3.1 | Circulation Improvements

Soldiers Field Road Improvements, Connectivity and Arrival

In Part Two of this report, we discussed the challenges and general opportunities as they relate to connectivity of the park to adjacent neighborhoods, the park arrival, internal circulation and parking. The *"Vehicular Circulation Improvement Plan" on page 90* summarizes the specific circulation recommendations, discussed briefly below.

1. Soldiers Field Road Diet and Improvements to Dr. Paul Dudley White Greenway

Figure '*"Soldiers Field Road : Existing Conditions Section and Plan" on page 91* illustrate a typical condition of the road along Herter Park: four vehicular lanes divided by a tree-planted median. Among the top community desires is to be able to access Herter Park safely and at multiple locations - yet the current road configuration promotes fast traffic and discourages pedestrian and bicycle circulation across the road as well as along the Dr. Paul Dudley Path.

Transforming Soldiers Field Road from a divided highway to a much narrower multi-modal road, i.e. a "Road Diet," presents a tremendous potential for Herter Park and its better integration with the Allston Brighton community. This road diet would be in line with the recommendations of the 2020 'DCR Parkways Master Plan', and has had successful precedents on other DCR parkways in the vicinity. Its benefits include vehicular traffic calming and a more pedestrian-friendly parkway, as well as expanded opportunities for on-road and off road bicycle transportation. Finally, the parkland gained with the road diet - an approximately 4.6 acres of formerly impervious surface turned into green space, can be used for stormwater management and to expand the park usable space. (See also *Chapter 3.4: Stormwater Improvements*).

Figure '*"Soldiers Field Road: Proposed Road Diet Concept" on page 92* illustrates the proposed road reconfiguration: keeping the eastbound lane largely within its present width (33'-wide) and striping to accommodate two-way traffic - with 10'-wide vehicular lanes as well as 5'-wide bicycle lanes. This new roadway configuration allows much shorter crossing distance and should greatly improve the pedestrian and bicycle access to Herter Park while also simplifying traffic at intersections. The removal of the former westbound lane allows the reconfiguration of Dr. Paul Dudley White Greenway into a 12'-wide shared-use path separated from the vehicular traffic with a generous planted buffer. At intersections with the park main entry drive and the parking lot driveways, the plan proposed recessed crossing design, per the 'MassDOT Separated Bike Lane Planning & Design Guide'. This design can reduce traffic conflicts by creating space for the motorist to yield to approaching bicyclists, followed by an additional space of approximately one car length to wait at the edge of the roadway prior to merging into traffic, without blocking the path. Raised crosswalks can be incorporated into the treatment to provide additional safety benefits.

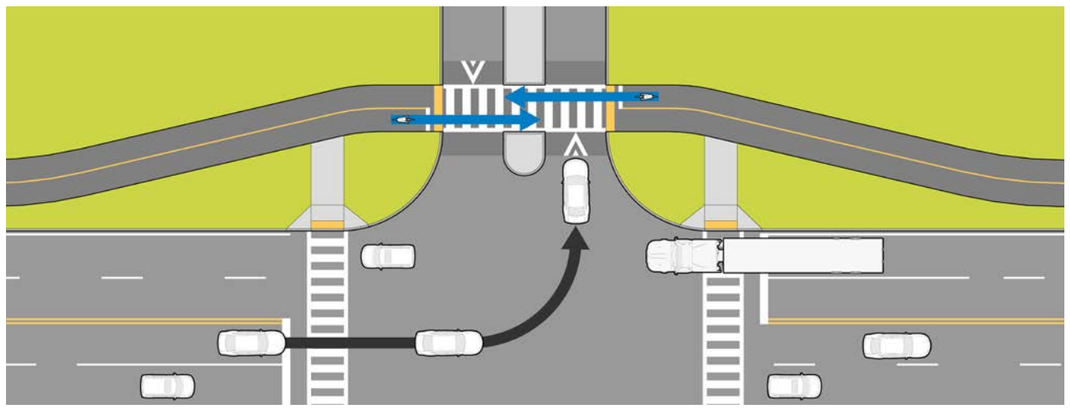


Figure 3-1. Recessed crossing at shared use path intersection, from the '*MassDOT Separated Bike Lane Planning & Design Guide*'.

2. Realign Westbound Off-Ramp at Arsenal Street Bridge

The existing Soldiers Field Road off-ramp at Arsenal Street splits into two segments close to each other, complicating the vehicular traffic and requiring those walking to Herter Park from Western Avenue to cross traffic multiple times. An ongoing traffic improvements study (by others) of the Leo. M. Birmingham Parkway and Western Avenue intersection has proposed realignment and consolidation of the off ramp as long-term alternatives.

The off-ramp realignment would allow the widening of the Dr. Paul Dudley White Greenway at its present pinch point, and greatly improve the pedestrian access to Herter Park from Western Avenue. While this area needs to be considered together with the larger intersection, the benefits of the realignment of the off-ramp are significant and should be considered for shorter-term rather than long-term implementation.

3. Eliminate Median and Guardrail at Separated Slip Lane

The existing slip lane along the eastbound traffic lane serves as a parallel road, adding yet more challenges to crossing the Soldiers Field Road with its vehicular guardrail as a physical and visual barrier. Eliminating this barrier and reconfiguring the slip lane will allow a reduction of impervious surfacing and a shorter crossing distance for the new pedestrian crossing that is proposed along this segment of the road.

