

## Franklin Street Redevelopment Study: January 29 Public Workshop

The first Public Workshop on the Franklin Street Redevelopment Study Phase 2 was held on the evening of January 29<sup>th</sup> in the Rines Auditorium at the Portland Public Library. Turnout was good, with about 140 people attending, and a lot of valuable public input was received.

A total of eight information stations with displays and graphics of various aspects of the Franklin Street project were set up, as follows:

- Station 1: Multi-Way Boulevard (Alternative 3)
- Station 2: New Development and Parking
- Station 3: Roundabouts
- Station 4: Transportation Choices: Using and Sharing Space
- Station 5: Reconnecting Cross Streets, Crossing Franklin Safely
- Station 6: Urban Parkway (Alternative 2)
- Station 7: Public Greenspace on Franklin Street
- Station 8: Urban Street (Alternative 1)

Various displays showing current conditions along Franklin Street were also set up at the sign-in station at the entrance to the meeting.

Each of the eight Stations was manned by members of the Public Advisory Committee and city staff, who explained to the roving attendees what the display was about, solicited comments, and answered questions on that Station's topic.

A new interactive website, <http://franklinstreet.mindmixer.com> was also set up to provide another way to gather public input from people who could not attend the Public Workshop. A summary of the public feedback gathered from the workshop and that website over the past several weeks is below.

A second Public Meeting will be scheduled for sometime in late spring, when a set of alternatives that have been refined based on this input will be presented for the public's thoughts and comment.

## **Station 1: Multi Way Boulevard**

### **Overall**

The most common reaction was that this alternative was too big, had too much pavement and too many car lanes. There were some clear divides between those that felt dividing slow local/bike traffic from fast through-traffic was a good thing and those that wanted a narrower road with slower traffic speeds and shared lanes.

### **Vehicle Traffic**

A large swath of people had concerns that traffic would move too fast, particularly in the travel lanes. The 2-3 lanes in each direction (including shared streets) were cited as encouraging this and as being excessive. Two separate people noted concerns about trucks navigating turns. Counter point on the number of lanes: a few people did voice opinions in favor of the shared streets as a way to move bicycle traffic off of the main road.

### **Bikes:**

The majority of bike related comments did not favor separating bikes from traffic. The shared streets were viewed with skepticism and seen as unpredictable spaces of car/bike conflict. Comments offering suggestions favored bicycles sharing traffic lanes with cars, though some liked traditional non-separated bike lanes, especially on uphill segments. But the split between hard-core bicyclists and recreational riders is clear. A comment was made regarding how car lanes are always clearer in winter than separated bike lanes.

### **Pedestrians:**

Well-constructed sidewalks and increased pedestrian access was desired for the entire corridor by most commenters on the subject. Specifics: Bayside Trail should cross at Union Branch RR corridor, and lighting should be part of improvements.

### **Green Space/Lincoln Park/Medians**

Clear disagreement here between people that want Lincoln Park restored and people that would like to see the space used for future development. Median should be large enough to contain trees .

### **Building Height/Design**

People were excited by the opportunity for new development, though had concerns about building height and massing. Wanted a variety of heights, some glass and steel, and care not to block views (of Observatory).

### **Street Connections**

Positive comments on reconnecting all the street grids.

## Station 2: New Development and Parking

### Overall

Very large developments were disliked, whether they were tall, wide or just large properties with one property owner. Despite this, there was a general desire for and understanding of the need for higher densities and increased housing. Many people championed variety and quality in height, design, building materials, and use. Mixed use and mixed income areas were seen as desirable. A note to think carefully about where we place the gateway, and it should be inviting w open space. Further up the hill?

*The Mindmixer comments* on development had more votes placing development on the Cumberland to Middle swath. In the commentary, there were comments on keeping aesthetic in tune with current buildings, need for cheaper retail/restaurant space, need for affordable housing, importance of Congress St. crossing, importance of access to Lincoln Park from India St., no open parking lots. A small but significant group used this as a place to plead for keeping vehicles free-flowing, particularly to the ferry terminal for islanders and tourists.

### Green/Open space

All positives about greenspace and the community gardens. This area should be expanded as a bike/ped destination. Make greenspace requirement part of development deals. Be careful to make sure city can handle maintenance.

