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Secretary Maeve Vallely Bartlett
MEPA Office
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114
Attn: Holly Johnson – holly.s.johnson@state.ma.us

15 December 2014

RE: Comments on the Environmental Notification Form for the I-90 Allston Interchange Project
EEA #15278

Dear Secretary Bartlett:

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the recently filed Environmental Notification Form for MassDOT's I-90 Allston Interchange Multi-modal Transportation Project. The Boston Society of Architects (BSA) is an approximately 4,000 member non-profit professional trade association and a chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

In the fall of 2014, the BSA started a new program – the Urban Design Workshop – designed to engage architects, stakeholders, and public officials in early stage-thinking about major urban design initiatives.

To launch the program, the BSA hosted a two-day urban design charrette on September 17 and 18, 2014, that focused on the urban design issues raised by MassDOT's proposal for the redesign of the Allston/Cambridge I-90 interchange. Two interdisciplinary urban design teams, led by Alex Krieger and Alan Mountjoy of NBBJ and Kishore Varanasi of CBT Architects, each produced urban design visions for Beacon Yards site that fully leveraged the city building opportunities of the MassDOT project. In addition to architects and urban designers, the teams included transportation planners and landscape architects enlisted through the efforts of the BSA Urban Design Committee. 2015 BSA President Tim Love AIA organized the event.

The design proposals are available online at <http://www.architects.org/programs-and-events/urban-design-workshops>, and a white paper on the issues and outcomes is attached.

As indicated in the design proposals, our prioritized recommendations are:

- **Include green stormwater infrastructure as an integrated component of the MassDOT contract** (that anticipates a future central open space).
- **Move the West Station access streets further west to reduce the height of the bridges and berms, making them more pedestrian-friendly.** This will create more land for development facing the Charles River.



- **Align the southern terminus of the West Station access streets with Malvern and Alcorn Streets** to allow for future direct pedestrian and bicycle access.
- **Consider the creation of a waterfront park** along the Charles River by realigning Storrow Drive.
- Study West Station to **ensure that multi-modal connectivity is established from both north and south** including opportunity for Bus Rapid Transit and DMU Service.

Of the schemes included in the ENF, Alternative 3J is preferred by the BSA as it reduces the width of Cambridge Street to a better scale by providing a second parallel street. That said, Multimodal Connectivity (p9-25) must be addressed particularly as it relates to the current plans. The proposed flyover ramps to West Station will not be pedestrian friendly in their current location and geometry, and will effectively create a giant wall in front of the Charles River. Future Development in the Project Area will be adversely affected by the East Drive Connector Ramp alignment in all Alternatives 3F through 3J.

We appreciate the enormous urban design opportunities of this project; opportunities – and responsibilities – that far exceed the specific requirements of a highway construction project. By intent or by default, the configuration of the roadways, ramps, stations, and associated infrastructure of the new Allston/Cambridge Interchange will dictate how surrounding parcels can be developed; how existing abutters and new users move through the site and access cultural, institutional, and natural resources; and how viable – or not – this new neighborhood will be. It's a once-in-a-century opportunity. MassDOT faces a tremendous and historic city making opportunity. The Boston Society of Architects believes that our recommended modifications to the proposed I-90 Allston Interchange project will set the stage not only for efficient road and rail infrastructure, but also for a vibrant new neighborhood that benefits the city and the region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "EGR", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Emily Grandstaff-Rice AIA
2014 President, Boston Society of Architects

Cc: MassDOT Highway Division, Environmental Services Section
Attn: James Cerbone
10 Park Plaza, Room 4260, Boston, MA 02116
James.Cerbone@state.ma.us



Conducted by Tim Love,
Alan Mountjoy, Alex Krieger,
and Kishore Varanasi

Krieger/Mountjoy Team
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Mattison, Herb Nolan,
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Scott Turner

Varanasi Team
Kishore Varanasi, Ganesh
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Ricco, Yichin Zhu, Matt
Urbanski, Chris Matthews,
Kyle Jonasen, Jason
Schrieber