4. New At-Grade Crossing and Future Pedestrian Connection

A new pedestrian connection to the residential neighborhood west of Telford Street is desirable. Possible locations could be along the parking lot of the existing garden center (Mahoney's), or immediately across from Waverly Street, as shown on the plan. The land between Western Avenue and Soldiers Field Road is private property, so a public pedestrian path would likely get implemented as part of future redevelopment of those parcels.

Figure 3-2. (Left) The westbound off-ramp at Arsenal Street Bridge realignment would provide significant pedestrian and bicycle circulation improvements. (Right) Existing slip lane (looking east) could be reconfigured to allow a shorter crossing distance at the proposed new crosswalk in this location.

Vehicular Circulation Improvements Plan

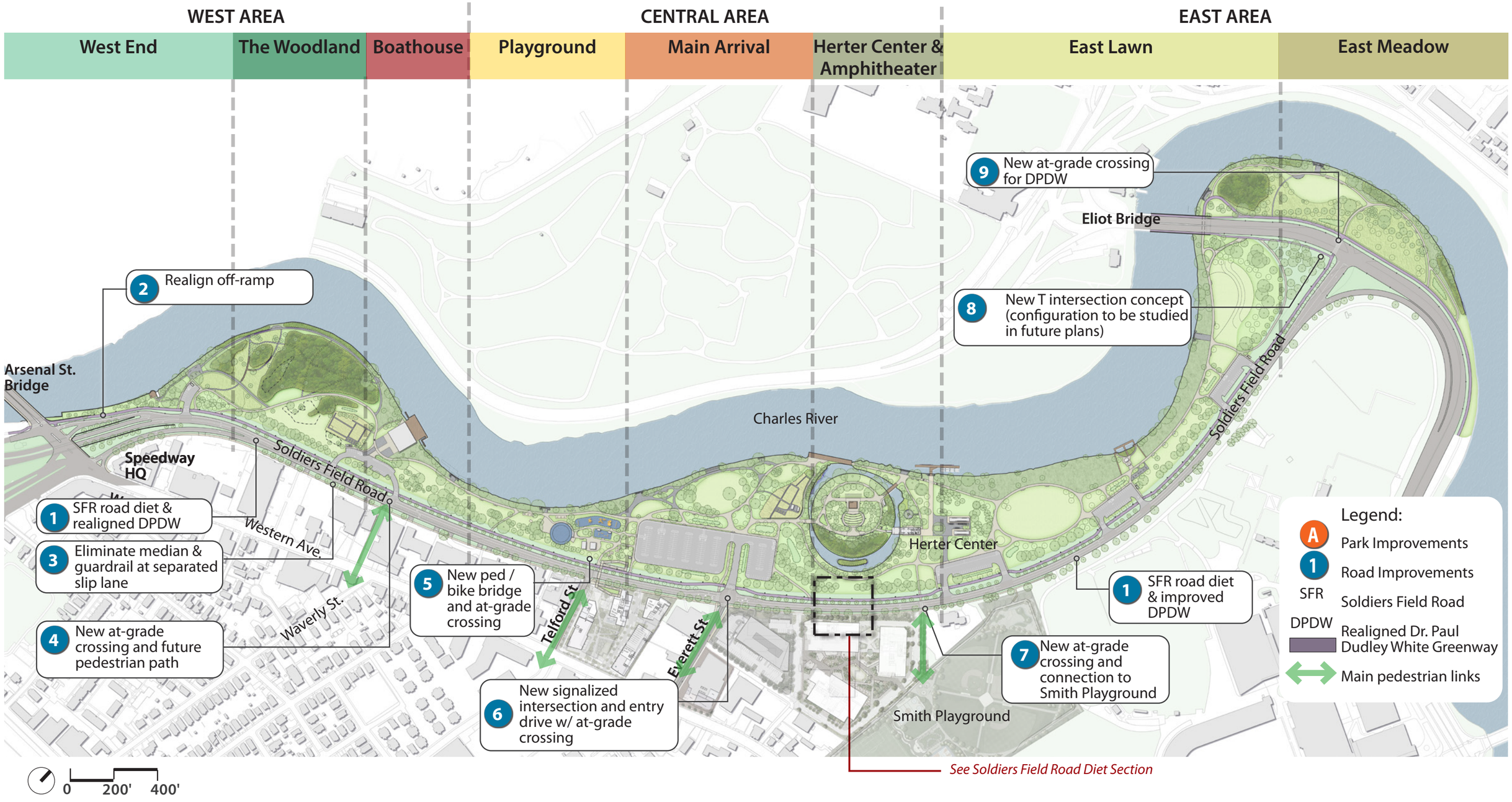
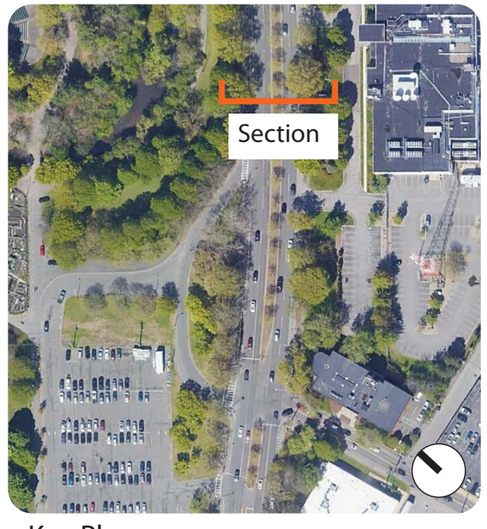


