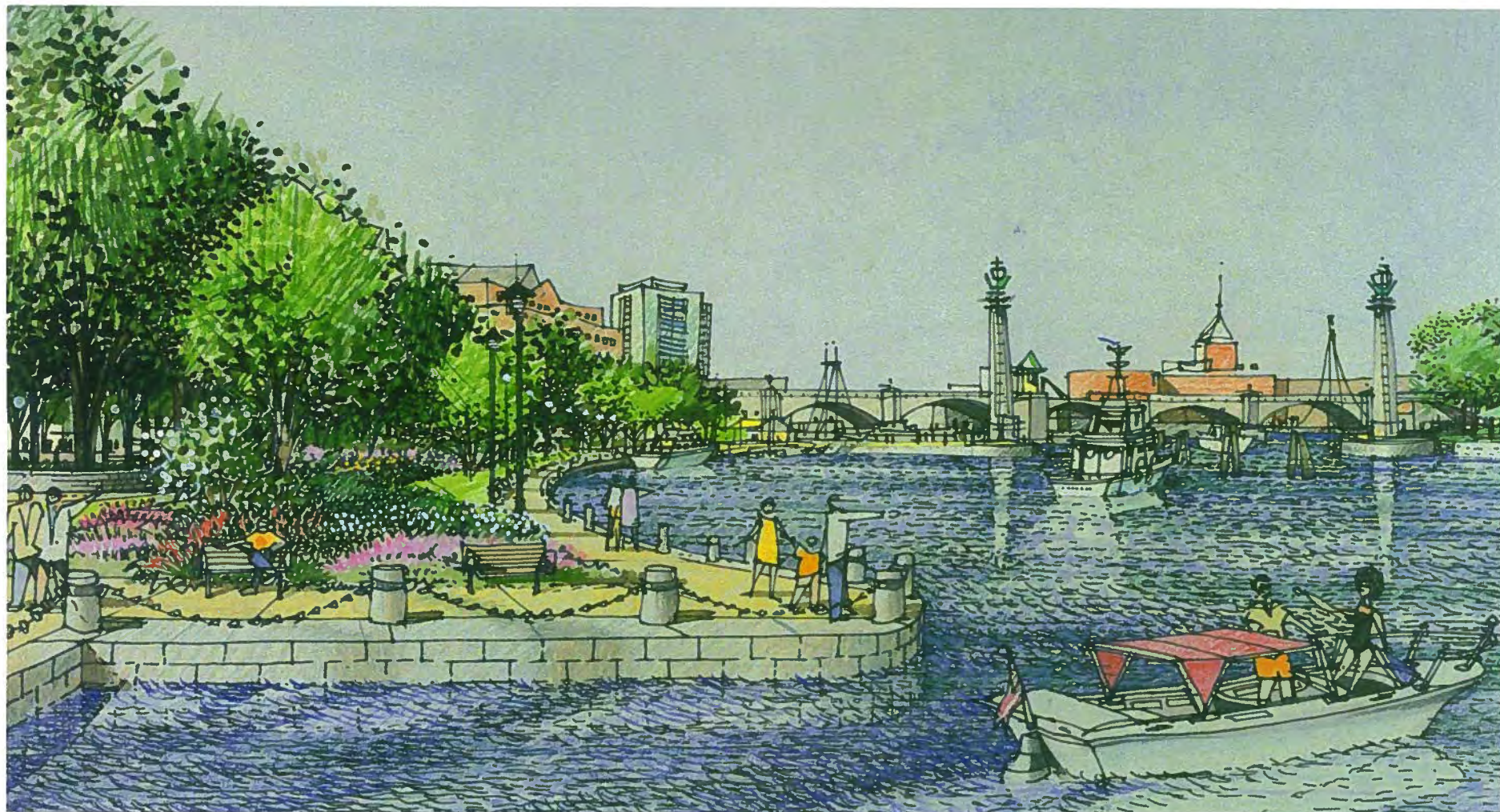


# NEW CHARLES RIVER BASIN

C H A R L E S R I V E R R E S E R V A T I O N



*The New Charles River Basin will transform the "lost half mile" of the river and provide continuous waterfront esplanades, green parks, and a variety of recreational and interpretive opportunities at the center of the Metropolitan Park System. From the railroad bridges that cross the river near North Station, views of the Nashua Meadows open out to the beacons and the Green Line viaduct upstream. Beyond the viaduct are the towers of Charles River Park and the Museum of Science.*

## THE VISION

The New Charles River Basin will complete the Metropolitan Park System's famed water park, reshaping the river and its banks in the lost half mile between the existing Charles River Esplanades and Boston's HarborPark. It will change the image of the river and the city. The mouth of the Charles, now obscured by dams, bridges, and derelict industry, will be rediscovered and celebrated. Over the next ten to fifteen years, these presently under-used and disjointed edges of Boston and Cambridge will be knit into a lively urban district, centered on a new recreational resource comparable in its impact to the creation of the Emerald Necklace in the late 19th century and the Boston waterfront renewal in the mid 20th century.

Over forty acres of parklands will offer broad green meadows, colorful plantings, and stately trees, as well as plazas, walkways, and bike paths on lands which are now mostly in public ownership. The Boston and Cambridge Esplanades will be connected along the river to HarborPark and the Freedom Trail. The large-scale engineering works—

bridges, dams, pumping stations, locks, and viaducts—will be set off and complemented by the powerful sweeps of parkland and water.

Three miles of tree-shaded bikeways will be built, together with almost four miles of pathways within the parklands and at the water's edge, across and under viaduct, rail, and bridge barriers. New walkways will lead people across the river in several locations. Gateways will tie the New Basin to Charlestown, the North End, downtown Boston, the new Boston Garden, and nearby office development, and from the West End, East Cambridge and North Point. These communities will be linked as never before. People will be able to stroll through fascinating parklands, animated by history, art, and science, from East Cambridge to the North End or from the West End to Charlestown.

