
Open Space Plan 2015 - 2021

Section 7

Analysis of Needs

**Section 7.2.2 Community Open Space &
Recreation
BACK BAY/BEACON HILL**

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Section 7.2.2: Community Open Space & Recreation BACK BAY/BEACON HILL

The Community Open Space & Recreation Needs Analysis breaks down the open space analysis by neighborhood, in contrast to the city-wide assessment which was explored in Sections 3, 4 and 5. At the neighborhood scale we are better able to inventory and analyze the specific fabric and make-up of a community, and explore how the open space resources in that community respond to its needs. Functionally, neighborhood boundaries have no meaning in the use and operation of the city's open space system but these established perimeters help organize the discussion for the purposes of the Open Space Plan. This is why we chose to call these areas "communities" rather than neighborhoods.

The six basic components of the Open Space Plan neighborhood needs assessment are:

- What is the neighborhood setting and history?
- Who is the parks and open space system serving in each neighborhood?
- Where in the neighborhood are the populations with the greatest need for access to open space and how well served are these areas?
- Where are the parks and open spaces in the neighborhood and what kinds of facilities are located in these places?
- Can residents easily walk to a public park?
- What planning and development is happening in the neighborhood? What are the potential open space impacts and opportunities associated with those projects?

For further detail on the components of this analysis, see pages 7.2-1, et seq.

Background

Beacon Hill takes its name from the sentry light erected on its peak to warn settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in case of a threat from Indians or foreign invaders. The south slope as it exists today began to emerge in the 1790s with the building of the present State House. Starting at this time, the hill was reshaped and the old beacon taken down.

Cutting and filling allowed the development of Louisburg Square and Mt. Vernon Street for substantial house lots. The north slope had three sections by the latter 1700s: stately houses around Bowdoin Square; an African-American community

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centered between Joy and Phillips Streets; and a “red light” district near the Charles River. The north slope changed largely due to construction of both the Massachusetts General Hospital complex and tenement and apartment buildings in the 1800s.

The Back Bay originally referred to a tidal body of water on the western edge of the Shawmut Peninsula that stretched from Brookline to Boston Common. A dam, finished in 1821 to harness industrial water power, ran along what is now Beacon Street from Charles Street to present-day Kenmore Square. Stagnant water and the accumulation of sewage soon led to demands to fill the area. Landfill began at the Public Garden and extended west. From the 1850s to the 1890s, the entire area was filled beyond Kenmore Square and north to the present location of Storrow Drive. Parisian boulevards were the inspiration for the linear plan of the Back Bay with its stately tree-lined spine of Commonwealth Avenue. By contrast, an English model with squares influenced the layout of Beacon Hill and the South End. The Back Bay developed quickly with fashionable townhouses reflecting the affluence of its residents. Deed restrictions created consistency for building heights, setbacks, and masonry construction.

In the realm of more recent history, development of the Massachusetts Turnpike, the Prudential Center, and Copley Place has created a major residential, commercial, and hotel complex on the southern reaches of this neighborhood. In addition, retail activity on Newbury and Boylston Streets has been substantially upgraded in the past few decades. Large swaths of both Beacon Hill and Back Bay are now designated historic districts that provide continuing design controls. Boston Common, the Public Garden, and Commonwealth Avenue Mall are themselves designated City of Boston Landmarks. In addition, Boston Common and the Public Garden are National Historic Landmarks (the highest tier of listing in the National Register of Historic Places).

Analysis

This community has 4.23 acres of protected open space for every 1000 residents, which is substantially lower than the city average of 7.64. Though actual access to open space is widespread in this neighborhood.

The population is dominated by young adults and it has the lowest percentage of children of any city neighborhood. High population density throughout the Back and Bay and Beacon Hill results in somewhat high park need scores for this area, but the effective distribution of park areas, as well as the quality of these spaces, results in a community that is well served by open space (Back Bay / Beacon Hill Maps 1 & 3).

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Because they are large, highly visible, and centrally located in or near dense residential and business districts, the parks in this area are among the most heavily used in the greater metropolitan area (as evidenced in the results of this plan's survey [see Section 6]): Boston Common, the Public Garden, Commonwealth Avenue Mall, and Copley Square Park (all under Parks Department jurisdiction), the DCR's Charles River Esplanade, and State House Park.

