

# Dear Franklin Park neighbors and friends,

## A Plan for Action

With \$28 million in funding from the City of Boston dedicated to improvements in the park (including \$5 million for a maintenance endowment), the purpose of the 18-month planning effort is to understand the plans that have come before it, what is working and isn't working in the park, and how surrounding neighborhoods want to make investments for its future. Ongoing community engagement is designed to enable park users and neighbors to become partners in creating a shared vision for the future and determining how that money is spent.

The following pages are a working draft of the Action Plan team's analysis of historic and existing conditions in Franklin Park. This draft is a preview of the work that will be discussed in the upcoming public workshop and engagement throughout the summer. For more information on upcoming engagement and feedback opportunities, visit the project website: [www.FranklinParkActionPlan.com](http://www.FranklinParkActionPlan.com).



## Created from your feedback

Beginning in November 2019, the Action Plan team reached out to the communities surrounding Franklin Park to understand how people use the park, hear favorite memories, and gather ideas for how their experiences could be improved through future investment. Community partners and neighbors have been instrumental in spreading the word and expanding our reach— thank you! We have connected with you through the following outreach efforts:

- Over 6,000 responses to the community survey
- 2,900 households by neighborhood canvassing
- Over 300 people by attending community and park events
- Nearly 300 people at community workshop #1
- ...and many others through park signage, comments sent through the project website, and the online mini-poll

## Understanding the Park

These summaries capture our current understanding of the park's historic and existing conditions through four themes. We have separated the work for clarity, but each theme informs the other so you will find some overlap between the summaries. Below is a quick list of what you'll find highlighted in each theme as a starting point.

The Action Plan does not formally include all areas of the park (as shown on the map). However, it is important to understand the park as a whole. The work reflects the relationship between these elements to inform future decision making.



In the summaries, you will learn about:

### History

- Pre-park history & the original character of the land
- The park's design intent & its relationship to the city
- How the park and the surrounding communities have evolved over time
- Key challenges and opportunities as we think about the park's next century

### Communities

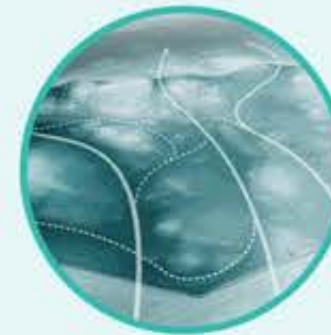
- Engagement and outreach to date
- Surrounding demographics and public health
- Community and park stewards
- Places, programs, park architecture, and utilities

### Connections

- Regional and city open space systems
- Transit connectivity
- Park edges and entries
- Park circulation and parking
- Public awareness and wayfinding

### Ecology

- Drainage and infrastructure
- The park's urban forest
- Ecological habitats and soils
- Heritage trees
- Park maintenance



# History

One of America's Great Large Parks

# The Early Landscape

## Massachusetts Tribe, Farmers, & Immigrants

To examine the past, one must start with the land. Many have left their mark on the place we now call Franklin Park. It is a rich, complicated, and ever-evolving narrative that's much larger than the park itself. It includes stories of geologic formation, Native Peoples and colonial settlement, urban development and public health, design and community advocacy, and so much more.

**Boston, the homelands of the Massachusetts Tribe, was situated at the end of the Shawmut Peninsula, with the only land-based route to the city being south through Roxbury. The town's strategic location and natural resources, which had long been used for regional trade and agricultural purposes, made this small town a key site for farming and movement of goods in the Colonial era. By the 1800s, immigrant communities established themselves in and around the soon-to-be park before the city's annexation of that land in 1881.**



### The Massachusetts Tribe

The land we now call Boston, including Franklin Park, is the homelands of the Massachusetts Tribe. The original English colony and present-day Commonwealth derive the name 'Massachusetts' from this tribe. But despite this provenance, the Colonial era precipitated a mass genocide of indigenous peoples largely through the Plague and violent conflict. By the time the Mayflower landed, 90% of the Tribe had died, clearing the way for 17th century colonial land seizure. Nevertheless, to this day and into the future, the Massachusetts Tribe continues to maintain a connection to the land.



### Boston in the Colonial Era

In 1630, John Winthrop led a group of English Puritans to initiate the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Roxbury was one of the six towns established, as a rural outpost of Boston. At this time, and for the next 200 years, the town also included West Roxbury and Jamaica Plain. The natural resources of Roxbury made it attractive to new settlers: farmable land, as it had been long used by Native inhabitants, water for supply and power, and timber and stone for building.

