

Site History and Existing Conditions Report (Final)

Agassiz Road

Back Bay Fens Boston, Massachusetts



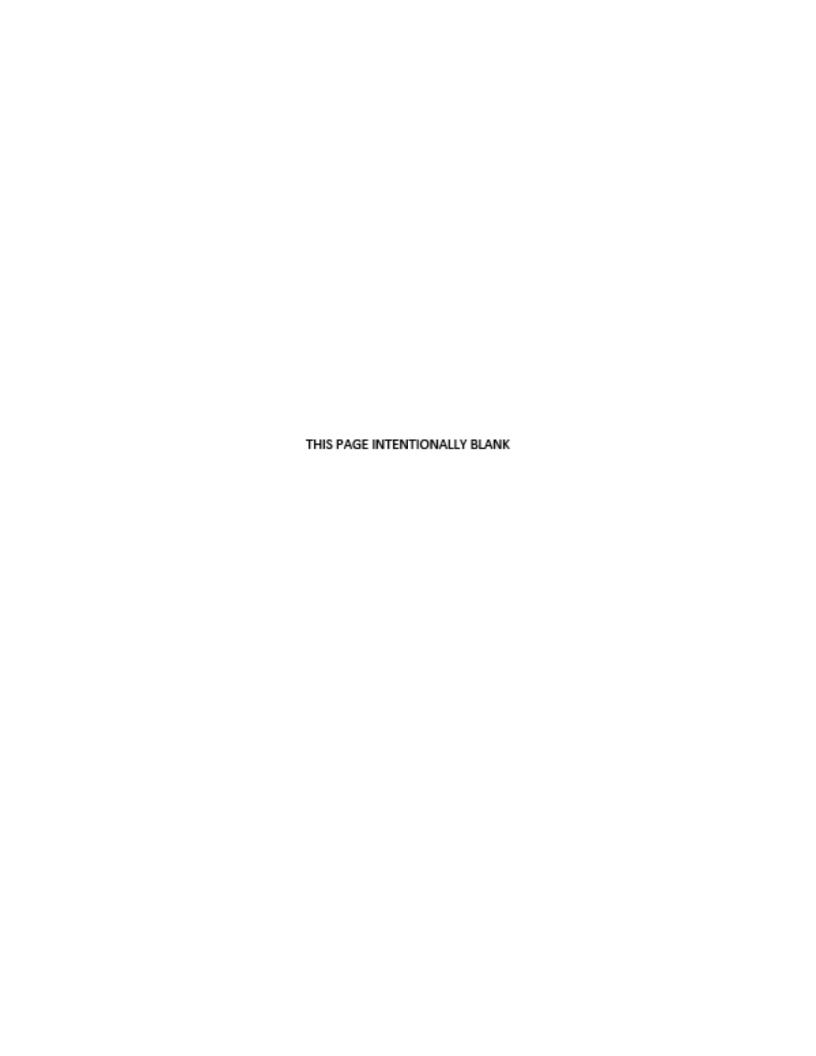
November 2011

Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation

Bureau of Planning and Resource Protection

In partnership with Fenway Civic Association

Report prepared by Pressley Associates, Inc., Cambridge, Massachusetts VHB, Inc., Boston, Massachusetts







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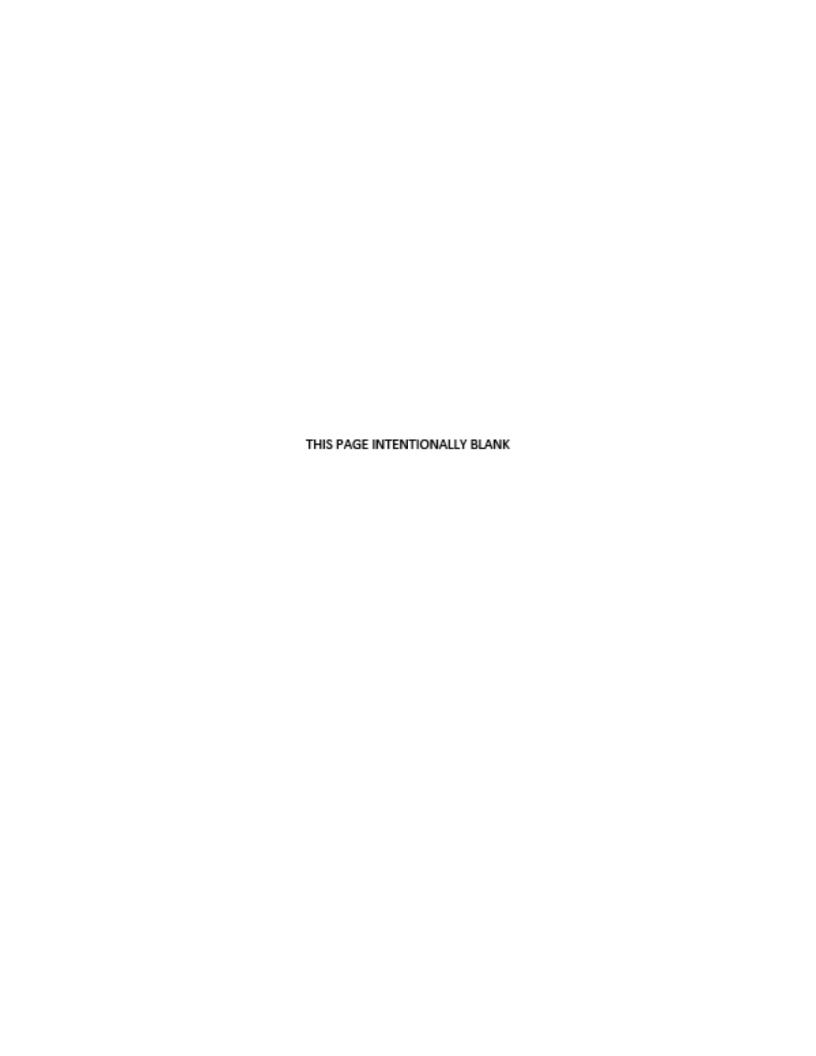
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DCR 251 Causeway Street Boston, MA 02114.

Funding support for this report was provided by the Fenway Civic Association (FCA) and DCR's Partnership Matching Funds program.

Deval L. Patrick, Governor Timothy P. Murray, Lt. Governor Richard K. Sullivan, Jr., Secretary, EOEEA Edward M. Lambert, Jr., Commissioner, DCR

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SITE HISTORY AND EXISTING CONDITIONS REPORT

Agassiz Road

Back Bay Fens Boston, Massachusetts

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1988 Agassiz Road Bridge Restoration Plan, Sheet L1

Illustrative Plan for the Back Bay Fens from The Emerald Necklace Parks Master Plan

Historic Plans Compilation - 11"x17"

Historic Photographs Compilation - 11"x17"

Current Aerial Photographs - 11"x17"

Context Map (200 scale) - 11"x17"

Existing Conditions Plan (60 scale) - 11"x17"



Introduction

This report on the site history and existing site circulation and landscape conditions of Agassiz Road is the first task in a larger process of developing conceptual design plans for the roadway and associated site. Coordinated as a joint project between the DCR and Fenway Civic Association (FCA), this project seeks to provide multimodal improvement options and park landscape and pathway improvements in this section of the Back Bay Fens and builds upon the Emerald Necklace Crosswalk and Pathway Treatment Guidelines being prepared by Pressley Associates for the DCR and Emerald Necklace Conservancy.

Agassiz Road is a short but historically-significant roadway under the jurisdiction of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and located within the Back Bay Fens in the Fenway neighborhood of Boston. The majority of the Back Bay Fens is under the jurisdiction of the Boston Parks and Recreation Department (BPRD), but the DCR maintains jurisdiction over the parkways and parkway right of ways. The Back Bay Fens (a.k.a. the "Fens") is part of a much larger system of parklands in Boston and Brookline known as the Emerald Necklace, stretching from the Boston Common and Public Garden to the Arnold Arboretum and Franklin Park. The central element within the Fens is the Muddy River that spills into the Charles River at Charlesgate. Upstream of the Fens, the Muddy River flows through the Riverway and Olmsted Park. The boundary of the Fens is defined by two parkways, the Fenway and Park Drive. Agassiz Road serves as a connector road between these parkways, crossing over the Muddy River via the historic Agassiz Road Bridge.

Based on known, published plans, Agassiz Road was a part of the original Frederick Law Olmsted plan for the Fens. The road was constructed in the mid-1880's, but has undergone a series of changes in its 125-year history, including reconfigurations at the intersections and a narrowing of the roadway from a two-way to one-way system. Agassiz Road is an important and well-used pedestrian and bicycle link, connecting the East and West Fenway neighborhoods across the Back Bay Fens.

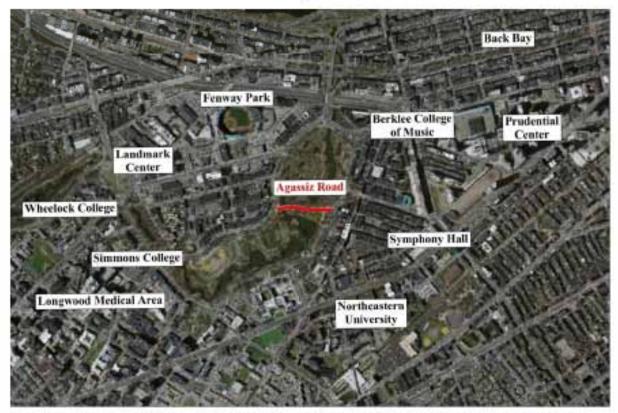


Figure 1 Aerial photograph of Agassiz Road and surrounding site context (image from Bing Maps)

Project Limits

Agassiz Road is located in the northern part of the Back Bay Fens, roughly between Boylston Street and Charlesgate to the north and the Museum of Fine Arts and Clemente Field to the south. Other nearby park elements include the Victory Gardens and Fire Alarm Building, north of the road, and the Rose Garden and War Memorials, south of the road.



