

Foundry Advisory Committee

Meeting Notes

Tuesday, February 20, 2024, 3:30 pm

**In-person Meeting at the Foundry – The Point
101 Rogers St. Cambridge MA**

FAC Members in Attendance: Connie Chin, Lauren O’Neal, Barbara Thomas, Jameson Johnson (*Absent:* Sangeeta Prasad, Ruben Mancha, Katheleen Williams)

CRA Staff: Tom Evans, Matthew Heller-Trulli, Gardy Laurent

Foundry Consortium Staff: Diana Navarrete-Rackauckas

Foundry Consortium Board: Peter Crawley

City of Cambridge Staff: Claudia Zarazua

Agenda

- Building & Leasing Update
- 2023 Foundry Consortium Annual Report
- Review of Foundry Volunteer Program
- Planning for the FAC in 2024 & beyond
- Listening session & other public feedback mechanisms

Building & Leasing Update

Matt Heller-Trulli began the meeting by providing an update on the last remaining vacant commercial office suite at the Foundry which has been leased to Lemelson-MIT (LMIT) with an intended occupancy of April 1. LMIT brings experience in STEM teaching which will help enhance the STEM components of the Foundry community spaces. Tom Evans explains that LMIT is planning to use their space not only as an office but also as a classroom and workshop space which will add to the community and learning spaces within the Foundry building. In addition to their own space, LMIT will continue to utilize space on the first floor for various teaching and community programs. Mr. Heller-Trulli explained that the project to subdivide the office for LMIT’s occupancy began on February 2 with an expected completion date of April 1 to allow for the tenant to begin their programming.

The Foundry received tax abatement from the City of Cambridge which will help the CRA unlock additional funding for the Foundry Consortium to expand their operating hours to Sunday along with building improvements that have been recommended by the FAC. Peter Crawley asked if

the abatement was for the full amount or a portion of the tax liability. Mr. Heller-Trulli explains that the building is separated into two tax zones, one for the community spaces and one for the commercial offices. The community space received a full abatement while the commercial office spaces only received a partial tax abatement based on the proportion of non-profit tenants that are in the building. Mr. Heller-Trulli showed three images of the ongoing construction work happening to create the LMIT office suite on the third floor. Mr. Crawley asked if the completion of the Lemelson space means we are at full commercial occupancy, to which Mr. Heller-Trulli replied that it does.

Claudia Zarazua asked if use of the community space by LMIT is included in their lease or if they pay on the same sliding scale as other organizations. Diana Navarrete-Rackauckas explained that there is a special tenant package allowing tenants to get a lump-sum amount of hours but booking is through the normal booking system that the public uses. Ms. Zarazua asks that if LMIT offers public programming in their suite, would it be in conflict with any of the other commercial office suites. Mr. Heller-Trulli explains that the only shared amenity amongst the commercial office spaces are the bathrooms and each office suite has their own entrance and entry fob so there should not be any issues.

Mr. Evans wonders how LMIT would be able to get hold open on their suite door for when they are running programming in order for students to easily enter the space. Ms. Navarrete-Rackauckas explains that all tenant spaces have a traditional key lock in addition to the fob that can be manually unlocked, allowing for free passage through the door.

2023 Foundry Consortium Annual Report

The Foundry Consortium Annual Report was sent to FAC members in the week prior to the meeting for their review. Mr. Heller-Trulli opened the floor for any FAC member to ask questions or provide comments on the annual report.

Lauren O'Neal asked Ms. Navarrete-Rackauckas if there were any things that were surprising when putting together the report. Ms. Navarrete-Rackauckas said that a lot of things surprised her but the main thing was how each space really does have its own personality and how some spaces have a lot of short uses while other have fewer use instances but for much longer times. This can mostly be seen between the dance studio and the performance space. There has been consistent returns to both spaces by the same people and groups over the course of the year. The kitchen space has also seen longer programming as is typical of the type of cooking demonstrations and classes that need longer periods of time.

Jameson Johnson asked how outreach for underutilized spaces has been implemented. Ms. Navarrete-Rackauckas said that the Foundry Consortium has started to connect with folks who are heavy users of the space to see if there has been a lack of outreach for the space or if the space is not conducive for the use that the community is looking for and how that can be remedied. The Foundry Consortium Board is going to be starting up a Strategic Advisory

Committee within the organization which is meant to tackle one major problem a year which is a great way to focus on a specific topic. In 2024, the focus is going to be on the maker spaces as a way to talk about free or low-cost classes and what can be done to get more of the community into those spaces.

Barbara Thomas had a question about the information on page 7 and how the text translates to the graphics. Ms. Thomas said that as a newer member of the FAC it is not always clear which shop has what function so an explanation in the report of the function of each shop could go a long way for the public to understand the data more clearly. Additionally, she stated that cross-referencing data to more clearly see which spaces are being used by Cambridge residents and non-Cambridge residents would be helpful. Ms. Navarrete-Rackauckas said that this is very helpful feedback and in the last iteration of the annual report, there was a map of the community spaces but that it was an oversight in this report and it will make its way into the next 2024 report draft.

