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BAY VILLAGE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION, INC.

Hi Bay Village Neighbors:

We've been surprisingly busy despite the ongoing pandemic.

**SPECIAL TOPICS:**

**Mayoral Candidate Introduction: Councilor Andrea Campbell**

The mayoral election year is now in full swing, and on Monday we hosted our first candidate, District 4 Councilor Andrea Campbell. For those who missed the meeting, you can learn more about her campaign at:

<https://andreacampbell.org/>

While we will work hard not to 'play favorites' amongst the candidates, Councilor Campbell deserves kudos for being the first to reach out to us and for doing a good job of fielding tough questions about her positions on rent regulations, police patrols and budgets, exam school entrance policies, and the future of the BPDA.

I strongly encourage neighbors to join these sessions and I'd love to hear questions from a broader cross-section of Bay Village rather than just from the "usual suspects" like myself. If you aren't able to make a particular meeting, or if you just don't like hearing the sound of your own voice on Zoom, email us and we'll do our best to get your questions asked and answered!

Remember, our votes matter and our engagement matters. Turnout in City elections has historically been frustratingly low, and Bay Village can have disproportionate clout to the extent we continue to show up on election day. At the May 3 Meeting, I believe we will have the opportunity to meet three candidates for At-Large Council positions, Said Abdikarim, Alex Gray, and David Halbert.

**Development Votes:**

**Our Lady of Victories, Isabella Street**

Harry Collings (Advisor), Ed Doherty (Developer – CEO KEMS Corporation) and Rebecca Berry and Tony Hsiao (Architects – Finegold Alexander) presented again their proposal to convert Our Lady of Victories at 25 Isabella Street into a 26-unit condominium development with approximately 21 parking spaces. 3 on-site units will be designated to meet the City's affordable housing requirements. I'm attaching a link to their BPDA Article 80 Small Projects filing with this email.

The proposal as submitted to the BPDA and presented to us on Monday is essentially the same as the team reviewed with us a few months ago – albeit with a few new renderings from different perspectives and a bit more specificity on a couple of small design details likely to be missed by all but the most keen observer.

The Executive Committee voted overwhelmingly in favor of a motion not to oppose the project as submitted, subject to continued review with the neighborhood of any design clarifications or modifications and preparation of a thoughtful plan to mitigate the impacts of construction. There were four abstentions and no opposing votes. The next steps for the developer are a public BPDA hearing at 6 PM on Wednesday, April 14<sup>th</sup>, followed by a Zoning Board of Appeals hearing to be scheduled.

I recognize that not everyone in the neighborhood is delighted by this project. Proponents note that KEMS is the third developer to take a crack at this, and this proposal is meaningfully smaller and much more architecturally sympathetic to the existing church building than previous proposals. The two main objections that I've heard are i) that 21 parking spaces under the rear of the building won't be sufficient to keep condo owners from adding to the demand for street space and ii) the penthouse floor of the addition, although set back from all sides and not visible from Isabella Street, adds another 10+ feet to a building that is already the tallest on the block and, at 76 feet above Isabella Street, significantly taller than the zoning cap.

In the final analysis, I don't feel that this development is worth a huge kerfuffle, and I hope that differing opinions won't lead to unbridgeable divisions between members of our community.

To the parking issue, while I suspect the developer would love to squeeze in a few more spaces, we know that the City is entirely unsympathetic to demands for parking this close to the Back Bay transit hub. Reasonable people may disagree about the functionality of the T, but I doubt appeals for more parking would be well received by the ultimate decision makers. Moreover, this proposal features large units – the smallest is about 800 square feet, and there are six three-bedroom units, several over 2000 square feet. An alternative development might well have more, smaller units, netting an even less favorable parking ratio, and we know that the ZBA has been quite willing to waive parking requirements entirely for downtown developments. My sense is that a parking:unit ratio of about 0.7, which is well within BTG guidelines, is about as favorable as we could reasonably expect.

