

PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES
FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT
OF THE BACK BAY



*A Report by the Development Committee
of the Neighborhood Association of
the Back Bay*

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September, 1999

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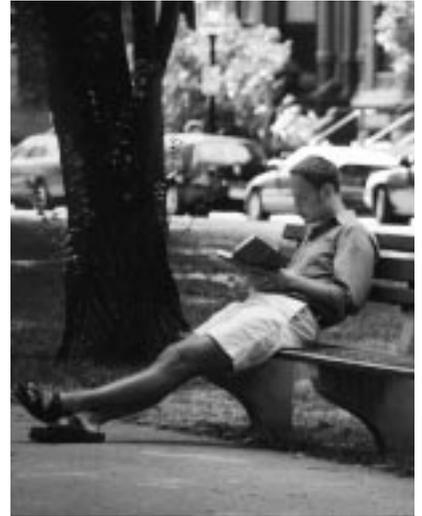


MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay (NABB), as defined in its Articles of Organization, is “To combat community deterioration in the Back Bay; to preserve and protect the architectural beauty of the Back Bay; and to further the residential character of the Back Bay.”

The Development Committee seeks to enhance the character and livability of the Back Bay by protecting the physical fabric of the historic neighborhood as future development occurs, and by maintaining a healthy balance in the unique mix of residential, commercial, cultural, and institutional uses that enrich Back Bay residential life. The goal of the committee, as expressed in this report, is to:

- Encourage the City of Boston to adopt a master plan, or set of strategies, for the neighborhood, in order to ensure development that is in harmony with the goal of enhancing the quality of residential life in the Back Bay.
- Monitor both public and private development projects that affect the neighborhood, considering both their individual and cumulative effects.
- Work cooperatively with the City and the Commonwealth, and with other neighborhoods and business, institutional, and cultural groups, in order to participate effectively in all stages of planning and design review.



*Government can play a major role
in fostering desirable interaction
between proposed real estate
developments and their neighbors.*

Alexander Garvin, *The American City,
What Works What Doesn't.*





INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report was prepared by the Development Committee of the Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay (NABB), which was formed in the spring of 1997 to assist the community in dealing with the challenges of new growth in an expanding urban economy. The report provides a framework of basic principles and guidelines for future development. It outlines the community's vision of a healthy neighborhood in a thriving city, incorporating important values of urbanism—diversity, density, complexity, spontaneity and sustainable economic growth—while protecting community cohesion, stability, continuity, and pedestrian scale.

The principles proposed are divided into five sections:

- I. Urban Design
- II. Land Use
- III. Environment and Infrastructure
- IV. Transportation and Circulation
- V. Community Involvement

Each of these areas was addressed by a subcommittee, whose objective was to define the scope of interest of the neighborhood in each area, identify important issues, and propose principles and guidelines that will create a context for appropriate development and adaptation to future conditions.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were identified as key to the success of future planning for the Back Bay:

- **Key Recommendation 1**—The establishment of an overall Urban Design Master Plan which addresses the appropriate scale and density for development within and adjacent to the neighborhood (including areas over the Turnpike), transitions between different areas, appropriate building materials, and environmental concerns, as outlined in Section I, Urban Design.
- **Key Recommendation 2**—Creation of an expanded Special Use District for Newbury St., Boylston St. and Massachusetts Avenue to limit the number of bars and restaurants and encourage residential use of the upper floors, as described in Section II-2, Mixed Use District.
- **Key Recommendation 3**—Responsible management of groundwater to protect the wooden pile foundations of historic Back Bay houses from damage due to lowered groundwater levels, as described in detail in Section III-5, Groundwater.
- **Key Recommendation 4**—Emphasis on mass-transit-based development, as detailed in Section IV, Transportation and Circulation. This effort should include: expansion of the parking freeze to include nonresidential accessory spaces as well as public spaces, zoning changes to prohibit interior parking garages in the residential district, and emphasis on mass transportation solutions such as a dedicated shuttle train from the South Boston Waterfront to the Back Bay.



I. URBAN DESIGN

There is a critical need for an overall Urban Design Master Plan which expressly addresses and defines limits for development not only within but adjacent to the neighborhood. Such a plan should include the following key elements:

- The appropriate scale and density for each part of the neighborhood;
- Transitions between different areas;
- Building materials; and
- Environmental concerns (light, air, open space, trees, etc.).

Current issues and specific recommendations concerning these key elements are identified below.

ISSUES

Several new development opportunities still exist in this almost fully built-out fabric, notably the Turnpike air rights parcels and the large parking lot at Newbury Street and Dartmouth Street. In addition, approved build-outs at the Prudential Center and along Boylston Street provide significant opportunities for growth. In a booming real estate market, these may invite overdevelopment.

Heavy demand for residential space in an area of finite housing stock is leading to pressure for additions to existing buildings, often inappropriate in scale, style, use, and materials.

Automobile accommodation in alleys and on street frontage of buildings is increasingly displacing vegetation, closing in open space, disrupting the street-wall and jeopardizing pedestrians.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Scale

- 1.1 Respect FAR (floor-to-area ratio) and other zoning limits to control density. Support extension of City of Boston zoning to Turnpike air rights parcels.



Design is not just a

matter of architectural style.

Style goes in and out of fashion;

successful planning has to

survive for decades.

Alexander Garvin, *The American City,*

What Works What Doesn't.



