



City of Chelsea

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

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TO: Chelsea Planning Board

FROM: Maggie Schmitt, AICP, Assistant Director
Alexander Train, Senior Planner/Project Manager

CC: John DePriest, AICP, Director
Thomas G. Ambrosino, City Manager

RE: **Chelsea Department of Planning & Development Mid-Year Update**

DATE: June 27, 2017

This memo is a mid-year update to the Board on several projects and initiatives the Department has been working on and will be pursuing in the months to come. In the past year, the Department also hired the following new staff:

- Elijah Romulus, Planner/Land Use Administrator
- Bethany Rosa, Senior Housing Development Project Manager
- Karl Allen, Planner/Economic Development Specialist

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT (CDBG) ACTIVITIES

The City is underway with activities funded with the CDBG federal fiscal year (FFY) 2015 and FFY2016 grants. CDBG funding is provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Department of Housing and Community Development, Massachusetts CDBG Program. These funds help small cities and towns to support housing, community, and economic development projects that assist low and moderate-income residents, or revitalize blighted areas. CDBG activities are focused in two residential target areas: the Addison/Orange Neighborhood and the Shurtleff/Bellingham Neighborhood. Downtown Chelsea/Broadway Corridor target area is a third target area proposed for FFY2017.

- Targeted Code Enforcement Program – The CDBG grant contributes funding for code inspections performed by staff in the Department of Inspectional Services to comply with the City’s Certificate of Habitability Ordinance. This Ordinance requires inspections of rental housing units to be at least once every five years, in addition to the requirement already in place for inspection of a rental unit prior to re-occupancy with a new tenant. A related, but separate activity, is the Department’s coordination with ISD as well as Law and other City Departments, on problem/distressed residential properties to identify strategies to improve the overall condition of the City’s housing stock and to identify possible funding sources, where possible. These efforts included continued collaboration with Harvard Kennedy School Ash Center and the students in the Innovative Field Lab team who are working to develop a predictive model for addressing problem properties in the City.
- Housing Rehabilitation Deferred Payment Loan Program – The CDBG funds provide a source of low-interest or no-interest loans to income-eligible property owners of one- to four-family residential buildings to bring properties into code compliance and address violations that threaten the health and safety of building occupants. The City incorporated this program in its CDBG grant to support the efforts of the ISD targeted code enforcement activities. Among the program requirements are that applicants and/or eligible tenants are

located in the CDBG target areas, are income-qualified, and are willing to execute a deed restriction that rental units rehabilitated with program assistance and occupied by low- and moderate income households are required to be maintained at affordable rent levels for a term of 15 years.

- Public Social Service Programs – Four social services programs currently receive funding from the CDBG grant: (1) Community Schools’ English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Program, which offers English language classes at the Williams School throughout the year; (2) the REACH Program at the high school which has the overarching goal to prevent at-risk students from dropping out of school; (3) the Citizenship Program, operated under a contract with the Chelsea Collaborative, to provide citizenship classes as well as immigration consultation and services throughout the year for residents, and (4) the ROCA’s Young Mother’s Program providing intensive case management and programming in life skills, education and employment for high-risk 16-24 year old mothers with one or more children.
- Hawthorn Street Sidewalks Project – The Department of Planning and Development, in conjunction with the Department of Public Works, is overseeing a sidewalk reconstruction project along the full extent of Hawthorn Street, from Marginal Street to the Broadway/Bellingham/Fifth Street intersection. The contractor started work in June 2017. This project not only complements the City’s other investments in Bellingham Square and downtown’s central business district, but serves the residents in Shurtleff-Bellingham by strengthening safe, accessible pedestrian connections to local businesses and public transit.
- Chelsea Housing Study – The goal of the housing study is to learn more about the current state of the housing conditions and housing market in the City, identify challenges and opportunities that exist, and help to develop goals and strategies that will address housing needs in the future, including steps to preserve and create affordable housing and serve populations in the city with specific housing needs. The study is expected to be completed in September 2017.

