BOSTON'S SOUTHWEST CORRIDOR: From Urban Battleground to Paths of Peace

The most confounding thing about pedestrian corridor projects is that we should have to establish them at all.

There was a time in America when footpaths ran through towns and farms in partial disregard of property ownership, very much like the English and Scottish common law footpaths. Our footpaths are derived from a second parentage as well: the Indian trails of common access that American colonists adopted as their own.

The common footpaths and trails would, by custom, remain accessible to the public so long as they were trod at least once every year. It was recognized, in our past, that public rights of access and private rights to privacy were not irreconcilable.

But that was eons ago. With the consolidation and fencing of property under real estate law and the industrialization of American cities, idiosyncratic common ways were extinguished, except for the few remnants that were preserved under public title. Then, too, there was the lack of foresight, chiefly in the nineteenth century, in not reserving path corridors within or along public corridor land as it was sold or granted to the railroads or retained and developed as highways.

The demise of the common law footpath was very much present in my mind as I began work on Boston's Southwest Corridor Project park master plan in the spring of 1977. The decade earlier I had traveled to England to study river corridors and footpaths and to learn how people and cities were served by them. The Southwest Corridor represented industrial blight and an overwhelming lack of access. Down its middle ran the old Penn Central railroad — which ran atop a grim, soot-covered, granite-faced embankment for its greater length and along down-at-the-heel industrial sprawl and menacing wastelands. Ever since its emergence more than a century ago, this corridor had divided communities and sealed them off from access to the city's center. Could anything be done to redeem it?
Boston residents are making Southwest Corridor Park a part of their city.

Photo © Ben E. Watkins.
Ten years earlier, I had prepared a rehabilitation plan for Frederick Law Olmsted’s Emerald Necklace and the parkland of the Charles River Basin. In the course of research I had learned how urban and highway development of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had extinguished many a well-trodden trail or path.

How might a path stretching the length of the Corridor, more than four miles, be physically formed? Would continuity throughout its length be important for access between Boston’s center and outlying neighborhoods? Were there ways to keep social friction low, both among path users and between users and abutting private and institutional properties?

There were other critical questions, some of which would determine the very fate and viability of the park, but neither questions nor answers can be adequately appreciated without an understanding of the broader physical, social and political context of the project and its precedents.

The Southwest Corridor of 1976, reaching from Boston’s Back Bay to Forest Hills, a stretch of more than four miles, was the legacy of some of the worst single-purpose transportation thinking of the century. The Corridor had been identified in the 1950s and 1960s as the ideal alignment for completion of Interstate 95, locally to have been designated as the Southwest Expressway. It was an element of the proposed Boston urban expressway system, crowned by the infamous “Inner Belt,” which would have devastated the city’s inner neighborhoods and appreciably degraded its environment.

Construction of the expressways and the bridges, tunnels and ramps associated with them would have decimated the historic parks of Boston, Brookline and Cambridge. Sixty acres of Charles River Basin and Emerald Necklace park lands would have been eradicated, out of a total of slightly more than 600 acres extant in 1967.

While the expressway program was still alive, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts had taken more than 100 acres of homes and other properties in Roxbury and Jamaica Plain, widening its holdings along the Penn Central railroad right-of-way — the spine of the Corridor — to accommodate the expressway and its interchanges. The raw wounds of the takings and growing awareness of the impending social, economic and environmental impacts of neighborhood displacement and other adversities led to protest. Coming on the heels of the Blue Hills Avenue riots, in which dozens of businesses had been burned to the ground in an outburst of African-American frustration and geographical boundaries of the major communities along the Corridor, the South End, Roxbury and Jamaica Plain. Anyone who lived, worked or owned property in any of these neighborhoods could participate.

Out of these groups grew another level of community review — eight very localized Station Area Task Forces, one for each new station planned along the Orange Line’s route. Anyone within a quarter mile of a new transit station could join the appropriate Station Area Task Force.

Another Corridor-wide organization, the Parkland Management Advisory Committee (PMAC) addressed the Park’s development, maintenance and management. It was and remains the forum for community involvement in all matters regarding the Park. Although

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local task forces were involved substantively in the Park's early conceptualization and programming. Subsequent design, construction, and management became PMA's province.