Figure 2 Aerial photograph of Agassiz Road and surrounding site (Bing Maps)

The technical limits of this project, like the Treatment Guidelines project, are within the DCR jurisdictional limits of Agassiz Road and the intersections of Park Drive and Fenway. DCR jurisdictional limits are defined as the back edge of the immediate sidewalks and pathways along Agassiz Road, Park Drive and Fenway. The width of this jurisdictional right of way can vary based on the location of the sidewalk/pathway. Along Agassiz Road, this jurisdictional limit is approximately 50 to 55 feet wide. Figure 3 shows the approximate DCR jurisdictional limits as defined above. Outside of the DCR jurisdiction, the Fens park land is owned and maintained by BPRD. No study of this roadway would be complete without the inclusion of the adjacent parkland and other nearby areas. As such, Figure 4 shows the expanded area covered in this existing conditions report. This expanded project area includes the Duck House and the landscape area around it.



Figure 3 DCR jurisdiction limits indicated in green



Figure 4 Limits of project existing conditions review

Historic Design of Roadway and Changes through Time

Original Park and Roadway Design

Agassiz Road, the Agassiz Road Bridge, and Duck House were constructed in the late 1800's at the same time as the construction of the Back Bay Fens and have been features within the park that remain to the present day. But as evidenced in historic plans and photographs, the design and flow of Agassiz Road and the intersections with Fenway and Park Drive have been altered in the course of the past 125 years, although not nearly as much as other parts of the Back Bay Fens. As such, the roadway, bridge, and Duck House remain as the few extant park features from the Frederick Law Olmsted 1880's design.

The Muddy River was originally a narrow creek that flowed into a large salt marsh in the area that is now the Back Bay Fens. The river and salt marsh ebbed and flowed with the ocean tides. With the increase in the City's population during the 1800s, the filling of the Back Bay for new city land, and construction of industrial and mill facilities, the cleansing tidal flow was reduced, turning the area into a stagnant breeding ground for mosquitos. The river and marsh, a major drainage basin within the city, was often filled with sewage and industrial effluent and commonly flooded into the surrounding developed areas. Working in conjunction with Boston Park Commissioners starting in 1878, Frederick Law Olmsted developed plans for improvements to the

salt marsh and Muddy River. While the plans for the Fens were mainly for sanitary and flood control purposes, Olmsted presented the idea of surrounding the reconfigured marsh with parkland and connecting pedestrian pathways, bridal paths, and parkways.

The 1879 Proposed Improvement of Back Bay plan prepared by for the City of Boston Park Department is the Olmsted firm's first published plan for the Back Bay Fens (Figure 5). A conceptual plan for the park prepared with minimal surveys, the 1879 plan shows Agassiz Road in approximately the same location and alignment as existing, along with the Agassiz Road Bridge over the reconfigured Muddy River, separating the northern and southern basins of the river. Agassiz Road was originally designed as a two-way road connecting the parkways bounding the park to the east and west.

In reviewing the 1879 plan, there are several features of Agassiz Road to note. At the intersection of present day Park Drive (then known as Audubon Road), there is a small triangle-shaped median with generous curbline radius transitioning between the two roadways. At the Fenway intersection, no median is shown, but similar large curbline transitions are shown. Sidewalks on either side of Agassiz Road connect to the pathways running parallel to the boundary parkways. The Duck House is sited in approximately the same location as currently exists and the plan seems to indicate some type of area connecting the building to the banks of the Muddy River to the west.

The majority of the Back Bay Fens was constructed during the 1880s. The 1885 Improvement of Back Bay, Showing Progress of Work to Dec. 31, 1885 and the 1887 Map of the Back Bay Fens provide a better illustration of the as-built conditions



Figure 5 Proposed Improvement of Back Bay (Frederick Law Olmsted for the City of Boston Park Department, 1879)

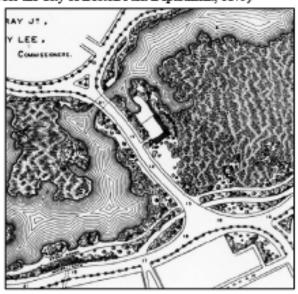


Figure 6 Close-up of Figure 5

(Figures 7 to 10). Roadway design is notably similar to the 1879 design plan with the addition of a landscaped median at the Fenway intersection. The 1887 map shows the sidewalk on both sides of Agassiz Road directly adjacent to the roadway and again connecting to the Park Drive and Fenway paths. The 1888 Cross Section of the Fenway, produced by William Jackson, Boston City Engineer, gives an idea of how Agassiz Road was probably originally constructed (Figure 11). The Olmsted firm put thought into the alignment of Agassiz Road but also its topographical relationship to the remainder of the park. According to John C. Olmsted, Frederick's son and landscape architect in the Olmsted firm:

"Agassiz Road, which crosses the main basin of the park, was dipped down to the lowest possible elevation to keep open the view through the length of the park ..."

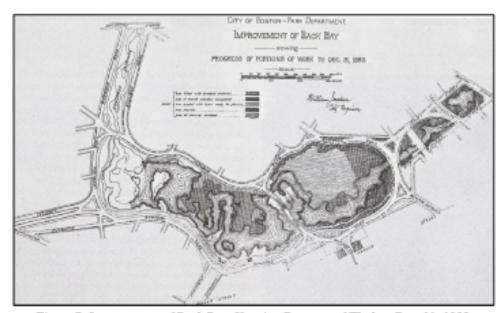


Figure 7 Improvement of Back Bay, Showing Progress of Work to Dec. 31, 1885 (City of Boston Park Department, 1885)



Figure 8 Close-up of Figure 7

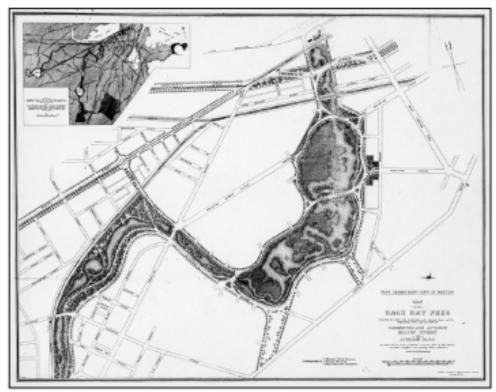


Figure 9 Map of the Back Bay Fens (Frederick Law Olmsted for the City of Boston Park Department, 1887)



Figure 10 Close-up of Figure 9



Figure 11 Cross Section of the Fenway (City of Boston Park Department, 1888)

The Agassiz Road Bridge was an integral part of the design of Agassiz Road and was constructed to the immediate east of the Park Drive (Audubon Road) intersection. The stone bridge is a composed of five small arched openings for the passage of the Muddy River. The bridge was constructed along with the road in 1887 and faced with Roxbury puddingstone salvaged from dismantled boundary walls in Franklin Park. Again according to John C. Olmsted, the arches were designed

"partly for picturesque effect, but partly as expressing the greater accommodations seemingly needed for the waterway, which had to pass the floods of Stony Brook rapidly during the low stages of the tide. Not being necessarily an imposing mass of masonry like Boylston Bridge, it was designed in an ultra-picturesque style, almost suggesting the interesting effect of a partly ruined, but still standing and useful, ancient piece of comparatively unskilled masonwork."

Figures 12 and 13 show the two known historic sketches of the bridge. In constructing the bridge, large shelves were placed on both sides of the bridge to provide a large planting space. These shelves were filled with soil and planted with what was just described as "creepers." Postcards from the early 20th century show the result of the bridge plantings (Figures 14 and 15).

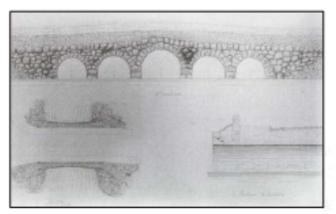


Figure 12 Elevation, Plan, and Sections for the Agassiz Road Bridge by the Boston City Architect's office. (March 1887)

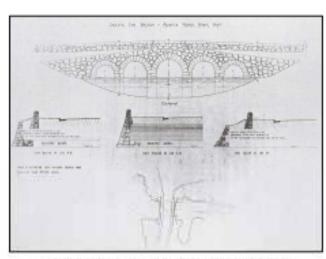


Figure 13 Elevation, Plan, and Sections for the Agassiz Road Bridge by Percy R. Jones of the Olmsted office. (March 1887)



Figure 14 Undated postcard of Agassiz Road Bridge



Figure 15 Undated postcard of Agassiz Road Bridge

A 1921 Back Bay Fens and Vicinity Survey prepared for the City of Boston Park Department is very important as it shows the as-built condition of Agassiz Road. This survey shows relatively unchanged conditions along Agassiz Road from the 1887 plan with the intersection medians and pathways generally in the same configuration (Figure 16). An early 1900's photograph of the road visually shows the two-way traffic system and the relationship of the wide sidewalks to the roadway and bridge (Figure 17).



Figure 16 Back Bay Fens and Vicinity Survey (City of Boston Park Department, November 1921)



Figure 17 Circa early 1900's photograph at the intersection of Agassiz Road with Park Drive, looking east down Agassiz Road. (Boston Public Library Print Room)

In a 1965 aerial photograph (Figure 18), the Park Drive intersection has tightened to a more standard "T" intersection with no evidence of the monument shown in the 1900's (Fig. 17) photograph, while the Fenway intersection has retained the landscaped median.

In 1989, the Agassiz Road Bridge was restored and mortar repointed based on 1988 plans prepared by the Walmsley/Pressley Joint Venture for the Boston Parks and Recreation Department. This effort also involved the replacement of capstones, graffiti removal, and repair to the north viewing overlook that was severely damaged by an errant vehicle in 1988. Many of the original puddingstones had to be pulled out of the Muddy River and placed back. In addition, puddingstone from the Franklin Park stockyard was used for replacement of missing stones in order to maintain the historic design (Figure 19).



