

Southwest Corridor Park Action Plan

dcr
Massachusetts



Acknowledgments



Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Maura T. Healey, Governor
Kimberley Driscoll, Lieutenant Governor
Rebecca L. Tepper, Secretary
Brian Arrigo, Commissioner

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), an agency of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, oversees 450,000 acres of parks and forests, beaches, bike trails, watersheds, dams, parkways, and over 100 National Register listed properties. The agency's mission is to protect, promote, and enhance our common wealth of natural, cultural, and recreational resources for the well-being of all.

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Contact us at mass.parks@state.ma.us.

DCR would like to recognize the contributions of the following individuals and organizations to this project:

Project Stakeholders

City of Boston

MBTA

Community Focus Group

The American City Coalition (TACC)
Fancy Lad Skateboards
Friends of Kelly Rink
Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation (JPNDC)
Northeastern University
Roxbury Community College
SWCP Alliance
SWCP Conservancy and Carlton Court Dog Park
SWCP Conservancy

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Acknowledgements	
Executive Summary	
Perspectives	

Executive Summary

SECTION 1 - Vision and Goals 01

Introduction	03
Project Description	04
Project Goals	05
Design Goals	06
Priorities	07
Context	07
Synopsis	08

SECTION 2 - Community Engagement 10

Engagement Overview	12
Engagement Approach	17
Community Feedback	18

SECTION 3 - Existing Conditions 25

Introduction	27
Physical Features	28
Park Usage	32
Corridor-wide Topics	33
Mobility and Access	34
Natural Resources	37

Cultural Resources	38
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SECTION 4 - Corridor-Wide Design Identity and Amenities 39

Introduction	41
Design Vision and Identity	42
Plans by Segment	43-66
Signage and Wayfinding	67
Site Furnishings	98
Park Entrances	116
MBTA Station Plazas	119
Accessibility	120

SECTION 5 - Mobility and Access 123

Mobility and Access	125
Primary Shared Path Use	126
Primary Path	128
Secondary Path	129
Network Connections	129
Street Crossings and Accessibility	130
Bike Parking	132
Materials	133
Path Etiquette	134
Mobility Recommendations by Segment	135

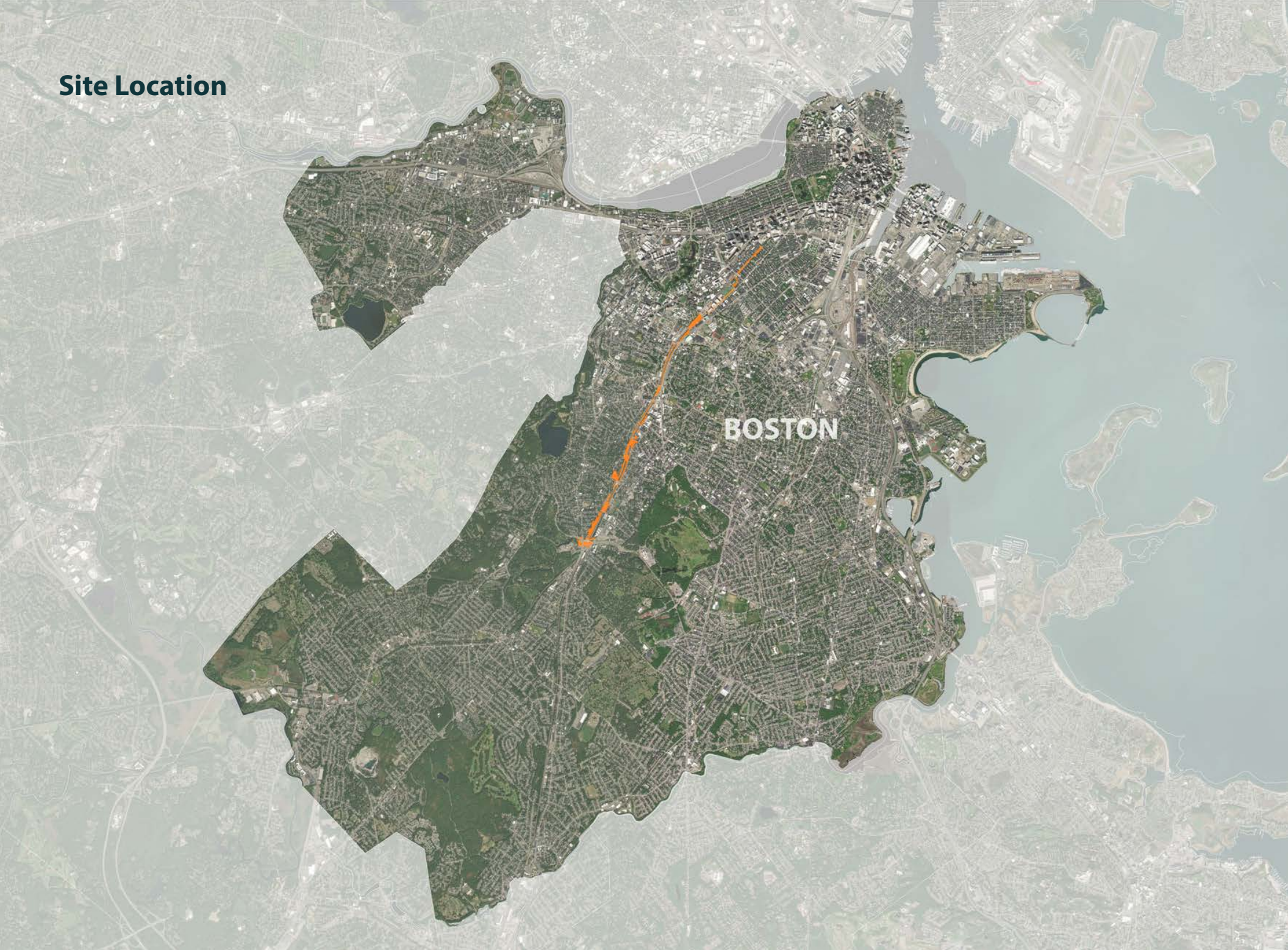
SECTION 6 - Park and Recreation Facilities 146

Introduction	148
Playgrounds	149
Hardcourts	162
Dog Parks	176

Table of Contents (continued)

Open Lawn/Green Areas	179		
Recreational Fields	180		
Community Gardens	181		
Amphitheaters	197		
Enhanced Parkland	200		
Restrooms	201		
SECTION 7 - DCR Operations Building	202		
Introduction	204		
DCR Operations Building	205		
SECTION 8 - Natural Resources	207		
Introduction	209		
A Sustainable Urban Park	211		
Urban Forestry	216		
Enhancing the Urban Forest	218		
Tree Planting Prioritization	219		
Planting Plans	220		
Planting Typology Zones	232		
Shrubs and Vines	235		
Plant Species	236		
Stormwater Management	241		
Erosion Repair and Prevention	243		
SECTION 9 - Cultural Resources	244		
Introduction	246		
Interpretive Opportunities	249		
		SECTION 10 - Implementation Strategy	253
		Implementation	255
		Setting Priorities	255
		Project Execution	256
		Early Action Projects (1-3 years)	258
		Project Execution Matrix	259
		Estimated Construction Costs	263
		Stewardship Strategy	264
		Tracking Progress	265
		SECTION 11 - Operations and Maintenance	266
		Introduction	268
		Organizational Structure and Responsibilities	269
		Benchmark Parks	275
		Proposed Routine Maintenance Protocols	284
		Proposed Resource Allocations	298
		Sustainability Practices	306

Site Location



BOSTON

A photograph of a person walking away from the camera on a paved path in a park. The person is wearing a black cap, a black jacket, and a tan backpack. The path is made of light-colored concrete and red brick. To the left is a lush green garden with yellow flowers. To the right is a low brick wall and a black metal railing. In the background, a city skyline with several tall buildings is visible under a clear blue sky.

Southwest Corridor Park Action Plan Executive Summary

The Southwest Corridor Park (SWCP) is a vital green space that extends through several neighborhoods, providing recreational opportunities and essential connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists. This summary outlines the primary goals and recommendations for enhancing the park's identity, accessibility, and usability, based on community feedback and thorough assessments.

