



THE

Fenway News

HYPERLOCAL NEWS FOR THE FENWAY, AUDUBON CIRCLE, KENMORE SQUARE, UPPER BACK BAY, PRUDENTIAL, LONGWOOD, AND MISSION HILL SINCE 1974 • VOLUME 52 NUMBER 10 • OCTOBER 2 – 30, 2026

Mission Hill Residents Want City Crackdown on Parties, Crowding in De Facto Frat Houses

BY ALISON PULTINAS

Assets like big houses with backyards, often with driveways, have become problem properties on the top of Mission Hill. They present a serious quality-of-life concern for immediate neighbors in the fall and spring, when off-campus student parties shift into high gear. At these parties, hundreds of young people—including those under 21—drink outdoors, play beer pong, host DJs, listen to loud music, and urinate outdoors.

Not all the social gatherings are associated with Northeastern University’s fraternities and sororities, but flags and banners are a giveaway. Alleghany, Cherokee, Sunset, Hillside, and Calumet streets are the epicenter. Some backyards without fences allow parties to expand across multiple properties and spill into the street.

Even Google’s overview feature recognizes the situation: “Northeastern University does not officially recognize Greek housing, but the neighborhood of Mission Hill acts as the primary off-campus hub for the university’s fraternity and sorority life.” Confoundingly, Mission Hill’s zoning—Article 59 of the city code—lists fraternities as a forbidden use in every residential subdistrict.

The University’s Center for Student Involvement web page names 40 fraternities and sororities with chapters at the school, or

with citywide membership affiliates. Nearly all their members don’t live in licensed Greek life (Northeastern prefers the term “fraternity and sorority life” or FSL) residences either on- or off-campus. Quoting the CSI’s FAQ page, “Members of organizations are not required to live together, but many affiliated students often choose to be roommates with their sisters or brothers!”

This is how a property becomes an unlicensed fraternity house. Instead of the national organization or alumni association owning the building, a landlord or property manager negotiates leases with each individual student.

The agenda for a Sept. 16 Community Alliance of Mission Hill (CAMH) hybrid meeting included a video from a fraternity-rush-week event at 9 Sunset St., later identified as affiliated with the Kappa Sigma fraternity. The video, taken from a neighbor’s porch on Sunday, Sept. 13, recorded over a few minutes what appeared to be more than 100 young men walking toward the rear yard.

Boston Police District B2 community service officer Michael O’Rourke attended the CAMH meeting virtually. City Councilor Sharon Durkan attended in person, arriving late and leaving early. She had to deal with some confrontational back-and-forth with residents openly hostile to what they labelled as her inadequate responses to desperate calls about out-of-control parties.

Calling 911 continues to be the recommended action. However, as several residents described at the meeting, police cars show up but leave quickly and the party resumes. There are the illegal activities—underage drinking and public urination on neighboring properties—and the noise, but if the university is not involved, there are minimal repercussions.

Related to 9 Sunset St., Sam Courage of the Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Services called Dave Isberg and John Tobin of Northeastern’s Office of Community and Civic Engagement, as did many residents. Northeastern’s Center for Student Involvement has staff members assigned to coordinate group activities and monitor fraternities and sororities. Mike Sampson is the associate director of fraternity and sorority life. In response to a question about contacts for the individual fraternities, he stated that the university does not share that information.

Councilor Durkan has suggested focusing on the landlords, work that previously fell to the Mission Hill Problem Properties Task Force (PPTF), which met with representatives of the local colleges and kept track of 911 calls. Activist and former PPTF member Dave Greenup has continued to monitor weekly Boston Police Department reports as well as unpaid fines for building code

MISSION HILL STUDENTS ON PAGE 5 >

CIVIC AGENDA

Thu, 10/8 @ 6:30pm Virtual Rally: Preview of All 9 Ballot Questions

A coalition of Democratic ward committees hosts a “ballot rally,” a 90-minute online intro to the nine referendum questions on the Nov. 3 ballot. Hear from backers about the issues the questions address. Register at bit.ly/BallotQuestions2026.

10/24 Final Day to Register to Vote

Register online, by mail, or in person using links on the Boston Election Department’s web page at tinyurl.com/RegisterForNov3.

10/17 to 10/30 Early Voting Period

The City of Boston hadn’t released locations and hours for early voting by our deadline, but sites typically include City Hall, the BPL Central Branch in Copley Square, and the BPL Parker Hill branch in Mission Hill. The department website, boston.gov/departments/elections, should have dates in early October.

Recount Flips Razor-thin State Senate Results

BY STEVE WOLF

Last month’s Democratic primary gave local voters a dramatic reminder that every vote really *does* count. On election night, an unofficial tally showed that Fenway resident Dan Lander had beaten incumbent Will Brownsberger of Belmont by a just four votes in the race to become the Democratic candidate for the Suffolk & Middlesex state senate seat.

The Democratic nominee will run unopposed in the general election on Nov. 3.

Both Brownsberger and Lander requested a recount, as any candidate can when the difference between totals amounts to less than 0.5 percent of votes cast (in this case, 121 votes out of just over 24,000). Volunteers for both campaigns monitored the recount, which took place on Sept. 8 and 9 and gave Brownsberger a slightly bigger 35-vote margin, which the secretary of state’s office has certified.

Lander topped Brownsberger in both Cambridge (by 248 votes) and Watertown (155 votes). In Boston, Lander won 1,762 more votes than Brownsberger, lifted by endorsements from Sen. Elizabeth Warren and Mayor Michelle Wu, who also campaigned with him. Belmont—where Brownsberger began his career on the select board, then served as a state rep—came through for the incumbent with a 2,200-vote margin, just enough for him to eke out a win.

Totals for Area Precincts Within the District

WARD/ PRECINCT	BROWNSBERGER	LANDER
4/10	25	20
4/12	31	34
5/2	90	117
5/10	57	91
5/12	61	94
5/15	105	67
21/1	102	169
21/1	10	26

UNOFFICIAL VOTE TOTALS FROM CITY OF BOSTON ELECTION DEPARTMENT

55 BUS CAMPAIGNERS SAVOR A WIN AS MBTA AGREES TO EXTEND HOURS

BY RUTH KHOWAIS

For more than six years, Fenway residents have battled the MBTA to restore a full schedule for the 55 bus. As part of its so-called Better Bus project, the MBTA shortened the route and cut its hours in 2020.

The bus schedule dropped from a full day (7am–11pm) to just six hours (10am–4pm). And it no longer carried passengers past Copley Square to Park Street.

Protests and letter-writing campaigns have been ongoing. On several occasions, the MBTA promised to restore the original hours, but did not, frustrating many residents.

Now, according to State Rep. Jay Livingstone (in white shirt in upper photo), who has supported the residents’ bus battle, “our advocacy has paid off.” Next week, the T will release a winter schedule that includes expanded 55 bus hours. It will go into effect Sunday, Dec. 14.

Since 2021, the 55 Bus Coalition has worked to restore transportation equity to the Fenway. The battle is not completely over, however, as the original route has not been restored, but the restoration of hours represents a victory for the neighborhood.

Ruth Khowais live in the West Fens.



