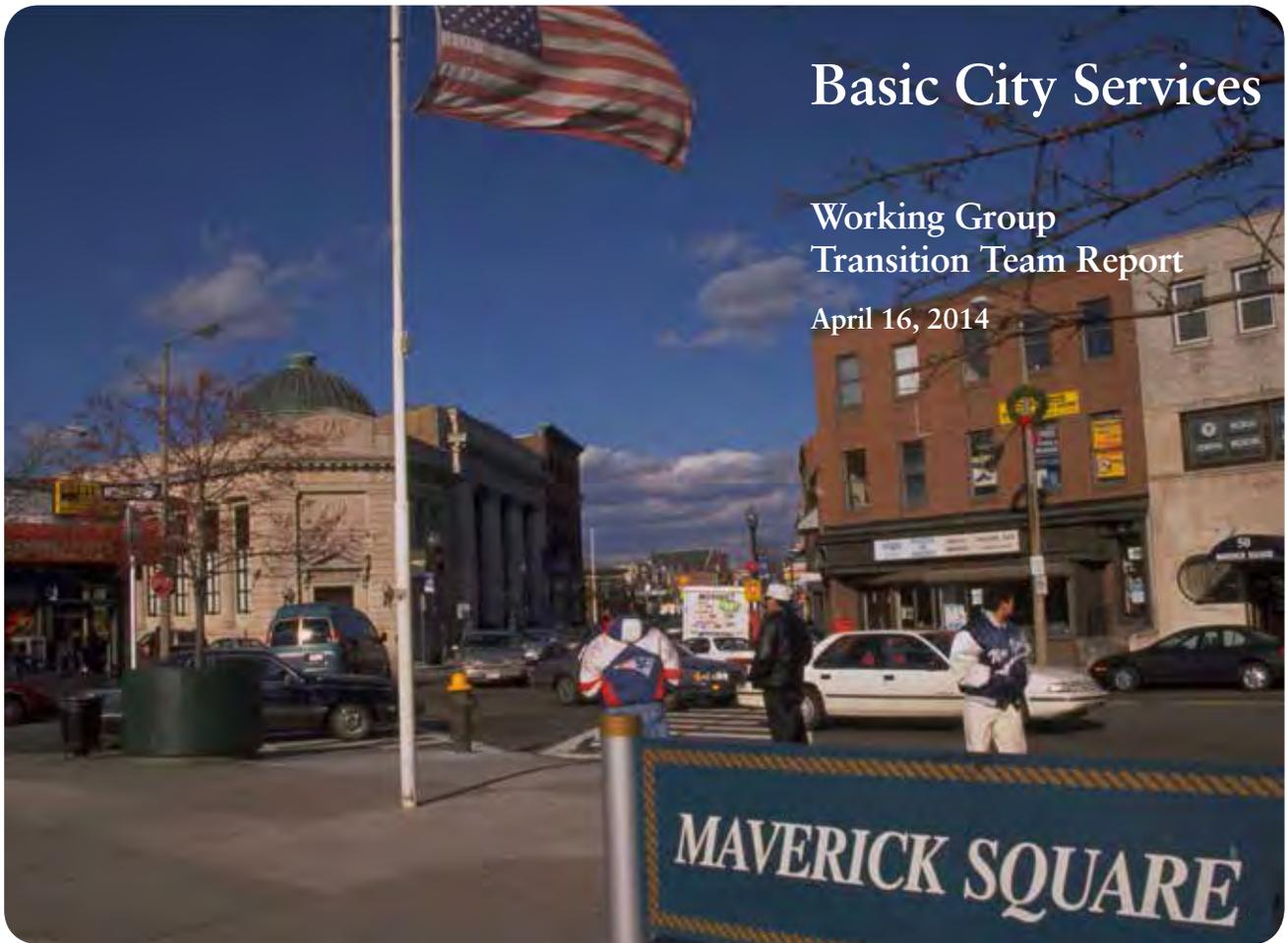


★ MAYOR ★  
**MARTIN J. WALSH**

**BOSTON**2014  
TRANSITION COMMITTEE



## Basic City Services

Working Group  
Transition Team Report

April 16, 2014

Photos: Kit Pyne





“How do we make basic city services more responsive to the needs of residents, businesses and institutional users, whether with regard to quality or cost-effectiveness?”

