

**South Boston: Planning in a Reluctant Community**

by

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Bachelor of Architecture  
Pratt Institute, 1987

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning  
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## South Boston: Planning in a Reluctant Community

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Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning on May 21, 1998 in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master in City Planning

### ABSTRACT

A new plan for the South Boston Seaport was unveiled by the City of Boston on November 25, 1997. A *Boston Globe* article of that same day stated, "Mayor Thomas Menino and his army of planners are bracing for a long and lively debate about the future of the prized 1,000 acres of real estate. At issue is . . . how much clout the South Boston residential neighborhood will have in the discussion." The Seaport Plan was the latest in a series of planning and land use proposals in South Boston, dating back to the 1930s. Why did some projects, such as public housing, go forward while others, such as the Patriots football stadium, did not? Does the failure of proposed interventions in Southie reflect the reluctance of the South Boston community to participate in a planning process? Or has the extraordinary political power of the community allowed South Boston to control outcomes, keeping others from the "table," and precluding a deliberative, democratic, and inclusive planning process? Planning literature often focuses on the need for planners to empower communities, encouraging the use of public participation and consensus building techniques to bring all constituencies to the table. What happens, however, when a community has no need for public participation, and can stymie the planning process by using its political clout? How can and do public officials respond?

This thesis looks at the history of planning in South Boston from the 1930s to the 1990s. Eight case studies are examined in the search for answers to these questions. Public housing efforts of the 1930s and 1940s, 1960s Urban Renewal attempts by the City of Boston, the 1980s Fan Pier development, the siting of the new Federal Courthouse on Fan Pier in the early 1990s, the failed Megaplex proposal of the mid-1990s, the 1997 struggle by Massport and Patriots owner Robert Kraft to site a new football stadium in South Boston, the 1997 decision to site the South Boston Convention and Exhibition Center in the waterfront district, and the South Boston Seaport Master Plan of 1997 are all examined to determine if there are recognizable patterns of community action and response. Voices in the community are identified to determine *who* is the community and if it has changed over time. Planning strategies of city and state officials are also examined. Similarities and differences are noted and key elements thought to be major factors in the community's responses, and engagement in the planning process are discussed. Commonalities found in all the cases were: the community's ability to speak in one voice when faced with an outside threat; the articulation of consistent goals over time; residents' trust in political leadership to lead the community through planning matters; the use of political access as a form of public participation; and the presence of a "reluctant" community. In conclusion, differences between the 1997 South Boston Seaport Master Plan and the other seven cases are used to illustrate challenges faced by the community and planners. South Boston confronted: changing demographics that threatened its long-time cohesiveness; growing vulnerability of its technique of using political muscle to achieve community benefits; and the loss of sole claim of "ownership" of the community's "backyard" (the Seaport), which suddenly became the City of Boston's "frontyard." So too, the Seaport case highlights planners' difficulties in structuring a city-wide inclusionary planning process for a project affecting a politically well-represented community that claims "disadvantage." All of these challenges are discussed with the acknowledgment that planning is an inherently political process.

Thesis Supervisor: Lawrence J. Vale  
Title: Associate Professor of Urban Planning

*For Ross and Isaac*



## Acknowledgments

This thesis culminates two of the most rewarding years of my life. The Department of Urban Studies and Planning has provided intellectual stimulation, a sense of community, and a supportive environment for my studies. I could not have wished for anything more at MIT.

Eight South Boston planning case studies are included in this thesis. I have attempted to be as evenhanded as possible when writing about the community and city planning processes. I thank the following people who helped me in my efforts by agreeing to meet with me, answer my questions, and discuss ideas: Lorraine Downey, Andrew Hargens, Vivien Li, Brian MacQuarrie, Martin Nee, Rusty Russell, Kairos Shen, Michael Vaughan, and David West.

At MIT, my sincerest appreciation is extended to all the faculty I have had the pleasure of working with. In particular, I wish to thank Dennis Frenchman, Mark Schuster, and Terry Szold. I was fortunate to have two outstanding thesis readers. I could not have asked for anyone better versed in the politics of planning in Boston than Professor Langley Keyes. Professor John deMonchaux's eloquence in defining and describing planning issues is unsurpassed. And of course, I offer many thanks to my thesis advisor, Professor Lawrence Vale. His intelligence, wit, and encouragement have made this endeavor a rewarding and enjoyable one.

To all the faculty, staff, and students in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning, I hope they know how important their support was, during this Winter and Spring of 1998. I cannot adequately express the level of my respect for them. Working with smart, funny, caring people makes life a joy.

And speaking of joy, this thesis is dedicated to Ross and Isaac. My time at MIT would not have been possible without the fierce encouragement of my husband, who put his own studies on hold so that I could pursue mine. And to Isaac, who asked me daily, "Mama, are you done with your thesis yet?" I can now give an emphatic "yes!"

# South Boston: Planning in a Reluctant Community

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

When the Irish immigrants of South Boston embraced politics over one hundred years ago, it was a means for an impoverished group to attain power they could not reach through economic channels. This embrace of politics has served Southie well. As Lawrence Kennedy describes in his survey of planning in Boston since 1630,

Planning is fundamentally and inherently a political process because it involves, as political scientist Harold Lasswell once said, who gets what, when, and how. Modern planning, when defined as the use of government power to advance the economic interests and alter the physical appearance of a city, is concerned with the allocation of resources in a defined area and time period. As such, it entails mediating needs and balancing the interests of innumerable forces and persons. Primarily, planning addresses economic rather than aesthetic or cultural needs, and the prime mover of planning is hence economic.<sup>1</sup>

In the twentieth century, many of the South Boston Irish traced their roots to the immigrants who landed on Boston's shores during the years of the Irish Potato Famine in the mid-nineteenth century. Poor of health, and lacking the financial resources to head west in search of greater fortunes, most were forced to remain in Boston, a city based in the service and financial economies. The city had little to offer the unskilled laborer of Ireland. With little hope of attaining a better way of life through acquired wealth and influential jobs, the South Boston Irish turned to politics as a means to assert control over the allocation of resources for their community. It has been a good match over the years. As one city official put it, "South Boston has been blessed over time with leaders that have attained great political power and have been smart about how to wield that power."<sup>2</sup>

Not surprisingly then, if planning is an inherently political process, Southie has played the game well. The lower end of Southie has consistently had some of the lowest median household incomes in the City of Boston, and yet Southie wields surprising political power. And this power has been consistent over time. In the 1930s, the influence and connections of Congressman John McCormack got South Boston three public housing projects, at a time when depression-weakened urban communities throughout the country

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence W. Kennedy, *Planning the City Upon a Hill: Boston Since 1630* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1992) 2.

<sup>2</sup> Lorraine Downey, Director, Environment Department, City of Boston, Interview (May 11, 1998).

were clamoring for just one. In the 1980s, Southie's political influence grew to even greater heights. Not only did the community have a powerful Congressman in Joseph Moakley, but both the Massachusetts House Speaker and the Mayor of the City of Boston were Southie residents, born and bred.

It is no surprise then, that when a new master plan for the South Boston Seaport was unveiled by the City of Boston on November 25, 1997, a *Boston Globe* article of that same day stated, "Mayor Thomas Menino and his army of planners are bracing for a long and lively debate about the future of the prized 1,000 acres of real estate. At issue is . . . how much clout the South Boston residential neighborhood will have in the discussion."<sup>3</sup>

The Seaport master plan was the latest in a string of attempted planning and land use interventions in South Boston. Always at issue was the amount of "clout" the community had in the discussion. Many previous planning efforts and project proposals in South Boston failed to be accepted by the community and were abandoned because of lack of support. When the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) was under the directorship of the powerful and politically savvy Edward Logue in the 1960s, Southie successfully fought off an urban renewal designation of its entire residential district. In the 1980s, Southie claimed "ownership" of the nearly 1000 acres of land in the South Boston Seaport in an effort to position itself as a heavily impacted community. This claim of political ownership allowed the community to negotiate linkage<sup>4</sup> and other benefits from the development on the Fan Pier. In the 1990s, South Boston residents rejected a plan for a Megaplex, a combined convention center and football stadium, in the Seaport, and then fought a contentious battle against Patriots owner Robert Kraft in his effort to site a football stadium on Massport-owned land in Southie. Later, however, the community accepted the new Boston Convention and Exhibition Center on a site immediately adjacent to the residential community.

Why have Southie residents accepted some projects but not others? This thesis looks at eight planning interventions between the 1930s and 1990s in South Boston in an effort to find commonalities of responses and strategies used by the community and outsiders over time. In all of these cases save public housing, Southie leadership has consistently demonstrated reluctance, at least, initially, to embrace planning

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<sup>3</sup>Anthony Flint, *The Boston Globe*, November 25, 1997.

<sup>4</sup>Linkage is the money that developers are required to pay to affordable housing and job training funds in the City of Boston. Mandated by the city's Chapter 80 zoning code, linkage requirements apply to commercial projects over 100,000 square feet.

initiatives. At first glance, this might lead one to believe that South Boston has been the reluctant object of planners' attentions. But just what does reluctant mean in this case? As the case studies illustrate, the community has not been a reluctant player in the planning game. Rather, the responses of the community to outside intervention in the case studies presented in this thesis highlight three kinds of community reluctance: a reluctance to change, a reluctance to play by outsiders' rules, and a strategic reluctance.

### A Reluctance to Change

As a study of the history and demographics of the community illustrates, Southie remained remarkably cohesive and insular over the years since Irish immigrants first settled there in the mid-nineteenth century. Change was a threat to a community that was uncommonly tightknit, with a shared history, religion, values, and culture. This is not to say that the entire community is Irish Catholic, or that all residents are 4th and 5th generation Southie. But in an increasingly mobile world, Southie residents were remarkably rooted. It is no surprise then, that Southie was a reluctant partner in planning endeavors. Planning signals change, be it for better or worse. And Southie resisted change, especially when prescribed by "outsiders." Coupled with the dislike for change was an abhorrence of the labels that are placed on Southie by those that live outside the community. Finding the label "slum," to be an insult, Southie reacted strongly against those who, with however many good intentions, wished to come and "fix" their neighborhood. In reality, South Boston residents saw little wrong with their community except those things brought on by outside forces such as gentrification, rising housing prices, traffic congestion, and inadequate social services.

Southie

reacted strongly when the phrase "working class" or "lower income" was interpreted to mean poor, impoverished or lazy. They refused to admit they were "poor"; they denied they lived in "slums"; they objected to outsiders describing their houses as "shacks" or "tenements." They took pride in their personal independence and deeply resented any suggestion that they were "on the dole" or dependent upon any other form of welfare or public charity. . . Above all, they were acutely conscious that many people in other parts of the Bay State regarded them as low class "shanty Irish," . . .Such discriminatory views only served to draw the families of South Boston even closer together into a solid working-class community determined to hold onto its own distinctive beliefs and values in the face of growing outside approval.<sup>5</sup>

### Reluctance to Play by Outsiders' Rules

Southie has also shown reluctance to play by the "rules," challenging planners and public officials with its adept politics and back room deals. In his history of South Boston, historian Thomas O'Connor writes

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<sup>5</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, *South Boston: My Home Town* (Boston: Quinlan Press, 1988) 125.

about

the clannishness of the immigrants, their refusal to participate in the affairs of the city and their reluctance to give up their traditional ways in favor of the social and cultural ethos of their new home. “Unable to participate in the normal associational affairs of the community, Oscar Handlin wrote in *Boston’s Immigrants*, “the Irish felt obliged to erect a society within a society, to act together in their own way. In every contact therefore the group, apart from other sections of the community, became intensely aware of its peculiar and exclusive identity.”<sup>6</sup>

### Strategic Reluctance

So too, Southie uses reluctance as a political strategy. A familiar community stance is that they never asked for the project, but since it would be forced upon them, they might as well receive some benefits. Coupled with this is the hardship that the community claims when negotiating with “outsiders.” These hardships are then translated into linkage dollars and other benefits for the community. While the community has demonstrated it has the political muscle to stop many unwanted projects, it also knows how to best stretch community impact from these projects into the most benefits for residents.

The case studies presented in this thesis illustrate these and other challenges that planners face in the South Boston community. The 1997 *South Boston Seaport Master Plan* is one such case presented here. Starting in 1997, there existed unique opportunities to shape the development of a large area of land adjacent to the thriving Boston downtown business district. Development pressure was intense and the waterfront location of the land was unique. At a time when waterfront redevelopment was surging forward across the country in cities such as San Francisco, Chicago, and Cleveland, the city and state were attempting to do significant work in Boston that could serve the long-term needs of public and private interests including the South Boston residential and business communities.

The clean-up of Boston Harbor and a thriving regional economy had renewed focus on the South Boston waterfront, an area with 1,000 acres of undeveloped or underdeveloped land, which acted as a buffer to the South Boston residential neighborhood. While there had been development interest in this area of South Boston before--most notably the Fan Pier proposal of the 1980s--BRA imposed caps on downtown development and planned infrastructure improvements including the new South Boston Piers Transitway, highway improvements, and increased water taxi connections, caused an increase in land value and mounting development pressure for portions of the waterfront.

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<sup>6</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 127.

In 1997, under pressure from the community to create a master plan to control development in the Seaport, the BRA released *The South Boston Seaport Master Plan*. This effort was a preliminary urban design plan that outlined general development sub-districts in the waterfront area and gave recommended building heights and street patterns. Missing were design guidelines, linkage programs, land use recommendations, and other elements that would comprise a more comprehensive plan toward waterfront development.

According to *The Boston Globe*, the plan was...“furiously put together over the last several months as development pressures heightened.”<sup>7</sup> Why did it take the city so long to offer this plan, as incomplete as it was? At first glance it is easy to conclude that city and state officials lacked the ability to engage in a meaningful, implementable master planning process. Upon deeper inspection of the history of planning and politics in the South Boston community, however, one might be led to conclude something quite different.

It is also possible that what could be taken as lack of vision on the part of the City of Boston had actually been a response to the “reluctance” of the South Boston community<sup>8</sup> to accept any planning or development intervention on their “turf.”<sup>9</sup> As the development climate heated up in Boston, both Massport and the BRA scrambled to seal development contracts for individual sites without the benefit of an overall land use or design guideline framework. One example of this piecemeal approach was the 1997 decision to site the new Boston Convention and Exhibition Center in South Boston, a decision which was made outside the framework of an overall policy and urban design plan for the waterfront development area. Do these piecemeal efforts illustrate the lack of vision or plan on the part of the city and state, or are they actually illustrative of a master plan of a different kind? I suggest that, rather than illustrating a lack of vision, this piecemeal approach to planning represented another type of plan which responds to the outcomes of previous planning efforts in the community. The city and state appeared to focus with extracting maximum value from the land (Massport was concerned with moving quickly to develop parcels

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<sup>7</sup>*The Boston Globe*, November 24, 1997.

<sup>8</sup> I intend to explore the issue of “community” in the South Boston case to understand if it is the average citizen, political representatives, community organizations or some combination of these who are driving the community’s response to planning. My case study will also attempt to determine if the dominant “voices” in South Boston have changed over time.

<sup>9</sup>At the community meeting to introduce the Seaport Plan to South Boston residents, many long-time residents of South Boston expressed their outrage that anything should be allowed to be developed on land that is “our children’s and grandchildren’s land.”

such as the hotel and office complex at the World Trade Center while the real estate market was strong) while avoiding the intense scrutiny of the South Boston community by keeping development commitments incremental and small. In this way, while the community certainly was aware of the current projects, the projects' disjointed incrementalism, as opposed to an alternative scenario of a large-scale master plan, was difficult to fight or negotiate. The community saw the disadvantages of this method though, and in 1997, when it became clear that the convention center would be sited in Southie, pressured the BRA to develop a master plan. The convention center deal was not approved by the city council until after the master plan was released in November 1997.

By waiting until development pressure intensified in the South Boston Seaport before preparing a master plan, the city was able to claim it was an advocate for South Boston residents, imploring the community to "back the BRA plan because development and change is going to occur with or without a plan and we can help you get what you want in the face of extraordinary development pressures."<sup>10</sup>

The struggles the city faced in preparing the master plan and engaging all interested parties is testament to the ongoing challenges posed by a politically savvy South Boston. In *Planning in the Face of Power*, John Forester seeks to look at the ways in which manifestations of power shape planning practices:

...by seeking to address or ignore the exercise of political power in the planning process, planners can make that process more democratic or less, more technocratic or less, still more dominated by the established wielders of power or less so.<sup>11</sup>

Forester's view assumes that power is something absent from most communities, and that it is the role of the planner to make certain that such power is shared. Yet, in the case of South Boston, powerful persons, connected to powerful institutions, have often been in alignment with the community, rather than in opposition to it.<sup>12</sup>

Over the years, South Boston has been the target of autocratic officials using landfill to create development

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<sup>10</sup> Statement made by BRA Director Tom O'Brien at the South Boston Community meeting on December 2, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> John Forester, *Planning in the Face of Power* (Berkeley and LA: University of California Press, 1989) 28.

<sup>12</sup> Lawrence Vale.



opportunities and searching for locations for unwanted urban land uses. The community has reacted by isolating itself from the city (both geographically and socially) while accumulating disproportionate political power at the city, state, and federal levels.<sup>13</sup> In this thesis, I explore the possibility that the community's refusal to participate in the planning process, or perhaps more accurately, the community's lack of need for a traditional participatory planning process, as defined by city and state planners, has caused some previous planning attempts in the community to fail. This thesis seeks to answer the following questions in offering a history of planning in South Boston since the 1930s, in the hope of offering insight into future planning endeavors in the community:

- What issues compel the community to act? Have these issues changed over time?
- Does the community speak in one voice, or are there many voices that speak for the community?
- Have these voices changed over time, with changing demographics?
- How has the community's relationship with "outsiders" changed over time?
- Are there generalizable patterns of strategies that South Boston has used over time?
- How does the community define success?
- What can the community and "outsiders" learn from these experiences?

The first part of this thesis outlines the context of previous planning efforts and development attempts in South Boston. After the brief introduction found in this chapter, *Chapter 2: History and Demographics of South Boston*, provides topographical information to explain South Boston's geographical isolation from Boston and to put it in an historical context. The effects of landfill and "outside" ownership of land are explored and a social and political history is briefly outlined. The effects of the Irish Potato Famine on Irish immigration and the treatment of the Irish immigrants by Boston natives is examined to provide an historical context for the isolation and eventual distrust of outsiders that developed in Southie. Finally, the political machinations of Boston are reviewed to explain the political strength found in the district and the community's reliance on political leaders in issues of planning. To provide a further framework for the case study analysis presented in *Chapters 3 and 4*, this chapter also includes demographic information for South Boston from 1990 as well as at previous points in time to track changes in the district that may or

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<sup>13</sup>While a demographic profile of South Boston reveals a mostly white, Irish Catholic community far below the Boston median income, with great numbers receiving public assistance of some kind, South Boston has been birthplace to a number of powerful political leaders and enjoys a strong political connection.

may not have had an effect on planning efforts.

In *Chapter 3: South Boston Planning Since the 1930s*, planning efforts made by local politicians, and public officials are examined in a series of "mini-cases." Each mini-case examines the players in major planning/development interventions from the 1930s through the 1990s. All are presented to the reader using a framework for comparison that offers a brief introduction to the case, provides a history of events leading to the planning intervention, outlines the interest groups involved and their key goals, evaluates the political climate of the time, assesses the strategies and stances of the various players, and offers an evaluation of the outcome. The study of these cases seeks to determine the relationship between the South Boston community and city/state/private dialogue partners over time.

The seven planning interventions examined in *Chapter 3* are the following:

- Public Housing: 1930s and 1940s
- Urban Renewal: 1960s
- Fan Pier/Pier 4: 1981-1987
- The Federal Courthouse: 1992-1998
- The Megaplex: 1992-1995
- The Patriots Stadium: 1996-1997
- The Boston Convention and Exhibition Center: 1996-1998

*Chapter 4: The South Boston Seaport Master Plan*, examines the 1997 planning effort to create a master plan for the Seaport. Using the same framework as Chapter 3, this chapter outlines the various infrastructure improvements that occurred or were planning in South Boston and places these in the context of the overall economic climate of the city and region.

In *Chapter 5: Common Threads*, an exploration is made of the eight planning interventions studied in *Chapters 3 and 4*, and comparisons are made between them. Five similarities are noted and key elements thought to be major factors in the community's responses and engagement in the planning process are discussed. Community voices responding to interventions are also examined in an attempt to understand if the unity of South Boston stakeholders has shifted or broken down over time.

In *Chapter 6: Conclusion*, the question is asked, "What can planners and the community learn from these past experiences, and how could these lessons inform future planning in South Boston?" This chapter

discusses the changes faced by the South Boston Community and looks at challenges city planners face when dealing with a “community of power.”

## Chapter 2

### History and Demographics of South Boston

In an 1847 *Memorial* to the leaders of the City of Boston, South Boston residents claimed that, their district's

municipal union with the City is merely arbitrary and political, for the continuance of which there can be no good reason except reciprocity of advantages: That heretofore most of the advantages of the union have been reaped by the City proper, while the disadvantages have fallen upon South Boston.<sup>14</sup>

One hundred and fifty years later, the BRA presented the *South Boston Seaport District Master Plan* to the South Boston community in December 1997. At this meeting, a South Boston resident claimed,

This is South Boston's waterfront, not the city's waterfront. Our children have a right to this land and the city is not going to take that away from them.

It appeared that little had changed in the relationship between South Boston and the City in those 150 years. The South Boston *Memorial* seems oddly prescient Southie in the 1990s, when district residents once again claimed that their beloved community was being “used” by the city of Boston with no reciprocal advantage for the residents. In the time spanning the South Boston *Memorial* to struggles over control of waterfront development in the 1990s, city leaders planned various interventions in the South Boston district. Common to most of these interventions is community resentment. In addition, residents often reacted to extraneous influences by isolating themselves from the city and strengthening the common bonds of the community in an “us vs. them” attitude. At the same time, while the district, since the late 1800s, had a higher share of poverty than most other Boston neighborhoods, the South Boston community had accumulated political power disproportionate to its socio-economic status.

How did this come to be? A study of Twentieth Century planning interventions in South Boston, and the subsequent reaction of the South Boston community must necessarily begin with a look at the history and demographics of the district. The portrait of the South Boston community is a complex one, involving geography, ethnicity, politics, religion, and economics. And this complex portrait of the district is surprisingly consistent throughout Boston's history. Indeed, South Boston is a unique place that, in some ways, has changed very little over time. As Boston College historian Thomas O'Connor aptly puts it in

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<sup>14</sup>Cranston Howe et al, *South Boston Memorial*, City Document No. 18 (Boston, MA, 1847) 2.

*South Boston: My Home Town,*

Of all Boston's neighborhoods, South Boston has survived with perhaps the fewest changes in its ethnic, social and religious composition. It is one of the last surviving relics of a distinctive way of life that goes back to the early days of immigrant Irish families and old-time political bosses.<sup>15</sup>

It is this consistency of place that offers an interesting and telling microcosm in which to study the efforts of city leaders and planners in the sixty years starting with the 1930s. To be sure, there were changes in the community. And yet, enough remained the same that the history and demographics of South Boston can offer much information to help us better understand some of the residents' reactions to outsider intervention in the 1990s.

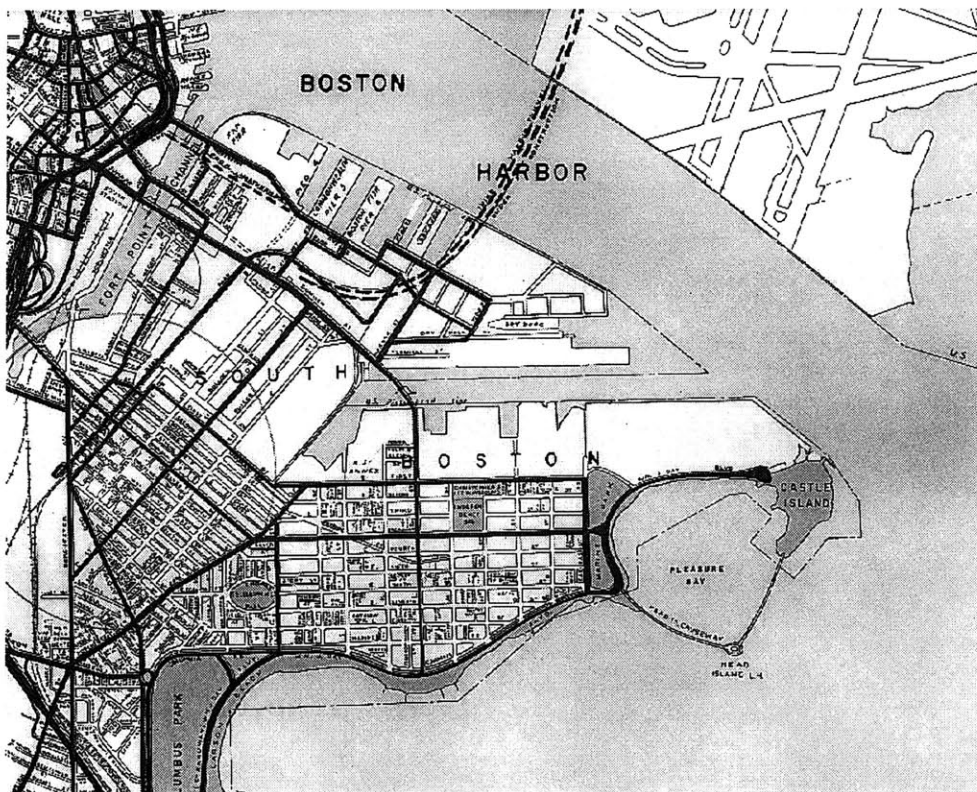


Fig. 1. Map of South Boston.

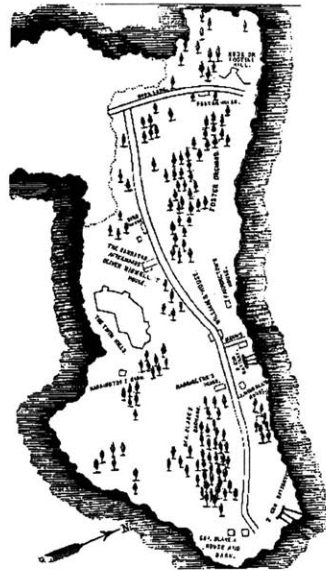
Even from the first colonial settlement of the Shawmut peninsula, South Boston's geography has done much to isolate the community from its neighbors and to foster the sense of "apartness" from Boston society. O'Connor writes,

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas H. O'Connor, *South Boston: My Home Town* (Boston: Quinlan Press, 1988) 2.

The very geographical location of the district contributed directly to its separateness. Residents of the isolated peninsula had always felt themselves part of a unique settlement, a place set apart, where they would have to live and work together in the face of what they often saw as the neglect and disdain of other parts of the city.<sup>16</sup>

The settlement of Dorchester, and later, South Boston, began in 1630 with the arrival of ships from England which carried Puritans wishing to escape religious persecution in their homeland. As more people and livestock arrived from England, the new colony was expanded to the nearby peninsula of Mattapanock (South Boston) where the land was used for cattle and horses. All settlers used this land as pasture land until the town restricted the use of pastures to only about 100 families in 1637. Gradually, colonists began to break their Mattapanock land holdings into smaller pieces for each successive line of heirs and permanent residences were built on the land toward the late 1600s. Even so, residents of what



**Fig. 2.** Plan of Dorchester Neck (South Boston), drawn for the British Army's use in 1775.  
*Source: South Boston: My Home Town.*

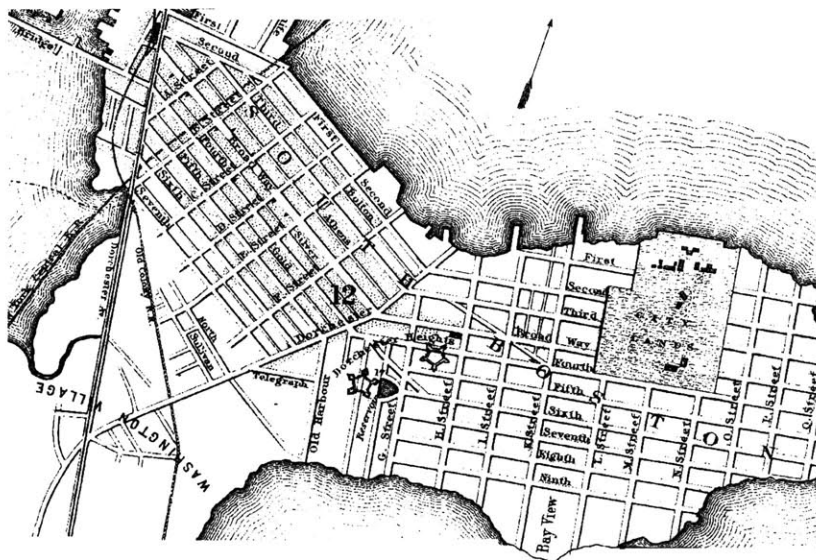
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<sup>16</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 124.

was to become South Boston were a close-knit group of families.

The land, which became known as Dorchester Neck, was virtually ignored by other settlers until after the Revolutionary War, when the remoteness of South Boston and its open spaces and salt air soon made it the target for institutional uses from the adjacent Town of Boston. With the opening of a small pox hospital on the peninsula in 1792, the town of Boston began what was to be a long trend of locating institutional uses in South Boston; the district became, “among other things, a favorite location for schools, hospitals, homes, asylums, workhouses, poorhouses and institutions of all kinds.<sup>17</sup>”

In addition to its usefulness as a remote site for Boston’s institutional and unwanted uses, the rapid expansion of the town’s population caused land speculators to look to the district for development. In 1803, speculators bought a large piece of land in South Boston and then petitioned the City of Boston to annex all of the peninsula in an attempt to increase land prices. “The inhabitants of Dorchester, however, were very much opposed to the change. They considered Mattapanock as belonging to them, and were



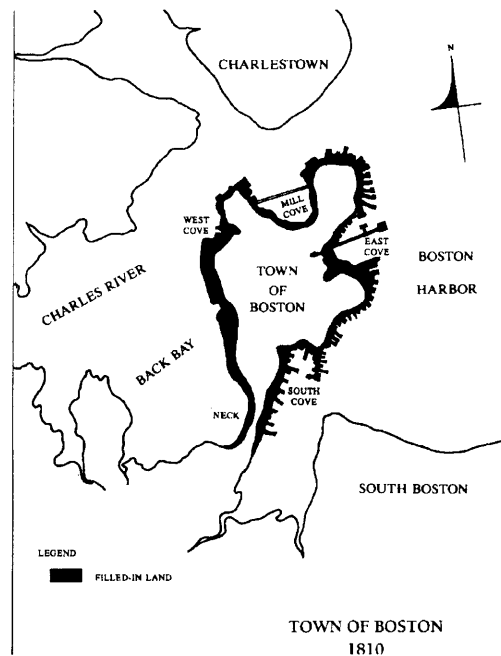
**Fig 3.** A map from the late Nineteenth Century, showing the layout of South Boston streets as they appeared in 1805, one year after annexation to the Town of Boston. Note the “City Lands” area between L and O Streets.  
*Source: History of South Boston.*

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<sup>17</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 15.

determined to retain their property if possible.<sup>18</sup> Despite this opposition, the Town of Boston annexed South Boston on March 6, 1804. Soon thereafter, this peninsula of 600 acres was connected to the southern end of Boston by two bridges and land values increased dramatically.

The construction of one of these two bridges, the new North Free Bridge, instigated what was perhaps the first official planning effort in South Boston. Easy access to the center of Boston made the peninsula hot real estate property, and the need for a more regular plan of streets was apparent. In an 1805 plan, two main streets were laid out in South Boston: Dorchester Street, and Broadway. Streets running parallel to Broadway were given numerical names and streets running parallel to Dorchester Street were set up in alphabetical order. Real estate development began in earnest. The peninsula was typically Anglo-Saxon-Protestant and followed the regular patterns of life in Boston communities during this time.



**Fig. 4.** Town of Boston in 1810. The filled land is shown along the edges of the original Shawmut Peninsula. *Source: Planning the City Upon a Hill.*

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas C. Simonds, *History of South Boston* (New York: Arno Press, 1974 (reprint of 1857 Edition)) 74.



The “City of Boston” was established in 1822 and efforts by city politicians to provide public assistance to the downtrodden and sick of the city continued to be located in South Boston. Following the small pox hospital established in 1792, the Perkins Institute for the Blind was established around 1839. In addition, The Massachusetts School of Idiots was founded in the City Point section of the peninsula, and Carney Hospital and House of Industry soon followed. City leaders purchased 53 acres of land which became known as the City Lands. A group of institutions here included, at one time or another, the House of Industry, a poorhouse, a house of correction for adults and one for children, and a lunatic asylum. This grouping of city social institutions on the small peninsula caused the first publicly acknowledged resentment over “outside” uses in the district. As aptly described in *South Boston: My Home Town*, “local residents came to resent the construction of so many institutional structures in what had formerly been a pastoral expanse of grazing lands, fruitful orchards and lovely houses. A formal expression of this resentment demonstrated the district’s emerging spirit of political solidarity.<sup>19</sup>” This formal expression of

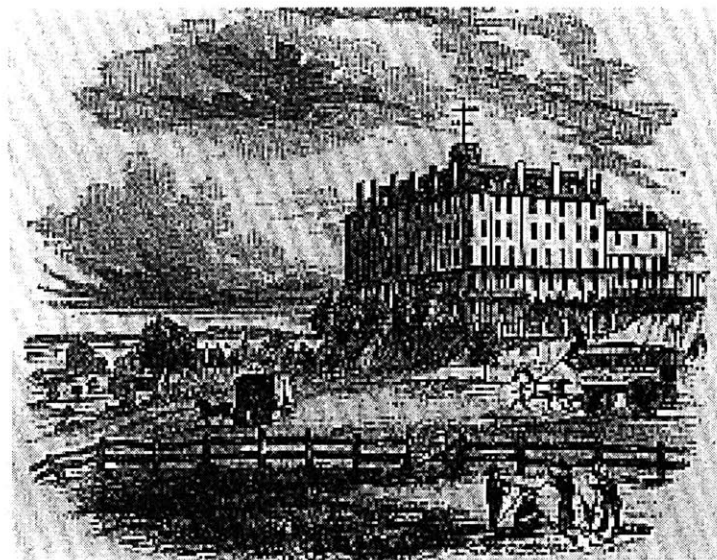


Fig. 5. The Perkins Institute for the Blind shortly after May 1839.  
Source: Boston Public, Library Print Department.

resentment came in the 1847 *Memorial* sent to the City leaders which recalled the opposition of South Boston residents to their annexation to Boston and called to the attention of city leaders that South Boston was unfairly singled out to house the city’s unwanted uses. It is interesting to note that the *Memorial* was

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<sup>19</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 30.

drafted before the huge influx of Irish immigrants to the district. Residents of South Boston were still relatively well-to-do Anglo Saxon Protestant land owners. Yet this *Memorial* is testament to the beginning of an ongoing resentment by the residents of South Boston, feeling as though they had, “sometimes been treated as the Botany Bay of the City, into which could be thrust those establishments which the City Fathers would consider nuisances in the neighborhood of their own private dwellings, such as Alms Houses, Prisons, and Small-pox Hospitals.”<sup>20</sup>

And so, even before the waves of Irish immigrants began to change the face of South Boston, the actions of the Anglo-Saxon-Protestant community were eerily prescient of Twentieth century opposition to city planners.

As the community struggled to develop its new political identity after its annexation to Boston in 1804, it began to resent what it saw as indifference and neglect on the part of Boston authorities regarding the needs and desires of South Boston residents. . . . This notion of independent action in the face of municipal neglect, this resentful spirit of “us against them,” was a theme that would continue on through the long history of the community and help explain episodes in that history when residents of South Boston would fail to cooperate with authorities or withhold their support from municipal projects.<sup>21</sup>

This “us vs. them” theme threads through the *Memorial*, which describes the fight by South Bostonians to halt annexation attempts, only to be “defeated by those Bostonians whose interests were always preferred to those of mere South Bostonians.”<sup>22</sup> Here again South Bostonians clearly felt they were being treated unfairly and unequally. Later in the *Memorial*, South Bostonians state, “the City did not seem inclined to consider the tax-payers of South Boston as having equal rights with real Bostonians, even in matters that were necessarily common.”<sup>23</sup>

While the peninsula was still predominantly composed of native Bostonians in 1847, the Anglo-Saxon-Protestant complexion of the district began to change as early as the 1830s when some Irish immigrants moved to the peninsula. While there were only about 100 Catholics in Boston at the time of the

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<sup>20</sup>Cranston Howe et al., p. 3.

<sup>21</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 32.

<sup>22</sup>Cranston Howe et al., p. 6.

<sup>23</sup>Cranston Howe et al., p. 9

Revolutionary War, by 1830, the Irish Catholics of Boston numbered over 8,000. At first, the Irish did not amount to significant enough numbers to seem a threat to native Bostonians. In chronicling the fate of the Irish in *Boston's Immigrants*, Oscar Handlin describes how, "the great waves of European migration, with one exception, caused scarcely a ripple in the placid stream of the city's life."<sup>24</sup> This exception was the Irish. Of all immigrant groups, the Irish, because of the great Potato Famine starting in 1846, came with no money, no skills, and with ill health. Where other immigrants heeded the advice to "go farther west," in search of the American promise of a better life, the Irish "exodus was not a carefully planned movement from a less desirable to a more desirable home. This was flight, and precise destination mattered little."<sup>25</sup> And flight it was. As an example, annual immigrant landings before the Irish wave of migration never topped 2000 before 1830. And of these, most were from varied nativity, heading west almost immediately upon setting foot on Boston's shores. During the years of the Potato Famine in Ireland, those Irish landing in Boston, on the other hand, "could not go elsewhere because poverty deprived them of the means, and dependence of the desire."<sup>26</sup> Immigrant landings "increased rapidly from 3,936 in 1840 to 28,917 in 1849. These newcomers were overwhelmingly Irish."<sup>27</sup> And as Handlin states, "Only among the Irish did the motives and circumstances of emigration necessitate settlement under the unfavorable conditions dictated by Boston's economic and social structure."<sup>28</sup> During that time, Boston was a city based, not in industry and manufacturing, which could make use of the unskilled Irish labor, but in finance, commerce, the professions, and some handicraft. As a result, the Irish offered little to the Boston economy and it offered less to them. Most remained unemployed. "Even the Negroes, who stood closest to the Irish in occupational experience, fared better than they."<sup>29</sup>

The Irish, also, were Catholic in a Protestant city. This fact, in conjunction with the desperate nature of their flight from famine, and their large numbers, served to mark them as a different kind of immigrant

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<sup>24</sup> Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants: A Study in Acculturation* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1959) 26.

<sup>25</sup>Oscar Handlin, p. 51.

<sup>26</sup>Oscar Handlin, p. 37.

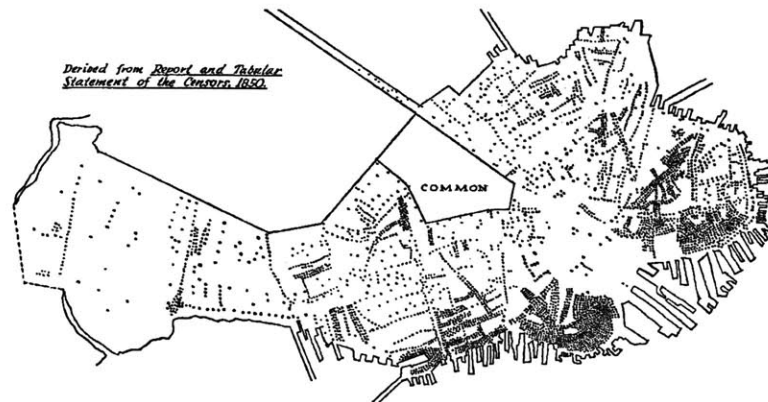
<sup>27</sup>Oscar Handlin, p. 52.

<sup>28</sup>Oscar Handlin, p. 53.

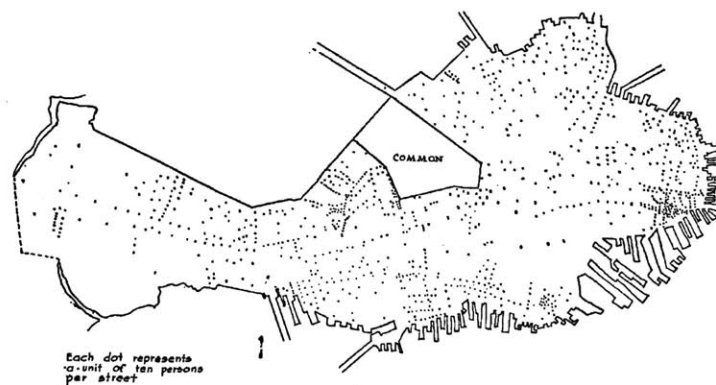
<sup>29</sup>Oscar Handlin, p. 69.

group. Their poverty forced them to congregate in the older sections of Boston, near the wharves and cheap living accommodations. This,

. . . winnowed the well-to-do from the impoverished, and consequently segregated the great mass of Irish within the narrow limits of old Boston. There was no such isolation in the distribution of other newcomers throughout the city. Once having secured employment, which their backgrounds enabled them to do more readily than the Irish, they easily adjusted the routines of their old lives to new homes. In some instances, several German, French, or English families resided on the same street, but generally there were no French, German, or English districts.<sup>30</sup>



MAP I. DISTRIBUTION OF THE IRISH IN BOSTON, 1850, BY STREETS  
Fig. 6. Map showing the distribution of the Irish in Boston in 1850. Source: *Boston's Immigrants*.



MAP II. DISTRIBUTION OF NON-IRISH FOREIGNERS IN BOSTON, 1850, BY STREETS  
Fig. 7. Map showing the distribution of non-Irish foreigners in Boston in 1850. Source: *Boston's Immigrants*.

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<sup>30</sup>Oscar Handlin, p. 91.