Figure 3-3. Vehicular Circulation Improvement Plan

Soldiers Field Road: Existing Conditions Section and Plan

Section

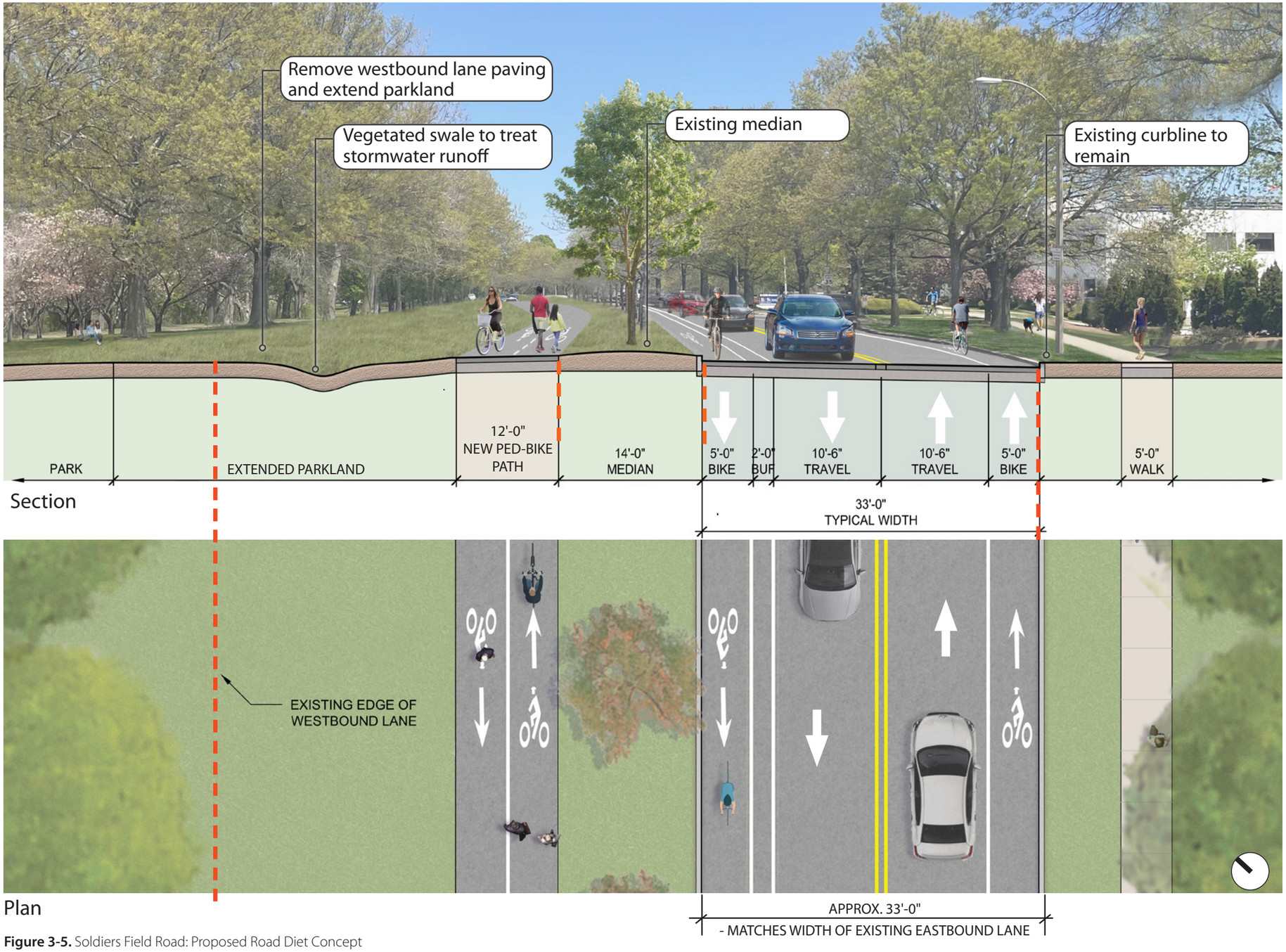
Plan



Key Plan

Figure 3-4. Soldiers Field Road : Existing Conditions Section and Plan

Soldiers Field Road: Proposed Road Diet Concept



Section

Plan

Key Plan

Figure 3-5. Soldiers Field Road: Proposed Road Diet Concept

5. New Pedestrian/ Bicycle Bridge and At-Grade Crossing at Telford Street

Telford Street existing footbridge is currently the main pedestrian arrival to Herter Park, yet the bridge does not meet accessibility and bicycle safety regulations. Several planning studies have recommended maintaining an above-grade connection at Telford Street, with the assumption that Soldiers Field Road would remain a four-lane road as it is today. This would require a new bridge structure to be built, which would have to be higher, to meet MassDOT clearance regulations; wider, to meet bicycle transportation regulations; and longer, to meet accessibility regulations.

However with the proposed Soldiers Field Road diet, an at-grade connection from Telford Street to Herter Park becomes feasible, safe, and convenient. A crosswalk here complements the community's objective to create a green link along Telford Street all the way to the river; and many community members prefer the at-grade connection.

A bridge connection still appeals to some community members, and the adjacent parcel's developer has publicly presented plans for integrating the south approach to this bridge as part of their public realm improvements. Future bridge design should ensure that the view and circulation corridor from Telford Street to Artesani Playground is not obstructed by the bridge structure

6. New Signalized Intersection and Entry Drive with At-Grade Crossing at Everett Street

The Master Plan proposes a new main arrival into the park directly across from Everett Street, and eliminating of the side loop drive. This reconfigured and signalized intersection, along with the Soldiers Field Road diet, strives to simplify the currently confusing vehicular traffic pattern and provide a new pedestrian crosswalk from Everett Street directly into the park. The new entry drive, lined on both sides with green open space and trees, provides clear and attractive main arrival; it also divides the expanse of Artesani Parking Lot into two areas, for a more human-scale environment while maintaining the lot's seasonal usage for snow storage and event boat trailer parking.

