

CRA Design Review Committee

Held Virtually on Zoom

Meeting Notes

October 13, 2021

ATTENDEES

Committee Members: Barry Zevin (CRA Board), Kathleen Born (CRA Board), Hugh Russell (Planning Board), Erik Thorkildsen (CDD)

CRA Staff: Tom Evans (CRA), Alexandra Levering (CRA), Fabiola Alikpokou (CRA), Carlos Peralta (CRA)

BXP Team: Eric Mo, Rebecca Stoddard, Sarah Horton (Poblocki Sign Company)

Residence Inn Team: Jennifer Pendola (General Manager), Barry Simon (Owner Rep), David Connolly (Attorney), John Wilmoth (Past General Manager), Eli Tuttle (Architect), Heather Link (Designer)

325 MAIN STREET PHASE II PUBLIC REALM PROPOSED MODIFICATIONS

PRESENTATION

Eric Mo presented on the 325 Main Street Phase II Public Realm proposed modifications regarding the social stair information screen – Parcel 4 of the Kendall Square Urban Redevelopment Plan.

COMMITTEE COMMENTS

Mr. Russell thought the change to an LCD screen was fine.

Mr. Zevin was okay with not using e-ink technology and thought it was a wise move. He asked if the art on the terracotta social stair wall would be applied as panels. Mr. Mo responded that they are metal panels, and within them are architectural sequins on the metal circles that will move during windy days. He also added that they are still finalizing mounting details.

Mr. Zevin also asked if it would make sense to stop the signage panel a little short at the top and let the terracotta wrap the corner to make the two surfaces appear as part of a single mass? Mr. Russell noted that a tremendous effort isn't needed to achieve Mr. Zevin's suggestion, and it is the same dimension at the bottom and that it is a good idea. Ms. Born asked if the strip under the aluminum soffit was a shadow? Mr. Mo answered that it was a shadow.

Ms. Born also asked how the overhang ends and if it ends flush with the terracotta that it abuts? Mr. Mo believed the sign's surface would be as close to the outer surface of the terracotta and the same plane as the edge of the overhang. Ms. Horton noted that the corner had not been completely shop drawn, and the panels would be flush, which is why it went all the way to the top. Ms. Born asked if the terracotta came with corner pieces. Mr. Zevin

noted corners at 145 Broadway are finished with aluminum corner beads and would assume they are using the same details.

Ms. Born also asked about the corner details for the LCD display and if it is two screens that are butted against each other or if it is one screen that wraps around the corner? Mr. Mo answered that the screen is only on the eastern side, and the other side is just aluminum signage. Ms. Horton added that the two sides would be joined so it would be smooth and continuous. Ms. Born clarified if the metal panels running all the way up was done for a design reason, avoiding a terracotta corner, or not? Mr. Mo answered that it was done for design reasons to make all the material as clean as possible.

Ms. Born added that if the terracotta turned the corner and the metal panel and LED or LCD screen stopped sooner, there seem to be two places to do that, given the existing graphics. One being at the line of shadow under the overhang, and the other being lower at the top of the LCD panel. If it were to happen, Ms. Born prefers to see the break be at the lower end so that there's more of the terracotta, turning the corner. It makes the graphics more visually pleasing. Mr. Zevin noted that the material condition at the base is the same as the top. Ms. Horton noted that the upper panel would be new, and the panel facing Main Street is actually an architectural element that's quite lovely, and is cut out inside so it has some dimension. If redesigned, it would take away from its artistic element. Ms. Stoddard added that there was a time between the LED / LCD screen array and this type of signage, where the wall was just entirely terracotta, and it was changed to this.

Mr. Russell suggested Eric Mo go back to the designers and let them make a decision on which direction to take. Mr. Thorkildsen agreed with everyone but noted that deciding where things end and what is flush and what is not flushed should be thought through further. Mr. Mo mentioned that the designer's intent to have the design as it is because, after many iterations, the current design offers more dimensionality and almost a sculptural-like element.

Ms. Born asked if everyone was okay with substituting the e-ink screen with LCD or LED technology? She added that she was okay with it because LCD is here to stay and livens the space. Mr. Zevin mentioned the concern about disturbing residents isn't relevant here because it is low and doesn't flash. Mr. Evans recommended reviewing MassDOT guidelines on moving images facing a public way and doesn't want it to be a safety distraction at Main Street. Mr. Mo noted that the MBTA lighting standards are extremely bright, offering a lot of ambient light in the area.

