
Open Space Plan 2015-2021

Section 7

Analysis of Needs

**Section 7.2.13 Community Open Space &
Recreation
ROXBURY**

DRAFT

Section 7.2.13: Community Open Space & Recreation ROXBURY

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

Members of the Massachusetts Bay Colony established a village in Roxbury in 1630. By the 18th century, rural homes and country estates of Boston's wealthy families occupied this area. Roxbury farms provided fresh produce to Boston, which had become a dense settlement specializing in maritime commerce.

By the 19th century, Roxbury's rural character began to change. When the Boston and Providence Railroad built a commuter line down the Stony Brook Valley in 1834, housing began to be built for people commuting to Boston. By the mid-19th century, Roxbury's northern section, Lower Roxbury, was a full-fledged industrial

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mill town providing jobs for the new Irish and German immigrants. In exchange for new gas, water, and sewer lines, Roxbury was annexed to Boston in 1868. By the late 1800s, with electric streetcar service now penetrating Roxbury, residential development was rapid and extensive.

In the late 1800s, the Boston parks movement began to influence Roxbury. Roxbury alderman Hugh O'Brien urged that Boston's "country" park, comparable to Central Park in New York, Prospect Park in Brooklyn, and Mount Royal Park in Montreal, be built in the newly annexed Roxbury. The city broke ground on the construction of this country park in 1885, during Hugh O'Brien's tenure as mayor. Designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, Franklin Park was one of the destinations of choice on a Sunday afternoon for Boston residents in the late 19th century. Franklin Park became the location of Boston's first sports field called the Playstead, and the nation's first municipal golf course.

The 20th century erosion of Boston's industrial base affected Roxbury adversely, as did the flight of middle class residents to the less dense suburbs surrounding Boston. The 1960s saw a major urban renewal effort in the residential Washington Park area of Roxbury. The Washington Park urban renewal program, begun in 1963, doubled the size of the historic Washington Park (now Malcolm X Park), and added an indoor recreation center, pool, and ice rink.

With the abandonment by the late 1960s of much housing and businesses, vacant land became abundant. The availability of land helped provide the opportunity for a strong grassroots community gardening movement, which is still an important feature of community revitalization efforts. Another community preservation effort was the campaign to stop the extension of I-95 through Roxbury into downtown Boston. Ultimately, this campaign generated the Southwest Corridor Park in 1987, Boston's first major new open space in over a half century, since Carson Beach was opened in South Boston in 1924. Other lands acquired for the highway right-of-way along Columbus Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard are now beginning to be developed. It is hoped that this development will contribute to a further economic revival in Roxbury, enhanced by the Southwest Corridor Park and the South Bay Harbor Trail pedestrian and bicycle paths along Melnea Cass Boulevard.

Analysis

Roxbury has the highest percentage of children of any community in the city (30.7%). This community has 3.7 acres of open space per 1000 residents which is about half the city average of 7.64 acres per thousand. Roxbury's population has grown significantly – 16.8% – between 2000 and 2010.

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While Roxbury is dense, its landscape character is distinctly different from its more inner core neighbors. Most of the city's inner core communities are built on fill or leveled hills, so topography and natural landscape characteristics are non-existent through the Back Bay, South End, Central Boston, and large portions of South Boston and the Seaport District. In Roxbury, that is not the case. This community is defined by its Roxbury puddingstone outcroppings, many of which are now meaningful features in its parks and urban wilds. Fort Hill remains a prominent feature in Boston's landscape, particularly with Highland Park and its iconic water tower at its summit.

All of Roxbury meets at least one of the state's Environmental Justice criteria, in most places for multiple criteria. These criteria, combined with the prevalence of families with children and overall neighborhood density result in most of the neighborhood receive a high score for park need (Roxbury Maps 2 & 3).

Roxbury possesses great variety in its many acres of protected open spaces, though many of the the facilities in Roxbury parks are distributed in clusters. For example, around Dudley Square and along Blue Hill Avenue, playgrounds and waterspray features are abundant. Similarly, in the southern part of the neighborhood Walnut Park, Crawford Street Park, Trotter School Playground, Laviscount Park, and Holborn Street Playlot are all within a block or two of each other. The multi-use parks that can accommodate active recreation are primarily located in the north portion of the neighborhood where urban renewal resulted in the creation of larger consolidated open spaces. In the middle of the neighborhood, where outcroppings have limited the development of some parcels, passive parks and urban wilds are predominant. These patterns are understandable but not necessarily desirable from the perspective of park use and facilities access. This arrangement also accentuates the importance of access to the larger recreational parks on the edges of the neighborhood (Roxbury Maps 4, 7 & 8).

