



Vacancies Rise, Rents Flatline in Pandemic Rental Market

BY KELLY GARRITY

The COVID-19 pandemic has hurt many sectors of the economy, and the rental market is no exception. Although rents have mostly held steady in Boston, apartment vacancies have increased. According to data from Boston Pads, a real-time real estate portal for Greater Boston comprising more than 15,000 landlords representing close to 166,000 units, the vacancy rate for apartments in Boston has grown by nearly 180 percent—that is, nearly tripled—compared to June 2019.

The rate as of June 22 was 2.01 percent, a number that rivals the vacancy rate of September of last year.

“The highest number you’ll ever see for vacancy is always September 1, because that’s when most apartments hit the market,” Boston Pads CEO Demetrios Salpoglou explained. “The highest we hit last year was in September, when we hit 2.27 percent. Right now, we’re at 2.01 percent, so we’re almost as high as what we would normally expect to see in September.”

In the Fenway, real-time vacancy as of June 22 was slightly higher, at 2.98 percent. Beth Damon, vice president of Boston Proper Real Estate, has worked in real estate in Boston for 15 years and said this was the softest rental market she has ever experienced.

“We are seeing an excess of available apartments due to the fact that companies aren’t hiring and some schools have not announced if they will return for in person classes this fall,” she said. “We have been living in a world where we can’t plan for more than two weeks in advance. Simply put, if people can’t plan, then they can’t make moves.”

Rich Dolabany, president of Boston Heritage Realty, has also noticed an increase in vacant apartments in the Fenway. However, Dolabany attributes this increase to the fact that most properties were unable to put their units on the market during March, April, and May as a result of the economic shutdown.

“Typically, in the Fenway, properties start renting even as early as December for September 1,” said Dolabany. “The ones that typically put their properties on say March, April, or May, they haven’t really been able to put them on because they’ve been shut down, and renters don’t want people in their apartments. So we’ve had that inventory from March through May hit the market now, and when you do something like that, it certainly puts a lot of supply out in a very short period of time.”

Despite an increase in the number

of vacancies, rents appear to be holding steady since the pandemic began. Data from Boston Pads shows rents for studios, and one- and two-bedrooms in the Fenway holding steady, while rents for three-, four- and five-bedrooms have trended slightly down since February. Average rent has seen a limited shift year-over-year. In June 2019 a one-bedroom apartment cost an average of \$1,876.75 to rent. That number has only seen a slight decrease, at \$1,875.25 as of June 22.

“The smaller landlords are still getting close to what they’re asking for with price,” said Dolabany. “The bigger landlords that might have 60 one-bedroom apartments available, they’re offering incentives. Some of them are paying some of the broker fees, some of them are waiving last month’s rent up front.”

Salpoglou said that many of the landlords he works with are also using incentives. “For 27 percent of all our listings in our database, the landlords are paying the full broker’s fee to get the place rented,” he said. Under normal conditions, Salpoglou estimated that around 5 percent of landlords covered or waived this payment.

Salpoglou also found that 8.9 percent of the landlords are paying half the broker’s fee, which typically costs the equivalent of one month’s rent, and some have also dropped security deposit and last month’s rent—two payments typically required up front to move into an apartment.

Although Massachusetts has entered Phase Two of reopening, the future of the housing market in the Fenway remains uncertain. Currently, the federal government has a travel ban in place, prohibiting travel to the United States from 38 countries. According to Salpoglou, changes in this ban could have a significant impact.

“If the travel ban is lifted, you could see an amazing amount of apartments being rented incredibly quickly,” he said. According to the *New York Times*, President Trump hinted in late May and early June that some international travel restrictions could soon be lifted. However, with COVID-19 cases rising in many places in the country, foreigners may be deterred from travelling to the United States for work or school.

Realtors and real estate agencies also face uncertainty if the colleges and universities in the neighborhood move classes online. *The Fenway News’s* coverage area is home to eight: Emmanuel College, Simmons University, Massachusetts College of Art and Design, Wentworth Institute of Technology,

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Parking Lot Saga: Licensed, But Maybe Not Legal

BY ALISON PULTINAS

Stanhope Garage, a family-run parking empire headquartered on a dead-end street in Allston, runs multiple surface parking lots around the Fenway and Mission Hill: 15 spaces at 101 Kilmarnock St.; two lots on either side of Brookline Avenue at Newbury Street Ext. just outside Kenmore Square; and 51 spaces at 690 Huntington Ave. at Wigglesworth Street.

Simon Gottlieb, current owner of Stanhope, purchased the Huntington parcel at a foreclosure auction in 1991. His grandfather started the business in 1920.

It’s a throwback to an earlier time when land values were much lower—an “anachronism,” as Mission Hill’s Mitch Hilton calls it—the only public surface lot on all of Huntington Avenue from Copley Square to Brookline.

Stanhope has facilities all over the city, almost all open-air lots or OALs, the official label for surface lots. They are typically odd-shaped, smaller properties that were either never built on or where older buildings were demolished. Some have been purchased from the city.

Boston’s regulation of off-street parking facilities involve a complicated,



The triangular surface parking lot at 690 Huntington Ave.

three-agency process involving the Boston Transportation Department (BTD), the Inspectional Services Department (ISD), and the Fire Marshal’s Office. BTD licenses OALs, with renewals required every July 1. Inspectional Services issues the original permits, and sometimes the Zoning Board of Appeal gets involved, as happened with the Kilmarnock lot next to the Holy Trinity Orthodox Cathedral.

Brigid Kenny-White of ISD explained that if capacity increases, an applicant files a use-of-premises form on the Inspectional Services web page. “You would say you want to increase the parking to [whatever] number of vehicles, upload plans, and pay the \$50 fee, then follow up with the other agencies,” she said.

But glitches occur with interagency communication. Carla Tankle, BTD’s constituent relations specialist, said the Fire Marshal sets capacity limits for lots, but she did not have his contact information. Kenny-White said her contact at BTD had retired.

The permit on file with Inspectional Services for the lot at 690 Huntington dates from 1989, before Gottlieb even owned the property. The permit allows just 30 spaces, yet the latest license with BTD allows for 51 spaces and new striping, which happened this spring. With the state’s Phase 2 reopening, the Monday-to-Friday attendant returned to the lot, and occupancy is again full.

Occasionally reports about Boston’s parking policies point out the inefficiencies and inconsistencies in licensing, enforcement, and permitting for off-street parking. The business group A Better City produced the most recent report in 2016. Its recommendations included giving priority to parking for high-occupancy vehicles; piloting city-facilitated shared-parking arrangements (such as using BPS lots for overnight parking); and creating screening and landscaping

Can’t pay rent or mortgage because of the pandemic shutdown? A new state program may offer help. See page 7

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PHOTO: ALISON PULTINAS

> **RENTAL MARKET** from previous page
Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, Northeastern University, School of the Museum of Fine Arts at Tufts University, and Boston University.

“Students’ not renewing and less coming to Boston has created the vast inventory in the Fenway and surrounding areas,” said Boston Proper Real Estate’s Damon. “International students seem to be absent, probably because of the time needed to arrange student visas, and we do not expect the majority of them to be returning to school. Parents also seem very wary of

sending their children to a densely populated city like Boston.”
However, the need for social distancing in dormitories and campus housing may conversely lead colleges and universities to encourage more students to look for housing off-campus. In some cases, students will be required to leave campus early. At Emmanuel College they will leave before Thanksgiving. Salpoglou said this could lead to a more fractured market. He recently spoke with an agent who was considering offering a shortened lease, starting in August and running through December or January.

However, he noted that this is likely more of last resort.
“I don’t think real estate agents are going to capitulate and take that yet, but if it’s August 15th, they’ll probably take that deal,” he said. “Something is always better than nothing, but those types of leases could create some error or noise in the equation.”
Despite the current number of vacancies, those looking to rent apartments have seen an increase in interest recently.
“Every week that we’re now into June, we’re seeing more and more phone calls coming,” said Dolabany, “and we’re going to

probably get a push after the 4th of July.”
Salpoglou has also noted an increase in Web traffic on Boston Pads, an increase in Google searches for the keywords ‘Boston apartments,’ and an uptick in renting in June compared to March and April.
“I think there was a gestation period where people were acclimating to renting properties through this virtual process. Now I think people are more used to it and more comfortable with the process,” said Salpoglou.
Kelly Garrity is a journalism student at Northeastern University.

