

COME TOGETHER



Annual Report **2022/2023**



THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!



Dear Friends,

“In a park, the largest provision is required for the human presence. Men must come together, and must be seen coming together, in carriages, on horseback and on foot, and [this] concourse of animated life... must itself be made, if possible, an attractive and diverting spectacle.”

Report to the Board of Commissioners of Prospect Park, 1866

Frederick Law Olmsted spoke those words nearly 160 years ago, early in his journey toward becoming America’s preeminent landscape architect—before he set his sights on Boston to sculpt the revolutionary park system we are committed to stewarding with your help. Within this report are stories of people doing just that—coming together to keep their parks clean, to learn and share with their friends and neighbors, to support better outcomes and futures for all.

2022 and 2023 were undoubtedly landmark years not only for the Emerald Necklace and the Conservancy, but for our entire region of parks and interconnected communities. In 2022, our work focused on honoring the bicentennial of Frederick Law Olmsted with **Olmsted Now**, a first-of-its-kind initiative that brought together hundreds of partners, activated Greater Boston’s parks in bold new ways and forged dialogues and partnerships that will have positive outcomes far beyond the bicentennial year. In 2023, we took the learnings from Olmsted Now and crafted our next 5-year strategic plan, with a vision for a thriving Emerald Necklace where people and parks care for each other. This vision will be made possible through thoughtful parks care, people-driven programming and inclusive policy work.



As we reflect on the lands and waters where these parks now stand, we acknowledge the millennia of care and stewardship by Indigenous communities including the Massachusetts, Pawtucket, Wampanoag and Nipmuc peoples, for whom the area of Greater Boston remains their unceded ancestral territories. The Conservancy continually looks to establish right relations with these communities, and will build on the steps we took toward that goal in 2022 and 2023.

We are immensely grateful for all that we accomplished over the past two years, for the help of our friends and partners and for you—the supporters who have made this work possible. Read on and learn about new placemaking initiatives, expanding education programming and improvements to the visitor experience, about the tree care and maintenance work that keeps our urban canopy healthy (and hydrated!) and about what it means for people to come together in greenspace, and to be seen coming together.

Karen Mauney-Brodek
President

Ben Taylor
Board Chair

Enjoying the Necklace Year-Round



With drop-off sites located throughout the parks and at partner organizations, folks from all corners of the Emerald Necklace stepped up to donate winter clothing. We were inspired by the outpouring of support.



The 1,100 acres comprising the Emerald Necklace parks are a valuable destination for recreation, relaxation, exploration and more. Connecting more than a dozen Boston and Brookline neighborhoods with meadows, woodlands, waterways, pathways and parkways, the Necklace is a hub of activity for residents, students, commuters and visitors year-round. These parks do not have an “off-season”!

When temperatures drop, the Necklace and other urban greenspaces can become inaccessible to individuals and families with financial challenges: winter gear is costly and growing children require new warm clothing every year, making time outdoors off-limits to many in the colder months. That’s why, in the winter of 2021 the Conservancy launched its first-ever Winter Clothing Drive to provide crucial items like coats, hats, gloves and more to neighbors in need. With drop-off sites located throughout the parks and at partner organizations, folks from all corners of the Emerald Necklace stepped up to donate over 1,100 items of winter clothing to Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD). We were inspired by the outpouring of support for this new wintertime tradition, and will keep it going for years to come.

Another frequent barrier to winter park use is early darkness. From February to March 2022, *Lights in the Necklace* returned to illuminate eight iconic Necklace bridges in brilliant emerald green, offering stunning nighttime vistas in some of the parks’ most frequented locations.



