

Informational Overview on Fourteen of Boston's Neighborhood Organizations

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Executive Summary

This report profiles the concerns and aspirations of 14 of Boston's neighborhood organizations. It is not meant to be an all encompassing documentation of the city's community concerns, because neither all of the city's districts nor all of the city's neighborhood organizations were interviewed. This is due to the time constraints related to this project. Instead, this report has been prepared for the Coalition for Community Control of Development (CCCD) to give a general overview of some of the common concerns and functions of Boston's neighborhood organizations. Part One of this report is a description of our interview method, Part Two presents our findings, and finally Part Three is a discussion summarizing these findings.

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide the Coalition for Community Control of Development (CCCD) with information on Boston's neighborhood organizations. This information will be used by CCCD in preparation for the Fall 1991 Neighborhood Convention.

Description of Methodology

We conducted person to person interviews with 20 neighborhood leaders, who gave us insight on critical issues facing Boston's neighborhoods as well as suggestions for skills and activities for the Fall 1991 Neighborhood Convention. We standardized our interview approach by developing a set of questions which we administered to all 20 neighborhood organization leaders (see appendix a). Through this series of interviews, we learned some of the aspirations of Boston's neighborhood organizations and the obstacles that currently hinder their work. We have insured confidentiality for all interviewees, and as a result their names are omitted from this report.

In our four month research period, we were able to interview neighborhood leaders representing organizations from Allston-Brighton, the Back Bay, Bay Village, Charlestown, Chinatown, Dorchester, Fenway, Jamaica Plain, the North End, Roxbury, South Boston, and the South End. Because of our time constraints as well as the leaders' of some neighborhood organizations busy schedules, we were unable to interview people from East Boston, Hyde Park, Mattapan, Roslindale, and West Roxbury.

Voices of Neighborhood Leaders

Brighton Allston Improvement Association (BAIA)

Primary Activities	BAIA is an area wide civic group which addresses the issues of zoning, crime, and institutional expansion (Universities and Hospitals). The organization also advocates for the implementation of city services.
Critical issues facing the neighborhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Absentee landlords- Excessive overbuilding- Housing needs of the city, because of location- Institutional expansion- Neighborhood developmental control- Noisy students- Traffic control problems- Transient residents
How BAIA Works on these issues	<p>A subcommittee meets on a monthly basis to address each expansionary proposal. It would like to take the lead and be pro-active but finds this difficult if not impossible. BAIA has asked Universities and Hospitals for copies of their master plans, and has issued them questionnaires inquiring about their commitment to working-class neighborhood children.</p> <p>A BAIA member attends each Zoning Board of Appeals meeting.</p>
Organization's needs	<p>Money to hire legal representation so that appeals to zoning decisions may be carried beyond the administrative and to the judicial level.</p> <p>Power and a formal role in the zoning review process.</p>
Benefits of the April 1989 Convention	Highlighted major neighborhood issues.
Skills and Activities Suggested for the Fall 1991 Convention	<p>Workshops on how neighborhoods can deal with such issues as institutional development and neighborhood empowerment.</p> <p>Discussions on formalizing the role of neighborhood groups' on the Interim Planning Overlay for Developments (IPODs).</p> <p>Facilitate discussions on ideas and knowledge as well as problems and strategies that can be shared across the city.</p>

Back Bay Neighborhood Association

Primary Activities	Preserving the quality of residential life in the Back Bay. Monitoring real estate development projects, traffic issues, and licensing. Hosting parties to raise money and bring people together.
Critical issues facing the neighborhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Affordable housing- Code enforcement- Large scale development- Neighborhood identity- Parking- Preserving the Commonwealth Avenue mall strip- Quality of life- Traffic
How the Back Bay Neighborhood Association Works on these issues	Forms committees to deal with issues and work with city counselors, the BRA, and the mayor's office. Works with other neighborhood groups on major issues such as the Prudential Center.
Organization's needs	Finances, human resources, and volunteers.
Benefits of the April 1989 Convention	"We met and interacted with people throughout the city, we broadened our perspective." Out of this convention, CCCD got the idea to broaden the appeal reform issue, because it deals with empowerment.
Skills and Activities Suggested for the Fall 1991 Convention	Finding other issues like quality of life to bring people together (i.e. traffic).

