



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Community Development Department

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To: Louis A. DePasquale, City Manager

From: Iram Farooq, Assistant City Manager for Community Development; Owen O' Riordan, Commissioner for Public Works

Date: November 8, 2021

Re: Awaiting Report #21-80, Council Order #O-4 dated October 25, 2021 related to reporting on all work done on the Carl Barron Plaza redesign proposal and all feedback from the community including the unhoused community in conjunction with the petition received by Council on October 18.

In response to the above referenced Policy Order, we submit the following.

The design process for Carl Barron Plaza (CBP) is part of the overall River Street Reconstruction project design which has been on-going since 2018. As part of that process, the City of Cambridge team has done extensive outreach regarding both the River Street corridor and plaza designs. The resulting design (see below) addresses many of the issues mentioned in the petition and tries to balance the varied needs of the many users of the plaza from the un-housed, transit riders, neighbors as well as the businesses and visitors to Central Square. The project will fully reconstruct the Carl Barron plaza with new walking paths in concrete, plaza areas with decorative paving, many trees, a variety of seating types, planted green spaces, separated bicycle facility, lighting as well as a signature, artist-designed "ribbon" connecting each end of the plaza and anchoring the plaza as a focal point of Central Square.

Public Outreach

Outreach regarding the plaza design has been extensive over the last three years. Pre-pandemic efforts focused on in-person events in the plaza or at Manning apartments, and in-person public and project advisory committee meetings. Since the pandemic began, outreach events have necessarily been remote.

Below is a summary of outreach efforts which included pre-pandemic, in-person, and on-line events. See link to Documents' tab for more background material:

<https://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/Projects/Transportation/riverstreetreconstruction>

- Working Group meetings:
 - 12 Working Group meetings 2018-2021 (CBP design discussed at 8 meetings). The last meeting was November 17, 2021.
 - Working Group "office hours" (8/2020).

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- Public meetings/activities:
 - 4 public meetings (CBP design discussed at 3 meetings and the last meeting was primarily focused on the plaza feedback: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/198b672dd4c34cd9b31ab39d64acd9ab>).
 - 2 public site walks (one was Urban Design focused and included the plaza).
 - CBP Existing Conditions Open House events conducted by Project for Public Spaces:
 - Two Existing Conditions Open House events focused on CBP and its immediate surroundings in the project area, to share the information the project team had gathered to-date and to solicit people’s ideas for the future of the space.
 - Open House dates were the evening of Wednesday, June 4, 2019 in the community space at the Manning Building and Saturday, June 7, 2019 in the plaza. The same materials were used at each event and over 140 people were engaged over the course of these events, providing some very helpful information.
 - Held a Senior Resource Fair (9/2019) – Attended to talk to seniors about the River Street Reconstruction project including CBP changes.

- Stakeholder meetings:
 - 2 meetings with Police and Human Services staff (2019 and 2021).
 - 1 meeting with Police stakeholder outreach association of businesses and non-profits (2019).
 - 5 meetings with Central Square BID/Business Association (2 meetings + 9/2020, 3/2021, 10/2021).
 - City Committees:
 - Central Square Advisory Committee (9/2020, 7/2021),
 - Pedestrian Committee (8/2020),
 - Bike Committee (9/2020), and
 - Transit Committee (10/2019, 11/2020).
 - Central Square Church – Pastor Henry Johnson (8/2020).
 - MBTA Service Planning, Transit Priority, Bus Operations, Wayfinding (4/2019, 5/2019, 8/2019, 12/2019, 10/2020, 8/2021).

- Project for Public Spaces interviews in 2019:
 - Tasha Williams & Ethel Delgado, Manning Apartments/Tenant Council
 - Susan Pacheco, COA
 - Michael Monestime and Sai Bandupalli, CSBA
 - Kaitlyn Kelley, Moore Youth Center Director
 - Jason Yee – CPL Central Branch Manager
 - Hitomi Abe + CET Outreach Workers
 - Diane Fluet, Stu Pratt – Hunneman RE/Holmes Building
 - Meghan Hynes and three constituents, AIDS Action
 - Maria Melo, Multi-Service Center

Suggestions from the October 18 petition

City and project staff appreciate the time and effort put into gathering suggestions for the design of Carl Barron Plaza. In response, City staff have summarized information below on seating areas, tree plantings, and responses to the suggestions included in the October 18 petition that was presented to City Council.

