



BOSTON COMMON

MASTER PLAN

FINAL REPORT
DECEMBER 2022



City of Boston
Parks and Recreation



FRIENDS
OF THE
PUBLIC GARDEN



View from Emerson College looking North



12 October 2022

Dear Friends,

Boston's history is a history of investing in our shared prosperity and collective future. We're home to our nation's first public school, first public library, and of course our first public park, the Boston Common. Over the years, the Common's tree-lined paths and open spaces have created space for so many moments marked in history, from civil disobedience to community celebration. As its nickname suggests, it is truly the "People's Park."

It makes sense, then, that the Boston Common Master Plan is the product of a multi-year collaboration between the Boston Parks and Recreation Department, the Friends of the Public Garden, and the public. Design firm Weston & Sampson brought together a team of park experts to gauge park management needs, solicit community input, and channel both into a holistic vision for the future of the Boston Common. From renovations to the popular Frog Pond and athletic fields, to more trees and clearer signage, we're excited to be sharing a plan that honors the Common's history, reflects the community's vision, and creates a space that will be more accessible, more resilient, and more inclusive for generations to come.

In this report, you will find background and historical context on the Common, an assessment of the park's current conditions, and a range of physical and operational proposals designed to create a richer community environment for all of us. At the heart of each proposal is a commitment to preserving a shared space for the people, while striving to set the standard for the types of green spaces and community treasures our residents deserve. With the release of this plan, we're excited to continue Boston's legacy of investing in our future through the vibrant spaces we share. See you in the park!

In service,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michelle Wu".

Michelle Wu
Mayor of Boston



City of Boston
Parks and Recreation





View looking north to the Massachusetts State House

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MANY THANKS TO...

Every stakeholder, city resident, tourist, and member of the public who contributed their time and input to the Boston Common Master Plan. The feedback you provided will help to shape the form and function of this beloved park for decades to come.



City of Boston
Parks and Recreation



FRIENDS
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Weston & SampsonSM
design studio

Supported by HR&A Advisors and Kyle Zick Landscape Architecture. Logo design by OPUS.

View of Flagstaff Hill from the Parade Ground looking east

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Boston Common Master Plan presents an aspirational yet pragmatic framework for substantive change at this deeply historic and culturally significant public park. Each recommendation described within these pages builds upon what already makes this cherished public space successful and paves the way toward a sustainable and resilient future for Boston Common.

Known as the “people’s park,” the Boston Common requires a plan that coalesces many competing needs to create a unified vision that will serve the people of Boston and visitors alike. Five principles are set forth to guide all recommendations, focusing on shared use and care, visitor experience and engagement, and the balance of maintaining the park’s historic character with contemporary needs. An inclusive stakeholder and public involvement process helped develop the goals and objectives that underpin the master plan vision and guiding principles.

Outreach and engagement with the people who use, enjoy, and work in the Common have grounded this master plan. Not only a worldwide landmark, Boston Common is also a city-wide public space and neighborhood park. It serves an enormous swath of people. Thus, a wide range of viewpoints, needs, and desires are woven throughout the recommendations.

The report walks the reader through the recommendations of the master plan in a clear and unified manner. First, the vision, guiding principles, goals, and objectives contextualize the proposed improvements to the built environment and recommendations around operational and management upgrades. Next, a brief history of the Common summarizes key moments and references previous planning efforts, which have served to inform the master plan. Driven by a robust outreach strategy to “bring the Common to the people” across the city and on-the-ground inventorying and analysis, the planning process has been guided by the connective thread of

civic access and engagement. These findings were channeled into recommendations for both improvements to the physical landscape and operational adjustments that will support capital investments.

Recommendations for improvements to the built environment run the gamut from small tweaks to significant proposals, driven by the Common’s deeply historic roots and its service to the city today and into the future. Park-wide strategies are introduced that weave through three major themes for recommendations: clarifying and coordinating park edges and entrances, connecting and upgrading core visitor amenities, and enhancing and diversifying active recreation opportunities. Think of each of the proposals as a feasibility study of what is possible in a given area of the Common. As these projects are implemented, the designs will be refined and fine-tuned based on continued input from the public and stakeholders.

The section outlining operational and management upgrades describes the back-of-house support needed for improvements to the built environment to be successful long-term. Recommendations are focused on establishing park management protocols, improving support facilities, and bolstering events and programming.

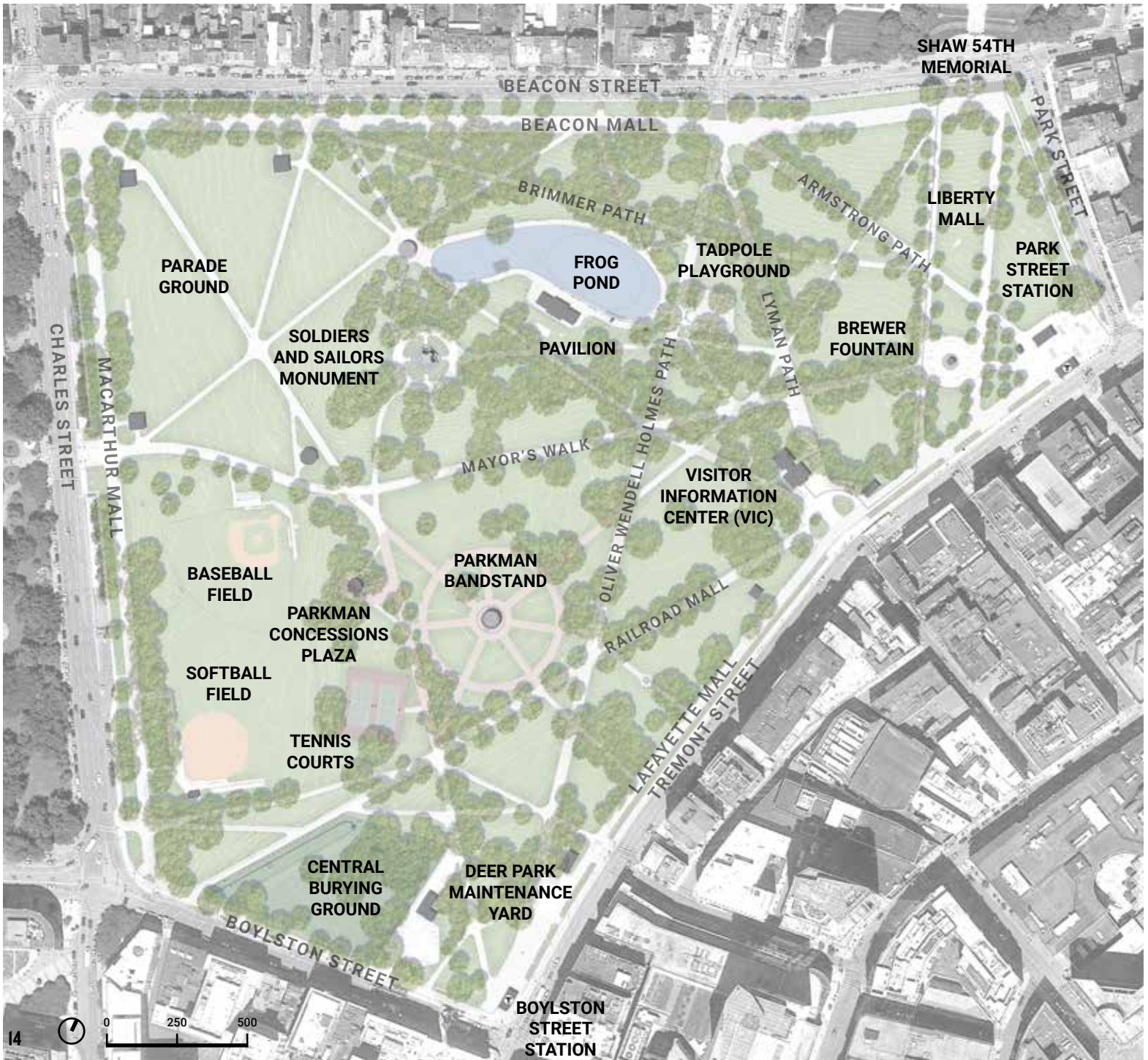
This master plan is a call to action. Recent challenging global events are evidence that, now more than ever, parks and open spaces within dense urban environments are critical to a healthy and vibrant society. As the first protected public open space in the United States, the Common should again become a pioneer in exemplifying how these important places can continue to be successful. By continuing to anticipate and support the needs of this park and its users, Boston Common can set a precedent for what it means to reinvest in and celebrate our nation’s most treasured places.

THE VISION





TODAY...



...TOMORROW

DEPLOY COMMON-WIDE STRATEGIES

- 1 Tree Planting (throughout)
- 2 Seating (throughout)
- 3 Access and Wayfinding (throughout)
- 4 Event Infrastructure (throughout)

