

BAY VILLAGE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION, INC.

Hi Bay Village Neighbors:

The year marches on, and we had another packed agenda this past Monday night.

SPECIAL TOPICS:

At-Large City Council Candidates: Said Abdikarim, Alex Gray, David Halbert

With Michelle Wu and Annissa Essaibi-George running for mayor, there are guaranteed to be some new faces amongst the At-Large Councilors next year. As of this writing, there are 21 candidates vying for the four seats, some of whom are taking the initiative to reach out to us. On Monday night, Messrs. Abdikarim, Gray and Halbert introduced themselves, described their backgrounds and priorities, and fielded questions from neighbors about topics including schools, the role of the BPDA, construction projects and quality of life, and their prospective agenda for their first 100 days in office.

The At-Large Councilor role is quite important, even in Boston's "strong mayor" system. While we are fortunate that our district councilor, Ed Flynn, is incredibly responsive and attentive to Bay Village issues large and small, and while we were historically well-covered by the Mayor's Office under Marty Walsh, it's extremely helpful to have other voices who can support our positions at hearings and introduce and give their vote to measures that address neighborhood concerns.

In my twenty-odd years here, I've seen the extremes of effectiveness and ineffectiveness in this position. We've come a long way since the days of Dapper O'Neil, who supported the destruction of the townhouses on Shawmut Street (the parking lot owner was a fan of Dapper, and Dapper wasn't a particular fan of Bay Village). But even in recent years, the difference between individual At-Large councilors has been notable. The best have been visible, have gotten to know at least some residents as individuals, and have diligently sent their representatives to cover neighborhood meetings and follow the progress of ZBA and Licensing Board hearings. Even if we don't always agree – and we usually do – we know they are paying attention, weighing the impact of proposals and policy, following through, and explaining their positions. Less effective At-Large councilors have either focused almost exclusively on their home neighborhoods, or have seemed far more interested in national issues than constituent services. And the worst have truly been "at large," virtually invisible not just to Bay Village but to all the downtown neighborhoods.

Introduction: Boston Music Project (Cel Kulasekaran)

BVNA member and Winchester Street resident Cel Kulasekaran, a founding board member of the Boston Music Project (BMP / www.bostonmusicproject.org), briefly introduced himself and the organization. BMP is a community non-profit that partners with Boston Public Schools, including our neighbors at Josiah Quincy Elementary, on music education. We would like to support them, both individually and as a neighborhood.

BMP is currently looking for some outdoor space over the summer to explore options for having safe spaces for children and a teacher to have short music classes. Cel approached our Parks Committee with the idea that we could use Bay Village Parks to conduct a class or two during late mornings or early afternoons for an hour or so, with 5-6 kids learning string instruments from an adult teacher. This idea has broad support in the neighborhood, and I hope that we can make it happen.

One of our long-term goals has been to bring music back to the parks, and as the pandemic winds down, we are hoping to sponsor some concerts and other events.

Update: 212 Stuart Street Construction (Ryan Souls - Greystar)

The 212 Stuart Street project topped out a couple of months ago, and the exterior panels are being installed quite rapidly. They will soon be working on the fenestration, and then the focus will switch over to the interior build-out.

Neighbors raised a couple of issues.

First, and most concerningly, on a couple of very windy recent days, some close neighbors have had bags and small items blow off the top of the building and onto their roof decks. Ryan recognizes this is a major concern, and has promised to follow-up. They may need to install some additional catch fencing and be more attentive to tying everything down. (Fun fact: Boston is the windiest major city in America, what we've experienced is far from unusual).

Second, we continue to have periodic complaints about early starts to construction. The Consigli crews like to get a jump on the 7AM "official starting hour," and sometimes they attempt staging and preparation work in advance of start that is almost as noisy as the construction itself. When we have raised this concern in the past, Ryan has followed up and the problem has been resolved for a while, only to return weeks later. It's been notably quieter again over the past couple of weeks, and we're hopeful there won't be any further backsliding into bad habits. Once the building is fully enclosed, this may be less of an issue.