Their concentration and easy group recognizability caused them to bear the brunt of resentment. Bostonians believed that, with “their wrongheaded religion, and their inappropriate culture, the new immigrants were the source of all difficulties---unsanitary, overcrowded housing, low wages, shoddy work, vulgar entertainment, ignorance, promiscuity, unruly children, lawlessness, and political corruption.”<sup>31</sup>

As time went on, the Irish began to move to areas of the city being vacated for greener pastures by the well-to-do. South Boston began to be home to many of these Irish who sought to escape the close living quarters around the docks and the growing resentment of Boston’s native residents. South Boston was also becoming a place known for industry and jobs....something attractive to the impoverished immigrants. Glass was manufactured in three plants on the peninsula and printing and manufacturing were also good sources of jobs in the district. The South Boston docks created jobs for common labor on the wharves. South Boston soon became home to Irish-Catholic laborers as well as small business people and craftsmen. The district took an increasingly large share of new immigrants; the population was less than 400 residents in 1810, 6,000 in 1835, 10,000 in 1845, and 16,000 in 1855.

The resentment of native Bostonians is understandable to some degree. Arriving on Boston’s shores with no money and often in poor physical condition, the immigrants required medical attention, food, clothing, and money. Further resentment between immigrants and natives built up over the issue of slave emancipation. While northerners formed the Republican party to stop the spread of slavery to the north, the Irish supported the right to own slaves and were generally unconcerned with issues that didn’t touch their everyday fight for survival. O’Connor also speaks about the

strong feelings of Irish Catholics against certain white people, especially those who loudly advocated the emancipation of slaves. Boston Irishmen regarded most of the liberal, upper-middle-class, native American Protestants who made up the membership of the local abolition movement as bigots and hypocrites who pretended to be concerned with human rights and the plight of poor black people. . . . but who joined the anti-Catholic forces . . . And campaigned against the interests of poor white immigrants.<sup>32</sup>

As Handlin points out, the Irish feared competition for jobs from freed slaves.

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<sup>31</sup> Sam Bass Warner Jr., *The Province of Reason* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1984) 98.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas H. O’Connor, p. 53.

There were other resentments and conflicts between the Irish immigrants, and native Bostonians and other immigrant groups. Handlin describes this as a “conflict of ideas” which involved both education and religion. As he states, “The Irish who settled in Boston. . . were products of a milieu completed isolated from the intellectual influences of London, Paris, or even Dublin. And every phase of their experience in America heightened the disparity between their heritage and that of their neighbors.<sup>33</sup>” In general, the Irish arriving during the Potato Famine were less literate than other immigrant groups. In as much as they came from an agrarian culture, they were not used to city culture and had escaped most of its influences while living in Ireland. The disparity in educational levels between the community of South Boston and other Boston residents has changed surprisingly little over the years. In 1980, 7 percent of those residents 25 and older held a college degree (only East Boston was lower), and while that percentage rose to 16% in 1990, there were still only 3 neighborhoods lower.

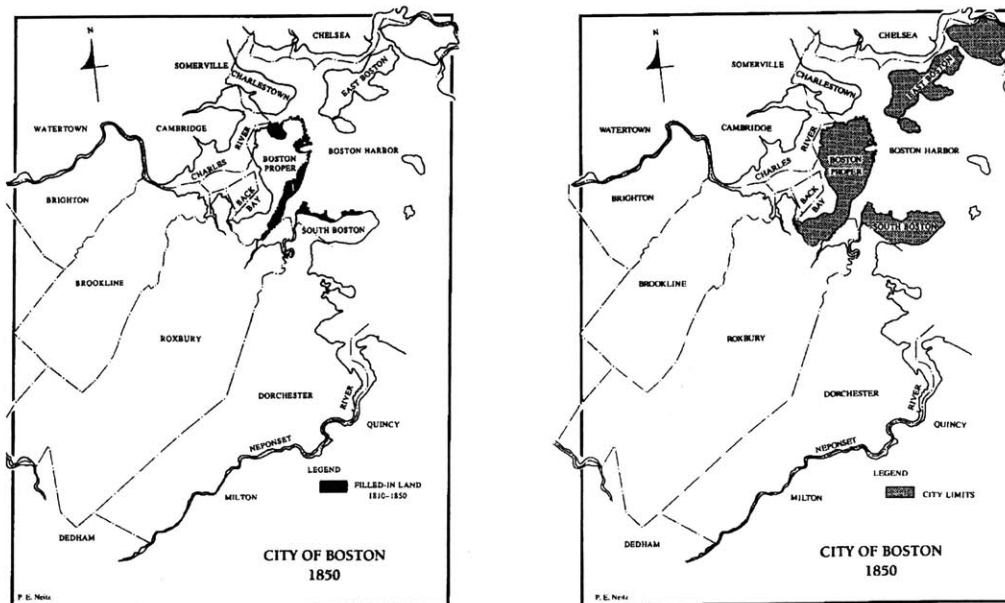
In addition to differing views and experiences in education, religion caused great conflict. “Contact bred conflict rather than conciliation. Irish Catholics could not think like their neighbors without a complete change in way of life. And natives could adopt no aspect of Catholic ideas without passing through a radical intellectual revolution.<sup>34</sup>” The pressure this conflict placed on the Irish was overwhelming. The Irish reacted with fierce Irish national pride that forged a group identity unknown by immigrant groups of other nativities.

By the late 1850s, South Boston was overwhelmingly Irish and Catholic. Both the industries on the peninsula, and the South Boston immigrant population, prospered during the Civil War. The population increased to 22,000 in 1860 to over 30,000 in 1865. During the war, 25 acres of mud flats running from Fort Point Channel to City Point were filled to make room for railroad operations. After the war though, many of the heavy industrial plants in South Boston moved or closed. This allowed the residential portion of the district to expand. Municipal jobs such as paving roads, laying power lines, and protecting the city, began to open up to South Boston immigrants as the city expanded and improved its services.

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<sup>33</sup>Oscar Handlin, p. 125.

<sup>34</sup>Oscar Handlin, p. 149.



**Fig. 8.** City of Boston in 1850. The map on the left shows landfill in relation to the original Shawmut Peninsula, and shows the beginning of development in South Boston. The map on the right shows those areas included in the city political boundaries. *Source: Planning the City Upon a Hill.*

The large Irish Catholic population of South Boston was supplemented with additional waves of immigrants comprised of Polish people, Lithuanians, and some Italians. Despite the influx of these other groups, the Irish-Catholic residents of South Boston were by far the dominant ethnic group on the peninsula. With common religious and cultural values, the community shared the “interrelationship of ethnicity and morality--this distinctive socioreligious culture--that would cause residents of South Boston to react violently and self-righteously to anything they regarded as a challenge to their ethnic pride, their religious beliefs and their moral principles.”<sup>35</sup>

As the Irish became a cohesive community in South Boston, the need developed to achieve political power, and Irishmen became masters at the game. That the Irish took so quickly and so adeptly to politics is partly explained in their continued expectation of harsh treatment and their need to defend themselves in some

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<sup>35</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 82.

way. As Handlin notes,

The Irish. . . segregated in their murky slums, in their lowly occupations, and their dread of losing religion, never ceased to anticipate harsh treatment from strangers or to distrust unknown ways. Centuries of struggles and engendered an acute wariness of Protestants, of Protestant friendship, and of Protestant assistance that too often masked proselytization with the guise of benevolence.<sup>36</sup>

And as the Irish “stuck to their own,” native Bostonians viewed this with both relief and resentment. Glad the Irish contained themselves, for the most part, in a few areas of the city, native Bostonians also resented the reluctance of the Irish to assimilate. Handlin quotes the *American* of 1837 as saying,

instead of assimilating at once with the customs of the country of their adoption, our foreign population are too much in the habit of retaining their own national usages, of associating too exclusively with each other. . . These practices serve no good purpose, and tend merely to alienate those among whom they have chosen to reside.<sup>37</sup>

While these resentments were there, it appears that native Bostonians at first felt no threat from the Irish, only irritation and resentment. When the Irish began to embrace politics though, suddenly there was a very threatening force to be reckoned with.

The crisis came when, after a decade of efforts in that direction, the Irish acquired a position of political importance. After 1840 their press insisted upon the duty “to themselves as well as to their families” of naturalization and a role in the government. Politicians sponsored societies which aided the unknowing and stimulated the indifferent to become citizens, and professional agents drew up papers, filled out forms, and rapidly turned out new voters for the sake of fees and political power.<sup>38</sup>

Just as the Irish in South Boston were gaining political clout at the turn of the century, they were unknowingly assisted in this endeavor by well-to-do Bostonians who were moving out of the city and to the suburbs, upsetting the old way of life in the city and shifting long-standing demographics and political ties. The group identity and social coherence of the Irish immigrants led to an Irish political party of sorts that embraced, what has been described as “ethnic” politics as opposed to the Brahmin “rational” politics of the time.<sup>39</sup> This was a direct attack on the more “rational” political decisions being made in the city,

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<sup>36</sup>Oscar Handlin, p. 161.

<sup>37</sup>Oscar Handlin, p. 185.

<sup>38</sup>Oscar Handlin, p. 191.

<sup>39</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 84.





**Fig. 9.** A cartoon showing the common stereotype of “drunken immigrants” stealing the ballot box. *Source: South Boston: My Home Town.*

which, in *Planning the City upon a Hill*, Lawrence Kennedy wrote, have “all too often kept American cities from meeting other needs more effectively. The “private market’s demand for workers, its capacities for dividing land, building houses, stores and factories, and its needs for public services have determined the shape and quality of America’s big cities.<sup>40</sup>” The Irish were not having their needs met by the private market or the rational politics of the day. Lacking economic clout, Irish politicians gained clout through what they did have access to: a large mass of voters. And Irish politicians soon became adept at the new type of “ethnic” politics that garnered loyalty more through personal similarities and friendships than through good deeds or public interest. The Irish rose to power through their political prowess by the end of the nineteenth century. Hugh O’Brien became the first Irish-born and first Catholic mayor in Boston’s history in 1884 and the Irish began to dominate the city’s political landscape after that. Politics in South Boston was even more closely controlled by the Irish as most other immigrant groups living in the district were registered to vote in fairly low numbers. Wards 13, 14 and 15 in South Boston were also controlled by political clubs in which, “local ward leaders were able to get together to support some legislative measure of particular importance to South Boston, or to back a South Boston man for some statewide or federal office. Indeed, to stimulate further common efforts on behalf of the peninsula, several important ward bosses formed what they called the Harmony Board, a council of leaders from the three South Boston wards, very similar to the city’s Democratic City Committee, which would plan strategy, support

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<sup>40</sup>Sam Bass Warner Jr., *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968).

candidates and arrange alliances with other wards.<sup>41</sup>”

Certainly, this system of politics, with each neighborhood or ward vying for its own agenda, created a fractured city hall at best, and sheds some light on the current struggle over control of development on the South Boston waterfront.

While this decentralized political process may have been advantageous for the individual neighborhoods, as they used their blocs of ethnic votes as bargaining chips to put their own candidate into office and obtain a greater share of the municipal budget, that process did much to hamper the development of a coherent and comprehensive policy of city planning and municipal management well into the twentieth century. With the interests of the numerous separate neighborhoods constantly pitted against the needs of the downtown Boston area, it would become almost impossible for city leaders to formulate an overall long-range program encompassing the concerns of Boston as a whole. The image of Boston as a “city of neighborhoods” may have sounded warm, friendly and “comfortable,” but it would go far toward preventing the development of a united and integrated municipality.<sup>42</sup>

Once again, the politics of the time served to heighten the “us vs. them” stance of the neighborhoods, and South Boston, in particular. Recent voting records indicate that politics is still an important part of life in the district. In the 1990 Gubernatorial election, Wards 6 and 7 (South Boston *North*, and South Boston *South*) showed an impressive 74% and 71% voter turnout, respectively. This turnout was higher in South Boston than any other wards except Jamaica Plain/Roslindale, West Roxbury and North Brighton. More important perhaps, is that South Boston had the lowest per capita income of these four neighborhoods in that year. In the 1993 citywide election, 64% voted in Southie; only West Roxbury/Roslindale had a higher percentage. In voter registration in 1990 in ward 7, an astounding 86% of the voting age population was registered to vote, compared to the citywide average of 53%. Clearly, Southie residents have retained their belief that political power is one of their best opportunities to achieve some kind of equality in the City of Boston.

Topography and the natural features of the district also heightened the isolation of the community. South Boston’s location on the harbor, gave it natural resources that made it unnecessary for residents to travel outside of the district for recreation. Community residents took great pride in the natural resources in their community and took advantage of beach front and sailing opportunities. The South Boston Yacht Club

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<sup>41</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 89.

<sup>42</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 102.

was incorporated in 1877 and the first bathhouse in the district was planned before the Civil War as an answer to the unsanitary living conditions of Boston's immigrants. Although construction was postponed during wartime, The L Street Bathhouse did not open for public use until 1865. Tens of thousands of people used the bathhouse during the summer season by the turn of the century. Some of the first playgrounds and parks in the district were constructed by the City in the 1890s after intense lobbying by social workers and neighborhood lobbying groups. Seen as an alternative to the pool halls and barrooms, the parks and recreation fields were used not only by the youth of South Boston but by working men for evening baseball. As recreational facilities were constructed, there were fewer reasons to leave the shelter provided by the South Boston community. "With their own beaches and bathhouses, playgrounds and parks, football and baseball teams, and a roster of legendary sports heroes, the people of South Boston could feel proud and comfortable in the insularity of their district and the fitness of their institutions."<sup>43</sup>

Education too, enforced the insularity of the community. Parochial schools, which were strong in the district, also placed a "special emphasis on the social and cultural heritage of the Irish race. . ."<sup>44</sup> The tie of religious education to the bonds of the community were cherished. Even those children who attended public school attended local schools with friends from church and their neighborhood. It is of little wonder that the community fought so hard in the early 1970s, against school desegregation and court-ordered busing. Here, in addition to the long-held views about blacks, the community was fighting to protect its unique, insulated, ethnic and religious character.

There were distinctive events, also, that solidified the feelings of separateness of the South Boston community. In September of 1919, Boston policemen voted to strike after nineteen patrolmen were fired in response to their attempt to start a union. When the ensuing riots were over and control restored to the city, all those strikers, many of them Irish immigrants, were fired. The effect was devastating to South Boston:

Although the worst effects of the strike lasted no more than two or three days, it would be a great many years before the people of South Boston recovered from its bitter aftereffects. Many family men from the district--fathers, brothers, uncles, cousins, nephews--lost jobs as policemen and were never allowed back on the force. But the whole episode also reminded people that great differences still separated the Irish-Catholic population of South Boston from the political and

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<sup>43</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 117.

<sup>44</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 121.

financial leaders of Boston society. . . The “us versus them” attitude toward in-town Bostonians helped bind the residents together in a common cause, despite the growing economic differences that might otherwise have created more substantial class divisions within the community itself.<sup>45</sup>

But still, the district struggled to retain, if not economic power, then certainly political power. Glimpses of modern day political patronage and power are seen in the Depression years. In 1929, James Michael Curley was elected to a third term as Mayor of Boston with overwhelming support from South Boston. His “Fifty-Year” plan provided a contract for \$117,288 to build a walkway to Castle Island, still separated from the mainland. This was temporary work for many South Bostonians. And yet this work was not very successful in providing long-term relief from South Bostonians who suffered greatly from the close of the many industries, both large and small, that dotted their land. Ironically, Mayor Curley later hindered the city from receiving a proportionate share of funding from the federal government under the Public Works Administration and the Works Progress Administration because,

administration leaders in Washington had a deep distrust of James Michael Curley and other influential political figures in Boston; they feared that government appropriations would be wasted, mismanaged or stolen. For another, political feuding, neighborhood rivalries and conflicts among various ethnic groups added to the national perception that Boston was not a city that could handle large sums of money honestly, equitably or responsibly.<sup>46</sup>

Of the funds that did come into the city, “South Boston got 14 percent more than should have been the case” based on proportionate allocation, and the district was “more strongly represented on the work rolls than North End Italians and West End Jews.<sup>47</sup>”

South Boston’s continued political clout is evidenced in Congressman John McCormack’s plea to President Roosevelt to offer greater financial assistance to South Bostonians to shore up Roosevelt’s waning political support from that district. This resulted in an even greater percentage of federal jobs for South Bostonians. “While other parts of the city waited in vain for public housing to be constructed, South Boston proudly witnessed the completion of Old Harbor Village. . .<sup>48</sup>”

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<sup>45</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 171.

<sup>46</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 187.

<sup>47</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 188.

<sup>48</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 190.

Times were changing though, in Southie. The ethnic solidarity and common bonds of religion and education became fractured after World War II when a deep change occurred in the district. Veterans returned to find that 3-6 years away from home had loosened their ties to the neighborhood. For perhaps the first time, the community was threatened with a loss of continuity and ethnic memory. South Boston had three public housing projects by 1950 and one of these, in particular, created other changes in South Boston. Old Harbor Village (later renamed the Mary Ellen McCormack Project after the congressman's mother) was filled with South Boston Irish working-class families, but the Old Colony project was filled with outsiders due to the wartime needs of the U.S. Government. The D Street Project (officially called West Broadway), opened in 1949, and although never more than 10% non-white until 1990, this project too, had many residents who from outside Southie.

Other changes were occurring as a result of new federal social policies. O'Connor points out that federal work programs and then later, social security, unemployment insurance and workmen's compensation insurance all gave increased power to federal officials while weakening local ward bosses and politicians. But regional politics also grew in importance as the Irish began to rise to power in the late 1800s. As Lawrence Kennedy states in his survey of Boston planning since 1630,

When the former ruling elite--the Boston Brahmins--lost control of political power in the city, they displayed Yankee ingenuity and created new ways to check the power of the emerging Irish. The state government, at that time still throughly dominated by the Republican elite, introduced metropolitan planning, in part to rationalize the provision of government services but more importantly to retain some control of Boston's political bosses.<sup>49</sup>

At first, the regional issue seems cursory to the discussion of South Boston history and demographics. Yet the struggle between Southie politicians and state powers continues to be seen in recent events. The fight over Massport's (a state authority) proposed siting of a new Patriots stadium in South Boston, and recent negotiations regarding linkages for the proposed Convention Center to be located in South Boston (see *Chapter 3*), all illustrate the political prowess of South Boston politicians beyond the city-wide playing field.

While it appeared that the changes brought about by World War II, public housing, and the lessening of local political patronage would fracture the once close-knit community, the issue of school busing re-

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<sup>49</sup> Lawrence W. Kennedy, *Planning the City Upon a Hill: Boston Since 1630* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1992) 7.

galvanized the community once again. In 1974, when Judge Garrity, an Irish-Catholic, who lived in suburban Wellesley, ruled that Boston's schools were unlawfully segregated, he breathed new life into the ethnic community of South Boston. Once again, the district, while perhaps less homogeneous than before, felt that outsiders were attempting to control the lives and culture of South Bostonians and had no right to do so.

Little consideration and even less understanding had been given to the plight of ethnic neighborhoods like South Boston, whose residents found themselves caught in a struggle for survival in which they were deserted by their friends, relatives, clergy and political representatives. Above all it was a struggle in which they saw themselves confronted by a bureaucracy of outside education specialists, sociological experts and legal authorities who knew nothing about their unique historical background, their distinctive social customs or their religious ideals--and who cared less.<sup>50</sup>

And while the South Bostonian saw his battle as protecting his right to make decisions for his children, he "was singled out as a lawless and violent racist, an ignorant and reactionary redneck who blocked the path of progress and opposed the equality of the races."<sup>51</sup> To make matters worse, during the school desegregation tumult,

the residents of South Boston felt under assault not only from the black population of the city, but also from members of their own Irish-Catholic population in the surrounding suburbs. A clearly bitter and defensive mentality intensified a neighborhood disposition that was already definitely parochial, and often xenophobic.<sup>52</sup>

The bitterness the community felt toward the "experts," the "educated," and the "specialists" clearly did not dissipate in the 25 years between the fight over school busing and the introduction of the South Boston Seaport master plan. At the December 1997 community meeting regarding the *South Boston Seaport District Master Plan*, one resident angrily shouted, "we can't say anything. . . we are just seen as obstructionist by the elitist *Globe*." And so, the South Boston of 1998, while ethnically less homogeneous, still pulled together when threatened and still shared strong common bonds. As Michael Vaughan, Regional Deputy of the BRA and liaison to the South Boston community said, "while they may say different things to each other, when confronted by outsiders, they all say the same thing."<sup>53</sup>

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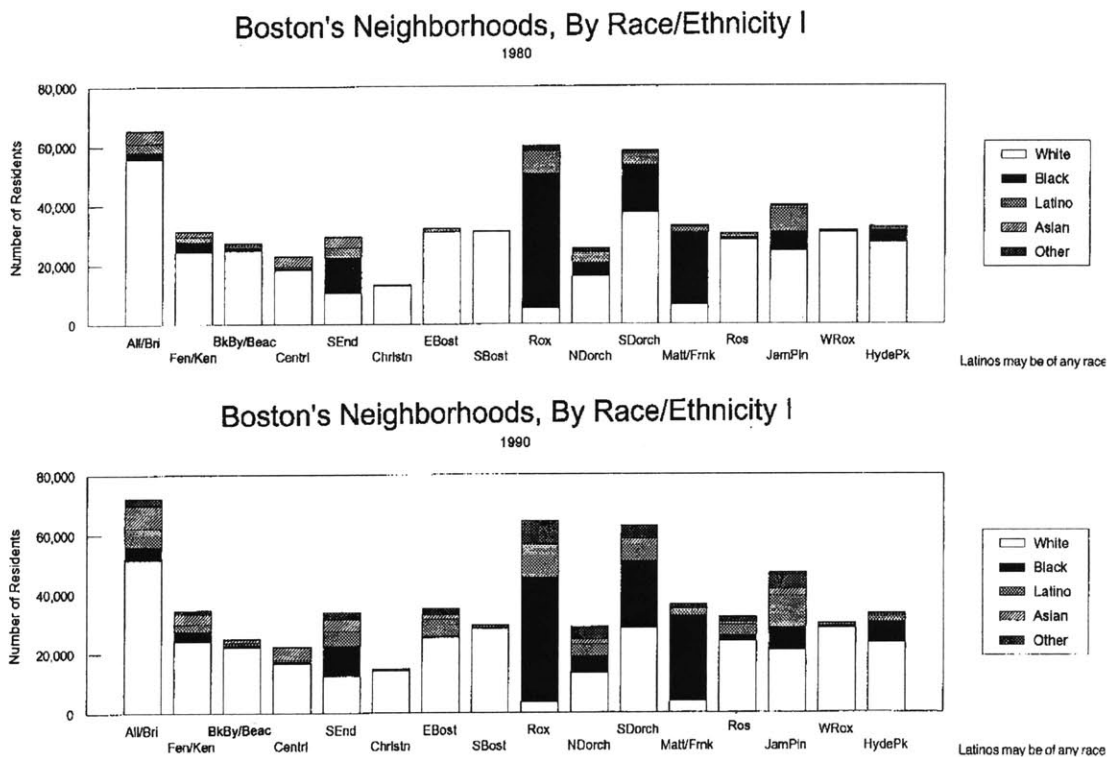
<sup>50</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 229.

<sup>51</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 4.

<sup>52</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 4.

<sup>53</sup>Michael Vaughan, Regional Deputy, Boston Redevelopment Authority, Interview (April 15, 1998).

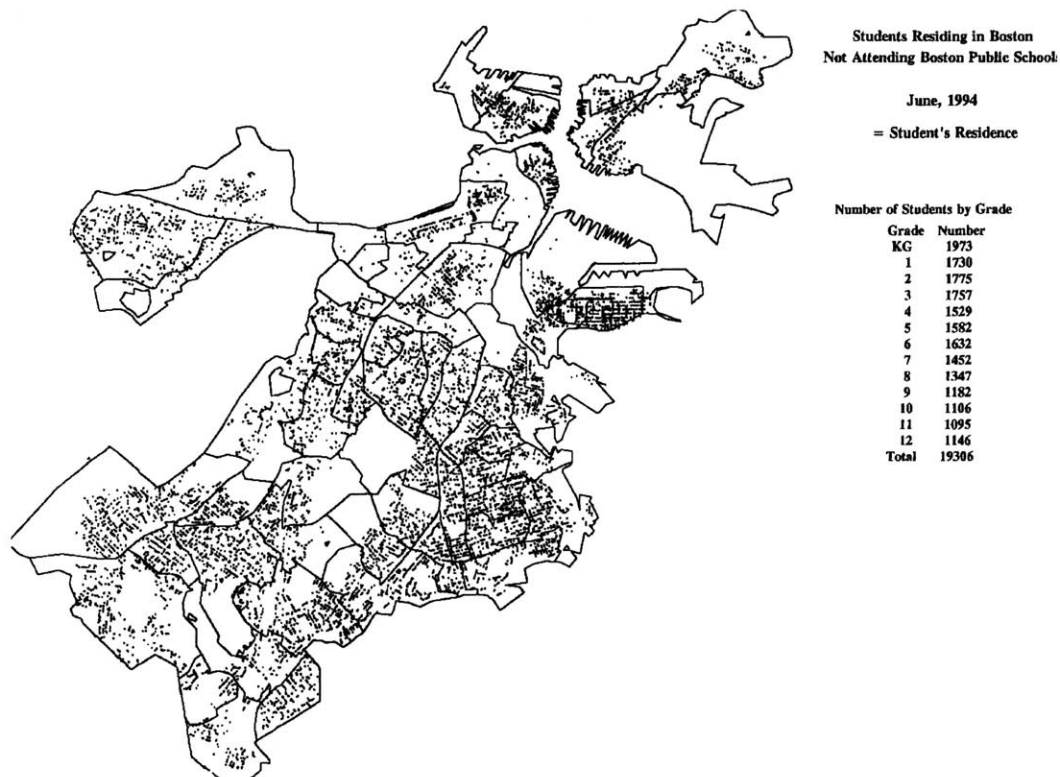
And while the community was ethnically less homogeneous than before, U.S. Census data from 1990 show that, of all Boston neighborhoods, South Boston had the highest percentage of whites (95.8%). What is more, although South Boston went from 98.7% white in 1980 down to 95.8 percent white in 1990, most of Boston's other neighborhoods showed much greater increases in blacks, Latinos and Asians during that decade. The district came under fierce criticism for its whiteness. As in the school desegregation issue, district residents felt that this criticism was hypocritical coming from liberal, upper-middle class whites living in all-white suburbs. As O'Connor writes, "many South Boston people [were forced] to regard the program of school desegregation and court-ordered busing as only the latest of a long series of schemes designed to transform their beloved neighborhood, even to obliterate it. . . ."<sup>54</sup>



**Fig. 10.** Boston's neighborhoods by race and ethnicity in 1980 (top) and 1990 (bottom). *Source: A Status Report on Boston, its Families and Children, 1995.*

<sup>54</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 229.

And even as the community banded together to protect itself from these “schemes from outsiders to transform their neighborhood,” residents faced growing criticism for what was perceived to be closed-minded ways and hatred of blacks. The whole issue of busing in the early 1970s brought to a head the growing shift in the public’s perception of Southie. While earlier in the century, Southie residents were tolerated as an uneducated, parochial lot, things shifted as Southie entrenched against outside attempts to integrate the district. “. . .it was not unusual to find South Boston men likened to the comic television personality Archie Bunker--a beer swilling, cigar-chewing, insensitive chauvinist and outright bigot.”<sup>55</sup>



**Fig. 11.** Students residing in Boston not attending Boston Public Schools - note the heavy concentration of dots in South Boston. *Source: A Status Report on Boston, its Families and Children, 1995.*

And so once again, South Boston was on the defensive. In ways not unlike the Anglo-Saxon-Protestant protest in the 1847 *Memorial* to the City of Boston, Southie took the stand that it was being used as a

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<sup>55</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 2.



dumping ground for social experiments...public housing with “outside” tenants, and then school busing, breaking apart their neighborhood schools. Interestingly, this defensiveness, or reactivity, as opposed to proactiveness, weaves through most of Southie’s history. The residents’ attitude of “leave us alone” has protected the integrity of the neighborhood. So very little change has been initiated by the community.

South Boston was isolated by geography, ethnicity, and class. Even before the waves of poor Irish immigrants moved into the district, its location was useful in the city’s search for a location for unwanted uses. The Anglo-Saxon-Protestant residents complained of the district’s neglect and the lack of city services in their 1847 *Memorial*, and the Irish population which followed fared much worse. Separated by ethnicity, religion, and class, South Boston residents came to expect a relationship with the City of Boston in which their needs are ignored. In fact, it appears as though the South Boston Irish have never really relinquished what Sam Bass Warner, Jr. calls “folk planning” in which a group’s religious and cultural ideology clash with that of the powers in planning, resulting in ongoing conflict about goals and methods.<sup>56</sup>

That clash became bitter during the debate over the future of the South Boston waterfront. Perhaps the cohesiveness of the district was never been more threatened than it was then. It appeared that real estate speculation and a strong economy would many Southie residents out of their own neighborhood. As State Representative Lynch was quick to point out at the December 1997 community meeting on the Seaport Master Plan, the 1993 average rent of \$754 for a 3 bedroom apartment in Southie had become \$1475 four years later. It mattered little to Southie residents that rent-control was abolished during this period, or that other sections of the city saw similar or greater increases in housing costs. The cost of housing was rising dramatically in Southie. At the same time, Southie retained its stigma as a poverty-ridden district. In 1979, it shared the distinction with Roxbury, (a community composed almost entirely of blacks and Latinos, and Southie’s unwanted partner in school busing orders), as the two neighborhoods with the lowest median incomes in Boston. In that same year, South Boston had a poverty rate of slightly over 20 percent and South Boston ranked last in household income. South Boston also had the highest percentage of residents working in Boston (86.8 percent) although their blue collar jobs in manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade were fast drying up in the city.<sup>57</sup> Changes appeared to be underway in Southie, however.

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<sup>56</sup>Sam Bass Warner Jr., *The Urban Wilderness: A History of the American City* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972) 7.

<sup>57</sup> Alexander Ganz, *Dimensions of Income and Poverty in Boston, 1970-80* (Boston: Boston Redevelopment Authority, October 1982), 30.

In 1989 dollars, mean household income went from \$23,758 in 1979 to \$31,882 in 1989, a 34.2 percent increase. This increase was exceeded only by the Back Bay, Charlestown, and the South End -- all neighborhoods which were “discovered by yuppies” as desirable places to live in the 1980s and 1990s. The number of persons living in poverty in Southie also declined in both absolute and relative terms. In 1980, 5,984 persons (20.1 percent) lived in poverty while this was down to 5,020 persons (17.3 percent) in 1990. In addition to these data, other changes were occurring in the district. The 1988 South Boston Neighborhood Profile, compiled by the City of Boston, stated, “Although the majority of South Boston’s population has been Irish. . . this majority has been declining, while the numbers of Eastern Europeans, French Canadians and Italians are growing.<sup>58</sup>”

Other indications of changes in the district included rent increases that only new-comers seemed able or willing to pay. As a two-year South Boston resident of Andrew Square recently said, “All I see are the yuppies, like myself, that work for State Street Bank and Fidelity, leaving their houses every morning to get to the office.<sup>59</sup>” This same resident states that long-time Southie residents like to say that they are “only 3-5 years behind Charlestown.” These residents don’t state this as a compliment....they are showing their concern that Southie will gentrify as Charlestown has. An indeed, the changes that appeared in their community could lead one to believe that Southie residents had cause to be concerned about the long-term health of the community *as they have known it*. In part, Southie’s political strength has come from the community’s solidarity and continuity. In the past, it appears that residents of the district have been less transient than those in other Boston neighborhoods. The percentage of South Bostonians residing in the same house for 5 or more years was 65 percent in 1980 and 58 percent in 1990, among the highest in the city, and on par with other “ethnic” neighborhoods such as Charlestown and East Boston. But that was expected to change as the older population of Southie turns over to a newer population of urban professionals and young families looking for housing in a tight real estate market in an area so close to downtown. It is no accident that Southie was not interested in a large housing component in the Seaport master plan. They wanted, as one resident put it, “affordable housing for our own.” The euphemism “zip code” was used to communicate their worry over large numbers of housing units upsetting their demographics and political strength when one resident said, “we are worried that if a large amount of

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<sup>58</sup> Alexander Ganz, *South Boston Neighborhood Profile 1988* (Boston: Boston Redevelopment Authority, 1988), 82.

<sup>59</sup> Michael Vaughan.

luxury housing is built, the waterfront area will become its own zip code.” In fact, the Seaport already has a different zip code from the residential portion of South Boston. Zip codes aren’t really the issue though. As the BRA urban designer for the master plan commented, “Southie residents own this Seaport area of 1000 acres. No they don’t own it legally, but they do own it politically.....and they always have.<sup>60</sup>” This political and historical “ownership” can be traced back to the days when jobs in the marine industrial port and the nearby factories drew thousands of Irish immigrants from the North End to South Boston to live and work. In 1998, when longshoremen’s work supported less than 200 people in the marine industrial port, and most of the manufacturing jobs had moved south, Southie residents viewed the land as their own. The residents possessed great fear that the construction of a large amount of market-rate and luxury housing units would cause the district to be split off as a separate political ward or would drastically change the demographics of their community....affecting their future political voice.

And so, knowing that the stakes were high, South Boston waged a battle to retain its “birthright,” as one resident put it. Urban design renderings and developer proposals meant little. It appeared that how the city reacted in dialogue with the community would be of the utmost importance in determining what happened on those 1000 acres of land in South Boston.

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<sup>60</sup> Kairos Shen, Assistant Director of Urban Design, Boston Redevelopment Authority, Interview (April 7, 1998).

## Chapter 3

### South Boston Planning Since the 1930s

*Chapter 2* describes a community that poses many challenges to the planner. Entrenched in an “us vs. them” attitude and armed with the political muscle to attain its goals and stop others from achieving theirs, Southie poses challenges to the modern-day planner trained in the practice of public participation and consensus building in planning. While the community is somewhat unique in terms of its political muscle, its stance against outsider intervention is not wholly unknown to planners, and in some ways, has been encouraged through the years. Historian Thomas O’Connor speaks of the tendency of people to group with others with same interests and culture,

These people were also of the same social class, with similar interests and tastes, a common education background and occupations that brought them into touch with one another and involved common types of experiences. . . The people of South Boston were certainly “comfortable” with one another, and “comfortable” with the distinctive type of ethnic neighborhood they had developed over the years. . . Its people were safe from outside contacts, and its values were protected from alien influences. Residents were happy to have it that way--they wanted it that way--and they were instinctively hostile to anyone who would think of changing it.<sup>61</sup>”

In *South Boston: My Home Town*, O’Connor makes a point of noting that when the Irish first began immigrating to Boston in large numbers, native Bostonians encouraged immigrants to group together, and “agreed that the people in the neighborhoods *would* do best to lead their own lives, go their own ways, do their own things, and stay with “their own kind.”<sup>62</sup>”

They would live in separate neighborhoods designed for different people, different nationalities, different races, different religions--all living together happily, peacefully and harmoniously--but always separately.<sup>63</sup>”

What happens, then, when after years of encouraging a kind of insularity, outside intervention is proposed to people in a community that is content to “lead their own lives, go their own ways, do their own things, and stay with their own kind?” This chapter looks at a series of planning interventions, some large, some

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<sup>61</sup>Thomas H. O’Connor, *South Boston: My Home Town* (Boston: Quinlan Press, 1988) 126.

<sup>62</sup>Thomas H. O’Connor, p. 127.

<sup>63</sup>Thomas H. O’Connor, p. 127.

small, some successfully implemented, some rejected by the community, that occurred in South Boston from the 1930s to 1998. This time period was chosen because the time immediately preceding World War II signaled the beginning of modern day planning in the City of Boston. The depression of the 1930's led to "New Deal" monies being available from the federal government for urban planning projects such as public housing. The Boston Housing Authority (BHA) was established in 1935, as a result of federal legislation that created the United States Housing Authority which assumed responsibility for all Public Works Administration (PWA) projects. While many of its powers were transferred to the Boston Redevelopment Authority in 1957, in the 1930s and 1940s, the BHA had the power to "receive subsidies from the federal government, determine what was substandard, plan and clear slums, and acquire land or take it by eminent domain."<sup>64</sup>

This chapter examines the following seven planning efforts in South Boston:

- Public Housing: 1930s and 1940s
- Urban Renewal: 1960s
- Fan Pier/Pier 4: 1981-1987
- The Federal Courthouse: 1992-1998
- The Megaplex: 1992-1995
- The Patriots Stadium: 1996-1997
- The Boston Convention and Exhibition Center: 1996-1998

While it is apparent that each of above cases is not of similar scope or magnitude, nor have all been initiated by public planning authorities, all do have similar characteristics in that there exist community "outsiders" proposing an intervention of one kind or another in Southie. In some of these cases, the outsiders are public officials at the state or city level, in others, private individuals or entities have made proposals for projects in South Boston. In all of these cases, there is a community response and reaction. The intent of the study of these cases is to assess the relationship Southie has maintained with the city, state, and other dialog partners in planning efforts over the years and to judge the effectiveness of this relationship and the success of the planning efforts.

I have used the term success here with caution. How is success defined in terms of these planning efforts? It is hoped that each study below will highlight the particular goals of the interest groups, including the

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<sup>64</sup> Lawrence W. Kennedy, *Planning the City Upon a Hill: Boston Since 1630* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1992) 148.

South Boston residential community, in a way which makes success easier to evaluate. In general terms, criteria includes the degree of implementation possible, increased property tax revenue for the city and state, city and region-wide direct and indirect economic benefits, progress on economic development in Southie and attainment of jobs for community residents, provision of affordable housing, and the degree of community participation in the process, to name a few. What may have been success as defined by the community may not have been deemed a successful effort by public or private planning partners. As such, in each case, I have attempted to outline the goals of the interest groups and evaluate success based on these goals, rather than from predetermined definitions.

Because of lack of public records and the passing of time, some of the cases below are more robust than others. Within these constraints, an attempt has been made to treat them as evenly as possible and as such, each case is broken down into the following components:

- a short history leading up to the intervention;
- the basic elements of the planning proposal;
- the interest groups involved and their goals;
- the political climate in which the proposal/project took place;
- the strategies and stances employed by each of the interest groups;
- and the outcome.

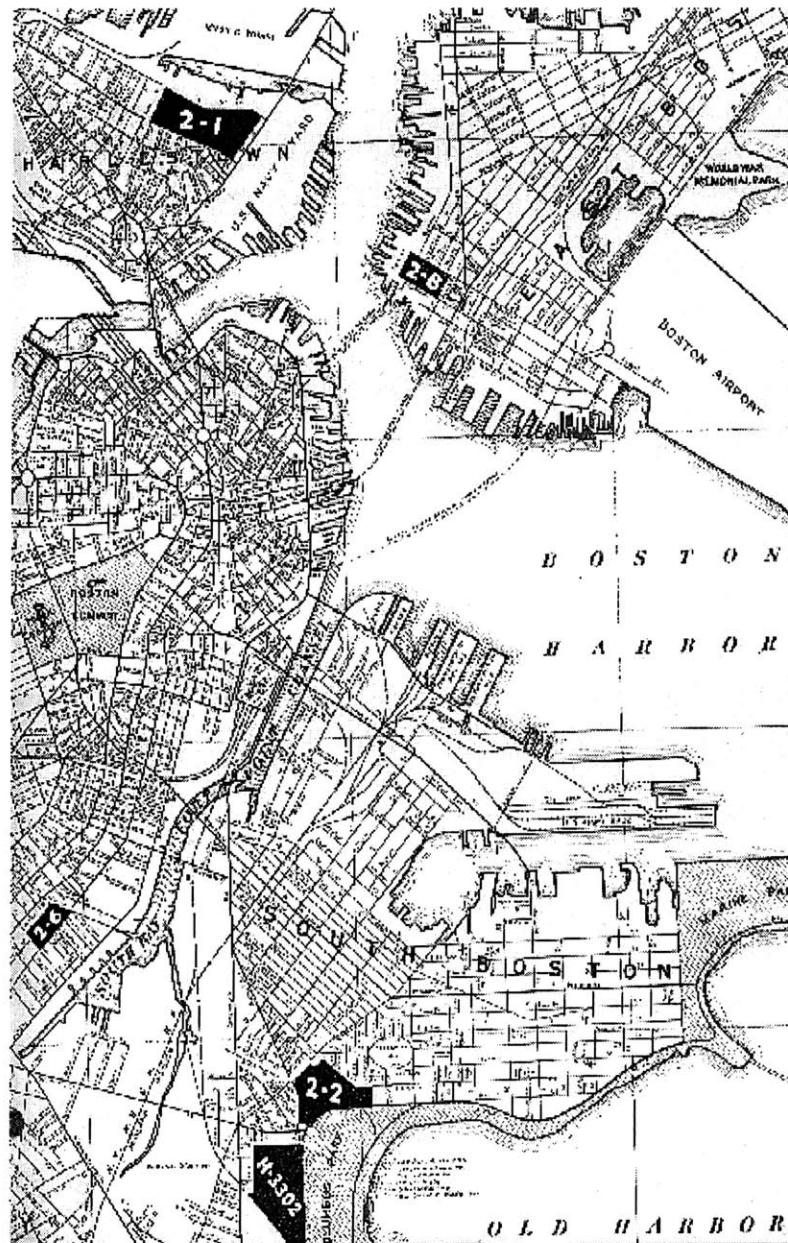
### **Public Housing in the 1930s and 1940s**

In the period of a little more than a decade, three public housing projects came to South Boston at a time when urban communities all over the United States were competing for federal money to build housing. Two projects were completed with federal tax dollars, while the other was made possible by state housing funding. Old Harbor, Old Colony, and West Broadway, completed from 1938 through 1949, are symbolic of one of the few proactive planning efforts shown by South Boston in the last sixty years. While many of the planning efforts highlighted in this study were proposed by outsiders, public housing in Southie was openly pursued by Southie politicians.

#### History

In the time leading up to World War II, American cities were struggling through the depression. The Public Works Administration (PWA) was responsible for a wide variety of work projects, including road construction, recreation projects, and housing construction. In a time when jobs were scarce, and living

conditions dismal in many urban neighborhoods, cities across the country competed for federal money to create jobs. In 1934, South Boston was first targeted for a “slum-clearance” re-housing project in the district’s “lower end,” where the poorest of community residents lived. When the Irish immigrants first settled in South Boston the poorest chose that section of South Boston known as the lower end, an area closest to the downtown business district, and encompassing most of the district’s industry and the highest densities in the district. The lower end was a far different place from the middle-class City Point section of the district and contained the lowest household incomes.