While these parks are regional and tourist destinations, they also serve the neighborhood. Both Boston Common and the Charles River Esplanade contain active sports facilities and a children's play area. In addition to these major parks, there are children's playgrounds within both the Beacon Hill and the Back Bay residential neighborhoods

The greatest deficiency in this neighborhood, similar to Central Boston, is the lack of availability of active recreation facilities (Back Bay / Beacon Hill Map 7). The Boston Common provides the only athletic fields and tennis courts in this part of the city. (Titus Sparrow provides courts and the Ebersole Fields on the Esplanade provide ball fields, but the former is a South End neighborhood park and the latter is in the Central Boston community. However, given similar deficiencies in these neighborhoods, these nearby parks can provide little reduction of this deficiency.) This community's section of the Charles River Reservation includes the public sailing facilities at Community Boating, as well as a network of pedestrian and bicycle paths. These paths span both sides of the Charles River, and provide iconic scenic views of Boston and Cambridge, an attraction that helps encourage use of the paths and parklands. Taken in this context, the open space access for this neighborhood is among the city's best.

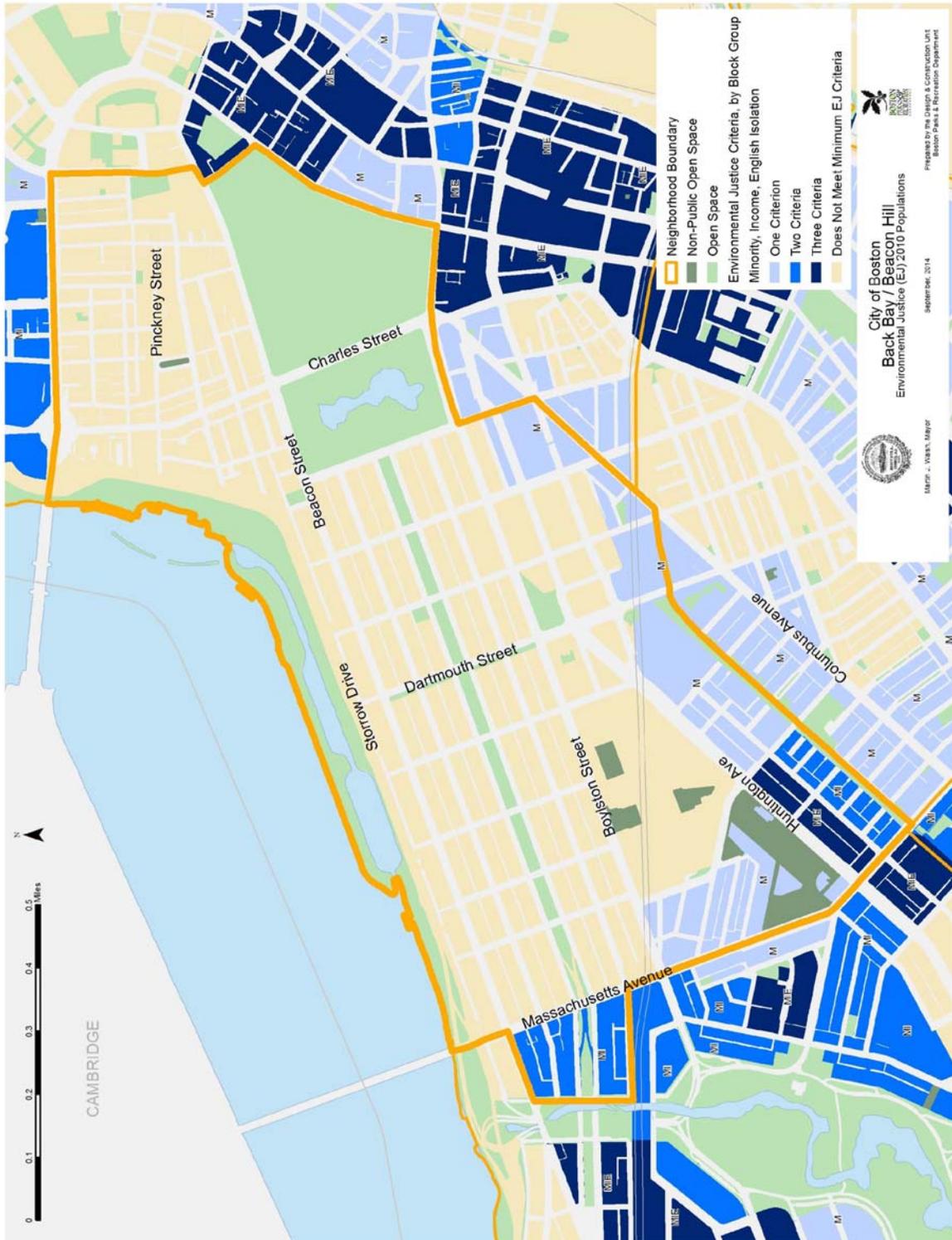
The Christian Science Complex, in the southwestern corner of the Back Bay/Beacon Hill community, contains lawn areas, plaza space, a fountain, and large reflecting pool. The Complex owner has proposed adding buildings to the complex, while retaining and improving much of the iconic open space that reflected the "New Boston," and the complex has been designated a Landmark by the Boston Landmarks Commission. The recently completed master plan calls for expanding the lawn areas and the number of trees in the complex. However, a small planted triangle (less than a quarter-acre) at the corner of Belvidere and Dalton Streets, nominally part of the complex, is slated to become a site for the construction of a tower building as part of the construction proposed in the new master plan. As part of the project, there will be included a new public/private park.

