

PART 3

COMMUNITY OPEN SPACE &  
RECREATION MISSION

*The Neighborhoods*

Allston-Brighton

Back Bay/Beacon Hill

Central Boston

Charlestown

Dorchester

East Boston

Fenway/Kenmore

Hyde Park

Jamaica Plain

Mattapan

Roslindale

Roxbury

South Boston

South End

West Roxbury



## PART 3 • COMMUNITY OPEN SPACE &amp; RECREATION MISSION

## THE NEIGHBORHOODS:

*Back Bay/Beacon Hill*

## THE SETTING

**History**

**B**eacon 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 “redlight” district near the Charles River. The north slope changed due largely 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 dam, finished in 1821 to harness industrial water power, ran along what is now Beacon Street from Charles Street to present-day Kenmore Square. Stagnant water and the accumulation of sewage soon led to demands to fill the area. Landfill began at the Public Garden and extended west. From the 1850s to the 1890s, the entire area was filled beyond Kenmore Square and north to the present location of Storrow Drive.





*Parisian boulevards were the inspiration for the linear plan of the Back Bay with its stately tree-lined spine of Commonwealth Avenue.*

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 have created a relatively new major residential, commercial, and hotel complex on the southern reaches of this neighborhood. In addition, retail activity on Newbury Street has been substantially upgraded in the past two decades. 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).

**Demographics/Housing**

The 1990 census enumerated 27,808 residents of Back Bay/Beacon Hill, down 8% from the 30,212 residents in the 1980 census. The 2000 census indicated another population loss of 4% to 26,721.

The average household size is relatively small – 1.6 persons – compared with the citywide figure of 2.4. One-person households dominate Back Bay/Beacon Hill by the significantly high figure of 59% of all households compared to 36% citywide.

Group quarters accommodate 12% of households, likely due to the number of college students and some lodging house tenants.

The relative affluence of the Back Bay and Beacon Hill neighborhoods is reflected in a median annual household income of \$40,912, compared to \$29,180 for the city at large. Only 10% of households are below the poverty line, versus 17% citywide. However, perhaps due to choice of lifestyle, proximity to mass

**Back Bay/Beacon Hill  
Demographic and Housing Profile**

POPULATION	
2000 Census	26,721
1990 Census	27,808
1980 Census	30,212
Population Growth/Decline 1990-2000	-4.07%
Population Growth/Decline 1980-1990	-7.96%

AGE		
2000 Census		
0-17 years	1,301	5%
18 and over	25,420	95%
1990 Census		
0-4 years	500	2%
5-9 years	288	1%
10-14 years	201	1%
15-17 years	163	1%
18-20 years	2,777	11%
21-24 years	4,091	16%
25-29 years	4,981	19%
30-34 years	3,175	12%
35-44 years	3,889	15%
45-54 years	2,536	10%
55-59 years	894	3%
60-64 years	791	3%
65-74 years	1,146	4%
75-84 years	708	3%
85 years and over	241	1%
Average Age (1990 Census)	35.5	

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC/HOUSING/DENSITY**

Population 16 Years and Older, by Employment Status		Occupied Units Ownership		Households by Age and Poverty Status	
(1990 Census)	%	(1990 Census)	% Units	(1990 Census)	% Households
Employed in armed forces	less than 1	Owner occupied	30	Above poverty, under age 65	80
Employed civilians	73	Renter occupied	70	Above poverty, age 65 and over	10
Unemployed civilians	3	Number of Year Round Units in Structure		Below poverty, under age 65	9
Not in labor force	24	(1990 Census)	% Units	Below poverty, age 65 and over	1
Median Household Income	\$40,912	Single units	4	Household by Number of Vehicles	
(1990 Census)		Double units	2	(1990 Census)	% Households
		3-9 units	44	No vehicles	48
		10-19 units	25	1 vehicles	42
		20-49 units	9	2 or more vehicles	10
		50 or more units	15	Population Density	
		All other	1		Persons per Square Mile
		Single/Multiple Unit Ratio	0.04	1980 Census	34,138.6
				1990 Census	31,057.6
				Density Change 1980 to 1990	-3,080.9

transit, or the difficulties of parking a car in this neighborhood, 48% of households do not have a vehicle versus 38% citywide.

