

BAY VILLAGE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION, INC.

Hi Bay Village Neighbors:

I hope all is well with you as the days continue to get longer, the weather continues to get warmer, and the Sox have taken the field. There are many small updates coming out of the last BVNA EC meeting on Monday April 4th:

Further discussion about historic-looking LED lamps in place of gas lamps around the 212 Stuart Street Project:

Since our last meeting, there have been several developments on the proposal to install “historic looking” LED lamps in lieu of the reinstallation of gas lamps as originally specified in the 212 Stuart Street project plan. On March 14th, there was a well-attended public meeting of the Bay Village Historic District Commission on site at 212 Stuart to look at the prototype lamp installed by the City on Shawmut Street. We hosted many people from the Back Bay and Beacon Hill, and BVHDC Commissioners were also joined by some Landmarks Commissioners from those neighborhoods. City Councilor Kenzie Bok was in attendance, as were representatives from the City’s Environment Commission and the Department of Public Works.

While several people voiced support for the overall goals of the project, given the imperative to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the first prototype lamp received mixed reviews. Most people felt that it captured the “look” of the colonial gas lamp fixtures, as promised, but several people at the meeting and many members who offered their opinions to us afterward felt that the light was too bright or intense compared to the nearby gas lamps, and that the color of the light was - in the words of one neighbor – a bit too “Donald Trump orange.” A member of the Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay took some readings with a light meter, and he concluded that the gas lamps registered at 3100 degrees Kelvin, whereas the prototype LED lamp registered close to its specification at 2400 degrees Kelvin. Fortunately, the intensity of the LEDs can be remotely adjusted, as Mike Donaghy from the Department of Public Works demonstrated at the meeting. Many neighbors felt it looked much better when set at 25% of rated output instead of the 50% default chosen by the City. However, the color could only be corrected with a different LED assembly.

We had a follow-up meeting on March 30th at the same site, which enabled some BVHDC commissioners who had conflicts with the earlier meeting to join. For this meeting, DPW installed a second prototype on Church Street Plaza, this one with a 3000K LED unit. Most people felt that this was a much better color match with the existing lights. There were mixed feelings on the subject of brightness and intensity - several neighbors again felt that the lamps were better when turned down to better match the gas lamps, but others were supportive of a slightly brighter light to improve visibility. For many, the ability to adjust the light level on individual lamps is a big plus – while light intensity is probably not a huge concern on the Church Street Plaza, where there will be several lamps and a fair amount of light coming from Stuart Street and the large neighboring buildings, it may be helpful to choose a slightly brighter setting near dark passageways.

With that as background, the BVNA Executive Committee VOTED on Monday April 4th to remove our objection to the LED conversion, subject to installation of the 3000K bulb assembly and to intensity being adjusted as guided by the Historic District Commission.

On the afternoon of April 12th, the Bay Village Historic District Commission accordingly voted to approve the installation, specifying the same bulb assembly, and with the proviso that the intensity be adjusted according to the Commission's direction on site after they are installed.

Committee Updates

Planning

- 25 Isabella Street

Ed Doherty of KEMS Corporation informed us that he expects to begin construction at the former Our Lady of Victories site within the next couple of months. He is working with the owners of the parking lot on Arlington Street to ensure that most of the staging can be done from the rear of the building – however, there will be some inevitable disruption on Isabella Street for some phases of the project work, e.g., for the removal of the non-historic stairs at the front of the church.

- 280 Stuart Street

As we expected, several residents of The Clarendon condominium building on Stuart Street have filed a lawsuit against the BPDA and Boston ZBA over the designation of a “Planned Development Area” for this parcel and the variances granted to approve this building at 390 feet. Under Stuart Street zoning, the maximum allowable height would have been 356 feet; the proposal also exceeds the maximum floor-area ratio by a similar percentage. As we have previously discussed at the BVNA Executive Committee, it is difficult to muster much sympathy for the BPDA, since the use of the PDA tool to end-run the zoning established in BPDA's own recent planning study was never well-justified. One must ask, was an extra 15% of space on a building already allowed to be over 30 stories tall significant enough for the BPDA to justify trampling on precedent, thumbing its nose to the many neighbors who participated in the BPDA's planning study, and making a mockery of the intent (and perhaps the letter, the courts will now determine) of the regulations governing the Authority's powers to sidestep zoning in very particular circumstances? For the 65 years of its existence, the BRA/BPDA has never seemed able to look beyond the latest shiny development proposal and prefers to “make up the rules as it goes” rather than perform or adhere to any actual *planning* (even its own) that might interfere with an immediate revenue stream. Perhaps this will now change under new leadership.

