



# NEIGHBORHOOD & LONG TERM PLANNING, PUBLIC FACILITIES, ARTS & CELEBRATION COMMITTEE

## COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Wednesday, June 9, 2021

5:00 PM

Sullivan Chamber

### I. Call to Order

Attendee Name	Present	Absent	Late	Arrived
Patricia Nolan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Dennis J. Carlone	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Alanna Mallon	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Marc C. McGovern	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Quinton Zondervan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

**A communication was received from Melissa Peters Director of Community Planning, transmitting presentation regarding neighborhood planning initiative.**

The Neighborhood & Long-Term Planning; Public Facilities, Arts and Celebrations Committee held a public hearing on Wednesday, June 9, 2021 at 5:00 p.m. to follow-up from the initial neighborhood group hearing and further discuss how the City can work with groups.

Present at the hearing via Zoom were Councillor Nolan, Chair of the Committee, Councillor Carlone, Vice Mayor Mallon, Councillor Zondervan, Iram Farooq, Deputy City Manager, Melissa Peters, Director of Community Planning, Daniel Wolf, Neighborhood Planner, Gary Chan, Associate Planner, Community Development Department (CDD), Gayle Willett, Director of Assessment, Matt Nelson, Coordinator and Community Engagement Manager, Michael Scarlett, Aide to Councillor Nolan, Naomie Stephen, Executive Assistant to the City Council, and Paula M. Crane, Deputy City Clerk.

Also present via Zoom were Susan Hunziker, Ann Tennis, John Hawkinson, Gary Dmytryk, Jim Gary, Nicola Williams, Tom Stohlman, John Chun, Charles Franklin, Lee Farris, Rebecca Bowie, Francis Donovan, Marilee Meyer, Mike Nakagawa, Doug Brown, Ruth Ryals, John Pitkin, Phoebe Sinclair and Michael Brandon.

Councillor Nolan convened the hearing and read the Call of the Meeting and the Governor's Executive Order regarding remote participation. She asked for a Roll Call to indicate a quorum for the hearing.

The roll was called and resulted as follows:

PRESENT: Councillor Nolan, Vice Mayor Mallon, and Councillor Zondervan -3

ABSENT: Councillor Carlone and Councillor McGovern -2

and a quorum was present, and the hearing was clearly audible to all participants.

Councillor Nolan gave an overview of the agenda for the hearing. She thanked all those present and stated that at the last hearing there were nearly 40 people from 14 groups with a long list of ideas to improve the City's support system. She stated that they heard highlights, successes, and challenges from every group. She stated that she is heartened by how much work goes into these groups and appreciates everything that is done to bring the neighborhood groups together. She stated that the committee has heard that every group wants to make the work they do more accessible and have tried many different ways for outreach in their neighborhoods. The committee has also heard that there is a lot of potential for the groups if they could receive more support from the City such as providing a place to meet, assisting with outreach to residents, provide childcare for the meetings to allow caregivers to attend, dissemination of information about the existing groups more widely, providing a small budget that might go a long way for groups, and providing technology support. She stated that there will be a presentation from City staff which will include ideas in the pipeline for implementation. She reiterated and reassured everyone that this plan is not to control groups, it is to support groups.

Iram Farooq introduced CDD staff. She said that this presentation is an attempt to reimagine the historic neighborhood planning process which used to be much more of City staff problem-solving and transforming into a more collaborative effort with neighborhood groups and people in the neighborhood to come up with ways to empower on the groundwork.

Melissa Peters gave an overview of a PowerPoint presentation (**ATTACHMENT A**). She stated that CDD would like to have regular meetings facilitated by CDD staff about this this proposed neighborhood planning initiative and how the City can revise and refine it to meet needs and bring neighborhood groups together.

Councillor Nolan opened the floor to comments.

Councillor Carlone stated that the presentation was quite thorough. He asked CDD if there were any thoughts on participation in neighborhood meetings by CDD staff. He stated that in the past he was sent to East Cambridge quite often. He said that the City had planning staff at every meeting. He asked if there is any thought being given to that idea. Ms. Farooq stated that they do already send neighborhood planners or a staff member with whatever area of expertise that a neighborhood group might be looking for. She stated that if neighborhood groups need City staff to speak to a particular topic, CDD staff is happy to attend and work with neighborhood groups. She stated that CDD has found regular attendance challenging because the number of groups has expanded considerably. She stated that there is a bit of a tradeoff between having groups have the benefit of City presence and it feeling like it is invasive. She said that CDD waits for invitations.