Southwest Corridor Park



Jamaica Plain

Roxbury

South End

Corridor-Wide Design Identity and Amenities

Executive Summary

Identity and Placemaking

Observations:

- **Consistency and Inconsistency:** While the park features consistent elements like tree-lined paths and boundaries marked with granite blocks, there are inconsistencies in signage and furnishings.
- **Unique Placemaking:** There is a desire to highlight parts of the park with unique placemaking elements.
- **Underutilized Parcels:** Some areas of the park are isolated and underutilized, presenting opportunities for expansion and increased usage.

Recommendations:

- **Strengthen Park Identity:** Introduce new signage and consistent furnishings.
- **Signage System:** Develop a family of signs (identification, wayfinding, information, interpretation) unique to the SWCP.
- **Bicycle Racks:** Replace “ribbon” bike racks with individual racks.
- **Standard Bench:** Implement one standard, contemporary bench design for the park.
- **Trash Receptacles:** Continue using the durable concrete trash receptacles with unique branding.
- **Drinking Fountains:** Add drinking fountains at key locations like Johnson Park, Stony Brook, Jackson Square, and Mission Deck.
- **Restroom Pads:** Provide pads and screening for seasonal restrooms.

Signage and Wayfinding Goals

Observations:

- Signage is out of date, unclear, and inconsistent.
- No interpretive signage exists.

Recommendations:

Identify:

- **Clear Gateways:** Enhance park entrances to clearly identify and lead visitors into the park.
- **Strengthen Park Identity:** Emphasize the identity of park spaces and amenities.

Orient, Direct & Inform:

- **Improve Orientation:** Enhance orientation for visitors and users.
- **Guide Traffic:** Direct pedestrians and cyclists to amenities and safe pathways.
- **Clear Use Regulations:** Provide concise use regulations at park amenities.

Discover & Inspire:

- **Storytelling:** Enrich visitor experience with storytelling about

Mobility and Access

Executive Summary

Observations:

- Bike path acts as a shared-used path.
- High volumes of all users.
- The existing bike path is too narrow.
- Curb ramps are narrow.
- Walking and bike paths merge just before crossings, leading to confusion.
- South End has narrow, missing, and misaligned curb ramps.
- South End path is too narrow to be shared and has limited park access points.

Recommendations:

- Where a single north-south asphalt path exists today, widen and designate it as shared use.
- Maintain parallel paths in most locations, and distinguish between the walking and biking paths to eliminate confusion.
- The shared use path and/or bike path should be a minimum of 11' wide / recommended 12-13'.
- Widen curb ramps.
- Coordinate with MBTA and City of Boston on road crossing design.
- Move obstructions to create smooth transitions and more waiting space at road crossings.
- In the South End, create a shared street, add more curb ramps, and add entrances at Blackwoods and Cumberland.

Park and Recreational Facilities

Executive Summary

Playgrounds

Observations:

- **Importance:** Playgrounds are a critical recreational element of the park.
- **Condition:** Some playgrounds need renovation to address accessibility and functionality.

Recommendations:

- **Renovate Playgrounds:** Update playgrounds at Spalding Street, Hall/Boynton Street, Train Park, Lawndale, and Jackson Square.

Hard Courts

Observations:

- **Popular Activities:** Basketball and tennis are popular, but some courts are in poor condition.
- **Multipurpose Use:** Courts are also used for skateboarding and fitness activities.

Recommendations:

- **Rehabilitate Courts:** Repave and recoat courts, add fencing and fitness equipment, and stripe tennis courts for pickleball.

Community Gardens

Observations:

- **High Demand:** There is a high demand for community garden plots with long waitlists.
- **Need for Renovation:** Gardens need to be made ADA compliant and improved to deter rodents and enhance functionality.

Recommendations:

- **Expand and Renovate Gardens:** Complete the community garden renovation project, consider expanding the most desired gardens, and add a new garden on the Mission Deck.

Skate Park

Observations:

- **Suitability:** The existing skatepark is suited for advanced users.
- **Community Usage:** Street skating and beginners use alternative park areas.

Recommendations:

- **Expand and Enhance:** Introduce more skate-friendly features and expand the skatepark to include a street course.

Dog Parks

Observations:

- **High Usage:** Many dog owners use the park but there is tension with other users.
- **Need for Fenced Areas:** Unfenced, off-leash areas are not feasible for enforcement.

Recommendations:

- **Provide Fenced Areas:** Establish a fenced dog park in Jamaica Plain.

Accessibility

Observations:

- **Pre-ADA Design:** Many park features do not comply with ADA standards.

Recommendations:

- **Rehabilitate for Compliance:** Update paths, signage, materials, and furnishings to make them ADA compliant. Coordinate with the City of Boston for curb ramps and sidewalks.

Kelly Rink

Observations:

- **Disconnection:** The rink is well-loved but disconnected from the park.
- **Deferred Maintenance:** Surrounding pavement and facilities need maintenance.

Recommendations:

- **Improve Connectivity and Identity:** Enhance path connections, add signage, and introduce more gathering and observation spaces. Offer year-round activities like pickleball, skateboarding, and pop-up vendors.

Natural Resources

Executive Summary

Cooling/Shading/Air Quality Design

Recommendations:

- **Tree Planting:** Prioritize tree planting in environmental justice areas.
- **Shade:** Provide shade for pavements, benches, and playgrounds.
- **Light-Colored Pavements:** Use light-colored pavements where possible.
- **Evening Lighting:** Provide lighting for evening use to avoid summer heat.

Stormwater Management

Observations:

- **Drainage System:** Existing systems quickly channel water to pipes and water bodies.
- **Storm Intensity:** Increasing frequency and intensity of storms necessitate better stormwater management.

Recommendations:

- **Infiltrate Stormwater:** Use pervious pavements, bioinfiltration devices, and rain gardens to manage stormwater.
- **Aerate Lawns:** Core aerate lawns to decompact soils and improve water absorption

Biodiversity

Observations:

- **Tree Diversity:** Four species make up almost 50% of the park's trees.
- **Tree Condition:** 78% of the 2098 trees in the park are in good condition.
- **Landscape Composition:** The landscape is mainly trees planted in lawns.

Recommendations:

- **Increase Species Diversity:** Introduce more tree species, rain gardens, and native meadows to enhance biodiversity.

