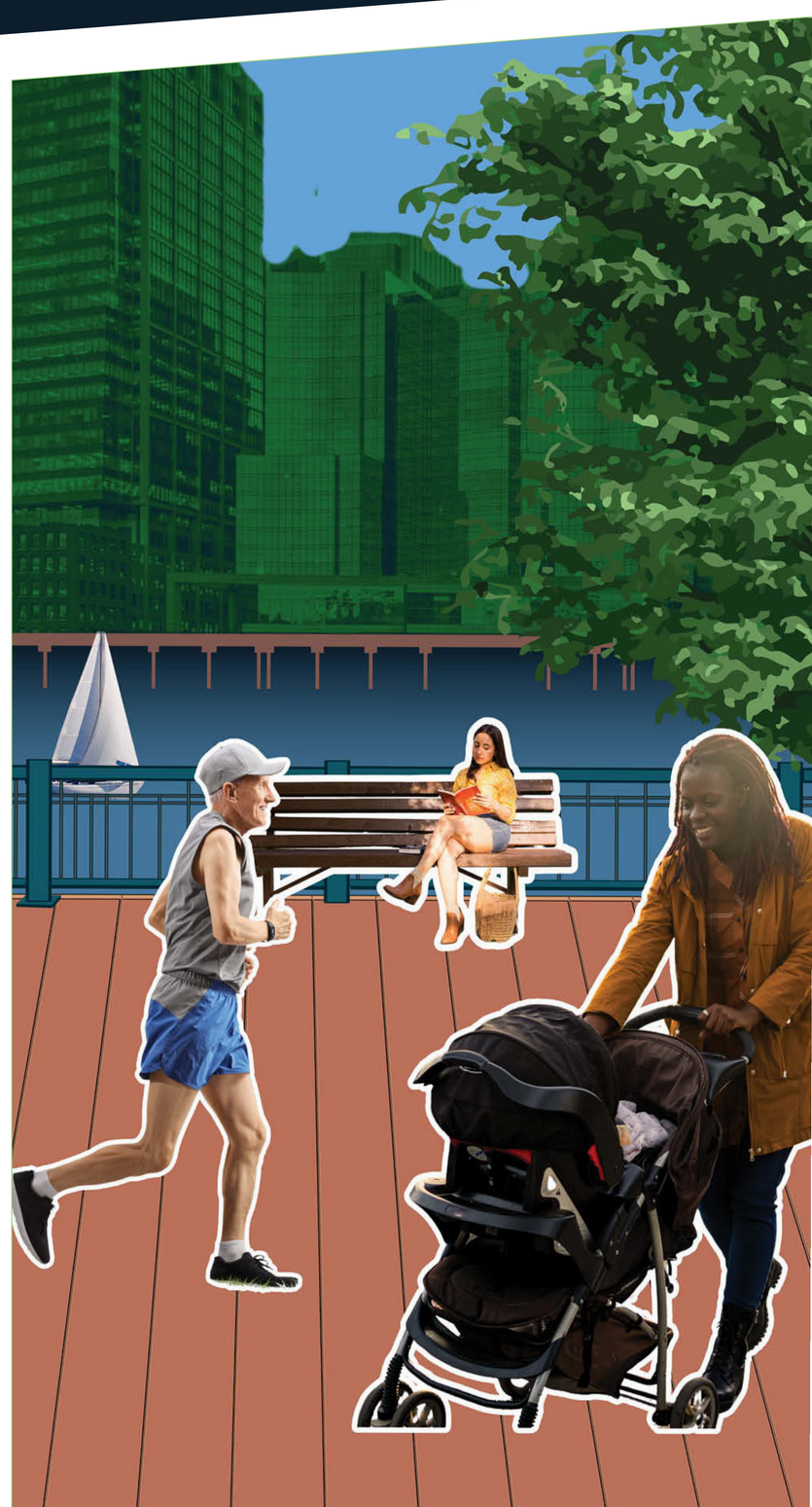
Help us create

Spaces For You

What is **Spaces For You?**

Spaces For You is a collaborative and proactive initiative by the City of Boston to co-create, enhance, and celebrate public outdoor spaces that foster joy, belonging, and well-being for all residents. It seeks to leverage private development to bridge the gap between community needs and city resources, knitting together public and privately generated open spaces to create vibrant social places for all.

Over the next few years, this framework will guide how private development contributes to open space creation, provide tools and design guidelines that ensure POPS serve Boston residents to the best of their ability—supporting an equitable, resilient, and accessible citywide open space network.



Both privately and publicly generated open spaces make up Boston's systems of publicly accessible open space

1 *Ownership*

Publicly accessible open space

~6% of the publicly accessible open spaces* in Boston are **privately owned, publicly accessible open spaces.**

** Excluding private cemeteries*

~2% of publicly accessible open spaces in Boston are owned by **private institutions**

~4% of publicly accessible open spaces in Boston are **privately owned public spaces (POPS)**

Based on total acreage

~7% of publicly accessible open spaces in Boston are owned by **other public entities (such as BHA, BPL, BPS, MassPort, etc)**

Based on total acreage

The Green at 401 Park, Fenway

Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS) are often created as part of private development.