RESTORE AND CLARIFY PARK EDGES AND ENTRANCES

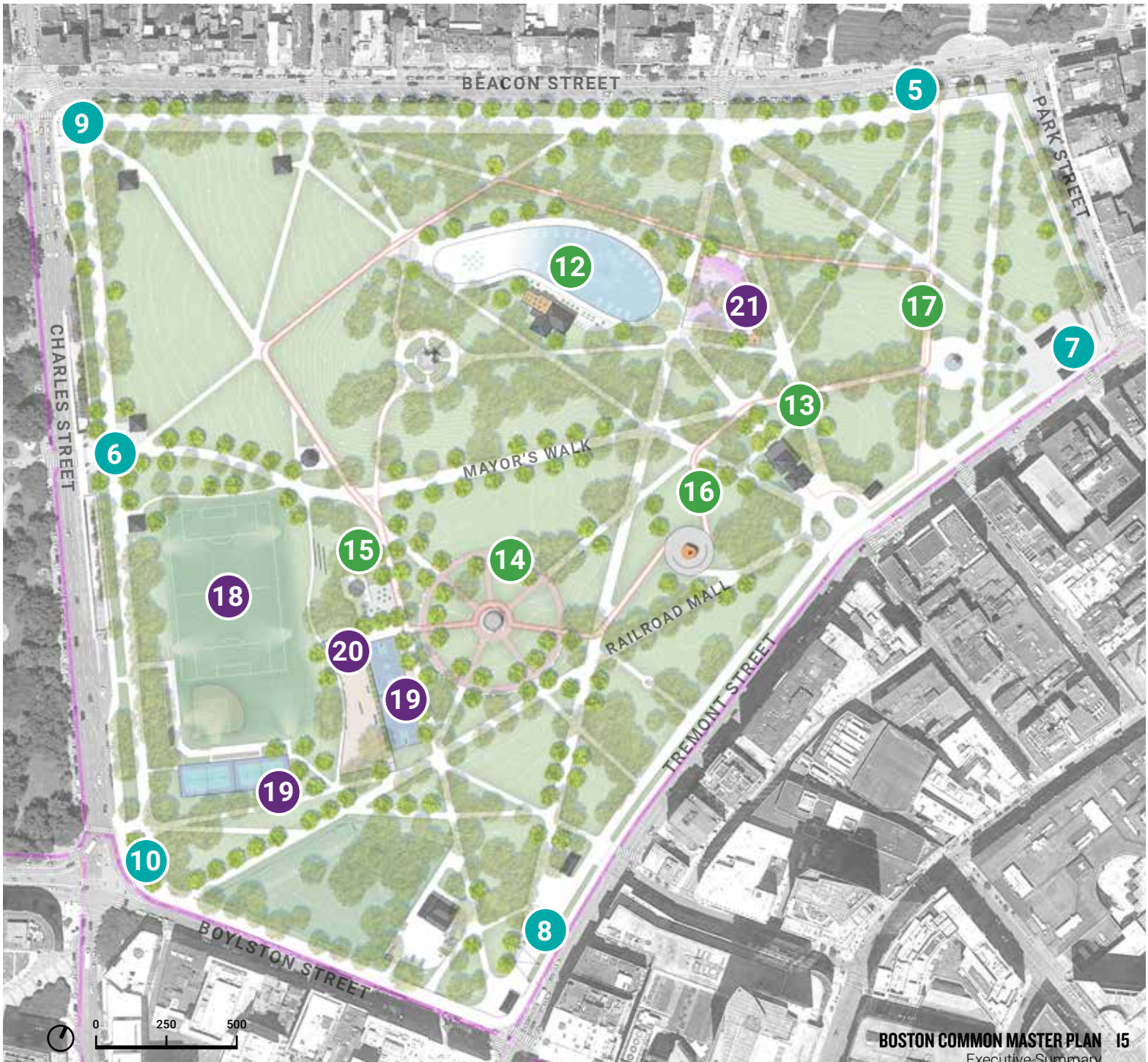
- 5 Accessible Entrance at the Shaw 54th Memorial
- 6 Charles Street Midblock Crossing at Mayor's Walk
- 7 Park Street Station Plaza
- 8 Boylston Street Station Plaza
- 9 Beacon and Charles Street Entrance
- 10 Boylston and Charles Street Entrance
- 11 Park Perimeter Upgrades (all)

CONNECT AND UPGRADE CORE VISITOR AMENITIES

- 12 Improvements to the Frog Pond and Pavilion
- 13 Visitor Information Center (VIC) Addition and Park-side Plaza
- 14 Improvements to the Parkman Bandstand
- 15 Improvements to the Parkman Concessions Plaza
- 16 Connections with the King Memorial
- 17 Landmark Loop

ENHANCE AND DIVERSIFY ACTIVE RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

- 18 Athletic Field Upgrades and Reconfiguration
- 19 Court Reconfiguration
- 20 Enclosed Dog Recreation Area
- 21 Tadpole Playground Expansion





CONTEXT

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VISION

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Many Things to All People

Destination and Crossroads

Historic and Contemporary

Balance of Park Use and Care

Champion for Resilient Approaches

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES



GOAL #1

Support and sustain a multi-functional park for the full diversity of users from all backgrounds and neighborhoods.



GOAL #2

Strengthen the park's natural, historic, cultural, and visual landscape character.



GOAL #3

Expand amenities to support park visitors.



GOAL #4

Improve safety, maintenance, and management of the Common.



GOAL #5

Improve the natural and physical infrastructure of the Common for quality and resilience.

Vision shapes the proposed improvements

IMPROVEMENTS TO THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

DEPLOY COMMON-WIDE STRATEGIES

RESTORE AND CLARIFY PARK EDGES AND ENTRANCES

CONNECT AND UPGRADE CORE VISITOR AMENITIES

ENHANCE AND DIVERSIFY ACTIVE RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

Investment in operations and management ensure long-term success of built improvements

OPERATIONAL AND MANAGEMENT UPGRADES

ESTABLISH PARK MANAGEMENT PROTOCOLS

IMPROVE SUPPORT FACILITIES

STRENGTHEN DAILY AND SPECIAL EVENT MANAGEMENT

VISION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Boston Common Master Plan seeks to create a vision for the Common that will serve the people of Boston and visitors alike while protecting this special place for decades to come. The plan imagines a future for the Common that embodies civic access and engagement with a profound sense of identity and a deep-rooted connection to this historic yet vibrant city.

The guiding principles of the Boston Common Master Plan build on the park's history and current conditions and function to identify what is fundamental to the use, character, health, and management of the Common now and into the future.

MANY THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE

The Common is the people's park, a place that welcomes all. It is, at once, a worldwide landmark, a regional public space, and a neighborhood park. It must promote shared use for a diverse community and support for a range of formal and informal activities.

DESTINATION AND CROSSROADS

Design for pedestrians. Provide "breathing room" and a connection to the natural world for those who visit, meet at, or pass through the Common on a daily basis while also offering a rich and inviting experience for those who engage with the park for its cultural, historical, recreational, and social value.

HISTORIC AND CONTEMPORARY

Acknowledge the Common's layers of history, both visible and invisible, while shaping it into a landscape that serves modern park users in a 21st century city. Protect and enhance the Common's historic character.

BALANCE OF PARK USE AND CARE

Strike the right balance between intensity of use and upholding the highest standards in park care and maintenance. Implement best practices and use requirements.

CHAMPION FOR RESILIENT APPROACHES

Incorporate innovative strategies for managing climate change, on-site stormwater, zero waste, and other methods that enhance park health, safety, and quality of life within the context of this historic environment.

Opposite: Vision diagram, outlining the relationship between guiding principles and master plan recommendations;

Below: Existing view looking south toward Brewer Fountain





GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The master plan's goals and objectives identify the major physical, maintenance, and management needs that the plan must address. These have been developed through an expansive process that involved:

- Input from over 6,000 park users in multiple forums: an online survey, Mini-Common tents that were set up in neighborhoods throughout Boston to engage with people about Boston Common, and multiple in-person and virtual open house events;
- Contributions from key constituencies and stakeholder groups;
- Recommendations and insights from previous studies of the park;
- Boston Common's historic significance and landscape character;
- Field reconnaissance; and
- The professional judgment of the project team, consisting of staff from the Boston Parks & Recreation Department (BPRD), the Friends of the Public Garden (FOPG), and Weston & Sampson.

The goals outlined on the following pages, and the objectives that support each goal, underpin the vision and guiding principles described previously. These include improvements to and the restoration of the built environment, as well as operational and management upgrades that contribute to some or all of the goals and objectives.

At the beginning of each subsequent chapter, a summarizing chart lists each proposed project with the particular goals and/or objectives it satisfies. Of course, the projects are explicitly designed to contribute to the overall vision and guiding principles in many complex ways that will be discussed in this report. These charts will serve as quick guides to support future implementation strategies and help steer decision-making when funds become available for projects.



Top to bottom: Pride Parade 2019; Existing view of the Visitor Information Center; **Opposite:** Typical view down a pedestrian mall





GOAL #1

Support and sustain a multi-functional park for the full diversity of users from all backgrounds and neighborhoods (residents, tourists, event attendees, infrequent visitors, daily commuters).

Nearly one million tourists pass through the Visitor Information Center doors each year. On any given day, over 40,000 visitors are moving through parts of the Common. Boston Common supports daily recreational and passive use, special events, regular and varied programming, and tourism. The Common must be many things to all different kinds of people, serving the diverse needs and interests of the park visitors of today and tomorrow.



OBJECTIVES

- 1A** Invest in park infrastructure that facilitates and supports programmed uses that range from big to small within the Common while allowing these shared spaces to recover and sustain daily use and activity.
- 1B** Enhance and activate popular destinations for programmed and unprogrammed activities for all ages and abilities, throughout all seasons.
- 1C** Balance the use of the Common both as a setting for large events and demonstrations, and as a green space that supports impromptu and passive activities. This mix of activity requires an approach to capital planning, maintenance, and management that is tailored to the Common's unique role.
- 1D** Improve circulation and accessibility by enhancing the pedestrian experience through pathway improvements and controlling bicycle travel through the Common (via bicycle improvements outside the park).

Above: 2019 Frog Pond summer opening at Boston Common



GOAL #2

Strengthen the park's natural, historic, cultural, and visual landscape character.

The Common's long history is both a strength and a challenge. The beauty of mature trees and vegetation is undercut by the gradual deterioration of underlying curbs and pathways; the historic impact of buildings and monuments is diminished by nearby furnishings in flagging condition. The Common must protect, enhance, and restore the many elements that contribute to its visual character so that they become mutually reinforcing and ensure the future success and relevancy of the Common.



OBJECTIVES

- 2A** Protect and enhance the Common's iconic landscape comprised of broad lawns and canopy trees by improving soil quality, management, and general maintenance, all while using best management and maintenance practices.
- 2B** Evaluate tree planting for clarity of spatial definition to reflect historic precedent and current day needs and preferences. Increase shade where people gather. Phase out flowering tree species that are inconsistent with historic precedent. Promote tree species most suitable for horticultural and climatic conditions of the Common.
- 2C** Restore built features (walks, curbs/edges, drainage systems, benches, and other site furnishings) to a state of good repair and high performance.
- 2D** Enhance the visual character of the Common's entrances, welcoming each visitor with a clear, consistent, and inviting sense of arrival at each park threshold.
- 2E** Rehabilitate historic structures (buildings, monuments, and Central Burying Ground).

