



## **MELNEA CASS/MASS AVE 2.0**

*A strategic plan for Newmarket  
Square and neighboring communities*

# MELNEA CASS/MASS AVE 2.0

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# MELNEA CASS/MASS AVE

## 2.0

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### 1. APPROACH

The City of Boston is experiencing the tragic consequences of a national opioid epidemic. Mayor Martin J. Walsh and his administration have approached this epidemic with urgency and dedicated a wide array of resources and services in an effort to minimize those aspects of the crisis that pose the most immediate threats to individual lives and the greater public health. The City has also developed long-term strategies with the goal of addressing the root causes of the epidemic and improving and expanding our public health infrastructure through investments like the creation of a comprehensive recovery campus on Long Island.

This epidemic is not confined to any one neighborhood or group of people. However, the area around Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard, including Newmarket Square and other nearby neighborhoods, has felt the impact of the epidemic most acutely. Residents and businesses in these neighborhoods have borne a disproportionate share of the burden required to combat this epidemic. City departments continue to work closely with residents and businesses in these areas to maintain and improve the overall health and well-being of the community and all who live, work, and stay there.

In recent months, the City has been confronting more challenges concentrated in the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard area and the surrounding neighborhoods. To address these issues, Mayor Walsh directed nearly a dozen City departments <sup>1</sup> to refocus and expand their existing efforts and create a three-pronged strategy focused on 1) public health, (2) public safety, and (3) quality of life issues as well as improvements to communication and coordination between departments and alignment of services.



To that end, the City has redoubled its commitment to strategic action with the overall goals of 1) connecting those struggling with substance use disorder (SUD) with resources and a pathway to recovery, 2) ensuring public safety for all residents by reducing criminal activity and 3) focusing on quality of life issues for our residents and businesses. This strategy is captured in the “Melnea Cass/Mass Ave. 2.0” plan, which presents key goals and measurable activities in each of the above-mentioned categories as well as goals related to coordination and alignment of services. The new activities laid out in this plan will be evaluated at six-month intervals to determine the City’s progress towards its goals.

<sup>1</sup> Office of Recovery Services, Emergency Medical Services, Boston Police Department, Boston Fire Department, Inspectional Services Department, Public Works Department, Department of Neighborhood Development, Office of Neighborhood Services, Parks and Recreation Department and the Boston Public Health Commission



## 2. VALUES

The complexity of our nation's substance use epidemic cannot be understated. Nor should it ever be forgotten that this crisis has many faces: those struggling with substance use disorder, their families and loved ones, and the many residents and businesses who deal with crime and quality of life issues that arise from this national crisis. For this reason, it is important to articulate the values that drive and define our efforts:

The City of Boston is committed to preserving the safety, health, and dignity of its residents and all persons engaged with its services in all its programs and activities, and across all departments and agencies. We also believe that with respect to the opioid epidemic, public safety begins with public health. That means prioritizing the health of both residents and those struggling with substance use disorder, and, where possible, diverting people away from the criminal justice system and into treatment. Decreasing criminal activity in the surrounding neighborhoods remains a high priority. Additionally, the City of Boston acknowledges that substance use has historically been criminalized in communities of color rather than treated as public health issues. We believe that following evidence-based practices, and embedding these practices in all City departments engaged in this work, is necessary to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past.



# 3. THE PLAN

## FOCUS AREA 1 - COORDINATION & ALIGNMENT OF SERVICES

### GOAL 1A

Improve internal and external coordination and communication of efforts related to the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard area to ensure A) an alignment of City, State and private efforts, B) greater awareness of services being provided, and C) better understanding of identified gaps:

- **Objective:** Create mechanisms for ongoing dialogue between diverse stakeholders by November 2019.
  - **Activity:** Create a Task Force comprised of 24 members including City and State officials, business and community residents, and other provider stakeholders. The Task Force will meet monthly to provide oversight and critical feedback on the City's ongoing efforts at Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard over the next couple of years.
  - **Activity:** Formalize an internal City of Boston Coordinated Response Team focused on ongoing efforts at Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard to monitor progress and work through gaps. The group will meet weekly to discuss relevant information and metrics and plan for the coming week.
  
