

Brickbottom ResiStat Meeting Notes

May 5, 2008

Officials Present:

Sen. Anthony D. Galluccio, Middlesex, Suffolk and Essex
Jim Henry, District Chief for Senator Galluccio
Maryann Heuston, Ward 2 Alderman
George Landers, Superintendent of Inspectional Services
Ethan Field, ResiStat Analyst, SomerStat Office
Eric Friedman, Senior Analyst, SomerStat Office

Updates:

Ethan Field gave brief updates on issues raised at the January meeting, including illegal dumping and motor vehicle break-ins. Ald. Heuston gave updates about bike lane striping on Joy and Chestnut Streets planned to begin May 13th. (See presentation.)

- **Police:** Ethan Field urged residents to report any crime they know about. A resident commented that her teenage son had once been assaulted, and she and her son had gone to the Police Station on three occasions to file a report. She said that each time, she had been told that the Police were "too busy" to take the report.
- **Bike Lane:** Residents said they were happy about getting the bike lane, both because of biking, and because it would serve as a reminder to businesses and drivers that it is a residential area. Some residents suggested the city add more cosmetic things that would serve as a similar reminder (e.g. hanging flowerpots from light posts, etc.). They said they would also appreciate the stylized striping at the intersections of Joy, Chestnut, and Poplar. Sen. Galluccio said the striping would be a positive addition, but cautioned residents not to be overly optimistic about the impact on traffic speed. He said similar projects in Cambridge had only had minor impact.
- **Widening Sidewalk:** Residents were excited at the possibility of widening the sidewalk on one side of Joy and Chestnut Streets. They were not in favor of prohibiting parking on one side of the street or of making it resident-only. Residents said that many of them have clients who come to visit them in their studios and parking during the day is already hard enough to find. A resident suggested making one of the streets one-way, though other residents pointed out that doing so might increase heavy-truck traffic on Fitchburg Street immediately in front of the building. **Note:** According to the city's traffic engineer, the road is not wide enough to widen the sidewalk without eliminating parking from one side of the street. Residents must choose whether they want (a) a wider sidewalk without parking, or (b) things to stay as they are, with narrow sidewalks but enough parking.

Other Pedestrian Concerns:

- **McGrath as Path to Lechmere:** Residents said that the McGrath Highway is their primary pedestrian path to Lechmere, the closest T stop. Residents report that the sidewalks along the elevated highway between Brickbottom and Lechmere are not regularly maintained, cleaned, or cleared of snow. Residents reported that during the winter, they often need to walk in the highway itself to get to Lechmere.

- **Somerville Ave Extension and Underpass:** A resident said that while the improvements to Joy and Chestnut were very positive, the Somerville Ave extension and underpass are the primary 'quick' way in and out of the neighborhood by foot, since it leads to Union Square. He observed that the road is not wide enough for a full sidewalk on both sides, and that cars are frequently parked on what sidewalk is there.
- **Jurisdiction Confusion:** Ethan Field said that the city's Division of Traffic and Parking reported they could not ticket cars for illegal parking on the Somerville Ave extension because it was a DCR-managed road. However, a resident said they had once reported illegal parking on that street to a State Police trooper who was parked nearby, and the State Officer said it was city property and that the City was responsible.
- **Business Issues:** Residents reported a number of concerns with specific businesses. George Landers noted the specific concerns and said he would do a neighborhood walk-through with the Neighborhood Impact Team. This is a team composed of himself, and representatives from the Police and Fire Department, and the Board of Health.
- **Trash in Streets:** Residents reported that the trash on the streets and sidewalks isn't only unsightly, it is seen as hazardous. A resident reported not being comfortable letting her young daughter walk through the neighborhood alone because of broken glass on the streets. Another resident describe how a friend felt she had to carry her small dog past the neighborhood rather than letting the dog walk. Residents reported that they didn't think the streets were being swept.
- **Safe Routes to Schools:** A resident reiterated that she did not feel comfortable letting her daughter walk to school through the neighborhood and said she drives her instead.
- **Trees:** Residents reported wanting more trees in the neighborhood, but everyone recognized that there was too little space on most sidewalks to plant them. A resident suggested Linwood and Fitchburg Street, near the underpass.
- **Twin Cities Plaza:** A resident mentioned that the walk signal across the McGrath highway at Rufo Road was not working properly.

Traffic Concerns:

- Residents report that exiting Linwood Street while driving is very difficult. Cars from the McGrath Highway usually have already filled the intersection, so there is no space for cars exiting from Linwood Street. Residents say it seems like the signal at Linwood is not synchronized with the other signals in the McGrath/Washington Street intersection.
- Residents also noted that for those getting on the highway northbound at Washington Street, but wanting to turn left on Highland Ave, it requires crossing four lanes of high-speed traffic.
- Residents both of the above things reinforce a general feeling among residents that the roadways in the area are designed for people passing quickly through the community, and not for people who actually live in the community.
- Residents reported that traffic entering the split between Highland Ave and Medford Street is often backed up by cars waiting to turn left on Hamlet Street and wondered if anything could be done to avoid those cars blocking traffic.

