

Jan 11, 2024 | Lower Roxbury Outreach Advisory Group Meeting

Attendees:

- Jen Rowe, Regional Planner, Boston Transportation Department
- Hannah Fong, Boston Transportation Department
- Maria Daniela Castillo, Boston Transportation Department
- Maya Mudgal, Boston Transportation Department
- Xavier Lopez, Boston Transportation Department
- Jamarhl Crawford, Boston Planning and Development Agency
- Keri Malone, Mayor's Office of Arts & Culture
- Andre Jones, Director of Community Engagement, Nuestra Comunidad
- Carol Blair, Chester Square Neighbors
- Ron Whitaker, Peoples Baptist Church

Agenda:

- Refresher on this group, what we've done to date
- Review next steps for the project and group
- Learn about upcoming Streets projects in Roxbury
- Discuss next steps for the group

[Slide deck](#)

Note:

- Ron Whitaker had an emergency to attend to and requested to speak later in the day.
- Just as the meeting was called off and other City staff logged off, Carol Blair and Andre Jones joined. Jen Rowe walked through the planned content, followed by a conversation about next steps for the project and the group.
- Afterwards, Jen shared the same updates with Ron Whitaker and discussed next steps for the project and the group.

Meeting Notes

Refresher:

- Project goal: build a collaborative process with community members to highlight neighborhood assets and create positive changes to your streets in Lower Roxbury

- The project area is bounded by, but does not include Columbus, Mass Ave., and Melnea Cass.
- Goal of Outreach Advisory Group (OAG): Help us communicate and collaborate with the communities in Lower Roxbury right now. * This is not the place where decisions about outcomes will be made
- Expectations for BTD:
 - Host outreach advisory group meetings quarterly, with ample notice.
 - Be accountable to you with regular communication.
 - Respectfully engage with the outreach advisory group and community members.
 - Incorporate your advice and recommendations about outreach, as best as we are able.
 - Make decisions transparently.
- Group Expectations:
 - Make a good faith effort to attend outreach advisory group meetings.
 - Engage respectfully with one other, with the project team, with community members.
 - Share your knowledge and experience.
 - Share back to your communities about the project.
- Our process: see diagram in slide deck, an iterative/looping process of listening, confirming community priorities, collaborating & planning, refining the design, and implementing
- What we've done so far:
 - Fall 2019 through 2020 - We asked community members:
 - Where do you find joy in the neighborhood?
 - What would you change about the streets?
 - 2021 - We confirmed with community members:
 - Which locations rose to the top as priorities
 - Information about the tools we could use to make changes on the streets.
 - Spring - Summer 2022 - shared proposed changes with community members, heard what residents liked, had questions about, and how they felt about any trade-offs
 - Fall - Winter 2022 - Refined the designs based on feedback from public outreach and other City departments, shared the final designs with community members, heard what residents liked and where they had questions
 - 2023 - finalized engineering plans, brought plans to the Public Improvement Commission (PIC), prepared to put the project out to bid (late winter - early spring)

Review next steps for the project and group

- Next steps for the project
 - Project timeline - see slide deck
 - We're working to secure funding in the City's Capital Budget for State Fiscal Year 2025 (begins this July 1, 2024)
 - We're also seeking permission to bid out the project a few months early so we have the best chance of construction starting up first thing in July
 - Our Public Works Department will advertise the project and manage it through construction
- Next steps for this group:
 - Jen has shifted to a new role (Regional Planner with the Streets Cabinet)
 - Coordinating with our partner agencies (MassDOT, MBTA, DCR)
 - Securing funding for great projects like this one :)
 - We're working to improve communication with residents as projects move into construction
 - Hannah Fong from the Public Works Infrastructure & Design team will be our liaison and do her best to keep this group updated, along with John Monacelli (project engineer)
 - Maria Daniela Castillo, the Neighborhood Planner for Roxbury, will host this group in April
- Next steps for the Streets Cabinet
 - We'd like to keep up our good momentum making positive changes to streets in Roxbury!
 - We have a number of projects moving forward:
 - Tremont/Columbus (Phase II)
 - Columbia Road
 - Roxbury Resilient Corridors

Learn about upcoming Streets projects in Roxbury

- Tremont/Columbus
 - What is this project?
 - Continuation of Columbus Ave center-running bus lanes in Egleston Sq
 - Will support increased high-frequency bus service provided through BNRD
 - 12, 15, 19, 22, 23, 28, 45, 66

