There are moments in the history of a city when decisive, integrated actions, regarding urban form, infrastructure and the natural environment, if taken, can lead to immediate and long term benefits to the city and its inhabitants.

**Now is such a time for Boston’s Allston Landing.**

To not act boldly and critically with regard to what is possible in this district will be remembered by future generations as at best a lost opportunity and more damningly as a failure of civic imagination.
Building on the work of many others, a set of core design principles form the foundation stones of this Vision:

1. To balance environmental, transportation and community objectives with open space goals through integrated planning and design.

2. To increase economic benefit for all concerned: the landowner, investors, neighbors, abutting universities and the general public.

3. To organize this new waterside community around a safe, pleasant and inviting open space infrastructure of enhanced regional pathways and strong local connections leading to large, destination, open space features.

4. To build safe transit, pedestrian and biking connections to the adjacent neighborhoods.

5. To be guided and shaped by progressive urban design objectives:
   - Enhanced social, recreational, pedestrian, bike transit, fitness and river use
   - Eco-habitats for a variety of native wildlife
   - Transit-oriented development
   - Mixed-income neighborhoods with walk-to-work and walk-to-school opportunities
   - Climate change protection and resiliency against water-level rise and storm surges
   - Enrichment of the natural environment and existing neighborhoods
   - “Best Practices”, day-lighted stormwater treatment for improved water quality of the river.

The Charles River Basin is our most integrating and orienting urban open space resource. The state, in concert with the owner, Harvard University, will be making decisions over the next few months that will set the boundaries of this river’s potential to serve this urban area for the next one hundred years.

Through circumstance, the Phase One I-90 renewal project has not fully investigated the opportunities that this site offers for both environmental improvement and open space enhancement.

This central part of our Boston region deserves an intelligent, inclusive and comprehensive plan now!

CAN THIS VISION BEGIN THAT PROCESS?

Preface

Over the past 3 years, many organizations and individuals have shared their thoughts, ideas and dreams about how to best redevelop the former Beacon Yards, an area that occupies nearly 3/4 mile of riverfront along the Charles.

The I-90 Allston Interchange Improvement Project began as a straight-forward, but complicated, transportation reconstruction initiative. It has been much improved through strong input from Harvard University, continuous citizen involvement, a Boston Society of Architects charrette, academic studio investigations, proposals from advocates for affordable housing development and bike/pedestrian access, and a place-making study by the Boston Planning and Development Agency.

This Allston Landing visioning effort, however, is the first attempt to integrate the recommendations and desires of all involved into a workable, holistic vision for this site, uniquely placed in the center of our urban area and along the very special urban Charles River.

This vision describes how a set of agreed upon design principles and four core open space elements combine to create an interconnected open space framework that can organize the entire site, while fulfilling fundamental design principles. It concludes with five specific requests to Harvard and MassDOT to take the lead in fulfilling the Vision.

This Vision looks at the whole of this development from the perspective of the River, its flora and fauna... its parklands and the open space connections to the surrounding community. It’s a good start, but it needs to be followed up with an officially sponsored Master Plan for the area, ideally in an open public/private partnership.
Making the Most of Allston Landing

From the 19th-century Watertown dam to Boston Harbor, the Charles River winds its way in front of some of the best education and health sciences institutions in the world, along densely packed neighborhoods with sailboats and rowing shells skimming the water's surface, past its bridges, lagoons, and such beloved venues as the Hatch Shell, the Community Boat House and the Boston Museum of Science. The Charles is an attractive, connective ten-mile corridor running through the heart of our urban area.

That is... except for a stretch right in the center...

Gratefully, however, several years ago, Harvard acquired Beacon Yards intending to develop it in the coming decades. In December, MassDOT submitted its Draft Environmental Impact Review for I-90, rail and roadway reconstruction that runs through this area and along the Charles River.

The Allston and Cambridgeport communities have been very involved in this planning effort, as have a number of agencies, not-for-profit interest groups and individuals. Together, they have significantly improved this narrowly focused transportation improvement project.

If the recommendations of these groups are integrated into this transportation upgrade, there will be much better connections between Allston, Boston University, Commonwealth Avenue, Longwood and Brookline, to the south and the river, its parklands and Cambridge to the north.

