



Alex Geourntas Office of the City Clerk 1 City Hall Plaza Room 601 Boston, MA 02201 January 31, 2025

Dear Mr. Geourntas,

Pursuant to the Boston, Massachusetts Municipal Code 7-15 Ordinance 2021 c. 19 § 1 that created the Commemoration Commission, which states that the Commission will file a bi-annual progress report with the City Clerk, the Commemoration Commission and City staff present this iteration of the report.

Best,

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Genesis Pimentel Commemoration Commission Manager Office of Historic Preservation



COMMEMORATION COMMISSION PROGRESS REPORT

January 2025

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1. SUMMARY

I. COMMEMORATION COMMISSION UPDATE

At the time of the previous report in July 2024, there were 44 members of the Commemoration Commission. Two appointed members have stepped away from their roles, putting the Commission at 42 members. In 2024, there were four Commemoration Commission meetings, starting in January. Amanda Zettel and Jean-Luc Pierite remain the co-chairs of the Commission.

We need to fill two appointed roles – Member from a Neighborhood with a Historic District and Member from the Boston Preservation Alliance.

II. SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATES

The Events, Exhibits, and Trails subcommittee co-chairs are Imari Jeffries and Suzanne Taylor. The subcommittee has 14 members. There were nine Events, Exhibits, and Trails meetings in 2024, starting in February.

The Timelines, Archives, and Curricula subcommittee co-chairs are Joe Bagley and Bob Allison. The subcommittee has 15 members. There were 10 Timelines, Archives, and Curricula meetings in 2024, starting in February.

The Legislation and Preservation Tools subcommittee chair is Lydia Lowe. Former co-chair Alison Frazee stepped down in December 2024. The subcommittee has 15 members. This subcommittee has had two commissioners step down, both of which are in the process of being replaced. There were 10 Legislation and Preservation Tools meetings, starting in February 2024.

2. VISION

I. MISSION STATEMENT

"The Commission exists to affirm that our diverse and intertwined community histories are of great value to the City of Boston, that historical tourism should be a driver of true shared prosperity, that inclusive and honest historical memory is a crucial public good worthy of attention and resources, and that communities all over the City should have the tools and resources to research, preserve, acknowledge, and celebrate their history."

The purpose of the Commemoration Commission is to highlight the importance of historic and cultural preservation of Boston. Like the Office of the Boston Bicentennial, the Commemoration Commission was created to reflect on our histories and pour into the mechanisms that protect, support, and boost history. Unlike the Office of Boston Bicentennial, the Commemoration Commission was created with the express purpose of uncovering blind spots, dealing with both noble and oppressive legacies, and connecting current Bostonians with the histories, ideologies, and truths that mattered enough to shape the past and to shape the present.

The creation of the Office of Historic Preservation and the Commemoration Commission affirms that the purpose for its existence matters, and that the execution of the plans created by the Commission will not only matter but will have the opportunity to shape the future of our City.

II. GOALS AND NEEDS

The Commemoration Commission identified these goals in 2024. This section will provide a view on which departments and other organizations might be able to take on the implementation of the goal alongside the Commemoration Commission team. If possible, this will also identify any potential need for additional staff and a sense of budget.

¹ Boston, Massachusetts, Municipal Code 7-15, Ord. 2021 c. 19 § 1.