Above: Protest at Brewer Fountain looking toward the State House



GOAL #3

Expand amenities to support park visitors.

The Common's current assortment of visitor amenities is a patchwork of different eras and objectives that have fused together over time. Rather than operating independently, expanded recreation opportunities, vending options, signage, restroom facilities, and park operations can work together for a more dynamic and consistent visitor experience.



OBJECTIVES

- 3A** Expand the capacity of existing restroom facilities (Frog Pond and VIC) and explore opportunities for additional restrooms in other park areas.
 - Expand or otherwise improve food options at appropriate locations.
- 3B**
 - Provide signage to support a variety of needs—wayfinding, informational, regulatory, interpretive—and improve existing information kiosks. Develop a variety of methods to communicate the significant narratives of the Common, including digital platforms.
- 3C**
 - Evaluate how vending on the Common can best support park users/visitors and make improvements to the visual quality and consistency of the vending program. Determine the best locations for carts to provide service and help define and activate associated spaces.
- 3D**
 - Provide new site furnishings (benches, trash receptacles, drinking fountains/bottle fillers) that are compatible with the Common’s landscape qualities and aesthetics for greater user convenience.
- 3E**

Above: Existing view of Tadpole Playground



GOAL #4

Improve safety, maintenance, and management of the Common.

The Common's incremental growth over time meant that its maintenance and management regime expanded in a similarly piecemeal fashion. Designing a cohesive and intentional plan of action will unite safety, access, maintenance, and permitting practices to ensure that each of these elements stem from a shared foundation.



OBJECTIVES

- 4A** Deploy multiple strategies—design, activation, lighting/cameras/call boxes, and inter-agency coordination—to improve safety throughout the Common and ensure sustainable use of park amenities.
- 4B** Reduce vehicular activity within the park to limit conflicts with pedestrians and to minimize damage to trees, turf, and paths.
- 4C** Develop a park management and maintenance strategy that responds to and balances the demands on this heavily used park. Ensure that specialty services, as needed, complement existing maintenance programs and permitting efforts to achieve an overall high performance.
- 4D** Improve the permitting process through transparency, mitigation, and revenue generation opportunities that can be reinvested in the park.
- 4E** Ensure that maintenance equipment is compatible with path widths, turning radii, specialty pavements, and energy efficiency goals.

Above: Shakespeare on the Common at Parkman Bandstand



GOAL #5

Improve the natural and physical infrastructure of the Common for quality and resilience.

The current pressures on the Common require an expanded infrastructural system and set of practices to ensure that it can keep up with demand over time. Updated maintenance regimens and capital improvement programs will support the Common's role as the civic and historic center for the City of Boston.



OBJECTIVES

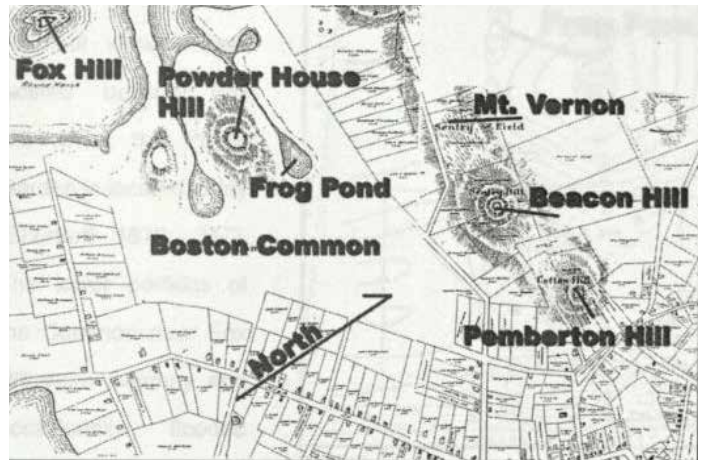
- 5A** Perform maintenance on all natural and built features on a regular cycle to sustain the quality and functioning of the park.
- 5B** Establish a phased and prioritized capital improvement program to renovate, restore, and improve park features.
- 5C** Establish/confirm design protocols that maximize the lifespan of various built systems and advance the city's climate resiliency standards and strategies.

Above: Existing view of the Parade Ground and athletic fields

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

Since its official establishment as a protected public open space in 1634, the Common has been central to Boston's civic life and the accompanying physical demands of societal needs and pressures. This 50-acre park remains deeply historic though its original topography has been softened, it is now surrounded by the city on all sides, and it bears new and updated uses. The park is not only a historic landmark in the physical sense but also in its rich history dating back to when the Boston area was still referred to as the Shawmut peninsula and Indigenous people lived seasonally on the land. Over the years, this history of people on the Common has grown along with the park. Over time, the Common slowly transitioned from a utilitarian landscape to one of a leisure park and began to more substantially support civic activities and social movements. Proffering up its lawns and State House frontage for Civil War recruitment booths in the 1860s, Vietnam War and civil rights rallies in the 1900s, and renewed racial, civil, and climate justice movements in the 2000s, the Common has adjusted to heavier and more varied use over time. Boston Common is not only held close to the heart of Bostonians but it also serves the region as a national landmark and a platform for the shifting tides of American culture.

A public park must support its city and visitors by being more than just a passive landscape. The Common provides visitor amenities, activities, business opportunities, space for civic engagement, and a place for social gathering and education. There now exists a patchwork of utility lines, a parking garage, subways running along its eastern and southern edges, paved pathways and iconic malls, a playground and shallow



Above: 1684 map of Boston showing locations of physical features on and near the Frog Pond

pool, a visitor center, a ranger station, ball fields, and a growing maintenance and management team. Each of these elements contributes to what Boston Common is today and provide the tools to prepare for a new and changing future.

BOSTON COMMON OVER TIME

From Indigenous habitation on the Shawmut Peninsula to the settlement of Boston and Boston today, the Common has transitioned from natural resource trove and pasture to everything from military encampment and protest stage to a vibrant and civically-active leisure park. While a brief review of its past uses is included in the timeline below and in the narrative within this section, it is by no means an exhaustive recounting. Please refer to The Boston Common Cultural Landscape Report (2016) for a detailed review of the history of the Common's evolution, use, and physical features.



6000 BP - 3000 BP

West of the Frog Pond, hunter-gatherers lived along the water's edge and built fish weirs to collect their food.



1634

The Common is officially established.



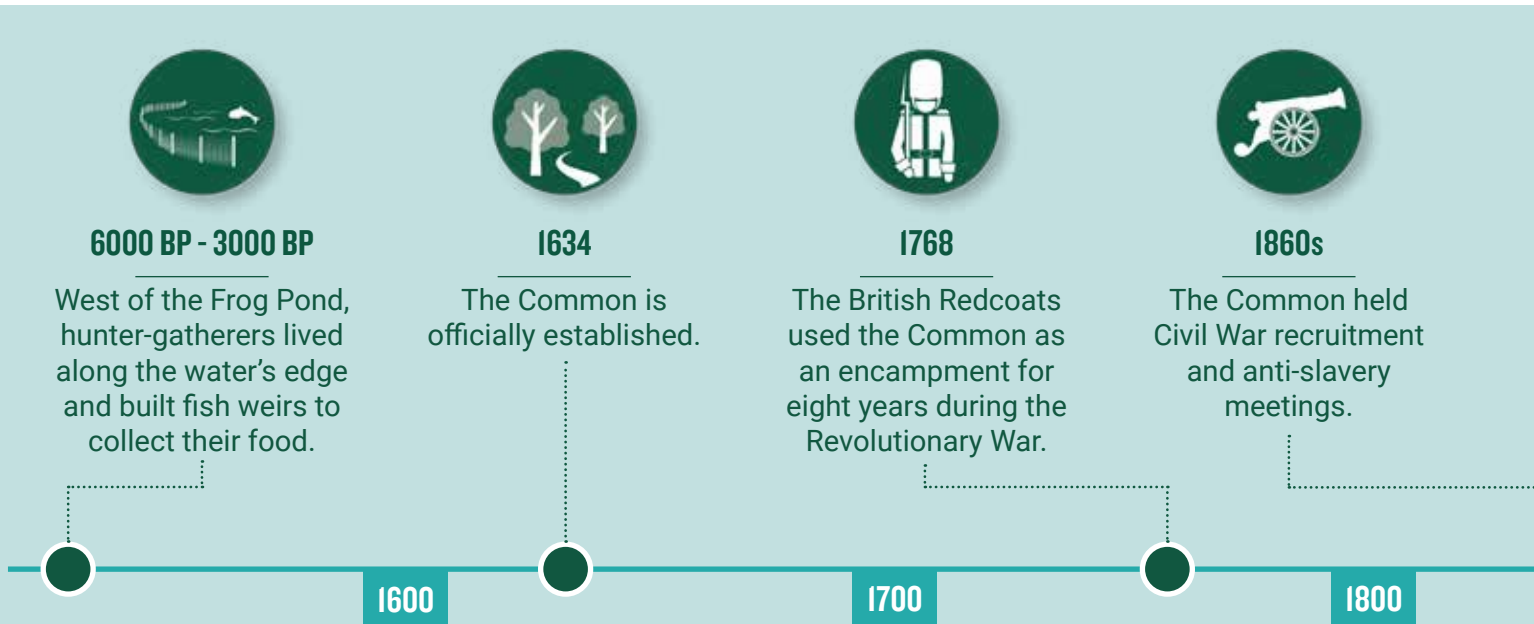
1768

The British Redcoats used the Common as an encampment for eight years during the Revolutionary War.



1860s

The Common held Civil War recruitment and anti-slavery meetings.



1600

1700

1800



Above: Lithograph of the State House by James Kidder with a park-like Common in the foreground (1829)



1913

Park improvements are designed by the sons of Frederick Law Olmsted.



WORLD WARS I & II

Victory Gardens sprouted up around the Common; park fencing is donated for use as wartime scrap metal.



1960s

The Common is used to host anti-war protests.



2022

The Boston Common Master Plan is released.

1900

2000



Indigenous People's History Pre-Boston Common

Early Boston consisted of glacial landforms including drumlins and moraines. The land was rich, and the spring water that flowed from the moraines was plentiful. It is not surprising to learn, then, that the first people of North America, the Paleo-Indians, spread across the region hunting their food (12,000 BP to 10,000 BP). Archaeological evidence of fish weirs, an indigenous fishing tool, was discovered during subway and subsequent garage construction.