1.2 Avoid “superblocks” created by street closure and assembly of parcels. Smaller building lots help to:

- Keep buildings in compatible scale.
- Keep street blocks pedestrian-friendly in scale.
- Minimize shadows on public areas.
- Keep ownership and decision-making incremental.
- Maximize opportunities for local residents and businesses.
- Maximize diversity.

1.3 Maintain harmony with and appropriate transitions to existing height and massing of buildings.

1.4 Maintain rhythms of existing street and architectural patterns.

1.5 Build to the street-wall line or zoned building line. Avoid nonconforming setbacks, front plazas or landscaped buffers that weaken street face and create ambiguous vacant space around buildings. Where feasible, remove existing buildouts that disrupt street wall rhythm.

1.6 Facades should be maximally pedestrian-oriented. This includes: providing frequent entry doors and requiring windows that show through to interior (not closed display box windows). Avoid large blank walls, garage ramps, and interiorized galleria/mall entries.

1.7 Vehicles should not enter buildings across sidewalks. Curb cuts that would permit vehicles to cross sidewalks should not be approved. Service and parking access should be from the alley. Car drop-offs and parking porte-cocheres should be avoided.

2. Transitions

2.1 Promote connections among neighborhoods. Avoid architectural and roadway barriers.

2.2 Promote mixed land uses in the commercial district so that residents are served within walking distance by institutional, educational, religious, cultural, commercial, and entertainment uses.



*The ultimate expressions
of the flight from the street are
the megastructures:
huge, multipurpose complexes
combining offices, stores, hotels,
and garages, and enclosed
in a great carapace of concrete
and glass.*

William H. Whyte, *City*.

2.3 Promote pedestrian connections at grade rather than by bridges or over/underpasses.

3. Building Materials

3.1 Maintain harmony with historic materials: brick, bearing stone, slate, wood, copper, iron, rather than concrete, steel, asphalt, glass or thin stone building skin;

3.2 Retain craft and art in architecture within the context of the guidelines of the Back Bay Architectural Commission and other regulatory agencies.

4. Environment

4.1 Protect light and air.

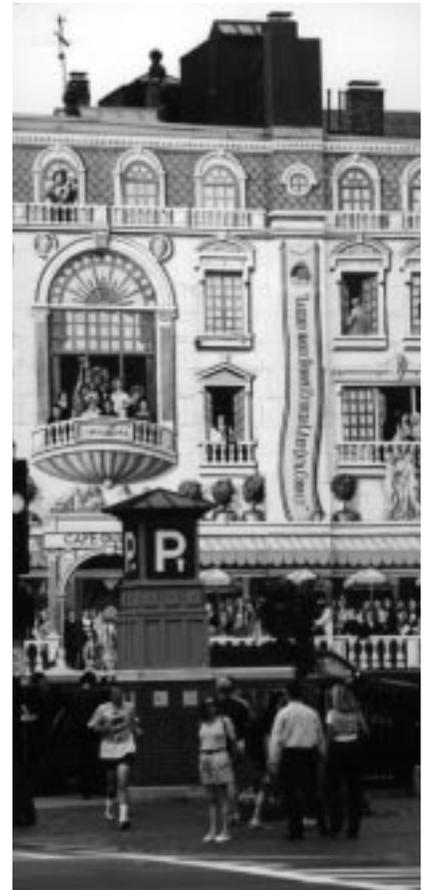
4.2 Plan open spaces where useful, rather than accepting residual vacancy, empty plazas, and token planters. Keep ground plane open for pedestrian use: avoid large obstructive planters. Use open space covenants to protect natural resources.

4.3 Promote connections among open spaces.

4.4 Protect existing mature trees. Reconstruct sidewalks to accommodate and support trees to mature size, using continuous planting trenches. Avoid grates and tree-guards, which can damage trees; do not install trees in planters.

4.5 Lighting: Keep at pedestrian scale, in historically compatible styles. Discourage uplights on buildings and plantings that cause glare in eyes of pedestrians and residents.

4.6 Street Furniture: Provide benches, trash cans and drinking fountains wherever useful. Provide bike racks to encourage bike travel and doggie bag dispensers to facilitate pickup.



*Moving elements in a city,
and in particular the people
and their activities,
are as important as the
stationary physical parts.*

Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*.



II. LAND USE

Land use in the Back Bay is divided into residential, mixed use, and open space. (See Appendix II for a map of current zoning districts.)

1. THE RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT

The boundaries of the Residential District are: Arlington Street to Charlesgate East and Back Street to the alley between Commonwealth Avenue and Newbury Street, excluding the properties abutting Massachusetts Avenue.

Current uses include: single family homes, condominiums, and apartments including short-term rentals and professional offices (in conjunction with the professional's residence)—all permitted under current zoning. In addition, the district contains academic and other institutions, private clubs, nonresident professional and other offices, lodging houses, dormitories/fraternities, assisted living facilities, churches, one restaurant, and a few businesses. All of these are currently either forbidden or conditional uses under current zoning law. Most of the existing facilities were grandfathered, having existed when the current zoning was adopted. In a few instances they are conditional uses for which a permit was obtained.

Issues

The residential character of this area, which is set in the midst of the city adjacent to commercial uses and which currently accommodates a host of additional uses, is extremely fragile. A number of considerations threaten to undermine it:

Institutional uses are both beneficial and detrimental. They do not contribute to the tax base and may displace long-term residents or prevent the addition of new residents. However, they may also benefit the neighborhood, for example, when they preserve historic interiors, or provide spaces for community functions.

The proliferation of corporate rentals displaces vested, long-term residents. The transient nature of these short-term rentals lessens the community's stability.