Figure 18 1965 Aerial photograph of Agassiz Road

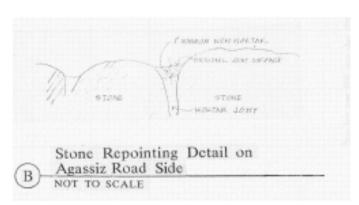
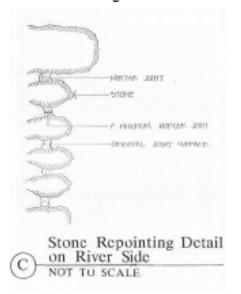


Figure 19 1988 Stone Repointing Details for the Agassiz Road Bridge Restoration (Walmsley/Pressley Joint Venture for the Boston Parks and Recreation Department)



Historic Planting Design in the Back Bay Fens

There is no known detailed planting design for the landscape around Agassiz Road. In, Cynthia Zaitzevsky's book, Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System, the original plant palette and design for the Back Bay Fens were inferred from planting plans and lists prepared for other areas of the Emerald Necklace, from correspondence between Olmsted and his planting designers, and from historic photographs. According to Zaitzevsky's book, Olmsted's general planting principles for the Muddy River parks was to densely plant in large drifts within a unified composition fitting within the whole landscape, rather than installing small or isolated planting areas. But Olmsted also aimed to maintain scenic, open views across the landscape using planting areas to frame views. Far from being truly natural, the planting concept for the Muddy River parks could be described as "naturalistic" in style and keeping with the original character of the land.

Olmsted's specific planting concept for the Fens can be seen as somewhat of a restoration of the native salt marsh using salt marsh grasses and hays, supplemented with shrubs, wildflowers and vines that could tolerate salt water. Unlike other salt marshes along the coast of Massachusetts that can have a large tide range, the tide gates constructed at Charlesgate as part of the Fens plan limited the Fens to only a one-foot tide range. This allowed for a much larger variety of plantings rather than the swaths of salt marsh grass typical of a full tide range salt marsh.



Figure 20 Back Bay Fens – Beach north of Agassiz Road showing planting along water's edge (Boston Parks Department, 1893)

According to Zaitzevsky, Olmsted largely relied on the expertise of William L. Fisher and others in the specification of plantings at the Fens. Fisher was a landscape gardener from Germany who had previously worked with Olmsted on Central Park and other parks projects. Fisher seemed to work without the preparation of planting plans, therefore the reason that there are no known historic plans. Based on correspondence between Fisher, Olmsted, and others, assumptions can be made on the specific plantings within the Fens. Adjacent to the salt grasses, plants such as sea lavender, goldenrods, asters, beach peas, and beach plum were specified by Fisher. Farther upslope, bayberry, sweetfern, Oregon hollygrape, bearberry, raspberry, blackberry, and gray willow, which could tolerate a smaller degree of salt water intrusion, were specified. Along the outer edges of the marsh, a variety of shrubs and shade trees were densely planted in this transitional zone, separating

the residential area from the marsh plantings. On this higher ground free of salt water intrusion, shrubs such as viburnums, barberry, privet, and summersweet were complemented with native and non-native tree plantings of white and red pines; honey locust; red, silver, and sugar maple; European, sweet, paper, and river birch; American yellowwood; white ash, and a variety of native oaks. Ornamental flowering and understory trees did not seem to be represented in any of the original specified plants for the Back Bay Fens and probably did not fit into the naturalistic style of landscape design. It should be noted that some of the plants specified by the Olmsted firm are now considered noxious, invasive plants in eastern Massachusetts. Examples of these plants that were specified in the Back Bay Fens include tree of heaven (also known by its genus, Ailanthus), Norway maple, and black locust.



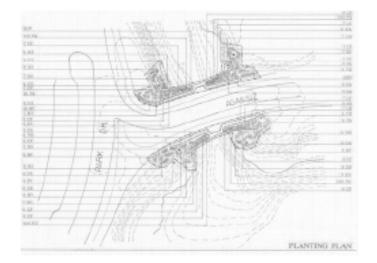
Figure 21 Circa 1897 photograph of Westland Avenue, Fenway and Agassiz Road (Paul Franklin Johnson, photographer; Boston Public Library Print Room)

With such density of plantings, the only areas of lawn were adjacent to the roadways surrounding the park. By the late 1800s, changes began with regard to the planting design of the Fens. With the damming of the Charles River in the early 1900's, the water of the Muddy River changed from salt to completely fresh water, resulting in a loss of the salt-tolerant planting palette along with the loss of the tidal fluctuation. Over time and under the direction of other Boston Parks landscape architects, mainly Arthur Shurtleff, the densely planted "naturalistic" areas we see today in the upland areas of the Fens transitioned to the more formal large shade tree over lawn. With the demise of the salt grass, invasive wetland plants took over along the water's edge. The previously mentioned invasive plants were also given the opportunity to thrive and take over areas of the landscape. All of this resulted in the eventual loss of the landscape views emphasized by Olmsted.

Along with the 1988 Agassiz Road Bridge historic restoration, planting plans were developed for replanting the bridge planting shelf and surrounding areas. Figure 23 shows the 1988 planting plan and plant list. Unfortunately the new plantings were improperly maintained and they have been choked out by a variety of invasive plants, thus little to none of the 1988 plantings remains.



Figure 22 View of Agassiz Road Bridge, circa 1925 (Boston Public Library Print Room)



DYMBOL	QUANTITY	BOTANICAL NAME	COMMON NAME	928	REHARK
SHRUB	5				
AA	12	Aconia arbatifolia	Red Chokeberry	3-4 15.	3 4 5
III	29	Serveria spinoergi Pigno	Dearl Japanese Barberry	2-5 M.	6 4 6
LF	15	Larycantitis Corners	Carouna Albigico	2+ M.	0.8.0
CA	21	Gettes sinifolia	Sammeraweet	2-5 M.	6.8 d
CF	78	Comptonia perigrina	Secritors	16"-24" apd.	1 di b
CS	13	Cornus sanguinea	Bloodtwig Bagwood	4-5 M.	64.6
HV	21	Hamaraclia virginiana	Common Witch Harel	2-9 hr.	1 4 4
IV	17	Hex verticillats	Winterberry	3-6' ht.	0 4 5
E.B.	13	Linders beassin	Spicebush	3-4" ht.	5 4 5
LF	27	Lonicers fragrantissima	Winter Honeysuckle	2-5 M.	545
ru	540	Participaciona qui scettina	Yingana Crieper	0 57: 1 get:	9.046
RV	1.6	Rosa multiflora	Jipanese Rose	15'-18' ht.	1565
SA	21	Symphonicarpos albus			
		Intrigutus	Sacwberry	3-4' 11.	0 6 5
50	19	Symphorioarposochiculatus	Cocalberry	2-3 ht.	5 6 5
W	1.5	Vibernon Josephia	May flower Viberton	2-3 ht.	1 4 4 5
VO.	25	Vilsannan dentatum	Arrowwood	3-4" M.	b & b
VT	- 5	Viberous americanum	American Cranbertylush		
		(mudalim)	Viboroom	4-5 M.	545
25	4.3	Nanthorbin simplicism	Yellesmont	1 pal.	
		REPRESENTATION OF THE PROPERTY OF			

Figure 23 1988 Planting Plan and Plant List for the Agassiz Road Bridge Restoration (Walmsley/Pressley Joint Venture for the Boston Parks and Recreation Department)

Significant Changes to Agassiz Road, Park Drive, and Fenway

For the better part of the 1900s, the Back Bay Fens parkways became a more important part of the regional transportation system and with this, growing amounts of vehicular traffic. With the completion of the Bowker Overpass at the Charlesgate area of the park in 1964, traffic volumes dramatically increased on the Fens parkways, providing a high speed connection to Storrow Drive and other parts of the city.

In 1975, the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC), predecessor to the DCR, and BPRD reviewed the "ParkPass" program that was initiated by the Fenway Project Area Committee. This bold program proposed the moving of through traffic and commuter traffic off of the parkways and onto nearby arterial roadways. The Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) expanded on the ParkPass program and undertook a "Fenway Circulation Study" in 1977. The BRA figured that by redirecting traffic onto Boylston Street through

intersection modifications and signal changes, the parkway vehicle counts could be dramatically reduced. One option in the BRA plan even called for converting Agassiz Road into a pedestrian-only route. But when the plans were advanced to construction, Agassiz Road remained as a vehicular road with a modified circulation pattern. Agassiz Road, as well as portions of Park Drive and Fenway, were all narrowed in width and converted into one-way traffic systems. In addition to narrowing the roadways, parallel parking along Park Drive was also eliminated and the formerly paved areas were converted into parkland. At Park Drive and Fenway, parking was redirected to the outer border parkway access roads where it remains today, although a portion of parallel parking still exists on the east side of the Fenway. Following construction, the BRA's analysis was confirmed and traffic counts were reduced by at least half, with significant drops along Park Drive.

Agassiz Road Site History and Existing Conditions Report

Existing Site Conditions

To document the existing crossing areas and pathway conditions, Pressley Associates conducted an on-site field review on May 25, 2011. Existing conditions for paving materials, path widths, built structures, lawn and vegetated areas, and individual trees were observed and documented. The base plans were prepared using the Survey of the Back Bay Fens prepared by Green International Associates in 2000. The base survey plans were supplemented and updated by information from MassGIS; Google Maps and Bing Maps aerial photographs; and the May 25th site review by Pressley Associates and VHB.

Working in cooperation with Pressley Associates, VHB, Inc. performed an evaluation of existing pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular conditions in the study area. This study is based on a program of data collection, an inventory of existing transportation infrastructure, and field observations performed during various time periods on different days of the week and during different seasons. Results of these evaluations are documented in a set of graphs and figures.

Roadway and Pathways

Agassiz Road is approximately 840 feet long running in a gently curving west-east alignment and connecting Park Drive to Fenway. The roadway accommodates one-way vehicular traffic in an eastbound direction and, therefore, is connected to the wider roadway network by only a left turn off Park Drive (one-way southbound) and a left-turn onto Fenway (one-way northbound) controlled by a stop sign. As the size and type of vehicles allowed to use Park Drive and Fenway are restricted (including prohibition of buses), Agassiz Road does not fulfill any function as a public transit route. It is noted, however, that privately operated shuttles buses serving the Longwood Medical and Academic Area travel along Fenway, but there are no stops in the area.

