

MAGAZINE BEACH (4N)

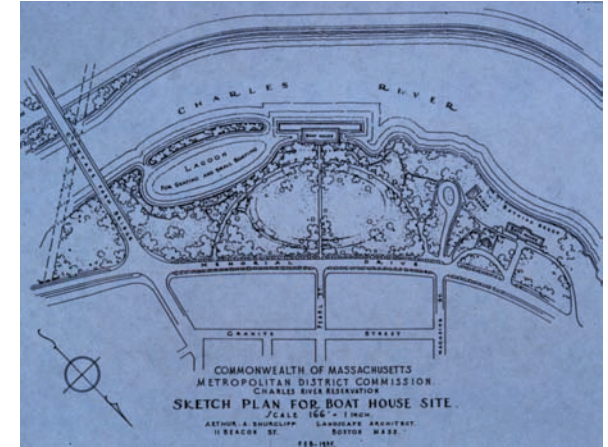
Memorial Drive between Boston University Bridge and River Street Bridge

KEY RESOURCES

- *Site of Captain's Island*
- *Memorial Drive (1898)*
- *Historic Bathhouse (1899)*
- *Riverside Boat Club (1912)*
- *River Street Bridge (1926)*
- *Boston University Bridge (1928)*
- *William J. Reid Overpass (1939)*
- *Athletic Fields (1947-1953)*
- *Veterans Memorial (Magazine Beach) Pool and Bathhouse (1952)*
- *MWRA Cottage Farm CSO facility (1971, 1999)*

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORY

Magazine Beach was the site of a military powder magazine built on Captain's Island in 1818. The island provided an isolated and defensible location for explosives. The small hill and the rebuilt stone structure are all that is left of the island and the magazine. The Olmsted firm laid out a park and bathing beach at the filled marshes on this site in 1899 and reused the stone of the old magazine for the bathhouse. Arthur Shurcliff's ambitious 1936 plan called for a boat basin at Magazine Beach similar to those at the Esplanade, but it was never carried out. The public beach remained open for swimming until the 1950s, when poor water quality and contaminated sediments forced swimmers out of the water. A swimming pool was built in 1952 to meet recreational needs, and a boat launch and large parking lot were developed at the same time.



THIS 1936 PLAN FOR MAGAZINE BEACH BY ARTHUR SHURCLIFF INCLUDED A BOATING LAGOON AND A BEACH. DECLINING WATER QUALITY FORCED SWIMMERS OUT OF THE RIVER IN THE 1950s.



EXISTING CONDITIONS AND ISSUES

The parking lot and boat launch were removed during the last major restoration at Magazine Beach. Today, aging facilities impart a disjointed and worn-out appearance to the area. The pool and bathhouse bear little relation to the river or nearby parkland. A curving parking lot built during the swimming-beach era intrudes on the river-bank. The main path directs people along Memorial Drive

rather than the shore. The play structure and spray pool, set in a dense grove of trees, are intensely shaded and deteriorating; leaves clog the drains regularly, and low power lines are both hazardous and unsightly. The historic stone bathhouse, used for equipment storage, needs a full restoration, including a new roof. The athletic fields, often bare and muddy, require improved turf management and drainage. The parking next to the CSO facility is visually intrusive and runs too close to the water, and the facility itself precludes shoreline access. Year-round public services are lacking at Magazine Beach: public restrooms, drinking fountains, and telephones within the bathhouse are only accessible during the swimming season.

The plantings at Magazine Beach vary from a handsome dense canopy of shade trees at the play area to worn turf along much of the shore. Intense use for sporting activities and major events like the Head of the Charles Regatta has packed the soil and worn bare the fields. The banks at some points are quite steep—a slope of 2:1 near the overlook—and need stabilization. There are no plantings along the edge of the athletic fields to soften the shore edge or frame views to the river.

Reaching Magazine Beach is also an issue for pedestrians. Memorial Drive is difficult and dangerous to cross, and a pedestrian bridge crossing Memorial Drive at Magazine Street is not well used. The most popular crossing points, Magazine and Pleasant Streets, lack traffic signals. The main pedestrian pathway runs along the edge of the park fence next to Memorial Drive, failing to take advantage of the river frontage. The City of Cambridge has provided funding to restore the playing fields and surrounding areas. This project, managed by the MDC, is now under way.