The river banks will be reshaped to strengthen the focus on the water, relate the two edges more strongly and create a powerful procession of river spaces leading out to the sea. The banks will be sloped down to the water's edge so that the river is visible from everywhere in the New Basin. There will be landings for tour boats

and water taxi service, and a central cove for transient docking. Small boats will ply sheltered waterways, bordered with native wetland plants and wildlife.

Central themes of these new public spaces will be the industrial and shipping history of East Cambridge and Charlestown, the social and cultural heritage of the North End and the West End, the ecology of

the Charles River, the history of transportation in Boston, and the creative forces of science and art. Designers, artists, and artisans will develop these themes, enriching the possibilities for exploration, learning, and celebration. Guided by this vision, the New Charles River Basin will become a gathering place for its neighbors, for school children, for downtown business people, for visitors—for the whole metropolitan community.



*The New Basin extends from the old Charles River Dam (lower right) to the new dam, just beyond the highway bridge. Downtown Boston is at the upper right. The esplanades of the MDC's Charles River Reservation will be connected to Boston's HarborPark, and gateways to the new public spaces will reinforce the ties between the river and surrounding neighborhoods. Funding for the first phase of this long-term master plan will be provided by the Massachusetts Highway Department.*





A panoramic view from Bunker Hill in 1848 shows the new railroads crossing over the Millers River and the lower Charles to stations on Causeway Street. Upstream are the Craigie Bridge (now the old dam), the West Boston (now Longfellow) Bridge, and the 1821 mill dam across the Back Bay. On the far right are the landscaped grounds of the McLean Asylum (Cambridge Historical Commission).

## RECLAIMING THE "LOST HALF MILE"

The Charles River Basin, extending from Watertown dam to Boston Harbor, looks to all appearances like one of the most visible and carefully preserved natural features of Boston. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. In the nineteenth century the shallow basin, its nine-mile length edged with broad salt marshes, was dammed for mills and filled for commercial and residential ventures. At low tide the bays of the lower Charles became vast expanses of stinking, sewage-laden mudflats. Not until the end of the century did the citizens of greater Boston take the first steps to clean up the river and transform its shores. Today nothing remains of the tidal estuary that was once the lower Charles—the margins of the Basin are an entirely man-made landscape.

The degradation of the river began with the construction of a mill dam, built in 1821 along the line of today's Beacon Street. Causeways for the Worcester and Providence railroads were constructed fourteen years later, further impeding the sluggish, increasingly fouled streams that flowed into the bay, and the mills failed. In 1857, the Commonwealth reclaimed its title to the polluted

tidelands and converted the bay into real estate by filling it with gravel, brought by trains running around the clock from Needham to Boston for more than twenty-five years. The sanitary hazard created by the mills and railroads in the Back Bay was resolved—for a time, at least—by state-funded intervention that created a whole new quadrant of the city.

Downstream of the Back Bay, the Boston & Lowell Railroad opened in 1835, and like the Worcester and Providence lines, built trestles over the tidal flats and open water of the rivers to reach the Boston peninsula. But the General Court chose not to develop its legal interest in the flats of the lower Charles and the Millers River, as it had in the Back Bay. The protests of the McLean Asylum were ignored, and railroads and other noisome industries continued to expand in East Cambridge and along the river's edge in Charlestown, largely unregulated by the state.

Along the lower Charles were two prisons, three coal-burning power plants, several gas works, and numerous shabby commercial and industrial structures. Two large slaughterhouses, one on the Millers River and

the other upstream of the Brighton marshes, dumped offal into the shallow waters. Instead of a public parkway along the river edge of the elegant Back Bay, there was "a contemptible scavenger's street, thirty feet wide, backing up against the unmentionable parts of private houses."

After decades of acrimonious debate, a dam was approved by the General Court and completed in 1910, with a large park on its earthen surface connecting East Cambridge and Boston's West End. The tides were excluded above the dam, and the now-stable water level covered the mudflats forever. The dam was built a half mile upstream of the harbor because by this time the railroads had "contrived to obtain permission to cover the river with a timber platform which they use as a rent-free switching yard and terminal." Since this was done under temporary permits, park planners were convinced that sooner or later the park would extend to Boston Harbor.

In fact, the railroads' permits were extended and made permanent. In the 1920s, the Boston & Maine line was authorized to construct seawalls

and fill land in Cambridge and Charlestown. Railroad traffic from North Station peaked in the 1950s. Only commuter lines crossed the two remaining bascule bridges over the Charles, and most of the vast switching yards were vacated. The Millers River became a paltry settling basin, and its once-broad confluence with the Charles was buried in a culvert.

Though the area was changing dramatically, the mouth of the river remained hidden from public use. In a landmark 1959 study, MIT urban planner Kevin Lynch found that many Boston residents could not say where the river met the harbor.

A new dam was approved in 1962, with legislation connecting the "lost half mile" of the Charles with the Metropolitan Park System. The first park lands in the New Basin were acquired as part of the dam construction, completed in 1978, and in the 1980s the MDC acquired almost twenty acres in Charlestown, Cambridge, and Boston. Construction on the first park in the New Basin will start in 1995. During the next decade, the esplanades, begun more than a century ago, will be connected with the sea for the first time.



The first Boston railroads built trestles across the Back Bay and the Millers River in the 1830s. Beginning in 1857, the mill ponds of the Back Bay were filled to make new land (1865 map, Cambridge Historical Commission).