Jim Gray, Linden Park Neighborhood Association, stated that that there is a lot that he likes in the presentation. He stated that is in a small neighborhood and he is really aware that the people who live near you are valuable. He stated that he thinks of politics from the individual person. He said that we must look at supporting smaller groups who live near each other. He said that he is pleased to see the issue of defining low growth areas and community building. He stated that his group has connected with a group who does facilitated conversation. He said that the techniques include thinking ahead carefully about how to get people to share what is important to them from their own experience and not just come into a meeting with a position and strategy for winning. He said that that it was that kind of experience and they were fortunate that Cortico, a group at the MIT Media Lab, offered to do three pro-bono sessions. He said that the topic was a bike path in his neighborhood. He noted that the meeting was recorded so people can go back and easily listen to what people said. He said that the issue was how to talk in a way that wasn't necessarily about coming to a single consensus but coming to their own best compromise. He stated that the feedback that he received was that people felt that they knew their neighbors in a new way.

Lee Farris stated that she is the President of the Cambridge Residents Alliance. She asked if CDD could set up some kind of way for the people to give feedback to them that is also visible to other neighborhood groups. She said that was one of things that was good about the Envision process. She said that the committee members were able to communicate with each other to some extent. She said that she would like monthly meetings not to just funnel up but be mutually engaged. She asked CDD to think about how to not it be from the top down. She said that she would like to save her comments for something written that will help to shape the agenda of the July 8<sup>th</sup> meeting.

Phoebe Sinclair, Agassiz Baldwin community, thanked CDD for the presentation. She stated that she is particularly excited about the website piece because it is helpful to have a home for all the information about her community and others. She said that she likes the idea of the Community Building Toolkit. She said that ready-made information is enormously helpful. She said that the materials that are put together tell a concise and helpful story but there is a neutrality to them that people don't experience in their own lives. She said she does not know how to bridge that divide. She said that zoning isn't neutral to people. She noted that even though the word zoning is neutral and the idea about how you do that is process. She said that people experience that as displacement. She said that she does not know where that fits. She stated that there is an element to where people have the feeling that something has changed, and it doesn't feel good to them. She stated that the national conversation is talking about displacement, race, and class but the local conversation is talking about the physical elements. She said that how these things come together is a question that she has as well.

Vice Mayor Mallon said that we must think about how we are presenting information. She stated that she has used Cortico as well for facilitated conversation and they do an amazing job. She said that it does the hard work of bringing people together. She said that the Family Policy Council and the City and focus groups and it has been really powerful. She said that they have transitioned to a more virtual world. She said that she would put her weight behind providing Cortico, or someone like them, to neighborhood groups. She said that this is a way to really hear one another. She said that we need community and each other. She said that having a contract with Cortico, or someone like them, would be beneficial.

Doug Brown commended Melissa Peters and her team for the thought that was put into the presentation. He said that there is a little bit of a read of top down, and he wants to brainstorm on how to flip that. He said that it is not all about zoning, neighborhood groups do other things too. He said that his neighborhood hosts a block party on Halloween. He said that existing events of longstanding status should be recognized. He said that it is not a simple process to get these approved. He said that he had a meeting about Tobin, and it is an example of where they are engaging with neighbors when we want to, not when the neighborhoods want to. He said that there has been a lot of outreach to neighbors but not necessarily with the neighborhood association itself. He said that they are in the process of working out how they are going to run that site for the next four years and the answer back was that documents will be sent when they have decided how to run it. He said that neighborhoods would like to have some say on how a project will be run. Mr. Brown said that one of the big issues in the City is housing affordability. He noted that every neighborhood is different in how they are structured. He wondered if the neighborhood associations could be asked how they would they solve it because it may not be the same in every neighborhood. He said that it is important to reach out to solve some of these issues and ask people in the areas for input. He said that the pandemic has been difficult for neighborhood associations and they have not met face to face in 18 months. He said that there is an opportunity to redefine the relationship between neighbors, neighborhood associations and the City itself. He said that there are interesting ideas in the presentation that are worth exploring. He said we need to get out of the habit of vilifying one group and uplifting another.

