

MSLD Study Committee Notes #20

August 12, 2026, 6:30 pm

Zoom <https://www.zoomgov.com/j/1651596582>

Study Committee Attendees:

Ameeth Deenanath (Alternate)
Crystal Galvin
Jeffrey Gonyeau
Kirsten Hoffman
Nancy Johnsen (Chair)
Linda Neshamkin
Ian Urquhart

Staff:

Gabriela Amore
Elizabeth Sherva
Jennifer Gaugler

Members of the Public:

Action/follow-up items for staff are highlighted in yellow.

I. REVIEW AND VOTE ON MEETING MINUTES

- A. **Kirsten** motions to approve meeting minutes from July 29, 2026. **Crystal** seconds the motion. Meeting minutes approved unanimously.
- B. **Linda** motions to approve meeting minutes from August 5, 2026. **Kirsten** seconds the motion. Meeting minutes approved unanimously.

II. PUBLIC FEEDBACK SINCE LAST MEETING

- A. Feedback received by staff:
 1. **Jennifer** reports that no new feedback has been received since the last meeting.
- B. Feedback received by study committee members:
 1. None.

III. REVIEW PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PLANS

- A. Planned schedule:
 1. Next committee meeting on September 16.
 2. Following that meeting, staff will make any final requested edits and clean up the working study report.
 3. Working study report to be released on September 22.
 4. Study committee to meet again on September 23 to prepare for the community meeting in October.
 5. Study committee to meet again in late October to debrief community meeting and to revise the report if needed.
 6. Draft report to be posted by November 13.
 7. Boston Landmarks Commission first hearing on January 12 (no vote). Commissioners to hear public testimony.
 8. Boston Landmarks Commission second hearing – date TBD.
- B. Staff have updated Memorial Hall (Abraham Lincoln Post No. 11) regarding the proposed dates for the community meeting in October. Committee members should check their own schedules and let staff know if they have any conflicts on October 21 or 22.

1. Staff have checked with the Planning Department and confirmed that there are no conflicts between our proposed schedule and any Charlestown-related Planning meetings in September and October.

C. Next steps:

1. Staff will meet with the new Charlestown liaison at the Office of Neighborhood Services, Isabella Carr, in two weeks.
2. Staff will check with the Patriot-Bridge about (free) announcements.
3. Staff will submit announcements to the ONS Charlestown newsletter.
4. Staff will invite City Councilor Coletta-Zapata and at-large councilors to October community event.
5. Staff will draft social media posts, flyers, and event activities (for October event) to share with the Study Committee at the next meeting.
6. **Nancy** has been and will continue to reach out to local neighborhood groups to spread the word about the upcoming working study report and community event.
7. **Crystal**: Also check if Patriot Bridge can reshare social media posts too (Facebook).
8. Staff asks if anyone on the committee can share the announcement about the October event at the CNC?
 - a) **Nancy**: Can someone from staff attend the CNC meeting in October 6?
 - b) **Elizabeth**: Better that we wait until the actual community engagement event, as the CNC meeting is not the forum for robust discussion or Q&A about the proposal itself. We want that to take place at the community meeting.
 - c) **Crystal**: It would be helpful to have someone from staff come to the CNC and promote the event and discuss the timeline.
 - d) **Elizabeth**: We will discuss internally about what that could look like.
9. **Nancy** asks if there will be a mailing to the property owners inside the boundary about the October community meeting?
 - a) **Elizabeth**: All property owners in the Landmark District and Protection Area will receive a mailed notice when the draft study report is released for formal 60-day comment period, but we don't have any money in budget for the extra mailing about the October event.
 - b) **Nancy**: It is important to consider that some property owners don't live in Charlestown and may not see flyers. If we're really saying that we want community input, then we have to make the real effort to do a mailing. Does anyone else on the committee feel strongly about this?
 - (1) **Linda**: Agrees that people who are in the projected expanded area for the Landmark District itself need to have some communication earlier than the 60-day comment period.
 - c) **Jennifer**: Suggests option of mailing both the October event announcement and January hearing notice at the same time (as the January hearing notice is legally required and must be funded). Staff needs to review this option after the meeting to see if it would satisfy all necessary legal requirements.
 - (1) Another option is to check with ONS to see if they can assist.
 - d) **Crystal**: It is important because there are many elderly homeowners in the district, and not everyone is online. The City has to do better.
 - e) **Nancy**: Agreed, the City needs to do better. If you're not pushing this up the chain hard enough, you need to push it harder. The

community has said over and over again that they were very upset that there weren't more mailings about this. For the last community event I hand-delivered all the flyers to everyone in the proposed area, alone, and we didn't even have enough to complete that. I had to go make some additional copies, because staff said there wasn't any money to make any additional copies. This is ridiculous. This is a City process. If the City has agreed, and the Landmarks Commission has taken it on, you fund it correctly. I would appreciate that you push this harder up the chain. While I understand you can say, "this is all we are required to do by statute," I think given the changes, and given what the community has said, this mailing should go out.