PHOTO: REPRESENTULLC



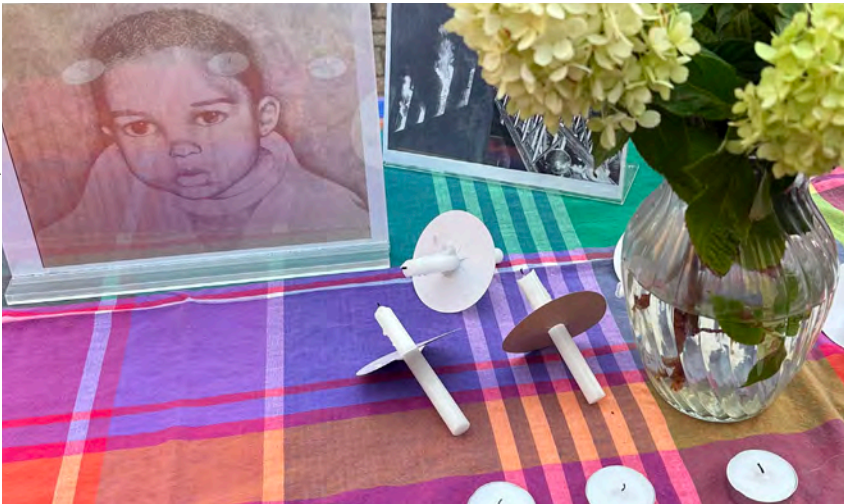
PHOTO: CASSIE WHITE/FENWAY FORWARD

On Oct. 2, 2025, the 55 Bus Route Coalition (above) held a bus “ride along” from the Fenway to Park Square, ending near MBTA headquarters, where participants rallied. On July 30 of this year, advocates from the Fenway traveled to Medford City Hall (left) to make their case at an MBTA community meeting.

Gardeners Mark 50 Years Since the Arson Death of Jesse Oliver

On Saturday, Sep. 12, the Symphony Road Community Garden hosted a quiet memorial for four-year-old Jesse Oliver, who died on the same day in 1976, victim of a five-alarm arson-for-profit fire that consumed buildings from 56 to 70 Symphony Road. Demolition of the buildings left an empty parcel that became the community garden, which contains a memorial stone with Jesse’s name. See page 3 for more on the ceremony and site history.

PHOTO: JULIETTE-MARIE SOMERSET



FENSVIEWS

Don’t Sacrifice Boston’s Affordable Housing

BY BRENDA CLARK

We’ve all felt the effects of the cost-of-living crisis: grocery costs are high, gas prices are rising, and rents keep going up. I’m fortunate to be able to live in an inclusionary zoning unit, a form of affordable housing that has kept my rents reasonable while rising rents have

forced many of my neighbors out of the area. However, some profit-driven

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developers now want to reduce the units created through Boston’s inclusionary zoning policy, which would push cost-of-living burdens on those struggling the most: low-income households.

Inclusionary zoning (IZ) requires a percentage of units in new market-rate housing to be set aside as affordable. These units are reserved for households making below certain income thresholds, and rents are set at a rate they can afford. Boston’s current IZ policy requires 17 percent of units in most new developments to be affordable to households making an average of 60 percent of area median income, or \$72,000 per year for a one-person household. An additional three percent of units must be set aside for people using mobile housing vouchers, such as Section 8.

There are too many people in desperate need of affordable housing, and this policy is a crucial tool for creating new affordable units in Boston. City and state funding for affordable housing is already overstretched, while IZ creates new affordable homes without the use of public funds. Since IZ pairs market-rate housing with affordable housing, it also creates mixed-income buildings and makes neighborhoods more economically and racially diverse. Unfortunately, some private developers are using the current

economic conditions to call for the city to weaken its IZ policy. Yes, it’s tough to build new housing right now: construction costs and interest rates are high. However, this doesn’t mean that we should push the burden onto low-income households.

The costs associated with IZ are a small portion of overall project budgets, and the city has other tools to help projects that are close to financial feasibility. Mayor Michelle Wu continues to support the current IZ policy and is using tools like targeted tax abatement to support new construction. However, a hearing order has been raised for Boston City Council to decide whether to use their authority to roll back the percentage of units required in this key affordable housing policy.

I’ve lived in inclusionary units in the Fenway for 15 years, and this housing has made a huge difference in my quality of life. I love this neighborhood. There are lots of things to do near me, and I’m connected to my neighbors here and have the opportunity to support my community. However, the years-long wait lists for other forms of affordable housing and the high rents in the Fenway mean that I wouldn’t have been able to stay in the area without IZ. As the cost-of-living crisis continues, now is the time to make these opportunities available to more low-income renters, not fewer.

I hope you’ll join me in contacting your city councilor to ask them to support keeping the current strong inclusionary zoning policy in Boston. You can find your councilor and their contact information at www.boston.gov/departments/city-council/who-my-boston-city-councilor. The Fenway is served by District 7 Councilor Miniard Culpepper (617-635-3510; miniard.culpepper@boston.gov) and District 8 Councilor Sharon Durkan (617-635-4225; sharon.durkan@boston.gov).

Brenda Clark lives in the West Fens.

Renewable Transition Is Easier—And More Urgent—Than Ever

BY SAJED KAMAL

The Earth is an active tinderbox. Europe has experienced more than 1,700 fires since the start of 2026, burning nearly 620,000 hectares (roughly 1,500,000 acres) of land. The USA, during the same period, has had more than 50,000 fires, burning about 7,700,000 acres of land. Canada has had

more than 4,900 fires, burning over 4,329,000 hectares (roughly

GUEST OPINION

10,700,000 acres, or nearly twice the size of Vermont). Not to mention the lives lost, properties destroyed, forests charcoaled, and species displaced or burnt alive. Fires continue to spread, and many are out of control. Years continue to get hotter. Ocean water warms and sea level rises higher than ever.

Climate change speaks louder than ever.

To survive, the need to accelerate the transition from the nonrenewable, rapidly depleting, and global-burning fossil fuel/nuclear path to a climate-friendly renewable energy path has never been more urgent.

There’s more than enough renewable energy. By one estimate, the amount of sunlight that hits the Earth’s surface in about one hour equals all the energy the entire planet uses in a year. “The Earth receives 23,000 TW [terawatts] of solar energy, while global energy consumption is 16 TW,” says Professor Xiao Yu Wu, an energy expert from MIT. Therefore, [fully renewable energy] could be possible even if we capture only 0.07 percent of the solar energy,”

The Sun channels renewable energy through the subsystems of light, heat, wind, water movement, and photosynthesis. We can tap these renewable sources technologically to store and release energy cost-effectively, environmentally responsibly, equitably, and sustainably.

Despite educational, social and political barriers, that is happening, offering an ever-wider range of appropriate technological options for diverse settings and scales, from a single home to an entire region, in villages and cities, on land and on

water. Costs have plummeted. Innovations and advancements in technology, designs, efficiency, financing and applications of renewable energy technologies continue to boom. Other options are at a theoretical or conceptual state. (Check out the box below.)

So, we have more than enough renewable energy and a wide variety of technologies that can match any need, place, or budget on Earth. The good news is that the transition is happening—at record speed—but that’s not fast enough. Limiting global warming to 1.5C remains a cornerstone of the Paris Agreement, but a recent UN report warns that the planet will exceed that limit unless we move faster. We need an urgent acceleration, holistically planned, and combined with the best possible conservation and efficiency. That must happen alongside a moratorium on further entrenchment of the fossil fuel/nuclear path, reserving those energies only for transitional fuels that move us toward the renewable future. The short period from manufacturing to implementation of renewable energy projects—compared to the long period from exploration to implementation of fossil/nuclear projects—represents a revolutionary advantage for the transition.

There’s no room for complacency, no time for “It’s happening on the other side of the ocean.” Fire, as with other impacts of climate disruption—heatwaves, floods, earthquakes, extreme weather—knows no borders. Massive public-awareness campaigns about both the crisis and solutions that lead to action remain key. We need education for action.

Political will and public will are imperative. Ultimately, when people are educated and act, politics follows. Compared to the centralized and oligopolistic concentration that the fossil fuel/nuclear path guarantees, renewable energy offers the revolutionary prospect of a decentralized and distributed structure with options to act at every level of society anywhere in the world.

Every action counts. The stakes are high. Let’s not let the Earth, “a beautiful blue dot,” turn into an infernal red flame!

Sajed Kamal, EdD, lives in the East Fens. Author of multiple books, he has worked internationally as an educator in renewable energy and sustainable development for 40 years, including 20 years with Brandeis’s Sustainable International Development program.

