



BAY VILLAGE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION, INC.

Hi Bay Village Neighbors:

It was good to see so many of you at the Block Party in September! I am happy that the event turned out so well after our frantic last-minute change to an indoor venue. My sincere thanks go out to Mark Fischer and Chloe Achinger of the Revere Hotel, who patiently held space for us and helped us scramble to get set up. Kudos to all of our Social Committee, especially Nan Rubin, who managed to remain poised and graceful during a whirlwind afternoon while adjusting our food order, preparing the room, and jumping into the truck to re-route the team delivering the tables and chairs. Thanks also to Kim Kulasekaran, who came up with fun events to keep the many children engaged. It is great to see such a cross-section of generations at the event, and we were happy to host Senator Aaron Michlewitz and Ed Flynn's wife Kristen, who ably covered for the Councilor, who was attending the National League of Cities Conference.

Following a successful outdoor Executive Committee meeting in Bay Village Park in September with a fairly light agenda, we returned to Zoom in October. Several topics were covered:

Special Guest: Stefanie Seskin – Active Transportation Director - BTB

Stefanie Seskin of the Boston Transportation Department joined us to discuss the City's plans to expand the bike lanes on Charles Street South. Her presentation is attached to the newsletter email in a separate link. At this point, things are still very much in draft stage – they are looking for our input before moving forward with design. We had a lively discussion of various issues, notably:

- Stefanie is very aware of the Eversource project to modernize the Carver Street Substation, which has blocked off lanes on Charles Street South and has caused the loss of parking spaces and periodic disruptions to traffic that have reduced the street to one lane. The City will work to coordinate the bike lane build around this.
- The City is also mindful of the dangerous street crossing conditions between Elliott Norton Park and Bay Village Park – their intent is to coordinate the bike lane project with a re-working of the crosswalks
- There is also a plan by Mass DOT to replace the Arlington and Tremont Street bridges over the Turnpike, and they would like to coordinate with these projects as well. This was the first we had heard of this project, and it is significant for BVNA, as it sets the stage for potential future air rights projects. Stefanie was aware that the small, triangular Parcel 19 adjacent to Marginal Road/Bay Street had been previously designated as green space, and she was hopeful that this could be made as part of the bridge project. It's clear that the planners are mindful of potential future development over Parcels 16-18. We will need to keep on top of this.
- Brian Boisvert reminded Stefanie that as a historic district, Bay Village should be planned with the red tactile crosswalk pads (as opposed to the yellow pads incorrectly installed at the Arlington Street crossing and shown in Stefanie's presentation) – she took this point, and also

indicated that there was discussion in the City of potentially upgrading to more expensive cast iron tactile pads, which would be preferable as both an aesthetic and functional upgrade.

Stefanie promised to keep us in the loop as part of a formal process the City will be managing to get community feedback on potential design variations. Many people in the neighborhood are very interested in this project – we have a number of bike advocates, and there is general agreement that the too-wide Charles Street South would benefit from traffic calming measures, but we are also mindful of the never-ending cycle of construction that has disrupted this end of the neighborhood.

Social

With the Block Party behind us, Halloween is next up! Huge thanks to Kim Kulasekaran for organizing an amazing program for 2022. Our first Halloween block party will be on Winchester Street between Church and Arlington on Saturday, October 29th, between 3-8 PM. In the event of rain, we will push to Sunday at the same time.

The party will be full of fun events for all, including boo-ling, candy corn hole, a costume parade with awards, a pumpkin carving contest, and more. There will be pizza and refreshments available at 5 PM, and BYO Desserts to share. There will also be and an outdoor movie at 6:30, *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (bring your own chairs for added comfort). We hope to see goblins of all ages! If you'd like to make a suggested \$20 donation to help us defray costs of this event, please drop a check to BVNA to Kim through the mailbox at 35 Winchester Street, or catch us at the party itself.

City Services

Mark your calendars for the morning of Saturday, November 19th (the Saturday before Thanksgiving Weekend) for the annual fall clean up. The meeting place, as usual, will be the Bay Village Garden on the corner of Melrose and Church Streets, and we will begin at 8AM. The usual parking restrictions will apply on this day, and we will work with the Revere Garage to secure temporary access where residents can put their cars while the streets are being cleaned. Our thanks go out to Kim Crucoli of the Office of Neighborhood Services for helping us make the special arrangement on this day, which is two months later than the City's official "Love Your Block" program this year. As a reminder, we hold this event late in the fall because our goal is to remove as many fallen leaves as possible, and clearing the leaves keeps the drains clear as we approach the winter. Even if it's a chilly morning, we'll provide coffee and donuts as well as brooms and rakes. It's a great occasion to meet up with neighbors and help make our streets and green spaces look their best.

