

3.15 walk

MAKING MASSACHUSETTS MORE WALKABLE



In honor of WalkBoston's 25th anniversary, four of its five founders provide their recollections of the early years. The five were Dorothea Hass, Bob Sloane, Sonia Hamel, Ann Hershfang and Sorin Garber. Inspiring the work of WalkBoston over these splendid years are the words of Margaret Mead: *Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.*



Left to right: Bob Sloane and Ken Kruckemeyer [long-time member] 2014. Ann Hershfang and Dorothea Hass, early 1990s at the French Library.

Boston

BY DOROTHEA HASS

Still changing the world

In the early 1980s my work was writing environmental impact reports documenting the negative impacts of the automobile. At meetings, planners bemoaned the second class status of public transportation. State and local officials wrung their hands, stating that the public would never see the wisdom of using the T, meanwhile nearly all of the officials used private automobiles. Governor Michael Dukakis, ever a committed Green Line passenger, was the exception.

I researched walking and found that 43,000 Bostonians were walking to work each day, and tens of thousands more walked to public transportation stops. Looking for a way to put walkers on the map, I started attending public transportation hearings. At one hearing, I held up a list of invitees and pointed out that 35 organizations had been invited but no walking groups. I pointed out to the chair, then Fred Salvucci, that if all the 43,000 walkers started driving, it would have a huge negative impact. Walkers needed representation. He agreed, but couldn't appoint me without an organization. Ann Hershfang, recently appointed to the Turnpike Board, agreed to work with me. Bob Sloane, Sorin Garber and Sonia Hamel soon joined us.

The early years were challenging and exciting. There was resistance. When we did a report highlighting walking projects for the Mass Highway Department, my client refused to let us use the term "traffic calming." Other officials and peers were surprised we were "still around." But starting with slide presentations in community meetings, we discovered our ideas resonated.

I am amazed at how far WalkBoston and similar groups across the country have come. Walking is now a recognized mode of transportation and public transit ridership is at an all-time high. Traffic in Boston has not risen in ten years. The public wants walkability and now has the language to advocate for it. After 25 years, WalkBoston is "still around," still evolving and still doing necessary work. Our story proves that, as Margaret Mead states, concerned citizens really can change the world.

BY SORIN GARBER

Our national impact

I started out at the New York City Dept. of Transportation where I was involved in many projects that stole roadway space from pedestrians and bicyclists. Many people were complaining about how unsafe and inconvenient it was to walk. Then I went to Europe and started to understand why walking was so important in cities.

Upon my return, I immediately volunteered for the Street Life Project with Holly Whyte, lectured at engineering schools about pedestrian issues, and got two small consulting assignments—only two in continued

BY ANN HERSHFANG

And we were off!

To my mind, WalkBoston's beginning set the pattern for our style today. Even 25 years later, we still operate by seizing opportunities, approaching them as knowledgeable transportation nerds, working in a social, collaborative way, often over food and drink.

Dorothea and I realized we both thought the walking environment needed more attention. That led to meetings of "the founding five" and creating the "Pedestrian Advocacy Group." Should it have members? Yes, for help and heft. So, we wrote to friends and colleagues quoting a current bumper sticker—"So many pedestrians, so little time." Forty people responded and we were off!

We just made it all up. Clearly our original name was blah. At our first member potluck, we free-associated, and Laurel Siegel came up with "WalkBoston." Onward—letterhead, a shared no-rent garret office, initial projects, an unpaid Executive Director [Dorothea], small grants. Early member gatherings were held in elegant spaces—Trinity Church, Old South Church—and we heard from top architects and designers while enjoying delicious stews cooked by Sonie. We continued strategizing—usually at bars!

Bob and members hit their stride, mapping and leading imaginative walks—Secret Pathways and Stairs of Brookline, Geology of Boston, Deer Island's new MWRA digesters, the Shawmut Peninsula and more. In advocacy meetings, members shared activities, and brainstormed solutions.

From such a modest start, WalkBoston has had many achievements: saving land for the Rose Kennedy Greenway, two walks over the Zakim Bridge for almost a million people, creating America Walks, a spectacular staff, expanding statewide and much more. It has been a great journey, with our heads in the clouds and our feet firmly on the ground.

BY BOB SLOANE

Good times were had

In a brightly sunlit window of Jake Wirth's 1890s saloon with 16-foot ceilings and a sawdust floor, the five of us sat at a circular table, jollyng each other along in the pursuit of another potentially lunatic idea. Dorothea and Ann had called us together.

