



BAY VILLAGE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION, INC.

Hi Bay Village Neighbors:

Happy New Year! I hope that you all enjoyed a restful holiday period and are navigating the Omicron spike without too much difficulty.

Our first Executive Committee meeting of 2002 on January 3rd was relatively brief and efficient, and several issues won't be addressed until the new Wu administration is fully staffed and up to speed. Still, we had a pretty full Planning and Licensing agenda.

Planning and Licensing:

- Immersive Art Space Boston (IASB)

As discussed briefly at prior meetings, we were approached by Immersive Art Space Boston about their plans to manage an immersive exhibition of the works of Frida Kahlo in the Park Plaza Castle event space on Columbus Avenue. (Note: this is NOT the former Smith and Wollensky space on the Arlington Street side of the building). To accompany the show, they wanted to be able to serve beer, wine, and potentially themed cocktails or cordials, and for that they needed a liquor license transfer.

While we weren't thrilled that IASB began selling tickets to the event itself before meeting with BVNA, the proponents did engage us very constructively on the matter of the liquor license. The Executive Committee voted to APPROVE the proposed license transfer SUBJECT TO the execution of a cooperation agreement between IASB and BVNA. This cooperation agreement was quickly executed and the license transfer was formally approved by the Licensing Board two days later. Our agreement is similar to ones that we have with other establishments in the area that serve alcoholic beverages, and addresses topics such as forbidden uses (i.e., the liquor license can't be used to support a nightclub at the location), hours (in this case, liquor will be served only from 11 AM to 10 PM Sundays to Thursdays and until 11 PM on Fridays and Saturdays), and a range of other subjects including delivery hours, trash collection, signage, and parking. None of the terms are unreasonable, but having written agreements in place helps us avoid later misunderstandings or complaints about noise in the wee hours or trucks in resident parking. We've found them to be especially valuable if there is a change of ownership or new management that needs to be brought up to speed on our expectations.

My thanks go to resident lawyer and Planning Chair Sarah Herlihy, who has continued to refine and improve the language in our agreements over the years. It's always good to have some lawyers active in BVNA – Steve Nolan also did an excellent job drafting our dog park lease agreement with the BPDA last year, and Clyde Bergstresser has assisted Sarah on the execution and enforcement of 212 Stuart Street agreements. We are incredibly grateful for

the work we have received from our legal volunteers, and we are not infrequently approached by other neighborhood associations for advice on agreements and template examples.

- **380 Stuart Street**

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 Skanska office tower proposed for 380 Stuart Street. We discussed this briefly and ultimately decided to take no vote/action, as there didn't seem to be sufficient enthusiasm either for or against. This project was originally proposed as part of an amended John Hancock Planned Development Area (PDA) that establishes special zoning rules for large projects – the question is whether the PDA rules should still apply after Hancock/Manulife sold the property and rights to Skanska, or should the revised design now go through regular zoning? The height limit for this Stuart Street zoning district was 356 feet, and the new building is proposed at 390 feet, with a similar excess over the maximum zoned FAR (floor-area-ratio). So, it's about 10 percent taller than the relatively recent and thoroughly vetted Stuart Street zoning would otherwise permit.

The counterargument is that Skanska's building is no larger than the Hancock proposal, and the design is in many respects superior to the original, especially at ground level; moreover, the same organizations which are currently contesting the applicability of the PDA process to Skanska contested the applicability of the PDA process to Hancock six years ago, and that argument failed with the BPDA and the Zoning Commission. Even if the original decision was incorrect, is a change of owner or a change of Mayor sufficient reason for this to be reconsidered?

I've had a constructive back-and-forth with Elliott Laffer of NABB. My personal take is that the use of "amended PDAs" to override zoning for a single-building project is a terrible practice and I welcome and support efforts to prohibit this practice. Our Impact Advisory Group representative, John Shope, underscored this point back in 2015. We will return to the EC in February seeking support for this position, and we may also follow up at ADCO. Undoing what was already done at 380 Stuart is a different matter – I can easily imagine this being subject to litigation, and I do worry that a "victory" might yield a building only modestly smaller and much less engaging at the street level, where it matters. Because this building is on a street that already has multiple tall buildings and commercial properties, it doesn't pose shadow risks to parks or residences other than the recent, tall Clarendon condo building on the same block.