GOALS

- **Diversify and strengthen the landscape character of Magazine Beach.**
- **Improve pathway continuity and shoreline access.**
- **Improve overall maintenance and manage active recreational use to sustain the landscape.**
- **Interpret the history of Magazine Beach.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Manage Magazine Beach as a place of river celebrations and special events.**

Continue to support active sports and passive recreation.

- **Phase out the aging swimming pool complex and explore the feasibility of an outdoor swimming lagoon and spray fountain.**

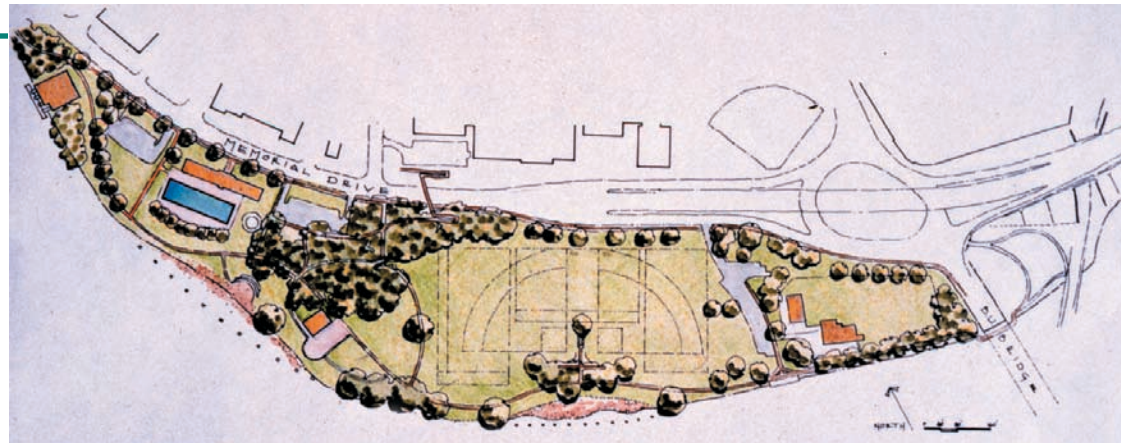
A future swimming lagoon would be located near the present pool site at the shore. Anticipate the need to reconfigure the shoreline, dredge the sediments, and create barrier islands to separate the swimming area from the navigable channel. If water quality and visibility cannot be sufficiently improved the swimming lagoon should



PROPOSED CHANGES AT MAGAZINE BEACH (UPPER PHOTO) AND EXISTING CONDITION (AT RIGHT).



be physically separated from the channel and have its own water circulation and filtration system. The entire complex including support structures should be fully integrated with and subservient to the landscape. Accommodate additional parking off site. The lagoon should support ice skating during the coldest months.