2 *Access*

Levels of Access are defined as -

Open Access: Publicly accessible to all park users from dawn to dusk. Permits for recreational uses available upon request. No locked gates restrict entry.

Time-Limited Access: Open to the public only during designated hours, similar to indoor facilities or school playgrounds.

Process-Limited Access: Site access requires a reservation, appointment, or coordination with a designated contact to open the facility.

Some Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS) have **process-limited access**

Unlike public parks, some other public open spaces have **time-limited access.**

Jordan Field, Allston

Photo credit: Rose Lincoln

3 *Protection*

Protection is defined as -

The term "protection" generally refers to the to the level by which an open space is protected from conversion to another use. Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS) have variable levels of protection.

Levels of Protections include:

Permanent: Permanently protected from development. Requires an arduous state process to over-turn permanent protection, which is unlikely to succeed.

Time-limited: Protected by contracts and agreements that have end dates.

None: No legal, contractual, or regulatory measures prevent development.

Boston Harborwalk, Downtown

Some (POPS) have **permanent legal protections**.

Harbor Way, Seaport

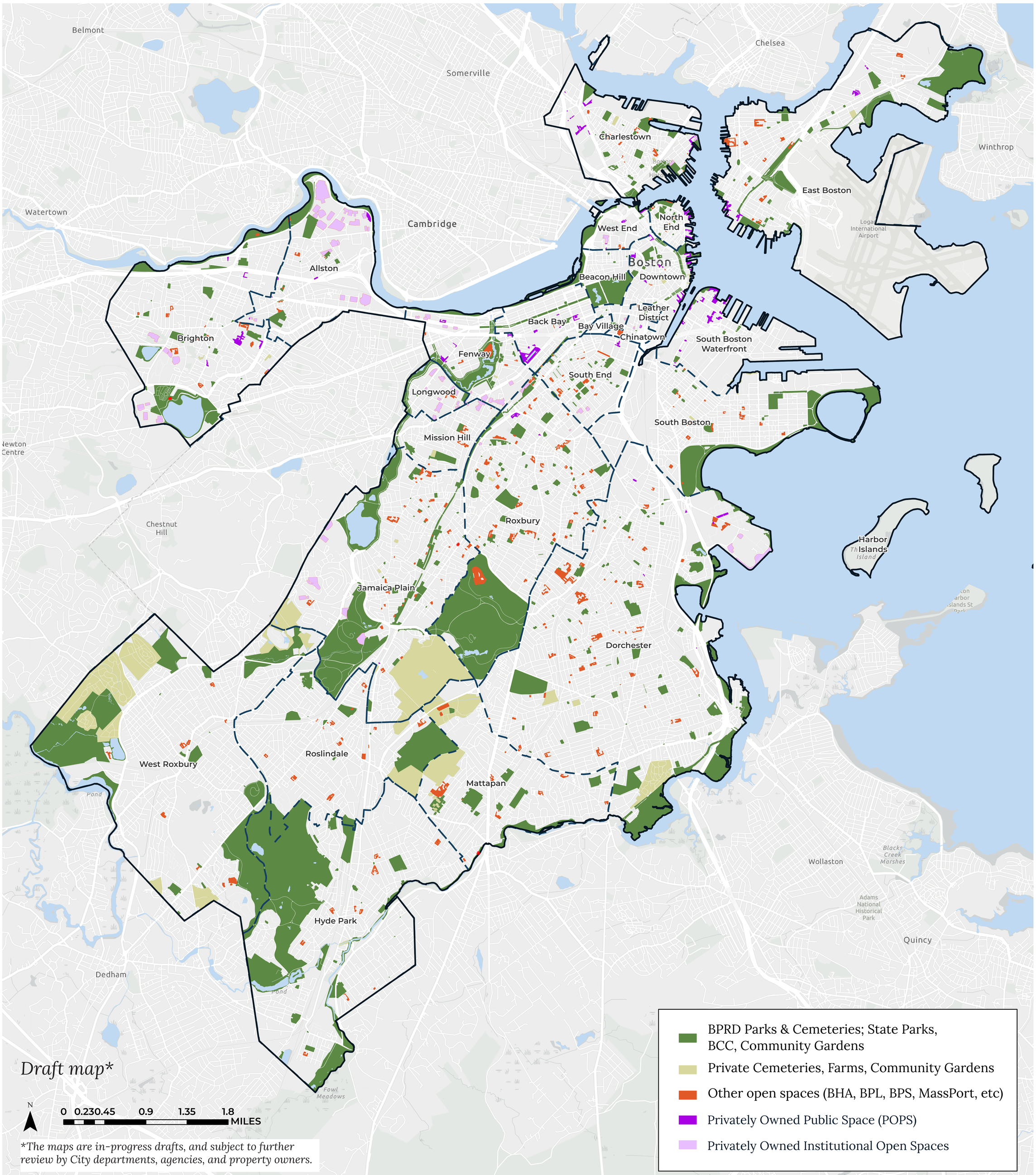
Other POPS have **time-limited protection** because of their cooperation agreements.

Open spaces across Boston range in ownership, management and funding.

87% of publicly accessible open spaces are owned by the Boston Parks and Recreation Department (BPRD) and the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

7% of publicly accessible open spaces are owned and managed by public entities, such as Boston Housing Authority, Boston Public Schools, Boston Public Library, and others.

Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS) make up **6%** of Boston's publicly accessible open space. These privately funded and maintained areas include spaces created through development and by private institutions. Some remain privately owned, while others may transition to public ownership.



*The maps are in-progress drafts, and subject to further review by City departments, agencies, and property owners.

Many of Boston's great and new outdoor spaces are privately generated!

Edgewater Food Forest, Mattapan

Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Longwood

401 Park, Fenway

The Holiday Market at Snowport, Seaport

Photo credit: The Travel

Spaces for **Play**

A Street Park, South Boston Waterfront

Spaces for **Rest**

Post Office Square, Downtown

Lyrik Back Bay, Back Bay

Millennium Tower Forecourt, Downtown Crossing

Prudential Center, Back Bay

Photo credit: Prudential Center

Jordan Field, Allston

Photo credit: Rose Lincoln

Harborwalk, Downtown

Spaces for **Socializing**

Boston Landing, Allston

Photo credit: Boston Landing

Harbor Way, Seaport

Photo credit: Eric Levin

Spaces for **Exercise**

Seaport Common, Seaport

Fan Pier Harborwalk, Seaport

Photo credit: The Fallon Company

Passive Spaces

Spaces for rest, relaxation, and spending time in nature

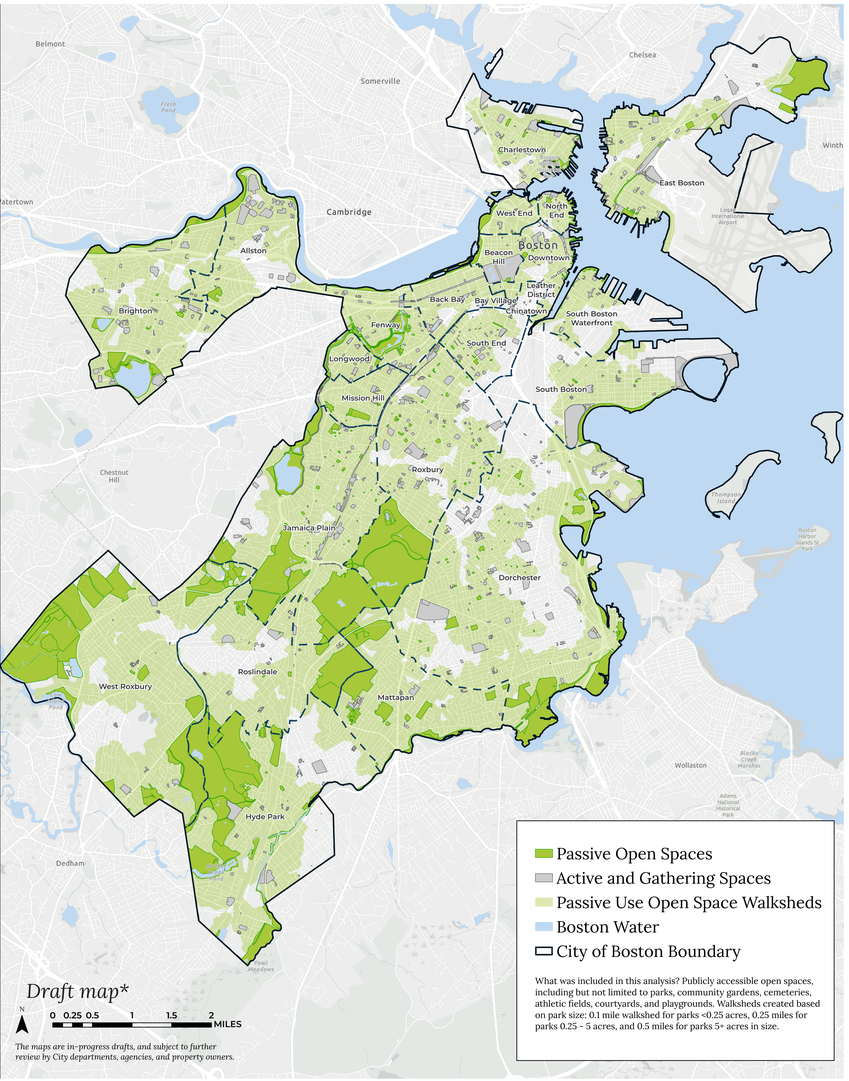
Gathering Spaces

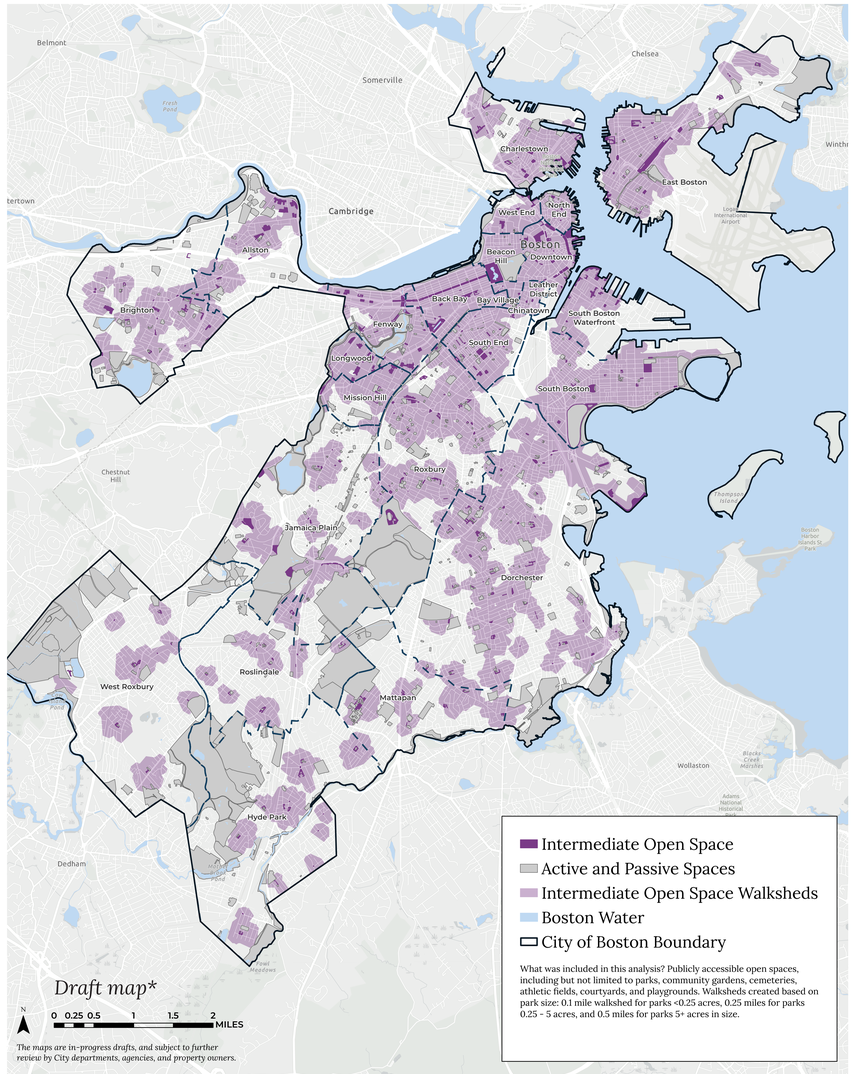
Spaces for community gathering

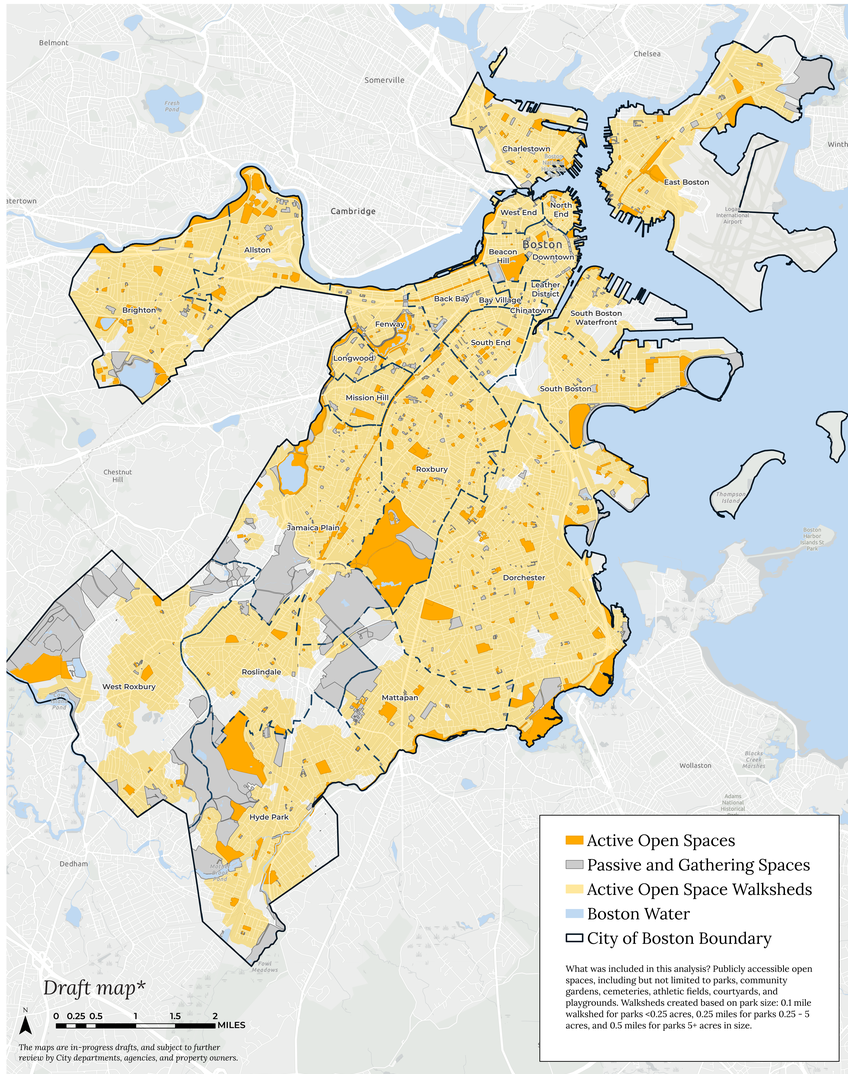
Active Spaces

Spaces for exercise and play

Many of Boston's open spaces offer a range of use types, from passive to active uses.