Over the 17th and 18th centuries, Roxbury grew into a site for farming and industry, including mills and tanneries. During the 19th century, Roxbury became home to a wide range of immigrants, including Irish, German, Scandinavian, Italian, Latvian, Jewish, and Maritime Canadian communities, who further grew the local economy.



### Acquiring Parkland

As industry, trade, and local populations expanded, Boston eventually incorporated Roxbury in 1868. In 1875, the Park Act was passed, enabling the city to obtain land for the West Roxbury Park (the initial name for Franklin Park). At the time, the area was mostly comprised of small farms with little urban development. Despite opposition from landowners, in 1881, the city acquired enough land for park construction.



# Gathering Place for All

## A New Idea for a Changing City

In the mid-19th century, influenced by scenes from England and France and the "civilized living" their large urban parks represented, American cities began to pursue significant open space systems of their own. Burgeoning urban populations and increased global travel, advancements in approaches to agriculture and urban development, and growing interests in natural science and technology all had profound effects on attitudes about healthy urban environments and conservation ideals.

**"What is the special purpose of a large park in distinction from the purposes that may be served by such smaller grounds as Boston is provided with?"\***  
**Over 100 years ago, Franklin Park was conceived of as the jewel of Boston's Emerald Necklace. Today, it is still Boston's largest park by far, serving some of the city's most dense and diverse neighborhoods.**



### A Growing City

In industrializing societies across America, including Boston, rapid city expansion was fueled by large-scale immigration and migration of the working classes from rural areas. Dense living and working environments led to significant public health challenges. Improvements came as cities implemented innovations in sanitation and drainage infrastructure. Still, residential squares within the city provided little green space and were often gated with limited entry. Expanded public transportation lines provided access to public parks - an escape for growing urban populations.

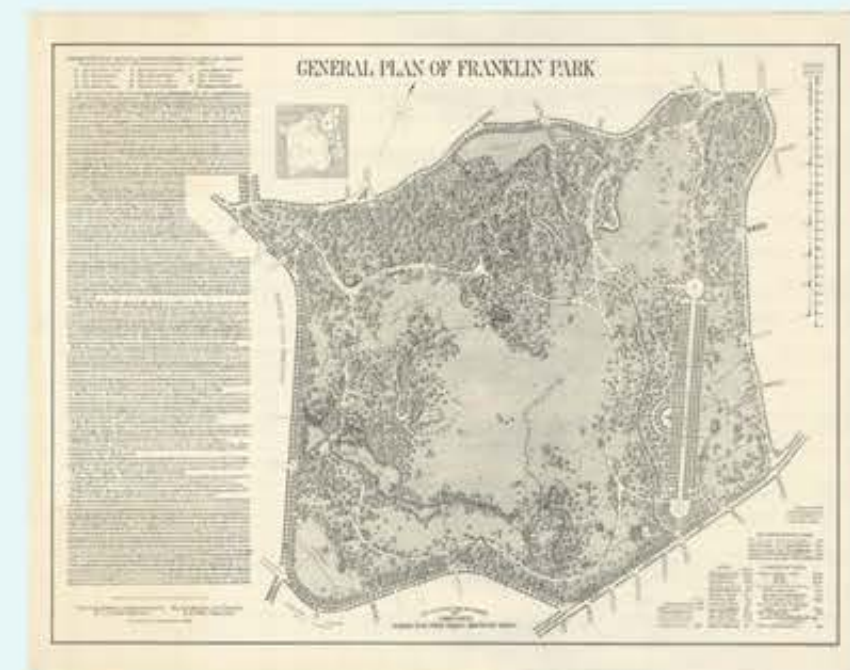


### More Than A Breathing Place

Spearheaded by active Bostonians on both sides of the political divide, the city engaged Frederick Law Olmsted to select a site for a large public park. Chosen for qualities 'complementary to the town' and with a design developed in contrast to other public spaces available within the confines of the city at the time, the park was intended to provide public access to nature and its restorative benefits -- for the purpose of 'delighting in nature and one's common humanity'.

### Developing a System

With the construction of Central and Prospect Parks complete, Olmsted expanded his thinking about the role of landscapes in cities beyond what parks could provide independently. He considered how open space could function as a linked system, with canopied streets as extensions of park carriageways and residential communities with recreational amenities. His lecture on 'Public Parks and the Enlargement of Towns', anticipated Boston's future growth and outlined his vision for the Emerald Necklace, an 1100-acre park system spanning across the city.