Organizing Committee
Tim Love and Gretchen Schneider

Advisory Committee
Mike Davis, Rick Dimino, and Eric White

Panel Discussion Participants
Renée Loth, Paul McMorrow, Matthew Urbanski, Gary
Hilderbrand, Scott Paige Reed, and Tim Love



Beacon Yards Urban Design Workshop

The Beacon Yards Charrette

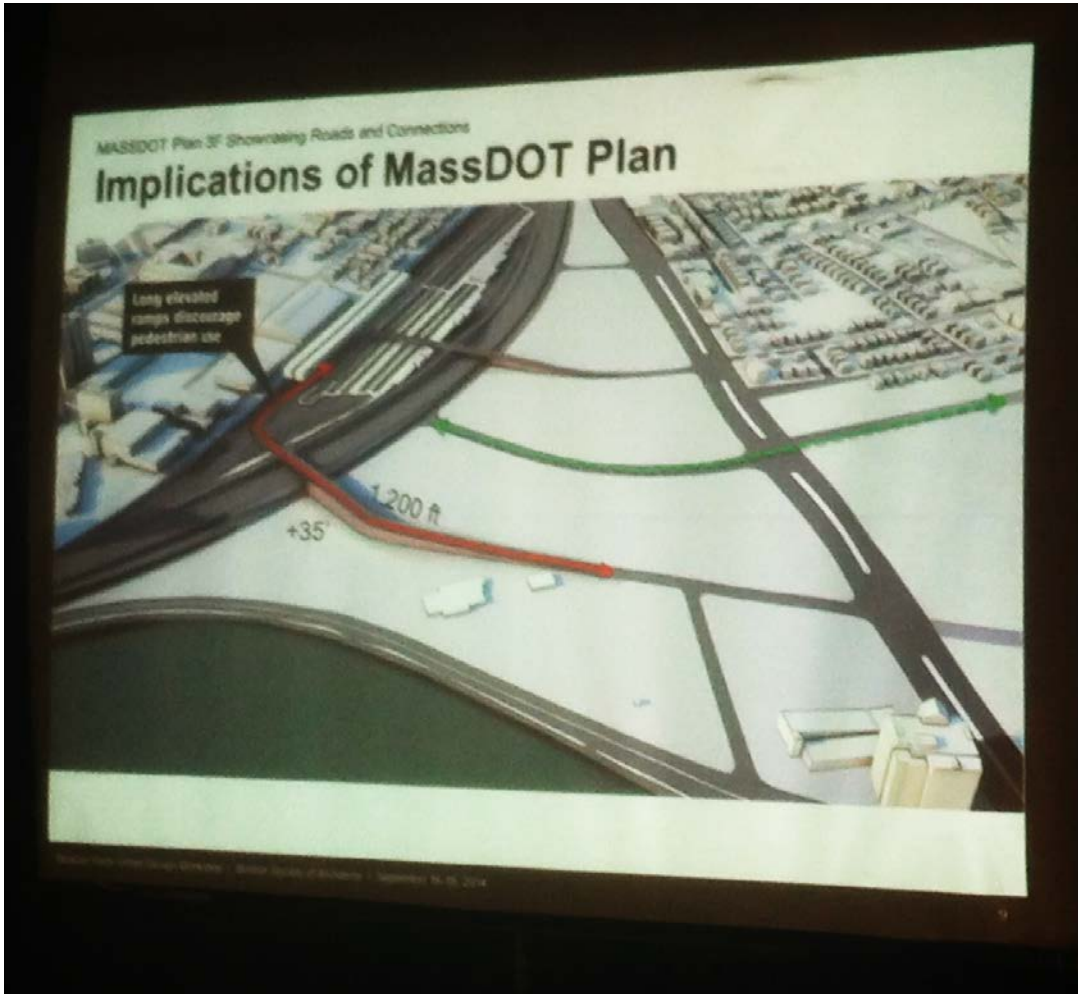
To launch the Urban Design Workshop program, the BSA hosted a two-day urban design charrette on September 17 and 18 that focused on the urban design issues raised by MassDOT's proposal for the redesign of the Allston/Cambridge interchange.