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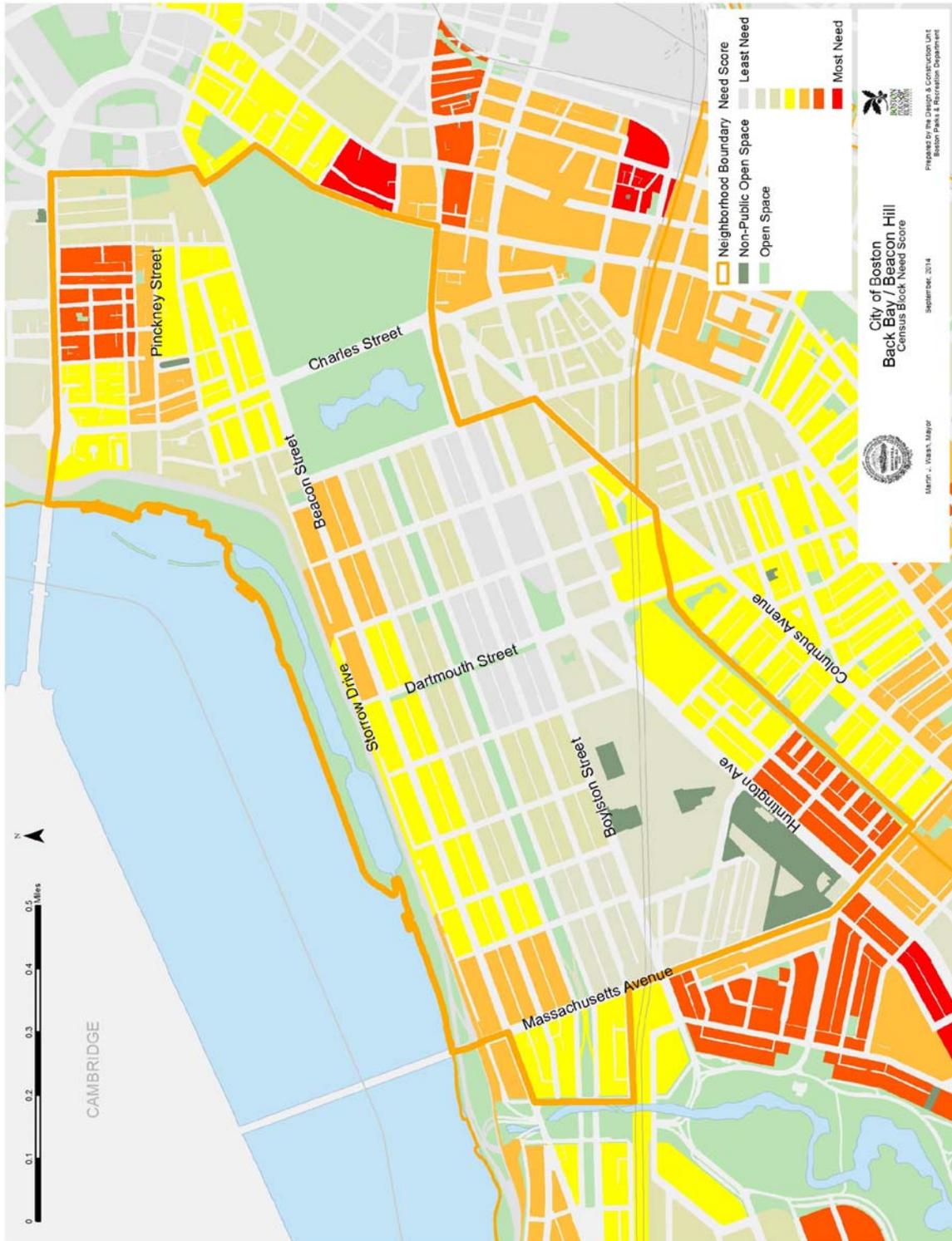
Map 1: Population Density, Back Bay/Beacon Hill

