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## **Boston Parks and Recreation Department Staff Workshop**

Funding provided by the District Local Technical Assistance program and the City of Boston.

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### **Prepared for**

City of Boston Parks and Recreation Department.

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Chris Cook  
Commissioner

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## **Project Background**

The City of Boston Parks and Recreation Department (BPRD) spent much of 2014 updating its previous open space and recreation plan. In July of 2014 BPRD approached MAPC to discuss the possibility of working with MAPC to facilitate a staff workshop aimed at developing ideas for the Seven Year Action Plan. MAPC and BPRD entered into an agreement on August 27, 2014 to provide technical assistance. The project was jointly funded by MAPC through the DLTA program with additional funding by the City of Boston.

The workshop was held on September 26, 2014 at the Curley House. A copy of the workshop agenda is included in this report.

The workshop was attended by BPRD staff from several divisions. The staff participants were divided into three smaller groups. Each group had a facilitator from MAPC and a BPRD staff acting as note taker. Notes were taken on flip charts posted on the wall. These flip charts were transcribed verbatim and the notes are included in this report. MAPC synthesized the results from the three groups into a set of Open Space and Recreation themes to facilitate review of the material. The compilation of notes was then presented to BPRD and subsequently used by their staff to develop the Seven Year Action Plan.

## **Open Space and Recreation Themes**

### **A. Be good stewards of the exceptional open space system we have inherited**

#### **1. There are essentially two separate but equally important park systems in Boston – historic sites and recreational facilities.**

Historic sites play a very important role in the parks system. These sites represent a unique resource which many local residents and tourists or out-of-state visitors come to see. The primary focus for historic sites is on preservation and restoration. It is often not feasible to provide total access to these resources and it may be necessary to use information technologies such as on-line databases and signage to increase access without threatening the resource.

#### **2. Successful parks have a wide variety of facilities that encourage many users, particularly families, to spend the day.**

The best parks in the system are well-used, have a diversity of uses and are visible to the public. They have (or are near) publicly accessible restrooms, water fountains, shade and food. Some of them are dog-friendly. Successful parks have good bones and can be adapted to changing demographics. Their spaces allow some flexibility to adapt to new uses and can facilitate park programming. They are designed and built for the long term with the infrastructure necessary to sustain that park.

Safety concerns need to be addressed to ensure that all parks will be utilized. Park design has to take into consideration the need to reduce vandalism and increase visibility.

There should also be park spaces that are not developed or programmed but available for passive recreation. These areas can be combined with areas used for storm-water management.

There should be a plan in place for evaluating the success of park renovations that is both quantitative and qualitative.

#### **3. Park programming is equally as important as park design.**

Park programming presents a number of challenges in today's current climate. The scheduling and permitting systems for the parks is important in order to ensure that organized activities can be carried out efficiently. Scheduling field use is made more challenging by the needs of the BPS schools and the charter schools. The needs of residents for scheduled time as well as casual, drop-in, unscheduled time need to be reconciled.

Young dog owners without children are a growing demographic fueling the demand for dog parks and dog-friendly facilities. Dedicated facilities for dogs are in demand but there is also a need for enforcement of dog rules in all parks. This is particularly important because of the growing presence of “dog day care” businesses that use the parks.

There is an interest in arts in the parks but these programs do require funding and logistical support. There may be merit in exploring a return to staffed parks. Another aspect of park programming is to contain the costs associated with events such as movie nights.

#### **4. People need more information about their parks.**

While Boston has an extensive public parks system, many people still don't know the full extent of what is available both locally and city-wide. Parks need to be visible to the public and well-signed. Much more could be done through traditional and more innovative methods of information dissemination. Information on the parks should be included in the welcome packets given to new residents. There also needs to be much greater use of on-line information and social media to inform residents of the location of parks, activities available in the parks and special events. This can also include the use of apps for mobile phones. Another aspect of informing the public is to help them to understand the park design process and the role of infrastructure investments (much of which is hidden from the public eye) in creating a vital park system. This includes drainage systems which are a major contributor to the cost of park renovations.

The system of community meetings when a park is undergoing renovations can also be used to educate the public about broader park issues.

There needs to be internal communications within the Parks Department to allow a better dialogue and understanding of how the various functions contribute to the whole.

#### **5. Park maintenance is a critical element in the system**

It is important to do everything possible to ensure that park maintenance can be carried out efficiently. The quality of maintenance adds to the perception of a well cared for park and that increases the perception of safety.

### **B. Plan for our Future Park System**

#### **1. New acquisition of park land needs to balance the need for recreation against the ability to maintain additional facilities.**

Concerns about the long-term ability to develop new parks and also to maintain them are valid but care should be taken to maintain a vision of a park system that grows and meets future residents' needs. In order to accomplish a strategic expansion of the parks system, the city will need to look at new models for public/private partnerships to fund aspects of park expansion. This might include working with institutions who are selling off land.

**2. The city needs to invest in the physical infrastructure and human capital of the Parks Department to ensure the continued long-term health of the parks system.**

In order to maintain and grow the parks system, the City needs to invest in the equipment, physical plant (such as greenhouses) and staff training and development. The City needs to address pay differentials so that they pay Parks staff and DPW staff the same for equivalent jobs.

**3. Planning for the impacts of climate change and “greening” the parks is critical to the sustainable future of the parks.**

Planning for sustainability in the parks, particularly in light of the impacts of climate change, requires a willingness to make major investments in infrastructure out of sight of the public eye and to communicate the importance of those investments to the public. It is important to take a long view when making these improvements and to learn from other municipalities who are developing innovative solutions combining storm-water management with the creation of new park land.

