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BAY VILLAGE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION, INC.

Hi Bay Village Neighbors:

I hope that the unusually wet summer is winding down happily for all of you! BVNA activities typically pick up after Labor Day, and this year is no exception. We had a lively Executive Committee meeting on Tuesday evening, but I recognize that many of you couldn't make it because of Rosh Hashanah celebrations or extended weekends away. We will return to our "usual" 7 PM meetings on the first Monday of the month in October, and I will get the Zoom links posted onto bayvillage.net shortly. Unfortunately, with the rise of the Delta variant, we are not yet in a position to resume our in-person meetings at South Cove.

**GUESTS AND SPECIAL TOPICS:**

**- Addition to 95-97 Broadway**

Neighbor Meichi Peng, her advisor Mike Ross and her team of architects and general contractor presented the latest version of her plans to add a third story to the commercial building on the corner of Winchester Street and Broadway, converting the building to a mixed-use combination of offices and two residences. Following a robust discussion, the Executive Committee voted overwhelmingly **not to oppose** the zoning variances required for this project, subject to the project being executed according to the revised plans we were shown.

Meichi and her team deserve credit and thanks for responding to the concerns raised by direct abutters, and for quickly turning around multiple iterations of the proposal reflecting these changes. Following feedback from a BVNA Planning Committee Meeting in June, a formal City-mediated meeting with near-neighbors, a series of private meetings with individual direct abutters, and a Planning Committee review last month, this proposal has gone through at least four iterations. Significant changes include: eliminating a proposed headhouse for roof deck access in favor of a hatch; modifying the location of the proposed roof deck/mechanicals and eliminating a 'privacy wall' that abutters felt was oppressive; shrinking the size of the addition to permit 12 foot setbacks at the rear in conjunction with a commitment to work to preserve existing trees; tweaking the front façade to increase the contrast and setback between the historic building and the addition. The zoning variances being sought here are relatively modest, as the addition would remain within the zoning height limit. There will need to be variances for FAR (floor-area-ratio) and confirmation of an engineering solution to recharge groundwater that is required for all projects in Bay Village; there may also need to be a variance for rear yard setback, although this is subject to interpretation, as the reduced-sized third-floor addition may in fact be in compliance even if the existing building is not. Several direct abutters voiced their support prior to the vote.

It will take some time to secure the required approvals and prepare the project, so the contractor estimated that construction would not begin until 2022, and that total construction time will take longer than a year. The specific timing may depend on their success in exploring a modular approach to construction, with more work done off-site. We had a good discussion about the need to communicate regularly about the construction schedule and received a commitment that project start times will be strictly observed. The next step on this project is a review by the Bay Village Historic District Commission, which meets Tuesday, September 14<sup>th</sup> at 4 PM.

I'm pleased by the iteration of this project and I look forward to its completion. I know that some neighbors are squeamish about approving any change to existing buildings, but this follows our general pattern of voting not to oppose sympathetic additions to early- and mid-twentieth century commercial buildings that include thoughtful setbacks and remain at the approximate scale of the original townhouses (cf., previous projects at 45 Church, 69 Church, 48-50 Melrose, etc.) While these buildings contribute to the character of the neighborhood and reflect our history with the film industry and a multitude of other businesses, Boston seems to have little regard for 70-150 year old commercial buildings that would be treasured in cities with less history. I'd much rather see them reinvigorated with sensitive additions than destroyed, as the City/BPDA has allowed elsewhere.

#### **- 10 Edgerly Place and 130-134 Arlington Street**

Developer Jonathan Lee joined the meeting to let us know that construction will be starting later this month on the townhouse being built at 10 Edgerly, across the street from the 1-17 Edgerly Place townhouses already under construction, and also on the three townhouses planned for 130-134 Arlington on the empty lot next to the former BCAE. He has also submitted proposals for roof decks on these townhouses which will also be reviewed at the Bay Village Historic Commission meeting Tuesday afternoon. (As previously discussed, because these townhouses are being built as-of-right within zoning, the roof decks will not likely require any zoning variance if the Historic Commission confirms that they meet standards and are not visible from a public way). Jonathan does not believe we will experience the same shaking/vibration issues we encountered with the work on the buildings New Boston Ventures is constructing across the street, as he will be using a different technique on the foundations. He promised to keep us informed as to the evolution and progress of the construction schedule, to ensure that morning start times follow regulations, and to coordinate closely with New Boston Ventures to ensure that conflicting major deliveries on the same day don't create an access nightmare for residents.

