

2.3 | Arrival, Circulation and Parking

Getting to Herter Park and circulation within the park rank high among community's concerns and desires for improvement. The analysis of connectivity and internal circulation issues is highlighted in the Circulation Diagrams shown on the following pages. The most pertinent issues are summarized below.

Arrival and Connectivity

Pedestrian / Bicycle Arrival

Presently, there are only two pedestrian/ bicycle access point from the Allston / Brighton neighborhood:

- Signaled crossing at Arsenal Street Bridge intersection, which serves as a connection from Western Avenue and links to the Dr. Paul Dudley White Greenway to the west, but is far from the present core of activities located about 1/2 mile further east.
- Telford Street shared use overpass, which connects the neighborhood to the destination Artesani Playground, is narrow, does not meet ADA requirements, and in deteriorating condition.



Figure 2-18. Currently there are only two safe pedestrian access points to Herter Park from the adjacent neighborhoods: (1) at the intersection of Soldiers Field Road at Arsenal Street Bridge, and (2) the Telford Street overpass.



Figure 2-19. Crosswalk to Herter Park at Everett Street is proposed by several planning studies and is part of DCR's ongoing project for roadway improvements at the Everett / Soldiers Field Road intersection. Image credit: Google.

Missing Neighborhood Connections

- The signalized Everett Street intersection, which is across from the main park entry, lacks a pedestrian crosswalk to the park. There is a strong pedestrian desire line to the park at this location, and it is recommended that a signalized crosswalk should be provided. (The DCR is developing a roadway improvements plan for Everett Street which includes a crossing that aligns with the west side of Everett Street.)
- Further east, several planning studies have recommended a crosswalk connection between the City of Boston Smith Playground and Herter Park, to link these two recreational destinations. The direct link is challenging due to grade differences between Smith Playground and Soldiers Field Road, and the most convenient connection would use the abutter's private property. (A present development proposal for the 1170-1190 site redevelopment does provide this pedestrian path as part of their public realm improvement proposal.)
- At Eliot Bridge, there is no at-grade crossing between the north and south sidewalks. The Dr. Paul Dudley White Greenway loops under the bridge to meet paths through the park; this connection exceeds the ADA slope requirements to serve as an accessible route.

Vehicular Arrival

Main vehicular arrival is from the Soldiers Field Road, across from the Everett Street intersection, via a complex traffic pattern due to the road median on Soldiers Field Road. Eastbound traffic has an inconspicuous left-hand turn into the Artesani Parking Lot. Westbound traffic enters the park via a loop east of the intersection. Everett Street traffic needs to turn left /westbound and then do a quick right into the parking lot.

- The park parking lots (except for Artesani) are accessible by car from the westbound Soldiers Field Road lane. Travelers on the eastbound lane need to do a U-turn near the Eliot Bridge intersection to loop back westbound.
- Artesani Parking Lot serves as the main arrival into the park; its vast paved expanse is a negative visual feature. The entire arrival sequence would benefit from simplification and aesthetic improvements.

Circulation within the Park

Herter Park features a network of paths of various widths shared by pedestrians, persons with disabilities, caregivers with children in strollers, people with on-leash dogs, and bicyclists of various abilities. During maintenance operations and during special events, these paths also serve vehicular circulation such as trucks bearing equipment or trailers for 8-person, 62-foot long rowing boats. The *Circulation: Existing Issues Diagram* on Page 39 illustrates the hierarchy of circulation paths and the issues observed. Below is a summary of findings relating to the circulation.

Path Materials

Most paths are paved with asphalt; there are a few near the river bank, north of Artesani Parking Lot, which have stonedust surfacing, and informal compacted dirt footpaths at the woodland in the west end of the park. A small segment near the Herter Island is a wood boardwalk.

Peripheral Circulation

The sidewalk along the north side of Soldiers Field Road is a segment of the Dr. Paul Dudley White Greenway, a wider network of shared-use paths that extend throughout the Charles River Reservation. It is an important recreational and commuter biking route, and is the only park path that is plowed in winter. Some issues that need to be addressed include the following:

- Its width of 5.5' to 6' does not meet the standards for a two-way shared-use path, which require 10-foot minimum width. The path is situated close to the fast moving traffic, which might discourage some bicyclists from using it and divert them to the park interior paths instead.
- Along the Herter Park frontage, the path crosses vehicular driveways 14 times, each of these requiring special attention to safety. The crossings have been equipped with detectable surfacing, however the few examples observed do not meet the ADA requirements for curb ramps.
- At Eliot Bridge, there is no at-grade crossing. Instead, the path circles down and under the bridge, and then back up via a non-ADA compliant segment.
- There is a lack of signage and wayfinding to inform the path users on directions, points of decision / park connections, and vehicular crossings.



Figure 2-20. Left: Dr. Paul Dudley White Greenway ("winter path") is narrow and too close to the roadway, which encourages bicyclists to use the park paths instead. Right: Within the park, some paths are striped as a visual cue to guide bicyclists away from the more popular river-side paths.



Figure 2-21. Left: Informal dirt paths along the woodland river edge are narrow, overgrown and not ADA accessible. Right: the boardwalk is too narrow for shared-use travel discouraging its desirable use as a sitting node.

Internal Park Circulation

Within the park, the paths are shared by pedestrians and bicyclists. We've heard from the community that pedestrians have often felt unsafe when bicyclists riding at higher speeds pass by or cut in front of them.

- In an attempt to steer the bicyclists away from the more popular paths along the river, some paths were rebuilt wider (10-foot wide) and have been painted with striping as a visual cue of a shared-use path.
- Signage and wayfinding is lacking that could help clarify direction, points of decision, or highlight conflict with other uses.
- The boardwalk is too narrow for its desirable use as a sitting node along with serving as a circulation path.
- At the west end of the park, the compacted dirt footpaths are not accessible and often get soggy due to the poor drainage in the area. Alternative paving materials, such as stabilized stone dust, wood chips trails, or boardwalks, would make this part of the park more user friendly while retaining its informal character.
- The Herter Amphitheater island has only one bridge to the island - a single connection is a safety concern in the context of assembly of large groups of visitors.

