

Community Voices from the Fairmount Corridor Project

Impressions and Ideas on Two Decades of Change



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This brief is based on an internal report prepared for the Boston Foundation in January 2018. It shares findings from a study that was led by James Jennings, Ph.D., with the assistance of Lisette DeSouza, Ph.D., a postdoctoral scholar at the Wellesley Centers for Women, Wellesley College; Trina Jackson, a master of public policy candidate and Neighborhood Fellow in the Urban & Environmental Policy & Planning Graduate Department at Tufts University; and Catalina Tang Yan, a doctoral candidate at Boston University's School of Social Work.

This team worked closely with members of the Boston Foundation, including Vice President of Programs Orlando Watkins, Neighborhoods & Housing Director Soni Gupta, former Neighborhoods & Housing Program Associate Gabrielle Sims, Boston Indicators Director Luc Shuster and, in early stages, former Boston Indicators Senior Manager of Research in Race and Equity Anise Vance. Edited by Senior Communications Manager Sandy Kendall.

Preface

In this booklet we attempt to summarize the perspectives of a range of analyst and community voices regarding accomplishments and challenges related to Fairmount Corridor initiatives and activities over the last two decades. We will look at the achievements, progress and opportunities that remain, as well as concerns expressed by neighborhood residents regarding the Fairmount Corridor.

It should be emphasized that this report is not a comprehensive evaluation of the myriad activities and programs that have been implemented as part of improving the Fairmount Commuter Rail Line or the Fairmount Corridor. It presents the results of a study led by Tufts University Professor Emeritus of Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning James Jennings, based on focus groups and interviews with key actors involved with opening and improving resident accessibility to the Fairmount Commuter Rail Line and increasing ridership, and also those engaged in using the latter as a place-based initiative to expand and strengthen neighborhood vibrancy in what is referred to as the Fairmount Corridor. Jennings says, “These dialogues provided an opportunity to consider both lessons learned about this multi-year and multi-neighborhood development, and what might be some next steps strengthening the impacts of Fairmount Corridor strategies and initiatives on its neighborhoods.”

The Introduction and Background sections provide information about the study and the neighborhood. This is followed by a presentation of the key accomplishments as identified in the focus group meetings and interviews. The next section presents the challenges identified in these meetings. The conclusion summarizes observations and next steps that residents suggested for consideration for enhancing the impacts of strategies and activities associated with the Fairmount Corridor.¹

¹ See, *The Fairmount Corridor – A Decade of Change*, Boston Indicators, The Boston Foundation (May 16, 2017); also, Fairmount Indigo Planning Initiative, Corridor Plan, Boston Redevelopment Authority (September 2014).

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Introduction

This is a story about the Fairmount Line and Corridor, its neighborhoods and residents. The Fairmount Line, also referred to popularly as the Fairmount Corridor, is a commuter rail line underutilized for decades. Parts of it lay dormant or hardly used through neighborhoods challenged by poverty and lack of job access to other parts of Boston. Over the years, coalitions of neighbors advocated for positive change and for generally linking transportation improvements to community development. Organizations like the Boston Foundation helped to facilitate resident involvement, and today improvements are taking place throughout the Fairmount Corridor. Residents are still working to build on such improvements and to ensure that they and their families and neighbors can enjoy them without displacement; they have been at this for a very long time now but will continue their struggles to ensure vibrant communities. Residents also want to share lessons and insights from their experience for others in neighborhoods around Boston facing similar challenges.

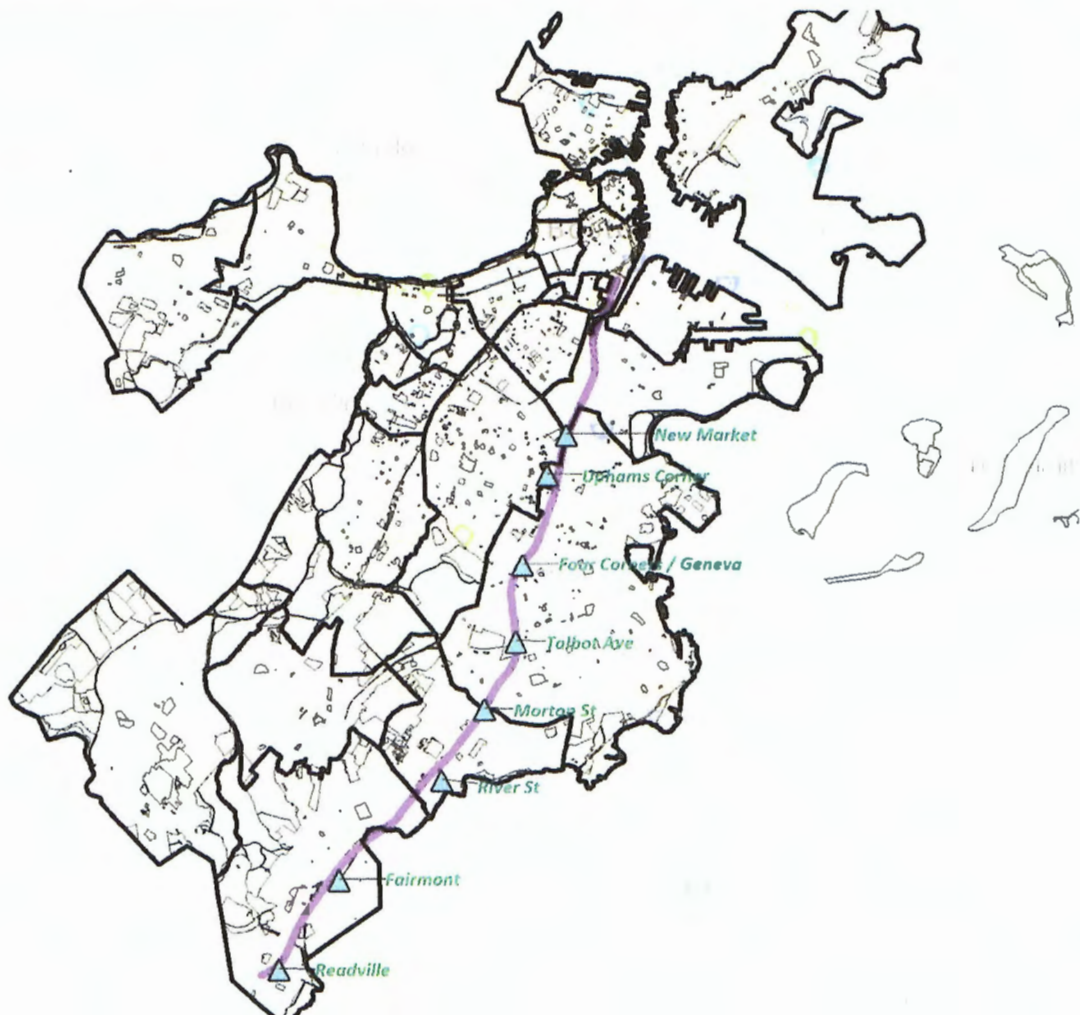
The Boston Foundation commissioned this report and provided funding for the study's research, which included dialogues with community and organizational representatives across the Fairmount Corridor. As noted in the Preface, this report is not an *evaluation* of how place-related goals were planned, designed, implemented or measured in terms of completion or impacts. Nor is it a study about Fairmount Line ridership, although this was discussed at times in the focus groups and interviews. (A 2017 report by transportation consulting firm Nelson Nygaard called *Increasing Ridership on the Fairmount Line* (available at tbfb.org) provides a comprehensive analysis of ridership and recommendations for increasing it along the Fairmount Line).²

This report shares a retrospective look at “lessons learned” about the planning and placemaking strategies associated with the physical rehabilitation and opening of stations along the Fairmount Commuter Rail Line, with suggestions from respondents in five community-based focus groups (see Appendix A) along with interviews with 23 community and civic leaders (see Appendix B). The research included review of archival documents; select review of literature (see Appendix C); focus groups; interviews with key voices; and collection and analysis of data germane to neighborhoods along the Fairmount Line. The focus groups and interviews provided an opportunity for the study team to understand the work of many (but not all) organizations involved with the Fairmount Corridor.

In addition to focus groups and interviews the study team spent the period between July 2018 and October 2018 in the field. One member visited the neighborhood areas of each of the Fairmount Line stations to get a sense of the surrounding neighborhood, and other members used the commuter rail to get an actual hands-on sense of this particular transportation line.

² See, *Increasing Ridership on the Fairmount Line*, Final Report, The Boston Foundation (April 2017).

Map 1: Fairmount Commuter Line and Fairmount Corridor by Neighborhoods



Map 1 shows the neighborhood areas that are part of the Fairmount Commuter Rail Line / Fairmount Corridor and the station areas.

Original Goals and Undertakings

Strategies and activities associated with the Fairmount Corridor reflect related goals, including building linkages across neighborhoods, revitalizing commercial districts and creating a sense of place along a 9+ mile stretch of land anchored by a commuter rail and other public transportation hubs. These goals have been pursued by a coalition of activists and organizations based on detailed component strategies described in various reports. The planning districts that align with the Fairmount Commuter Line include Hyde Park, Mattapan and Dorchester.

Based on the study team's review of reports and documents about the Fairmount Corridor, activities for Fairmount Line station placemaking tackled a gamut of neighborhood

Map 2: Fairmount Commuter Line and MBTA Rapid Transit



Map 2 shows the Fairmount Commuter Rail Line in relation to the MBTA Rapid Transit lines.

improvement and empowerment goals: redeveloping existing vacant lots for urban gardening; encouraging utilization of mixed-income and mixed-use redevelopment; using vacant lots for new housing opportunities; expanding homeownership programs; enhancing walkability and bike-ability; enhancing access to the station; prioritizing economic development and job creation; engaging youth directly; promoting art and culture; enhancing public safety, including lighting and safety at stations and parks, and enhancing sidewalks for pedestrians; minimizing displacement of long-time residents; strengthening community connections to station development; and other objectives related to these broad goals. Neighborhood organizations at each station pursued some of these goals differentially.³

³ Table 1 is a summary list of the general goals pursued along the Fairmount Corridor stations based on the review of documents and reports.

Table 1: General Goals Associated with Fairmount Corridor Stations

Goals		UCorner	BH Ave/ Cummins	4Cs/ Geneva	Morton	New- market	Talbot	R'ville	Fair- mount
PROSPERITY	Redevelop existing vacant lots, properties to bring new investment	x	x	x					
	Reinforce arts & culture	x							
	Enhance walkability and mobility	x		x					
	Reinforce & provide training to local business		x	x					
	Leverage MBTA parking lot to be redeveloped		x						
	Research long-term transportation improvements							x	
HOME	Increase multifamily options near station	x	x	x					
	Invite mixed-income and mixed-use redevelopment	x	x						
	Use vacant lots for new housing opportunities	x		x	x				
	Minimize displacement of existing residents	x	x						
	Improve housing quality & sustainability			x					
	Retain diversity & affordability		x	x					
PLACE	Expand homeownership programs		x						
	Improve wayfinding	x					x		
	Strengthen gateway	x	x	x					
	Highlight historic assets & public art	x	x	x					
	Expand restaurant offerings		x						
	Extend activity to rail stations				x		x		x
GETTING AROUND	Generate industrial, manufacturing commercial activity					x	x	x	
	Use vacant lots for transit redevelopment				x				x
	Improve buildings frontage						x		
	Modify zoning	x		x					
	Enhance walkability & bikeability	x		x	x				
	Invest in street & intersection improvement	x	x	x					
PARKS/ PUBLIC SPACE	Enhance pedestrian safety	x			x				
	Enhance & manage parking	x	x	x					
	Create central mobility at station ramp					x			
	Expand public space	x		x			x		
	Improve access to public space	x	x	x					x
	Enhance lighting & safety at parks		x			x			
QUALITY OF LIFE	Enhance sidewalks for pedestrians	x	x		x	x		x	x
	Enhance landscape					x			
	Enhance access to the station	x							
	Strengthen community connections to stations & Strand Theatre	x							
	Prioritize economic development & job creation					x			
	Create new developments	x		x			x		
QUALITY OF LIFE	New station improvements	x							
	Encourage use of public/private parking	x							
	Promote art & culture	x	x	x					
	Enhance public safety	x		x				x	
	Engage youth directly			x					
	Address station area crime & safety concerns		x						
	Create central hub of community activity & station access				x				
	Mitigate traffic		x					x	
	Maintain community voice & presence		x	x					

Community Feedback Methodology

Over the years considerable data regarding key metrics related to the Fairmount Corridor have been collected. Because the “subjective” impact of work done (or not done) can be as powerful as objectively quantifiable measures, we also wanted to hear community members’ impressions of and experiences with changes in the Corridor. In this, focus groups and interviews proved invaluable. Several questions provided a framework for the study’s data collection and questions for interviewees and focus group participants. These include the perceptions of neighborhood residents regarding how the Fairmount Corridor has changed since the launch of initial activities, as well as ideas about neighborhood resources that should have been more fully tapped. Also, what new or current concerns on the part of residents were not emphasized in the initial strategies associated with the Fairmount Corridor? What are ideas for continuing or expanding the involvement of residents and community-based organizations to ensure that the Fairmount Line is used as a resource for improving the quality of life in neighborhoods? Discussions also touched upon the building of partnerships and coalitions throughout the Fairmount Corridor. Individuals were queried about the extent of resident involvement and about ideas or suggestions that should be considered for ensuring that community residents benefit from the development of the Fairmount Corridor.

