



BAY VILLAGE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION, INC.

Hi Bay Village Neighbors:

As I write this, the thaw has ended, and the flakes are flying again. At least we have been reminded that spring isn't too far away!

Our Executive Committee meeting agenda on Monday February 7th was full of little items, so we wound up using more than the full hour.

Committee Updates:

Planning and Licensing:

- 380 Stuart Street

We returned to a brief discussion of our response to this project, first discussed at the January EC meeting. As you will recall, BVNA was approached by NABB (Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay) and Ellis Neighborhood Association, requesting that we sign on to a letter they have drafted in opposition to the office tower proposed for 380 Stuart Street, on the grounds that the Planned Development Area (PDA) rights granted to John Hancock should not have been transferrable to a new developer, Skanska. We weren't comfortable endorsing this position, because there didn't seem to be any language in the documentation that prohibited a transfer of rights. We are also concerned about creating an awkward precedent suggesting that a final determination of zoning can be relitigated whenever there is a change in the Mayor's office. Since the difference between what was granted in the PDA versus what would be allowed as-of-right by Stuart Street Zoning is 34 feet (approximately 3 commercial floors, or about 10 percent of an already tallish building), this does not seem to be a hill worth dying on.

However, as I noted in last month's newsletter, I do agree with Elliott Laffer, President of NABB, that the BPDA's original application in 2015 of an "amended PDA" to override zoning for this single-building project was a terrible mistake. This is completely inconsistent with the BPDA's purported requirements for a development initiative to be eligible for the special zoning treatment associated with a PDA, i.e., this tool is intended for large, complex projects with substantial public benefits, occupying more than an acre of land. This is a single building on an unremarkable mid-block footprint with no particularly notable public benefits. The end-around was also an insult to the residents who participated in the BPDA's own Stuart Street Planning Study between 2008-2011, which established the zoning limits for this area. We therefore took a unanimous VOTE to reiterate our opposition to the use of PDAs or after-the-fact PDA extensions for single-building "spot zoning." Even if we can't unwind this decision, we should not face this situation again. If a developer proposes a single building that requires a variance, he/she should go through the same appeals process that applies to the rest of us, irrespective of political connections. While the concept of a "Planned Development Area" requiring special consideration has merit for truly complex and

transformative projects (e.g., Turnpike Air Rights, build out of the Seaport, etcetera), misapplication of this powerful tool merely increases the perception that the BRA/BPDA continues to “make up the rules as it goes along,” as it has since the 1950s. It’s impossible to please everyone, but if a planning agency can’t even stick to its *own* published guidelines, it will never establish trust or credibility with the city’s neighborhoods.

- **LED Replacement of Gas Lamps around the 212 Stuart Street Project**

As we discussed in January and reviewed in last month’s newsletter, Boston Department of Public Works intends to replace the seven gas lamps that previously existed on the Church Street plaza and along the north side of Shawmut Street adjacent to 212 Stuart with seven “historic looking” LED lamps. Ultimately, the City would prefer to replace all gas lamps with LED units that are “greener” and much less expensive to maintain. Since our last meeting, I have had lengthy conversations with Joe Cornish, the Director of Design Review for the City’s Landmarks Commission, Michael Donaghy of DPW, Ryan Souls of Greystar, the developer of 212 Stuart, and with Rob Whitney, President of Beacon Hill Civic Association (BHCA) and Sue Prindle, Architectural Committee chair of the Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay.

The City understands that this is a topic of interest to ALL of the neighborhoods that currently have gas lamps – Beacon Hill has about a thousand of them, and they also line Marlborough Street in Back Bay. While Michael Donaghy assures me that the physical appearance of the new LED lamps will be identical to the current lamps, he also understands our concerns about the warmth and diffusion pattern of the LED units. None of us are comfortable signing off on something we haven’t seen. Therefore, DPW is working with Greystar to arrange for a single prototype lamp to be installed near 212 Stuart that will remain in place for a number of days so that it can be viewed by residents of Back Bay and Beacon Hill as well as Bay Village. We will send an email alert to give residents a heads-up when this is in place.

