

## **MEETING NOTES**

### **DUDLEY SQUARE-ELIOT SQUARE CULTURAL DISTRICT PLANNING MEETING**

**5/9/2016, 6:00 P.M. - 8:00 P.M.**

#### **NORTHEASTERN CROSSING**

**ATTENDEES:** 37 people attended, including Representative Byron Rushing, Barry Gaither, David Lee, Marshall Hughes, staff members from the offices of Councilor Tito Jackson and Councilor Ayanna Pressley, and community members. The meeting was facilitated by Kelley Chunn and Associates.

**PURPOSE:** This was the second in a series of public conversations about seeking state designation from the Massachusetts Cultural Council (MCC) for a cultural district in Roxbury. This process grows out of the long-term goals of two loosely knit grassroots art and culture organizations, the Roxbury Cultural Network and Common Thread Coalition. Through a series of meetings, this collaborative venture seeks to convene and work with stakeholders in developing an inclusive planning process, including community engagement and stakeholder alignment, for a cultural district in Roxbury and take the steps to complete the application to the MCC.

**SUMMARY:** Below, please find a summary of the agenda and key themes, ideas, and suggestions discussed during the meeting. This second community meeting was a time to review what was discussed and documented at the first community meeting on April 11 and to more specifically discuss the vision, mission, and goals for the cultural district in Roxbury. The discussion was facilitated by Kelly Chunn and framed by a short PowerPoint presentation that is available on the planning website ([www.roxburyculturaldistrict.org](http://www.roxburyculturaldistrict.org)).

#### **A. Agenda**

The discussion was framed by the following agenda:

- Pre-Meeting Exercise: Mapping Cultural Assets on Roxbury Map
- Welcome and Introductions
- Our Process and Meeting Recap: Massachusetts Cultural Council (MCC) Cultural District Application Process and April 11 Community Meeting Recap
- Demonstration and Feedback: Proposed Interactive Cultural Asset Mapping Tool
- Group Conversations: Vision and Goals
- Next Steps

#### **B. Pre-Meeting Exercise: Mapping Cultural Assets on Roxbury Map**

Prior to the start of the meeting, attendees were invited to use a paper map to mark art and cultural assets.

#### **C. Welcome and Introductions**

Attendees were welcomed by Derek Lumpkins, Director of Neighborhood Partnerships and Programs, Northeastern University. Lumpkins explained the key functions of Northeastern

Crossing. He also spoke about the art currently on exhibition in the space, as well as the center's ongoing support for arts and culture.

#### **D. Our Process and Meeting Recap: Massachusetts Cultural Council (MCC) Cultural District Application Process and April 11 Community Meeting Recap**

At the first community meeting on April 11, Chunn used a PowerPoint presentation to frame the conversation. As a means to introduce new attendees to the community planning process to date, Chunn again shared this presentation to the group. However, this presentation was updated with community input from the first meeting. This input was recapped and attendees had an opportunity to make corrections or add additional suggestions.

Select points included:

- Process includes both approval from Boston City Council as well as MCC on the overall assessment by MCC regarding state designation.
- Examples of cultural districts in MA per legislation passed in 2010 and implemented in 2011 include: Aquinnah Circle on Martha's Vineyard, Seaport District in New Bedford (including Whaling Museum), Canalway in Lowell, Fenway Cultural District in Boston, Boston Literary District in Back Bay/Beacon Hill, and Latin Quarter in Jamaica Plain (approved by city council but not yet designated by MCC).
- Overview of MCC Cultural District Application. Note: Dense geographical location grounded in cultural assets, walkable.
- As per the first community meeting on April 11, Chunn engaged participants in the following questions and conversation:
- Roxbury is culturally rich. How do we communicate this from within?
- What are Roxbury's cultural assets? How do we identify the public art, venues for theater and spoken word, architecture, and many other cultural assets? Note: MCC's definition of cultural assets.
- The MCC required a dense, walkable district. However, the assets of Roxbury lie beyond the current Dudley Square/John Eliot Square limitations. How do we feel about current designated areas being named after white men? Inclusivity means broadening cultural distinction. How do we want to define the cultural designation?
- Organizational support: The current planning process was initially organized by three organizations, but this number is expanding. There are now 13 organizational supporters and this number will continue to grow.

#### **E. Demonstration and Feedback: Proposed Interactive Cultural Asset Mapping Tool**

Sasaki Associates, an architectural firm that worked on the Bruce C. Bolling Building, is providing pro bono technical assistance to the planning process (mapping and mapping tools). They have offered use of their proprietary software to help map cultural assets through a link on the website. Christine Dunn, a principal at Sasaki, gave a demonstration of the application and how it might be used.

- Users can map their cultural assets by dropping and dragging icons onto the map. Users can put as many icons on the map as they want. There is an option to add comments.