Finally, Sarah Herlihy questioned whether there was any change to the facade materials versus what was initially approved. To some eyes, the concrete precast panels seem a bit lighter-colored and smoother/more monotone versus the "flecked" surfaces we saw in the renderings? However, Ryan assured us this was not the case, what is being installed is exactly what the BPDA signed off – and he reminded us

that the appearance will change a bit as the panels weather. (Of course, the BPDA has been known to authorize, overlook, and sometimes even initiate modest tweaks like this after a public process is complete, so there still may be a partial disconnect). The good news is that many people will appreciate a greater surface contrast versus the dreary Revere Hotel and LAZ Garage, the lasting monuments to the dark days of BRA-led urban renewal in Bay Village.

Ryan also provided us with updated renderings for the project, which I am sharing in a separate link to this newsletter email.

Committee Updates: Licensing and Planning **- License Change at Bootleg Special**

Lawyers for Bootleg Special went before the Licensing Board to request a license transfer (effectively a 'swap') that would exchange their prior beer/wine license for a full liquor license with a 2AM closing time. They also would like to add live music, so an entertainment application is expected to follow.

The BVNA Planning and Licensing committee gathered inputs from many residents, and we are certainly sympathetic to the difficulties that restaurants have faced in the last fourteen months. We are OK with the restaurant getting a full liquor license, we're amenable to arrangements for outdoor seating, and we'd be fine with some live entertainment, as long as it isn't too amplified or too late – the proponent mentioned the possibility of having some jazz or Dixieland by Berklee students, in keeping with the restaurant's New Orleans theme, and that seems appropriate.

We remain opposed, however, to 2AM licenses and entertainment that would suggest a late-night dance club/bar. We've been consistent about this for all venues within earshot. Of course, the restaurant isn't technically within Bay Village, but it is less than 300 feet from our neighbor at 1 Bay Street, and there's nothing between us and it across the Pike canyon, over which sound travels quite easily. We also note that there hasn't been a restaurant near us that serves until 2AM or even close to that within recent memory, so it doesn't seem that maintaining current hours (a 1AM close Thursday to Saturday) would require any compromise to their business model, which they adamantly insist will remain a restaurant. Indeed, the proponent's lawyer struggled to explain why they'd need or how they'd use the extra hours. What the proponents didn't say, but we know from experience, is that it is the future option value of a 2AM license that usually motivates these requests. If the restaurant is not successful, it may simply be reformatted into a club, and should the owners elect to sell, the Licensing Board routinely "rubber stamps" transfers *in situ* to other operators, even if their programming is significantly different. A 2AM license thus opens up a Pandora's box for future use.

The proponent had the support of the Castle Square Association, and we weren't entirely surprised by the support it got from the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services. We were shocked, however, that Neighborhood Services went out of its way to dismiss our concerns, insisting that Castle Square was the only relevant neighborhood association (!), never mind our proximity or the fact that we've

historically been signatories to a cooperation agreement with the operators at this location. Our voice mattered in 2017, but it apparently doesn't now.

Once again, we are reminded that there has been a change in the Mayor's Office. Under Mayor Walsh, of course, Neighborhood Services routinely solicited our input on proposals much further beyond the bounds of Bay Village. For example, we were represented on the Back Bay Station IAG, and more recently David Wright has graciously been covering for us on the YWCA redevelopment. We have been judicious in our participation in reviews further from our bounds that seemed to have limited impact on us, often politely declining invitations to participate (e.g., on the Benjamin Franklin Institute redevelopment) or deferring to other neighborhoods (e.g., to Chinatown on the Jacob Wirth cannabis proposal). Will the Mayor's Office now defer exclusively to us on proposals within the bounds of Bay Village? Will our input on proposals in (say) Park Square or the other side of Eliot Norton Park no longer be sought? I guess time will tell, but from my perspective, this is not a welcome development.