CDBG FFY2017 Mini-Entitlement Program Grant Application – In March 2017, the City submitted its annual CDBG funding application the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development application (\$825,000). It is anticipated that the City will hear from the state during the summer if the City receives the grant award. The following activities were proposed: (1) continuation of the Housing Rehabilitation Program, (2) focused weekly targeted code inspections in the Shurtleff-Bellingham and Addison-Orange neighborhoods, (3) a request for the reconstruction of sidewalks in calendar year 2018 on Congress Avenue, originating at Willow Street and terminating at Park Street; (4) micro-enterprise business assistance consisting of one-on-one consultation on best retail practices and technical assistance on business identity, marketing, and interior and exterior design for up to eight (8) low- and/or moderate-income business owners; and (5) the preparation of an ADA Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan, focusing on City buildings, parks and playgrounds, to address compliance with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), as amended. Finally, the City’s application included a request for public social services funding, capped at 20% of the grant, for the Chelsea ESOL Program, the REACH Program, the Citizenship Program, and a new activity, which is to allow CAPIC to hire a new Health Access Caseworker to develop a community-based approach to reducing health-related issues, strengthen protective factors, and decrease risk factors to eliminate barriers for individuals and families. The time period for completion of all of these activities is proposed by the end of December 2018.

OTHER PROJECTS AND FUTURE ACTIVITIES

Parks and Open Space Projects

- Mystic River Overlook Park – In 2016, the City was awarded funds to construct a passive park (e.g. walking paths, lighting, seating areas) that captures views of the Mystic River and Boston skyline. The proposed site, 20 Broadway (Parcel 10-101), is city-owned land underneath the Tobin Bridge. This project is the the first component to the City’s planned pedestrian corridor, a green path that would run from the waterfront to Downtown Chelsea underneath Route 1. Culminating in early summer 2017, this project has transformed dormant, underutilized land into productive open space, aesthetically enhancing the waterfront neighborhood.

- Highland Park Basketball Courts – The Department successfully attained a FY’17 PARC grant, through a competitive statewide application process, to refurbish the basketball courts (e.g. surfacing, backboards, lighting, and site furniture) at Highland Park. Moreover, the playground will be overhauled, yielding new playground equipment and rubber surfacing as well as rehabilitation of the gathering area so that it will eventually have an expanded, color-coded seating area, a net climber for older youth, a spray feature with splash pad, and multiple shade trees. Supplementing the grant funds are City funds targeting restoration of the perimeter landscaping by installing a new irrigation system, trees, and shrubs. The parking lot will also be resurfaced once all work is completed. The Department finalized the design process, encompassing three public meetings, in June of 2017. Bidding and construction are scheduled for September 2017.
- O’Neil Park – The City will submit a PARC Grant application in July of 2017 for the renovation of O’Neil Playground, situated at the corner of High Street and Beacon Street. A small neighborhood playground enveloped by two retaining walls, O’Neil Playground has not been renovated in over a decade. Playground equipment, rubber surfacing, and site amenities warrant replacement to ensure conformance with health, safety, and accessibility standards. If awarded funding, full design and two subsequent public meetings will commence during winter of 2017, with construction beginning no earlier than July 1, 2018. Based on neighborhood feedback, the Department is also assessing various traffic calming treatments to accompany the proposed park improvements.
- Proposed Dog Park – The City, through the Department of Planning and Development, has been awarded a grant from the Stanton Foundation for funding to design a new dog park, to be situated adjacent to the Mystic River Overlook Park. Completion of construction and bidding documents will occur throughout summer of 2017, followed by bidding in the fall. The Stanton Foundation has committed up to \$200,000 in construction funding, pending execution of a memorandum of understanding.
- Open Space and Recreation Plan Update – Every seven years, the City is required to revise and update its Open Space and Recreation Plan in order to access state funding (PARC grant) for parks, open space, and recreational facilities. In conjunction with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), the City embarked on the Open Space and Recreation Plan in April 2017. Building off the foundation of past planning initiatives, the Open Space and Recreation Plan will also include chapters on designing public art and cultural installations in parks, encouraging the implementation of green infrastructure and other climate adaptation elements, and properly maintaining our open space assets through the utilization of traditional maintenance methods and specialty expertise, such as arborists.

