



Homeless Spreading Into the Back Bay

By Cullen Paradis

A bridge on Boylston Street has garnered a small population of the unhoused, with city officials saying there aren't easy answers when it comes to clearing obstructions to pedestrian traffic.

The intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Boylston Street, along with the

bridge taking them over the Turnpike, has in recent weeks attracted enough homeless residents to partially obstruct foot traffic.

It's nowhere near the level seen in large encampments like Mass and Cass, but city officials are working to make sure it doesn't become a larger issue.

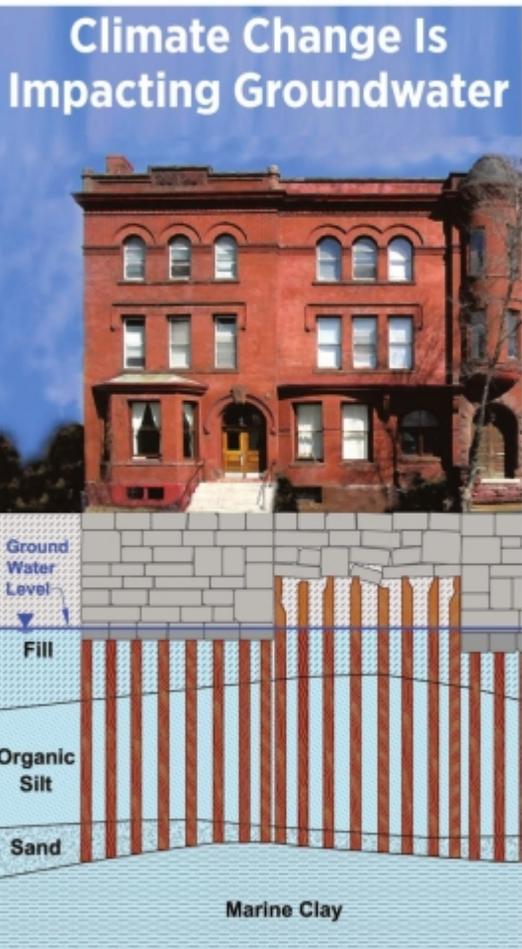
Continued on Page 10

And the Winners Are...

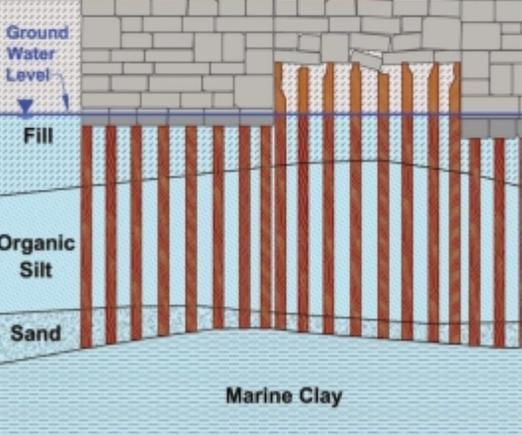


Think of it as the Back Bay's Emmy's and Oscars. The Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay presented its annual community service awards at the group's annual meeting on

September 14. Laurie Thomas received the Mary Natalie Citizenship Award and Michael McCord was given the Paul Prindle Community Leadership Award.



Climate Change Is Impacting Groundwater



By Cullen Paradis

Boston's groundwater caretakers are trying to preserve the city's foundations in the face of climate change, with large swaths of the city's infrastructure at stake as they confront record-breaking droughts. Boston's Groundwater Trust convened a public forum on September 20 to coordinate the city's response to growing climate risks. Combined floods and droughts threaten

to disrupt the balance of Boston's extensive groundwater infrastructure, rotting the subsurface wooden piers that support buildings in areas closer to the shore. The Groundwater Trust was founded over three decades ago the last time the piers were threatened, when maintenance was had enough that homes in the lower parts of Beacon Hill started to sink into the ground.