\*Frederick Law Olmsted, Notes on Franklin Park

# Designed for the Everyday

## The General Plan of Franklin Park

Olmsted's design philosophy was rooted in the belief that open space could positively impact a community's physical and mental health. In Franklin Park, the goal of recuperative time outdoors was embodied in a purposeful design that blurred the line between art and nature. Masterfully indistinguishable from what existed before, with carefully designated areas of use, the cumulative impact of the park was only fully experienced through a developed familiarity with the place, a relationship with nature.

“...the benefits of a park to the people of a city, of all classes and conditions, come chiefly in a gradual way,...such benefits are neither experienced nor are the conditions on which they depend apt to be dwelt upon by an occasional observer.”\*

Franklin Park was designed for Boston's communities to develop a relationship with nature, and with each other in nature. The recuperative and community-building roles that Franklin Park plays remain vital today.

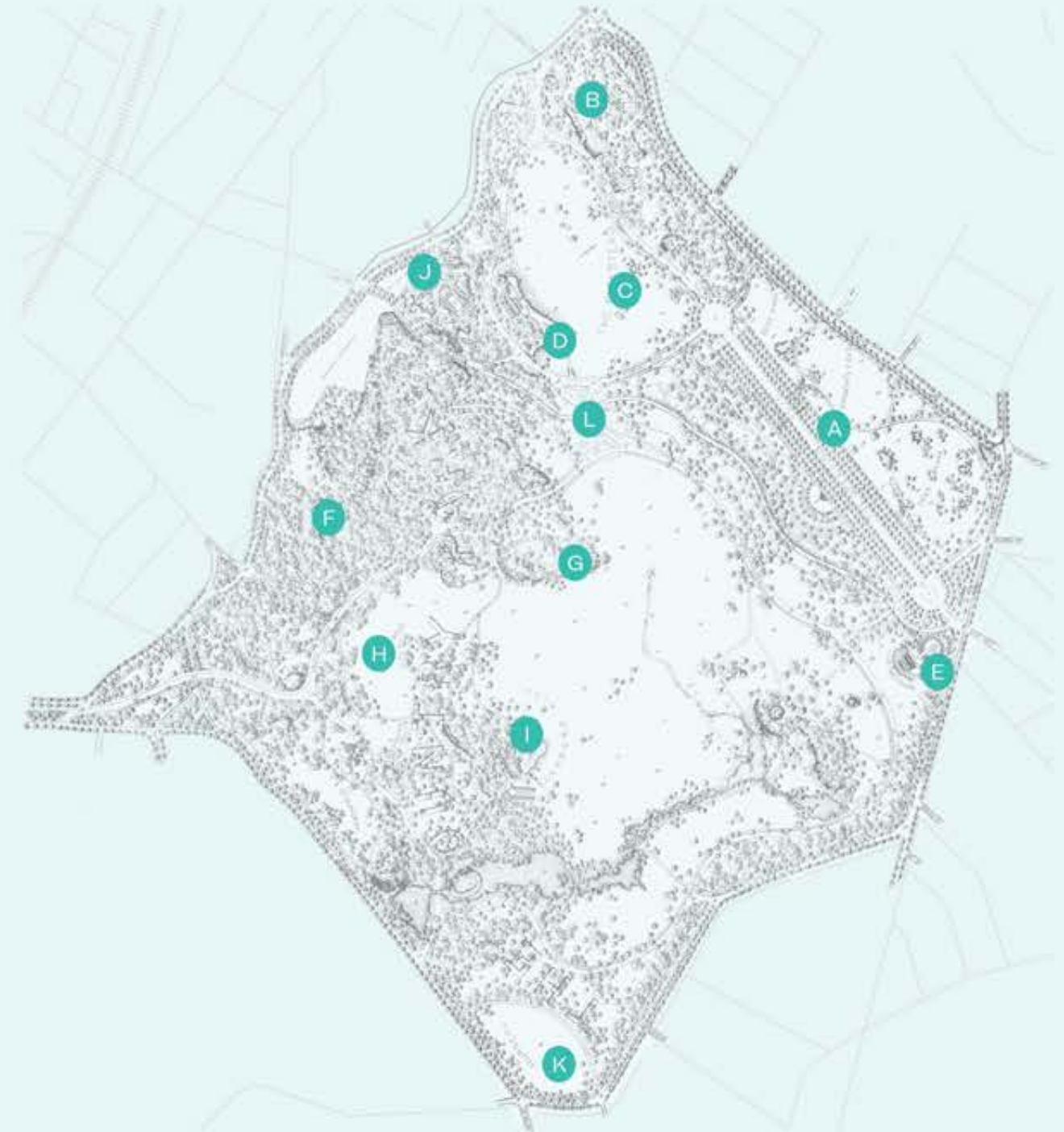


### An Unwavering Commitment

Olmsted believed deeply that providing designed scenery complimentary to the natural context put visitors' minds at ease and improved both their mental and physical health. His work at Franklin Park allowed built elements to fade into the background (reducing visual complexity), fit program to the land and facilitated comfortable, fluid movement, resulting in a design that functioned without singular spectacle and shaped experience without a formula.



