

the Whistler

Newsletter of the Baldwin Neighborhood Council | February-March 2024

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BNC News

NOTES FROM THE FEBRUARY 13 BNC MEETING

Mass Ave Planning Study



Drew Kane, Senior City Planner from Cambridge's Community Development Department (CDD), attended the February 13th Baldwin Neighborhood Council meeting to introduce the Mass Ave Planning Study (MAPS) project. This is a long-range planning study looking at the two-mile stretch of

Massachusetts Avenue between Cambridge Common and Alewife Brook Parkway. This effort is intended to help planning for the next 15 years in areas of housing density and affordability, local and small business support, and enhancing sidewalks and public spaces.

Alongside Mr. Kane, the project is being led by Director of Community Planning Melissa Peters, partners across other city departments, and consultants in planning and urban design, architecture, and real estate and housing.

The project also involves a working group consisting of homeowners, renters, students, business owners, representatives from neighborhood groups, institutional representatives, and professionals with relevant backgrounds in urban design, architecture, and commercial property development.

"We wanted to get a broad spectrum of people," Mr. Kane said.

The working group's role is to reflect community interests, provide feedback, monitor progress, engage other community members, and help establish goals. Mr. Kane said the group plans to meet regularly.

The planning study will be divided into four rounds over 18 months. After the first round

NEXT BNC MONTHLY MEETING

April 9th, 7:30-9:00 PM
ZOOM

- *Meet City Councillor Joan Pickett*
- *Introduction to Activist Afternoons*
- *Introduction to Feast & Fettle, prepared foods*

kicking off the project, the team will first focus on the section of Mass Ave south of Porter Square. From mid-summer through the end of the year, they will then focus on the northern section of Mass Ave. The fourth round will close the project with a public event to reveal and celebrate the final plan.

The team will also host community meetings throughout the four rounds, which help meet the goal of a “more equitable process,” as Mr. Kane explained.

“We are trying to do as much outreach and engagement as possible,” he said.

Mr. Kane distinguished this project from the other concurrent city initiatives along Mass Ave: Partial Construction for the planning and design of separated bike lanes, Impact Study of assessing the new bike lanes’ economic impact, and Combined Sewer and Overflow Mitigation exploring green stormwater infrastructure mitigation measures to prevent combined sewer overflow events.

“Urban design is very much part of this project,” Mr. Kane explained.

The first community meeting for MAPS was held virtually on February 29th. To learn about future meetings and to get more information about the MAPS project, please visit: bit.ly/massavestudy

Q&A

Q: “What are the most significant lessons you and your team learned from the process to install protected bike lanes on parts of Mass Ave and how does it relate to this process?”

A: “For the separated bike lanes on Cambridge Street, we were able to receive input and concerns, such as interest in shortening the distance between crossings, and accommodating mobility issues and summarize the issues in an engagement report.. For this process, we want to take all voices into consideration. However, a lot of the work with respect to

transportation and bicycle planning has been done already, but it will be referenced in our planning process.”

Q: “How do you see the future of the motorized vehicle and how does that fit into this planning?”

A: “The city encourages reducing the reliance on personal automobiles, but I think considering people who use their own vehicles is part of our near term planning, and we need to be able to accommodate that.”

Q: “What’s going to happen to the median strip?”

A: “Historically it was made to reduce pedestrian crossings and facilitate the flow of traffic. The Mass Ave Partial Construction Project is looking to remove those to retain some on-street parking and loading, while making street safety improvements.”

Q: “At one point in this neighborhood, the sewer and stormwater systems were separated. How does that interact with the plan you mentioned?”

A: “The sewer and stormwater system in this neighborhood does not relate to the planning in North Cambridge at the Alewife Brook.”

Q: “How does this project intersect with the affordable housing overlay?”

A: “We want to prioritize the development of affordable housing. Right now, Mass Ave is a maze of different zoning districts that all involve different heights and densities. We want to establish a bit of consistency of zoning along Mass Ave, which will involve increasing height and density. It will be a matter of community input and feedback. We will consider the influence of the Affordable Housing Overlay as we plan for Mass Ave, but those are separate regulations from our work here.”

