

arthemia

Published on *Dorchester Reporter* (<http://www.dotnews.com>)[Home](#) > Big turnout for Mattapan United launch

Big turnout for Mattapan United launch

By *Anonymous*

Created 07/21/2011 - 7:00am

By **Alex Owens, Special to the Reporter**

Jul. 21, 2011

Alex Owens, Special to the Reporter



In defiance of the sweltering summer heat, an eager crowd of more than 100 people packed themselves into the parish hall at the Church of the Holy Spirit in Mattapan Square on Monday evening. The multitude was gathered for the inaugural public meeting of the community network known as Mattapan United, and featured scores of Mattapan's best and brightest, including residents, community

activists, business owners, elected officials and other stakeholders.

Described by constituents as a method to connect Mattapan's various community organizations, Mattapan United had its start, in August 2010, as a small group of community leaders who organized to submit an application for a competitive funding program from the Boston affiliate of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (Boston LISC.) In September, the Mattapan community was rocked by a grisly murder scene on Woolson Street, which propelled the fledgling group into a full-blown coalition, spanning several community groups.

"Too often in our community, tragedy is the impetus for us coming together, but there isn't a staying together," said City Councillor At-Large Ayanna Pressley at Monday's meeting. "I refuse to have our bonds of community only forged in tragedy." Pressley was joined by several colleagues—State Sen. Jack Hart, State Reps. Russell Holmes and Linda

Dorcena Forry, who is married to Reporter managing editor Bill Forry, and City Councillor Rob Consalvo.

In the months following Mattapan United's creation, a committee of Mattapan community members continued working to secure funding from LISC, under its Resilient Communities/Resilient Families program. LISC offered to funnel resources into so-called "convening agencies" in three Boston neighborhoods for the purpose of collaborative community building. Along with similar efforts in Codman Square/Four Corners and on the Warren Street Corridor, Mattapan United was selected to receive a \$25,000, "Early Action" grant with the Mattapan ABCD Family Service Center as the convening agency. The group was also able to secure \$5,000 of separate LISC public safety grants for local events over the summer.

The money does come with conditions. First, a full-time coordinator would have to be hired to focus on organizing the collaboration. The coordinator's salary would be paid by LISC as part of the three-year commitment packaged with the Resilient Families/Resilient Communities model. ABCD hired Jeffery Stone, formerly the Executive Director of City-Wide Dialogues on Boston's Ethnic and Racial Diversity under the Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts.

Second, a community-driven "quality of life" plan or community contract would have to be drawn up with short-term goals across a variety of areas.

"We expect a community contract...a commitment to address the priorities of the community in manageable and concrete steps," said Boston LISC director Bob Van Meter.

According to those involved with Mattapan United, such an action plan will be based on information gained through a campaign of one-on-one conversations with members of the community—from residents and business owners, to community leaders, elected officials and police. Members of Mattapan United kicked off that process during the meeting by initiating group discussions about the future of the community.

Residents seemed eager to discuss their ideas at a personal level.

"I think Mattapan is small enough to maximize the impact," said Rev. Zenetta Armstrong, pastor of the Church of the Holy Spirit. "I really value the model of one-on-one conversations. This time of listening is a necessity." The conversation also included leaders of Mattapan's substantial Haitian community, a group notably absent from several community processes.

"These conversations are what the process is all about," said Stone. "We hope to hold 100-200 of these discussions over the next two months."

The crowd was percolating with ideas and concerns about their community, from virtually every category imaginable-- a daunting task for members of Mattapan United, who hope to distill the neighborhood's concerns into priorities and report back to the community by October.

"I really have to hit the ground running, because there are so many different residents with different needs and concerns. There is no sleep in this job." said Milagros Arbaje-Thomas, the new director at the Family Service Center. Arbaje-Thomas is taking over where former Family Service Center Director Lillie Searcy left off when she stepped down from the position in May. As one of the founding members of Mattapan United, Searcy had been deeply involved in the project.

According to Stone, Mattapan United is aiming to have their action plan ready by the end of the year. Ultimately, the goal is to create an application process through which the LISC funds would be distributed to the community. For now, several stakeholders seem to be optimistic about the unifying ideals of the Mattapan United.

"I like the idea of uniting Mattapan" said Mattapan resident Earl Faulk. "I think that it will enable us to really hold our elected officials' feet to the fire, to make sure they follow through with the things we need."

"I appreciate that [Mattapan United is] stressing the importance of being united," said resident Jeanne Jacobs. "We can achieve our goals for Mattapan, but it is going to take all of the community working together."

Tags: [Civics](#) ^[1] [Mattapan](#) ^[2]

[Civics](#) [Mattapan](#)

Copyright 2011, Boston Neighborhood News, Inc. [About/Contact us](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Advertising](#)

Source URL: <http://www.dotnews.com/2011/big-turnout-mattapan-united-launch>

Links:

[1] <http://www.dotnews.com/civics>

[2] <http://www.dotnews.com/mattapan>