

## Section 7.2.4:

**CHARLESTOWN**

For an explanation of the organization, content and maps in this section, please see the Introduction to Section 7.2: Community Open Space and Recreation (page 160).

**Background**

Originally settled in 1629, Charlestown was already a thriving harbor-side community by the time of the American Revolution and did not become a part of Boston until 1874. A naval shipyard was established in 1800, generating a mixture of industry and port-related activities as well as large sections of tenement housing for workers. As waves of working class Europeans arrived to work in the shipyard, many of the wealthy old Charlestown families began to move out.

With World War II placing a heavy demand on the shipyard, many of the neighborhood's homes were converted into rooming houses to accommodate both workers and ship crews.

During the immediate post-war period, the area began a decline that continued until the urban renewal efforts of the 1970s. A key part of this reinvestment was the redevelopment of the Charlestown Navy Yard for office, research, and residential uses. With adjacent parcels converted for mixed-use development, and the new Paul Revere and City Square state parks, the southern gateway to the neighborhood has been transformed.

**Open Space Access & Equity**

This neighborhood has seen over 8% population growth between the 2000 and 2010 censuses. It contains 3.09 acres of open space per 1,000 residents which is among the lowest ratio citywide—particularly for a residential neighborhood.

Charlestown is a dense walkable neighborhood that's just over 1 mile from one end to the other. Despite its compact nature, the neighborhood is best described via its four distinct geographic areas.

**Town Hill/Breed's Hill**

This southern section of Charlestown is primarily residential with some institutional buildings and churches. Many of its row-houses have been converted into condominiums and two-family houses to accommodate an influx of new residents. Historical open spaces such as the John Harvard Mall and City Square Park are in the Town Hill area.

The Monument Square National Register District surrounds the Bunker Hill Monument. The Training Field (aka Winthrop Square) serves as the centerpiece of a cohesive residential community known as Breed's Hill. Rich in passive open space, the Town Hill/Breed's Hill area accesses active recreation spaces around its perimeter to accommodate its expanding population: at Bunker Hill Community College, the Navy Yard, Paul Revere Park, Rutherford Union, and Harvard Mall. The area with the most limited access to open space is the part of the neighborhood nearest the Bunker Hill Monument. The monument itself is a significant landscape feature, but offers limited recreational value to residents (Charlestown Map 10).

**Bunker Hill/Little Mystic**

This area contains most of Charlestown's one- and two-family houses. It features a variety of playgrounds and waterfront access areas, including Ryan, Doherty, and Barry Playgrounds. Ryan provides access to the Mystic River, while Barry provides access along the Little Mystic River. The latter water body also has public housing developments and abandoned sites at its edges, as well as a public access boat ramp. The nearby Charlestown High School has a full complex of ball fields and tennis and basketball courts, now maintained by the Parks Department.

**Charlestown Navy Yard**

This area has developed as a distinct neighborhood with affordable, elderly, and market-rate housing. The historic buildings have been rehabbed as office space and research facilities to provide employment and a substantial daytime population. Shipyard Park is a family-oriented facility, and the wharves allow increased public waterfront access.

**Rutherford Avenue and the Neck**

This area is on the western side of Charlestown bordering Somerville and is dominated by transportation arteries. While there is a small residential enclave north of Cambridge Street, most land uses are commercial or industrial. This section of Charlestown is served by the open spaces at Edwards Playground, Rutherford/Union and Caldwell Street. The Sullivan Square side of the neighborhood has much lower population densities, so there is not yet a pronounced park need score for this area (Charlestown Map 3). As redevelopment of Sullivan Square sub-area moves forward, new public park areas must be incorporated into the neighborhood to serve these new residents.

**Future Development**

The Rutherford Avenue/Sullivan Square improvement initiative being undertaken by the BTB with assistance from the BRA can have benefits for the open space character of this part of Charlestown. After a multi-year community involved planning process, the BTB is proposing an all-surface/at-grade option for the reconstruction of Rutherford Avenue from the City Square area to the Alford Street Bridge over the Mystic River. This option would result a corridor along the east side of Rutherford Avenue that would provide a multi-use path, tree plantings, and landscaping to make Rutherford Avenue a more multi-modal street that improves neighborhood connectivity.