Parks –

In Memoriam: Tom Kauycheck (1941-2022)

As I was working through final edits on this newsletter, I was informed that Tom had passed away. I thought it most appropriate to include a few words in his memory in the Parks section of the update, given that Tom devoted an enormous amount of his time to tending plants and making improvements to Bay Village Park at the intersection of Broadway, Fayette and Melrose. Even as his health was failing in recent years, Tom did his best to keep the park colorful and lush, and he loved to spend time outdoors – to borrow the Jane Jacobs terminology, he was the "eyes on the street" on Fayette for many years. He was particularly vigilant about keeping his block clean, picking up stray trash and waking up early to meet the garbagemen and assure everything was tidy in their wake. Fayette Street will now be a bit more lonely, and it is difficult to imagine a spring planting season

without his involvement. I'll be huddling with my BVNA Executive Committee colleagues over the next week to determine the best way to honor his memory.

Dog Park

We are looking for volunteers to help us spread the mulch away from the edges of the Dog Park on Monday October 17 from 5-7 PM, and then again, once the site has been prepared, to help us spread a new load of wood chips on Friday October 21 from 5-7 PM. Contact parks@bayvillage.net for more information.

Planning and Licensing

We appear to have reached the end of one of the longest “boom” real estate cycles on record, and as a result, activity of the Planning and Licensing subcommittee has been at a relative low ebb.

At our September meeting, Andy Isaacson presented his plans for a renovation and modest expansion of 32 Fayette Street – this work is all being completed “as of right” (that is, it doesn't require any zoning variance), so this was done as a courtesy to the neighborhood. Andy has also had discussions with direct abutters, so they know what's coming. In recent weeks, work has started on the condominium redevelopment of Our Lady of Victories. One of the first steps will be the removal of the non-historic stairs at the front of the building, which will require some near-term disruption on Isabella Street – the goal for the bulk of the project is for most of the work and access to the site to be handled from the rear.

On the plus side, we did hear that the BPDA did approve directing the second tranche of 212 Stuart Street mitigation funds directly to BVNA – this apparently happened at a Board meeting some time ago, but we found out about this only recently. We will keep the neighborhood informed as to when the funds are actually received, and we will work carefully to ensure these dollars are spent only as intended, on longer-term improvement projects.

ADCO

Mayor Wu announced a shake-up of the Zoning Board of Appeals, which many of us felt was long overdue – the ZBA long seemed to be a rubber-stamp for the whims of the BRA/BPDA, and inconsistent in its treatment of different neighborhoods. That's the good news. The bad news is that the Mayor's appointments hail from: West Roxbury, Mission Hill, Roxbury, Mattapan, Dorchester, Eastie, Jamaica Plain, West End, Roslindale, Brighton, Hyde Park, Dorchester, and Roslindale. Which is to say: triple-decker Boston is very well represented, while the downtown neighborhoods aren't represented at all, unless we count Katie Whewell of the West End, whose full-time job as the Chief Planner for Newton (!) suggests that she, too, has deep experience where lawns are a thing, and few buildings exceed four stories.

As a result, the Alliance of Downtown Community Associations sent a strongly-worded letter of protest. Time will tell whether our fears will materialize – will the ZBA continue to be obsessed with minor quibbles over dormers and accessory apartments in outlying neighborhoods, and blithely dismissive of its own recently-written code downtown, as in the recent case of 380 Stuart Street? And what is to become of the BRA/BPDA? In a perfect world, the neighborhood affiliation of ZBA members shouldn't matter, but the prior chairperson, who hailed from Roslindale, seemed to agonize endlessly about whether four-story developments in Rozzie Square were “too big for the neighborhood” or provided enough parking, while being a mute rubber-stamp for city-center projects that were 50 or more times larger. Having recently watched the Shreve building turned to

rubble, and after years of wrangling to make large projects more friendly to their immediate neighbors and to street-level pedestrians, we are nervous that our architectural heritage will continue to be at risk, and fearful that the “solution” to the housing crisis will be viewed entirely through the lens of maximizing the number of subsidized units in a handful of soulless, value-engineered towers downtown. If, instead, the new ZBA gives priority to modernizing the archaic, fundamentally suburban orientation of Boston’s zoning outside the core, which is essential to cost-effectively increasing the City’s housing supply, I’ll happily eat my words.

Planning for Next Year

The Executive Committee voted to combine our Annual Meeting with our November Executive Committee Meeting on November 7th. We are going to try to do this in person, details to come! We also authorized a nominating committee to propose a slate of EC members for the coming year – Trish and I will be joined by Sarah Herlihy, Nancy Morrisroe, Kim Kulasekaran, Daniel Krulewitch, and Scott Orzell. As has been our custom, we endeavor to keep EC membership broad and to make sure that we have multiple people working on each of our subcommittees. We would very much welcome the involvement of residents new to Bay Village! Contact president@bayvillage.net if interested.

