

The Charles River Basin is a system of paths—parkways, pathways, and the waterway itself. On warm days in the spring and fall the Basin attracts thousands of enthusiastic visitors. Its narrowness and length generally favor motion, such activities as bicycling, inline skating, running, and rowing. Mobile users congregate on the pathways and the river channel and often compete intensely for them. Conspicuously absent from the busy pathways during peak



times are children and the elderly—people who might not feel comfortable with the crowding and speed.

Because of the high student population in the Lower Basin, warm spring and fall week-

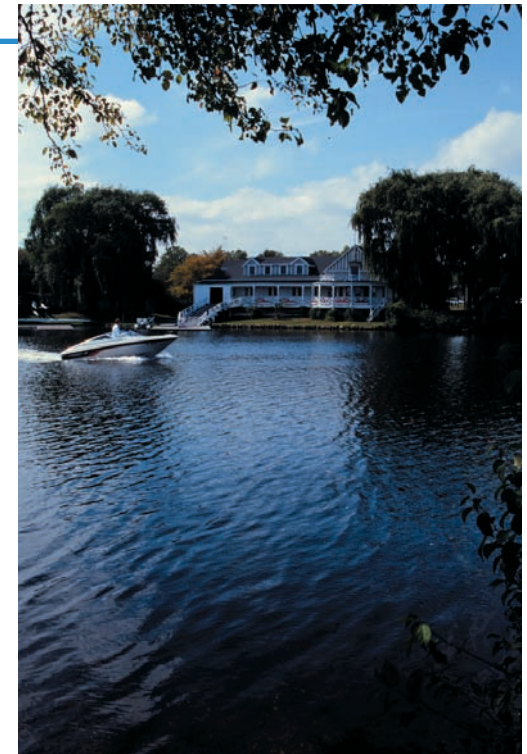
ends tend to be high-use periods. Foot and boat traffic is heavier in the lower section (below Herter Park) than in the upper section, because of the three universities and the greater population densities downstream. Upwards of one hundred thousand people drive along Basin parkways every day. Drivers constitute the largest group of users.

Far more people boat on the Charles than is immediately apparent. Private rowing club members total 1,750 (1,100 members and 650 auxiliary members and guests). Educational institutions contribute an additional 4,200 users (3,200 club members and 1,000 auxiliary or seasonal members).

The Basin hosts a wide variety of boating resources. Some powerboat owners find the Charles a convenient berth because of its access to Boston Harbor. Boaters with no mooring or dock space on the river put in at the Daly Ramp to fish the upper reaches of the Basin and to gain access to the harbor. Visitors on boat tours see some of the most spectacular and iconic views of Boston and Cambridge in the Lower Basin. For sailors the Lower Basin is for practical purposes a wide lake, with room to set up triangular sailing courses between the Harvard and Longfellow bridges. For canoeists and kayakers, the upper stretch of the Basin offers a green, natural corridor to explore.