Working together, beyond the narrow scope of this MassDOT process and this Vision, we can accomplish much to lessen negative impacts and increase enjoyment...

However, to do this, we need a collaborative and comprehensive master plan for all of Allston Landing
Setting the Open Space Framework...

Conceptual Site Use Program

Interconnected open space is at the center of a general-use plan for the Beacon Yards area. Allston Landing is imagined as comprised of four use zones within a transportation-oriented development (TOD district). Each zone has its own characteristics, attributes, and champions.

- **River Park**: A new ‘central park’ spanning the most geographic and most populous stretch of the Charles River Basin, including a new park node, Allston Meadows.

- **Allston at Salt Creek**: A new mixed-use, mixed-income residential-retail neighborhood

- **Table Top**: The core mixed-use (commercial, office, research, retail) development centered around West Station Transportation Center, built largely on air-rights

- **BU River Village (air rights)**: Potential air-rights development in the narrow Throat area, accessible from BU and Commonwealth Avenue

Four core Open Space Elements

In addition to pedestrian/bike paths, neighborhood parks and playgrounds, this Vision identifies four critical, interconnected open-space elements that maximize river access to boating and activity nodes along the river.

1. River Park on the Charles
2. West Station Plaza on Table Top
3. People’s Pike at Salt Creek
4. Allston Esplanade and the possible ‘BU High Line’
River Park on the Charles

In this Vision, a new 6-acre park node in Allston, (Allston Meadows), coupled with Magazine Beach across the Charles, engages the river with its neighborhoods in new ways, both on the water and along its banks, creating a new central, destination river park sited in both Cambridge and Allston.

As shown, Allston Meadows could include a large grassy field for picnics, events and recreation; a quiet cove at the mouth of the reopened and restored Salt Creek providing additional turning space for rowing events; a performance ring with a grand staircase/seating to West Station Plaza, a year-round restaurant/activity space at the water’s edge, a ferry landing with docks, a segment of a replanted and expanded Allston Esplanade, and convenient pedestrian connections from all of the above to Boston University and Commonwealth Avenue.

Allston Meadows can be wide enough and large enough to support a wide variety of land and water activities for people throughout the Region!

Allston Meadows nearly triples the width and size of parkland proposed in this area.
next, create exciting New Ways to the River...

Via West Station Plaza ...

This Vision proposes that West Station be built as a major transportation hub with intercity Commuter Rail and local light rail serving North, South and Back Bay stations, bus and taxi service to points in Cambridge, Allston, Longwood and Brookline, and a seasonal, no-wake river ferry along the Charles.

The lively West Station Plaza provides a direct connection to Cambridge, Boston, Harvard, BU and MIT via an attractive bridge plaza over the rail and roadways (like Harvard’s Plaza over the Broadway underpass linking the Science Center with Harvard Yard) and leading down to the river as a large, well-used riverside park node for events, festivals, art displays, food trucks, or simple pedestrian accessways.

As the core of a Transit-Oriented District (TOD), the West Station transit hub, West Station Plaza, and the critical foundations supporting air rights should be built as a Phase One priority. Ultimately, development buildout and the required air rights structure would be the responsibility of private initiatives, similar to the process by which Copley Place was built above the Turnpike and its interchange ramps.

Heading home at the end of a busy day
Along Salt Creek Park...

Based on conversations with the Charles River Watershed Association, as a major environmental enhancement of the Charles River’s water quality, this park uncovers and reroutes Salt Creek, currently buried in a century-old underground viaduct. It proposes a day-lighted stormwater mitigation and treatment facility, similar to one recently completed at Alewife Brook. Overlaying this is the Allston neighborhood’s long-sought “People’s Pike,” a network of safe, generous bike and pedestrian pathways connecting Allston to the river, potentially grade-separated from vehicular traffic.

Along this open space spine in this low-lying part of the site, the owner, Harvard University, can create one of the nation’s most diverse and environmentally sustainable mixed-use communities by incorporating ‘best use’ practices across all of its social, physical and environmental aspects.

Salt Creek Park weaves resiliency, storm water treatment, bike and walking paths and lounging areas together.
and especially ... enliven the River’s edge

The Allston Esplanade
The Allston Esplanade can provide a lush greensward for the Paul Dudley White Bikeway. However, today, three areas pose significant challenges.