*Early twentieth century reformers
who fought for city zoning ordinances,
and the latter twentieth century
environmentalists, who fought for
state and federal legislation
to protect the countryside,
share a common distaste for entirely
market driven land use decisions.
They are not willing to wait for
the damage to be done.*

Alexander Garvin, *The American City,
What Works What Doesn't.*

The demand for housing in a limited geographic area with competing uses has created pressure to add floors, additions, and decks to buildings, so that the scale and detail of the historic architecture are potentially compromised.

Parking demand increases with corporate and luxury housing demand. This, in turn, results in the paving-over of alley rear yard areas and the development of more garages, closing alley open space. Increased paving to create parking may have serious negative effects on the groundwater table.

The trend has been towards loss of diversity of housing opportunities as the residential stock is steadily converted to very high-priced condominiums and secondary living space is converted to garages. There is a loss of safety with the loss of ground-floor “eyes on the street” due to conversion of ground-floor units to nonresidential uses. As parking demand increases, the pressure builds to cut garage doors into historic facades to create internal parking.

Parking is one of the most frequently raised and seriously debated problems affecting the residents in this district. Without doubt, any change that increases cars parking in this area only exacerbates this problem, threatening the quality of life for residents.

Recommendations

1.1 Change the current zoning law to:

- Preserve landmark quality interiors in the historic district.
- Require realtors to inform prospective buyers about historic district remodeling restrictions.
- Treat interior parking as a forbidden use.
- Designate the Residential District as a Density Limitation District.

1.2 Provide support and enforcement for the Back Bay Architectural Commission guidelines.



*The Back Bay demonstrates
the ability of sound planning
to preserve the integrity
of a neighborhood.*

*In brownstone and brick
it symbolizes its epoch in
a way that words
and figures alone cannot.*

Bainbridge Bunting,
Houses of Boston's Back Bay.

1.3 Encourage maintaining the openness of Back Bay alleys. (Parking recommendations are discussed in Section IV).

1.4 Corporate Hotels: Require owners of corporate rental apartments to obtain Conditional Use Permits. Require the City to track numbers and to apply taxes at the same commercial rates as hotels.

2. MIXED USE DISTRICT

The Mixed Use District of the Back Bay is comprised of Newbury Street and Boylston Street from Arlington to Charlesgate East, and Massachusetts Avenue from the Charles River to Boylston Street. It is currently zoned commercial, although restaurants are conditional on Newbury Street and the north side of Boylston Street. Apartments and condominiums are permitted uses in the Mixed Use District.

Issues

The most important goal for the Mixed Use District is to encourage the continuation of a balanced mix of residential and commercial uses. Recent developments in the Mixed Use District appear to be pushing towards its conversion into a full-fledged “service district” for conventioners and tourists, rather than an area comprised of a balance of commercial, residential, cultural and institutional uses, with adequate open spaces. The City and the neighborhood must work to ensure that the Back Bay retains its strong appeal as a special place to reside by discouraging the influx of chain retail establishments and liquor licenses and restaurants.

Pedestrian passage is being encroached upon by sidewalk patio space.

Recommendations

2.1 Establish a Special Use District:

- Freeze permitting of bars and restaurants to limit the proliferation of single uses.
- Study and determine the appropriate number of liquor and restaurant licenses in the Back Bay and decrease numbers by attrition to the target number.



*Only intricacy and vitality
of use give to the parts
of a city appropriate
structure and shape.*

Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of
Great American Cities.*

-
- Prepare a plan for managing licenses that increases community control over licensing and over the owner's ability to transfer licenses within the district.
 - Consider establishment of "floor by floor zoning" for buildings in the Mixed Use District to encourage retail uses on lower floors, residential above.
 - Provide incentives for residential units on upper floors.
- 2.2 Consistently enforce conditions specified in the Board of Appeals conditional use permits through the Inspectional Services Department.
- 2.3 Prohibit live entertainment licenses because of close proximity to the Residential District and the residents residing in the Mixed Use District.
- 2.4 Prohibit transfer of new all-alcohol licenses into the district, including those from enclosed malls and hotels within Back Bay (such as Copley Place and Prudential).
- 2.5 Efforts should be directed at maintaining a human scale in the Mixed Use District and encouraging residents and visitors to view it as a walkable area. The City and the neighborhood should work to encourage small to mid-size shops in order to preserve the area's unique nature. Buildings should remain complementary in their scale and dimension, as well as their diversity. The small floorplates that exist, particularly on Newbury Street, should be maintained and larger buildings and uses strongly discouraged.
- 2.6 Provide consistent enforcement of trash, litter, vandalism, noise, traffic and parking laws.
- 2.7 Enforce the requirement that existing dumpsters obtain and display a permit from the Department of Public Works. No new dumpsters should be permitted on public property. Encourage removal of existing dumpsters and the provision of interior storage/compaction for trash.



*There is a fine sense of order
in this design, no single element
is thought of as an end in itself
but always in relation to the
whole composition.*

*Bainbridge Bunting,
Houses of Boston's Back Bay.*

-
- 2.8 Install covered litter baskets, and empty them more frequently, especially during period of intense use.
 - 2.9 To ensure adequate space for pedestrian passage, control of restaurant patio areas is needed. These must be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.
 - 2.10 Improve street tree plantings and tree pit treatments (pruning, planting in adequate pits, seasonal light removal).

3. STREET SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Newbury Street

Current Uses

Residential and retail. Retail consists largely of specialty shops, art galleries, salons, restaurants, and small private offices. The street has recently attracted large chains and upscale restaurants; there are currently 54 liquor licenses in 8 blocks.

