

DAC Meeting Minutes – January 14, 2004

Project: Cambridge Public Library

Phase: End of Schematic Design

Meeting Date: 14 January 2004

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Attendees: Cambridge Public Library, Design Advisory Committee
William Rawn Associates
Ann Beha Architects
Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, Inc.

These meeting notes record the Design Advisory Committee (DAC) meeting held on January 14 at the Cambridge Public Library. Comments are from the DAC and the public. The purpose of this meeting was threefold:

- I. To update the DAC on the landscape schematic design. The presentation focused on the four principles for development of the park design. These principles are as follows:
 - The park is a cherished place in the community,
 - The park is a democratic landscape that belongs to everyone,
 - The design should improve the appearance of the landscape, and
 - The design should carefully integrate the library addition into the site.

Laura Solano of MVVA discussed the layout of the paths to accommodate connections to the city and internal links between the high school, library and park. Two paths form the major connections to the city: a broad north-south path adjacent to the high school connects Broadway and Cambridge Streets and a path connecting the intersection of Ellery and Broadway joins the north-south path. Internal paths would have a hierarchy in size and material, with the main walks being wider and made of unit pavers. The structure of the site plan would be flexible so that it could accommodate every day uses as well as community events. Spaces in front of the old and new library would remain open but have differing characters. The space in front of the old library would have bench-lined paths. Joan Lorentz field would have one broad arching walk, as it does now, allowing for more open lawn that could be used for active and passive uses.

Planting is concentrated on the Broadway and Ellery Street edges of the site. Large-scale canopy trees would replace trees lost on Broadway and supplement the edge around Joan Lorentz field. These trees would be limbed up to allow clear views into the site. The beech trees in front of the old library would be protected and a few other trees will be transplanted.

The high school wall will be removed and replaced with a new entrance area lined with benches and a planter. The high school amphitheater courtyard, which requires some remedial roof repair, would be reconfigured with an accessible path, a low seat wall and new plantings facing the school classrooms. A planted slope between the high school and new library addition will

create a buffer for the amphitheater and views of the landscape from the library. The amphitheater area would be for the exclusive use of the high school. The high school would control access to the courtyard with gates on the east and west ends of the space. It is anticipated that the overall open space will increase relative to the existing conditions because of the removal of the 1967 wing, and the removal of the surface parking lot and access roadway.

The west entrance path to the tennis court would be made accessible by filling over the existing steps. The path would end at the tennis courts. New spectator benches would be provided on the east and west ends of the tennis court.

Two alternative tot lot locations were shown: on the east side of the new garage entrance and in front of the existing tennis courts. Both would have equipment similar to the existing tot lot. Other features include benches, trees for shade, and a small track for tricycles. Entrances into the tot lots would be setback from the street and surrounded by a fence.

2. Presentation by Pamela Hawkes of Ann Beha Architects of design recommendation for the treatment of the library's existing front entrance portico. Presentation included options for enclosing the space with glass and/or metal grilles. For historic preservation reasons, whichever solution is finally agreed to must be reversible.
3. Presentation by Clifford Gayley of William Rawn Associates on proposed vs. existing building elevations as well as presentation of sun shading diagrams.

I. The DAC's comments are as follows:

A. Landscape Schematic Design:

1. When will there be a decision on the placement of the proposed tot lot?
2. Does the High School use the existing amphitheater?
3. What is the site progression of an individual entering the park from Broadway and how do they discover the front entry of the Proposed Library?
4. What is the route of bicycles from Broadway and how does this relate to other modes of transportation on the walkway systems?
5. What will the character of the trees be like initially, and what will they look like in 25 years?
6. Will the drainage work in the proposed tot lots if they are sunk below the existing grade? (Yes)
7. The Tot Lots should be configured to allow for the largest continuous open space in the park.
8. Joan Lorentz field should remain as large as possible.

9. The tot lot alternative located near the tennis courts makes the most sense, as the tot lot location near the garage is not preferred. Even enclosed, the siting is too close to the garage (traffic concern), the high school, and automobile traffic on Broadway.
10. Must the amphitheater be rebuilt as it exists now? (Yes, due to the structure of the classroom below)
11. Does the high school amphitheater courtyard space have a connection to the café located between the existing and proposed libraries?
12. Could the courtyard become more of a gateway to the auditorium serving to connect a sequence of events that leads to the gymnasium?
13. Could the courtyard contain more infrastructural and media elements?
14. It was recommended that the library and the school should not share a connection.
15. The courtyard entry will be controlled by the school, not the library.
16. What is the current size of the existing tot lot and how does it compare to the proposed tot lots?
17. Considering the site arrangement, Tot Lot B is the best layout and placement.
18. Could the entry of Tot Lot B be moved from Ellery Street and located closer to the proposed library addition?
19. Good idea to sink tot lot below grade.
20. Fire Access on site will be accommodated two ways: The fire truck will use Broadway and drive up path to the rear courtyard and back out. Trowbridge path will be used to gain access to the front of the building. These paths will be designed per code to accommodate this traffic.
21. Structure of major park elements is evolving nicely.
22. Proposed seatwalls will replace the existing sitewall between the High School Entry and the Existing Cambridge Public Library Building. These proposed seatwalls will be 18" ht. and allow for seating and conversation.
23. On the Southeast side of the proposed addition, the site will seamlessly blend into the surrounding park and grades.
24. Tot Lot A brings a life and activity to the site that is not present when compared against the Tot Lot B scheme.
25. Minimal changes in the park design have been made (and will be made) in the portion immediately adjacent to Ellery Street.

