
Open Space Plan 2008-2014

Section 7
Analysis of Needs

**Section 7.2.10 Community Open
Space & Recreation
MATTAPAN**

Section 7.2.10: Community Open Space & Recreation MATTAPAN

THE SETTING

History

Mattapan became part of Boston in 1870 as part of the annexation of the town of Dorchester. Mattapan is predominantly residential, a classic “streetcar suburb.” First the Midlands Branch railroad in 1855 and then the trolley in the 1890s opened up Mattapan to waves of residential construction. The Franklin sub-neighborhood, in the northern third of Mattapan, was more densely built-up with two- and three-family houses. The middle third, the Wellington Hill area, had single-family home construction mixed in with the two- and three-family homes. In the southern third of Mattapan, east and west of Mattapan Square, single-family homes on larger lots were built in the middle of the 20th century. Mattapan Square, at the confluence of Blue Hill Avenue, River Street, and Cummins Highway, with MBTA Red Line trolley service, became the commercial heart of Mattapan.

During the 1960s, a process of racial change occurred in Mattapan. Wellington Hill and southern Mattapan offered middle-income black families opportunities for home ownership. Unlike other parts of Blue Hill Avenue, Mattapan Square continued to be a busy neighborhood commercial district.

Because of the density and age of housing in the older Franklin area, poorer black families were able to afford housing there. A period of disinvestment, deterioration, and abandonment affected this neighborhood severely. By the 1980s, with market improvement and public housing investments, the Franklin area stabilized. However, Blue Hill Avenue in this area still exhibits some of the effects of this period of decline, with several vacant storefronts.

Mattapan has seen overall improvements in the 1990s thanks to continued public and private investment, spurred on in part by the general growth in the national economy and by the significant reduction in street gang- and drug-related crime.

Needs Analysis

Demographics/Housing

The decade between 1970 and 1980 saw a population decline of almost 10,000 persons, over 20% of the 1970 population. The population figure for 1990, 36,135, represents a 1% increase over the 1980 figure of 35,827. Population growth of 3.42% in the 1990s yielded a 2000 population total for Mattapan of 37,371.

The number of households grew by 11% from 1990 to 2000, much higher than the citywide figure of 5%. Average household size is higher here than the citywide figure: 2.96 versus 2.31 for the city. Population density increased to 13,299.3 persons per square mile, versus 12,172.3 for the city.

Mattapan remains a predominantly non-white neighborhood, but with the Hispanic share increasing from 7% in 1990 to 12% in 2000.

It has a significantly younger population than the city as a whole: the percent of persons 17 years and younger was 33% for Mattapan versus 20% for Boston.

Mattapan's income profile was lower than Boston's in terms of household median income (\$32,748 versus \$39,629, respectively) and in poverty rate (22% versus 20%, respectively). Unemployment was also higher than for Boston (9.7% versus 7.2%, respectively). The owner to renter ratio was similar to Boston as a whole (35% owner to 65% renter for Mattapan; 32% owner to 68% renter for Boston).

Single- and two-family homes make up 46% of Mattapan's housing stock, with another 36% being 3-9 unit residential structures. While 38% of Boston's residential structures was in the 3-9 unit range, only 32% of the city's housing stock was in the single- and two-family home range. Given the lower scale of the vast majority of units, backyards are a likely component of the house lot. However, many houselots in the Franklin area are small for two- and three-family homes. As a suburban neighborhood on Boston's southern boundary, fewer households have no vehicles available than for Boston as a whole (31% versus 35%, respectively).

Demographic and Housing Profile

Population	
2000 Census	37,371
1990 Census	36,135
1980 Census	35,827
Population growth/decline, 1990 - 2000	3.42%
Population growth/decline, 1980 - 1990	0.86%

Age		
0 to 4	3,060	8%
5 to 9	3,648	10%
10 to 14	3,626	10%
15 to 17	1,858	5%
18 to 24	3,633	10%
25 to 44	11,125	30%
45 to 64	7,753	21%
65 to 74	1,682	5%
75 to 84	801	2%
85 and over	185	0%

Race		% of Total Population
White alone		6%
Black or African American alone		81%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone		0%
Asian alone		1%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone		0%
Some other race alone		6%
Two or more races		6%

