

STATE OF OUR NEIGHBORHOOD 2015

HOUSING WORKING GROUP

1- PLANNING

Topic 1:

Planning initiative for the Egleston / Washington / Forest Hills Corridor

Context:

Radiating from Egleston Square to Forest Hills and Jackson Square, Washington Street and Columbus Avenue present an unparalleled opportunity to create new housing, new jobs, and a more livable community in Jamaica Plain and Roxbury.

THE OPPORTUNITY:

Dozens of underutilized parcels awaiting redevelopment. A lack of private investment over the years is manifest in the corridor's many empty warehouses, vehicle storage lots, and other undercapitalized properties which generate little in the way of employment or tax revenue. On at least fifty parcels, the building is worth far less than the land itself.

An ideal transit-oriented location. The corridor is served by four Orange Line stops, the Forest Hills bus hub, the Bike Path, Hubway, and Zipcar. The Orange Line alone provides access to a quarter of the jobs in the entire region. Households in the area own fewer cars, spend less on transportation, and generate less traffic than their counterparts elsewhere.

A market ready for growth. New units at Jackson Square are full, the Commons at Forest Hills is under construction, and numerous other multifamily and mixed use projects are in the works. New production provides an opportunity to take pressure off the existing stock and create substantial numbers of new affordable units through high inclusionary housing requirements.

THE CHALLENGES:

Outdated zoning and development guidelines. Large stretches of the corridor are still zoned Light Industrial, requiring a raft of variances to build the new housing the city needs. Excessive parking requirements drive up the cost of housing and attract car-owning households less likely to use transit and more likely to cause traffic.

A substandard streetscape. Major stretches of both Washington Street and Columbus Avenue—most notably the intersection of the two—are unpleasant if not downright hostile to pedestrians and bicyclists, isolating local businesses from customers who are potentially within walking distance.

Question:

Now is the time for a city-led, comprehensive, innovative, and inclusive planning process to establish a framework for development and infrastructure investments in the corridor. This process should address both land use and the public realm, with the goal of developing an urban design plan, a transportation plan, and the regulatory framework necessary to guide development (zoning, affordability requirements, and appropriate parking standards.) Extensive community engagement—including nontraditional outreach methods and bilingual communication—should be a central element of this effort, though it should not unnecessarily delay the planning process, since rapidly increasing market interest in the corridor makes it essential that a plan is developed within the next 12 months.



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Topic 2: Developing the Arborway Yard

Context:

The Arborway Yard is a parcel of State-owned land in the Forest Hills neighborhood.

- In 1998 the MBTA announced its plans to develop a facility at the Arborway Yard. The MBTA's plans included a garage for 186 busses, a maintenance facility, surface parking for over 500 cars, and a preliminary design that raised serious environmental concerns. The MBTA also planned to use all 17 plus acres of the site for its proposed facility.
- A group of JP residents, advocates, and community organizations formed the Community Planning Committee for the Arborway Yard (CPCAY) to advocate for a comprehensive and collaborative community planning process. 21 groups extended their support, including business and resident associations, open space groups, community development corporations, affordable housing, and youth advocacy organizations. Every elected official representing Jamaica Plain, as well as Mayor Menino, endorsed the CPCAY.
- After a full year of organizing, the MBTA abandoned its original plans and agreed to engage in a community planning process for the development of the Arborway Yard.
- In January of 2000, the community planning process began as a collaborative effort of the CPCAY, the MBTA and the City. More than 60 JP residents participated in working groups focused on the appropriate size, scale and scope of the new facility; environmental, open space, traffic, design issues, and impact mitigation.
- In February of 2001 the MBTA and the Mayor signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that was approved by the CPCAY.
- The MOU includes: the facility would accommodate no more than 104 busses; no public parking; strong environmental safeguards; guarantees of significant open space; a design review process to be overseen by the CPCAY and the City; and the **transfer of 8 acres of the site to the City for affordable housing, youth recreation, and other uses.**
- In 2008 The Forest Hills Planning Initiative produced concrete guidelines for development in the area, including the Arborway Yard.

For over 10 years the neighborhood has lived with a "temporary" facility that does not meet any of the standards articulated in the MOU.

Question:

What steps will you take to ensure that the promises in the Memorandum Of Understanding, are kept and that the Arborway Yard is developed to improve our community?



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HOUSING WORKING GROUP

2- REGULATIONS

Topic 1: Just Cause Eviction Campaign

Context:

As Boston becomes an increasingly more expensive and economically unequal city, low income families and communities of color are feeling drastic effects. In JP and Roxbury, but also all across the city, we as community organizations and you as elected officials hear stories every day from families who over the years had set down roots and made their block into a community – and now are at risk of losing their homes, precisely because their work and public tax money have succeeded in improving their neighborhoods.

A network of community organizations including City Life/Vida Urbana have been talking about an emergency response to the displacement crisis. We believe that a municipal Just Cause Eviction law limiting eviction to certain circumstances and including a mediation procedure is an important first step towards community stabilization. Who would this help?

- Renters in privately-owned, non-subsidized housing, who are most vulnerable to being displaced for profit by no-fault eviction, because their tenancies are the least subject to regulation and protection. As lower-income tenants get pushed out of market-rate housing, landlords charge more, and the market rent goes up.
- Sharp increases in market rents endanger Section 8 tenants, whose landlords can then get the S8 agency to approve rent increases beyond the government’s “Fair Market Rent” level by proving that rents are higher locally. These increases fall entirely on the tenant, making their housing unaffordable.
- Soaring rental markets cause the owners of HUD-subsidized buildings to refuse to renew their rental affordability restrictions, or look for ways to get out of them early.
- When market rent increases cause property values to rise out of proportion to neighborhood income, pressure builds for public housing to be scaled back or relocated, and residents risk being displaced due to “redevelopment” that reduces the quantity of affordable housing.
- The inflation of property values resulting from runaway rental markets burdens low/fixed-income homeowners with unaffordable taxes and leaves them vulnerable to predatory lending. Low- and moderate-income homebuyers are priced out of communities they work in, belong to, or grew up in.
- Local small business owners can lose their livelihoods due to rising commercial rents.