Zoning

Commercial with residential permitted. The permitted building height is 65 feet with an FAR of 3. Bars and restaurants are conditional uses.

Issues

Residential uses are under pressure from high-rent commercial demand.

Diversity of commercial retail is threatened by retail chains and liquor-licensed restaurants that are able to pay higher rents. Traffic congestion and air pollution threaten pedestrians and residents. Through traffic to the Turnpike on-ramp at Massachusetts Avenue exacerbates this problem.

Recommendations

- 3.1 Recognizing that the low-rise mixed residential-commercial use of Newbury Street is vital to its attractiveness to tourists and residents, the City should strive to maintain and enhance these qualities.



It is difficult to design a space that

will not attract people.

What is remarkable is how often this

has been accomplished.

William H. Whyte, *City*.

-
- 3.2 Provide special consideration for resident needs: adequate control of noise, litter, traffic and vandalism.
 - 3.3 Enforce more frequent trash pick-up on Newbury Street, especially during warm weather, especially between Hereford Street and Massachusetts Avenue.
 - 3.4 The Sign Code provisions of the Zoning Code and the requirements of the Back Bay Architectural Commission BBAC must be adequately enforced.

Boylston Street

Current Uses

Retail and office; restaurant and bars. (Currently there are 37 alcohol licenses in 8 blocks). The approved build-out of the Prudential Center will create a substantial addition to the residential presence on the street.

Zoning

Zoning is for retail and office; heights vary from 90 to 120 feet and FAR from 6 to 8, different blocks having different limits. The north and south sides are treated differently in terms of both use and mass. The Prudential Center is a special zoning district. The BBAC does not have jurisdiction over the south side of Boylston Street.

Issues

The street is a visually and functionally incoherent “single loaded corridor,” discouraging foot traffic and weakening market strength in attracting and sustaining diverse businesses. Gaps in the street facade discourage pedestrian traffic on long stretches of the street (e.g., the Prudential Center’s garage ramp area and open space, the Hynes Convention Center’s empty arcade, the Library addition’s fortress walls, the Turnpike).

- Architectural styles are haphazard and incompatible.
- Sidewalk pavements are patchy and discontinuous, often in disrepair.
- Street trees are mostly in decline.
- Road width and traffic speed make pedestrian crossing difficult.



For the business at its center,

(the city) must have

streets, buildings,

and places to meet and talk.

As far as essentials are

concerned, it has little more than

the agora of ancient Greece.

William H. Whyte, City.

The trend is to restaurant and bar uses, attracting car traffic and users who may not respect residents, leading to noise, traffic, graffiti, and disruptive behavior. This trend discourages other types of businesses from moving to the street, as well as pedestrian traffic, and accelerates the downward spiral.

Recommendations

- 3.5 A retail presence should be strongly encouraged. Implementation of the Boylston Street Development Plan, which anticipates an upgraded and more visually appealing avenue, should be a City priority. Include repaving of sidewalks in a consistent pattern, installing light fixtures as specified in the study, and replanting of trees in wide, continuous trenches.
- 3.6 Encourage development of upper-floor residential use to support diverse locally-oriented business and all-hour foot traffic, to decrease auto traffic, and to create a constituency for protection of the street: use zoning, tax incentives, new-development requirements for residential use. It should be noted that the Prudential Center Master Plan mandates such development.
- 3.7 Encourage commercial and institutional uses that neither generate traffic and parking nor take away from residential housing, such as locally oriented goods and services, schools and small offices.
- 3.8 Permit no more commercial parking garages or surface parking lots; encourage businesses to promote transit use by their patrons.
- 3.9 Within the proposed cap on restaurant and bar uses, encourage sit-down restaurants that focus on food rather than alcohol.
- 3.10 Examine enclosing the Hynes Convention Center arcade with small shops.

Massachusetts Avenue

Current Uses

Mixed residential, retail, commercial and institutional uses; restaurants and bars are as-of-right uses.



The greatest urban

spaces are street corners.

William H. Whyte, City.

Zoning

The zoning is commercial. The height limit is 120, with an FAR of 8.

Issues

Traffic congestion, pedestrian hazards and noise are increasing. Turnpike air-rights development will affect both the character of the street and traffic. Street trees, if any, are in decline. Sidewalks are in disrepair. Compliance with the Boston Sign Code is inadequate; illegal neon signs are proliferating.

Recommendations

- 3.11 Encourage facade improvements.
- 3.12 Expand diversity of uses.
- 3.13 Provide incentives to encourage stability of neighborhood-oriented businesses.
- 3.14 Encourage shopkeepers to clean their sidewalks.
- 3.15 Change signal-light timing to provide longer walk cycles.
- 3.16 Study ways to alleviate Turnpike-bound traffic on Newbury Street.
- 3.17 Redesign the Massachusetts Avenue bus stop.
- 3.18 Consider lowering height limit and FAR in this area.

4. OPEN SPACES AND RECREATIONAL AREAS

The primary open spaces in the Back Bay are: The Commonwealth Avenue Mall, The Public Garden, the Charles River Esplanade, the park at Charlesgate, the Clarendon St. Playground, Copley Square, and the Dartmouth Street Mall.

Issues

Overuse is causing damage to grass, trees and plantings. Damaged trees and grass are not being replaced. Irrigation systems are outdated. There is a general lack of maintenance; walkways are in disrepair. Numerous resident uses are not being adequately accommodated.