Then and Now – LGBTQ Bars and Clubs

No history of Bay Village would be complete without describing the neighborhood’s role as a social hub for Boston’s LGBTQ community over the course of many decades. While Bay Village was mostly under the radar of several generations of Greater Bostonians, even those who didn’t know our official name understood that Park Square and the area between Stuart Street and the Mass Pike was a “gay neighborhood,” with multiple establishments patronized predominantly by a LGBTQ clientele. Dozens of LGBTQ bars, clubs, restaurants, cafes and other hangouts here were part of a thriving social scene that evolved throughout the twentieth century.

But despite their number, their popularity, and their significance in the history of Boston, the photographic record of these institutions, particularly in the early years, is comparatively slight. This isn’t surprising. Police harassment was the norm until recent decades, and “official” Boston, including the Globe and other newspapers, seemed to be at pains to hide or ignore the City’s LGBTQ community. It was little reported upon and seldom photographed – and when an event was too large for the newspapers to ignore, it was typically cast in a negative light. Much attention has been given in recent years to the destructive impact of urban renewal plans on the neighborhoods of ethnic minorities and poor people, and the same can be said of its impact on the gay and lesbian community. The BRA “renewal” projects that greatly reduced and re-defined Bay Village/Kerry Village bulldozed the commercial corridors that had been meeting places for people from across all of metropolitan Boston. There is a lot of LGBTQ history buried beneath the State Transportation Building, the reconfigured Stuart Street, and Elliot Norton Park.

In the earlier years of the twentieth century, most of Boston’s gay and lesbian social scene was confined to private homes and unofficial clubs, as public displays of non-hetero behavior could result in arrest. Well into the 1960s, a law prohibiting “appearing in public in masquerade” was used to detain people. Unsurprisingly, the community developed a network of code words and signals to facilitate discreet communication. The first public bars and clubs that catered to an LGBTQ clientele were not owned or managed by members of the community – they were instead often run by the mobsters of the day, who sometimes also trafficked in other activity that was considered illicit – drugs, prostitution, gambling, money laundering – and were willing to accept dealing with the police as a cost of doing business. In his series of books about Whitey Bulger,

Howie Carr has mused about the likelihood that Whitey was bisexual, based, it seems, on Whitey's frequent appearances at LGBTQ bars in Boston and elsewhere, including Jacques and Mario's in Bay Village. Carr seems to find this amusing, but is likely missing the point: members of the LGBTQ community were frequently the targets of extortion rackets and, like other marginalized groups, less able and less likely to appeal to the authorities if victimized. There was money to be made selling to and preying upon an underserved group, and recollections of community members suggest that Whitey was far from the only person with ties to organized crime who frequented, and in many cases managed these establishments.

Walking through Bay Village today, it's difficult to appreciate how numerous the LGBTQ bars and clubs once were: only Jacques remains. Everyone in Bay Village knows Jacques, which opened in 1938 and was explicitly catering to an LGBTQ crowd by the 1940s. At different points in its evolution, Jacques has catered to gay, lesbian, and trans communities. The long and frequently contentious relationship between Henry Vara, the owner of Jacques, and the Bay Village Neighborhood Association is too complex to summarize here, and would itself be a worthy subject for a future newsletter. From 1965 to 1976, Jacques had a sister club, The Other Side, across the street, which was at one time an even greater focus of neighborhood ire. Crowds were loud and spilled onto the streets, and residents complained about prostitution and drug dealing in the neighborhood by club patrons.



These days, the corner of Broadway and Piedmont is quieter. Broader societal acceptance of different gender identities and gender expressions has brought an increasing number of cisgender straight patrons to Jacques, and the greatest source of noise are squealing parties of bachelorettes. Whether this is a positive development is not clear: while the stretch limos with New Hampshire plates presumably keep Jacques' cash registers humming while other LGBTQ bars have failed, what was once a refuge for a very marginalized community risks becoming trivial source of entertainment for a clientele that is fundamentally (pardon the pun) unengaged.

While Jacques and BVNA battled for many years, relations between the Neighborhood Association (which has always had a significant LGBTQ membership) and some other bars was much less fraught. The Napoleon Club, at 52 Piedmont Street, first opened as a speakeasy in 1929, was reconfigured as a gay bar in the early 1950s, and known as a piano bar for much of its history. The atmospheric multi-room Napoleon catered to an older and more sophisticated crowd, and famously hosted celebrities like Liberace and Judy Garland, who visited the club every night for a week shortly before her death in 1969. Before it closed and was converted to condos in the late 1990s, the club hosted BVNA holiday parties – and many BVNA old-timers will contend that we’ve yet to find a venue that matched it for warmth and charm.

