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# Open Space Plan 2015-2021

## Section 7

# Analysis of Needs

**Section 7.2.4      Community Open Space &  
Recreation  
CHARLESTOWN**

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## Section 7.2.4: Community Open Space & Recreation CHARLESTOWN

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*

Originally settled in 1629, Charlestown did not become a part of Boston until 1874. It was already a thriving harborside community by the time of the American Revolution. A naval shipyard was established there 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.

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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 did not begin to reverse 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.

### *Analysis*

This neighborhood has seen over 8% population growth between the 2000 and 2010 censuses. It contains 3.09 acres of open space per 1000 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 rowhouses 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 (tennis courts and playing fields), the Navy Yard (tennis courts), Paul Revere Park (play lot and playing field), Rutherford Union (playlot and tennis court), and Harvard Mall (playlot). 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).

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### 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. In addition, 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 as research facilities to provide employment and a substantial daytime population. Shipyard Park has expanded into a family-oriented facility, and the wharves now have 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 has few open spaces, primarily Edwards Playground and the playlots at Rutherford/Union and Caldwell Street. The Sullivan Square side of the neighborhood has much lower population densities, so there is not 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.

There are several concepts and proposals that can have benefits for the open space character of Charlestown. One of the most prominent is the Rutherford Avenue/Sullivan Square improvement initiative being undertaken by the BTM with assistance from the BRA. After a multi-year community involved planning process, the BTM 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 connections to the residential community and the institutional/commercial/industrial neighbors on either side of the Avenue.

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

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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 BTB 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. (((This is unclear)))

At Bunker Hill Community College, the new 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

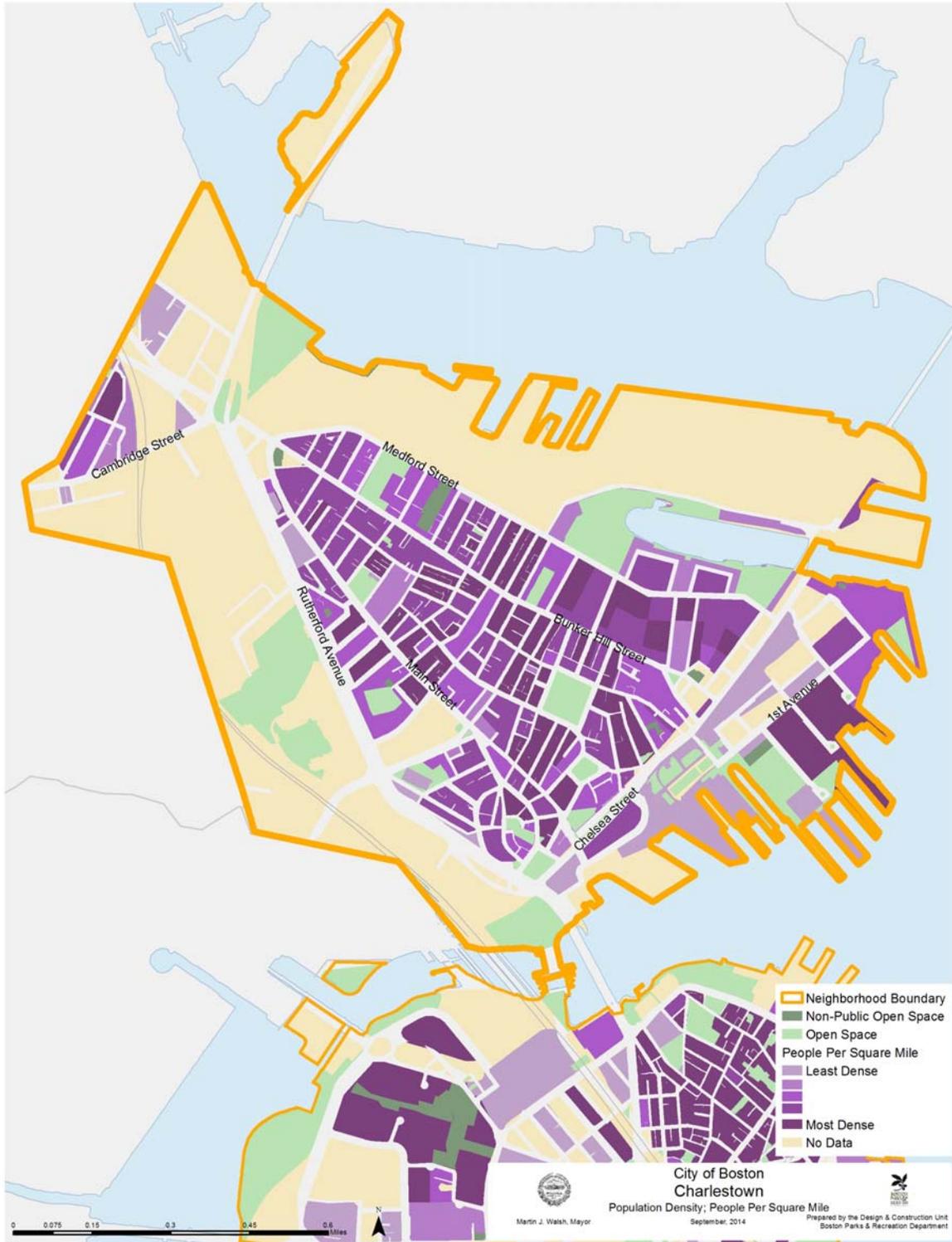
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academic and support activities at the southern and central end of the campus, near the Bunker Hill Orange Line station.

