

Boston Harbor Islands Partnership

Meeting Minutes

WilmerHale, 60 State Street, 26th Floor, Boston, MA

Tuesday, March 21, 2017, 3:00 – 4:30 PM

Attendees:

Michael Creasey and Giles Parker —National Park Service (NPS); CDR Brad Kelly—United States Coast Guard (USCG); Priscilla Geigis, Susan Hamilton, Susan Kane and Leo Roy—Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR); Marianne Connolly and Fred Laskey—Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA); Richard McGuinness—Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA); Arthur Pearson—Thompson Island Outward Bound Education Center (TIOBEC); Jocelyn Forbush—The Trustees of Reservations (Trustees); Phil Griffiths—Boston Harbor Now (BHN); Maureen Cavanaugh, Elizabeth Solomon and Heather Deschenes—Boston Harbor Islands Advisory Council

Call to Order and Introductions, Chair

Fred Laskey, chair of the Boston Harbor Islands Partnership, welcomed the group and called the meeting to order, with a quorum present. Partners in attendance and audience members introduced themselves.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

The minutes from the January 17th, 2016, meeting were approved.

Partner and Public Consideration

Sea Level Rise and the Boston Harbor Islands

Bud Ris, Senior Advisor on Climate Change to the Barr Foundation, presented findings from the *Climate Ready Boston* report from Green Ribbon Commission (see accompanying PowerPoint slides). He offered a geographical and historical perspective, describing Boston as a “City Built On Fill” from its establishment in 1611 to the present day, particularly noting the current boom in the Waterfront area. Looking at ominous trends in sea-level rise and the increasing number of named hurricanes passing within 50 miles, it’s clear the city will face serious challenges ahead. But, he noted, we’ve tackled some big problems in recent years, from the Boston Harbor Cleanup to the Big Dig.

The good news is, there’s no shortage of great ideas, and there is much to learn from other countries and cities, abroad and domestically, facing similar situations. To that end, Bud summarized some key findings from the Boston Research Advisory Group (BRAG) report:

1. Climate Consensus

According to the Boston Research Advisory Group (BRAG), there is a clear and convincing consensus within the scientific community predicting extreme temperature fluctuations, record levels of participation, and a rising sea level resulting in coastal and riverine flooding. In short, Boston will get hotter, wetter, and more exposed to flooding.

2. Vulnerability Assessment

In the near term, from the 2030s to the 2050s, the threat from flooding will be concentrated in South Boston, East Boston, Charlestown, and Downtown. By mid-century, exposure will increase across waterfront neighborhoods and start to significantly impact Dorchester. In the 2070s and beyond, vast areas of the city will be vulnerable, including neighborhoods like the South End and areas along the Charles River. To put our vulnerability in perspective: under current projections, circa 2030 there will be a 1% flood risk for 18,000 people and 2000 buildings valued at \$20 billion; circa 2070, those numbers increase to 85,000 people and 12,000 buildings valued at \$85 billion. The economic toll of flooding would be devastating, with annualized losses (damage to buildings and their contents; relocation costs; lost productivity; and mental stress and anxiety) projected to rise from \$137 million to \$1.39 billion.

3. Resilience Initiatives

The recommended resilience initiatives are built on a strong, multi-layer framework: Working with updated climate projections; Preparing and connecting communities; Protecting shores; Building resilient infrastructure; Adapting existing buildings. Bud touched on specific initiatives within each of these layers, highlighting level three, the Protected Shores Strategy to develop local climate resilience plans, coordinate adaption efforts, and create and construct coastal-protection systems such as living shorelines and dune landscapes, multipurpose levee parks and roads, and temporary and permanent floodwalls.

Harbor-wide Barrier Alternatives

Paul Kirshen, Academic Director of the Sustainable Solutions Lab at the University of Massachusetts/Boston, offered additional details on alternatives for harbor-wide barriers. He discussed the feasibility of a coastal-protection system comprised of Inner Harbor, Harbor Island, and Outer Harbor barriers, including the Sapphire Necklace proposal to expand Lovells Island and seal the harbor and reduce the tidal range through walls and gates. He cautioned that, in every scenario, it is important to consider potential conflicts with other harbor uses—from commerce and industry to tourism and recreation—as well as issues of water quality, distribution, costs, flooding, and cascade impacts. Information gathering and analysis are still ongoing, but hopefully the study will be concluded by the end of November of 2017.

Michael Creasey, General Superintendent of National Parks in Boston, asked what other strategies besides walls are being considered. He mentioned gates, and wondered about other alternatives, and what we have been able to learn from the Dutch. Bud pointed out that the Dutch have been looking at a much longer time horizon, and ensuring that there's a public benefit to every action.

Knowing what they know now, they would not look to dykes as a solution, but perhaps strategies like marsh creation—though for our purposes it may be harder to think of natural solutions in an urban harbor environment. Paul also noted that the Dutch have a dedicated revenue stream through their water tax, which allows for a more creative and nimble approach. He stressed the importance of looking at alternatives, and developing a comprehensive set of strategies for the entire harbor district, over and above plans for protecting certain neighborhoods. What are we more concerned about protecting against: incremental sea-level rise, storm surges, or both? Will a plan to protect Dorchester just divert a problem to Quincy? We need to look at the big picture.

Elizabeth asked about our own longer time horizon, looking beyond the end of the century. Should we consider the ideas and initiatives in this report as more stopgap strategies? Should we be thinking about the much longer term? Should be thinking about moving? We

only have to look out these 26th-floor windows to see so much water that once was land. Paul said we don't know what to expect beyond 2100, but predicts that by 2050 we'll have a better handle on what climate change will bring. With all the uncertainty, it's especially important to be nimble and adjust as we go. Bud added that stabilizing and reducing carbon in the atmosphere is the crucial first step even before shovel-in-the-ground activities. One hopeful note: last year, renewable energy sources coming online actually outpaced coal.

