

Report of the Task Force on Community Engagement in 2030 Planning on Development of MIT-Owned Property in Kendall Square

October 12, 2012

Background

The Task Force on Community Engagement in 2030 Planning, consisting of eight faculty members¹, was appointed in August, 2012 by Provost Chris Kaiser and asked to provide guidance on upcoming decisions related to campus development within the context of the capital planning process known as MIT 2030. Specifically, the Task force was charged with:

1. Providing advice regarding the development of MIT-owned property in Kendall Square.
2. Determining the most effective ways to engage the MIT community in the overall campus planning process going forward.

[The full charge to the Task Force is provided in Appendix 1.]

At present, MIT faces a decision whether to move forward with submitting a rezoning petition to the City of Cambridge for formal approval, which would enable the Institute to proceed with further planning, design, and construction of a series of capital projects in Kendall Square expected to span roughly the next ten years. Specifically, the petition requests an “up-zoning” to increase the permitted density of development in the target area to allow taller buildings.

Because of timing considerations related to this decision, this report addresses the first part of our charge. Specifically, we offer our recommendations on the question of whether or not, or under what

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Xavier de Souza Briggs, Urban Studies and Planning

Peter Fisher, Physics

Dennis Frenchman, Urban Studies and Planning; Center for Real Estate

Lorna Gibson, Materials Science and Engineering

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William Wheaton, Urban Studies and Planning; Economics; Center for Real Estate

Patrick Winston, Electrical Engineering and Computer Science

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conditions, MIT should file the up-zoning petition with the City of Cambridge to allow development of Kendall Square to proceed.

Later this fall term, we intend to submit a follow-up report that addresses the second part of our charge.

Process

The Task Force met weekly from early August through early October 2012. Meetings primarily involved interviews with stakeholders in the MIT 2030 process in general and in the Kendall Square development issues in particular. These stakeholders included individuals both within and outside of the MIT community. [A list of individuals interviewed is provided in Appendix 2.]

In addition, the Task Force reviewed MIT internal documents related to the development of MIT-owned property in Kendall Square and elsewhere on campus, as well as public documents related to development in relevant areas of Cambridge, in order to better understand the Institute's campus planning process as well as its interaction with the City of Cambridge on these issues.

The Task Force focused primarily on an assessment of the current rezoning petition, involving the 26-acre MIT East Campus property in Kendall Square proposed for development by the MIT Investment Management Company (MITIMCo), a division of MIT that manages the Institute's endowment and real estate investments. The petition seeks the City of Cambridge's permission to allow MIT to add more total gross square footage, including taller building heights, than allowed under current zoning in this area of the campus. The design concept that accompanies the petition includes a set of illustrative building sites for commercial office/laboratory use, plus potential academic, retail and residential uses and other improvements.

Findings

The following key findings about the up-zoning petition reflect our discussions with stakeholders and review of the data:

1. The MIT property that will be affected by the proposed up-zoning petition is first and foremost part of the MIT campus, as it lies within the area of Kendall Square south of Main Street that has traditionally defined one of the Institute's East Campus boundaries. It is intimately tied to the Institute's campus structure and patterns of movement extending from 77 Massachusetts Avenue to the Sloan School. This area of land is also the last piece of undeveloped, contiguous campus space lying between the Charles River, Main Street and Ames Street, with ready access to the MBTA Red Line, representing an extremely precious resource.
2. The planning and development process affecting this part of campus has become intertwined with MIT's commercial real estate investment goals. MIT land development for investment purposes traditionally has taken place beyond the edge of what normally is considered to

comprise the MIT campus, often a significant distance away from the center of campus activity. Such development seeks to maximize financial returns.