Accessibility

Accessibility is a wider topic that is addressed in a separate section in this report. In terms of circulation, the majority of the Herter circulation network meets ADA accessibility standards or could meet them with minor reconstruction of existing paths of inadequate cross slopes. The issues requiring more extensive work due to steep longitudinal slopes include:

- "Goat paths:" Informal footpaths connecting the Soldiers Field Road sidewalk with the park circulation
- Herter Amphitheater: Access paths to the amphitheater as well as slopes within the amphitheater.
- Loop connection from under Eliot Bridge to the surface Dr. Paul Dudley White Greenway at the top of the bridge.

Circulation: Existing Issues Diagram

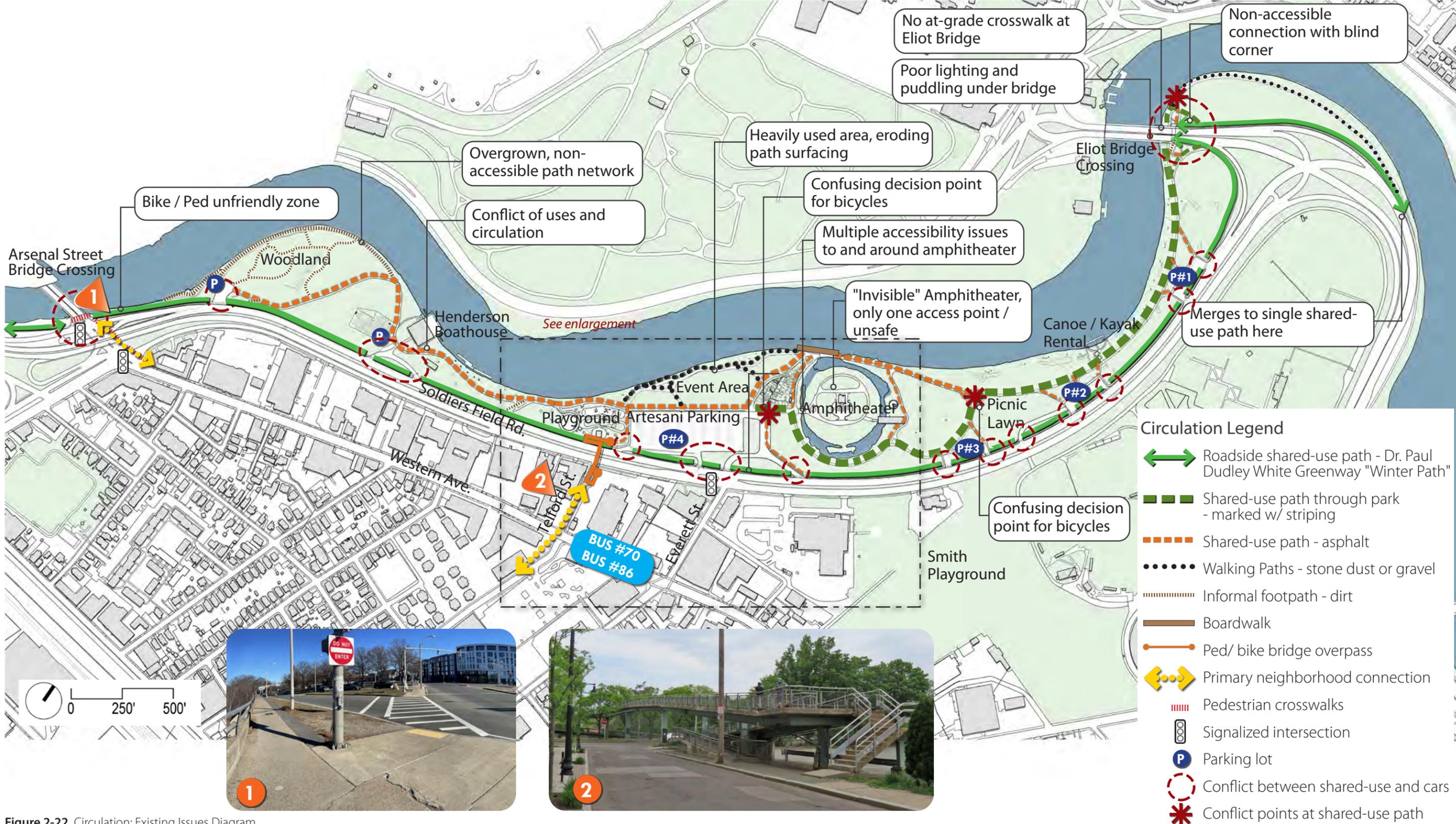


Figure 2-22. Circulation: Existing Issues Diagram.

