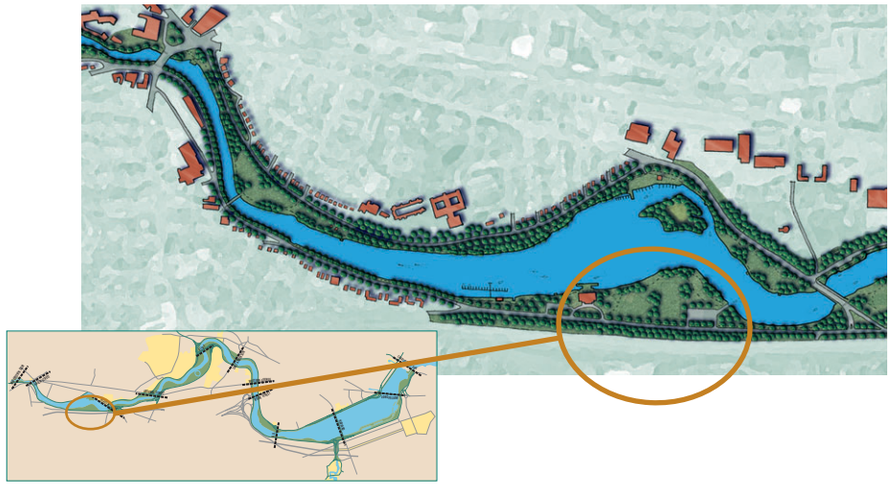


DALY FIELD AND THE UPPER BASIN (10S)

Nonantum Road from the North Beacon Street Bridge to Daly Rink

Key Resources

- *Daly Rink (1966)*
- *Community Rowing launch site*
- *Daly Field*
- *Boat ramp*
- *Possible prehistoric sites*

Introduction and History

Daly Field and the Upper Basin are framed by tree-covered hills. Dredging and filling in the 19th and 20th centuries transformed a marsh into a shallow basin for boating. Daly Field has two to four feet of fill on its historic grade. Even with Sunrise Island in the river, this stretch of the Basin is wide enough to accommodate four separate boating facilities, including the boat ramp. Rapid resiltation is reestablishing marsh-like conditions in which only shallow-draft boats can be used.

Despite its breadth and the powerful presence of the Perkins School tower as a place marker, the Upper Basin does not have a unified focus. Thickly wooded banks block views to and across the river, and a tenuous pathway system is unsuccessful at knitting the fragments together.

Existing Conditions and Issues

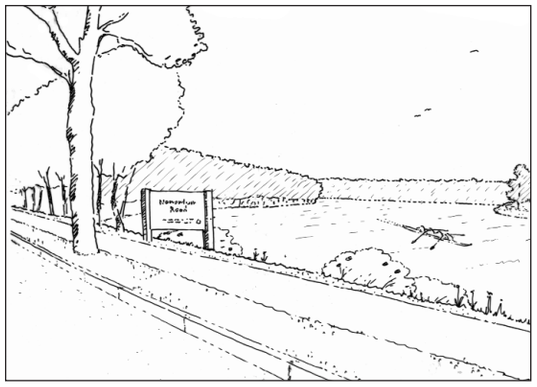
Daly Field is isolated from adjacent neighborhoods in Newton and Brighton by the Turnpike. Residents of Brighton must pass through a narrow and dangerous underpass beneath the Turnpike to reach Daly Field. Residents of Newton Corner must travel down Charlesbank Road to an unsignalized intersection on a curving, high-speed parkway. The only available pathway runs alongside Nonantum Road with fields and parking lots separating pedestrians from the river.

Except at the Community Rowing floats and the public boat launch ramp, a continuous band of trees and underbrush blocks views to the river.

Though heavily used in season, the athletic facilities that dominate Daly Field bear no relationship to the river or the Upper Basin. Once a pastoral setting with views of Perkins School across the river, the field was transformed into a stadium site. The athletic fields that remain are fenced off, focused inward, and have no relation to the river. The field lights and scoreboards are visually intrusive.

PROMINENT FEATURES OF THE UPPER BASIN INCLUDE DALY FIELD (LOWER LEFT), THE NEWTON YACHT CLUB (ABOVE IT ON THE SAME BANK OF THE RIVER) AND THE WATERTOWN YACHT CLUB ON THE OPPOSITE BANK.

Daly Rink is an aging skating facility that, like the fields, focuses inward and meshes poorly with its river setting. The structure and its parking lot crowd the shore. The rink is shared with Community Rowing, which stores shells there during the warm months. "Temporary" storage yards and sheds for Community Rowing have a negative visual and environmental impact on the narrow shore zone between the rink and the river.



SELECTIVE REMOVAL OF VEGETATION (TOP) WOULD RESTORE KEY VIEWS; LOWER PHOTO SHOWS THE EXISTING CONDITION ALONG NONANTUM ROAD.

Goals

- **Unify the Upper Basin as a cohesive pastoral setting primarily for passive recreation as well as some active recreation.**
- **Maintain the Upper Basin as a center of recreational boating with emphasis on shallow-draft boats.**
- **Establish safe pedestrian connections to the Basin, along the shore, and between Squibnocket Park, the Watertown Front, and Daly Field.**

Recommendations

- **Install new pedestrian signals at Charlesbank Road and at the east side of the intersection of Nonantum Road and North Beacon Street.** Add a pedestrian phase to the existing traffic signal on the west side of that intersection. Add a crosswalk across Nonantum Road in front of the Newton Yacht Club and align the crosswalk, signal, and handicapped ramp at the intersection of Nonantum Road and Brooks Street.

