

A TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PANEL REPORT

Germantown Housing Development Quincy, MA



**Urban Land
Institute**

Boston

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Executive Summary

Under the direction of the Urban Land Institute's Boston District Council, The Quincy Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) convened in the Germantown neighborhood in Quincy, MA in October 2013. The TAP convened stakeholders, City and community leaders, and a panel of land use and development professionals for a day-long session focused on options for improving the overall environment of the Snug Harbor and Riverside Housing Developments as well as improving parking capacity and management for the residents of the neighborhood.

Focusing on the Quincy Housing Authority's (QHA) goals for improving the neighborhood, the team met with the QHA, toured the Germantown neighborhood, before interviewing nearly a dozen stakeholders and community leaders to understand the neighborhood and its needs in terms of parking and aesthetic improvements. Data collected and prepared by the QHA staff prior to the TAP informed this discussion.

The panel then held a "closed door" charrette during which it discussed the redevelopment possibilities. The outcome of this collaborative effort was a presentation by the panelists at a public meeting and this report.

The report that follows is separated into four chapters and provides background about the TAP program, an overview of the issues associated with the Germantown neighborhood, the Panel's recommendations regarding the neighborhood and the QHA's next steps.

Chapter 1: ULI and the TAP Process gives an overview of the Urban Land Institute's Boston District Council and its Technical Assistance Panels and provides a detailed list of participants in the October 2013 Quincy TAP including stakeholders, and a panel of land use and development professionals.

Chapter 2: Background and Assignment provides a recount of the Germantown neighborhood's history and the QHA's goals for improvements to the neighborhood.

In *Chapter 3: Observations and Findings* the panel enumerates the relevant issues raised in the tour and provides recommendations for aesthetic and parking improvements that will have the most significant impacts.

Finally, in *Chapter 4: Recommendations*, the panel provides its recommendations for neighborhood-wide aesthetic, safety and parking improvements and funding sources for the improvements.



Map of Germantown neighborhood.

1. ULI and the TAP Process

a. Urban Land Institute (ULI)

The Urban Land Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit research and education organization supported by its members. Founded in 1936, the institute now has 30,000 members worldwide representing the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines, working in private enterprise and public service.

As the preeminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI facilitates the open exchange of ideas, information and experience among local, national and international industry leaders and policy makers dedicated to creating better places. The mission of ULI is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and to help sustain and create thriving communities. ULI Boston serves the six New England states.

b. Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs)

ULI Boston's Real Estate Advisory Committee convenes TAPs at the request of municipalities and public agencies. They serve underresourced communities and nonprofit organizations facing complex land use challenges who benefit from planning and development professionals providing pro bono recommendations. At the TAP, a group of diverse professionals representing the full spectrum of land use and real estate disciplines typically spend one to two days visiting and analyzing existing built environments, identifying specific planning and development issues. They then formulate realistic and actionable recommendations to move initiatives forward in a way consistent with the applicant's

goals and objectives.

c. Panelists and TAP Process

Panel Members

ULI Boston convened a panel of volunteers whose members represent a range of disciplines associated with land use and development required to assess QHA's options for improving the Germantown neighborhood. Disciplines represented included transportation engineering, urban planning, civil engineering, landscape architecture, architecture, and public housing. Members were selected with the intent of convening a robust array of professional expertise relevant to the City's objectives for the TAP.

The following is the list of panelists:

- Jason Denoncourt, Project Manager, The Gutierrez Company (TAP Co-Chair)
- Jeremy Wilkening, Director of Real Estate, Urban Edge (TAP Co-Chair)
- Steve Cebra, Senior Vice President, Walker Parking Consultants/Engineers
- Susan Connelly, Director, Community Housing Initiatives, Massachusetts Housing Partnership
- Amy Korte, Principal, Arrowstreet
- Brandon Kunkel, Landscape Architect, Copley Wolff Design Group
- Nancy Ludwig, Principal, ICON architecture
- Scott Payette, Principal, Scott Payette Architects
- Kartik Shah, Urban Designer, Cannon Design
- Scott Turner, Director of Planning, Nitsch Engineering

Michelle Landers, Director at ULI Boston provided organizational and technical support in preparation for and during the TAP event, and served as report writer.

James Lydon, Executive Director of the Quincy Housing Authority, served as a primary contact for the TAP.

Stakeholders

The success of this TAP would not have been possible without the cooperation of the diverse group of stakeholders who met with the panel and shared ideas, assessments and opinions on a range of issues.

