
Open Space Plan 2015-2021

Section 7

Analysis of Needs

**Section 7.2.1 Community Open Space &
Recreation
ALLSTON-BRIGHTON**

Section 7.2.1:

Community Open Space & Recreation

ALLSTON-BRIGHTON

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

Like many Boston neighborhoods, the Allston-Brighton area was established in the colonial era (1635) with land grants. A sparsely settled agricultural pattern prevailed until the filling in of the Back Bay and Kenmore Square areas in the late 1800s, by which time the Brighton stockyards had become the foremost cattle market in the region. Another important agricultural development in Brighton was the growth of horticulture: commercial gardens and extensive greenhouses covered many of the hills of Brighton. The Massachusetts Horticultural Society was founded in Brighton in 1829 and the area became well known for the many flowers and other

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decorative plants, fruit trees, and vegetables developed by Brighton growers. The grounds of Saint John's Seminary are the remains of an old estate orchard.

Proximity to the Charles River and the Boston & Albany Railroad encouraged construction of stockyards, slaughterhouses, and meatpacking operations in both Allston and the northern and eastern sections of Brighton. As the nation expanded westward and refrigerated railroad cars were introduced, regional stockyards, like those in Brighton, declined in importance. These cattle-related businesses were replaced over time by other industrial plants, commercial warehouses, and homes.

In the late 1800s, the extension of streetcar lines – especially along the Commonwealth Avenue corridor – encouraged high quality residential development in Brighton, much of which remains today.

After World War II, the Massachusetts Turnpike Extension further divided this neighborhood. Wider than the existing railroad tracks, the Pike added more noise and air pollution as it severed pedestrian links on either side. Proximity to expanding universities on all sides resulted in a considerable influx of students, coupled with younger families and immigrants from many lands. These changing population patterns in turn spurred much conversion of large-scale apartments and 19th century single family homes to smaller rental units and condominiums.

Analysis

Allston-Brighton's ratio of protected open space per 1000 residents is 4.83 acres which is lower than the city average of 7.64 acres per 1000. City of Boston facilities include many neighborhood parks with play and sports facilities, an 18th century historic cemetery, a 19th century landscaped cemetery, a community garden, and passive areas such as Chandler Pond and the wooded part of Ringer Park. The urban wilds are numerous, helping to provide outlets for contact with nature. Parkland of historic and regional significance includes the DCR's Chestnut Hill Reservoir and Charles River Reservation. Commonwealth Avenue is notable as an historic boulevard and an important link in the open space system (Allston / Brighton Map 4).

The largest demographic group in this neighborhood is young adults – college age or just beyond. Children make up a small portion of the overall population (only 13.3%) which is the second smallest portion of children for any city neighborhood (behind Back Bay/Beacon Hill). This community shares borders with Newton, Brookline, Cambridge, and Watertown; it has a small border with the Boston community of Fenway/Longwood.

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About 1/3 of the community's open space (a quantity not included in the acres per 1000 ratio above) falls into the category of unprotected campus open space owned primarily by Boston College, Harvard University, and Boston University (Allston / Brighton Map 6). These institutional lands provide a sense of spaciousness and as well as visual amenity to neighborhood residents and visitors. Retaining and protecting community access to open space owned by hospitals, schools, and religious organizations in Allston and Brighton, often taken for granted, is an important issue, especially as new uses are found and planned for some of these institutional sites. Understanding and documenting the ecosystem services of these lands provide can also inform the discussion about their value and need for protection.

The greatest population density in the neighborhood is along Commonwealth Avenue. The park Need Score, which also takes into account environmental justice criteria and age variables, reinforces the park needs along this Commonwealth Avenue corridor (Allston / Brighton Maps 1, 2 & 3).

Park distribution in the neighborhood differs in Allston than in Brighton. Brighton's parks are typically about ½ mile apart which serves the neighborhood well and allows for a reasonable distribution of facilities. Allston has fewer parks and they are more spread out. As this part of the neighborhood redevelops and converts industrial uses to commercial, office, residential and institutional uses, this lack of park facilities will be increasingly felt. Prioritizing the creation of meaningful, usable, open space as Allston continues to densify is essential.

The DCR's Charles River Reservation is a very significant regional and neighborhood recreational resource – used by picnickers, canoeists, kayakers, boaters, runners, walkers, bicyclists, and community gardeners. Neighborhood access to the Reservation however is difficult at most points due to the barriers created by the Massachusetts Turnpike and Soldiers Field Road.