Cultural Resources

Executive Summary

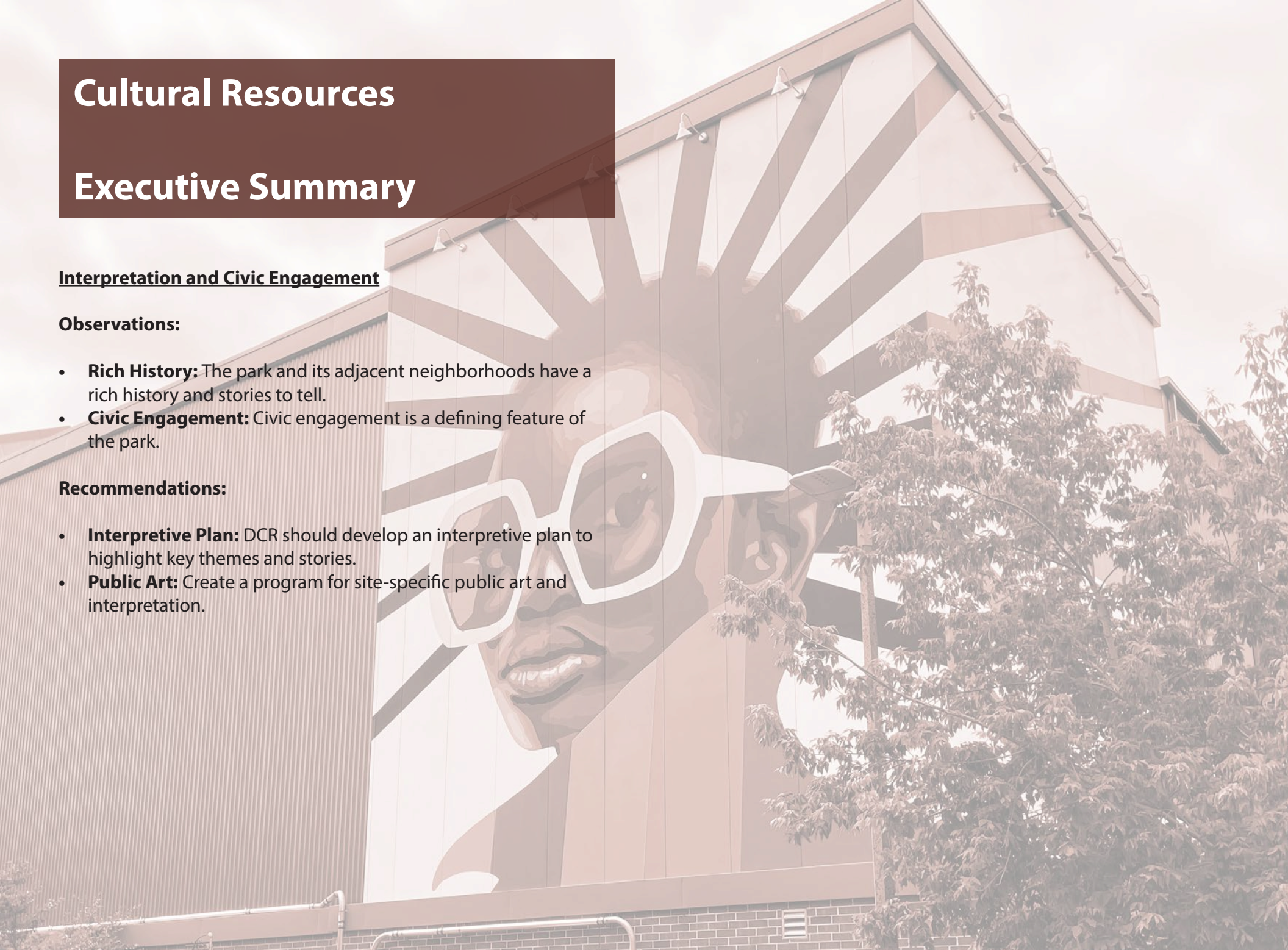
Interpretation and Civic Engagement

Observations:

- **Rich History:** The park and its adjacent neighborhoods have a rich history and stories to tell.
- **Civic Engagement:** Civic engagement is a defining feature of the park.

Recommendations:

- **Interpretive Plan:** DCR should develop an interpretive plan to highlight key themes and stories.
- **Public Art:** Create a program for site-specific public art and interpretation.



Implementation

Executive Summary

Observations

- Action plan is needed to guide investment and allocation of resources for the park.
- Changes to stewardship model are needed to improve park conditions.
- More funding from DCR and outside sources is needed to support the park stewardship.

Recommendations

This Action Plan recommends a range of important park improvements. Given the scale of these enhancements, not all can be implemented simultaneously. Therefore, projects should be prioritized based on addressing safety, accessibility, equity, and community benefits first, while also considering factors such as cost, sequencing, resilience, readiness, and ownership.

The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) has already been active in several early action park improvement initiatives, including upgrading the Mission Hill playground and splash pad, renovating the Stony Brook playground, path repairs, and piloting path etiquette and safety measures. DCR is currently designing improvements for enhancing Kelly Rink and improving Stony Brook and Amory Park.

Capital Planning Priorities:

- Complete and design and engineering process for path improvements, bundled with path adjacent tree planting, drainage, signage, and entrance enhancements.
- Fund a contract for hazardous tree removal and tree pruning

corridor wide.

- Develop designs for Lawndale playground renovation and skatepark expansion.
- Consider combining the dog park project with the Train Park playground renovation.
- Design the combined Anson/Boynton playground.
- Plan for the renovation of the Jackson Square playground and courts, as well as the Mission Hill deck court and fitness areas.
- Hire a consultant to develop an interpretive plan.

Coordination with MBTA and City of Boston Projects:

There are many recommended improvements that will greatly enhance the SWCP that require the MBTA or the City of Boston to implement because they own and control the infrastructure. The MBTA is responsible for MBTA station plazas and station accessibility while the City of Boston is responsible for road crossings and the public sidewalk. DCR should continue to coordinate with these agencies as SWCP improvements are made.

These agencies have improvements already in design for McBride Street, Columbus Avenue bus lanes, Ruggles Station, and relocating Jackson Square's Bluebikes stations.

Stewardship Model Recommendations:

- Increase DCR staffing and funding dedicated to the park.
- Expand capacity of friends groups, empowering them to professionalize and potentially consolidate efforts.
- Focus on grant writing, fundraising, and generating revenue from park activities.
- Leverage revenue opportunities from abutting development projects and contributions from the MBTA.

Operations & Maintenance

Executive Summary

Observations:

- The Southwest Corridor Park's complex ownership and management structure is a challenge for effective maintenance.
- Maintenance staff for the park has decreased over time, resulting in a high proportion of maintenance activities being reactionary, rather than proactive.
- Similar linear parks in Boston and elsewhere benefit from larger horticulture staff, strong Friends Groups who provide direct maintenance labor and fundraising support, and additional revenue sources from use fees or private sources.

Recommendations:

- Formal agreements could ensure shared commitment by different agencies and groups
- A time-task analysis of existing operations and maintenance activities would provide a framework to understand how staff spend their time, how staff can be most efficient, and how future resources can be best allocated.
- Staff are too limited to effectively maintain the park, currently. A larger group of dedicated Southwest Corridor Park staff with additional seasonal capacity will be key to maintaining any improvements in the Action Plan.
- The maintenance protocols with frequency-based tasks and event-based tasks provided in the chapter are a recommended starting point for considering how future staff time could be allocated.
- Consider the true costs of contracted labor versus additional staff members.

South End

The South End is a vibrant, landscaped area of the corridor situated on capped rail infrastructure. Interventions should enhance the well-established landscape, which is carefully maintained by dedicated volunteers. To improve mobility, adding and updating curb ramps will support a shared street, clearly designated with ground art. The path north of Massachusetts Avenue can be regraded to eliminate the stairs and ramp, and new park entrances should be created at Blackwoods and Cumberland Streets.