## INTRODUCTION

Basic city services refer to the essential services provided to all of Boston’s neighborhoods, businesses, and residents. These services include but are not limited to infrastructure improvements to the city’s streets and sidewalks, snow removal, tax collection, and business and building permitting for health and safety from various city agencies, along with other issues.

Addressing the issues in basic city services is essential to a well-run city. Under Mayor Martin J. Walsh’s Administration, the City of Boston should elevate the delivery of basic city services to businesses and residents with the goal of becoming a more customer friendly, innovative, transparent, and accountable city. The City of Boston can achieve this vision through the active engagement of committed

public employees, utilization of advances in technology, and following best practices from around the country.

The Walsh Administration must retain services and programs that exceed expectations, and work rigorously to accelerate the effectiveness and responsiveness of those services in need of improvement to better serve the residents and businesses of Boston.

## THE PROCESS

Mayor Martin J. Walsh asked the Basic City Services Working Group, “How do we make basic city services more responsive to the needs of residents, businesses and institutional users, whether with regard to quality or cost-effectiveness? And what can Boston city government do to make it easier for residents to access basic city services? You should feel free to interpret these questions broadly, to encompass not only public-facing services, like trash pickup, but also basic systems or processes such as procurement.”

The Basic City Services Working Group recognized that it could not deeply engage in the issues of all departments across the entirety of city services. Over the course of three Working Group meetings, the Open Town Meeting, public hearing, and evaluation of written testimonies from the public, the Working Group identified five themes that were identified as our top priorities as areas for improvement.

The five focuses are:

1. Neighborhood inequity in the delivery and accessibility of basic city services

2. Inconsistency and lack of communication among departments and agencies
3. Accountability
4. Business-friendly promotion
5. Technology improvements

1. Inequity in Basic City Services: Many city residents perceive that there is inequity in the delivery of basic city services to some of Boston’s underserved neighborhoods. Residents cite inequity in the delivery of infrastructure improvements, maintenance of public assets and street ornaments, and the level of attentiveness to neighborhood streets. For example, some residents felt that neighborhoods such as Chinatown and Upham’s Corner do not receive the same level of services as central neighborhoods and districts such as Back Bay and Downtown Crossing. However, some Working Group members argue that these well-known neighborhoods receive less than standard basic city services as well.

2. Communication: There is widespread agreement among members of the Working Group that improved communication between city agencies and departments will improve basic city services. Testimonies submitted at the Public Hearing, statements by city staff, and personal experiences among Working Group members described a serious lack of communication between departments and agencies.

The Working Group recognizes that city staff members are extremely attentive, hardworking, and perform to the best of their abilities given the resources and the system under which they work. Lack of communication may be the result of a combination of a bureaucratic structure,



the lack of a technology infrastructure that could speed up decision-making, insufficient collaboration among city departments, and the apparent inability of departmental staff to make on the spot decisions.

Consideration should be given to moving the licensing board staff to the same building as the permitting staff at 1010 Mass Avenue. Currently, business owners must visit separate agencies in different locations for the same license. Housing the licensing board staff within the 1010 Mass Avenue building will improve communication and decrease this cumbersome

process for businesses owners.