Five major accomplishments were cited and discussed throughout the dialogues with the study team. First, residents did see **major physical improvements** along the Fairmount Commuter Rail Line and the Fairmount Corridor, and some affordable housing was built. An economic framework for **connecting residents to downtown jobs** emerged as a strategy that is currently being implemented. Also, **civic coalitions were established** in efforts to work collaboratively in several areas. Generally, throughout the Fairmount Corridor and its transit hubs there was a **heightened sense of urban agriculture**, including greening of the environment. Finally, civic involvement across neighborhood areas occurred and resulted in **stronger community networks** spanning organizational silos, and it was noted that civic involvement around individual station planning was vibrant over many years. A facet of this accomplishment was the founding of the Fairmount Indigo Network (FIN) in 2015 to expand neighborhood-based and inter-neighborhood collaboration; it was ultimately composed of 20 organizations. (Although FIN ceased operations in 2019 it played a pivotal role in raising public and community awareness about a range of issues associated with the Fairmount Corridor neighborhoods.)

These same achievements are related to the challenges and concerns that were expressed in the dialogues. Many persons, for example, mentioned the outstanding **needs for additional physical improvements** along the Fairmount Line stations; for **stronger connections between employers and residents**; for **greater emphasis on resident involvement**; for more aggressive exploration of the potential neighborhood benefits arising from **stronger linkages between economic opportunity and transportation**; and for ensuring that **arts and placemaking activities** do not emerge as a double-edged sword where residents reap little of the benefits, or

The fear of potential and actual displacement of long-time residents was expressed as a major concern.

the improvement serves only to facilitate gentrification along the Fairmount Corridor. Indeed, the fear of potential and actual displacement of long-time residents was expressed as a major and pervasive concern in the interviews and focus groups.

This report's conclusion presents the participants' ideas for building on the accomplishments above, and for responding to the challenges and concerns. These include:

- Advance the idea of "Transit-Oriented Development Special Protection Zones" along the Fairmount Line
- Work with elderly homeowners to ensure their housing security
- Help support development or expansion of neighborhood businesses
- Expand opportunities for youth and connect them to economic development
- Support the design and implementation of community land trusts to enhance housing security for long-time residents
- Use the arts to organize youth in the community, and to support artists who live and have worked in the community
- Expand resources for community-centered organizing
- Increase opportunities for public education activities
- Expand resources for planning and implementing cross-neighborhood collaborative strategies and programs, including resources for follow-through in identifying and tackling obstacles to greater collaboration or impacts.

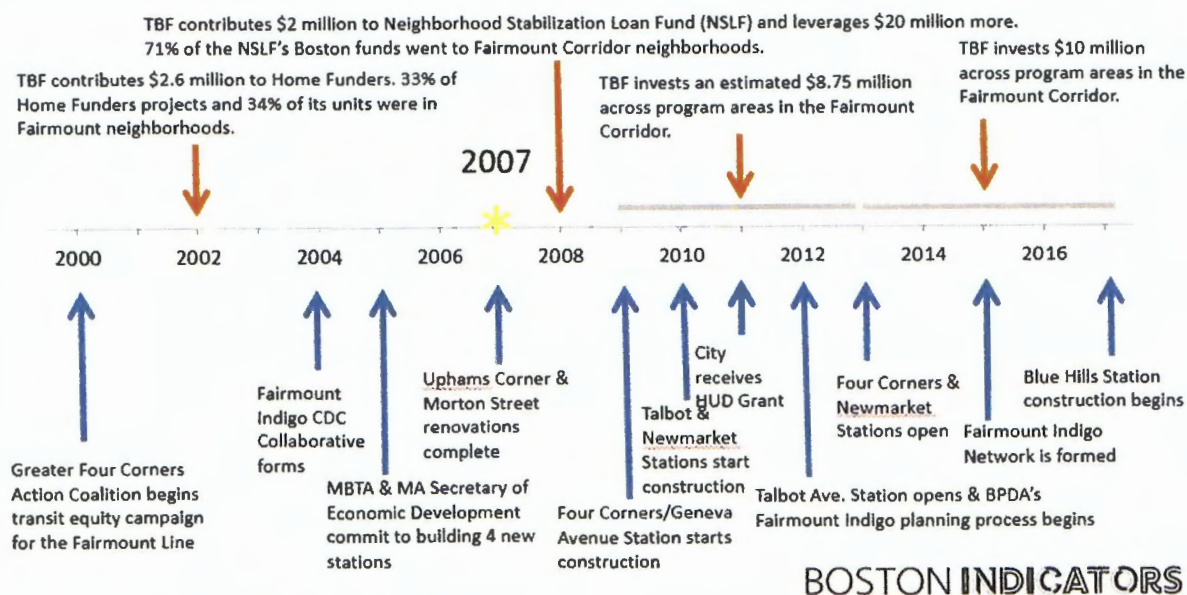
These nine potential areas for action are explained in greater detail in the last section of this report.

History/Background

In its Imagine Boston 2030 plan, the City of Boston lifts up the challenges and opportunities in the Fairmount Corridor related to housing, economic development and transit. The City has been a critical partner in the future-facing work in specific neighborhoods such as Uphams Corner and elsewhere throughout the Corridor. Along with other organizations, the Boston Foundation has had a long involvement in assisting with strategies and a range of activities in line with the City's efforts. These have been focused on increasing ridership on the Fairmount Line, but also on using that as a basis for enhancing the quality of life in the Fairmount Corridor's neighborhoods. Since 2010 the Foundation has provided funding in the areas of arts and placemaking, workforce development, youth activities, environmental greening and urban agriculture. Funding for these kinds of activities has spanned a period in which the city's economic context changed considerably. At one extreme is the 2008 Great Recession, with its explosion of housing foreclosures and depreciation of housing quality and equity. But now we see almost the opposite, where housing values have increased dramatically due to capital developments as well as speculative real estate practices.

Figure 1. Fairmount Corridor Work in the 21st Century

Timeline of key investments and actions.



This chart from the research arm of the Boston Foundation gives a chronology of some Corridor milestones.

The voices and stories captured in this study's interviews and focus groups reflect that changing context—a context also identified as a major challenge by the Fairmount /Indigo Line CDC Collaborative in its *Strategic Plan for 2015–2018*:

As nonprofit affordable housing developers, the Collaborative understood from the very beginning that the Fairmount/Indigo Line could provide an unprecedented opportunity for new economic prosperity for low and moderate-income residents. But, the timing of community development strategies must take into account market-driven forces which can counteract our goals. As new rapid rail stations come on line there is the potential side-effect of attracting more real estate speculators, and eventually creating a competitive real estate market for people with higher incomes...We know displacement issues are part of a regional dynamic, driven by the ever escalating costs of housing and a growing population in the Boston area. People of higher incomes begin moving into areas that were predominantly low-income communities in their own pressure-cooker searches for housing options. The rate of change is not happening at the same pace in every neighborhood in the Fairmount/Indigo Line Corridor, but neighborhoods in the Dudley Street area and other parts of Roxbury are organizing in full force as part of a "Right to Remain" campaign. They are documenting rapid rent increases by landlords intent on flipping real estate. (p.3)

There is some acknowledgment that accomplishments associated with the earlier transit and neighborhood improvements could be problematic if they lead to displacement. Further, the report notes, "Increasing housing density and building more permanently affordable housing is one way to slow the dynamic. But, it is not enough. The growing attractiveness of the Fairmount/Indigo Line, with its proximity to downtown Boston, and the physical improvements we are making to housing, commercial districts and planned open spaces, lay

Accomplishments associated with the earlier transit and neighborhood improvements could be problematic if they lead to displacement.

the groundwork for our once under-invested communities to eventually become 'hot' real estate markets. In the past two years, there's been an uptick in private speculators buying property and real estate agencies beginning to market specific sections of Dorchester, with new stations of the Fairmount/Indigo line being featured as an attribute." (p.3)

To date, statistics on the Corridor do not reflect widespread displacement as a direct result of transportation improvements, but it is wise to be aware and cautious of potential signs as indicated later in this report. This is a part of Boston with numerous reports of evictions, as well as foreclosure petitions. And not to be overlooked: Living with displacement anxiety creates a housing insecurity of a psychological sort, which takes its own toll on all people, but especially the young and elderly.

Retrospective Look - Accomplishments

There are five key accomplishments associated with the strategies, initiatives and funding related to the opening and improving of the Fairmount Commuter Rail Line and using that as a springboard to enhance neighborhood vibrancy. These accomplishments were raised in the focus groups and interviews, and reflected in other hard data.

✓ **Completing Physical Improvements and Accessibility to the Fairmount Commuter Line, and Some Affordable Housing along the Fairmount Corridor**

At a very basic but important level, residents and representatives of community-based organizations believe that the Fairmount Corridor has changed for the better in physical terms. To various degrees, some of the recommendations proffered in a plethora of earlier reports about transit-oriented development designs and activities have been implemented.⁴

Residents see the improvements with the Fairmount Line itself as well as improvements in turning vacant lots into community gardens or providing spaces for the arts and placemaking—or even housing. There has been development of mixed-income housing that include affordable units for residents.⁵

Given a history of neglect along the Corridor, an accomplishment cited by many individuals was the actual rehabilitation of the Fairmount Line, which included successes such as the corralling of \$200 million for rail line improvements; the opening of three stations (now four as we go to press); and fare reductions and weekend service. Some saw as a victory the investment of dollars in an area that had been disinvested in for a long period of time and where long-time residents initially believed that “this line was originally built for suburban folks.”

Over its first four years after redevelopment, daily ridership on the Fairmount Line went way up, especially compared with other, more established lines. This is promising (and shouldn't be surprising given the minimal service in the Corridor previously) and needs re-measuring since the final station on the line has opened. Even with significantly increased use of the Commuter Rail, bus ridership still dominates as a public transit choice in the Corridor, which substantiates some of the challenges or complaints residents raised about service frequency or reliability.

Meanwhile, looking beyond transportation itself, there are numerous examples of new green mixed-income housing developed by the CDC Collaborative with a range of units affordable for long-time residents with low or moderate income. In some areas these developments replaced

⁴ See one report listing and proposing potential improvements: *Placemaking along the Fairmount Indigo Line Corridor: Lighter, Quicker Cheaper: A Short Term Action Plan* (July 2012). Project for Public Spaces, Inc.

⁵ For the latest example of housing development see “The Residences at Fairmount Station Opens with Celebration: New Transit-Oriented Development Offers 27 Units of Mixed-Income Rental Housing in Hyde Park.” *City of Boston News* (November 15, 2018).

spaces that were not just eyesores, but dangerous for community residents. The developments also tapped minority-owned businesses to perform various facets of the work, and designed spaces for these businesses. Some of these include Uphams West (555 Dudley Street), Quincy Heights Housing, 157 Washington Street Mixed Use, The Levedo Building and other developments.

✓ **Building a Strategy for Connecting Residents in the Fairmount Corridor to Downtown Jobs and Employment Opportunities**

A second accomplishment included strategies and activities for connecting residents in the Fairmount Corridor neighborhoods to downtown jobs as a consequence of the rehabilitation of the Fairmount Line and opening of stations. Fairmount Corridor Job Referral Network was established as part of a partnership with Boston Career Link, JVS Career Solutions and the New England Center for Arts and Technology. These partnerships have created a stronger potential for matching residents with jobs in Boston's downtown, and especially in the Newmarket business district.

Partnerships have created a stronger potential for matching residents with jobs in Boston's downtown.

Members of the FIN and a staff member based at the Dorchester Bay CDC) have put some focus on building relationships between employers and residents. Part of this focus includes the design and implementation of education strategies tailored to existing and new kinds of

jobs with the required skills and vocational training.⁶ There are planned and active attempts to provide information to potential job seekers about opportunities in the downtown area of Boston, as well to continue communication with potential employers.

