



## **Environmental Justice for Boston Parks: A “green paper” for the new governor of Massachusetts**

Dear Governor-Elect Deval Patrick,

Congratulations! Thank you for your strong endorsement of urban parks during your campaign and for agreeing to increase the DCR budget for state parks by \$10 million in your first year. We were in the audience and cheered when you made that commitment at the MIT environmental debate last summer. The story you told about growing up on Chicago’s Southside and playing in your neighborhood park means you understand the need for safe, well-maintained parks in all of Boston’s neighborhoods.

The Boston Park Advocacy Coalition is a diverse group that spans a spectrum of community constituents that include youth, arts, recreation, sports, park friends groups, community development corporations, and public health institutions representing every neighborhood of Boston. Many of us are volunteers who work to maintain and care for our local parks. We represent most of the citywide and community-based park organizations. We have worked tirelessly to reverse the trend of disinvestment at the state and local level in urban greenspace. Urban parks are the cornerstone of environmental justice. Parks provide opportunities for physical activity and active living and mitigate air pollution and related health problems that disproportionately impact low income neighborhoods. Poorly maintained parks are magnets for criminal activity and keep community residents from accessing greenspace that wealthier areas have in abundance.

Boston’s parks, playgrounds, beaches, historic cemeteries and city squares are the “front yard” of the Commonwealth – what visitors see first when they travel to Massachusetts. For city residents, the parks are our “backyards.” The City’s parklands are managed by two different agencies. Approximately half or 2,100 acres will be directly under your jurisdiction through the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). The Boston Parks & Recreation Department (BPRD) oversees 2,200 acres of parkland, playgrounds, athletic fields, and game courts. There is little coordination between the Boston Parks Department and DCR’s Urban Parks Division – for Boston residents, however, there is ONE park system.

This fall Coalition members met to identify priorities for park improvements. In the attached document you will see the top issues and why they are critical to making DCR and BPRD parks in Boston lively, safe gathering places for all in our community. The issues span a range of

Boston Park Advocates Coalition  
Green Paper for the Governor

concerns: equity, public safety, trees, youth programming, maintenance, and access. We also identified specific ways that you can make a difference in parks at the beginning of your tenure.

With new funding, policy changes, and management improvements, much can be done to improve Boston's DCR and city-owned parks. Many are simple "wins" that will change the experiences of park users and show a visible difference in our valuable urban greenspace. These recommendations come from our collective experience as park users, community organizers, and park advocates.

**Management Improvements:**

1. Inter-agency coordination and cooperation:

a. Develop a formal mechanism for coordination and communication between Boston's city and state park agencies. Create a memorandum of agreement that establishes the areas in which the two agencies will coordinate and a timetable for specific actions.

b. Increase access to parks with a multi-agency effort between the MBTA, Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, Mass Highway, DCR, BPRD, and the Boston Transportation Department. Goals: 1) improve pedestrian and bicycle connections to parks; 2) establish a coordinated park sign system that includes access maps for T stations and signage on state and city roads.

2. Public Safety:

a. Create a public safety task force with membership from the state and city police agencies to develop a coordinated policing plan for Boston's DCR and BPRD parks. Parks lost a dedicated security presence when the state park police became part of the State Police and the city's Municipal Police were merged into the Boston Police Department.

b. Move State Park Rangers out of the State House to active patrol in DCR urban parks.

c. Improve the 911 call system from cell phones and parks to enable better response capacity and tracking.

3. Mandate a ratio of skilled maintenance staff per acre of DCR Boston park land.

**Policy Improvements:**

1. Expand the bottle bill to include sports drinks and water. This will decrease trash and conserve maintenance hours in parks.

2. Prioritize urban ballfields, courts, and playgrounds in the DCR capital budget to maximize available facilities for city youth.

3. Allow for new revenues collected from concessions and other sources to be retained and deposited in a permanent fund dedicated to parks.

**Funding Improvements:**

1. Increase General Fund appropriation to DCR by \$10 million annually for the next four years.
2. Create a state-funded grant initiative for parks to which municipalities and non-profits can apply. Model it after the Town Common program developed to fund improvements and management for urban parks under the last Democratic administration.
3. Expand the state's support of youth summer jobs through a focus on work/learning programs for parks and the environment.
4. Fund an urban youth sports initiative to support and facilitate activities and leagues for children and youth in underserved neighborhood parks.

Parks add much to the fabric of our city. They enhance public and environmental health, increase the economic value of neighborhoods if they are maintained, and bring spiritual renewal and a sense of community for many in our hectic lives. They serve rich and poor, black and white, Asian and Latino, young and old – including teens, and give urban dwellers a place to gather outside their concrete worlds. From the community gardens and tot lots in Roxbury and Mattapan to the South Boston beaches to the city's 527-acre Franklin Park and to the Charles River basin, our open spaces are valued and loved.

As you know, access to parks and free activities and programs in parks bring hope and renewal to city dwellers. *Together we can* make a difference in our parks. We look forward to working with you!

## **Endorsing Organizations**

1. Allston-Brighton CDC
2. Allston-Brighton Greenspace Alliance
3. Arborway Coalition
4. BOLD Teens
5. Boston Nature Center / Mass Audubon Society
6. Boston Natural Areas Network (BNAN)
7. Chelsea Creek Action Group
8. Chelsea Greenspace Alliance
9. Codman Square Health Center
10. Codman Square NDC
11. Collins Apartments
12. Developmental Neighborhood Coalition
13. Dorchester Environmental Health Coalition
14. DotWell
15. Eagle Eye Institute
16. Earthworks
17. Elma Lewis Playhouse in the Park
18. Emerald Necklace Conservancy
19. Emerald Necklace Greenway Project
20. Evening Garden Club of West Roxbury
21. Fenway Alliance
22. Fenway Civic Association
23. Fenway Garden Society
24. Fields Corner Main Street
25. Four Corners Main Street
26. Franklin Park Coalition
27. Friends of Bay Village Parks
28. Friends of Belle Isle Marsh
29. Friends of Charlestown Navy Yard
30. Friends of East Boston Greenway
31. Friends of Healy Field
32. Friends of Oak Square
33. Friends of Pinebank

34. Friends of Ringer Park
35. Friends of Ronan Park
36. Friends of the Lincoln Street Green Strip
37. Friends of the Public Garden
38. Garden Club Federation of Massachusetts
39. Greater Boston Urban Forestry Coalition
40. Jeffries Point Crew
41. John McCormack Civic Association
42. JP Trees
43. Minton Stable Community Garden
44. Muddy River MOC
45. Neighborhood of Affordable Housing
46. Neponset River Greenway Council
47. Parkland Management Advisory Council
48. Ramsay Park Community Advisory Board
49. Ringer Park Crime Watch
50. Roslindale Green & Clean
51. Showdown Youth Development
52. Southwest Corridor Park Conservancy
53. Spontaneous Celebrations
54. The Trustees of Reservations
55. Trust for Public Land
56. Urban Ecology Institute
57. Washington Street Corridor Coalition
58. Zoo New England