BOSTON'S SOUTHWEST CORRIDOR: From Urban Battleground to Paths of Peace

The most confounding thing about pedestrian corridor projects is that we should have to establish them at all.

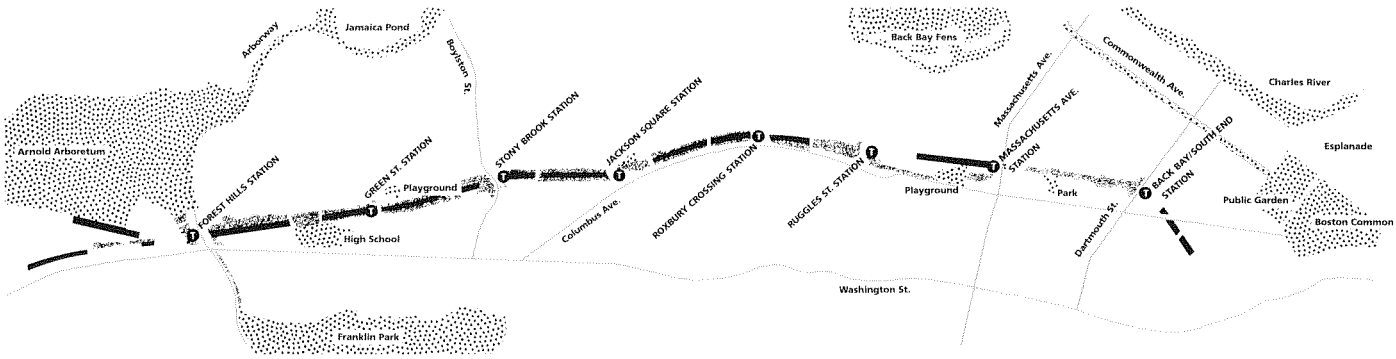
There was a time in America when footpaths ran through towns and farms in partial disregard of property ownership, very much like the English and Scottish common law footpaths. Our footpaths are derived from a second parentage as well: the Indian trails of common access that American colonists adopted as their own.

The common footpaths and trails would, by custom, remain accessible to the public so long as they were trod at least once every year. It was recognized, in our past, that public rights of access and private rights to privacy were not irreconcilable.

But that was eons ago. With the consolidation and fencing of property under real estate law and the industrialization of American cities, idiosyncratic common ways were extinguished, except for the few remnants that were preserved under public title. Then, too, there was the lack of foresight, chiefly in the nineteenth century, in not reserving path corridors within or along public corridor land as it was sold or granted to the railroads or retained and developed as highways.

The demise of the common law footpath was very much present in my mind as I began work on Boston's Southwest Corridor Project park master plan in the spring of 1977. The decade earlier I had traveled to England to study river corridors and footpaths and to learn how people and cities were served by them. The Southwest Corridor represented industrial blight and an overwhelming lack of access. Down its middle ran the old Penn Central railroad — which ran atop a grim, soot-covered, granite-faced embankment for its greater length and along down-at-the-heel industrial sprawl and menacing wastelands. Ever since its emergence more than a century ago, this corridor had divided communities and sealed them off from access to the city's center. Could anything be done to redeem it?

Boston residents are making Southwest Corridor Park a part of their city.
Photo © Ben E. Watkins.



Ten years earlier, I had prepared a rehabilitation plan for Frederick Law Olmsted's Emerald Necklace and the parkland of the Charles River Basin.[1] In the course of research I had learned how urban and highway development of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had extinguished many a well-trodden trail or path.

How might a path stretching the length of the Corridor, more than four miles, be physically formed? Would continuity throughout its length be important for access between Boston's center and outlying neighborhoods? Were there ways to keep social friction low, both among path users and between users and abutting private and institutional properties?

There were other critical questions, some of which would determine the very fate and viability of the park, but neither questions nor answers can be adequately appreciated without an understanding of the broader physical, social and political context of the project and its precedents.

The Southwest Corridor of 1976, reaching from Boston's Back Bay to Forest Hills, a stretch of more than four miles, was the legacy of some of the worst single-purpose transportation thinking of the century. The Corridor had been identified in the 1950s and '60s as the ideal alignment for completion of Interstate 95, locally to have been designated as the Southwest Expressway. It was an element of the proposed Boston urban expressway system, crowned by the infamous "Inner Belt," which would have devastated the city's inner neighborhoods and appreciably degraded its environment.

Construction of the expressways and the bridges, tunnels and ramps associated with them would have decimated the historic parks of Boston, Brookline and Cambridge. Sixty acres of Charles River Basin and Emerald Necklace park lands would have been eradicated, out of a total of slightly more than 600 acres extant in 1967.

While the expressway program was still alive, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts had taken more than 100 acres of homes and other properties in Roxbury and Jamaica Plain, widening its holdings along the Penn Central railroad right-of-way — the spine of the Corridor — to accommodate the expressway and its interchanges. The raw wounds of the takings and growing awareness of the impending social, economic and environmental impacts of neighborhood displacement and other adversities led to protest. Coming on the heels of the Blue Hills Avenue riots, in which dozens of businesses had been burned to the ground in an outburst of African-American frustration and

How the Community Shaped Southwest Corridor Park

The community-based coalition that helped stop the construction of the Southwest Expressway did not dissipate once the highway project was dropped in the late 1970s. Its members reorganized to form the Southwest Corridor Coalition, a non-profit advocacy group that was actively involved in the pre-design and planning phases of the Park and transit corridor and helped select project consultants. The Coalition's main thrust was to ensure maximum economic development opportunities for neighborhood residents during the design and construction phase of the Project.

Community members were involved in all aspects of the Park and transit corridor design, from the vertical alignment of the tracks and bridges to the flooring tiles and lighting fixtures in stations. The MBTA organized community residents into a corridor-wide Working Committee during the earliest stages of planning and design of the project, when overall goals, objectives and uses were considered and urban design guidelines that applied to the entire corridor were created. From the outset, community consensus dictated there should be public uses for land that was not needed for the subway line and stations. The Park was one way of achieving this goal.

As the project progressed to smaller scale design and planning issues, the forum for community participation and the forums for discussing and resolving issues shifted correspondingly. The Working Committee spawned three task forces that participated in the design of smaller sections of the Park. The sections were organized to correspond with the geographical boundaries of the major communities along the Corridor, the South End, Roxbury and Jamaica Plain. Anyone who lived, worked or owned property in any of these neighborhoods could participate.