✓ **Building Coalitions and Collaborative Work across the Fairmount Corridor**

The establishment of coalitions seeking to work collaboratively across the Fairmount Line was also raised as an accomplishment. This includes coalitions such as the Four Corners Action Coalition, the CDC Collaborative, the Fairmount Greenway Collaborative, the Fairmount/Indigo Transit Equity Coalition and others. Based on cross-neighborhood collaboration coalitions like the Fairmount Greenway Task Force helped to build community consciousness about the green environment and beautifying urban spaces. There are two immediate benefits from these kinds of coalitions: First, collaborative work takes place across topic areas that in other settings are approached in silos such as green space, transit equity and housing. In too many instances these are areas that are not connected in terms of community organizing and represent separate policy domains. Second, given the challenges

⁶ See FIN's "Fairmount Indigo Network 2018 Initiatives" (December 2018).

and “wicked issues”⁷ facing the entire City of Boston, the coalitions involved with the Fairmount Corridor emerge as a reminder of the need for community organizing—and funding—to reflect the inseparability of big problems.

✓ **Creating a Heightened Sense of the Importance of Urban Agriculture and Greening Local Economies**

A fourth accomplishment was an emergent and heightened sense of the importance of urban agriculture along the Fairmount Corridor. Community organizing around urban agriculture and green spaces is not new in Boston, of course. For many years urban activists such as Mel King and others reminded the general public about the significance of urban agriculture. Organizations such as Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) have a long history regarding this issue. But the Fairmount Corridor did add a “space” to expand such efforts and in a way that might connect neighborhoods to each other. A level of community organizing around green spaces took place in significant ways and with notable (and visible) achievements.

There have been improvements and changes involving community gardens, urban agriculture and cleaner playgrounds. A Fairmount Greenway Path has helped to frame planning across neighborhoods. The Food Project, Magnolia Community Gardens, the Washington St. Food Forest and other projects are an example of some of these green and urban agriculture initiatives. This includes the building of a shared commercial kitchen incubator along with a food truck commissary and the Oasis on Ballou Avenue initiative, which uses urban agriculture as social enterprise and seeks to facilitate inter-generational work in growing healthy food and employing local residents.

✓ **Encouraging Greater Civic Involvement across the Neighborhoods in the Fairmount Corridor**

The previous accomplishment is related to another. There has been a greater level of civic involvement *across* neighborhoods in Fairmount Corridor, or “hands across neighborhoods,” as one person phrased it. Another person observed that the earlier community conversations about improving the Fairmount Commuter Rail Line and working on neighborhood issues reflected creativity, enthusiasm and a spirit of innovation. The latter also made people more aware that “single-issue solutions and solutions limited to single neighborhoods are not sufficient” for resolving problems affecting neighborhoods—a notion that was reflected in many of the dialogues.

⁷ *Wicked issues* refers to challenges and problems such as gentrification/displacement, poverty, academic achievement gaps and others that cannot be resolved through “silo” approaches but require comprehensive and systemic approaches. See Paul Williams, “The Competent Boundary Spanner,” *Public Administration*, Vol. 80 No. 1 (2002).

Fairmount Indigo Network

These institutions have participated in FIN over time.

- Action for Regional Equity
- Art Morpheus/Fairmount Innovation Lab
- Bowdoin Geneva Main Streets
- Bowdoin Street Health Center
- City Life/Vida Urbana
- Commonwealth Kitchen
- Conservation Law Foundation
- Coop Power
- Design Studio for Social Intervention
- Dorchester Arts Collaborative
- Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative
- FABLabs for America
- Fairmount CDC Collaborative
- Fairmount Cultural Corridor
- Family Independence Initiative
- Four Corners Main Street
- Greater Four Corners Action Coalition
- Grove Hall Main Street
- Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) Boston
- Massachusetts Smart Growth Alliance
- Mattapan Family Service Center
- Mattapan United
- Millenium Ten
- New Market Business Association
- New Market Community Partners
- On the Move Coalition
- Project RIGHT
- The American City Coalition
- The Boston Foundation
- The Fairmount Greenway Task Force
- The Trotter Institute at UMass Boston
- TforMass
- Uphams Corner Health Center
- Uphams Corner Main Streets

There were efforts to use the arts and placemaking as a creative tool for encouraging residents to participate in visioning exercises along the Fairmount Line. This involved residents but also people and organizations from outside the neighborhoods, resulting in greater communication between residents and non-residents. An increase in civic involvement led to the creation of organizations seeking to sustain activities around arts and placemaking and involving community residents. Over the years there were numerous initiatives and activities around “station planning” that increased civic involvement in the various neighborhood areas; literally, hundreds of residents participated in “creative placemaking” around the stations.

Organizations like Design Studio for Social Intervention (DS4SI) helped to integrate the arts and placemaking within a context of community empowerment. “Creative placemaking” was also approached as one way to establish links across neighborhood areas. This is a holistic concept that seeks to frame strategies and activities that draw connections between and among sectors in a neighborhood, but specifically to benefit residents, as the decision makers and visionaries.⁸ This concept created greater recognition today of the need for both neighborhood-based *and* inter-neighborhood collaboration in developing comprehensive and sustained strategies and actions. The latter is a critical glue that reminds us that challenges in the areas of neighborhood quality, housing, economic development and transportation cannot be resolved in silos.

As an umbrella organization the Fairmount Indigo Network (FIN) provided space for nonprofits and community-based organizations to work across neighborhood areas and programmatic silos. There are many stakeholders in this part of the city, and community-based organizations and nonprofits with individual agendas became more interlocked as a result of FIN’s facilitative role.

⁸ For an explanation of this concept and how it was applied in one neighborhood area, see Lori Lobenstine, “Do You See Yourself in Uphams Corner: A Case Study of the Belonging, Dis-belonging and the Uphams Corner ArtPlace Initiative.” Fairmount Cultural Corridor: Uphams Corner Pilot, 2015.

Retrospective Look - Challenges

Participants in the focus groups and interviewees acknowledged some of the successes of the planning and activities of the Fairmount Corridor over the years, as described in the previous section. They also expressed concerns about continual and even new challenges. Five major challenges are summarized below and followed by what participants also suggested as potential next steps.

□ Ongoing Need for Physical Improvements to Increase Accessibility and Usability of Fairmount Commuter Rail Line

Residents pointed to the need to enact better coordination between bus schedules and the commuter rail. This logistical issue was raised by many:

- “You gotta take an Uber to get over there...or you have to take a bus to get a bus and you have to walk for 13 minutes to get to it...by the time you were in the Fairmount Indigo line, you could be downtown in the T.”
- “It’s faster to take the bus to go to Ruggles and the Orange line. Plus, the bus is cheaper, the bus is more frequent. So the promise—of a rapid transit line—it’s just a promise. It’s not very convenient.”

The lack of Charlie Card usability initially deterred ridership. (After much activism, the T has started using hand-held Charlie Card readers.) There were complaints about access for people with disabilities; one person opined that planners presumed that considering people with disabilities only meant that wheelchair accommodation is adequate. There was major concern expressed in one focus group regarding designs of the new stations not being “warm and friendly” or open to community design input. Also, issues about lighting were raised for two stations. More attention can be paid to allaying the fears of abutters and homeowners regarding externalities such as traffic problems, signage and parking.

□ Insufficient Outreach to Increase Resident and New Resident Civic Involvement in the Fairmount Corridor

Another challenge is that even with impressive civic involvement on the part of community-based organizations, there is a need to involve more residents, especially since some neighborhoods are changing demographically (as noted on page 24 of this report).

There was concern expressed in several discussions that many residents did not have a sense of efficacy in terms of involvement related to the Fairmount Line. Faith-based organizations and small, local businesses were not perceived as playing major roles—as opposed to periodic and infrequent roles—in the planning and implementation of activities along the Fairmount Corridor. People were also concerned that not enough follow-through with residents had taken place in terms of progress reports or community meetings to hear both complaints and

suggestions for neighborhood improvements. This led to some frustration, expressed in the following way in one of the focus groups:

“Yeah, there was involvement and we were invited... and I believe in this thing, but I have to recognize that there was a certain kind of political correctness in order to attract investment, which didn’t allow us to say what concerned us about it....”

Strongly and widely endorsed was that there should be some focus on ensuring communication between individuals and organizations who have been involved with the Fairmount Corridor from the beginning with residents who may feel left out of discussions about the future.

It is not clear that investments in physical improvements resulted in a significant number of new jobs at the neighborhood level....

There may have been a lost opportunity to connect planning and activities with local public schools. The study team suspects that except for the work of a few community-based organizations, there were not extensive efforts to link strategies and developments in the Fairmount Corridor with local public

schools. There are about 27 public schools (based on a count of Boston Public Schools (BPS) in November 2016) located within the Fairmount Corridor and its designated buffers. Given that the BPS is seeking to expand community engagement, residents thought, a community group should have invited a BPS representative to join its network, or at least make a presentation to the Boston School Committee in order to make that body aware of community activities that may be directly or indirectly connected to public education. This could have opened opportunities for collaborative activities for students and parents along the Fairmount Corridor neighborhood areas. (See page 31 for further ideas for future action.)

Potential Linkages between Transportation and Capital Developments with the Enhancement of Local Economic Development Have Not Been Fully Actualized

“Intentionality,” as described by one interviewee, between local economic development and transportation improvements was not as strong as it could have been. It is not clear that investment in physical improvements resulted in significant numbers of new jobs at the neighborhood level or that residents were employed in the infrastructure improvements of individual stations. Some interviewees felt that more attention should be paid to generating jobs in neighborhoods, or to other components of a comprehensive economic development strategy: entrepreneurship, community-wide financial literacy and attracting and retaining local businesses.

While transportation improvements are important for getting residents *to jobs*, it can also be a resource *to create jobs* in neighborhoods, or along the Fairmount Line. Further, the focus regarding transit and employment opportunities seems to be on how to get residents to jobs in

South Boston or the financial district even while “getting to a job” can also be targeted toward the South, and not exclusively North to downtown Boston. It was raised that many working adults in some Fairmount Corridor neighborhoods actually work in low-paying occupations in the health industry; it is more important for this group of workers to get to the hospitals, especially in the Longwood Medical Area.⁹

There are ample plans outlining specific strategies to enhance the connections between transportation and local neighborhood economies. But follow-up or monitoring of specific objectives that could enhance the implementation of broad goals remains necessary.

□ Concerns Persist about the Future of Arts and Placemaking in the Fairmount Corridor

The focus on arts and placemaking around stations was perceived as critical for neighborhood vibrancy. But in focus groups the question, “What is the future of the arts and placemaking along the Fairmount Corridor?” was raised more than once. Initiatives to use the arts or a community’s culture to enhance the vitality of the neighborhood is a long-time proposition; it will not happen automatically due to a vastly improved and accessible commuter rail. Related to this was the question of how new or currently available funds for the arts will be distributed across the various neighborhoods and buffers. Most of the arts initiatives and activities have taken place in Roxbury and Dorchester; it is less the case in Mattapan and Hyde Park. Keeping these queries in the community consciousness will help to ensure that initiatives in this area reflect the presence of long-time local artists in these places.

Some residents also noted that the cultural diversity and history of their neighborhood areas could be threatened if the arts are pursued in isolation from strong neighborhood connections, insisting “residents must be deeply involved.” Another focus group echoed that with a story: Youth working in Uphams Corner composing a mural for the MBTA included paintings of burning houses, as a symbol of the roots of DSNI. This was rejected by planners and the MBTA, who insisted on more “beautiful” images; today, the mural remains incomplete according to this account. The feeling was that local artists should be included in significant ways. In one focus group this was raised as a major concern because local artists who know the community can potentially make better connections with youth in the neighborhood and encourage their interests and entrepreneurship in the arts.

⁹ 2017 occupation estimates suggest that anywhere between 10% and 15% of the labor force in the Fairmount Corridor buffers work in health-related occupations; this figure increases when considering those who work in low-wage occupations such as food preparation in the health industry.

□ Growing Fears of Resident Displacement as a Result of Transportation Improvements and Recent Capital and Real Estate Development

By far the biggest concern identified by residents, community-based organizations and others was the possibility that physical improvements in the Fairmount Corridor with an improved commuter rail will have a negative impact on the availability of affordable housing for long-time residents. This was described as the “unintended consequences of transit improvements.” During some of the focus groups, residents raised concerns about the rapidity and number of large developments throughout their neighborhoods. The number of permits for housing and commercial construction in the Fairmount Corridor increased from representing 8 percent of all permits in Boston in 2011, to 14 percent in 2017.¹⁰ As Map 3 shows, furthermore, there are numerous developments concentrated in some parts of the Fairmount Corridor.

Since its founding in 2004 the CDC Collaborative has been able to build new housing with affordable units; there are some projects in the pipeline that will result in an increase of affordable housing in some parts of the Fairmount Corridor. Nevertheless, there is a widespread sense of vulnerability about housing, and an angst about potential displacement; this was a major theme in all of the focus groups. While building of new income-restricted housing is still under way, its proportion of all new housing has been on a swift decline since at least 2011.

