Uncertainty Is Looming For Future City Budgets

By Ian Stevenson

With multiple vaccines being distributed across the country, the end of the Covid-19 pandemic is in sight. But its effects on city finances may be felt for years to come.

Though the economic impacts of Covid-19 are yet to be seen in city property valuations, which operate on data from the prior year, Boston is heavily reliant on real estate taxes to finance city services. In fiscal year 2021, the city expects to bring in $2.7 billion in property taxes, a 6.6% increase of $166 million from last year. After years of declining state aid, property taxes now account for nearly three quarters of the city’s budget.

In 2020, this reliance on property taxes left Boston more financially stable than other cities that rely more on excise taxes, which can see larger swings after drops in market activity.

“It’s ironic, I and many others have long been pushing to have a more diverse tax base so that the cost of running the city is not borne so heavily by property tax alone,” Kenzie Bok, Councilor for District 8 and chair of the Ways and Means Committee, told The Boston Guardian.

What Is the Mayoral Line of Succession?

By Ian Stevenson

When Mayor Marty Walsh becomes President-Elect Joe Biden’s Secretary of Labor, he will leave office only ten months before a regular election. When he leaves, the City Charter stipulates that the President of the City Council, Roxbury City Councilor Kim Janey will become acting mayor.

But who would become mayor if Councilor Janey cannot serve? The Charter notes that another councilor would be elected acting mayor by the Council. This process could be repeated, but there is no further guidance in the Charter about succession.

“I don’t believe there’s ever been an instance in history where it needed to travel along the route of succession any further than [the council president],” John Nucci, who served on the Council in the ’90s, told The Boston Guardian. The Charter also notes that the acting mayor “shall possess the powers of mayor only in matters not admitting of delay.”

“The Law Department is reviewing case law and preparing a briefing for the Council President and the City Council regarding the question of powers,” Emma Pettit, a spokesperson for the Mayor’s Press Office, wrote in an email.

Preservation Leaders Rally After Wild year

By Justin Roshak

Nonprofits involved in the downtown’s historic identity are looking to the future after a year of canceled fundraisers, a scramble to remote organizing, and plenty of historic events.

“Thankfully we were able to avoid our worst fears, which was a precipitous drop off in support,” said Dr. Greg Gales, executive director of the Boston Preservation Alliance (BPA).

However, the number of BPA event sponsors dwindled from 140 to about 100, many of the roughly 40 member organizations were unable to pay their membership dues. But BPA leadership granted a one-year grace period.

A Tale of Two Rivers: Upper & Lower Charles

By Justin Roshak

The Charles River’s latest report card on health and safety is finally out. It covers 2019 and shows, for the first time, the sharp divide between the suburban upper and urban lower stretches.

The lower basin between Boston’s downtown, Cambridge, and Watertown scored B, the same overall grade as the previous year. That grade is based on how often the river exceeded safety limits for E. coli, toxic cyanobacteria, and raw sewage.

The downtown waterfront was safe for boating about 90 percent of the time, and safe for swimming about 75 percent of the time, but only in dry conditions.
**City Budgets**

Continued from Page 1

“However, it happens that in this particular crisis, because of the way that short-term economic activity has been so hurt by the pandemic, that over-weighted tax base towards property tax has actually had a major stabilizing effect on Boston finances and helped ensure the city can provide public services without layoffs to a much more consistent level than other cities in America.”

But if upshot of the Covid pandemic include an exodus of residents, a decline in commercial property value, and a cooling of Boston’s construction boom, these shifts would decrease the city’s tax base. Due to state law limiting rapid tax hikes, increasing the annual tax intake is partially reliant on new buildings.

“We’ve been in this nirvana for the last 10 years, with commercial prices being very elevated, but this may be an inflection point,” Steve Wintermeier, managing principal at Fenway Financial Advisors, told the The Boston Guardian. “We may see commercial property values drop, and that tax has to land somewhere, so it lands on the middle class. It’s all [yet] to be determined, but that’s how the math works.” In recent years, Boston’s robust commercial property values from growth and new development have led the city to rely on businesses to make up the majority of the tax revenue.

Though the gap has been narrowing, businesses in 2021 will pay 58% of property taxes despite being only 33% of the city’s property value, according to data analyzed by the Boston Municipal Research Bureau.

But commercial property values could diminish if, after a pandemic that has forced many people to work from home, office space in cities becomes less attractive.