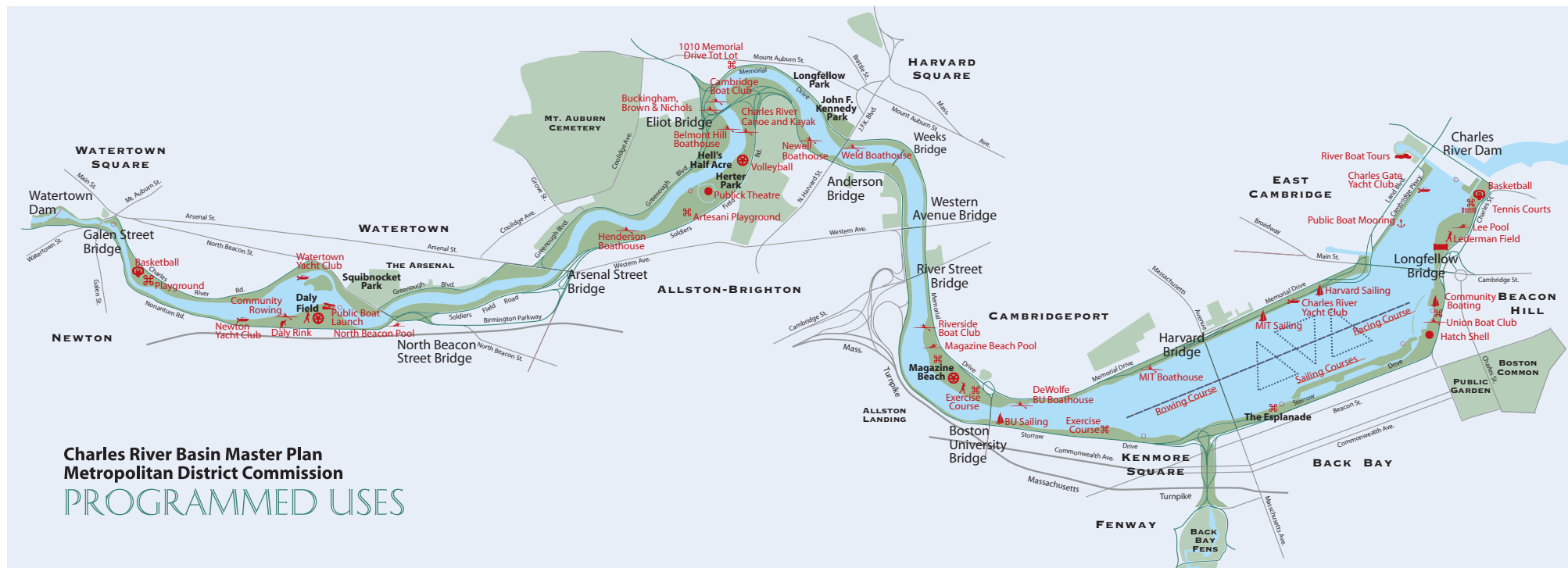
Four yacht clubs—two in the Upper Basin and two in the Lower Basin—count a total of 600 members and 650 auxiliary members and guests. A 1997 inventory showed approximately 390 motorized craft berthed in the Basin each summer, excluding rowing and sailing program launches. Of these, 215 are berthed in the Upper Basin and must travel the length of the river to reach Boston Harbor. The Daly boat ramp supports a high level of use—about fifty launches on weekend days in the summer.

There are also four sailing facilities: three belong to educational institutions and have a total membership of roughly 6,700; one is public, with about 1,000 members.



THE CAMBRIDGE BOAT CLUB, BUILT IN 1909, WAS MOVED TO ITS PRESENT SITE TO MAKE WAY FOR AN EXTENSION OF MEMORIAL DRIVE.

USES & PERCEPTION *of the Charles River Basin*



The Basin includes eleven rowing boat-houses—one public, three private, and seven belonging to educational institutions—that sponsor twenty-nine different programs. Community Rowing, a public program, sponsors twelve of these programs. These eleven clubs together have about 4,400 members and 1,400 seasonal and auxiliary members. In 1997, almost 1,100 rowing shells were kept in boathouses along the Charles, along with 134 canoes and kayaks. Row As One, another public program, teaches rowing to high school and junior high school girls from Boston.

Commercial rental and sightseeing operations bring the largest number of people onto the water. Charles River Canoe and Kayak, a boat rental facility at Herter Park, put approximately six thousand people on the Charles in 1997

with thirty-five boats. Two sightseeing companies, the Charles River Boat Company and the Boston Duck Tours, put approximately 50,000 and 300,000 sightseers respectively on the river each year.

The new Charles River Dam provides passage between the Charles River Basin and Boston Harbor. About 30,000 boats use the Gridley Locks at the new dam over the course of a year and hundreds on an average summer weekend.

The Basin's parklands offer diverse areas for different users. Most of the activities that occur daily in the

Basin are unstructured and informal: jogging, sunbathing, cycling, picnicking, walking dogs, playing volleyball, and bird watching. Groups and individuals looking for broader areas for informal use and passive enjoyment turn to parts of the Esplanade, Magazine Beach, Daly Field and Herter Park.



Herter Park attracts some of the most diverse uses in the Basin. A popular place for family picnics and volleyball, it also contains two community gardens and is the terminus of the popular Run of the Charles race each spring.