3. **Accountability:** City officials involved with the delivery of basic city services should be held directly accountable for the effective and efficient delivery of such services to businesses and residents. The Working Group believes that in order to improve accountability, departments should have access to technology that would collect all necessary data, track a project's workflow and status, make that information visible to everyone involved in the process, and make the data available to the public.
4. **Technology:** The Working Group recognizes that the City of Boston has made investments in technology improvements and upgrades to systems, such as the Boston Administration Information System (BAIS), which has improved the city's integrated financial and human resources management system, in recent years. The Working Group also notes the work underway to improve the city's Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system for the public safety departments. However, the Working Group believes that other departments providing basic city services could improve through the use of advanced and innovative systems. To this end, the Working Group strongly advocates a thorough examination of the technological capabilities and systems available to these other departments, and the establishment of groups that can identify specific areas with potential for improvement.
5. **Business Friendly City:** Both small and large businesses play critical roles throughout the city's neighborhoods. The Walsh Administration should encourage more business owners and entrepreneurs to operate businesses within

the city. Through the appropriate City of Boston agencies, the administration should communicate that Boston is a city that is open to all businesses and provide new businesses with high caliber customer service throughout its departments. Programs and support for entrepreneurs should align with a comprehensive campaign that welcomes and makes it easier for individuals to start and open a business.

The delay in city permitting for small businesses is an egregious example of poor quality city service. The Working Group collected a number of horrific stories about the costly financial burden on small businesses waiting for appropriate zoning and city permit approvals from the city. An improved process for small businesses permitting is a high priority. The Inspectional Services Department Working Group has provided detailed recommendations to improve the inner workings of the department. However, in conjunction with the ISD Committee's recommendations, a public campaign and a dedicated resource such as a Small Business Help Center will reflect Boston's aspiration as a city that welcomes all types of businesses.

## THE RECOMMENDATIONS

### FOCUS 1: TECHNOLOGY

Providing basic city services requires keeping pace with system upgrades and new innovations to meet city

departmental objectives and ever-increasing public expectations. Boston is positioned to meet this goal. Recognizing the importance of a technology strategy that balances innovation with efficient day-to-day operation, the Walsh Administration should achieve the following technological goals:

- 1) Work to eliminate unaddressed issues in maintenance and documentation of existing IT systems
- 2) Better coordinate the city's civic innovation and operational efforts
- 3) Create a more appropriate and maintainable IT structure
- 4) Ensure best IT and software development practices are in use
- 5) Create better, more usable technologies for civic engagement
- 6) Maintain role as leader in civic innovation

### KEEP

- 1) Support The Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics: Continue to support the New Urban Mechanics office and recognizes its role as regional and national leader in civic technology and citizen engagement.
- 2) Collaborate with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council: Continue to collaborate with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council and other partners to play a prominent regional leadership role.

## IMPLEMENT

- 1) 3-1-1 SYSTEM: A 3-1-1 system should be implemented to provide a one-stop call center for all non-emergency questions. The system can also divert non-emergency calls from the 9-1-1 system. Such a system can greatly improve basic city services questions for many residents and businesses.
- 2) Conduct IT Audit: Launch an organization-wide IT audit to resolve outstanding technology concerns and reduce technical debt.
- 3) Collaboration between New Urban Mechanics and DoIT: New Urban Mechanics and DoIT should collaborate more closely.
- 4) Create City Chief Data Officer: Create a dedicated data department, led by a new City Chief Data Officer (CDO). The CDO will provide a central policy coordination role:
  - a) Increase use and visibility of data portal
  - b) Create a standard process for fulfillment of Freedom of Information Act requests
  - c) Produce a strategic roadmap for enterprise data management and governance
  - d) Represent DoIT in interactions with vendors to protect the integrity and value of the city's data assets
  - e) Act as a visible spokesperson for city data efforts including addressing any privacy concerns
  - f) Coordinate city efforts around data transparency, including collaboration at the regional and national level.

## DREAM

- 1) Increase resources for The Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics: New Urban Mechanics should have more dedicated resources for innovation.

## FOCUS 2: BUILDING DEPARTMENT

The slow speed for approvals for simple business permits, strict requirements and interpretation of building codes for minor home improvements, the multiple department locations between 1010 Massachusetts Avenue and related agencies at City Hall, and poor quality customer service have created an overcomplicated and frustrating experience for many residents and businesses. A working group should be created to help streamline this process and suggest further improvements. The Inspection Services Department Committee has also made specific recommendations in a separate report.