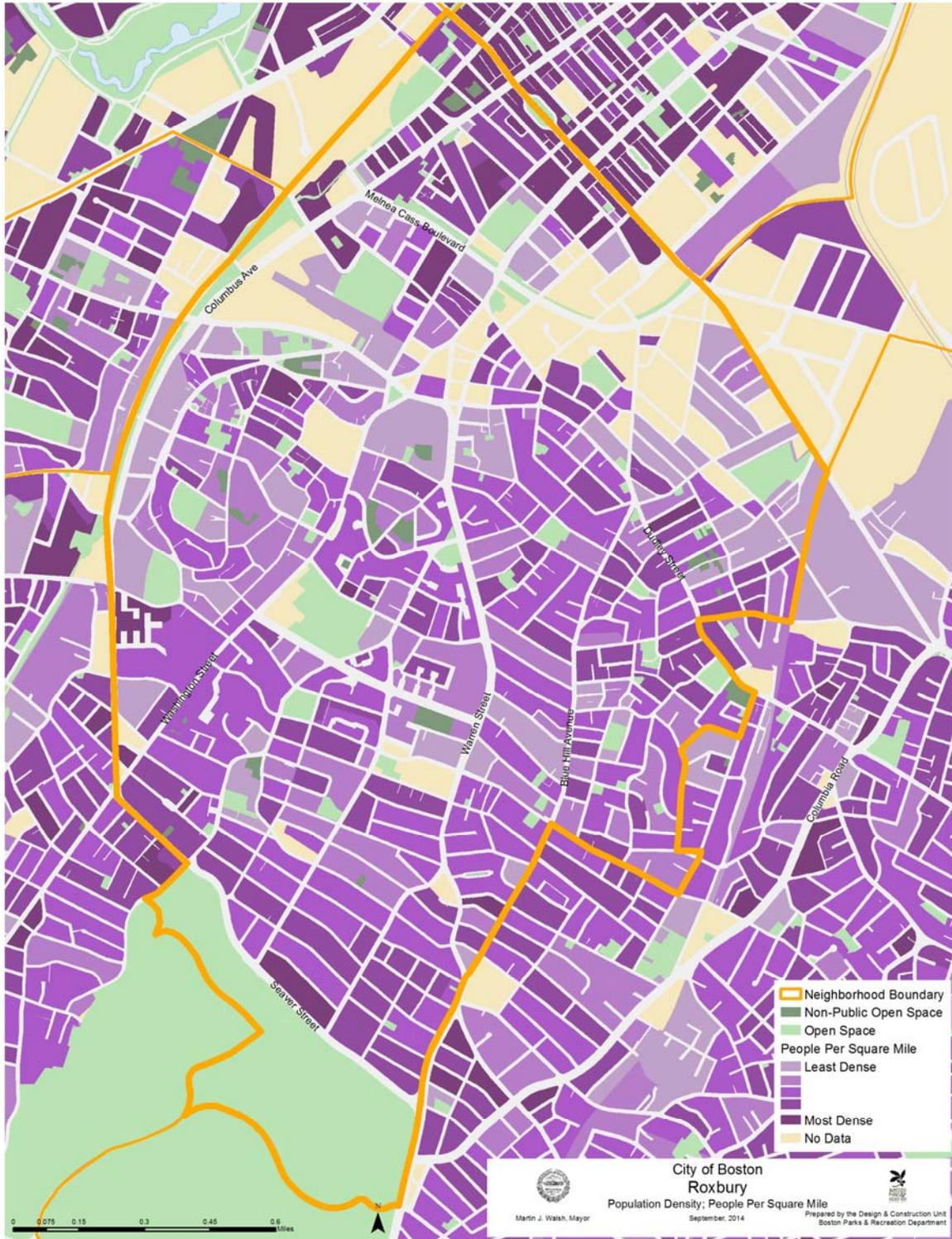
The abundance of parks – even small ones – in Roxbury, means that most residents have one or more parks that can be easily accessed in a 5 or 10 minute walk (Roxbury Map 10). The Grove Hall neighborhood is close to the city's largest park, Franklin Park, but the Franklin Park Zoo occupies much of the Seaver Street park frontage which limits access and proximity to park amenities for these neighbors. Grove Hall is a dense, high need area and improved access to park facilities here should be explored (Roxbury Map 11).