These technologies and applications are already available. I created a long list to counter the common impression that renewables can’t fully power the global economy. Available options include stand-alone, hybrid, grid-connected, utility-scale systems • centralized and distributed generation systems • building-integrated micro-wind-turbines • back- or front-yard tree-shaped micro wind turbines and solar arrays • microgrids • community solar systems • combined wind turbines/agricultural farms • biomass plants • combined biomass/agricultural farms • agrivoltaics—utility-scale, solar-panel-field/agricultural farms producing energy and food simultaneously • photovoltaic fields for farms • solar-powered manufacturing plants for solar panels and other components • wind farms • hybrid solar/wind energy farms • solar pumps • solar-powered refrigeration units • solar irrigation systems • irrigation canals covered with solar panels that generate electricity and reduce evaporation • solar instant power supply as a backup in power outages • solar-powered wheelchairs • offshore wind farms • floating wind farms • underwater wind power systems • ecologically scaled hydropower plants and microhydros • tidal, wave, and ocean energy technologies • “floatovoltaics,” floating solar plants that simultaneously prevent water evaporation • floatovoltaic-powered fish farming • solar-powered floating agricultural farms • transparent solar cells • solar glass for windows, facades, and skylights that generates energy and allows light to pass through • solar-powered airplanes • solar-powered satellites • solar-powered space stations • solar slates and tiles • solar-powered EV charging infrastructure • solar-built sound barriers to reduce highway noise for neighbors • solar-powered roads • balcony solar • solar garden lights • solar and solar-/wind-powered desalinations stations • solar-powered water management and purification • solar-powered boats, ships, and ferries • a solar-powered train (Australia) • solar-powered passenger coaches with rooftop panels for lights, fans, and mobile charging (India) • renewable-energy-powered sky train (China) • wind-powered electric train (the Netherlands) • multiple-scale solar greenhouses • home-scale to industrial-scale biogas plants for cooking fuel and lighting • solar thermal systems for hot water • Passive House designs with highly efficient solar heating and cooling • geothermal systems • energy storage batteries • green hydrogen from renewable sources to power fuel cells • solar cookers, including some that connect to a solar electric system to enable solar cooking day or night, rain or shine!

THE Fenway News

Published monthly by the Fenway News Association, Inc., run by community members and dedicated to local journalism. Serving the Fenway, Mission Hill, Circle, Kenmore Square, upper Back Bay and lower Roxbury

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NEXT ISSUE APPEARS

Friday, October 30

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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.

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LETTERS

Helen Cox Made Me Feel Welcome and Plugged In to My New Home
TO THE EDITOR

I met Helen when I first joined the *Fenway News* team in 2011, shortly after meeting [then-board chair] Joyce Foster while weeding at Symphony Road Community Garden. Helen immediately welcomed me and could hardly wait to get this then-new Bostonian up to speed, both with the paper and our local politicians (“Are you registered to vote? Excellent! These are our representatives...”). She and I would meet for an outing, lunch when possible, whenever she was in the LMA, where I worked, and sometimes on the weekends when she had “something” she wanted “to run by” me.

When the evenings darkened in the winter, she worried about me walking the eight minutes home from meetings if my husband was unable to meet me. “Call me when you get home.” Then, when I was pregnant in 2014, Helen insisted on driving me home. The first time she drove to my building in Kenmore Square I told her I felt badly that she’d have to drive out of her way. On the way, she settled any protests about further escorts when she said, “You have to cross that intersection!”

Just klike countless other proposition in the Fenway, this was not happening on Helen’s watch.

My daughter is nearly 12 years old now. I still have the gifts Helen gave us when she was born.

In 2015, I sadly left Boston—and, in doing so, the *Fenway News*. I’ve missed the Fenway ever since. But I found a way back in 2020, thanks (??) to the pandemic and the newspaper board’s move to virtual meetings. Helen was ecstatic (she told me so!) that I was “back.” I was ecstatic to be back, even in my distant capacity. Her emails to me to catch up and “check in” are now treasured keepsakes, just like those baby gifts... It was hard when email became a challenge for her. But she could still chat on the phone. Until even that became too difficult.

I have missed her for a while now, and I’ll certainly miss her from here out. The Fenway will never be the same. I know well that Helen was a force with which to be reckoned. It was a privilege to be near that force without being subjected to it.

Most of all, it was an honor to simply know her.

MANDY KAPICA

Brownsberger Praises Lander and Thanks Election Workers
TO THE EDITOR

Last week, election personnel finalized the results of the Sept. 1 Democratic Primary for State Senator. In the end, a recount confirmed that I won re-election by 35 votes.

First, I congratulate my challenger Daniel Lander on a spirited campaign. Second, I thank all of the careful

election workers who counted and then recounted the ballots cast. The publicly-witnessed recount altered the previous final count by only one vote. This should reassure everyone about the election process—not just in this race, but in general.

Early reporting showed me up and then down and then up by varying amounts, but those variations reflected legitimate movements in the counting process. These movements happen in every race after election day as various special categories of ballots are hand counted. Normally, we do not pay attention to microscopic changes because the results are not close. Once all the votes were counted and official results posted (by Sept. 5), the numbers did not change and the recount confirmed them on Sept. 10.

Finally, a close race means that people have a range of perceptions of the candidates and the issues. I will be listening carefully over the coming weeks to better understand that range of perceptions. My cell phone is 617-771-8274 and my personal email is willbrownsberger@gmail.com and I hope all of my constituents will feel free to reach out to me with thoughts.

I am grateful for the opportunity to continue to serve, and I look forward to getting back to work.

Thank you again to all who participated in the election.

WILL BROWNSBERGER
STATE SENATOR, SUFFOLK AND
MIDDLESEX DISTRICT

Lander Thanks Election Workers and Congratulates Brownsberger
IN A STATEMENT

I want to thank every election worker and volunteer who made sure every single vote was counted in this election. And—most importantly—I want to thank every voter who cast a ballot—no matter who you cast it for.

I’d also like to congratulate Senator Brownberger on victory. I sincerely wish him the best because the people of our district are counting on him to fight for them.

While this race did not end as we’d

hoped, I am so deeply proud of the campaign we built. I know we have woken up the State Senate and sent a message loud and clear that the days of delay and inaction must end now.

When I started this campaign on a snowy day in December, no one in the political establishment thought I could win. Most didn’t even think it would even be close.

But we built an incredible coalition of young people, seniors, educators, climate activists, students, renters, union members and more who saw themselves in a movement that believes in delivering on the promise of our state.

This race was never about me. It was about them. We knocked on more than 40,000 doors in every corner of this district, and we made over 15,000 phone calls.

Despite the establishment’s best efforts, this campaign won three of the four communities of this district. After being outspent two to one, our grassroots coalition made clear this district is hungry for change.

And I know—those who saw themselves in our campaign, who believe in an urgent state government that will run towards our toughest challenge—they will stay in this fight.

And I promise I will be shoulder to shoulder with them every single day over the next two years.

To hold our State Senate accountable, and to fight to build a more just Massachusetts: where everyone can afford a home in the communities they love; where no immigrant is afraid to walk down our streets; and where families can thrive.

This race has already shaken up the broken status quo. From Beacon Hill and beyond, we have put our State Senate on notice.

Residents are tired of excuses and ready for real action.

Together, we sent a message to State Senate leadership that Beacon Hill has to work harder and do more. Our work is not finished. We will fight on for the Massachusetts we deserve, because big dreams will never die.

DANIEL LANDER
WEST FENS

NEWSLINES

Simmons Faces Demolition Delays for Historic Buildings

Due to the age of the 13 brick buildings on Simmons University’s residential campus at Pilgrim Road and Brookline Avenue, an additional public process is required before the City’s Inspectional Services Department can issue demolition permits. The Simmons properties do not have any historic protections.

On Sept. 21, Skanska USA’s Carolyn Desmond, representing the Longwood Place developers, submitted paperwork to the Boston Landmarks Commission (BLC) staff, which typically has just 10 days to decide whether a property’s historic significance requires a hearing. (Review the 12 applications—all dated Sept. 12, 2026—or submit comments through tinyurl.com/SimmonsDemoDelay.) On Sept. 28, BLC staff issued a determination of significance for the 12 buildings more than 50 years old. The decision asks for alternatives to demolition. A review of the Longwood Place plan required by the Massachusetts Historical Commission also requested alternatives that could preserve some existing buildings—specifically, Alumnae, Bartol Dining, North, and South Halls, all designed by Guy Lowell and all dating from 1905 to 1907.

