
Open Space Plan 2008-2012

Section 7

Analysis of Needs

**Section 7.2.8 Community Open
Space & Recreation
HYDE PARK**

Section 7.2.8: Community Open Space & Recreation HYDE PARK

THE SETTING

History

The last town annexed to Boston (in 1912), Hyde Park's history illustrates the original independent identity of many of Boston's neighborhoods. It also illustrates the steady process that each neighborhood underwent as they came under the influence of Boston. Hyde Park had a manufacturing base as far back as the early eighteenth century with associated residential and commercial development. That manufacturing base was dependent on the major water resource of Hyde Park – the Neponset River. The Mother Brook Canal, built in the mid-1800s to connect the Charles to the Neponset, enhanced the river's flow. The first dam and paper mill was built in 1714 along the Neponset, near where the current Bay State Paper mill (a paper recycling plant) is now located. By the late 1800s, industry (paper and cotton mills and other factories) grew so rapidly from the available water power that the town population increased a startling 900% from 1,512 persons in 1887 to 15,000 persons in 1912. Thanks to the extension of rail lines and the proximity to major highways, manufacturing continues to have a large place in Hyde Park's economy.

Another factor in the rapid population growth of Hyde Park in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was the introduction of the trolley and rail lines to and from Boston. New residents who worked in Boston sought the grassy lawns and lower housing density available in Hyde Park. The pull toward Boston was now taking hold. Dissatisfied with town water rates and service, Hyde Park voted to join Boston in 1911.

Hyde Park provided the backdrop for events in the women's suffrage and abolition movements. Speaking out for human rights were such Hyde Park residents as Angelina and Sarah Grimke, Mehitable Sunderland (the first doctor in Hyde Park), and Theodore Weld. The first black regiment mustered for the Civil War, the Massachusetts 54th – subject of the movie "Glory" – was trained at Camp Meigs in Hyde Park, as was James Munroe Trotter, the first black officer of the American Army.

Needs Analysis

While absorbed into Boston, Hyde Park has maintained a sense of its own independent spirit and identity. Residents were so dissatisfied with the Southwest Expressway proposal that in 1962 they petitioned their legislators to secede from Boston and join Norfolk County. Fortunately, both the secession and the expressway proposals failed.

Demographics/Housing

Hyde Park's total population declined by almost 1% from 30,223 in 1980 to 29,985 in 1990, then increased by almost 6% to 31,697 in 2000. This compares with Boston's 2.6% population growth between 1990 and 2000, and with the -3.5% loss in the adjacent southwest Boston suburban neighborhood of West Roxbury.

Hyde Park's minority population increased from 1980 to 2000. In search of family-oriented housing opportunities, these groups have migrated primarily to Hyde Park's eastern sections, adjacent to largely minority Mattapan. The black share of Hyde Park's racial/ethnic mix in 2000 (41%) is somewhat more than Boston's as a whole (25%). Hyde Park's Hispanic population in 2000 is 13%, comparable to the citywide figure of 14%. The white population dropped from 72% in 1990 to 47% in 2000.

Hyde Park remains a family-oriented neighborhood. Its average household size is 2.7 persons, larger than Boston's 2.3 figure. Its age pyramid closer to the hourglass shape than Boston's: the age groups at the top (45 and over) and at the bottom (0-17) are a larger share than for Boston; and, for the age groups of 18-44, they are a smaller share than for Boston. In 2000, persons aged 17 and under represent 26% of the neighborhood population, while for the city, it is only 20%. The dominant household type is the family: 84% of persons were in family households, versus 65% for Boston.

The Hyde Park median annual household income is \$44,704, above Boston's median annual household income of \$39,629. Poverty has affected a much smaller percentage of persons and families in Hyde Park than in the city of Boston as a whole, with 10% of Hyde Park's population estimated to be below poverty level compared with a figure of 20% citywide.

Single-family homes (48%) and double units (24%) made up nearly three-quarters of the housing stock. The owner-occupancy figure of 59% of households is one of the highest rates in Boston.

Needs Analysis

THE OPEN SPACE SYSTEM TODAY*Equity and Investment*

Hyde Park has a total of 619 acres in its open space inventory of parks, playgrounds, squares, malls, and other open spaces. Of this total, 588 are considered protected. This constitutes a ratio of 18.57 acres of protected open space per thousand persons, which compares very favorably to the city's ratio of 7.47 acres per thousand persons.

The City of Boston invested close to \$4 million in improving its parks, squares, and recreation facilities in Hyde Park, from Amatucci Playground to George Wright Golf Course. Stonehill Park was an old children's play lot held by the federal government which went into disrepair. The city bought it a few years ago and recently rehabilitated the play lot.