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In 2004, the BRA released the Roxbury Strategic Master Plan. It called for several strategies to improve open space in the Roxbury community. The first was to revive the Roxbury Heritage State Park, which includes the Dillaway-Thomas House and the land surrounding it. The most significant advance is the selection by DCR of Roxbury Heritage State Park as the recipient of one of six Signature Park Project awards by the state. The project began in 2013 and construction on a redesigned park and refurbished historic house is projected to be substantially completed by the end of 2014.

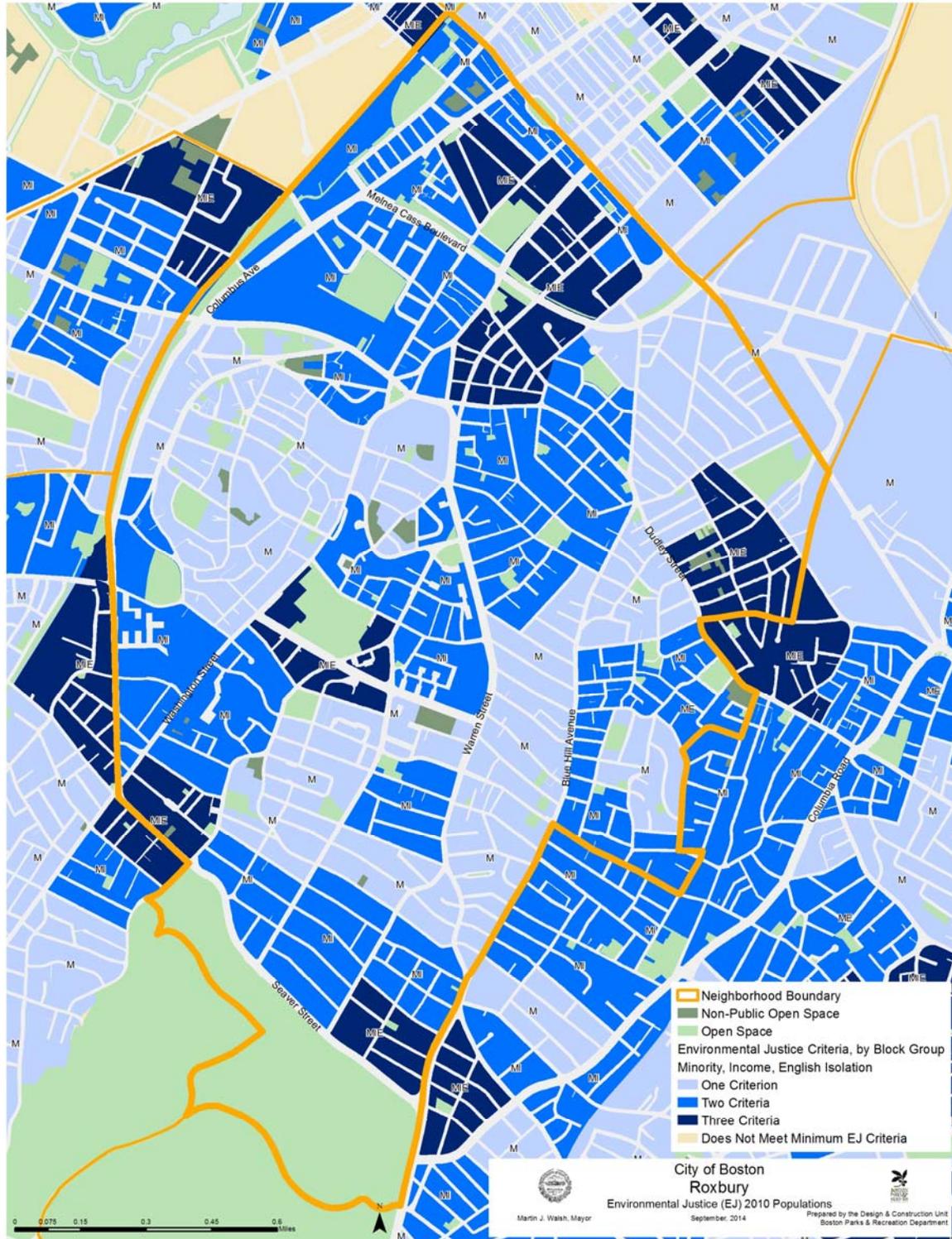
Another strategy in the Roxbury Strategic Master Plan is to improve connections between parks and open spaces to provide opportunities for pedestrian and bicycle recreation. One major project to advance this item is the BTD managed redesign of Melnea Cass Boulevard to allow for bus rapid transit lanes within a corridor that supports continued motor vehicle travel with a generous sidewalk, a bicycle path (called the South Bay Harbor Trail), and a median supporting a row of trees.