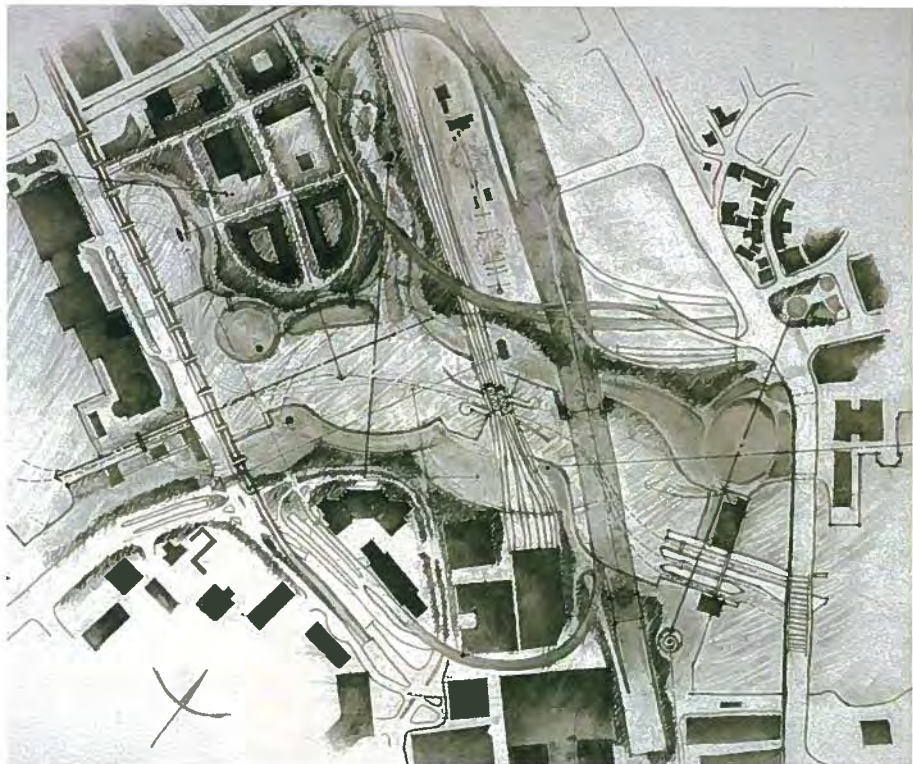


In 1923, the Millers River still flowed around and under the railroad bridges and platforms. On the left along the edge of the old dam (built 1903-1910) is the West End Street Railway viaduct, now the Green Line to Lechmere (Bostonian Society).

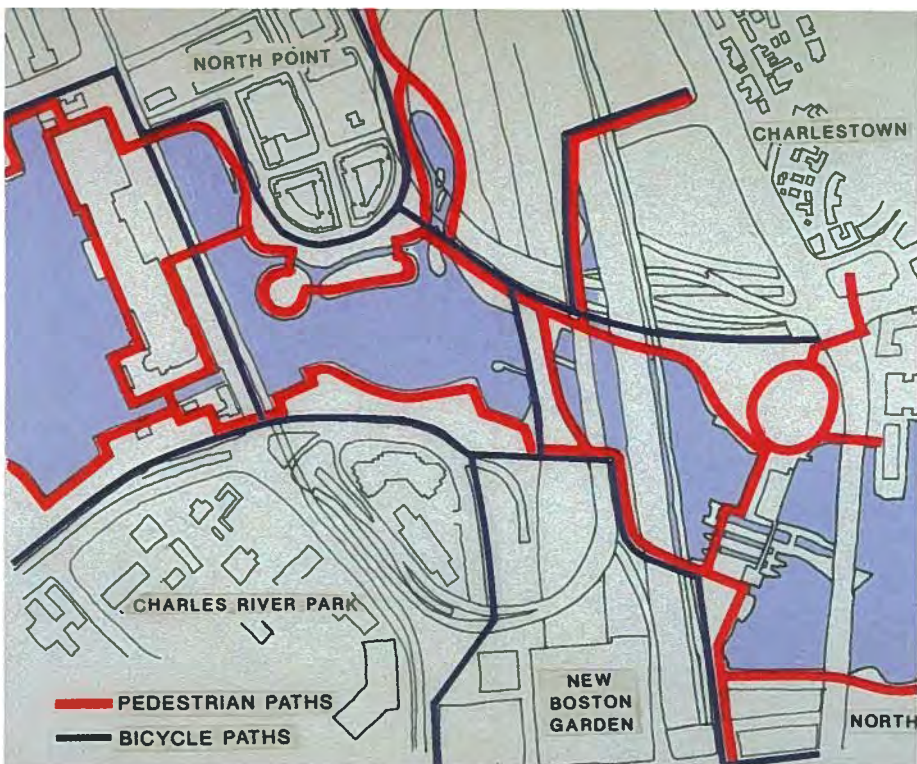


The park and buildings on the dam (today the site of the Museum of Science) were designed by Guy Lowell. Downstream is the seawall constructed in the 1920s by the Boston and Maine Railroad (ca. 1947, Cambridge Historical Commission).





The concept for the New Basin is to enclose a series of connected water bodies with sloped meadows and shaded uplands edged with tall trees.



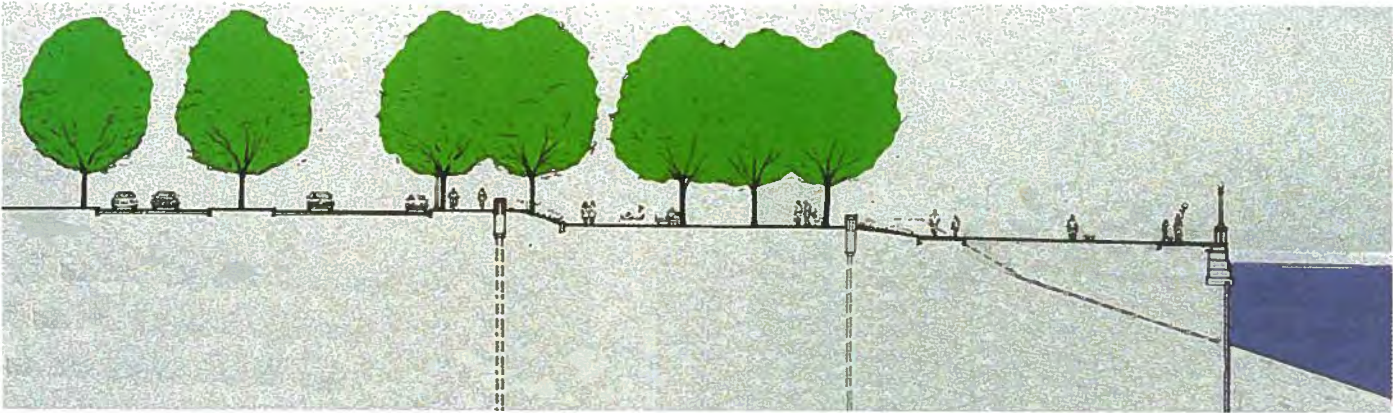
The New Basin will build over seven miles of new pathways to extend the Boston tradition of strolling, jogging, bicycling, and skating along the river.

