

# Seven things you should know about John Barros

By **Megan Woolhouse** GLOBE STAFF OCTOBER 19, 2014  
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John Barros, chief of economic development for Boston since February, has changes large and small on his radar.

Roxbury-born and Dartmouth College-educated, Barros, 41, is overseeing the remaking of the Boston Redevelopment Authority as well as well as various agencies dedicated to job creation and neighborhood redevelopment. He recently spoke with Globe reporter Megan Woolhouse about the opportunities and challenges ahead. Here's what she found out:

1 Boston is among the nation's fastest growing cities, and Barros's role is to promote development while keeping the city inclusive and affordable. He spends considerable time working with small businesses, especially those owned by women and minorities, to find ways that local government can help them compete in the marketplace.

*"There's two taglines: new opportunities and who gets to take advantage of those opportunities," he said. "Boston has tremendous opportunity to grow. But with development comes the responsibility to steward those opportunities in a way that more people can take advantage."*

2 Barros is former executive director of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, which helped revitalize the Dudley Square area. Now, that the neighborhood is attracting new investment, businesses, and people, maintaining affordable housing is key to allowing longtime residents to share in the transformation.

*"Dudley is the symbol. We have to make sure we have*

*housing for low and moderate income, we have to make sure that working families have a place in Boston. You don't stop developing to do that. You make sure you can leverage all the growth to do that."*

3Barros said he moved with his wife and two young children to the Uphams Corner part of Dorchester, not far from the Roxbury street where he was born and raised.

*"I've still got a lot of family in that neighborhood. I still feel committed to lifelong work of really improving that part of the city. Being a homeowner is really a part of that."*

4As a former School Committee member, he expressed concern about the state of Madison Park Technical Vocational High School, the city's only vocational school and one of the worst-performing schools in the state. The headmaster recently resigned under pressure. Barros called the school "an amazing asset" that needs stable leadership.

*"I was encouraged that our students were on it, they sounded the alarm [about the problems.] Then the adults around them got together and responded. That's a silver lining in this whole thing."*

5Barros will be the boss of the next Boston Redevelopment Authority chief, but he did not say when a new director would be named. An audit ordered by Mayor Martin J. Walsh found an agency incapable of performing basic functions, such as tracking payments, collecting rent on public property, and enforcing agreements with developers.  
total:0

*"Clearly the mayor is looking at the recommendations and concerns that came out of the last audit and launching some new inquiries."*

6Business leaders are trying to get Boston go to host the 2024 Olympics, but Barros says a citywide planning effort to guide development through 2030 is needed. That plan will offer direction as to how the Olympics might fit.

*“I support the idea of thinking about Boston as a world class city that can host any major event. The question is: Where is Boston going, what is Boston’s future, and will the Olympics help us get there?”*

7Chinese investors have approached Barros about real estate possibilities and asked him questions about the federal EB-5 program, which grants visas to foreign investors involved in commercial enterprises. He said he sees additional opportunities to boost investment and tourism from Asia.

*“There’s real low-hanging fruit in building relations internationally. Those types of opportunities we haven’t really explored or nurtured in the past. We can do a lot more.”*

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