The presence of children in this neighborhood is limited. The average age of 35.5 is higher than the citywide average of 34.6 years. While 19% of the city is in the 17 and under age group (1990), only 5% are in this group in Back Bay/Beacon Hill; the 2000 figures are 20% for the city and 5% for Back Bay/Beacon Hill. Only 5% of households have one or more persons under the age of 18 versus 25% citywide. Only 32% of the neighborhood's population live in family households versus 67% citywide. While 51% of the city's households are families, only 23% of this neighborhood's households are families.

The presence of college students and young professionals in this neighborhood likely accounts for the differential in the population percentage for the 18-29 age group: 46% in the Back Bay/Beacon Hill neighborhood versus 31% citywide.

The major trends in race/ethnicity figures are the gradual decline in the white population from 1980 (90%) to 2000 (85%), and the gradual increase in the combined Latino and Asian/Pacific Islander population share (1980, 5%; 1990, 8%; 2000, 10%).

RACE	1980 Census		1990 Census		2000 Census	
White	27,147	90%	24,602	88%	22,654	85%
Black	1,254	4%	950	3%	792	3%
Hispanic	937	3%	887	3%	1,099	4%
Asian or Pacific Islander	647	2%	1,283	5%	1,620	6%
Other	227	1%	86	less than 1%	556	2%

**HOUSEHOLDS**

Households	
1990 Census	14,939
1980 Census	15,862
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Household Growth/Decline, 1980-1990	-5.82%

Population by Household Type	
(1990 Census)	% Persons
Family households	32%
Non-family hshlds	56%
Group quarters	12%

Households w/ One or More Persons Under 18 Years		
(1990 Census)	Households	%
All households	15,889	100%
No one under 18	15,103	95%
One or more under 18	786	5%

Households with Children by Type	
(1990 Census)	%
Married couple families	82
Other family, male head	4
Other family, female head	14
Non-family	less than 1

Persons in Households		
(1990 Census)	Households	%
1 person households	8,825	59
2 person households	4,667	31
3 person households	931	6
4 person households	360	2
5 or more person hshlds	156	1
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Average Persons per Household (1990 Census)		1.56

Family Type	
(1990 Census)	% Families
Married couple	86
Other family, male head	4
Other family, female head	10
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Families as a % of All Households	23%

Masonry townhouses of 4-6 stories are the predominant type of housing in the area, dating mainly from the 19th century. Many buildings are now divided into 5 or more units. There are some larger apartment buildings. Back Bay/Beacon Hill has a higher percentage of 3-9 unit residential structures (44% versus 38% citywide), and a sharply higher percentage of housing units in the mid-range to larger structures (49% in structures 10 units or greater versus 31% citywide). Back Bay and Beacon Hill have the highest property values in the city, the highest rents (median rent of \$768 versus \$550 citywide in 1989, when rent control was still in effect), and only 4% of the total assisted housing units in the city.

**THE OPEN SPACE SYSTEM TODAY**

**Equity and Investment**

The area's residents have a ratio of 4.99 acres of protected open space per 1,000 persons, compared to the citywide ratio of 7.43 acres of protected open space per 1,000 persons. The 4.99 acres per thousand ratio for this neighborhood compares quite favorably with the 2.5 acres per thousand persons guideline set out in the South End Open Space Study prepared by the Boston Urban Gardeners (1988). This is a more appropriate guideline for comparison for downtown-core urban neighborhoods like Back Bay and Beacon Hill.

The total amount of open space in the area is approximately 140 acres compared to a total of 133 acres of protected open space. Due to high real estate values and highly limited avail-

ability of vacant land, the overall amount of open space is unlikely to increase unless private landowners or public development agencies can provide open space in their development plans.