Q: “With Harvard University moving its science functions to Allston-Brighton, who are you working with from Harvard and what are

their use plans for the buildings that will be vacated?”

A: “We did speak to the Harvard planning team; however, we did not discuss what will become of the buildings that will be vacated. I don’t know enough about their space planning and occupancy plans. We also weren’t told anything by that department that would suggest any major changes. There will be opportunities to ask questions in the future and a member of the working group is part of the Harvard campus planning team. We’ll be in touch with them throughout the course of the project.”



Herbwell Cannabis Update

Arish Halani, owner of Herbwell Cannabis at 1686 Massachusetts Avenue, joined the February 13th meeting to share another educational presentation on cannabis and re-introduce his sister Sareena Halani, Operations Director.

The store has now been open for a few months and had its grand opening on February 10th. Ms. Halani presented the different effects of cannabis and explained how they categorize products by their intended or likely effects.

Herbwell has also created a consumer guide of these effects that are available physically in-store or as a digital download.

Q&A

Q: “There is another cannabis shop opening a few blocks away. What methods will you use to distinguish yourself from the competition?”

A: “The primary differentiating factor is that we

have effectively categorized every product into an effect range so we can answer how each product will affect you, and categorize it in a way that is easy for the consumer to understand.” - AH

A: “We are very focused on consumer experience and want to take on the diligence of a pharmacy when selling anything.” - SH

A: “There are a handful of permits in Porter Square that are not open yet. None of these stores have begun their construction process, so we don’t see them opening any time soon.” - AH

Q: “Do you have any interactions with communities impacted by the war on drugs and is that factored into your hiring?”

A: “We have a contract with the city that says we will hire, and have hired, a certain percentage of people representing different identities. [Ours] is also a minority-owned dispensary permit. We also have another contract with the state requiring us to identify a member of the community that has been impacted by the war on drugs and have some working relationship with them. We have identified a candidate and are working with them to help them open up their own store in Boston.” - AH

Q: “How does your door work?”

A: “As per state regulation, you cannot see any cannabis product from the street. We have a vestibule that protects the dispensary merchandise, so you first walk into a check in area where your ID is verified by an employee and scanned by a statewide system. You are buzzed in once your ID has been verified.” - AH

Q: “What’s the difference between chewing or dissolving in terms of absorption rates?”

A: “Generally, unless it’s fast acting, either method will depend on your digestion.” - SH



Community



HIP HOP FESTIVAL RECAP

Thursday, February 22nd was the 26th Annual Hip Hop Festival! We welcomed hip hop lovers of all ages to the Baldwin School gymnasium to enjoy performances by Bakari JB, KHANscience Wisdom, The Floor Lords, Zakiyyah, King Open Rhythmic Beats Squad, and OrigiNation. Naheem Garcia returned as emcee and Motivate Merren DJ'ed.

The Hip Hop Festival is more than just a showcase of local talent; it's a celebration of a now half-century old genre that unites hip hop lovers across generations. It is also one of our organization's few time-honored events that we've been able to continue after its pandemic hiatus.

As Naheem Garcia so generously puts it: "It's the best hip hop festival in the world." While there may be arguments otherwise, we can't help but believe that, for one hour each February, we are witnessing some of today's most unique and talented hip hop acts.

You can view more photos from the event by visiting <https://bit.ly/hiphopfest2024photos>



THANK YOU 2023 DONORS

Additional donations to Maria L. Baldwin Community Center come through Maud Morgan Arts and the Living Well Network. We're also grateful for the many hours of time donated by volunteer food pantry delivery cyclists and drivers between 2020 and summer 2023.

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2024 OUTBACK & CIT REGISTRATION

Save the dates!
 2024 Outback registration will begin Wednesday, March 13th at 8 PM and Counselor-in-Training (CIT) registration will begin March 27th at 8 PM. Our summer programming will run from July 1st-August 23rd.