The Zoning Code’s Article 85 (Demolition Delay) allows the BLC to delay demolition for up to 90 days with a vote at a public hearing so it can discuss alternatives with the applicant. After the delay expires, the applicant will be able to demolish the buildings and cut down 71 trees. Mitigation and preservation of character-defining features can also be discussed at the hearing. At press time, the BLC had set no hearing date. The Boston Environment Department will provide the date, when set, in its newsletter, as a post on the Boston Office of Historic Preservation’s Facebook page, and in ’s Instagram feed.

Union Activity Picks Up At Hospitals, Schools

- Registered nurses at Brigham & Women’s Hospital voted 2,986 to 215 on Sept. 24 to authorize an open-ended strike until a contract is signed. Negotiations since a one-day strike on July 8 have reached a stalemate, and as of Sept. 29 the union had set no date for a strike. The Massachusetts Nurses Association, which represents the nurses, noted in a press release that the strike vote coincided with new data from the state showing that Mass General Brigham, the Brigham’s parent company, ranked (again) as the most profitable hospital system in Massachusetts, with a total surplus of \$2.3 billion.
- The Harvard Graduate Students Union (HGSU) is expected to authorize its UAW Local 5118 bargaining committee to call for a strike if two-thirds of voting members approve the move. Voting started Sept. 28 and runs through Oct. 6 and comes just four months after union members staged a 40-day walkout over stalled contract bargaining. The union says remaining issues include better processes for reporting workplace harassment, higher and more equitable pay, and protection of non-citizen graduate workers. HGSU represents student workers from Harvard’s Boston and Cambridge campuses, including the Medical School and the Chan School of Public Health.
- A majority of library staff from across the various Tufts campuses—Medford, Chinatown, and the Fenway—signed authorization cards in September to establish a union and affiliate with SEIU Local 888. A flyer at Tufts SMFA says, “Fighting for Dignity, Respect, and Voice on the job, Tell President Kumar to recognize the Tufts library union and to negotiate a FAIR contract!”

PILOT PROJECT PROMISES EXTRA T.L.C. FOR THE FENS

PHOTO: SOLOMON FOUNDATION



This fall two Northeastern co-op students, led by full-time park steward Johnathan Bacdayan (above), will bring new skilled horticultural care to the Back Bay Fens, marking the start of a three-year pilot project sponsored by the Boston Parks Partnership. The BPP brings together Boston Parks & Recreation, Northeastern, and park funders led by the Solomon Foundation. After three years users should see new trees, revegetated river banks, new areas of lush grass for sitting, and more. Responding to a Fenway News inquiry, Lauren Bryant, project manager for the Back Bay Paths project, called project “exciting” and said the department and partnership have already begun coordination to assure that both efforts can operate simultaneously. The BPP looks to test the idea that “better care for the Fens will improve their health and appearance, which in turn will encourage more people to slow down and spend time with their neighbors in a beautiful setting.” For more information about the pilot project, email herbnolan@solomonfoundation.org.

Verdant Setting for a Somber Memorial

PHOTO: JULIETTE-MARIE SOMERSET



Gardener Nasreen Latif speaks at the Sept. 12 memorial for Jesse Oliver, a four-year-old who died in a 1976 fire on the site. The death put a tragic exclamation point on a string of nearly 30 fires that plagued Symphony Road in the mid-1970s. Delving into property records, a group of residents—the Symphony Tenants Organizing Project, or STOP—uncovered evidence of a large arson-for-profit ring. Owners sold buildings to other conspirators at inflated prices, insured them for the fake values, hired “torches” to set the fires at night, then collected payouts. State Rep. Mel King helped STOP get the attention of then-Attorney General Frank Bellotti, who ultimately won convictions against the conspirators in the late 1970s.

—STEVE WOLF

Revised 165 Park Drive Plan Looks Likely to Win Quick OK

BY STEVE WOLF

Three years after winning BPDA approval, the developer of a 117-unit housing project in the West Fens has submitted a notice of project change (NPC) that will get swift processing under a relatively new

Planning Department policy.

Transom Real Estate's first plan for 165 Park Drive called for two seven-story buildings on the parking lot of Holy Trinity Orthodox Cathedral at the corner of Park Drive and Kilmarnock Street. It proposed one building with 48 affordable condos in one section and 69 market-rate apartments in another. The revised plan drops the condos, combines the two sections, and cuts the height by a floor. Despite the lower height, the newer version would only lose five units—112, down from 117—presumably because it has more small apartments.

The filing says that a “lack of available funding to support the construction of new affordable home ownership units” prompted the revision. That appears to point to the stalled mixed-use redevelop-

opment of the Star Market site, known as 1400 Boylston and approved by the BPDA in 2024. Under that proposal, Samuels & Associates would have pumped \$18 million into this project to help meet 1400 Boylston's affordable-housing obligations off-site. Approved more than 30 months ago, the Samuels project has yet to break ground (the supermarket hasn't even moved out). That project faces high interest rates, high construction costs, and a massive surplus of lab space, with some 32 percent of existing supply in the Boston market sitting empty, according to real estate news site propmodo.com.

The NPC argues that the revision qualifies for fast review because it maintains the approved footprint and parking, key requirements under an interim policy adopted in 2024 as part of a “modernization” of development review. The fast-track process includes a public comment period, which ends Oct. 13. Brittany Comak, assistant director of communications for the Planning Department,

said in an email that public comments help shape staff recommendation to the BPDA board as well as any subsequent redesign. Approval looks certain, says Comak, because the BPDA considers this “a straightforward review process, as the change would have minimal impact to [sic] the built environment.”

The updated plan would meet inclusionary zoning requirements by making 20 percent of units affordable. The project would also qualify for LEED Silver certification and as “carbon neutral ready” under Boston's building code.

As a footnote, the plan reflects a relatively recent national trend to address the housing shortage by building housing on land owned by churches, synagogues, or mosques—often well-located, with extra space, and not producing income. Playing on the epithet NIMBY (not in my back yard), proponents call it YIGBY, or yes in God's backyard.

Steve Wolf lives in the West Fens.

RENDERING: TRANSMOM REAL ESTATE



View up Kilmarnock Street from Park Drive. This rendering comes from the original plan approved by the BPDA. The revised plan cuts the building's height by one floor and eliminates condos.

Two Wentworth Engineers, Two Different Paths to Success

BY ED BALLO

With Northeastern University down the street and that more famous institute of technology in Cambridge, it certainly would be easy to overlook Wentworth Institute of Technology. Yet it has established its niche and has become a solid anchor in the Fenway and Mission Hill neighborhoods.

Wentworth traces its beginnings to 1903, when Boston marble supplier and real estate holder Arioch Wentworth left the majority of his estate, estimated at \$7 million, (about \$230 million in today's dollars) to found an industrial school in Boston. The school's aim

was “to furnish education in the mechanical arts.” Only two months after this will was drawn up, Wentworth died. Enter his daughter, Susan, who contested the will and was angered by the redirection of the bulk of her father's fortune to the new school (and away from the family). After some months of litigation, the courts decided to split the fortune in half and the school was born in 1904.

Of Wentworth's many distinguished alumni over the last 120 years, the Urban Detective wants to highlight two.

Russell Sidney Colley (1897-1996)

Russell Colley was Born on July 22, 1897, in Stoneham and graduated from Wentworth in 1918 with a degree in mechanical engineering.

As a youth, Colley wanted to design women's fashion, but his parents would have none of that! Ten years after graduating from Wentworth, he moved to Akron, Ohio to work for B.F. Goodrich. His first innovation was “Riv-nut,” a tubular, internally threaded rivet that could be fully installed from one side and which revolutionized aircraft production.

