
Open Space Plan 2015-2021

Section 7

Analysis of Needs

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

DRAFT

Section 7.2.6: Community Open Space & Recreation EAST BOSTON

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 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

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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 left severe impacts on 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 recent years has had many new investments geared toward public facilities. The third harbor tunnel (aka Ted Williams Tunnel) has helped 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.

Analysis

East Boston is pre-dominantly a family neighborhood – nearly 25% of the population is composed of children under the age of 20. East Boston compares favorably with other densely populated neighborhoods in that it has 5.33 acres of open space for every 1000 residents, though this number is still below the city average of 7.64 acres. The neighborhood has seen 5.5% population growth between 2000–2010, a trend that will likely continue as underutilized parcels are redeveloped for residential uses (East Boston Map 1).

East Boston neighborhoods are generally dense, with limited private residential outdoor space. This is a community that is dependent on its parks. East Boston has an extremely rich mix of landscape types: active and passive areas, linear facilities, natural areas and waterfront access. Over 206 acres of open space in East Boston are located within two sizable saltwater marshes.

Nearly the entire neighborhood meets at least one of the State’s Environmental Justice criteria. This combination of factors – high density, demographic and socio/economic factors – results in a high park need score for almost all of East Boston, with the greatest need in the Eagle Hill neighborhood (East Boston Maps 2 & 3).

Across East Boston, many parks are located on the edges of the neighborhood – bordering the water or the airport. Playground distribution is reasonable and walkable in this neighborhood, though two areas rely on BPS schoolyards for playlots – Orient Heights (Bradley School) and Eagle Hill (O’Donnell and Kennedy) (East Boston Map 7).

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Due to recent renovations, East Boston now has three synthetic turf fields – East Boston Memorial Stadium, LoPresti Park, and American Legion Park. Conversion from natural to synthetic turf allows these facilities to accommodate heavy use loads, which is necessary in this neighborhood (East Boston Map 8).

Eagle Hill stands out as a neighborhood with high open space needs that are not being met. The north side of Orient Heights near Suffolk Downs also has a deficiency of park space (East Boston Map 11). This issue might see some improvement with the upcoming phased renovation of the BHA Orient Heights public housing community. Impacts of the possible redevelopment of Suffolk Downs could be sizable, but are uncertain at this point. Much of the land there is unbuilt.

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 Park 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. The former Hess Oil site, with likely contaminated soils, yet on the Chelsea Creek waterfront, has unrealized potential for community open space.

Maverick Square

Roughly the triangular area between Maverick Square, Central Square, and LoPresti Park, the Maverick Square sub-area contains a mix of residential and industrial uses. However, traffic arteries and commercial uses dominate both Central (a center for neighborhood commerce) and Maverick Squares.

LoPresti Park, located next to the Maverick Landing public housing development (1,500 residents), is in the midst of a multi-phased renovation effort. Central Square will be reconfigured through a Boston Transportation Department project, making its central feature, Bertulli Park, more accessible to the neighborhood for passive uses.

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The Lewis Mall from Maverick Square to Boston Harbor along Lewis Street suffers from inattention and lack of development. As development proceeds over time along the piers in this area, with the consequent extension of Harborwalk, this open space connection 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 is a small passive area. The rest of the open space facilities are dominated by ball courts and sitting areas. Porzio Park and Piers Park provides access to the water.

This area remains relatively isolated from active recreation facilities with airport-related highway ramps separating the residents from East Boston Memorial Park. The first segment of the East Boston Greenway connects this area to East Boston Memorial Park, helping to overcome that isolation, and to Piers Park, the latter a much used and valued asset for both Maverick Square and Jeffries Point residents. The extension of the East Boston Greenway from the Bremen Street Park to Constitution Beach has been designed.

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. Pedestrian and bicycle connections between different facilities in the Orient Heights area are lacking and several of the natural areas are unprotected.