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

I was surprised to see a Greystar application to install seven "historic looking" LED lamps at 212 Stuart Street on the original Bay Village Historic District Commission agenda for January 11th. These LEDs would replace the gas lamps that previously existed on the Church Street plaza and along the north side of Shawmut Street. EC meeting regulars will recall that Michael Donaghy of the Lighting Division of Boston Public Works had presented this concept to us in December 2020, when it was described as "in the planning stages" in conjunction with another project slated for Temple Street in Beacon Hill – and we hadn't heard anything about this since. We assumed, as per our discussion a year ago, that BVNA would see working examples and be able to sign-off on the design before

anything went forward. We also presumed that we would learn more from the LED pilot project on Beacon Hill, announced in the press months prior to DPW meeting with us.

I followed up at length with Ryan Souls of Greystar, who was simply doing what the City told him to do. When 212 Stuart Street was approved, the assumption was that the gas lamps would be re-installed, and Ryan's team preserved them. Then they were told that these lamps would be converted to electric. More recently they were told that entirely new lamps would need to be purchased, and that it was a policy change of the City not to install any new gas lamps, even where they had existed previously. This was news to us – and also news to Rob Whitney, chair of the Beacon Hill Civic Association, who hasn't heard anything from DPW about the Temple Street project following the press announcements in 2020.

The Executive Committee voted to OPPOSE this application to BVHDC. We insist on a public process to vet the designs and light pattern to ensure that any changes are respectful and consistent with the desire for warm, low-level atmospheric lighting of narrow streets and passageways, not something more appropriate for a parking lot or major artery. We also want to ensure that if the City is making a policy change, other gas lamp neighborhoods have an opportunity to give their input.

To be clear: I'm not adamantly opposed to the ultimate conversion of our lighting to LEDs if it can be done carefully and the look of the neighborhood is maintained. I recognize that there are significant savings to the City if this can be accomplished over time (gas lamps cost a lot for DPW to maintain, electrics will be much cheaper) and there can also be some modest "green" benefits as well if enough lamps are converted.

However, I want to make absolutely sure that we are not treated differently or in isolation from other neighborhoods. Specifically, Beacon Hill has approximately 1000 gas lamps of the same design as ours. The City isn't going to achieve meaningful savings if our relatively modest number of lamps are converted and Beacon Hill's are not, and Bay Village certainly doesn't want to be stuck with an oddball orphan design if changes are later made when the roll-out proceeds on the other side of the Common. If the goal is efficiency, we need to have a common standard. Beacon Hill Civic Association is aligned with us on this, and we intend to work together on this issue going forward.

I reported this all back to Ryan Souls, and he graciously agreed to postpone the hearing with the BVHDC until February, which gives us time to organize and gather more information. I know Greystar is frustrated, because they'd like to get their project and plaza completed, and I appreciate their flexibility in helping us to do the right thing.

Committee Updates: Social

Thanks go out to Nan Rubin and the Social Committee for organizing the BVNA baked goods drive for our local firemen over the holiday week. Social Committee members dropped off baked goods to the fire station just in time for breakfast, where firemen were treated to blueberry muffins and cranberry nut bread. Delicious cookies and brownies awaited them for dessert with lunch and dinner.