- Enhanced bus stops, reduced delays for bus riders
 - Green infrastructure, safer pedestrian & bicycle crossings, reconstruction of Roxbury Crossing Plaza
 - Where is this happening?
 - Jackson Sq → Roxbury Crossing → Ruggles Station
 - Who is leading this project?
 - MBTA is responsible for the design and construction of this project
 - City of Boston is contributing to the funding, design, and maintenance
 - Our job is to ensure that the final project does right by our transit riders and other people using the street
 - What is the timeline?
 - Currently in design, aiming to begin major construction in 2026
 - How can I learn more? Learn more at: mbta.com/projects/columbus-avenue-bus-lanes
- Columbia Road
 - Identified as a key project in Go Boston 2030
 - 2.4 mile corridor in Dorchester connecting Franklin Park and Moakley Park
 - Create a linear park, repurposing the existing median, sidewalks, and improving transportation connectivity for the surrounding neighborhoods
 - Project Design Goals:
 - Provide universal access
 - Improve safety
 - Increased greenery & enhance the public realm
 - Next Steps
 - Development of Public Engagement Plan
 - Community engagement to begin Spring 2024
 - Near-term improvements to be implemented Summer/Fall 2024
 - Project Webpage: boston.gov/columbia-road
- Roxbury Resilient Corridors
 - The City will partner with local residents and community organizations to apply the fund toward the planning, design and implementation of improvements for Warren Street, Malcolm X Boulevard, and Melnea Cass Boulevard in Roxbury.
 - Project Goals
 - Improve safety for all those who use the corridor on a daily basis
 - Proactively include approaches for climate resilience with green stormwater infrastructure, street trees, and “hot spot” heat mitigation
 - Address parking and traffic flow concerns
 - Next Steps
 - Publish the Request For Proposals (RFP)

- Develop a community engagement strategy taking into consideration nearby, ongoing projects
- Gather information from the Environment Department and MONUM's pilot projects over the summer

Discuss next steps for the group

Note: Q: references to a question asked; C: references to a comment stated; A: references to answering a question or comment

- Q: Jen - Curious for your thoughts about whether it'd be helpful to continue this Outreach Advisory Group as this project wraps up and as upcoming Streets initiatives (like the three mentioned earlier) start up/become more active? Key aspects of this forum being:
 - (1) open to anyone who wishes to engage
 - (2) quarterly virtual meetings
 - (3) mutually accountable group norms (see above)
 - (4) focused on communicating and collaborating with communities in neighborhoods right now
 - (5) intentionally *not* the place where decisions about design outcomes will be made, in recognition that it is not and cannot* be representative of all communities in Lower Roxbury

a **much larger budget and staffing for community engagement would be required to recruit a committee that gets close to representing the diverse communities in Lower Roxbury and compensate them for their time*
- Q: Andre - Was this group helpful for the project team?
- A: Jen - yes, it has been very helpful. Four reasons come to mind:
 1. Providing guidance on how to reach and engage residents and other stakeholders, especially those who haven't historically participated in planning processes (youth, older adults, people with lower incomes, people who speak languages other than English, parents with young children, etc)
 2. Holding the project team accountable to making decisions transparently. While the group wasn't the place where design decisions were made, anytime we made major decisions, we explained them to the group and received their feedback around how to communicate them to the broader communities in the neighborhood
 3. Keeping up momentum - having quarterly check-ins prompted the project team to periodically check in on progress with the design and community engagement, to think through updates we have to share, and to think

through questions we have around the appropriate type of outreach and engagement in the next quarter.

4. Helping the project weather challenges and changes - no matter how robust and thorough we do outreach, there are always folks who missed our notices or forgot to follow up on them. There's also change-over in organizations, local representatives, city staff, and, to some degree, residents over the life of a project. Having residents and other stakeholders who can speak to the process, the outcome, and how/why we've made decisions along the way can help newcomers catch up, engage constructively in whatever stage a project is at, and allow it to move forward.
- A: Andre - yes, we all have so much going on and so many things fighting for our attention. It's easy to miss something, even if it was well publicized.
 - A: Carol - agree with Andre about that. I also like the idea of an outreach advisory group as a way to build community and organize in neighborhoods, especially those like ours where it can be challenging to do so. We are a diverse neighborhood and there aren't necessarily channels that everyone is plugged into. A group like this is a nice balance - it allows people who want to and have the capacity to help guide planning processes do so, reserving decisions on outcomes to planners informed by broader input.
 - A: Andre and Carol - a quarterly cadence and virtual meetings make sense.
 - A: Andre - it'd make sense to rethink the geography of the group for different projects - those who want to be very involved on Columbia Road will be a different, though overlapping, set of people and organizations. The same for Roxbury Resilient Corridors.
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Afterwards

- C: Jen - shared current project status, next steps for project and group, summary of discussion with Ron Whitaker
- Q: Jen - Curious for your thoughts about whether it'd be helpful to continue this Outreach Advisory Group as this project wraps up and as upcoming Streets initiatives start up/become more active?
- A: Ron - agree with Carol and Andre that this group has been helpful and should continue. Before it began this project was stuck and nothing was going to happen. Ever since we've been working on it together, we've kept it moving forward and we're going to have improvements actually built soon. We also have brought together a group that wants to work constructively toward positive changes.

- A: Ron - we should revisit and try to re-engage and grow the group's membership, as we have a number of times over the years.
- Q: Jen - do you think the best time to do that is now?
- A: Ron - since the proposed changes are finalized, the right time would probably be in the weeks before construction, so that we bring folks in when there's something for them to help communicate.
- C: Jen - we're hoping that construction could begin in July, if everything aligns (no guarantees).
- C: Ron - We could meet soon to strategize how to do that. If we divide it up, it shouldn't be too much on any one person.