Owing to its location in relation to the surrounding area, it provides not only recreational access within the Emerald Necklace and the two abutting neighborhoods, but also provides a pedestrian route connecting a myriad of employment, educational, cultural, retail and recreational/sports destinations in the Back Bay, Fenway and Longwood neighborhoods.

In the same way that Agassiz Road is a strategic pedestrian corridor, it affords the same function for bicycles, albeit that currently there are no specific bicycle accommodations. Indeed, for cyclists, Agassiz Road provides an attractive alternative to the heavily-trafficked Boylston Street and Huntington Avenue corridors to the north and south, respectively. It is worth noting also that Park Drive is a "Suggested Bike Route on Street" on the Emerald Necklace Parks Map and Guide published by the Emerald Necklace Conservancy (Figure 26).



Figure 24 Agassiz Road, facing east towards Fenway (May 25, 2011)



Figure 25 Agassiz Road. facing west towards bridge and Park Drive. (May 25, 2011)

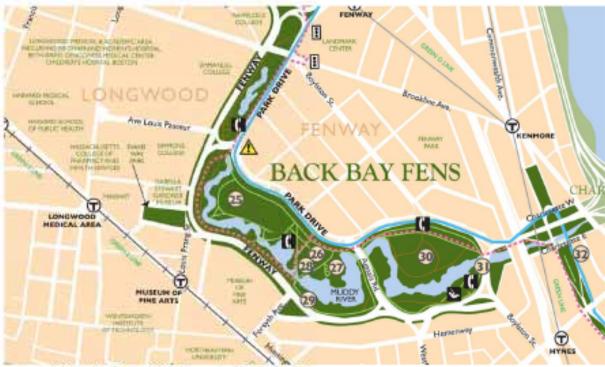


Figure 26 Emerald Necklace Parks Map and Guide – suggested bike route on street indicated with a solid blue line (Emerald Necklace Conservancy)

As noted previously, Agassiz Road was narrowed in the 1970's from an approximately 36 feet width to its current width of 18 to 19 feet from curb to curb. The original width of the roadway can be inferred from the catch basin inlets still in place between the curb and sidewalks (Figure 27). The line striping on Agassiz Road is worn, solid white lines offset 1 foot from the curblines in addition to the parallel line striping at the crosswalks and the stop line in advance of the Fenway intersection crosswalk. There are no designated bike lanes. The sloped granite curb along both sides of the road have a three-to-four-inch reveal. The Agassiz Road roadway and curbing are in generally good to fair condition, but the sloped curbing allows vehicles to easily jump the curb allowing vehicular parking along the sides of Agassiz Road



Figure 27 Catch basin inlet demarking old roadway width (two-way traffic) (May 25, 2011)

There is no parking on either side of Agassiz Road, or on Park Drive and Fenway, with the exception of onstreet spaces along the east side of Fenway in the vicinity. There is, however, residential, parallel parking on the frontage/service roads of both Park Drive and Fenway.

Two designated, striped crosswalks cross Agassiz Road, one located at each of the parkway intersections. The Fenway intersection crosswalk is Crossing Area No. 5 and the Park Drive intersection crossing is Crossing Area No. 22 in the Emerald Necklace Crosswalk and Pathway Treatment Guidelines. Both crosswalks are non-signalized, but the Fenway crosswalk is protected with a stop sign. Pedestrians must be more cautious at the Park Drive intersection where vehicles sometimes turn quickly onto Agassiz Road. There are no mid-block crosswalks on Agassiz Road. 100 feet north of the Fenway intersection, an on-demand, traffic-signalized crosswalk crosses Fenway (Crossing Area No. 4). This is primarily a pedestrian signal with push button actuation and a maximum 60-second vehicle phase, but it also provides an opportunity for vehicles exiting the parallel frontage/service road on the east side. Farther up Fenway at the Westland Avenue intersection, another traffic controlled signal with crosswalks crosses Fenway and Westland Avenue. Approximately 125 feet north of the Park Drive intersection at Queensbury Street, there is an on-demand, traffic-signalized crosswalk crossing Park Drive (Crossing Area No. 21). 180 feet to the south of the Park Drive intersection is a nonsignalized crosswalk (Crossing Area No. 23), located mid-block between Jersey Street and Queensbury Street. Both Park Drive crosswalks also cross the parallel frontage/service road on its west side. All curb ramps are concrete and can be considered in fair to good condition and fully functional, although the Park Drive intersection ramps have some concrete structural cracking.

Topographically, Agassiz Road has an arched slope going over the Agassiz Street Bridge and then slopes slightly eastbound toward Fenway. The Agassiz Road low point (per survey, elevation 12.01 at drain inlet) is located approximately 275 feet west of the Fenway intersection and defined by two drain inlets. From the low point, the road gradually slopes back up to Fenway. On the date of site observation, water was observed puddling alongside the road and sidewalks in the vicinity of this low point (Figure 30). There are six drain inlets along the roadway with most backed up by the original catchbasin set back in the area between the existing curbline and sidewalks. All drain inlet grates are in a rectangular grid patterns.

Sidewalks along both sides of Agassiz Road are paved with concrete and are approximately 6 feet wide. They connect to existing concrete, bituminous concrete, and stonedust sidewalks and pathways at the Park Drive and Fenway intersections. The quality of the Agassiz Road concrete sidewalks are mostly fair, with some breakage and cracking occurring along the outside edges, especially where the adjacent landscape areas are worn and compacted. The landscape strips between the sidewalk and curb appear to be mostly composed of highly compacted soil and small stones, with little to no good quality soil. This landscape strip is typically ten feet wide, but it can be as narrow



Figure 28 Intersection of Agassiz Road and Fenway, facing north. (May 25, 2011)



Figure 29 Intersection of Agassiz Road and Park Drive. (May 25, 2011)



Figure 30 Low point on north side of Agassiz Road. Notice bicyclist traveling against the one-way. (May 25, 2011)



Figure 31 Recently paved stonedust path connecting to south-side Agassiz Road sidewalk. (May 25, 2011)

as eight feet or as wide as fourteen feet. Based on field observations, the landscape strips is frequently used by pedestrians, runners, and bicyclists, and parked upon by vehicles, lending to its highly compacted condition. Over the bridge, the strips are a mix of very sandy soil embedded with a good amount of stones, varying in size from less than one-quarter to as large as five to six inches, including broken pieces of old asphalt. It can be

assumed that some of this material came from the old roadway when it was narrowed and any good quality soil put in place at the time of construction has since washed away.

It is apparent that the existing sidewalk width is too narrow for the amount of pedestrian and off-road bicycle traffic occurring in this area. Only near Fenway is there any evidence of relatively healthy grass and herbaceous growth in the landscape strips. Within the strips there are two trees planted along the south side of the road. There are no trees in the north side landscape strip.

At the Fenway intersection, there are several desire lines where the existing paved pathways and sidewalks do not follow the logical or desired flow of pedestrian travel.



Figure 32 Gravel mix between sidewalk and curb at Agassiz Road bridge. (May 25, 2011)

Site Lighting

Existing street lighting consists of cobra head fixtures attached to concrete poles. These lights are on both sides of Agassiz Road, variably spaced and alternating, for a total of 10 poles along the street frontage. They are typically set within the landscape area between the sidewalk and curbline, therefore it is likely that the lights were installed or moved at the time Agassiz Road was narrowed. There are two types of light fixture arms as shown in Figures 33 and 34. There are a variety of concrete light poles, some with smooth faced concrete and others with exposed aggregate. Several of the poles have been painted grey up to about four to six feet from the ground (see Figures 33 and 34). Similar lighting types are repeated along Park Drive and Fenway. There are no pedestrian scale lights on Agassiz Road.



Figure 33 Typical light pole and fixture along Agassiz Road, shorter reach arm. (May 25, 2011)



Figure 34 Typical light pole and fixture along Agassiz Road, longer reach arm. (May 25, 2011)

The existing Agassiz Road lights are not in any way consistent with the historic lights fixtures as seen in 1897 photograph of Westland Avenue, Fenway and Agassiz Road (Figure 21). They are also not in line with current DCR standards for parkways which indicate the use of "pendent"-style lights. Although there are no pedestrian lights, the current Boston Parks and Recreation Department standard for pedestrian-scale lights is the Boston post and acom fixtures.

Duck House

Although the Duck House is technically not within the jurisdiction of the DCR, the structure is part of the Agassiz Road landscape. The Duck House is under the jurisdiction of the City of Boston and managed by the Boston Parks and Recreation Department. Based on an existing conditions assessment report prepared for Boston Parks and Recreation Department by McGinley Kalsow and Associates LLP in April 2008, the structure was designed by Architect Alexander M. Longfellow and built in 1897. The building was originally sited in the 1879 Olmsted site plan of the Fens and shows up as a feature on the 1921 Fens survey. The roof was reconstructed in 1990 following a 1986 fire that closed the structure for public use. Being an original structure within the Back Bay Fens, it is listed as a contributing structure in the designation of the Emerald Necklace Park system as a Boston Landmark (designated as such in 1983).

Since the fire, the building has been vacant and unused. Aside from substantial deterioration, reconstruction of the roof from the fire, and the boarding up of the doors and windows, both the interior and exterior remain largely unchanged since original construction. Two-thirds of the interior space serves as restrooms, the original purpose for the building, with the other space reserved for office, storage, and mechanical. Per the McGinley Kalsow report, exterior walls are constructed of random ashlar and jointed granite, brown and blue/gray in color. The simplified 1990 reconstructed roof is made of Vermont green slate, some of which was salvaged from the original roof following the fire. There are two exterior doors on the south and west sides, serving the men's and women's restrooms. A single chimney connects to the mechanical room in the lower part of the building. There is an exterior service door for the mechanical room on the north side of the building. Net interior space is approximately 670 square feet. Due to the height of the door thresholds and the narrow width of the doors. the building cannot be considered accessible based on current Massachusetts Architectural Access Board standards.

