

MMOC Meeting Minutes
November 15, 2023, ZOOM Meeting, 6:00-7:30pm
As Approved January 10, 2024
Minutes prepared by Matt Eddy, MMOC Administrator

Member Attendees:

- Kelly Brilliant, Elisabeth Cianciola, Elton Elperin, Jan Henderson, Parker James, Lisa Kumpf, Arleyn Levee, Karen Mauney-Brodek, Marilyn Ray Smith, Tom Timmons, Freddie Veikley; Matt Eddy (MMOC Administrator).

Other Attendees:

- Erin Baker (ENC), Caroline Reeves.

Phase 2 Updates:

- During the first week of November, Work Areas 3 and 4 (upper Riverway Park) and 7, 8, and 9 (upper Fens) were inspected by the nonfederal sponsors, Charter, and the Army Corps. With the exception of some small areas where turf establishment is poor, these areas were deemed acceptable and have now been transferred to local control – Brookline Parks and Open Space and Boston Parks and Recreation. Construction fencing has been removed, opening up stone-dust paths for pedestrian use. Access to the Mother’s Rest Playground has been re-established.
- Boston Parks conducted an extensive clean-up of areas adjacent to the construction fences before they came down – with the intent of creating visual continuity between Project areas and adjacent BPRD lands. This effort has been successful in creating a sense of a well-tended park. Another clean-up is planned later in the year after all the leaves have fallen.
- Boston Parks and Recreation Department will prepare a Phase 2 maintenance contract (modeled after the Phase 1 contract) and put it out to bid in early December. The contract is expected to begin January 1, 2024.
- Temporary fencing will remain around the non-accepted turf areas; those will continue to be Charter’s responsibility for at least one more year. In some cases, reseeded areas outside any fencing (e.g. upland areas at Work Area 4 near Netherlands Rd) will continue to be managed by Charter. The focus will be on soil decompaction.
- Tom Timmons stated that Boston Parks has determined that the existing 4-ft black fences will remain in place. Locks have been removed from gates, so the public has access to areas inside the fences, but the fences will guide pedestrian activity and potentially reduce impacts by geese.
 - Tom’s point produced a lively exchange. Some MMOC members expressed their feeling that the fences were not in line with the Olmsted aesthetic and otherwise presented a psychological barrier (if not a physical barrier) between the public and the river’s edge. Others felt that the fences were useful but not visually attractive.

- Tom noted that the fences are easier to remove than to reinstall. He reiterated a “wait and see” approach.
- Karen Mauney-Brodek is interested in having a map of which fences are up and which have been (or will be) removed. There was no clear determination as to what organization would undertake building such a map, but it may be an internal ENC project.
- The issue of fencing was tabled for discussion at a future meeting.
- A number of questions were raised regarding installation of public signage – at fenced-in lawn panels, at the Phragmites-dominated areas along Agassiz Rd, and at areas where low fences will remain in place.
 - It was suggested that the signs include a QR code pointing passersby to the MMOC website and the summary of Phrag management plans posted there. Other MMOC members expressed their desire to keep signage to a minimum.
 - Tom Timmons agreed to speak with Charter about the possibility of their paying for/installing signage at Agassiz Rd, noting that the area will be Charter’s responsibility for another two years.
 - Questions and recommendations related to signage will be referred to the MMOC Communications Subcommittee for further discussion.
- The question of whether Agassiz Rd would be returned to use by auto traffic was raised. While no one had definitive information, some MMOC members suggested that DCR/MassDOT were leaning towards keeping that area as bicycles-and-pedestrians-only.
- Freddie Veikley noted vigorous undesirable vine growth on the west side of the lagoon at Work Area 9 (near the War Memorials). Tom responded that this area is outside the boundaries of the Project but that he would communicate with Josh Altidor (General Superintendent of Parks Maintenance) to ask what might be possible there.
- Charter’s Phase 2 ribbon-cutting ceremony is scheduled for Wednesday, November 29 at 11AM at the Duck House along Agassiz Rd. Elected officials have been contacted and are expected to attend. Kelly Brilliant will speak briefly on behalf of the MMOC.
- Activity related to unhoused persons has increased, especially near Charlesgate. This activity often leads to large amounts of trash entering the river. Kelly Brilliant agreed to bring this to Patrice Kish’s attention.
- Caroline Reeves noted that floating trash at the Watergoat has been intermittent; it’s not clear where the trash goes.

Phase 1 updates:

- The Phase 1 area looks to be in good condition overall. Discussions as to the future management of the Brookline Ave area (the “Moonscape”) are ongoing in the Landscape Maintenance Subcommittee.