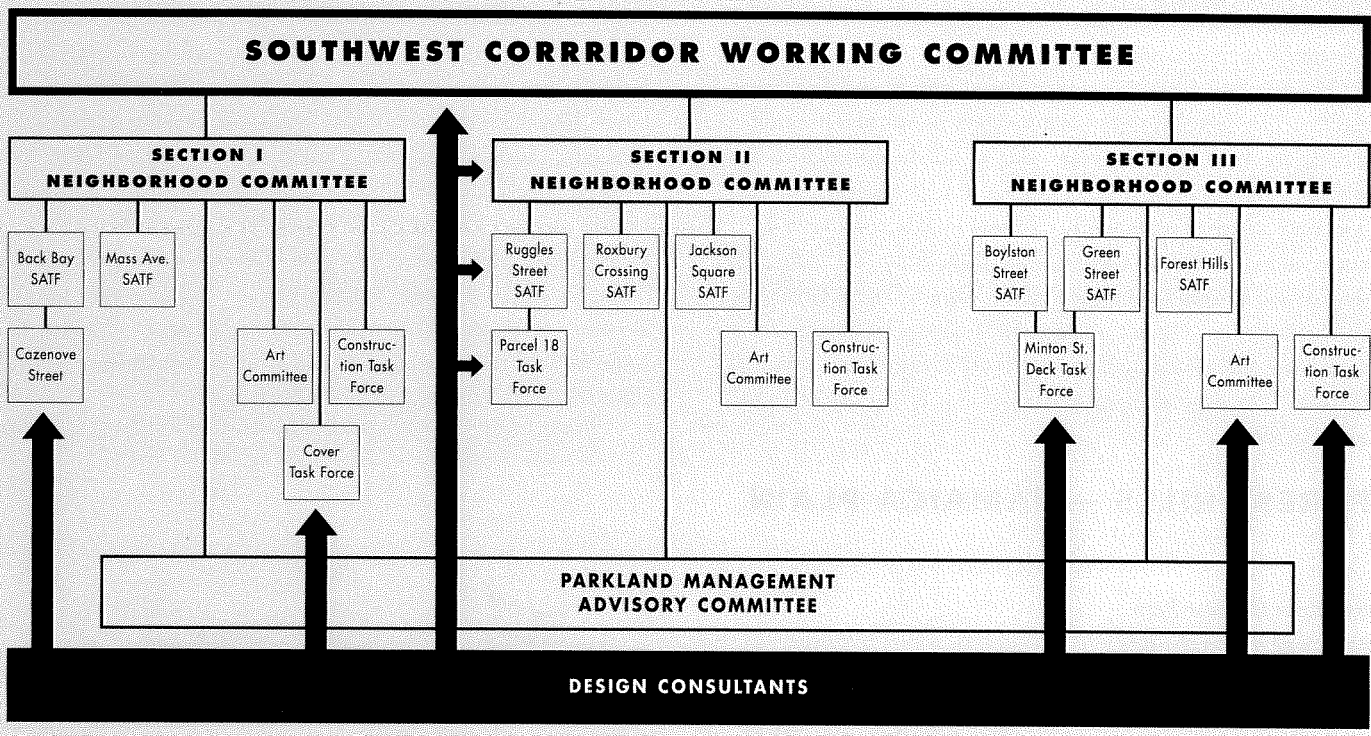
Out of these groups grew another level of community review — eight very localized Station Area Task Forces, one for each new station planned along the Orange Line's route. Anyone within a quarter mile of a new transit station could join the appropriate Station Area Task Force.

Another Corridor-wide organization, the Parkland Management Advisory Committee (PMAC) addressed the Park's development, maintenance and management. It was and remains the forum for community involvement in all matters regarding the Park. Although

• I helped evaluate the T's design proposals, disseminate information in my neighborhood, encourage meeting participation and advocate for a particular position at project meetings. • When the project budget was threatened I worked with others to gain political support to retain the original design.

— Edwina Cloherty, Southwest Corridor resident

The committee structure that channeled community participation. Graphic adapted from MBTA.



local task forces were involved substantively in the Park's early conceptualization and programming, subsequent design, construction and management became PMAC's province.

Other specialized groups arose as different topics warranted closer attention. The Art Advisory Committee, for example, selected artwork for the transit stations and parkland. The Minton Street Deck Committee, formed from the Green Street and Boylston Street Station Area Task Forces, was convened to program the uses for a parkland deck cover located between those two stations. The Parcel 18+ Task Force concentrated on issues of future mixed-use land development near Ruggles Station.

Notwithstanding the breadth and complexity of the participation process, design issues were identified and addressed according to the project schedule and, typically, once resolved, issues were not reopened for discussion.

The community's influence was particularly evident with the design of the Park because, unlike with other components of the project, everyone was familiar with parks and recreational areas and needed very little technical information to express opinions. Park design was of vital interest to most community participants, and it held their interest longer than matters of station design, perhaps because they perceived the Park as a more significant part of their neighborhoods than the stations.

— Harry Ellenzweig, Jacqueline Hall

The Park runs more than four miles along what was once an expressway right-of-way, connecting several Boston neighborhoods with downtown. Photo courtesy MBTA.

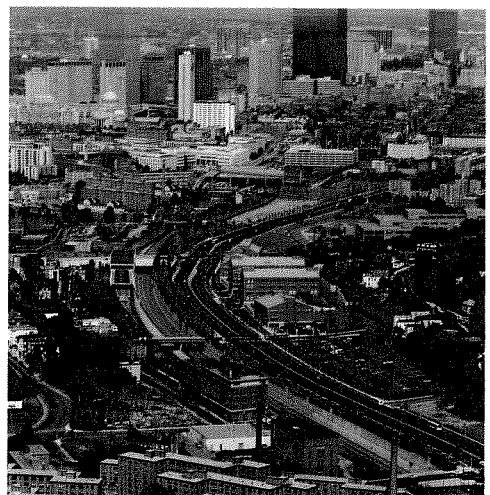


Photo courtesy Mason and Frey.

Continuity of Place and Time

The system of double paths — one for pedestrians, one for bicyclists — and the trees that line them are two of the elements that provide visual and functional continuity along the length of Southwest Corridor Park.

Another element that gives the Park a sense of cohesiveness is the use of granite block in curbs, retaining walls and seating. Before the Corridor was cleared for construction, trains ran for part of its length along a rampart that was faced with granite block, locally quarried and similar to that used in buildings throughout the city. The granite was

anger, the land takings of the Southwest Expressway project furthered mistrust of and antagonism to government in the city's African-American community.

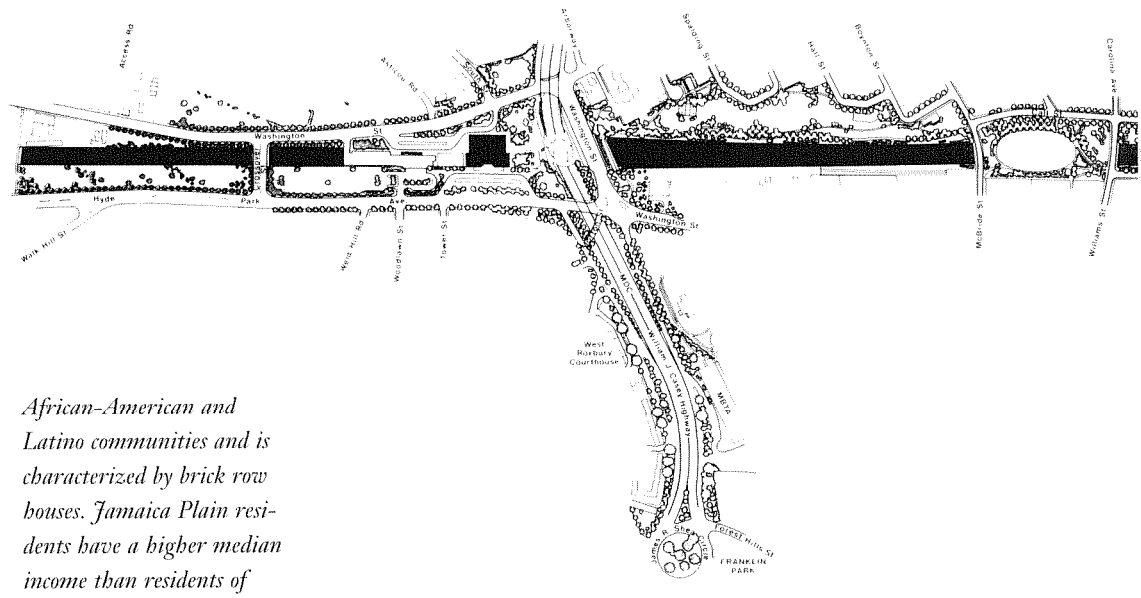
Whites, Latinos and others in the neighborhoods adjoining the Corridor were also evicted from their homes and businesses during the land-clearing years. Bit by bit the protests of the African-American community coalesced with the protests and concerns of other community, professional, business and civic interests in the Boston region, principally under the banner of the Greater Boston Committee on the Transportation Crisis, the chief grass roots warrior against the highway bulldozer. They were ultimately joined by Boston's City Hall and several state legislators.[2] The expressway program was finally abandoned in the early 1970s.