Circulation: Existing Arrival and Access Diagram

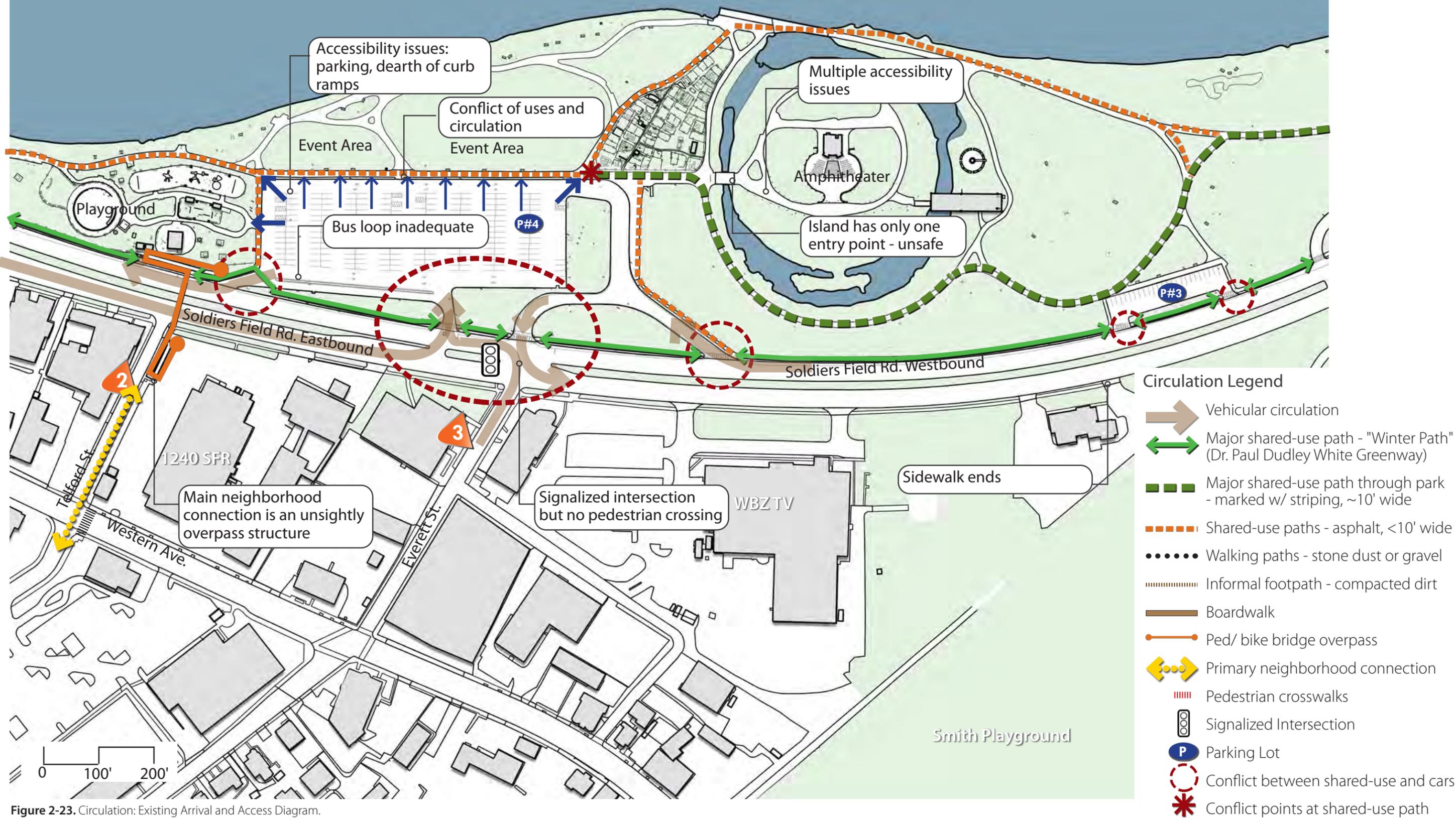


Figure 2-23. Circulation: Existing Arrival and Access Diagram.

Circulation: Opportunities Diagram

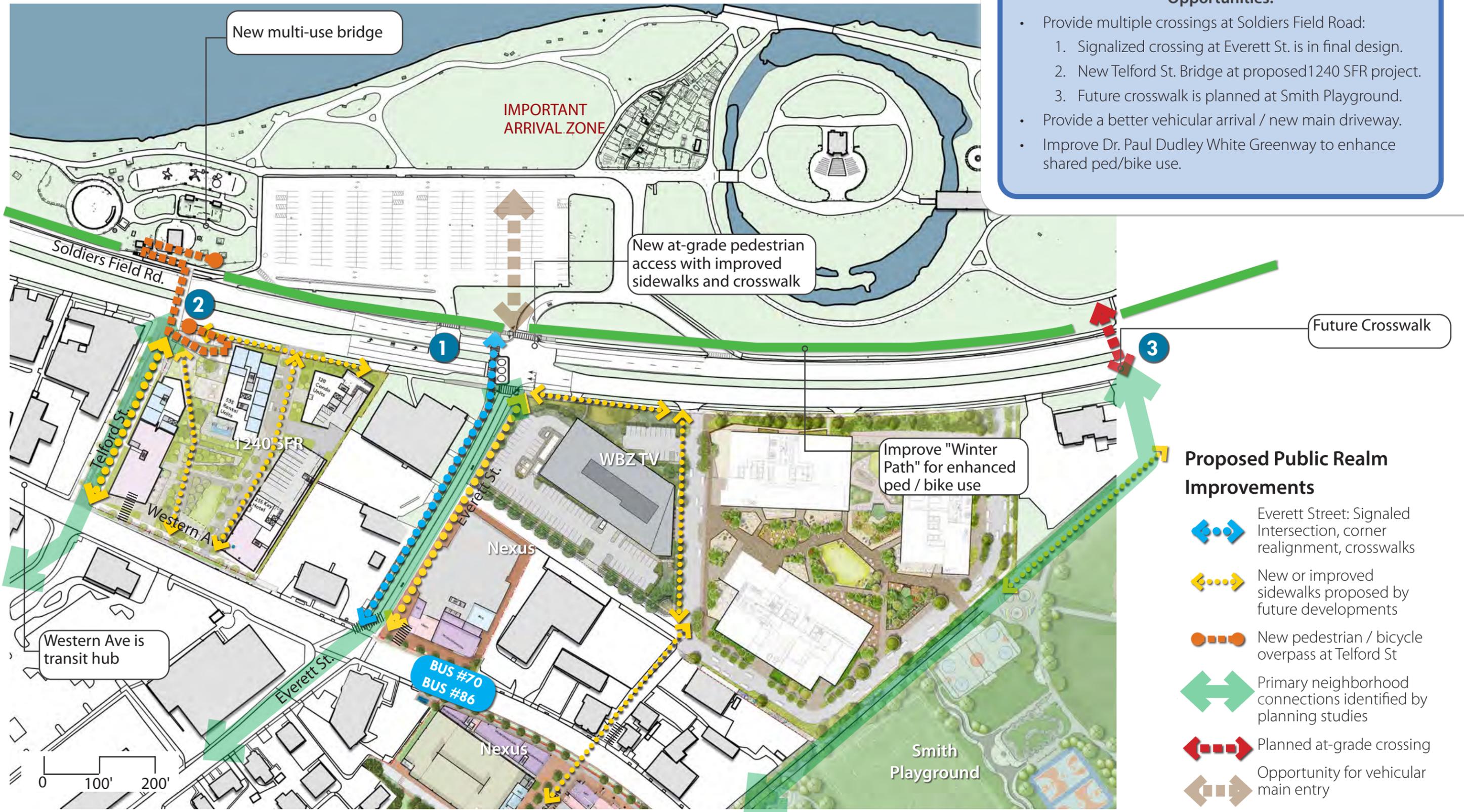


Figure 2-24. Circulation: Opportunities Diagram

Circulation General Recommendations

Some of the circulation issues presented here have already been addressed with recommendations in other recent planning studies; those recommendations provide direction for ongoing development efforts, as well as for this Master Plan. The circulation opportunities can be classified into three broad categories of: Connectivity - improving connections to the Allston / Brighton neighborhoods; Arrival - improving the entries into the park for all modes of transportation; and Circulation - internal park circulation improvements.

The *Circulation Opportunities Diagram* shown on the preceding pages presents some of those opportunities in the central area of the park. Additional opportunities are summarized below.