Goal	Collaborators	Needs
Design and Launch an official City of Boston Website & accompanying Social Media channels. This should be a central communications vehicle for any and all events and activities within the city over 2025 and 2026, with a list of all commemorative activities	 Department of Innovation and Technology Organizations that are producing events? Office of Historic Preservation 	 The website and social media will need to be connected to the Commemoration Commission It will need to have dedicated staff working on keeping it updated, potentially across multiple City departments There should be website redirects There will need to be a way to tie the Commemoration Commission into the website and branding Need a sense of the ongoing budget required for the creation and upkeep of a website and social media
Branding: Develop distinctive Boston 250 and Boston 400 brands that will be used on all public events, media, organizations, etc. (Say more about what the desire for placement is from the Commemorations Commission discussions)	 Department of Innovation and Technology Branding and Graphic Design staff Mayor's Office of Partnerships Freedom Trail 	 There will need to be Boston 250 and Boston 400 branding, with logos and taglines The Freedom Trail Foundation has offered to support Boston's efforts in marketing through their grant.
Marker Program: Plan and establish a permanent historic marker program for the city of Boston that highlights places, people and situations that have been important to the city's history and evolution. In particular, make certain a marker program expresses the full story of Boston and all its people in time.	 Office of Arts and Culture Parks and Recreation Office of Historic Preservation The Freedom Trail Foundation Revolutionary Spaces Embrace Boston 	 The Commemoration Commission would like to start a marker program that is special to the 250th first, in which people can get specific landmarks to have plaques There is a need to design a special Commemoration Commission plaque that will also translate into the future Marker Program The Commemoration Commission recommends that a Marker Program for historic site be create and sit in the Office of Historic Preservation There will be a need for a dedicated staff person We would need a typology of what is being commemorating We need cost of production for a plaque, need cost for installation of plaques, and there is potential for recommendation of how many plaques a year can be produced and installed. There will need to be a cost estimate of a

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		full-time staff person running the program.
Walking Trails: Develop a series of walking trails that introduce city residents and visitors to the rich history of Boston and its neighborhoods. These tours may be general or thematic.	 Community Engagement; Neighborhood Services Historic Preservation Walk Boston Boston by Foot The Freedom Trail Boston Women's Heritage Trail Immigrant History Trail Live Like a Local Any other trails and tours institutions 	 Walking trails need potential GIS mapping A process that determines the length, location and interpretation of at least one new trail per Boston neighborhood. Need a place to be compiled and exist on both Boston250 website and boston.gov website when they are created. The City has an opportunity to create an app or use mapping specifically, so that the different trails and organizations can be consolidated for tourists who would like to explore multiple parts of the City. This would have to include DoIT, Language Access, and many other relevant departments.
Leverage engagement with the arts as a means of expressing Boston culture.	 Arts and Culture Historic Preservation Mayor's Office of Partnerships Cultural institutions Youth organizations Local artist collectives 	 Art expresses the values, thoughts, and culture of a City. By creating opportunities for sculptors to create Boston-related art, for poets and singers to host open-mic nights, for painters to paint their communities, and for all of these communities to be able to put on galas, events, or even be featured in art institutions will not only attract residents and tourists, but it will elevate Boston's art scene through economic stimulation and recognition. It will also allow for youth artists the ability to express themselves with a platform. There is a need to collaborate with institutions to create these events. There is a potential to create toolkits that guide the creation and success of these events.
The 250th would benefit from creating toolkits with funding that allow communities to create 250th events across all neighborhoods, so that they can create or amplify existing events like parades or festivals. In terms of advertising for	 Mayor's Office of Partnerships Economic Opportunity and Inclusion Arts and Culture Community Engagement Historic Preservation 	 Local communities and groups often do not have funding capacity to commemorate history with large events. With a potential modeling off of the MA250 Field Guide, there can be a Boston Field Guide for throwing events. In addition, there should be financial incentive to put these events on such as comping a public facility cost, so that there is less financial burden on people interested

tourism, media partners and advertising City events as well as annual events will be a net positive.		in having events. • The City should have a vehicle that event planners can utilize to promote events.
The City of Boston has an incentive to partner with local businesses and cultural institutions, as per the Commemoration Commission ordinance, to boost the local economy and highlight staple businesses.	 Economic Opportunity and Inclusion Arts and Culture 	Local businesses and cultural institutions stand to gain from the tourism that will stimulate our economy. With the branding coming from the City (Boston 250), businesses and local institutions can become partners and owners of what Boston 250 represents. Like the Bicentennial's 'passport' program that gave discounts for hotels and restaurants, this will boost the local economy and contextualize what institutions mean to their neighborhoods.

