



## John Fitzgerald Kennedy National Historic Site: Envisioning the Future: A Community Dialogue

The public meeting took place at the Edward Devotion School, 345 Harvard Street, Brookline, MA on May 6, 2009 from 6:30 pm - 9:00 pm. Approximately 40 members of the public attended. Superintendent Myra Harrison welcomed them and provided background on the John F. Kennedy National Historic Site, and its need to do a long-range management plan. Planner Jim O'Connell explained the general management planning process and anticipated schedule for key milestones.

Following this overview the public was invited to visit five stations for discussion of issues related to John F. Kennedy NHS. The topical areas for the five stations included Visitor Experience, Historic Neighborhood, Public Outreach & Partnerships, Audiences, Preservation. An additional area was set aside to invite the public to offer any personal stories or memories they may have about the site, the Kennedys and the neighborhood. NPS employees, who were staffing each station, made a brief introduction to their topic as they invited members of the public to join their discussion. The comments that follow are verbatim as the public wrote them down on comment sheets.



### Public Comments

- Will write at greater length but will state here that I would be delighted to see changes kept to a small enough size to aid preservation, intimacy of place...since no more than 9 or 12 can tour, seems need to increase size of groups, overall number of visitors—would like to see time appropriate changes about which I will write—preserve integrity of the house and neighborhood—think separate building only appropriate for viewing films, large gatherings, exhibits, etc.
- No intro film is in place at the house. Last I knew (last year)—15minute video would be good and it could help manage the traffic when many visitors come. Have you thought about appearing on BATV cable? The Brookline CAN station. High schoolers could help produce it, yes? Because the studio (last I knew) to move from Old Lincoln School to the high school.

- Help the neighbors think together with you about the options for a historic district of some sort on Beals Street. Ditto regarding the trees. The trees are probably the main thing tying together the character of the neighborhood. There needs to be a plan for their in-fill and very gradual replacement with younger stock.
- Avoid much more signage on Beals Street! It is okay for people to ask directions! Currently parking seems not to be a problem. Use marketing approaches that encourage non-auto access to the site.
- Find a site away from the NHS, probably on or near the walking tour route, but not on Beals Street. That can serve the needs of historical videos, etc. in a supplemental visitor center. Consider a model like the one used for the tenement district site on the Lower east Side of Manhattan. Something on Harvard Street in JFK Corner, near a parking area.
- I live at 60 Beals. I frequently see people walk down the street who ask “Where is the Kennedy house?” “Three houses down on the right,” I say. This leads to a suggestion. 1) Include house number (83) on sign at end of street and/or 2) arrange for modest sign half way down street.
- Publish hard copies of the two reports for teacher workshops. Do this in collaboration with JFK Library education outreach program.
- The charm of this site is the fact that it’s built right into the neighborhood. People have to make an effort to find it—take the T, walk, etc. It’s a treasure, not a giant tour destination. That shouldn’t be changed.
- Great idea: Consider converting a storefront on Harvard Street into a visitor center. Would be open when house isn’t. Would take pressure off house/traffic. See Philip Johnson Glass House visitor center in CT as a good model.
- Help with historic designation for street? Benefits to historic district designation: better maintenance for trees. Need to be sure we protect the sycamores. No salt rule during winter, etc.
- As the bay boomers, who remember JFK, get older, is there any hope of making the house handicapped accessible?
- You should be open on Marathon Monday. Many, many people come when it’s closed.
- It would be nice if some sort of scrim could be placed in the windows, showing the views of the Kennedy family would have during their residency. People often ask about the ethnicity of the neighborhood, so it would be great if any buildings in the illustrations could be labeled with the name of the owner at the time.
- I think that garbage collection day on Beals Street and surroundings shall be on the day when the site is closed because it does not give a good impression to the visitors.
- Expand visitor hours. Pursue town historic classification for Beals Street. Self-guided tours seem important to continue. Plane trees are very important to the “sense of place.”—they are old, historic—add to the beauty of the street and give a real historic, established sense to the area. They need protection. Plans in place when Kennedy family members are ill/die.