Mr. Crawley asked if there is knowledge of who paid full price, who paid under full price, and if there are tiers of pricing. Ms. Navarrete-Rackauckas described that the report displays the percentage of groups that took each level of the sliding scale. These consist mostly of small businesses and non-profits.

Ms. Johnson asked if the current sliding scale usage is a goal met for the Foundry Consortium or if there is room for improvement. Ms. Navarrete-Rackauckas said that she is happy how it is being used and that it is showing that there is a lot of need in the community for free or highly subsidized space to run programming. Balancing is required between full-price rentals and subsidized rentals to allow for reduced rates to be able to continue to be offered while maintaining the financial needs of the space.

Gardy Laurent asks about what the unreported section of the geographical data means. Ms. Navarrete-Rackauckas said that this is from before the Foundry Consortium switched to the new reporting and booking system where they are now able to gather data more easily. Previous to the new system, data on location was not collected.

Ms. Johnson asked how detailed the geographic data is collected and Ms. Navarrete-Rackauckas responded that zip codes are asked but nothing more specific than that. Ms. Johnson then asked if there has been an effort to break out data by zip code within Cambridge to see which neighborhoods are utilizing the space more than others. Ms. Navarrete-Rackauckas said that since August that data has been collected so the Foundry Consortium will look into breaking this data out going forward.

Mr. Crawley states that it looks like about 50% of use hours are from individuals and organizations that are Cambridge-based and asked what the goal for Cambridge usage is if there is one. A member of the public then asks if there is priority for Cambridge over other cities and Ms. Navarrete-Rackauckas responds that the Foundry Consortium has a program rubric, which can be found on the Foundry website, that gives priority to Cambridge-based individuals and organizations over others. The same member of the public also asked if there is a price

differential for non-Cambridge entities and Ms. Navarrete-Rackauckas responded that currently there is not other than commercial versus non-profit.

Ms. Thomas said that the annual report does a great job at explaining each section with text before presenting the data but on page 17, there is no explanation and this should be added so that there is consistency throughout the report and more information to explain what is being conveyed on this page. Ms. Johnson states that there is no mention of the FAC in the annual report or which comments were provided by the FAC. She goes on to state that she is still unsure what the FAC's relationship is with the Foundry Consortium Board and if both entities could get together. Mr. Crawley makes clear that he is on the Board of the Foundry Consortium and that there will be a combined listening session between the Foundry Consortium Board and FAC in March to review the recommendations from the FAC and discuss more about how the FAC can help the Foundry Consortium Board.

Ms. O'Neal would love to see more details about how the goals stated in the report are actionable and what steps are going to be taken to make them a reality. Ms. Navarrete-Rackauckas intends to address this section at FAC meetings going forward to provide progress reports on how the Foundry Consortium is moving towards these goals and what has been achieved.

Review of Foundry Volunteer Program

Mr. Heller-Trulli explained that one of the FAC members had asked for a more detailed explanation on the volunteer program already in place within the Foundry and that Ms. Navarrete-Rackauckas will be giving an explanation of this and answering questions from the FAC.

Ms. Navarrete-Rackauckas describes how there are two main areas of volunteers in the space. The one that is more structured is the volunteer program for the maker spaces since there is more complexity and an element of safety associated with the work that goes on there. There are multiple positions of volunteers that consist of guides, mentors, stewards, builders, and trainers. The general volunteer program is in the middle of a re-vamp and consists of a list of volunteers that are reached out to when they are needed for events, programs, or for the welcome desk. These consist of 8-week cycles so that a familiar face and consistent presence is felt in the space. The Foundry Consortium is open to suggestions and recommendations on how the program could be improved.

The Foundry Consortium is currently looking into volunteers that want to teach classes to allow for programs to be run either free or at very-low cost to the public. Ms. Zarazua asks if artists would want to offer their when many are rebounding from the lack of work during the pandemic. Ms. Navarrete-Rackauckas clarifies that these are not people who are being asked to teach for free but rather individuals, often retired or looking to give back to the community, who want to lend their time and expertise for community benefit.

A member of the public asked what spaces the Foundry Consortium sees as in need of the most help in activation when it comes to volunteers who are looking to teach a class. Ms. Navarrete-Rackauckas states that spaces such as the Kitchen, the fiber arts studio, and other areas that are more focused on the maker spaces.

Ms. Thomas asked what the possibility is that the Foundry will be open on Sundays in 2024. Ms. Navarrete-Rackauckas noted that her intention and goal is to open on Sundays starting by the summer. She notes that it will be a heavy lift to get to that point so help would be appreciated when it is needed and that the Foundry Consortium will keep the FAC updated on the Sunday opening plans as we get closer to the summer.