I have stressed to DPW and Landmarks that Bay Village certainly doesn’t want to be stuck with an oddball orphan design if other neighborhoods insist on changes when the roll-out proceeds on the other side of the Common. Bay Village Historic District Commissioner Anne Kilguss also inquired at the last BVHDC meeting about the possibility of a joint review of the design by all the relevant neighborhood commissions – we would like Beacon Hill and Back Bay feedback to be incorporated now, and to work hard toward a common agreement about how DPW should proceed.

- **Immersive Art Space Boston (IASB) / Frida Kahlo Exhibit**

Sarah shared with us the banner/artwork proposed for the *Frida: Immersive Dream* exhibition in the Park Plaza Castle. It seemed appropriate to all of us on the call. There does seem to be a bit of irony in a staunch communist who hated American capitalism as the centerpiece of an unrepentantly commercial adaptation of popular artwork – she was both Trotsky’s lover and an apologist for Stalin. It seems like an immersive commercial interpretation of, say, Salvador Dali would be more likely to be smiled upon from the grave, but Frida’s image and persona are undoubtedly more *au courant* than his

City Services

- **Space Savers**

You will have seen my email about space savers following the late January snowstorm. As most longer-term residents will recall, several years ago we joined our peers in the South End in voting overwhelmingly to ban space savers. Historically, space savers had never been a “thing” in the downtown neighborhoods – Elliott Laffer of NABB and Rob Whitney of BHCA have told me that

their organizations never bothered to institute a formal prohibition only because it was generally understood that the tribal customs of Southie and Roslindale couldn't work in downtown neighborhoods where the number of resident parking stickers greatly outnumbers the number of spaces available. It's hard enough to find a spot without some being reserved for days on end. Unfortunately, as the last few mayors have granted this "olde tyme neighborhood Boston" ritual a veneer of official legitimacy, new residents have become confused, and the totemic broken lawn chairs are popping up in places they'd never been seen before. The fact that the Mayor's announcement on the subject mentioned the South End but not Bay Village didn't help. As I told Mayor's office liaison Kim Crucoli, we feel like we are being dragged backward into a crummy Matt Damon movie where everyone steals cars, bums cigarettes, wears a scally cap, drinks Narragansett, and speaks with an accent that sounds like a Kennedy with a speech impediment.

We'll try to get the official line clarified. In the meantime, my request is that we continue to refrain from using space savers, but that we be polite and respectful when we inform others that this practice is not allowed in Bay Village. Some people are legitimately confused. I'd rather not see us play out the other ceremonies that traditionally accompany this neighborhood ritual, such as passive-aggressive notes, deflating the tires of vehicles that trespass upon the sacred rectangles of black asphalt, and fisticuffs over Ma's old ironing board.

- **Trash**

We have a trash problem. Trash is being put out too early, it's being put out in the wrong places, and, most importantly, it's being put out in inappropriate containers like paper bags. We've created a Caesar's Palace buffet for rats, and all the detritus whipping around on a windy Friday morning makes even Fayette Street look like an alley in a neglected favela.

Our thanks go out to neighbors like Jim McCormick, Katherine Nelson, and many others who have spent hours cleaning up after the untidy. It makes me embarrassed, though, to get a request for help from the retired Marist Fathers of the former Our Lady of Victories church, who have been picking up on the north side of Isabella Street every week on trash days, and are finding this increasingly difficult. The youngest of these gentlemen is over 80.

We are looking for more volunteers to help out, and we encourage everyone to politely remind younger and newer residents to take more care. Everyone is forewarned that we will also be stepping up calls to 311 and ensuring that the City tickets residences that leave out trash too early or in improper containers. This also means that you must leave trash only in front of your own residence – don't drag it to the abandoned building across the street or to a park further down. I realize that some people are moving their trash to make it more visible to collectors and to make certain sidewalk sections less crowded, but unfortunately properly bagged trash seems to attract improperly bagged trash, and when the City is called to enforce regulations, they will enforce ALL regulations. Inspectors will dig through all the junk mail and empty Amazon boxes to figure out who is responsible, so please bag your trash carefully, don't put it out before 5 PM, and keep it in front of your residence and not your neighbors'.

- **Safety**

We seem to be very close on the much-delayed cameras project? The EC VOTED to increase the discretionary spend on cameras from BVNA funds and 212 Stuart Street mitigation funds from the previously authorized \$35K to \$50K, reflecting a longer and more detailed list from the Boston Police Department, and perhaps some inflation. The Safety Committee will scrutinize this to ensure that it only covers the infrastructure that we have authorized and not bells and whistles that we have not. As previously discussed, we are perfectly happy to support some installations that are technically in adjacent neighborhoods, particularly Chinatown and the Theater District, as many

past incidents requiring police investigation and follow-up have begun at the clubs, but we will ensure that the funds are not diverted to further reaches of the City.