Tom Stohlman said that he has a comment about a word that was used in the presentation – empowerment. He said that is an important term. He asked what is empowerment to a citizen of Cambridge or a neighborhood organization. He said that if a zoning change is occurring down the block or next to you and it is affecting you and you feel that it is the first time you heard of it or that you attended all the meetings and nobody was listening to you, that is not empowerment. He said that you may disagree with an end result but you should always feel heard and know that your comments made an impact. He said that was on the Envision Advisory Group and there were subgroups. He said that when he looks at that process and what resulted, there are good things, but he also looks at the places where there was true empowerment. He said that he does not feel that happened with all involved. He said that there is a great way to help solve a common problem with affordable housing. He said that is called form-based zoning which acknowledges that neighborhoods are different.

Mike Nakagawa, Alewife Study Group, stated that one thing about neighborhood groups is that they try to discuss and balance the needs of the neighbors who understand the complexities of the area. He said that it is hard to come to a conclusion because there are varied interests and there are things that the neighbors know that other people do not. He said that the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority is coming up with a Rindge Neighborhood Open Space Connectivity Plan to connect Sherman Street to the other side of the parkway, but it doesn't connect anything useful at this time. He said that we need things that connect and having these discussions is where neighborhood groups can have an advantage. He said one of the complexities with his area is that there is a mix of demographics with the highest density of affordable housing in very large apartment buildings to triple-deckers, neighborhoods to blocks, and homeowners to renters. He said that there has recently been an influx of transient renters in the luxury apartment buildings near the T Station where people park there until they find a place elsewhere to move. He said that another part of the missing demographic is that they have different ways of communicating. He said that some are social media connected and others who do not have time to get onto media or attend meetings. He said that most people have to prioritize meetings that they attend. He said that the people who are meeting tend to be the people who have been around for a long time and understand the complexities. He said that neighborhood groups try to be representative of neighbors. He noted that there has been explosive residential growth since his group has formed. He said that there were pretty much no residents from Route 2 to Fresh Pond. He said that in the past 10 years there has been over 3600 units of housing build, permitted or in the process within half a mile of the T station. Mr. Nakagawa thanked all for the work that is being made to make connections. He said that social networking is an important part of having a resilient community.

Councillor Nolan stated that she lives on Observatory Hill which is a neighborhood and there is no group and she didn't know who to invite to the hearing. She said that she would be interested to figure out how neighborhood groups form and how they talk to each other.

Susan Hunziker spoke about the perception that the City isn't really listening and is not interested in the input that people have. She said that she thought about participating in the Envision process and decided not to. She said that her conversations with several people involved in the work said that it was clear early-on that the City had a plan and you were there as a prop. She said that there wasn't the kind of listening that was wanted, and people felt as if they were wasting their time. She said that the subject came up a couple of times about the City not listening. She said that there are people who have lived in their neighborhood for a long time, and she has attended four different cycles of what to do with the median along Massachusetts Avenue. She said that the issue does not change and there are strong feelings about it. She said that there is a better solution in the middle. She said that suggestions and insights get lost somewhere. She said that she has skepticism to get involved in another planning process that she is not confident that this is more than performance. She said that there are lots of committed and thoughtful people with good ideas.

Melissa Peters stated that it is not the intention for past or future processes, but she does recognize that this is how people are feeling and CDD is committed to changing that perception. She said that, in part, was fueling how they framed the neighborhood planning initiative. She said they would go to the community and listen and hear what their priorities are. She said that having a process with all the other community building events allowed CDD to get the neighborhoods more intimately so the City can begin to be less reactive or transactional and more responsive to needs and listening. She said that in the engagement program, they are trying to make people aware of what other communities are saying as oftentimes people only hear what their neighbors are saying. They are elevating voices and sharing so that people can see why decisions were made and not intentionally dismissing others.

Iram Farooq stated that she does appreciate people mentioning this and it is definitely something that is on the radar in terms of when CDD goes through a process that is focused on a particular topic, there is almost always a thing that people have a lot of different opinions on. Regardless of whether it is CDD's intention, if people end up feeling unheard, it is on CDD. She said that one of the main pieces of impetus behind what has been laid out for the committee today. She said CDD wants this version of neighborhood planning not be starting from a project or initiative that we are trying to have happen, but start from a place of building relationships, listening learning and having mutual dialogue. She said that a neighborhood should have agency in terms of focusing on which of those make the most sense for them. She said that she agrees that a neighborhood should have agency in terms of figuring out what should be the focus of their neighborhood conversations. She said that there may be groups that do want to talk about zoning but rather things like play streets and community building. She said that in all the work that CDD does, they are so focused on projects and initiatives that one of the most remarkable pieces of community intelligence that she gained going through the Envision Cambridge process was how many people in Cambridge were concerned about the fraying of neighborhood relationships and the focus on community wellbeing and how that loss has diminished neighborhood connections. She said that they are hoping that these processes can really be focused on that component because they come in without an agenda. She said that mutual respect can be the foundation for future discussions so that even when disagreeing, we will respect the other person's perspective. She said that it is less blameful and confrontational and more about solving problems together even if we don't agree. She said that it helps to start without an agenda to really focus on the relationship aspect.