Connectivity

- Implement vehicular calming measures on Soldiers Field Road:
 - Road Diet (reduction of roadway width, and / or reduction of vehicular lane width, while adding on-road bicycle striped lanes);
 - Intersection redesign at Eliot Bridge Intersection.
- Provide multiple crossings at Soldiers Field Road:
 - Signalized crosswalk at Everett Street;
 - New Telford St. Bridge and / or at-grade crosswalk;
 - New crosswalk at Smith Playground;
 - Future connection west of Telford Street (as part of a future development).

Arrival

- Provide a simplified vehicular arrival - eliminate the “loop” entry and create a new signalized intersection across from Everett Street;
- Reconfigure Artesani Parking Lot with an arrival tree-lined driveway for a more attractive arrival experience;
- Complement traffic reconfiguration with new signage that identifies the park entries and the parking areas; greets and orients visitors upon arrival.

Circulation

- Improve Dr. Paul Dudley White Greenway along Soldiers Field Road as a shared-use path with safety measures integrated in the design, to encourage its use by commuting bicyclists and bypass park interior circulation;
- Provide on-road bike lanes on Soldiers Field Road to diversify the circulation options for bicyclists;
- Within the park, provide wider paths at higher-use areas to allow enough space for all to share;
- Provide universal accessibility;
- Provide a signage and wayfinding system that informs, directs, and educates the park visitors.

For more specific recommended improvements relating to circulation, refer to *Part Three* of this report.

Parking Issues

Parking is a critical part of the visitor arrival to Herter Park. The lack of public transportation nearby (except for the MBTA bus line on Western Avenue), makes driving to the park necessary for many visitors that live far, or are unable to access the park by foot or bike. Resolving the various issues identified as part of this site analysis will go a long way towards creating an improved visitor experience for those arriving by car.

Parking Lot # 4 (Artesani Parking Lot)

The vast Artesani Parking Lot is the “workhorse” of the park. It provides parking for 230 cars, some of which are reserved for Park & Ride users. The parking is currently free, which has led to some misuse by commuters and notably by BB&N students, who park here daily and are taken to their school across the river by the school’s shuttle bus. In addition to parking, the wide paved expanse is useful for staging of various organized events, parking of about 60 rowing boat trailers during the Head of the Charles Regatta (HOCR), and for snow storage in winter.

The Artesani Parking Lot has several issues that need to be addressed as part of this master plan:

- Inadequate drainage: the low points at catch basins are lower than the river bank, and the drain inverts are lower than the discharge into the river. This is causing backups and flooding during larger rain events. There are also no measures that reduce the pollutants prior to the release of stormwater into the Charles.
- Accessibility Issues: inadequate number of accessible parking spaces and accompanying signage, and lack of accessible curb ramps onto the adjacent sidewalks.
- Aesthetics and visitor comfort: visually the wide expanse of parking is unappealing; the lack of shade over it is unpleasant in summer.



Figure 2-25. Artesani parking lot is essential for parking of rowing boat trailers during the Head of the Charles Regatta. Image credit: HOCR.



Figure 2-26. Flooding issues at Parking Lot #1 (left), and filtered river views at the West End parking (right).

Parking Lots #1 to #3

The three parking lots east of Herter Center serve the popular picnic grounds and the canoe and kayak rental facility.

- Each of these lots has drainage and flooding issues, as well as an inadequate number of accessible parking spaces.
- These parking lots (especially #2) are also used for trailer parking during Head of the Charles Regatta in addition to parking lot #4 (Artesani) as shown in the image. Small size and turning constraints make these lots unsuited for trailer access and adjacent parkland often gets damaged. Also, boat trailers attempting tight turns to park accelerate deterioration of parking lot surfaces and pavement markings.

Parking at Henderson Boathouse

At present the vehicular loop at the boathouse has an informal gravel parking area that is used by the boathouse patrons, community garden users, as well as the high school rowing clubs that utilize the adjacent garage area. There are several drainage issues and a circulation conflict where a sharp turn on the shared use path crosses vehicular circulation from the parking to the boathouse entrance.

Northeastern University, who owns the boathouse, is building a parking lot within the area that is subject to their Memorandum of Understanding with the DCR; the approved design provides circulation improvements and stormwater BMPs such as porous paving, subsurface drains, and bioretention.

West End Parking

The small 8-car parking lot near Arsenal Street Bridge is a remnant of the historic Speedway loop. The parking has direct access to the woodland trails and attractive water views, but the adjacent area is overgrown, mostly with invasive plants, with poor visibility. Entrance to the lot is very wide and steep, and should be reconfigured for a safer crossing of the Dr. Paul Dudley White Greenway. The Charles River Conservancy has a truck and a metal container (“Conex” box) parked at this lot, which are used by this partner organization and its volunteers to do occasional park cleanups. The Conex box should be given a more permanent location.