### The 1896 General Plan



\*Frederick Law Olmsted, Notes on Franklin Park



## The 1896 General Plan Outlined

Putting into practice design ideas and philosophies tested in parks prior, Frederick Law Olmsted took to composing a refined and sophisticated plan for an immersive public park. The design divided the space into two parts. The main park, or Country Park, emphasized passive enjoyment and scenery, providing visitors with a serene and expansive experience. The Ante Park carefully tucked group activities, including athletic grounds, and venues for music and entertainment into the topography.

### The Ante Park

- A** The Greeting - The main entry to the park was designed with a tree-lined promenade that accommodated pedestrian, carriage, and bicycle circulation, with areas for designated individual programs. It was never fully realized.
- B** Long Crouch Woods - Named after the Colonial name for Seaver Street, Long Crouch was a zoological display and would later become home to the Bear Dens.
- C** The Playstead - This flat, open field was designed for recreation and education for children, as well as civic ceremonies and other activities that would gather large crowds.
- D** The Overlook - The elevated platform set into the hillside was built of boulders obtained from clearing the Playstead. The only building Olmsted designed resided here and housed park security, lockers, and restrooms.
- E** Refectory Hill - Located near the main entry, The Refectory included one of the few buildings within the park, serving refreshments to visitors outdoors.

### Circulation

- K** Glen Road - The park was divided by a road intended for through-traffic running from Blue Hill Avenue to Forest Hill Street.
- L** Park Loops- The primary way to experience the park was through walking or riding on the Circuit Loop around the Country Park or the smaller loop around the Playstead.
- M** The Valley Gates - This marks where the two parks meet, as well as the convergence of the two primary circulation loops.

### The Country Park

- F** The Wilderness - Referred to as 'the rocky wilderness land' in early records, this area was intended to serve in contrast to the open, picturesque character associated with the rest of the country park.
- G** Schoolmaster Hill - Its name refers to William and Ralph Waldo Emerson, who lived in a nearby house while teaching at school in Roxbury in the early 1800s. The hillside featured rough terracing with a boulder overlook and an arbor for small, shaded gatherings.
- H** Ellicottdale - Named after a nearby homestead, this small, open meadow was intended for lawn games, like tennis and croquet
- I** Scarboro Hill - A winding path leads visitors to the top of the hillside with a resting place halfway up where a Dairy was located to provide necessities for picnics.

### Park's Facilities

- J** The Steading - Never fully constructed, this rocky knoll was intended to house park offices within the woods.
- K** The Nursery- Intended as a service garden, today the park's maintenance yard occupies this space.

