



**PLAN: Downtown**  
**Roundtable Discussions: Preservation & Conservation**  
Thursday, February 19, 2019, 12:00–2:00 PM  
Location: NBBJ, One Beacon St, Boston, MA

**Attendees:**

- Jesse Brackenberry, Greenway Conservancy
- Alison Frazee, Boston Preservation Alliance
- Rebecca McKevez, Greenway Conservancy
- Suzanne Taylor, Freedom Trail Foundation
- Liz Vizza, Friends of the Public Garden
- Jessica Wong Camhi, Chinatown Land Trust

**PLAN: Downtown Consultant Team:**

- Kathryn Firth, NBBJ
- Chris Herlich, NBBJ
- Lisa Howe, Building Conservation Associates

**Unable to Attend:**

- Lydia Lowe, Chinatown Land Trust
- Kathy Kottardis, Historic Boston

**PLAN: Downtown Website:** [bit.ly/plandowntownboston](http://bit.ly/plandowntownboston)

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**Roundtable Summary:**

Each roundtable discussion was hosted by the PLAN: Downtown planning consultant, NBBJ. BPDA and City of Boston staff did not attend. The roundtable discussions supplement the broader conversations that occur within PLAN: Downtown public meetings and the PLAN: Downtown Advisory Group with targeted input from community members well versed in each topic. Roundtable topics include Preservation & Conservation, the Chinatown Community Master Plan, the Institutional Master Plans, Development & Land Ownership, and Ground-floor Business Owners. Shorter follow-up sessions occurred as needed to supplement the conversation.

**Meeting Summary:**

A short project overview & presentation was provided by NBBJ to outline the intent of PLAN: Downtown and to frame the conversation. Two follow-up conversations occurred on February 27, 2019, and March 7, 2019, to supplement this conversation.

**Roundtable Discussion Notes:**

The notes below were expressed by discussion participants and do not reflect the opinion of the BPDA or its planning consultants.

## ***Modes & Outcomes of Development & Growth***

- “Glass hats” can be a great tool for preserving existing structures while adding density but they are not universally good.
  - Should be focused on less-significant buildings with structural capacity.
  - The existing buildings need to be allowed to speak for themselves – hats should not overwhelm the context.
- Context must be considered – what is the backdrop to historical features? E.g., the Millennium Tower sacrificed some contextual features of the area; Old South Meeting House now has a large glass tower as a backdrop which may compromise the experience.
- The ‘sky view’ is important to character
- Gutting buildings and preserving/reusing facades while building a tower – e.g., 125 Summer or Hong Lok – is another great way to add density but there need to be some clear guidelines.
  - Generous setbacks give the original buildings/facades room to breathe.
  - New buildings should also be high quality and able to stand on their own merits.
  - Easier to compromise on preservation when a proposed use is something with public benefit, like affordable housing.
- Transfer of Development Rights could be a great tool for owners of older/historic properties to capture the development value they’re otherwise passing up by keeping their building in its current form.
- Need to be able to illustrate that density can increase without that always guaranteeing that height increases dramatically.
- We need less space to live and work than is the current standard.
- The addition of green space should be a priority, and more spaces should serve the purpose that Post Office Square serves as an organizing principle for a subdistrict.
  - More pocket parks. Rooftop “public” spaces aren’t viable.
  - Whether ground floor lobbies function as public space is up for debate – depends on how indoor-outdoor access is designed.
  - Design guidance on how to make indoor spaces feel public would be welcome.
  - Is there a way to connect green spaces – e.g., from the Boston Common to the waterfront – green as a way to improve legibility?
- Development projects should provide better on-site accommodations for dogs – there are negative impacts on the few existing green spaces and the public realm more generally.
- What are the standards for privately-owned public spaces (POPS)? How should they be designed and how should they be communicated to the public?
- We can use the building itself to tell the story, e.g., Rockefeller Center and Diego Rivera.
- Incremental changes are the greatest threat because they allow us to ignore problems for too long.
- Inevitably, older buildings will need to be retrofit to mitigate climate change impacts, but what are the standards for those?
- We shouldn’t abandon the High Spine as a unifying concept for Boston’s density.
- There was always an expectation that development would accompany to completion of the Greenway.