There is also the need to carefully consider the environmental impacts of park improvements such as the move to use artificial turf fields and poured in place court surfacing. These durable surfaces, while extending the useable playing time of fields and courts, also contribute to the urban heat island effect and these temperature increases need to be offset with tree planting and other means of providing shade.

Planning for greater sustainability will also require additional capacity to grow and plant trees to increase the tree canopy.

**C. Be Leaders in Improving the Urban Environment**

**1. Park planning needs to be fully integrated with the development planning and permitting process which is overseen by the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA).**

There is a serious disconnect between the project-driven development review and permitting process overseen by the BRA which results in development decisions and projects that don't take into consideration the open space and recreation needs of new residents or the impact on surrounding parks and open spaces. There are some neighborhoods such as the Seaport District which have virtually no open space. The Parks Department needs to work with the BRA neighborhood planners to foster a collaborative relationship. There are other city departments and state agencies where close collaboration will have many benefits including the Health Department, Environment Department and the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

**2. The parks system needs to be fully integrated with the transportation system.**

In general, the goals of the Complete Streets program are compatible with a great parks system but the Parks Department does not have jurisdiction over the street network and any progress with Complete Streets will need to come from a partnership approach. More can be done to promote access to the parks through the transit system.

**3. Consider the public health benefits of the parks system.**

The connection between achieving public health goals such as reduced obesity rates and the parks system can and should be strengthened. Fitness programs such as boot camp classes and yoga that are held in the parks are a low cost alternative to gym memberships and foster a sense of community and interest in the parks. The Boston Parks and Recreation Department should work closely with the Boston Public Health Commission to determine ways to increase public health programming in the parks.

**4. The parks system should continue to be innovators in solving day to day maintenance issues as well as long-term environmental issues.**

There are many existing environmental issues in the parks which can benefit from innovative solutions. Recycling needs to be increased and bio-digesting of dog wastes has been suggested. Another recent innovation was the use of goats to remove invasive species. Basics like trash collection and recycling would benefit from a systems approach city-wide rather than as an isolated parks issue. New models such as removing trash cans and implementing a “pack it in, pack it out” policy should be tested in pilot programs.

It is important to consider energy use when designing new park improvements including solar lighting, smart irrigation systems as well as the fleet of vehicles used for park maintenance.

**Transcription of the Flip Charts by Note Taker Liza Mayer with additional notes by Joan Blaustein**

**A. Be good stewards of the exceptional open space system we have inherited.**

***Which open spaces work best?***

- Burying grounds: partnership with cemetery division.
- Variety of features esp. electricity for performances, space for programs.
- Spaces with public/private partnerships Communication and helping things get done.
- Successful space: one that people use.
- Diversity of uses and function- like a family coming to use it and all finding what they want.
- Does understanding ecological function expand people's use and appreciation of a space?
- Well defined features, interpretive information (certain behaviors, uses allowed, others not).
- Should we go back to staffed parks like the Massport parks?
- Visible parks – the ones that are easy to find, newcomers know about them.
- Problem: people don't know where to find parks, the information isn't out there.
- Do we provide any information about parks in the new resident's "welcome package"?

***What are people saying they want to see?***

- Restrooms, dogs, playground interests.
- Accessibility – getting into/through a park not feasible in all sites (historic burying grounds) but information could be brought to the point where people could access.
- Example: Boston Common sites/places not accessible – provide virtual tours.

***What do we think about for park users who aren't residents (the out of town visitors)? I don't think these comments below were specifically addressing this question. These seem to be more responses to the overarching question / goal.***

- Good park = good uses/active and good bones.
- Need to remember and emphasize that our renovation work has to be appropriate for 20 years – long view.
- Balance of how we use funds has to respond lots goes to infrastructure, the things underground/not visible take more and more dollars.
- Invest in the most environmentally responsible long term thinking solutions and elements.
- How do we shift from reactive to proactive?
- Disconnect between city population growth and open space growth/expansion to provide for these people?
- Hackensack a good example of stormwater management on created park lands.



- Providing field space for BPS and charter schools creates a challenge. There are more and more charter schools and each wants its own time on the fields.
- Less children in the regular BPS school system (than when?) but there are more programs and recreational needs. (BPS is losing students to charter schools etc)
- What is the process for growing the amount of open space we have in the city?
- Availability of open space for casual use (not official permitted use), meet-ups, but it needs to be scheduled so that the lights can go on – pop up use. Drop in nights, open gym.
- Making progress on on-line permitting.
- Need to be able to define the active recreation needs of our growing city population.
- How do we capture that? The users who aren't part of our permitting system?
- Other metrics – social media, twitter, observation.

## **B. Plan for our future park system**

- What are the elements that we need to provide so that people will stay in our parks for longer?
- Restrooms, drinking water, food, shade, interesting things to do.
- Perception around drinking fountains and bottle fillers (challenge – need to be able to maintain them)
- Opportunity = bottle redemption expansion.
- City-wide infrastructure – need to sign/take advantage of infrastructure provided by others, provide and encourage access. Make it known (like Chapter 91 bathrooms).
- Drinking water app and bathroom app.