Hyde Park Capital Projects 2001-2006	
Amatucci Playground	\$230,027
Fairview Cemetery	\$937,463
George Wright Golf Course	\$2,178,342
Reservation Road Park	\$305,107
Stonehill Park	\$345,607
Total	\$3,996,547

Assessment

The large amount of open space in Hyde Park affords it great diversity – downtown squares, playing fields and courts, and remote natural areas are all available in this neighborhood. The largest holder of open space in this neighborhood (470 acres) is the DCR. Their major holdings are in the Stony Brook and Neponset River Reservations. Access to these natural lands by mass transit – either MBTA bus or commuter rail - makes these reservations valued parts of Boston's inventory of close-to-home outdoor recreation experiences.

Active Recreation Needs

Both the Parks Department Parks Department and the DCR manage several active recreation facilities in Hyde Park. Parks Department facilities such as Iacono in the Readville (southwest) area and Ross in the northeast portion of Hyde Park provide a wide variety of activities from basketball, tennis, and street hockey to baseball, softball and children's play lots. The DCR facilities help to supplement these city facilities, particularly Kelly Field, which

Needs Analysis

includes soccer, football, baseball, and softball fields. A recreational facility for disabled youth, the Thompson Center, is located in DCR's Stony Brook Reservation.

Children's play lots are distributed throughout Hyde Park, with five of the eight play lots owned by the DCR. Most are located west of Hyde Park Avenue and the Amtrak rail line. These playgrounds are supplemented where available by play lots in schoolyards. One site that has suffered greatly is Weider Park, just north of Sherrin Street Woods. It contains an out-of-date, derelict play lot and a basketball court more frequently used for street hockey, an unintended use. It deserves capital rehabilitation as soon as possible for safety reasons as well as for recreational purposes.

Most open spaces in Hyde Park are located west of Hyde Park Avenue and the Amtrak/MBTA tracks – two access barriers lying side-by-side, splitting this neighborhood in two. Large residential areas east of these north-south transportation corridors have few close-to-home recreation areas available. This is critical in terms of children's play lots.

Recent investment by the city in its park spaces has resulted in increased use of these facilities. Yet the predominance of DCR facilities in Hyde Park means the state's current financial condition has impacted this area's access to recreational opportunities. (Please see the Community Priorities section below.) Given the strength and stability of Hyde Park's residential areas and the lack of vacant land in those areas, the opportunities for acquiring additional facilities are extremely limited. Improvement of all existing facilities will help minimize the flaws in the spatial distribution of open space in Hyde Park. It is hoped that the state's recent renewed emphasis on funding its existing recreational facilities will positively impact the needs in Hyde Park.

"A River Runs Through It:" Rivers, Trails, and Greenways

Another major factor in assessing open space in Hyde Park is the type of open space available. The proportion of open space devoted to natural areas is indeed large. Without natural areas such as the DCR Stony Brook and Neponset River Reservations and the smaller urban wilds, Hyde Park's total open space falls from 618 acres to 161 acres; the total open space acres per thousand persons ratio falls from 19 to 5. However, the near-ubiquitous presence of private backyard space and the presence of schoolyards helps to ameliorate this deficiency, making it much less keenly felt than in more dense, highly urbanized neighborhoods.

Needs Analysis

The DCR's Stony Brook Reservation is the most significant open space for Hyde Park. It is a regional facility containing large natural tracts crisscrossed by trails and paths, parking for visitors, and a pond (Turtle Pond) with fishing docks. No other neighborhood can match the trail-oriented, natural resource-based outdoor recreation it provides. Additional programming, trail and dock reconstruction, and better trail maintenance (there has been some attention to the worse deficiencies of the bike path) would make this facility better and more safely used by a wider group of neighborhood residents, other city residents, and out-of-area visitors.

The other DCR reservation in Hyde Park is the Neponset River Reservation. Until its southernmost reaches in Hyde Park, this reservation is made up of thin tracts of riverbank along either side of the river. While the reservation from Mattapan Square eastward has received attention from the Lower Neponset River Reservation Master Plan (the Phase I Plan) awhile ago, a new phase of planning has extended the scope of consideration westward to Hyde Park. The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) began work on a Phase II master plan for a major section of the Neponset River Reservation from Central Avenue in Milton to Paul's Bridge in Hyde Park and Milton. This area is approximately 125 acres in size with over 11 miles of river banks. Guiding principles in developing the plan include the protection and enhancement of the ecological systems along and in the Neponset River, enhancement of recreation opportunities, and protection and enhancement of the river as a living system. This plan provides access to the river, a continuous trail connecting to the Phase I trail, five MBTA stations and several private development sites along the river, as well as a wide range of recreation opportunities for the adjacent neighborhoods and region. The plan, completed in 2006, will also include recommendations for property acquisitions, management, operations and public and private funding sources.