Continued on Page 10

Girl Scouts

Continued from Page 5

Troops are typically affiliated with schools. However, Troop 65321's neighborhood affiliation is unique, with the eleven members attending seven different schools in total and spanning multiple age groups.

Laura Fleming and Sofia Alrenhoff are the only two leaders remaining from the original group who established Troop 65321.

"A bunch of moms got together

and wanted to start a Girl Scout troop more than a decade ago, which didn't have anything to do with the schools because many of the kids all go to different schools... it was really to get to know the girls in the neighborhood that may not have otherwise crossed each other's paths," said Fleming.

Originally consisting of around 70 girls aged between kindergarten and early elementary, the eleven remaining girl scouts are now all in their early to mid-teens.

As the girls have matured, so have their activities, which are

transitioning from crafts and selling cookies to travel and community service projects. Meetings that were once held weekly in local churches, now occur twice monthly at restaurants.

"It still has the same mission which is neighborhood girls coming together but now it's much more of a social thing," Fleming said. "As the girls have gotten older, their activities have become more sophisticated."

Fleming noted the intensity of the Gold Award, which several of the troop's members are currently

pursuing. "They've done the Bronze. They've done the Silver and now they're going after the Gold Award. It would be likened to an Eagle Scout project. Although in my opinion, it's much more difficult because it has a learning component and the hours are much longer," said Fleming. "But it's 80 hours of commitment. A girl has to identify a [community] need and follow that over two years." With the gradual aging of the remaining girl scouts, Fleming explained, the face of Troop 65321 seems bleak. "Our troop is going to die until

the next group of moms come along and say, hey, can we take 65321. You do things for your children when they're that age and they run their course, and you're always looking for the next cycle to step up and do it for their children," she said.

Whether or not the troop continues, Fleming is sure that the impact of the last decade will stick with the current members throughout the duration of their lives.

"They will be leaders themselves. Girl Scouts will be with them for a very long time," she said.

Seaport Voting

Continued from Page 9

"Needless to say, it wasn't the best experience."

Despite multiple requests, the Mayor's press office declined to

make election officials available for comment. "The polling locations are a top priority, and we have a lot of basic city services that are lacking there. Climate change and the rising tides are a key issue, as is transportation, connecting the Downtown area with the waterfront and getting it connected

to the ferry service," said Ed Flynn, the district's City Councilor. "We have a lot of work to do, but we're working closely with the residents and business community to make sure their voices are heard."

Overall, it seems likely that these issues will continue to improve in the coming years

as redistricting and ongoing community organizing ensure the growing population has a say in city politics.

"It's a pocket in our city where people drive through there and don't really think of it as a residential location, but there are a lot of people there that

need a lot of city services," said At-large City Councilor Erin Murphy. "They want more say on what buildings are going up, how much housing they have in them, what's on the ground floor? They've definitely grown to a point where they're no longer an afterthought."

Groundwater

Continued from Page 1

Now the organization is trying to get ahead of climate change, a large enough threat to city property that Mayor Michelle Wu headlined the September event alongside city councilors and state officials. She emphasized the long history Boston has with finding a balance between urbanization and the natural landscape.

"Homes and historic buildings are the treasures of our neighborhoods, and that's what this organization and this effort seeks to protect," she said. "Our history is one of centuries of changes to the land, which came with serious interventions conserving our relationship to the water. We know how much of a problem these intense droughts

are, how much our changing climate is affecting the health and safety of our residents. There's a ticking clock and Boston has a lot of work to do."

Roughly a third of the Downtown area is built on constructed land, efforts dating back centuries to fortify the loose soil unfit for foundations by sinking pylons down to solid marine clay. A conservative estimate from Garret Dash Nelson, president and head curator of the Boston Public Library's Leventhal Map and Education Center, suggests \$35 billion dollars of taxable land is these parcels of constructed land, \$54 billion if you count parcels partially on constructed land. That's more than a quarter of the city's property tax income.