Latino Status		% of Total Population
Not Hispanic or Latino		88%
Hispanic or Latino		12%

N.B.: "0%" means "less than 1%"

Demographic and Housing Profile

Households	
2000 Census	12,532
1990 Census	11,255
1980 Census	11,084
Household Growth/Decline, 1980-1990	2.28%
Household Growth/Decline, 1990-2000	11.34%

Population by Household Type

	% Persons
Family households	89%
Non-family households	10%
Group quarters	1%

Average Household Size

	Persons per Household Type
All Households	2.96
Family Households	3.55
Nonfamily Households	1.22

Persons Per Household

	Households	%
1-person households	2,641	21%
2-person households	3,126	25%
3-person households	2,676	21%
4-person households	1,960	16%
5-person households	1,180	9%
6-person households	510	4%
7-or more person households	439	4%

Demographic and Housing Profile

Population Density	
	Persons per Square Mile
1980 Census	12,749.8
1990 Census	12,859.4
2000 Census	13,299.3
Density Change 1980 to 1990	109.6
Density Change 1990 to 2000	439.9

Housing Tenure in Occupied Housing Units	
	% in Occupied Housing Units
Owner occupied	35%
Renter occupied	65%

Total Occupied & Vacant Housing Units in Structure	
Single units	23%
Double units	23%
3-9 units	36%
10-19 units	8%
20-49 units	7%
50 or more units	2%
All other	0%
Single/Multiple Unit Ratio	0.3

Household by Number of Vehicles Available	
No vehicles	31%
1 vehicle	47%
2 vehicles	17%
3 or more vehicles	5%

Median Household Income
\$32,748

Civilian Unemployment Rate
9.7%

Poverty Rate
22.3%

Needs Analysis

THE OPEN SPACE SYSTEM TODAY*Equity and Investment*

Mattapan has a total of 368 acres in its open space inventory of parks, playgrounds, squares, and malls. However, only 141 acres are considered protected. With a 2000 population of 37,371, the ratio of protected open space acres per thousand persons translates to 3.78 acres per thousand persons, below the city average of 7.47 acres per thousand persons.

The City of Boston invested over \$2 million in improving three of its five recreational facilities in Mattapan: Harambee (Franklin Field), Thetford Street and Walker (see table). Ball fields, play lots, and courts, as well as associated infrastructure, have been rehabilitated thanks to the capital improvement program of the City of Boston.