Green line Extension:

Both Sen. Galluccio and a Brickbottom resident had been at a Green Line Extension meeting immediately before the ResiStat meeting. They stressed that they were only repeating what they'd heard, this having been the first night they'd heard any of these details. They reported:

- The tentative site for the Brickbottom Green Line stop would be on Joy Street, relatively close to Washington Street. Residents were somewhat disappointed, because they were expecting that it would be closer to Poplar Street. They re-affirmed that they did not want a Green Line stop immediately next to the building.
- The tentative site for the new maintenance yard would be at Yard 8, an area between the end of Inner Belt Road and the Brickbottom building. Residents were very concerned that this would bring lots of noise and nuisance to residents. Residents, Ald. Heuston, and the Sen. Galluccio were all concerned about the potential loss in tax revenue. Jim Henry mentioned that he had heard about possible designs for an underground maintenance yard, which would reduce noise.
- Residents expressed frustration that the combination of the sites for the Brickbottom stop and the maintenance yard made it feel like they would be getting the negative aspects of the project without getting the positive aspects.
- Ethan Field suggested that a benefit that the EOT could offer Brickbottom residents would be to incorporate pedestrian corridors from Brickbottom to Union Square as a part of the construction of the Green Line spur to Union Square.

Resident Priorities:

Residents were each given five votes to distribute any way they wished between the options described in the presentation, and added new ones not mentioned in the presentation. These issues will be combined with other neighborhoods' priorities to create a resident budget priorities report. Issues that emerge as the highest neighborhood or City-wide priorities will inform the City Departments as they set their goals for the upcoming year. These departmental goals determine how each department prioritizes its staff time and budget. Goals involving state-managed property will help the Mayor prioritize requests to state agencies

<u>Votes</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Issue</u>
17	1	Oppose Green line maintenance yard in Yard 8
12	2	Increase DPW focus on cleanup, tree trimming, concrete/asphalt patching in the area.
12	2	Work with State to improve enforcement of traffic and parking policies along Somerville Ave extension.
12	2	Push DCR to clear snow and trash from sidewalks and staircases along McGrath Highway to Lechmere
10	5	Push State EOT and MBTA to incorporate pedestrian corridors from Brickbottom to Union Square in Green Line Extension design
8	6	Push state to add crosswalks and "yield to pedestrians" signs at (1) Medford Street and Somerville Ave, and (2) McGrath highway at Poplar Street.
5	7	Visit area businesses to share resident concerns about gates, odors, street and sidewalk use, driving behavior, tree and brush trimming.
4	8	Push DCR to add signaled pedestrian crossings wherever there are traffic signals in the Linwood Street / Washington Street / McGrath intersection.
2	9	Widen sidewalks along Joy and Chestnut Streets
2	9	Work with State officials to improve signage and striping in underpass.

1	11	Add traffic-slowing stylized striping at intersection of Chestnut & Joy with Poplar St.
0		Prohibit parking on the west side of Joy & Chestnut Streets

Next Steps for City Staff:

- Relay comment about police being "too busy" to take a report.
- Suggest DPW should consider what simple/decorative things could be done to make resident presence in the neighborhood more visible (e.g. flowers hanging from light posts, more trees where possible.)
- Ensure all city streets (including those in the Brickbottom area) are being swept on schedule.
- Have the Neighborhood Impact Team visit area businesses to ensure compliance with city code for trash, parking, and noise.
- Explore the possibility of widening the sidewalk on one side of Joy and Chestnut Streets, if it can be done without removing on-street parking.

Requests for State Delegation and Agencies:

- Ask DCR: Are the traffic signals at Washington Street & McGrath Highway synchronized with the traffic signal at Linwood Street? Can they be adjusted to ensure that cars can exit Linwood more easily?
- Residents request a pedestrian signal at the crosswalk for crossing underneath and on both sides of the highway at Linwood Street / Washington Street.
- Request that DCR regularly clear snow and trash from sidewalks and staircases along McGrath Highway to Lechmere.
- Request that the DCR clarify whether or not the Somerville Ave Extension is under city or state jurisdiction; if state, then residents request that State Police enforce parking restrictions (particularly parking on sidewalks) on the Somerville Ave Extension.
- Request that the state explore the best way to improve pedestrian access from Brickbottom to Union Square via the underpass – this may involve working with the EOT to integrate such a pedestrian route into the Green Line spur to Union Square.
- Request the DCR inspect the walk signal across McGrath highway at Rufo Road and repair if necessary.

Next Steps for Residents:

- Report all crimes to the police, even if there is nothing that can be done about the particular crime. Knowing crime data helps prevent future crime.
- Call 311 immediately to report debris or trash in the streets, especially if you think it may be hazardous.
- Call 311 or George Landers (617-625-6600 x5610) if there are any concerns about code violations at particular area businesses.
- *If we don't know about it, we can't do anything about it.*