Once the expressway serpent had been slain, mass transportation advocates and Boston planners began fashioning a new, and progressive, program for the Corridor. Led by Frederick P. Salvucci, the city's transit-supportive transportation planner and later Massachusetts Secretary of Transportation under Michael Dukakis, the new program, entitled the Southwest Corridor Project, sought transit and rail improvements, combined with improvements to existing arterial and local streets. *No new arterials or expressway elements were to be developed under the program.* This fact received special emphasis as the message went out to Boston's citizens that government would again attempt to improve area transportation, but this time it would work in the interests of the community, not against them.

FOREST HILLS — JAMAICA PLAIN

Southwest Corridor Park starts with a flourish. Just where this brand-new open space converges with Frederick Law Olmsted's century-old Emerald Necklace, just where commuter, Amtrak, subway and bus lines meet in a spaghetti bowl of tracks, ramps and roads, the clock tower of Forest Hills Station puts things in perspective. This is neither an outpost, a way station, nor the end of the line.

The Park heads north and east from here through Jamaica Plain, an Irish, working-class district of one- and two-family wood-frame homes. The northern section of Jamaica Plain, near Roxbury, is home to sizable African-American and Latino communities and is characterized by brick row houses. Jamaica Plain residents have a higher median income than residents of other communities along the Corridor.



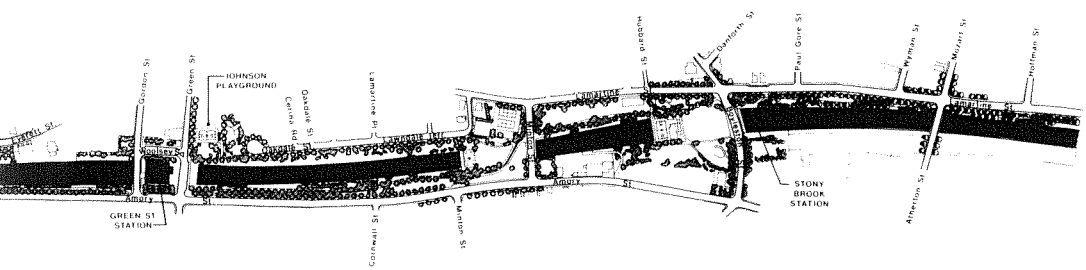
Two of the concerns of Jamaica Plain residents were to make as many connections across the open cut right-of-way as possible, and to provide open, green areas that

saved when the rampart was taken down and reused throughout the Park. The granite also gives the Park the appearance that it is aged, solid and important. The granite conveys a sense of continuity with the land and continuity with Boston's history that concrete abutments and walls, visible in some places, do not.

Yet, the adversarial history of the Southwest Corridor would test the intent and performance of the Commonwealth, its Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) and their consultants at each stage of SWCP plan review.[3] Elated with their victory over the expressway, Boston's activist communities were not about to slide into complacency with the commonwealth's alternative program, no matter how replete it was with urban mass transportation, parkland and joint development potential. Roxbury, Mission Hill, Jamaica Plain and the South End played a wait-and-see position at MBTA-sponsored Neighborhood Task Force meetings until the SWCP, in its benign form, began to come together.

Each of the diverse neighborhood interests within the affected area of the city was represented on the Southwest Corridor Coalition, the overall advocacy group that had in part succeeded the Greater Boston Committee on the Transportation Crisis. The Coalition served as the principal watchdog over the SWCP ("would the Governor sneak a highway element back into the picture?"), but it was also a strong positive influence in its support of a cohesive and continuous park system. The eight station area task forces, convened to discuss the design of the subway stations and the areas surrounding them, were more concerned with local access, safety and recreation issues than with Corridor-wide or citywide issues.

Needless to say, the ill-fated Southwest Expressway had had no provision for footpaths and bikeways, let alone parks and playgrounds, community gardens, or joint commercial development. But the SWCP would. This much had been determined by the



could support a variety of activities. Consequently, nine streets and four broad decks bridge the tracks. One of the decks, an elliptical green, adjoins a high school. Elsewhere, a "town green," also serves as a front yard for the Stony Brook Station.

Another neighborhood concern (as elsewhere along the Corridor) was for safety. Spaces programmed for specific activities, such as playgrounds and tennis courts, were situated so they could be observed from adjacent streets and homes.

This stretch of the Park is wonderfully aloof from its regional pretensions. One cannot drive along it easily (no single street parallels its entire length), or reach it very easily from major arterials — although it is well connected to neighborhood streets. Except for where there are decks, the Park is not much wider than a house or a yard, so its scale does not overwhelm its surroundings. After walking a short distance into the Park, one feels as if one is in nothing more than a small, pleasant neighborhood park.

Nevertheless, one is connected with and oriented to the central city. One can look down the railroad corridor from almost any point and see the Prudential tower, which sits near the northeast end of the Park not far from downtown. One can reach downtown by hopping a subway, walking, or biking along the Park, or heading back to Forest Hills and meandering along Olmsted's past the Arnold Arboretum, past Jamaica Pond, and along the Fens and the Charles River.

Yet it is the clock tower, perhaps the most visible single landscape element in the Park, that is the more apt landmark. The tower proclaims that many competing visions — old and new, transit and open space, regional and neighborhood — have somehow been resolved in this many-faceted Park.
— Todd Bressi, Aileen Rosen

Near Forest Hills, benches provide a vantage from which one can see the railroad corridor, the neighborhood on the other side and downtown landmarks. Photo courtesy Mason and Frey.

"peace talks" between Salvucci's transportation planners and the SCC.When the professional work began on the park master plan in 1977, this basic understanding, supported by a 1975 feasibility study, served as the intended program.

Yet it remained to be seen: Was there really a chance to see a strong and satisfying park emerge, one that could provide individual and neighborhood satisfaction and also command the respect and attention of the public agencies and legislative bodies arm-bent into adopting this new, "other side of the tracks," ragtag, bean pole of a linear park?

At the start of planning in 1977, there was only the trackside wasteland and desolate standing uses of the Corridor and no certainty as to which public agency would adopt the future greenway. And there were those who doubted that the way would be very green at all. One of our first challenges, then, was to see if we could find an approach to Corridor planning that could create a *genius loci* for the four-mile reach where none, or a fairly grimy one, had previously existed.

The Forest Hills Station clock tower marks the point at which these tracks connect with the Southwest Corridor transit line, and at which the Arnold Arboretum connects with Southwest Corridor Park. Photo © Ben E. Watkins.

Reviving a Forgotten Creek

To be more precise, actually, the southerly three-quarters of the Corridor had once possessed an interesting *genius*, a rugged and colorful one that could have contributed a valuable aesthetic to the Corridor had it persisted into the twentieth century or been allowed to resurface through the workings of Corridor reconstruction. This was the vale of Stony Brook, the small stream that wove its way between the glaciated hills of the area, through a bottomland originally rich in maples and oaks, to its debouchment into the Charles River estuary in the vicinity of what is today the Boston Fens.

This small, forested stream had overfilled its banks far too often for the comfort of the urban settlers of Jamaica Plain and the Back Bay. When, in the 1880s, Boston's engineers and Frederick Law Olmsted were charged with resolving the perennial flooding of Stony Brook and the Muddy River, it was the milder Muddy River that was selected as the armature of

Although Park planners were not able to revive a creek that is channeled beneath the railroad corridor, the Park does include several fountains. Photo courtesy Mason and Frey.

