



Meeting Notes

Webster Avenue Playground Improvements Meeting #2

June 10, 2026

Attendees:

+/- 20 public attendees, including project stakeholders and representatives from the City of Boston, Old North Church, Freedom Trail Foundation, and the design team

Kenya Thompson, BPRD

My'Kel McMillen, BPRD

Maria Perez, Office of Neighborhood Services

Kyle Zick, KZLA

Yongjae Lee, KZLA

Community Meeting #2 Summary

Overview:

The second community meeting focused on reviewing schematic design concepts for Webster Avenue Playground, also known as Old North Church Park. The project team presented four design alternatives exploring different approaches to accessibility improvements, circulation, seating, planting, memorial placement, and Freedom Trail alignment.

The City reiterated that the primary goals of the project are to improve accessibility, safety, circulation, and overall usability of the plaza while respecting its historic setting and preserving important site features. Proposed improvements include replacement of uneven paving with new brick and bluestone compatible with Paul Revere Mall, protection of existing trees, improved access to the memorial area, and exploration of stormwater management opportunities.

The meeting included a detailed discussion of the memorial area, planting character, seating, pedestrian circulation, maintenance responsibilities, and long-term stewardship of the site. Community members provided feedback on the strengths and challenges of each design option and offered suggestions for refining a preferred concept plan.

Project Design and Timeline:

The project team reviewed the project schedule and noted that the project is currently in schematic design. Community Meeting #1 was held in April 2026 and focused on existing conditions and community priorities. Community Meeting #2 presented design alternatives for discussion and feedback.

Following the meeting, the design team will refine a preferred concept plan based on community input. The preferred concept will be posted on the project webpage for additional public review. The project will then proceed through Boston Landmarks Commission review, Boston Water and Sewer review, construction documentation, and bidding.

The City noted that construction is anticipated to begin in 2027. The project budget remains approximately \$470,000.



Design Concepts Review:

Four design options were presented for discussion. Each option retained the existing eight honey locust trees and incorporated accessibility improvements, upgraded paving, and a Freedom Trail connection through the site.

Option 1 maintained the existing memorial location and overall organization of the plaza while improving accessibility, expanding seating opportunities, and preserving planting areas.

Option 2 increased paved gathering space and circulation areas while reducing planting areas and creating a more open memorial setting.

Option 3 relocated the memorial beneath the tree canopy and expanded planting areas along the eastern edge of the site.

Option 4 introduced a linear memorial arrangement, modified planting zones, and alternative seating configurations while maintaining clear circulation routes.

The design team explained that the alternatives were intentionally different in order to test priorities and gather community feedback regarding circulation, planting, seating, memorial use, and overall character.

Summary of Feedback:

- Community members generally favored Option 1 as the preferred framework because it preserves the existing character of the plaza, maintains the memorial in a familiar location, retains planting areas, and improves accessibility.
- Several attendees expressed concern that Option 2 removed too much green space and created an overly paved environment. Community members emphasized that planting areas help soften the surrounding brick environment and contribute to the quiet, contemplative character of the space.
- Participants generally supported maintaining a balance between open gathering space and landscaped areas rather than maximizing either condition.
- Community members emphasized that the memorial is one of the most significant features of the plaza and should remain a focal point of the design.
- Several attendees noted that the plaza serves as a location for military commemorations, wreath-laying ceremonies, memorial services, reflection, and informal gathering, and that the design should continue to support these activities.
- Strong support was expressed for preserving the contemplative character of the memorial setting while improving accessibility and circulation around it.
- Discussion focused on the existing memorial construction and the long-term durability of its materials. Several attendees noted that the pressure-treated wood posts appear temporary and suggested exploring more durable materials such as steel, bronze, granite, or other permanent materials.
- Community members expressed interest in maintaining the memorial's existing rugged and battlefield-inspired character while improving its longevity and overall composition.



- One attendee suggested investigating the possible use of salvaged World Trade Center structural steel as part of a future memorial enhancement.
- Reverend Matthew Cadwell suggested studying a revised memorial orientation that would rotate the memorial toward the center of the plaza. Community members responded positively to this idea and noted that it could improve visibility, visitor interaction, and ceremonial use.
- During the discussion, the design team prepared sketch studies exploring potential memorial rotation and revised circulation patterns to better support gathering space and ceremonial functions.
- Suzanne Taylor of the Freedom Trail Foundation suggested that any revised memorial orientation should be studied in conjunction with the Freedom Trail alignment. Discussion included the possibility of creating a more direct trail route through the plaza while increasing open space around the memorial.
- Community members generally supported further study of the Freedom Trail alignment if it improves circulation and memorial use. It was noted that any modifications to the Freedom Trail would require review by the Freedom Trail Commission.
- Several attendees supported preserving the memorial's curved form, noting that the geometry softens the otherwise rectilinear character of the plaza and contributes to the space's contemplative quality.
- Additional seating was widely supported, particularly seating located beneath the existing tree canopy. Community members noted that seating should support both quiet reflection and everyday use while avoiding conflicts with pedestrian circulation and ceremonial activities.
- Concerns were raised regarding the maintenance of planting areas. Community members generally supported planting improvements provided that the planting design remains manageable and realistic for long-term maintenance.
- Questions were raised regarding maintenance responsibilities for planting areas, snow removal, tree care, and overall stewardship of the plaza.
- The City noted that tree and pavement maintenance would remain under Parks Department responsibility and that planting maintenance may require coordination with Old North Church or other community partners.
- Questions were raised regarding potential rodent habitat within planting areas. The design team noted that future planting design would seek to avoid dense shrub masses that may create maintenance concerns.
- Community members supported the protection of all existing honey locust trees and emphasized the importance of preserving the mature tree canopy.
- Questions were raised regarding tree roots and future pavement performance. The design team noted that future paving design will consider root growth and long-term tree health.
- Discussion also addressed stormwater management requirements. The design team explained that future design development will include coordination with Boston Water and Sewer to evaluate infiltration opportunities while minimizing maintenance impacts and avoiding conflicts with existing trees and adjacent historic structures.



Questions for the Community Raised During the Meeting:

- Which design elements from the four options should be incorporated into the preferred concept plan?
- Should the memorial be reoriented to strengthen its relationship to the plaza and improve ceremonial use?
- Should the Freedom Trail alignment be adjusted to create additional space around the memorial and improve circulation?
- What balance of planting, gathering space, and seating best supports the character and function of the plaza?
- How can the memorial be reconstructed using more durable materials while preserving its existing character and significance?

Next Steps:

The project team will use community feedback to develop a preferred concept plan based primarily on the ideas supported during the meeting. Additional study will include memorial orientation, Freedom Trail alignment, planting design, seating placement, circulation, memorial materials, stormwater management, and maintenance considerations.

The preferred concept plan will be posted on the project webpage and distributed to meeting participants for additional review and comment. The project will then advance into permitting, agency review, construction documentation, and bidding prior to construction anticipated in 2027.

Chat / Contact Information:

kenya.thompson2@boston.gov

Project webpage:

boston.gov/webster-ave-playground