



SEPTEMBER
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DON'T
FOREGET:
NEW
ENGLAND
REGIONAL
CONFERENCE
SEPT. 30 -
OCT. 1

**Published by the
Massachusetts and
Rhode Island Chapters
of the American
Planning Association**

New England PLANNING

Massachusetts Chapter & Rhode Island Chapter

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

reprinted from The Green Roundtable, Newsletter, August 2004

Green building continues to accelerate in the market place. The clearest indicator of this is the US Green Building Council's LEED™ program, which is quickly becoming a standard for institutions and governments. However, there's only so much you can achieve with individual buildings. Most of the financial and physical investment in our built environment is in our infrastructure systems, and therefore embodied in our planning practices. Planning principles that specifically address passive aspects of design such as orientation and massing, create the conditions conducive to better individual building design. Additionally, there are some strategies, like water reuse systems, that are simply not feasible in a single building, but can be very effective at a larger neighborhood scale. Especially in a tight urban context such as Boston, where the existing building fabric is one of the oldest in the country, retrofitting water reuse systems in a renovation can be cost prohibitive or impossible due to space constraints. Alternative water management strategies at a larger scale can take advantage of available space for collection and localized distribution and have a long term impact of reducing the cost water treatment and distribution.

Heightened awareness of smart growth practices and transit-oriented development begin to address issues of community health and sustainability, but do not necessarily result in strategies that address natural resource flows and environmental impacts most effectively. The core principles of smart growth include a goal of "protecting" natural resources. What does that mean? Frankly, we are beyond that. "Protect" infers safeguarding a current situation whereas there are not any places in which we build that are unaffected. There are no biological or natural systems that do not suffer from contamination. Therefore we need to go beyond protecting resources and be a regenerative force to resuscitate and revive natural systems where we intervene. That expands the role of the planner beyond policy maker.

After in depth analysis of city planning and development practices around the country, Green Roundtable has observed a consistent omission. There are very few, if any, urban planning approaches that use an overlay of natural resource flows as a guiding design principle. The common approach seems to be to impose our development desires instead of embedding them within the context of natural system dynamics. Our decisions are typically based on response to human (economic, social and cultural) needs and conditions rather than a combination of those factors and the realities of resource flows. This results in costly and ineffective systems to control, distribute and react to environmental conditions. The amount of money spent on water management, waste management, asthma treatment and other effects of human intervention in the landscape are a burden on our pockets and our quality of life.

Some cities, including Boston, are beginning to incorporate more aggressive sustainable design strategies into their typical practices to address these challenges. Water is an excellent indicator of sustainability and is a useful aspect to look at in the following two examples.

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Massachusetts Chapter

by Peter Lowitt, AICP, Chapter President



President's Message:

I hope to see all of you at the annual regional conference in Springfield, September 30 thru October 1. This happens to be the week of the New England States Exposition (The Big E) so it should be a happening time in the Pioneer Valley. Don't miss the Carnival-inspired reception, Thursday evening, at the new Basketball Hall of

Fame.

I want to take this moment to thank the many people who helped create this event. Linda Petrella, the City of Springfield's Planning Director, fought hard to bring this conference to the City. Her capable colleague, Katie Galluzzo (Stebbins) was brought into service as conference chair and she and her entire team deserve our thanks and appreciation. Mary Coolidge cajoled Robert Mitchell, AICP into service on the program committee which did an outstanding job pulling together a dynamic program. Doug Landry, AICP did a fabulous job with fundraising and Peg McDonough handled the books, registration and sponsorships with ease (kudos to Peg). Stu Beckly receives thanks for handling facilities for the conference as well as in-town trolley transportation. Please take a moment to thank the exhibitors and advertisers who helped underwrite the conference. We couldn't do it without them.

Thanks also to the regional members of the conference planning committee: Jared Rhodes, Roberta Groch, Tom Kravitz, Ashley Shea, Christopher Smith, Michael Piscatelli AICP, Sally Pickett AICP and Dan (the conference man) Tuba.

The Roster of Massachusetts Planners will be available for distribution to Massachusetts Planners at the Regional Conference. Be sure to pick up and use this handy reference book.

Anyone interested in helping host a delegation of Chinese Mayors learning about planning who will be visiting Boston in early October (7-8) should contact me at 978-772-8831.

Peter C. Lowitt, AICP

Beyond the Big Dig: Reconnecting Boston

Thomas M. Menino, Mayor
City of Boston, Massachusetts

This summer we have seen the last vestiges of the Central Artery come down and the nascent emergence of the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway. On July 26th, the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway was dedicated in an elegant and exuberant ceremony. Several weeks before the dedication, the creation of the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Conservancy, Inc. was announced by Governor Romney, Massachusetts Turnpike Authority Chairman Matthew J. Amorello, Speaker of the House Thomas Finneran, Senate President Robert Travaglini, Senator Kennedy and myself. Indeed, the pieces are falling into place for the blossoming of 27 acres of new open space and cultural institutions in Downtown Boston.