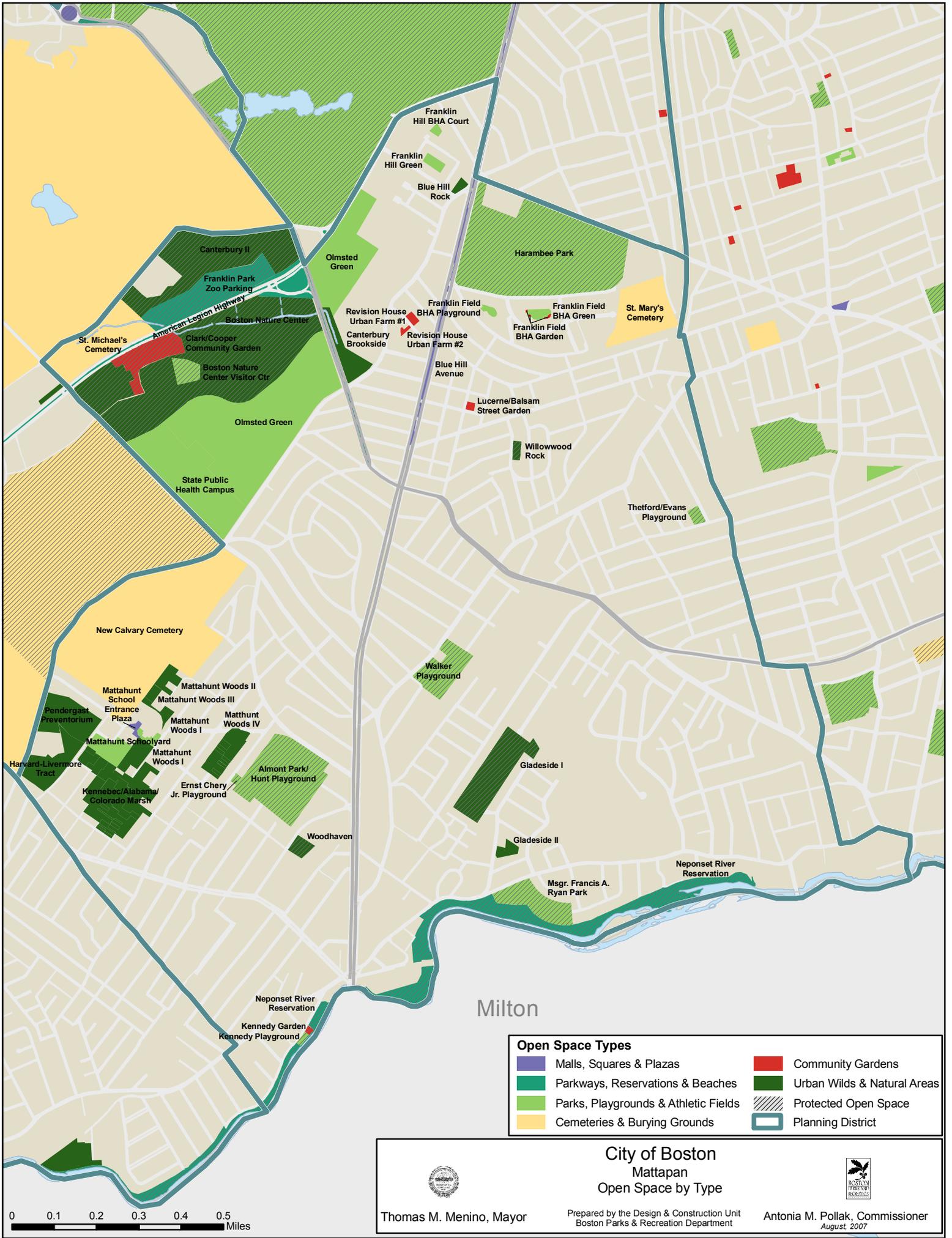
The Boston Conservation Commission, with assistance from the Boston Parks and Recreation Department and the Open Space Acquisition Fund, recently acquired an urban wild from the Boston Public Facilities Commission, a 10+ acre woodland area known as Gladeside I. With trails and a wetland area, it is a close-to-home opportunity for this neighborhood and nearby schools to learn more about the natural world.

Mattapan Capital Projects 2001-2006

Harambee Park	\$740,193
Gladeside I (Acquisition)	\$25,800
Mt. Hope Cemetery	\$418,599
Thetford Street Playground	\$328,480
Walker Playground	\$583,275
Total	\$2,096,347

*Assessment***ENHANCING EXISTING FACILITIES**

The approaches for assessment fall into two categories: enhancing existing facilities and developing new opportunities. The city has made significant investments in Mattapan's city parks. Further proposed investments will be evaluated for scheduling in the ongoing maintenance of effort cycle – capital planning, design and maintenance – for the Parks Department facilities. Candidates for capital rehabilitation include Harambee (playlot with water feature) and Hunt/Almont.



Open Space Types	
	Malls, Squares & Plazas
	Parks, Playgrounds & Athletic Fields
	Cemeteries & Burying Grounds
	Community Gardens
	Urban Wilds & Natural Areas
	Protected Open Space
	Planning District

City of Boston
Mattapan
Open Space by Type



Thomas M. Menino, Mayor

Prepared by the Design & Construction Unit
 Boston Parks & Recreation Department



Antonia M. Pollak, Commissioner
 August, 2007

Needs Analysis

Other existing facilities that deserve attention include schoolyards, thoroughfares, and waterfront access. With localized areas underserved by existing park space, the barren, paved schoolyards have the potential to meet their needs. The Mayor's Schoolyard Initiative has re-designed many such schoolyards to be educational and community open space assets and can provide the leadership for change on this issue in Mattapan.

