

Lambert Neighborhood Meeting Notes 1/21/21

Attendees:

Liz Trice, Brian Eng, Matt Peters (Maine Cooperative Development Partners)

Neighbor Intros: Where do you live, and what would most improve your neighborhood?

Keith and Karen Johnson --- 179 Lambert; direct abutter; best improvement would be more pedestrian friendly --- speed control, sidewalks, etc.

Ruth Bettinger --- 501 Summit (corner of Lambert); would like to see dog-walking area for residents because there are lots of dogs in the neighborhood

Mary Caffazzo --- 544 Summit; would like safer walking --- sidewalks or other means of traffic calming; there are a ton of walkers and dogs and cyclists

Amy Johnson --- corner of Auburn and Armstrong Heights; would like to see better walking and safe crossings of Auburn at Washington and Summit

Ed Eggleston --- lives on Auburn Street half block up from Washington Ave. Ext; would like to see facilities for dog walking, sidewalks

Pauline and Ingrid Graver 513 Summit; would like sidewalks

“Cameron” Donna and William Allen

Oak

Other Guests:

Mary Davis (City of Portland, Housing Department)

Seth Kimball (Aceto Landscape Architects)

Sam Lebel (Acorn Civil Engineer)

Angela King (Bicycle Coalition of Maine Advocacy Manager) --- excited about this project as a model for the state

David Libby (Town & Country Federal Credit Union) --- how TCFCU can help; grew up on Brook Road behind Shaw's --- parents lived there for 40 years; used to visit Christmas lights on Summit every year

Zack Barowitz (Libbytown Neighborhood, Greater Portland Community Land Trust) --- 80% as head of the Portland Bike/Ped Advisory Committee; 20% because of interest in the Douglass Commons project and GPCLT Randall Street

Presentation of neighborhood issues and desires we've heard in previous 3 meetings.

What did we miss?

Keith: The culvert under Lambert floods 10 to 12 times per year even with mild rain. Bigger storms can create bigger problems. Maybe development could get credits for permeable/retentive surfaces re: stormwater fees.

Need to add dog walking & facilities to the list

Angela: a lot of support from the neighborhood can move street & pedestrian improvements quicker

Brian: it's exciting to see such a unified neighborhood voice, because we can bring a stronger message to the city, and there's potential to get even federal funds. There's also a movement afoot to preserve some land at 1831 Washington, including the Land Bank and the Trust for Public Land, so there's potential to connect to that. There's a lot of momentum and energy, and I'm invigorated to hear your enthusiasm.

Concept Presentation:

Matt: Our concepts are a combination of our goals, what we've heard at these meetings, what we've heard from one on one conversations with neighbors, and what's in the city's comprehensive plan. These images are just first sketches, nothing is close to final. There would be sidewalks the length of Washington.

(Alternative A) The idea is that the roads would be narrow so that it feels cozy and safe for pedestrians and children. The red buildings are where we would like to see small neighborhood level retail on the first floor facing Washington. The orange building would be three story walkups with a mix of 1, 2 & 3 bedroom homes, and the yellow would be two story townhomes. We envision having street parking on Washington, we expect that we'd be required to add sidewalks and street trees. (Alternative B) is similar. This is the general scope and idea, but we're a long way from specifics.

Liz: It struck us that that strip of Washington is not residential as is, so we were looking for a way that we could make that stretch feel more like a neighborhood, and envisioned a neighborhood center like Deering Center, or on Ocean Street in Knightville where CIA cafe is. The vision is to have micro retail that serves the neighborhood that can walk there, and would be managed by coop residents who would choose occupants that they thought contributed to the neighborhood in nice ways. We're trying to set it up financially so that there is no dependence on income from those spaces so that residents can choose what they think will enhance their neighborhood. Some might be micro retail, but could be shop space, or totally non-profit community space.

Neighbor Feedback on Draft Concept:

Ed: overall this is good. How many cars are you going to have? I imagine at least 1/3 of new households will probably have cars. You might want to make sure that the entrance locations consider traffic backups on Washington heading towards Auburn during rush hour. It would be great to have a traffic light at Auburn and Washington

Allens: We are confused about the concept about commercial space and associated zoning change, since it is a neighborhood and not a commercial area... homes are fine but we're not

sure about shops. We would not object but are cautiously leery about increasing the commercialization of a residential neighborhood we have been in since 1977.

Ruth: is still thinking about this, not sure yet.

Keith: Likes Alternative B looks where greenspace is more accessible to the surrounding neighborhood.

Ed: Likes Alternative A as greenspace in the middle is more protective for children.

Liz: either way we'd like to make the road narrow enough that it is safe for children.

Mary C: In my early 20s I lived in Deering center and enjoyed the small town, main street feel. Living on Summit Street for the last 30 years, it's not the same, and I'm reflecting on that - what would it be like to have shops to walk to? I like the idea of hopping on my bike or walking down the street and going to a gallery, it's just a matter of imagining how that would be in this location.

Oak: I'm feeling cautious optimism; I grew up in Deering Center and went to Deering High School and Lincoln Middle School; I agree with vision as presented; but worried about what types of businesses would actually locate there; would it be pawn shops and strip clubs?

