

Section 7.2.13:

ROXBURY

For an explanation of the organization, content and maps in this section, please see the Introduction to Section 7.2: Community Open Space and Recreation (page 160).

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 construction began for people commuting to Boston. By the mid-19th century, Roxbury's northern section, Lower Roxbury, was a full-fledged industrial 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 many 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 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.

Open Space Access & Equity

Roxbury has the highest percentage of residents under the age of 20 of any community in the city (30.7%). Teenagers make up 8.9% of the neighborhood population which is among the highest percentage in the city (along with Dorchester, Mattapan and Hyde Park). Roxbury has 3.7 acres of open space per 1,000 residents which is about half the city average of 7.59 acres per thousand. Roxbury's population has grown significantly—16.8%—between 2000 and 2010.

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 almost 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 distinct 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 high scores for park need (Roxbury Maps 2 and 3).

Roxbury possesses great variety in its many acres of protected open spaces, though many of 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 northern 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 and 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).

Future Development

In 2004, the BRA released the Roxbury Strategic Master Plan which 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 is currently awaiting finalization for funding for construction.

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 Boston Transportation Department managed redesign of Melnea Cass Boulevard to allow for potential future bus rapid transit lanes within a corridor that accommodates vehicular travel, a generous pedestrian realm, a bike way (called the South Bay Harbor Trail), and street trees. Redesign of Malcolm X Boulevard / Dudley Street as a Complete Street will further advance this goal.

Dudley Square has been the focus of infill and redevelopment in recent years including significant public investment in municipal facilities and transportation improvements. Sustained development in this area, like the reuse of the former Bartlett Yards site, will strengthen the neighborhood and bring new users to existing open space amenities. Not far from Dudley Square, development sites along Tremont Street have the potential to bring a mix of uses to the area between the Roxbury Crossing and Ruggles Orange Line stations. This community, currently anchored by Roxbury Community College and the Boston Police Headquarters, will be transformed with new infill projects. Pedestrian scale amenities and connections should be emphasized with these projects to shift this neighborhood away from its automobile oriented, large block character to one that encourages walkability and active streets.

As stated previously, at its current density, Roxbury only provides 3.7 acres of open space per 1,000 residents. With its attractive housing stock, proximity to downtown and the Longwood Medical Area, and vibrant community, Roxbury will continue to be a desirable for development. Retaining an appropriate balance between park space and park users will be essential as this neighborhood densifies.

Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile

ROXBURY

Population	
2010 Census	48,454
2000 Census	41,484
Population Growth/Decline, 2000–2010	16.8%

Population Density		Persons per Acre
2010 Census		28.5
2000 Census		24.4
Density Change, 2000–2010		4.1

Age	Persons	Percent of Population
0 to 9	6,502	13%
10 to 19	8,376	17%
20 to 34	12,468	26%
35 to 54	11,957	25%
55 to 64	4,963	10%
65 and over	4,458	9%

Teens, City to Community Comparison	Total Population	Total Children 12-17	% of Boston's Children 12-17	Children 12-17 as % of Neighborhood Population
Boston	617,594	33,920	100.0%	5.5%
Roxbury	48,116	4,260	12.6%	8.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Decennial Census, BRA Research Division Analysis

Race/Ethnicity/Latino Status	Persons	Percent of Population
White alone	5,431	11%
Hispanic or Latino	13,316	27%
Black or African American alone	25,100	52%
Asian alone	1,291	3%
Other	3,316	7%

Median Household Income
\$27,480

Source: US Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey, BRA Research Division Analysis

Percent of Households by Number of Vehicles Available	
No vehicles	44%
1 vehicle	42%
2 vehicles	11%
3 or more vehicles	3%

Source: American Community Survey 2006-2010; BRA Research Division Analysis

Population* with Disability	Persons	Percent of Population
Boston	72,390	11.6%
Roxbury	8,363	18.0%

*Civilian Noninstitutionalized

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 American Community Survey, BRA Research Division Analysis

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

All Tables 2010 U.S. Decennial Census, unless otherwise noted





















