
Open Space Plan 2008-2012

Section 7
Analysis of Needs

**Section 7.2.6 Community Open
Space & Recreation
EAST BOSTON**

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THE SETTING

History

Originally a five-island group, East Boston was connected to Boston with the establishment of the first ferry in 1637. In the 1833, William Sumner established the East Boston Company to develop this area as one of the first planned communities in Boston.

From 1840 to 1865, East Boston began to expand rapidly, becoming a major site for the construction of world-famous clipper ships by well-known builders such as Donald McKay and Samuel Hall. Thus, East Boston became a significant transportation center and shipping port. Attracting a large number of immigrants seeking employment in the shipbuilding industry, its population began to grow dramatically. With the Cunard Line establishing a port of entry in the Maverick Square area by 1839, East Boston became the Ellis Island of New England.

In 1905, the first subway tunnel to downtown was opened. The development of Logan Airport in 1923, the Sumner Tunnel in 1934, and other transportation-related projects severely impacted the neighborhood. Local industrial facilities began to decline in favor of airport-related development and many families left for the suburbs.

Today, despite such pressures, East Boston has stabilized as a neighborhood and in the coming years will have many new investments geared toward public facilities. The new Third Harbor Tunnel (aka Ted Williams Tunnel) will help reduce airport-bound traffic on residential streets. East Boston enjoys an extensive waterfront that will continue to provide redevelopment opportunities for maritime, industrial, commercial, residential, and open space uses.

Needs Analysis*Demographics/Housing*

While East Boston still maintains much of its Italian-American flavor and spirit with succeeding generations continuing to stay in the neighborhood, dramatic changes have taken and are taking shape. The Hispanic population of the neighborhood jumped from a mere 942 in 1980 to close to 6,000 (or 18% of East Boston's total population) in 1990, the largest increase in the Hispanic population of any neighborhood in the city during that period. Most of these new families have settled in the Maverick Square area. In 2000, the Hispanic population again increased dramatically to 14,990, or 39% of the neighborhood's total population.

The total population itself increased by 2% over the 1980 population to almost 33,000 in 1990, indicating signs of stability after three decades of steady decrease. The population grew 16.6% between 1990 and 2000 to 38,413, a significant jump.

In 2000, youth under 18 years of age comprised 23% of the neighborhood population, compared to 20% of the city's population.

A majority of East Boston's housing stock is comprised of triple-deckers with little yard space. The Maverick and Orient Heights housing developments, along with the Heritage Housing complex at Maverick Square, make up the bulk of assisted rentals. Along with a median income lower than the city figure (\$31,311 vs. \$39,629), the neighborhood also has more households with no access to a vehicle compared to Boston as a whole, 41% versus 35%, respectively.

THE OPEN SPACE SYSTEM TODAY*Equity and Investment*

East Boston has 228 acres of protected open space; total open space, both protected and unprotected, equals 370 acres. With a 2000 population of 38,413, East Boston has 5.93 acres of protected open space per thousand persons, only somewhat less than the citywide ratio of 7.47 acres per thousand.

Over 206 acres of open space in East Boston are located in two sizable saltwater marshes. However, there is an increase in open space taking place: there are 11 acres of new open space in the soon-to-be-opened Bremen Street Park.

Needs Analysis

The Parks Department has invested more than four million dollars in open space improvements through the city's capital plan over the past six years (see table).

East Boston Capital Projects 2001-2006	
Belle Isle Marsh Reservation	\$1,039,981
Bennington Street Cemetery	\$109,796
Condor Street Beach Urban Wild	\$1,465,213
East Boston Memorial Park	\$1,160,000
Porzio Park	\$291,164
Putnam Square	\$314,914
Summer & Lamson Street Playground	\$24,750
Total	\$4,405,817

This extensive investment includes the restoration of a waterfront park (Porzio), the creation of a new artificial turf soccer field and running track at Sartori Stadium (East Boston Memorial Park), and the first phase of a regional greenway along East Boston's Chelsea Creek waterfront (Condor Street Beach Urban Wild).