In the past seven years, the City of Boston and other parties have invested over \$11 million for capital improvements in the area's parks (see table below). Boston Common received a substantial facelift, with such major projects as the Frog Pond skating rink/wading pool, the Parkman Bandstand, the Visitor Information Center, the Shaw Monument steps, fencing, pathways, fields, and other improvements. The major features of the bridge, fountains, lagoon, and lawn have been restored at the Public Garden. Capital improvements have enhanced the lawns, fencing, and tree pruning and planting at the Commonwealth Avenue Mall. Clarendon Street Playground, the only children's play lot within the Back Bay residential neighborhood, was renovated in the 1990s as a result of the city's *Getting the Job Done* capital improvement program.

#### CAPITAL PROJECTS 1993-2000/ BACK BAY/BEACON HILL

Boston Common	\$ 8,642,466
Clarendon Street Playground	\$ 130,000
Commonwealth Avenue Mall	\$ 648,566
Kings Chapel/Granary Burying Grounds	\$ 170,000
Public Garden	\$ 1,566,828
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$11,157,860</b>

### Assessment

#### *A Neighborhood of Regional Parks*

**B**ecause they are large, historic in character, 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: Boston Common, the Public Garden, Commonwealth Avenue Mall, and Copley Square Park (all under Parks Department jurisdiction), the MDC'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 a children's play area. In addition to these major parks, there is one children's playground each within the Beacon Hill and the Back Bay residential neighborhoods.

There will more open space in the near future in the Back Bay. The city will begin construction later this year on a new approximately half-acre Dartmouth Street Plaza. This will extend the Dartmouth Street entrance of the Boston Public Library eastward toward Copley Square Park. The city will close the southbound side of Dartmouth Street to enable the construction of this new plaza. This will reduce pedestrian crossing time from Copley Square Park to the Library side of Dartmouth, and help make Copley Square an even more desirable destination for special events of citywide appeal. The city anticipates completing construction on the \$1.2 million ISTEA-funded project during 2002.

Despite heavy use, the parks in this area are generally in very good condition. The master plans and management plans that have been formulated in the past fifteen years, the most recent



Copley Square Park

being the Copley Square Park Management Plan (1996), have guided capital investment, programming, and use of these parks. It is also due in large part to increased maintenance funding (especially from the Parkman Fund) and improved maintenance by the Parks Department. Funding provided by private, neighborhood-based groups has complemented the Department's maintenance efforts. These groups, primarily the Friends of the Public Garden and the Friends of Copley Square Park, reflect the substantial affluence of many of the neighborhood's residents and their elevated sense of civic responsibility. Their fundraising for additional maintenance, repair, and other associated services helps address the high standard of park development in these urbanized, heavily used parks.

A pressing concern is the availability of extraordinary resources to restore and maintain the Charles River Reservation here in its most heavily used segment. The continued pressure on the MDC's capital and maintenance budgets has affected the condition of this premier regional park. The MDC's own Charles River Reservation Master Plan identifies the deterioration that affects the park's facilities. The new master plan then maps out an implementation schedule for restoring major portions of the park and redesigning others to meet new needs. Naturally for an historic park, a major recommendation of the plan is to "[p]reserve the essential character-defining features of the historic landscape while adapting the Basin to contemporary uses." (from the poster *Charles River Basin: The Second Century*, MDC, 2000) It further recommends for the Esplanade the restoration of ornamental tree and shrub plantings.

One key recommendation of the new master plan is that a pedestrian and bicycle connection should be established between the Back Bay Fens, Commonwealth Avenue Mall, Charlesgate, and the Charles River Reservation. Another recommendation is to complement the proposed pedestrian-only zone on the Esplanade islands with a wider pathway on the Storrow Lagoon's inside edge suitable for bicyclists and skaters. This is in accord with the accepted open space planning principle to reserve the space closest to a water body for pedestrians, and the next closest for users of faster modes of recreational transport (e.g., skaters and bicyclists). Also important is the recommendation to more carefully manage special events on the Esplanade to help preserve this historic landscape, but also to better distribute events to other alternative locations within the Reservation.