Needs Analysis



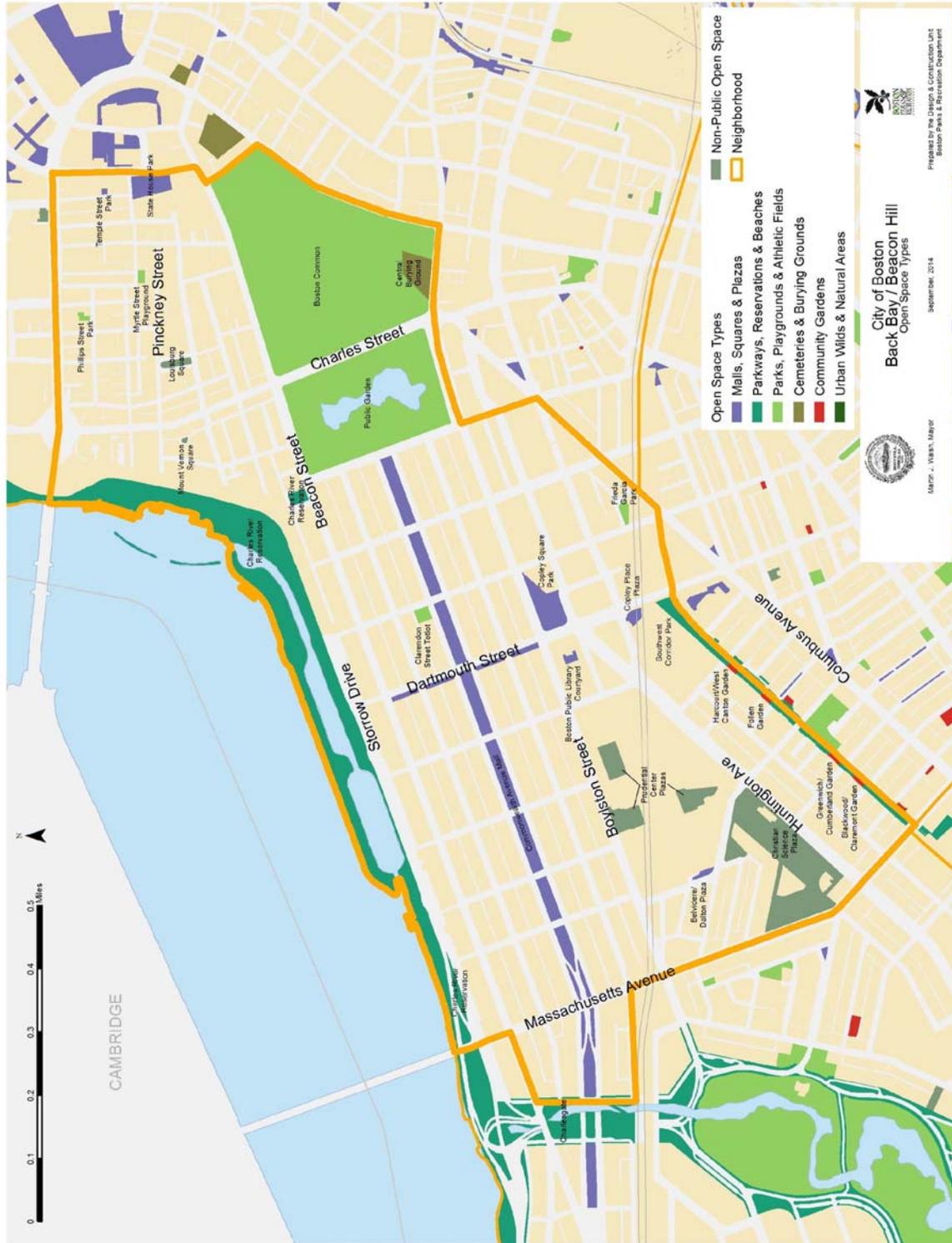
Map 2: Environmental Justice Populations, Back Bay/Beacon Hill