Goal	Collaborators	Needs
History Database Index of existing repositories and projects	 Boston Public Library Archives Historic Preservation 	 The Boston Public Library is working on a database that will live with them. There will be a need to map these repositories and clearly define the database's purpose.
The Boston Bicentennial created the Neighborhood Stories series. The opportunity to recreate the series and have an oral historic record of today to reflect on how the City has changed is important for tracking Boston's historical narratives.	 Office of Community Engagement Boston Public Library Archives Office of Historic Preservation Mass Memories Road Show (RoPA) Mass Humanities 	 There is a need to collaborate with institutions that will be undertaking this work because they already have similar projects. There is a need for Historic Preservation Staff as well as Community Engagement staff to partner with organizations like WBUR and others to interview people. It can be both a booklet and it can be a video format, which would be new for the 250th.
Data, Resources, Archives collection and curation	 Archives Boston Public Library Museums and Universities 	 There will be a need to identify how the curation and collection of archives and other resources will be selected and sorted. There will need to be partnership considerations for who will end up hosting these archival collections.

Digitizing archives	 Department of Innovation and Technology Archives Boston Landmarks Commission Boston Public Library Digital Commonwe alth Digitization Specialists Community Preservation Office State Archives 	 Digitizing archives will require a selection process for which archives will be digitized and where those digital copies will be stored. Digitization might require funding for contracting digitization specialists. Where possible, relationships with archival institutions with the capacity and desire to undertake digitization projects should be cultivated. Once archives are digitized, their online repositories should be advertised and made well-known.
Language access and other accessibility accommodations	Office of Equity and Inclusion	All digital resources should be made accessible where possible.
Museum curations, BPL exhibitions, BPS curriculum, internship, boosting other history and archival institutions	 Boston Public Library Boston Public Schools Arts and Culture Historic Preservation 	 There will be a need to collaborate with museums and Boston institutions. The creation of internships for Boston students is an important way to get youth interested in history and related fields for potential future careers. With Boston Public Library, their book curations and the content they promote can be thematic and topical. Museums can also work on their exhibitions to align with the commemorative nature of these times, including through internships for students and through partnering with local art institutions as well as relevant City departments.

Goal	Collaborators	Needs
Article 85 Reform is a named goal in the ordinance for the Legislation and Preservation Tools subcommittee. The goal is to reform the legislation to ensure better protection for historic structures and	 Planning Department Inspectional Services Zoning Boston Landmarks Commission 	 There is a need to do an analysis on Article 85 and how effective it is in preventing empty lots and preserving historic buildings. There is a need for a significant increase in the demolition delay time period, understanding that ISD still has the ability to interfere wherever a dangerous building stands. There is a need for the City to take on the



to reconsider Article 85 as a climate action tool.		 advocacy of preservation of housing through avoiding demolition where possible in favor of deconstruction and salvage as a climate action tool and as a tool of naturally occurring affordable housing. There is a need to recontextualize delay into Demolition Alternatives.
The Historic and Cultural Resource Survey is also a named goal in the ordinance, as it is recommended that Certified Local Governments all have one, and it	 Boston Landmarks Commission Office of Arts and Culture Metropolitan Area Planning Council 	 Because the City of Boston has never done a full inventory of its cultural and historic resources, it is possible that buildings that were never known to be significant are demolished. Having a cultural and historic resource survey would enable the BLC and its staff to know immediately when a resource is significant and why. In addition, a resource survey would identify important historic and cultural artifacts in communities that have been impacted by Urban Renewal in the past, that are being impacted by development currently, and will allow communities of color and low-income communities better advocate for themselves. There is a need for a multi-year budget of millions of dollars to undertake the surveying of this historic City. There is a need for a staff person inside of Historic Preservation who, alongside the Assistant Survey Director, as a Survey & GIS Project Manager, oversees the GIS Mapping of this project. SurveyLA has a good model-it identifies a platform that would be necessary in hosting the survey (ARCHES), and then a website or webpage where this information is publicly available.