“Are businesses going to say, ‘I can do my job and be a successful business with half my [office] space and [only] bringing half my workers in?” Elaine Beattie, a senior strategic advisor at the Research Bureau, told the The Boston Guardian. “How much of that is going to become the reality?”

The city’s residential value could also decrease if Bostonians permanently head for the hills.

“I’ve heard from realtors that the high end [housing] market is very soft right now,” said Wintermeier.

“We’ve seen an exodus of people leaving cities due to Covid. Have they sold, and will they come back?” Since 2016, and not yet accounting for any dips due to Covid-19, Boston’s residential property value has increased by 52%, while business property value has increased by 43%, according to the Research Bureau’s analysis.

Despite the potential for lessened property values to constrain the city budget, Bok said that she felt confident about the strength of Boston’s economy and attraction to residents. “I suspect that Covid impacts are going to lead to changes in use in certain parts of the city rather than decreases in value,” Bok added, citing the Kenmore Square Redevelopment Project, an office and retail development under construction in Fenway.

In November, the developer filed to convert some of the planned office space into laboratory space. “I think Boston is going to prove to be very resilient economically because the city remains a deeply desirable place to live and work.”

**Two Rivers**

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Swimming was not usually safe for 48 hours after one half inch of rain.

The most polluted area which the report assessed was the Muddy River, a tributary that flows from the Boston fens between Back Bay and Kenmore. It scored a D-, meaning it is only sometimes safe for boating and almost never for swimming.

Other sections of the upper and middle watershed, between Watertown and Hopkinton, received grades of A or A-. This indicates that overall safety goals were met more than 90 percent of the time for boating and at least 70 percent of the time for swimming.

The Charles River Watershed Association (CRWA) and Environmental Protection Agency partnered on the report, which attributed the relative health of the upper stretches to significant wetlands and green, open spaces. These serve as natural filters for sewage and fertilizer, the major sources of contamination.

But Boston, Cambridge, Brookline, and Newton are more densely populated and mostly hardscape, producing more contaminants with less natural filtering. Here, government agencies have focused on reducing combined sewer overflows and upgrading infrastructure to be greener, the report said.

The report card was delayed multiple times due to the Covid 19 pandemic, and was published in late December 2020, many months after its expected summer release. It was a larger project than previous years. This is the first report card which subdivides the river and includes upper sections of the watershed and tributaries. Previous editions published since 1995 only surveyed the lower basin.

The CRWA collected monthly samples along the entire 80 mile length and along the Muddy River. The new grading system uses a three-year rolling average of E. coli counts, which reduces the confounding effect of weather. It also measured cyanobacteria and sewage levels directly for the first time.

“While E. coli bacteria levels are an important water quality indicator, they do not tell the whole story,” said Emily Norton, Executive Director of CRWA. “People have a right to know about the additional public health risks caused by toxic algae blooms and raw sewage discharges.”

“It is great to have this clear information: it tells us what needs to be done,” said Karen Mauney Brodek, President of the Emerald Necklace Conservancy.

She added, “Let’s get to work!”

**Preservation Leaders**

Continued from Page 1

Galer said his priority was retaining member organizations. Chief among them is the Freedom Trail Foundation, which in March canceled its popular walking tours of downtown Boston. Few BPA member organizations have large endowments.

“Many of these are small organizations that struggle year to year in a regular economy,” said Galer. That fragility was on full display in 2020, as donors cut back, fundraising events were canceled, and already narrow margins strained.

“As nonprofit organizations, it’s vitally important to always be ready for things to not go as planned, and always be prepared with sufficient reserves,” said Kathy Kottaridis, executive director of Historic Boston Incorporated, which renovates and manages historic buildings for new uses. Saving for the future requires strategic commitment, said Kottaridis, who expects the experience of Covid has taught that lesson clearly.

Historic Boston Inc. paused some projects, especially during the spring building freeze. Project approvals and licenses have slowed down, and businesses were not necessarily able to take advantage of the slowdown to rebuild.

“Because there were so many unknowns in this downturn, very few were focused on doing costly renovations at a time when they weren’t sure whether they’d be able to operate,” said Kottaridis. Nevertheless, there were unexpected bright spots.

The shift to remote meetings drove a major upswing in citizen participation, said Rob Whitney, Chair of the Beacon Hill Civic Association. It used to be that hearings at City Hall, e.g. the Beacon Hill Architectural District, were lucky to have three or four attendees. Now, remote meetings draw as many as ten or twenty. “We have definitely seen an uptick, not only in the number of people that are on the call, but also those that are actually participating,” said Whitney.

