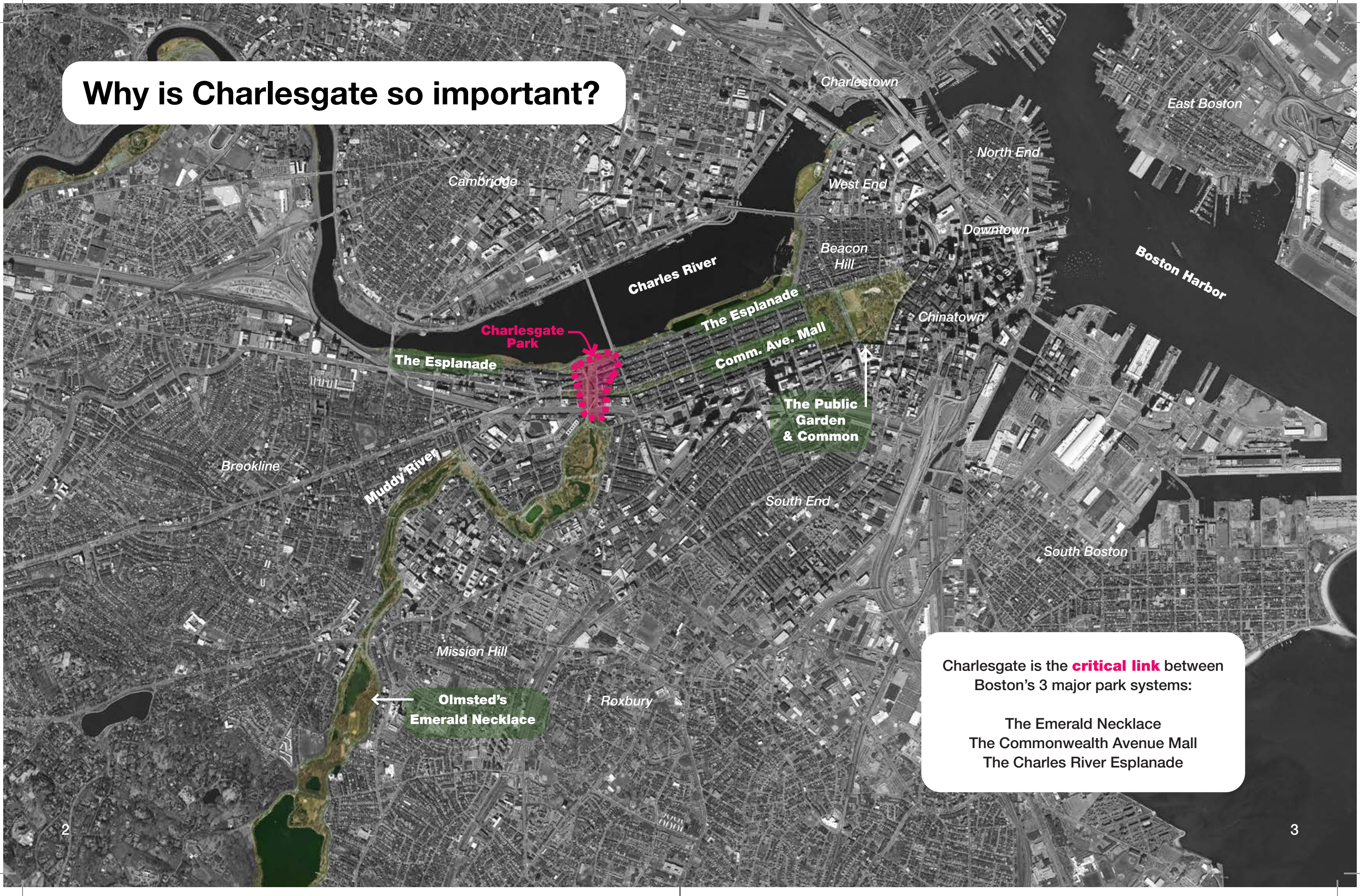


Charlesgate Revitalization



July 2026

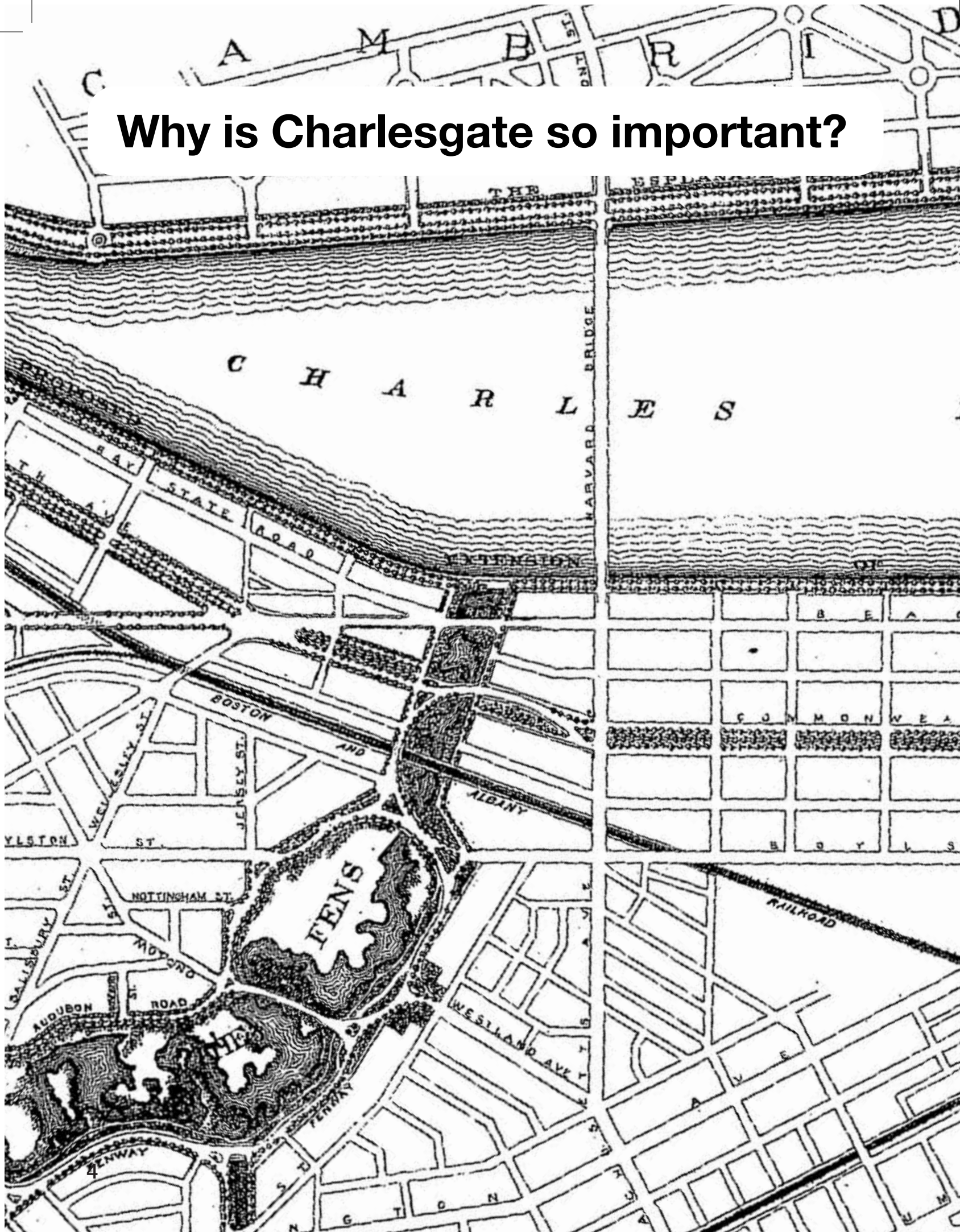
Why is Charlesgate so important?