**Fig. 12.** Map showing location of the planned BHA public housing projects between 1936 and 1940. The area marked 2-2 is the Old Colony Village, and the area marked H-3302 is the Old Harbor Village projects.  
*Source: Boston Housing Authority: Rehousing 1936-1940.*

The population in Southie went from around 80,000 at the turn of the century to less than half that after World War II. During this time, housing conditions declined and,

gained increased attention among housing reformers. As a result, South Boston featured prominently in the map of Boston and Cambridge prepared in 1934 by the newly-established Massachusetts State Housing Board "Showing Sections in Which are Blighted Areas that may be Considered for Rehousing Projects." Acknowledging the special urgency of the South Boston case, in their 1936 annual report, the State Board highlighted a 27-acre section of its lower end to illustrate the need for slum clearance and new housing.<sup>65</sup>

The project was pulled from consideration by the Housing Board, in part, when a city-wide uproar ensued over a 1934 report that called the residents of the lower end, "low grade Irish, Poles, and Lithuanians." Other reasons included disagreements between real estate and business interests in the community. Ironically, the district was then the recipient of two slum clearance efforts in a less-needy part of Southie. These projects were the Old Harbor Project, completed in 1938, and the Old Colony Project, finished in 1941.

#### Contents of the Plans

The 1016-unit Old Harbor Village opened on South Boston's waterfront in 1938. Old Harbor was a PWA project on a substantially vacant site (creating new housing but not replacing slums) that was chosen in part because of the relative ease with which the parcel could be assembled.



**Fig. 13.** Plan of Old Harbor Village public housing project. *Source:* Lawrence Vale

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<sup>65</sup> Lawrence Vale, "Three Public Neighborhoods: The Death and Life of American Public Housing," unpublished manuscript (Cambridge, MA, July, 1996) Chapter 1.





**Fig. 14.** Old Harbor Village shortly after its completion. *Source: Boston Housing Authority: Rehousing, 1936-1940.*

The project was Boston's first low-rent housing project. It consisted of 37 separate structures with 152 apartments in row houses and 864 units in apartment buildings.

The 873-unit Old Colony project, financed by the Boston Housing Authority, opened in 1941 on a twelve acre site that had been razed in South Boston - a result the court-upheld right of the Boston Housing Authority to designate sub-standard areas for clearance and use for public housing. Unlike the Old Harbor Village project, when Old Colony opened in 1941, it was taken over by the federal government for use by wartime workers, many of whom came from outside the district, and even from other states.



**Fig. 15.** Plan of Old Colony Village public housing project. *Source: Lawrence Vale.*



Fig. 16. Site photograph showing the 16.24 acre Old Colony project area. Source: Boston Housing Authority: *Rehousing, 1936-1940*.

### The Interest Groups and Their Goals

It was 1933 and the country was in the throes of the depression. Most U.S. cities wanted public housing built with federal money and Southie was no different. However, the main attraction of public housing for the community was the construction jobs the projects would provide of community residents, many of whom were blue collar workers. It was no coincidence then, that a pilot project of the PWA should be built in Congressman McCormack's home district.

The Boston Housing Authority was a new city agency, established in 1935. For its part, the agency wished to carry out its mandate to eliminate slums and unsafe and unsanitary living conditions. The Old Colony

project was one of the first that the BHA undertook and therefore, the agency was eager that it should go well. As the BHA wrote in its report of activities from 1936-1940,

“The past five years brought many and varied experiences to the Boston Housing Authority. There were many problems, some accomplishments, and a few disappointments. Despite the financial aid and technical counsel provided by the United States Housing Authority, it was inevitable that local housing authorities would encounter obstacles which for the moment would appear to be almost insuperable.<sup>66</sup>”

Not everyone was happy with the proposal for public housing. While civic and church leaders campaigned for slum clearance, many community residents protested over the proposed site clearances, especially later, at the West Broadway site, which contained school buildings and churches, and local businesses. Local clubs and civic associations wanted a “decent entrance” to the district,<sup>67</sup> and local clergy were concerned about the appalling living conditions in the worst of the housing.

### Political Climate

Some of what made the public housing desirable and possible was the change in the city’s traditional political structure during the depression years. As O’Connor puts it in *Southie: My Home Town*,

Roosevelt’s New Deal programs had produced a vast network of federal agencies that replaced neighborhood politicians and big-city bosses. In the past the lifeblood of South Boston’s political system had been the ability of popular and colorful politicians. . .to deliver the greatest amount of services--jobs, favors, housing, medical care, legal assistance--in the shortest amount of time, to as many friends as possible. With the passage of such New Deal legislation as social security, unemployment insurance and workmen’s compensation. . .there was much less reason for anyone to go to the local ward boss for help when Uncle Sam could provide bigger and better benefits.<sup>68</sup>

As O’Connor says, “men like Congressman McCormack became much more influential contacts for favors and positions.<sup>69</sup>” McCormack was first elected to Congress in 1926, after serving as a state representative and then a state senator. He was reelected to congress twenty times. His ability to get the pilot PWA housing project located in Southie is a testament to his political prowess, even after only little more than ten years in Congress. So too, certain clout was wielded by the city-wide Irish political machine. As

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<sup>66</sup>Boston Housing Authority, *Boston Housing Authority: Rehousing, 1936-1940* (Boston, MA.).

<sup>67</sup>Lawrence Vale, Chapter 1.

<sup>68</sup>Thomas H. O’Connor, p. 188.

<sup>69</sup>Thomas H. O’Connor, p. 189.

Lawrence Vale explains in describing public housing in Boston from 1935 - 1942, “Boston’s Irish were early and wholehearted supporters of Roosevelt and the New Deal. . .”<sup>70</sup>”

These projects were conceived in the years of the depression. Between 1931 and 1932, unemployment in Boston averaged almost 30%; many of the factories in South Boston cut back on hours or closed altogether. Textile manufacturing was moving south in search of cheap labor and raw materials and the Port of Boston also saw a corresponding decrease in volume. In this climate, any construction project was a good project--and more so if it provided good shelter for South Boston residents born and bred.

Southie was also losing population, an issue that most likely concerned long-time residents. Support of public housing by politicians and some citizens is not difficult to understand in this context, especially “given the ethnic politics [of the project’s] South Boston location. . .” As one critic charged, “it became readily apparent. . .that the non-Irish need not apply. . .all tenants were white, and practically all came either from South Boston or from nearby sections of Dorchester.”<sup>71</sup>”

#### Strategies and Stances

Public housing initiatives in Southie were not imposed from “outsiders” but were rather, pushed by politicians and business groups. While there are subtle differences between the first two projects, the strategies and stances adopted by the various interest groups are similar in all. Business and civic groups had one thing in mind as supporters of public housing--change the look of the neighborhood. This was especially true of the later West Broadway Project, which served as an entrance to the neighborhood and thus set an image of Southie; civic leaders were very aggressive in garnering support for the project. One church group, headed by John Flaherty, soon to be State Representative, “commissioned a survey of the site, including extensive photography and film footage of “some of the wrecked and dilapidated houses,” to be “used as convincing arguments before members of the Housing Authority.”<sup>72</sup>”

And so, there was very little citizen involvement in the decision to build the Old Harbor Village and Old Colony projects. In fact, in a move steeped in secrecy, “On January 30, 1935, the federal PWA stunned

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<sup>70</sup> Lawrence Vale, Chapter 1.

<sup>71</sup> Lawrence Vale, Chapter 1.

<sup>72</sup> Lawrence Vale, Chapter 1.

three hundred local landowners with the announcement that condemnation proceedings would begin on their properties, located in an eleven-block area of South Boston. . . .<sup>73</sup> While the project was supported by a citizen’s committee, various housing advocates, and social service agencies, “Owners and renters alike resented the designation of their neighborhood as a slum, and pointed to other areas in the “lower end” of South Boston where conditions were much worse.<sup>74</sup>” In words that would be echoed again during urban renewal attempts of the 1960s, one Southie resident exclaimed,

The call it a slum district. Well, it’s good enough for me and it has been good enough for you. Why didn’t they find out what the people of the district thought before they decided to throw people out of their homes and out of small businesses that have taken years to build up? They kept quiet about it until the last minute because they knew there would be a roar of protest which would balk at the land grab. . . .<sup>75</sup>

Real estate interests were also irate about the land condemnation proceedings. Some “blasted federal housing as a racket carried out by crooked politicians.<sup>76</sup>” Politicians became the target because of their influence not only in winning the project, but for their role in determining who received the construction contracts. Southie was Congressman McCormack’s home district. Because of legal challenges and resident protest, the original site for Old Harbor Village had been rejected in favor of a largely vacant site with few legal obstacles. Ironically, this caused even more irritation in the community, with homeowners on the original parcel claiming that the value of their buildings and corresponding rents had decreased dramatically because of the expected government takings. “McCormack, by then considered a loyal New Dealer, fought for the best interests of his district in Washington, and Roosevelt responded to him directly, assuring him that a project on the original site would indeed eventually go forward. . . .<sup>77</sup>”

Later, in the West Broadway case, land that had been taken under eminent domain for federal low-rent housing was actually put into a state program to house returning war veterans. When in 1948, the project went into the state’s new Veteran’s Housing Program, Councilor Linehan, along with Representative John Wenzler, made certain that the State Housing Board moved the project to the top of the priority list.

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<sup>73</sup>Lawrence Vale, Chapter 1.

<sup>74</sup>Lawrence Vale, Chapter 1.

<sup>75</sup>Lawrence Vale, Chapter 1.

<sup>76</sup>Lawrence Vale, Chapter 1.

<sup>77</sup>Lawrence Vale, Chapter 1.

“Despite its delays, it was a struggle that revealed a community well-armed with political connections and determined that the new housing would be used to bring its own involuntary exiles back home to Southie.<sup>78</sup>”

The community by and large supported the project because it was meant for Southie Veterans. At a time when the district was losing population, and when some returning veterans were heading to the suburbs, the construction of public housing units for the working class, was a desirable thing in Southie.

### Outcome

Two of Boston’s first five public housing projects came to South Boston, despite the opposition of residents in the condemned areas. “In the end, slum clearance or not, the influential McCormack had made sure that the project was built in his district, a mere five minute walk from the Vinton Street house where he had grown up, and [Mayor] Curley, not to be left out of the patronage game, had made certain that the construction deal went to one of his favored contractors.<sup>79</sup>” At a time when other Boston neighborhoods sought to attract public housing, it is testament to the political power of Southie’s own that the projects were located there, despite the angry protests of those who would be displaced.

The outcome of the public housing episode of the 1930s showed “a fundamental ambivalence in that district. . . which would only increase in subsequent decades. On the one hand, South Boston residents could legitimately feel put upon by the heavy-handed and unpredictable machinations of a distant federal government; on the other hand, the South Boston district had much to gain from its position as a clearly-favored destination for government largesse.<sup>80</sup>”

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<sup>78</sup>Lawrence Vale, Chapter 1.

<sup>79</sup>Lawrence Vale.

<sup>80</sup>Lawrence Vale.

## Urban Renewal in the 1960s

The availability of federal funding for local projects reached unprecedented heights after the New Deal legislation was signed by President Roosevelt. At a time when most American cities were losing population and economic investment to the suburbs, politicians were under great pressure to “fix” the situation. In the wake of New Deal programs, urban renewal, or the large scale clearance of “slums,” was seen as the most efficient way to stop the wasteful drain of resources to “impoverished areas” in the 1950s and 1960s. At no time was urban renewal touted primarily as a means to rehouse the poor in higher quality housing. The focus of the program at the time was not to improve living conditions of current residents, but to stop the drain of tax dollars into “unprofitable” communities and improve the image of the city.

### History

When he ran for mayor in 1949, John Hynes adopted the slogan “New Boston” for his campaign. As stated by Kennedy in *Planning the City upon a Hill*, “Boston in the middle of the twentieth century desperately needed such energy. The city faced a slew of problems in the 1950s, including economic stagnation and a population decrease of over 100,000.<sup>81</sup>”

Urban renewal started in Boston with Mayor Hynes. Hynes’ major project was the redevelopment of the West End in Boston, an area adjacent to what was to become government center. “The city’s business and political leadership realized that Boston had to revitalize the central business district in order to return to prosperity and to a position of leadership among American cities. . . To revitalize the city, experts believed that “blighted” areas should be removed and homes for the middle-class built.<sup>82</sup>” Beginning in 1958, the demolition of 2,700 units of old housing in the West End was undertaken to make way for apartments for upper-income tenants and the expansion of the Massachusetts General Hospital. An immigrant community well-documented in Herbert Gans’ *The Urban Villagers*, the demise of the West End and the subsequent dispersal of its residents throughout the region, became a symbol of the destruction wreaked by urban renewal. With cheap land, poor housing conditions, and residents of low incomes, Charlestown, South Boston, the South End, and Roxbury, were all earmarked for BRA urban renewal projects during the 1960s. Given the outcome of the West End “story,” it is no wonder that the urban renewal program was

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<sup>81</sup>Lawrence W. Kennedy, p. 157.

<sup>82</sup>Lawrence W. Kennedy, p. 158-59.

looked upon with fear by other Boston neighborhoods in the 1950s and 1960s.

### Contents of the Plan/Proposal

When it was first released in summary form in the Fall of 1962, the BRA's plan was called a *General Neighborhood Renewal Plan*. The follow up document to the summary was the official *Survey and Planning Application for the South Boston Urban Renewal Area* which was prepared in 1965. The summary appears to be a promotional device aimed at convincing the neighborhood of the legitimacy and good intentions of the planning efforts, while the 1965 application contains more data and surveys of the actual site, in an effort to convince federal authorities of the "slum-like" nature of this part of Boston. The plan covered "the part of South Boston which is predominantly residential today."<sup>83</sup> The area of the

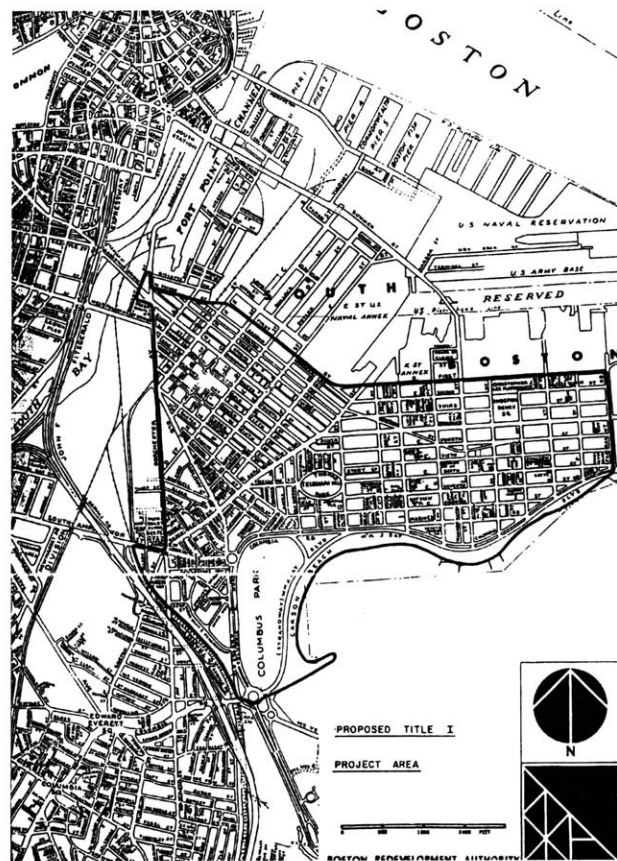


Fig. 17. Map showing the proposed urban renewal area in South Boston. The area encompasses the entire residential community. Source: *Survey and Application for Urban Renewal, South Boston, 1965*.

<sup>83</sup> The Boston Redevelopment Authority, *General Neighborhood Renewal Plan* (Boston, MA, 1962).



residential district was over 950 acres of land and included 6041 structures. The city proposed to acquire 122.5 acres containing 1050 structures, or 13% of the land area.<sup>84</sup> The land in these 122.5 acres was termed “clearance and redevelopment area,” and in general, more than 50% of the buildings in those areas were to be demolished. The remaining 87% of land was proposed to be rehabilitated. In its application to the Federal Housing and Home Finance Agency, the BRA estimated that 95.8% of the 6041 buildings in the proposed urban renewal area had deficiencies. When evaluated in terms of dwelling units, the application estimated that 14,017 of the 14,555 dwelling units in the urban renewal area had deficiencies.

The plan called for the displacement of 1,300 families due to urban renewal activity,<sup>85</sup> but indicated that “1400 units of low-moderate income housing will be constructed and available for relocation housing. All of the above new units will be available to racial minority families.<sup>86</sup>” This was at a time when South Boston had only twenty-two non-white households<sup>87</sup> ! As stated in the plan, the Southie urban renewal “area contains five major environmental deficiencies,” which were: overcrowding or improper location of the structures on the land; obsolete building types, such as large residences or other buildings which have a blighting influence; detrimental land uses or conditions such as incompatible uses, structure in mixed use or adverse influences from noise, smoke or fumes; unsafe, congested, poorly designed or otherwise deficient streets; inadequate public utilities or community facilities contributing to unsatisfactory living conditions or economic decline. The proposed urban renewal area contained the preliminary *South Boston General Neighborhood Renewal Plan* area of the 1962 summary plan, plus an additional 11 acres. Six of the fourteen public school buildings were also slated for demolition, with the others being substantially improved and repaired. The plan called for assistance to private homeowners and businesses and designated a “Special Development District” for industries. Improved zoning, safer streets, and better access roads were all stated goals of the plan.<sup>88</sup> The 1965 plan was slated for implementation between 1969-1972 at a cost of approximately \$30 million.

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<sup>84</sup> The Boston Redevelopment Authority, *Survey and Planning Application for the South Boston Urban Renewal Area* (Boston, MA, 1965).

<sup>85</sup>The Boston Redevelopment Authority.

<sup>86</sup>The Boston Redevelopment Authority.

<sup>87</sup>The Boston Redevelopment Authority.

<sup>88</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor.



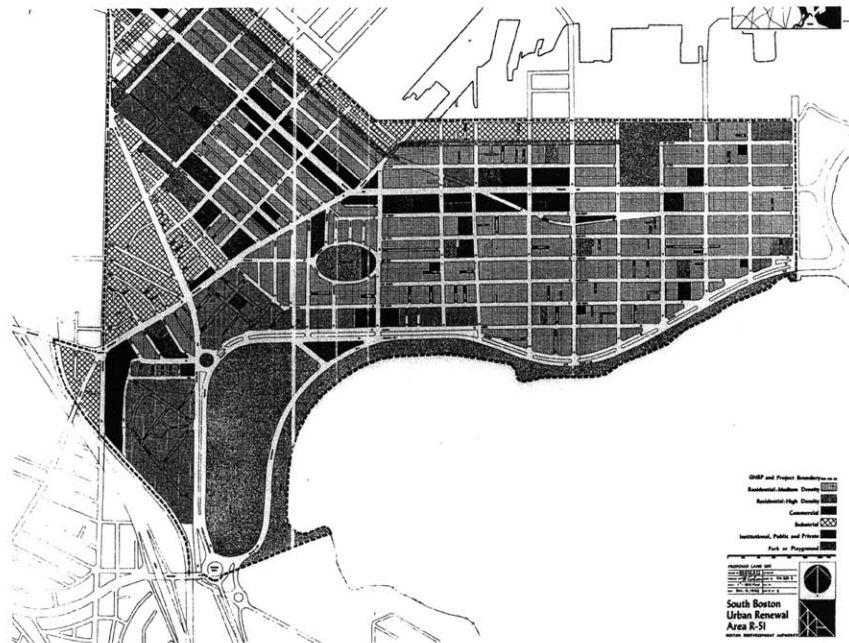
**Fig. 18.** Map of the South Boston Urban Renewal Area. The dark areas indicate the portions of the district slated for demolition. *Source: Survey and Application for Urban Renewal, South Boston, 1965.*

### The Interest Groups and Their Goals

Mayor John Collins wished to push ahead with urban renewal plans in the city. Facing a lack of confidence in the city by business leaders, Collins was looking for ways to improve Boston's image with the white middle and upper-middle class. He said, "that there was a kind of 'malaise of spirit.' 'We were all kind of ashamed,'" he recalled. Even the fashionable Back Bay had lost its old elegance. "City income was going down, city taxes were going up, and established businesses were abandoning Boston every day to relocate in cities with lower taxes, cheaper labor, better benefits and a more congenial political climate."<sup>89</sup> Collins had to do quick damage control. And he needed to earn the trust of the neighborhoods and also show business leaders he had a plan that could work. Older neighborhoods were seen as

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<sup>89</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 195.



**Fig. 19.** Map of South Boston Urban Renewal Area R-51 showing land uses. The majority of the community is medium density residential. Dark parcels are commercial uses. The strip along the northern edge of the boundary is primarily industrial. *Source: South Boston General Neighborhood Renewal Plan, 1962.*

emblematic of the problems Boston faced. They were symbolic of lack of progress and a city rooted in the past, not a modern metropolis forging ahead toward a bright future.

Business groups had growing concerns regarding dis-investment in the city. The 1950s and 1960s were a time of “white flight” from Boston. This flight was due less from racial tension--in 1960, Boston was still 91% white--and more to the pull of a federally subsidized suburbia. Construction of office buildings was non-existent, and business leaders were concerned first and foremost with the “image of the city.” In supporting urban renewal, leaders hoped to lure middle class and upper middle class whites back to Boston with modern buildings and clean streets.

Southie was wary. Long an insular community, the two decades after World War II had brought about significant change to the community. Southie servicemen, away for many years, lost the narrow perspective on life that they had. For returning veterans, the world was a wider place and the grass was greener in the suburbs. Historian Thomas O’Connor explains:

. . . South Boston experienced significant changes in its traditional patterns of life and society during the postwar years. A number of old and familiar institutions that had bound the people of South Boston together now began to weaken. Some even disappeared completely. Families were increasingly smaller in size as the number of children steadily declined and older relatives were placed in sanitariums or convalescent homes instead of being kept at home.

O'Connor also talks about the effects of World War II, in that the war,

had had a profound effect on the relationship of the younger generation and their old neighborhood. The government had taken thousands of young men and women from working-class families, most of whom had seldom been outside of New England, and sent them all over the world to fight for their country. As they traveled from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from Europe to Asia, these young people experienced a culture shock of enormous proportions. Unlike the disruption of life during World War I, this dislocation was not for a few months or a year; it was for three or four years. . . For many of these young men and women, nothing was ever quite the same after 1945. The old links had been severed; the old attachments had been broken. Better educated, more experienced, less parochial, more casual about their ethnic roots and less defensive about their religious views, they packed up and left the old three-deckers and moved out to new split-level ranch houses that sprang up in the suburbs during the 1950s.<sup>90</sup>

Southie, for the first time since it was settled by Irish immigrants, was facing a loss of community homogeneity. It is no surprise then, that the community welcomed the West Broadway housing project, completed in 1949, and touted as a home for returning Southie veterans and their families. Although a large proportion of initial residents of West Broadway turned out to be from outside the district, it is likely that the goals of long-time community residents and politicians were to preserve the "old neighborhood" and shore up against the loss of population to the suburbs. In a natural abhorrence of change, residents were searching for ways of preserving their community, and some of this meant preserving it from invasion by outsiders. Looking at the West End, it is easy to see how Southie may have feared that their community would be overrun by middle class and upper middle class residents.

### Political Climate

Southie had long protested the labeling of the community as a "slum." And slum clearance was the goal of urban renewal. Mayor Hynes' plan included slum clearance projects in Dorchester, the South End, and the West End. As O'Connor notes, "The ruthlessness of the demolitions program produced such a wave of horrified reaction that the future of urban renewal became very much in doubt."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 196-7.

<sup>91</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 203.

It was also during this time that a new city agency entered the political climate. Boston's redevelopment had been carried out under the BHA because the city lacked a development authority. "Ever since the Irish takeover of city hall in the late 1800s the Commonwealth of Massachusetts had taken power away from the city, but when the Democratic party won control of the state legislature in the 1950s and 1960s this tendency was reversed. . . On the other side of Bullfinch's State House, the election of South Boston's Johnny Powers as Senate president immeasurably assisted Boston during the fifties.<sup>92</sup>" As a result of more state-wide support, legislation was passed, allowing Boston to have a development authority in 1957. At this time, development power shifted from the BHA to the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), formed in that year. The BRA became responsible for all urban renewal plans in the City of Boston.

Southie was hopeful for relief from the prospect of urban renewal when one of its own, Johnny Powers, was up for election of mayor in 1959. It was not to be, however. It was John Collins who replaced Hynes as Mayor that year. This was a blow to South Boston. Residents were livid over the loss, and convinced that it was a "dirty trick" pulled by Collins during a nasty mayoral race. The neighborhood became especially wary of any planning attempts, and this wariness grew into apprehension with the demolition of the West End.

The urban renewal plans for South Boston occurred in this climate of neighborhood fear. O'Connor comments that neighborhood residents "were determined to prevent bureaucrats, bankers and out-of-state real estate developers from moving into their neighborhoods, taking over their property and destroying their communities."<sup>93</sup>

### Strategies and Stances

Aware of the problems created by the "slash and burn" urban renewal techniques of his predecessor, Mayor Collins hired Edward Logue to head the BRA in 1960. Collins and Logue went forward with a more comprehensive yet much less drastic urban renewal plan in an effort to appease the neighborhoods who thought that Mayor Hynes had spent too much time and money on downtown to the detriment of the surrounding communities. Of course, it didn't hurt that Logue was an Irishman.

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<sup>92</sup>Lawrence W. Kennedy, p. 161.

<sup>93</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 205.

The Collins and Logue approach from the beginning was to treat neighborhoods much more carefully than the West End had been treated under the previous administration. The BRA tried to include community groups in planning neighborhoods, much as it worked with business groups to plan the downtown. The BRA philosophy under Logue was “that neighborhoods will be planned by people living or working in those neighborhoods and that the Redevelopment Authority personnel will act as co-workers in this planning.” Logue called it “planning with people.”<sup>94</sup>

In another move designed to ease the fears of the neighborhoods, Mayor Collins appointed Monsignor Francis J. Lally, a Charlestown resident, as Chairman of the BRA in a move that was “calculated to guarantee residents of the various communities that urban renewal would now take on a more humane and enlightened character.”<sup>95</sup>

As described by Lawrence Kennedy in his survey of planning in Boston, “Logue mounted an exceedingly active, savvy, and successful operation. Collins granted Logue the support necessary to withstand traditional patronage practices and Logue was able to attract the best available people.”<sup>96</sup>

The 1962 *South Boston General Neighborhood Plan Summary* demonstrates the care with which Logue framed the urban renewal question. The summary contains language that appears to have been chosen to appease the community and convince Southie of the merits of urban renewal. The document was obviously geared toward the community in an obvious “first step” to win neighborhood approval for the plan. The term “urban renewal” appears not at all in the summary; “neighborhood renewal” is used in its stead. The 1962 document speaks to ongoing community concerns such as traffic congestion and availability of jobs, and tries to fit urban renewal into the natural scheme of things in Southie by stating, “South Boston was a planned community from the start. Streets were laid out in an orderly pattern of alphabetical and numerical progression; schools, markets, and burial places were part of the original plan.”<sup>97</sup> Here the argument seems to be that to continue “planning” in the form of urban renewal is simply continuing a way of life in Southie.

The summary also blames the decline of population from over 70,000 people in 1910 to 44,000 residents

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<sup>94</sup>Lawrence W. Kennedy, p. 186.

<sup>95</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 205.

<sup>96</sup>Lawrence W. Kennedy, p. 176.

<sup>97</sup>The Boston Redevelopment Authority.

in 1960 on the “surroundings of the residential community” and on the old shops and community facilities which are “obsolete by present day standards.”<sup>98</sup> It speaks to Southie’s fixation with the need for jobs in the nearby industrial areas of the district. The summary states,

To the north and west the gradual and piecemeal encroachment by industry has blighted nearby homes. Truck traffic from the industry passes through street bordered with houses and schools. Employees park all day on residential streets. The housing deteriorates; but the industry suffers too. It is cramped and cannot expand without creating community opposition or paying high prices for residential parcels.<sup>99</sup>

But the summary never uses the words “slum” or “blight.” Instead, terms such as “obsolete” and “repair and rehabilitation” are used to describe the neighborhood and the plan’s intentions. The summary is also careful to point out that, “In considering the future potential of South Boston, its assets are more important than its present-day problems, however.”<sup>100</sup> Certainly the retention of 87% of the residential area for rehabilitation was a huge step forward from the West End urban renewal project which bulldozed the entire neighborhood in a “clean slate” approach. On the other hand, the South Boston Urban Renewal Area was many times larger than the West End.

Lastly, the Summary played to three areas of great importance to the Southie community: jobs, the beaches and recreation areas that Southie called its own, and retaining its *present* population:

Thus, South Boston in the future, as today, has several roles to play in the City:

- (1) as a sound environment for certain industries, especially those linked to downtown.
- (2) as a recreational area for the City, providing beaches and open spaces.
- (3) as an improved living area for its present population (gen plan sum: 5}.

For the community’s part, there must have been great resistance to the label placed on Southie in another document, the official application to grant South Boston designation as an urban renewal area. While the 1962 Summary is crafted to recognize and assuage every Southie fear, the 1965 *Survey and Planning Application*, takes a different tone. In this application to the federal government for urban renewal funds,

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<sup>98</sup>The Boston Redevelopment Authority.

<sup>99</sup>The Boston Redevelopment Authority.

<sup>100</sup>The Boston Redevelopment Authority, p. 4.

the BRA states that “the proposed Urban Renewal Area described above is a slum, blighted, deteriorated, or deteriorating area. . .” The application also speaks about preventing the spread of slums and urban blight through the planning and undertaking of the urban renewal project.<sup>101</sup>

The community must have also felt protective of its recreational “turf.” Southie residents have long considered the beach the community’s front yard, while the industrial and port area has been its backyard. The plan’s intention to make “recreational area for the City, providing beaches and open spaces” must not have sat well with community residents who were protective of what little open space they had in the district, and proud of their splendid beaches along Boston Harbor. Once more, elements of the plan indicated that the residential community would be infiltrated by outsiders, either to live or recreate. It is not surprising then that, “The united resistance of angry South Boston residents, who feared that these ambitious plans would destroy the family character of their community and displace old-time residents as they had seen happen in the West End, stopped the BRA plans cold.”<sup>102</sup>

In fact, it appears the fight was a rather short one, with Edward Logue backing down early in the game. It is interesting to note that Logue backed down from the South Boston plans while forging ahead to face years of contentious arguments in Charlestown. The answer to the different approaches in each community may be found in the words of “Logue’s critics [who] have charged that he would never risk a public hearing unless he was certain of a numerical advantage over opponents.”<sup>103</sup> Logue’s willingness to forge ahead in Charlestown, also an Irish Catholic community, might be explained in the differences between Southie’s and Charlestown’s political structures. In Langley Keyes description of the urban renewal attempts in Charlestown during the 1960’s, he states,

. . . Charlestown has little political power at the city or state level. . . The fact that Charlestown is almost totally Democratic means that once a state politician has gotten past the primary election, he has to make few efforts to be assured of the Charlestown vote. The single state representative is, as we have pointed out, under so much pressure from individuals in the Town seeking personal favors that he has little time to think or act for the Town as a whole. This lack of political muscle is reflected in the distribution of public funds to Charlestown, as astute Townies are well aware:

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<sup>101</sup>The Boston Redevelopment Authority.

<sup>102</sup>Thomas H. O’Connor, p. 205.

<sup>103</sup>Lawrence W. Kennedy, p. 187.



The state has spent millions in Southie [South Boston] . . . and while we don't begrudge any section their just due we still wonder why we never have any state funds spent in Charlestown. . .<sup>104</sup> ”

It may have been possible to build consensus in Charlestown because the community was fractured, with many voices that could come to the table during urban renewal negotiations with the BRA. Southie, on the other hand, presented itself as speaking with one voice.

### Outcome

In the end, urban renewal went forward in Washington Park, Charlestown, and the South End but Logue dropped all such plans for urban renewal in Southie. It appears that much of what was accomplished or not accomplished in Southie was the result of the influence of political and civic leaders, not a result of grassroots activism by residents. Unlike Charlestown's Townies, Southie residents had long come to expect results from their politicians.

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<sup>104</sup>Langley Carleton Keyes, Jr., *The Rehabilitation Planning Game* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1969) p. 100-101.

## Fan Pier/Pier 4 Project: 1981-1987

Efforts to construct public housing and the rejection of urban renewal plans, were all played out in the residential portion of Southie. The industrial portion of Southie, an area matching this in size, though, became the focus of planning efforts in the 1980s and 1990s. While development of the industrial area of South Boston, also called the South Boston Seaport, had been hampered over the years by lack of infrastructure and incompatible land uses, the land closest to the CBD always had a certain attraction to developers. Within walking distance of the financial district, and approximately ½ mile from South Station commuter rail access and the Red Line, development of the piers area closest to downtown had been discussed for years. In the years leading up to the 1981 Fan Pier/Pier 4 proposal, no less than four proposals were made for the site.

### History

In the 1980s, the Boston real estate market was the hottest it had been in many years. “With real estate property in the overcrowded downtown area at an absolute premium by the 1980s, Bostonians looked for available open space in localities close to the central city. South Boston was a natural and obvious attraction to public planners and private developers--especially those underdeveloped sections off Summer Street just across the Fort Point Channel.<sup>105</sup>” A new BRA Director was at the helm, and the development climate was hot.

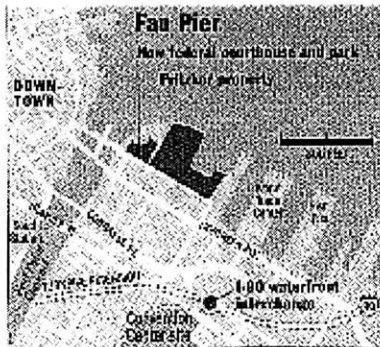


Fig. 20. Map showing Fan Pier site in South Boston. *Source: The Boston Globe.*

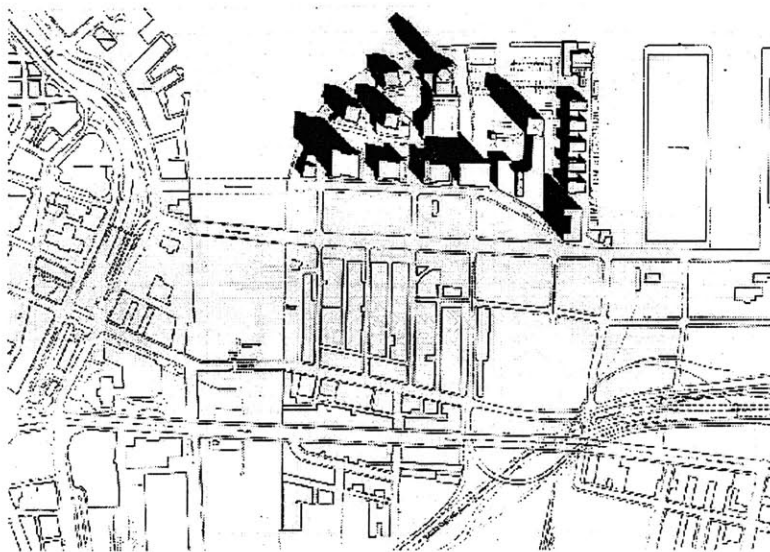
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<sup>105</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 237-8.

### Contents of the Plan

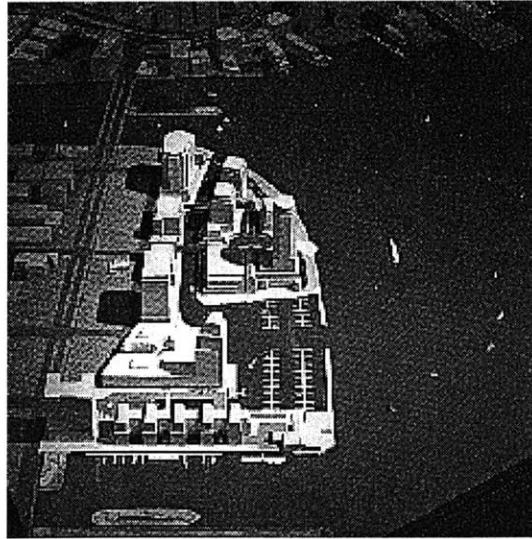
In the beginning of 1981, Anthony Athanas, a restaurateur who owned both Fan Pier and Pier 4, signed a preliminary agreement with the Pritzker family in Chicago and with local developer Richard Friedman to develop the land, which was collectively known as the Fan Pier. Over the next 2-1/2 years, an agreement was hammered out that was signed in 1983. This agreement set 1988 as the deadline for the start of construction of the hotel complex on Fan Pier. In January of 1986, plans made public for Fan Pier estimated a total construction cost of \$1.1 billion.

The Fan Pier proposal was actually two separate projects on land owned by Anthony Athanas. The 18-



**Fig. 21.** Plan of the Fan Pier development showing Fan Pier and Pier 4.  
*Source: Enterprise: The Pier 4 Development, 1986-7.*

acre Fan Pier site would feature a 550-foot tall Hyatt Hotel containing 900 hotel rooms. The smaller Pier 4 project would have 500 condominiums, 660,000 square feet of office space, 95,000 square feet of retail space, and 2,200 parking spaces. The two projects totaled 35 acres at the northern-most tip of South Boston, directly across from the financial district. At the time, although there was developer interest in other South Boston sites, particularly in land owned by Massport along the piers, the project was an isolated one, not likely, on its own, to cause massive changes in the district. A wave of development could be seen for the future though, especially with infrastructure improvements that included the new Northern Avenue bridge which was starting construction around the same time.



**Fig. 22.** Site model of the Fan Pier Development.  
*Source: Enterprise: The Pier 4 Development, 1986-7.*

The project changed over the course of several years but the mix of uses remained constant. Overall, the entire project was slated to include: 2.1 million square feet of office space, 250,000 square feet of retail, 900,000 square feet of hotel space, 1.4 million square feet of housing (more than 1000 dwelling units), and 5,150 parking spaces. More than a dozen buildings were planned for the site. Land was also to be provided for a new cultural center, with the state and city adding \$23 million for its construction. The Institute of Contemporary Art was slated to relocate to the site.

In addition, linkage created by the project was to include a \$15.4 million developer donation to a housing trust fund, \$3 million to a jobs training fund, and the construction of 100 affordable units in the project "with primary preference for Southie residents." Developers would also be required to create up to 150 units of affordable housing and 40 units of artists work space near, but not on the site. These benefits were all requested by the Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) for the project. In other mitigation measures, the developers agreed to ease traffic in the project and to delay the last 25% of the project for four years if necessary, if traffic levels were judged to be too high.

#### The Interest Groups and Their Goals

The Mayor of Boston was Raymond Flynn and the BRA Director at the time was Stephen Coyle. The Mayor appointed the CAC with the "assistance" of Southie politicians, but this group clearly did not have

the support of the entire community. Two groups emerged during discussions of the project. The first included Southie politicians and citizens of the traditional residential area of South Boston. This group was well represented by the politically appointed CAC. The second group appears to have been composed of people living in the “newer” residential areas of Southie including the Fort Point Channel artists community. While this second group of residents spoke loudly, they were not loud enough to stifle the project. The CAC had the responsibility of being the “official” voice of the community, and looked at issues of urban design, jobs, and traffic. CAC chairman Larry Dwyer, a Southie native, said that opponents to the plan did not speak for the community at large and were fueling a negative view of South Boston, which he said has often been regarded as an insular and reactionary pocket of the city because of its strong opposition 10 years previously to court-ordered school desegregation.<sup>106</sup> In effect, the traditional community gave no legitimacy to the opponents’ rights to speak for the community.

While many in the artist community were concerned with too many office buildings and new industry increasing real estate prices and eventually driving them out of Fort Point Channel, marine industrial interests saw this project as the first of many like-minded proposals that would chip away at the usefulness of the port. Shippers associations were worried development would stifle water-dependent businesses in Boston Harbor.

The developers, on the other hand, were trying to maximize their return on the project with as little opposition from Southie as possible. While the Fan Pier/Pier 4 project was being proposed by two separate developers, all of the land was owned by one man, Anthony Athanas, owner of Anthony’s Pier Four Restaurant. For more than twenty years, Athanas had fostered strong ties to Southie and maintained close relations with Southie politicians. Athanas had hosted many a fund raising event over the years for Southie politicians, including Congressman Moakley, who was described as a close friend of Athanas by the Boston media. So, while Southie politicians were well-positioned to represent and protect the community, they also maintained their own agenda.

### The Political Climate

Just ten years before the Fan Pier/Pier 4 proposal surfaced, Southie had been embroiled in the school busing fight in Boston. When court-ordered school desegregation put Southie children on buses heading

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<sup>106</sup>Carol Beggy, *The Boston Globe*, March 25 1987.

for Roxbury, and Roxbury youths on buses headed for Southie schools, images of angry whites attacking school buses transporting black children to South Boston schools were seen on televisions in every living room in the United States. The school busing fights held dramatic consequences for Southie. One devastating effect was that “many white families decided to abandon their old homes in the frightening battleground of South Boston in favor of the quieter surroundings of the suburbs.<sup>107</sup>” So too, the image of Southie went through a remarkable transformation. Attacked by “outsiders” as racist, with their neighborhood labeled a “slum,” Southie’s protests had “marked the community indelibly in the minds of people throughout the nation as a depressed and depraved area where beer-bellied men and foul-mouthed women made war on defenseless children simply because they were black.<sup>108</sup>”

The Fan Pier/Pier 4 proposal occurred at a time when Southie was just beginning to come out of that brief but dismal period in its history. In 1983, Raymond Flynn became the first Southie native to win a mayoral race in what historian Thomas O’Connor calls,

both a real and a symbolic turning point for South Boston after a decade of anger, bitterness and insecurity. . . South Boston continued to be perhaps the most reluctant of all the Boston neighborhoods to let down its guard and modify its defensive attitudes--memories are long among the Irish--but even here the worst appeared to be over. . .<sup>109</sup>

South Boston residents also felt more secure knowing that their own neighborhood now had a significant number of well-known native sons in positions of power and influence in municipal government. After years of feeling neglected and abandoned, manipulated by political leaders from other parts of the city, the prospect of having someone from South Boston in a position to influence government policies did a great deal to improve the spirit of the community.<sup>110</sup>

Not only was Raymond Flynn Mayor of Boston, but another Southie native, William M. Bulger, had risen to become President of the Massachusetts Senate in 1979. “With Joseph Moakley in the United States House of Representatives, Michael Flaherty as a representative in the state legislature and James Kelly on the city council, the political influence of the district seemed even further solidified.<sup>111</sup>” And so, with

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<sup>107</sup>Thomas H. O’Connor, p. 227.

