

Blackstone/Franklin Square Neighborhood Association
January 2021 Community and Member Meeting

7:00 p.m., Tuesday, Jan. 19th, 2021

Via Zoom

*This meeting was recorded and video is available on
The BFSNA YouTube channel*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nT4q6LK11f4>

AGENDA

Please join us virtually for our January 2021 general meeting. Our agenda is as follows:

7:00 p.m. Welcome and announcements (Board).

7:05 p.m. Remembrance of Andrew Parthum (Members and friends). We will remember and honor Andrew Parthum, our longtime member, past leader and friend, who passed away last month. Known to all for his care and kindness, Andrew was among the most important contributors in BFSNA's 40-year history, including to oversee creation of an extraordinary scholarship fund that has helped dozens of South End young people with the costs of college and higher education. We celebrate Andrew's life and legacy with immense love and affection.

MINUTES: The following spoke in remembrance of Andrew:

- Bill Leonard (Andrew's partner)
- Dave Wisholek
- Jennifer Coplon
- Jeremy Kazanjian-Amory
- Mark Ott
- Lisa Jenks
- Mayor Walsh
- Deborah Hull

BFSNA Treasurer Matt Mues reported that over \$10,000 has been donated over the past few weeks in honor of Andrew. BFSNA Secretary Toni Crotall asked that people please consider joining the Scholarship Committee to continue the impact.

VIDEO OF THIS AGENDA ITEM: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nT4q6LK11f4>

7:35 p.m. Dog uses in Blackstone and Franklin Squares (Boston Parks Department, BFNSA and residents). In conjunction with the Boston Parks Department, we'll have a community discussion about dog activity in Blackstone and Franklin Squares and how the City and residents can work to best ensure the safe and happy use of the parks for people and pets alike.

Parks Department leadership will be present to take comments, listen to ideas and concerns, and answer questions. Topics to be covered include whether creation of a formal dog park is desired or feasible, if residents would favor sanctioned off-leash areas and hours (as exists on Boston Common), how to strengthen the Human Quadrant initiative and any other proposals or policies residents may wish to suggest.

A tragic recent incident in which a dog being chased was struck and fatally injured after running into the street underscores the importance of this discussion. All are invited and all views and ideas are welcome.

MINUTES: Boston Parks Commissioner Ryan Woods said:

- Of the 331 parks in Boston, about 116 have Friends groups, ranging from Friends of the Public Garden and its \$19 million endowment to one or two next-door neighbors. Commissioner Woods recalled that one of his first actions upon joining the Parks Department was meeting with Friends of the Squares and back then, the issue was how do we bring more positive activity into the Squares. Two-legged and four-legged positive activity is welcome.
- With regard to regulating dog use, Parks' goal is not to come into parks and start ticketing or fining, but rather work with communities to find solutions, which may differ from park to park. Parks has found that a key to success is having a dogs group established within a Friends group, which Parks can then work with.
- Parks will be deploying Please Leash Your Dog sandwich boards in the Squares in the next few weeks. The City's approach is an educational campaign, where the signs are up for a few weeks.
- Parks' goal is to have a dog park in every neighborhood. There are six now, including in the South End (Peter's Park)—meaning 22 to go.
- In response to a question about whether Parks might be able to reseed, aerate and restore some of the grassy areas, Commissioner Woods said this could be possible, if that is how the community wants to spend money in the Square's dedicated reserve fund and accepts some of the panels being offline for a time. He noted that the grass restoration on the Common is privately-funded.
- Friends of the Public Garden are advocating for a fenced dog park and elimination of the off-leash dog program on the Common as part of the master plan for the Common. They're experiencing a lot of issues including multiple children bitten over the past six months in the off-leash panels. Joe Schutt noted that after seven years, the Common Canine group has seen a fall-off in participation/leadership and they're working to remedy that.

Commissioner Woods spoke to considerations around creating a dedicated dog park somewhere within the Squares:

- The most recent dog park undertaken by the City cost about \$260,000. A dog park can't just be a fenced-in grass area due to dog waste and impact; it has to be pea stone, or artificial turf with irrigation to remove waste residue and meet public health codes. There are decisions to be made about size and whether to separate large and small dogs.