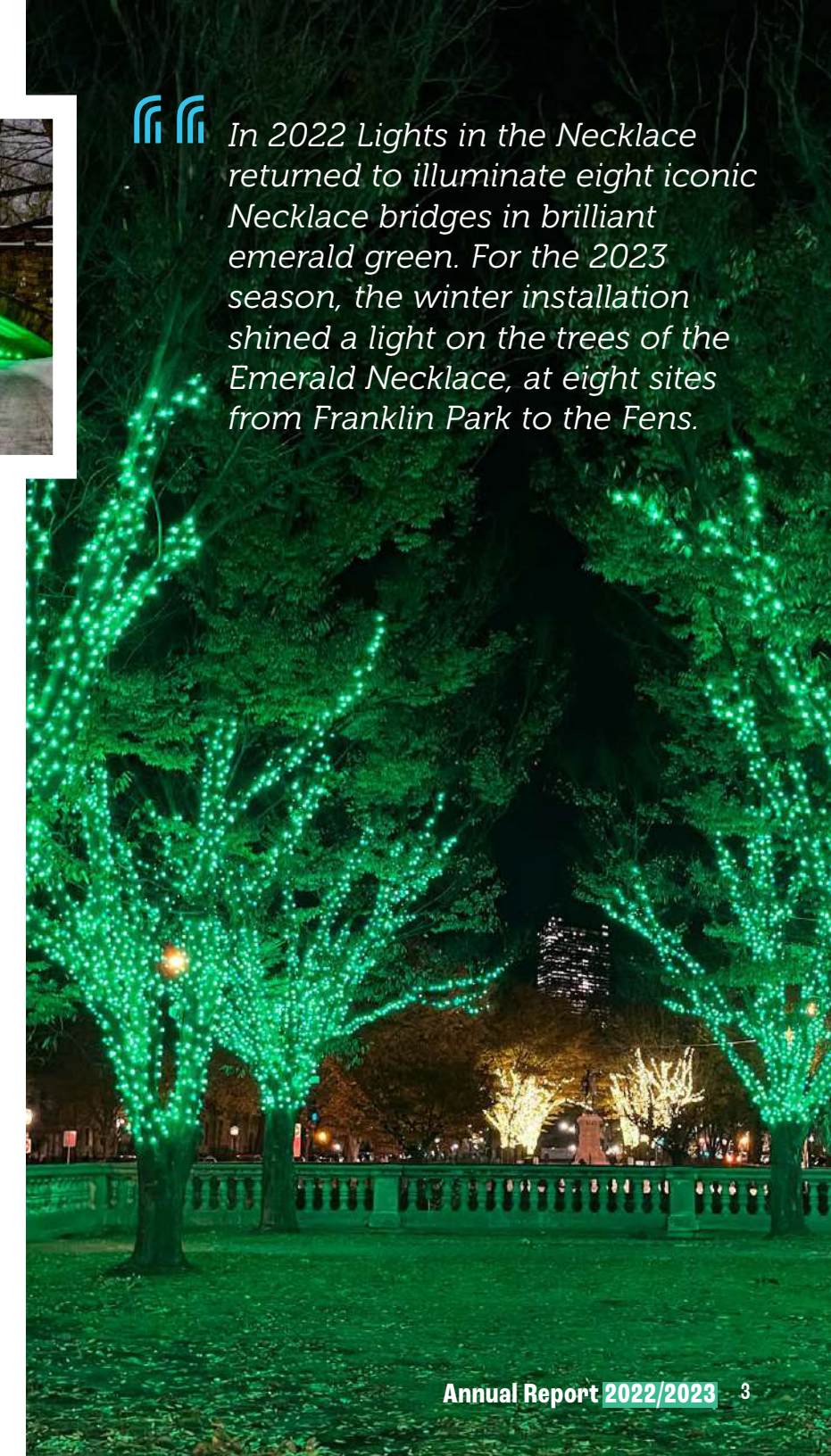
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For the 2023 season, the winter installation instead shined a light on the trees of the Emerald Necklace, at eight sites from Franklin Park to the Fens. These emerald scenes celebrated the power of public parks to bring people together and light the way in challenging times.

Lights in the Necklace lit another Boston parks icon green for the first time in 2022. Working with the Charlesgate Alliance, the Emerald Necklace Conservancy extended the annual lighting of the Commonwealth Avenue Mall to the Mall’s intersection with the Emerald Necklace at Charlesgate Park! Ten trees were aglow each night from December through March, brightening the junction of Fenway, Back Bay and Kenmore neighborhoods and shining a spotlight on the ongoing efforts to revitalize the first link of Olmsted’s parks.

