



CITY of BOSTON

# MELNEA CASS/ MASS AVE 2.0

*Strategic Plan and Accomplishments*

*Mayor Martin J. Walsh*



Dear Residents,

Boston has long been a leader in providing quality medical care and therapeutic resources to people battling substance use disorder. In 2014, we established the first municipal Office of Recovery Services in the country. We have cultivated strong relationships with public, private, and nonprofit partners, and we've championed bold, forward-thinking solutions.

Last October, we took another important step with the creation of the Melnea Cass/Mass Ave 2.0 strategic plan, which coordinates our response to the opioid epidemic in one of our hardest-hit neighborhoods, and citywide.

The Melnea Cass/Mass Ave 2.0 strategic plan focuses on public health, public safety, and quality of life. It improves coordination, communication, and efficiency to address the impact of substance use disorder, *as well as* the often-related issues of trauma, poverty, mental health, and homelessness. At the same time, the City and its partners continue to focus on providing more permanent, affordable housing, and building a comprehensive recovery campus on Long Island.

This report details the strides we have already made in accomplishing the goals of the Melnea Cass/Mass Ave 2.0 plan. It also discusses the ways in which the COVID-19 public health emergency has exacerbated existing inequities and presented new challenges. As we continue to battle the pandemic, we are providing supportive services for individuals struggling with substance use disorder, *while also* implementing public health and safety measures to improve quality of life for the entire Boston community.

I am grateful to all of the partners who have dedicated their time, resources, and expertise to help us meet our goals, including elected officials, community groups, civic associations, service providers, and individual residents. Together, we will continue this important work in order to protect the health, safety, and dignity of all Boston residents.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Martin J. Walsh". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Martin J. Walsh  
Mayor of Boston

## ***Summary of the Melnea Cass/Mass Ave 2.0 Strategic Plan and Accomplishments***

Since launching the Melnea Cass/Mass Ave 2.0 Strategic Plan, coordination and communication between internal agencies has improved significantly regarding the day-to-day and long-term strategic planning on Newmarket Square and neighboring communities. The Coordinated Response Team, representing the Mayor's Office of Health and Human Services, Mayor's Office of Recovery Services, Boston Public Health Commission, Boston Police Department, Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services, Department of Public Works, Emergency Medical Services, Boston Fire Department, Inspectional Services Department, Boston Parks Department, Department of Neighborhood Development, and the Office of New Urban Mechanics was operationalized and the resulting coordination has not only enabled greater consistency in implementing new programming, but greater efficiency of resources.

In addition, a 25-member Task Force composed of community leaders, non-profit partners, institutions, residents, business owners, and elected officials, all of whom are stakeholders in the Melnea Cass Boulevard and Massachusetts Avenue area, was established in November 2019. The Task Force meets monthly to continue a productive dialogue with diverse stakeholders, increasing the transparency of city-wide efforts towards combating the opioid and homelessness crisis, and offering real-time perspective to policy shapers and service providers alike.

Through the initial Task Force meetings, the Melnea Cass and Mass Ave 2.0 buffer zone was defined to include both a 0.5 mile and 0.75 mile diameter around the intersection of Melnea Cass Boulevard and Massachusetts Avenue. The defined area includes parts of the Roxbury, South End, South Boston, Dorchester and Newmarket Square, which are most acutely impacted by the opioid epidemic. The Coordinated Response Team currently meets three times a week to strategize immediate, short, and long-term goals, respond to constituent concerns, and improve the quality of life for residents and businesses.

The 2.0 Plan created a dedicated Public Works team to the Melnea Cass and Mass Ave area to provide additional street clean ups. The number of street outreach workers through the Mayor's Office of Recovery Services was doubled to assist with harm reduction efforts in the neighborhoods and increase engagement. The plan also created a Boston Police Department Street Outreach Unit with the mission to

promote community-based outreach to those affected by mental illness, substance use disorder and homelessness to connect individuals to services.