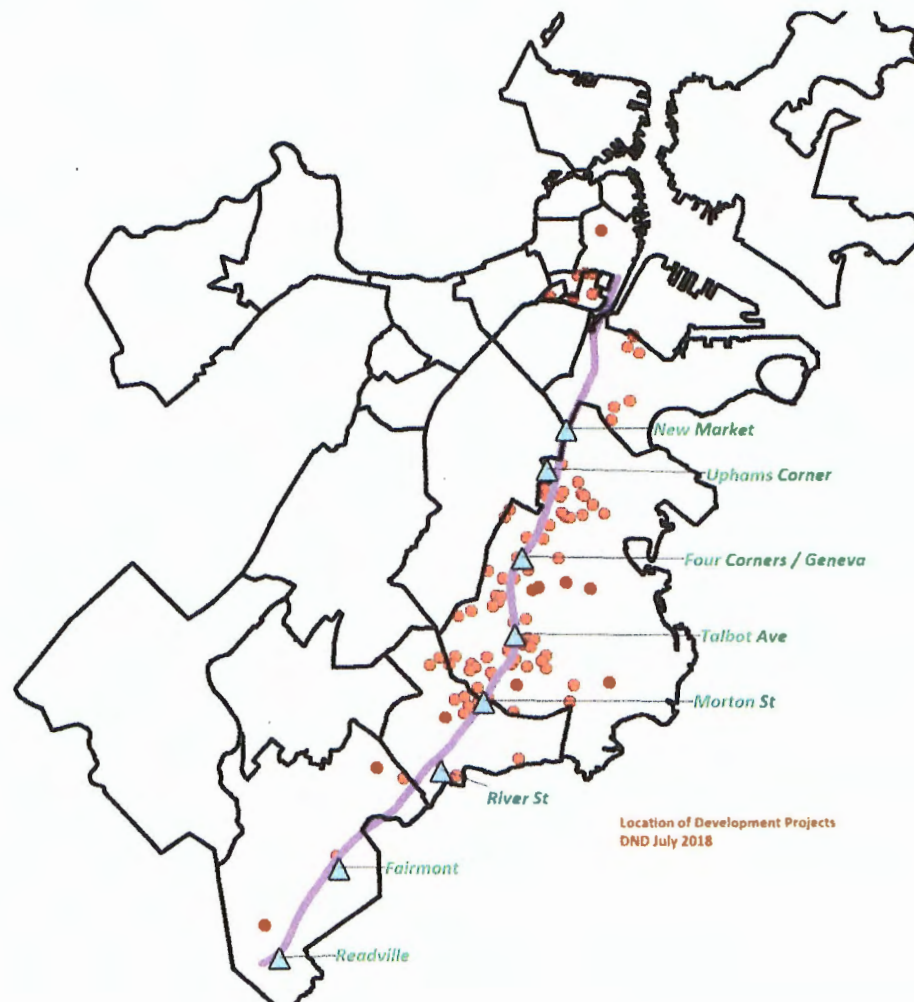
Many interviewee comments and observations as well as discussions in the focus groups captured the insecurity associated with gentrification and possible displacement: “In a community I grew up in, I can now get easily lost due to all the construction and development... which residents know nothing about, [nor have] control over its direction.” The latter sentiment is consistent with the number of developments reported by the Department of Neighborhood Development in 2018 and the concentrations of these development projects in the Uphams Corner, Four Corners, Morton Street and Blue Hill/Cummins areas of the Fairmount Corridor. (See Map 3).

Another comment: “We always knew that our community was a diamond in the rough, and we struggled for years to refine it; now others, outside of our community, only see a diamond... I don’t want them to move out the people that have been here in this diamond in the rough. All of a sudden, you want to shine it, polish it [up] and make it a great place... no, it’s always been like this.”

And a very long-time resident who was involved in full support of Fairmount Line improvements and services to communities from the early stages, simply exasperated in frustration, said: “Who would have known?!” in proposing that the initial planning was not connected to affordable housing for residents. This reflected the opinion of another person: “People were not concerned about displacement in the visioning exercise because the focus was

¹⁰ Boston Planning and Development Agency, June 2018

Map 3: Location and Concentration of Development Projects in or Near the Fairmount Corridor

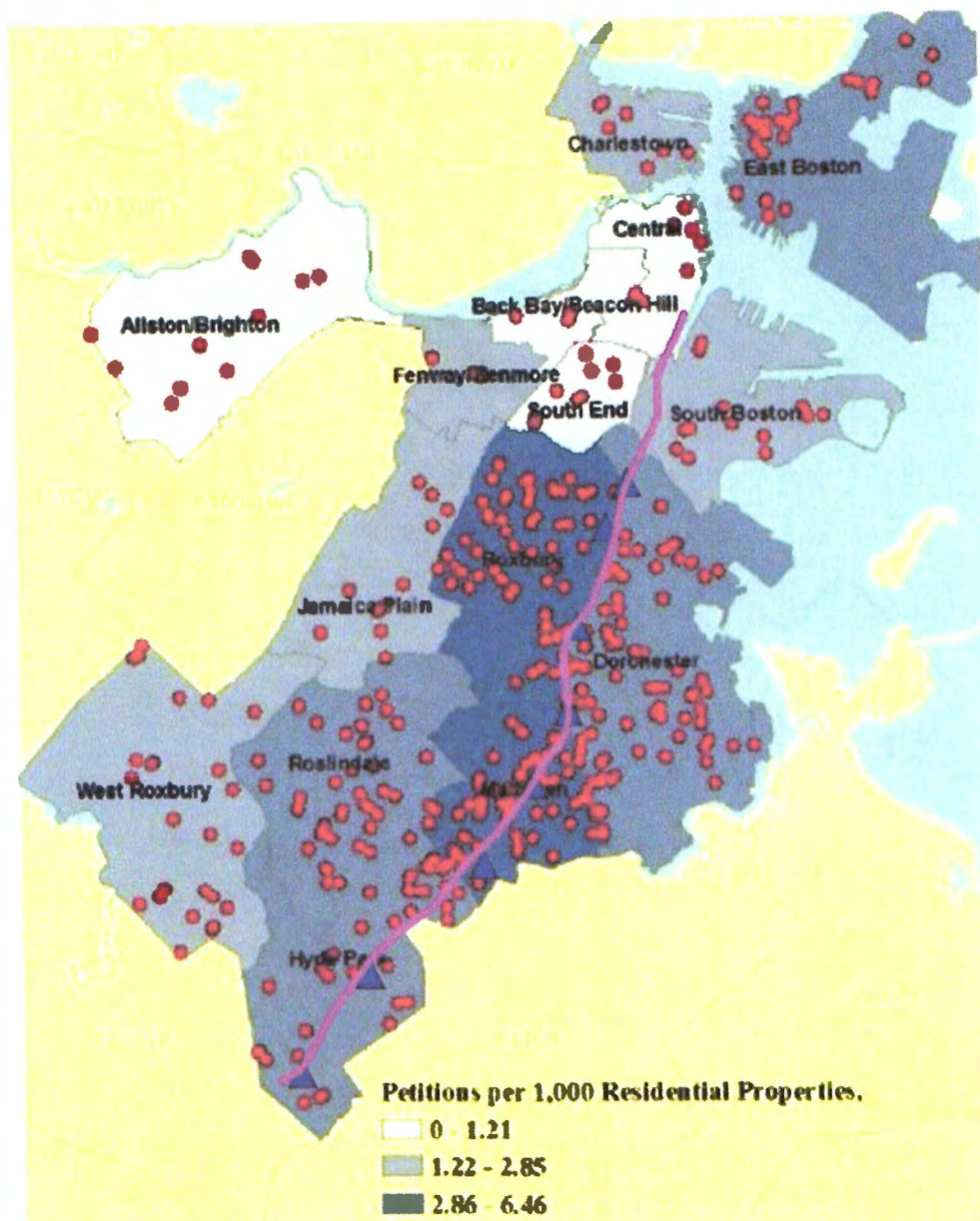


Source: Department of Neighborhood Development (July 2018)

on bringing vitality to the neighborhood. It wasn't about taking something away. It was about what kinds of services and access points would you want in your neighborhood?"

Again: "The affordability that we had... the fear is it's gonna disappear with all the people buying over-million-dollar condos. We don't know what to do to stop them because you cannot stop someone from selling their home [for] over a million dollars and you cannot prevent someone from buying with cash. Some people are making money. That's the fear that we have about a lot of people who own houses. You get a certain age and you have to sell and move on. So it's happening, but it's the wrong way." The concentration of foreclosure petitions and

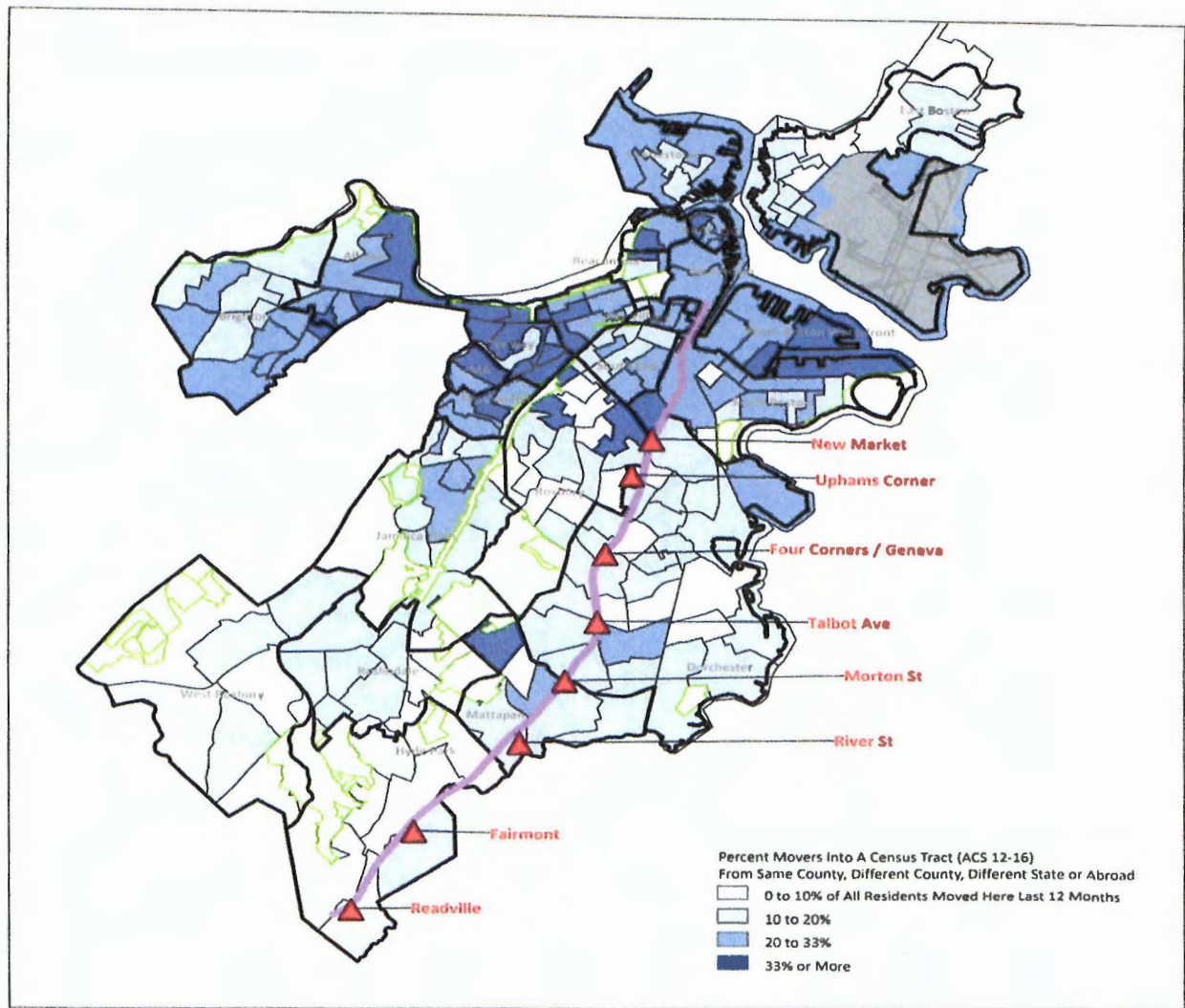
Map 4: Fairmount Corridor and Location and Rates of Foreclosure Petitions, 2017¹¹



evictions along the Fairmount Corridor feeds this angst among residents. For example, **Map 4** shows the concentration of 2017 foreclosure petitions along the Fairmount Corridor. The base map was generated by the City to show foreclosure petitions and rate by neighborhoods.¹²

¹¹ This Map 4 was produced by the Department of Neighborhood Development but taken from Christine Dixon, et al., *Boston Housing Court Data Report: An Overview and Analysis of 2014 Boston Housing Court Data by Project Hope, HomeStart, and Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative* (Fall 2016); the author added the Fairmount Corridor Line and associated stations.

