

# East Boston's Community Commons

## Development Survey

February 2013

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*Conducted by the Community Alliance*

*Supported by Neighbors United for a Better East Boston (NUBE) and Northeastern University*

## INTRODUCTION

East Boston may soon be experiencing a surge of development. Currently, there are several proposals for housing, retail, and commercial development along the waterfront, with the groundbreaking of Portside at Pier One occurring in January 2013. Recently, a partnership between Suffolk Downs and Caesar's Entertainment has submitted an application to build a resort style casino at the Suffolk Downs race track.

If any these developments are built, they will certainly change the fabric of community. Several residents in the neighborhood were interested in what East Boston residents know about these developments, what they predict will happen if any of the proposals go through, and whether residents support these proposed projects.

This Community Alliance, a group of active residents from across the neighborhood, worked with a team of graduate students from Northeastern University to develop a series of surveys to answer these questions. Once the surveys were developed, Dr. Neenah Estrella-Luna, a professor at Northeastern and an East Boston resident, served as the principle investigator to assist the Community Alliance in developing and implementing the survey focused on what residents know and think about the proposed developments. From May 2012 through August 2012, residents from across the neighborhood distributed surveys on paper and online in English and Spanish to their neighbors, at neighborhood association meetings, at community events, and via online networks. In the end, 360 surveys from East Boston residents were collected. Dr. Estrella-Luna oversaw the process to ensure that the survey was administered properly and that data was entered accurately. She analyzed the data under the direction of Community Alliance members. This report is a summary of this analysis.

Overall, the survey found that knowledge about the waterfront projects is highest in Jeffries Point, Eagle Hill, and Orient Heights. Residents who live in Maverick Square

or Central Square, as well as Latino residents, are least likely to know about any of the proposals for waterfront redevelopment. Support for waterfront development is high, with most residents expecting positive changes in the neighborhood once those developments are completed. However, residents are also concerned about the potential for gentrification.

Over half of residents surveyed are opposed to the proposed casino. Only one-quarter of residents support the casino. Importantly, opposition to the casino is higher among registered voters than the general population. Opposition to the casino is wide across each section of East Boston, with the exception of Central Square. Most residents expect do expect that the casino will increase the number of jobs available for residents. However, residents reported expecting more negative impacts than positive impacts if a casino was built at Suffolk Downs.

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## SUMMARY OF RESULTS

### Who filled out the survey?

The respondents to the survey are a cross-section of the neighborhood. There are slightly more surveys from women than men. Most of the respondents are US born residents, are in the working-age range, and include a largely equal representation of different income groups in the neighborhood. Ethnically, the majority of the people who completed the survey are either non-Hispanic White or Latino. The most important difference between the population of East Boston and the residents who completed the survey is that more than half of East Boston's population is Latino but only 30% of survey respondents described themselves as Latino. The majority of the surveys came from Eagle Hill, Jeffries Point, and Orient Heights, which is consistent with the population centers of the neighborhood. The overwhelming majority of respondents are currently registered to vote in East Boston.

### Knowledge about the waterfront projects

Almost two-thirds of residents surveyed stated that they knew about at least one of the proposed waterfront development projects. However, knowledge of the waterfront projects varied considerably across the neighborhood. Knowledge of the projects is highest in Jeffries Point, Eagle Hill, and Orient Heights. Fewer than half of the residents living in Maverick Square and Central Square reported knowing about any waterfront development projects compared to 71% of the rest of the neighborhood.

Knowledge of the waterfront projects also varied by ethnicity and income. Only 34% of Latino residents were aware of any of the waterfront development projects compared to 81% of non-Hispanic White residents. The only section of East Boston in which Latino knowledge of the waterfront proposals was similar to non-Hispanic White knowledge was in Jeffries Point. In all other sections of the neighborhood, Latinos are the least likely to know about these projects. Over 70% of Latino residents in Maverick Square and Central Square reported that they did not know about any of the proposed projects.