### *Responding and recovering from the COVID-19 public health emergency*

From its inception, the Melnea Cass/Mass Ave 2.0 Strategic Plan was designed to be a living document, flexible to changing realities on the ground. The COVID-19 pandemic represented a dramatic and sudden shift in effort and focus towards providing resources and services while encouraging social distancing and good hygienic practices. With the State's stay-at-home advisory and closure of nonessential businesses, significant new complexities were added to the already significant challenges of addressing issues with homelessness, substance use, and mental health in the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard area. These challenges, such as closure of daytime services, reduced access to treatment and shelters, increased releases from jails and prisons, closure of courts, reduced options for public safety interventions, and closure of public restrooms and access to bathrooms, led to coordinated efforts within our Coordinated Response Team agencies to quickly address these new issues.

While adaptations were made to programming to maintain physical distancing and ensure public safety measures, it is notable that all City services remained operational during the public health emergency. This includes greatly expanded outdoor space at the Engagement Center (located behind the 112 Southampton Shelter) to maintain guest capacity, the addition of six handwashing stations in Downtown Boston, the shifting of outpatient services to telehealth, and implementation of additional COVID-19 screening, testing, and infection control measures at residential programs. Additionally, "comfort stations" were temporarily piloted to provide access to handwashing stations and bathrooms, including the hiring and deployment of two new recovery coaches to assist with staffing and provide treatment opportunities. The Boston Police Street Outreach Unit added Section 35s through a mobile unit.

Through partnerships with local universities, Pine Street Inn and other homeless shelters, space was created throughout the shelter system to enable safe social distancing. Collaboration with the State, Partners Healthcare, Ascension, Boston Health Care for the Homeless, and others led to the creation of 1,000 beds for COVID-19 patients at the Boston Hope Medical Center: 500 for homeless individuals and 500 for hospital overflows. The Boston Medical Center opened the East Newton Pavilion to create an additional 250 beds for COVID-19 patients. The

City secured universal testing for shelter guests on two-week intervals, led by Boston Health Care for the Homeless as the clinical partner and in coordination with the Boston Public Health Commission, St. Francis House, and the Pine Street Inn. Guests who test positive for COVID-19 receive the care and support needed to recover and individuals who test negative are placed in designated areas to allow for better physical distancing.

Screening and testing protocols were also rapidly developed and implemented at emergency shelters, the Engagement Center, and other programs. Through the creation of the Boston Resiliency Fund, Mayor Martin J. Walsh and the Boston Resiliency Fund Steering Committee raised \$33.3 million and awarded nearly \$25.9 million to 340 organizations who are working to increase access to medical care, food access, and technology for remote learning. Many of these organizations work in the Mass/Cass area, including Boston Health Care for the Homeless, Pine Street Inn, Boston Medical Center, and the Greater Boston Food Bank. In partnership with the Resiliency Fund and RIZE Massachusetts, critically important funds Covid-19 Rapid Response Grants were awarded to residential substance use treatment providers in Boston. These grants have helped treatment providers continue to provide crucial services to those struggling with substance use.

As the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the City of Boston continues to reopen in a phased and cautious manner, the Task Force continues to plan and reevaluate the services and resources available after COVID-19 in order to ensure ongoing and uninterrupted coordination, and engagement and providing pathways to substance use disorder treatment and housing.

