

The Landscape Architect's Guide to **BOSTON**

Emerald Necklace

History

1634 The Boston Common was established for the people's collective benefit as a utilitarian and functional landscape of open pasture. It became a training ground for local militia, a place for hangings and the village stocks, as well as a place for public strolling.

1830 The Common began to change into recreational grounds. In addition to the banishing of cows, the grounds were significantly regraded, leveling hills, filling ponds, adding paths. Six hundred trees and expanses of open lawn replaced the pasture.

1837 Philanthropist Horace Gray successfully petitioned for the creation of the nation's first botanical garden, the Public Garden. Construction of the park, based on architect George F. Meacham's design, began in 1859 and was completed by the early 1860s.

1875 A Park Act was passed that allowed the city to acquire land for park purposes within the city of Boston and in cooperation with adjoining cities and towns. Landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. was driven through the proposed park sites with the commissioners. An anonymous competition was held to design the parks, but Olmsted declined to enter. He was later asked to judge the competition and also declined.

1878 Olmsted was given a contract to design the Back Bay Park.

1879 Olmsted and John Charles spend most of the next year on further studies and refinements of their plan, and the first plan for Boston. As a result, the "Proposed Improvement of Back Bay" is published. In Olmsted's mind, this was a sanitary improvement and not a "park" as such, and he eventually recommended that it be called the Back Bay Fens instead of the Back Bay Park. Because of the engineering requirements, only about half of the total acreage could be used for recreational purposes.

1895 The park's construction was completed. Later that year, Olmsted retired.

1910 Brothers John Charles and Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. joined Arthur Shurtleff on a perambulatory tour through the park system. The Olmsted Brothers were asked to make a report with recommendations, which was written by John Charles and published in the 1910 Report of the Boston Park Commission (published January 31, 1911).

1976 A master plan was created by Carol R. Johnson Associates for the Fens.

1980 Weinmayr Associates prepared the Franklin Park Master Plan.

1984-1989 "The Emerald Parks Master Plan for Back Bay Fens, The Riverway, Olmsted Park and Jamaica Pond" was prepared by the Walmsley/Pressley Joint Venture and "The Franklin Park Master Plan" was prepared by the Halvorson Design Partnership under the Department of Environmental Management (DEM), Olmsted Historic Landscape Preservation Program.

1996 The Muddy River floods sweep in on October 19th, causing major damage to Boston and Brookline homes, schools, and cultural institutions. Flooding occurred again in 1999 and 2001, but with less damage.

1999 The Boston Parks and Recreation Department and the Brookline Department of Public Works submitted an Environmental Notification Form (ENF) for the Emerald Necklace Environmental Improvements Master Plan, Phase I Muddy River Flood Control, Water Quality and Habitat Enhancement to the Massachusetts Environmental Protection Agency (MEPA) as proponents. In 2001, Boston & Brookline estimated this work to be approx. \$93 million.

2001 The "Emerald Necklace Parks Master Plan - Back Bay Fens to Jamaica Pond" was published.

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In 2012 the Army Corp of Engineers starts the first phase of day-lighting and dredging of the Muddy River.

Resources:

[Arnold Arboretum](#)

[The Friends of the Public Garden and Common](#)

[The Emerald Necklace Conservancy](#)

[The Cultural Landscape Foundation](#)

[Muddy River Restoration Project](#)