

Inman Neighborhood Meeting

December 20, 2016 at Ole Restaurant

NEXT MEETING January 10th 7:00 PM at Ole Restaurant

Introduction

Like the first meeting, the second gathering of the new neighborhood association was a packed house. As more neighbors make their opinions and suggestions heard, we are starting to move toward some committees to handle specific issues or goals. Though we ran out of time to get those committees formed, I am beginning these notes with the list (from the agenda) of committees to be formed based on written, verbal and digital responses from all of you. If you would like to lead or be active on one of these committees, send an email to Susan Markowitz at susanmarkowitz@gmail.com and we will put you in touch with others hoping to work on the same topic. And, if you think we are missing a committee/topic, let us know!

Committees:

- Inman Intersection/Traffic Planning/Bus 69
- Beautification in Inman Square and Vellucci Plaza
- Concerns about garbage, litter and rodents
- Social gathering around Inman Square
- Adding Inman Square to the name of the future Prospect St. T station
- Parking in Inman (system to share existing commercial lots?)
- Renewable Energy: accessing group discounts for rooftop solar, solar garden, etc..

What We Discussed

1. **Meet the Neighbors.** We started with a brief get-to-know your neighbor period, something we hope to continue in one form or another at future meetings.
2. **The Green Line Extension.** There was a brief update on how and why we can act to get Inman Square added to the name of the future Prospect Street station. On the to-do list are outreach to Cambridge and state-level representatives, coordinating with our local business association (East Cambridge Business Association), and reaching out to our Union Square neighbors. The group welcomes anyone who wants to help in this effort or who can introduce members to Somerville contacts.
3. **Inman Intersection Proposals.** This topic proved to be the focus of the meeting thanks to a recent presentation of the “peanutabout” proposal from Boston Cyclists Union and upcoming deadlines in the City’s decision-making process. The City will be holding a community meeting in mid-to-late January to present and lead discussion on its four proposals. The first of the City proposals, barring left turns in the intersection, is already in place. The City’s consultants have been working on three other options: one that “bends” Cambridge Street into Hampshire at both ends of the intersection, a second that “bends” Hampshire/Beacon into Cambridge Street at both ends of the intersection, and a third of the consultant’s choice. Presumably, they will

also comment on the peanut. In a meeting with Joe Barr and Patrick Baxter of the Traffic Dept. several of us asked the City to also consider bending Hampshire into Cambridge St. at the rear of Vellucci Plaza, thereby moving the plaza to the other side of the street so that it extends the sidewalk in front of Punjabi Dhaba. This idea was presented at our December 20th meeting. This shift would create a much larger plaza in front of shops and restaurants on that side of the street.

Some basics were presented on how intersections generally deal with auto, pedestrian and bicycle modes.

Joe Barr, Director of the City's Traffic, Parking and Transportation Department, kindly agreed on the spot to tell us more about their process during the meeting. Significantly, he said that they are willing to consider alternative ideas, including the "peanutabout" or shifting Vellucci so long as they see community support behind an idea. However, the City would like to start focusing on a plan after a January meeting they plan to hold between 1/18 and 1/25 (TBD). Mr. Barr exhorted us to gather enough consensus before and during that meeting to ensure we have an impact.

Your Comments:

Based on these factors, we took the time originally designated in our Agenda for committee set-up to having people talk in small groups about their priorities and suggestions for the intersection. We followed this with a group discussion and then invited people to fill out a very short survey about how they use the intersection area and an index card with their thoughts. We received 38 comments.

Not surprisingly, safety in the intersection was the most common concern. A couple of people just wanted anything that improved traffic flow, and two more specified bike safety. But the majority of safety comments focused on making the intersection safer, clearer and more comfortable for pedestrians. This sentiment showed up in comments about the most popular intersection proposal at the meeting. While one neighbor was in favor of the Bicyclists roundabout plan, all other comments favored something to create more outdoor gathering and seating space. Some of these comments did not favor a specific proposal but most explicitly favored the Hampshire Street bend with a shift of Vellucci Plaza from its current location. These comments went hand-in-hand with requests for seating, landscaping, and public art and programming. One comment proposed affordable housing in the current Vellucci plaza lot. Commenters in the discussion and on the index cards pointed to Lafayette plaza in Central Square, the plaza in Davis Square and the programming at Downtown Crossing as models for what could happen in Inman.

We received 5 comments showing concern for how the remade intersection would affect Inman's side streets. Specifically, neighbors are concerned that Antrim be accessible and that we address existing speeding issues on that street. One comment urged us to consider the safety and convenience of each side street equally and another asked us not to shunt everything onto Elm, which already gets its fair share of traffic.

A few of you also commented on the Square's commercial function. We had two comments suggesting we need to consider the small businesses in our intersection proposals. Two more comments expressed an interest in reconfiguring parking to allow public use of private lots during the evening. And finally, we had two general concerns noted: one neighbor felt the affordable housing would not work in Vellucci while another wondered how we could ensure Vellucci would work better in a new space.

How You Can Participate:

Given the widespread sense at the meeting that the Inman intersection plans have thus far focused more on getting people through the Square, rather than allowing people to move around easily within the Square, we would like to see as many neighbors as possible participating in the final decision about traffic reconfiguration. While safety for all modes of transportation is the highest priority, we also want to make Inman more of a destination, not just a crossroads. You can help by joining the committee, following along on Facebook (@inmansquare), showing up at the City's January meeting (we will send time and date as soon as those are set), sending us your comments, or just talking with your neighbors.

Here are some links to help you understand the proposals thus far:

City Presentation from June Inman Intersection Meeting:

https://www.cambridgema.gov/~media/Files/Traffic/InmanNeighborhoodMeeting_20160622.pdf?la=en

Current Left Turn Restrictions in Inman:

<http://www.cambridgema.gov/traffic/News/detail.aspx?path=%2fsitecore%2fcontent%2fhome%2ftraffic%2fNews%2f2016%2f10%2finmansquareleftturnrestrictions>

Boston Cyclists Union roundabout: <http://bostoncyclistsunion.org/activism/the-inman-square-peanutabout-birth-of-an-innovative-design-solution/>