## ***What kinds of open spaces do we need?***

- We need burial space.
- Connecting and mobility – linear parks.
- Health – different ways that people recreation – how to get people outside, partnerships (with BPHC).
- Flexibility – how do our parks adapt to changing users, needs.
- Infrastructure and timing – climate change thinking going forward.
- Make our park system in 10 years work for 30 years out.
- Think about non-residents too/tourists. This is a huge population of people who we serve/cater to.
- Restoration, Preservation – No change/appropriate changes. Sometimes it's like we have two separate park systems because the goals are different b/n historic and non-historic parks.
- 0/0 for Art programs
- We are the owners/stewards of these places that visitors come to Boston to see.
- Tour groups – we provide the resource but see none of the returns.
- Rangers – opportunity
- DCR Iron Ranger program – collections @ the Granary. At the USS Constitution they make more \$ by donations.
- Thinking more creatively about art in our parks.

- Acknowledging the amount of time and logistics it takes to get art installed.
- Capitalize on the opportunity of the new arts and culture cabinet chief.
- Movies? Do we get any \$ from those. We need to get more money back from these events to offset our costs associated with them.
- MCCA – Massachusetts Convention Center Authority Convention center. I forget what this comment related to – maybe that they get some money from movies?

### ***Adding open space***

- New open spaces that we acquire now have to come with maintenance and operating funding through a partnership.
- We should come up with some policies so that we can take on new parkland in other ways like the Wentworth property.
- How do we position ourselves to acquire land?
- Other changes? Demographics.
- Dogs as a demographic (20 somethings with no kids but with dogs).
- Other models such as private dog parks, Green Dogs.
- Top goals for future park system – need to update and improve our internal departmental resources and infrastructure (like the aged greenhouses).
- Need to be properly staffed, proper equipment.
- There has to be growth in this area.
- Invest in ourselves. The maintenance infrastructure that delivers these services.
- Recycling: needs investment in capital and operating to make it a reality.
- What's the level of investment that we need to hit in order to achieve the desired level of service in our parks?
- Question: What's the best way to maintain a park (Millennium is an example of a park with a unique and successful maintenance strategy).
- Friends groups – can we make more out of the groups that want to be involved in their parks?
- How can we be strategic? Not saying yes to everyone and everything?

### **Be leaders in improving the urban environment**

- Some things are already in place like MUSCO
- Trash – pack it in/pack it out?
- Residential trash issues
- Community gardens
- Managing trash/recycling as a municipality not by department.
- Composting and anaerobic digestion, etc.
- Coastal flood area – design the parks to be floodable.
- How can we design parks to reduce energy use and resources as well as human capital.
- Perform a maintenance and energy assessment pre and post renovation.
- What are the costs to maintain green infrastructure?
- Park infrastructure provides a variety of benefits: direct and indirect costs and benefits.

- Look at the systems comprehensively not in a silo structure.
- Partnerships with other agencies makes that feasible.
- Solar lights – retrofit is a challenge – new installations.
- Can we design parks in a way that will deter geese?
- Dog policy – AKC – dogs as good citizens.
- Shade: We add artificial turf and poured in place surfacing and both of these are hotter.
- How are we offsetting this heat island effect.
- Maintenance and operations and bad behavior issues. (not sure what this was about)
- Shade – urban heat island.
- Material selection can help mitigate that. Think about the experience in a heat wave. Think about turf products, infill mix, courts.
- Misting station.
- Future irrigation sensors – systems that won't turn on when it's going to rain.
- MWRA – does my garden need water app.
- Leadership – making sure people know what we're doing.
- Trees – selection and diversity.
- What trees are successful now and what will be successful as our climate warms?
- Fitness equipment and planning for aging baby boomers.
- Drones and drone policy.

### ***How can our parks improve urban quality of life?***

- Programming: sustaining programs in a particular neighborhood vs. the traveling road show approach.
- “Splash dance” parties.
- Communication across departments/agencies/institution to let people know what's happening citywide.
- Digital message board (mentioned under Question #1)
- Shared, interactive, searchable calendar.
- Bringing back recreation and distributing it/neighborhoods rather than sports based.
- BPHC coordination – Parks Count.
- Immigrant communities and habits of park use.
- BPHC research – restorative aspects of park design.

### **Additional notes from facilitator Joan Blaustein**

#### **A.**

- Historic cemeteries – partnerships.
- A lot of people in city are new and they don't know about them – people don't know about the parks – needs park trail connectors – trails to find.
- They weren't aware of Boston Parks app.
- Need more of an on-line presence.

- Parent to parent communication is important. Digital message boards could work well (Margaret wouldn't approve for historic sites).
- Put information in welcome packet.
- Some clashes over historic versus neighborhood.
- Restrooms and dogs come up.
- ADA – doesn't come up much when we're doing design – public doesn't bring it up. Design staff brings it up. Universal access is better model.
- Burying grounds can't always be accessible. Historic issues – many sites don't have any paved pathways.
- Interpretive panels could be used to overcome access issues – could be done.
- Common has a huge accessibility issue because of grades of the paths.
- Universal access – could we build a virtual access web presence – Friends of Public Garden – on-line action plan.
- Infrastructure – long term costs a lot.
- Most parks fortunately have good bones.
- Drainage is a huge part of design.
- Amount of dollars being spent underground on drainage.
- BPRD has a minimum of three community meetings when making capital investments.
- Infrastructure is behind the scenes and the public doesn't see it.
- Environmental standards change and they have to un-do old stuff.
- How the parks system fits into transportation, development (BRA), biking and walking.
- Disconnect between BRA development and parks/open space needs. Fort Point residents play softball in the Common because no space for them close to where they live.
- Seaport has no open space – despite global warming – Hackensack and Miami are doing detention tunnels and parks on top – innovative.
- New model for schools – using park system at different times.
- Pressure on parks during prime time. School department issues – could they change the sports seasons?
- Charter schools need space.
- Fewer children in Boston.
- Impact of Title 9.
- Large institutions are chewing up field space – situation at U Mass.
- BRA Disconnect – the neighborhood planners don't come to parks meetings.
- How to integrate BRA/development plans into open space plan.
- BRA is development project driven.
- Availability of open space for casual use rather than use requiring a permit. Tweets are being used to coordinate activities. No space for pick-up games. Need to turn lights on.
- Parks Dept. needs to be in center of parks planning even if it's a BRA process.
- Needs to be in the action plan – coordination.