Note for all maps: What was included in this analysis? Publicly accessible open spaces, including but not limited to parks, community gardens, cemeteries, athletic fields, courtyards, and playgrounds. Walksheds created based on park size: 0.1 mile walkshed for parks <0.25 acres, 0.25 miles for parks 0.25 - 5 acres, and 0.5 miles for parks 5+ acres in size.

**The maps are in-progress drafts, and subject to further review by City departments, agencies, and property owners.*

Passive Spaces

Spaces for rest, relaxation, and spending time in nature

Gathering Spaces

Spaces for community gathering

Active Spaces

Spaces for exercise and play

Open Space in _____

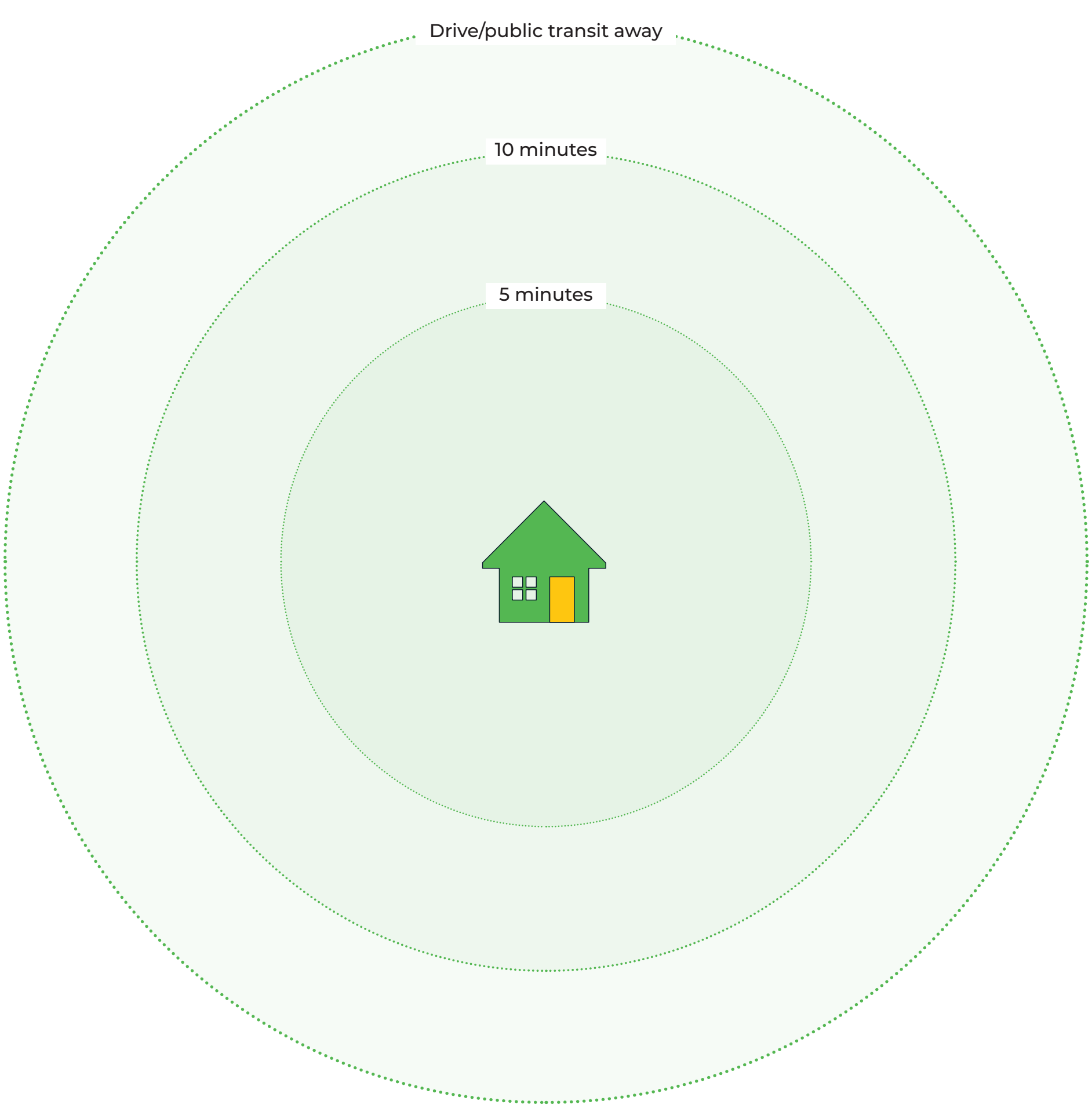
[your neighborhood]

Today, Boston has many different types of open spaces, from natural, green spaces to sports fields to plazas. Spaces For You aims to create a complete network of these spaces, so every Bostonian has access to all types of open spaces. However, not every space can be within short walking distance.

> In this exercise, we'd like to learn your priorities: **Which types of spaces are important to have close to home, and which can be farther away?**

1 Imagine your home is in the middle of the circle.

2 Use all 8 stickers to show how far you'd be willing to travel for each space type. Place stickers closer to the middle if you want that space near your home, and farther out if you're okay with traveling farther.



