Field Session FS020

The Rose Kennedy Greenway:
A Harmonious Composition Shaped by Distinct Parcels

November 15, 2013
Overview

This Field Session will walk attendees through the linear park’s three most distinct parcels - Chinatown Park, Wharf District Parks, and North End Parks. Designers of all three parks worked, not only to develop a unified system of open spaces in the heart of downtown, but also to design parcels that respond to each area’s unique neighborhood qualities.

Each stop will enlighten visitors on the Greenway’s ‘Proper Bostonian’ inception; offer a glimpse into each landscape architect’s experience designing the parcels; and introduce the uncharted territory of the Greenway’s future.

Attendees will hear introductory remarks from Cortney Kirk. Fred Yoularis and Skip Smallridge will follow with the history and background of the project - how the idea of the Greenway started in the 70s and the complex political process involved with the planning. Immediately following, attendees will depart from the Boston Convention and Exposition Center (BCEC) and will make four stops along the 1.5-mile-long Rose Kennedy Greenway. One stop at each of the three Greenway Parcels and one stop at an adjacent high-rise building, to capture a birds-eye view of the entire length of the Greenway.

Chinatown Park - Designed by CRJA-IBI Group. Chris Bridle will speak about the expectations and outcomes of the park.

Wharf District Parks - Designed by EDAW and Copley Wolff Design Group (CWDG). Dennis Carmichael will speak about the historic design elements and their incorporation into the larger project. Sean Sanger will speak about the collaborative process.

North End Parks - Designed by Crosby | Schlessinger | Smallridge (CSS) and Gustafson Guthrie Nichol. Deneen Crosby will share her experience working with constrained spaces such as the tight-knit neighborhood of the North End as well as the insubstantial 12 inches between the park and the top of the Central Artery tunnel.

In conclusion, Tom Nally of A Better City will highlight the economic impact the linear park has had on the city and will speak to the new design opportunities that have emerged since the opening of the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway.
CHINATOWN PARK
CRJA-IBI Group

Chinatown Park, the first of the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway way parks to be completed, replaced a highway tunnel off-ramp which had divided Boston’s Chinatown neighborhood since the 1950’s. The park’s design philosophy, A Balance of Memory and Prophecy, honors the traditions of a largely Asian population while creating a new vision for their future.

Located just outside the traditional Chinatown Gate that marks the entrance to Boston’s Chinatown neighborhood, the park is about 3/4 of an acre in size. Being the largest open space within Chinatown, the southern portion of the park’s design responds to the vigorous social life of the Asian community by providing an open plaza as a framework for the many festivals, celebrations, and daily activities that take place throughout the year.

Expressing the park’s design theme of balancing memory and prophecy, the design interprets traditional Chinese elements of the village festival space, contemplative gardens, gateways, walls, stone, and flowing water, in a contemporary fashion, to create a space that is uniquely modern yet with strong references to the past.

Essex Street Gateway

• A contemporary entrance to the park and a wayfinding element designed to be highly visible on the Greenway from Dewey Square.

• The sail sculpture evokes Boston’s China trade of the late 17th and early 18th century - instrumental in the development of Chinatown.

• Passing under the gate, individuals can see one post standing firmly in a metaphorical field of rice, while the other support disappears in a grove of tall stone bamboo. At night, the composition changes - the sail becomes a beacon of soft light while the angular red gateway glows warmly and invitingly against the illuminated grasses and the green bamboo.
Serpentine Path and Garden

- The Serpentine Path contains rich planting, a waterfall and stream, and shaded spaces to provide enclosure from the busy street.
- Curving seat walls accommodate socialization and support parade events.
- Along the walk is a changing seasonal display of flowering and foliage plants originating in Asia. The large plant material was selected for the qualities they represent in traditional Asian design: Bamboo (strength/flexibility of the young man), cherry trees (youth and beauty of the young woman), the willow (grace and beauty of the mature woman), and the lacebark pine (long life and endurance of the wise old man).