Dispatches from The Pandemic

BY MARY ANN BROGAN

LOCAL CARE FACILITIES BEGIN EASING SOME RESTRICTIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a new normal day-to-day life for residents of assisted living facilities.
The Susan Bailis Assisted Living at 352 Mass. Ave. was initially challenged by the frenzy of getting PPE and masks for all their residents. Now, they are well-equipped and able to maintain a safe environment.
Executive director Mariann Zenitz Jones said Bailis was able to get masks for residents from the Department of Public Health. The residents readily don masks when venturing out of their rooms.
The activity director has creatively continued exercise groups and artwork activities using physical-distancing protocols. Exercise groups are limited to four or five, and residents can participate in table art activities two at a time.
Brown-bag activities are offered daily to each resident in their room. The general store has been relegated to a rolling cart that stops at each room to allow residents to purchase of sundries.
Residents continue to dine in their rooms. Visitation recently shifted from online-only to

in-person on the patio by reservation.
Mission Hill’s Landmark Assisted Living on Parker Hill Avenue had a few COVID-19 cases in the memory care unit but otherwise has remained COVID-free.
Residents are relegated to their units except for scheduled recreational activity. Activities are conducted with a staggered schedule to maintain distancing protocols. Landmark ensures that each resident is equipped for Facetime or Skype with family and friends.
In addition, Landmark has created a blog for residents and guests that features topics such as “how to keep your mind active during quarantine,” and “twelve easy plants to care for.”
With the exception of residents in the memory care unit, residents are again eating in the dining hall. Landmark has also started to schedule outdoor family visits.
Both Bailis and Landmark have begun preparing for a potential second wave of the virus later this year.

BOSTON COVID-19 CASES BY RACE AND ETHNICITY AS OF JULY 1				
RACE/ETHNICITY	KNOWN CASES	% OF TOTAL CASES	DEATHS	% OF TOTAL DEATHS
Asian/Pacific Islander	440	4	46	6
Black	4,305	37	239	35
Latinx/Hispanic	3,181	27	81	12
White	2,910	25	301	44
Other	783	7	27	4

DATA POINTS

- The State reported that only 2.5 percent of participants in recent Black Lives Matter protests had tested positive for the virus. Most had worn masks.
 - Harvard’s T.H. Chan School of Public Health issued a study linking long-term exposure to fine particulate matter and low air quality with an increased COVID-19 death rate. Mapping shows that areas with the lowest air quality are communities of color and COVID-19 hot spots.
 - Local test centers include:
 - Fenway Health (available to current patients only; appointment required)
 - Brigham & Women’s Hospital
- Mary Ann Brogan lives in the East Fens. COVID-19 figures from the City of Boston.*

SERVICE-LEARNING COURSES SEEKING COMMUNITY-BASED PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS FOR FALL 2020 SEMESTER

Partner with us! Community-Engaged Teaching and Research, a program of Northeastern’s Office of City and Community Engagement, is looking for community-based organizations to collaborate with for our Fall 2020 Service-Learning courses. Types of partnerships can range from project-based management or marketing consulting to curriculum development for specific topics and general academic enrichment, virtual volunteer support, or other remote capacity-building projects.

Visit bit.ly/fall20RFP for more information and to submit your intent to partner.

Dorothy's, A Boston Original, Falls to the Pandemic

BY ALISON BARNET

Dorothy's Boutique, located at 190 Mass. Ave., went out of business on June 30, a sad day for all. As owner Jon Diamond puts it, Dorothy's was doing well until the pandemic hit. Since then, too few customers have been coming in, and, since local theaters are closed, Dorothy's wigs and costumes weren't selling. Even during 30-to-50-percent-off sales in June, not enough people were buying. Everything has now gone into storage,

and Jon will probably start selling online. Luckily, his five employees have second jobs. With the lack of revenue, Jon knew something had to change. He decided to close the store at the end of June, so as not to be saddled with another month's rent. At 65, he's worried about the turn things have taken. "I love retail, and I'll probably get involved with something else," but for now he's dealing with hard times. "I'm a one-person show, seven days a week," he says. October has historically been his best

month, but he has no confidence that things will improve by this fall. "There's too much against me." The good news is that he may start a Halloween pop-up—somewhere else. But will there be lines down the block?

Businesses across Mass. Ave. aren't doing well either and some have closed. Bodega on Clearway Street is boarded up, Jon says, because they're afraid of looters.

Another factor in Jon's decision to close is a Christian Science Center proposal to "repurpose" the block (they own

it) by issuing a long-term ground lease to a group that would replace the stores between Clearway and St. Germain streets with high-rise affordable housing—a benefit to the neighborhood, according to a Christian Science source.

In 1947 Jon Diamond's parents opened Dorothy's millinery shops in several locations before coming to the Fenway in 1960. Dorothy's Hat Fashions opened at 244 Mass. Ave., the block in front of the Christian Science church, a strip of stores torn down between 1968 and 1973 for the church's urban renewal. Dorothy's moved to 190 Mass. Ave. in the early 1970s. Why did the name change from Dorothy's Hat Fashions to Dorothy's Boutique? According to Jon, hat sales suffered after churches announced that fancy hats were no longer the norm; the Diamonds then started carrying a variety of other products.

Jon started working at 190 Mass. Ave. in 1984, taking over the linen shop next door in 1992. He began bringing in the type of merchandise we became familiar with.

The business did well until the advent of Amazon; it was "a fun store," made a little



PHOTO: JON DIAMOND



PHOTO: JON DIAMOND

money, and Jon was able to send his kids to college.

Oh, dear, what are we going to do when we're in dire need of a horse's head mask, a chef's hat, or a couple of aviator badges and there's nowhere in the neighborhood to buy one! How about a 1910 cash register for \$500? We will miss the giant silver skeleton in the front window, to say nothing of the fancy shoes with heels so high we'd fall flat on the sidewalk our first day out. What about those huge eyeglasses? Much, much bigger than those across the street at Urban Eye.

Dorothy's store was always unusual, eclectic, original, comical, kitschy, and amazing, and will be sorely missed.

Alison Barnet lives in the South End.

> **PARKING LOTS** from page 1

ordinances for surface lots. The Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA) recommendations for projects seeking variances typically call for a five-foot planting strip between the sidewalk and the parking, in addition to three- to four-foot-high fencing.

The most comprehensive report was "Parking in Boston," from Access Boston, a transportation study completed more than a dozen years ago under the

late Mayor Thomas Menino. That study referred to the 1997-98 parking inventory tabulated by the state's Central Transportation Planning Staff. Its counts of off-street parking spaces correlated with employment densities: downtown ranked highest at 40,500 spaces, but Mission Hill, Longwood, and Fenway/Kenmore came in second with 20,200.

This summer, the City's Air Pollution Control Commission (APCC) is considering changes in a decades-old parking freeze. There are now three parking freeze districts with three sets of regulations: Downtown, up to the northeast (downtown) side of Mass. Ave.; South Boston; and East Boston. No freeze covers Mission Hill, Longwood, or Fenway/Kenmore.

Essentially, the freezes create banks based on the number of off-street commercial spaces at the time the regulations went into effect. New projects with proposed public parking apply to the APCC to withdraw spaces from the relevant bank. The APCC meets quarterly and holds its next meeting in September; it will post the latest draft for the revised regulations in August. In an email, Kat Eshel, Boston's carbon-neutrality program manager, said that the drafts now on the website may be outdated and don't reflect public comments or the discussion at the commission's March meeting.

Eshel explained that the APCC does not have regulations specific to Mission Hill, Longwood, or Fenway/Kenmore. A restricted-parking overlay district established in 1976 includes the Fenway and the Longwood Area, using Huntington as a boundary, but most of Mission Hill lies outside the district.

A restricted-parking overlay makes commercial parking facilities a conditional requiring approval from the Zoning Board of Appeal. However, the overlay doesn't apply to properties and projects subject to the BPDA's Article 80 Large-Project Review, institutional master plans, or planned development areas. A question for planners: should the parking freeze be extended to other neighborhoods?

The story of 690 Huntington's transformation from 19th-century brick residences to parking lot is somewhat typical, but also tragic. Demolition removed four Wigglesworth Street rowhouses between 1965 and 1971. A fifth was torn down in 1985. In 1972, an Arby's restaurant was built on the site of the demolitions, its covered-wagon-styled roof noticeably unusual in the context of the 19th-century urban fabric around it.

