



MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF  
CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

The background of the slide is a photograph of Herter Park. In the foreground, a dirt path leads towards a large, multi-trunked tree with white bark. To the left of the tree is a body of water, and to the right is a paved path that leads into the distance. The background is filled with lush green trees and foliage.

## Herter Park Public Meeting #1





# Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Governor

**Charles D. Baker**

Lieutenant Governor

**Karyn E. Polito**

Energy and Environmental Secretary

**Kathleen A. Theoharides**

Department of Conservation and Recreation Commissioner

**Jim Montgomery**

## Meeting Logistics

- Our speakers will go through the presentation, asking everyone else to be muted.
- You will have the opportunity to submit comments over the course of the next two weeks at DCR Public Comments:

*<https://www.mass.gov/forms/dcr-public-comments>*

- Two ways to ask questions during the meeting.
  - Raise your hand Zoom function
  - Use the chat function
- Tonight's meeting will be recorded.
  - The recording and slide deck will be available shortly after the meeting at:

*[www.mass.gov/dcr/past-public-meetings](http://www.mass.gov/dcr/past-public-meetings)*

## DCR Mission

To protect, promote and enhance our common wealth of  
natural, cultural and recreational resources  
for the well-being of all.



# Introductions

1. Legislators
2. DCR Team
3. Halvorson | Tighe & Bond Team



# Agenda

## A. Halvorson Park Overview

1. DCR Goals for Herter Park
2. Review of Site Inventory and Analysis
3. Opportunities and Constraints Summary

## B. Public Input: We want to hear from you

1. What do you love about Herter Park and wouldn't want to change
2. What is the #1 issues that needs improvement
3. What is missing from the park program
4. Other ideas / feedback





## Herter Park at a Glance

- Approx. 60-acre open space, one of the region's most heavily used and programmed parks.
- First developed as The Charles River Speedway, within the Charles River Reservation - one of the earliest open spaces of the Boston's Metropolitan Park System.
- 1960s site redevelopment and Herter Center building form the basis for today's park.
- Designated in 1974 as Christian A. Herter Park.





## DCR's Vision for Herter Park

- Dynamic and accessible public recreation space set in a rich and diverse riverine habitat.

## Goals for Herter Park

- 1. Public Access and Circulation:** Provide accessible, safe, and efficient circulation to and within the park.
- 2. Programming:** Propose vital programs for the Herter Park signature facilities. Accommodate and encourage existing activities and program usage.
- 3. Environmental Stewardship:** Remove invasive plant species and restore with Boston Basin native species. Manage river bank for access vs. nuisance wildlife.
- 4. Visitor Experience:** Improve views, wayfinding, interpretive signage. Provide enhanced visitor amenities.
- 5. Operations:** Develop an improved diagram for daily operation and maintenance, and special events staging. Provide storage.
- 6. Stormwater and Utilities:** Integrate best management practices to improve drainage, water quality and ecosystem functions.



# PARK OVERVIEW: Buildings and Key Facilities



1 Henderson Boat House



2 Garage/ BLS rowing



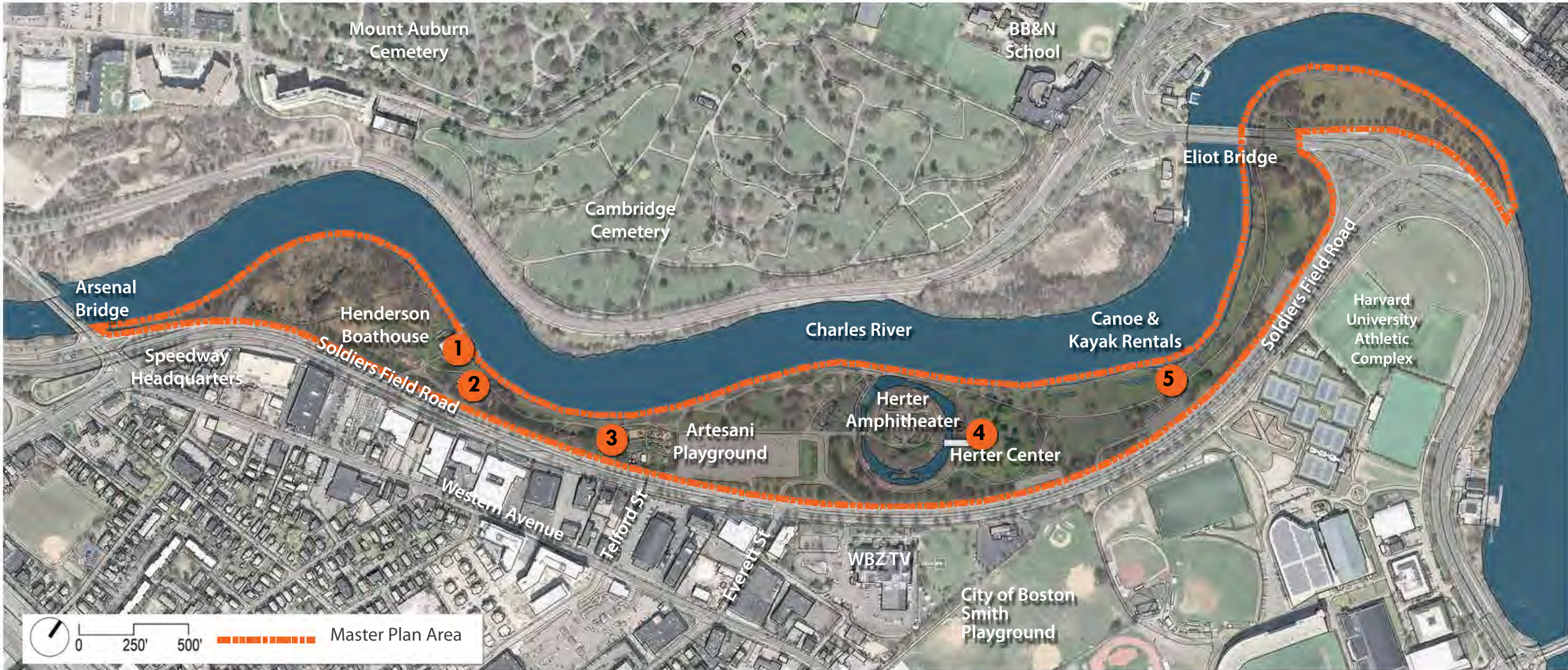
3 Artesani Playground Comfort Station



4 Herter Center



5 Canoe & Kayak Rental





# PARK OVERVIEW: Prominent Site Features



1 Arsenal Street Bridge



2 Community Gardens



3 Artesani Playground and Spray Park



4 Herter Amphitheater



5 Eliot Bridge





## BACKGROUND: Prior to 1898



Ca. 1770 map "Boston Harbor and its Surroundings" by John Mills



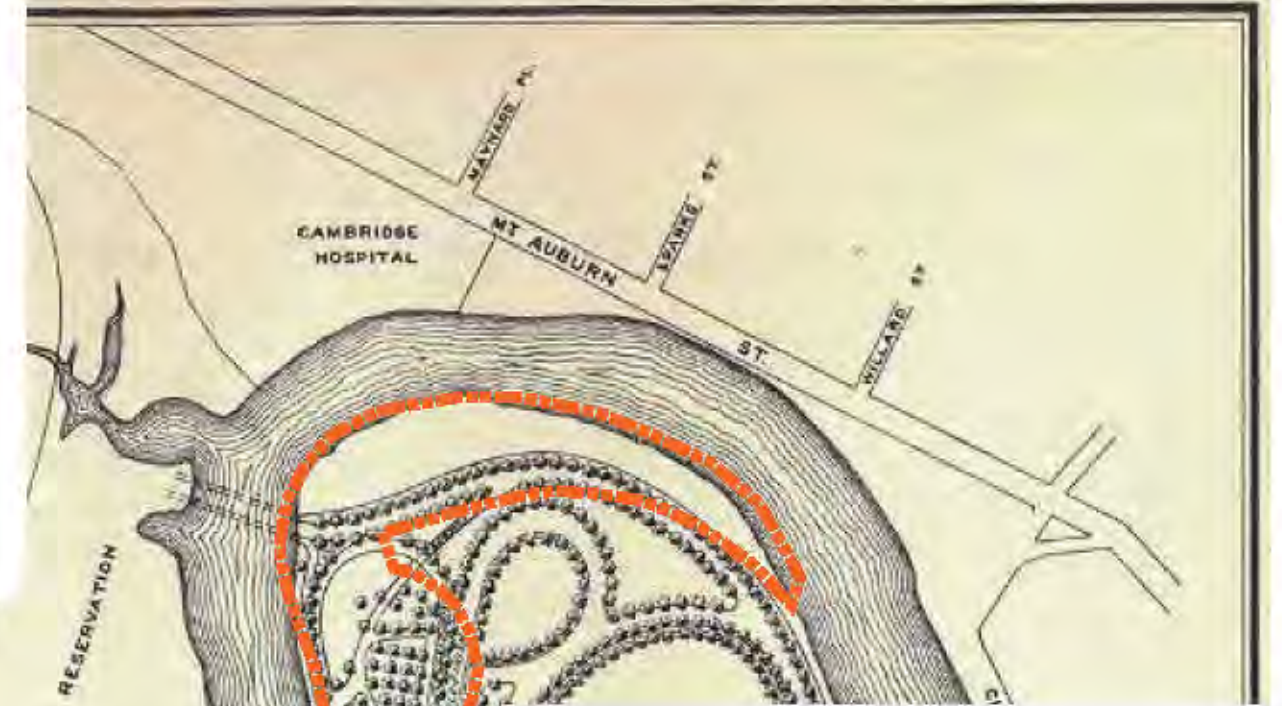
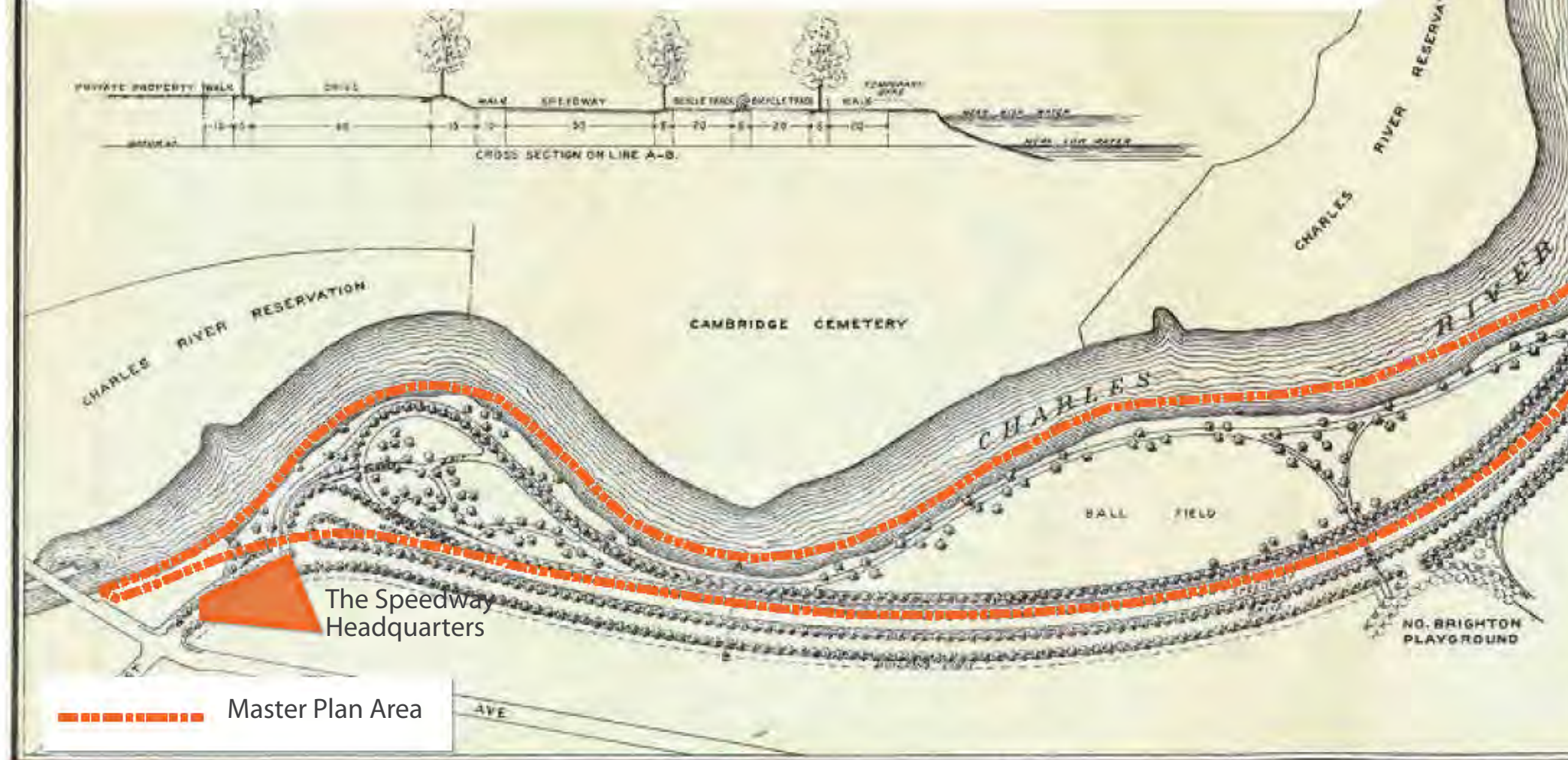
1875 "Atlas of Suffolk County" by G. M. Hopkins & Co.