- f) **Elizabeth:** We have no discretionary spending this year outside of what we are regulatorily mandated to do. But we understand all of your concerns. I can raise your voices again. We will look into it and let the committee know if we have any viable options to do the extra mailing.
- g) **Nancy:** Do you know how much it would cost to do the mailing?
 - (1) **Elizabeth:** It's upwards of 60 cents per postcard mailing, excluding printing costs.
 - (2) **Jennifer:** Ballpark figure of about 3,000 properties in the proposed Landmark District and Protection Area.
 - (3) Staff will confirm exact number of properties and printing/ mailing costs after this meeting.

IV. REVIEW STANDARDS AND CRITERIA

A. Protection Area boundary:

- 1. **Nancy** asks for an update on what staff found about whether parcels can be included if they are partially within the Protection Area boundary line.
 - a) **Elizabeth** says that staff has confirmed that if the 1200-foot maximum boundary line crosses through a parcel, only the portion of the parcel that is inside the boundary line can be part of the Protection Area (not the whole parcel).
 - b) **Elizabeth** also says that it is legally possible to draw the boundary of a Protection Area across a parcel, but it is not best practice. We spoke to our preservation planners and our Director of Design Review, who said that it can create a gray area which can be hard for preservation planners to administer and for Commissioners to understand and have a discussion about.
 - c) Staff also looked again at the criteria for designation of a Protection Area in the enabling legislation: (a) views and vistas; (b) patterns of roads, paths, and alleys; (c) size and shape of land parcels; and (d) contrast of scale and density. This is about cohesiveness of an area.
 - d) **Nancy** asks if it is possible to draw a boundary that doesn't follow parcel lines? Aren't there other Landmarks or Districts that have this situation?
 - (1) **Elizabeth:** Yes, and it made projects hard to review, and was confusing for the property owners.
 - (2) **Jeff** says that it is hard for Commissioners to deal with a gray area and can be confusing for property owners and neighbors if they don't feel like there is a consistency to where regulations are applied. To the extent that you can do full blocks and have discrete boundaries, even if that leaves out a

few things you might be concerned about, it makes the administration going forward a lot easier.

2. **Nancy:** How are the cemeteries protected?

- a) Staff explains that cemeteries are protected at two levels:
 - (1) The state law that you cannot build on a cemetery if it is owned by a municipality.
 - (2) Boston's Historic Burying Grounds initiative, run out of the Parks Department, provides an extra level of care and protection.
- b) In addition, there is an unmarked burial law in Massachusetts which means that if you start to dig and you find a potential burial site you must stop and call police, forensics, and the state archaeologist.
 - (1) **Linda:** I worked on a project in Brighton next to a historic burial ground. Those protections are notable.

c) **Jennifer** agrees with **Crystal's** suggestion that all protected cemeteries should be shown on the map.

3. Study committee returns back to the issue of defining the Protection Area boundary.

- a) **Elizabeth** suggests looking back again at the four criteria for a Protection Area and making sure that the boundary is defensible.
- b) **Crystal** says that the zoning changes are fueling some of the concern over future development in Charlestown. Maybe it's easier to digest if we think about residential areas and commercial areas a bit differently.
- c) Regarding the issue of cutting through parcels and the Bunker Hill Mall in particular, **Nancy** agrees that there is a difference between large-scale commercial parcels and small-scale residential parcels. Understands that it could be confusing for individual homeowners to cut through a block of small lots, but feels more comfortable cutting across the Bunker Hill Mall parcel because they have professional architects and planners that can help them review regulatory guidelines. **Nancy** also suggests pulling in more of Main Street where the Monument Charlestown Restaurant and Tavern is located.
 - (1) **Linda** agrees that there is a difference between individual row houses and much bigger forces. Linda also suggests that criteria (c) and (d) are very hard to define.
 - (2) **Jeff** says that he is reminded of the Eustis St. Protection Area. Those lots are ripe for big development, which is appropriate in that area, but how is that impacted by its adjacency to the Eustis Street area? Appreciates Nancy's point that the large commercial parcels are different from small residential areas.
 - (3) **Elizabeth:** One of the things that we look at when discussing appropriate boundaries is the pattern of development in terms of similar parcel sizes, similar setbacks, scale and density.
 - (4) **Nancy:** Regarding criteria (a) (views and vistas), you can see the monument as you walk over from the T station bridge and the Bunker Hill Mall parcel. Large development on this parcel would remove this vista. (There are also developments planned for New Rutherford Avenue.) This seems to relate to criteria (a) for a protection area. This seems defensible. What are the concerns about not being defensible?