<sup>108</sup>Thomas H. O’Connor, p. 229.

<sup>109</sup>Thomas H. O’Connor, p. 231.

<sup>110</sup>Thomas H. O’Connor, p. 234.

<sup>111</sup>Thomas H. O’Connor, p. 236.

strong representation at the city, state, and federal levels, the Fan Pier/Pier 4 proposal was introduced not to a neighborhood lacking confidence and security, but rather to a community that felt empowered and influential. BRA Director Stephen Coyle was seen as pro-development but sympathetic to the neighborhoods and Southie felt they were well-protected by the nature of Flynn's position.

### Strategies and Stances

While politicians were generally in support of the Fan Pier project, the community seemed divided on its benefits. The CAC was appointed at an early date. The committee, formed in 1985, was charged with considering urban design, employment opportunities, and transportation issues. The importance of this move by the city cannot be underestimated. When asked about his experiences with Southie residents during negotiations for the Fan Pier proposal, former BRA director Stephen Coyle said, "the community was no problem at all. . .I just appointed a CAC. Why would there be any problem?"<sup>112</sup> In fact, the CAC was appointed with direct input from Southie politicians. With politicians clearly in support of the project, as long as the community received its share of benefits, the city had little to be concerned about on this project.

The project had the strong support of Southie politicians and civic leaders. In response to the concern of some citizens regarding the impact of traffic and business activities, politicians insisted

that the city would do all in its power to "accommodate" South Boston during development and gentrification. Although some changes were bound to have "negative" aspects, [Councilor] Kelly conceded, he generally favored using open spaces for industrial development rather than for housing programs which would only bring in more "outsiders" and more upper-class "dinks" (double-income, no kids), who would change the basic character of the South Boston population. .

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Here, it appears, the strategy of local politicians was to encourage jobs, tourism activities, and industry but discourage a significant change in the demographics of the community through the creation of new housing. It was not a coincidence that the mix of uses in the Fan Pier project was heavily tilted toward office space, retail, and hotel rooms. Although the project proposed approximately 1000 units of housing, at least 100 of these would be affordable and it would be unlikely that the remaining 900 units would tip

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<sup>112</sup>Stephen Coyle, Conversation, April 14, 1998 (Boston, MA).

<sup>113</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 238-9.

the scale of politics in South Boston as the traditional neighborhood had about 12,000 units of housing.

At the same time, Southie political forces recognized a unique opportunity to receive linkage money and housing benefits. As Vivien Li, Executive Director of The Boston Harbor Association put it, Southie was very savvy to have “claimed” ownership of this land back in the 1980s. As *Chapter 2* illustrates, Southie “ownership” goes back further than this. But while Southie’s tie to the South Boston Seaport had been one concerned with marine industrial jobs and industry, in the 1980s, Southie claimed the land as part of their community, and thus claimed all the negative impacts of development, including gentrification and increased traffic congestion. The \$1.1 billion development proposal presented an opportunity for Southie to capitalize on claimed impacts. Li says that once this claim of “ownership” was asserted, without challenge from other neighborhoods, the community was in an excellent position to take the reins in project negotiations.<sup>114</sup>

Not recognizing the longstanding ties between the residential community and the waterfront, developers were stymied by claims of neighborhood impacts. When residents stated that the project would generate too much traffic through their already congested neighborhood, developers defended their project, noting that they had asked for residents’ input and claiming that they would create 10,000 permanent jobs and 1,100 housing units. Developers stated at the time that they were, “. . . puzzled by the opposition in South Boston because while Fan Pier falls under South Boston's political jurisdiction, it is closer to other residential neighborhoods in the city. "It's probably just as far away from the North End, the Back Bay, or the South End," said Richard L. Friedman, a principal in the development. "In fact, it's closer to Beacon Hill." And yet Friedman had his own answer: Fan Pier falls under Southie’s political jurisdiction and community politicians were certainly not going to let “this one get away” without clear and measurable benefits for Southie.

So too, Southie politicians had other interests in this project. The Fan Pier/Pier 4 proposal demonstrates how far political favoritism and long-standing friendships went in Southie. In fact, the methods of old Ward politics were alive and well during the Fan Pier negotiations. The ties between the developer and Southie politicians were acknowledged by most in the community, and resented by a few. Daniel M. Yotts, said that "by approving the Fan Pier project, politicians were ignoring the needs of South Boston

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<sup>114</sup> Vivien Li, City Design and Development Forum, MIT DUSP (Cambridge, MA, April 27, 1998).



residents and showing political favoritism to developers." "The politicians are so concerned with repaying favors that they don't go out to the community and see what the people think." Mr. Yotts said. "It shouldn't be all privatized and glamorized," he said. "Where do the blue-collar workers go? Where's the Stop and Shop?"<sup>115</sup> Another community resident expressed frustration with the political leadership's tight hold on the project negotiations when he asked, "Why are we second-class citizens whenever it comes to this project?"

It was actually a difficult position for Mayor Flynn, a Southie native. As late as March of 1987, Flynn didn't take a stand, one way or another, on the project. In mounting frustration over how the project was tightly controlled by Southie politicians and the CAC, affordable housing advocate and Boston Fair Share Staff Director Janice Fine stated "The mayor comes from that neighborhood and he stands of a lot of the values of the working class, but his administration is presiding over what may be an end to the South Boston neighborhood."<sup>116</sup> Fine charged that the public benefits given by developers would not offset traffic problems and gentrification of Southie. Just how powerful Southie politicians were, was commented upon in *The Boston Globe* when it was reported that, because of the enormous political pressure supporting the project, Flynn had no choice but to let the project go forward...he couldn't stop it.<sup>117</sup>

A *Boston Business Journal* article described gentrification as largely just a fear: "Most Southie residents would say the area hasn't changed much in the past 20 years." But residents feared the upscale development of the Fan Pier may push waterfront warehouse industries toward lower Broadway (near the MBTA stop). As one resident stated, "New development may create a "tremendous amount of jobs" and improve the quality of life but it could also get out of hand and reach a point where "people who grew up here can no longer afford to stay." "So far people are selling and renting to folks who are like themselves."<sup>118</sup>

It is evident that the CAC was heavily loaded with Southie representatives who would be sympathetic to

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<sup>115</sup>Carol Beggy

<sup>116</sup>Carol Beggy

<sup>117</sup>Tom Sheehan, *The Boston Globe*, March 27 1987.

<sup>118</sup>Sue Reinart, *The Boston Business Journal*, March 30 1987.

the project without “giving away the store.” Larry Dwyer, a Southie resident on the committee, and a very vocal proponent of the project, praised the developers for all the meetings they had held, and claimed that opponents of the project had not attended these meetings, implying these people had no legitimacy in the planning process.

Other players weighed in during negotiations. Senate President Bulger came to bat for the project and helped secure funding from the “state to build and pay for a new road that would allow construction trucks from the development area to bypass heavily residential parts of South Boston.”<sup>119</sup> Traffic was a primary concern of residents; many had fears that construction vehicles would clog their already congested streets.

The CAC was generally pleased with the project and voted its preliminary support in April of 1985. Committee chairman Lawrence Dwyer said, “We will be working with the BRA and developers in attempts to address what we perceive to be some major community concerns involving transportation access issues, environmental impact and the spin-off effects of the development.” Dwyer said that he wanted the interest of the nearby Southie neighborhood protected and “We will be looking for potential benefits for Boston residents at-large and for South Boston residents in particular in terms of employment opportunities the development.”<sup>120</sup>

Preliminary approval for the Fan Pier project was given by the BRA in February of 1986. While people testified about traffic concerns, none voiced opposition to the project, expressing the belief that traffic issues could be worked out. The city pledged to mitigate traffic by: planning for the reconstruction of the Northern Avenue Bridge, reopening the stretch of Dorchester Avenue along the channel controlled by the post office, and constructing a truck by-pass road to keep construction vehicles off Southie residential streets during the project construction.

While the Fan Pier project, as an isolated development, caused moderate concern in Southie, the real fear was the opening up of the district to large-scale redevelopment that would drastically alter the community. In response to community concerns, in March of 1987, BRA chief Stephen Coyle stated that he wanted “a

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<sup>119</sup>Anthony Yudis, *The Boston Globe*, April 7 1985.

<sup>120</sup>Anthony Yudis.

limit on the commercial economy in that area.<sup>121</sup>" The move was largely seen as a tradeoff for approval of the Fan Pier Project by the CAC. Limits would include a parking freeze, additional linkage requirements, and temporary restricted zoning districts, known as Interim Planning Overlay Districts (IPODS) , all requested by the CAC for the project.

The area singled out for development restrictions was not clear as of March 1987 but it was called the "Northern Avenue Corridor/South Boston Residential Fringe." Approximately 600 acres were included in two zones, one extending south from the waterfront to Summer Street, and the other a residential area on the edge of the industrial district near Fort Point Channel. Most was zoned for industry or manufacturing, which gave the city little control over commercial development. The IPOD was designed to help the city restrict density and height of projects, protect residential areas from encroachment by industrial and marine uses, preserve the historic character of Fort Point Channel, protect open space, improve streets and buffer residential areas from the effects of major transportation projects. Coyle wanted to discourage commercial development and introduce housing. With the IPOD, Coyle seemed able to answer all the concerns of the community: encourage economic development and jobs, and protect the residential lower end.

Concerns of Southie residents continued to be voiced about the project. It was stated that the "size and commerce it will generate will shatter the residential character of South Boston." Developers proposed an \$8 million public benefit package which would include affordable housing (100 units), 120 off-site affordable units and a neighborhood stabilization fund....granting low-interest renovation loans to South Boston residents who could not otherwise obtain financing., money to local artists groups for housing. In addition, the developers agreed not only to pay linkage to the city to help finance housing and employment initiatives but to provide \$146,000 in voluntary funds to the South Boston Job Stop to recruit and prepare Boston residents, "in particular South Boston residents," for permanent jobs in the city.<sup>122</sup>

### Outcome

In April of 1987, the BRA approved the plans which included 1100 housing units, 2.1 million square feet of office space and 1,100 hotel rooms. Throughout the debate, Flynn was caught in the middle between Southie residents worried about gentrification and politicians and civic leaders supporting the

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<sup>121</sup>Sue Reinert.

<sup>122</sup>M.E. Malone, *The Boston Globe*, April 23 1987.

project. Flynn adopted a cautious approach because South Boston remained his political base.

While there were concerns, Southie had no intention of stopping the project, only receiving as many benefits as it could from the development. Ironically, it wasn't community action that halted the project, but rather, a move by Athanas to extract more money from his development partners that shut the project down. In May of 1987, Anthony Athanas sent his development partners a letter saying he didn't approve of the Fan Pier design proposal. It was a move that was widely viewed as attempting to procure more money for Athanas by holding the project hostage. Lawsuits were filed by all parties in January of 1988, with each side blaming the other for delays. In April of 1989, a judge ruled that Athanas, "unreasonably withheld...approval" of HBC's \$800 million plan just months before it was to start construction.<sup>123</sup> Athanas was ordered to pay damages to the Pritzker family.

Though not built, the project served as a generator for another idea though. In an editorial in *The Boston Globe* in 1985, it was noted that the red line was one half a mile away from the development sites on the piers and that a master plan of the whole area was needed, with transit planned for it to be successful. "There is a clear need for a master plan to be adopted for the area by the Boston Redevelopment Authority. That process should begin at once, before too many decisions are preempted by the developers."<sup>124</sup> Southie politicians also called for a plan, saying traffic and transportation were the greatest concerns of the neighborhood and urged a master plan for the whole area so that residents' needs could be met.

The Athanas lawsuit halted the project, and the economy slipped into recession at the end of the 1980s; it would take another twelve years before that recommendation was heeded by city officials.

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<sup>123</sup>Teresa Hanafin and John King, *The Boston Globe*, April 20 1989.

<sup>124</sup>Editorial, *The Boston Globe*, December 23 1985.

## The Federal Courthouse: 1992 - 1998

The Federal Courthouse, sited on a portion of Fan Pier, is testament to the political clout of Southie politicians. During the depths of the recession in 1992, many developers and land owners were vying for the opportunity to sell their land to the federal government for the purposes of building a new Federal Courthouse in Boston. While he denied it at the time, it was generally accepted that Congressman Moakley, as chairman of the House Rules Committee, weighed in heavily in favor of the selection of the Fan Pier site, owned by his friend Anthony Athanas.

### History

In 1987, when the Fan Pier project went to the courts instead of going into construction, the courts found Athanas liable for damages for breach of contract. Athanas looked to find a quick way to come up with the damage money. His problems led directly to the choice of the Fan Pier as the site for the new Federal Courthouse for Boston.

### Contents of the Plan

In June of 1991, the United States General Services Administration (GSA) paid \$34 million for a 4.5 acre parcel on the northern most edge of Fan Pier. On this parcel, the federal government planned to construct a new Federal Courthouse.

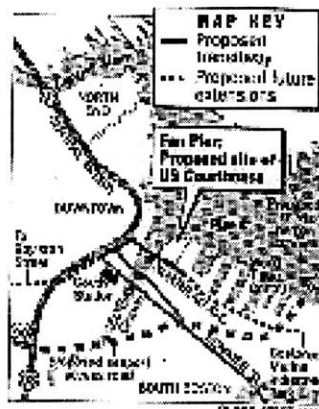
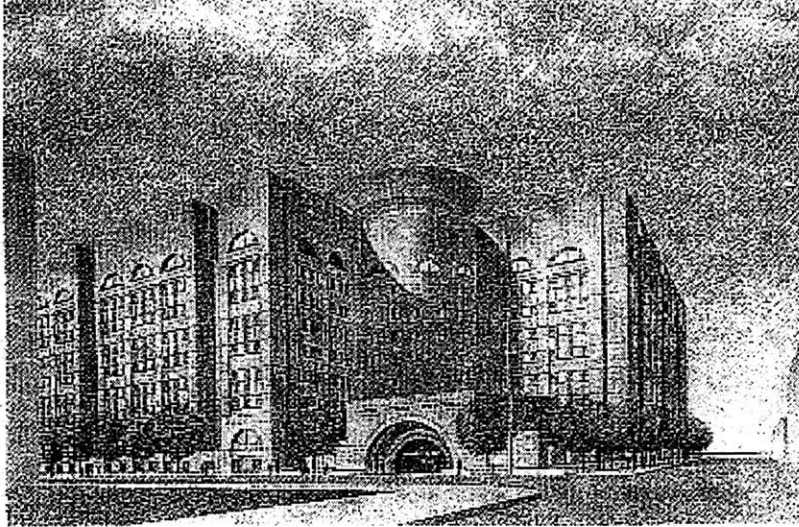
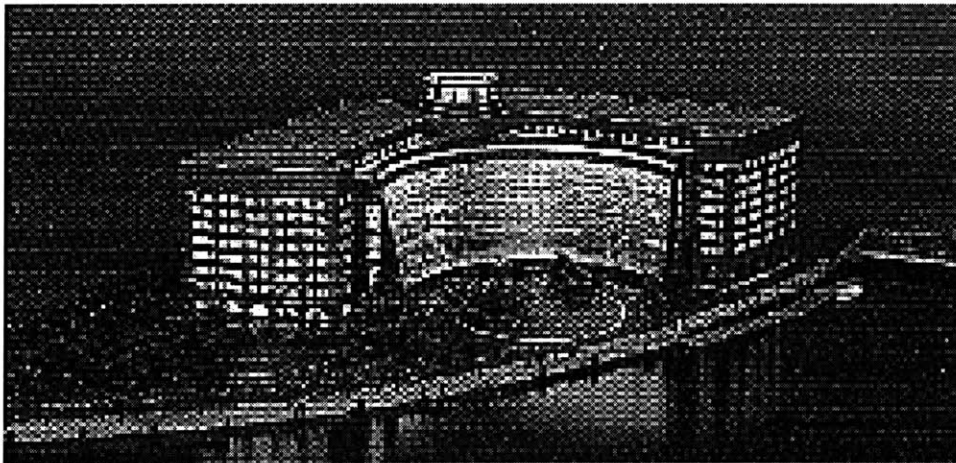


Fig. 23. Map showing location of Federal Courthouse on Fan Pier in South Boston. *Source: The Boston Globe.*



**Fig. 24.** Rendering of the Northern Avenue facade of the Federal Courthouse on Fan Pier. *Source: The Boston Globe*



**Fig. 25.** Model of the Federal Courthouse, as seen from Boston Harbor. *Source: Federal Courthouse Area Master Plan, June 1994.*

### The Interest Groups and Their Goals

While many civic groups and city agencies had great interest in the development of Fan Pier, there existed only two interest groups with any say in the Federal Courthouse deal for the parcel. Anthony Athanas needed money and he needed it quickly. Forced to pay millions in damages to the Pritzker Family, his development partner in the Fan Pier project, and facing a recession that made development of his land impossible, Athanas needed a quick source of cash to pay the court ordered damages.

Congressman Moakley was in a position to help out his long-time friend. As *The Boston Globe* stated, "the long-standing ties between the Albanian-born restaurateur and a host of Massachusetts politicians--in particular, Rep. J. Joseph Moakley--are difficult to ignore in reconstructing a decision that officials tussled with for six years, fast tracked last fall and then almost magically, resolved in six months."<sup>125</sup>

But the project went beyond the friendship between the two men. There were aspects about the project which had great appeal for Moakley. In short, Moakley saw a way to help his long-time friend Athanas, and give a boost to Southie economic development. As Boston lost blue-collar jobs, any development in Southie that offered employment, even if only temporary construction jobs, was a bonus for the community. His goals were clear from a 1991 statement in which he said, "This is going to make the many acres of barren land there a very, very sought-after place to locate business."<sup>126</sup>

### The Political Climate

Because the courthouse was a federal project, city politics did not play out as usual in this case. Many public officials and harbor advocates did not want a courthouse on the end of Fan Pier. The city had long looked to the Fan Pier site, directly across the channel from the financial district, as an area of great importance in setting the tone of development in the South Boston Seaport. Developer Frank McCourt also had other desires for that site. As the owner of a large piece of land along New Northern Avenue, McCourt was hoping for a critical mass of office, retail, housing, and hotel space to create a density of uses and people necessary for the success of any development he would undertake. The courthouse project had no mix of uses and was, in many ways, a project removed from public discussion. Anthony Athanas had, for thirty years, "operated a seafood restaurant frequented by celebrities and political figures -- some of whom helped lay the groundwork for the sale of a part of Fan Pier for a courthouse."<sup>127</sup> The city was no match for the federal government or Congressman Moakley.. In fact, Mayor Menino had originally supported another site for the project but switched gears and supported the Fan Pier site, most likely under pressure from Moakley.

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<sup>125</sup>Joan Vennoch and Jerry Ackerman, *The Boston Globe*, June 16 1991.

<sup>126</sup>Alex Beam, *The Boston Globe*, June 21 1991.

<sup>127</sup>Jerry Ackerman, *The Boston Globe*, December 31 1991.

## Strategies and Stances

The real estate market was in a downward slide in 1991, and developers were searching for projects to save their balance sheets. It is not surprising then, that there were at least three sites in competition for the courthouse. Athanas had an advantage in the process though, because Congressman

Moakley, a South Boston native and longtime friend of Athanas; was a key catalyst, convincing colleagues in Washington to authorize millions of dollars to build not only the new courthouse, but a new transit system to service the remote Fan Pier location. Two other South Boston politicians also aided the selection: Senate President William M. Bulger, who made sure a state transportation bond issue included a Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority commitment to the site to supplement congressional funding for public transportation; and Mayor Flynn, who abandoned his administration's previous support for two alternate downtown sites." As another local lawyer commented, "This was a classic in smart, savvy, high-powered, bring-home-the-bacon politics."<sup>128</sup>

Government officials insisted their choice was based entirely on the site's merit but some mentioned Athanas' longtime political connections as helping. As *The Boston Globe* pointed out, the Federal Courthouse deal "will bail out Athanas (many vied for spot in the city, including the "now-defunct Commonwealth Center project in midtown who had hoped federal dollars would rescue their debt-ridden real estate)."

And the Southie political strategy seemed to have multiple goals: help Athanas, create construction jobs, and use the project as leverage to get a commitment for transportation infrastructure improvements in the Seaport. By convincing the federal government to throw in transportation improvement dollars, Moakley was trying to assuage the always present fear of Southie residents about increased traffic on their residential streets. As was pointed out during the Fan Pier discussions of the 1980s, the red line service at South Station was ½ mile away from the Fan Pier site, a distance that was deemed too great. In addition, the project proposed constructing over 5,000 parking spaces! The Federal Courthouse, by contrast, would employ few people, and with a red line stop outside its front door, there were few concerns about increased traffic in Southie.

What few residents seemed to realize at the time, or perhaps had no power to stop, was the impact the red line extension would have on future development in the Seaport. US Rep Joseph D. Early (Democrat) summed it up when he said, "the development was positioned to "open the door to expansion over there [in

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<sup>128</sup>Jerry Ackerman.



South Boston] like you've never seen.<sup>129</sup>

But while the siting of the courthouse was a “done deal” and while technically the GSA was exempt from local zoning regulations, once again Southie politicians worked to have some influence over the project. The BRA appointed another CAC, again headed by Larry Dwyer, Commissioner of the Parks and Recreation Department of the City of Boston. Vivien Li of The Boston Harbor Association, a member of the committee, commented on the unique nature of advising a federal project:

While the community had complaints that the building was too large and too tall, the usual concerns about job creation for Southie residents wasn't an issue here. Southie knew it couldn't receive those kind of linkages on a federal project where 99.9% of the workers would simply relocate from the former Federal Courthouse facilities.<sup>130</sup>

Li talked about how the strategy of the GSA and the judges also prevented residents from negotiating in their usual way. In a move that she believed was a conscious decision on the part of the GSA, the federal judges negotiated with the community; representatives of the GSA were never present at any meetings. Li said it was difficult, even for normally contentious Southie, to be anything but differential to the judges who always referred to themselves, not as Tommy or Eddy, but as Judge Smith or Judge Jones. In our society, we are expected to show respect to judges as figures of wisdom and authority and the judges got a “free ride” because of this. She also believed that because the project was federal, it was much more difficult for the committee to “get its hands around” who was in charge. In all of the discussions, she remembered only one tense time, when Tommy Butler, a resident of Southie, and an employee for Massport, said to the judges that he was uncomfortable with the building's “derriere” facing the community. The judges showed such shock at his comment that it was never brought up again. That is about as contentious as it got, says Li.<sup>131</sup>

While Boston officials had little to say about the siting of the courthouse on Fan Pier, it did try to take control of the project in other ways. The city responded by commissioning a *Federal Courthouse Area Master Plan* from Goody Clancy & Associates. A Steering Committee for the Federal Courthouse Special

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<sup>129</sup>Jerry Ackerman.

<sup>130</sup> Vivien Li, Executive Director, The Boston Harbor Association, Interview (Boston, MA, May 1, 1998).

<sup>131</sup>Vivien Li.

Task Force was assembled and possibilities for the public areas adjacent to the courthouse site were explored. The Master Plan states, “This Masterplan presents an achievable vision for the public realm around the new Federal Courthouse. This vision is constructed from the dreams of many who for many years have cared deeply about the future of Boston and its Harbor.<sup>132</sup>” Interestingly, Southie residents were noticeably absent from the Special Task Force. While there were a few representatives of Southie, many on the committee represented city agencies, harbor advocacy groups, and business interests in the area. It seems that while Southie was concerned about the height and bulk of the courthouse, the design of the public realm in the vicinity of the project held less interest.

### Outcome

When the construction of the courthouse was almost completed in 1998, many of the fears of Southie residents and various advocacy groups were realized. The building was generally seen as too massive and bulky for the site and certainly turned its back to the residential community. On the other hand, federal and state transit dollars were earmarked for the creation of the South Boston Piers Transitway, which would enable more development in the Seaport.

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<sup>132</sup>Goody, Clancy & Associates and The Steering Committee for the Federal Courthouse Special Task Force, *Federal Courthouse Area Master Plan* (Boston, MA, 1994) 1.

## **The Megaplex: 1992 - 1995**

Long considered a second-rate player in the competition for major conventions and tourist dollars, the city in the 1980s began looking for a means to increase its convention capacity. In the mid-1980s, the renovation of the Hynes Convention Center, in the Back Bay, was completed but these facilities could only handle the smallest of the regional conventions and tended to cater to modest medical and technology conferences, playing off of Boston's reputation as a world leader in medical care and research. The need for a larger convention center, and a new patriots stadium converged in the idea of a Megaplex which would house both facilities.

### History

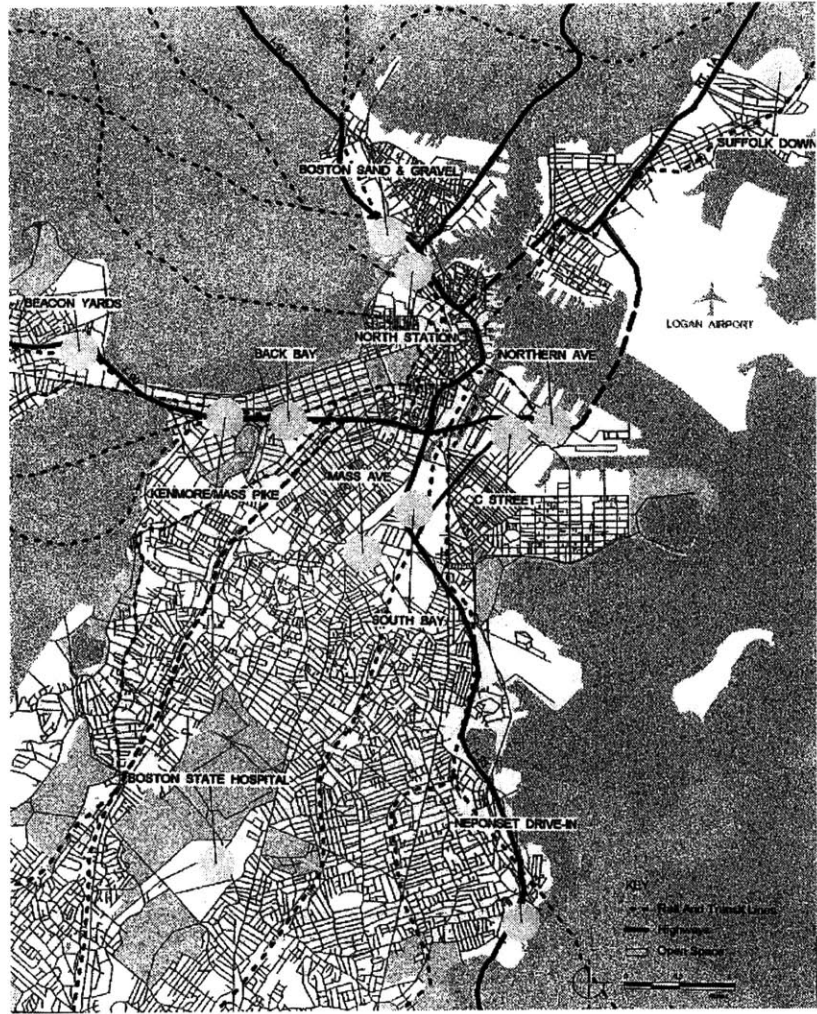
In 1992, the concept of a "Megaplex," combining a football stadium and convention center, surfaced in Boston. The Massachusetts Convention Center Authority (MCCA) began working in cooperation with the Olympic Organizing Committee to investigate a location for a Megaplex, and approached the BRA to look at possible sites. The Patriots claimed to have an outdated stadium in Foxboro, approximately 20 miles south of the city, and the newly-renovated Hynes Convention Center in the Back Bay was deemed too small to host the more profitable larger conventions and shows. Because of its in-town location, adjacent to the Massachusetts Turnpike and the Prudential Center, it wasn't possible to expand the Hynes.

### Contents of the Plan

The Megaplex proposal consisted of a 70-acre convention center and attached domed stadium. The idea of putting the domed stadium and convention center together in one "mega" project was created by financing needs. As Kairos Shen, of the BRA, said, "the marrying of the convention center to a domed stadium was purely a legislative concoction."<sup>133</sup> It was a way to issue tax-exempt bonds (allowed for public buildings) to help pay for the combined complex which also would house the Patriots Stadium.

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<sup>133</sup> Kairos Shen, Assistant Director of Urban Design, Boston Redevelopment Authority. Interview (April 7, 1998).



**Fig. 26.** Site Plan showing the proposed locations of the Megaplex.  
*Source: Boston's New Exposition Center and Stadium, Interim Report 1994.*

The Interest Groups and Their Goals

When the discussion surfaced regarding the project, no site was pinpointed as the location for the facility. Because of this, early media coverage contained little mention of Southie concerns. At the start, the discussion centered purely around which site made the most sense from a cost and infrastructure point of view. The community, too, kept silent for a long time on the issue. Later, when the site was narrowed down to Southie, voice grew louder as the community took up the familiar mantra of concerns: traffic congestion, gentrification, and job creation.

Because of its dual role as convention facility and sports arena, there were various parties supporting the

Megaplex. Seen as a good generator of both direct and indirect economic benefits, the convention center portion of the project was touted as an answer to Boston's lagging market share in tourism and was supported by the tourism industry and Chamber of Commerce.

Politicians kept a low profile at first, at least in the media. Senate President William Bulger, of South Boston, was a key player in the deal as the convention center was being funded, in part, with state money. He also was involved in another way as he had appointed a friend, Francis X. Joyce, as executive director of the MCCA. Governor Weld was also a strong supporter of the Megaplex facility. The Governor's office lobbied members of the MCCA to support a full Megaplex including an attached domed stadium, rather than just a convention center. Weld's position can probably be traced to the support of big business for the Patriots Stadium. As Martin Nee of the South Boston Neighborhood Development Corporation said, "look to BankBoston. . .they were the force behind the push to site a stadium in Southie."<sup>134</sup>

#### Political Climate

Southie's political representation was strong. Senator Bulger had significant political power during this time. He had also hand-picked the head of the MCCA and so it is likely that he felt he had additional control over the project.

This was also a time in Massachusetts when the economy had sunk to its lowest level. Missing the prosperity of the real estate and business economy in the 1980s, the city and state searched for ways to jump start a stagnant economy and encourage investment in the region. The Fan Pier project of the 1980s had fallen through due to a disagreement between development partners, and Southie, like other New England communities relying on blue-collar jobs, was feeling the devastating effects of the recession.

#### Strategies and Stances

In August 1992, a 42-acre site at the crossroads of the Massachusetts Turnpike and the South East Expressway was earmarked for a domed stadium that could host football, Olympics and major national conventions. The proposal was dubbed "South Bay Gateway" and was one of twenty sites proposed across the state. A BRA study then showed that a 70-acre Megaplex was possible to site in South Boston and a joint commission later recommended the C Street site in the district. When asked how the South Boston

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<sup>134</sup> Martin Nee, Executive Director, South Boston Neighborhood Development Corporation, Interview (April 28, 1998).

site came to be the focus of BRA interest, Shen said only, “I did the study to prove it could be sited there, because people thought it wasn’t possible.”<sup>135</sup>

By 1993, the Weld Administration supported the idea of the Megaplex but emphatically stated that it could not be financed with new taxes. In general, the Greater Boston Convention and Visitors Bureau and city business leaders supported the Megaplex as a way to increase economic development, boost tourism and travel related business, and generate investment in the city. The problem of financing continued to present itself and played a major part in the early maneuvering to identify a site. In May of 1993, Massport proposed a Northern Avenue site in South Boston as a way to avoid the state legislature’s mandate of no new taxes for the Megaplex. Massport’s ownership of the land would allow it to float bonds to pay for the project. Hotels at this site were also considered more desirable than on other sites being investigated. At this point a competition developed between landowners and potential developers, to attract the favor of the commission, much in the way cities bid for the “privilege” to host the Olympic Games. In January of 1994, the South Bay site once again entered the fray and gained favor with the BRA.



**Fig. 27.** Map showing location of three sites chosen for further consideration in late 1994. *Source: Boston’s New Exposition Center and Stadium, Interim Report 1994.*

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<sup>135</sup>Kairos Shen.

Bulger's initial hesitation about siting the facility in Southie were changing: "The reservations Senate President William M. Bulger once expressed for a Summer Street convention center softened, as Francis X. Joyce, executive director of the Massachusetts Convention Center Authority and Bulger's one-time protégé, warmed to the site.<sup>136</sup> While Bulger repeatedly stated that the jobs created in both the construction and operation of the facility were the reason for his support of a combined facility, there may have been other motives. Bulger seemed to be playing both sides in a bid to win the convention center but perhaps not the stadium. It is not difficult to see why the community might support one and not the other. A state transportation study of the site expected that a convention center would draw 15,000 persons, a baseball stadium would draw 45,000 and football stadium 70,000 persons on a typical Sunday afternoon.<sup>137</sup> Although the convention center would draw a steady stream of visitors year-round, while football games might occur only ten times in a year, images of properly suited business people arriving for trade shows were certainly more palatable than the thought of 70,000 screaming football fans enjoying tailgate parties on a Sunday afternoon. Job creation was also an issue. As many in Southie saw it, the convention center portion of the project would provide opportunities for good jobs, year round. The stadium portion, on the other hand, would bring 70,000 people to Southie but offer little in the way of community benefits; jobs created by the new stadium would be seasonal and most likely low-paying.

The Weld administration still pushed for a combined facility. Major Massachusetts businesses, such as BankBoston, were looking to be major investors. Meanwhile, the city had done its own homework and found that combined facilities were not practical. In late 1994, the BRA published *Boston's New Exposition Center and Stadium, Interim Report*. The agency came to the conclusion that "the exposition center and football stadium should be built separately in different locations {bcec: I}." Based on the report, which recommended the convention center be sited in Southie and a further study be undertaken for a football stadium at the South Bay site, Mayor Menino outlined plans for a \$440 million "stand alone convention center on C Street in South Boston."<sup>138</sup> Still, the state pushed for a combined facility. In May of 1995, Governor Weld stated that "if both convention center and stadium couldn't be built in South Boston, he would push to move the project back to Roxbury." And Bulger continued his support of the Weld's position on a combined stadium. At least in appearances. Interestingly, very little discussion

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<sup>136</sup>Meg Vaillancourt, *The Boston Globe*, June 24 1994.

<sup>137</sup>Richard Kindleberger and Meg Vaillancourt, *The Boston Globe*, May 26 1995.

<sup>138</sup>*The Boston Globe*, October 10, 1994.

occurs in the media at the time, regarding concerns of the South Boston community. Discussion in the early stages was mostly related to financial feasibility of building and operating the center, not about neighborhood concerns. There were some reports of community concerns over traffic, but they were interjected with quotes from residents welcoming the “economic development in our back yard.”<sup>139</sup> Certainly, public comment was not loud or contentious enough to frighten away the commission. In many respects, William Bulger may have been deliberately pushing South Boston to a low profile by supporting the Megaplex in theory, but along with Weld, remaining adamant about no new taxes to fund the stadium portion of the deal. In essence, Bulger was assuring that the stadium portion of the deal would fall through at some future date when financing became the main topic of discussion. Bulger’s stance, and the relative silence of the community certainly helped the commission make its decision.

In May of 1995, the commission responsible for the Megaplex project decided in a 10-3 vote to recommend building the project in South Boston, not at the Cross Town site in Roxbury. Stipulations were made as part of their decision that it would be “financially feasible and not harm the neighborhood.” But the Governor and House Ways and Means Chairman expressed concern over the costs of the improving the site and continued to hold out the possibility of revisiting the Roxbury site.<sup>140</sup>

Not surprisingly, after the decision, debate did pick up regarding the impact of the Megaplex on the neighborhood. A May 1995 headline in *The Boston Globe* stated, “Many South Boston residents are feeling besieged by schemes.” The article goes on to say that, newcomers to South Boston move there for what is available and don’t want it to change: “Though she moved to South Boston from New York just 10 years ago, Laura Simon has grown to love its family-oriented, “neighborhood-y” feel.” “So when Simon considers the extra traffic South Boston is suddenly being asked to put up with by Megaplex planners and Central Artery project officials, on streets already teeming with cars and trucks, she reacts with the protective instincts of a Southie native.” The article then goes on to say that many Southie residents say they will embrace the Megaplex if it yields jobs for the neighborhood. However, “Regular people like us, we want to stay here,” said Jack Chisholm, 62. “But we’re afraid we won’t be able to” if the Megaplex

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<sup>139</sup>The Boston Globe.

<sup>140</sup>Richard Kindleberger, *The Boston Globe*, July 26, 1995.



drives up property values and land prices.<sup>141</sup>"

Even after the vote to site the Megaplex in Southie, Bulger is on the record for supporting the Megaplex, but not the new taxes to build it. In effect, by supporting the combined facility, he was sending a message that Southie would not be "difficult" in the negotiations. Bulger kept the emphasis during the site selection process on financial considerations, not neighborhood concerns. By using this strategy, he was avoiding the possibility that Weld might decide the Roxbury presented less obstacles. In what appeared to be a complex political game, Bulger appeared to want the South Boston site locked in before pushing for a convention-only facility at the site.

Senator Bulger's strategy appeared to be effective. In August of 1995, *The Boston Globe* reported, "The coalition behind a special state commission's June 1 recommendation to build the facility on Summer Street in South Boston has appeared to splinter recently." Sources close to the process thought the convention facility would still be built at Summer Street location.<sup>142</sup> It is hard to believe that this is not what Bulger and the community wanted all along. Southie waited a long time to begin the outcry over impacts to the community. Why did it take three years for the community to speak up? As *The Globe* reported, "The Megaplex commission's recommendation for a combined facility in South Boston has provoked an outcry from residents worried about traffic congestion."<sup>143</sup> When this happened, the commitment to the site was already made. Instead of switching to the Cross Town site in Roxbury, Mayor Menino switched gears and backed away from combined facility...asking for only convention center at the site.

### Outcome

The Megaplex proposal became a dead deal. As many close to the deal said, the combined convention center and football stadium was too much for the community to digest all at once.<sup>144</sup> This was not surprising. What is interesting is the possibility that the community wanted the convention center all along

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<sup>141</sup>Richard Kindleberger, *The Boston Globe*, May 12 1995.

<sup>142</sup>Richard Kindleberger, *The Boston Globe*, August 17 1995.

<sup>143</sup>Richard Kindleberger.

<sup>144</sup>Kairos Shen; Vivien Li; Martin Nee.

and negotiated, through Senate President Bulger, in such a way as to ensure the combined facility didn't go to Roxbury. As a result, plans continued for a convention center to be located in Southie and the stadium was dropped from the project.

## **Patriots Stadium: 1996-1997**

When the stadium was pulled out from the Megaplex deal, leaving just the convention center as a possibility for the Summer Street site in Southie, the Patriots were left to scramble for another deal and another site. As Kairos Shen, of the BRA, said, “the stadium idea still had a lot of steam behind it after the Megaplex fell through.<sup>145</sup>” Massport took up Patriots owner Robert Kraft’s cause and attempted to site the stadium as a separate facility on Massport-owned land in South Boston.

### History

In 1995, the C Street site in South Boston was selected for the Megaplex, a combined convention center and football stadium. While Senate President Bulger claimed to support the combined facility, he also stated he would not support constructing the stadium with taxpayer dollars. After the siting of the facility, dissension broke out between various parties and the Mayor decided to go ahead only with a “stand alone convention facility” at the C street site. Governor Weld, a staunch supporter of a new Patriots stadium in Boston, directed his administration to work with Kraft to find an alternative solution to siting a new stadium.

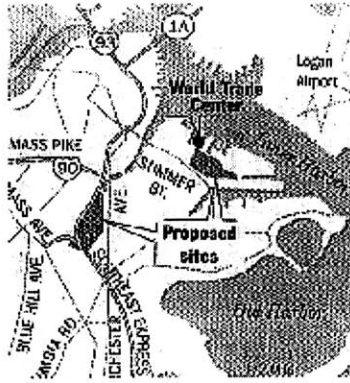
### Contents of the Plan

The Patriots proposed a \$200 million privately financed open-air stadium in South Boston on land owned by the Massachusetts Port Authority (Massport). The 30 acre site was bordered by Summer Street, the Reserve Channel and the Boston Marine Industrial Park.

Not simply a stand-alone football stadium, the proposed facility included a restaurant and NFL Pavilion, which would include a virtual reality attraction, and a Pro Football Hall of Fame satellite center. Kraft claimed that the pavilion, a high-technology, interactive, indoor theme park designed to draw paying visitors all year, was crucial to the success of the project. NFL officials projected that the pavilion would draw up to 2 million people a year. Kraft made it clear that his plan would only work on the proposed waterfront site because the club/restaurant and Hall of Fame were dependent on year-round business from downtown professionals.

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<sup>145</sup> Kairos Shen, Assistant Director of Urban Design, Boston Redevelopment Authority, Interview, (April 7, 1998).



**Fig. 28.** Map showing proposed site for the Patriots Stadium in South Boston. The site was primarily owned by Massport, with one 5-acre parcel under federal government ownership.  
*Source: The Boston Globe*

The facility required the extensive infrastructure that was built or planned in South Boston as part of the Central Artery/Tunnel Project. Kraft and Massport also sought the support of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBA) and the state Transportation Department because of the necessity for a multi modal transportation center at the stadium, where ferries and buses would serve the football fans and pavilion visitors. In addition, the proposal included the use of adjacent land owned by the U.S. Army. This 5-acre parcel would be the site of a 2,300-car parking garage.

