



Charlesbank Landing
Project Update
October 2021



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DCR-EA Public/Private Partnership

- The **Esplanade Association**, founded in 2001, is a privately-funded ‘public charity’ nonprofit organization that works to revitalize and enhance the Charles River Esplanade, sustain its natural green space, and build community in the park by providing educational, cultural, and recreational programs for everyone.
- EA works in collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation and is dedicated to improving the experiences of the millions of visitors who enjoy Boston’s iconic riverside park.

EA Capital Project Successes

Over \$21 million in privately-raised funds invested to:

- Restore the Hatch Shell Oval Lawn, Eliot Memorial, and Lotta Fountain
- Establish, Maintain and Improve Teddy Ebersol's Red Sox Fields
- Renew Esplanade Tree Canopy, leading to first major planting effort in over 50 years
- Establish and Maintain 15 Ornamental Gardens and Invasives Removal Program
- Build and Maintain Two Children's Playgrounds
- Install Esplanade's first new Wayfinding signs in decades
- Fund and execute plans on varying topics (Pathway Safety, Interpretive Signage, etc.)
- Commission and maintain four public art murals



EA Ongoing Programmatic Work

EA continues to produce free programming appealing to a diverse array of park user groups:

- Concerts at Hatch Shell for organizations led by and featuring artists of color
- Over 35 nights of free fitness classes annually, plus newly launched winter fitness series
- Children in the Park program for summer day camps for Boston area school-children
- Single-night major programs – Jazz Along the Charles, Water Lantern Festival, Esplanade 5K, Costume Run – with attendance ranging from 1,000 to 20,000 attendees
- Management of ~2,000 annual volunteers performing ~5,000 hours of in-park service
- Tours (History, Public Art, Nature, and Garden)



Modern History of Lee Pool Site: Recreation and Operations

Since the 1950s, the Lee Pool had been sited in the historic Charlesbank area of the Esplanade. For ~25 years, the pool was closed to the public and throughout much of that time was used by DCR, EA, Hill House, and others to program and maintain the Esplanade.



Pre-Demolition

A Partnership to Improve the Lee Pool Site Has Been Discussed Since At Least 2012

DCR and the Esplanade Association have been engaged for nearly a decade in a conversation around how to remake the two-acre site of the former Lee Pool.



“Charlesbank River Center”
2012

Seeking a Better, Public Outcome at the Lee Pool Site

In 2017, State Representative Jay Livingstone asked DCR to lead a project planning effort to reimagine the Lee Pool site. DCR issued scope of work to consider future use of the site:

Scope of Work

- \$200,000 contract for initial planning
- Existing conditions assessment
- Regulatory analysis
- Site and building program
- 3 conceptual designs (1 adaptive reuse)
- Schematic development of preferred alt.
- DCAMM Certified Building Study and construction cost estimate.

Seeking a Better, Public Outcome at the Lee Pool Site

Esplanade Riverfront Pavilion Planning Project

A plan to make the Lee Pool a multi-purpose pavilion

Project goals

The project team will lead a public planning process and develop a design concept for a new riverfront pavilion and park in the area of the Lee Pool. The new building will be a signature, LEED certified building, the first new construction on the Esplanade in over 50 years. Specific project goals are to:

- Engage the community, DCR partners, and user groups in planning and programming;
- Create an indoor, year round event venue including food service, areas for DCR programs, and partnership events;
- Provide critical park amenities such as bathrooms and water fountains;
- Support DCR's Esplanade maintenance and storage use;
- Increase access to the waterfront;
- Broaden opportunities for active outdoor recreation;
- Reclaim parkland;
- Connect the Lee Pool area to the broader Esplanade landscape.

Community Groups & Stakeholders Engaged to Galvanize Public Feedback

Partners and Stakeholders

Beacon Hill Civic Association
Charles River Conservancy
Charles River Watershed Association
Community Boating
Downtown North Association
Environmental League of Massachusetts
Equity Residential
Esplanade Association
Hill House
Livable Streets Alliance
Mass Eye and Ear Infirmary
Mass General Hospital
MassBike
Neighborhood Association Back Bay
Representative Jay D. Livingstone
Senator Sal N. DiDomenico
West End Civic Association
West End Community Center
Friends of Teddy Ebersol Red Sox Fields

DCR Process Relied on Wide Public Engagement Effort

February 23, 2017	Partner Site Walk Through at Lee Pool
March 7, 2017	Stakeholder Meeting #1
April 13, 2017	Public Meeting & Design Charrette
May 24, 2017	Stakeholder Meeting #2
June 13, 2017	Stakeholder Meeting #3
June 28, 2017	Review Consensus Goals & Three Design Options
August 1, 2017	Stakeholder Meeting #4
October 11, 2017	Stakeholder Meeting #5
November 1, 2017	Review Consensus Schematic Building Design

Over 250+ public comments received before consensus schematic finalized.