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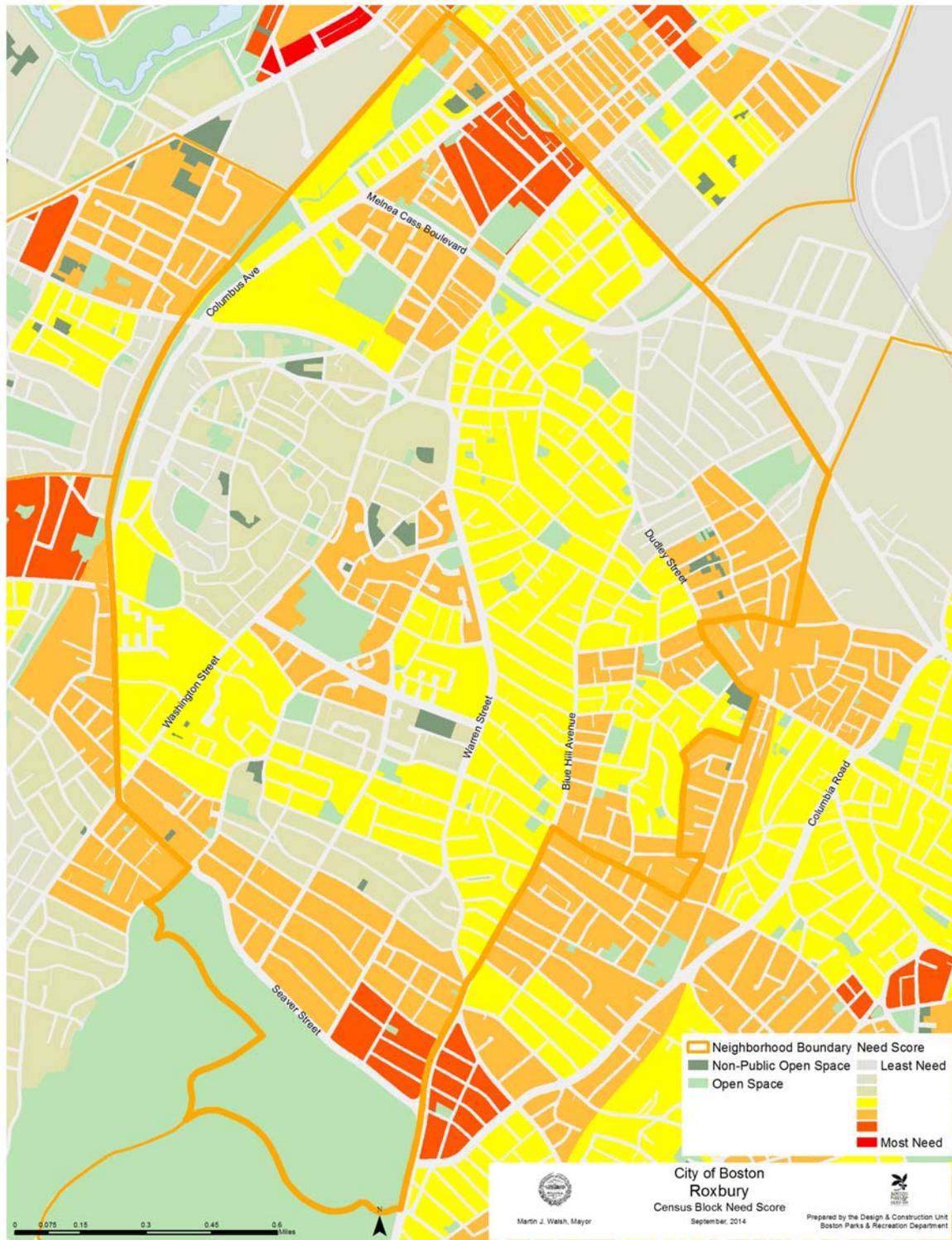
Map 1: Population Density, Roxbury

