

**PUBLIC DOCUMENT NO. 11.
ANNUAL REPORT OF THE BOARD
OF HARBOR AND LAND
COMMISSIONERS. FOR THE YEAR
1896**

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Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

REPORT.

To the Honorable the Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The Board of Harbor and Land Commissioners, pursuant to the provisions of law, respectfully submits its annual report for the year 1896, covering a period of twelve months, from Nov. 30, 1895.

HEARINGS.

The Board has held one hundred and sixty-six formal sessions during the year, at which one hundred and eighty-three hearings were given. One hundred and twenty-one petitions were received for licenses to build and maintain structures, and for privileges in tide waters, great ponds and the Connecticut River; of these, one hundred and fifteen were granted, four withdrawn and two denied.

On June 5, 1896, a hearing was given at Buzzards Bay on the petition of the town of Wareham that the boundary line on tide water between the towns of Wareham and Bourne at the highway bridge across Cohasset Narrows, as defined by the Board under chapter 196 of the Acts of 1881, be marked on said bridge.

On June 20, 1896, a hearing was given in Nantucket on the petition of the local board of health for license to fill a dock.

On June 23, 1896, a hearing was given in Vineyard Haven on the matter of boundary line between the towns of Gay Head and Chilmark, pursuant to chapter 187 of the Acts of 1896.

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On July 11, 1896, a hearing was given in Provincetown in regard to the occupation of the Province Lands.

All other hearings were given by the Board in Boston.

Many important matters pending before various committees of the Legislature during the last session have required the attendance of the Board, and demanded careful study and consideration of the interests of the Commonwealth.

SOUTH BOSTON FLATS.

The work of filling and improving the tide-water lands known as the Commonwealth's flats at South Boston has been confined to a general care of the property and a supervision of the deposits, also to the cremation of the rubbish and other material brought in carts for which a free dump is desired. The solid part of this material has been used in surfacing a portion of the area which was filled by hydraulic dredging, and also in filling some holes along the bulkheads protecting the northerly and easterly sides of the seventy-acre lot where the filling had been washed out by the sea during heavy storms.

The property generally, including the sewers, is in excellent condition. The streets, however, other than Congress Street between B and C streets, although filled to grade, have not been paved or otherwise surfaced to prepare them for teaming.

The development of the lands has been retarded by the uncertainty existing as to the future of Congress Street, about which the New England Railroad Company, the city of Boston and the Commonwealth had been unable to reach an agreement. A special grade crossing act passed last winter, being chapter 535, Acts of 1896, authorized a commission to hear the parties interested and determine what should be done in the matter. That commission has been sitting and has proceeded so far as to determine that the portion of Congress Street crossing the land of the railroad company shall be discontinued, and that a new street starting at the intersection of the extension of Summer Street with the harbor line on the westerly side of Fort Point Channel shall cross Fort Point Channel and the intervening land at an elevation and join Congress Street at about its junction with C Street,

there making a slight angle. The width of the new street will be 100 feet and its highest elevation will be 24.5 feet in crossing the railroad tracks, from which it will descend at grades of from 1.5 per cent. to 1.75 per cent. to the level of existing streets.

It has also been determined to broaden Congress Street from L Street bridge to a point just east of C Street to a width of 100 feet; also to build a side approach to Congress Street 80 feet wide along the harbor line on the Boston side of Fort Point Channel; and to widen Congress Street to 80 feet from the harbor line to Atlantic Avenue. On the South Boston side a lateral approach is to start near the harbor line and to follow substantially the location of the tracks of the New England Railroad to A Street. After passing on to the Commonwealth's property another lateral approach is to start at D Street and follow D Street to Fargo Street, thence to C Street. A bridge is to span B Street 60 feet wide, with 19 feet headroom, and another at C Street 80 feet wide, with a minimum headroom of 16½ feet. This elevated street it is feared may occasion damage to all of the Commonwealth's land, but more particularly that portion in its immediate vicinity, because this street is the only one affording direct communication with the business heart of the city, and provision for approaching it at two points only has been laid out by the Commissioners,—one on Congress Street about 268 feet east of E Street, the other at the corner of C and Fargo Streets. This last street is only 50 feet wide and is the only outlet over the new street provided for the 100 acres of the Commonwealth's property south of Congress Street and north of West First Street.

