Section 7.2.2:

BACK BAY/BEACON HILL

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

Beacon Hill takes its name from the sentry light erected on its peak to warn settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in case of a threat from Indians or foreign invaders. The south slope as it exists today began to emerge in the 1790s with the building of the present State House. Starting at this time, the hill was reshaped and the old beacon taken down.

Cutting and filling allowed the development of Louisburg Square and Mt. Vernon Street for substantial house lots. The north slope had three sections by the latter 1700s: stately houses around Bowdoin Square; an African-American community centered between Joy and Phillips Streets; and a "red light" district near the Charles River. The north slope changed largely due to construction of both the Massachusetts General Hospital complex and tenement and apartment buildings in the 1800s.

The Back Bay originally referred to a tidal body of water on the western edge of the Shawmut Peninsula that stretched from Brookline to Boston Common. A discussion on the process of landfilling and neighborhood development can be found under Section 3: Community Setting. Parisian boulevards were the inspiration for the linear plan of the Back Bay with its stately tree-lined spine of Commonwealth Avenue. By contrast, an English model with squares influenced the layout of Beacon Hill and the South End. The Back Bay developed quickly with fashionable townhouses reflecting the affluence of its residents. Deed restrictions created consistency for building heights, setbacks, and masonry construction.

In the realm of more recent history, development of the Massachusetts Turnpike, the Prudential Center, and Copley Place created a major residential, commercial, and hotel complex on the southern reaches of this neighborhood. Newbury and Boylston Streets continue to support thriving retail and restaurant uses. Large swaths of both Beacon Hill and Back Bay are now designated historic districts that provide continuing design controls. Boston Common, the Public Garden, and Commonwealth Avenue Mall are themselves designated City of Boston Landmarks. In addition, Boston Common and the Public Garden are National Historic Landmarks (the highest tier of listing in the National Register of Historic Places).

Open Space Access & Equity/ Future Development

This community has 4.23 acres of protected open space for every 1,000 residents, which is lower than the city average of 7.59 but higher than most inner core neighborhoods. Despite the lower than average ratio, actual access to open space is quite successful in this neighborhood.

The population is dominated by young adults and has the lowest percentage of children of any city neighborhood. High population density throughout the Back Bay and Beacon Hill results in somewhat high park need scores for this area, but the effective distribution of park areas, as well as the quality of these spaces, results in a community that is well served by open space (Back Bay/Beacon Hill Maps 1 & 3).

Because they are large, highly visible, and centrally located in or near dense residential and business districts, the parks in this area are among the most heavily used in the greater metropolitan area (as evidenced in the results of this plan's survey as seen in Section 6): Boston Common, the Public Garden, Commonwealth Avenue Mall, and Copley Square Park (all under Parks Department jurisdiction), the DCR's Charles River Esplanade, and State House Park.

While these parks are regional and tourist destinations, they also serve the neighborhood. Both Boston Common and the Charles River Esplanade contain active sports facilities and children's play areas. In addition to these major parks, there are children's playgrounds within both the Beacon Hill and the Back Bay residential neighborhoods.

The greatest deficiency in this neighborhood, similar to Central Boston, is the lack of availability of active recreation facilities (Back Bay/Beacon Hill Map 7). Boston Common provides the only athletic fields and tennis courts in this part of the city. Titus Sparrow provides courts and the Ebersole Fields on the Esplanade provide ball fields, but the former is a South End neighborhood park and the latter is in the Central Boston community. Given similar deficiencies in these neighborhoods, these nearby parks can provide little reduction of this deficiency. This community's section of the Charles River Reservation includes the public sailing facilities at Community Boating, as well as a network of pedestrian and bicycle paths. These paths span both sides of the Charles River, and provide iconic scenic views of Boston and Cambridge, an attraction that helps encourage use of the paths and parklands. Taken in this context, the open space access for this neighborhood is among the city's best.

The Christian Science Complex, in the southwestern corner of the Back Bay/Beacon Hill community and designated a Landmark by the Boston Landmarks Commission, contains lawn areas, plaza space, a fountain, and large reflecting pool. The Complex owner has proposed adding buildings to the campus, while retaining and improving much of the iconic open space that reflected the "New Boston". The recently completed master plan calls for expanding the lawn areas and the number of trees in the complex. However, a small planted triangle (less than a quarter-acre) at the corner of Belvidere and Dalton Streets, nominally part of the complex, is slated to become a site for the construction of a tower building as part of the construction proposed in the new master plan. As part of the project, there will be included a new public/private park.

Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile

BACK BAY/BEACON HILL

Population	
2010 Census	27,111
2000 Census	27,004
Population Growth/Decline, 2000–2010	**0.4%**

Population Density	Persons per Acre
2010 Census	45.3
2000 Census	45.1
Density Change, 2000–2010	**0.2**

Age	Persons	Percent of Population
0 to 9	1,264	5%
10 to 19	1,490	6%
20 to 34	12,997	48%
35 to 54	5,697	21%
55 to 64	2,672	10%
65 and over	2,991	11%

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%
Back Bay/Boston	27,111	295	0.9%	1.1%

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

Race/Ethnicity/ Latino Status	Persons	Percent of Population
White alone	21,983	81%
Hispanic or Latino	1,424	5%
Black or African American alone	881	3%
Asian alone	2,275	8%
Other	548	2%

Median Household Income
$77,712

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

Percent of Households by Number of Vehicles Available	
No vehicles	51%
1 vehicle	38%
2 vehicles	10%
3 or more vehicles	1%

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

Population* with Disability	Persons	Percent of Population
Boston	72,390	11.6%
Back Bay/Boston	1,483	5.6%

*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

Map 1: Population Density
Back Bay/Beacon Hill

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Legend:
Neighborhood Boundary
Non-Public Open Space
Open Space
People Per Square Mile
Least Dense
Most Dense
No Data

CAMBRIDGE

Pinckney Street
Charles Street
Beacon Street
Storrow Drive
Dartmouth Street
Boylston Street
Massachusetts Avenue
Columbus Avenue
Huntington Ave

Map 2: Environmental Justice Populations
Back Bay/Beacon Hill

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Legend

Neighborhood Boundary
Non-Public Open Space
Open Space
Environmental Justice Criteria, by Block Group
Minority, Income, English Isolation
One Criterion
Two Criteria
Three Criteria
Does Not Meet Minimum EJ Criteria

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Pinckney Street
Charles Street
Beacon Street
Storrow Drive
Dartmouth Street
Boylston Street
Columbus Avenue
Huntington Ave
Massachusetts Avenue

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Map 3: Need Score by Census Block Groups
Back Bay/Beacon Hill

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Need Score

Neighborhood Boundary
Non-Public Open Space
Open Space

Highest Score

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CAMBRIDGE

Pinckney Street
Charles Street
Beacon Street
Storrow Drive
Dartmouth Street
Boylston Street
Columbus Avenue
Huntington Ave
Massachusetts Avenue

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Open Space Types

Malls, Squares & Plazas
Parkways, Reservations & Beaches
Parks, Playgrounds & Athletic Fields
Cemeteries & Burying Grounds
Community Gardens
Urban Wilds & Natural Areas

Non-Public Open Space
Neighborhood

Map 4: Open Space by Type
Back Bay/Beacon Hill

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N

Miles
0   0.1   0.2   0.3   0.4   0.5

Temple Street Park
State House Park
Myrtle Street Playground
Phillips Street Park
Pinckney Street
Louisburg Square
Mount Vernon Square
Charles River Reservation
Beacon Street
Charles Street
Boston Common
Central Burying Ground
Public Garden
Frieda Garcia Park
Copley Square Park
Copley Place Plaza
Southwest Corridor Park
Clarendon Street Totlot
Dartmouth Street
Storrow Drive
Commonwealth Avenue Mall
Boston Public Library Courtyard
Boylston Street
Prudential Center Plazas
Columbus Avenue
Harcourt/West Canton Garden
Follen Garden
Greenwich/Cumberland Garden
Blackwood/Claremont Garden
Huntington Ave
Christian Science Plaza
Belvidere/Dalton Plaza
Charles River Reservation
Massachusetts Avenue
Charlesgate

Map 5: Open Space by Ownership
Back Bay/Beacon Hill

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Public Open Space Ownership Classes

- City of Boston
- Boston Natural Areas Network
- Boston Water & Sewer Commission
- Commonwealth of Massachusetts
- Community Group/Nonprofit
- MassDOT
- No Data
- United States of America
- Non-Public Open Space
- Neighborhood Boundary