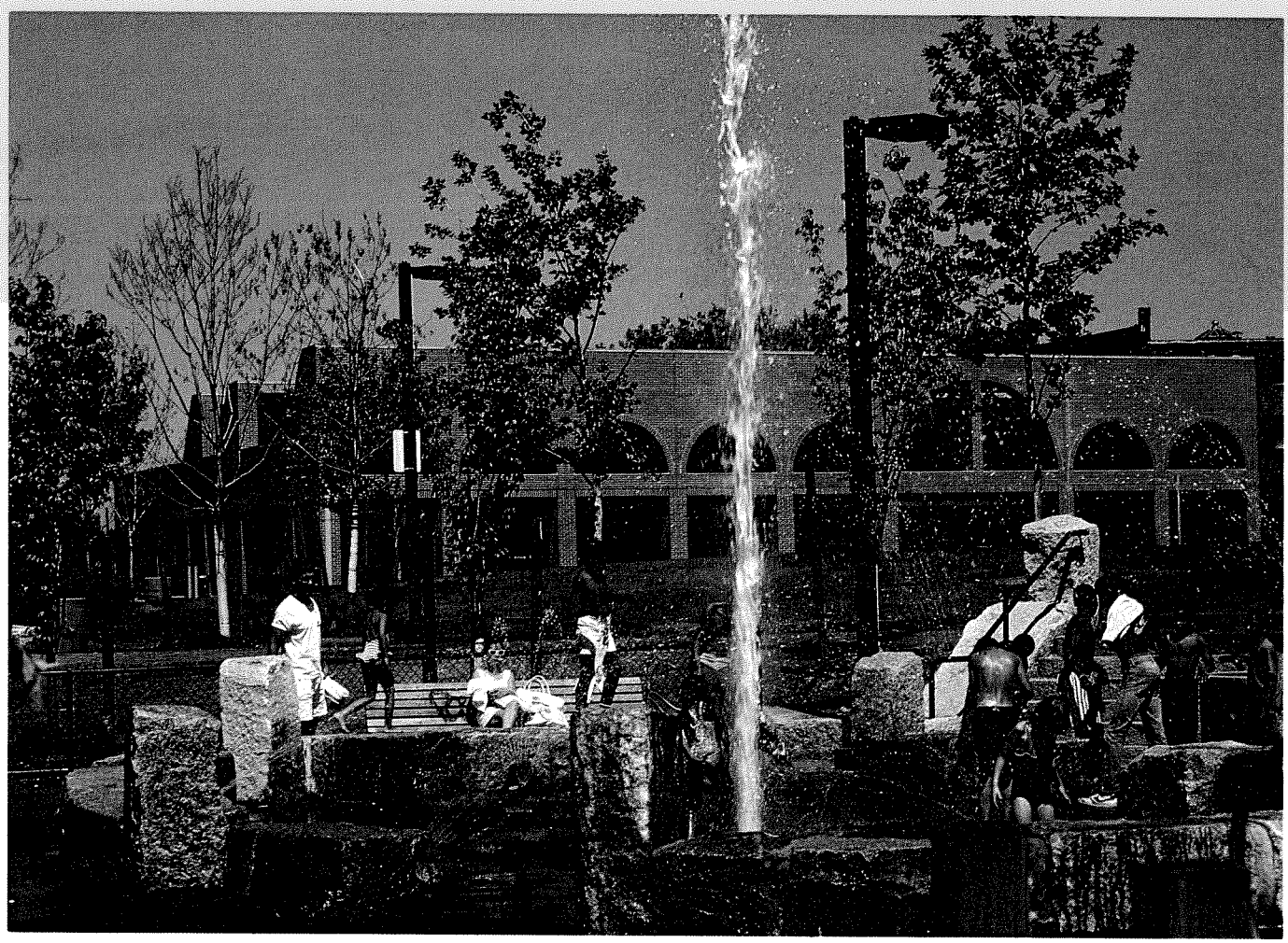
Lessons from Southwest Corridor Park: • *Sustain the effort: continuity of participants is necessary.* • *Establish a clearly defined fair and open process for desicion making. Then, FOLLOW IT AND LIVE WITH THE DECISIONS.* • *Expect everyone to abide by the process and decision.* • *Do your homework; get accurate information.* • *Build coalitions, which may mean compromise — which isn't always bad!* • *Hold your public officials accountable as well as yourselves.* • *Promote the commonwealth over local self-interest.* • *Maintain a sense of humor.* • *Take up knitting, not smoking.*

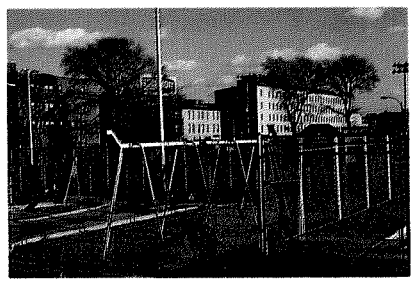
— Edwina Cloherty

Olmsted's ultimately famed Emerald Necklace and the more tumultuous Stony Brook which was incarcerated in the large buried conduit that now bears its name.

Could we propose the retrieval of the stream, a restoring of Stony Brook to the surface? How wonderful it would be to see its waters flow once again in the hollow of the valley that had for so long been merely rail corridor, sooty granite and brick walls of a transportation seam of the city and the back endings of disadvantaged neighborhoods. How almost poetic a form of equalization, providing Stony Brook's urban valley with some of the stream-and-park amenities which its sister stream, the Muddy River, had so happily conserved with the help of Olmsted and his Emerald Necklace transmutations.

We pencil-sketched and explored the possibilities. They were not easy. Although the open space destined for parkland was ample north of the Arborway (where expressway ramps were once planned), they narrowed again from Green Street northward to Mozart Street. Along that stretch the going was tough, with little land at all outside the trackway structure, in many cases barely a 10- to 20-foot-wide green strip on either side. In addition, all crossing streets were at grade. It would be a tough assignment to argue for the disinterment of a historically undisciplined stream if that would require its accommodation in a channel large enough to carry its 100-year flow, within a narrow band of land, and under new bridges. It quickly became apparent that restoring Stony Brook to a live state would be nearly impossible, technically and financially. We abandoned the attempt to find an answer.



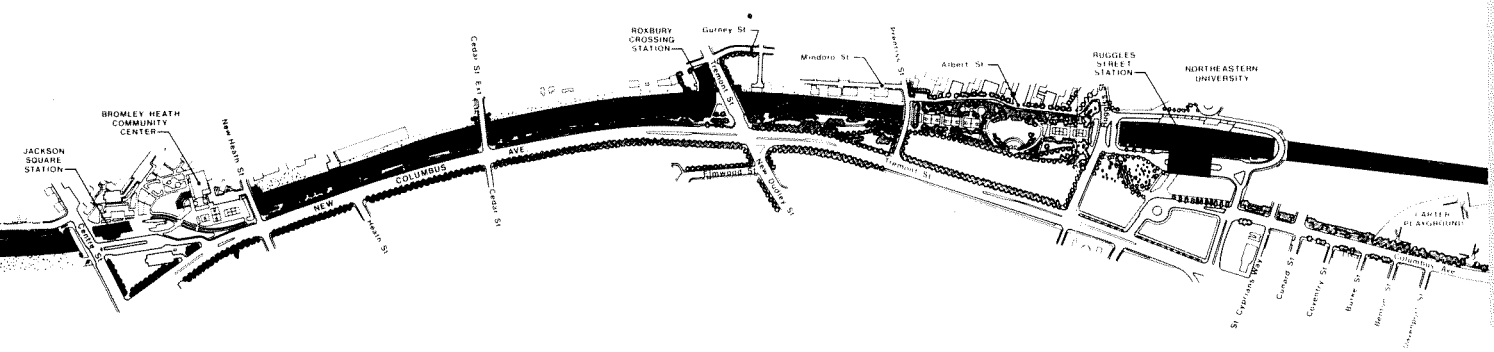




Building the Necklace's New Strand

We conceived of microsimulations of Stony Brook, modest reaches of running water that would flow along the trackway and across its parkland decks, with water that would be tapped from the conduit. The water would be there to please the eye and offer a whispered affirmation of quality, echoing the Muddy River and Stony Brook's own once proud and wild aesthetic. But we knew the concept was a long-shot bet, and when it was presented, it was rejected out of hand.

