



BAY VILLAGE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION, INC.

Hi Bay Village Neighbors:

I received mostly positive feedback to the first newsletter that I produced last month, so I'm happy to write up another.

And as a reminder, if you have yet to join NextDoor, please do. It remains the best source to keep up on happenings in the 'hood! To join go to: https://help.nextdoor.com/s/article/How-to-join-Nextdoor?language=en_US).

Note that NextDoor uses public records to verify your address. If you have a problem joining, please drop me a message or reach out directly to our "Leads" – Sarah Herlihy or Mark Slater. They can verify neighbors as well.

SPECIAL TOPICS:

City Pilot Program to replace gas lamps with historic-appearing LED lamps

At the December EC Meeting, Michael Donaghy of the Boston Public Works Department gave a presentation to BVNA to invite us to participate in a pilot program to evaluate replacing our gas lamps with LED lamps, as described in the December newsletter. Mike had some technical difficulties with the Zoom screen share of his presentation, and in order to get permission to post it, we needed to jump through a little hoop with the City's records guardians. We have now accomplished that, and the link is included in the same email that brought you to this page.

Emerson College Spring Semester Plans

Peggy Ings and Mary Higgins from the Emerson College Community Relations team gave an update about the College's Spring Semester Plans. As they warned us, things remain fluid as COVID-19 rages on, so these plans are subject to further change. Following recommendations from the Governor, the re-opening of the dorms, including the W Hotel space, has been pushed back to January 21-24. On-line classes will begin on January 19, but in-person classes will not start until February. As in the fall, students will be tested twice a week at the test center in Chinatown (run by Tufts Medical/Broad Institute) and testing information will be tied to student IDs, so individuals won't be able to access buildings unless their tests are current. Compliance was very good in the fall, with a positive rate of 0.08%, one of the lowest in the city.

Standing Committee Updates: Planning and Licensing

Sarah Herlihy brought us up to date on three topics.

- 212 Stuart Street: Sarah and Clyde Bergstresser are meeting with the BPDA this week to review use of the \$542K in mitigation funds provided by this project for use in Bay Village pursuant to the developer's agreement with the BPDA. A portion of the funds are earmarked for certain of the parks in the neighborhood, with other funds to be used to support the BVNA's mission. The priority with respect to the first amount available (50% of the total) is to support the cameras project and various park improvements. I noted that Greystar had recently made a \$1000 contribution to our general fund, over and above the mitigation funds. The construction continues, and it's been noisy at times: it was requested that we get an update on the project timeline at the next EC meeting. I spoke with Ryan Souls at Greystar and he will be joining us on the February 1st call. Ryan informed me that they have now established a power hook-up with the Revere Hotel/Garage and have removed the large and noisy generator on Shawmut. We all hope that this will reduce the overall noise – I know it has been very difficult for people working at home during the pandemic to manage through the construction din.
- Our Lady of Victories Redevelopment: Sarah shared the presentation given to the Planning Committee last month by Ed Doherty and KEMS Corporation, the latest developer to propose a redevelopment of Our Lady of Victories on Isabella Street.

The KEMS proposal is for an entirely residential development of approximately 26 condominiums which would include the affordable housing requirements on site and enough parking under to satisfy the City's nominal 0.7 spaces/unit requirement. There is broad consensus that the latest rendition, which is more architecturally sympathetic to the church than the earlier proposals (it's less of a "box") and which has larger set-backs on the addition is an improvement. There is disagreement, however, as to whether the improvement is enough to warrant our approval – objections being focused on the fact that there is still penthouse level proposed above the current roof peak of the church. While this level has been set back so that it will not be visible from Isabella Street, it will be visible from Arlington Street and from some higher-floor residences. Some residents are concerned about precedent of allowing additional height on an already non-conforming tall building; others are more receptive to the latest re-design, concerned that other developers have passed on the opportunity and fears that it may otherwise remain vacant and deteriorate.

At this point there is no formal proposal requiring action by BVNA – the developer is presenting ideas to the Historical Commission next week, and it is quite possible that there will be further amendments to the proposal before it comes to us again. We will keep the neighborhood posted of further developments and if/when KEMS approaches us seeking formal approval.