Assessment

East Boston can be divided into four distinct geographic areas:

Eagle Hill

Bordered by the Chelsea River, the Inner Harbor, and the McClellan Highway, this is a primarily residential area with some abandoned industrial uses along the waterfront. Small open spaces like Prescott and Putnam Squares are located at street grid corners. American Legion Playground accommodates active recreation needs. The area is one of East Boston's most stable sections, with many of the homes here having been occupied by the same families for generations.

This area, while rich in history and future potential, is currently lacking in the availability of diverse recreational and passive open space resources. This is especially true for the dense residential streets between Central and Day Squares, with the nearest ball field being at American Legion. The Chelsea River (aka Chelsea Creek) and Inner Harbor edges also remain generally inaccessible and undeveloped. This has changed in part with the development of an accessible natural area and park at Condor Street Beach. New vitality is also being brought to the Inner Harbor shore with current and future market-rate-dominated residential developments there, which include Harborwalk segments and other open space amenities. The City also hopes that its proposed re-use of the

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MBTA Car Barns site will include a recreational facility with potential waterfront access onto Chelsea Creek.

Maverick Square

Roughly the triangular area between Maverick Square, Central Square, and LoPresti Park, Maverick Square contains a mix of residential and industrial uses. Central Square itself is a center for neighborhood commerce. LoPresti Park, located next to the 1,500-resident Maverick Landing public housing development, has ball courts and access to the water. The Maverick Landing housing development has recently received an award-winning re-design, including new waterfront open spaces and a new park, Lombardi Park, to connect the development to the surrounding neighborhood. Traffic arteries and commercial users dominate both Central and Maverick Squares.

The “walk-to-the-sea” mall from Maverick Square suffers from inattention and lack of development. As development proceeds over time along the piers in this area, with the consequent extension of Harborwalk in this area, the “walk-to-the-sea” mall will increase in importance as a gateway from the interior of this neighborhood to its greatest regional open space asset.

Jeffries Point

A largely residential area to the south of East Boston Memorial Park, Jeffries Point has a long waterfront directly facing downtown Boston. While some piers have maritime uses, most are underutilized or abandoned. This is one of the oldest and most densely settled areas of the neighborhood, dominated by triple-decker rowhouses. Brophy Park has a small passive area. The rest of the open space facilities are dominated by ball courts and sitting areas. Porzio Park provides access to the water along with Piers Park, completed several years ago.

This area remains relatively isolated from active recreation facilities with airport-related highway ramps separating the residents from Memorial Park. The first segment of the East Boston Greenway will connect this area to East Boston Memorial Park and Piers Park. The latter is a relatively new but much used and valued asset for both Maverick Square and Jeffries Point residents.

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Orient Heights/Harborview

This northernmost area of Boston has the Orient Heights public housing development as well as a number of single-family homes (the rest of East Boston has multiple-family homes). It is characterized by hills gently sloping up from the water with the housing situated on well-defined terraces.

Available open space facilities have a rich diversity and include a large playground (Noyes), saltwater marshes, Constitution Beach, a cemetery, and small play areas. However, Wood Island Park, a 65-acre Olmsted-designed park, was taken from this neighborhood years ago to make way for an airport runway.

Thanks to the Joint (City-State) Commission on the Boston Harbor Beaches, the DCR has responded with an extensive reinvestment in Constitution Beach. However, pedestrian and bicycle connections between different facilities in the Orient Heights area are lacking and many of the natural areas are unprotected.

East Boston Greenway

A regional linkage of old and new parks is an on-going creation in East Boston. Thanks to strong community advocacy by long-standing local neighborhood groups and the East Boston Greenway Coordinating Council, a vision of a continuous series of waterfront and inland parks and open spaces is being realized. The technical assistance of the Boston Natural Areas Network, supported by the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, has provided guidance to both the community groups and city officials.

With support from community groups, these city officials in turn have built the southernmost 3-mile segment of this urban greenway in the heart of one of the densest neighborhoods in the city. The Boston Parks and Recreation Department, making the first use of the Mayor's Open Space Acquisition Fund, acquired the first section of the East Boston Greenway in 1998. The Department undertook a design process with community input for this first section of the greenway, located between Jeffries Point and Maverick Square, and near the East Boston waterfront close to Piers Park. The federal ISTEAs Enhancements program has helped support design and construction funding for this project. Passive areas are mixed with a walking/biking trail in this grade-separated abandoned rail corridor in the heart of a dense residential East Boston neighborhood.