- In the late 1700's Charles River was a tidal estuary, with salt marshes and swampy land where the present Herter park is.
- In the 1800s the riverfront was occupied by industrial uses (coal and lumber yards, slaughter houses) leading to pollution and public health concerns.
- In 1831 Mount Auburn was established as a rural cemetery just across the river. Widely revered for the beauty of its designed landscape, it helped lay the ground for the later Park Movement that influenced the establishment of Boston's Metropolitan Park System..



# BACKGROUND: Early Years 1898-1910

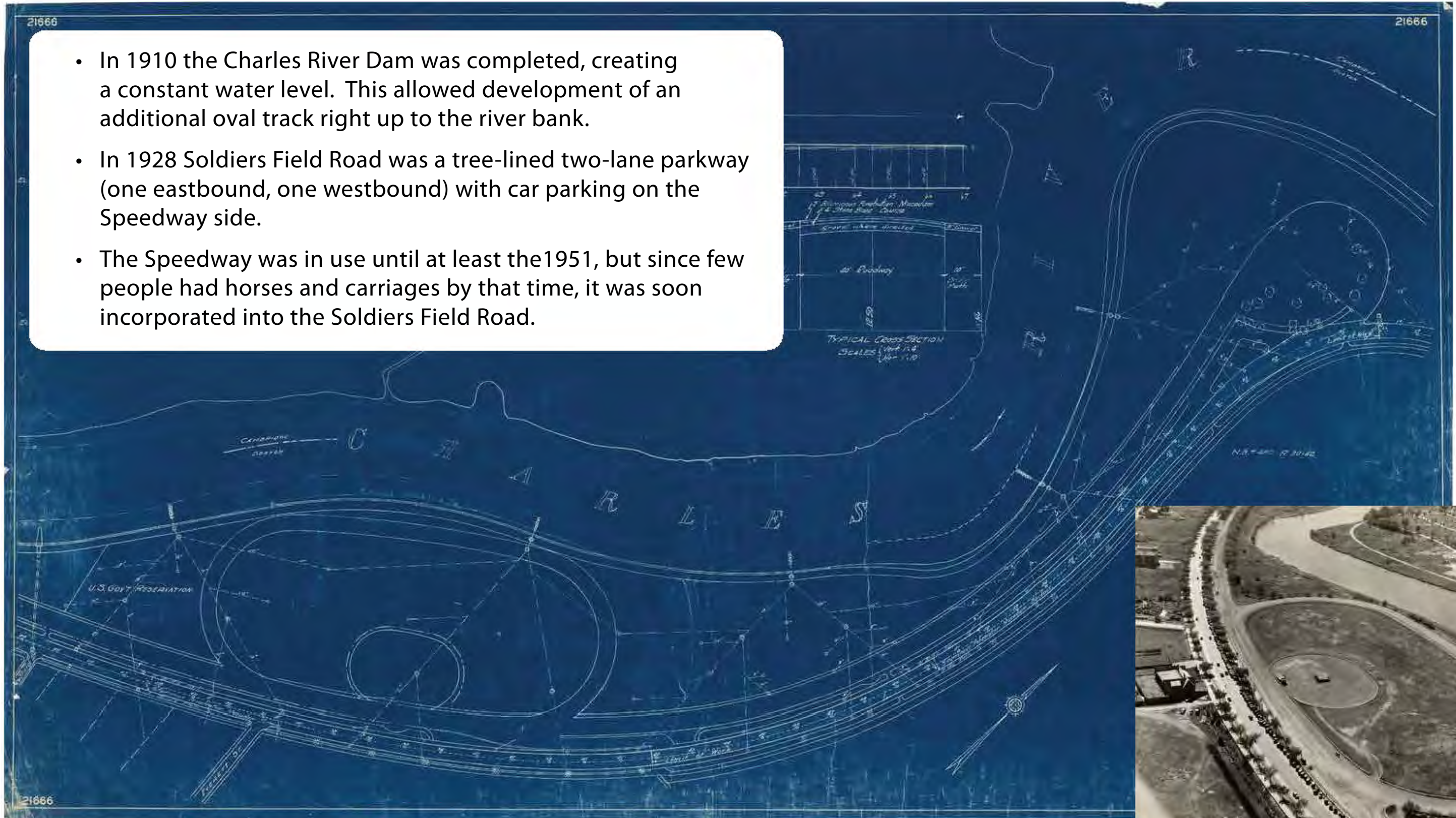
- In 1893 the Metropolitan Park System was established, with the Charles River Reservation as the first protected parkland.
- The term “reservation” was adopted to emphasize that the land was “reserved” in a “naturalistic” state for passive and active recreation. Many of these landscapes were intended to be designed; in particular the Charles riverbank had to be converted from industrial uses to pleasure grounds.
- Charles River Speedway, designed by Charles Eliot and built in 1899, featured a 1.75-mile parkway, 1 mile race track for harness racing and bicycles, and a pedestrian promenade.





# BACKGROUND: 1910-1958

- In 1910 the Charles River Dam was completed, creating a constant water level. This allowed development of an additional oval track right up to the river bank.
- In 1928 Soldiers Field Road was a tree-lined two-lane parkway (one eastbound, one westbound) with car parking on the Speedway side.
- The Speedway was in use until at least the 1951, but since few people had horses and carriages by that time, it was soon incorporated into the Soldiers Field Road.



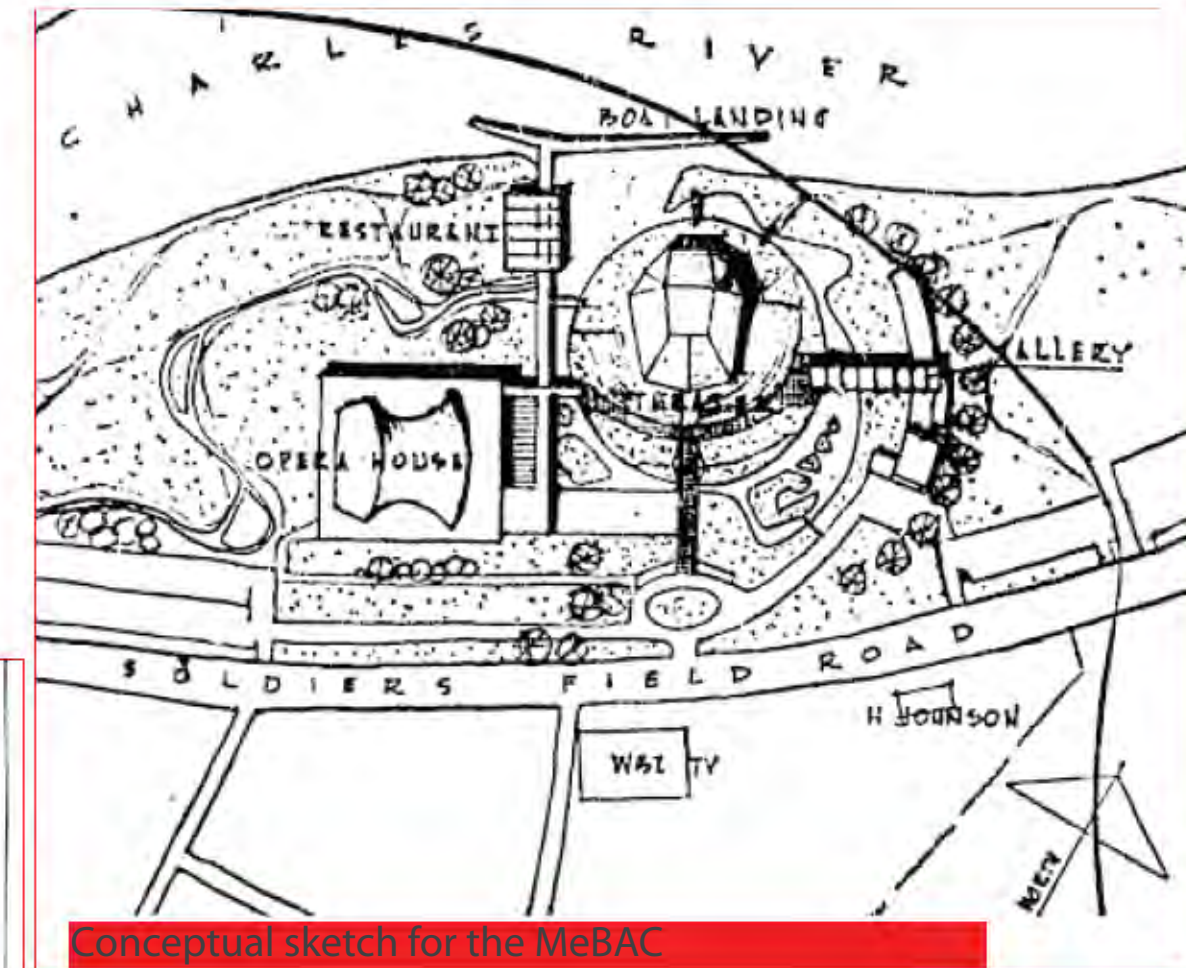
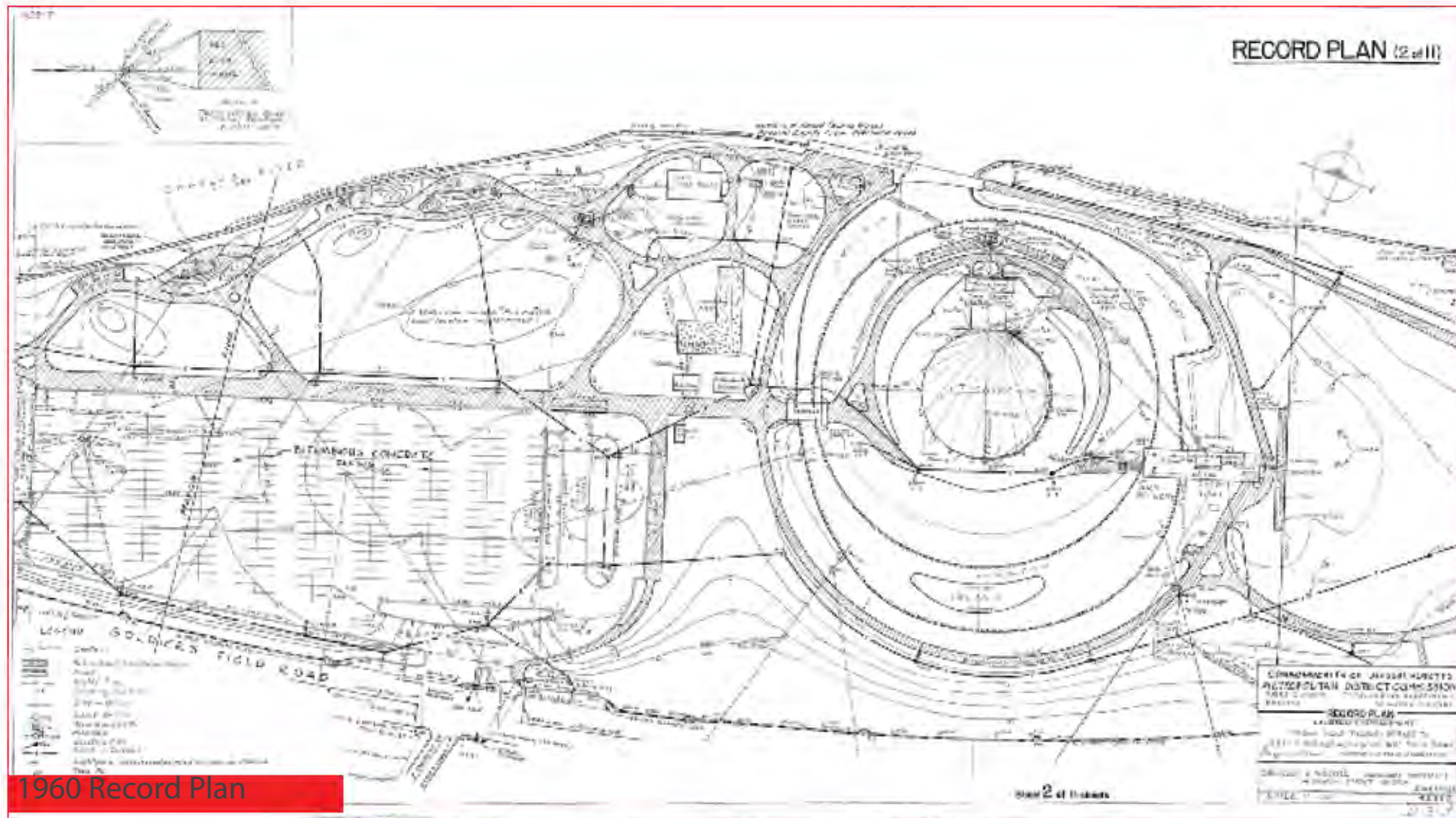
1933 Speedway Resurfacing Plan