- Mapping tool does not define boundaries and users can place icons anywhere they want. Map uses Google technology and can be viewed in two modes: traditional map and Google earth.
- Discussion regarding map; overall, attendees expressed support for the base map as presented.
- Discussion regarding icons and the pros and cons of using them to map cultural assets. The demonstrated icons were not the right fit for this project and need to be revised. Icons are an imperfect system to document. However, they do allow for the information to be sorted.
- Action item: Need to go back and define the categories and vet with others to get feedback before the link goes live.
- You can filter our input on interactive map/close/reopen to review other's input.
- The process began with strategy based on MCC goals that are tailored to meet community needs. There are three lenses: MCC goals, community goals, strategies for meeting goals.
- Curious about various locations and their names; cultural district, what does it mean? How does it benefit our community? What do we want the benefit to be? Making folks aware of cultural legacy. (R. Noel)
- Question? Can we add categories, placeholder, or marker? Answer: Yes, you can, move the box (icon placeholder) anywhere you want it on the map. There is an icon for other and users can define this category themselves.
- Representative Rushing distributed a map and discussed the changing and shrinking boundaries of Roxbury, starting in 1868. Why is the proposed cultural district so small?
- General Comments: Literary District got all the things they wanted in a district. Walkability is constraining in Roxbury. Why not have 5 or 6 cultural designations with walking tours? You could begin at Roxbury Heritage State Park and radiate outwards as there is significant architectural interest in all Roxbury neighborhoods.
- Question: Can we rename the square named for white men? Don't know enough about Thomas Dudley and John Eliot to make a judgment call. However, is this consistent with what we are trying to uplift? (A. Brae)

## **F. Group Conversations: Vision and Goals**

Attendees broke into two groups for conversations regarding the vision and goals for the district. A worksheet that included ideas from the first meeting and draft vision and goals framed the discussion. Select notes from the discussion include:

- It is not immediately clear how this relates to existing collaboration with efforts related to branding. (B. Gaither) To be determined, but not meant to supplant or replace anything. Joint marketing in wealthier districts build budget with dues. For example, in the Fenway District there might be a \$5K buy in depending on an organization's budget, recognizing this goes towards a net financial gain. (D. Bustin)
- What is the difference between a culture district and society? (D. Lee) Culture district is a destination. (D. Bustin) Places that need help with mutual marketing are places that need this designation.

- Some places already have the assets there, whereas we have to develop a list and buy in for this. (C. Walton) We have institutions and assets that are unique to the area that do not exist in any other places in the city. (B. Gaither)
- Excellent opportunity to collaborate by developing strategy and showcase assets in the community.
- May be an opportunity to locate new funding since arts and culture in the community is underfunded; may just switch to better vehicle for some rather than compete.
- Are existing organizations included in this planning process? What is the role of corporations in this planning process? What we have to do is see who has a stake in this and get their buy-in.
- We also need to look at the nexus of transportation to see what impact it will have; Dudley Bus Depot has 30,000 people passing through daily, but not many are pausing to spend money. (D. Bustin) In 5 to 10 years, Roxbury may have less of a pass-through feel and be a destination for Roxbury. (B. Gaither) We need to identify various assets that can become vital in Roxbury of the future. Branding and meeting will make people want to stop so really celebrating the district with flyers, banners, and ads.
- Roxbury can be a state of mind rather than being all about the boundaries so we do not get hung up on the ends. (D. Lee)
- Looking at vision this will outline how we can be more community-based focus on the goals that will flow out of that. (N. Sadler)
- The vision and goals need to be tailored and reflect the needs of the community of Roxbury.
- Maybe we look at the population who will benefit in 10 years.
- Roxbury we may not be able to fit in the box we are trying to fit into MCC guidelines. (Terrence) Look at the MCC guidelines as the floor not the ceiling.
- We need to be clear in the goals about how people who live here benefit. (N. Sadler)
- We need to get feedback from the community. (C. Walton)
- May not work if the community has issues supporting itself (i.e. Bartlett Yard not being developed). (Terrence)
- Roxbury is on the ascent and we need to determine if we want to participate or bail out and we need to decide the skill to create vehicle to survive and have buy-in from outside the community. This does that, and adds to the development of the community. (B. Gaither)
- This seems to have been a part of the conversation in the community for decades. (Terrence)
- How do we mobilize the community to get involved? (D. Lee)

### **G. Next Steps**

The next community meeting will be held on June 16 at Dudley Branch, Boston Public Library, at 65 Warren Street from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

In addition, there will be a public conversation and luncheon for seniors on Tuesday, May 24, 2016 from noon to 1:30 p.m. at Dudley Branch, Boston Public Library, 65 Warren Street, Roxbury, MA.

Please help us engage others in this community planning process. If you know of a group that might be interested in learning more, please contact Kelley Chunn at [kcassociates106@gmail.com](mailto:kcassociates106@gmail.com).