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BAY VILLAGE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION, INC.

Hi Bay Village Neighbors:

I'm feeling a bit tired after springing forward! Our Executive Committee meeting agenda on Monday March 7<sup>th</sup> was dominated by the discussion of the gas lamp to LED pilot project.

**Special Guests: Joe Cornish, Director of Design Review, Boston Landmarks Commission; Mike Donaghy, Electrical Engineer, DPW Lighting Division; Environment Department Commissioner Alison Brizius; Environment Department Communications Director Stacia Sheputa; Public Outreach Coordinator Lindsey Santana; Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay Director Sue Prindle; Greystar Development Director Ryan Souls**

**Proposal to install LED “faux gas lamps” in place of gas lamps around the 212 Stuart Street Project:**

To recap the issue previously discussed at our January and February meetings: we were caught off guard by a Greystar application in January to the Bay Village Historic District Commission to install seven “historic looking” LED lamps in lieu of the reinstallation of gas lamps as originally specified in the 212 Stuart Street project plan. While Michael Donaghy of the Lighting Division of Boston Public Works had briefly presented this concept to us in December 2020, at that time 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 more about this until this year. The Executive Committee voted in January to OPPOSE this application to BVHDC, insisting 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. We also wanted to ensure that if the City is making a policy change, other gas lamp neighborhoods had ample opportunity to give their input – Beacon Hill has over 1000 lamps of the same design as ours, and they also line Marlborough Street in the Back Bay. Everyone understands that the City isn't going to achieve any meaningful energy savings or greenhouse benefits 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.

Joe Cornish of Landmarks and Mike Donaghy of the Department of Public Works responded to our concerns, and they are working to get broader public feedback, starting with Monday's meeting. The next and most significant step is a single LED prototype lamp, which was installed on the north side of Shawmut Street at the rear of 212 Stuart Street this past Wednesday. This will remain in place for a few weeks – PLEASE RESPOND TO ME OR DROP A MESSAGE AT [planning@bayvillage.net](mailto:planning@bayvillage.net) TO LET US KNOW WHAT YOU THINK. I appreciate that the City has made a strong effort to duplicate the current lamp design, but there are some differences. I have already received some written feedback from the Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay on the impressions of their subcommittee reviewing this, which includes the input of an electrical engineer.

The next step is a special meeting of the Bay Village Historic District Commission tonight, Monday March 14<sup>th</sup>, at 7 PM, at the Stuart Street site. Landmarks commissioners not just from Bay Village but also from Beacon Hill and Back Bay will be in attendance, and the public is welcome to join and offer their comments and feedback. There will be further meetings scheduled with Beacon Hill and other gas lamp neighborhoods at a later date.

Again, your input is important, because while there will only be seven lamps around the Greystar building and no *immediate* plans to replace other gas lamps in the downtown neighborhoods, this pilot is intended to guide future City policy. The Environmental Commissioner told us last Monday night that the City is determined to push alternatives, given that gas lamps are more expensive to operate and maintain and they generate far more greenhouse emissions than the LEDs. Therefore, decisions made now may ultimately have repercussions on the gas lamps outside your windows in the not-too-distant future. Do you think they are a close enough “match” to the existing lamps? Is the light too bright, or not bright enough? Does the light have the right color and adequately recreate the historic atmosphere of the gas lamps? Now is our chance to frame the discussion and work with other neighborhoods toward a common agreement about how the Department of Public Works should proceed.



This is the prototype!

## **Committee Updates**

### **Planning**

#### **- Pergola on roofdeck of 27 Isabella Street, Amar Tanna and his architect**

To paraphrase Yogi Berra, it was déjà vu all over again, as we discussed the 27 Isabella Street pergola proposal for the third or fourth time – the Tannas have been working on this project for more than a year. The proposal hasn't changed, but the City's final determination on the permits and approvals required often isn't clear until partway through the process, and in this case they ultimately decided that a Zoning variance is necessary. The Zoning Board of Appeals looks to BVNA for neighborhood feedback, so that required an Executive Committee vote. This was not a controversial project the when it was discussed at Planning and Executive Committee meetings last year, since the structure is not visible from Isabella Street and only minimally visible from Columbus Avenue. The condo association has reviewed architectural plans and signed off, and several residents on Isabella have previously spoken in favor of the proposal, so the Executive Committee voted unanimously NOT TO OPPOSE this variance.

### **Parks**

#### **- Dog Park Expenditures and Improvements**

We also voted to APPROVE expenditures up to \$350 to install a new trash can with a secure lid at the Dog Park, and to try again to install a dispenser of dog poop bags on site. We attempted a bag dispenser before, and it didn't take long before all of the bags were stolen, so this time we will aim to replenish it in smaller increments. Please help us to remind people to pick up after their pets. The accumulation of dog waste on the wood chips in the park has been disappointing – the same handful of volunteers end up doing most of the work to keep the park clean, week after week, and our hope is that the dispenser will eliminate any remaining excuse for not picking up.

