

General Report on Community Input

Speaking Up, Being Heard: An Esplanade 2020 Community Input Session

January 20th, 2010

Boston Public Library

Sponsored by The Esplanade Association

In collaboration with the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation

During the January 20th *Speaking Up, Being Heard* community input session, participants were asked to self-select into one of eight breakout groups, which were ordered by particular thematic areas relevant to the Esplanade: Lower Park; Center Park; Upper Park; Programs and activities; Architecture and structures; Landscape and horticulture; Access and pathways; or Communication, wayfinding, and safety.

Guided by their chosen theme, participants were invited to share with their group any opinions on park strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement. Individuals were also asked to record their thoughts on color-coded index cards, which were collected by the breakout session facilitators. At the conclusion of the session, a representative from each group reported back key findings to the broader audience.

TEA has compiled the public's comments, both as key points (i.e. those which were reported by group representatives at the meeting) and as categorized raw data (i.e. the comments recorded on the color-coded index cards). These documents are available on TEA's website, at: <http://esplanadeassociation.org/news/index.html>.

As could be expected, there were many ideas that intersected the boundaries of the eight breakout groups. For example, issues related to pathway conditions and access points were mentioned repeatedly in nearly every thematic area. Moreover, there was a great deal of crossover between topics identified as "weaknesses" and those noted as "opportunities." These perspectives are essentially two sides of the same coin—that which is considered a challenge or limitation should also be thought of as an opening for improvement and change. Case in point: while the decaying docks at Community Boating (CBI) is indeed a weakness of the Esplanade, so too is the prospect of rebuilding them an opportunity.

What follows is a review of the dominant, most-frequently discussed issues from the *Speaking Up, Being Heard* breakout sessions, ordered alphabetically and as recorded by the evening's participants.

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The following pages represent a distillation of recurring ideas from the *Speaking Up, Being Heard* community input session.

Access: Access to and from the Esplanade is thought to be cumbersome, difficult for people with disabilities, and in some cases, dangerous. The pedestrian footbridges are hard to find, inadequate in their ADA compliance, and too sparsely spread through the park. At-grade entry points into the park would improve these conditions, as would access to and from the Longfellow, BU, and Harvard (Mass Ave) Bridges.

Café: Café Esplanade holds little appeal to many people; it represents an underutilized, poorly situated snack bar with marginal food choices. A café that stands in a more attractive area, serving better food with improved amenities (such as wi-fi) would improve the café's standing and make it a park destination that people look forward to visiting.

Charles River: The Charles River is what makes the Esplanade appealing, but it should be better celebrated and capitalized upon. Water taxis, more river docks, and kayak/boat rentals would increase activity on the water sheet. Furthermore, the Charles River's water quality has improved over the years, and there is significant desire to facilitate swimming in or near the river.

Community Boating Docks: The docks at Community Boating (CBI) are in generally poor condition, and their rehabilitation or replacement are of great import to many park users. The sailing programs at CBI are immensely popular, and it is critical that the docks be improved.

Connections to Parklands: The Esplanade is cut off from the Public Garden, Boston Common, Muddy River, and Emerald Necklace, among other green spaces. Connections should be made (or improved) so as improve circulation between parks. Such connections would be a realization of the interconnected system of parklands envisioned by Frederick Law Olmstead in his original design of the Boston Metropolitan Park system.

Event Programming: The Esplanade is thought to be a three-season park, as there are few park activities during the winter months. People would like to see more, seasonally-diverse programs that target both youth and adults.

Facilities and Structures: Facilities such as the Lee Pool and Dartmouth Street Pavilion stand unused, and are an eyesore to many park users. The buildings should be restored and reprogrammed to offer active space (Lee Pool) and an additional comfort station/restroom (Dartmouth St. Pavilion).

Landscape: The Esplanade's landscape is in mediocre condition, with dying trees, chewed turf, and an apparent lack of a planting scheme. Attention to the historic landscape should be paid, and landscape management practices must be improved.

Pathways: The Esplanade's pathways are widely thought to be too narrow, and there is far too much conflict between cyclists/rollerbladers and pedestrians. While the pathways provide a great linear flow of movement through the park, there needs to be better segregation of fast and slow moving traffic. Such separation will not only improve the safety, but also the experience of all pathway users, whether they are moving quickly or slowly.

Public Art: Aside from the park's several memorials, there is little art on the Esplanade. The installation of public art works – be it sculpture, lighting installations, or environmentally responsive art – would generate greater park interest within the community and make the Esplanade a greater tourist draw.

Restrooms: The shortage of restrooms in the park was widely disparaged, as was the lack of open restroom facilities during the winter months. More bathrooms would improve the comfort of park visitors, and should be installed in the upper park, as well as near facilities such as the Stoneman playground and Teddy Ebersol's Red Sox Fields.

Play Space: There should be more children and family-friendly activities in the park, and additional play spaces would enhance the Esplanade's capacity to serve these groups. There is particular interest in creating a play space near the Hatch Shell.

Safety: While the park is not considered unsafe, improved lighting and security at dusk and later at night would enhance visitor safety. Similarly, the installation of police call boxes and the presence of a first aid station would benefit park users.

Signage: There is a noticeable lack of wayfinding signage both inside and out of the Esplanade. A dedicated, comprehensive system of signs and maps would bring people into the park, and would help them navigate the space, find entry and exit points, and generally improve their park experience.

Storrow Drive: Storrow Drive is perceived to be a burden to the parkland, contributing to noise and environmental pollution that render portions of the Esplanade unusable. Eliminating a lane of Storrow Drive for bicycle traffic; slowing down traffic; creating at-grade crossing points; building landforms to mitigate traffic noise: each of these ideas may help to alleviate the effects of the parkway on the parkland.

Swimming: Creating swimming pools in the river itself, building swimming pavilions or docks, and the renovation of the Lee Pool are all of importance to park users.