Throughout the Allston-Brighton neighborhood, the established parks consistently have very poor street frontage and visibility. This condition is present at Hooker-Sorrento, Ringer Playground, Overlook Park, Portsmouth Playground and Ray Mellone Park. This lack of visibility can invite misuse and reduces access to these important public spaces. This condition should be studied as each of these spaces is renovated and opportunities for improvement of access and visibility should be prioritized.

There are only three parks in the neighborhood with tennis courts. The need for additional courts should be assessed among residents. Given the demographics of the neighborhood, open space uses and programming should be geared toward adult users. This includes a need for fields and courts for sports league play, passive

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spaces for relaxing, and spaces that encourage active/fitness uses (trails, connected path systems, exercise equipment). The neighborhood's open space facilities should be evaluated through this lens at the onset of all future capital planning or improvement work (Allston / Brighton Map 8).

As previously noted, parks are reasonably well distributed in much of this neighborhood, with the greatest gaps in park access occurring along the Mass Pike/railyard area in Allston. The existing demographics of these areas do not *yet* indicate that they are high need areas for parks. However, redevelopment of the Allston Yards, other industrial areas in North Allston and Brighton, and properties associated with the growth of Harvard University and Boston College must include significant public open space to address the existing deficiencies and accommodate future users (Allston / Brighton Maps 10 & 11).

West of the current Harvard campus in Allston, there is an area called the Holton Street Corridor, between the Massachusetts Turnpike and Soldiers Field Road, that has received attention through a planning initiative by the BRA. A mixed use redevelopment with commercial, ground floor retail, and residential is proposed for this area, including one or more parks, along with strengthened connections to the Charles River Reservation via either Telford Street or Everett Street, or both.

Like other institutions with facilities in Boston, Harvard University has an Institutional Master Plan (IMP). This IMP proposes a connected series of open spaces from Mellone Park northeastward to the Charles River and the eastern end of Western Avenue. This greenway will be intersected by existing and proposed streets in a new grid. Other open spaces that will be more campus-centric will also be created in the IMP area as well. These potential open spaces are an opportunity for the neighborhood, but their creation on institutional lands does not ensure their long-term protection nor their access or amenities for non-student populations.

The Charlesview multi-family housing development has moved west to the Holton Street Corridor area, but the grove of trees it left behind will be protected, with public access allowed, as a focal point of the Barry's Corner area. The Barry's Corner area will also have plazas with public access as a component to insure pedestrian activation and flow at this important intersection.

In the North Brighton section, there is an industrial area with some commercial uses that has attracted office commercial uses. The BRA anticipates that this area, the Guest Street industrial area between North Beacon Street and the Massachusetts Turnpike, will be a focus of real estate development in the next 20 years. Their 2013 Guest Street Area Planning Study is a yardstick by which they propose to influence development both public and private to create another creative live/work/play district.

