
Open Space Plan 2008-2012

Section 7

Analysis of Needs

**Section 7.2.1 Community Open
Space & Recreation
ALLSTON-BRIGHTON**

Section 7.2.1: Community Open Space & Recreation ALLSTON-BRIGHTON

THE SETTING

History

Like many Boston neighborhoods, the Allston-Brighton area was established in the colonial era (1635) with land grants. A sparsely settled agricultural pattern prevailed until the filling in of the Back Bay and Kenmore Square areas in the late 1800s, by which time the Brighton stockyards had become the foremost cattle market in the region. Another important agricultural development in Brighton was the growth of horticulture: commercial gardens and extensive greenhouses covered many of the hills of Brighton. The Massachusetts Horticultural Society was founded in Brighton in 1829 and the area became well known for the many flowers and other decorative plants, fruit trees, and vegetables developed by Brighton growers. The grounds of Saint John's Seminary are the remains of an old estate orchard. In fact, some historians believe the first tomato in America was grown in Brighton.

In the late 1800s, the extension of streetcar lines – especially along the Commonwealth Avenue corridor – encouraged high quality residential development in Brighton, much of which remains today.

Proximity to the Charles River and the Boston & Albany Railroad encouraged construction of stockyards, slaughterhouses, and meatpacking operations in both Allston and the northern and eastern sections of Brighton. As the nation expanded westward and refrigerated railroad cars were introduced, regional stockyards, like those in Brighton, declined in importance. These cattle-related businesses were replaced over time by other industrial plants, commercial warehouses, and homes.

After World War II, the Massachusetts Turnpike Extension further divided this neighborhood. Wider than the existing railroad tracks, the Pike added more noise and air pollution as it severed pedestrian links on either side. Proximity to expanding universities on all sides resulted in a considerable influx of students, coupled with younger families and immigrants from many lands. These changing population patterns in turn spurred much conversion of large-scale apartments and 19th century single family homes to smaller rental units and condominiums.

Needs Analysis*Demographics/Housing*

Allston-Brighton's 1990 population of 70,284 included Irish, Italian, Greek, Jewish, and more recently, Asian, Eastern European, African-American and Hispanic ethnic groups. The 1990 population total represented an 8.76% increase from the 1980 figure of 64,622, while the figure for 2000 is 69,648, a slight decrease (-0.09%) from the 1990 total.

While diversity is the order of the day as far as race/ethnicity is concerned in Allston-Brighton, two trends stand out: the decline in the black population and the rise in the Asian/Pacific Islander population. Allston-Brighton's 1990 population was 73% white, 7% black, 9% Hispanic, and 10% Asian/Pacific Islander. In 2000, 74% were white, 4% black, 9% Hispanic, and 14% Asian/Pacific Islander. In the year 2000, the Census for the first time offered the choice of "multi-racial." Four percent (4%) of the population identified themselves in this category. This new category and the new category of "some other race" may explain, in part, the 3% drop in the black population in this neighborhood from 1990 to 2000.

Socio-economic and demographic data bear out the image of Allston-Brighton as a neighborhood with a significant young adult-oriented population. The age cohort of 18-24 in Allston-Brighton was 30%, compared to a citywide figure of 16%. Allston-Brighton's age profile shows that in 1990 12% of the population was 17 years of age or younger versus 19% for the city as a whole [the comparable figures for 2000 were 9% in Allston/Brighton versus 20% in Boston].

Allston-Brighton's median household income was \$38,941, comparable to the citywide average of \$39,629. In addition, one-third (32%) of all Allston-Brighton households do not have a vehicle compared to 35% for the city as a whole. Some of these certainly are among the nearly 20,000 persons in the community who attend college.

The widespread presence of college students in the community, as well as the prevalence of rental housing -- from large, multi-dwelling buildings on the Commonwealth Avenue corridor, to triple deckers, to the more recent garden apartments -- means only 20% of housing is owner-occupied. This compares to 32% for the city as a whole. The impact of college students upon the community is further reflected by 51% of the population dwelling in non-family households, living as singles or roommates, compared to 29% across the city.

Needs Analysis

Housing in Allston-Brighton includes one-to-six family structures, row houses, garden apartments, and medium-rise apartment buildings, all in substantial numbers. The main concentration of units per structure is the mid-range of 3 to 49 units. Allston-Brighton has 60% of units in these 3 to 49 unit structures versus 56% for Boston. However, within this range, the 10 to 49 unit structure is more heavily represented than the 3 to 9 unit structures in Allston-Brighton versus Boston. Therefore, with medium-range apartment units predominating, there is a greater dependence on public open space to meet the needs of a highly dense neighborhood: 15,974.3 persons per square mile versus 12,172.3 persons per square mile citywide.

