



## Connecting People and Parks and Conserving the Emerald Necklace

CHARLES GATE PARK • BACK BAY FENS • RIVERWAY • OLMSTED PARK • JAMAICA POND • ARNOLD ARBORETUM • FRANKLIN PARK

Karen Mauney-Brodek, *President* April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2023

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Boston City Hall, 5th Floor  
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Boston, MA 02201

### Re: Proposed FY2024 Boston Parks & Recreation Department Budget

Dear Mayor Wu and Members of the City Council,

The Emerald Necklace Conservancy is thankful for the city's leadership as we work together to improve our parks, expand and restore urban park space and increase support for our vital public lands, including parks, trees, parkways, waterways and all the users that depend on them.

The 1,100-acre Emerald Necklace park system is a vital part of our community, providing health and recreational opportunities, and represents over 40% of Boston's parkland, serving 14+ neighborhoods and connecting our city. These spaces provide invaluable ecological functions including: the Muddy River's daily stormwater work; 9,000+ trees which help cool the city's most vulnerable communities; critical wildlife habitat; and have proven essential in improving public health outcomes.

We appreciate several of the city's recent investments in our public lands, including additional funds for the city's tree canopy, funding to address climate readiness and the Boston PowerCorps program. The PowerCorps program was launched very thoughtfully and has been a great success. Teaching young adults the skills they need for successful "green" careers – and paying them for it – is an example of the city leading in economic opportunity, equity and environment and how they can be done together. We hope to see these forestry investments continue to increase, both in terms of staff and scope, so that we can all do more for the city's urban forest. The Conservancy's *Olmsted Tree Society* partnership with Boston provides matching donations and investment to the Emerald Necklace trees, including tree planting and watering, tree pruning and soil improvements for heritage trees. We remain committed to this wonderful and resilient 7+ year partnership with the city. The value of this work grows daily as the city's canopy endures increased summer heat, worsening storms, migrating pests and other management challenges that connect directly to community health.

**However, the city's proposed total operational budget for the Parks and Recreation Department is still less than most park budgets in similar U.S. cities.** It is very important that we continue to increase day-to-day park maintenance resources to be able to provide much-needed care and support to the city's communities and open spaces.

The City of Boston's proposed FY24 operations budget is, in total, \$4,280,000,000. The Parks and Recreation Department's operations budget is \$34,080,037, which is just 0.73% of the city's total operations budget. While we are pleased to see a continued investment in our city's open space, the Parks and Recreation Department's operations budget is less than 1% of the city's total operation budget. This is insufficient to support the maintenance and improvement of our greenspaces. To ensure the countless ecological and social benefits reach those most vulnerable, we urge you to increase the Parks and Recreation Department budget to equal to or be greater than 1% of the city's budget.

### **Specific Ways to Invest in Our Parks**

We believe that there are focused investments, many included in your proposed budget, that will build on past successes. We request that in the budget include the following allocations:

#### **Expand Maintenance and Management Staffing in the Parks and Recreation Department Operations Budget**

**Park Staffing:** We support an increase in park staffing and capacity with continued, increasing investments in urban forestry and horticultural expertise throughout Boston's parks. We encourage the Boston Parks and Recreation Department to invest in our existing hardworking field staff in addition to adding new staff. The Urban Wilds program is particularly well situated to continue to grow and expand in its scope, working with the design and construction team to continue park stewardship beyond capital project implementation.

- 1) **Field Staff: Add 8 Full-Time and 8 Part-Time Maintenance Staff Team Members.** Expand the maintenance staff team by at least 8 additional full-time staff and 8 part-time for maintenance related tasks including mowing and turf care, snow removal, and general grounds care (litter pick-up, emptying trash and recycling receptacles, surface cleaning, upkeep of benches and other amenities, minor repairs, assistance to a natural resource crew, etc.).
- 2) **Capital Project Managers: Add 2 Additional Project Managers.** The city should hire 2 dedicated staff for communication and coordination around all park activities: events, maintenance, programming, construction, and volunteer activities.
- 3) **Park Rangers: Increase Park Ranger Salaries.** The current compensation for Park Rangers has negatively impacted staffing, leading to consistently low retention rates and training inefficiencies. At a critical time where park safety is an increasing concern across Boston, increasing pay for rangers will improve retention. An increase in salary will also ease the financial burden the rangers face in terms of rapidly increasing housing costs, as they are required to live within the city.

**By making the above investments in maintenance and capital staffing, many key needs and projects could be addressed:**

#### **Capital Projects:**

Providing additional project managers will allow the city to implement many of the desired capital projects identified and funded:

- Franklin Park Master Plan (\$22,750,000)
  - Franklin Park Elma Lewis Playhouse Feasibility Study (\$250,000)
  - Franklin Park Bear Dens (\$900,000)
  - Greenhouses at Franklin Park (\$750,000)
- Back Bay Fens Pathway Project (\$7,500,500)
- Jamaica Pond Boathouse Study (\$500,000)
- City Wide Open Space Acquisition (\$10,000,000)
- Tree Canopy (\$7,500,000)
- Urban Wilds (\$2,000,000)

In addition to maintenance of vegetation and soil in the parks, infrastructural improvements are needed in several key areas, some of which are listed below.

- Restore historic stonework of the **Chapel Street Bridge** and **Longwood Bridge**.

- **Riverway pathway** restoration and activating “Mosaic funds” to complete Boston pathway.
- Make the **Riverway Roundhouse** safer and accessible and consider opportunities to activate it during the summer to encourage safe use.
- Improvements and repaving for the **Jamaicaway path** in Olmsted Park.
- Erosion control and hillside restoration at **Mothers Rest** in the Back Bay Fens.

**Key Ongoing Maintenance Projects:**

- Invasive species overgrowth, monitoring and removal.
  - Continued and consistent monitoring and treatment for the phragmites along the Muddy River in order to protect habitat and maintain the major public investments of the last decade.
  - Removal of Japanese knotweed and Glossy buckthorn, which overgrow and crowd out local plants in hundreds of acres of parks citywide.
  - Replanting and restoration of the area to support our parks and communities.
- Erosion control projects and prevention.
  - Site analysis and plans for investment in areas with concerning erosion, such as the Mothers Rest hillside in the Back Bay Fens and various sites along the Necklace and Muddy River. Erosion can complicate accessibility, threaten tree health, and prevent grass and shrubs from growing.
- Planting bed care and horticultural maintenance.
  - New Muddy River plantings and historic Jamaica Pond planting beds require increased maintenance and horticultural expertise to distinguish desired plants from overgrowth.

**Key Policy Needs:**

**Sunshine Policy:**

A true citywide sunshine projection policy must be enacted to support and protect all of Boston’s parkland, environment, and communities. The city and others must work to balance, distribute, and support development in such a way that maintains necessary sunlight for the permanent public open space of the Emerald Necklace and all city parks.

**Franklin Park/Shattuck Hospital: Process, Transparency and Land Use**

The city must engage in the vital conversation around the 13 acres of former parkland in Franklin Park, currently used by the Commonwealth’s Executive Office of Health and Human Services for the Shattuck Hospital and related services, plus a parking lot. The Commonwealth has proposed demolition of the hospital and relocation of most services to a new facility elsewhere, but local communities surrounding the park have not had a voice in determining the best use for this former parkland.

**The quality, quantity and health of our shared public green space is integral to our city’s vitality and we must continue our partnered efforts to increase investment in our park system. Thank you for your continued partnership as we invest together for Boston’s health for future generations.**

Sincerely,



Karen Mauney-Brodek  
President

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