## Coordination & Alignment of Services

Focus Areas	Key Accomplishments	Next Steps
<p>Improve internal and external coordination and communication</p>	<p>Created a 25-member task force comprised of stakeholders that meets monthly</p> <p>Created a Coordinated Response Team (CRT) of various city agencies focused on issues in the Melnea Cass Boulevard and Massachusetts Avenue area. The Team conducts daily calls and meets weekly to monitor progress</p>	<p>Continue internal coordination of efforts by the Mayor’s Office of Health and Human Services, Mayor’s Office of Recovery Services, Boston Public Health Commission, Boston Police Department, Boston EMS, Public Works Department, Department of Neighborhood Development, Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Services, Boston Public Schools, and Parks and Recreation Department</p> <p>Actively engage the Mass/Cass Task Force for the next year to improve external communications and continue dialogue with elected officials, private, non-profit, and community stakeholders</p>
<p>Raise public awareness of current efforts being implemented</p>	<p>The Task Force recommended a 0.5 and 0.75 mile zone around the Melnea Cass Boulevard and Massachusetts Avenue intersection to focus on coordinated efforts in the area</p> <p>Launched a <a href="http://boston.gov/mass-cass">public website</a> (boston.gov/mass-cass), <a href="#">metric dashboard</a>, <a href="#">resource map</a> and public awareness campaign</p> <p>Worked with the Department of Innovation and Technology to streamline data collection processes and communicate summary data across departments, allowing the CRT to monitor trends</p>	<p>Actively maintain the website with updates to contextualize metrics</p> <p>Leverage new and existing data sources to better understand the impact outside the Mass and Cass area</p>

## Public Health

Focus Areas	Key Accomplishments	Next Steps
<p>Reduce overdose risk and infectious diseases through harm reduction and health programming</p>	<p>Post Overdose Response Team (PORT) created programming which automates follow up engagement with individuals who have recently experienced an overdose (on average 5-7 visits/week)</p> <p>At the beginning of COVID-19, BPHC worked with nonprofit and private partners and state agencies to create emergency testing for our most vulnerable populations. In addition, we created temporary shelter spaces to allow for social distancing.</p>	<p>Recovery Services, BFD, and BPD Street Outreach Units will continue to collaborate to provide supportive services to individuals after experiencing an overdose</p>
<p>Increase access and engagement in all types of treatment</p>	<p>Expanded Engagement Center hours to 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.</p> <p>Employed a rotating Consumer Advisory Board to assist Street Outreach in neighborhood outreach, syringe disposal, and engagement</p> <p>Implemented quarterly volunteer nights in Recovery Services programs</p> <p>Expanded the STEP Pilot program, which provides intensive case management, seamless treatment placements, housing supports, and recovery supports to chronically homeless individuals in Mass/Cass</p>	<p>Continuing to identify partners to expand low-threshold programming for women</p> <p>Continue to increase engagements by the Street Outreach Team</p>
<p>Reduce unsheltered homeless population in the Melnea Cass Boulevard and Massachusetts Avenue intersection</p>	<p>Created a pilot program to develop individualized housing plans for chronically homeless individuals in Mass/Cass. Since January, we have housed 162 individuals.</p>	<p>Working to construct a permanent Engagement Center which will serve the same number of individuals to get off the street and connect with care. Construction is slated to begin</p>

		this fall.
Reduce the incidence of weather-related illnesses and exposures	EMS, BPD Street Outreach Team, DND Department of Homelessness, and the Recovery Services Street Outreach Team continue to monitor unsheltered individuals	Strategic planning and coordinated efforts to engage individuals during the summer and winter seasons



## Quality of Life

Focus Areas	Key Accomplishments	Next Steps
<p>Reduce trash and waste in public areas</p>	<p>Increased daily street cleanings by the Public Works Department every day in the Mass Cass area</p> <p>Boston Public Health Commission's (BPHC) property management increased additional ground sweeps of BPHC properties</p> <p>Assigned street sweepers during the spring/summer months</p> <p>Added four additional Public Works staff to create a Mass/Cass Special Operations Team</p> <p>Coordinated cleanups with the Mobile Sharps Team, Public Works and BPD SOU</p> <p>Expanded collaboration with Project Place, a nonprofit organization that offers innovative job training programs and related services for Boston's underserved populations. Currently they assist with cleaning up debris in the Melnea Cass/Mass Ave area.</p> <p>Weekly scheduled clean with DPW, BPD, Sharps at the Reed Street bus stop three times a week</p>	<p>Continuing to implement coordinated neighborhood cleanups through <a href="#">Love Your Block</a> every summer and fall (May and November)</p> <p>Address public defecation issues in the Mass Cass area</p>
<p>Strengthen public health approach to encampments</p>	<p>Drafting an encampment policy with the Coordinated Response Team</p> <p>Expanded EMS Squad 80 to 7 days a week</p> <p>BFD provided a transport van to assist with creating access to treatment</p>	<p>Implement a city-wide encampment policy and procedure</p>

