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Grant-funded Partnership Removes Big Obstacle—Snow

January 10, 2011 — A little collaboration will enable the senior citizens of West Roxbury to go a long way—toward shopping, transportation, and other services in their neighborhoods.

Working with a \$7,000 portion of a \$55,000 grant from The Boston Foundation, Ethos, a senior services agency, is partnering with WalkBoston to literally remove an obstacle for pedestrians—snow.

They've launched a pilot initiative, AgeWell West Roxbury, that will develop a network of volunteers attentive to the specific snow clearance needs of individuals, and will create a range of educational materials for distribution across the wider community.

WalkBoston, a 20-year-old organization that champions pedestrian needs throughout the state, brings to the partnership its extensive research and experience with snow clearance.

Most recently, the organization worked with Somerville residents to develop an effective sidewalk clearance campaign that improved shoveling and led to adoption of a new ordinance designed to strengthen that city's enforcement of shoveling.

Compliance is important but not the ultimate goal of the program in West Roxbury.

"We have to meet the immediate needs of our most vulnerable citizens," said Executive Director Wendy Landman. "At the same time we need to increase overall awareness about established snow clearance rules for sidewalks and other areas.

"We'd like snow shoveling to be a social norm. Without it, basic mobility and human rights are curtailed."

Landman, who is "always thinking about replicating effective programs," looks to create a model for finding and engaging a roster of people to take care of neighborhood shoveling, adding that shovelers are "hard to find and hard to pay" if you're a senior citizen or disabled.

With 25% of its population aged 60+, West Roxbury has more elders living in single-family homes than any other neighborhood in Boston and was a natural site for a partnership focused on removing obstacles to senior citizens' mobility.

Ethos first approached WalkBoston after both organizations' executive directors met casually at a conference on aging. It was a natural fit considering WalkBoston's track record with the issue of snow removal strategies and its reputation for preferring partnerships to solo efforts.

"We collaborate on practically all our projects," she says. "Sometimes we approach other nonprofits, sometimes they approach us."

For example, Bay State Roads, a program to train municipal public works employees, brought in WalkBoston to provide education on snow removal techniques.

As with all of their collaborative efforts, the partnering organizations "work together but each stay aligned with their mission," Landman says.