

Boston Peninsula to the east and that of the Shawmut Peninsula to the west. Thus, orchestrating a variable, interesting skyline may be more important than establishing some continuous district cornice heights (which some are advocating). As seen from the harbor the architecture of the district will have to compensate for the dull geography. Furthermore, the view *from* the Seaport District is generally toward an equally featureless, flat, landfill-created landscape: that of Logan Airport immediately across the inner harbor. Views westward toward the downtown and eastward toward South Boston, to the harbor islands and the open Atlantic beyond, are much more engaging (and come with less jet noise) than views directly across the water to the airport. It is interesting to contemplate how the orientation of the blocks in the district – the massing of buildings and their architectural quality – could reflect these conditions. A standard “contextual” approach to the urbanism and architecture of the district may not produce a superb enough setting.

Along the waterfronts of cities world-wide, as well as in Boston, the human instincts both to preserve and to reinvent are robustly acted out in the passion play of waterfront revitalization. This dynamic is ongoing. Cities that at one moment successfully calibrate the imperatives of progress and those of preservation often face new challenges. The very attractions of a balance forged between progress and preservation bring additional pressures for change along valued domains such as waterfronts, threatening new harm to surviving evidence of the city’s prior (even recent) epochs. Still, as Boston has shown over its three centuries, and will demonstrate again in its Seaport District, approaching this predicament with undue caution is rarely the best strategy. Perhaps the tactics of urban planning at the waterfront should be a bit like that of the tide: scouring, reshaping, yet miraculously sustaining the shore.