RAPPAPORT INSTITUTE FOR GREATER BOSTON
John F. Kennedy School of Government
Harvard University

AN UNCOMMON PLACE

The Boston Common has become an iconic place in the City of Boston—a place for active and passive recreation, political and social rallies, and large civic gatherings. While the Common originated as a cow pasture and place for military exercises, it has played a little-appreciated role in the creation of the conservation movement in Massachusetts and the United States. On September 4, 2003, six experts discussed the Boston Common's legacy at a celebration of Boston Charter Day.

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Soon after Boston's founding in 1630, the free men of the town agreed to pool their financial resources to buy the property that would become the Boston Common. The reasons behind this move varied. Bostonians had a vague notion that the community should possess a place that all could use for the individual and communal purposes. The new common would provide a place for cows to graze, people to gather for civic activities, and soldiers to train. Practically speaking, the purchase allowed townspeople to free themselves of William Blackstone, the nettlesome neighbor who owned the property.

Over the years, the Boston Common has become synonymous with the conservation movement in America—but has not taken its place in the history books as the founding moment of that movement. Other projects, such as the construction of Central Park in New York City or the erection of physical ornaments brought to cities as part of the City Beautiful movement, have gained more attention as historic milestones in the nation's efforts to preserve and maintain open space for public enjoyment. Part of the reason for this curious gap in the history books owes to a syndrome familiar to fans of the Boston Red Sox baseball team: New York, by dint of its size and influence in the wider world, seems to loom imperiously over the rest of urban America.

But the untold story of the Boston Common's influence over the parks and conservation movements also stems from a sense that the Common was not really a park in the modern sense of the word. A place for grazing and military exercises, sure, but not a park *per se*. But as James Levitt shows in his paper "Palladium of the People," soon after its creation the Boston Common became a place of recreational activities that we now associate with parks. Even though Boston Common was not invented as a park, its creation was a signal moment in the history of parks and the protection of natural spaces in America.

To explore the issues raised in Levitt's paper, the Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government and the Massachusetts Historical Society convened a panel discussion. The discussion was part of the annual Charter Day celebrations, which commemorate Boston's birthday of September 7, 1630.

Previous Charter Day events have featured figures such as Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino and U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice Stephen Breyer, and events at Faneuil Hall, Old North Church, and the Boston Public Library. The 2003 celebrations focused on the importance of "common spaces for the commonwealth."

The discussion, held on September 4, 2003 at the Massachusetts Historical Society in Boston, engaged five key figures in Boston's recent history of conservation, parks, and environmental issues:

• Richard Dimino, former transportation commissioner for the City of Boston, is executive director of the Artery Business Committee, a business organization that has been active in the $14-billion Central Artery/Third Harbor Tunnel Project for more than a decade. Dimino has played an influential role in planning for the artery's "surface restoration" – that is, what kinds of parks and other civic spaces will be created on the land once the elevated highway is removed in favor of underground tunnels. The ABC and other organizations have examined a number of questions about the Rose Kennedy Greenway: What kind of design will it have? What kinds of natural and open space will be mixed in with what kinds of civic spaces? How will the Greenway reattach Boston proper to the oceanfront, which has been cut off from the rest of the city for so many years?

• William Fowler is the executive director of the Massachusetts Historical Society. A former professor of history at Northeastern University, Fowler is completing a study of the French and Indian War. Fowler has been expanding Mass Historical Society's holdings to include contemporary issues of the environment and the growing ethnic and racial diversity of the state.

• Laura Johnson is the president of the Massachusetts Audubon Society, which had been active in a wide range of conservation and environmental initiatives across the state. Mass Audubon operates the new Boston Nature Center at the old Boston State Hospital site in the Mattapan neighborhood of Boston – and area that has come to be known as the "Heart of the City." The Boston Nature Center is designed to reach out to as many urbanites, particularly young people, and expose them to the city as a natural environment.