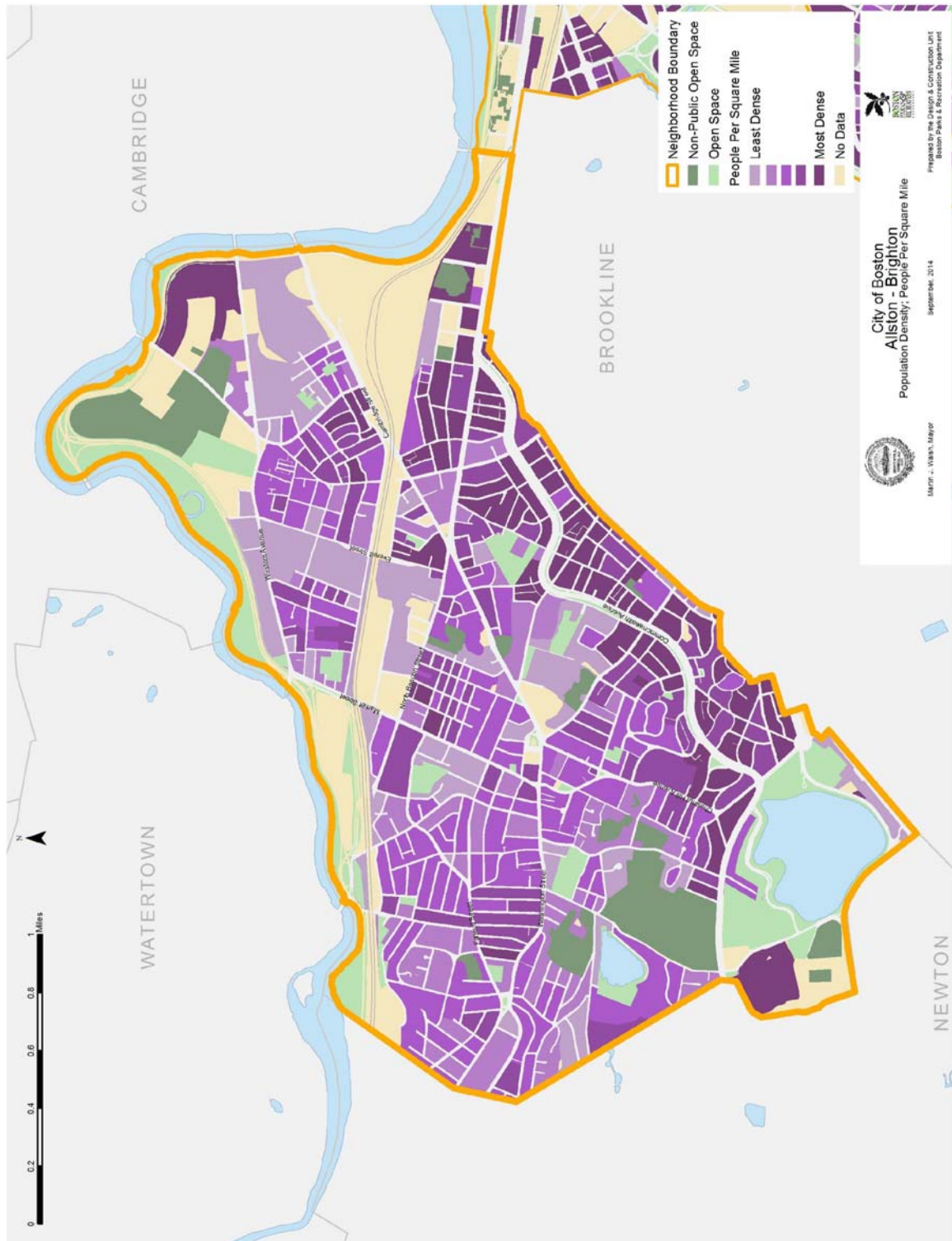
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The study recommends early implementation of open spaces to create a sense of place for this area. A north-south boulevard is proposed that will lead to a pedestrian bridge to cross over the Turnpike to access the North Allston neighborhood.

Another important connection will be between the Guest Street area and the Allston rail yards/former tollbooths area. By doing so, the Guest Street area and others south of the Turnpike can, through a system of linked open space in the Allston yards/tollbooths area, access the Charles River to the east, and new open spaces in the former rail yards/tollbooth area.

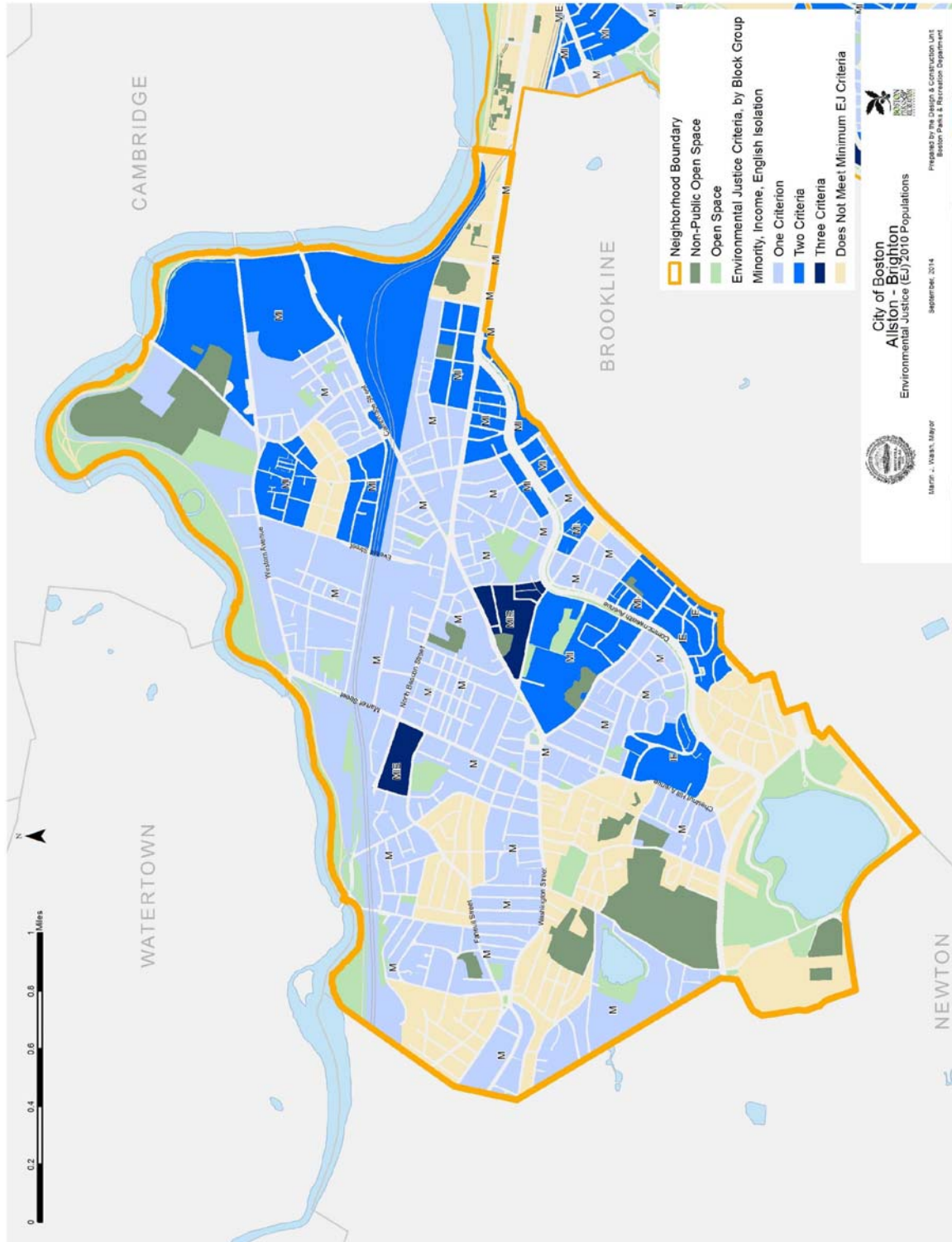
Redevelopment of industrial areas offers an opportunity to integrate an appropriate quantity of open space into these areas to serve future residents. A strategy for long term protection of these open spaces should be developed and an open space planning process to ensure a mix of recreational facilities and uses should be employed. These redevelopment projects do not address the open space needs along the Commonwealth Avenue corridor.