Other specialized groups arose on different topics warranted closer attention. The Art Advisory Committee, for example, selected artwork for the transit stations and parkland. The Minton Street Deck Committee, formed from the Green Street and Boylston Street Station Area Task Force, was convened to program the uses for a parkland deck cover located between those two stations. The Parcel 18 Task Force concentrated on issues of future mixed-use land development near Ruggles Station.

Notwithstanding the breadth and complexity of the participation process, design issues were identified and addressed according to the project schedule and, typically, once resolved, issues were not reopened for discussion.

The community's influence was particularly evident with the design of the Park because, unlike with other components of this project, everyone was familiar with parks and recreational areas and needed very little technical information to express opinions. Park design was of vital interest to most community participants, and it held their interest longer than matters of station design, perhaps because they perceived the Park as a more significant part of their neighborhoods than the stations.

— Harry EllenREW, Jacqueline Hall
anger, the land takings of the Southwest Expressway project furthered mistrust of and antagonism to government in the city’s African-American community.

Whites, Latinos and others in the neighborhoods adjoining the Corridor were also evicted from their homes and businesses during the land-clearing years. Bit by bit the protests of the African-American community coalesced with the protests and concerns of other communities, professional, business and civic interests in the Boston region, principally under the banner of the Greater Boston Committee on the Transportation Crisis, the chief grass roots warrior against the highway bulldozer. They were ultimately joined by Boston’s City Hall and several state legislators. The expressway program was finally abandoned in the early 1970s.

FOREST HILLS — JAMAICA PLAIN

Southwest Corridor Park starts with a flourish. Just where this brand-new open space converges with Frederick Law Olmsted’s century-old Emerald Necklace, just where commuter, commuter, subway and bus lines meet in a spaghetti bowl of tracks, ramps and roads, the clock tower of Forest Hills Station puts things in perspective. This is neither an output, a subway station, nor the end of the line.

The Park heads north and east from here through Jamaica Plain, an Irish, working-class district of one- and two-family wood-frame homes. The northeast section of Jamaica Plain, near Roxbury, is home to stable African-American and Latino communities and is characterized by brick row houses. Jamaica Plain residents have a higher median income than residents of other communities along the Corridor.

Ties of the concerns of Jamaica Plain residents were to make as many connections across the open cut right-of-way as possible, and to provide open, green areas that once the expressway serpent had been slain, mass transportation advocates and Boston planners began fashioning a new, and progressive, program for the Corridor. Led by Frederick P. Salvucci, the city’s transit-supportive transportation planner and later Massachusetts Secretary of Transportation under Michael Dukakis, the new program, entitled the Southwest Corridor Project, sought transit and rail improvements, combined with improvements to existing arterial and local streets. No new arterial or expressway elements were to be developed under the program.

This fact received special emphasis as the message went out to Boston’s citizens that government would again attempt to improve area transportation, but this time it would work in the interests of the community, not against them.
Yet, the adversarial history of the Southwest Corridor would test the intent and performance of the Commonwealth, its Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) and their consultants at each stage of the SWCP plan review.2 Elected with their victory over the expressway, Boston's activist communities were not about to slide into complacency with the commonwealth's alternative program, no matter how replete it was with urban mass transportation, parkland and joint development potential. Rosbury, Mission Hill, Jamaica Plain and the South End played a wait-and-see position at MBTA-sponsored Neighborhood Task Force meetings until the SWCP, in its benign form, began to come together. Each of the diverse neighborhood interests within the affected area of the city was represented on the Southwest Corridor

Coalition, the overall advocacy group that had in part succeeded the Greater Boston Committee on the Transportation Crisis. The Coalition served as the principal watchdog over the SWCP ("would the Governor sneak a highway element back into the picture?"); but it was also a strong positive influence in its support of a cohesive and continuous park system. The eight station area task forces, convened to discuss the design of the subway stations and the areas surrounding them, were more concerned with local access, safety and recreation issues than with Corridor-wide or citywide issues.

Needless to say, the ill-fated Southwest Expressway had had no provision for footpaths and bikeways, let alone parks and playgrounds, community gardens, or joint commercial development. But the SWCP would. This much had been determined by the

see the Prudential center, which sits near the northeast end of the Park not far from downtown. One can reach downtown by hopping a subway, walking, or biking along the Park, or heating back to Forest Hills and meandering along Olmsted's path the Arnold Arboretum, past Jamaica Pond, and along the Flats and the Charles River. Yet it is the checkerboard perhaps the most visible single landscape element in the Park, that is the more apt landmark. The plan proclaims that many competing visions — old and new, transit and open space, regional and neighborhood — have somehow been rendezvoused in this many-faceted Park.