This plan would also create a new block pattern in the Sullivan Square area, eliminating the enlarged traffic island that we now refer to as Sullivan Square, but has no reference to the original 19<sup>th</sup> century community square that no longer exists. The new streets and block pattern would make pedestrian connections from the residential community to the Sullivan Square Orange Line station safer and more pleasant. It would also provide space for growth of new residential buildings. The improved pedestrian connections over Rutherford Avenue would allow residents in this new area to better connect to Ryan Playground and the Mystic River.

While the BTD provided the proposed block pattern/street network, the BRA created a proposed set of development guidelines for these blocks, called the Sullivan Square Disposition Study (December 2013). This study proposes a series of small-scale linked open spaces, in part to link the T station to Ryan Playground and the main residential community in Charlestown.

The premise of a linked series of small spaces in the Sullivan Square area should be evaluated to understand if it brings enough open space value to this specific sub-area and the Charlestown community as a whole. The study proposes that the private sector generate the funding for construction and maintenance of these spaces. The City and the BRA will need to work together to insure this occurs even in the face of difficult market conditions.

In addition, the concept of the landscaped corridor for pedestrian and bicycle travel along the eastern flank of the renewed Rutherford Avenue surface artery needs to be evaluated as well for feasibility of maintenance and operation as the steward for this new open space has yet to be determined.

Another proposal suggested by Charlestown community activists, WalkBoston, and MassBike would convert the abandoned Mystic Wharf Branch rail line along the northeastern side of Charlestown to a bicycle and pedestrian corridor. This area of Charlestown has no access to the Mystic River except at the Schraffts Center and Ryan Playground due to the Designated Port Area and associated industrial and commercial uses. This bicycle/pedestrian corridor, also known as the Medford Street Corridor, can complement the Rutherford Avenue bicycle/pedestrian corridor—they intersect at the Sullivan Square area—and connect to the Harborwalk at the Little Mystic Channel, creating a greenway ring around Charlestown. It is held by Massport, which now has experience as a green space manager in East Boston (Piers Park, Bremen Street Park, Narrow Gauge Link Pathway). Massport has stopped further consideration of this rail right-of-way as a potential haul road and freight corridor. The bicycle/pedestrian corridor proposal would need evaluation to see if it is a feasible project.

At Bunker Hill Community College, the current Master Plan calls for new buildings to be added and linked to existing buildings, creating in the process a new central quadrangle with various sub-spaces. This plan appears to spare the active recreation facilities at the north end of the campus, and concentrate buildings and academic and support activities at the southern and central end of the campus, near the Bunker Hill Orange Line station.

The BRA released the Charlestown Navy Yard Waterfront Activation Plan (2007) proposing a public access and open space network that will reinforce the site’s unique historical character and common identity. It would create interpretative trail segments for the Navy Yard, reinforced with a wayfinding system. The plan proposes a stewardship entity for the system of spaces that would coordinate the various entities involved in the Yard, program the spaces with events, target further improvements, and fundraise to implement the plan.

## Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile

### CHARLESTOWN

Population	
2010 Census	16,439
2000 Census	15,195
<b>Population Growth/Decline, 2000–2010</b>	<b>8.2%</b>

Population Density		Persons per Acre
2010 Census		18.9
2000 Census		17.4
<b>Density Change, 2000–2010</b>		<b>1.5</b>

Age	Persons	Percent of Population
0 to 9	1,806	11%
10 to 19	1,108	7%
20 to 34	5,494	33%
35 to 54	4,668	28%
55 to 64	1,679	10%
65 and over	1,684	10%

Teens, City to Community Comparison	Total Population	Total Children 12-17	% of Boston's Children 12-17	Children 12-17 as % of Neighborhood Population
Boston	617,594	33,920	100.0%	5.5%
Charlestown	16,439	647	1.9%	3.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Decennial Census, BRA Research Division Analysis

Race/Ethnicity/Latino Status	Persons	Percent of Population
White alone	12,458	76%
Hispanic or Latino	1,591	10%
Black or African American alone	764	5%
Asian alone	1,334	8%
Other	292	2%

Median Household Income
\$83,282

Source: US Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey, BRA Research Division Analysis