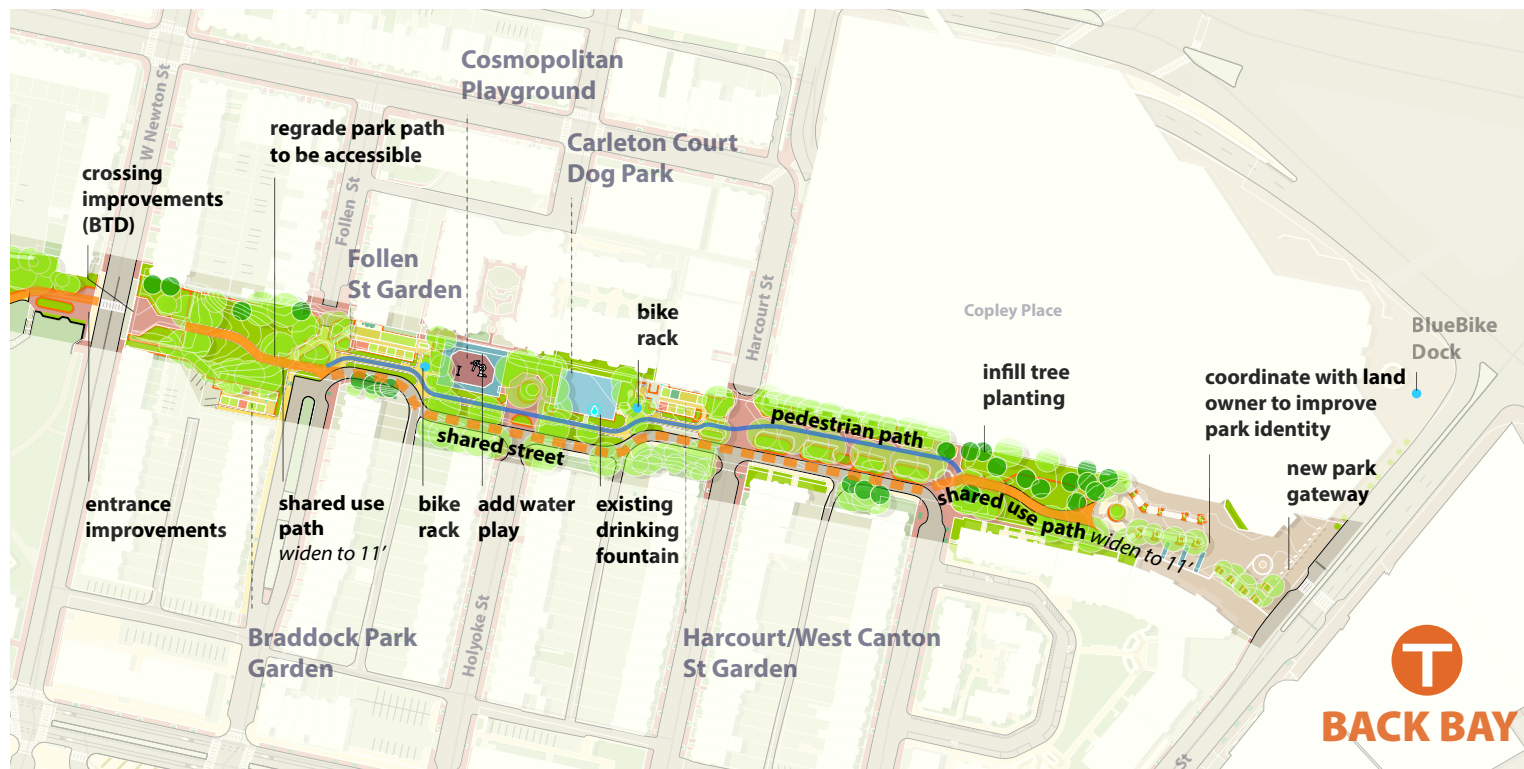
West Newton to Dartmouth

A more prominent gateway is needed at Dartmouth Street to better identify the park and guide visitors. The existing art and map kiosk are too understated. However, since the “gateway” is on privately owned land, outreach to the developer is necessary to enhance the area’s aesthetic and environmental quality. Improvements should include seating, planting beds, and trees to create a more inviting entry point, seamlessly integrating the park with the urban surroundings.

The lush, garden-like landscape beginning at Yarmouth Street is thanks to volunteers. In the South End, the path system is mainly a single sidewalk parallel to the road. Recommendations on this can be found in the mobility and access section.

Carleton Court Dog Park, managed by a dedicated friends group, is a well-maintained space with secure fencing and good vegetation. The Cosmopolitan Playground, designed for young children, will see upgrades including fencing, gates, and a small water play area. The path at West Newton Street also needs regrading for better accessibility.

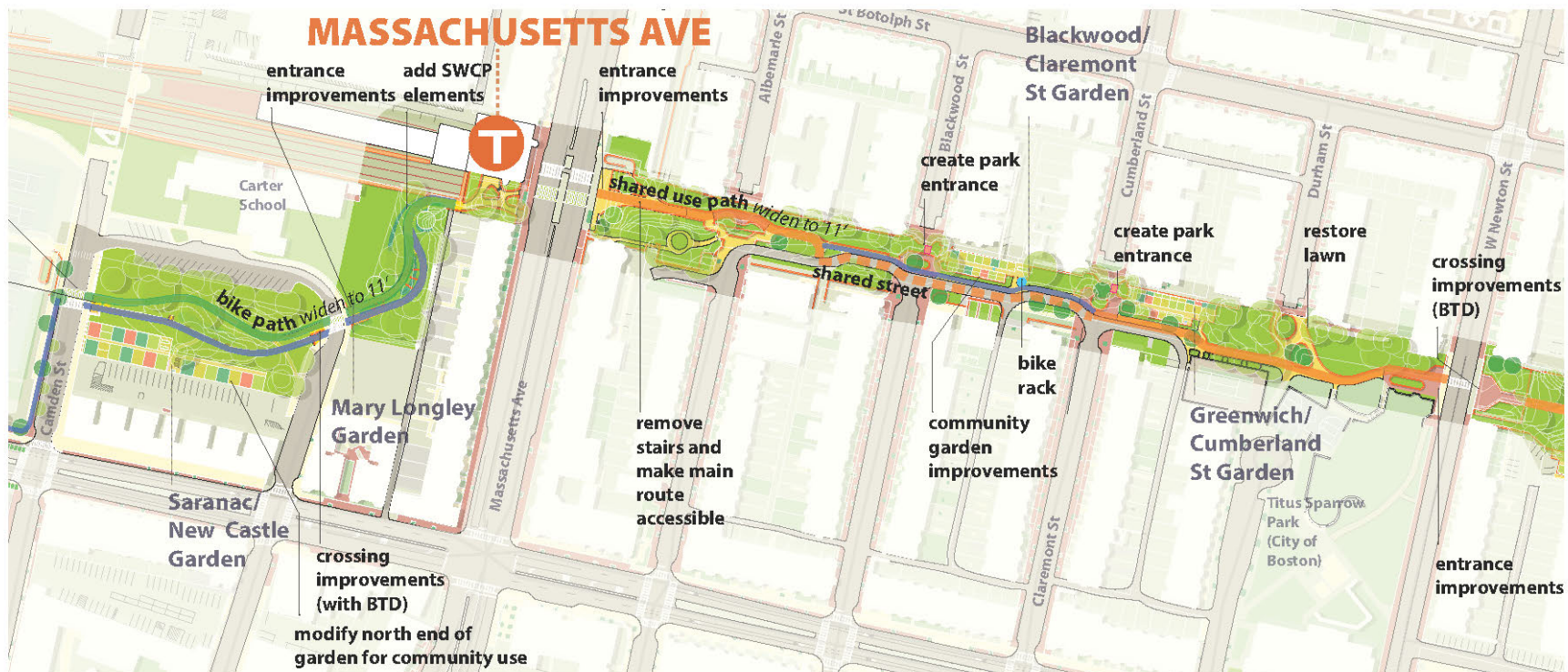
City of Boston road crossings within the corridor need improvements, with the city responsible for assessing, designing, and implementing necessary changes.



Camden to West Newton

Bike racks should be strategically placed near key destinations like community gardens, playgrounds, and the dog park, using modern racks that can accommodate typical, e-bikes, and cargo bikes. The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) is addressing accessibility, aging materials, drainage, infrastructure, and fencing in the South End's Southwest Corridor Park (SWCP) community gardens.

New lateral entrances should be added at Cumberland and Blackwood Streets, requiring re-grading and adjustments to granite block walls. North of Massachusetts Avenue, the path should be re-graded to replace the stairs and ramp with a single accessible path, and coordination with the MBTA could help remove the overhead structure, enhancing the skyline view. Gateway signage and regrading the MBTA plaza will improve usability and introduce green space. New trees will line the dual path system, with plans to expand the Mary Longeley garden. In the Northampton to Camden Streets area, pruning existing trees and removing overgrown yew shrubs, wood steps, and stonedust paths will improve the park..