As mentioned previously, East Boston as a whole has a high park need score (East Boston Map 3). Its high density contributes to that score, and the consequent pressure for housing contributes to the lack of open land for future parks distributed throughout the neighborhood. Instead, as noted in the East Boston Master Plan (BRA, 2000), looking to existing open spaces and assets and linking them will generate a high degree of access and usability out of the limited open space resources, many of which are high quality and water-oriented.

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One such linkage is the Harborwalk system, supported by the Chapter 91 Tidelands mandate for open space and public access to the waterfront. Linking existing waterfront parks owned by public agencies to open spaces within proposed developments will provide a sense of continuity that reduces the spatial limitation inherent in the small size of each particular open space parcel. There will need to be alternative means of routing pedestrians and cyclists so that access restrictions at industrial sites and Designated Port Areas minimize the interruption in continuity. With increased pressure for housing in the city and continued improvements in the economy, undeveloped private parcels will soon begin construction on housing and the associated open spaces. In turn, publicly held parcels, such as the Phase II area of Piers Park, will also begin to develop and help fill in the vision of a continuous experience along the East Boston harborfront.

Another system of open space linkage is the East Boston Greenway. This greenway will link open spaces between Boston Harbor and Belle Isle Marsh Reservation – Piers Park, Bremen Street Park, Constitution Beach, Bayswater Street Urban Wild, and Belle Isle Coastal Preserve – as well as be an open space opportunity itself. A recent addition to the chain is the Wood Island Bay Link built by Massport in 2014, which extends the greenway northeastwards for half a mile from Bremen Street Park. In 2015, it is expected that the BRA will complete the next third of a mile of the greenway, to be called the Narrow Gauge Link, from the Wood Island Bay Link to the DCR's Constitution Beach. Further work will be needed to extend the greenway northeastward from Constitution Beach to its ultimate destination in the Belle Isle Marsh Reservation. The BTD Green Links Project will need to look carefully at this extension.