—Ted Brown, Alston Review
"peace talks" between Silvercreek's transportation planners and the SCC. When the professional work began on the park master plan in 1977, this basic understanding, supported by a 1975 feasibility study, served as the intended program.

Yet it remained to be seen: Was there really a chance to see a strong and satisfying park emerge, one that could provide individual and neighborhood satisfaction and also command the respect and attention of the public agencies and legislative bodies arm-bent into adopting this new, "other side of the tracks," ragtag, bean pole of a linear park?

At the start of planning in 1977, there was only the trackside wasteland and desolate standing ones of the Corridor and no certainty as to which public agency would adopt the future greenway. And there were those who doubted that the way would be very green at all. One of our first challenges, then, was to see if we could find an approach to Corridor planning that could create a genteel look for the four-mile reach where none, or a fairly grimy one, had previously existed.

**Reviving a Forgotten Creek**

To be more precise, actually, the southerly three-quarters of the Corridor had once possessed an interesting genius, a rugged and colorful one that could have contributed a valuable aesthetic to the Corridor had it persisted into the twentieth century or been allowed to reemerge through the workings of Corridor reconstruction. This was the vail of Stony Brook, the small stream that wove its way between the glaciated hills of the area, through a bottomland originally rich in maples and oaks, to its debouchment into the Charles River estuary in the vicinity of what is today the Boston Fen.

This small, forested stream had overfilled its banks far too often for the comfort of the urban settlers of Jamaica Plain and the Back Bay. When, in the 1880s, Boston's engineers and Frederick Law Olmsted were charged with resolving the perennial flooding of Stony Brook and the Muddy River, it was the milder Muddy River that was selected as the armature of

Although Park planners were not able to revive a creek that is channelized beneath the railroad corridor, the track does include several fountains.

% Picture: "Forest Hills Station Rock" scene meets the portal at which these tracks connect with the Southeast Corridor tunnel by the lettering. Additional images include: Southeast Corridor Park. 

Photo by: E. Watkins. 

**PLACES 1-5**
Lessons from Southwest Corridor Park: • Sustain the effort: continuity of participants is necessary. • Establish a clearly defined fair and open process for decision making. Then, FOLLOW IT AND LIVE WITH THE DECISIONS. • Expect everyone to abide by the process and decision. • Do your homework; get accurate information. • Build coalitions, which may mean compromise — which isn’t always bad! • Hold your public officials accountable as well as yourselves. • Promote the commonwealth over local self-interest. • Maintain a sense of humor. • Take up knitting, not smoking.

— Edwina Colbert

Olmsted’s ultimately famed Emerald Necklace and the more tumultuous Stony Brook which was incarcerated in the large buried conduit that now bears its name. Could we propose the retrieval of the stream, a restoring of Stony Brook to the surface? How wonderful it would be to see its waters flow once again in the hollow of the valley that had for so long been merely rail corridor, sooty granite and brick walls of a transportation seam of the city and the back endings of disadvantaged neighborhoods. How almost poetic a form of equalization, providing Stony Brook’s urban valley with some of the stream-and-park amenities which its sister stream, the Muddy River, had so happily conserved with the help of Olmsted and his Emerald Necklace transmutations.

We pencil-sketch and explored the possibilities. They were not easy. Although the open space desired for parkland was ample north of the Arborway (where expressway ramps were once planned), they narrowed again from Green Street northward to Mozart Street. Along that stretch the going was tough, with little land at all outside the trackway structure, in many cases barely a 10- to 20-foot-wide green strip on either side. In addition, all crossing streets were at grade. It would be a tough assignment to argue for the disinterment of a historically undisciplined stream if that would require its accommodation in a channel large enough to carry its 100-year flow, within a narrow band of land, and under new bridges. It quickly became apparent that restoring Stony Brook to a live state would be nearly impossible, technically and financially. We abandoned the attempt to find an answer.
Building the Necklace's New Strand

We conceived of microsimulations of Stony Brook, modest reaches of running water that would flow along the trackway and across its parkland decks, with water that would be tapped from the conduit. The water would be there to please the eye and offer a whispered affirmation of quality, echoing the Muddy River and Stony Brook's own once proud and wild aesthetic. But we knew the concept was a long-shot bet, and when it was presented, it was rejected out of hand.

