

February 27, 2014

TO: Our Jamaica Plain Elected Officials
RE: **Disaster Preparedness: Equity During Crisis**

The history of recent northeast ice storms, hurricanes, and other emergencies—such as Sandy and Irene, Blizzard Nemo, and even the Boston Marathon bombings—underscores that neighbors are our true “first responders.”

Extended power outages, flooding, infrastructure damage, transportation interruptions, and food shortages are not uncommon, and they can cause significant hardship for individuals, families, and communities. And we all know that some of our City’s most vulnerable populations—the elderly, low-income, and residents of public housing developments—are likely to bear the greatest burden and hardship during an emergency.

But we also know that a modest amount of networking and preparation makes a huge difference.

Unfortunately, while there are resources available for emergency preparedness at the local, state, and federal levels, we’ve seen through our work over the last year that there’s a real disconnect between those resources and the needs of residents. We have been piloting an effort in Jamaica Plain to create a bottom-up approach—bringing people together block by block—to build the kind of resilience that individuals and neighborhoods really need. The model, which we’ve managed to develop and implement with very few resources, includes block-by-block organizing (what we’ve been calling Pie Parties), and the exploration of neighborhood hubs that could serve as meeting points for residents in the event of an emergency. We’re currently working with River of Life Church to further develop the neighborhood hub concept, and others have expressed interest.

We strongly urge the City to work in collaboration with neighborhood-based groups like the Jamaica Plain New Economy Transition to ensure that *everyone* is well prepared in the event of an emergency. Specifically, we ask the City of Boston and State officials to consider working with us to:

- Create a position for a JP Emergency Response Liaison (as a pilot that could then be replicated in other neighborhoods throughout Boston)
- Deliver Emergency Preparedness Sessions at Public Housing Developments
- Offer free and subsidized materials and equipment
- Hold a City Council Hearing to look at disaster response scenarios
- Hold a State-level hearing to look at the vulnerability of the Seacoast to climate change
- Allocate resources for neighborhood organizing

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