

**Town of Brookline
Preservation Commission and Planning Board
Joint Subcommittee for Beacon Street Design Guidelines**

Minutes of the September 9, 2019 Meeting
Town Hall, Room 310, 8:15 am

Attendees

David King (co-chair), Elton Elperin (co-chair), Elizabeth Armstrong, Preservation Commission;
James Carr, Steven Heikin, and Mark Zarrillo, Planning Board

Staff: Valerie Birmingham, Lara Kritzer, Maria Morelli

Public: Jules Milner-Brage

Background

In 2017 a subcommittee of the Preservation Commission initiated a study of Harvard Street, one of five major thoroughfares in Brookline, and prepared design guidelines intended to better ensure that any redevelopment would respect the character defining features of this culturally significant neighborhood as it evolves. A spate of major impact projects in a small radius underscored the need for such a study: Five prominent sites on Harvard Street are 40B developments, which will convert characteristic one-story retail of the streetscape to 4.5 story mixed use, a viable concept for other sites. Although the draft report has not yet been formally adopted, design guidelines are a necessary foundation for any comprehensive planning and redevelopment.

Like Harvard Street, Beacon Street has been the site of several major impact development proposals, public works projects, and multimodal initiatives. The Commission recommended forming a joint subcommittee with the Planning Board to prepare design guidelines for Beacon Street, the entirety of which is in the National Register of Historic Places, to conserve its character as it, too, evolves. Largely one-story commercial with four-story residential nodes, Beacon Street also features outlier mid- and high-rise multifamily structures, some of which are successfully integrated.

Major Themes of the Discussion

The first meeting of the subcommittee served to share perspectives about the Committee's scope of work. Although the catalyst for forming the Committee was the need to document character-defining features of the built environment to guide any redevelopment of private properties, some members encouraged the Committee to consider the public realm and envision what Beacon Street could be. Member James Carr undertook a Beacon Street analysis for the Committee to consider.

This summary lists the major themes of the discussion. The co-chairs recommended reading Mr. Carr's report and preparing to refine the Committee's goals and scope of work for the October 7 meeting.

1. Identify Beacon Street stakeholders and their vision and concerns
2. Document character-defining features of this National Register District
3. Compile a repository of all the studies, planning documents, and initiatives that involve Beacon
4. Ensure that infrastructure projects (trees, pedestrian bump outs, utility poles) managed by various departments are coordinated to leverage efficiencies and sustainability and not run at cross-purposes
5. Create better connections across Beacon
6. Consider curb control and loading zones for ride share and deliveries

7. Be prepared to assess when MBTA changes (for e.g. double-length train cars) might exacerbate Beacon Street's challenges (make it even more difficult to cross the boulevard)
8. Work on a vision of what the public realm could be

Existing Policy/Planning Documents and Initiatives Pertaining to Beacon Street

Architecture and Development

- Beacon Street National Register District Form B (Mass. Historical Commission)
- Brookline Climate Vulnerability Assessment 2017
- Brookline Housing Production Plan 2017

Design Guidelines for Public Realm

- 1990s Beacon Street Guidelines
- Planning Board's Design Guidelines for public benefits in the public realm
- DPW Design Guidelines for Infrastructure

Infrastructure Planning

- Complete Streets Program
- Beacon Street Green Transport (Multimodal) Program
- Bicycle Bridle Path Feasibility Study
- EV Charging Infrastructure Project
- MBTA Signalization Upgrades
- Town Tree Planting Plan

Prospective Amendment to Zoning Bylaw

- Site Plan and Design Review
- Fall 2019 Warrant Article 20: Micro-Units

Resources recommended by Committee Members

- "Curb Control", Planning Magazine [PDF under separate cover]
- *Urban Divides*, Perspecta 50, Yale School of Architecture, MIT Press
- *Great Streets*, Allan B. Jacobs, MIT Press
- Olmsted Early Planning, Emerald Necklace

Goals for October 7 Meeting:

- Identify Beacon Street stakeholders
- Establish the goal of the joint subcommittee
- Define the scope of work to be undertaken
- Create a timeframe and topics for monthly meetings
- Read draft analysis prepared by James Carr

Next Steps for Staff:

- List related studies and policy documents affecting Beacon Street
- Note the scope of studies for other major thoroughfares (Boylston Street, Comm Ave)
- Create a webpage that (a) makes the Committee's ongoing work readily available to the public and (b) serves as a repository of reference documents for the Committee

Scheduled Meetings: October 7, November 4, December 2 at 8:15 am in Room 310