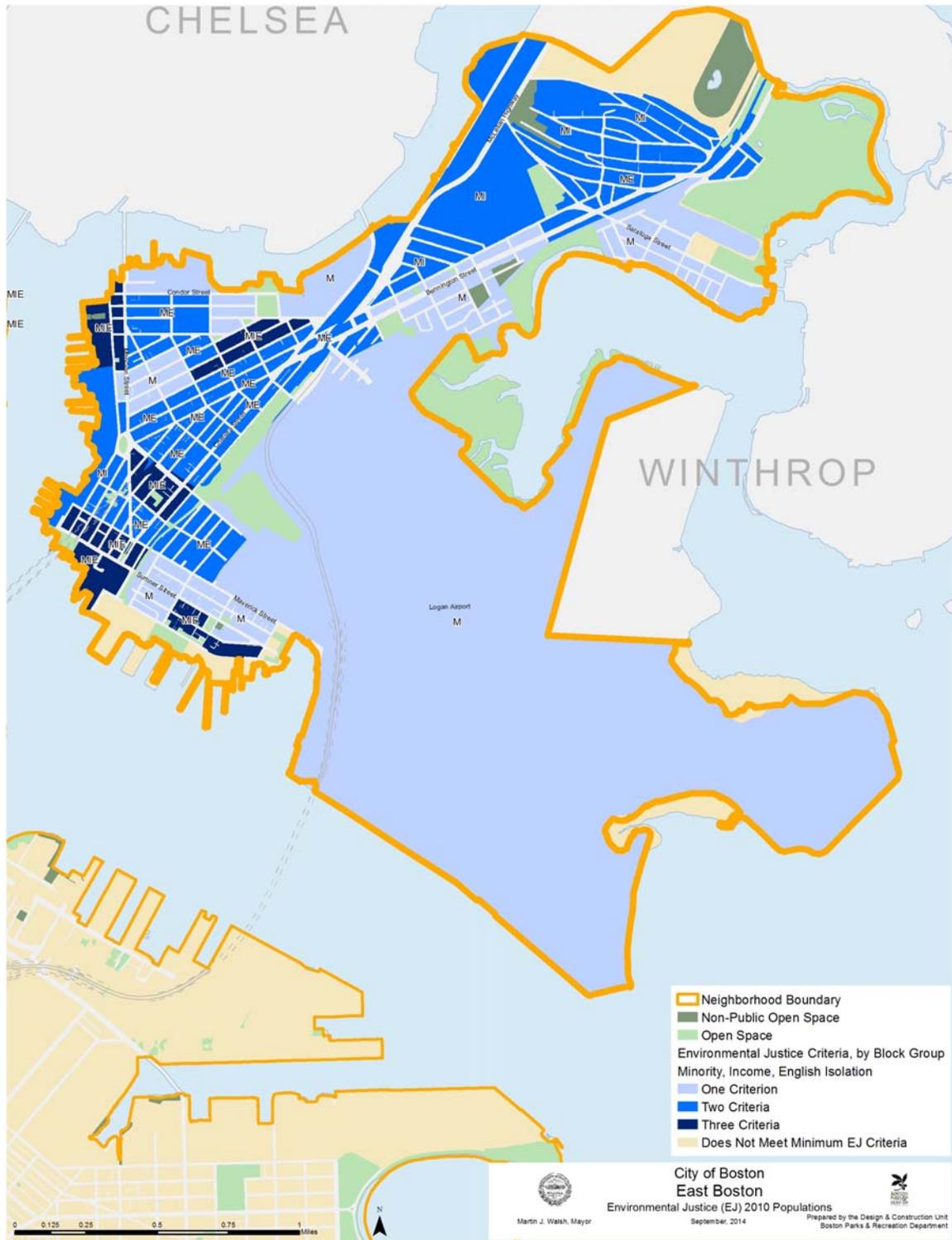
Another project for consideration by the BTD Green Links Project would be the tangential extension of the East Boston Greenway northward toward Chelsea Creek via an abandoned rail corridor that is being studied for a haul road. If some space can be reserved for pedestrian and bicycle travel, it could help make a connection between the East Boston Greenway and a Harborwalk or greenway along the Chelsea Creek shoreline.

Another option for linkage may be the use of Prescott and Putnam Streets to connect the Harborwalk in the area of Condor Street Beach Urban Wild and American Legion Playground to the Bremen Street Park portion of the East Boston Greenway. This would create the opportunity for an approximately 2.5-3 mile loop in the southern 'half' of East Boston.