The Archaic period (10,000 BP to 3,000 BP) was even more hospitable to hunter-gatherers who frequented outlets of rivers and estuaries. West of the Frog Pond, several fish weirs were discovered during construction in the 1940s and 1980s. These stakes of wooden fences that corralled fish for harvest are dated to between 5000 and 3500 years old and would have been made by the native Massachusetts people. Though prolonged habitation by the Massachusetts people has not been documented on the Common, their migratory and land use patterns likely do underlay the Common as they periodically spent time on the Shawmut peninsula.



Early Colonial History: Early to Late 1600s

William Blackstone was the first European to settle on the Shawmut peninsula in the early 1600s. Upon arriving in Massachusetts in 1623, he acquired a large area of land that included the Shawmut peninsula from the Council of New England, which held the British patent for Massachusetts. Settling on the peninsula, near the boundary of today's Common, Blackstone was there to welcome Governor John Winthrop and a group of Puritans to the area in 1629. When religious disagreements influenced Blackstone's decision to leave for Rhode Island, the colonists purchased fifty acres of his land for thirty pounds and taxed each household for no less than six shillings. As was the custom in England, they set the purchased land aside for common use.

Within the limits of Boston Common, there were several hills, ponds, and physical features. The four hills included Fox Hill, Ridge Hill, Powder-house Hill, and Washington Hill, all of which have either been modified or completely removed over time. Only the Frog Pond, Powder-house Hill (Flagstaff Hill where Soldiers and Sailors Monument sits) and the slight hill of the burial ground still exists today. The lower portions of the Common—primarily its western side—were salt marsh and swamp and occasionally flooded, even late into the 17th century.

Legal protections for the Common were established as early as the 1640s to ensure it remained a public space in perpetuity; the land was officially documented as such in the 1680s.



Land Evolution and Military Use: Early 1700s to 1776

As people's needs became less purely utilitarian, the landscape of the Common evolved in response. Tree planting and a path along the eastern edge—Tremont Mall—was the first planned recreational space on the Common. Soon areas were informally set aside for different uses: grazing, gardening, defense and military activities (Powder-house Hill and northwest corner), and civic uses in the northeastern corner closest to town. The Great Elm stood as the singular tree among a grazing landscape. Informal recreation, community gathering, and social activities began taking place in the grazing areas.

The Beautification Years: 1810 to 1890

After the Revolutionary War, the city and surrounding area of the Common grew rapidly, though the Common's recovery was slow. Once the Charles River was dammed in the early 19th century, the Common became more accessible and tree-lined pedestrian malls within the park gained popularity as a spot for promenading. The Common truly transitioned from utilitarian landscape to a public park when cow grazing was banned in 1830. The Common was quickly established as the unequivocal stage for political activities, military events, and civic celebrations—a reputation which endures today.

Modernization of the Common: 1890s to Today

Following its use during the Civil War, character-defining features, like the tree-lined pedestrian malls, were replanted. Amenities, like seating, curbs, and fencing, were added. The construction of the subway through the Common brought new park users, mainly commuters, from outlying neighborhoods into downtown Boston to serve the business needs of a growing and bustling city. The firm of world-renowned landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted was commissioned in 1910 to evaluate the condition of the Common and develop a list of recommendations, several of which were executed. Other rehabilitation efforts brought iconic landmarks to the Common, including the Parkman Bandstand, Liberty Mall, and a relocated Brewer Fountain.

Again, the Common was used for military purposes during World War I and World War II, with few improvements taking place. After World War II, the Common was again re-established as the preeminent location for recreation, social gatherings, and political dissent,

Top to bottom, at right: Historic image, "Coasting on the Boston Common" (1930); Historic image "Marble contest on the Boston Common" (1924); Historic image, "Sailors with their girls" (1930); **Top to bottom, opposite:** Water Celebration (1848); Historic image of the Frog Pond (no date); Historic image of Boylston Street Station Plaza (1917)



which continues to this day. More modern amenities were built into the Common, such as the parking garage from the early 1960s that lies under the Parade Ground.

By 1970, the Common's physical condition had declined. The Friends of the Public Garden, established in response to the dire conditions of the Public Garden, quickly expanded their sights to the Common. From the 1970s on, improvements to the Common followed the city's economic and development cycle, with gradual improvements along the way, aided by increasing investment from the nonprofit Friends. Many planning studies, which are described in more detail later in this section, addressed the various issues surrounding the park, needs that incrementally grow over time. This master plan offers the chance to take a comprehensive look at the Common and steer future improvements toward a more cohesive park that will better serve today's residents and the city over the next several decades.

PREVIOUS PLANNING ANALYSES

An analysis of past planning projects and studies of the Common, the City, or neighborhood was completed as part of this effort to build a foundational understanding of what may affect future renovations of the Common. Studies specific to Boston Common are included and briefly summarized on the following page.

Additionally, several other documents and city-wide reports were included in the team's review, such as:

- Studies by Weston & Sampson: pedestrian counts in 2020, and inventories of pathways and site furnishings 2013-2016
- Garage Renovation Plan by Sasaki Associates, 1993

- Capital improvements (including pathways) made between 2015 and 2020
- Permits issued for events on the Common from 2017 to 2020
- Several soils studies, dating back to an article in Landscape Architecture Magazine by Frederick Law Olmsted in 1911
- Climate Ready Boston, 2016
- Imagine Boston 2030
- 2015-2021 Boston Open Space and Recreation Plan
- Boston Common, by C.P. & B.R. Curtis and N.I. Bowditch, 1843, which discusses the right and title of the City of Boston to the Common.
- Boston Common, by William D. Ticknor and H.B. Williams, 1842

Below: Historic image of protests after the Kent State Shooting on Boston Common (1970); **Opposite:** Table of the past plans and information that was reviewed as part of this master plan's analysis effort.



Document Name	Author (with consultants, if applicable)	Date	Notes
Boston Common Frog Pond Facility Master Plan Study	BPRD, Public Facilities Department, with support from BH+A and KZLA	2018	Provides a study of needs and recommendations for improvements to the Frog Pond Pavilion, skating rink, and wading pool.
Boston Common Cultural Landscape Report	FOPG and BPRD, with Shary Page Berg	2016	Provides historical framework for the Common's plantings, pathways, and features. Aligns with changes in use, population, and the wider city.
Park Use Analysis of the Boston Common	FOPG, with support from People, Places, and Design Research	2016	Combines a four question survey with behavioral mapping and in-person interviews.
Updates to the Capital Needs Projects in Boston Common and the Public Garden	FOPG, with support from Brown, Richardson & Rowe and others	2014	Lays out areas of need and focus for capital investment based on necessary repairs and renovations.
Historic Benches in Boston Common	BPRD, with support from Weston & Sampson	2012	Proposes an updated Common bench after an analysis of the Common's existing and past benches.
Boston Common Improvement Study	BPRD	2006	Breaks the Common into six areas of evaluation to present the need for capital dollar investment to repair, improve, and support the Common.
Life on the Frog Pond: A Prehistory of Boston Common	Independent work by Joseph Bagley	2006	Describes a pre-history Common and Shawmut Peninsula landscape, people, and life. Includes archaeological information found as part of several significant projects as early as 1910-13.
Boston Common Management Plan	City of Boston and BPRD, with support from Walker Kluesing Design Group	1996	Based on the 1991 management plan, outlines goals and recommendations in regards to administration, maintenance, horticulture, and built elements on the Common.
Boston Common and Garden Utility Report	City of Boston, with support from Storch Associates	1991	Identifies system inadequacies, existing conditions, and recommendations for the future drainage and irrigation.
Boston Common Pathway Plan	City of Boston, with support from Walker Kluesing Design Group	1989	Assesses access points and each pathway's condition, width, and use. Provides recommendations for improvements based on use hierarchy, deteriorating material, ADA needs, and overall park character.
Boston Common Use Study	FOPG, with support from Carr Lynch Associates	1988	Focuses on understanding the way the Common is used and perceived to support the relocation of the VIC.
Boston Common Boston Landmarks Commission Study Report	Boston Landmarks Commission	1977	Focuses on historic features, events, and monuments, to emphasize the Common's physical and architectural significance and why it should be designated as a Landmark.
Boston Common Master Plan	BPRD and Public Facilities Department, with support from Carol R. Johnson & Associates	1970	Recommendations focus on bench conditions, regrading and drainage improvements, tree planting, pathway material and alignments, and other overall park improvements.
Soil Improvement and Irrigation on Boston Common	Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects	1911	Evaluates the existing tree canopy on the Common and examines steps forward, via soil sampling and other scientific means.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