However, we are also wary of the ultimate intent of plaintiffs in this case, at least a few of whom, in separate letters to the BPDA, seem to be mostly focused on protecting their views. Whether the building is 35 or 39 stories tall makes very little difference to that. In a sense, this entire project epitomizes the frustrating paradox of Boston's development environment: on the one hand, we have an agency supposedly responsible for “planning and development” that disregards orderly process and seems to view zoning rules and regulations (even its own) as an inconvenience that only applies to other institutions and the little people; on the other hand, it seems that once occupied, every high-end tall residential building instantly becomes a NIMBY barrier to the construction of similarly tall buildings nearby. With the combination of an authority that plays fast and loose with regulations and litigious neighbors, it's no wonder that Boston has a housing crisis and a backlog in the courts.

Parks

- Woodland Park (Lyndeboro Place)

As many of you may have noticed, the Parks Department removed two dead trees from this small BPDA-owned park space bordered by Elliot Norton Park, Lyndeboro Place, Warrenton Street, and Charles Street South. It is our intent to make the space look nice again by replacing these trees with appropriate, native trees using BVNA funds – while in theory we *could* put in a request for trees to be replanted by the City, Kim Crucoli of ONS confirmed our belief that this would put us on a years-long waiting list, and this particular space might also be further deprioritized as it's not officially owned by the Parks Department. A subcommittee of our Parks Committee, led by Carol Carlson, is overseeing this effort. We are working to get the formal permissions from the City and quotes from a nursery, and we hope to have new trees in place within the next month or two.

