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NEWS

NEWS TO US: DUDLEY DO RIGHT

Posted on November 13, 2013 by CHRIS FARAONE Email



Derek Lumpkins of Discover Roxbury on the heart of the Hub

Photo credit: Mona Maruyama

Recent articles mentioning Roxbury during the mayoral campaign offer excitement about our voices being heard and our arts becoming more widely known. These articles highlight Roxbury's current development and reference its history of unequal distribution of resources and lack of a cultural policy.

What must not get lost in the shuffle is the role that Roxbury's residents will play. Although Tuesday's winner has months until he assumes office, it's not clear how he will create a sustainable network between City Hall and community-based organizations. That infrastructure will be critical for developing an equitable and transformational policy that is aware of and responsive to the community.

Both candidates have made numerous appearances in Roxbury. Unfortunately, the narrative of their visits has seemingly reduced the voices of residents to little more than that of background singers in a traveling band. However, this can change through strategic policymaking and inclusive hiring and appointments that draw upon and encourage growth of the existing talents and assets of Roxbury.

Given the rapid pace of change in Roxbury, there is a great deal at stake for residents. I encourage Tuesday's winner to immerse himself in the spirited, messy, and ambitious conversations that make living in Roxbury both dynamic and cherished by many. I also look forward to him leading the evolution of Boston's understanding of its own identity, to the point that Roxbury and its residents cease to be the city's cautionary tale and instead serve as its exemplars.

-Derek Lumpkins, Executive Director, Discover Roxbury

Penned by community and local arts advocate Derek Lumpkins on the eve of last week's mayoral election, the above missive ran in the *Boston Globe* on the morning of November 5, and has since spurred a healthy and productive conversation on social media about the direction Roxbury is headed in. The executive director of the nonprofit [Discover Roxbury](#), Lumpkins has for years trumpeted the virtues of the neighborhood he represents. On the heels of his viral open letter, we asked him to speak further about what Roxbury needs under the coming [Walsh](#) administration, and to extoll the beauty that already lies in and around historic Dudley Square. Like he told us: "People

who live and work here know there are a lot of assets that get overshadowed by the crime and statistics. The positive aspects aren't given the attention they need to grow and to thrive and to flourish."

Were there any specific proposals regarding the Roxbury area from the Walsh or Connolly campaigns that stuck out to you?

A lot of it seemed rally vague. One that stood out in Connolly's campaign was to bring an innovation hub to Dudley as part of the Ferdinand Building ... which would add to the knowledge base in Roxbury. With Walsh, I didn't hear any particular promises. Near the end of the campaign, though, he was using Roxbury as a cautionary tale. In particular, he was using Egleston Square as an example of a place where stores are locked down, and where people are afraid. I'm on the board of Egleston Square Main Street, and while there are some problems, that's not how the district is overall.

What is the first thing you are going to ask of Walsh when you get some face time?

I would love to see the city take its own unused property and leverage it as a neighborhood resource. Several schools have been closed in the past couple of years—are they going to be sold off as real estate for high-priced condos? Or can some be turned into studio space for artists—sculptors, jewelry makers, all kinds? There's just so much city-owned property. At the same time, we're running out of space, and there's going to be a pressure that if you can't afford to be here, you're going to be squeezed out.

What are the biggest challenges facing businesses in Roxbury right now?

The Ferdinand Building, which is supposed to open in January of 2015, poses a great opportunity. I don't know how many people will be working there, but there needs to be an educational campaign for the people who are coming to work in Roxbury every day. They should really go out and support the places that are already there. I would also hope that the Ferdinand will not only house the [city's] school department, but also other departments that would really interact with local businesses in ways other than just buying empanadas.

If you could see any kind of business open up in Roxbury, what would it be?

In terms of the basic things—a hardware store, an art supply store. A lot of people would also love a great Japanese place, or a great Thai place. A variety of flavor.

Are we going to see a Walmart in your community anytime soon?

I haven't heard any new whispers about Walmart recently. The idea was beaten up so much that people will be more cautious about it. Also—there's rapid gentrification, so if Walmart wanted to come in, they probably would have bought the land already.

What are some of the businesses and institutions you consider cornerstones of Roxbury at the moment? What should people check out?


Grab a meal at [Haley House](#)—breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Most of our tourist sites tend to be based in colonial history—the [Eliot Burying Ground](#), Dillaway-Thomas House. For something more contemporary, there's the [National Center of Afro-American Artists](#), the [Franklin Park Zoo](#) and golf course, of course, performances at Hibernian Hall, to name a few. For other food, there are a lot of mom and pop places that are only open during the day, or I love [Millenium Restaurant](#) in Egleston, Eddie's in Dudley, Silver Slipper for sweet tea. United House of Prayer is where you'll want to go for good old southern cooking—turkey leg, catfish, black-eyed peas. You'll walk out of there full paying only \$12. That includes drink and desert.

What will never change about Roxbury no matter what development awaits?

Maybe it's because we live between hills, or because of all the trees, or the older character of the housing, or that we're not quite suburban or hyper-urban either, but there's an energy to this neighborhood I don't feel in other places.

Check out [discoverroxbury.org](#) for lists of tours and attractions, and check out the Discover Roxbury holiday pop-up shop featuring crafts from local artists at 2201 Washington St. in Dudley Square from 12.6 through 12.24.


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