Simplification of Landmark Petition Process	Boston Landmarks Commission	 The Landmark Petition process can be time-consuming, and may be inaccessible both to those who are unaware this process exists and to those who might not have the ability to go through the process but would like to preserve their neighborhood's character. There could be public training and education sessions where members of the public learn about landmarks and the petition process, if staff time allows. There could be a form that residents fill out stating their interest to landmark a building that is public, so that another resident with the ability to go through the petition process might undertake the process based on what communities want to see landmarked. All relevant departments as well as public facing institutions like the City Council should advertise the landmark process and encourage their constituents to engage with the process. With the creation of a Marker Program, landmarks can and would be eligible to have a plaque that goes alongside their new landmark status.
Mitigation procedures and a mitigation fund for the loss of cultural/historic resources and environmental impact when a demolition occurs	 Environment Department Office of Arts and Culture 	• Similar to the Building Emissions Reduction and Disclosure Ordinance (BERDO), the subcommittee recommends that historic preservation adopt an ordinance and a system that will allow for the calculation of emissions released when demolishing a building, the use of the Carbon Avoided Retrofit Estimator, the creation of something like Alternative Compliance Payments (or use of the Legacy Fund). There needs to be a process for offsetting the impact of cultural, historic, and environmental loss.

More historic districts, more legitimacy and	Boston Landmarks Commission	Because Article 85 governs demolition delay of significant buildings but does not stop
weight for cultural districts, more tools for preservation	 Office of Arts and Culture Office of Historic Preservation 	 demolition altogether, it is only one tool in the historic preservation toolbox that does not always end in preservation. If there is incentive and excitement for new historic districts, people might go through the process of petitioning for a new district to protect their resources. Since every district requires a Preservation Planner, new districts can only be created with a budget for new staff. Because budgets might not necessarily increase, a deep dive into other tools for historic preservation protection that exist and can be adopted by the City is necessary. In addition, since cultural districts are designated as a tool to preserve and reuse historic buildings alongside MHC guidelines, more research should be done in how that is supported and how more support can be provided.
Allow for Chinatown to be considered for landmark district status	 Boston Landmarks Commission Legal Other government entities 	 Chinatowns in New England have disappeared due to displacement and demolitions. Since Chinatown is in an area where there will always be considerable development, there is a need to protect this site of heritage that is a staple of the United States and its long history with immigration. Chinatown is seen as a neighborhood distinct from Downtown, and this means that Chapter 772 merits some reconsideration to allow this neighborhood the potential to become a historic district
Deconstruction Ordinance for climate change mitigation	 Environment Department Office of Historic Preservation 	 The Deconstruction ordinance is a project that came out of Zero Waste Boston. It was found that demolition and construction materials contribute a significant amount of waste. As a climate action tool, deconstruction was being explored in order to reduce waste in landfills, in order to reduce the embodied carbon released through demolition, and in order to use historic preservation and demolition delay as a climate action tool. Historic Preservation once again must partner with Environment to work on a

		deconstruction ordinance. • The City Council as well as the Mayor and other relevant departments should consider supporting a deconstruction ordinance that would help reduce Boston's carbon footprint.
Community Preservation/Inter-office collaboration	 Community Preservation Office Office of Housing National Trust for Historic Preservation 	 Collaboration with existing projects in Affordable Housing like Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing, Office to Housing, Additional Dwelling Units. Collaboration with CPA on marker programs. The ordinance calls for recommending changes to CPA, so collaboration with CPA on what is feasible and plausible to amend would be necessary.
Economic studies about why historic preservation is good for local economy, jobs, affordability • Investments in other studies and preservation tools	 Office of Economic Opportunity Historic Preservation 	 The ordinance states that it would like to affirm that historical tourism should be a driver of true shared prosperity and that inclusive and honest historical memory is a crucial public good worthy of attention and resources. We believe that if we partner with the appropriate departments to do research into the creation of jobs and how historic preservation boosts the local economy, there would be an incentive to continue the programs that promote historic preservation and commemoration since they provide economic growth.