On June 25, 1973, two Arby's workers, Charles Webber and Thomas Regan, were intentionally set afire in a horrible robbery at the end of their shifts. Webber died that night; Regan lived but suffered major burns. The crime was never solved. The restaurant stayed open but was demolished in 1989.

One longtime Wigglesworth Street resident remembered the fire and how neighbors did not object in the 1980s to the site's becoming a parking lot. The alternatives—a proposed private nightclub, a motel, even a church—seemed incompatible with the tranquil neighborhood. Neighbors today say almost the same thing—they tolerate the lot because any developer would likely propose something tall that would block light and views and wouldn't complement the historic character of the Triangle, as it's known.

Neighbors have some protection from inappropriate development because the Triangle won designation as an architectural conservation district in 1985, with strict criteria for new construction. However past experience with proposed projects has made the community wary (see nomissionhilltower.org regarding 45 Worthington St.) Also, Mission Hill's 1996 rezoning included the parking lot in the residential district—where, oddly, commercial parking is a forbidden use.

Open-air lots are an anachronism, but the car remains king in Boston. In the post-pandemic recovery will commuters abandon transit for single-occupant vehicles? The 2016 ABC report estimates that Boston has 380,000 off-street spaces. Residential development and employee parking are exempt from both the APCC reviews and the parking freeze, meaning off-street parking inventory could keep increasing, along with the traffic.

Alison Pultinas lives in Mission Hill.

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FENSVIEWS

COVID-19, Racism, and a More Perfect Union

BY JON SANTIAGO

Treating patients in Boston’s busiest emergency room has taught me a lot about the intersection of COVID-19 with race, class, and inequity. From ER visits to protests, black and Latinx people are enduring one of the most challenging moments in recent history. The dual pandemic of coronavirus and racism has taken over America while emotionally exhausting those of us involved. As an ER physician and elected official who is often the only person of color in both worlds, the relationship between both scourges has never been more intertwined.

Let’s start with a primer. COVID-19 sees no race or class. It only sees opportunity. And conditions that disproportionately impact

GUEST OPINION

communities of color—poverty, lack of access to health care, increased air pollution—create an invitation to wreak havoc. Scores of immigrants, essential workers, and people of color have borne the highest rates of coronavirus cases, hospitalizations, and deaths.

But what began as a public health crisis has now morphed into the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. Unemployment rates are higher in communities of color. Black and Latinx businesses have been shut out from large federal stimulus programs. Desperation is beginning to creep in and hope is quickly vanishing.

In medicine, the social determinants of health drive up to 80 percent of health outcomes. Whether I’m treating a heart attack, a case of coronavirus, or a young person shot in the ER, these acute issues are directly tied to the inequity found in urban America.

The socioeconomic injustice faced by people of color, codified in law over centuries, has not only led to gross health disparities, but has propped up a criminal justice system where an innocent black man could be murdered by a policeman coldly kneeling on his neck. George Floyd’s death is fundamentally about the systemic

racism that has haunted this country since its founding. And so is COVID-19’s impact on communities of color. They are inextricably linked, and evidence of coronavirus infection discovered during Mr. Floyd’s autopsy underscores this sad truth.

So when people peacefully demonstrate across the country, it’s not just to honor the life and legacy of George Floyd. It’s not solely to reject the sanctioned violence that killed Eric Garner or Breonna Taylor. Rather, it’s to protest the conditions that have created a system where the value and dignity of people of color are considered inferior. The millions of protesters—diverse in color, age, and experience—exercising their free speech are critiquing the political, economic, and social systems that have laid the foundation for these two plagues.

Many of us have stood with and encouraged demonstrators to speak up and express their indignation and desire for change. The protests have been solution-oriented, constructive, and predominantly peaceful. The demonstrations are as American as those associated with the founding of this country, from the Boston Tea Party to the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

I urge mask wearing, social distancing when possible, and encourage virtual protesting as an alternative. I stand near the back of the protests, separated six feet away with my own mask, lost in moments of reflection. I do my best to explain to my colleagues in government and healthcare why we cannot address COVID-19 and racism without transforming minds and laws that govern society.

And despite the continued loss of life from both epidemics, I remain inspired by the awakening and growing pains our country is undergoing. I feel it in the patients I care for who have shown incredible resolve in the face of an unrelenting virus. I feel it in discussions with legislative colleagues who recognize that now is the time to tackle structural inequities with boldness and urgency. For if America has proven anything, it is our capacity to change and desire to fight for a more perfect union. And that moment has arrived.

State Rep. Jon Santiago represents much of the Fenway in the legislature and serves as an ER physician at Boston Medical Center. This is an abridged version of an op-ed essay that appeared in CommonWealth magazine.

Editor’s note: Audubon Circle resident Dolly Boogdanian sent this letter last month to Sen Brownsberger and Reps. Livingston, Santiago, and Tyler following a virtual meeting for constituents at which they all spoke. We have published it with her permission.

Spending Must Be Principled, Voting Must Be Secure As We Try to Meet the Crises Bessetting Us

I WANT TO THANK EACH OF YOU for the Zoom meeting on June 9. Thank you for sharing your time and a glimpse into the many and important efforts you are making to keep Massachusetts strong and moving in the right direction.

The revenue numbers are sobering and the choices that you will need to make this year and likely in those ahead will be very difficult. I do not envy you and worry for us all. But I also see the times we are in as an opportunity for you and all of us to take a cold, hard look at the money that goes into

supporting the institutions and practices that exist due the ills of our society rather than into preventing those ills in the first place. We all know that crime, at just about every level (selling illegal drugs, domestic violence, thefts and robbery, gang violence) and the over-crowding in our prisons are mostly due to deprivation and lack of productive options. We know that our prisons are full of people who didn’t have a better choice. So much money is being spent to deal with, or support, so much pain and dysfunction rather than in preventing these ills. We seem ever closer to bankrupting ourselves, financially and morally.

It is this conundrum that the push to “defund the police” is directed towards. It is not to deprive our police forces of the resources they need to perform their duties; it means taking steps to significantly reduce those duties. If we are going to spend increasingly scarce resources, let’s spend

them to do positive, productive things for our citizens, not to punish or deprive them for having no good choices. So often it is not so much that we have no resources,

but rather it is that we spend our resources on foolish things.

We must do better, something that—in the public realm—is all the more clear in the face of a splintered economy.

On top of all the demands to address a myriad of serious issues (in which I hold de-militarization of our police forces near the top) is the need to protect citizens’ right to vote. The steady diminution of civil rights, civil discourse, and civilian participation in our society is erasing the foundation of our democracy, and one of the few things that we can safely and effectively do [about it] is vote out those who are hell-bent in their assault on our institutions of peace and justice.

DOLLY BOOGDANIAN
AUDUBON CIRCLE

LETTER

No Annual Meeting for The Fenway News

The Fenway News Association board has voted not to hold its 2020 annual meeting, which would normally take place in July. Even with physical distancing, we couldn’t justify the health risks a meeting presented—never mind the fact that only a handful of folks would show up. Moving the meeting online didn’t feel like a suitable solution for an event that focuses on community connection.

We can, however, fulfill one requirement of our bylaws with no risk to anyone: printing the list of association members. As in the past, membership includes anyone who has contributed content to the paper in the last year and any community member who asks to become a member. If you’d like to join, simply send an email to fenwaynews@gmail.com and include “membership” in the subject line.

One focus of this year’s meeting would have been a new fund-raising initiative that begins later this month. Instead of launching it at the meeting, we’ll provide more information by email and on our Facebook page. Stay tuned.