- Dog Park Expenditures and Improvements

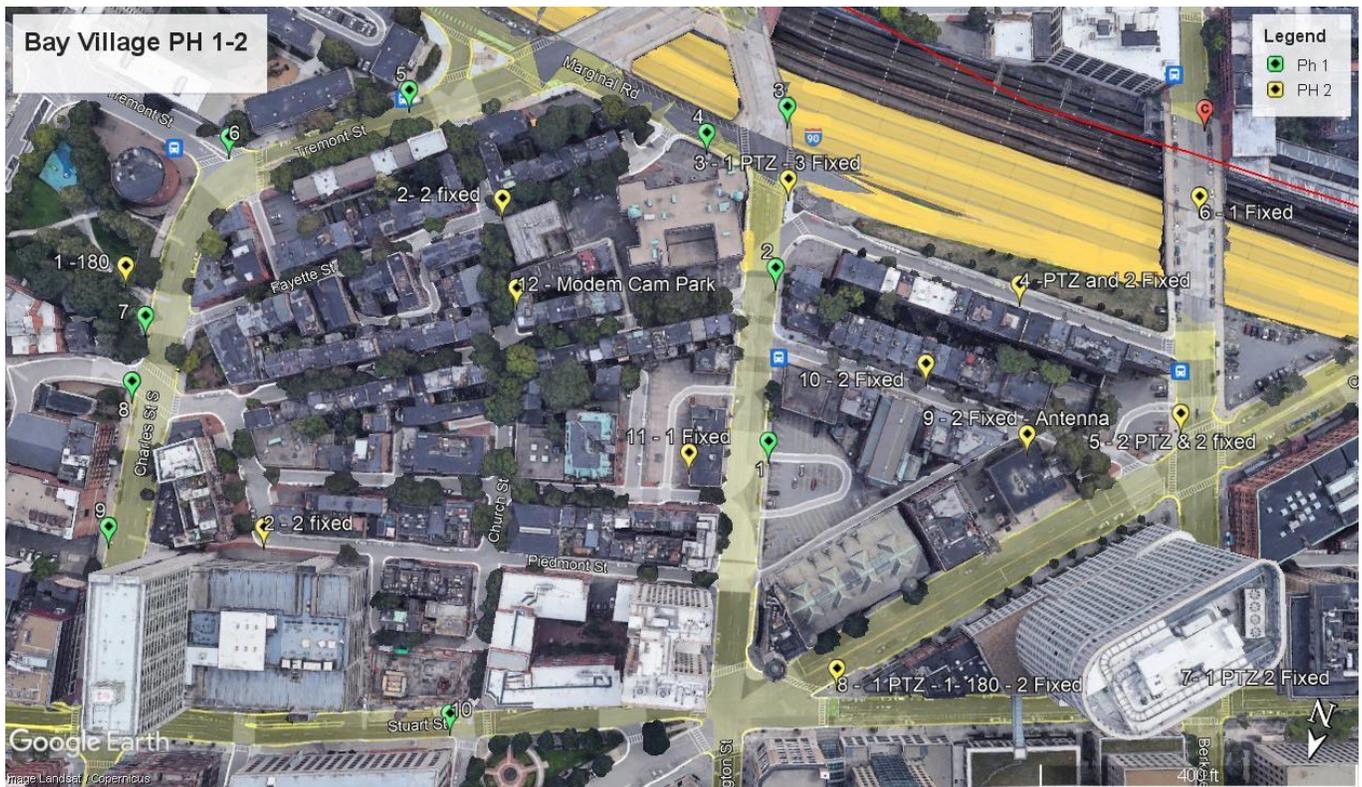
The new trash can and dog poop bag dispenser approved at March's meeting have now been installed. We are now working to get quotes to repair and upgrade the fence and gate that volunteers hastily installed for safety reasons over a year ago when we first took on the lease for this property. Our thanks go out to Ed Doherty and KEMS Corporation (developers of the Isabella Street Church), and Jonathan Lee (developer of 10 Edgerly and 130-134 Arlington) for each committing \$1000, matching the contribution of David Goldman of New Boston Ventures (developers of 1-17 Edgerly), who is also helping us find contractors for this project. With their help, in the meantime, we've also shored up the existing gate. The Dog Park subcommittee is also communicating to professional dog walkers who use the park that we can't continue to allow huge numbers of dogs at any one time, supervised by just one or two walkers. The park simply isn't large enough to support this, and it is frustrating dog parents in the neighborhood who feel squeezed out.

- Bay Village Park (Fayette/Melrose/Broadway) Reconstruction

Aoife Austin has heard from Annie Blair in the Boston Parks Department that the demolition and construction work will not begin this year as originally planned – the Parks Department is working behind the scenes to transfer ownership of the parcel from the Department of Public Works over to Parks, and apparently that has delayed the bid process. (Historians will note that this park is in the former right-of-way of Broadway when it extended from Park Square all the way through Southie, which is why it has always been in the hands of DPW). This transfer should help us in the long run – there have been many frustrating conversations in the past about the need of one City department to get “permissions” from another to facilitate simple changes – but it is frustrating to again be held up by inter-agency bureaucracy. We look forward to the redesign planned by the Browne Fund, and we sincerely hope that work can begin promptly in 2023. In the meantime, Carol, Tom K, and other members of Parks will work to keep the space looking nice again this summer.

- Safety

The BPD did get back to us with a map for cameras installation, copied below, which we reviewed at Monday's meeting. Camera locations are indicated by the yellow and green dots. We are satisfied with this plan, which achieves the goal of creating a “ring” around Bay Village – ideally, we would have a few more camera locations on the interior of the neighborhood, but the City is limited by access to power, typically either on City-owned light poles or City-owned buildings. We previously approved the transfer of monies from our Cameras fund and from the 212 Stuart Street mitigation funds to finance this project – we just need the City to execute. Danny Moll continues to follow up on this weekly.



- Social and Membership

Nan Rubin reviewed preliminary budget estimates for the Block Party and reviewed the finances of last year's party. One challenge that we face is that the permitting process becomes more difficult with each passing year; another challenge is that the cost of catering continues to skyrocket, in part because of the labor shortage and inflation that is affecting everyone, in part because of the tighter requirements of the City around licensing which result in other costs passed along to us. We are determined to continue the tradition of the Block Party, which is the most popular Bay Village social event every year, and continues to be a great place to meet and interact with new neighbors. We are also determined to keep the ticket prices affordable to all and to continue to offer discounts to seniors and students. Last year, we would have run a significant deficit were it not for the generous personal contributions of some members of the Social Committee.