Ed: asks for summary of what's allowed in the relevant zones: R3, R2, B1.

Amy: The retail idea is pretty exciting. The idea that the coop residents themselves would get to choose the business tenants feels qualitatively different to me; you're more likely to get a Honey store and a bakery than a Dollar General. That feels really attractive, and would make my neighborhood feel more like a neighborhood. Where I live on Auburn Street doesn't really feel like a neighborhood to me. As a long time resident of Portland, it seems like everyone eventually needs a car, so it might be optimistic to think that a minority of residents might need cars. There's a condo development just south on Lambert, and it's a lot of impervious pavement, and it doesn't feel like part of my community. How do we make this feel integrated with the larger neighborhood, and be a place that you want to walk through and spend time?

Brian: Part of the goal is to create spaces that the larger neighborhood can spend time in.

Keith: It's a lot to process, and it's hard to visualize what the visual impact will be. The saving grace is it is a cooperative, so hopefully that will lend itself to having better neighbors as opposed to being an apartment complex whether there's a lot of turnover. It's a little more dense than we expected it to be. I like Option B where the green space is off to one side; My feeling is that if the green space is in the center, is that the people in the cooperative will feel like it's their space and not want interlopers.

Mary C.: I need to go. I have another Zoom meeting to attend. Thank you for the invite and I look forward to continuing with you all on this project. Take care.

Amy: "I'm also out of time but thanks for the presentation — great to hear how things are evolving!" "I also prefer alternative B for the same reasons as Keith."

Ruth: "This is interesting, so I am sorry that I have to leave. I will send my thoughts soon. Thank you for this opportunity to be part of the planning process."

Liz: The detailed site planning will happen starting in April or May, but the next step in front of us is to request a zone change, and in order to do that, we will need to know if we have support for neighborhood commercial.

Matt: Yes, it's likely that we would need neighborhood support to have neighborhood commercial spaces.

Mary Davis: This process is exactly what the housing committee had in mind. It wasn't just to plop housing here, but to have a process with the neighborhood to see what would enhance the whole neighborhood.

Zack: Agrees with Keith about how the first design is too inward facing. In Amsterdam, they just kept designing more and more concentric circles, and then the circles started getting too big, so they started creating designs with tall buildings on the outside and more intimate space on the inside. It seems to me if you use the grid that goes through the red buildings, you would create a more public street but only people who know about those trail connections would use it. Also, there's a measure of neighborhood safety which is, How old a child would you send to get a popsicle? The younger the child, the safer the neighborhood. Having small commercial spaces, which might end up being owned by residents, would greatly increase the safety according to that metric. I also wonder, what do you have to do to get a quart of milk? If you have to drive, then you're part of the problem, making the streets full of traffic and not safe to walk, but if you can walk, then you're making the streets safer. Last, there is debate among pedestrian advocates about on the merits street parking, but one advantage is it provides a wall of metal that can protect pedestrians from cars - three cars hopped a curb on Brighton Avenue last year.

How does zoning request work?

Matt: we will submit a request - ideally in the next few weeks, and we'll have another, publicly noticed neighborhood meeting. There will be a workshop at the planning board where they will take public comment, then the planning board votes to recommend it to the city council, then the city council has a hearing and votes.

Liz: We would hope to work out most issues in these informal meetings. City council meetings are not an ideal place to have discussion, as people are limited to 3 minutes, you only get to speak once, it's not set up for a conversation, and it's difficult for us to change things mid-process.

Allens: "Given the shortage for affordable housing in the Portland area, we would be fully in support of the area for housing but would be strongly opposed to commercial establishments. There are plenty of those closeby. Donna & Bill Allen"

Angela: Adding places people can walk to is an important part of livable and walkable neighborhoods.

David Libby: I'm very intrigued with the commercial, especially startup, Etsy style businesses: there are a lot of makers in Maine. The key with commercial space is safety and connectivity feel. Having activity on the street improves that safety. I'm glad people have picked up on the benefit of a coop, Town & Country is a member owned coop. The second design where the open space connects with trail, could connect to Sebago to the Sea, Riverton Trolley Park, there's a connector to the Ballpark a few hundred feet away' I used to play in that ballpark, and if you add some small businesses you could walk to, it could make it a very livable neighborhood. What to do about cars gets me worked up, because right now we all use cars, but soon the technology is going to change all that; eventually the community could just have a few electric autonomous cars. It stinks if we have to build for everyone having cars. So having some components of bikable walkable commercial space moves us towards that bigger dream while we're waiting for it to come to fruition.

Keith: I'm not opposed to the type of neighborhood business commercial you're proposing. I don't think it would harm the neighborhood.

Oak: it looks like it's condos rather than single family homes is that right?

Brian: yes, the original proposal was single family homes, but the process evolved we heard that people wanted preservation of forest, and we're able to do that

Zack: "My basic understanding of zoning is R is residential, C is commercial, and I is industrial and that the lower the number, the lower the intensity of the use."

Liz: We will put together more specific information on what types or retail would be allowed or not.