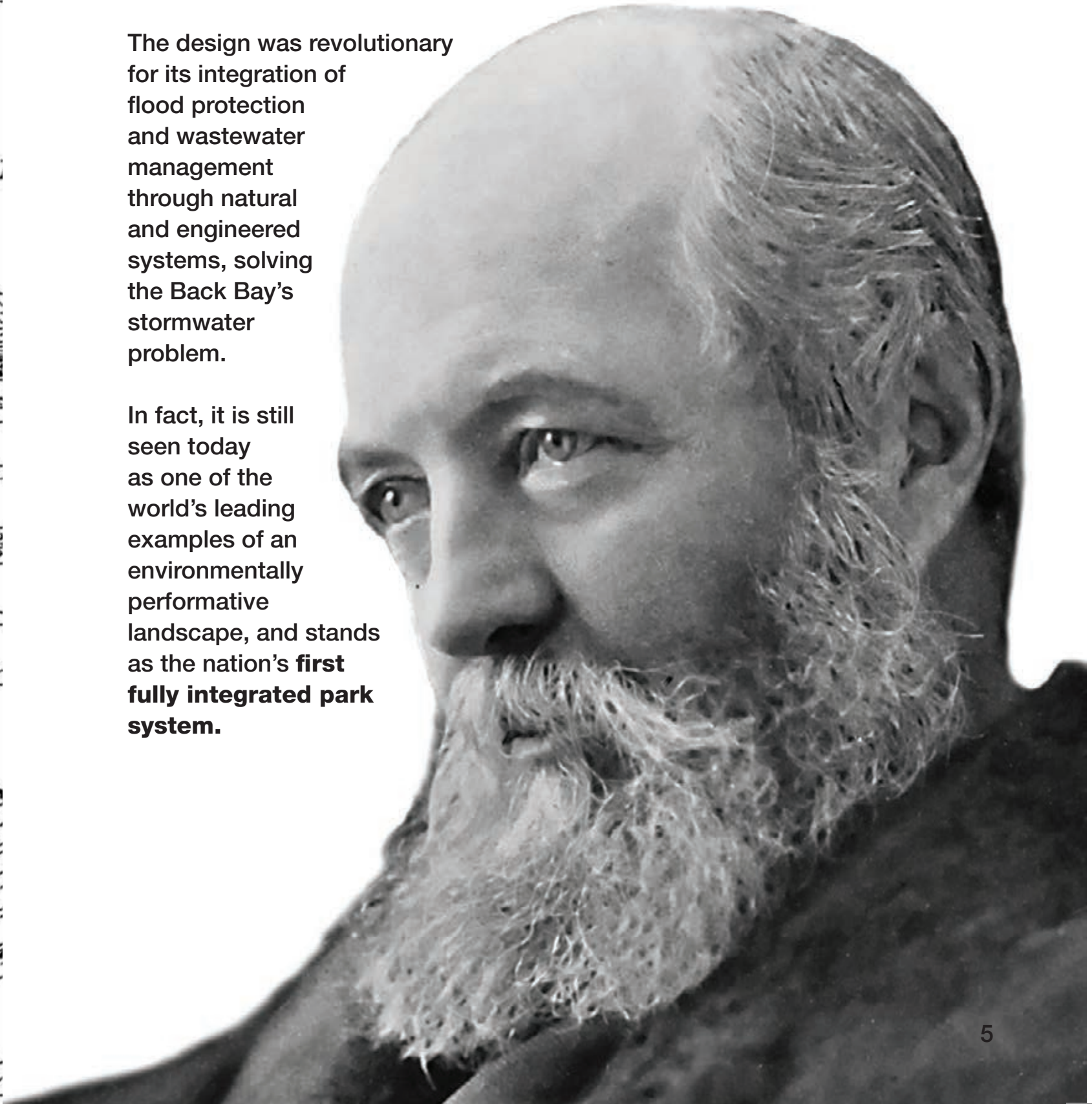
Charlesgate is the **critical link** between Boston's 3 major park systems:

The Emerald Necklace
The Commonwealth Avenue Mall
The Charles River Esplanade

Why is Charlesgate so important?

A detailed historical map of Boston, Massachusetts, focusing on the area around the Charles River and the Charlesgate. The map shows the river flowing through the city, with the Charlesgate area marked. Key streets include State Road, Boston, Albany, Westland Ave, and various local streets like Jemsey St, Nottingham St, and Audubon St. The map also shows the location of the Charlesgate area, which is a significant landmark in the city's history. The map is oriented with North at the top, and the Charles River is shown flowing from the top left towards the bottom right. The Charlesgate area is located on the right side of the river, near the intersection of State Road and Boston. The map is a black and white line drawing, typical of historical cartography.

In fact, it is still seen today as one of the world's leading examples of an environmentally performative landscape, and stands as the nation's **first fully integrated park system.**



Circa 1900



The Charlesgate neighborhood looked like this. The area had become one of the most desirable neighborhoods in Boston.



Hotel Braemore 466 Commonwealth Ave., at Charlesgate West — Boston, Mass.



Postcard art: collection of Parker James.

Circa 1900



Aerial above Boylston St. looking northeast: Aero Scenic Airviews Co., 1929, Boston Pictorial Archive, BPL



Above Charlesgate West Looking north to Beacon St.: "Bird's eye view, Harvard bridge" by Leslie Jones, Courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Leslie Jones Collection



View of the Boylston St. Bridge Looking southwest: Historic photograph, ca. 1890–1910, Boston Pictorial Archive, Digital Commonwealth



The Fens Pond Bridge looking north across the Charles: "Locks at Esplanade looking towards M.I.T." by Leslie Jones, Courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Leslie Jones Collection

The Problem: Circa 1950s & 60s

This dramatically changed with the roadway construction projects of the 1950s and 60s...



1955 Aerial View above *The Fens* looking North Across Charlesgate towards the new Storrow Dr. bridge.

starting with Storrow Dr., which disconnected Charlesgate from the Charles River...



1965 photo of the Bowker Overpass under construction. Getty Images.

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.

The Problem: Circa 1960s

After these construction projects, the character of Charlesgate Park was dramatically different.



1966 photo of the Bowker and Storrow Dr. Bridges under construction. Digital Commonwealth.

These once scenic landscapes, lush with vegetation and park resources, are now interrupted and suffocated by infrastructure.



1966 photo of the Bowker Overpass under construction. Digital Commonwealth.

The Problem: Today

armored shore

untreated
stormwater
from street

untreated runoff
from Bowker
Overpass

bottles, debris
in the water

duckweed bloom
indicating elevated
nutrient levels

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
- Bottles, cans, plastic wrappers, and other solid waste on the water surface
- An armored shoreline that prevents plants from filtering Stormwater and limits aquatic and riparian habitat
- The Bowker Overpass and adjacent streets draining directly into the Muddy River without any treatment, contributing sediments and heavy metals to the waterway

*Photo of the Muddy River north of
Beacon St. under the Bowker Overpass.*

Yet There is Beauty

*Photo of the Richardson bridge supporting
Commonwealth Avenue along the Muddy River.*

There are still moments of beauty, many hidden, like this tranquil view of the Muddy River that evokes the era of Olmsted.

Hidden Gems



Trees and shrubs grow along the granite-clad banks of the Muddy River despite the pollution.



Pockets of isolated landscapes between highways hold stands of uniquely mature trees.



Historic architecture can be found throughout. The Fens Pond Bridge, originally spanning the confluence of the Muddy River and the Charles, is buried in a grassy mound.

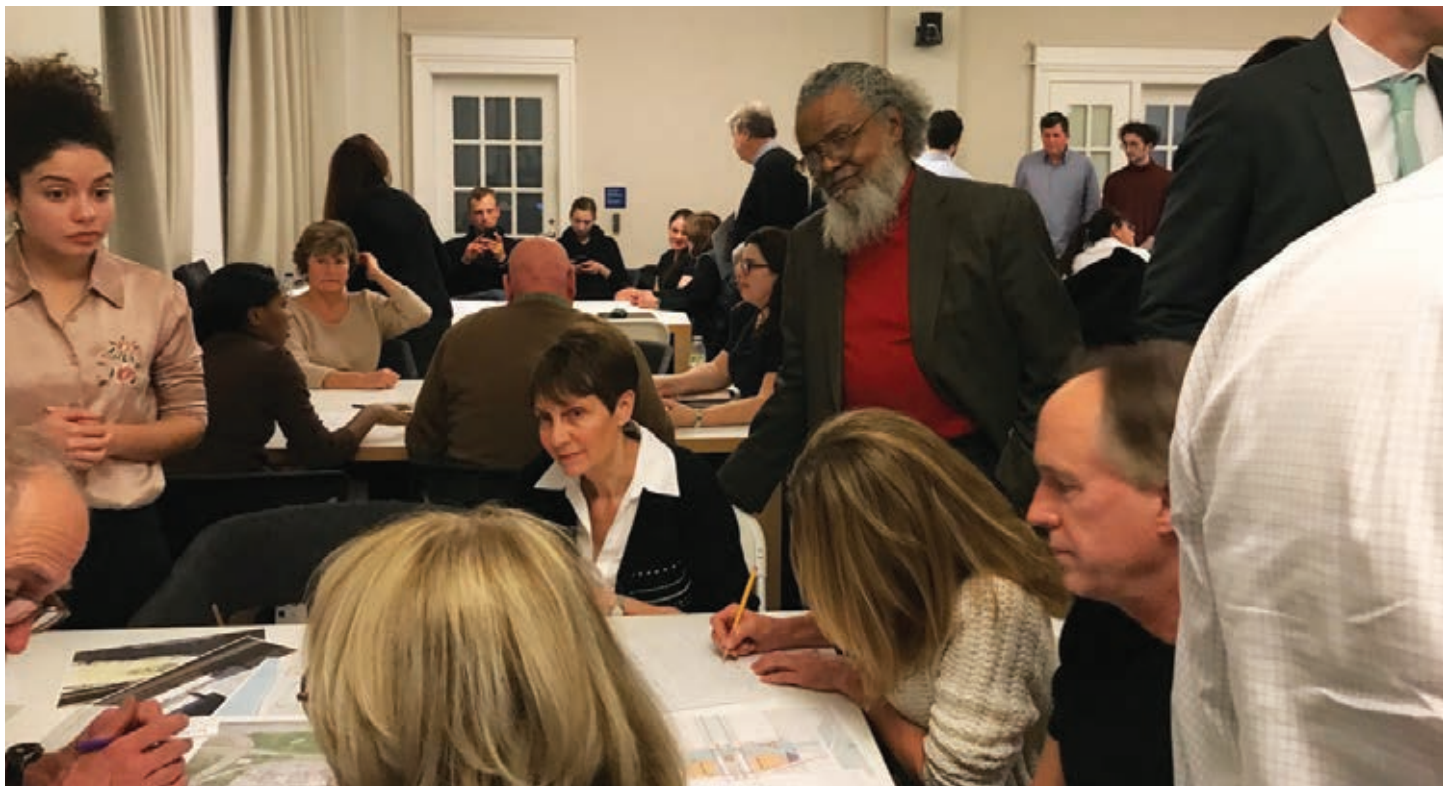


A granite pier and iron railing by Olmsted sit next to a concrete balustrade by Shurcliff.