• Ashley G. Lanfer is the campaign manager for Boston Parks 2004, an effort to highlight the importance of parks and open space in Boston in the year leading up to the Democratic National Convention in July 2004. Ashley formerly coordinated the Rappaport Institute's Heart of the City Project, which created a comprehensive on-line inventory and analysis of all the green spaces and neighborhood resources in the geographic center of Boston. This area includes Franklin Park, the Arnold Arboretum, the Boston Nature Center, Forest Hills Cemetery, which abut the neighborhoods of Roxbury, Dorchester, Mattapan, Jamaica Plain, and Roslindale.

• James Levitt is a former businessman and consultant who has turned, in recent years, to devoting full time to conservation issues. He was the founder and director of the Internet Conservation Project at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. Levitt argues that every new innovation in transportation or communication technology changes the way we settle and live in our communities. Levitt is the editor of *Conservation in the Internet Age: Threats and Opportunities* (Washington: island Press, 2002). More recently he has turned his attention to understanding the various linkages in the history of open space in Boston and Massachusetts.

• Frederic Winthrop is the former agriculture commissioner for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. He also is former executive director of the Trustees of Reservations and a long time environmental activist. His ancestor was John Winthrop, who came in here on a boat called the Arbella, which settled in Boston in 1630.

The panel was moderated by Charles Euchner, executive director of the Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston. Euchner, a former college professor and city planner, is the editor of the Governing Greater Boston Series. His latest book, coauthored with Stephen McGovern of Haverford College, is *Urban Policy Reconsidered: Dialogues on the Problems and Prospects of American Cities* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

An edited transcript of the conversation follows:

Charles Euchner: What is so distinctive about Boston's founding, and how the civic spirit that was articulated in John Winthrop's statements at the time related to the creation of the Boston Common and the later development of the environment in Boston and Massachusetts?

William Fowler: One of the most important things to remember about the men and women who came here in 1630 is that they were a covenanted people. They viewed themselves as the descendents of the Israelites of old. And they believed that they had a special relationship with God – a contractual relationship. They believed that if they did well and obeyed the Old Testament, then they would, in fact, be rewarded in this land. They did not necessarily refer to themselves as Puritans. That was a name given by others to them. But they did view themselves as purifying the Church of England. They came here to continue that purification.

It is likely, by the way, that they came here not to stay. They came here to this New England, this New Canaan, to preserve that which was best in their own world because they were convinced that the old world was literally and figuratively going to hell. They believed that someday they would be called upon to recreate a society, a Godly society, and that the Lord delivered them to New England for that reason.

Fundamental to these people is that they were English. They were of a particular Puritan, Protestant persuasion, to be sure, but they were English men and women. They came from a country that was relatively small and orderly. It was physically orderly. Their worldview was one that was relatively small in scope and scale. Imagine, then, what it was like for them to arrive here to this vast, limitless expanse of what they referred to as a "howling wilderness."

The task of Boston's early settlers 'was to bring order to the wilderness, to bring order not only to their societal structure, their relationship with one another, but to the physical environment as well' was to bring order to the wilderness, to bring order not only to their societal structure, their relationship with one another, but to the physical environment as well.

Their task was to bring order to the wilderness, to bring order not only to their societal structure, their relationship with one another, but to the physical environment as well. They were to tame this wilderness because they identified wilderness with evil, the devil. Civilization was the taming of the territory. So that is what they were here to do. They divided the land amongst themselves,

according to their own scheme. They knew they had a right to the land because the king had given them that right, by royal charter.

But they also asserted their right to the land because they improved it. The native Americans who lived in this area – at that time there were not that many – had not used the land, in the eyes of these English men and women. They had not improved the land. Therefore, not only did the English believe they had a right to the land from the king, but they had a right to the land because they were improving it, bring order to it, making it productive, which indeed they did.

It is out of this sense of covenant, this sense of responsibility to one another, this sense of taming this land, or making this land productive, that Boston Common came into being. It was not part of a plan. The Boston Common was not intended to be the first park in America. That was not in John Winthrop's mind. Nor was it in the mind of the others who were with him. What drove them to do this was not a plan for a park but a commitment to one another and a commitment to the community. That was the origin of the creation of this land.