In the 1930s, he helped develop the aircraft deicer, which became a major product for Goodrich. He successfully tested his deicer in a storm that had grounded every other airplane!

In 1934, pilot pilot Wiley Post reached the jet stream wearing a Colley-designed suit consisting of three layers: a long-underwear base, then a rubberized air-pressure bladder, and finally, rubberized parachute fabric. In time, Post would reach 47,000 feet or nearly 8 miles aloft!

In the 1940s, he helped design Goodrich's XH-5 full-pressure suit for the U.S. Army, and this specialization would lead to his work for NASA and Project Mercury in the 1950s and 60s. In fact, all six original Mercury astronauts, including Alan B. Shepard, the first American in space, went to Akron to be fitted by Colley for their suits. In 1962, John Glenn, first American to orbit the earth, wanted the spacesuit fingertips to light up so he could better see his instrument panel and Colley delivered.

Often dubbed “The Tailor of the Space Age”, Colley received NASA's Distinguished Public Service Medal in 1994, and collected 65 patents during his career. He died at the ripe old age of 98!

John Anthony Volpe (1908-1994)

The name of Volpe resonates on the tongue of every Italian-American of my generation. His climb from humble beginnings in the North End to governor of Massachusetts, U.S. Transportation Secretary, and U.S. Ambassador to Italy mirrors the ascendancy of the Irish some 50 years earlier—the American Dream incarnate!

He was the son of immigrants who had come from Abruzzo in Central Italy on the Adriatic Sea to the North End in 1905. (The Volpes may have known the Urban Detective's great grandfather!)

Volpe attended Wentworth, where he majored in architectural construction and entered the construction business, owning his own firm by the age of 22. During World War II, he volunteered to serve stateside as a U.S. Seabee training officer, achieving the rank of lieutenant commander. “Seabee” comes from a phonetic pronunciation of the initials “CB” for Construction Battalion.

After the war, Volpe entered politics. He took up his first political post in 1951 as deputy chair of the Massachusetts Republican Party. In 1953 he was appointed the state's Commissioner of Public Works. Volpe then moved to the national stage with his appointment by Dwight Eisenhower as the first head of the Federal Highway Administration in 1956, where he oversaw the initial stages of the interstate highway system. Later in his career, after his return to Massachusetts in the 1960s, Volpe took a more nuanced view against unbridled highway expansion and actually was instrumental in killing the “Inner Belt” plan for I-695, which would have cut a swath through Somerville,

PHOTO: DIGITAL COMMONWEALTH



John Volpe and Giovannina Volpe in 1965

Cambridge, the Fenway, Mission Hill, and Roxbury.

Volpe was elected governor of the commonwealth three times: in 1960, 1964 and 1966 (he lost a reelection bid in 1962, and a new four-year term went into effect in time for his 1966 win). He served as the U.S. Secretary of Transportation under Richard Nixon from 1969 to 1973, during which time Amtrak was established. Volpe was also an avid cyclist who biked to work on a folding bike!

Ed Ballo lives in the West Fens. His periodic “Urban Detective” column presents small bites of local history to help decipher the city around you and enhance your appreciation of it.

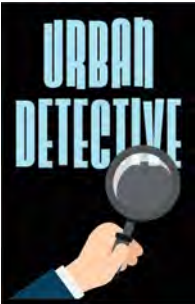


PHOTO: NASA



Alan Shepherd in the suit Russell Colley designed for the Mercury space program.

DON'T LET PET WASTE HAUNT YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD!

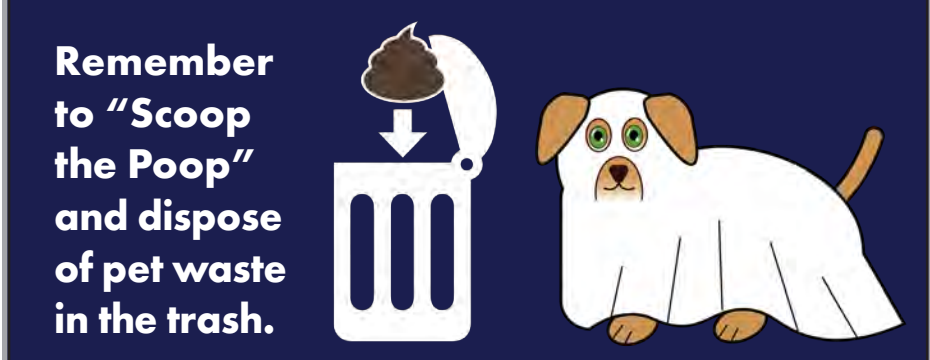


PET WASTE IS NOT A TREAT FOR OUR WATERWAYS!

Polluted waterways? Now thats scary!

Pet waste discarded on the street or in catch basins carries harmful bacteria straight into the waterways we rely on for recreation. Proper disposal of pet waste protects the environment and our waterways from contamination.

Remember to “Scoop the Poop” and dispose of pet waste in the trash.





On Busy Boylston, Walking Get A Boost

Thanks to advocacy by West Fens residents, city transportation staff reprogrammed the signals at the intersection of Boylston and Kilmarnock streets in August to introduce a pedestrians-only crossing phase. The new phase uses the same loud ticking sound heard at Westland Avenue and Hemenway Street in the East Fens, which has had an all-cross phase for several years.



DASHBOARD
TRASH/RECYCLING
PICK-UP

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

STREET CLEANING

Street cleaning (and towing) takes place April 1–November 30. Fenway residents should check both City and DCR schedules to see when street cleaning takes place.

- For the City schedule, visit tinyurl.com/s9fyarf8.
- For the DCR schedule, visit tinyurl.com/4usvd8w3.

CELEBRATING
HELEN COX



Join us on Thursday, October 15, from 6 to 8pm to celebrate the life of Helen Keene Cox.



On what would have been Helen’s 95th birthday, come with stories and memories to share about our friend, neighbor, and maker of good trouble.

6–8PM, OCTOBER 15 • FENWAY COMMUNITY CENTER
1282 BOYLSTON ST. (ENTRY ON JERSEY ST.)

PIZZA, SNACKS & SOFT DRINKS

> MISSION HILL STUDENTS FROM PAGE 1 violations. Greenup said he wants to see Officer O’Rourke’s weekly reports include not just addresses named in 911 calls but also the number of calls for each property in order to assess the broader impact of a particular incident.

At the September CAMH meeting, several residents suggested that District D2 adopt a model from District 14, where the community service officer sends a letter



A Mission Hill party shown on Sigma Phi Epsilon’s Instagram account.

every September to off-campus college students in Allston and Brighton. Shared on Boston University’s website, “Boston Police Department Warning: Loud Parties and Disturbances,” describes penalties for lessees who allow a “noisy and disorderly house,” especially 11pm–3am. The letter, although not overtly threatening, mentions the potential for a criminal record as well as the fines. However, meeting attendees also said the fine for landlords keeping a disorderly house was too low and needed to be considerably higher “to hit their pockets.”

September rush weeks are when the fraternities and sororities recruit new members. Later in October come orientation and Greek Week—Oct. 17 to 23—listed on the Northeastern calendar. Weekend parties are ongoing, triggering predictable sleepless nights and angry calls from neighbors.

At the CAMH meeting, landlord and Mission Hill resident Adam Sarbaugh suggested using the leverage of Inspectional Services Department inspectors. Greenup also said the annual rental registration process could offer an enforcement method for confirming whether a property has a valid registration. The zoning rule limiting to four the number of undergrads who can share a rental could be better enforced (although with five- or six-bedroom apartments the rule does seem illogical).

Strategizing how to use Boston’s multiple licensing and permitting requirements to regulate these unofficial fraternity houses pre-emptively could include requiring lodging house licenses. Boston has only one sanctioned Northeastern fraternity house, at 234 Commonwealth Ave., owned by the Beta Gamma Epsilon Alumni Association. It operates under a lodging house license with a designated capacity of 23 people. The license requires a list of occupants, annual renewals and inspections, and a community process with the Boston Licensing Board and the Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Services.