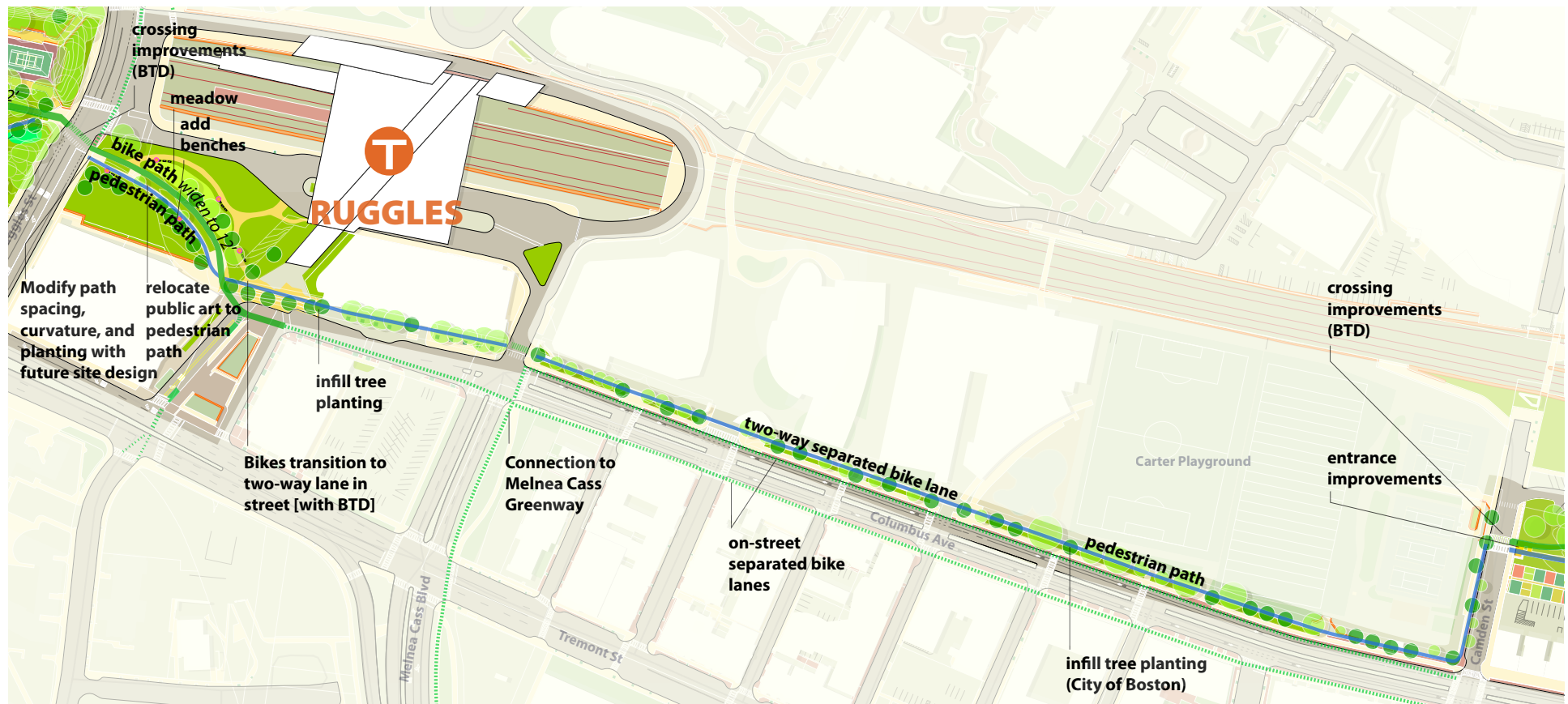
Roxbury

Widening the bicycle path will enhance path use. The Mission Deck court complex will maintain basketball and tennis facilities while adding a fitness area with shaded seating and skate-friendly features. There will be a strong emphasis on expanding the tree canopy to provide environmental benefits.



Ruggles to Camden

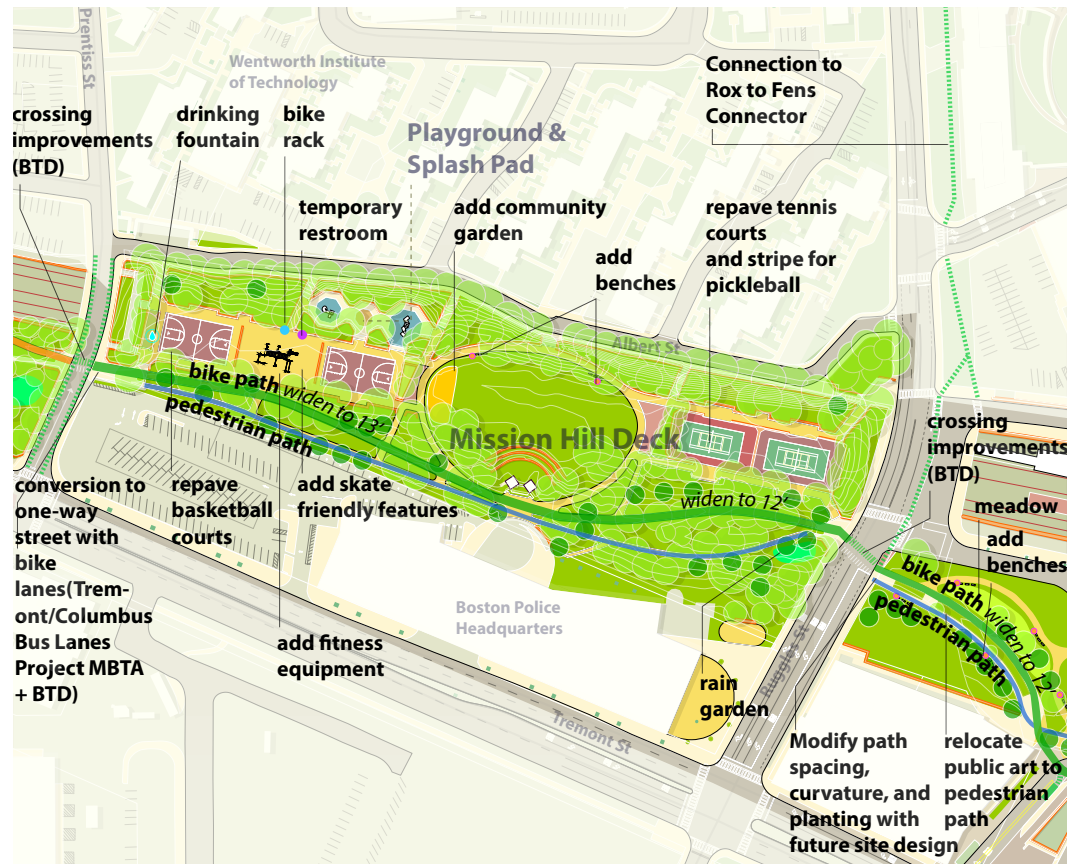
Between Ruggles and Camden Streets, the park shifts from a lush, green space to a more urban, linear path integrated into the streetscape. This area features paths running parallel to busy streets, with trees and landscaping interspersed among hardscapes and infrastructure. The focus here is on connectivity and mobility within an urban environment. To enhance the landscape, coordination with the City of Boston is needed for new tree planting, restoring greenery for park users. From Ruggles Street to the MBTA station, additional tree planting will provide shade and improve the area's appeal. Public art should be relocated along the pedestrian path to create a more engaging environment, and the concrete bike path should be replaced with smoother asphalt for cyclists.



Prentiss to Ruggles

Mission Deck is a key community space with basketball and tennis courts, a water play area, playground, and gathering spots. To enhance its appeal, these improvements are recommended:

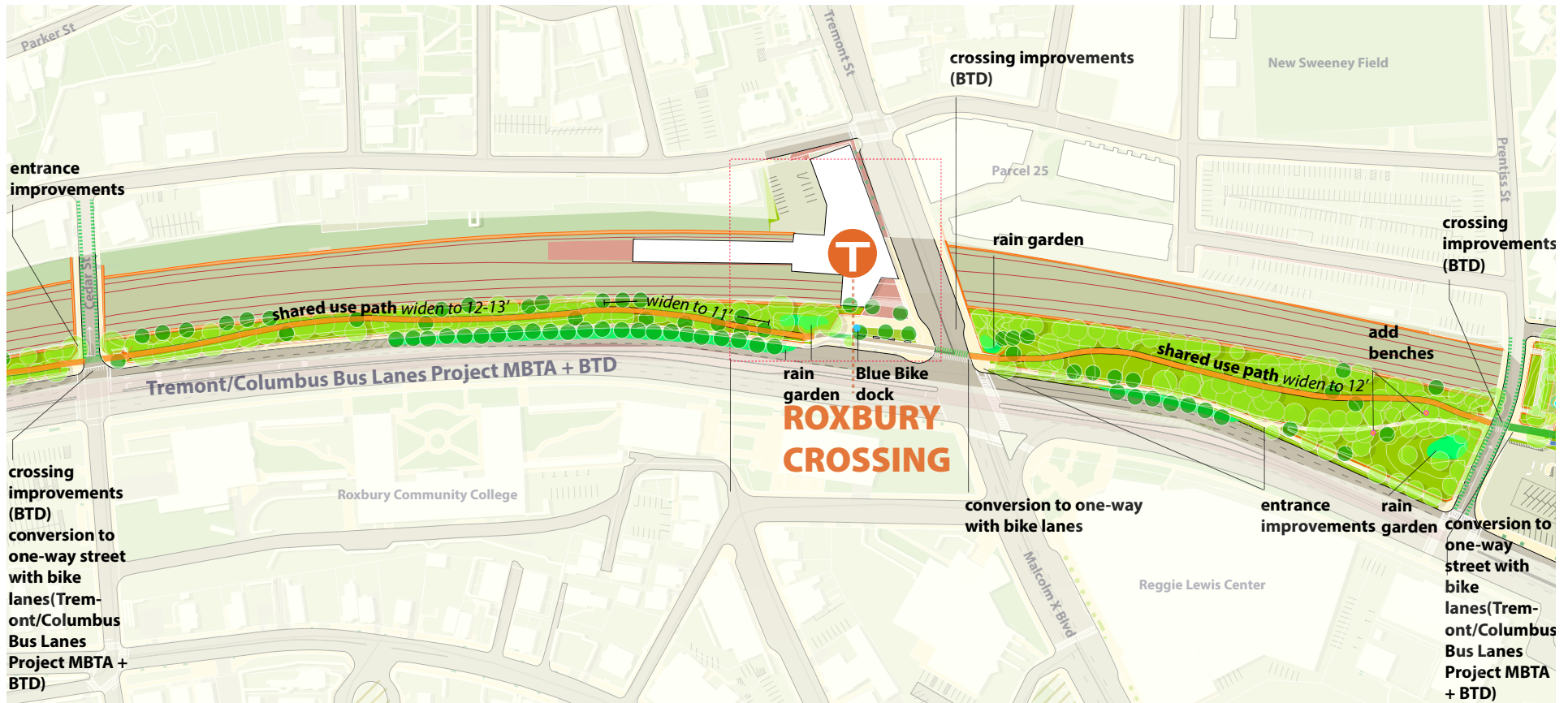
1. **Court Diversity:** Keep two basketball courts and convert the middle one into an outdoor fitness area with shaded seating and a drinking fountain. Add skateboard-friendly features to diversify use.
2. **Murals:** Commission a local artist to create murals on the courts, adding color and cultural value.
3. **Community Garden:** Convert the oval lawn into a community garden for fresh produce, shaped by the community's input.
4. **Accessibility:** Regrade the amphitheater area to remove steps, improving access for all visitors.
5. **Stewardship:** Create a friends group for Roxbury to boost maintenance and community engagement.