The Duck House is served with a small paved parking area, essentially a small driveway with parking possible for two cars. (Figure 37) Two concrete sidewalks connect the Duck House to the Agassiz Road sidewalk, approaching the east and west



Figure 35 Front (south-facing) side of Duck House (May 25, 2011)



Figure 36 Back (north-facing) side of Duck House (May 25, 2011)



Figure 37 Driveway at east side of Duck House (May 25, 2011)

side of the building with a sidewalk across the front. This sidewalk forms a rectangular landscape area in the immediate front of the structure containing several large trees and some areas of grass growth, although most of the ground is exposed soil, probably due to shading from the tree, soil compaction, and runoff from the roadway sidewalk. There is a small paved, rectangular area along the west side of the structure.

The Emerald Necklace Parks Master Plan (1989, updated 2000) called for the restoration of the Duck House and reusing it as a Park Ranger Station, but to date it has remained an empty structure. There has been recent interest in not only restoring the Duck House but also in developing a commercial reuse and enhancement strategy for the building and surrounding landscape. In partnership with the Wentworth Institute of Technology, members of the Fenway Civic Association conducted a survey in March 2009 to gauge the use of the Back Bay Fens and to solicit ideas and comments for business types and other new uses in the park. A charette hosted by the Fenway Civic Associations and Historic Boston was conducted on June 26, 2009 to discuss and generate design ideas for the future of the Duck House, including landscape improvements and financing strategies. Attendees at the charette were composed of various stakeholders, partners, community members, and city officials. Challenges such as building restoration, security, utilities, parking, sustainability, and business profitability were on the table during the charette. The charette and survey were used as a catalyst for getting state legislation passed in 2010 for the City of Boston to create a long-term lease for the commercial use of a renovated Duck House. This study of the Agassiz Road site is a result of these previous efforts on the Duck House.



Figure 38 Emerald Necklace Parks Master Plan for the Back Bay Fens (Walmsley/Pressley Joint Venture. 1989, updated 2001)

Other Built Features

The Agassiz Road Bridge was described previously and there are no significant changes from its original design. Note that this report does not include a structural review of the quality or condition of the bridge. Aside from the heavy vegetative growth in and around the structure, the bridge is observed to remain in fair condition following the 1988-89 stone work restoration project. Alongside the sidewalks on both sides of the bridge, there are small overlooks over the central channel of the river, part of the historic bridge design.

The only other built feature of significance is a small monument dedicated to Katherine Lee Bates (author of the lyrics to "America the Beautiful"). The monument is composed of a copper plaque placed on stone monument. It is located in the



Figure 39 Overlook at Agassiz Road bridge. (May 25, 2011)

grass area immediately south of Agassiz Road and it not directly associated with any of the existing pathways. Due to its size and location, it is rather lost in the landscape and easily unnoticed.

Vegetation

Most of the existing plants within or immediately adjacent to the DCR jurisdiction limits of Agassiz Road are large shade trees over lawn. With the exception of a lone basswood tree at the Park Drive intersection and a small red oak along the southern side of Agassiz Road, there are no other trees in the landscape areas between the road and sidewalk. Trees along the outside of the sidewalk include a mix of primarily pin oaks. red oaks, and basswoods. Along the front of the Duck House is a dense grove of red and pin oaks. Other trees in the project area include red and silver maples, ornamental crabapples, ashes, and weeping willows. Several of the oak trees are quite large with canopies overhanging Agassiz Road. Most of the trees visually appear to be healthy and in relatively good form at the time of observation (May 25, 2011). Some of the oaks can be considered specimen quality. There appears to have been some recent pruning on some of the trees closest to the road.

At the Agassiz Road bridge, there is a significant amount of mixed shrubby and invasive vegetation growing up along the outside of the bridge wall and within the bridge planting shelves. Observed plants in and around the bridge include honeysuckle, buckthorn, knotweed, sumac, tree of heaven, and miscellaneous sapling trees. Little of the 1989 bridge replanting can be seen and has most likely been choked out by the invasive plants. Along the river bank is a mix of dense herbaceous and shrubby vegetation backed by large areas of phragmites (giant reed). The densest area of phragmites is concentrated on the back side of the Duck House and along the north side of Agassiz Road although it occurs along most areas of the riverbank in the Fens. Phragmites dominates many areas along the Muddy River in the Fens and has unfortunately eliminated many of the views across the water and has caused increased siltation of the river.



Figure 40 View of existing vegetation along Agassiz Road (May 25, 2011)



Figure 41 Overgrown vegetation along Agassiz Road Bridge (May 25, 2011)



Figure 42 Agassiz Road Bridge immediately following replanting of planting shelf and removal of invasive vegetation in 1989 (Pressley Associates, 1989)

Existing Transportation Analysis

During late Fall 2009, a program of pedestrian, bicycle and vehicle counts were performed in the area on Friday November 13 and Sunday November 15 by a team of volunteer residents and students from the Center for Community & Learning Partnerships at Wentworth Institute of Technology. These surveys yielded extensive data on pedestrian and vehicular movement in the area, and provide a useful baseline for activity during that season, even though they do not represent high demand pedestrian conditions. It should be noted that the counts were performed on a Sunday, being the rain-date for the Saturday as originally planned. These counts were part of the planning for the Duck House discussed previously.

As part of this project and to quantify pedestrian and bicycle activity under fair-weather conditions, a new data collection program was executed in Spring 2011. Specifically, 12-hour pedestrian, bicycle and vehicle counts were performed on Agassiz Road in the vicinity of the Duck House on Friday May 6 and Saturday May 7, 2011, when schools and colleges were still in session. There is a large student population in the West Fenway neighborhoods that use Agassiz Road as a connector the many schools and colleges along the east side of the Fens.

The vehicle traffic data from the November 2009 counts are not subject to the seasonal sensitivity of pedestrian and bicycle activity, and therefore are valid for use in the assessment of existing traffic conditions. Thus, the previous data have been supplemented by a traffic count program performed in June 2011, including the following:

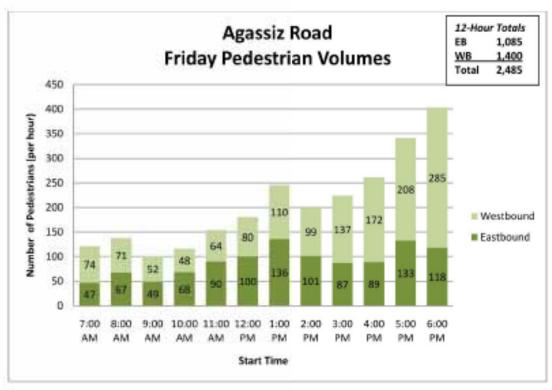
- 7-day automatic traffic recorder (ATR) counts on Agassiz Road
- Weekday morning and evening commuter peak period traffic counts at the intersection of Agassiz Road and Fenway

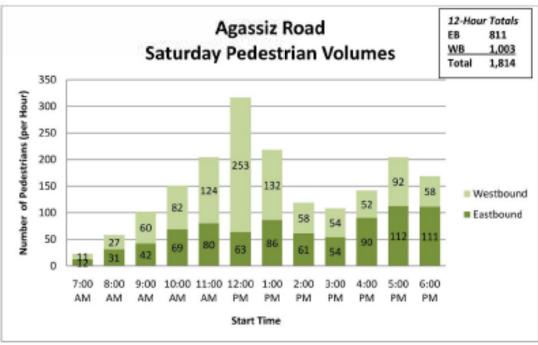
Existing Pedestrian, Bicycle and Vehicle Volumes

Relevant data from the November 2009, May 2011 and June 2011 have been combined and analyzed to provide Existing Conditions (2011) for pedestrians, bicycles and vehicles on the Agassiz Road corridor that are representative of good seasonal conditions for walking and cycling.

Pedestrians

Hourly pedestrian volumes on Agassiz Road for Friday and Saturday (Spring 2011) are presented in Figure 43. Based on the pedestrian patterns determined during the 2009 surveys, the geographic and directional distribution of daily pedestrian trips for weekdays and weekend are presented in Figure 44. Corresponding 2009 patterns for the peak pedestrian hour are presented in Figure 45.





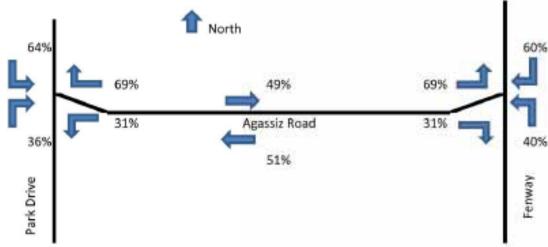
Note: Data were collected on May 6 and 7, 2011 - Red Sox games were played at Fenway Park on both days, starting at 7:10PM and 1:10PM, respectively.

Figure 43- May 6 and 7, 2011 12-Hour Pedestrian Volumes

Agassiz Road

Daily Directional Distribution of Pedestrians





Weekend



Note: Based on data collected in November 2009

Figure 44 – Friday November 13 and Sunday November 15, 2009 Daily Directional Distribution of Pedestrians

Agassiz Road Peak Hour Directional Distribution of Pedestrians



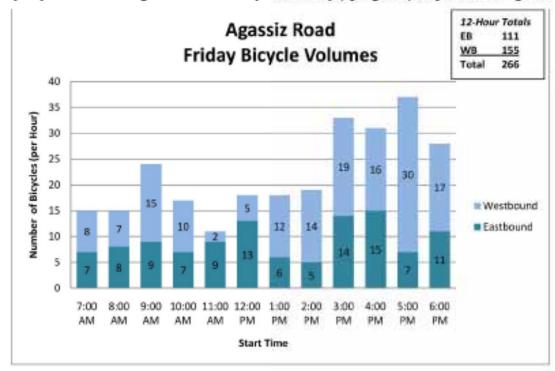


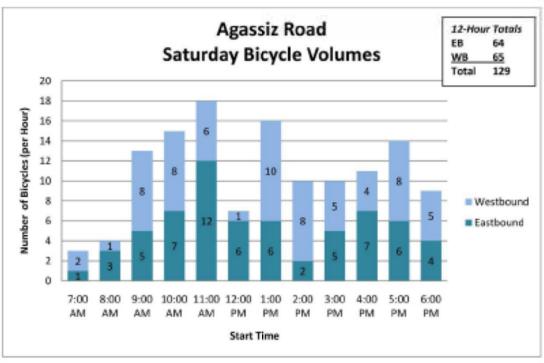
Note: Based on data collected in November 2009

Figure 45 - Friday November 13 and Sunday November 15, 2009 Peak Hour Directional Distribution of Pedestrians

Bicycles

Hourly bicycle volumes on Agassiz Road for Friday and Saturday (Spring 2011) are presented in Figure 45.