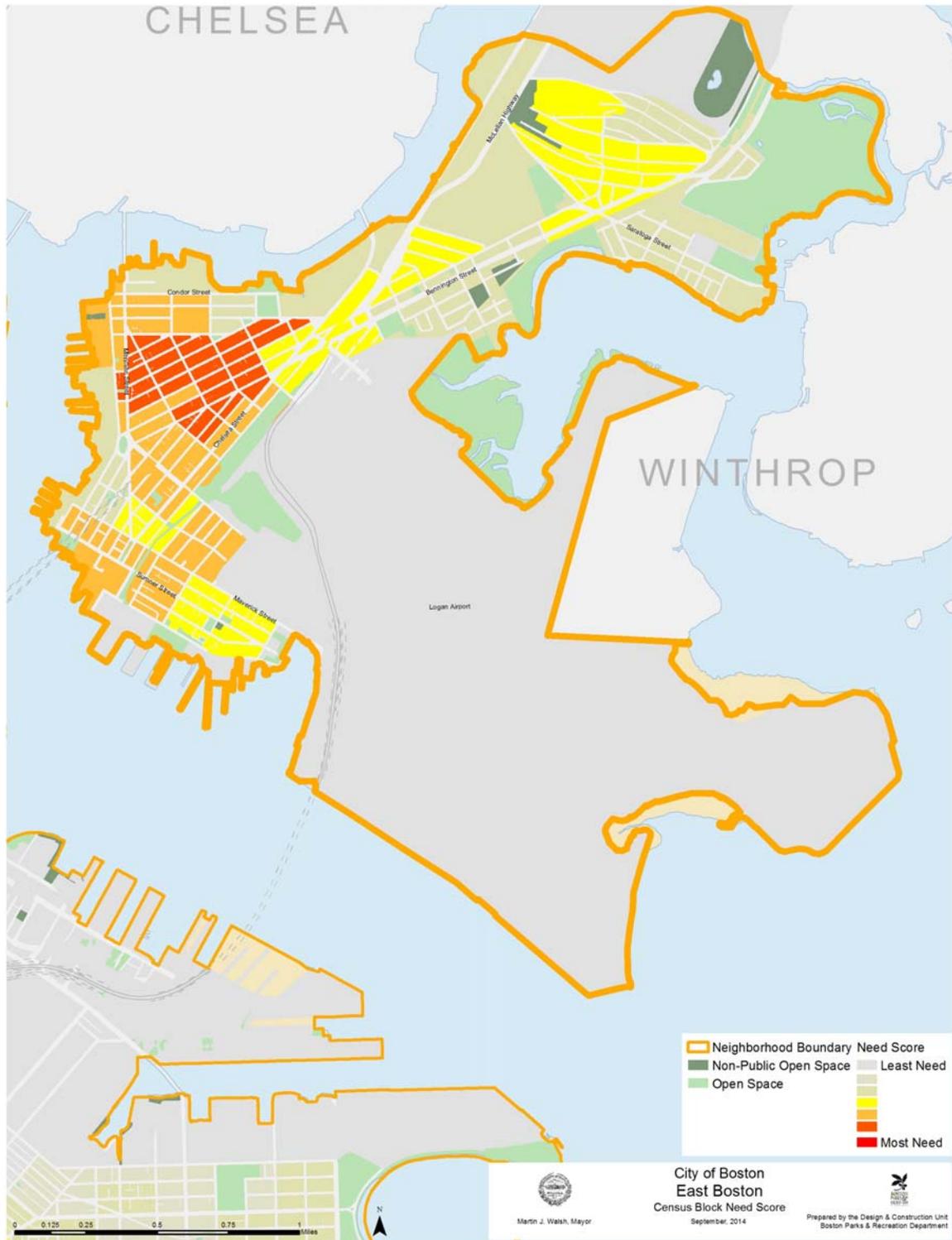
Map 1: Population Density, East Boston

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Map 2: Environmental Justice Populations, East Boston