Ms. Johnson asked if there is any money in the budget for the Foundry Consortium to directly pay teachers and run programs and Ms. Navarrete-Rackauckas noted that currently, it is only a small part of the budget as most of the programs have been run by outside entities that have come in to rent space.

Ms. Thomas asked if there would be a way for the Foundry Consortium to provide small businesses or non-profits looking to provide programming at the Foundry with a grant database. Ms. Navarrete-Rackauckas said that the Foundry Consortium is looking into this as others in the community have asked for the same thing.

A member of the public asked why the City cannot fund the Foundry from the participatory budget as the member of the city that they talked to said that the Foundry is not a City building even though it is owned by the City of Cambridge. Ms. Zarazua stated that she would talk to the City departments and provide an answer to this inquiry.

Planning for the FAC in 2024 & beyond

Mr. Heller-Trulli summarized the FAC presentation to the CRA Board that occurred at a regular meeting of the CRA Board on November 15, 2023. He notes that the CRA Board was excited about the progress that the Foundry has made in its first full year of operations and thanked the FAC for its role as community ambassadors that have and will help the CRA to continue to refine the uses of the building over time.

Mr. Heller-Trulli brought up the topic of a FAC code of conduct that one of the FAC members, Barbara Thomas, had asked to discuss. Ms. Thomas discussed a previous group that she was a part of that had a living code of conduct document allowing for clarity on how to be kind to one another while being a member of the group. Mr. Heller-Trulli asks if Ms. Thomas could send over the example that she had discussed and Ms. Thomas agreed to share it with the CRA so that the FAC could develop a code of conduct moving forward. Ms. Johnson asked what the use of this document would be for and Ms. Thomas said that it is a living document that the group can reference when there are disagreements amongst the group or a situation that causes problems. It helps to create a safe space for everyone, especially when new members rotate into the group.

Mr. Heller-Trulli brought up the next sub-topic of how the FAC could be most helpful to the CRA and the Foundry Consortium moving forward. He discussed that this will be brought up at the Foundry Consortium Board meeting with the FAC in March. Mr. Evans talked about how the CRA has learned that in their outreach, different types of mechanisms reach different folks and provide different types of feedback so it might be best to think about multiple means of feedback rather than a singular event. Mr. Heller-Trulli stated that having the data broken out by Cambridge zip code could help target areas that are not using the Foundry as much to see either why that is and/or what they are looking for that the Foundry currently does not provide.

Connie Chin stated that she had a conversation with a City Councilor about listening sessions and how we might be asking the question the wrong way. It might be worth asking people in a specific sector for feedback to help improve the usage in that area rather than a general call for suggestions. Ms. Navarrete-Rackauckas said that when she brings people through the space she is most interested in what vibes they get from the space and what would be needed in the space to get that person the vibe they are looking for in order to run a program or participate in the activation of the space.

Ms. Johnson recommends that surveys can also be used as informational banners to allow those taking it to learn about the Foundry as they progress through the survey or on a poster about the survey. Ms. Thomas suggests that in Foundry emails it might be useful to showcase one of the Shops each time in case the recipients do not know that the Foundry has a woodshop, a fiber workshop, or similar. Ms. Navarrete-Rackauckas said that she has heard feedback over the last year that people have been wanting more physical advertising and outreach from the Foundry and while it takes a lot of staff time, she is looking at how to implement this going forward.

The final sub-topic of this section was what the goals of the FAC are in 2024. Mr. Heller-Trulli describes how the feedback from 2023 was incorporated into the plan of goals for 2024 and how the FAC made that happen through their feedback from the community. He described how the group should use that momentum to help the Foundry Consortium in achieving those goals, such as opening on Sundays. In addition to goals, it is important to continue the thread of progress and knowledge when FAC members step down and are onboarded. Mr. Heller-Trulli suggested a welcome packet for new FAC members that the CRA could put together and one-on-one meetings that current or former FAC members could have with new FAC members to bring them up to speed. Mr. Evans tells the group that the CRA has been looking into writing up the history of the Foundry project as a case study to share with other entities and new FAC members in a digestible way.

Listening session & other public feedback mechanisms

This section was tabled until the Foundry Consortium Board meeting discussion with the FAC in March.

Contact List and Links

[FAC webpage HERE](#): The CRA has a web page dedicated to the Foundry Advisory Committee, including the current list of **FAC members**. It also includes agendas, minutes, and meeting handouts for current and past meetings.

(<https://www.cambridgeredevelopment.org/foundry-advisory-committee>)

[CRA/Foundry webpage HERE](#): The CRA Foundry page has information on construction, leasing, and operations, as well as a compendium of all documents related to the Foundry.

(<https://www.cambridgeredevelopment.org/foundry>)

[Foundry Consortium webpage HERE](#): this site is evolving to include information about reservations, spaces, and events. Consider following the Foundry on Instagram and/or Facebook. Be sure to check these sources regularly to follow the activities.

(<https://www.cambridgefoundry.org/>)

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