The Civic Association ramped up outreach efforts, and Whitney advocates for continued remote access even after in person meetings resume. “The challenge of 2021 will be to use heightened interest to repair falling revenue. More philosophically, Greg Galer said that 2020 had been “illumination”. The demonstrations after the death of George Floyd and the movement for racial justice provided an opportu- nity to reexamine how Boston celebrates its history, he said.

“We think this is really a time when the city should be forming a committee to look at not only sculptures but how things are named,” said Galer. He cited Faneuil Hall and Columbus Avenue as examples of locations whose namesakes participated in historic crimes. He foresaw new interest in preserving historically Black businesses, Green Book sites, and places from LGBTQ history as community hubs.

**Mayoral Succession**

Continued from Page 1

“I don’t think we’d want to see an acting mayor be handcuffed, especially in times of crisis like this,” Nucci said.

As the mayor transfers power to Councilor Janey, City Hall will have to prepare for another potential power shift before the end years.

If Mayor Walsh resigns before March 5, the council must call a special election to fill his seat until January 2022.

The election could be held no sooner than 120 days after the vacancy, meaning that a special election would take place in the late spring or early summer.

The regularly scheduled mayoral election is for November 2, only a few months later.

Last week, District 5’s Councilor Ricardo Arroyo filed a petition with the state legislature asking for the special election requirement to be overridden.

“Multiple elections in the same year would create an unnecessary financial burden on the city,” he wrote on Twitter. “It is unsafe during a global pandemic to create a situation that requires Boston residents to leave their homes to vote four times in the same year for the same office.”

A special election would require a preliminary election to narrow the field because there are already more than two declared candidates. Another preliminary election would then be held in September in advance of the November election.

“There’s a strong belief among many that the city should just forego the special election,” Nucci said. “It really doesn’t make much sense to have an election for mayor in June and another in the fall.”

And if Councilor Janey decides to run for mayor, she may have an advantage over her competitors. The last person to serve as acting mayor was Thomas Menino, in 1993. He went on to win the November election that year and was Boston’s mayor until 2014.
“Living Lab” Aims To Save Downtown

By Justin Roshak

A new research project brings public and private resources to the problem of adapting Boston’s downtown waterfront to a rapidly changing climate and a rising sea.

The Stone Living Lab is a collaboration between UMass Boston’s School for the Environment, the City of Boston, the state Department of Conservation and Recreation, the National Park Service, and nonprofit Boston Harbor Now. It was announced in late 2020 and begins operations this year.

As the name suggests, the Living Lab will study solutions for sea level rise that utilize natural geography, native organisms, and ecology in and around Boston Harbor and the downtown shoreline.

The Lab’s first projects will be a monitoring station on Rainsford Island erected by the Woods Hole Group and UMass Boston, and a pilot project at Fallon Pier. The latter examines nature based solutions for unpredictable weather conditions and public engagement.

The Lab plans to study the protective potential of green spaces, which form self-sustaining buffers against flooding, storm surge and shoreline erosion. Its experiments are intended to find solutions that can work at the local and state levels.

The City of Boston projects that by 2070, significant chunks of the Back Bay, most of the Public Garden and Storrow Drive, and large portions of the North End and Chinatown will face a one percent annual risk of flooding. These models are based on a three-foot rise in sea level.

But a five-foot rise in global sea levels would place Fenway, Back Bay, much of Beacon Hill, and all of North and East Boston at ten percent annual risk of flooding, according to research conducted by UMASS Boston, Woods Hole Group, MassGIS, and mapping company Esri. A five-foot rise is in the upper quartile of current projections is not likely, but possible.

The Stone Living Lab also aims to identify solutions with high cost to benefit ratios. Traditional physical sea barriers may not be suitable or cost effective for Boston’s situation. A 2018 study by UMASS Boston Professor Paul Kirshen found that an inner harbor barrier, running from Hull to Deer Island, costing between $6.5 and 11.8 billion, would cause major economic disruptions, and could be finished by 2050 at the earliest. The City’s total budget for the next fiscal year is about $3.6 billion.

Continued on Page 8
Copley Place attracts ultra high-end shoppers and shoplifters. On January 5, police responded to a larceny call at the Saint Laurent store about the theft of two $420 T-shirts.