Other significant clubs included the Midtown Rendezvous, in the basement of what is now the Charles Playhouse – this catered to lesbian patrons in the 1950s, and was one of the first, if not the first, establishments that allowed same-sex dancing. Another dancing pioneer was the Punch Bowl, a large club owned by Henry Vara that stood from 1946 to 1969 on Stuart Street, where the South Cove Plaza senior housing complex now stands. At both the Rendezvous and the Punch Bowl, patrons understood that when the lights started flashing, that was a signal to stop dancing or trade for a partner of the opposite gender – a raid by the vice squad was imminent.



69 Church Street, where condos are now being completed, also has a very long history. More recent arrivals to Bay Village will remember this building as the site of the restaurant Erbaluce, and before that, Dedo – but for decades prior, the two-story venue was the site of Mario’s restaurant and a number of LGBTQ bars and clubs, operating at different times as Luxor, Jox, and Sail Aweigh. The upstairs space in some iterations was configured for dancing, and for others as a more relaxed piano bar.

The first establishment in Boston actually owned and managed by the LGBTQ community was 12 Carver Street, a bar established in 1958 by Roland Lachance and Phil Baiona. It survived over two decades of raids by the police and sanctions by the City, but it ultimately couldn’t avoid the wrecking ball as part of the Park Square urban renewal project in 1979. Frederick Langone, unofficially the “Mayor of the North End,” and a City Councilor from 1961-71 and 1973-83, was one of the most outspoken proponents of demolition, claiming that “we will be better off without these incubators of homosexuality and indecency... we will uproot this cancer in one area of the city.” In the 1970s, the space upstairs at 12 Carver was known as “Herbie’s Ramrod Room,” a leather bar that moved to 1254 Boylston in the Fenway after the building was reduced to rubble. There it was simply known as Ramrod, and enjoyed success for many more years, as City government slowly became less hostile to the community.

The recitation above merely scratches the surface. Working from the History Project's excellent Bar Collection (historyproject.org), newspaper archives, and interviews, Tessa Bahoosh has mapped out the historical locations of LGBTQ nightlife across Boston, and Bay Village and its immediate surrounds are buried in notations. Vicki's and Cavana's were lesbian bars that operated in the once lively jumble of streets that was ultimately buried under Elliott Norton Park and the Mass Pike Towers projects; Warrenton Street was at one point home to Diva's/Venus, the Fan Club, the Boy's Club, and, of course, Chaps; in addition to Jacques and the Other Side, Broadway was the location of the short-lived Kerry Village Grill and the basement Empty Barrel; the obliterated Carver Street was also the home of the Lion's Den upstairs at 12 Carver before Herbie's Ramrod Room opened. A host of other nearby venues, including some restaurants on Boylston Street and a bar in the Park Plaza hotel, catered to a mixed crowd but were understood to be LGBTQ friendly at a time when that was unusual.

And now they are all gone. Except for Jacques, which limps on.

From the standpoint of civil rights, much has changed for the positive in the last hundred years. Prior to the Second World War, LGBTQ nightlife in Boston was primarily an underground, private affair, as community members faced the prospect of jail time; starting in the 1950s, public bars and clubs emerged, although for a long while these establishments were barely tolerated and frequently harassed; by the 1970s, post-Stonewall, LGBTQ venues were more visible, and advertising finally became possible. They prospered in the 1980s and 1990s despite the trauma of the AIDS epidemic. Legal progress for the community came more slowly – as late as 1985 the Dukakis administration pulled foster children from gay parents, and sodomy statutes weren't eliminated until 2002. When same sex marriage was legally recognized in 2004, it may have been the first instance in which Massachusetts was actually a pioneer in recognizing LGBTQ rights.

Prejudice still lingers, of course, but same sex couples, transgender and non-binary people are much more likely to be welcomed in places that were completely off-limits not very long ago. With greater social acceptance, and the ubiquity of the internet as a means of meeting people – which has had a transformative impact on *all* bars and clubs – LGBTQ-dedicated venues have struggled to survive. But you don't have to be a member of the LGBTQ community to wonder if something has been lost. As we all seem destined to have fun in the same generic spaces and meet each other on the same iPhone apps, we seem to have achieved greater inclusion at the expense of a different sort of conformity. Bay Village will see many more upscale condos, but there will never be another Napoleon Club, and that's a shame.

Until Next Month (or Two),
Tom

Sources:

The Non-Profit History Project (historyproject.org) is the go-to site for a trove of information about the history of Boston's LGBTQ community.

Mark Krone, a Board member of the History Project, wrote a series of articles for [Boston Spirit Magazine](#): "Gay Boston in the 1940s" in the July/Aug 2014 Issue, and "Gay Boston in the 1950s" in the Nov/Dec 2014 Issue, available online both in the Boston Spirit archive and at markthomaskrone.wordpress.com

Scott Kearnan, "When Did Boston's Gay Scene Get So Straight" in [Boston Magazine](#), Dec 2017