Left submerged in silt the pylons can last hundreds of years, but they're being

threatened by severe drought. When exposed to air bacteria eat away at the structures, compromising their integrity. The five-month precipitation statistics for 2022 are the worst the Trust has on record, with only 8 inches of rain despite a historical average of 20. The only year that comes close is 2016, one of the most severe droughts the region has on record.

The critical difference today is that city infrastructure and active conservation efforts have thus far been enough to mitigate the impact on groundwater levels. Since the 2016 drought, city officials and the Trust have been working to install new water conservation systems and beef up active leak monitoring. The systems are showing some strain, but they're not yet overwhelmed.

Those droughts have been paired in recent

decades with short, severe rain events that cause flooding. That see-saw is difficult for infrastructure to manage, but officials are confident they can mitigate some of the worst effects by continuing to press for wider adoption of rainwater and groundwater conservation systems. Vandana Rao, the state's director of water policy, said more extensive water recharge systems are needed to counteract the expanding developments that exacerbate climate stresses.

"We're seeing a lot more of both high and low events, with greater frequency and greater intensity," she said. "Our streamflows and wider groundwater have seen all-time record lows, and in Massachusetts we have records going back to the late 1800s. The lack of recharge systems in Boston and statewide is really wreaking havoc on so many different systems."

Homeless

Continued from Page 1

Finding permanent housing, however, is always a daunting task, officials aren't making any promises when it comes to matching the homeless up with better living situations.

There are several elements that make the area an attractive site for those that don't have more substantial housing.

It's a wide sidewalk with heavy foot traffic, relatively comfortable and ideal for those looking to engage with the public for panhandling or selling street art.

It's nothing new to see some people loitering there, but encampments have recently become

common enough to garner more attention from the city.

"We've been consistently hearing from neighborhood coalitions, calls for assistance that come from concerned residents and people with the Berkeley College of Music," said Jim Greene, assistant director for street homelessness initiative in the mayor's office of housing.

"I've been over repeatedly and worked with the Pine Street Inn's daytime street outreach program as well as the department of mental health's homeless outreach team, Boston healthcare for the homeless and other agencies to try to assess and assist people that are at that intersection." Officials are already engaged with the street's occupants, checking in regularly to make sure they're healthy and trying to work

around any obstacles that are keeping them on the street.

As with the more severe situation at Mass and Cass, however, not everyone that wants a better living situation is willing to leap into the arms of the city's daunting system of social programs. Greene did specify that none of the individuals at that intersection are spillovers from Mass and Cass, which sees significant problems with petty crime, substance abuse and even human trafficking.

"It's been a challenging few months. People have their own preferences and idiosyncrasies. It's problematic that the amount of staff makes the sidewalk crowded, and we try to offer people alternatives to being there that they'll be willing to try, but the weather is

warmer recently and there's less incentive for people to head inside. They say beggars can't be choosers, but people who have long histories of homelessness and dealing with medical or mental health issues do have preferences about where they're willing to go," he said.

The Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay (NABB) held its annual meeting on September 14. Chair Elliot Laffer says that while homelessness is a broader concern in the Back Bay, the spot at Boylston and Mass Avenue isn't severe enough for members to bring it up specifically.

"I did take a walk up to take a look for myself and there were a couple people up there. This was daytime, there was one person selling artwork, one person sleeping,

some belongings suggesting other people lived there as well. Certainly nothing resembling Mass and Cass, but anytime you have unhoused people it's bad for them and the community," said Laffer.

For now, Greene says the most they can do is to sustain contact with the people living at the intersection to find more permanent housing solutions, and ensure they aren't being preyed on by more dangerous elements.

"The skilled professionals we send out are trying to work with them toward hopefully a resolution that will be better for everyone," he said. "We can't force them to accept those. Some have been on and off the street several times in the coming months, and these people can actually be quite vulnerable."