*A mixture of uses, if it is
to be sufficiently complex to
sustain city safety,
public contact and cross-use,
needs an enormous diversity
of ingredients.*

*Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life
of Great American Cities.**

General Recommendations

- 4.1 A coherent community-based plan that accommodates and encourages appropriate uses of open space should be developed.
- 4.2 Proper regulation of public functions, including adequate crowd control and limitations on the type and number of events, is essential.
- 4.3 Street tree plantings should be encouraged; a watering campaign should be developed with local businesses and residents.

Commonwealth Avenue Mall

- 4.4 Formalize the relationship between the Commonwealth Avenue Mall Committee and the Boston Parks and Recreation Department in a working structure with clear lines of authority and responsibility. Develop a management plan similar to that created for Copley Square and the Boston Common. Continue to enhance, where possible, City support, counsel, and activity beyond routine maintenance (mowing, snow removal, trash removal).

Current Priorities:

- Restore and maintain grass. Discourage pedestrian crossing of grass areas.
- Install and maintain new irrigation system. Report observed problems to Parks Department.
- Continue tree replanting of Mall according to established pattern, encouraging use of memorial and heritage tree program.
- Design and replant underpass section of the Mall.
- Repair and reactivate water outlets in the green spaces at the Massachusetts Avenue underpass.
- Complete lighting of Mall monuments.
- Complete ornamental fencing at Fairfield Street; install experimental wing fences at Dartmouth Street.
- Add protective curbs around statues.



*The barrier to building a better city
is not lack of knowledge, but refusal
to apply that knowledge.*

Arnold Toynbee, Cities on the Move.

- Redesign Collins base and reset or remove statue entirely.
- Resurface walkways. Correct drainage at all cross streets.
- Replace existing benches with newly approved three section wood and iron benches.
- Establish a maintenance plan for the trees including pruning, fertilization, and injection.
- Enforce all park rules, particularly the “dog ordinances.”
- Protect from further shadows through extension of state legislation already in place for Common and Public Garden.

Charles River Esplanade

4.5 Support neighborhood goals in developing the Charles River Master Plan: Increase maintenance and care of parkland, memorials and facilities; develop and enforce guidelines for events at the Hatch Shell and on the Esplanade; manage traffic and encourage access via public transportation; balance active and passive recreational use; improve safety in the parkland and on the pathways; enhance the understanding and appreciation of the Esplanade.

Priorities:

- Preserve the open space; protect pedestrians and passive recreational use.
- Protect from overuse by marches, performances, and parades.
- Protect from further shadows through state legislation.
- Maintain and improve accessibility for recreational uses.
- Restore or convert playgrounds.
- Consider adapting boat houses for other uses.
- Encourage experimental programs to aid the reintroduction of native species to the area, such as native trees and a variety of fish for recreational fishing.



*(The city environment) should speak
of the individuals and their
complex society, of their aspirations
and their historical traditions,
of the natural setting,
and of the complicated functions
and movements of the city world.*

Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*.

- Explore the possibility of dredging the Muddy River and Charles River to improve water quality and encourage controlled vegetation.

Copley Square

4.6 Develop a more regular system of consultations between the Friends of Copley Square and the Parks Department. Strengthen and improve the implementation of the Copley Square Management Plan. Continue to enhance City support, counsel, and activity for Copley Square. Improve routine maintenance provided by Parks Department (snow removal, trash removal, plantings).

Priorities:

- Protect Copley Square from further shadows through extension of state legislation already in place for Common and Public Garden.
- Preserve open space for passive use.
- Increase enforcement of park ordinances and extend police coverage for monitoring of skateboarding, rollerblading, panhandling, and dog violations.
- Preserve open space from further visual clutter (monuments, kiosks, and other permanent installations).
- Limit commercial promotions in connection with events.
- Increase level of scrutiny of the numbers and types of public events.

Dartmouth Street Mall

4.7 *Priorities:*

- Complete replacement of period appropriate lighting on east side of street.
- Repair and restore sidewalks.
- Develop and install new tree pit design.



*The best buildings are not those
that are cut, like a tailored suit,
to fit only one set of functions,
but rather those that are strong
enough to retain their character
as they accommodate
different functions over time.*

Robert Campbell and Peter Vanderwarker,
Cityscapes of Boston.

- Complete tree planting.
- Replace Dartmouth Street T stations with period appropriate structures sensitive to Old South Church, preferably on the adjacent corner where there is an existing exit. Handicapped access should be provided.
- Redesign newsstand to be a more period appropriate structure sensitive to the Old South Church.

Charlesgate Overpass Park

4.8 Total redesign and re-thinking of the space is needed. Design should focus on making the space less intimidating as well as restoring the link between the Emerald Necklace and the Charles River. Develop a working group that includes the MDC and the Parks Department to address the needs of this derelict space.

Priorities:

- Repair overpass structure.
- Consider removing curved stone walls and replace with soundproof structure nearer Turnpike.
- Create system of pedestrian paths connecting to the Charles River and the Fenway.
- Pursue dredging of the Muddy River.
- Encourage recreational activities.
- Introduce new lighting and other landscape enhancements; support new plantings with a maintenance plan.
- Increase enforcement of park ordinances.
- Provide routine maintenance, trash collection and cleaning of waterways.



The Emerald Necklace

represents the vision of the

nineteenth century

and the

negligence of the twentieth.

Anne Whiston Spurr, *The Granite Garden*.

III. ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

ISSUES

Development projects often conflict with environmental goals for air quality, shadows, water quality, groundwater table, etc. In addition, many utility systems in Back Bay are aging and in disrepair. Too often, agencies with jurisdiction over these utilities are uncoordinated and behind the technological times. Changes in technology may lead to increased demand for underground utilities; coordination among agencies, both public and private, is essential to minimize disruption.