PLANNING PRINCIPLES

The New Basin has been designed as one inclusive spatial whole, extending from the old dam to Boston Harbor and relating this new open space to its urban context. The central idea of connection informs every aspect of this new waterpark link:

- The broad curves of the shorelines visually connect the two sides of the river and create a procession of river pools leading to the sea.
- Sloped and terraced river banks focus attention on the water as the central organizing element.
- A choice of paths connect end to end and shore to shore, and offer loops of varying lengths and character.
- A dense border of tall trees defines the river park and provides a coherent visual background up and down the river.
- Gateways in the trees and other bordering structures frame landmarks within and beyond the Basin, creating vistas which relate the Basin to its context and each part to the next.
- Shaded upland terraces provide zones of transition between busy city streets and roadways and the sanctuary of meadows and water.

- In the meadows, broad sweeps of perennial planting, punctuated by flowering shrubs and small flowering trees, frame the spaces and provide continuity, with large shade trees as anchors.
- Special interpretive features—including collaborations between designers, artists, and artisans—reveal important hidden connections between natural elements and human activities.
- A comprehensive program of environmental, recreational, and cultural activities reinforces all the connections in the New Basin and integrates the landscape with the life of the park.

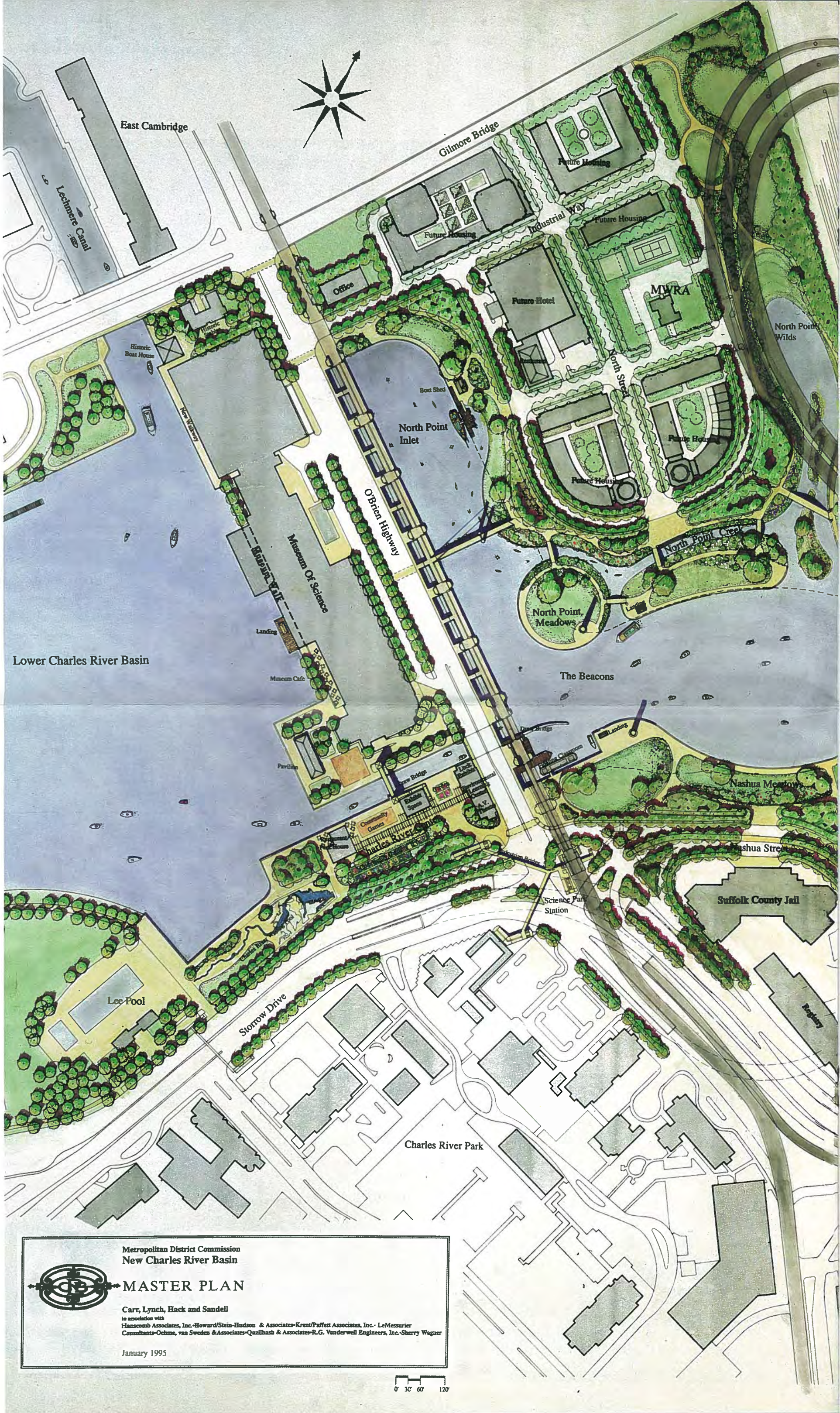



The banks of the New Basin will slope down to the water and focus attention on the elegant forms of the river.



Entering Nashua Meadows from the Boston Esplanade at Leverett Circle, the beacons and the cable stay bridge will be framed by the gateway under the Green Line viaduct. Nashua Meadows will provide shaded sitting terraces and colorful open meadows for people who live and work nearby.







