



# BOSTON COMMON

## MASTER PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
DECEMBER 2022



City of Boston  
Parks and Recreation



FRIENDS  
OF THE  
PUBLIC GARDEN

The Boston Common Master Plan is an aspirational yet pragmatic framework for exciting and substantive change at this deeply historic and culturally significant public park. Each recommendation described within these pages builds upon what already makes this cherished public space successful and paves the way toward a sustainable and resilient future for Boston Common.

Known as the “people’s park,” the Boston Common requires a plan that coalesces many competing needs to create a unified vision that will serve the people of Boston and visitors alike. Five principles are set forth to guide all recommendations. They focus on shared use and care, visitor experience and engagement, and the balance of upholding historic character and serving contemporary needs. An inclusive stakeholder and public involvement process helped develop the goals and objectives that underpin the master plan vision and guiding principles.

Outreach and engagement with the people who use, enjoy, and work in the Common has grounded this master plan. Not only a worldwide landmark, Boston Common is also a city-wide public space and neighborhood park. It serves an enormous range of people. Thus, a wide range of viewpoints, needs, and desires are woven throughout all these recommendations.

The report walks the reader through the recommendations of the master plan in a clear and unified manner. First, the vision, guiding principles, goals and objectives contextualize the proposed improvements to the built environment and recommendations around operational and management upgrades. Next, a brief history of the Common summarizes key moments and references previous planning efforts, which has informed the master plan. Driven by a robust outreach strategy to “bring the Common to the people” across the city and on-the-ground inventorying and analysis, the

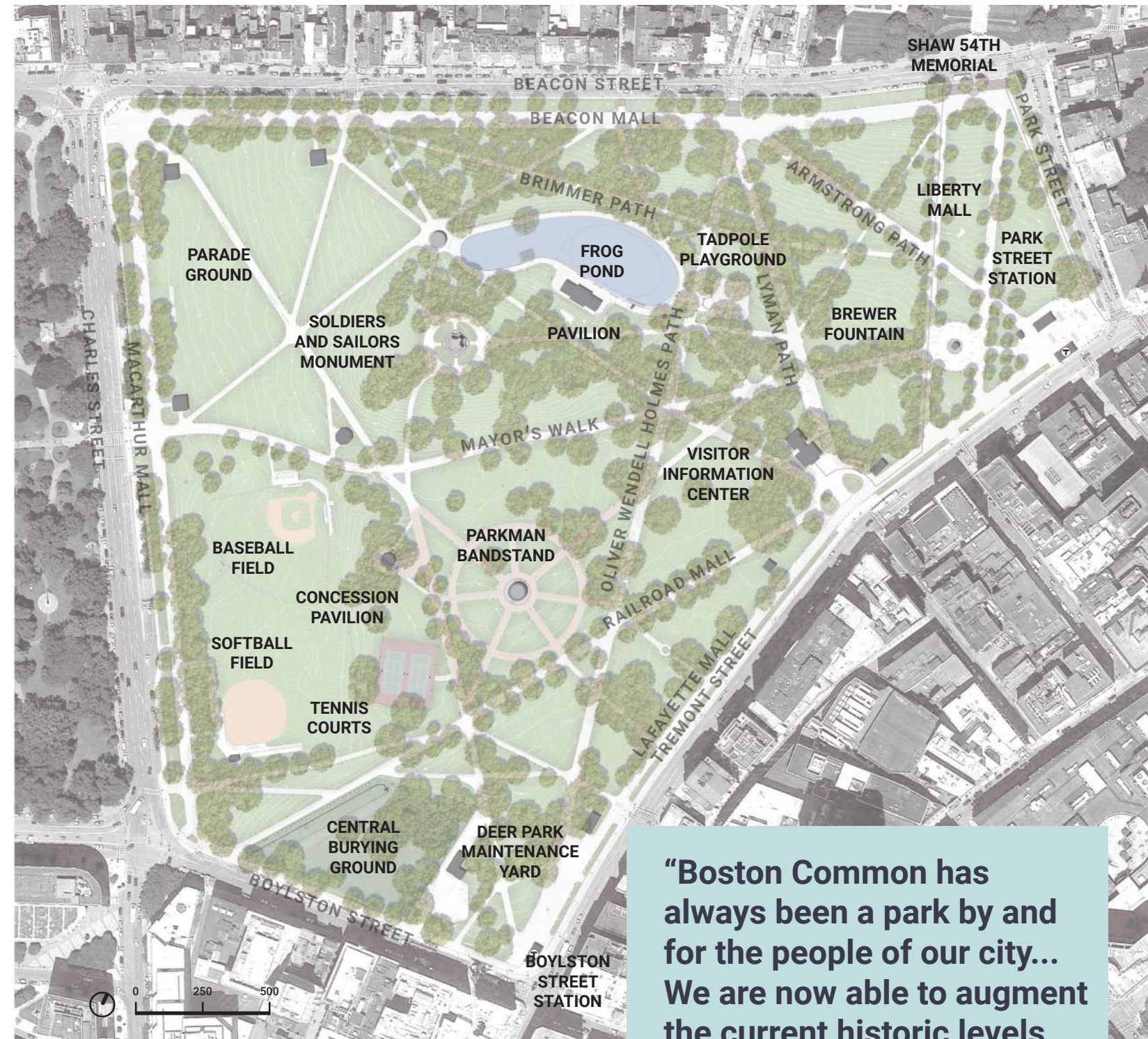
planning process has been guided by the connective thread of civic access and engagement. These findings were channeled into recommendations for both improvements to the physical landscape and operational adjustments that will support capital investments.

Recommendations for improvements to the built environment run the gamut from small tweaks to significant proposals, driven by the Common’s deeply historic roots and its service to the city today and into the future. Park-wide strategies are introduced that weave through three major themes for recommendations: clarifying and coordinating park edges and entrances, connecting and upgrading core visitor amenities, and enhancing and diversifying active recreation opportunities. Think of each of these proposals as a feasibility study of what is possible in a given area of the Common. As these projects are implemented, the designs will be refined and fine-tuned based on continued input from the public and stakeholders.

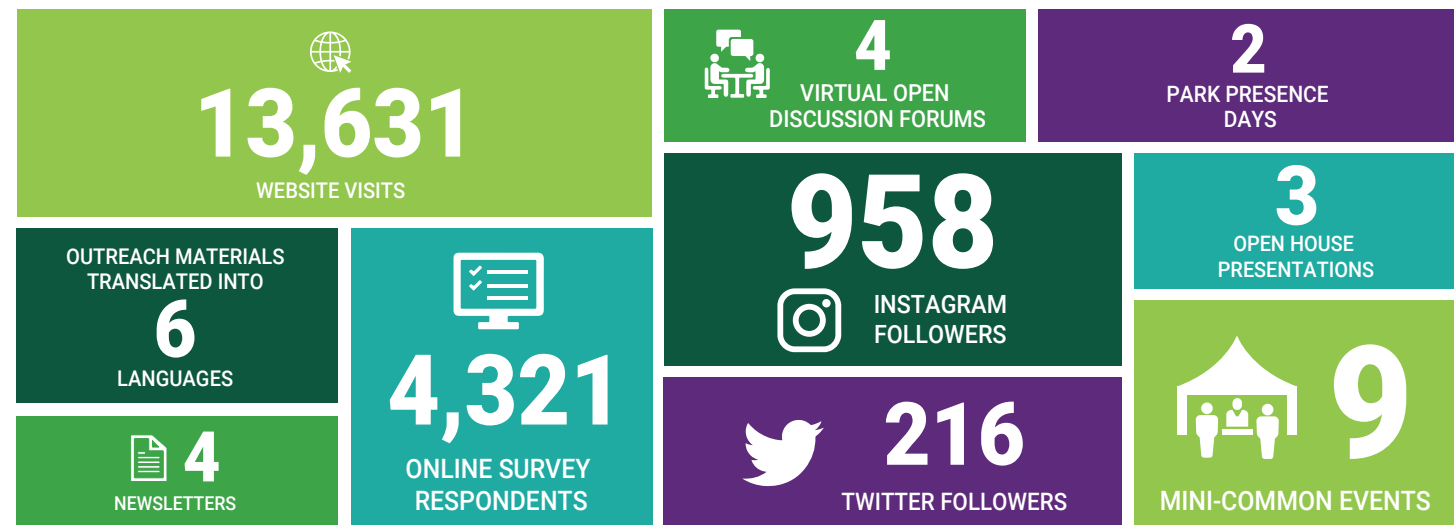
The section outlining operational and management upgrades describes the back-of-house support needed for improvements to the built environment to be successful long-term. Recommendations are focused on establishing park management protocols, improving support facilities, and bolstering events and programming.

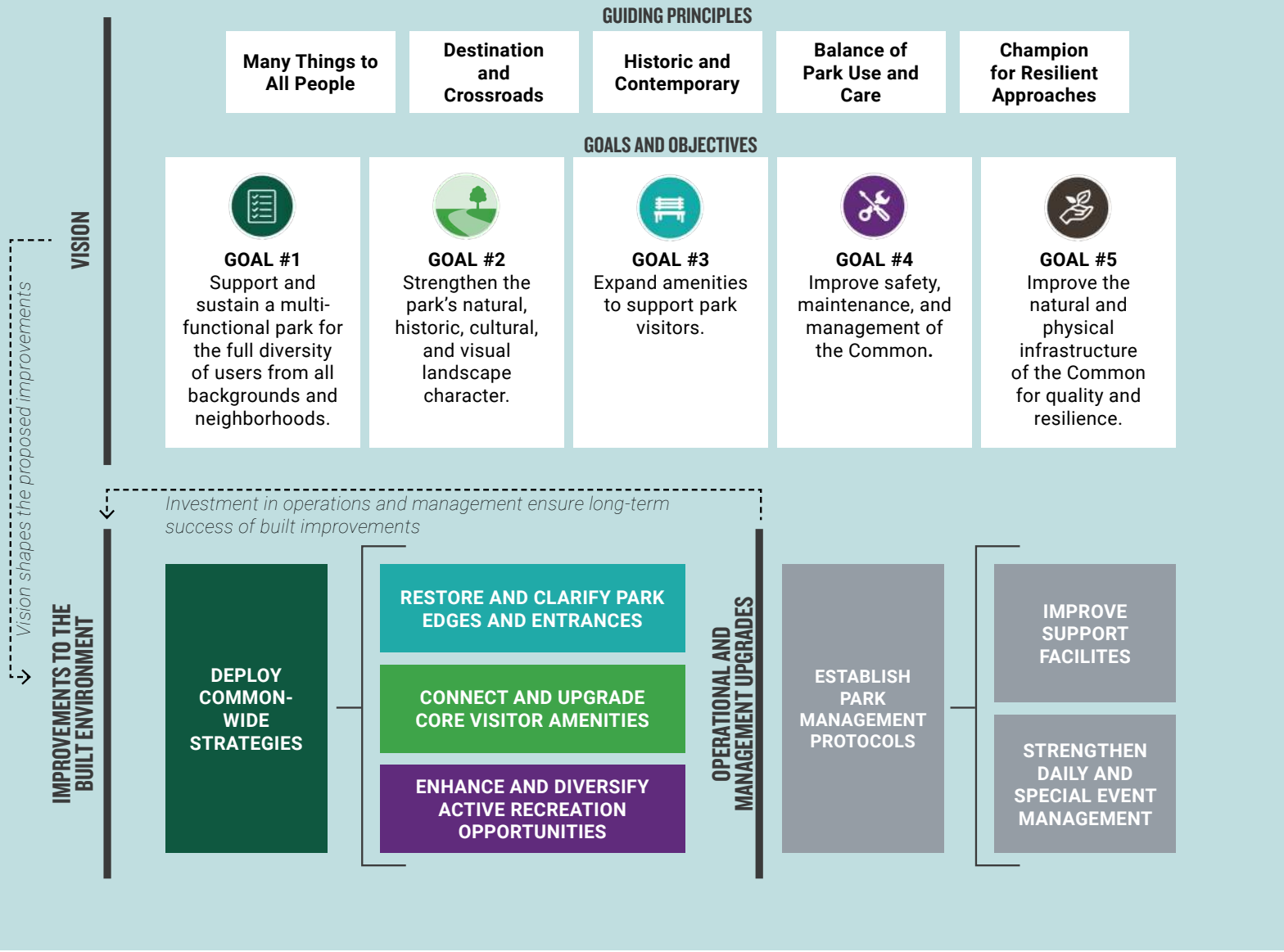
This master plan is a call to action. These recently challenging times are evidence that, now more than ever, parks and open spaces within dense urban environments are critical to a healthy and vibrant society. As the first land to be officially established as a public open space, the Common should again become a pioneer in how these important places can be successful. By continuing to anticipate and support the needs of this park and its users, Boston Common can set a precedent for what it means to reinvest in and celebrate our nation’s most treasured places.