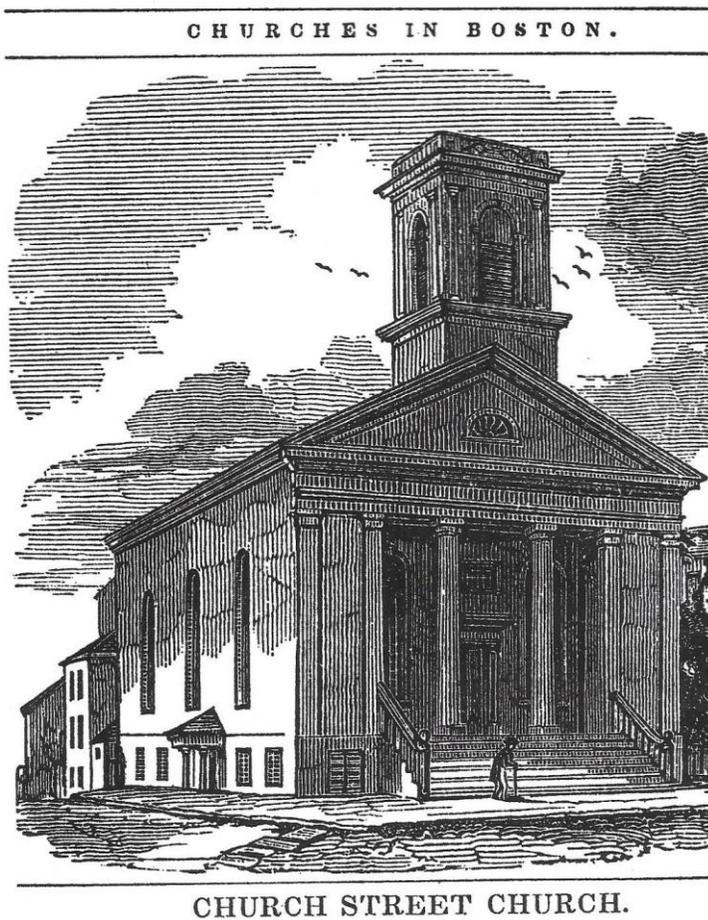
On Monday we discussed alternatives to keep the budget manageable. We may trim back the food expense a bit, and we are likely to modestly bump the prices of standard and day-of-event tickets. We may also make a special appeal for donations in conjunction with the event itself. Given the fact that we've been somewhat limited in our social calendar over the past two COVID years, members of the Executive Committee on Monday's call seemed amenable to subsidizing the event in 2022 – our accounts are currently in good shape – but we may need to put our heads together for creative approaches to the Block Party in future years.

- City Services

We still do not yet have a date for the Spring clean-up, and Kim Crucoli from the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services told us that the City may not have its act together with the "Love Your Block" program this year. This is very disappointing – we were a bit frustrated when Mayor Janey's team provided more T-shirts than brooms last spring, but at least they didn't punt altogether! We will organize our own *ad hoc* clean-up day if the City doesn't come through, but this won't happen until May.

Then and Now – Houses of Worship

Like all older cities, Boston has a tremendous number of religious buildings, and even tiny Bay Village has hosted a large number of religious institutions in the two centuries since this area was first settled. One of the first was the building for which Church Street was named, erected on the current site of the United Artists Building (now housing Raphael & Raphael, CPAs) on Church Street between Piedmont and Winchester Streets. This was built as a Presbyterian Church in 1827, and then converted to serve the Third Methodist Episcopal society in 1834. The Methodists relocated to a larger facility on Columbus Avenue in 1879, at which time the building was taken over by Jewish congregations, first as the Gates of Prayer Temple and later as an Orthodox Synagogue, Zion's Holy Prophets of Israel. In 1899 it became a Baptist church, and then in the twentieth century it was repurposed for a time as a garage before being torn down.