Water levels in Riverway Park:

- Matt Eddy showed recent photos of the exposed mudflats in the areas downstream of the Chapel St Footbridge. They grow and shrink in extent based on variations in water level associated with closure/opening of the New Charles River Dam.
- Kelly Brilliant summarized her recent communications with Bonnie Heiple, MassDEP Commissioner, in regards to the letter sent by the MMOC to Ms. Heiple's office expressing concerns about the health of the river ecosystem in that area. Ms. Heiple had been waiting for the Army Corps to provide its final report before replying. Kelly is now working with Ms. Heiple's staff to schedule a meeting in the next few weeks.
 - Marilyn Ray Smith asked why Ms. Heiple was the primary contact and not Rebecca Tepper, EOEEA Secretary. Kelly replied that that had been the recommendation of Kurt Gaertner.
 - Lisa Kumpf added that the relevant permit for work in the area where the cofferdam used to be had been issued by MassDEP, and it was MassDEP representatives who had accepted the Army Corps' work upon completion. The MMOC is seeking to contest MassDEP's decision.
- Lisa Kumpf noted that Mary Mancini (of CDM-Smith) has reached out to her to ask for CRWA's help in monitoring environmental conditions at the former cofferdam site.
- Marilyn recommended that the MMOC reach out directly to elected representatives including those at the federal level who have influence over the Army Corps' activities. Kelly replied that likelihood is high that the next strategic phase would be contacting additional legislators at both the state and federal levels.
- Arleyn Levee reminded the full MMOC that we ought not to lose sight of concerns that extend beyond water level, including aesthetic and health concerns.

Updates on Other Local Projects:

- Charlesgate/Bowker 25% Design community meeting: Parker James summarized MassDOT's presentation of the 25% design phase at a recent community meeting. He gave a mixed review of the plan but felt the direction of the plan is better than it might have been. Karen reinforced Parker's mixed review.
 - MassDOT has received letters both in support of and in opposition to the current proposal. Letters of support have been sent from ENC, Fenway Alliance, CRWA, Charlesgate Alliance, and Fenway Civic, among others. The possibility of the MMOC writing its own letter was discussed.
 - The focus is on impervious surface reduction and green stormwater infrastructure.
 - There were some concerns that the plan would cause cyclists to be diverted into the Back Bay Fens instead of promoting bicycle traffic along Commonwealth Ave and Beacon St.
- Back Bay Fens Pathways Project virtual community meeting: This was taking place as the MMOC was meeting. Additional updates will be available at a subsequent MMOC meeting.

- 1400 Boylston St. (Star Market site): BPDA website shows the most recent concept drawings. The design includes 553,000 square feet of mixed-use development with at least one building extending to 11 stories. The project will include public parkland and a one-story public library. The buildings are set back 100 feet from the Parkway (per Parkway Ordinance). The buildings will not cast shadows on the Muddy River.
 - Freddie, Lisa, and Elton Elperin volunteered to assist in further reviewing the project and, if appropriate, drafting a letter on behalf of the MMOC.

Subcommittee Reports:

- The Water Quality Subcommittee met with Mary Mancini in late October to finalize details related to post-construction water quality monitoring. Water quality will be monitored at approximately 13 sites, per the SFEIR. The Subcommittee continues to examine MS4 data from the Town of Brookline and attend to DCR's Notice of Intent regarding improvement of stormwater outfalls that enter the Muddy River.
- The Landscape Maintenance Subcommittee has prepared a concept proposal for the "Moonscape" area near Brookline Ave in Phase 1. This area has been difficult to manage, as pedestrian traffic is high, desire paths are well established, and exposure to the elements is severe; neither trees nor turf have thrived here. The proposal – which emphasizes a pivot to a more naturalistic and lower-maintenance "meadow-like" ecosystem – has been delivered to Ryan Woods and Boston Parks and Recreation Department.

Public Comment:

- Caroline Reeves asked that any future changes to MMOC meeting dates be more widely publicized so the public can attend. Kelly apologized for the oversight in this case and said that all future changes to meeting dates would be posted proactively on the MMOC website.

MMOC Member Business:

- Following motion by Lisa Kumpf and second by Freddie Veikley, minutes for the MMOC meeting for October 11, 2023, were approved by unanimous vote (with abstentions from those who were not present for that meeting). Final copies of the minutes will be distributed to MMOC members and will be available on the MMOC website.

Upcoming MMOC Meetings:

- Weds, January 10, 2024, 6:00 PM

Adjourned 7:30PM