The BPDA has acknowledged its tardiness in presenting the required paperwork to Councilor Flynn, and we are hopeful that we can get this all buttoned up and underway within a week or two.

- **Social**

Dilara Yavuz joined us from Nusr-Et to let us know that the restaurant has a private room that they can make available to the Association for small meetings and events. We are grateful for their generosity and may take them up on this offer in the spring. Salt Bae is also expected to make an appearance at the restaurant soon.

Mark Fischer and Ashley Sheen from the Revere Hotel also sent us word that they have instituted a 20% discount on room rates for Bay Village residents – subject to blackout dates and availability. This is a great option if you are hosting family that won't fit into your residence.

We encourage members to patronize local businesses that support us. It has been a rough couple of years for most of them, and with the tourist trade much reduced, they depend on local customers to survive.

- **Archives**

We are readying another set of documents to be scanned into our electronic archive, which Olga Galkina is helping us to organize. If you have documents of historical significance or current relevance that you would like us to preserve, please get these to me or to Sarah Herlihy ASAP!

- **Parks**

Sarah Herlihy and Clyde Bergstresser continue to press the BPDA on solutions that would enable BVNA to direct 212 Stuart Street funds toward the parks originally designated in the agreement with the developer that the BPDA blessed several years ago. Unfortunately, the spirit of “yes, yes, yes,” which characterizes the BPDA’s assessment of feasibility when they are looking for neighborhood support at the start of a project tends to devolve into sclerosis and amnesia as projects approach conclusion and it becomes time for the agency to actually deliver on its commitments. Rest assured that we have full documentation and will not rest until they follow through.

Then and Now – The Pleasant Street Incline

This month’s historic photo set returns to the current site of Elliot Norton Park. As is frequently the case on the east end of Bay Village, so many buildings have changed and the street layout has been so radically re-worked by urban renewal that it can be difficult to find your bearings in older photographs. The Hotel Bradford (aka Courtyard Marriott) is a reliable anchor between these two photos, and if you enlarge the older photograph you will also see the marquee for the Schubert Theater, the Metropolitan (Wang/Boch) Theater, and the Little Building (now part of Emerson College) in the background further along Tremont Street. The South Cove Plaza East building, which blocks the view of the lower half of the Bradford/Courtyard in the contemporary photo, is built on partly on the site of the comparatively diminutive White Tower restaurant that occupied what was previously an irregularly-shaped corner. Old-timers will remember White Tower as a knock-off of White Castle (the latter was founded in 1921, the former in 1926): these were among the original American burger chains. White Castle continues, but the sole remaining White Tower is in Toledo, Ohio.



The star of the older photo, however, is the PCC streetcar, in the orange and buff livery that characterized all of Boston MTA's light rail fleet prior to the Green Line being assigned its eponymous color in 1967. The photo was taken by Clark Frazier, who documented rapid transit cars in many cities. We can confidently date the photo to early 1962 or very late 1961, because the portal was closed in April 1962, and eagle-eyed auto mavens will recognize a shiny red 1962 Chrysler behind the fence on Tremont Street. No doubt it still had that new-car smell.

If you have traveled on the Green Line through Boylston Street Station, and noted the historic streetcars and maintenance vehicles parked on disused spurs to the right and left of the current platforms, you may have asked yourself, where do those tunnels go? This is the answer. While the portal itself has been permanently sealed, and the former incline buried under Elliot Norton Park, there are still abandoned subway tunnels extending under Tremont Street from Boylston to half a block south of the Bradford/Courtyard. These tunnels were part of the original Boston subway, dating from 1897, and they opened only a few months after the branch that currently serves the westbound Green Line adjacent to the Common. The T currently uses a portion of this underground space for electrical infrastructure, but it's otherwise empty.