Bay Village Neighborhood Association

Primary Activities	Reflects concerns of neighborhood residents. Hosts a street fair each year.
Critical issues facing the neighborhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Crime- Licensing- Quality of city services- Zoning
How the Bay Village Association Works on these issues	A Planning Committee meets monthly to work on zoning and licensing issues. Committees also address crime and city service, as well as beautification issues.
Organization's needs	Leadership in both the organization and in the city.
Benefits of the April 1989 Convention	Addressed zoning board of appeals bonding issue. Addressed citizen empowerment.
Skills and Activities Suggested for the Fall 1991 Convention	Skills for groups that do not have experience in dealing with development. Provide an opportunity for people to meet with city leaders, the Boston Redevelopment Authority, and developers. Panel discussions on how the city will compromise upcoming development.

Charlestown Neighborhood Council

Primary Activities	<p>Acts as an advisory panel to the city of Boston on any issue that the city of Boston has jurisdiction over. Most of the time it deals with development issues.</p> <p>Provides an effective forum for community participation and to publicize the issues in local newspapers.</p>
Critical issues facing the neighborhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development - Mer-zone- Maritime industrial restricted zone to save the working part of the water front - Central Artery North Area (CANA) - Resolution of the development of the Charlestown Navy Yard - Z-scheme plan as well as the modified Z-scheme plan - Billboards - Public safety - Quality of life
How the Charlestown Neighborhood Council Works on these issues	<p>Committees are structured around critical issues.</p> <p>Maintains a broad based body, representing many areas in town.</p> <p>Encourages developers to discuss proposed developments with neighborhood organizations before coming to the Neighborhood Council.</p>
Organization's needs	<p>Staff and money.</p>
Benefits of the April 1989 Convention	<p>Met a lot of people from Boston's neighborhoods other than Charlestown.</p>
Skills and Activities Suggested for the Fall 1991 Convention	<p>Socializing workshops, giving participants the ability to recognize each other, and to realize that there are many things their neighborhoods have in common.</p>

Asian Community Development Corporation

Primary Activities	<p>Developing affordable housing.</p> <p>Advocating for community-based economic development.</p> <p>Ensuring that neighborhood residents have an equal shot at long-term jobs in site management and maintenance.</p> <p>Organizing around the Central Artery.</p>
Critical issues facing the neighborhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cutbacks in funding - Development pressures - Language barriers - Achieving self-determination
How the Asian Community Development Corporation Works on these issues	<p>By anticipating and becoming knowledgeable of development pressures and by trying to change them so they don't have detrimental effects on the community.</p> <p>By lobbying for whom we need in office in order to make sure the changes are made.</p> <p>By organizing people to demonstrate support in addressing critical issues.</p> <p>By providing access into the building trades for neighborhood people.</p> <p>By creating informational material with translations in Mandarin, Vietnamese, and Cambodian.</p>
Organization's needs	Funding and staff.
Benefits of the April 1989 Convention	Was not part of Asian Community Development Corporation at the time.
Skills and Activities Suggested for the Fall 1991 Convention	<p>It should offer workshops on how we can to continue the work that we do, in light of hardships. How do we work with fewer resources? How do we keep our people inspired?</p> <p>It would be helpful to get an update on issues outlined at the last convention and new focuses of organizations, as well as highlights of progress since April 1989.</p>

Uphams Corner Neighborhood Housing Services

Primary Activities	<p>Neighborhood revitalization by originating affordable housing rehabilitation loans to unbankable homeowners.</p> <p>Community organizing on broad issues, trying to facilitate organization building.</p> <p>Helps to organize and streamline the concerns of number of area non-profits.</p>
Critical issues facing the neighborhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Crime - Development - Drugs - Funding Cutbacks - Lack of commercial development that serves the racially and ethnically mixed communities - Quality of Life
How Uphams Corner Neighborhood Housing Services Works on these issues	<p>Serves as the lead agency, in negotiating with a private developer, to develop commercial property with community needs in mind.</p> <p>Works with the police to help anti-drug task forces across two police districts.</p>
Organization's needs	<p>More resources, staff, and funding.</p> <p>Closer and more effective working relationships with the various city agencies, as well as more responsiveness from such agencies vis a' vis community concerns.</p>
Benefits of the April 1989 Convention	<p>A representative did not attend.</p>
Skills and Activities Suggested for the Fall 1991 Convention	<p>How organizations can do planning on their own terms, to think proactively rather than reactively.</p> <p>How to step back and think more structurally, focus more on the "mission" aspect, and try to get more creative in achieving goals.</p> <p>Focus on the role of city government/ city hall because of the upcoming election season.</p>