These initiatives provide more than scenic photo-ops. Winter placemaking is essential for public spaces, even more so in regions like ours where the season brings shorter days and freezing temperatures. Making sure the Necklace is welcoming—and that people can comfortably experience it—is a job for all seasons. Your support helps to light the way!

THREE YEARS OF ILLUMINATING *Lights in the Necklace*



Youth Learn and Lead



700+ students
LEARNED ABOUT TREES AND NATURE IN THE PARK




“The wisest and noblest teacher is nature itself,” wrote Renaissance polymath Leonardo Da Vinci. It’s true: greenspaces like this iconic urban linear park system provide insight into many elements of our world. The natural sciences; our relationship with the plants, animals, water and earth that shape our environment; and even human society can be studied in natural settings like the Emerald Necklace. Since 2008, the Conservancy’s two teenage education programs—the after-school Youth Leadership Program (YLP) and the summer Green Team—have been providing valuable nature connection and real-world experience to teens from all over Boston.

In spring 2022, for the second year in a row, the Youth Leadership Program culminated in an Arbor Day tree planting in Franklin Park, a living testament to the lessons the teens learned in earth and life sciences. One program member shared that their summer Green Team experience opened the door to a world of new opportunities: *“I participated in outdoor experiences for the first time—canoeing, looking at stars...sleeping in a tent, building a campfire, viewing wildlife I have never seen before.”*

For younger explorers, Canopy Classroom—our 3rd and 4th-grade field trip program—provides free educational experiences in the Necklace to Boston Public School students. In the 2021-22 school year, we welcomed over 400 students to the Emerald Necklace on these outdoor educational experiences. The following year, that figure rose to a record **700+** students learning about tree cycles, adaptations and predator/prey cycles in nature, a 75% increase.

As stewards of these invaluable urban greenspaces, we have an obligation to pass the teaching and invigorating power of the Necklace to a new generation, so they can discover these wonders for the first time. It is an honor to facilitate these teachings alongside the greatest teacher of them all—nature itself.



 *I participated in outdoor experiences for the first time—canoeing, looking at stars...sleeping in a tent, building a campfire, viewing wildlife I have never seen before.”*

Program member from summer Green Team.

Volunteers

Get to Work

Parks face many challenges in an urban environment, from litter and debris to invasive plant species that choke out native vegetation and take over the natural ecosystem. Stewarding 1,100 acres is a group effort, and we owe an enormous thank-you to the thousands of volunteers who helped keep these spaces green in 2022 and 2023!

The annual Muddy River Cleanup is the Conservancy's largest volunteer event each year, and 2022 was no exception—community members came together across seven parks to remove over three tons of litter and invasive plants, the largest removal in recent years! Not to be outdone, the 2023 Muddy River Cleanup proved to be our biggest-ever volunteer event, with over 400 volunteers spread out across the Necklace.

All year long, we were uplifted by the support and assistance of our community volunteers: during our monthly "Second Saturday" park care events, undertaking stewardship projects throughout the parks; caring for the ever-fragrant Kelleher Rose Garden with our popular "Tuesdays with Roses" summer program in the Back Bay Fens; coming together with colleagues and coworkers for team-building cleanups through our "Day in the Dirt" corporate volunteer days and more. The Emerald Partners Program grew with more teams from companies across Boston enjoying volunteer days, visibility opportunities and more ways to support and engage with the Emerald Necklace.

Over 6,000 lbs
OF TRASH AND INVASIVES REMOVED DURING
THE 2022 MUDDY RIVER CLEANUP



Volunteers are absolutely vital to the parks and our community—we are only able to support the Necklace with the people of all ages who donate their time and their skills to these wonderful parks, to ensure they are just as amazing for the next people who discover them.



A Toast to the Parks

It is a great joy to gather each spring in celebration of the Emerald Necklace at Party in the Park, also known as the annual Justine Mee Liff Luncheon. Funds raised at Party in the Park support the year-round work of the Conservancy including capital improvements and essential tree care in the parks, as people come together in the Emerald Necklace to celebrate greenspace in Boston.