## **B. Future open space system**

- Places where people spend the whole day. Restrooms, drinking fountains, shade.
- Kids "misuse" versus vandalism or design doesn't prevent misuse.

- Hard to bring water to parks but if it is already there – some people feel bubblers are gross. Bottle fillers in some parks but not a huge constituency.
- Question 2 would be a big help.
- Has reduced the litter. Bottle pickers pick up the beer bottles.
- Evaluate at the system level – proximity to other facilities – Chapter 91 bathrooms. Don't need to provide at every park.
- Different owners of open space – DCR, private, Chapter 91 lands.
- Lots of accessible bathrooms.
- There are apps for finding drinking water and bathrooms.
- Tot lot to grave – Burial space is a big need. Mary Cummings for burial space?
- Mobility, connectivity, linear parks.
- Health – different ways people recreate outdoors versus the gym.
- Flexibility to react to population trends.
- Infrastructure and timing – life cycle predictions for future flooding.
- For the next 30 years – diversity of species.
- Millions of tourists use the parks – they don't vote but economically they are huge.
- Signage for tourists.
- Visitors – historic resources. Historic sightseeing is big for tourists. Need to maintain historic resources – preserve, not change them.
- Boston Parks doesn't get any direct benefit from meals/hotel tax.
- What about 2% for art or restoration?
- Don't mention CPA – it's a big political no-no.
- Tour groups on the Common – overuse of historic sites – can't restrict who uses it. Tour guides can be historically inaccurate. Rangers used to give tours. Tried a donation box. Could consider Iron Ranger secure donation boxes.
- Think more creatively about arts in the park.
- Film crews – not a good fee structure now – is being looked at now.
- The big events are not bringing in enough money – big festivals.
- Prefer no acquisition if it doesn't have \$ for development and maintenance – Liza – we need to take a broader look than that; can't be constrained by \$.
- Wentworth selling Sweeny Field but needs \$. Hellenic College.
- Certain neighborhoods used to be transients but now families are staying.
- More canine residents. Young people in 20's don't have kids – they have dogs and the dogs tend to be big ones.
- A Street – indoor dog park at a private development – it is run by condo development. There are new dog friendly developments.
- NYC – private dog parks – look at dog uses as an indicator of gentrification.
- Infrastructure within parks department – green houses. Parks Dept. needs better infrastructure to do its job. There have been drastic cuts in the Parks Department.
- Need more trees, staff, trucks.
- Growth in capital investment.
- Huge effort in fleet, equipment – need for \$ for Parking Dept. facilities.
- To bring recycling to 100% of parks would require a big capital investment.

- The Parks Department has a fair amount of outside contracts but it depends on what the service is?
- Friends Groups – do we want to be more proactive about that. Some work well and bring in \$, others just have good intentions.

### **C. Green Infrastructure**

- Grant – green communities. 3 departments – they got more energy efficient lighting system. MUSCO – a brand of lights. There is a parks department sustainability study.
- Don't do much solar. Would like to try pack it in, pack it out – maybe not in large urban parks but should study it.
- Community gardens become transfer stations for residential trash.
- Policy of trash is trash versus jurisdictional trash issues.
- Composting and waste management.
- Anaerobic digestion potential for greenhouses.
- Parks as green infrastructure – adequate shade.
- Design parks to be floodable.
- Energy use in parks maintenance.
- Baseline before and after renovation, energy use and staff hours. Low mow lawns.
- Goat scaping. Start figuring out the energy use.
- Less impervious – all improvements require maintenance including artificial turf fields.
- Green infrastructure providing a wide range of benefits – need to publicize that.
- Solar on roofs and brownfields sites that we don't intend to clean up are a possibility.
- Geese – you need a multi-faceted approach. Dogs, harassment, relocation.
- AKC – For dogs, good citizens in parks program.
- Old shelter program – trial program for shade shelters in Allston.
- Removed trees when turf fields went in and turf fields are hotter. Poured in place playground surfacing also ups the heat.
- Cut down shrubs to deter drug activity.
- Shade to deal with urban heat island.
- Misting stations.
- Turf.

## **Transcription of the Flip Charts by Note Taker Aldo Ghirin**

### **9:30 AM breakout – Be good stewards of the exceptional open space system we have inherited**

Which of our parks and open spaces works the best?