Public Life in Privately Owned Public Spaces

***The Spaces For You* team surveyed both privately and publicly owned open spaces across Boston using the Public Space Public Life (PSPL) survey method. This people-centered approach uses systematic observation methods, which provide us with an understanding of who uses public spaces, what they do there, and what design elements make the spaces lively, welcoming, and well-used. This data will help us develop design guidelines for privately owned public spaces (POPS).**

Methodology

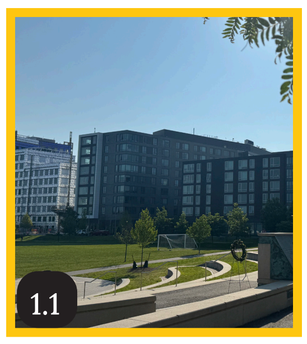
Using the PSPL observational method, surveyors recorded perceived age and gender, along with the activities people were engaged in—such as sitting, standing, or conversing.

> We conducted observations over two sessions: June (Thursday, June 5, and Saturday, June 7) and October (Thursday, October 2, and Saturday, October 4). Each day was divided into three time periods: morning (8–10am), midday (12–2pm), and evening (5–7pm).

> Weather conditions varied: June included one hot, sunny day and one with thunderstorms, while October days were cool and sunny.

Public Space Public Life Survey Sites

Surveyors observed a total of 26 sites across 7 neighborhoods. The variety of sites allowed us to compare key differences (physical form, adjacencies, size, use type, design elements & ownership). 15 of the sites were Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS) and 11 of the sites were publicly owned parks. Spaces use types fell into three categories: Passive Spaces, Gathering Spaces, Active Spaces.



Survey sites are as follows:

Allston-Brighton

 # Site (ownership, use type)

1.1 Smith Playground (Public, Active)
1.2 Boston Landing (Private, Gathering)
1.3 St. Gabriel's (Private, Gathering)

Fenway-Back Bay

2.1 The Green at 401 Park (Private, Gathering)
2.2 Lyrik Back Bay (Private, Gathering)
2.3 Prudential Center Plaza (Private, Gathering)
2.5 Edgerly Road Playground (Public, Active)
2.6 Symphony Community Park (Public, Active)
2.7 Ramler Park (Public, Passive)

East Boston

3.1 Bremen Street Community Park (Other, Gathering)
3.2 Clippership Apartments (Private Passive)

Downtown

4.1 Christopher Columbus Park (Public, Active)
4.2 Rowe's Wharf (Private, Gathering)
4.3 Post Office Square (Private, Gathering)
4.4 Millennium Tower Forecourt (Private, Gathering)

South Boston Waterfront

5.1 Fan Pier Park (Private, Passive)
5.2 Harbor Way (Private, Gathering)
5.3 The Superette (Private, Gathering)
5.4 A Street Park (Public, Active)

Jamaica Plain-Roxbury

6.1 Mozart Street Playground (Public, Active)
6.2 Malcolm X Park (Public, Active)
6.3 Horatio Harris Park (Public, Active)
6.4 Carter Playground (Public, Active)

Mattapan

7.1 Walker Playground (Public, Active)
7.2 Cote Village Playground (Other, Active)
7.3 Edgewater Food Forest (Other, Passive)

Passive Spaces

Passive spaces offer moments of calm, and are often naturalized or highly vegetated. They allow people to rest, recharge, and reconnect with nature away from active recreation and bustling city life.

Edgewater Food Forest, Mattapan

The Richer the Vegetation, the Longer the Dwell Time

People tended to spend more time in places with multisensory, high-quality, lush landscapes.

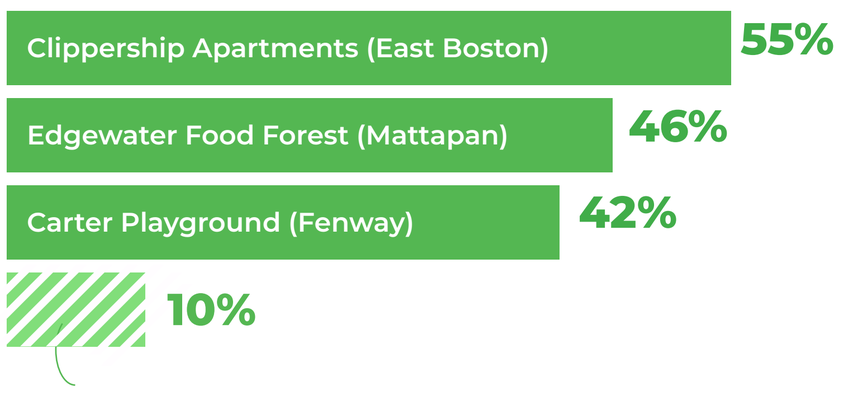
On average, people stayed in spaces with lush greenery for more than

30 min

Providing Space for Observation

Activities associated with respite, like observing the envrionment around you and people-watching, are most pronounced in lush and natualized resident-oriented spaces. Though these spaces saw lower foot traffic, they serve an important neighborhood-scale function as places for rest, dwell, and relax.