Out of the exercise, though, we learned a valuable lesson. If so little land were available for parkland development within the Corridor outside the trackway structure, some means would have to be found to reinforce the macro qualities of the greenway. Some major landscape feature would have to be planned and nurtured to allow the future Park's users and the public at large to visualize the Corridor as a major landscape arm of the city's overall open space framework. Without achieving this end, the Park could easily become a mere daisy chain of neighborhood playgrounds and green linkages, as fragile as a paper chain in the face

MISSION HILL — PARKER HILL — FORT HILL
ROXBURY — CENTER STREET — JAMAICA PLAIN



North of the Jackson Square Station, the Park passes through a hard-bitten district characterized by industrial and commercial activities east of the Corridor and residential areas, primarily public housing projects, to the west.

Roxbury residents, primarily African-Americans and Latinos, have lower incomes and higher rates of unemployment than people living in other communities along the Corridor. The four public housing developments are home to a large number of children and young adults.

Neighborhood residents (many of whom do not have private yards) were concerned with providing recreation space for their children, keeping the Park safe and making sure somebody was responsible for taking care of the Park once it was finished. They were especially concerned about the proximity of bicycle and pedestrian paths to neighborhood play and sitting areas — fearing conflict between passers-by and neighborhood Park users. The paths were moved away from play areas and housing.

There are two decks in this section. One is at Bromley-Heath, a public housing project near Jackson Square Station. Here, a community center, basketball courts and play areas are built next to the station and the housing. The deck at Mission Hill, cut off from the adjacent neighborhood by a grade separation, is covered with basketball courts, tennis courts and a small amphitheater (which as of yet is not used much).

Most striking is the barren land that adjoins so much of this section, which suffered the greatest demolition during the land-clearance program for the Southwest Expressway (more than 62 acres were cleared here). Although 500 new housing units were subsequently built, most of this land remains undeveloped.

The vacant lots seem incongruous next to the freshly planted Park and the busy streets and spaces of the housing projects. Yet the land is a sign of hope: Residents saw the Project as an opportunity for community revi-

The selection and arrangement of recreational facilities was a challenging task. People of all ages and interests live along the Park, and residents were concerned that special facilities might attract strangers from other parts of the city. Residents worked with landscape designers during evening and weekend charrettes to generate proposals, designs and siting suggestions for all types of activities: skateboard areas, street hockey areas, community gardens, wading pools and game tables.

This aspect of the Park's design was particularly important to Roxbury residents. Aware that recreation facilities in inner city parks are typically limited to basketball courts, they were adamant that young people be exposed to other forms of play. Consequently, tennis courts were included in all three sections of the Park.

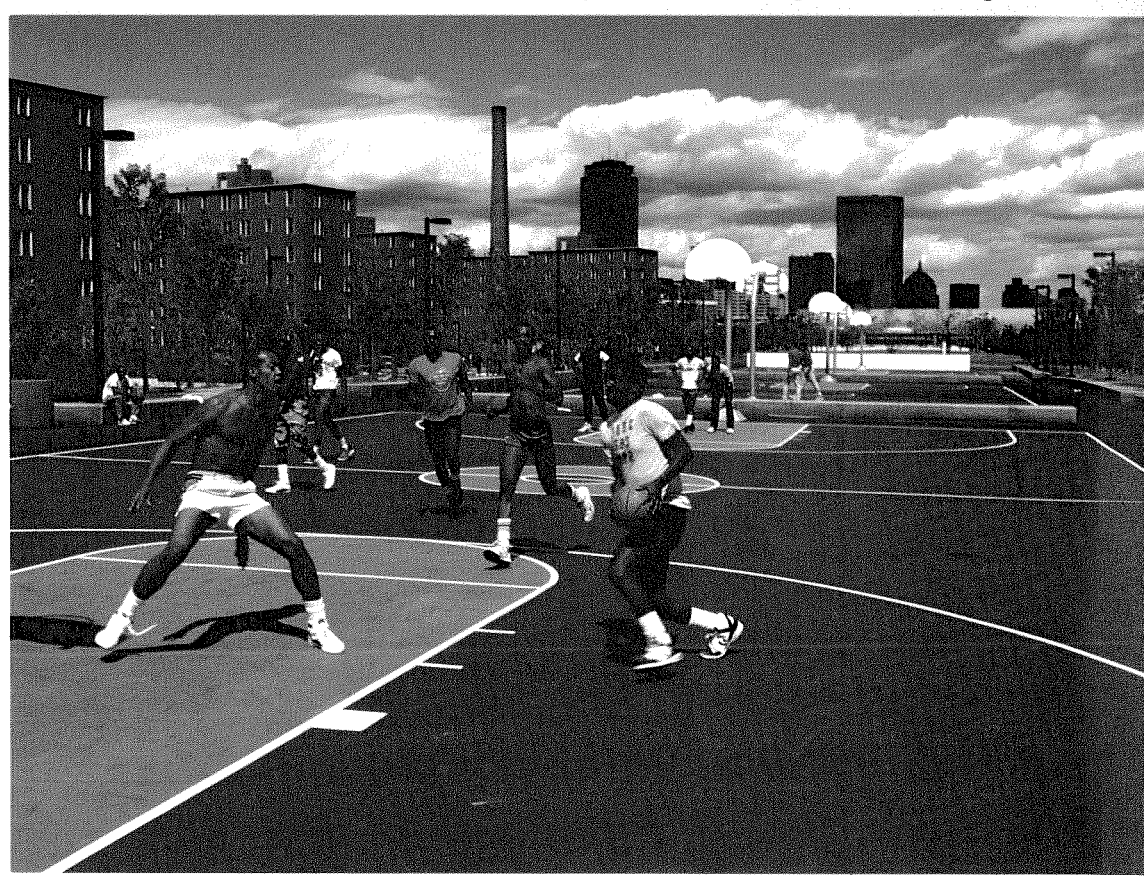
Active recreation areas were sited close to community centers and entrances to day care centers. Game tables, popular with adults, were positioned to allow easy surveillance of children's play areas. While basketball and tennis courts are equally accessible and visible to regional users and residents of adjacent public housing developments, their lighting is controlled by managers of the public housing.

of the winds of governmental operational and maintenance budgetary decisions and political changes of heart.

Two other landscape features could stand out as major elements. One was a path system, the other a border of shade trees (preferably with double or triple rows) along the paths. Both features could extend from one end of the Park to the other with few breaks. Together they could form a natural and human-use armature that could be appreciated both recreationally and aesthetically as a single environmental offering. People would "read" this armature as being a city-scaled park feature, rather than the weak chain of individual elements that we were seeking to avoid.

Another element needed strengthening: pedestrian links along streets leading from neighborhood interiors to the Park. Many of these streets, laid out at least a century ago, were narrow. Some were lined with trees. But few had sidewalks wider than six or seven feet. Few opportunities existed to expand any of these into a "visitor-friendly" environment. Would neighborhood children, families and elderly residents walk a quarter- or half-mile to the new Park? Would people ride their bikes down to the Corridor and then along it to downtown (or uptown) employment, to classes at nearby schools and universities, or to Copley Place? The immutability of the side streets stymied us. We placed our hope in the belief that the Park itself, if designed and built well enough, would attract people — that people would find a way to find their way.

How to design the system wasn't hard to decide. Instructive precedents for ample paths and strong sinews of shade trees abounded throughout America. But parks were no longer the



Left photos courtesy Mason and Frey.
Bottom photo © Ben E. Watkins.

talization and development, the vacant land as a resource for economic mobility.

