

## Allston Brighton Boston College Community Task Force

August 25, 2004

Mr. Thomas Keady  
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Dear Tom:

In order to continue the constructive relationship established with Boston College, the Allston-Brighton Boston College Community Task Force has met to outline the essential issues that we believe Boston College should consider as preparations are made to either amend or create a new Master Plan.

We advance our views in a spirit of constructive engagement, hoping that the issues we raise stimulate a productive dialogue between the college and the community thereby framing a comprehensive Master Planning Process. We divide this letter into four main sections: first, a brief view of the problems that confront the Allston-Brighton community; second, issues relating to the planning process; third, recommendations concerning substantive issues that we believe Boston College should address as it renews the Master Planning Process; fourth, general recommendations concerning community benefits.

### Problems Confronting the Allston-Brighton Community

Boston College renews its Master Planning Process at a decisive and difficult time for Allston-Brighton. Obviously, within this letter, we can only sketch the major challenges currently confronting the community. The following provides a context that should be considered by Boston College at this time.

In recent years, Allston-Brighton has experienced a period of unprecedented university expansion. This expansion includes major purchases by Harvard University and Boston College (43 acres of St. John's seminary, with a further 3.25 acres in two years and the optional sale of almost 18 additional acres in 10 years). This additional institutional expansion will likely adversely affect the remaining residential neighborhoods of Allston-Brighton by exacerbating, in part, the following conditions:

- A. The high cost of housing, both in terms of home prices and rental housing, makes it difficult for working and middle class people to reside in Allston-Brighton.

- B. Because of the high cost of housing, Allston-Brighton has experienced a steep decline in the number of families residing in the community. For example, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of family households in Allston-Brighton declined 6.5% between 1990 and 2000. Family households now account for only 32.7% of Allston-Brighton households. The city-wide average is 48.1 %. The loss of families and children in the neighborhood has reached a crisis point, leading to the closing of two public schools (the Baldwin and Taft), the closing of a high school (St. Columbkille), and the anticipated closing of a Roman Catholic Grammar school (Our Lady of the Presentation).
- C. Allston-Brighton's owner occupancy rate continues to decline. According to the 2000 census, only 19.3% of housing units in Allston-Brighton are owner occupied. Absentee ownership, in part driven by landlords renting to undergraduate and graduate students, has an influence on rents and home prices in Allston-Brighton. Allston-Brighton was one of only two Boston neighborhoods to experience a decline in owner-occupancy during the 1990's. The rate of owner-occupancy in Allston-Brighton compares unfavorably with the city average of 30.7%.
- D. Despite the economic growth experienced by the city of Boston and by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in the 1990's, the poverty rate in Allston-Brighton increased from 20.1% in 1990 to 23% in 2000, a 14.7% increase. Our neighborhood's poverty rate is now higher than the city average of 19.5% and is higher than most Boston neighborhoods, including Mattapan, North and South Dorchester, Hyde Park, East Boston, Jamaica Plan, South Boston and Roslindale (all data from the U.S. Census).

#### Recommendations Concerning the Master Planning Process

We seek a transparent process that provides the community with timely information on the Master Plan process in order to ensure that an informed dialogue will take place between the community and college.

More specifically, we seek:

1. An annotated Master Plan schedule that identifies critical steps in the process with targeted completion dates. This will provide the Task Force and the community with the opportunity to respond in a timely and systematic manner to proposals by the college.

2. As part of the annotated Master Plan schedule, we seek, for example the following information:
  - a. projected facility needs for graduate and undergraduate students, faculty and administration (including any immediate plans for reuse of the property at St. John's);
  - b. a site map of the campus showing existing and newly acquired property: significant features including buildings, parking lots and roads~ and natural resources (such as important trees, flood plains, and rock outcroppings). This information will help both the college and the community to evaluate proposed development in light of valuable resources, circulation considerations and potential impacts.
  - c. construction phasing - existing and new projects will have to be identified with an updated timeline for their completion, those projects with beneficial attributes for the community should be scheduled early.
  - d. impact studies examining development alternatives

Recommendations Concerning Specific Issues Relating to the Next Master Plan.

1. Boston College should agree to a moratorium on further institutional expansion, (i.e., further land purchases), over the course of the 2005-2010 Master Plan cycle. This moratorium would not affect the land already purchased from the Archdiocese of Boston. We seek this moratorium because we believe that further institutional expansion threatens the very fabric of the Allston-Brighton community. Boston College's recent expansion needs to be considered within the context of other institutional expansion, especially the purchases by Harvard University. In particular, given the continuing housing crisis influencing the community, the Task Force is opposed to expansion that would result in losing residential housing stock. For example, we do not want a repetition of College Road and Hammond Street in Newton (where the college has purchased many homes) to occur on Lake Street and Foster Street in Brighton.