Seating and Other Design Elements

The petition included comments that indicated concern about losing permanent seating options in favor of moveable, flexible seating. Moveable seating is included to make the plaza space more flexible, and easier to program with events and performances. The current plaza is estimated to have approximately 65 seats in fixed seating areas. There are additional seats in the bus shelters and at benches at the bus terminal area. The proposed design for the Carl Barron Plaza and new Green Street Plaza area has 61 fixed seats with 38 at the Mass Avenue Plaza and 23 in the Green Street Plaza. For movable, flexible seating, the proposed design has 44 seats with 28 in the Mass Avenue Plaza and 16 in the Green Street Plaza. Finally, the three bus shelters have additional seats in each shelter and dedicated spaces for people using wheeled mobility devices.

Table: Number of seats provided in the Carl Barron Plaza and Green Street Plaza today and in the proposed plaza designs.

	Number of seats in current plaza	Number of seats in Green Street Plaza area	Total current number of seats	Number of seats proposed in plaza	Number of seats proposed in Green Street plaza	Total proposed number of seats
Fixed seats (brick, steel, stone, wood benches)	65	6	71	38	23	61
Movable, flexible seats	0	0	0	28	16	44
Bus stop seating (benches in shelters)	N/A	8-12	8-12	N/A	14 or more	14+
Total	65	14-18	79-83	66	53	119+

The current design for the new Carl Barron Plaza and Green Street Plaza also includes the following design elements:

- Renovated sidewalks with a concrete walking surface and accessible concrete paver plaza areas.
- Two drinking fountains and bottle-fill stations.

- A handwashing station at the Portland Loo at Mass Ave. and River St.
- A sharps container box at the Portland Loo at Mass Ave. and River St. and an additional one in the plaza.
- Foot-operated trash and recycling receptacles.
- Community message board/kiosk – a location has been identified in the plaza for a potential kiosk and the staff are reviewing content and programming questions.

The petition also included concerns about trees and signage, and times when water sprinklers are activated. For the trees in the plaza, given their limited access to soil in the plaza, they will be relocated or removed and replanted to improve soil volumes, and create a more flexible plaza area.

Tree planting details include:

- Currently there are 8 trees in the plaza, and zero trees in the bus terminal area.
- Proposed design includes 16 trees in the current (Mass Ave.) plaza area and 7 trees in the Green Street plaza planted in much larger soil volumes.
- Current caliper inches is: 76. Proposed is: 128.

Signage for hours of operation for sprinklers in the plaza.

- The future design generally includes undersurface or hidden watering systems so these would not spray people.
- If surface spraying is used, signage could be installed so that people are not surprised when they spray.

The following ideas that were mentioned in the petition have not specifically come up in the public process to date and would require further discussion and evaluation to determine feasibility:

- Dispensers for pet waste bags in the plaza area as these are now used in only city parks.
- Publicly-accessible electrical outlets for charging mobile devices, wheeled mobility devices – outlets for general use are not currently used in the public way.
- Free fridge/microwave – these tend to be run by non-profits outside of the public right of way.
- Change orientation of Amazon door swing – these are on private property and likely oriented this way due to fire safety code issues.
- Narcan – a pilot program of Narcan boxes have been installed indoors, in city buildings and further discussion is needed about additional locations.
- Alternate gathering areas during the construction phase of the project – separate meetings will be held with Human Service staff to discuss how this might be handled.



Carl Barron Plaza



LEGEND

1. Pedestrian scale lighting
2. Drinking water bottle fill stations
3. Bus shelters with real-time information digital displays
4. Seating
5. Architectural ribbon element
6. Separated bicycle facility
7. Trees & planting areas
8. Concrete sidewalk
9. "Flexible plaza space"
10. Space for possible information kiosk
11. Sharps container
12. Bike racks