Downtown-Related Projects and Initiatives

- Downtown Initiative, Chelsea Prospers – Utilizing City funding allocated by Chelsea City Council, several projects and new initiatives are underway. The goals of the Downtown Initiative are to build a healthy business environment, to foster an attractive public realm that invites, connects and accommodates the cultural and economic diversity of the community, and to foster business vitality. This effort is led by the City’s Downtown Coordinator, a new municipal position, created to facilitate cross-municipal department and cross-sector coordination. Starting this summer in mid-July, there will be Chelsea Lunch Marketplace, a collaboration with Healthy Chelsea bringing food and other vendors to the lawn of City Hall and concerts and happenings on Thursday evenings in August in Chelsea Square in collaboration with The Neighborhood Developers. Business training includes the Retail Best Practices Program with the Chamber of Commerce, a half-day workshop for all downtown businesses plus one-on-one consulting and a mini-grant for six businesses. A focus on food safety and boosting consumer confidence has led to the enrollment in the FDA Voluntary National Retail Food Regulatory Program Standards and a deeply discounted training for workers in the downtown happening in July. The Chelsea Prospers Placemaking Program offers mini-grants to individuals, businesses and community groups for small scale projects like parklets, pop-up events, and temporary art installations. The deadline for applications is in August. Work will also begin on a Cultural Assets Survey. Ongoing is the Downtown

Hub, a partnership with Chelsea Police, to address the persistent quality of life and safety challenges in the district.

- Re-Imagining Broadway – The Department of Planning and Development has retained Nelson/Nygaard Consulting Associates for a multi-modal study of the vehicular, pedestrian, and bicyclist circulation patterns throughout the Broadway Corridor, as well as the performance of a downtown parking study. This study seeks to optimize downtown circulation patterns, enhance the streetscape and public spaces within the downtown, improve way-finding and navigation, reduce the frequency of vehicular and pedestrian crashes, and foster retail business visibility. Moreover, this study is also addressing public transit access and operations within the downtown, involving bus stop relocations/consolidations, linkages with the Silver Line Gateway stations, and possible route alterations, in conjunction with MassDOT and the MBTA. The next public meeting is scheduled for July 13, 2017. A myriad of stakeholder meetings, informal conversations with business owners, and point-in-time surveys along Broadway have been and will continually be conducted. Once completed, a series of recommendations will transition into a full engineering and design process, funded by Chelsea City Council, for comprehensive infrastructure improvements.
- Apollinaire Theatre – The Department of Planning and Development has been working with the Apollinaire Theatre Company to assist them in the conversion of retail space to new theatre space that has recently been completed. Additionally, the Department facilitates coordination between the Theatre and Eastern Minerals regarding summer performances in P.O.R.T. Park on Marginal Street.

Transportation, Roadway and Infrastructure Projects

- MassWorks Phase V – Encompassing the untouched portion of Everett Avenue, from Carter Street to Route 16, this project will progress through the full design phase, permitting, and bidding during summer of 2017. In 2016, the Department was successful at securing funding, through a competitive MassWorks Grant Program process, for construction. Full-depth roadway reconstruction, sidewalk reconstruction, installation of street trees and lighting, and the replacement of water/sewer/drainage utilities are warranted due to the antiquated nature and performance of existing infrastructure. Moreover, coordination is required between the Department and Fairfield Residential, the private developer of Chelsea Lofts, and multiple private utility companies who are scheduled to install or upgrade communications, gas, and electric services to the site. The construction program will unfold in the months ahead, with construction commencing in October of 2017 and carrying forward to fall of 2018. Guidelines of the MassWorks grant require construction to be completed by the end of FY' 19.
- Marginal Street Pedestrian Signalization – The Department of Planning and Development will oversee the design and construction of a pedestrian signal system that will safely facilitate the crossing of Marginal Street to reach P.O.R.T. Park. The design process includes the widening of Marginal Street's northerly sidewalks between Charles Street and Highland Street, in order to provide ADA-compliant paths of travel. Bicycle lanes, if feasible, will also be provided at a yet to be identified location.
- Highland Hill Green Corridor Phase II – Intersecting with previous streetscape and open space improvements performed along Highland Street, from Bellingham Hill Park to Box District Station in Phase I, this project will continue with site improvements, beginning at Bellingham Hill Park and truncating along the waterfront. The proposed scope of work calls for the replacement of deteriorating and non-compliant sidewalks, handicap ramps, and crosswalks along the southerly section of Highland Street, accentuated with the installation of street trees that will provide temperature cooling, carbon sequestration, and air quality improvements on Bellingham Hill. Abundant with impervious surface, this stretch of Highland Street presently has little green space or tree cover. This project will also introduce sidewalk segments along areas of Highland Street and surrounding ways that are devoid of pedestrian accommodations. Bicycle lanes, if feasible, will also be provided at a yet to be identified location.