Stakeholder contributors to the Quincy TAP included:

- Margaret Milne, QHA
- Sean Glennon, Director of Community Development, City of Quincy Planning Department
- Regina Jones-Jenkins, Germantown resident and Chair of the Harborview Residents Association
- Larry Norton, former public housing Germantown resident, current homeowner
- Claire Brennan, Germantown Neighborhood Center
- Joanne Roche, QHA
- Kathleen Porazzo, QHA
- Carolyn Crossley, QHA
- Deborah Williamson, QHA
- David Ferris, QHA

TAP Process

The Quincy TAP was held on October 29, 2013. In the morning, the panel met at the Germantown Neighborhood Center and was welcomed by QHA Executive Director, James Lydon, Quincy Mayor, Thomas P. Koch, Ward 1 Councillor, Margaret Laforest, and QHA Commissioner and former Ward 1 Councillor, Leo Kelly, along with several other QHA staff members. The panel was given an overview of the neighborhood, its history, relevant issues and dynamics within the neighborhood, and the city's aspirations for improving the neighborhood.

This introduction was followed by a tour of the neighborhood. After the tour, the panel interviewed a diverse series of stakeholders that included QHA staff, residents, and community center staff.

The panelists then engaged in an intensive "closed door" charette to develop recommendations addressing some of the relevant issues associated with aesthetics, safety, parking, and community connections along with "next step" recommendations that were shared with the community at a public presentation that evening.

The panel delivered its presentation to an audience of approximately 30 people, consisting of local residents QHA staff, and other interested individuals. The presentation is available electronically by request from the QHA and at the ULI Boston website <http://boston.uli.org>.



Panelists at Firehouse Beach

2. Background & Assignment

a. Neighborhood Overview

The Germantown neighborhood is located on a beautiful peninsula extending into Quincy Bay, but none of the public housing developments located there takes advantage of its waterside location in terms of amenities or activities. Additionally, the location is in need of streetscape improvements, landscaping and other elements that would soften and improve the visual environment.

Parking is also an issue. There needs to be either additional parking and/or present parking areas need to be clearly noted and designated. The Germantown neighborhood is home to the public housing developments: Riverview, Snug Harbor Crowley Court and O'Brien Towers, as well as a small cluster of privately owned homes.

The study area for this TAP included:

- Snug Harbor - a Massachusetts DHCD-funded development consisting of 100 four-unit structures an located on 28.3 acres of land

- Riverview - a HUD-funded development which includes 45 four-unit structures on 28 acres of land

- Crowley Court - a DHCD-funded development that consists of 44 units of housing located in 12 brick single-story structures on 3.7 acres of land

Site History

The Germantown neighborhood was originally know as Shedd's Neck. Originally settled as a glass making and basket weaving manufacturing community for German immigrants, the planned community failed and until the middle of the twentieth century was known mainly as a small farming community.

After World War II, the QHA and Commonwealth of Massachusetts built 400 units for returning veterans and their families. The Commonwealth sold surplus land it owned to the federal government to build low-income housing, this became the Riverview development, consisting of 180 units for families.



The Boardwalk at Firehouse Beach

b. Site Description

The study area of Snug Harbor, Riverview and Crowley Court consists of three different types of housing stock.

Snug Harbor

The Snug Harbor Development is funded by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and operated and managed by the QHA. It consists of 100 four-unit homes scattered over 28 acres of land. The exteriors of the homes are cedar shakes and are in good condition having recently undergone an \$8 million renovation to replace the siding. While the buildings themselves are in good shape, there is little to no landscaping and the homes have chain link fences and metal clotheslines in various states of disrepair. Much of the fencing has been recently removed and has increased the look of the neighborhood greatly.

Parking in the Snug Harbor Development is unorganized and not clearly managed. Residents prefer to park as close to their homes as possible out of convenience or perceived safety issues. Because there is not adequate parking for the number of

cars owned by residents, this leads to residents parking on lawns and open spaces rather than nearby paved lots. The paved lots are not well placed or well marked and are underutilized. There is currently no parking management plan in place and residents are not required to display a permit for on-street or off-street parking in the development.

Riverview

The Riverview Development is funded by the federal government and is operated and managed by the QHA. It consists of 45 four-unit structures scattered over 28 acres of land.

The Riverview Development is also in good shape having recently undergone an \$8 million renovation to replace the roofs and siding of the buildings.

Overall, parking at Riverview is more organized and centrally located small paved lots are well marked and maintained.