Park vegetation persists even in the site's most inhospitable conditions

The Solution: A Community Vision



The Charlesgate Alliance and the Emerald Necklace Conservancy, with the support of the Solomon Foundation, hired Landing Studio, a design firm, to organize a series of public events and meetings to develop a new **community vision** for the area. These public events

engaged with diverse groups of local stakeholders, including the Esplanade Association, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), and MassDOT, which share responsibilities affecting Charlesgate.



The Solution: A Community Vision

Through these public meetings and workshops, six major principles emerged:

Activate the site with new uses

- provide amenity spaces that invite a variety of uses
- include a dog park!
- design flexible, adaptable spaces

Remediate the Muddy River and improve habitat

- manage stormwater through landscape systems
- create habitat-rich planting and shoreline conditions

Reconnect Boston's 3 park systems

- connect neighborhoods across Charlesgate
- provide safe pedestrian and bicycle accommodations
- open views through and across the park

Advance equitable access and safety through design

- continue extensive community engagement
- improve accessibility throughout the site
- coordinate park stewardship and security

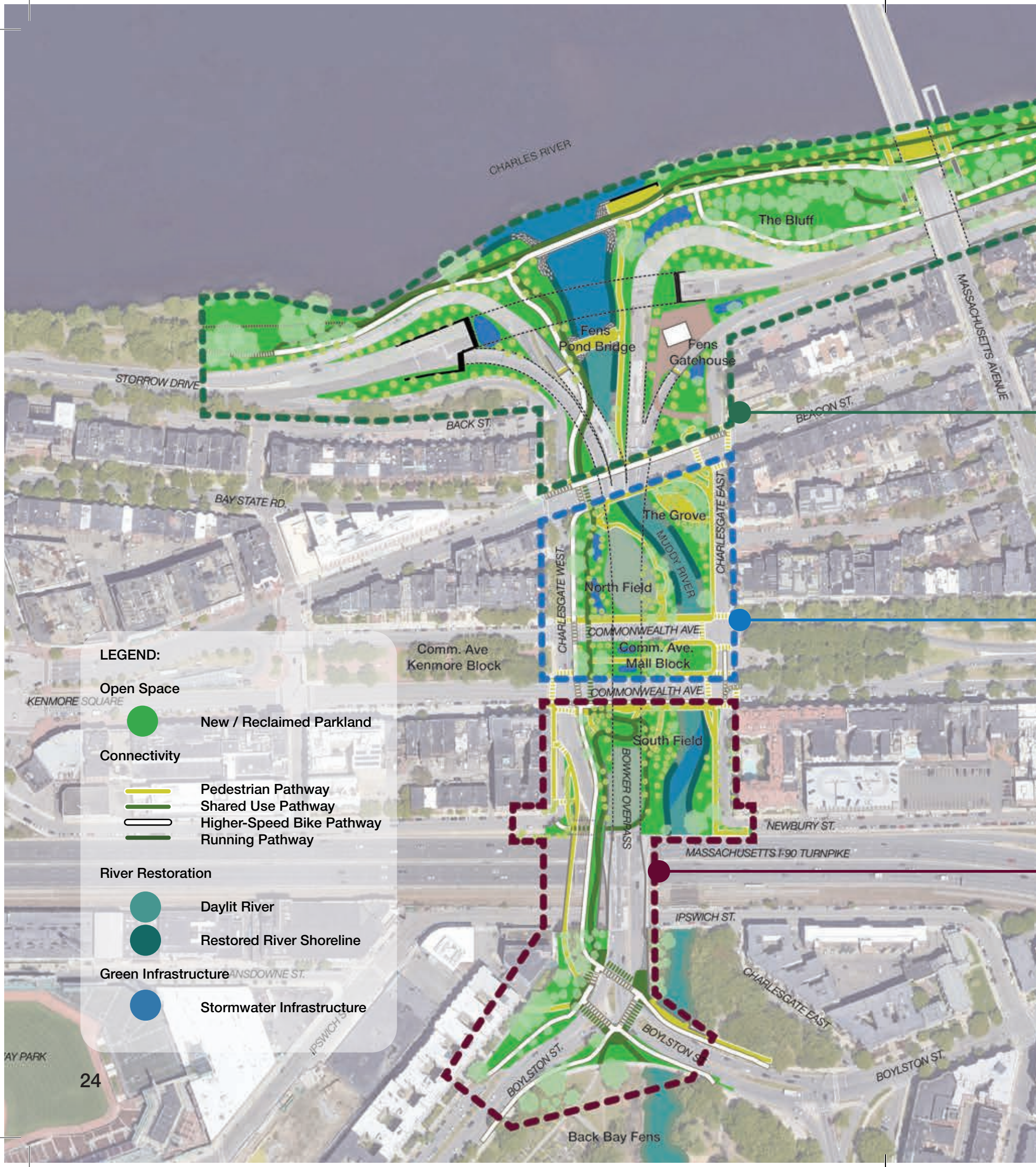
Honor Charlesgate's history

- preserve and incorporate significant structures and vegetation
- develop a language that complements Charlesgate's design legacy

Establish a long-term maintenance plan

- coordinate ongoing work with Project Place
- fund raise for long-term maintenance and stewardship





The Solution: A Community Vision

A vision plan was made from our major guiding principles for the revitalization of Charlesgate Park. The revitalization has been planned in three major projects.

Emerald Necklace to Esplanade Connection

In Design by MassDOT in Coordination with the DCR Redesigns vehicular infrastructure to be more efficient, providing new parkland, improved path networks, and daylighting of the Muddy River. The design effort by MassDOT is underway in consultation with the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

Heart of the Park Project

In Design by the Charlesgate Alliance and Emerald Necklace Conservancy Connects path and park networks established by the “Fens to Commonwealth Avenue” project and the “Emerald Necklace to Esplanade” project. The design process and fundraising efforts are being led by the Emerald Necklace Conservancy and the Charlesgate Alliance in consultation with DCR.

Fens to Commonwealth Avenue Emerald Necklace Connection

Under Construction by MassDOT until 2028 Renovations to the Bowker Overpass which improve traffic patterns, revitalize park space, establish proper path networks, and remove infrastructure above the Muddy River. This project is currently under construction by MassDOT in consultation with the DCR.

LEGEND:

Open Space

New / Reclaimed Parkland

Connectivity

Pedestrian Pathway

Shared Use Pathway

Higher-Speed Bike Pathway

Running Pathway

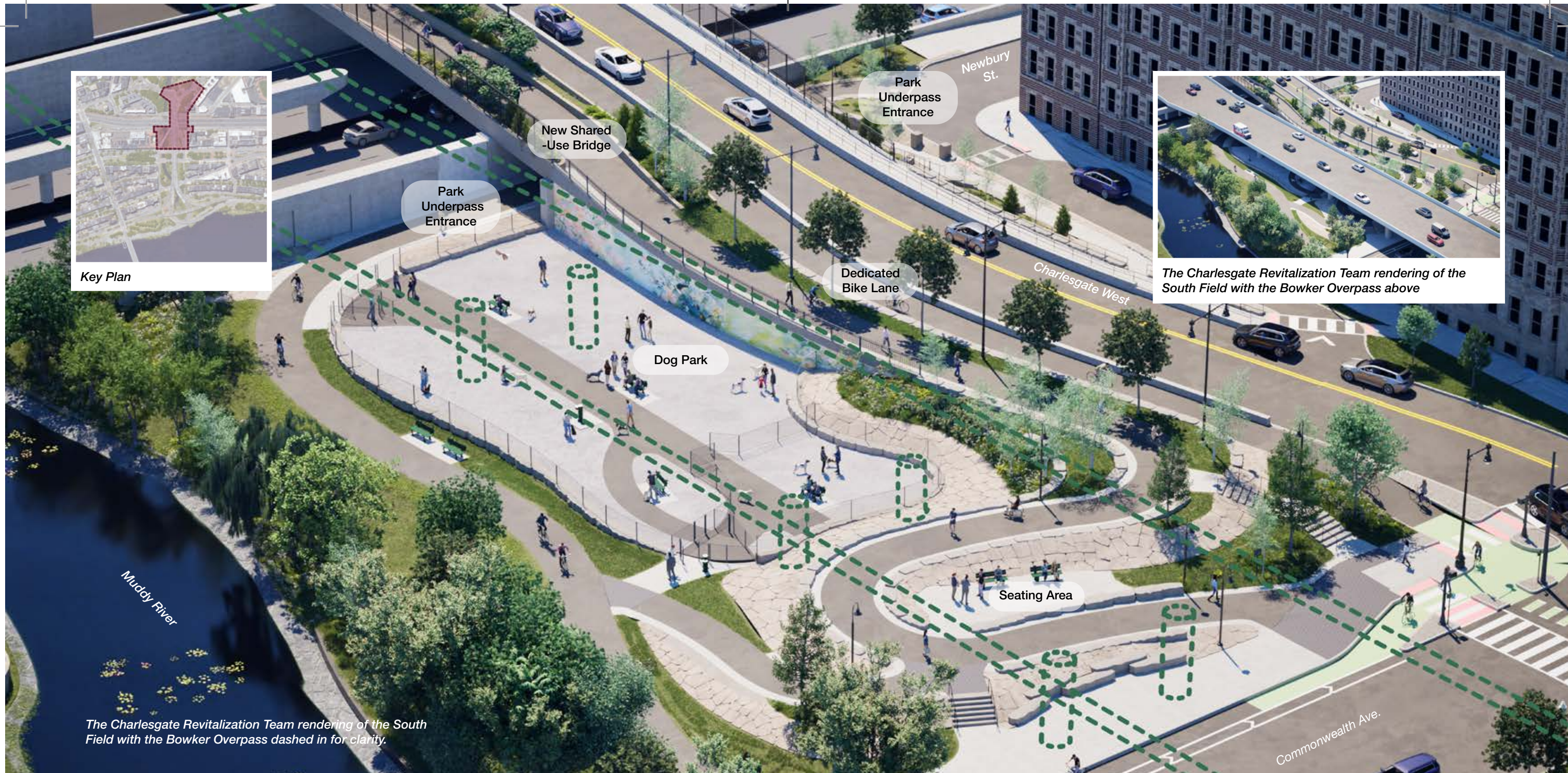
River Restoration

Daylit River

Restored River Shoreline

Green Infrastructure

Stormwater Infrastructure



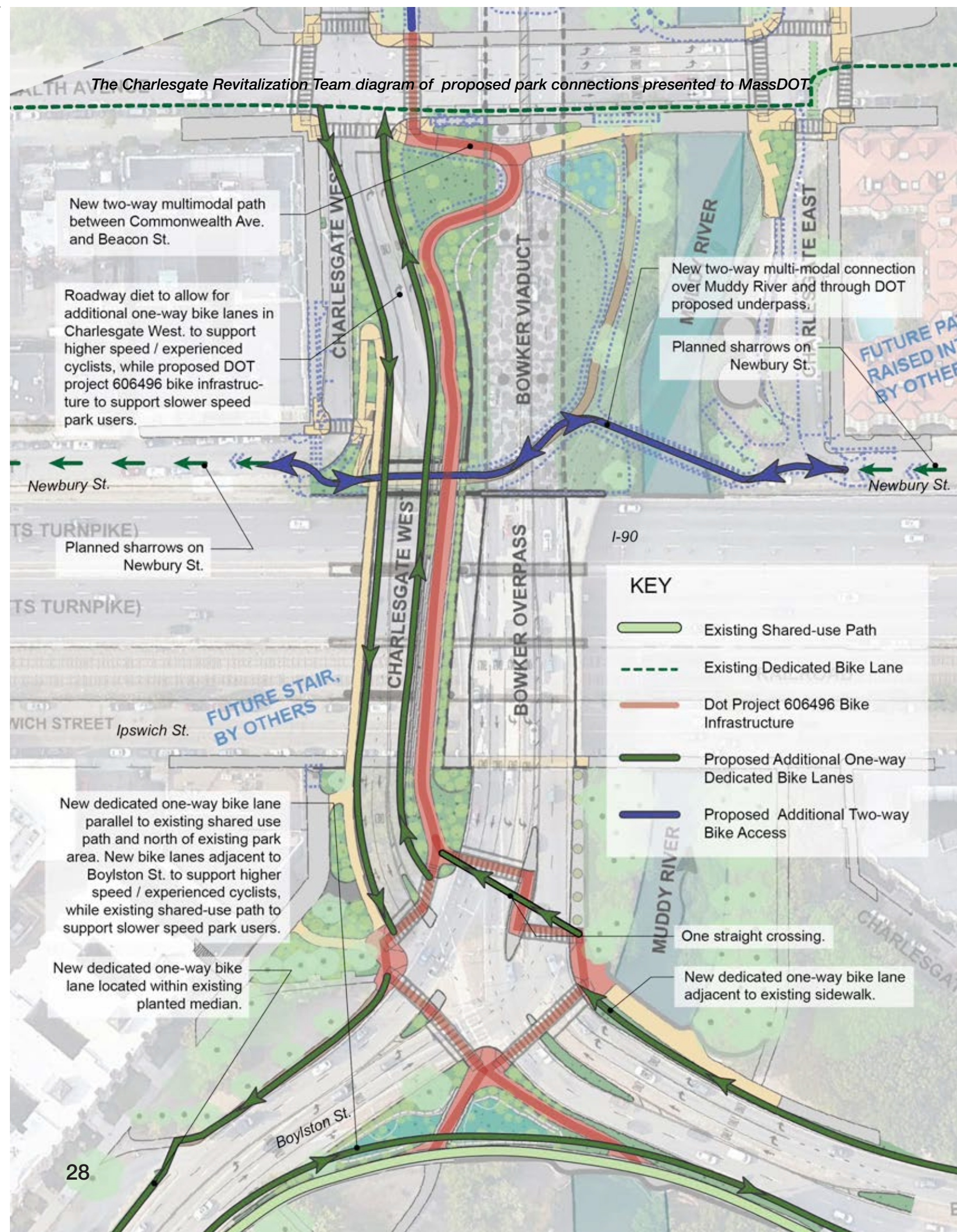
Fens to Commonwealth Avenue Emerald Necklace Connection

Boylston Intersection, Bowker Overpass Over I-90, and South Field

Construction Underway

The MassDOT project to make necessary repairs to the Bowker Overpass over I-90 has been designed to create over 2 acres improved park space, plant more than 100 new trees + 100 new shrubs, and provide over 1/4 mile of new dedicated bike lanes

and ADA-accessible paths each. New crosswalks and intersections at Commonwealth Avenue and Boylston St. will make both streets more accessible and safer. The project also removes traffic infrastructure above the Muddy River.





The Charlesgate Revitalization Team rendering of the proposed dog park under the Bowker Overpass looking north.



The Charlesgate Revitalization Team rendering of the proposed lawn overlooking the daylit Muddy River.



The Charlesgate Revitalization Team rendering of the proposed shared use path under the bridge looking south at the dog park.



The Charlesgate Revitalization Team aerial rendering of the proposed multi-modal facilities looking south above Commonwealth Avenue.



Key Plan



Charlesgate Revitalization Team rendering of new park uses in the North Field looking South from Beacon St.

Heart of the Park Project

The North Field, the Grove, and
Charlesgate Commonwealth Avenue Block

Design and Funding Ongoing by the Charlesgate Alliance and the Emerald Necklace Conservancy

This project serves as the connection between the two MassDOT projects by transforming the North Field into a park with bike and pedestrian connections, playground recreation spaces, and planted swales for stormwater management.

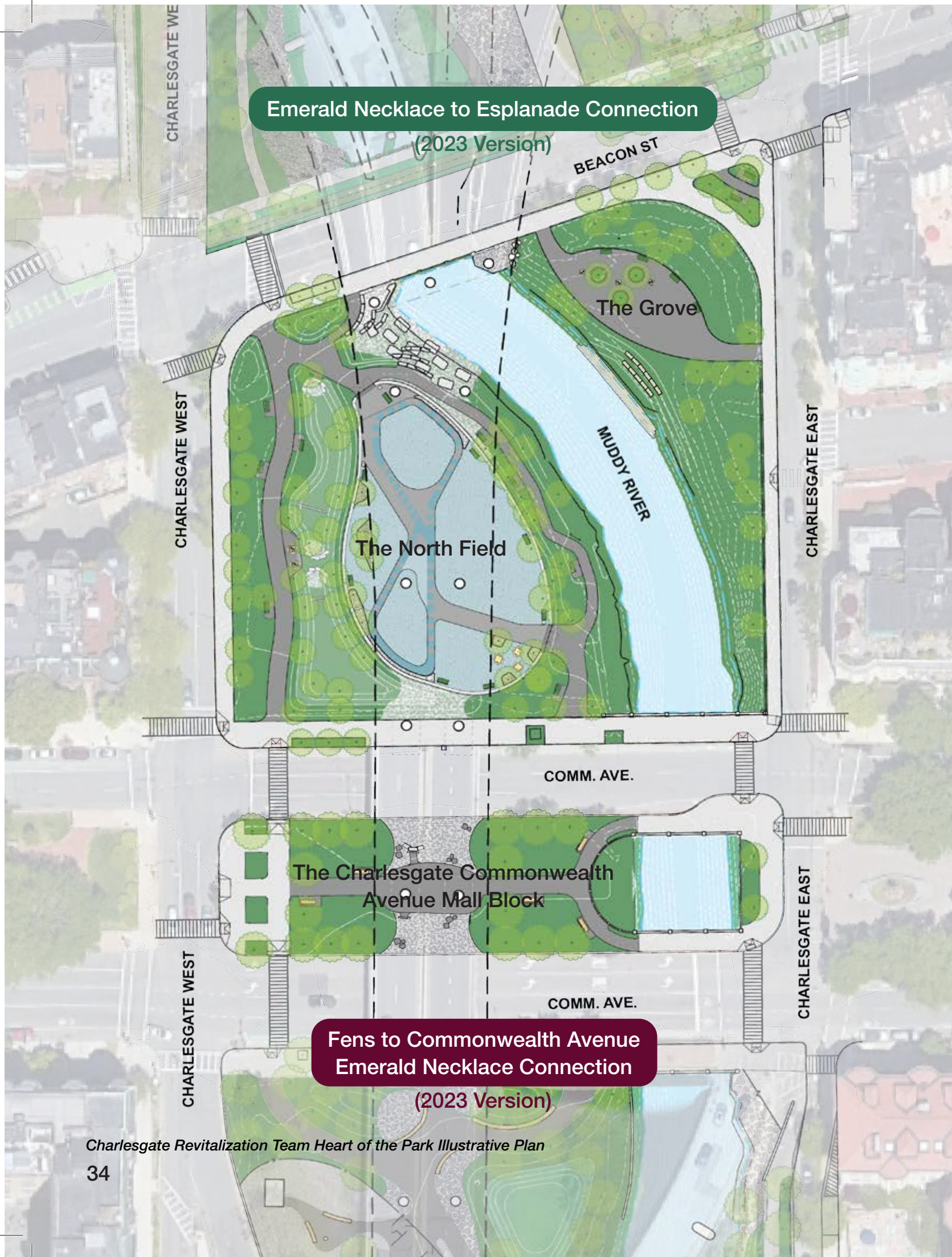


Photo of the existing condition of the North Field looking south.