In a creative effort to increase park enjoyment, two stretches of parkway are shut down on Sundays from the last weekend in April through the last weekend in October. Highly popular Riverbend Park is created when Memorial Drive is set aside for pedestrians from River Street to Fresh Pond Parkway. Similarly, Greenough Boulevard between North Beacon and Arsenal Street in Watertown is also closed to auto traffic on Sundays.

The formal granite steps along the Esplanade provide formal places for people to get close to the water. Augmenting the steps, the wooden landings within the Basin are popular with sunbathers and boaters. Only two of them are handicapped-accessible. The landings in Watertown Square, at Herter Park, and along the Esplanade are frequently used for sunbathing, fishing, and peaceful contemplation.

The Basin offers numerous facilities for team sports and structured athletics—seven softball fields, two soccer fields, two pairs of tennis courts, one skating rink, three swimming pools (one of which is closed), two exercise courses, two basketball courts, eight playgrounds, and nineteen boathouses and yacht clubs. The facilities at

Lederman Field, Magazine Beach, and Daly Field are most often used, usually on weekends and in the early evenings during summer and early fall.

The balance between active and passive uses varies in each of the twelve parks within the Basin:

- **Lederman Field** is entirely given over to athletic fields.
- **The Esplanade's** pathways, banks, and facilities are heavily used, so heavily used at times that quiet space for contemplation is hard to find. What quiet areas exist are all at the water's edge, on the islands, and at the landings.



- At **Magazine Beach**, a large portion of the park is occupied by athletic fields, a spray pool, and a swimming pool, but the picnic areas are heavily used, and the park is very popular for dog-walking.
- The **banks between the Western Avenue and Anderson Bridges** fronting Harvard University are heavily used for sunbathing,

reading, sketching, quiet conversation, and other passive activities.

- **John F. Kennedy Park**, at the northwest corner of John F. Kennedy Street and Memorial Drive, is intended to be a passive space; students often read here or play informal games of Frisbee. The park is the commonwealth's memorial to President John F. Kennedy.
- **Longfellow Park** and **Peabody Park**, just west of John F. Kennedy Park, link the Henry Wadsworth Longfellow House with the river. Users sometimes play volleyball in this flexible, grassy area. A volunteer group

maintains a tot lot off to one side and has planted the banks of the river with daffodils, creating a spectacular springtime display.

- **Hell's Half Acre**, a passive area next to Gerry's Landing, is the largest wetland in the Basin. American

Legion Marsh Post 442 and a parking lot occupy much of the open area by the Eliot Bridge.

- **Herter Park** has a fairly even balance between active and passive uses. Flexible fields support a wide variety of informal uses.
- **Herter Park West** (including the Northeastern University Boat House) was

once an MDC maintenance yard and has ample open space for passive or active uses.

- **The Meadow at Greenough Boulevard and Arsenal Street** is quite small and has no structured uses.
- **Squibnocket Park** (North Beacon Street), with its open view of the Upper Basin, is a popular spot for sunbathing and picnicking.
- **Daly Field**'s wide expanse of parkland is almost entirely occupied by athletic fields, parking lots, and the Daly Rink.
- The **Meadow at Charles River Road** is evenly balanced between unprogrammed space for passive uses and facilities for active uses. It is not well used, however, in part because of drainage problems.

BASIN SPECIAL EVENTS, 1997					
	CONCERT/ THEATRE	EVENT	ROAD RACE	WALKATHON	TOTAL
Artesani/Herter	50	13	1	5	69
Cambridge Parkway	0	2	1	1	4
Charles River Road	0	0	1	0	1
Charlesgate	0	0	1	1	2
Daly Field	0	6	1	1	8
Esplanade	0	4	8	3	15
Hatch Shell	43	17	1	10	71
JFK Park	0	1	0	0	1
Lechmere Canal	0	0	0	1	1
Lederman Field/Lee Pool	0	4	15	3	22
Magazine Beach	0	7	0	0	7
Memorial Drive	0	2	5	3	10
Riverbend Park	0	1	0	1	2
Weeks Footbridge	0	1	0	0	1
	93	58	34	29	214

BOSTON POPS CONCERTS
AND FUNDRAISING
WALKS DRAW ENORMOUS
CROWDS TO THE HATCH
SHELL FROM THE SPRING
TO THE FALL.

