

# **Allston-Brighton Community Survey /Needs Assessment Research**

## **Executive Summary – December 1, 2008**

### **Overview**

This research was conducted to obtain valid, reliable “voice of the community” insights on the needs of Allston-Brighton residents. These insights will be used to inform the Harvard Allston Task Force, the City of Boston and Harvard in the development of a comprehensive master plan of community benefits which will be part of the overall Harvard University Institutional Master Plan.

### **Survey Process**

The survey was conducted by Copernicus Research based in Waltham, MA. Their work was guided by the Survey/ Needs Assessment Committee which comprised community residents and representatives from the City of Boston and Harvard. Community needs were surveyed in five areas – Education; Health; Housing; Transportation and Public Realm. An exhaustive process was followed to identify 79 needs across these five areas. This process of developing the list of 79 items included:

- Extensive review of published secondary information and review of Task Force minutes when community benefits were discussed
- Interviews with Harvard Allston Task Force members; Survey / Needs Assessment Committee members; and Allston-Brighton elected officials
- Interviews with leaders of the Allston-Brighton Community Development Corporation, Allston-Brighton Partnership for Community Health, City of Boston Transportation Department, MBTA, Charles River Watershed Association, Gardner Pilot Academy, Jackson Mann School, Jackson Mann Community Center Adult Education Program, Joseph M. Smith Community Health Center, City of Boston Public Health Commission
- Meetings with City of Boston and Harvard University representatives
- Reviews at Survey / Needs Assessment Committee meetings
- Public community meeting

The survey was conducted over a period of six weeks – late-August through early-October 2008. A comprehensive process was followed to ensure the survey was inclusive and represented the full diversity of Allston-Brighton’s resident population.

- Postcards were sent to every Allston-Brighton resident announcing the survey
- Advertisements and fliers (in multiple languages) were also used to encourage participation
- The survey was available in multiple languages- English, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, and Russian
- Residents were allowed to take the survey online, over the phone or in-person (at several locations throughout Allston-Brighton)

The Allston-Brighton community responded to these efforts by broad participation in the survey. A total of 2715 eligible surveys were completed with all types of demographic groups included. U.S. Census information was used to balance the final sample and ensure it correctly represents all Allston-Brighton residents.

## **Survey Results**

Residents answered two key questions for the 79 needs included in this survey:

1. *In your opinion, to what extent is each of these an important need for the community?*
2. *In your opinion, which of these needs should be a priority for Harvard University to address?*

Community answers to each question were used to identify:

- Perceived Top Tier Community Needs (top one-third of needs based on proportion of people saying issue is a major or important need). Other needs were categorized as Second Tier Needs or Third Tier Needs depending on the importance score they received.
- Perceived Top Tier Priorities for Harvard to Address (these are needs that scored in the top one-third on the “prioritization” question). Other areas were categorized as Second Tier Priorities or Third Tier Priorities depending on the prioritization score they received.

Survey results were analyzed for many different demographic sub-groups. For North Allston-Brighton there are 27 needs that can be labeled top tier needs and 26 needs that can be labeled top tier priorities for Harvard to address. 17 of these needs are common to both groups – i.e. they are top tier needs and top tier priorities for Harvard, based on the opinions of North Allston-Brighton residents. These 17 needs have been summarized below:

### Education

- Helping students with college counseling, admissions, financial aid and scholarships
- Helping high schools students with career counseling/training including summer jobs/internships
- Helping K-12 students improve their reading, writing, math and science skills
- Helping students graduate from high school
- Providing K-12 students with better after-school programs
- Providing K-12 students with better out-of-school programs, including summer programs
- Providing advanced learning programs for qualified K-12 students

### Health

- Providing Allston-Brighton residents with better access to indoor/outdoor athletic facilities

### Public Realm

- Improving maintenance and upkeep of public parks and spaces in Allston-Brighton
- Helping improve the water quality of the Charles river
- Developing green pathways from Allston to the Charles river
- Using a sustainable, 'good-for-the-environment' approach to new development, public spaces and streets in Allston-Brighton
- Making it easier for people to access the Charles river by foot/bike
- Improving the maintenance of community/recreational space along the Charles river
- Creating more parks and gardens in Allston-Brighton

### Transportation

- Better maintenance of streets and sidewalks in the neighborhood
- Improving overall pedestrian safety in the neighborhood

Further details of the survey and a complete presentation made to the Harvard Allston Task Force are available online at [www.allston.harvard.edu](http://www.allston.harvard.edu)

## **Summary**

This survey brings the “voice of the community” into the discussion on benefits planning by providing valid, reliable data on the opinions of Allston-Brighton residents. Survey results are not meant to be specific recommendations for community benefits – this is simply additional information that will guide the planning effort. The Harvard Allston Task Force, the City of Boston and Harvard University will discuss what is feasible and appropriate for the master plan of community benefits and continue to engage and inform the community as the plan is developed.

## **Survey/Needs Assessment Committee**

**Mary-Helen Black-** *Project Manager for Neighborhood Planning, Harvard University*

**Keith Collar-** *Executive Director of Research, Innovation and Outreach, Harvard Graduate School of Education, Harvard University*

**Ellin Flood-Murphy-** *Allston resident*

**Michael Hanlon-** *Member of Harvard Allston Task Force*

**Linda Kowalcky-** *Deputy Director of Economic Development, Boston Redevelopment Authority and Mayor Menino’s Liaison to Higher Education*

**Kevin McCluskey-** *Senior Director of Community Relations-Boston, Harvard University*

**Kathy Morancy-** *Third Grade Teacher and Member of the Governing Board, Gardner Pilot Academy*

**Rita Vaidya-** *Allston resident*

**Anand Vaishnav –** *Chief of Staff to the Superintendent of Boston Public Schools*

**Brent Whelan-** *Allston resident and member of Harvard Allston Task Force*