



Friends of  
THE PUBLIC GARDEN  
90 Mt Vernon Street Boston 02108

GOVDOC  
BRA  
4484

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

No. 4

Fall, 1973

NEWSLETTER

The past six months have seen considerable activity affecting the Garden, most of it encouraging. The patient is still in danger and still beset with threats to its survival, but its deterioration has halted for the moment, and here and there its condition has begun to improve.

Park Plaza

A major threat to the Garden remains the so-called Park Plaza Urban Renewal Plan. In June, the BRA submitted this plan for the third time to the State Department of Community Affairs. In matters affecting the Garden it differed very little from previous submissions. Accordingly, we testified against the plan at State hearings in June and August. As expected, Commissioner Crampton finally approved the project but with certain conditions, one of which was continued state review of environmental impact studies. These conditions proved unacceptable to the Developer, and on September 27, Mr. Kenney wrote Commissioner Crampton that "further communication about Park Plaza is useless."

Since then they have been in constant communication, and the BRA has now prepared a fourth submission. From all evidence it is virtually the same as its predecessors and will pose the same dangers to the Common and Garden. Unfortunately, this time the Governor has requested full capitulation. For members who have not read it, there is enclosed a copy of the Letter to the Editor that appeared last month in the Globe and the Ledger setting forth very briefly the views of the Friends and other civic groups. It bears repeating that virtually no organization opposes thoughtful reconstruction in the area but only an ill-formed plan whose defects still exceed its merits.

What Can We Do?

In the middle of Park Square stands a small grass plot with a statue of Abraham Lincoln. Removal of this park, for such it is officially, appears to require a two-thirds vote of both the State House and Senate. A practical way of expressing opposition to the present Park Plaza plan would be to write your State representative and senator, urging them to vote against this bill (Senate 1214).

900 2-4-73

### Highrise

Regardless of Park Plaza, it is now clear that we need regulation of highrise buildings abutting the Garden and indeed all public parks. It will always be argued that each new structure alone will not cause undue damage, but one will lead to another and yet another until the scale and character of the area are lost, and the parks themselves are darkened and destroyed as public amenities. If approved, Park Plaza will open the door to developers who regard our parks as free front yards for their real estate ventures.

There are legislative acts on the books passed in 1896 limiting the height of buildings around public parks, but in Boston they have been allowed to lapse. Their revival may now be vital to the preservation of our dwindling open spaces.

### Improvements

Turning to happier matters, work has commenced on the improvements described in earlier Newsletters including replacement of the fencing along Charles Street, planting of new shrubs along Beacon Street (selected by the Horticultural Planning Committee), and installation of ball and chain fences around several grass plots. During the summer about 40 of the Garden's trees were aerated and fed, and experimental treatment was undertaken on several elms with signs of disease. Although opposed by the Friends, the work also included placement of granite curbing designed to keep city trucks off the grass.

### Plans

Application has been made to the U. S. Bureau of Outdoor Recreation for a matching grant of \$150,000 to finance completion of the peripheral fence. In addition, the Parks and Recreation Department has agreed to the preparation of a master plan for long-term restoration in both Common and Garden.

These are heartening signs, but much of course remains to be done. Improvements will require further federal and city financing and, wherever feasible, substantial private help. The Office of the Boston Bicentennial has prepared a list of items needed in the Common and Garden suitable as corporate gifts. We hope this appeal will bring a good response from Boston business concerns. Through the assistance of the Bicentennial Office, the Friends will be able for its part to establish specific funds, the contributions to which will be tax-deductible. One such project may be a special planting program for trees and shrubbery.

### Dogs

As members well know, the leash law passed last year has not been staunchly enforced. However, there are now several hopeful developments. Mayor White has appointed an Animal Control Commission which includes two members of the Friends. In addition, police officers will soon be equipped with citations they can issue to anyone whose dog is running loose in the Garden, and the Animal Rescue League, hitherto shorthanded, has now a second dog catcher and truck. Whether these measures will improve the situation may depend partly on public demand. If you have inquiries or complaints, we urge you to call or write Mr. James Shevlin, Chairman, Animal Control Commission, City Hall, Boston 02201 (tel: 722-4100).