The charrette was organized by Tim Love, the BSA President-elect.

To set the stage for the charrette, Renee Loth, editor of *ArchitectureBoston* magazine, moderated a panel discussion on the evening of September 16. Tim Love introduced the scope and goals of the charrette and provided background information on MassDOT's ongoing process. After the presentation, Loth engaged Gary Hilderbrand, landscape architect at Reed Hilderbrand Associates; Matthew Urbanski, a landscape architect at MVVA; Paige Scott Reed, MassDOT's General Counsel, and Paul McMorrow, Associate Editor of *Commonwealth Magazine* and a contributor to the *Boston Globe*, in a lively discussion.

Two interdisciplinary urban design teams, led by Alex Krieger and Alan Mountjoy of NBBJ and Kishore Varanasi of CBT Architects, each produced urban design visions for the Beacon Yards site that fully leveraged the city building opportunities of the MassDOT interchange project. In addition to architects and urban designers, the teams included transportation planners and landscape architects enlisted through the efforts of the BSA Urban Design Committee.

Each team was provided with the same background information, layered maps, and a digital model. Teams got to work on the morning of Wednesday, September 17 and their proposals were unveiled at 4:00pm on Thursday, September 18 at a BSA-hosted public meeting at the Jackson Mann Community Center in Allston, near the Beacon Yards parcel. The proposals included a street and open space network, suggestions for the configuration of real estate parcels, general building massing, and strategies for linking Boston University to Harvard and the Beacon Yards site to the Charles River.



Above: A close-up of the public meeting presentation at the Jackson Mann Community Center.

Bottom left: Kishore Varanasi presents his team's scheme.

Bottom right: Alan Mountjoy presents his team's scheme.

Varanasi Team Proposal

The Varanasi Team’s urban design proposal embraces the idea that infrastructure is common ground and transforms it into a public realm asset.

Keeping in mind the theme of ‘living with infrastructure,’ the scheme proposes an elevated linear public space along the realigned Massachusetts Turnpike and Rail Corridor. This raised space would become an important link between Lower Allston, the Charles River, the newly proposed West Station, Boston University, and Magazine Beach across the river in Cambridge. The open space would fit within a network which originates at the intersection of North Harvard Street and Cambridge Street, then follows the curve of the relocated turnpike, and which finally culminates in a dramatic overlook before dropping down to the Charles River. This robust network would be the early action investment in Beacon Yards that corresponds with the reconstruction of the turnpike. This results in direct pedestrian and bike connections both between the Lower Allston neighborhood and the Charles River pedestrian and bicycle path, and between Commonwealth Avenue and Beacon Yards along the north-south axis. The perceived ground plane of the new district is raised up enough that it follows the elevated roadways connecting the turnpike and West Station, so the open space network bridges over a relocated section of Soldiers’ Field Road. In addition to serving as the primary place-making strategy for the proposal, the open space network adds value to the adjacent real estate parcels. Its orientation and organization provide value on all sides and great views toward the Boston skyline.

The Charles River Basin’s open space does so much to define the image of both Boston and Cambridge, but it breaks down when Soldier’s Field Road is squeezed close to the river at the Beacon Yards site. We propose transforming the public perception of Beacon Yards

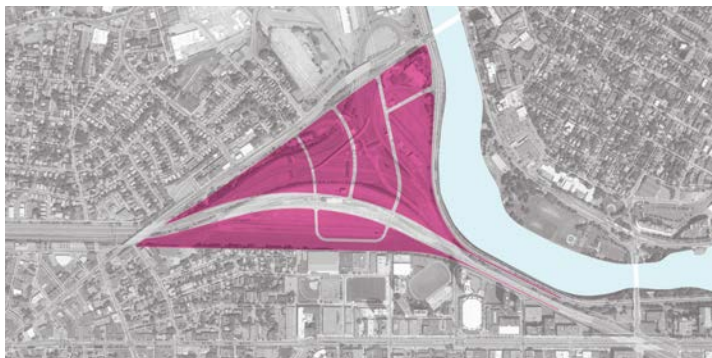


Beacon Yards is a piece of a bigger puzzle.