In response to the developments around the Charles River Reservation, two groups have formed. The Charles River Conservancy (CRC) promises to advocate for more adequate budgets for this regional park, for its protection, and for master plan implementation. The Esplanade Association (TEA) is specifically focused on this neighborhood's particular segment of



the Charles River Reservation. It is conducting fundraising for specific items such as bench repair and statue restoration.

Of more immediate concern, in recent years the MDC has removed two deteriorated playgrounds on the Esplanade (the name for the Back Bay/Beacon Hill section of the Charles River Reservation). Due to the diminished funding levels at the MDC, they were not to be replaced. While relatively speaking this neighborhood does not have a large population of resident children, the Esplanade has in the past contributed significantly to the few play lot resources available for neighborhood children, local school children, and children visiting from throughout the region. The Esplanade Association therefore formed The Esplanade Playground Appeal (TEPA), a fund-raising campaign to build new playgrounds. As a first step, they raised the \$300,000 estimated cost for a new play lot in the park's Fairfield Street-Gloucester Street section. The playground is now completed, and the campaign is now in the process of raising \$100,000 for a permanent endowment for its maintenance. Given the affluence of this neighborhood, it is likely that they will soon reach their goal.

The fate of the second Esplanade play lot removed by the MDC – located north of the Hatch Shell – has yet to be determined. A process will likely take place to determine the need for it on a local and regional basis.

#### *Tree Care: A Neighborhood Asset*

The Parks Department has planted many street and park trees during the past nine years, thereby reinforcing the scenic urban character of this neighborhood. Several new park trees have been planted through a Department program where persons or other entities can donate funds for a tree with a plaque placed in the soil. The minimum donation also includes two years of follow-up care. Friends groups have also contributed to tree planting and care. The Department has eliminated the backlog of dead, dying, and diseased street trees needing removal. Many of the tree pits have been replanted with a mix of species to prevent large-scale losses from disease. The goal for tree care in this neighborhood in the future will be assuring adequate funding for park and street tree maintenance as many of the newer trees recently planted get older, and as already aging and stressed trees call for more frequent care.



The Esplanade

### *The Turnpike Air Rights Connection*

**A**lthough there is a need for more ball fields, play areas, and tennis courts, such needs are highly land-intensive. Therefore, they are unlikely to be met in the near term given the intense land use pressures and high property values in this neighborhood. As mentioned before, one approach will be the provision of open space amenities as part of public and private development projects. The Parks Department will continue to work with the BRA through Article 80 and other review processes, as well as through the Parks and Recreation Commission's 100-foot rule review process, to determine the need for open space amenities as part of development projects.

This approach may yield some results as the development process proceeds for the air rights parcels over the Massachusetts Turnpike Extension. The BRA-commissioned study resulting from the work of the Strategic Development Study Committee (SDSC), *A Civic Vision for Turnpike Air Rights in Boston*, calls for a new connection from the Fens to the Charles River through Parcel 10 (to be underwritten by development on Parcel 9 in the Kenmore Square neighborhood). This would also link the Commonwealth Avenue Mall to these two parks. The other Back Bay-relevant open space proposals in this study are the recommendations to leave Parcel 11 undeveloped and to limit heights or arrange massing on Parcel 12. These development restrictions are based on the goal of protecting the Fenway Studios artist housing cooperative's access to sunlight and natural northern exposure. The National Park Service has designated this building a National Historic Landmark. It will also provide some sense of openness and visual access to the sky and to a larger perspective on the skyline. That is the one virtue of the Turnpike boat sections (below-grade yet open to the sky) as they cut through the built-up neighborhoods of Boston.