# Uniquely Boston

## A City of Hills

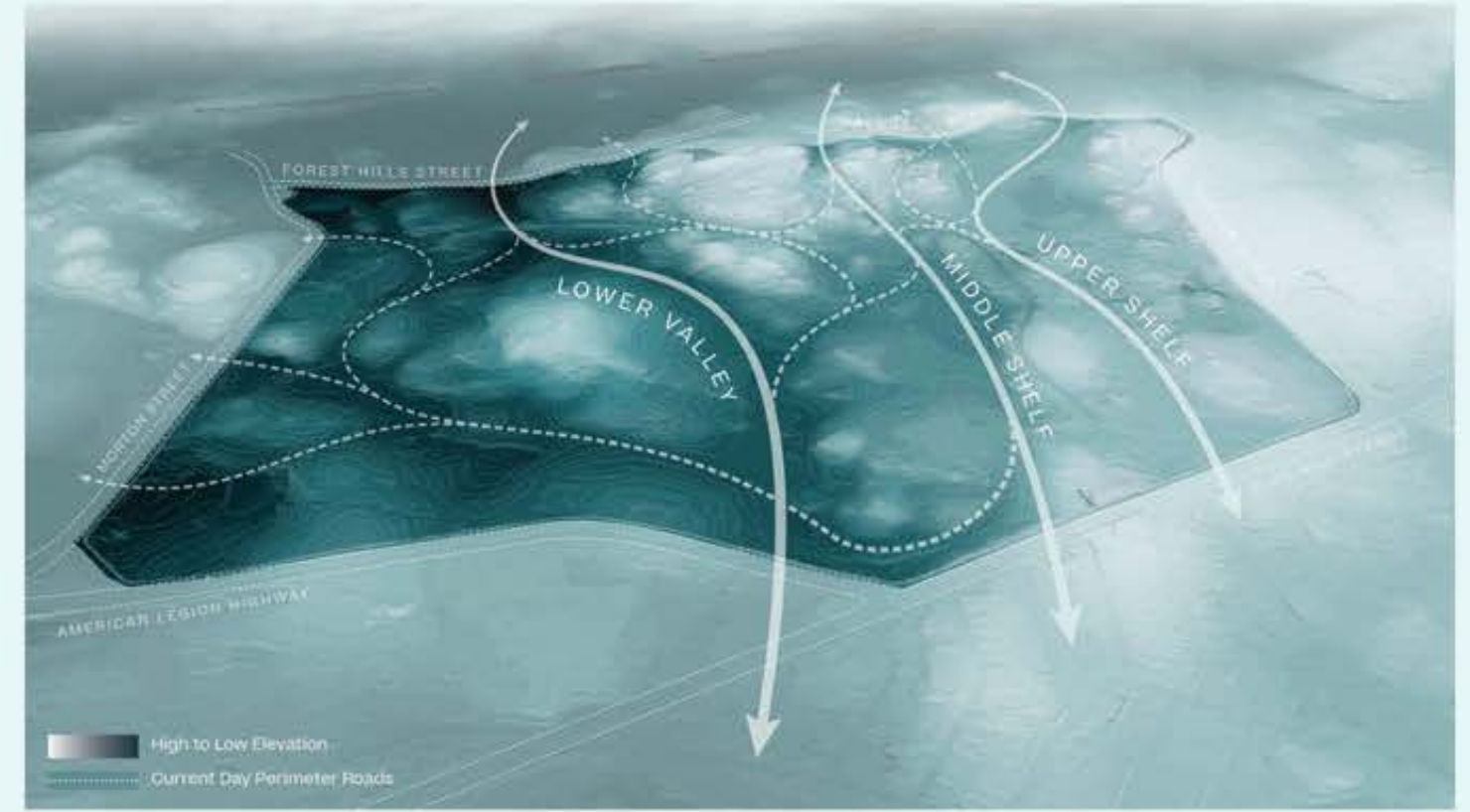
The selection of the site was driven in part by its powerful topography. The park's boundaries intersect a drumlin field, created by glacial sediment deposited over 570 million years ago. The knobby hills and valleys iconic to Boston' landscape are a result of this same process. Within the park, two topographic shelves to the east and a large valley to the west are stitched together by a series of glacial cuts. This extraordinary topography, its open rolling pastures and rocky outcrops, have become synonymous with the park's landscape.

The hilly glacial formations - or drumlins - found in the park are the result of a geologic process that shaped the land in and around Boston millions of years ago. The park's design was structured by this unique topography and its rocky outcrops remain an iconic feature of the park today.



### Iconic Boston

Boston's hills and islands are represented in countless early maps and artistic depictions. Whether it be the of Boston Harbor, illustrating fortifications and navigation routes, or the backdrop to scenes of a developing city, the topography quickly became a recognizable feature of the area.



### A Logic Revealed

Looking at the park through the lens of elevation and topography is almost like examining an x-ray, providing a glance into what lies beneath the surface: the upper shelf formed the Ante Park, the middle shelf followed Glen Road, and the lower valley connected The Wilderness to the meadow (today's golf course) through a sweeping bend across the Country Park.

### How is a drumlin hill formed?



The core of the site's drumlins is composed of bedrock.



Melting glaciers moved over bedrock, depositing glacial till, rock, and sand to form a gentle slope. This movement and carving also created deep 'cuts' between hills, separating them from one another.



# A Place to Escape

## The New England Landscape Amplified

The park's design was founded on the specific conditions of the site, revealing or intensifying its quintessentially New England scenery. Masses of second growth woods, punctuated by rocky ledges and large boulders and rolling lowland pastures were threaded with paths to allow visitors to experience these contrasts. The plan's careful composition was more than a sum of its parts, evoking qualities of 'breadth, distance, depth, intricacy, atmosphere, mystery, grandeur, and sublimity.'

The park's design elevated the original site characteristics, ordering and intensifying the experience of shady woodlands and open meadows. While the bones of the design remain, key spatial relationships have been lost as programs shifted and maintenance regimes evolved. Clarifying, and in some cases, reestablishing these key relationships is critical to returning coherence to the park.



