



PLAN: Downtown Advisory Group Meeting #6

Wednesday, September 25th, 6:00 p.m.
Location: Boston City Hall, BPDA Board Room

Advisory Group Attendees:

- Barbara Boylan, The Druker Company
- Paul Chan, Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of New England
- George Coorsen, Downtown Boston Residents' Association (DBRA)
- Alison Frazee, Boston Preservation Alliance
- Arturo Gossage, Chinatown Residents Association
- Peggy Ings, Emerson College
- Jung Shen Kuo, Josiah Quincy Upper School & Asian Community Development Corporation (ACDC)
- Chuck Labins, Tufts Medical Center
- Karen LaFrazia, St. Francis House
- Susanne Lavoie, Wharf District Council & Greenway Conservancy Board
- Joshua Leffler, Beacon Hill Civic Association
- Lydia Lowe, Chinatown Community Land Trust
- Beatrice Nessen, Friends of the Public Garden
- Mary Ann Ponti, Saint Anthony Shrine
- Joyce Sanchez, Boston University
- Rosemarie Sansone, Downtown Boston Business Improvement District
- Theresa Tsoi, Chinatown Business Association
- Jason Wright, Suffolk University

Ex-Officio Attendees:

- Captain Kenneth Fong, BPD

City of Boston Attendees:

- Arreen Andrew, BPDA
- Katherine Eshel, Environment Department
- Andrew Grace, Mayor's Office of Economic Development
- Phillip Hu, BPDA
- William Moose, Transportation Department (BTD)
- Tad Read, BPDA
- Kennan Rhyne, BPDA
- Lauren Shurtleff, BPDA
- Corey Zehngebot, BPDA
- Jill Zick, BPDA

PLAN: Downtown Consultant Team:

- Kathryn Firth, NBBJ
- Rodrigo Guerra, NBBJ

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- Alex Krieger, NBBJ
- Conor Semler, Kittleson Associates

Public Attendees:

2 members of the public

- Liza Perry, Tufts University
- Barry Keppard, Metropolitan Area Planning Council

Advisory Group Members Unable to Attend:

- Rob Adams, Boston Society of Landscape Architects
- Gilbert Ho, Chinatown Main Streets
- Angie Liou, ACDC
- Herb Lozano, Roxbury Innovation Center
- Roger Mann, MBTA
- Seth Riseman, Boston Society of Architects
- Rishi Shukla, DBRA
- Tony Ursillo, DBRA

PLAN: Downtown Website: bit.ly/plandowntownboston

Materials and the Presentation from the Advisory Group can be found here:

<http://www.bostonplans.org/news-calendar/calendar/2019/09/25/PLAN-Downtown-Advisory-Group-Meeting-6>

Meeting Summary:

On Wednesday, September 25th, 2019, the sixth meeting of the PLAN: Downtown Advisory Group commenced at approximately 6:05 pm, with an introduction by the PLAN: Downtown co-leads Kennan Rhyne, BPDA Senior Planner, and Corey Zehngelot, BPDA Senior Urban Designer and Architect, at the BPDA Board Room at Boston City Hall.

Kennan then introduced the agenda for the evening. She presented a recap of the team's recent community engagement events that took place over the summer, including Popsicles in the Park and walking tours. She then discussed the schedule for the next advisory group meetings. Finally, she presented the updated Visions and Goals statements, based on prior feedback from the Advisory Group and community.

For the first portion of the meeting, Kathryn Firth, NBBJ, presented preliminary public space recommendations. She discussed the team's analysis of existing public spaces and criteria for public space improvements. In total, there were 16 priority projects identified at this point.

After the first portion of the presentation, the AG and community participants were invited to comment on boards that showed the 16 public spaces. Scanned feedback can be found in the Meeting and Presentation materials on the project website:

<http://www.bostonplans.org/news-calendar/calendar/2019/09/25/PLAN-Downtown-Advisory-Group-Meeting-6>

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After the break, Kathryn begins the second part of the presentation to go over preliminary planning recommendations, covering different aspects such as preservation, housing, and growth. Conor Semler, Kittleson Associates, presented on mobility and public space, including topics such as street directionality, active mobility, and transit.