#### Interest Groups and Their Goals

Southie was clear on community goals during the Megaplex debate the year before. Of chief concern was the large number of automobiles that the football games would bring to the neighborhood. Job creation was also an issue. While the construction of the facility would create quite a number of high paying construction jobs for union members, these were temporary. Because of the seasonal nature of the stadium, Southie didn't view the project as a desirable generator of jobs, especially when weighed against potential disadvantages. As Senator Lynch stated when Kraft presented his elaborate plan for club seats and facility design, "he, [Representative] Hart and [Councilor] Kelly were unimpressed by the details of

Kraft's plan, including the executives' club. "It doesn't do anything for me, or the neighborhood," he said.<sup>146</sup>

South Boston residents were not undivided on the issue though. As the *Boston Herald* stated, "opposition to the plan among Southie residents is not absolute, as stadium foes Sen. Stephen Lynch, Rep. John A. Hart and City Council President James Kelly have painted it."<sup>147</sup> While permanent jobs were few, the Ironworkers Union Local 7 was very interested in a construction project of that magnitude. Local 7 went so far as to offer its meeting hall to Kraft so that he could explain his plan in a friendlier setting. As Jay Hurley, a business agent for the union said at the time, he knew "of hundreds of Southie residents who want to hear more about the proposed stadium."<sup>148</sup> The South Boston Citizen Residents Association also met privately with Kraft's son Jonathan in an effort to hear more about the stadium proposal outside the contentious walls of the Gavin School.

With the exception of Governor Weld, politicians seemed united in their opposition to the stadium. Mayor Menino first came out in possible favor of the project, but quickly switched gears when Senator Lynch took up the fight. This was a wise move. The Menino Administration's own report on the Megaplex had concluded,

The study of possible sites for a football stadium indicates that there is no site within the City adjacent to both high-capacity rail (MBA Red Line or Orange Line) and to multiple arterial roadways capable of accommodating the considerable traffic volumes generated by the post-game exodus of 10,000 to 15,000 cars without extensive roadway improvements.

The only potentially usable site is South Bay. The construction of a football stadium on the Massachusetts Avenue site would cause disruptions to surrounding neighborhoods because there is no effective buffer. . .<sup>149</sup>

In an effort to keep the stadium proposal alive in Boston, Menino offered an alternative to the South Boston site. . .the South Bay-Incinerator parcel located between Roxbury, the South End and South Boston. Perhaps because it straddled three neighborhoods, Mayor Menino believed the communities would

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<sup>146</sup> Joe Battenfeld, *The Boston Globe*, December 11 1996.

<sup>147</sup> *Boston Herald*, January 19 1997.

<sup>148</sup> *Boston Herald*.

<sup>149</sup> Boston Redevelopment Authority, *Boston's New Exposition Center and Stadium, Interim Report* (Boston, MA, 1994) 37.

be more receptive to the project. Senator Lynch also pushed a stadium on that site, saying it was a good deal--Southie would get a convention center, and Roxbury could have the stadium. . .implying the magnanimity of Southie residents in "spreading the wealth around."

At the time of the proposal, Mayor Menino's pet project was the convention center. Menino's position against the stadium carried few political risks. Both he and the business community were wary of the wrench that the stadium proposal would throw into the convention negotiations. A Boston businessman summed up the situation when he said, "many of his colleagues are wary of Kraft's plan because they fear it could delay or even torpedo the construction of a coveted new convention center on Summer Street near the proposed stadium site." "Some people feel that introducing both a convention center and a stadium on that South Boston site diminishes the likelihood that either of them could get done - for political reasons, for community reasons, for all kinds of reasons."<sup>150</sup>

### Political Climate

In 1996, the Menino administration and Massport collaborated, for the first time, on a master plan for maritime activities on Boston's waterfront. In *The Port of Boston Economic Development* report, the city and Massport agreed to a joint review process for the South Boston waterfront in an effort to minimize "bureaucratic wrangling and competing agendas. . . However, a proposal to locate the Patriots stadium on Massport land in South Boston. . . was not part of the master plan. Its sudden appearance on the Massport agenda was an unpleasant surprise for the Menino Administration and South Boston residents. . ."<sup>151</sup> The proposal also frustrated Mayor Menino, who had stated in 1996, "My commitment is to a convention center, first and foremost."<sup>152</sup>

Southie was in a vulnerable position. After a protracted discussion regarding the Megaplex proposal, community residents felt they got what they wanted.....a stand-alone convention center and designated buffer zone that would act as a barrier of sorts between their residential community and the Seaport. The center would most likely provide jobs for Southie residents, and the community believed traffic generation would be held to a minimum because the center's clientele would mostly be out-of-towners, dependent on

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<sup>150</sup>*Boston Herald.*

<sup>151</sup>Meg Vaillancourt, *The Boston Globe*, June 10 1997.

<sup>152</sup>Jack Meyers, *The Boston Globe*, March 18 1996.

public transportation. Massport's announcement of the stadium deal with Kraft pulled the rug out from under the community. Politically, it became a David vs. Goliath battle played out in the media. As the *Boston Herald* stated,

Southie is reminding us it's not only OK to step out of line, it's also OK to say no, even if it means inviting the ridicule of wiseguys who insufferably believe they're so much sharper than the rest of us. And maybe it's reminding itself, too, because it's been a long while since it had the combined muscle of Ray Flynn running City Hall and Billy Bulger running roughshod over Beacon Hill. It's obvious that downtown movers and shakers now regard Southie as politically impotent, all bark and no bite. . . .<sup>153</sup>

Governor Weld's commitment to the project seemed strongly linked to the business backing of the stadium. Weld's doggedness in supporting the stadium, even as the battle raged around him, was ridiculed by many as serving the elite few of the football team and BankBoston, a main financial supporter of the stadium.<sup>154</sup> With Weld's support, Kraft and Massport felt they could circumvent the lengthy legislative review process that had delayed and then killed the Megaplex project.

#### Strategies and Stances

The Patriots Stadium proposal took the community by surprise. According to Vivien Li, the trouble started when "Kraft was assured by Steve Tocco [Chairman of Massport], 'I'll take care of the community.'<sup>155</sup>" In reality, there was no strategy for the Patriots Stadium, perhaps because Massport and Kraft erroneously believed that a stadium built on Massport-owned land couldn't be stopped by Southie. Even as late as January 1997, Governor Weld stated he would go ahead and build the stadium in Southie despite community opposition, and *The Boston Globe* reported that, "On the surface, there is not much the city can do to stop the project."<sup>156</sup> On the surface, perhaps, but in the behind-the-scenes world of Southie politics, *The Globe*, Massport and Kraft would be proven very wrong in their assumption that the deal was unstoppable.

In perhaps the most damaging tactical error, the plan was leaked to the press before Massport introduced

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<sup>153</sup>*Boston Herald*, December 10 1996.

<sup>154</sup>*The Boston Globe*, January 19 1997.

<sup>155</sup>Vivien Li.

<sup>156</sup>*The Boston Globe*.

Kraft to the community. As Li stated, “the community expects you to pay homage first, before the press gets a hold of the plan.<sup>157</sup>” But Kraft rushed the project, wrongly believing that the Patriot’s winning streak that year would garner him instant acceptance by the City of Boston. The results were devastating. State Senator “Lynch had the political victory handed to him on a silver platter.<sup>158</sup>”

Kraft made other errors. Correctly feeling he was about to be set up, he declined an offer from Southie elected leaders to present the stadium plans at a community meeting in the beginning of January 1997. *The Boston Globe* described his divide and conquer attitude: “. . .the owner of the New England Patriots prefers to privately pitch the proposal to residents. The response appears to be part of a strategy by Kraft to go around state Sen. Stephen Lynch and City Council President James Kelly, both ardent opponents of the plan.<sup>159</sup>” Part of Kraft’s plan was to get both the Catholic leadership and blue-collar workers on his side. He presented his proposal to Cardinal Bernard Law, “apparently hoping the cardinal could open doors for him in the Catholic enclave of South Boston.<sup>160</sup>” He also met with the Building Trades Council to discuss the lucrative union jobs that would be created by the construction of the complex.

Union members were seemingly annoyed at not having an opportunity to learn more about the plan. Joe Nigro, a South Boston resident and secretary treasurer of the Boston Building Trades Council, representing 31 local unions with 35,000 members, stated his dissatisfaction with Southie’s political leadership when he stated, “I thought there was an awful lot that hadn’t been reported that our members who live in South Boston should have the opportunity to hear first-hand, instead of reading second-hand and hearing from politicians.” As Kraft’s son Jonathon stated, “People and groups in South Boston have contacted us to meet with us privately to learn about our proposed plan. . . We will meet privately with any group of people or organization that asks us to explain the details of our plan.<sup>161</sup>”

Senator Kelly and Councilman Lynch first appeared stymied by Kraft’s strategy. In a City Hall conference

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<sup>157</sup>Vivien Li.

<sup>158</sup>Michael Vaughan, Regional Deputy, Boston Redevelopment Authority, Interview (April 15, 1998).

<sup>159</sup>*The Boston Globe*, January 1 1997.

<sup>160</sup>*The Boston Globe*.

<sup>161</sup>*The Boston Globe*.



in December 1996, approximately thirty South Boston leaders, Lynch and Kelly among them, rejected the proposal for a South Boston Patriots Stadium without taking the plans to the residents of the community. Originally they had said there was no need for Southie residents to hear the stadium proposal but, when faced with Kraft's attempts to meet with individual community groups, changed their position and called for a January 1997 public meeting at the Gavin School (site of the school busing protest meetings of the 1970s). Kraft sensed a set up. After initially agreeing to attend, he reversed and said that he was "concerned that only opponents would attend the meeting and that it would deteriorate into a media spectacle with angry residents voicing their anxieties, rather than listening to the plan."<sup>162</sup> Councilor Kelly used Kraft's reluctance as an opportunity to trounce on his courage and character: "Bob Kraft, I'd rather him face the neighborhood directly, rather than give the appearance of sneaking around. He says one thing and does another," Kelly said. "He prefers to have secret meetings with certain people."<sup>163</sup>

Governor Weld maintained his commitment to the South Boston stadium and attempted to refocus the debate on jobs, not personalities. Unfortunately for stadium proponents, Weld could not have chosen worse words in making his arguments for a South Boston stadium. In an interview with *The Boston Globe* in December 1996, Weld stressed that

a stadium could benefit South Boston.. . [and] that local rank-and-file workers, especially in the construction trades, would benefit from the promised jobs. And South Boston residents in particular, he argued, would benefit from mitigation money. "I'm talking about a dollar amount offered to compensate the neighborhood like we do when we site a prison or something like that."<sup>164</sup>

Later, when asked how he would overcome Southie's strong opposition to the project, Weld stated,

he was so confident that the stadium would be a "good neighbor" that he'd welcome a similar project in his tony neighborhood in Cambridge. "I happen to think a football stadium is a pretty good neighbor," Weld said. "I wouldn't mind if they put it on Brattle Street."<sup>165</sup>

Perhaps these arguments sounded too much like school desegregation reasoning back the 1970s. Once

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<sup>162</sup>*The Boston Globe.*

<sup>163</sup>*The Boston Globe.*

<sup>164</sup>*The Boston Globe.*

<sup>165</sup>*The Boston Globe.*

again, well-to-do whites were telling Southie what it should and shouldn't have in its backyard, and comparing those things to "prisons" no less.

Just when it appeared that there was little that could be done to derail the proposal, Moakley used his political muscle in Washington to place roadblocks in the project's path. Southie's Congressman made the deal next-to-impossible when he convinced the United States Army to cancel plans to sell or lease government-owned land to Kraft for stadium parking. As the *Boston Herald* reported,

U.S. Rep. Joseph Moakley has launched a powerful new bid to block a football stadium in South Boston, personally calling the Army secretary to stop the sale of land targeted for the project. Moakley's political squeeze play could drive a final stake through the controversial stadium plan. Sources close to the project said building the football stadium would be "almost impossible" if Moakley is successful in convincing the Army to kill the land deal. "Without the land it's almost physically impossible to put the stadium there," one source said. "There is complete agreement you probably can't go forward without it."<sup>166</sup>

After strong lobbying from Moakley, U.S. Army Secretary Togo D. West Jr. canceled the land deal for an Army-owned five-acre plot that New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft wanted as part of his proposed 27-acre stadium. Moakley pointed out that, ". . . his intervening in the Patriots stadium controversy also blocked an Army consolidation plan that would have cost the city 1,200 jobs. "I have a problem with the Army giving up any of their land," Moakley said. "I don't think that it is the function of the Army to make it easy for Massport to build a parking lot for a stadium."<sup>167</sup>

While Moakley effectively killed the proposal, Senator Lynch received credit for the successful battle, and a huge political boost in a fight that can only be called a politician's dream. Vaughan recalled the evening in Southie when the community packed the Gavin school to show opposition to the project:

Lynch was masterful. He waited until the end of the evening and then got up to the microphone. He started his talk really friendly by saying hello to Mrs. "So and so" in the audience, and good to see you, Mr. "So and so," how's your family doing? And then Lynch launched into a tirade about how Kraft wasn't going to destroy his neighborhood.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup>*Boston Herald*, February 1 1997.

<sup>167</sup>*The Boston Globe*, February 8 1997.

<sup>168</sup>Michael Vaughan.

Just as Louise Day Hicks built a reputation for her stand against school desegregation in the early 1970s, so too did Southie politicians use the stadium to demonstrate their loyalty to the community and their commitment to fighting for their neighborhood. The Patriots Stadium issue was likened to school busing by the community. It was not uncommon the hear residents proclaim, “they aren’t going to do this to us again.<sup>169</sup>” Indeed, Senator Steve Lynch even supported these feelings of *Deja Vu* by choosing the Gavin School as the site for the community meetings to voice opposition to the stadium. This was a ready-made opportunity for a young, ambitious politician. Although he was talking about his community’s opposition to the Megaplex, a resident discussing Southie’s history of fighting certainly could have been talking of the Patriots Stadium meetings when he “issued a warning to anyone who thinks the neighborhood will roll over for outsiders. “Southie’s got a lot of tradition. . .You’ll see that when they start having public meetings, people will show up in droves.<sup>170</sup>” As Michael Vaughan of the BRA states, “community meetings are a sport in South Boston. This is a contentious group. They love a fight.<sup>171</sup>”

### Outcome

On February 21, 1997, New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft announced on television that he had abandoned plans for a football stadium in South Boston. A week later, in response to the announcement, Mayor Menino said, “We’re staying focused right now on a new convention center in South Boston. That’s our number one priority. . .A convention center will bring real jobs.<sup>172</sup>”

In retrospect, a domed stadium and a convention center in South Boston was just too much for the community to digest at one time. Shen believed this is why the stadium was doomed to fail. When the Megaplex deal collapsed, Massport and Kraft should have seen the writing on the wall. Many believe the Patriots Stadium was dead the moment it was leaked to the press. As Vivien Li stated, “by the time Bob Kraft and his son Jonathon met with community residents it was too late. Too much had been played out in the press; deals hadn’t been cut yet.<sup>173</sup>”

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<sup>169</sup>Andrew Hargens, Massport Port Planner, Interview ( March 30, 1998).

<sup>170</sup>*The Boston Globe*.

<sup>171</sup>Michael Vaughan.

<sup>172</sup>Charles M. Sennott and Tina Cassidy, *The Boston Globe*, February 23 1997.

<sup>173</sup>Vivien Li.

Perhaps the difficulties Massport and Kraft faced in Southie were best summed up in the words of Kraft himself when he said, "The trouble with Boston . . . is that there are 100 people who can single-handedly kill a project the size of a football stadium, "but there isn't a single person you can go to who can make it happen."<sup>174</sup> His belief that Steve Tocco of Massport could "deal with the neighborhood" didn't allow for the complex political machinations in South Boston. "With all his money, why didn't he hire somebody to take him through this process?" said one state official sympathetic to Kraft, echoing a criticism heard around town lately. A tin ear for Boston politics, klutzy public-relations skills, a poor sense of timing, a little too much pride, or just a bad idea stubbornly adhered to -- whatever the fatal flaw, it was Kraft's.<sup>175</sup> Of course it was also the argument of too few jobs that were seasonal and low-paying, and too much traffic. But in the end, Kraft and Massport may have done well to follow the lead of the Red Sox in February of 1996 as the team was looking at two sites in South Boston, one along Fort Point Channel and the other on McCourt-owned property in South Boston. A leader in the ball club's organization said, "Before I do anything, I want to go to the [South Boston] community, ask them what their concerns are as to having a baseball park as their neighbor . . . If their concerns are insurmountable, then I've got to move on."<sup>176</sup> And indeed, the Red Sox did move on, with little fanfare.

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<sup>174</sup>David Halbfinger, *The Boston Globe*, December 23 1996.

<sup>175</sup>David Halbfinger.

<sup>176</sup>David Halbfinger, *The Boston Globe*, February 22 1996.

## **The Boston Convention and Exhibition Center: 1994-1998**

The decision to site the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center (BCEC) in South Boston was four years in the making. The real push to site the convention center as a “stand-alone” facility began after the failed Patriots stadium proposal by Massport and Kraft in 1997. As many observed, this certainly contributed to the success of the BCEC and its eventual acceptance by the community. As Mayor Menino said after the BCEC legislation was approved in City Council, “We didn’t do a Megaplex, we didn’t do a stadium, but on this, we stayed focused.”<sup>177</sup>

### History

Four years previously, Boston needed a convention center and football stadium. In perhaps the planning understatement of the year, at the 1998 American Planning Association National Convention, BRA Director Tom O’Brien said, “Partly as a result of politics, I suppose, we decided to go after a convention center, not the football stadium.”<sup>178</sup> In 1995, the Megaplex was sited and then rejected for Southie after community uproar over traffic stalled the project. But the community never discounted the convention center project alone.

### Contents of the Plan

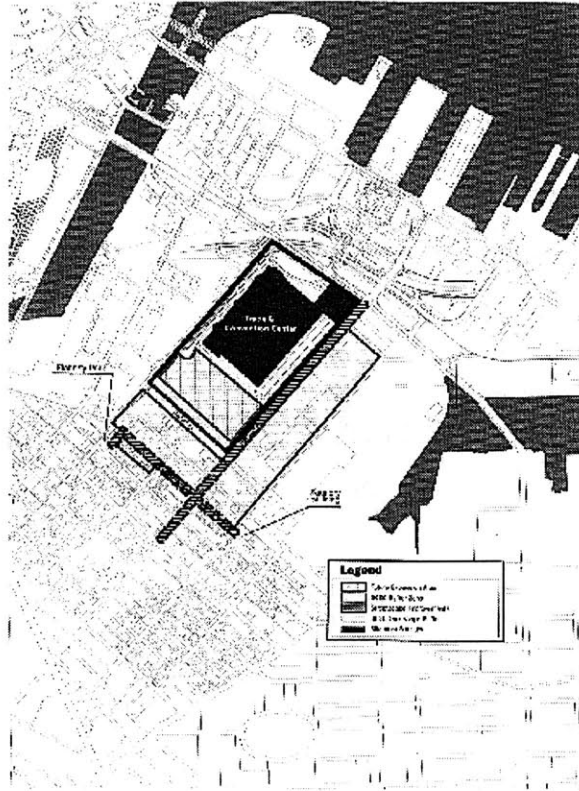
In October of 1994, Mayor Menino outlined plans for a \$440 million “stand alone convention center on C Street in South Boston.”<sup>179</sup> The proposed Boston Convention and Exhibition Center (BCEC) was a 60-acre facility that would house exhibition and meeting space and support facilities. The center would be able to handle larger conventions than the Hynes Convention Center in the Back Bay and would have approximately 600,000 square feet of exhibit space. Included with the proposal was the BCEC buffer zone which was a one-block wide band along the southern edge of the facility. The city stated that the land uses in the buffer (primarily vacant land at the time of the proposal) would be determined in close cooperation with the South Boston Community.

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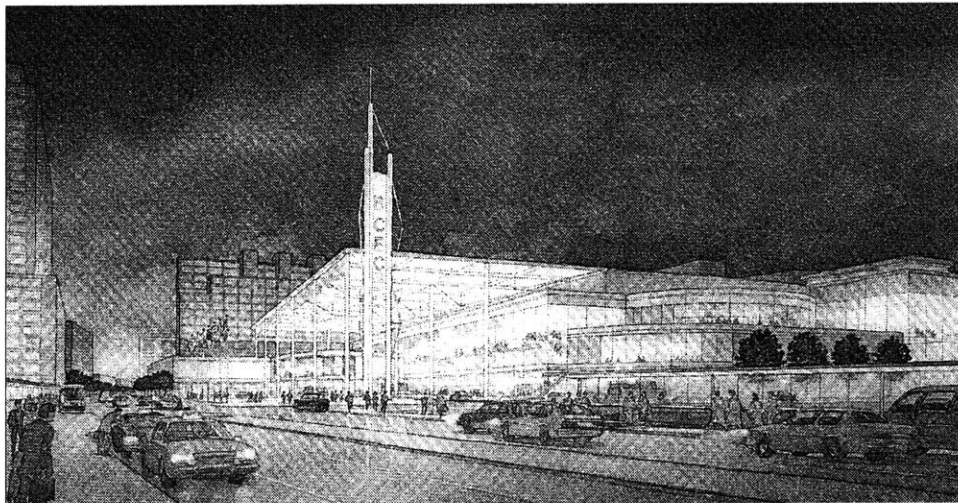
<sup>177</sup>*The Boston Globe*, March 12 1998.

<sup>178</sup> Tom O’Brien, “The Boston Convention and Exhibition Center,” APA National Conference (Boston, MA, April 7, 1998).

<sup>179</sup>*The Boston Globe*.



**Fig. 30.** Site plan of proposed Boston Convention and Exhibition Center at Summer Street. Note the buffer zones around the facility. *Source: Boston Convention and Exposition Center, Final Report.*



**Fig. 31.** Rendering of the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center. *Source: The Boston Redevelopment Authority.*

### Interest Groups and Their Goals

Kairos Shen of the BRA, claimed the main reason the community accepted the concept of a convention center in Southie was the size and nature of the facility. Southie is savvy, claims Shen. The community realized early on that the development market was heating up again. The land proposed for the convention center occupied almost 70 different parcels, with a few dozen owners. While Southie politicians had been extremely effective at controlling large-scale development in the community's backyard, the prospect of battling with dozens of individual development proposals was a daunting one. In effect, Southie saw the convention center as an ideal opportunity to achieve some key community goals: establish a buffer zone between the residential community and the Seaport, and control the development by negotiating with one entity....not many different land-owners.<sup>180</sup>

While most of the community wanted a buffer between the Seaport and residential lower end, the feeling was not unanimous. The artist and design community of Fort Point Channel, organized into a group called SAND (Seaport Alliance for a Neighborhood Design), pointed out that, "The plan presents its back to South Boston, with the convention center acting as a barrier between this community and its waterfront." SAND appeared to be at odds with traditional Southie residents who not only wanted a buffer between their community and the waterfront, but wanted to limit residential development as well.

### Political Climate

Southie was in a fighting mood after the Patriots Stadium fiasco, a battle that many likened to the school busing fight of the 1970s. Senator Lynch took on an increasingly vocal and active role in guiding the future of his community. Vivien Li said that a *Boston Globe* profile around this time did much to bolster Lynch's image as a politician, and a force in state politics, giving him added clout during negotiations.

### Strategies and Stances

As a member of the South Boston Waterfront Committee (SBWC) said, "the Menino Administration was very very shrewd--they hired the right people to do the feasibility study."<sup>181</sup> Two firms, Fort Point Associates and ML Strategies were brought on board to assist the BRA in negotiations with the SBWC. Bob Ryan, former BRA Director under Mayor Kevin White, and an Irish Catholic, became the key point

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<sup>180</sup>Kairos Shen.

<sup>181</sup>Vivien Li.

man at the meetings. He met every week with the SBWC and asked them over and over again “if we can build a convention center, what do you want?” As Vivien Li recalled, he patiently took page after page of notes of every request from “more jobs” to “trees at this point in the sidewalk” and never belittled one request or laughed at the residents. Week after week he pushed the community for specifics, asking them things such as, “how many trees?, where do you want the sidewalks?, how wide should the sidewalks be?” Li believed this was key to the success of the convention center effort...the community felt respected, they were pressed to think again and again about all that they wanted, and they were never belittled.<sup>182</sup> Edward Tsoi, a member of the Boston Civic Design Commission, applauded the expanded community process used for the negotiations. As Tsoi said of the community, “they are clear what they want.” He also claimed that the convention center process of “communication is far better than anything I have ever seen before.”<sup>183</sup>

As Tom O’Brien confirmed, this was “very much a community-based project, a community-issues project.”<sup>184</sup> He does think they got started on the wrong foot. When initial discussion of the project began four years ago, the Convention Center site was termed the “C Street site.” This gave the wrong impression to residents about how much impact the facility would have on the residential community. Things got better when the city changed its reference to the site to the “Summer Street site.” As O’Brien said of the BRA, “we are kicking ourselves about calling it the C Street site not the Summer Street site. It set us back a year.”<sup>185</sup>

While it appeared that Southie wanted the convention center, the community played down the benefits it was to receive from the facility. Instead, politicians gave, what had become the standard complaint over the years, that the community was being infringed upon. This paved the way for negotiations on community benefits. As City Councilor-at-Large Peggy Davis-Mullen said, “South Boston didn’t ask for a convention center. . . but it has resigned itself to the fact that it has a great back yard and now we’re going to get something for it.”

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<sup>182</sup>Vivien Li.

<sup>183</sup> Edward Tsoi, "The Boston Convention and Exhibition Center," APA National Conference (Boston, MA, April 7, 1998).

<sup>184</sup>Tom O'Brien.

<sup>185</sup>Tom O'Brien.



What Southie got for it is something they wanted for a long time. In the community debates over the Fan Pier project, concern over commercial uses pushing toward the lower end were voiced by many in Southie. With the convention center facility, “a buffer zone was created to protect interests of residential neighborhoods.” As Kairos Shen says, in the last economic cycle, Summer Street was divider between industrial and residential community. “It is not a coincidence that there are no exits south of Summer Street on the new highway.<sup>186</sup>” When red line was being planned, discussion about going through the community was rejected by residents wholeheartedly! While the convention center orientation doesn’t present a long wall toward the residential community, the negotiated buffer of open space and housing will provide the protection against outsiders that the community craves. As Shen stated, it was an added bonus that the users of the facility will be out-of-towners.<sup>187</sup> The prospect of business people using the facility and returning to their hotel rooms appeared to be less of a threat than locals swarming into their neighborhood.

The buffer zone was just one piece of the benefits package negotiated for the project. When Mayor Menino insisted that government projects do not generate linkage fees, only private developments do, the City Council ignored him. Menino withheld the release of the 1997 *South Boston Seaport Master Plan* until the state legislature had voted approval for the convention center funds. He hadn’t wanted the Seaport plan to hold up the project. Menino miscalculated and underestimated the power of Councilor Kelly to hold the project hostage at the city level. As *The Boston Globe* stated, “The council was astute enough to ignore the mantra of the Menino administration in recent weeks that community benefits could not be a part of the convention center vote. Government projects do not generate such funds, the administration said, private developers do.<sup>188</sup>” City Council President Kelly “had a majority of council votes in his pocket during the arduous negotiations, councilors who would have voted down the convention center if it did not have enough goodies for constituents.<sup>189</sup>”

And goodies could be too weak a word to describe the benefits Southie won during city council negotiations. Council President Kelly negotiated a side agreement, or Memorandum of Understanding

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<sup>186</sup>Kairos Shen.

<sup>187</sup>Kairos Shen.

<sup>188</sup>*The Boston Globe*.

<sup>189</sup>*The Boston Globe*.

(MOU), that maintained council oversight and made sure benefits such as jobs and money for affordable housing flowed to South Boston. Details of the MOU were still being ironed out minutes before the vote but the agreement, between Kelly and the BRA, also signed by Lynch and Hart, called for:

- Regular hearings in South Boston to update residents on the project's progress.
- The establishment of job information centers in South Boston and Roxbury to recruit people for convention center-related jobs. Job training for those jobs is guaranteed for Southie residents.
- Assurances that 100% of the linkage money from the convention center's headquarters hotel goes to South Boston, wherever the hotel winds up being built.
- Assurances that 50% of all linkage money from all waterfront area development goes to South Boston.
- The establishment of a trust for community affordable housing.
- In the Seaport, developers wanting to build above the 150 foot IPOD height limit would be required to pay even more to a fund for South Boston.

As Joan Vennoch put it in her column in *The Boston Globe*, "The Private Sector,"

All roads to a new convention center lead directly to South Boston. In that geographic fact lies a political reality - and a business reality, as well." City Council President "Kelly, along with other South Boston politicians, made sure the people of that community will get as much as possible from the hot, new piece of Boston waterfront that also happens to lie in Southie's back yard. With the vote came a side agreement between the Boston Redevelopment Authority and Kelly, state Senator Stephen F. Lynch, and state Representative John A. Hart Jr., all of South Boston.<sup>190</sup>"

Senator Lynch estimated community benefits to be in excess of \$40 million for South Boston jobs and affordable housing; if leveraged properly, the linkage could become \$120 million in actual monies for affordable housing.

And so, the separate MOU, tied to the city's convention center legislation, wrapped up the Seaport deal as well. As *The Globe* said, "The deal to make linkage payments flow from the headquarters hotel -- wherever it is -- removes a big bargaining chip for O'Brien." For months before the legislation was passed,

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<sup>190</sup>*The Boston Globe*, March 20 1998.

O'Brien was fighting to put the convention center hotel on the northeast corner of the facility, something the community and Councilor Kelly were against. The BRA believed the success of the facility would be determined, in part, by the adjacency of a major hotel. Councilor Kelly called the prospects for a hotel on northeast corner of the site "less than 50-50" and stated that the hotel could go elsewhere, like across the Street.<sup>191</sup> O'Brien lost his bargaining chip when the MOU gave Southie 100% of the linkage money, no matter where the hotel would be located. As *The Globe* said, the MOU was a thorn in O'Brien's side.<sup>192</sup>

### Outcome

The community's agreement to accept the convention center was something the BRA saw as a "huge accomplishment for them." Shen considered the convention center to be a major planning victory. The timing of the convention center helped close the deal. Convention center negotiations occurred fresh on the heels of the Patriots Stadium fight. In that battle, *The Boston Globe* supported the stadium and attacked the community for being insular. During convention center negotiations, Vivien Li recalled members of the SBWC expressing concern that the neighborhood was perceived to be against "everything." This concern is strikingly similar to the South Boston of the 1930s and 1940s that Lawrence Vale describes in *Three Public Neighborhoods*,

. . . South Bostonians remained centrally concerned about their district's image to outsiders. Perhaps by more than mere coincidence, the South Boston Gazette paired its approving announcement of the new public housing initiative with a editorial letter, reprinted from the Boston American, explaining how "South Boston residents are engaged in a campaign to wipe out wrong impressions of that community, caused by unfair stories, cheap 'Southie' songs, slurs by public speakers and politicians, cheap jokes in theaters or in any other manner," concluding that "We are using postal cards and the press to make protests." In this context, the call to place a "new village" at the community's "entrance" was yet another mode of protest, a pro-active attempt to rebuild the neighborhood's image in the eyes of dismissive outsiders.<sup>193</sup>

Southie's acceptance of the convention center exemplified a new attempt to locate something at the community's entrance. It also opened the way for intensive development in the Seaport by creating a ready demand for additional hotel rooms and entertainment facilities. This expected demand led the South Boston community to pressure the BRA into preparing a master plan for the South Boston Seaport.

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<sup>191</sup>Anthony Flint, *The Boston Globe*, March 10 1998.

<sup>192</sup>Anthony Flint.

<sup>193</sup>Lawrence J. Vale.

## Chapter 4

### The South Boston Seaport Master Plan: 1997 - 1998

A New Plan for the South Boston Seaport was unveiled by the City of Boston on November 25, 1997. A *Boston Globe* article of that same day stated, “Mayor Thomas Menino and his army of planners are bracing for a long and lively debate about the future of the prized 1,000 acres of real estate. At issue is . . . how much clout the South Boston residential neighborhood will have in the discussion.” The *Globe* goes on to imply that although the plan is similar to redevelopment areas in other US cities, the uniqueness here is that, “the South Boston community has a powerful grip on what gets built in the area, as witnessed by the rejection of Patriots owner Robert Kraft’s proposal for a football stadium there earlier this year.<sup>194</sup>”

At the time of the plan’s presentation to the South Boston community in December of 1997, BRA Director Thomas O’Brien assured residents that the public comment period would continue until all had the opportunity to give input and to be satisfied with the plan--60-90 days at most. Ninety days came and went. The BRA announced in April of 1998 that the process would continue throughout the summer of 1998, with the Seaport Master Plan expected to be completed sometime in mid-autumn. What happened to the master plan from November to April? As described in *Chapter 3*, there is an extensive history of strong reaction and opposition by Southie to outside intervention. Would the new plan be the latest in the line of “plans” to be hit hard by Southie opposition? Had the Menino Administration learned from previous planning efforts in Southie? Who were the key interest groups involved in the planning process? To answer these questions, one has to step back a few years to find the beginnings of the plan.

#### History

What had been dubbed the South Boston Seaport by city officials was an area of approximately 1000 acres that was comprised mainly of lands that were reclaimed from Boston Harbor between 1870 and 1920 through filling operations. This land reclamation was performed to allow the rail lines to serve the water’s edge at a time when the Port of Boston was host to multiple marine industrial uses and shipping companies. Along with these rail lines came the requisite warehouses, mostly built along Fort Point Channel. Starting in the 1950s, the rail yards were gradually sold off as the Port of Boston lost market share to Halifax and the Port of New York/New Jersey. Some marine industrial uses remained at the

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<sup>194</sup>Anthony Flint, *The Boston Globe*, November 25 1997.



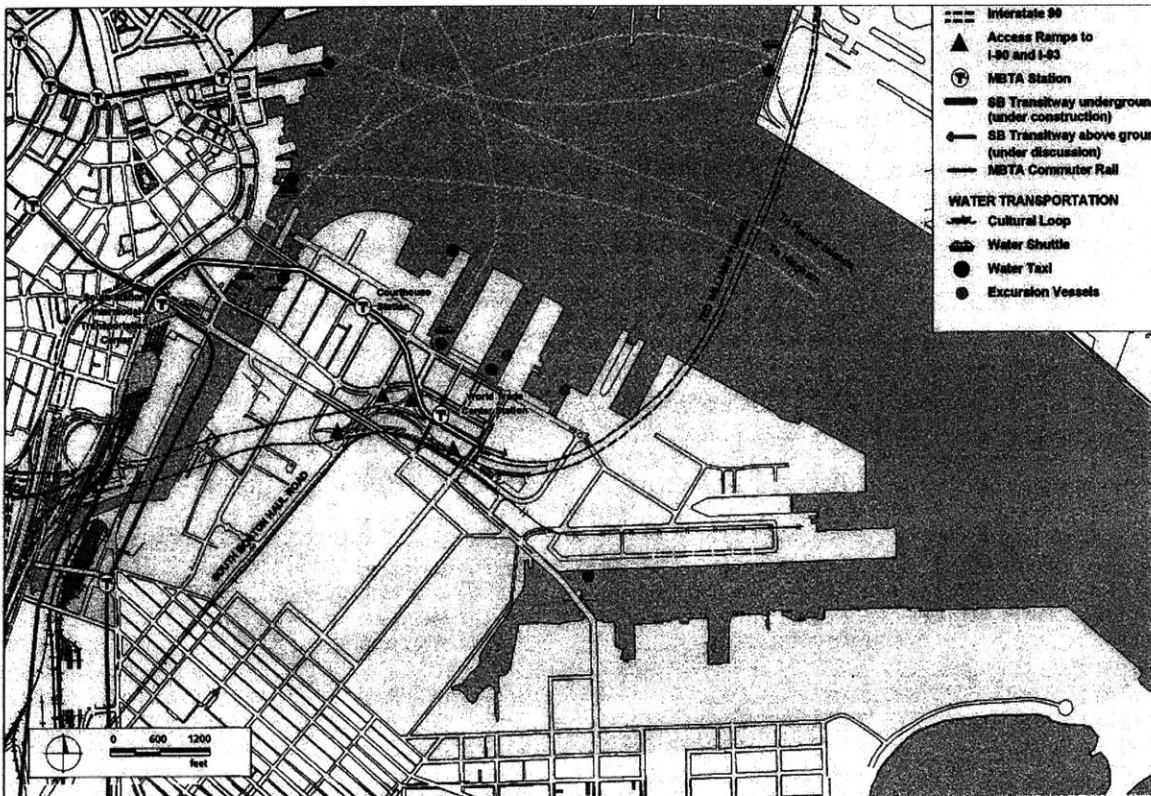
**Fig. 32** Aerial photo of South Boston showing traditional residential neighborhood and reclaimed land area to the north. *Source: Mass GIS and MIT.*

eastern end of the Seaport around the deep water access area at Conley Terminal. These uses included intermodal cargo shipping, seafood processing, and the ocean cruise ship industry. The Fort Point Channel warehouse district was home to printing businesses, architects and design offices, and artist live and work space. Much of the remaining open land, formerly rail yards, was being used for parking lots, serving commuters to the Boston Central Business District (CBD), seafood restaurants, and the World Trade Center. Until the 1980s, lack of infrastructure improvements in sewers, water, and transportation access, kept this area from developing into an extension of the CBD. In addition to the physical impediments to development, there were other obstacles more difficult to quantify. Because of the long history of the marine industrial jobs in the South Boston Port, Southie residents consistently fought to retain the port functions, making it politically difficult to develop this area for other uses.

Starting in the early 1980's serious developer interest surfaced regarding a few select waterfront parcels

closest to the downtown business district. As explained in the previous chapter, the Fan Pier development proposals spurred politicians and residents to call for a master plan for the area during this time of rapid economic expansion. The collapse of the real estate economy at the end of the 1980s brought an end to proposals for the area and the cries for a waterfront master plan died down. In early 1996, the Mayor put together a team of 21 people, 18 of them residents of South Boston, to form the South Boston Waterfront Committee (SBWC). This committee was initially formed to look at development of the Boston Marine Industrial Park (BMIP), located on the site of the former U.S. Army base land, for other uses. After assessing the incompatibility of proposed uses (hotels, luxury residential, advertising agencies) with the working port, the SBWC advised the Mayor to abandon plans to redevelop the BMIP and Mayor Menino concurred.

While the SBWC continued to meet to discuss issues affecting the waterfront, it wasn't until the Spring of 1997 that they started meeting weekly with the BRA to discuss a master plan for the South Boston Seaport. Although accounts differ as to how the idea of a master plan got off the ground, it appears the city undertook the process as a "necessity" rather than as an "opportunity." Kairos Shen, urban designer at the



**Fig. 33.** Transportation Infrastructure (existing or under construction) in South Boston. *Source: The South Boston Seaport: A Master Plan for the Fort Point and South Boston Waterfront.*

BRA, described how his agency was pressured by the South Boston community into developing a master plan before it had intended. While reluctant to undertake a master planning process, the city must have seen some need for planning for the area as infrastructure improvements got underway. The Central Artery/Tunnel Project, coupled with the clean-up of Boston Harbor opened this area up to intense developer speculation. The Ted Williams Tunnel; the South Boston By-Pass/Haul Road; the MBTA South Boston Transitway; the Evelyn Moakley Bridge; and extensive new water transit routes are all new infrastructure completed or underway in the South Boston Seaport. All of these improvements have made the area ripe for development, and were also instrumental in the decision to site the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center in the district, which in turn, has increased hotel and retail development pressure.

The SBWC met continuously through the late fall of 1997, offering input to the BRA regarding the master plan. Interestingly, when the *South Boston Seaport Master Plan* was introduced to the public, the SBWC had not seen it. As one member of the committee stressed, “we were just advisory.”<sup>195</sup> *The South Boston Seaport Master Plan* was presented by Mayor Menino at a press conference in November 1997.

#### The Proposal: Contents of the Plan

*The South Boston Seaport: A Master Plan for the Fort Point and South Boston Waterfront*, was dubbed “an Interim Report.” While it was called a master plan, it was really more of a framework for the development of a plan. In the forty-page document, dated December 1997, the BRA: lays out principles for growth in the South Boston Seaport; describes the existing context/framework for the plan; proposes ideas for the public realm; discusses economic development strategies; outlines the nine subdistricts of the South Boston Seaport; and points the way toward the next steps in the planning process.

Much of the plan simply presents existing conditions in the Seaport. Included also were statements regarding the city’s commitment to general growth principles for the district. Very little new information is supplied regarding a future vision for the Seaport. As Vivien Li, a member of the SBWC stated, “the BRA got so taken up with the details of height and design issues, they lost the vision.”<sup>196</sup> It may also have been more than attention to detail that caused the BRA to issue such a general plan with no vision for the Seaport. Andrew Hargens, Port Planner for Massport, described how people in his agency were

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<sup>195</sup> Vivien Li, City Design and Development Forum, MIT DUSP (Cambridge, MA, April 27, 1998).

