

PLAN: Charlestown

Before there was Boston, there was Charlestown. As Boston's first and oldest neighborhood, Charlestown is a rich and valuable repository of our city, state and national spirit.

With a proud history and a strong commitment to the ideal of community, Charlestown, in collaboration with City, State and Federal officials, is currently working to assemble and implement a Neighborhood Plan that will ensure the successful preservation of the neighborhood. This will be supported by a robust business community that ensures economic prosperity for all residents, the unsurpassed education of our children, and the advancement of sustainable environmental and public health and safety. Anchored by generations of longtime residents, buoyed by the more recent addition of young professionals, and enriched by a diverse population who have chosen to raise their families here, Charlestown's future is indeed bright and promising.

Though essentially an island, Charlestown is connected to the greater Boston metropolitan area by centuries of development and growth, some good, some less so. It is the hope of thousands of citizens along with the more than 30 local organizations involved in and committed to a vibrant future that a neighborhood plan will not only enhance Charlestown, but also serve as a shining example of why Boston is one of the world's most renowned places to live, work, and visit in the world.

Why Is there a need for a Neighborhood Plan?

Driven by the need for modernization that fully respects history, our neighborhood's close proximity to downtown, the availability of underutilized land in close proximity to two MBTA subway stations along Rutherford Avenue, and an aging housing stock make Charlestown a desirable location for smart, large-scale economic development. Lack of a comprehensive, practical, implementable plan puts Charlestown's future as a diverse and thriving community at risk:

Currently, Charlestown suffers from this lack of strategic development, phasing and planning in a variety of ways:

- Overcrowded and unreliable public transportation as well as traffic gridlock greatly hinder the mobility of workers and their ability to support their families and fuel our economy.
- Severely congested roads and outdated traffic management delay response times for police and rescue services.
- A lack of sufficient, modern school facilities and athletic field capacity to support our current population is causing growing families to leave the community.
- Residential housing challenges limit the ability of Charlestown to accommodate the influx of those currently living or seeking to live here. The high cost of living is challenging and we do not have enough affordable housing for our work-force.
- Overcrowded stores and limited services, along with a lack of affordable space for new restaurants, retail and professional services hinder livability and economic prosperity. In some cases, rental rates are higher than Newbury Street due to lack of supply!
- Historic Charlestown is underdeveloped and isolated to the Bunker Hill Monument; it is poorly integrated with Boston's other sites of importance, limiting the community's ability to fully and appropriately serve as an educational tool and magnet for tourists that fully

honors the community-wide involvement in the American Revolution and the formation of our nation.

- Existing green space is overburdened and insufficient for the current population's needs and requires updating to accommodate current use.

A Glance at the Future

Faced with ever-expanding large- and small-scale developments in surrounding communities (e.g., the Encore casino and Assembly Square) paired with the Mayor's investment in building and housing, these issues will only be compounded with a 34% increase in population over the next 10 years. This increase only accounts for projects currently approved or in planning and does not reflect the contribution of parcels earmarked for development. Parcels earmarked for development comprise over 20% of all of the land in Charlestown.

In response, a grass roots effort led by a partnership between the [Charlestown Preservation Society](#) (CPS) and the [Charlestown Historical Society](#) (CHS) along with dozens of other local groups evolved and a rallying cry for a "Master Plan" concept emerged. The [02129 Neighbor Alliance](#) formed to connect the neighborhood's groups and residents in order to collectively advocate for a comprehensive neighborhood plan for all of Charlestown. Over 30 neighborhood groups, 2,000 petition signatures, and the support of Representative Dan Ryan, and City Councilors Michelle Wu, Anissa Essaibi-George and Lydia Edwards spoke loudly, resulting in a comprehensive planning initiative being granted by Mayor Walsh and the BPDA in June 2019. The 02129 Neighbor Alliance is committed to ensuring that the community's voice is heard and is the foundation of this plan.

Charlestown's current infrastructure and service issues will be solved through strategic planning and thoughtful, responsible growth. We will ensure that our community retains its family-friendly, historically significant neighborhood charm, proudly contributing to Boston's reputation as a world class city. We will not let commercial or individual personal interests alone shape our neighborhood's future.

How do we ensure the planning initiative in Charlestown is effective, produces change, and guides responsible growth?

- **Work within the System.** It is important for the community and other stakeholders to work within the existing legal and regulatory system with guidance from the Mayor's Office, City Counsel, State legislators and Federal representatives as needed. These processes are recognized by the City of Boston and its agencies.
 - **Words Matter.** Use widely understood, common terminology that is accurate and enforceable, binding all stakeholder and public officials to a common plan.
 - **Activate and Amplify.** Deeply and transparently engage the entire community and public officials in the process through technology and translation services.
 - **Protect and Prevent Derailment.** Protect the neighborhood while we plan by preventing the derailment of a strategic plan by inappropriate interim development
 - **Hold the BPDA and the City Accountable.** Hold the City government accountable through its representation by the BPDA and existing processes while supplementing those processes with the means necessary to achieve the community's goals.