Perhaps a new type of workplace will emerge here, one that is intimately connected with the Park waiting patiently next door and with the neighborhoods beyond. For now the Park feels unfinished, ready to accept the change the community wants, a reminder the Project included promises of better things to come.
— Todd Bressi, Aileen Rosen

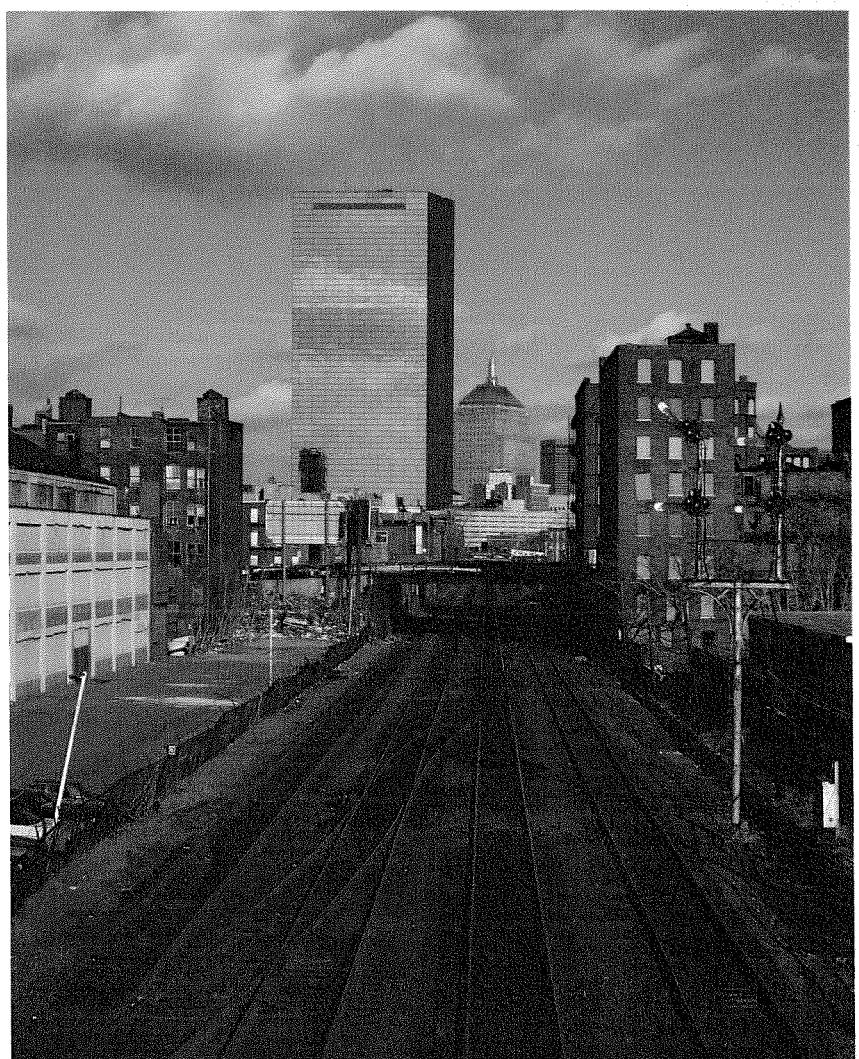
A street hockey court is transformed into a stage, while an amphitheater (marked by the ventilation stacks visible beyond the truck) is little used. Photo © Ben E. Watkins.

idyllic glades of yesteryear. Paths and park open space needed defensible design, to use Oscar Newman's term. Fast bicycles made conflict with slow baby carriages and older walkers almost inevitable on single-path systems; we were sure that a double-path system, with one path dedicated to cyclists and the other to pedestrians, would help minimize conflict and encourage more and better use.

But the more we pondered the desirability of a dual-path system, which had not been an explicit element of the initial SWCP program, the more we realized that few corridor-wide considerations had been in the forefront of the public debate that was helping to guide the planning process. The neighborhoods, which had been responsible in good measure for stopping the ill-advised expressway program, were focused primarily on neighborhood concerns: play area needs, safety and security, graffiti and vandalism. No one was stepping to the plate to bat for the community at large.

Each neighborhood, in fact, was suspicious of the others. Upscale St. Botolph's Street and the economically and racially mixed South End were at loggerheads. The blue- and white-collar people of Forest Hills and Mission Hill were skeptical of how worthwhile the continuous paths that would thread through their domain would be. The largely African-American communities of Roxbury and the two public housing projects of the Corridor were concerned with intrusions of miscreants from the outside.

The more we studied the larger picture, however, the more we realized what a boon the Park and its dual-path system would be to all the residents within the Corridor neighborhoods. People could ride their bikes to work, commuting to jobs anywhere along the Corridor. Simlilarly, the paths provided access to the numerous educational and public institutions of Back Bay. The paths would provide pleasurable, recreational access to the Common, the Public Gardens and the great expanse of the Charles River Basin — all reachable over short street distances from the central armature of the Corridor. Northeastern University, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Symphony Hall,



Before the Park, the railroad corridor divided Back Bay from the South End. Photo courtesy Monroe and Gary.

To keep people from sleeping in the innermost section of the Park, no benches were installed. Retaining walls rise to a comfortable sitting height. Photo courtesy Moriece and Gary.

the Boston Public Library, Copley Place and the Fens are just a few of the educational, cultural and recreational destinations that are just a stone's throw from the Park.

We presented the concept, then, of a Park and a dual path system that would serve as a true community arterial serving several communities and not simply as a low-capacity, desultory quiltwork of paths and grass. The concept was accepted. The idea of *corridor* began to take.

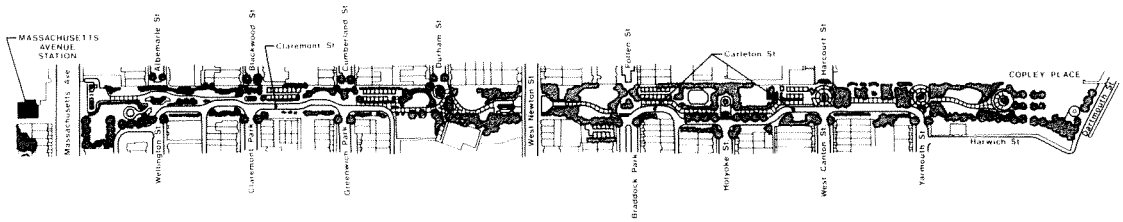
Inspiration from Olmsted

The cue for the tree planting system came straight from Olmsted. The great Northern Red Oaks of the Emerald Necklace were approximately 90 years old and in a magnificent state in 1977. They reached in a robust, continuous chain from the Fens along the Jamaicaway and the Riverway, and then along the Arborway, for about four miles — approximately the same length as the incipient Park.

It would be great to have similar marching columns of giant shade trees threading though the Stony Brook valley, creating a kind of environmental parity between the beat-upon neighborhoods of the Corridor and the upbeat neighborhoods astride Olmsted's Muddy River parklands. With that sense of parity perceived, I hoped, the public could consider the Park a "new strand in Boston's Emerald Necklace," and thus be prepared to devote to it the attention and commitment it would require. The phrase, and the parity concept for which it stood, soon caught the public's attention. The term "new strand" has been used ever since.

We wondered whether we could forego mass tree plantings and diversified plantings along the path backbone of the Park to

BACK BAY – ST. BOTOLPH – SOUTH END – FENWAY – SYMPHONY



Between Massachusetts Avenue and Back Bay Station is the Park's most urban section. This ten-block stretch is built on a deck over subway and railroad tracks and through a seam between Back Bay, South End, St. Botolph and the Fenway — neighborhoods that are densely developed and include many cultural and educational institutions.

The landscaped deck posed formidable challenges. Paying for it required political arm twisting; building it required careful engineering. The complicated program included creating play spaces for a community starved for recreation facilities, protecting the privacy of homes built right next to the park, keeping train noise down and replacing an alley that ran parallel to the tracks.

These neighborhoods contain more economic, ethnic and social diversity than others along the Park. The South End, traditionally populated by poor and working-class households, is drawing young, middle- and upper-middle class people to its attractive Victorian row houses, while Chinese and Arab residents remain. Some tensions surfaced during design discussions because of the disparity in lifestyles between the upper-income families and the recently arrived immigrants.