Note: Data were collected on May 6 and 7, 2011 - Red Sox games were played at Fernway Park on both days, starting at 7:10PM and 1:10PM, respectively.

Figure 46 - May 6 and 7, 2011 12-Hour Bicycle Volumes

Vehicles

Vehicular traffic volumes on Agassiz Road by day of week (June 2011) are presented in Figure 47. Hourly vehicular traffic volumes on Agassiz Road for Friday and Saturday (June 2011) are presented in Figure 48. Morning and evening commuter peak hour traffic turning movements at the intersections of Agassiz Road at Park Drive and at Fenway are presented in Figure 49.

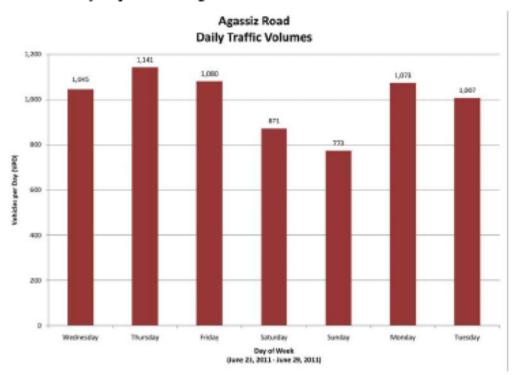


Figure 47 – June 23-29, 2011 Daily Traffic (Vehicular) Volumes based on automatic traffic recorder (ATR) system

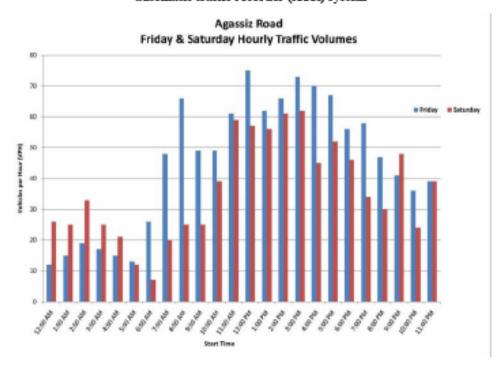
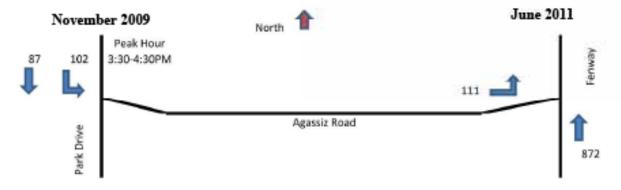


Figure 48 - June 25 and 26, 2011 Daily Traffic (Vehicular) Hourly Volumes

Agassiz Road Weekday Commuter Peak Traffic Turning Movements



Evening Peak Hour 4:15 - 5:15 PM



Note:

- 1. Park Drive and Agassiz Road counts conducted in November 2009
- 2. Ferrway and Agassiz Road counts conducted in June 2011.

Figure 49 – Weekday Commuter Peak Traffic Turning Movements, Park Drive and Agassiz Road (November 2009) and Fenway and Agassiz Road (June 2011)

Existing Pedestrian, Bicycle, and Vehicular Analysis

Pedestrians

As noted previously, Agassiz Road is an important pedestrian corridor connecting the sections of the Fenway neighborhood to the west of Park Drive and east of Fenway, including the Symphony neighborhood. Owing to its location in relation to the surrounding area, it provides not only recreational access within the Emerald Necklace and the two abutting neighborhoods, but also as a pedestrian route connecting a myriad of employment, educational, cultural, retail, recreational, and sports destinations in the Back Bay, Fenway, and Longwood neighborhoods. Its' importance as a pedestrian corridor is confirmed by the significant volumes of pedestrians on both weekdays and the weekend.

Over the course of the 12-hour day from 7 AM to 7 PM, a total of 2,485 and 1,814 pedestrians traversed Agassiz Road (total both directions) on a Friday and Saturday, respectively. On both days, there were surges in pedestrian volumes in the periods before the start of the Red Sox games (403 peak hour volume on Friday, 6-7 PM, and 316 peak hour volume on Saturday, 12-1 PM). Outside of these times, the peak pedestrian activity on both days appears to have been in the early afternoon, with 316 and 218 pedestrians between 1-2 PM on Friday and Saturday, respectively. On both days, 55% - 56% of the pedestrians were westbound, perhaps reflecting the effects of pedestrians walking to Fenway Park.

At Park Drive, on a daily basis, approximately two-thirds of pedestrians arrive from or depart to the north on both the weekday (Friday) and the weekend (Sunday), based on the 2009 data. A similar distribution occurs at Fenway on the weekday, but for the weekend the daily proportion arriving from and departing to the north is between 75% and 80%. Again based on the 2009 data, 60% - 65% of the pedestrian flow is westbound on Agassiz Road on both weekday and weekend, with more variation in the directional distribution at either end. These patterns reflect the role of Agassiz Road as a pedestrian connector across the Fens with the juxtaposition of multiple origins and destinations being predominantly to the north at either end.

Pedestrian Crossings

There are crosswalks on Agassiz Road at either end, but no "mid-block"/intermediate crosswalks. As a result, there is a limited amount of jay-walking along Agassiz Road, made easier by the low traffic volumes.

At Park Drive, the crosswalks are located at some distance from Agassiz Road, and observations indicate that they are not well used. Indeed, a large proportion of pedestrians using Agassiz Road simply jay-walk to cross Park Drive in the immediate vicinity of Agassiz Road, due to the inconvenient location of the existing crosswalks.

At Fenway, although the signalized crosswalk at the carriage lane exit is located north of Agassiz Road, observations indicate that it is well-used. It does provide a safe crossing for pedestrians across the higher traffic flow, but a limited extent of jay-walking is observed at Agassiz Road because the crosswalk is some distance away.

Bicvcles

Agassiz Road fulfills the same strategic function for bicycles as it does for pedestrians. Although there are no specific bicycle accommodations, vehicular traffic is light and Agassiz Road provides an attractive alternative for cyclists to the heavily-trafficked Boylston Street and Huntington Avenue corridors to the north and south, respectively. Cyclists do of course encounter much more significant vehicle traffic volumes when joining or crossing Fenway.

Over the course of the 12-hour day from 7 AM to 7 PM, a total of 266 and 129 bicycles traversed Agassiz Road (total both directions) on a Friday and Saturday, respectively. Approximately 58% of the volume was westbound on Friday, but the east and westbound directions were evenly balanced on Saturday. The peak hour bicycle volume is approximately 37-38 bicycles on both days, occurring between 5 – 6 PM on Friday, and 11 AM – 12 PM on Saturday. The higher bicycle volumes on Friday compared to Saturday may reflect use of Agassiz Road by commuters, connecting the neighborhoods with Longwood, Back Bay and downtown Boston.

Vehicles

Because of its one-way eastbound direction, and its connection with one-way roadways at either end, Agassiz

Road does not have a regional role in the roadway network. Rather, it is a local/district level roadway which primarily serves traffic departing the Fenway neighborhood and the Boylston Street area. Because all traffic enters Agassiz Road from the north and must exit to the north, it has limited attraction as a cut-through route for traffic, as reflected in the volumes of traffic using the road.

Vehicle traffic volumes on Agassiz Road vary on a day to day basis, and are significantly lower at the weekend than during the week. On Saturday and Sunday, the 24-hour vehicle volumes are 871 and 773, respectively, compared to a maximum volume of 1,141 daily vehicles on a weekday. The average weekday 24-hour volume is 1069 vehicles. The pattern varies over the course of the day, with the weekday reflecting the commuter peak periods, and the weekend showing a peak in traffic volume during the middle of the day. The highest hourly volume of 75 vehicles occurred between 12 – 1 PM on Friday, with a peak of 62 vehicles between 3 – 4 PM on Saturday. For most of the day, traffic volumes are less than one vehicle every minute.

There were no at-home Red Sox games during the week of the continuous traffic count, but vehicles were counted during the 12-hour periods of pedestrian and bicycle counts in May, 2011, when there were home games at Fenway Park. These counts indicate that Friday evening peak hour volumes increased to about 100 vehicles in advance of the evening game, and that on Saturday there was a surge of over 140 vehicles between 6 – 7 PM following the daytime game. This pattern indicates that Agassiz Road experiences some increase in advance of games at Fenway Park, but a much more significant increase at the end of games while parking lots in the Boylston Street area are emptying.

Finally, the heaviest traffic volumes on Park Drive and Fenway occur during the afternoon peak rather than the morning peak, likely reflecting the fact that Fenway in particular is used by many commuters departing the Longwood Medical Area and seeking access to Storrow Drive.

There are no capacity issues at Park Drive, as there are no conflicting turning movements. At Fenway, traffic on Agassiz Road must stop and wait for a gap in the Fenway traffic flow. Capacity analysis indicates that there is no theoretical capacity issue for Agassiz Road traffic to exit onto Fenway. In practice, however, there is often a queue back from the nearby pedestrian signal and the signalized intersection on Fenway at the Westland Avenue resulting in some queuing on Agassiz Road while drivers wait for a gap to join the Fenway traffic flow. Occasionally, the stationary queue on Fenway presents an opportunity for Agassiz Road drivers to join Fenway at low speed through driver courtesy.

Agassiz Road Site History and Existing Conditions Report

30 November 2011

Conclusion

Although the conversion of Agassiz Road, Park Drive, and Fenway to one-way systems dramatically reduced the level of vehicular traffic along the Fen's parkways, not all changes in the MDC plan were beneficial for all users of Agassiz Road. Along with the transition to one-way traffic and a narrowing of the roadway profile, the sidewalk widths were reduced to their present narrow width, which can be seen as inadequate to carry the pedestrian and bicycle circulation across the park.