This iconic annual event is a celebration of the Emerald Necklace and an occasion to applaud the work of parks and public space champions regionally and nationwide—people like Kathy Abbott, President and CEO of Boston Harbor Now (2022), and former White House National Climate Advisor Gina McCarthy (2023), both Liff Spirit Awardees. Presented annually to individuals who demonstrate leadership, dedication and inspiration befitting its namesake, the Liff Spirit Award honors the legacy of late Boston Parks Commissioner Justine Mee Liff, in whose memory the luncheon is held.

Boston, the Commonwealth, our country and the world need exceptional parks...to help heal our wounds and lead us to a safer, healthier and more fulfilling future."

Kathy Abbott, President and CEO, Boston Harbor Now (2022)

Accepting the 2022 award, Ms. Abbott gave inspiring remarks about the power of our public spaces: "Boston, the Commonwealth, our country and the world need exceptional parks...to help heal our wounds and lead us to a safer, healthier and more fulfilling future." Ms. McCarthy's words were equally powerful in 2023: "today and every day, let's try to be generous... to keep this city beautiful. To keep our Emerald Necklace shining like an emerald ought to shine!"

We are deeply grateful to all who joined us at Party in the Park or expressed support from afar – your generosity and participation at this annual luncheon ensures a greener and healthier future for Boston's largest park system!



Healthy Trees and Helping Hands

When it comes to helping keep 1,100 acres of urban parkland verdant, healthy and lush, it's not easy being green! But with the right equipment and team, we are up to the task – and the honor – of stewarding nearly 10,000 inventoried trees in the Emerald Necklace canopy. Park maintenance and restoration activities hummed throughout the Necklace in 2022 and 2023. Our Field Operations team was hard at work in every season, starting with the completion of the Conservancy's first seven-year pruning cycle, signifying that each of the trees in the Conservancy's tree inventory was inspected, pruned or cared for. This is a major milestone for our core tree care initiative, the Olmsted Tree Society, and for Boston's largest park system.

As temperatures soared in spring and summer, 110 newly planted and vulnerable trees needed extra care to ensure they would survive and thrive in the summer heat. Early watering is crucial for the health of young trees, especially in urban environments. With help from D.W.I.G.H.T. (Delivering Water Increasingly Grows Happy Trees)—our community-named watering truck—Conservancy crews provided much-needed hydration to saplings from Franklin Park to Charlesgate throughout the summer months.

We were also excited to forge a new partnership in our mission to care for Olmsted's extraordinary parks. In summer 2022, the Conservancy worked with the inaugural cohort of PowerCorpsBOS, a program from the City of Boston that provides paid green job training and experience to returning citizens, youth experiencing homelessness or housing instability, court-involved individuals and other marginalized communities. PowerCorps crews worked side-by-side with the Conservancy's Field Operations team to undertake several much-needed maintenance projects in the parks, from removing harmful invasive plants in Olmsted Park to planting ten new trees in the Back Bay Fens for Arbor Day 2023.

Keeping these 1,100 acres green and growing is a massive undertaking, but for all the gifts and benefits provided by the Emerald Necklace—purifying our air, cooling our city, protecting from severe floods—it's the least we can do to return the favor!