Traffic threatens the quality of life in the neighborhood; parking demand exceeds capacity; the current recycling program does not address larger buildings and is poorly implemented; water and sewer lines are antiquated and near capacity; lowered groundwater levels threaten the neighborhood housing stock; graffiti prevention and removal programs are inadequate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Development Review

These recommendations are intended to supplement and enhance the guidelines outlined in the City of Boston's Article 80 regulations, as well as the BRA's Development Review procedures.

- 1.1 Support full scoping determination for all projects to provide maximum protection of the environment and provide documentation of the cumulative effects of development.
- 1.2 Eliminate "Scoping Determination Waiving Further Review" for medium and large development projects as outlined in the City of Boston's Article 80 Development and Approval regulations.
- 1.3 Identify regional resources such as groundwater that require protection and understanding.



*(The city) is both
a natural object and a thing
to be cultivated, individual and group,
something lived
and something dreamed.*

Claude Lévi-Strauss quoted in Anne Whiston Spirn,
The Granite Garden.

1.4 Create environmental performance zoning using measurable performance criteria to require a proposed project to demonstrate that the current function of an environmental resource area or process (such as groundwater) will be maintained or improved after the development is completed.

1.5 Develop accurate and objective cost-benefit analysis of infrastructure work calculating in not only primary costs such as labor and materials, but also secondary costs (such as utilities installation that may adversely impact groundwater and jeopardize the integrity of surrounding pilings).

2. Traffic and Air Quality

2.1 Perform a City air quality study of Back Bay during the summer.

2.2 Enforce regulations against idling and fine drivers of vehicles emitting exhaust or noise pollution exceeding standards, especially garbage trucks, trucks and buses. Enforce stricter inspection and control of motorcycle noise pollution using the new Department of Transportation certified Sound Decibel Meters.

2.3 Enforce weight restrictions on roads to prevent premature deterioration and excessive vibration: identify classes of vehicles not permitted on roads.

2.4 Fill in all potholes.

2.5 Use alternative de-icing materials to avoid salt damage to vegetation, pavements and cars.

3. Recycling

3.1 Establish and publicize a full recycling program, including larger buildings.

3.2 Establish an awareness program and create regular “drop off” days for residents to safely dispose of common household hazardous wastes such as batteries.



*From the point of view of the
modern city planner,
the only criticism that can be
leveled against the nineteenth
century designer is that he
could not foresee
the staggering requirements
of present-day traffic.*

*Bainbridge Bunting,
Houses of Boston's Back Bay.*

4. Infrastructure

- 4.1 Coordinate work of agencies and corporations, and perform cost-benefit analyses to determine most timely infrastructure investments.
- 4.2 Encourage use of existing tunnels such as transportation tunnels for utility lines.
- 4.3 Streamline coordination process between utilities with respect to repairing utility lines, streets and sidewalks.
- 4.4 Support the current MWRA's Combined Sewer Overflows (CSO) program, scheduled to be complete in 2008.
- 4.5 Develop and implement a plan to upgrade the water and sewer infrastructure and determine the carrying capacity of these lines. Limit development if necessary.
- 4.6 Implement an adequate flood control plan at the Muddy River and other potential flooding sites.

5. Groundwater

- 5.1 Maintain groundwater levels to protect wood pile foundations of houses, historic buildings, and entire neighborhoods from deterioration.
- 5.2 Provide full and ongoing financial support for the Boston Groundwater Trust to sustain the recently initiated monitoring program, develop a computerized data base and install new wells for the expanded monitoring network as recommended by previous geotechnical studies, as well as any other functions necessary to support the work of the Groundwater Trust.
- 5.3 Maintain a diligent review of proposed new real estate development projects. Require preconstruction analysis, construction phase contingency measures, and post-construction monitoring to avoid damage to groundwater levels. Where pre-existing deteriorated conditions are identified, investigate possible contributions to assist in returning groundwater to normal levels.

*Cities are fragile creations
balanced on the earth's crust,
exposed to the slow but
inexorable pace of erosion and
sedimentation, vulnerable to
every tremor of
the violent forces beneath,
and dependent on dwindling
mineral resources.*

Anne Whiston Spurr,
The Granite Garden.

-
- 5.4 Encourage the cooperation of public utility departments and other agencies such as the Boston Water and Sewer Commission, the MBTA and the Turnpike Authority to properly maintain their underground infrastructure in order to help manage groundwater levels responsibly.
 - 5.5 Make necessary administrative changes to make the Boston Water and Sewer Commission responsible for groundwater management.
 - 5.6 Address groundwater quality by initiating a program to identify small (under 1,000 gallons), unregulated underground oil tanks to determine their soundness and to remove them if leaking.

6. Graffiti Control

- 6.1 Establish a coordinated program for graffiti control and removal from public and private property.
- 6.2 Implement a graffiti discouragement education program, involving the Police Department, to be presented at area schools.





IV. TRANSPORTATION
AND CIRCULATION

ISSUES

Circulation is impaired by volume and inadequate traffic management; parking demand exceeds supply.

Visitor traffic in Back Bay is causing increasing pressure on parking spaces, congestion and air pollution problems. New development projects generally focus on suburban and tourist patrons, who usually drive in to the city. Developers are generally permitted to build the maximum number of parking spaces.

Pedestrian circulation is jeopardized by increased traffic volume and light cycles that favor traffic flow.