The Throat
This Vision urges reconstruction of roadways and railways at-grade, for reasons of cost, social and environmental impact, and development flexibility. Of the three options to be submitted in the DEIR, the abc alternative is judged preferable.

However, even when all other width dimensions are held to a minimum, less than 9 feet of width remains for parkland, even though 40 feet is the minimum width required for dedicated and separated bike and strolling lanes, landscaped buffer/rain gardens at the highway’s edge, along with wildlife habitats and intermittent docks at the water’s edge.

Given the narrowness of this part of the site, only two solutions would yield a generous, pleasant, safe park movement corridor for bikers and strollers through this area:

Alternative A- Expanding parkland into the river. This configuration, while ultimately the least costly to build and maintain, could delay the project. It would also impact the river environment, but ultimately could enrich the riverbanks for both wildlife and boaters.

Alternative B- A “High Line” styled belvedere above the highway. It would cost more than Alt ‘A’, but much less than an elevated 8 lane turnpike; however, it would minimize river impacts, provide better noise mitigation, and promote connectivity and air-rights development across this narrow neck.

NOTE: Both schemes would incorporate well-built, well-landscaped, full-height sound walls to reduce highway and railway noise, as does the sound wall along the Thomas J. Butler Freight Corridor and Memorial Park in South Boston.

By expanding into the river in this wide segment, one gains a better engineered wildlife interface, a public promenade at the river’s edge, seating and native landscaping, a dedicated bikeway and a day-lighted stormwater treatment corridor at lower cost than with other schemes. Fill might come from selective dredging of the Basin to improve boat movement.

Staying out of the river completely requires an elevated promenade above Soldiers Field Road. This allows for future BU air-rights development. In the future, an over-the-water walkway (similar to that found at Herter Park) would provide waterside access and, if built in Phase one, could provide an area for construction staging and an edge for continuous, day-lighted storm water treatment.
Grand Junction Bridge

This project includes reconstruction of Grand Junction Bridge, for the following reasons:
1. It will upgrade rail service into Cambridge, as a potential rail link from Cambridge to North Station.
2. The existing bridge is old, poorly maintained and in need of significant repair.
3. Both its horizontal and vertical alignments will likely need to shift in order to become a significant new public transitway into Cambridge and North Station.
4. The bridge’s present abutments prohibit development of pathways under the BU Bridge that could efficiently extend the Boston Esplanade pathway system upriver along the extensive Paul Dudley White Bikeway that runs the length of the Basin.
5. The reconstruction can eliminate a dangerous ‘kink’ in the path system by removing the existing narrow ‘over-water’ pedestrian/bicycle wooden bridge, with its poor sightlines and channel restrictions.
6. Removal of the wooden bridge would make it easier for boats to navigate the BU pier abutments. This should be a major priority for both the DCR and boaters.

Grand Junction Bridge today (above) and, in the future (below) incorporating park paths. In this view, the BU Belvedere sits atop the realigned Turn Pike (West bound)
River Street Intersection

This is one of the Allston Esplanade’s most unpleasant and unsafe stretches.

While MassDOT’s current recommendation to remove the west-bound off-ramp altogether appeals to bikers and park lovers, this is also a major access point for drivers into Cambridge. Two improvements could ease this situation and allow a single right-turn-only off-ramp to remain:

1. The Charles River Conservancy proposes a bike/pedestrian passage under River Street. Most bikers and pedestrians would then be safely separated from right turning vehicular traffic, thus facilitating these right turn movements for motorists. Since this bridge is in poor repair and in need of reconstruction, this project should dovetail closely with MassDOT’s planned Allston I-90 improvements.

2. Also, this Vision proposes not to make East Avenue an exit route for I-90 westbound, but to reroute that movement to Cattle Drive. This would facilitate traffic circulation off Soldiers Field Road by allowing a safer and easier right-turn, resulting in a shorter drive time, making it more desirable for motorists.
Concluding Thoughts

1. MassDOT Phase One scope should be limited to its core mission, i.e ...
   - I-90 reconstructed, (at-grade through the ‘Throat’), with only the key interchange roadways built now across the development area
   - Two track, through-rail serving South and North Stations
   - A new West Station, with full transportation services on air-rights plaza above
   - Bus, bike and pedestrian connections to Commonwealth Avenue and into Cambridge
   - Bike/footpath improvements at Lincoln Street and River Street Bridge
   - Landscaped sound walls adjacent residential areas and parkland.
   - First phase stormwater treatment infrastructure

This would allow time for comprehensive and integrated planning and permitting of the entire Allston Landing site and river improvements. Specifically, realignment of Soldiers Field Road west of the ‘Throat’ and storm water treatment configurations should not be implemented until this process is comprehensively planned.

