

FINAL ASSIGNMENT: NORTH ALLSTON

The major assignment for this class will be done in teams of three students each. The task is to write and illustrate an imagined account of the making and the realization of a Big Plan. As the subject of the story each team will tell we have selected the new development on the land owned by Harvard University in the North Allston area of the City of Boston. The beginning of the story will be told to us by the city (represented by Rebecca Barnes, Chief Planner, Boston Redevelopment Authority). The remainder of the story will be told by the team in its own presentation and report must take into account the perspectives of all the actors and stake-holders in these developments.

Allston Landing is the name associated with an extensive area of land in railway/trucking use recently purchased by Harvard with a view to accommodating the future growth of the university and, in all likelihood, associated private development for housing, research, cultural and commercial activities that are attracted to the vicinity of major research universities. The core of Harvard's campus is surrounded by existing residential neighbors most of whom are reluctant to see any further development of the university in their back yard, hence the university's interest in acquiring land beyond that core but still relatively nearby. Some of this land was added to Harvard's portfolio in ways invisible to the neighborhood, a practice Harvard has ceased but which many believe has left a residue of resentment or at least a readiness to challenge every new development proposal the university makes. On the other hand, universities such as Harvard and MIT have been shown to be a critical ingredient in the economic growth of the region as well as very important to the more local economies such as those of Boston and Cambridge. For example, about a quarter of the jobs in bio-technology in Massachusetts are in Cambridge - and most of these within a ten minute walk to MIT.

The guidelines for development are beginning to be circulated and discussed on the website: www.gcassoc.com/planning/nallston, but no proposals have yet been approved or begun. The website represents the first - and difficult - step in reconciling the urgently needed expansion of Harvard's campus, the neighborhoods' concerns about housing, traffic congestion and local amenities, and the City of Boston's interest in meeting both institutional and community goals and needs.

The assignment for the class is to write a paper that IMAGINES what would have to happen if the sites now owned by Harvard were to be developed, broadly as sketched on the website. The following questions should be considered:

- What uses might be accommodated?
- What advocacy by what groups would need to be put in place?
- What opposition would be mounted?
- How might this be done?

What sequence of technical studies would need to be undertaken, beyond those already done?

Whose commitment needs to be gained, when in the process, how, and in what form?

How might the financing for such a development be put in place?

How will the interests of Harvard University, local residents, local businesses, special interest groups, etc., be heard and acted upon in the process?

How might a Citizens Advisory Committee be composed with respect to your selected cluster of sites, who would they hear from and what criteria might they use to reach their conclusions?

What force might their conclusions carry?

In a summing up, what will be the arguments made for the development proposals you have imagined, what is their performance in terms of overall desirability as a public good and their feasibility in terms of implementation?

Draw upon the cases we have looked at in the course as a source of principles and ideas for addressing these issues in the making of big plans and big projects. We recognize that your ideas will necessarily be speculation: our interest is that the speculation be reasonably informed by the histories of the, perhaps, comparable projects we have examined in class. We will be looking for imagination, logic and plausibility in your accounts, not certainty. One possible way to imagine your presentation is to put yourselves in the place of a lecturer in the Big Plans class in the year 2025 at MIT invited to tell the story to the class.

It is proposed that you work in self-selected teams of three to undertake the assignment. There is no specified length for your paper but we imagine that 15 to 20 double spaced pages, including maps and illustrations, would be needed to assemble and present your case.

Research sources to consult include articles, reports, speeches, newspaper accounts, interviews - if you can get them - and any other material you can find. You should cite the sources you use, whether quoted or paraphrased, using one of the standard formats for footnotes and references.

To tell the full story of the development of the Harvard sites you may want to imagine the content yet unpublished documents, the results of yet unformed committees, the attitudes of yet un-elected governors and so on. This approach is appropriate providing you have made clear the content of imagined documents, attitudes, etc and have cited them appropriately.

Final papers will be due on Wednesday May 7 and well rehearsed presentations will be made on Wednesday May 7 and Monday May 12.

For the presentations, we will invite BRA and Harvard planners, consultant planners from Goody Clancy, and neighborhood representatives who are collaborating on developing the current plan for the North Allston area.