

An aerial photograph of a city, likely New York City, showing a dense urban landscape with numerous skyscrapers in the background and a large green park area in the foreground. A semi-transparent dark green rectangular box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing a large white number '1' and the text 'Vision and Goals' in white.

# 1

## Vision and Goals

Source: Google Earth



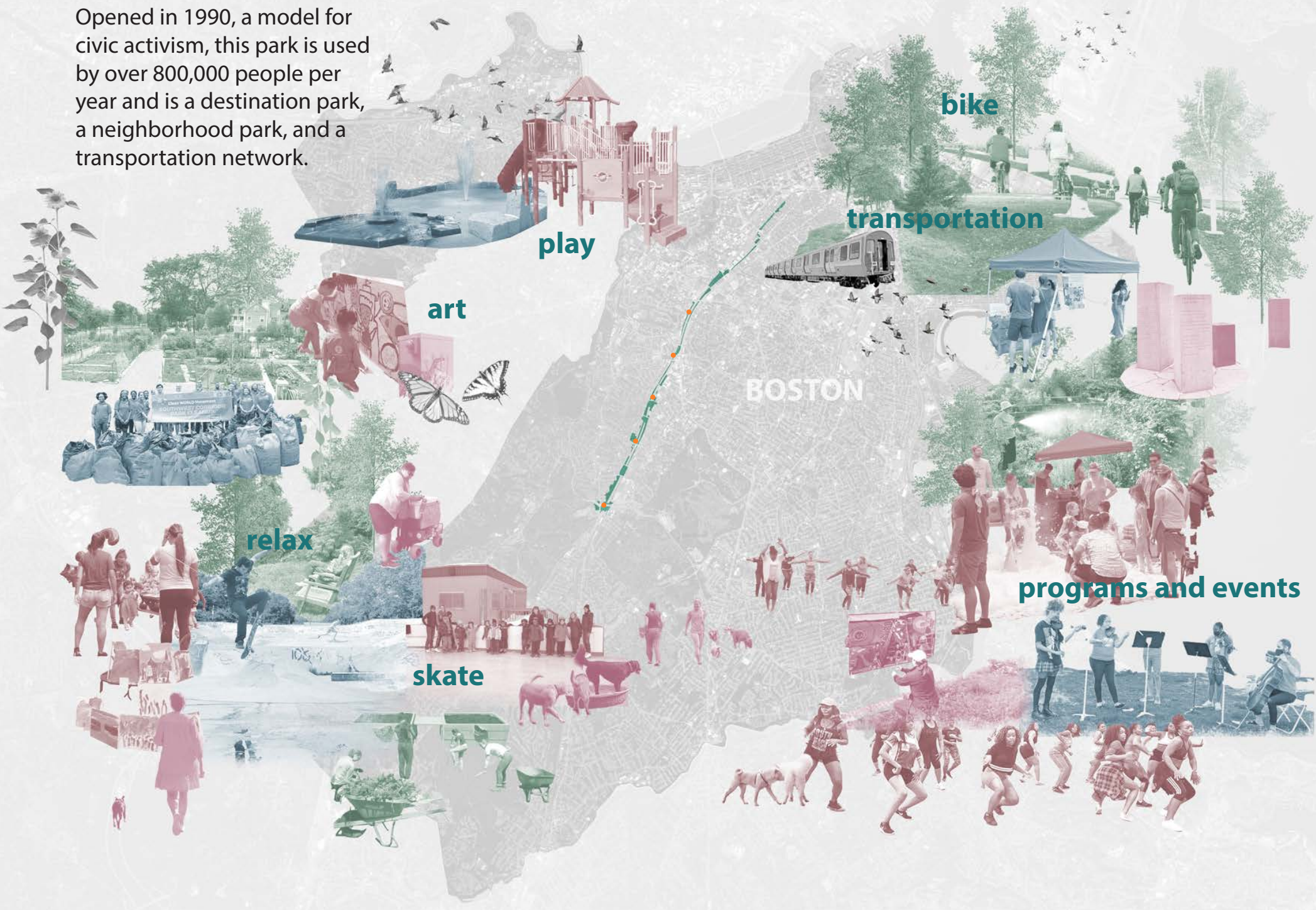
# Vision



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Opened in 1990, a model for civic activism, this park is used by over 800,000 people per year and is a destination park, a neighborhood park, and a transportation network.