Consensus Emerges to Pursue Largest Presented Option

Selected Option (**Option 3**) advanced for schematic development

- Focused on large format facility with 3 indoor courts, 45,200 interior sq ft
- Stakeholder Group consulted for feedback
- 150+ written and online comments
- 100+ individuals and organizations engaged in process
- Est. \$50 million cost to construct and \$850k annual operations cost



DCR Identifies Need for Private Partner to Develop Preferred Alternative

- DCR made clear at final public meeting and throughout stakeholder engagement process that ***the agency does not plan to put public resources towards construction, operation, or maintenance of the project***, and that it would look to the private sector to bear the cost through a public/private partnership.
- DCR noted that the likely arrangement would have ***the Commonwealth retain ownership*** over the completed building while the private sector ***partner would lease the site*** to operate and maintain the building.
- DCR also noted that ***the successful operator could retain revenue*** generated by the building but could only obtain a 10-year operating agreement without legislative authorization for a longer lease.

Demolition of Lee Pool Clears Way for Charlesbank Landing Project

- DCR sought to capitalize on then-existing funding to remove/remediate Lee Pool, beginning in 2019
- DCR agreed to lease to provide 3-year, in-park operations space to EA to continue EA's field work
- DCR moved its own operations to new facility in Cambridge in 2020
- DCR completed remediation in 2020
- Resulting lawn at former Lee Pool has significant grade and drainage challenges



DCR Commissioner with State Rep, EA, CRC, Hill House, and CBI on Demo Day



Current Status of Lee Pool Site



EA, DCR and Elected Officials Seek Consensus Path Towards Project Completion

- Based on hundreds of stakeholder conversations held after the 2017 public process, EA worked with DCR to propose an updated approach to the project
- In 2019, DCR leadership embraced and supported this direction while still reviewing some specific project elements
 - Ex. Requested changes to building design and deleted dedicated space for DCR given the opening of the North Point facility
- DCR requested EA design a sign announcing the project and signaled support for EA pursuing legislation to seek a longer lease term

EA Refines Plans with Stakeholders, Releases Updated Plan for Public Review

EA retained DCR's Pavilion Architect and Landscape Architect – Maryann Thompson Architects and Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, respectively – to refine plan that:

- Adheres to consensus goals from 2017 public process
- Lowers costs from \$50 million to \$14 million
- Reduces building size
- Creates more public open space and feels more 'public' throughout site
- Adds new public amenities, including a visitors center
- Incorporates climate change-focused landscape improvements

Then...



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...and now...



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Current Condition



Detailed Landscape Plan



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Charlesbank Landing Amenities

Outdoor

- 1.6 acres of landscape improvements
- Nature play area with modern water management
- River access point and improved riparian riverbank
- Youth regulation size synthetic playing field
- Event Lawn
- Enhanced seating and pathway connections
- Roofdeck gathering space and covered plaza
- New tree groves, pollinator gardens, and lawn areas
- Park maintenance and operations space

Indoor

- LEED-certified year-round visitors center and interpretive services space
- Year-round public bathrooms
- A café
- Public meeting rooms
- Non-profit park support office space



Around the corner...

Amplifying the *Charlesbank Landing* plan in light of EA's work on the **Boston Green Ribbon Commission** and **Coalition for a Resilient and Inclusive Waterfront**, we are studying the addition of solar energy and a living, green roof to our existing environmentally-focused plans to further set an example for future public realm projects.





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Numerous Public Benefits are Realized Through this Innovative PPP

- Visitor Experience
- Environmental and Climate Change Preparedness
- Equity and Access
- Operational
- Children's & Family Programming
- Recreational & Open Space



Proposed Plan Has Earned Widespread Support



The **project** and the **proposed legislation** are supported by State Senator Sal DiDomenico, State Senator William Brownsberger, State Representative Jay Livingstone, Boston City Councilor Kenzie Bok, and the *Boston Globe* Editorial Board along with the following organizations:

Beacon Hill Civic Association
Boston Art & Music Soul (BAMS) Fest
Boston Landmarks Orchestra
Charlesgate Alliance
Charles River Alliance
Charles River Conservancy
Charles River Watershed Association
Community Boating, Inc.
Downtown North Association
Environmental League of Massachusetts
Esplanade Association
Friends of Teddy Ebersol's Red Sox Fields

Friends of the Public Garden
Garden Club of the Back Bay
Hill House
Lederman Memorial Committee
Massachusetts General Hospital
Museum of Science, Boston
LivableStreets Alliance
Neighborhood Association of the Back Bay
WalkBoston
West End Civic Association
West End Museum

Plus, ~400 public comments received since 9-20-2021 from 70 different zip codes in MA.