TOWNSCAPE/SCENIC ENHANCEMENTS

Thoroughfares have also tended to look barren but have the potential to provide a healthier image for Mattapan by careful use of landscape elements. Major reconstruction has been done on Blue Hill Avenue from Franklin Park to Mattapan Square, and to American Legion Highway. The work has included street tree and median strip plantings. Judicious landscape treatment, including the use of planters enlivened with annuals supplied and designed by the Parks Department's Horticulture Unit, in such a prominent location has provided an example for other thoroughfares in the neighborhood, such as the DCR's Morton Street.

CONNECTING (TO) THE NEPONSET RIVER

Waterfront access is an unrealized opportunity in Mattapan. Only the DCR's Ryan Playground and Kennedy Playground and Community Gardens offer access to the water – the Neponset. The rehabilitation of Ryan Playground and the additional attention from the Greenways to the Harbor program, have provided paths down to and along the river including canoe launches at Ryan and Kennedy. (The Greenways to the Harbor program is a joint effort of the Boston Natural Areas Network and the DCR. The community partner is the Neponset River Greenway Coordinating Council, composed of residents of Dorchester, Hyde Park, Mattapan, and Milton.)

The DCR Planning Office is systematically looking at means to improve access to the Neponset from the mouth of the river westward to Mattapan Square and has made a recent acquisition just west of Mattapan Square adjacent to Kennedy Playground and Community Garden. The mid-1990s saw the DCR release The Lower Neponset River Reservation Master Plan. This plan calls for a greenway to be developed from the mouth of the Neponset at Dorchester and Quincy, and along the river inland to the Mattapan Square. It calls for a new park – Edgewater Park – near Mattapan Square, adjacent to Kennedy Playground and Community Gardens, to ensure greater riverfront public access. The opening of the DCR

Needs Analysis

Pope John Paul II Park and Neponset River Greenway to Central Avenue, both in Dorchester, are important steps toward the fulfillment of the DCR Master Plan for the Lower Neponset.

The DCR had suggested, in an appendix to the Lower Neponset master plan, the continuing of its planning for a Neponset River Greenway system west of Mattapan Square into Hyde Park. That will make the entire Neponset River Greenway from the Harbor westward a more valuable and usable recreation opportunity for the city as a whole, and for residents of Hyde Park, Dorchester, and Mattapan. This has been recently done (please see the Hyde Park section and the Greenways, Trails, and Bikeways section of the Analysis of Needs).

One important planning vision based on this westward extension of the Greenway would be to connect the Neponset River to the Charles River via Mother Brook in Hyde Park. This connection would result in a continuous riverside greenway from the mouth of the Neponset to the mouth of the Charles. 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 implementing this vision will be in the hands of the state, especially the DCR. As the Lower Neponset River Reservation Master Plan gets fully implemented, this vision will gain more attention from the public.

ADDRESSING NEW NEEDS, DEVELOPING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

One of the strongest needs in Mattapan is for the provision of more soccer and cricket fields. With the large immigrant population in Mattapan (as well as soccer's growing nationwide popularity), this appears to be a valid need. Given the high proportion of children in the neighborhood population, other needs identified include neighborhood-oriented play lots in underserved areas and ball fields. Mattapan has several open land resources available with the potential to meet these needs. Vacant lots exist in many areas of Mattapan. To assure that some portion of city-owned vacant tracts provide usable open space, the Department of Neighborhood Development is working with the Parks Department to evaluate vacant lots for potential park uses through Parks Department participation in the Real Estate Management Committee at DND.

Another City-owned resource is the surplus land at the Mattapan Chronic Disease Hospital on River Street. A portion of this site is known as Gladeside I, a ten-acre BRA-designated urban wild targeted for preservation in the city's master plan for the hospital (a

Needs Analysis

highly significant urban wild for this neighborhood as identified by the 1990 BNAF urban wilds report). The Boston Conservation Commission, with assistance from the Parks Department and the Mayor's Open Space Acquisition Fund, acquired this parcel from the Boston Public Health Commission in 2006. The Parks Department's Urban Wilds Initiative program now manages Gladeside I as a natural area on behalf of the Conservation Commission. In 2007, the Initiative, in concert with the Conservation Commission and the Boston Natural Areas Network, worked on eliminating two major encroachments on the property, in one case, resulting in restoring a key wetland area on the site. With programming through the Initiative and the School Department, Gladeside I could be an important environmental education resource for the youth of this area.