## BACKGROUND: 1958-60 Redesign

- Today's park was designed and built in 1958-60.
- It was centered on a man-made island that was envisioned as a Metropolitan Boston Arts Center (MeBAC) with a theater, art gallery, opera house, and boat landing.
- The tent-covered theater and art gallery were both short lived, possibly due to remoteness, and lack of access and transportation options.





# Herter Amphitheater: Then and Now

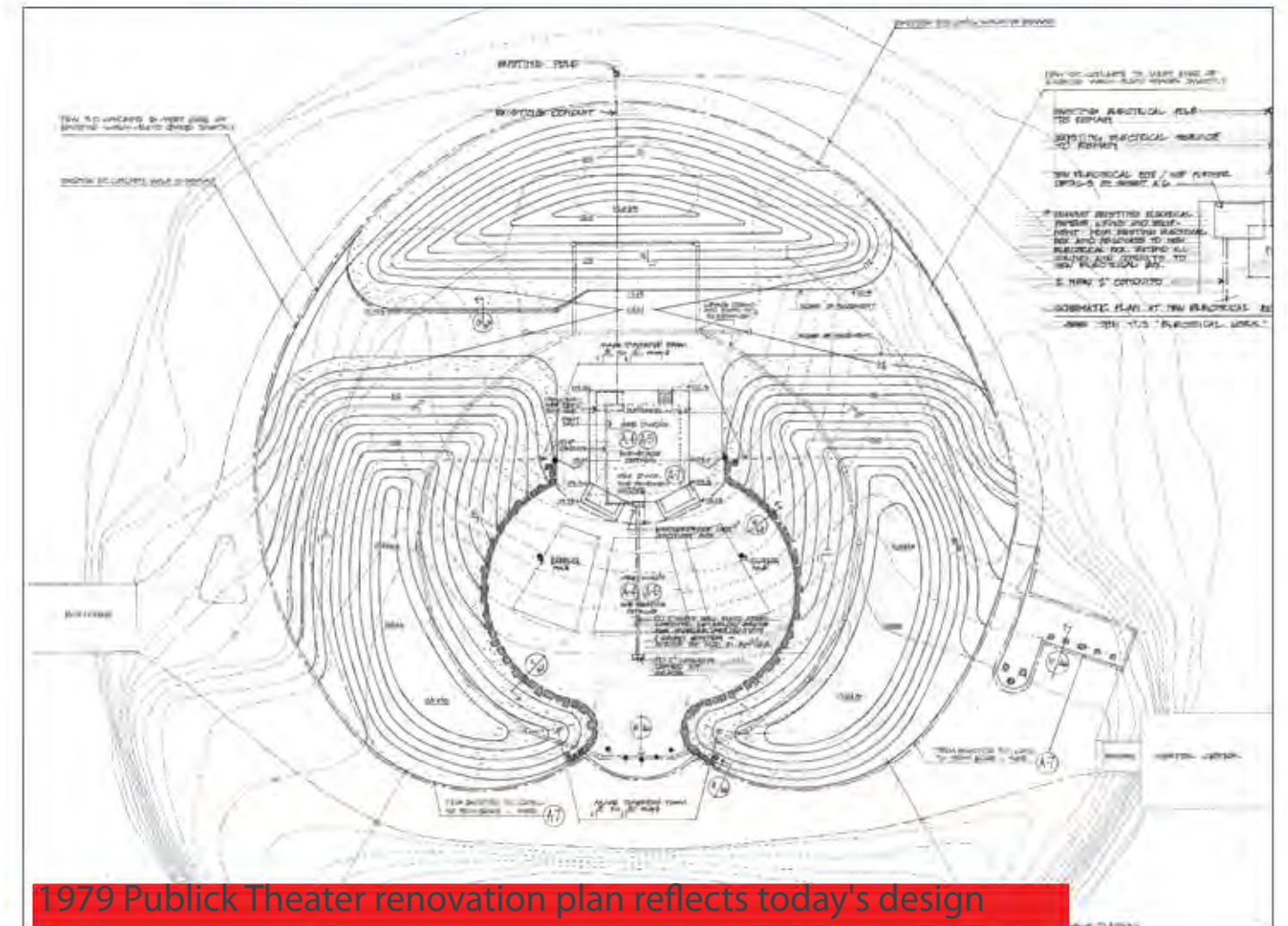
- The original theater had a tent structure that had to be taken down in winter; this was expensive and was soon abandoned.
- In 1979 the Theater was redesigned as a summer stage for the Publick Theater, who operated there for almost 38 years.
- After years of inactivity, it has recently been revitalized by the Friends of Herter Park who operates a series of performance programs there.



1958 MeBAC Summer Theater w/ the short-lived tent canopy



2021



1979 Public Theater renovation plan reflects today's design



# Herter Center: Then and Now



- The Herter Center was designed as the home of the Institute of Contemporary Art (the ICA), which left after 3 years.
- Over the years the ground floor was infilled to accommodate other uses.
- Most recently the building housed the Sports Museum, but has been vacant for years.

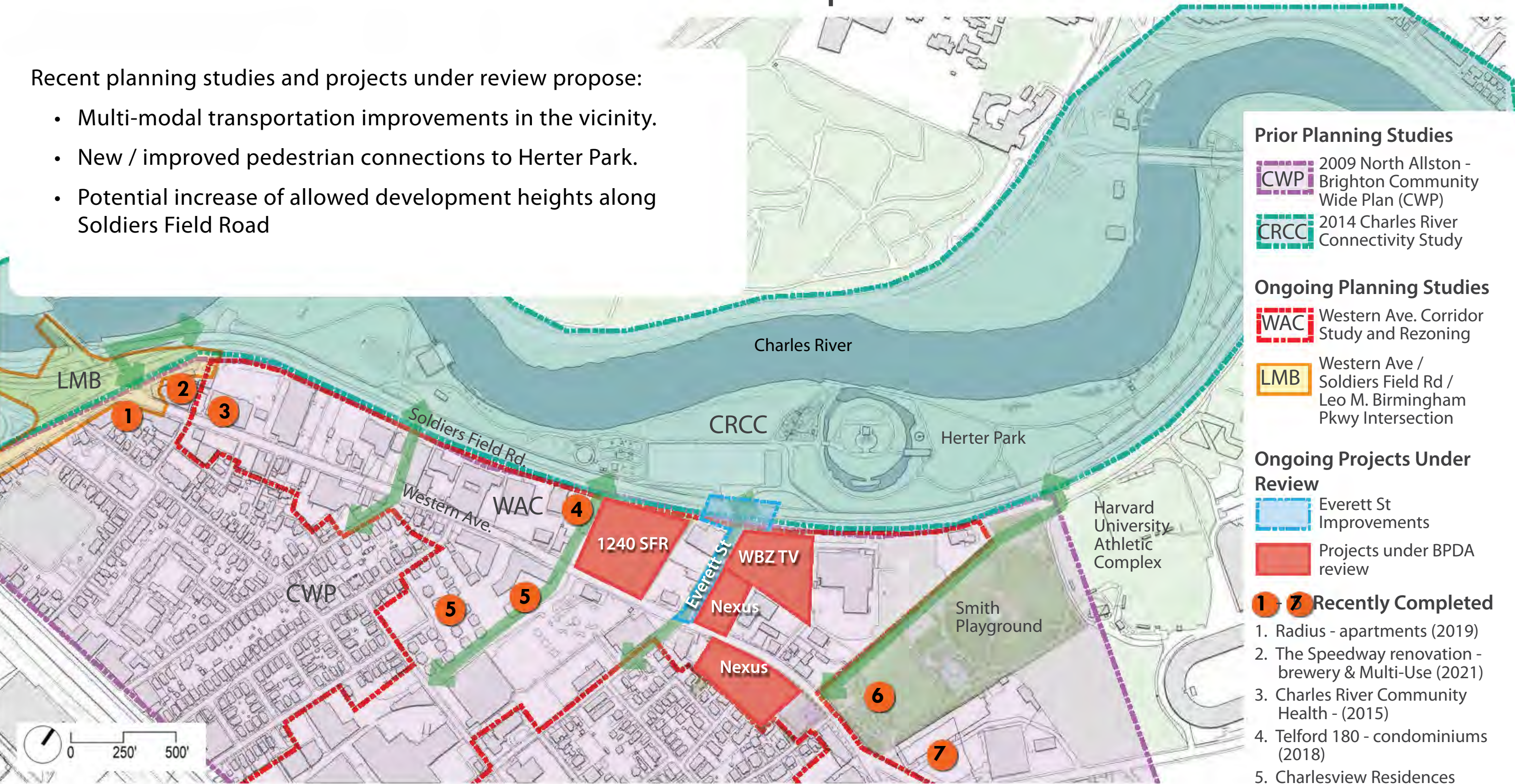




# PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT: Recent and Proposed Plans

Recent planning studies and projects under review propose:

- Multi-modal transportation improvements in the vicinity.
- New / improved pedestrian connections to Herter Park.
- Potential increase of allowed development heights along Soldiers Field Road



## Prior Planning Studies

- CWP** 2009 North Allston - Brighton Community Wide Plan (CWP)
- CRCC** 2014 Charles River Connectivity Study

## Ongoing Planning Studies

- WAC** Western Ave. Corridor Study and Rezoning
- LMB** Western Ave / Soldiers Field Rd / Leo M. Birmingham Pkwy Intersection

## Ongoing Projects Under Review

- Everett St Improvements**
- Projects under BPDA review**

## 1 - 7 Recently Completed

1. Radius - apartments (2019)
2. The Speedway renovation - brewery & Multi-Use (2021)
3. Charles River Community Health - (2015)
4. Telford 180 - condominiums (2018)
5. Charlesview Residences - affordable housing (2015)
6. Smith Playground (2019)
7. Continuum - apartments & retail (2016)

↔ New or improved neighborhood connections recommended by various planning studies



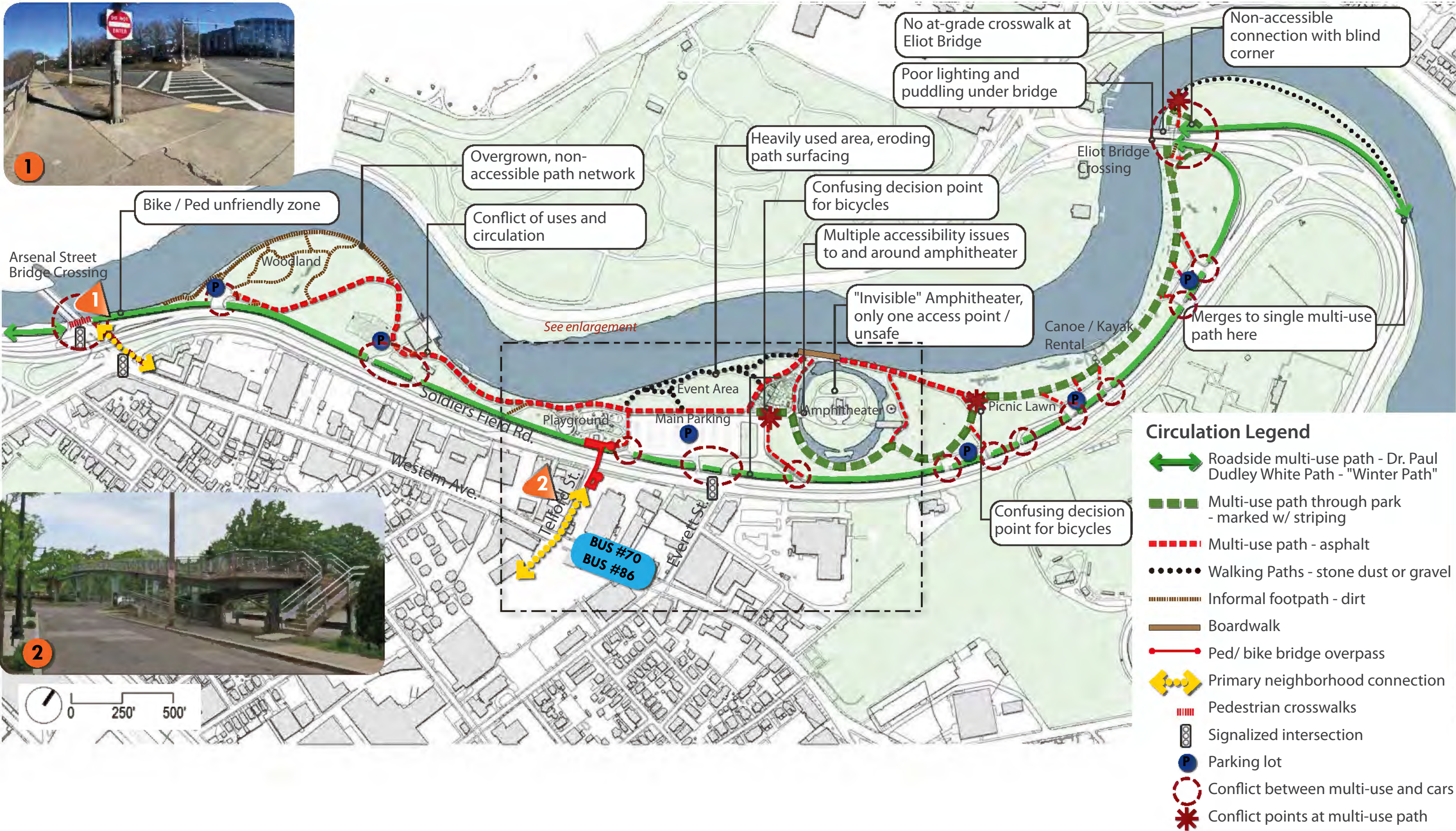
# CIRCULATION: Existing Issues



1  
Bike / Ped unfriendly zone

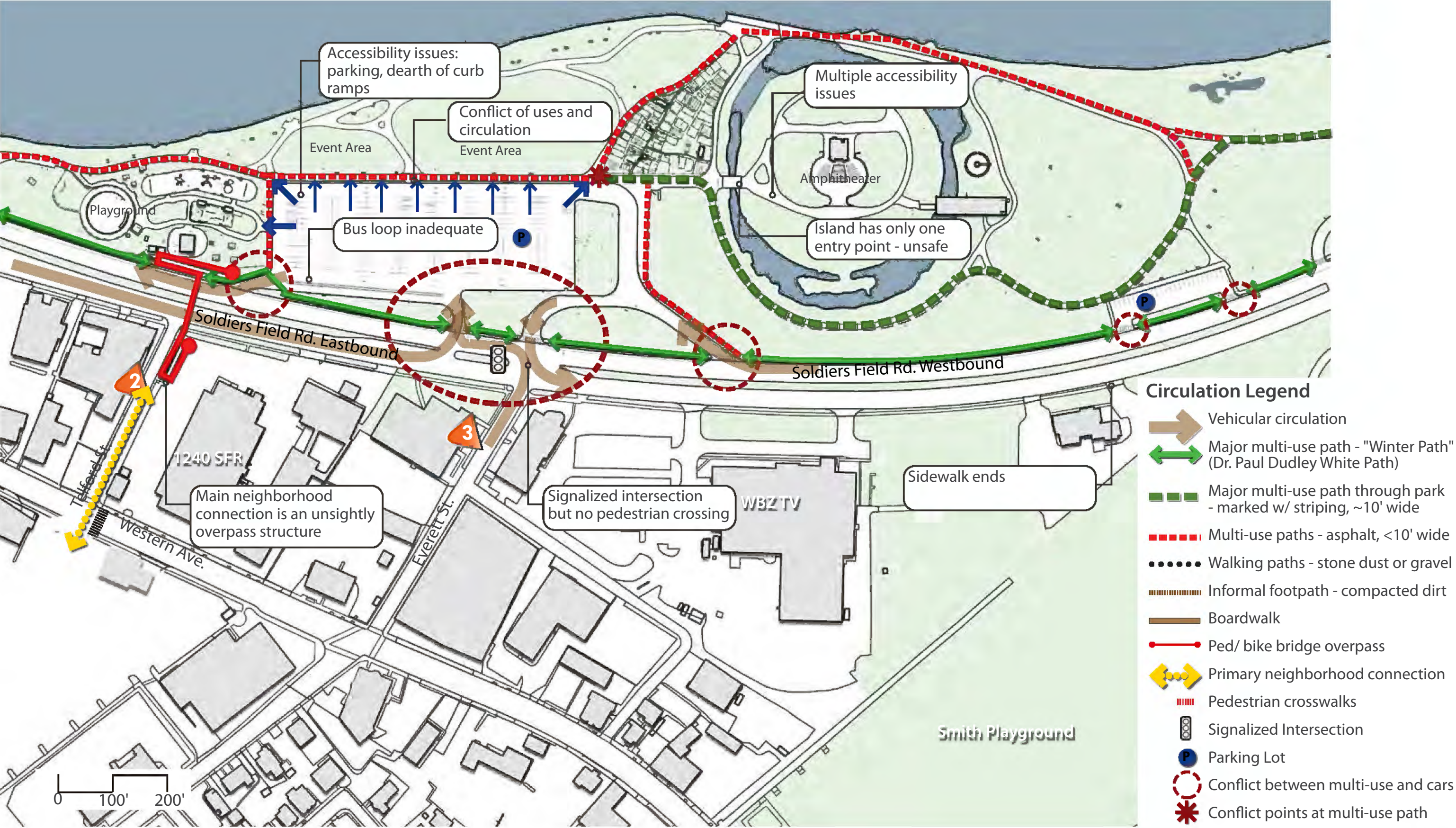


2  
Overgrown, non-accessible path network





# CIRCULATION: Arrival / Access





# CIRCULATION: Arrival / Access



Intersection at Arsenal St. Bridge looking towards Western Ave.



Telford St. overpass.



Everett St. Intersection at Soldiers Field Rd.

## What We've Learned:

- There are only two pedestrian/ bicycle access point from the neighborhood:
  1. Signaled crossing at Arsenal Street Bridge intersection, which is far from the present core of activities.
  2. Telford Street shared use overpass, which is narrow and in deteriorating condition, and
  3. At Everett Street, even though there's a traffic signal, there is no pedestrian crossing.
- Everett Street intersection has a complex traffic pattern with the in-and-out loop to the park east of the intersection.



# CIRCULATION: Pedestrian / Bicycle Issues



Dr. Paul Dudley White Path ("Winter Path") should be wider for enhanced shared use by bicycles and pedestrians.



Striped shared use path is relatively new. There is no signage or material change to distinguish from paths intended for pedestrians-only.



Informal paths along the wooded west end of the park are narrow, overgrown and not ADA accessible.



