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Meeting Notes
Improvement to The Oak Allée at Poplar Gate
June 11, 2025

Time:
6:00 PM – 7:30 PM
Location:
The community Zoom meeting
Attendees:
+/-15 public attendees
Kezia Ofiesh, BPRD
My'Kel McMillen, BPRD
Kathy Baker Eclipse, BPRD
Caroline Peters, BPRD
Danny Schissler, Arnold Arboretum
Z Porter, Arnold Arboretum
Rodney Eason, Arnold Arboretum
Kyle Zick, KZLA
Yongjae Lee, KZLA

Community Meeting Summary

- Meeting Overview & Project Introduction
  A community briefing was held to discuss the upcoming renovation of the Oak Allée at the Arnold Arboretum. The project is managed by Kezia Ofiesh from the Boston Parks and Recreation Department in collaboration with the Arnold Arboretum and Kyle Zick Landscape Architecture.

- Key Project Goals & Context:
  - Project Focus: The renovation targets the Oak Allée, a 750-foot path connecting the Arboretum's Poplar Gate to Peters Hill Road.
  - Building on Past Work: This project complements the Arboretum's nearly completed "Entrance Improvements Project," which revitalized five gateways, including the Poplar Gate. The new Poplar Gate entrance is slated to reopen later this month.
  - Public-Private Partnership: The collaboration between the City of Boston and the Arboretum was highlighted as a successful model for enhancing a key city landmark.
  - Broader Connectivity: The Oak Allée renovation is a segment of the larger Roslindale Gateway Path project, a 1.5-mile shared-use path intended to connect Roslindale Village to Forest Hills.
  - City & Parks Dept. Priorities: The project aligns with city-wide goals of promoting green spaces, creating accessible and resilient parks, and fostering community engagement.

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Project Scope, Schedule & Budget

The project involves a straightforward renovation of the existing path with a focus on restoration, safety, and ecological sensitivity.

- Scope of Work:
  - Repave the asphalt path.
  - Restore and unearth the historic cobble swales that line both sides of the path but are currently buried under asphalt.
  - Implement rigorous measures to protect the mature oak trees that line the allée.
  - Improve stormwater drainage systems, including cleaning and inspecting underground pipes.
  - Add new amenities, including a bench, bike racks, and signage. The existing drinking fountain and trash receptacle will be reset.

- Project Schedule:
  - Current Phase: Schematic Design.
  - Bidding: Aiming for Fall 2025.
  - Construction Start: Spring 2026.
  - Duration: Estimated to take a few months, with the path closed to the public during this period.

- Estimated Budget:
  - The construction cost is estimated to be between $550,000 and $850,000, contingent on the final paving method selected.

Design Details & Considerations

The design prioritizes protecting the site's historical and natural character, particularly the mature oak trees, while improving user experience and accessibility where possible.

- Pavement Options & Tree Protection:
  - A primary decision is whether to use typical asphalt or pervious asphalt.
  - Pervious asphalt allows water to seep through to the ground, benefiting the trees and helping mitigate stormwater runoff. However, it requires a deeper excavation of nearly two feet.
  - A test pit will be dug to examine the depth of the oak tree roots near the path's edge. If the roots are shallow, standard asphalt will be used to avoid causing damage. Protecting the trees' critical root zones is a top priority.

- Accessibility Plan:
  - The path has sections with a slope steeper than the 5% maximum grade allowed by accessibility regulations.

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- Regrading the path to be fully compliant is not feasible as it would critically damage the root systems of the adjacent oak trees.
- The project team has consulted with the City of Boston Disabilities Commission. A variance will be submitted, and accommodations will be made.
- Accommodations: Signage at the top and bottom of the path will inform users of the steep grade. A resting area with a bench and a companion pad for a wheelchair will be installed at the midpoint of the hill. A compliant, accessible route will be created across the cobble swale to the bench.

Community Questions & Answers

The community raised several questions regarding access, parking, and related neighborhood infrastructure.

- Access During Construction: The Oak Allée path will be closed during construction, but adjacent meadow areas will remain accessible.
- Parking and Gate Accessibility: A resident expressed concern that removing parking areas near gates has made it difficult for people with mobility issues to access the Arboretum.
- Arboretum Response: Parking removal at gates like South Street was a deliberate decision to restore the historic landscape and solve problems with late-night car gatherings and noise. The Arboretum advocates for more city-installed ADA parking on surrounding streets and offers special driving permits for visitors with accessibility needs.
- Pervious Pavement: In response to a question, the team clarified that pervious asphalt has a slightly coarser texture but is fine for wheels (strollers, wheelchairs, bikes).
- Neighborhood Connectivity: A resident highlighted the lack of safe, accessible sidewalks on South Street leading to the Poplar Gate. Arboretum staff noted that this issue is the focus of Phase 3 of the Roslindale Gateway Path project, for which a feasibility study is complete.
- Wall Repair: A crumbling wall across the street from the project area is on a list for future repairs by the Parks Department.

Closing Notes

- Positive feedback from neighbors and attendees.
- Next steps: Tree root investigation via test pit and coordination with Dig Safe and Arboretum.
- Community encouraged to follow updates on the project webpage and contact Keisha with further questions.