

Designing and Building the Wellington Greenway: Project History and Future Plans

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Project Description and Background

The Wellington Greenway is an emerging and nearly-completed 3.5 mile long multi-use trail, which connects beyond its ends to more than 50 miles of other existing and proposed future trails. The Wellington Greenway is an urban greenway; the path traverses six abutting properties located along the Mystic and Malden Rivers in the densely populated cities of Malden and Medford, Massachusetts. Work has been ongoing for over four decades, and while not measured in many miles, much progress has been made. The project is complicated in both technical and political spheres, as the Greenway passes through a mix of public and private properties, crosses major arterial roadways, active commuter rail lines and wetlands, as well as landscapes which vary from naturalistic parklands to urban mixed use developments. The Greenway is a also waterfront and as such it is subject to all of the intense environmental requirements and



jurisdictional reviews of such developments. Finally, the entire project site area was originally a severe brownfield condition.

Site History: From 1850 to 1920 this landscape was at the epicenter of the American Industrial Revolution in the northeastern United States. Originally tidal estuary and extensive marshlands, the area was filled and became the home of heavy industrial users. These included nationally prominent steel mills, paint, textile and chemical manufacturing plants which relied on the river for transportation and a place to dump waste. By the 1980's the site was essentially abandoned by competitive commercial uses, leaving heavily contaminated areas, many derelict buildings, and a forgotten and largely inaccessible riverfront.



1998 photo. Some of the worst of the existing conditions along the Wellington Greenway site – Over a century of abuse had resulted in the natural marshland ecosystem long being obliterated; in many places the polluted riverfront was inaccessible to and completely forgotten by the public.

My experience working on the Greenway began in 1987, when I first walked a desolate project site with Julia O'Brien, then Director of Design for the Massachusetts Metropolitan District Commission (now the DCR, Department of Conservation and Recreation). Since then I have been aware of many relevant and connected projects along and nearby the Greenway, and involved with the design and construction of four projects along its course. I am currently working on the upcoming construction of a fifth project, as part of a team which includes the

developer of an adjacent property, the City of Medford, the MBTA, the Massachusetts Environmental Trust, an LSP (Licensed Site Professional), a civil engineer and the General Contractor.



Site Context: The site is located just five miles north of Boston, at the confluence of the Mystic and Malden Rivers, and near the transportation hub of Wellington Circle in Medford, MA. In recent years the area has been the benefactor of numerous public / private collaborations, all under the guidance of the DCR, and many Greenway improvements have been fueled by significant high density "Smart Growth" development projects, with many new residences and supporting mixed use projects.

A major achievement of the Greenway Project has been in bringing people back to the riverfront, by providing access to this valuable public resource. The general demographic shift towards urban living has also greatly benefitted the area. With the direct service to downtown Boston from Wellington Station on the MBTA's Orange Line, these transit-oriented waterfront developments have become popular places to live, and with the new population has come an increased interest and action toward the further improvement of the Greenway.



Recent photo of one of the segments of the Greenway which has been recently refurbished. These projects take time. I had orchestrated the planting of these trees in 1988. In 2010, we repaved the path, repaired and added new benches and other site furnishings, and did a significant amount of invasive vegetation management.

Project Goals and Objectives:

The Wellington Greenway Project has and will:

1. Provide a direct connection between many local urban neighborhoods and a very large number of existing waterfront parks and amenities, benefitting thousands of nearby residents and office workers, bicyclists, recreational joggers and the boating community.
2. Complete a 3.5 mile missing link in a difficult, complex urban section of a much larger network of extensive existing and planned trails beyond.
3. Allow regional access to the area and great potential for increased recreational use and increased awareness of the Rivers and their critical role in the history and ecology of the region.
4. Make the entire Mystic River Basin immediately accessible by foot and bicycle to additional new visitors, via the MBTA Orange Line Station.
5. Increase commuter and recreational use of the Orange Line Train which in turn will reduce pressure on the intense automobile traffic in the area. Consultants from have estimated the next segment of the Greenway will reduce the daily use number by between 1,200-1,750 daily vehicle trips.
6. Leverage currently underutilized open space assets and opportunities. By virtue of the greatly improved access to them, momentum has been created to spin off several significant improvements and amenities to existing parkland, such as access to the

dramatic new overlook at the existing peninsula under the MBTA Bridge at the confluence of the Mystic and Malden Rivers.

7. Provide many environmental benefits, such as brownfields cleanup, use of many sustainable landscape construction techniques, and ecosystem improvements such as improving wildlife habitat through the almost singular use of non-irrigated native plant materials which reduce water consumption and increased wildlife habitat and food value.