North of the Jackson Square Station, the Park passes through a hard-bitten district characterized by industrial and commercial activities east of the Corridor and residential areas, primarily public housing projects, to the west.

Roxbury residents, primarily African-Americans and Latins, have lower incomes and higher rates of unemployment than people living in other communities along the Corridor. The four public housing developments are home to a large number of children and young adults.

Neighborhood residents (many of whom do not have private yards) were concerned with providing recreation space for their children, keeping the Park safe and making sure nobody was responsible for taking care of the Park once it was finished. They were especially concerned about the proximity of bicycle and pedestrian paths to neighborhood play and sitting areas — fearing conflict between parents-by and neighborhood Park users. The paths were moved away from play areas and housing.

There are two decks in this section. One is at Bromley-Heath, a public housing project near Jackson Square Station. Here, a community center, basketball courts and play areas are built next to the station and the housing. The deck at Mission Hill, cut off from the adjacent neighborhood by a grade separation, is served with basketball courts, tennis courts and a small amphitheater (which as of yet is not used much).

Most striking is the barren land that adjoins so much of this section, which suffered the greatest devastation during the land-clearance program for the Southwest Expressway (more than 62 acres were cleared here). Although 550 new housing units were subsequently built, most of this land remains undeveloped. The present lot seems incongruous next to the freshly planted Park and the busy streets and spaces of the housing projects. Yet the land is a sign of hope. Residents saw the Project as an opportunity for community revi-
of the winds of governmental operational and maintenance budgetary decisions and political changes of heart.

Two other landscape features could stand out as major elements. One was a path system, the other a border of shade trees (preferably with double or triple rows) along the paths. Both features could extend from one end of the Park to the other with few breaks. Together they could form a natural and human-use armature that could be appreciated both recreationally and aesthetically as a single environmental offering. People would "read" this armature as being a city-scaled park feature, rather than the weak chain of individual elements that we were seeking to avoid.

Another element needed strengthening: pedestrian links along streets leading from neighborhood interiors to the Park. Many of these streets, laid out at least a century ago, were narrow.

Suggestions for all types of activities: skateboard areas, street hockey areas, community gardens, wading pools and game tables.

This aspect of the Park's design was particularly important to Rosbury residents. Aware that recreation facilities in inner city parks are typically linked to basketball courts, they were adamant that young people be exposed to other forms of play. Consequently, tennis courts were included in all three sections of the Park.

Active recreation areas were sited close to community centers and entrances to day care centers. Game tables, popular with adults, were positioned to allow easy surveillance of children's play areas. While basketball and tennis courts are equally accessible and visible to regional users and residents of adjacent public housing developments, their lighting is controlled by managers of the public housing.

Left photos courtesy Mason and Frey. Bottom photo © Ben E. Watkins.

talization and development, the vacant land as a resource for economic mobility.

Perhaps a new type of workplace will emerge here, one that is intimately connected with the Park waiting patiently next door and with the neighborhoods beyond. For now the Park feels unfinished, ready to accept the change the community wants, a reminder the Project included promises of better things to come.

— Todd Brenn, Steven Reuer

Some were lined with trees. But few had sidewalks wider than six or seven feet. Few opportunities existed to expand any of these into a "visitor-friendly" environment. Would neighborhood children, families and elderly residents walk a quarter- or half-mile to the new Park? Would people ride their bikes down to the Corridor and then along it to downtown (or uptown) employment, to classes at nearby schools and universities, or to Copley Place? The immobility of the side streets dismayed us. We placed our hope in the belief that the Park itself, if designed and built well enough, would attract people — that people would find a way to find their way.

How to design the system wasn't hard to decide. Instructive precedents for ample paths and strong sinews of shade trees abounded throughout America. But parks were no longer the
idyllic glades of yesteryear. Paths and park open space needed defensible design, to use Oscar Newman's term. Fast bicycles made conflict with slow baby carriages and older walkers almost inevitable on single-path systems; we were sure that a double-path system, with one path dedicated to cyclists and the other to pedestrians, would help minimize conflict and encourage more and better use.