#### **Introduction: District 1 City Councilor Lydia Edwards, candidate for State Senate seat being vacated by Joe Boncore**

As many of you will have heard, our State Senator, Joe Boncore, is stepping down to become the CEO of MassBio, which will trigger a special election early next year. Councilor Edwards, whose district includes Eastie, Charlestown, and the North End, requested to meet with BVNA to introduce herself shortly after she announced her candidacy, since she is less familiar to us than to other constituents of Senator Boncore, who reside in her current City Council district. We had a typically lively question-and-answer session about issues of concern across the city, with a particular focus on housing and the zoning code. Councilor Edwards emphasized

that her desire to move to the State House is driven in part by frustration at how little power City government has to effect changes without action at the State level.

## **Committee Updates: Social**

Craig brought us up to speed on plans underway to hold the 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Bay Village Block Party on the evening of Thursday September 23rd. As in the past, we have filed for permits to close Melrose Street between Church and Arlington. Please Save the Date!

There are some challenges to planning a large event as the pandemic grinds through its second year. In the past, we have worked with BPS to use the school space as a fallback in the event of rain – that isn't a possibility given COVID regulations. A next obvious backup solution would be to use tents, but as one might imagine, the surging demand for tent rentals has made these almost impossible to secure without reserving several months in advance. We can't even secure the rental furniture for a "backup date" without paying twice. Another complication is that the large increase in outdoor events and some changes at City Hall have led to increased scrutiny over the issuance of event permits – we will need more permits than in the past, and we will need to configure the tables on Melrose Street differently.

We are working on some creative backup plans, but please keep your fingers crossed for good weather, and be patient with us if things are a bit awkward on a soggy evening!

## **Parks Bay Village Park**

In early August, we had a second meeting with the Parks Department and the Copley Wolff Design Group, landscape architects paid for by a generous grant from the Brown Fund, to discuss the park on the corner of Melrose/Broadway/Fayette. Following feedback from neighbors discussed in the first meeting in June, this second meeting was focused on specific potential options presented by Copley Wolff to refresh the park. The "reworking" of this park will not entail an entire reprogramming of the space, which I think most of us agree is a nice oasis that has been well-maintained by neighborhood volunteers, but rather a thorough updating that will address some serious shortcomings of the existing configuration, some of which aren't obvious to casual Park users. We would like to make the Park accessible to disabled persons, and we need to address the fountain, which wastes an incredible amount of water. The brick planters at the corners of the Park are also problematic –they difficult to weed and water, they screen visibility into the Park, and they have become literal rat's nests.

There was widespread consensus around one of the options presented – those interested can find a video recap of the meeting here:

<https://www.boston.gov/departments/parks-and-recreation/improvements-bay-village-neighborhood-park>

There will be a third meeting, currently scheduled for October 14<sup>th</sup>. Please join us if you are interested! Our Project Manager seemed quite confident that we can secure

further grant to fund the reconfiguration, which could potentially begin at some point in 2022.

In the meantime, Carol Carlson has done a terrific job keeping the space looking good, covering for Tom K as he dealt with a health issue.

### **Dog Park**

Regulars at the Dog Park will note that we have continued to make small improvements to this space. Thanks go out to Steve Nolan, Mark Slater, and others for their efforts to construct the fence edging to better contain the wood chips. Now that this is in place, we are ready for another delivery/refresh of the chips.

### **Woodland Park (Lyndeboro Enclave)**

This little bit of green space, across from the Dog Park and adjacent to Lyndeboro Place and Eliot Norton Park, has also historically been tended by BVNA members, but in recent years has become overgrown with invasive ivy. Subsequent to our Tuesday meeting, the Executive Committee voted to authorize Carol and team some funds to plant some new, native woodland perennials and remove the ivy.