Cedar to Prentiss

As the park narrows through Roxbury, the limited space challenges tree growth, yet maintaining a healthy canopy is vital for both the community and park users. More focus is needed on planting new trees and caring for existing ones through pruning, watering, and soil improvements.

The Columbus Avenue Bus Lane project, led by the City of Boston and the MBTA, will calm traffic and add green infrastructure, including long tree lines to buffer the park and provide shade. Additionally, the project will renovate the MBTA plaza, improving pathways, accessibility, and tree planting.



Jamaica Plain

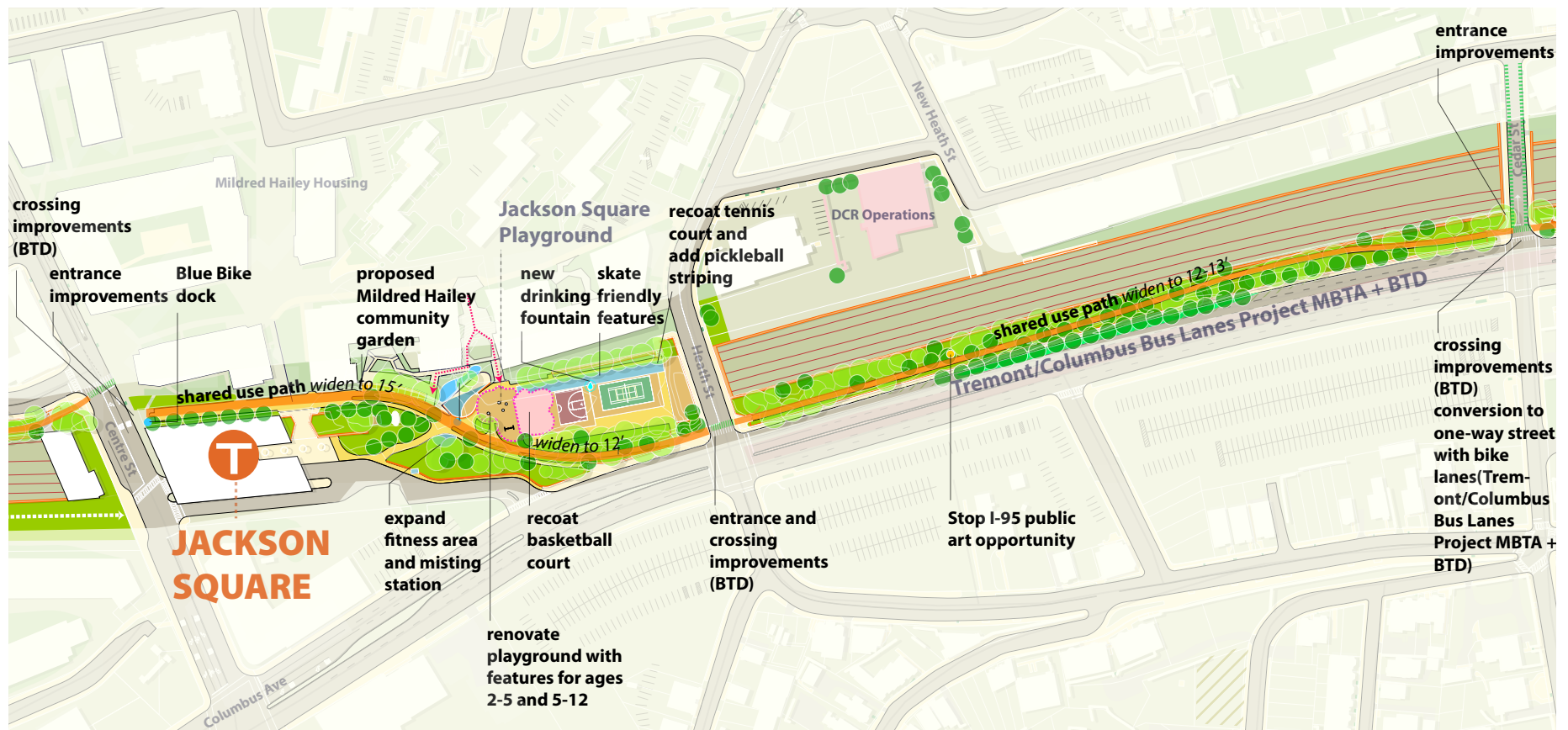
The dual path system is heavily utilized, warranting the widening of the bicycle path. Park amenities should be updated to address the current and future needs of the community. Open lawns are valued as flexible spaces for unprogrammed activities.



Centre to Cedar

The corridor between Heath Street and Cedar Street requires focused tree planting and thorough aftercare to ensure tree health. The Columbus Avenue Bus Lane project will introduce green infrastructure and street trees for traffic buffering, environmental benefits, and shade.