- Development projects are not the right mechanism to fund things outside of Downtown. We should look at other mechanisms to fund permanent public amenities.
- The concept of Transfer of Development Rights is great, but we need the transit capacity to match it; even still, we should be building taller and more densely.
- Development projects surrounding the Greenway are not keeping their promises to provide truly public amenities – part of that is a cost/operation & maintenance issue, because there's not enough density to support such amenities.
- The placement and scale of new development should consider the shadow impacts on the Freedom Trail.
- The effects of the construction process need to be monitored carefully in how it impacts our historic resources structurally and how it impacts daily operations.
- New development can complement our historic resources and enhance view corridors or serve as a backdrop for historic buildings. An example is how Exchange Place serves as a backdrop for the Old State House.
- Preserving and supplementing existing view corridors and thinking critically about framing specific views is important.

### ***Role of the Greenway Conservancy***

- In the near future, the Greenway Conservancy's priority will be to take the existing physical resources of the Greenway that are good and make them great.
  - Dewey Square + park: lighting improvements, plaza redesign
  - The parcels adjacent to the Dock Square and Government Center Garage blocks of the Greenway are gaps in the network in many ways. The ramps need to be covered, which requires coordination with MassDOT. It is not clear how such projects would get funded yet.
  - Improvements to bike connections between North and South Stations – the Greenway wasn't originally intended to serve this purpose, but it's a critical connection.
- The relationship between the Greenway Conservancy and the Greenway BID is not yet understood, and the two groups are figuring out how to operate together.

### ***Role of the City***

- We need to clearly understand what the City's preservation interests and priorities are, which should be articulated through restrictions and incentives.
- The City should be more proactive in encouraging children and families to visit and live in Downtown Boston. We need to build appreciation for the unique character in the next generation.
- The development process needs an open dialogue with the broader public to clarify big-picture interests.
- The City should focus on protecting pedestrians on and off-street.
- BIDs are an important tool that can be further utilized. Now that the Downtown BID and the Greenway BID are here their roles can expand.
- The Greenway Conservancy is a rarity in Boston: a non-profit tasked with managing a public park. It is an effective model that could be supported elsewhere in the city.

### ***Purpose and Manifestation of Preservation***

- There is information available to the public that details preservation efforts and existing protections, but it is difficult for them to access.
- We are more interested in identifying and protecting character than in the preservation of any specific structure. A sense of place is defined by a collection of buildings and features not just a single historic asset.
  - What is the sense of place? How can we provide for/protect what makes a place unique?
- Corridors and districts evolve – what we value (or don't) can and will change over time, so we should not box ourselves in with a strict definition of what is worth preserving.
- Preserving programming can be just as important as physical resources, or more so; festivals, ceremonies, and other cultural celebrations can bring back a diaspora and keep a character alive even as the buildings change.
- How can we use technology to tell more stories (augmented or virtual reality)?  
Acknowledge that the city is changing and the ways we interact with it are changing, too.
- This group is not anti-development – we're just pro-intelligent economic growth.
- Preservation must change from Big-H "Historical" (landmark buildings) to little-h "historical" (character and culture).

### ***Plan Outcomes***

- What are the collective impacts of pipeline projects?
- This effort should lead to new zoning, and there needs to be teeth.
- We need a clear strategy for how standards and guidelines will be enforced, even if they do get translated into zoning – we've seen zoning bypassed so often.
- Some protection for the scale and grain of the Ladder Blocks is a major priority; it's a special area whose redevelopment will have significant impacts on small businesses, open space, and character generally.
- "Make sure there's more 'accommodation' in "Facilities of Public Accommodation" – things that serve the public and, importantly, are properly communicated to the public.
- Create or at least call for a set of design guidelines for "hardening pedestrian targets" – places where vehicles can cause significant damage to people on foot.
- Push for congestion pricing and Transportation Network Company fees to generate local revenue for non-auto infrastructure.
- Make it more expensive to drive, create more open space, improve pedestrian safety – Let's create some guidelines and requirements for protecting pedestrian zones.
- Effective public art
  - Is often unmissable, something that compels notice.
  - Should be integrated into the fabric and infrastructure of the place
  - Should consider the possibilities of telling a story in dynamic ways, e.g., projection, a mural
- Preserving Readers' Park as a significant historical outdoor space is important.
- The view corridor up State Street is significant for tourists since most of the tour buses take that route and provides a straight view to the Old State House.
- Improvements to the sidewalk conditions on School Street are essential.

- Signage and wayfinding are important for navigating the Freedom Trail. The Freedom Trail Foundation works with the Downtown BID and Greenway Conservancy for complementary signage. A new signage program for the Freedom Trail is rolling out soon that includes wayfinding and site demarcation.
- There is a general need for high quality useable open space Downtown.