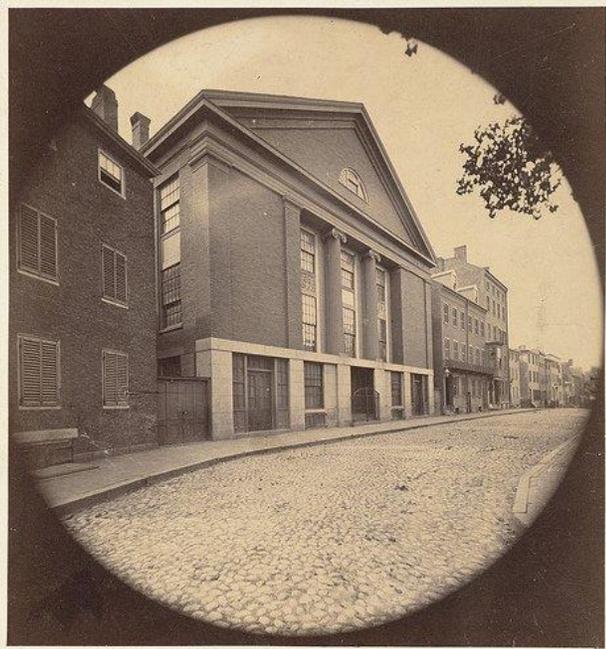


Site of Church Today

The “Church Street Church” was not the only Bay Village building to serve as a synagogue – few people realize that our neighborhood was the hub of Boston’s tiny but vibrant Jewish community in the middle of the nineteenth century. The first synagogue in Boston was dedicated by Ohabei Shalom in 1852 on Warren (now Warrenton) Street near the rear of what is now the Courtyard Marriott (née Bradford) Hotel. At that time, the thirty- by forty-six-foot building was large enough to host all of the approximately 125 Jewish families in the City. Shortly afterward, there was a schism between the German Jewish community that had dominated the early years of Jewish life in Boston and the Polish Jewish community that grew rapidly with immigration from

Central and Eastern Europe starting in the 1850s. The German seceders took the name of Adath Israel and established the second synagogue in Boston in a renovated house on Pleasant Street (now Broadway, near Melrose Street, close to where the dentist's office at 100 Broadway stands today). In 1885 Adath Israel moved into larger quarters on Columbus Avenue in the South End (now the AME Zion Church), and in 1907, as Temple Israel, into a grand building on Commonwealth Avenue near the Brookline town line.

In the meantime, across from Ohabei Shalom on Warrenton Street stood a more imposing Universalist Church, by famed architect Asher Benjamin, built in 1839. As the Jewish community continued to grow, in 1863, Ohabei Shalom purchased and renovated this building, which later became a Presbyterian Church, then a nightclub, and still stands today as the Charles Playhouse. In 1887 Ohabei Shalom moved again, this time purchasing a large Unitarian Church on Union Park in the South End, which is now the St John the Baptist Greek Orthodox Church. Over time the center of gravity of Boston's Jewish community moved out of the area, first to the South End, then to Roxbury and Mattapan, Brookline and Newton, and few traces of its seminal history in Bay Village remain.



As you can tell, it is tricky to keep track of who was based where at any point in time: a recurring theme of the nineteenth and early twentieth century Boston was the frequent renovation and adaptation of religious buildings by different congregations, many of whom seem to have cooperated with each other on charitable events and sometimes even shared quarters – Adath Israel's Sunday School operated for some time out of a Unitarian Church. Most of the religious institutions established in and around Bay Village served hardscrabble immigrant communities with limited resources, and they seem to have taken a very practical approach of adapting and reusing each other's buildings. Jewish congregations took over churches built by gentiles, Christian denominations repurposed synagogues, and swaps between various Protestant sects are almost too numerous to count.