Question:

Would you work for the passage of a municipal Just Cause Eviction law that would:

- Require landlords who are not owner-occupants to have a legitimate reason for eviction.
- Require landlords who are not owner-occupants to engage in mediation before moving to evict over large rent increases.
- Provide property tax relief for owner-occupants and Boston-resident small landlords who keep their rents at or below certain levels of affordability.

This law would need to be passed by the Mayor and City Council, then the first 2 elements of it would need approval from the State Legislature.



STATE OF OUR NEIGHBORHOOD 2015

HOUSING WORKING GROUP

2- REGULATIONS

Topic 2:

Adopt the Boston Median Income instead the Metropolitan Area Median Income

Context:

For the City's Inclusionary Development Policy, we understand that the City of Boston acknowledges that the metropolitan area median income (known as the area median income or "AMI"), which includes such diverse communities as Weston, Lawrence and even parts of southern New Hampshire is different from the Boston Median Income or the area that the policy is intended to serve.

Recent orders relative to the income policy acknowledge that the 70% - 125% area median income requirements are comparable to 100% - 160% of Boston median income where the units are located and presumably intended to serve.

It appears that the affordability requirements of the policy are 30 to 40% higher than the population the policy is intended to benefit.

Question:

Is there a reason that the Inclusionary Development Policy cannot be adjusted to deliver units that are affordable to the Boston Median Income limits?

Can we rely on you to support Jamaica Plain's efforts to hold developers to the Boston Median Income for units produced in our community?

If you cannot support us, can you help us understand why not?



STATE OF OUR NEIGHBORHOOD 2015 HOUSING WORKING GROUP

3- RESOURCES

Topic 1: Adopt a Comprehensive Inclusionary Development Program

Context:

The demand for affordable housing in this neighborhood is not met by new developments (public, non-profit, or private). The Inclusionary development Policy, approved in 2000 and amended in 2003, 2005, 2006 and 2007, has proven to be a significant tool to generate resources, both in affordable units built and in funding construction of equivalent units; but, it needs some changes to improve its impact considering current and future resident displacement conditions. The current policy requests private developers who are building more than 10 units to designate at least 15% of the market rate units to be affordable, and if they cannot build those units on site, they can do it off-site or make at least a \$200,000 payment per unit to the City. In June 2004 the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council approved to urge the City to amend the IDP to raise the percentage of affordable units from 15% to 25%, accept no cash payments in lieu of providing the affordable units, and other items related to income guidelines. Several organizations, including the Boston Tenant Coalition and City Life, have been advocating for a change in this policy.

Question:

Would you support the adoption of a comprehensive inclusionary development policy that requires in any private development with more than 10 units, that at least 25% of the market rate units must be affordable for low- and moderate-income households and individuals? And the payout, only if it is justifiable, must be equivalent to the current unit construction cost?

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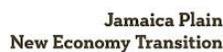
3- RESOURCES

Topic 2: Increase the Brownfields Redevelopment Fund by \$15 million in FY16

Context:

The Brownfields Redevelopment Fund, established in 1998, has provided critical funding for assessment or remediation of brownfields sites. Over the past six years in the state over 4,000 housing units were built and 2,600 jobs are expected to be created as a result of this fund.

The fund started with \$30 million in 1998, received another \$30 million contribution in 2006, and \$15 in 2014. MassDevelopment, the agency that manages this fund, has estimated that \$15 million are needed each year to support the projects in the pipeline.



Hundreds of affordable units are now a reality in the neighborhood due to the resources provided by this fund, for example Catherine Gallagher Coop, Copper Beech Montessori School, 41 Amory Street, and Blessed Sacrament.

The available land to be developed in this neighborhood and located near public transportation is contaminated (Jackson Square, Forest Hills). Without this fund is impossible to develop affordable housing, generate local jobs, as well as reducing toxic hazards

Question:

What would you do to support the Brownfields Redevelopment Fund as a permanent funding for affordable housing? Would you engage community members and local organizations to ensure that at least \$15 million are allocated each year?

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3 - RESOURCES

Topic #3:

Include the Community Preservation Act on Boston Ballot and Support its Approval

Context:

The Community Preservation Act (CPA) is a smart growth tool that helps communities to preserve critical open space and historic sites, and create affordable housing. CPA became a Massachusetts Law in December, 2000 and since that time 158 communities have adopted CPA (45% of the Commonwealth cities and towns) which have benefited from the resources generated by a surcharge of not more than 3% of the tax levy against real property and matching funds from the State. Close to \$1.4 billion has been raised to date for community preservation funding in Massachusetts, and as a result 8,500 affordable housing units have been created or supported, as well as 21,838 acres of open space being preserved, and 3,600 appropriations for historic preservation projects.

In recent years, residents in cities such as Quincy, Somerville, Fall River and New Bedford have passed CPA. Mayor Walsh have mentioned his intention to support a new referendum to adopt CPA in Boston

Question:

Will you support the initiative to include CPA on the November election ballot either in 2015 or 2016? And if so, will you be actively engaged in the campaign to educate and mobilize Boston voters to adopt CPA?

