



FRIENDS
OF THE
PUBLIC GARDEN

Strategic Plan 2014-2018



“ Strategic partnerships such as the one the City has long enjoyed with the Friends of the Public Garden are vital to the health and vibrancy of Boston’s greenspaces now and into the future.”

– Martin J. Walsh
Mayor of Boston

INTRODUCTION

The Friends of the Public Garden was established by concerned citizens in 1970, a time when all of Boston’s parks were suffering from neglect. Founded to preserve and enhance the Public Garden, the Friends soon broadened its scope to include the Boston Common and the Commonwealth Avenue Mall, adjacent parks equally in need of help. In its early years the Friends won a dramatic battle to protect the

parks against the threat of high-rise development. Over the next four decades, the Friends partnered with the City’s Parks and Recreation Department to restore, maintain, and protect these civic treasures in the heart of the city. This highly effective partnership – the first in the region – saved these parks and made Boston a more livable and desirable city.



Boston Common in the early 1970s

- 1970 – the Friends formed as a non-profit citizens’ advocacy group
- 1971-77 – the Friends opposes and helps defeat a major development that would cast damaging shadows on the parks

- 1980 – Shaw 54th Regiment Memorial restored as the Friends 10th anniversary project
- 1988 – the Rose Brigade, a volunteer group of the Friends, begins caring for the Garden’s roses

STRATEGIC PLANNING

In 2005, the Friends made the transition from a volunteer structure to an organization supported by a professional staff. In 2011, after more than forty years of inspiring leadership, the Friends founding president Henry Lee became president emeritus. That same year, the Friends leased office space overlooking the Garden and the Common.

This is a pivotal time for the parks and the Friends. While much improved from their low point in the 1970s, these iconic parks deserve a higher standard of excellence. Now is the time to lay out an ambitious vision to engage the growing parks community in stewardship and advocacy, to raise additional funds, and to partner with the City to elevate the quality of care.

For the planning process, the Friends engaged a consultant who worked closely with a task force throughout 2013 to interview over 40 stakeholders, collect and analyze research data, and solicit board, staff, and stakeholder group input to collaboratively shape the Strategic Plan, 2014-2018.



Parkman Bandstand, built in 1912 to honor George F. Parkman, an early benefactor of the Common.



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IN MEMORIAM

The Friends embarks on this next chapter without one of our strongest and wisest leaders, Eugenie Beal, who passed away in August, 2013. A guiding hand of the Friends from the early years, Genie was an invaluable source of insight and pragmatism. We will honor her memory by dedicating this Strategic Plan to her and by committing ourselves to realizing her vision of excellence for all of our parks, and particularly for the Common.

MISSION

To preserve and enhance the Boston Common, Public Garden, and Commonwealth Avenue Mall.

VISION

The Boston Common, Public Garden, and Commonwealth Avenue Mall are nationally important havens of natural beauty within an urban environment, enhanced with sculpture, where people delight in their surroundings and gather with others. In our vision these great outdoor spaces are buoyed by large and diverse groups of tending stewards working in partnership with the City and will forever be parks of the highest level of excellence.

STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

- I. Build a strong and broad base of support for the three parks
- II. Partner with the City to achieve excellence within the three parks
- III. Revitalize the Boston Common so that it meets the needs of its constituents now and into the future
- IV. Be a robust and well-run organization



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Revolutionary War Colonel John Glover presiding over the Mall, one of the over 40 pieces of sculpture and memorials cared for by the Friends in the three parks.

GOAL I

Build a strong and broad base of support for the three parks

Expand and diversify the cadre of park supporters and mobilize them in the work of achieving our vision

The influence of the Friends depends on our positive working relationship with the City as well as our ability to speak for all who use and care for these parks.

The most effective and ardent park supporters are those who are actively engaged with them in some way. The public wants to learn about park history, horticulture, and sculpture, and do what they can to ensure that the parks continue to thrive. Our goal is to provide people access to deeper park connections.