# TODAY...



“Boston Common has always been a park by and for the people of our city... We are now able to augment the current historic levels of funding to fully renovate America’s first public park while preserving its rich heritage.”  
 - Boston Parks Commissioner Ryan Woods

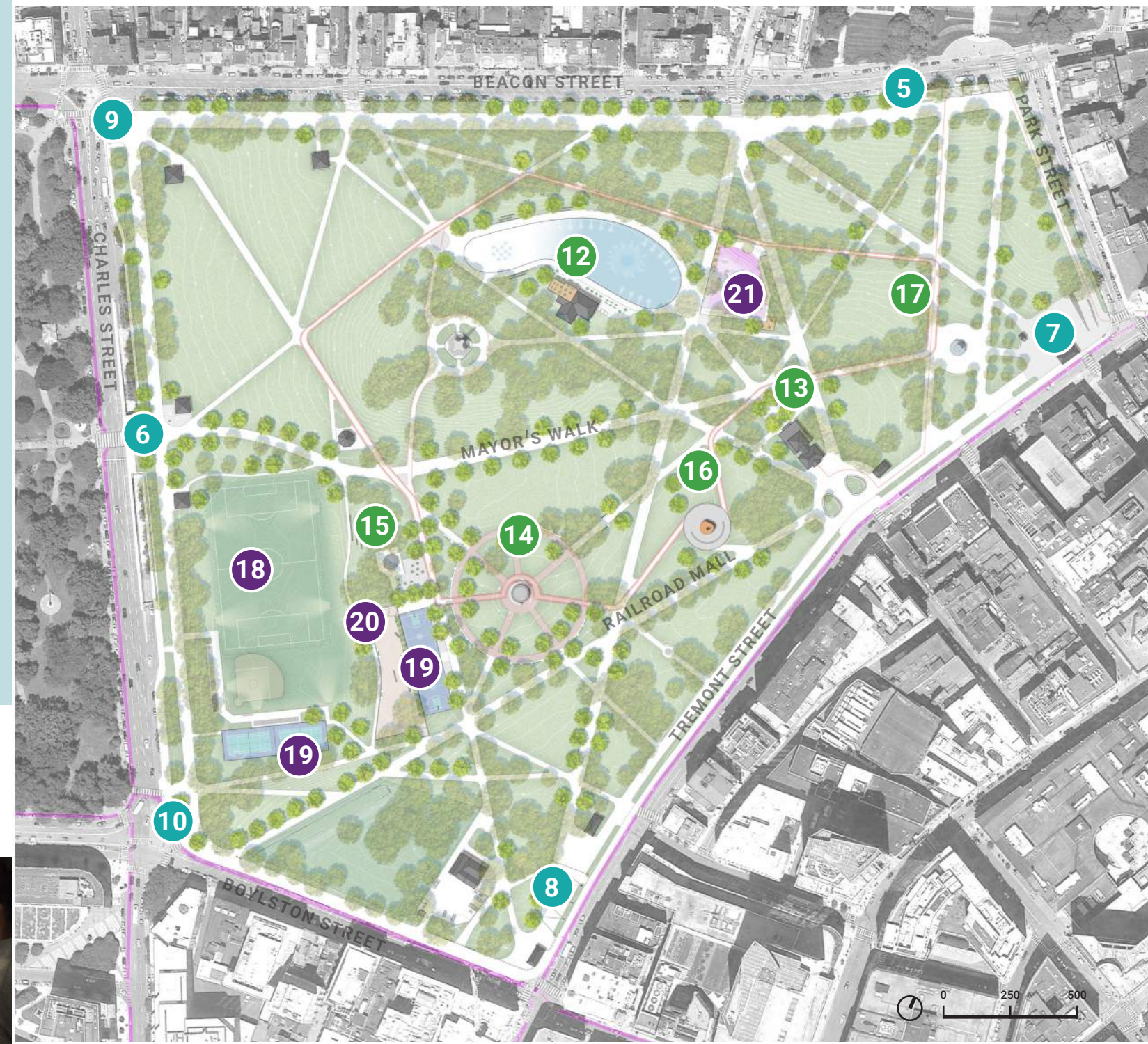




**Above:** Boston Common Master Plan vision diagram  
**Below, left to right:** Pop-Up Mini-Common at the African Festival, August 2019, Workshop discussion with the public at Open House #2



# ...TOMORROW



- DEPLOY COMMON-WIDE STRATEGIES**
- 1** Tree Planting (throughout)
  - 2** Seating (throughout)
  - 3** Access and Wayfinding (throughout)
  - 4** Event Infrastructure (throughout)

- RESTORE AND CLARIFY PARK EDGES AND ENTRANCES**
- 5.** Accessible Entrance at the Shaw 54th Memorial
  - 6.** Charles Street Mid-block Crossing at Mayor's Walk
  - 7.** Park Street Station Plaza
  - 8.** Boylston Street Station Plaza
  - 9.** Beacon and Charles Street Entrance
  - 10.** Boylston and Charles Street Entrance
  - 11** Park Perimeter Upgrades (all)

- CONNECT AND UPGRADE CORE VISITOR AMENITIES**
- 12.** Improvements to the Frog Pond and Pavilion
  - 13.** Visitor Information Center (VIC) Addition and Park-side Plaza
  - 14.** Improvements to the Parkman Bandstand
  - 15.** Improvements to the Parkman Concessions Plaza
  - 16.** Connections with the King Memorial
  - 17.** Landmark Loop

- ENHANCE AND DIVERSIFY ACTIVE RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES**
- 18.** Athletic Field Upgrades and Reconfiguration
  - 19.** Court Expansion
  - 20.** Enclosed Dog Recreation Area
  - 21.** Tadpole Playground Expansion

# IMPROVEMENTS TO THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT



Above: Proposed view of the Common looking east

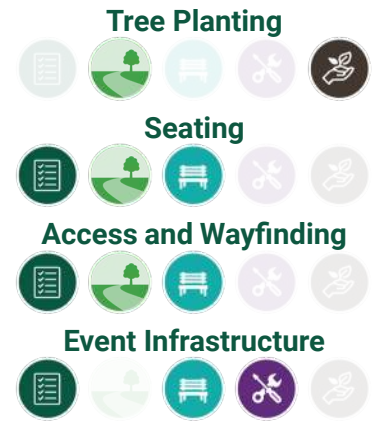
The Boston Common Master Plan’s vision for the Common will serve the people of Boston and visitors alike while protecting this special place for generations to come. The plan imagines a future for the Common that embodies civic access and engagement with a profound sense of identity and a deep-rooted connection to this historic yet vibrant city. To meet the vision’s guiding principles, goals, and objectives, recommendations for improvements to the built environment are categorized into four distinct actionable themes:

- Deploy Common-wide strategies
- Restore and clarify park edges and entrances
- Connect and upgrade core visitor amenities
- Enhance and diversify active recreation opportunities

Summarized in the following pages, the themes, and project ideas within each theme, work from the edges of the park inward and focus attention on both distinct upgrades to specific areas of the park and broader strategies that can be applied across all project ideas, as articulated in the section covering Common-wide strategies.



