

Mattapan Reporter

“The News and Values Around the Neighborhood”

All contents copyright © 2008 Boston Neighborhood News, Inc.

Volume 6 Issue 33

Thursday, August 14, 2008

Free

Grogan gets close-up with Mattapan leaders ‘Intimate conversation’ at CDC breakfast

By Ed Forry

A group of Mattapan community leaders and agency heads gathered at a breakfast meeting on Tuesday to discuss ways of developing joint efforts to deal with issues in the neighborhood.

Billed as “an intimate conversation” and organized by the Mattapan Community Development Corporation (CDC), the meeting brought together officials of several local service agencies with officials from The Boston Foundation (TBF), the leading grant making foundation in Greater Boston. The meeting was held in the community room of the Foley Senior Residences on River Street.

Representing the foundation was its president, Paul Grogan, and Robert Lewis Jr., vice president for programs. The meeting was convened and chaired by Spencer DeShields, CDC president.

The roundtable, numbering some 15 people, gathered representatives from the ABCD Neighborhood Service Center, Mattapan Community Health Center, Mattapan Board of Trade and the Mildred Avenue Community Center, some neighbor-

hood civic leaders and local merchants, and a representative of the Morton Street Board of Commerce.

One by one, attendees discussed what each saw as compelling issues facing the community. Among problems cited were the current mortgage foreclosure crisis, a lack of vocational training for young people, and a continuing problem related to Criminal Offender Record Information Act (CORI) reporting requirements, which many said prevents young people with even minor criminal offenses from finding meaningful work.

“The foundation needs to renew its understanding of what’s happening in communities across the city,” Grogan said. “We need to renew our relationships with leaders in the communities. It is how we will become most effective. The Boston Foundation is a great institution, it’s made a great contribution to Mattapan and many other neighborhoods in the past. But we have got to figure out what the highest leverage investments are now in this community.”

For the Boston Foundation, the meeting this

week was just the third in a series of small, intimate conversations in neighborhoods throughout the city being conducted this summer and early fall to engage local business, civic, nonprofit and community leaders.

Grogan said he was pleased the CDC had hosted, and promised he and his staff would meet again with the group. “Having a strong CDC is a great asset for a community, so we’re very interested in the Mattapan CDC and strengthening it. It doesn’t have the same history as some of the CDCs across the city but we’re hopeful it can be a major player here.”

“We’d really like to be challenged,” he said. “Everybody has to take care of their own business, we understand that. But I was intrigued and impressed that a number of the leaders said ‘We’ve got to come together around a strategy and then maybe challenge the foundation.’ We would like nothing better. I think there’s a lot of thoughtfulness and candor about what’s going well and what isn’t. This meeting was a great help to us.”

In his invitation to local “stakeholders” in Mat-



Robert Lewis Jr., vice president for programs for the Boston Foundation, left, with Spencer DeShields of Mattapan CDC and Paul Grogan, president of the Boston Foundation, right. Photo by Rich Moore

tapan, DeShields had said, “In keeping with Mattapan CDC’s Mission of ‘being dedicated to improving the social and economic conditions of all the people living and working in Mattapan,’ it is very important ... to connect one to one with an organization like The Boston Foundation. As a community, we have a unique opportunity to host and share with Paul Grogan the issues, opportunities, and

challenges facing our community.”

In an interview after the meeting, DeShields said, “The goal was to give a united community issue acknowledgement to probably the number one funder and foundation in the Boston area, so that we, with all the initiatives that the various organizations have on their plate, can talk about a unified, collaborative support mechanism.” DeShields

said the joint effort was needed “both from a leverage and a financial perspective.”

“We are at a pinnacle point where we all have been vying for the same monies, and it gets diluted as it gets to each entity. So we need to have a galvanized united effort that can move Mattapan to the next level and avoid some of that.”