Although the addition of 27 acres in a downtown setting is extraordinary in and of itself, it would be extremely limiting to think of the benefits merely in terms of the absolute acreage. The taking down of the Central Artery and the creation of the Rose Kennedy Greenway will fundamentally change the way neighborhoods relate to each other, the way people mentally map downtown, the way traffic gets about and through the city, and the pattern and make up of development—for starters.

Our role at the City, then, is to try to stretch the potential impacts of the Greenway to the utmost. Our first effort in this regard is the Crossroads Initiative. It targets the essential east/west connections across the former Central Artery that will weave the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway into the city and reconnect the neighborhoods of downtown. To get at the importance of the Crossroads and the greater potential of the Greenway, it helps to understand the changing dynamics of the city form in Boston.

The Evolving City

In actuality, the Big Dig and the Greenway are a happy synchronicity within a greater trend that is taking place in all of the neighborhoods that surround the Boston Harbor. During the last decade, Boston's entire cityscape has been evolving to reorient itself to the water. In the process, downtown is on its way to becoming a more vibrant, mixed-use part of the city.

Recent years have seen new planning and development projects along many waterfronts of Boston—in East Boston and South Boston, the Fort Point Channel, Charlestown and Downtown. Waterfront areas accounted for more than 60 percent of all growth in the City's population in the 1990's. Likewise, during a similar period, employment rose by 29 percent in waterfront zip codes, in both cases well above the city average. *(These statistics are from a report just released by Save the Harbor, Save the Bay called "The Leading Edge: Boston Harbor's New Role in the City's Economy.")*

The growth and interest along Boston's waterfront is due, in no small way, to the clean-up and restoration of Boston Harbor. To date, the Boston Harborwalk (www.bostonharborwalk.com) has added 31 miles of shoreline walkways from East Boston to Dorchester, with more planned. In 1996, the Boston Harbor Islands National Park was created, increasing access and enjoyment of the Harbor itself. Over 30 islands, ranging from one to twenty acres in size, are part of the park and are accessible by public ferry or private craft.

The renewed interest in the waterfront and the evolution of downtown has been supported by major transit improvements, completed and underway. MBTA water shuttles now run between Charlestown, Downtown, South Boston and the Airport and more are planned. There are new stations and head houses at the Airport, Aquarium, North Station and, soon, at MGH. Shortly after the Democratic National Convention, the elevated portion of the Green Line in the Bullfinch Triangle will come down. And, the first portion of the Silverline, Boston's newest transit line with service from Dudley to the Logan Airport via downtown and South Boston, is open with Phase II scheduled to begin service next year. All of this is in addition to the Big Dig.

The Rose Kennedy Greenway touches on all of the trends already underway in and around downtown Boston. More importantly, it brings us the opportunity to tie them together into a more coherent whole. A perfect example of this is the potential of the Greenway to provide new cultural and recreational facilities in between existing destinations. At one end of the district, in South Boston, there are the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center opened in June, the Children's Museum and the Institute for Contemporary Design, planned for Fan Pier. Not far from the Greenway is the revitalized Theater District and, at the far end, the Fleet Center. Along the length of the Greenway then, there are sites for new institutions. These may include the YMCA adjacent to the North End, the New Center for Culture and the Arts, the Boston Museum Project, and the Darwin Project.

When the Greenway is developed it will help to create a continuous arc of cultural destinations, bringing into focus the vision of a more mixed-use, vibrant, waterfront appreciative city.

Magnifying the Benefit

Many sectors of government and society, local and national, made the Big Dig and the Rose Kennedy Greenway possible. The City of Boston intends to take these political and financial investments and leverage them for the greatest possible benefit to the City and region. Last year, I asked the BRA to hire Ken Greenberg to consider the Greenway in the context of the evolving city and to work with the City's team to strategize how the positive impact of the Greenway can be broadened and, at the same time, reinforce these trends.

The first proposal to come out of Ken's work with the City is the Crossroads Initiative. The initiative centers on a handful of streets that, with the creation of the Greenway, have the potential to form vital connections between neighborhoods—districts such as the West End and the North End, as well as South Boston and Chinatown—neighborhoods that have been isolated from each other for nearly 50 years. At the same time, the network these improved streets and the Greenway will form, will create new ways of looking at and explaining the City.

Targeted improvements to these Crossroads streets will make inviting connections between the Greenway parks, neighborhoods, and cultural destinations. These streets, branching out from and leading to the Greenway, are an opportunity to celebrate gateways—at the water's edge, at South Bay, North Station, South Station and Long Wharf. Finally, tightly weaving the Greenway into the fabric of the City will reinforce the notion that the Greenway is to be a new "Common Ground"—another, year-round center for Boston's social life that highlights the distinctive character of the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway and its districts.

Making Progress

It is exciting to be taking the first step towards for the implementation of the Crossroads Initiative with a feasibility study this Fall, to determine the current state of the designated Crossroads and their potential for improvement. With the information from this study, the City will be able to engage in the design and construction of improvements along the Crossroads, anticipated to begin in early 2005.