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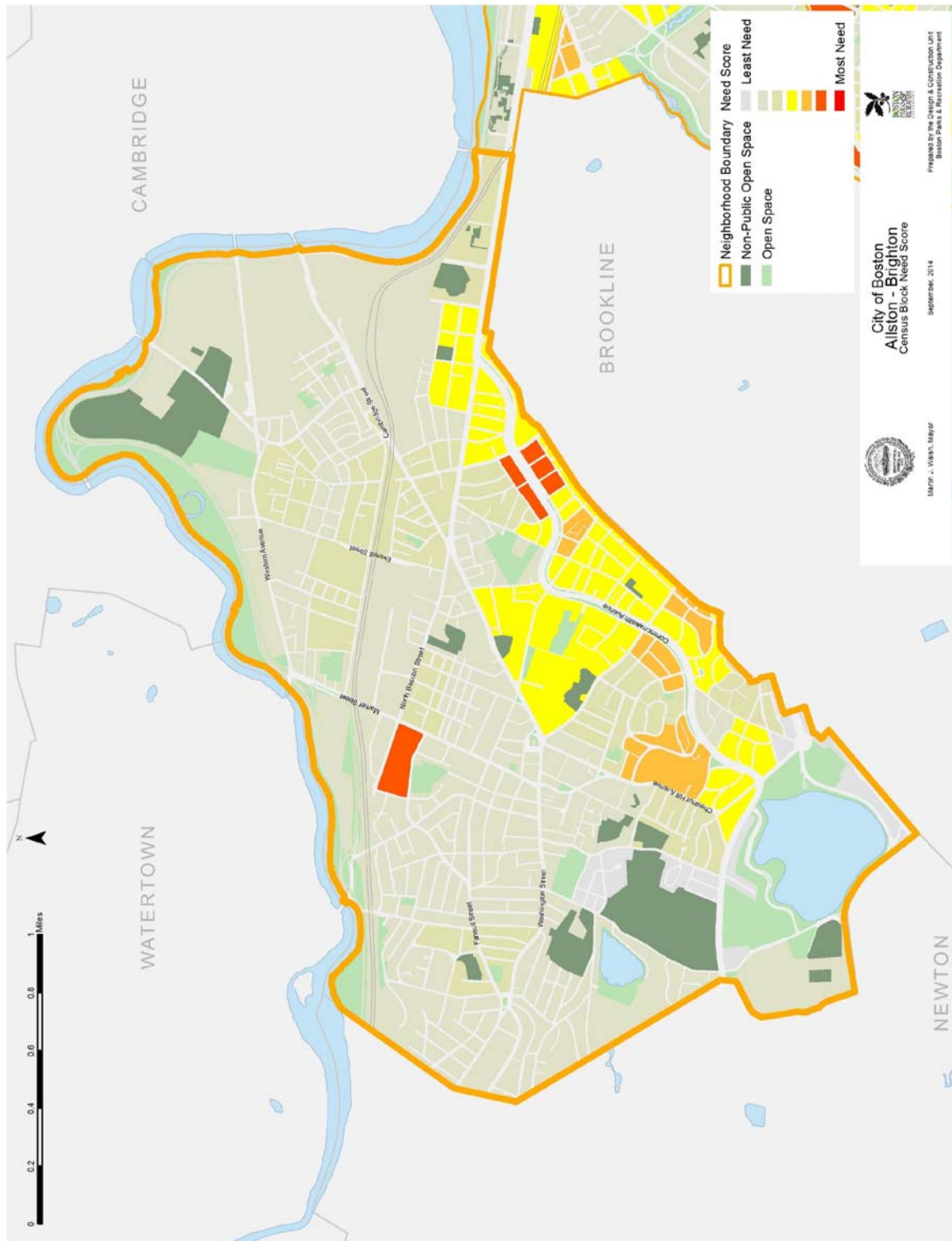
Map 1: Population Density, Allston-Brighton