Today this section of the Park is packed with activity. Basketball courts, playgrounds and even a tennis court (included partly at the insistence of a local politician) seem shoehorned into every corner. It is lush and lavish, with dozens of garden plots, berms and planters insulating the abutting buildings from the main paths and play areas. Contingents of trees march along (as they do through the entire Park).

Protection from Strangers

All along the Park, residents who participated in the Park design expressed a concern that both the linear connection and cross connections it would create would allow strangers to access their neighborhoods.

Here, along the most urban section of the Park, residents of some streets requested that vehicular and pedestrian access to their street from the Park not be permitted. On these blocks, the grade of the Park does not meet street level, and walls and fences were built.

Now, after the Park has been used for three years, some of these residents feel that a connection should be made. Although there are no plans to do so, the Park design could be adapted to allow pedestrian connections to be built.

allow the Corridor trees to stand alone. Could we forego understory plantings to keep the trunks clear and vivid, as Olmsted had done here and along most of the Emerald Necklace? There would be another benefit: Kept clear of growth, the trees would allow ample views into the linear park from adjacent streets and neighboring homes and other buildings, an important way of addressing the security concerns of adjacent neighborhoods.

Low shrubs, with a height at maturity no greater than about three-and-a-half feet, would allow low ornamental accent and form-making without providing blinds for ambush. The trees would possibly need to be trimmed up, too, to about a seven-foot height, to keep branches from obscuring view. This "Clear-view Zone," as we termed it, would ensure easy surveillance.

In subsequent public meetings of the Corridor's eight station area task forces, the presentation of this design approach began to flesh out the landscape of the Corridor Park where it counted most. People expressed agreement or gave head-nodding approval. A new confidence was also felt as we presented "safety-and-security" design option sketches to the people who lived in the St. Botolph Street and South End neighborhoods, and to the residents of the Mission Hill Extension and Bromley-Heath public housing projects in Roxbury. Their feelings switched further away from apprehension and mistrust to understanding and confidence as we demonstrated that design could channel users who were just passing through away from sensitive access points important to local residents.

The choice of tree for the Corridor-long planting was complicated by several issues. One was that part of the Park would be built on a deck above a subway and train tunnel, which would not be able to support the weight of much softscape fill. We wondered what trees would be good survivors in the relatively shallow root zone.

Community gardens are shoehorned into every imaginable corner of the Park.
Photo © Ben E. Watkins.

As elsewhere, the Park seems to have taken on a life of its own. It is busy with bicyclists, people walking dogs and people hurrying to and from shops and jobs in the Copley Square area. It is home to an annual barbeque that celebrates the fusion, both physical and social, of these neighborhoods.

The Park has transformed a neglected urban "sink" into a proud front yard. Buildings that turned away from the tracks are orienting themselves toward the rebuilt open space: a flowerbox here, a door there, even brand-new balconies have been appended. New buildings embrace the Park as openly as they do the street.

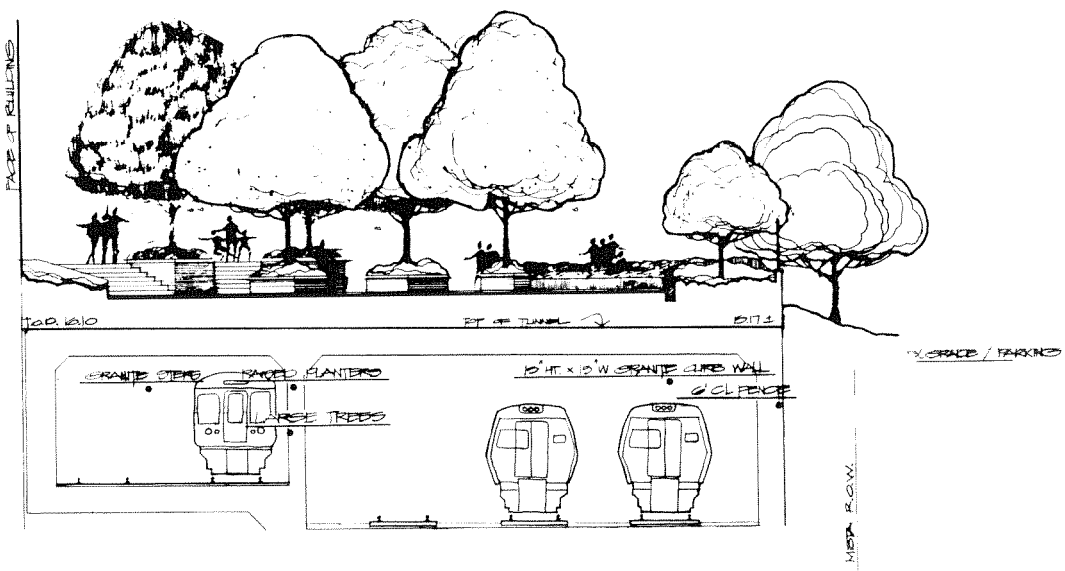
Bit by bit, the investments public agencies made in the Park are being matched by the investments of Bostonians themselves, who are making the Park part of their city.
—Todd Bressi, Aileen Rosen

Photos courtesy Moreice and Gary.

In this case we could turn to New York City's Riverside Park, designed by Olmsted in 1893 and modified by Robert Moses in the 1930s. This linear park, which hugs Manhattan's rising shoreland between 72nd and 125th streets, completely covers the trackway tunnel of an Amtrak line. The answers were reassuring. Green parkland flows seamlessly across the buried railroad tunnel. The London Planes (the tree of choice here) that were planted on top of the cover were seemingly as vigorous as those standing to either side and almost as large and high. How deep was the soil? We peered down through a tunnel air intake grill (the New York City Parks Department could not locate plans). It seemed that there was a root zone depth of four feet, perhaps a bit more.

The London Plane is the most widely planted shade tree in New York and many other Northeast cities. It already has a proud tradition in the Boston region as the legendary tree of Cambridge's Memorial Drive, where embattled Harvard students tied themselves to the "sycamores" in the 1960s to save them from the Metropolitan District Commission's highway-expanding chainsaws. While the limit of its hardiness range is northern Massachusetts, the grandly crowned trees on Memorial Drive were 70 years old and in robust health in 1978.

We thought the London Plane would be a fine Corridor tree. With its upward spreading limbs, broad crown and ample shade, and its cream and brown mottled bark, the London Plane could offer a better year-round aesthetic than oaks or maples (although it would lack the bright red autumn color of the latter). Planted with this single species, the Corridor tree rows and path would reach magnificently along the Park, leading the eye to the far dis-



Section through the Back Bay segment of the Park shows how acoustic decks were topped with landscaping. At one point in the deck, a railroad technicians' workroom is sandwiched between the top of the tunnel and the surface of the Park. Drawing courtesy MBTA.

• *We accomplished our goals.* • *We shaped the decisions.* • *We restored our community to health.*

— *Edwina Cloherty*

tance and reminding the user of the continuity of the park system overall and the entirety of the Corridor experience.

