

# BROAD CANAL (IN)

Off Cambridge Parkway, just below Longfellow Bridge

### **KEY RESOURCE**

• Broad Canal and seawall (1805)

#### HISTORY

Broad Canal was developed in 1805 (sixty-nine years before the Lechmere Canal) to serve the port of Cambridge. Nineteenth-century photographs show wooden structures lining the banks of the canal and wooden vessels standing high and dry at low tide. The Broad Canal represents one of the last vestiges of the river's industrial past and is an excellent site for interpreting the history of the river.

#### **EXISTING CONDITIONS AND ISSUES**

This granite-lined canal off the Lower Basin is isolated and rarely used today. At 1,000 feet long and 100 feet wide, the canal is small in scale compared to the rest of the reservation. The mouth of Broad Canal is located at one of the most inaccessible stretches of the Basin for pedestrians, joggers, and cyclists. To get to the Broad Canal, people on the river pathway must cross four lanes of high-speed traffic. It is equally inaccessible to boaters: Two old drawbridges, now permanently lowered, create a clearance of just five feet between the water and the large steel beams supporting the bridges, blocking the entrance to the canal for all but the smallest boats.

On Land Boulevard, the old drawbridge control building sits empty,

and the traffic signals used when the drawbridge was raised are intact but unused. Granite seawalls rising approximately seven feet above the water border the canal. On its eastern side layers of stone walls from different eras are clearly visible. The Southern Energy power plant flanks one side of Broad Canal; Kendall Square office buildings border the other. A rarely used path runs along the back of the office buildings on the west side of the canal, but none of the buildings open onto the path.

A steel sheet pile wall is located at the head of the canal. The seawall here is three feet six inches high, much lower than the stone wall, and is backed by an eight-foot-wide granite terrace with granite blocks and

landscaping. Immediately adjacent to the terrace is a large surface parking lot, slated for major development in the near future.

GOALS

- Reconnect Broad Canal with the Lower Basin through new pathways and replacement bridges.
- Improve boating access.
- Preserve and interpret the canal's seawalls and bridge structures.
- Respect and reflect this industrial heritage in new development along the canal.





THE BASIN'S INDUSTRIAL PAST IS STILL VISIBLE ALONG BROAD CANAL, SHOWN IN PHOTOS TAKEN IN 1904 (TOP) AND 1998 (BOTTOM).

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#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Construct a ramp and dock at the head of the canal in coordination with any new development. A ramp and dock along the water's edge would allow launching of small powerboats, canoes, and kayaks. A water-taxi service might also be accommodated. On weekends boaters could use parking lots of the office complex, mostly empty at those times.
- Rebuild the drawbridges and refine the structural supports in order to maximize clearance. At least eight feet is needed to get small powerboats out of the canal. This design objective should be achieved when each bridge come up for replacement at the end of its life cycle.
- Establish a continuous path along the seawall on the east side of the canal similar in width to the path on its west. A land-preserving alternative would be a boardwalk along the base of the seawall, connected to the head of the canal by the boat ramp. Such a boardwalk could slope up to ground level before the first drawbridge; the existing traffic lights would then be reactivated to allow foot and wheeled traffic to cross First Street and Land Boulevard. Alternatively, if the drawbridges are rebuilt to allow greater clearance, the boardwalk could run under them and downriver along the seawall, connecting to the proposed public landing at Front Park. A boardwalk would need to be handicapped-accessible, would have to be built to withstand ice, and would require significant maintenance. The participation of private developers would be essential.
- Work with MIT and other abutters to continue the path from the head of Broad Canal to Broadway and down Wadsworth Street. This will provide an alternative to the Longfellow Bridge viaduct for pedestrians, joggers, cyclists, and inline skaters travelling from the Front to the Cambridge Esplanade.
- Interpret the industrial history of the canal, through signage, ranger tours, or the preservation and interpretation of such artifacts as the old bridge building.



## CHARLESBANK PARK (1S)

David M. Mugar Way (formerly Embankment Road) between the Charles River Dam and Longfellow Bridge

#### KEY RESOURCES

- Charlesbank Park (1892)
- Seawall (1910)
- Embankment Road
- Lederman Athletic Field and pool (constructed 1951, named 1974)

#### HISTORY

Frederick Law Olmsted was commissioned to design a park on newly filled land along the edge of Boston's West End. Patterned after similar playgrounds in Germany, Charlesbank Park was one of the first of its kind in this country. Specialized recreation facilities, enclosed by fences, were provided for men, women, and children. A promenade and open lawn were provided along the bank for passive enjoyment of the river scenery. The widening of Embankment Road (now Mugar Way) and the construc-