Ms. Born confirmed that the designers would take another look at the elevation above the LCD display. Mr. Zevin requested details on the applied art. Mr. Mo noted more detail would come.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None

BROADWAY RESIDENCE INN OPEN SPACE PROPOSAL

PRESENTATION

Heather Link presented on the 120 Broadway Residence Inn Open Space Proposal – Parcel 3 of the Kendall Square Urban Redevelopment Plan.

COMMITTEE COMMENTS

Ms. Born opened the committee comment period by noting that there are two categories for discussion. One is that the CRA's role as a public agency is to ensure the public is not losing any public access to a space that has been covenanted to be public at certain hours of the day. The second category is design-specific issues.

Mr. Evans expressed that the item before the Board is design specific. It is important to consider how the nuances of the design elements like the boundary of furniture and others all send messages to the public regarding what feels public and what is closed off and privatized. Therefore, the messaging of the design is the focus of discussion. Mr. Evans also noted that slight modifications could add an overall programmatic benefit to the park.

Mr. Zevin expressed dislike for the patio design; specifically, the fire features on the site. He continued to say that it is weird to have a fire feature in a city considering banning new gas hookups and that it furthers global warming. He also noted that the Cambridge Fire Department prohibits the use of fire pits. Mr. Zevin added that part of what Residence Inn is doing involves taking down the steel and brick fence on one side of the park, turning a symmetrical design into an odd asymmetrical state. He continued to add that Danny Lewin Park is one of the few quiet spaces in Kendall Square and that the park is dedicated to someone who passed away in 911; therefore, it deserves a certain dignity. He asked where this project fits into designs for revisions to the entire park; it seems unwise to make a significant investment in the park without knowing how the other side will look. He also suggests that Residence Inn's drawing should conform to standard architectural practice and show line weight that differentiates chairs from 20ft tall columns. He mentioned that the spacing between the planters seemed more appropriate for a fortress than for something that is supposed to be penetrable and welcoming. He doesn't believe that the space is permeable and doesn't understand what happens to the furniture off hours and off seasons. And why fake planters?

Ms. Levering clarified that the fence element specifically is the CRA's role and that staff has been working with Residence Inn and BXP to discuss the removal of the brick and wrought iron fence on both the north and south edges. The idea that removing the fence would open the space and feel more welcoming came from public comments in the Ames Place Open Space community discussions and an inclusive public space survey conducted by CDD and the CRA. Ms. Levering continued to say that as they look at the redesign of the space, it will be done in a way that makes the space more porous, and with Residence Inn's design, the space won't be asymmetrical. She added the ownership dynamic is unique, and ensuring the project is done cohesively is the goal.

Mr. Connolly noted that Residence Inn has been collaborating with the CRA to select the appropriate planters shown in the presentation, and utilized precedents shared with the staff, did site walks to look at examples, and incorporated other ideas presented by the CRA staff.

Ms. Born asked if the openings in the side of the building were new? Mr. Tuttle answered they are existing storefront windows and that Residence Inn is removing one storefront window and replacing it with a door with a transom, keeping the opening the same. It will be the door service staff will use, and people in the lobby will use it

to access the new patio. Mr. Tuttle added that the door south of the new door is an existing emergency stairwell exit and the double doors south of that are the existing electrical storage room.

Ms. Born also asked if anyone, including, for example, a group of teenagers, would be able to access the patio and sit on any of the seating before 5 pm? Mr. Connolly and Mr. Simon answered, yes, that is correct. Ms. Born clarified that at 5 pm, staff would place the chains between the planters, light the fire element, and set the tables? Will they place a sign that says private? Ms. Pendola noted that the feel of the space is dependent on the season. For example, the fire feature might not be on during daylight hours. She added that there would be a sign that says, "see the host" to be seated after 5 pm. Ms. Born asked would people be asked to order food/drink or leave? Ms. Pendola answered no, they wouldn't be asked that.

Ms. Born asked if the plant materials in the planters would be artificial? Ms. Link answered yes. Ms. Born noted it was an absolute no and that it has to be real to fit the natural character of the current space. Ms. Born confirmed that no trees would be taken down, and Mr. Connolly confirmed no trees would be removed.

Ms. Born reemphasized that the CRA is responsible to the public and is incredibly sensitive to anything that looks and feels like the privatization of public space. She noted that the tension is between the public use of the space and the real desire to enliven the public space. She acknowledged that adding food and retail service is important and something the public wants to see, so it would be contradictory for the CRA to go against the idea of enlivening the space.

