

CHARLES RIVER CONSERVANCY

Annual Report 2014





The Charles River Conservancy is dedicated to the stewardship, renewal, and enhancement of the urban parklands along the Charles River.

The Conservancy promotes the active use and vitality of the parklands, increases recreational and cultural opportunities, and works to ensure the beauty and integrity of this extraordinary public resource.

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR AND PRESIDENT



The Charles River Conservancy is a labor of love for all involved. And in 2014, our labor has seen great progress across our programs and projects. In this annual report, we are delighted to share a few of our achievements with you.

From our record number of volunteers serving in the parklands doing critical stewardship and maintenance work to the Lynch Family Skatepark groundbreaking, your support has enabled us to activate and enhance the parklands in far-reaching and significant ways.

The Conservancy Volunteers program held 46 service events engaging over 2,000 volunteers and hosted 13 summer Sunday Parkland Games jumping with joyful active families. We welcomed you back into the water with the second annual Charles River Community Swim. We successfully persuaded the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) to add pedestrian/bicycle underpasses into its bridge rehabilitation plans—and were thrilled when they gave the green light for an underpass for the Anderson Memorial Bridge and pledged support for bridge underpasses in the future at River Street and Western Avenue. Working with advocacy partners, we have gained momentum for an

Allston Esplanade as part of MassDOT's I-90 Interchange Improvement project.

After a decade of environmental challenges and complicated negotiations, we broke ground on the Lynch Family Skatepark. We look forward to celebrating the opening of the skatepark with you later this year!

In all of the work we do, your generosity is integral to the Conservancy's success. As we partner with the Massachusetts Departments of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and MassDOT to ensure that the Charles River parklands realize their full potential, we continue to look to you—park users and supporters—to inform the Conservancy's vision of a world-class urban riverfront park enjoyed by all.

Thank you for your generosity and partnership.
See you along the river,

Debra Iles
Chair

Renata von Tschanner
Founder & President

Programs & Projects

Conservancy Volunteers

Year-round, the Conservancy Volunteers (CV) program provides critical stewardship and maintenance work in the river parklands. From debris pick-up and tree pruning to painting railings and repairing benches to removing invasive plant species and planting daffodil bulbs, the volunteers who work in the parklands are dedicated to making the parks along the urban Charles vibrant places for respite and recreation.

In 2014, the CV program organized 46 volunteer workdays along the Charles, enlisting over 2,000 volunteers who contributed 4,500 hours of service. These volunteer hours amount to approximately \$100,000 in donated labor for our parklands! Participating volunteers included middle and high school students, college students, corporate-

sector employees, and community members, all of whom showed how much they care for the river parklands.

The CV program gives much-needed support to DCR's operational work in the lower basin. Thank you to all the volunteers who worked with the Conservancy in 2014!

Advocacy

Critical and central to the Conservancy's work is its advocacy for the improvement of the parklands. Increased public access to and through the parklands is a priority for the Conservancy's advocacy team. We work closely with appointed and elected officials to identify problems and to find solutions. An example of this is our advocacy for pedestrian/bicycle underpasses at three river bridges that are scheduled for restoration, making it easier and safer for pedestrians and bicyclists to use the river pathways.



The Conservancy's advocacy efforts triumphed in 2014 when MassDOT agreed to support all three underpasses and began work to design the first as part of the Anderson Memorial Bridge's rehabilitation.

The Charles River Parklands include the parkways (like Storrow and Memorial Drive), as well as 20 miles of pathways and the green spaces around them. Users of these paths currently risk the perils of congested street-level crossings at the Anderson Memorial, River Street, and Western Avenue Bridge intersections. Once realized, these three underpasses will ensure fluid passage under the bridges, offering runners, walkers, and cyclists more than seven miles of uninterrupted pathway along the Boston side of the river.

Over the last several years, the coalition of underpass supporters grew to more than 1,500 individuals, over 50 organizations, and 53 elected officials in support of the underpasses. The Conservancy was awarded two grants from the Barr Foundation to advance the underpasses initiative in 2014, including funding for architectural renderings of the underpasses and expanded communications and outreach.

Thank you to all who committed their support to this campaign—we look forward to sharing news of continued progress in 2015!



Other CRC advocacy work in 2014 focused on MassDOT's I-90 Interchange Improvement project, which we hope will include the creation of the "Allston Esplanade" and the addition of a multi-modal path along the Grand Junction Rail Line to increase connections for bicyclists and pedestrians across the river. In addition to the I-90 Interchange Improvement project, other advocacy initiatives to keep an eye on in 2015 include the consolidation of Storrow Drive under one arch of the Longfellow Bridge (freeing up the second arch for increased parkland) and Mass. Eye and Ear Infirmary's project to restore parklands in the Esplanade area, as well as many other urban planning issues affecting the Charles River corridor.