by creating generously-sized landmark open spaces that connect the neighborhoods and the Beacon Yards site to this pivotal and highly visible point on the river. This will accomplish for Beacon Yards what the Public Garden and Commonwealth Avenue did for the Back Bay. Despite its huge size, the site is currently hidden from view, and it is hard to place the area within the standard mental map of Boston. This open space could be called Beacon Common, and it would take its place alongside the world-class parks of Boston. More to the point, it would put Beacon Yards firmly on the map.



The project site has been entirely regraded to create a surface which meets the elevations of proposed on / off ramps. This new topography helps mediate the dramatic height required by the highway network and introduces a dramatic opportunity for public space.



The Varanasi team's vision for Beacon Yards shifts elevated ramps west and makes connections across Cambridge Street to Stadium Way and the proposed East Drive. This scheme pulls highway traffic away from the Charles River without discharging it into adjacent residential neighborhoods.



A continuous slope passes over the realigned Storrow Drive, connecting the Allston neighborhood directly to the river front.

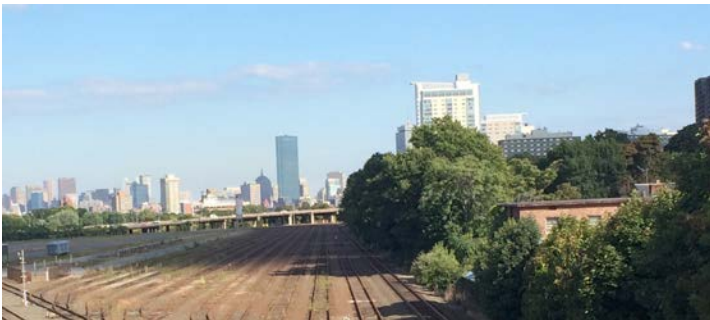


Cambridge St: From a traffic arterial to a pedestrian-friendly Main Street

The introduction of a new network of streets across the Beacon Yards offers an ideal opportunity to reduce the number traffic lanes in Cambridge St and to return the street back to pedestrians. A mix of high-density uses fronting wider sidewalks provides a distinctive pedestrian-friendly transition between existing neighborhood to the west and the proposed development east of Cambridge St.



Beacon Commons: A new addition to Boston's open space network made possible by 'pulling-in' Storrow Drive away from the water, and carving out a public green space in direct connection to water. The open space negotiates the grade difference between the station plaza and the riverfront while at the same time offering a strategic opportunity to channel the remediation dollars from infrastructure interventions into a tangible public amenity.



Living with Infrastructure: Proposed pedestrian greenway and bike path rises alongside realigned turnpike providing direct pedestrian access from Allston neighborhoods. The greenway open up at the West Station plaza offering sweeping views of the City before gradually making its way down to the waterfront and the proposed public green, Beacon Commons.



Significant observations and considerations:

1. A major open space generates the first phase roadway network, instead of imagining that the planning process generates leftover spaces to be filled in as open space.
2. If we elevate the ground plane of future open spaces and abutting development, we can camouflage the true elevation of bermed roadways and bridges.
3. Moving the access ramps to I-90 further west will create a better urban network and allow for more public space along the Charles River.
4. The new West Station should sit closer to the realigned turnpike, so the residents on the south side will be better protected and so the station can engage with the public realm.
5. Soldier's Field Road should be pulled away from the river bank and concealed by a land bridge, which allows the new park land to descend uninterrupted to the river.
6. The open space runs along the line of the old Salt River, and this allows us to create wetland habitat at the point where the two rivers meet, which will unlock additional environmental and experiential benefits.
7. A significant residential component will create a truly public and mixed-use neighborhood and waterfront.