Map 5: Proportion New Movers into Fairmount Corridor by Tracts and Stations



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2012–2016

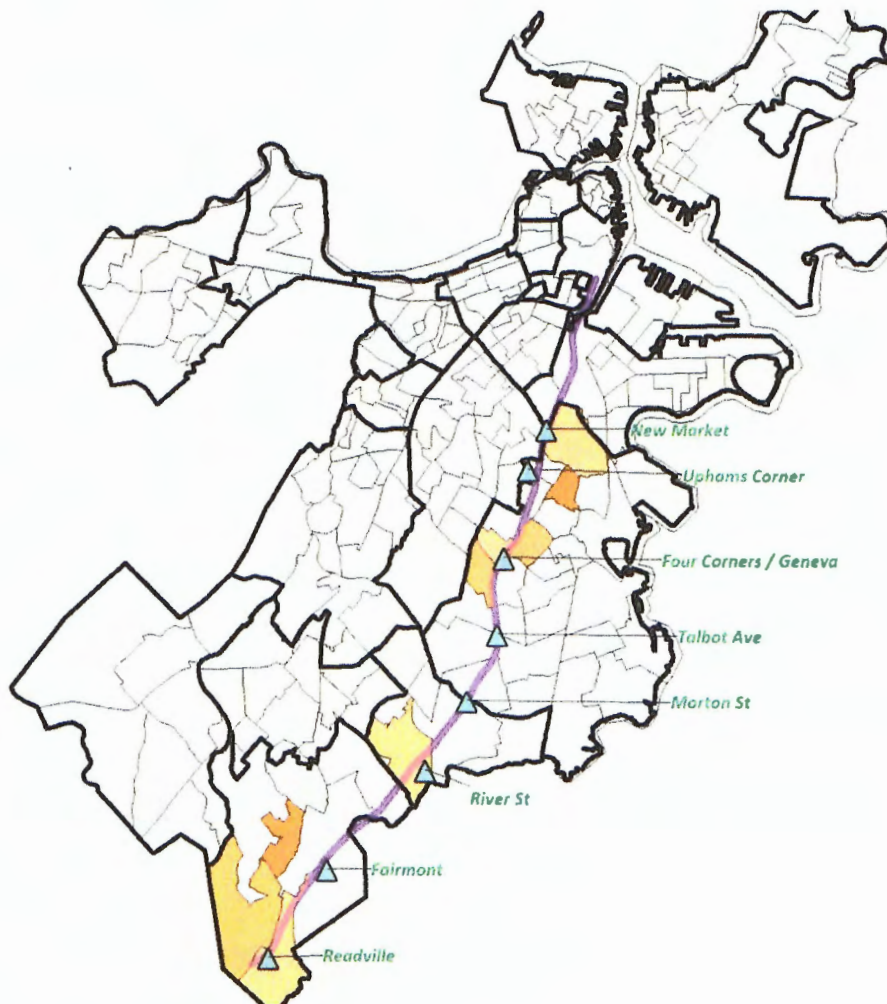
This concern was rampant in dialogues in the focus groups and with interviewees, and some of the hard data collected by the study team shown above, and below supports this growing anxiety.¹³ **Map 5** shows that there are Fairmount Corridor sections (tracts) such as the Morton Street buffer, Blue Hill/Cummins Highway buffer, and the River Street buffer, where 20 to 33 percent of the residents had recently moved into the area. There are two tracts in the Newmarket buffer area where 33 percent or more of the residents are relatively new. These are the same neighborhood areas where there is major development and real estate activity as shown above in Map 3.

¹² See, "Foreclosure Petitions and Rate by Neighborhood, 2017," *Foreclosure Trends 2017*, Department of Neighborhood Development (2017).

¹³ Also see data pertinent to the Fairmount Corridor collected by the Boston Indicators, and data and information presented in the Fairmount/Indigo Line CDC Collaborative, *Strategic Plan for 2015-2018* (May 2015)

Map 6 shows that some areas in the Fairmount Corridor new arrivals are wealthier (in terms of median income) than long-time residents.

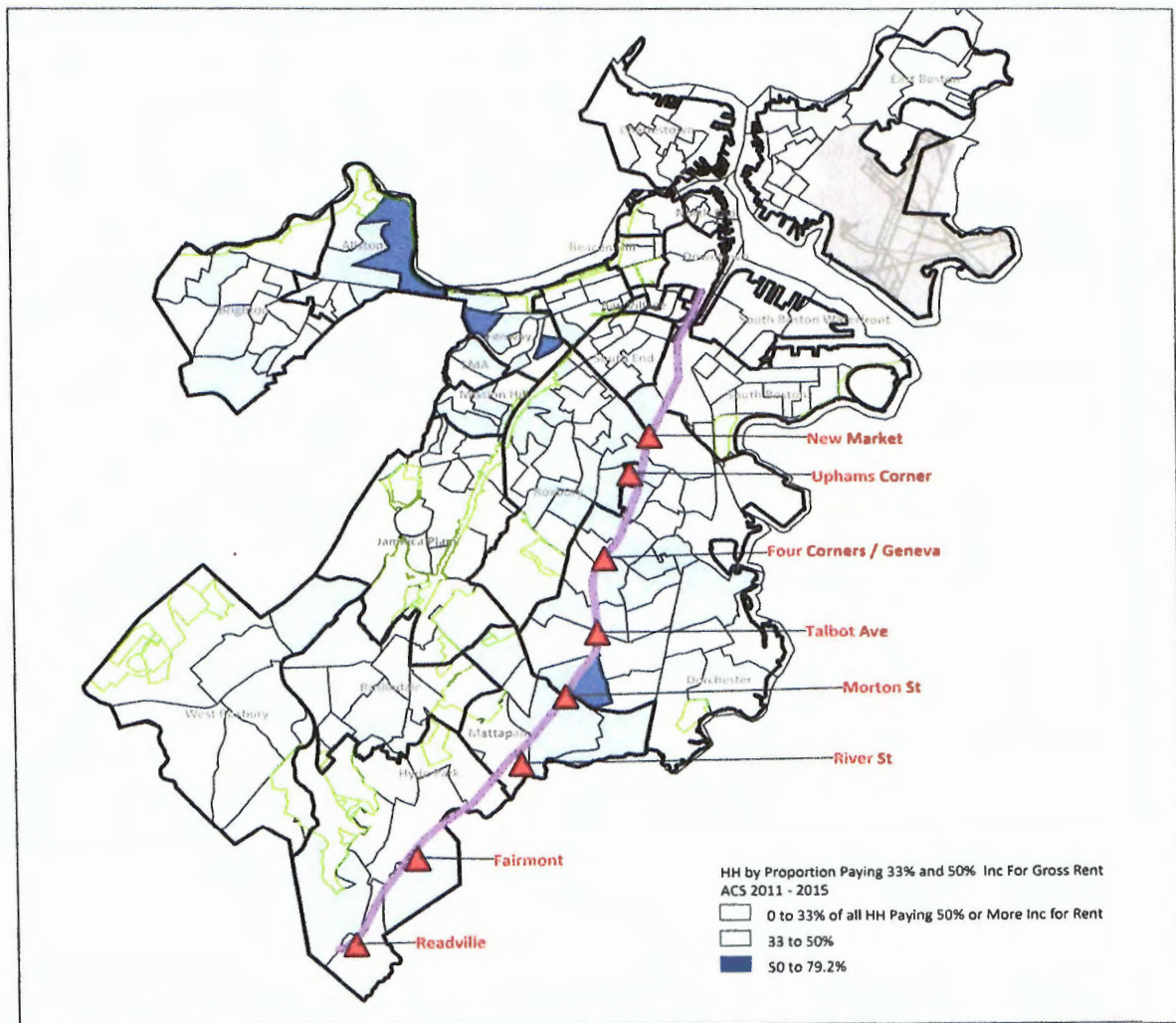
Map 6: Where New Movers to Neighborhood Have Median Incomes \$5,000 Higher (or More) Than Residents Reporting Same Address One Year Ago



Source: American Community Survey 2012–2016

And **Map 7** shows the tracts in Boston by the proportion of households paying 50 percent or more of income on gross rent. Again, these areas also corresponding with intense real estate activity in terms of capital development projects reported by DND.

Map 7: Proportion of Households Spending 50 Percent or More of Income on Gross Rent



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2011–2016

The changes noted above are taking place in parts of the Fairmount Corridor with a significant number of housing court cases resulting in evictions. According to information reported in the *Boston Housing Court Data Report*, there were 322 evictions (including subsidized and non-subsidized housing) in 2014; in Hyde Park there were 105 evictions; in Roxbury there were 648 evictions in this same year.¹⁴ Data reported in *Boston Housing Court Data Report* show that many of the housing court cases resulting in evictions are located along the Fairmount Corridor.¹⁵

Of the five most mentioned deficits remaining in the Fairmount corridor, the sense of impending displacement may weigh the heaviest, even if commuting challenges are more of a daily annoyance. With all of these challenges and aspirations in mind, residents are eager to share ideas for improvements.

¹⁴ Dixon, et al., op cit.

¹⁵ See, Table 9. 2014 Cases by Neighborhood in *Boston Housing Court Data Report*.

Conclusion – Community Observations and Thoughts on Next Steps

Over several years, numerous plans, initiatives and activities have aimed at ensuring that accessibility and physical improvements associated with the Fairmount Commuter Line would be linked with improvements in neighborhood areas not served by this commuter rail. Under the concept of transit-oriented development there were efforts to connect improved transportation with opportunities to enhance the quality of neighborhood life. As described earlier, this yielded important accomplishments but also continuing and new challenges. The following are nine ideas and potential next steps that focus group members and interviewees proposed to the study team, aimed at building on the accomplishments but also responding to the challenges that residents see throughout the Fairmount Corridor.

→ Support Discussions for Establishing “Transit-Oriented Development Special Protection Zones” along the Fairmount Line

This was proposed by the Action for Equity (and other organizations) and discussed at meetings of the Fairmount Indigo Network. It is an idea that has precedent in Boston’s zoning for smart-growth districts. As part of its anti-displacement strategies, furthermore, Boston has taken an important step in acknowledging that all neighborhoods are not equal, and therefore the impacts of public policy fall differently in some of these places. Accordingly, the Department of Neighborhood Development is investigating some innovative and creative ways to mitigate negative impacts of development in some neighborhood areas. Residents in the Fairmount Corridor should be part of these discussions and new policies or practices.¹⁶

This can also encourage the empowerment of residents in seeking better services from the MBTA and MASSDOT. Researchers heard widespread criticism of the lack of accountability of these agencies regarding how they approach the voices

of residents and community leaders. In short, while MassDOT and the MBTA and others have invested in improvements and the new stations, there is much work ahead. Community advocacy organizations like the Greater Four Corners Action Coalition and others initiated and mobilized a transit equity strategy pertaining to the Fairmount Line in 2000, but have at times felt disenfranchised; they should be acknowledged and included in plans for ongoing improvements.

Special protection zones would provide ... an opportunity to pursue development without displacement.

As mentioned earlier, major concern about displacement pervades among residents living near or adjacent to the Fairmount Commuter Line. Hard data about neighborhood characteristics

¹⁶ See *Boston Housing 2030 Update*

confirm some basis for such fears. Establishing Transit Oriented Development Special Protection Zones would be one step in not just allaying these fears, but also raising community awareness about transportation and land developments that may have the potential to lead to displacement. This could be an effective organizing tool to counter “speculative practices and policies *before* they fully take hold in our communities.”¹⁷

This kind of proposal is important because it responds to “displacement” not only as evictions or “forced” removal of people from their homes. Displacement is a process that comprises several components. Among these is a sense of vulnerability about housing; this too, must be considered in strategies to ensure adequate housing for all people.

Some researchers have proposed that there are psychological and mental health impacts, as well as effects on education outcomes for children who live in households clouded by anxiety about housing vulnerability.¹⁸ Another dimension associated with displacement is the possibility of being “priced-out” of one’s neighborhood and thereby one’s cultural space.¹⁹ Special protection zones, by providing information and data about real estate activity, evictions, condo conversions and resulting impacts on rents and changes in the availability of affordable housing would provide a foundation for residents to understand better neighborhood changes and advocate more effectively to pursue and negotiate development, but without displacement. Development proposals would have to be reviewed by residents to ensure that it is designed and implemented in ways which strengthen neighborhoods. .