Swimmable Charles Initiative

Over a decade ago, the Conservancy began developing the Swimmable Charles Initiative to return public swimming to the lower Charles River. Swimming in the Charles was once a popular activity, but in the mid-1950s, due to a growing awareness of the public health issues, swimming in the river was banned.

In 2004, the Charles River Conservancy initiated legislation that created the Charles River Water Quality Commission. The Conservancy, in collaboration with DCR and the Charles River Swimming Club, organized the first public Community Swim in the Charles in 2013—the first in more than 50 years. It was a momentous day in the river's history and for all involved in decades of work to improve the water quality of the river. With cheers of excitement and shouts of "Love that dirty water," swimmers jumped off the dock at the Esplanade to enjoy a cool, deep-water swim in the Charles. Swimmers splashed, laughed, and



treaded water in awe of the moment, as lifeguards watched from the dock and in kayaks on the water.

In July 2014, the Conservancy brought the public back into the waters of the Charles River for its Second Annual Community Swim. With your continued support, the Conservancy will work with DCR to host twice as many community swims in the river in 2015. *Are you ready to jump into the Charles?*

Beyond 2015, the Conservancy will continue to explore opportunities to establish a new permanent public swimming area in the Charles River.

Sunday Parkland Games

The Conservancy's Sunday Parkland Games celebrated its sixth successful season in 2014. Each Sunday afternoon, June through September, the Conservancy hosted free games and athletic activities in the river parklands in Cambridge, by the Weeks Footbridge. Each week, hundreds of people of all ages and abilities participated.

Working with Knucklebones, a local athletic and events company, CRC provided equipment and instruction for a variety of games for children and adults alike. Activities included bocce, beanbag toss, mini-basketball, hula-hoops, and badminton, among many others. Thanks to the generous instructors at Cambridge-based Karma Yoga Studio, a one-hour yoga class was also available.

The Sunday Parkland Games has become a signature program of the Conservancy, providing fitness and recreation opportunities in the parklands for children and families, giving them access to athletic equipment and instruction that they might not otherwise experience. Your support makes this important program possible—we look forward to continuing the games in 2015!

The Lynch Family Skatepark

As we wrapped up our 2014 fiscal year, the Conservancy prepared to break ground on a cornerstone project: the Lynch Family Skatepark. When built, the skatepark will be the largest of its kind in New England, transforming



a former contaminated industrial site—or brownfield—into a much-needed recreation venue for skateboarders, inline skaters, and BMX cyclists. The skatepark will have the capacity to host community clinics and events, as well as world-class competitions.

Located under the ramps of I-93 on the Cambridge side of the Zakim Bridge, the skatepark will be a 40,000 sq. ft. facility, free for all to use. In the last decade, the area around the skatepark, named North Point Park, has seen an astonishing transformation from a contaminated wasteland to a lush park with lagoons and a new pedestrian bridge connecting Cambridge with Charlestown. This new urban waterfront park was created using Big Dig mitigation and federal stimulus funds. It is well worth a visit!

Chosen in May of 2014, Valleycrest Landscape Development, Inc. will be the CRC's general contractor for the skatepark. A ceremonial groundbreaking was held on site in late October 2014 with over 200 supporters huddled under a tent in heavy rain but nonetheless elated to see the project moving forward. Once the ground thaws in spring 2015, construction will begin with pre-loading soil onto the site.

The Conservancy is grateful to the many supporters of the skatepark, notably the leadership support of Vans Corporation, the Lynch Foundation, the Barr Foundation, WilmerHale LLP's pro-bono legal work, the City of Cambridge, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Carol and Paul Fremont-Smith, and the City of Boston. We look forward to celebrating the opening of the park in the fall of 2015 with all those who made this project possible and those who will use it.

River Stories, Volume III

As part of its mission to strengthen emotional ties to the Charles River and the parklands that surround it, the Charles River Conservancy has published two volumes of *River Stories* using words and art to bring people closer to the parklands. We are proud to be preparing a third volume of *River Stories* for publication in 2015.

These *River Stories* volumes collect memoirs, poetry, written reflections, and artwork by contributors who offer a wide variety of perspectives on the Charles River. Featuring rich prose and vibrant artwork, the collection



The Lynch Family Skatepark groundbreaking on October 23, 2014. Shown here in the front of the Vans Tour Bus from the left: Brian Swett from the City of Boston, State Rep. Jay Livingstone, State Senator Sal DiDomenico, Cambridge City Councilor Marc McGovern, Vans' Steve Van Doren, Joe Ciaglia from California Skateparks, CRC's Renata von Tscharnier, Stantec's Mike McIntyre, DCR Commissioner Jack Murray, EEA Secretary Maeve Bartlett, US Congressman Michael Capuano, Lynch Foundation's Peter Lynch, State Rep. Tim Toomey, Vans' skating legends Tony Alva and Christian Hosoi, and Cambridge City Councilor Leland Cheung.

celebrates the Charles River parklands and conveys cherished experiences and memories.

