



Community Meeting Notes

Meeting Number: 4
Project: BBF Pathways Conceptual Design
Date: March 28, 2023
Attending: Lauren Bryant (BPRD)
Shanna Dixon (BPRD)
Mike Doucette (KZLA)
Kyle Zick (KZLA)
25+ public community members

1. Is the boundary on the flood plain reflective of the whole boundary or just that affecting the BBF?
 - a. Flood zone is the red dashed line that falls within our project scope. The flood zone does continue further along the Muddy River.
2. Items I would love to see in parks; recycling for picnicking. Dumpsters are available but better to figure out how to incorporate recycling. Placement on benches placements, careful to stay away from garden fences. Alternatives to larger place to site, other ways to get it in the landscape/VG while allowing vehicular access?
 - a. Recycling in Boston Parks is currently being rolled out. BPRD working on the system currently. Currently, we are putting the trash receptacle on a concrete pad, pad is generally wider, to incorporate the recycling units when they are to be rolled out.
 - b. VG Meeting – entry plaza space, social space. We are looking at what type of space/benches should be in that entry area. We did pull out the benches along the garden edges that people had concerns over. Still trying to locate benches to take in the Muddy River views.
3. Bank planting in area 1 is great. High bird area in that section. Bike racks placement near the Rose Garden, wonder of it being so close to the Shurcliff designed circle? Possible to put it on the other side of the path, to have the Rose Garden stand alone. Drinking fountain needed, great location at basketball courts. Area 2, bench to be placed at the end of Clemente Field, this area has a lot of encampments. Access to bridges, is there a way to include to deter speed? Bike and E-bikes come across the bridges at a high rate of speed. Please don't increase the speed with new designs. Stonedust ACOE path, connection to DCR sidewalk in area 3 – will this be improved? Removal of non-historic wall near Agassiz Road, it is used as a seating element. Can we implement more benches? Old mature trees at the Burns statue, new tree plantings possible? Love the idea of upgrading trash receptacle, will these be put on pads?
 - a. Area 1 – bike rack near Rose Garden, will study this area more.
 - b. Detering speeds is something we are thinking about: at the Evans Way bridge we will consider bollards to tighten up the path so bikes need to slow down. We imagine that this is only pedestrian, no vehicular access.
 - c. Southern bridge at MFA, stairs are proposed along the most direct path and the accessible route reverses direction to slow down bike traffic.

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- d. Handrails on the path leading to the northern footbridge should deter speeds.
 - e. Wall and benches, trees at Burns all great comments.
 - f. 55 gallon drums for trash collection are seasonal. New receptacles will be permanent.
- 4. Evans Way cut back area nice solution. New light fixtures please in place of cobra fixtures in Victory Garden. Would love the lighting to live up to the standards of the common/public garden. Concerned with activating passive space, picnic areas, sunning area, not a space to add formal seating. No reason to have seating in the Victory Garden, passive space to enjoy nature. The gathering area should look at the south side of the Victory Gardens, new open space with a nice view of the river. East end of the Fens, bench in the area, problems with encampments during the summer months. Asphalt pathways are not ideal, but understand for accessibility, but don't love the idea of more pavement in the parkland. Stonedust pathways redone in 2008, DCR pathways were part of that work. Stonedust paths could work if they are properly done, pervious, easily replaced.
 - a. We hear you on the cobra lights, we will work with Boston Street Lighting on new lighting.
 - b. Understand the thoughts on the gathering area.
- 5. Thrilled with the good news tonight, deeply thrilled on the steep slope with bridge #2. Inclement weather makes that route really challenging.
- 6. Curious on the shrub removal along pathways, wondering if we could replace these instead of removing? Intrigued by the meadows, nice spaces, great for biodiversity. Longer meadow, transition zone from DCR to Boston. Maintenance in general? Spaces for native pollinator species as well? Cleanup events at ENC, trash accumulated at benches, locate trash closer to benches? Counterflow lane on Agassiz, DCR owned area? Advocating for decompaction work around Mother Rest. Possibility for shade trees for the playground area at Mother's Rest?
 - a. Shrub replacement will be looked at, although currently encroaching, remnant of a former design idea. Point taken, about replacing/adding shrubs.
 - b. Meadows – DCR land ownership stops at the backside of path. Goldenrod in these meadows, herbaceous plants that could be mowed once a year.
 - c. Thanks for the info on trash cleanups.
 - d. Adding trees at Mother Rest playground is a good point.
 - e. Counterflow lane, DCR is in talks with ACOE about final deliverables for the Muddy River scope. The conversation is still in the works.
- 7. Lighting - seems like we are adding need lighting. Concern about light pollution and light levels, in general. Trash/recycling - south of Clemente, keep this more natural, less trash barrels/benches. Try to encourage carry in, carry out policies. Less is more here, cringe at the thought of adding benches and pavement, it's a small park. Like the idea of more trees. Keep the park open for passive use.
 - a. Lighting, good point. We are cognizant about. Lighting for safety, but aware of impact on wildlife. We need to have more conversations with Boston Street Lighting.
 - b. Appreciate the comment about less is more. Always a balancing act between catering to the park user, but having a light touch.