- Have something for visitors to see, perhaps in side yard or back yard, that would be “open” even when site is closed.
- Is there a way to direct staff funding to more staffing at the house rather than in “middle management” positions?
- Create outreach “presentation” most likely a video with intro and give passes to all kids for them to do an on site visit.
- Purchase another building nearby to expand into to serve as visitor center—show film—will help preserve house and collections.
- Archive of memory as well as the physical collection of mementoes of Kennedys there as well as in the neighborhood since the site opened to the public.
- Digital catalogue—that could be accessed through the website or in a “kiosk” set-up on site.
- Regarding tours size, etc.: 1) May have to adjust tour length; 2) Have start/finish always be in front and back so tours don’t get stuck on same floor.
- Have iPod downloads with Kennedy info. Virtual tour online with Mrs. Kennedy’s recordings.
- Put #83 on the sign at the top of Beals Street. Camera to count visitors when house is closed.
- Check out Playawaydigital.com to put the house tour on an MP3 player in different languages. Also could be used for a walking tour.
- To get Boston audience—have rangers in uniform go to Boston schools and talk about JFK—then give them discount tickets to bring their families. Bus route 66 goes from Roxbury to Harvard Square—put kiosk at either end about the JFK site. Also, are there two websites—here and the JFK Library—mentioning each other? Probably. Have virtual tour on the website in Mrs. Kennedy’s voice, as well as translations.
- I know several people who have not come to the birthplace. Reason—they couldn’t get in when they attempted to visit because the site was closed. Can you tie-in to the current excitement about Obama’s presidency as a way to reach new audiences/ audiences who don’t recall JFK? Have you tried a “Boston Day” with special interpretation that would appeal specifically to locals?
- Surveillance to see how often people come and are disappointed.
- Tour/merchant relationships--“I’m an NHS site supporter.” “Park here for JFK NHS.”
- Tent on the grounds—For showing film? For managing heavy visitor traffic?
- Visitor experience: Books only published once. NPS. Gov website VERY difficult and misleading season info. VERY SHORT SEASON. Truman home site/visitor center five blocks apart. Eight people in house at a time; sign up at visitor center. Do you have V.I.P. at Kennedy site? Form Friends of Kennedy Birthplace Foundation.
- How about a “Friends of the JFK House” group for fundraising? To plan events for members outside of hours the house is open.

- If a film is made, how about selling DVDs? CDs? In the gift shop—could this be a project for Brookline High School students in computer/video? Where to show a film?? Outside, in a tent!
- What materials do you put in the Courtyard By Marriott and the Holiday Inn? How often restocked? Something that a Friends Group can do. Put literature in the three Brookline Library branches.
- Taxi drivers information. Two cab companies in town—make sure dispatcher knows about JFK House, so he can tell the cabbies the location.
- Website—list alternative parking sites, i.e. lots and streets where metered parking is available.
- Parking and access directions on NPS website make it sound like walk is too long to walk!
- In your literature, warn folks about parking in Brookline. Show walkable distance and parking places. Also T directions from Commonwealth Avenue and Beacon Street.
- Liaison with Chamber of Commerce? NPS should attend, give presentation at Chamber meetings at Holiday Inn.
- Need to update major guidebooks on dates/hours open. Need signage at trolley stops. Show on website where parking is—how to get to site by public transportation (with map). Give info on services available. Change hours. Be open on Mondays. I tour business, tours come into cities for lower hotel rates. On Mondays tours leave. Tour guides need to fill that time with interesting tours before arriving at next hotel. Old Town Trolleys and Landry's for Bike Tours.
- Increase presence and links on website, including JFK Library, Town of Brookline, local hotels.
- Compare how Kennedy visitors get to site and how visitors 9especially international and out of state) get to Theodore Roosevelt site at Sagamore Hill. Tie in historic neighborhood aspect: trees, architecture, local commerce. How Brookline neighborhood developed. Maybe encourage local stores and town to put up historic photos to better develop a sense of surroundings.
- Embrace technology for downtimes—podcast or some posted video (possibly for a fee) when you approach the house.
- Not only the house, but also the neighborhood is important—guided (ranger) or self-guided walking tours.
- Remove furniture/rugs from some rooms and rotate them back in. Then news to “re-release” certain rooms furnished. This allows more people in the building at one time. Like Biltmore House in Asheville, NC.
- “Disney”-style queuing system. “Fast-pass” needs to be linked to an off-site ticket generator.
- You should copy the Adams Historic Site in Quincy. This would solve most of your problems. Like you do in Quincy, rent a storefront in Coolidge Corner, You would then have A) a place for tour buses to drop off tourists; B) a place for exhibits; C) rest rooms; D) an expanded bookstore; E) a place people could learn more about the Kennedys (and good for schoolchildren); F) expanded hours—birthplace might be closed, but center could be open year round; G) with 12 person limit,

could offer timed tickets, encouraging people to walk the neighborhood and patronize local businesses and restaurants. A visitor center would be a perfect focus and would take some of the heat off the house.

