



GMNC Monthly Meeting
November 4 2019 6:30-8:00pm
Mildred Community Center

Meeting Minutes

I. Council Members Present

Mirlande Joseph, Assistant Secretary
David Lopes
Matthew Skelly, Secretary
Janae Tooley, Vice Chair
Vickey Siggers, Treasurer
Ruby James Saucer
June Joseph
Fatima ali-Salaam, Chair
Nichole Purvis

II. September Meeting Minutes

- a Moved to approve - Tooley
- b Seconded – Siggers
- c Vote – Unanimous

III. October Meeting Minutes

- a Moved to approve - Tooley
- b Seconded – June Joseph
- c Vote – Unanimous

IV. Presenters

a) Lawrence (Larry) DiCara, P.C.

- Grew up in Dorchester on the border of Mattapan
- Lots of unofficial rules to determine where Mattapan ends and Dorchester begins
- The Boston zoning code was enacted in 1965 – passed the enabling act in 1956 and took 9 years to get the vote
- Post war years were not kind to Boston – Christian Science Monitor asked if Boston was even worth saving
- Bond rate was the lowest of any major City
- Through changes in leadership in the City, everything was downzoned in the 80s and 90s
- Last time the Mattapan map was revised was 2012, maps 8A and 8B
- Massive population loss in the 1960s, horrible economic downturn in the 70s, and nobody really wanted to build anything

- August 1976 things started to turn around with the opening of Quincy Market
- Arson was also a big problem, including one ring that was mostly fire fighters
- When the zoning code was rewritten, it wasn't always logical. Because of that, many matters go to the zoning board of appeals
- Councilor Campbell has identified over 100 parcels in District 4 alone that could potentially be used to construct housing
- Zoning resulted in the "Combat Zone" where eventually the property values became so high that other uses bought in instead
- Around the revolutionary war, Boston was a 35 foot building height City, then around 50 feet by the Civil War, then 100 feet about a hundred years ago, and now we have sky scrapers
- In 2020 we'll be back to our population levels from the 1960s (around 700,000 people). Back then, family size was about 3, and now in some places the family size is hardly over 1, almost everyone lives alone
- We need the federal government to step up and provide funding – sometimes housing funding can be very complex
- We should be 'unassisted living' for people who are older and want to downsize, also for 20 somethings who want to move away from their parents
- We've made laws for affordable housing, but it's still hard to build.
- New generations really care about the environment, but also use Uber

Q: What does as-of-right use mean?

A: For every parcel in the City, something can be built by right. Single family, duplexes, three deckers, etc. That's what is considered as-of-right.

Q: How about churches and schools? Can they just pop up everywhere?

A: The Dover Amendment doesn't apply to Boston, churches are as of right everywhere, but may have dimensional issues. Schools are different.

Q: Can we fight churches popping up in residential neighborhoods? We're currently dealing with a proposal for a church on Savannah Avenue.

A: If a permit was given, neighbors can appeal the issuance of that permit within a certain time limit. Also no parking in front yards.

Q: What opportunities are there for regular folks to get involved in the big development boom?

A: It's tough because housing is really expensive to build. If the City will donate the land, that helps with the equation. There are also City and State programs to tap into, but they require some expertise to tap into.

Q: 844 Morton Street used to be a single family house, almost at the corner of Norfolk. City said it was as of right to develop 14 units.

A: I would be surprised if that was zoned for more than 2-3 units. There are ratios involved, so the number of floor area buildable is based on the size of the parcel.

Q: Can we appeal it?

A: You would need to find a permit that was granted

b) Michelle Wu, City Councilor at Large, and Chair of the Committee on Planning, Development, and Transportation

- Plan to Abolish the BPDA is reporting back on what she learned during her time chairing planning and development committee