A recessed as well as raised crossing at the intersection between the main entry drive and the improved Dr. Paul Dudley White Greenway will reduce the potential conflict of bicyclists crossing vehicular traffic.

7. New At-Grade Crossing and Connection to Smith Playground

The community's desire to provide a connection between Smith Playground and Herter Park has been highlighted in numerous planning studies. The most convenient location, as shown on this plan, would require the link to happen on private land. There is a current development proposal for this parcel that features a pedestrian sidewalk at this location, however its implementation would be reliant on the private developer's timeline. A less convenient option exists further east at the far corner of Smith Playground, which would require careful grading to achieve an accessible route, as well as construction of a missing sidewalk on Soldiers Field Road; the benefit of this option is that it would be on public land and could be implemented with collaboration between the DCR and the City of Boston.

8. Simplified Intersection at Eliot Bridge

The current road configuration along the east end of Herter Park features a complicated network of multi-lane roads, medians, and slip lanes, which are often confusing to the motorists, and impossible to cross safely at-grade for pedestrians and bicyclists. The 2020 'DCR Parkways Master Plan' recommended that this area is reconfigured as a smaller - footprint signalized intersection, to simplify the complicated traffic pattern and allow a safe crossing for pedestrians and bicyclists. The roadway consolidation could free up large areas of open space, allowing the expansion of Herter Park and providing a deeper planted buffer between the active park users and the road.

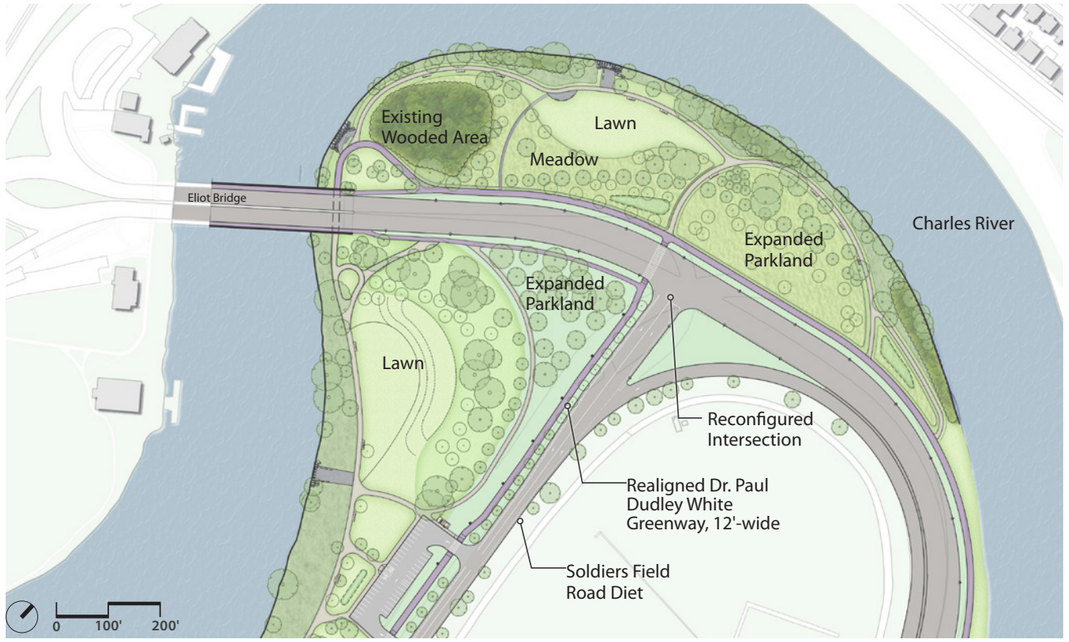


Figure 3-6. Soldiers Field Road: Concept for Eliot Bridge Intersection.

9. New At-Grade Crossing for Dr. Paul Dudley White Greenway at Eliot Bridge

While the Dr. Paul Dudley White Greenway currently skirts the edges of the Soldiers Field Road on both sides of Eliot Bridge, to cross from one to the other side of the road requires looping back through Herter Park and under the bridge via a steep, non-accessible, path segment. The reconfiguration of the Soldiers Field Intersection would enable an at-grade, signalized crossing for the Dr. Paul Dudley White Greenway near Eliot Bridge, providing a direct route. This more convenient option could divert many commuting bicyclists and faster riders from using the park paths, thereby reducing conflict with pedestrians and other users. The design of this intersection will require future study.

Benefits of Soldiers Field Road and Dr. Paul Dudley White Greenway Improvements to Internal Park Circulation

Among the community's greatest concerns is the conflict between bicyclists and other park users as they all share the same park circulation network. Creating separate bike paths within that park would be challenging, and possibly not enforceable. A better solution is to provide greater and better options in the vicinity of the park, which would draw some of the bicyclists away from the park paths, reducing congestion and conflict.

The improvements to Soldiers Field Road and the Dr. Paul Dudley White Greenway will play a significant positive role in this regard. The proposed path doubles the existing width to 12-feet, also providing a wide green buffer between the trail and the road, recessed crossings at driveways, and integrated signage and wayfinding; this would be a comfortable route for bicyclists of all abilities for commuting as well as for recreation. Additionally, on-street bike lanes on Soldiers Field Road provide an option for bicyclists who are comfortable riding along cars.