- c. Carry in and carry out is the standard in Boston Urban Wilds.
8. Appreciate the design for the steep slope near the MFA. Could you create a comparison of current asphalt vs proposed asphalt? Will the site survey be posted? Survey to show trees, and interested in what will be impacted with new routes.
 - a. This calculation of asphalt area will take place as a part of the permitting process. If the impervious area increases, we need to treat the stormwater runoff. We have been looking at alternatives to asphalt for pathways, but we have to consider what BPRD can maintain.
 - b. Site survey is an aerial survey showing the entire park. We have been using this survey to study accessibility improvements and are able to work around and avoid existing trees.
 - c. We will have a diagram that shows completely new pathways for the next meeting.
9. Second concern about light pollution. Hopeful that the plan includes replacing huge streetlights in the Victory Garden. Excited to see new trees along Clemente field, other opportunities in the park too? Didn't address the field house? Missed opportunity to not address it. At least the aesthetic. Forsyth Park, Endecott statue – enormous yews along the statue act as a dumping ground of trash. Similar to the yews near the War Memorial, these could be improved.
 - a. Forsyth Park area is possibly being added to this project. We're looking at this, analysis and inventory have been completed, but it isn't officially in this project yet.
 - b. The Fieldhouse isn't in the project scope. But there are opportunities to clean up around the structure. The building itself, is a shell that hides a transformer.
 - c. Victory Garden lights - underground wiring to be installed, lights to be changed to a standard Boston Street Lighting fixture.
 - d. Duckhouse, hasn't been addressed yet, ACOE actively in this area now. We will look at this area as well.
10. Switch back at the Victory Garden lovely spot for benches. Will raising the grade impact the trees? Victory Garden spur paths, would you consider using stabilized stonedust instead of asphalt? Are other permeable surfaces on the table besides asphalt? DCR said trash barrels attract trash, Victory Garden does a weekly clean up of trash. No fabric allowed in trash anymore. Blankets, clothing shoes, are issues in the Gardens.
11. Duckhouse – movement underway to do something there. Reactivate this space in the coming years.
12. Friends of the Back Bay Fens Group?
 - a. Not that we are aware of. Someone at the BPRD office to help coordinate Friends Groups, currently staffing is vacant but once the position is filled, we would be happy to connect people to establish some type of group like this.

