

CRA Design Review Committee
Held Virtually on Zoom
Meeting Notes
November 4, 2020

Attendees:

Kathy Born (CRA Board), Barry Zevin (CRA Board), Margret Drury (CRA Board), Tom Evans (CRA), Alex Levering (CRA), Carlos Peralta (CRA), Fabiola Alikpokou (CRA), David Gamble (Gamble Associates), Heather Hoffman (Public), Bob Simha (Public), Kathryn Brown (MITIMCO), Ben Lavery (MITIMCO), Michael Owu (MITIMCO), Brian Skrovig (PCA), Ian Hatch (BxP), Michael Tilford (BxP), Tony Markese (PCA), Andrew Barnett (PCA), Erik Thorkildsen (CDD), Brian Murray (Akamai).

MXD SUBSTATION PROJECT'S CONCEPTUAL SITE DESIGN DISCUSSION

Presentation:

Boston Properties (BXP) and Pickard Chilton Architects (PCA) presented slides that provided details on the MXD Substation Project's programming, site design, and massing concepts. A link to the November 4, 2020 presentation can be found here <https://www.cambridgeredevelopment.org/s/201104-CRA-Design-Review-Meeting-Presented.pdf>. Open space planning reference materials were also reviewed by CRA staff.

Additional MXD Substation Project materials can be found by visiting <https://www.mxdsb.site/>.

Committee Comment:

Upon completion of the presentation, committee members provided design comments.

It was noted that the open space wedges shown on either side of 135 Broadway should be represented more as connectors than as open space. Questions were asked about the substation transmission lines and 135 Broadway's foundation design, along with the opportunity for the East and West Service Drives to be more pedestrian friendly while planning around existing bus shuttle service. Staff also mentioned the prospect of taking advantage of the existing open spaces facing the service drives in front of Biogen's buildings. It was also pointed out that the June 21, 12PM shadow studies were incorrect.

Questions were asked about the project's central open space "urban park / living room / piazza" area. It was noted that the open space will be more of a built park rather than a natural space due to the buried substation structure. PCA agreed with that assessment, noting that there will be opportunities for trees to be strategically placed within the site, or by constructing planters on top of the substation. PCA also raised the idea of providing clues within the open space that hinted at, or educated people about, the substation structure and utilities underneath.

The committee discussed the fact that the internal open space will need to be slightly elevated as a result of the substation, but that if done correctly it could facilitate an interesting open space design. Raising the streets to meet the open space elevation was also suggested, along with creating a figural space in the center of the park with active buildings facades framing it to draw people in. It was also

proposed that having a strong tree canopy or pronounced and mature landscaping throughout the area would help link and stitch the site together while supporting environmental resiliency.

It was also noted that the angle of the 135 Broadway building tower helped to facilitate a visual connection into the central open space area, but that it will be important to make those open space wedges meaningful. Committee members expressed appreciation of the site's modulated building heights and site layout that supported a strong east-west connection, extending Broad Canal Way through the Eversource site from Volpe.

Questions were asked about the need for a connecting structure between the two commercial buildings on Binney Street. PCA and BXP identified that those designs are still very much conceptual, and would likely depend on future tenant needs. PCA suggested that this could create an interesting threshold entry.

The committee discussed the massing of 135 Broadway. Comments were made about preferences for the 135 Broadway building being something that was slender, sleek, and well-proportioned, especially due to its proximity to the Akamai building

Public Comment:

A member of the public commented that protecting the 6th Street Connector's trees could be considered a priority.

An Akamai employee identified that the future 135 Broadway building will block Akamai's existing eastern Broadway views, and asked about the option of a setback or alternative massing concepts.

BXP noted that shifting the residential building's footprint north would be difficult due to the substation infrastructure, and that the building's skewed layout was designed to provide greater distance between the southern end of 135 Broadway and the eastern edge of 145 Broadway.

Committee members noted that MITIMCO's Volpe plan locates three buildings along Broadway that will block 145 Broadway's view-corridor in the future. Questions were asked about the opportunity to further increase the height of 135 Broadway to allow for a leaner massing. It was also noted that views are also not always orthogonal, and that it will be important to think about the programming of the residential building in the areas of close proximity to 145 Broadway.

It was agreed that when refining the residential massing, careful consideration should be given when designing the building's southwestern corner to provide additional breathing room between the two buildings and to improve the massing conditions.