Needs Analysis



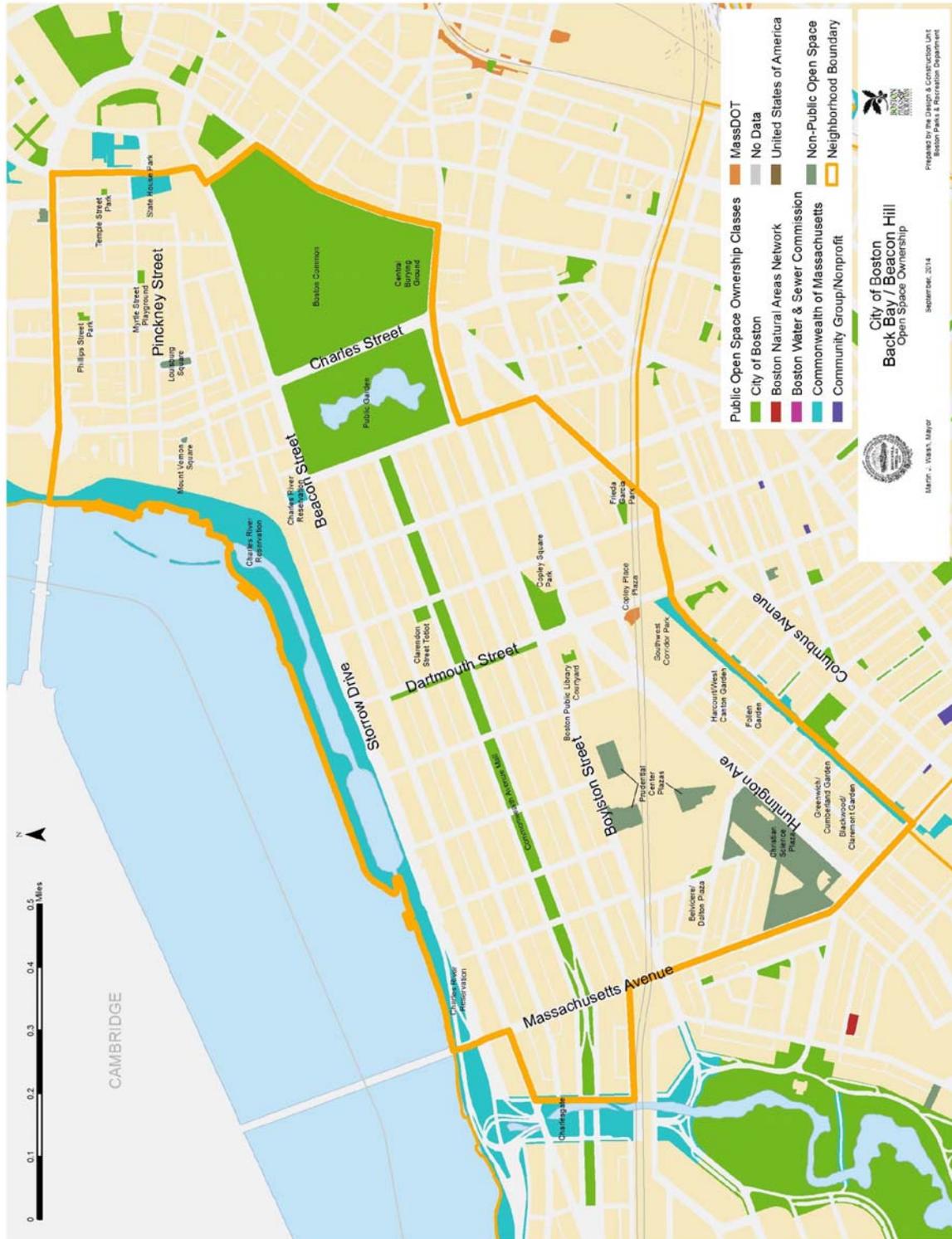
Map 3: Need Score by Census Block Group, Back Bay/Beacon Hill

