



BOSTON COMMON

MASTER PLAN

FROM: Boston Common Master Plan Team

DATE: September 22nd, 2020

SUBJECT: Open House #3 - Discussion Forum #1 Summary Notes: Park-wide Strategies for Improvements

Panelists: Liza Meyer, *Boston Parks and Recreation Department (BPRD)*
Bob Mulcahy, *Friends of the Public Garden (FOPG)*
Gene Bolinger, *Weston & Sampson (W&S)*

This Discussion Forum consisted of a brief panelist introduction followed by a summary with supporting slides of the proposed park-wide systems including tree canopy, benches and seating, circulation and access, and events and programming.

Accessibility

- **Attendee:** Regarding the vertical access at the Shaw 54th Memorial (the Shaw 54th), a while ago we had talked about a ramp or exterior elevator. What is the current thinking on this in the master plan?
 - **Panelist:** We are still looking at the best way to provide access up to the Shaw 54th; there was previous study that evaluated a ramp or an elevator; a ramp is probably easier to build and is more reliable than an exterior elevator. One of the factors that needs to be considered is the improvements that the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) needs to do for emergency egress at the Red Line tunnel in that part of the Common. We'll be coordinating with the MBTA to understand their egress needs, so there may be an opportunity to double-up on what the MBTA needs to do in conjunction to the improved access from the Common up to Beacon Street. That is still a priority and is still a project goal, but we do not have a preferred option yet.
- **Attendee:** Is there any language in the master plan about this vertical access? I want to make sure this is not missed at the Shaw 54th. The public has complained in the past about the Freedom Trail's lack of accessibility at the Shaw 54th.
 - **Panelist:** The plan itself is not yet written, but yes, there will be language in the master plan about improving accessibility, not just at that particular location but in several locations across the Common including Park Street Plaza, Parkman Bandstand, and the playground.

Benches and Seating

- **Attendee:** The number of benches will be a major visual element as it is already. Is the team planning to change the current design of the benches and are they going to be consistent throughout the park?
 - **Panelist(s):** There were previously many more benches out on the Common and their presence certainly make a visual impact. We always must be aware of aesthetics and where benches are placed. We also think in terms of visitor convenience and how the Common is used – where does it make sense to have benches? Regarding styles of benches, the



Common would benefit from having a consistent bench vocabulary which might mean there could be a limited number of styles that work together to meet different needs; it could be long linear runs of benches connected, or aspects of backless benches versus backed benches. We also appreciate the historic character of the bench placement as seen in historic photographs.

Dog Park

- **Attendee:** I am concerned with the size of the proposed dog area. I feel that it is too small. Is it possible to extend it further beyond the Earl of Sandwich to connect to Mayor's Walk?
 - **Panelist:** Keep in mind that at the master plan level the details only go so far. The true dimensions and design details will be worked out when we are developing plans for construction. We will be sharing a study of nearby dog park footprints at a later forum to show how the proposed space compares.
- **Attendee:** How would you enforce dog park users to stay out of the lawn panels?
 - **Panelist:** The city and the Friends of the Public Garden (FOPG) will continue to work with Park Rangers and the Common Canine group to manage and maintain the dog run spaces to ensure compliance with park regulations.
- **Attendee:** What would you envision the surface to be in the dog area? It is difficult to clean-up on pea gravel.
 - **Panelist:** There are a variety of options. No one surface is "award winning"; stone dust, pea gravel, etc. Terrain and mature shade trees make the space supportive of dog use. We are still in the master planning level, so surfacing will be vetted during the construction documentation phase for this project.
- **Attendee:** Will rotating dog panels continue until the dedicated dog space is created?
 - **Panelist:** Yes, they will continue until the new space is fully operational.

Monuments & Memorials

- **Attendee:** (Discussion comment about monumentation)
 - **Panelist:** Currently, the King Memorial is proposed for the Common. It is still in the design phase but has a clear design intent and is funded by an outside source. The location has been determined (adjacent to the Visitor Information Center (VIC)), and the project will move forward in the coming months. The master plan also needs to consider the larger collection of monuments at the Common; what stories are being told, should they stay at this location, etc. We are working with the Arts Commission to understand the role of art in this space as well as the inclusion of indigenous art, other untold stories, and programming in addition to these aspects in other public spaces throughout the city.