But the more we pondered the desirability of a dual-path system, which had not been an explicit element of the initial SWCP program, the more we realized that few corridor-wide considerations had been in the forefront of the public debate that was helping to guide the planning process. The neighborhoods, which had been responsible in good measure for stopping the ill-advised expressway program, were focused primarily on neighborhood concerns: play area needs, safety and security, graffiti and vandalism. No one was stepping to the plate to bat for the community at large.

Each neighborhood, in fact, was suspicious of the others. Upscale St. Rosaph's Street and the economically and racially mixed South End were at loggerheads. The blue- and white-collar people of Forest Hills and Mission Hill were skeptical of how worthwhile the continuous paths that would thread through their domain would be. The largely African-American communities of Rosbury and the two public housing projects of the Corridor were concerned with intrusions of miscreants from the outside.

The more we studied the larger picture, however, the more we realized what a boon the Park and its dual-path system would be to all the residents within the Corridor neighborhoods. People could ride their bikes to work, commuting to jobs anywhere along the Corridor. Similarly, the paths provided access to the numerous educational and public institutions of Back Bay. The paths would provide pleasurable, recreational access to the Common, the Public Gardens and the great expanse of the Charles River Basin — all reachable over short street distances from the central armature of the Corridor. Northeastern University, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Symphony Hall,
the Boston Public Library, Copley Place and the Fens are just a few of the educational, cultural and recreational destinations that are just a stone's throw from the Park.

We presented the concept, then, of a Park and a dual path system that would serve as a true community arterial serving several communities and not simply as a low-capacity, desultory quiltwork of paths and grass. The concept was accepted. The idea of corridor began to take.

**Inspiration from Olmsted**

The cue for the tree planting system came straight from Olmsted. The great Northern Red Oaks of the Emerald Necklace were approximately 90 years old and in a magnificent state in 1977. They reached in a robust, continuous chain from the Fens along the Jamaicaway and the Riverway, and then along the Arborway, for about four miles — approximately the same length as the incipient Park.

It would be great to have similar marching columns of giant shade trees threading through the Stony Brook valley, creating a kind of environmental parity between the beat-upon neighborhoods of the Corridor and the upmarket neighborhoods astride Mission's Muddy River parklands. With that sense of parity perceived, I hoped, the public could consider the Park a "new strand in Boston's Emerald Necklace," and thus be prepared to devote to it the attention and commitment it would require. The phrase, and the parity concept for which it stood, soon caught the public's attention. The term "new strand" has been used ever since.

We wondered whether we could forego mass tree plantings and diversified plantings along the path backbone of the Park to

**BACK BAY – ST. BOTOLPH – SOUTH END – FENWAY – SYMPHONY**

Between Massachusetts Avenue and Back Bay Station is the Park's most urban section. This ten-block stretch is built on a deck over subway and railroad tracks and through a maze between Back Bay, South End, St. Botolph and the Fenway — neighborhoods that are densely developed and include many cultural and educational institutions.

The landscaped deck posed formidable challenges. Paying for it required political arm-twisting; building it required careful engineering. The complicated project involved creating play spaces for a community starved for recreation facilities, protecting the privacy of homes built right next to the park, keeping trains noise down and replacing an alley that ran parallel to the tracks.

Three neighborhoods contain more economic, ethnic and racial diversity than others along the Park. The South End, traditionally populated by poor and working-class households, is drawing young, middle- and upper-middle class people to its attractive Victorian row houses, while Chinese and Arab residents remain. Some tensions surfaced during design discussions because of the disparity in lifestyles between the upper-income families and the recently arrived immigrants.

Today this section of the Park is packed with activity. Basketball courts, playfields and even a tennis court (included partly at the insistence of a local politician) seem absorbed into every corner. It is busy and lively, with dozens of garden plots, benches and planters insulating the abutting buildings from the main paths and play areas. Contingents of trees march along (as they do through the entire Park).
Protection from Strangers

All along the Park, residents who participated in the Park design expressed a concern that both the linear connection and cross connections it would create would allow strangers to access their neighborhoods. Here, along the most urban section of the Park, residents of some streets requested that vehicular and pedestrian access to their street from the Park not be permitted. On these blocks, the grade of the Park does not meet street level, and walls and fences were built. Now, after the Park has been used for three years, some of these residents feel that a connection should be made. Although there are no plans to do so, the Park design could be adapted to allow pedestrian connections to be built.

allow the Corridor trees to stand alone. Could we forego under-story plantings to keep the trunks clear and vivid, as Olmsted had done here and along most of the Emerald Necklace? There would be another benefit: kept clear of growth, the trees would allow ample views into the linear park from adjacent streets and neighboring homes and other buildings, an important way of addressing the security concerns of adjacent neighborhoods.