Car ownership in the neighborhood is increasing as the income levels of residents rise and as more suburban families return to the city. Additional pressure on parking comes from restaurant valet parking, which blocks streets with double parking and occupies resident parking spaces.

Traffic problems are exacerbated by private shuttle buses, which often travel nearly empty, and by through traffic which cuts through residential streets to Storrow Drive and the Turnpike. The development of the Convention Center and the South Boston Waterfront will increase these problems.

There are serious issues with mass transit. The Green Line is at capacity. Pedestrian access to Back Bay Station and the Orange Line is difficult.

Many special events such as charity walks and marathons are held in Back Bay, causing traffic confusion and congestion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Boston Transportation Department (BTD) should distribute and formally present the June 1991 BTD Transportation Strategies



*America continues to
spend billions planning highways,
installing traffic systems,
and building garages,
but devotes little attention
to pedestrian movement after
the vehicles have arrived.*

*Alexander Garvin, The American City,
What Works What Doesn't.*



for the Back Bay Transportation Plan, review recommended strategies and develop a plan for implementing those that are agreed upon.

2. Regularly evaluate a development project's impacts on traffic after construction, and compare to projections in the project's Environmental Impact Report. Maintain up to date traffic data for evaluation of new development proposals.

3. Limit Car Influx

- 3.1 Obtain BRA and BTD commitments to the philosophy of limiting private vehicle commuting. Explore ways to reduce numbers of vehicles using Back Bay streets.
- 3.2 Work with the BRA, BTD and MBTA to enhance transit use to limit car influx by visitors.
- 3.3 Create transit programs with local tourist-draw businesses, employers, and hotels.
- 3.4 Require new developments in Back Bay to be transit-oriented and convenient for pedestrians, with no parking garages.
- 3.5 Provide tax breaks or other financial incentives for businesses implementing subsidized T-pass programs for employees, and for those who sell T passes via payroll deduction.

4. Traffic Control Measures

- 4.1 Enforce existing traffic regulations and speed limits.
- 4.2 Install traffic-calming measures rather than traffic-expediting measures, particularly in the residential district, to discourage car use and enhance pedestrian safety. Keep turning radii tight and keep roadways to minimum widths; remove lanes, narrow lanes, remove medians; remove wide right turns and refuge islands; put the space into sidewalks instead.
- 4.3 Study ways to reduce overall car volumes rather than simply shunting traffic from one street to another.



*How can you know what to try
with traffic until you know
how the city itself works,
and what else it needs to do
with its streets?*

Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of
Great American Cities.*

5. Pedestrian Traffic, Bicycle Traffic and Safety

- 5.1 Where possible, build “neck-downs” at intersections to shorten crossing distance for pedestrians.
- 5.2 Provide safe travel lanes for bicycles.
- 5.3 Study and rationalize signal timing to maximize safe pedestrian flow.
- 5.4 Link pedestrian movement to and through neighboring communities.

6. Parking

- 6.1 Study residential parking sticker system to maximize existing parking for residents, including those who do not own cars. Enforce requirement that those using residential parking spaces be annual permit holders. Limit use of residential space by commercial vehicles.
- 6.2 Do not grandfather existing surface spaces into new development parking allowance.
- 6.3 Enforce the parking freeze and extend to cover all off-street parking spaces.
- 6.4 Prohibit new or temporary commercial surface parking lots and the development of new public parking facilities.
- 6.5 Enforce valet parking regulations. Enforce ban on new individual valet parking spaces. Implement plan to consolidate individual valet parking spaces into zones for use by several establishments.

7. Enforce Truck Route Limitations

- 7.1 Enforce truck restriction between 11:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. on Beacon Street.
- 7.2 Enforce truck and bus exclusion on Commonwealth Avenue, Marlborough Street, and cross streets. Replace signs that have been removed.

8. Mass Transit

- 8.1 Promote the convenience and reliability of T service to the public. Provide public information about the T, promotional events, passes, and free days.



*The way to plan a street
is not as a means of access
to other things,
but as an end in itself,
a place that can be enjoyed
for its own sake.*

Roger Scruton, quoted in
Robert Campbell and Peter Vanderwarker,
Cityscapes of Boston.

8.2 Regularly reassess maximum capacity and actual use. Maximize train lengths and minimize headways. Provide 24 hour service.

8.3 Redesign pedestrian access to Back Bay Station to encourage use.

8.4 Provide a dedicated shuttle train from hotels in Back Bay to the South Boston Waterfront.

8.5 Examine effect of proposed North-South rail link on Back Bay station.

8.6 Open Yawkey Station year-round.

9. Special Events

9.1 Designate official event walk routes in various parts of the city, and require that groups use different routes on a rotating basis.



The blight of parking

lies in what is not there.

William H. Whyte, *City*.



V. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Good development can benefit both the city and the neighborhood. However, no plan or objective can be successful without comprehensive and continuous community and government interaction and involvement. Therefore, public involvement must be incorporated into all planning and development review processes.

One of the most successful techniques for public involvement is the formation of a Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC). To be effective, CACs need to be familiar with the concerns of the affected communities. Reports such as this and community-based Master Plans can provide guidance to a CAC, enabling it to work more effectively and ensuring that ongoing neighborhood concerns are addressed in the review of a specific development project.

RECOMMENDED PROCESS

As the representative organization of the Back Bay residential community, NABB should continue to be proactive in planning and project review, as described below:

As a matter of BRA policy, all projects and policies affecting the Back Bay must be submitted for neighborhood review.

Adequate time for public input should be assured. Where outside consultants and legal assistance are required, the City should make the necessary funding available.