## DEPLOY COMMON-WIDE STRATEGIES



## RESTORE AND CLARIFY PARK EDGES AND ENTRANCES



## CONNECT AND UPGRADE CORE VISITOR AMENITIES



## ENHANCE AND DIVERSIFY ACTIVE RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

PROJECT IDEAS

### Accessible Entrance at the Shaw 54th Memorial



### Charles Street Mid-block Crossing at Mayor’s Walk



### Park Street Station Plaza



### Boylston Street Station Plaza



### Beacon and Charles Street Entrance



### Boylston and Charles Street Entrance



### Park Perimeter Upgrades



### Improvements to the Frog Pond and Pavilion



### VIC Addition and Park-side Plaza



### Improvements to the Parkman Bandstand



### Improvements to the Parkman Concessions Plaza



### Connections with the King Memorial



### Landmark Loop



### Athletic Field Upgrades and Reconfiguration



### Court Expansion



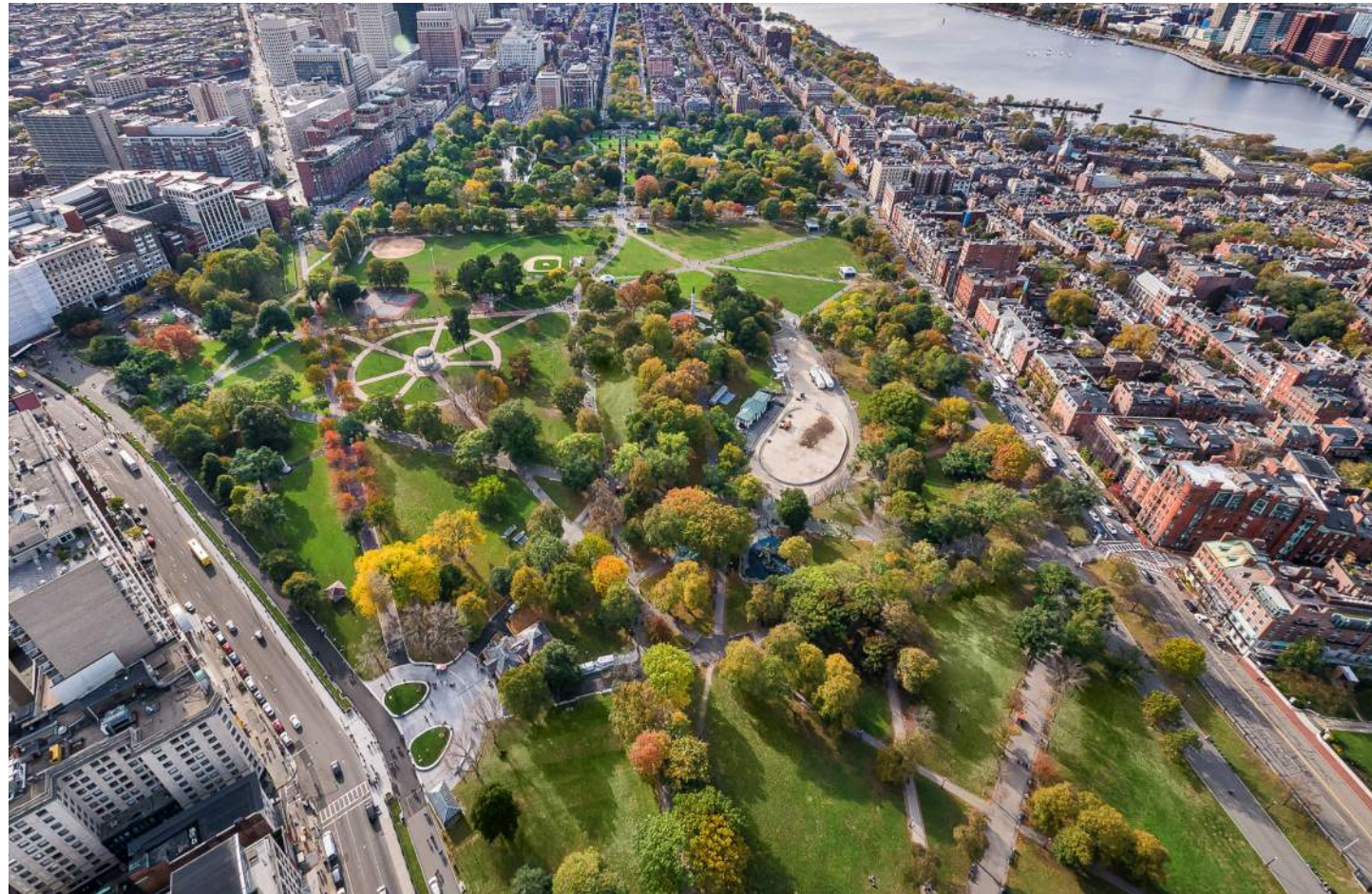
### Enclosed Dog Recreation Area



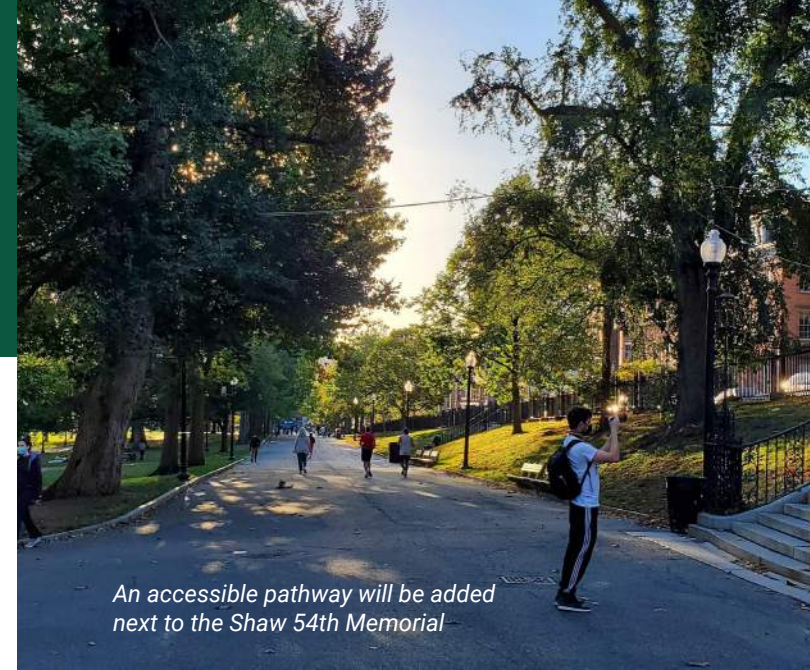
### Tadpole Playground Expansion



# DEPLOY COMMON-WIDE STRATEGIES



Above: Aerial view courtesy of the Friends of the Public Garden



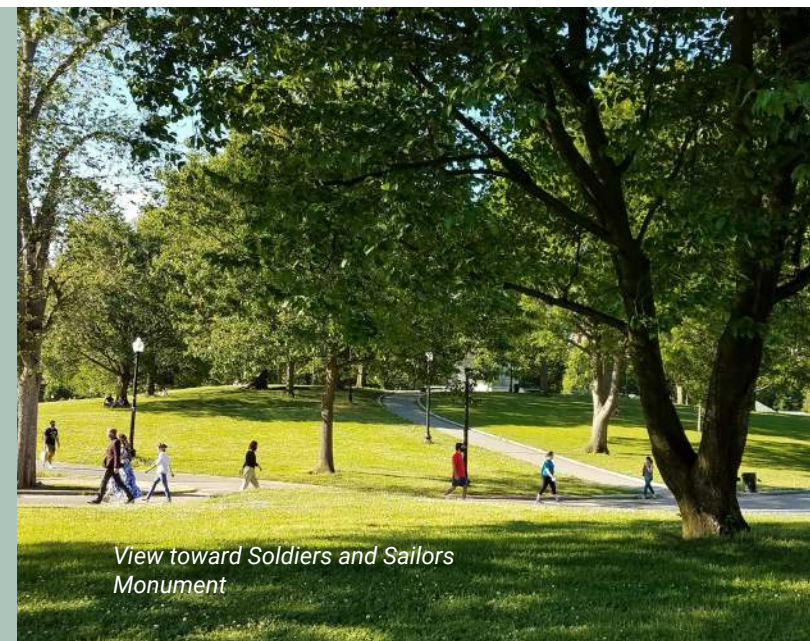
An accessible pathway will be added next to the Shaw 54th Memorial



Brewer Plaza

The malls, trees, lawns, and walking paths on the Common have supported a shared experience for park users for almost four centuries. These elements are foundational to this historic landscape. Strategies that focus on these different systems and needs across the park will be important to overall park success and will benefit the more localized proposals. Strategies on trees, seating, access and wayfinding, and event infrastructure are meant to formalize and enhance critical systems that already exist but need direct attention. The advantage of site-wide strategies is that they take an all-encompassing look at the needs of the park and add a layer of intentionality, setting a precedent for the future of the park that actively responds to public needs. Upgrades to these broad systems will benefit the park daily and support the more specific requests and needs put forth by park users and the city.

- 1 Tree Planting
- 2 Seating
- 3 Access and Wayfinding
- 4 Event Infrastructure



View toward Soldiers and Sailors Monument



Image courtesy of the Commonwealth Shakespeare Company

# 1 TREE PLANTING



PROJECT GOALS MET:



The Common has seen significant canopy loss in recent years and has been replanted in a piecemeal fashion. The gaps in tree cover have altered the pedestrian experience along long linear corridors that were once flanked by tree allées on both sides and affect the overall biodiversity of this area in the city. Under this strategy, new trees will be planted to enhance and frame views, fill in gaps in the existing tree canopy, and better define pedestrian malls. Selections for new plantings will align with existing species and the Common's historic character, provide shade for new seating, and add environmental capital to downtown Boston for future generations.

# 2 SEATING

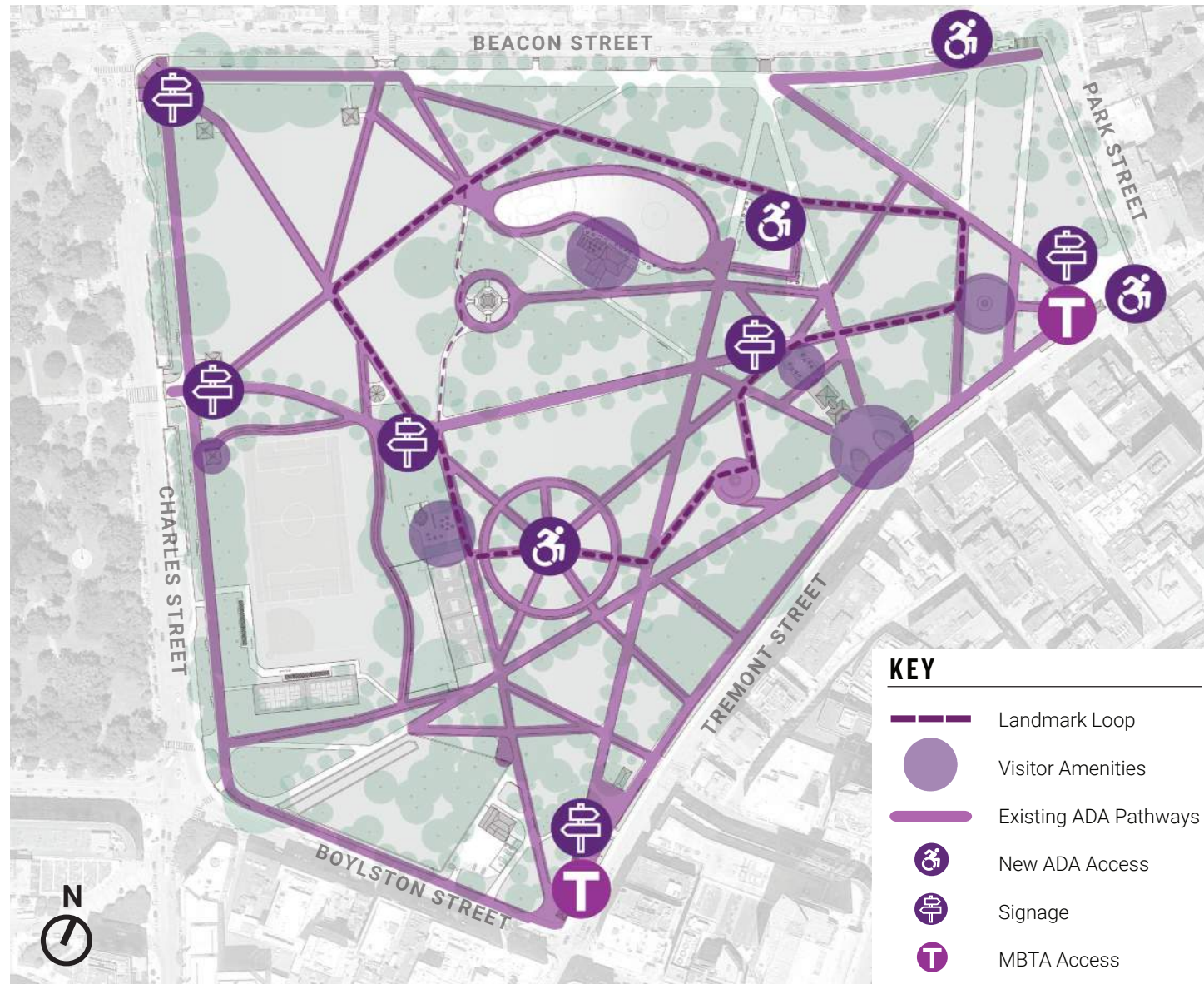


PROJECT GOALS MET:



An overall seating strategy for the Common will work in tandem with efforts to improve the tree canopy, thereby bringing cohesion and consistency to the landscape character of the Common. Recommendations include enhancements to pedestrian malls, more seating capacity installed at regular and predictable intervals, activation of social nodes and support for active recreation. A new Boston Common standard bench is recommended for use to improve seating comfort and bring a cohesive style across the park. As with the other park-wide strategies, this new bench system will be phased in over time.