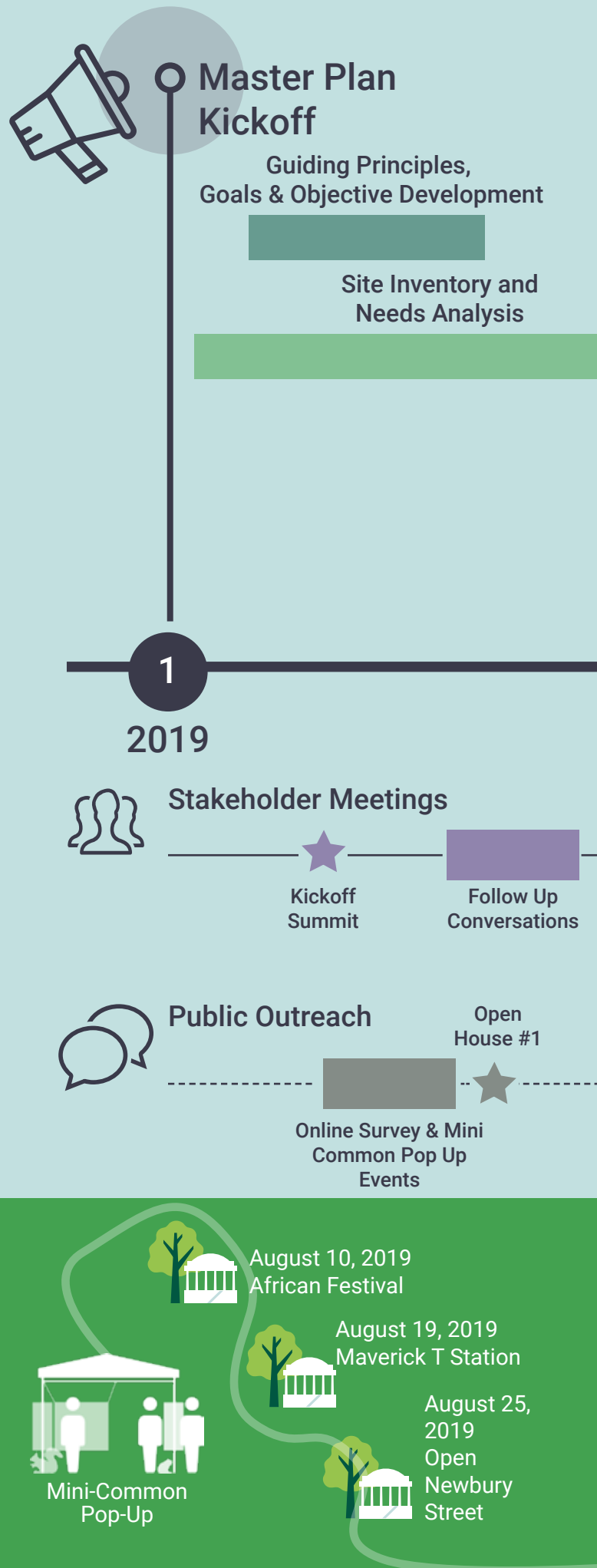
OUTREACH

This report is guided by the goal of crafting an environment of civic access and engagement. The master planning team carefully calibrated and worked through a robust stakeholder and public outreach process to capture a diverse range of voices across the city and beyond. The project kicked off with a series of stakeholder engagement sessions with many groups, including:

- Boston Parks and Recreation Department Vending, Permitting, Maintenance and Park Rangers
- Friends of the Public Garden’s Common Committee
- Boston Police Department
- Boston Landmarks Commission
- Boston Accessibility Commission
- Boston Art Commission
- The City Archeology Program
- Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)
- Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau (GB-CVB)/Visitors Information Center (VIC)
- Massachusetts Convention Center Authority (MCCA)/Boston Common Garage

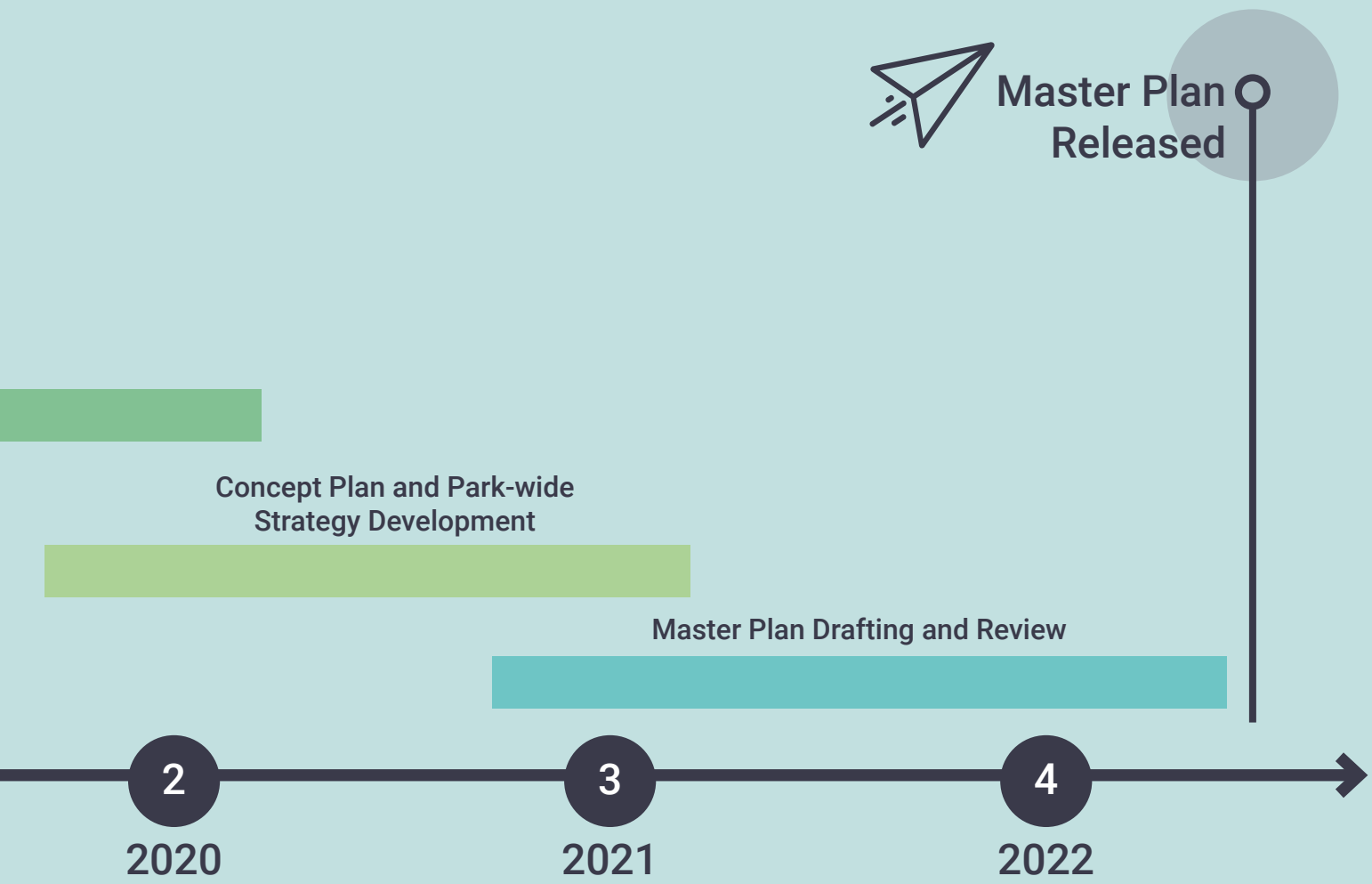
Stakeholder sessions served to ground the Boston Common master planning team in the daily operations and challenges facing each of these groups. These meetings were just the beginning of ongoing conversations with each of these groups, as conceptual plans were developed and operational and management adjustments were considered.

In June of 2019, public engagement kicked off with an online survey and Mini-Common pop-up exhibits. Mini Common pop-ups were deployed in the park itself and across the city at T-stations, community events, and farmer’s markets to “bring the Common to the people.” These pop-ups gave residents and visitors the opportunity to comment on areas of the Common they liked the best and the least, to evaluate current programming, and to create a wish list of potential interventions and improvements. The first open house followed, to share information and hear more feedback on what was learned thus far, including present observations and analysis.





Master Plan Released



At the second open house, “Opportunity Vignettes” were developed to suggest potential changes to critical areas of the Common that addressed both public commentary and anticipated park needs. The public joined the project team for small group “breakout” discussions on specific areas around the Common.

Following the second open house, the global pandemic necessitated adjustments to the outreach process. Virtual events were designed with the goal of making them as dynamic and equitable as in-person events. A month-long series of events, kicked off by a virtual open house, dove into park-wide strategies and proposed improvements to specific areas. Smaller, interactive virtual open forum discussions followed the first event and provided members of the public an opportunity to review proposed improvements, ask questions, and share ideas with the project team panelists.

Following the release of the master plan draft in October 2022, the public was invited to participate in the public comment period, which lasted 50 days. All park improvement plans and supporting graphics were posted online, where the public could review information and provide feedback. A summary of feedback results can be found in Appendix F.

SITE INVENTORYING AND ANALYSIS

A deep dive into the on-the-ground conditions was undertaken as soon as the project kicked off. First, a detailed topographic survey was completed to identify all existing conditions currently present on the Common, including pathways, curbing, trees, utilities, and structures. Through field reconnaissance, conversations with stakeholders, and data collection, the project team analyzed the following features:

- Existing landscape character, historic features, structures, and site furnishings
- Circulation and access, including entrances, gates, and pathways
- Sculptures, monuments, and plaques
- Signage, including rules, place markers, and wayfinding
- Views and view corridors
- Security features including security cameras and emergency call boxes
- Soils and drainage
- Shade/shadows and vegetation
- Utilities

Below: Diagram quantifying community engagement that was received during the master planning effort; **Right, top to bottom:** Pedestrian counter on the Common; Mini Common in Chinatown



The project team reviewed previous planning and historical documentation of the Common, which laid out how the Common's history, evolution, and character-defining features affected master plan recommendations. Additionally, the team provided regular input for the design of a new memorial honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King located on Boston Common. Master plan recommendations were carefully coordinated and are complementary to the King Memorial project.

Analysis of the park's current use, and how the current design, programming, maintenance, and operations of the park supports or inhibits those activities, was also integrated into the basis for recommendations. The following were included in this effort:

- Normal passive and active use and enjoyment of the park
- Special events, permitted and programmed uses
- Demographics, distinct user groups, intensity, timing and conflict of use
- Lighting and power capacity for facilities, programs, and security
- Use permits, fees, enforcement of terms; mitigation of impacts
- Vending and food service; use of Common by pri-





vate commercial ventures outside the vendor program (such as dog walking services, “boot camps,” etc.)

- Vehicle and other modes of transportation, including counts and impacts
- Visitor information services and facilities
- Non-BPRD uses and impacts (MBTA, MCCA/Common Garage, GBCVB/Visitors Information Center, social services)
- Park Rangers and Boston Police activities on Common, Park Rules and Regulations
- Partnerships and park operations

Pedestrian patterns were evaluated through the placement of pedestrian counting devices that the team affixed to pedestrian light poles throughout the Common. These counters were in place for two weeks at a time, in seven sequential rounds from mid-August through early December 2019.

To gain perspective on innovations in maintenance and management operations, the project team interviewed the operators of five parks of similar civic status, scale, downtown location, and historic value. Programming, funding and partnerships strategies, operations and maintenance strategies, and methods for revenue generation were recorded and analyzed. A summary of the results is included in Appendix A.