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) is working on an initiative to begin marking bicycle lanes along Brush Hill Road and Truman Parkway from Mattapan Square in Boston to Paul's Bridge in Readville and the Neponset Valley Parkway in Readville and Milton. The initiative, meant to provide better bicycle access along the Parkway, a wide, four-lane roadway with a seven-foot-wide shoulder. The painted bicycle lane will occupy five feet of the shoulder. Plans are to eventually create a raised bicycle path along the Parkway by extending the curb another few feet into the roadway and developing a raised bike and pedestrian path alongside, similar to paths along the Esplanade in Boston. The initiative is one of the early-action items of the

Needs Analysis

Neponset River Master Plan Phase II. This early action will help increase awareness of this open space opportunity and support for the plan.

Another opportunity for linking people to the Neponset will likely involve any future re-development of the old Stop and Shop warehouse site off the Neponset Valley Parkway. This site is just south of the southern terminus of Truman Highway, and just west of the Fowl Meadows portion of the Neponset River Reservation. With residential development being discussed for this site, connections to the parkland and to nearby trail systems will be part of the mix, given the concentration of recreational opportunities and resources found in this area.

At some future point, DCR planners should look at the Mother Brook. The concept would be to connect the Neponset River to the Charles River via Mother Brook. This would result in a continuous riverside greenway from the mouth of the Neponset to the mouth of the Charles [the DCR is also working on the other prong and expresses that “the agency’s larger goal to extend the Charles River greenway 14 miles to Brook Farm in West Roxbury.” (<http://www.mass.gov/dcr/masterPlans.htm>)]. The Harborwalk system would then connect the mouth of the Neponset to the mouth of the Charles to form a continuous open space system encircling Boston ... a “Blue-and-Green Ring.” The city will assist with planning and through other means, but the major role in realizing this concept will be in the hands of the DCR. As the Neponset River Reservation Master Plan gets fully implemented, this concept of Mother Brook as an open space connector between the Charles and the Neponset will gain more attention from the public. This will be a new open space frontier for Hyde Park in the years and decades to come.

Access to Nature

Hyde Park is blessed with natural areas, from woods and wetland areas such as the Sherrin Street Woods and the huge Stony Brook Reservation to riverside access areas like Mill Pond and the Reservation Road park/urban wild. Of the few natural areas still remaining in private hands, the one key parcel in Hyde Park is the Euclid Street urban wild along the Neponset. The Euclid Street tract provides access to the Neponset. This parcel should be sought at some future point for acquisition by the DCR.

Sherrin Street Woods may be suitable as a site for wetland restoration and flood storage in the Stony Brook watershed. This should be explored along with improvements to its signage and its

Needs Analysis

trails. Maintenance via crews managed by the Parks Department Urban Wilds Initiative should continue at this and other Hyde Park urban wilds owned by the city.

Townscape and Scenic Improvements

Attractive parkways such as Truman Highway, Enneking Parkway, Turtle Pond Parkway, and the Neponset Valley Parkway traverse Hyde Park. Hyde Park has recently seen improvements in its squares, such as Cleary Square, Hurley Square, Logan Square, and Williams Square to make them more attractive and usable for passive recreation. A key action for the future of Hyde Park's image has been the reconstruction of Hyde Park Avenue, the main artery connecting Hyde Park to neighborhoods to the north. The Public Works Department collaborated with the Parks Department to assure that attractive plantings of street trees and at-grade features were part of the design.

The Parks Department also enhanced Hyde Park Avenue for the long term by acquiring the Dell Avenue Rock urban wild. This urban wild, whose Hyde Park Avenue face presents a cliff-like appearance, serves as a kind of "Gibraltar," standing sentinel as pedestrians and cars enter and leave the greater Cleary Square area.

Other arteries should be investigated to determine if enhanced streetscape treatments and accommodations for pedestrians and bicyclists can be provided. Such improvements should be coordinated to better connect open space resources in the neighborhood and with resources beyond the neighborhood.