2. Boston College should maintain its stated obligation not to exceed current levels of enrollment of graduate and undergraduate students over the next five year Master Plan period. Such increases would produce further burdens on both the college and the community.
3. Boston College should commit to house all undergraduates on campus by 2010. Approximately, 1,250 students live in off-campus apartments and houses. Their presence in residential housing stock plays a role in fueling escalating rents and home prices in Allston-Brighton; their presence also raises quality-of-life concerns for residents. With the recent expansion of the college, the task of housing students on campus will be made easier, with administrative and faculty offices potentially moving to the former seminary.

We also emphasize that in the previous Master Plan Process, the college and the Task Force identified multiple sites for the construction of additional dormitories on the Boston College campus. Once again we suggest making more appropriate use of the land where the "mods" are located (we note again that the "mods" were built as "temporary" housing for undergraduates in the 1970's. These low rise buildings occupy considerable space while housing too few students).

4. In terms of the future development of the former seminary property, we urge the college to consider the following:
  - a. the primary use of the property should be for faculty and administrative offices and practice fields (any potential lighting of those fields should be brought to the Task Force's attention immediately);
  - b. to protect the residential character of surrounding streets, the college should agree to a substantial no-build buffer zone around the property~
  - c. given the lack of open space in Brighton, the college should conserve open, green space. Any new development should be clustered in order to preserve open space.
  - d. The college should protect the open space through the use of a conservation easement, thereby, protecting green space from future development.

- e. Given the discussion above and the issues outlined in the second paragraph of point three, the Task Force is opposed to the construction of undergraduate dormitories on the former seminary grounds. New dormitories should be and can be constructed on the main campus.

#### Recommendations Concerning Community Benefits

The Task Force believes that Boston College should consider a major expansion in the benefits that it supplies to Allston-Brighton in particular and the city of Boston in general. We believe this expansion in benefits would properly reflect the fact that the college, with its purchase of the seminary grounds, will have an increasingly important influence on the Allston-Brighton community. We suggest that the benefits should be increased in direct proportion to the size of the college's expansion.

We offer, for example, the following general recommendations for community benefits:

1. The college should retain and expand the current scholarship program for Allston-Brighton residents and Boston residents. The college deserves credit for expanding this program at the start of the last Master Plan. Over the course of five years, the college will have supplied 50 four-year scholarships to Boston residents. We believe firmly that this program has provided benefits to the college, the Allston-Brighton community and the city of Boston.
2. The college should retain and expand the grant program for community groups and organizations in Allston-Brighton. This program has well served the college, the community, and the city.
3. Given its expertise and the talents of its faculty and staff, the college should develop a more systematic and organized program that would enrich the education of students at public and private schools in Allston-Brighton.
4. As a largely symbolic act, but one that would underscore the commitment of the college to the Allston-Brighton community, we ask that the college consider relinquishing control of the two homes on Foster Street previously owned by the archdiocese. We suggest that these homes be sold at below market cost to Allston-Brighton residents who have been unable to find housing at an affordable price in this community.

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5. The college should establish a Business School liaison with the Cleveland Circle merchant community as a means to collaborate on developing a more vibrant commercial center.

### Conclusion

We are hopeful that you will be able to provide an initial response to our suggested approach to amending and/or creating a new Master Plan by September 21, 2004, the date of our next meeting. At that time we look forward to discussing a framework for subsequent meetings during which we will be able to explore these recommendations and concerns in more depth.

We close by underscoring our desire to continue to build and sustain a productive relationship with Boston College as we move through the Master Planning Process. We seek to produce a Master Plan that serves the best interests of both the college and the community. We trust that Boston College seeks the same outcome.

Sincerely,

Maureen A. McGrail  
Chair

cc.: William P. Leahy, S.J., President, Boston College  
James J. Lehane, Executive Assistant to the President, Boston College  
Thomas M. Menino, Mayor, City of Boston  
Mark Maloney, Director, Boston Redevelopment Authority  
Michael Kineavey, Director, Office of Neighborhood Services  
Paul Holloway, Neighborhood Coordinator, City of Boston  
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Senator Steven Tolman  
Representative Brian Golden  
Representative Kevin Honan  
City Councilor Jerry McDermott  
Task Force Members