I'm more sympathetic to concerns about height, which obviously requires a zoning variance. I think that the biggest concern is that this will set an unhelpful precedent. The counterargument is that a church redevelopment is a special case – there are necessarily some costs and space inefficiencies that come with preserving the historic church facade and parts of the shell. Also, the additional height is minimally visible from ground level. It is clear from my conversations with members of the Executive Committee that no one regards this as a precedent at all relevant to greenfield development on empty lots or re-working of buildings that lack the significance of this church.

## **Pergola at 27 Isabella Street (Marc Condo Building)**

Amar Tanna then presented revised plans to install a pergola on the existing roofdeck associated with PH 9 at 27 Isabella Street. The presentation included specific details confirming that the roof membrane of the building would not be breached and the structure would be strongly secured against wind.

This was unanimously approved by the Executive Committee, as the pergola is not visible from Isabella Street and only minimally visible from Columbus Avenue, the condo association does not object, and other residents of Isabella Street have spoken in favor.

The latter point is particularly important to me, as it is also in the context of the Our Lady of Victories development. BVNA has historically been dominated by voices from east of Arlington Street. When I moved to Bay Village 23 years ago, we struggled to get participation from “beyond Arlington” – many residents there were young, transient renters, and these blocks were too easily forgotten. The City did its best to forget them as well – sidewalks seemed to be the last to be repaired, and the failed Columbus Center project left a mess in its wake until we kicked up a fuss. The ugly, anachronistic streetlamps still bother me. Nevertheless, I think we all can agree that Isabella Street looks much better than it did not long ago, thanks to the many thoughtful, engaged new neighbors who moved into the redeveloped buildings. There didn’t seem to be any large groundswell of opposition to the church proposal from its close neighbors, which gives me comfort that we are making the right call in supporting it, and I hope the new residences attract still more BVNA stalwarts.

## **Committee Issues: Parks**

Huge thanks to Steve Nolan for a crisp, thoughtful markup of the lease document for the Dog Park which we finally got back from the BPDA. They countered with no substantive changes, and I signed it on our behalf on Tuesday. As approved by vote at the Monday meeting, we are spending an additional ~\$460 annually to increase our liability insurance, which was one of the conditions that the BPDA insisted on before we could take responsibility for the property.

Dog Park regulars can anticipate a slow roll-out of minor improvements to the space, as I have described in earlier newsletters: signs, double gates, better drainage, and more plantings. It’s never going to be the Tuileries, but we can make it much better.

Mark your calendars: Saturday, April 17 at 7 AM, we will have a new delivery of wood chips. Volunteers to help spread and level are welcome!

You will all note the pretty “Little Library” that has been installed in the Bay Village Garden on the corner of Church and Melrose. Residents are encouraged to share

books. Many thanks to Judy Komarow and her brother, Bruce, who designed, built, and donated this to us! We voted to reimburse Bruce for the cost of sending it to us.

I'm still waiting for requests for new planter barrels! I have only received two so far. It's getting warmer, so it's worth thinking about whether you want to tend a barrel this summer or if your existing barrel is in need of replacement.

## **Safety**

At the March Safety meeting, Sergeant Moy made us aware of a serious incident at 11 Cortes Street in mid-February. A search warrant was executed for a residence, and this resulted in an arrest following recovery of crack cocaine, fentanyl, and a loaded, unlicensed 9mm firearm.

This is the most serious incident we have had in Bay Village in a while. This is a Caritas Communities building, and we have invited their leadership to the next Safety Meeting at 6:30 on April 20<sup>th</sup> to discuss their screening procedures and security oversight. Note: this is a Tuesday night, given the Patriot's Day holiday the day before.

## **ADCO (Alliance of Downtown Civic Organizations)**

Win some, lose some. BVNA sent a letter in support of our compatriots in the West End Civic Association, fighting yet another attempt to get a variance for a digital billboard in an area where they aren't permitted. This was voted down by the ZBA, 5-2. Once again, our thanks go to Councilor Flynn, who has been tireless and vigilant in holding the ZBA accountable.

