

# walk

By ANN HERSHFANG

## Advocacy efforts pay off

For 10 years, WalkBoston has worked to revise signal timing in the City of Boston, and in September 2004, we finally reached that goal. Under the new City policy, a green light will trigger a walk light without anyone pushing a button. And instead of having seven seconds to walk and 60-90 seconds to wait, pedestrians will have adequate walk time and shorter waits. This encourages pedestrians to wait for the Walk, and thus make crossing the street safer. Check out the retimed signals on Franklin/Pearl Streets at Post Office Square, or in front of Back Bay Station, to see what's in store citywide.

John DeBenedictis, Chief Engineer for the Boston Transportation Department, drafted the new signal timing policy and a plan for retrofitting. Warm thanks to John. Thanks also to The Boston Foundation, whose timely grant allowed us to hire expert help, and to the Foundation's president, Paul Grogan, for his personal support. Both were critical to this success.

Next up: the City and WalkBoston are asking the Central Artery project to redo plans for the Rose Kennedy Greenway signals to conform to the new policy. Another Artery activity of note is revisiting the sidewalk at 500 Atlantic Avenue, where a Boston-approved plan allows four-inch curbs and vehicle loading/parking across the sidewalk right-of-way. This forces pedestrians to circle to the building door on private property to continue—a terrible precedent that we hope to reverse.

Statewide Advocacy: It's our fourth year on the Task Force rewriting the Highway Design Manual to simplify for municipalities the process of designing sensible roadways rather than speedways. Legislatively, we helped get \$5 million for Safe Routes to Schools into the Transportation Bond Bill and gained seven pedestrian positions on the statewide Bicycle Advisory Committee, and we are soliciting suggestions for statewide appointees—urgently.

Safe Sidewalks: We're working to draw attention to the issue of poorly laid and maintained brick sidewalks, which are treacherous for the elderly and disabled. Also on the agenda is municipal snow shoveling of curb ramps and the sidewalks along public parks and schools.

And there's still more: a host of Central Artery/Greenway efforts; working with the Convention Center Authority on pedestrian measures for Summer Street; advocating for a Bike/Pedestrian Advisory Committee and planner for Boston... The Advocacy Committee looks forward to the challenges of the coming year.

By WENDY LANDMAN

## How I hit the ground walking

Since joining WalkBoston as Executive Director last Fall, my days have been a whirlwind of learning, advocacy, planning new programs, and fundraising. Learning first: although I was a longtime member of WalkBoston, I was not aware of the full range and depth of what we do as an organization. Nor could I appreciate from a distance the incredible talents, energy and enthusiasm of the volunteers who make WalkBoston such a success.

We are focusing our advocacy efforts on programs that promote walking, and we're seeing results. These include initiating Safe Routes to Schools programs in two Boston schools, organizing a coalition to press for a statewide SRS program, and providing technical and program advice to neighborhood walking groups through the Boston Public Health Commission's STEPS program. On the Central Artery, we're working with the City of Boston and the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority on the Walk/Don't Walk signal timing along the Greenway, urging the completion of the Charles River Basin pedestrian network, and reviewing site-specific projects along the Artery route.

New programs we are working toward will build on the public's growing interest in walking. The first is WalkRx™, a WalkBoston idea in which health care providers would write "walking prescriptions" for their patients, and support them with a walking specialist to identify neighborhood walk routes and walk partners. The goal of our second initiative is to make it easier for out-of-town visitors to start walking. So, for example, we prepared two self-guided walking tours for the National Association of Art Educators' annual convention held here in early March, and we are working to improve the walk between South Station and the new Convention Center.

Finally there's fundraising, bringing in new corporate and organizational members to provide a predictable financial base. We are thrilled to have received new funding from supporters ranging from environmental and transportation consultants, to law firms and financial services corporations and public agencies.

I've been caught up in all the energy and excitement fueling WalkBoston these days, from the Board of Directors, from President Liz Levin, from the volunteers.

So I'll end with a recruiting pitch: if you have energy and ideas, or a little bit of time, please let me know and we'll catch you up in it too!

## Columnist Judy Foreman keynotes Annual Meeting

All members should plan to attend WalkBoston's 15th Annual Meeting on Thursday, March 31, at the offices of Wilmer, Cutler, Pickering, Hale & Dorr, on the 26th floor of the 60 State Street building.

We're starting with something different this year—a **4:00 walk** to 60 State from Post Office Square Park, along the Rose Kennedy Greenway. The **social hour commences at 5:30**, with the **meeting following at 6:30**. Liz Levin will present the President's Report, and we'll present our annual Golden Shoe Awards to Mayor Thomas Menino for his support of walking throughout the city; Vineet Gupta and John DeBenedictis of the Boston Transportation Department for supporting

innovative pedestrian projects; and Ann McHugh of the Boston Public Health Commission for integrating WalkBoston into the City's STEPS program to focus on pedestrian activities and health.

At **7:30**, health columnist **Judy Foreman** offers "Walking: A Prescription for Life." Foreman's work appears locally in the Boston Globe and is syndicated nationwide. It will be a pleasure to hear her views on the everyday benefits of walking.

