In the late 1800s, Boston was a rapidly growing city with a swampy backyard. The city had long used its outlying areas for the disposal of sewage and other waste. With public-health concerns (and odors) coming to a head in the 1870s, city leaders asked for advice from Frederick Law Olmsted, known for his insightful design work on New York’s Central Park. Olmsted—who had also worked as a journalist, bookkeeper, farmer, and gold-mine manager—proposed creating a string of connected parks in Boston. His visionary plan would provide a carefully engineered but natural-looking solution to the sanitation crisis, providing a drainage design that also offered residents a place to get away from “the bustle and jar of the streets.” He would spend the last two decades of his working life on this urban masterpiece, relocating to Brookline from New York and committing his small firm to “doing the best for Boston all the time.”

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Emerald Necklace Conservancy. We think it’s the perfect time to (re)discover your parks. Why the parentheses? Because for some of you, the parks are a totally new discovery—a wooded, well-planned backyard of 1,100 acres that you haven’t had the chance to explore yet. In these pages, you’ll learn more about how the parks came to be and what each one offers. For others, the Emerald Necklace is already familiar territory. But this is the perfect time to rediscover this incredible park system, too: change is in the air (and on the ground!).

Twenty years after the founders of this organization pledged to protect and restore the Emerald Necklace, we have accomplished more than we could have imagined. With key partners including the city of Boston, town of Brookline, Commonwealth of Massachusetts and Army Corps of Engineers, we returned a buried stretch of the Muddy River to its rightful place, bringing it out of culverts and re-creating a park where a vast parking lot stood for decades. We have inventoried and assessed the condition of hundreds of historic trees and are taking steps to ensure their health. We have drawn people to the parks for music, movies, and movement; connected students to nature through education and volunteer programs; and inspired people across the city to pitch in, plant seeds, and get involved.

This year, we’re excited to build on that momentum. We’re designing a new, interactive visitor center and bringing an internationally recognized artist to town for an ethereal, eye-catching installation you’ll have to see to believe. We’re exploring how new wayfinding signs could help more people (re)discover the Necklace. And we’re celebrating new efforts to reconnect the parks, from a citizen-led project to restore Charlesgate Park, which connects the Necklace to the Charles River, to the completion of the Casey Arborway in Jamaica Plain, which replaces a divisive concrete overpass with a bike-friendly, street-level greenway.

So we hope you’ll read this report. But more than that, we hope you’ll get out and (re)discover the Emerald Necklace this year, whether it’s your first time in Franklin Park or you know the Fens like the back of your hand. We’re excited to get out there and (re)discover it with you!
We’re celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Emerald Necklace Conservancy in 2018. We think it’s the perfect time to (re)discover your parks.

Why the parentheses on (re)discover? Because whether it’s your first time in this 1,100-acre urban backyard or you know it like the back of your hand, the woods and waters of the Emerald Necklace always have something new to offer.

Twenty years ago, the founders of our organization pledged to protect and restore this unique and important system. In the years since, we have accomplished more than we could have imagined. With key partners including the Boston Parks & Recreation Department, Brookline Parks and Open Space, Commonwealth of Massachusetts and Army Corps of Engineers, we returned a buried stretch of the Muddy River to its rightful place, bringing it out of culverts and recreating a park where a vast parking lot had stood for decades. We have inventoried and assessed the condition of thousands of trees and are improving their health each season. We have drawn people to the parks for music, movies and movement; connected students to nature through education and volunteer programs; and inspired volunteers across the city to pitch in.

This year, we’re excited to build on that momentum. We’re designing new, interactive visitor center displays and bringing an internationally recognized artist to town for an ethereal, eye-catching installation you’ll have to see to believe. We’re exploring how new wayfinding methods could help more people (re)discover the Emerald Necklace. And we’re encouraging and celebrating new efforts to reconnect the parks—check out the map in this report for details.

We hope you’ll read these pages. But more than that, we hope you’ll get out and (re)discover the Emerald Necklace this year. We’re excited to get out there and (re)discover it with you!