110 newly planted trees

IN 2022/2023



20 gallons
of water

EACH WEEK DURING THE SUMMER
FOR 110 YOUNG TREES

Advocacy and Action

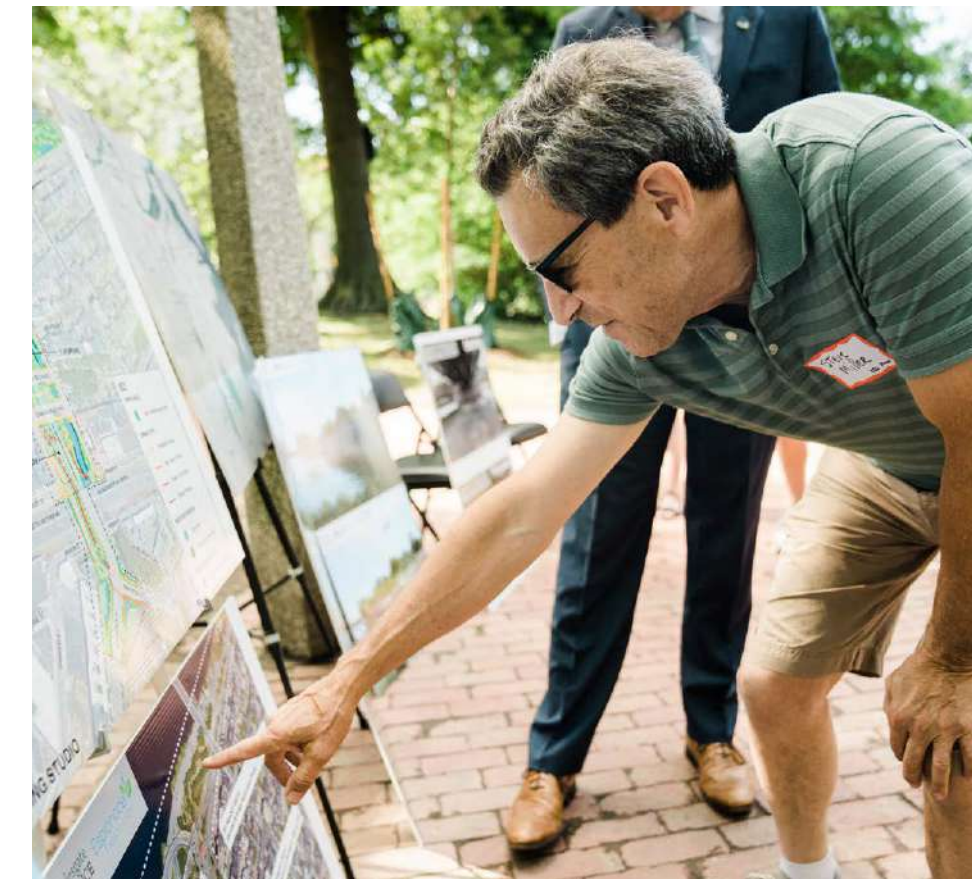


The Emerald Necklace park system is a valuable treasure for our community, and with your support the Conservancy works tirelessly to ensure it remains a green oasis in metropolitan Boston. From end to end of the 5-mile park chain, we have been busy with our public and private partners to advocate for access improvements, greenspace restoration and more:

- ≡ We continued to campaign for heightened accessibility and safety improvements along the Arborway—connecting Jamaica Pond to the Arnold Arboretum—as the state Department of Conservation and Recreation proceeds with plans to update and improve outmoded, complex traffic patterns for multi-modal transportation;
- ≡ The Conservancy has led the charge on advocating for citywide sunlight protection policies, to ensure that new large development will not cause environmental damage by casting shadows over large swaths of parkland;
- ≡ In Franklin Park, the opportunity of restoring 13 acres of lost parkland around the park’s former Heathfield continues to be a major policy point as the dilapidated Shattuck Hospital awaits demolition—the Conservancy’s inclusive policy work serves to ensure any projects include the involvement of residents in Roxbury, Dorchester, Mattapan and Jamaica Plain who are expressing concerns about proposed new development on the site;
- ≡ And in Charlesgate Park at the northern tip of the Necklace, we are closer than ever to restoring the connection between the Esplanade, the Commonwealth Avenue Mall and the Emerald Necklace after large-scale, transformational investments were approved by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) for key elements of the revitalization project.

Our advocacy has had more immediate and visible effects as well. Spanning three parks, Phase Two of the Muddy River Restoration Project proceeded on schedule as crews led by the US Army Corps of Engineers continued dredging the Muddy to improve its flood control capabilities and restore native habitats. In the summer of 2022, the Conservancy and partner organizations of the Muddy River Maintenance and Oversight Committee (MMOC) successfully campaigned for additional invasive species removal in the Back Bay Fens, clearing more of the harmful, choking phragmites from the river and improving visibility along the shoreline. This \$3 Million project addition was made possible thanks to funding secured by Boston City Councilor Kenzie Bok.

