

CRA Design Review Committee

Held Virtually on Zoom

Meeting Notes

March 30th, 2021

ATTENDEES

Barry Zevin (CRA Board), Kathleen Born (CRA Board), Hugh Russell (Planning Board), Erik Thorkildsen (CDD), Tom Evans (CRA), Alexandra Levering (CRA), Ellen Shore (CRA), Fabiola Alikpokou (CRA), Chris Herlich (NBBJ), Jay Siebenmorgen (NBBJ), Rodrigo Guerra (NBBJ), Alan Mountjoy (NBBJ), Maija Benjamins (Eversource), Todd Lanham (Eversource), Liz Toner (Eversource), Keith Sonia (Watkins Strategies), Bin Wang (GZA), John Zicko (Eversource), Eric Weyant (Stantec), Timothy Reagen (Stantec), Brett Lambert (Stantec), Steven Engler (Sasaki), Joel Smith (Sasaki), Alan Ward (Sasaki), Brian Skrovig (Pickard Chilton), Anthony Markese (Pickard Chilton), Michael Tilford (BXP), Eric Mo (BXP), David Gamble (Gamble Associates), Ilan Levy (Public), Brian Murray (Akamai/Public), Heather Hoffman (Public), Charles Hinds (Public), O.R. Simha (Public).

MXD SUBSTATION AND DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

PRESENTATION

Boston Properties (BXP) and its consultants, NBBJ, Sasaki, Pickard Chilton Architects, and Stantec, presented slides that provided details on the two commercial buildings on the northern portion of the development parcel, open space in the center, and a residential building on the south side.

COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS

Anthony Markese from Pickard Chilton Architects discussed the two commercial buildings on the northern portion of the development parcel. Mr. Markese noted that the team is working towards sizing the commercial buildings to function well as life science buildings and incorporating terraces, balconies, and overlooks.

Mr. Markese showed three massing variations. In the first variation, the design included a sheared form with a projecting bay to ensure the long face is broken up into a series of facets and some long thin vertical forms along Binney Street and the green space area.

In the second variation, the design creates a defined frame on the two ends to make a series of exterior terraces facing the south towards the sun and park, allowing for a better connection between the buildings' interior and exterior.

The third variation showed a leaner form so that the buildings can peek past one another within the cityscape. Mr. Markese noted that this might include more angular shapes. He also mentioned that the designers are examining the idea of a potential bridge connection between the buildings and an eastern building angle to follow the Sixth Street Connector to create a gap between the buildings to have more sense of open space between them.

OPEN SPACE

Chris Herlich from NBBJ led the open space presentation. He noted they are considering three elements when designing the space; the open space above the substation, the service roads to the east and west, and the entry points from Broadway and Binney Street into the parcel. Mr. Herlich noted that a significant part of the space's operation will be air circulation and that there will be two zones for intake and exhaust. The consultant proposed the intake zones towards the south of the site near the residential building because it's less disruptive.

The presentation went on to look at the existing vehicular access through the service roads, in particular the need for infrequent but significant access for a 67 foot trailer and cranes. Ensuring safe and minimally invasive access to the site is important. Mr. Herlich also noted that site grading is important in that every access point needs to be 4 feet above the minimum flood elevation of 21 feet. The consultant also looked at solar data by examining the coldest and hottest days of the year. They found that there are some spaces that get under an hour of sunlight during the winter season, and others get over three in the course of the day. During the warmer months, the northern building gets better solar. NBBJ noted the solar data is important to consider when thinking about human and landscape programming. Lastly, they looked at the perimeter to understand ground-level activity such as where loading takes place and how the eastern and western service drives might interact with Biogen building entrances. Mr. Herlich noted that heavy water usage is not desirable for the space but that there might be a space for a small integrated water feature around the residential building or south of the commercial west building.

NBBJ highlighted the importance of connecting the open space to the planned pedestrian connectors coming from the Volpe project and connecting to the nearby neighborhoods.

Overall, the design team noted they are working through the space's dimensional constraints. They will continue to look at the substation's ventilation location and requirements.

The consultants then presented ideas for programming the open space. The theme for programing is around energy, how it is produced, distributed, and innovated. This will also help visitors understand what is happening underground. The three program concept ideas were:

- Activity & wellness: fitness, performance, interaction
- Art environment: light and sound, sculpture, verticality
- Urban oasis: peace and realization, sanctuary, natural form

Alan Ward from Sasaki examined the activity and wellness concept further by first looking at different connections to the space, such as the north and south connection from Broadway and east to Volpe. Mr. Ward noted the commercial buildings have a potential for a water wall or feature integrated with a green wall. He explained the central lawn is envisioned to be a space that can be used for activities like yoga and other informal recreation. The space can also be used for youth soccer or other flexible courts that are installed seasonally. A wooden platform was shown that can be used for a stage or to conduct a physical activity class. There are also opportunities for planters with trees inside them that move around, and an area for children to play or an outdoor reading room.

The art environment presentation by Jay Siebenmorgen from NBBJ looked at ideas for ventilation and access structures that are needed for Eversource on the south side of the site near the residential building and doing something beautiful with them. Ideas included big sculptures that can house the vault intake and exhaust and incorporate vault egress and different types of seating. Another idea brought up was lighting and interactive elements that will illuminate the floor of the plaza.