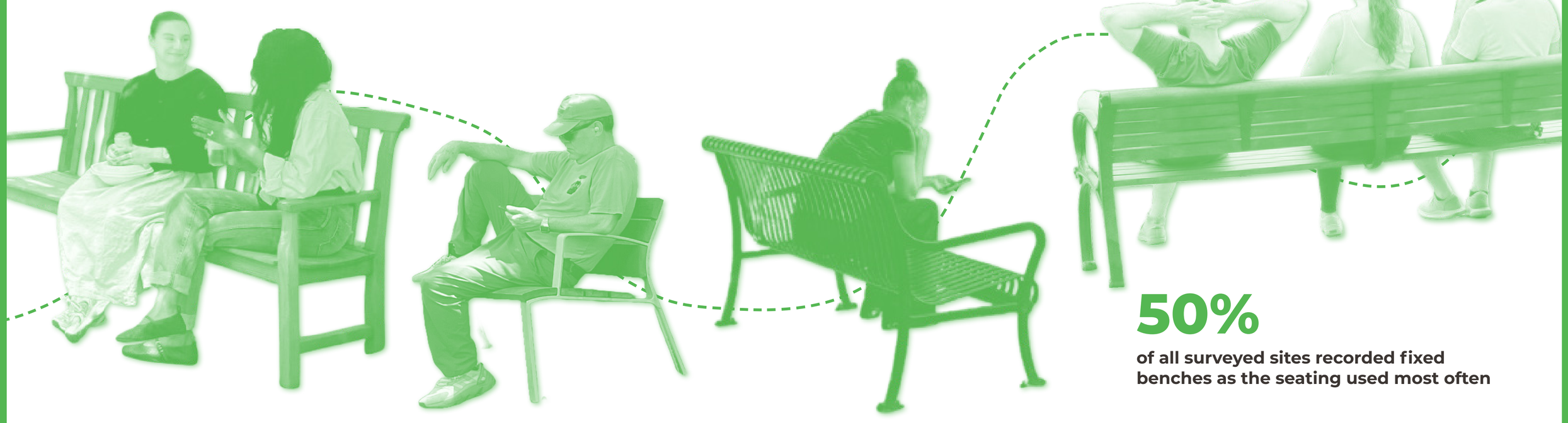
Proportion of people observing or people watching



Clippership Harborwalk , East Boston

Seating Invite Relaxation

Fixed benches are the most commonly used seating type across both POPS and public parks.



50%

of all surveyed sites recorded fixed benches as the seating used most often

Gathering Spaces

Gathering spaces bring everyday city life together. They invite conversation, activity, and exchange—dynamic places where the familiar meets the unexpected. Successful gathering spaces offer opportunities for people-watching and community programming, and they are visually connected to the street, drawing people in and encouraging interaction.

Little Things Everyday

Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS) often provide a robust calendar of programs, and POPS that had programming during survey observations times saw a surge in foot traffic.

Out of all the spaces that offered programming,

7/10 were POPS

POPS with programming saw pedestrian activity increase by up to

283%

(comparing event hours to non-event hours)

Where Commercial Activity Supports Connection

POPS in dense office and commercial districts consistently perform well as gathering spaces, and provide people with alternate spaces for conversation and gathering. Spaces with food and beverage establishments onsite supported longer stays in the space, creating a lively and social atmosphere.

Proportion of people in conversation

Visibility Sustains Active Public Life

Sites with tucked away or privatized areas see lower volumes of people and fewer people engaged in social or commercial activities.

Restricting access to open spaces during peak hours can reduce public use and create the impression of exclusivity. Design and management strategies should prioritize openness, visibility, and shared use to sustain a welcoming public character.

Active Spaces

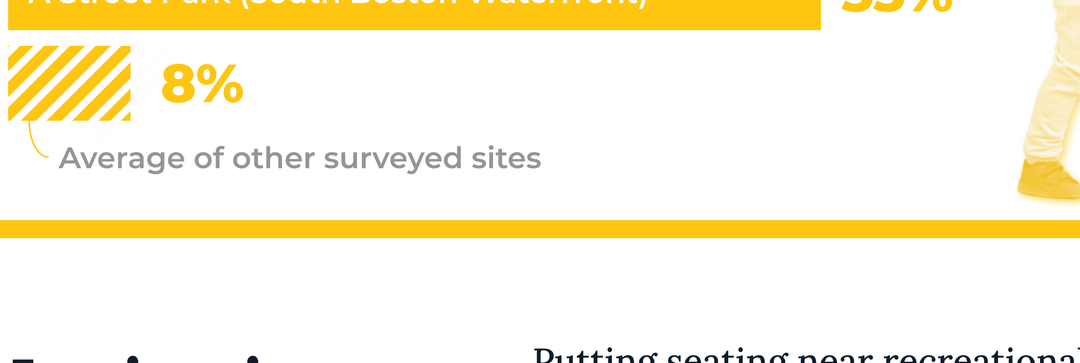
Active spaces are vibrant hubs that welcome a wide spectrum of users and encourage movement, play, and social interaction. Active spaces invite everyone to join in, whether as participants, spectators, or simply as community members enjoying the lively atmosphere.