Kenmore Audubon Fenway Neighborhood Initiative (KAFNI)

Primary Activities	Advocates for residents on issues relating to the planning process. Fosters an active planning process to preserve residential, economic and racial diversity within the area.
Critical issues facing the neighborhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Affordable housing - Community participation in development process - Development - Institutional expansion - Parking - Pollution - Quality of life - Retaining diversity - Resident involvement
How KAFNI Works on these issues	It is committed to the democratic process.
Organization's needs	Funding, staff, and more membership training.
Benefits of the April 1989 Convention	Not applicable.
Skills and Activities Suggested for the Fall 1991 Convention	Host a discussion on the lessons learned from Planning Zone of Appeals Commissions. How do we change the balance of power?

City Life of Jamaica Plain

Primary Activities	<p>Advocates for development of affordable housing as well as tenants' rights.</p> <p>Maintains activity on political issues.</p>
Critical issues facing the neighborhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Affordable housing - Crime - Development - Drugs - Labor issues - Language barriers - Quality of life - Racism - Tenants rights - Youth violence
How the City Life of Jamaica Plain Works on these issues	<p>Organizes committees on issues such as housing, labor, the Gulf War, and the Spanish language (Latino issues) which meet every few weeks.</p>
Organization's needs	<p>More staffing, and greater funding resources.</p>
Benefits of the April 1989 Convention	<p>Not Applicable.</p>
Skills and Activities Suggested for the Fall 1991 Convention	<p>A workshop on linking common issues between neighborhoods beyond the convention.</p> <p>Bring together progressive organizations, rather than representative organizations.</p>

North End Neighborhood Council

Primary Activities	Acts as the forum for neighborhood issues as it relates to the city's development process. It is an advisory board.
Critical issues facing the neighborhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Affordable housing - Central Artery impact on real estate values - Crime - City services - Development - Lack of parking - Noise, dirt, and pest control from Central Artery reconstruction - Quality of life - Zoning
How the North End Neighborhood Council Works on these issues	Establishes committees to work on specific issues and meets on a monthly basis.
Organization's needs	Financial support, paid staffing, chairing support, and office space.
Benefits of the April 1989 Convention	Met a variety of people with similar concerns. It was very informative.
Skills and Activities Suggested for the Fall 1991 Convention	<p>A workshop on whether this is a good time for CDC's to be out there looking for funding and properties.</p> <p>A discussion on whether we should get the local banking industry back involved with development issues.</p>

Greater Roxbury Neighborhood Authority (GRNA)

Primary Activities	<p>Provides a voice/vehicle for the Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan neighborhoods.</p> <p>Advocates around housing and economic development issues.</p> <p>Monitors Boston Redevelopment Authority and state-initiated development projects.</p>
Critical issues facing the neighborhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community control of development - Economic development - Education - Housing - Public safety
How the GRNA Works on these issues	<p>Organizes residents to advocate for policy changes and actual concessions from city and state officials in the economic development arena.</p>
Organization's needs	<p>Financial resources and staff.</p>
Benefits of the April 1989 Convention	<p>*</p>
Skills and Activities Suggested for the Fall 1991 Convention	<p>*</p>

* Questions regarding these topics were not asked.

West Broadway Task Force

Primary Activities	<p>Preparing current residents for the "D Street" project; for racial desegregation.</p> <p>Training tenants in multicultural awareness.</p>
Critical issues facing the neighborhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - City Services - Housing - New Federal Housing Authority working policy - Racism
How the West Broadway Task Force Works on these issues	<p>By gradually introducing new tenants to the community.</p> <p>Utilize a nun (sister of Notre Dame) to quell some of the possible tensions and inform tenants of their new surroundings.</p> <p>By conducting meetings to identify and address concerns of residents concerning the influx of Blacks, Latinos, and Asians.</p>
Organization's needs	Funding and land.
Benefits of the April 1989 Convention	Did not attend.
Skills and Activities Suggested for the Fall 1991 Convention	Proposal writing.