- Jamaica Pond Park
- Arboretum
- Copley Square
- Billings Field
- Millennium Park

#### ***What about these Parks and Open Spaces makes them function well?***

- Users proximity to park (Jamaica Pond/Arboretum)
- Quiet spaces – can find solitude and also active recreation (Millennium Park)
- Topographic changes that are great for kids at playlot – (Billings)
- Well-defined entrances/signs (Jamaica Pond/Arboretum)
- Connected to large park systems (Jamaica Pond/Arboretum)
- Active as well as passive uses(Jamaica Pond/Arboretum)
- Welcoming/well designed (Jamaica Pond/Arboretum)
- The feeling of being Open and Safe, yet not exposed (Jamaica Pond)
- A large water feature (Jamaica Pond Park)
- Easy to maintain (Jamaica Pond Park)

#### ***What are the key elements that make the parks function well?***

- Perception of Safety
- Ease of Maintenance – Important because the quality of maintenance adds to the perception of a well cared for park that increases the perception of safety. This includes vegetation management as well as other maintenance
- Numbers of people using the park – increases perception of safety
- Different experiences available in a park – this depends upon quality of design
- Design the park for its intended uses – make it contextually sensitive and designed for the neighborhood and the residents users

#### ***What things need to change to make parks from non-functioning into well functioning parks?***

- Dogs versus people in the parks (beyond design – needs to include enforcement. Even in parks where there are areas set aside for dogs, the dogs use the areas set aside for people.) This is further complicated because NO capital funds can be set aside and used for dog parks. It is also complicated by “dog day care” businesses that use the parks for business purposes

(although this business-use issue also relates to “boot camps” or yoga classes that are run in the parks).

- Need to work against the perception that all spaces must be programmed – Un-programmed space such as a lawn may be perfectly OK for a design – it allows for passive uses and may also be important for retention/infiltration of storm-water and or for climate change mitigation.
- There needs to be better, and ongoing proactive, communication between the public and the parks staff. There needs to be more outlets for non-capital concerns (i.e., need to communicate not just when designing a park, but regularly).
- Need the Park Partners program – currently only 1 person (who also has other responsibilities)
- Need to go out to community meetings to discuss broader park issues; need to be able to respond to issues raised. Need staff dedicated (assigned) to interacting with the community
- Note that there was an acknowledgement of some potential conflict between regular users of the parks versus the park partners – need to manage that dynamic.
- Boston Results: City seems to be very “numbers oriented” rather than focused on quality of plans – Better that there should be some self-evaluation and monitoring of a re-designed and constructed park to determine if it is functioning as designed
- There needs to be better INTERNAL communications within the Parks and Recreation Department. This would allow better understanding of, and dialogue about, why things are done they way they are and built the way that they are. This could also address issues of maintenance.
- The Parks and Recreation Department needs to find ways (and resources) to improve the ability to maintain innovative designs
- Need for a 7-day-per-week maintenance operation.

#### **10:25 Breakout Session – Plan for our future open space system**

***As viewed from the year 2024, what changes would you like to see that are different from 2014?***

- Organized sports de-emphasized (not eliminated), more flexible space within parks
- Creative Innovative Design that draws visitors globally to the parks
- Recycling in the parks
- Solar benches
- Biodigesting of dog wastes
- Environmental education
- Interpretive programming
- Jewels of Each Neighborhood, contextually designed, different for each neighborhood, but with each neighborhood having a signature park (also showcase great maintenance on these Signature parks)
- Performance space – permanent
- Use high-tech for interpretation
- Ecological restoration - such as invasive species removal in the Muddy River
- Connections between the parks improved
- Alternatives to artificial turf – Cost benefits of capital improvements to regularly build artificial turf fields versus the long-term maintenance of natural turf fields and putting in irrigation to make the fields work – also look at the climate change implications
- Vandalism – a sign design determinant



- Want to hear “That would never be allowed in Boston” – want Boston to be held up as the standard by parks departments across the country.
- Natural area in parks need better entry and pathway design, management, maintenance – currently ignored. There is no money for natural areas for operating funds
- Needs to be a parks tree budget that is separate from capital budget – in order to meet goal of more canopy – need to be able to replace trees as they are removed (removals due to safety re dead/diseased/unsafe trees). Also need separate allocation for street trees.
- There should be a reduction in the total number of projects but larger amount of money allocated to per Capital Project, and an increase in the operations/maintenance budgets – more cost-effective and better/more visible results
- The culture of the department needs to change – this will improve morale – now feels like only numbers are important
- The public asks for 1% of operating budget for parks – this still has not yet been accomplished
- Less reliance on conservancies – more parks innovation in-house
- Link the activities of the Parks Department with the activities of other Departments in the City
- Seek outside money for Programs and Activities – but there needs to be staff & time set aside to go after these grants
- Add training and professional development of staff
- Address Differential pay rates for Parks Department – same job at Parks Dept pays less than comparable job in DPW – difficult to keep experienced staff if cannot pay competitively. Staff also have little upwards mobility in Parks Department (so they leave to go to other departments for either more money or better career ladder) – need to address this by finding ways to attract, retain and train all personnel
- Need to plan for the flight of families and the influx of more older adults re the future park system
- Also need to plan to address issues such as dog-walking companies using the public space for profit. Similarly yoga and boot-camps and others that do the same.
- Address dedicated enforcement – planning for proactive and visible enforcement for improving safety – used to be done by municipal police but Boston Police have little time for this since they have other issues in the neighborhoods. But must address hot spots of negative use.
- Lighting – need to have a better policy that is more contextual to neighborhoods
- Need to plan for Arts in the Parks better than is done now. Need to plan for temporary and permanent art – should plan ahead for where the art should go
- Need to improve technology in parks (or at least in some appropriate locations (wi-fi, charging stations), But parks should also be natural areas, an oasis FROM technology (so must be context sensitive)
- Use of the parks for Science and Environmental Education.

***11:10 Breakout session: Be leaders in improving the urban environment – both by enhancing natural processes and features, and by improving the experience of people living in the city***

#### Energy

- LED Lighting – need a management plan

- The parks have done a good job of lowering energy, usually via capital funds (as parts of capital projects) or via grants.