2. We need an officially sponsored comprehensive Infrastructure Master Plan
This plan would finalize the scope, design intent and alignment of all public infrastructure: streets, roadways, transit facilities, parks and open space, bikeways and foot paths, docks and other river-side impacts. This would greatly facilitate future build-out.

As with the Storrow Drive tunnels at the Hatch Shell, inexpensive, interim repairs to the viaduct can be made to allow time for this more comprehensive approach. It will also provide time for any required permitting regarding the river.

In the meantime, we must find funding for early improvements—e.g., relocation of existing sewer and stormwater lines—to keep options open for a better final result.

3. There’s lot’s of money to be saved
   - The potential savings, both in capital ($70-100 Million) and lifecycle costs, of an at-grade solution as opposed to an elevated turnpike, can offset many other project’s costs.
   - The Vision’s initial capital costs will be more than offset by its long-term benefits, in terms of the increased attractiveness and economic value of the resulting development parcels, given their disposition along the river, which will contribute to the health and enjoyment of future generations.
   - Moreover, shortfalls appears to be modest enough for a strong public/private initiative to close much of the expense gap. There are examples all over the country.

What could still make a difference in Phase One?

With a few key moves, the Phase One, I-90 Improvement Project can set the stage, assuming Harvard and MassDOT ‘s collaboration, to insure eventual realization of the key components of this Open Space Vision.

1- Realign Soldiers Field Road, much further away from the River than currently proposed, to make room for a broad, new 6+acre, multi-purpose river-side parkland with mitigation as necessary to insulate the park and river from highway impacts, engaging the river and improving the water’s edge for boaters.

2- Reconsider Stormwater Treatment options- At Salt Creek Park and in the Throat, weave day-lighted, storm water treatment with dedicated bike and foot pathways into a pleasant linear park tapistry, from Allston to and along the river.

3- Support early construction of a multi-modal West Station Transportation Center in PHASE ONE and encourage significant TOD development on air-rights around the station and along BU in the ‘Throat’

4- Make Allston Esplanade a safe, pleasant and engaging activity corridor the length of the water’s edge: in the Throat Area, at Grand Junction Bridge and at River Street.

5- Rethink street alignments, connections, scale, hierarchy and well-landscaped pathways to maximize the Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) potential around West Station and connections to the river Parklands.
MAKING IT HAPPEN ...

1. Think and Plan comprehensively-

The physical form and details of this vision for Allston Landing represents the current understood desires of the community and the various interest groups and stakeholders. It is also based on today’s physical and financial realities. While these will evolve over the coming years, the core planning and design principles need not. It is important that development decisions be made in an open and inclusive manner. A well organized master planning process, led by a team free to examine all issues, opportunities and the desires of all interest groups can do this.

This is the largest and most significant development site in the heart of the Boston urban core. It deserves a comprehensive and holistic examination of the issues and opportunities involved in any work proposed impacting the river. This is particularly true regarding the ‘Throat’, Soldiers Field Road’s realignment, storm water treatment strategies. The need for better rail and bus service to serve both the existing community and new development is obvious.

This plan would finalize the scope, design intent and alignment of all public infrastructure: streets, roadways, transit facilities, parks and open space, bikeways and foot paths, docks and other riverside impacts.

As with the Storrow Drive tunnels at the Hatch Shell, inexpensive, interim repairs to the viaduct can be made to allow time for this more comprehensive approach. It will also provide time for any required permitting regarding the river.

The need for a more comprehensive study is well evidenced by a recent analysis by Sasaki Associates of the Throat area, organized by the Charles River Conservancy and WalkBoston and sponsored by the Solomon Fund. It clearly shows that, even in this small part of the site, how there are multiple solutions than better meet everyone’s goals than those currently proposed in the DEIR.

