

Paul Prindle Is Remembered as a Legendary Back Bay Activist

Lawrence T. Perera

Elliott Laffer

The Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay has lost one of its most esteemed members. When Paul Prindle and his wife, Susan, moved into the Back Bay in the mid-1960s, the situation was grave. The Back Bay neighborhood stood on the brink of being overwhelmed by high-rise construction and unsuitable institutional uses. Paul played a yeoman's role in NABB's effort to turn back the tide.

Upon volunteering for service, Paul was first assigned the formidable task of cleaning up the alleys. With imagination and energy, he organized the first Alley Rally and enlisted MIT students to lend their muscle power to the task. By the end of the day, the dumpsters at the end of each block were overflowing, and our alleys were presentable for the first time in many decades. This was only the start of Paul's career as a neighborhood activist. Over time, he played a leading role in a host of zoning and licensing disputes, and stood up for zoning changes which ended the threat of Park Plaza project, and the original New England Life proposal for Boylston Street.

There are only a few of us left who served through the early campaigns with Paul. The collective memory is growing dim. It is not necessary, however, for the current membership to know the details of each and every battle in which Paul played a part. The lesson that we should draw from Paul's high sense of civic responsibility is that good governance depends upon the willingness of citizens to participate in the political process and thereby shape the future of their communities. Paul was well grounded in the principles of the New England form of government. He understood that the Neighborhood Association was the most appropriate agency to determine what was in the best interest of the residents of the Back Bay. He recognized that if the Neighborhood Association did not defend the Back Bay, the future of the neighborhood would pass by default to planners in the city and state governments, who might have very different ideas as to what would be appropriate for our neighborhood. The Neighborhood Association will best honor Paul's memory by continuing our tradition of speaking clearly and forcefully on behalf of the community.

For Paul, fighting for the Back Bay neighborhood was a privilege and a pleasure. Paul thoroughly enjoyed his civic endeavors. He witnessed many more victories than defeats. After a setback, Paul never rested very long before beginning the counter attack. We will miss Paul's friendship and will remember his devotion to the neighborhood in which he lived. Our hearts go out to his wife, Susan, and his family.

It's fair to say that without Paul Prindle and a handful of pioneers like him, the Back Bay as we know it today would not exist.

When Paul and Sue moved to the neighborhood in 1967, it was a move into an area where rats were common neighbors in the backyard, where the architectural glories of an earlier era were largely run down. Back Bay wasn't a desirable address; it was a transient place where students and rooming house boarders far outnumbered the few hardy souls who had founded NABB in the previous decade.

The Prindles chose to come to Back Bay, and soon they and a few of the other couples who had moved here at that time chose to do something that was, then, even more unusual: After having children, they *stayed here* and led people in the fight to make this once again a neighborhood in which families would choose to live. They were leaders in the establishment of two key institutions that made this neighborhood family friendly: the Clarendon Street impact on our neighborhood.



His achievements in leading battles against oversized and inappropriate development are legendary. From Park Plaza, an early 1970s proposal that would have permanently shadowed the Common and Public Garden in the gloom of high-rise buildings, to the current Millennium proposal at Massachusetts Avenue, Paul was a chief marshal of the forces of preservation and, perhaps more importantly, of citizen participation. His uncompromising positions gave backbone to those of us in the neighborhood who were more likely to reach middle ground, and moved those compromises closer to the neighborhood's original positions.

Paul saw the value of neighborhoods working together. He reached out to other groups, setting the stage for later alliances that have strengthened all the downtown residential areas and allowed us to have the positive impacts that improved such projects as Copley Place, 500 Boylston Street/222 Berkeley Street, and Prudential. He could do this because he didn't look at where a person came from, or how much money he had, or even whether he might disagree on particular positions or tactics, as we all did from time to time. He appreciated motivation and effort, and his encouragement got results from many of us.

On a personal basis, the Prindles were responsible for the first involvement in NABB of a couple of New York area refugees who had just moved to Back Bay from Brighton in the mid-1970s. I will always be profoundly grateful for the faith that they showed in me that let me grow into a player on the NABB stage.

Spring Alley Rally 2000 Paul Prindle's legacy lives on as Chair Chris Mitchell and the MIT fraternities lend muscle to sweeping the alleys.