Metropolitan District Commission  
New Charles River Basin

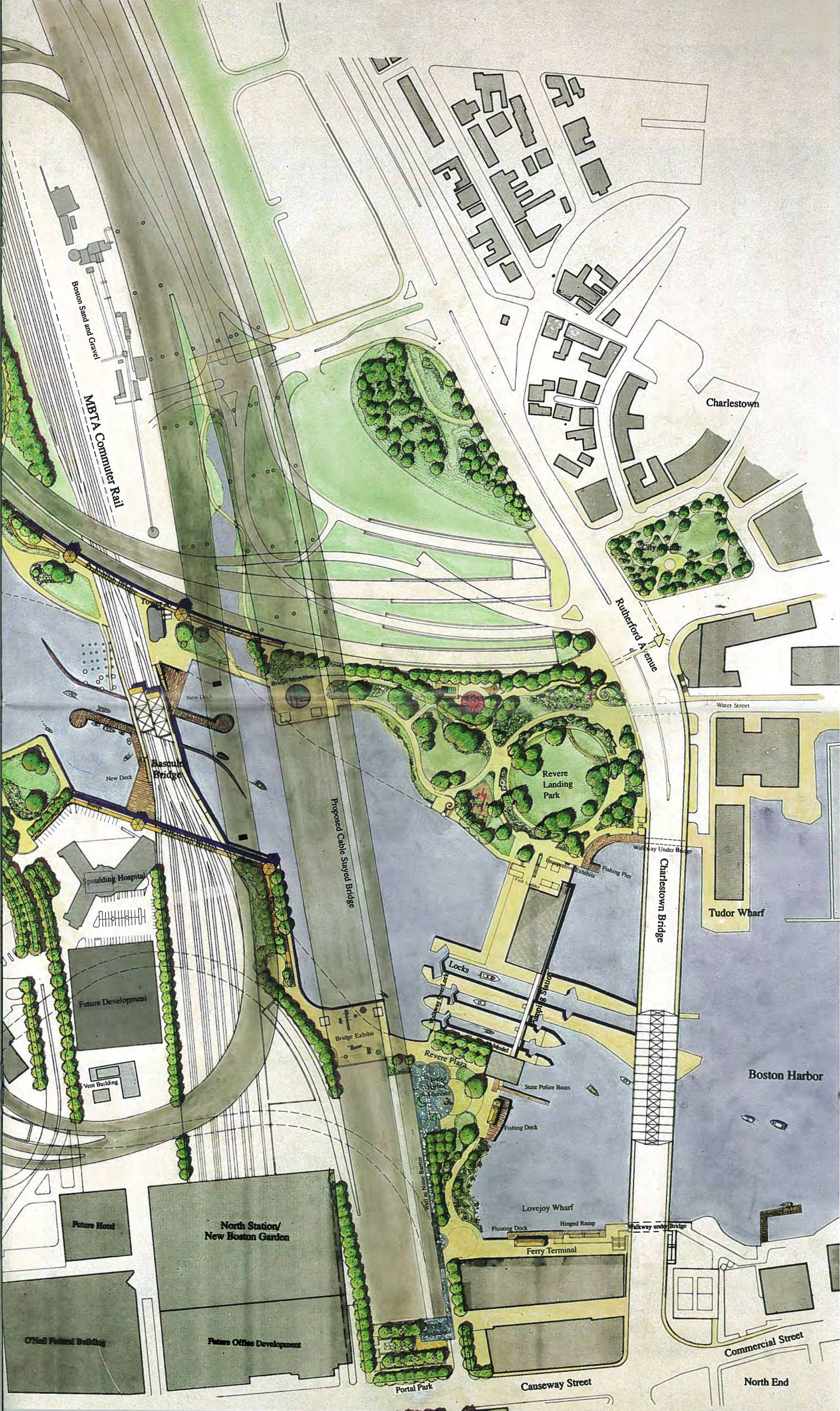
## MASTER PLAN

Carr, Lynch, Hack and Sandell  
in association with  
Hanscomb Associates, Inc. Howard/Stein-Hudson & Associates-Krent/Paffett Associates, Inc. LeMessurier  
Consultants-Oelme, van Sweden & Associates-Qazilbash & Associates-R.G. Vanderwell Engineers, Inc.-Sherry Wagner