- Film/video—early years of Kennedy family; neighborhood development; streetcars/building; focus on the unusual and different from what happens today.
- Keep a museum store with items relevant to the Kennedy family. Items available pre-visit, on-site, or post-visit. Make available out of print books that are essential to helping understand the store.
- Have some emphasis on Rose; her achievements for herself and her children. Maybe make comparisons between rise of Kennedy's and rise of American middle class in general. To reach out to locals and encourage visits: give out Halloween candy. Beals Street is closed to cars. When people come to our door, many times they ask. Can give out literature then.
- WPA guides for info; 2) students' search; 3) web sites; 4) Brookline teachers info packet—they should be sources for others; 5) MBTA info on their site; 6) Space? Not only beautiful but necessary; 7) have kids draw the walking map; 8) kids' slide show.
- Enter a space that begins to reflect the family and then enter the house and get a sense of the family and how they interacted. How did they spend their time? What made them come to Brookline/made them leave?
- For website—Virtual tours—house, neighborhood, where Mrs. Kennedy would go shopping, to church, etc.; virtual walking tour.
- The very presence of the house and the plinth in front creates a “memorial” and “reflective space.” Acknowledging the role of memory, reflection and memorial needs to be an actively conscious part of planning and stewardship.
- Have educational program for hotel concierges about site. Website for MA parks is not as usable as other states. Do remote VC to have focus point for the start of a trip (orientation, staging)—can be open more days and handle more visitors; look at Adams model; would be able to stagger groups. Make cellar area feel more like space upstairs the feel quicker in the visitors experience.
- Liaison with Brookline Booksmith, especially to furnish materials when house is closed.
- Is there an existing NGO in Brookline that might act as a “friends” group for the house?
- Consider establishing visitor center offsite; 2) improve signage in Brookline; 3) connect with auto museum (vintage autos); Devotion House (house museum); Brookline Community Foundation (volunteerism).
- Train volunteer groups, especially teenagers, as part of “civic duty”—theme of the JFK house.
- Love our partnership; pre-site visit, on-site, post-site; goal to enrich experience.
- Improve relationships with town schools—have more Brookline schools visit the site; publicize JFK opening at town meeting; have some kind of event to celebrate opening, i.e. showing of movie “primary” at Devotion School or Coolidge Corner Theatre; develop relationship with Coolidge

Corner Merchants Association; consider visitor center in Arcade Building in Coolidge Corner—have visitor center with “Rose Kennedy” giving walking tour of neighborhood

- \*\* What about friends for JFK Birthplace; foundation; talk to Molly Quackenbush at the Roosevelt Inaugural Site, Buffalo
- Look for organizations that can complement different aspects of the site’s history; work with any other sites that are from the same era; work with other institutions that were funded in the same way; outreach with educational institutions, schools with a program that might just consist of a video presentation with an intro and follow-up and also the students would receive a pass to visit the site; work with neighborhood on a block party; also off-site storefront or even kiosk type visitor center’ new maps that are easily available in the neighborhood.
- Establish regular contact person(s) for Brookline/NPS communication—Kara Brewton and Marge Amster for Brookline – 617-730-2468; 2) promote 40<sup>th</sup> open house at Brookline town meeting on May 26; 3) set up relationship with Brookline schools for town-wide class visits; 4) form relationship with Coolidge Corner Theatre for topical films; 5) connect with Coolidge Corner Merchants Association; 6) have timed visitor tickets.
- Do you have any programs that include a visit into school classrooms (As a way to educate people to your existence in Brookline.)
- Artifacts—need for off-site center and digital presence; Kennedy—theme of place: Peace Corps; programs of conflict resolution, etc.
- Digital Catalogue—that could be accessed through the website or is a “kiosk” set up on site; at the Ti Stops at Beacon & Commonwealth Ave, for example, directional signage, make sure events listings go on town’s website so local/neighborhood residents will know what’s going on.
- Brochures at JFK Library and info on library at house; downloadable map—where is parking, walking distances to T, including JFK house, St. Aidan’s, Abbotsford; have staggered times with some walking the neighborhood, other into the home; put kiosks at T and at nearby parking lots—showing birthplace, Devotion School, St. Aidan’s, Abbotsford Rd., and any other Brookline historical sites; Devotion School parking lot available in summer for home visitors; a detailed website covering the family, Brookline, and Boston at the time; Website—audio (Mrs. Kennedy) virtual tour of the house and photos of whole residential neighborhood and lots of info about family and neighborhood history
- Site should plan for vigil/mourning of Sen. Ted Kennedy.
- When I think of John F. Kennedy’s presidency, the Peace Corps reverberates. The theme of working for peace through cultural understanding exemplified by the Peace Corps can be brought to this house in Brookline. With the multicultural population mix found in Brookline, people of different backgrounds and ages could meet in JFK’s house for programs teaching mutual respect, conflict resolution, language, geography or world history.

In addition, while in Israel I visited Beit Gabriel, a cultural center on the Kinneret that has special rooms set aside for peace talks. Although an international peace focus might sound too grand, this idea would benefit the memory of President Kennedy. A pleasant place to stop for a rest at the newly built cultural center, Beit Gabriel. Performances, lectures, conferences, and exhibitions are held here regularly. The center was erected by Mrs. Gita Sherover of Jerusalem in memory of her

son Gabi. It was a meeting place during the peace talks between the late Prime Minister of Israel, Yitzhak Rabin, and the late King Hussein of Jordan. You are free to enter the building, enjoy a pleasant meal at the restaurant, the wide windows revealing the lake and its surrounding mountains and the garden lawn sloping down to the water's edge. Look for the sculptures of birds on the window ledge and among the tree-like pillars supporting the garden balcony.

- Is a “strategic plan” the same as a “general management plan”?
- What about an off-site—but in Coolidge Corner Beals Street Neighborhood—welcome center? Could orient to a walking tour, show a short film, etc.
- In looking for info on the NPS website, I kept reading the same text over and over again. I suggest editing the GMP pages so they are more streamlined.