# 3 ACCESS AND WAYFINDING

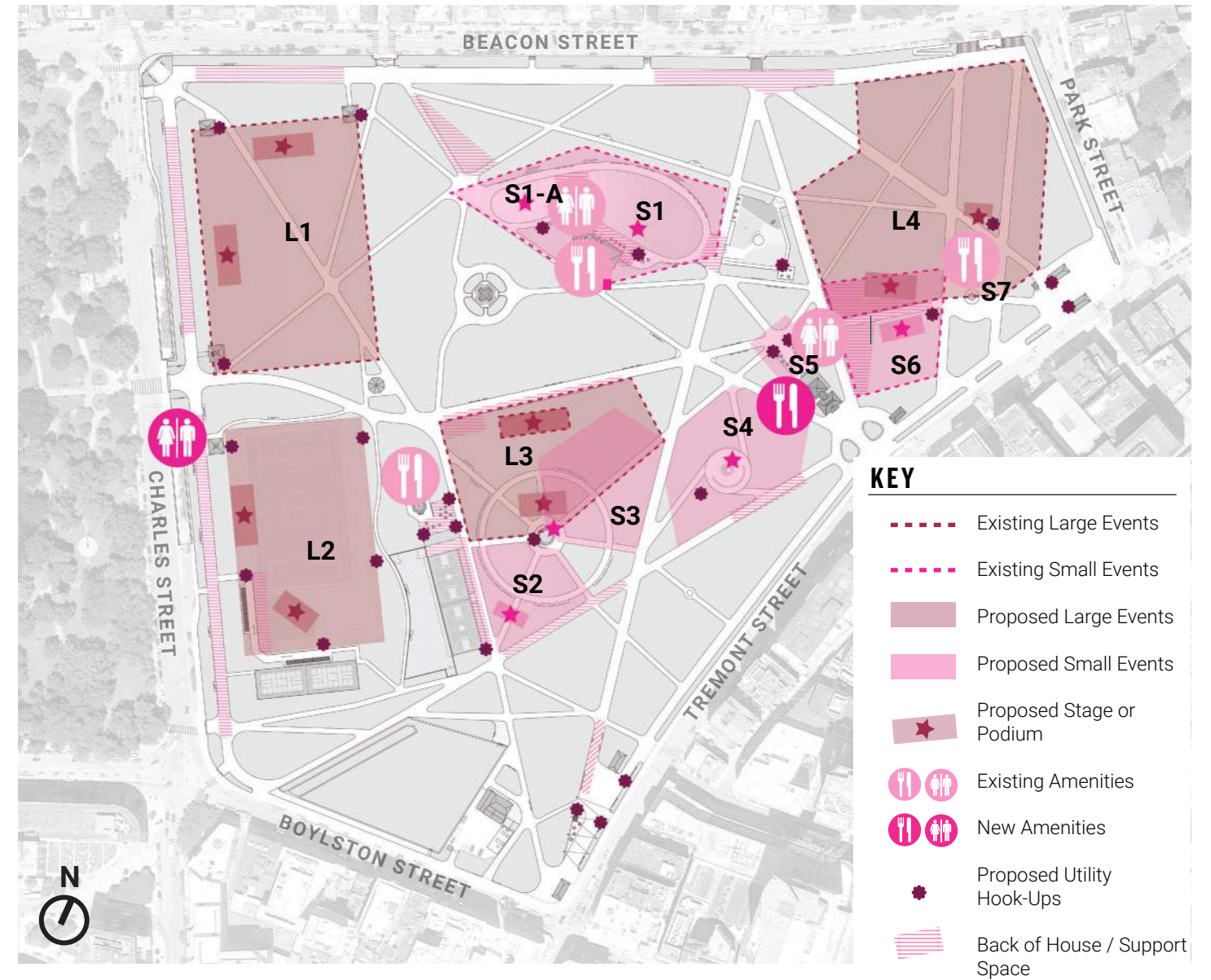


PROJECT GOALS MET:



Today, Boston Common's linear corridors move people through the park from end to end but don't effectively or intuitively connect visitors to key park features and destinations. Accessible routes are often circuitous, and pedestrians are hindered by bikers moving through at high speeds. The proposed circulation strategy designates an interior loop that connects amenities, provides more direct ADA routes from park entrances to core park amenities, reinforces the hierarchy of pathway widths, and adds clear wayfinding / directional signage around the interior loop, at critical nodes, and park entrances.

# 4 EVENT INFRASTRUCTURE

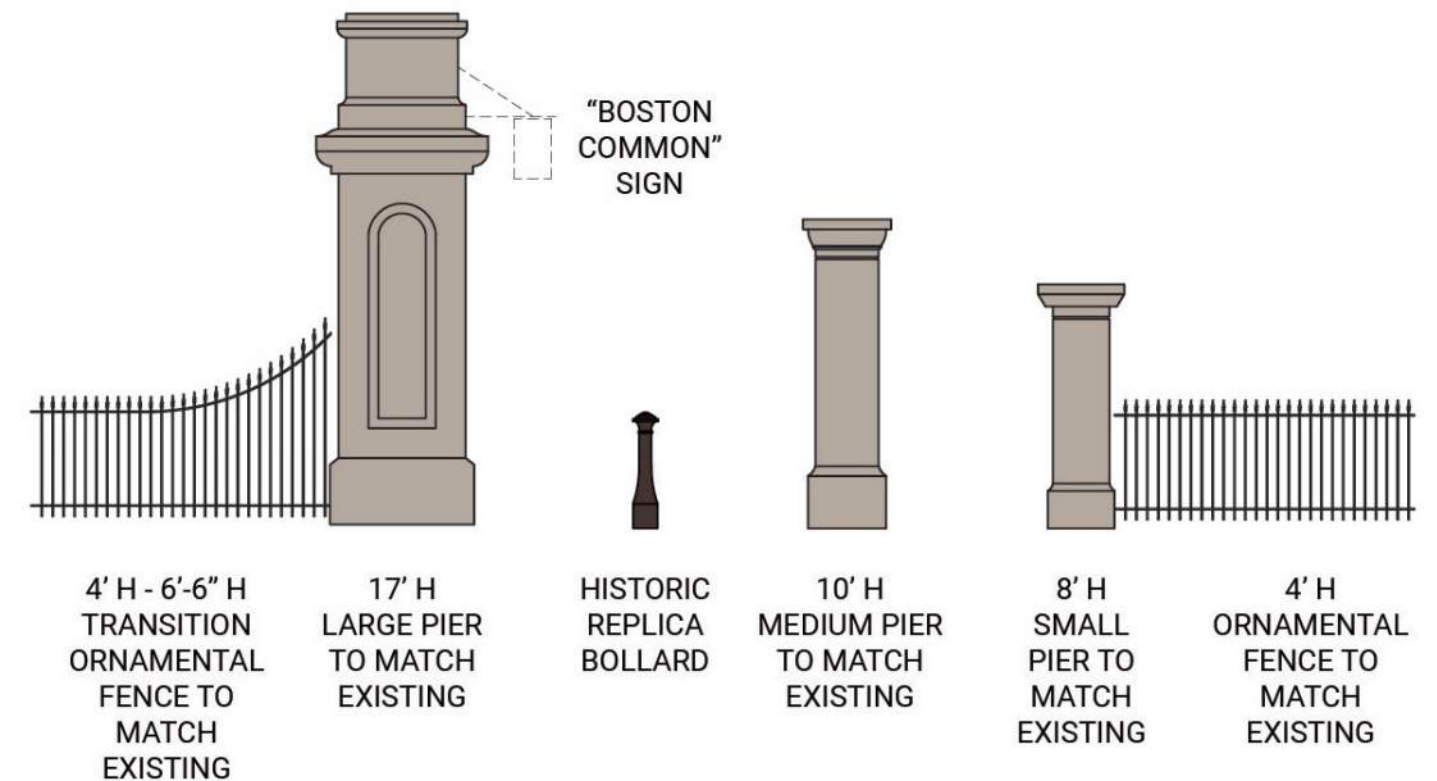
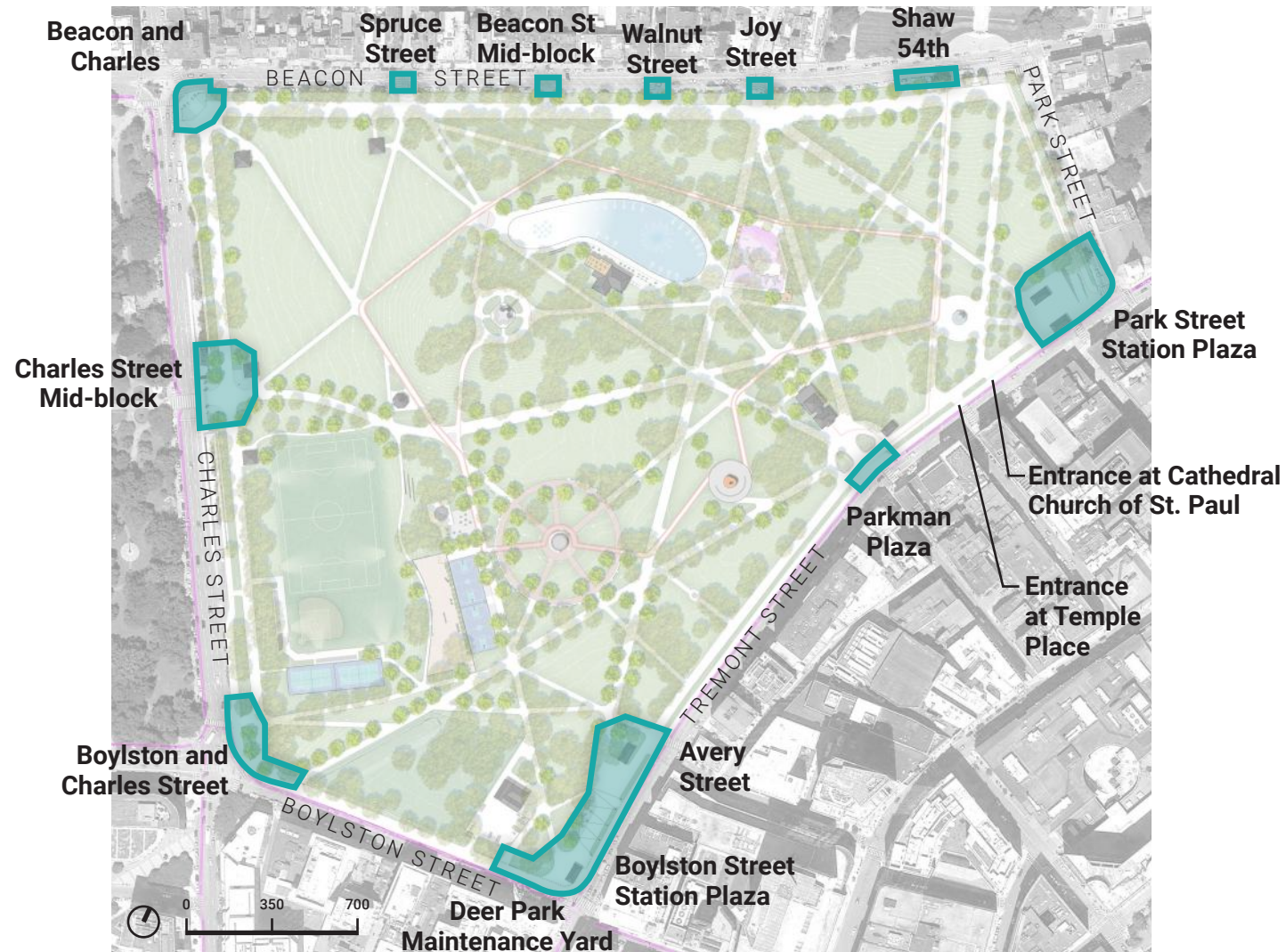


PROJECT GOALS MET:



More robust infrastructure will allow for events of varying sizes to be better distributed, activate single-use areas of the park in different ways, and afford high-use areas to rest more easily. Retooling the Common's paved surfaces and reinforcing areas of turf will allow hardscape and lawn areas to support event and programming needs beyond their daily functions. Additionally, the Common's existing restrooms and concessions will be upgraded. More of each will be added to distribute these conveniences across the park and to allow for visitors to comfortably spend the day at the park.