Work within the System

Where we are today...

In June 2019, organizers of the 02129 Neighbor Alliance—Julie Hall (CHS) and Amanda Zettel (CPS)—met with Mayor Walsh and the executive leadership of the [Boston Planning and Development Agency](#) (BPDA) including Brian Golden, Director; Lauren Shurtleff, Acting Director of Planning; and Michael Christopher, Deputy Director of Development Review/Government Affairs. The BPDA’s mission is as follows: “In partnership with communities, the BPDA plans Boston’s future while respecting its past. By guiding physical, social, and economic change in Boston’s neighborhoods, the BPDA seeks to shape a more prosperous, resilient and vibrant city for all.”

This meeting produced an agreement that a planning initiative and study would be performed for Charlestown with an understanding that the boundaries would be *all* of Charlestown and would contain these elements as a minimum:

1. Education
2. Land Use
3. Housing
4. Economic Development
5. Natural and Cultural Resources
6. Open Space and Recreation
7. Services and Facilities
8. Circulation
9. Energy and Environment
10. Health and Safety

How the process works...

Phase 1: Information Gathering – September-December 2019

Beginning in the fall of 2019, the BPDA sent representatives into the neighborhood, holding both formal and informal meetings in order to officially define the boundaries and scope for the planning effort. The BPDA gathered public comment on what needs to be changed and improved in the neighborhood and what geographic areas should be covered. The information gathered confirmed that the neighborhood supports this effort and that a laundry list of issues needs to be addressed.

Outcome: January 2020

The BPDA has defined the boundary as “the entire neighborhood” and the scope and goals for the plan is as follows: “*PLAN: Charlestown* is a comprehensive planning initiative in partnership with the community, staffed by a planning team consisting of an interdepartmental working group from across city departments and state transportation agencies.

Through this process, the entire neighborhood will be comprehensively examined to determine a shared vision for the future of Charlestown. Community discussions will focus on future land use, [and] current development, as well as strategies to enhance the existing community and preserve its historic assets.

Most importantly, the process seeks to establish a comprehensive and coordinated plan to ensure the equitable provision of infrastructure to support neighborhood needs in the areas of: transportation, parks and open space, climate resilience, education, and affordable housing.”

<http://www.bostonplans.org/plan-charlestown>

Phase 2: PLAN: Charlestown planning initiative – January 2020 - ??

Beginning in January of 2020, public meetings will be held and organized around each of the elements prescribed by the community’s definition of the PLAN’s scope, goals and priorities for the neighborhood.

Expected Outcome:

It is expected that Phase 2, the most substantive and critical phase of the planning process, will last at least 18-24 months, or until a satisfactory, implementable plan is adopted and ratified by the majority of the stakeholders.

Words Matter – Using Terminology that is Both Descriptively Accurate and Legally Enforceable

What is a Master Plan and why won't the City use the term for Charlestown's PLAN?

Success demands all stakeholders use common language to describe and define all aspects of the planning process. Consequently, it is important to distinguish between the legal term "Master Plan" and the rallying cry and much more colloquially used term "Master Plan" invoked collectively by the 02129 Neighbor Alliance. The "Master Plan" term was last utilized in this context in East Boston in 2000 prior to the issuance of the city's comprehensive plan for the city, Boston 2030, and is what we based our ask on.

Since the issuance of *Boston 2030*, the city no longer uses or recognizes the term "Master Plan" to define the comprehensive city plan that Charlestown requires. Throughout this process, we have used the term "Master Plan" not as a legally defined process, but to communicate the comprehensiveness of the planning concept that is consistent with the community's desires and expectations for what it believes is the right direction for Charlestown.

We must address the use of the term "Master Plan" as it is referenced in both the City of Boston's Zoning Code articles 80A and 80C and Massachusetts General Law Article 81D. When referenced in the zoning code, the term does not apply to a city-plan. When referenced in Massachusetts Law, Boston is specifically excepted from the article.

Two recent planning initiatives that contain all of the elements Charlestown seeks for our "Master Plan" concept can be referenced for terminology. *Imagine Boston 2030*, the citywide "Master Plan," is called a city-wide plan, and East Boston's "Master Plan" concept is called *PLAN: East Boston*.

Massachusetts General Law

Section 81. Outlines the need for a planning board in a city or town in Massachusetts. It specifically excepts the City of Boston (COB) because it has a development authority.

Section 81A. "Any city except Boston, and, except as hereinafter provided, any town may at any time establish a planning board hereunder."