A male entered the boutique wearing a black beanie, blue face mask, a black and yellow Bruin’s jacket and yellow shirt, blue jeans and black sneakers. We shall make no comment about mixing three colors in an ensemble other than that the thief attracted the attention of store employees.

Our fashion-plate walked to the men’s clothing rack, chose his items carefully and went to the fitting room. Several minutes later, he emerged and headed for the exit where alarms went off. When confronted, our suspect denied having anything in his duffle bag, became irate and stomped out.

Sounds like a Donald Trump wannabe.

So what makes a T-shirt worth $420? Either it comes with Tom Brady inside or it is made of gold thread with little specks of weapon’s grade plutonium to give the garment a glow.

Road Rage?
Police were called to 154 Newbury Street at 2:24pm on January 5. A driver in a Toyota Corolla was cut off by a black Dodge Journey whose driver exited, threw an ashtray at him, slapped him across the face and tried to take his cell phone. Police searched the area but with no success.

The Cops Got Their Wallet
Also on January 5, police responded to a call about a bag with a purse at 265 Clarendon Street. A driver’s license led our D-4 officers to the bag’s owner. The only items missing were credit cards which had already been cancelled. Almost sounds like a typical errant Amazon delivery but this time the bag had been stolen from a vehicle hours before.

More Police Success
On January 6 at 3:27pm, D4 officers responded to a shoplifter who had stolen goods from Marshall’s at 126 Brookline Avenue. Mr. Sticky-fingers was found a short distance away with his loot. He was known to the police from previous episodes and arrests as being homeless and have drug issues.

Where’s the Horse Whip?
Boston School Police reported a larceny at the McKinley South End Academy at 9:30am on January 7. A student had been given a gold chain by his recently deceased mother. A fellow student asked to “see” the chain, grabbed it and sprinted out of the building. The suspect will be summoned and charged with larceny. It might be politically incorrect to suggest, but sometimes an old-fashioned whipping may be an appropriate punishment.

Yup, Yet Again
It wouldn’t be a police report without a shoplifting incident at Sak’s Fifth Avenue on Ring Road. This time, two men and two women entered the store around 4:40pm on January 7, took two Prada wallets (worth $495 each) off the shelf and then exited stage left.

Might they be in competition with the guy who stole the Saint Laurent T-shirts two days prior?

High End Thieves
Not to be outdone, a shoplifter entered the Loro Piana store at 43 Newbury Street at 3:55pm on January 8 and left with a great souvenir, a $2,395 pocketbook. Obviously, the perpetrator didn’t want to pay the additional six percent state sales tax. Because the suspect was wearing heavy clothing and a mask, no identity (including the person’s sex) was possible.
Visitors to the Charles River Esplanade this winter will be treated to a brand-new light show at the Hatch Memorial Shell.

Beginning January 22, the Hatch Shell, which usually serves as an outdoor performance venue in warmer months for groups like the Boston Pops, will be lit up nightly with a colorful projection titled Hatched: Breaking the Silence. “About a year ago, we learned that the state’s Department of Conservation and Recreation would leave the Hatch Shell open for the winter, which we thought created a wonderful opportunity to bring in something artistic and light based,” said Michael Nichols, executive director of the Esplanade Association. “It’s such a focal point of the Esplanade, and we wanted to bring real amusement to the winter.”

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Beacon Hill History

By Anthony Samarco

By the mid-19th Century, Beacon Hill had many substantial houses along Beacon, Chestnut, Mount Vernon and Pinckney Streets. The first were red brick and later, brownstone row houses went up.

Many were owned by affluent people descended from the region’s 17th Century English settlers. They came to be called “Boston Brahmins,” after the highest caste in India, after Oliver Wendell Holmes (1808-1894), the poet, essayist and physician, jokingly called them “the Brahmin Caste of New England,” a “harmless, inoffensive, untitled aristocracy.”

Some of the early houses designed by Charles Bulfinch stood out prominently on Beacon Street facing the Boston Common. Inside were newly painted portraits of ancestors and other family members and porcelains brought back from the lucrative China trade. Unitarians and Episcopalians became dominant. The residents of these houses also tended to believe in the perfectibility of man and the need for reform and philanthropy, seasoned with a Yankee shrewdness.

By the Civil War Beacon Hill was largely built up and was an achievement that neither Bulfinch nor the Mount Vernon Proprietors could have envisioned seven decades earlier.