- **Objective:** Raise the visibility of current efforts being implemented by City and private entities focused on the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard area.
  - **Activity:** Actively maintain a publicly viewable page on the City website with consistent updates pertaining City activities in the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard area as well as resource maps to maintain transparency with respect to progress towards stated goals.
  - **Activity:** Launch ongoing public awareness campaign to increase visibility and inform residents of all efforts occurring in the area to keep people safe, engaged and on pathways to care.

### GOAL 1B



Continuous assessment of strategic efforts in all three key goal areas to ensure scaling of proven effective activities and redesign for efforts needing to be improved or strengthened:

- **Objective:** Using the “Melnea Cass/ Mass Ave. 2.0” plan , create a clear dashboard to track relative outputs, outcomes and short-term impact by December 2019.
  - **Activity:** Aggregate relevant data from all City departments ensuring that leadership at City is apprised of important developments, performance metrics and alerts in the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard service area.
  - **Activity:** Enhance utilization of EMS data including patient encounters, types of calls, Narcotic Related Illnesses (NRI), mapping of incidents in any target areas to inform, support and measure outcomes identified in the plan.
  - **Activity:** Leverage new and existing data sources to better understand the impact of the opioid epidemic on neighborhoods *outside* the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard area to help us proactively address emerging issues and make the case for a Citywide response.
  - **Activity:** Measure outputs and assess progress by comparing new metrics to established, baseline data in all three key goal areas.
  - **Activity:** Review monthly data through aforementioned Task Force and Working Group to identify areas of progress and concern where more investment or attention is needed.
  - **Activity:** Produce a six-month report to highlight where current efforts are producing impact (including related data) and highlight areas where more development is needed.

## FOCUS AREA 2 - PUBLIC HEALTH

### GOAL 2A

Reduce overdose risk and infectious disease through comprehensive harm reduction and drug user health and education:

- **Objective:** Eliminate fatal overdose in the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard area.
  - **Activity:** Increase overdose prevention trainings to treatment providers, community groups, businesses, and law enforcement agencies by **50 percent** across the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard area, from **14 to 21** agencies trained.
  - **Activity:** Add naloxone rescue kits to **five** public buildings in the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard area in areas where they will be accessible to the public.
  - **Activity:** The City of Boston Post Overdose Response Team (PORT), staffed by the Boston Fire Department and Recovery Services, will increase post-overdose response visits to provide education, resources and treatment placement to businesses and residences in the surrounding communities by 15 percent. BFD and the Mayor's Office of Recovery Services team deliver the in-person intervention and overdose response by trained staff with knowledge and experience in working with the substance use disorder continuum of care and treatment system.
- **Objective:** Reduce the spread of infectious disease through drug user health and education.
  - **Activity:** Increase clean syringe distribution and disposal by expanding mobile routes and creating Syringe Service Programming (SSP) in **three** new sites across the city outside of the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard neighborhood.
  - **Activity:** Provide monthly HIV/HCV/STI testing events at the Engagement Center, 112 Southampton and Woods Mullen shelters through the Mayor's Office of Recovery Services and NGO partners.
  - **Activity:** Provide education sessions and materials to at least **150** shelter guests by December 31, 2019.

### GOAL 2B

Increase access and engagement in all modalities of treatment:





- **Objective:** Increase placement in SUD treatment through the PAATHS Program.
  - **Activity:** Expand the Street Outreach Team by **eight** team members to provide engagement and supported referrals to neighborhood homeless and service providers. Increase the number of people engaged each month by **20 percent from 250 to 300** people.
  - **Activity:** Increase the number of people placed in treatment a week by **15 percent from 75 to 90** by the PAATHS program.
  - **Activity:** Expand the STEP pilot, which provides seamless treatment and intensive wrap-around supports to homeless participants with SUD, by 50 percent (from 10 participants to 20 participants).
  
- **Objective:** Reduce stigma towards substance use disorder, mental health disorders, and homelessness.
  - **Activity:** Provide monthly trainings to community groups, neighbors, businesses, city agencies, and program participants on how stigma is often a barrier to care for those struggling with substance use disorder.
  - **Activity:** Employ a rotating Consumer Advisory Board of **six** program participants to assist the Street Outreach Team in neighborhood outreach, syringe disposal, and engagement efforts.
  - **Activity:** Implement quarterly volunteer nights in Recovery Services programs to engage residents and community groups.
  