3. SUCCESSES

I. INTERNAL

Based on the challenges identified in the previous progress report, the Commission and its staff have been working alongside many other departments to address the challenges presented by Open Meeting Law. The challenges included being unable to reach quorum due to the size of the commission, and the inability to create a fleshed-out recommendation for commemoration as required by the ordinance because all communication between a quorum of commissioners must be public, properly noticed, and must not run the risk of violating Open Meeting Law by reaching quorum through serial communication.

The Commission and City staff have worked to update the ordinance founding the Commemoration Commission such that the quorum for the Commission meetings will be reduced from 23 to 19. The ordinance has also been updated to change the subcommittees into advisory committees, so that the three subcommittees which are currently public bodies might act as advisory bodies to the Commission instead. This will allow for a dedicated group of people to work on planning recommendations for the upcoming commemorations that the Commission can approve and recommend to relevant City departments. The amendments to the original ordinance are being reviewed by the City Council.

II. EXTERNAL

The Commission staff member has fostered many new relationships with external partners that will be crucial during times of commemoration. She is working with Bunker Hill 250 in Charlestown, with East Boston and Chelsea on the 250th of the Battle of Chelsea Creek, with the British Consulate for the 250th of the American Revolution, and many other organizations and groups with a vested interest in planning around commemorative events and activities.

She partners with organizations planning events to provide them support in navigating City of Boston processes for hosting special events. She acts as a liaison between communities and organizations. She, when possible, tries to support existing commemorative events, and is responsible for the creation and execution of any projects that fall under the jurisdiction of the Office of Historic Preservation.



4. CHALLENGES

I. INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS

The Commemoration Commission faces specific challenges, including a lack of budget, a lack of appropriate staffing, a disconnect in interdepartmental engagement, and a missed opportunity for community engagement.

Since its inception, the Commemoration Commission team has not had any budget allocated for the creation of commemorative materials or events. Furthermore, the City had not allocated any funding specifically for the 250th in any City department. Commissioners felt that, given the lack of budget conversations being had across the board, it would be difficult to create recommendations with no sense of the budget landscape. In addition, the lack of budget given to the Office of Historic Preservation and Commemoration Commission team meant that there could be no meaningful projects coming out of the team and department in which the Commission sits. If the Office of Historic Preservation and the Commemoration Commission team had appropriate funding, there might be more capacity to push forward some projects and goals.

The question of budget ties into the discussion around staffing, community engagement, and interdepartmental engagement. Currently, the Commission has one staff member overseeing every aspect related to the Commemoration Commission and to commemoration at large. One staff member is not an adequate number of people working on the goals of the Commission and commemoration. The commissioners feel a negative impact because of the inefficiency that comes from having one person designated to do all aspects of the work.

Because there is one staff member overseeing all aspects of the Commission, it also comes at the cost of a lasting impact of what the City could do in terms of community engagement. If there were other staff on the Commemoration Commission team, the Office of Historic Preservation could plan more meaningful engagements with residents across the City of Boston. Residents would be able to have a more hands-on role in determining what histories need to be told during this commemorative moment and there would be potential for meaningful commemorative activities to include the everyday person.

Since the ordinance states that "the primary responsibility of the Boston Commemoration Commission is to advise the Mayor and relevant departments," consideration must be given to how the Commission and the City departments interact.² While the intention seemed to be that the City departments be part of the Commission and be able to implement what the Commission would plan, that is not what ended up

² Boston, Massachusetts, Municipal Code 7-15, Ord. 2021 c. 19 § 1.



happening. Because of how the Commission is structured, departments do sit on the Commission as members but often cannot meaningfully publicly share the draft stages of what they work on. Departments had also started planning their own commemorative processes as the Commission began to form, which

means some of their work has not been able to be introduced or vetted by the Commission. In addition, if and when the City department members who sit on the Commission get a recommendation from the Commission, the question around how the Commission is engaged after a department or internal group takes ownership of a recommendation still exists.