Unfortunately, the ZBA also gave us an unwelcome surprise, wedging an oft-postponed hearing on a Sonder request for an "Executive Suites" variance for a building on Batterymarch Street at the end of a four-hour meeting, and voting 6-1 to approve. This essentially gives the nation's largest corporate Air BnB operator a loophole to skirt the city ordinance intended to regulate Air BnBs. If you are keeping score at home, you'll note this means **you** can't buy and then rent out a Boston condo as an absentee landlord on Air BnB, but apparently a mega-corporation based in San Francisco can, with a bit of persistence and pull with the ZBA.

According to Universal Hub, the mayor-controlled Office of Neighborhood Services, which opposed a similar Sonder proposal for an Arch Street building under Mayor Walsh, supported the proposal in the first meeting under Acting Mayor Janey. Councilors Flynn, Bok, Essaibi-George and Edwards voiced strong opposition to this and vowed to block any future attempts to end-run the ordinance originally proposed by Councilor Wu that took effect in 2019.

## City Services

Mark your calendars: our Spring neighborhood clean-up is scheduled for Saturday, May 15<sup>th</sup>. Brooms and bags will be circulated as usual at 8AM at the corner of Church and Melrose Streets.

We're making some progress on the sidewalk repairs. These will never be perfect – as Public Works has told us, they don't have the budget to re-grade and re-install sidewalks all over the city, so we will still need to step carefully on uneven surfaces, particularly near trees. However, we can get bricks replaced and secured. Unless you feel a sidewalk presents an immediate safety hazard, I would suggest working through Brian Boisvert and our City Services team to get issues addressed. Emergency requests are “solved” with asphalt. Brian's personal involvement and considerable powers of persuasion yield bricks and mortar.

## Nevermore:

Over the last three weeks, I've had an enlightening back-and-forth with several academics (Shawn Rosenheim at my alma mater, Williams; Scott Peeples at the University of Charleston; and Paul Lewis at Boston College) on the subject of Edgar Allan Poe.

This came as an outgrowth of conversations I was having with Eversource on two topics: first, I wanted an update on the renovation project for the substation on Charles Street South that they presented to us last year; second, I wanted to push them to address the graffiti on the building. The latter topic has been acknowledged, but corporate wheels seem to turn slowly – the tags are still there as I write this. Eversource did confirm that substation renovation is planned to begin around June, and I asked if anything was being done to acknowledge the site's Poe history.

I assume that all of you are familiar with the Stefanie Roknack statue, “Poe Returning to Boston,” at the corner of Boylston and Charles Street South. As many of you also know, he is “returning” to the place of his presumed birth, 62 Carver Street. Carver Street was erased from the map in the course of a typically clumsy BRA urban renewal effort in the '60s and '70s that chopped up the eastern end of Bay Village, yielding us the bunker-like Revere (*née* Howard Johnson 57) Hotel and far-too-wide Charles Street South. But several *buildings* on what was the East side of Carver remain – what was 58 Carver and 60 Carver are now 58 Charles South and 60 Charles South. And to this day, Eversource refers to their building as “The Carver Street Substation.” As noted above, corporate wheels sometimes turn slowly – very slowly.

There was a building at 62 Carver until 1959, when it was bulldozed by Eversource's predecessor, Boston Edison, to expand the parking lot next to the substation (the two buildings on the left still stand):



But was this Poe's birthplace? Here I yield the floor to Professor Paul Lewis:

*The best evidence for 62 Carver Street/62 Charles Street South is the entry for "David Poo Actor" in the May or June of 1808 list (or Taking Book) of taxable Boston residents. At the time we put together [The Raven in the Frog Pond](#) exhibition and co-wrote the chapter on Poe in the Born in the USA collection, Dan Currie and I were convinced that Poe was born at 62 Carver. I still think this is a good guess, one made decades before by Arthur Hobson Quinn, an early biographer, who wrote this:*