Similarly, low income residents across East Boston are least likely to know about any of the waterfront development projects compared to other income groups. About half of the low income residents did not know about any of the waterfront development projects. With the exception of Jeffries Point, low and middle income residents were much less likely than high income residents to know about any of these projects.

### Expected impacts of waterfront development

Most respondents have positive expectations about what the waterfront redevelopment will bring to East Boston. Residents reported that they expect waterfront development to increase jobs and customers at local businesses. Few residents expect an increase in crime. The most important concerns is that waterfront development will increase traffic

and decrease parking availability. About equal numbers of residents who completed the survey expect either no change or an increase in noise. Importantly, a majority of respondents expect that pride in the neighborhood will increase.

The majority of comments made in the open-ended question were positive. Many residents expressed optimism that the developments would provide positive benefits for the community. Many residents are looking forward to the cleanup and positive reuse of abandoned waterfront property. One resident expects the waterfront development will bring,

*“[W]ater shuttles, Piers Park phase 2, other upscale developments & restaurants/bistros.”*

- Orient Heights voter, 45-64 year old white female, born and raised in East Boston

However, many residents were very concerned that the developments will result in displacement of current residents, as well as loss of affordability. Many residents are concerned about how these developments will change the fabric of the community. One resident wrote,

*“I worry that the developments will only having micro-apartments and will not be geared towards families.”*

-Maverick Square voter, 25-44 year old Hispanic female, moved here when she married

Residents also expressed concern that the new residents will not integrate into the community. As one resident put it,

*“In my opinion, one of the best things about EB is the close knit nature of working-class people (mostly immigrants) who have struggled to build better lives for themselves. Any waterfront development should be designed to encourage integration between newcomers and long-time residents.”*

- Jeffries Point voter, 45-64 year old female, lives here because of friends and family

### Position on the casino

The overwhelming majority of residents surveyed know about the casino project. There were no important differences found between different neighborhoods or demographic groups with respect to knowledge about the casino proposal. Over 50% of residents are opposed to building a casino in East Boston. Only one-quarter of residents stated that they support a casino with the rest either having no opinion or not having enough information to form an opinion. Opposition to the casino is highest among registered voters. With the exception of Central Square, over 50% of registered voters in each section of East Boston stated that they did not support the casino proposal. In Central Square, 42% of respondents stated that they do not have an opinion on the casino. Race and income were not important predictors of position on the casino. The most important predictor of position is education. Support for a casino in East Boston is highest among residents with a high school education or less.

### Expected impacts of a casino

Residents reported that they expect many negative impacts if a casino was built in East Boston. Residents who completed the survey expect higher crime, more traffic, more air pollution, more noise, and less parking. Over 40% of residents expect pride in the neighborhood to decline. However, residents do expect that there will be more jobs from the casino. One resident wrote,

*“People talk about jobs. This is what our community needs... A corporation like Caesar's knows that they need to staff a casino.”*

-Maverick Square voter, 65-74 year old white male, born and raised here

In the open-ended comments, some residents reported that there may be both positive and negative benefits from the casino.

*“A casino is a center for gamblers (obsessive-compulsive players). Many bad things can happen and it can generate money for the city.”*

-Wood Island/Day Square non-registered voter, 45-64 year old Hispanic female, moved here for work (translated from Spanish)

The vast majority of comments are negative. Residents expect that the casino would have a severe and negative impact on public services, most especially police and fire services. Equally important, residents stated that both traffic and public transit service will decline in quality. Residents overwhelmingly stated that the general quality of life and sense of community would decline should a casino be built at Suffolk Downs. Many residents expressed concerns that the casino will increase addictions of all types, most especially gambling addictions. Many residents commented on the predatory nature of casinos. One resident stated:

*“Many people in Eastie live paycheck to paycheck, but they spend large amounts of money on the lottery in the hopes of winning. Slot machines make it much easier to lose money than a lottery ticket ... I can't think of a better way to waste money than a casino.”*

- Eagle Hill voter, 25-44 year old white female, moved here because it is affordable

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## CONCLUSION

There are three main conclusions that can be drawn from this survey. First, this survey demonstrates a disturbing lack of awareness about the waterfront development proposals in East Boston. A majority of the current proposals for waterfront development are sited in the Maverick Square and Central Square sections of the neighborhood. However, a resident of Orient Heights is considerably more likely to know about any of those projects than the residents in Maverick or Central Square. This is concerning because, aside from the long planned Pier One project, the majority of new proposals are in the Maverick

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Square/Central Square areas of the neighborhood. Equally problematic is the lack of knowledge about these developments among the Latino and low income residents, especially in the neighborhoods where new development is proposed. The only notable exception to this pattern is in Jeffries Point.