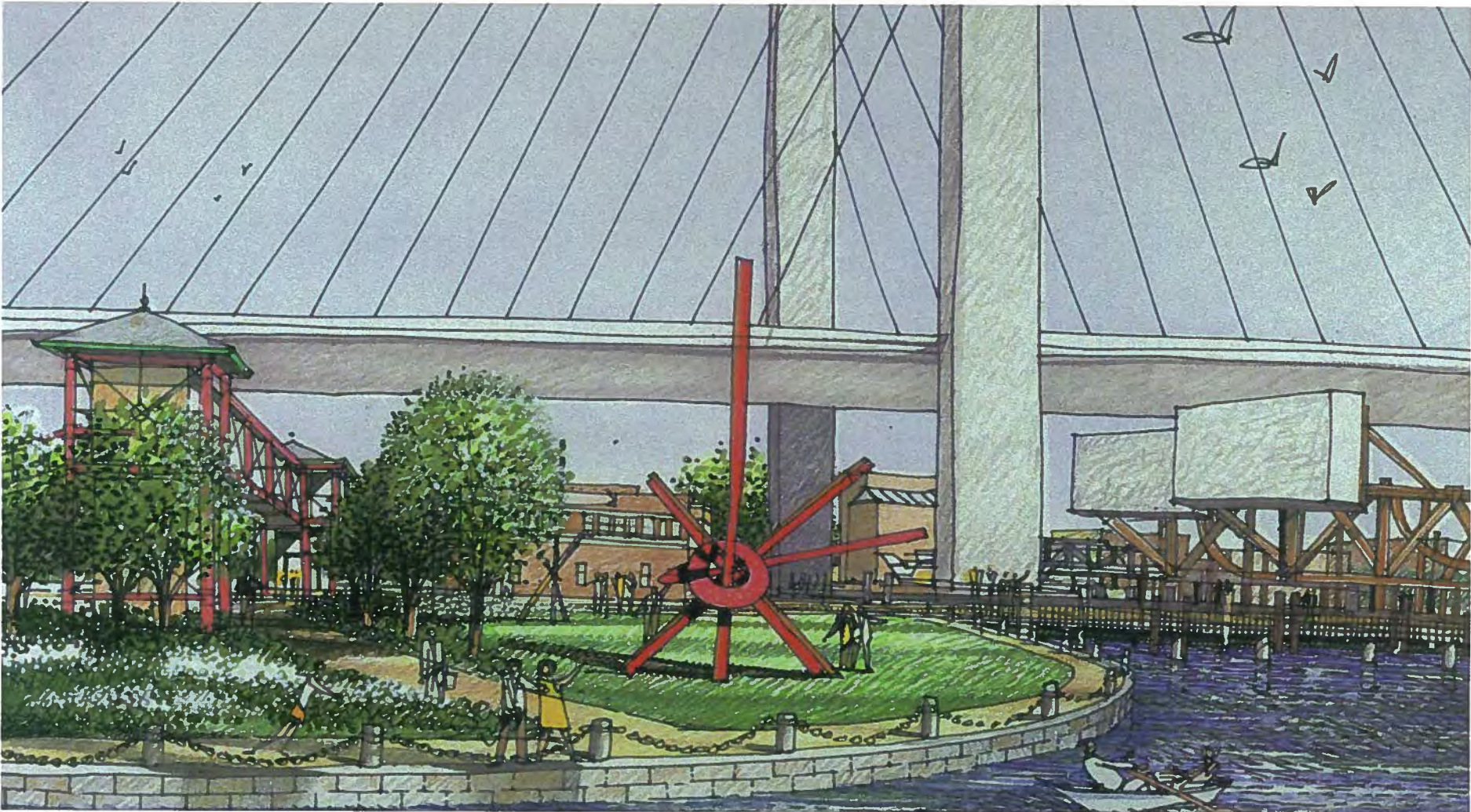
January 1995

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Downstream from North Point, the cable stay bridge and the railroad bridges will provide a setting for temporary and permanent art works in the Bascule Bridge Park.

ANIMATING THE NEW BASIN

The interpretive theme of the New Basin will be "Connections"—an exploration of the relationship of the city and the river, the evolution of greater Boston's built environment, the development of the area's park and transportation systems, and the interactions between the cultures and traditions of the communities along the river. As a part of the Charles River Reservation and the larger Metropolitan Park System, the New Basin will include interpretive themes that explore the river's ecological system and the role of the MDC as steward of this important resource.

Building on the theme of connections, the interpretive design,

exhibits, and public programming will enliven the New Basin and transform this special landscape into a place for exploration and contemplation for park visitors. The interpretive program will include special features integrated into the park design and furnishings to convey the history of the area, denote uses, indicate views, and provide information about the natural environment.

Strategically located installations will become landmarks that orient users and invite more sustained attention, including scale models, interactive displays, sculpture, and fountains. In addition, a number of destinations will attract visitors for specific purposes. These include the Charles River Visitor Center, a Learning Lab Barge, small boat rentals, dam and lock exhibits, and

changing works of art at the Bascule Bridge Park.

The Charles River Visitor Center on the historic dam will be the primary gateway into the New Basin and will house both permanent and changing exhibits that provide information, orientation, and education to park users. The main exhibit will present an audiovisual "boatride" down the Charles River.

Public programming in the New Basin will include school programs, adult classes, tours, recreational activities, art works, and special events, as well as large-scale celebrations. These programs will attract diverse users, increase park security, and raise awareness of both the natural and the man-made environment.

**PUBLIC PROCESS**

The New Charles River Basin Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) has actively contributed ideas, attitudes and expectations about the park. Many other people have attended meetings and made helpful comments and criticisms. The MDC extends special thanks to all of these participants.

**Citizens Advisory Committee**

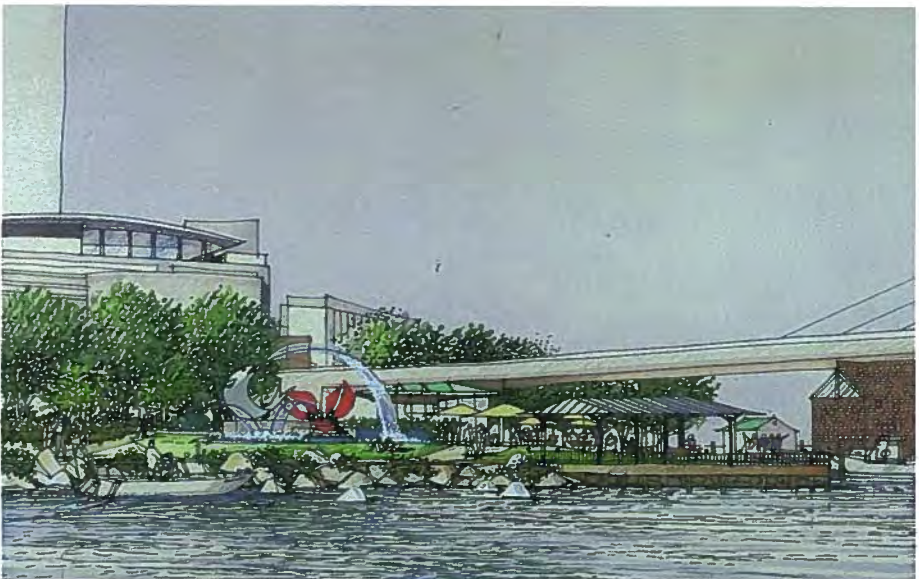
**Secretary of Environmental Affairs Appointees:**  
Joel Bard, Lee Breckenridge, Richard Heath, Janet McCabe, Judith McDonough, Patrick T. McMahon, Mark Primack, Jan Reitsma, Robert Zimmerman

**City of Boston Appointees:**  
Lorraine M. Downey, Robert Davidoff, Judy Evers, Joseph Hinkle, Nancy Keys, Justine Liff, Jim Mansfield, Lisa Morwinkle, Robert O'Brein, Ken Stone, Dan Wilson

**City of Cambridge Appointees:**  
Roger Booth, Elizabeth Epstein, Ruby Mintz, Anthony Platt, Sam Reece, Hugh Russell, Walter Willett