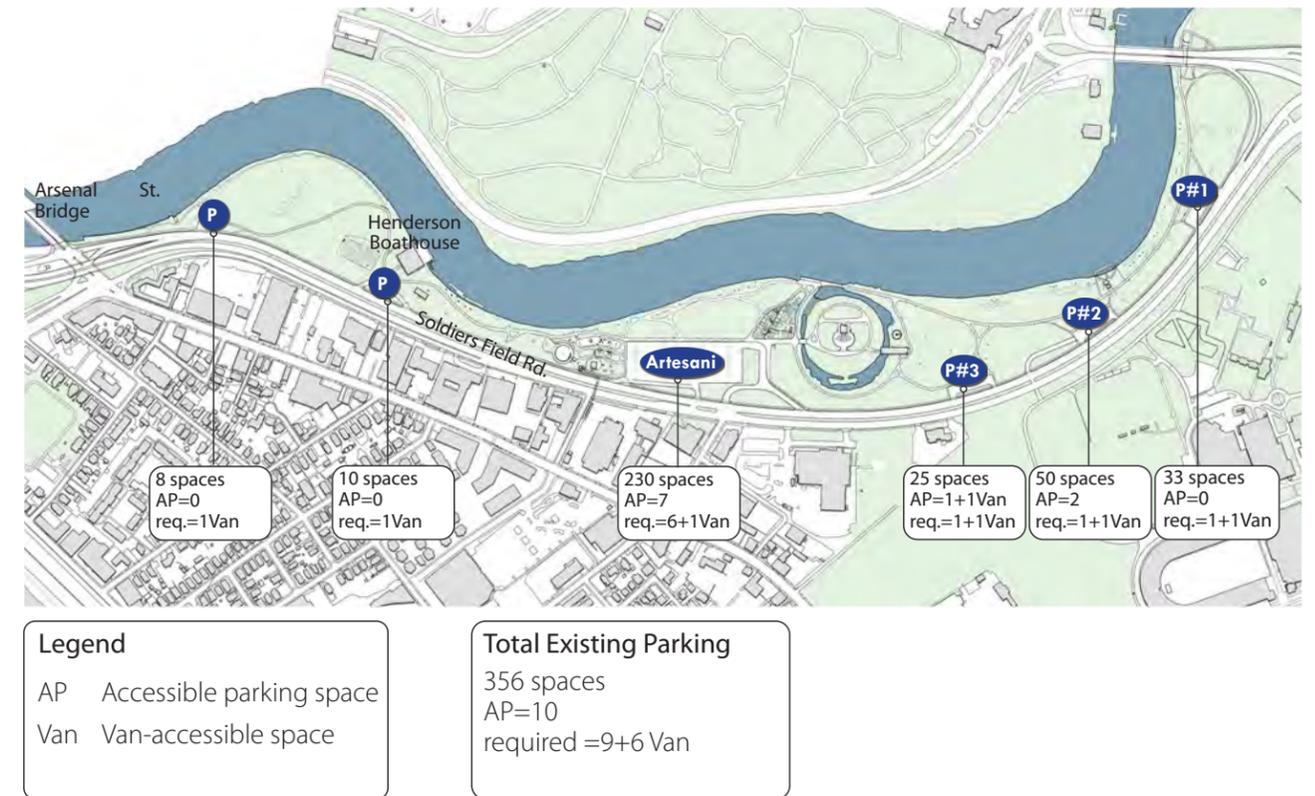


Figure 2-27. Existing parking lots location and number of parking spaces, including existing and required accessible spots.

Parking General Recommendations

The community, the stakeholders, and the DCR have expressed the importance of parking lots for the functioning of Herter Park. While this master plan explores ways to expand arrival opportunities by foot or by bike, it is not anticipated that the demand for parking will diminish in the near future. Therefore the recommendation is to preserve the overall number of parking spaces and possibly expand it somewhat where the plan proposes new uses. Below is a summary of opportunities related to parking.

- Reconfigure Artesani Parking Lot:
 - Integrate with a new entrance drive and promenade for an attractive arrival.
 - Ensure that the driveway and parking lot configuration allows vehicles and rowing boat trailers to safely enter, park, and exit during the Head of the Charles Regatta, and other special events.
- Parking Lots #1 to #3:
 - Reconfigure and regrade the lots to resolve drainage issues, and provide green infrastructure stormwater treatment measures. Due to high groundwater conditions in parkland adjacent to the river, parking lots with permeable pavement surfaces may remain wet or flooded during high groundwater conditions and thus permeable pavement surfaces may not be suitable where groundwater elevations are close to parking lot surface elevations.
 - Ensure that driveway radii and parking configuration allows larger vehicles typically used during park events can safely enter and exit the parking lots. Consider new circulation or parking configurations or provisions for the boat trailers during events.
- Reconfigure Henderson Boathouse parking:
 - Improve parking, enhance the safety of pedestrians and bicycle circulation, and provide green infrastructure stormwater treatment measures.
 - Potentially expand the parking beyond the area that is within the Northeastern Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the DCR, to serve the community garden and other park visitors.

- West End Parking Improvements:
 - Reconfigure the overly-wide entrance for a safer crossing along the Dr. Paul Dudley White Greenway.
 - Provide a more permanent location for the Charles River Conservancy's truck and Conex storage container.
 - Maintain overgrown and invasive vegetation according to the CRVMP for an enhanced sense of safety.
 - West End Parking area may be a suitable parking lot for permeable pavement as it may be adequately above groundwater elevations.
- Accessibility improvements for all parking lots:
 - Ensure that the adequate quantity, layout, slope, and types (regular, van) of accessible parking spots are provided along with required striping and signage.
 - Provide multiple accessible curb ramps to adjacent sidewalks and park paths.
- Signage and wayfinding improvements for all parking lots:
 - Provide consolidated Rules and Regulations and other required signage, to replace the present clusters of individual regulatory signs.
- Stormwater management for all parking lots:
 - Provide green infrastructure and nature-based solutions for stormwater treatment.
- Snow management plan: Follow *DCR's Snow Management Plan* that is posted on the DCR website.

For specific recommended improvements to each parking lot and its surrounding areas - see *Part Three: Master Plan Recommendations*.

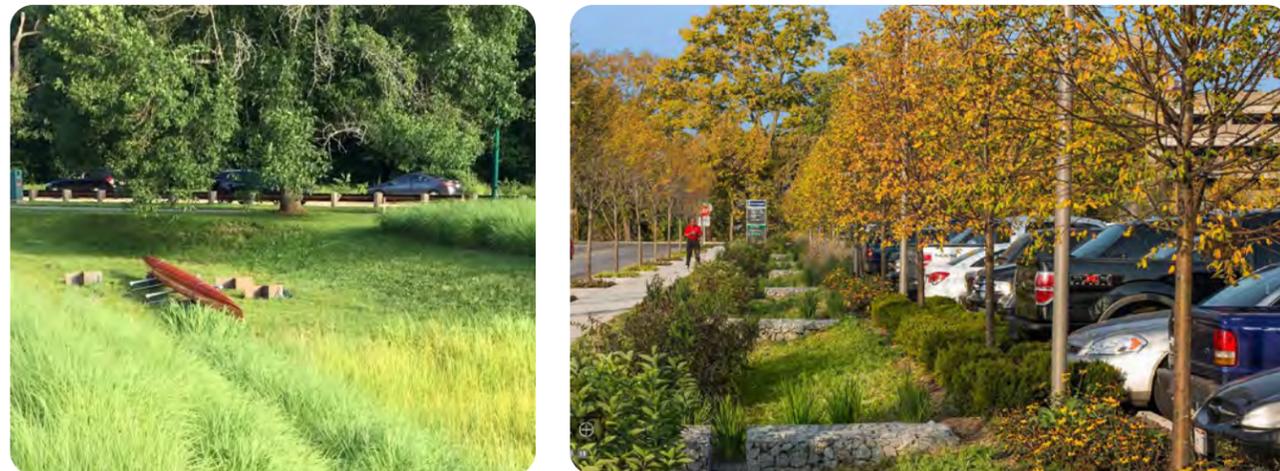


Figure 2-28. Examples of green infrastructure for treatment of parking stormwater runoff: Bioretention swales at Harry Parker Boathouse, Brighton, MA (left) and Christ Hospital, Cincinnati OH (right). Image credit (left): DCR, (right): www.OJB.com.