New Commissioner

Members of the Friends and other civic organizations met in November with the new Commissioner of Parks and Recreation, Anthony E. Forgione. We appreciated his frank and open discussion of problems and were especially pleased with his new maintenance procedures. The results of his efforts are already visible, and we look forward to working with Mr. Forgione as plans develop for the Garden.

Membership

Renewal notices were mailed in July, and the response was excellent. However, some cards are still among the missing. In hope that this was a summer oversight, there follows a form which dilatory members may detach and return with their 1973-1974 contribution. We need and earnestly solicit your continued help and participation.

Henry Lee  
President

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I/We wish to renew my/our membership in the Friends of the Public Garden for 1973-1974 and enclose herewith a membership contribution for:

- Single Member \$ 2.00
- Family Member \$ 5.00
- Commercial \$25.00

M \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Please mail this form and your contribution to: Friends of the Public Garden, 90 Mt. Vernon Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02108.

# Park Plaza: Many risks, few benefits 10/26/73

As representatives of four civic organizations, the undersigned believe that recent commentary on the BRA's Park Plaza Renewal Plan has failed to measure public opposition to the Plan among Boston residents and has drawn a misleading picture of the project's supposed benefits. . . . We believe that certain general considerations should be made clear.

The property tax benefits to the city were doubtful. On the basis of the BRA's figures, even if all went well with Park Plaza and on schedule, the advantages of increasing the tax base would have been largely offset by the tax subsidies to be given the developer and the cost of additional municipal services required by the development. Other supposed tax benefits to the city were found after careful study by Comr. Crampton to have been "greatly inflated." In short, no showing was ever made, or could have been made, that Park Plaza would produce a tax bonanza.

The claim that approval of the plan would facilitate immediate jobs for construction workers was illusory. The project was so speculative, its chances of proper financing so dubious, its long delay in the courts so certain that no one could foresee such jobs for years to come. A suitable program implemented in smaller segments, together with other projects in the city already in design stages, would provide far more assurance of building jobs and provide it now when it is needed.

The idea that redevelopment in the Combat Zone is dependent on Park Plaza is equally false. The Combat Zone was no more than a tenuous part of the Plan scheduled for a far distant future. Despite many years of intermittent review, the BRA has yet to produce a proposal for an area that is truly blighted and crying for improvement. We urge the BRA to expedite plans now and to move ahead on this important work.

The BRA proposal, as submitted to the state, would have seriously endangered the Common and the Public Garden. The proposed buildings if placed on the same scale next to Central Park would be higher than Mount Washington. Yet the plan was accompanied by no final environmental studies, no alternative designs, no commitment to the preservation of these historic parks. In allowing the BRA to fulfill an environmental work program at a late stage of the project, Commissioner Crampton bent the law as far as it would go. There is no reason why a project for the benefit of a relative few should threaten public parks dedicated to the enjoyment of all and endanger historic downtown residential areas inhabited by thousands.

Virtually every Boston civic organization we have heard from has opposed this Plan simply because it offered many risks and few benefits. It is time to put it aside and start again. We support now, as we always have, the idea of improvement in the Park Square area. We need new and imaginative plans that will revive the area, benefit the city, and provide new jobs while still protecting property owners, neighboring districts, and the city's precious, dwindling open spaces. As members of the Civic Advisory Committee and of established citizens' associations, we pledge our help and cooperation in stimulating and reviewing such plans, and the sooner we get on with the job the better.

- PAUL PRINDLE  
Neighborhood Association  
of the Back Bay
- BERNARD BORMAN  
Beacon Hill Civic Association
- HENRY LEE  
Friends of the Public Garden
- JON STRAIGHT  
Bay Village Association
- STELLA TRAFFORD  
Friends of the Public Garden

Boston