



WATERTOWN FRONT (ION)

Charles River Road between North Beacon Street and Galen Street Bridge

KEY RESOURCES

- *Possible prehistoric sites*
- *Charles River Road (1902, 1911)*
- *Galen Street Bridge (1907)*
- *Memorial to the founders of Watertown (1931)*
- *Watertown Boat Landing (1937)*
- *Memorial to the 1630 landing of Roger Clap and the Dorchester Men (1947)*
- *Watertown Square: Thomas Mayhew Memorial; Benjamin Robbins Curtis Memorial; Hood Rubber Company Memorial*

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORY

The Metropolitan Park Commission acquired the river frontage between the Cambridge Hospital and the Watertown Dam in 1910 and awarded a contract for construction of Charles River Road that same year. The Watertown boat landing, built in 1937, marks the upper terminus of the Basin. It replaced a landing located just upstream, one of six built along the river in 1911.

EXISTING CONDITIONS AND ISSUES

This stretch of river serves as Watertown's waterfront. Residential neighborhoods face directly onto the reservation, and a half dozen local streets intersect Charles River Road. Despite these benefits the Watertown Front seems unconnected both to the river and to the neighborhood. There is an opportunity here to reshape the river's edge and invite more people to enjoy the reservation.

The mile-long Charles River Road operates well below capacity as a four-lane parkway. Quiet much of the day and evening, it is a favorite location for bicycling. Its width and alignment, however, encourage speeds well above the posted limit. Charles River Road's recent narrowing through restriping has helped to calm traffic. Because North Beacon Street connects directly to Watertown Square, development at the Arsenal site is not expected to add substantial traffic to this parkway.

Crosswalks between Watertown neighborhoods and the reservation are few and poorly marked. For much of its length the main river pathway runs along Charles River Road with no setback or protection from roadway traffic. A steep embankment near the Perkins School for the Blind diverts the main path from the parkway in a confusing and dangerous turn. Joggers regularly step off the path and run along the travel lane at this point. An informal secondary path along the wooded shoreline is very narrow and has severely eroded the embankment in places, particularly at the base of the Perkins School hill.

The wooded banks and open meadows along Charles River Road are isolated from the rest of the reservation and underused. The river, much narrower along this stretch, is almost entirely screened from view. The landscape in this section is a mixture of thick, wooded areas and open



CHARLES RIVER ROAD BEGINS AT WATERTOWN SQUARE (VISIBLE IN THE LOWER LEFT CORNER) AND FOLLOWS A BROAD ARC TO NORTH BEACON STREET (RIGHT CENTER).

meadow. The woodland areas are overgrown with a number of invasive species, including poison ivy. Before trees grew to block their view, benches at the crest of the knoll once commanded views of the Boston skyline to the east

The Pat and Gabriel Farren Playground and the basketball court near Irving Street lack any landscaping and intrude on the river setting. Much of the playground and ball court equipment is damaged or out of date. The historic Watertown Landing just below the Galen Street Bridge is in need of restoration. Haphazard plantings around the landing screen it and the river from view. The Saltonstall monument is as impressive as any monument on the Esplanade, yet it is hidden from view on the north side of Charles River Road. The area also includes several benches and three additional memorials:

- to Thomas Mayhew, a leader in Watertown affairs from 1635 to 1645;
- to Benjamin Robbins Curtis, the United States Supreme Court justice who wrote the dissenting opinion in the Dred Scott decision; and
- to the Hood Rubber Company employees who died in the two world wars.

The entrance to Charles River Road and the parkway system at Watertown Square is cramped by side streets and in need of stronger plantings.

GOALS

- **Enhance the horticultural health and diversity of the reservation.**
- **Unite the park and the river with scenic vistas at key points.**
- **Limit the impact of cars on the visitor experience.**
- **Improve the character of the pathways.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Eliminate two travel lanes and narrow Charles River Road by fifteen to twenty feet.** Maintain three-foot shoulders to accommodate on-road bicycle traffic. Provide pullouts for parallel parking near Watertown Square, next to the playground meadow, and close to North Beacon Street. Redesign the multiuse pathway and provide a six- to ten-foot planting strip for parkway trees. Reassess the location of guardrails and remove any that are extraneous. (A restriping of Charles River Road reduced driving lanes to two and added biking lanes during the summer of 2000; the Watertown Arsenal Development Corporation provided financial assistance for the project.)

- **Redesign the existing multiuse pathway and widen it to ten feet to accommodate two-way traffic.** Add crosswalks and “Yield to Pedestrian” signs at key neighborhood streets, including Irving Street.
- **Redesign the existing shoreline path as a soft woodland path at least six feet wide.** This width may require construction of a retaining wall at the base of Perkins School hill. Remove the broken asphalt.
- **Install a new pedestrian footbridge across the river at a site near Maple Street** in order to divide one of the longest walking loops in the reservation into two shorter loops and to provide splendid views up and down the river. A new pedestrian bridge would link Watertown neighborhoods to the recreational opportunities at Daly Field.



EXISTING CONDITION (TOP) AND PROPOSED TREATMENT (ABOVE)



- **Reinforce a continuous street-tree edge along Charles River Road,** particularly abutting residential neighborhoods. Mark the Watertown Square gateway with ornamental shrubs, grasses, and perennials.
- **Reestablish scenic vistas, including views from Watertown Square to the river and toward downtown Boston from the knoll near the Perkins School.** Align vistas to the river with neighborhood streets.
- **Maintain the rich mixture of open fields and wooded banks along the river that characterizes this section of the reservation.** Promote understory shrubs and trees in woodlands and add evergreens to provide winter interest. Control invasive plants such as poison ivy. Prune dead and dying trees along the walkways. Establish meadow grass and wildflowers in place of mowed field while maintaining enough turf for picnics

and games. Establish hardy groundcovers, such as a fescue grass mix, on such steep slopes as the one running between the parkway and the playground meadow.

- **Remove the intrusive and damaged spray fountain, fencing, and broken playground equipment and selectively replace them with new play structures chosen and sited to be as unobtrusive as possible.**

Relocate the basketball court to a city lot. Because brightly colored playground equipment and fences would be out of place along this natural riverfront,

develop instead a natural-landscape play area with climbing trees, boulders, and landforms that would help introduce young children to the natural environment.

- **Remove the parkway trees in front of the Saltonstall monument** to permit an unobstructed view of it from the parkway and paths. It should be possible to see glimpses of the river from the monument as well. Repoint and conserve the monument.
- **Restore the landscape at the Watertown Square landing.** Reduce the paved area and replace asphalt with pavers to match the character of the stonework. Restore the granite balustrades. Redesign plantings to frame seating areas and reduce exposure to passing cars. Protect existing oak trees as major landscape assets. Provide pedestrian lighting.



THE SKETCH ABOVE SHOWS EXISTING CONDITIONS. THE PROPOSED TREATMENT (RIGHT) INCLUDES OPENING NEW VIEWS TO THE GALEN STREET BRIDGE; REPAVING AND REPLANTING THE OVERLOOK; AND SPECIAL MAINTENANCE OF THE LARGE OAKS ALONG NORTH BEACON.