Photo of the existing condition of the Grove.



Photo of the existing condition of the Commonwealth Avenue Mall Block

The goal of the Heart of the Park Project is to restore activity and ecological performance to several central landscapes within the Charlesgate Park System:

- **The North Field:** Create new play and recreation space, establish an accessible path network, expand the tree canopy, & improve stormwater management
- **The Grove:** Improved accessibility & expand the tree canopy
- **The Charlesgate Commonwealth Avenue Mall Block:** Better integrate the block with the rest of Comm. Ave, reconnect its path network, and improve visual connectivity to the Muddy River



Key Plan



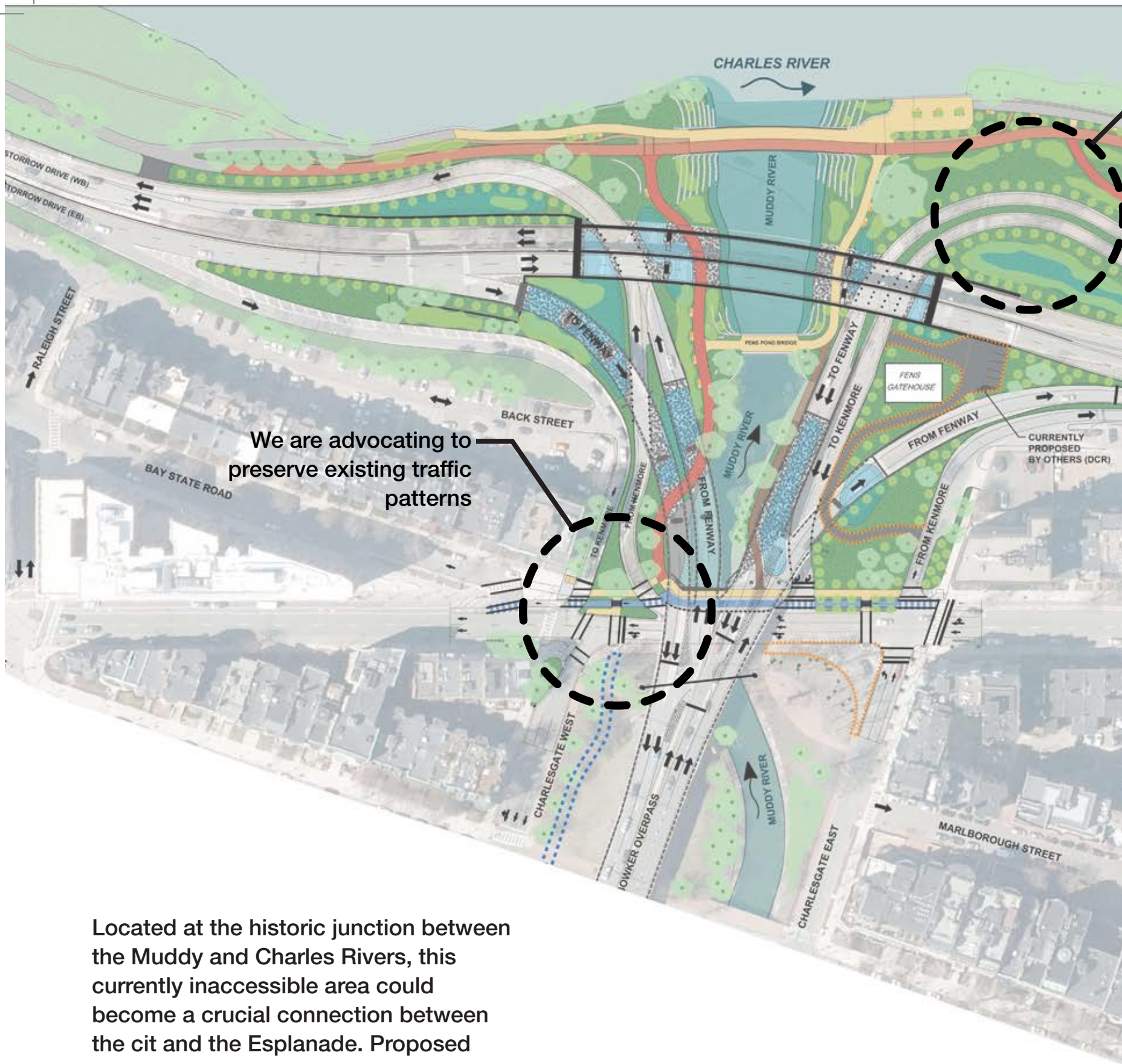
Charlesgate Revitalization Team rendering of potential daylighting and park connections

