition, especially with all the development happening at Cambridge Crossing and Kendall Square. Staff have spoken with the East Cambridge Business Association.

Mr. Zevin said that the City keeps a database of empty storefronts that is updated quarterly.

Other Business

At 7:50 p.m., the Board had concluded all of the business set forth on the regular agenda and would not reconvene in open session after the Executive Session. The reason for entering into executive session is because having such conversations in open session could compromise the CRA's position and negotiations.

A motion was moved by Mr. Bator, to enter into Executive Session, to consider the terms of potential real estate transaction for the acquisition of property affordable housing development A roll call was taken by Mr. Evans.

Chris Bator – yes

Kathy Born – yes

Conrad Crawford – yes
Barry Zevin – yes
The motion carried.

The Executive Session will start at 8:10 p.m. Mr. Evans said that a link to the Executive Session was sent out by Mr. Vangel.