Karen Mauney-Brodek, President
Ben Taylor, Chair
In the late 1800s, Boston was a rapidly growing city with a swampy backyard. The city had long used its outlying areas for the disposal of sewage and other waste. With public-health concerns (and odors) coming to a head in the 1870s, city leaders asked for advice from Frederick Law Olmsted, known for his insightful design work on New York’s Central Park. Olmsted—who had also worked as a journalist, bookkeeper, farmer and gold-mine manager—proposed creating a string of connected parks in Boston. His visionary plan would offer a carefully engineered but natural-looking solution to the sanitation crisis, providing a drainage design that also gave residents a place to get away from the chaos of the surrounding city. He would spend the last two decades of his working life on this urban masterpiece, relocating to Brookline from New York and committing his small but influential firm to, as he wrote in a letter to his partners in 1893, ‘doing the best for Boston all the time.’

Frederick Law Olmsted, designer of the Emerald Necklace, was a keen observer of the connections between people and place.
They say April showers bring May flowers, but in Boston, they also bring colorful feathers, frocks and fascinators. Each May, more than 700 brilliantly bedecked supporters of the Conservancy gather for the annual Party in the Park. This high-spirited, high-fashion fundraiser, which has raised a total of $9 million to support the parks since its inception in 2004, draws young and old alike for an elegant luncheon. The event—held in Franklin Park this year—honors dedicated park advocates and includes the presentation of the Liff Spirit Award, which has recognized champions of urban parks such as the late Boston Mayor Tom Menino and former Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis. In 2012, attendees launched the Olmsted Tree Society, a fund dedicated to ensuring the health of the more than 7,000 trees in the parks. By celebrating the history and underwriting the future of the Emerald Necklace, the Party in the Park has become a signature event for the Conservancy, for the city of Boston and for keen-eyed couture fans near and far.

Fashion for a cause: The annual Party in the Park is the Conservancy’s signature fundraiser.
If you’ve walked across a bridge in the Fens or wandered through Franklin Park, you’ve seen it: the colorful, jumbled rock known as Roxbury conglomerate. Designated as the state rock of Massachusetts, this local bedrock underlies much of metropolitan Boston and is nicknamed “puddingstone” due to its similarity to a pudding dotted with nuts and raisins—in this case, the nuts and raisins are fragments of granite and quartz. Builders in the 1800s and early 1900s favored it for houses and churches, including Back Bay landmarks; it was a logical choice for the shelters, gatehouses and bridges of Frederick Law Olmsted’s new parks, which were intended to look as native to their surroundings as possible. Roxbury puddingstone can be seen throughout Boston, in forms both natural and built, and also by visitors to Gettysburg, where a rough-hewn boulder was placed as a battlefield monument to Massachusetts infantrymen.
It’s not the most poetic notion, but absorbing stormwater is an essential function of the Emerald Necklace. The construction of the parks was an exercise in civil engineering, an inconspicuous solution to sewage and stormwater issues. The three-tiered design of the Fens and Riverway, which creates different levels for roadways, walkways and the river itself, also provided critical protection from floods. The importance of this design became especially clear in the mid-1990s; with pavement covering sections of the Muddy River, floodwaters cascaded instead into local institutions including the Museum of Fine Arts and the Kenmore T Station. This damaging event sparked the creation of the Emerald Necklace Conservancy, which is restoring the Muddy River to its rightful cultural—and infrastructural—place. The parks’ ability to absorb water will be increasingly important in the face of the extreme weather and rising sea levels tied to climate change.
The Emerald Necklace is regaining a link thanks to the Casey Arborway Project, which is expected to be finished this year. The multi-year endeavor will restore the connection between Arnold Arboretum and Franklin Park, replacing the hulking, heavily trafficked Casey Overpass north of the Forest Hills T station with surface-level roads, landscaped pedestrian and bicycle lanes, and more than 500 trees.