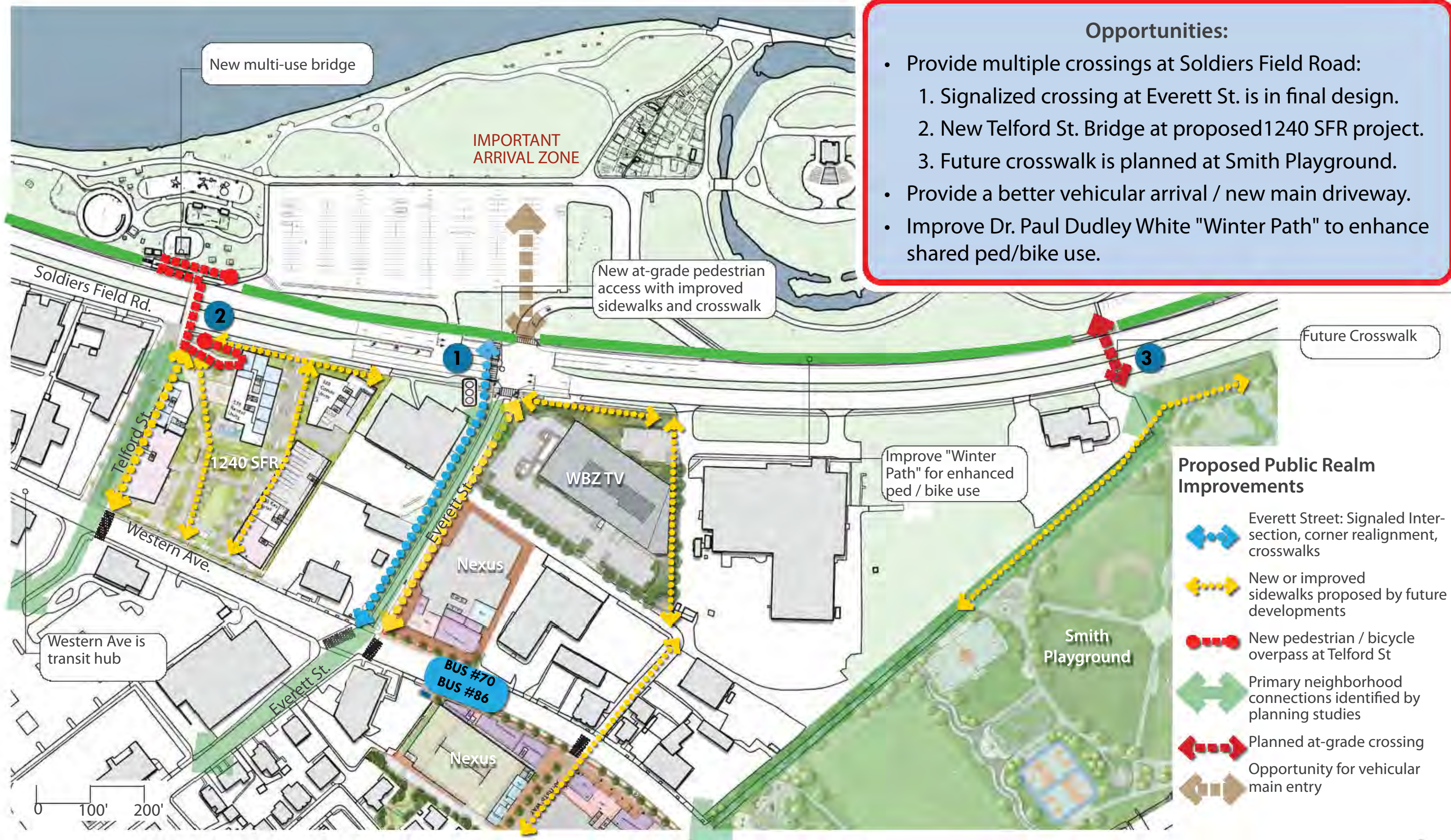
The boardwalk is not wide enough to accommodate both circulation and a sitting node.

## What We've Learned:

- Dr. Paul Dudley White Path along the westbound lane of Soldiers Field Road serves as the ped/bike "Winter Path" (plowed).
  - It is only 5' to 6' wide, too narrow for a shared use path.
  - It crosses parking driveways 14 times. The crossing points have detectable surfacing but many are not ADA compliant.
  - At Eliot Bridge, there is no at-grade crossing. The path circles down and under the bridge, and then back up via a non-ADA compliant segment.
- Within the park, all paved paths are used by pedestrians and bikes. They are not typically plowed in winter.
  - The striping on the ped/bike path was intended as a visual cue to guide commuting bicyclists.



# CIRCULATION: Opportunities





# PARKING: Issues



## What We've Learned:

- The vast Artesani Parking lot is a "workhorse:"
  - Free parking for 230 cars
  - Daily usage by commuters
  - ADA issues: inadequate number of accessible parking spaces (type and signage), and few curb ramps.
  - Visually it creates an unfavorable first impression.
  - Head of the Charles Regatta uses it to park 60-70 trailers.
- The smaller parking lots P#1 to P#3 have drainage and flooding issues.
- Parking lot at Henderson Boathouse (HB) has conflicts with pedestrian and bike circulation.
- Parking lot near Arsenal St. Bridge is a remnant of the historic Speedway loop; the area is uninviting.





# PARKING: Opportunities

## Opportunities:

- Reconfigure Artesani Parking lot:
  - Integrate with a new entrance drive and promenade for an attractive arrival.
  - Integrate green infrastructure for stormwater treatment.
  - Better regulate parking usage.
- At Henderson Boathouse improve parking, vehicle access, and separate pedestrians and bikes from vehicles.
- Reconfigure the lot near Arsenal St. Bridge, make the area more inviting.
- Resolve flooding and drainage issues, and provide stormwater treatment measures.
- Balance reduction of parking spaces at Artesani with other parking opportunities, maintaining the overall number of parking spaces.



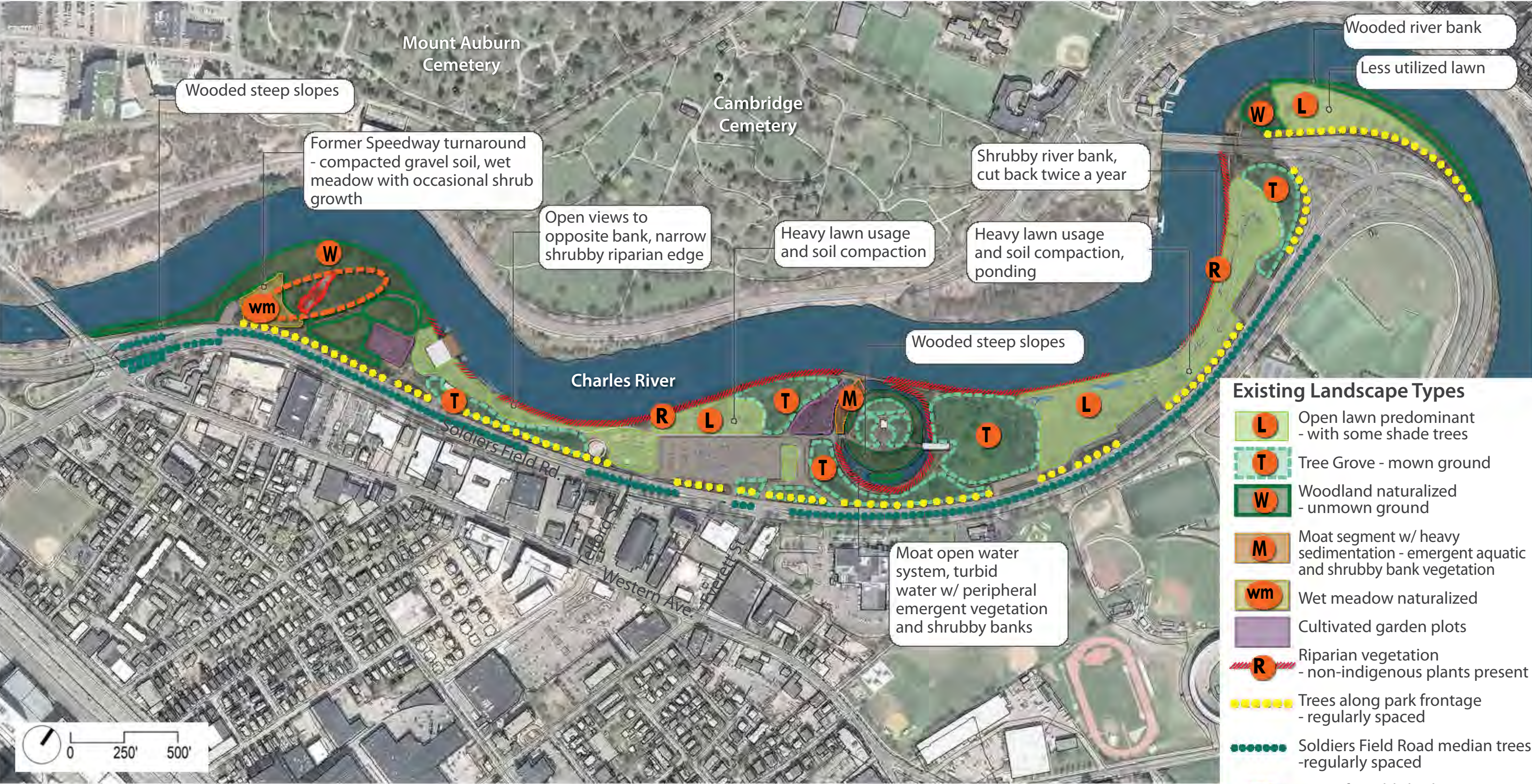
Bioretention area example, at Harry Parker Boathouse, Brighton, MA.



Bioswale at parking lot, at Christ Hospital, Cincinnati OH.



# VEGETATION: Existing Types and Issues





# VEGETATION: Existing Types and Issues



Open lawn predominant - some shade trees



Tree grove with mown lawn



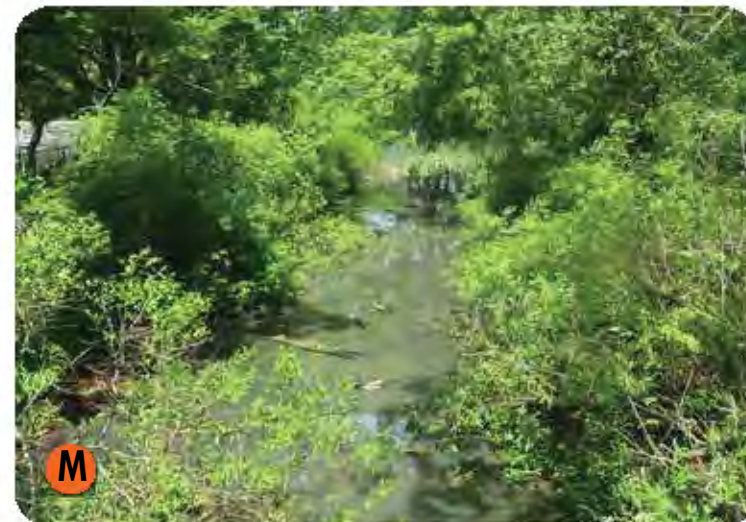
Woodland naturalized



Wet meadow naturalized



Riparian vegetation



Moat silted up area

## What We've Learned:

- The park is valued for its expanse of open lawns and shaded groves that allow multiple uses: from informal to programmed events.
- The park features over 1,500 trees that are 4" caliper or larger.
  - This does not include wooded areas where trees were not counted.
  - The canopy trees are mostly mature.
- Lawns in the east parkland have areas of ponding and are often flooded. This could be from high groundwater, soil compaction, and poor stormwater infiltration.
- The west end of the park features dense upland tree areas as well as a wet meadow.
  - Monocultures of invasive plants (including trees) are established in the area.
- Riparian vegetation is mostly shrubs with a few trees.
  - Non-indigenous False Indigo (*Amorpha fruticosa*) is a dominant species along the riverbank.
  - The riverbank shrubs are managed twice a year for views and water sheet access / Head of the Charles Regatta.
  - The cut edges encourage bank erosion.
- The moat is an open water system with peripheral emergent marsh and steep shrubby banks. The water is turbid and there are areas with significant sedimentation.
  - It provides habitat for wildlife such as ducks and turtles, but the stagnant water is breeding ground for mosquitoes.
- The park is part of migratory bird corridor that includes larger open spaces in vicinity including cemeteries, Fresh Pond Reservation, etc.



# VEGETATION: Opportunities

## Opportunities:

- Balance open lawn and shaded / wooded areas.
  - Improve visual porosity in overgrown areas for an enhanced sense of safety and views.
  - Introduce areas of meadow planting to enhance habitat value to pollinators and wildlife, improve permeability and soil quality, capture and filter stormwater flow, reduce erosion, and reduce carbon footprint (minimized mowing).
- Resolve lawn drainage issues.
  - Drainage solutions : subsurface and surface.
  - Grading changes in combination with balancing flood storage capacity, increased storm water infiltration, and reduced erosion.
- Provide a win-win shoreline edge:
  - Geese vs. sight lines vs. erosion and stormwater infiltration
  - Nature-based solutions preferred over hard / reinforced edges.
  - Allow water sheet access at defined locations.
- Enhance biodiversity in general.
- Enhance climate resiliency



Lawn landforms, at Chelsea Cove Park, New York, NY.