Special events bring up to half a million people from across the region into the Basin, people who might otherwise not enjoy this special setting. Two annual rowing events, the Head of the Charles and the Run of the Charles, attract hundreds of thousands in the fall and spring. In

1997, there were twenty-nine walkathons, thirty-four road races, and forty-three concerts at the Hatch Shell, fifty performances at the Publick Theatre in Herter Park, fifty-eight events on the water, including fishing tournaments, sailing regattas and crew races. Two of the annual walkathons, the Walk for Hunger and the AIDS Action Walk, attract between 30,000 and 40,000 participants, eleven each had a few thousand participants, and sixteen each had a few hundred participants. The Cambridge River Festival, staged annually between Western Avenue and Anderson Bridges, brings thousands to visit craft booths, food vendors, and entertainers.

Special events and their impacts are concentrated in a few places: the Hatch Shell, the Esplanade, Lederman Field, and Herter Park. The Hatch Shell hosted one-third of the special events along the Charles in 1997, including all of the concerts and ten of the twenty-nine walkathons. Nearly half of all special events in 1997 took place on the Esplanade, the Hatch Shell, the Lee Pool, and Lederman Field, including sixteen of twenty-nine walkathons and twenty-five of thirty-four road races (see table).

On any given day 90,000 to 120,000 drivers use the Charles River Basin parkways. Traffic is two to three times heavier on the south shoreline of the Basin than the north shoreline. Daily

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volumes increase significantly from west to east: up to 20,000 cars travel on Memorial Drive by MIT each day, compared to 5,000 to 6,000 a day on Charles River Road; 60,000 cars use Storrow Drive daily, compared to 20,000 on Nonantum Road. Trucks and buses are excluded from these roads to maintain the character of the park setting and increase the pleasure of driving the parkways.

THE USER SURVEY

The MDC commissioned a telephone survey of 500 households in zip codes bordering the Charles River Basin. No businesses or visiting users were included in the sample. The survey did include students in college dormitories.

The residential respondents were often the adult members of a household rather than children, so the survey results are somewhat biased toward an older user group.

The questions covered a broad range of topics, from how often people used the Basin to their opinions about its maintenance. The survey found a tremendous awareness of and

appreciation for the river among park users in abutting neighborhoods and a high frequency of use. Though some had specific con-

cerns, residents were generally pleased with the Basin's condition and upkeep. More than sixty percent of those surveyed used the Basin more

than once a week on average for strolling, relaxing, attending concerts or attending special events. Use was fairly evenly distributed along the entire Basin and between its north and south banks. While

the south bank has higher levels of use at peak times, the people using the north side use it more frequently. Peak-use times are afternoons and weekends. Summer use far surpasses use during other seasons.

The survey asked respondents to list and rank how they used the Basin. The top twelve responses were, in order of frequency:

- Walking for pleasure
 - Attending concerts or events
 - Relaxing in the park
 - Driving on the parkways
 - Running or walking for exercise
 - Biking
 - Using Riverbend Park in summer
 - Picnicking
 - Enjoying the outdoors with children
 - Inline skating
 - Walkathons
 - Informal sports
- Half of these uses, including the three most frequent, are passive activities.