# RESTORE AND CLARIFY PARK EDGES AND ENTRANCES



Above: Architectural elements for entryway consistency; Below, left to right: Existing view of the Charles Midblock Entrance, Park Street Station Plaza, and Boylston Street Station Plaza; Opposite: Plan indicating the park's entrances

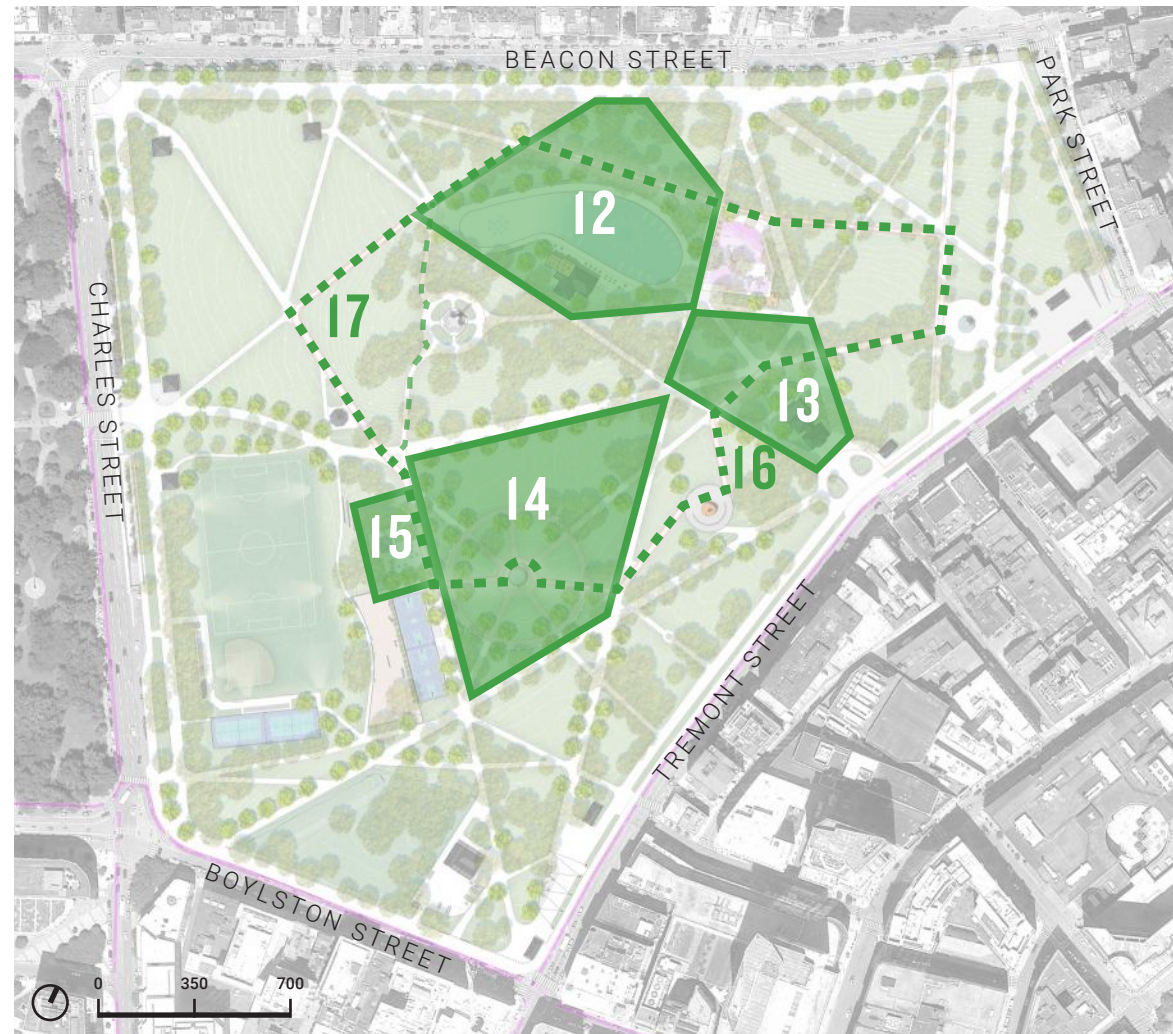
The sense of arrival and entry around the Common varies. At the two MBTA stations, people often dash to the subway, not considering that the plaza space is actually park land. The mid-block entrance on Charles Street is often misunderstood as moving between two parts of the same greenspace instead of leaving one (the Public Garden) and entering another (the Common). While this porosity between park and city speaks to the Common's spirit of openness, the ambiguity also weakens the identity of the Common.

A major step in upgrading the Common's edges is to improve the function of its many entryways. A study of the entryways as they exist today or how they were organized in the past brought about a family of architectural forms as the basis of these recommendations. A combination of these forms applied to each entrance, as appropriate, will result in a more accessible, distinct, and enjoyable park experience. Once complete, upgraded entrances will celebrate the Common as a special place, reflect its history, and provide important wayfinding cues.



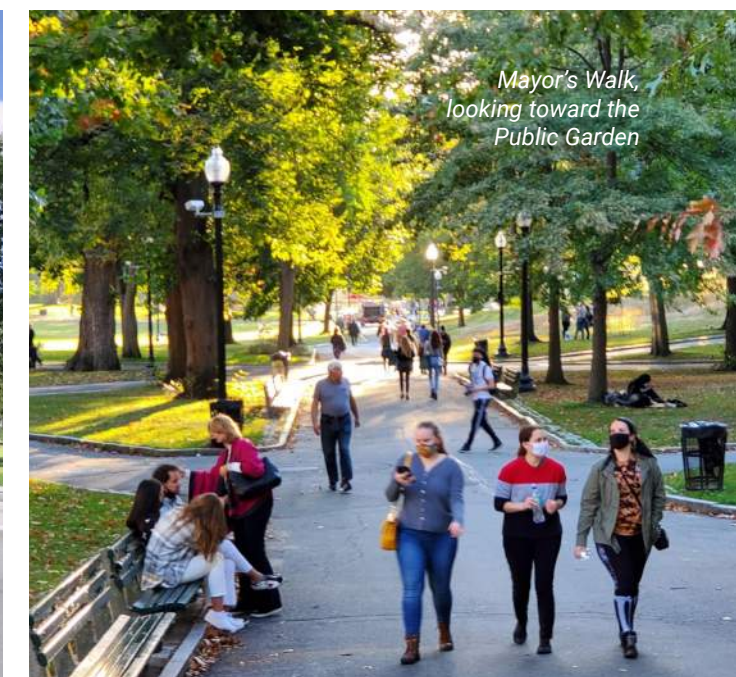


# CONNECT AND UPGRADE CORE VISITOR AMENITIES



Today's park attractions and amenities are a patchwork of incremental improvements that reflect various needs and objectives over the park's history. This master planning effort is an opportunity to bridge the gaps between core recreation, cultural, and social spaces across the Common in a way that is intentional and intuitive. Not only does this group of proposed improvements aim to rejuvenate some of Boston Common's iconic visitor experiences, like the Frog Pond, but they also add new facilities and infrastructure that support diverse uses, offer activities and amenities for multiple ages and abilities, create cohesive visitor information resources, and expand upon the park's current restroom capacity to better serve demand. Together, these projects will enhance the public perception of what the Common has to offer, establishing a new era for the park as a historic yet contemporary destination in downtown Boston.

- 12 Improvements to Frog Pond and Pavilion
  - 12A. Improvements to Frog Pond
  - 12B. Frog Pond Pavilion Expansion / Upgrades
- 13 Visitor Information Center (VIC) Addition and Park-side Plaza
  - 14A. VIC Interior Upgrades and Expansion
  - 14B. New Park-side VIC Plaza
- 14 Improvements to Parkman Bandstand
  - 15A. Accessibility at the Bandstand
  - 15B. Special Event Venue Upgrades
- 15 Improvements to the Concessions Building and Plaza
- 16 Connections with the King Memorial
- 17 Landmark Loop



# 12 IMPROVEMENTS TO FROG POND AND PAVILION

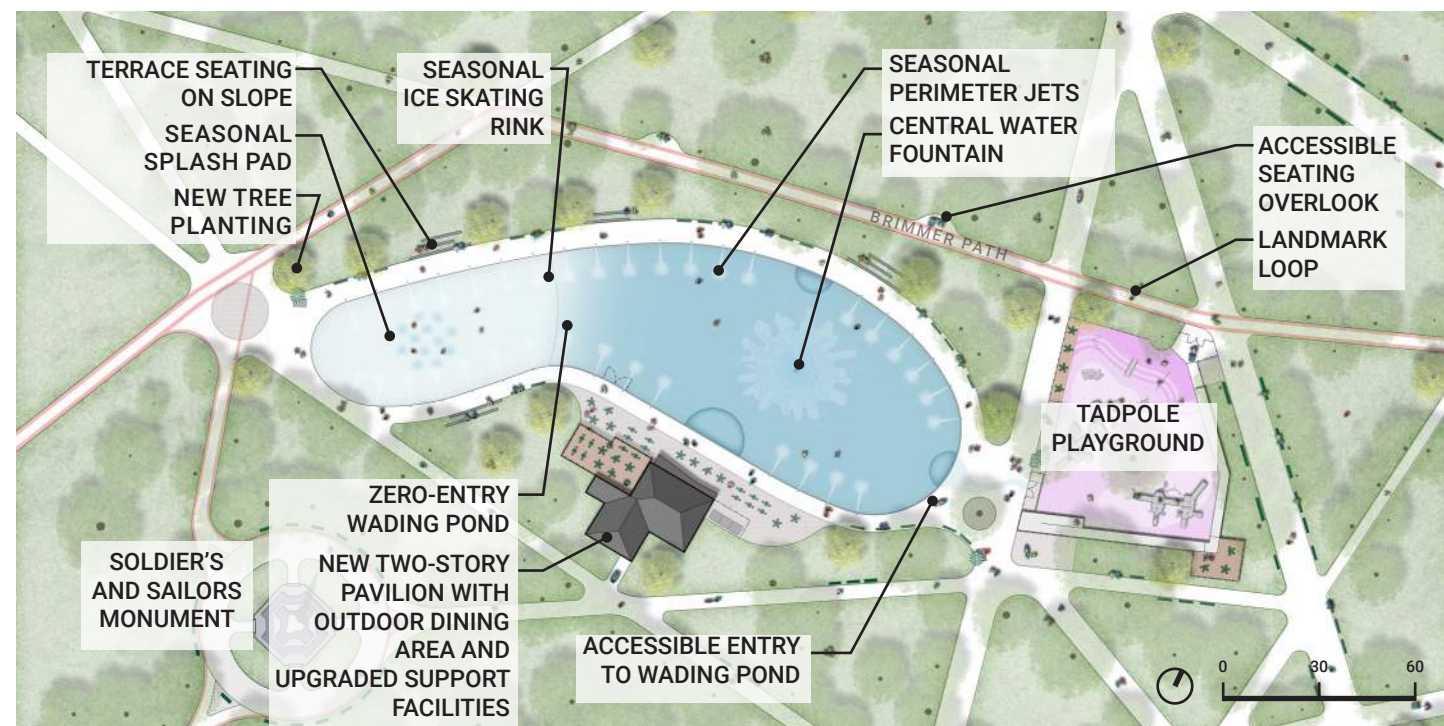


Above: View of proposed splash pad during summer;  
Below: Proposed plan

## PROJECT GOALS MET:



Iconic in its own right, the Frog Pond should be fully renovated to include a new two-story pavilion, a new splash pad, and an improved wading pool complete with accessible entries and water features throughout. Newly planted trees will increase shade opportunities and more diverse seating options will be incorporated. Support infrastructure such as electrical and sound service, improved Wi-Fi, and pond refrigeration for multi-season events and flexible programmed use will improve efficiency and functionality.