<sup>196</sup> Vivien Li.

disappointed with the *Port of Boston Economic Development* study jointly issued by Massport and the BRA in 1994. As he said, “It just got watered down because Massport and the BRA were trying hard not to offend anyone.<sup>197</sup>” The *South Boston Seaport Master Plan* is another document that avoids offense. Lorraine Downey, Director of the Environment Department for the City of Boston, explains the contents of the interim report in this way:

there were years of work leading up to the public realm plan. In the end though, it was rushed because of development pressure created by the convention center deal. Let’s just say that the planners’ intent was there in the plan but when it passed through certain hands, voids were created in the document. Some things were consciously, or unconsciously left out. . . somehow, the message was supposed to be the public realm but because of proposed heights shown in the plan, it was perceived as a blueprint for specific sites.<sup>198</sup>

And while Vivien Li blamed the attention to detail and design for the gaps and lack of vision in the plan,



**Fig. 34.** Detail of proposed street lamp for the Seaport. *Source: The South Boston Seaport: A Master Plan for the Fort Point and South Boston Waterfront.*

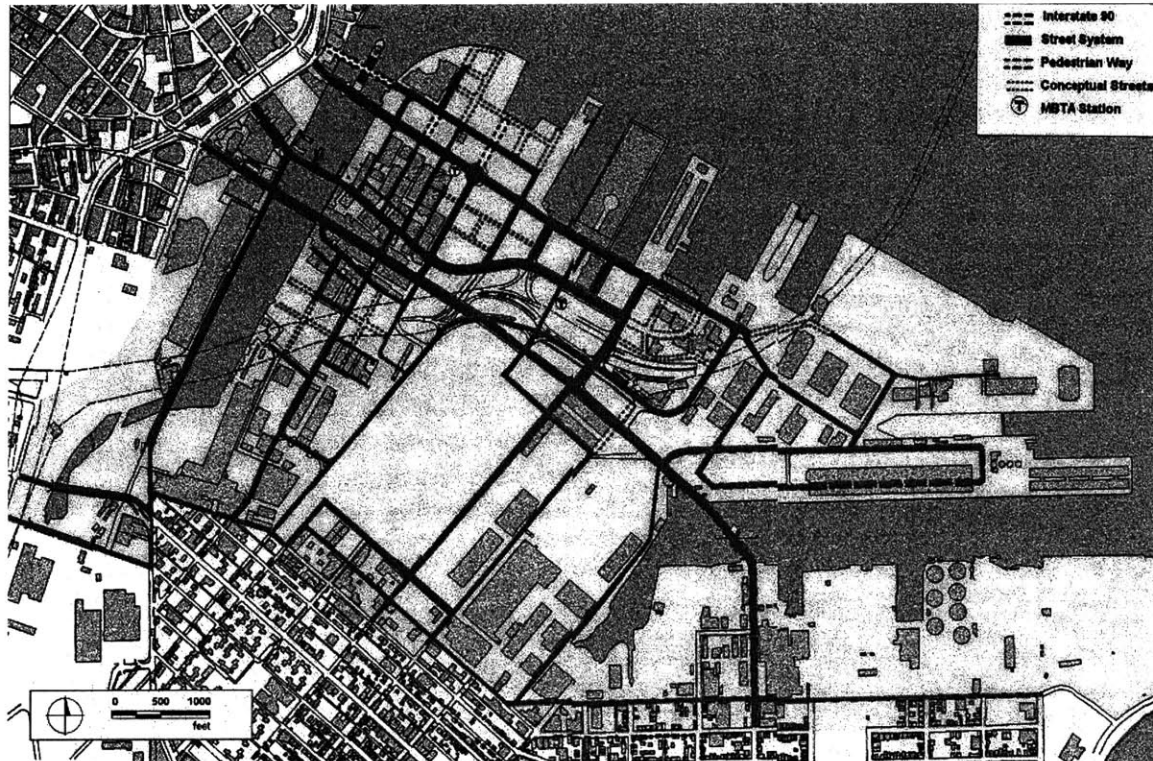
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<sup>197</sup> Andrew Hargens, Massport Port Planner, Interview ( March 30, 1998).

<sup>198</sup> Lorraine Downey, Director, Environment Department, City of Boston , Interview ( May 11, 1998).



design seems to be represented only minimally--focusing not on such things as new streets (the plan of new streets looks no different than the plan showing existing streets -- perhaps a deliberate move to appease Seaport landowners by leaving parcels large!)--but on the intricate design details of proposed lighting for the streets. This is not the level of small detail expected in a master plan



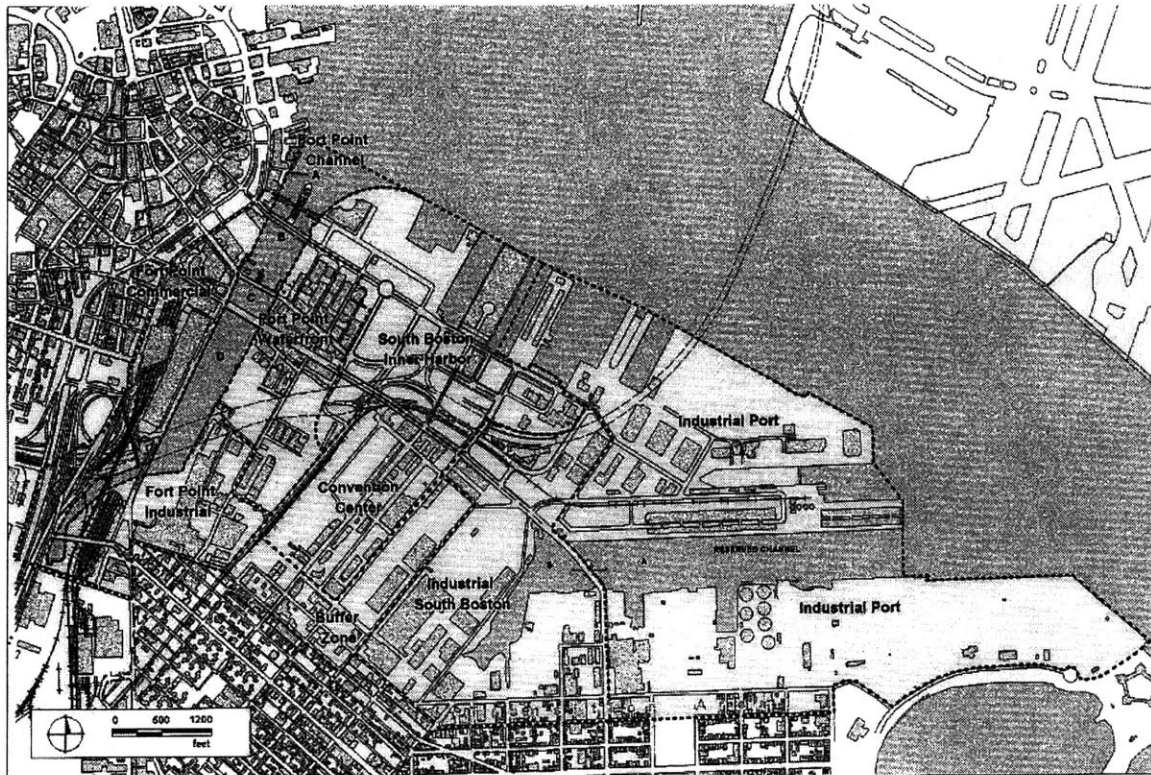
**Fig. 35.** Map showing the proposed street system in the master plan. A comparison to the existing street system shown in the infrastructure plan in Fig. 33. shows no difference in the two, except for the “conceptual streets” shown on this plan. *Source: The South Boston Seaport: A Master Plan for the Fort Point and South Boston Waterfront.*

After laying out nine subdistricts in the South Boston Seaport, the master plan outlines eight comprehensive principles to guide growth in the South Boston Seaport. These principles are quite general and include: Create a vibrant public realm; Guarantee public access to the water; Enhance public use of the water sheet; Protect and enhance maritime industrial and industrial uses; Encourage economic and job diversity; Achieve benefits for the South Boston community; Provide uses and a level of density to create activity at different times of the day; Conduct a public planning process.<sup>199</sup> While there were some

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<sup>199</sup> Boston Redevelopment Authority, *The South Boston Seaport: A Master Plan for the Fort Point and South Boston Waterfront*, Interim Report (Boston, MA: Boston Redevelopment Authority, 1997) 3.

important decisions on the Seaport development implied here, these principles were so general and broad that most would be hard pressed to disagree with them.



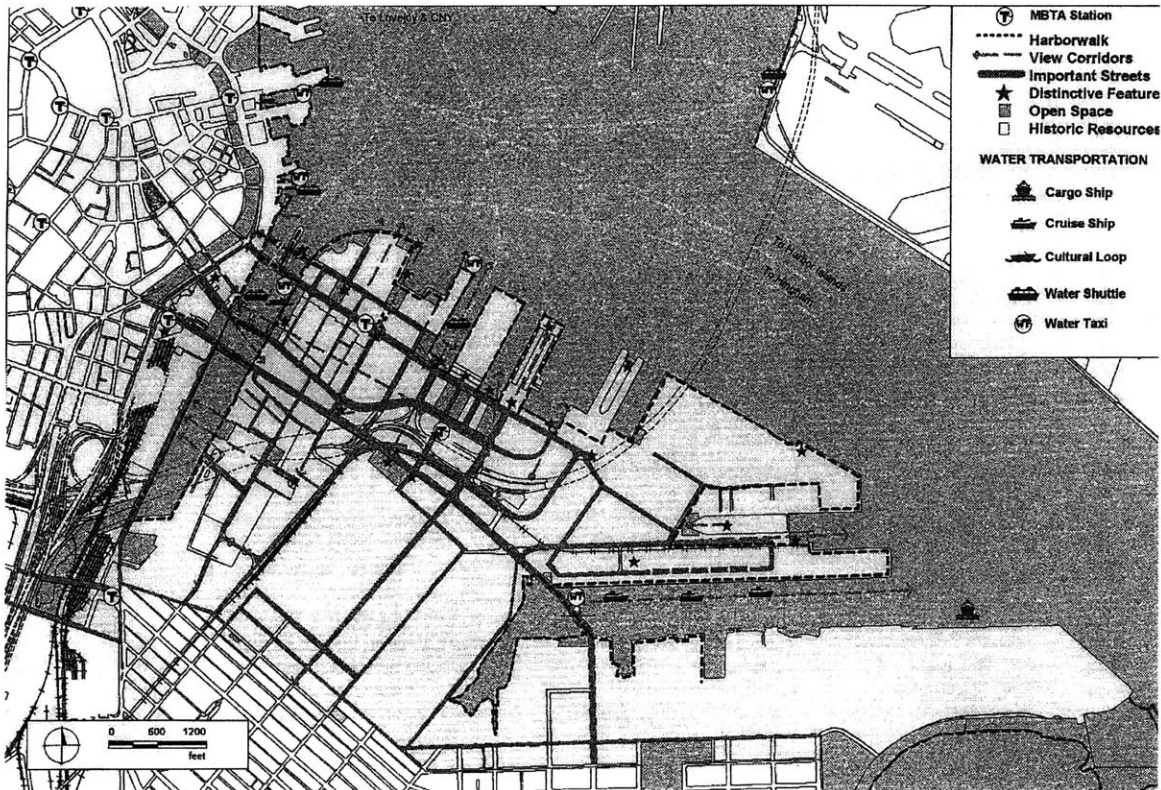
**Fig. 36.** Map showing the subdistricts of the South Boston Seaport. *Source: The South Boston Seaport: A Master Plan for the Fort Point and South Boston Waterfront.*

After outlining existing conditions, the plan proposes some ideas for the public realm which include: the preservation of view corridors in the district; a proposed street system; and urban design guidelines for the streetscape which discuss street setbacks, special light fixtures, signs and street trees; proposed harbor walk and open space system; and distinctive features and imagery. A “Public Realm Plan” shows the location of open space, distinctive features, the HarborWalk, and water transportation.

The plan also notes the linkage available for affordable housing and job training and discusses the mix of uses possible in the Seaport: maritime industrial; general industrial; the visitor economy; the hotel industry; office space; residential use; retail; and cultural uses. Proposed heights of new buildings are then given.

What *The South Boston Seaport Master Plan* does not offer is a vision for the district. Noticeably absent from the plan are: detailed massing studies of the district, zoning recommendations for uses that would

encourage the stated goal of a “24-hour district,” and a comprehensive open space plan that includes more than streets, sidewalks, and the HarborWalk as “open space.” There is also no mention of development phasing.



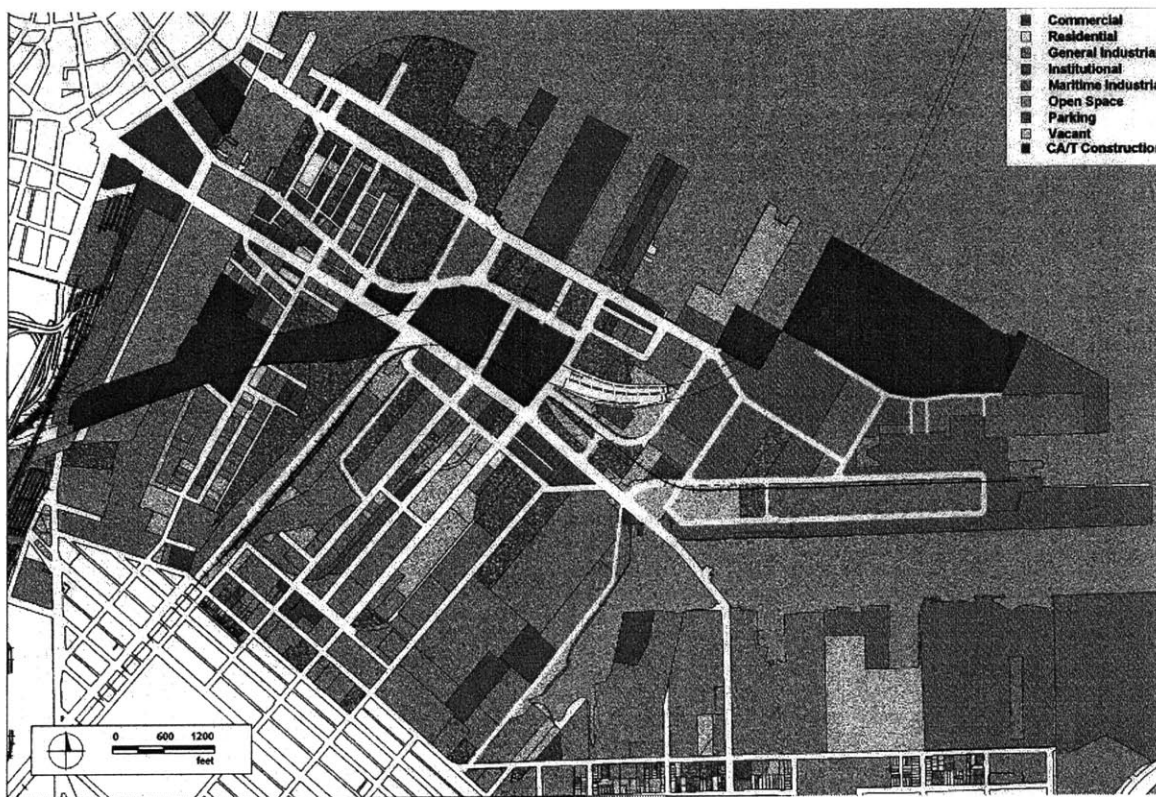
**Fig. 37.** Public realm plan for the South Boston Seaport. *Source: The South Boston Seaport: A Master Plan for the Fort Point Channel and South Boston Waterfront.*

The master plan concludes with “Next Steps,” which outlines the process necessary to carry the plan forward. These include making an amendment to the City’s Zoning Code, establishment of Planned Development Areas (PDAs) in the Seaport, and review of Chapter 91 of the Massachusetts General Laws, undertake a special study of the Convention Center Buffer Zone, coordinate with a transportation management plan and passenger water transportation plan, and coordinate with the master plan for the BMIP.

While specific development figures are not stated in the document, *The Boston Globe* gave the following

breakdown of the long-term development expected as part of the plan: 5000 hotel rooms; 2 million square feet of residential housing; 14 million square feet of commercial and retail space; 15 acres of open space, parks, and waterside pedestrian access (out of 1000 acres); and the \$800 million convention center. *The Globe* arrived at these figures, which were not disputed by the BRA, by doing rough calculations based on proposed building heights and probable uses in the Seaport.

The voids in the plan are apparent. While there is a map showing existing land uses, there is no indication of proposed zoning for the Seaport. Open space is not explored beyond the use of trees along major streets and the existence of the HarborWalk along the water's edge. No mention is made of the actual mix of uses, in terms of square footage, that would be required to "create a vibrant public realm, encourage economic and job diversity, and provide uses and a level of density to create activity at different times of the day."<sup>200</sup> This plan was an overture to the community, hinting at what might be, but avoiding a commitment to form and uses that might be evaluated and debated.



**Fig. 38.** Map showing existing land uses in the South Boston Seaport. *Source: The South Boston Seaport: A Master Plan for the Fort Point and South Boston Waterfront.*

<sup>200</sup>Boston Redevelopment Authority, p. 3.



### The Interest Groups and Their Goals

The City had approached the creation of the *South Boston Seaport Master Plan* in much the same way it had approached other South Boston planning efforts. The BRA and the Mayor's office formed a community advisory committee, called the South Boston Waterfront Committee (SBWC) to work with BRA planners to articulate community needs and to work on planning issues at the committee level before presenting a plan to the general public. But the SBWC did not represent all of Southie. State Senator Lynch warned that the committee, "doesn't speak for South Boston. If this is presented in any way as a done deal, the community will feel put upon. That was the mistake made by Mr. Kraft."<sup>201</sup> While Lynch himself was on the committee, as were City Council President James Kelly and State Representative Jack Hart, his message was clear: the planning was not over with the publication of the *South Boston Seaport Master Plan*; the public planning process had only just begun and Southie intended to be very involved.

The commitment of Southie residents and politicians to be involved in the process was very clear. So too, was Southie's understanding of what it wanted in return, according to most people who had worked on committees with South Boston representatives over the years.<sup>202</sup> As Vivien Li, a member of the SBWC explained, "the people of Southie are very sophisticated. They may not be planners or architects but they know just the right questions to ask."<sup>203</sup> When South Boston residents *were* asked what they wanted, the immediate answer was affordable housing and jobs, for Southie residents, "born and bred." And those jobs were required to be port-related jobs; Southie wasn't interested in jobs from tourism. As the Executive Director of the South Boston Neighborhood Development Corporation said, "if my nine-year old son grows up to work in the port, not all my dreams for him will be fulfilled, but it's better than if he is unemployed and being supported by a wife working as a maid in a seaport hotel."<sup>204</sup>

Affordable housing was the other key issue for Southie residents. Article 80 in the City of Boston Zoning Code allowed for standard linkage fees for new construction of commercial buildings over 100,000 square feet in any part of the city. The regulations required that developers pay \$5 per square foot (over 100,000

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<sup>201</sup>Anthony Flint.

<sup>202</sup> Vivien Li, Executive Director, The Boston Harbor Association, Interview (May 1, 1998); Martin Nee, Executive Director, South Boston Neighborhood Development Corporation, Interview (April 28, 1998).

<sup>203</sup>Vivien Li.

<sup>204</sup>Martin Nee.

square feet) into an affordable housing fund, and an additional \$1 per square foot into a job training fund. To Southie, the linkage money for affordable housing was sorely needed. At the time the master plan was announced, local newspaper reports stated that,

Rents have increased 40 percent in two years, more and more property is being bought by outside investors, and longtime residents from Andrew Square to City Point wonder whether this spectacular project will hasten the end of the traditional South Boston neighborhood. The answer, for many, is an unqualified yes.

And for the families that remain, many residents say, the social fabric of the community may be altered dramatically. Instead of a tight network of families who have lived, worked, prayed, and played together for generations, the new South Boston may be dominated by unattached professionals attracted to the neighborhood by low crime, ocean vistas, and proximity to downtown.<sup>205</sup>

And these fears seemed well-founded. Michael Vaughan, a native of Dorchester who moved to Andrew Square in South Boston in 1996, summed up the situation quite succinctly when he said, “damn, my neighborhood is Melrose Place. We all get up in the morning, buy our coffee, and go off to work at State Street Bank and Fidelity. It’s driving the older people crazy -- ‘yuppie’ is a derogatory word here.”<sup>206</sup> Residents believed the key to protecting their old neighborhood was linkage money and they wanted as much of it as they could negotiate. As City Councilor James Kelly said,

“First we have to stabilize the neighborhood, make sure the people born and raised there are not being driven out by outside forces, people with more money.. . The housing will be created for South Boston residents so they can afford to remain in the neighborhood where they were born and raised.”<sup>207</sup>

BRA Director O’Brien told the neighborhood that linkage requirements would provide a tremendous amount of money from developers for affordable housing, first-time home purchases, and job training. In addition, he said developers would be asked to provide even more money in negotiated “mitigation” packages.<sup>208</sup> These were the words Southie wanted to hear most although they may have had unrealistic expectations in the area of affordable housing because fair housing regulations dictated that neighborhood

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<sup>205</sup>*The Boston Globe*, January 13 1998.

<sup>206</sup> Michael Vaughan, Regional Deputy, Boston Redevelopment Authority, Interview (April 15, 1998).

<sup>207</sup>*The Boston Globe*.

<sup>208</sup>*The Boston Globe*.

residents could no longer be given preference for subsidized housing units.

When the talk switched to market rate and luxury housing in the seaport, the discussion turned contentious. Councilor Kelly was a vocal opponent of “luxury residential towers on the waterfront because most people from South Boston won’t be able to afford to live there.”<sup>209</sup> In fact, the stated goals of the BRA seemed at odds with the desires of most of the neighborhood; long-time residents didn’t want a 24-hour district<sup>210</sup> adjacent to their community.

The debate surrounding a “24-hour district” pointed to the existence of at least two opinions and communities in South Boston. It is important to note that the South Boston residents who resided in the Fort Point waterfront area were a separate voice from the traditional Southie community. These residents were not even acknowledged in the South Boston Leadership Committee (a powerful local council, created by Councilor Kelly, and made up of elected officials and business and civic leaders) until 1996, when two artists from Fort Point were invited to join. In fact, frustrated that their concerns were not being heard, this group of residents, mostly comprised of artists who lived and worked in the old warehouse buildings along the channel, formed their own community group called, The Seaport Alliance for a Neighborhood Design, or SAND. One of SAND’s chief objections to the BRA plan was that it, “lacks significant residential community development, essential for the creation of a safe and active neighborhood.”<sup>211</sup> But SAND’s clout in the process seemed minimal at best. An indication of who retained the power can be seen in the BRA presentation schedule of the plan to community groups. The presentation to the Fort Point community and SAND did not take place until January 20, 1998, more than 30 days after the presentation at the Tynan School, in the heart of South Boston.

Less important than jobs and affordable housing was the public realm. As Martin Nee of the South Boston Neighborhood Development Corporation said, “Step back from architectural integrity for a moment and look at the jobs and integrity of jobs first and foremost. What does the area do to put food on the table,

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<sup>209</sup>*The Boston Globe.*

<sup>210</sup>This term is used to describe a residential community, not an entertainment district, which some mistakenly assumed when this element of the plan was first introduced.

<sup>211</sup> Seaport Alliance for a Neighborhood Design,  
*[Http://www.bostonseaport.com/SAND/Archive/SandComments1.html](http://www.bostonseaport.com/SAND/Archive/SandComments1.html)*

and a roof overhead?<sup>212</sup>” While community residents protested heavily about building heights and lack of open space at the water’s edge shown in the master plan, many officials and community activists felt building height was simply a lightning rod used by community politicians to stir protests and gain political advantage.<sup>213</sup> In fact, Kairos Shen of the BRA believed the community focused on building height as an issue because it was “quantifiable” -- something they could measure foot for foot against development linkage.<sup>214</sup> Andrew Hargens, a port planner with Massport, said it was clear to many in his agency that, “the community doesn’t care about open space on the waterfront, they just want jobs, and very little housing on the waterfront. They just want to use this as a great opportunity to leverage housing and jobs for their own.<sup>215</sup>” As Vivien Li pointed out, in her experience, waterfront open space in the North End and Charlestown just isn’t used by those communities, and residential areas in those neighborhoods are closer than Southie’s to the harbor . As Li explained, in all of these residential areas, the traditional community centers are not at the water’s edge and residents don’t naturally go there. The same would probably hold true in South Boston.<sup>216</sup>

The Menino administration had its own hopes for the master plan. Mayor Menino saw the proposed Boston Convention and Exhibition Center (BCEC) and corresponding waterfront development as his legacy to the city. In as much, he was perceived as very “pro-development” but knew that the Southie community would have to be acknowledged. For Tom O’Brien, new to his post of BRA Director, the *South Boston Seaport Master Plan* was his first big test. While other projects were in the works, such as Millennium Place near Downtown Crossing, none were of the scale and political magnitude of the Seaport plan. In addition to the “test” this plan posed for the two men, the city had other interests in the plan. In Boston, city officials had a history of using private development money to create public benefits. The city didn’t have the money or the will to pay for the open space and amenities along the proposed HarborWalk. The Federal Courthouse on Fan Pier is a project which exemplifies the use of developer’s (in this case, the

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<sup>212</sup> Martin Nee, Executive Director, South Boston Neighborhood Development Corporation, Interview (April 28, 1998).

<sup>213</sup> Kairos Shen, Assistant Director of Urban Design, Boston Redevelopment Authority, Interview (April 7, 1998); Martin Nee.

<sup>214</sup>Kairos Shen.

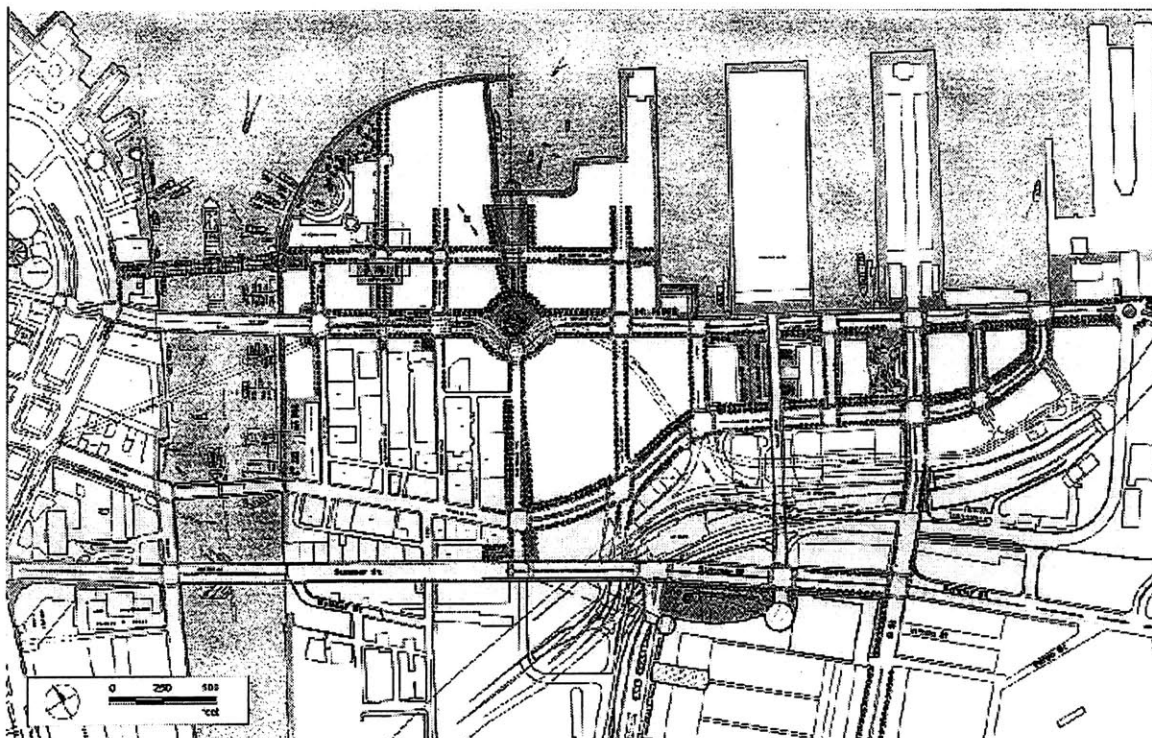
<sup>215</sup>Andrew Hargens.

<sup>216</sup>Vivien Li.



General Services Administration) money for public benefits such as an outdoor plaza, public boat docking facilities, and an art gallery. Linkage money, mitigation requirements, and other provisions that could be built into the Seaport master plan would provide private money to pay for public amenities such as parks, HarborWalk improvements, street furniture, boat docks, and even the programming of public events.

There were others who had a stake in the master plan. While there were land-owners of small parcels (a case in point is the Convention Center site which was comprised of many separately-owned parcels), there were really only a handful of major land holders in the South Boston Seaport and all had a keen interest in the regulatory processes underway in the district. Massport was a big player, owning over 300 acres of land. The Pritzker Family of Chicago, owner of the Hyatt Hotel chain, controlled the parcel adjacent to the Federal Courthouse on the Fan Pier. The McCourt Company also owned key real estate along New Northern Avenue and had been very vocal about the necessity for a plan for the Seaport. In fact, Frank McCourt hired architect Howard Elkus to create a vision for the Seaport and had been presenting a slide show of the proposal to public and private figures in Boston for three years prior to 1997. The McCourt vision likened the Seaport to the Back Bay and attempted to create New Northern Avenue in the image of



**Fig. 39.** Proposed Streetscape for the South Boston Seaport. This BRA plan is identical to the McCourt Company plan for the district, except the McCourt plan shows a complete traffic circle on New Northern Avenue. *Source: The South Boston Seaport: A Master Plan for the Fort Point and South Boston Waterfront.*

the Commonwealth Mall. Interestingly, the McCourt 'vision,' like the city's, was a two-dimensional representation, fixed in plan formalism and lacking the depth of a three dimensional model. McCourt's quiet lobbying seemed to have paid off as the BRA plan was strikingly similar to his own. The two plans are exactly the same save that the McCourt version shows a complete traffic circle on Northern Avenue instead of the half circle on the BRA plan. McCourt believed ground rules should be established for development and that everyone should abide by them. In fact, most developers wanted a master plan so that they could proceed with their plans under more certain regulatory circumstances than existed in 1997.

There was development pressure from other quarters as well. In order to secure the state funding for the convention center, 4800 hotel rooms had to be on line at the time of the center's opening. Developers used the legislation to put pressure on the Menino Administration to streamline the regulatory process and get things moving in South Boston. The incompleteness of the plan, or more accurately, the lack of a plan caused continued concerns for developers and the community. In February of 1998, Tom O'Brien, in response to neighborhood concerns, imposed temporary zoning curbs on the district in the form of an Interim Planning Overlay District (IPOD), which included a 150-foot height limit on all buildings. While the obvious concern was that development would move forward before a plan could be put in place (the BRA had, by this time, stated it would take until the fall of 1998 to revise the plan), the 150-foot height limit gave the community a bargaining chip for additional linkage money for taller buildings. Developers warned that tough zoning curbs would jeopardize any waterfront development. And indeed, soon thereafter, the developers for Fan Pier withdraw their plan for development because of the IPOD building height limits and pressure from state and local officials to wait for a master plan. They suggested that an entirely new project could be forthcoming and that it could very well have a smaller office component. Interestingly, less commercial space would mean less linkage money for Southie as linkage is tied to commercial, not residential development. So while Southie wished to encourage commercial development in hopes of creating linkage, and in avoiding luxury housing that could shift neighborhood demographics and political clout, provisions for additional linkage for commercial buildings over the 150-foot IPOD limit may have given developers incentive to push for more housing. Massport too, was on the verge of recommending two teams of developers to lease a prime 1.5 acre lot known as "Parcel F" for a 250-foot high office building and a 170-high hotel) but put it on hold because of interim height limits.

While their interests diverged on some issues, environmental groups and harbor advocates closely followed *The South Boston Seaport Master Plan*. The Conservation Law Foundation (CLF) had an interest in

reducing the amount of parking required in any new development in the Seaport, and was an advocate for a waterfront fully accessible to the public. The Boston Harbor Association (TBHA) and Save the Harbor/Save the Bay, were concerned with the quality of water in Boston Harbor, an accessible harbor, and the preservation of the working port in Boston. City and State environmental agencies had legal control over development through Chapter 91 regulations governing the protection of working port areas and public accessibility to the waterfront.

Other Boston neighborhoods also had a stake in waterfront development. As stated by the members of the “expert panel” at the Boston Conference in April 1998, the Seaport should be a place for everyone. All of Boston has the right to access the water and benefit from jobs created from Seaport development. In particular, Roxbury residents were interested in Seaport-related jobs and community leaders from that neighborhood wanted to ensure access to the waterfront, especially for inner-city children. The Reverend Ray Hammond, pastor of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Roxbury, and a member of the conference panel, supported earlier decisions to award Southie special benefits because it would be most impacted, but urged all neighborhoods be given a voice in harbor planning. “The goal should be for Boston’s diversity to be well represented here,” said Hammond.<sup>217</sup> SAND echoed these thoughts when it stated, on its web site, “The BRA must allow the seaport district to be developed through a truly open and public process.”<sup>218</sup>

For others, such as planners, architects, and urban advocates, the *South Boston Seaport Master Plan* was simply the biggest thing to come along in Boston over one hundred years. Often compared to the filling of the Back Bay, the project created interest in what form this new planning project would take, and people seemed especially concerned that the master plan reflect the “true” Boston, whatever that meant.

In April 1998, Southie politicians were asked to articulate their goals for the linkage money that would eventually be generated by development in the Seaport. Councilor Kelly emphasized that change doesn’t necessarily mean improvement. He wanted funding to “keep the enclave just the way it is, by building affordable housing for those born and bred in Southie by improving education, particularly in the area’s parochial schools.” “We are not going to use that money to clean streets. We’re not going to use that

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<sup>217</sup>The Boston Conference (Boston, MA, April 14, 15, 16, 1998).

<sup>218</sup>Seaport Alliance for a Neighborhood Design.

money to build parks. We pay taxes to the city so the city maintains the streets and cleans the parks.<sup>219</sup>”

The city was cautiously quiet on Kelly’s goals to provide housing “for those born and bred in Southie.” Tom O’Brien responded to Kelly’s remarks by saying, “I don’t know if it is legal or not.<sup>220</sup>” Federal fair housing guidelines precluded limiting new units just to South Boston residents. Politicians were also eager for linkage money to be targeted to education used mostly by Southie residents. Hence Kelly’s emphasis on assisting parochial schools. As Peggy Davis-Mullen, City Councilor-at-Large said, “We should continue to work on public schools, but the reality is most . . . constituents just don’t use them because they don’t work.<sup>221</sup>”

### Political Climate

*The South Boston Seaport Master Plan* was undertaken in the wake of the failed Massport/Robert Kraft attempt to build a Patriots Stadium in South Boston. In what has been described as a debacle and a fiasco, Southie came out in full force in 1996 to tell Mr. Kraft, the owner of the Patriots, just where to put his stadium. It was in this climate that *The South Boston Seaport Master Plan* was produced, and city planners were well aware of this. *The Boston Globe Magazine* featuring a profile of BRA Director Tom O’Brien in February 1998, stated,

. . . O’Brien knew that the best plan in the world couldn’t be carried out if it were derailed by the community activism for which South Boston is famous. All he had to do was look at Robert Kraft’s ill-fated proposal last year to build a 70,000-seat open-air football stadium for the New England Patriots near the Reserve Channel. So O’Brien has taken pains to reach out to South Boston residents, trying to cut off potential sources of criticism before they can sprout.<sup>222</sup>

In fact, when asked why the BRA decided to undertake a master plan for the area then, when Southie was still smoldering from the Patriots Stadium debacle, and ready and eager to enter another fight, Kairos Shen, the BRA employee responsible for the urban design elements of the plan, said he had no real answer other than the “blank slate of South Boston is too compelling to leave alone” and also that, “the infrastructure

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<sup>219</sup>Tina Cassidy, *The Boston Globe*, April 19 1998.

<sup>220</sup>Tina Cassidy.

<sup>221</sup>Tina Cassidy.

<sup>222</sup> Tina Cassidy, "The Dealmaker," *The Boston Globe Magazine*, February 15 1998: 17-32.

needs design.” When pushed a little harder though, he admitted that the BRA’s hand was forced in master planning the South Boston Seaport before they wished. “The convention center increased the need for a master plan because of community pressure.” Southie residents were concerned about the torrent of development that would be unleashed by the construction of the convention center.<sup>223</sup>

Development pressure was certainly heating up in the district. Massport was the most aggressive developer in the Seaport. Across Northern Avenue from the World Trade Center, the Seaport Hotel, on Massport land, was nearing completion and the development of Massport’s “Parcel F” was underway. In 1998, the economy was strong and the real estate market was hot but no-one expected it to stay that way forever and the city wanted to take advantage of the current boom. “We need more space today,” O’Brien argued, “or we’re going to start losing jobs.” And the push to get South Boston through the regulatory process was crucial. As the developer Don Chiafaro said, all his projects “are on a “now” time frame. I don’t want to be building projects in five years. I think there’s going to be an end to this.”<sup>224</sup>

*The Boston Globe* also put increasing pressure on the Menino administration to offer up a lasting vision for the waterfront. The previous Boston Globe publisher was a founder of The Boston Harbor Association and the Harbor became a pet project of *The Globe*. As Vivien Li stated, “this is something no one could have foreseen. In a sense, *The Globe* is setting the agenda for Harbor-related issues.”<sup>225</sup> One week after the announcement of the master plan, the Globe felt compelled to offer insight on how five other cities are planning their waterfronts. The implicit message to the Menino Administration was, “get some help.” And so, everything that was done was done under the microscope of the press.

The roles of Southie’s local, state, and federal politicians must also be acknowledged. In other Boston neighborhoods such as East Boston, for instance, differences within the community are highlighted in the media. No so in Southie, where the community is typically represented with one voice, and that voice is often Councilor Kelly’s or Senator Lynch’s. As Vivien Li described, the politicians work together in Southie. The South Boston Leadership Committee brings all the players to one table so that efforts can be

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<sup>223</sup>Kairos Shen.

<sup>224</sup>Andrew Caffrey, *The Boston Globe*, December 7 1997.

<sup>225</sup>Vivien Li.

coordinated. . .there is very rarely public dissension on the part of the Southie leadership.<sup>226</sup> The community planning process has been less concerned with bringing different factions of the community together (such as residents and local business owners who may live elsewhere), and more about getting Southie what it wants. In Southie, politicians set the tone of community support or opposition to a proposed project. When asked about the apparent lack of grassroots community activism, Martin Nee stated that, except for the activity of the St. Vincents neighborhood, the community was mostly reactive. “We usually fall in step with the politicians here. . . they have a pretty good sense of what is going on and have a good sense of what Southie residents want.”<sup>227</sup> As Lorraine Downey explained, Southie residents have a high comfort level with their politicians.<sup>228</sup>

### Strategies and Stances

The City of Boston undertook the master planning process with a keen sense of this political climate. Well aware of the importance of the success of the convention center to the city economy and Mayor Menino’s reputation, and very careful about including the community in the planning process, the city wrote *The South Boston Seaport Master Plan* for Southie. This is evident from the very name of the district: The South Boston Seaport. As *The Globe* stated, “Boston’s waterfront. . . has [been] dubbed the South Boston Seaport District.”<sup>229</sup> Prior to the publication of the plan, the area was known simply as South Boston, or Fort Point. When asked how and why the name was chosen, BRA Director Tom O’Brien answered, “It was clearly a question of playing to the neighborhood.”<sup>230</sup> Vivien Li concurred and believed that Michael Vaughan probably had a lot to do with the naming decision. Whoever made the decision, it was made because of the city’s acknowledgment of the “ownership” of the district. In an interview with Kairos Shen, Assistant Director of Urban Design at the BRA, he stated that the Commonwealth Flats/Marine Industrial area of South Boston, “has always been owned by the people of South Boston.” When asked to clarify this, he said that the Seaport master plan was prepared with the full understanding and due consideration

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<sup>226</sup>Vivien Li.

<sup>227</sup>Martin Nee.

<sup>228</sup>Lorraine Downey.

<sup>229</sup>Anthony Flint, *The Boston Globe*, December 1 1997.

<sup>230</sup>Tom O’Brien, Director, Boston Redevelopment Authority, Interview (APA National Conference, Boston MA, April 7, 1998).

that this land was “politically owned” by Southie.<sup>231</sup>

And so, the city created a new name for the district --the South Boston Seaport. During the efforts to site the Patriots Stadium in the district, Massport dubbed the area “Commonwealth Flats.” Michael Vaughan, regional deputy at the BRA, and the liaison to the South Boston community stated that “Commonwealth Flats was just a cute name concocted by Massport and Bob Kraft when they were trying to “sell” their stadium idea. In fact, the area has always been called South Boston or Fort Point Channel by Southie residents.<sup>232</sup>” The name *Commonwealth* Flats implied that the area belonged to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and so reduced Southie’s claim of ownership. In *The South Boston Seaport Master Plan*, care is used to avoid this term and Boston Flats is used instead.<sup>233</sup> The document also is carefully inclusive of the South Boston community and acknowledges Southie’s claimed “ownership” of the district. The master plan stresses the importance of the future of the working port (where Southie residents still look for jobs), assures Southie that connections between the neighborhood and the waterfront will be made so as not to cut off residents from the port, and ensures that benefits will “flow” to the South Boston community.

Southie’s “connectedness” to, and claimed “ownership” of, the seaport was at the heart of the issue in this planning endeavor. Southie was afraid of losing control or “ownership” of the Seaport through the construction of market-rate and luxury housing. At the December 1997 meeting of the Boston Civic Design Commission (BCDC), the BRA urban design staff presented a model showing a possible development scenario for the Seaport. Homer Russell, Director of Urban Design for the BRA was taken to task for not ensuring more residential units would be provided in the Seaport. His response was, “My hands are tied. The community doesn’t want any units here at the waterfront. . .it will upset their voting demographics.<sup>234</sup>” Most of the maneuvering regarding this issue was done privately. Michael Vaughan and Kairos Shen both confirmed that Kelly had been adamant about no housing in the Seaport. Li said that the issue had not come up at any of the SBWC meetings until an April 1998 meeting of a special sub-committee discussing housing. One of the members of the committee mentioned that luxury housing

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<sup>231</sup>Kairos Shen.

<sup>232</sup>Michael Vaughan.

<sup>233</sup>Boston Redevelopment Authority.

<sup>234</sup> Homer Russell, Director of Urban Design, BRA, Boston Civic Design Commission Meeting (Boston, MA, December, 1997).

should not be a part of the Seaport because in the 1983 Ward 6 elections Kelly only won by little more than one hundred votes. It seemed to matter little that those elections were held fifteen years ago; the threat was still very real. One possible solution aired at that meeting was to require developers to build one affordable unit for each luxury unit provided. This was discussed as something that could be dictated by the master plan (above and beyond linkage money) and a way to keep a politically balanced district.<sup>235</sup>

The city did everything it could to make sure the master planning process was not forestalled by other things. O'Brien asked Charles Euchner, a staff member working on the Boston400 comprehensive planning initiative to wait to meet with the South Boston community until after the master plan was introduced to Southie. So, Euchner had met with all other neighborhoods in Boston by late November of 1997, except Southie. O'Brien wanted nothing to go wrong in Southie.<sup>236</sup> As a result, the introduction of the plan to the community was a cautious step. As O'Brien was quick to note in an interview after the press conference, the release of the master plan "is a beginning." And he suggested that nothing was set in stone.<sup>237</sup> The introduction of the plan to Southie residents at the Tynan School in December of 1997 was a carefully scripted event. Ken Sinkiewicz, Chairman of the SBWC, and a Southie native, ran the meeting in what appeared to be an effort to let residents know that the community was in the driver's seat. Even while introducing the plan, he repeatedly emphasized that the plan they would see that night was "only a beginning:"

On behalf of South Boston, all have played a role in the plan's creation. Now I am not suggesting that any of them or even the waterfront committee here tonight are saying this is our plan. This is not our plan. This is a plan which the BRA staff have put together, working with us in thirty-two meetings that went over one hundred hours of pretty serious debate that got contentious at times and we believe this document represents something that as a community we need to spend the next two or three months talking about. Now nobody is asking you to read this tonight, absorb it and ask good questions about it. Now I'll turn it over to BRA staff, they will walk you through the basic elements of the plan. We will open it up to any question, any comments people from the floor want to make. We'll stay as long as we need to stay to tonight. After tonight we will go through a series of additional community meetings which again, the director of the BRA will talk a

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<sup>235</sup>Vivien Li.