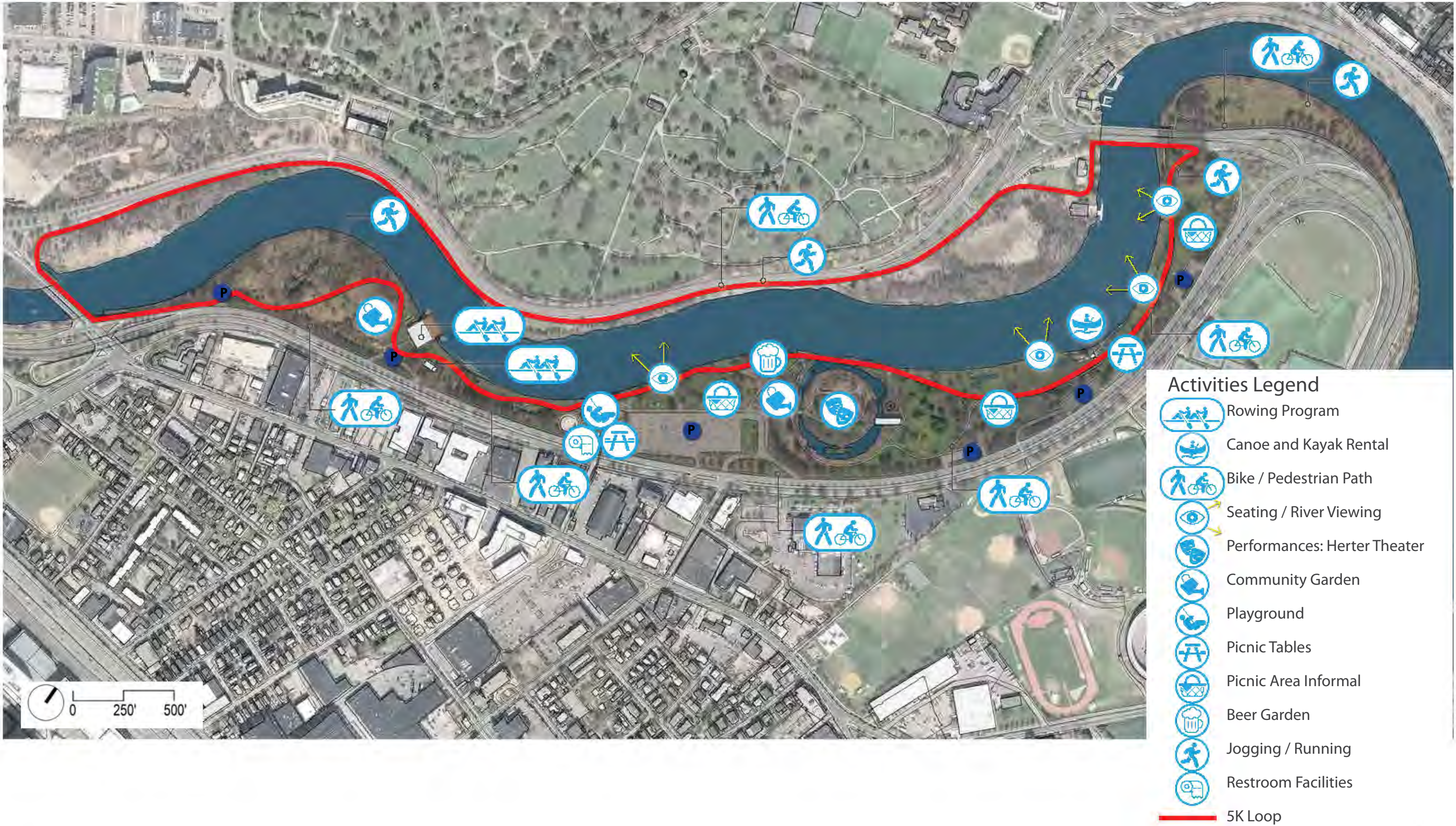
Example of maintained visual porosity in wooded areas.



Meadow planting, Wellesley, MA.



# PROGRAM ACTIVITIES: Visitor, Recreational, and Permitted Uses





## PROGRAM ACTIVITIES: Visitor and Recreational Uses



### What We've Learned:

- The park is well used year round by a diverse audience.
- Recreational uses include: Walking, running, scenery and people-watching, biking, roller-blading, picnicking, playing, informal gatherings and games, drum circle, water recreation.
- Facilities that support these uses:
  - Artesani Playground and Spray Pool (recent construction) - for younger children.
  - Artesani comfort station: restrooms, changing rooms (recent construction).
  - Lifeguard break room and pool storage are housed in temporary shed-like structures.
  - Seasonal portable toilets at several locations.
  - Picnic tables at several location
  - There are no drinking fountains other than at Artesani.
  - There are no grilling stations. Charcoal use and open fire are not allowed.



# PROGRAM ACTIVITIES: Permitted Uses



## What We've Learned:

### • Permitted uses:

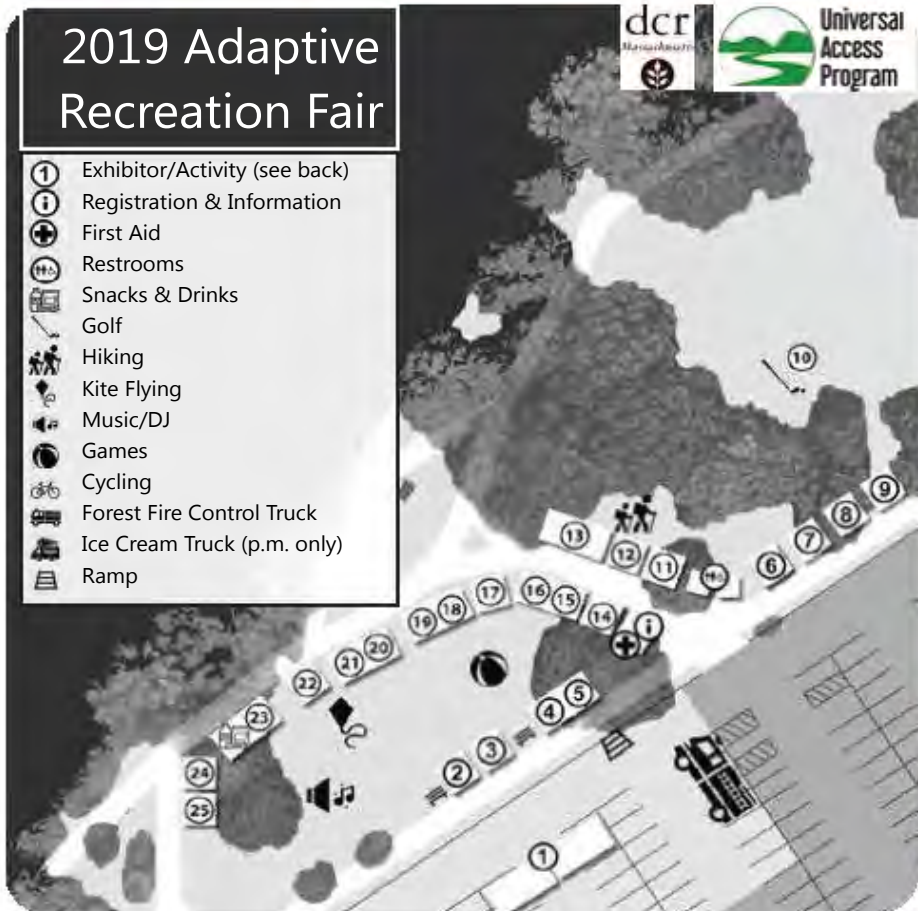
- Canoeing, kayaking, paddle boarding - at Paddle Boston public boat rental - summer use.
- Beer Garden 'Owl's Nest'
- Rowing, boating - part of the NEU Henderson Boat House program.
- Herter Amphitheater program
  - Permitted through MOU with the Friends of Herter Park
  - Open-air performance space subject to weather
  - No storage and no changing facilities
  - Safety issues - only one entrance / exit
  - Accessibility issues

### • Currently not permitted uses:

- Community Gardens were established in the 1970s and 1980s.
- Boston Latin & Brookline High School have been using the land and garage next to Henderson Boat House.



# PROGRAM ACTIVITIES: Programmed Events



## What We've Learned:

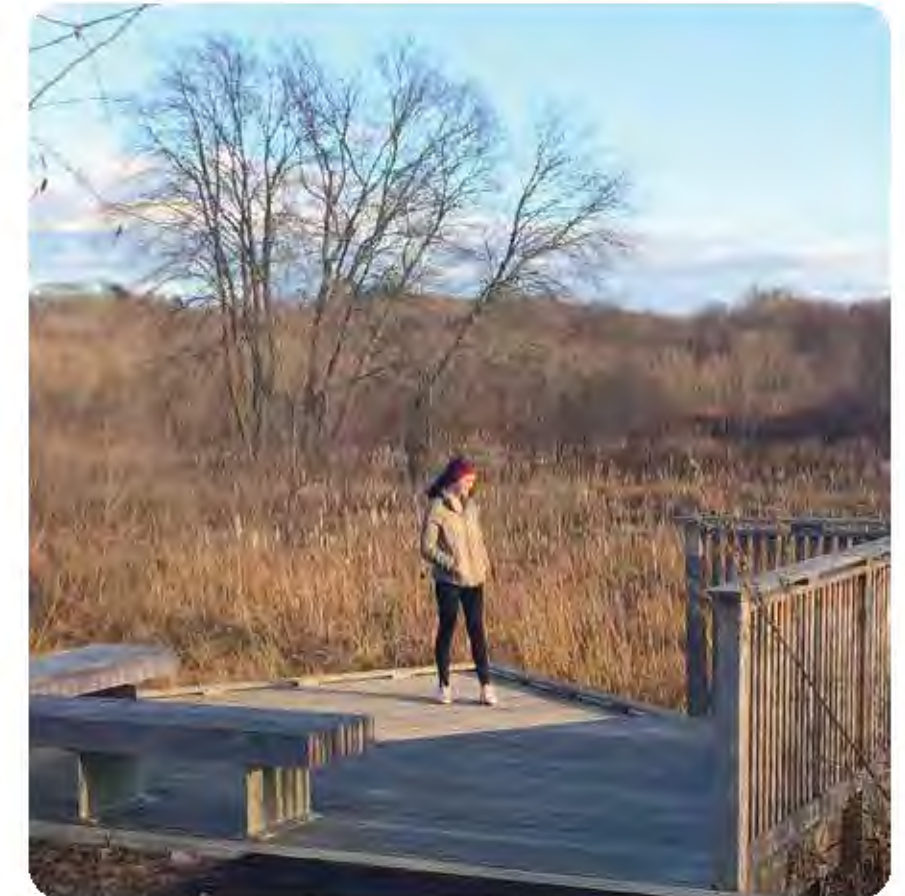
- Herter Park is the most event - programmed park in the DCR system.
- Most events are from October to Memorial Day, to allow full community use during the summer.
  - Walkathons and running races
  - Adaptive Recreation Fair and Adaptive Cycling Event
  - Run of the Charles Canoe and Kayak Race
  - Head of the Charles Regatta (HOCR), the second weekend in October - the largest event, with 11,000 competitors from world-wide, and \$60M in economic impact to the region.
- The largest impact to the park is by the HOCR:
  - Setup and break-down over 2 weeks, highly organized
  - Exhibitor and spectator tents and various amenities occupy the park from Artesani Playground to Eliot Bridge.
  - Artesani parking accommodates 70-90 trailers, another 30-50 are parked elsewhere in the park.
  - Event setup is challenged by areas of soggy lawn - in recent years temporary flooring has been utilized.
  - Maintenance plan after the event: lawn decompaction and overseeding, late in the season.