ASSOCIATION MEMBERS AS OF JUNE 29, 2020

Alvarez, Shannon Al-Wakeel, Arlene Ash, Nicole Auberg, Jonathan Ball, Alison Barnet, Elizabeth Bertolozzi, Mary Ann Brogan, Will Brownsberger, Kelsey Bruun, Tony Capobianco, Bob Case, Steve Chase, Conrad Cizek, Brian Clague, Suzanne Comtois, Tracy Conta, Jerry Cooper, Helen Cox, Tracey Cusick, Alex Danseco, Bennie diNardo, Kerry Do, Richard Dunshee, Margot Edwards, Johnette Ellis, John Engstrom, Stan Everett, Barbara Fay, Lisa Fay, Mary Finn, Nikki Flionis, Michael Foley, Marie Fukuda, Raul Garcia, Slim Gelzer, Galen Gilbert, Elizabeth Gillis, Kathy Greenough, Renee Harmon, Sam Harnish, Steven Harnish, Tim Horn, Tracey Hunt, Cathy Jacobowitz, Akshata Kadagathur, Rosie Kamal, Sajed Kamal, John Kelly, Joseph Kenyon, Ruth Khowais, Robert Kordenbrock, Nasreen Latif, Kristen Lauerma, Nate Lescovic, Brenda Lew, Adanya Lustig, Aqilla Manna, Joanne McKenna, Maureen McLaughlin, Kristen Mobilia, Pat Murphy, Letta Neely, Timothy Ney, Patrick O’Connor, Sheneal Parker, Catherine Pedemonti, Eesha Pendaharkar, Richard Pendleton, Jana Peretz, Camille Platt, Gloria Platt, Lauren Dewey Platt, Susan Povak, Michael Prentky, Cara Presley, Alison Pultinas, Michelle Reinstein, Carl Richter, Karla Rideout, Michael Rogan, Mallory Rohrig, Mike Ross, Rosaria Salerno, Valarie Seabrook, Helaine Simmonds, Matti Kniva Spencer, Ginny Such, Will Tentindo, Mat Thall, Bonnie Thryselius, Eric Tingdahl, Theresa Tobin, Fredericka Veikley, Chris Viveiros, Derrick Warren, Jim Wice, Hugh Wilburn, Margaret Witham, Steve Wolf, Erica Yee

THE Fenway News

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“Comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable.”

The founders of The Fenway News adopted this motto to express their mission of exposing and opposing the dangers the neighborhood faced in the early 1970s—rampant arson, predatory landlords, and a destructive urban renewal plan. If the original motto no longer fits today’s Fenway, we remain committed to its spirit of identifying problems and making our neighborhood a better and safer place to live.

> FREQUENCY <

The Fenway News reaches distribution sites on the Friday closest to the first of each month. Our next issue will appear on **Friday, July 31.**

> DEADLINE <

The deadline for letters, news items, and ads for our next issue is **Friday, July 24.**

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IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

A LOT HAPPENED IN OUR NEIGHBORHOODS SINCE THE LAST ISSUE, INCLUDING...

The redesign of Commonwealth Avenue and Beacon Street for the proposed Kenmore Hotel project got another continuation when the Public Improvement Commission moved a vote on the plan to its July



23 meeting. At the PIC's June 18 hearing, Steve Martorano of Bohler Engineering requested the extension on behalf of Mark Development, the proponent, to continue discussions with the Audubon Circle Neighborhood Association. ➡ **Scholar and activist Ibram X. Kendi joined the B.U. faculty on July 1, bringing along from American University the Center for Antiracist Research and Policy. Kendi, author of the 2019 best seller**

How To Be an Antiracist and winner of the National Book Award in 2016, says the the center will build policy proposals based on its research and hints that BU might become the first American university to offer a degree in anti-racism studies. ➡ The name of Mayor Walsh's new cabinet-level equity officer should ring a bell for Fenway residents. That's because Karilyn Crockett gave keynote address for recent annual meetings of both the Fenway News Association and the Fenway CDC. Both times, Crockett, a lecturer in urban studies at MIT, gave inspiring presentations about the history of grassroots activism she chronicled in her 2018 book, *People Before Highways*. ➡ **The show must go on...next year. The Huntington Theatre announced that it will furlough or lay off two-thirds of its staff in July as it seeks to cut costs by 50%. The theatre had already cancelled the final plays of the 2019-20 season, and it now says it doesn't expect to relight its stage until 2021. It does intend to present as many of the plays it had scheduled as it can.** ➡ The *Globe's* "Food" section turned the spotlight on two area restaurants. First, it listed Darryl's Corner Bar & Kitchen (in the former Bob the Chef's space at 604 Columbus Ave.) in an article on "Black-owned Boston restaurants to support. The following week it ran a feature on Cheryl Staughter, chef-owner of "Southern-inflected" Soleil in Nubian Square [2306 Washington Street]. ➡ **Speaking of Nubian Square, "The Fine Print" column in the Sunday Globe gave an extended shout-out to Frugal Bookstore in the square, which ran a successful GoFundMe campaign at the start of the pandemic, then suddenly found itself swamped with orders for anti-racism books after landing on lists of black-owned bookstores that circulated in the weeks after George Floyd's death. A Washington Post article on black-owned bookstores also name-checked the store in early July.** ➡ Back on the grimmer side of the restaurant scene, after 28 years of operation, O'Leary's Pub in Audubon Circle won't reopen, say its owners. In a particularly bitter twist, *Boston Magazine* had named it one of the city's best Irish pubs just a week before the lockdown began. A few blocks east in Kenmore Square, Garrett Harker has locked horns with his landlord over a rent increase for his celebrated dining/drinking spots Eastern Standard, The Hawthorne, and Island Creek Oyster Bar. He laid out his side of the nasty fight in a story on the front page of the *Globe*. ➡ **Wentworth Institute will host a new program intended to compensate for weak STEM programs in Boston Public Schools. It aims to connect students with careers in high-paying tech fields. Working with the group Digital Ready and the Barr Foundation, Wentworth will offer a free year of college-level training in science and engineering with coaching on nonacademic aspects of college for as many as 40 low-income Boston students.** ➡ Harvard Med School psychiatrist Deirdre Leigh Barrett has compiled thousands of peoples' unusual coronavirus dreams in a new book called, imaginatively, *Pandemic Dreams*. If the pandemic has prompted your id to pump out surprising, disturbing, or even banal dreams, add them to Barrett's database by taking her short survey at www.surveymonkey.com/r/B8S75CN. ➡

PATIO DINING BOOMS IN PANDEMIC ERA

PHOTO: ALISON PULTINAS



Milkweed Cafe hosts weekend brunch on Burney Street behind the Tremont Street block facing Mission Church. Public-health restrictions now allow limited indoor dining, but many restaurants have focused on outdoor dining. Area restaurants with patio seating include Bennett's Sandwich Shop, Cafe Landwer, Cask 'n' Flagon, El Pelon, Gyro City, Kappo Sushi & Ramen, Neighborhood's Cafe, Oath Pizza, Orfano, Rod Thai, SOJUBa, Sweet Cheeks, Tasty Burger, Thornton's, The Deck on Lansdowne, and Tiger Mama. In addition, House of Blues recently opened a new rooftop bar.

Bike Lanes Coming to Boylston in the West Fens

At the Public Improvement Commission's June 18 hearing, Boston Transportation Dept. project manager Charlotte Fleetwood presented one aspect of a proposed plan for new bicycle facilities on Boylston Street from Park Drive near The Pierce to Park Drive near Ipswich Street. In order to maintain a drop-off pick-up zone at the Fenway Health Center at 1340 Boylston, the bike lane will morph into what she called an "Eliot Hotel-style ramp," requiring removal of one of the sidewalk's honey locust trees. Parking will be removed on alternate blocks of Boylston to create the new lanes. The commission will vote on the project July 23, although it depends on the Parks Department's review of the tree removal.

Changes at Massachusetts College of Art and Design

On June 15, senior vice president and provost Kimberly Pinder took over as acting president of MassArt following0s David Nelson's departure. Pinder was also recently nominated for a seat on the Boston Art Commission. At the end of June, MassArt announced that its academic areas all plan to offer a hybrid course model for the fall semester, which means they will mix on-campus and remote learning.

Mission Hill Main Streets Moves Office

Ellen Walker, director of Mission Hill Main Streets (MHMS), announced the organization's move to 1534 Tremont St. on July 1. MHMS will share the office, at the corner of Pontiac Street, with the nonprofit Boston Debate League. Neighborhood speculation is that 812 Huntington Ave., where MHMS and the New England Baptist Hospital leased space, might go up for sale soon. Built in 1967 for the American Red Cross, the property includes a large parking lot facing Hillside Street, altogether almost an acre of land. In the 1950s, the site held a Chevrolet dealer's showroom and service facility.