→ Work with Elderly Homeowners to Ensure Their Housing Security

Map 8 shows that in some parts (tracts) of the Fairmount Corridor the proportion of elderly persons (65 years and over) among all homeowners can be one third or greater. Such high concentrations of elderly homeowners are prominent in Four Corners, Talbot Avenue, Morton Street, Blue Hill/Cummins and the River Street station areas. As such, focusing assistance on this demographic group can go a long way in helping homeowners throughout the Fairmount Corridor.

Elders require more, but also *targeted* outreach, versus *universal* outreach. Based on organizing work with elder homeowners, the Black Economic Institute proposed a survey and follow-up activities to ensure that elder homeowners along the Fairmount Corridor are aware of resources that would help them keep their homes, but also provide buffers to predatory lending. It would be very helpful, for example, to train seniors to know and understand how to navigate opportunities to lower interest rates, or manage reliable home improvements. Boston has an

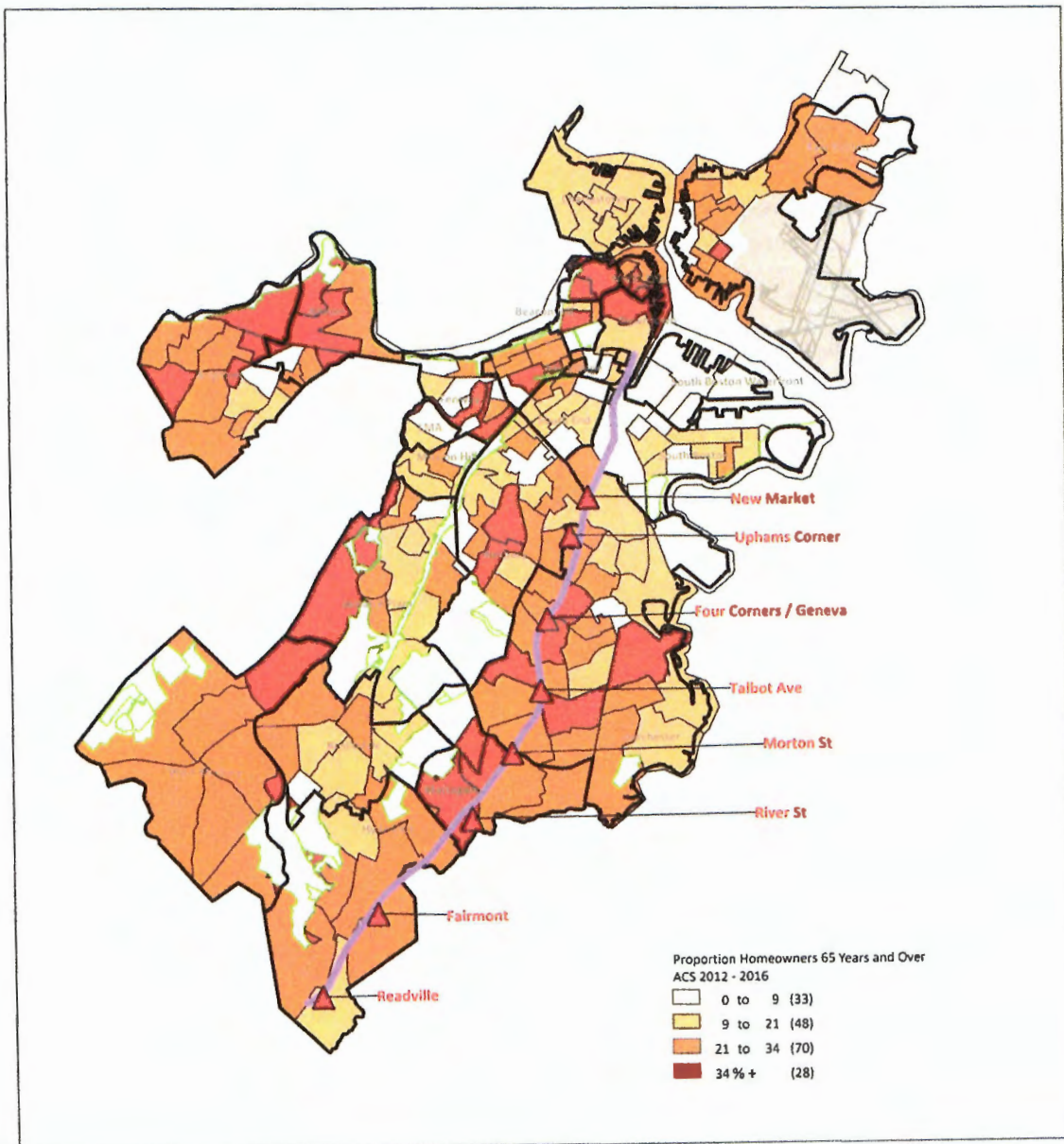
¹⁷ Fairmount/Indigo Line CDC Collaborative, *Strategic Plan for 2015-2018*, (May 2015), p.2

¹⁸ As a start, see the research and publications of Dr. Millie Fullilove, “Root Shock: Consequences of African American Dispossession” *Journal of Urban Health*, 78(1) (2001); also, Kristen Hackett, “A Community-Centered Perspective on Displacement” *Shelterforce* (November 13, 2018).

¹⁹ Hackett, op.cit.

array of resources that could help elderly homeowners and renters, but this information has to be widely known and tapped. It would not be efficient to simply rely on the elderly to seek this information on their own; here community organizers could play a very positive role.

Map 8: Proportion of Fairmount Corridor Homeowners 65 Years or Older, by Tracts



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2012–2016

→ Help Support Development or Expansion of Neighborhood Businesses

An earlier collaborative report by LISC, TACC and ICIC, *Fairmount Indigo Corridor Business and Job Attraction and Retention Strategy*, explained how linkages and connections could be strengthened:

“The acceleration of economic opportunity requires a collaborative strategy focused on meeting multiple needs simultaneously, including: 1) supporting and strengthening local entrepreneurship; 2) enhancing the vitality of retail corridors; 3) tailoring workforce development programming to meet current resident and employer needs; 4) working directly with residents to build financial assets and expand financial empowerment; 5) ensuring access and opportunity for both temporary and permanent jobs; 6) strengthening connections to existing job centers (e.g., downtown business district and the Longwood Medical Area); and 7) attracting and retaining businesses and jobs.”²⁰

This report should be reviewed and implemented because it provides a roadmap toward the “intentionality” community members sought in business development efforts.

It would be important to focus on strategies for the benefit of very small businesses given that 65 percent of all establishments in the Fairmount Corridor employ between one and four employees.

Respondents felt there should be an emphasis on local neighborhood businesses as well as MBEs and WBEs. According to the *InfoUSA* business database for 2015, there were approximately 1,373 establishments in the Services area, but only 160 in Construction, 64 in Manufacturing and 132 in Transportation, and these were not evenly spread throughout the neighborhood areas of the Fairmount Corridor.

A strategic plan to strengthen the business sector in the Fairmount Corridor requires information about existing businesses, and those that have closed, and attention to how this sector can be strengthened and diversified.

There are existing recommendations about how the latter can happen in a way that ensures that MBEs and WBEs benefit from strategies to strengthen the Fairmount Corridor’s business sector. Recently, the Initiative for a Competitive Inner City (ICIC) offered strategies to ensure racial and ethnic diversity in high tech incubators and accelerators; there should be similar reviews

²⁰ *Fairmount Indigo Corridor Business and Job Attraction and Retention Strategy*, LISC, TACC and ICIC (October 2016), p.3

and analysis of how emerging businesses in the Fairmount Corridor would reflect and or expand racial, ethnic and gender diversity among its workforce, but also how opportunities to establish and grow local and neighborhood-based businesses owned by people of color.²¹

It was also felt that resources should be devoted also to stronger connections between potential employers and residents. Employer needs and residents as a workforce could be better matched. For example, potential employers and organizations involved in working with residents should consider how to enhance coordination around job readiness and follow-through to ensure that strategies are effective. There is room for an expanded job referral network, like a revitalized Fairmount Corridor Job Referral Network, with more partnerships and strategies for targeted workforce development in terms of career opportunities, job mobility and access to training in higher paying occupations and industries. Interviewees mentioned the possibility of partnering with community colleges to help incentivize businesses to hire and train people in neighborhoods along the Corridor. The latter responds to the fact that many workers in the Fairmount Corridor are found in low-paying jobs in categories like health-care support, protective services, food preparation, personal care, and sales.

→ Expand Opportunities for Youth to Connect Directly to Economic Development Initiatives

Youth should be more involved with the economic aspects of transit-oriented development and transit equity, community members said. Some community organizations have made progress on this front, but resources for expanding such efforts should be more readily available and designed for long-term impacts on young people's education and employment prospects. For example, the Bowdoin-Geneva focus group called for more youth opportunities to develop and apply entrepreneurial skills. Project Right also has a summer youth program that has been actively involved in the Fairmount Corridor organizing, including the surveying of neighborhood issues and taking test rides on the Fairmount Line using their youth passes. These kinds of efforts should be supported and expanded. Main Streets along the Fairmount Corridor could hold broad community conversations to solicit ideas in response to the query: How best can we connect youth more intricately to economic development: Jobs? Workforce training? Apprenticeships? Opportunities for entrepreneurship? Linkages with public schools and workshops?

Youth should be more involved with the economic aspects of transit-oriented development and transit equity.

Perhaps a preliminary step in engaging the community with these challenges is a review and overview of youth characteristics that are directly or indirectly associated with employment and

²¹ See *Creating Inclusive High-Tech Incubators and Accelerators: Strategies to Increase Participation Rates of Women and Minority Entrepreneurs*, www.icic.org.

workforce development. This kind of overview should be segmented to capture the multi-faceted nature and experiences of the youth population across the neighborhoods in the Fairmount Corridor.

→ Support the Development of Community Land Trusts to Enhance Housing Security for Long-Time Residents along the Fairmount Corridor

Several focus groups and interviewees mentioned the creation of more community land trusts throughout the Fairmount Corridor. This is an idea that is attracting major public support and has the endorsement of the City of Boston.²² Recently, DND counted approximately 150 distressed properties in June 2018. As **Map 9** shows, a substantial number of these kinds of properties are found in or adjacent to neighborhood areas along the Fairmount Corridor.²³ Many of these properties might be housing stock that could be developed as community land trusts.

There are also numerous vacant units *not* on the market along the Fairmount Corridor; these should be identified and investigated in terms of why they are not on the market, and utilized to expand different types of community land trusts. **Map 10** shows that the Fairmount Corridor has a considerable number of vacant units off the market based on data in the ACS 2012–2016 5-Year Estimates.²⁴ This is the case especially for the River Street, Blue Hill/Cummins Highway, and Morton Street neighborhood areas.

Discussion pointed to the importance of ensuring that the arts be utilized as a tool to organize youth, but without overlooking long-time local artists.

→ Expand the Use of Arts to Organize Youth in the Community, but Also to Support Artists Who Live and Have Worked in the Community

Over the years many local artists were tapped throughout the Fairmount Corridor under arts and placemaking initiatives. As noted earlier, there is some concern that this focus will not be sustained after the initial periods. The Mattapan Cultural Development discussion pointed to the importance of ensuring that the arts be utilized as a tool to organize youth, but without overlooking long-time local artists. The discussion emphasized that it is local artists who can do a better job in reaching youth in the community.

