



January 23, 2024

Bradford Walker, Chair  
Boston Landmarks Commission  
20 City Hall Avenue  
Boston, MA 02108

Dear Mr. Walker,

Thank you for this opportunity to comment of the proposed renovation of White Stadium, 24.0613 BLC, which is in Franklin Park. While these comments are largely about the significance of the park, I do wish to note that the approvals process is moving with great haste; it has been less than two months since a letter of intent was sent to the Boston Redevelopment Authority by Boston Unity Soccer Partners, LLC about the stadium redesign, and now it's before the Boston Landmarks Commission (BLC). Moreover, the planning documents presented at a January 11, 2024, [public forum](#), much of which have been repurposed for this present meeting, were out of date and did not reflect the most recent design proposals. Incomplete documentation denies the public, and one of its most effective advocates and stewards, the Emerald Necklace Conservancy, opportunities to thoroughly analyze and comment on the impacts of this proposal.

Franklin Park, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., and John Charles Olmsted, is 527-acre "Country Park" and the largest in the 1,100-acre chain of parks known as the Emerald Necklace. The park was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1971 and designated a local landmark in 1980. In a 2017 article for [The Huffington Post](#) I wrote that the Emerald Necklace is a likely candidate for designation as both a National Historic Landmark and a World Heritage Site, as it's the first urban greenway in the world and the progenitor of this now recognized landscape typology. The park itself, according to the preeminent Olmsted scholar Dr. Charles Beveridge, has been grouped with New York's Central and Prospect Parks and Chicago's Washington Park as one of the four great Country Parks in America designed by Olmsted.

Why then rush through a project without any authentic public engagement? This treasured landscape is the subject of a city-funded master plan, which was the only project to receive the American Society of Landscape Architects' 2023 [Award of Excellence](#) in Analysis and Planning. The jury statement for the award, which was given to the City of Boston Parks and Recreation and the design team led by the renowned landscape architecture firm Reed Hilderbrand, included the following observation:

Franklin Park has long been a beloved center of recreation, gathering, and discovery for Boston's most diverse communities. Emerging from the Imagine Boston 2030 Plan, the Action Plan is founded on equal respect for the park's historic fabric, ecological systems, and the strong community of contemporary users who have stewarded it through years of disinvestment. Focused on issues of equity, ecological resilience, climate change, and cultural significance, its aspirations are forward-looking and visionary, but based in practical and action-oriented recommendations. It advocates for thoughtfully guided, community-driven improvements implemented through equitable investment to enable this treasured park to do what it does now, only better.

The BLC was founded in 1975, in between the time Franklin Park was listed in the National Register and designated locally. The BLC's aims and mandate are inspiring and worth citing: (a) to protect the beauty of the city of Boston and improve the quality of its environment through identification, recognition, conservation, maintenance and enhancement of areas, sites, structures and fixtures which constitute or reflect distinctive features of the political, economic, social, cultural or architectural history of the city; (b) to foster appropriate use and wider public knowledge and appreciation of such features, areas, sites, structures and fixtures; and (c) to resist and restrain environmental influences adverse to such purposes.

The language of the master plan is equally significant, especially the following:

“Implementation of the plan recommendations can build local capacity to make change, returning value not just to the park, but emanating that value back out to its adjacent communities in real ways. This requires buy-in, advocacy, and coordinated support across City agencies. It requires thinking holistically about the park and the communities that surround it.

“The recommendations of this plan are the result of years of research and consultation with the community and park stakeholders, including the Franklin Park Coalition and the Emerald Necklace Conservancy, and are built upon a united understanding that Franklin Park is a landmark American public space – a landscape of cultural, social, and ecological significance. The interrelationship of these various dimensions is crucial to envisioning how the park can continue to evolve its legacy and better serve the Boston community.”

Franklin Park is due great deference and respect, and alterations, encroachments, and possible adverse effects should be given great consideration. Moreover, the public should have adequate time and opportunities to review up to date planning documents and related materials in order to provide informed input in the public review process. The City of Boston is fortunate to be home to one of the greatest achievements in landscape architecture and urban planning. The city also the responsibility of careful and appropriate stewardship. Fortunately, the city has an excellent partner in the Emerald Necklace Conservancy, which has spearheaded some of the most significant and beneficial projects in the past several decades.

We urge the BLC to exercise caution in the review of the stadium project, to provide adequate time for public review, and to consult with and heed the advice of the Emerald Necklace Conservancy. Thank you, again, for this opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'C' followed by a horizontal line that extends to the right and then loops back under the 'C'.

Charles A. Birnbaum, FASLA, FAAR  
President & CEO

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