Charlesgate
Public Concept Plan

Photo by Randall Albright
Where is Charlesgate?
Charlesgate is the critical link between Boston's major park systems:

- The Emerald Necklace
- The Commonwealth Avenue Mall
- The Charles River Esplanade

Why is Charlesgate so important?
In 1878 Frederick Law Olmsted designed Charlesgate as the Beacon Street Entrance to the Back Bay Fens. The design was revolutionary for its integration of flood protection and waste water management through natural and engineered systems, solving the Back Bay’s sewage problem. In fact, it is still seen today as one of the world’s leading examples of an environmentally performative landscape.
In the early 20th century, the Charlesgate neighborhood looked like this...

The area had become one of the most desirable neighborhoods in Boston.
To the construction of the Bowker Overpass in the 1960s, which brought an elevated roadway through the middle of Charlesgate and dramatically reduced the size of the Muddy River.

Until the roadway construction projects of the 1950s and 60s...

Starting with Storrow Drive that disconnected Charlesgate from the Charles River...
Today, the area is plagued by water quality problems and neglect.

For instance, here we see:

- A duckweed bloom indicating nutrient pollution in the water,
- Solid waste on the water sheet - bottles, cans, plastic wrappers,
- A paved edge to the River, preventing plant filtration of storm water and habitat,
- The Bowker Overpass draining directly into the Muddy River without any treatment, contributing sediments and heavy metals to the waterway.
The Problem

There is evidence of neglect and disrepair throughout...

graffiti  broken brick paving  graffiti

broken out lighting  peeling paint  graffiti

debri  graffiti  broken brick paving  graffiti  graffiti  graffiti

graffiti  graffiti  broken brick paving  graffiti  graffiti  graffiti

debri  graffiti  missing lamp  graffiti  broken brick paving  broken railing
Much of the Charlesgate is dull and uninviting, with no places to sit, play, or stroll...
Yet...

There are still moments of beauty, many hidden, like this tranquil view from Olmsted's Fens Pond Bridge.
To the left, a view of the Muddy River and the Somerset evoke the era of Olmsted.

To the right, historic relics are found throughout. A granite pier and iron railing by Olmsted sits next to a decorative concrete balustrade by Shurcliff.

Below, the Fens Pond Bridge, originally spanning the confluence of the Muddy River and the Charles, is buried in a grassy mound.

Yet...
Today, there is new hope for the Charlesgate!

In 2017, a group of concerned residents organized and called themselves the Charlesgate Alliance. They were joined by the leadership of the Emerald Necklace Conservancy, to develop a community-led vision to bring back the Charlesgate.

Meet (some of) the Charlesgate Alliance!
Over the course of 2017 - 2019, the Charlesgate Alliance formed partnerships with local stakeholders including the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), which is the custodian of Charlesgate, garnered the support of the Solomon Foundation, and hired the design firm, Landing Studio, to help hold a series of public events and meetings and develop the vision.

LANDING STUDIO

2017-2019 Charlesgate Outreach & Events

04/29/2017 Muddy River Cleanup Event
09/16/2017 Walk Around - Public Event
10/04/2017 Leadership Meeting
10/05/2017 DCR Meeting
10/10/2017 Public Meeting 1 - Charlesgate Talk About
10/23/2017 Charles River Watershed Association Meeting
10/30/2017 Maintenance and Management Oversight Committee Meeting
11/02/2017 Leadership Meeting
11/17/2017 Boston Water and Sewer Commission Meeting
12/04/2017 Public Meeting 2 - Charlesgate Talk About
01/08/2018 Leadership Meeting
01/28/2018 Silent Auction - Fundraising Event
02/05/2018 Leadership Meeting
03/05/2018 DCR Meeting
03/14/2018 MassDOT Highway Commissioner Meeting
04/09/2018 Public Meeting 3 - Talk About
04/28/2018 Muddy River Cleanup Event
04/28/2018 Charlesgate in Bloom - Fundraising Event
05/04/2018 State Legislators Brownsberger, Rushing, Livingstone Meeting
05/15/2018 DCR Meeting
06/09/2018 Public Meeting 4 - Walk Around and Talk About
06/25/2018 Leadership Meeting
07/05/2018 Charlesgate Chairs Commences
07/23/2018 Leadership Meeting
08/29/2018 Leadership Meeting
09/24/2018 Leadership Meeting
10/11/2018 Something's Brewing Fundraising Event
10/18/2018 Leadership Meeting
11/05/2018 Universal Access Design Workshop
12/10/2018 Leadership Meeting
01/27/2019 Silent Auction - Fundraising Event
03/11/2019 Leadership Meeting
04/27/2019 Extravaganza