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Map 2: Environmental Justice Populations, Allston-Brighton

Needs Analysis



Map 3: Need Score by Census Block Groups, Allston-Brighton

Needs Analysis



Map 4: Open Space by Type, Allston-Brighton

Needs Analysis



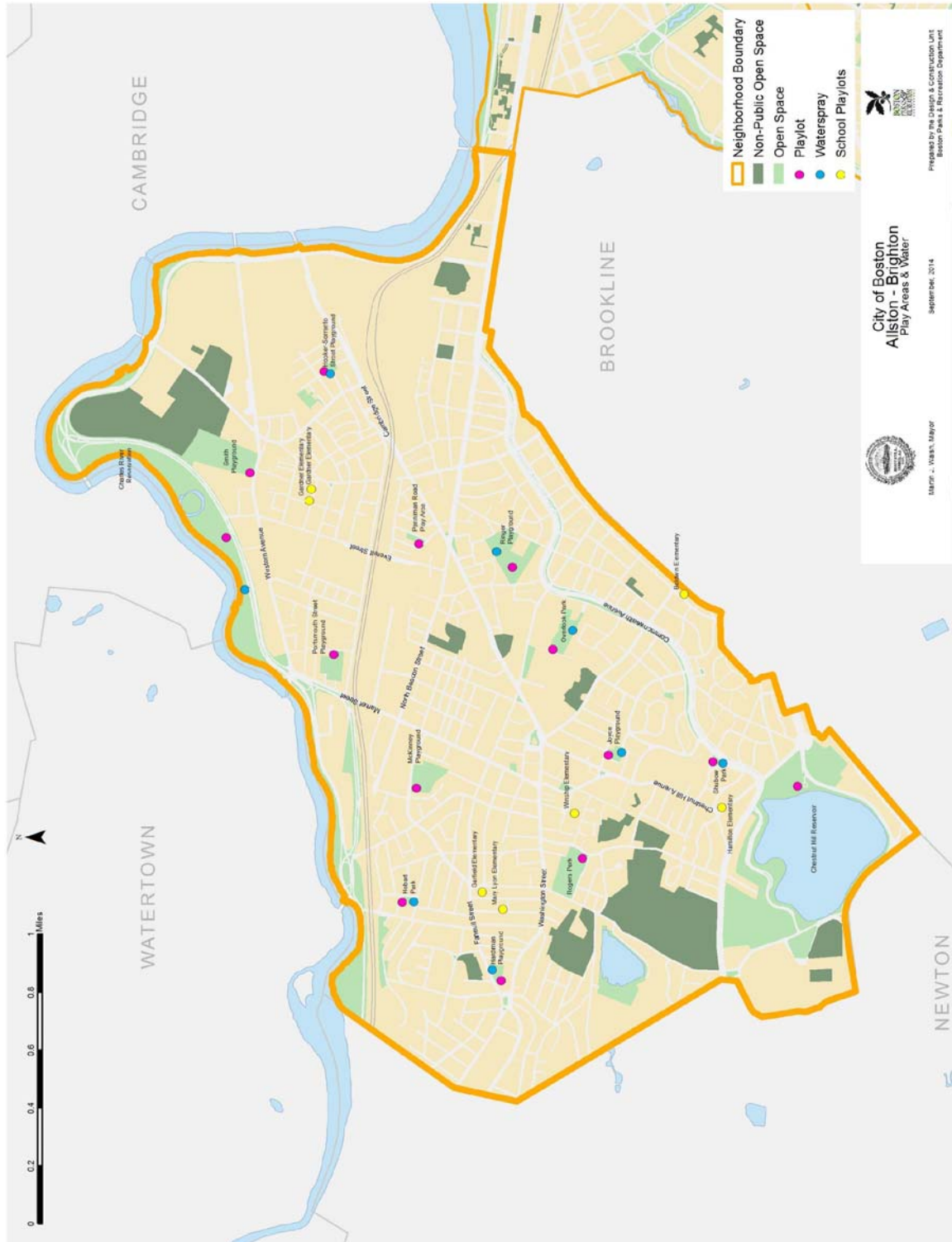
Map 5: Open Space by Ownership, Allston-Brighton