One of the words that best defines the Emerald Necklace is connections: connections between people and nature, between river and sea, between the agencies and organizations working together to maintain the parks, and between the parks themselves. In the mid-20th century, prevailing economic and political winds led the city to approve development schemes that paved over and bisected the parks. This damaged the land, altered Olmsted’s vision and limited opportunities for exploration, recreation and relaxation. Many of these decisions are now being reconsidered through creative approaches ranging from a citizen-led effort to restore Charlestown, once seen as the gateway to the park system, to the demolition of the Casey Overpass in Jamaica Plain. The reconnections featured here, all recently unveiled or launched, are making it possible for more people to enjoy the parks—and improving the ability of the parks to function as a natural system.
Charlesgate Improvements

Once viewed as a vital green link connecting the Charles River to the Fens, Charlesgate was cut off from the rest of the Emerald Necklace by the construction of Storrow Drive and the Bowker Overpass. The newly formed Charlesgate Alliance is working to revitalize and clean up the long-isolated area, which includes a stretch of the Muddy River. The group hopes to build stronger recognition of the Charlesgate neighborhood and make it a more pedestrian-friendly place.

Route 9 Crossing

Pedestrians and bicyclists attempting to cross four busy lanes of traffic on Route 9 between the Riverway and Olmsted Park can breathe a little easier now, thanks to the installation of a brick crosswalk, curb cuts and pedestrian-activated traffic signals. The project, implemented by the Town of Brookline, vastly improves the safety of this route, which is popular with those who commute by bicycle as well as those who ride for recreation.

Justine Mee Liff Park

Consumption beat out conservation when Sears was allowed to build a paved parking lot in the Riverway. But decades later, conservation got its moment in the sun. Working with the Army Corps of Engineers, the city restored this “missing link” by daylighting the Muddy River, realigning traffic, and installing bridges and plantings. The resulting park is named for the late Justine Mee Liff, a former Boston Parks Commissioner who was fiercely dedicated to restoring Olmsted’s vision.
The Emerald Necklace

Back Bay Fens
Established: 1879
Acres: 86

Lay of the land: An open, welcoming area with riverside paths, athletic fields and a playground, the Kelleher Rose Garden and the Fenway Victory Gardens—all within walking distance of landmarks such as the Museum of Fine Arts, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and even Fenway Park. Once a tidal marsh, this walkable park was named by Olmsted as a nod to its origins.

On the horizon: Keep your eye out for new displays in the Shattuck Visitor Center in the H. H. Richardson–designed gatehouse across from the Museum of Fine Arts. Since 2010, the building has served as a headquarters for the Conservancy with a small welcome area for visitors, but will soon be primarily dedicated to exhibits, interactive visitor experiences and youth education programs.

The Riverway
Established: 1890
Acres: 40

Lay of the land: Street-level pathways and narrow green space—including the newly dedicated Justine Mee Liff Park and the newly resurfaced Muddy River, which had been buried in culverts for decades under a paved parking area—give way to lower-elevation, wooded walkways as you head south, taking you away from the hustle and bustle of the city.

On the horizon: With Phase One of the Muddy River restoration complete, resulting in the resurfacing of a long-buried section of river, the Conservancy and partners including the Army Corps of Engineers are embarking on Phase Two, which will involve dredging of the river in the Riverway, Fens and Olmsted Park to address contamination and reduce flooding. With sufficient funding, removal of more of the invasive phragmites along the river’s banks will also be possible.

Olmsted Park
Established: 1891
Acres: 62

Lay of the land: Blink and you could miss this park along the Boston-Brookline border, but you won’t want to overlook its offerings: four ponds, a wildflower meadow, woods and footbridges, as well as the popular Daisy Field athletic area. The park is an example of Olmsted’s intentional alternating of wooded and open areas to provide a range of experiences for visitors. Originally named Leverett Park, it was renamed to honor its designer in 1900, three years before his death.

