

## MEETING NOTES

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

4/11/2016, 6:00 P.M. - 8:00 P.M.

BRUCE C. BOLLING MUNICIPAL BUILDING, 6<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR

**ATTENDEES:** 75 people attended, including Representative Byron Rushing, Joyce Ferriabough Bolling, members of the Roxbury Memory Trail and Jazz Boston Heritage Trail, residents, and community members. The meeting was facilitated by Kelley Chunn and Associates.

**PURPOSE:** This was the first 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 first community meeting was a time for attendees to talk with each other about their vision for a cultural district in Roxbury; the meeting covered a broad range of topics through a rich, informal discussion. 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:

- Welcome and Introductions
- Brief History of Cultural Districts in Massachusetts
- Our Process: Community Engagement, Cultural Assets and Mapping, Identifying Goals, and Shared Governance
- Next Steps

#### B. What is a Cultural District?

According to the MCC, a cultural district is a specific geographical area in a city or town that has a concentration of cultural facilities, activities, and assets. It is a walkable, compact area that is easily identifiable to visitors and residents and serves as a center of cultural, artistic, and economic activity.

Across the state, cultural districts vary greatly according to the location and cultural assets. Here is a link to the approved districts in Massachusetts:

[http://www.massculturalcouncil.org/services/cultural\\_districts.asp](http://www.massculturalcouncil.org/services/cultural_districts.asp)

In Boston, there are currently two cultural districts, the Fenway Cultural District and the Literacy Cultural District. Jamaica Plain is in the process of establishing The Latin Quarter. One

example of a booming cultural district is the city of New Bedford, where their cultural assets include a whaling museum, whaling ship events, and an online calendar:

<http://www.newbedford-ma.gov/galleries/new-bedford-historic-national-park/>

### **C. Community Engagement**

Currently, a series of public meetings are planned. The next meeting is scheduled for May 9, 2016 at Northeastern Crossing, followed by a meeting on June 16, 2016 at Dudley Library. Meetings will be additive, so attendees are encouraged to attend all meetings. In addition, bi-weekly advisory meetings are scheduled on Mondays from 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. at The American City Coalition (TACC). The next meeting is Monday, April 25. Anyone interested in helping to guide the process is encouraged to attend. Suggestions can also be emailed to DECDinfo@gmail.com.

### **D. Cultural Assets and Mapping**

“Roxbury is culturally rich.” Those in attendance are aware of the rich cultural assets of Roxbury. Chunn presented examples of a limited number of cultural assets and explained the MCC requirement that we map cultural assets and collect baseline data on arts and culture in Roxbury. She then posed the following question for discussion, “How do we communicate our cultural treasures from the inside out?”

Discussion: The discussion included a broad range of topics and ideas about how to share Roxbury’s cultural assets from the inside out:

- **Youth Participation**: The group wanted to ensure that particular attention was given to youth participation. One recommendation was to utilize summer works programs to provide youth with training opportunities as neighborhood guides and ambassadors similar to MYTOWN.
- **Technology**: Bridgette Wallace, Skylab, talked about the importance of connecting the district through technology, in particular as a means to engage young people. Technology is a good way to share information. Can use phone apps to coordinate information and access Roxbury history from a kiosk(s). Can use holograms to walk, talk, and tour history. Ethos is planning to use phone apps on the “trail swell” on the Memory Trail. Another attendee mentioned how young people use the phone all the time and how it can be used as a means to connect with new Bostonians.
- **Streaming Roxbury Radio**: Several attendees suggested developing a streaming Roxbury Radio station to share spoken word, music, oral history, local news source, and cultural information. Vernon Robinson (see [blackstonian.com](http://blackstonian.com)) said a Blackstonian streaming radio station is needed to accentuate the arts in the cultural district and as a means to promote community forums.
- **Common Language**: Emerson Kingston, an arts producer, talked about developing a common language between new technology and arts in Roxbury and try to look for something that encompasses both of these things. Find a common language to define the district.
- **Events and Programming**: Incorporating weekly events focused on film, dance, ethnic foods, music, oral history, galleries, projection onto buildings (illuminate large scale

historical faces) with narratives and festivals was discussed. Another suggestion was to establish “A Day of Creativity in Roxbury.” One attendee suggested a model similar to the former “Destination World” at the Canal Way District in Lowell, MA which was a monthly program sponsored by COOL (Cultural Organization in Lowell). Several people mentioned events as a good way to attract college students.