Brownsberger Survey Shows Broad Wariness About the T

State Senator Will Brownsberger received 1,737 responses to a survey he sent out in late May about use of the MBTA. The results from residents of the Back Bay, Fenway, Brighton, and Allston, as well as Watertown and Belmont, suggest that transit ridership will likely remain low for an extended period as people continue to work from home. Among regular riders who used the system at least one day a week prior to the pandemic, 61 percent now agree they are "too concerned about disease transmission to ride the MBTA, at least until doctors develop vaccines or better treatments for COVID." Of this group, 75 percent thought their T use will likely "stay down at least until a vaccine or treatment is developed." Support for social distancing remains strong—54 percent feel that the phased reopening is going at the right pace; 39 percent feel we are reopening too fast; and 6 percent feel we should be opening faster. 10 percent of respondents reported being unemployed and 58 percent reported working from home.

STREET CLEANING & TRASH PICK-UP

TRASH & RECYCLING PICK-UP

- **BACK BAY:** Monday and Thursday
- **FENWAY:** Tuesday and Friday
- **MISSION HILL:** Tuesday and Friday

STREET CLEANING

The **CITY OF BOSTON** has suspended ticketing of cars parked in designated street-cleaning zones until further notice. Check the City website for temporary transportation information at bit.ly/2KJ3TXV.

The **DCR** cleans state-owned streets along the Back Bay Fens on this schedule:

- **SECOND THURSDAY**
8:00am-12:00pm: The Riverway

• SECOND FRIDAY

- > 8:00am-noon: The Fenway from Ave. Louis Pasteur to Westland (includes inside lane) + Forsyth Way
- > 12:00-3:00pm: 8 to 54 The Fenway (includes inside lane) + Boylston + Charlesgate East + Charlesgate Extension

• THIRD TUESDAY

- > 8:00am-noon : Park Drive from Boylston St. to Holy Trinity Orthodox Cathedral (includes inside lane) + upper Boylston Street
- > 12:00-3:00pm: Park Drive from Holy Trinity to The Pierce, then from D Line overpass to Beacon Street

Visit www.mass.gov/doc/fenway/ download for a map of locations and cleaning times.

Farmers Markets

Look for arugula, bok choy, broccoli, cauliflower, cherry tomatoes, cucumbers, garlic scapes, kale, scallions, spinach, strawberries, and zucchini.	ROXBURY CROSSING T STATION (ORANGE LINE)	
	Tuesday & Friday	11:00 a.m.-7:00 p.m.
	COPLEY SQUARE	
	Tuesday & Friday	11:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.
	BRIGHAM CIRCLE	
	Thursday	11:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m.

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Welcome Back, Delia!



West Fens neighbors recently welcomed home 96-year-old Delia Alvarez (above, at left in 2019 with Gloria Platt and Rachel Huot in the foreground) after a serious bout of COVID-19. Following a month in rehab, Delia is not only comfortably reinstalled at home, with the able assistance of niece Sandra, but she's also been spotted tooling down neighborhood sidewalks with her walker.

WHERE DO DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS STAND?

The public-health shutdown froze work on major Fenway developments. *The Fenway News* asked the BPDA project manager for the Fenway, Tim Czerwinski, to give us an update on the status of these projects. Here's what he told us.

60 KILMARNOCK CABOT, CABOT & FORBES	Awaiting BPDA design review and other City approvals. Developer aims to begin demolition and construction this fall.
1241 BOYLSTON 1241 BOYLSTON LLC	Awaiting BPDA design review and other City approvals. Developer aims to begin construction in 2021.
1252-1270 BOYLSTON SCAPE BOYLSTON LLC	Awaiting BPDA design review and other City approvals. Developer aims to begin construction by the end of 2020
KENMORE SQUARE REDEVELOPMENT RELATED BEAL LLC	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Commonwealth Building (corner of Deerfield & Beacon streets): construction was delayed; developer aims to complete construction in late 2021.Beacon Building (directly north of the bus station): received a building permit on June 4, 2020; developer anticipates a 24-month construction period.
201 BROOKLINE AVE. SAMUELS & ASSOCS.	Demolition of parts of the garage and building began again this month, but no direct response yet from the developer.
FENWAY CENTER MEREDITH MANAGEMENT	Developer hopes to begin construction of the deck above the Turnpike in August and complete it in 24 months. Aims to complete Phase 2 within four years of starting the foundation.
MGM MUSIC HALL LIVE NATION + RED SOX	The Red Sox did not respond to an inquiry. Look for an update in August if they respond.

Blue Bikes Rolls Out Station, Deals for Essential Workers

After a long absence, a Blue Bike station has returned to 401 Park. The previous station disappeared during construction of the Time Out Market food hall and conversion of parking into the development's new "front lawn." With that work complete, the replacement station is larger and features more bikes than the previous station. In related news, the City has begun offering free Blue Bike passes to essential workers. The free passes are available to employees of local retail establishments and restaurants, grocery stores, pharmacies, and hospital staff. Passes for retail, restaurant, and grocery store workers come in the form of 90-day trials; those for hospital workers appear to be indefinite. Find detailed information, including instructions on how to apply, at www.boston.gov/news/free-bluebikes-passes-essential-workers.



MISSION HILL/FENWAY NEIGHBORHOOD TRUST

2020 GRANT AWARDS

The Mission Hill/Fenway Neighborhood Trust administers and operates a fund that gives grants to Mission Hill and Fenway nonprofits, community development corporations, and other civic groups to promote and enhance quality of life. The grants support specific projects related to arts and education, youth sports and recreation, and any other categories the board of the Trust deems appropriate.

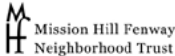
Due to COVID-19 restrictions on large indoor meetings, the Trust cancelled this year's awards ceremony and mailed grants directly to the 16 recipients. The board of Trust congratulates the applicants and thanks them for taking the time to do this work for their organizations and their communities.

THE FENWAY

- > **Fenway Community Development Corporation:** \$9,000 for a Social Capital Inc. (SCI) AmeriCorps fellow for workforce development programs
- > **Fenway Civic Association:** \$800 for musician fees for community events in June and December
- > **Friends of Ramler Park:** \$1,252 for replacement/addition of plants and shrubs in Ramler Park
- > **Fenway Community Center:** \$10,000 for establishing the Boston Chapter of Navigators USA at FCC
- > **Fenway Cares:** \$20,000 for distribution of produce boxes and COVID-19 safety materials to residents in need in the Fenway and Mission Hill
- > **Operation P.E.A.C.E. Northeast:** \$7,660 for a summer and afterschool staff person and resource toolkits
- > **Peterborough Senior Center:** \$7,353 for healthy food and cultural trips for seniors
- > **Kaji Aso Studio:** \$3,500 for general operating support to match funds from the Boston Cultural Council

MISSION HILL

- > **Sociedad Latina:** \$2,750 for Latino Heritage Month celebration
- > **Huntington Avenue YMCA:** \$4,500 for emergency food distribution to address food insecurity in Mission Hill and the Fenway
- > **Mission Hill Women's Writing Group:** \$3,670 for a Women's Writing Workshop in spring 2021
- > **Mission Hill Health Movement:** \$5,150 for initiatives to commemorate 50th anniversary
- > **Mission Hill Artists Collective:** \$2,500 for website redesign and video instruction workshops
- > **Boston Building Resources:** \$10,000 for a rack and display system for the Reuse Center in Mission Hill
- > **MissionSAFE:** \$12,600 for internships for 15 youths in Mission Hill
- > **Mission Main Tenant Task Force** \$6,950 for four annual community events for residents



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DEVELOPMENT NEWS ROUNDUP

BY ALISON PULTINAS

Newcastle-Saranac Apartments

NS Apartments LLC, a recently created entity, has begun the rehab of the 97 Newcastle-Saranac apartments on Columbus Avenue. The business’s address is listed as the Fenway CDC’s office at 70 Burbank St.

In December, the City’s Neighborhood Housing Trust awarded \$1 million to the project. In the application for the funding, co-developers Fenway CDC and Schochet Co. stated that 20 percent of the units were currently vacant and will become swing space to keep tenant relocation onsite during the renovation.

In a recent email, Fenway CDC’s Sam LaTronica stated that the partners will close on construction financing relatively soon. Kevin Construction of Canton is the contractor.

In January 2020, Fenway CDC received \$500,000 from the Brownfields Remediation Fund, a program of Mass Development, the state’s economic development authority. At the June 11 Neighborhood Housing Trust meeting, another \$550,000 was granted. The application for the funds stated that 82 of the existing households qualify for rent subsidies.