After the second part of the presentation, the AG and community participants were invited to comment on boards that showed the preliminary planning recommendations. Scanned feedback can be found in the Meeting and Presentation materials on the project website:

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Advisory Group, Public Questions & Comments

After the first part of the presentation, the following questions and comments were received:

- An AG member asked how the public space improvements would be funded.
 - Kennan responded that both public and private sources would be used for public space improvements.
- An AG member commented that Tufts Medical Center's previous attempts to redesign one of the identified public spaces (4. Tufts Medical Center on presentation) was unsuccessful in the past and they hoped that this time around, new ideas could improve it.
 - Kathryn responded that a landscape architect would be instrumental to providing design ideas.
- An AG member asked how these public space improvements would be implemented and how maintenance would be implemented.
 - Kathryn responded that the plan will provide high-level guidance which will direct the parameters of what a future, detailed design should address, likening it to a design brief. For example, the plan might identify a space that lacks seating, and a future design should include seating. Public investment coupled with private development investment would be combined to support maintenance for public spaces. Private spaces would be expected to be maintained by their private owners.
- An AG member asked about governance of the spaces and expressed concerns about ownership and maintenance. They commented on how the success of these spaces will depend very heavily on future maintenance plans and wanted to know how the plan would implement maintenance.
- An AG member added that these spaces function well during the day, but was concerned that at night, there would be many issues with drug activity and homelessness.
- An AG member added that they hoped that as the planning team analyzed public spaces that the team could also monitor what new strategies other cities are using to deal with emerging challenges.
- Another AG member commented that their concerns stemmed from their observations of the maintenance issues at the recently redesigned plaza in front of the China Trade Center.
 - Kathryn added that a sense of ownership and responsibility over the public space will depend on making sure that the design includes adjacencies and activation such as front doors, to foster a vested interest in good public space maintenance.

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- An AG member added that there are many members of the Downtown BID who do not support an expansion to the pedestrian zone.
- An AG member suggested look at an existing example of a maintenance agreement between the Parks Department and one of the nearby universities.
- An AG member asked for coordination between PLAN: Downtown and the Greenway Conservancy's plans for Chin Park.
 - Kennan responded that throughout the summer engagement, many participants thought that the park could be improved, particularly around introducing more green opportunities. The BPDA regularly checks in with the Greenway Conservancy and is due for another coordination meeting about PLAN: Downtown soon.

During the second part of the presentation, the following questions and comments were received:

- An AG member asked for clarification on how the planning recommendations will affect future development.
 - Kathryn answered that through the planning process, there will also be development scenarios and recommended, corresponding heights.
- An AG member added that shadows are only one concern; they asked for clarification on how the plan will address historical assets.
 - Kathryn responded that as a result of the planning process, there will be design guidelines as well as policy and planning recommendations that will address historical preservation. Unlike the discussion about specific public spaces, the design guidelines will take a broader look rather than specific places. Tailored to each character area, these guidelines will dictate how to balance preservation and growth, guiding how new buildings should fit in their context or how historical buildings can be preserved. For example, the guidelines might identify key cornice lines that would need to be respected.
 - Kennan added that there will be future AG meetings and public engagement opportunities to discuss the urban design guidelines in more detail.
- An AG member asked how other agencies and departments fit into the process.
 - Kennan identified City of Boston team members attending the meeting. She added that other departments such as the Boston Transportation Department, Office of Economic Development, and Environment Department have been actively participating in the process. She added that the material presented was reviewed by these departments plus the Department of Neighborhood Development, Parks Department, and Boston Landmarks Commission. It was also presented to other City departments through an interagency working group that focuses on the ongoing planning initiatives.

After the second part of the presentation, the following questions and comments were received:

- An AG member asked how the team will test the impact of the proposed street directionality.
 - Conor responded that the analysis would take into account the existing traffic volume and would be a general feasibility estimate. If the proposal is generally feasible, then any redesign would need a detailed study under a future scope of services.
- An AG member asked when the last time Tremont Street was two-way.