Emerald Necklace to Esplanade Connection

Beacon St., Storrow Dr., and the Esplanade

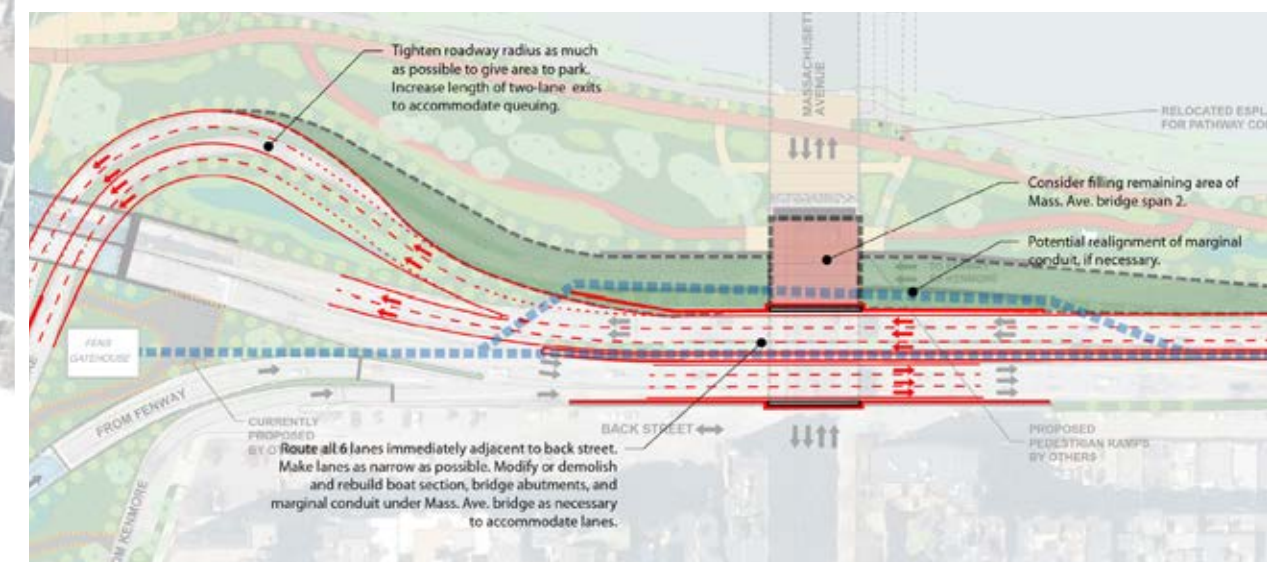
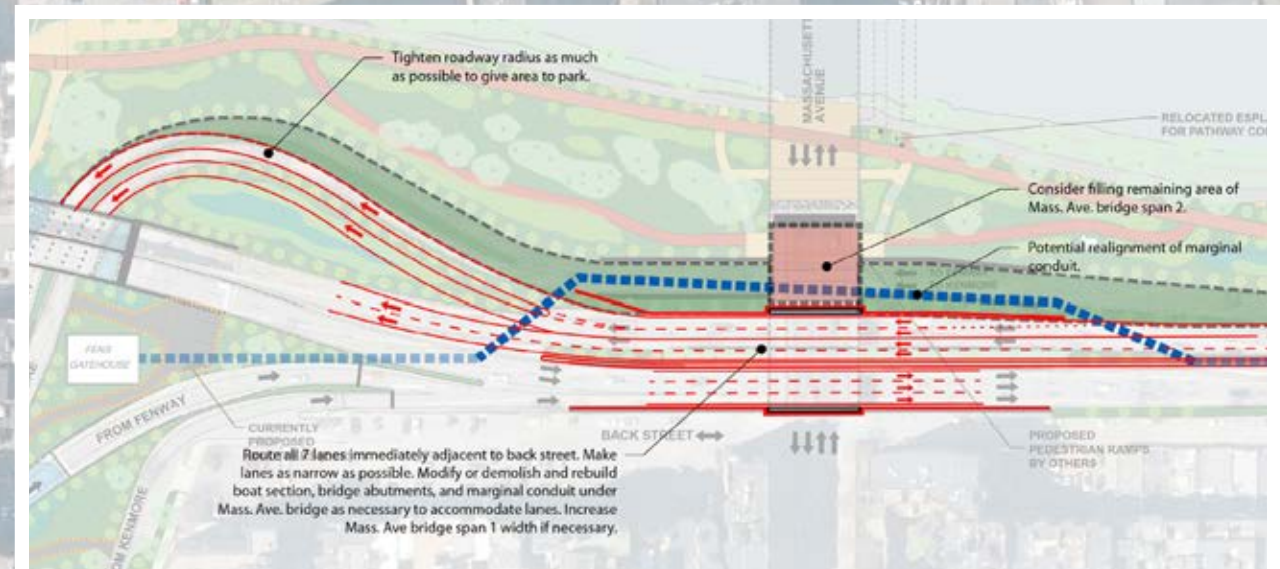
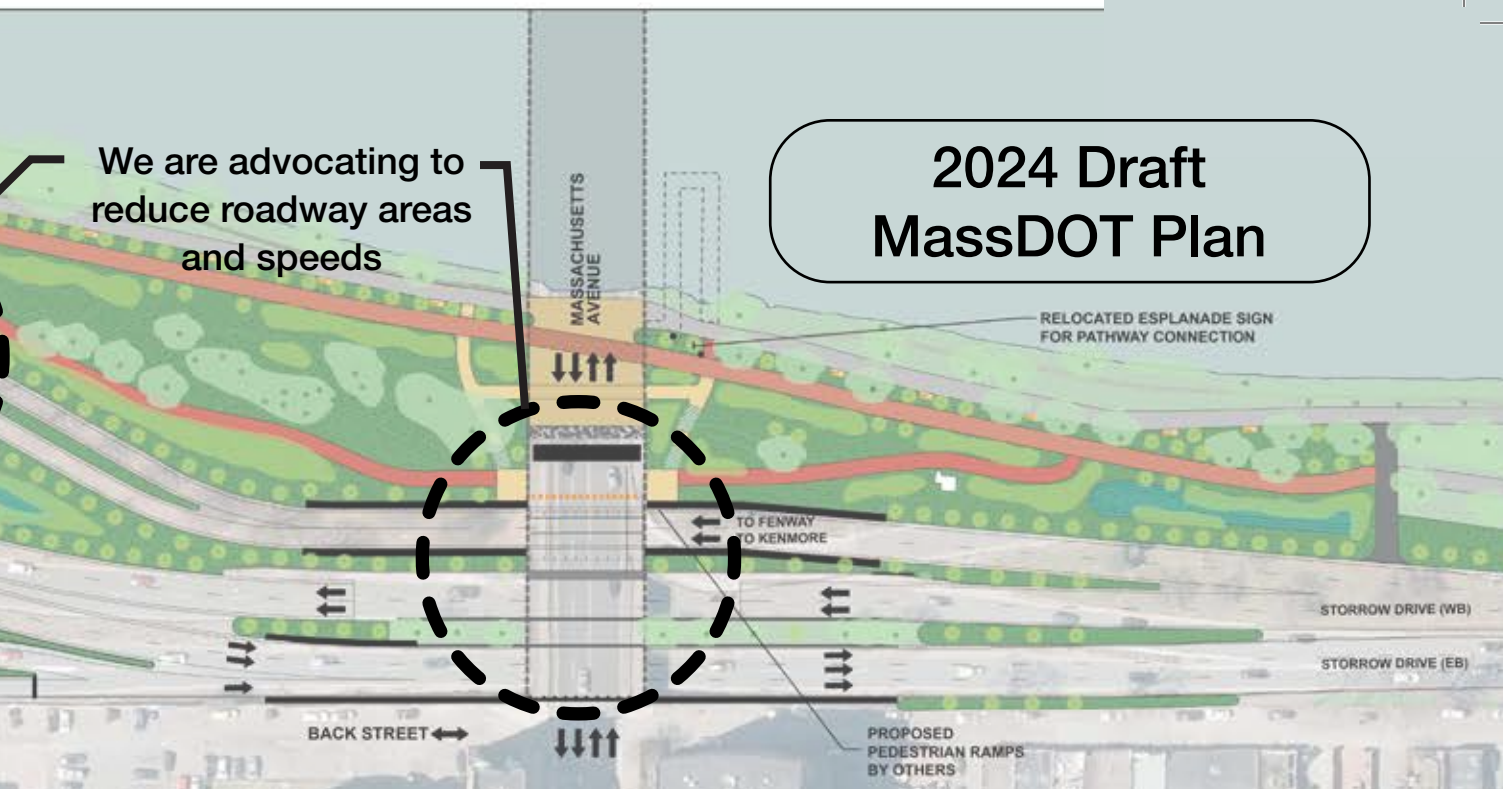
Design Work Ongoing

This project offers the opportunity to reconfigure Storrow Dr., reclaim parkland for the Esplanade, reconnect the Esplanade to Charlesgate, and open expansive views over the Charles River.



Located at the historic junction between the Muddy and Charles Rivers, this currently inaccessible area could become a crucial connection between the city and the Esplanade. Proposed shared-use paths would connect pedestrian and cyclist users from Beacon St. to the Esplanade and from the Esplanade up to the Massachusetts Avenue Bridge.

The Charlesgate Revitalization Team has been working alongside MassDOT to define community priorities through drawings.



Charlesgate Revitalization Team drawings above were used to advocate for lane reductions along Storrow Dr.



Before

A view of the current-day buried Fens Pond Bridge looking south towards the Muddy River.



After

Charlesgate Revitalization Team renderings of potential design at the buried Fens Pond Bridge looking south towards the Muddy River.



Before

A view of the current-day banks of the Charles River looking towards the Muddy River (culverted under headwall).



After

Charlesgate Revitalization Team renderings of potential design at the banks of the Charles River looking towards the Muddy River (daylit).

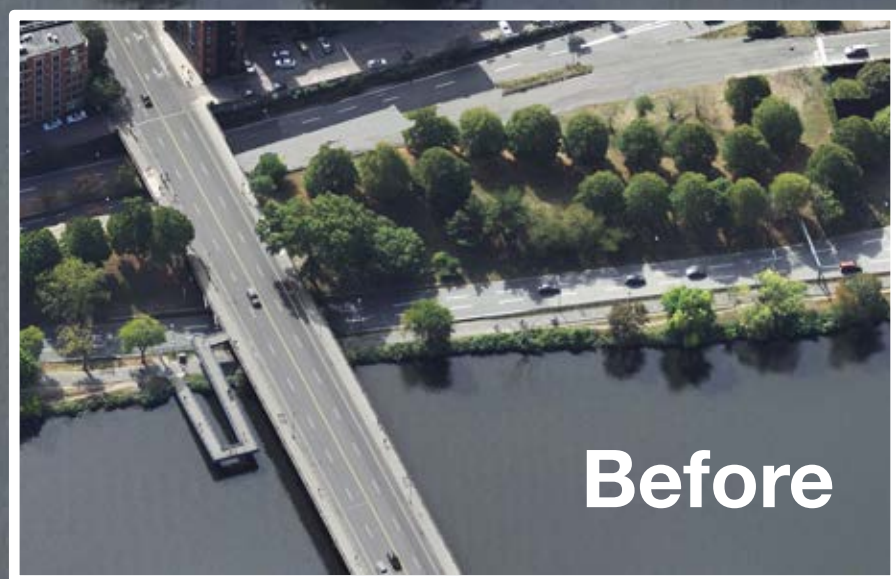


The Charlesgate Revitalization Team continues to work with MassDOT as the design progresses for this project.

The Charles River

After

The Charlesgate Revitalization Team rendering of the potential design above the Massachusetts Avenue bridge.



Before



The Solution: Community Efforts

Aligned Improvements

To reconstitute Charlesgate Park, projects across Charlesgate have been initiated by other organizations that align with the community vision.

The Solution: Community Efforts

Aligned Improvements



1 DCR Water Cleanup

Fall 2018 - Present:
Water Sheet Cleanings
implemented by the DCR.



2 Muddy Water Initiative WATERGOAT

Summer 2020 - Present: Muddy Water Initiative implementation of a WATERGOAT, a low-cost, community-accessible measure to treat the Muddy River.



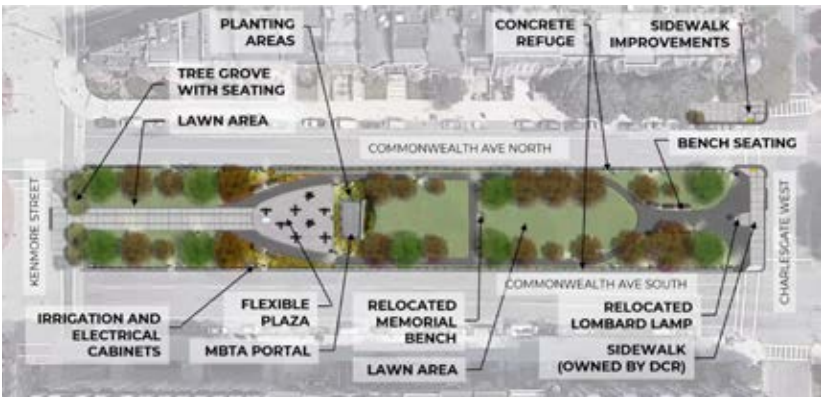
3 Muddy Water Initiative Charlesgate farmers market

Summer 2024 - 2025: Farmers Market under the Bowker Viaduct hosting local farms, bakers, chefs, and other food businesses.