Section 81D. Outlines a specific framework for a "Master Plan" for cities and towns without a planning board.

City of Boston Zoning Code

Sections 80C and 80D state the fundamental requirements for a Master Plan and explain the differences of the term and the process for approval:

- Section 80C explains the process for a private property owner to create a Planned Development Area (PDA) for their piece of private property if it is greater than one acre. Within the PDA framework is a larger zoning mechanism known as a PDA Master Plan, which applies to properties greater than five acres. For instance, the Hood Park project has a PDA Master Plan. The key takeaway is that this is generally for a single large property and property owner, rather than a neighborhood.

- Section 80D is the process for institutions (e.g., colleges and hospitals) to develop an Institutional Master Plan for their campus. This is for a campus within a larger neighborhood or city.

Summary:

The city of Boston zoning law allows for a Master Plan in two cases: for a private land-owner with a parcel over one acre and for institutional campuses such as hospitals or colleges. Massachusetts General Law cannot be invoked to define a "Master Plan" for Charlestown because Boston is exempted.

Our ask for a comprehensive neighborhood plan was modelled after the planning process East Boston is currently going through, and it is called PLAN or PLAN: East Boston by the City. Officially, Charlestown's plan should be called PLAN: Charlestown.

What are the 10 elements of PLAN: Charlestown?

This plan should encompass the elements that we have requested, including everything that the community has advocated for. We reference MGL Article 81D and *Imagine Boston 2030* to outline a specific framework. These elements are as follows:

- (1) Education – must address current school capacity and access issues and provide a concrete and well-funded growth plan for the expanding population, evaluate bus routes, plan for aging facilities, and address the quality of education, etc.
- (2) Land Use Plan – where things go, i.e., residential vs commercial vs industrial zoning, where is open space located and how much of it. Addresses density of people living per square acre, etc.
- (3) Housing – plans for entire income range solutions to housing, including low-income housing, workforce housing, single-family and starter housing concepts, etc.
- (4) Economic Development – how can we create and fill local, in-town jobs; establish a main streets program and support our small businesses; and possibly establish technical schools? etc.
- (5) Natural and Cultural Resources – historic and cultural preservation topics, landmarks and parks, etc.
- (6) Open Space and Recreation– density of the built environment and what percentage of a development is required to have open space? etc.
- (7) Services and Facilities – prioritize space needed for youth sports and services like doctors, post office, laundry, additional grocery, etc.
- (8) Circulation – mass transit, traffic and gridlock solutions; pedestrian safety and dedicated bike routes; options for additional in-town transit, etc.
- (9) Energy and Environment – prepare for environmental impacts, prioritize energy efficiency and green building, etc.
- (10) Health and Safety – quality of life, air quality, rescue services and planning, etc.

Summary:

The 02129 Neighbor Alliance has continued to use the term "Master Plan" as a concept for marketing and communication purposes to express the comprehensiveness the plan should include from the community's perspective. It is the name that is on the petition and what the community recognizes for our planning advocacy work. It is a common term used in the practice of urban planning.

Mayor Walsh and BPDA executives heard our request and need for a plan with boundaries that include and impact all of Charlestown, including border areas, as well as the need for study and solutions to our current problems. The BPDA is the authority on planning in the city of Boston and needs to oversee and validate the study in order for other city and state agencies to adopt and implement the finished plan.

We support, enthusiastically participate, and endorse a planning initiative that includes the 10 elements requested with a boundary of the entire neighborhood of Charlestown.

How Will We Activate and Amplify the Community's Engagement?

Phase 1: Information Gathering – September-December 2019

The first 3-month period, extending from September through December 2019, was critical to the process. The input that the BPDA received from the community determined the boundary and scope of *PLAN: Charlestown*. The 02129 Neighbor Alliance engaged every member of the community with flyer, media and email campaigns. It is important that every member of the community has the opportunity to be included, that the process is transparent, and the information is collected and utilized. The Alliance will continue reaching out to the community during the planning process.

The 02129 Neighbor Alliance is also advocating for the utilization of an experienced third-party planning facilitator to supplement the community outreach portion of the study. Public meetings are often difficult for people to attend and awareness is created by naturally limited advertising. Input from the community is gathered at these meetings and through private email. There is no public record for comments or transparency into how these comments are treated.

CoUrbanize is a community engagement platform that helps planners engage with a more inclusive and diverse group of community members. A centralized community forum is created online and complements the community meeting component. Community input is sought through multi-lingual signage, postcards and social media and is then gathered and recorded through tools such as text messaging, surveys and postings to the community forum. This enables collection of broader and more representative feedback than in-person meetings alone. Community members can participate in the process 24/7, even if they can't attend meetings or English is not their first language.

Phase 2: PLAN: Charlestown planning initiative – January 2020 - ??