While direct open space impacts from the Turnpike air rights may be limited in the Back Bay neighborhood, one aspect of the overall scheme that should be considered is developing a connector between the Turnpike air rights east and west of the Back Bay. The connector – a bike lane – would substitute for a more direct linear feature, given the current configuration of the Prudential Center complex and the Copley Place complex. An on-street bike lane on Boylston Street and appropriate cross streets can serve a linkage function. If a bike route is more feasible as the connector, signage will be needed, as it will also be for pedestrians using this or a similar route.

See also the chapters on the *Emerald Necklace* and *Historic Burying Grounds* for further in-depth discussion of issues and recommendations important to parks in the Back Bay/Beacon Hill neighborhood.

## THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

This neighborhood's already popular parks will continue to see increasing use in the next few years, especially with the city's ongoing focus on tourism and the renewed interest in downtown residency and visitation. For many parks in the area, the need is for extraordinary maintenance and management efforts to safeguard already completed or currently pending capital improvements.

### Opportunities

#### *A Neighborhood of Regional Parks*

- Continue to enhance the Boston Parks Department's maintenance resources, especially for turf management, routine maintenance of park elements, and graffiti removal.
- Manage for the reduction of competing uses and overuse by continuing to follow the master plans and other established Parks Department policies regarding use of specific areas and facilities. Explore cooperative efforts with public, non-profit, and for-profit entities to create additional active play and sports facilities, recognizing that the expansion of ball fields, children's play areas, and courts is generally not feasible in existing parks.
- Support continued partnerships with the neighborhood's committed park friends groups to undertake extraordinary maintenance and other expenses for these heavily used regional parks.
- Focus city capital and fundraising monies on the monuments and memorials in Boston Common, the Public Garden, and the Commonwealth Avenue Mall. Encourage ongoing efforts by the city's Adopt-a-Statue Program.
- Support the construction of the Dartmouth Street Plaza.
- Support MDC efforts to maintain and improve the Charles River Esplanade. Support the implementation of the new master plan for the Charles River Reservation, including landscape and structure restoration, pedestrians-only Esplanade islands, a wider inboard pathway for cyclists and skaters, and improved special events management to help reduce over-use of the Esplanade.
- Determine the need for a second Esplanade play lot near the Hatch Shell/Beacon Hill segment through a process that includes local, city, and regional interests.

#### *Tree Care: A Neighborhood Asset*

- Seek out a multitude of outside sources – friends groups, neighborhood and block associations, property owners and the like – for supplemental support of the Department's street and park tree maintenance.

*The Turnpike Air Rights Connection*

- Work with the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority and the BRA to ensure that open space amenities are included as part of the future Turnpike air rights developments.
- Urge the MDC to begin the planning process for re-designing Charlesgate to accommodate pedestrian and bicycle connections from the Back Bay Fens and Commonwealth Avenue Mall to the Charles River Reservation. Urge the MDC to seek opportunities from the nearby Turnpike air rights developments or TEA-21 Transportation Enhancements program for assistance in funding this large-scale enhanced multi-modal transportation project.
- Work with BTM to plan a bike lane or bike route connector to help link the Turnpike air rights parcels east and west of the Prudential Center and Copley Place complexes. Use signage to assist pedestrians on the connector route.

**Community Priorities**

- Explore design options for maximum use of existing active recreation facilities without disturbing the peace or historic integrity of the parks or their surrounds.
- Support implementation of streetscape improvements in the Boston Public Works Department plan for Boylston Street.
- Continue to maintain the horticultural health of Copley Square and safeguard the capital investments there by public/private efforts.
- Encourage the MDC to care for Charlesgate.
- Consider enhancements for the Dartmouth Street Mall, particularly in light of the new Dartmouth Street Plaza.