Whether the results are felt in days or months or years, we are always working to improve our community’s parks, and we are grateful for the opportunity to preserve these spaces for years to come!



Coming Together for Olmsted's Bicentennial



**OLMSTED
NOW**

For over a dozen neighborhoods and countless thousands of annual visitors, Boston would be very different today without Frederick Law Olmsted's vision of interconnected open parks. His philosophy and design principles were ahead of his time in many ways—imagining shared public space as the very grounds of a successful democracy, where all voices are heard and all bodies can gather; sculpting water and land to meet the environmental and engineering needs of a bustling city, still protected from floods and pollution over a century later; believing that access to nature is essential for the physical, mental and spiritual health of a person. Honoring the 200th birthday of this visionary designer has been a major goal of the Conservancy for years, and it was the greatest of honors to bring that initiative to life in 2022.

For Boston' observance of Olmsted's Bicentennial, organizing partners at the Conservancy and Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site in Brookline sought to look beyond only celebrating the accomplishments of Olmsted, and to instead look forward—in the same way he did—to create an inclusive, aspirational movement based around his values: shared use, shared health and shared power in parks and public space. These values came together to form a regional, yearlong initiative that brought together nearly 200 partners from Massachusetts and beyond—Olmsted Now: Greater Boston's Olmsted Bicentennial.

Olmsted Now addressed these values by producing three key initiatives: partnerships to practice better collaboration across a wide range of sectors and disciplines, power sharing to rectify structural imbalances in the decision-making processes of Greater Boston's parks, and Parks as Platform, a brand-new event series to increase park access, amplify the work of our partners and offer a slate of diverse public events using the Emerald Necklace parks as a staging ground.

Of course, Olmsted's Bicentennial would be incomplete without highlighting the man himself. Though delayed by rain on Olmsted's actual birthday of April 26, nearly 200 community members, elected officials and greenspace advocates gathered on the shores of Jamaica Pond for a sunset celebration of his life and work the following evening, offering speeches, toasts and cake-cutting to his legacy of equity and open spaces.

Partnerships

Monthly public dialogues served as a free online forum featuring highlighted partner programs, guest speakers tackling questions based on the themes of the bicentennial, and space for audience members to participate, ask questions and engage in discussion, effectively re-centering ideas among Olmsted Now coalition members toward the communities served by the parks.

A website, olmstednow.org, served as a community-generated resource to share events, parks stories, ideas and more throughout the bicentennial year. During the program, over 19,000 new users visited the site, nearly 250 events were shared by partner organizations and 74 stories were shared—including musical compositions, performance art and an original work of fiction writing.

Power Sharing

From the start of our bicentennial planning, we knew it was important to include as many voices from the community as possible—voices that have been unfortunately shut out of greenspace conversations for many decades. These planning discussions led to the formation of the Olmsted Now Committee of Neighborhoods, a group of intergenerational leaders working in Boston's Roxbury, Mattapan,





Grove Hall and Dorchester neighborhoods. With over \$200,000 raised by the Conservancy Board of Directors, the Committee funded 16 projects in 2022 via the Olmsted Now Parks Equity and Spatial Justice Grant. These projects, 100% BIPOC-led and located throughout Greater Boston, activated greenspace through music, art-making, movement, history-keeping and traditional practices. The Conservancy aided project leads with permitting for park spaces, advocating for permissions when approval was needed from officials, lending event supplies and promoting upcoming public activities on our channels.

These projects expanded thinking about greenspace use across Greater Boston, and the impacts are still felt today: at Charlestown's Little Mystic Channel boat launch, for instance, plans for an upcoming renovation for the space include designs that will enable further Indigenous use, following the historic ceremonial mishoon burn that took place there in 2022. Additionally, the project opened the door for further spatial justice and cultural revitalization ceremonies by the project leads in other parts of Massachusetts.