What I find somewhat curious is that we seem in our own time to have lost the sense of commitment. We don't seem to know as a society, as a community, what commitment is about. We know a lot about plans. But I would also point out, this one, curious thing, that is particularly apt in terms of our current concern with downtown, that in fact, Boston Common was initially created by, purchased by monies raised on behalf of the partners of the colony, what we would call the state.

It was the state that created that park and then they sold it to the city. And it is the city today that maintains the Common. So there is a precedent event. There is a precedent we can hope for in which the state creates some park land and then, hopefully, turns it over to the city.

James Levitt: I can just add one element to what Bill said before I launch into my little piece: the people who settled Boston, including Fred Winthrop's 13th great-grandfather, were very conscious that they were establishing a story. I was in the Common today and came on a monument that I had never noticed before. The monument had a picture of the Puritans on the one side, and on the other side are the words: "For we must consider that we shall be a city on a hill. The eyes of all people upon us… We shall be made a story and byword through the world."

So though they might have intended to eventually go back to England, they were very self-conscious about creating an example and a story that would live through the ages. And one of the parts of that story has been forgotten a little bit. If you look through bookstores today for histories of the environmental movement and the conservation movement, you will see *Life* magazine's "Our National Parks." You will also see a beautiful, large-format book called *Central Park, An American Masterpiece: A Comprehensive History of the Nation's First Urban Park.* But Central Park is not the nation's first urban park. It just isn't so.

The story of the Common and its importance, while not entirely forgotten, has been largely disregarded in such books. Perhaps the people on the panel today can help correct that just a little bit.

One of the innovations that Winthrop and his followers came up with was local self-governance. Remember, this was a group of Puritans who had John Winthrop, a lawyer who had attended Cambridge University in England, as their leader. Self-governance came from

the fact that most of the male members of Winthrop's group were shareholders of what we would call today a corporation. Because of the way that their charter was written, the shareholders, or "freemen," had the right to vote about their own government.

They had the right to govern themselves on a local basis because of a loophole in the group's charter from the king. The loophole allowed them to take their charter with them to New England. They were able to govern yourselves without going back to London every year for approval. Well, that was a loophole that Winthrop and his fellow, highly educated Puritans took advantage of in several very important ways. One of the things that they early on decided to do was to buy some land and a fellow named William Blackstone, himself educated in Cambridge. Blackstone was a solitary type that had settled in Shawmut Peninsula before the Puritans had arrived.

And what they did set a precedent that we still use in one form or another today. They decided, in an open meeting of the freemen and other inhabitants of Boston, to collect from each household, a fee of six shillings – a bit more from some more prosperous households – for the purpose of buying Mr. Blackstone's land from him.

So they bought private property, or what we would today call private property, from another Englishman, with money that they collected from a self-imposed property tax.

Within six years, having the right of local self-governance, Bostonians imposed upon themselves a series of land-use regulations. They said, in effect: "No one shall build upon this land." There was a series of ordinances passed in open town meetings over six or seven years that said, in effect, "Nobody shall build upon this land without the permission of the majority of the people who live here," and "Nobody shall dump animal carcasses here," and "No one shall dig sods here," and "No one shall throw stones on this space."

The settlers in Massachusetts took advantage of a loophole in the charter from the king. They were able to govern themselves without going back to London every year for approval. Winthrop and his fellow Puritans took advantage of this loophole when they voted to buy land from William Blackstone.

The land initially was used as a cow pasture and a military training ground, but soon thereafter it was used for recreational purposes, civic purposes, religious purposes, and patriotic purposes.

A second important element in the land's history is that the Boston Common has been passionately defended over the years. In our research, we found a document dated 1799, which shows that the people of Boston stridently defended what they saw as "the people's" open space years before Emerson was born, before Thoreau was born, before Olmstead was born. The Boston Common was defended as "sacred ground" 40 years before any proposal was put out to create what New Yorkers like to think of as the first urban park, 72 years before the world's first national park was established and 100 before Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot claimed to be present at the birth of conservation. The whole conservation movement in fact has very deep roots in Boston.