Needs Analysis



Map 2: Environmental Justice Populations, Roxbury

Needs Analysis



Map 3: Need Score by Census Block Groups, Roxbury

Needs Analysis



Map 4: Open Space by Type, Roxbury

Needs Analysis



Map 5: Open Space by Ownership, Roxbury

Needs Analysis



Map 6: Open Space by Protection Status, Roxbury

Needs Analysis



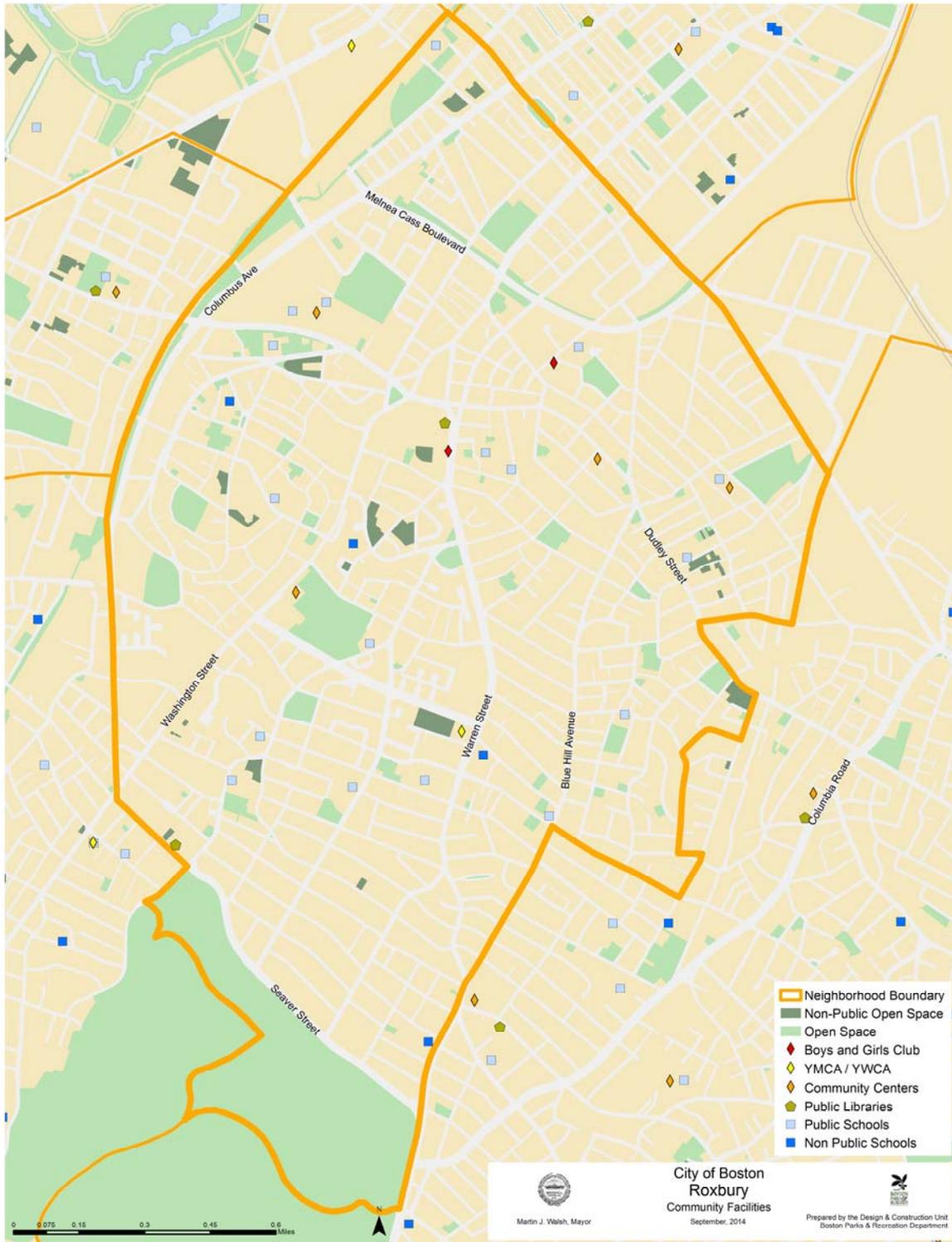
Map 7: Play Areas and Water Spray Features, Roxbury