Chat

- Lauren Bryant: Lauren.Bryant@boston.gov
- Lauren Bryant: <https://www.boston.gov/departments/parks-and-recreation/improvements-back-bay-fens-pathways>
- Kyle, is the boundary on the flood plain reflective of the whole boundary or just that affecting the BBF?
- Do you know which City plans are proposing bike access through the park?
- Lauren Bryant: BTD has done some studies over the years. Also Boston Bikes
- Has DCR agreed to create a contraflow lane on Agassiz Rd.?
- Lauren Bryant: My understanding is that the decision on Agassiz is still in the works and that it isn't finalized yet.
- How many total benches are proposed to be added?
- We are still in very conceptual design so these are only thoughts right now and are likely to shift locations and quantities. I have asked the design team if it is possible to count up the ones on these plans for me and can hopefully share those shortly.
- Lauren Bryant: Again, this is conceptual, and likely to change, but currently these plans show adding 10 new benches and replacing 4 existing benches.
- Is there a way to change the switch back a straight line from the bridge to the lower pathway?
- Lauren Bryant: Unfortunately there isn't enough length to get the slope under allowable slope if there isn't a switch back.
- The old-fashioned tables (with wood) look very fussy. Much prefer the all-steel model shown.
- Lauren Bryant: Thanks for the input!
- Will recycling receptacles be possible?
- Have you determined where the trash receptacles will be placed?
- Yes on recycling bins!
- Another question about the switch back path by the garden: Are there any tree impacts?
- Congratulations on the regrading / accessibility - the designs look really good.
- I also really like adding trees by Clemente / Basketball Courts
- Can we please see the path materials slide again?
- Of course I defer to residents on whether or not this is a preference (and I know the victory gardens already have a compost pile), but Kristen's recycling comment made me wonder if Parks had talked to MONUM about a project Oscar compost bin for community use?
- I was about to ask about project Oscar bin.
- Threshold entrance to V. Garden, = "more grand." I hope for a dramatic yet low key curved teak bench. Ex : the park w. curved teak benches, behind the new Allston Park, behind the Continuum apt. bldg, , corner of Western Ave and Harvard Ave, part of the Harvard athletic field. Huge Prometheus statue there. These curved teak benches: durable, elegant,dramatic yet relaxed. Make threshold not a place to dump cigarette butts, make it natural but statement entrance.

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- Lauren Bryant: Thank you for those thoughts!
- Also looked at Ramler Garden Peterborough St, 1/2 circle wisteria pergola. Nice, small area.
- Ditto comments about the meadow space not needing formal seating.
- Counterflow biking on Agassiz is already well-established, it's often the best route b/t E and W sides of the park, and it has relatively low traffic volume.
- Interesting on the benches - I had a different reaction, thinking that more benches would be great, so that more people can stop and enjoy the views.
- There is a lone chionanthus virginicus between Agassiz and the ENC visitor center but I think it's the only one. Maybe it would like some company throughout the BBF when you are replanting shrubs if there's a space that would be appropriate.
- I'm skeptical that carry-in/carry-out would work in this area. There are a lot of people passing through and a lot of people from outside the neighborhood (who may have less investment in keeping the park clean). Given how much litter I pick up on a daily basis, I'm not sure we're evolved enough 🤔 for that here.
- Late to the meeting - is this porous asphalt?
- Really great to hear many emphasizing the passive use, natural space character of this space. Go back and listen to the previous meetings, well said there too. Thanks for all your great work here.
- Yes, the carry in/out was well addressed as being good for "destination" and wilderness areas, but not realistic in a pass-through place, such as this. Thanks
- Thanks for the great meeting! I have to jump off but on behalf of Rep. Livingstone's office, we are excited to see how the project evolves and appreciate the thoughtful attention that has been given to the project thus far. I can be reached at Cassidy.Trabilcy@mahouse.gov if anyone needs me! Thank you!
- There are also yews adjacent to the 8 The Fenway Boston Conservatory/Berklee building along DCR sidewalks. I think yews might be historic to the Olmsted list but I could be wrong?
- Lauren, is there a "friends of the Back Bay Fens" group?
- In our dreams. :-)
- Will the Army Corps fix the cracks on the stone bridge?
- There is the ENC - a group or friends groups from along the necklace
- There is a friends of the Rose Garden and there is the garden society
- From Lauren Bryant to Everyone:
 - Lauren.Bryant@boston.gov
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