



BOSTON COMMON

MASTER PLAN

FROM: Boston Common Master Plan Team

DATE: October 1st, 2020

SUBJECT: Open House #3 - Discussion Forum #4 Summary Notes: Gateways and Edges

Panelists: Nate Frazee, *Boston Parks and Recreation Department (BPRD)*
Liz Vizza, *Friends of the Public Garden (FOPG)*
Cheri Ruane, *Weston & Sampson (W&S)*

This Discussion Forum consisted of a brief panelist introduction followed by a summary with supporting slides of the existing proposed conditions of gateways and edges including Park Street Plaza, Charles Mid-Block entrance, and the Beacon and Charles Street entrance.

Bike Traffic

- **Attendee:** I am wondering about bicycles: Beacon Street & Charles Street need to be designed for varied bicycle access.
 - **Panelist:** The Boston Transportation Department (BTD) has been doing a thorough study of bicycle access in Downtown Boston. BTD has proposed a bike lane on Charles and Tremont Street (with a test of this proposed bike line happening now). There is opportunity to separate bike traffic from pedestrian traffic to limit dangerous situations. The master plan will propose that bike traffic be limited to outside the park footprint.
- **Attendee:** Why does the proposed bike lane not run up Beacon Street? Charles and Beacon is a dangerous intersection, and the sidewalk is narrow. Traffic calming is needed along the edges.
 - **Panelist:** Slope and car parking proposes challenges along that edge, so it has not been included in the proposed plan. The pilot bike lanes along Charles, Boylston, and Tremont seem to be a success so far.
- **Attendee:** As a bicyclist and park enthusiast I understand the need for quiet space within the park, but I am worried about bike access and safety with heavy traffic. Jamaica Pond comes to mind. A path parallel to Beacon may ensure bike safety along that edge. Is the sidewalk on Beacon Street wide enough to offer a bike lane?
 - **Panelist:** We will consider it as an exception to the rule. It would be nice to solve access from Charles and Beacon to the State House. The BTD study of cyclist counters proved that not many people use Beacon Street due to the steep incline, but they have not arrived at a strong consensus for that area.

Arrival / Entry Sequence

- **Panelist:** What does it feel like when you enter this park? What are some priorities that you would like the master plan to tackle first? Do any entrances feel problematic visually or functionally?



Attendee: I live on Beacon Street, so I am intrigued to hear more about Park Street. There are quite a few troubled people congregating in that area. Pedestrians do not observe the traffic lights, I would love to see a more organized and restrained entrance.

- **Panelist:** More visually striking gateways will announce your arrival at the park and accessibility improvements will help organize the vast space. BTD also has plans to improve crosswalks and pedestrian movements with the proposed bike lane along Tremont Street.
- **Attendee:** The Winter Street entrance does not feel safe, and leaves people feeling that they have not arrived well. Think about how buses sit at that edge too
 - **Panelist:** BTD is studying better crossings at Winter Street both into the park and into the greater downtown area. BTD and the master plan team want to maintain seamless connections for pedestrians.
- **Attendee:** It would be great to extend the look and feel of the Common into the downtown area. I am concerned about safety issues at Liberty Mall and Park Street. I would also like to see a more formal framing of the State House from Park Street, which might have an impact to change the way people use the space (drive out undesirable activity).
- **Attendee:** Boylston/Tremont should be included in the main entrance study as well.
 - **Panelist:** We certainly will include thinking for this area in the master plan.
- **Attendee:** Is there a schematic for the Park Street Station plaza?
 - **Panelist:** Yes, we have been looking to the Government Center as a precedent to create a more elegantly sloped plaza, to reorganize vending, and to improve the paving. The whole area/plaza is considered the “entrance.”

Vehicles on the Common

- **Panelist:** Controlling cars is important at Charles and Beacon; we want to limit access to approved vehicles only.
- **Attendee:** I walk on the Common and do not like the large trucks. I would like to see more, smaller electric vehicles that fit better with the pathways and are not as intimidating to pedestrians.
 - **Panelist:** BPRD is exploring alternative vehicles (electric) throughout the parks system. A pilot program just launched so we will be exploring similar options at the Common.
- **Attendee:** The Arnold Arboretum is moving toward electric vehicles; the master plan team may want to talk to them to understand their strategy and see if there is opportunity to share ideas.
 - **Panelist:** Great idea but we will need to consider these items as they are specific to each park location. We are advocates for moving toward sustainably powered vehicles system wide.

Public Art / Memorials

- **Attendee:** Would love to see some beautiful statue or artwork to help convey the history of the Common potentially at Park Street. Are more statues and artwork being considered for the master plan? Is it within the budget or project goals? Are any statues under siege?
 - **Panelist:** We are discussing art on the Common with the Boston Arts Commission. They have partnered with researchers on studies of the Common which analyze social issues with the Shaw 54th Memorial and other monuments ([link to study here](#)). The master plan team defers to the Arts Commission to speak to the future of the Common, currently a moratorium is in place to limit any new structures.
- **Attendee:** Is the King Memorial still going up?



- **Panelist:** Regulatory processes and private funding allow for the King Memorial to be installed near the VIC in the short-term. The King has been a different process than other monuments; it is the only exception to the current moratorium. The Common and Public Garden continue to attract proposals for new memorials given their prominence in the downtown area. We are striving for balance between built and unbuilt stories being told as we look to the future of this park and other parks in Boston. Monuments and the stories they tell are part of a national discourse right now, so decisions about the existing and future monuments, statues, and plaques on the Common is larger than this master planning process.

Accessibility

- **Attendee:** As a driver, it is important to drive carefully / bike safely along Beacon Street (bikers flying down the hill) especially with cars parked on both sides.
 - **Panelist:** We are studying the accessibility of Beacon Street Mall to the Shaw 54th Memorial and are working with MBTA to develop a cohesive concept plan. Boston Public Works Department (BPWD) is working with MBTA and the Shaw 54th study. BTM is still working through their study of Beacon Street as well.
- **Attendee:** Why is there such a steep grade along Beacon and Walnut and at State House? Was it engineered?
 - **Panelist:** There has always been significant grade change across the Common, with the high point along Beacon Street. There is opportunity for switchbacks up that bank to allow for accessible pathways up to the State House. That is a priority item, but we are working with limited funding. Support from the MBTA and BPWD will be needed to implement these improvements.
- **Attendee:** Mechanical solution to this area is not a good idea since it will most likely breakdown.
 - **Panelist:** Correct, a switchback also allows for more users than a mechanical elevator. We are coordinating with partner agencies on this project.

Site-wide systems (i.e. Lighting, Tree Planting, Vending)

- **Attendee:** Does the Shaw 54th Memorial rehabilitation include better lighting? That part of the Common is dark.
 - **Panelist:** The master plan will advocate for increased lighting at park features as well as for general wayfinding. Wayfinding and interpretation are also being considered. The improvements should not litter the landscape with signs, so we are considering the possibility of interactive web-based information to share stories of the Common.
- **Attendee:** I would like to see as many added trees as possible.
 - **Panelist:** We understand the need and opportunity to frame views and fill in gaps where trees were previously eliminated due to poor health. We want to manage the current poor health of trees and replace them with resilient, native candidates.
- **Attendee:** What would the vending stations be? Do you know if they will be moveable or permanent?
 - **Panelist:** While not yet designed, they need to be more beautiful and in keeping with the park's aesthetic. We plan to share images that help to visualize what they could look and feel like. We will also identify areas where they make the most sense and ensure they meet long-term and short-term goals for the Common's vending program and administrators.



- End of Discussion Forum #4 Summary Notes -