	<p>ISD created an Investigations &amp; Enforcement team, collaborating with Recovery Services, BFD, and BPHC to address vacant and blighted properties in the city</p> <p>BFD through a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) grant, created a Medical Response Area pilot program, a Delta 21 car staffed with two first responders/recovery coaches that will respond to certain incident calls in the Mass Cass area three days a week</p> <p>BFD is hosting recovery coach academy training for BFD first responders to enhance the department's initiatives in the area</p>	
<p>Enhance beautification efforts in affected neighborhoods and promote positive neighborhood</p>	<p>The Parks &amp; Recreation Department increased the maintenance schedule for Clifford, Ramsey, and Orchard Parks</p> <p>Boston Public Schools increased cleaning schedules for Madison Park and Orchard Garden Schools</p>	<p>Replacement of mulch to rubber playground surfaces</p> <p>Implementing Safe Corridors Initiative through the Boson Public Schools to ensure all children have safe methods to get to school.</p>

## Public Safety

Focus Areas	Key Accomplishments	Next Steps
<p>Reduce criminal activity in the Melnea Cass Boulevard and Massachusetts Avenue area</p>	<p>The Police Department, BPD Street Outreach, and Office of Recovery Services hold bi-weekly meetings to strategize deployments based upon assessments of hotspots of activity</p> <p>Police Districts D4, C6, and B2 created fixed posts as a method of strategic deployment to increase police presence in the area</p> <p>Deployed the bike unit into the Mass/Cass area</p> <p>Office of Recovery Services and BPD are working together to increase opportunities for Crisis Intervention and Recovery Coach trainings for public safety officials</p>	<p>The Street Outreach Unit works with the Office of Recovery Services, Pine Street, BPD Street Outreach Unit and the Department of Neighborhood Development's Department of Homelessness on a daily basis</p> <p>Implementing expansion of the HUB model after successful pilots in East Boston and Jamaica Plain, which consists of 10 different social services partners who will meet weekly to identify high utilizers of services in the Mass Ave &amp; Melnea Cass area and develop a comprehensive service plan</p>
<p>Increase diversion options in coordination with public health services</p>	<p>Created the BPD Street Outreach Unit that currently includes five officers and one Sergeant under the direction of a Deputy</p>	<p>Expansion of the BEST team and partnership with PAARI recovery coaches</p>

	<p>Superintendent</p> <p>Ongoing partnership with PAARI and have three PAARI recovery coaches within the Street Outreach Unit</p> <p>Partnered with four BEST clinicians to assist with mental health calls and visits</p> <p>Created a monthly Outreach Day in coordination with the Mayor's Office of Recovery Services and District Community Service Officers to offer services in the Mass Ave and Melnea Cass area</p> <p>Created a protocol for internal and external communications to expedite the BPD outreach teams response to client referrals</p> <p>Created a partnership with Hope House, Project Place, Project Assert and Casa Esperanza to increase access to care</p>	<p>Working closely with Recovery Services and local treatment providers to facilitate access to care</p> <p>Ongoing and continued discussions between the BPD, Homeless Services, Recovery Services, the Courts, and community partners to create alternative pathways to recovery and housing options</p> <p>In the process of creating a crisis intervention program training for all first responders at the Boston Police Department Academy</p>
--	---	--

## Next Steps

While many of the short-term goals are accomplished or on track, long-term planning and strategies remain an ongoing focus. The unexpected, serious and ongoing nature of the COVID-19 pandemic greatly impacted virtually all services in the City of Boston. Around the Melnea Cass/Mass Ave. area, shifting focus and resources to prevent the spread of COVID-19 became a priority. Current services and resources continue to adapt and adjust to this new normal. The three-pronged approach to improving public health, public safety, and quality of life measures will remain the central focus of the work. Specifically, the City of Boston will continue to work with community partners and civic associations to sustain initiatives, expand successful programming or services throughout the City, and develop new strategies to combat the impacts of homelessness, substance use disorder and the opioid crisis. Efforts will continue to focus on decentralization of services in the Mass Cass area and the development of new initiatives in other areas of the City to provide comprehensive care and resources to our most vulnerable populations.

