



A citywide network of people who champion urban greenspace

BOSTON PARKS - BY THE NUMBERS

- Boston has a total of 4,797 acres of public parkland:
 - 2,236 acres are managed by Boston Parks & Recreation or other city agencies – 50% or 1,100 acres in the historic Emerald Necklace.
 - 2,516 acres are under the MA Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR), including 416 acres of protected urban wilds, beaches, parkways and bike paths, Charles River and Boston Harbor parks, and Stonybrook Reservation – Boston’s largest forest.
 - 45 park acres are owned by other public agencies.
- **Urban Wilds:** Boston’s public open space includes 30 protected urban wilds, 181 acres or 8% of city-owned parkland. There is currently *no maintenance crew* for the city-owned urban wilds whose tree canopies and other features are critical to the city’s climate resilience.
- **Schoolyards:** Schoolyards in the city comprise hundreds of acres and offer opportunities for outdoor learning, physical activity, and neighborhood play. Study after study show that outdoor learning improves test scores, health, focus, and social connections, yet there is no dedicated outdoor learning staff or curriculum in the BPS. Some teachers engage their classes in outdoor learning, but many don’t.
- **Community Gardens:** Boston’s 200 community gardens and urban farms produce \$1.4 million in organic produce, saving gardeners about \$435/year. Bostonians have one of the highest rates of access to community gardens per person in the U.S.
- **Trees:** The City’s tree canopy has not changed for 8 years, covering about 27% of the city with 125,000 trees in parks and open spaces and 35,000 street trees. Tree loss has primarily taken place on private property, while planting has been on public land. A first step to growing the canopy is a comprehensive tree inventory currently underway. Boston’s trees remove 10 million tons of CO₂ annually, absorb 247 million pounds of air pollution, and prevent 16,823 million gallons of stormwater runoff.
- **Access & equity:** Boston is one of two cities nationally where all residents are within a 10-minute walk of a park, yet neighborhoods of color have 13% less park space than white neighborhoods and low income neighborhoods have 20% less park space than higher income areas.
- **Programs and Permits:** 3,000+ free park use permits are granted every year by the Parks Dept for outdoor youth sports, adult leagues, and weddings/special events in City parks.
- **Park Funding (FY 2021):**
 - Boston’s total park spending from all sources = \$69,752,000
 - Boston Parks Department operating budget = \$27,135,000
 - Parks Capital budget = \$36,476,000
 - External funds (raised from sponsorships, grants, fees) = \$6,141,000
 - DCR spending on state-owned parks in the City = \$20.87 million, despite control of close to 300 more acres than what the City owns. DCR funding is just 40% of what Boston spends on its parks.

- Park non-profit organizations contribute \$18.54 million or 17% of all funds spent on Boston public parks, just \$2.33 million less than DCR spending in the city.
- The Community Preservation Act (CPA) has funded 65 open space projects totaling almost \$20 million since 2018.
- Under the last administration the capital budget increased by \$22.8 million (+118.6%); operating allocations went up \$10 million (+47.5%)
- **Capital Projects:** Currently the six Boston Parks Department project managers have between 45-50 active projects with another 5-10 they are involved with and 25-30 completed projects in the last year and a half. With climate resilience needs, greater community engagement, and a growing demand for more facilities, the projects are larger and more complex than in past decades.

HOW DOES BOSTON COMPARE? Rankings among the 100 largest U.S. cities

- 23rd in total park funding - we can do better!
- 28th in per capita funding for parks at \$115/person
- 57th percentile for the number of basketball hoops
- 75th percentile for the number of dog parks
- 79th percentile for the number of playgrounds
- 37th percentile for the number of bathrooms in parks

THE CASE FOR GREENSPACE

Health & Wellness:

- Many rigorous scientific studies (too many to list here!) document the health and wellness benefits of greenspace exposure over time, from significant learning benefits for children to reductions in chronic disease, as well as lower levels of stress and improved social capital and cohesion.

Climate Resilience:

- Boston's trees remove about 10 million tons of CO2 annually, absorb 247 million pounds of air pollution, and prevent 16,823 million gallons of storm runoff.
- Boston's greenspaces offer an Annual Park Stormwater Retention Value of \$8,675,000.
- The average tree offers \$62,000 of air pollution control over a 50-year lifespan, measured in public health costs, external economic services, and other forms of ecosystem valuation.
- Retrofitting of large parks like Moakley in South Boston and Langone Park in the North End will enable the City to prevent flooding across at-risk neighborhoods and throughout downtown.

THE ROAD AHEAD

- **Raise the Boston Parks Operating budget to 1%** to add \$9 million for more maintenance, park rangers, tree care, and project managers to address the backlog in capital projects.
- Open Streets, closing roads to cars permanently or occasionally for park activity.
- A stronger Community Engagement structure in the Parks Dept - outreach staff to work with planners and more programming to draw residents into the parks.