4 DCR & DCAMM Fens Gatehouse Restoration

Ongoing: Interior and exterior renovations to the historic Fens Gatehouse to store maintenance items.



5 City of Boston Kenmore Block Improvements

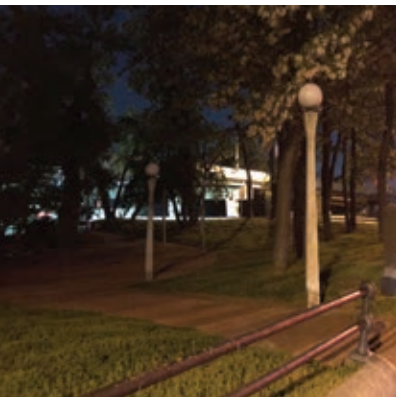
Ongoing: Refurbishment and improvements to the Kenmore block of Commonwealth Avenue for improved safety, connectivity, and consistency.

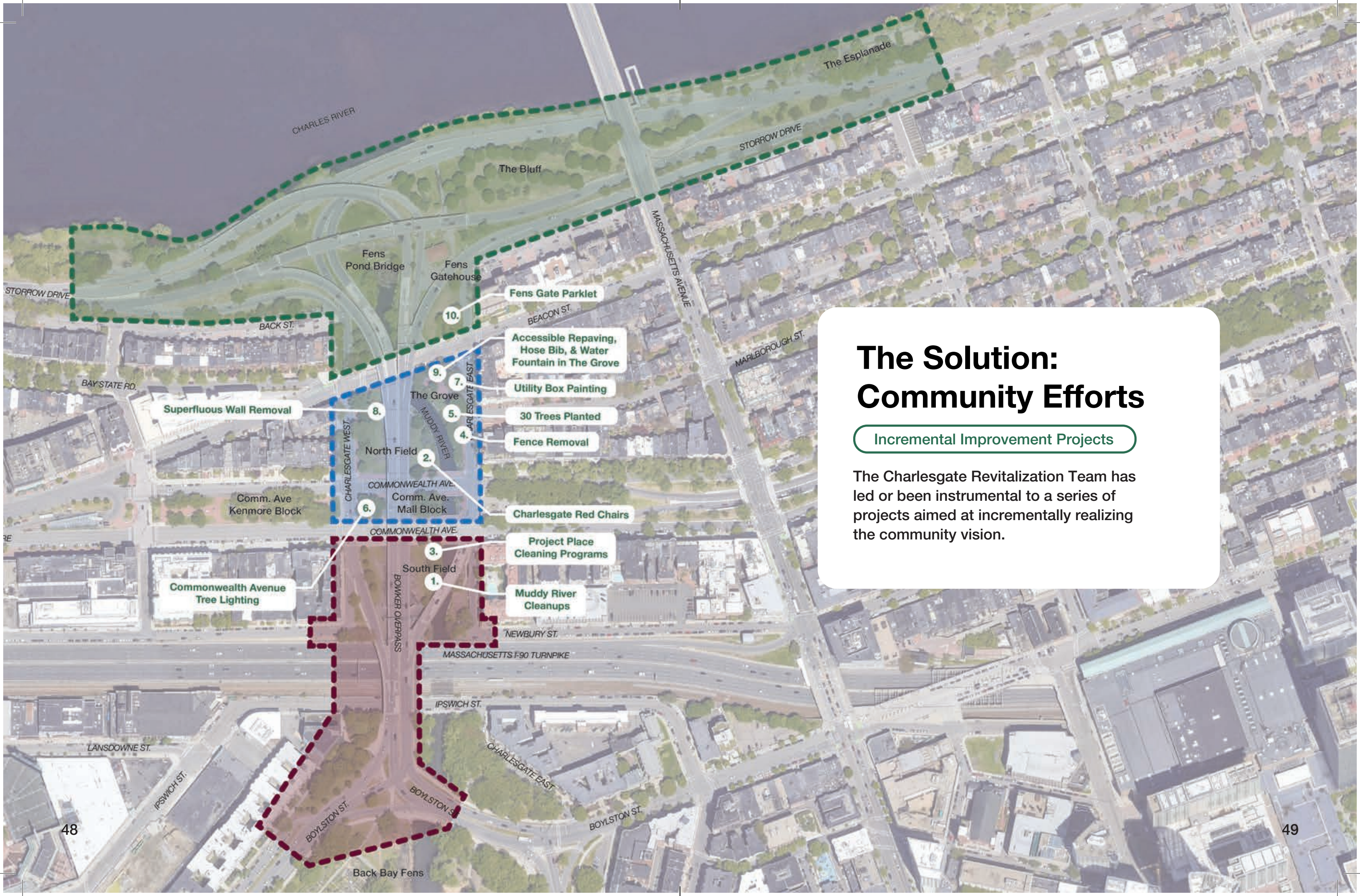


6 DCR Repairs

2019 - Present: Repairs made by the DCR across Charlesgate Park. These repairs include

- Replacement of broken and missing patches in brick paving
- Fixes to historic light fixtures
- Resetting and refinishing of historic metal railings
- Removal of graffiti
- Fixes to historic stone detailing of Richardson bridges





The Solution: Community Efforts

Incremental Improvement Projects

The Charlesgate Revitalization Team has led or been instrumental to a series of projects aimed at incrementally realizing the community vision.

The Solution: Community Efforts

Incremental Improvement Projects



2018 Cleanup along the Muddy River.



2019 Cleanup along the Muddy River.



2024 Cleanup Volunteers.



2025 Cleanup meeting in The Grove.

1 Muddy River Cleanup

2017 - Present: Annual cleanup events bring together community volunteers to remove fallen branches and litter throughout Charlesgate Park.



Community Meeting Photo by Jules Milner-Brage 2018.



Project Place Cleaning 2018.



Movie Night in Charlesgate Park Sept. 2019.

2 Charlesgate Red Chairs

Fall 2018 - Present: The Charlesgate red chairs, donated by the Solomon Foundation, made available through cooperation with the DCR, and maintained by Project Place workers, give park users a new way to enjoy Charlesgate Park.

The Solution: Community Efforts

Incremental Improvement Projects



Photo of Charlesgate Alliance Board member Maddy Segal with members of Project Place.

3 Project Place Programs

Winter 2018 - Present: The Charlesgate Alliance employs the non-profit social service organization Project Place to help maintain the Charlesgate area spring through fall. We also pay for a cleaning program during the winter months.



Photo of Cambridge Landscape removing the unsightly fence.

4 Fence Removal

Winter 2020: 650 feet of chain link fence removed through the efforts of Jenn Carter, president of the Bay State Road Neighborhood Association; BPDA funding made available through the Fenway Park Demonstration Project; and support from members of the Charlesgate Alliance board.

The Solution: Community Efforts

Incremental Improvement Projects



Trees being planted in the Grove.



Dedication Event Photo by Chris McIntosh.



Charlesgate Champions Photo by Chris McIntosh.



Dedication Event Photo by Chris McIntosh.

5 30 Trees Planted

2022 - 2025: The Charlesgate Alliance planted` 30 new trees by in collaboration with the DCR and the Emerald Necklace Conservancy.



Comm. Ave. Mall in Charlesgate Park Tree Lighting Photo by Randall Albright: Winter 2022.



Comm. Ave. Mall in Charlesgate Park Tree Lighting Photo by Randall Albright: Winter 2022.

6 Comm. Ave. Tree Lighting

Winter 2022 – Present: Holiday lights were installed by the Emerald Necklace Conservancy with support from the Charlesgate Alliance for the first three years; they are now installed by the Friends of the Public Garden with support from the Charlesgate Alliance.

The Solution: Community Efforts

Incremental Improvement Projects



Artists at the utility box in the Grove.



In progress painting of the utility box in the South Field.



Finished utility box in the Grove.



Finished utility box in the South Field.

7 Utility Box Painting

Summer 2023: The Charlesgate Alliance, with permission from the DCR, commissioned and funded the painting of DCR utility boxes by Stephanie Li and Jane Kim-Testa.



Existing viaduct wall.



Removed viaduct wall.



Wall removal in progress in the North Field.

8 Superfluous Wall Removal

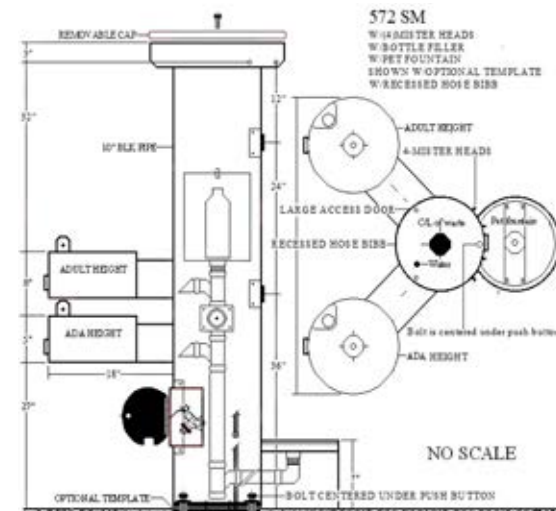
Fall 2025: Removal of nonessential viaduct wall dividing Charlesgate Park funded by a matching grant between the DCR and the Charlesgate Alliance with additional funding from the Emerald Necklace Conservancy.