Krieger/Mountjoy Proposal

The Krieger/Mountjoy team’s proposal capitalizes on the existing street grid to restore connectivity across the turnpike and to the river.

This team identified the following goals for future development over the existing railways and Turnpike:

- Reconnect across the “great divide” and ensure transit accessibility to the future West Station from the north and south.
- Improve connections to the Charles River and enhanced parkland condition at Soldiers Field Road.
- Maximize future development compatibility with Allston and Cambridge neighborhoods and with both Harvard and Boston University.

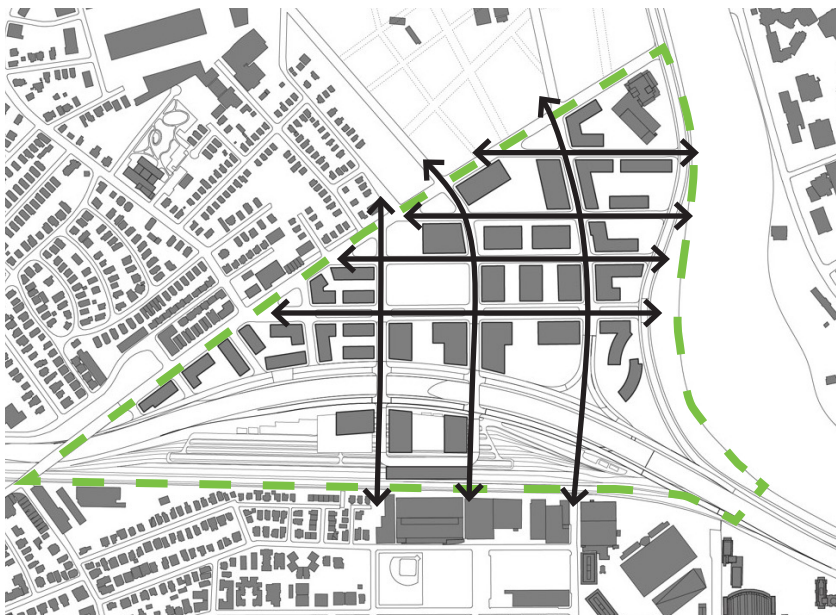
The proposal made several assumptions about existing conditions, such as predicting the future relocation of Houghton Chemical and

the connecting rail spur that currently constrains the relocation of Soldiers Field Road. The proposal also assumes that future use of the Grand Junction alignment will accommodate both pedestrian and rail traffic and that Harvard will implement a network of streets north of Cambridge Street—such as Stadium Way and East Drive—which will connect the Beacon Yards site to Western Avenue.

The team’s starting point for design was the Option 3F plan, presented to the community on September 3, 2014. Subsequent plans have made slight modifications to this alternative, including a second, parallel Cambridge Street that will reduce the cross section of both streets. In the team’s design proposal, they acknowledged the community desire for a “People’s Pike” that would provide an off-road multi-use path through Beacon Yards to the Charles River and Cambridge beyond. The team also concluded that the 3F scheme did not fully support a walkable future, especially for those approaching West Station, nor did it adequately connect to the Charles River or to Boston University.

The Krieger/Mountjoy proposal has several key imperatives:

- The foremost imperative is to create a pedestrian-friendly network of streets that reconnect Lower Allston over the Turnpike and Beacon Yards to Boston University and Commonwealth Avenue. The team acknowledges that implementing this street network may take decades, but feels strongly that the current roadway and ramp construction should be compatible with this long range



The Krieger/Mountjoy scheme responds to the existing street grid on both sides of the turnpike, allowing flexibility for long-term connectivity.

goal. Aligning new streets over Beacon Yards with existing streets such as Malvern and Alcorn would provide short-term legibility for pedestrians while allowing for long-term options for more connectivity over time.