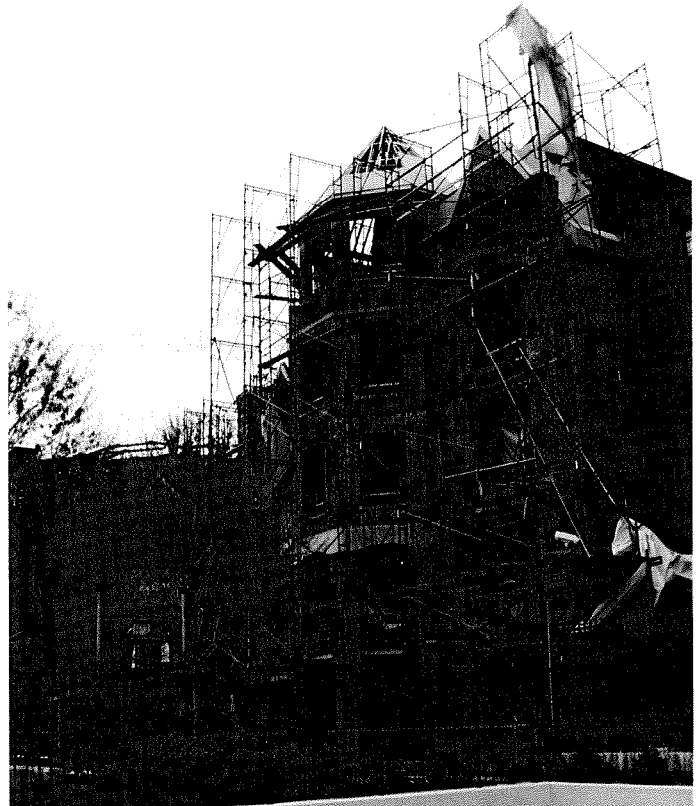
Another concern was that monospecial planting could be unwise, given the possibility of unforeseen disease and insect attack. We thought planting only the Bloodgood variety of the London Plane, which had successfully resisted all health problems for nearly a century since its introduction, would preclude these problems. This hybrid of the Oriental Plane Tree and the American Sycamore would be likely to persist in its resistance to disease and insects of both Old World and New World origins.

However, largely because of the sad experience of the American Elm's demise, an understandable mistrust of monospecies planting had developed among park agency officials and urban foresters. In the end we adopted a compromise approach, using three species — Red Maple and Northern Red Oak as well as London Plane — to carry the thread of continuity through the Park. Each was large, fairly round-crowned, and robust, and the fall foliage colors of bright red, brick red, and yellow would counterpoise well. Continuity would be achieved by planting each species in long chains of 14 to 20 trees. Not a perfect marching column, but at least the platoons would be recognizable and respectable.

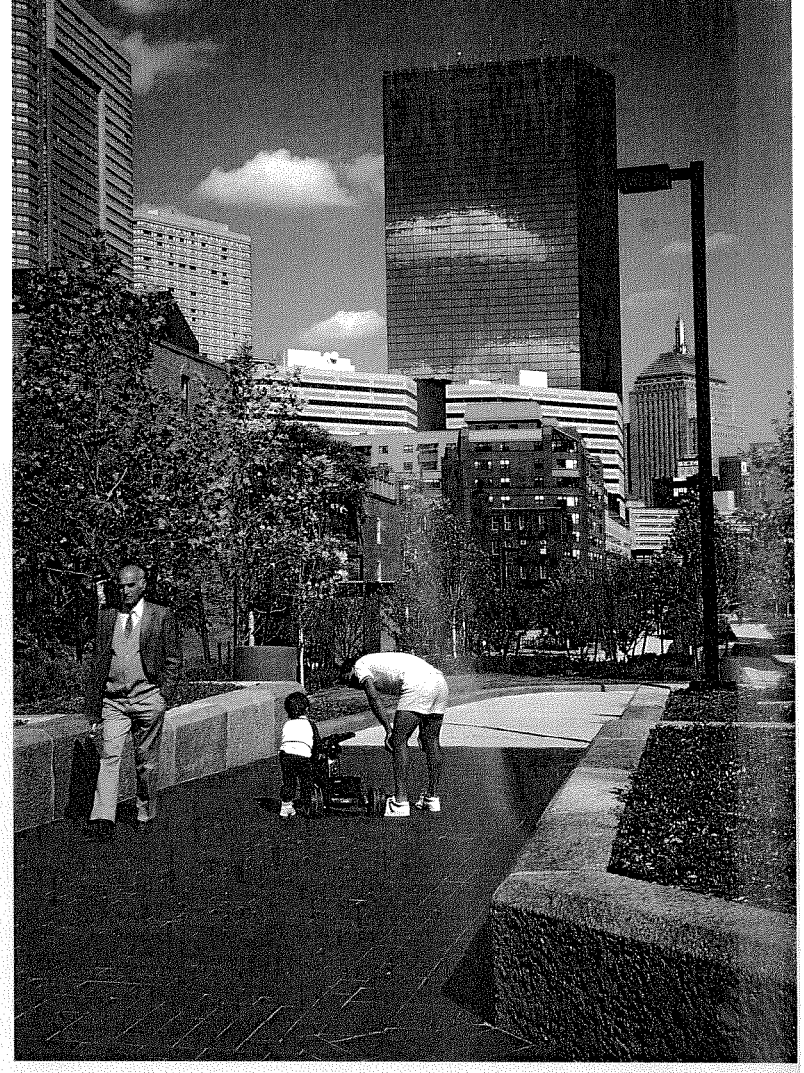
Clusters of Neighborhood Parks

Skeletons are only as valuable as the life they support, and the tree-and-path backbone of the Park would be less important were it not for the special places that cluster and eddy along this central stream. There are places for play, places for resting and waiting, and, perhaps most notably, places to grow kitchen produce. Community gardening has long been a matter of civic pride in Boston, well before an appreciable segment of Olmsted's historic Fens was converted to the Victory Gardens of World War II. Citizens' rights, rather than civic pride, are the force behind many community gardens in Boston, and many acres owned by the city or the Boston Redevelopment Authority have been cultivated by residents over the years in almost the same spirit as the early citizens of the city used its common cow pastures, common footpaths and common fishing and hunting grounds.

Thus it felt historically proper, as well as socially responsive, to provide for community gardens within the body of the park. Each neighborhood would have its territory, with access and use managed by an organization such as Boston Urban Gardeners, which had been the city's community gardening voice for years. The aesthetic annoyances of jerry-rigged chicken wire fences and



New construction is turning its face toward the Park. Photo by Todd W. Bressi.



The Park provides a pleasant pedestrian conection to Boston's Copley Square district. Photo © Ben E. Watkins.

the rank growth of weedy garden plots would be precluded, we believed, with judicious screen plantings of ornamental shrubs and good iron picket fencing and gates. And the advantages of the presence of good neighbors in the gardens would help the public watch over the park as a whole.

With the Park now in its fourth year since completion, a sense of coming of age pervades the grassy swards, the tree rows, the gardens and the rest of this very Boston linear park. The old wounds of the highway-building, neighborhood-busting days are healed, or at least invisible. The great tree crowns are filling out, the favorite benches are getting worn in just the right places. The people of old neighborhoods that had been kept apart by a nineteenth century railroad for a century and a half are now joined, and they in turn are linked more openly with the heart of Boston.

Not a bad outcome for a former urban battleground.

Notes

1. Boston Redevelopment Authority, *Boston's Scenic Corridors: Study and Plan for Rehabilitation of the Charles River and Muddy River Parklands* (Unpublished report, 1968).

2. Among the opponents of the freeway were Barney Frank, then an aide to Mayor Kevin White and later a U.S. Representative, and Michael Dukakis, then a state senator and later Governor.

3. The $780 million rail, transit and park project was developed by the MBTA under the planning, engineering and design coordination of Kaiser Engineers/Fay, Spofford & Thorndike. Roy Mann Associates served as the coordinating landscape architects and master planner for the Park. RMA also designed the Park's sign kiosks, path markers and other special furnishings and pavement devices.

For design purposes, the Park was segmented into three sections, each of which was assigned to separate engineering and landscape architecture firms. For the Forest Hills section, Mason and Frey served as landscape architect and Howard Needles Tammen and Bergendoff served as engineer. For the Roxbury section, Sasaki Associates served as landscape architect and PRC Engineering served as engineer. For the Back Bay section, Moreice and Gary served as landscape architects and Kaiser Engineers/Fay Spofford & Thorndike served as engineers. Carol R. Johnson Associates was landscape architect at the Ruggles St. Station, and Morgan Wheelock was landscape architect at the Jackson Square Station.

The community coordination consultant was Ellenzweig Associates, Inc., and the park management consultant was CBT/Childs Bertram Tseckares and Casendino, Inc.

The comments by Edwina Cloherty were excerpted from a submission nominating the project for the Rudy Bruner Award for Excellence in the Urban Environment in 1989. The project was named a finalist in that competition.