Needs Analysis



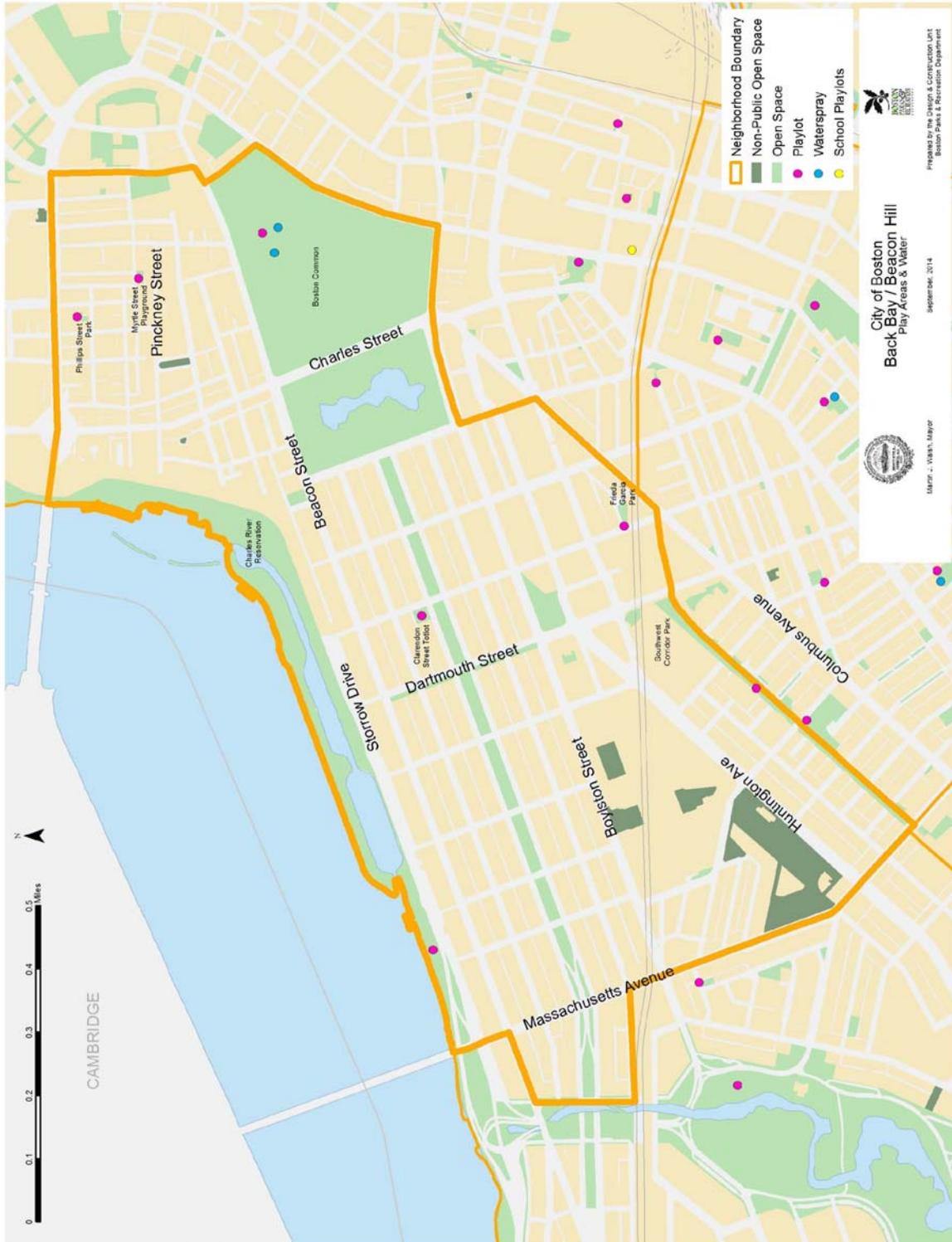
Map 4: Open Space by Type, Back Bay/Beacon Hill