2.4 | Site Features and Built Facilities

Master Plan Area

Herter Park is a part of the Charles River Reservation located in the Brighton neighborhood of Boston. The plan area extends from Arsenal Street Bridge to include the “teardrop” of land past Eliot Bridge. Soldiers Field Road defines the south edge of the park with its 4-lane, fast-moving traffic, presenting a formidable barrier to direct pedestrian access from the adjacent neighborhood.

Across the Charles River to the north are the Cambridge Cemetery and Mount Auburn Cemetery; together with the Charles River Reservation lands their open spaces play a vital ecological and cultural role within the dense urban environment. Across from Soldiers Field Road, to the east of Everett Street, the land is primarily active recreation open space comprising of Harvard University’s large playing fields and sports facilities, and the City of Boston Smith Playground. West of Everett Street there is a zone of mixed commercial buildings of varying heights; recent and proposed development will transform the scale and character of the neighborhood along the park’s south side.

Herter Park Stats

- 56-acre open space
- 1.6 miles (8,535 linear feet) of Charles River bank
- 0.5 miles (2,640 linear feet) of moat bank
- 0.44-acres inland wetland resource areas
- 3.3-acres Special Flood Hazard Areas subject to inundation from the 1% annual chance flood (per FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Map)
- 1.5 miles of curblines at Soldiers Field Road
- 83 feet typical width from curb to curb at Soldiers Field Road

West End Site Features and Facilities

Arsenal Street Bridge anchors the west end of the park. The sidewalk /shared use path from the Arsenal Street Bridge is one of the three main pedestrian access points to the park (the other two being the Telford Street Overpass, and the access from Eliot Bridge). The parkland east of the bridge is a narrow strip of wooded, steeply sloping terrain; at its base, along the river’s edge, is a concrete embankment wall with a metal guardrail. A paved area in the vicinity serves as parking for 8 cars; its layout coincides with the end of the former Charles River Speedway loop; the rest of the loop was long abandoned and any vestiges obliterated by successional vegetation.



Figure 2-29. View west to Arsenal St. Bridge (left). View east showing a derelict outfall structure along with attractive river views.



Figure 2-30. Renovated Charles River Speedway Headquarters, as seen from Herter Park.

Across the Soldiers Field Road from this parking lot is the **Speedway Headquarters**, an attractive shingle-style historic building, which was recently renovated and features a brewery, community and retail uses. A direct pedestrian connection between the Speedway Headquarters and Herter Park across the Soldiers Field Road would be desirable, but is it not feasible because of the road on- and off-ramps and retaining walls.

The West End gives the impression of having a lower level of maintenance than the more active areas to the east; the unkempt edges of the parking lot, and especially the filled with debris outfall structure, graffiti, lack of vegetation management, and erosion contribute to this perception. Public process participants have mentioned “illicit activities” in the area. On the other hand, the area offers attractive views to the river; along with its historic remnants and visual connections to the Speedway HQ, there are excellent opportunities to revitalize this end of the park as a river view node with historic interpretation.

The Woodland: The segment between the Arsenal Bridge parking lot and the Henderson Boathouse to the east is a wooded area webbed with an informal footpath network. A dirt trail traces the curved edge of the river to the north, and the paved path to the south veers off of the Soldiers Field Road sidewalk and towards the boathouse. Both the paved path and the sidewalk are considered segments of the **Dr. Paul Dudley White Greenway (DPDW)**; but only the sidewalk is plowed in winter so it is commonly referred to as the “winter path.”

In the original Speedway design this area was the west turnaround of a gravel racing loop, along with ancillary buildings and facilities -see ‘Herter Park and Soldiers Field Road with the Speedway Layout Overlay’ on Page 24. After the park redesign in 1959, the speedway loop was abandoned, but it appears that the gravel bed was not removed - DCR field staff has encountered highly compacted stone aggregate soils in the area, which suggests that landscape restoration was not done adequately at the time. In the vegetated areas there are also scattered pieces of granite, concrete overturned bench remnants, and other potential historic features.

The poor drainage present here could be a result of such compacted soils, or a combination of natural hydrology and man-made disturbances. A bordering vegetated wetland at the center of the woodland was outlined by Tighe&Bond’s field staff in April of 2021; it collects surface runoff that sheets over the main path from the adjacent land to the east. Resolving the drainage is one of the issues that need to be addressed in the master plan. Another issue is the presence of extensive monocultures of invasive plants, which are described in greater detail in the Vegetation section. There are also two active monitoring wells in this area, which monitor a slow-moving plume of chlorinated VOC’s that originate from across the street (1420 SFRD – MDC State Barracks and Labor Yard).