- Culture and Branding: Participants stressed the importance of branding the district as being inclusive and communicating the Roxbury art and cultural experience by stretching the boundaries and articulating a strong message that is inclusive and welcoming to all. The need for a good, broad definition so that no one is excluded. Discussion also touched on what a brand might be such as Discovering Roxbury or Undiscovered Roxbury.
- Defining Culture: There was a discussion about what is culture. One definition offered was: A culture is a way of life for a group of people--the behaviors, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next.
- Roxbury Memory Trail: In a separate, but complementary initiative, Joyce Stanley, Director of Dudley Square Main Streets, talked about the Roxbury Memory Trail and shared some of the sites and twentieth-century events included in the tour, the planning of which is now underway. Photographer Hakim Raquib has documented the Roxbury Memory Trail in a photo documentary from Franklin Park to Grove Hall and Warren Street to Dudley Square. Stanley expressed the need to use Dudley Station to articulate our story; some of the existing historical placards have been stolen. Stanley expressed the overarching need for a narrative to describe significant historical facts about people and places including: Martin Luther King lived on Mass. Ave. in close proximity to the Mass. Ave. MBTA station during his graduate studies at Boston University; Malcolm X lived on Dale Street and that site is currently undergoing an archeological dig and renovation; Dillaway-Thomas House; re-enactments--Patriot’s Day and William Dawes Ride at Eliot Square; Women’s Welfare Protest of the 1960s (Grove Hall); the city-sponsored James Brown concert to tamper down potential riots; Mother Caroline of Mother Caroline Academy as the leader of insurrection at Grove Hall’s Welfare Office; landmarks as well as statues of famous contributors to Roxbury’s history.
- Boston Jazz Heritage Trail: Pauline Bilsky and Don Carlson highlighted important places in Roxbury related to jazz. JazzBoston is working with the Museum of African American History to develop a Boston Jazz Heritage Trail in Roxbury.
- History of African Americans in Boston: Joyce Ferriabough Bolling spoke briefly about the long and important history of African Americans in Boston. She authored the book, *African Americans in Boston: More Than 350 Years*. Bolling wrote and researched the history of blacks and worked with the African American Museum of History to publish the book, which she noted needs to be updated as it only goes up to 1992 and does not include Deval Patrick and others. She wants children who attend the Trotter school to know who William Trotter is; with each new generation the information has to be communicated. History is culture; culture is history.

- Look Broadly and Deeply at Cultural Assets: Dorothea Jones stressed the need to showcase Roxbury's rich assets and cultural legacies that are far more than institutions and examples mentioned in the presentation and should also include: Elma Lewis' playhouse in the park; Sunday concerts in the park; Malcolm X's house; the large number of Puddingstone foundations and churches; Cleveland Armory; Townsend Street/historical homes; Roxbury Community College's rich political and cultural history. Need to look deeply and truly at what are historic sites.
- Community Resources: Should think broadly and make use of resources. Discover Roxbury founder Marcia Butman is a resource, as is former Executive Director Derek Lumpkins. There are no archives in Roxbury, yet; need to have this. (Discover Roxbury's archives are under the control of the Board of Directors. Contact: Kim Janey and Rodney Singleton, co-Chairs.) Mary Churchill, Chair, Roxbury Cultural Network is another resource.
- Artist: Foster art and artists with city investments. Exhibit and share knowledge of arts in Roxbury including Ekuia Holmes, a Roxbury artist.
- Mapping Assets: Representative Byron Rushing suggested conducting a survey oriented to the Roxbury cultural district. The survey would help to explore the question, "What are the most important historic cultural places and institutions?" He suggested that the process should not be bound by the map and we should start by looking at the assets first and then worrying about the boundaries of a district. Maps are fluid. According to historical maps, both the Museum of Fine Arts and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum are located in Roxbury. Others mentioned that, to date, the boundaries and name have not been firmly defined, however, there are parameters as set forth by the MCC; Representative Rushing suggested the possibility of asking for an exception for a larger geographic district. Also, there is a need to be able to look quickly and know what other organizations and individuals are doing. If you have visitors, they should be able to look quickly and know what is going on. One attendee mentioned that when she worked as a guard at the MFA, people would ask her where to go to go in Roxbury and she did not know where to send them; would be helpful to have a list.