Charles Euchner: Panel, what do you make of all this?

Eugenie Beal: When this group of people came over, they had certain circumstances that they had to adapt. As Bill Fowler has noted, they didn't intend to make a park, but they knew that they needed a pasture, they needed a place for militia to train and all of those things. When the people of Boston did what they did, and the people of the 11 other early towns did what they did, they were adapting to their own circumstances. They weren't necessarily following somebody else's footsteps.

Charles Euchner: How much of a civic ideal was embodied in the purchase of the land from Blackstone and the creation of a Common? The very word "common" suggests some kind of civic outlook.

Eugenie Beal: I don't think it was an ideal at all. They needed a place to put their cows.

Richard Dimino: I do think that there is one distinctly different feature of this Common as compared to other commons, which is the notion of taxation, decided upon by the people, without a higher authority authorizing it. And I want to make that distinction very clear because for me, in today's discussion about open space issues associated with the Central Artery surface restoration, that question is constant. We are trying to raise the revenues and resources that are necessary to raise beautiful and well-developed park space.

'The innovation was in the financing of that common space. Today, we're faced with very similar questions because we have resource challenges to creating new open space and in maintaining existing open space. We need to ask ourselves: Are we willing to kind of find new ways to find resources?'

So this notion of people taking a step, way back in 1634, proactively to go outside of the traditional tax system, to agree to set aside resources to create a common, is an example that we have much to learn from that today. Now, today, there are many examples how that takes place. That is why my first point is about this notion of what I call civic innovation and entrepreneurship. There was civic innovation and entrepreneurship in that action.

I think that Eugenie is right. The purpose might have been more utilitarian relative to the initial needs of the Bostonians at that time. But the innovation was in the financing of that common space. And today, we're faced with very similar questions because not only do we have resource challenges to creating new open space, we have resource challenges concerning the care and the maintenance of existing open space. We need to ask ourselves: Are we willing to kind of find new ways to find resources? Are we willing to impose additional burdens on ourselves to protect those resources and ensure that they are here for generations to come?

Charles Euchner: I wonder if Laura Johnson might comment on that point. The Massachusetts Audubon Society has to use a variety of resources and create a variety of partnerships and alliances to create parks for the people, to preserve land even if it is not in active use and so forth.

Laura Johnson: It's important to understand some of these firsts. I don't think we should view necessity as diminishing achievement. Just because necessity drove them to create the Common doesn't mean it wasn't a significant achievement. The point of history is to recognize the achievement that was embedded in trying to make life work.

What strikes me is that life has gotten so complicated – today there are many necessities. The marketplace of ideas and the marketplace of needs are so crowded that it is not as clear to everyone that parks and open space are a necessity. The need for us to innovate for their maintenance and stewardship is even less obvious to the general public.

It may be that we need to emphasize that parks and open spaces are essential for education, reflection, and renewal – all of those different purposes for which we have a park. Where, today, are the voices that are making that case within the crowded marketplace of needs, desires, and necessities?

Charles Euchner: Ashley Lanfer is now working on a project called Boston Parks 2004, which is trying to highlight the integral role of parks in everyday life in the neighborhoods. What I like about this conversation so far, is the discussion of what's essential and what's not so essential. And I would posit that parks are, indeed, an essential part of urban life.

One of the challenges that Ashley's taken on is how to think about the parks. Some people think of parks as being somehow a break from urban life. Ashley's work is really showing that parks are an integral part of urban life. How do you kind of think about what proper role parks have and how they can be developed, how they can develop constituencies to support them over the long haul?

Ashley Lanfer: When it came to establishing this Public Garden, the public vote in all of Boston, was 60 to 1. That vote said: "Yes, we want to keep an open space here. We want to establish the Commonwealth Avenue Mall. This is what we want to do."

Years later, in the 1960s and 1970s, the Public Garden experienced vandalism, crime, the fences were all broken down, the equipment was run down, and the bridges were about to collapse. It was incredible and I had no idea that, even in this downtown area of Boston, that the Public Garden ever got to this point. What a difference between that period of indifference and the earlier time of "Parkomania," when people were just so charged up.