Another potential tool for controlling parties: the Boston Fire Department requires a Place of Assembly permit for any indoor or outdoor space where 50 or more people gather (events, venues, temporary setups).

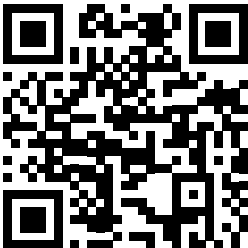
Alison Pultinas lives in Mission Hill.



City of Boston
Planning
Department

The City of Boston’s Planning Department invites residents to participate in planning that will help shape the future of the City.

You can sign up to receive Planning Department emails and learn about opportunities to get involved here: bosplans.org/GetInvolved



A Look Beneath the Bowker

On Tuesday, Sept. 15, the Emerald Necklace Conservancy and the Charlesgate Alliance led a tour focused on changes that will come to Charlesgate from the repair of the Bowker Overpass. Just off Beacon Street, Karen Mauney-Brodek of the Conservancy explained one change already in place: the gray pipe behind her carries roadway runoff to a filtration field that removes some pollutants before releasing the water into the Muddy River. (The fencing beyond the group encloses a pop-up park installed by the Muddy Water Initiative in July). A new ramp configuration will restore some park area, and a proposed realignment of Storrow Drive could reconnect land with shade trees trapped between the road’s inbound and outbound sides—although MassDOT hasn’t committed to that yet.



SENIOR EVENTS

- Drop into the Peterborough Senior Center for a program or two and bring your friends! Open Tue–Thu, 12–3:30pm. For more information call Tracey or Ariana at 617-536-7154.

 - Tue, Oct. 6 at 12pm: Film—MADEA BOO
 - Wed, Oct. 7 & 28 at 12pm: WATERCOLORS
 - Thu, Oct. 8 at 12pm: REMEMBRANCE LUNCH
- Wed, Oct. 7, 14, 21, & 28 at 12:45pm: TECH CAFE with Little Brothers Friends of the Elderly
 - Tue, Oct. 13 & 27 at 12pm: TRIVIA & BINGO
 - Thursday, Oct. 15 at 12pm: MASSACHUSETTS CHAPTER OF NATIONAL ACADEMY OF ELDER LAW
 - Tue, Oct. 20 at 12pm: SILK BLOOMS: ARTFUL CRAFTS—making a fall wreath with Jan Loussaint.
- The limit is 14 participants

 - Wed, Oct. 21 at 2pm: CRAFT HOUR
 - Thu, Oct. 22 at 12pm: HALLOWEEN TRIVIA with D-4 community police officers
 - Wed, Oct. 28 at 12pm: LOW-IMPACT EXERCISES with Simmons University physical therapy students
 - Thu, Oct. 29 at 12pm: HALLOWEEN PARTY

The Arts

PHOTO: FENWAY ALLIANCE

Free, Fun & Festive: Opening Our Doors Turns 25 on Oct. 12



The Hot Tamale Brass Band led a New Orleans-style “second line” family parade to kick off Opening Our Doors in 2012. This year, Brazilian drum corps Grooversity, led by Marcus Santos, provides irresistible beats to close the opening ceremonies at the BYSO stage. The parade will begin its march around the plaza at about 11:15.

BY STEVE WOLF

Something puzzled Kelly Brilliant right off the bat when she took up the role of Fenway Alliance executive director in 2000. An organization of cultural powerhouses—including the world-renowned Boston Symphony Orchestra and the Museum of Fine Arts—had no big public event celebrating the arts. “I was surprised that no such thing existed,” she says.

So, she decided to conjure one up.

That led to Opening Our Doors (OOD), which marks its 25th anniversary on Monday, Oct. 12, with many of the features we associate with the festival today there at the start. Beyond the obvious one—celebrating the variety of cultural activities of Fenway institutions—OOD focuses on getting visitors into spaces they might not otherwise see and experiences they might otherwise not have, all for free. Open access, in fact, represented an obvious goal at the start, the answer to a question Brilliant and Alliance members pondered as they planned the first OOD: “What can we do for the city of Boston as a gift?”

Brilliant credits former MFA director Malcolm Rogers for inspiring the event’s intent and name. In 1995 Rogers literally reopened the museum’s front doors on Huntington Avenue, reclaiming the museum’s main entrance from the Museum Road parking lot.

Since 2001, OOD has grown to 20 participating institutions and—critically, says Genevieve Day, Brilliant’s co-executive director—a similar number of community arts groups for whom Opening Our Doors can serve as a launching pad to greater recognition.

Groups OOD has featured include Zumix, a program that uses “music and creative technology programming...to equip youth with the tools necessary to reach their



At last year’s OOD, a budding theater kid (left) got a taste of costuming whimsy during a backstage tour of the Huntington while two friends tackled art projects on the MassArt Art Museum plaza.



PHOTOS: ANNELLY CAMARGO FOR THE FENWAY ALLIANCE

full potential.” Circus Up, which helps young people overcome social barriers and build resilience through circus-skills training and performing; and the Boston Youth Symphony Orchestras, a respected program that immerses young musicians from across class and economic divides in “music training and performance at the highest level.”

This kind of metaphorical door-opening parallels the physical door-opening built into the festival. OOD provides entrée to normally unseen spaces through, for example, tours of the Fenway Studios building, Symphony Hall, and back-of-house spaces at the Huntington Theatre, as well as the Boston Youth Symphony Orchestras building on Christian Science Plaza, where the opening ceremonies now take place.

The festival creates another kind of access, activation of otherwise passive-use public spaces that creates “stages” for performances. In 2025, for example, OOD added the Lyrik plaza on Mass. Ave., it featured performances and Boston Public Art Triennial installations. Other stages

have included New Edgerly Plaza in front of Whole Foods in the East Fens and Evans Way Park across from the Gardner. This year the spotlight falls on Haviland Place, another East Fens space, located across Haviland Street from the Edgerly Road Playground.

Brilliant and Day don’t mind engaging in a little humble-bragging about OOD’s impact on city policy. Mayor Michelle Wu has supported the event since her days on the City Council, as shown in a photo that Day shared of Wu, Brilliant, and then-State Rep. Byron Rushing eyeing tiers of cupcakes from Oakleaf Cakes at OOD’s 10th anniversary.

Wu credits the festival with inspiring Boston Family Days, a public-private partnership that gives any Boston school student (plus two adult guests) free admission to 26 cultural institutions on the first and second Sundays of every month. Local participants include Berklee, the BSO, the Gardner, the Huntington, MassArt Art Museum, the MFA, and Wheelock Family Theatre. “I think that’s a great example of what community festivals can do,” says

Brilliant.

Day and Brilliant underline the fact that participating institutions pump thousands of behind-the-scenes dollars into Opening Our Doors. Many might normally close on Indigenous People’s Day (formerly Columbus Day) but instead pay staff overtime to run OOD programs. Examples range from an instrument “petting zoo” and guided tours at Symphony Hall to art-making classes at MassArt Art Museum.

“They do not bring their B game,” Brilliant says of the festival’s participating institutions. “They bring their A game for this.”

Steve Wolf lives in the West Fens. Opening Our Doors takes place on Monday, Oct. 12, from 10am to 5pm. The kickoff ceremony takes place 10-11:15am at the BYSO Youth Center for Music, 235 Huntington Ave. (the round building between the reflecting pool and Horticulture Hall on the Christian Science Plaza). Find details at fenwayculture.org/ood-2026-schedule.

IF APRIL IS THE CRUELEST MONTH, LET’S CALL SEPTEMBER THE MOST FESTIVE

SEPTEMBER 16

After two wet and chilly years, the weather gods smiled on this year’s Taste of the Fenway, delivering a partly sunny afternoon. Fenway Forward organizes the annual celebration of local restaurants.



PHOTO: STEVE WOLF

SEPTEMBER 10

A late-afternoon neighborhood block party served up food and fun—like the massive bubble Renée Harmon made for a young fan. Unsurprisingly, the Boston Police ice cream truck, with its free treats, proved popular. Friends of Symphony Park cosponsored the event with Fenway Civic Association.