The mobility of residents in Maverick and Central Square cannot explain the very high numbers of residents who report knowing nothing about the waterfront development proposals. According to the US Census Bureau, 46% of residents in Maverick and Central Square have lived in the same housing unit for at least six years, including more than a third of renters. In this survey, 9% of the respondents from Maverick Square and 24% of the respondents from Central Square stated that they were born and raised in East Boston.

The second major finding is that opposition to building a casino in East Boston is widespread. It is very high among registered voters. The most important predictor of support for the casino is education. This makes sense since individuals with low education are likely to experience the most job insecurity. Access to low skilled jobs is understandably attractive to these residents. Overall, however, a small minority of residents, most especially among registered voters, expressed support for a casino. The majority of residents who completed this survey are opposed to it.

Finally, this survey demonstrates that East Boston residents are capable of conducting a scientifically valid survey within the neighborhood. More than a dozen residents worked together to develop and implement this survey. They live in all the sections of East Boston. Members of the Community Alliance include long time Italian-American residents, long time non-Italian-American residents, Latino residents who have lived here for as little as 3 and as long as 20 years, young professionals who have just moved in, and community activists who have a long history

of neighborhood involvement. The residents who came together for this effort include those who are active in their neighborhood associations and those who are active in the newer networks of residents found in online forums and social media. The completion of this survey is evidence of the power of collaboration and demonstrates that the long history of neighborhood activism is alive and well in East Boston. There are three Community Commons surveys that have been developed by the Community Alliance. Given the success of this survey, there can be no doubt that future surveys will include even larger numbers of residents, giving East Boston residents a better sense of what the true opinions and concerns of their neighbors are. Equally important, this survey and future efforts will allow residents to hold their public officials accountable for their actions as well as promote transparency in the community development and planning process.

This report was written by Dr. Neenah Estrella-Luna. Inquiries can be made at [n.estrellaluna@neu.edu](mailto:n.estrellaluna@neu.edu)

## APPENDIX A: DESCRIPTION OF THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS

**Table 1A: Description of the respondents in the Community Commons Development Survey**

	#	%		#	%
<u>Gender</u>			<u>Ethnicity</u>		
Male	142	41%	Hispanic/Latino	101	30%
Female	205	59%	Non-Hispanic White	221	65%
Transgender	1	<1%	Black/ African American	8	2%
			American Indian/Alaskan Native	2	1%
			Asian	2	1%
<u>Age</u>			Mixed race (not specified)	4	1%
16-18	8	2%	Other	4	1%
19-24	20	6%			
25-44	171	49%	<u>Language spoken at home</u>		
45-64	107	31%	English	250	71%
65-74	32	9%	Spanish	87	25%
75 or older	10	3%	Arabic	6	2%
			French	3	1%
<u>Nativity</u>			Italian	3	1%
US Born	240	70%	Other	2	1%
Foreign Born	103	30%	Chinese	1	<1%
<u>Individual Income</u>			<u>Education</u>		
Less than \$10,000	29	11%	No HS diploma or GED	28	8%
\$10,000 – \$24,999	48	18%	High school diploma/GED	63	18%
\$25,000 – \$49,999	69	25%	Vocational/ technical/ Associates	18	5%
\$50,000 – \$74,999	66	24%	Some college but no degree	53	15%
\$75,000 or more	62	23%	Bachelor's degree	98	28%
			Post-graduate, professional	84	24%
<u>Voter registration status</u>					
Registered to vote	260	75%	<u>Why do you live here?<sup>1</sup></u>		
Not registered to vote	64	18%	I was born and raised here	72	20%
Ineligible to vote	22	6%	I have friends and family here	94	26%
			An employment opportunity	31	9%
<u>Neighborhood of residence</u>			EB's rich history and diversity	50	14%
Central Square	21	7%	Amenities (parks & waterfront)	81	23%
Day Square/ Wood Island	16	5%	I found affordable housing here	138	38%
Eagle Hill	100	31%	No particular reason	17	5%
Jeffries Point	86	27%			
Maverick Square	34	11%	<u>Method of completing the survey</u>		
Orient Heights	61	19%	Paper	159	44%
			Online	201	56%

