



Speedway Rehabilitation Project Background

November 2021

The 1899 Charles River Speedway Administration Building is an integral part of the legacy of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and its predecessor agencies, the Metropolitan Parks Commission and the Metropolitan Districts Commission. This iconic structure is one of the few remaining original structures designed by William D. Austin and demonstrates the intimate design relationship between park architecture and the surrounding natural landscape. Despite its architectural and historic significance, this century-plus-old facility from a more graceful age required substantial capital investment and was no longer suitable to support the maintenance needs of a modern parks agency without altering it or destroying the character which makes it special.

While some of the spaces remained occupied, and DCR invested in stabilization measures, the building slipped into decline due to the elements, overgrowth, vagrancy, vandalism and time in the mid-2000s. DCAMM and DCR studied the condition and feasibility for rehab, and because no agency reuse could justify the enormous pricetag, the building was headed towards disposition – demolition was discussed as one of the few feasible options.



In the late 2000s, the local preservation community, led by Boston Preservation Alliance, Historic Boston Inc. and the Boston Landmarks Commission, as well as Preservation Mass, MHC, Brighton Allston Historic Society, etc., brought the community together to advocate for the building's preservation.

In order to develop a plan for the long-term preservation of the Speedway Complex, DCR produced a Feasibility Study in 2011 with the support of concerned stakeholders, neighborhood groups and the local preservation community. The report concluded that estimates for the rehabilitation, reuse and maintenance were over \$5,000,000 and recommended pursuing a long-term lease through the Historic Curatorship Program as an option for its long-term preservation. Through the Historic Curatorship Program, DCR leverages private investment towards the rehabilitation and reuse of significant historic properties. The building was added to the program enabling legislation in 2011, and in 2012 DCR released a Request for Expressions of Interest (RFEI) to gauge the level of interest from potential developers in the opportunity to

rehabilitate and reuse the property in exchange for a long-term lease. DCR released a Request for Proposals in 2013 and Architectural Heritage Foundation's (AHF) proposal was selected from a total of six submitted proposals.

AHF is a historic preservation and real estate development non-profit with a strong record of historic development, adaptive reuse and public-private leases. Under their forty-year lease, they will rehabilitate and reactivate the Speedway complex with a mix of non-profit Charles River themed tenants, local craftspeople, local artisans and food and beverage establishments. The central courtyard has been transformed from a what was a maintenance area into an active public space with opportunities for a variety of events and programs. The original proposal included a residential construction component which would have removed the 1940s garage. This component has since been removed from the project and the garage has been rehabilitated for use as an event and program space.

Representative Michael Moran sponsored HB 4337 which named AHF as lessee for the property and allowed for the sale of the adjacent garage parcel to AHF. The bill was adopted on July 31, 2014 by a unanimous vote of the legislature and signed as Chapter 262 of the Acts of 2014. Representative Moran provided leadership throughout the process of negotiating a lease.

AHF's investment into the building to date is over \$11 million, not including the significant costs of forty years of management and ongoing maintenance, which should add an additional estimated \$2 million or more. Major required work included the introduction of all new building systems (heat, plumbing, electric, fire safety), replacement of interior finishes, and restoration of significant historic features, including exterior siding, windows, doors and some interior features.

The property is accessible for handicapped visitors, with an innovative design that references some of the building's historic features while creating a dynamic and welcoming landscape for visitors of all abilities. This investment removes an unsightly eyesore from one of DCR's flagship parks, eliminates a dangerous liability, helps to erase over \$11 million from DCR's deferred maintenance backlog, and most importantly, ensures that DCR can fulfill its mandate and mission to preserve one of its most significant historic resources for the enjoyment of future generations.

Despite the challenges and limitations presented by the pandemic, the Speedway opened to the public in July 2021, and has already become a very popular destination. The main tenant, Notch Brewery, provides food and drink with indoor and courtyard space, while the other spaces serve small food vendors, maker spaces, and non-profit (including AHF) offices. A second anchor tenant is being sought for the building's former Police Station section.

2020 and 2021 saw the return of Speedway to active reuse, while during the same period another one of the agency's original headquarters buildings was saved through the Historic Curatorship Program as well – the 1903 Superintendent's House at Mt. Wachusett Reservation in Princeton. Both have saved once threatened historic landmarks, introduced new public uses to once closed-off buildings, and now offer services and amenities to park visitors and the surrounding community.

Since DCR's Historic Curatorship Program's inception in 1994, over \$37 million in private funds have been leveraged toward the preservation of twenty-four of the state's unused but historically significant properties. The program has become a national model, inspiring other government entities to add this innovative public-private partnership model to their preservation toolbox.