The Solution: Community Efforts

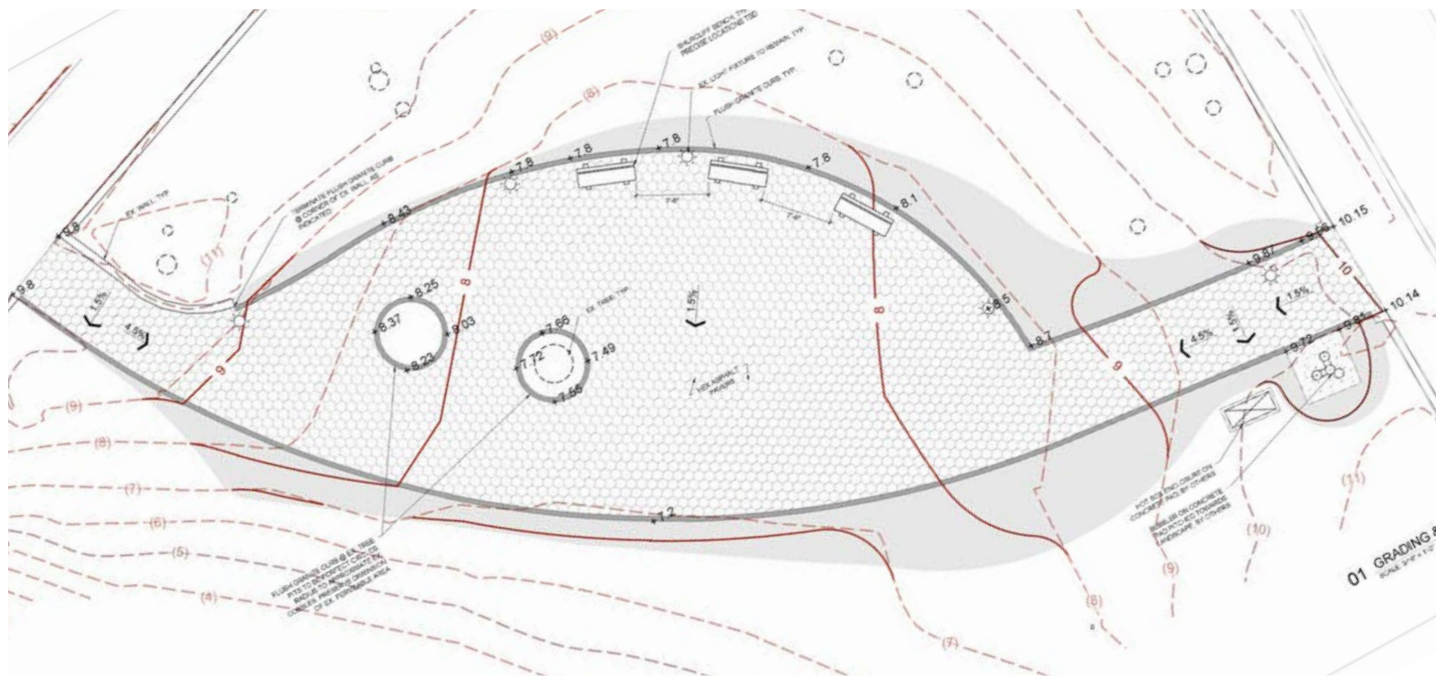
Incremental Improvement Projects



Existing conditions photo of The Grove



Drawing of proposed DCR fountain and hose bib fixture.



Charlesgate Revitalization Team plan of proposed accessible regrading.

9 Improvements in The Grove

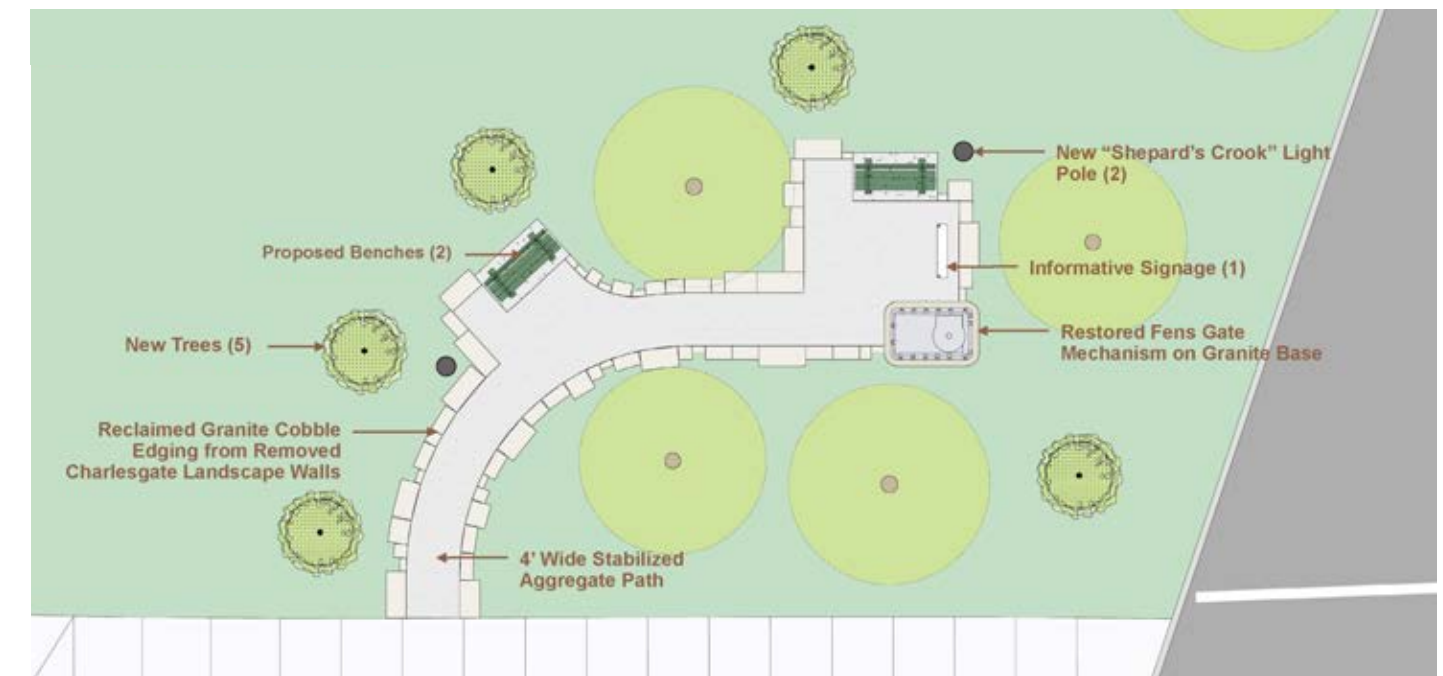
2025 - Present: Charlesgate Revitalization Team in collaboration with the DCR to bring ADA-compliant improvements and features such as a water fountain and hose bib to The Grove.



Salvaged mechanism from the Fens Gatehouse.



Charlesgate Revitalization Team rendering of proposed design.



Charlesgate Revitalization Team Plan of Proposed Design.

10 Fens Gate Parklet

2025 - Present: Charlesgate Revitalization Team in collaboration with the DCR designed a small park space for the presentation of a salvaged gate mechanism from the renovated Fens Gatehouse.

In Construction as of July 2026

Check out some of the changes that are coming to the Charlesgate area, thanks to the Mass. Department of Transportation!



The new granite curbs are beginning to reveal the future layout of Charlesgate—expanding the park, narrowing the intersection, and creating dedicated walking and biking paths carefully laid out to preserve mature trees.



By removing the slip lanes at the Boylston Street intersection, this project is creating new park space and a safer, more welcoming entrance to the Emerald Necklace.



New light poles are being staged for installation along the new pedestrian pathways connecting the Back Bay Fens and Charlesgate Park.



The new dedicated shared-use bridge and Charlesgate West bridge are being built directly on top of the original stone abutments from H.H. Richardson and Frederick Law Olmsted’s historic bridge.



The Charlesgate Revitalization Team coordinated a letter to the governor in support of the project, signed by the organizations shown above.

Thank you to all the elected officials, volunteers, donors, and other contributors who make this work possible.

Contact Us

For further information, and to donate, please contact any of the three organizations below:

Phone: 617-947-0402

Email: charlesgatealliance@gmail.com

Mailing Address: 423 Marlborough Street, Boston, MA 02115

Donations: Mail a check payable to "Charlesgate Alliance," or visit the following website: <https://charlesgatealliance.org/donate/>



Phone: 617-522-2700

Email: info@emeraldnecklace.org

Mailing Address: 350 Jamaica Way, Boston, MA 02130

Visit us at: The Shattuck Visitor Center: 125 The Fenway, Boston, MA 02115

Donations: Visit the following website: <https://www.emeraldnecklace.org/donate/>



Phone: 617-227-0365

Email: info@esplanade.org

Mailing Address: 575 Boylston Street, Suite 4R, Boston, MA 02116 (Valid through 12/31/2026)

Donations: Mail a check payable to "Esplanade Association" or visit the following website: <https://esplanade.org/waystogive/>



Please confirm current mailing information online before sending a donation.

Designed and edited by Landing Studio's Daniel Adams, Marie Law Adams, Ryan Gagnebin, Claire Weaver-Porras, Jake Okrent, and Dafne Saint-Hilaire

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