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MEETING NOTES

21-Oct-2026

Meeting Date: 10/15/2026
Location: Zoom
Topic: Jamaica Plain Boathouse and Bandstand Community Meeting #3

Attendees:

Panelists:

Kezia Ofiesh – BPRD
Alistair Lucks – PFD
Whitney Hansley – PFD
Jason Bowers – Annum Architects
Ashley Merchant – Annum Architects
Mark Pantano – Annum Architects
Kaley Denaro – Annum Architects

Other Attendees:

Michael Giodano, Representative MacGregor's Office
Hodari Keels, Boston Park Ranger
Dave DiLorenzo, Courageous Sailing
Gretchen Grozier, Jamaica Plain Historical Society

Approx. 59 community members, including the attendees listed above

A copy of the presentation can be found on the Parks Department project website.

Presentation:

- Kezia Ofiesh (BPRD) welcomed attendees, introduced the project team, reviewed the goals of the study, and noted that the upper level of the Bandstand is currently closed pending guardrail repairs anticipated spring 2027.
- Alistair Lucks (PFD) reviewed the project scope and schedule. He explained that the concepts presented represent a broad range of possibilities intended to test opportunities and constraints at the site and noted that additional community input will continue to be collected through future engagement and online feedback.
- Mark Pantano (Annum) reviewed existing conditions at the site and discussed priorities for improving the current facilities and user experience.
- Ashley Merchant (Annum) presented the range of recommendations, reviewed the four levels of intervention, and explained potential improvements related to accessibility, restrooms, educational programming, food service, and public use. She also introduced the discussion topics and community feedback questions.

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Questions from Community:

- Patricia Rea asked whether the Upper Bandstand is currently available for rental.
    - Kezia Ofiesh (BPRD) responded that it will not be available until the guardrails are repaired next spring.
- Alexandra Rollins noted that many historic houses use lifts for accessibility, eliminating the need for intrusive and unsightly ramps.
    - Kenneth Dietz commented that the ramp concepts made the lift option appear much more palatable and less historically disruptive.
    - Kezia Ofiesh (BPRD) thanked participants for the feedback.
- Ralph Walton asked whether a ramp could include a deliberate viewing and resting area where the ramp doubles back, potentially including benches and enough width to accommodate users traveling in both directions.
    - Kezia Ofiesh (BPRD) responded that this is something that could be studied further if the project advances into the next phase.
- Melissa Goldman asked how the proposed single-user restrooms would address situations where users lock themselves inside for extended periods, rendering facilities inaccessible. She also raised concerns about safety incidents within a restroom.
    - Kezia Ofiesh (BPRD) responded that the project would include security cameras outside restroom doors and alarm systems to alert staff when doors remain locked for extended periods. The details will continue to be developed in the design phase.
- Gretchen Grozier (JP Historical Society) stated that restrooms are the highest priority and asked why dedicated ranger office space is needed if Rangers are only present intermittently. She also commented that budgeting decisions should reflect community priorities.
    - Ashley Merchant (Annum) responded that Rangers currently conduct administrative work at the site and prefer to have a dedicated space available.
    - Kezia Ofiesh (BPRD) responded that future programming and departmental changes could increase the Ranger programming at Jamaica Pond. She noted that Rangers have historically maintained a presence at the site, operate the horse outpost, and conduct public safety work throughout the park.
- Matt Wright asked whether the existing terrace outside the Bandstand could be modified to accommodate an exterior accessibility ramp rather than locating the ramp inside the structure.
    - Ashley Merchant (Annum) explained that there is not space to build an exterior ramp, and the plaza is considered historical.
- Lorna Gibson asked in the chat whether year-round restroom access could be included within Level 1 improvements rather than waiting until Level 2.
- William Messenger asked in the chat whether the project team has spoken with café operators or vendors at similar facilities to better understand whether either café concept would be commercially viable. He expressed concern that an unsuccessful café could become vacant and underutilized.
- Sergio Martinez asked how the proposed reservation system for the second floor of the Boathouse would operate.
    - Kezia Ofiesh (BPRD) responded that reservations would function similarly to current Boston Parks reservation systems, with users obtaining permits online. She noted that operational details would continue to be developed.