Needs Analysis



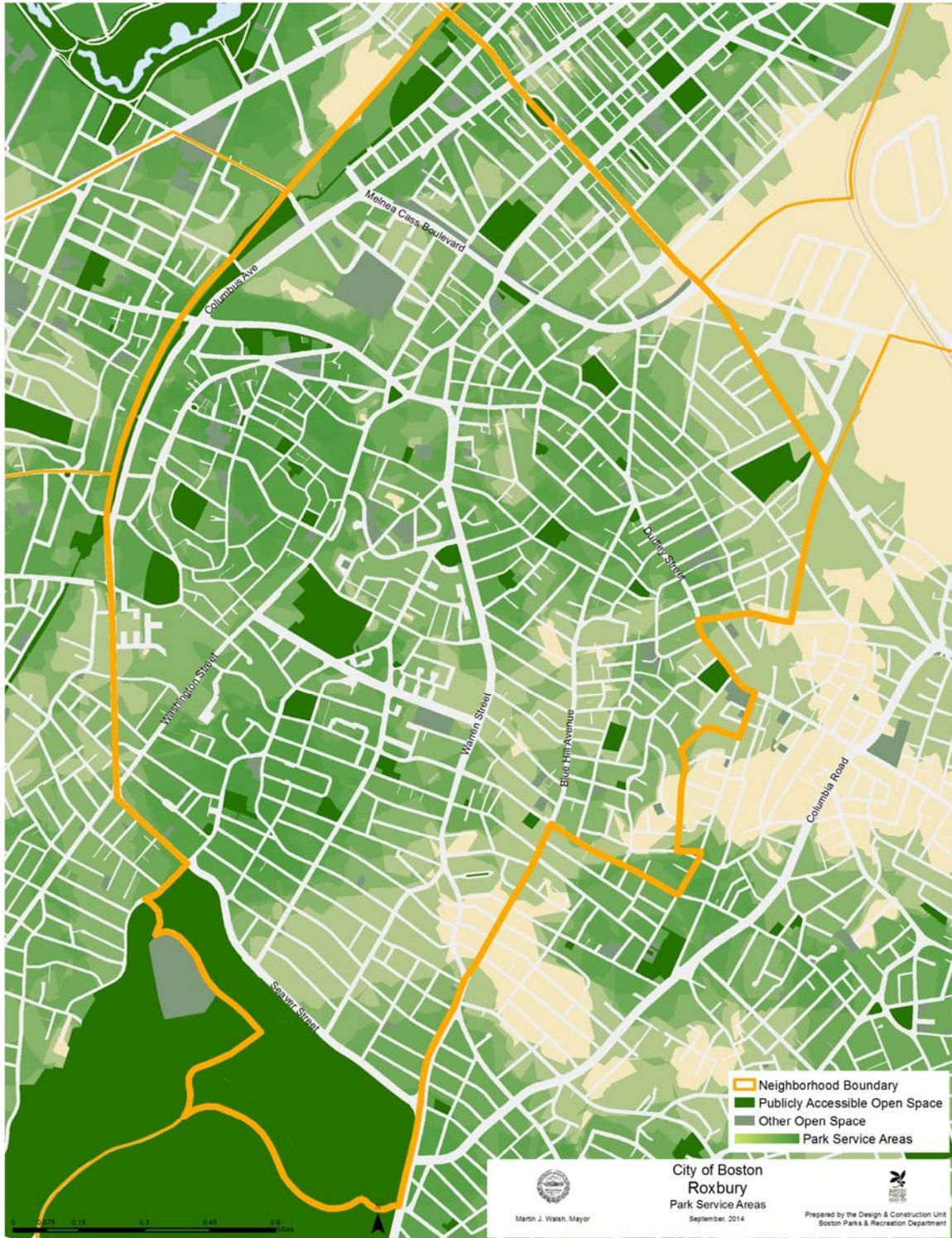
Map 8: Fields and Courts, Roxbury

Needs Analysis



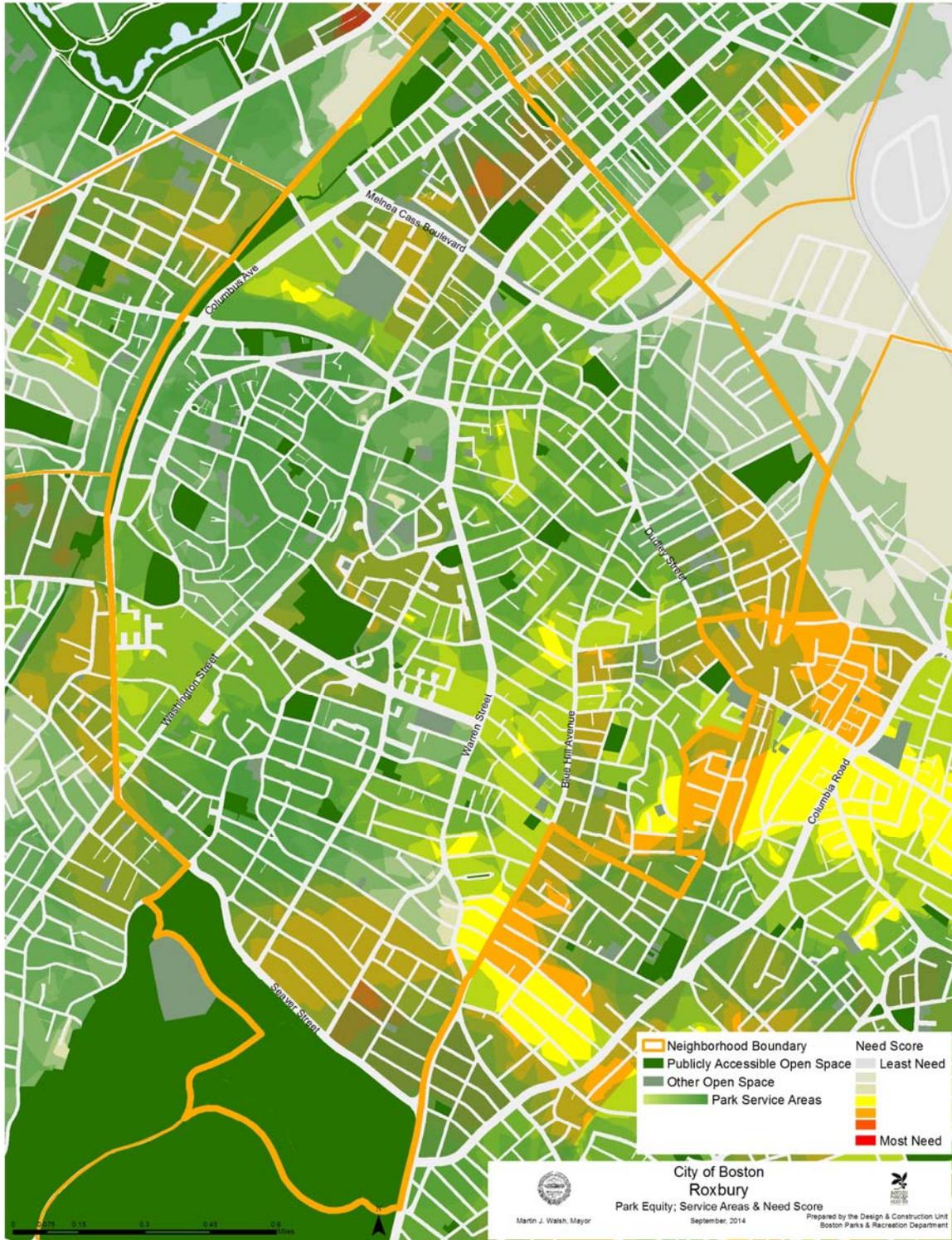
Map 9: Community Facilities, Roxbury

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Map 10: Park Service Areas, Roxbury

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Map 11: Park Equity: Service Areas and Need Scores, Roxbury

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Population	
2010 Census	48,454
2000 Census	41,484
Population growth/decline, 2000-2010	16.8%

Age		
Under 9	6,502	13.4%
10-19	8,376	17.3%
20-34	12,468	25.7%
35-54	11,957	24.7%
55-64	4,963	9.7%
65 and over	4,458	9.2%

Race	
	% of Total Population
White Alone	11.2%
Black or African American alone	51.8%
Asian Alone	2.7%
Other	6.8%

Latino Status	
	% of Total Population
Hispanic or Latino	27.5%

Population Density	
	Persons Per Acre
2010 Census	28.5

Median Household Income	
	\$27,034

Household by Number of Vehicles Available	
No Vehicle	44.4%
1 vehicle	41.6%
2 vehicles	11.2%
3 or more vehicles	2.7%