### Woodlands and Meadows

If the site's topography set the stage, the woodlands took the lead role, establishing seclusion from the city and setting the park experience apart. This significant landscape feature provided visual depth and contrast through the dynamic play of light and shadow.

Large open grasslands hosted both active and passive programs. The central meadow was most significant. Offering long views over a rolling expanse, it was intended for quiet gatherings at many scales.

Notions of the benefits of spending time in nature were at the forefront of the design, recognizing its positive impacts on mental and physical health over 100 years ago.



### Movement

Circulation was built without significant alteration to the land. Rather, "every turn was suggested by natural circumstances". Primary loops fit closely to the topography, carefully tracing paths where the foot of hills and the upper edge of valleys met. Secondary spurs cut across grade at gentle slopes, sending visitors to a series of outlooks at higher elevations around the park. Though these served as pauses for orientation and prospect, the park's scenery was intended to be enjoyed through constant and easy movement.





### Views

Rural vistas within and beyond the park were essential to its purpose - 'an illusion of unlimited space' and 'unbroken countryside' within the confines of a growing city. The site's dense woodland - existing and created - played an important role in shaping these landscape scenes, promoting seclusion and framing open spaces within the park.

A long view across the Playstead provided a broad prospect through the Country Park and beyond to the Blue Hills of Milton; looking west, a distant wooded horizon was formed by the Forest Hills Cemetery and Arnold Arboretum. Both views afforded to the site were uninterrupted by the city around it, demonstrating the relationship of the park to its larger landscape context and enhancing its phenomenological qualities.



### Materials & Built Elements

A strict attitude towards built elements in the park established that materials and construction methods should not express wealth or elegance. All park architecture, walls, bridges, and steps deferred to the power of picturesque scenery, and felt as if they had always been there. Puddingstone mined from a quarry near Schoolmaster Hill was used to construct almost every built feature in the design, deepening the connection between park and place. With the exception of Forest Hills Entrance Bridge and Scarboro Pond Carriage Bridge, which were made of Cape Ann granite to match others in the Emerald Necklace, all buildings, the three terraces, the 99 steps, the Ellicott Arch, and Scarboro Pond footbridge were all Puddingstone construction.



# The Unmaking of a Plan

## Changes to the Park Over Time

By the early 1900s, the major park circulation had been constructed, including establishing Glen Road between the Country Park and Ante Park. Program areas easily accessed by primary circulation routes, including the Playstead and Ellicottdale, were built and immediately put into use. Beyond these initial elements, the rest of the park's design was not constructed. Decreased funding and changes in leadership started a chain of decision-making that slowly unravelled the park's character and original intentions, most of which is still evident in the park today.

Beyond its initial construction, the park was never fully realized as intended. Deviations in attitudes about design and program almost immediately emerged, producing a range of new ideas, interventions, and ownership in the park, ultimately impacting the collective experience today.



### Park Intentions

The original plan was never completed as designed, resulting in immediate trade-offs between park experience and addressing immediate needs.

- Country Park
- Ante Park
- Park Admin & Maintenance Areas
- Water Bodies
- Deviations from the Olmsted Plan
- Roads & Paths
- Buildings & Structures



### A Early Introductions

The Greeting, a primary component of the original plan intended for strolling and programmed activities like concerts, play areas for children, and other exhibits, was never fully constructed. In 1912, the zoo, free and open to the public, was established with a design that respected the layout and orientation of The Greeting.



### B&C Changes in the Center

While the golf course was used for informal play early on, the official turnover of that acreage in the 1930s represented a significant shift in the park's purpose. Transforming such a large space into a single use meant most visitors could not experience the expansive and immersive park scenery as intended. Roads originally meant for carriages were widened for cars. The realignment and expansion of Circuit Drive introduced vehicles through the Country Park, creating a new division in the park's organization and character.



### D&E New Neighbors

The next two decades brought further additions to the park with the construction of White Stadium (1944-49) and Shattuck Hospital (1949), shifting both acreage and ownership and once again shrinking the park experience. Park staff struggled to maintain order as automobile intrusion became pervasive throughout and safety issues increased with a decline in funding and park maintenance.



# Shifting Communities & Cultures

## The Park and its Neighbors Evolve Together

A park's design is one element of what shapes its character and identity, but its social, political, and demographic context have an equal role to play. The city and the park's surrounding neighborhoods have witnessed many changes throughout its 100+ year history, influencing how the park is used and by whom. These changes are both physical (evolving program) and cultural, as the community makes the park their own.