2. Establish Phase One priorities-

MassDOT and Harvard have priorities that differ from those of the Allston, Cambridgeport and river-user communities, making a comprehensive and inclusive master plan even more critical. Per the weight of community desires, and given the Phase One funding limitations, this Vision recommends the following items be included in Phase One:

- **Reconstruction of I-90 and mainline railways**- per the less costly ‘Throat’ configuration, i.e. the abc all-at-grade solution, with adequate space provided for future air-rights development the length of the ‘Throat”

- **Development of West Station and plaza complex**- This facility would include the open air-rights platform for bus operations and the central plaza leading to the river. Requests for proposals for development of the air rights immediately around the plaza could be issued upon completion of the master plan, thus coordinating initial development.

- **Bus, bike and pedestrian connections to Commonwealth Avenue**- At a minimum this includes a new connecting ramp to Malvern Street and potentially to either Alcorn or Babcock Streets.

- **Sound wall(s)**- Fully landscaped along any abutting residential properties and the riverside parklands

- **Mass Pike Off Ramps**- Make Cattle Drive and **not** East Drive the main exit from I-90 WB and Stadium Way the main exit from Mass Pike EB.

- **Storm water system**- Develop an interim storm water treatment strategy that allows a more innovative, day-lighted storm water solution in the future.

Due to funding constraints, we propose that final construction of three items of the present scope be delayed to a later phase and implemented per the results of the proposed master plan:

1. Realignment and reconstruction of Soldiers Fields Road west of the “Throat”
2. Streets within the development zone that are not critical for MassPike access and egress
3. Essential storm water treatment only
3. Finding the Funds-

Phase One is narrowly defined as rebuilding I-90 and its interchange as quickly and cheaply as possible. At a minimum, sponsors must be quickly found to fund:

- A comprehensive master planning effort
- Early improvements, e.g. relocation of existing sewer and stormwater lines, in order to keep options open for a better final result

MassDOT prefers the viaduct alternative through the ‘Throat’, in spite of the fact that its construction is estimated to be $70 to $100 million more than the abc-at-grade alternative. The savings by building at-grade (both construction and maintenance) could help fund West Station and bus/bike/pedestrian connections to Commonwealth Avenue.

Moreover, if reconstruction of Soldiers Field Road west of the ‘Throat’ were delayed until the master plan were complete, additional savings can be realized. By building the minimal internal street grid at this time even more funds can be available. It’s a matter of priorities.

We believe that with proper support from the state, a public/private partnership could garner substantial amounts of funds for public park and open space development. Several, similar initiatives are happening all over the country.

West Station and its core air rights development should be a first priority. Connecting it through parkland down to the river would enhance its economic viability and create year-round vitality.

This report presents sturdy, informed and broad–based evidence for a better solution.

Will the City, or Harvard, or the State, provide the means to help realize the best results – for all of us and the River?
Inspiration from other places

River Park
- Paris-Parc Citroen
- Zurich, Water’s Edge Playground

Salt Creek Park:
- Hamburg- Planten un Blomen
- Boston- Muddy River Daylighted

West Station
- Bethesda- DC Metro Center
- Seattle- Air Rights in Freeway Park

Allston Esplanade
- Indianapolis- Canal State Park
- Columbus, OH- Scioto Mile Riverway
Inspiration from other places

Hamburg- Hafen City Resiliency

San Francisco- Union Square

Boston- Olmsted’s Fenway

Prague- Vitava Belvedere

Drammen, Norway- River Promenade

Hamburg- Hafen City Resiliency

Portland, OR- Floating Multi-purpose Path
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is the result of an extended conversation among Allston and Cambridgeport community members, over a two year period, concerning the need for a larger vision of what this area can become for the sake of the community, the river, and its parklands. Over the past half decade, a volunteer group of Boston professionals, aka the informal River Remarkable Work Group, has conducted numerous studies of issues and opportunities within the Charles River Basin. In this spirit, it formed the volunteer Allston Landing Design Team, ALDT. An inclusive ad-hoc advisory group kept the effort focused. While this document is the result of invaluable input from many vested parties, special thanks go out to its major authors: Skip Burck, Landscape Architect; Frank Costantino, Illustrator / Imagineer; Todd Larson, Copy Editor; Paul Lukez, Architect / Urban Designer; Allister McIntosh, Landscape Architect; John Shields, Architect / Urban Designer