*At the time of Edgar Poe's birth, his parents were living in a section of Boston south of the Common and near the Charles River. As usual, there is a dispute among antiquarians as to the exact location of their home, whether it was in a house then on Haskins Street and afterwards No. 62 Carver Street, or at No. 38 Hollis Street. I am inclined to the first theory, but since the streets were close together, it is quite possible that actors like the Poes moved from one house to the other. Neither house has survived and local tradition is shadowy.*

*Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography, 1941.*

*By the time I wrote the plaque for the Rocknak statue in 2014, I was less certain and described 62 Carver as the "likely birth site" because, although we know Poe's parents were lodging there a few months before Poe was born, we cannot infer that they were still living there when he was born. I think that "likely" is as far as this conclusion will ever get.*

*I'm not an historian of American architecture, but I have seen a convincing argument against the idea that the building at 62 Charles Street demolished in the 1950s and the surviving one at 60 would have been in place as early as 1809.*

*I should say that installing a plaque that described 62 Charles Street South as Poe's "likely birth site" would be consistent with the Rocknak statue plaque and a useful starting point for my infrequently offered walking tours of Poe's Boston.*

*One other thing, contrary to the widely shared view that Poe hated Boston and Boston hated Poe, which I have been working to complicate and refute, I have recently concluded that, if one counts specific commemorative works going back to [Martin Milmore's "Departure" plaque](#) on the Soldiers and Sailors Monument (1877), Poe is the most memorialized writer in the city!*

The good news is that Eversource **was** indeed planning to install a plaque, albeit not one consistent with Professor Lewis's research. We have since put them in touch, and they are working on a revised and historically accurate design. Eversource also plans for improved fencing, which should yield a more suitable (even if less macabre) backdrop for a Poe memorial.



### **Poe-script:**

But what, you may ask, about the Poe condominium building at 15 Fayette Street? There is a Poe medallion there, too. I'm afraid there is no historical record that Poe

had any association with 15 Fayette, despite what real estate agents have occasionally claimed. This part of Fayette Street would still have been part of the Charles River mudflats at the time of his birth.



But that doesn't mean this isn't of historical interest or significance.

In the pre-yuppie middle of the twentieth century, Bay Village was a much more bohemian community, and the building at 15 Fayette was the home or workshop of several artists and artisans, most notably the sculptor Kahlil George Gibran (1922-2008). Gibran's work can be found at museums around the world; here in Boston he designed the Copley Square memorial to his even-more-famous poet/philosopher

cousin and godfather for whom he was named, Gibran Khalil (Kahlil) Gibran (1883-1931). (Further digression – the elder Gibran also spent his formative years not far from here: did you know the author of *The Prophet* attended the Josiah Quincy School?) You can also see a Gibran sculpture, *West Canton Street Child*, in the South End's Hayes Park, near where he lived later in his life, and another, *Ad Astra*, in Childe Hassam Park.

In addition to being a sculptor, painter, luthier, furniture-maker and biographer, the multi-talented Gibran was also well-known as an art dealer and a collector of medallions, medals, and bas reliefs. He was a master of the form who had a good eye for other artists' work and an understanding of historical significance. Bequests from his extensive collection ultimately went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Bowdoin College Museum of Art.

Which brings us back to the Poe Medallion at 15 Fayette.

This isn't a dime-store throw-away. It's a bronze plaque by Edith Woodman Burroughs (1871-1916), one of a couple hundred cast for the Grolier Club in New York to commemorate the centennial of Poe's birth in 1909. Burroughs studied under Saint-Gaudens and appreciation for her work has grown over the years. There's one of these at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, too.

So how did it end up at 15 Fayette? According to long-time 15 Fayette resident Daniel Krulewitch, who asked Gibran about this many years ago, the medallion was installed as a bit of a lark – they just thought it looked good there. And indeed, it does.

I'm sorry that I never had a chance to meet Mr. Gibran, although I know that many neighborhood old-timers did, and I'd love to hear more. Many of his most famous works were created at 15 Fayette, and irrespective of Poe, **that** is worth remembering. (Thanks to Daniel for pointing me to this).

History is everywhere in Bay Village!

Tom Perkins  
President, BVNA