Where did these streetcars go? For the first half of the twentieth century, there were two primary streetcar lines that used the Tremont tunnels. The first, line 43, began at North Station and after surfacing at the portal ran along the surface of Tremont Street through the South End, continuing down at Columbus Avenue to Egleston Square, where connections could be made to other streetcars serving Dorchester, Mattapan, Roslindale, and Jamaica Plain. In 1956, this line was cut back to a loop at Tremont and Lenox Streets; five years later this was replaced with a bus that transferred to streetcars at the portal entrance. Shortly after that the portal was abandoned entirely.

The second, line 9, served North Station from City Point via Broadway. This line was replaced by buses in 1953. Pleasant Street was renamed Broadway by the 1930s – although Boston historians refer to this junction as the “Pleasant Street Incline” or “Pleasant Street Portal,” mid-century residents would know this corner as Tremont and Broadway. Prior to urban renewal and the Mass Pike extension project, Broadway was a major street worthy of its name, continuous from City Point through South Boston, the South End, and Bay Village all the way to Boston Common. The disconnected little stub of Broadway in Bay Village once continued to the north, through the footprint of what is now the Revere Hotel, adjacent to the Motor Mart Garage and alongside the former Emancipation Statue to meet up with Columbus Avenue in Park Square across from the intersection of Boylston and Charles Streets.

A second photo set below shows an inbound streetcar from South Boston at the corner of Broadway and Shawmut on its way to the subway portal shortly before this branch was abandoned. (The cars once again help date the photo – that's a '51 or '52 Plymouth trailing close behind).



In this case, the views are so different, it seems like these photos couldn't possibly depict the same location. But if you look closely in the background of the early '50s photo you'll see the familiar cornice of 100 Shawmut Street, the façade of which has been incorporated into a much taller condominium complex currently being completed, and behind that you can see the 1874 German Trinity Church at 140 Shawmut, which has also been converted into condos ("The Lucas"). When I moved to Bay Village in the late '90s, Roman Catholic masses were still conducted in German at this church to a rapidly-dwindling community of older parishioners. In the foreground, Broadway has been eliminated, and the irregular historic street layout replaced by a regular grid. The eclectic mix of late nineteenth and early twentieth century tenements and commercial buildings along Broadway and Shawmut were bulldozed and replaced by the charmless, bunker-like Josiah Quincy School complex.

Transit advocates periodically raise the possibility of reopening the tunnels under Tremont Street, because while they only span a handful of short blocks, the network connection to the Green Line system is potentially very valuable, and this is one of the most expensive locations in the city to dig a new tunnel, given the narrow rights-of-way and the need to work around historic buildings and other underground infrastructure. In the late 1990s, these tunnels were considered for an extension of the Silver Line from South Station (the so-called Silver Line Phase 3), but engineers concluded that the rail bore diameter was too narrow to accommodate buses and the geometry too constrained to link with new tunnels under Essex Street. In the early 2000s, the MBTA instead proposed a new tunnel under Charles Street South, which was strongly opposed in Bay Village – digging would have come within feet of our building foundations, and the T's ultimate preferred scheme would have resulted in a fenced-off open trench along Tremont Street near Bay Village Cleaners, further dividing us from the South End. Cost estimates spiraled north of \$2 billion for less than a mile of tunnel as the T struggled to manage the engineering complexity of excavating under Essex and Charles, and fortunately (but unsurprisingly) the project was deemed economically unfeasible and formally cancelled in 2010.

Will the Tremont tunnels be revisited in our lifetimes? I suspect that an effort to revive and extend the original tunnels further south under Tremont/Shawmut to facilitate new Green Line branches to the Nubian Square and/or South Boston would be much more warmly received in Bay Village than the clumsy, disconnected bus-based schemes of fifteen years ago. The routing would also be more direct and more useful to the residents of Roxbury and the South End. Sadly, the MBTA's aversion to street-running its light rail cars makes this unlikely any time soon: while cities like Zurich, Toronto and Portland Oregon have revived and expanded their systems, this is still a bit too cutting-edge for the T. In the years since they "temporarily suspended" Watertown service in 1969 and Arborway service in the 1986, they still periodically make noises about terminating the E Line south of Brigham Circle – their focus is on dedicated rights-of-way and projects that reach the suburbs. Still, as Boston's population has sharply rebounded in the past few decades, and congestion and environmental awareness have increased, we can only look back with regret at all of the transit infrastructure that was so casually abandoned in the second half of the last century, of which this is but a tiny piece.

Until Next Month,
Tom