- The second imperative is to improve connectivity from the Allston neighborhoods and Boston University to the Charles River. This would be achieved through a new network of east-west streets that lead directly to Soldiers Field Road perpendicular to the Charles River. This new street grid would provide both visual connectivity and support a pedestrian route leading from Harvard and Cambridge Streets to a pedestrian crossing to the Paul Dudley White Path either over or under Soldiers Field Road. A modified “People’s Pike” could be accommodated in a single widened street resembling Commonwealth Avenue. This connection to the river should be combined with a realignment of Soldiers Field Road to expand the width of parklands along the Charles River.

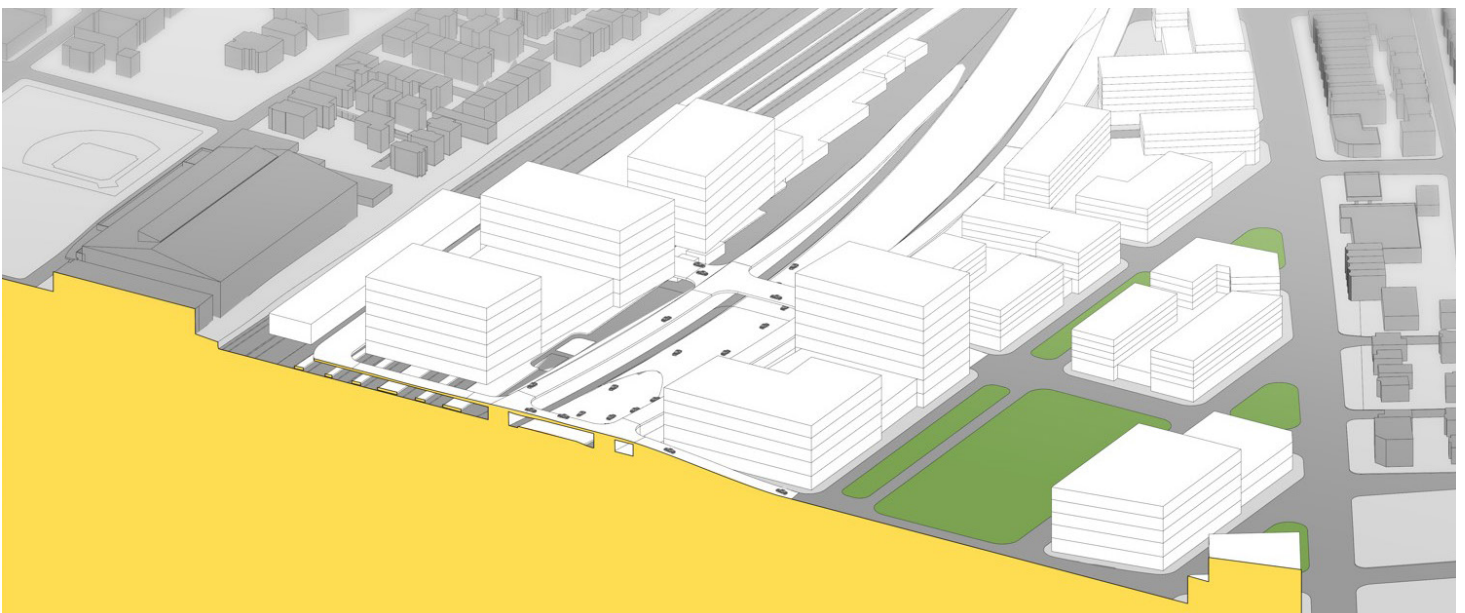
- The third imperative is to scale the future development at Beacon Yards to relate to and enhance the existing neighborhoods, and to provide future developable parcels for a wide range of uses. The team has envisioned mixed-use and retail development scaled to the existing neighborhood fabric on the south side of Cambridge Street facing the Lower Allston residential neighborhoods near North Harvard Street. At the center of the site and adjacent to the Turnpike, they proposed larger parcels and taller buildings, suitable for commercial and research facilities associated with Harvard’s proposed Enterprise Research Campus north of Cambridge Street. Adjacent to the Charles River, they recommended high-rise housing or hotels—similar to those nearby—that take advantage of the views and access to recreation that is afforded at this site.