On the horizon: Phase Two of the Muddy River restoration (see The Riverway) is scheduled to include dredging in Leverett Pond, with the goal of removing contaminated soil and debris and reducing future flood damage. Conservancy volunteers will also continue to remove invasive species, replacing them with native plants like hay-scented ferns and New England asters.
Jamaica Pond
Established: 1891
Acres: 120

Lay of the land: Long a popular spot for boating, ice fishing and other water-based recreation, Jamaica Pond—a kettle pond that reaches 53 feet deep and is the source of the Muddy River—is community-oriented, with boat rentals, a bandstand and a wide path around its perimeter. Pinebank Promontory offers a gathering place for events, including concerts in the Conservancy’s Summer on the Emerald Necklace series.

On the horizon: The Conservancy will soon be undertaking an expansion of its offices from the H. H. Richardson-designed gatehouse in the Fens to the city-owned James P. Curley House, a 1915 landmark that overlooks Jamaica Pond. Situated in the middle of the Necklace, this three-floor house will offer ample room for organizational space and exhibits, community events and more.

Arnold Arboretum
Established: 1872
Acres: 281

Lay of the land: You don’t have to know much about plants to enjoy the winding trails and colorful sights of the second-largest link in the Emerald Necklace, but you’ll almost certainly know more about them by the time you leave. Visitors especially enjoy making their way to the top of Bussey Hill and Peters Hill for city views, learning more about the collection at the Visitor Center, and attending classes, concerts and other events at this carefully cultivated park.

On the horizon: The Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University boasts a robust education and events schedule—and the installation of three new lighted crosswalks on busy Centre Street, which borders the park, will make it easier to get there. A collaboration between residents, the state Department of Conservation and Recreation and the Conservancy, this project is a key step in an effort to improve park access system-wide.

Franklin Park
Established: 1885
Acres: 527

Lay of the land: Boston’s largest public park has something for everyone: a 200-acre forest, stone bridges, walking paths, a pond and fields, as well as several attractions added after designer Frederick Law Olmsted’s day, including a golf course, baseball fields and the Franklin Park Zoo. Olmsted intended this “country park,” which many consider to be one of his best designs, as an escape from the city. In the century-plus since then, the city has grown around it, but the park still offers respite.

On the horizon: This year will see a key Conservancy event come to Franklin Park: The signature Party in the Park fundraiser, which has raised $9 million for the parks over the past 15 years. The Conservancy also expects to host a public art installation at the park this year, and has raised funds for infrastructure improvements such as drinking fountains.
Peek into Spring Pond at Olmsted Park, and you might spot a three-spine stickleback. The theory is the non-native fish was introduced as part of Olmsted’s plan to create a series of natural-history pools in the park; that plan was scrapped, but the hardy fish lives on. Sticklebacks aren’t the only unusual wildlife in the Necklace. Plot-tenders at the Fenway Victory Gardens—the country’s oldest continuously operating victory garden, dating to 1942—were surprised to see a lizard darting through their produce a couple of years ago. Turns out a small population of Italian wall lizards (also non-native, as the name indicates) calls the compost home. Whether you’re on the lookout for a pipevine swallowtail or a common grasshopper, you can find these and many other native and non-native creatures in the parks—to say nothing of the 3,800 types of trees, plants and vines in the Arnold Arboretum and the 200 rose varieties in the Fens’ Kelleher Rose Garden.

The three-spined stickleback is just one of the unusual creatures that call the Necklace home.
In the 1960s, local civil-rights activist Elma Lewis created a concert stage from the ruins of the Olmsted-designed Overlook Shelter in Franklin Park. Lewis drew performers like Duke Ellington and Odetta to the space; she also created a vivid reminder that parks can bring people of all backgrounds together. Today the tradition continues with the Franklin Park Coalition’s Elma Lewis Playhouse in the Park concert series and the Conservancy’s Summer on the Emerald Necklace series, which offer free music and family fun. This summer, the Conservancy will also present a series of fog sculptures by artist Fujiko Nakaya. Installed along the length of the Necklace, this immersive artwork will provide a platform for collaboration with local groups. Music and performance artists, ballet dancers, student choirs and more will use the Emerald Necklace as their stage, drawing a new generation of visitors to experience the harmony of the parks.