Marie Nolan organized a follow-on call last Wednesday to discuss the next round of Dog Park improvements, and to review our outreach to professional dog walkers who use the park. While Bay Village Neighborhood Association leases the property from the BPDA, it is understood that this is a public amenity accessible to all. Still, heavy use by professional dog walkers certainly increases wear and tear on the little space, and has led us to increase the frequency with which we replenish the chips, replace plantings, and update hardware. We will therefore be looking to these profit-making enterprises to help us defray the additional costs of upkeep, and remind them to keep the ratio of minders-to-canines within reason.

Next on the agenda is a replacement of the double gate which Pete from Boston Dog Butlers helped us install last year, and which Mark Slater has done his best to try to keep operational. We put up this additional fencing in a hurry immediately after securing the lease to the park, because the prior single gate presented a hazard: it was too easy for dogs to run into traffic. David Goldman of New Boston Ventures, the developer of the townhouses at 1-17 Edgerly Place, has volunteered to help us find a fencing contractor and to contribute the first \$1,000 toward a new and better gate. My heartfelt thanks go out to David for helping us take this next step, and also to Marie Nolan for continuing to organize and advocate for the park, to Steve Nolan for his efforts to lead and organize the trash crew, and to Mark Slater and Carol Carlson for their work on maintenance and plantings.

#### **- Safety**

We are still waiting for final confirmation on the cameras installation.

#### **- City Services**

We do not yet have a date for the Spring clean-up – this will likely be in late April or early May.

## **Then and Now – What’s in a (Street) Name?**

Among American cities, New Orleans undoubtedly has the best street names. I don’t believe that any other city has had a bestselling book that traces its history through its streets (John Churchill Chase’s *Frenchmen, Desire, Good Children*) or one with as memorable a literary adaptation as Blanche DuBois’s opening line in Tennessee Williams’ *A Streetcar Named Desire*:

They told me to take a street-car named Desire, and transfer to one called Cemeteries, and ride six blocks and get off at – Elysian Fields!\*

Street names in The Hub aren’t *quite* as memorable as those in the Crescent City, but several still have some interest and charm. There are, however, a few limitations to Boston’s street nomenclature – some interesting themes were mangled a bit in the execution, some logical patterns lost coherence over time, especially during urban renewal, and, of course, there has long been a degree of duplication that has presumably flummoxed tourists since the days of Paul Revere.

The charm of the Back Bay, for example, is enhanced by the alphabetic procession of English peers (Arlington, Berkeley, Clarendon, Dartmouth, Exeter, Fairfield, Gloucester, Hereford). On the other side of Massachusetts Avenue, however, the Fenway street layout was influenced by Olmstead’s plan for the Emerald Necklace and the natural irregularity of the Muddy River, so the grid was sacrificed for a more typically Boston hodge-podge, and the continued alphabetic progression of Ipswich, Jersey, Kilmarnock, and Lansdowne aren’t particularly helpful for wayfinding. In the early twentieth century, as the area including Fenway Park was built out to plans different from Olmstead’s, blocks were made larger and the plot was lost altogether ... I believe Mornington became Van Ness (?), and Nottingham and Onslow are lost to the mists of time, although Peterborough and Queensbury proudly remain. The sequence was supposed to continue all the way to York and Zetland, excepting only X, but perhaps it is just as well that it ended where it did.

Bay Villagers, of course, are familiar with the Arlington-Berkeley end of this alphabetic progression, but our end of Arlington Street is not original. As early as the 1830s, the Boston and Providence Railway was built across a causeway of the Back Bay when the “Bay” still contained water, terminating in Park Square at the site of what is now the Park Plaza Hotel. In the 1870s, a grand station was built at this site, which extended as far west as Berkeley Street. Thus the station and tracks separated the Back Bay from what is now Bay Village, and Arlington Street terminated at Boylston into the early twentieth century.

Just as the theme for several Beacon Hill streets was trees, and the theme for the Back Bay British peers, the theme for the streets on the western end of Bay Village was the Spanish exploration and conquest of North America – Ferdinand, Isabella, Columbus, Cortes. (“Indigenous People’s Day” clearly wasn’t on the radar of Nineteenth Century Bostonians). Ferdinand Street was where Arlington Street is today, only not nearly as wide. After South Station was completed in 1899, the rail termini were consolidated there, and by the 1920s, Arlington Street was extended to subsume Ferdinand. Thus was Boston’s Aragon separated from its Castile. Divorced from her husband, Isabella was joined instead with a scheming Earl, who, though he once served as Charles II’s emissary to Madrid and ultimately declared himself a Catholic on his deathbed, spent a good deal of his career renouncing popery and punishing non-conformists. This truly was a marriage of convenience.