Needs Analysis



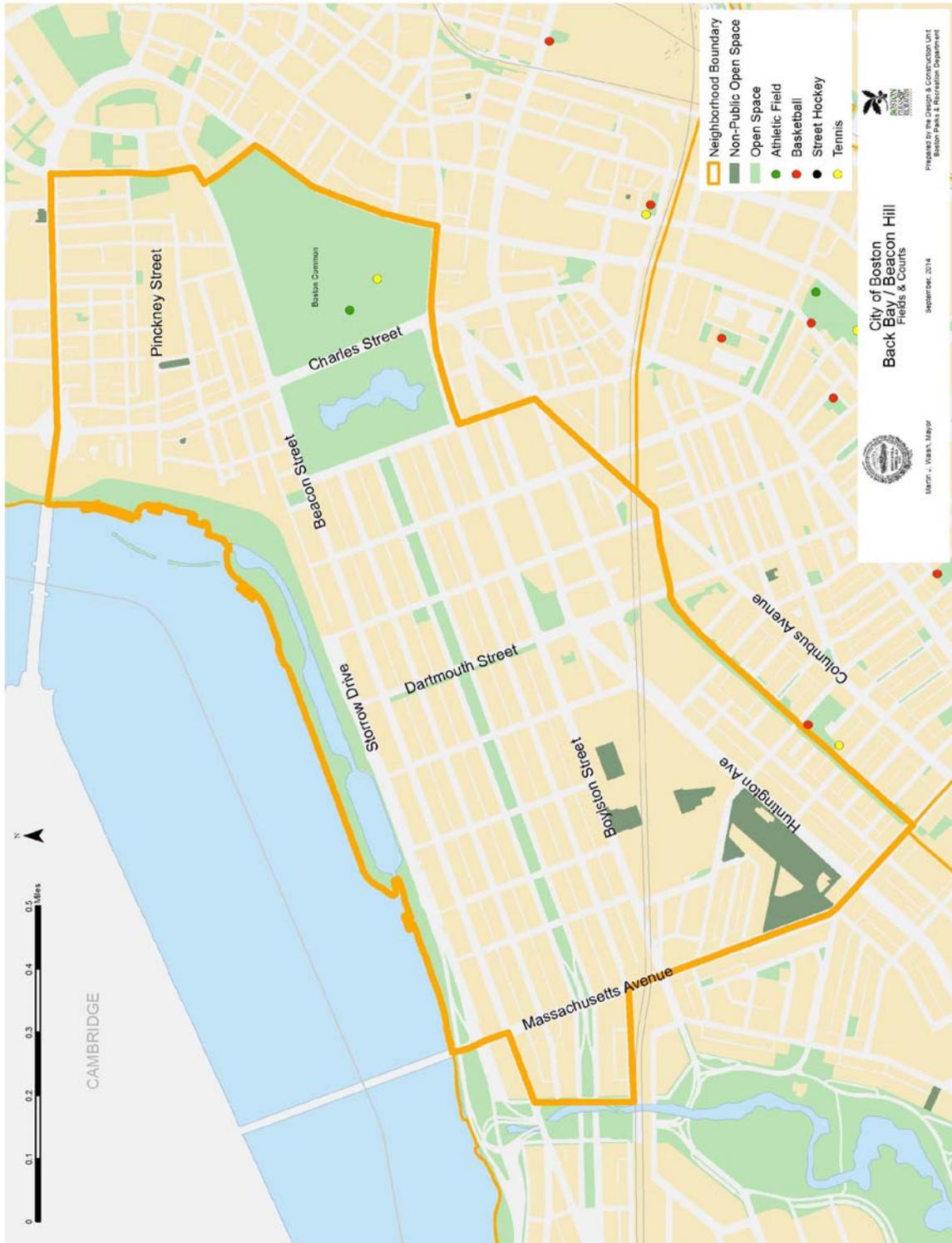
Map 5: Open Space by Ownership, Back Bay/Beacon Hill