We will strive to:

- Expand our constituency to represent the broad spectrum of park users
- Build a robust stewardship program including parks care, education, and advocacy
- Align programming with membership, stewardship, and visibility goals

WHY IT MATTERS:

Members play a critical role in the successful implementation of the Strategic Plan. Their participation shows broad recognition of the importance of protecting and enhancing these civic treasures for today and for future generations. Effective advocacy can happen only with a large and diverse membership who understands what is at stake, why the Friends matters, and whose collective voice calls for a high level of parks care and protection.

“From their very beginnings, it has been public participation that has saved these parks, and it is public concern that alone will assure in years to come their care and keeping.”

-Henry Lee, President Emeritus of the Friends



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The Common, Garden, and Mall are neighborhood parks for tens of thousands of residents. Deepening community connections to the parks will strengthen advocacy for their care.



© Jerry Leonard

For over two decades, the Rose Brigade has been a visible presence of volunteer care in the Garden.

THINK ABOUT THIS...

Membership and Adjacent Neighborhoods:

- over 2,500 Friends members come from over 100 Massachusetts communities and 30 other states
- Downtown Crossing/Midtown Neighborhood:
 - Since 1989, 8,400 residents including 2,800 students have moved to area
 - 2017 projection – over 11,000 residents
- Back Bay, Bay Village, Beacon Hill, Chinatown:
 - over 25,000 residents

Sources: Boston Redevelopment Authority, Downtown Crossing BID, Emerson College, Suffolk University

GOAL II

Partner with the City to achieve excellence within the three parks

Raise the parks to a level of excellence on par with their iconic history and central role for Boston

Although the City of Boston owns and manages these parks, its resources are limited. The role of the Friends in bringing private support is vital to bridge the gap between what the City can do and what these parks need and deserve to reach their full potential.

This plan begins in 2014 following a leadership change in the City and new relationships that must be developed.

With their downtown location, their links to Boston's history, and their beauty, these parks are key contributors to the tourism industry and drivers of economic development and property values.

To achieve excellence it will be necessary to:

- Renew and solidify our long-standing partnership with the City
- Develop a process to collectively define high standards of excellence
- Collaborate with the City to prioritize capital needs and develop a sustainable maintenance plan



Restoring Brewer Plaza on the Common transformed a once-shunned park space into one of the most popular outdoor living rooms in the City. The Friends has invested \$4 million into this major project.

WHY IT MATTERS:

These parks are in many ways the souls of the city, and are called upon to serve the recreational and restorative needs of millions of people. Public-private collaboration for parks care often leads to enhanced outcomes that would not be possible without the contributions of each.



The Friends sculpture care program is vital in maintaining Boston's largest and most significant collection of public art.

“
The unique roles these parks play in the life of our city – neighborhood parks to tens of thousands, regional destinations, tourist must-sees – demand new standards of quality for their care.”

-Valerie Burns, President,
Boston Natural Areas
Network, 1988-2014

THINK ABOUT THIS...

Contributions from the Friends:

- 1971 – \$500 helped remove several dying elms from the Garden
- 2013 – \$1 million for park maintenance and capital improvements and support for Park Rangers
- 1970 – over 50% of the Mall's trees were dead or dying
- 2013 – Mall's trees have been fully replanted
- Ongoing – care for 1,700 trees and over 40 pieces of sculpture and memorials

Source: Friends of the Public Garden

GOAL III

Revitalize the Boston Common so that it meets the needs of its constituents now and into the future

Collaborate with the City to develop a comprehensive plan for the Common and to ensure its implementation

Throughout the region, the Common is understood to be a special open space with major historical and civic significance. As one of a few large open spaces served by public transportation and centrally located, it is used extensively for large and small events, public rallies, active recreation, informal gatherings, transportation, and repose. We see value in having areas of activity and facilities that give people a reason to come to the Common, to stay, and enjoy the park.

Such extensive use, however, requires mitigation after major events and renewal on a regular basis. Without a higher level of care, the Common cannot thrive as healthy parkland.