Last August, the development team celebrated preservation of these affordable apartments with state and local officials. However, the Mass Alliance of HUD Tenants (MAHT) has cautioned that the rents may still rise from 30 percent to 40 percent of tenant income. MAHT promised to continue supporting the tenant association.

BPDA Adopts Updated Tufts IMP That Adds Museum School

The BPDA’s June vote on a renewal and amendment of Tufts University’s Institutional Master Plan marked the first time since pandemic restrictions began that the agency’s monthly meetings included an agenda item open to public testimony.

The meeting was held virtually and run by

Priscilla Rojas, who replaced Timothy Burke as BPDA board chair in May. Brian Miller from South Boston is the board member.

The board voted unanimously for the university’s revised IMP, which adds the Museum School facilities to the plan. Katelyn Gosselyn, Tufts campus planning director, described some of the community benefits for the Fenway and Mission Hill—a renovated café at 230 the Fenway open to the public and maintenance of the landscaped garden in Calumet Square on Mission Hill.

BPDA Project manager Ed Carmody read aloud the comments received, including a letter from City Councilor Kenzie Bok, who tangentially mentioned her hope for full PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) payments from the school in the future. Kelly Brilliant of the Fenway Alliance supported the vote, saying Tufts had recently joined the alliance.

The Fenway CDC’s Richard Giordano also spoke in support. His letter stated that the CDC has received assurances that there will not be a map amendment, which adds an institutional overlay to the zoning, as there is no long-term ground lease with the MFA and Tufts doesn’t own the two parcels.

Tufts will now police the private way running behind the St. Alphonsus Street studio building, typically filled with out-of-state cars from nearby residences. Responding to concerns from neighbors, who complained about compromised emergency-vehicle access and trash, Tufts will no longer allow public parking in the so-called “Alleghany Alley.”

Simmons Campus Consolidation

Simmons University’s proposed consolidation of its campus replaces dormitories and the Holmes Sports Center on Pilgrim Road with a high-rise tower on the site of the four-story science building next to Avenue Louis Pasteur. The Pilgrim Road residential campus would be ground-leased for future development.

The university first filed the plan with the City

in May 2019, but the project met some setbacks in the approval process. Boston Parks staff expressed concern about shadow impacts on the Back Bay Fens, and the Boston Civic Design Commission (BCDC) raised questions about reducing the size of the central college quad.

Internally, there have been rumblings from library science alums disappointed that the plan would compress Beatley Library to one floor to make room for displaced science labs and classrooms. In March, Abby Vervaeke, a writer for the student newspaper, *The Simmons Voice*, wrote about a lack of transparency for current and incoming students about the major facility changes.

At a virtual meeting of the BCDC design review subcommittee on June 23, Laura Brink Pisinski, vice president of university real estate development and facilities management, said the university has modified the tower height in order to reduce shadow impacts and will angle the tower to make it less intrusive on the central quad. Chris Jones from IBI Placemaking described bike- and pedestrian-friendly improvements for the service drive next to Boston Latin School and a more “celebratory gateway” at Avenue Louis Pasteur. Because this was the third review of the design, the subcommittee agreed to send the project back to the full commission for a vote in July.

Demolition and new construction has been set to start this summer.

Like many other institutions of higher education, Simmons has not officially announced how it will conduct its fall semester. The board of trustees will vote at the end of June on a reopening strategy. The plan’s pending approval and uncertainty about reopening make this a complicated time for a new leader, but Lynn Perry Wooten began her term as president on July 1, succeeding Helen Drinan, who served as president for 12 years. Wooten, formerly dean of Cornell University’s School of Applied Economics and Management, becomes Simmons’s first African-American president.

The expected BCDC vote is scheduled for July 7. *Alison Pultinas lives in Mission Hill..*

HELP OUT THE F.C.C.

Although the Fenway Community Center continues its closure as a public-health measure, the FCC team is actively working on new programming and wants your input. Take a few minutes to complete a brief survey about activities you’d like to see at the center. To complete the survey, visit bit.ly/2YPXRN4.

NEW STATE PROGRAM SUPPORTS RENT, MORTGAGE PAYMENTS

On July 1 the state launched the Emergency Rent & Mortgage Assistance program (ERMA), which builds on an earlier program known as RAFT. Renters and homeowners in arrears because of the pandemic and public-health shutdown can apply for up to \$4,000 of assistance with rent, mortgage, or utility payments. Qualifying income level varies by household size but, for example, can reach \$67,000 for a one-person household. Contact MetroHousing Boston, one of a dozen regional housing-assistance centers managing the program for the state. Their website has an easy-to-understand explanation of the program and the process. Visit www.metrohousingboston.org/what-we-do/specialized-services/raft/ or call [617] 859-0400.

[ADVERTISEMENT]

VOLUNTEER OUTREACH COORDINATOR

Fenway CDC seeks a Volunteer Outreach Coordinator to help build our Community Programs Department. The position involves helping vulnerable and low-income residents of the Fenway and Mission Hill improve quality of life by helping them access social services, education, job opportunities, and community resources. Most activities will be conducted virtually; if physical meetings are needed they will comply with state public-health guidelines. This is a one-year SCI AmeriCorps position, supported by a grant from the Mission Hill/Fenway Neighborhood Trust.

OVERVIEW—Design an outreach plan to recruit participants for programs and service referrals; conduct outreach using social media, online platforms, and other methods; help participants improve job-submission documents; enter program data in a tracking system and prepare program reports.

QUALIFICATIONS—Bachelor’s degree preferred; strong written and oral communication skills; ability to work with a diverse population, especially people of color; strong organizational skills, results-driven approach, and problem-solving ability.

To learn more about the job and our work, visit www.fenwaycdc.org. To apply, please email a cover letter and resume to Kris Anderson at kanderson@fenwaycdc.org

Back in Bloom: Rose Garden Reopens

PHOTOS: RUTH KHOAWAIS



Just in time for the official start of summer, the James P. Kelleher Rose Garden, located in the Fens across from 73 Park Dr., reopened on June 10.

ANNUAL MEETINGS COVER LOTS OF TERRITORY—ON SCREEN

BOTH STORIES BY RUTH KHOWAIS

Conservancy Looks at Charlesgate’s History and Future

Like other organizations, the Emerald Necklace Conservancy held its annual meeting on Zoom (alas, no refreshments). Over 120 people attended the online forum.

The meeting began with a collection of postcard slides from H. Parker James, which showed Charlesgate Park around the turn of the century.

Conservancy President Karen Mauney-Brodek then outlined the organization’s 2019 achievements. Their very active Green Team and Youth Leadership program went virtual, serving 100 young people, and they now have a mobile tour guide of the Victory Gardens, educational videos, and their own symphony. The Conservancy is creating more space for pedestrians and cyclists, as well as planting trees along the parkways.

The theme of the evening was the restoration of Charlesgate Park. Mauney-Brodek said that many people (including this writer) did not know that Charlesgate was the actual start of the Emerald Necklace and at one time connected to the Charles River.

One of the keynote speakers was

Garrett Dash Nelson, curator of maps and director of geographic scholarship at the Norman B. Leventhal Map and Education Center at the Boston Public Library. Nelson focused on “Where is the Emerald Necklace,” showing numerous maps dating from the 1800s. They included Olmsted’s original 1885 plan for Franklin Park, an 1897 plan for Columbia Road that has not been achieved, and a succession of maps showing changes in the Charles River area from 1884, when Charlesgate was mudflats, to 1938. Using charts for median household income and population, he noted “extreme economic inequality” and racial diversity along the Emerald Necklace, which stretches from the Back Bay Fens to Franklin Park.

Urban landscapers Dan Adams and Marie Law Adams, principals of Landing Studio, spoke about the history and future of Charlesgate. In 1890, they said, Charlesgate was a park with water and the doorway to the Charles River. The Charles and Muddy rivers formed one continuous watershed, said Adams; now the Muddy River is culverted. A postcard from 1890, featuring the Braemore Hotel,

clearly shows a park with water. Even in 1949, as shown in a photo, the Emerald Necklace continued to the Charles River under the Fens Pond Bridge. In 1999 it still looked like a park, but in 2011, light posts, trees, benches, and paths were gone.