- Project Amendments at Our Lady of Victories

The Isabella Street church redevelopment continues through the BPDA's Article 80 Process, and Harry Collings informed us that there has been a project change that doesn't affect the physical envelope of the building: the developer has reduced the number of units from 26 to 18 (larger) units, and slightly reduced the number of parking spaces, also to 18, leaving a parking ratio of 1:1. The Affordable Housing Requirement would continue to be met on-site, with one two bedroom and one three bedroom unit. We will keep you posted on any further changes: I know that generally many neighbors will be pleased with a higher parking ratio and larger units.

Parks

We continue to make small, incremental improvements to the Dog Park. Thanks go to Pete Kusinski, Melissa Mittelman and their merry band of volunteers for addressing a safety hazard by installing a dual gate at the entry, and to Steve and Marie Nolan for coordinating the first wood chip delivery of the year and rustling up a crew to help spread them. We will be increasing the wood chip deliveries to 3x/year given the increasingly heavy usage of the Dog Park. We also owe a shout-out to Daniel Krulewitch and Carol Carlson for planting dog-friendly shrubbery and installing some protective fencing to return a bit more greenery to the space.

Signs posting Dog Park rules are on order and should be installed within a few weeks. Realistically, we're going to depend on neighbors to call out bad behavior and reinforce norms. The biggest problems of late have been individual dog walkers who bring as many as a dozen dogs to the little space at a time, crowding out neighbors, and individuals who smoke in the park and toss cigarette butts onto the wood chips. See something, (politely) say something. There has been a surge in "pandemic puppy" ownership, and both humans and canines are going to have to play together nicely! We are happy to host people from other neighborhoods that lack dog parks,

and we are grateful for dog walking professionals like Pete who have given their own time and effort to keep the space tidy. Memo to dog owners seeking walkers: to judge the quality of a service, spend some time at the park. You'll meet both true professionals who monitor and engage their charges, and clock-punchers who indifferently herd aggressive dogs out of a van and never look up from their iPhones.

Parks Commissioner Ryan Woods recently estimated that it would cost the City \$250K to outfit a proper dog park. We're pleased to note that our modest accomplishments to date have required only a tiny fraction of the \$20K the neighborhood has authorized, facilitated by lots and lots of volunteer labor and a significant amount of donated materials. That means that we can still contemplate larger and more professional efforts to improve the space, and as importantly, we are keeping resources in reserve to continue to refresh the park regularly, given its intense utilization.

Now that spring is here, our people parks are also seeing increased activity, and thanks go to Joe Kuranda, Aoife Austin, Tom Kauycheck, Carol Carlson and others for their efforts in planting, watering, and tidying the Bay Village Garden, Isabella Park, and Bay Village Park. Joe has also distributed the first wave of new whiskey barrel planters – contact us if you want one.

Safety

The police were unable to join us for the April Safety meeting, as this coincided with the George Floyd verdict, and all hands were on standby. However, we did have a substantive meeting with Caritas Communities management to discuss their operating and screening procedures following the February incident at 11 Cortes Street described in the last newsletter (a search warrant led to a firearms and drug possession arrest). The Caritas team assured us that they were maintaining strict screening procedures, and that incidents in the past year had been exclusively connected to two tenants whom they had been monitoring closely. One of these tenants had been evicted by the time of our meeting, and they were in the process of evicting the other. They noted that eviction procedures were more difficult and time-consuming given COVID regulations. They are also installing a fence at the rear of the Cortes Street properties, as they have had issues with non-residents trying to access the property from the rear.

City Services

Spring neighborhood clean-up is on for Saturday, May 15th. Brooms and bags will be circulated as usual at 8AM at the corner of Church and Melrose Streets. Mayoral Candidate Jon Santiago has told us that he will try to stop by to introduce himself.