### *Permanent Engagement Center*

The current Engagement Center began in 2017 as a pilot program to provide a welcoming indoor low threshold space with basic comfort amenities and a nurse's clinic. Guests are provided with water, coffee, and light snacks in a space that also provides connections to nearby services with support and guidance. The current space is a tent located behind the 112 Southamptn Shelter that was originally used during the construction of the shelter in 2015. The tent, a temporary structure, has no permanent plumbing, water, or electrical service. During the pilot program, these amenities were brought in through service lines and outdoor restrooms and showers. In the last two years, the Engagement Center is a successful element in the network of services provided by the City for unsheltered people and those suffering from substance use disorder.

In recognition of the temporary nature of the existing tent, the Mayor's Office of Recovery Services and Boston Public Health Commission collaborated with the Department of Public Facilities to design a permanent engagement center on Atkinson Street. As a previously untried initiative, lessons from some of the challenges around the Engagement Center are actively being applied in order to ensure its greatest effectiveness and success going forward. Accordingly, the new Engagement Center will be a larger space but maintain the same capacity levels to provide more space for guests. It will create a welcoming safe space with added

security. The center will include indoor showers and toilets, a larger nurse's clinic, breakout space for programming, and an exterior courtyard with privacy screening. The anticipated completion date for this project is Fall 2021.

### *Long Island Recovery Campus*

The City continues to make progress on the permitting necessary to replace the deck of the Long Island Bridge, which would reestablish vehicular access for the planned Long Island Recovery Campus. By December 2018, the City had submitted applications for every major local, state, and federal permit required to rebuild the Long Island Bridge. One of the remaining state permits is the Chapter 91 License from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. With its submission to DEP this summer, the City has concluded the administrative completeness review for the Chapter 91 License. In addition, the City continues to litigate its appeal in Suffolk Superior Court of the Quincy Conservation Commission's denial of a local permit for the Long Island Bridge. On August 27, 2020, the Court held oral arguments on the merits of Boston's challenge, and post-hearing briefs are due to the Superior Court this month.

## Mass Cass Task Force

Eilleen McGuire	Hope House
Barry Bock	Boston Healthcare for the Homeless
	Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative
Karen Antman	Boston University Medical Campus
Lavell Fulks	Madison Park Development Corporation
Linda Dorcena Forry	Northeast Suffolk Construction
Lyndia Downie	Pine Street Inn
Michael Mancusi	East Boston Neighborhood Health Center
Mike Coelho	Massachusetts Probation
Reverend Dr. Jay Williams	Union Methodist Church
Leemarie Mosca	Rosie's Place
Sue Sullivan	Newmarket Business Association
Megan Webb	Orchard Gardens Principal
Steve Fox	South End Forum
Frank Baker	City Councilor District 3
Annissa Essaibi George	City Councilor At Large
Jon Santiago	State Representative , 9th Suffolk
Ed Flynn	City Councilor District 2
Liz Miranda	State Representative, 5th Suffolk
Steve Tompkins	Suffolk County Sheriff's Office
David Stone	Blackstone Franklin Square Neighborhood Association
Michael Nelson	South End Resident
Dr Miriam Komaromy	Boston Medical Center
Pattie McCormick	Andrew Square Civic Association
Stephen Wright	Roxbury Resident

*This report is dedicated to Aubri Esters, a fierce advocate for the rights of people who use drugs and a leader in Boston's harm reduction community. As a member of the Mass/Cass 2.0 Task Force, she challenged us to look at progressive drug user health policies in a different way, and never wavered to confront the oppression and stigma faced by people who use drugs. Aubri's voice was a driving force in advancing harm reduction policy and fighting for equitable representation of people who use drugs in our Mass/Cass 2.0 efforts.*