Internal Circulation Improvements

Within the park, the Master Plan proposes a series of improvements related to circulation, including:

- Parking lot reconfiguration, expansion, and other improvements
- Park paths realignment and widening to accommodate all users
- Accessibility improvements particularly to and around the Amphitheater
- Accessible paths and boardwalks at the West Area Woodland
- Improved access to the water at defined locations
- Signage and wayfinding system throughout the park.

These will be discussed specifically in the following chapters when reviewing each separate area of the park.

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3.2 | Area-Specific Recommendations

To help describe the recommendations on a more site-specific level, we have designated three park areas: West, Central, and East. Each of these areas has their own identity that distinguishes it from the others, both in programming and in landscape character. The West Area has a certain "wild" character, with denser vegetation and fewer amenities than the more active Central Area with its large parking lot, popular picnic grounds, and the playground; proceeding east, the park becomes more pastoral with trees over lawn, areas for picnicking and informal recreation.

West Area

The West Area (from Arsenal Street Bridge to Henderson Boathouse) itself is divided in three distinct zones: the West End, the Woodland, and the Boathouse. The recommendations below relate to the 'West Area Site Concept Plan' shown on the following pages.

1. Realign Dr. Paul Dudley White Greenway

The Soldiers Field Road diet, described previously, allows the Dr. Paul Dudley White Greenway to be reconstructed as a 12-foot wide shared-use trail. Especially near Arsenal Street Bridge, the realignment of the road ramps allows a more generous configuration at the present pinch point.

2. Create a Speedway Interpretive Area

The West End parking lot coincides with the end of the original Speedway west loop. This, along with the visual proximity of the historic Speedway Headquarters across the road, has inspired the recommendation to create a historic interpretive area - recreating the shape of the Speedway loop with new park paths and a new meadow in the middle (where originally there was a wide gravel race track), along with interpretive signage. The meadow would provide ecological rehabilitation in an area currently dominated by buckthorn and other invasive plants.

3. Reconfigure Parking Lots at the West End and near Henderson Boathouse

Reconfigure the West End parking lot entrance from the existing excessive with to a standard 24'-wide driveway, allowing safer crossing of the shared use path. Keeping the same number of parking spaces, it should include van-accessible parking, as well as a designated spot for the Charles River Conservancy truck and storage container that this partner organization uses to support park cleanups.

At Henderson Boathouse, expand the parking lot for improved accessibility and much needed additional parking. The proposed lot expansion impacts the buffer zone of an existing isolated wetland resource area (under the City of Boston Wetland Protection Ordinance); therefore the expanded parking should be considered along with enhancements to the resource area or replication in another location.

4. Improve the Charles River Community Garden

Accessibility improvements are necessary to allow the community garden use by people of all abilities. The plan proposes a new accessible route from the proposed accessible parking, widening of main paths within the garden, and an array of raised beds in different configurations. At least 5% of all garden plots should be raised beds.

Additionally it is desirable to enhance access and engagement of the general public who are not community garden members through educational events, interpretive signage, garden "open houses" etc. A small plaza outside the garden entrance could facilitate some of these gatherings.

Mitigation of environmental impacts of the community garden includes a proposed rain garden area to filter the nutrient-rich runoff. Additionally, it is assumed that the DCR's future permit agreement with the Charles River Community Garden organization will regulate the use of fertilizers, pesticides, and non-desirable planting species, as well as the standard of care for the garden and its perimeter. Expansion of the garden is not possible at this location because of an adjacent wetland resource area.

5. Create a Fishing Dock

An existing semi-circular overlook at the West End is already an informal spot for fishing as noted over several site visits. The desire for more opportunities for fishing has been heard from the community, and the plan proposes to formalize this outlook as a fishing dock with an accessible path from the parking lot. This project should be done in conjunction with structural repairs and safety enhancements at the adjacent deteriorated stormwater outfall, which will require coordination with the outfall owner, the Boston Water and Sewer Commission.

6. Create View Terraces

View terraces and sitting areas along the river allow the people to get near the water. These could be just be a few granite blocks that step down the bank, or it might be a more generous viewing node with seating and picnic benches such as near the West End parking lot. Along the river path in the Woodland, selective pruning should allow visual connection to the river, as well as enhance the path sight lines and the sense of safety.

7. Restore the Woodland

As described previously, the existing woodland is mostly volunteer vegetation that established post-Speedway, with extensive areas of invasive plants present. Ecological rehabilitation is needed here for enhanced habitat value, to "clean up" but at the same time preserve the "wild" character. Large-scale removal and an ongoing program of maintenance will be necessary to control the invasive species and restore habitat. The visual character will change as a result; once the buckthorn thicket is removed, the land will attain a much more open character with a few preserved trees and clusters of native sumac, and restored with a meadow. The east half where upland trees are denser, should remain as woodland post restoration end enriched with native low-growing understory.

Improvements to the existing informal trail network include: Provide accessible path surfacing such as stabilized stonedust aggregate or boardwalks at wet locations, close and monitor unauthorized trails, place park benches at a few locations, use remnant granite blocks as seats and sculptural features, and provide appropriate wayfinding.

8. Demolish the "Garage"

This master plan proposes a new facility and a new location for the high school rowing use that currently occupies the garage and its surroundings. Once the rowing use is relocated, the removal of the old masonry building at the present sharp turn on the path will allow circulation to work better by allowing path realignment and opening sight lines for better visibility. Restore the area as park landscape.