- An Impact Advisory Group (IAG) has been formed for the former YWCA building at 140 Clarendon Street. This is obviously not in Bay Village proper, but as we are only a couple of blocks away, Councilor Flynn asked us to participate in the IAG, and David Wright has graciously volunteered to serve. We will post information about public meetings on this project on Next Door – the next public meeting is on Wednesday January 13 at 6PM, and the Zoom link details are in the Next Door Events Calendar.

The proposal is to renovate the building, which is currently houses a mix of market rate housing, affordable housing, a budget hotel, the Lyric Theater, an annex of the Snowden International School, and commercial and retail suites. The renovation would eliminate the hotel, market rate housing, and some offices in favor of 100% affordable units, including transition housing for homeless persons, managed by the Pine Street Inn. The school, theater and ground-floor retail suites would remain, and the exterior of the building would be largely unchanged.

We know that this proposal has generated considerable opposition, particularly from condominium owners at the Clarendon across the street. While Bay Village will have no formal say in this project, I encourage interested residents to attend the meetings; David will keep us posted on the progress of the IAG, whose role is to ensure that there are appropriate provisions for mitigation of issues caused by the change of use.

City Services

Brian Boisvert is working with our Mayor's Office liaison Kim Crucoli to arrange a walk-through of neighborhood sidewalks in disrepair to triage those requiring most urgent action. In some cases, loose bricks appear to be a serious safety hazard. As noted in last month's newsletter, the DPW team has a considerable backlog and some of this work may need to wait for warmer weather, but we will be persistent in follow-up. We are also looking to spend some of the 212 Stuart mitigation funds to replace trees in empty tree beds.

ADCO (Alliance of Downtown Civic Organizations)

Nancy Morrisroe reports that the Zoning Board of Appeals decision on the controversial electronic billboard proposal for Chinatown has been delayed again, following extensive neighborhood opposition. As you may have read in the *Boston Sun*, there has recently been yet another proposal for an electronic billboard at the Pine Street Inn. Councilor Flynn will shortly be holding a hearing to discuss the proliferation of these billboards and future zoning enforcement of such billboards.

Social and Membership

Thanks to Craig Davis, Steve Vondran (Ho Ho Ho!), Nancy Chan, and Richard Teague for arranging the visit of Santa and elves on December 20th. Thanks also to Joe Kuranda for ensuring that letters to Santa received a response from the North Pole, which is closer than you might think. This event generated an amazing amount of positive feedback.

Thanks also to resident photographer Steve Dunwell for the idea and the photo for the electronic holiday card we sent around last month.

An Editorial: Some thoughts on Development

I've been a homeowner in Bay Village for almost 23 years, and there is no topic that has caused more friction and disagreement between neighbors than development proposals that require zoning variances – which, given the restrictive nature of our zoning code, the profit instinct of developers, and the city's push to address a perceived housing shortage, is virtually all of them. In the time since I first became aware of the existence of Bay Village, our neighborhood and its immediate surroundings have been utterly transformed. Some of the changes have been for the better, some have not. I remember fondly our holiday parties at the Napoleon Club, the casual vibe of the Tar Bar, and, more recently, dinners at Erbaluce; on the other hand, I certainly don't miss the bus station or the empty lots on Piedmont and Winchester Streets. I also don't have any nostalgia for the time I used to spend sweeping up used condoms – a regular problem into the early years of this millennium. Gentrification is not without its upsides.

Over the course of two-plus decades (this makes me feel old!) I've been on opposite sides of different development debates. Old-timers may recall that I spearheaded the neighborhood opposition to the T's ill-considered Silver Line bus tunnel proposal, and was quite vocal in opposition to the Ceres proposal for redeveloping 212 Stuart in the early 2000s. I still regard the destruction of the townhouses on the north side of Shawmut as the saddest moment of my time in Bay Village.

I also opposed the Drucker Company project that will eventually replace the former Shreve building and its neighbors with a background building that wouldn't look out of place on Route 128. That these attractive buildings have sat largely empty and underutilized for well over a decade through one of the largest building booms in history, despite the developer having approvals in hand, is a reminder that even well-known developers may prefer to landbank rather than countenance *any* risk.

