

HIGHLIGHT

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The Newsletter of the High Street Hill Association

October 2012

Groundbreaking for the Muddy River Project *A Short History*

In 1978, after a record breaking blizzard, the town needed a place to deposit snow that was being cleared from the streets of Brookline. Olmsted Park, which was then considered to be marginal land, became the dumping site. The park was in disrepair, a busy commuter road ran through it (where the bike path is now) and shopping carts and tires were tossed in amongst the weeds. Many felt the park was a buffer zone against the "rougher elements" on the Boston side. But when the spring thaw came and mounds of trash hidden in the snow clogged the landscape, several board members of the HSHA decided it was time to reclaim their park and formed the HSHA Friends of Leverett Pond (FOLP).

HSHA members Arlene Mattison and Betsy Shure Gross were the founding co-chairs of FOLP, followed by Hugh Mattison and Louise Castle. They, along with Cornelia McMurtrie, Sam and Edith Abbott, Sandy Gadsby, Tom and Joanna Kennedy, Rob Devries, Dick and Lucy Robb and Francis Shedd Fisher and so many others, banded together to take on the environmental cleanup project which developed into a model for historic landscape restoration. HSHA FOLP held neighborhood cleanups, lobbied the town and the state and worked with other like-minded groups who were faced with similar challenges in other cities, establishing the National Association of Olmsted Parks following a major national conference held in Brookline in April of 1981. Working closely with the Dukakis administration in 1983, they obtained state Open Space Bond Bill funding to develop the Olmsted Historic Landscape Preservation Program and the Emerald Necklace Master Plan.



1996 Flooding in Olmsted Park

In October 1996 it became clear that their focus would be expanded to include flood remediation when a major storm overwhelmed the Muddy River and floodwaters filled the Kenmore Square T station, seeped into the art storage areas of the

Fine Arts Museum and caused millions of dollars of damage to Precinct 4 and 5 homes.

Although Brookline's side of Olmsted Park has been rehabilitated according to the Master Plan using state capital and Town of Brookline funds, it has taken the 16 years since that storm to develop the solution to the flooding problem. Complex cooperative agreements between Brookline, Boston and the Commonwealth were drawn up, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers devised a plan, and extensive financing and permitting were put in place.



Some Friends of Leverett Pond, 1983:
Mary Kuhns and Hugh, Arlene, Erica
and Harry Mattison

This Wednesday, Governor Deval Patrick, Mayor Tom Menino, Selectman Betsy DeWitt and Colonel Charles Samaris from the Army Corps of Engineers will hold a groundbreaking ceremony for the \$31 million, Phase 1 of the project. This first part will unclog the Muddy River by removing old culverts and bring the river back above ground in front of the Old Sears Building, replacing pavement and traffic with parkland and open river. Phase 2, for approximately \$60 million more, will extend the dredging and rehabilitation up to Willow Pond in our neighborhood.

Neighbor Betsy Shure Gross, still on the HSHA board and vice chairwoman of the Muddy River Maintenance, Management and Oversight Committee (MMOC) said, "This will be a great gift to the folks who work, live and study near the river." (Boston.com).

To those who have devoted so many years and so much effort to this immense and important task, we say "Thank you."

The HSHA has a scrapbook filled with documents and photos of the early years of the FOLP available for viewing upon request. Hugh Mattison and Rob Daves are currently serving as co-chairs.

Brookline Changes: 2000 to 2010

Although the HSHA website may be an old fashioned "static" site (we're working on changing that) new stuff pops up occasionally. Under the "Precinct 5" button on our homepage, our webmaster, Tom Elwertowski, has posted data he gleaned from the 2010 U.S. Census and linked to an interactive map. By clicking on the whole town or a single census tract (Pill Hill is tract #4010) you can easily compare demographic changes from 2000 to 2010. Why did the number of people on Pill Hill aged 60-61 increase by 127%?