Program Age Eligibility Update

Due to updates to our program's EEC license, we will no longer be able to accept children younger than 5 years old. Our license now stipulates that a child must be at least 5 years old at the start of the program. This change will also impact our school year programming.

Beach & Pool Trips

We will not be offering any weekly pool trips this summer. Losing access to the War Memorial Pool, which is within walking distance of our program, created many logistical challenges last

summer. While we hear families' requests for swimming opportunities, we feel that the Gold Star Pool alternative offered to us last year was not a great fit for our program.

We are bringing back weekly beach trips! This summer, we will visit Singing Beach in Manchester-by-the-Sea on Thursdays during weeks 2-7.

Find more information, including tuition rates, by visiting: bit.ly/outbacksummerprogram.



Maud Morgan Arts

STORIES, CRAFT & CULTURE WORKSHOP AT MAUD MORGAN ARTS

Drop into this free family workshop on Saturday, March 23rd! Families are invited to listen to an age-appropriate reading and participate in an art activity reflecting the story's themes.

This upcoming workshop will be led by afterschool teachers Taylor and Yolanda. Stories, Craft & Culture is made possible thanks to grant funding from The Coop. It is free to attend but \$5 per person donations are suggested to help us sustain this program.

- When:** Saturday, March 23rd, 10:00 AM-12:00 Noon
- Where:** Maud Morgan Arts Center, 20A Sacramento Street
- Info / RSVP:** bit.ly/mma_stories

ADULT CLASSES & WORKSHOPS AT MAUD MORGAN ARTS

Registration is open for the spring session of adult classes and workshops at Maud Morgan Arts. Spots are still open in Screenprinting, Immersion Collage, and Still Life Painting. You can find more information and links to register by visiting: maudmorganarts.org.

About Screenprinting (March 1st-May 21st)

Class is structured both for introductory as well as experienced screenprinters. This course covers water-based screenprinting. As always in our studios, there will be an emphasis on non-toxic methods and materials. Techniques covered will include: cut paper and hand-painted (autographic) stencils, monotypes, and photographic emulsion.

About Immersion Collage (March 19th)

MMA is offering another session of this popular collage workshop with artist Jenny Brown (whose work is pictured below). The class is about committing to the materials that are at hand, and the community spirit of sifting through carefully collected materials to build a piece of artwork that reflects a narrative, or create pieces focused on aesthetics.



About Still Life Painting (March 25th-April 15th)

Sit, stay, and paint the finer details in this 4-week still life painting class. Work in layers with heavy body acrylic paint, learn the buttery consistency and painterly techniques guided by artist and painter, Roz Sommer.

City Wide

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TEAM SPRING MAKING CONNECTIONS TRAINING PROGRAM

Prepared by the City of Cambridge

The Community Engagement Team (CET) is a multi-agency collaborative and a program of the City of Cambridge Department of Human Service Programs. This spring, CET is offering the Making Connections training program, a free, in-person, seven-session outreach and engagement training program that emphasizes core skills necessary to effectively engage community members.

This program brings together service providers who are interested in strengthening their community engagement practices while also networking and learning about other programs and resources across the city. Making Connections is designed for providers who interact with the public. This may include: school-based family liaisons, public safety personnel, community health workers, public health outreach volunteers, youth advocacy and leadership teams, and other staff who engage the public.

Participants must be able to attend all 7 sessions on April 23, April 24, April 25, April 30, May 1, May 7 and May 8.

Applications to participate in the program are due March 22nd. For more information, contact cet@cambridge.gov.

Community Calendar

March & April 2024

Tuesday, March 5th		No afterschool programs
Wednesday, March 13th	8:00 PM	Outback registration opens online
Saturday, March 23rd	10:00 AM-12:00 PM	Stories, Craft & Culture Workshop at Maud Morgan Arts
Wednesday, March 27th	8:00 PM	CIT registration opens online
Friday, March 29th		No afterschool programs
Tuesday, April 9th	7:30-9:00 PM	BNC Meeting on zoom
Monday, April 15th		MLBCC and Maud Morgan Arts closed in observance of Patriots' Day

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