### Shade

- The Parks Department needs to support the natural succession of the tree canopy
- (Athletic) Fields in the parks may limit the areas appropriate for increasing tree canopy
- There needs to be a focus on increasing the diversity of trees, but also focusing on which trees will do well in specific locations/environments (e.g streetside, high foot-traffic areas, etc).
- Need to better train DPW and others regarding trees – they kill a lot of trees through not knowing what will damage them – need to have DPW tree-work or any work near trees be under jurisdiction/supervision of Parks Dept tree specialists

### Stormwater Management

- There is a conflict between contaminated stormwater management and tree-pit soils – putting contaminated water here can kill the trees. Need to better design to clean stormwater before putting near trees or infiltrating
- “Where appropriate”, it is ok to locate storm-water management facilities within parks – however, this should not have an adverse impact on other purposes for which the park is designed

### Urban Environment

- Parks should contribute to the biodiversity of the City
- Water quality should be improved through reduction in waste

### Waste management

- There should be an increase in
  - Recycling
  - Composting
  - Dog-waste digestersthrough a Parks Department on-site program

### **Summary report-out from Group 3**

*Prepared by participating Boston Parks Staff*

### **Session 1: Be good stewards of the exceptional open space that we have inherited:**

#### A park that “works the best”

- Jamaica Pond Park is a good example of a desirable park because it is well-maintained, with contextually-sensitive design that makes use of a variety of passive and active activities with a perceived sense of safety.

#### How to make the Parks better:

- Improved Communications internally and with the community that fosters pro-active dialogue versus reactionary responses
- Self-evaluation of previous decisions and designs
- Addressing dogs and park use

- 7-days-per-week maintenance operations to get ahead
- Re-examination of Park Partners to make it successful for Parks

### **Session 2: Plan for the Future Open Space System**

- Training and staff development for all employees to foster a positive work environment – Happy Employees = Great Spaces; Improved structure of promotions
- 7-days per week maintenance to get ahead
- Realistic funding and staffing – Realistic workload that truly encompasses and address needs – Workloads and staffing aligned with workforce – Without even 1% of the city’s operating budget, the work demanded of this department as currently staffed and resourced is unrealistic to achieve what is desired by the public and its representatives
- Increasing perceived sense of safety – improve police enforcement in “hot spots”
- Want folks in parks systems around the country to compare themselves to Boston since it will be the best; want them to say “That would never be allowed in Boston”
- Institute a Recycling program
- Innovation and pushing the envelope regarding design and maintenance of park facilities
- Money for ecological restoration and trees and natural areas management
- Increased funding for Operating Budgets versus capital programs
- Signature Neighborhood Parks interconnecting with other open spaces
- Improved interpretation programs through environmental education and utilizing technology
- Manage parks to increase biodiversity of entire urban environment
- Improve waste management – recycling, composting and dog-waste digesters
- Support natural succession of tree canopy; “more money for Greg’s damn trees” - Understory is currently a dirty word

### **Session 3: Be leaders in improving the urban environment – both by enhancing natural processes and features, and by improving the experience of people living in the city**

- Where appropriate, give consideration to storm-water infiltration on parks, but only without detriment to green infrastructure or adverse impact to expected/designed use of the park
- Parks do not have the resources to support Complete Streets – how do we bridge that gap? Possible collaboration with other Departments?
- Continued support to department initiatives for energy improvements
- Follow through on city initiatives, such as
  - Complete Streets
  - Grow Boston Green
  - Citizen Pruner
  - Boston About Results
  - Department Sustainability Guidelines

## **Transcription of the Flip Charts by Note Taker Margaret Dyson and Chris Cook**

### **Notes from 9/26/14 Boston Parks and Recreation discussion regarding OSRP**

Group 1 (Facilitator: Jenny Raitt, Scribe: Chris Cook and Margaret Dyson)

#### **9:30 AM breakout – Be good stewards of the exceptional open space system we have inherited**

Which of our parks and open spaces works the best?

- Boston Common (private funding helps)
- Park Line
- “Friends” of the parks helps
- Parks that integrate recreation and ecology
- Privately-developed parks, those that are privately managed
- Two golf courses – these are tied to direct revenue from course users
- Millenium Park – was a landfill and is now a well-used park and recreational opportunities draw people from across the city
- Any park where resources align with needs and MOU/ MOA partnerships are well-established.

What about these Parks and Open Spaces makes them function well?

- Dedicated staff
- Friends groups
- Invested people/ ownership
- Accessibility (parking/ transit access)
- Bigger parks
- Urban wilds work well with volunteers assisting with upkeep
- Smaller parks can be easier to manage and have good ownership by neighbors of parks

What are the key elements that make the parks function well?

- Perception of Safety
- Ease of Maintenance – Important because the quality of maintenance adds to the perception of a well cared for park that increases the perception of safety. This includes vegetation management as well as other maintenance
- Numbers of people using the park – increases perception of safety
- Different experiences available in a park – this depends upon quality of design
- Design the park for its intended uses – make it contextually sensitive and designed for the neighborhood and the residents users

What things need to change to make parks from non-functioning into well functioning parks?