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Remove the Stone Barrier Walls Is the First Step Toward Providing New Park Amenities

By Ian Stevenson

The Fenway Community Center (FCC) plans to start theater and youth programs in this year. Closed since March 2020, the center has been operating online throughout the pandemic, offering monthly painting classes, game nights, and other activities.
The new theater program, which is funded in part by the Boston Cultural Council, will be in honor of Fenway resident Stephen Sorkin, who taught acting at the center before his death in 2019.
After receiving a grant from the Mission Hill Fenway Neighborhood Trust, the FCC will be launching a new chapter of Navigators USA, an enrichment program for children and families that teaches leadership skills and community service.
Both the theater program and youth group involve in-person meetings or field trips, which will not begin until after the pandemic ends.
“We’re trying to figure out how we can effectively launch these during the pandemic,” Robert Kordenbrock, executive director of the FCC, told the Boston Guardian.
The FCC’s only ongoing in-person activity is its fortnightly food giveaway. Last spring, the FCC partnered with the Fenway Civic Association, Fenway Community Development Corporation, and other groups to form a mutual aid network for residents who needed assistance. Volunteers helped neighbors pick up prescriptions and do their grocery shopping.
As the months wore on, the network began to focus on food access.
In August, the coalition, called Fenway Cares, began distributing food every two weeks at Symphony Community Park and at the FCC. From 3:30-5:30 on alternating Wednesdays, the group gives out 150 to 200 bags of fresh produce, bread, and other products.
The demand this year is high; residents begin lining up to receive a grocery bag up to an hour beforehand, Kordenbrock said.
“By 4 o’clock, everything has been passed out to community members,” he added.
“Our hope is that we continue to receive funding because [food insecurity] seems like something that is going to continue throughout the winter.”

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Pine Street Inn Planning to Further Curb Homelessness

By Ian Stevenson

With an eye to the future, the homeless shelter Pine Street Inn will continue to transition Boston's homeless population into permanent housing this year. Two housing projects are in development that could add 250 units of subsidized, permanent housing for Boston's homeless.

Pine Street's long-term housing, called "permanent supportive housing," provides tenants with support services like healthcare and job training.

In Jamaica Plain, Pine Street plans to build 140 units for recently homeless residents. The developer's goal was to have the new building at 3368 Washington Street completed by early 2022; but this August a neighbor sued, arguing that the current proposal is too large and has insufficient parking. The litigation is ongoing.

“We hope that gets resolved,” Barbara Trevisan, a spokesperson for Pine Street, told The Boston Guardian.

In Back Bay, YW Boston, a women’s empowerment nonprofit, has sold its 140 Clarendon Street property to a developer who will renovate the building. The remodeling, which is intended to be completed in 2023, will include around 100 units for formerly homeless residents that will be managed by Pine Street. “We’re finding housing wherever we can and doing it at scale that will have a real impact,” Trevisan said.

Partly because of Pine Street’s efforts since its founding in 1969, Boston has one of the lowest unhoused homeless rates in the nation. But nine months into a pandemic, the organization has had to stretch its capacity to serve guests safely.

Its emergency, short-term shelters are operating at less than 70% capacity to allow guests to socially distance. In July, the organization signed a 1-year lease of a former Best Western hotel to have access to more beds. In total, Pine Street accommodates 400-500 guests each night.

We have staff that works with people to find out if there are any other alternatives [to shelter],” Trevisan said. “We see if we can negotiate with a family member or a friend so that we can prevent someone from coming into the shelter system.” In recent months, the extra space has helped keep down Covid infections. The shelter’s guests, who are tested every 2 weeks, have a positivity rate of under 2%, which is much lower than the city-wide rate of over 7%. In the spring, without social distancing, the positivity rate at shelters rose as high as 36%.

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Xmas Trees Recycled For Citywide Gardens

By Trea Lavorie

As the holiday season winds down, residents across the city of Boston will soon be decorating the sidewalks with dead Christmas trees, left out to be picked up with the garbage, but many of these trees will soon find a new life.

For the first two weeks of January, the city's public works department picked up the discarded pines and brought them to be shredded to be used as mulch and compost along with other yard waste.

“It's an opportunity for people to throw their trees curbside to be recycled and kept out of incinerators with the regular trash,” said Brian Coughlin, superintendent of waste reduction for the city. “It saves us on the disposal, so we don't have to pay the trash fees.”

