

10.21

# walk

MAKING MASSACHUSETTS MORE WALKABLE

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S LETTER

Welcome to the Fall 2021 edition of our newsletter. Times are better than they were this time last year. WalkBoston remains strong and is now taking stock of what worked best to make walking safer, more accessible, and instrumental in helping people cope with the pandemic. Walking was one of the few retreats that was readily available and safe. This edition focuses on one such highlight: Shared Streets programs. These programs, which have been implemented across the country and the world, provide a mechanism to create more space for people to walk, bike, run, play, sit, and dine during the public health emergency. With many people driving less while working from home, fewer cars on the road meant lots of unused parking spaces—spaces that could be transformed into people-centered places.

Here in Massachusetts, MassDOT led the way in reimagining street space with the launch of its Shared Streets and Spaces Program, which provides funds to municipalities that allow them to quickly respond to the many challenges highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of these challenges include finding more sidewalk space, expanding outdoor dining into unused parking lanes, and reimagining streets as low-speed, safe spaces for people walking and biking. The popularity of this program demonstrated the desire, need, and capabilities of municipalities to implement quick-build projects to make streets safer and more enjoyable for all.

WalkBoston played a leading role in promoting the MassDOT program by advising municipalities on potential Shared Streets projects, and by raising awareness of different advocacy issues. We are thrilled that MassDOT has committed to funding the Shared Streets and Spaces Program for another year. What began as a COVID-19 response strategy is now what many of us have been advocating for for years—street space transformed for people walking.

Thanks for supporting us. We can't do it without you.

  
Stacey Beuttell, Executive Director

# Boston

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BY MIRANDA BRISEÑO / WALKBOSTON PROGRAM MANAGER

## Successful Outdoor Dining — à la Shared Streets Funding

*Miranda Briseño joined WalkBoston as a Program Manager in early July. Previously she was with the Office of Planning, Development, and Sustainability for the City of Medford where she focused on the COVID-19 response—helping to create the City's first business grant program, supporting residential Shared Streets programs, and managing the 2021 Outdoor Dining program.*

Like communities nationwide, Medford was no stranger to having to reframe its approach to streets in 2020. Residents wanted—and still want—to feel safe and distanced from cars and others during COVID-19, and restaurants desperately needed an alternative to indoor dining. When MassDOT's Shared Streets and Spaces grant program was announced, Medford jumped at the opportunity to receive funding to support these efforts.

The 2020 Outdoor Dining program in Medford provided an opportunity for restaurants to get

creative and paved the way for the program's second iteration. At the first pass, despite uncertainties around health and safety, a small group of 15 Medford restaurants volunteered to participate in the pilot program. The limited number of participants aside, residents and business owners alike were huge fans of

the program.

One of the success stories for the 2020 program was that of Bistro 5 in West Medford. In the summer of 2020, due to the pandemic, the owner, Vittorio Ettore, reached out to the Board of Health to let them know of his decision to permanently close his restaurant. One of our wonderful Health Department staff convinced him to give Outdoor Dining a try before closing down for good. Fast forward to 2021: Bistro 5 still stands strong in West Medford! Vittorio cites the support from the City for Outdoor Dining in 2020, which included safety equipment and guidance on safe outdoor setups, as key

to keeping his doors open. He was the first to call asking when the 2021 season would begin.

For the 2021 season, the City was able to provide establishments with more support in the form of safety equipment and minor beautification efforts—like lights and

planters—through the MassDOT Shared Streets and Spaces grant. Due to the success of the pilot, the 2021 program attracted twice the number of participants. Part of this newfound interest in the 2021 program was due to the City's committed outreach. Given that restaurant regulations were constantly changing and **continued**



Tenoch Mexican Restaurant's outdoor dining setup. Medford, MA.

## BTBS Challenge

### Beat the Bay State Challenge

November 1—30, 2021

The challenge encourages people of all ages to be active over the course of 30 days. Walk on your own or join a group of friends, co-workers, or family members to cover 900 miles.

#### How it works:

- Walk/run wherever you are
- Virtually move along a route of the 900-mile perimeter of Massachusetts.
- Earn fun badges showing your progress as you “travel” the state.

#### Win prizes for:

- The biggest team
- The most money raised
- First to complete the route

Your participation supports our work and advocacy.

#### Register and more info:

[runsignup.com/baystate](http://runsignup.com/baystate)

## Celebrating Bob King Sloane 11/3/1936—5/12/2021

Earlier this year WalkBoston lost a member of our family, Bob Sloane.

Bob was a dear friend, a mentor, a creative genius, and a true pioneer in walking advocacy. On September 9, we gathered together virtually to celebrate his extraordinary life and reminisce about our times together with him.

Stories were told about the early days, about his trailblazing work on the Boston Transportation Planning Review, where he pushed forward the message that walking is a fundamental part of the transportation conversation at a time when it was not a popular view. We heard about how Bob and company founded WalkBoston over beers at Jacob Wirth’s. We heard about how Bob stuck to his principles and ideals, regardless of the professional consequences. We heard about his kindness and empathy, his contagious enthusiasm and dedication.

Bob’s presence was palpable throughout the night as the same themes came through in every story. His

kindness, his stalwart nature, his sense of humor, his creativity, and even his insistence on sharing snacks (especially Clover fries and Yorkshire tea).

“A fierce advocate,” “heart of gold,” “he never gave up,” “one of nature’s true gentlemen,” “truly a life well lived,” “the soul of WalkBoston” — this is how we described Bob. We will all miss the twinkle in his eye as he came up with his latest scheme. We will miss the sight of him hunched over his maps and tracing paper. We will miss him walking into the room and saying “Do you have a minute?”

Thank you, Bob, for everything, and thank you to his family for sharing him with us. His legacy and impact will be felt for generations to come. He leaves behind a more walkable, livable, vibrant, and welcoming community for all of us. We hold him in our hearts and will never forget him.

You can find his obituary at [walkboston.org/bob](http://walkboston.org/bob).

Register for the 2021 Beat the Bay State Challenge

10.21 dining pilots

WalkBoston makes walking safer and easier in Massachusetts to encourage better health, a cleaner environment and vibrant communities.

mission

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## thank you!

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## Successful Outdoor Dining continued

aiming for a smooth review process, I led the City’s effort to revamp the program’s online application, hosted two webinars/office hours for restaurant owners to ask questions, and provided technical assistance to owners interested in applying for the program.

Restaurants like the aforementioned Bistro 5, Dempsey’s, Salvatore’s, and Fiorlaly were eager to engage with the program again. Meanwhile, Tenoch Mexican, Neighborhood Kitchen, and Tasty Cafe on the Hill joined for the first time. With logistical support from myself and safety approval from our Public Works department and Fire Prevention office, Tenoch built a beautiful parklet level with the sidewalk, making it accessible to all, as well as being decorated with lights and planters. The Porch opened Medford’s first “beer garden” experience filled with fun lawn games.

The pandemic was devastating for everyone. Fortunately, MassDOT created a lifeline to support businesses in the Commonwealth. Thanks to its grant program, cities like Medford were able to extend aid to local restaurants and test the impact of people-centered shared streets. The real outcome? We proved that shared streets benefit people and local businesses, and that such a program can and should last well beyond the pandemic.