- Everett Avenue Area Way Finding –The Everett Avenue Urban Renewal Area has witnessed significant public and private investment, including approximately \$20 million in public investment utilized for roadway, sidewalk, and utility rehabilitation. In 2016, this burgeoning commercial, retail, and residential district also experienced the opening of new residences, a hotel, and the FBI Headquarters. The Department will study and implement way-finding and signage infrastructure throughout the district with the goal to improve way finding and direct pedestrians, bicyclists, vehicles, and public transit riders in a clear, cohesive, and understandable fashion that complements recent infrastructure development.
- Chelsea Silver Line Gateway / Washington Avenue Bridge / Chelsea Greenway Project – MassDOT continues with Phase I construction of the Silver Line Extension and accompanying Shared Use Path, tentatively scheduled to culminate in March of 2018. Contemporaneously, the City is overseeing the design and construction of the On-Road Greenway and Phase III landscape and gateway enhancements, funded by the Gateway City Parks Program, which will connect to the Silver Line Shared Use Path. This sub-project will be released for bidding during the winter of 2017 for a spring 2018 construction start date. Phase II of the multi-phased Silver Line project will consist of the relocation of the Chelsea Commuter Rail Station to a location adjacent to Market Basket. Funding for Phase II was recently confirmed by MassDOT and the MBTA as part of their Capital Improvement Plan for FY'18 and FY'19, with a construction schedule for this phase to be established in the future.
- Beacham/Williams Transportation Corridor Study – With funding requested from the Massachusetts Gaming Commission's Casino Mitigation Fund, the Department is leading a corridor study, which commenced during winter of 2016, to collect and analyze multi-modal transportation data along the Beacham/Williams corridor, as well as all relevant intersections. By conducting future traffic network projections, anchored by various scenarios related to the Wynn Everett casino development, recommendations for corridor improvements, such as signal retiming, intersection redesign, roadway/streetscape layout, and demand management strategies will be developed. This data collection effort will provide the City a baseline from which it may gauge casino-related traffic impacts. Additionally, a technical design concept will be drafted during this study, along with ancillary land surveys, environmental testing, and utility line confirmation. A road safety audit, mandatory for projects seeking state or federal funding that host Federal Highway Administration designated crash clusters, is also planned for this summer. Furthermore, the Director of Planning and Development is appointed as a member of the Local Casino Advisory Committee, a committee that crafts regional policy recommendations for the Massachusetts Gaming Commission.
- Upper Broadway Reconstruction – The Department of Planning and Development, in conjunction with the Department of Public Works, has advanced the design plans to the 25% design point and has submitted plans to the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) for review. The corridor contains innumerable deficient elements, such as geometrically unsafe intersections, outdated traffic signalization, and unacceptable rates of vehicular and pedestrian crashes. Consisting of a linear project area stretching from City Hall to the Revere/Chelsea city line, this project will entail full-depth reconstruction of the roadway, reconstructed sidewalks and intersections, new and/or modified signalization at for intersections that will be synchronized, as well as the institution of “complete streets” principles, yielding bicycle lanes and enhanced pedestrian amenities. Some bus stops along this route, serviced by the MBTA Route 116 and 117, will also be consolidated or relocated. These movements will diminish existing bus/vehicle conflicts and merging patterns that interfere with traffic flow and pedestrian/bicyclist navigation. In May 2017, the Department's advocacy efforts contributed to the successful attainment of over \$9 million in federal and state funds, as part of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) denoted for FFY 2022. A 25% design public hearing, to be hosted by MassDOT, is expected towards the latter part of 2017.
- Complete Streets Plan – The Department of Planning and Development will undertake a Complete Streets Prioritization Plan, an initiative focused on creating safe bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, in FY'18, pending availability of funding from MassDOT. With the completion of this plan, the City will be eligible to access \$400,000 in construction funding for a ‘complete streets’ infrastructure project.

