



South End/Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust

February 2, 2009

Armando Goncalves
Deputy Director for Economic Development and Planning
Boston Redevelopment Authority
Boston City Hall, 9th Floor
Boston, MA 02201

Dear Mr. Goncalves:

Thank you for meeting with us last week to discuss concerns about the Berkeley Street Community Garden fence. We were pleased to open up this dialogue and hope that by clarifying some misconceptions about the fence—and by facing up to our mistakes—we can move forward together to make the garden a clean, safe and welcoming green space that is an asset to the neighborhood.

Many people—including the writer of the recent Boston Courant article—think that this is a chain-link fence. It is not. The chain-link that is now on the fence frames is meant to be temporary. By spring, we intend to replace it with a much lighter custom-made 3-inch square wire mesh. This will be much more attractive, while still performing several important functions: it will catch the trash that blows off the street and provide security and visibility. Passers-by and, more importantly, police patrolling in cruisers will be able to see into the garden to enjoy our landscaping and discourage inappropriate behavior.

Another misconception is that the fence encroaches into the public way. It does not. The fence, like all fences, is at the edge of the garden's property line, leaving an 8-foot wide sidewalk. This allows us to be better stewards of the entire garden by making it much easier to keep both sides free of trash. We look forward to working with the City on the redesign and reconstruction of the current asphalt sidewalk—an even surface with updated lighting will be much more welcoming.

The 7 foot height of the fence is in direct response to our neighbors who wanted the garden to be more visually appealing when viewed from the street. The garden's 167 plots come in all varieties. While all the plots have the same basic structure (we built these in 1989), some gardeners have built their plots up with trellises to hold vines and gourds. The finished fence with mesh and attractive plantings at its base responds to residents' concerns by giving the garden a more consistent, homogeneous appearance when viewed from either side of East Berkeley Street.

The fence project is phase two of a three-part master plan for renovating and upgrading the garden. The first phase, which included a new central path with water troughs etched with poetry in English and Chinese, a pair of trellises on the Dwight Street alley and gates on Tremont Street and Shawmut Avenue, was completed nine years ago. The gates and trellises put up then have the same height and diagonal structures as the new fence frames along Berkeley.

The current phase includes the fence, and a crushed stone path and water taps between the fence and the first row of plots. There will also be a double gate on Shawmut that will allow us to bring in a dumpster for our twice yearly cleanups and receive annual compost deliveries. The design of the fence, with its unusual diagonal elements, was reviewed and approved by South End Landmarks, as well as by the Old Dover Neighborhood Association and the Eight Streets Neighborhood Association, both of which appreciated its clean, modern lines and visual rhythm.

In the spring, the new fence panels will frame new landscaping. There will be plantings on both sides of the Tremont Street gate—one bed is inside, the other outside the fence—and all along the strip of land between the fence and the new path, as well as at the Shawmut Avenue corner. Gardeners are currently working with professional designers to select plantings that will provide year-round color and interest. The center meeting area, which is already beautifully landscaped, will be much more visible to people walking down Berkeley. We hope that the improved visibility provided by the new fence will encourage our neighbors to come into the garden to enjoy our shaded landscape and consider joining our community of gardeners.

The third and final phase of the Berkeley Garden's master plan is the renovation of the Dwight Street alley edge, but fundraising for this has yet to begin. The alley work would involve a low concrete retaining wall topped by a new chain-link fence with several side gates. This will create a neat, clean edge while finally securing the entire garden. We want to be open and welcoming to our neighbors during the day, but locked against people who are likely to be engaging in inappropriate behavior at night.

This master plan was created to fulfill the intent of the 1992 development plan, which formed the basis of our Land Disposition Agreement with the BRA. As you know, the design details of that plan were meant to be conceptual placeholders. Here are two examples to show that the details of that plan are not appropriate to today's South End. The plan calls for an entrance to the garden from Tremont Street by stairs; this would not meet current ADA requirements. The Shawmut Street edge shows a staggered masonry wall with "structural ceramic Chinese grillwork and tiles"—a perfect design if the goal is to provide niches for drug deliveries and a hiding place for people engaged in illegal behavior. Our fence

design addresses the current needs of a modern South End and meets the requirements of the LDA.

We—the Berkeley Street Community Garden gardeners and the board leadership of the South End/Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust (SELROST)—apologize to the BRA and its staff for not reviewing these plans with them. That we didn't realize that this was a requirement is no excuse. We are also sorry that we didn't do a public presentation of the fence plans when we were about to launch construction. Again, by way of explanation and not excuse, the fundraising for this ambitious \$300,000 project has been long and arduous and the neighborhood has welcomed many new residents since our last public meetings. When SELROST received the grant from the Department of Neighborhood Development last summer, we were so eager to begin this long delayed work that we neglected to fully inform our neighbors.

We sincerely hope that we can move forward with the BRA and our South End neighbors to complete this project. All of us share the same goals—to beautify one of Boston's principle gateways and to make the Berkeley Street Community Garden an inviting place for gardeners and neighbors alike. When the snow is gone and the new path is visible, the integrity of the current design and the potential of the newly cleared planting beds framed by a contemporary mesh fence will be more apparent. We look forward to working with the BRA, our landscape designers and our neighbors to select plantings that will provide year-round interest, show off the beauty of the row of maturing ginkgo trees along Berkeley Street and beautify the sidewalk edges of Tremont, Berkeley and Shawmut.

Sincerely,

Betsy Johnson, Board President, South End/Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust
John McLachlan, President of Eight Streets Neighborhood Association
Ann McQueen, Berkeley gardener
Roger Stearns, a founding gardener of the Berkeley Street Community Garden
Valerie Burns, Executive Director, Boston Natural Areas Network

CC:

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