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- Kathryn responded that based on historic photos, it would have been pre-1950's. (Note: Tremont Street was converted to a one-way street in 1950 as mitigation for Storrow Drive (Embankment Road) construction impacts. For five to six weeks Tremont was supposed to be one way, but it was never returned to its two-way configuration.)
- An AG member asked whether the team considered indoor public space in the analysis, such as meeting spaces, and asked how such a space would be designated.
 - The team responded that this was being considered.
- An AG member commented that while they generally agree with the recommendations, the recommendations are still high-level, and they need to know more about specifics before they feel they could give meaningful feedback.
 - Kennan responded that the questions from the AG will help to shape more detailed full scenarios that will get into more specificity.
 - Kathryn added that if AG members had questions about certain specifics of the recommendations, it would help to inform the details of the recommendations. The goal of the recommendations was to provide a framework of prioritized, key elements that the City should focus on.
- An AG member commented that public safety and quality of life is one of the biggest issues in the area and was missing from the categories of recommendations.
- An AG member added that there did not appear to be many surface parking lots left and were concerned that if more surface parking lots were developed, there would be less parking available; without enough parking, people who do not have access to transit would not be able to park their cars downtown. They added that they want to know where the affordable housing would go and would prefer that affordable units were on-site rather than off-site.
 - Kathryn and Kennan commented that many affordable housing developers would prefer off-site, since they can be more cost-effective and create more units. They also added that the current policy is to keep off-site units nearby and in the neighborhood.
- An AG member asked where these recommendations would be in the zoning and how they would be enforced and implemented.
 - Kennan replied that in November, development scenarios on focus sites will be presented.
- An AG member commented that many organizations in Chinatown are working on a Chinatown-focused visioning process and would like to make sure that the processes are integrated with each other and that PLAN: Downtown can help to incorporate many of the ideas from the Chinatown visioning conversations.
 - Kathryn and Kennan responded that the team has been involved in many of those conversations and workshops. Kennan added that one of the presented public spaces (Hudson Street and Marginal Street) actually emerged from those conversations, and that the team looks forward to continued collaboration.
- An AG member commented that the recommendations are focused more on the bricks and mortar concerns but not enough on softer quality of issues. They suggested that the recommendations include another category around quality of life and safety.

- An AG member commented that these quality of life issues should also be built into the vision and thinks that it stands in the way of other issues. They also wanted to know more about economic development strategies.
 - Kennan responded that the process emphasizes keeping downtown Boston as a regional economic hub, and the team will look at how the recommendations can address it more directly.
 - Andrew Grace, Office of Economic Development, commented that the planning process is moving into a content-heavy phase, and acknowledged that there is a lot of content to absorb. He asked the AG to provide ideas on formats that would help the AG provide more meaningful feedback and absorb all the content better.
 - Kennan added that she will ask AG members to fill out a follow-up survey to hear their more detailed thoughts on the recommendations.
- An AG member asked whether a follow-up series of round table discussions could happen.
- An AG member commented that these follow-up discussions need to focus on the details of the high-level recommendations such as number of units of income-restricted housing.
 - A member of the planning team added that in the next AG meetings, the focus will be on discussing more concrete development scenarios that are being developed with the feedback to date.
 - Alex Krieger, NBBJ, explained that the process was meant to be slow and deliberate so that there would be a sense of agreement on where the process was going. At that point, there will be something specific to react to, and the feedback on the details will be important. The team is still exploring what the possibilities are and where the priorities lie.
- Kathryn concluded the presentation and reemphasized that the feedback from the evening is what drives the process and will be useful to informing the ideas around public space and recommendations.

Kennan concluded the meeting and thanked everyone for their attendance and participation. The next Advisory Group meeting will be held on November 7, 2019. The next PLAN: Downtown public meeting will be held on October 24, 2019 at 6:00 pm at St. Anthony Shrine. The meeting concluded at 8:15 pm.