'What a difference between that period of indifference and the earlier time of Parkomania, when people were just so charged up. What did they do back in the 1850s and 1860s to make people on fire about the space?'

What did they do back in the 1850s and 1860s to make people "on fire" about the space? Remarkable people stepped forward to speak on behalf of open spaces – people like the president of Harvard and Ralph Waldo Emerson. There was a great deal of publicity – they had newspaper articles, they had petitions going out, they had many ways of getting the word out in a public way. And then, most of all, I was interested in this of sense of patriotism. All in all, there was passion!

These speeches, I just love them. Here's an excerpt from one: "Love your native land. Feel no scruples in welcoming and nourishing a peculiar affection for its wind and its soil, its coast and hills, its memory, its flag. You cannot more wisely love the world than by loving your country." This captures the passion for open spaces. And we are not quite capturing that, that whole breadth of ways to get at what matters most to people.

Charles Euchner: You know, Marion Kane of the Barr Foundation, a passionate supporter and defender of the parks, says that maybe what we need to do to raise the passion on this

issue is to close the parks down for a weekend and see how people get along without them and make them realize exactly what they take for granted.

Frederic Winthrop: What strikes me about the history of the Boston Common is how many times the Common has come "under the gun" over the last 350 years. I think we all assumed that the Boston Common had been created, everybody loved it, and that was pretty much it. I remember that during my lifetime there was a squabble about a parking lot, but the Common nevertheless seemed to be well-established.

But really the number of attacks on the Common over the years is quite extraordinary. And the observation I would make is most of the attacks came from government, mainly the Boston City Council. And the ones who would save the Common are the people. I began to think about this issue of stewardship. It's all very well to preserve properties, and we work hard at it, but the idea of preserving them, maintaining them, and supporting them, that is something that government doesn't do terribly well. Sometimes it doesn't overtly attack the resource, but it doesn't really support it all that well.

Charles Euchner: Why is that, Fred?

Frederic Winthrop: Well, I just think that it is politically relatively easy to raise funds to buy something and to own it, but rather difficult to raise funds to support it in a way that it should be. This is why organizations like the Massachusetts Audubon Society and the Trustees of the Reservations got started. Charles Eliot, when he started the Trustees in 1891, was quite fed up with the lack or attention of government agencies. He started the Trustees, which was similar in some ways to a museum that would, instead of preserving paintings hanging on a wall, would preserve very special places of historic interest and natural beauty. Eliot believed it was not a frill or something that would be nice if we had some money left over. He thought, let's do it because it is important for society. There were health reasons that I think were paramount in his mind. He looked at Boston growing by leaps and bounds in the 1880s and 1890s. He saw crime. He saw sickness. And he lamented that there was a lack of scenic and historic places to refresh the spirit and to refresh ourselves. He came out pretty clearly on the side of parks being an essential part of urban life.

I hadn't realized that the Puritans saw the Godliness of improving the land to the extent that they did. That is really an intriguing idea. I think that's an idea that has sort of carried on through the open space in the state, acquiring land, managing it, and taking care of it.

And to the extent that the government doesn't do that function, there seem to be people out there who can take it upon themselves. And you can see that certainly has happened in Boston.

Charles Euchner: It is a very Lockean idea too – the idea that you mix your labor with the land and therefore you become part of it.

Eugenie Beal: I want to break in at this point. I think it would be very Godly to improve Boston Common today.

James Levitt: That is pertinent to an important point that comes up repeatedly in the history of Boston. People like Charles Eliot, groups like the Friends of the Public Garden, in generation after generation after generation, have rediscovered this need to defend and take care of our open spaces. You see this in the 1840s and the 1850s, with the Trustees of the Public Garden. You see it again in the 1890s with Charles Eliot and his allies. You see it again in the

1970s with the emergence of the Friends of Public Gardens. The people of Boston looked at what was going on with their treasured public spaces and said what you just said. It is a tradition – a lovely tradition – in this Commonwealth. It's a vital tradition and it's one that all of us sitting in this room are well-advised to carry on in the future.

