

ISNA Meeting Notes

July 18, 2017, Cambridge Hospital

After a month off in June, ISNA reconvened to catch up on news in the neighborhood, meet some new neighbors and hear a presentation from Commonwealth Alternative Care, the group that has proposed a medical marijuana dispensary for the building currently housing the Quickmart.

1. Intersection Redesign

Intersection Committee leaders caught the group up on a meeting that morning with Joe Barr, the head of the City's Traffic and Parking Department, to get the latest news on plans for the intersection. Following the City's announcement this spring that it would go with the "Bend Northside" plan (now called the "Signalized" plan), a group of walking, biking and park activists, including some members of ISNA, asked that the City look at modifications. Those would include cutting the car travel lanes in the current plan from 4 to 2 lanes, which would allow for Vellucci Plaza to remain alongside the new plaza envisioned in the Signalized plan. The City is considering these and other suggestions.

The ISNA members presented voted on a written request to present to the City, which includes our request for certain data and information we believe necessary to an informed decision about the details of the final plan. We are requesting that this information be made public before the final phase of planning commences, so that neighbors can participate in meaningful ways. [We will post a copy of that letter on the website when the final draft is completed]. We are requesting information pertaining to the likely impact of the plan on neighbors and businesses with regard to parking and left turn prohibitions; the effects of changing car and bike traffic patterns; solutions available to Inman-area businesses who serve patrons who might be dependent on cars (i.e. two pharmacies); a plan for effective snow removal on our sidewalks and curbs; a plan for additional bike parking. Some concerns were also expressed about the new locations of bus stops, especially the #83 bus. ISNA will follow up with this question.

The City will hold a meeting to present the current design on July 25th from 6 to 8 PM at the Cambridge Public Library Lower Level.

2. John Greene from Commonwealth Alternative Care presented on the medical marijuana dispensary to be located (the one-page flyer presented to the Planning Board is [here](#)). The proposed dispensary would be located on the ground floor of the building with the primary entrance moved to Springfield Street and information about the history of the Square set out in the front windows. The current 2nd and 3rd floor access would remain; those floors would be used by Commonwealth for its offices and some office space might be let or used for co-working. The dispensary in its present plans provides only non-euphoric forms of marijuana to patients with prescriptions. No medical or therapeutic services would be on site per regulations, but Commonwealth represented that it would refer patients to local health and wellness specialists. The presenter estimated that 25 jobs would be created at the new headquarters; Commonwealth has two other dispensaries outside the city.

ISNA members asked for feedback on a number of concerns:

- The group plans to add a fairly inactive non-retail use to a key retail space in the Square, which is already heavily populated by medical facilities. Greene answered that placing the dispensary above the ground floor would require an additional \$2 million in renovation costs over the \$2-3 million current estimate. Sharing the space with another retailer would be difficult, he argued, because of the security requirements imposed by the state.
- There are similar buildings down Cambridge Street that are traditionally used by health and other service providers. Greene argued that Commonwealth was limited because of special zoning created for marijuana dispensaries. ISNA members noted that the dispensary zoning does, in fact, continue down Cambridge Street.
- ISNA was concerned that while the current plan is for a medical marijuana dispensary, the group seems likely to be planning to act on the recent vote to legalize recreational marijuana sales (under proposed regulations, existing medical marijuana dispensaries would have priority in licensing). Greene confined his answer to saying that they cannot plan for the effect of the legal changes, though if the market dictated non-medical sales, they would certainly consider that.
- There was a question about whether the dispensary might attract users of illegal drugs. Greene cited evidence that this has not happened around other dispensaries in the short time those have been in operation. He also referenced the need for a prescription, the fact that Commonwealth's products would be non-euphoric, and that the price of these products would likely be prohibitive.

In the resulting discussion and our response to Commonwealth, ISNA members noted that we are particularly concerned about the loss of a retail outlet (Quickmart) that had recently and was used by residents to another health care facility unlikely to help us in our efforts to revitalize the Square as a commercial area. While many members felt that this change could be better than an alternative (if Commonwealth were to lose its bid), the group as a whole agreed to tell Commonwealth that we would like to it find a way to include a more active street engagement in at least some part of the ground floor.

Commonwealth's proposal goes before the Planning Board in September. If any residents hope to stop the opening of the dispensary as planned, they will need to speak up strongly before the Board.

Residents are also wondering if the preschool located at the Church across from the proposed site means that the site is in violation of the medical marijuana ordinance that prohibits dispensaries opening too close to places where children congregate.

With the discussion at a close, the meeting ended. See you all in August.