Needs Analysis



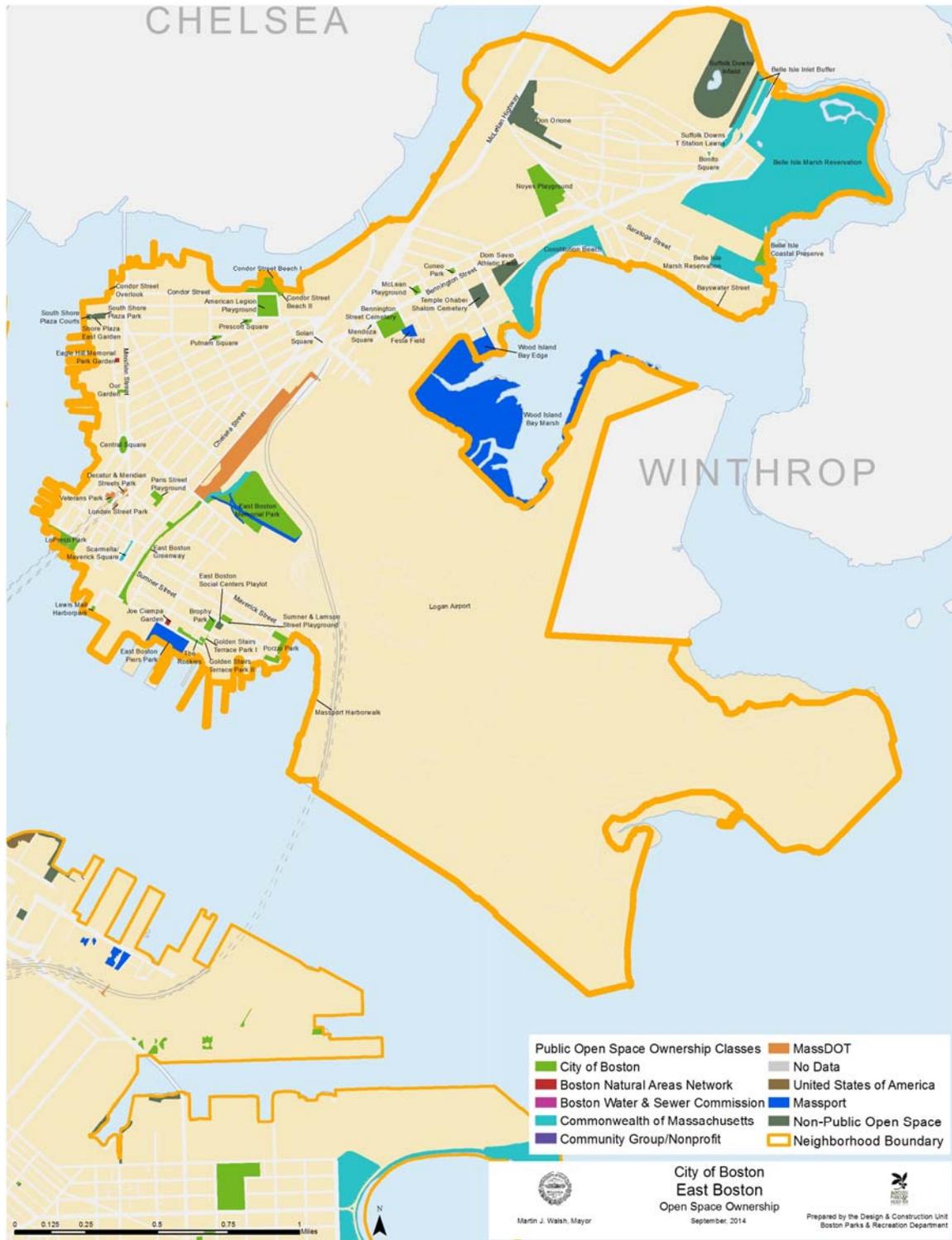
Map 3: Need Score by Census Block Group, East Boston