# 13 VISITOR INFORMATION CENTER ADDITION AND PARK-SIDE PLAZA

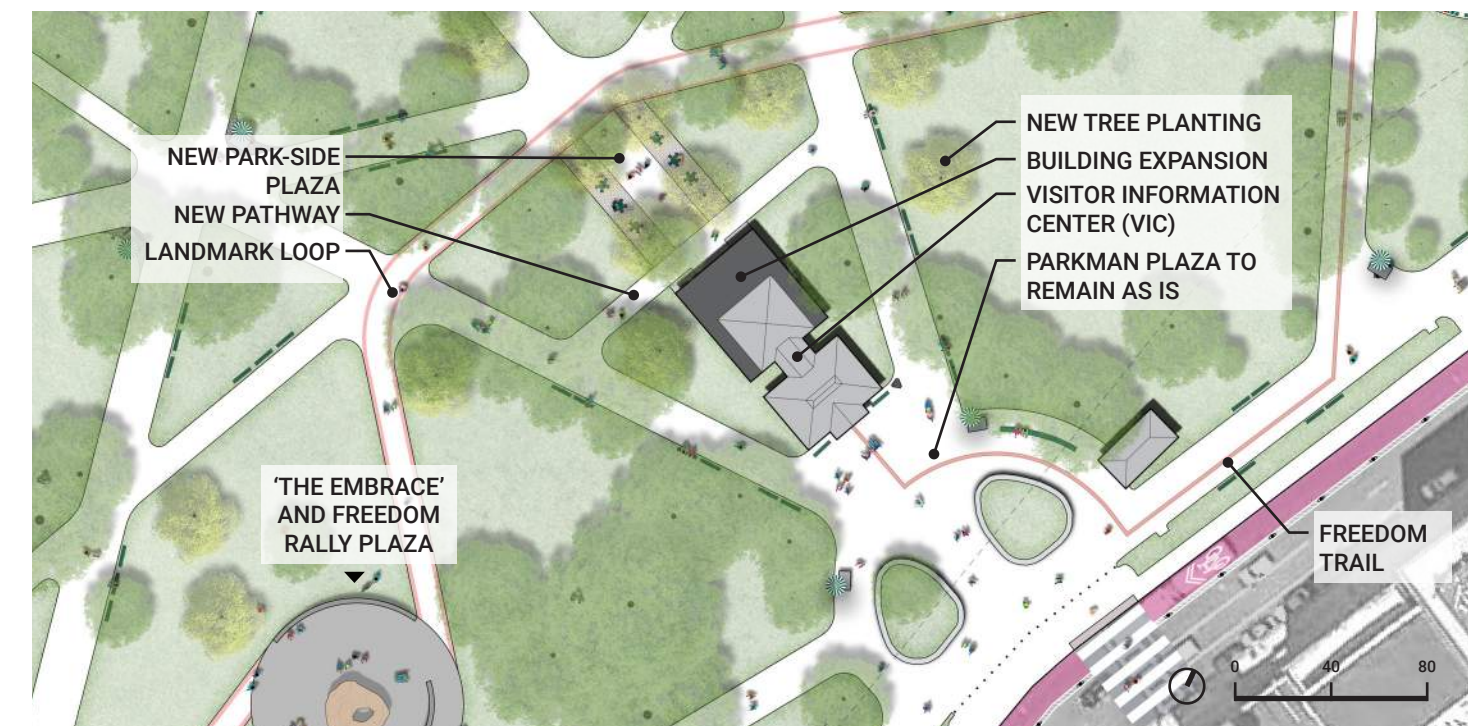


Above: View of proposed plaza interfacing Mayor's Walk and VIC;  
Below: Proposed plan

## PROJECT GOALS MET:



An expansion of the Visitor Information Center (VIC) building will offer additional, much-needed restrooms in this area of the Common. The interior space will also offer grab-and-go vending options and act as the nerve center for Boston Common-focused visitor information. A new outdoor space on the park-side of the VIC will connect to the Mayor's Walk, incorporate tree planting, and provide plenty of seating and directional signage, making it the logical starting point for the Landmark Loop and supporting visitor activity on the Freedom Trail.



# 13 14 IMPROVEMENTS TO PARKMAN BANDSTAND AND THE CONCESSIONS BUILDING AND PLAZA

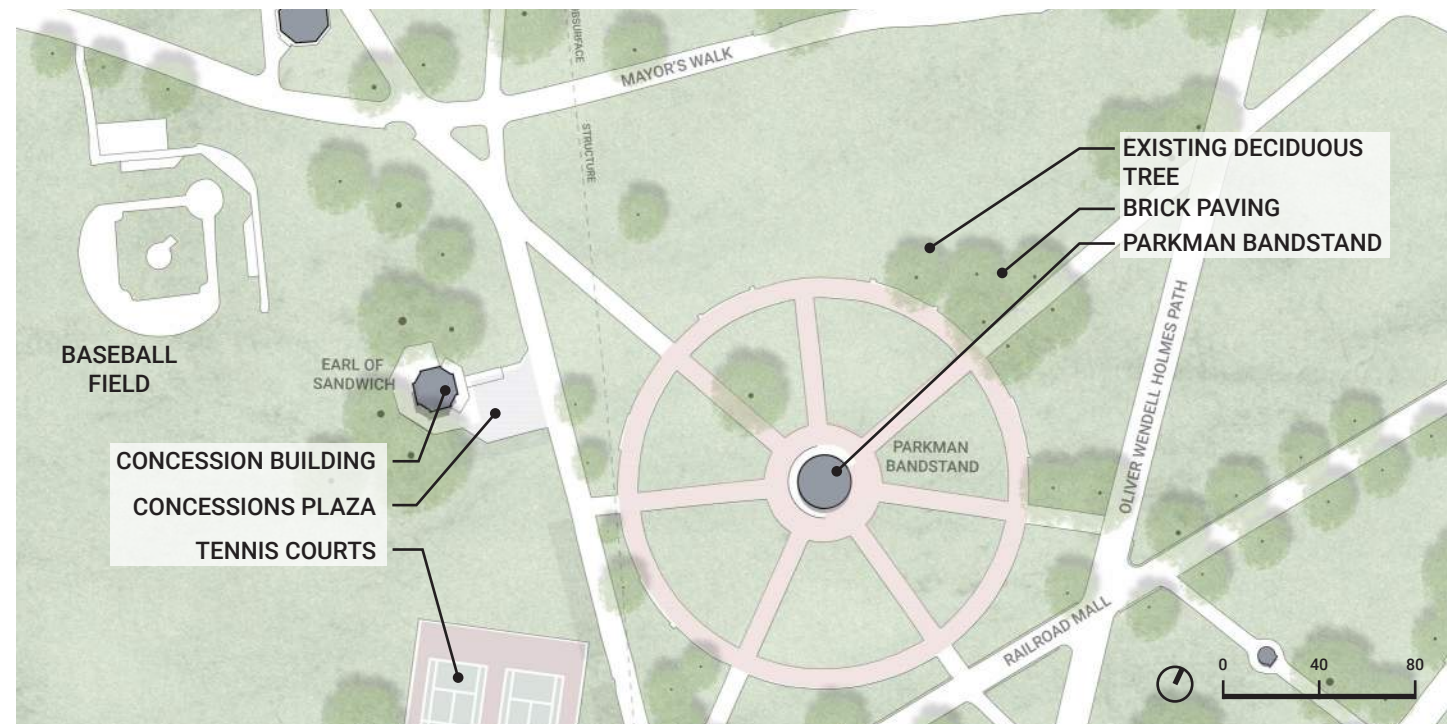


**Above:** Rendered view of the proposed improved Parkman Bandstand;  
**Below:** Existing conditions plan

**PROJECT GOALS MET:**



Upgrading the Parkman Bandstand will include adding a fully accessible, architecturally appropriate ramp that allows for universal access to its interior space. In addition to accessibility upgrades, pathway improvements, perimeter tree planting, and new seating options are recommended. Ultimately, each of these proposed improvements to the Parkman Bandstand will enhance its existing character while providing new connections and access.

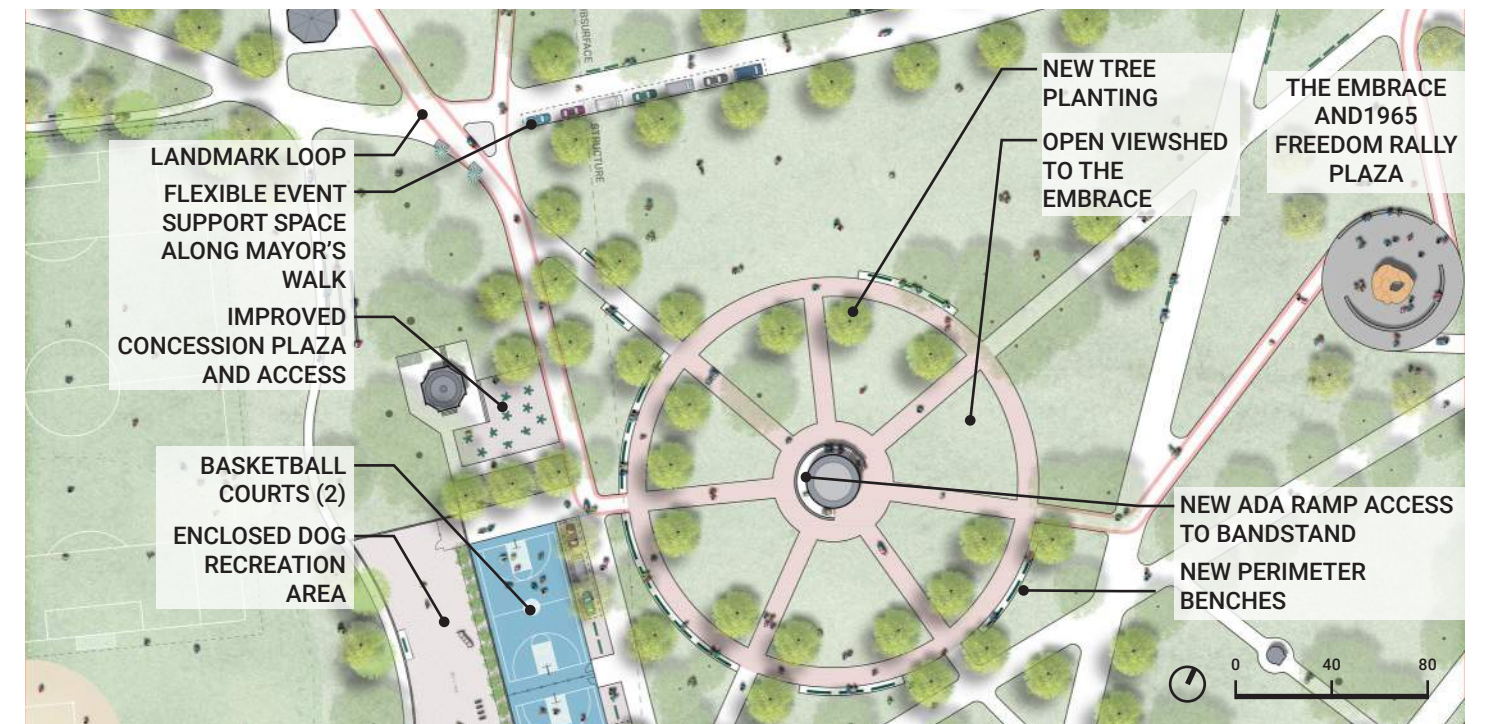


**Above:** View of the existing Concessions Pavilion next to walk  
**Below:** Proposed plan of Improvements to Parkman Bandstand and the Concessions Plaza