CAMBRIDGE

N

Miles
0   0.1   0.2   0.3   0.4   0.5

Temple Street Park
State House Park
Pinckney Street
Myrtle Street Playground
Philips Street Park
Louisburg Square
Mount Vernon Square
Boston Common
Central Burying Ground
Charles Street
Public Garden
Charles River Reservation
Beacon Street
Charles River Reservation
Storrow Drive
Commonwealth Avenue Mall
Dartmouth Street
Clarendon Street Totlot
Copley Square Park
Copley Place Plaza
Frieda Garcia Park
Southwest Corridor Park
Columbus Avenue
Harcourt/West Canton Garden
Follen Garden
Boylston Street
Boston Public Library Courtyard
Prudential Center Plazas
Christian Science Plaza
Huntington Ave
Greenwich/ Cumberland Garden
Blackwood/ Claremont Garden
Belvidere/ Dalton Plaza
Charles River Reservation
Massachusetts Avenue
Charlesgate

CAMBRIDGE

Pinckney Street

Temple Street Park

State House Park

Myrtle Street Playground

Phillips Street Park

Louisburg Square

Mount Vernon Square

Boston Common

Central Burying Ground

Charles Street

Charles River Reservation

Beacon Street

Public Garden

Charles River Reservation

Storrow Drive

Clarendon Street Tot lot

Dartmouth Street

Copley Square Park

Frieda Garcia Park

Copley Place Plaza

Southwest Corridor Park

Columbus Avenue

Commonwealth Avenue Mall

Boston Public Library Courtyard

Boylston Street

Prudential Center Plazas

Harcourt/West Canton Garden

Follen Garden

Greenwich/ Cumberland Garden

Blackwood/ Claremont Garden

Huntington Ave

Christian Science Plaza

Belvidere/ Dalton Plaza

Charles River Reservation

Massachusetts Avenue

Charlesgate

N

0   0.1   0.2   0.3   0.4   0.5
Miles

Legend:
Neighborhood Boundary
Protected Open Space
Unprotected Open Space

Map 6: Open Space by Protection Status
Back Bay/Beacon Hill
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Map 7: Play Areas & Water Spray Features
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Legend
- Neighborhood Boundary
- Non-Public Open Space
- Open Space
- Playlot
- Playlot (pink)
- Waterspray (blue)
- School Playlots (yellow)

Phillips Street Park
Myrtle Street Playground
Pinckney Street
Boston Common
Charles Street
Beacon Street
Charles River Reservation
Frieda Garcia Park
Clarendon Street Totlot
Dartmouth Street
Storrow Drive
Boylston Street
Southwest Corridor Park
Columbus Avenue
Huntington Ave
Massachusetts Avenue
CAMBRIDGE

N

0.5 Miles
0 0.1 0.2 0.3 0.4

Neighborhood Boundary
Non-Public Open Space
Open Space
Athletic Field
Basketball
Street Hockey
Tennis

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Map 8: Fields & Courts
Back Bay/Beacon Hill
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Pinckney Street

Boston Common

Charles Street

Beacon Street

Storrow Drive

Dartmouth Street

Boylston Street

Huntington Ave

Columbus Avenue

Massachusetts Avenue

CAMBRIDGE

N

Miles
0   0.1   0.2   0.3   0.4   0.5

Pinckney Street

Charles Street

Beacon Street

Storrow Drive

Dartmouth Street

Boylston Street

Columbus Avenue

Huntington Ave

Massachusetts Avenue

CAMBRIDGE

N

Miles
0.5
0.4
0.3
0.2
0.1
0

Neighborhood Boundary
Non-Public Open Space
Open Space
Boys and Girls Club
YMCA / YWCA
Community Centers
Public Libraries
Public Schools
Non Public Schools

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Map 9: Community Facilities
Back Bay/Beacon Hill
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Pinckney Street

Charles Street

Beacon Street

Storrow Drive

Dartmouth Street

Boylston Street

Columbus Avenue

Huntington Ave

Massachusetts Avenue

CAMBRIDGE

N

Miles
0   0.1   0.2   0.3   0.4   0.5

Access: Park Service Areas
- Beyond any park service area
- Served by 1 park
- Served by 2 parks
- Served by 3 or more parks
- Neighborhood Boundary
- Publicly Accessible Open Space
- Other Open Space

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Map 10: Park Service Areas
Back Bay/Beacon Hill

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CAMBRIDGE

Pinckney Street

Charles Street

Beacon Street

Storrow Drive

Dartmouth Street

Boylston Street

Columbus Avenue

Huntington Ave

Massachusetts Avenue

N

0   0.1   0.2   0.3   0.4   0.5
Miles

Access: Park Service Areas

Beyond any park service area
Served by 1 park
Served by 2 parks
Served by 3 or more parks

Need Score

Highest Score

Neighborhood Boundary
Publicly Accessible Open Space
Other Open Space

Map 11: Park Equity: Service Areas & Need Scores
Back Bay/Beacon Hill

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