Eugenie Beal: But, Jim, if you look at the Common today, it looks rather scruffy. And the Boston Park Department will tell you that acre for acre, it gets more than its share of the maintenance money, because it is well understood that it gets more than its share of the use. But it is still not adequate.

James Levitt: It's a lot better than when Jack's Joke Shop was across the street from the Common in 1970.

Eugenie Beal: It's a lot better than what it was, but it is not what it wants to be. I want to use the word money.

Charles Euchner: That is, money that would be used to maintain it?

Eugenie Beal: We need it and, in particular, we need the Boston community to support the Boston Common, which you can say is the flagship of parks.

Richard Dimino: I think that actually a good segue because I wanted to talk about money. I also wanted to pick up a point that Fred Winthrop made earlier. This whole notion of private relationships and roles in the open space and park space is something that obviously has had an important and significant role in the history Boston Common and Public Garden. In many instances it was that kind of activism and investment that helped to spur action.

In a way, I think that we too often see what we do in overly segmented ways. We think, these people are going to take care of this, and those people are going to take care of that, and those people really should have a role in this other project. The notion of Common was really, truly common. A broad cross-section of different people was involved. I raise this because sometimes we end up, today, not allowing ourselves to integrate our interests. We don't allow ourselves to embrace those parties that are willing to roll up their sleeves and involve themselves in new and different endeavors.

There are a couple of examples of this notion of infrastructure and development and the collaborations and investments that have to happen. Alice Hennessey was one of the leading forces behind the creation of the new Millennium Park in West Roxbury. Alice and I were talking about money and parks. Boy, engineers and contractors and park developers don't typically sit across the table and create such beautiful park space. But it happened. There was a good integration of different interests and different parties coming together to realize the wonderful new park space in West Roxbury. I know Spectacle Island will be wonderful as well.

Today, however, we talk about the notion of a Friends Group on the Rose Kennedy Greenway. But the discussion is so timid. Should we really do it? What will the open space community really think about it? Can we really talk about this? Is it our role to actually think about involving the private sector? Should it take on some responsibility in this premier new open space?

But back in the days of the creation of the Boston Common, as well as our great parks systems, there was entrepreneurship, a willingness and boldness in people to speak up and

allow these partnerships to take place. In 1830, this notion of the Public Garden took hold. Clearly, it was a private action, which was pretty unprecedented. Can we allow ourselves to think like that today? Can we escape our preconceptions and allow ourselves to see this space as common space and allow others, maybe even some of the elite interests, to get involved?

Charles Euchner: Well, as long as you mention Alice Hennessey, it might be appropriate to note that one of the most creative and clever things done to create Millennium Park – and there were a lot of them – was using Big Dig dirt to cap the garbage and to turn it into something new and fresh. And that was innovative. Too often, we don't know these stories. Maybe part of the problem – and it gets a little bit to your point about the story telling – is that we don't tell enough stories about how it is that we created what we created. I don't know how many people know that story about Big Dig dirt being used in Millennium Park, but it's an important one.

William Fowler: Well, I think we still have a tendency to perhaps romanticize a bit our 17th-century ancestors. One of the reasons why they were able to purchase the Common, quite frankly, was that they wanted to get rid of Mr. Blackstone. To add to the case of a willing seller and an eager buyer, getting Blackstone out of town was seen as a good thing.

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But let me raise another point. When we are talking about the 17th century, we are talking about a homogeneous population. The people shared a common background, a common communication, a common education, a common religion, and a common commitment to their civic environment. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Boston is not a homogeneous place. It strikes me that the issue of parkland really goes beyond parkland. What is the twenty-first century Boston? What is the notion of civic responsibility today?

This is where we need leadership. We need the kind of people mentioned before who will speak out to rally support from all sectors of our society. We don't often seem to be able to do that. I think the fractionalized nature of the 21st-century urban environment is reflected in some measure. It is certainly the issue we have with parkland, and with a number of other issues as well.

