

Section 1

Executive Summary

Contents

- Section 1 — Executive Summary**..... 1
- Section 2 — Introduction**..... 3
- Section 3 — Community Setting** 7
- Section 4 — Environmental Inventory & Analysis**33
- Section 5 — Inventory of Lands of Conservation and Recreation Interest**65
- Section 6 —Community Vision**..... 111
- Section 7.1 — Analysis of Needs: Resource Protection** 131
- Section 7.2 — Analysis of Needs: Community Open Space & Recreation** 153
- Section 7.3 — Analysis of Needs: Open Space Systems Management** 369
- Section 8 — Goals & Objectives**..... 393
- Section 9 — Seven-Year Action Plan**..... 395
- Section 10 — Public Comments**..... 401
- Section 11 — References**..... 405
- Appendices** 411

Executive Summary

Boston's open space system is dynamic, historically significant, and critical to the quality of life for its residents. America's first park, Boston Common, played a vital role in the beginnings of our country, but it is also a neighborhood park with a playground, off leash dog areas, skating rink and tennis courts. The Common is also a regional destination where millions annually attend festivals, concerts, learn history and enjoy Shakespeare. Its more than 600 trees and rolling lawns provide vital green space benefits to an increasing densely populated downtown. The challenge of balancing historical significance and aging infrastructure with sustainable design and heavy use may not be unique to our city. It is, however, the penultimate challenge for our stewardship of Boston's open spaces. The Boston Parks and Recreation Department mission focuses on access, equity and excellence—so that every neighborhood is home to beautiful spaces that serve both the people and the environment.

This Open Space Plan (OSP) provides the Boston Parks and Recreation Department (BPRD) an opportunity to assess Boston's current system. The analysis of collected data informs an action plan that will guide our efforts through the year 2021. It will inform investment, programming, operations, citywide initiatives, and evaluation of ongoing policy work. Through our inventory and analysis of existing open space (Sections 4, 5, and 7) and our extensive public input process (Sections 2 and 6) we found that the city currently features:

- Exceptional walkable access to our existing open spaces
- Disparities in the quantity and quality of open space available to residents from one community to the next
- A treasured system of historic parks and sites
- Linear parks, parkways and greenways that provide a connective fabric through the city

In addition, three broad challenge areas are present throughout the plan: *Open Space Access and Quantity*; *Open Space Quality*; and *Climate Change and Resilience*.

Open Space Access and Quantity

Boston is a mature but rapidly growing city. If the rate of growth remains constant (the MAPC "Status Quo" Scenario – see page 3-32), the city's population will grow by 3.7% by 2020 and by 7.6% by 2030. Mayor Walsh's Housing Report (*Housing and a Changing City, Boston 2030*) projects a city population of 700,000 by 2030. To maintain our open space ratios as they are today (7.59 acres per 1,000 residents), the city would need to add another 173 acres of protected open space to our inventory by 2020, plus 451 additional acres by 2030. A city as built out as ours makes this level of acquisition particularly daunting. We will need to identify new open space opportunities through planning, development, and partnerships. A siloed approach to green space will no longer suffice. The City will look to the public right-of-way and other properties to provide pedestrian and bicycle amenities, shade, seating, and gathering spaces.

Critical to the OSP's success will be its integration into the Boston Redevelopment Authority's master planning process for the city- Boston 2030. As we evaluate potential impacts, BPRD must

also advocate for a stronger relationship between building development and open space development. Strategies must be employed that aggregate open space provisions into larger, multi-purpose facilities for public use. Our city's projected growth has the potential to widen disparities in open space distribution. Many of the densest neighborhoods will be experiencing additional residential development, increasing pressures on existing parks. These inner core neighborhoods offer few opportunities for the creation of new recreation areas. Strategic assessment of potential new park spaces, an enhanced public realm, and strong connections to existing green spaces from these neighborhoods are paramount. Collaborative planning with other agencies is key to these efforts.

Open Space Quality

Equity is a core component of the BPRD mission and our parks must be equitable not only in their distribution but also their quality. Park quality includes environmental, health, social, economic, and aesthetic factors. Some of these factors are explored in the coming chapters, others are highlighted in our Action Plan, and all will require an ongoing analysis. This analysis will enhance our understanding of how our park system serves the public through the quality of its open spaces. The multiple uses and values of open space are discussed further in Section 2. What cannot be achieved through creating new park land must be realized through improving and sustaining the quality and functionality of existing resources so that these spaces can meet or exceed the level of service city residents and visitors expect.

Designing and sustaining high-quality parks is one of the highest priorities of the OSP. Stewardship is at the core of the work that park owners and managers undertake. Stewardship activities include capital reinvestment, maintenance, renovation, restoration, and historic preservation. However, BPRD must also place a renewed focus on innovation as an activity. Best practices, partnerships and operations optimizations must be explored, implemented and evaluated to ensure quality throughout our system. This work requires significant annual funding to sustain, and these investment needs will climb with population growth and increased impacts on park facilities. BPRD must diversify its sources of investment to ensure an equitably high quality parks system.

Climate Change and Resilience

This OSP complements the 2014 City of Boston's Climate Action Plan. These two planning efforts share fundamental objectives to improve quality of life in the city while reducing carbon emissions and preparing for climate change. Bolstering the city's green infrastructure systems can help us withstand and temper the impacts of climate change through storm water absorption, tree canopy benefits, and walkable access to active and passive recreational facilities. Expanded open space systems can provide physical buffers to increasingly powerful storms, support systems of non-vehicular transportation, and mitigate the health risks associated with warming urban environments. Parks and open spaces are central to the future health, resilience and livability of our city. The Open Space Plan will guide us in making informed decisions to improve our city in the years to come.

These challenge areas, *Open Space Access and Quantity*; *Open Space Quality*; and *Climate Change and Resilience*, are complex and interrelated. However, they are not intractable. Section 8 of the OSP introduces three goals that will lead BPRD's responses to these and other challenges presented to our parks system. These goals are:

- Steward the exceptional open space system that the City of Boston has inherited;
- Envision and create an accessible and equitable open space system for Boston's future; and
- Enhance the urban natural environment and improve quality of life and well-being in the city.

The objectives and action items presented in Section 9 provide the means to track the Open Space Plan's success. Over the next seven years, the assessment will be as important as the implementation. By evaluating progress on a routine basis, the BPRD will be able to take corrective action when needed. We will also be able to celebrate our successes. We look forward to working with all of you to build a better open space system for Boston.