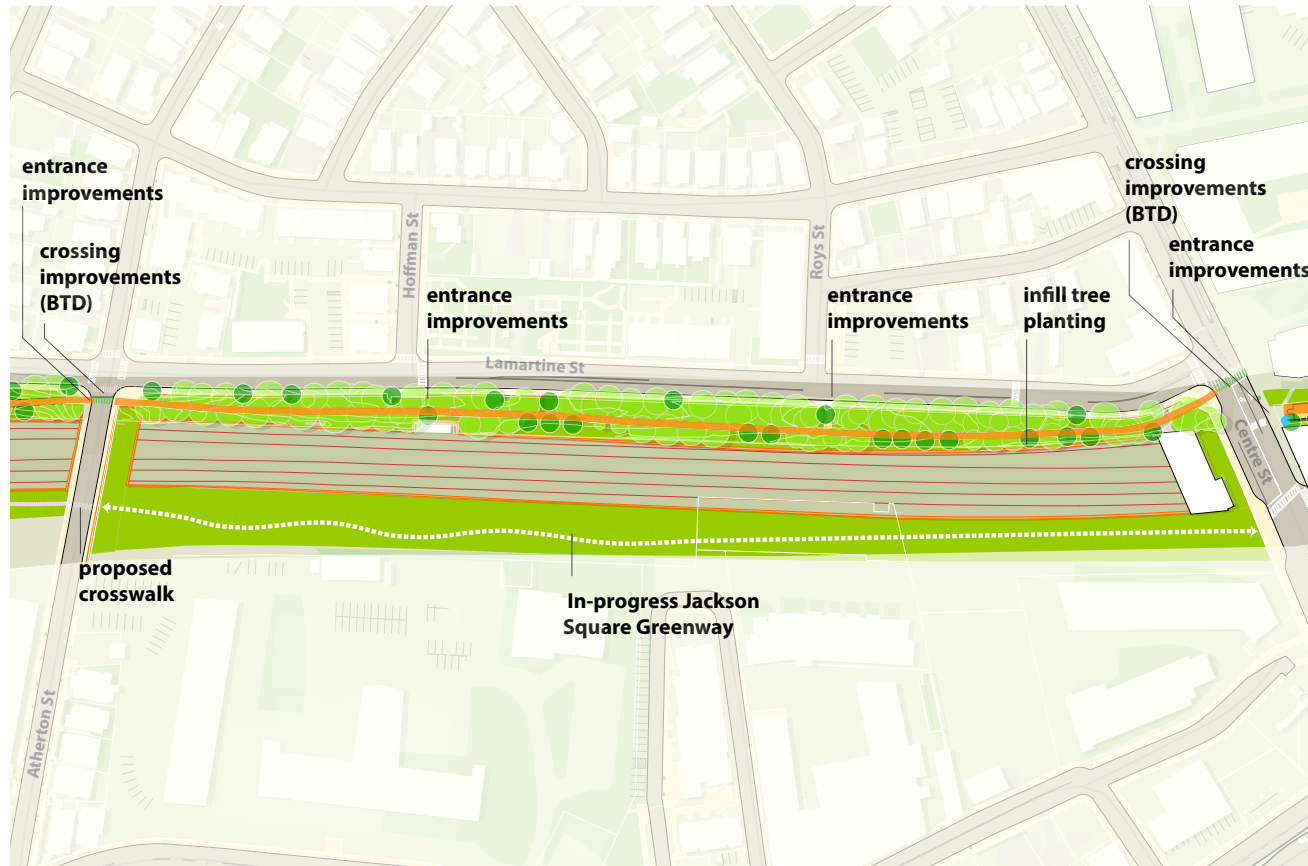
At Jackson Square, playground improvements will impact the surrounding landscape. Expanding the playground may involve reconfiguring elements, such as converting the full-court basketball area to a half-court or replacing the zipline with equipment for younger children. Adding fitness equipment, shaded seating, and skateboard features will enhance the area. North of Jackson Square, the dual path system will merge into a single shared-use path to optimize circulation and park space. Adjustments will be needed to guide routes around the play area due to the new Mildred Hailey development. Future park expansion over the rail corridor north of Jackson Square would increase green space, enhance recreational facilities, and establish a public presence for the DCR Operations building, fostering community engagement.



Atherton to Centre

The narrow park corridor between Atherton and Centre is more comfortable due to residential uses and additional tree canopy. Park users have consistently noted the need for improved road crossings, which the City of Boston will address.

To the east, the Jackson Square Greenway is being developed by private developers, enhancing connectivity to the Kelly Rink and new housing. Once an underutilized buffer, this development aims to transform it into a vibrant, integrated part of the park.



New Minton to Atherton

The Stony Brook area of the park is among the most popular within the Southwest Corridor, featuring vibrant hubs that cater to diverse interests. Each hub offers distinct amenities, creating an engaging environment for residents.

With many recreational options, Stony Brook attracts families with its basketball courts and playgrounds, while expansive lawns and picnic areas provide space for relaxation. Water play facilities enhance its appeal in warmer months.

Community-driven initiatives, like the popular community garden, are highly valued by residents, offering opportunities for urban agriculture.

These diverse activity hubs make Stony Brook a focal point for engagement, complementing one another and catering to various interests and age groups. Their ongoing success underscores the need for continued support and enhancement.



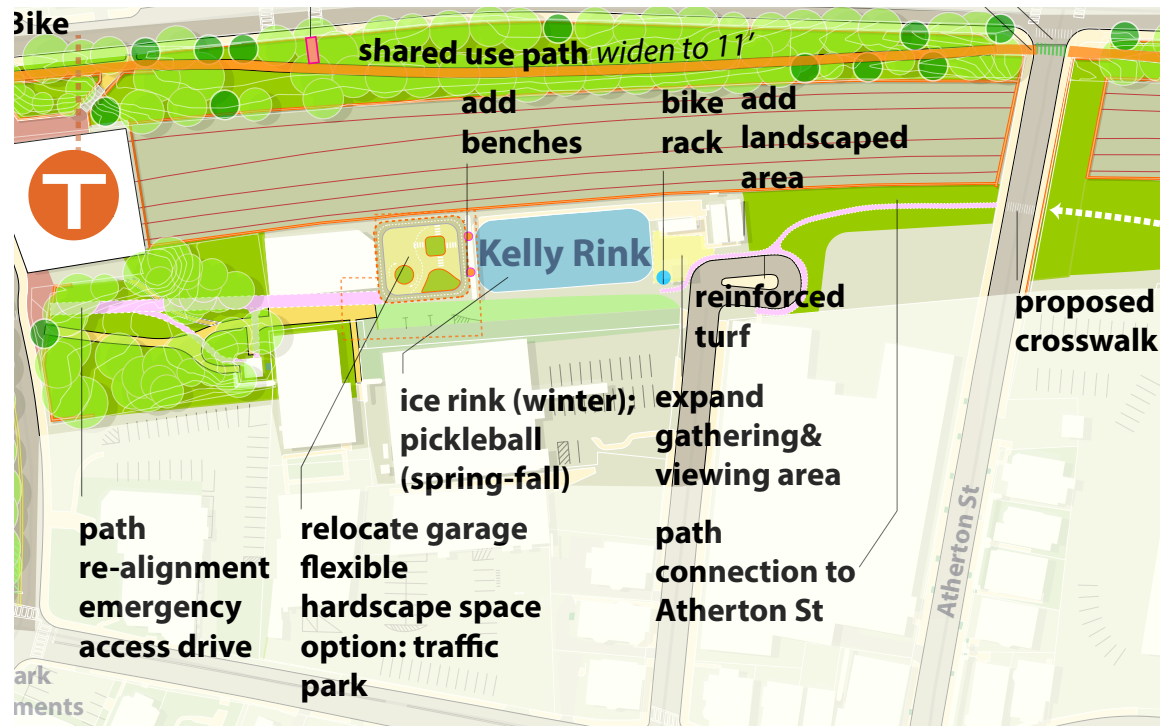
New Minton to Atherton (continued)

A major issue with Kelly Rink is its poor connectivity to the surrounding park, limiting access and integration with other amenities. Its low visibility and outdated facilities also highlight the need for upgrades to better serve the community.

DCR is exploring options to enhance usability and extend the skating season, including adding a roof to protect against weather disruptions. Relocating the Zamboni garage could improve access and streamline maintenance.

To optimize year-round use, adding pickleball striping could introduce a new activity during the off-season. Improving connectivity, particularly by redesigning the pedestrian route from Boylston Street, is also a priority.

A new pathway from Atherton Street to the Jackson Square Greenway could be developed if the MBTA and Northeastern University modify their lease agreement. Additionally, if Legal Services parking is no longer needed or relocated, the freed space near the rink could be repurposed for a children's traffic park, skateboarding facilities, or improved pedestrian circulation, enhancing the rink's appeal and functionality for the community.