<sup>1</sup>Respondents could select more than one option. The percentages here are based on the 328 respondents who answered this question.

**APPENDIX B: KNOWLEDGE ABOUT PROPOSED WATERFRONT DEVELOPMENTS & EXPECTED IMPACTS**

**Table 1B: Knowledge about the waterfront development proposals by neighborhood**

	Knowledge of any of the proposed projects	No knowledge of any of the proposed projects
Central Square	33%	67%
Day Square/ Wood Island	75%	25%
Eagle Hill	63%	35%
Jeffries Point	86%	14%
Maverick Square	53%	44%
Orient Heights	67%	30%

**Table 2B: Knowledge about the waterfront development proposals**

	Knowledge of any of the proposed projects	No knowledge of any of the proposed projects
Jeffries Point	86%	14%
Central Square & Maverick Square	45%	53%
Rest of the neighborhood	64%	34%

**Table 3B: Knowledge about the waterfront development proposals by ethnicity**

	Knowledge of any of the proposed projects	No knowledge of any of the proposed projects
Latino	34%	66%
Non-Hispanic White	81%	19%

**Table 4B: Knowledge about the waterfront development proposals by individual income**

	Knowledge of any of the proposed projects	No knowledge of any of the proposed projects
Less than \$25,000	51%	49%
\$25,000-75,000	70%	30%
More than \$75,000	93%	7%

**Table 5B: Expected impacts on the neighborhood from waterfront redevelopment**

	No change	More	Less
Crime	38%	17%	17%
Parking	21%	17%	38%
Traffic	18%	59%	1%
Noise	38%	36%	3%
Jobs	26%	42%	4%
Customers at local businesses	8%	63%	4%
Pride	15%	55%	5%

**APPENDIX C: POSITION ON THE PROPOSED CASINO DEVELOPMENT & EXPECTED IMPACTS****Table 1C: Position on the casino**

	In favor	Opposed	No opinion	Don't know enough about it
All	24%	52%	16%	8%
Registered voters	21%	56%	16%	7%

**Table 2C: Position on the casino among registered voters by education**

	In favor	Opposed	No opinion	Don't know enough about it
HS Education or less	39%	42%	11%	8%
Some college or training	20%	61%	13%	6%
College degree or higher	17%	58%	18%	8%

**Table 3C: Position on the casino among registered voters by section of the neighborhood**

	In favor	Opposed	No opinion	Don't know enough about it
Maverick Square	28%	56%	6%	11%
Jeffries Point	13%	59%	18%	9%
Central Square	25%	33%	42%	0%
Eagle Hill	21%	54%	17%	8%
Orient Heights	25%	58%	10%	6%
Other <sup>1</sup>	30%	61%	9%	0%

<sup>1</sup>This includes Day Square, Wood Island, Harbor View/St Mary's, Paris Flats, Airport, "near the tunnel," and those who were not sure which section of the neighborhood they lived in. This category comprises 9% of the total respondents.

**Table 4C: Expected impacts on the neighborhood from casino development**

	No change	More	Less	Don't Know
Crime	17%	70%	6%	8%
Parking	20%	25%	48%	8%
Traffic	5%	89%	2%	4%
Noise	23%	67%	2%	7%
Air pollution	22%	67%	2%	9%
Jobs	26%	50%	10%	13%
Pride	18%	25%	42%	15%