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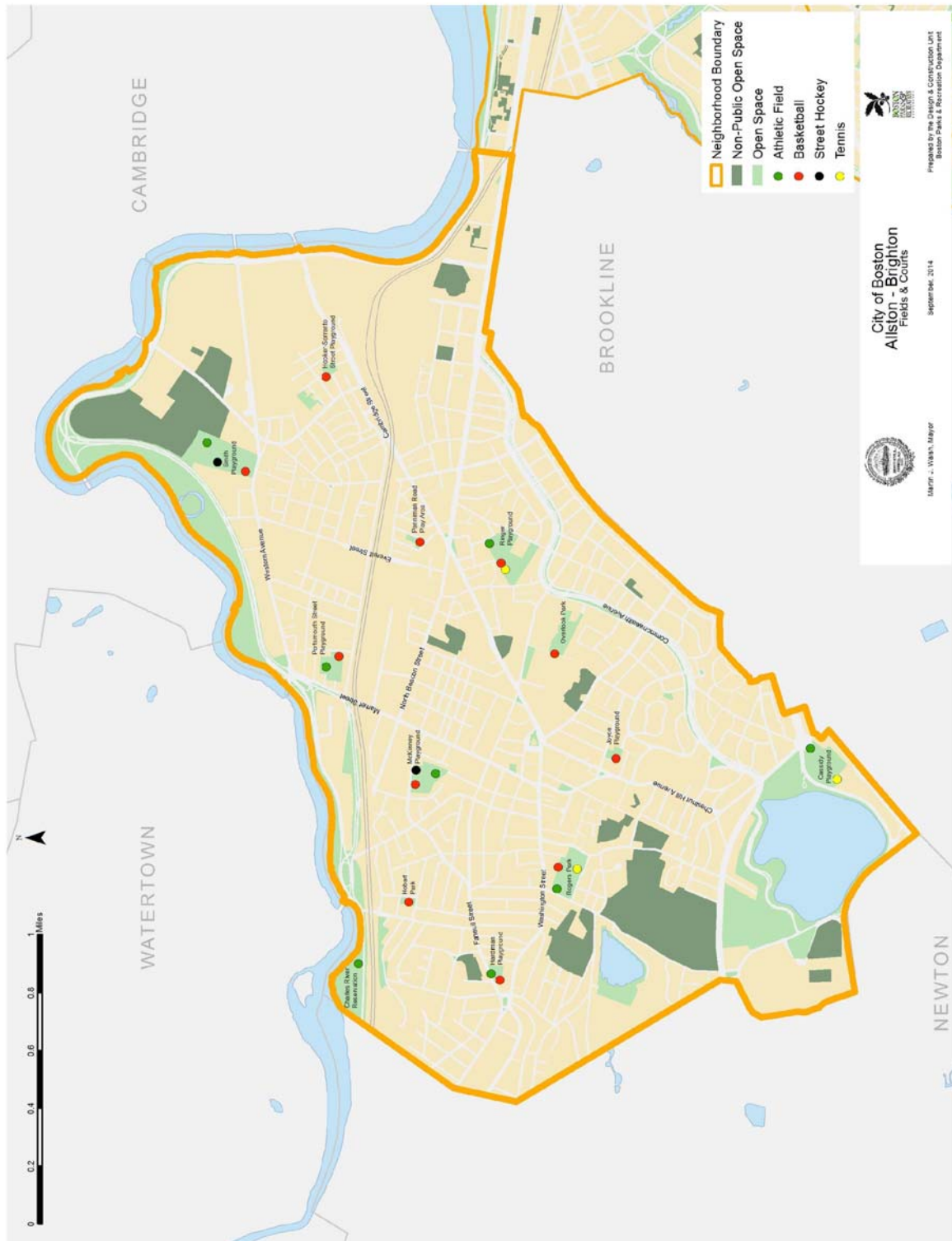
Map 6: Open Space by Protection Status, Allston-Brighton