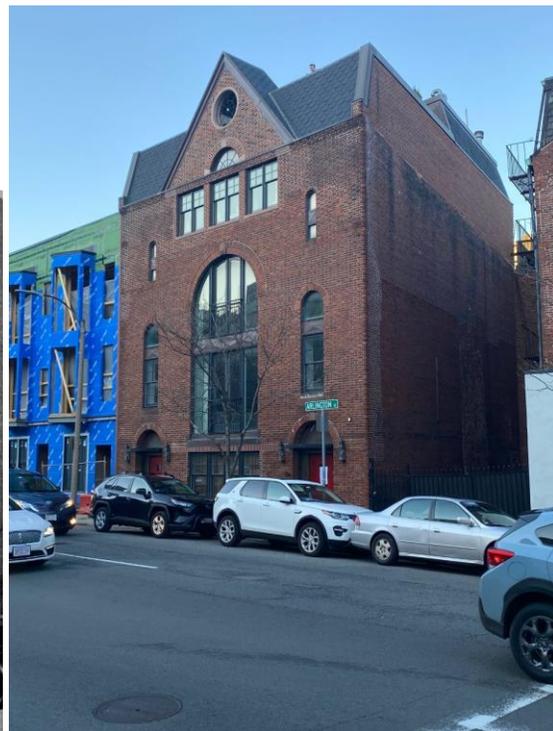
Another early Bay Village religious building was a German Evangelical Church, or Hope Chapel, established on Shawmut Street in the 1840s. This building survived into the present century,

converted into office and restaurant uses – the rear of the building originally faced a narrow alleyway, but when Stuart Street was widened and extended through Bay Village, the orientation of the building was reversed, and in the 1930s, the side facing Stuart Street was given an Art Deco façade. Many will remember this as Jae’s restaurant; it was ultimately torn down for the 212 Stuart Street project.

The roster of religious institutions gives us an idea of the incredible diversity of the area in the nineteenth century – like the North End, Bay Village with its mix of modestly-sized houses and tenements hosted many different waves of European immigrants. On Isabella Street, Our Lady of Victories (or Notre Dame des Victoires), the subject of the recently-approved development proposal discussed above, was built in the 1880s to serve Boston’s French-speaking Roman Catholic population. (Massachusetts had a considerable number of French speaking families, mostly Canadian emigres, well into the twentieth century – among the children raised in French was Lowell’s Jean-Louis Lebris de Kerouac, better known as Jack, who did not fully master English until adolescence). By the 1880s, Cortes Street was the home of the Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd, and at the far end of Isabella Street, a large Presbyterian Church on the corner of Berkeley Street (a parking lot today) stood opposite to a large Methodist Episcopal Church on Columbus Avenue (current site of Liberty Mutual) where the Church Street Church congregation had moved. The Eastern Swedish Conference purchased a church on the corner of Melrose and Ferdinand (Arlington) Street in 1889, which they occupied until 1913; the following year the building was sold to a Ukrainian Catholic community and renamed Sacred Heart. At the time of the First World War, there were approximately 4,000 Ukrainians living in Boston. Later, after a schism in the community, the Arlington Street church became Ukrainian Orthodox and was renamed Holy Trinity; the Ukrainian Catholics split off and for a time shared space with the German Trinity Catholic Church a few blocks away on Shawmut Avenue in the South End (now The Lucas condominium building). Years later, this group established Christ the King Ukrainian Catholic Church in Jamaica Plain. After a period of time serving other functions, including a recording studio, the church at 136 Arlington was converted into residences.



Ukrainian Church in the 1940s



136 Arlington Street Today

French, German, Swedish/Ukrainian – other than the Charles Playhouse, it seems that most of the surviving buildings have been reworked as condos. Is there any city in America that has more religious structures that have been repurposed into residential buildings than Boston?

New congregations continued to come to Bay Village into the latter half of the twentieth century. The Chinese Church of Saving Grace took over a commercial building at 115 Broadway, and in 1975 the BRA facilitated construction of the now-abandoned cylindrical Church of All Nations on the edge of Elliot Norton Park. This originally served a congregation that had lost its earlier church in the 1960s to the Turnpike Extension. In today's much more secular world, it's sometimes difficult to imagine a time when religious affiliation was the central determinant of community, and when Bay Village was the gathering point for so many different communities.

Principal Sources and suggested further reading:

Van Meter, Mary *Bay Village or the Church-Street District, A survey of its history and some of its buildings and inhabitants* (Bostonian Society, 1970)

Sarna, Jonathan D., Smith, Ellen, Kosofsky, Scott Martin *Jews of Boston*, Yale University Press (Revised Edition, 2005)