The upcoming volume of *River Stories* will include written pieces by Pulitzer Prize-winning authors Megan Marshall and Stephen Greenblatt, NPR's Tom Ashbrook, architect William Rawn, and many more. We are also proud to feature artistic maps from local artists, including award-winning watercolorist Frank Costantino, Tom Gastel, Carolyn Newberger, and other fine artists. The 2015 edition will also include short quotations from a broad cross-section of the river's admirers.

Illumination of the Harvard Bridge

Supported by a private donor, the Conservancy engaged in a process to explore illuminating the Harvard Bridge (often referred to as the Mass. Ave. Bridge) with a design that incorporates MIT's tradition of "Smoot" measurements.

The lighting of the Harvard Bridge would be a further realization of the CRC's goal to beautify and bring attention to the architectural treasures connecting Boston and Cambridge. The Charles River Conservancy began arranging for temporary bridge illumination of the Weeks Footbridge in 2001, and continued with both temporary and permanent bridge illuminations as part of the RiverSing festival. Over time, the Conservancy's efforts have progressed to advocate for permanent façade lighting on all Charles River bridges.

Working closely with the MassDOT, which owns and maintains the vehicular bridges over the Charles, the Conservancy held a design competition for the Harvard Bridge lighting. The selected lighting scheme was conceived by local bridge architect Miguel Rosales of Rosales + Partners.

In deference to the history and design of the Harvard Bridge, the chosen design hid most of the lighting fixtures, except for a series of blue globes that would highlight the steel beams supporting the bridge sidewalks. Gentle, diffused LED lighting would illuminate the bridge's façade and dramatic granite piers. Linear, interactive lights would be placed on all sidewalks to highlight the infamous Smoot-marks painted on the bridge by MIT students. Finally, new LED fixtures would bring additional light to the bridge's roadway and sidewalks, greatly increasing visibility and safety at night.

Financial Summary (FY14)

Year ending September 30, 2014

| Operating Revenue & Support | Amount |
|--|------------------|
| Grants and Contributions, including releases | \$355,191 |
| Donated Goods and Services | 76,877 |
| Program Revenue | 111,169 |
| Investment and Other Income | 9,565 |
| Total Revenue | \$552,802 |

| Expenses | Amount |
|-------------------------------|------------------|
| Program Services: | |
| Conservancy Volunteers | \$87,843 |
| Active Parklands | 79,386 |
| Advocacy and Outreach | 139,007 |
| Skatepark | 71,234 |
| Harvard Bridge Project | 100,101 |
| Total Program Services | \$477,571 |

| | |
|---------------------------------|------------------|
| Program Support: | |
| Fundraising | \$73,367 |
| General and Administrative | 102,586 |
| Total Program Support | \$175,953 |
| Total Operating Expenses | \$653,524 |

| | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Net Asset Composition | |
| Operating | \$313,417 |
| Skatepark | 1,771,522 |
| Fixed Assets | 31,558 |
| Total Net Assets | \$2,116,497 |

Independent auditor's report including financial statements is available on CRC's website at www.thecharles.org.

*The Charles River Conservancy gratefully acknowledges the individuals, businesses, and foundations that generously supported our work during fiscal year **October 1, 2013–September 30, 2014**. The Conservancy is fortunate to have a broad group of dedicated supporters who make crucial investments in our programs. With your support, we will continue to ensure that the Charles River parklands are more active, attractive, and accessible for all. **Thank you!***

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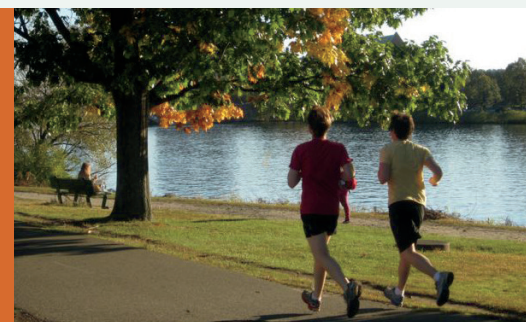
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If we have listed your name incorrectly or have not included your name, please let us know. Contact Julia Giordano at 617.608.1410 or at jgiordano@thecharles.org, so that we can amend our records.

Thank you for your support.

Thank you to our colleagues at the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation for your partnership as we work together to steward, enhance, and renew the Charles River parklands.



Planned Giving: Looking Ahead and Giving Back

There are several ways that you can make a planned gift to the Conservancy, including gifts by will or living trust, or by designating CRC as a beneficiary of a retirement account or life insurance policy. These gifts provide critical resources for the future of the Charles River parklands.

Should you choose to make the Conservancy a beneficiary of your estate plans, please let us know your intentions so that we may express our gratitude and acknowledge your generosity. Please contact CRC's President, Renata von Tscharnier, at 617.300.8174 or by email at rvt@thecharles.org for more information or to share your legacy gift intention with us.



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The Charles River Conservancy: working to make the urban parklands along the Charles more active, attractive, and accessible for all—
from the Boston Harbor to the Watertown Dam.