Altogether, this comprehensive analysis provided the springboard to contextualize the master planning effort and develop a set of grounded opportunities and constraints that are addressed through this report.

PARK-WIDE STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT AND CONCEPTUAL PLANNING

Following the inventorying and analysis phase, the project team developed preliminary conceptual plans for critical areas around the Common and initial thinking on broader park-wide strategies. These initial plans and recommendations were presented at the third open house series of events held virtually during September 2020. After collecting the input received from the public, the concept plans and strategies were refined and rough cost estimates were developed.



MASTER PLAN DRAFT AND ADOPTION

A master plan framework was then developed from the proposed improvement plans, park-wide strategies, and operational recommendations. It is informed by the guiding principles, goals and objectives, inventory, and analysis, and incorporates community and key stakeholder input, city and BPRD priorities, and safety and regulatory standards.



Top to bottom, right: Open House #1 at Emerson College, Open House #2 at Josiah Quincy School; **Opposite, top to bottom:** Word cloud with community response priorities; Example of a postcard with project information provided to Chinese speaking residents

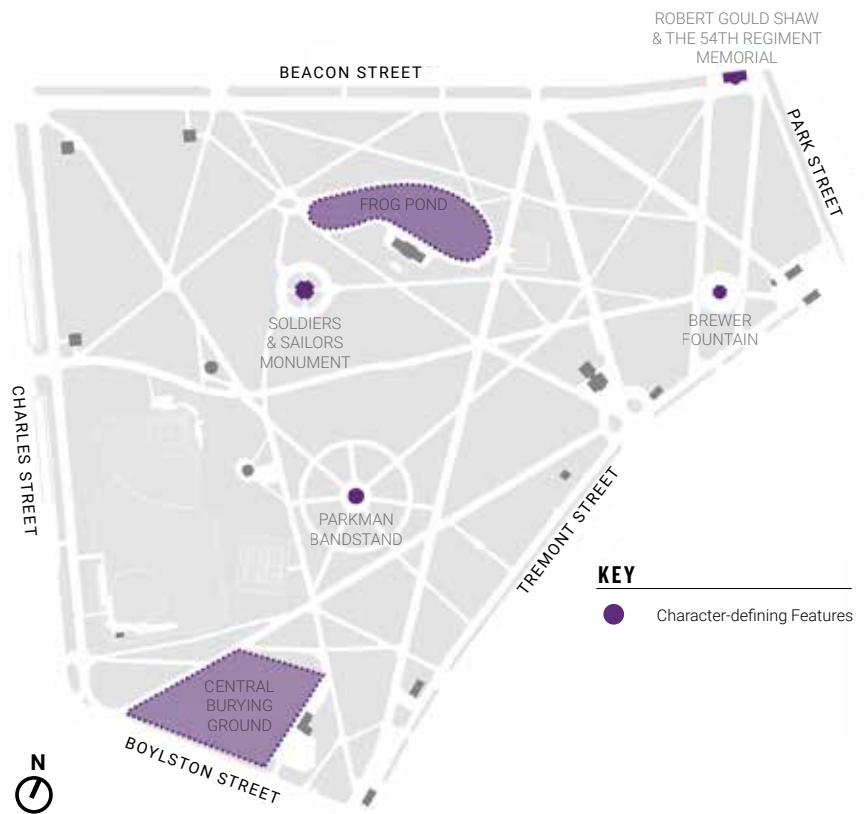
SITE INVENTORY

Gaining a true sense of the physical features and conditions as they exist today served as a baseline to develop a strong set of opportunities and constraints on the Common. From the first moment the project began, the project team was on site to observe how people move through the park and where they congregate, how spaces are used day-to-day and then how those areas transform for special events, vehicular travel, maintenance operations, and so on. The team stationed staff at various times throughout the day for a three month period to turn these observations into empirical data. In addition, the master planning team

collected information in other ways, such as counting pedestrian travel through various locations, to inform the proposals suggested in subsequent sections of this document. The following briefly describes various aspects of the Common that were inventoried and the key takeaways for each.

Character-Defining Features

There are several historic, iconic, and/or defining site features such as vertical structures, water features, or memorials that together form the unique and distinct identity of the Common as we know it today. These include Shaw 54th Memorial, Brewer Fountain, Frog Pond, Soldiers and Sailors Monument, Parkman Bandstand, Central Burying Ground, and the perimeter malls and topography. While noteworthy in their own right, these features would lose their intrinsic significance if taken out of context of the Common.



Above, right: Plan of the Common’s character-defining features; **Below, left to right:** View into the Central Burying Ground; View to the Soldiers and Sailors Monument; **Opposite, top to bottom:** View of the tennis courts; Plan of the existing civic spaces and special events use; Plan of existing active recreation areas





Civic Spaces And Special Event Use

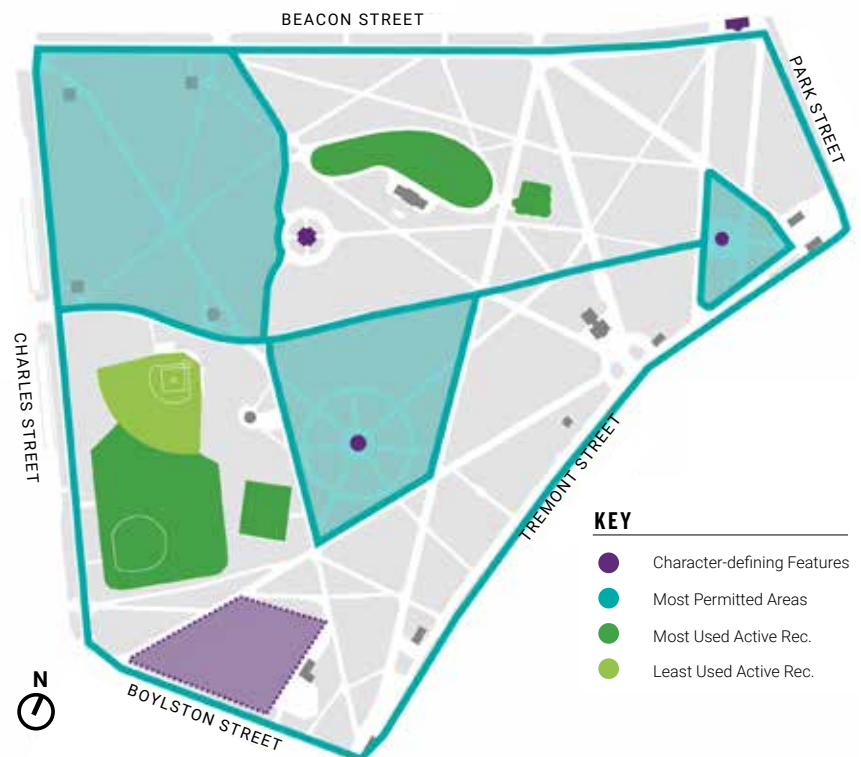
Areas deemed most conducive for flexible event use include:

- Brewer Plaza which hosts food trucks, Berklee College summer performances, and other events;
- Parkman Bandstand and vicinity in which Shakespeare on the Common, free speech/civic protest take place;
- and the Parade Ground which supports events such as Fundraiser Walks/5k Road Races, Making History on the Common, and the Freedom Rally.



Active Recreation

Areas established for organized, active recreational use include the softball field, Little League baseball field, tennis courts, Frog Pond, and Tadpole Playground with other active sports being permitted at the flexible-use lawn in the outfields of both ball fields.



Gathering Areas

Areas defined either formally or informally by their capacity to support casual meetups and smaller groups: lawn areas, Boylston Street Station Plaza, Park Street Station Plaza, Parkman Concessions Plaza, Frog Pond Pavilion, Parkman Bandstand and vicinity, and the Parade Ground.

Trees

Tree foliage provides shade to park users, helps define circulation areas, creates wildlife habitat, and contributes to the overall historic character of the park. The tree canopy frames pedestrian allées, certain monuments, and historic features, and also provides shaded lawn areas.

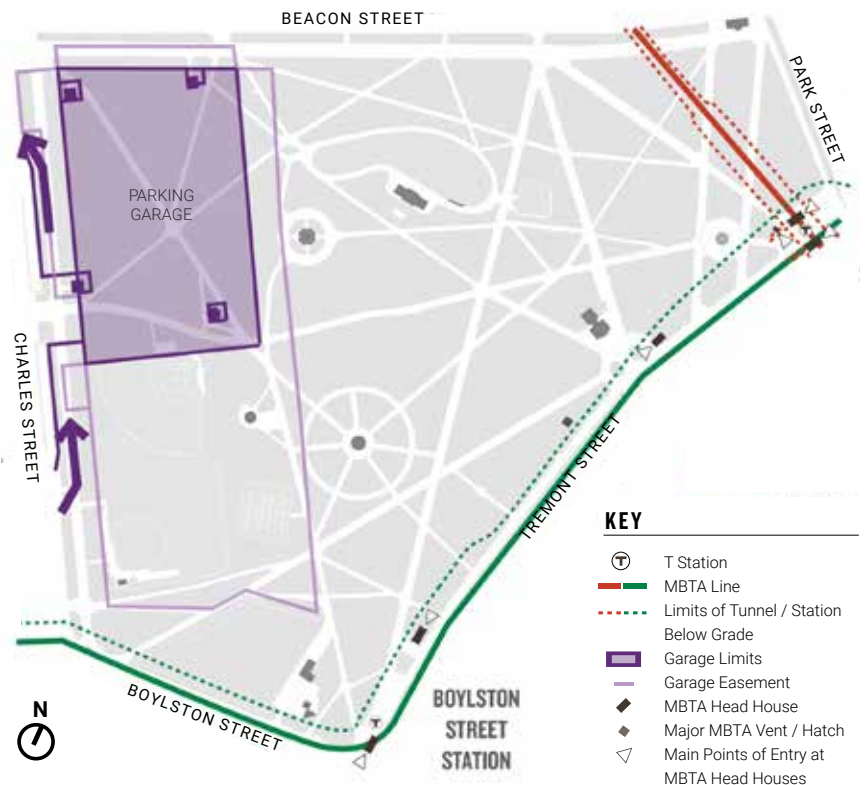
Benches and Seating

Furnishings throughout the park provide areas for rest and observation or facilitate dining/gathering spaces. Bench seating is sporadic and in varying states of disrepair. Flexible café seating is located primarily in the Brewer Fountain Plaza, at the Parkman Concessions Plaza, and at the Frog Pond Pavilion.