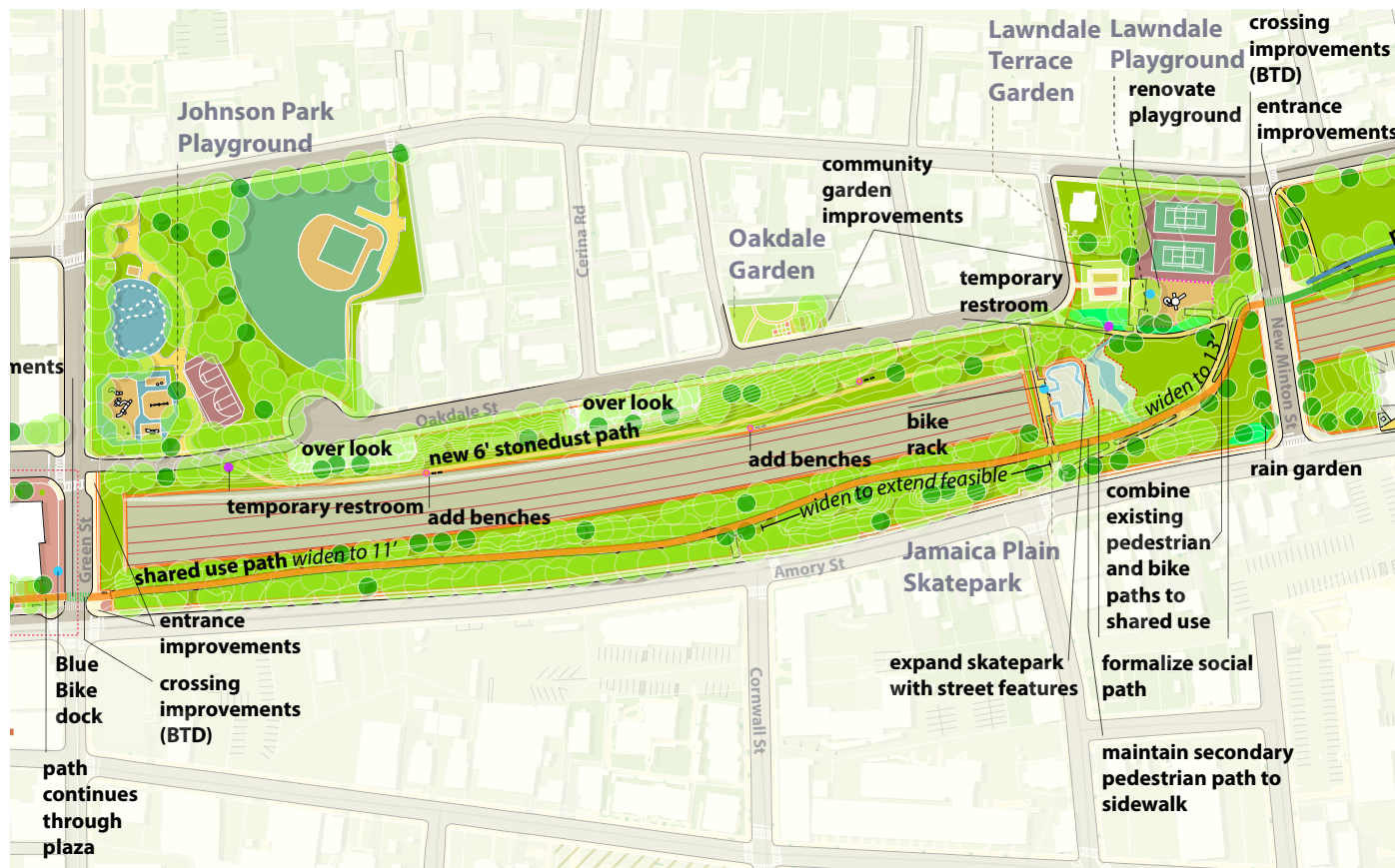
Green to New Minton

The park spans both sides of the rail corridor, offering various circulation options. The east side's formal dual path system will be enhanced, while the west side will gain a new stonedust path with lighting for improved safety.

A significant upgrade to the underutilized playground is recommended, including separating the tennis court entrance from the playground. The tennis court will be repaved and striped for both tennis and pickleball.

The existing skatepark will expand to include a street course, accommodating more users, especially those with less experience, based on community feedback.

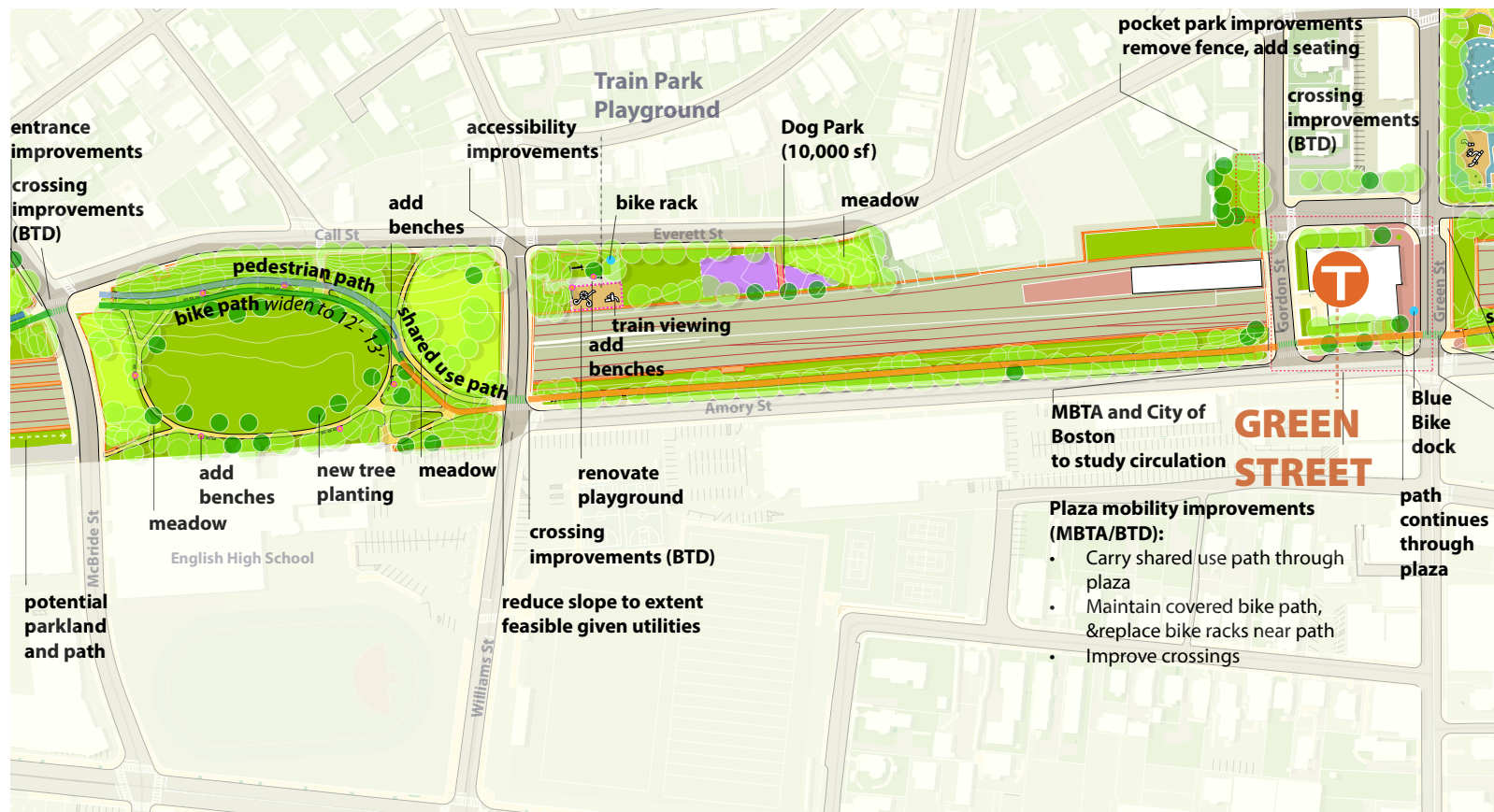
Oakdale Street will continue to serve as an alternative route, with understated overlooks maintaining their minimalistic character. Johnson Park does not require immediate improvements, as it currently meets community needs.



McBride to Green

The community emphasizes preserving the open nature of the oval lawn along Call Street, advocating for enhancements without heavy programming. Improvements will focus on upgrading paths, planting more trees, installing benches, and converting some turf into meadow areas, maintaining the lawn's openness while adding functionality. The Train Park playground will undergo a comprehensive renovation to address accessibility issues and enhance usability, incorporating features that highlight train viewing.

A new dog park is proposed between Everett Street and the rail corridor, providing an off-leash area for dogs and their owners. Improvements are also planned for the pocket park at Gordon Street and Woolsey Square, including a path, benches, and diverse planting to support pollinators. The Green Street MBTA plaza will undergo extensive renovation to clarify travel paths, address accessibility, and improve tree planting, enhancing functionality and aesthetics.



Arborway to McBride

To preserve and enhance the park's character, it's vital to maintain its rolling topography and varied outdoor rooms. Converting turf on transitional slopes to native meadows will improve aesthetics and increase biodiversity. Integrating rain gardens in low areas can help manage stormwater and provide ecological benefits.

Combining the two playgrounds in the area is recommended to create a more engaging space for a broader range of children, making it a central feature of the park.

Expanding the community garden is also desired, as long as it doesn't compromise other park activities, supporting local gardening efforts and enhancing community amenities.