As stated in the first report, a project management group created for the implementation of commemorative events made up of staff members from multiple City departments—many of whom sit on the Commission—continues to meet. There has been more engagement between this team and the commissioners, but questions remain surrounding the need for the Commission to recommend plans if City groups are undertaking both the planning and implementation processes of the City's 250th activations.

However, given that there are City departments collaborating to push forward commemorative activations, there might be a positive impact in having multiple internal City teams created so that every subcommittee might have a group that reviews their recommendations and provides their support for implementation, with reports written updating the Commission on its progress.



5. NEXT STEPS

Looking ahead, the Commission should first and foremost have the two empty positions filled as soon as possible.

If the ordinance change gets passed through City Council, there will have to be a larger discussion and support around the implementation of the changes and how it will impact the commissioners. In addition, there will need to be more learning opportunities for everyone to understand the new capacities of the advisory bodies as well as potential restrictions.

In addition, we hope that there are budget considerations for the Office of Historic Preservation and the Commemoration Commission team to be able to increase its staffing as well as take on dedicated commemorative opportunities, including the creation of a Marker Program inside of the Office of Historic Preservation for not just the 250th and 400th, but as a long-term output of the commemorations.

As the concept of Boston 250 begins to take shape, we hope that the Commemoration Commission and the City of Boston can streamline and continue to shape their engagement processes with one another, so that there is no redundancy and a sense of purpose that exists in the output of the City's commemoration process.

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6. APPENDIX

I. COMMEMORATION COMMISSION MEMBER LIST

Events, Exhibits, and Trails

Jay Ash, Massachusetts Competitive Partnership

John Borders IV, Mayor's Office of Tourism, Sports, and Entertainment

Karin Goodfellow, Mayor's Office of Arts and Culture

Juan Eusebio, Local 26 Union Member

Faries Gray, Massachusett Tribe

Eric Hanson-Plass, National Parks Service of Boston (NPS)

Imari Jeffries, Embrace Boston

Juan Lopez, Latinx History Expert

Dave O'Donnell, Meet Boston

Celia Richa, Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce

Nat Sheidley, Revolutionary Spaces

Kyera Singleton, The Royall House

Suzanne Taylor, The Freedom Trail Foundation

Noelle Trent, Museum of African-American - Boston

<u>Legislation and</u> <u>Preservation Tools</u>

Kenzie Bok, Boston Housing Authority

Chelsea Blanchard, Historic Preservation Architect & Executive Director of the Boston Landmarks Commission (BLC) Designee

Michael Creasey, NPS

Lynn Smiledge, BLC Chair Designee

Senator Mike Rush, Boston Legislative Delegation

Council President Ruthzee Louijeune, Boston City Council

Jean-Luc Pierite, North American Indian Center of Boston

Lydia Lowe, Chinatown Community Land Trust

Boston Preservation Alliance

Amanda Zettel, Charlestown Preservation Society

Rebecca Tomasovic, Planning Department

Margaret Dyson, Treasury Department

Neighborhood with a Historic District

Kathy Kottaridis, Director of Historic Preservation & Environment, Energy and Open Space Designee

<u>Timelines</u>, <u>Archives</u>, and Curricula

Bob Allison, Suffolk University & Revolution 250

Joe Bagley, City Archaeologist

Kimberly Barzola, Society of American Archivists & Archivists and Archives of Color

Tatiana M.F. Cruz, Simmons University

Carolyn Goldstein, Mass Memories Road Show -UMass Boston

Angela Hedley-Mitchell, Boston Public Schools

Joan Ilacqua, The History Project

Dory Klein, Boston Public Library & The Boston Research Center (BRC) -Northeastern University

Collin Knight, Live Like a Local Tours Boston

Kristen Lafferty, City Archivist

David Leonard, Boston Public Library

Giordana Mecagni, Northeastern University Special Collections, BRC, East Boston Museum and Historical Society

Liza Stearns, NPS

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai, Massachusetts Historical Society

Cedric Woods, Institute for New England Native American Studies - UMass Boston