### **Eliot Norton**

Several of you have registered concerns about the individual who has assembled an encampment in Eliot Norton a few feet from the children's playground. While homelessness is not an easy problem to solve, this is a particularly unsuitable location for an unsanitary encampment, and we have raised this issue with ONS and the BPD on many occasions over the last several months.

In early August, the City posted multiple notices on the encampment that the materials would be removed and disposed of by the City no later than August 11<sup>th</sup>. Finally, we thought, the City is addressing the problem! Then, at around mid-day on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August, we received an invitation to a "Mayor's Coffee Hour" for Chinatown and Bay Village at Eliot Norton the following morning, too late for us to even send out invitations.

Sure enough, while the sizeable encampment was still there at 8AM on the 11<sup>th</sup>, it was nowhere to be seen when the Mayor and the TV cameras arrived at 10:30 for the "coffee hour." But shortly after the Mayor and the TV cameras were gone, the encampment returned, with the same materials as before.

I had warned Kim Crucioli of ONS at the event that I'd be in touch if the encampment returned, and I know she has done her best to communicate to higher-ups who are blind to hypocrisy. It's not her fault we aren't getting the results we'd like. Kim put me in touch with Jim Greene of the Department of Neighborhood Development, who took a half hour out of his day to discuss the situation with me. The good news is that the City's social services team is very aware of the situation, Jim and others have had lengthy interactions with the individual who built the encampment, and they are hopeful that they can eventually convince him to move. Jim has worked under several administrations, and it's clear he's a caring individual who is doing his best to get the individual some help and remedy the situation – there is shelter space available, but the offer has been refused repeatedly. The bad news is that DND itself has no power to enforce a removal.

We certainly wish Jim and his team success. It's sad that someone has been exposed to the elements in Eliot Norton through the series of tropical storms we've endured this summer. Unless Jim's powers of persuasion are successful, however, I don't expect a resolution in this until there's a meaningful change in either the weather or the political climate. We can't count on mayoral events more than once a year.

## **All Parks**

Trash collection from the Parks continues to be a challenge, with the burden disproportionately falling on the same handful of individuals. Given the heavy use of the Dog Park and the popularity of the Parks for *al fresco* Mike & Patty's lunches, bins end up being filled quickly, and if they aren't cleared very regularly, they attract rodents. We are investigating the possibility of working with Project Place to hire someone for a few hours each week to help us keep the neighborhood clean.

### **Reminder: PLEASE VOTE on Tuesday!**

Tuesday is the preliminary election that will determine the finalists for the Mayoral contest and the At-Large City Council seats. It's non-partisan: anyone registered to vote can vote. Turnout in City elections has historically been pretty dreadful – barely 30% of registered voters made it to the polls for the preliminary election in 2013, the last time we had a contest without an elected incumbent. In 2017, turnout was far less than that. What's worse, even many of those who do vote in these elections don't even choose a full slate of City Council candidates.

This is a situation where every vote really DOES matter. At-large Councilor Julia Mejia won her seat by a **single vote** in 2019, 22,492 to 22,491. Nor was this the first tight election in my time here – there was also an At-Large recount decided by a handful of votes in 2001. In preliminary elections, vote gaps between individual At Large candidates are often three-digit numbers. Even in the last open mayoral contest in 2013, when overall turnout was comparatively high, both the preliminary election and the final election of Marty Walsh were decided by only a few thousand votes.

Because the numbers are so small and votes so precious, elected officials pay very close attention to turnout by ward and precinct. Historically, certain precincts in Southie and West Roxbury had terrific relative turnout and – surprise! – they receive disproportionate attention from the City and elected representatives. On the other end of the spectrum, some precincts in the South End and Fenway have had notoriously poor turnout. Our own Ward 5, Precinct 1 hasn't been terrible, but we certainly could do even better.

The best way for us to ensure that our parks and streets and sidewalks and gas lamps get attention is to vote. The best way to ensure that the Zoning Board and the Licensing Board and every other city department takes BVNA correspondence seriously is to vote. There may be only ~1400 residents in Bay Village, some of whom are ineligible or not registered ... but we have the ability to swing a few hundred votes, and in the crazy world of Boston politics, our representatives understand that a few hundred votes can be the difference between the brass ring and the fuzzy end of the lollipop.