PHOTO: CREDIT TO COME

SEPTEMBER 24

In addition to food, drinks, and a live band at the Fenway Community Center’s 10th birthday party, Kristen Mobilia received the FCC Community Spirit Award. Left to right, FCC Director Mallory Rohrig; Pasquale Mobilia, Kristen’s father; Kristen; and Romy St. Hilaire, co-chair of the FCC board.



PHOTO: HENRY CLARK PHOTOGRAPHY



PHOTO: LESLIE POND

SEPTEMBER 12

School of HONK—a radically inclusive brass band and all ages music school run by volunteer mentor musicians—entertained at the Museum of Fine Arts. The band hosts similar, community-focused events every Sunday afternoon.

Lily Allen’s Onstage Trashing of Her Ex Passes Its Sell-By Date

BY MICHAEL GUTIERREZ

When does the circus sideshow of celebrity breakups take the main stage? When the British singer-songwriter Lily Allen comes through town on her “West End Girl” tour, promoting her 2025 album by the same name, which is on the shortlist for the most elaborate and highest-profile takedown of an ex-husband in recent memory.

The man with a bullseye on his back is David Harbour. You know him as the gentle giant of a local police chief from “Stranger Things.” Lily Allen knows him as her “sex addicted” partner whose breezy proposal for an open marriage sets off a cascading series of hurt feelings, self doubt, recriminations and, ultimately, separation.

Allen musters an effective stage plot to communicate her vision of herself as a scorned woman on the “West End Girl” tour. All the action takes place within the elegantly, if minimally, furnished living space of a high-priced brownstone—the same one that Allen “could never afford” but Harbour was “pushing forward” in the first song on the album.

The singer inhabits the space alone throughout the set, in various states of undress, rotating from bed, to couch, to fridge, and back to the bed again, talking us through the major bullet points of her dissolving marriage in chronological fashion. Allen rarely missed an opportunity to land a bon mot at Harbour’s expense. And where wit was in short supply, an embarrassingly intimate detail about his sexual proclivities would do.

Scathing ripostes with feminist uptake,

delivered with the authenticity of street parlance rather than op-ed pages, and packaged within irrepressible pop anthems, have always been part of Allen’s musical toolkit. “Hard out Here,” “22,” “The Fear,” are a few songs from her back catalog that joyously skewer misogyny in society. She’s a character who fascinates on the strength of her persona as much as her music. The “West End Girl” album is a clear nod toward what fans have come to expect from her.

If anything was missing onstage at MGM Music Hall, though, it might have been the impish joy. Allen sashayed from bed, to couch, to fridge, and back again to bed, with all the dramatic jouissance of a forced march.

Maybe it was an off night. Maybe the exhaustion of being on the same tour since 2025 has settled in. Maybe participation in such a public simulacrum of her dissolved marriage is starting to feel more like an obstacle to, rather than a cathartic release in support of, healing in the face of traumatic separation. At the close of the final song of the night, Allen made the dramatic gesture of wiping a tear from her eyes, as if the emotion of the confessional had finally caught up with her.

Was it a real tear? Or staged for effect? And why should it matter to us?

Or maybe she’s just entered a new phase in her life with kids, different interests, an acting career that she’s trying to get off the ground, and she can no longer comfortably inhabit the edgy persona cemented in the world’s mind when her album “Alright, Still” broke out in 2006.

There are varieties of musical personas



Lily Allen’s tour revolves around rehashing and reliving her broken marriage.

that simply age out. Hip-hop, a genre that Allen’s music has more in common with than the tween pop idols she’s often toured with, is rife with middle-aged rappers who can’t grow their art beyond the mental and verbal jargon of early adulthood. Fans were aghast when Andre 3000 (Outkast) dropped off the radar for years and reemerged with an instrumental flute album. But he was chasing his creative star. “West End Girl,” an album and tour devoted to confession as fan service, suggests that Allen is not quite ready to chase hers in the music space.

The opening act was a cello sextet, playing instrumental versions of Allen’s older

hits. The cellists were led by a conductor whose main purpose seemed to be rallying the room into a sing-along to fill the performative void that 2026 Lily Allen could not, or would not, fill herself.

The crowd didn’t bite, and the room—full of mostly millennials, mostly women—used the 75-minute prelude (45-minute cello set, 30-minute intermission) to chat loudly, refresh their drinks, and wonder, Where the hell is Lily Allen?

Michael Gutierrez lives in Mission Hill. He is the editor of Hump Day News (humpday.news) and the arts editor of the Cambridge/Somerville Independent.

How a 2,000-Year-Old Story Went Viral in 1600s Holland

IMAGE: NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA, OTTAWA, VIA ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM



Rembrandt’s “A Jewish Heroine (Possibly Esther) from the Hebrew Bible,” created when he was 26, shows us a Dutch-appearing woman of the 1600s. His remarkable brushwork makes the texture of her clothes seem almost tactile.

against a powerful enemy. Second, the Dutch couldn’t get enough of the “exotic” cultures of Asia and South America, a thirst driven by the country’s growing and wildly lucrative trading empire. Third, on an otherwise hostile continent, the Dutch Republic had

emerged as a haven for a small but growing community of Jews.

At the start, a large print puts visitors inside Amsterdam’s Portuguese Synagogue during its dedication in 1675. Dutch Jews rub shoulders with their non-Jewish neighbors, and if the neighbors look like gawkers, who wouldn’t prefer that to the persecution, torture, and murder that awaited elsewhere? The synagogue’s name reflected its congregation’s origins in the Iberian peninsula before Spanish expulsion (1492) and forced conversion in Portugal (1497). The Netherlands, still under Spanish rule at

that point, offered an obvious but risky destination for those planing to flee. You might speak the official language, but you faced torture and death if the Inquisition so much as suspected you of practicing Judaism secretly.

The art puzzles 21st-century eyes: A larger-than-life image of Esther outside the entrance—Rembrandt’s “A Jewish Heroine (Possibly Esther) from the Hebrew Bible,” painted around 1633—looks curiously unattractive for a woman chosen to marry a king based on her surpassing beauty. That dissonance, however, helps us understand that Dutch artists couldn’t see past their own bi-ases. They assumed that ancient female beauty matched their contemporary ideals: hefty and blond. (We call this body type “Rubenesque” for a reason; he doesn’t appear in this show, but Rembrandt’s Flemish peer Rubens famously defined this ideal in his paintings.)

The artists had no better luck with clothes, imagining that a Persian queen in 450 B.C.E. would wear the same cloth from central Asia just starting to appear in Dutch markets, or else whatever any contemporary monarch might wear. Rembrandt lavishes attention on Esther’s anachronistic gown, painting it so meticulously that you can almost feel the textures of rich velvet, silk brocade, metallic filigree, and translucent sleeves, as ethereal as ghosts.

In the partially finished etching “The Great Jewish Bride [Probably Esther]” Rembrandt seems to recover his focus. The subject’s long hair commands attention; each distinct strand represents a line engraved on a metal plate by an artist showing surpassing control of a tricky medium.

But Rembrandt’s works look so-ber next to the melodramatic canvases nearby, signs that his fellow artists were

having a high old time at the easel. Jan Steen’s “Esther, Ashashuares, and Haman” brings together the story’s key players. Esther sits on the left, the star of this scene—and star is precisely right, since stage productions shaped popular ideas of the story. Calm and composed, she’s gotten the outcome she’d hoped for from her husband, Ashashueras. He stands enraged at the center, threatening the genocidal Haman who slums in defeat at right.

Steen’s canvas suggests another reason Dutch artists must have loved Esther: the chance to show off their skills. On top of which, every exotic element—peacock pie, anyone?—would resonate with viewers’ knowledge of the trade network then making the Netherlands the richest country in Europe.

In “The Feast of Esther” Jan Lievens zeroes in on the moment when Esther reveals Haman’s plot. She sits in the center this time, bathed in heavenly light and points an accusing finger at a shocked Haman, on the left. Ashashueras, at right, looks stony-faced, both hands balled into fists. All sport colorful layers of luxuriant dress—velvet, silk, befeathered turbans, and lots of jewels.

