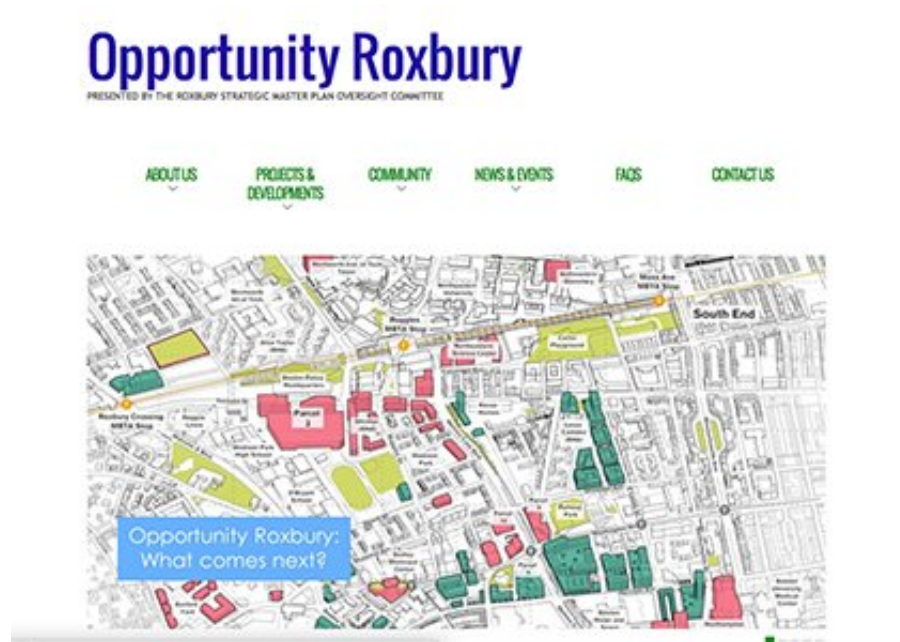


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New website for Roxbury Strategic Master Plan Oversight Committee

[Sandra Larson](#) | 9/10/2014, 11:47 a.m.



The Roxbury Master Plan Oversight Committee website is designed to give residents easy access to information on development projects in the neighborhood.

The Roxbury Strategic Master Plan Oversight Committee has launched a new website, along with Twitter, Facebook and Instagram accounts, to provide the Roxbury community with updates and information about local development activity, upcoming meetings events, and community resources and the Roxbury Strategic Master Plan itself.

Though the website was designed over the past six months, longtime RSMPOC chair Darnell Williams said that in a way, establishment of the site has been a 10 year journey.

“We started in 2004. There has always been this strident cry of ‘how can we do a better job of informing Roxbury citizens?’” said Williams. “We figured we could launch a vehicle for people to access everything in a straightforward, transparent way.”

The Oversight Committee was formed to ensure that development of Roxbury land parcels proceeded in accordance with the 2004 Roxbury Strategic Master Plan, forged over years of work by community residents, community organizations and city officials. The Oversight Committee’s 15 members comprise local residents and other stakeholders such as representatives of business, nonprofits, and neighborhood associations. Members were appointed by former Mayor Thomas Menino from a pool of candidates

nominated by the Roxbury Neighborhood Council and elected officials.

The “Opportunity Roxbury” site was developed with the help of The American City Coalition. The Boston nonprofit used its own funds to hire a web developer and provided staff at no charge to refine the site, working with committee members and a small number of community members to upload content and devise a user-friendly interface, according to TACC associate Ronette Seeney.

The new website lists current members and their affiliations and includes a calendar of RSMPOC regular meetings and working sessions. Generally, regular meetings are held the first Monday of each month at 6 p.m. at the Dudley Branch Library, 65 Warren Street. Working sessions are held on the third Monday each month at Central Boston Elders Services, 2315 Washington Street. Both meetings and working sessions are open to the public, and meeting notes are to be posted regularly to the website.

Some meeting notes are available on the site now, though so far only from meetings up to fall of 2013. Williams said he expects more up-to-date notes to be available in 30 to 45 days.

The site’s Community Resources page includes agendas and handouts from recent RSMPOC meetings and links to BRA project review guides, Roxbury maps and data, Boston’s Inclusionary Development policy and other information. A Frequently Asked Questions page includes a form for site visitors to send in their own questions.

Attendees leaving the RSMPOC’s Sept. 8 meeting expressed a mix of positive reactions to the new website and desired improvements and additional features.

“It’s a great start,” said Kai Grant. “But they need to have two-way communication.”

Community members Bridgette Wallace and Albert Willis, who said they gave input to the website creators during the later stages of development, also expressed a wish for the site to have a more interactive public forum.

“It’s a tool for folks to get engaged, folks who can’t come to every meeting,” said Wallace, but she would like to see an “opportunity gap” section in which residents could communicate concerns.

Willis added, “There should be a discussion forum, where residents could interact with committee members. As it is, nothing happens between [RSMPOC] meetings.”

While community members say they value RSMPOC meetings as a way to hold developers accountable to both committee members and residents, some complain about the seemingly endless process of developer foot-dragging, in which some appear repeatedly before the committee with little demonstrated progress toward turning plans for a vacant parcel into reality. Other attendees have felt rebuffed when only a short time at the end of meetings is allotted for community input.

Williams is quick to defend the work of committee members, whom he stresses are volunteering their time for “the love of community, and dedication to a process.”

Norman Stembridge, one of RSMPOC’s co-chairs, said he believes the committee is “slowly but surely” fulfilling its mission to oversee the implementation of the Master Plan.

“It’s not the Innovation District. It’s not the Back Bay. It’s not Downtown,” Stembridge said. “Things take a little longer here.”