Adams said that changes occurred with urban renewal from the 1940s to 1969: construction of the Central Artery and Storrow Drive in the 1950s, and the Bowker Overpass, built from 1967 to 1969. “Charlesgate was overtaken by roadways and bridges. It was an erased landscape,” said Dan Adams.

In contrast, photos of the overpass today, included in the Adamases’ slide presentation, showed untreated sewage, bottles and debris, and duckweed blooms, a pollution indicator. The Adamases and neighborhood activists are working to restore the critical link at Charlesgate.

In 2017, the Charlesgate Alliance formed to improve the quality of Muddy River water, activate the site with new uses, reconnect the three park systems and neighborhoods across Charlesgate, and celebrate Charlesgate. 2019 saw short-term improvements:

repaired lighting, replacement of railings designed by Olmsted, and the addition of Adirondack-style chairs. Today, Storrow Drive’s eastbound ramp needs to be replaced and more pedestrian access is needed, as the connections between the east and west sides are poor. “More crossings are needed,” said Marie Adams. “The neighborhood still doesn’t have access.” Of eight crossings, none lie within the park, the east and west sides are hard to get to, and pathways do not connect from one part to another.

Dan and Marie Adams propose building two ramps, which would replace Storrow Drive eastbound and elevate Storrow Drive westbound, increasing the area devoted to parkland. A new connection between the Esplanade and the Emerald Necklace could pass under the new bridges and the connection between the Charles River and the Muddy River would be restored. This would allow for pedestrian and bike connections between the Emerald Necklace and the Esplanade. They also propose eliminating surface roads in order to daylight the last 270 feet of the Muddy River. Other proposals include building a playground and dog park and restoring the tree canopy on Commonwealth Avenue.

ACNA HEARS FROM BOK, AIRS DEVELOPMENT CONCERNS

The Audubon Circle Neighborhood Association (ACNA) virtually held its annual meeting on June 23. About 25 people attended, including City Councilor Kenzie Bok, Alicia Brisson representing Sen. Brownsberger, Peter Sougarides from Samuels & Associates, and John Rosenthal from

Meredith Management.

Councilor Bok gave a review of her first (almost) six months in office. She said that she was just getting her “feet wet” when her office closed due to the pandemic. She quickly realized that the crisis was “throwing up systemic problems.” She said, “We’re seeing that

our society does not have a safety net for a lot of people.”

This is particularly evident with food scarcity. Bok helped set up food distribution and delivery to those in need and has now delivered two million meals. “Since COVID-19 began,” said Bok, “we have seen an increased need for food access.” She said that 70,000 people qualify for food stamps but many do not use the benefit, partially due to information’s not being available in a variety of languages. She said that the infrastructure for food delivery began in the Fenway.

Another issue is affordable housing. Bok said that 500 people are sitting with housing vouchers but no place to live. She has worked with landlords to improve the situation. Calling herself “a policy wonk,” Bok said she is working on legislation that would make Boston a city with protected categories.

Of particular concern is the fact that what universities do about housing affects the neighborhoods but, according to Bok, the universities “operate like their own kingdoms.” She and two other councilors will hold a meeting in July to discuss university reopening plans.

She is the chair of the Ways and Means committee and said the committee has been “grappling with the scale of the police budget” and the very high compensation for certain officers. Bok said that cutting the police budget on paper does not work, as the department is allowed to go over budget. The answer likely lies in negotiating with the police union.

Bok said that the lesson she’s learned from dealing with the pandemic is: If there’s a will, there’s a way. She feels that it would be nice to keep that spirit alive for life after the pandemic.

During a question-and-answer session, both James Buechl and Kathy Greenough of ACNA mentioned the long history Audubon Circle has of dealing with B.U.’s encroachment on the neighborhood. They offered to fill Bok in on this history.

The next speaker was John Rosenthal, who is developing the Fenway Center above the Mass. Pike between

Beacon Street and Brookline Avenue. He called the pandemic “an incredible strain” on both his profit and nonprofit work. Work on the Fenway Center phase 1 was 95 percent complete when the mayor shut down construction. Rosenthal said that Building 1 will be completed on July 17 and Building 2 in September. Rosenthal also said that the area around Lansdowne Station is being landscaped. Buildings 3 and 4 will have office space and labs with a portal from Brookline Avenue to Beacon Street. Rosenthal said that there is 37,000 square feet of retail at the Fenway Center, but he doesn’t know what the future will look like for stores and restaurants.

Residents expressed concerns about traffic and the new layout for Beacon Street, which includes parking lanes, bike lanes, and wider sidewalks. The concern was whether two lanes of traffic would be able to get by in the new configuration. Dolly Boogdanian, president, also noted that Rosenthal had filed a permit to work on Saturdays from 5am to midnight. She asked if he was really going to do this. Rosenthal apologized, saying he was trying to catch up with the construction but if this ended up being a nuisance, he would consider discontinuing it.

The meeting ended with an update by Boogdanian on the Circle Garden at the intersection of Beacon and Park Drive. The virus has derailed the plans, she said, but they have solicited a proposal from a landscaping company. The issue is irrigation; they don’t know if there is water available at the site.

Boogdanian also mentioned that the year had been both frustrating and rewarding. New restaurants and stores had plans to open, and their fate is uncertain. However, neighbors did not have to deal with concerts at Fenway Park. An ongoing issue of has been getting the MBTA to recognize the noise its tunnel project creates. There are also concerns about a proposed 16-story 450-unit residential building with very small units. Boogdanian said this is not the neighborhood-focused housing and would like to see restrictions on undergraduates.

Ruth Khowais lives in the West Fens.

IN MEMORIAM

Carlos Pimentel

Carlos Pimentel, a resident of the Fenway for over 30 years, passed away on June 13. He was 72.

He was often seen walking his beloved beige terrier, Molly. Mr. Pimentel, originally from Puerto Rico, will be greatly missed by the Fenway community.

—Submitted by Maria Rodríguez.

GEARING UP FOR DREDGING AS RIVER PROJECT OPENS PHASE 2



In late June, the Charter Company moved in equipment and installed fencing along both sides of Agassiz Road ahead of its work with the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) on Phase 2 of the Muddy River restoration project. Phase 2 will entail dredging of 1-8 feet of sediment from the riverbed to improve water flow, removal of some (but not all) phragmites, and restoration and replanting of the riverbank with native species. For the next three months, Charter will erect fencing and build access roads to the dredging sites at Leverett Pond in Brookline and between the Duck House and the Victory Gardens. Actual dredging won’t begin until October. As of June 30, the ACOE’s Jennifer Flanagan announced that 123 trees will be removed in three separate stages during the course of the project. On July 6, the crew will be working between Avenue Louis Pasteur and Agassiz Road on the first group of takedowns. To keep up to date on the work, visit www.muddyriverrmmoc.org, run by the project’s Management and Maintenance Oversight Committee. Sign up for newsletter updates by emailing MuddyRiver@usace.army.mil

The Arts

KAJI ASO STUDIO AND
SYMPHONY PARK PRESENT

Tanabata, an Ancient Story for Modern Times

Tanabata is a beloved celebration in Japan that recognizes an ancient story of separation, longing, hopes, wishes, and reunion. It is celebrated on the seventh day of the seventh month (July 7).

Every year, Kaji Aso Studio presents art, poetry, and music inspired by this story, and participants help celebrate by tying wishes to green branches (in Japan—bamboo). This year, Kaji Aso Studio joined with

Symphony Park to help the community learn about and enjoy this story to nourish our hearts. More than ever we can empathize with the couple's patience, longing and promise to be together. Find out more at www.kajiasostudioevents.com/

On July 7, any time from 7am to 10pm, visit Symphony Park to see the five-color streamers flying and write your own wishes to tie to the bamboo "Wishing Tree."

At 7pm the studio will present a

virtual event inspired by the theme, An Evening of Art, Poetry and Music. [Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83888929719#success.>]

This project is supported by a Transformative Public Art grant from the Mayor's Office of Arts and Culture. Kaji Aso Studio programming is also supported in part by a grant from the Boston Cultural Council and administered by the Mayor's Office of Arts and Culture; and a grant from the Mission Hill/Fenway Neighborhood Trust.