The parkland aesthetics of Agassiz Road are affected with the compacted and worn landscape areas as well as encroaching, invasive vegetation. Vegetation management around the bridge is required to reveal the historic and architectural character as well as to protect the structure from deterioration and damage. A planting plan for the area should be supplemented with a long term vegetation management plan and allocation of maintenance resources. Along with the recent discussions to reopen the Duck House for public use or a concessionaire, the building's connections and physical relationship to Agassiz Road must be thoughtfully planned albeit based on the anticipated program for the building.

These existing conditions and circulation studies, coupled with an understanding of the roadway and park history, will inform the next tasks of preparing conceptual plan alternates. Conceptual plans will involve the determination of roadway and pathway use, design, and paving materials; new and better located crosswalks; supplemental and replacement vegetation, trees, and lawn areas; and appropriate site lighting treatments. Agassiz Road is an important, historic link in the Fens and the conceptual plans will seek to ensure that its future design and use return the roadway as an appropriate pleasure route within the park for all users.

Sources

McGinley Kalsow and Associates LLP. Agassiz Road Shelter Assessment, Back Bay Fens, Boston, Massachusetts. Prepared for Boston Parks and Recreation Department. April 2008.

Walmsley/Pressley Joint Venture. The Emerald Necklace Parks Master Plan. Prepared for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management, Office of Historic Resources. 1989, updated 2001 by Pressley Associates.

Zaitzevsky, Cynthia. Frederick Law Olmsted and the Boston Park System. The Belnap Press of Harvard University Press. Cambridge, MA and London, England. 1982.

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<u>Appendices</u>

1988 Agassiz Road Bridge Restoration Plan, Sheet L1

Illustrative Plan for the Back Bay Fens from The Emerald Necklace Parks Master Plan

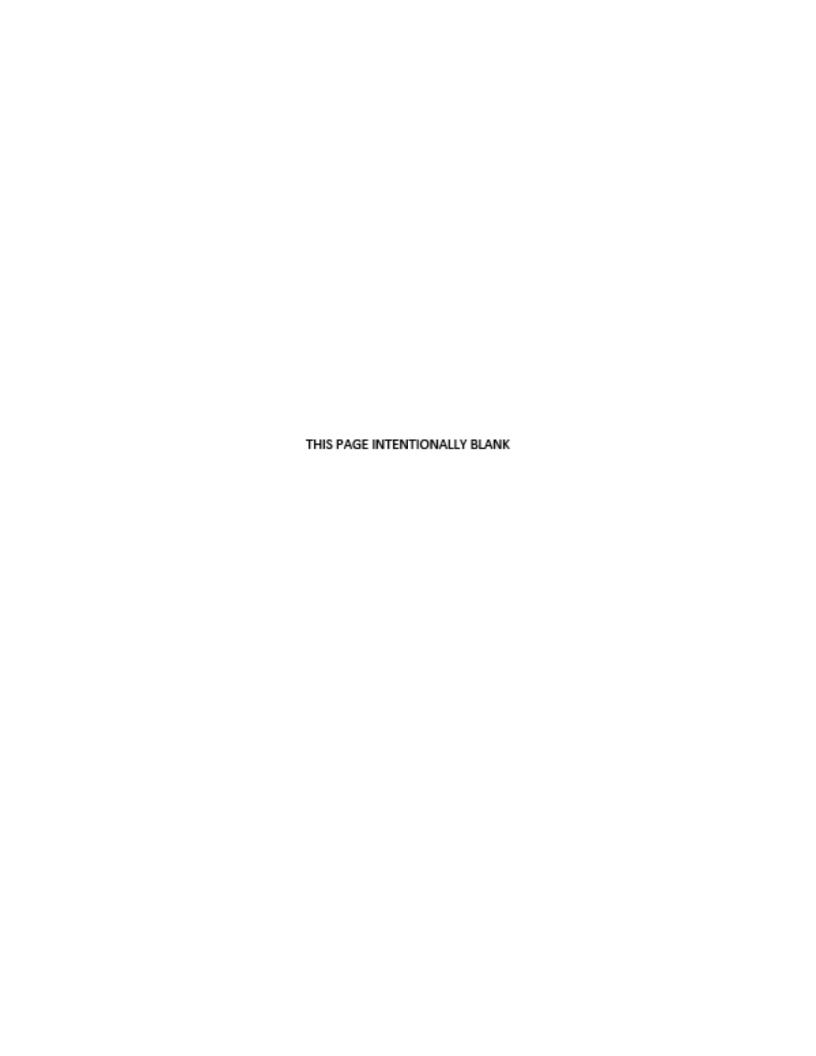
Historic Plans Compilation - 11"x17"

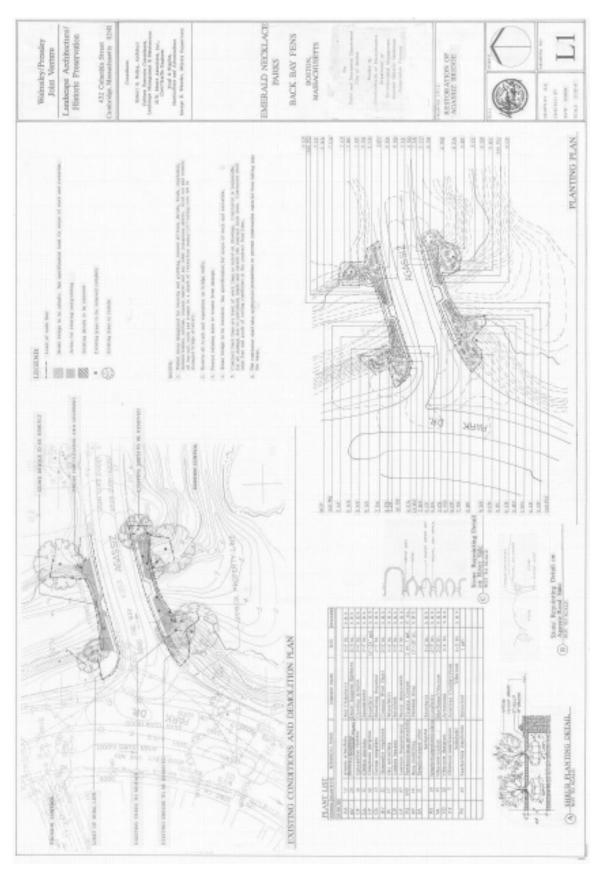
Historic Photographs Compilation - 11"x17"

Current Aerial Photographs - 11"x17"

Context Map (200 scale) - 11"x17"

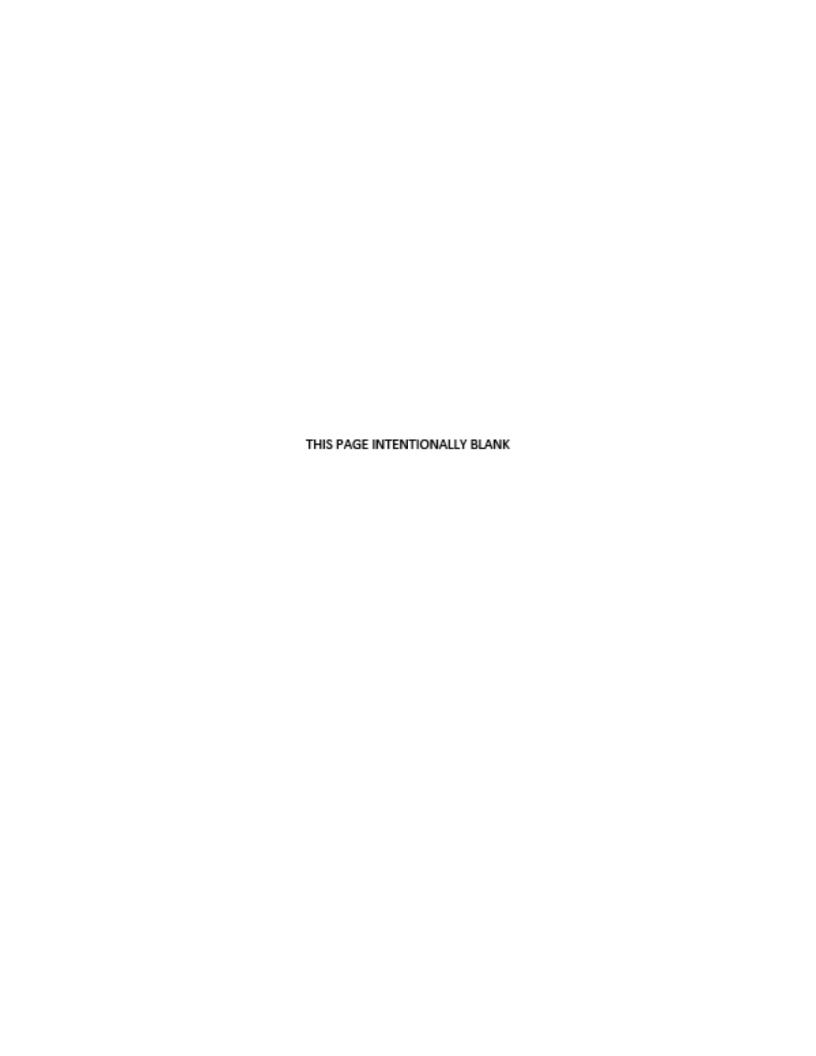
Existing Conditions Plan (60 scale) - 11"x17"