- The fact that the Squares are within the South End Landmark District imposes special design and review requirements.
- Financial constraints exist and private funds need to be raised for these dog parks. (Peters Park raised \$350,000 for their park.) There is a foundation called the Stanton Foundation which is the leading philanthropic supporter of dog parks, though they only do one per municipality at a time.
- If the community were to desire a dog park in Blackstone or Franklin Squares, and funds could be raised and a dog group in place to take responsibility, the Parks Department would be supportive and the process could move pretty quickly (contingent on Landmarks approval). A typical Parks project involves around six months for design and community input, followed by a year to undertake and complete construction, so a year and a half total.

Toni:

- Reiterated the request we have received from BPD that dog owners please leash up their dogs at times when BPD officers are in the Squares enforcing laws against prohibited human activity like public drinking, smoking and drug use. Police report that offenders sometimes push back and claim that if dog owners can break the rules, they can too.
- We welcome and need dog owners to join the volunteers, boards and dog committee leadership and generally represent dog owners as a collective in the community – please join us.
- Dog owners need to volunteer, clean up, 311, speak out against bad owner behavior, unify and strengthen their positive impact on the community and encourage all owners to understand that Blackstone and Franklin off-leash activity is a privilege, not a right.

Joe Schutt, resident and co-founder of The Square Dog, a Blackstone/Franklin Square dog group:

- Dog owners would love to have a dog park in every park. Ronan Park is a dog park to aspire to.
- Dog owners feel threatened when Animal Control aggressively enforces, even though we understand it is a privilege and not a right to have dogs off-leash in the parks. It's frustrating because we need places to bring our dogs and we need help from the City to do that.
- The Square Dog group is still in existence, though the original admin group has gone through life changes of kids, moving, work and so forth. Joe said anyone interested is invited to join as they need more admins and volunteers. He said anyone who has a dog issue to communicate this to The Square Dog (www.facebook.com/groups/TheSquareDog) or feel free to text him at 617 833 3376 or email joe@UnitBoston.com .

Ideas presented and views/concerns offered by residents attending the meeting:

- A resident said that Blackstone Square is not beautiful anymore because of dogs; they're in the Human Quadrant and fountain and running in front of people on the pathways. It's not fair for people without dogs, particularly as the ordinance is no dogs off-leash period. He said his ask is not for no dogs but let's have a Dog Quadrant, a properly fenced-in dog area. There needs to be greater consideration for those who are not dog owners and their right to enjoy the parks.
 - A participant chatted his strong agreement with this.

- A resident said she and her husband take their dog to Blackstone but have become more wary lately due to the presence of unfamiliar dogs not well-controlled by their owners. She suggested exploring an off-leash license program such as exists in Brookline, where owners have to meet some requirements to obtain the privilege of having dogs off-leash. Joe noted that Brookline's program is associated with specific hours. Another resident reported her experience that Newton and Watertown required specific licenses for use of dog parks in those communities.
 - Multiple participants shared their support or interest in the license concept.
- WSANA VP Desi Murphy expressed his support for a designated fenced-in area. He described how even though his two-year old mostly enjoys the dogs in Blackstone, he and other parents have had enough bad experiences with unwatched and unleashed dogs going after food in their shopping bags that people are spending less time in the Squares and instead walking farther to other parks.
 - Multiple participants shared their agreement that inattentive dog owners are a significant problem.
- A resident suggested the existence of the Square Dog should be promoted with laminated signs in the Squares. She noted that there are lots of new dog owners and people like herself who've only recently moved to the neighborhood. Joe and BSFNA said they'd work to do this.
- Former BSFNA leader Dave Wisholek recalled his experience of how much time and effort it took working with Parks to repave the walkways in the Squares and restore the fountains to operation. Making a dog park would require a group of people willing to make a similar investment of energy.
- Additional comments: Can there be poop bag dispensers? Designated dog-friendly hours? Informational packets for new residents, distributed by landlords, realtors? Boston overall does a poor job compared with NYC in having dog parks.

Survey: During the meeting, two Zoom polls were offered:

- "Would you be interested in a historically complaint dog park in either Blackstone or Franklin Square?": 84% (26 people) yes; 16% (5 people) no.
- "Do you own a dog?": 63% (22 people) yes; 37% (12 people) no.

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8:30 p.m. Adjourn.