Please notify the WalkBoston office by March 25 if you plan to attend. There is a suggested donation of \$10 per person.

# Boston

**MAKING OUR COMMUNITIES  
MORE WALKABLE**

**SPRING 2005**

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WalkBoston promotes walking for transportation, health and recreation through education and advocacy. Our mission is to create and preserve safe walking environments that build vital communities.

## MISSION

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## staying sharp

Recent evidence suggests walking can provide a strong cognitive benefit for seniors along with the obvious physical one. A University of Virginia researcher found men ages 71 to 93 who walked less than one-quarter mile a day were almost twice as likely to develop dementia than men who walked two miles a day. A second study at Brigham & Women's Hospital involving women ages 70 to 81 found that women who walked as little as 1.5 hours a week did better on tests of mental function than less active women.

The findings are good news for older people who want to avoid mental decline without extreme or strenuous exercise. They are also ammunition for health care providers promoting exercise programs among seniors most at risk.

## Fido down under

Commonwealth dog owners take note: The Australian Better Health Channel says that about 40% of Australian households have dogs, and simply walking their dog a few times a week could offer owners substantial health benefits.

A study published in the Medical Journal of Australia found that 41% of dog owners walk, on average, 18 minutes per week longer than people without dogs. However, the majority of dog owners (59%) don't walk their dogs at all, and actually record lower physical activity levels than people without dogs. The report authors estimate that if all dog owners regularly walked their dogs, the boost in physical fitness across the community would save Australia's health care system about \$175 million (\$140 million USD) every year.

## spring walks

We're walking weekends and weekdays, afternoons and evenings, and from early spring to mid summer this walking season. Walks are free for members and \$10 for nonmembers. Preregistration is appreciated. Watch for a mailing and check our website for times and details.

**Thurs. March 31: Walk the Rose Kennedy Greenway** to our Annual Meeting to learn about ped-friendly aspects of this new corridor.

**Mon. April 18: Franklin Park** explores the largest Emerald Necklace park with Uphams Corner Health Center.

**Sat. April 30: Boston Tops**—Corbels, Cornices, Caps & Spires focuses on Boston's fabulous rooftops.

**Tues. May 10 & Thurs. May 12: Downtown & South Boston by foot**

**and boat**—easy connection to retail and convention centers with the Downtown Crossing Association.

**Sat. May 14: Little Lanes of Boston** explores downtown's many 17th-century shortcuts.

**Sat. May 21: Commonwealth Avenue Mall Sculptures** view the statues with Meredith Bergmann, sculptor of the Women's Memorial.

**Sat. June 4: Brookline's Secret Stairways & Paths** finds the vital pedestrian links between neighborhoods, shopping and transit.

**Sat. June 18: Arlington Heights**, a tour with Walking in Arlington.

**Sat. July 9: Explore the South End Medical District** and the neighborhood's major influence in history.

**Mon. July 25: Foraging for Food in the Fens** hunts edibles with expert forager Russ Cohen.

## membership application

Complete this form & mail along with your check made payable to: WalkBoston, Old City Hall, 45 School Street, Boston, MA 02108.  
 T: 617.367.9255 | F: 617.367.9285 | info@walkboston.org | www.walkboston.org

name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

address \_\_\_\_\_

phone: daytime \_\_\_\_\_ evening \_\_\_\_\_

e-mail \_\_\_\_\_ fax \_\_\_\_\_

check one:  INDIVIDUAL \$30     SUPPORTER \$100—\$499     STROLLER \$1000  
 DUAL / FAMILY \$50     SUSTAINING \$500—\$5000     STRIDER \$2500  
 FRIEND \$65     AMBLER \$300     RACEWALKER \$5000

check committees you are interested in. (to contact them directly - see front)

membership     advocacy     communications  
 legislative     development     programs

Your donation is tax deductible as a charitable contribution.

## Grants increase

WalkBoston has received four grants in the past few months. WalkBoston's pilot project to develop walks for visitors is underway, supported by the Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau. Funding allows for a pilot program to create self-guided walking tours for tourists and visitors to Boston. This first project encourages conference attendees to walk near convention centers and hotels, beginning with the March convention of the National Association of Art Educators.

The other grants are from the Herman and Frieda L. Miller Foundation (sustaining funding to support WalkBoston's ongoing program activities); Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Massachusetts

(supporting WalkBoston's advocacy for the creation of a statewide, publicly funded Safe Routes to Schools program); and the Harvard School of Public Health (technical assistance for a project led by Dr. Anne Lusk to carry out pilot walk route interventions for an elementary school in Arlington, MA). These grants offer strong evidence that our voice is not only being heard, it is also being supported.

## Annual Meeting

**March 31, 2005 | 60 State Street**

4:00 Rose Kennedy Greenway walk  
 [meet at Post Office Square Park]  
 5:30 Eat | Drink | Schmooze  
 6:30 Meeting | Golden Shoe Awards  
 7:30 Judy Foreman presents  
 "Walking: A Prescription for Life"