26. The high school courtyard amphitheater between the proposed library addition and the existing Cambridge Public Library will be a beautiful space.
27. The Trowbridge Street entry and pathway into the park are important, and the design should be responsive to this importance.
28. Consider adding smaller scale trees that flower or fruit to the planting design.
29. Pull path away from stairs at the existing library entry. This will help to distinguish this entry as non functional.
30. The relative distance between the CRLHS gate and Cambridge Street is similar in the existing and proposed schemes.
31. It's a good idea to pull the walk away from the existing building entrance.

B. Existing Library Front Entry:

1. The glass is nice from inside, but there is the concern about nearby high school students communicating to each other through glass. Could removing the existing stairs prevent this activity?
2. Could the stairs extend farther across the front of the existing library? If so, this must be done with stone of same character and color.
3. Could the steps be embellished with a mid-landing to make them less step like?
4. The removal of the steps may not be permissible by local and state historical societies as these institutions prohibit changes that are irreversible.
5. Could the existing front entry remain, but allow only entrance, not exit?
6. The library can have only one entrance, and that is the one located on the proposed addition.
7. It might be confusing to let people go up the stairs only to be greeted by glass.
8. The landscape plan currently features a path leading to the portico; the landscape should deemphasize the role of the portico as an entrance.
9. Could elements like plantings and large urns discourage the steps to be used as seating? It could also provide a way to break up the stairs.
10. Overall goals for front entry are great, but the treatment is "not there yet." The design solution must be harmonious with the building character.
11. The gates currently seem "out of scale" with the existing architecture.

12. The entrances must be made clear and distinct. The existing entry should be clearly not the entry to the new library, and the gate solution is consistent with the period of the style of the existing building.
13. Any enclosure made of glass should be considered in an historical context.
14. If the gate solution is deemed appropriate, then it doesn't matter whether the glass is behind it or not, since the goal is to make clear that it is no longer the entrance.

C. Existing vs. Proposed Architectural Elevations and Sun Shading Diagrams:

1. What will be the noise level of the proposed HVAC intake and exhaust vents between the proposed library addition and the existing Cambridge Rindge and Latin Building?
2. What is the character of the rear façade of the proposed building?
3. In the sun/shade diagrams, what changes would the diagrams have if the structure and canopies of the proposed and existing trees were considered in all the seasons?

II. The Public's Comments are as Follows:

A. Landscape Schematic Design:

1. Tot Lot B is preferred due to Tot Lot A's location to the garage ramp.
2. The soil to be planted over garage must be of a specific type and quality to work in the condition and to ensure plant growth.
3. Every measure to save the beech trees must be taken.
4. Proposed open space, removal of the existing site wall between the high school and library buildings, and potential reclamation of space by removing the 1967 building wing are all benefits of the current plan.
5. The High School is concerned about the relationship of the proposed garage entry on Broadway and the major pedestrian entrance of the High School.
6. Exploration of a garage entrance on Ellery or near intersection on Ellery would be a better solution.
7. The character of the rear building façade is a concern for the high school.

8. There should be a connection from the high school to the existing library in the high school amphitheater courtyard area.
9. What will be the tree species, sizes and types?
10. It is disappointing that there is no diagonal connection in the proposed plans between Broadway and Cambridge Street like there is now.
11. The garage headhouse should be shown in all plans.
12. The firechief has reviewed and approved all fire access routes.
13. The neighborhood is concerned that the city will not keep its commitment to maintain the proposed and existing trees to ensure the design intent in the future.
14. The proposed site design will meet all current accessibility requirements at entries.
15. A great deal of the existing plant material is near maturity. It would be a good exercise to diagram all plant material to be removed/relocated in the proposed design.
16. Existing Austrian pines near the tennis courts provide beneficial shade and relief. These should be protected.
17. The proposed design will fix current drainage problems at Joan Lorentz field.
18. A traffic presentation will occur at the next MCNCDC meeting.
19. Neither Tot Lot location is acceptable.
20. Site needs a variety of trees; people should be able to walk through flowering trees.
21. It was suggested that Tot Lot B is unfavorable because there is a potential for children to get hit with tennis balls from the adjacent tennis courts.
22. The design of courtyard and entry for high school are good.
23. Figure out how and what the cost would be to save the trees in front of the existing library.
24. The high school amphitheater courtyard space is very important, so its design should reflect this.
25. It was suggested that additional potential tot lot locations be examined. A potential placement could be siting the Tot Lot in front of the existing library building, adjacent to the existing steps.
26. Tot Lot B takes up too much space at Joan Lorentz Field.
27. The Tot Lot is better near the ramp, although there still is a concern about automobile fumes. Advantages to this scheme are: Views to Building and Better surveillance from Broadway.

28. The diagonal walk from Broadway to Cambridge Street was promised to the community. By removing this access, the design team has created an unviable space behind the high school. This access should be restored in the plans.
29. The width of the paths should be studied to determine appropriateness.

B. Existing Library Front Entry:

1. Design for the front entry should be studied further.

C. Existing vs. Proposed Building and Solar Diagrams:

1. It may be appropriate for the effects of the existing and proposed plantings to be displayed on the sun/shade diagrams, as there canopies/structures will affect the site through the seasons.
2. The proposed building will meet all current accessibility requirements at entries.