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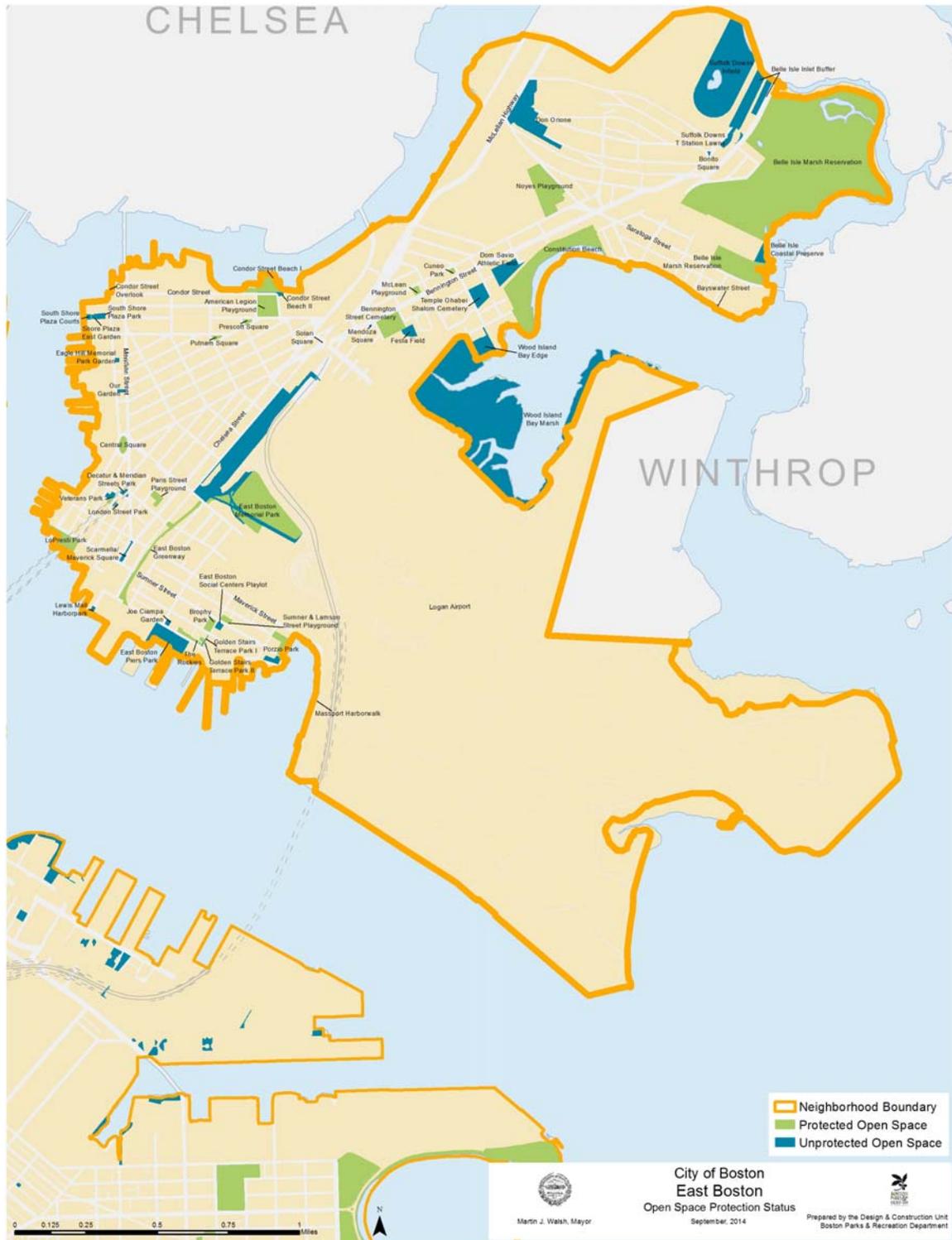
Map 4: Open Space by Type, East Boston

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Map 5: Open Space by Ownership, East Boston

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Map 6: Open Space by Protection Status, East Boston

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Map 7: Play Areas and Water Spray Features, East Boston