In addition to Gladeside I, the protection of the ecologically significant urban wild known as the Pendergast Preventorium will help enable the residents of Mattapan to find a balance in open space types not often found in many places in the city. It is comprised of a large forested wetland and smaller areas of upland forest. It can be an environmental education resource for city schoolchildren (the Mattahunt School is close by), and a part of the outreach of the Massachusetts Audubon Society's Boston Nature Center. At the time of this writing, the Conservation Commission approved a development plan for the site that protects the most vulnerable portions of the site. However, the owner, a church, has not yet begun construction, as it has not yet completed its fundraising goal.

Nearby the Pendergast Preventorium and the Mattahunt School are a large number of undeveloped wooded parcels with isolated lands subject to flooding, i.e., wetlands, that many in the nearby community wish to have preserved for their scenic beauty, habitat value, and flood storage capabilities. Bisected by three north-south paper streets, Kennebec, Alabama, and Colorado streets, these woodlands are made up of many city-owned as well as private parcels. It was hoped that the same model of success as in the Roslindale Wetlands urban wild can be applied here. Thanks to community activism and work by Conservation Commission and Parks Department staffs, the legal and physical protection of a majority of the parcels in this Kennebec/Alabama/Colorado Marsh has been assured, as the Public Facilities Commission in 2008 voted to transfer these parcels to the Conservation Commission for permanent conservation.

Needs Analysis

Mattapan's largest land resource with open space potential is the Boston State Hospital, which closed in 1981. Parts are BRA-designated urban wilds; part is already used as a community garden. In 1996, the Massachusetts Audubon Society (MAS) acquired 68 acres of the Hospital and has subsequently created the Boston Nature Center, partially funded by the City of Boston George Robert White Fund. The Nature Center use protects the most valued urban wilds and the gardens. Working to increase public transit access as well as pedestrian and bicycle access to this site will help make the investment by the MAS donors and the city's taxpayers even more valuable. These transportation access improvements should be done within the context of the other major open spaces in this area, a grouping sometimes known as the Heart of the City: the Arnold Arboretum, Forest Hills Cemetery, Franklin Park, and the Boston Nature Center.

Given that some of Mattapan's underserved areas border this site, active recreation should be considered for a portion of this site within the areas slated for development for housing or institutional uses, such as Olmsted Green or the state Public Health Department parcels.

Needs Analysis

THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

Much has been accomplished in the last five years for the city's recreational facilities in Mattapan. Further improvements of the city facilities are desired, as well as basic rehabilitation of the DCR facilities. Underserved areas should be addressed. Vacant lands may supply part of the answer to providing recreational facilities for underserved areas. Access to a future greenway on the Neponset River, and the protection and management of natural areas, emerged as two other major themes.

Opportunities

ENHANCING EXISTING FACILITIES

- Continue to participate in the community efforts with the DCR to secure the state's reinvestment in Kennedy Playground, a neighborhood facility in need of rehabilitation.
- Continue the cyclic restoration of capital facilities in the city-owned park system, such as Harambee and Hunt/Almont.
- Give priority to public schools in Mattapan for allocations from the Boston Schoolyard Initiative, in light of the needs both of the school's population and resident children in Mattapan.
- Install blue safety call boxes in parks where, in the judgment of park and police officials, the combination of park areas located far from the street or other public activity areas, *and* public safety history, warrants such infrastructure.

TOWNSCAPE/SCENIC ENHANCEMENTS

- Green-up and make more bicycle-friendly (such as use of bike lanes) major thoroughfares such as American Legion Highway, Cummins Highway, River Street, and the DCR Morton Street. Encourage the Growing Boston Greener tree-planting initiative to make Mattapan one of its focus areas.

CONNECTING (TO) THE NEPONSET RIVER

- Explore with the DCR enhancing formalized access along the Neponset River Reservation. Work with the DCR Planning Office on implementing the master plan for the Neponset from the Harbor to Mattapan Square. Work with the Neponset River Greenway Coordinating Council to urge the DCR to implement the plan for a Neponset Greenway from Mattapan Square to Hyde Park.
- Advance the DCR's progress toward implementation of Edgewater Park, assuring connections to Mattapan Square and the Neponset River.