Existing Built Facilities



1 Henderson Boat House



2 The Garage / High School Rowing



3 Artesani Playground Comfort Station



4 Herter Center



5 Canoe & Kayak Rental

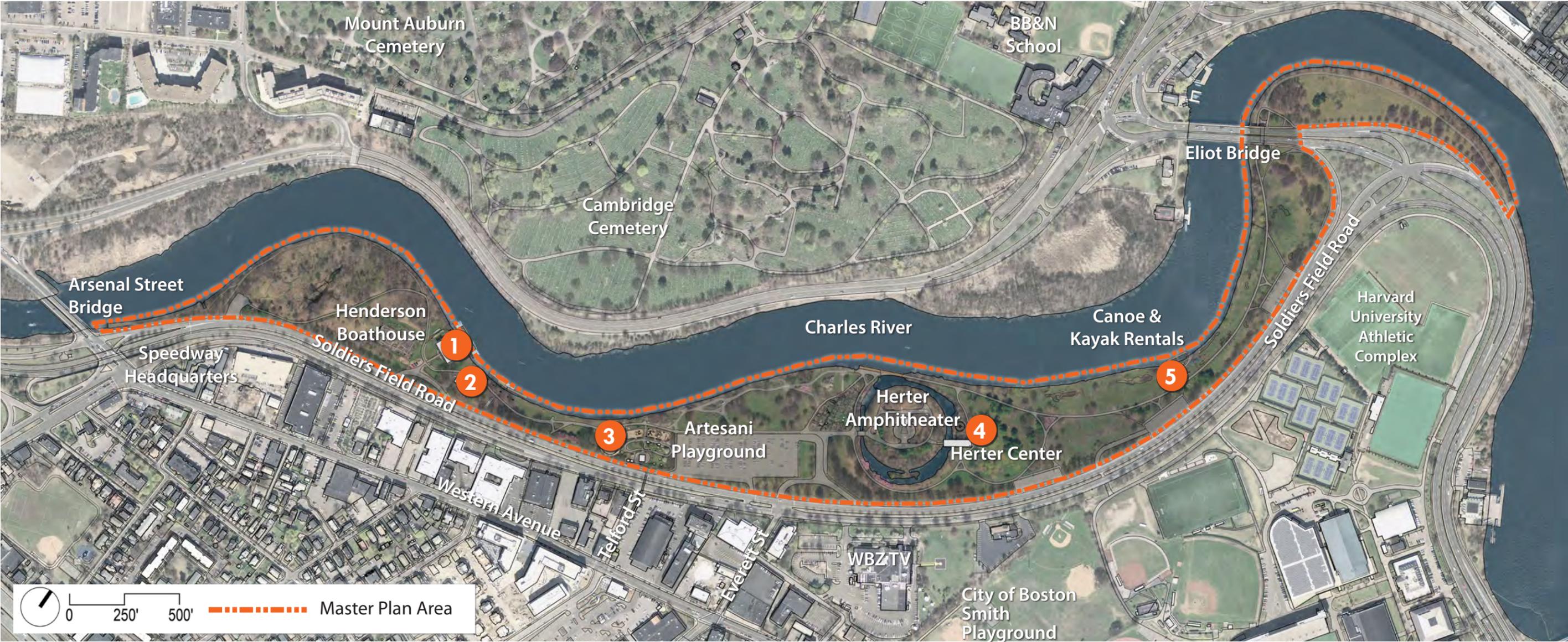


Figure 2-31. Existing built facilities.

Existing Prominent Site Features



1 Arsenal Street Bridge



2 Community Gardens



3 Artesani Playground and Spray Park



4 Herter Amphitheater



5 Eliot Bridge



Figure 2-32. Existing prominent site features.



Figure 2-33. Landscape character of the Woodland: Areas of denser trees are intertwined with areas of meadow.

The Woodland presents a wilder, more naturalistic character, which is rare in the immediate urban context and appreciated by many park visitors. However, invasive plant species are present throughout this area. Some public process participants expressed the desire to “clean up” the overgrowth, but to keep it as a “wild place.” A program of invasive species control following the CRVMP will enhance the area as a valuable wildlife habitat.

East of the Woodland, the curving park path brings the visitor to a cluster of uses concentrated around the Henderson Boathouse, which include the Charles River Community Gardens, an older garage / storage building and parking. Improving the parking, circulation, drainage, and usage conflict in this area are an important objective of the master plan, along with a study of how the high school rowing program could be accommodated on the site.

Henderson Boathouse (built 1989) is the home to Northeastern University’s Men & Women’s Rowing team, providing boat storage, boat ramp and a floating dock for water sheet access. This is not a publicly accessible facility, and is a subject to a lease agreement with the DCR.

The **Charles River Community Garden**, established in 1980, occupies an area of 0.5 acres (21,780 sf) surrounded by a chain link fence. The garden is accessed from the Henderson Boathouse parking lot, which sometimes creates usage conflict. Along the edges of the garden are encroaching invasive species such as purple loose strife and glossy buckthorn, which are present throughout the wider area; and along the south side there are areas of decomposing garden debris and escaped garden plants such as comfrey and daylilies. This highly disturbed area has the potential to expand the parking to serve the garden and visitors to the west end of the park.

The **Garage** building east of Henderson Boathouse is an older concrete block structure built as operational support. Without a formal agreement with the DCR, it is currently used as storage for the Boston Latin and Brookline High School rowing programs, serving about 240 students between their two programs. The facility is not code-compliant for accessibility and does not provide running water or restrooms. Rowing shells are stored on racks outside the building, often in a haphazard manner, contributing to visual clutter. To access the river, the students need to carry the shells across the main path to the bank, crossing paths with pedestrians and bicyclists using the path, and causing soil compaction and erosion. The high school rowing stakeholders have expressed a desire for a more suitable facility, preferably as an exclusive facility for Boston’s public high school rowing. This could allow better access to the sport for public school students.

Central Area Site Features and Facilities

Artesani Playground, designated by an act of Legislature in 1962 as Richard T. Artesani Memorial Playground, and updated in 2019, is one of the most popular destination in the park. It draws families to its two recently renovated play enclosures, wading pool and spray deck, and picnic table areas with grills, which can be reserved for bigger parties. The wading pool recirculates the water while the spray pool drains to sanitary sewer. The adjacent **Comfort Station**, open seasonally, offers the park’s only permanent restrooms. Adjacent to the pool, two temporary shed structures provide a break room for the life guards and storage; the DCR Aquatic program has expressed the need to consolidate these uses into a permanent structure. Providing shade for the pool waiting area would help enhance the user experience.

Artesani Parking Lot is the park’s “workhorse,” providing parking for 230 cars including 7 accessible spaces and several designated ‘park and ride’ spaces (see *Chapter 2.3: Arrival, Circulation and Parking*), with convenient access to the Artesani playground, the Herter Theater and the adjacent picnic areas. Its paved expanse is useful for staging of boat trailers for the Head of the Charles Regatta, and for DCR’s snow storage. Issues that need to be addressed include stormwater management and improvements to accessibility, as well as aesthetic improvements.

Next to the parking lot is a lawn area surrounded with mature shade trees, which is a popular picnic and event lawn. Night Shift Brewery has used one corner in summer as a beer garden. A stonedust paths meanders close to the river bank. The Head of the Charles Regatta finish line marker is a granite monument set near the bank. Some of the issues observed here are compaction in the root zone of the shade trees, and circulation conflicts due to the bicycle usage of the stonedust paths which were intended primarily for pedestrian use. There is also major erosion between the path and the bank, which at sections is devoid of vegetation, leading to unfiltered stormwater runoff into the river.