Percent of Households by Number of Vehicles Available	
No vehicles	24%
1 vehicle	53%
2 vehicles	22%
3 or more vehicles	2%

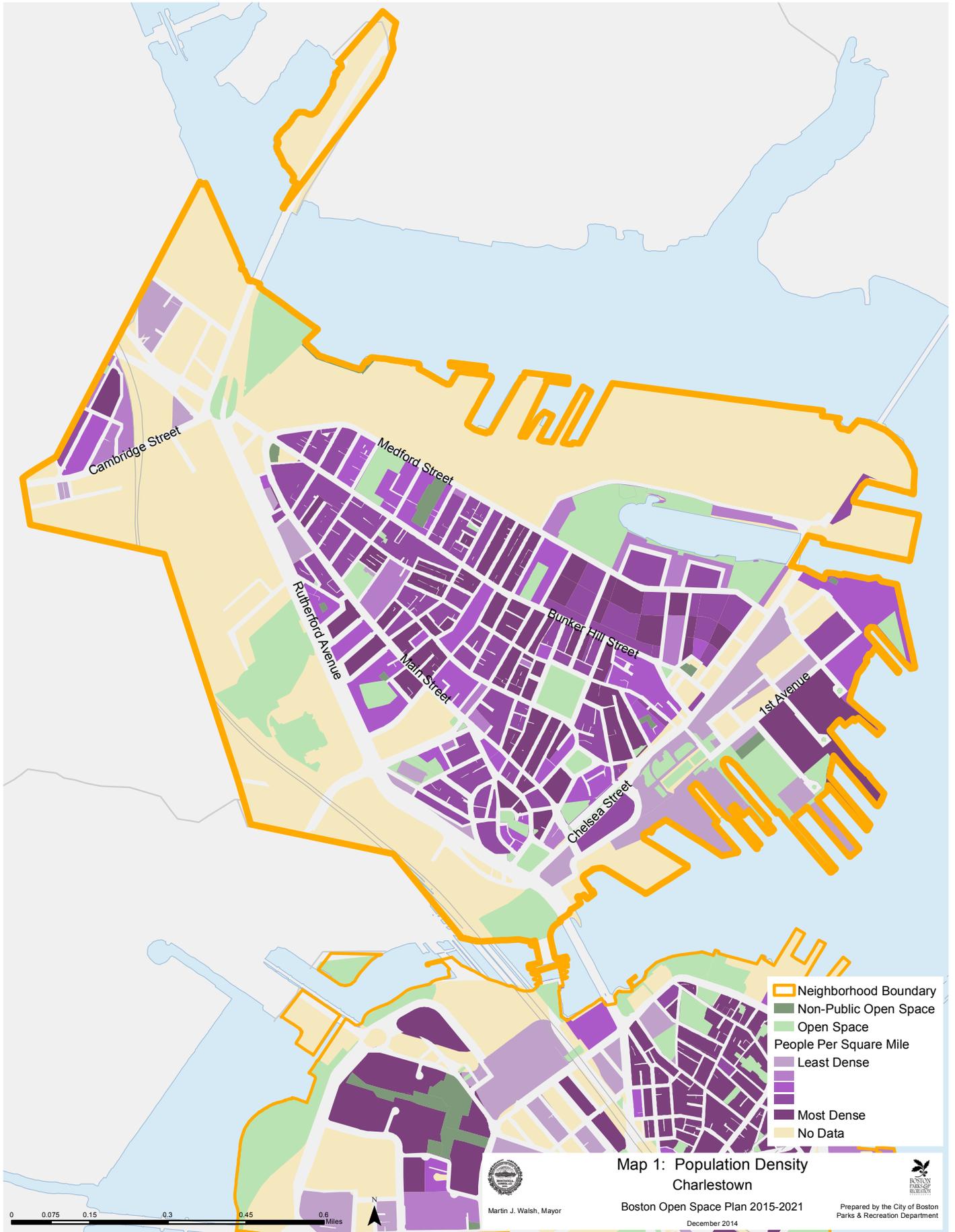
Source: American Community Survey 2006-2010; BRA Research Division Analysis

Population* with Disability	Persons	Percent of Population
Boston	72,390	11.6%
Charlestown	1,643	9.5%