Inside the Transportation Building, Dorothea was known for her trademark straw hat, orange and floppy with a wide brim and a circular green band. She used her unassuming appearance—gentle eyes, delicate hands, wry smile, a husky soft-spoken voice—to assert pedestrians' needs and rights. Her efforts seemed like tilting at windmills, Don Quixote style. Little did they know where she was leading them and us! continued

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25th celebration

WalkBoston 25th anniversary
Wed., March 25, 5pm—8pm
NERD Center
1 Memorial Drive, Cambridge
Tickets: \$25
RSVP: walkboston25th.eventbrite.com

Join us to thank the people who have advocated and contributed to our impact and success.

Speaker: Mayor of Somerville
Joseph Curtatone

Golden Shoe Awards:

- Mayor Curtatone + community
- Tom DiPaolo + Bonnie Polin
- 25 years of Golden Shoe winners

Want to volunteer?

More info:
www.walkboston.org/March25th

events

Walking Evolution & Revolution
Thurs., March 26, 9am—5pm
BSA Space

290 Congress Street, Boston
Cost: \$65 includes lunch
 Held in conjunction with our anniversary, this conference focuses on walkability. Led by the Assoc. for Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals Boston Chapter, WalkBoston, Project for Public Spaces and MAPC. Hosted by BSA Space. Connect with planners, designers and advocates to explore the freshest thinking about walkability and place-making.
www.walkboston.org/WERC

WalkBoston's upcoming walks
 April/Somerville, May/Dorchester, June/Worcester, July/Springfield, September/Longfellow Bridge Walk

National impact of WalkBoston continued

two years—that included improving walkability.

To make a living, I got involved in the Environmental Impact Statement for the Big Dig. I was lucky to meet Dorothea, Ann, Sonie and Bob. We commiserated about how little work was in our desired field, but enjoyed our gatherings! I was only in Boston a short while, but was privileged to help WalkBoston get off the ground.

Fast forward to 2015, I work at a firm in South Florida (T.Y. Lin), which employs seven full time planners and engineers focused entirely on traffic calming, Complete Streets, and design/implementation of bicycle lanes and walkways. Now there is demand from citizens and the highest levels of government.

Across the country more people are walking to work and pedestrian crash rates (but not totals) are decreasing. Cities are adopting Complete Streets regulations, highway engineers are being trained in pedestrian safety, and the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials now says 10 to 10.5 foot lanes are appropriate for low-to-moderate-capacity roads. There is no doubt that by being at the forefront of this movement, WalkBoston has helped to make a difference nationally. **Do we still need WalkBoston? Well, there were 68 pedestrian fatalities in Massachusetts last year. I don't believe that our work is finished yet.**



Please donate today!
walkboston.org/donate

3.15 anniversary

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mission
 WalkBoston makes walking safer and easier in Massachusetts to encourage better health, a cleaner environment and vibrant communities.

thank you!

RACEWALKER



STRIDERS

Eaton Vance
 Massport
 Partners HealthCare
 Robinson & Cole
 Trinity Financial
 Vanasse Hangen Brustlin

STROLLERS

Boston Society of Architects
 DLA Piper
 Eastern Bank
 Edelstein & Company
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 Fay, Spofford & Thorndike
 Goody, Clancy
 Goulston & Storrs
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Howard/Stein-Hudson
 MassDevelopment
 Microsoft NERD Center
 Millennium Partners
 New Balance
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 The Collaborative
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AMBLERS

A Better City
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 Barrington Wright Assoc.
 BETA Group
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 BEVCO Assoc.
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 Environmental Business Council of N.E.
 Finegold, Alexander + Assoc.
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Good times were had continued

Ann, for a long while the Undersecretary of Transportation, was always clad in bright reds that also showed up in her office window in gorgeous, translucent cyclamens with butterfly blossoms tipped in white. Exciting then as now, she challenged staff to expand horizons and explore new ideas. She and I worked together on legislation, and celebrated when the Legislature magically passed a bill pursuing ride sharing. Our method of celebrating was to sing a silly duet, both of us crooning “Just Plain Bill” from the musical “Showboat” to remind ourselves that a bill can get passed—with some effort.

Sonie and I worked in the state's Central Transportation Planning Staff, where she became known for preparing complicated and erudite air quality analyses for transportation projects. Knowing that walking improves air quality by reducing the number of vehicles, she zealously insinuated pedestrian issues into her work. Also, dazzlingly imaginative, she once prepared a birthday party for me with a room decorated entirely with rice cakes!

Sorin Garber was an enthusiastic participant in talking about walking. He helped us form the group, then soon left for a West Coast job.

After a short back-and-forth at Jacob Wirth's, we five raised our glasses and agreed to pursue the idea that became WalkBoston!