James Levitt: One of the interesting historical characters I ran across in my research was this eccentric character named Charles Francis Barnard who, in the 1850s, did everything he could think of to save the Public Garden. He organized the children from the Warren Street Church – children of immigrants that worked in factories in Boston who otherwise weren't getting any attention. He organized these children on the Fourth of July to have this wonderful parade, right through the middle of Boston. The children would be on carts and the carts would be piled with flowers. These immigrant children that were being served by the Warren Street Church would go out on the Public Garden and sell these flowers to anyone who came by, which was everybody in Boston on the fourth of July. And the money was, in part, used to help support the park while its fate was being determined.

The Unitarian ministers who were involved with the Warren Street Church saw this flower-selling effort as a civilizing or Americanizing enterprise. They were trying to integrate these kids into American society. They were teaching them about the Fourth of July by getting them involved in this process. So, 150 years ago, we were dealing with diverse population on these parks. The challenge is immensely more complex today. But there is still great value in dealing with the new immigrants who were coming into Boston – people who never heard of the Boston Common – and saying to them, “There is something here of great value here in the middle of our City.”

Charles Euchner: There is another lesson to draw from this example. The Friends of the Common and the Public Garden became effective when they made this issue visible. What better way to make it visible than to occupy public space, to carry on through that public space, and find some kind of symbol of what you are trying to champion.

Ashley Lanfer: I was just thinking about the question of how to invite people to participate. You are talking about a big spectacle, bringing people into the park. And the way that Charlie Euchner and I have thought about this whole question is by looking at the edges of a really big park. I often think of Franklin Park as being the Central Park of Boston because is it the City’s geographic center and has 527 acres of parkland. It is enormous. The important question is, how do you invite people to get involved with the park? Too often, Franklin Park operates as a buffer between people, rather than something that brings people together. At its best, I can imagine where every single part of the edge of Franklin Park is an invitation to all kinds of people to come into this park for all kinds of reasons, to do all kinds of things. It really can be a wonderful meeting ground.

Charles Euchner: As opposed to a barrier.

Ashley Lanfer: Yes, as opposed to a barrier. The result would be that people wouldn’t see the map of Boston showing a picture of: “Here is environment and here is neighborhood,” or “Here is the city and here is the green space.” The picture would rather represent something that is integrated, something that is part of the everyday life to flow into and out of the area for a great diversity of reasons. I think that is part of the kind of invitation that we want to offer.

Frederic Winthrop: Just to support what you just said, I think Eliot pressed very hard for preserving places that would be used, where people would not just say, “What’s that in the distance,” but would actually use the green spaces. I think that’s the way you build a constituency for parks. And thinking of the Common and its origins, yes, it was a very important agricultural place – and it was used! That’s the important thing.

‘Eliot pressed very hard for preserving places that would be used, where people would not just say, “What’s that in the distance?” but would actually use the green spaces. I think that’s the way you build a constituency for parks’

When the Common started falling down, it was really after the cows were banned in the 1830s. But when it had a good productive use, and people counted on it, they said, “Hey, that’s mine,” and did a little self-policing. That’s what you need. It may not be agriculture but I’m sure there are parallels today.

Charles Euchner: In fact your remarks make me remember that some people have a problem with the very term "open space" because open sounds like a void. Whereas what we should be talking about is an active, natural, urban, human space or some other thing.

Laura, I wonder if you want to say something about your efforts in the heart of the city, in the Boston Nature Center. How are you drawing in people?

Laura Johnson: Mass Audubon's new Boston Nature Center is an urban place that is intended to be embedded in six of the most underserved communities in Massachusetts. One of the biggest things we've done is to make an enormous push in schools, with a very clear structure of educational programming. The result is that the kids are starting to recognize that Mass Audubon, and the teachers in their classrooms, and adults in their community, all care about a place in their neighborhoods, the Boston Nature Center. They bring that information home to their parents saying come to this, that, or the other thing at the BNC or other green spaces in the area. We begin to be embedded in the community in a very collaborative and, hopefully, productive kind of way. Through education we are reaching out to kids, and families, and the community, to build that network of people who care about the place.