## FACILITIES

### BACK BAY/BEACON HILL

#### Malls, Squares & Plazas

Site Name	Acreage	P	Ownership	BB	SB	LL	FB	SC	BK	TN	SH	PL	WS	CS	CR	FH	FN	HB	HS	LC	PA	PK	RG	VB	AR	CG	NT	Other
Belvidere/Dalton Plaza	0.15		COB/PWD																									
Commonwealth Avenue Mall	11.88	•	Parks																			9				8		
Copley Place Plaza	0.28		MTA																			1				1		
Copley Square	1.88	•	Parks													1						1				1		
Dartmouth Street Mall	1.11	•	Parks																									
Louisburg Square	0.32	•	COB																									
Prudential Center Plaza	2.54		Private																							1		
Saltonstall Plaza	0.84		COM																									
Somerset Street Plaza	1.03		COM																									
Temple Street Mall	0.42		Private																									
Temple Street Park	0.06	•	Parks																					1				

#### Parkways, Reservations & Beaches

Site Name	Acreage	P	Ownership	BB	SB	LL	FB	SC	BK	TN	SH	PL	WS	CS	CR	FH	FN	HB	HS	LC	PA	PK	RG	VB	AR	CG	NT	Other
Charles River Reservation	33.73	•	MDC									1	1			1										1		Hatch Shell, Ped/Bike Paths Community Sailing, Boat Landing
Southwest Corridor Park	3.70	•	MDC																			1						Ped/Bike Paths

#### Playgrounds & Athletic Fields

Site Name	Acreage	P	Ownership	BB	SB	LL	FB	SC	BK	TN	SH	PL	WS	CS	CR	FH	FN	HB	HS	LC	PA	PK	RG	VB	AR	CG	NT	Other
Boston Common	46.45	•	Parks		1	1				2		1	1	1		1	1				1				3			Frog Pond Ice Rink/ Wading Pool, Parkman Bandstand
Charlesgate	5.76	•	MDC																			1						
Clarendon Street Play Lot	0.33	•	Parks									1										1						
Myrtle Street Play Area	0.17	•	Parks									1										1						
Public Garden	24.25	•	Parks													1	6					9			1			Scenic Bridge, Botanical Garden
State House Park	1.24		COM																			1				1		
Phillips Street Park	0.13	•	Parks																						1			

#### Cemeteries & Burying Grounds

Site Name	Acreage	P	Ownership	BB	SB	LL	FB	SC	BK	TN	SH	PL	WS	CS	CR	FH	FN	HB	HS	LC	PA	PK	RG	VB	AR	CG	NT	Other
Central Burying Ground	1.65	•	Parks																									
Granary Burying Ground	1.88	•	Parks																									