Transportation Infrastructure

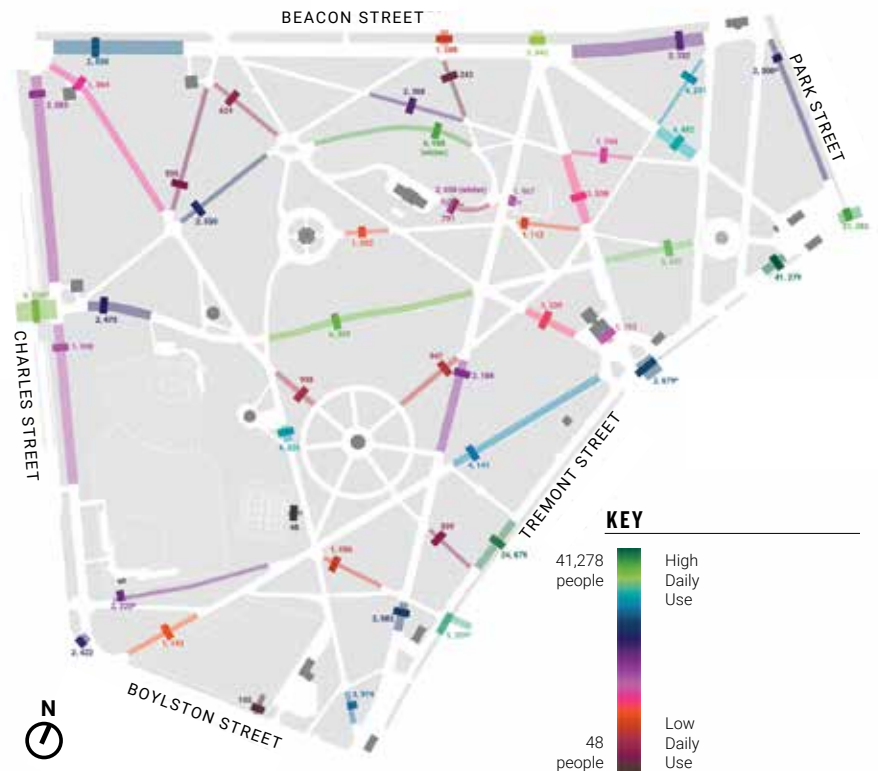
Parking Garage - A parking garage is located underneath the Parade Ground on the eastern edge of the park. Renovated and reopened to the public in 1995, the garage offers hourly, daily, and monthly parking rates. The central location of the garage provides quick access to Boston Common as well as many other areas in downtown Boston.

Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) Stations - There are two T Stations (Park Street Station and Boylston Station) inside the park and a third within a quarter mile of its eastern edge (Downtown Crossing). Between these three stations, visitors can directly access the park from four different subway lines (Green, Red, Orange, Silver). The park is also within a quick transfer or walking distance from all other major subway routes.



Circulation Patterns

Major routes of travel were captured through pedestrian counter data (daily averages captured Summer 2019 through early Winter 2019), and vehicular access and routes were observed and mapped. Patterns of movement related to large events and special-use permitting, ADA accessibility, and bike routes through the Common were collected via on-site observation, public input, and stakeholder feedback.



Topography

The heat map to the right depicts the existing topographic change on the Common, with red representing the highest elevations and blues representing the lowest. The northeastern corner of the park at the Shaw 54th Memorial is the highest point. Soldiers and Sailors Monument is at a higher elevation as well. The lowest point on the Common is along Charles Street, which was previously comprised of marshy tidal banks. As a result, drainage in the ball fields has historically been troublesome for Boston Parks' maintenance crew. Over time, the topography has changed a great deal, and there are accessibility challenges at the park's highest points and edge conditions, particularly at Park Street Plaza and the Shaw 54th Memorial. Topography also frames views across the park and up to the State House and creates areas of discovery around the Common.

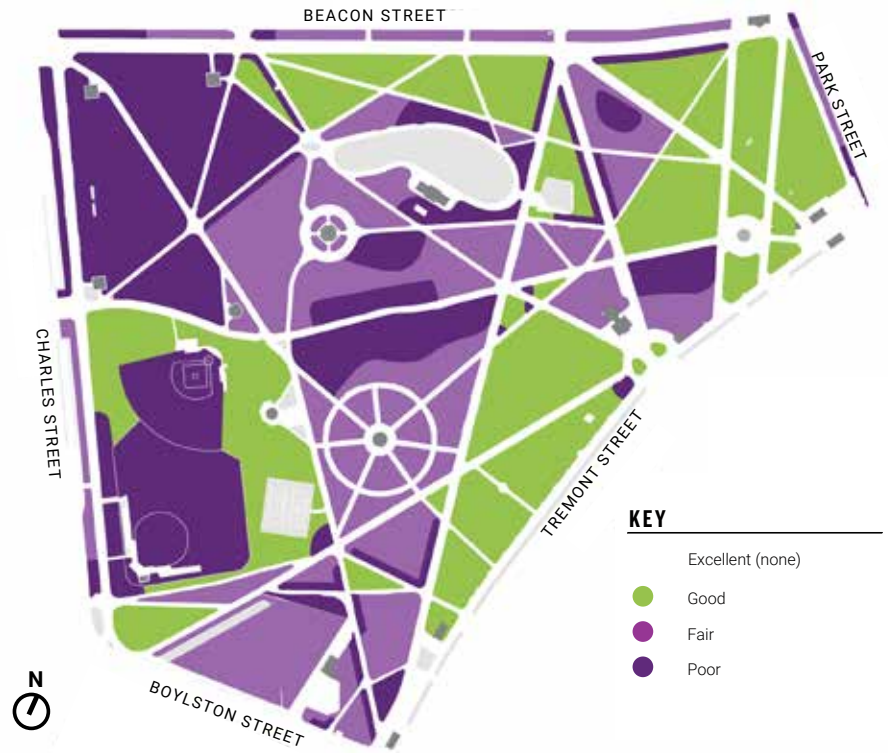


Above, top to bottom: Plan of existing pedestrian circulation patterns; existing topography plan; View of the Parade Ground; **Opposite, top to bottom:** Plan of the existing gathering areas, trees and seating areas; Plan of existing transportation infrastructure



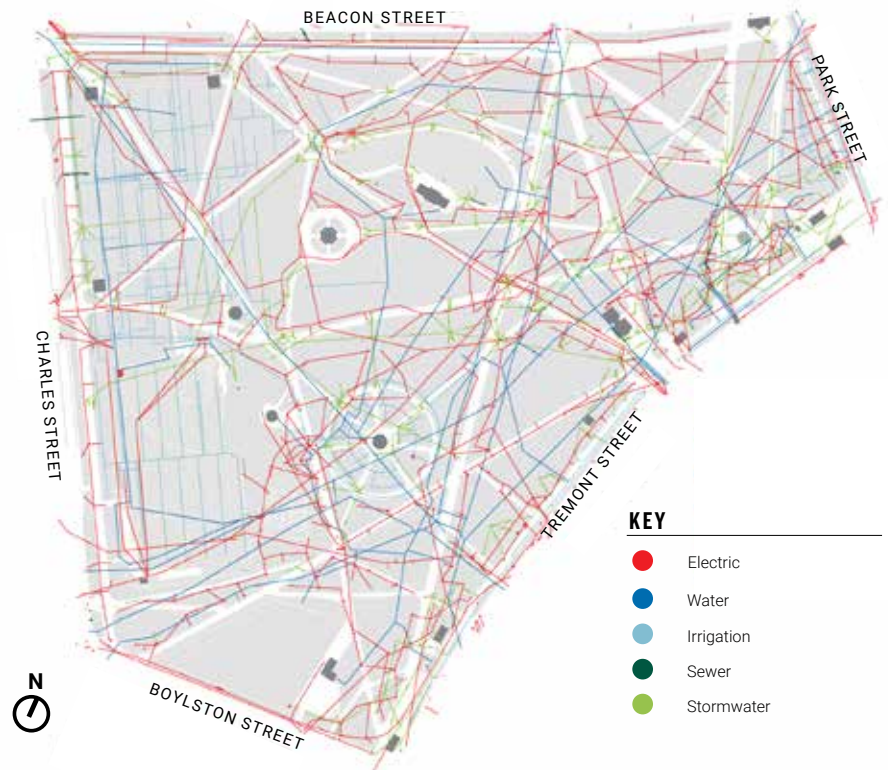
Soils and Turf

Extensive soil sampling was done across the Common by the Friends as an independent study just before the master planning process began. Their findings were incorporated into our analysis and understanding of the quality of lawn panels across the Common. Soil quality is of the utmost importance to support healthy trees as well as manage the use many of the lawn panels experience on a daily basis. Irrigation lines are located in the ball fields and Parade Ground, and soils are filled with a patchwork quilt of underground utility lines mapped below.



Utility Infrastructure

The existing system enables a wide range of infrastructural needs required for the basic functioning of the park: water and irrigation lines, electricity connections and control vaults, sewer pipes and control vaults, and stormwater collection areas. The current system is the result of piecemeal improvements over time, and maintenance staff has found it difficult to make repairs as a result.