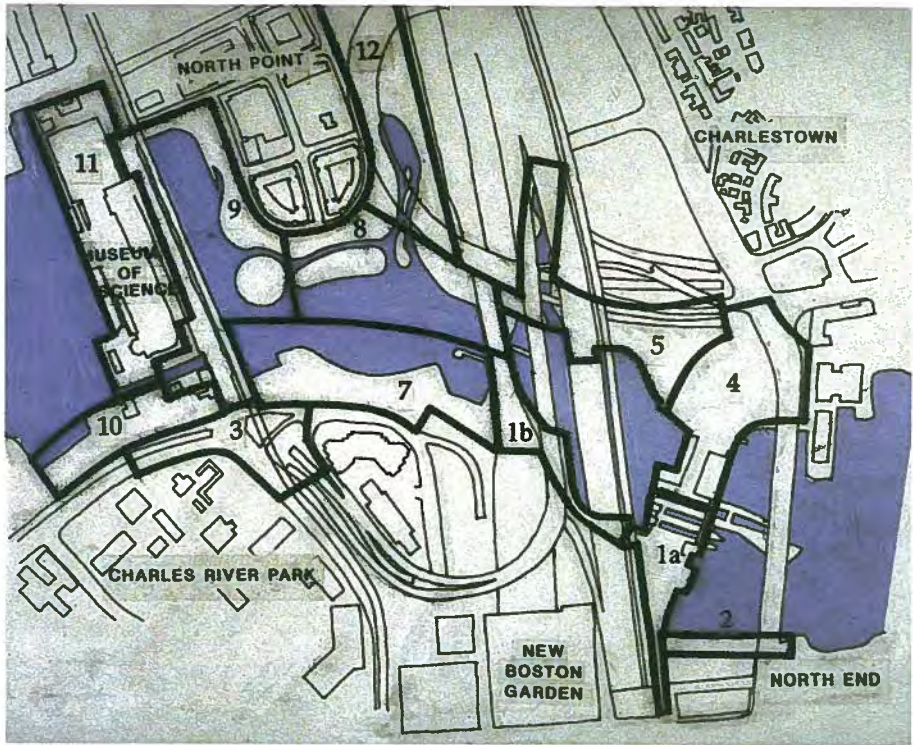


Historic schooners may be moored at North Point Inlet. Here visitors will learn more about the role of boats on the river. To the right are the Green Line Viaduct and Charles River Park.



In Revere Plaza, at the spring point of the new Charles River bridge, a whimsical fountain with creations of the river and sea will mark their connections. The new Boston Garden is at the left.





The MDC owns or has long-term control of most of the more than forty acres of planned waterfront parkland (all but parcel 2, parcel 8, and a small portion of parcel 1b).

**BUILDING THE NEW BASIN**

As the New Basin moves from the Master Plan into design and construction, the MDC will continue its leadership role in promoting the park improvements and working cooperatively with the Massachusetts Highway Department (MHD) and other involved agencies and institutions. Throughout the design process, the MDC will encourage an active and involved citizens advisory committee to provide guidance on design issues and to ensure that the Master Plan is carried out faithfully.

The projects listed below will be designed and construction will begin prior to the construction of the highway.

- Revere Landing Park East
- North Point Meadows East
- North Point Meadows West
- Lovejoy Wharf
- Historic Dam North
- Historic Dam South
- Nashua Meadows

The remaining parcels are scheduled for construction early in the next century, after the highway is completed:

- Revere Plaza
- Leverett Circle
- Revere Landing Park West
- North Point Wilds

The MHD is committed to funding \$80 million (in 1993 dollars) of park improvements as mitigation for the Central Artery/Tunnel project. Alternative sources of funding will be needed for some elements of the Master Plan.

The eastern half of Revere Landing Park will be the first parcel built, starting in 1995, setting the standards for the New Basin. The first portion of the New Basin esplanade will connect to the Charlestown waterfront. A large oval lawn will provide an open meadow for park goers to gather and enjoy. Art projects will reveal the uniqueness of the site. At the pumping station, educational elements will explain the dam and locks, and the history of the Charles River. This new open space will be a strong addition to the Charles River Reservation for the citizens of the Boston metropolitan area.



When complete, the open spaces of the New Basin will be connected both visually and physically. From Bascule Bridge Park, the view of the historic lock of the old Charles River Dam will be framed by the beacons. The Museum of Science is on the right, behind the Green Line Viaduct.