On the other side of the ledger, I've been on record supporting some large projects, including the W Hotel development, and Columbus Center, and smaller projects, such as Piedmont Park Square and 110 Arlington. In many cases I did so with reservations, but with a sense that I didn't want the perfect to be the enemy of the good. In some instances, I have been disappointed by the final form of projects I supported – for example, the BRA's abandonment of the Warrenton Street improvements after the W development was flushed through a bankruptcy process.

Having attended over two decades' worth of often heated meetings, my take is that passionate disagreement about the merits of individual projects among our members is inevitable, and actually healthy. I'm perfectly fine with residents having some frank and pointed discussions about individual projects, and obviously I'm not afraid of argument myself. My hope, however, is that we don't allow intense disagreements devolve into personal animosities, and that we strongly resist attributing ulterior motives to neighbors with whom we disagree. I am confident that those who would oppose, for example, any additional height to the Isabella Street Church are sincere about their concerns about setting a bad precedent for a mid-block development in the historic zone. I am also confident that those who would be willing to accept a one-story penthouse with setbacks are doing so because they genuinely like the overall appearance and are sincerely worried about the parcel sitting idle.

The danger when disagreements metastasize into larger feuds in an all-volunteer organization is that we risk the loss of some of our vital energy. If a disagreement brings more people to our meetings, that's a good thing! But if disagreement leads people to disengage, it threatens our existence. Over the years we have lost the participation of some members who felt that involvement "wasn't worth the hassle" – and we miss their perspective not just in the development debates, but also their involvement in the neighborhood clean-up, our charitable fund-raising, in helping with garden plantings, or just bringing good cheer to social events. And the reality is, the more participation we have, the greater our neighborhood voice. The only reason that our input on development projects is given any weight in the first place is because we are organized and we vote.

I hope we will be able to bring some more new people to BVNA in 2021, and I hope that we can welcome some more new faces to the Executive

Committee every year. We become vulnerable if we are too dependent on the same dozen individuals volunteering their time as a labor of love. Let's be clear: each of our committee members performs a lot of work on our behalf in return for nothing more than our thanks – there's no EC slush fund, no money from the City or developers or anywhere else that goes into anything but approved projects for the common good. On the contrary, our finances have been supported every year by significant donations from a small number of active residents who insist on anonymity, and by individuals who incur expenses on our behalf and refuse to bill us. Not to mention the services that are rendered – if we had to pay for the labor that Tom puts into gardening, or Tim devotes to doing our taxes or the neighborhood lawyers like Sarah and Steve N. devote to red-lining our cooperation agreements and contracts, we'd go bust.

This is not complaining on my part. President is in many ways the easiest job, and obviously the most prestigious. But I hope to minimize the number of conversations I have with friends and neighbors who tell me, "I stopped being active after the fight over the XYZ project, where I felt like I was being attacked." This is sad. The Executive Committee is not a cabal, we often don't agree amongst ourselves about individual projects. If service ceases to be fun for some it may ultimately become no fun for all.

Above all, then, I hope we can put these development debates in perspective. Compared to the fights endured by our predecessors – I recall the late June McCourt's description of the BRA processes in the '60s that led to the destruction of much of our street grid and the imposition of the huge bunker-like 57 (now Revere) Hotel – some of the current controversies seem like tiddlywinks, and really not worth losing friends over. If you live in the neighborhood for any length of time, chances are excellent that you will find yourself on both the 'losing' and 'winning' sides of votes, as I have been, and aligned with one neighbor on one project but opposed on another.

And in every case, it's wise to be humble – there have been instances when a parcel continues to be undeveloped for years after a contentious debate leading to support, or a completed building is more obviously flawed than it seemed to be in the architectural drawings. (I cringe every time I walk by One Charles – I wish we had pushed harder for better ground-level engagement!) In other instances, we voiced opposition to a proposal only to end up with a later iteration that many people feel is worse. On the whole, however, I think most reasonable persons would conclude that our involvement in these processes have resulted in better projects, and that on the whole our neighborhood is in a better place than it was twenty-five years ago. Our power comes from working together, even when we agree to disagree.

Tom Perkins
President, BVNA