## **E. Identifying Goals**

MCC outlines a very specific set of goals including attracting artists and cultural enterprises, sparking business and job development, attracting tourists, preserving and reusing historic buildings, enhancing property values, fostering local cultural development. However, across the Commonwealth, cities and towns have tailored the program to meet the unique history and conditions of their communities. Chunn posed the following question for discussion, "How can we work together to establish goals for Roxbury?"

Discussion: Below are some of the ideas discussed about identifying goals for the cultural district.

- Look at Best Practices: Joyce Stanley feels a strong model is AHA! (see [www.ahanewbedford.org](http://www.ahanewbedford.org)) in New Bedford, which is a free monthly celebration of arts, history, and architecture in Downtown New Bedford and the New Bedford Seaport that includes: galleries, beer/coffee shops, open mic opportunities, photo computer labs,

and theater. Also discussed the need for dialogue to include everyone engaged in multiple discussions so that the work is efficient, for creative jobs and economic empowerment, to explore mutual interests, and to develop shared goals and accomplishments.

- Foster Strong Outcomes: Discussed how to create a climate to foster a successful/sustainable cultural district where the community would achieve some or all of the following, incrementally: attract artists and cultural enterprises; encourage business and job creation and growth; establish the district as a tourist destination; preserve history and reuse historic buildings (Historic Boston Inc.); enhance the existing community and strengthen organizations through shared governance and marketing of programming.
- Create a Nurturing/Thriving Environment for Artists: Attendees discussed goals directly connected to practicing artists including: bridging the gap between established artists and newbies by promoting inter-generational conversations and other means; providing affordable alternatives for artists to live work and play in the city and opportunities that complement what already exists; supporting social and environmental consciousness; maintaining a database of artists and activities.
- Work with Developers: Joyce Stanley mentioned need to create linkages and do something creative so that not all money flows into housing. In Portland, Maine, they have a 1% fund for the arts. Need to come up with some creative plans for funding the things needed in the community, including a visitors center and archives. Charlotte Nelson, a member of the Roxbury Strategic Master Plan Oversight Committee, wanted to zero in and hone in on what Stanley said. Need to look at developers categorically and then, as Byron Rushing said, be as inclusive as we can be. As a group, we can work together and getting some people to work on arts and culture events, some on jobs, etc. Need to organize ourselves around community need and be active.
- Minimize the Space Barrier: The need for affordable space is ongoing and cuts across the entire creative sector. The million-dollar question is, “How do we secure artists access to affordable space?” Artists are lacking performance spaces, with limited access to both indoor and outdoor spaces. Attendees suggested that the community regain access to public spaces they used to be able to use such as the Jeremiah Burke High School and the Auditorium at Boston Latin. Other remarks related to space include asking: Where do we, people of color, congregate in Boston? There is no consensus: Slade’s, Darryl’s Corner Bar & Kitchen--where? Another attendee remarked on how neighborhoods are siloed: Bostonians, including those in Roxbury, sometimes feel disconnected from other neighborhoods. There is sometimes a lack of connection between communities.

## **F. Shared Governance**

Prior to this meeting, a small group of Roxbury-based organizations (Haley House, MPDC, and TACC) have worked collaborative to relaunch the discussion (that many of the attendees have been participants in in the past) about seeking MCC designation for a cultural district. Since August 2015, their work has included looking at best practices and technical assistance needs, applying for funding, and hiring a consultant with funding from The Catalyst Fund. The table is

set, but now needs to be joined by many more to develop a strong, sustainable entity with shared governance. The hope is that after tonight, this will quickly grow into a broad, collaborative venture. Attendees were asked to join in this shared work by attending advisory meetings, putting their logos on the website, partnering on an organizational level, and sharing ideas, experiences, and expertise.

Chunn then posed the following question for discussion, “How do we work collaboratively to maintain and sustain a cultural district?”