Overall Plan

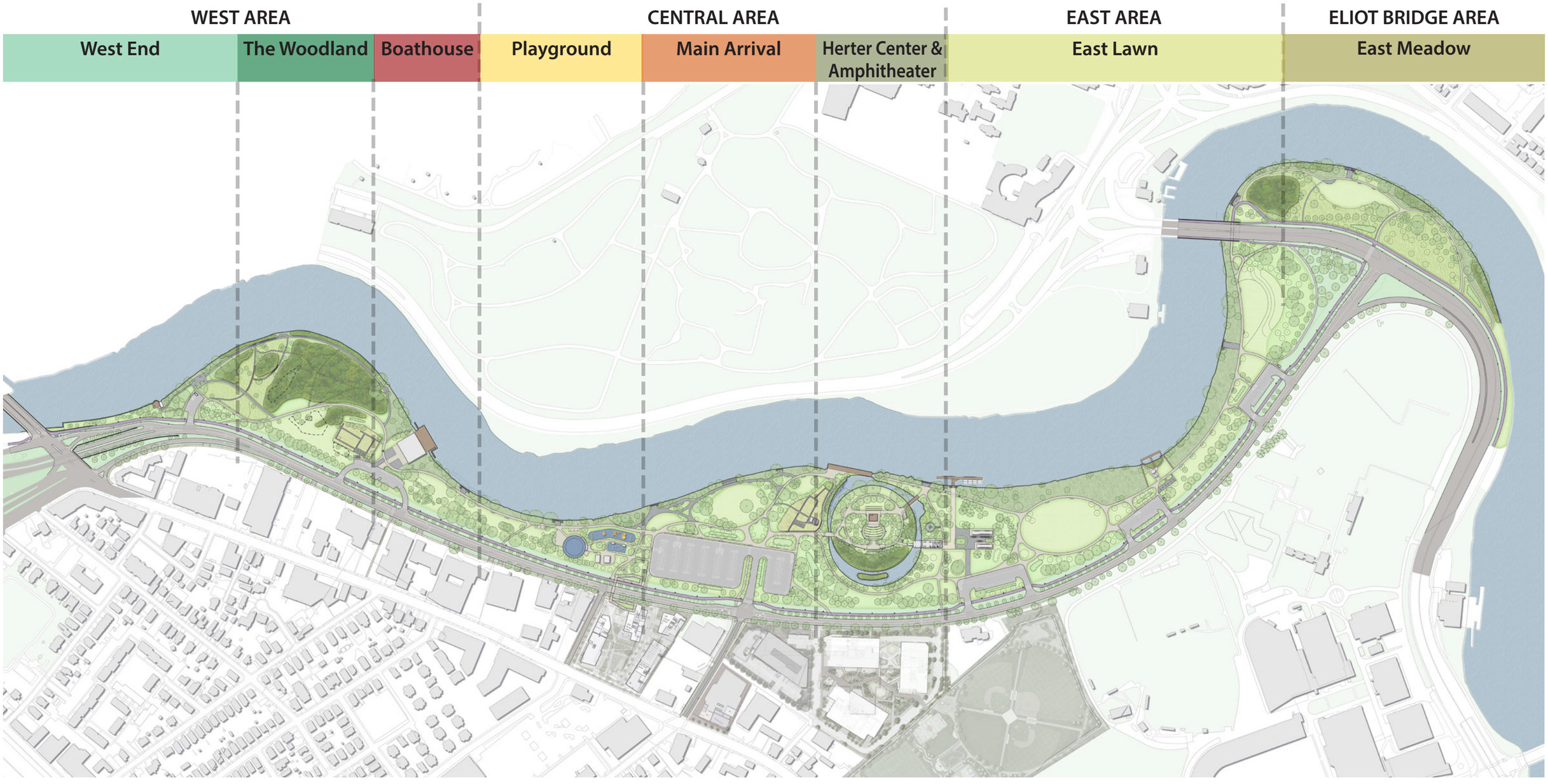

Figure 3-7. Overall Plan with Park Areas.

West Area Site Concept

Figure 3-8. West Area Site Concept.

Central Area

The Central Area is the epicenter of activities at Herter Park. The Master Plan proposes many improvements to enhance the arrival experience and highlight some of the best park assets. The recommendations below relate to the 'Central Area Site Concept Plan' shown on the following pages.

1. Realign Dr. Paul Dudley White Greenway

Important features of the realigned path are its intersections with the main park entry and the Telford Street crossing. At the main entry, the shared use path curves back to allow a setback crossing in combination with a raised crosswalk for enhanced safety. At Telford Street crossing, appropriate pavement markings and signage are necessary to announce and give priority to the Telford pedestrian circulation that crosses the shared use path.

2. Create New Park Main Entry

The proposed new tree-lined main entry creates an attractive sense of arrival and a clear and safe circulation pattern. The two-way driveway across from Everett Street replaces the presently confusing traffic pattern at Everett Street, with a simple signalized intersection and a new pedestrian crosswalk. The present "jug-handle" driveway further east is replaced with a pedestrian path, which could be used for controlled backup access for boat trailers during events.

3. New At-grade Crossings: at Everett Street and Telford Street

The new at-grade connections at Everett Street and Telford Street have been long sought by the community, and the proposed narrowing of Soldiers Field Road makes them safer and convenient. These improved links will enable park arrival by foot and by bike, lessening some of the car parking demands.

4. New Telford Bridge Landing

There are prior community commitments to rebuild Telford Street overpass as a 12-feet wide accessible shared use bridge. It is important that the future structure is configured in a way that it allows an unobstructed circulation and view corridor from Telford Street to the Artesani playground and beyond to the river. The landing of this structure should be designed so that it avoids circulation conflict with the Dr. Paul Dudley White Greenway.