The East Boston Greenway will now extend from the Piers Park area past East Boston Stadium and the Bremen Street Park. In the

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future, connections will be made to help users reach its northern terminus at the Belle Isle Marsh Reservation. This will thus link and benefit many sub-neighborhoods in East Boston.

THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

While a combination of transportation facilities and industrial uses have severely impacted the quality of life in East Boston, the coming decade promises to reverse this trend if the on-going open space developments continue their focus on strengthening and interlocking of two latent open space systems. The first system is the creation of buffers along proposed transportation corridors for coordinated open space use; and the second system is the extension of such buffer corridors to parks, beaches, and designated walkways along the harborfront. Such a framework would be considerably enhanced by the integration of a third component, access to the vast salt marshes that can be found in the area. In combination with other public realm improvements advocated by the BRA East Boston Master Plan, this program would realize the broadly held vision of East Boston's inherent livability.

Opportunities

- Create a continuous Harborwalk from Porzio Park at Jeffries Point to LoPresti Park in the Maverick area through private developments' compliance with Chapter 91. Expand Harborwalk to stretch from the Harborside Hyatt Hotel to the Condor Street Overlook with key nodes at Clippership Wharf and the Boston East site.
- Enhance the natural resources along East Boston's waterfront through natural area restoration under the Parks Department Urban Wilds Initiative and similar restoration programs of the DCR. Transfer the now restored city-owned Belle Isle Coastal Preserve, now an enclave of the Belle Isle Marsh Reservation, to DCR for integration with the Reservation.
- Promote overall streetscape improvements to all of East Boston's squares, as a component of the Growing Boston Greener Initiative.
- Make special provisions for the elderly in all open space improvements.
- Continue to fund capital rehabilitation of city park facilities as needed in the capital renewal cycle, such as at Noyes, American Legion, and Sumner-Lamson.

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Eagle Hill

- Develop new waterfront open space at the old MBTA Car Barns site that extends access to Chelsea Creek.
- Investigate further potential open space at the vacant Hess Oil site. Explore connecting the Hess Oil site with the Condor Street natural area and the future open space at the MBTA Car Barns site.

Maverick Square

- Promote the inclusion of a much-needed passive open space for the Boston East site. Develop the site to educate citizens about the historical and cultural importance of the clipper ship industry of years past. Initiate a clean-up of the hazardous waste on the site.
- Support efforts by the Boston Housing Authority to link and integrate green spaces around the Maverick Landing housing development.

Jeffries Point

- Enhance access to Sartori Stadium/Memorial Park facilities from the Jeffries Point area.
- Develop additional parkland adjacent to Piers Park that will complement that park and turn another dilapidated dock into green space (Piers Park Phase II and Pier 5).
- Promote pedestrian connections within the Southwest Service Area corridor, from Maverick Street to East Boston Stadium, as part of Airport Edge Buffer Program.

Orient Heights/Harborview

- Promote the extension of the East Boston Greenway from the Bremen Street Park to Belle Isle Marsh Reservation.
- Explore the abandoned railroad right-of-way at the northern end of the Chelsea Creek shore as a potential opportunity to extend the East Boston Greenway.
- Connect Constitution Beach and the East Boston Greenway to Noyes Playground and Orient Heights by improving the streetscape elements along Bennington Street near Saratoga Street, allowing for better pedestrian circulation.
- Explore access to the Wood Island Marsh via the north service area as part of airport edge improvements.

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Community Priorities

- Evaluate the need for street trees to green the neighborhood, as part of the Growing Boston Greener Initiative.
- Provide programs and facilities for informal sports to encourage group activities for teenagers such as volleyball, frisbee, paddleball, and touch football.
- Evaluate the demand for street hockey at public housing developments.

Eagle Hill

- Analyze vacant land in the Eagle Hill area, especially at street intersections, for new open space similar in scale to those at Prescott and Putnam Squares.

Maverick Square

- Stabilize the piers of LoPresti Playground to allow for small scale water access for the neighborhood.
- Support the Massachusetts Turnpike Reclamation Project plans to improve parcels at Decatur, Havre, and Porter Streets adjacent to the tunnel portals.

Orient Heights/Harborview

- Install new playground equipment at Noyes Playground.