Low shrubs, with a height at maturity no greater than about three-and-a-half feet, would allow low ornamental accent and form-making without providing blinds for ambush. The trees would possibly need to be trimmed up, too, to about a seven-foot height, to keep branches from obscuring view. This “clear-view Zone,” as we termed it, would ensure easy surveillance.

In subsequent public meetings of the Corridor’s eight station area task forces, the presentation of this design approach began to flesh out the landscape of the Corridor Park where it counted most. People expressed agreement or gave head-nodding approval. A new confidence was also felt as we presented “safety-and-security” design option sketches to the people who lived in the St. Rololph Street and South End neighborhoods, and to the residents of the Mission Hill Extension and Bromley-Heath public housing projects in Roxbury. Their feelings switched farther away from apprehension and mistrust to understanding and confidence as we demonstrated that design could channel users who were just passing through away from sensitive access points important to local residents.

The choice of tree for the Corridor-long planting was complicated by several issues. One was that part of the Park would be built on a deck above a subway and train tunnel, which would not be able to support the weight of much sodscape fill. We wondered what trees would be good survivors in the relatively shallow root zone.

As elsewhere, the Park seems to have taken on a life of its own. It is busy with bicyclists, people walking dogs and people hurrying to and from shops and jobs in the Copley Square area. It is home to an annual barbecue that celebrates the fusion, both physical and social, of three neighborhoods.

The Park has retained, formed a neglected urban “sink” into a proud front yard. Buildings that turned away from the tracks are orienting themselves toward the rebuilt open space: a floriferous here, a doorthere, even brand-new balconies have been appended. New buildings embrace the Park as openly as they do the street. Bit by bit, the investments public agencies made in the Park are being matched by the investments of Bostonian themselves, who are making the Park part of their city.

— Todd Bresi, Ashton Rosen

Community gardens are shrub-horned into every imaginable corner of the Park.

Photo © Ben G. Watkins.
In this case we could turn to New York City’s Riverside Park, designed by Olmsted in 1893 and modified by Robert Moses in the 1930s. This linear park, which hugs Manhattan’s rising shore-land between 72nd and 125th streets, completely covers the trackway tunnel of an Amtrak line. The answers were reassuring. Green parkland flows seamlessly across the buried railroad tun-nel. The London Planes (the tree of choice here) that were plant-
ed on top of the cover were seemingly as vigorous as those stand-
ing to either side and almost as large and high. How deep was the soil? We peered down through a tunnel air intake grill (the New York City Parks Department could not locate plans). It seemed that there was a root zone depth of four feet, perhaps a bit more.

The London Plane is the most widely planted shade tree in New York and many other Northeast cities. It already has a proud tradition in the Boston region as the legendary tree of Cambridge’s Memorial Drive, where embattled Harvard students tied themselves to the “pecan trees” in the 1960s to save them from the Metropolitan District Commission’s highway-expanding chainaws. While the limit of its hardiness range is northern Massachusetts, the grandly crowned trees on Memorial Drive were 70 years old and in robust health in 1978.

We thought the London Plane would be a fine Corridor tree. With its upward spreading limbs, broad crown and ample shade, and its cream and brown mottled bark, the London Plane could offer a better year-round aesthetic than oaks or maples (although it would lack the bright red autumn color of the latter). Planted with this single species, the Corridor tree rows and path would reach magnificently along the Park, leading the eye to the far dis-
tance and reminding the user of the continuity of the park system overall and the entirety of the Corridor experience.

Another concern was that monospecific planting could be unwise, given the possibility of unforeseen disease and insect attack. We thought planting only the Bloodgood variety of the London Plane, which had successfully resisted all health problems for nearly a century since its introduction, would preclude these problems. This hybrid of the Oriental Plane Tree and the American Sycamore would be likely to persist in its resistance to disease and insects of both Old World and New World origins.