THE OPEN SPACE SYSTEM TODAY

Equity and Investment

Allston-Brighton has 351 protected acres in its inventory of parks, playgrounds, squares, malls, reservations, community gardens, and other open spaces. This gives this neighborhood a ratio of 5.03 acres of protected open space per 1,000 residents, compared to a citywide ratio of 7.47 acres per 1,000 residents. Urban wilds, college athletic fields, and other institutionally owned lands add another 158 acres of unprotected open space to this densely populated neighborhood.

The City of Boston has invested over \$2 million in improving and protecting 10 facilities in the past six years through the city's capital improvement program (see table).

Allston-Brighton Captial Projects 2001-2006	
Cassidy Playground	\$122,150
Fidelis Way Park	\$178,150
Hardiman Playground	\$237,652
Hobart Park	\$366,018
Hooker / Sorrento Playground	\$366,018
McKinney Playground	\$264,267
Penniman Road Play Area	\$264,267
Ringer Playground	\$521,530
Rogers Park	\$83,643
Smith Playground	\$358,446
Total	\$2,762,141

Needs Analysis

Assessment

Allston-Brighton has a rich palette of public parkland and other contributing open spaces. City of Boston facilities include many neighborhood parks with play and sports facilities, an 18th century historic cemetery, a 19th century landscaped cemetery, one of the neighborhood's four community gardens, and passive areas such as Chandler Pond and the wooded part of Ringer Park. The urban wilds are numerous, helping to provide outlets for contact with nature. Parkland of historic and regional significance includes the DCR's Chestnut Hill Reservoir and Charles River Reservation. Commonwealth Avenue is notable as an historic boulevard and a link in the open space system. Retaining and protecting community access to open space owned by hospitals, schools, and religious organizations in Allston and Brighton, often taken for granted, will be an important issue in the future, especially as new uses are found and planned for some of these institutional sites.

Allston

This part of the community is situated between the Charles River and the east-west line composed of Commonwealth Avenue, Brighton Avenue, and North Beacon Street. Allston's internal spine consists of the Massachusetts Turnpike Extension and adjacent railroad tracks. The Harvard athletic complex, including Harvard Stadium, and the Harvard Business School campus anchors its northeast corner. Residential areas are largely clustered along the Turnpike/railroad track spine. Detached wood-frame housing predominates while there are brick apartment complexes and rowhouses along major streets. In-fill building of numerous garden apartments several decades ago has increased population density while providing additional rental housing. The population is diverse and largely rental, including numerous college students.

This northeast portion of the larger community has fewer neighborhood parks. The disorganized growth of Allston has resulted in difficult community access to existing parklands as well as a general lack of green space in the community.

The DCR's Charles River Reservation is a very significant regional and neighborhood recreational resource – used by picnickers, canoeists, kayakers, boaters, runners, walkers, bicyclists, and community gardeners. The DCR has rebuilt Artesani Playground, the children's play lot in the Herter Park section of the Reservation. Neighborhood access to the Reservation however is difficult at some points across the Massachusetts Turnpike and Soldier's Field Road.

Needs Analysis

The new master plan for the Charles River Reservation will present future opportunities to improve access to this important facility. Other recommendations include creating a new visitor center at Herter Park with interpretive sites and a nature loop, new ornamental plantings at the bridge landings and the clearing of riverbank vegetation for new scenic vistas, the improvement of the moat in Herter Park for better public access to the water, and a new amenity cluster and food concession at Herter Park.

In addition to the inventory of public recreational lands, Harvard University's Allston campuses include open space and a sports complex. With sizable land purchases in Allston by Harvard in the 1990s, it is hoped that the community will also benefit by improvements to the public realm in scenic, passive, and recreation facilities that will result from development of these new holdings.

Brighton

Larger in area than Allston, Brighton stretches south to Brookline, west to Chestnut Hill, and north to Newton. Thoroughfares, commercial centers, institutional campuses, and varied residential sub-neighborhoods visually delineate it. Industrial and commercial facilities predominate only along Brighton Avenue and North Beacon Street on the northern Allston border. Except for Commonwealth Avenue and Chestnut Hill Avenue, with their large apartment and condominium blocks, Brighton's neighborhoods are defined mostly by detached wood-frame single- and multiple-unit houses.

The larger open spaces in Brighton are generally clustered in the central area between Commonwealth Avenue and the Cambridge Street-Washington Street corridor. Running through the most densely populated areas of both Allston and Brighton is Commonwealth Avenue, which includes the B-line trolley of the MBTA. Several MBTA bus lines also serve Allston-Brighton. This helps enable good access to the parks in this central area, as well as in the southwest corner of the sub-neighborhood. The C-line trolley terminus at Cleveland Circle also serves this southwest corner.

