

Section 7.2.6:

EAST BOSTON

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

Originally a group of five islands, East Boston was connected to Boston with the establishment of the first ferry in 1637. In 1833, William Sumner established the East Boston Company to develop this area as one of the first planned communities in Boston.

From 1840 to 1865, East Boston began to expand rapidly, becoming a major site for the construction of world-famous clipper ships by well-known builders such as Donald McKay and Samuel Hall. East Boston became a significant transportation center and shipping port, attracting immigrants seeking employment in the shipbuilding industry. With the Cunard Line establishing a port of entry in the Maverick Square area by 1839, East Boston became the Ellis Island of New England.

In 1905, the first subway tunnel to downtown was opened. The development of Logan Airport in 1923, the Sumner Tunnel in 1934, and other transportation-related projects dramatically impacted the neighborhood. Local industrial facilities began to decline in favor of airport-related development and many families left for the suburbs.

Today, despite such pressures, East Boston has stabilized as a neighborhood and in recent years has benefitted from many new investments geared toward public facilities. The third harbor tunnel (aka Ted Williams Tunnel) has helped reduce airport bound traffic on residential streets. East Boston enjoys an extensive waterfront that will continue to provide redevelopment opportunities for maritime, industrial, commercial, residential, and open space uses.

Open Space Access & Equity

East Boston is predominantly a family neighborhood—nearly 25% of the population is composed of youth under the age of 20. East Boston compares favorably with other densely populated neighborhoods, with 5.33 acres of open space for every 1,000 residents, though this number is still below the city average of 7.59 acres. The neighborhood has had 5.5% population growth from 2000–2010, a trend that will likely continue as underutilized parcels are redeveloped for residential uses (East Boston Map 1).

East Boston neighborhoods are generally dense, with limited private residential outdoor space. This is a community that is dependent on its parks. East Boston has an extremely rich mix of open space types: active and passive areas, linear facilities, natural areas and waterfront access. Over 206 acres of open space in East Boston are located within two sizable saltwater marshes.

Nearly the entire neighborhood meets at least one of the State's Environmental Justice criteria. This combination of factors—high density, demographic and socio-economic factors—results in a

high park need score for almost all of East Boston, with the greatest need in the Eagle Hill neighborhood (East Boston Maps 2 and 3).

Many of East Boston's parks are located on the edges of the neighborhood—bordering the water or the airport. Playground distribution is reasonable and walkable in this neighborhood, though two areas rely on BPS schoolyards for playlots—Orient Heights (Bradley School) and Eagle Hill (O'Donnell and Kennedy) (East Boston Map 7).

Due to recent renovations, East Boston now has three synthetic turf fields at East Boston Memorial Stadium, LoPresti Park, and American Legion Park. Conversion from natural to synthetic turf allows these facilities to accommodate heavy use, which is necessary in this dense neighborhood (East Boston Map 8).

Eagle Hill

Bordered by the Chelsea River, the Inner Harbor, and McClellan Highway, this is a primarily residential area with defunct industrial uses along the waterfront. Small open spaces like Prescott and Putnam Squares are located at street grid corners. American Legion Park accommodates active recreation needs. The area is one of East Boston's most stable sections, with many of the homes occupied by the same families for generations.

Eagle Hill, while rich in history and future potential, is currently lacking in the availability of diverse recreational and passive open space resources. This is especially true for the dense residential streets between Central and Day Squares. Central Square will be reconfigured through a Boston Transportation Department project, making its central feature, Bertulli Park, more accessible to the neighborhood for passive uses. The Chelsea River (aka Chelsea Creek) and Inner Harbor edges also remain generally inaccessible and undeveloped. The former Hess Oil site, on the Chelsea Creek waterfront has significant unrealized potential for community open space, though environmental remediation will likely be required preceding any project on this site.

Maverick Square

Roughly the triangular area between Maverick Square, Central Square, and LoPresti Park, the Maverick Square sub-area contains a mix of residential and industrial uses. Traffic arteries and commercial uses dominate both Central (a center for neighborhood commerce) and Maverick Squares.

LoPresti Park, located next to the Maverick Landing housing development (1,500 residents), is nearing completion of a multi-phased renovation effort. The adjacent New Street development will expand the publicly-accessible waterfront open space in this area.

The Lewis Mall from Maverick Square to Boston Harbor along Lewis Street suffers from inattention and lack of development. As reinvestment occurs along the piers in this area, with the consequent extension of Harborwalk, this open space connection will increase in importance as a gateway from the interior of this neighborhood to its greatest regional open space asset.

Jeffries Point

A largely residential area to the south of East Boston Memorial Park, Jeffries Point has a long waterfront directly facing downtown Boston. While some piers have maritime uses, most are underutilized or abandoned. This is one of the oldest and most densely settled areas of the neighborhood, dominated by triple-decker rowhouses. Neighborhood parks are predominantly passive or a mix of court-based recreational facilities. Porzio Park and Piers Park provide access to the water.

