



CHARLES RIVER

conservancy

FOUR BRATTLE STREET
CAMBRIDGE MASSACHUSETTS
0 2 1 3 8

617 608 1410 t
617 491 1245 f

crc@thecharles.org
www.thecharles.org

Mayor Marty Walsh
Transition Team on Open Space and the Environment
Boston City Hall
One City Hall Square
Boston, MA 02201

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Re: Comments for forum on Open Space and the Environment

January 8, 2014

Dear Mayor Walsh and the Open Space and the Environment Transition Team,

My name is Jessica Parsons and I am the Director of Projects for the Charles River Conservancy. Dedicated to the stewardship, renewal, and enhancement of the urban parklands along the Charles River, the mission of our 14-year old organization with over 25,000 members and volunteers is to make this urban waterfront more active, attractive and accessible to all.

I want to start by thanking all the Committee members for your time and thoughtful attention to shaping the future of our city in regards to the environment and Open Space. Our parks are critical to the vitality, livability, health and economy of Boston. The focus of this letter is on the Charles River Parklands—the urban parklands along the Boston side of the river between Boston Harbor and the Watertown Dam that include extensive stretches of open space, like Herter Park in Allston. **All of these parks are linked together by the Dr. Paul Dudley White bike path, which is in dire need of improvement and reinvestment.**

Many people don't know that the parklands along the Charles are actually state-owned and managed by the Department of Conservation and Recreation. This creates a more complicated scenario, because DCR, a state agency whose budget has decreased by 20% in the last 5 years, is simply too strapped for resources to keep up with the maintenance needs of the urban parks and parkways in Boston. We urge you to:

- 1. Invest in a deeper partnership with the State to collaboratively maintain and enhance the resources that we depend on for enjoyment, for daily travel, and for tourism:**

Our city continues to grow, with a population that is young and active, and commuters who are increasingly choosing to walk or bike, often using the parklands to get between home and work. As more institutional, commercial and residential development happens, we should see community benefits extending to maintenance of open space and parklands, including those managed by the State.

The Charles River corridor is heavily traveled by both recreators and commuters, and the parklands are enjoyed by millions of people per year. For example, **the City of Cambridge is now expanding a “public/public partnership” with DCR** to maintain and improve Magazine Beach, and the same model of site adoption could apply to the

City of Boston.

2. Support the addition of Pedestrian Underpasses at the Anderson, River and Western Bridges:

Last week, in newspaper articles across the country, there were countless photos of the Charles in fog, in ice or snow as a backdrop to runners or cyclists braving the weather. With a new advocacy campaign to work with MassDOT to add pedestrian underpasses at 3 bridges along the Boston side of the river as part of the Accelerated Bridge Program, we have a huge opportunity to **create 7 miles of uninterrupted pathway along the Dr. Paul Dudley White bike path**. This campaign for adding these critical safety improvements to Anderson Memorial, River St. and Western Ave bridges has been supported by both elected and appointed city officials to date, including former transportation Commissioner Tinlin and Chief of Environment and Energy Brian Swett.

With this and other projects, a strong partnership between the city and DCR is essential. We all know that open space belongs to everyone. The Charles is a symbol of Boston, and the city has a responsibility to work with DCR to ensure there are adequate resources to maintain Boston's river parklands. And our new mayor has years of experience in the State Legislature—we hope to see him leverage the relationships he already has. **I urge you to prioritize collaboration with DCR so that the Charles River Parklands that call Boston home can continue to be a signature resource for our city.**

Thank you the opportunity to comment,

Jessica Parsons
Director of Projects

Charles River Conservancy
jparsons@thecharles.org
617-300-8164