↑ **Untitled (painting)**—Marilyn Casey, Mission Hill



← **Hoop Dreams (photo)**—Nancy Ahmadifar, Mission Hill

→ **Please Don't Eat the Daisies (photo)**—Matti Spencer, South End



← **Fenway Scene (oil painting)**—Itsuo Kiritani, Mission Hill

CREATIVE NEIGHBORS (PART DEUX)

Our last issue featured a page of art created by area residents, which led other artists to ask if we could feature *their* work. Take a look at more local creativity.



↑ **Shredded Shroud (fiber art)**—Beverly Sky, Fenway Studios



↑ **Floral Painting**—Lisa Fay, West Fens



↑ **John Lennon (acrylic painting)**—C.J. Hutchings, East Fens

NEW CONTEST DEADLINE IS JULY 20

There's a new deadline for the "Silver Linings" contest seeking ideas about good things you'd like the community (or the world) to salvage from the pandemic experience—things like cleaner air, fresh food, the new focus on racial equity and justice. FENSFund, which promotes art and community in the Fenway, will award cash prizes of \$250, \$150, and \$100 to the best ideas, as judged by the readers of *The Fenway News*. Here's what you need to know.

- **NEW DEADLINE: JULY 20**
- **SAME RULES:**

1. In 150 words or less, describe an idea for making life better in Boston (or beyond) inspired by the experience

of pandemic response. New policies, new ideas, new attitudes—anything.

2. Describe how it could work and suggest one first step for getting the ball rolling to make it happen.

3. Send as many ideas as you like (each must be a separate entry) by July 20 to FensFund@gmail.com. You can also deliver your entry (or entries) as a hard copy to any of these neighbors: Bob Case, Nikki Flionis, Ruth Khowais, Tim Ney, Mallory Rohrig, or Mat Thall.

- **JUDGING:** In a blind judging process, the FENSFund Board will choose up to 20 suggestions and publish them in *The Fenway News*, with readers voting to choose the three winners. So get going! And submit by July 20!

Silver Linings
WHAT CAN
OUR WORLD BECOME?

July CALENDAR

Tue, July 7/ 14/ 21

SENIOR CENTER LIFE STORYTELLING WORKSHOP. 1pm, Join by Zoom using meeting ID 450 7174 121. To join by phone, dial (301) 715-8592, same meeting ID.

Tue, July 7/ 14/ 21/ 28

LIFEBOAT BOSTON FOOD PANTRY: Elders or residents in need get a free bag of fresh fruits/vegetables. 3–6pm, Boston Temple, 105 Jersey Street. Questions? Email lifboatboston@gmail.com. Register at bit.ly/lifeboat-bostonregistration

Wed, July 8/ 15/ 22/ 29

GUIDED MEDITATION AT FENWAY COMMUNITY CENTER. Guided meditation to help reduce stress and improve your

emotional health. 6pm. <https://bostonu.zoom.us/j/7457018624>

Thu, July 9

FENWAY CDC ORGANIZING COMMITTEE at 6pm. Learn more about the 2020 Census, voter engagement, rent stabilization, and community reinvestment. Find out how you can get involved. Email Jaya at jaiyer@fenwaycdc.org for the Zoom conference call link.

Thu, July 9/ 16/ 23/ 30

• **SENIOR CENTER COFFEE & CONVERSATIONS.** 11:30am. Join by Zoom using meeting ID 740 4088 6705, password 8DdNEk. To join by phone, dial (929) 205-6099, same ID, password, 630183.

• **LIFEBOAT BOSTON FOOD PANTRY** Elders or residents in need get a free bag of fresh fruits/vegetables. 3–6pm, Boston Temple, 105 Jersey Street. Questions? Email lifboatboston@gmail.com. Register at bit.ly/lifeboatbostonregistration

• **GAME NIGHT AT THE FCC.** Join the Fenway Community Center for a virtual game night, every Thurs. at 7pm. All ages welcome. <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89496229467>

Thu, July 23 & 30

LIVE VIRTUAL CHAIR YOGA. The Emerald Necklace Conservancy offers virtual chair yoga at 11am. Register at www.emeraldnecklace.org/event.

The Arts



PHOTOS: STEVE WOLF

Magical Menagerie Along The Riverway



Craving some not-virtual art? Head over to the Brookline side of the Muddy River to view 13 “site-responsive sculptures” commenting on human threats to the planet. Installed behind the Longwood T stop by Studios Without Walls, “2020 See Change” offers works in metal, fabric, glass, natural and painted wood—and even old yogurt cups. Grab a map on site and follow the self-guided tour, or wander from sculpture to sculpture. Each installation includes an artist’s statement listing materials and discussing intent. The show remains up through September 7. Visit www.studioswithoutwalls.org for details.



Dream House in the Back Bay Fens

BY STEVE WOLF

Let’s give the coronavirus credit for doing at least one good thing: It brought us the Stick House. That’s the ever-evolving structure made of twigs and branches that snakes through a clearing along the Muddy River in the Back Bay Fens. Its creators—Caden, Silas, and Dennis Brown of the West Fens—didn’t have anything particular in mind when they began working on it in early April. Well, that’s not quite accurate. Early in the lockdown, Dennis and his sons Caden, 8, and Silas, 5, had begun a daily routine of heading out around the time the boys normally left for school and walking the perimeter of the Fens. When rain threatened on April 5, they decided to build a small “fort” out of fallen branches as shelter from the rain—so small, in fact, that “the two of them could just barely sit in it,” says Dennis. They soon began noticing dead branches on their daily walk, and since the fort sat right on their route, they began dragging some of their best finds to the site. The idea of enlarging the original structure seemed natural. “We just kept going,” says Caden; “we wanted to build more. We thought it was just going to be a project while we were out of school.” But schools stayed closed, and soon their daily routine grew to include regular Stick House construction work.

They had no plan, but they did follow two rules. First, they only used branches found on the ground. Caden and Silas have retrieved every one from the area between the Boylston Street Bridge and the Simmons campus (and Caden has discovered that attaching an 8-foot sling to his bike lets him bring back a lot more branches in a lot fewer trips). Second, no structural shortcuts are allowed. “Nothing’s tied together; there’re no fasteners,” says Dennis. “It’s pretty much gravity, pressure, and using other sticks to create torque.” Their description of their process makes it clear that the structure itself, the materials they find, and the topography of the site tell them what to build next. This approach might seem modest, but it’s produced a sinuous structure that,

by Dennis’s estimate, now covers 3,000 square feet (he took a measuring tape to earlier stages). Naturally, something that big has drawn attention and created a sense of community among regular passersby, who the Browns know by sight and conversation, if not by name. People have expressed support and admiration, both in person and on Facebook and Instagram, where the Stick House has its own accounts and modest followings. And support has appeared from surprising places. Early in the construction process a park ranger cruised by; when he drove by a second time, he stopped his car and got out. As Caden tells it, “We thought, ‘Oh no, this is the time he’s going to tell us to shut it down,’ but he actually told us to keep going and that the rangers loved it!” Other folks love it, too. A woman in her 70s, who practices tai chi nearby, approached the boys one day to tell them that she’d set herself a yoga-like challenge of moving through the inside of the Stick House without ever touching the structure as she twists, turns and contorts her body to avoid contact. “Please don’t make it any longer,” she pleaded, “I’m exhausted!” Rebecca Brown, Dennis’s wife and the boys’ mother, quickly embraced the Stick House. Able to continue her physical therapy practice remotely during the shutdown, she found patient after patient struggling to manage cooped-up households where children spent most days on computers or tablets for school and entertainment. That gave her a deeper appreciation for the experience Caden and Silas were having. “It felt really cool to see them energetic and lively and having those aha-type of days in times that were, understandably, so stagnant.” What comes next for the Stick House? The construction crew seems primed to keep going. When the school year ended—an occasion the Browns marked with an ice-cream-and-fishing party for both boys’ classmates—Caden wanted to know, “Now that school’s over, do we have to stop?”

Steve Wolf lives in the West Fens.



Caden and Silas in front of the Stick House at their end-of-school party.

LOCKDOWN BRINGS EMPTY STREETS TO THE FENWAY



One upside of three months of quarantine: a dramatic reduction in traffic.



PHOTOS: STEVE CHASE

LAST CALL FOR HAIKU

In response to coronavirus shutdown, Kaji Aso Studio in the East Fens moved the deadline for its annual haiku contest to July 15. First prize is \$300, and think of all that time you’ve had a home to work on yours! For directions on submitting entries, go to www.kajiasostudio.com.