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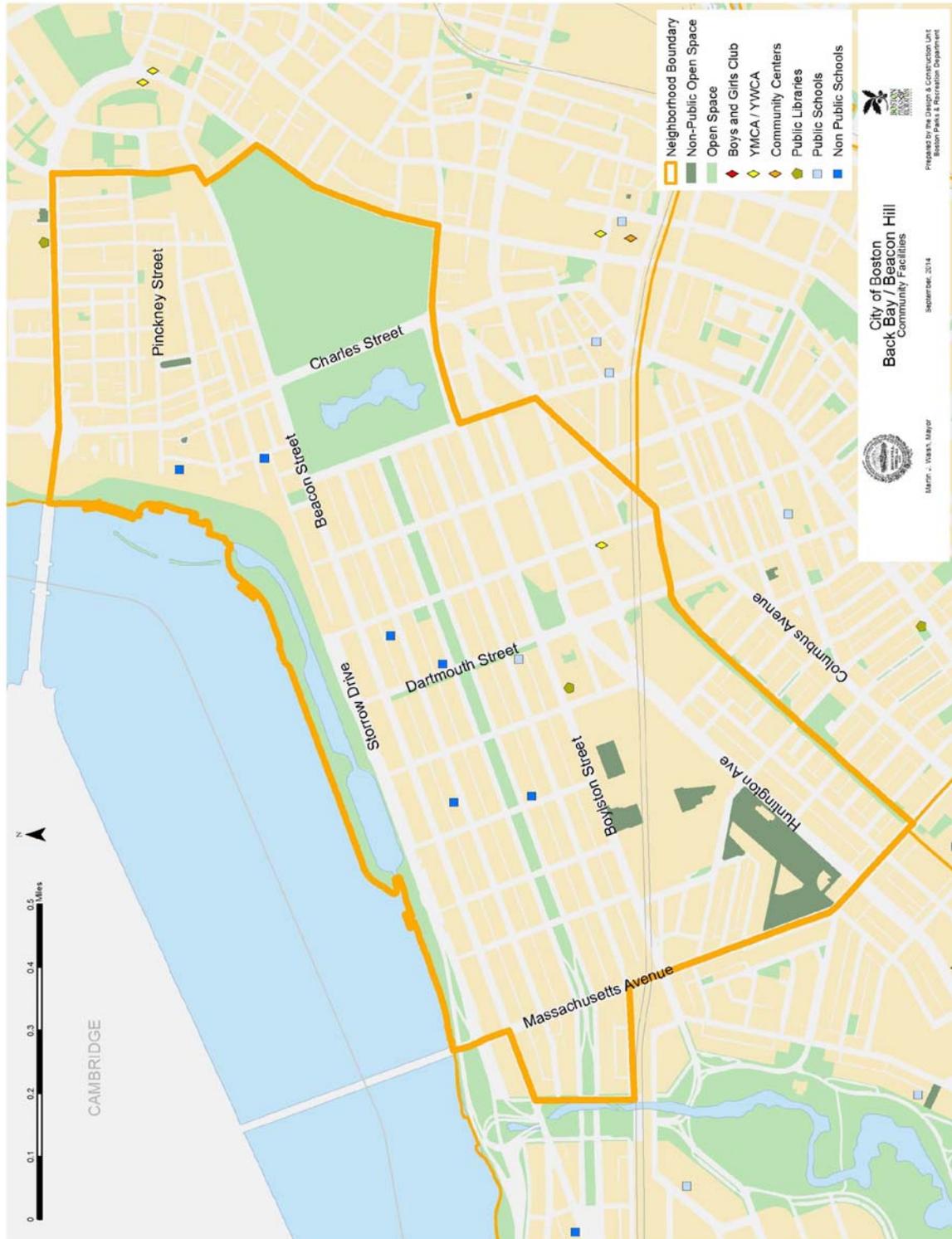
Map 7: Play Areas and Water Spray Features, Back Bay/Beacon Hill

Needs Analysis



Map 8: Fields and Courts, Back Bay/Beacon Hill

Needs Analysis



Map 9: Community Facilities, Back Bay/Beacon Hill

Needs Analysis



Map 10: Park Service Areas, Back Bay/Beacon Hill

Needs Analysis



Map 11: Park Equity, Service Areas & Need Scores, Back Bay/Beacon Hill

Needs Analysis

Population	
2010 Census	27,111
2000 Census	27,004
Population growth/decline, 2000-2010	0.5%

Age		
Under 9	1,264	4.66%
10-19	1,490	5.49%
20-34	12,997	47.93%
35-54	5,697	21.01%
55-64	2,672	9.85%
65 and over	2,991	11.03%

Race		% of Total Population
White Alone		81.08%
Black or African American alone		3.24%
Asian Alone		8.39%
Other		2.15%

Latino Status		% of Total Population
Not Hispanic or Latino		
Hispanic or Latino		5.25%

Population Density		Persons Per Acre
2010 Census		45.3

Median Household Income	
	\$86,604

Household by Number of Vehicles Available	
No Vehicle	50.62%
1 vehicle	38.42%
2 vehicles	10.03%
3 or more vehicles	0.91%