## KEEP

- 1) Online Permitting System: The system allows for the processing of building permits for non-structural construction on homes.

## IMPLEMENT

- 1) A Menu System: This system would inform customers about the necessary permits, forms and documents that are needed for each permit.
- 2) Greeters: At City Hall offices, greeters should approach and assist members of the public. This staff, made up of existing staff members can be deployed flexibly during high traffic times.

- 3) Increased Bilingual Staff: This would enable better communication with a culturally diverse public and improve service.

- 4) Additional Computer Equipment: Add computer equipment so that more staff members can review plans.

- 5) Highlight Department Success: Success replicates success. The department should be recognized for its achievements.

## DREAM

- 1) Fully Implement The Hanson System: The Hanson system integrates city departments and enables them to conduct business online . Fully implementing this system would improve productivity, increase document storage



capacity, and provide better customer service. The administration should review and take immediate action to implement this system across all departments.

- 2) Business Friendly Campaign: Conduct a public campaign that sends the message that Boston is a business-friendly city.

### **FOCUS 3: INFRASTRUCTURE**

Infrastructure represents the backbone of the city and is essential for the functioning of our society and economy. Continued investment in the city's

streets, sidewalks, utilities, and community assets has a direct impact on the economic health and well-being of Boston. To ensure the safety and security of the city while promoting Boston's continued prosperity, the Walsh Administration should continue to reinvest in infrastructure throughout all of Boston's neighborhoods.

#### **KEEP**

- 1) Citizens Connect: Citizens Connect has been a useful means for the public to report non-

working infrastructure, but improvements must be made to ensure accountability and timely responsiveness.

## IMPLEMENT

- 1) Coordination of Street Furniture: Similar types of furniture would help improve the street corridor view. This includes lighting, trash receptacles, and types of sidewalk designs, signage, and bus shelters. The goal should be to create a consistent view corridor.
- 2) Upgraded Handicap Ramps: Current handicap ramps collect and trap trash and dirt.

## DREAM

- 1) Greater Equity in Infrastructure Improvements To Neighborhoods: Resolve the perception that certain neighborhoods are favored over others. A plan should be created to identify neighborhoods in need of updated street infrastructure.

## FOCUS 4: RECYCLING

Improved recycling can improve the quality of life, drive down city costs, and contribute to the sustainability of the city. The City of Boston lags behind other cities in the Commonwealth in its recycling practices. A working group should conduct a thorough review of the city's recycling program.

## IMPLEMENT

- 1) Review Trash and Recycling Contracts: Update pay metrics and performance criteria. As the city is in the process of issuing new Requests for Proposals (RFPs), a thorough review should include the most up-to-date the recycling practices.
- 2) Review Recycling and Trash Collection Policies: San Francisco, CA and Gloucester, MA are examples of cities with well-respected recycling and trash practices. A working group comprised of current city workers should conduct a study to improve the City of Boston's practices on recycling and trash removal.
- 3) Institute An "Organics" Recycling Practice: The Commonwealth has implemented new regulations to encourage organic product recycling. Organic recycling is the collection and recycling of household materials including most food debris, cardboard materials, and yard waste. The materials list can include most items that are biodegradable.

## FOCUS 5: CITYWIDE CLEANLINESS

The City of Boston provides garbage collection and snow removal, yet depends upon business owners and citizens to clean the public way. The City of Boston's Ordinance 23-5 states that "the owner or person in

control of any premises within the City shall at all times maintain the sidewalks, alleys, streets, and places adjoining the premises free of trash, refuse, rubbish, or debris...” This ordinance is not enforced consistently, nor is it enforced on a citywide basis.

### KEEP

- 1) Snow Emergency Removal Policies and Program
- 2) The Hokies Program: This neighborhood street cleaning program should be upgraded to use newer equipment to maximize the effectiveness of the staff over a larger area. While effective, the program is labor intensive.