A view of the plan looking west; the team proposed increased open space along the Charles River and an orientation of the entire site toward the waterfront, with improved pedestrian accommodations across Soldier’s Field Road and over the turnpike.



The scheme provides for views to the river from Charles Street, with a “People’s Pike” promenade that connects pedestrians and cyclists to open space along the Charles River, the Paul Dudley White Path and beyond.



A section along Stadium Way intersecting the new West Station, possible air rights development, and a proposed neighborhood-serving park.



The proposed land use program for the Krieger/Mountjoy scheme responds to the existing context: housing and ground level retail are located adjacent to Allston's residential community; commercial and research buildings continue the fabric of Harvard's proposed Enterprise Research Campus; and residential and hotel uses line the parcels along the Charles River, taking advantage of views to downtown Boston.

The BSA Urban Design Workshops (UDW)

In the fall of 2014, the Boston Society of Architects launched a new program designed to engage architects, stakeholders, and public officials in early-stage thinking about major urban design initiatives.

These workshops provide a valuable resource to public agencies and major property owners that could benefit from big-picture design thinking as part of a larger planning and public outreach process. Modeled on existing programs such as the NEA's Mayors' Institute on City Design, ULI's technical advisory panel team workshops, and the AIA's RUDAT program, the Urban Design Workshops (UDW) pull together relevant professional experts, including architects, urban designers, transportation planners, and real estate experts — among others—to provide a holistic and design-focused look at particular urban areas.

The workshops involve a detailed briefing about the project issues, a moderated panel discussion to tease out the political and community issues surrounding the project, and a two-day working session that results in both design deliverables and a list of recommendations to inform and enrich the larger public discourse. Workshop leaders are invited by the UDW program director (the BSA President or his/her delegate), and they then work with volunteers culled through a selection process to assess design and software skills and interest level. The BSA's Urban Design Committee manages this process. The kick-off panel discussion and the presentation of the workshop "results" are open to the public.

The key to the success of the UDW workshops

is engagement with the media during the planning stages. Targeted reporters and commentators are invited to participate in the kick-off panel discussion and cover the full scope of the workshop. In addition, the BSA encourages partnerships with professional organizations such as the APA, ASLA, and ULI. To maintain focus on the best unbiased professional-level thinking, the BSA has chosen not to partner with advocacy groups like Livable Streets, WalkBoston, or the Boston Harbor Association. We assume that these groups are engaged in the public debate about the projects or sites through their typical advocacy work.

In order to keep the program in the public eye while at the same time staying mindful of costs and organizational effort, two workshops will be held a year. The topics will be determined based on the relevancy of the design issue, the relative interest of public agency stakeholders, and the BSA's ongoing priorities as outlined by the Civic Engagement Task Force and supported by the Executive Committee of the Board.

Post-Workshop Initiatives and Impact

After the workshop, follow-up presentations of the charrette results were presented to the MassDOT project management and consultant team on Tuesday, October 21 and the planning staff of the BRA on Wednesday, October 22.

As demonstrated in the design proposals, the prioritized recommendations to MassDOT were:

- Consider green stormwater infrastructure as an integrated component of the MassDOT contract (that anticipates a future central open space).
- Consider moving West Station access streets further west to reduce the height of the bridges and berms, making them more pedestrian-friendly. This will also create more Charles River-facing developable land.
- Consider aligning the West Station access streets with Malvern and Alcorn Streets to allow for future direct pedestrian and bicycle access.

MassDOT was receptive to the recommendations and committed to considering them in future iterations of the plan. The BRA was also receptive to the proposals and recommendations and plans to use some of the analysis done by the teams to inform and illustrate their own comments as the project progresses.

In addition, the key concepts and strategies of the two proposals were taken up by Tim Love's Graduate Research Studio at Northeastern University, a full-year design studio (2014-2015) focused on the urban design opportunities of Beacon Yards. Love engaged the Charles River Watershed Association, BRA, MassDOT, and MassDOT's Task Force as part of the on-going research and design initiative. Both MassDOT and the BRA will schedule follow-up meetings with Love and his students as their work advances.