Muddy River Cleanup Event
Charlesgate in Bloom Fundraising Event
Public Meeting 1: Oct 10, 2017
Group visioning
68 attendees

Public Meeting 2: Dec 4, 2017
Design & program workshops - round 1
65 attendees

Public Meeting 3: April 9, 2018
Design & program workshops - round 2
50 attendees

Public Meeting 4: June 9, 2018
Site tours & review concept design
25 attendees
Through the public meetings and workshops, four major principles emerged:

1- **Improve Muddy River water quality and habitat**
   - manage storm water with landscape systems
   - provide habitat-rich landscape design

2- **Reconnect Boston’s 3 park systems and neighborhoods across Charlesgate**
   - add bike accommodations
   - safe pedestrian connections
   - open up views

3- **Celebrate Charlesgate’s history**
   - incorporate significant built elements and flora
   - develop a language that complements Charlesgate’s design legacy

4- **Activate the site with new uses**
   - provide amenity spaces that invite a variety of uses
   - dog park!
   - flexibility
The Community’s Vision

The four principles of water quality, connectivity, history, and activity evolved into this multi-layered concept plan:

- The Expanded Esplanade
- The Grove
- The Patio
- The Circles
- The Bowl & Bridge
- North Field
- South Field
Remember the **critical link**? There are three related projects that will restore the connections between the Emerald Necklace, the Commonwealth Avenue Mall, and the Esplanade:

1. MassDOT’s Storrow EB Bridge Replacement
2. The Charlesgate Revitalization Project
3. MassDOT’s Bowker Overpass over the Turnpike Replacement

The Charlesgate Alliance and the Emerald Necklace Conservancy are focused on the Charlesgate Revitalization Project to link the projects together, and connect Boston’s Park System!
The Grove
A wonderful, quiet seating area, shaded by a grove of mature black locust trees that date back to Olmsted’s Beacon Street Entrance.

The North Field
An active play area is protected from sun and rain by the overpass above, surrounded by planted swales for storm water management. Along one side, a shared-use path connects cyclists and walkers to toward the Esplanade!

The South Field
A safe and fun haven for Charlesgate dogs and dog owners! With a large and small area for dogs to play and socialize, new seating and shared-use pathways, including a small footbridge over the Muddy that networks the area into the neighborhood.

The Patio
A charming tree covered seating area extends the Commonwealth Avenue Mall into the Charlesgate.
The Bowl & Bridge
This hidden gem, with a buried Fens Pond Bridge, graceful weeping willows, and a view of the Charles, will be accessible for the first time since Storrow Drive!

The Expanded Esplanade
Reconfiguration of Storrow Drive creates the opportunity to reclaim new parkland for the Esplanade, creating new connectivity to Charlesgate and generous views over the Charles River!
The Bowl & Bridge is a reclaimed landscape: formerly at the junction between the Muddy and the Charles, this area will support amphitheater-like seating, storm water filtration landscapes, and a new boardwalk that re-links the space back to Beacon Street.
Green Storm Water Management
(occurs throughout)

All of the storm water runoff from the Bowker Overpass will be pretreated in catch basins and filtered through planted bioswales and retention areas, thereby reducing the pollutants reaching the Muddy River and eventually the Ocean!

1. an existing drain leader from the Bowker conducts storm water runoff
2. through a pipe to a
3. catch basin with sump to trap solid waste and sediments
4. the water then flows out of the catch basin by gravity
5. and dissipates into a new storm water filtration landscape with plants and stone
The storm water management landscape extends the wetland planting palette of the Muddy River into the South Field. To the right, dogs happily play in the dog park. In the distance, the Newbury Street footbridge forms a critical link, making the area less fragmented and more accessible.
Charlesgate dogs can choose between a larger and smaller play zone, with benches, water, agility features, and a maintenance shed. Dogs climb on mini-mountains made of re-purposed granite. A new sound wall with a vibrant mural lessens the noise from the Turnpike.
A ‘living shoreline’ will reinvigorate the Muddy River banks with plants and animal habitat, and help contribute to improved water quality by preventing runoff and erosion.