Brighton has a generally good distribution of existing neighborhood parks. It has great variety in its open space as well, including such resources as Evergreen Cemetery and Chestnut Hill Reservoir. Increased street greening, such as along Commonwealth Avenue, is a major objective, as is using thoroughfares to link and strengthen the area's open space system as a whole.

Needs Analysis

The recent move of the Allston-Brighton branch of the YMCA from its location next to Rogers Park westward to a location in Oak Square next to Hardiman will likely place additional use and pressure on Hardiman. Additional city resources may be needed to address this pressure.

Unprotected urban wilds represent 15% of the neighborhood's acreage of all open space. Almost all of the wilds are owned by institutions rather than publicly held.

In this highly dense sub-neighborhood, as in the Allston-Harvard situation, much available open land is held by institutions. Working with these institutions to preserve and make accessible some part of these lands in future developments will be a key approach to addressing the open space needs of this neighborhood, whether for scenic, ecological, passive, or active recreation opportunities. This is especially true regarding the recent purchase of the St. John's Seminary property by Boston College for institutional expansion.

Chandler Pond itself has recently been restored, but the surrounding landscape needs improvements. The Chandler Pond Preservation Society, conducted a pilot project along a portion of the Lake Shore Road shoreline. Volunteers planted emergent wetland vegetation along the shoreline edge to replace the eroding lawn-oriented shoreline that exists along that side of the pond. It has so far been successful in taking hold in the newly planted area. Further work along this line, as well as other techniques to decrease pollution into the pond from the watershed, will help improve water quality and maintain the pond depths achieved through the recent dredging project. Capital improvements to the landscape (i.e., Gallagher Memorial Park) need to be scheduled. In addition to new parkway tree plantings and the clearing of riverbank vegetation for new scenic vistas, the new master plan for the Charles River Reservation calls for "an entirely new fifteen-acre park ... fronting on the river with three direct links to the Brighton neighborhood." (From the Executive Summary, Charles River Basin: The Second Century.) The DCR has major tasks to accomplish before the proposed new park will be ready to open: "acquisition of land, removal of the old DCR pool facility, and moving the parkway back from the river." Yet it is worth striving for, as this new park will add considerable access to the Charles River Reservation from Brighton, which currently has limited access. It will also provide much-needed opportunities for flexible field arrangements for local sports enthusiasts.

THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

One important goal will be to continue and expand public/institutional partnerships to protect and enhance recreational opportunities for community members. Efforts to make Allston greener and improve pedestrian and bicycle access to existing parklands need to continue. Rehabilitation of the Charles River Reservation, particularly its pathways and shoreline, is a community goal as well as a master plan goal. The rehabilitation should take place along with improved access from the community to this regional park. The re-greening of the Commonwealth Avenue spine needs to be implemented once transportation funding for the arterial reconstruction is in place. A comprehensive approach with an emphasis on improving the Chestnut Hill Reservoir/historic pump station area as a gateway to Boston would benefit the entire community. Environmental improvements at Chandler Pond were recently completed and can serve as a model for upgrading other green and open spaces with community support.

Opportunities

Allston

- Develop an Allston greening plan with the assistance of the BRA and the Allston-Brighton Community Development Corporation's Allston-Brighton Green Space Advocates (ABGSA). Focus on the southern boundary thoroughfares, pedestrian and bicycle access to and among parks, and opportunities for public open space at Allston Landing North such as BRA and community recommendations for active recreational facilities. Improvements to the Massachusetts Turnpike right-of-way, particularly along Lincoln Street, need to be made to reduce noise and screen the highway from view.
- Support Department of Conservation and Recreation Charles River Reservation master plan implementation efforts to provide recreational opportunities and access to them in keeping with the historic character of the parkland and to meet its extraordinary maintenance needs. Improve the recreational paths and shoreline in accordance with the master plan. Improve bicycle and pedestrian access to the Reservation from the Allston sub-neighborhoods to the south, especially at the Telford Street and Everett Street crossings.
- Support implementation of open space recommendations of the BRA's North Allston Strategic Framework for Planning (NASFP), such as strengthening links to Herter Park and