Doug Brown stated that he loves the idea the idea where we can be more proactive. He said that they have never met his neighborhood planner. He said that he does wish that what has been laid out is true. He said that there is a lot of things that his neighborhood would like to see developed. He stated that he will believe it when he sees it, but he supports the concept.

Susan Hunziker stated that she appreciates the difficulties of walking into different community meetings and getting to know people and the issues involved. She said that to get at the City piece, at her last neighborhood meeting, they spent a lot of time talking about the recent report from the Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department about the bike ordinance. She said that it was an elephant in the room where it was supposed to provide thoughtful analysis of the strips along Massachusetts Avenue, and it was awful with one size fits all solutions. She said that the City just met the deadline. She said that it is a perception. She said that it is there.

Ruth Ryals stated that as you build out a webpage, you may want to remember that many neighborhoods have webpages and Facebook pages. She said that she does not believe that anyone from the City looks at those things. She said that she was on the Advisory Committee and she enjoyed and felt that she was contributing to the Envision process but at the end that there was a pre-ordained ending, and the committee was being shepherded toward it. As it relates to the bike safety, we need to talk about the small businesses and their loading zones in a cooperative way.

Nicola Williams said that she echoes other speakers' views. She said that if you want to give agency, you must treat the neighborhood associations the same way that the businesses and developers are treated. That will give people agency. She said that that if e-mails are sent, please respond. She said that businesses and developers are responded to. She said that it is important that residents are heard. She said that neighborhood want to be treated as key stakeholders. She said that a link to the speaker sign up on the same page as the agenda would be helpful. She said that signing up for to give public comments can be confusing. She said that having a protocol in terms of responding to e-mails would be helpful. This is the way to build trust.

Councillor Carlone said that two things that he has constantly heard. He said that high speed traffic on streets is an issue. He said that every neighborhood has something, and the City doesn't deal with it. He said that he knows all CDD staff in this hearing but the symbolism of CDD is in the Planning Board. He said that they do not listen to neighborhoods. He said that very rarely does the Planning Board stand up to the development teams. He said that you very rarely see projects modified. He said that he loves what CDD is proposing and what the neighborhoods are saying. He said that it cannot just be CDD, it has to be the Planning Board, BZA, and the City Manager to integrate the neighborhood point of view. He said that the City is commercial development oriented. He said that more residential development is wanted. He said that it must go from the top. He said that CDD does everything it can but that is what is being heard from the neighbors. He said that you have to take planning principles and transfer it into urban designs, so people understand what is coming.

Mike Nakagawa said that it seems like when we involve neighbors and residents, the City take some of the comments and some of the positions to note and ignore the ones that don't fit with the general scheme. He said that it seems like there are good discussions with CDD and certain ideas do not get translated in the right way. He said that traffic is at capacity when we look at what traffic is at the single peak hour during rush hour when rush hour lasts for many hours. He said that we need to look at things that we can have influence on. He said that the things that matter the most to people is traffic but because it comes up all the time and there is little progress it seems like the City is not listening to what the neighbors want. He talked about who should be on the neighborhood group discussion.

Charles Franklin asked for a stop light at Cardinal Medeiros and Cambridge Street. He said that this intersection is a nightmare.

Vice Mayor Mallon stated that she believes that Ms. Peters is on vacation and she thanked her for being present at the hearing on her time off. She said that it is exciting to think about what was talked about at the last hearing and then what was internalized at CDD, with Ms. Peters and the group, and then what we are imagining today about how the City could work better and provide support. She said that Phase One is about organizing and visualizing, and then strategizing and realizing. She said that CDD wants to engage with a large section of a community rather than just the members of a specific neighborhood group. She wonders how CDD is going to reach out into the community and reach community members who are not part of a neighborhood or community group to receive feedback while also introducing them to neighborhood groups. She asked how CDD has envisioned that process. Ms. Peters stated that when talking about the neighborhood initiative, it is the neighborhood broadly, not just a particular group. She said that they have found that for engagement to be successful, there needs to be a multimedia approach and use a variety of tools and strategy. There is a new Community Engagement Manager who has great experience with inclusive engagement. She said that the CET model is a good one and having liaisons from underrepresented communities is helpful to organize focus groups but also doing digital and analog engagement and understanding. She said that she recognizes that the quality and quantity of those engagements are different but that is CDD's job to synthesize that and presenting it as a package to the full decision-making body. She said that she is excited to have the Community Engagement Manager on board who really brings the equity lens and how to reach underrepresented communities. Vice Mayor

Mallon said that the question could be that once those people are reached, how do you tie them into the large neighborhood group so there can be better representation?