# PROGRAM ACTIVITIES: Opportunities

## Opportunities / Questions:

- Keep the park activities and program as present,  
or
- Introduce new activities?
- What are the things that should not be changed?
- What is missing?
- Provide a safe connection across Soldiers Field Road to the Smith Playground, to connect to its complementary recreational facilities.



Examples of various park activities



# HERTER AMPHITHEATER: Opportunities & Challenges

## Opportunities :

- Improve accessibility to Herter Amphitheater, the stage, and the seating.
- Provide a second bridge to the island for second egress and for better integration with the park.
- Provide storage / support amenities for the theater and park use.
- Upgrade site lighting and electrical infrastructure.
- Celebrate the uniqueness of this park feature
  - Should we make it more visible ... or
  - Should it remain an intimate space?

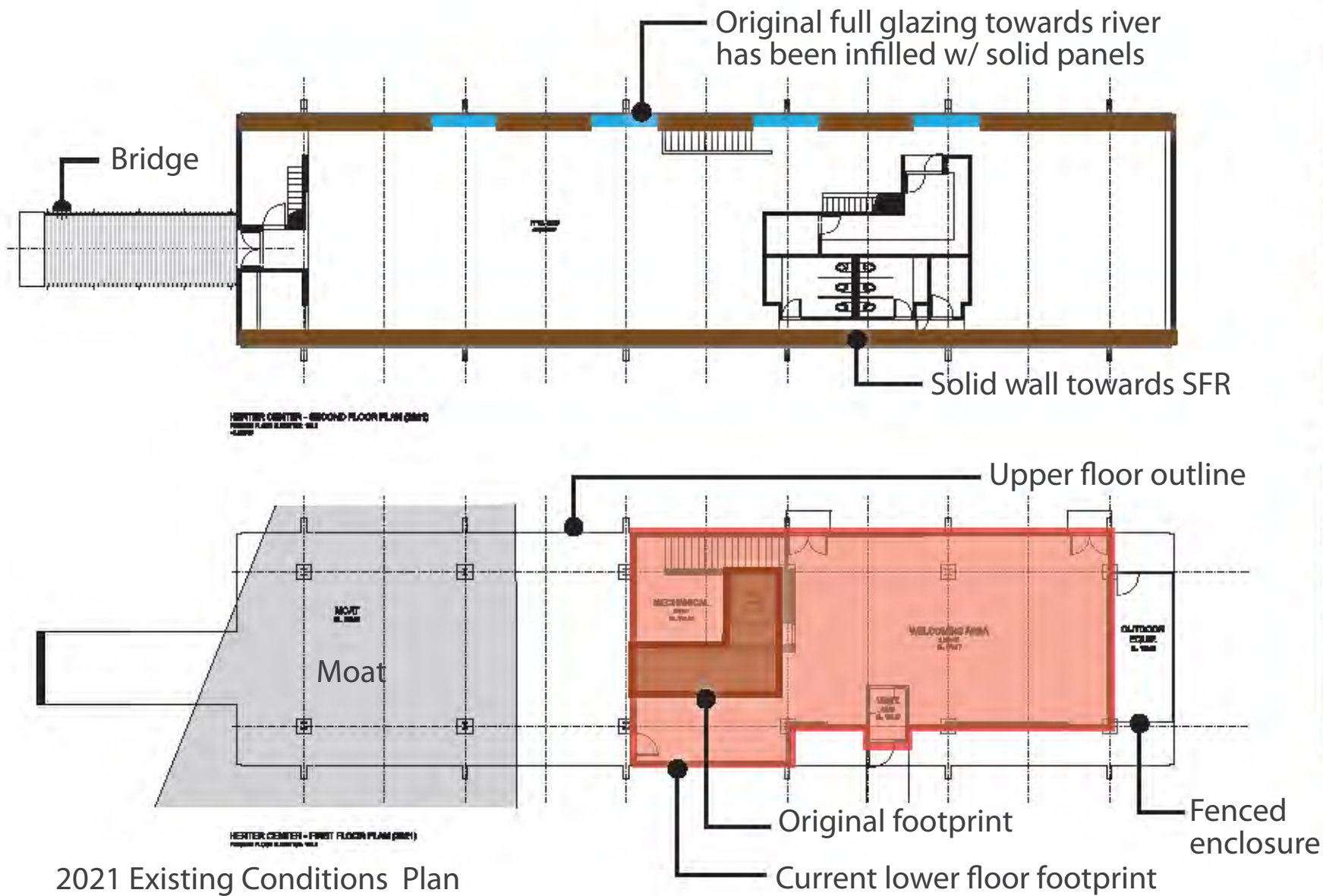
## Challenges:

- Cost of interventions needs to be balanced with other park needs.
- Existing topography is a challenge for ADA accessibility.





# HERTER CENTER: Issues



## What We've Learned:

- The original design had a much smaller footprint consisting of only stairs and restrooms; the space under the upper floor was open.
- The original building had a strong visual connection to the river with its fully glazed facade.
- Current safety regulations require a second means of egress from the upper floor; therefore an elevator will most likely be required.



# HERTER CENTER: Opportunities & Challenges

## Opportunities:

- Rehabilitate Herter Center as a cultural landmark and a functional park facility.
- Development options:
  - Single tenant (≈5,200 SF, on two floors)
  - Single tenant (≈3,800 SF on upper floor) with open covered public space at ground level
  - Two tenants (≈3,800 SF on upper floor and ≈1,400 SF on lower floor)
- Possible program uses discussed in the past include:
  - Herter Amphitheater support space
  - Season cafe / refreshment stand
  - Environmental education center
  - Rowing-related use
  - Public meeting space
  - Art exhibit space.



Visitor pavilion concept at Promenade Samuel-De Champlain, Quebec.



The Dairy Visitor Center, Central Park, New York City, NY



# VISITOR EXPERIENCE: Issues



## What We've Learned:

- The community appreciates the sense of expansive open space, great visual connection to Charles River, and being close to the water.
- In some areas the paths are near the water's edge, but there are no opportunity to get down to the water.
- In the east part the main path is set back from the river, with benches "floating" in the lawn away from the circulation.
- The standard DCR benches need modifications to be ADA compliant .
- There are few user amenities (trash receptacles, drinking fountains).
- Portable toilets and dumpsters near parking lots are not a welcoming sight.



# VISITOR EXPERIENCE: Opportunities & Challenges

## Opportunities:

- Maintain views and vistas to the river, Eliot, and Arsenal St. Bridge.
- Provide varied opportunities to access the water's edge.
- Integrate environmental education opportunities to draw in visitors and educate.
- Design site furnishings placement for universal accessibility.
- Provide visitor amenities such as drinking fountains, trash receptacles, bicycle racks, +and gas-powered grills.
- Consider screening structures for portable toilets and dumpsters.

## Challenges:

- Open vistas vs. planted buffers to deter geese.
- Balance the additional amenities with the added maintenance they require.



Extended paving for accessible seating next to benches.



Informal access at the water's edge - St Lawrence River, Quebec.



Drinking fountain at Smith Playground. The product offers a pet-fountain option.



Screening structure for portable toilets, at Farnham-Connolly State Park, Canton, MA.



# SIGNAGE & WAYFINDING: Issues



## Issues

- Well-designed and well-placed signage helps visitors find their way, promotes a pedestrian-friendly environment, and enhances the park's identity.
- The signage at Herter Park is heavy on Regulatory, Rules and Safety signs. You are told what you can't do, but not given direction as to what you can do.
- **What is Present:**
  - Overabundant Regulatory signs of various types and conditions, using inconsistent templates and multi-sign clustering.
  - Temporary 'The Friends of Herter Park' banner.
  - Ad-hoc Covid-19 and community gardens signage.
- **What is Missing** (When comparing to DCR's Graphic Standards Manual):
  - No **Main Identification Signs** at major public entrances.
  - Few examples of **Secondary Identification Signs**.
  - No **Welcome Waysides / Orientation Signs** (maps).
  - No **Interpretive Waysides** reflecting the history and other interesting aspects of the park.
  - No **Internal Park Information Signs** flagging directions to specific facilities, and
  - No **Contact Station** signs which give at a quick glance some immediate messaging.



# SIGNAGE & WAYFINDING: Issues

## Opportunities

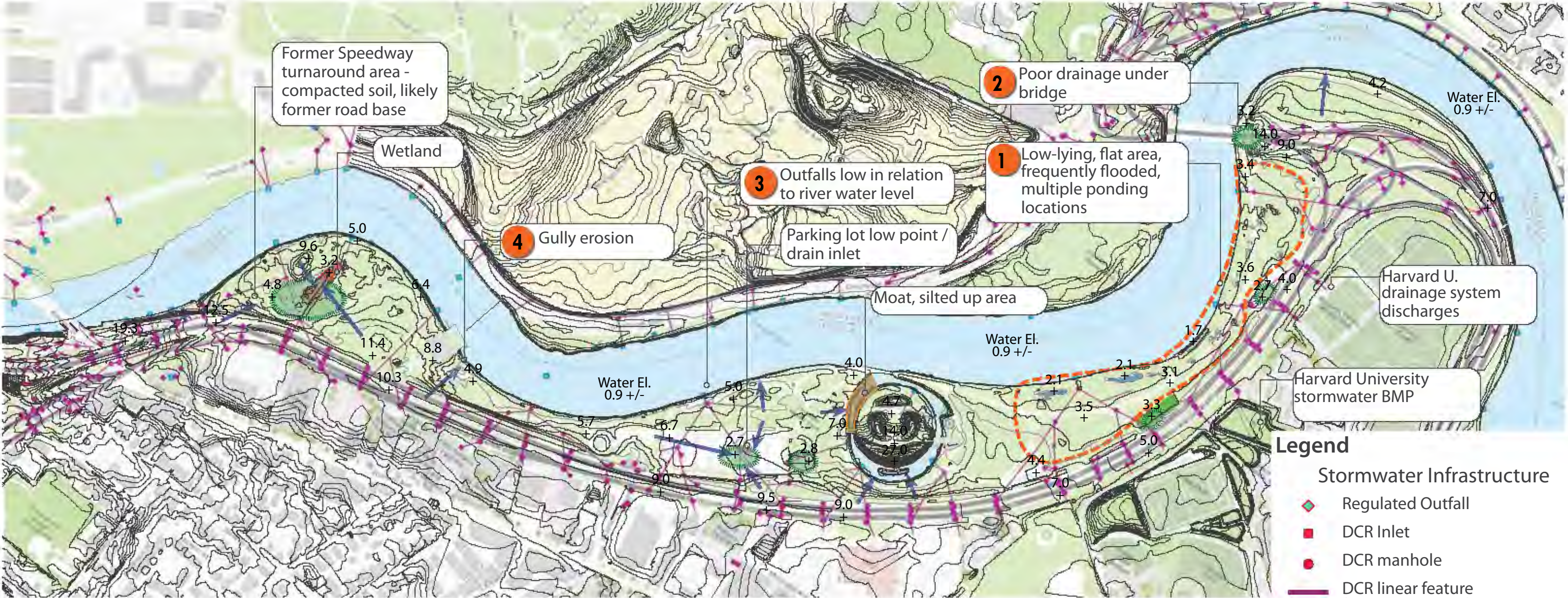
- Develop a clear framework for signage and wayfinding, aligned with the DCR's Graphic Standards Manual;
  - Approach: leads visitors into the park with ease, especially for first-time or infrequent guests.
  - Announce: Mark the entry points clearly.
  - Orient and Direct: help visitors find their way. Help newcomers understand what and where park amenities are.
  - Discover and Inspire: help visitors discover all that the park has to offer. Complement Herter Park's unique and beautiful character, the history of the park, and natural assets.