### IMPLEMENT

- 1) Enforce Ordinance 23-5 to Promote Cleaning Accountability: Businesses and residents must be informed about their responsibility for maintaining cleanliness in the public way. The city must define who is responsible for cleaning under and around waste barrels and new boxes and hold such persons accountable. The city should orchestrate an anti-litter campaign.
- 2) Redefine Department Performance Measures: Public works performance measures should be redefined, to measure the cleanliness of the area, not the amount of garbage collected.
- 3) Performance Measures: The Public Works

Commissioner should communicate these measures to people doing the work and management should be held accountable for quality controls. Incorporate CQI (Certified Quality Index) in which a neutral party conducts a monthly audit of performance measures.

### DREAM

- 1) Sanitation Districts: Establish high trafficked districts where city sanitation workers take ownership for an area’s cleanliness and are empowered to sweep, collect garbage, and write code violations.
- 2) Trash Collection Coordination: Coordinate trash collection and street cleaning schedules so that they occur in tandem wherever possible. This way, cars parked elsewhere for street cleaning will enable trash collection to occur more quickly with less impact on traffic. Street cleaners working later that day can sweep debris left behind and clean close to the curb.

### FOCUS 6: LOCALIZED/ DECENTRALIZED BASIC CITY SERVICES

The Working Group heard concerns about issues of inequity in the delivery of services to different neighborhoods, the need to depoliticize the process, and issues surrounding accountability.



Localizing essential basic city services brings city services directly to city neighborhoods. For some residents and neighborhoods, making the trek to City Hall or 1010 Massachusetts Avenue can be time consuming and inconvenient, especially given the lack of public transportation to 1010 Massachusetts Avenue.

## KEEP

- 1) The Boston Main Streets Program: The program should be expanded to include localized business services with additional assistance from the city.

## IMPLEMENT

- 1) Quarterly Neighborhood Meetings: The Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Services should host quarterly neighborhood town hall meetings to better understand the demands for basic city services. Commissioners and department heads should attend the meetings.



## DREAM

- 1) Create Little City Halls: The delivery of basic city services could be conducted through a caseworker model, where public staff members could take an issue and bring it through the city process from beginning to satisfactory completion. The city should identify three to six staff members who can serve as caseworkers for any resident seeking basic city services. The staff should have strong computer skills and multiple language skills. Local libraries could serve as existing facilities to host, deliver, and complete these services. The caseworker model will humanize Boston's delivery of basic city services. Some issues that these "Little City Halls" should handle include:
  - a) Concerns about trash removal, snow removal, cleanliness, calls regarding a lack of heat, streetlights, permits for parking, and block parties.
  - b) Job opportunities within each neighborhood, including youth summer jobs.
  - c) Marriage and dog licenses. Community meetings, substance abuse meetings, and youth activities.

## Basic City Services Working Group

### Co-chairs

- My Lam, Founder/Manager, Escazú Development
- Rosemarie Sansone, President, Downtown Boston Improvement District Corporation

### Members

- Frank Baker, Boston City Councilor
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- William (Buddy) Christopher, Principal Architect, Roche Christopher Architecture
- Maura Doyle, Clerk of the Supreme Judicial Court
- Leo Fahey, Business Manager, Pipefitters Local 537
- Tomás Gonzalez, Statewide Campaign Director, Massachusetts Communities Action Network
- Beverly Hillaire, Owner, A Sweet Place
- Gilbert Ho, IT Business Analyst, Commonwealth of MA IT, Office of the State Treasurer
- Amanda Kennedy, Animal Control Officer, Arlington Police Department
- Meg Mainzer-Cohen, President, Back Bay Association
- Dianne Morad, Government Affairs Consultant
- Jerome Smith, Chief of Staff to Senate President Therese Murray
- James Taylor, Professional Painter
- Sam Tyler, President, Boston Municipal Research Bureau
- Sean Wheeler, Software Engineer
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### Staff Support

- Ellen McDonough, South Boston resident

Organizational titles and affiliations are provided for identification purposes only.