The other streets now connecting with Congress Street, viz., B, D and E Streets, will be left at the points of intersection from 6 to 24 feet below the grade of the new street, and will have to be filled by the Commonwealth to make graded approaches. The result of this will be to create a high causeway across the middle of the lands to which the side streets will have to be graded at more or less expense. Doubtless the work of construction will proceed as rapidly as possible on this new street, but until it and its approaches and the new bridge across Fort Point Channel to connect it

with Summer Street shall be nearly completed, the land will fail to present the desired attractiveness for building purposes for which it is so well adapted. The same commission is also charged with the duty of determining in what proportions the cost of this grade crossing shall be borne by the respective parties. The Commonwealth's interests have been most carefully guarded throughout the hearings by the Attorney-General's department, to which this Board has given every and all assistance and information within its power.

Another fact affecting these lands of the Commonwealth was the passage of the Southern Union Station Act, being chapter 516, Acts of 1896, whereby ten wharves, covering one-half mile of water front on Fort Point Channel, have been forever barred to maritime purposes. The operation of the two statutes prohibits the contemplated extension of Mt. Washington Avenue as a thoroughfare through the hundred-acre parcel between Congress and West First streets, and will compel all traffic from this district to seek an outlet through one or the other of the aforementioned streets.

It is fair to presume that the conditions are now fixed under which the filled lands at South Boston may be developed without further interference from the railroads. There are about 177 acres of these lands, of which about 70 will lie north of the new elevated street. Of this a strip of say perhaps 150 feet in depth, fronting southerly on the new street, may be sold for warehouses or mercantile purposes, in the rear of which lies a large tract of many acres bounded on the north by the harbor and on the west by the railroad property. This tract is particularly well located with its large water front for maritime purposes and is already attracting attention. No land is better located for improvement for wharf and dock purposes than that lying adjacent to the railroad premises.

Now that the action of the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad Company has cut off all approaches along the western side of this great property of the Commonwealth for seven-eighths of a mile between First Street and the proposed Northern Avenue to one street, and that one elevated over the railroad to a height of 24.5 feet above the general

level, it becomes imperative to proceed with the construction of Northern Avenue across the railroad property and with the building of Oliver Street bridge. Otherwise the seventy acres north of Congress Street will be practically bottled up, and it would be idle to contemplate development by improving the wharf frontage with no outlet at grade for the heavy traffic incident to commercial trucking, and no opportunity of reaching the warehouses and wholesale marts of the city without travelling three sides of a square and elevating a load 24.5 feet in the air, instead of a short straight line at grade.

The time has come which must decide whether the wharf frontage of the Commonwealth's property is to be made valuable to the public or be neglected for lack of due and proper approaches.

The Board recommends that provision be made for laying out and building Northern Avenue across the property of the New England Railroad Company and for the construction of a bridge in continuation thereof across Fort Point Channel to the city proper, thereby connecting the proposed docks and piers on the Commonwealth's property with the business portion of the city by a practically level street.

The plan appended shows the proposed bridge and Northern Avenue, so laid out as to connect at grade with the projected docks and wharves. It shows the avenue on the Commonwealth's lands at a width of 150 feet, as being the proper width in the light of modern requirements for an avenue at the head of wharves of the proposed class. The proposed Northern Avenue will necessarily be at grade with the railroad tracks. Its purposes are to supply additional conveniences for delivering and shipping merchandise at the proposed docks and wharves by both rail-haul and truckage, and to afford more direct and shorter communication at grade with the business centres of the city and with connecting railroads. Its uses would naturally be confined to heavy teaming and railroad transportation such as is connected with loading and discharging steamships. It can never be expected or desired that it will be a pleasure drive, and its establishment at grade should be secured beyond fear of change and the expense incident thereto.