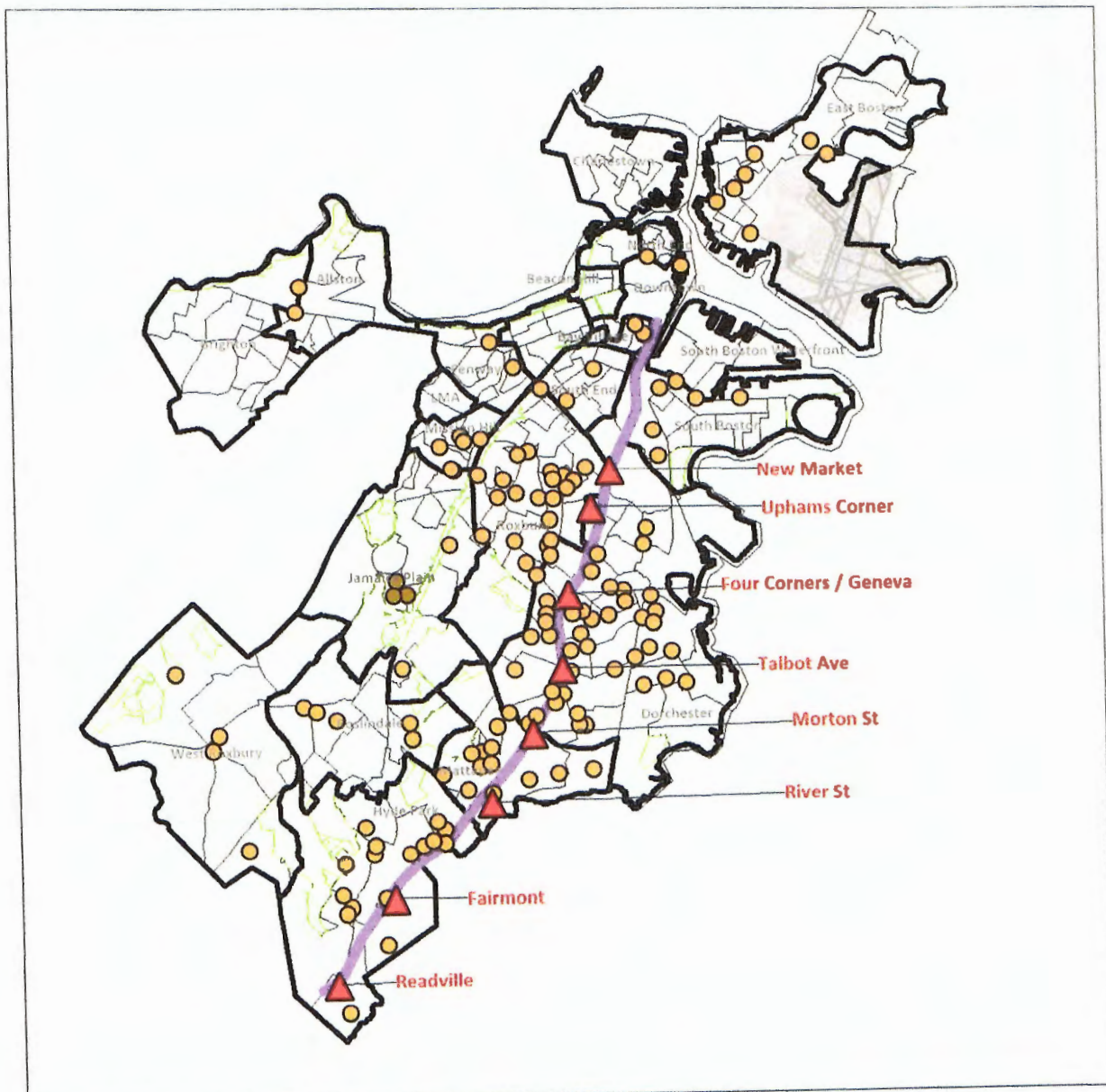
²² See, *Housing Boston 2030*, and *Housing Boston 2030 UPDATE*.

²³ There are about 75 to 80 residential and commercial properties along the Fairmount Corridor based on the information reported by DND for June 2018.

²⁴ Estimated vacant units includes those units that are for rent; rented but not occupied; for sale only; sold, but not occupied; seasonal vacant units; migrant worker vacant units; and other vacant. The latter are those vacant units that do not fall under the earlier categories and are off the market.

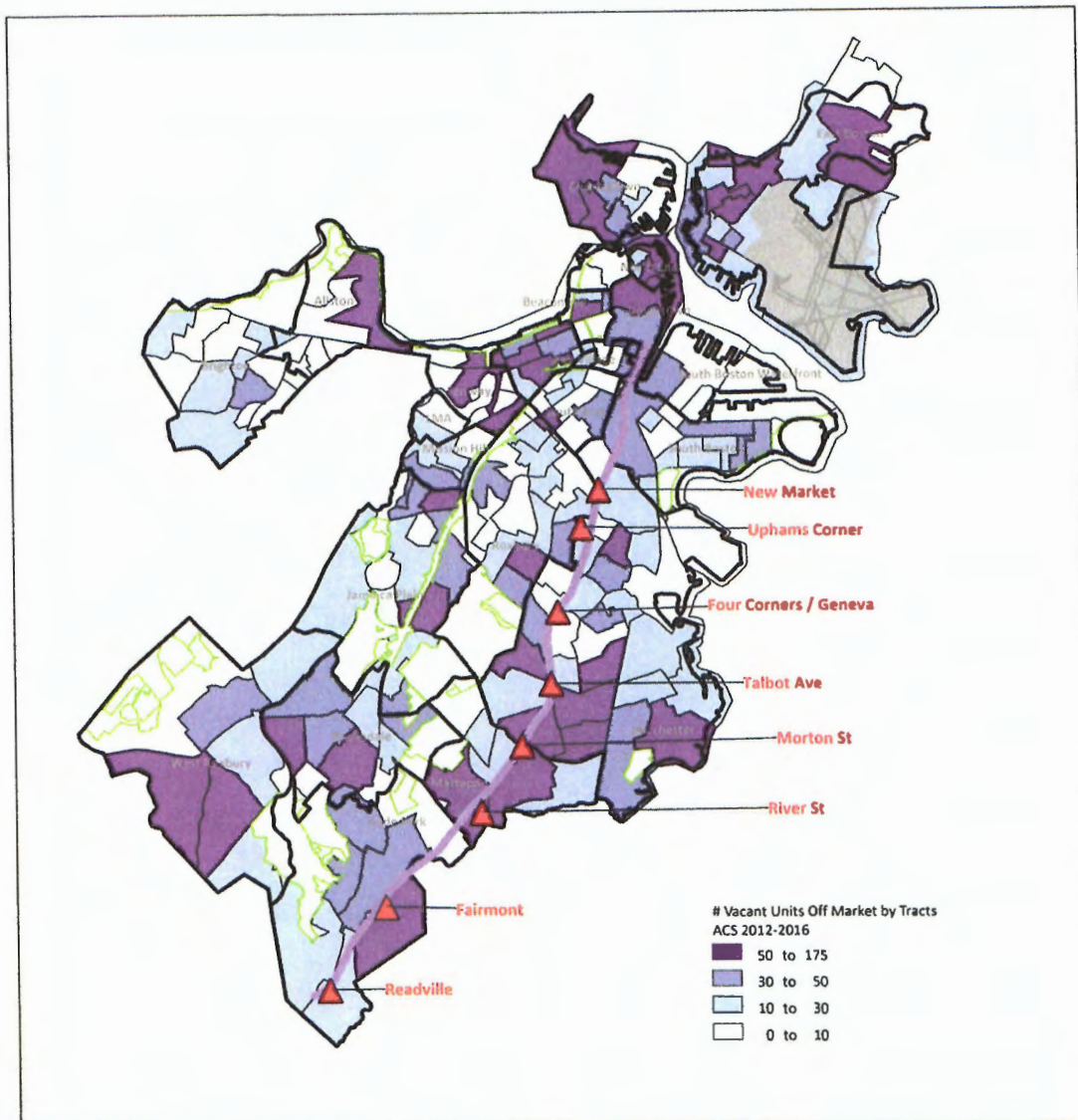
But continued and expanded arts and placemaking can also bring new worries, particularly that successful efforts could end up as a tool of displacement. Community members suggested

Map 9: Location of Distressed Buildings (Commercial and Residential), June 2018



Source: Department of Neighborhood Development (June 2018).

Map 10: Number of Off-Market Vacant Housing Units along Fairmount Corridor



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2012–2016

questions for guiding arts planning that could help to dispel the fear and even the eventuality of arts initiatives having a negative gentrifying effect. For instance:

- Who or what processes are determining a vision for arts and placemaking, and how will such vision(s) be pursued?
- Who, or what sectors are not part of such visioning and why not?
- How will decision making about the funding and implementation of arts and placemaking initiatives be made?
- How will proposed arts and placemaking initiatives impact current and resident-based artists and arts?

A broader query is, simply, what is meant by the “Cultural Corridor” today? And can this concept be used to extend the arts deeper into neighborhood areas that may not be part of the Cultural Corridor?

→ Expand Resources for “Community-Centered” Organizing

There are basic logistical issues that could increase residents’ involvement in civic issues related to transportation and their neighborhood: the provision of child care for meetings; offering food when meetings are held during certain times; friendly facilitation; or flexibility in what residents want to discuss or focus on. Also, given the diversity of the neighborhoods along the Fairmount Line, translation resources are important, as well as different discussion formats depending on the group being outreached.

Beyond these logistical issues a consensus heard throughout the focus groups and most of the interviews is the need to support and expand “community-centered organizing” aimed at making residents more aware of opportunities to increase and sustain civic participation and empowerment.

Mentioned several times was that not enough residents know about existing opportunities to enhance their livelihood or how to become more involved with neighborhood challenges. Some neighborhood sectors are not being tapped fully due, in part, to the lack of ample outreach. These sectors include the elderly population, neighborhood-based businesses, faith-based organizations, new ethnic groups and immigrants throughout the Fairmount Corridor.

[There is] a call ... for resources and frameworks to generate cross-sector and cross-community organizing on behalf of the neighborhood.

In response to this scenario is a call for a focus on community-centered organizing, or what one participant described as “going back to the roots.” This is not a call simply for more community organizers, but rather for resources and frameworks to generate cross-sector and cross-community organizing on behalf of the neighborhood. It resonates with the strong call for intensive political and neighborhood mobilization on the part of networks, collaboratives and other Fairmount Corridor organizations.²⁵

In the context of the Fairmount Corridor, and based on the focus groups and interviews, community-centered organizing here means:

²⁵ The CDC Collaborative has adopted the building of “organizing muscle” as one of its priority goals: “organize a power base of tenants and homeowners who will provide active leadership... to push public officials to act on the demands to stop speculator-driven displacement of residents....” Fairmount/Indigo Line CDC Collaborative, *Strategic Plan for 2015-2018* (May 2015), p.13.

- Involving residents as the movers and decision makers about visions for the neighborhood.
- Organizing in order to influence policies and the narratives driving them, but also to build a sense of community among residents.
- Emphasizing a strong equity orientation as “glue” to develop a sense of unity among different community interests, where all voices are heard and are integral to decision making.
- Guaranteeing space for new groups to participate in public discourses about the nature and resolution of problems.
- Incorporating popular education, broadly defined.²⁶

Community-centered organizing can help to achieve broad goals that have been widely endorsed by many community groups and organizations throughout the Fairmount Corridor. For example, “Transit Equity and Justice,” “Affordable Housing and Development without Displacement,” “Financial Empowerment,” “Community Pride and High Quality Environments,” and “Racial Justice and Political Power” are goals/values iterated by the CDC Collaborative, but they also resounded throughout the focus group meetings and interviews. These goals/values may not be achievable without a greater level and intensity of community organizing.

→ Increase Opportunities for Public Education Activities

Concern was expressed at several meetings and conversations with individuals about residents not being fully aware of changes that could affect their housing. The Greater Four Corners Action Coalition, Bowdoin-Geneva Main Streets, Black Economic Institute for Justice, and DSNI called for the development or expansion of community-friendly workshops to inform renters, homeowners and elders about their housing rights and how to maintain housing security. Public education in the format of workshops or frequent community meetings is a first step in helping to preserve housing for long-time residents. Residents should be made aware of the social and economic changes around them and which could be problematic for their homes and communities and sense of place.

Models are available that can inform residents and help them engage in proactive strategies. Recently, for example, Alternatives for the Community and the Environment (ACE) worked with a group of local researchers to review and analyze data that might indicate potential and

²⁶ There are many examples of how community-centered organizing has been approached and implemented in U.S. society. We only offer one here, as an example: “Community organizing is a long-term approach where people affected by an issue are supported in identifying problems and taking collective action to achieve solutions. At the heart of community organizing are inclusion, ownership, relationship building, and leadership development – all of which are critical to developing effective local policies.” Rhonda Jones-Webb and Melanie Wall, “Neighborhood Racial/Ethnic Concentration, Social Disadvantage and Homicide Risk...” *Journal of Urban Health* (2008).

actual gentrification by census tracts.²⁷ Earlier, DSNI and James Jennings developed an index to help identify areas that might be susceptible to gentrification based on real estate, social, economic and demographic patterns.²⁸ Community organizing should include opportunities to present this kind of data and information to residents to enhance understanding about neighborhood changes.

There is also an opportunity to involve public schools more extensively with community-organizing activities within the Fairmount Corridor. Community-based organizations should be supported in reaching out to local public schools to involve both students and parents in a range of community-building strategies or initiatives that could be beneficial to parent engagement and even academic achievement. Arts and placemaking should be expanded as a bridge between public schools and community-based organizations. Organizations like Cooperative Energy, Recycling and Organics (CERO) or the Transit Equity Coalition, and others based in parts of the Fairmount Corridor, can probably have powerful impacts on how children and youth in public schools understand that issues related to green economies and transit justice affect their lives and neighborhoods. These kinds of potential linkages with BPS classes in various formats should be explored.