5. Reconfigure Artesani Parking Lot

The Artesani parking reconfiguration provides multiple benefits. The subdividing of the parking lot into two areas improves the arrival experience and places accessible parking closer to the Herter Community Garden and Herter Amphitheater. The new configuration gains green space towards the river for additional picnic grounds, event lawn expansion, or stormwater bioretention; also allowing the placement of a significant subsurface stormwater treatment infrastructure, which will provide great environmental benefits to the Charles River. The reconfigured lot accommodates the same number of parking spaces and a comparable number of HOCR boat trailers as at present.

6. Define and Improve Event / Picnic Lawns

The Central Area lawns have been prone to soil compaction and poor drainage due to the heavy use especially during events. The plan reshapes the circulation to define lawns close to the river, designated and maintained for high use, and allowing other areas to be managed as low-use lawns or meadows. Special soil profile with subsurface drainage are recommended as the best practices for high-use lawns.

7. Create View Terraces

A few formalized overlooks will allow a closer physical access to the water. These could be smaller nodes with a bench or two and stone bank stabilization, or near the event lawn a longer stepped edge, which would also facilitate better access to the water sheet and to temporary docks during water race events.

8. New Aquatics Office and Artesani Playground Improvements

A new Aquatics Office is proposed for the Aquatic program. The proposed new building, located adjacent to the existing comfort station, includes a break room for the lifeguards, restrooms, office, and storage. A pergola structure unifies the new Aquatics Office and the comfort station. For more details refer to the following chapter. Other proposed improvements include a shade structure along the fence line of the wading pool, for improved comfort for those waiting in line to enter, and expanded picnic areas adjacent to the playground, with a screened dumpster area nearby. The improved playground circulation provides a clear path from the Telford Street crosswalk to the playground and on to the river, and realignment of the playground paths to rectify some accessibility issues.

9. Improve Herter Amphitheater

The range of amphitheater improvements include a new pedestrian bridge over the moat, accessibility improvements on the approach to the amphitheater, the stage, and the seating, screened visitor portable restrooms, green room and restroom facilities for the performers, new covered stage with integrated stage lighting, and improvements to the amphitheater seating. More detailed improvements are described in the following chapter.

10. Moat Dredging

Dredging the accumulated sediment to restore the moat original depth will allow better water circulation and a better habitat for fish, which will naturally reduce the mosquito larvae population in combination with subsurface water aeration. A stormwater treatment area in the nearby parkland will reduce sediment and other pollutants from off-site inputs, prior to discharge into the moat, and reduce the rate of future sedimentation. Landscape restoration along the moat should include invasive species removal and restoration with native plants.

11. Improve Herter Community Garden

Provide accessibility of the garden to people of all abilities, including an accessible route from the parking, accessible gates, adequate width of paths within the garden, and an array of raised beds to meet the needs of people of various abilities. Improve the outward appearance of the garden by replacing the deteriorated chainlink fence with a more attractive wood and metal mesh fence. To manage environmental impacts, the DCR's agreement with the Garden should regulates the use of fertilizers, pesticides, and non-desirable planting species, as well as the standard of care for the garden and its perimeter.

12. Pollinator Networks Gardens

Improve the existing Pollinator Network Garden with a new wood and mesh fence. Create two new pollinator garden managed / interpretive areas: north of the Herter Memorial circle for shade plantings, and east of Eliot Bridge where most of the area is proposed to be a meadow.