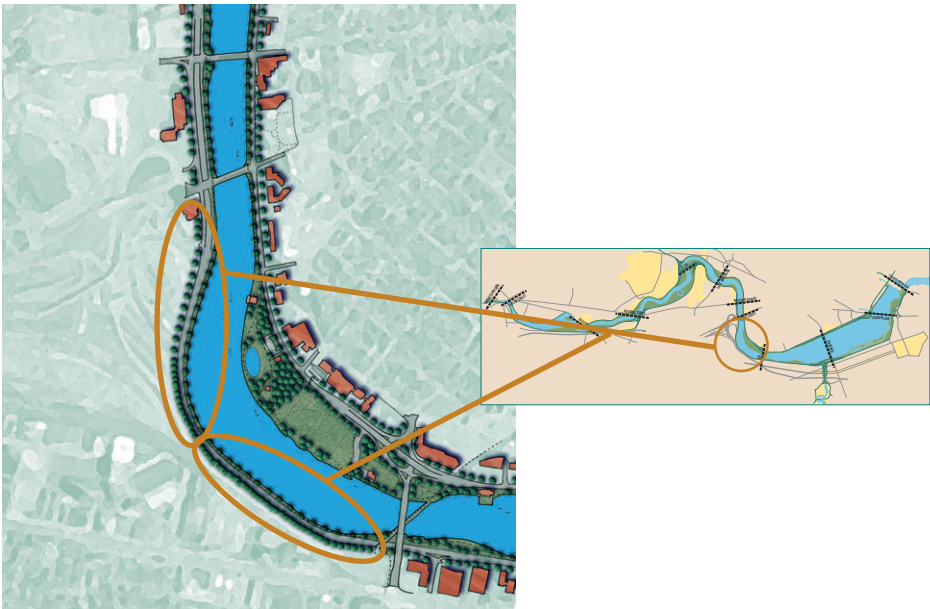
CONCEPTUAL SKETCH

University Bridge, and east along the bank past the Boston University Boathouse to the existing shoreline path. The path will tie into a new river crossing at the existing Grand Junction Railroad Bridge. It should also

form a measured loop connection with the walkway along Memorial Drive for walkers and joggers.

- **Improve the small pebble beach next to the athletic fields to allow direct access to the edge of the water** for beaching canoes or kayaks and wading when the water quality permits.
- **Design the athletic fields to be flexible open spaces that are an expression of the river landscape.** Configure these spaces so fields overlap for different combinations of play. By maximizing the layout of soccer, baseball, and softball three possibilities for simultaneous play would be possible—a) two softball games, b) one softball and one soccer game with practice space, or c) three soccer games. Open space should be set aside for unprogrammed pick-up games among neighborhood kids. Regardless of field configuration, there should be minimal fencing or permanent equipment on the fields and no night lighting. Use black vinyl backstop fences and limit their length and height. Plant groves of trees to soften the field edges and give a better sense of a riverine park setting. Improve drainage and provide irrigation to create better conditions for turf. Schedule downtime for the fields and open times for pick-up games and other informal uses.
- **Create a continuous multiuse path along but set back from the edge of the water.** This path should connect to paths downriver by way of a new path running past the CSO facility, under the Boston
- **Promote access to the Charles by developing a small dock for hand-carried craft near the MWRA's facility.** This dock could double as a launch site for crew teams visiting the Boston University Boathouse or rowing in the Head of the Charles.
- **Make restrooms at the pool bathhouse available to all park users.**
- **Working closely with the Cambridge Historical Commission, explore the renovation of the historic bathhouse for more public uses.** Consider reuse for exhibits, a picnic shelter, or a concession café. Anticipate reconstruction to admit more light and better access.
- **Create interpretive elements at the overlook on the history of Magazine Beach,** including the powder magazine, the filling of the marshes, river swimming, crew races, and other themes.
- **Build an informal children's play space under the trees to replace the existing play equipment.** Relocate the exercise course at the Cottage Farm facility to a less intrusive location and landscape the area to blend with the park.

- Create additional optional program elements, including a food concession at the pool building, or a small pull-off with power and light for concession trucks.
- Plant additional trees along the parkway in front of the pool and near the oaks in front of the pedestrian bridge.
- Frame river views by adding copses of trees along the edge of the athletic fields. This will also soften the view of the Turnpike.
- Mark the intersection of the Boston University Bridge and the Reid Overpass with perennial ornamental plants.
- Accent the wall of the granite overlook with distinctive plantings.
- Regrade the steep slope along the river edge of the pool, remove the parking lot, and substitute a greater variety of plant materials for the arborvitae.
- Redesign existing lots to break up the parking and insure a minimum fifty-foot setback from the shore. Provide signage indicating that public parking in Morse School parking lot is available during off-peak hours, acknowledging the agreement reached with Cambridge when the school was renovated.
- Realign the entry drive to the MWRA facility to blend better with the park landscape.
- Signalize Pleasant Street and include a pedestrian phase.



ALLSTON LANDING (4S)

Soldiers Field Road between BU Bridge and River Street Bridge

KEY RESOURCES

- *River Street Bridge (1926)*
- *Soldiers Field Road (1930)*
- *Massachusetts Turnpike (1965)*
- *Dr. Paul Dudley White bicycle path extension (1970s)*



SOLDIERS FIELD ROAD
AND THE ELEVATED
TURNPIKE JUST EAST
OF ALLSTON LANDING.