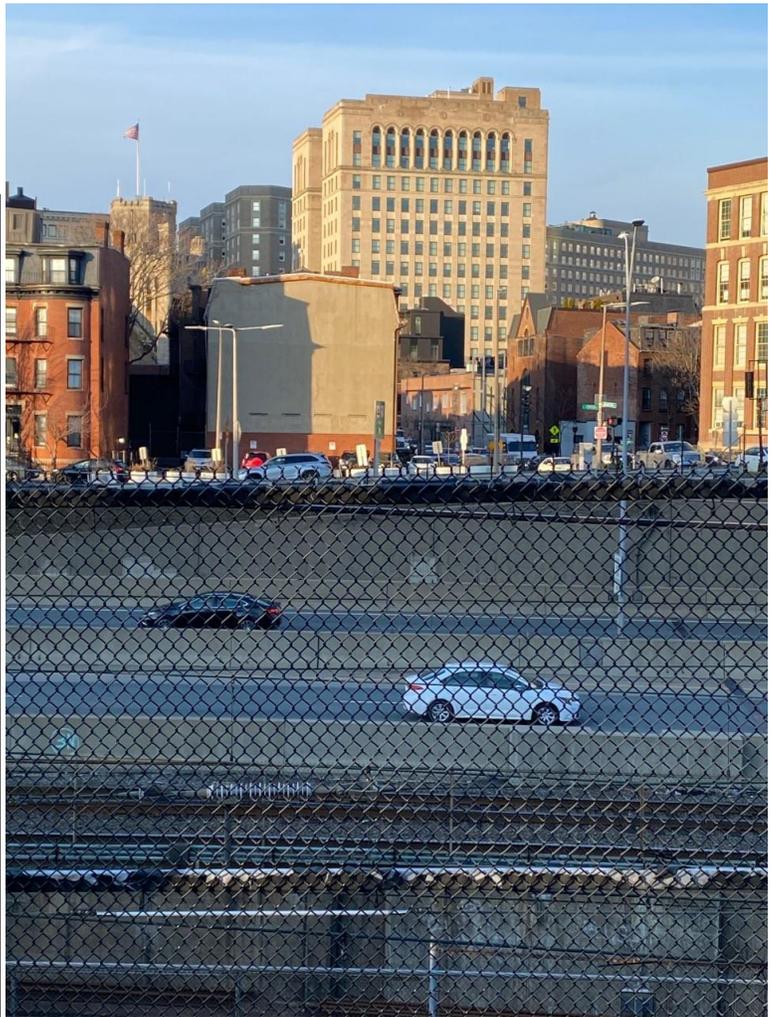
We also received a wonderful message of thanks from Josiah Quincy Upper School for the holiday donations made to the school.

Parks

The Parks continue to look festive! We anticipate more news about the 2022 improvement projects in the coming months.

Then and Now – Across the Tracks

This month's historic photo set looks at Cortes Street from the other side of the railroad corridor. The first shot is from the Leslie Jones archive, which chronicled the demolition of the Castle Square Hotel and Theater in early 1933; the contemporary photo comes from my iPhone, taken from the children's park at the end of Chandler Street across from the CVS on Tremont. It's not lined up as well as last month's photos from Steve Dunwell, but you'll see 100 Arlington anchoring the view in both photos, with the Statler/Park Plaza hotel behind it, and part of the Castle/Armory to the left. The older photo also captures the top of the Motor Mart Garage in the rear background. But the buildings in the foreground seem entirely different. What's going on here?



The difference, as you probably guessed, is that numerous buildings were demolished when the railroad right-of-way was widened to accommodate the Massachusetts Turnpike

extension. There was once a complete row of buildings on the south side of Cortes Street, and these were actually built prior to the north side townhouses that are visible from the South End today. The church seen here was shown on maps as early as the 1870s as the Episcopal Free Church of the Good Shepherd at 20 Cortes. The three buildings to the right of the church in the older photo are the rear of an Arlington Street rowhouse block extending south of Cortes Street that also was eliminated. Because my contemporary photo is taken from a lower vantage point and further forward, it is not as obvious how much wider the transportation right-of-way is now than it was then. If you look carefully through the windows of the demolished theater in the older photo, you will see a row of three parked cars and a fire hydrant between the building and the Boston and Albany steam locomotive. That is Chandler Street. To more accurately capture the perspective of the earlier photo, I would have required a drone to hover over the top of the Animal Rescue League Building.

The comparatively modest span of the bridge over the rail tracks is more clear from a 1920s photo in the other direction:



The Castle Square Theatre and Hotel has an interesting history. Built in 1894, the complex was designed by Winslow and Wetherell, a well-regarded Boston firm that was

also responsible for the iconic S.S. Pierce building in Coolidge Corner, the Jewelers Building on Washington Street, and the Hotel Touraine at Tremont and Boylston (now an apartment building), all of which still stand. For many years it was the base of Henry W Savage's well-regarded "Castle Square Opera Company," which toured across the country and premiered many significant operas sung in English. Gertrude Quinlan's career was launched there. It was a particularly large venue, with grand public spaces, cafes, and a 500-room hotel attached to the 1800-seat theater, and frontage on Tremont, Arlington, and Chandler Streets. The huge fixed costs associated with its size may have led to its undoing. The complex was renamed the Arlington Theatre and Hotel for a period of time (as the photo above indicates), and the theater was converted to motion pictures for a period of time, but ultimately it reverted to its live performances and its original name. When the nation slid into the Great Depression, it was closed and demolished.

Until Next Month,
Tom