<sup>236</sup> Charles Euchner, BRA Boston400 Assistant Director, Presentation at MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning Student Forum (Cambridge, MA, November 20, 1997).

<sup>237</sup>*The Boston Globe*, November 26 1997.



little bit about.<sup>238</sup>

Repeatedly at that meeting, O'Brien stressed the fact that the city would listen to all Southie's concerns. But he also cautioned Southie against thinking that if they didn't approve a plan, development would go away. As he told them, "development is coming whether there is a plan or not. Use the plan to get as much as you can."<sup>239</sup> In urging Southie to get as much as possible from the development, O'Brien positioned himself as someone "on their side" and set up a planning scenario that relied heavily on deal making. His comments reinforced Southie's desire to set the agenda for the master plan, as the "most impacted" neighborhood, and effectively locked other interests out of the process. The Mayor reinforced this in the *Waterfront Report*, a newsletter the BRA published solely for the purpose of providing ongoing information about the Seaport plan. In the February 1998 issue, the Mayor wrote,

Since the Seaport Plan Interim Report was released in November, I have had the opportunities to meet with the South Boston community to discuss the plan. I am very appreciative of the active role South Boston residents are taking in shaping the Seaport plan. . . Today, we have a much better idea of where you want your community to be in twenty years. . .<sup>240</sup>

South Boston political input has been strong from the start of the planning process. Local politicians assisted in the selection of the 21-member SBWC. Regarding this committee, Li explained, "these people are the cream of the crop, and very savvy and intelligent."<sup>241</sup> Planning involved meetings with the SBWC, and with the South Boston Leadership Committee which was made up of the local politicians and neighborhood organization leaders. This was not to say there were no other voices in Southie, vying for a piece of the plan and influence on city officials. After the release of the master plan, there were voices in Southie that pushed for the process to be opened up. In January 1998, the city announced more detailed plans for residents to join three task forces on housing, transportation and the public realm. According to Linda Haar, Director of Planning and Zoning for the BRA, participation of residents on the task forces (other than those that had been involved in the process as part of the SBWC) had been light. Perhaps this was best explained by a Project Manager with the City of Boston, Department of Neighborhood Development who said, "it's not that Southie doesn't have public participation. . . it's just that their form of

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<sup>238</sup>South Boston Community Meeting (Tynan School, Boston, December 2, 1997).

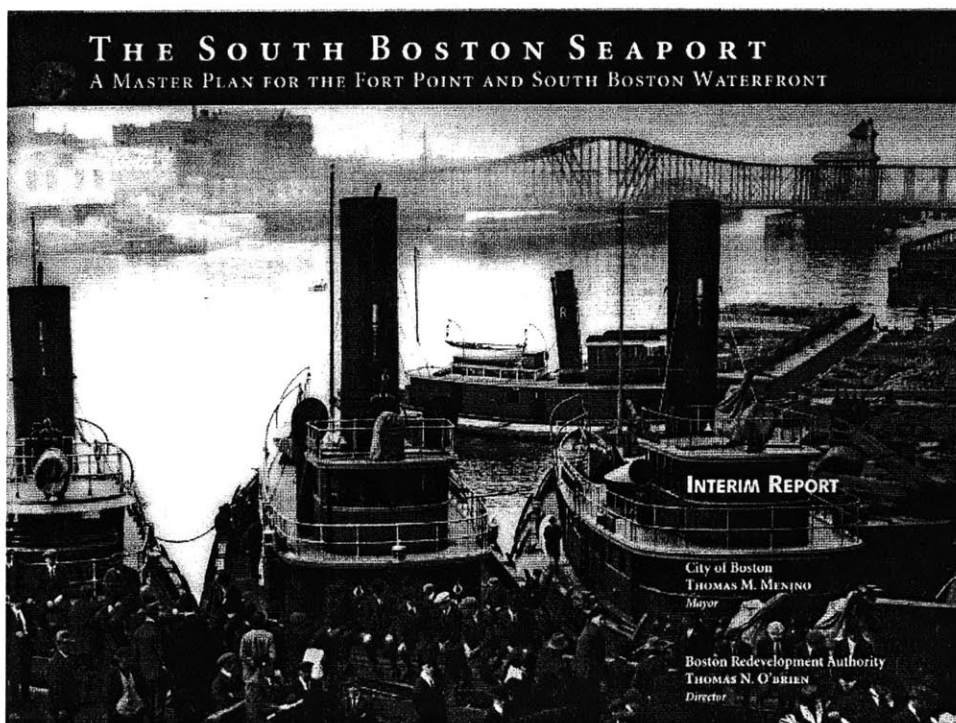
<sup>239</sup>South Boston Community Meeting.

<sup>240</sup>Thomas Menino, *Waterfront Report*, February 11 1998.

<sup>241</sup>Vivien Li.

public participation isn't about attending a public meeting or task force, but rather, it's about calling up their local politician.<sup>242</sup>

The city was also careful in its master planning strategy regarding jobs. As Lorraine Downey said, “the issue of the working port is one we deal with very very carefully here at City Hall.<sup>243</sup>” The employment concerns of Southie residents were addressed in the introduction to the *South Boston Seaport Master Plan* in which Mayor Thomas Menino was careful to include mention of the labor force in Southie and the existence of “an international deep water port .” Even the cover of the master plan illustrated an historic photo of the working port, implying, perhaps, a strong future role for port activities.



**Fig. 40 .** Cover of the master plan interim report, showing an historic port photograph.  
*Source: The South Boston Seaport: A Master Plan for the Fort Point and South Boston Waterfront.*

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<sup>242</sup> David West, Project Manager, City of Boston Department of Neighborhood Development, Interview (April 9, 1998).

<sup>243</sup> Lorraine Downey, Director, Environment Department, City of Boston , Interview (May 11, 1998).

While the community was vocal in its concerns about gentrification and traffic, it was clear that residents understood the value of a master plan. As Senator Lynch stated, “It’s much much better than trying to fight this thing one parcel at a time. We could end up with a very bizarre result if we did that.”<sup>244</sup> With a master plan, Southie could negotiate benefits for all Seaport development. And Southie politicians moved one step ahead of the plan to ensure the community got the benefits it wanted. In a complicated deal that tied the Seaport plan to the convention center legislation in ways that Tom O’Brien didn’t want, Councilor Kelly claimed he would kill the convention center legislation unless Mayor Menino signed a separate Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with him and Senator Lynch, guaranteeing not only 100% of the linkage money for the convention center, but also giving the community 50% of the linkage money generated by development in the Seaport and 100% of all additional linkage payments for buildings exceeding the 150-foot height limit in the district. Basically “Developers who want to construct a building higher than 150 feet in the waterfront area. . . will have to negotiate a community benefits package with elected officials. . . any cash payments will be deposited into the South Boston Betterment Trust.”<sup>245</sup>

One developer had their own strategy for maximizing benefits from the plan. Of all the land-owners in the district, the McCourts understood best how the community plays the game and how it takes care of its own. Frank McCourt, once a board member of the Children’s Museum, was President of South Boston Neighborhood House, the leading social services agency in Southie. By using personal donations and his significant clout to encourage others to donate, he spent years building goodwill in the community in a very quiet way. As one source close to the process said, “of all the land-owners in the South Boston Seaport, the McCourts will get the biggest free ride.” McCourt and his wife Jamie seemed to understand better than anyone, what is important in Southie. In an April 1998 *Boston Globe* profile on Jamie, her statements perfectly echoed the comments of Southie residents at master plan community meetings when she stated, “We live here, Our family is invested. And I think at the end of it all, it is different. It’s about our children, and our children’s children. . . they have an opportunity, if they want, to be part of this legacy, this future of Boston.”<sup>246</sup> While they live in Brookline, Frank stresses the blue-collar roots of his family--“union men.” As the source said, Paul Nace (local spokesperson for the Pritzker Family--owners of Fan Pier land) could learn some lessons from the McCourts in strategy.

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<sup>244</sup>Tina Cassidy, pp. 17-32.

<sup>245</sup>Anthony Flint.

<sup>246</sup>*The Boston Globe*, April 5, 1998.

The environmental interest groups were a strong voice in their opposition to the plan and the process. Concerned about public access to the waterfront, too much parking, environmental issues in the Harbor, and the proposed heights of buildings at the water's edge, the CLF had staff working full time on researching alternative visions for the South Boston Seaport. After the publication of the master plan, the CLF went so far as to post an opening for a planning intern to "assist CLF in its work to shape both a master plan for the 1,000 acre Seaport district on the South Boston waterfront and individual developments proposed for the area." In February 1997, the CLF hosted a workshop on the Seaport and is undergoing internal discussions of how to open up the planning process to the public in a better way.

Interestingly, other public agencies voiced concern over their lack of input into the process. The master plan would have to receive approval from Massachusetts Coastal Zone Management for compliance with Chapter 91 regulations which dictated uses of land at the water's edge and set rules for public access to the water. These regulations were not even considered in the interim report. In fact, in the "Next Steps" section of the master plan, it states, "An analysis will be undertaken to determine where the land use and dimensional recommendations in this plan differ with those of the Chapter 91."<sup>247</sup> In December 1997, *The Boston Globe* revealed that Massachusetts Chapter 91 regulations impose height limits of 55 feet for buildings near the water's edge although *The South Boston Seaport Master Plan* allowed Fan Pier development to reach 225 feet in height. A lack of Municipal HarborPlan for South Boston (the only area of the city not to have one) means the city will have a difficult time negotiating these heights.<sup>248</sup> Early on, people recognized that the plan made no attempt to deal with the environmental regulations for waterfront development. *The Boston Globe* reported that some had labeled the plan, "an unimaginative framework for a mini-downtown with few inviting open spaces and too many tall buildings near the water to pass state environmental guidelines -- restrictions that O'Brien may have been hoping to outmaneuver."<sup>249</sup> O'Brien acknowledged some leeway was hoped for when he said, the administration of Acting Governor Paul Cellucci, "has tried to be thoughtful about regulatory impositions on development opportunities."<sup>250</sup> "The city's posture has certainly been aggressive," said one state environmental regulator. "This is about who

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<sup>247</sup>Boston Redevelopment Authority, p. 39.

<sup>248</sup>Anthony Flint, *The Boston Globe*, December 9 1997.

<sup>249</sup>Tina Cassidy, pp. 17-32.

<sup>250</sup>Anthony Flint.

controls development in this area,” said one City Hall official.”<sup>251</sup>

### Outcome

The BRA “spoke” to South Boston residents with the master plan, but the Menino administration underestimated the power of other groups in what appeared to be a gross miscalculation of the special interests involved. Vivien Li explained the miscalculation in this way, “The day the Mayor [at the November press conference announcing the master plan] said ‘we are creating a new Boston,’ it moved from a neighborhood plan to a city plan. People heard him say “once-in-a-lifetime” opportunity and felt they needed to get involved and make their voices heard.”<sup>252</sup> Suddenly, what was a planning process that had been tightly controlled by the BRA to include South Boston voices and a select group of developers and port advocates, was thrown open in the public arena.

Leaders from Boston’s inner city neighborhoods expressed dismay at the “perceived ownership of the process by Southie.” As an inner-city activist said, “The clean up [of Boston Harbor] was not paid for by developers. Nor was it paid for by any one neighborhood. Benefits should not only go to one neighborhood but to all neighborhoods.”<sup>253</sup> As Li said, “In retrospect, the SBWC should have been opened up then [after the publication of the Master Plan], to city-wide representation. The BRA didn’t understand that the community process that had worked before, with the South Boston St. Vincent’s Neighborhood Association, for example, would not work any longer for the South Boston Seaport.”<sup>254</sup> ”

It appears that in place of a plan, a deal was struck. Perhaps too much emphasis was placed on appeasing Southie. It seems, for “insiders,” that acceptance of the plan was dictated by the mere location of the first meeting between Southie residents and the BRA in December of 1997. As Michael Vaughan at the BRA put it,

everyone in Southie knows that *where* the meetings are located dictates the tone of the meeting and acceptance of the proposal. A community meeting at the Gavin School means that everyone shows up swinging. That school was the site of all the meetings regarding school busing back in the 1970s. It has a history of contentious meetings. On October 26, 1996, four hundred people

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<sup>251</sup> Anthony Flint.

<sup>252</sup> Vivien Li.

<sup>253</sup> The Boston Conference (Boston, MA, April 14, 15, 16, 1998).

<sup>254</sup> Vivien Li.

packed the Gavin School to show opposition to the Patriots Stadium proposal. Senator Lynch picked the location for that meeting. Southie residents knew what that meant. The meeting for the Seaport Master Plan was at the Tynan School. I picked that school as the location.<sup>255</sup>

This is a secret code of sorts, and let the unwary outsider beware! What Michael Vaughan implied here was that the politicians let him pick the site of the meeting, sending a signal that, while the community would voice its concerns, Southie would not elevate the disagreements to the level of contentiousness seen in either for school busing or the Patriots Stadium. In other words, the plan would be discussed, negotiated, and eventually accepted by the community.

In fact, the “deals” that were made set the tone for the master plan to come. Some of the most significant items were hammered out early:

“David Barrett of Boston Properties Corp. recently warned that excessively tight zoning curbs could jeopardize hopes for a waterfront renaissance. BRA spokeswoman Kelley Quinn insisted yesterday that the 150-foot standard proposed in the Interim Planning Overlay District “is a base height. It’s not the maximum height allowable. Quinn said any waterfront developer wishing to exceed that height could win a waiver if the developer presented a design and “benefits package” acceptable to the BRA and the South Boston community. What it comes down to, she said, is “if you want to go higher, you have to pay for it.”<sup>256</sup>”

This same height limit and waiver process was expected to remain in place with the final plan. Not everyone at the BRA was happy with the IPOD. As Kairos Shen said, the IPOD would most likely remain intact with final zoning that sets as-of-right height limits at 150 feet. The zoning will “not have created predictability which is what zoning is supposed to do. The linkage aren’t being done right.” In fact, he actually stated that he believed the IPOD could be successfully challenged in court.<sup>257</sup>

The Seaport master plan ‘deal’ was done when the separate MOU was signed as part of the convention center legislation. In that MOU, Southie got 50% of the linkage monies for Seaport development and 100% of the additional linkage created by heights over 150 feet. With building heights limited to 150 feet, Southie was able to get a greater percentage than typical and to get it all for South Boston; most people agree that there will be buildings on the waterfront that go significantly higher than 150 feet. While the

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<sup>255</sup>Michael Vaughan.

<sup>256</sup>*The Boston Globe*, March 7 1998.

<sup>257</sup>Kairos Shen.

standard linkage applies only to commercial buildings over 100,000 feet, the negotiated linkage for excess height applies to *all* buildings. Any incentive Southie had to participate in the crafting of a public realm plan was eradicated by the MOU. In fact, Southie had significant incentive to encourage buildings over 150 feet in height.....that's when the real money would kick in--and it would all go to the community.

Perhaps this is what some at the BRA envisioned when they have claimed that “the BRA played too many cards by releasing the master plan.”<sup>258</sup> Although Menino waited to release the plan until the state approved the convention center, he didn't wait quite long enough and Councilor Kelly and Senator Lynch held the convention center hostage at the city level until Southie's part of the deal was assured on both the BCEC and on the Seaport plan. In a likely scenario, it could be imagined that now, South Boston's politicians don't care much what happens in the Seaport; they have their jobs and affordable housing linkage. It is ironic that after months of community meetings in which Southie residents demanded that buildings remain low “to preserve the fresh salt air and sea breezes for our community,”<sup>259</sup> the linkage agreement says, the bigger the development, the better for Southie. In fact, Michael Vaughan admitted that Southie groups were already at his door, asking for advance loans for the linkage money they knew would begin pouring in soon.<sup>260</sup> Perhaps this implicit approval of the Seaport plan is what Shen was referring to when he cryptically said, “we have enough to go forward right now....but we won't, it isn't good planning.”<sup>261</sup>

But while Southie may have been taken care of, there were others involved now and Shen admitted that the “master plan is running into trouble. . .there is too much to deal with.”<sup>262</sup> It appears the BRA did not calculate the power of the environmental lobby. According to an article in *The Massachusetts Lawyer*, state environmental regulators were in the drivers seat on this plan.<sup>263</sup> When criticized that the plan did not meet Chapter 91 requirements, and when it was pointed out that the City had not begun its Municipal HarborPlan, which was required to be prepared in conjunction with the Seaport master plan, city officials

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<sup>258</sup>Kairos Shen.

<sup>259</sup>South Boston Community Meeting.

<sup>260</sup>Michael Vaughan.

<sup>261</sup>Kairos Shen.

<sup>262</sup>Kairos Shen.

<sup>263</sup>"The Massachusetts Lawyer" (September 29, 1997).

said only that, “O’Brien has already contacted state Environmental Affairs Secretary Trudy Coxe to try to smooth out that process.”<sup>264</sup> It seems odd that the “smoothing out of that process” did not begin until after the interim report was published. But the city felt compelled to “deal” with Southie first. *The Boston Globe* noted that, “Menino and O’Brien worked for months to line up support, including from representatives of residential South Boston, and coordinate efforts with Massport, a major landowner in the district with its own plans for development at the base of the World Trade Center.”<sup>265</sup>

This careful attention to Southie appears to have worked, but at a possible price. O’Brien does deals first and planning later. During a conversation in April of 1998, Tom O’Brien said, “as the plan develops it will move away from a community emphasis.”<sup>266</sup> Perhaps he meant that once the “deal was done” with linkage agreements, the BRA would be free to move on to other issues. Standard linkage money as well as the additional funds created by exceeding the 150-foot height limit would mean that “South Boston. . . is in line for enough mitigation to fund significant changes in a neighborhood that has often tried to resist change at all costs. The money alone could total \$60 million over the next 20 years. . . The city established a neighborhood trust fund that expected its first big check -- \$600,000 -- by May 15, 1998.”<sup>267</sup> The community wanted as much linkage money as possible, an incentive to push for taller buildings on the waterfront, while others are fighting to create a public realm of which the city can be proud. While taller buildings and a good public realm aren’t necessarily exclusive, there was general acknowledgment that the north-facing waterfront of the Seaport would need lower buildings to give a sense of human vibrancy to the HarborWalk and other open spaces. It appears that deal making assured community approval (and acceptance of Southie’s vision of affordable housing and job training) at the price of a city-wide vision. That lack of vision appears to have been acknowledged by city officials. The BRA planned a “forum” in June 1998 to garner ideas for the waterfront in a move seen by many as an attempt to find the inspiration, and perhaps the support, to drive the master plan. He could have been describing South Boston when City Councilor Thomas M. Keane Jr., speaking about City Hall Plaza, said, “I guess the question here is, have we let the imperatives of getting this deal done impede the sense of creating a vision for what it should be?”

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<sup>264</sup> Anthony Flint.

<sup>265</sup> *The Boston Globe*, January 26 1998.

<sup>266</sup> Tom O’Brien.

<sup>267</sup> *The Boston Globe*.



## Chapter 5

### Common Threads

*Chapters 3 and 4* describe eight planning interventions over the space of a little more than sixty years in South Boston. The events that are described are complex ones, involving varied political players, far-ranging proposals, and seemingly very different means of interaction between Southie and “outsiders.” And yet, clearly, there are common threads that run through these cases. This chapter explores the remarkable continuity with which Southie has engaged in planning efforts, and attempts to place these common threads within the context of South Boston’s cultural and historical landscape. Also studied in this chapter are the patterns of stances taken by “outsiders” when dealing with the community and what effect these stances had on the outcome in each of the cases. Five common patterns of behavior and engagement emerge from the eight case studies presented in this thesis. But before those patterns are discussed, the broader issue of the cases must be reviewed.

### Frontyard/Backyard

Geographically, and metaphorically, the cases can be divided into two groups. Southie has a Front Yard and a backyard. Both of these areas, each about 1000 acres in size, are under the same political jurisdiction. Of the eight cases since the 1930s, only two, public housing and urban renewal, focused on the traditional residential section of South Boston.



**Fig. 41.** Aerial photo of South Boston with the “Frontyard” or residential district outlined. *Source: Mass GIS and MIT.*

This area of Southie, including the beaches along Boston Harbor, is the community's front yard. This land is the site of the original settlement of the Peninsula in the 1600s and is where old-timers in the community trace their roots. In every way, this area is OFF limits to outside intervention. While the lower end of the residential neighborhood has often been termed a "slum," the community's rejection of urban renewal plans illustrates how resolutely residents reject this label and resent outsiders attempting to "improve" their community.

The simple matter of parking illustrates just how defensive the community is regarding the traditional neighborhood. Most residents of the City of Boston who live in communities in or close to downtown have what is deemed "resident parking" privileges. Because parking is at a premium in the first place, and because automobile commuters would happily take free street spots in lieu of paying twenty dollars per day to park in public garages, communities such as the North End, South End, Back Bay, and Beacon Hill have resident parking programs in place. In these neighborhoods, a resident can obtain a sticker for his or her automobile that allows on-street parking in the community. Signs restricting parking to "residents only" are posted on most residential streets, while business thoroughfares are usually equipped with parking meters. Visitor passes are obtainable for guests visiting community residents.

In Southie, a community that, over the years, has consistently voiced concerns about increased traffic congestion, and lack of parking for community residents, there is no resident parking program. As Michael Vaughan, Regional Deputy of the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) and liaison to South Boston, explains,

Southie won't accept resident parking stickers for the same reason they said no to urban renewal. . the government isn't going to tell them what to do. If they get resident parking, they'll get meter maids, and then they won't be able to double and triple park, especially on Broadway. Residents are also worried about what happens when family comes to visit from out of town. . .there is no way that the government is going to tell them who can and can't park in their community.<sup>268</sup>

And so, in issues ranging from parking to urban renewal, Southie is protective of its traditional residential enclave--its front yard--and consistently says "no" to outside intervention of any kind.

The remaining six cases presented in this thesis illustrate planning interventions proposed for the

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<sup>268</sup> Michael Vaughan, Regional Deputy, Boston Redevelopment Authority, Interview (April 15, 1998),

community's adjacent waterfront industrial area--an area Southie calls its backyard. In fact, Senator Lynch's scheduled presentation on Southie and its relationship to the Seaport, at the April 1998 MIT/Boston Globe Boston Conference, was entitled, "My Backyard: The Role of Boston's Historic Neighborhoods."



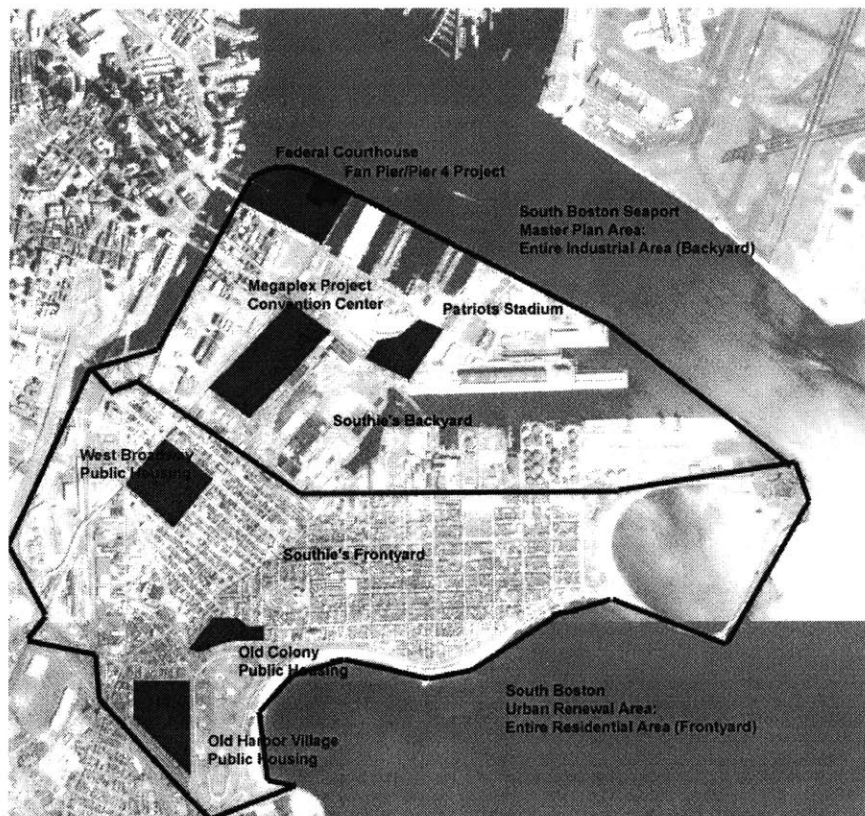
**Fig. 42.** Aerial photo of South Boston with the "Backyard" or marine/ industrial district outlined.  
*Source: Mass GIS and MIT.*

Most of this area was created by filling operations in the nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. The area became symbolic of "opportunity" for the Irish immigrants who settled Southie. The burgeoning industries, and creation of the rail yards in the port area, meant the creation of jobs adjacent to the South Boston residential district. Immigrants moved to the community and worked in the industrial backyard.<sup>269</sup> This traditional relationship between the two parts of South Boston created a strong sense of ownership of the backyard and an expectation that the Seaport area would continue to generate jobs. This relationship helps explain, why long after most port jobs were gone and the rail lines torn up, Southie still felt passionately that the backyard should remain a job generator for residents. In the 1980s, when the Fan Pier project was proposed, Southie politicians were clever to reassert "ownership" and the connection between the two parts

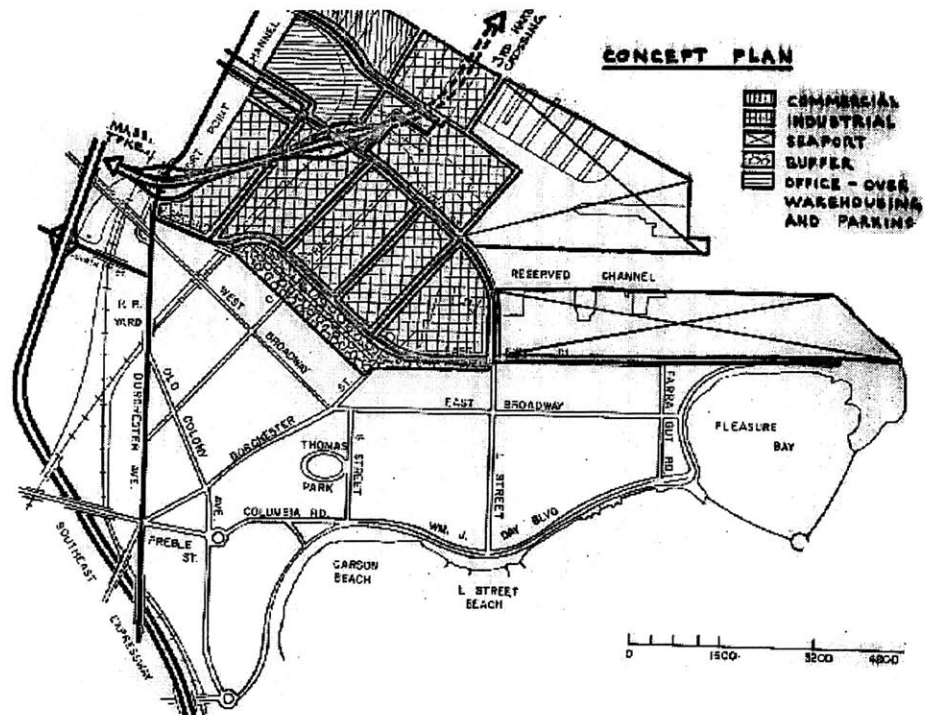
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<sup>269</sup>A 1976 *Economic Development Plan for the Boston Marine Industrial Park* in the South Boston Seaport was very clear about the distinction between residential and industrial South Boston. The report stated, "South Boston is divided geographically into two distinct areas. To the south lies the residential community which stretches from Dorchester Avenue in the west to the Inner Harbor on the east and south. Lying to the north of the residential community is the industrial section with the area between First and Second Street forming the dividing line."

of Southie and maintain their insistence that the backyard still generate benefits for community residents. In the six cases involving the industrial and port area of South Boston which was dubbed the “Seaport” in 1997 by the City of Boston, the backyard is “put to work” for the benefit of the front yard. This helps to explain the aggressiveness with which Southie politicians pursued benefits for the community from these projects. It also explains, in part, why Southie continually claims “impacts” from development in this area, even when other neighborhoods such as Chinatown, and the North End are closer in physical proximity to waterfront development. Southie’s claimed impacts are not based solely on location or calculated traffic projections, but on an historical connection to the Seaport which put bread on the table for community residents.



**Fig. 43.** Aerial photo of South Boston showing the distribution of the eight case studies. *Source: Mass GIS and MIT.*



**Fig. 44.** South Boston District Planning Program from the South Boston Waterfront-Industrial Study of May 1970. Note the clear distinction between the residential and industrial sections of the district and the buffer zone between the two. *Source: South Boston Waterfront-Industrial Study.*

Within this framework of frontyard and backyard in South Boston, the following five common threads are found throughout all the planning cases presented in this thesis:

- The Community as One Voice
- Trust in Elected Leadership
- Political Access as a Form of Public Participation
- Consistent Goals
- A Reluctant Community

### **The Community as One Voice**

Throughout this thesis, the term ‘community’ is used. Is there really such a thing as one “community” in South Boston? In urban neighborhoods, community is a term that often describes a diverse set of socio-economic interests. Middle class professionals can live just blocks from blue-collar workers. Various religious groups exist harmoniously side by side. People of different educational backgrounds can share

churches, social groups, and civic organizations. Sometimes all these groups take part in the planning process, often a dominant group will step forward.

Consistently in the planning stories explored, Southie has presented one voice to the outside world. How has a community successfully managed to maintain its apparent coherence and single mindedness of purpose through changing political times, loss of population, external stresses, and changing demographics? To answer this question it is important to acknowledge that while Southie has presented one voice to outsiders, there is certainly dissension within the community. In fact, Southie's "one voice" is a tactical move rather than a social reality. As more than one public official said, no matter what they say to each other, residents tend to band together when faced with an outside threat.<sup>270</sup> This may go back to the "us vs. them" attitude long cultivated by Southie residents. As shown in *Chapter 2*, the history of residents feeling put upon by city officials and of having unwanted uses dumped in their beloved South Boston, is documented as far back as 1847, when the district was inhabited by wealthy Anglo-Saxon Protestants. In the face of outsider intervention, there seems to be a longstanding tacit agreement to put aside differences for the sake of presenting a united front to the enemy.

This attitude of Southie residents in the face of opposition is not unusual. What is unusual is the continued consistency with which it has been applied throughout the years. In his study of rehabilitation planning in Boston during the 1960s, Langley Keyes describes how neighborhoods rally to find a single voice when faced with an adversarial position:

The great bulk of the population what would be affected by rehabilitation planning constituted a single vocal interest group that maintained an attitude close to what Meyerson and Banfield have called "a communalist unitary conception" of the public interest. Residents might vie with one another for prestige and have radically different incomes and occupations, but when the chips are down, they were all Townies united together against outsiders threatening their urban village--that is, until the issue of renewal split their community into warring factions.<sup>271</sup>

Southie has not experienced the split into warring factions that Keyes describes of the Charlestown community, another Irish Catholic immigrant neighborhood in Boston. In fact, when all of residential

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<sup>270</sup>Vaughan; Kairos Shen, Assistant Director of Urban Design, Boston Redevelopment Authority, Interview (April 7, 1998).

<sup>271</sup>Langley Carleton Keyes, Jr., *The Rehabilitation Planning Game* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1969) 194.

Southie was designated an urban renewal area in the 1960s, the community had no such internal struggles over the merit of the plan. A BRA employee description of the community in 1998 is likely to be just as accurate describing the Southie of the 1960s: “While there are several groups in South Boston, all competing for attention and special interests, all show tremendous fear of gentrification and are suspicious of professionals and other educated people.<sup>272</sup>” Without these internal struggles, it was impossible for Edward Logue, of the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), to communicate with separate community groups to win support for the plan.

Some of the unity presented by Southie may be tied to the community’s longstanding resentment at being labeled a “slum.” In 1994, *U.S. News and World Report*

identified 15 white underclass city neighborhoods, areas where most residents were non-Hispanic whites, 40 percent or more lived in poverty, and many children were raised by single parents. Topping the list, with the highest share of white families headed by a single mother of any white slum, was a section of South Boston’s lower end.<sup>273</sup>

In a fierce pride that extends back to the early immigrant settlement of South Boston, residents reject the label of “slum” and challenge outsiders to dare intervene in a community they view as having few problems. In a *Boston Globe* series on violence and despair in the community, it was reported that, “One obstacle to remedying the lower end’s problems is that many residents refuse to acknowledge them.” One resident, whose son was killed, posted community letters that stated, [my son] was killed by ambivalence, tolerance and a general ‘it can’t happen here’ attitude.<sup>274</sup>”

But strong as Southie’s one voice may appear in the face of opposition, dissention does exist, albeit in weakened form and most commonly behind doors closed to outsiders. In public housing efforts, those displaced by clearance were naturally the most vocal in opposition to the plans. But they were not in the majority (confirm this). In the Fan Pier proposal, those ‘newer’ residents of Fort Point Channel were a dissenting voice but were overshadowed by the “traditional’ community. In discussing that proposal Lorraine Downey, a member of the Fan Piers advisory committee (confirm), found it ironic that at the same

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<sup>272</sup> Kairos Shen, Assistant Director of Urban Design, Boston Redevelopment Authority, Interview (April 7, 1998).

<sup>273</sup> *U.S. News and World Report*, December 9, 1996: 46.

<sup>274</sup> *The Boston Globe*, March 19 1997.

time the community was claiming “ownership’ of the seaport, and stressing the impacts of development, they were disavowing the residential community living in this area, and claiming that these newer residents, many of them artists and younger professionals, did not have legitimacy to speak for the “neighborhood.<sup>275</sup>” The residents of Fort Point Channel were also denied representation on the South Boston Leadership Committee until 1996. The most apparent split, therefore, is between the traditional community and the new community, made up mostly of artists and “urban pioneers.” It is not surprising then, that in the 1997 South Boston Seaport master planning process, the traditional community continually expressed concern about the creation of large numbers of market rate housing units in the Seaport. Part of Southie’s success in previous planning endeavors has come from the community’s strength in presenting one voice at the bargaining table. If community demographics were to change dramatically, with the influx of thousands of new residents, most of whom would most likely be younger, urban professionals, the power of the community would shift dramatically.

While the split between the traditional community and newer residents is the most apparent, other issues have caused dissension in the community. During the Patriots Stadium proposal in 1996 and 1997, politicians opposed the project without presenting it to the community. Those blue-collar workers with the most to gain from temporary construction jobs wished to learn more about the project before Southie’s leadership had dismissed it without proper public presentation and discourse. Bob Kraft tried to use events such as these to gain grassroots support from the community, a strategy that failed miserably in Southie, for reasons that will be discussed later in this chapter.

These examples of dissension appear trivial compared to experiences in other parts of the city where neighborhood residents may fight over issues of ethnicity, class, and religion. In looking at the social machinations of Southie, it is possible to deduce the origins of the strong singular voice with which the community speaks. In the *Rehabilitation Planning Game*, Langley Keyes describes the social complexity that often comprises urban neighborhoods. While Keyes is speaking about those urban patterns that were present in Boston neighborhoods undergoing rehabilitation during the 1960s, his description is accurate for the South Boston shown through the eight case studies:

The social complexity of neighborhoods has been the focal point of several studies, all of which emphasize the impact of local environment on individual attitudes and behavior. . . a person’s

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<sup>275</sup> Lorraine Downey, Director, Environment Department, City of Boston, Interview (May 11, 1998).



participation in formal associations is a function not only of his social status as measured by income, education, and occupation but also of the socioeconomic characteristics of the neighborhood in which that individual lives. These neighborhood characteristics may ‘define a set of general societal expectations’ which significantly influence the extent of individual involvement in local organizations. Thus under certain neighborhood conditions an individual whose class rank alone would indicate low participation in organizations may be deeply involved in local affairs.<sup>276</sup>

The local environment in Southie is one which emphasizes sameness, not disparity. While the City Point residents live in expensive single family homes along the waterfront, working class families in the lower end crowd into triple deckers and scramble to assemble the dollars necessary to send their children to parochial schools. But shared experiences, longevity in the community, ethnic solidarity, and religious commonality transcend class differences. Indeed, social class is less of an issue here than neighborhood longevity and most long-time residents appear to take great pride in their humble roots. City Council President Kelly is a member of the sheet metal workers union, and Senator Lynch is a member of the iron workers union. As a city official explained, politicians in Southie remember where they came from.<sup>277</sup>

The single voice of the community also makes Southie a much more effective player in the arena of planning, politics and power. In his work on power in planning, John Forester explains how planners have different strategies of interaction with different actors. When planning in the face of conflict, Forester describes how public planning directors often are more at ease with developers as they “speak a common language” and know what they want. The implication here is that developers often have an advantage in negotiations with the community. He makes an important point when he states,

Developers speak with one voice; neighbors do not. When planners listen to developers, they know who they are listening to, and they know what they are likely to hear elaborated, defended, or qualified next week. When planners listen to neighborhood residents, though. . .they cannot be so sure how strongly to trust what they hear. “Who really speaks for the neighborhood?” the director wonders.<sup>278</sup>

There are no such ruminations for public officials working with Southie. As elaborated on in the next section, it is generally accepted that South Boston’s politicians speak for the community.

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<sup>276</sup>Langley Carleton Keyes.

<sup>277</sup>Lorraine Downey.

<sup>278</sup>John Forester, *Planning in the Face of Power* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1989) 87.

## Trust in Elected Leadership

It is clear that the community's ability to speak with one voice is a product of shared history of Southie's residents and concern over outside intervention that supersedes all other issues. But Southie is only able to effectively speak with one voice due to the political machine which drives community life. As stated in *Chapter 1*, when the Irish immigrants of South Boston embraced politics over one hundred years ago, it was a means for an impoverished group of citizens to attain power they could not otherwise reach. This embrace of politics has served Southie well. Consistent throughout all of the cases presented in this thesis is the relationship between South Boston residents and the district's political leaders. There are two important points about this relationship. First, it is clear that Southie has been blessed with able political leadership that understands how to wield the power it has. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the traditional community maintains great trust in its elected leaders and has no qualms about placing itself in the politician's hands. With good reason. It appears that, throughout the eight cases presented, this community trust has never been violated.

This is not to say that politicians have not worked within the system of old ward style politics in which political patronage plays a large role. What it does mean is that the community is comfortable working under a system of "ethnic politics" which allows the politicians some leeway in matters, as long as these are not to the detriment of the community. As Brian MacQuarrie, a reporter for *The Boston Globe*, explained, "Politicians will do all the work for the residents although resident's groups do keep their eyes on the politicians to ensure that they don't take "too much" for themselves."<sup>279</sup> In his history of South Boston, Thomas O'Connor offers up the following amusing anecdote to explain how ethnic politics plays out in Southie:

[A] proper Beacon Hill dowager. . . went ringing doorbells in South Boston on behalf of her candidate for the school committee. At one house, an Irish housewife listened politely to the lady's appeal and then asked, "But doesn't he have a sister who works for the schools or has something to do with the school system in Boston?" The Boston lady drew herself up and said haughtily, "I assure you, madam, he's not the sort of man who would *ever* use his position to advance the interests of his sister!" Whereupon the South Boston lady responded, "Well, if the sonuvabitch won't help his own sister, then why should I vote for him?" and slammed the door.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> Brian MacQuarrie, Reporter for the *Boston Globe*. Interview (April 13, 1998).

<sup>280</sup> Thomas H. O'Connor, *South Boston: My Home Town* (Boston: Quinlan Press, 1988) 84-85.

Patronage is an accepted way of life in Southie, but it stays within accepted bounds. Good examples are the Fan Pier project of the mid-eighties and the Federal Courthouse project of the 1990s. In the Fan Pier project, no discussion existed in the community about whether the project should be allowed to go forward. Anthony Athanas, politically well-connected in Southie, especially to his friend Congressman Moakley, owned the piers land and it seems that politicians in Southie made a decision early on to encourage the project, all the while getting benefits for the community through linkage money. It is telling that from media reports, it appeared that the one group most uncomfortable with the obvious patronage in the Fan Pier project was not composed of residents of the traditional community, who knew best how the game was played, but by the “newer” residents of A Street and the Fort Point Channel artists community outraged that the project might received easy approvals because the developer was a friend of Southie politicians. This group claimed that, "by approving the Fan Pier project, politicians were ignoring the needs of South Boston residents and showing political favoritism to developers." "The politicians are so concerned with repaying favors that they don't go out to the community and see what the people think."<sup>281</sup> This appears to be a rare complaint in Southie.

In the Federal Courthouse project, again Congressman Moakley used contacts to help out his buddy Athanas who owed millions in damages from a lost court case from the Fan Pier project. And again, there was no dissention in the community, even for a project which would generate very few jobs for Southie residents.

In each case, though, the impact on the community was negligible, at least in the short run. Based on their track record, it is clear that politicians would not have made that same kind of commitment for Robert Kraft. For one thing, he was a newcomer. For another, the negative impacts to the community outweighed the benefits. Southie politicians know where to draw the line in patronage and always manage to tie favors with some form of extracted benefits for Southie. In the Federal Courthouse deal, Moakley not only appeared to convince the GSA to site the courthouse on Athanas' land, but also received guarantees that the federal government would pick up part of the tab for the new South Boston Piers Transitway, thus alleviating some of Southie's concerns regarding increased traffic congestion from future development in the Seaport. During the Patriots stadium debate, Congressman Moakley stopped the project cold by

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<sup>281</sup>*The Boston Globe*, March 27, 1987.

convincing the U.S. Army to decide against selling its 5-acre parcel to team-owner Bob Kraft to make it possible to building a parking garage for the facility. Some would argue that Moakley's action denied eagerly sought construction jobs for local unions. But Moakley made sure to let the community know that his actions saved the 1300 jobs already tied to government operations at the Army site.