Water and Stone in the Park

- The park includes a large waterfall and stream - features often found in Asian gardens. The park’s natural stones are remainders of Fort Point Channel seawalls that were reconstructed by the Big Dig. The stones may have been witness to early 19th century ships from Boston’s China Trade.

The Public Plaza

- By tradition, the public space outside a Chinese village is reserved for festivals and for welcoming visitors. In response to this tradition, the plaza was planned to accommodate a diverse program of public events and celebrations.
- Plaza lighting was custom designed to support the hanging of 1,000 festival lanterns and banners.

Beach Street Gate

- The plaza in front of the Gate features an art installation by public artist Sun Mei of San Francisco and site design by the late Paul C.K. Lu, Boston landscape architect. The public art installation represents a Chinese chess board and ancient bone carvings which were the earliest examples of Asian written languages.
- Improved lighting for the historic gate was designed and installed as a contribution from Light Boston.
WHARF DISTRICT PARKS
Copley Wolff Design Group, Inc.

The district, originally in Boston Harbor, is made up of five wharfs — City, Long, Central, India and Rowes—which were built out into the harbor over time and subsequently backfilled to create made land, extending up to 1,000 feet from the colonial shoreline. This became the design intent of the parks and it was agreed that the parks should visually and physically reflect the history of the making of the wharfs. Design elements pay tribute to the wharf’s historic contribution to the city’s international role in immigration, commerce and trade, and fishing and maritime industries. The name of each of the five wharfs is engraved in granite to make visitors aware of the waterfront history.

The parks act as a gateway, welcoming users to and from the city and harbor front. They are a conduit for pedestrian circulation from every direction and offer flexible spaces that attract and sustain activities for all ages and backgrounds.

Because of their central location in the city, the parks connect and knit together the urban fabric, act as both a passage and a destination, and are a memorable destination in their own right.

The Promenade

- A key feature in emphasizing the connections north and south along the parks, in contrast to the east-west connections from the city to the water.
- Contains a formal native tree-lined allée on the city side that is in keeping with the tightly built architectural edge of the parks while the harbor side includes an informal meander of groves that are curvilinear and naturalistic which is indicative of a waterfront environment.

The Great Room

- Located between Long Wharf and India Wharf and considered the center of the Greenway, the area acts as a venue for larger gatherings and events such as performances and festivals.
- Framed by 24-foot-tall custom-steel light blades (designed by EDAW) that suggest both the masts of the tall ships that once graced the harbor as well as the glass surfaces of the surrounding buildings.
Mother’s Walk

- A curving path running along the harborside.
- Consists of fundraising pavers purchased by individuals and inscribed with names and personal messages.

Children’s Storytelling Circle

- Located at the north end of the parks, this area is seen as an orientation place - a plaza where people can meet.
- Contains large granite seats engraved with regional trade routes portraying the transformation of the waterfront from 1775 to 2008.

Rings Fountain

- The parks’ center point and connection to the harbor and aquarium
- Interactive fountain exhibiting choreographed and illuminated water displays. (designed by Wet Design)

Harbor Fog Fountain

- An interactive nautical-themed fountain (designed by Ross Miller) that was inspired by navigational markers from Boston Harbor and suggests the changing light conditions and weather patterns experienced at the ocean’s edge.

Kingdom of Fish

- The “Kingdom of Fish” describes the enormous magnitude and importance of the fishing industry and in particular, the importance of cod fishing.
- Historic images and cod forms are carved into the granite that composes the stage and seating area.

All the Worlds’ People

- All the Worlds’ People” interprets the intermingling of natives and newcomers and four centuries of immigrants who primarily landed at this location.
- Brass replicas of letters, immigration papers, and transport advertisements are inset into the paving along the path of commuters passing through the Rowes Wharf arch to the ferry beyond.
NORTH END PARKS
Crosby | Schlessinger | Smallridge (CSS)
and Gustafson Guthrie Nichol

The North End Parks comprise 2.7 acres and are the northern most section of the Rose Kennedy Greenway. The two parcels were designed as an important civic park as part of the Greenway and the City’s open space system. The park is sited at the threshold between downtown Boston and the historic North End neighborhood. The design is based on the importance of the North End as a “home” community and the importance of the site as a place of crossing between “home” and the City.