Charles Euchner: Has this project made you think differently about the city?

Laura Johnson: One of the things that we are learning is that there is wilderness, there is wildness, in Boston. It's remarkable how resilient some of the plants and animals are. And there is an obligation for all us to create a place that this wildness can continue to survive and where people can interact with it in an appropriate but real way. We don't want to close this off. We want kids and families and anybody else to be in this place, to hear birds, to see the red-tailed fox. Sometimes urban kids are very comfortable on the asphalt and very scared of a boardwalk through a marsh or a trail. And this makes "bringing people in" more of a challenge.

Richard Dimono: Well, what Laura's doing and what we're thinking about a lot in connection with the surface artery, relative to the park design, is to address the question: "Who are parks for?" Laura is obviously trying to bridge the parks in urban life with neighborhood families and neighborhood children. She is trying to make that connection.

I know that the Boston GreenSpace Alliance has done a lot of thinking about this lately. They have looked at playgrounds – where the families and children actually interact in or around playgrounds. They are asking whether families and kids are actually are going into the space. I think that really gets to the question about how you engage park design so that it really, truly does bring people into the space. We need to know how parks become part of the real life our families.

And so the question I've been asking myself – and Eugenie also asks this question – is: How do you design park space along the surface corridor that will really get Boston families involved. How do we get people to say, "Hey, it's Sunday afternoon, let's go to the park space along Boston's waterfront."?

What will be the trigger that Laura is trying to develop to get people into the park space in the urban center, and the garden center? What will be the trigger that will get children back in playgrounds?

Eugenie Beal: Well, there are all kinds of parks. There are parks for active recreation that have ball fields, there are playgrounds for kids, there are places to sit. You might say that every park is different, a place on a continuum. And I think it is important that the city as a whole try to put within the reach of every home a variety of park space, not just one kind. Can I bring up another issue?

Charles Euchner: Please.

Eugenie Beal: Rick raised the issue of what kind of private support can be given to the public sector. And I think that there are two main ways that this can be done. We can just divide it into two general aspects. One is, we can do what we do in Friends of Public Garden. I have a quote from Henry Lee that I brought that I will read. "The relationship that is between the park and private organization is informal but roles are clear. The Park Department is responsible for the care and operation of Boston's parkland, including that owned by the state. Friends serve a double role. One is that of advocate and watchdog. The second is advising the department and carrying out, as permitted, various projects and programs." Now here comes the punch line. "Critics sometimes question the relationship. Some believe the city should do everything; others, that private groups should assume whole control. The first is infeasible. Private operation, on the other hand, seems impractical and wrong. We find, in short, that private participation and public authority are the most effective stewardship."

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The other is the idea followed by the Central Park Conservancy. They really took over the management and maintenance of Central Park from the City of New York government. They said, "We'll do it," and got some money from the city but I think it was really a token.

In Boston, we are really following Henry Lee's idea. A year ago I said, you've got a coherent philosophy and those of us that have been working with you for a long time, are well aware of what it is. But when new board members come in, they really ought to have a sort of mission statement to refer to, which we never really put one in words In other words, his idea is that private organizations supports the city government, holds its feet to the fire when necessary, raises money for things that the Park Department approves of and permits but doesn't take control.

My idea is that the Community Preservation Act ought to be amended so that it allows some of the money to go for parkland maintenance. Acquiring new parks is a good idea, particularly in some communities in Massachusetts. But we need to take care of what we already have, and amending the CPA would be a good way to help in that regard.

Charles Euchner: Ultimately, to gain support for parks and natural spaces, there needs to be a story that connects these places to people's lives. Today we do not have enough resources at the state or local level to keep up our parks and make sure there are enough parks in all the neighborhoods. What can change that? People need to be aroused by stories

that connect these places with their core needs and values. There are so many rich stories connected with the Boston Common—not only stories about its creation, and how it influenced the conservation movement across the United States, but also how ordinary people rose up to defend it when it was under attack. It offers a model for action. What stories are we making today?

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