We are asking that the BPDA engage and contract with *coUrbanize* or similar platform within the planning process of *PLAN: Charlestown*.

Protect and Prevent Derailment

PLAN: Charlestown will present an achievable vision for the community's future based on data and best practices and will build on a clear understanding of current issues, future needs, and pressures driven by the vision of the residents and businesses for their mutually desired future. It will establish goals and objectives for all decisions and activities that will affect the local community. Specifically, *Plan: Charlestown* will serve as a basis for zoning and other government decisions affecting the physical, economic, environmental, safety and other impacts on the future development of the community.

The process to create this plan is long and encumbering and will require an ongoing commitment. The efforts and community involvement must be respected and all planning and development must reflect the community's will. We are asking that the BPDA ensure the following:

- Variance approvals for change in use, change in occupancy, height excess, and open space be restricted and informed by the larger needs of the community over individual property owners or developers.
- The development process for the Bunker Hill Housing Development runs concurrently with the planning process for *PLAN: Charlestown*.
- A moratorium for development, planning and RFPs be issued for all available city and BPDA-owned parcels in Charlestown until completion of *PLAN: Charlestown*.

Note: *PLAN: Charlestown* may result in the need to modify Charlestown's Zoning Overlay depending on the outcome. Article 27-1 of Boston's Zoning Code states: "In the time period during which the comprehensive planning study and contemplated rezoning are prepared, it is essential to protect the area under review from unwise development that would frustrate the ultimate goals of the comprehensive planning process and contemplated rezoning; the use of interim zoning measures to protect the integrity of an area pending completion of a comprehensive planning study and preparation of a rezoning proposal is a commonly used technique around the country." An IPOD (interim planning overlay district) may be issued in order to slow development while an area is being planned.

East Boston was issued an IPOD for their *PLAN: East Boston* process with a threshold of over 1,000 sq. ft. What this means is that all projects over 1,000 sq. ft. must be reviewed by the Zoning Board. An IPOD essentially adds an additional variance to projects over the threshold and requires additional oversight.

In Charlestown, multiple variances are sought for each project that requires abutters meetings and a hearing at the Zoning Board of Appeals. Large projects such as One Charlestown or Hood Park trigger an Article 80 project review that encompasses a 45-day public comment period; requires a special review process (including design); and the approval of both the BPDA and the Zoning Commission. An IPOD does not offer protection above and beyond the processes currently in place.

All should be aware that an IPOD is not a guaranteed moratorium on development.

Holding the BPDA and the City Accountable

The two public meetings and community outreach in the fall of 2019 revealed deep skepticism within the community that the BPDA will hear the community and invest equal attention, resources and political capital into development and execution of *Plan: Charlestown* as it will to City interests and *Imagine Boston 2030's* priorities.

While the 02129 Neighbor Alliance has the complete and sincere intention of working in a good-faith, collaborative manner with the BPDA, the organization, at the behest of the citizens in the community, will engage local advocacy groups; consult and retain counsel; and contract with independent 3rd party agencies to advise the community and review the BPDA's work program and work products in order to provide the full legal and political protection possible to support the community's strategic planning objectives and outcomes.

We will form local technical and oversight working groups to read and evaluate the BPDA work plan against the highest standards established by best practices and modern urban planning, critically considering work products and public statements to prepare technical assessments, identify issues, request answers to questions, and evaluate potential responses. They will be formed around each

element of the plan and will include both residents, people working in Charlestown, and advocacy groups. These working groups will be in position to recommend hiring outside experts as needed.

We respectfully insist on full, public transparency from the BPDA, including open community review of the BPDA's work program/schedule, work in progress (drafts), and RFPs for all consultants materially affiliated with the project.

It is critical that the community's voice is heard and impactful. We will ensure that the information collected from all sources involved will remain static, i.e., cannot be deleted or manipulated and can be easily viewed, tracked and synthesized for analysis.

This is Exciting!

We are only at the start of this process and it is critical to leap off and stay on solid footing throughout this important endeavor to determine what Charlestown will be like for generations to come. The 02129 Neighbor Alliance and its collective group of residents and community groups will continue to meet with the BPDA and demand guarantees that they will use the data collected from independent consultants and community outreach, ensure transparency, and protect community interests from development—not only while we plan, but well into the future.

Executive Summary

The Charlestown Preservation Society recognizes and embraces the fact that the decisions we will make to set a course toward our future as a community in 2020-2021 are just as relevant and vital as the decisions made in 1629, when our community was first settled, and in 1776, when Charlestown was rebuilt after being burned to the ground in the battle of Bunker Hill. What we do now, the manner in which we do it, and the results of our labor will impact many future generations. We will work to form and execute a plan with a dedication and determination that will set an example for and earn the respect of those who follow in our footsteps.

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