**Fig. 45.** Aerial photo of South Boston showing the location of the Federal Courthouse on Fan Pier in relation to the traditional residential community. *Source: Mass GIS and MIT.*

The strength of South Boston's political representation also comes from the deep seated mistrust the community has for outsiders. As Lorraine Downey, a lifelong Boston resident, put it, "the tightness of the South Boston community is unique, even for Boston." It is this tightness, and a mistrust of the public planning process, that draws Southie residents to place such trust in their elected politicians. As she puts it, "what most characterizes Southie politicians is that they are all from the district, live in the district and never, ever forget where they came from. In contrast, city planning agencies are controlled by outsiders, people who most likely have no connection or empathy with the community."<sup>282</sup>

It is also possible that Southie's trust in political leadership has some of its roots in the religious culture of the community. Southie has been an overwhelmingly Irish Catholic community. It is most likely not coincidental that there is not very much evidence of grassroots political organization in Southie. While he

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<sup>282</sup>Lorraine Downey.

believes the politicians have their “hands on the pulse of the community,” Martin Nee of the South Boston Community Development Corporation says, the community typically follows lockstep behind the politicians’ lead. He says there are very few exceptions to the community’s reactive role in planning issues. He cites the St. Vincents area of Southie as one example of a community that has been more proactive in getting what it wants, but admits most of the community prefers to wait until called upon to “react.” It is worth noting that in the St. Vincents case, residents were led by Father Murphy, of the local parish. Perhaps residents throughout the community are continuing a pattern in planning issues that they have been very familiar with in the Catholic church, which maintains a “top down” hierarchy. As historian Thomas O’Connor quotes in *South Boston: My Home Town*, “It was as if your church, your parish church, was your extended family,” one nun recalled, “and the priest was the father, with all the patriarchal connotations.”<sup>283</sup>

Ironically, to be effective, Southie’s leaders have had to transcend the atmosphere of mistrust and hostility toward outsiders that exists in South Boston. The community allows the politicians their power, the successfulness of politicians to thwart negative impacts on Southie reinforces this trust, and allows them to “lead the community.” As with the convention center, the politicians do the deals first, and then there is room for citizen involvement in the form of Citizen Advisory Committees (picked with the assistance of Southie’s elected leadership). How outsiders first approach the community’s political leadership can make or break a deal. As Lorraine Downey of the City of Boston Environment Department said,

if my department were doing a project in Southie, I would first ask for the input and reaction of good friends who are Southie natives, and I would then go directly to [City Council President] James Kelly and the South Boston Leadership Committee. . .without a doubt. That’s why the group is there. . .so you can tell everyone at one time and get feedback on what the issues are and what to focus on. You might make the rounds to separate community leaders after that, but never before going to the committee first. Someone will usually tell you if you will get sandbagged when you present to the community. They won’t defend you in public, but they will warn you if they respect you.<sup>284</sup>

## **Consistent Goals**

The community has been remarkably consistent with its concerns and goals over the course of sixty years.

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<sup>283</sup>Thomas H. O’Connor, *South Boston: My Home Town* (Boston: Quinlan Press, 1988) 126.

<sup>284</sup>Lorraine Downey.

The desire to protect the tightknit community from change, the fight for affordable housing for Southie's own, the constant search for good blue-collar jobs for Southie residents (preferably port-related jobs), and the desire to reduce traffic in the community threads throughout the cases and makes it clear the community knows what it wants. This is a far cry from many neighborhoods. As Forester describes:

. . .then there's the community. With the neighbors, there's no consistency. One week one group comes in, and the next week it's another. It's hard if there's no consistent view. One group's worried about traffic; the other group's not worried about traffic but about shadows. There isn't one point of view there. They also don't know the process (though there are those cases where there are too *many* experts!).<sup>285</sup>

Given that Southie has been able to maintain a single voice for political purposes, it is no accident that the interventions that Southie adamantly opposed were ones which were no-compromise issues that threatened the continuity of the "old neighborhood" and residents' rights to self determination. The first public housing efforts in Southie were not perceived to be a threat because at the time, preference was promised for community residents. Urban renewal, on the other hand, took control of the community out of residents hands and put some of it, not even in the city's hands, but in the control of the federal government. It is no surprise the community objected given that their entire residential enclave of almost 1000 acres was designated a slum area and was earmarked for "outsider" control. In addition, Southie had seen what had happened in the West End, when a way of life had disappeared to make way for middle and upper income apartments. Room for compromise was possible in the Fan Pier project because it was seen "to have very little impact on the residential portion of the community."<sup>286</sup> The convention center, on the other hand, although Southie would most likely never openly admit it, was a bonus for the community, acting as a large buffer zone between the residential community and unwanted uses and visitors. In effect, the convention center would provide jobs and act as a buffer without imminent dangers of gentrification (the center is simply does not present the same threat as having 200,000 square feet of investment banking offices adjacent to the neighborhood and a significant number of employees moving into the neighborhood because of the easy commute. This clarity of Southie's needs also helped it push for a seaport master plan so that linkages and benefits could be negotiated all at once....ensuring preservation of the neighborhood, at least to some degree.

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<sup>285</sup>John Forester, p. 86.

<sup>286</sup>Lorraine Downey.

## Political Access as a Form of Public Participation

The political climate described in each of the eight case studies is consistent in one outstanding factor. The community has been empowered, not through large-scale public participation at planning meetings, nor by organizing at the grassroots level, but through its political prowess at the city, state, and federal levels of government. The roots of Southie's accumulation of power through political leadership can be traced back to the early Irish settlers of Boston:

Denied any access to political power in the "old country" for centuries, the Irish often found themselves despised in their adopted land as well, and they were determined to achieve a measure of unassailable personal security and ethnic solidarity. Most avenues for rapid economic advancement were closed to them, especially in a city with a traditional, rigidly controlled financial establishment. Politics, therefore, provided a ready-made road to power and influence for those who were quick, shrewd and tough enough to seize opportunity<sup>287</sup>

The need for security, and the ongoing mistrust of outsiders appear to have made the community wary of accepting the extended hand of public and private players who seek to encourage public participation and consensus building techniques in the community. In Southie, outsiders go to the elected leadership first when they have a project to propose, no matter how small or large. When Bob Kraft was selling his football stadium to Southie residents, he tried circumventing the normal channels for engaging with the community. It didn't work. While there were some residents who were willing to hear him, most consistently showed a desire that projects or proposals be "vetted" by their elected leadership, before being presented to the public. Bob Kraft's strategy made the community and politicians wary. Circumventing the elected leadership of Southie was tantamount to telling the community that their politicians could not be trusted.

By relying on their elected officials in issues of planning, the community ensured that it was not at the mercy of public officials who were outsiders. When proposing a new project, the typical methods used by planners and other government employees to engage the community, ensure that all voices are heard, and negotiate details of the plans usually include: scheduling a series of community meetings to listen to citizen concerns, creating an a committee of residents to advise the project, and sponsoring outside consultant studies to address concerns of neighborhoods. Indeed Southie demands that all of these things take place when faced with outside intervention, but as Southie is well aware, these forms of participation and

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<sup>287</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 83.

methods of obtaining information are controlled, not by the community, but by the public or private planning intervenors who provide or create them. With outsiders controlling the process, there is no guarantee community voices will be heard or heeded, as demonstrated in the Patriots Stadium case.

The community was extremely vocal in its opposition to the siting of the project in South Boston. And yet, as late as just two weeks before the deal was finally canceled, many believed that there was little to be done to stop the project because of Massport's control of the land. This could have been Southie's worst nightmare--voice community opposition but receive no acknowledgment of resident concerns. But Southie didn't rely on the usual channels in these matters. Congressman Moakley, working behind closed doors in Washington, stopped the project by convincing the U.S. Army not to sell a key parcel to Kraft for the construction of stadium parking.

It seems the community is uncomfortable with being "granted" power by planning officials; residents would rather attain it through more familiar channels: the political arena. In the discussions regarding the convention center and Seaport master plan, BRA Director O'Brien repeatedly told the community to "ask for what you want." He assured community members they would get linkage money for affordable housing, that they could have a say in height restrictions, and that they would receive job training dollars. But these were just words to Southie, spoken by an outsider with no allegiance to the community. Southie once again, distrustful of leaving its fate in the hands of an outsider, ensured those spoken promises were law. These assurances to the community were written into the city convention center legislation in March 1998 in a complex back room political deal, not with the BRA, but with the Mayor and other lawmakers, who desperately wanted the convention center.

It is important to note that the one major setback Southie has suffered during the period from the 1930s to 1998 was the school desegregation fight. When the case went to Federal Court, Southie had high hopes for a favorable outcome, after all, Judge Garrity was an Irish-Catholic. But the community was handed a devastating blow when Garrity found that the Boston School Committee "had knowingly carried out a systematic program of segregation."<sup>288</sup> Southie was impotent to fight because their political power meant nothing within the federal judicial system.

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<sup>288</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 215.



In a last note, for those that say Southie doesn't have a forum for public participation, the answer is, Southie has its own system for community expression and public participation: they call up their local politician and tell them what's on their mind. And they trust in the system. Voting records for South Boston tell the true story of public participation for residents: they do it at the polls, every November.

### **South Boston as a Reluctant Community**

It may appear to be a contradiction that a community that has wholeheartedly thrown itself into the political fray of Boston, and that has battled long and hard, mostly successfully, to achieve the things it needs and wants, be dubbed "reluctant." An yet, throughout the eight case studies, Southie presents three distinct types of reluctance: a reluctance to accept change, a reluctance to play by rules set by outsiders, and a strategic reluctance that has allowed the community to negotiate handsome benefits over the years.

#### Reluctance to Accept Change

Change is hard for all communities, especially ones that have a cohesiveness of character and commonality of culture found in South Boston.. As described throughout this thesis, the early character of the Irish community in Boston caused a banding together of immigrants in communities of "kindred spirit." Faced with few opportunities in Boston's financial and service based economy, some of these immigrants made a humble way of life for themselves in a district called South Boston, in close proximity to one of the few sources of jobs open to them: the port activities and industrial works of South Boston. A community of Catholics in a city of Protestants, the community developed an insular and protective quality that exists to this day. While times have changed, the community faced new threats in the twentieth century. A flight of residents to the suburbs in the 1950s and 1960s, and then later, the threat of gentrification caused by improvements to the Seaport infrastructure and a booming economy, forced Southie to face the growing possibility of change in the beloved community. Southie's continued reluctance to accept change is explained by historian Thomas O'Connor:

The sense of privacy, of space, of what would later be characterized as "turf," was extremely important to people in South Boston--as it was to most other ethnic groups living in the closed confines of an urban metropolis. Most immigrant people had gone so long without freedom, land, property or any sense of permanence or security that when they finally found some little corner of the world to truly call their own, they determined to hold on to it forever. It became *their* piece of turf; it belonged to no one else. They would never give it up, and they would never let anyone

take it away from them.<sup>289</sup>

A point of clarification is necessary here. Southie's reluctance to change applies to the traditional residential community, not to the adjacent 1000 acres of industrial land that sits between old Southie and the Boston Harbor. Southie's ability to refuse change is partly due to the community's political connectedness, but also due, in large part to luck. When jobs are needed and linkage benefits are desired, as they are in many of Boston's neighborhoods, it is easier to be reluctant to change when the community has a separate place, almost akin to a separate banking account, that can be tapped into without affecting the balance in the first account, and in fact, can actually increase it through linkage for affordable housing and job training. Southie can vehemently protect its residential neighborhood from change, from increases in traffic, from large scale development, all because it has other avenues to pursue in achieving benefits for the community in terms of economic development, and affordable housing financing.

#### Reluctance to Play by Rules Set Up by Outsiders

The second form of reluctance encountered in South Boston is the reluctance to play by accepted rules. Southie has weighed the benefits of empowerment through conventional planning methods against the desire for autonomy and has managed to create a situation that allows the community exceptional power with a high degree of autonomy. One only has to look, on a Saturday afternoon, at the triple parked cars along Broadway, none of which have parking tickets plastered to their windshield, to understand that the community makes its own rules and defies all others to tell them they can't.

As described above in the discussion on political leadership, Southie often circumvents normal channels of communication and negotiation to achieve its purposes. In the fall of 1996, proposed legislation was being prepared for Congress in an effort to designate thirty-one (verify number here) Boston Harbor Islands a National Recreation Area. Castle Island, now connected to the mainland in South Boston, was one of the Islands on the list. The legislation proposed, not that the federal government would take control of the islands, but that the separate owners--in Castle Island's case it was the Commonwealth of Massachusetts--would work under a unified management plan to develop a vision for the islands, a water sheet transportation network, and programming for the islands. Throughout the two years of negotiations prior to the final legislation proposal being sent to Congress, Congressman Moakley's office had worked closely with National Park Service officials in drafting the legislation and all seemed in order. Sarah Peskin,

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<sup>289</sup>Thomas H. O'Connor, p. 174.

Manager of Planning and Legislation for the North Atlantic Office of the NPS recalled receiving a phone call from one of Moakley's aides just days before the Congressional vote. She was simply told, "Congressman Moakley would be very pleased if you would alter the islands map to exclude Castle Island."<sup>290</sup> While she tried to reason and stall, her efforts were to no avail. It was clear that if Castle Island wasn't removed as one of the Harbor Islands, the legislation would be killed in Congress.

During the two years of negotiations and planning, Moakley hinted not once that his constituents didn't want Castle Island included in the park. One might normally expect, as the Park Service did, that objections would be raised and discussed during the twenty-four months of meetings. This is not how Southie always does things. By asking for a "change in the map" at the eleventh hour, Moakley ensured that discussion of Southie's position could not take place without endangering the entire Harbor Islands proposal. He also put the decision in the hands of Southie residents, not with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the island's owner. The National Park Service changed the map, and the legislation passed. Even Mayor Menino didn't realize that Castle Island was removed from the Park until months later (find globe magazine article for quote here). Clearly, Southie is protective of "its" Island. Although technically under the ownership of the Commonwealth, it is in Southie territory--and precious territory at that--right along the edge of Southie's front yard. Southie's feelings on the matter were best exemplified by comments made by a resident at the November 1997 community meeting in which the BRA introduced *The South Boston Seaport Master Plan* to the community. He said, "we want to ensure, by writing into law, that the new hotels that will be built in the Seaport are not allowed to bring tour buses to Castle Island. We don't want tourists on our streets, and we don't want them overrunning our Castle Island."

### Strategic Reluctance

A third type of reluctance permeates all dialogue between the community and outsiders. It is reluctance that while at times is quite real, is also strategic in nature. In essence, the community never directly embraces a proposed project, even when benefits are perceived and wanted by the community. In fact, the community has demonstrated a knee-jerk type of reaction over the years to all outside intervention that has allowed it to take advantage of the label of "underdog" while at the same time, making outsiders wary of invading Southie turf.

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<sup>290</sup> Sarah Peskin, Manager of Planning and Legislation, National Park Service North Atlantic Office, Interview (Boston, MA, August, 1997).

A familiar phrase from politicians' mouths is, "well we didn't ask for this project, but if we are going to get it, we might as well receive some benefits. . ." Coupled with this is the hardship that the community claims when negotiating with "outsiders." These hardships are then translated into linkage dollars and other benefits for the community. The community knows how to best stretch community impact from "unwanted" projects into the most benefits for residents. In reality, the community has demonstrated adequate political power to stop most unwanted projects. Certainly, the convention center project could have easily been stopped by Southie politicians. They killed the Megaplex deal, and halted Robert Kraft in his tracks when he attempted to site the Patriots Stadium in South Boston. With the convention center proposal though, the community privately saw the benefits it afforded residents but publicly emphasized the disadvantages to the community, in hopes of gaining maximum linkages. This reluctance has become a useful political strategy.

This method of feigning reluctance and then extracting maximum benefits as an "impacted" community has worked well throughout the sixty years studied in this thesis. The Fan Pier project brought with it the promise of affordable housing and job training linkages, and the Federal Courthouse project brought guarantees of federal funding of a new transit line for the waterfront. Those projects that failed to be implemented were ones in which it was more difficult for the community to control and determine the flow of linkages and other benefits to residents. Urban renewal was a federally funded program that offered few real benefits when weighed against the disadvantages of the federal and city governments intruding on the traditional residential community. Southie has perfected the art of NIMBY (UYP).<sup>291</sup>

Southie politicians also understand that the community's ability to claim impact and then demand linkage dollars and know that mitigation funding works best on larger projects. It is not a coincidence that, public housing aside, the two projects Southie politicians took the most proactive role on, were the two projects that would create the most benefits for Southie: The Convention Center and the Seaport Plan. And yet in both of these projects, the community claimed it didn't want the proposal!

In the convention center proposal, the community gained a long-desired buffer between the traditional residential neighborhood and the industrial seaport or backyard. Senate President Bulger's carefully subtle solicitation of the project for his own community is proof that Southie saw clear benefits to the project. As

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<sup>291</sup>Credit goes to Lawrence Vale for this acronym, which stands for "Not In My Backyard (Unless You Pay).

Senator Lynch admitted, negotiating one benefits package with the city for the 70-acre site, was a lot easier than trying to extract linkages from as many as forty separate property-owners for small developments on that land.

So too, the community pushed the BRA into creating a master plan for the Seaport in 1997. Taken individually, negotiation of linkages and other benefits on individual parcels would have been a challenging and time consuming endeavor, even for Southie politicians. By urging the BRA to create a master plan, suddenly the development was of enormous magnitude (few mentioned that build out of the Seaport could take up to fifty years) and required corresponding linkage benefits for Southie residents.

In the end, in what has been a continuing challenge to outsiders, Southie politicians have successfully balanced the community's hatred of outside interference with the desire to generate benefits for residents from planning projects. This strange dichotomy is described by Lawrence Vale in his study of public housing in South Boston:

The outcome of the public housing episode of the 1930s showed "a fundamental ambivalence in that district. . . which would only increase in subsequent decades. On the one hand, South Boston residents could legitimately feel put upon by the heavy-handed and unpredictable machinations of a distant federal government; on the other hand, the South Boston district had much to gain from its position as a clearly-favored destination for government largesse."<sup>292</sup>

The common threads discussed above, describe a community that has been remarkably consistent in its responses and reactions to outsider interventions over the course of over sixty years. The final chapter of this thesis looks at how some differences among the case studies, most notably the South Boston Seaport Master Plan, and all the others, may indicate changes and challenges that Southie will face in the future.

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<sup>292</sup> Lawrence Vale.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

The previous chapter analyzes the commonalities that are evident throughout the eight case studies described in *Chapters 3 and 4*. It is clear that the community has: spoken in one voice to outsiders; put great trust in its elected leadership; used political access in lieu of traditional public participation; maintained consistent goals; and has exhibited a three-pronged reluctance. These common threads offer the answers to some of the questions posed in *Chapter 1* of this thesis:

- What issues compel the community to act? Have these changed over time?
- Does the community speak in one voice, or are there many voices that speak for the community?
- Have these voices changed over time, with changing demographics?
- How has the community's relationship with "outsiders" changed over time?
- Are there generalizable patterns of strategies that South Boston has used over time?
- How does the community define success?
- What can the community and "outsiders" learn from these experiences?

The community responses that run through the case studies have made clear those issues which have compelled the community to act--issues that have remained consistent over time. Threats to the traditional residential community, loss of blue-collar jobs and threats to the working port, and outsider interference in community affairs, have all caused Southie to rise up and fight. It is also clear that the community has spoken loudly in one voice, at least for tactical reasons, and has been able to overcome internal dissent for the purpose of a common cause. Evident in many of the cases though, is the presence of other voices within the community, vying for attention and power, albeit apparently at a much lower volume than the "community" voice. The community's relationship with outsiders has changed little in the sixty year period studied in this thesis. Ever distrustful, Southie continually relied on its own elected politicians to protect the community and achieve desired results. So too, Southie's politicians have been active in the community's strategic reluctance. This reluctance has allowed community politicians to stop some projects and negotiate the maximum benefits possible from others. Based on community goals, it is clear too, that the community has defined success in two ways: first, by its ability to protect the integrity of the traditional residential neighborhood--Southie's frontyard, and second, by its power to negotiate maximum

benefits from the community's backyard--the South Boston Seaport.

This brings us then, to the final question, "What can the community and "outsiders" learn from the experiences illustrated in the case studies?" To answer this question, it is necessary to look, not only at the commonalities among the cases, but at the differences. While the common threads are striking in the eight cases described herein, it is their very strength and consistency which force a second look at the last case study, the South Boston Seaport Master Plan. This planning experience in the late 1990s is obviously different from the others. Make no mistake, the common threads are there. But the South Boston Seaport Master Plan presented new challenges to both the community and planners. On the one hand, the community, while successful in negotiating linkage from Seaport development, was facing increased challenges from gentrification and claims of outside interest in its backyard. On the other, planners found that "doing business as usual with Southie" didn't necessarily provide the best outcome for a wider constituency of citizens. This concluding chapter examines a series of issues, faced by both the community, and by city planners, that are evident in the differences among the case studies. It concludes by very briefly touching upon how the challenges posed by the community and the Seaport master planning process fit into a wider body of planning theory.

### **The Community**

The South Boston Seaport master planning process highlights four challenges that are unique in that planning effort and they are all about change within the community:

- the changing demographics of the community that threatened its long-time cohesiveness and sameness;
- the vulnerability of Southie's traditional process: would Southie's use of political muscle to achieve benefits be sustainable in the wake of changing demographics within the community;
- the loss of sole claim of "ownership" on the community's "backyard," which suddenly became the City of Boston's "frontyard;" and
- the need to decide within the community, what people and organizations would have control over, and use of, the linkage windfall from Seaport development.

### Changing Demographics

The times, they are a changin,<sup>293</sup> in Southie. Much of South Boston's success in preventing outside intervention can be attributed to the community's homogeneity. The verve with which residents resist change and outsider influence is testament to the importance of the continuity of the traditional Southie community and culture. In fact, Southie's ability to fight change is clearly boosted by the long-standing ties with the neighborhood and the solidarity residents feel when threatened by outside forces.

What happens to the community then, when it begins to fray at the edges of its solidarity? Demographics were changing in Southie in 1998. Perhaps the most potent sign of the change underway in Southie was a *Market Study and Feasibility Analysis* for the West Broadway Development, prepared for the Boston Housing Authority in February 1998. The BHA commissioned the report to "help explore development options" for the 244 un-renovated units adjacent to the renovated 500 units of the West Broadway public housing project.<sup>294</sup> The report states,

South Boston, in general, and the West Broadway neighborhood, specifically, experienced significant changes during the first part of this decade. The West Broadway neighborhood experienced increases in its aggregate population and a turnover of the population as new households, attracted by the area's proximity to downtown Boston, replaced more established households. Trends evidencing these changes are expected to continue through the year 2002.<sup>295</sup>

The study goes on to report that, "households entering the neighborhood are primarily 25 to 35 years old," and "are primarily single person households and two person households without children." In addition, the study states, "the influx of new households increased the primary market area median household income significantly. The neighborhood median household income exceeds that seen in the balance of the city."<sup>296</sup> Finally, the report states,

Estimates for South Boston and the West Broadway neighborhood are based on recent patterns. These trends may accelerate as the neighborhood is increasingly seen as an attractive location independent of its proximity to downtown Boston. In addition, any new development occurring to

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<sup>293</sup> A thank you to Langley Keyes for his Bob Dylan reference here.

<sup>294</sup> Bonz/REA Real Estate Advisors, *Market Study & Feasibility Analysis: West Broadway Development*. Prepared for the Boston Housing Authority (Boston, MA: 1998) 1.

<sup>295</sup> Bonz/REA Real Estate Advisors, p. 4.

<sup>296</sup> Bonz/REA Real Estate Advisors, p. 4.



the north of the site should also accelerate recent trends observed.<sup>297</sup>

Clearly, the community was changing. And the study predicted more rapid changes if and when development in the Seaport eventually got underway.

In 1998, some felt the changes weren't drastic enough to warrant concern but others clearly saw the need to "shore up" the neighborhood. The newcomers, predicted Michael Vaughan, were more likely to follow the lead of the old-timers in political matters; after all, they wanted to protect the community characteristics that drew them to Southie in the first place. As Vaughan stated, it was a case of "last one in, shut the door."<sup>298</sup> It seems though, that it is a question of how tightly that door could be shut in the face of an increasing flow of outsiders. Though Southie residents spoke about reserving affordable housing benefits for "Southie's own, born and bred," even Southie politicians would not be powerful enough to alter economic forces, or change federal fair housing laws to exclude outsiders.

But how could the old values be retained when the community was about to withstand a major influx of outsiders, many of whom would have no commonalities with a community that stressed family and a common heritage. Would affordable housing and jobs be the key issues in the years to come, or would the community eventually tire of the mantra and, like East Boston, push for market rate housing and life in the mainstream economy?

### Sustainability of the Process

How the traditional community would maintain its coherence and solidarity is a question that would be answered, in part, by the proven sustainability of the process Southie has used to excel in the planning game in Boston. Changing demographics also means changing politics. With a newer population, not necessarily concerned with the same issues as long-time residents, Southie's very political structure could be threatened in two ways.

First, seeds of dissension were already apparent in the Fan Pier project, the convention center, and the South Boston Seaport master plan. Newer residents did not feel that elected officials adequately

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<sup>297</sup>Bonz/REA Real Estate Advisors, p. 5.

<sup>298</sup>Michael Vaughan.

represented their concerns. The organization called SAND, made up of residents in the Fort Point area, was one indication that there was some grassroots activity stirring in the community. This was not the way Southie did things in the past.

Second, Lorraine Downey pointed out that City Council President Kelly was extremely successful at representing not only Southie, but Chinatown and the South End, as well. While this appears to have been true in the 1990s, her comment points out a political reality for Southie: namely that most of the community's politicians represent more than the one neighborhood, and thus have a wider constituency base. What would occur when James Kelly, Joseph Moakley, and William Bulger<sup>299</sup> were no longer "speaking" for Southie? Would politicians from other communities take over the reigns of power? While *Chapter 2* illustrates Southie's extraordinary history of voter turnout at each election, would this pattern continue in the future, or would newer residents possibly not feel it was necessary to vote."

As illustrated by the case studies, Southie's strategy from the 1930s through the 1990s was one in which the community took control, not through traditional planning practices, but by exerting political muscle. It is clear that the sustainability of the community's "success" could be under threat; this planning strategy may not be sustainable in the face of changing demographics. The ability of the community to have a voice in future planning would depend on its ability to shift to other methods for engaging in dialogue with planners.

#### A Community's Backyard Becomes the City's Frontyard

As discussed in the previous chapter, Southie has, in part, been extraordinarily lucky in having a backyard that created a flow of benefits to the community. The community has also been shrewd in claiming the backyard as its own. In *Chapter 5*, the backyard is likened to a second bank account--one that protects and even, at times, increases the balance in the first. Southie was able to retain "ownership" of the backyard account because no other community or constituency ever laid claim to the South Boston Seaport. Suddenly in 1998, Southie's backyard became Boston's frontyard. It appeared as though Southie would no longer be able to cut planning deals in a vacuum. The Community would be faced with the challenge

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<sup>299</sup>William Bulger is the former President of the Massachusetts Senate. While he no longer held that post in the late 1990s, having moved on to become President of the University of Massachusetts, he was still a potent voice for Southie. As Lorraine Downey said, make no mistake, while it appears Bulger isn't there (in the political arena), he is still there--and serves as a strong influence in the community and political circles.

of negotiating for benefits in a more complex planning and regulatory environment.

In the late 1990s, a range of interested parties claimed interest in, and ownership of, the Seaport. The Conservation Law Foundation and The Boston Harbor Association maintained considerable clout and legal ability. Each organization was very interested in the master plan and the process for the South Boston Seaport. While the goals of other constituencies and the South Boston community were not necessarily mutually exclusive, one of the most contentious issues was that of housing. The politicians of Southie emphatically rejected the idea of market rate housing in the Seaport. But this was one fight that would be difficult for Southie to win; outside the community, there was nearly universal agreement that the Seaport must have a sizeable amount of housing to make it a vital and interesting “24-hour” district, and people felt passionately about this issue. As Lorraine Downey said, “This is one issue that we will not let pass. There must be housing in the Seaport.”<sup>300</sup>

Like the CLF and TBHA, other constituencies making claims on the Seaport were powerful; many also had judicial experience behind them, and state regulations on their side. And as was demonstrated by the school desegregation court case of the 1970s, Southie’s political power was no match against judicial matters. As Rusty Russell of the Conservation Law Foundation said, “there are a whole host of things that can stop this plan and the deals being made: the downtown parking freeze, Chapter 91 requirements, and MEPA to name a few.”<sup>301</sup>

### Control of the Backyard Account

In the seven planning cases leading up to the Seaport master plan, benefits to the community were not windfalls, but rather small things, some more tangible than others. Public housing provided housing and construction jobs for Southie’s own. The Fan Pier project never occurred; linkage payments to the community were never received. The Megaplex proposal died, and the Federal Courthouse generated no linkage funds, only public amenities and federal support for the South Boston Piers Transitway. The convention center was expected to generate some linkage but the real windfall was coming with the Seaport plan. As already explained in more detail in *Chapter 3*, the separate MOU attached to the City Council’s convention center legislation guaranteed the community 50% of all linkage funds from Seaport

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<sup>300</sup>Lorraine Downey, Director, Environment Department, City of Boston, Interview (May 11, 1998).

<sup>301</sup>Rusty Russell, Director of Media, Conservation Law Foundation, Interview (March 27, 1998).

development. Michael Vaughan knew the ramifications for the community. As he said, Southie groups were already at his door, requesting advances on the money they knew would start flowing soon.<sup>302</sup>

What happens when the community is no longer pushed together to fight a common enemy, but must turn inward to make choices on who controls the linkage account and how it is used? Early in the process, there was already dissension. As one city official said, “while the community has spoken with one voice, the real debate is only just beginning about who controls the linkage money.”<sup>303</sup> When asked who would control the linkage money, Martin Nee, Executive Director of the South Boston Neighborhood Development Corporation said, with a hint of bitterness, “Why me of course.” When pushed, he said he had no idea who would choose but expected much “discussion.”<sup>304</sup>

One is reminded of an old Jewish joke, “thank God for the Arabs, otherwise we would be fighting each other.” While the Arab-Israeli conflict is not to be taken lightly, the point applies equally well to less contentious situations. Without a common enemy, would the one voice grow weaker as special interests in the community speak out? Even the politicians were divided on future use of the benefits. Councilor Kelly wanted to halt change, and “shore up the neighborhood,” by funding affordable housing and parochial school initiatives. City Councilor-At-Large Davis-Mullen was more forward looking and wished to prepare the community for change. Senator Lynch, on the other hand, was looking toward education as the key to the health of the community. It appears as though Southie was not prepared for the next phase of its life. As Langley Keyes has said, linkage may indeed sow the apple of discord.

### **Planners**<sup>305</sup>

While the challenges described above were facing the community, so too, challenges existed for planners. The differences evident in the South Boston Seaport case study posed difficulties, some of them

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<sup>302</sup>Michael Vaughan.

<sup>303</sup>Lorraine Downey.

<sup>304</sup>Martin Nee, Executive Director, South Boston Neighborhood Development Corporation, Interview (April 28, 1998).

<sup>305</sup>The term “planners” is intended to include all those involved in the planning and policy making process, and is not meant to limit this discussion to those serving in the official role of “planner.”

unforeseen, for Boston planners:

- planners' acknowledgment and consideration of Southie's power led to a planning process that narrowly defined the issues and left planners unable to deal with the full range of interest groups and environmental regulations;
- planners allowed, and even encouraged, Southie to use its political muscle to exclude others from the process;
- planners were ineffective in balancing Southie's demands, packaged in a world view of "ethnic politics," with the "rational politics" of city-wide constituencies seeking public benefits and the pursuit of the "public good;"
- planners and city-wide constituencies continued to be challenged by a community that possessed enormous political power but claimed to be "disadvantaged" and "abused" by outsiders.

### Power

In *Planning in the Face of Power*, John Forester states, "If planners ignore those in power, they assure their own powerlessness."<sup>306</sup> Certainly, no one can fault city planners for ignoring South Boston in the Seaport master planning process. The community's responses and subsequent outcomes evidenced in the planning cases presented in this thesis indicate that any planner who chose to ignore the community would do so at his or her own peril. In the South Boston Seaport case, city officials appeared quite cognizant of Southie's power to shape the planning process. Ironically, it appears that planners' acknowledgment and consideration of Southie's power left the planners powerless, at least in the first round of the planning process. As a BRA readily admitted, the agency played too many cards, too early in the game.<sup>307</sup> The city's fixation with appeasing Southie, evidenced in everything from the name of the plan, which gives ownership to South Boston, to the words in *The South Boston Seaport Master Plan*, which speak of the working port, and benefits for the community, gave the community additional power in the planning game.

When crafting planning strategies, it is not unusual for planners to look at the history of a community and its responses, over time, to the issues that effect it. Boston planners, by focusing on the paradigm of power

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<sup>306</sup>John Forester, *Planning in the Face of Power* (Berkeley and LA: University of California Press: 1989) 5.

<sup>307</sup>Kairos Shen.

in previous South Boston negotiations described in the case studies, failed to recognize the existence of other constituencies that had a rightful place at the table. It was an understandable misstep. The playing field was remarkably constant in the history of planning in South Boston up until 1997. *Chapter 5* identifies the five common threads that weave throughout the cases. And yet, by focusing on these commonalities, the city failed to foresee that the field was shifting and growing, and that other voices were clamoring to be heard. No longer just Southie's backyard, the Seaport symbolized the next frontier of Boston development, likened to the Back Bay filling project of a century before. And everyone wanted a piece of the action.

### An Inclusive Process

The city underestimated, and even discounted, the strength of those other voices. It is a fundamental rule of negotiation theory that those parties that can have an effect on the plan's outcome (in other words, those that can kill the deal) should be present at the bargaining table. In a gross simplification of the planning process and the political reality, city planners focused on Southie as the "one to win over."

The city's preoccupation with satisfying the South Boston community led it to construct an exclusive planning process. By accepting Southie's claim of "ownership" of the South Boston Seaport, and by keeping the preliminary planning process closed from public scrutiny,<sup>308</sup> city officials legitimized Southie's efforts to block others from coming to the table. The city reduced the complexities of the planning process to a few simple elements. In doing so, just as Forester argues, city planners ignored that fact that

. . . the structure of the economy organizes autonomy and independence for some people, powerlessness and dependency for others. Planners do not work on a neutral stage, an ideally liberal setting in which all affected interests have voice; they work within political institutions, on political issues, on problems whose most basic technical components. . . may be celebrated by some, contested by others. Any account of planning must face these political realities.<sup>309</sup>

City planners ignored the political realities of the existence of a larger, city-wide constituency for the South Boston Seaport Master Plan, focusing instead, on a unitary model of power (a model in evidence in earlier planning cases in Southie). In the first seven case studies described in this thesis, Southie was able to

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<sup>308</sup>Prior to the release of the master plan in November 1997, the meetings of the South Boston Waterfront Committee were closed to the general public.

<sup>309</sup>Forester, p. 3.

control the negotiations and discussion because of the simplicity of the negotiation process. In most of these other cases, interested parties were limited to government officials and/or developers. In those cases where environmentalists and harbor advocates were involved, such as the Fan Pier project or the Federal Courthouse, the scope of projects was small. In the South Boston Seaport master planning process, the old, comfortable concerns about “who will live on my street” and “where will the traffic be diverted” were still there, but other, broader issues about the public realm, waterfront access, and good urban design, entered the debate, and it appeared that city planners were not prepared.

In fact, the city appeared to be not able to deal with broader issues and with Southie simultaneously. *The South Boston Seaport Master Plan* makes clear that all the environmental considerations, and even the transportation study, would come later in the planning process.<sup>310</sup> After the release of the master plan, there was increased pressure from regional organizations such as Save the Harbor/Save the Bay, and the Conservation Law Foundation, to open up the South Boston Seaport planning process. Many felt that, “Having tapped Greater Boston residents for more than \$4 billion to clean up Boston Harbor, officials now must encourage people to feel stronger ownership of the city’s “front yard” and help them enjoy what they have paid so dearly to clean up.”<sup>311</sup>

#### Rational vs. Ethnic Politics

Because of the presence of other, power, interested parties, the Seaport master planning negotiations brought into sharp relief the differences between Southie’s expectations and the expectations of a city-wide constituency. For Southie, the issue wasn’t one of public access or architectural integrity, it was of jobs and housing. As historian Thomas O’Connor states, Southie’s expectations that these basic necessities would be provided by government sources was nothing new in the community. In fact, it appeared as though the community had not changed much in 150 years:

Whereas the newly arrived Irish voters were looking to the government to help them acquire food, clothing, shelter and jobs, established Bostonians took an entirely different view. The Bostonian of Yankee background looked for government to set and enforce rules, operate the financial system frugally, and guarantee high-quality leadership. {hill: 97}

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<sup>310</sup>This is unusual. Planning practice usually dictates that transportation studies be done concurrently with master planning so that the issues raised can be incorporated into the planning process and planning documents. The BRA went so far as to claim, that the transportation study would not commence until the master plan was complete in the Fall of 1998.

<sup>311</sup>*The Boston Globe*, March 10, 1998.

And so, the contrast between Southie's expectations and those of the "establishment" was great. Southie's world view was colored by its practice of "ethnic politics," in which it focused on linkage money for housing and job training and other benefits for community residents. City-wide constituents, on the other hand, were operating in a mode of "rational politics," seeking public benefits and the pursuit of the "public good;" through the establishment of a "24-hour district," and discussions of the quality of the public realm and urban design inherent in the plan. By focusing on Southie's concerns first, the city foreclosed on an opportunity to more broadly define the issues for the benefit of all constituencies during the initial phase of the master planning process.

### Planning in a "Disadvantaged" Community

What Forester doesn't discuss in *Planning in the Face of Power*, is the unique challenges planners face when the community of power is labeled a "disadvantaged" one, either by outside forces, or by the community itself. It is more common to find a powerful community that is strong, both socially and economically. Southie has posed a challenge for planners because its power is disproportionate to its economic strength. While claiming to be disadvantaged, and forever positioning itself as the underdog, Southie has wielded the power to control the planning process and reap massive benefits. The claim of "disadvantage" is a difficult one for outsiders to refute without appearing insensitive or downright bigoted. Southie residents had been on the other end of this experience when the community rose up against school desegregation plans in the 1970s. It is not surprising then, that in all of the case studies presented here, no community outsider has challenged Southie's claims of impact.<sup>312</sup> John Forester speaks about how "political-economic power may function systematically to misinform affected publics, by misrepresenting risk or costs and benefits, for instance."<sup>313</sup> While Forester appears to be implying that official powers, such as government planners, do this, in Southie, the community claimed negative impacts, in some cases without foundation, in most of the case studies presented here. While rents rising rapidly throughout the city and region in the late 1990s, no-one challenged Southie's outraged claims of unique disadvantage and its belief that the community had a right, through linkage exclusivity for Southie residents, to temper the effects of supply and demand in its community. Few seem to realize that Southie's claims often come at

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<sup>312</sup>"This is not to say that outsiders have not used more mild forms of protest against community claims of impact and disadvantage. Robert Kraft, for instance, commissioned traffic studies to illustrate the community was "mised" in its belief that the residential neighborhood would be overrun with traffic. This is also not to say that, simply because no challenge to the community's claim of disadvantage appeared in the media, that privately and in smaller groups, this discussion was not going on.

<sup>313</sup>Forester, p. 31.



cost to others. When discussing the significant linkage fees the convention center legislation would generate for the community, Joan Vennoch of *The Globe* pointed out, “It will be interesting to see how much the political leverage of one neighborhood raises the price tag for everyone else.”<sup>314</sup>

## Conclusion

In one sense, it can hardly be argued that Southie is anything but a unique community. The combination of homogeneity, solidarity, and residents’ shared experiences over time, coupled with extraordinary political power, has created a community that is unique in many ways. And yet, the challenges presented to planners in these eight case studies, when taken individually, are not uncommon in most planning experiences.

The city embarked on the Seaport master planning process because of pressure from the community. It is clear that city officials saw the plan, not as an opportunity, but as a necessity, and approached it with some trepidation. In the first phase of the project, it appears that the city’s anticipation of conflict with the South Boston community foreclosed on a truly democratic and inclusive planning process. Alan Altshuler got it right when he said, “In practice, unfortunately, even the most staunchly “physical” planners have found no way to isolate the effects of their work from the murky crosscurrents of economic and social conflict.”<sup>315</sup>

The political struggles, and the economic and social conflicts inherent in these South Boston case studies are present, to varying degrees of intensity, in all planning endeavors, in all communities. Particularly, Boston city planners faced three questions that confront all planners:

- how do planners balance the “public good” against community special interests?;
- how can successful negotiations be undertaken with communities that use political power as a planning tool?; and
- how do planners create opportunities for a wide range of constituencies to come to the table?

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<sup>314</sup>*The Boston Globe*, March 10, 1998.

<sup>315</sup>Alan Altshuler, *The City Planning Process: A Political Analysis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press:1965) p. 2.

Boston officials found themselves confronted with a community that “plans from the face of power.” Or perhaps it would be better described as a community that “deals from the face of power.” In the classical model of planning, politicians “attend” to the planning process rather than strictly control it. Throughout the cases presented in this thesis, Southie politicians are found “guarding the gate” of public participation, and exerting a raw use of power to achieve the desired results.<sup>316</sup> Southie’s mode of “planning from the face of power” precludes a certain deliberativeness that can benefit communities and larger constituency groups alike. Without deliberativeness, this use of political power to control the planning process (if indeed it can be called a planning process) is heavily dependent on deal making, which is at the opposite end of the spectrum from consensus building. This is not meant to suggest that planners face an “either/or” dilemma. It would be naive and counterproductive for planners to discount the role of political power in the planning process. However, the South Boston case studies, and the Seaport Master Plan in particular, illustrate the dangers of structuring planning processes to appease one group while ignoring others. If indeed planners are interested in balancing the “public good” against community special interests, and are concerned with creating opportunities for a wide range of constituencies to come to the table, of the greatest importance is the design of a planning process that allows for a balance between the use of political power and the inclusion of many voices at the planning “table.”

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<sup>316</sup>A thank you to John de Monchaux for describing the situation in Southie so succinctly.

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