The urban oasis is thought of as a passive lawn space that can integrate a soft, gradually sloping surface that is ADA accessible. The slope could also create space for bike parking and be integrated into the substation egress. Urban artwork and a low contour fountain pool could also be integrated with the space.

RESIDENTIAL

Eric Weyant from Stantec discussed the project's housing component at 135 Broadway by showing three residential typologies designed around the location's constraints.

The first typology included a bar building scheme, the second was a point tower to express the vertical element given the building's height, and the third had an L-shaped floor plate.

To refine the decision on which of the three building typologies to go with, the team looked at the designs from a qualitative and quantitative perspective. The team reviewed shadow studies to see the impact on the open space during the spring, fall, and winter seasons. The data found that the point tower scheme created the least amount of shadow on the open space in all three seasons. Next, the group looked at the façade area. All three buildings have the same volume of 400,000 square feet, but the point tower scheme accommodated that square footage with less building façade area, likely making it more efficient in terms of heat gain and loss. Structural efficiency was also examined. Unlike the bar and L schemes, the point tower scheme would be self-contained on the site without needing to be cantilevered over the substation vault or cable lines. The point tower also improved the east-west pedestrian connector and allowed for a clearer path connection.

Lastly, the group explained the Infill Development Concept Plan's baseline massing would be the point tower scheme. The image shows the point tower with an 85-foot tall podium that was aligned with the Akamai jenga block with a 9-foot setback. Mr. Weyant revealed a baseline massing ground floor plan, which included a large plaza space that will lead to the open space across Broadway and create a visual connection to the Akamai entrance. The baseline massing in relation to the Volpe project showed the east and west connection to the Volpe site and towards Binney Street Park.

COMMITTEE COMMENTS

After the presentations, committee members provided design comments.

COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS

Members noted that it was difficult to differentiate the building variations, and that it was challenging to understand the width and connection between the buildings and their relationship to the GSA project and center park. It was discussed that the KSQ guidelines are cautious about connectors; therefore, more is needed to understand them in the design. Members added it was essential to differentiate the two commercial buildings so they are not identical and so they do not look like one building with a bridge connector.

It was mentioned that the character of the open space might influence the façade of the commercial buildings. Members liked the balcony variation.

OPEN SPACE

A committee member mentioned the importance of having activities on the lawn and leaving the area flexible so more can be done there. It was also noted that having a recreational sport was necessary because there are a few spaces like that in the community. Therefore, having a small-scale sport could draw people to the area. An idea

for the structure is to have one large recreational area with smaller spaces on the outer sides. Members liked the sculptures, water features, and the windows on the substation in Seattle example. Another member noted that a 15-20' canopy would make the space feel more humane. Members also had the idea of a museum of fossil fuels, to display how much power Cambridge is drawing over time and in different city districts.

A member wondered about the grade level on the surface top relative to the street and noted that it would be great to have it flatten to feel more open.

It was vocalized that the lack of greenery was concerning. Also, showing the entire open space area from building to building in the presentation was important to understand the space.

A member asked about vehicular flow regarding where parking will be located and how much will be associated with the commercial building.

RESIDENTIAL

Board members favored the point tower building because it celebrates verticality, and creates a better-proportioned building. It was pointed out that the residential has a better relationship to the open space in the center.

Questions were asked about parking and vehicle movement throughout the area. A committee member noted they would like to understand the amount of parking that will be associated with the commercial buildings and how vehicles will move through the area.

It was pointed out that adding a north arrow on the images would be helpful. Members also agreed that it would be beneficial to show the models from the ground level to demonstrate the alignments, passages, and corridor views, which might effectuate change in the elevations of the buildings that surround the space.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

A public member wondered about the height of the two commercial buildings noting that the buildings as shown in the zoning proposal were different heights. Pickard Chilton Architects confirmed that the building's slight height difference is due to opening the spaces between them. They also asked how far the shadows go into the neighborhoods. BXP noted they did not have that information on hand, but that it could be provided.

An Akamai employee expressed dissatisfaction with the residential design as they didn't anticipate the plan when they signed a lease with BXP and an agreement with the City of Cambridge. They understood the circumstance but hoped there could be a compromise that could adjust the residential tower in a way that will be acceptable to all parties. A committee member asked for clarity of the dissatisfaction, wondering if it was the spacing between the Akamai building and the residential building or the setback? The Akamai employee noted that they hope to have a diagonal view of their logo and building entrance from Broadway, but that the new residential tower will block it. He requested the consultants tweak to design to improve visibility of the entrance, the building's logo, and the overall design of the building.

Another public member liked the new open space ideas of different things to put onto the center park. They also wondered if the designer thought of how the buildings would look from the nearby residential neighborhoods. A committee member noted the previous IDCP's plan provided massing studies of the new buildings looking from I-93 and from other views in Kendall Square. The public member requested a view study from the nearby neighborhoods as well.

It was recommended that the designers think about keeping buildings away from the 6th Street Walkaway to protect the trees.

A public member also wondered how much modeling could be done of the new buildings' noise, and how it will travel from the north parcel to the surrounding areas? They noted they hoped BXP would agree to do that model.