- **Objective:** Expand access to gender-specific programming and crisis response services for women.
  - **Activity:** Expand low-threshold programming for women in the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard neighborhood to provide gender-specific harm reduction, crisis response, and recovery support services, including services for women who are engaged in sex work or who have experienced sexual violence.
  - **Activity:** Work with community partners to identify opportunities to expand gender-specific programming outside of the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard neighborhood.

## GOAL 2C

Reduce unsheltered homeless population in the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard area:



● **Objective:** Improve identification, assessment, engagement and coordination across partner organizations on the streets and shelters.

○ **Activity:** The Department of Neighborhood Development, Mayor's Office of Recovery Services, Boston Public Health Commission and Pine Street Inn will use street outreach and shelter utilization data to create a targeted list of 40-60 unsheltered persons to be prioritized for assessment, referral and placement.

○ **Activity:** Agencies above will hold weekly case conferences of individuals on the targeted list to identify the right intervention and supports to transition off the streets.

● **Objective:** Increase placement of homeless persons from the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard area into housing or other informal residential placements.

○ **Activity:** The Shelter and Street Diversion Team, the Boston Public Health Commission's front door triage program and street outreach, will offer realtime diversion and triage to help people utilizing emergency shelter resolve housing instability issues quickly, based on the consent of the individual. Participants may be offered the following:

Short-term assistance

- Transportation aid to reconnect with family or social support systems
- Flexible funds or other resources to help individuals return to informal housing options and overcome barriers to relocation
- Other resources to facilitate transitions from the streets and shelters to other programs or residential opportunities, especially clients seeking to reconnect or return to prior placements or seek opportunities outside of Boston
- Prioritized access to substance use treatment programs through the PAATHS program

Intermediate assistance

- Provide Rapid Rehousing (RRH) for intermediate term shelter stayers needing up to 24 months of support in order to successfully return to housing

Long-term assistance



- Increase Permanent housing solutions and long-term residential placements for long-term shelter stayers and chronically homeless unsheltered individuals on the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard priority list.

● **Objective:** Deconcentrate persons in need of services in the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard area by helping unsheltered individuals move from the streets into programs.

○ **Activity:** Develop a user-friendly resource guide for persons in need of services that street outreach workers and providers can distribute.

○ **Activity:** Develop a resource map for outreach workers, provider agencies, public health public safety first responders, and community groups in order to encourage referrals, expedite placements, and strengthen partnerships to assist persons in need.

○ **Activity:** Encourage clients who are currently disconnected from services to utilize programs. Shelters, substance use and mental health providers and others will encourage clients to participate in day programs.

○ **Activity:** Increase referral to day centers throughout the city that offer counseling, case management and programs to help clients transition from the streets.

- Provide information and referral to persons in need of services about day programs across the city.
- Coordinated Response Team to provide a “warm hand-off” to clients so that there is a welcoming experience when participating in a new program.
- Provide real time resolution and review for individuals with barriers to accessing services.

○ **Activity:** Work with faith community to expand low-threshold day programs that provide welcoming environments, address basic needs (food, clothing, access to bathrooms, etc), and create referral opportunities.

○ **Activity:** Increase referral to low-barrier Overnight drop-in programs outside the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard area, where vulnerable people can be safe and get off the street.

- Provide information and referral to persons in need about low-barrier nighttime programs across the city and throughout Greater Boston.
- Coordinated Response Team to provide transportation and a “warm hand-off” of clients so that there is a welcoming experience when relocating or participating in a new program.
- Provide assistance to vulnerable persons in need seeking to reconnect with support systems in their communities of origin.



○ **Activity:** Work with State agencies to increase regional winter overflow beds and ensure prioritization of persons from the streets in the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard area.

○ **Activity:** Work with City and non-profit partner agencies to explore expansion of additional low-barrier night time drop-in programs in other city neighborhoods.

## **GOAL 2D**

Reduce the incidence of weather-related illnesses and exposures:

- **Activity:** Meet basic human needs by providing access to drinking water and shelter accessible 24 hours a day.
- **Activity:** Monitor those on the street for heat and cold-weather related exposures.



