

CRA Design Review Committee
Held Virtually on Zoom
Meeting Notes
July 8th, 2020

Attendees – Kathy Born (CRA Board), Barry Zevin (CRA Board), Hugh Russell (Planning Board), Erik Thorkildsen (CDD), Tom Evans (CRA), Alex Levering (CRA), Ellen Shore (CRA) Carlos Peralta (CRA), Heather Hoffman (Public), James (Public), Patricia Smirnoudis (Stantec), Rebecca Stoddard (BXP), Jessica Finch (Selbert Perkins), Ian Hatch (BXP), Eric Mo (BXP), Beth Cohen (Oat Foundry).

In response to the COVID-19 State of Emergency, on March 12, 2020, Governor Baker issued an Order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law. The Order allows government bodies subject to the law to meet using remote participation, without presence of members of the general public, the chair, or a quorum of the public body in a physical location at a specified meeting location. In accordance with the Order, the CRA held the Design Review meeting virtually via Zoom webinar, with the ability for the public to access and participate either through a computer or by calling in via a cell phone or landline.

325 Main Street Kendall Headhouse Review

Boston Properties (BXP) provided a design update of the North Kendall Headhouse. For code compliance, the designs included the addition of a second “bridge” connection from the roof of the headhouse to the second level terrace of 325 Main Street. The Committee discussed various elements of the bridge, including materiality, lighting, and maintenance agreements between the MBTA and BXP. Committee members commented on the fact that the addition of the bridge helps to make the second level area feel like one space. The new bridge also provides a covered walkway for MBTA users entering/exiting the 325 Main Street east ground-level entrance. The committee agreed that details need to be looked at to ensure the underside of the walkways are designed to feel as light as possible and to review the materiality of the bridges.

Action Items: For CRA Staff to follow the MBTA PDG Headhouse Design Review discussion, and to review lighting and materiality of the bridge connections.

325 Main Street Phase II Public Realm Wayfinding Presentation

Wayfinding and Branding: BXP presented their marketing and branding designs for the 325 Main Street Public Realm space. Representatives from BXP’s design consultants, Selbert Perkins

Designs (SP), joined the meeting to present the branding, wayfinding, and art concepts. The committee discussed their appreciation for the upbeat and bright wayfinding and art elements, noting they provide areas of interest and excitement in the project, like “canaries in the forest”. It was also agreed that art on the trellis entrance portals helped make more sense of the structures.

The committee discussed the Urban Park (UP) branding nomenclature of the Plaza, Porch and Perch for the Plaza, Terrace and Roof Garden respectively. The committee agreed the Roof Garden’s Perch designation might want further consideration, and that the Roof Garden’s naming must feel welcoming and public. Locations for wayfinding were reviewed. It was recommended that areas from Broadway, Pioneer Way (exterior and internal), and the Public Lobby be included, and that the wayfinding story should travel through every route of the project’s public realm area.

Selbert Perkins noted there will be opportunities for sculptural, digital, temporary and permanent mural locations in the project. Boston Properties confirmed they would be looking to have multiple local artists participate in the project, but that they would ensure those artists work to complement the brand.

Questions were raised about MIT’s SoMa wayfinding concepts and compatibility with the North headhouse and proposed branding. It was affirmed that the MBTA’s wayfinding division had participated in the North Headhouse designs and review. It was also agreed that the Main Street streetscape designs should help tie the two headhouses together, and emphasize a direct pedestrian connection.

Action Items - Wayfinding: *For BXP and SP to think through how the wayfinding designs presented interacts with the existing wayfinding in KSQ, ensure the wayfinding story travels through every route of the public realm area, and review the nomenclature of UP. Ensure the wayfinding art and branding is cohesive and not frenetic.*

Split-Flap: Boston Properties presented a new concept for the terracotta social stair wall called a Split-Flap sign. The split-flap is an electromechanical display that presents changeable letters or color tiles. The manufacturer of the sign, Oat Foundry, joined the call to answer questions and provide a live demonstration. In the conversation it was noted that the display would be mounted so that it was level with the surface of the terracotta and shielded with glass to protect it from weather and people. It was noted that the enclosure would be designed to allow the sound of the rotating tiles to be heard. The split-flap display would consist of hundreds of modules, roughly 5”x 6”, each containing up to 50 tiles displaying letters, punctuation, and colors.

In comparison to the digital wall screen alternative, the committee noted the split-flap display provides less content flexibility. It was also agreed that the black display felt inconsistent with the bright and colorful wayfinding concepts shown previously. Questions were raised about the angle of the sign and how the letters would be seen, especially through glare from glass, and it

was noted that the screen was likely intended to be seen orthogonally rather than from an angle. Ideas for how to make the sign interactive were suggested. One idea was to provide imagery of the Red Line train on the display as it passed below.

All committee members agreed that an electronic sign of some sort was sensible at the social stair terracotta wall location. The group discussed the concept of the static sign facing Main Street having a different design character than the split-flap sign, that perhaps could be more vibrant. It was pointed out that some of the examples of art work seen previously in the wayfinding presentation had black in them, which could be coordinated with the split-flap display. It was noted that anyone can put up a digital screen, but that a split-flap is a concept that is fun and unique. After much discussion, the committee reached consensus that the split-flap idea should continue to be explored, but identified items that needed further review.

Action Items - Split-Flap: *The committee agreed to continue to explore the split-flap design, but noted that additional questions needed to be answered. Those included: looking at different site lines, sign dimensions, visual interference with the vision glass, lighting opportunities and potential content. Consider ways for the design of the split-flap or static sign to be more in line with the character of the wayfinding/branding proposal. Revised designs will be presented at the CRA Board meeting on July 15th.*

Roof Garden Gate: Boston Properties showed two revised iterations of the Roof Garden Gate. The first option involved a truss beam and the second showed a plate girder beam. BXP also showed both beam designs being higher from the original proposed height to provide a better visual from Main Street and Kendall Plaza. Two different design iterations were also seen for the gate panels, one that incorporated UP in the pattern and another that was designed to look like a branching tree structure. It was agreed that the truss design and the raised gate option was preferred, though additional information was requested to learn how the bottom of the gate would fasten.

The committee also noted that the gate structure, like the split-flap design, should incorporate the wayfinding and branding designs. The committee agreed the color of the gate was dark and that color and vibrancy should be brought into the designs. It was also proposed that the truss angles could be designed to better reflect the UP language, though also agreed it would need to be assessed by a structural engineer and that the structure has a long span and heavy load. It was also noted that the infill space of the trusses could be used for art.

Action Items - Roof Garden Gate: *For BXP to move forward by refining the truss gate structure and to review the structural elements needed for a higher gate design. BXP should also consider ways to incorporate the colorful branding and wayfinding language into the gate. Revised designs will be presented at the CRA Board meeting on July 15th.*