Tree comments from Mindmixer:

*How important is it to add new trees in the Franklin St. Plan? (Choose 1)*

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| Please add as many new trees as possible            | 72 votes |
| Trees are okay, but be mindful of expense           | 20 votes |
| Private fundraising is a good way to add more trees | 23 votes |
| I don't care about trees; Franklin St is a road     | 16 votes |

Comments: Trees are all good, and have many psychological benefits, why was cost attached to this and nothing else, want trees on sidewalks, shaded boulevard look is good, want bigger trees!

### Parking

Some level of on-street parking was generally greeted favorably though some felt that it should not be on both sides of the street at the same time. A number of people noted that it depended a lot on what types of development were eventually built. Surface parking was not liked. Parking garages had many votes against it but also some in favor of them as a way to reduce surface parking. First floor parking was not liked as it did not

present a friendly face to the street. A couple of people felt strongly that back in parking would be a good thing. Overall, an understanding that parking is needed especially in retail locations and it can slow traffic but want it to be safe for bikes (door issue, which was repeated in many locations).

*The Mindmixer feedback* on on-street parking fell out at 32 people for it, with 24 people against it. Some of the people against it were those who wanted Franklin to remain an arterial, some were those who don't like cars and think we should not accommodate them. Most who wanted it were flexible in where it went, tying it to development. Towards that end, many comments were that it was needed more on the south side. Suggestions to meter it, test it, and create car-share parking by Whole Foods.

### **Building height/design**

People have strong opinions on building design. 4-5 stories were generally seen as a good building height, though significant groups were ok with taller in specific places (the spine). But some felt that over 4 stories would be too tall anywhere in the corridor. Others said to zone for it in a few places to make sure it only goes there. The "spine" of the road (around Cumberland and Congress) was most often seen as the place to put taller buildings (6 stories was the popular limit though many saw that as too tall) with some people wanting to limit it only to the downtown side of Franklin. Frequently, building height was seen as "stepping down" from there in either direction.

Building mass was also a concern with a large number of people speaking out against unbroken walls of buildings. Some specifically saying that façade changes were not enough to break this wall; buildings needed to be physically separate. A large number of people called for "good", "appropriate", and/or "innovative" design. The most common thread was diversity of size, height and building design.

*Mindmixer comments*, including graphics, are in separate document.

### **Uses**

Mixed use and housing for all was the theme. Note on better use for east end of cemetery.

## Station 3: Roundabouts

### Overall

While overall people felt that in theory, roundabouts could be good for traffic flow, there were a lot of concerns about their appropriateness for Franklin. People felt they took up a large amount of useful land, that they might hinder truck and/or bus access, and about their effects on cyclists and pedestrians. People also cited them as “confusing”, “scary”, “unsafe” and “suburban”. People were mostly more likely to support smaller roundabouts rather than large ones. Two-lane roundabouts in particular were seen as too much and unsafe. A significant number of people were opposed to the very idea of roundabouts. But a similar number felt they were a great idea.

*Mindmixer comments were strongly against roundabouts, primarily because of the concern about pedestrian access as well as a lack of understanding regarding their utility. The no's were bike/ped/safety related, along with a handful who felt that they are not urban. This was one of the most active spots in terms of commenting on others' comments. The yesses were positive about SMALL roundabouts, thought they could handle traffic well, make a good statement at both ends. This was a very active portion of the site.*

### Marginal Way

The Franklin and Marginal Way intersection received the most support for a roundabout, particularly a one-lane version if it could handle the volume of traffic and trucks/buses. A number of people felt that this was a very good idea to address the problems of this intersection. Very few people that entertained the idea of roundabouts at all voiced the opinion that a roundabout was a *bad* idea here. A question: *If you had a roundabout at Marginal would it be necessary to have one at Fox St. too? So that traffic doesn't stack up into the roundabout?*

### Commercial

People were more split on this location with many people in favor and many people opposed to using a roundabout here. People were particularly concerned with a roundabouts ability to serve the large pedestrian and tour bus traffic flows in this area.

### Bike/Pedestrian

The primary opposition to roundabouts was in terms of bike and pedestrian safety. They were seen as confusing, unsafe, time consuming, and difficult for both populations to navigate. Safety was the primary concern in regards to cyclists. Pedestrians were as concerned about the how they would navigate a roundabout and how much more time would be involved as they were in the safety aspects.