Crowley Court

Crowley Court is funded by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and consists of 44 units in 12 sin-



Homes in the Snug Harbor Development



Homes in the Riverview Development

gle story brick buildings. The residential units are reserved for the handicapped and the elderly and while the outdoor decorations put in place by the residents may not be aesthetically pleasing, the residents clearly see this as their home and community and in general are more welcoming to new residents than the other developments.

While the panel focused on landscaping and safety improvements that would be universal for all three developments, the bulk of the parking and circulation work focused on the Snug Harbor Development.

environment of public housing developments with streetscape and landscape improvements. They also requested that the panel recommend improvements for parking circulation and connections to the water.

c. Quincy Housing Authority Goals

As stated during the TAP application process, the goals of the QHA include improving the overall



Homes in the Crowley Court Development

3. Neighborhood Assets

a. Civic Assets

The Snug Harbor Community School

The elementary school serves the children in both the private and public housing.

The Germantown Community Center

Along with the elementary school, the Germantown Neighborhood Center serve as the gateway to the neighborhood.

The Neighborhood Center is located in a former church that was decommissioned by the Archdiocese several years ago. Currently the Neighborhood Center serves families in both public and private housing.

The Manet Community Health Center

Located on Bicknell Street, the Manet Community Health Center opened in 1983. The health center is not-for-profit and provides health and social services to the community.

The Housing Authority Offices

The QHA Maintenance Office is located at 15 Bickell Street. The office handles all maintenance issues for the Housing Authority and is open to residents to report maintenance issues daily. The QHA uses the lot behind the office to store heavy equipment.

The Rotary

The rotary once hosted community movie nights and other civic events, but is currently unattractive and unwelcoming. The Shed Memorial Beacon in the center of the rotary has stood in its current location for more than 60 years. The memorial, in the form of a lighthouse, consists of a column of Quincy granite topped by a large glass and copper lantern. The Memorial is currently undergoing repair.



QHA maintenance facility and Manet Community Health Center from Palmer Street



Sailor Snug Harbor Beach from Palmer Street

b. Recreation and Public Space

Firehouse Beach

Firehouse Beach is located at the end of Doane Street. It is located next to an active firehouse and is owned by the QHA. There is a small parking lot and recent renovations include a 247-foot boardwalk that provides access from the lot to the beach.

The sand at the beach is quite coarse, so while it may not be well suited for a swimming beach, it is a wonderful opportunity for passive use, sitting, sunbathing, or beach games.

While this beach is listed on beach guides produced by the city of Quincy, few residents outside of Germantown use or know of the beach.

Sailors Snug Harbor Beach

Once home to community gatherings, this beach is overgrown and the entrance to the beach is marked by jersey barriers.

Basketball Courts

The basketball courts have fallen into a state of disrepair, but represent a recreation opportunity for the neighborhood residents. In the recent past, the

basketball league at the community center sold out and had a waiting list, so there is major interest in playing basketball in the neighborhood.

Jean Kennedy Playground

The playground seems to be in good condition. There were conflicting reports about how often it is used by the resident children, however, if parents felt the playground was safe and well maintained it could represent another community asset.

Public Soccer Field

The soccer field is owned and maintained by the City of Quincy. When the panel viewed the field in late October, it was hard to tell what its primary use was because there were no goals or lines on the field. If that was because it was off season, fine. If the field is generally kept in such condition, some investment might create a space that the neighborhood could use outside of organized city soccer leagues.