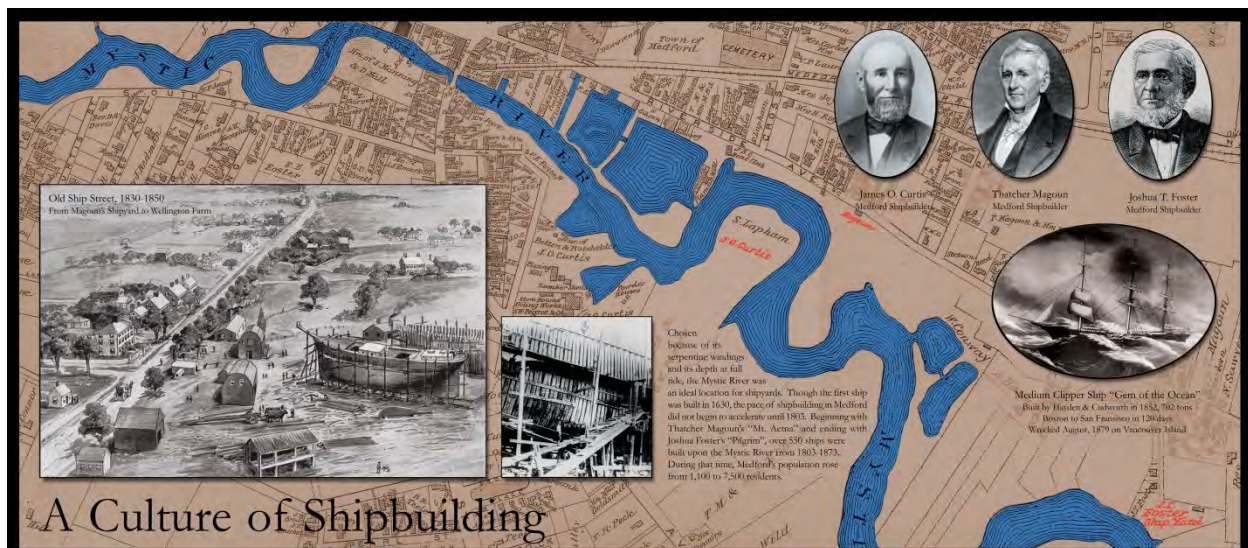
Major Components of the Greenway:

The Wellington Greenway is currently composed of five major segments:

- MacDonald Park and Mystic River Reservation
- Station Landing
- Wellington MBTA Station
- Wellington Business Center
- River's Edge

Revealing this Place of Cultural and Historic Significance.

The Greenway is located entirely within an extremely historic area which time has forgotten, and a significant part of the work of the Greenways is to reveal this history to the public. Perhaps the most celebrated part of the area's history was its leading role in the design and production of sailing ships. At one point in time there were more than ten shipyards located within a mile of each other, and between 1803 and 1873, a total of 568 ships were produced along these very few miles of riverfront, including some of the most successful vessels of the fabled clippership era.



This legacy is revealed and extended in different ways along the Greenway, through interpretive markers, the use of nautical materials, in metaphors and in contemporary use of the rivers, as boat clubs with launches, boathouses, docks and many overlooks of the rivers.



MacDonald Park and Mystic Reservation

Macdonald Park and the Mystic River Reservation were built on a reclaimed dredge spoiled area left after the construction of Route 93. The park serves as a major public open space for the City of Medford and is a link to the larger Mystic River Reservation, as well as the starting point for the Wellington Greenway.



Station Landing

This major, mixed-use waterfront development features approximately 600 new residences, 160,000 square feet of office space and over 30 new retail stores and restaurants. The Park and Greenway acts as the major public space for Station Landing and draws visitors and residents to the edge of the Mystic River.



Wellington MBTA Station

The section of the greenway is currently in development, with construction completed on the first section in the fall of 2012. When completed in its entirety, it will create the critical central link which connects the two major completed section of the Greenway

Different lengths of this section of the trail are owned by various parties:

- 1,700 ft are privately owned (existing trail – Wellington Business Center)
- 2,200 ft are owned by the DCR (existing DCR trail)
- 1,000 ft owned by the DCR (no trail)
- 1,200 ft owned by the MBTA
- 500 ft owned by private party (no trail)

The most recent component of the greenway is the “Overlook”, the centerpiece feature at the confluence of the two rivers, which affords a dramatic 270 degree panoramic vista from an abandoned rail bridge abutment. Details of this ongoing project are on the next pages.