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- Joanne Zitek asked whether additional trash collection would be provided if food and coffee service are added to the site.
    - Kezia Ofiesh (BPRD) responded that increased trash collection would be a requirement of any food-service program.
- Gretchen Grozier (JP Historical Society) asked whether the Nature Center concept could instead become a Jamaica Pond history exhibit incorporating environmental education and nature exhibits.
    - Hodari Keels (Boston Park Ranger) responded that the concept for the space remains flexible and could provide educational opportunities that help visitors engage with both the environment and the history of the site. He noted that future staffing plans include expanded educational programming.
- Gretchen Grozier (JP Historical Society) asked whether agencies beyond the Boston Landmarks Commission, including the Massachusetts Historical Commission and National Register review authorities, would be involved in project review.
    - Ashley Merchant (Annum) responded that Jamaica Pond is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and will therefore be subject to historic review requirements.
- Gretchen Grozier (JP Historical Society) asked whether food service could be provided through food trucks rather than investing in building renovations.
    - Ashley Merchant (Annum) responded that the Level 2 concept includes seating, electrical infrastructure, and support for food carts and pop-up vendors. She explained that accommodating full-size food trucks could create conflicts with pedestrian circulation.
- Judy Teitelman asked whether a café could be located within the Boathouse where plumbing already exists rather than within the Bandstand.
    - Ashley Merchant (Annum) responded that the concept is possible but would require relocation of either the restroom facilities or Courageous Sailing operations, both of which rely on existing plumbing infrastructure.
- Steven Rothstein asked how climate change, ecology, and broader environmental issues affecting Jamaica Pond are being considered as part of the project.
    - Kezia Ofiesh (BPRD) responded that the current feasibility study is focused primarily on the buildings and structures rather than the pond ecosystem.
    - Mark Pantano (Annum) responded that future interpretive programming could include educational signage that explains the surrounding ecosystem.
- Dave DiLorenzo (Courageous Sailing) asked whether project phasing is being considered to minimize disruption to existing programs and services, noting that even a summer closure could significantly impact participating families.
    - Alistair Lucks (PFD) responded that construction phasing cannot be determined until the project scope is finalized. He stated that smaller scopes would provide greater flexibility and that the City routinely works around seasonal constraints to minimize disruption in its projects.
- Steven Rothstein asked how project decisions will be made, whether community members can recommend moving items between phases, and whether future project funding could include private fundraising.
    - Ashley Merchant (Annum) responded that written feedback should be submitted to Kezia Ofiesh and that feedback will be reflected in the final report.

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  - Alistair Lucks (PFD) responded that current funding supports the feasibility study. He explained that future design and construction would require additional funding once project costs are better understood.
- Deyja Gentile asked whether additional community meetings would be held as the project advances.
  - Alistair Lucks (PFD) responded that community members can participate through the City's capital budgeting process and through future design phases. He noted that if the project advances, there could be five or six additional public meetings.
- Kenneth Dietz asked why the overall project timeline appears lengthy and requested additional information regarding the schedule from feasibility study through construction.
  - Alistair Lucks (PFD) responded that the schedule is driven by community engagement, coordination among City departments, annual budgeting cycles, and public procurement requirements for both design and construction. He emphasized the City's desire to be thorough and develop reliable cost and scope information.

Community Comments:

- Michael Muehe commented that, as a wheelchair user and accessibility advocate with the Boston Center for Independent Living, he agrees that a switchback ramp is preferable to a long single-direction ramp because it maintains a closer relationship to the Bandstand. He noted that a lift would have the advantage of a smaller footprint, but stated that exterior lifts are problematic in Boston's climate and would need to be fully or substantially enclosed to prevent weather-related impacts to users and equipment.
- Alexandra Rollins suggested that the term "café" is concerning given existing restroom and trash management challenges. She suggested that a “tea room” concept could provide a more limited offering with fewer operational challenges while adding historic character. Alexandra also stated that preserving the buildings should remain the highest priority and expressed concern that alterations made to address current needs may not remain necessary in the future. She further suggested that educational programming should address the day-to-day health of Jamaica Pond and recommended regular public information about water quality and ecosystem health.
- Travis Johnston expressed strong support for the café concept and stated that it would help attract people to the site and enhance the experience of the community resource.
- Dave DiLorenzo (Courageous Sailing) commented that Courageous Sailing values its role as a steward of Jamaica Pond and is excited by the proposed improvements. He noted that many current operational constraints stem from the condition of the existing building and stated that the organization looks forward to reviewing the proposals further and participating in future discussions. He also noted that Courageous Sailing currently sells limited beverages and frozen treats that do not require special permitting and would be open to expanding food offerings if facilities and infrastructure allowed.
- Ralph Walton notes that taxidermy displays should be protected from direct sunlight. He also noted that a nearby historic building was previously lost because funding was not available for maintenance, underscoring the importance of preserving existing assets.
- Sandra Jordan commented that the highest priority should be structural repairs that preserve the historic nature of the buildings while minimizing changes to their visual character and footprint.

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- Andrew Shores commented that the project involves both a historic building and a historic landscape and that changes to the landscape should be minimized. He stated that structural repairs should be prioritized, windows should be restored rather than replaced, and a lift is the only acceptable accessibility intervention. He also expressed concern about losing access to the Boathouse and Courageous Sailing during construction.
    - Kezia Ofiesh (BPRD) clarified that construction would not result in closures extending continuously until 2030 and that impacts would depend on project scope.
    - Alistair Lucks (PFD) responded that portions of the site could remain operational during construction and that the project team is not anticipating a multiyear closure of the Boathouse.
- Melissa Goldman said that food vending should be prioritized, preferably through small local businesses. She expressed interest in providing infrastructure that supports micro-enterprise opportunities at the site. Melissa also stated that many local business owners would be interested in helping the City develop a successful vendor program. In addition, she emphasized the importance of receiving detailed information regarding restroom safety. She noted that Courageous Sailing's current food offerings are limited.
- Deyja Gentile commented that she does not support additional commercial programming because food-service options are already available within walking distance of Jamaica Pond and because the historic character of the park should remain the priority.
- William Messenger commented that even fully enclosed lifts, such as those used within the MBTA system, frequently experience operational and maintenance issues. He also stated that while historic preservation is important, it should not be the primary consideration in an actively used public park. He believes that the public's current needs, recreational use, and enjoyment of the site should take precedence when priorities conflict.
- Deacon Marvel suggested that a café should be considered because similar uses existed at the site historically and because plumbing infrastructure already exists within the facility. He also stated that the proposed ramp requires substantially more study and suggested integrating it with a viewing platform, seating, and other amenities so that it becomes an architecturally integrated destination rather than solely an accessibility feature.
- Sarah Freeman said that it would be helpful to review examples of ADA improvements at historic parks in Boston and elsewhere. She identified preservation of historic character, scale, and landscape as key priorities and noted that coffee service was previously available at the Boathouse.
- Kenneth Dietz commented that historic preservation should remain the top priority and that the architecture of the Boathouse and Bandstand contributes significantly to the identity of Jamaica Plain. He stated that improvements can be implemented without compromising the historic character of the buildings. He encouraged the project team to carefully balance modernization with preservation.
- Rich Serrao commented that successful neighborhoods such as the South End demonstrate how historic preservation and modern enhancements can coexist. While supporting preservation, he stated that selective contemporary improvements could make Jamaica Pond more attractive and welcoming. He expressed concern that preserving the buildings exactly as they exist today may miss an opportunity to enhance the site's appearance and public appeal.
- Helen Raizen mentioned that accessibility is her highest priority after basic repairs are completed. She also stated that year-round restroom access is important for both public safety and visitor convenience.

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Next Steps:

- Community members can submit additional written comments directly to Kezia Ofiesh (BPRD).
- Annum will complete the final feasibility study report.
    - Community feedback will be documented in the report
- Following completion of the study, the City will determine future project scope, budgeting, and implementation priorities
    - Additional public engagement opportunities are anticipated if the project advances into future design phases.