Fairview's Future

One of the City of Boston's active cemeteries, Fairview, is located in Hyde Park near the DCR Stony Brook Reservation. It is one of several active city-owned cemeteries which are being improved under the city's capital program. Improvements have included renovations to the administration building. Plans are underway to provide expanded burial space for needs until the year 2030. Burial expansion costs and maintenance are funded through cemetery trust funds, managed by the Trust Office.

THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

All of Hyde Park's city-owned parks have been rehabilitated in the last twenty years through the city's capital improvement program. Maintenance of this city investment is a key desire of the community. Improving the supply of facilities in underserved areas of Hyde Park where possible will be a target for planning in the years to come. Improving access to the shores of Mother Brook and the Neponset River will continue to be an important planning theme. Upgrading the aesthetics of major thoroughfares to match the green character of its residential neighborhoods will help complete the open space picture for Hyde Park.

Opportunities

Active Recreation Needs

- Improve the usability of schoolyards for after-school use by neighborhood residents. This would help address the needs of certain areas with few open space resources, particularly active children's play spaces.
- Support the DCR as it addresses the backlog of capital needs at its facilities in Hyde Park, particularly at Weider Park.
- Continue to fund capital rehabilitation of city park facilities as needed in the capital renewal cycle, such as at Fairview Cemetery and George Wright Golf Course.

Rivers, Trails, and Greenways

- Support the DCR in its efforts to put capital investment into restoring the trails, paved paths, and fishing docks at Stony Brook Reservation, and operating budget dollars into trail maintenance and nature interpretation programming.
- Work with the DCR and the Boston Conservation Commission (BCC) to increase both linear and point access to the bank of Mother Brook in the Stony Brook Reservation and the Neponset River Reservation. Look at streets that connect River Street to the Neponset, and bridges that cross it, for access opportunities. Public safety should remain a prime consideration. Encourage public support of the Mother Brook Greenway as a key link in the "Blue-and-Green Ring."
- Improve access to Mother Brook through new pedestrian connections between DCR facilities on and near Mother Brook at River Street (Colella Playground, Factory Hill Playground, and Kelly Field). Investigate traffic

Needs Analysis

- improvements to enable users to safely cross River Street between these sites.
- Take measures to clean the urban wilds and natural areas along the Neponset and provide public access that will help limit misuse of the sites for dumping. Target sites near the dense Cleary Square sub-neighborhood and close to the Fairmount Hills commuter rail stop.
 - Work with the MBTA to improve access to the Neponset at the Fairmount Hills commuter rail stop. Make this site an attractive destination for non-commuters as well as waiting commuters with a decorative fence and seating area.
 - Support the DCR in its future efforts to implement its Phase II master plan for environmental protection, recreational use, and public access along the Neponset River. Support the DCR's implementation of the early action item of bike lanes along Brush Hill Road (Milton) and Truman Highway (Hyde Park).
 - Encourage the DCR to set up an environmental indicators monitoring system for its natural resource-based holdings – the Stony Brook, Neponset River, and Mill Pond/Mother Brook Reservations.
 - Make recreational/open space planning part of the early discussions for any proposed re-development of the old Stop and Shop warehouse site. Make future trails and bike paths here a contribution to the community as well as an asset for the development, knitting the new development into the neighborhood and the larger regional open space system.

Access to Nature

- Work with the Boston Water and Sewer Commission (BWSC) and the BCC on the proposal to restore the Stony Brook as an open-to-the-sky stream at the Sherrin Street Woods for better flood storage capacity and enhanced wetlands and wildlife habitat.
- Support DCR efforts to acquire the Euclid Street urban wild for incorporation into the Neponset River Reservation.

Townscape and Scenic Improvements

- Green-up and make more bicycle-friendly such major thoroughfares as River Street, Cummins Highway, Greenfield/Rector Road, and Poplar/Canterbury Street.

Community Priorities
Active Recreation Needs

Needs Analysis

- Protect the significant capital investments accomplished in the parks under BPRD jurisdiction with the consistent maintenance standard developed in the recent past.
- Keep public safety a priority, particularly at Ross Field. Develop more multiple use activities at the sites affected. Work with the Municipal Police and the Police Department to develop an appropriate response.
- Support the DCR's efforts to further improve maintenance of its Hyde Park playgrounds and parks. Sustain existing DCR recreation opportunities through an improved, consistent standard of maintenance, given that a significant portion of this neighborhood's open space is in DCR hands.

Access to Nature

- Protect and nurture urban wilds such as Sherrin Street Woods through maintenance by the Parks Department Urban Wilds Initiative.

Fairview's Future

- Support the Police Department in their efforts to control the limited vandalism that occurs in Fairview Cemetery.