**PROJECT GOALS MET:**



Upgrades to the concession plaza will make it a more functional outdoor eatery and small gathering space. A reconfigured footprint, more seating, tree plantings and an accessible pathway to the ordering window will cement the spaces as a hub for daily use in support of Parkman Bandstand and the Common's active recreation areas as well as larger scale events.



# 16 CONNECTIONS WITH THE KING MEMORIAL

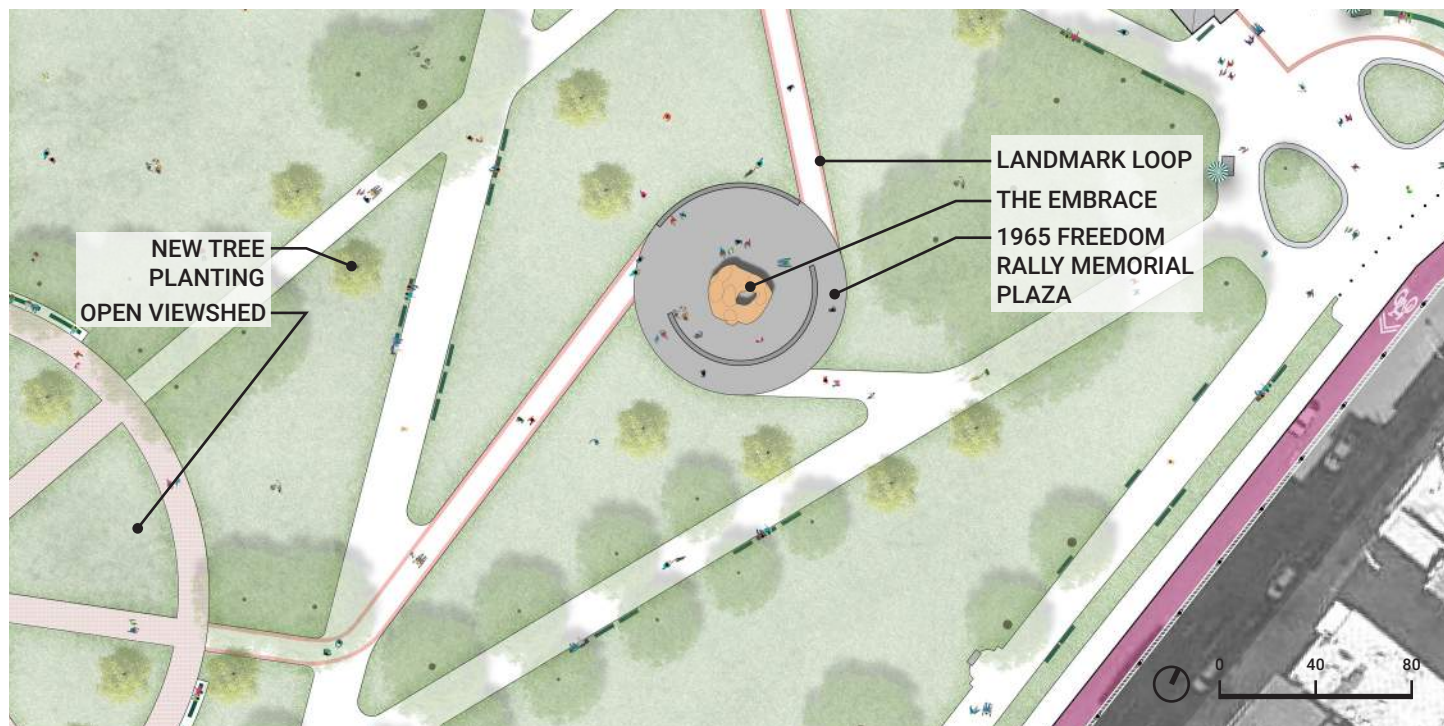


Top to bottom: View of proposed the King Memorial, courtesy of Mass Design Group; Proposed plan; Below: Plan of the proposed Landmark Loop route

## PROJECT GOALS MET:



Physical and visual connections to the Embrace from across the Common will both connect this new dedicated space to its surrounding landscape and celebrate its own uniqueness. As a node on the Landmark Loop, the memorial will draw visitors to explore and engage with its message.



# 17 LANDMARK LOOP



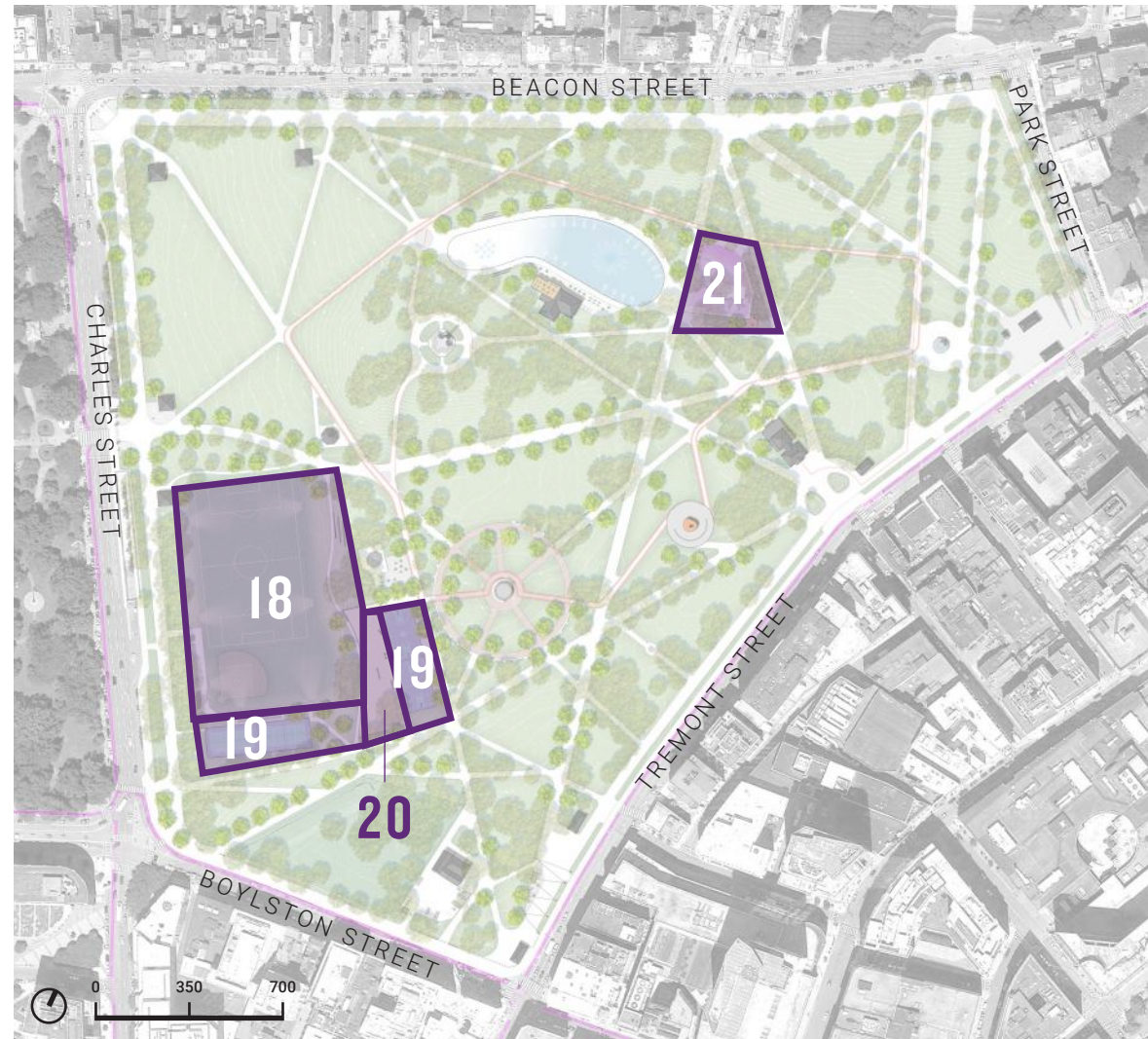
## PROJECT GOALS MET:



An interior loop will connect major park attractions within the Common's core. Practically speaking, the designated interior loop will be a subtle installation in the landscape by way of signage and pavement markings. Signage will be key to the Loop's success; consistent iconography shall be developed to mark each stop on the educational walk. On the ground, the loop can be lined with accent banding to differentiate it from the other park pathways, much like how the Freedom Trail functions today on the Common.

Information and mapping that articulates the designated route and its 'stops' will also be incorporated into the Common's online and printed resources.

# ENHANCE AND DIVERSIFY ACTIVE RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES



This master plan is an opportunity to reassess the types of structured recreational activities offered at the Common. With an eye toward creating new and better opportunities for recreation, the Common can widen its ability to serve athletes, dog owners, playground goers, and general park visitors for years to come. Collectively, these recommendations will reinforce one another to serve a diversity of users, meet current recreational demands, and support fresh programming that will add new dimension to the park.

## 18 Athletic Field Upgrades and Reconfiguration

## 19 Court Expansion

19A. Tennis Court Relocation  
19B. New Basketball Courts

## 20 Enclosed Dog Recreation Area

## 21 Tadpole Playground Expansion



# 18 ATHLETIC FIELD UPGRADES AND RECONFIGURATION

## PROJECT GOALS MET:



Reconfiguring the ballfields will allow for more flexibility in the type of recreational opportunities that the Common can offer. A re-imagined athletics complex with one ballfield and a multi-use field overlay will support a wider range of programming and provide an auxiliary space to support large events, which can relieve pressure from the Parade Ground.

Upgrades will include new and refurbished pathways, renovated fields, fence and backstop replacement, outfield fence removal, new benches and dugouts, a new scoreboard, terraced spectator seating, a park support facility with restrooms and equipment storage and rental, and sports lighting.