Above: The paved Muddy River shoreline today
North Field

Some of the biggest contributors to the feelings of disorientation and fragmentation in the Charlesgate today are the two tall ashlar granite walls, seen in this photo, that were constructed with the Bowker Overpass in the 1960s.
Dismantling those walls will tie together the real expanse of the Charlesgate for the first time since the Bowker! Looking from the Beacon Street bridge, an active zone enlivens the North Field under the Bowker, with a living shoreline visible in the foreground.
What it will take to realize the Charlesgate Revitalization Project - next steps

The New Charlesgate!

*The project can be built all at once or in phases, depending on funding and other factors.

Construction - 2020-21

We are here

spring/summer 2020 - Shovel Ready documents

Design development - summer 2019-
summer 2020

Fundraising for construction & maintenance - 2019-20

fundraising for design & engineering - winter 2019

A community vision is developed - completed June 2018

Charlesgate Alliance is formed - Feb 2017

Thanks to support from community members, elected reps Brownsberger, Livingstone, and Rushing, and the CPA, we recently achieved our first fundraising milestone - raising $650,000 for design development of the area south of Beacon. Our next big goal is to raise $10,000,000 for construction of the Charlesgate Revitalization Project.

* $10,000,000 is a concept level estimate of the construction cost that will be updated as the design develops.

$10,000,000 is a big goal. We’ll need great support from the Charlesgate community and our partners. The Charlesgate Revitalization Project will play an essential role in linking all of the projects and the park system together.

Depending on amounts and timing of funds raised, Charlesgate construction can be phased so portions of the vision are built while we raise funds for other portions.

We plan to dedicate 10% of funds raised toward the creation of a maintenance endowment to ensure the sustainability and lasting beauty of Charlesgate after construction.
Suggested levels of giving

Help us reach our goal of raising $10,500,000 by becoming a contributing member of the Charlesgate Alliance! All contributing members will be recognized on charlesgatealliance.org and more, contact us at charlesgatealliance@gmail.com for more information.

Elemental Member
Contributions up to $999

Bedrock Member
Contributions $1,000 to $4,999

River Member
Contributions $5,000 to $9,999

Garden Member
Contributions $10,000 to $14,999

Grove Member
Contributions $15,000 to $49,999

Emerald Member
Contributions of $50K or more

Your contribution will make a difference

With your support, we could start construction in phases even before the full $8,800,000 has been achieved:

- $10,500,000  - 100% Construction & Maintenance Fund
- $7,875,000  - 75% Construction & Maintenance Fund
- $5,250,000  - 50% Construction & Maintenance Fund
- $2,625,000  - 25% Construction & Maintenance Fund

Ways to give

There are several ways to donate to the Charlesgate vision. All donations are tax-deductible.

1- Online:
   Visit charlesgatealliance.org and click on 'Donate'

2- Write a check to the Emerald Necklace Conservancy (our fiscal sponsor) with the memo: Charlesgate Alliance
   Mail to:
   The Emerald Necklace Conservancy
   Re: Charlesgate Alliance Capital Campaign
   125 The Fenway
   Boston, MA 02115

3- Donate through your company. Find out more by contacting charlesgatealliance@gmail.com

4- Get involved! Join us if you would like to participate or take a leadership role in the Charlesgate Alliance!
   Visit charlesgatealliance.org/join-us-2/ for more information.
What else we’re up to

The Charlesgate Alliance is currently taking several courses of action to achieve the vision, including:

- Develop public agency partnerships: with the DCR and MassDOT (DCR has care, custody, and control of the land, and MassDOT which operates the Bowker Overpass above, Storrow Drive and the Mass Pike)

- Public funding: working with elected representatives

- Private fundraising: successful events in 2018 and 2019!

- Grants: awarded a Fenway Park Demonstration Project grant for tree pruning, and pursuing other grant opportunities

- Community building: Charlesgate Chairs, and other ideas in the works

Stay tuned!