#### Community Gardens

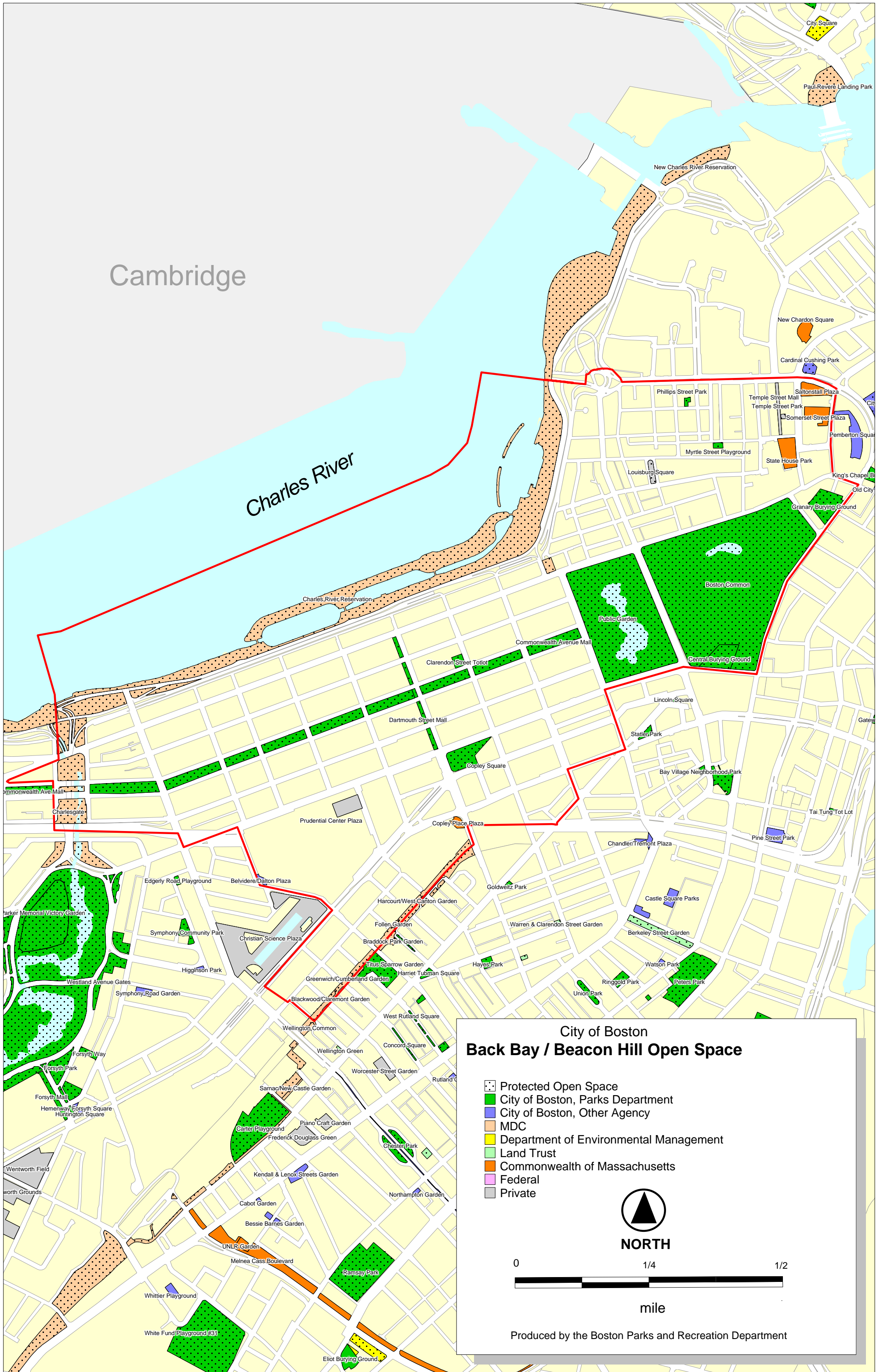
Site Name	Acreage	P	Ownership	BB	SB	LL	FB	SC	BK	TN	SH	PL	WS	CS	CR	FH	FN	HB	HS	LC	PA	PK	RG	VB	AR	CG	NT	Other
Blackwood/Claremont Garden	0.05	•	MDC																								1	
Greenwich/Cumberland Garden	0.05	•	MDC																								1	

#### Legend

P	Protected	TN	Tennis Court	FN	Fountain	VB	Volleyball Area
BB	Baseball Field	SH	Street Hockey	HB	Handball	AR	Artwork/Monuments
SB	Softball Field	PL	Children’s Play Lot	HS	Horseshoes	CG	Community Garden
LL	Little League Field	WS	Water Spray Feature	LC	Lacrosse	NT	Nature Trail
FB	Football Field	CS	Concessions	PA	Passive Area		
SC	Soccer Field	CR	Cricket Field	PK	Parking Area		
BK	Basketball Court	FH	Field House	RG	Rugby Field		

Cambridge

Charles River



**City of Boston  
Back Bay / Beacon Hill Open Space**

- Protected Open Space
- City of Boston, Parks Department
- City of Boston, Other Agency
- MDC
- Department of Environmental Management
- Land Trust
- Commonwealth of Massachusetts
- Federal
- Private

**NORTH**

0 1/4 1/2  
mile

Produced by the Boston Parks and Recreation Department