Needs Analysis

- other sections of the Charles River Reservation. Work for the River Walk promenade suggested by the NASFP, linking the Charles River Reservation near the Cambridge Street crossing, passing through Harvard's new and existing campus, to Smith Field and the Herter Park portion of the Reservation.
- Work with Harvard University to create more community benefits from its existing open spaces and sports complex. Urge the provision of open space amenities in future developments on Harvard University land to reduce impacts on existing public resources. Provide community and public realm benefits from new Harvard developments to mitigate impacts and to better integrate these new developments with the surrounding community. Work with Harvard to insure better access to the Charles from the residential neighborhood, such as the greening of the Everett Street streetscape.
 - Continue to fund capital rehabilitation of city park facilities as needed in the capital renewal cycle.
 - Preserve the parkway landscape character of Soldiers Field Road/Storrow Drive through zoning setbacks and height limitations for properties along their edge. Seek preservation of open space along the parkway's inboard edge, especially at Soldiers Field.
 - Create an Outreach Partners program parallel to the Park Partners program to stimulate community recreational activities on non-publicly owned land. Encourage and assist universities and other institutions, developers, and businesses in planning and implementing recreational programming, maintenance, and capital projects. Offer technical assistance regarding planning and design for development that also protects existing open space or creates new neighborhood park facilities.
 - Support new community-based Park Partner programs using Oak Square as a model.

Brighton

- Strengthen Brighton's existing public open space system. Explore opportunities such as strengthening the connections with surrounding parks, cemeteries, and urban wilds along Commonwealth Avenue, Market Street, and Chestnut Hill Avenue, and planting more street trees along Warren and Washington Streets.

Needs Analysis

- Design for the re-greening of Commonwealth Avenue using the BRA plan and the original Olmsted plan for guidance. Provide seating and other amenities for specific areas as requested by the community.
- Continue to fund capital rehabilitation of city park facilities as needed in the capital renewal cycle, such as at Rogers and Brighton Square.
- Work with the BRA to develop an open space preservation strategy for institutional lands with open space or natural resource values. Approach institutions and the community with a partnership concept for future implementation. Address community needs for open space as planning for Boston College's institutional master plan incorporates the St. John's Seminary properties it recently purchased.
- Advance a watershed-based approach to protecting water quality at Chandler Pond. Schedule capital funds to rehabilitate the path and other passive features of the park. Continue the shoreline re-vegetation and stabilization pilot project. Maintain selected "get-down" areas where fishing enthusiasts and others can get down to the water's edge without disturbing the wetland shoreline edge plantings.
- Work with the DCR to investigate the feasibility of making the Chestnut Hill Reservoir a more accessible resource at the water's edge. Determine if there can be at least a segment of the shoreline where people can approach the water's edge within the context of a supervised, programmed use.
- Maintain the integrity of the landscape surrounding the historic Chestnut Hill pump stations. Make this a key requirement in Requests for Proposals issued for redevelopment of the site.
- Create an Outreach Partners program parallel to the Park Partners program to stimulate community recreational activities on non-publicly owned land. Encourage and assist universities and other institutions, developers, and businesses in planning and implementing recreational programming, maintenance, and capital projects. Offer technical assistance regarding planning and design for development that protects existing open space or creates new neighborhood park facilities.
- Support new community-based Park Partner programs using Oak Square as a model.
- Encourage the DCR's creation of a new 15-acre park for the Brighton area called for in the Charles River Reservation master plan.

Needs Analysis*Community Priorities*

- Provide more ball fields and practice areas, additional dedicated soccer fields and practice areas, and additional play areas for young children.
- Continue to utilize the Park Department's Open Space Acquisition Program to examine, and if found suitable, acquire new open spaces in the community to complement existing resources. Support acquisitions of urban wilds and natural areas to preserve nature in this densely populated neighborhood.
- Protect valued open spaces at the St. John's Seminary urban wild.
- Safeguard the city's ongoing capital improvements in neighborhood parks with adequate maintenance and supplement city maintenance capabilities with community and institutional assistance as needed.
- Provide more passive park amenities along Commonwealth Avenue as part of a general Commonwealth Avenue redevelopment effort. Remove dead trees and replant with new, hardier trees.
- Maintain the area of the running path at Chestnut Hill Reservoir in good condition, focusing especially on public safety and visibility.
- Preserve the landscaping around the two Chestnut Hill pumping stations, regardless of their final uses.
- Provide more community gardens while working with such organizations as Garden Futures for the training of gardeners and supply of critical resources such as water, compost, and trash removal.
- Coordinate efforts between the community, the ParkARTS Program, and the Boston Art Commission regarding appropriate installation and care of public art in parks.
- In the face of increased dog ownership, expand enforcement and signage to regulate the use of dogs in parks and playgrounds. Increase public awareness of water quality impacts on the Charles from stormwater contaminated by dog waste.
- Coordinate maintenance of the improved streetscape on Brighton Avenue/Cambridge Street/Washington Street between the Parks and Recreation Department and the Public Works Department to insure its aesthetic and community economic development values.
- Support community efforts, such as that of the Chandler Pond Preservation Society, to limit Canada Goose visitation of Chandler Pond as one means to improve water quality.