Examples of signage and wayfinding aligned with the DCR Graphic Standards Manual: at Walden Pond State Reservation, Concord, MA.



# STORMWATER & DRAINAGE: Issues



MassDCR MS4 Web Viewer: Stormwater Infrastructure

**Legend**

**Stormwater Infrastructure**

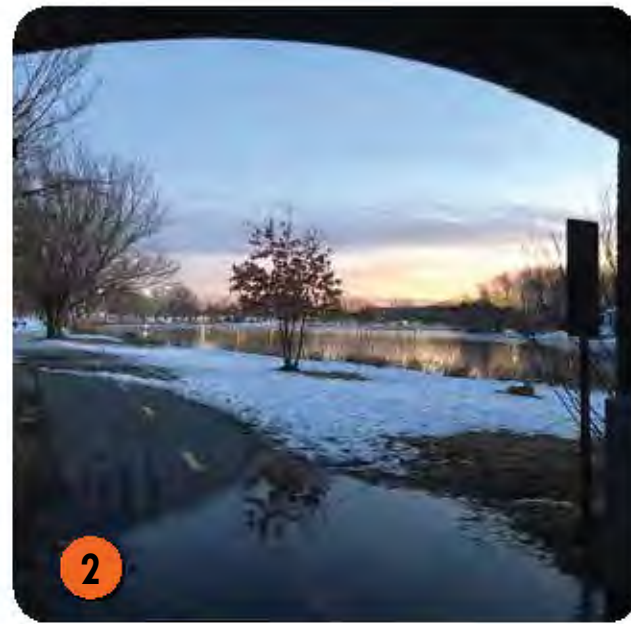
- Regulated Outfall
- DCR Inlet
- DCR manhole
- DCR linear feature (stormwater Pipe)
- Porous Paving

**Drainage Legend**

- Ponding / standing water
- Flagged wetland
- Poorly drained area
- Low-lying, flat area
- Direction of overland flow
- Spot elevation, approx.



# STORMWATER & DRAINAGE: Issues



## What We've Learned

- Historically Charles River was a tidal estuary and the area of Herter Park was marshy terrain. The land was filled during the construction of the Speedway.
- River level is controlled by the Charles River Dam.
- High groundwater leads to ponding of low-lying areas and the parking.
- Park drainage is associated with the Soldiers Field Road drainage infrastructure, and drains into the Charles. Many outfalls are below the river level.
- Artesani parking lot low point is about 2 feet below the top of the nearby river bank; it drains inefficiently.
- Several drain inlets discharge into the moat. This may have contributed to the increased sedimentation.
- At the west end, the existing ground is compacted (possibly remnant Speedway road bed) and drains poorly.
- Surrounding catchment area discharges through Herter Park.



# STORMWATER & DRAINAGE: Opportunities & Challenges

## Opportunities

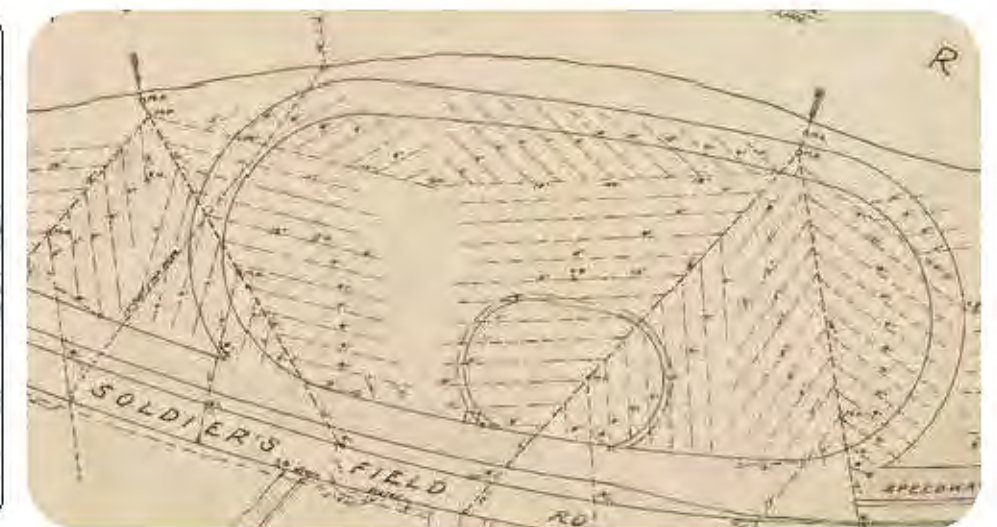
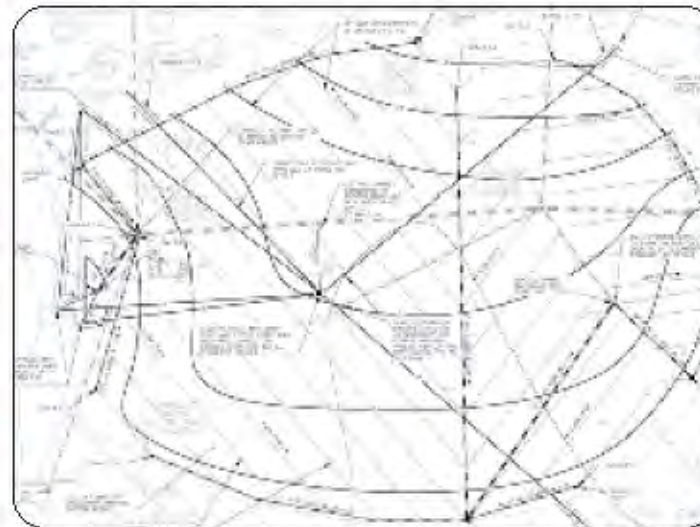
- Include green infrastructure for infiltration, sediment and pollutant removal, lower runoff temperature, and lower peak attenuation (runoff rate).
- Utilize a "kit of parts" - stormwater management strategies that provide an attractive and functional park design:
  - Bioretention swales
  - Surface grading modifications
  - Subsurface drainage at high-use lawn areas
  - Reduction of impervious surfaces
  - Use of vegetation types to slow-down runoff or to "soak up" saturated moisture from soil.

## Challenges

- Climate issues locally and along the river include increasing temperatures & precipitation, more intense storms, and storm surge flooding associated with sea level rise. This impacts the low-lying areas that already flood frequently.
- Insufficient depth to ground water for infiltration.



Example of a stormwater management feature as an attractive park element.



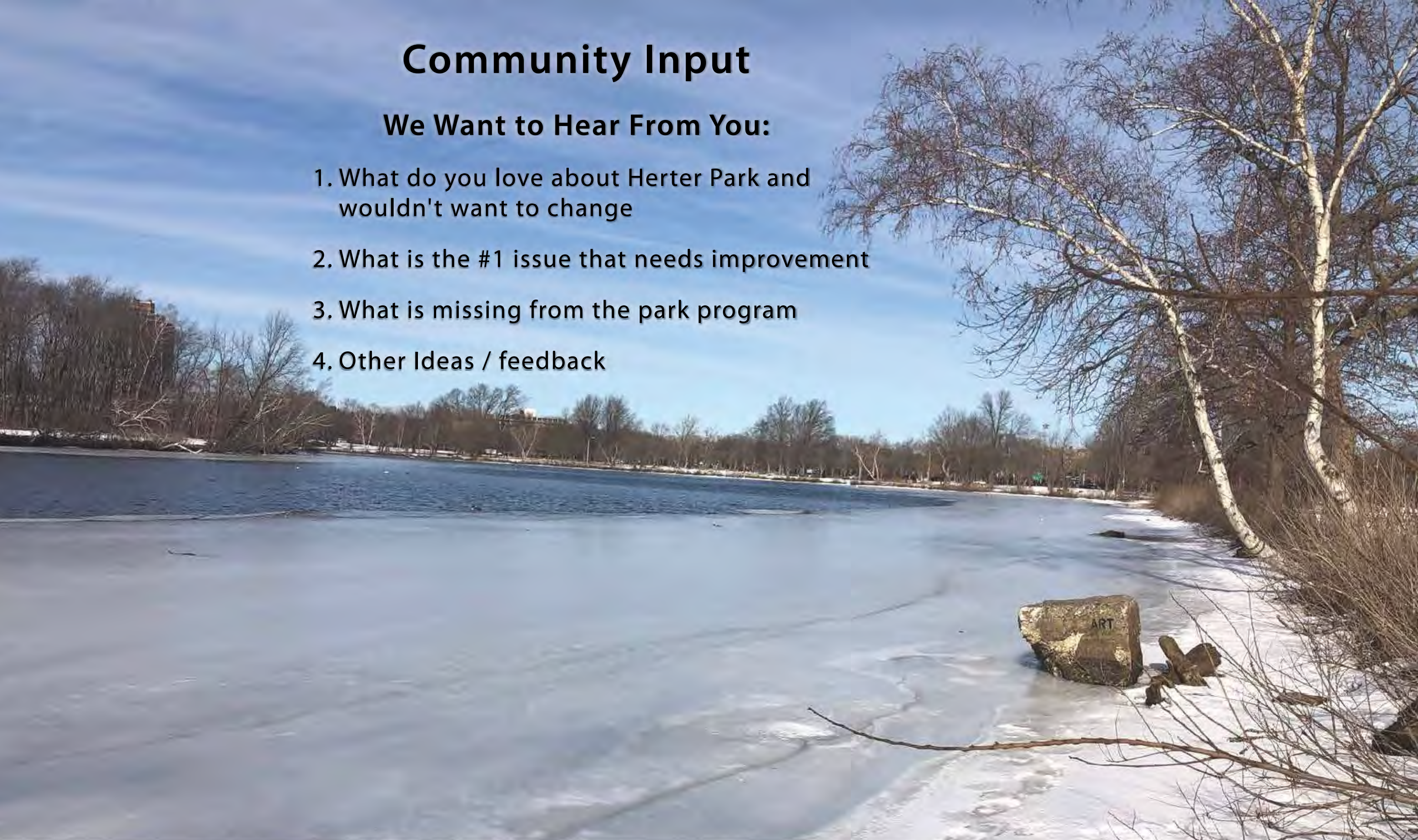
Subsurface drainage for the Hatch Shell lawn, and a historic precedent at the Speedway.



# Community Input

## We Want to Hear From You:

1. What do you love about Herter Park and wouldn't want to change
2. What is the #1 issue that needs improvement
3. What is missing from the park program
4. Other Ideas / feedback





# Next Steps

1. We will synthesize the public input and finalize the Site Analysis report.
2. Over the summer we will work on developing the Draft Master Plan.
3. Public Meeting #2 in the fall to present and receive feedback on the Draft Master Plan, which will inform the Final Master Plan.



# Additional Information

- Recording and tonight's slide deck will be available at:  
*[www.mass.gov/dcr/past-public-meetings](http://www.mass.gov/dcr/past-public-meetings)*
- If you have comments or suggestions on this project:
  - Submit online: *[www.mass.gov/dcr/public-comment](http://www.mass.gov/dcr/public-comment)*
  - Deadline: Thursday, June 24 ,2021
  - Please note: the contents of comments submitted to DCR, including your name, town and zip code, will be posted on DCR's website. Additional contact information provided, notably email address, will only be used for outreach on future updates to the subject project or property.
- If you wish to subscribe to a DCR general information or project-related listserv:
  - Contact DCR's Office of Community Relations via email at: *[mass.parks@mass.gov](mailto:mass.parks@mass.gov)*