- **Set the paved pathway further back from Nonantum Road to provide a more suitable environment for parkway trees and to protect people on the path more fully from traffic.** Replace the missing oaks next to the path and establish a second row further back from the roadway to define the pathway.

- **Establish a soft path set back from the water's edge for walkers and joggers with clear views of the river.** Ensure a public right-of-way in front of any future boating facilities.

- **Restore athletic fields to a more flexible arrangement and pastoral appearance.** Introduce landscaping and eliminate fences, bleachers, floodlights, and other nonessential athletic equipment.

- **Break up large parking lots into smaller units,** set them back from the shore, and landscape them to fit the river setting.

- **Clear and maintain selected views to the water and to the opposite shore to help unify the Upper Basin.**

- **Scale back the public boat ramp in order to reduce conflicts on the water.** Encourage boaters who desire access to Boston Harbor to use alternative launch sites closer to the harbor (see Segment 1N). Provide information to the boating community, including signage at the Daly ramp that informs potential users of launch site alternatives and river use regulations.

COMMUNITY ROWING FACILITIES AT DALY RINK.

- **Phase out Daly Rink to make room for a permanent facility for public-access rowing. If needed, consider alternative nonriver sites, including the GSA site along Greenough Boulevard, for a future new rink.**

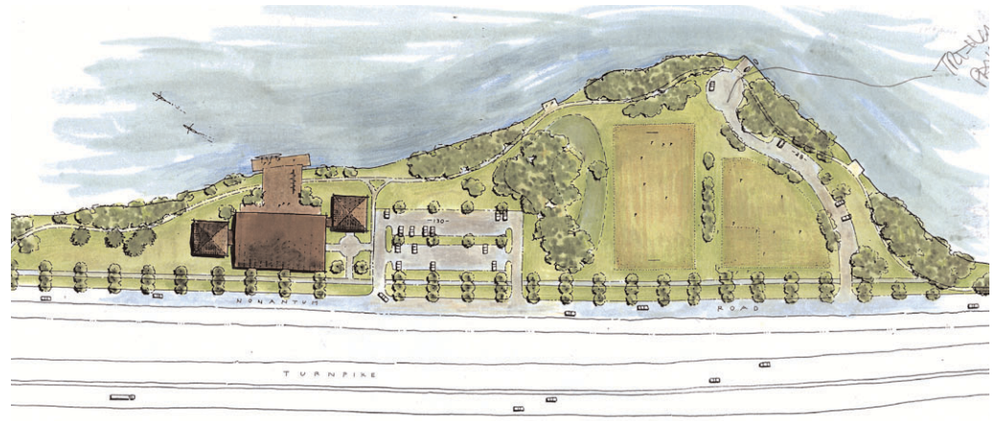
After a thorough consideration of alternatives, Daly Field continues to be the most appropriate location for public-access rowing. The advantages of this location include the breadth of the watersheet, the room available on shore for a facility of this size, and a need to prevent further congestion downriver. The shallow water in the Upper Basin, while a major liability for yachts, is far less problematic for shallow-draft boats. The water chestnuts that clog the Upper Basin each summer will require extensive yearly harvesting. A new public-access rowing facility should offer a range of public benefits for park users, including public bathrooms, food concessions, equipment rental, and limited storage for small rowing boats.

Three scenarios for siting this rowing facility are described here; Alternative A is recommended:

- **Alternative A** would replace the rink with a new public boathouse closer to the shore. The building should be set back from the parkway and angled to fit into the river setting. It would have a smaller and more appropriate footprint than the rink. The design should have compelling facades on both the river and the parkway. The major drawback would be the significant costs of demolishing and relocating Daly Rink and building a new boathouse. The MDC would lose the current flexible program option, where both skating and rowing coexist, but it would avoid the inevitable conflicts of such an arrangement.

- **Alternative B** would build a separate boathouse to the west of the existing rink. The two facilities would share an entry area and locker rooms. The boathouse would be hidden behind the rink; the approach and entry to it would be very awkward, resulting in a lack of a clear identity. The massive footprint resulting from these two large but separate facilities would be very intrusive and would reduce access along the shore

- **Alternative C**—converting the skating rink into a boathouse while maintaining the rink's function in winter—might provide a temporary solution. A rowing program would take full responsibility for the facility and have priority in terms of schedule and maintenance. A new, heated, two- to three-story entry structure would replace the existing one-story service building and contain room for a reception area, public bathrooms, a food concession, an equipment rental or similar concession, locker rooms, a workout room, classrooms, offices, and a boat shop. Rowing tanks, if required, could be accommodated west of the rink.



ALTERNATIVE C

While this alternative would offer a cost-effective short-term solution, it would limit design flexibility. Replacing the one-story structure with a two-story structure would improve the appearance of the existing complex. Offsetting the boathouse from the shore by 80 to 100 feet is not ideal for a rowing facility, but it would accommodate public access along the shore in front of the boathouse. A dock area for coaches' launches would need to be fenced for security purposes. Until the rink was phased out and the conversion complete, a rowing program would still need secure winter boat storage. One solution would be to build a limited number of temporary boat bays off the western end of the rink.