



WHARF DISTRICT
COUNCIL
B O S T O N

MAY 19, 2020 (5-6:30 PM) Wharf District Council Meeting

STAYING CONNECTED: A CONVERSATION WITH MAYOR WALSH

HOSTING THE MEETING – MARC MARGULIES, FAIA, LEED AP, WDC PRESIDENT

The WDC welcomed the new North End and West End Liaison John Romano and recognized Councilor Ed Flynn's volunteer initiative that helped arrange 5,000 phone calls to seniors and persons with disabilities in need of assistance.

FOCUSING ON THE FOUR STAGES OF REOPENING & OTHER TOPICS – MAYOR MARTY WALSH

Stressing the need for a slow and cautious approach to reopening the City, Mayor Walsh opened his discussion with the Wharf District Council at their May meeting by referencing the latest COVID-19 numbers, which as of Wednesday, May 20, stood at 588 deaths and over 12,000 reported cases in Boston.

Mayor Walsh then went on to answer many questions from the Council and meeting attendees.

Restaurants, Hotels, and Hospitality

The restaurants and lodging will have to wait until phase two of Governor Baker's four phase plan in order to further revive operations. With each phase designed to last three weeks, and relying on trending public health data, insights were sought on what is being done at the City level to assist businesses.

Outdoor dining was discussed and is a measure the City supports with a working plan in place. Walsh acknowledged that having to free up parking spaces for accommodation may mean having to make difficult decisions. Indoor dining is not off the table, but public safety remains a priority.

Boston Planning and Development Agency

When asked if the Boston Planning and Development Agency (BPDA) has made any progress toward adapting all of its meetings to virtual, Walsh replied that no definitive date has been set for a complete transition. The public review process for Article 80 projects and BPDA planning studies remain on hold until further notice.

Voting

One resident brought up COVID-19's impact on voting and referenced vote-by-mail. Mayor Walsh voiced his support for vote-by-mail. Walsh added that a discussion is ongoing on whether to designate November 3rd as a one-day public holiday to facilitate a safer in-person experience. The City is currently reaching out to senior housing, schools, and other facilities ahead of the elections to ensure a state of readiness at polling places.

Schools

Asked whether or not grade school will be making an in-person return in the Fall, Walsh replied that no decision has been reached, but cited the recent antibody test results released on May 15th as playing a role in continued conversations with Boston Public Schools (BPS) and other officials regarding student safety.

Colleges have "a bit of a way to go" Walsh admitted, with the overall situation still being very fluid and different institutions mapping out strategies to combat and deal with the pandemic.

Northern Avenue Bridge

The Northern Avenue Bridge Project was discussed, with Walsh stating his confidence in the bridge being able to relieve tension along the South Boston Waterfront due to emergency vehicles and buses traveling one-way. Capital funds have been allocated, but COVID-19 may present challenges in regards to the project timeline.

Tourism

It may take well over a year for tourism to return to full strength, with all large summer events canceled in Boston. The Mayor estimated we may start to see an increase in visitors in the fall if most colleges reopen due to families coming into the city.

BOSTON POLICE A-1 UPDATE – CAPTAIN KENNETH FONG, COMMANDER DISTRICT A-1 & A-15

Captain Fong provided a brief police report, stating that the majority of criminal activity during the past several weeks in the Wharf District has centered around breaking and entering offenses against commercial properties. BPD (Boston Police Department) has also been responding to COVID-19 internally, implementing staggered shifts and making use of PPE. One hundred officers have tested positive for the virus; many have recovered and, unfortunately, one officer has passed away.

Focusing on outreach, BPD is stepping up its efforts at mask distribution as a means of educating and empowering residents to comply with safety guidelines. With over 700 homeless individuals testing positive for COVID-19 in the city of Boston out of over 2,000, Captain Fong acknowledged that many challenges are currently being faced by the homeless community.

The City's curfew advisory (from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m.) remains in effect.

RETURNING TO THE WORKPLACE & PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION – RICK DIMINO, PRESIDENT, A BETTER CITY

A Better City (ABC)'s President and CEO Rick Dimino led a discussion on making workplace safety and the health of commuters using public transit top priorities.

Concerning workplace safety, ABC has engaged with tenants, building owners, and other stakeholders to gauge the overall sentiment and state of readiness. Conversations are ongoing, with the general assessment being that there will need to be increased attention put toward lobbies, elevators, and other areas of frequent contact.

With the City set to reopen some offices at 25% capacity on June 1st, Dimino estimated an increase in vehicle traffic and potential congestion, but not on as significant a scale due to factors such as staggered shifts being implemented and fewer employees needing to drive in due to work from home options. A Better City continues to monitor these developments closely.

USING THE GREENWAY NOW & IN THE FUTURE AS BOSTON REOPENS – JESSE BRACKENBURY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREENWAY CONSERVANCY

The Greenway Conservancy's Executive Director Jesse Brackenburg delivered a presentation providing updates on programming, amenities, and events.

Discussions are currently taking place regarding the status of the carousel, Rings Fountain, and outdoor beer garden. Food trucks are able to operate, but many have been hit hard by COVID-19. The farmers' market may make a return in June.

Visitors are asked to continue practicing physical distancing and wear face coverings. There has been an uptick in dog owners failing to pick up after their pets. There will be two new public art installations debuting this year. The Greenway also recently launched an at home version of their augmented reality experience.

Credit to Steve Vilkas, North End Waterfront Newsletter for update