

MEETING NOTES

Meeting Date:	July 28, 2009
Meeting Topic:	Final Presentation
Meeting Location:	Carlton School, Salem, MA
Project:	Salem Bridge Neck Neighborhood Planning Study
Attendees:	Community members, The City of Salem Department of Planning and Community Development, The Cecil Group
Prepared by:	Margarita Iglesia and Meghan Grafton
Copies:	Danielle McKnight, Department of Planning and Community Development Project File

On July 28, the final public meeting for the Salem Bridge Neck neighborhood planning study was held at the Carlton School. The meeting attracted around 30 participants from the community.

The Cecil Group presented a slide show summarizing the study's key findings and recommendations. The presentation was followed by an active discussion among all the participants, covering a variety of topics of shared interest and concern.

The following points relate the key questions and comments discussed:

- The importance of maintaining an adequate balance between homeownership and rental housing in the neighborhood has been emphasized since the first public meeting for this process. When the Jefferson Station apartments were developed, substantial changes happened to the neighborhood all of a sudden. What is the plan recommending regarding balance?

The consultant team has found that a good "balance" between owner-occupied and rental housing already exists in the neighborhood, and significant risks of alteration to the existing balance in the near future were not perceived. Even if changes may occur, especially if some potentially developable sites are redeveloped, the estimated amount of new development would not be big enough to significantly disrupt the existing balance. However, explicit mention of this subject and recommendations to maintain the current balance of owner-occupied versus rental housing will be added to the final plan document. It will be important to make sure that future new development gets thoroughly reviewed at each incremental step prior to approval.

- The development feasibility tests conducted as part of this study indicate that up to 60 residential units could possibly be accommodated in the Brake & Clutch site. These appeared to be too many units and too many cars for some of the residents attending the meeting.

The analysis of potential development concepts looked into building types and densities with a similar character to the ones that already exist in the

neighborhood (for example, the buildings that were considered along the side streets where adjacent single- and two-family homes currently exist were two-family homes). In looking ahead, if development proposals were made for the site, the character of future development would need to be determined and controlled through zoning and possibly design guidelines.

It would be up to the neighborhood to decide what type and extent of guidelines they would like to have. Design guidelines would need to be reviewed by the community through a public process. One potential mechanism for the preparation and application of design guidelines could be the establishment of a Neighborhood Preservation District. However, this has been attempted before without success because the corresponding guidelines were perceived as being restrictive. There are other alternatives – for example, projects in the North River Canal district get advisory input from the existing Salem Design Review committee. This type of review and input could be particularly useful if new projects are proposed, in order to make them be compatible in design with the rest of the neighborhood.

- It should be noted that this is a National Historic District and repairs can be very expensive when they need to be made.

That is true in a way. However, Historic Tax Credits may also be available under certain circumstances if repairs are made conforming to historic preservation guidelines.

Placing design restrictions on new construction is good. However, there should not be restrictions on building repairs or anybody else. A balancing point in terms of requirements needs to be established somewhere in between.

- How will the proposed waterfront walk and beach access be accomplished? The study also talks about a different type of restaurants. What is the incentive for the owners?

A neighborhood plan does not have the capacity to compel redevelopment. However, if restaurant owners would propose changes or improvements in the future, the creation of waterfront access may be one of the conditions required for approval. The state waterways regulations (Chapter 91) would likely require the provision of public access along the water, for example. On a complementary note, this kind of improvements could result in an enhanced district image, better restaurant services and more business opportunities.

- The Tracy walkway is being incorporated into the bicycle and pedestrian path system by connecting the Bypass bike path to Collins Cove. This new pedestrian and bike way connection is being designed and will be built as part of the ongoing Bridge Street reconstruction project.
- Through all these ideas and planning process, the City has always had a clear intention of working together with the existing property owners to bring about positive change. There has never been any intention of eminent domain.
- Many neighbors are financially incapable of making any improvements to their properties. This plan is not about compelling neighbors to spend, but rather about discussing and generating ideas for the future so that the City receives guidance from the community to move and allocate public funds in the right direction when change comes.

- The Bypass Road has been built for a relatively short period of time. However, some of the noise wall foundations are already cracked. Requests for repairs have gotten no response so far.

The purpose of this planning process is to set a basis in moving forward in planning for the future. However, a record will be made with these notes that the noise walls need to be reviewed and repaired.

- The proposed PUD zoning mechanism for future redevelopment is not applicable to all the parcels that need change along Bridge Street. In particular, PUD does not apply to parcels smaller than 60,000 sf. A different zoning mechanism is needed for the smaller parcels.
- A small group of local businesses has been active through the Chamber of Commerce for about three years. The members of the Working Group that was established to oversee the preparation of this study could continue working with the Chamber of Commerce, and with other interested neighbors, in advancing the key ideas and recommendations of this plan.
- One of the important concepts discussed at the last Working Group meeting involved the possibility to work in collaboration with non-profit developer corporations to rehabilitate vacant buildings. Affordable housing, well priced, could be one of the very few options available to recover and repair these properties.
- Affordable housing could also be the mechanism that would allow some of the existing residents, and their children, to remain in the neighborhood if housing prices go back up again in the future.
- An important call for caution: If there is a desire to improve derelict properties and clean up the neighborhood, the proposals of small developers and local business owners that are trying with great effort to improve their properties against significant odds should not be dismissed. There is a need to reconcile the development pressures caused by the rising costs of construction with the general desire to keep densities low in the neighborhood.
- An important benefit provided by this planning process, which could be extended through the continuous interaction of a neighborhood group or local business association, is the opportunity to review and discuss important issues of general concern with other neighbors in a public forum.