

FALL 2004
MIT SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING
11.328J/4.240J: URBAN DESIGN SKILLS
OBSERVING, INTERPRETING & REPRESENTING THE CITY

PART B – PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT (OBJECTIVE READING)

You will need to return to an area of East Cambridge a couple times to complete each of the following components. You might want to take photos while in the field to remind you of your visit when you return home.

Purpose:

To document what you see about the physical environment in a more abstract, analytical way. The goal will be to see what impact the physical environment has on the way people use space (Part B).

Task:

The goal is to pull apart the components that comprise the built fabric of the city in order to understand what impact each of them has on the way people behave in the city. You should evaluate these components and try to understand what characteristics you feel support activity and what ones do not. Take a position on what physical attributes are positive and what ones are not. Use one page of diagrams (with supporting point form notes on that page) for each of the following components – in each case, keep in mind what impact the physical characteristics of these components has on the quality of the environment.

1) Streets Types:

Identify and draw a profile (in section, or elevation) of the various street types you observe in East Cambridge. Remember, the goal is not to document every street, but only the handful (3-4?) major types of streets that you perceive. Pace the typical streets by foot to get a sense of the width (measure your pace). Count the floors and deduce the building heights. Note the characteristics of the street using the criteria we identified in class (landscape, width, building height, transit, median, setback, etc.). Indicate on an overall plan of East Cambridge where one of each street type exists.

2) Block Types:

Identify the typical block types of the area. Draw the plan of the block indicating the basic dimensions (including sidewalks) and, in very general terms, the parcelization of the blocks (i.e. what is the typical lot width? Are they consistent or do they vary in width?). If possible, draw the cross-section through these block

types. Identify only the typical conditions rather than every block – you are trying to distill the complex network down to only a few typical types. Indicate on an overall plan where one of each type exist.

3) Building Types:

Identify the major building types of the area. Remember, building type refers to the underlying configuration of a building, rather than its style or its use. Again, there are probably only a handful of different building types – try to distill what you observe down to only a few. Think of the following criteria : building size, attached/detached, relationship to street, etc.

Indicate on an overall plan roughly where one of each building type exists.

4) Open Spaces:

Diagram the location and type of major open spaces of the area on a map, keeping in mind the various types

5) Land Uses:

Make a diagram outlining the basic land uses (residential, commercial, retail, industrial, etc) of the area, using the standard planning color code system.

The goal is not to identify every building (or even every street) but, in general, the kinds of uses you find in different parts of the city. Make a plan outlining, in general, where various uses exist.

6) Transportation:

Indicate on a map the location of the major transit nodes in and immediately around the observed area.. Make note of what uses are in the immediate vicinity. How far (in walking time) is it from the major places of activities or to these transit stops?

7) Skeleton:

Draw a diagram that indicates the major places and streets. Think of this as the most important places in the area.

Deliverables: One page of diagrams (supplemented with very short notes) for each topic (7 pages of diagrams and point-form notes).