Parks as Platform

Taking center stage of this jam-packed year was an all-new event series that perfectly encapsulated the goals of Olmsted Now: giving power to the people that use the parks each day, broadening understandings of how the space can be used and ceding our platform to amplify the great work of our partners. Running monthly from April through October, Parks as Platform activated different parks of the Emerald Necklace with a varied slate of events, from concerts and festivals to picnics and parades, culminating in the Necklace-wide Parkfest on September 24 taking place simultaneously in every park.

Olmsted Now served as a proving ground for ideas and partnerships our greenspace community had never seen before, and the lessons we gained from it.

Throughout 2022's Olmsted Now happenings, the Conservancy partnered with CultureHouse for both programming assistance and quantifiable data on the impact of the initiative. For more in-depth information on the scope and teachings of Olmsted Now, read our separate Olmsted Now Impact Report online [here](#).



Partnering for Park Equity

Committee of Neighborhoods/ Summer Fests

When the Committee of Neighborhoods was formed as a cornerstone initiative of Olmsted Now in 2022, we knew the work could not stop there. To begin to rectify structural inequalities in Greater Boston’s park decision-making, the work of this groundbreaking coalition had to extend beyond the Bi-centennial year. That’s why, when the Committee was awarded the Olmsted Award of Excellence at An Emerald Evening in early 2023, the Conservancy announced its commitment to centering our next year of public programs around cultural partnerships and parks equity. This meant a program budget five times more than previous years, and deeper cultivation of programming relationships and equity.



It wouldn’t be summer in the Emerald Necklace without vibrant events bringing its surrounding communities together. With a renewed emphasis on partnership, the Conservancy took on a new role: rather than take the lead on events programming, we partnered with community groups up and down the Necklace to help facilitate and support big events including Fenway Porchfest in the Fens, Brookline Community Parkfest in Olmsted Park, Jamaica Plain Porchfest at Jamaica Pond and Boston Art & Music Soul (BAMS) Fest in Franklin Park.

Partnering with the community and local organizers allowed the Conservancy to amplify and expand the scope of beloved community events, while July’s Brookline Community Parkfest (in partnership with Brookline Community Foundation) ushered in a first-of-its-kind event to foster more learning, connection and celebration in the Necklace.

After making history with the Parks Equity and Spatial Justice Grants—including cultural celebrations, art exhibitions and Boston’s first Indigenous mishoon burn in four centuries—the Committee of Neighborhoods remained busy. For 2023, they moved their focus to working on “permitting justice”, planning workshops and exploring ways to reimagine and improve the permitting process for creatives and community members. The work is far from finished, but the Committee and the Conservancy are committed to breaking more ground and making Boston’s parks more equitable and welcoming for all.



Planning for the Future

We developed a Strategic Planning initiative to best serve the range of work the Conservancy does for the parks and people who depend on them, we developed Strategic Planning initiative in 2023 that will guide the organization through the next five years.

Throughout the yearlong planning process, it was imperative to not only hear voices from within the Conservancy, but from the people who use the parks every day for recreation, relaxation and commuting. Through months of listening sessions, internal and external discussions, a Necklace-wide park user survey and more, we shaped a vision for the future and distilled our most urgent priorities into five goals:

1. Facilitating and promoting excellent, equitable park maintenance and restoration throughout the Necklace
2. Pursuing targeted park improvement projects with broad social and environmental benefits
3. Deepening opportunities for diverse park activation and human connection to nature, primarily through partnerships
4. Establishing the Conservancy as an essential voice in civic thought and action in Greater Boston
5. Investing and growing practices, from strengthening partnerships and community engagement to revising our governance structure and enhancing our staff capacity

A noteworthy finding in this process was the realization that, compared to peer organizations in Boston and around the country, the Conservancy stewards a much larger amount of greenspace with a far smaller staff and budget. By taking the steps outlined here from now through 2028, we are setting ourselves on the right track for growing to meet the needs of all 1,100 acres of the Emerald Necklace.