HSHA Advocacy

for Preservation

In 2009 the HSHA led a five historic district survey of Preservation Commission (PC) practices that resulted in substantial changes including more positive experiences at design review hearings. But at the September HSHA board meeting questions were raised about local violations of the Preservation Commission's Design Guidelines. To better understand the problem the board sent a letter to the PC asking the following:

- What information could be distributed to Local Historic Districts to better educate property owners about common violations?
- What property addresses in the Pill Hill Local Historic District have been cited for violations? Please include category of violation, date recorded, method of enforcement, redress, violation corrected, etc.
- What tools or methods does the Preservation Commission use to correct violations?
- How many violations have been corrected during the past year in Brookline's Local Historic Districts?

HSHA board looks forward to working with the Commission to support its Design Guidelines for Local Historic Districts and to help it communicate with residents. We wish to continue the dialogue established by the 2009 survey and believe it would be beneficial for the PC to arrange a meeting with Local Historic District representatives to discuss current issues and concerns.

for Transportation

At the same meeting we also discussed the Pond Avenue and High Street Safety Improvement Plan. Board members agreed that Pond Avenue's new five raised crosswalks are a tremendous success in terms of improving pedestrian and vehicle safety and we voted to send a letter of thanks to Transportation

Board Chair Michael Sandman and Transportation Division staff Todd Kirrane and Kurt Fraser for their sensitivity to neighborhood concerns.

We also asked that two advisory signs, "25 mph" and "Hill Blocks View," which, according to the final plan were to be located approximately 200 feet north of the new solar speed board on High Street, were never installed. We asked that they be installed as planned in order to make the speed board more effective by recommending a safe speed for drivers. Currently the only speed sign motorists see before heading down the hill is one posted for 30 mph. We also reminded the town that they promised to pursue a possible speed reduction to 25 mph for all of High Street by gathering new traffic speed data after the safety improvements were in place. Finally, we thanked the Transportation Division for a second crosswalk at the High-Allerton intersection that wasn't on the final Safety Improvement Plan.

Neighborhood Extras

TEDxBeaconStreet is an exciting new conference set to take place in the Greater Boston area beginning this fall and continuing for the next year, with a focus on fascinating speakers, captivating field trips called "Adventures," and a cross-generational audience. Several Pill Hill neighbors have been involved as "curators" or as featured speakers including: BHS High School Junior Ben Hoff; HSHA board member, writer and champion of urban design Anthony Flint; and entrepreneur, social activist and humanitarian David Knight. Explore new ideas, open your mind to things you haven't seen before, or engage something you see everyday from an entirely new perspective. On November 17 and 18 Lincoln School will host a portion of the scheduled events. Visit [TEDxBeaconStreet](#) online for details.

The Friends of Fairsted, Frederick Law Olmsted's historic home and office on Warren Street, is hosting another in a series of successful lectures about Olmsted's legacy. On November 15 Anita Berrizbeitia will present "Time Made Visible: Charles Eliot and the Boston Metropolitan Parks." And sometime in the winter Michael Van Valkenburg will discuss the new urban parks his firm has created, reclaiming industrial sites in New York City. Stay tuned to "HSHA Neighborhood Updates" for registration info. **Co-sponsored by the HSHA.**

Pumpkinfest is a major fundraiser for Lincoln School which last year raised \$60,000. Bring the family and join the fun with a costume sale, silent auction, crafts, baked goods and baskets, and games. If you would like to help out you can submit your donation or sponsorship by completing a donor form online at <http://auctions.readysetauction.com/lincolnschoolpto/donate>. Sunday October 21st, 12-4pm

The Emerald Necklace Conservancy has expressly invited HSHA residents to join them for their upcoming Annual Meeting. Coleen O'Connell from Lesley University will speak on "Urban Parks: Ensuring a Resilient Future." Thursday, November 15, Northeastern University Curry Student Ballroom, 346 Huntington Avenue, Boston. 5:30pm reception; 6:00pm program begins. Free. RSVP by November 6 online at www.emeraldnecklace.org or call 617-522-2700.

Blessing of the Animals Come to celebrate your pets, honor service and therapy animals and remember our loved companion animals. Live music with "The Pennies" and family fun with finger puppets and animal masks. For more info contact Reverend Eliza Blanchard, Affiliate Minister, First Parish Church and Interfaith Spiritual Advisor for the New England Pet Hospice at 774-551-6071. 5-6pm Sunday, October 14, Pierce Hall, First Parish Church, 382 Walnut Street.