Needs Analysis

- Support the Army Corps of Engineers study of the impacts of dam removal on the Neponset, which should encourage use of the river by non-motorized water craft such as canoes and kayaks.

ADDRESSING NEW NEEDS, DEVELOPING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

- Continue the participation by Parks Department staff in DND's Real Estate Management Committee. Monitor the disposition of vacant parcels that could be turned into play lots or playing fields.
- Develop public multi-purpose (active and passive) open space from a portion of the excess land designated for housing development at the Mattapan Chronic Disease Hospital. Work with DND and BRA to assure development of this open space opportunity for new and old residents of this underserved area.
- Develop measures at the ten-acre Gladeside I urban wild for improved access, resource protection, and environmental education to create a highly valued neighborhood asset.
- Support the protection of the wetlands on the Pendergast Preventorium site.
- Support protecting the natural resource values of the Mattahunt Woods marsh through its management by the Urban Wilds Initiative program. Develop the capacity of potential community partners for long-term stewardship of these wetlands in the Kennebec/Alabama/Colorado Streets area.
- Promote the city's interest in preserving portions of the Boston State Hospital (BSH) site for open space. Devote a portion of this large site to active recreation uses for underserved neighborhoods surrounding BSH.
- Encourage the continuing development of the Boston Nature Center by the Massachusetts Audubon Society (MAS). Work with MAS and the MBTA to improve public transportation to the site. Assist MAS in marketing the site, especially in view of possible links to the Arboretum and Franklin Park, and regional greenways. Develop safer pedestrian and bicycle access to the Center.

Needs Analysis

Community Priorities

ENHANCING EXISTING FACILITIES

- Continue maintenance, and assist community gardens, at Hunt Playground.
- Support the Blue Hill Avenue Boys and Girls Club leased management of the George Robert White Youth Development Center located at Harambee (a recently constructed \$4 million youth recreation center funded through the City of Boston Trust Office). Coordinate with such groups as the Lena Park Association and the Dorchester YMCA.
- Encourage appropriate passive recreational use of cemeteries.
- Install bike racks at Kennedy Playground. Improve the canoe launch and the garden plots as well.

TOWNSCAPE/SCENIC ENHANCEMENTS

- Continue maintaining thoroughfares such as Blue Hill Avenue and American Legion Highway.
- Encourage further outreach by the Parks Department to inform the community about obtaining more public shade trees on residential streets. Market the 635-PARK constituent service line as the means to obtain public shade trees.

CONNECTING (TO) THE NEPONSET RIVER

- Increase access to the Neponset River waterfront.
- Undertake appropriate integrated pest management practices to control mosquitoes.

ADDRESSING NEW NEEDS, DEVELOPING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

- Work to provide for more and better-distributed fields for soccer, baseball, and Little League.
- Pursue siting of more close-to-home play lots in several underserved sub-areas of Mattapan. Investigate one potential site in an underserved sub-area, the "North Expansion Area," a portion of the vacant land at the Mattapan Chronic Disease Hospital campus.
- Provide for small, scattered basketball court sites and play lots for older children (aged 7-12) in the Franklin Field South area. Work with the DND neighborhood initiative to investigate using vacant lands for this purpose.
- Convert some vacant lots into open space. Look at alternative funding sources such as the DND Grassroots program.

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- Encourage residential abutters to acquire adjacent unbuildable city-owned vacant lots through the DND Abutter Lots program.
- Encourage private owners to clean up their vacant lots to prevent rats, dumping, and use by drug traffickers and users.
- Make more citizens aware of city assistance (Boston Youth Fund crews, etc.) for vacant lot maintenance.
- Expand enforcement and signage to regulate the use of dogs in parks and playgrounds in the face of increased dog ownership. Increase public awareness of water quality impacts on the Neponset and the Harbor from stormwater contaminated by dog waste. Identify responsible dog owners groups as potential stewards for such public awareness campaigns and for potential dog park areas.