## Bay Village and the Film Industry

As many of you know, for several decades Bay Village was the regional center for the motion picture industry. Here's a side-by-side view of Winchester Street, looking from Church toward Arlington:



The malaise-era Detroit iron parked in the left-hand photo dates this from the mid-1970s. Film canisters are ready for shipment. From an architectural standpoint, there hasn't been too much change in the last 48 years. There are more trees now than then, as everywhere in Bay Village, and the trees are much larger. The Liberty Mutual building dominates the background of the current photo, and a townhouse at 41-43 Winchester, obscured by the trees, was completed early this century to fill the gap in the row visible in the earlier photo. Multiple Bay Village parcels were cleared and used only for parking for decades, but empty lots are now an endangered species.

In the pre-digital era, film distribution entailed much more complicated physical logistics. Given its proximity to the theater district, Bay Village had long been a favored location for businesses that provided support services to stages and cinemas, and in the golden age of Hollywood from the '30s to the '60s, studios established their regional film exchanges for New England here. These exchanges contained

offices, film libraries, and screening rooms. Some older townhouses were re-worked with new facades, and some purpose-built buildings were constructed with heavy floors to handle the considerable weight of motion picture libraries. Regional sales teams working out of these offices cultivated relationships with theater owners in every New England town, and ensured timely delivery and pick-up of reels.

I don't have a comprehensive list of who-was-where, but we know that 45 Church (later the Seafarer's home, now condos) was the home of Columbia Pictures, 52 Church (currently the offices of Raphael and Raphael) housed United Artists, 36 Melrose (later law offices, now residential) was the base for Paramount News, and 122 Arlington (now BCAE/JVS) was the RKO screening room. Universal was at 60 Church, now demolished. The building at 46 Church Street that now houses the administrative offices for New England Law once housed the MGM Screening Room. Note the lion above the entrance:



In the pre-television era, film premieres were large and elaborate affairs, and they weren't all in Hollywood: studios were keen to use these events for regional promotion. Boston had its share of blockbuster film premieres – Disney's *Cinderella*, for example, was distributed by RKO and premiered here in 1950.

The local MGM team had their hands full in the summer of '45, right before V-J Day. Here's an excerpt from the August 18, 1945 *Motion Picture Herald* (Library of Congress Archive):

MGM's "Ziegfeld Follies" Opens

The world premiere of MGM's "Ziegfeld Follies"

was held Monday, August 13, at the Colonial Theatre in Boston with all of the fanfare of a Hollywood premiere.

Judy Garland, one of the stars of the picture, and her husband, Vincente Minnelli, who directed it, were among the notables who attended. Governor Maurice J. Tobin of Massachusetts and Mrs. Tobin and John Kerrigan, Mayor of Boston, also attended.

The Boston engagement, a two-a-day policy, is limited to two weeks. An extensive advance advertising and exploitation campaign preceded the premiere and the advance sale of tickets was reportedly one of the largest in the history of the company for a roadshow engagement. Opening night tickets, priced at \$2.40, were sold out two weeks before the opening.

The Colonial was redecorated and equipped with new sound devices and a special front for the event.

A second similar engagement at the Nixon Theatre in Pittsburgh begins August 26.

Following the Boston showing, William F. Rodgers, MGM vice-president and general sales manager, was host at a special luncheon for approximately 50 "in-town" exhibitors in the Boston territory on Tuesday, August 14.

Roll-outs in those days were more deliberate, coordinated with other releases. Mixed audience reactions to the film led to some further edits, and Ziegfeld Follies did not go national until 1946. Inflated into current dollars, those opening night tickets cost over \$36, but obviously many people thought that a bargain to see the stars in person. Political leaders treated these events with the reverence currently given to our sports teams. John Kerrigan was in the midst of a campaign, and may have been particularly keen to be seen at popular events – he was our last “Acting Mayor,” a former City Council President elevated to the mayoral role when Tobin became Governor in January of 1945. In his case, though, any star-power didn’t rub off: he was trounced in the November election, never did serve a full term, and later returned to the Council.

Until next month,

Tom Perkins  
President, BVNA