The **Herter Community Garden**, founded in 1976, is a chain-link fence enclosed area of about 0.64 acres (27,700 sf) located to the west of the moat. Its area closest to the river is a separate Pollinator Garden, which is enclosed with a fence and locked gate and not accessible to the general public. The garden is sited in a heavily used area of the park, and the gardeners’ activities sometimes conflict with park events and circulation. Because of its cluttered appearance, and its edges overgrown with garden escapees, the Herter Community Garden does not contribute to a welcoming character at the park arrival. The plan should explore improvements to its accessibility and appearance.

The Island, surrounded by a circular moat, is a unique landscape feature that distinguishes Herter Park. Envisioned in the late 1950s to be the site of the Metropolitan Boston Arts Center (MeBAC), the original concept included a tent-covered theater on the island. However, the tent structure was short-lived, and since then the theater has



Figure 2-34. Wading pool at Artesani Playground (left)(Image credit: DCR) and the Artesani Parking Lot (right).



Figure 2-35. Herter Park's hidden treasures: the Amphitheater hidden behind a landscaped berm as seen from the island bridge (left) , and the Memorial Garden dedicated to Christian A. Herter and his wife (right).

operated as an open-air summer venue. The Friends of Herter Park have recently revived the programming of **Herter Amphitheater**; however this use has been limited by the lack of storage, restroom facilities, and cover over the stage. Spatially, the Amphitheater feels as an isolated enclave in the heart of the park - largely invisible to the casual park visitors and difficult to get to for people with reduced mobility. Its single-bridge access is a potential hazard in case of an emergency. The deteriorated paving, lack of suitable lighting, invasive vegetation, and the stagnant moat with mosquitoes, all detract from the enjoyment of what should be celebrated as a unique and attractive setting. On the positive side, the moat supports habitat for multiple species including turtles and migratory birds.

The **Herter Center**, an extraordinary example of mid-century modern architecture, spans over the moat on the east side of the island. Originally designed to be the Institute of Contemporary Art gallery space, the rectangular structure faces the river with a glass facade. A photo of its early days shows a prominent bi-colored triangular pattern on the wall facing Soldiers Field Road - today, that side is a nondescript brown that blends rather than contrasts with the mature vegetation around it. The original open ground floor was infilled years later to become an enclosed ground floor that has bathrooms and office space, while the large upstairs room has most of the river-facing windows blocked off to natural light and views. The second floor is accessible from the island / amphitheater area, via a rusting narrow bridge and an uninviting single door.

The structure has been vacant for years; previous uses occupying the space suffered from lack of visitors to make them financially successful. However, with its compelling design, location, and views, Herter Center deserves another chance for renewed public use. Substantial renovation of the building will be required.

North of the Herter Center is a shady garden with a circular seat wall, a **memorial to Christian A. Herter and his wife Mary Caroline Herter**. This is a space that feels quiet and off-the-beaten-path, even as it is close to bustling park areas. A new use for the Herter Center is likely to change its character, making it more active and visible.

The **boardwalk** that crosses the moat and over the bank of the Charles River is a popular area for sitting, birdwatching, and fishing - but it is also one of the worst pinch points in the park. The boardwalk carries almost all of the foot and wheeled traffic passing through Herter Park, making it the site of frequent conflicts. The boardwalk functions as a bridge but there is insufficient clearance under the boardwalk for canoes or kayaks to reach the moat.

East Area Site Features and Facilities

East Lawn: From the Herter Center east to Eliot Bridge the park is a low lying parkland with a single pedestrian-bicycle path down the middle. This is a popular destination for strolling, picnicking, volleyball, and family gatherings - a member of the public vividly described the vibrant scene as a “park in a French Impressionist painting”.

Yet this is also an area that is prone to flooding and frequent ponding between the main path and the river bank, as shown on the Park Overview Map. This coincides with the prime location for the Head of the Charles Regatta, with viewing tents crowded along the bank, exhibitor tents along the main path, and various lawn areas used for temporary parking of cars, trucks and trailers. The poor drainage / ponding could be the result of years of compaction associated with this and other special events hosted in the area combined with high groundwater.

East of Herter Center, a few massive willow trees, some of them partially fallen (most likely due to age), provide wonderful opportunities for play. Clusters of park benches are placed in the lawn near the shoreline, but are not connected with a walking path and are therefore not accessible, especially as the lawn around them is often soggy. Some park benches are missing but their foundations remain. The fringe of shrubby bank vegetation was historically cut down in the fall, for the Head of the Charles Regatta, growing back quickly the next season and often concealing water views. As of 2021, and in compliance with the CRVMP, the non native and/or nuisance vegetation is trimmed to 24” and only cut shorter where the event installs their temporary docks.

The **Paddle Boston Public Boat Rental** offers access to the water sheet. Visitors can rent a canoe or kayak or bring their own. Although dock is publicly accessible for kayaks, members of the public have expressed that there should be more boat launches.

Further east past Eliot Bridge the park path loops back steeply to rejoin with the Dr. Paul Dudley White Greenway along Soldiers Field Road. The river bends sharply, offering the potential for a scenic viewing spot, but the banks are densely vegetated with trees, limiting views. A gravel path runs along the river, with a larger lawn area towards the road. This is a more lightly used part of the park probably because of its remoteness from parking and other facilities. The area has great potential for a more naturalistic type of landscape. The DCR is currently testing meadow seed mixes at two test plots (6A and 6B) in this area as part of the DCR *“Charles River Vegetation Management Plan (CRVMP)”*.

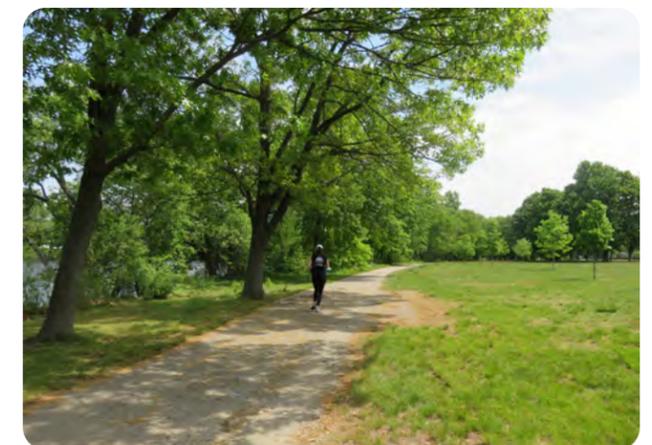


Figure 2-36. The East Lawn is a popular picnic area (left). Past Eliot Bridge the park has a more informal character with a gravel path and wooded banks (right).