Ellis Neighborhood Organization

Primary Activities	Advocacy for the neighborhood.
	Maintains an ongoing dialogue with city hall officials on such issues as traffic, crime, street cleaning services, and street lights.
Critical issues facing the neighborhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Air rights over the Massachusetts Turnpike - Crime - Development - Quality of life - Zoning
How the Ellis Neighborhood Organization Works on these issues	<p>Committees. For example, one committee has input on restaurant entertainment and liquor licences, and deals with such issues as trash pick-up, ventilation and valet parking.</p> <p>Most decisions are made at the board level but if it is a critical issue it is taken to the neighborhood. "We use a pronged approach in order to disseminate information to the neighborhood, in order to get people involved and make them aware." This allows people to get involved and to become aware.</p>
Organization's needs	More volunteers and more money.
Benefits of the April 1989 Convention	Did not attend.
Skills and Activities Suggested for the Fall 1991 Convention	<p>A workshop demonstrating a sense of neighborhood association threats between each other. For example, to what extent will individual neighborhoods bare the burdens of increased / re-routed traffic during the suppression of the Central Artery. How do we work together and overcome the not in my backyard (NIMBY) dilemma?</p> <p>Forums on the Boston Redevelopment Authority master planning committee.</p>

Inquilinos Boriquas en Accion (IBA)

Primary Activities	<p>Empowering the Villa Victoria community in the South End, fostering the human, social and economic well-being of Villa Victoria residents.</p> <p>Promoting and advocating for Latinos city-wide.</p> <p>Perpetuating the rich Latino cultural and artistic heritage.</p>
Critical issues facing the neighborhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Affordable housing - Citizen Empowerment - Development - Employment for youths - Lack of City services - Lack of human services - Lack of youth leadership - Long-term employment prospects - Loss of services for the Latino community - Not taking action - Speculation
How Inquilinos Boriquas en Accion Works on these issues	<p>Creates and preserves affordable housing in Boston.</p> <p>Runs programs for youth, families, adults, and the elderly.</p>
Organization's needs	<p>Financial resources and staffing.</p> <p>More constructive partnerships between major institutions in the city- schools, human service providers, and policy makers.</p>
Benefits of the April 1989 Convention	<p>Learned the struggles of other neighborhoods.</p>
Skills and Activities Suggested for the Fall 1991 Convention	<p>Workshops on affordable housing. What does affordable housing mean? Who are the people that benefit?</p> <p>Workshops on community economic development.</p> <p>Opportunities for neighborhood groups to share experiences; to break-down feelings of isolation between neighborhoods; to commiserate about aches, pains, and successes.</p>

South End Neighborhood Action Committee (SNAP)

Primary Activities	Provides direct service and advocacy on behalf of low income people. Community organizing.
Critical issues facing the neighborhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Air rights over the Massachusetts Turnpike- Crime- Encroachment of new development (biomedical development)- Lost job opportunities connected with institutional expansion
How SNAP Works on these issues	Has formed a coalition of 30 community organizations which includes 1/3 moderate income, 1/2 low income/ and 1/3 development Is currently working on a 21st century master plan to address transportation and housing issues.
Organization's needs	Financial resources and staff.
Benefits of the April 1989 Convention	The city benefitted from being brought together.
Skills and Activities Suggested for the Fall 1991 Convention	Workshops on: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- zoning- community control of development- upcoming election campaigns

Summary of findings:

Development

Some of the development issues which respondents believe are critical to their communities' well being have begun to be addressed by the Coalition for Community Control of Development. These issues include: representation on the Zoning Commission and the Zoning Board of Appeals; legal authority to oppose zoning decisions; and the right to sue land owners and developers who do not comply with local codes. Many respondents feel that these powers are crucial to residents' abilities to maintain their neighborhoods' identity.

Affordable Housing

Retaining affordable housing remains a problem in Boston, many community groups are concerned that longtime residents can no longer afford to live in the city, and in some neighborhoods there is not enough access to affordable housing for the people who need it.