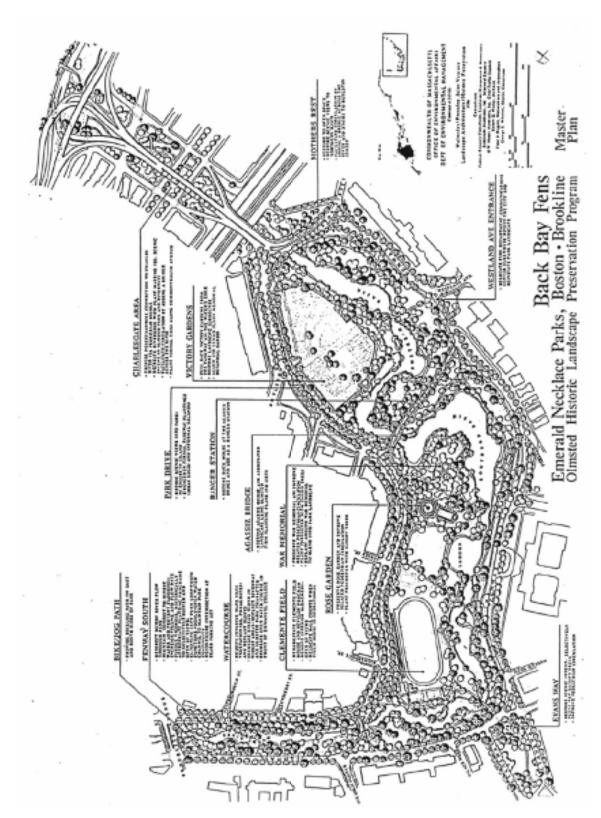




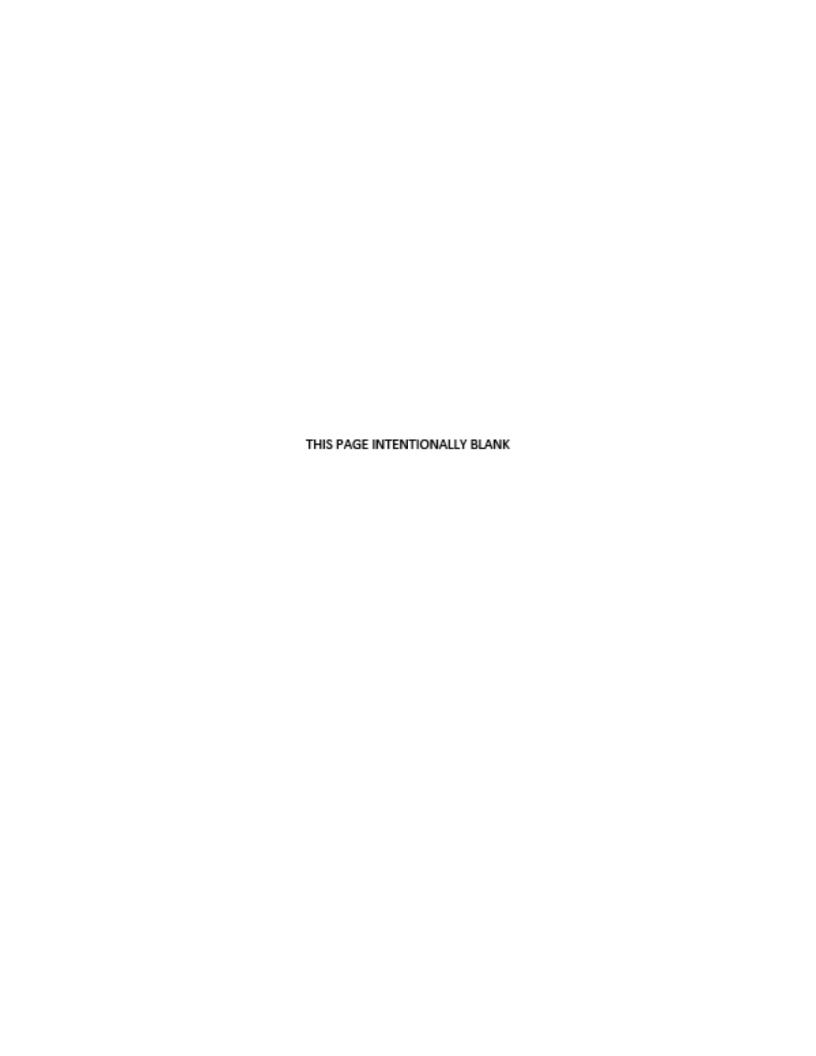
1988 Design Plans for the Restoration of Agassiz Bridge (Walmsley/Pressley Joint Venture)

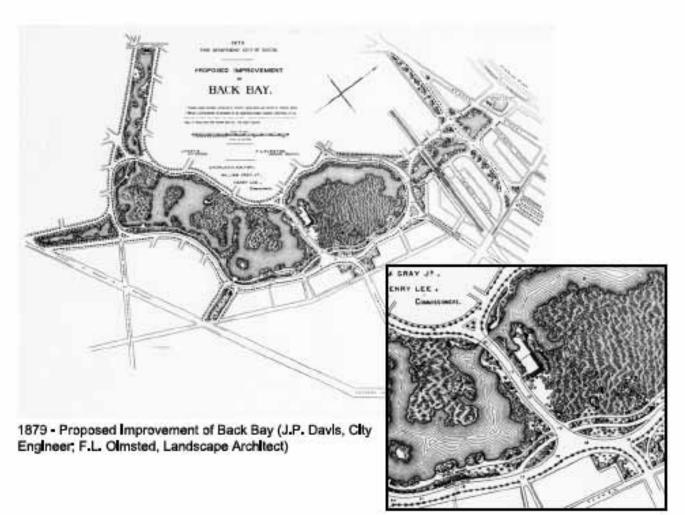
34 November 2011

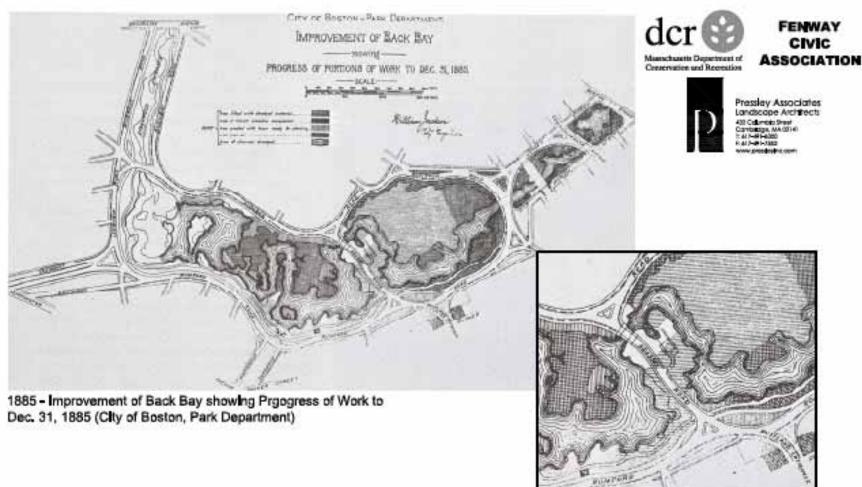


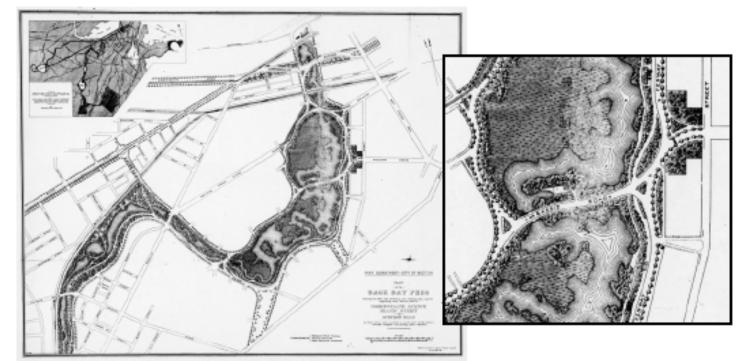


Emerald Necklace Parks Master Plan for the Back Bay Fens (Walmsley/Pressley Joint Venture. (1989, updated 2001)

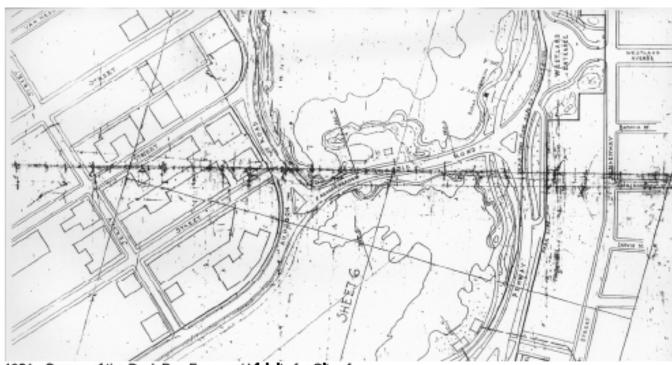








1887 - Map of the Back Bay Fens for City of Boston Park Department (F.L. Olmsted, Landscape Architect Advisor for Park Department, City of Boston)



1921 - Survey of the Back Bay Fens and Vidnity for City of Boston Park Department (prepared for Arthur A. Shurtleff)

DCR Agassiz Road - Path and Parkway Improvements





1897 - Intersection of Agassiz Road and Fenway, looking west



Circa early 1900's - Postcard of Agassiz Bridge



ND - Aerial view over MFA looking west



Circa early 1900's - Intersection of Agassiz Road and Audobon Road (now Park Drive), looking east



Circa 1935 - Aeriai view, looking northeast (Agassiz Road on left side of photograph)



December 1965 - Aerial photograph (Agassiz Road on left side of photograph)

DCR Agassiz Road - Path and Parkway Improvements















DCR Agassiz Road - Path and Parkway Improvements

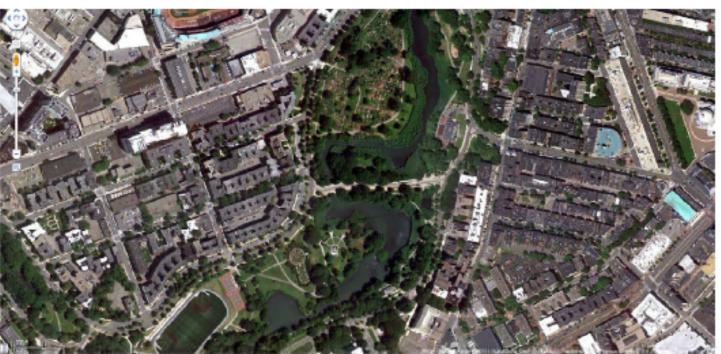
Current Aerial Photographs - from Bing Maps (dates unknown)















DCR Agassiz Road - Path and Parkway Improvements

Current Aerial Photographs - from Google Maps and Bing Maps (dates unknown)