However, largely because of the sad experience of the American Elm’s demise, an understandable mistrust of monospecies planting had developed among park-agency officials and urban foresters. In the end we adopted a compromise approach, using three species — Red Maple and Northern Red Oak as well as London Plane — to carry the thread of continuity through the Park. Each was large, fairly round-crowned, and robust, and the full foliage colors of bright red, brick red, and yellow would counterpoint well. Continuity would be achieved by planting each species in long chains of 14 to 20 trees. Not a perfect marching column, but at least the platoons would be recognizable and respectable.

Clusters of Neighborhood Parks

Skeletons are only as valuable as the life they support, and the tree-and-path backbone of the Park would be less important were it not for the special places that cluster and eddy along this central stream. There are places for play, places for resting and waiting, and, perhaps most notably, places to grow kitchen produce. Community gardening has long been a matter of civic pride in Boston, well before an appreciable segment of Olmsted’s historic Fens was converted to the Victory Gardens of World War II. Citizens’ rights, rather than civic pride, are the force behind many community gardens in Boston, and many acres owned by the city or the Boston Redevelopment Authority have been cultivated by residents over the years in almost the same spirit as the early citizens of the city used its common cow pastures, common footpaths and common fishing and hunting grounds.

Thus it felt historically proper, as well as socially responsive, to provide for community gardens within the body of the park. Each neighborhood would have its territory, with access and use managed by an organization such as Boston Urban Gardeners, which had been the city’s community gardening voice for years. The aesthetic annoyances of jury-rigged chicken wire fences and
the rank growth of woody garden plots would be precluded, we
believed, with judicious screen plantings of ornamental shrubs
and good iron picket fencing and gates. And the advantages of
the presence of good neighbors in the gardens would help the
public watch over the park as a whole.

With the Park now in its fourth year since completion, a sense
of coming of age pervades the gruzy wards, the tree rows, the
gardens and the rear of this very Boston linear park. The old
wounds of the highway-building, neighborhood-busting days are
healed, or at least invisible. The great tree crowns are filling out,
the favorite benches are getting worn in just the right places. The
people of old neighborhoods that had been kept apart by a nine-
teenth century railroad for a century and a half are now joined,
and they in turn are linked more openly with the heart of Boston.
Not a bad outcome for a former urban battleground.

Notes
1. Boston Redevelopment
   Authority, Boston’s Linear
   Corridors: Study and Plan for
   Rehabilitation of the Charles
   River and Middle River Parkway
2. Among the opponents of the
   freeway were Barney Frank,
   then an aide to Mayor Kevin
   White and later a U.S.
   Representative, and Michael
   Dukakis, then a state senator
   and later Governor.
3. The $700 million rail, transit
   and park project was developed
   by the MBTA under the plan-
   ning, engineering and design
   coordination of Kaiser
   Engineers/Wy, Spofld &
   Thornbile. Roy Marn
   Associates served as the coordi-
   nating landscape architects and
   master planner for the Park.
   BMA also designed the Park’s
   sign boards, path markers and
   other special furnishings and
   pavement devices.
   For design purposes, the
   Park was segmented into three
   sections, each of which was
   assigned to separate engineering
   and landscape architect firms.
   For the Forest Hills section,
   Maren and Frey served as land-
   scape architect and Howard
   Neulitz, Farnum and
   Rostreslaff served as engineer.
   For the Back Bay section, Saulki
   Associates served as landscape
   architect and PBC Engineering
   served as engineer. For the Back
   Bay section, Morris and Gray
   served as landscape architect
   and Kaiser Engineers/Wy
   Spofld & Thornbile served as
   engineers. Carol R. Johnson
   Associates was landscape archi-
   tect at the Ruggles St. Station,
   and Morgan Wheelock was
   landscape architect at the
   Jackson Square Station.

   The community coordi-
   nating consultant was Ekker
   Associates, Inc., and the park
   management consultant was
   CRET/Choi/Bestor Tenenbaum
   and Cannell, Inc.

   The comments by Edna
   Chisholm were excerpted from a
   submission nominating the pro-
   ject for the Body Booster Award
   for Excellence in the Urban
   Environment in 1989. The pro-
   ject was named a finalist in that
   competition.