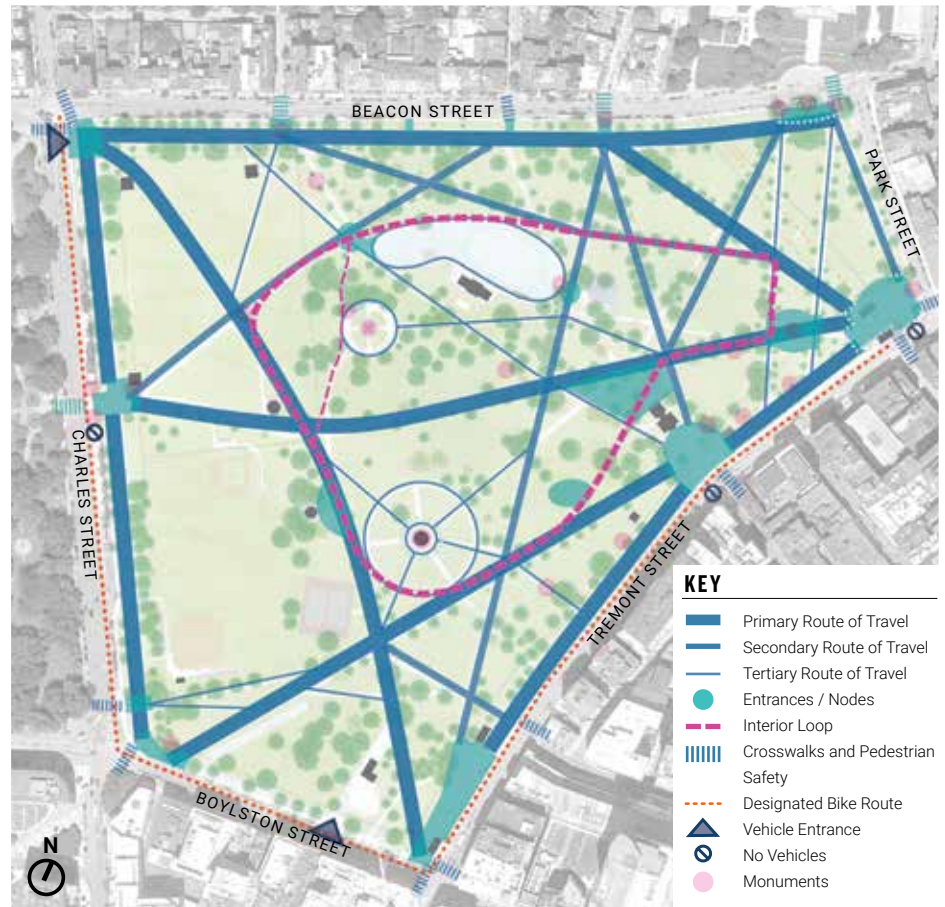


Top to bottom: Plan of the Common's existing soils and turf conditions; Plan of the existing utility infrastructure; View of the turf condition along Liberty Mall



NEEDS ANALYSIS

As an outgrowth of the site inventory and outreach processes, the project team identified the critical changes necessary in building a better and more functional Common. Current unmet and anticipated future needs are discussed below, along with maintenance and management considerations for the park. The impact of regular daily and special event programming was also incorporated, as it contributes to the current degradation of lawn spaces. These three main categories—circulation, basic park amenities (trees, benches, and lighting), and special use and infrastructure—seek to cover the range of needs identified through this master planning process. More on security and management topics is included in the “Operational and Management Upgrades” chapter of this report.



Above: Mapping of circulation needs

Circulation

One of Boston Common’s most important functions is its ability to sustain a large amount of movement for its diverse constituency. The park is a common thoroughfare for commuters and a hot spot for seasonal activities, supporting between 5,000 and 41,000 people a day in the most frequented crosswalks, sidewalks, and event spaces. Boston Common also provides places for gathering and scenic routes for pedestrians and bicyclists, garnering medium usage (zones with 4,000 to 2,000 daily average) in the following areas:

- Tremont and Avery Crosswalk
- The pathway that runs from Boylston Street Station Plaza to the Joy Street entrance
- The Parkman Concessions Plaza
- Brimmer Path (from Liberty Mall to the Spruce Street Entrance at the Founders Memorial)
- Beacon Street Mall
- The Parade Ground

In addition to commuter paths, seasonal event areas, and gathering spaces, the Common also provides spac-

es for smaller gatherings, historic tours, and athletic activities, supporting 2,000 daily users or fewer at Parkman Bandstand, the tennis courts, Central Burying Ground, Soldiers and Sailors Monument, and Lyman Path (which runs from the VIC to the Joy Street entrance).

At public engagement events, while people spoke favorably about the Common’s accessibility and proximity to downtown amenities, people generally agreed that new circulation strategies could improve the overall park experience. Suggested items that are incorporated in the master plan’s recommendations include:

- An enhanced sense of arrival and safer crosswalks at all entrances
- Directional wayfinding and interpretive signage
- An interior circulation route highlighting signature park features
- Improved walkway paving
- Designated bike lanes at the park exterior
- Controlled vehicle access and routes
- High and low points related to views, drainage patterns, ADA accessibility, and associated limitations



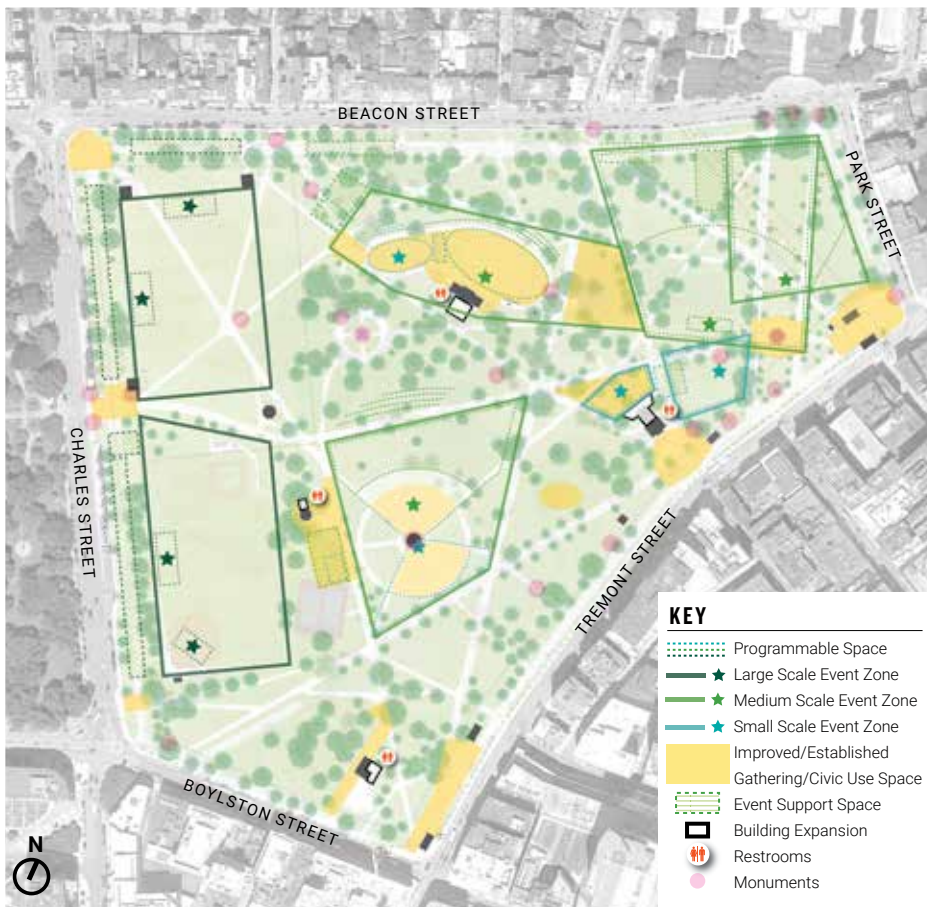
Above, counterclockwise: Map of trees, benches and lighting needs; Existing view of the Parade Ground; Typical pedestrian malls in the Common

Basic Park Features

Trees, benches, and lighting at Boston Common activate and enhance the underlying structure of this park. Trees help guide park goers throughout the park, marking important routes and vistas while grounding gathering areas with shade and shelter. Currently, there are trees in varying condition. Even so, according to nearly every form of public outreach, tree canopy was a unifying factor for park visitors, with 87% of online survey recipients citing trees and lawn as their favorite part of the Common and 77% agreeing that the best outcome of the master plan would be a beautified landscape. This overwhelming consensus presents a clear argument for significant investment in protecting and improving existing tree canopy while increasing shady areas and overall greenspace.

Benches around the Common work in conjunction with the tree canopy to create shady areas for rest and gathering. The existing network of benches and other types of seating is largely concentrated around areas that support heavy activity, such as the Frog Pond and

Brewer Fountain. Benches are also distributed more sporadically along pathways and plazas, which are illuminated by light poles once the sun sets. These light poles are dispersed at regular intervals along pathways; additional multi-purpose light poles accommodate spaces with high levels of activity, such as the athletic fields and Frog Pond. Many respondents from the online survey, Mini-Common events, and open houses emphasized the need for improved and increased night lighting for safety purposes. This master plan will prioritize designing a relationship between the lighting, benches, and tree canopy that creates a cohesive and comfortable park experience.



Above, clockwise: Map of special use area and infrastructure needs; Yoga on the Parade Ground; Summer swimming in the Frog Pond

Special-Use Areas and Infrastructure

As a result of its central location and abundance of green space, Boston Common is a uniquely popular destination for events in the Boston area. Currently, Boston Common covers a wide spectrum of programming, including active recreation and play, history and education, food and community, and arts and culture. Programming at Boston Common is not concentrated in certain nodes, but is instead distributed across the park. As such, any updates to the athletic fields should ensure that their footprints are flexible, rather than being dedicated to any one use. This will promote an increased flexibility that could help address the request from nearly half of all online survey respondents to provide more activities and special events. This push for special events and activities must be balanced with other calls to minimize the impacts of large events to ensure that the Common can be sustained as a healthy greenspace.

With more events comes the need for improved infra-

structure. This reality is bolstered by the fact that 74% of online survey respondents think the best outcome of the master plan would be improved physical infrastructure. For example, much of the existing ground plane, paving, and lawn areas are stressed from decades of heavy use. Recommendations propose to improve pathways, lawns, and plazas, etc. while accommodating the park's delicate subsurface conditions. The large-scale construction efforts required to update essential infrastructure create an opportunity to introduce sustainable environmental practices, such as rainwater harvesting and improved recycling systems, to the Common. New environmental practices will help fuse the park's historic identity with innovative practices, establishing new and continued relevance for Boston Common.