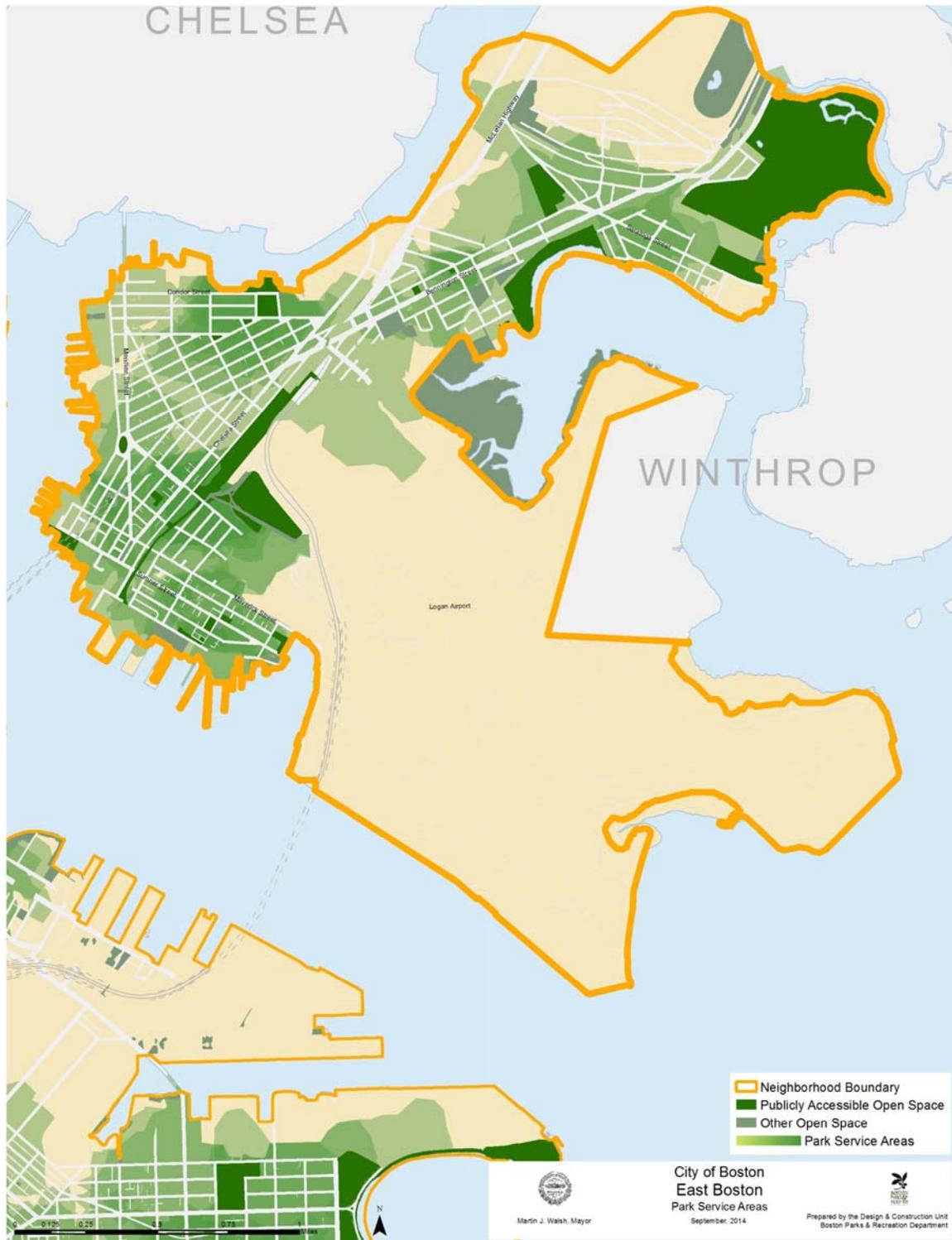
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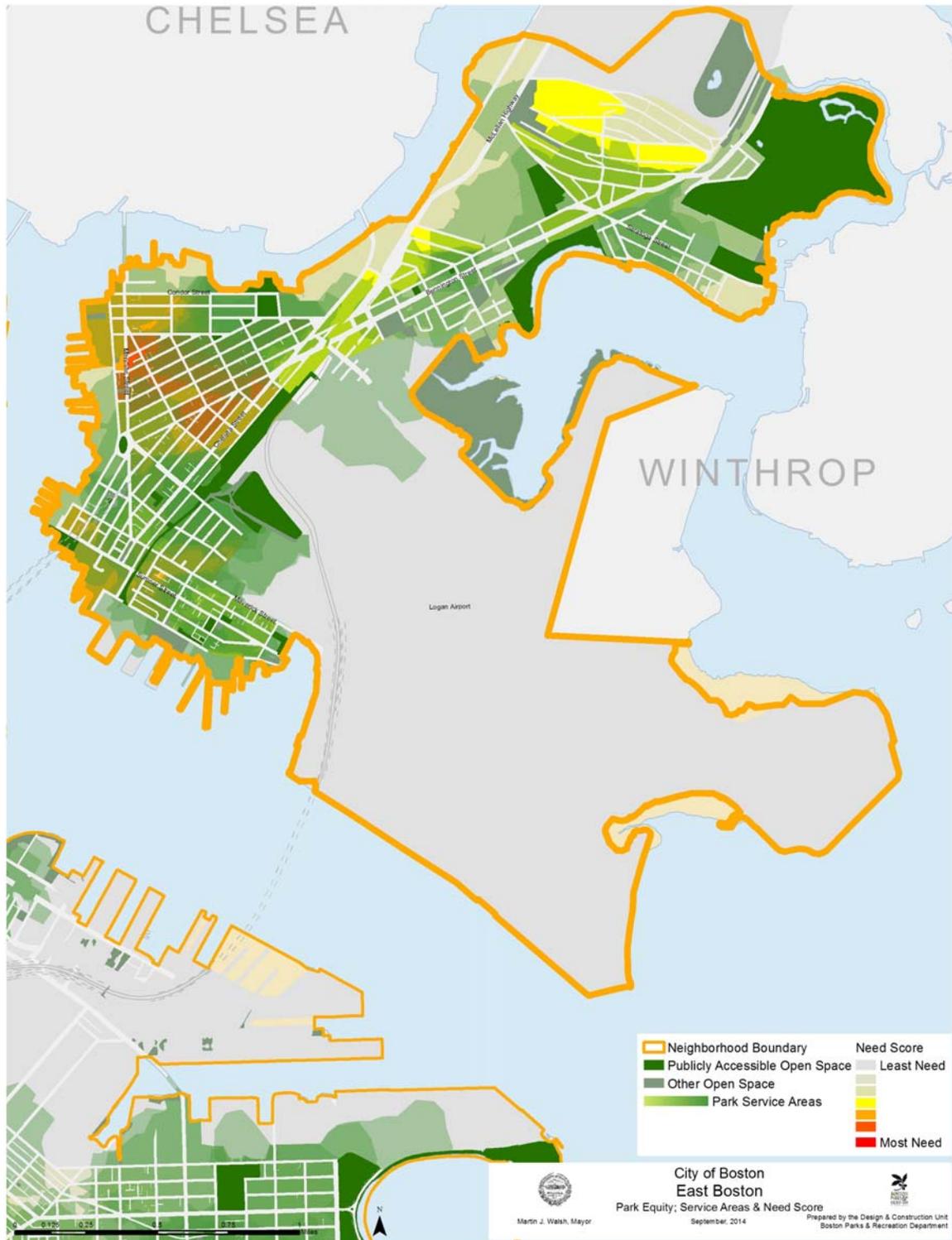
Map 8: Fields and Courts, East Boston



Map 9: Community Facilities, East Boston



Map 10: Park Service Areas, East Boston



Map 11: Park Equity: Service Areas & Needs Scores, East Boston

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Population	
2010 Census	40,508
2000 Census	38,413
Population growth/decline, 2000-2010	5.5%

Age		
Under 9	5,554	13.7%
10-19	4,508	11.1%
20-34	12,476	30.8%
35-54	11,478	28.3%
55-64	2,960	7.3%
65 and over	3,532	8.7%

Race		% of Total Population
White Alone		37.2%
Black or African American alone		3.2%
Asian Alone		3.5%
Other		3.3%

Latino Status		% of Total Population
Not Hispanic or Latino		
Hispanic or Latino		52.9%

Population Density		Persons Per Acre
2010 Census		26.8

Median Household Income
\$49,507

Household by Number of Vehicles Available	
No Vehicle	37.2%
1 vehicle	44.2%
2 vehicles	15.2%
3 or more vehicles	3.47%