→ Expand Resources for Planning and Implementing Cross-Neighborhood Collaborative Strategies and Programs, Including Resources for Follow-Through in Identifying and Responding to Obstacles to Greater Collaboration or Impacts

Strategic planning for the future of the Fairmount Corridor should be implemented by an inter-neighborhood organization modeled after the former FIN, which had the advantage of being community-based *throughout* the Fairmount Corridor by virtue of the organizations represented. Resources should be devoted to potential tools for measuring impacts of initiatives and activities; providing and co-sharing information with partner organizations about effective outreach activities; and planning activities to involve more residents (long-time, elderly, youth, businesses) in Fairmount Corridor activities.

In attempts to expand or support cross-neighborhood collaboration it should not be overlooked that there are social and economic differences in neighborhood areas and buffers that are part of the Fairmount Corridor.²⁹ Community-based organizations seeking to continue or expand the building of an inter-neighborhood network should consider these social and economic

²⁷ See, Appendix C: Neighborhood Characteristics and Changes - Potential Warning Signs for Displacement in J. Jennings, B. Terrell, J. Douglas, K. Barnett, and A.E. Harding, *Understanding Gentrification and Displacement: Community Voices and Changing Neighborhoods* (August 2016), at <https://sites.tufts.edu/jamesjennings/>
Displacement in J. Jennings, B. Terrell, J. Douglas, K. Barnett, and A.E. Harding, *Understanding Gentrification and Displacement: Community Voices and Changing Neighborhoods* (August 2016), at <https://sites.tufts.edu/jamesjennings/>

²⁸ J. Jennings, *Development without Displacement: The Spatial Face of Potential Gentrification in Boston, Massachusetts*, DSNI Research Brief (June 2014)

²⁹ As used in earlier reports the buffers are ½ mile radii around the Fairmount Corridor's station areas; see p.10 in current Report.

differences in terms of outreach and increasing resident participation. For example, census population estimates for 2017 show that the “average” share of Latinos in the Fairmount Corridor buffers was 24.6 percent, but for Four Corners it was reported at 31 percent, with Uphams Corner at 29.2 percent.

Poverty levels differ significantly across the area. The average rate of families below the poverty level (with or without children) is 23.2 percent, based on 2017 census estimates, but for the Readville buffer it is 9.9 percent; Fairmount buffer, 10.4 percent; Uphams Corner, 27 percent; Newmarket 25 percent; Morton Street, 26.5 percent; and Four Corners, 30 percent.³⁰

Unemployment also varies across the Fairmount Corridor. The overall civilian unemployment rate based on 2017 census estimates was reported at 9.8 percent, but for Morton Street buffer it was 10 percent; River Street, 12 percent; and for Four Corners, 13.4 percent.

Subtle differences must be considered when trying to increase residents’ participation in efforts that address their mutual concerns.

There are differences in the types of family households. The average rate of female headed-households with children for the Fairmount Corridor buffers is 30 percent, based on 2017 census estimates, but for the Readville buffer it was 17.2 percent; River Street, 25 percent; Morton Street, 31 percent; and Four Corners, 37.1

percent. The numbers of large households (four persons or more) also show some stark contrasts. There are approximately 2,100 such households in the Four Corners / Geneva area; this is followed by Uphams Corner (1,741 households with four persons or more); Talbot Ave (1,515 households); and Morton Street (1,471 households). Meanwhile, the number of large households in the Fairmount area is 715 households; River Street, 615 households; Newmarket, 607 households; and in Readville only 315 households have four persons or more.

All of these subtle differences must be considered when trying to increase residents’ participation in efforts that address their mutual concerns.

A final point about next steps: The suggestions above echo previous reports. Earlier recommendations are associated with the strategic and programmatic areas listed in Table 1 on page 8. There should be provision and resources for a systematic review of the recommendations proposed in these reports. Such a review would help in ensuring that the “the wheel is not re-invented” but also provide an opportunity to understand how to resolve new issues and challenges and ensure that responses are intricately linked to the well-being of residents and neighborhoods in the Fairmount Corridor.

³⁰ Also see data collected and presented by Boston Indicators regarding neighborhood differences based on tracks; see, for example, xxx [jj: cite 1 or 2 examples].

Epilogue

This is a story about the Fairmount Line and Corridor, its neighborhoods and residents and a history of community struggles not only to improve transportation, but to achieve transportation equity and justice. By itself, improving transportation can be potentially dangerous for communities that have borne the brunt of historical transportation inequities.³¹ For communities challenged by poverty, historical neglect and institutional racism, whether in education, public health or economic development, transportation equity is an antidote. This is also a story, therefore, of how coalitions of neighborhood residents have sought and continue to seek that equity and justice as improvements in the Fairmount area are pursued.

Improvements are indeed taking place. Since the research for this report was completed, all stations along the Fairmount Line have come on line and are being utilized by riders every day. The Fiscal Management and Control Board recently voted to electrify most of the commuter rail system, which could result in 15-minute headways between trains. The first phase of this transformation will happen on three commuter rail lines, including Fairmount.

Residents are still working to build on improvements and to ensure that they and their families and neighbors can enjoy them without fear of displacement; they have been at this for a very long time now but will continue their struggles to ensure vibrant communities in the Fairmount Corridor. Very importantly, residents also want their story to be told. They want to share their own lessons that might benefit the efforts of residents for their own better neighborhoods, and ultimately, a better Boston for all.

³¹ There are many works that can be cited here to illustrate this point, but a premier historical study on race and the role of transportation inequities in relation to one of the nation's oldest Black communities, Bedford Stuyvesant, is Harold X. Connally, *A Ghetto Grows in Brooklyn* (New York University Press, 1977).

Appendix A: Focus Groups Overview

Five focus groups were completed between July 2018 and September 2018; during this period 21 interviews were also conducted. Additionally, the research team compiled an annotated bibliography summarizing extant reports and news items.³² Facilitation for all the focus groups was participatory-based and guided by questions in a conversation format, but after a framework of the study was presented. The sessions and discussions were framed as a conversation about lessons learned versus a formal study. The conversations covered accomplishments, challenges, and recommendations offered by participants regarding how transportation improvements could be more directly linked to benefits for residents. The focus groups were organized around community-based organizations involved with the Fairmount Corridor, but spread geographically given the area that the Fairmount Line covers.

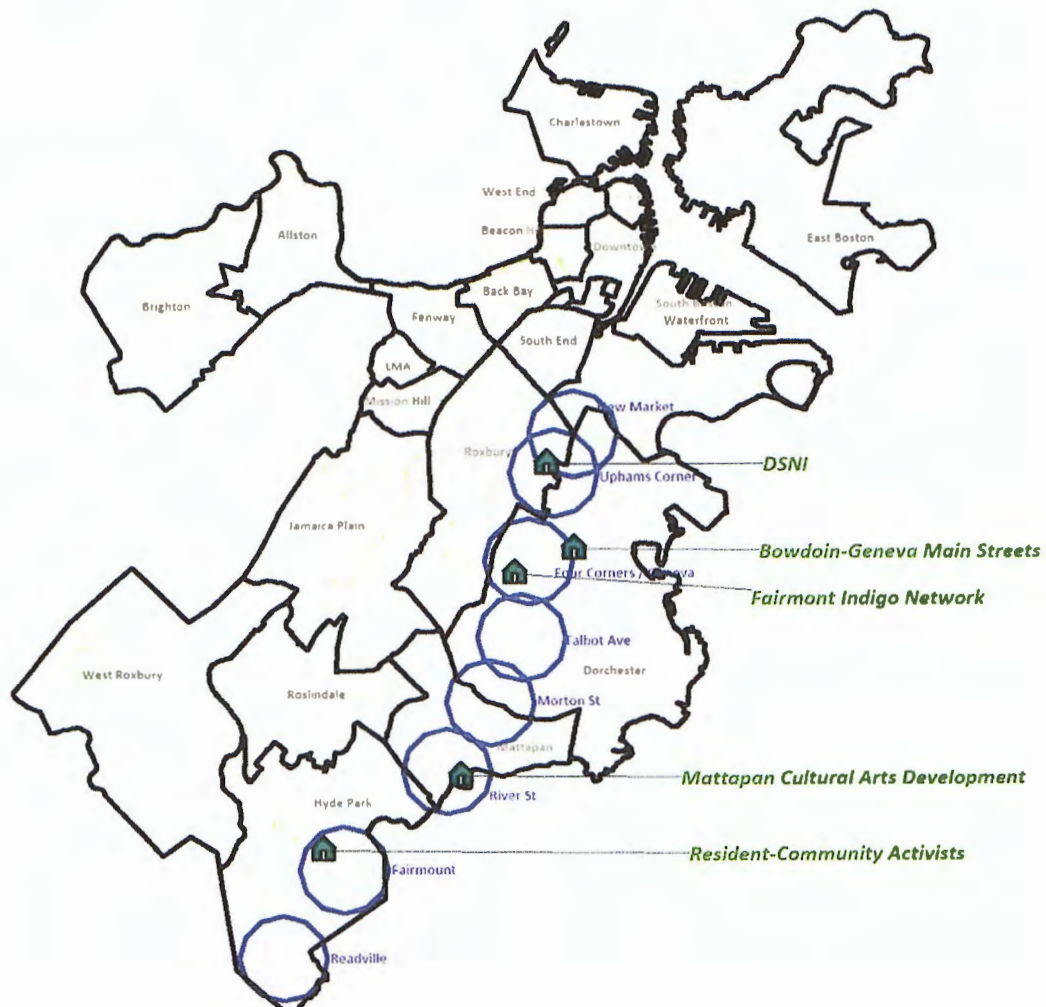
All focus groups and some interviewees were provided with a draft annotated bibliography about the Fairmount Corridor. As preparation for the focus group discussions, participants were also provided with an overview of demographic and economic information about parts of the Fairmount Corridor. These materials included a PDF-layered map³³ of the various spatial layers (ZIP Codes, tracts, neighborhoods, buffers, etc.) used in various reports about the Fairmount Corridor; summary and overview of population characteristics by Fairmount Corridor buffers used in some reports (based on 2017 census estimates); and a PDF-layered map showing the neighborhood infrastructure along and near the Fairmount Corridor (public housing, public schools, Main Streets, child care providers, rapid transit lines, etc.). Focus group participants were also given the general questions and issues to be raised in the discussions.

Map 11 on the next page shows the location of the five focus groups in relation to the Fairmount Line and buffers used in various reports. The focus groups allowed the study team to include a prominent community-based organization, Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI); a Main Streets organization; the network organization for the Fairmount Corridor, Fairmount Indigo Network (FIN); a group of artists in Mattapan; and a resident activist organization in Hyde Park.

³² See Appendix C: Select Bibliography

³³ PDF-layered maps can be open in some versions of ADOBE and gives the reader the capacity to select or unselect layers depending on what the person wants to view.

Map I: Location of Organization Focus Groups in the Fairmount Corridor



Appendix B: Interviews Overview

Interviewees were selected based on suggestions from the Boston Foundation, but also a review of work related to the Fairmount Corridor to identify other individuals. The interviewees included community and civic voices involved with some aspect of the Fairmount Line and Fairmount Corridor activities.³⁴ The interviews were open-ended and included both community individuals and partner organizations.

Most of the interviewees are long-time residents in neighborhoods along the Fairmount Line, and some of these individuals are frequent riders on the Fairmount Commuter Rail Line:

An anonymous interviewee	Mela Miles
Bithia Carter	Michelle Moon
Hakim Cunningham	Vivien Morris
Joseph D. Feaster	Anita Morson-Matra
Barbara Fields	Anh Nguyen
Juan Evereteze	Ines Palmarin
Dara Frederick	Lilly Searcy
State Rep. Russell Holmes	Harry Smith
Dr. Chris Jones	Sue Sullivan
Gail Latimore	Bob Terrell
Marvin Martin	Travis Watson
Allentza Michel	

The study team was able to contact and speak with individuals involved with Woodhaven Neighborhood Organization, Mattapan United, Mattapan ABCD, Fairmount Greenway Project, Codman Square NDC, Southwest Boston CDC, Fairmount Greenway Task Force, DSNI, Greater Four Corners Coalition, Newmarket Business Association, Mattapan Cultural Arts Development, Bowdoin-Geneva Main Streets, Fairmount Indigo Network, Dorchester Bay EDC, The American City Coalition (TACC), Morton Street Neighborhood Civic Association, Black Economic Justice Institute (BEJI), CDC Collaborative, New England Blacks in Philanthropy and many others. The study's timeframe limited the outreach that could be conducted in terms of the number of interviews and other organizations involved with Fairmount Corridor.

³⁴ One interviewee, also a long-time and involved resident, requested anonymity. Also note that the names of focus group participants are not listed here.

Appendix C: Select Bibliography

This bibliography is a select list of academic, media and commissioned reports describing various facets of the Fairmount Corridor since 2002. The citations, listed chronologically, were helpful to the study team in terms of providing a historical and current overview of the Fairmount Line and neighborhood activities sponsored by foundations and local community organizations. An annotated version of this bibliography was shared with focus group participants and some interviewees.

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