Discussion: The discussion focused primarily on sustainability, included the following:

- **Build a Sustainable Model for the Future:** Chunn opened up the topic of sustainability. A key challenge in developing a cultural district is sustainability. How do we measure our success? What does success look like? How do we strengthen the legacy of our cultural institutions? What are the funding/investment strategies long term? Attendees had the following suggestions: 1) A key objective for developing a sustainable cultural district is to layer our efforts by building on and expand the existing cultural infrastructure (i.e. Roxbury Visitor Center informational kiosk). 2) Attract new investments and identify additional funding streams. The former Arts Lottery was mentioned. 3) Another idea is lobbying to get legislation that taxes cars at tolls entering Boston with a percentage targeting our cultural district. 4) As a part of the community benefits package for developments in Roxbury, the community/city should ask developers to share a percentage of the development cost and/or subsidize/donate space(s) that goes to the cultural district in Roxbury. 5) Jacqui Parker, a Roxbury artist, actress, and playwright, has been telling the story of Roxbury in her craft. Dillon Bustin, Creative Director for Hibernian Hall, commissioned Parker as a performer/actress. She is just one of many talented artists/actors in the Roxbury community who is always compromised because of a lack of funding. (She was recently nominated for “Best New Play” award, but felt it was more important to show her support for the cultural district instead of attending the awards event the same night.)
- **Working with Developers:** Also see related notes in Section E. above. P-3 Partners are underwriting a trolley between Tremont Crossing and Dudley Square. An evolving cultural district might include different, more upscale shops, more parking spaces, etc. This is a different story than the existing perception of Dudley Square, which is undergoing a transformation. One attendee asked, “Is it detrimental to work with developers?” Another mentioned that developers could be asked for a certain portion of their community benefits package to go to culture.
- **Need Innovative Ideas and Resources:** The following were mentioned: endowments, match and map resources, involving private companies, getting everyone together, building community partnerships and logos, looking at geography to benefit and bundle cultural Roxbury to be a cultural magnet destination/inclusive economic platform.

## **G. Upcoming Meetings and Announcements**

### **Contact Information**

Website: [www.roxburyculturaldistrict.org](http://www.roxburyculturaldistrict.org)

Email: [DECDinfo@gmail.com](mailto:DECDinfo@gmail.com)

Phone: 617.427.0046

Facebook: [Roxbury Cultural District in Dudley Square-Eliot Square](#)

Twitter: [@roxburyculture](#)

### **Dudley Square-Eliot Square Cultural District Advisory Meeting**

This is a smaller meeting of people interested in helping to guide the planning process. All are welcome.

April 25, 2016 (1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.)

The American City Coalition (TACC)

2136 Washington Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor

Roxbury, MA 02119

### **Dudley Square-Eliot Square Cultural District Planning Meeting**

This is the next public conversation. These meetings will be additive, so please plan to attend.

Please help us spread the word to others; email any ideas you have about outreach to

[DECDinfo@gmail.com](mailto:DECDinfo@gmail.com)

May 9, 2016 (6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.)

Northeastern Crossing

1175 Tremont Street (Ruggles T-Stop)

Boston, MA 02120

\*Note: Parking is limited. We encourage you to take public transportation.

### **Announcements**

#### **Roxbury Memory Trail**

The next meeting of the Roxbury Memory Trail is scheduled for April 14, 2016 from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the Trail Hub@ Grove Hall Neighborhood Development Corporation, 283 Blue Hill Avenue. This event is sponsored by the Grove Hall NDC, Dudley Square Main Streets, Greater Grove Hall Main Streets, Earthos, and The National Center for Afro-American Artists.

#### **Roxbury Patriots Day**

Sponsored by the Roxbury Collaborative

This annual event will be held on April 18, 2016 from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at the First Church Roxbury, 10 Putnam Street, John Eliot Square. Program includes the Unsung Heroes Breakfast and a trolley ride. All events are free. For additional information contact Dudley Square Main Street at 617.541.4644.

#### **Jazz Week**

April 22 - May 1, 2016

Jazz Boston/MAAH Walking Tour, conducted by Pauline Bilskey

Tribute Concert on April 29 @ Museum of African American History (MAAH)

6:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. on Beacon Hill featuring Mae Ornette, Roy Haynes, and Eric Jackson as hosts.