Institutional Expansion

In addition, neighborhoods are continuing to experience high levels of development from Institutional Expansion (i.e. colleges, universities, hospitals, and research facilities). They have advocated for the city to use its power to manage growth and limit fallout from traffic, noise, absentee landlords, and transient residents. Paradoxically, utilization of the neighborhood review process has not proven to be a reliable method to alleviate this problem, because institutions have been over-represented on such task forces.

City Services

Many organizations also expressed the need for improving city services to their neighborhoods. This includes increasing police patrols, enhancing street drainage, maintaining street lights, providing cleaning services, and providing pest control.

Public Safety

Crime was the most often stated public safety issue. Crime not only poses a physical threat to neighborhood residents but also can smear the identity of a neighborhood. A neighborhood that is labeled unsafe to live in, is likely to experience bad press by the media as well as limited economic development. In addition the threat of crime may cause people to move out of a neighborhood, and others less likely to move in.

Quality of Life

Most respondents expressed that they would like the benefits of living in the city without the burdens such as traffic, crime, large scale development and issues that threaten their neighborhoods' identity. In addition some respondents mentioned the need for maintaining a balance between preserving open space and development. They feel that urban gardens, as well as parks, compliment a neighborhood's identity as well as enhance the quality of life for residents. In some cases, however, conflict arises when the needs for housing compete with the needs for preserving open space.

**Citizen
Participation**

Most leaders emphasized that it is very difficult to get people involved and committed to neighborhood organizations unless something dramatic happens. This makes it difficult for neighborhood organizations to survive during relatively quiet periods, while critical issues such as racism and economic development persist.

**Organizations'
Needs:**

Almost all neighborhood organizations mentioned that they need additional funds and staffing. Other common needs are: volunteers, training in community organizing, and information about other neighborhood groups. As one respondent explains, "Community organizing takes a lot of time and you are often not appreciated for what you do. There is high burn-out and a lot of turn-over."

Funding

Neighborhood organizations are constantly faced with cutbacks in staff and funding. Funding is difficult to generate because funders like to donate to organizations that achieve tangible results such as buildings and social service programs. In contrast, the primary activity of many of these neighborhood groups is advocacy and organizing. This type of activity is extremely important for enhancing the effectiveness of neighborhood groups. It provides the means to the ends. As one respondent suggests, "Organizing puts important things in motion without which those concrete things can not happen."

Legal Services

Most of the aforementioned objectives require legal services too costly for most neighborhood organizations. Legal assistance is necessary for enforcing and blocking many of the the actions of developers and land owners, as well as to appeal decisions of the Zoning Board of Appeals and the Zoning Commission. Some neighborhood organizations suggested establishing a general fund to help provide neighborhood organizations with legal services.

Conclusion

Boston's current political structure and legislation must be changed in order to adequately fulfill the needs for which these these neighborhood groups are advocating. Critical issues such as citizen empowerment, affordable housing, crime, and zoning legislation require regional coalitions to effectively reform their current stature. Accordingly, neighborhood organizations need to maintain contact with one another in order to identify and address issues that can be better advocated for by regional coalitions rather than by a local neighborhood group. Overwhelmingly, respondents support the need for broad based coalitions, such as CCCD, to deal with critical community issues which cross neighborhood lines.

Interview Questions

- 1) What does your organization do? (or what are your organization's primary activities?)
- *2) What is your connection with the Coalition for Control of Community Development?
- *3) When you think of CCCD, what comes to your mind?
- 4) What do you believe to be the critical issues facing your neighborhood?
- 5) How does your group work on these issues?
- 6) What does your organization need right now in order to work more effectively?
- *7) How can CCCD provide support in meeting your organization's needs?
- *8) What are the issues that you believe to be critical to CCCD's effectiveness?
- *9) In what way does CCCD address these issues? (concerning its effectiveness)
- *10) What could CCCD do to work more effectively? (Suggestions / CCCD's potential)
- *11) If CCCD was doing _____ (these effective types of things), would your organization benefit? How?
- 12) Did you go to the April 1989 Neighborhood Convention?
 - a) if yes then How did your organization benefit from the convention?
 - b) if no then Why not?
- 13) Can you identify skills needed, and key issues that ought to be addressed at the Fall Neighborhood Convention?
- 14) In addition to the convention, can you think of other ways that neighborhoods can communicate their needs?
- *15) Given its present structure and agenda, what do you think about CCCD's future?

*Answers to these questions were not included in this report.