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Map 7: Play Areas and Water Spray Features, Allston-Brighton

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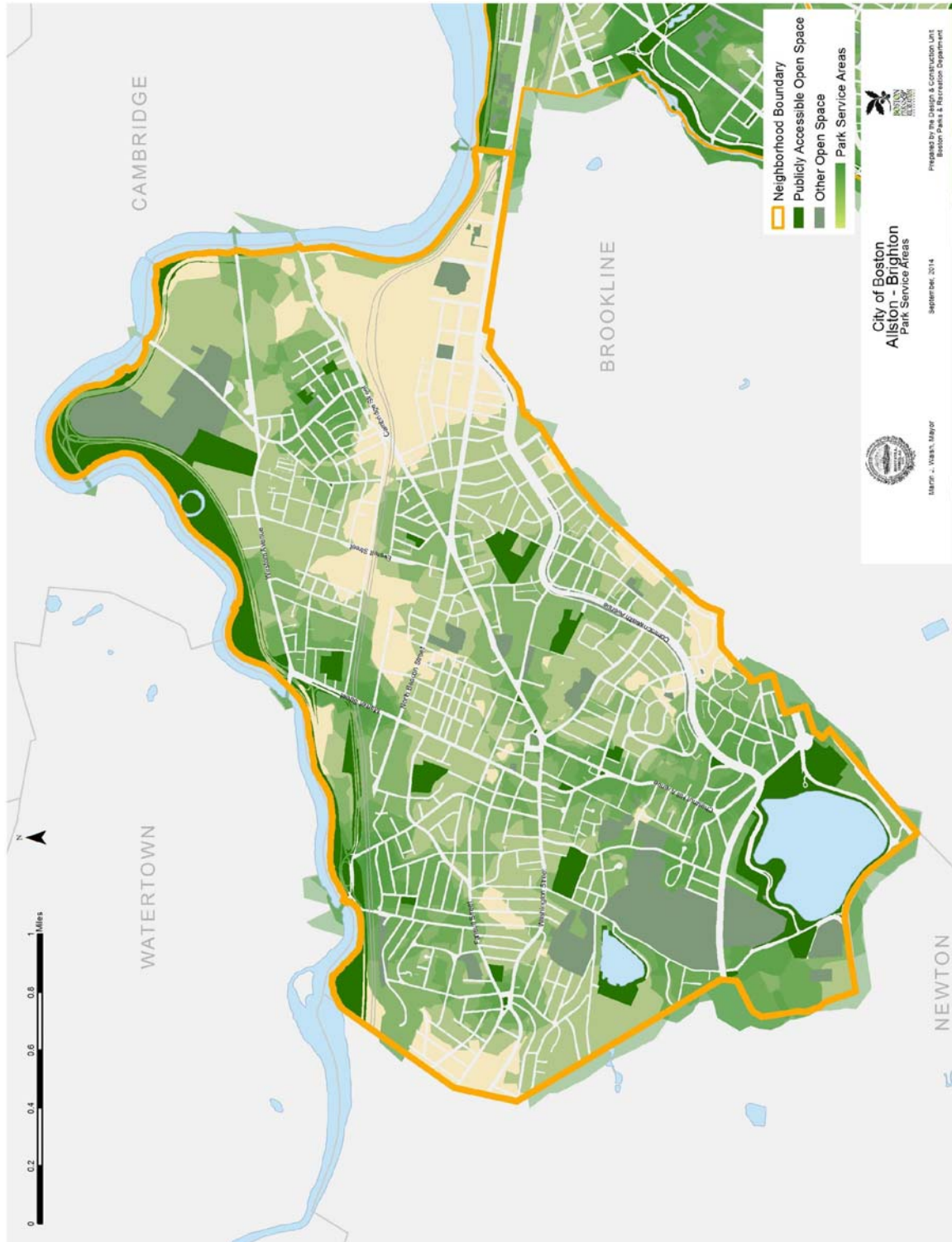
Map 8: Fields and Courts, Allston-Brighton