**Below:** Birdseye view of the proposed athletic field configuration;  
**Opposite:** Proposed plan



# 19 COURT EXPANSION

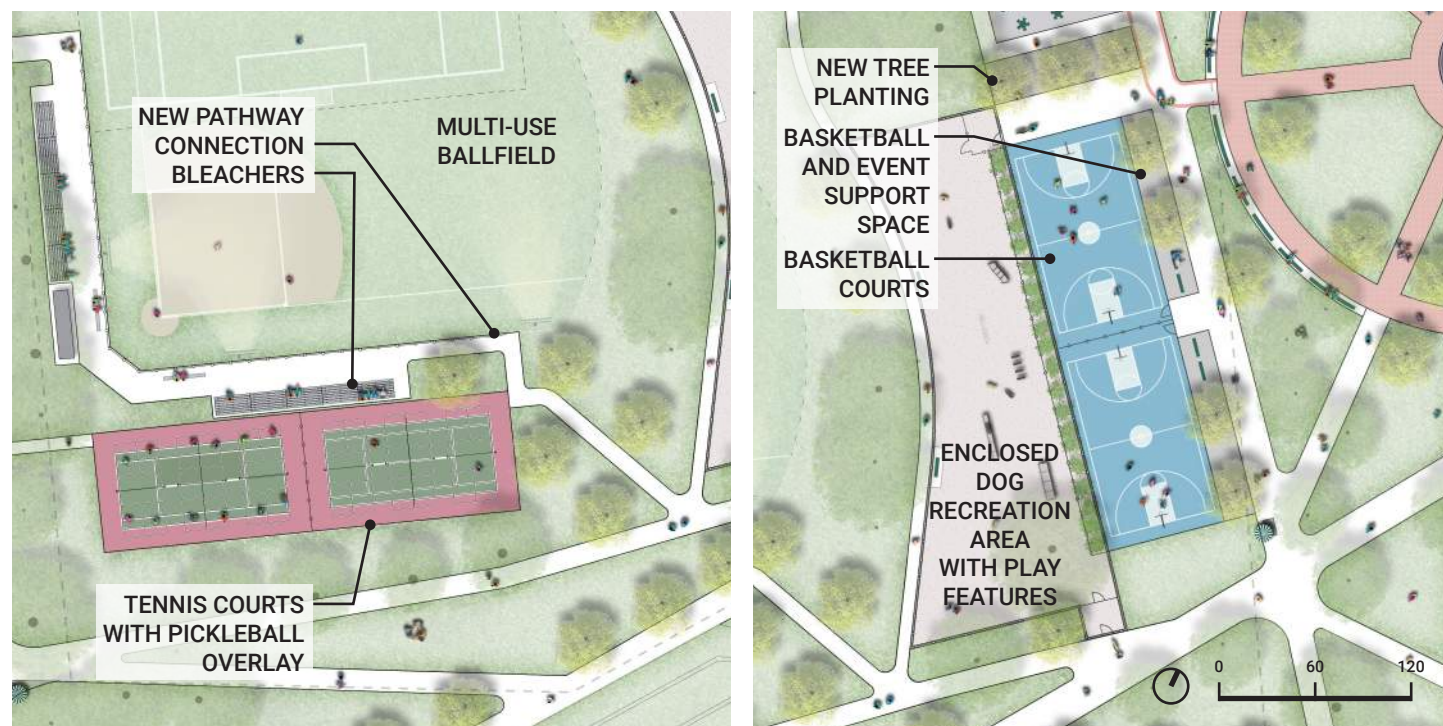


Above: View of existing tennis courts;  
Below: Proposed plans

## PROJECT GOALS MET:



Relocating the tennis courts will provide a more logical and protected spot for tennis on the Common and allow its current space to be repurposed for new amenities. Two new basketball courts will line Parkman Bandstand and form a boundary with a new enclosed dog recreation area. With limited fencing needed, these basketball courts can double as a back-of-house area for periodic larger events at Parkman Bandstand to reduce lawn impacts.



# 20 ENCLOSED DOG RECREATION AREA

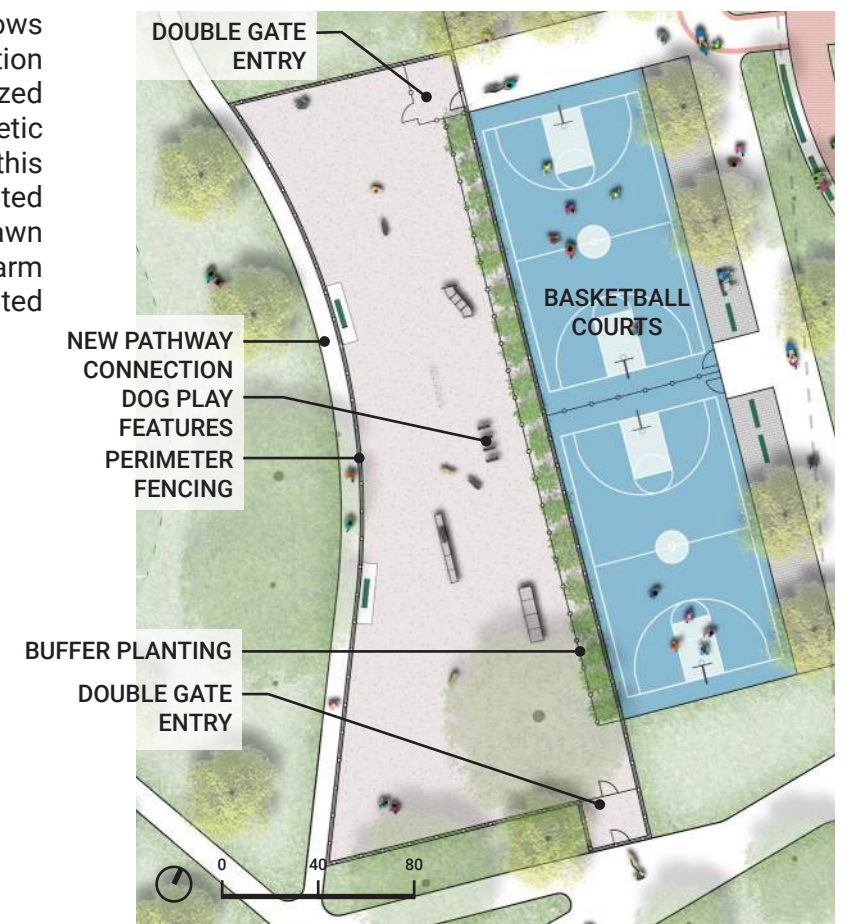


Above: View of the Railroad Mall off-leash panel  
Below: Proposed plan

## PROJECT GOALS MET:



The recommended court reconfiguration allows for an appropriately sized enclosed dog recreation area to be accommodated in the underutilized space between the new courts and the athletic fields. A dedicated space for dogs will remove this use from the lawn panels currently designated for the off-leash program. Many of these lawn panels are in high demand for use during the warm season, making it difficult for them to be rested and restored after off-leash dog use.



# 21 TADPOLE PLAYGROUND EXPANSION



Above: View of the existing Tadpole Playground  
Below: Proposed plan



## PROJECT GOALS MET:



An expanded Tadpole Playground will introduce more diverse and accessible play equipment that serves a wider range of ages and abilities. Upgrades will include a secondary gate at Brimmer Path, accessible connections from Brimmer Path to the Frog Pond, dedicated stroller parking, improved seating options, and tree protection. Under these recommendations, the Tadpole Playground's footprint would increase from roughly 5,500 square feet to around 15,000 square feet, which will better meet the demands on this important park feature.



Above: Existing views of Tadpole Playground



# OPERATIONAL AND MANAGEMENT UPGRADES



For the Common to better serve recreational, cultural, and civic needs for the city, its level of use must be matched by an equally high level of care. Carefully calibrating this balance between use and care will be central to any future development of Boston Common, as the enjoyment of the space is contingent on how well the physical landscape is managed and maintained. Today, some areas of the park either meet or exceed their carrying capacity while other areas are underutilized.

A clear park management program will provide a framework for operational and management policies and practices that can support the complex needs of this intensively used and dynamic park. While it is necessary to build upon the good work of the 1996 Management Plan (and many items from that plan are relevant today), it is important to recognize that needs change over time, and management protocols must have the flexibility to respond to new issues and conditions in the future. Upgraded operations protocols will ensure that the efforts of all park personnel are working in concert with one another. Thinking about these management recommendations as interconnected is essential in shaping a maintenance program tailored to the Common that guarantees the continued use and enjoyment of the park by all its visitors.

Above: Existing view of the Deer Park Maintenance Yard



## ESTABLISH PARK MANAGEMENT PROTOCOLS

To sustain a public park as historically significant and intensively used as the Boston Common, effective management protocols tailored to the park must be set in place. The intricacies inherent to the park will be matched by an equally nuanced management plan - one that is guided by an overall vision and broad administrative improvements, but also that tackles specific challenges the Common faces, such as vending, vehicular access, event use, and visitor safety. Though varied in scope, each of these recommendations will contribute to a more enjoyable park experience while remaining flexible and responsive to a changing future.

### Regional Park Administrator



### Vending Management Upgrades



### Vehicular Access and Control



### Visitor Safety and Support Services



## IMPROVE SUPPORT FACILITIES

Maintenance operations facilitate activity in the park at nearly every level, from programming to athletics to passive enjoyment. To ensure that the public face of the Common functions seamlessly, these maintenance operations must be supported. Physical improvements will aid daily efforts and include the expansion and general upgrading of Deer Park Maintenance Yard, procuring better equipment and storage areas, and increasing the maintenance team's capacity by providing trainings and additional staff. A park's physical character and functioning must be cultivated and continually cared for by equipping the Common's maintenance team with the tools they need to improve the overall park experience for visitors.

### Deer Park Maintenance Yard Expansion and Upgrades



### Better Equipment and Storage Facilities



### Expanded Maintenance Capacity



## STRENGTHEN DAILY AND SPECIAL EVENT MANAGEMENT

As the heart of downtown Boston, the Common must support a wide variety of programs and events. New daily and special event management strategies will equip the park with tools to host these events without overburdening the landscape. An improved event management system, comprehensive permitting application and event planning process will ensure better event execution and post-event recovery. Capacity restrictions for certain venues, temporary landscape protections, and mitigation strategies will ensure that the park's long-term health is sustained. It will establish a process that better serves the needs of both the people and the landscape.

### Improvements to the Existing Permitting System



### Capacity Restrictions



### Landscape Recovery Methods



### Temporary Protections



### Event Mitigation Fees



Note: For a description of the icons, see page 4.





# BOSTON COMMON

## MASTER PLAN

### DEPLOY COMMON-WIDE STRATEGIES

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- 2 Seating
- 3 Access and Wayfinding
- 4 Event Infrastructure

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- 6 Charles Street Mid-block Crossing at Mayor's Walk
- 7 Park Street Station Plaza
- 8 Boylston Street Station Plaza
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- 20 Enclosed Dog Recreation Area
- 21 Tadpole Playground Expansion





## MANY THANKS TO . . .

every stakeholder, city resident, tourist, and member of the public who contributed their time and input to the Boston Common Master Plan. Your provided feedback will help to shape the form and function of this beloved park for decades to come.



City of Boston  
*Parks and Recreation*



FRIENDS  
OF THE  
PUBLIC GARDEN

Weston & Sampson<sup>SM</sup>  
design studio