Coughlin said that the longstanding program has been very successful, with the city picking up between 400 and 500 tons of trees in the past few years. He didn’t expect there to be any negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the program, either, despite the increase of trash and recycling that residents have been producing while they have been at home.

Continued on Page 8
The Flat of the Hill, the area from Charles Street West to the Charles River, was then developed by the cutting down of Beacon Hill. The houses often had small shops on the ground floor for the likes of retailers, carpenters and shoemakers, and there were carriage houses for the large houses on the hill itself. New streets were laid which attracted not just residential growth but also new churches such as the Charles Street Meeting House and the Church of the Advent.

The North Slope, which claims the oldest extant house on Beacon Hill, said to be at 5 Pinkney Street, had red brick row houses. Many African Americans moved there from the North End. The African Meeting House, on Smith Court off Joy Street, was not only a place of worship, but a community center where Frederick Douglass promoted abolition, and William Lloyd Garrison formed the New England Anti-Slavery Society. The North Slope was to become a hotbed and an important depot on the Underground Railroad in the years leading up to the Civil War.

The North Slope saw even larger numbers of immigrants, moving there, including Irish, Germans, Lithuanians, Russian Jewish and other immigrants who lived alongside the African-American residents. Brick tenements of four and five stories replaced three-story red brick or wooden row houses. New buff-brick apartment buildings were constructed, generally with shops with windows on the first floor and impressive porches, and many homes were converted to boarding houses.

In 1898, Anshe Vilner, a Lithuanian cheva now known as Vilna Shul was established on Phillips Street and in 1890 the African Meeting House was converted into the Anshe Libwat shul and remained a Jewish place of worship until 1972.

Before then, in 1862, immigrants bought the Twelfth Congregational Church in the West End and dedicated it to St. Joseph as a Roman Catholic church. Because of new development in the early 20th Century, and to ensure that there were controls on new development and demolition, the Beacon Hill Association was formed in 1922. West Hill Place and Charles River Square, two cul-de-sacs with large performance art works.

Nichols said. “Hatched will be a piece, which also includes four murals currently on display throughout the park. The piece is free and open to the public.”

“This year the Esplanade was as essential as ever before to the physical health and mental well-being of our visitors,” Nichols said. “Hatched will provide a safe, open-air destination for people and their families to experience art while enjoying the tranquil beauty of the Esplanade in winter.”

The projection will show geometric shapes, musical instruments, human hands and colorful animations across the sky.

The number of Americans without enough to eat has skyrocketed during the pandemic, perhaps rising to 50 million people across the U.S., including 17 million children, according to Feeding America.

Without the ability to meet in person, the FCC has had to pause some of its existing programming, like its death discussion group.

Called Death Café, the concept was devised in the United Kingdom as a way to talk about death and dying in a comfortable setting. The FCC’s in-person events were facilitated every six weeks by Carol Lasky, who told The Boston Guardian her meetings attracted a range of ages, from teenagers to octogenarians, and that “the live events had us laughing and crying in equal measure.” Since moving online, however, the four gatherings she’s held haven’t been the same.

“I missed the humor, the spontaneity. [Now] you’re constantly reminding somebody they’re on mute,” Lasky said. “There’s no laughter in a pandemic… I can’t find for myself the uplift when everyone is living in such an atmosphere of fear.”

Death Café meetings of the FCC are now on hold until after the pandemic, when attendees will be able to sit in the same room and enjoy the stipulated refreshments of cake and tea.

“I think we need to have some perspective on this COVID nightmare to regain the skill of open conversation again,” Lasky said.

The Lab intends to study.

Meanwhile, the Lab received $5 million in initial funding from the James M. and Cathleen D. Stone Foundation, as well as $375,000 from Cabot Corporation.

Beacon Hill was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1962. Today Beacon Hill remains predominantly residential, and is still nationally famous for its rich history and lovely streetscapes, with its houses with “beautiful doors and decorative iron work,” as well as its “brick sidewalks, narrow streets, and gas lamps.”

Oliver Wendell Holmes, in a famous series of essays, published in 1858 in The Atlantic Monthly, called the “The Autocrat at the Breakfast Table,” quipped that “Boston State House is the hub of the solar system.” He was making fun of Bostonians’ self-importance. But certainly Beacon Hill is a hub of urban beauty as well as the political hub of New England.

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