The North End is the oldest neighborhood in the city of Boston. Almost every immigrant group that has passed through Boston up to the early 20th century settled in the North End and added a new layer to its cultural history. This unique site has played an important role in shaping the history of Boston over the course of centuries. In the 1640s, a narrow land bridge connected what is now the North End to the greater City of Boston. Hanover Street crossed a channel of water that ran between a marshy cove known as the Mill Pond to the north and the city’s early harbor.

The land form of the site, which has been both a cultural and physical crossroads for hundreds of years, can be described as “cradled and connected.” The site occupies a low point between two high points in the City: Copps Hill to the east and Beacon Hill to the west. This “cradling” of the land creates a subtle sense of enclosure. At the same time, the site occupies a high point between two low points, a remnant of the neck of land that once connected two tidal marshes to the north and south. This physical location in the city makes the site extremely valuable for orienting oneself to the major features of both the historic and current city of Boston. The design strongly acknowledges the site as a place of crossing between “home” and the City and a place which connects to the Greenway to the south.
Community Participation

- The community had a strong influence on the design through an enthusiastic public process.

- The design responds to the community’s desire for a welcoming, urban meeting place that contrasts the scale of nearby City Hall Plaza with a softer space.

- The park is designed to be used with the same intensity as the narrow sidewalks and streets of the North End. It incorporates the community’s distinct traditions of urban culture, socializing in public spaces, walking as the primary mode of transportation, and the intense use of streetscape space for meeting, resting, socializing, eating, and general daily life.

- The success of North End Parks lies in the daily and constant use it receives by residents, tourists, and school groups.

Design Challenges (technical and process-oriented)

- The park is built over layers of tunnels and associated utilities which required an understanding of several layers of conditions, some existing and some under construction at the time of the design of the North End Parks.

- The design of the park was impacted by complications of building a two-city block water feature over tunnels and existing utilities and limited soil depths in some planting areas.

- Aggressive design schedule – the process was inclusive and efficient so that the design team could meet its goals and schedule. Internal goals for public participation regarding input on specific design issues were articulated to keep the process and design moving forward.
ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF THE GREENWAY
A Better City (Tom Nally)

• By the numbers: The Boston Redevelopment Authority in its Greenway District Planning Study cites an acceleration growth of property value of 47% in the five years when the Greenway was completed above a 36% value growth for the rest of the Central Business District.
• The numbers tell only part of the story.
• Development that took place in anticipation of the Greenway:
  - Rowes Wharf
• New abutting developments in place subsequent to completion of the Greenway:
  - Intercontinental
  - Atlantic Wharf
  - Opening the ends of the cut off buildings
• New abutting development being planned:
  - 55 India Street
  - 110 Broad Street
  - Government Center Garage Replacement
• These developments take advantage of both the views and open space opportunities provided by the Greenway, and also help to make the area more attractive by locating more people nearby to activate the spaces.
CULTURAL IMPACTS OF THE GREENWAY

• By the numbers: Increasing number of visitors have used the Greenway with each passing year. According to the Conservancy, attendance has grown from 96,000 in 2009 to 215,000 in 2010, 372,000 in 2011, and 622,000 in 2012.

• The Greenway is becoming knit more closely into the fabric of the city: with special concerts and events held in the open space, weekend markets, activities for children, and food trucks for lunch.

• The Greenway has become a place for active and passive activities used by visitors, nearby employees, and residents alike.

• The Boston Globe calls the Greenway “a democratic haven, a place for the masses to cool off and unwind, perhaps with a cold drink and a magazine.”

• New restaurants and sidewalk cafés near the edges of the Greenway help to connect it to city life.

• New attractions on the Greenway itself have also made it more of a destination.

• The new carousel provides another attraction to supplement features like the fountains and other existing park elements.

• The Harbor Islands Pavilion connects the Greenway to the National Park Service parks on the islands and in the metropolitan area.