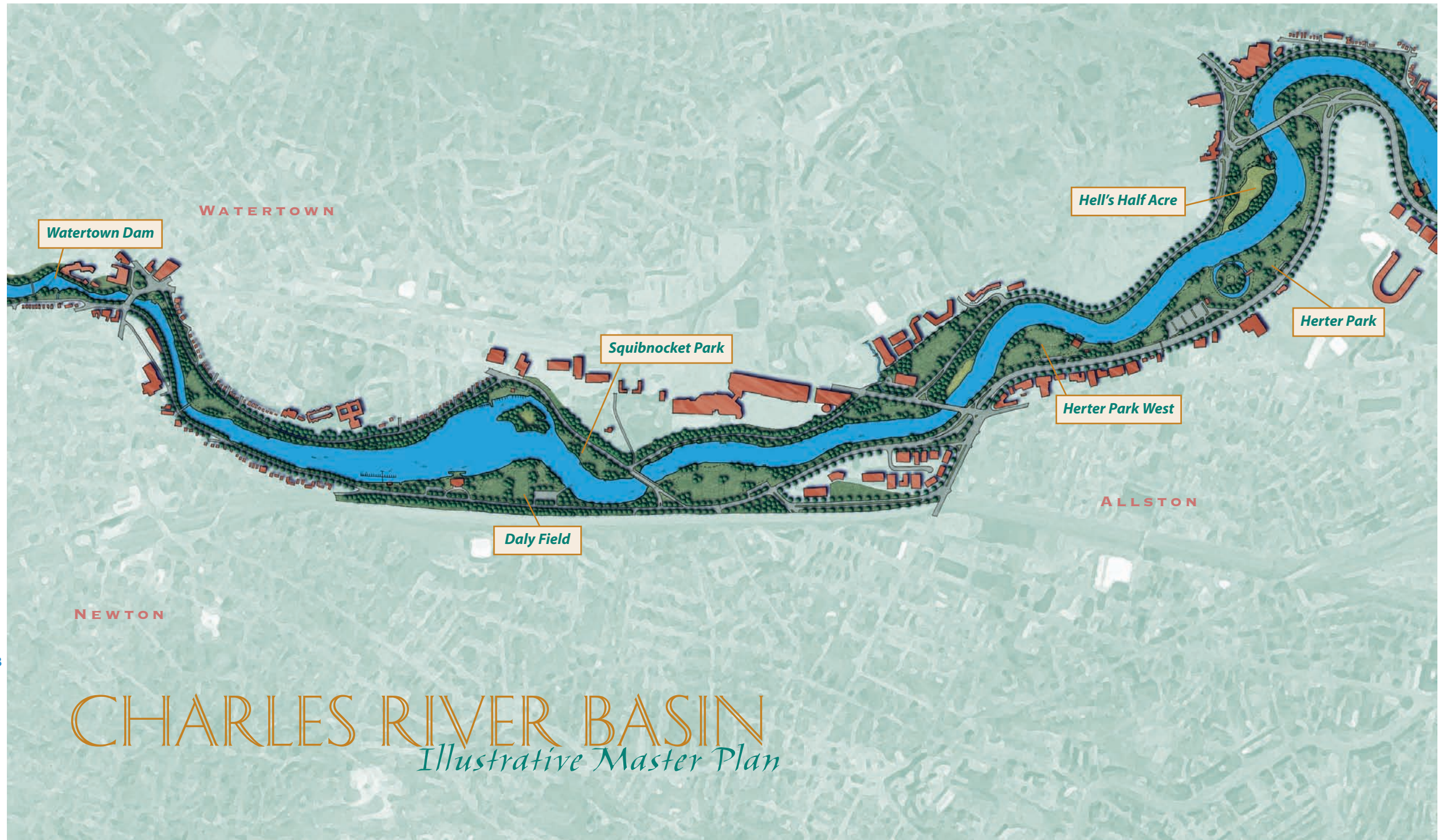


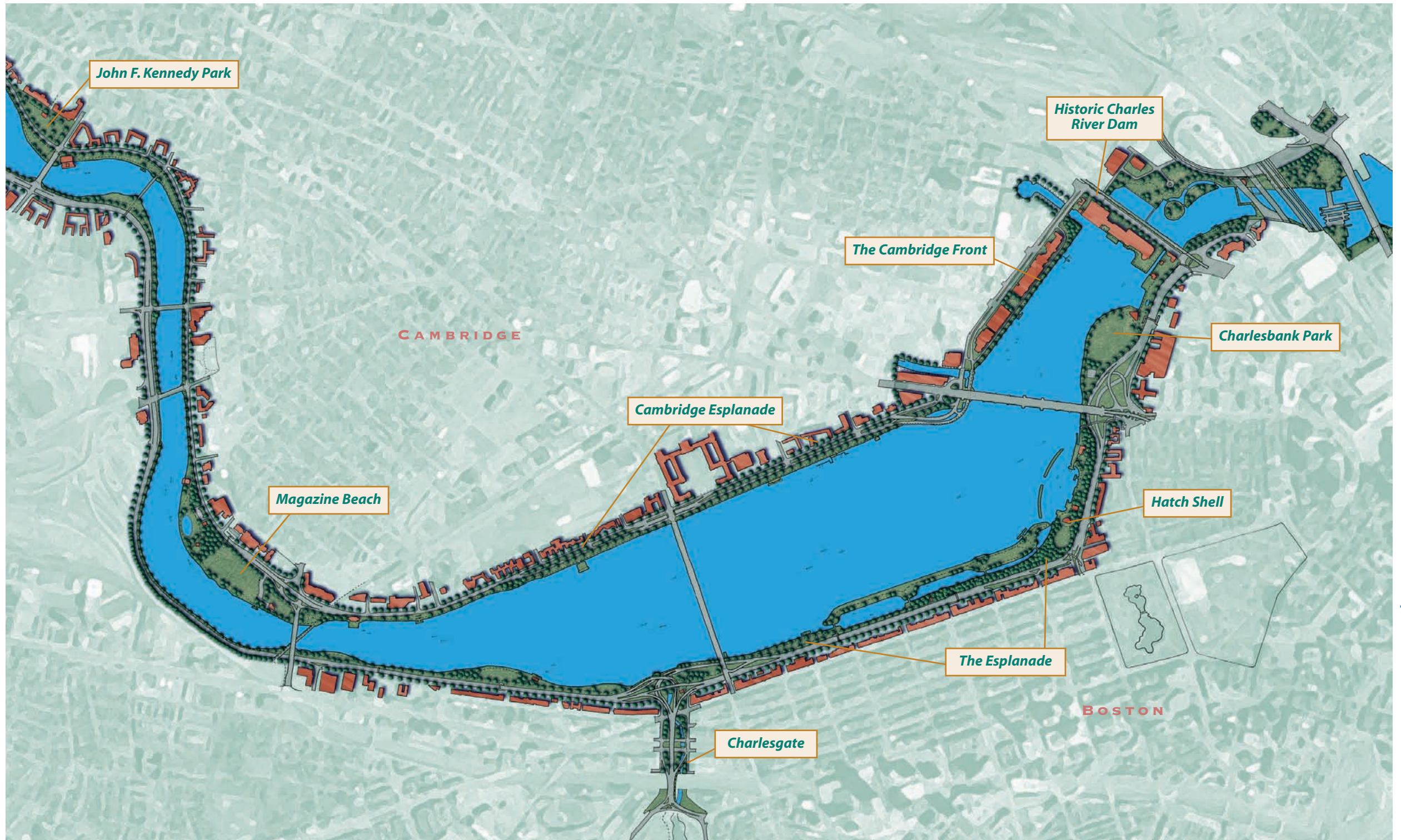
An extraordinary proportion of respondents expressed a positive attitude about the Basin. Ninety percent feel that the Boston area would be less appealing without the Charles River Basin. Ninety percent feel comfortable within it during the day. Eighty-six percent feel the parks and paths are well maintained. Eighty-two percent feel the parkways are attractive and efficient. Seventy-three percent feel the Basin is a great place to be with children. These are extremely positive numbers.

Half of all respondents, however, feel that the level of automobile traffic spoils their enjoyment of the parkland and that crossing the parkways to get to parklands is dangerous and difficult. A sizable minority (forty-five percent) feels the Basin's pathways are congested, and thirty-six percent of respondents do not feel safe in the parks at night.

Some of the changes users desire would address the problems they identify, while others would create more amenities. Ninety-one per-

A survey commissioned by the MDC suggests that the public wants the Basin to be easier to reach, quieter and better maintained.





cent of users want better lighting at night; 89% want additional bathrooms. Although 86% of users stated that the parks and paths were well maintained, 88% requested better maintenance. Eighty-six percent asked for easier and safer pedestrian access to the Basin, and an equal proportion recommended separating pathways by

user types. Users also frequently called for more benches and places to sit, more wildlife areas, more park rangers, and more convenient parking.

The survey found that a majority of respondents favored slowing traffic on the parkways, clearing more views to the water, narrowing the

parkways, adding more wading pools and fountains, limiting craft on the water, increasing access to the water's edge, enacting more temporary road closures, and converting sports fields to informal uses. The public wants the Basin to be easier to reach, quieter, and better maintained