- (a) **Elizabeth:** Refers to the enabling legislation which says that an area to be designated as a Protection Area must be “visually related to the landmark, landmark district or architectural conservation district but is not necessarily of sufficient historical, social, cultural, architectural or aesthetic significance to warrant designation as such.” Also points to criteria (d), “contrasts between scale and density.” Would not include the Bunker Hill Mall site based on those criteria or what might happen there in the future.
- (5) **Crystal** points out that the City’s zoning change without community support is what is leading to the interest in including this Protection Area in the site.
 - (a) **Elizabeth:** Understood, but we are advising you all on how to reach a defensible boundary.
- (6) **Nancy:** This area is an entry point and gateway to the neighborhood and it is a valid inclusion in the Protection Area. Feels like we already settled this at the last meeting. Why are we going back?
 - (a) **Elizabeth:** The boundary was a working boundary but it has not been fully hammered out until the recent and current meetings, which is part of the process. Bunker Hill Street used to be the northern boundary of the Protection Area and that
- (7) **Ian:** Are we losing sight of the original purpose of the petition which was to protect the architectural integrity of the features around Monument Square? Is this turning into a development prevention tool? The Protection Area doesn’t need to be as big as it can be.
 - (a) **Nancy:** This isn’t anti-development but it is about making sure that development is appropriate.
 - (b) **Crystal:** Going back to our boundary walk, we didn’t talk about such a large area. Is there an alternative way to synthesize everything?
 - (c) **Crystal** points out that Newtown won’t have vistas of the monument once the Bunker Hill redevelopment is finished.
 - (i) Seeing visual options would be helpful.
 - (d) **Ian:** Is the purpose of the Protection Area about views?
 - (i) **Elizabeth:** That is part of what we are talking about in terms of protecting the sense of place. Vistas is one piece of that. We are also talking about the pattern of development, contrasts of scale and density, and a cohesive feeling. Think about the character-defining features of Charlestown, what “feels like Charlestown,” for example, street scale. Think of 5 Putnam Street.
 - (ii) **Crystal:** 5 Putnam was the situation that got more people in the neighborhood on board with this proposal.

- (8) **Jennifer:** The proposed boundary doesn't have to be a final decision yet. We can show options to the community and get their feedback.
 - (a) **Crystal:** That would be helpful.
 - (b) **Nancy:** Agrees.
 - (c) **Jeff:** Maybe show one option but describe a possible future pathway for other options. In other words, "we considered these things, but down the road, you could also consider A, B, and C in addition to what we did."
- (9) **Nancy:** School Street (west side of the protection area) seems to make sense as the western boundary.
 - (a) **Crystal:** Agrees.
- (10) **Nancy:** When we did the boundary walk, we concluded that Bunker Hill Street was a good northern boundary for the Protection Area because everything on the other side had been redeveloped. Nancy is comfortable with the northern boundary being Bunker Hill Street.
- (11) The study committee discusses certain blocks north of Bunker Hill Street which could be shown as potential add-on options to get community input on.
 - (a) **Crystal** asks whether it makes sense to encourage people to start a new petition.
 - (b) **Ian** agrees with Crystal that maybe these farther areas should be another petition, as it sometimes feels like we are getting too far afield from the initial charge.
 - (c) **Linda** agrees that she could see another petition for the area around Upper Bunker Hill Street.
- B. **Nancy:** question on Archaeology standards for both Landmark District - can language stipulating if "technically and economically feasible" be added?
 - 1. Staff will clarify costs/requirements with Archaeology and will check on the Archaeology language from other districts.

V. PUBLIC COMMENTS

- A. No members of the public in attendance.

VI. ADJOURNMENT: 8:30 PM

- A. **Ian** motions to adjourn, **Jeff** seconds. Unanimous vote to adjourn.