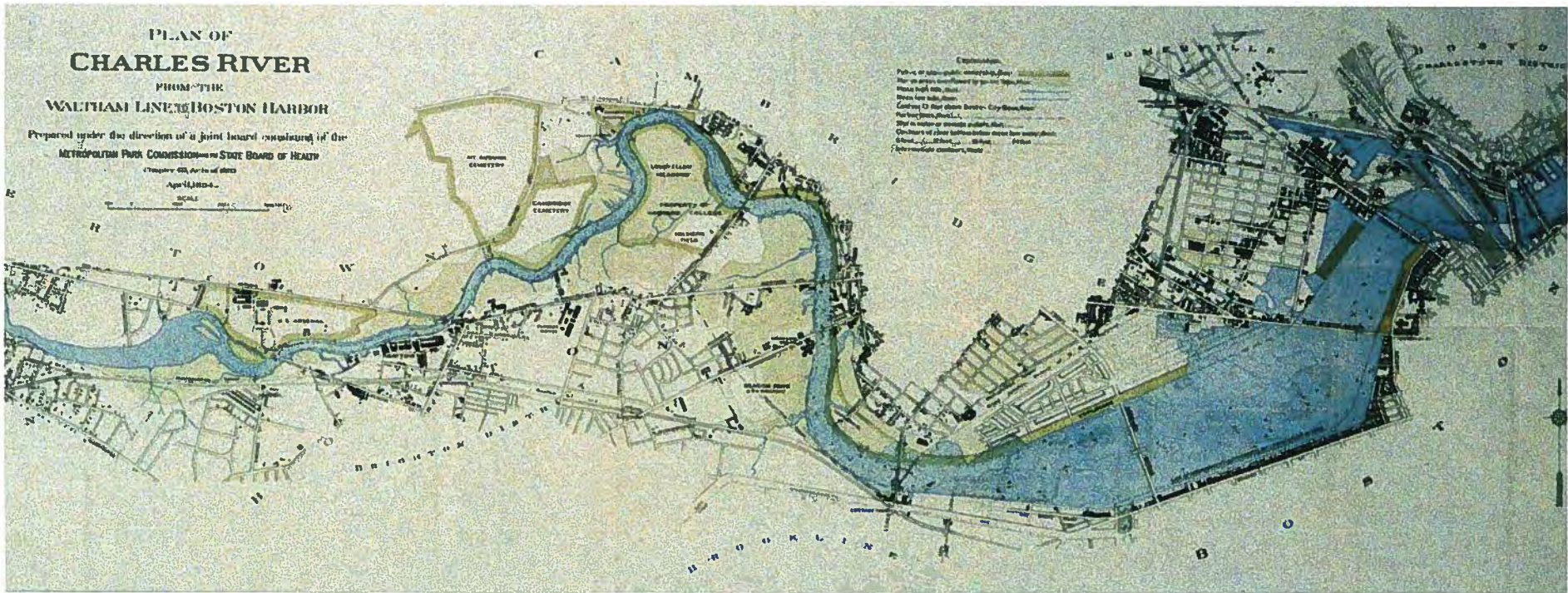


Revere Landing Park, as seen from the new Boston Garden, will be the first parcel of the New Basin to be built with construction beginning in 1995. The three acres between the Charlestown Bridge and the existing Interstate highway will connect the neighborhoods of Charlestown to the Charles River and the esplanades. Bunker Hill Monument is at the top.



The Charles River Visitor Center on the historic dam will include exhibits exploring the development of the New Basin. Beyond the new pedestrian bridge over the old lock is the tower of the Lower Lock House (the Lock House now includes the Lower Basin Police Station). A new pedestrian connection from the old lock along the upstream side of the Museum of Science will link the Esplanade with the Lechmere Canal.





A joint commission of the Metropolitan Park Commission and the State Board of Health produced a remarkable map in 1894 showing the deplorable state of the Charles River Basin. Along the waterfront were two prisons, three coal-burning powerplants, numerous shabby commercial ventures (including slaughterhouses in Brighton and East Cambridge), a bankrupt residential development in Cambridge (today the site of MIT), and "temporary" railroad trestles below Craigie's Bridge. The only park on the river was the Charlesbank, near Boston's West End (MDC Archives).



The metropolitan park plan of 1893 was bounded by the rock hills that surround Boston about ten miles from the State House. Forest reservations—the Middlesex Fells and the Blue Hills—were laid out along this ring of hills. The radial spokes of the park system were the three rivers—the Mystic, the Charles, and the Neponset. Comprising the third element of the plan were the beaches of the bay and sea shores; tree-lined parkways linked the hills, the rivers, and the shores. By 1899, over nine thousand acres of reservations and parkways had been acquired (MDC Archives).

### THE CHARLES RIVER AND THE METROPOLITAN PARK SYSTEM

In 1893 the Boston Metropolitan Park Commission published its first report, written by Sylvester Baxter, the commission's secretary, and Charles Eliot, its landscape architect. They proposed a park system that would preserve the "rock hills, the stream banks, and the bay and the sea shores" of greater Boston. Once in the public domain these natural features of the region would establish the framework for urban development, not the haphazard and unplanned assemblage of street, lots, railroads, and streetcar lines.

The first reservations to be acquired—Beaver Brook, the Blue Hills, the Middlesex Fells—represented "unique and characteristic" New England scenery. The rivers and bays, with their shores reclaimed, offered "permanently open spaces provided by nature without cost."

In spite of the foul condition of the Basin, Eliot was certain that it

would become the central reservation of the metropolitan district and the most celebrated "water park" in the entire country. The Cambridge and Metropolitan Park Commissions made their first takings along the river in 1894-95.

Six years later James Storrow led a new campaign for a dam at Craigie's Bridge, and the dam, along with a 100-foot embankment on the Boston side was finally completed in 1910. A few lamented the loss of the last "once primitive and beautiful salt meadows," but the stabilized river drew to its banks new campuses for Harvard, MIT, and Boston University. The Storrow Memorial Embankment—now known as the Esplanade—was designed by Arthur Shurcliff and dedicated in 1936, ninety years after a water park was first proposed on the Charles.

The public spaces of the New Basin to be built in the next decade will continue the 100-year improvement of the river as the "Central Park" of the Metropolitan Park System.

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts**  
William F. Weld, Governor  
Argeo Paul Cellucci, Lt. Governor  
Trudy Coxe, Secretary, EOEA  
Leo Roy, Undersecretary, EOEA  
James J. Kerasiotes, Secretary, EOTC  
Robert M. Ruzzo, Deputy Secretary, EOTC

**Metropolitan District Commission**  
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Robert H. Carr, Jr., Avril T. Elkort, Darryl S. Settles, Charles F. Wu, Associate Commissioners  
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**Federal Highway Administration**  
Donald E. Hammer, Division Administrator

**Central Artery/Tunnel Project**  
Massachusetts Highway Department  
Peter M. Zuk, Project Director  
Robert Albee, Director, Construction Services  
Curtis Davis, Director, Design & Engineering  
Paul A. Stakutis, Manager, Environmental Planning

**Bechtel/Parsons Brinckerhoff**  
Beatrice J. Nessen  
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**Master Plan Consultants**  
Carr, Lynch, Hack and Sandell  
Planning, Urban Design, and Landscape Architecture  
Oehme, van Sweden & Associates  
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Cost Estimating  
LeMessurier Consultants  
Structural Engineering  
R.G. Vanderweil Engineers, Inc.  
Mechanical Engineering  
Childs Engineering Corporation, Inc.  
Marine Engineering

We invite your comments.  
Contact the Metropolitan District Commission Planning Office, 20 Somerset Street, Boston, MA 02108, (617) 727-9639, ext. 269.

### NEW CHARLES RIVER BASIN CHARLES RIVER RESERVATION

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Boston, MA 02108

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