The BRA released the Charlestown Navy Yard Waterfront Activation Plan (2007) proposes 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 Harborwalk there, and reinforce them with a wayfinding system. It calls for improved connections between the Yard and the Charlestown community north of the Yard. The plan proposes a stewardship entity for the system of spaces and access that would coordinate the various entities involved in the Yard, program the spaces with events, target further improvements, and fundraise to implement the plan. Linkage to the Rutherford Avenue bike/pedestrian corridor, the Harborwalk along the Little Mystic Channel and the proposed Medford Street Corridor would create a green ring around Charlestown, enhancing this community's livability even further.

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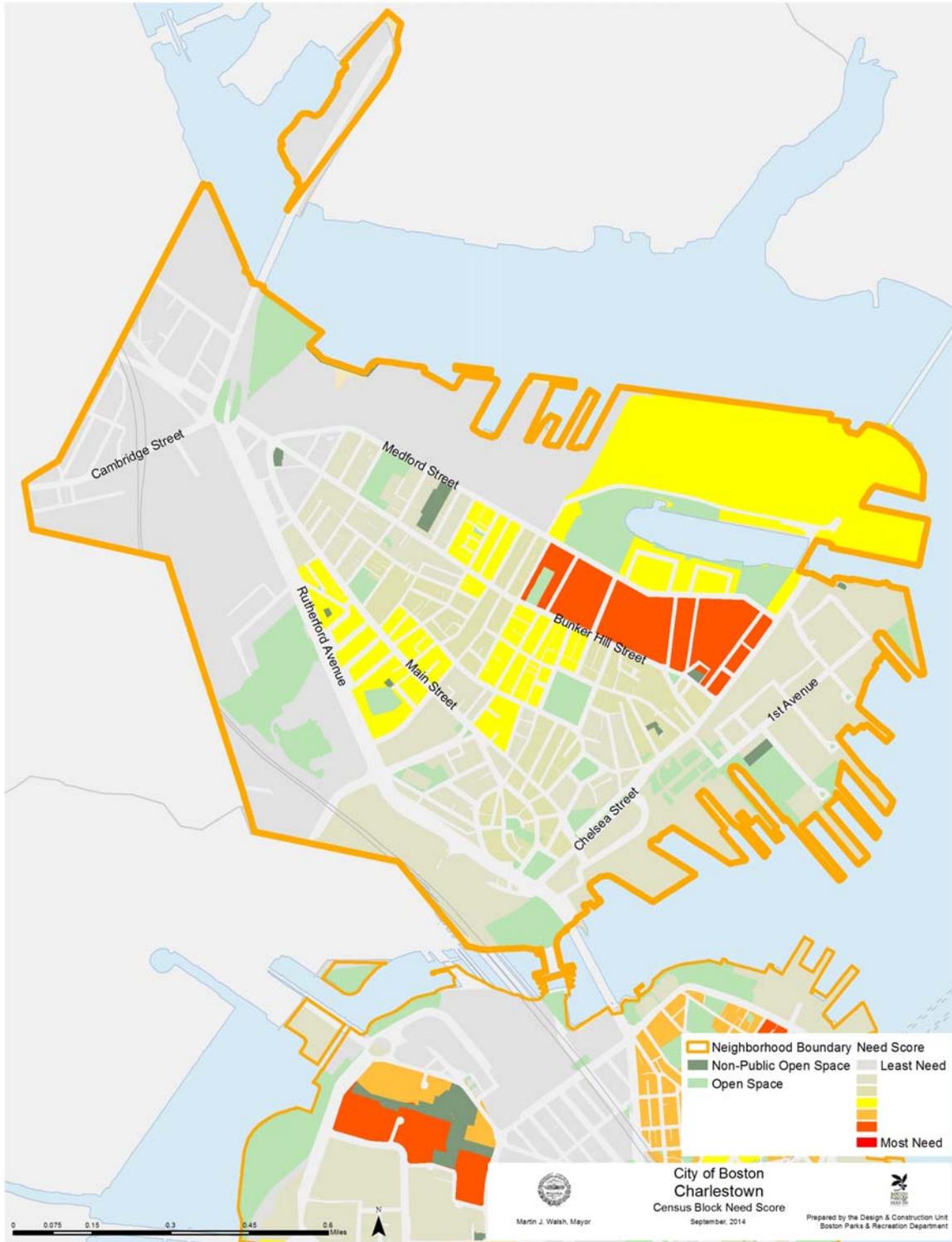
Map 1: Population Density, Charlestown

