

Army Corps Advertises Phase I Construction for Muddy River Project

In the late 1800s, the renowned landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted worked with engineer Alexis French to create a park that would also serve as a flood control channel. They called the project the Muddy River Improvement and, by linking it to ponds upstream and the Fens downstream, created part of the historic Emerald Necklace Park System. A century later, a master plan was developed for restoration of the historic system. It noted flooding but did not emphasize this particular function of the park. In 1996, a massive rain event changed that. The Muddy River overtopped its banks and the park couldn't contain the flood.

Storm water filled MBTA tunnels and Kenmore station. Hospitals, schools, businesses and homes were damaged. It became clear that the cumulative effect of 100 years of changes meant that the Muddy's once-effective storm water control system could no longer do its job. The neighborhood had been covered by buildings, roads, and sidewalks that shed water into the Muddy. The river itself had been narrowed by undersized culverts (pipes) and the invasive vegetation that grew along the banks. Sediment from roadway runoff and eroding banks had reduced capacity even further.

The City of Boston and Town of Brookline worked in collaboration with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and U. S. Army Corps of Engineers to develop a comprehensive program to restore the Muddy River. Funding for the \$92 million effort comes from the Army Corps; the Massachusetts Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs and its Department of Conservation and Recreation; Boston and Brookline.

The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers designed the Muddy River Project to reduce flood damage and improve ecosystems. At the same time, the Project will restore an historic landmark, expand habitat areas and improve access through the park system. The first phase of the project was advertised by the Corps in January 2012 and involves daylighting the Muddy River in the areas in front of the Landmark Center and between Brookline Avenue and Avenue Louis Pasteur. ("Daylighting" means taking a river that has been put underground in pipes and opening it up to the daylight once again.) The work will include new river crossings with granite faced bridges and enhanced wetland plantings. Phase 2 includes dredging the Muddy upstream and downstream of the Phase 1 area, removing invasive reeds and replanting of the river's edge with appropriate plants selected from the historic planting plans. The work in both phases – opening the river, dredging and removing invasive plants - improves habitat and lets the river convey more rainwater.

The Muddy River Project is an essential part of the on-going effort to rehabilitate the Emerald Necklace park system. The rehabilitation is guided by The Emerald Necklace Environmental Improvements Master Plan and the Muddy River Flood Control, Water Quality, Habitat Enhancement and Historic Preservation Project. This overarching effort includes improvements at Charlesgate (completed in 2005), as well as the Back Bay Fens, Riverway, and Olmsted parks.