To achieve excellence it will be necessary to:

- *Develop a comprehensive plan that prioritizes needs, balances use and care, develops a budget and funding strategies, and monitors implementation*



Public and private support together restored the Frog Pond to a popular all-season center of activity on the Common, with over 100,000 skaters each winter and over 110,000 waders each summer.

WHY IT MATTERS:

Our interviews expressed an almost universal opinion that the Common should be on a par with the best urban parks, and that it is falling far short. A plan for the historic land “of the people” of Boston should be responsive to its extraordinary use. A partnership between the City and the Friends can elevate the Common to the level of excellence it deserves.

“
America’s oldest park and the center stage of Boston’s public life is showing its age, and needs a higher level of care to match the demands of its intense use.”

-Margaret Carr,
Tremont Street resident &
Friends Common Committee
member



The Common suffers from a great imbalance between care and use.

THINK ABOUT THIS... Boston Common is a busy place

- 700 permitted events annually - 5 to 55,000 people participating
 - About 200 of these events draw over 10,000 people each
- The Visitor Information Center receives 500,000 - 600,000 people each year
- People on the move...
 - Common Garage - 650,000 entries in 2013
 - Every day over 26,000 people enter one of the two MBTA stations
 - Park Street station is the 4th busiest in the system

Sources: Massachusetts Convention and Visitors Bureau, Massachusetts Convention Center Authority, MBTA, Boston Parks and Recreation Department

GOAL IV

Be a robust and well-run organization

Strengthen and grow our organization so that we can successfully carry out our mission

The Friends of the Public Garden was organized over 40 years ago and, with the City, has accomplished a tremendous amount in these parks. It has only been in the past decade, however, that the organization has added full-time staff members, leased office space close to the parks, and tackled major capital improvement projects.

In order to meet our ambitious Strategic Plan Goals, it is necessary to implement efficient organizational procedures and effective communication and fundraising strategies.

To accomplish our work we must direct our efforts to:

- Increase fundraising and establish an Excellence Fund for use in implementing Goals II and III
- Make improvements to our volunteer structure
- Ensure our staff members have the necessary resources and training to accomplish our goals and measure our success
- Develop and implement a communication strategy to increase visibility for the Friends accomplishments in caring for the three parks and advocating for excellence



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We will establish an Excellence Fund and inspire philanthropists, park users, and greenspace advocates to join the cause in achieving our Goals for these parks.

WHY IT MATTERS:

We heard from our stakeholders about the significant work still ahead of us in improving these three flagship parks of Boston, and about the critical need to make our role in their care and well-being much more visible to the general public. Strengthening the organization and its resources is essential to carry out this work in partnership with the City.



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A visibility campaign will raise awareness of the Friends vital role in all three parks.



Mary Halpin

Great outdoor spaces enjoyed by many need the support of a strong organization.

“
The Friends is the most effective community-based organization in the region, and a real force for good.”

-Peter Meade, former Director of the Boston Redevelopment Authority & Back Bay resident

THE PARKS

THE BOSTON COMMON, 1634, is America's oldest park.

- British troops camped there, 1768-1776.
- It has hosted famous visitors from Generals Washington and Lafayette to Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. and Pope John Paul II.
- It has always been a stage for free speech and public assembly.
- The Shaw/54th Regiment Memorial by Augustus Saint-Gaudens is one of the greatest 19th-century works of American sculpture.
- There are 680 trees on the Common. The elms at the Shaw Memorial are likely the oldest in the western hemisphere, dating to the 1770s.

THE PUBLIC GARDEN, 1837, was the first public botanical garden to be established in the U.S.

- It was designed with a Victorian influence by George Meacham, winner of a public design competition.
- The famous Swan Boats, created by Robert Paget, arrived in 1877, and they are still operated by the Paget family.
- The Make Way for Ducklings Sculpture by Nancy Schön was commissioned and installed in 1987 by the Friends.
- There are 500 trees representing 62 species and 125 varieties.

THE COMMONWEALTH AVENUE MALL, 1857, was the centerpiece of the newly filled land creating the Back Bay in the mid 19th century.