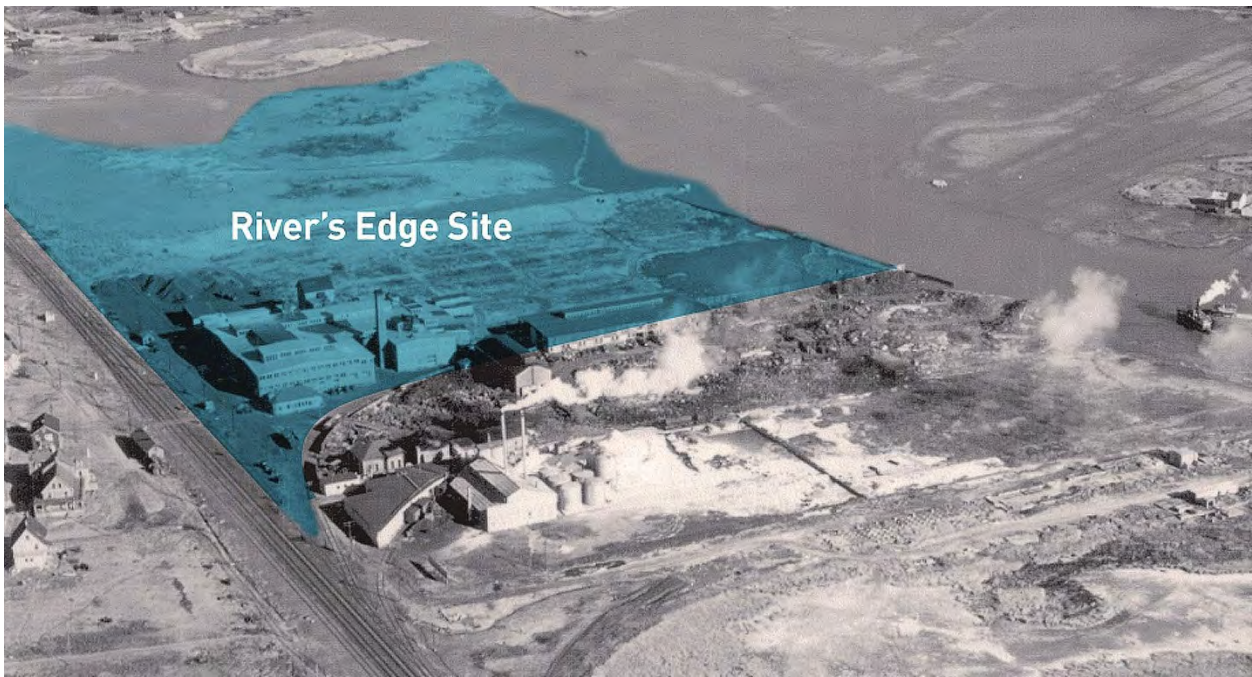




River's Edge

The Greenway currently concludes at The Park at River's Edge, the most recent and most fully designed area of the Greenway. As the spearhead of a brownfield restoration and 30-acre mixed use Transit Oriented project, River's Edge has transformed an industrial wasteland and greatly improved the quality of life for an entire community.

Surrounded by underserved dense urban neighborhoods, the project now provides a healthy and well-used waterfront public open space. In design terms, the park is at once wholly contemporary yet profoundly appropriate and fully connected to this regional and historic New England waterfront.



Prior to 1845, the site was part of a wetlands ecosystem which extended to Boston Harbor. Implementation of the *Malden Canal Project*, the largest federally funded project in the United States at the time, saw the filling of these wetlands. This image shows how industrial users filled the marshlands ahead of them as they progressed in “improving” the site.



This view shows the site after removal of derelict buildings but prior to removal of the 100-ton, 40' x 270' sunken, and garbage filled barge. Landfill soils were typical of the entire riverbank. Over 17,000 tires were recycled. The nearly completed Tufts University Boathouse is in the center of the photo.



During construction, the bank was relocated by 26' and extensive care was taken to clean toxic soils and provide the foundation for a renewed ecosystem.



Taken shortly after construction, this view shows the Greenway path as it winds through the large park. This is a rare elevated and open expansive view of the river.



Today, major wetlands planting has filled in, providing valuable habitat for urban wildlife. The boathouse is barely visible in the center of the image. Late summer seasonal color glows in the afternoon light.



The ambience of the riverfront is informal, yet the sculpted landforms are intentional, the plantings are deliberately placed, and strategically located park elements are choreographed to provide a sequence of views, connections, transitions, spaces and experiences.



Preparing for a regatta on a brisk spring morning. The park supports a broad range of activities, from cycling to soccer and cross country skiing to sun bathing. The largest user group is the steady stream of walkers and joggers.



There is a central lawn just off of the main park path, which provides a broad, quiet expanse and it hosts frequent games of catch and many family picnics. The walls are a contemporary and comfortable reinterpretation of the ubiquitous New England Sea Walls found throughout the area.



This overlook off the main path provides a quiet cove from which to enjoy the river. Aggregate paths encourage walking rather than boarding or wheeling. The Massachusetts Audubon Society has recorded a large increase in the number of bird sightings and the species diversity at the site since the park opened.



The flowing site walls are woven with plantings and into rolling landforms, recalling a once-meandering riparian landscape. The wall's materiality, mass and integration within the landforms instilled a sense of permanence in this newly reclaimed landscape.