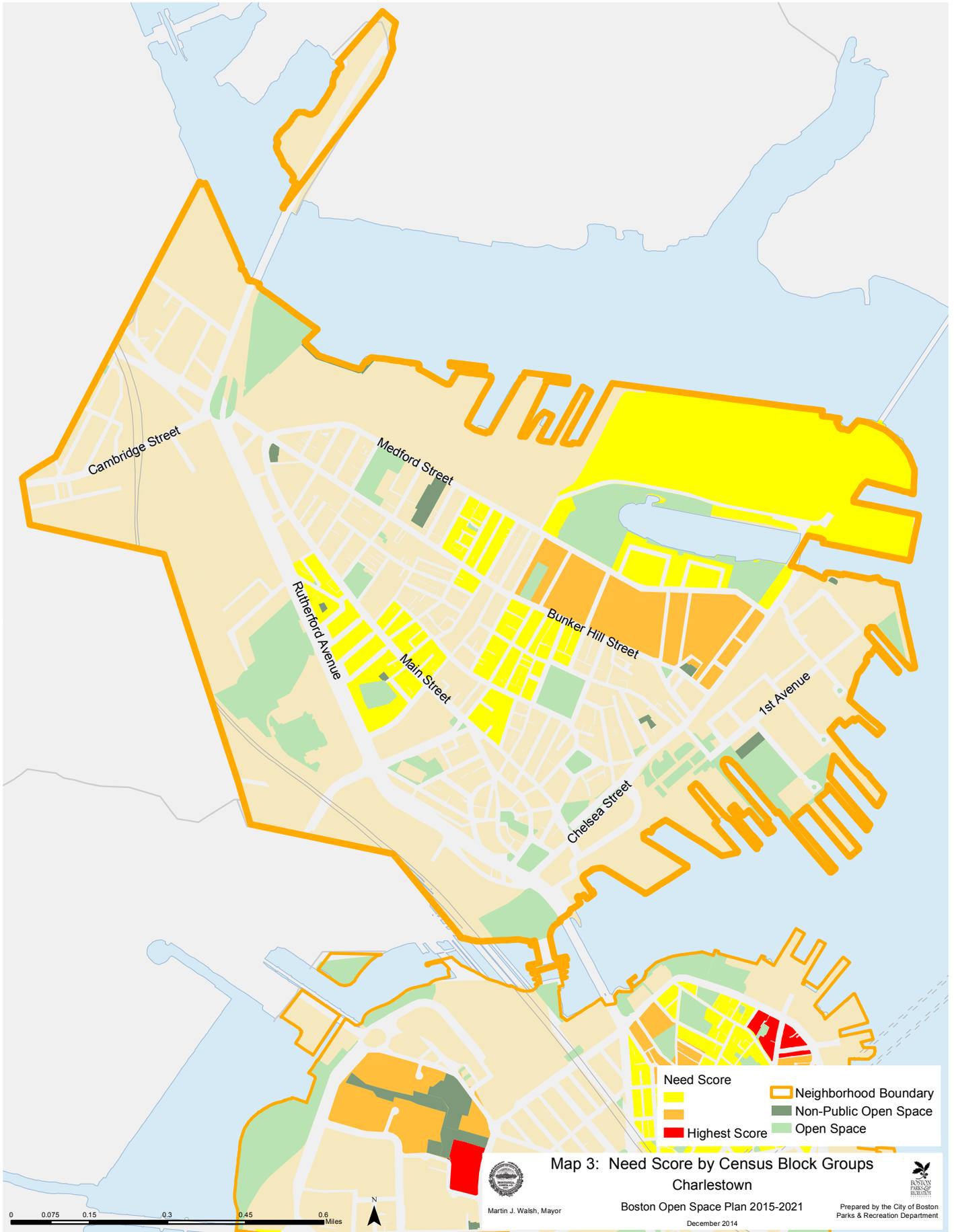
\*Civilian Noninstitutionalized  
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 American Community Survey, BRA Research Division Analysis

N.B.: “0%” means “less than 1%”

All Tables 2010 U.S. Decennial Census, unless otherwise noted













Map 6: Open Space by Protection Status  
Charlestown

Boston Open Space Plan 2015-2021

December 2014



Martin J. Walsh, Mayor



Prepared by the City of Boston  
Parks & Recreation Department