The neighborhoods around the park have and still represent a convergence of richly diverse cultures, but post-war disinvestment in these communities left the park in a state of neglect. Local activists and organizations, fed up with the lack of maintenance, funding, and crime, banded together and took action, reclaiming the park as their own.



### Boston Migration

From 1820-1880, Irish and Jewish communities surrounded the Park, with Germans, Scandinavians, Italians, Latvians, and a substantial enclave of Maritime Canadians settling there as well. Boston annexes Roxbury in 1868, and by 1875, 500 acres of farmland were selected as the site for Franklin Park.

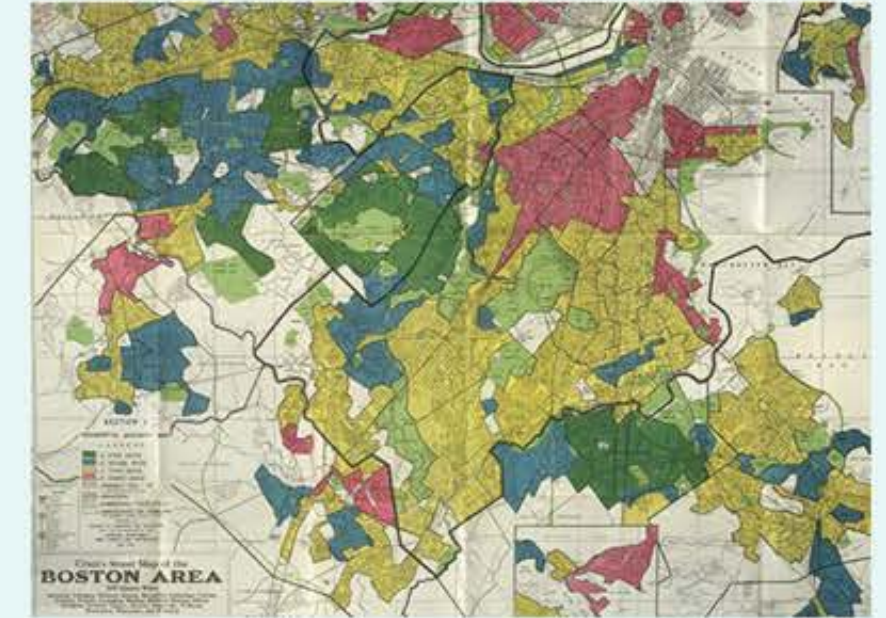
African Americans living in Beacon Hill and the South End and new Caribbean immigrants from West India, Jamaica, and Barbados, moved areas around the park beginning in the 1930s. Continuing until after WWII, Roxbury was transformed into one of the Northeast's most prominent Black communities. By the 50s and 60s, community organizations formed to support the increasing Spanish-speaking population from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic.



### Reclaiming the Park

By the 1970s, demographic shifts due to gentrification, redlining, white flight, and blockbusting further established Roxbury as a predominantly Black neighborhood. Since then, Dominican and Cape Verdean communities have grown to be some of the largest immigrant groups around the park, with Haitian communities living nearby in Mattapan.

As the park's neighborhoods became further established, the city's upkeep and investment in the park declined. What was once a symbol of public health and a shared resource, became a center of dangerous activity and a dumping ground for industrial waste. Local activists and organizations, like the Franklin Park Coalition, Elma Lewis, and the Franklin Park Golfers Association took action into their own hands, initiating clean-ups, programming and fundraising. Their work drew attention to the park, as it hosted important community events, like concerts, festivals, the Elma Lewis Playhouse, and Black Panther Rallies.



### The Franklin Park Coalition

The Coalition was founded in 1978 by a small group of community members who watched the park degrade after a decade of funding and staffing cuts were made to parks across the city. This instrumental group brought attention to years of neglect, advocating for funding from City leaders and recruiting volunteers to restore and build awareness of the park. Their organization continues to play an active role in the park today.