This area remains relatively isolated from active recreation facilities with airport-related highway ramps separating the residents from East Boston Memorial Park. A new pedestrian and bike path, built by Massport, connects from Maverick Street north up to Porter Street to provide access from Jeffries Point to the active recreation facilities at East Boston Memorial Park. The East Boston Greenway complements this connection on the other side of the neighborhood, connecting to Massport's Bremen Street Park.

Orient Heights/Harborview

This northernmost area of Boston includes the Orient Heights public housing development as well as a number of single-family homes (the rest of East Boston is dominated by multi-family homes). Orient Heights is characterized by hills gently sloping up from the water with the housing situated on well-defined terraces.

Available open space facilities have a rich diversity and include a large multi-use park (Noyes), saltwater marshes, Constitution Beach, a cemetery, and small play areas. Pedestrian and bicycle connections between different facilities in the Orient Heights area are lacking and several of the natural areas are unprotected.

The topography of this neighborhood is a factor in evaluating park access for area residents. Noyes Playground is directly adjacent to the Brandywyne Village apartment community, but is less convenient to other Orient Heights residents who live up on the hill. The deficiency of park space on the north side of Orient Heights near Suffolk Downs has the potential to be ameliorated as part of the upcoming phased renovation of the BHA Orient Heights public housing community (East Boston Map 11). A more substantive opportunity for open space expansion lays in the future redevelopment of Suffolk Downs which could provide regional open space amenities.

Future Development

Large underutilized parcels, combined with great transit access, make East Boston attractive for redevelopment. As these developable sites are transformed, particular attention must be paid to the impacts these projects will have on existing open spaces. The East Boston Greenway, in particular, is flanked by numerous potential project sites. Each of these future projects should aim to improve access to the Greenway, animate the corridor with thoughtfully designed adjacencies, and retain the sense of spaciousness within the park (via sunlight, views and plantings) that makes this linear amenity inviting.

As noted previously, East Boston as a whole has a high park need score (East Boston Map 3). Its high density contributes to that score, and the consequent pressure for housing contributes to the lack of open land for future parks distributed throughout the neighborhood. Instead, as noted in the East Boston Master Plan (BRA, 2000), looking to existing open spaces and assets and linking them will generate a high degree of access and usability out of the limited open space resources, many of which are high quality and water-oriented.

One such linkage is the Harborwalk system, supported by the Chapter 91 Tidelands mandate for open space and public access to the waterfront. Linking existing waterfront parks owned by public agencies to open spaces within proposed developments will provide a sense of continuity that reduces the spatial limitation inherent in the small size of each particular open space parcel. There will need to be alternative means of routing pedestrians and cyclists so that access restrictions at industrial sites and Designated Port Areas minimize the interruption in continuity.

Similarly, the East Boston Greenway, when fully constructed, will link open spaces between Boston Harbor and Belle Isle Marsh Reservation—Piers Park, Bremen Street Park, Constitution Beach, Bayswater Street Urban Wild, and Belle Isle Coastal Preserve—as well as be an open space amenity itself. A recent addition to the chain is the Wood Island Bay Link built by Massport in 2014, which extends the greenway northeastwards for half a mile from Bremen Street Park. It is expected that the BRA will soon complete the next third of a mile of the greenway, the Narrow Gauge Link, from the Wood Island Bay Link to the DCR's Constitution Beach. Further work will be needed to extend the greenway northeastward from Constitution Beach to its ultimate destination in the Belle Isle Marsh Reservation. The BTD Green Links Project is an opportunity to look carefully at this extension.

Another project for consideration by the BTD Green Links Project would be the tangential extension of the East Boston Greenway northward toward Chelsea Creek via an abandoned rail corridor that is being studied for a haul road. If some space can be reserved for pedestrian and bicycle travel, it could help make a connection along the Chelsea Creek shoreline and beyond into Chelsea.

To address some of the open space shortcomings in the Eagle Hill neighborhood, the use of Prescott and Putnam Streets as links between Condor Street Urban Wild / American Legion Playground and the Bremen Street Park portion of the East Boston Greenway would be beneficial. This would create the opportunity for an approximately 2.5 to 3 mile loop in the southern "half" of East Boston.

Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile

EAST BOSTON

Population	
2010 Census	40,508
2000 Census	38,413
Population Growth/Decline, 2000–2010	5.5%

Population Density		Persons per Acre
2010 Census		26.8
2000 Census		25.5
Density Change, 2000–2010		1.3

Age	Persons	Percent of Population
0 to 9	5,554	14%
10 to 19	4,508	11%
20 to 34	12,476	31%
35 to 54	11,478	28%
55 to 64	2,960	7%
65 and over	3,532	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%
East Boston	40,508	2,588	7.6%	6.4%

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

Race/Ethnicity/ Latino Status	Persons	Percent of Population
White alone	15,051	37%
Hispanic or Latino	21,419	53%
Black or African American alone	1,283	3%
Asian alone	1,410	3%
Other	1,345	3%

Median Household Income	
\$42,747	

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

Percent of Households by Number of Vehicles Available	
No vehicles	37%
1 vehicle	44%
2 vehicles	15%
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%
East Boston	5,448	12.5%

*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





