A Model PPP for State Park Improvements



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- The Esplanade Association has agreed to fund *without taxpayer funds*:
 - Design
 - Permitting
 - Construction
 - Annual Operations & Programming Responsibility, including staffing (for up to 40 years)
 - Building and Site Maintenance (for up to 40 years)

- EA has also agreed to:
 - ...gift all improvements to the Commonwealth
 - ...restrict revenue to being used on site or within the overall park
 - ...strict reporting and transparency considerations
 - ...scrutiny from the Inspector General's Office and the Legislature
 - ...undergoing a 'no net loss' analysis
 - ...language that would revert the site to DCR's operational responsibility if provisions to support public access aren't met
 - ...collaborate on a formal role for DCR, including having a DCR Park Ranger serve as 'initial point of contact' on site

Working Through Expressed Concerns



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1. ‘Look and Feel’ of a Public Building/Site

- Reduced building size, redesigned entry to DCR Commissioner’s specs, amplified open space/recreational amenities, added visitors center

2. Revenue Retention

- Restricted revenue to site/park uses to be approved by DCR, added Executive & Legislative branch reporting requirements, added transparency requirements on revenues/expenses/programming

3. Programming Approach

- Modelled after leading local/national examples of programming models, developed sample programming calendars emphasizing equity/access, sought community support for PPP/programming model

4. Operational Facilities

- Committed to Inspector General review and ‘No Net Loss’ appraisal to determine value, sought approval from public process and stakeholder groups, designed to augment public experience

5. Operations/Programming Model Too Focused on Abutters

- Creating Equity, Access and Environmental Justice Plan

Charlesbank Landing PPP Model Supports Equitable Access For All

- EA views as a hallmark of our **equity and environmental justice** work that the park and all spaces within the park shall be open to ALL
- We recognize that many areas of our PPP with DCR allow for DCR to **reallocate public funding** from the Commonwealth's busiest state park to other areas around the state
- We have also sought to **partner with groups led by creatives of color** to produce art, music, and other programming on the Esplanade that better reflects the Commonwealth's rich diversity, including: the Boston Arts Music & Soul (BAMS) Fest, Volunteers Incorporating Black Excellence (VIBE), Afrobeat Fit, Afrodesia City, TrillFit, City Awake, Froca Fitness, and more.
- **These groups seek more accessible and flexible programming venues** and have found success and economic opportunity on the Esplanade.

Charlesbank Landing PPP Model Supports Equitable Access For All

Catherine Morris, Founder and Executive Director of BAMS Fest

- “...for this space to exist means we have a moment, particularly in the city of Boston, to do some amazing radical, imaginative things that are creative.”
- “The Esplanade Association is working to make the Esplanade a welcoming and inclusive space for artists, makers, musicians, and others... [they] made the famed Hatch Shell available to musical artists and producers of color and we are excited about upcoming programming opportunities at Charlesbank Landing.”



Photo Credit: **WBZ-TV, Gift Of Over \$20 Million For Boston's Esplanade Would Fund New Visitors Center, Outdoor Spaces, 9-21-2021**

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EDITORIAL

The Esplanade should get its makeover

A public-private partnership holds the key to revitalize a part of the Emerald Necklace. Beacon Hill should give it the OK.

By **The Editorial Board** Updated September 26, 2021, 4:00 a.m.



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“The legislation that will make this particular partnership possible is carefully crafted to ensure public access and to safeguard the rights of taxpayers as well. While the property under lease would be offered rent-free, the Esplanade Association would be obligated to spend at least \$10 million on “planning, design, construction, refurbishment, repair, and improvements” to the site and agree to other public benefits to assure “no net loss” to the state.

For two decades the Esplanade Association has proved itself a worthy — and generous — partner and a good steward of one of the gems of visionary landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted’s Emerald Necklace. The Charlesbank Landing project is in keeping with that tradition. State lawmakers should help make it happen.”

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Charlesbank Landing returns the site its historical name while focusing on the overall two acres of publicly accessible improvements and centers the project as ***a bold initiative to create a public destination park alongside the Charles River.***