Young and old alike enjoy music and movies during the free Summer on the Emerald Necklace series.
Helping to take care of 1,100 acres of land is no easy task, so the Conservancy is lucky that hundreds of volunteers get involved in protecting and maintaining the Necklace each year. A squadron of flower-minders makes sure the Kelleher Rose Garden in the Fens is in fine form from spring to fall. In Franklin Park and Olmsted Park, volunteers gather monthly to yank out invasive plants and replace them with native species like New England asters, hay-scented ferns and serviceberry shrubs. Specially trained tour guides lead visitors on walking and biking explorations of the parks, ambassadors represent the Conservancy at events and local residents turn out in droves each April for the annual Muddy River clean-up. If helping the great outdoors from the great indoors is more your speed, there’s lots to do at Conservancy headquarters too, from greeting visitors to conducting research. Dig in!

From the Kelleher Rose Garden (shown) to Franklin Park, volunteers play a crucial role in keeping the Emerald Necklace green.
What happens when you breathe on a tree? Why are a grasshopper’s back legs so big? Where do chipmunks go when it snows? These are the kinds of questions that come up in our Canopy Classroom program, which brings local third-graders into the parks. Started in 2015, the program is expanding to three schools this year, in Jamaica Plain, Roxbury and Mattapan. The Conservancy offers learning opportunities for older students as well: Each summer, twenty-five to thirty Boston teens collaborate on projects across the park system as part of the Green Team, learning about natural systems, tools and maintenance techniques. Some go on to participate in the school-year Youth Leadership Program, which integrates forest and watershed management lessons with leadership and public-speaking training. This year, YLP students are working with some Canopy Classroom students, bringing the programs together for the first time—and showing those wide-eyed third-graders just where their curiosity can lead.
It’s hard to imagine that in just a few steps, you can leave a crowded campus or a busy office building, make your way across a multi-lane road and end up on a peaceful river bank. Or that you can peel yourself off a packed city bus, walk three blocks and find yourself in the quiet of thousands of trees in a world-renowned arboretum. But that’s exactly what the Emerald Necklace offers: Serenity in the midst of the city. A moment of quiet in a watershed that’s home to 300,000 people and a metro area that’s home to nearly 5 million. Olmsted thought the best urban parks offered exactly that; in a speech delivered in Boston in 1870, he described his vision clearly: “We want a ground to which people may easily go when the day’s work is done, where they may stroll for an hour, seeing, hearing and feeling nothing of the bustle and jar of the streets; where they shall, in effect, find the city put far away from them.”

In a crowded city, it’s still possible to enjoy a quiet jaunt through the woods, no matter the season.
Whether you’re making your first visit to the Emerald Necklace or your five-hundredth, you’ll find something new on the path ahead. The Conservancy has exciting plans for 2018 and beyond. We will embark on the next phase of restoring the Muddy River, now flowing freely for the first time in sixty years. We will continue connecting youth to the parks, we will ramp up our efforts to ensure the health of the tree canopy through the Olmsted Tree Society and we will push for much-needed improvements, from installing drinking fountains to removing invasive species to designing new signage. We will bring cutting-edge public art to the parks, relocate our headquarters and create a new visitor center at the H. H. Richardson-designed Fens gatehouse. These parks belong to you. With your help, we’ll make sure future generations get to (re)discover them all over again.

Special programs marking the Conservancy’s 20th Anniversary include the ethereal fog installations of artist Fujiko Nakaya.
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THANK YOU!

Our deepest thanks to the individuals, foundations, corporations, and government and institutional partners who contributed so generously to help us achieve our mission to maintain, restore and protect the parks of the Emerald Necklace. Our parks would not be the same without you.

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Since our founding, we have...

- Inventoried more than 7,000 trees and 200 acres of woodlands for the Olmsted Tree Management Plan
- Guided more than 4,600 visitors in docent-led tours and activities
Since our founding, we have...

- Welcomed more than 15,000 attendees to the Summer on the Emerald Necklace event series.
- Mentored almost 400 teenagers through the Green Team and Youth Leadership Programs.

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This is an audited financial summary for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2017. The independent auditor’s report, including financial statements, is available on the Conservancy’s website, www.emeraldnecklace.org/about-us.