Waterfront and Climate Change Planning and Initiatives

- Municipal Harbor Plan – The City has been awarded funding through the Seaport Economic Council for an 18-month Municipal Harbor Plan study. This study will assess the existing land economics, economic development activity, and physical infrastructure condition surrounding the City’s Chelsea Creek Designated Port Area (DPA). Recommendations will be tailored to foster maritime economic development and infrastructure rehabilitation that will facilitate such development. Additionally, this study will approach public waterfront access. It follows upon the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM) designation decision in April 2016, which removed the areas referred to as the Railroad South and Railroad North planning units from inclusion in the Chelsea Creek DPA.
- Coastal Community Resiliency Grant Vulnerability Assessment – Utilizing funding provided by the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM), the City will soon publish a study to assess the vulnerability and risks posed to local infrastructure by climate change, particularly rising sea levels and storm surges. By modeling future flood pathways, flooding probabilities, and inundation depths, the Department has developed forecasts for 2030 and 2070, accompanied by conceptual design recommendations and cost estimates for methods of fortifying and protecting infrastructure.
- Municipal Vulnerability Program, EEA – The Department of Planning and Development was recently successful in applying for and receiving a grant through the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs’ Municipal Vulnerability Program. The objective of this program is to increase holistic preparedness for climate change. Due to Chelsea’s advancements in infrastructure resilience planning and combined sewer overflow separation, this project will primarily analyze the socioeconomic, demographic, and societal susceptibilities permeating throughout our community. The study’s recommendations will highlight methods of strengthening preparedness to reduce these vulnerabilities.
- Urban Heat Island Effect Study – The Department of Planning and Development, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, and the MIT SeaGrant program will again undertake a city-wide climate preparedness study. This long-standing partnership between municipal government and academia has provided the City a contemporaneous lens, rooted in recent literature and prevailing academic studies, has tackled a series of issues related to climate change, enabling the City to make progressive strides in understanding and preparing for the adverse impacts of climate change. This study will analyze the urban heat island affect throughout Chelsea, utilizing geospatial analysis and a myriad of data, such as information on housing stock, air conditioning usage, electrical grid operations, and urban tree cover. The study will result in recommendations to lessen the negative effects of excessive heat, a particularly onerous issue in densely populated, urban areas.
- American Geophysical Union / Thriving Earth Exchange – The Department of Planning and Development has partnered with the American Geophysical Union, a prestigious academic group whose members include climate scientists, hydrologists, and geophysicists, through the Thriving Earth Exchange Program. This program provides academic technical assistance, at no expense, pairing the City with a specialized academic. Dr. Asha Sharma, who a recently matriculated PhD from Cornell, has been assisting the City in a peer review process. By synthesizing environmental and climate-related policies, projects, and other initiatives completed to date, Dr. Sharma’s report will provide direction to the City, based on prevailing academic literature and studies, on strengthening its climate adaptation work. In addition to identifying a trajectory of evolution, Dr. Sharma will also furnish recommendations on how the City can enhance communications of climate risks and strategies to its multi-cultural, environmental justice populations.

Regional Coordination

- Greater Boston Regional Economic Compact – The Planning Director and other staff in the Department have and will continue to represent Chelsea on a recently-initiated, three-year collaborative effort

between Boston, Braintree, Cambridge, Chelsea, Quincy, and Somerville to focus on the areas of transportation, economic development, housing and sustainability as they pertain to regional development.

- North Suburban Consortium – The Department staff represent Chelsea on the North Suburban Consortium (NSC) Board. NSC is an affordable housing consortium serving the communities of Malden, Medford, Arlington, Chelsea, Everett, Revere, Melrose and Winthrop. The NSC utilizes federal HOME funds to create new affordable homeownership and rental units in these communities and rehabilitates older units for low income renters and owners. The NSC also administers a First-Time Home Buyer Program.
- Metro Mayors Coalition – The Department of Planning and Development provides support and advisory services to the City Manager, a member of the Metro Mayors Coalition, a group of local leaders convened by Mayor Walsh of Boston to tackle exigent issues surrounding climate change adaptation and mitigation.