The same Boston and Albany and Boston and Providence rail lines also inspired the theme of South End streets, which were named after towns served by the railways. Hence the parade of streets including Milford, Newton, Dedham, Brookline, Worcester, etcetera, continuing across

what is now Mass Ave (formerly Chester Park) to Northampton and Lenox Streets at the historic Roxbury line. The trend to name streets after towns was extended to Bay Village, too: at some point in the 1860s, What had been Marion Street was renamed Melrose Street, and the former South Cedar Street became Winchester Street. Here, again, the idea seems sound, the execution less so. Renaming South Cedar seems a sensible move, given the likely confusion with the completely unrelated West Cedar Street on the other side of the Common in Beacon Hill, but the job was left incomplete: tiny South Cedar Place remains.



And why did they stop the renaming there? Shawmut Street was left untouched, guaranteeing a century and a half of confusion with the much larger Shawmut Avenue about eight blocks away. Duplication has been a bugaboo of Boston area street naming from the start. What Peachtree is to Atlanta, Beacon and Washington are to the Boston area. And there are many other culprits. I've met tourists looking hopefully for a Doubletree Hotel on Mt. Vernon Street in Beacon Hill (it's in Dorchester) and we used to have a steady parade of backpackers seeking a hostel on Church Street (that one is in Everett, so not even Boston, but there are also Church Streets in Dorchester, Hyde Park, and West Roxbury). Boston was so ga-ga about the Marquis de Lafayette that not one but two streets were named after him, and another, LaGrange, after his estate, but fortunately our

Fayette Street is not as easily confused with Avenue de Lafayette. Edgerly Place, named after an early landowner, is much more easily mixed up with Edgerly Road behind Symphony Hall – guaranteeing continued confusion for visitors to the residents of the new townhouses being built there.

Little Knox Street once extended further both east and west, and tiny Bay Street once extended further north and south. A fire station (later Chemical No. 2, now residential) was erected on the Knox Street right-of-way at what is now 23-25 Church Street – the remaining end of Knox Street east of Church was renamed Dingley Place after the then-owner of 33 Fayette Street. To the west, several Knox Street houses were eliminated for the building of the Abraham Lincoln School in 1908, which also truncated Bay Street.

On the other ends of Bay Village, many historic streets were lost to BRA bulldozers. Porter, Kirkland, and Wheeler Streets vanished under the Mass Pike towers on the south side of Tremont Street towards the Turnpike, and Common, Hollis, and Fore Streets were wiped off the map on the East side of Tremont, across from what is now Elliott Norton Park. As discussed in the last newsletter, Broadway (originally Pleasant Street) was truncated to a stub entirely detached from the rest of the street that continued across the tracks through South Boston. Historic Carver Street met much the same fate as Ferdinand – widened and squared off, it was re-christened Charles Street South, following the name of the Beacon Hill Street with which it was connected. Warrenton Street was also truncated and re-routed, leaving the Doubletree Hotel (former Don Bosco School) oddly perched askew from the simplified BRA street grid.

On the other side of the Turnpike, the “New York Streets” area was famously wiped out by the BRA in the 1950s. These streets (Seneca, Oneida, Oswego, Genessee, Rochester, Troy) were named in honor of the rail connection to Albany in 1842 that extended rail access from Boston to the towns of central New York. (Albany Street remains – the rest are buried under the “Ink Block” and its surrounds).

The crude hand and lack of imagination that characterized the BRA’s creation of wide roads, desolate streetscapes, and superblocks of dreary minimalist towers extended to its approach to street naming. On our side of the rail and road trench, the street running parallel to the Turnpike was known as Corning Street through the 1960s, but after the BRA finished stripping it of buildings, it was rechristened ... “Marginal Road,” never mind the longstanding existence of a Marginal Street in East Boston. This austere designation seems to accurately capture the BRA’s attitude toward urban renewal in Bay Village/South Cove area more broadly, but it’s also of a piece with more recent utilitarian gems such as “Haul Road,” “Surface Road,” “Service Road,” “Frontage Road,” and “East/West Side Drive.” (The latter referring to sides of the Convention Center). I’m not sure why stark functional minimalism must extend beyond our architecture to our streets – the recently established new street grids in the Seaport and Cambridge’s Northpoint seem like missed opportunities to add a more lyric quality to our maps. If we are so completely devoid of new ideas, perhaps we should just update the Back Bay concept and re-appropriate current names from the House of Windsor – I think I’d rather live on a street named after Elizabeth or Camilla or Meghan than “Marginal Road.”



Until Next Month,  
Tom

\*Pedants will note that Williams took some liberties with New Orleans geography to preserve his literary symbolism, because while these all existed in 1940s New Orleans, the sequence of transfers quoted by Blanche DuBois makes no sense – coming from the River, you would have *started* toward Cemeteries and *then* transferred to Desire to reach Elysian Fields; and coming from the train station, Blanche would have taken an entirely different series of streetcars.