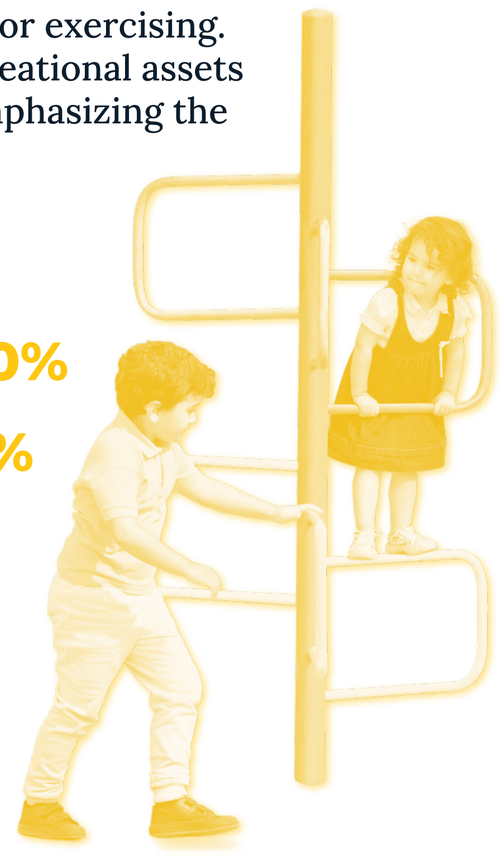
A Street Park, South Boston Waterfront

Public Parks Spark Playful Energy

Public parks have the highest proportion of people playing or exercising. All public parks observed in the survey have dedicated recreational assets such as playgrounds, basketball courts, and open lawns, emphasizing the importance of these assets in supporting active use.

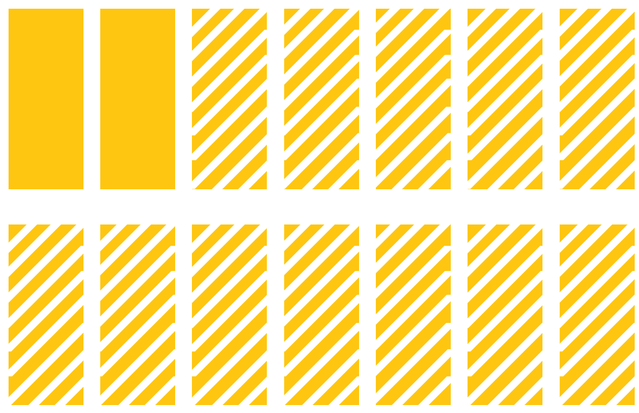
Proportion of people playing or exercising





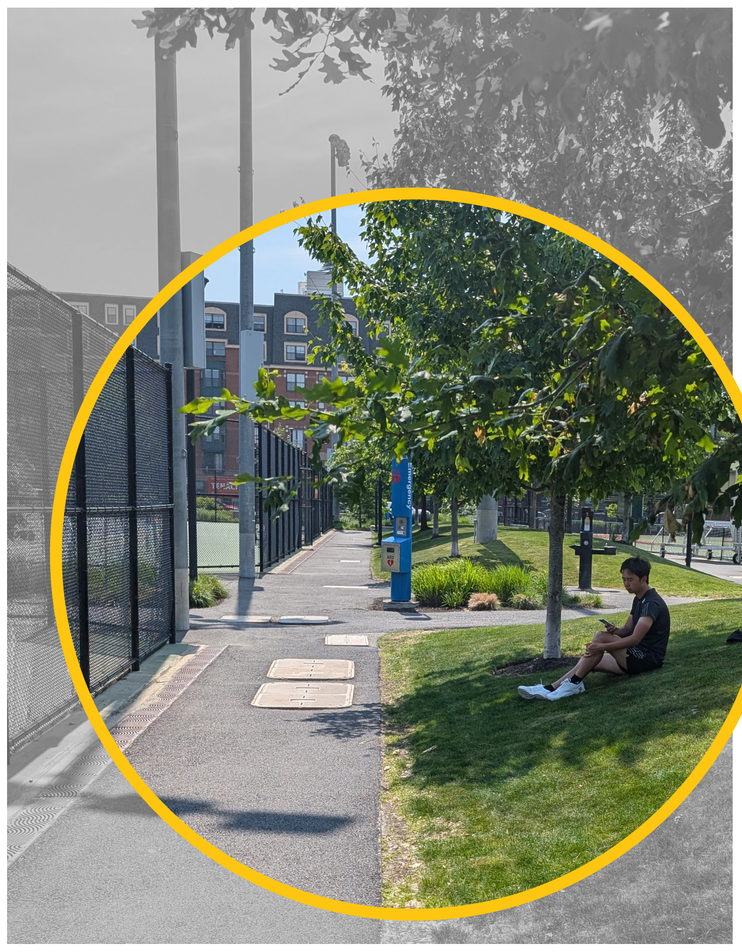
Missed Opportunities

Currently, due to concerns around liability, many privately owned public spaces (POPS) do not have fixed recreational assets for play and exercise but have active programming.



2/14 POPS surveyed have recreational assets

Invitations to Spectate

Putting seating near recreational fields and courts invites people to watch the action, making physical activity and recreation a focal point, rather than a standalone activity.

Successful active parks have several seating areas, such as a seating grove and grassy mounds that are positioned strategically near the courts or recreational fields, allowing for casual viewing and passive social interaction