View south from Firehouse Beach



Basketball Courts on Taffrail Road

4. Recommendations

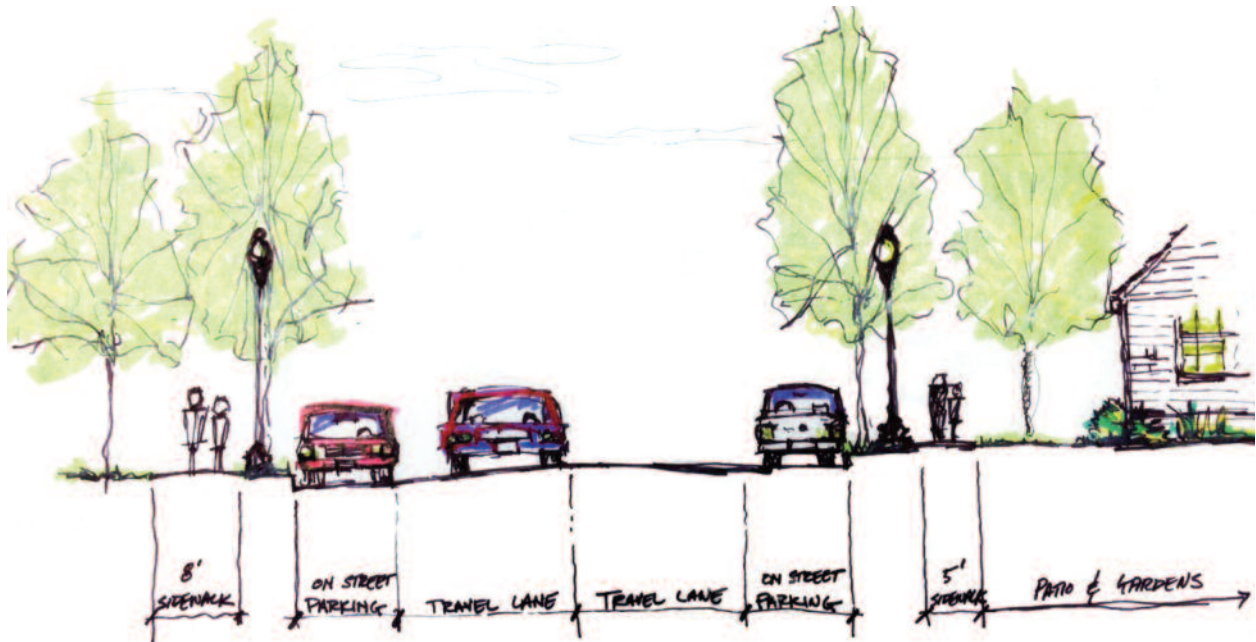
a. Landscape

While the seaside location gives the neighborhood some fantastic natural amenities such as the beaches, the overall environment could be greatly improved with some modest investments in appropriate landscaping and streetscaping.

When selecting which trees and shrubs to plant and where to plant them, it is very important to keep scale in mind. By placing larger “street trees” between the sidewalk and the street edge, you can create a natural buffer for pedestrians. For entities like the QHA, it is especially important to choose trees that are well suited to the climate or are native to the area. This will reduce maintenance and increase the likelihood that the trees survive and thrive. Good choices for street trees in Germantown include Honey Locust, Ginko Biloba and White Oak, all of which are commonly planted trees in Quincy.



Street tree examples.
Above: Honey Locust
Right: Ginko Biloba



Streetscape scale examples

The next level of scale to consider is the area between the sidewalk and the individual homes or yards. This area can provide some measure privacy for the homes and will help fill in the vast empty spaces that currently exist. Good tree and planting choices for these areas include Redbud, Shadblow Serviceberry and New Jersey Tea.

The final level of scale is the area immediately adjacent to the individual homes. Currently, the plantings in these areas range from none at all to vegetable gardens to well maintained flower gardens. The panel felt that individual gardens including vegetable gardens should be allowed to continue and even encouraged as they can foster a sense of ownership among the residents. In addition to the minimal landscaping, the presence of outdated clothes drying lines and chain-link fences detract from the scenic setting. The panel recommends that the QHA continue the removal process of these drying lines and fences.

Planting a variety of low maintenance shrubs and grasses in these areas will have a beautifying affect on the area and will minimize the time that QHA maintenance crews have to devote to mowing grass, which can currently take three full days each month. Planting recommendations include: Northern Bayberry, Pennsylvania Sedge and Salt-meadow Cordgrass.



Pennsylvania Sedge, a good choice for replacing some lawns

b. Streetscape

In addition to these landscaping recommendations, investments in streetlights, street furniture, such as benches, curbing and sidewalks would have the effect of improving the aesthetics of the neighborhood as well as making pedestrians safer. This may encourage more people to walk through the neighborhood which increases “eyes on the street,” along with a sense of community.

Wayfinding signs are currently non-existent in the Germantown Neighborhood. A welcome to Germantown sign placed at the rotary, would welcome residents and guests to the neighborhood. Wayfinding signs directing people to the civic and recreational amenities are recommended as a way to activate some of these areas with residents of both the neighborhood and the city of Quincy.

The rotary is another area that could use some modest investment. The rotary once hosted community movie nights and other civic events, but is currently unattractive and unwelcoming. The Shedd Memorial Beacon in the center of the rotary is currently undergoing repair. The panel recommends improving electrical access in this area to expand the number of trees that are lit for the holiday season, installing some street lights so the area is well lit for evening pedestrians. With a focal art piece - such as the beacon and some statement plantings, this rotary could serve as the centerpiece of a ‘civic spine’.