Thank You to **Our Supporters!**

2,000 Gifts Received

RANGING FROM \$5 TO \$2,000,000

\$5 Million

RAISED IN A SINGLE YEAR

89% Increase

IN GIVING FROM FY22 TO FY23

"Thank you for making the landscape beautiful in every way". This heartfelt message came from a generous Conservancy donor, but we're the ones who are thankful: to all who have supported our mission with time, passion and resources that make this work possible. We are incredibly grateful for the staggering amount of support we've received these past two years—the Olmsted Now initiative not only welcomed an inspiring wave of new community partners, but also led record-breaking investment in our programming that laid a strong foundation for the Conservancy's future.

During FY2022 and FY2023

- Over 2,000 gifts were received from individuals, foundations, corporations, organizations and government entities during these two years, ranging from gifts of \$5 to an amazing commitment of \$2,000,000 to our general endowment.
- For the first time in the Conservancy's history, over \$5,000,000 was committed in gifts and multi-year pledges in a single year, resulting in an 89% increase in giving from FY22 to FY23.

Gifts to Operating Funds and General Endowment	FY22	FY23
Individuals	\$973,611	\$626,754
Foundations	\$1,159,507	\$4,382,543
Corporate	\$766,021	\$426,260
Government Grants	\$187,367	\$424,222
Other	\$17,550	\$18,479
Total	\$3,104,056	\$5,878,258

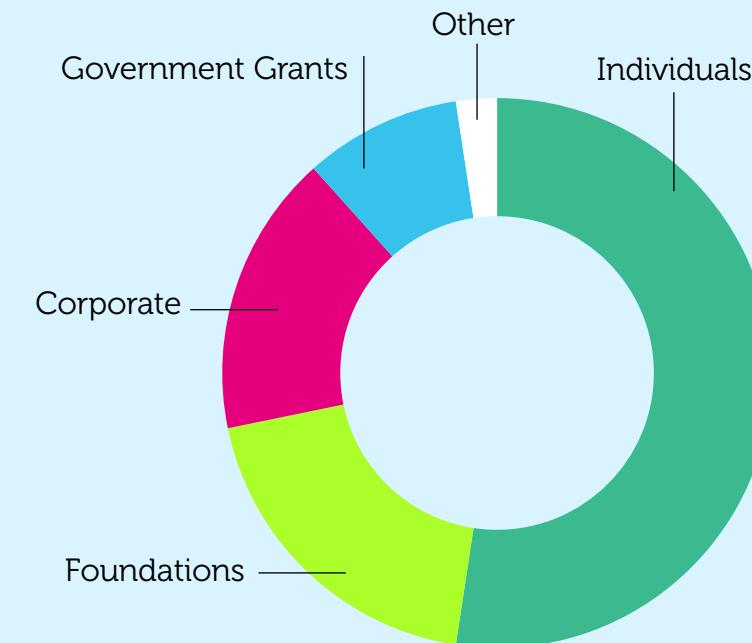


The Justine Mee Liff Fund, an endowed fund created to honor Boston Parks Commissioner Justine Mee Liff, continues to grow and support restoration and capital improvements throughout the Emerald Necklace.

These generous gifts, whether unrestricted or designated to Olmsted Now, the Olmsted Tree Society, the Liff Fund or our Operating Endowment, allow the Emerald Necklace to flourish. To all who have supported the Conservancy across its wide range of services, be it Parks care, People connection or Policy improvements, we extend our deepest gratitude and a commitment to supporting these greenspaces and the people who depend on them.

Sources of Contributed Revenue

(FY22 AND FY23 COMBINED)



The Endowment Challenge

In December 2022, the Conservancy created an endowment fund to support ongoing operations across our mission to restore and improve the Emerald Necklace. An anonymous donor made an initial gift of \$1 million AND then issued a \$1.5 million matching challenge for gifts raised over the next four years; inspired by that challenge, an additional donor made a \$1 million commitment. The Conservancy has set a goal of raising \$7 million by December 31, 2028. This endowment will provide flexible, consistent operating funds to sustain the Conservancy's growth for years to come.



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