- There needs to be a much more clear MOU/ MOA process and volunteer waiver process
- The process to get things “fixed” takes too long
- Dogs
- Lack of police resources coupled with outdated rules and regulations for policing the parks
- Our need to better communicate the story of how challenging it is to maintain the parks we have and that resources drive our ability to respond. There are 331 parks and only 241 staff.
- Parks are like a “relief valve” for the city: lots of things are tolerated in the parks that aren’t okay behaviors in other places (e.g. homelessness, drug use)
- We need to improve our communications with the community
- We need to keep up with new forms of communication
- We do too much project design instead of more comprehensive design
- We need capital to look at the whole park, rather than fix small problems
- There is too much trash overflow – there’s a mismatch between times that the park is used (weekends) and the staff resources/ hours to address use (staff don’t work on weekends)
- Poor design
- No standards
- Poor oversight of contractors
- Ecology not strong
- The Parks and Rec commission needs to boost morale
- We need to recognize staff and volunteer efforts
- Ornamental fountains and splash parks are a challenge, especially if they are not in a “friends” park
- The Commission’s rules are outdated
- There’s not enough recycling in the parks
- We need better maintenance of safety in parks – constituent services needs to be increased to mediate and mitigate public/ staff issues.
- We need to build parks that are responsive to community needs and staff expertise
- We need to have a role in reviewing all development in the city through Article 80 variances and other rules (100’ of open space and other requirements need to be better enforced).
- We need to create excitement about stewardships to recruit, inspire, and diffuse situations
- We need to encourage the public to get involved
- We should be more actively seeking out public/ private partnerships (e.g. J.P. Boathouse and skating club)
- Our restricted thinking in the commission is an obstacle, particularly when it comes to budgets
- Grilling in parks needs better rules
- There are many grandfathered activities happening in the parks

What we heard/ what we need to do better:

- It takes so long to fix things
- There are conflicting priorities (dogs/ no dogs) (kids/ elderly/ adults)
- The department is hard to work with (permits, permission, access)
- There is a lack of trust in our ability to communicate (does parks and rec have an agenda) folks are jaded by these notions
- More bike access

- Better permitting
- More lighting
- Better landscaping
- More field houses (bathrooms)
- Online access to park info to showcase our park assets
- Sites for recreational activities may not match demand
- Money
- Staffing
- Have a clear agenda
- Sustain our investments
- Have a formal and clear approach
- Avoid creating a two-tiered system in our parks (disparities in access and quality parks if you live in a rich vs poor neighborhood in the city)
- Clarify roles and the meaning of partnerships
- “Ownership” of parks is both a pro and a con
- Institutional expansion
- Staff training and equipment (e.g. CPSI)
- Financial planning for replacement needs
- We need budget (actual \$s) for maintenance (54m for pathways)
- Communication between staff
- Need to improve communication to bring construction in line with maintenance
- Access to technology and training
- We don’t always know who does what and when and when/ who you need to call within the commission
- We need a more effective system
- If we acquire parks, we need priorities
- If we want to acquire parks, how do we fund them in the long term
- The department does not have clear priorities
- How do we work with the Boston Redevelopment Authority to balance development and open space needs
- How to plan, manage, and prioritize capital projects
- How do we connect capital investment and maintenance needs. We need a manual.
- We need to understand best practices for maintenance work.

**10:25 Breakout Session – Plan for our future open space system**

As viewed from the year 2024, what changes would you like to see that are different from 2014?

- Organized sports
- We will have multi-layered parks and recreation, flood management and stormwater management will be viewed as an asset not an impediment. We will have an integrated system.
- Athletics will have bathrooms
- We will attract different users (community gardens, DRFD (?), golf courses, off season usage)
- We will emulate non-traditional Dutch examples of bathrooms
- We will have a comprehensive animal control plan

- Homelessness issues will be managed
- Public partnerships will be expanded and strengthened (BPHC, BCYF, BPL, nonprofit groups, AMC and AMC Rx)
- We will use broad communication tools, including outdoor billboards
- We will have smart parks, integrated technology throughout the system
- There will be more equitable distribution of sponsorships and partnerships
- There will be greater security (all eyes on the park)
- There will be more fully-sustainable (financially) parks that are self-funded
- We will have environmentally sustainable parks
- We will increase funding in our parks and fund maintenance as capital improvements to address the gaps in our park system and in order to successfully grow.
- We will ask for money for ongoing maintenance (splash pads, art)
- We will have a comprehensive bike plan
- We will develop four large athletic fields to relieve pressures on existing college/ university partners and add acreage.
- We will have a fairground for COB (except the Common)
- We will have a vision for future growth, design standards, standard operating procedures, and implement our agenda
- We will acquire additional park space from BWSC
- We will have more universally-accessible parks
- There will be more friends groups (big partners can help emerging groups to start up to tutor/ mentor and we will develop a “how to be a friend” handbook)
- Our parks will be adaptive and balanced – they will be sustainable, durable, welcoming, innovative, and protected, award winning (by TPL) and there will be performance measures
- We will receive feedback from maintenance to design group
- We will hold quarterly community forums citywide and in neighborhoods
- We will be equitable and exceed expectations. It will not just be about having enough parks, it will be about having the right parks.
- We will continue to conduct comprehensive strategic planning
- We will have a policy for commercial uses of parks (e.g. dog walkers and boot camps)

**11:10 Breakout session: Be leaders in improving the urban environment – both by enhancing natural processes and features, and by improving the experience of people living in the city**

**New park activities in the past ten years and any new facilities developed to accommodate new activities:**

ACTIVITY	NEW FACILITY
• Dog parks	Yes
• Disc Golf/ Ultimate/ Foot golf	No
• Slack lining	No
• Skateboard parks	No
• Bikes	Yes
• Cricket	Yes
• Splash pads	Yes
• Food trucks	Permitted