# A Powerful Place Remains

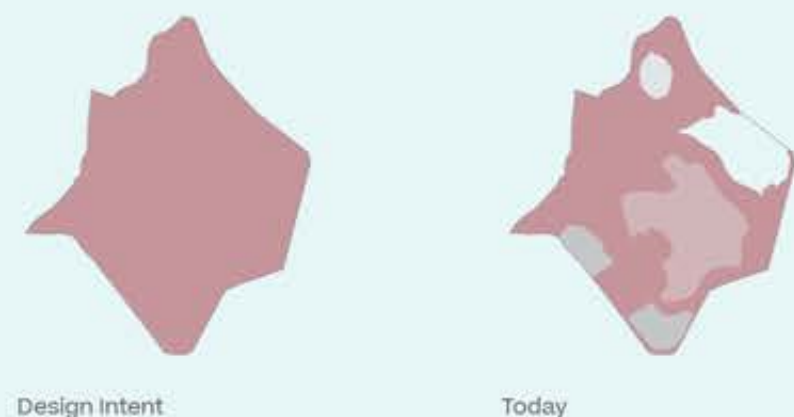
## An Opportunity to Reconnect

Since its conception and initial construction close to 140 years ago, the park has changed dramatically. Incremental modifications have eroded key spatial relationships and duplication of circulation, unmaintained canopy, and increased internal boundaries all contribute to a fractured reading and disjointed experience of the park. Despite this, it is remarkable to recognize, that the bones of the place remain and they are strong.

Incremental changes have eroded the original design and split the park into pieces. But the powerful natural features that led the city to select the site for its first large park remain, ready to be re-revealed.

Many challenges, questions, and opportunities exist as we evaluate ways to reconnect parts of the park, carefully integrate new program, and establish a welcoming face to visitors from near and far.

With multiple constituents sharing space, how can the park experience become unified and whole again?



### Ownership

Design Intent: A unified park footprint accessible to all visitors.

Today: Multiple groups share the park, limiting access to some areas.



How can we ensure the healthy ecosystems and improve biodiversity that provides new experiences for visitors?



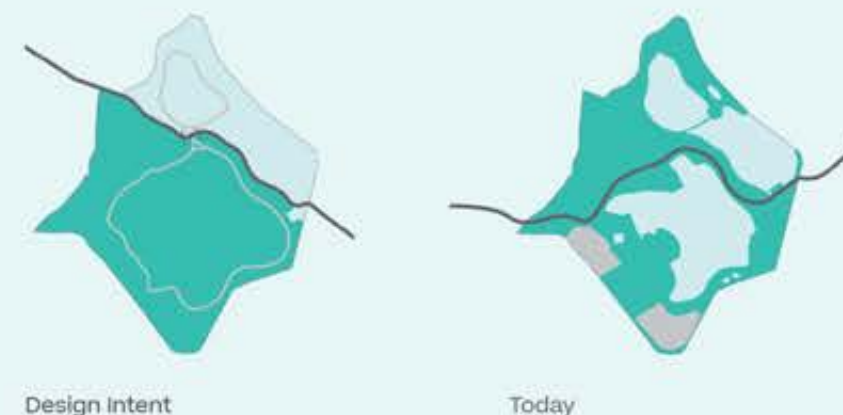
### Vegetation

Design Intent: Canopy created a sense of enclosure, framed purposeful views within and outside of the park, with program carefully tucked into its edges.

Today: The woodlands have expanded and matured, enclosing views. Dense and invasive vegetation dominates where gatherings once took place.



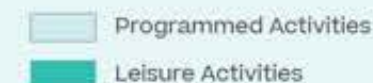
How do program and activities become accessible to all park neighbors, while maintaining the open, natural character of the park?



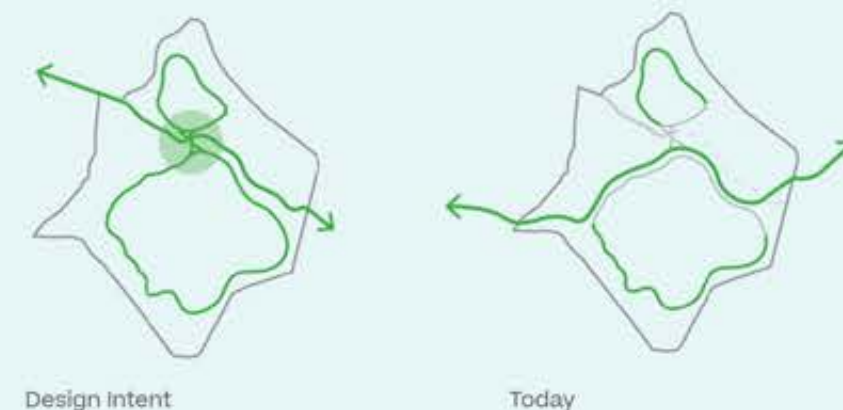
### Program

Design Intent: Glen Road and Valley Gates separate active programs from leisure.

Today: Active and leisure activities are dispersed throughout the park.



Can circulation and entries be clarified to better welcome visitors, and provide safe and easy ways around the park?



### Circulation

Design Intent: Two major circulation loops meet at the Valley Gates with through-traffic on Glen Road.

Today: Circuit Drive through-traffic divides the park; part of Glen Road runs through the zoo.