NABB and other interested neighborhood organizations should be briefed by the BRA at a standing monthly meeting concerning any pending and ongoing plans for development or other policies or activities affecting their communities. The results of these meetings should be reviewed internally by the attending organizations. The attending neighborhood organizations should also monitor ongoing projects for adherence to approved plans.

If a large-scale project is contemplated, the BRA will convene a Citizens' Advisory Committee. The CAC should be structured as outlined in Appendix I.



*This boat that we built
is just fine—And don't try to
tell us it's not.*

*The sides and the back are divine—
It's the bottom I guess we forgot...*

Shel Silverstein,
Where the Sidewalk Ends.

APPENDIX I. THE STRUCTURE OF SUCCESSFUL CACS

Citizens' Advisory Committees (CACs) have become an accepted and productive vehicle to study the potential benefits as well as the negative effects of large projects on the surrounding neighborhoods and the city as a whole. The largest project currently active is the Prudential Center, now in Phase II of its process.

NABB has a long history of participation in these reviews, beginning in 1972 with the Park Plaza CAC. The Boylston Street zoning and planning effort, The New England building, Copley Place, and Prudential also underwent the CAC process. All of these bodies were made up of representatives of the constituencies most affected by the project—neighborhood groups, labor, government and business.

In general, the successful CACs have been deliberative and have not felt any pressure to rush to judgment. The process may take from two to four years, depending on the magnitude of the project, and must not be hurried by the City, the developer, or public opinion.

A successful CAC is a complicated process that requires of its members sound judgment, persuasive ability, political skills, and the ability to follow the mandate of the constituent groups.

The most productive CACs have been characterized by the following elements:

- A clearly defined assignment, and clearly defined advisory authority.
- Strong project review powers, with CAC involvement in all phases of the project.
- Established communications, procedures and meeting schedules.
- Funding for independent consultants and staff.
- Independence from the BRA.
- A balance between neighborhood and business interests. The CAC should be large enough so that all affected neighbor-



It is primarily at the neighborhood level that meaningful... opportunities for the exercise of urban citizenship exist.

James O. Wilson, *Cities in American Life*.

hoods are represented. A majority of CAC members should be selected by the affected communities.

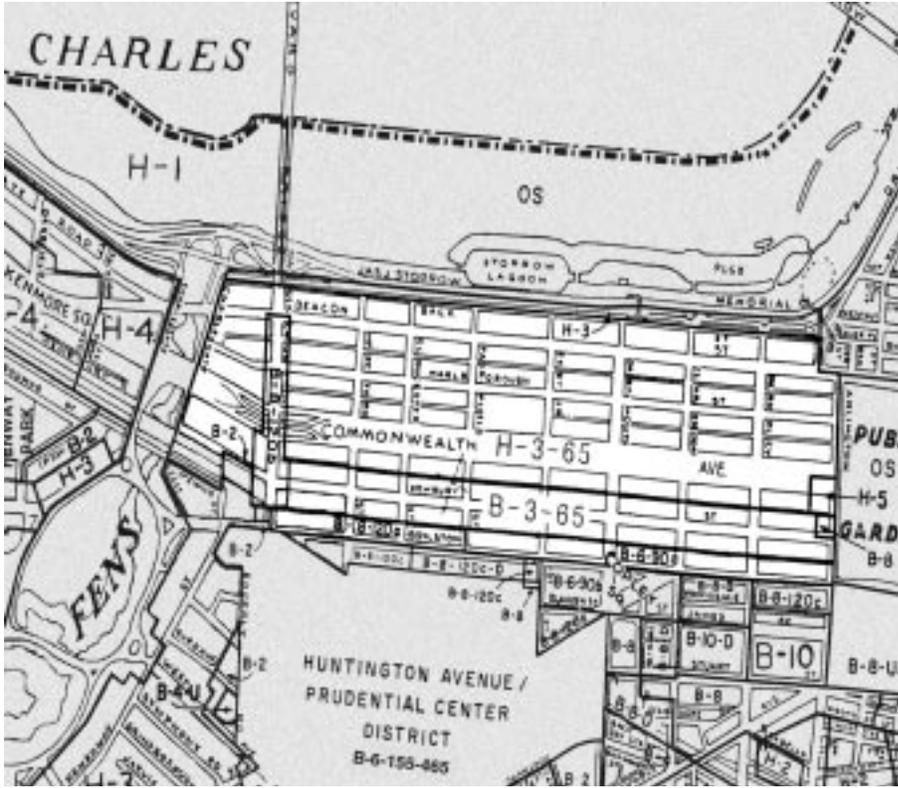
- An elected, rather than appointed, Chair.
- Experienced, dedicated neighborhood members and alternates appointed by their neighborhood groups. These representatives should have clear mandates from the neighborhoods they represent and maintain close touch with their constituent groups.
- An agreement that no building will begin until the CAC has finished its deliberations and made a final recommendation.

*It is when civic groups
and citizens become too
supportive, too understanding,
that planning and zoning
go to hell.*

William H. Whyte, *City*.



APPENDIX II: BACK BAY ZONING DISTRICTS



Key to symbols: H = residential use; B = business. First number indicates FAR (floor area ratio, which is the allowed gross area of the structure in relation to the total area of the lot). Second number indicates maximum allowable height for occupied space. Thus, H-3-65 means the area is residential, with an FAR of 3 and a maximum height of 65 feet; B-8 means a commercial area with an FAR of 8 and no maximum height. Highlighted area indicates the Back Bay Architectural District.



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