- Four sections, all available at www.abolishthebpda.com
- Our City is growing really fast, and we don't have great rules for it. The forces driving development are profit for developers instead of the interests of citizens.
- Using the Seaport as an example, we've poured 10s of Millions of dollars into that area, but not a single mortgage to African American buyers, transportation is horrible, etc.
- BPDA was originally created as the Boston Redevelopment Authority – the federal government paid to demolish neighborhoods and then rebuild something different. It routinely pushed out the lower income communities and did not build affordable housing in its place.
- In most of American, this practice was stopped, but in Boston we went the other way and made the BRA more powerful, and we even made it self funding. That's good because you don't need taxpayer money, but their money comes from land they own instead of the City. So the City does not have oversight of their operations the same way it does over the rest of the City budget.
- In 2016 the name changed from BRA to BPDA, but most of their operations did not change. The last time the City did a City-wide plan was in the mid-1960s. The zoning codes have been updated sporadically over the years, but it's happened piecemeal. We haven't planned where the housing units should go, so even though we have goals for growth, we can't get the housing in the right places. We wind up with developers putting the housing where its cheapest to build and communities are least organized to push back against them.
- We need to have community on the front end of deciding where the housing should go. Our economic development decisions directly affect the ways we need to grow. When we bring all kinds of new people in without a good plan for them, we get all kinds of problems including gentrification, housing instability, traffic and transit problems. We're also not focused on climate change.
- Urban planning is making decisions around tradeoffs in a city, both in terms of the physical space and in terms of time. Currently, we're not doing any planning. We're ceding it to the developers to decide.
- Transparency and accountability are problems with our current system. Developers make promises and the City doesn't monitor whether or not the promises are kept.
- When the BPDA comes out to the community for Civic Engagement, it's not an actual seat at the table, it's just a box to check.
- We engaged 15,000 residents in our latest master planning process. Indianapolis, which is only slightly larger than Boston, engaged 100,000 people.
- We need to build a City for everyone. We invented public education, public parks, public libraries, we dug the first subway in the country. When we invested in everyone, we all did better.
- "Abolish the BPDA"? The intention is not to fire all the employees or remove all the functions. Just to do it in a different way.
- Several times in the past, mayoral candidates have promised to get rid of the BPDA, but nobody has ever done it because of how much money development brings in to the City.
- BPDA is exempt from public bidding requirements, many other rules, still really powerful.
- The report states that we could accomplish 80% of the change without any State approval.
 - First step is to restore City control. Transfer the BPDA properties back over the City and start collecting the revenue
 - Second step is to end urban renewal. The maps date back to the 1960s – after 40 years the BRA should have gone away. They've continued to ask for more time. The new sunset date is 2022
 - Third step is to get State approval, but by that time it would be all but disabled anyway.

- The report contains actions that City Council should immediately begin to undertake.

Q: We know that ISD and ZBA are often the decision makers, but what about the small decisions that may not make it those entities? How do planning and zoning relate?

A: The ZBA is closely related to the BPDA. The ZBA should be comprised of people without a stake in the process. It's no longer a waiver or an exception if every project needs one.

Q: How does getting rid of the BPDA ensure that black Boston will be able to attain real wealth?

A: The Fed did a study that said the net worth of black families was approximately \$8 while the net worth of the average white family was \$256,000, mostly because of home ownership. Families across all racial backgrounds ride buses at about the same rate, but families of color wind up spending much more time on buses because of traffic, trip length, and problems with service. \$664m discretionary spending that we can decide exactly what to do with for development contracts, and we give almost none of it to Boston residents, let alone people of color and women. If we direct development to places with high rates of displacement, we're inviting gentrification. We need clear rules to address equity.

Q: The 28 bus gets pulled to go to other routes when there are problems. We try to push back, but nobody listens to us.

A: We need better metrics to understand quality of life. It shouldn't be up to the community to be engaged with the developer on a parcel by parcel basis. The time to do that is before a developer has proposed anything.

Q: Do we have the power to fight back against developers? And is anyone listening to us?

A: There are very specific requirements for people to get waivers from the ZBA. It's normally a challengeable decision on whether or not it's a hardship, and they often get overturned. We can't be trying to adjudicate these issues on a one by one basis. We need to have a plan.

IV. Working Committees – No updates this month.

IV – Wrap Up Announcements

- We will put all of the proposals currently up before the City Councils up on our website.
- VOTE TOMORROW!
- Roudnie Celestin – Mattapan tree lighting is December 6 in Mattapan Square
- Kenya Beamon – PLAN Mattapan 1 year anniversary meeting on November 13 at Kipp Academy
- Cummins Highway survey is out, please take it