## FOCUS AREA 3 - QUALITY OF LIFE

### GOAL 3A

Reduce discarded syringes, drug paraphernalia and trash in public spaces:

- **Objective:** Increase options for proper disposal of syringes.
  - **Activity:** Create incentive program for active users to return syringes to pick-up locations with the goal of collecting an additional **1,000** syringes per week.
  - **Activity:** Add up to five additional syringe drop off locations outside.
- **Objective:** Reduce trash and debris in public spaces through ongoing cleaning and attention to streets.
  - **Activity:** Add grounds sweep three times a week by BPHC property management for all BPHC properties.
  - **Activity:** Expand collaboration with Project Place and increase area covered.
  - **Activity:** Implement a coordinated neighborhood clean up twice a year through Love Your Block/ONS.
  - **Activity:** Daily street cleaning by DPW water truck at 5 a.m. through the following areas:
    - Worcester Square
    - Massachusetts Avenue (Connector to Harrison)
    - Harrison Avenue (Melnea Cass Boulevard to Massachusetts Avenue and toward East Newton)
    - Dudley Square
    - Andrew Square
  - **Activity:** DPW hiring four new employees for a Special Operations Team, to help keep the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard area safe and clean, by providing street sweeping, washing, etc. This team will be deployed in a cross shift plan to operate from midday to early evening hours.
  - **Activity:** Individual DPW streeter sweepers (“hokeys”) at attention seven days a week in the Massachusetts Avenue/South End area.
  - **Activity:** Scheduled noon time cleans with BPD and the Mobile Sharps Team at bus depot below Reed Street on Mondays and Thursdays, every week .

### GOAL 3B



Strengthen the public health approach to encampments and issues impacting unsheltered people:

- **Objective:** Coordinated Response Team will address 311 complaints regarding substance use disorders/mental health and homelessness; all 311 call center employees will be trained to ensure that calls are prioritized and forwarded to the Coordinated Response Team.
  - **Activity:** Create 311 requests specifically for encampments that dispatches to Coordinated Response Team in real time.
  
- **Objective:** Develop consistent citywide protocol for redirecting encampments.
  - **Activity:** Coordinated Response Team will take lead on all encampment related issues; Implement HELP (Homeless Encampment Liaison Protocol) training for all City departments and agencies engaged in encampment management. HELP protocol entails:
    - Assess and Assist - With the help of above mentioned improvements in communications infrastructure, alert relevant City departments to encampment location and dispatch officials to assess the encampment for both public safety and fire hazards and offer assistance to any unsheltered individuals.
    - Triage and Refer - Identify unique needs of unsheltered individuals and refer them to relevant service providers.
    - Clean up - Remove any debris or hazardous materials from encampment site within 48 hours of alert.
  - **Activity:** Expand Boston EMS Squad 80 (non-transport community service unit) from Monday - Friday day and evening shifts to seven days a week by the end of October 2019.

### GOAL 3C

Enhance beautification efforts in the area to promote positive neighborhood appearance and maintenance:

- **Objective:** Create spaces across the neighborhood to create a more welcoming feel for the area.
  - **Activity:** Install “welcome” kiosk at Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard to provide signage demarcating Newmarket Square business district, creating a sense of place and information hub for business owners, residents, etc.



- **Activity:** Install welcome banners along Melnea Cass Boulevard, creating a sense of place/identity for this area of the city.
  - **Activity:** Increase street lighting in the Newmarket Square area.
  - **Activity:** Assess all city and state owned property in the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard neighborhood and create a plan for maintenance, beautification and upkeep.
- **Objective:** Ensure that public open spaces are clean, safe and welcoming:
    - **Activity:** The Boston Parks and Recreation Department will execute two thorough cleanings at Clifford Park each weekday at approximately 8 a.m. and again at 2 p.m. (before school begins and before school gets out). Parks will also assign additional crews on the weekends to do additional maintenance at the park.
    - **Activity:** Parks to replace Clifford Park playground wood chips/fibar mulch for new safety surfacing and to execute complete redesign of the park in partnership with the Lewis Family Foundation.
    - **Activity:** Institute Safe Corridors initiative to help maintain school properties and playgrounds are safe and free of dangerous debris. Safe Corridors would be a formalized volunteer effort to maintain safety around schools in hotspot areas. The program would be a collaboration between the City, businesses and community members and would aim to provide extra support and welcoming route for students traveling to and from school. Volunteers would opt to patrol routes around schools at the start and end of the school day or to keep watch from their homes or businesses.