Tremont / Boylston Street Corner

- **Attendee:** For people, who live next to the Common, the state of the Tremont/Boylston Street corner is a major issue. The area does not seem like a part of the park. I feel that an extension of the Tremont St. black fencing to this corner would make a big difference. Having a formal entrance to the park, like the one on Charles Street, would help. More presence from the Rangers and Police would also help.
 - **Panelist:** Gateways and edges will be covered in the final discussion forum, but we can certainly discuss this area now. That area has been identified as an opportunity zone early on



in the project, so there is a desire to upgrade its look, feel and performance. The MBTA and their Green Line Transformation Project (GLX) will have significant impacts to the Tremont Street edge so our thinking has been delayed in that area due to other agencies that shape that space. Improvements have been made over the years, with the connection to Chinatown and the South End, especially with Emerson's significant investment in that area which has been noteworthy and we want that area of the Common to be more responsive. As the MBTA finalizes their area, we look to strengthen the edge and improve the aesthetic quality to better align with the rest of the park improvements.

- **Attendee:** Thank you for putting this presentation together and sharing with the community. I love the loop idea; it will be great for people of many mobilities to experience the views and topography of the park. The State House view is especially important because it embodies "access to government" for all.

Tree Planting / Canopy Cover

- **Panelist:** We are hoping to receive feedback on trees at the Common. You will see we are proposing to add trees in the Bandstand area since it previously had a tree canopy. We are curious to know your thoughts on adding more shade to that space.
 - **Attendee:** There are significant parts of the Common where we cannot plant trees (Parade Ground and the subway lines), I'm in favor of adding more trees throughout, just be aware of the theatre group who uses the Bandstand. The King Memorial could be removing more trees too. Trees are very important to the city especially in terms of climate change.
 - **Panelist:** There could be some loss and gain from the impact of the King Memorial. The new trees will take time to grow but they will be added to that area of the park.
- **Panelist:** Finding respite from the hot summer sun will be important moving forward. We can still do some planting in the Bandstand area and still honor the sightlines for performances.
- **Panelist:** Looking again to historic imagery, we want to restore a healthy tree cover but maintain a functional sun/shade ratio and optimal light down to the pathways to allow for turf growth.
- **Attendee:** Area around Bandstand used to be a fabulous Elm forest, it was a nice area and having a stately tree there made a statement. It was a special place.

Events and Restrooms

- **Panelist:** What are people's thoughts on the proposed strategy for events on the Common, offering more spaces for events of different sizes to ensure proper support infrastructure to manage and maintain proper landscape conditions. Any responses to these ideas?
- **Panelist:** We all know that the Parade Ground is over-used, so with an opportunity to shift some of the 500+ events to other locations within the park, we can give this and other highly desirable locations periods of rest.
- **Attendee:** Looks like there are more restroom facilities and they are scattered throughout the park. I am worried about more built structures in the park since there are already a lot. Can we limit the restrooms to the edges?
 - **Panelist:** Restrooms will be enhanced in their current locations to make them more accessible and better for visitors. The proposed restroom improvements will minimize impacts to other uses of the Common. The proposed location on McArthur Mall could potentially replace the temporary facility provided by the FOPG.



- **Attendee:** Event infrastructure is super critical; space must be designed properly to provide convenience and incentive to allow other highly desirable spaces to rest.

Project Schedule

- **Attendee:** What is the proposed timeline for the improvements? When will the master plan be completed? When might we be able to see these improvements happening on the Common?
 - **Panelist:** We plan to complete the master plan in the of spring 2021 and hope to have a shovel in the ground as soon as possible thereafter. King Memorial is happening concurrently with the master plan. Master plan improvements will be phased and will come about as funding is secured. An expansion of the Tadpole Playground, for example, is one of the more feasible projects to get started, but the limit of improvements as 'one project' with renovations to the Frog Pond and Pavilion needs more study.

- *End of Discussion Forum #1 Summary Notes* -