## Project Description

The Southwest Corridor Park (“SWCP”) is a roughly 4-mile corridor running from Back Bay Station to Forest Hills Station through several Boston neighborhoods including Back Bay, South End, Roxbury, Fenway, Mission Hill, and Jamaica Plain. A landscape adjacent to and over the MBTA’s Orange Line, the 52-acre park is a greenway facilitating access to eight transit stations (subway, bus, and commuter rail services) with unique characteristics and facilities, from community gardens to basketball and tennis courts, a skate park, and playgrounds.

Opened 1987-1990, the SWCP enjoys an iconic status because of the number of neighborhoods and residents it serves, the diversity of uses, and, especially, its emergence from the citizen activism that stopped a highway project and envisioned an award-winning transit and park system in its place.

After more than 30 years, however, the park is due for renewed attention and investment. The city and the neighborhoods surrounding the Southwest Corridor Park have undergone significant growth and demographic changes. Mobility and recreational patterns have evolved – climate change and equity concerns are at the forefront of our attention. And some segments of the SWCP function better than others with varying degrees of deferred maintenance and modernization needs.

This Action Plan envisions a comprehensive and inclusive master planning process leading to a vision for both short- and long-term investments that renovate and modernize the park while strengthening and supporting the communities it serves.

## Project Goals

The proposed program and design goals for the Project include:

- Create a vision for the future of the SWCP and the roadmap to implement it, including identifying the appropriate level of resources for DCR Operations and external partners to maintain the park at an optimal level.
- Balance opportunities to be ambitious and visionary with the desire to yield projects and programs that are actionable and achievable in both the short term and long term.
- Celebrate the history of the SWCP as a model of responding to and incorporating community voices through active community engagement.
- Understand which elements of the SWCP are successful and should be preserved, and which ones are less successful and deserve reframing.
- Incorporate strategies to adapt to climate change (e.g., heat island, stormwater flooding from more frequent and intense storms) and to mitigate climate impacts (e.g., reducing carbon impact, dependence on fossil fuels).
- Incorporate equity considerations in both process and outcomes to ensure that the SWCP serves the diverse populations that use it.
- Create a safe, welcoming, and accessible path system for all ages and all abilities.
- Enhance connections to surrounding neighborhoods.
- Develop a collaborative and proactive approach to maintenance, stewardship, and programming along the Southwest Corridor, including specifying site furnishings and plant materials that are durable, easy to maintain, and improve ecosystem functions.
- Develop a modern, responsive, and flexible approach to protecting and interpreting historical and cultural resources along the corridor.
- Create a corridor-wide design identity that provides a cohesive and unified visitor experience.



## Vision

This Action Plan aims to further elevate the impact of this pioneering linear park, born out of vibrant community engagement, by fostering public health through the promotion of walking, cycling, and recreational activities. By seamlessly linking neighborhoods, the park will emerge as a shared “backyard,” providing diverse urban experiences and fostering a deeper connection with nature. It will play a crucial role in addressing the challenges of climate change, serving as a green sanctuary that helps mitigate its effects.

### Design Goals

The design goals outlined below helped to align the project with intended outcomes and provide a framework for evaluating its success.

- The park design should be adapted to accommodate Boston’s growing and diverse population, reflecting the needs of new and varied users. It is essential to share and interpret the significance of the community activism that played a pivotal role in the park’s creation, ensuring that this historical context is celebrated and understood.
- Improving the legibility of the park’s identity across the entire corridor is crucial, while also allowing for unique placemaking that highlights different areas of the park. This approach will help in creating a cohesive yet distinctive experience for visitors.
- Environmental stewardship must be a priority, with a focus on mitigating climate change impacts. This includes enhancing stormwater infiltration, diversifying plant species to support biodiversity, and improving wildlife habitat.
- The park should also aim to improve mobility by creating a safe, welcoming, and accessible path system. Incorporating the diverse needs and desires of the community is vital to ensure that the park serves all voices and promotes inclusivity.
- The design should prioritize durability and ease of maintenance and operations, ensuring that the park remains functional and inviting over time

## Vision(continued)

### Priorities

The project identified the below priorities to ensure that goals are addressed and resources are allocated effectively.