## FOCUS AREA 4 - PUBLIC SAFETY

### GOAL 4A

Reduce criminal activity through coordinated efforts in and around the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard area:

- **Objective:** Address criminal activity in and around services in the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard area through the strategic, data-driven deployment of more officers and sergeants.
  - **Activity:** Strategic deployment of BPD officers to fixed posts around the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard area based on assessment of hotspots, and increased deployment of Citywide Bike Unit and officers on foot.
    - Four officers and one supervisor will be deployed to a fixed post in District D4 South End for a day and evening shift (7:30 a.m. to 11:45 p.m.), assigned to patrol the area of Worcester Square through Massachusetts Avenue. These officers are supported by additional Code 19 assignments in this area by other district units when available.
    - Three officers and one supervisor will be deployed to a fixed post in the area of Southampton Street and Massachusetts Avenue 24 hours a day in District C6 South Boston.
    - Citywide Bicycle Unit will be deployed with a new focus on the areas of Worcester Square, Massachusetts Avenue, Melnea Cass Boulevard and Harrison Avenue, as well as Blackstone, Franklin and Ramsay parks.
    - Two bicycle officers will be deployed to fixed posts in the Dudley Station area, and one Anti-crime unit with two officers will be deployed to the areas of Melnea Cass Boulevard through Massachusetts Avenue. The Anti-crime patrol includes the Orchard Gardens School, the Mason School and Clifford Park. All officers will patrol 24 hours a day.
  - **Activity:** Biweekly meetings to assess crime statistics (i.e. drug arrests, burglary, etc.) *specifically in the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard area* and determine strategic deployments for following week.
  - **Activity:** Continued focus on designated areas by the Drug Control Unit targeting persons responsible for distributing drugs. Diversion to treatment options where possible for low level, non-violent offenders, i.e. person buying and possessing drugs.
  - **Activity:** Officers will be working with partners in the Mayor's Office of Recovery Services, the Department of Neighborhood Development, and



Pine Street Outreach Teams to proactively engage people struggling with substance use, homelessness, or mental health to offer services including treatment and housing services.

- **Objective:** BPD will lead coordination of all public safety and security teams in the neighborhood.
  - **Activity:** Monthly public safety meeting to review crime data and trends and coordinate efforts aimed at maximizing a coordinated public safety response in the neighborhood.
  - **Activity:** Ensure ongoing training in de-escalation, overdose response, crisis intervention when working with SUD/MH populations.
- **Objective:** BPD effort to focus on criminal activity in adjoining neighborhoods in key targeted hot spot.
  - **Activity:** Strategic deployment of BPD officers to hotspots in adjoining neighborhoods.
  - **Activity:** Increased deployment of bike patrols and officers on foot.
- **Objective:** Ensure the safety of staff and guests at BPHC shelters.
  - **Activity:** Assign **two** public safety officers to daily 3 - 11 p.m. shifts at Wood Mullens post.

#### **GOAL 4B**

Increase Diversion Options in coordination with public health services:

- **Objective:** Enhance the capacity of BPD Street Outreach Unit.
  - **Activity:** Increase the number of officers from **two to five** officers and add one sergeant on unit to provide **10** referrals to treatment per week. With the addition of these three officers we will be able to expand our outreach and cover more areas of the city. This will greatly increase the Unit's ability to offer intervention and services to more individuals. These officers will be an added resource to support the district stations by responding to calls for service and 311 concerns involving Substance Use Disorder, Mental Health and Homelessness.
  - **Activity:** Provide outreach hotline to BPD Districts C6, B2, D4 to ensure connection to Outreach Unit for support.
- **Objective:** Increase public health approach to public safety



- **Activity:** Add **two** coordinated walking routes with BPD and Recovery Services Outreach team two mornings per week to engage **five** people per week in care.
- **Activity:** Increase BEST Team Co-response teams from **five to seven** to assist officers with mental health related calls for service.
- **Activity:** Increase PAARI Recovery Coach Co-response teams from **two to five** covering day and evening shifts.
- **Activity:** Increase number of officers trained in Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) or similar training that addresses interaction with pp experiencing SUD and MH issues.
- **Activity:** Continue building relationships with treatment facilities to increase access to beds and treatment resources.
- **Activity:** Assess the feasibility of expanding legal services to assist in resolving outstanding legal issues that are barriers to employment, housing and treatment, could be modeled on Judge Coffey's homeless court.