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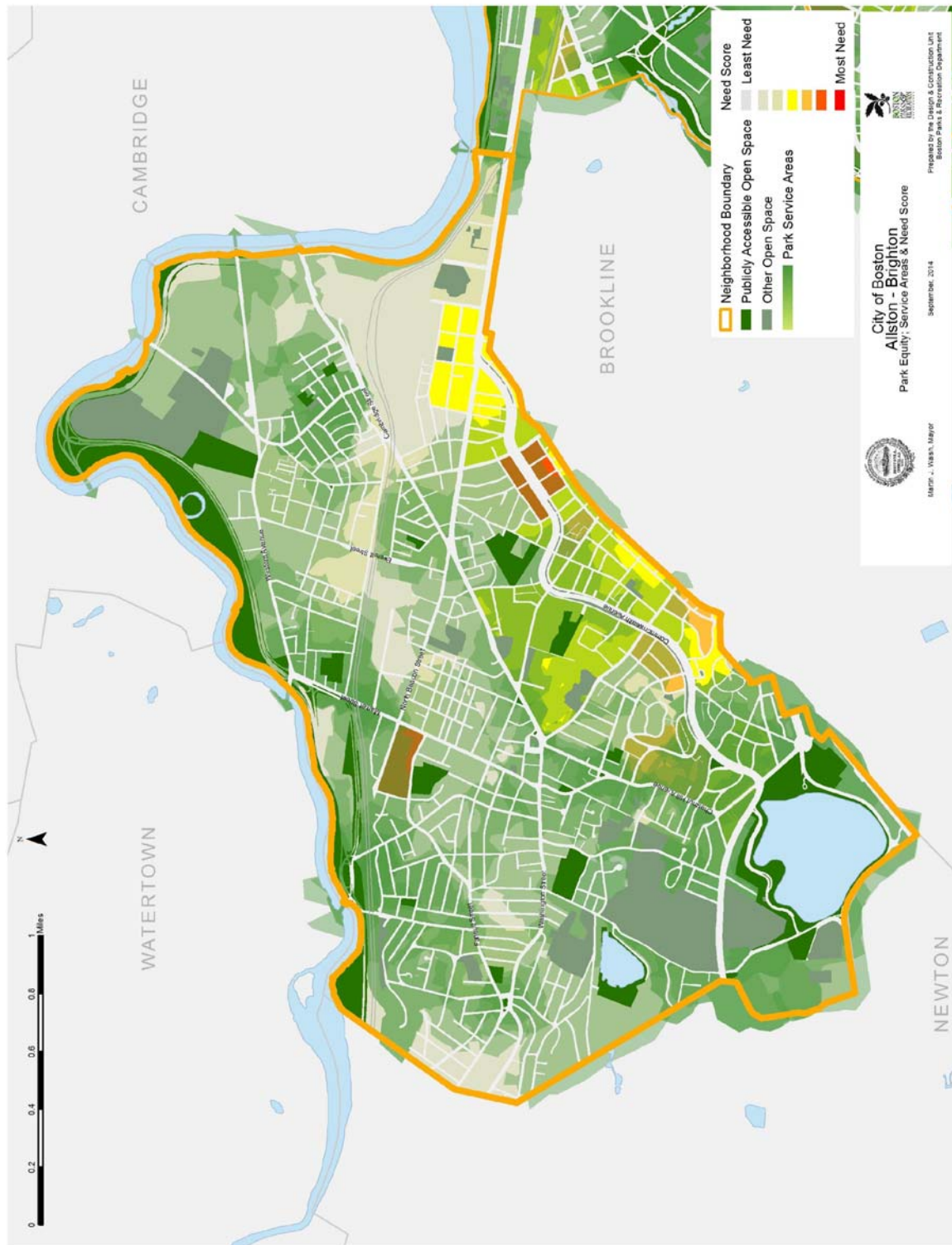
Map 9: Community Facilities, Allston-Brighton

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Map 10: Park Service Areas, Allston-Brighton

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Map 11: Park Equity, Service Areas & Need Scores, Allston-Brighton

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Population	
2010 Census	74,997
2000 Census	69,648
Population growth/decline, 2000-2010	8.95%

Age		
Under 9	3,431	4.57%
10-19	6,552	8.73%
20-34	44,344	59.12%
35-54	10,697	14.26%
55-64	3,975	5.30%
65 and over	5,998	7.99%

Race	
	% of Total Population
White Alone	66.09%
Black or African American alone	4.57%
Asian Alone	15.39%
Other	4.01%

Latino Status	
	% of Total Population
Not Hispanic or Latino	
Hispanic or Latino	9.92%

Population Density	
	Persons Per Acre
2010 Census	26.4

Median Household Income
\$45,862

Household by Number of Vehicles Available	
No Vehicle	37.5%
1 vehicle	39.3%
2 vehicles	16.25%
3 or more vehicles	6.76%