- Beer gardens Permitted
- Carousel Yes
- Commercial activities (daycare, Earl of Sandwich) EOS/ Comfort stations
- Rugby Permits in facilities
- Street hockey Not new
- Food foraging No
- Partnerships with Universities Yes
- Recycling Piloting new program
- Informal daycare No
- Kayaking Program at Millenium Park
- Goatscaping Yes and seeking more
- Universal design access at parks Yes
- Fitness equipment Yes
- Stormwater Management Yes
- Solar benches Piloting program
- Community gardens Yes
- Flag football
- Play courts Yes
- New playgrounds, fields, and paths Yes
- Embankment slides Yes
- Utilities for markets and bandstands Yes
- Buskers
- BMX/ Dirt bikes

### Energy

- Are we big energy consumers? Yes! Definitely of water. WE should be using captured water for irrigation.
- In the three remaining location where we use oil for heat, we should convert to gas
- Transportation to and from parks headquarters. We should Skype to City Hall, fleet updates especially maintain development (also lawnmowers) and equipment. We should install bike lanes from 1010 to City Hall – demonstrated demand for all of these to save on energy consumption
- Solar use
- Update buildings
- Change out lights to LED on fields and park lights
- Don't use field lights for security
- Should we be mowing less?
- New vehicles to meet new fuel standards
- Reduce water use – balance with community desires for fountains and other irrigational elements
- Compost (retrofit the greenhouse)
- Recycling
- Improve the heating system at the greenhouse



## Shade

- We need a plan for urban trees
- We should grow our own shade trees
- The turf fields are hot and lack shade
- We also need to think about street trees
- We should increase the canopy – maintain the canopy, prune trees, and water them to establish new growth
- Shade can become space for undesirable behaviors (issues with Boston Police Department)
- Trees sometimes compete with lawns – we need to balance needs
- We need to ensure that trees can mature and reduce carbon
- We need to choose tree species for/ in response to climate change and disease
- We should be looking beyond trees for shade and identify hybrid tent structures and look at best practices for shading
- We need more solar-powered stands

## Stormwater Management

- BWSC builds more parks to manage versus use parks
- We should manage stormwater goals better and look at above-grade systems versus below-grade systems and consider mosquito issues and creation of vernal pools
- We need to establish a goal on water quality – example, a stream next to a fertilized athletic field
- We need to identify problem areas, how can we help more
- We need systems to absorb water – golf course is getting Audubon certification (GW in process, FP on way)
- We need training dedicated staff for management. This is a whole new system, infiltrate within 24 hours.
- We need to implement, evaluate, and reassess our progress and it should be cross-departmental.
- There are park use implications because stormwater systems can take up space. We need to educate the public and have citywide signage and raise awareness.
- We need to build for the worst case scenario (example Dottie Curran)
- French drains don't work for maintenance (we need new systems)
- We need to know best practices systemwide – we need to fix existing parks and demonstrate stewardship as leadership.
- National best practices needs to be operationalized
- We need to fund a comprehensive, rolling reinvestment strategy
- We need to adopt S.M.A.R.T. goals

## Environmental Education

- Programming and marketing – use urban wilds (video P.S> walking tours)
- Maintain natural areas
- Better, friendly website
- Manage public safety concerns
- Better mapping
- Strengthen partnerships

- Infrastructure (roll in grass and educate)
- Interactive (tech), greenway, connect gaming to education, make it like problem solving/ urban adventures
- Create summer jobs

#### Good models elsewhere

- NYC
- Seattle
- Portland, OR
- Cambridge
- Brookline (dog usage)
- Scandinavia
- Las Vegas
- San Francisco
- Philadelphia

#### Public Art

- Cooperation between art community (maintenance, operations, parks, brownie)
- The parks are a cultural resources
- San Francisco has temporary art (it arrives and goes) in the Presidio neighborhood
- Community-generated art versus curated collection pieces
- “Functional” art (recycled trash/ play equipment)
- Street furnishings
- Environmental art (that will degrade over time)

**Boston Parks and Recreation Department**  
**Open Space Plan Update Staff Workshop**  
September 26, 2014

<b>8:30 –9:00 AM</b>	<b>Sign-in with coffee and refreshments/brown paper exercise</b>
<b>9:00– 9:05 AM</b>	<b>Opening Remarks –Chris Cook</b>
<b>9:05 – 9:20 AM</b>	<b>Setting the stage</b> - BPRD staff will give a brief recap of the process for updating the plan.
<b>9:20 – 9:30 AM</b>	<b>Workshop overview – Joan Blaustein, MAPC</b>
<b>9:30 – 10:15 AM</b>	<b>Goal #1: Be good stewards of the exceptional open space system we have inherited</b> - We will discuss what parks/open spaces function well and what can be done to make all parks and open spaces the best that they can be.
<b>10:15 – 10:25 AM</b>	<b>Break</b>
<b>10:25 – 11:00 AM</b>	<b>Goal #2: Plan for our future open space system –We will look ahead 10 years and envision the parks system in terms of the people and activities that will be taking place.</b>
<b>11:00 – 11:10 AM</b>	<b>Break</b>
<b>11:10 -11:45 AM</b>	<b>Goal #3: Be leaders in improving the urban environment-</b> How can our parks use less energy, enhance the environment and improve the quality of life for our residents and visitors.
<b>11:45 -12:30</b>	<b>Lunch</b>
<b>12:30 – 1:00 PM</b>	<b>Group report outs</b>
<b>1:00 -1:10 PM</b>	<b>Wrap-up – Chris Cook</b>