As a resident of Hull, Ed McCabe loves the ideas coming out of the Netherlands, but advised caution. We need to consider the impact that “front door” actions on the harbor and coastline may have on river systems at the “back door,” e.g., keeping salt water out.

Noting that there a lot of players to coordinate, Bud and Paul suggested that forming a subcommittee could be helpful. More input would be welcome from such constituencies as property managers, social services, recreation groups, environmentalists, and shoreline residents. Fred advised anyone interested in the subcommittee to talk to Giles. Also, governance and legal implications should be talked about. Marc Albert, National Park Service Program Manager, could also address topics like storm surges, flow velocities, tides, and erosion.

Upcoming Park Season

Phil Griffiths, Project Manager for Special Projects at Boston Harbor Now, presented an overview of 2017 in the Boston Harbor Islands National and State Park (see accompanying PowerPoint slides). Susan Kane, Islands District Manager at Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, and Liza Stearns from the National Park Service, also participated. The group highlighted a full slate of vents and public programs scheduled throughout the spring, summer, and fall.

They particularly focused on the Youth Engagement *Creating Pathways of Opportunity* program— in its second year of funding though a grant from the Massachusetts Environmental Trust (MET)— outlining the project goals:

- Create a youth-engagement strategy for the Park;
- Increase the number of youth from underserved communities accessing the Park; and
- Improve the on-island experience for youth through coordinated program delivery with DCR and NPS.

With the help of the Goodman Research Group, Inc., a situation-analysis survey was conducted to identify the most important needs and interests of current user groups and to assess the on-island experience. Of the 499 people invited to participate in the survey, 186 responded—a very impressive 37% response rate. Among the findings:

- The majority (93%) of respondents were from non-profit groups.
- A full 75% serve youth from low-income communities.
- There was a high-percentage of Latina/Latino participants, relative to the overall Boston demographic.
- Leaders believed that programs had a significant impact on youth attitudes toward the Boston Harbor Islands.
- Participants requested more online programming and activity options.
- Perceived barriers for family participation include cost, lack of understanding of the ticketing process, and not being aware of options.
- Respondents suggested better alignment of ferry and camp schedules.

Coming out of the survey, the following action items were developed:

- Enhance strategic coordination among partners.
- Develop coordinated communication materials about programming options.
- Create a menu of energizing, age-appropriate options for groups, and make those materials easily accessible, downloaded from online sources or picked up on-site.
- Develop a welcoming, user-friendly landing page that links to youth-oriented pages of partners.
- Create pathways of engagement for everyone from early learners up to the post-secondary level.
- Better coordinate communication about programming options.

They also touched on several operational and logistical topics for the upcoming 2017 season:

- The Spectacle Island Marina will reopen by Memorial Day, with moorings likely to be managed through a combination of DCR and Mass Maritime. The Boston Harbor Island Mooring Program will feature APEX/DCR permitting through USACE/City of Boston, with 50 on the western side of Spectacle Island; 25 on the northwestern side of Georges Island, 11 on the southeastern side of Gallops Island (to service Georges Island). Rather than the first-come first-served system of the past, reservations will be possible through the DCR/BHN online system.
- For Sail Boston 2017, the Spectacle Island Ferry schedule will be revised, with Parade of Sail ticketing for June 17th, and no service to other islands during the Parade.
- The Camping Program will feature camping on Peddocks, Lovells, Grape, and Bumpkin islands. New lighting is needed for the new yurts on Peddocks.
- The new Intermodal Center at the Hingham Shipyard will provide a professional, welcoming entry point, with a fully operational ticket office, rangers and interpretive staff on-hand, and opportunities for BHI marketing and merchandising. Contracting issues are being addressed.

It was suggested that Conventures be invited to an upcoming meeting to discuss plans for Sail Boston.

Capitol Hill Visits

Michael reported on a recent visit to Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. He, Kathy Abbott of Boston Harbor Now, and Giles Parker of the National Park Service had the opportunity to call on Senator Ed Markey, Senator Elizabeth Warren, and Representative Michael Capuano, briefing them on a wide range of topics, including our climate efforts, water transportation issues and opportunities; educational outreach; youth employment programs, and more. The meetings were productive and encouraging, and we were urged to be prepared with shovel-ready projects on both the land and island sides. Notwithstanding the cumbersome legislative process, there is hope for progress in creating legislation help make us more forward-looking and 21st-century oriented, more flexible and nimble, as we move forward.

Partnership Roundtable Updates

The next Council Meeting will be May 1st, 2017, from 4:00 – 6:00 p.m., at the New England Aquarium Harbor Education Center.

Suzanne Gall Marsh and the Friends of the Boston Harbor Islands are hosting their annual meeting on April 23rd in the historic pump station at the MWRA Deer Island Treatment Plant. The special guest speaker will be Tom Martorelli, author of *An Island in the Family*, a fascinating discussion of island living featuring the McDevitt family. Anyone interested in

attending is urged to keep in mind the security procedures at Deer Island, and note that preregistration is required.

Public Comment

Former Chairman Arthur Pearson was presented with a large framed map in recognition of his dedicated service to the Partnership Committee.

Marc Albert has been working with Northeastern University, the New England Aquarium, and the University of Massachusetts on an upcoming BHI Science Symposium.

Adjourn

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting, and seconded. **The motion to adjourn was approved.**