## Station 4: Transportation Choice

### **Bike**

People were generally in favor of bike infrastructure, but a serious debate is taking place over what that infrastructure should be. A large number of people favored separated bike facilities, likely with parking between them and the car lanes. They felt this was safe and accommodating of all users, but were cautious about potential maintenance costs and sensitive to the additional right of way width/paved space. An equally vocal contingent felt that these types of facilities were sacrificing money and space for dubious safety gains, citing intersection and pedestrian conflicts as well as added difficulty making left turns. This group largely felt that a traditional bike lane was plenty sufficient for an urban area and that the best and safest place for bikes was in the travel lane. Both groups agreed that lower traffic speeds would be good. Completely separated bike infrastructure received some positive feedback but was mostly dismissed as impractical, limiting, and costly in the urban environment.

*The Mindmixer feedback* was highly in favor of a multi-use path. An assumption could be made that we got a wider group with a higher percentage of recreational riders.

### **Bike Travel Options: Instant Poll**

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| Multi Use Path:                         | 71 votes |
| Bike lane between parking and sidewalk: | 48 votes |
| Classic bike lane:                      | 39 votes |
| Raised Cycle Track:                     | 38 votes |

### **Ped/Shared streets**

People were largely skeptical of the utility of shared space in the corridor. They were leery of sharing pedestrian space with cars for the most part and the potential safety issue for blind and disabled people was noted. There was more support as the presence of cars diminished: the photo of shared space in Cambridge, which looked closer to a pedestrian mall, was highly rated.

### **Transit**

Transit met with much approval but also with skepticism. As we have said, it is outside the current scope and some people seemed to think that the reality was too far in the future. For some people, this meant we should not save space, particularly with no inkling of how it would work. For others it meant we should be working harder to make it happen now. A few voices wanted to see parking around Marginal Way that would feed directly to transit and discourage car use on the peninsula.

*The Mindmixer feedback is shown below:*

**Transit on Franklin St: Should city reserve space for dedicated ROW for future transit?  
(Could choose 1 and add an idea)**

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| Yes, reserve the space                   | 34 votes |
| I'd rather have more bike/ped facilities | 36 votes |
| Use space for private development        | 8 votes  |
| Use space for trees and parks            | 11 votes |
| I'd use extra space for:                 |          |

- Trolleys/streetcars: 2
- Bike/ped/bus service:
- Buses
- Tunnel
- Train station
- Franklin not ideal transit route
- Crosstown shuttle from midtown (Bayside) to water

## Station 5: Cross Streets

### Overall

Most participants felt that pedestrian connections needed to be improved throughout the corridor. A large and vocal group felt that *all* past cross streets should be reconnected for all modes of travel. Justifications for this ranged from accessibility and traffic flow to sense of place to moral imperative. The streets most desired to reconnect were Federal, Oxford and Newbury. People were in favor of strong visual pedestrian crossings. Opinions on raised crossings averaged out to a mild skepticism of maintenance costs and plowing issues.

The tunnel was brought up at this station with the proposal left out for people to see. It received little comment though what was given was positive.

*The Mindmixer feedback* had an overall small but significant number of comments supporting the “initial proposal” of a tunnel, even though it was not one of the topic areas.

### Oxford

It was widely felt that some kind of connection across Franklin should be established here. A vocal group of people felt that it should be pedestrian only. This was in part to worries that putting a full street here would impinge on the space currently used by the community gardens. *Please note that Noyes currently has a parking lot adjacent to their building where the connection would go, and so is against a road connection, but fine with a bike/ped connection. Also, recent info indicates that the city no longer owns the ROW on the south side of Franklin – not sure about the other side.*

### Federal and Newbury

Overall people felt that both these streets should be connected for all modes. Some felt one or the other should not be connected in favor of the other but the group was fairly evenly split on which. At both locations, a pedestrian bridge was proposed. While some support was shown for this there was also opposition.

### Bayside Trail

It was noted in several places that the connection across Franklin is truly bad – worse than having no trail at all.

## **Station 6: Urban Parkway**

### **Overall**

People seemed lukewarm on this alternative with multiple people saying they preferred the Urban Street alternative.

### **Bike/Ped**

People liked the sidewalks on each side. While some people liked how the bike lane was separated from traffic, a vocal group disagreed saying that bike traffic belonged in the street. Overwhelmingly people on both sides of this disagreement felt that there should be bike components on both sides of the street rather than on just one.