Mr. Zevin added that he is not convinced by some of the arguments and is surprised that people view Danny Lewin Park as private. He noted that he often sees people enjoying the space and nobody seems to be put off by the fenced boundary of the space. He stated the pedestrian entrance to the yellow garage is in the center of Parcel 3, and that pedestrian traffic goes back and forth through the park. He also asked why not leave the existing steel and brick boundary for the moment and buy some stanchions to rope off the drinking area? He suggests testing it out to see how it works before committing to major changes to the space. Mr. Tuttle noted that they were advised to show the design with the steel and brick fence removed and that they are only removing mulch and bark dust and not limiting any of the walkways through the park.

Ms. Born asked what the current public rule was regarding carrying open containers of alcohol and if it changed during COVID? Mr. Connolly noted that he is unsure about the open space carrying, but the general practice is that the license commission wants owners to exhibit dominion and control of who is in the space and that no other alcohol or substance is brought into the space. Mr. Evans noted that the rule that was loosened up was the passage of alcohol in public ways to allow sidewalk restaurants to be on the road and have waitstaff carry across the sidewalk and the ability for restaurants to serve alcohol to go.

Mr. Evans wondered if Residence Inn would be open to the exploration of a lighter intervention while the CRA conducts additional design work. Ms. Born agreed with the idea and didn't want to do anything except enliven the space. She also pointed to the outdoor furniture in Harvard Yard as an example of something that can go in the park.

Mr. Evans added that CRA is seeking some improvement to the space and are asking Boston Properties to consider. He noted, before taking it to the Board, a collaboration of ways to get to some modification and some elements to be compatible with the park's existing and future design might be wise.

Mr. Zevin agreed with the direction and noted that a hedge is a third way to define the space. He continued that a common understanding of what this space becomes is needed. He mentioned that the design of the space would replace permeable surfaces with concrete, and while people do want a place to sit outside and eat, they also value green space.

Ms. Born added that the activation is a good idea, and the goal is to implement it with minimal intervention. She suggested maybe a temporary wood decking instead of paving.

Ms. Pendola noted that if there is a time to do this project, it is now while the hotel industry is picking up again and while other constructions are happening.

Mr. Zevin asked how fast we could reach a strategy for the entire site? He also mentioned that this area gets significant sunlight during much of the day and is okay with it being used in the evening, just with minimal intervention.

Ms. Born noted concern for the large fire feature and how kids will interact with it. Mr. Tuttle pointed out that it would be a glass media on the inside when it is turned off, it will be covered, and kids can interact with it without getting burnt. He also said that the fire feature is more ambiance and aesthetic. Ms. Born asked about the height of the fire feature, and Mr. Tuttle answered that it is 30 inches and that it would have chairs around it.

Mr. Zevin reiterated his dislike for degree to which the space will be closed off. Mr. Tuttle asked the Board if they felt comfortable with the planters being moved during the day to open the space and put back after hours? Ms. Born and Mr. Zevin agree that it is a good idea to open up the space more.

Ms. Born suggested removing the bar seating with the fire element. Mr. Tuttle asked, what if it is lower to table height, so it is less prominent? Mr. Tuttle added that the fire element is directly connected to a gas line underneath that is stubbed up and that it is for a candlelight aesthetic with little heat to it.

Ms. Levering commented on outstanding design questions from the CRA staff, including drainage in the area and what it will do if an impervious pad is added; getting additional information about the impact on trees and roots; and questions about the proposed lighting feature for the area. She also added that the CRA had started a conversation with BXP about the redesign of the space and the fence removal. In the meantime, she agrees that the project can move forward with minimal intervention while we work with others to think about the space holistically.

Mr. Zevin suggested designing the space up to the ownership line and recognizing that the circular middle might not be the best solution. He is worried about the solid element that follows a line that perhaps shouldn't be there in the first place. Mr. Tuttle added that they wanted to layout the space without impacting the walkway and pull away 6 inches for drainage reasons and that drainage won't be any more than 2% slope in either direction. He also added that they will try to slope it towards existing trees and that there is an existing tightline drainage system within the landscaping area, and they plan on exposing that system and modifying it to accommodate the new runoff and tie it back into the buildings existing system. They won't know for sure until they see what is currently there, but overall, a new walkway will not get flooded, and it will be ADA compliant.

Ms. Link added that there would be simple string white dimmable lights across the top of the space.

Ms. Born asked if the gas fire element is prefabricated or -built on-site? Mr. Tuttle answered that it is not prefabricated and will be customized in the space to fit the character of the space and brick that is similar to the building.

Ms. Levering added that there is a good direction, and that should Residence Inn have the materials ready, it could be presented at the full board meeting in November.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

None