- Safety is a fundamental priority, ensuring that all repairs and redesign efforts deliver safe and accessible paths and park features for all users.
- Equity is equally crucial: improvements, amenities, and funding must be equitably distributed, with a particular focus on areas that have historically been underserved. The park's pathways and features should bridge and connect neighborhoods, fostering inclusivity and access for all community members.
- Adaptation and enhancement are necessary to meet the evolving needs of the community, as the park's demands have shifted since its opening in 1990. Updating the park to reflect current and future needs is essential, with an emphasis on supporting flexible uses that cater to diverse activities and user groups.
- Resilience is vital for addressing the impacts of climate change. This includes mitigating heat island effects, improving air quality, and managing inland flooding.

Increasing tree canopy coverage, diversifying the urban forest, and enhancing stormwater infiltration are key strategies to bolster the park's environmental resilience and sustainability.

### Context

The Southwest Corridor Park is a landmark project, distinguished by its origins in community activism and engagement. The vigorous public involvement of the 1980s shaped the park that we enjoy today. Its original design featured key character-defining elements, such as a continuous tree-lined dual path system that connects three Boston neighborhoods, a linear park with a diverse range of recreational programs, and historic granite blocks salvaged for its boundaries.

Over the past 35 years, Boston and the communities traversed by the park have undergone significant changes. As a result, the park now requires updates to meet evolving recreational needs, accommodate the increased volume and variety of travel modes on its pathways, ensure compliance with current regulations, and address previous disparities in park investment.

## Vision(continued)

### Synopsis

The park's path system is crucial for circulation but requires enhancements in connectivity and usability. Narrow paths and poorly connected routes should be widened and clearly marked to minimize conflicts between walkers, bikers, scooters, and other devices. Developing new connections to link the park with surrounding neighborhoods and transportation hubs is essential. Additionally, reimagining underutilized or isolated park parcels to expand functional space could transform these areas into vibrant community spaces or recreational zones.

Inconsistencies such as varying signage and furnishings detract from its overall coherence. To strengthen the park's identity, it is essential to develop a unified signage and furnishings system that aligns with the park's original design while updating it to meet current needs. Updating wayfinding signage will help guide users effectively through the park and to adjacent cultural destinations.

Developing an interpretive plan will be essential to convey the rich history of the park and its surrounding communities. This plan will identify key interpretive themes and guide the design of signage, ensuring that it

effectively communicates the park's story. Additionally, the plan will propose distinctive design elements, including artistic features and historical markers, which will highlight unique areas of the park and celebrate the cultural and historical significance of the surrounding neighborhoods. These enhancements will not only enrich the visitor experience but also foster a deeper connection between the park and the community.

Currently, the park's tree canopy lacks diversity and adequate coverage. Increasing the variety of tree species will boost biodiversity and resilience, while prioritizing new plantings in areas with limited canopy coverage will improve shade, air quality, and aesthetics.

The park's existing stormwater management system relies on traditional methods that may not fully address the increased rainfall intensity due to climate change. Introducing green infrastructure—such as pervious pavements and rain gardens—will enhance stormwater management and support groundwater recharge. Updating drainage systems to improve stormwater infiltration can reduce flooding and bolster tree health.

Ensuring equitable access to park amenities is a critical concern. Addressing historical disinvestment and making all park improvements ADA-compliant and accessible to



## Vision(continued)

### Synopsis (continued)

people of all abilities is essential. This project engaged diverse community groups in the planning process helping address specific needs and preferences, and ensuring that recommendations benefit all users and promote social equity.

To effectively implement these enhancements, a detailed action plan has been developed. This plan outlines specific actions, responsible parties, with clear goals. Regular monitoring and evaluation of progress will be necessary to ensure the success of the changes and to make adjustments based on feedback and evolving needs.