### **Median**

People did not like medians. The existing large median was unanimously disliked and the proposed medians were not liked much more. A few voices asked for trees in a median.

### **Development**

The primary opinion people expressed on development was that it should be moved closer to the sidewalk rather than having landscaped areas between the sidewalk and buildings.

### **Lincoln Park**

People here were still on both sides of the issue in regards to the desire to expand Lincoln Park. Many felt that it should be expanded, most to its full original extent. A smaller group disagreed with this, feeling that the space in between Lincoln Park and a new alignment of Franklin should be developed to bring people and activity to the park.

## Station 7: Green Space

### Lincoln Park

Everyone seems to agree that it is not living up to its potential now and that more activity needs to be added through programming, landscaping and connections to the city. Development around the park other than the Franklin side is widely approved if it has ground level commercial elements to bring people to the area. Expansion of the park is a very contentious issue with groups of people on both sides. Those against expansion see little to be gained by it. They feel the space can be much better used in improving the road and adding development to bring people and activity to the area. Those in favor of expanding the park mostly wish to do so for historic reasons, though they often feel that the expansion will make the park more attractive for people to use. As their reasoning is historically motivated, many are taking a hard line and are not interested in a compromise that expands the park but not all the way to the previous dimensions.

*From the Mindmixer site:* Here is one of the biggest differences in terms of opinion: The large majority of people preferred to create more activity in and around the park to enlarging it. See below. Written comments were similar to those gathered in the meeting.

*Lincoln Park: How should we improve it? (Could choose 2 and add idea)*

|                                       |          |
|---------------------------------------|----------|
| Restore to historic footprint:        | 34 votes |
| Make it bigger but not historic size: | 23 votes |
| Surround with activity:               | 74 votes |
| Create more stuff IN the park:        | 56       |
| Leave it the way it is:               | 9        |

### Community Gardens/Boyd Street Community Gardens

People were very supportive of community gardens in general and the Boyd St. Gardens specifically. A number of people expressed concern that reconnecting Oxford St. would conflict with the gardens. The group was split on which should take priority in the event of that conflict. Those that favored the road connection still did not want to lose the gardens and wondered about moving them. Those favoring the gardens argued that this would be difficult, expensive, and ultimately not as good.

*Mindmixer feedback:*

*Community Gardens: Should we reserve space? Open ended.*

|     |          |
|-----|----------|
| Yes | 31 votes |
| No  | 6 votes  |

The no votes were based on using the land for housing, is this the best location for this asset, they should be sprinkled around town, etc. Suggestions for improving included make it a central use, not an edge use, improve access, and create an edge. The yes votes were all very positive, with several who use it saying what a great space it is and how it can co-exist with other buildings.

### **Median**

People did not like large medians. They were seen as “dead”, “useless” and a waste of space. People advocated for keeping the median as narrow as possible in order to open up more space on the edges of the road for other purposes. A few people did want to maintain a median wide enough to support large mature trees.

## **Station 8: Urban Street Alternative**

### **Overall**

This alternative was well liked overall, with numerous positive comments and many saying it was the best of the three presented alternatives as a whole. It was seen as “friendly”, and closest to the historic pattern. People mostly liked the amount of infill development and subsequent activity as reflected in wide sidewalks serving that development. The primary areas of debate were; parking, bike lanes, and Lincoln Park. Some commented that additional greenspace and trees would improve it.

### **Parking**

Many people liked the prevalence of on-street parking and the fact that it was parallel parking, though there were a couple dissenting voices. People felt that this amount of on street parking would be sufficient and that off-street parking should be limited or non-existent.

### **Bike Lanes**

A few people liked the idea of buffering bike lanes from the road with parking, a large and vocal contingent did not. A number of arguments against buffered bike lanes were put forth. It was felt that they were not safer or more convenient in this configuration. People also noted that buffered bike lanes are not good for downhill grades or for stretches with frequent cross streets.

### **Lincoln Park**

While the C-C’ cross section that includes Lincoln Park showed two separate proposals, neither reflected an expansion of Lincoln Park and a number of people expressed their opinion that the park should be expanded to some degree if not to its original extent. There were a few dissenting opinions stating that some development between the park and Franklin would do a lot toward adding the activity and drawn that the park needs.