Rotary in its current state

b. Parking and Circulation

The issue of parking surfaced many times in the stakeholder interviews, site tour and planning charette. Currently, the parking is managed differently in Snug Harbor and Riverview. At Riverview there is a parking permit program and it is well enforced. Parking in the Snug Harbor Development can best be described as random. Residents prefer to park as close to their front door as possible, out of convenience or perceived safety issues, this leads to residents parking on lawns and other open spaces rather than nearby paved lots. The lots themselves are poorly striped and underutilized with limited signage and space delineation.

There is no parking management plan in place and enforcement by local police or property management is sporadic. Residents are not required to display a permit for parking and spaces for visitors/non-residents are not designated. Because of these issues, it is not possible to determine the adequacy of the current parking supply at Snug Harbor.

Physical Improvements

The first step in improving the parking situation involves establishing the current parking inventory. The paved areas that serve as resident parking lots are unorganized and it is not clear exactly how many parking spaces are contained in each area. In

addition to striping the lots, installing curbing or wheel stops along the edges would prevent residents from driving onto the lawns and other restricted areas.

In addition to striping the lots, the panel recommends painting lines for parallel on-street parking where appropriate.

With a goal of providing two parking spaces per unit, some ideas for consolidating and increasing the size of some of the lots are demonstrated below.

Operational Improvements

The panel recommends that the QHA develop a permitting system for Snug Harbor residents and limiting free permits to two per household. This would be in line with the ratio of available parking suggested by the panel.

Parking for visitors or overnight guests should be delineated and provided at remote lots.

Providing residents with a permit to display in their car, whether it is a discreet sticker or a hanging placard, would aid enforcement efforts by both the QHA and the city of Quincy.

The panel also recommends that additional permits be made available to residents for a fee. We understand this will be unpopular, but parking permit fees may help underwrite some of the parking improvements.



Current Conditions



Ideas for Increasing and Improving Parking Lots

c. Improved Connections

The panel felt that the QHA could have a big impact in the short term by focusing the first round of landscape and streetscape recommendations along the “civic spine.” Beginning at the Snug Harbor Community School and continuing along Palmer Street past the Community Center and rotary, to the Health Center and QHA offices, the major civic and social service assets form a natural focal point for the neighborhood.

A welcome sign at the rotary can enhance this focus and provide a point of pride for the neighborhood.

The rotary itself would be the center of this spine

with the Neighborhood Center on one side and the Health Center and social services offices on the other. The rotary was once home to community gatherings like a movie night and community tree lighting, reinstating some of these events and adding programming such as a farmers market or other community gatherings would be an effective way to activate the open space.

Installing a crosswalk and some landscape improvements, including restoring the Shed Memorial in the rotary, would make the rotary safer and more attractive and would further strengthen the connection between the neighborhood center and the rest of the neighborhood.



Improved connections along the “civic spine”

d. Recreational Paths

Looking at aerial images and walking the neighborhood, it became clear to the panel that there are many opportunities to increase the connections throughout the neighborhood and to the water with a series of recreational paths.

The foundation for a walking path that extends along the shore and through the neighborhood is largely in place. With some signage and brush clearing, this path could become a neighborhood amenity for residents and visitors with a small capital investment. This path would link the beaches, the basketball court, the soccer fields and the civic

spine and would provide scenic views and an activity option for residents.

A bike path linking the Neighborhood Center to the beaches and tot lot is another low cost way to link the neighborhood assets and draw Quincy residents from outside the Germantown Neighborhood.

e. Funding

Although there is no clear source to fund these recommendations fully, there were potential sources identified for pieces of the plan as well as existing



Improved connections throughout the neighborhood and to the water with a pedestrian path (green) and a bike path (red).

DHCD state public housing commitments to Snug Harbor including \$5 million in ADA accessibility money and \$1 million for site work. There was mention of a \$70,000 grant for refurbishing the basketball court and a strong indication by the City that Community Preservation Act money would be appropriate for the site. The panel strongly recommends that the QHA takes the time to look at these sources, their ability to potentially leverage other sources and how they can be best used together. For example will the ADA funds also cover widening sidewalks and creating HP parking spots? If so, how then would the QHA best leverage or use the funds to help support the streetscape improvements along the 'civic spine' and re-work the parking plan? There seems to be a lot of opportunity and potential resources to start to make the QHA's goals, reality and if well coordinated, the potential to get more done with less resources.