Central Area Site Concept

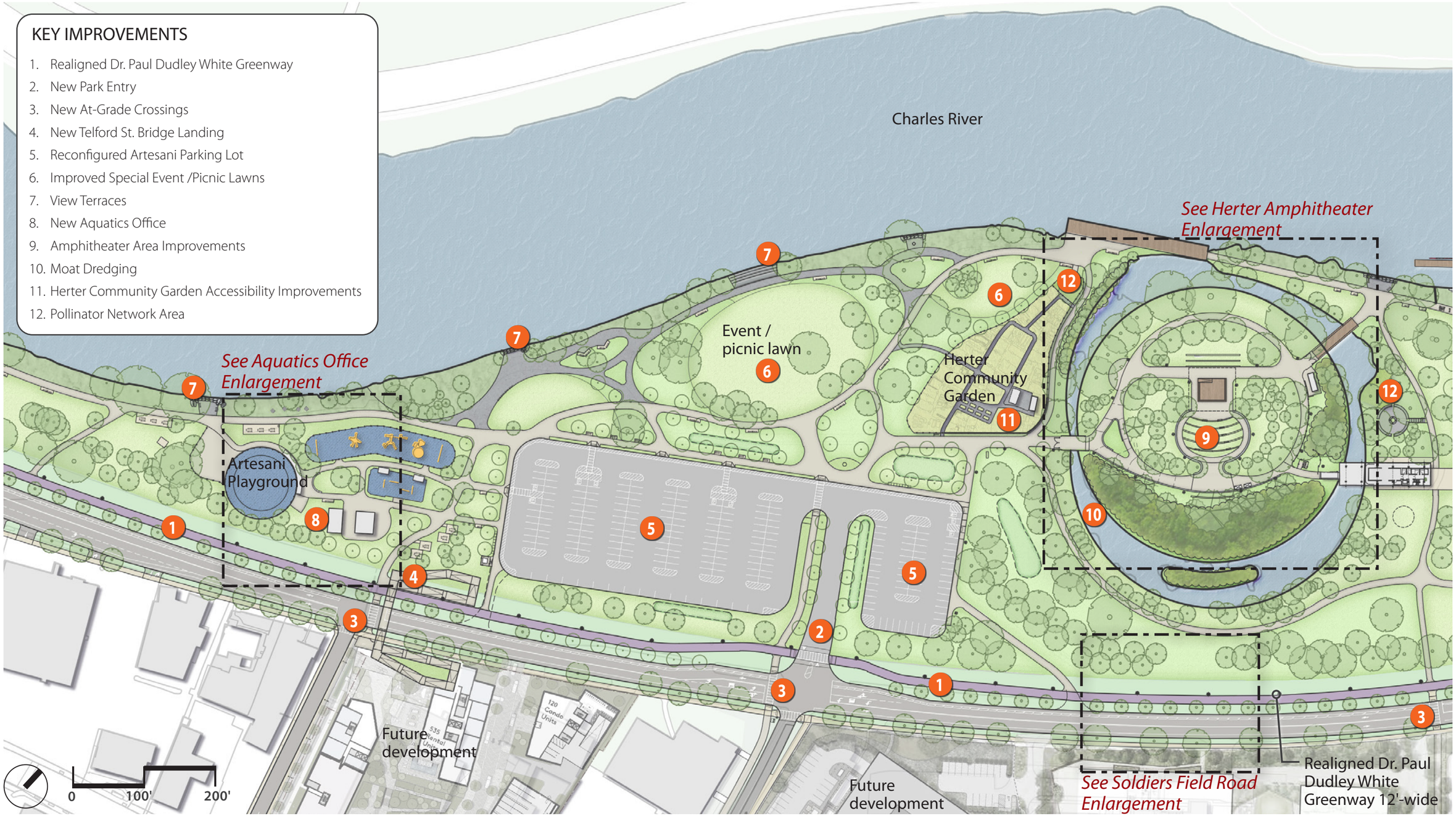

Figure 3-9. Central Area Site Concept.

East Area

1. Realign Dr. Paul Dudley White Greenway Shared Used Path

Where the path crosses parking lot driveways, recessed crossing design is proposed for increased safety.

2. New At-Grade Crossing to Smith Playground

The proposed crosswalk and a future connection to Smith Playground align well with the north-south pedestrian spine established proposed along Herter Center.

3. Reconfigure Parking Lots

Remove the exit loop at Parking Lot No. 2 to allow an expanded and renovated event lawn. Include an adequate number of accessible parking spaces, as well as bioretention areas next to each lot for treatment of surface runoff. Expand Parking Lot No.3 near Herter Center to accommodate a bus dropoff area as well as a designated parking for boat trailers, for the adjacent proposed High School Rowing Program.

4. Renovate Lawns

Compaction and poor drainage are present issues in the East Lawn, yet its use is important as a popular picnic destination and the main event staging for the Head of the Charles Regatta. The plan proposes creating a large Event Lawn defined by reconfigured paths, raised in elevation and graded for better drainage, and improved with high-use soil mix and underdrains, to keep the area dry and more conductive to events and active use. The frequently wet areas between the path and the riverbank could be mowed less often; they could still be utilized for the HOCR but would require the use of ground protection mats or decking.

5. Herter Center Adaptive Reuse

On the ground floor the plan proposes a touch-down space with changing rooms and restrooms for the High School Rowing Program, and separate public restrooms. On the upstairs level are proposed an amphitheater support facility, which is directly accessible from the amphitheater area, as well as a multi-use room that could be used by the High School Rowing during their active season and available for other uses the rest of the year. An elevator will be necessary to provide a second means of egress from the upper floor.

6. New High School Rowing Program Area

Because the Herter Center building is too small for rowing boat storage, new boat storage facility is proposed to the east of Herter Center, along with a permanent dock, and parking expansion to support the rowing program. The Herter Center improvements are described in greater detail in the following chapter.

Eliot Bridge Area

1. Realign Dr. Paul Dudley White Greenway Shared Used Path

Link to existing path segments at Eliot Bridge, and continue along the realigned Eliot Bridge approach roadway, separated from the road with a landscaped buffer.

2. New Crosswalk at Soldiers Field Road

Provide an at-grade crossing at the reconfigured Soldiers Field Road intersection at Eliot Bridge approach – a significant improvement that will allow the path users to bypass going under Eliot Bridge and through the park, which would be especially useful in reducing commuting bike traffic through the park. The option to go under the bridge remains to those that want to avoid the intersection.

3. Reconfigure Parking Lots

Balance the parking space reduction at Parking Lot No.2 with a slight increase of the number of parking spaces at Parking Lot No.1. Include an adequate number of accessible parking spaces, as well as bioretention areas next to the lots for treatment of surface runoff.

4. Renovate Lawns

One of these improved lawns near Eliot Bridge is envisioned as a lawn bowl, raised in elevation to take advantage of attractive views to the West along Charles River. This park improvement is made possible by the reconfiguration of the Solders Field Road intersection near Eliot Bridge, which would allow a generous tree-planted buffer between the lawn and the road.

5. New Meadow

Past Eliot Bridge, the East Meadow will reclaim large swaths of open space with the consolidation of the Soldiers Field Road approach to Eliot Bridge. The area is not immediately adjacent to parking and therefore it is better suited for less intensive uses. A new vista created here, along with a smaller passive use lawn would enjoy framed river views and a place for more quiet enjoyment of the river and the park, and is surrounded with proposed native meadow that will have great benefits to the pollinators and wildlife.

6. View Terraces

Like in the other parts of the park, creating overlooks with benches will allow close access to the river at defined locations, so that in other areas more generous bank vegetated buffers can be maintained.

East Area Site Concept

Figure 3-10. East Area Site Concept.

Eliot Bridge Area Site Concept

Figure 3-11. Central Area Site Concept.