This show offers unexpected insights in its survey of the surprising embrace of a foundational Jewish tale by a decidedly non-Jewish culture just as it was bursting onto the European stage.

Steve Wolf lives in the West Fens. “The Book of Esther in the Age of Rembrandt” runs through January 18, 2027.

@ THE CENTER

The Fenway Community Center is open six days a week. Visit fenwaycommunitycenter.org for details.

- Tuesdays, 10am–12pm: OPEN PLAY WITH VIKING SPORTS (ages 4 and under)
- Saturday, Oct. 10 & 24, 11:30am–1pm: CREATIVITY CORNER with Semaj, MassArt CACP Community Art Educator
- Tuesday, Oct. 20, 6–8pm: HALLOWEEN GARLANDS, a textile workshop with Erica Desautels

MICHAL ROVNER'S CONTEMPORARY TAKES ON ESTHER

In her modern vision of Esther, artist Michael Rovner has created works in the form of megillahs, scrolls from which Esther’s story is read during the Purim festival. On view in the Fenway Gallery, the pieces feel ancient and mysterious. In “Esther Scroll: The Kingdom,” a large animated drawing, two large figures—one black, one white, both apparently Esther—appear and disappear in an arid landscape as chains of tinier cloaked women move past them, emerging from and trudging toward the point where the tall screen’s mirrored halves converge. The mysterious work will mesmerize you.

October

CALENDAR

Now ➡ Sun, 10/11

Winner of both the Pulitzer Prize and the 2025 Tony Award for best play, **PURPOSE** explores the explosive, sometimes comic dynamics in a prominent African American. Tue-Thu 7pm; Fri-Sat 7:30pm; Sat-Sun 2pm at the Calderwood Pavilion. Tickets \$100–280 and details at huntingtontheatre.org/whats-on.

Fri, 10/2 & Sun, 10/4

Before the *Messiah*, G.F. Handel produced a different big hit, *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*, “a musical celebration of the human spirit” based on poems by John Milton. **HANDEL + HAYDN** opens its season with the piece, featuring period instruments, chorus, and guest soloists. Fri 7:30pm and Sun 3pm, at Symphony Hall. Tickets \$20-138 and details at handelandhaydn.org.

Sun, 10/4

The Friends of Ramler Park and the Robert and Naomi Waldman Foundation present a concert by **ANNIE & THE FUR TRAPPERS** at Ramler Park. 4pm, 130 Peterborough Street. More info at friendsoframlerpark.org. **FREE**

Mon, 10/5

FIRST MONDAY AT JORDAN HALL presents a program of Steve Reich, Francis Poulenc,

and Beethoven (Symphony No. 2). The series brings together faculty, students, and guest artists for chamber music performances. 7:30pm at Jordan Hall. No charge, but tickets required. More info at tinyurl.com/NECFirstMonday. **FREE**

Fri, 10/9

ANNA ORTIZ VISITING ARTIST LECTURE at the SMFA campus. Mission Hill Building, Big Space C208, 160 Saint Alphonsus St. 12pm. **FREE**

Sat, 10/10

- Huntington Hosts and Spotlight present **VAMPED OUT**, the “hottest, draggiest, bloodiest celebration of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* you’ll ever experience!” 7:30 at Maso Studio, 264 Huntington Ave. Tickets \$28 at huntingtontheatre.org.
- Boston Conservatory’s Hemenway Strings “bring **VIVALDI’S THE FOUR SEASONS** to life with brilliance, energy, and vivid storytelling” at the BPL’s Shaw-Roxbury Branch in Nubian Square. 12pm; no ticket required, but get there early (doors at 11:30am). Sponsored by Vivo Performing Arts **FREE**

Thu, 10/15

Join a tribute to the remarkable life and

impact of the late **HELEN COX**. Bring your anecdotes and memories to share. Music, light refreshments, and fabulous stories. 6–8pm, Fenway Community Center, 1282 Boylston (enter from Jersey Street). **FREE**

Sat, 10/17 & Sun, 10/18

The 31st annual **BOSTON VEG FOOD FEST** comes to the Reggie Lewis Center at 1350 Tremont Street. Learn about (and taste!) plant-based food and lifestyle products. Sat 10am–5pm; Sun 11am–4pm. Details at bostonveg.org/foodfest. **FREE**

Sun, 10/18

Internationally renowned flutist—and Fenway resident—**PAULA ROBISON** presents *The Great Vivaldi*, a program of five concerti plus folk songs and arias. Among other accomplishments, Robison served as co-director of the Spoleto Festivals and helped launch the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. 3pm, Jordan Hall. No charge, but tickets required; reserve at tinyurl.com/RobisonVivaldi. **FREE**

Thu, 10/22 ➡ Sun, 10/25

The Huntington presents Tony Award-winner **LAURA BENANTI** in *Nobody Cares*, a mashup of comedy, storytelling, and songs. Benanti brings “hilarious, heartfelt, and sometimes brutally honest takes on motherhood, people pleasing and the joys of

aging.” Calderwood Pavilion, Thu-Sat 7:30, Sat-Sun 2pm. Tickets \$45–104 and details at huntingtontheatre.org.

Fri 10/23 & Sat 10/24

Nine-member Australian circus troupe **TEN THOUSAND HOURS** presents *Gravity & Other Myths*, a show featuring “jaw-dropping feats,” at the Boston Arts Academy theater. Fri-Sat 8pm; Sat 2pm. Tickets \$68-98 at vivoperformingarts.org.

Sat, 10/24

- ANNUAL LATIN DERBY**. Watch matches between men’s and women’s soccer teams from Boston Latin School and Boston Latin Academy. 4pm. Roberto Clemente Field, Back Bay Fens. **FREE**
- ART SCHOOL OPEN STUDIOS**, a citywide graduate open studios event. Boston University, 808 Commonwealth Ave., 10am–12pm; Massachusetts College of Art and Design, 625 Huntington Ave., 1–3pm; SMFA at Tufts (Mission Hill), 160 St Alphonsus St., 3:30pm–5:30pm. **FREE**

Sun, 10/25

The **BOSTON SYMPHONY CHAMBER PLAYERS** present a program of Schubert, Mendelssohn, and Elliott Carter. Jordan Hall, 3pm. Program details and tickets (\$44-66) at tinyURL.com/BSOChamberPlayers.



PHOTO: ALISON PULITINAS

POSH APARTMENT TOWER OPENS

Across from Symphony Hall tenants have begun moving into a 34-story luxury apartment tower called the Lyra. The Inspectional Services Department issued a temporary certificate of occupancy to Suffolk Construction on behalf of the owners at the end of August. The inbound lane of Huntington Avenue parallel to the underpass has reopened after more than two years of detours because of cranes and trucks on the sidewalk and road. Monthly rents range from \$3,710 for a 444-square-foot studio to \$13,685 for a 3-bed/2-bath penthouse.

COMMUNITY meetings

THU, OCTOBER 8 Join the **BOSTON WARDWORKS ALLIANCE**, a coalition of Democratic ward committees across Boston, for an interactive evening of learning about the nine ballot questions on the state ballot in November and how you can get involved with them. 6:30–8pm. This event takes place virtually on Zoom. Register at bit.ly/BallotQuestions2026.

THU, OCTOBER 8 Join your neighbors for the October meeting of **FENWAY**

FORWARD’S ORGANIZING COMMITTEE, a group of residents advocating together for affordable housing and other neighborhood needs. Dinner will be provided. Contact lruizsanchez@fenwayforward.org for more information. 6pm to 7:30pm, Fenway Community Center, 1282 Boylston St.

TUE, OCTOBER 13 The Boston **WARD 5 REPUBLICAN COMMITTEE** hosts its October meeting. Hilton Boston Park Plaza, 50 Park Plaza. 6–8pm.

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Hidden Histories

Waves of

Lani Asunción & Joanna Tam

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