3. Setting aside the question of whether commercial development is appropriate at this location, financial return should not be the principal criterion of value creation and success for this area of campus. Equally important are criteria related to the 21st century image of MIT, creation of a significant eastern gateway to the campus, the enhancement of student life, and providing opportunities for future academic buildings and activities that we have yet to invent. We also believe these latter considerations, which go to the heart of MIT's mission, will be more important to sustaining financial returns to the Institute in the long run.
4. The current rezoning plan (as outlined by MITIMCo) for development of the Kendall Square area falls short of the aspirations described above. The Task Force has concerns with the single diagram that MITIMCo has presented as its design proposal. We have been reassured by MITIMCo that its proposal is flexible and that, if the up-zoning is approved, MIT retains options to work with the city and surrounding neighborhoods to alter building heights, densities, and footprints (within the constraints of the zoning) to improve the project.
5. MIT needs to carefully consider the need for additional campus-serving housing, especially for graduate students. Concerns were raised with our Task Force that there is a need to expand graduate student housing either on campus or off campus in some affordable way. Certain Cambridge resident groups also have expressed concern for more housing in this area of the city. MITIMCo's current proposal includes provision for 120,000 square feet of new housing, tentatively targeted for a new building adjacent to One Broadway in Kendall Square. These will be primarily market priced units and not likely within the reach of graduate students (although Cambridge will require that 15% of the units be reserved for low and moderate income families). At this point our Task Force does not have sufficient information to judge whether more graduate student housing is needed on or off campus and, if so, how much. Nor have potential housing needs or goals been incorporated into the MIT 2030 planning process to date. Therefore, a study of housing needs of graduate students, faculty, and staff should be undertaken with involvement from these constituent groups as part of the MIT 2030 process. The study should consider the benefits and costs of Kendall Square and other on- or off-campus potential housing sites.
6. The likely traffic impacts of Kendall Square development need further analysis and discussion as well. We heard very different views on whether the Kendall Square development would affect future traffic flows in the surrounding areas. Again we do not have sufficient information to decide what the impacts on traffic, parking, use of public transportation, etc. will be and we worry that these issues have not yet been studied adequately – particularly from the student point of view – or integrated in the Kendall Square design/development process. MIT has ample faculty, student, and staff expertise to draw on to address these

questions, and this analysis should be incorporated into a comprehensive planning process for East Campus.

7. The City of Cambridge Historical Commission has designated three buildings on the south side of Main Street as historical landmarks that must be preserved. This significantly constrains the design and development options for use of this space for ground floor retail, academic or commercial purposes and limits the opportunity to create a landmark gateway connecting Kendall Square to MIT. Creative options for preserving the historical importance and awareness of these sites in particular, and of Kendall Square more generally, need to be explored jointly by MIT and the City.
8. The City Manager and the Cambridge Planning Commission have expressed interest in receiving MIT's up-zoning petition soon and look forward to working closely with MIT in developing this area in ways that meet the mutual needs and interests of the City, the MIT community, area residents, and current and future commercial businesses that will enhance the area's reputation as a world-class hub of innovation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Given these findings, we support moving forward with MIT's submission of the rezoning petition provided that:

1. A comprehensive urban design plan for East Campus is conducted and completed after the petition is approved but before anything is built in the area covered by the petition. The plan needs to consider alternatives to the current MITIMCo diagram for commercial building sites, floor plates, program, heights, and scale of development, keeping in mind the findings described above.
2. This Task Force or a similarly constituted faculty group participates directly in the East Campus planning process and design of the Kendall Square project.

and

3. The work of preparing and deliberating a plan for East Campus, and subsequent development of the area, including Kendall Square, is guided by a set of design principles, described in the next section.

Design Principles/Criteria. Any development of the parcels under consideration in Kendall Square must honor the following principles/criteria for evaluating design options and decisions that involve MIT-owned property developed either for academic purposes or for commercial purposes (with the possibility that commercial may house some academic uses at some point in the future). Our sense is that MITIMCo currently evaluates development opportunities primarily against a return on investment

(ROI) criterion. This is appropriate when property is solely for investment purposes, away from the core of the MIT campus. But Kendall Square, with its Red Line MBTA station, clearly has the potential to serve as a new gateway to MIT, similar to the function now served by 77 Mass. Ave. to the west. Equally important, much of the property that would be developed for commercial tenants could house MIT uses at some point in the future. Therefore, it is critical that these buildings and the space they create on the ground be considered first as a part of the campus designed to support our students, faculty and staff. To ensure this, we recommend the following principles to guide decisions about development and design of this area:

- ***There must be a gateway to MIT worthy of MIT and its aspirations, mission and standards of design excellence.*** The gateway should not just be an entrance, but a physically prominent node of activity, equivalent to the function of MIT's Lobby 7, containing destinations relevant to the MIT community and helpful to visitors (e.g. an information office) linked to clearly recognizable spaces that support learning and research (e.g. laboratories, studios, classrooms, study and meeting spaces accessible to the public). It should connect MIT directly to Kendall Square with minimal physical barriers or gaps. The gateway should be welcoming to residents and visitors.
- ***East Campus buildings and spaces must create and convey a campus feeling that serves the needs of the MIT community in ways that attract people to the area across the broad band of hours that typifies the rhythm of student, faculty, and staff life.*** This means, for example, providing amenities and services for students, faculty, staff and residents, with a minimal corporate presence (on the campus side), and well-defined public space for people to gather, affordable places to eat, bicycle parking, and access, etc. To ensure this, the ground floor space on all buildings should be primarily reserved for inviting academic, student life, or retail uses, and not have a "gated," privatized character.
- ***Any commercial space in Kendall Square should serve as an extension of the campus and not the other way around.*** The businesses invited to locate there should complement and support the mission of MIT to promote innovation and start-ups and allow maximum access to students and faculty for research, class projects, and other mutual learning opportunities. Kendall Square should not just be a commercial or corporate office location that happens to be adjacent to a university.
- ***The portion of the development intended for commercial use should generate an appropriate financial return to warrant investment of MIT endowment funds.*** However, given the location of this development on campus and the need to support academic and student life, it may not be reasonable to expect the same level of return as that from commercial property developed in sites removed from the campus. Alternatively, it would be appropriate for the Institute to consider investing a portion of the income from the Kendall commercial development into developing the campus spaces, facilities and academic environment planned for the area.

- ***Design of commercial development should proceed only in the context of a comprehensive plan for the future of the East Campus, including its public realm, academic, student life, transport, and recreational functions, taking into account potential disposition of all property between Main Street and the Charles River.*** It is not sufficient or prudent to design commercial buildings in the absence of a systematic analysis and clear understanding of how the remainder of the East Campus is intended to evolve. It is important that ample space for future academic expansion be reserved in the up-zoning petition. We have not studied this issue in sufficient depth to reach a conclusion about how much space at this point, and, therefore, it is another issue for further review and discussion in the post-up-zoning design phase and plan for East Campus.

Flexibility: Envelope versus Constraints. We have heard from the Cambridge City Manager, MITIMCo, and others that the up-zoning petition would create an “envelope” that would allow for considerable flexibility in design and development options going forward. The key constraints from the City of Cambridge’s perspective would be limitations on building height, total square footage of new development, the need to retain three historical buildings, and provision of an appropriate amount of housing. Given these minimal constraints, we need assurance from MIT leadership that the principles listed above are acceptable and the path clear to consider design alternatives. Among the options that should be considered are:

- Less commercial development in the area shown as Site 3 on the MITIMCO plan, providing the potential to develop a significant gateway to the campus.
- A better defined campus space connecting to Eastgate and Sloan that is more closely associated with Main Street, so there can be sufficient interaction and permeability to support campus activity. This space should also facilitate interaction with the rest of the Institute, which is vital to achieving the goal of a “One MIT” campus culture.
- More space for academic development and student life.
- Reallocation of height and massing to the edges rather than heart of the campus area, or a smaller commercial project overall.
- Alternate sites for commercial office and housing development that reduce impact on the campus.