Vice Mayor Mallon asked where we are in the process of putting this together. Ms. Peters said that it will happen in different stages. She said that she is hopeful to start the first round this fall when there will be a third planner on board. She is hoping that they are hoping to get all 13 web sites up this summer and to make them more visible on CDD's website. She said that a lot of the placemaking and community building has been waiting for COVID to end. She said that CDD is looking at opportunities to connect people to organizations. Vice Mayor Mallon asked if CDD is going to reach back out to the neighborhoods to get input to ensure that the City is hearing and capturing information about their own neighborhoods. Melissa Peters responded in the affirmative.

Daniel Wolf underscored that he feels that convening people in the neighborhood through a process that lasts a year and includes fun events brings unexpected happenings in public space as well as brings people together organically. He said that it is an opening to reimagine on some level how different communities can talk to each other. He said that if we can all collectively hold some of the values around inclusivity and prioritizing that we can come to a greater understanding on how to be more open and including in our engagement.

Councillor Zondervan said that he appreciates the conversation and Councillor Carlone expressed quite eloquently the elephant in the room which is that people are not feeling heard. He said that part of the challenge is that we need to be more open to hearing from different voices and perspectives. He said that the other challenge is that we are not being very representative. He said that all renters are not transient. He said that they deserve as much participation as anyone else. He said that unhoused people are members of the community, but they do not have a specific address where they live. He said that we must think hard about how to broaden the scope to get much more diversity and get community members into the conversation. He said less of the agenda-driven approach would be helpful. He said that he is encouraged by the conversation and he stated his hope that things will improve.

Phoebe Sinclair said that the elephant in the room is the idea of equity. She said that she has been at a neighborhood council meeting and the City came in and described wanting to do something that was more accessible, and the community members did not care. She said that it is important that all voices are heard but there are also forces at play where an issue is not important to people. She said that that is a real tension. She said that having been to so many meetings, there are different languages that people are speaking whether it is through an equity lens or a longstanding community member with a lot of experience. She said that there are different ways of speaking to one another. She would like to be at a place of listening with agreement. She said they are not the same thing. She said that this is a missing piece. She said that this is an element that she sees in real time, what is real for one person isn't even in the conversation for someone else. She said that the City is not responsible for all of that, but it does come into play. She said that there are many people that will not come to a meeting, but some don't come because they feel unwelcome at a meeting.

Councillor Nolan stated that we have a lot of trust to build and a lot of conversations to have. She said that this is the start of a good process of having transparent conversation and bringing people together. She said that CDD will be convening meetings and she is happy to continue to chair meetings. She said that the City Council can reach out more to neighborhood groups. She said that there is a challenge in outreach. She said that neighborhood organizations should tell CDD ideas about improvement of websites. She said that Boston has a map of neighborhoods and on the map is listed who the neighborhood contact is. She said that any ideas should be sent to CDD.

Councillor Nolan said that the Committee stands ready to continue the conversation in the context of the City Council and happy to support CDD's plan to work with neighborhood groups around the City.

Councillor Carlone said that as it relates to building trust, the public has to see CDD at Planning Board hearings and other hearings talking about both sides, the complexity of an issue and the complexity of a project. He said that this was done 30 years ago when he was a consultant. He said that is how to build trust. He said that you have to stand up and talk about the complexity of any project and the Board has to evaluate both sides in a cohesive way. He said that does not typically happen. He said that is how to build trust.

Councillor Nolan thanked all those present.

Vice Mayor Mallon made a motion to adjourn the hearing.

The roll was called and resulted as follows:

PRESENT: Councillor Nolan, Councillor Carlone, Vice Mayor Mallon,  
and Councillor Zondervan -4

ABSENT: Councillor McGovern -1

and the hearing was adjourned at 7:03 p.m.

For the Committee,

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Councillor Patricia Nolan, Chair  
Neighborhood & Long-Term Planning;  
Public Facilities, Arts and Celebrations Committee