



Ellis South End Neighborhood Association
Annual Meeting, May 22, 2007
President's Report

A year ago, I talked at some length about the Silver Line and how it focused Ellis activities. Since then there have been times when it felt like we were going to be hit by one of those buses.

Seriously, this year has not been characterized by galvanizing issues. No calls for letter-writing campaigns, no super-contentious hearings. The Silver Line remains under study, and the coalition of neighborhoods that comprise the Silver Line Working Group continues to press for more cost effective alternatives that better serve the line's ridership. Public funding battles for Columbus Center have been won - and lost - but the project remains in a sort of suspended animation, awaiting financing while infrastructure prep work continues. And there has been progress on groundwater, with the MBTA establishing recharge protocols at our local hotspots on Cazenove and St. Charles, new zoning that mandates groundwater conservation measures, and new efforts by the Boston Water and Sewer Commission to shore up its system here in the South End.

We've made similar, slow/steady progress in expanding our collaborations. For instance, Light Rail Today - an exploration of one alternative to the Silver Line buses - was originally an Ellis Public Forum, but as the idea evolved it became clear it had wider appeal. We still took the lead in planning, but were joined by the Eight Streets and Old Dover Neighborhood Associations, the Castle Square Tenants Organization and The Neighborhood Forum. It got South End-wide visibility, and I'm pleased to report that it's traveling around to other parts of the city - Roxbury, Mattapan, Chinatown, and the Back Bay.

Last year The Neighborhood Forum itself - a coalition of diverse South End and Lower Roxbury organizations - was just getting off the ground. Now the Forum is taking the lead in pulling together neighborhood-wide events. As a founding member, we took an active role in organizing the Forum's very well-attended community meeting with Police Commissioner Davis, and then a Candidate's Night for the first round of the recent special election for District 2 City Councilor. I trust that Ellis will continue to support the Forum, whose efforts are gaining momentum and whose influence can leverage our own. We've already signed on to welcome Councilor-elect Linehan, probably next month.

Within the Ellis, it has also been a year of quiet growth, and a certain amount of introspection.

. We've taken a hard look at our fundraising activities and drawn up new guidelines for the future. Thanks to Gordon Holmes and his task force for setting us on a fresh course.

. We've standardized our procedures for dealing with Licensing matters, and with Development and Zoning. Here, thanks go to David Mundel for shepherding them through multiple iterations. To Betsy Boveroux, Licensing chair, for her leadership

on the Beehive's request for extended hours on the BCA Plaza and her efforts to manage our often difficult relationship with Clery's. And of course to John Herbert, our Development and Zoning chair, this year especially for his role in getting The Bryant on Columbus more or less back on track with its neighbors.

. We've implemented a new, more interactive website, too - and I hope many of you have already used it to renew your membership. Thanks to Susan Passoni, who as our Communications chair spearheaded this effort - in her spare time, while running a great campaign. Do check it out if you haven't already.

. Speaking of membership, we've continued to grow, and I'm sure everyone who enjoyed the Casino Night in March sends kudos to Sandra Silver and her Membership committee for pulling it off. While we're voting tonight, maybe we should do a straw poll about making it an annual event.

. We've made progress this year with cleaning up those annoying newsboxes - at least ensuring that they comply with city ordinances. Tom Boyden provided just the right combination of diplomacy and dogged determination as chair of our Neighborhood Services Committee for most of the year. For better or worse, however, they continue to proliferate. If you'd like work on this one, let us know.

. Thanks to Tom as well for providing the impetus and the information for the new Ellis Resource Card that I trust you've found on your chair tonight. It's a tight package, but full of tips for handling trash/snow/graffiti - those constant irritations of city life. We'll mail this first edition to our members, but we'd like to distribute them neighborhood-wide and maybe to realtors come the fall rental season. They need to be road-tested though, so please put them to use and give us your feedback. Thanks to Betsy Hall and Leigh Bivings for pulling this together in time for tonight's meeting.

Oh yes, be sure to put the trash violation, street light and police numbers in your cells - and don't hesitate to use them.

. Another initiative, still in the works, is the Ellis Block Captain program - intended to capitalize on the teamwork so evident at our spring and fall cleanups. We'd like to keep that going year round, with residents of individual streets - or natural groupings of streets - keeping in touch within the Ellis umbrella.

Jay Fogarty has been laying the groundwork for this, and we hope to get it going this fall. If you'd like to get involved - once again - let us know.

info@ellisneighborhood.org may be the easiest way, but there is also a list of committees in the materials you have, and on the website.

. As I've already noted, we've seen steady progress on groundwater, but no breakthrough events. It's just not that kind of issue. Peter Pogorski keeps us up-to-date as chair of our Groundwater committee, Mike Nairne represents the South End on the Boston Groundwater Trust, and many, many others in the Ellis remain active in the Citywide Groundwater Emergency Taskforce. There is still much to be done; Jim Hunt will update us on some city/state efforts in a few minutes. But each of us needs to keep an eye on this one. Check our website for useful links.

. Of course we've done a lot of fun stuff, too. I can't thank our Events chair Mary Lionette enough for organizing things like our progressive dinner and the recent Easter basket hunt, and for ensuring that all our other events - like tonight's meeting - are carried off with style. The Ellis Wine Group continues to do its thing under the leadership of Bill Gregor and Jay Fogarty, and the Ellis Book Group - led

so ably by Myrna Baylis and Borgna Brunner for the past few years - is already at work on its fall calendar, with new leaders Betsy Boveroux and Trudy Kontoff.

. And there's a whole new social group - the Young Friends of the Ellis. The Y-FOE's - our very first catchy name - is a grassroots effort that got underway this spring. Kimball Robeson is heading it up, and we look forward to great things - and great fun - from this group as it grows.

Last but not least - Ellis will again be marching in the Pride Parade on Saturday, June 9. Everybody had a great time last year, even in the rain, so don't miss it. If you want to participate - or help out - contact our parade marshal Susan Passoni at communications@ellisneighborhood.org

All in all, it's been a busy year. Not flashy - well, except for the Pride Parade - but with plenty of progress.

Tonight we're delighted to be electing a new slate of officers and directors who bring their own ideas and energy to the Ellis, and who will - with the support of our members - make this organization stronger and more vibrant. Let's move on to the election. Thanks.