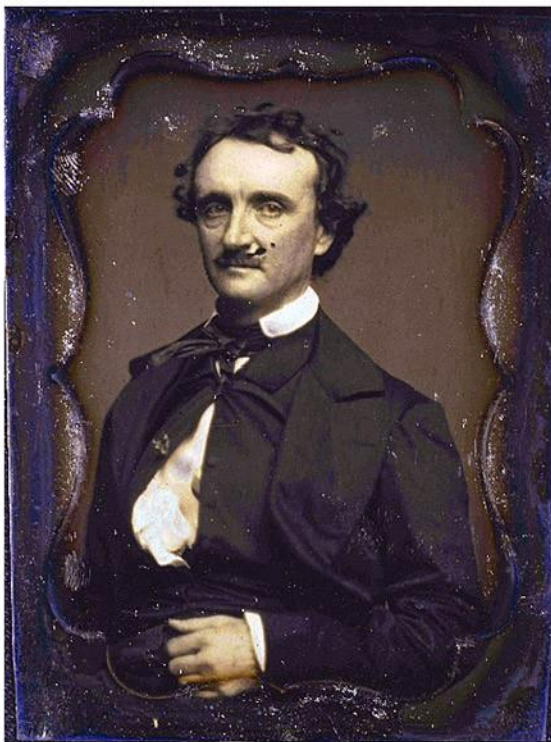
Social / Membership

We're considerably behind on renewals – please check to see if you are up-to-date so we don't have to chase you down! And please encourage new neighbors to join. The cost is less than the value of the whiskey barrel planters we are distributing to

members, so it's a great deal for people who are looking to brighten the sidewalks near their homes. We are mindful that the pandemic has had an adverse impact on some family finances, and we are also happy to confidentially facilitate fee waivers for those for whom this is not a trivial expense.

Post Poe-Script:

As noted in the last newsletter, Eversource has been working with Boston College Professor Paul Lewis on the plaque that will be placed at Poe's presumed birth site once the substation renovation project is completed. Meredith Boericke from Eversource has asked for Bay Village input on the following proposed image and text:



Edgar Allan Poe

David and Eliza Poe were performing at Boston's Federal Street Theatre and living in a house at this location around the time their son Edgar was born on January 19, 1809.

*From childhood's hour I have not been
As others were – I have not seen
As others saw – I could not bring
My passions from a common spring.
—“Alone”*

I'm inclined to defer to Professor Lewis on this, but if you have comments or thoughts, please let me know! We have some time before the plaque design needs to be finalized, as it won't be installed until the completion of the substation project in Q3 2022, and the design need only locked in by Q1. Professor Lewis has offered to meet with the neighborhood to describe and explain what he has proposed, and he is also hoping to be able to take BVNA residents on his Raven's Trail Walking Tour. More to come.

A bit more history

As I described in an earlier newsletter, I'd like to get more of our neighborhood history onto the BVNA website and coordinated with our Wiki page. A fun way to do this is via "then" and "now" photographs with captions. I've been compiling photos and I really welcome any historic images residents have of the neighborhood. For example, the view of the corner of Melrose and Church Streets across the street from my house has changed pretty dramatically since 1956:



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P.O. Box 171066 • Boston, MA 02117

Of course, this wasn't the only Bay Village building that was burned out, vacant or torn down in the difficult years between 1950, when the City's population reached its peak of over 800 thousand, and its nadir of about 560 thousand in 1980 following the busing crisis and decades of suburban flight. For a long while, Bay Village buildings just weren't worth very much. This led to both destruction and, sometimes, inadvertent preservation, because in the years before the historical district was established, it wasn't worth tearing down a serviceable building in favor of something newer or larger. In recent decades, not only have real estate values soared, but family sizes have shriveled and per capita living space has expanded. Despite the seemingly never-ending wave of residential construction we have experienced in the last twenty years, the city still has some way to go to achieve the density it had seventy years ago.

Until next month,

Tom Perkins
President, BVNA