



February 28, 2024

Via email to Amy.Linne@boston.gov and eastiegreenway@gmail.com

Amy Linné
Boston Parks and Recreation Department
1010 Massachusetts Avenue, 3rd Floor
Boston, MA 02118

Re: Improvements to Mary Ellen Welch Greenway

Dear Ms. Linné:

Lawyers for Civil Rights and GreenRoots are delighted to see that the City of Boston is planning to renovate and improve the City-owned section of the Mary Ellen Welch Greenway (“The Greenway”) in East Boston to reduce stormwater and coastal flooding; mitigate heat island effect; and promote tree health. We are writing to make recommendations for the design process. The Greenway is a major community asset, and with improvements it can become a crown jewel spurring recreational, cultural, and economic activity in East Boston.

Climate Resiliency

As the 2022 community [survey](#) on the Greenway confirms, the City’s design process rightfully identified the reduction of stormwater and coastal flooding as a top priority. Flooding along the Greenway is exacerbated by its topographic context. Being the lowest spot in the area, it floods regularly rendering it unusable for days at a time and resulting in damage to plantings and paved surfaces. Proper drainage mechanisms should be meaningfully incorporated throughout the Greenway. As storms intensify due to climate change, it is critical to implement resilience strategies adapted to the Greenway’s topographical features. Finding viable and durable strategies to ensure that stormwater recedes quickly and effectively is critical for the Greenway and surrounding communities.

Language Access

While the Greenway has some signage in English and Spanish, upgraded signage should be made available in multiple languages, including Arabic. As signs are added or replaced, language access should be a top priority for the City with signs produced in English, Spanish, and Arabic. This effort should begin immediately to make the Greenway accessible and functional for the entire community.

Abutters, Public Health and Safety

The Greenway has abutters who are failing to properly maintain their properties.



As part of the City's design process for renovation and improvement, abutters should have clear roles and responsibilities for maintenance and upkeep. For example, the area adjacent to the parking lot owned by the East Boston Neighborhood Health Center (EBNHC) is particularly blighted. The lot, fenced in with a decrepit chain-linked fence near the Gove Street entrance to the Greenway, has garbage that regularly spills over into the Greenway. Poor stormwater management on their property results in erosion scour into the Greenway from the parking lot. Nearby structures have graffiti. Even if the lot and structures are privately owned or managed, they still need meaningful integration to enhance the landscape and reduce nuisances. At a minimum, mitigating measures on adjacent sites should include dense plantings.

EBNHC and other abutters should have specific guidelines for the maintenance of adjoining areas. Where property lines meet the Greenway should be carefully monitored to fully realize the City's improvements. Regular inspections and enforcement activities should be conducted by the City's Parks and Recreation Department along with Inspectional Services, including the Environmental Sanitation Division. Since unaddressed garbage and litter attracts vermin and pests, enforcement is critical for public health. Neglect also foments vandalism.

Collaboration with abutters is critical, particularly those enjoying special access to the Greenway, such as the Gumball Factory Lofts near the Gove Street Greenway Crossing. Major developments near Greenway access points, including but not limited to Clippership, Portside, and MassPort should also be included among abutters who work with the City to coordinate maintenance. Since Greenway improvements may enhance property values and desirability, abutters may be amenable to supporting community-focused efforts. The ongoing redesign process also presents unique opportunities for the City and Friends of the Mary Ellen Welch Greenway to jointly convene abutters to explore opportunities for coordination and collaboration.

Garbage

The City should methodically determine if the number of available trash cans along the Greenway are sufficient for the traffic and volume of users. To avoid garbage pile up and overflow, more trash cans should be placed along the Greenway or more frequent trash removal may be warranted.

Amenities

Public furniture like the Adirondack chairs placed near the Gove Street and Marginal Street entrances should be featured across the full length of the Greenway. This would be particularly helpful to make the Greenway accessible and usable for families with children and the elderly.



Cultural and Economic Development

The Greenway should be more strategically leveraged to spur economic and cultural activities in East Boston. The Greenway would benefit from a public art study and assessment. Beau Stanton’s “Precipice” was a stunning recent public art addition to the Greenway. It complements Sophy Tuttle’s “Rising Tides” mural in a nearby underpass. However, art created in past years has deteriorated, particularly in the Maverick Street and Porter Street underpasses. Those murals appear to have been painted in 2007 and 2010. Over more than a decade, the murals have chipped away. Murals should be restored in consultation with community groups and the artists who created the art.

More spaces along the Greenway may be appropriate for the commission of new murals and installation of permanent or temporary public art. This would enhance the natural beauty of the unique landscape. As part of this process, the local community, especially students and youth, can be activated, engaged, and connected to the Greenway. This also presents an opportunity to deepen and expand the creative and cultural economy in East Boston that is anchored by institutions such as the [ICA Watershed](#), [Atlantic Works Gallery](#), [Zumix](#), and the [Veronica Robles Cultural Center](#).

Curated arts, cultural, and community programming would help to activate the Greenway and promote economic growth. The Greenway should also foster greater entrepreneurship. Refurbishing the [caboose](#) on Marginal Street and transforming it into an ice cream shop is a step in this direction. A pop-up model could also be highly viable, building on the example of the [Travel Mug](#), the coffee shop tricycle near the piers. Greenway improvements could easily facilitate artistic and economic development.

COVID-19 Memorial

At least one memorial currently exists in the Gove Street Greenway Crossing dedicated to the Korean War in 2002. The Greenway would benefit from the identification of sites suitable for the creation of future memorials. The Boston Globe has featured emerging efforts surrounding how we [memorialize the COVID-19 pandemic](#), and East Boston has been specifically identified as a [site](#). The Greenway would be an ideal place for the creation of a COVID-19 memorial. This creates an amenity for local residents and visitors alike and helps stimulate the local economy in surrounding communities.

Respectfully submitted,

Ivan Espinoza-Madrignol

Iván Espinoza-Madrignol
Executive Director
Lawyers for Civil Rights

John Walkey
Director of Climate Justice & Waterfront Initiatives
GreenRoots

Cc: *Friends of the Mary Ellen Welch Greenway*