- The Mall was the grand boulevard and the central axis of Arthur Gilman's plan for the Back Bay.
- The Mall became the link between the core historic downtown parks and the Frederick Law Olmsted designed parks from the Fens to Franklin Park.
- There are 630 trees on the Mall, from Arlington Street to Kenmore Square, and nine pieces of sculpture.



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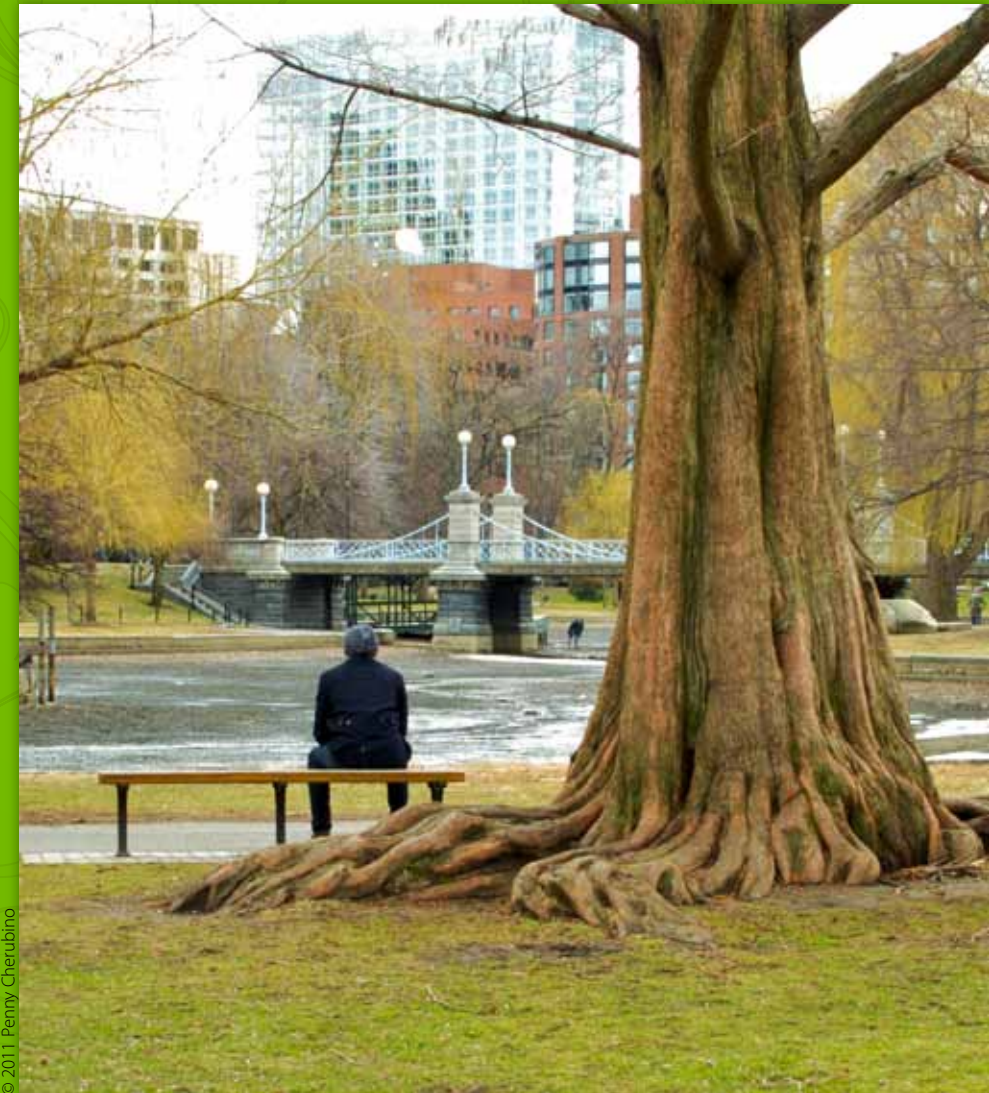


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BE INFORMED BE INSPIRED BE INVOLVED



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