Historic Preservation Options. We commend the City and MIT for honoring the principle that the history and co-evolution of Kendall Square and the MIT campus be preserved, honored, and featured in the design of this site. At the same time, we are deeply concerned that simply preserving the three buildings on Main Street proposed as historic landmarks will substantially increase development costs and limit design options for the spaces these buildings now occupy. We believe that by working together and in consultation with residents and the business community in the area, the historic preservation

objectives can be met in creative ways while also opening up the space needed to create a world class gateway to the Institute. One way to do so would be to design and build a multi-media supported entrance and information center that provides a visual, interactive timeline of the past, current, and future contributions of this region to the advancement of knowledge, industry, and city life. We urge a joint Cambridge/MIT study be undertaken of creative options for meeting these objectives.

Process moving forward

We commend the Provost and President for creating this Task Force and providing the faculty an opportunity to weigh in on the Kendall Square proposal. As stated earlier, we believe that this Faculty Task Force, or a similarly constituted group that is broadly representative of the faculty and includes individuals with special expertise in design, planning and real estate economics, should continue into the post-up-zoning design stage of the Kendall Square development process to advise the Provost and President on the academic issues associated with campus design and planning.

We thank the MIT staff, faculty and students and Cambridge leaders who provided inputs to our work. We look forward to continuing to work together on future phases of this important opportunity.

We welcome comments from the MIT Community and Cambridge neighbors on this report and/or on our future work as we take up the second item in our charge from the Provost—considering the best way to engage the MIT Community in the ongoing development of the MIT 2030 vision and plan.

Appendix 1 Provost's Charge to the Task Force

Dear Faculty Colleagues,

The capital planning framework known as [MIT 2030](#) was launched two years ago to guide the Institute in making decisions about campus renewal and development in the decades ahead, relying on the broad engagement of the campus community to help inform these decisions. In recent months the effort has begun to transition from planning to implementation, particularly for development of MIT-owned land in Kendall Square in ways that continue to revitalize this important area of Cambridge while best serving the long-range interests of the Institute. To ensure that we maintain constructive community engagement through the implementation process, I have appointed an ad hoc faculty committee, the Task Force on Community Engagement in 2030 Planning, which is charged with advising me about decisions related specifically to the development of MIT property in Kendall Square and about the most effective ways to engage the MIT community in the 2030 decision process generally, going forward. Members of the Task Force include Thomas Kochan (chair), Samuel Allen, Xavier de Souza Briggs, Peter Fisher, Dennis Frenchman, Lorna Gibson, William Wheaton, and Patrick Winston.

The Task Force will begin engaging with members of the faculty and other Institute stakeholders on these issues in the weeks and months ahead. I want to thank Professor Kochan and other members of the Task Force for their willingness to devote their time and effort to this process, and I look forward to our continuing discussions regarding MIT 2030.

Sincerely,

Chris A. Kaiser

Appendix 2 Individuals interviewed by the Task Force

Chris Kaiser, Provost

Martin Schmidt, Associate Provost

Israel Ruiz, Executive Vice President and Treasurer

John Reed, Chairman of the MIT Corporation

Lawrence Fish, Member of the MIT Corporation

Steven Marsh, Managing Director, Real Estate, MITIMCo

Michael Owu, Director, Real Estate, MITIMCo

Patrick Rowe, Associate Director, Real Estate, MITIMCo

Sarah Gallop, Co-Director, Office of Government and Community Relations

Jonathan King, Professor, Biology

Edward Roberts, David Sarnoff Professor of Management of Technology

Nigel Wilson, Professor, Civil and Environmental Engineering

Frederick Salvucci, Senior Lecturer, Center for Transportation and Logistics

John Attanucci, Research Associate, Civil and Environmental Engineering

Pamela Delphenich, Director of Campus Planning and Design

Peter Roth, Lecturer, Center for Real Estate

O. Robert Simha, Research Affiliate, Urban Studies and Planning

Representatives of the Graduate Student Council

Representatives of the Undergraduate Association

Robert Healy, Cambridge City Manager

Timothy Rowe, CEO, Cambridge Innovation Center

Charles Sullivan, Executive Director, Cambridge Historical Commission