Needs Analysis



Map 2: Environmental Justice Populations, Charlestown

Needs Analysis



Map 3: Need Score by Census Block Group, Charlestown

Needs Analysis



Map 4: Open Space by Type, Charlestown

Needs Analysis



Map 5: Open Space by Ownership, Charlestown

Needs Analysis



Map 6: Open Space by Protection Status, Charlestown

Needs Analysis



Map 7: Play Areas and Water Spray Features, Charlestown

Needs Analysis



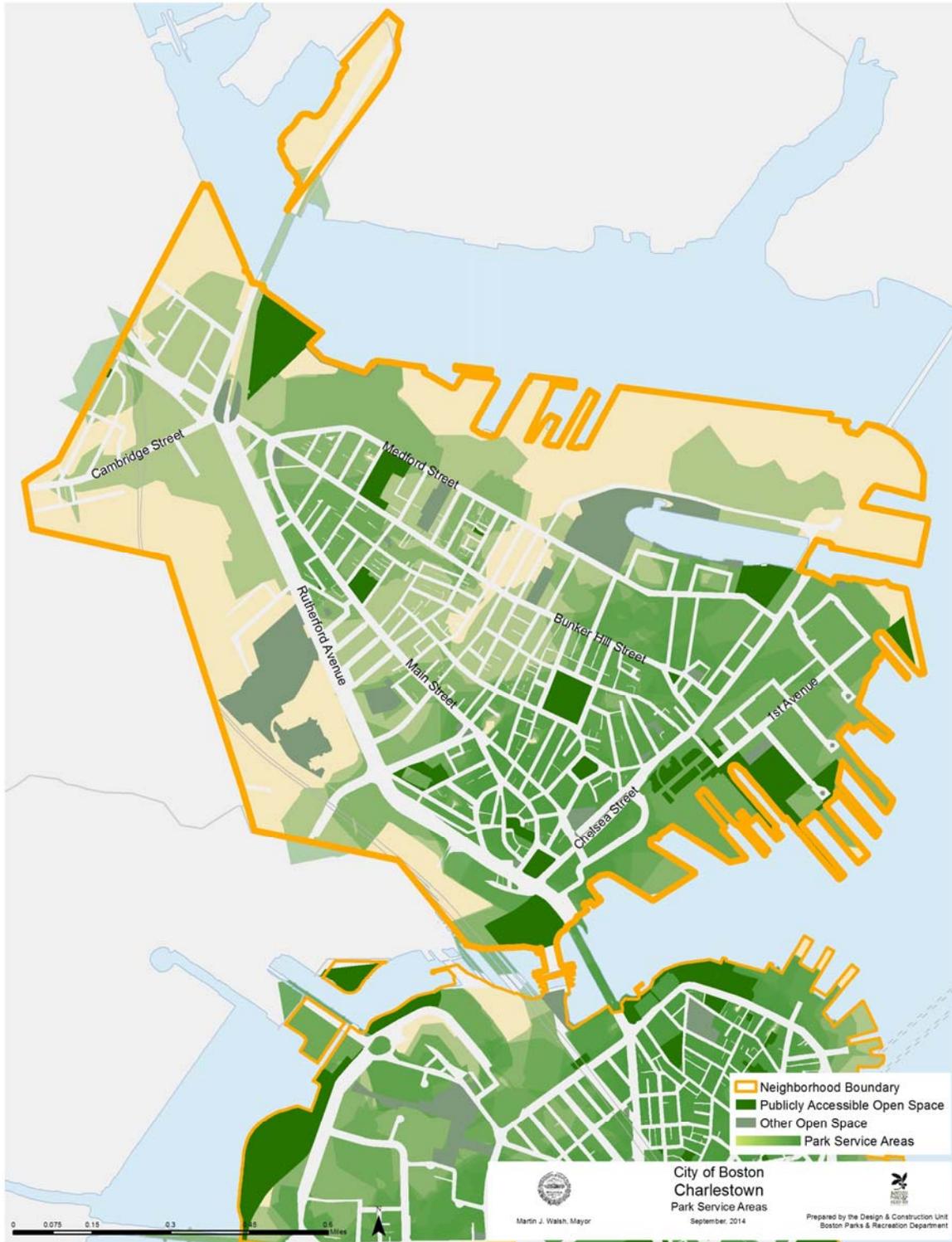
Map 8: Fields and Courts, Charlestown

Needs Analysis



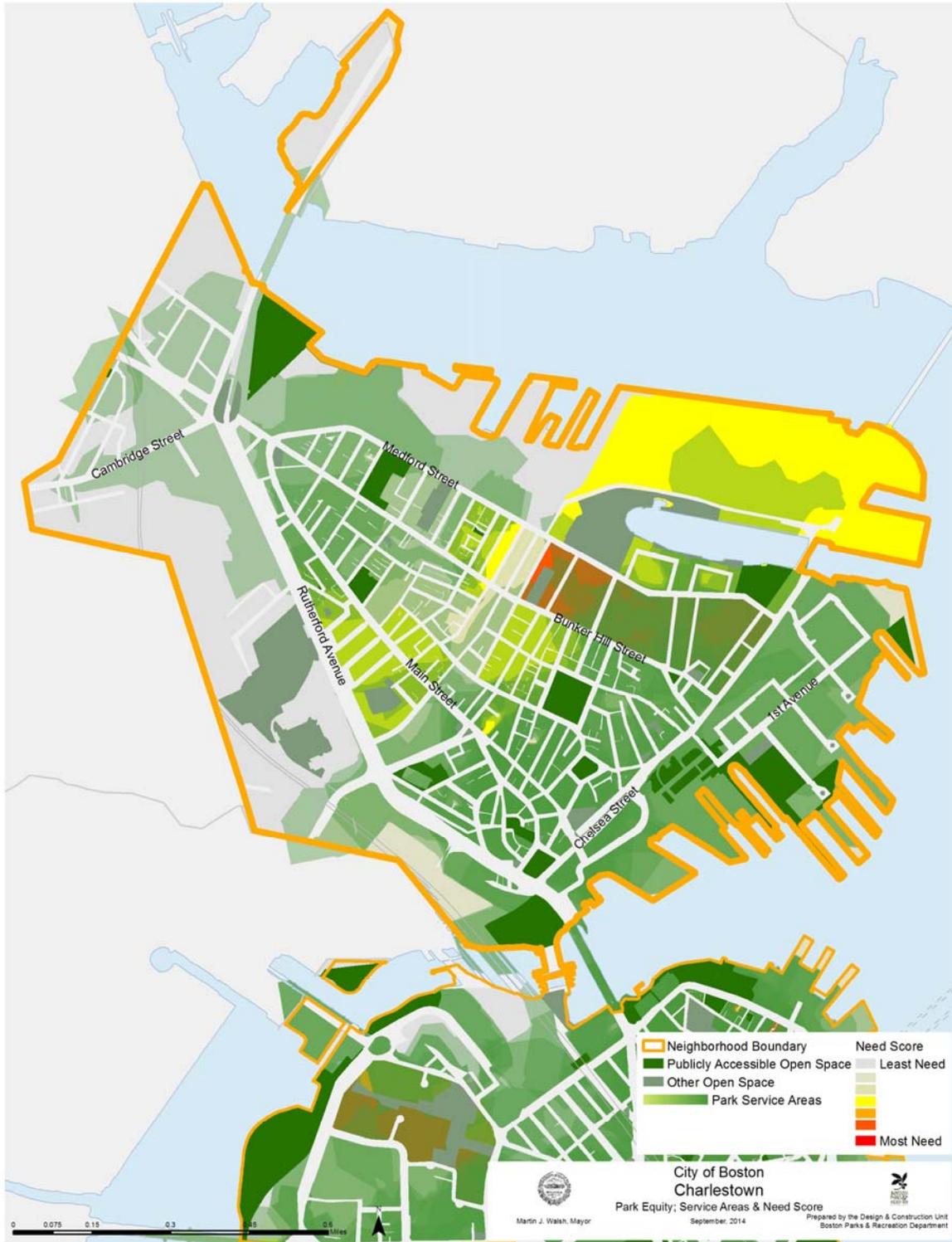
Map 9: Community Facilities, Charlestown

Needs Analysis



Map 10: Park Service Areas, Charlestown

Needs Analysis



## Needs Analysis

Population	
2010 Census	16,439
2000 Census	15,195
Population growth/decline, 2000-2010	8.2%

Age		
Under 9	1,806	11.0%
10-19	1,108	6.7%
20-34	5,494	33.4%
35-54	4,668	28.4%
55-64	1,679	10.2%
65 and over	1,684	10.2%

Race		% of Total Population
White Alone		75.8%
Black or African American alone		4.6%
Asian Alone		8.1%
Other		1.8%

Latino Status		% of Total Population
Not Hispanic or Latino		
Hispanic or Latino		9.7%

Population Density		Persons Per Acre
2010 Census		18.9

Median Household Income	
	\$90,369

Household by Number of Vehicles Available	
No Vehicle	23.8%
1 vehicle	52.7%
2 vehicles	21.5%
3 or more vehicles	2.0%