



43 THORNDIKE STREET, S3-3  
CAMBRIDGE MASSACHUSETTS  
0 2 1 4 1

617 608 1410 t

[crc@thecharles.org](mailto:crc@thecharles.org)  
[www.thecharles.org](http://www.thecharles.org)

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Laura Jasinski  
*Executive Director*  
Craig Bida  
Nathan Gauthier  
Lonsdale Koester, *Chair*  
Frans Lawaetz  
Bonnie McLellan  
Simeen Mohsen  
Alana Olsen Westwater  
Nayeli Rodriguez  
Laurel Schwab  
Gautam Sundaram

**BOARD OF ADVISORS**

Renata von Tscharnar  
*Founder*  
Ronald Axelrod  
Jeffrey Bilezikian  
Dennis Carlone  
Philip W. Crutchfield  
John DeVillars  
Catherine Donaher  
Hon. Michael S. Dukakis  
Michael Epstein  
Paul Fremont-Smith Jr.  
Jennifer Gilbert  
John Isaacson  
Mark Krackiewicz  
Daniel Langenthal  
Henry Lee  
Edward G. LeFlore  
Linda Lerner  
Harry Mattison  
Geraldine Pangaro  
Randy Peeler  
Matthew Petrie  
Amy Segal  
John Shields  
Ann Tikkanen  
Paul Walker  
Ania Wieckowski  
John T. Williams  
Hon. Michelle Wu

Commissioner Brian Arrigo  
Department of Conservation and Recreation  
10 Park Plaza, Suite 6620  
Boston, MA 02116

**Re: Head of the Charles Regatta Strategic Plan**

May 29, 2024

Dear Commissioner Arrigo and the Head of the Charles Regatta Strategic Plan team,

On behalf of the Charles River Conservancy (CRC), we extend our gratitude for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Head of the Charles Regatta (HOTC) Strategic Plan. As a steadfast advocate for the sustainability and well-being of the Charles River and its surrounding parklands, our organization holds a vested interest in ensuring that events such as the Head of the Charles Regatta are conducted in a manner that preserves the ecological integrity and recreational value of our cherished public spaces.

The Head of the Charles Regatta stands as a hallmark event, drawing in thousands of spectators and participants annually to our city's riverfront. While we recognize the significance of this event in promoting community engagement and fostering a spirit of athleticism, we also acknowledge the impact it can have on the natural environment. At the CRC, our principles lie in designing for resilience throughout these areas. With this in mind, we wish to underscore several key priorities for the parks that we believe are essential to address in the HOTC Strategic Plan.

**1. Protection of trees and critical root zones.**

We advocate for robust measures for tree protection. Given the logistical demands of event setup and load-in processes, it is imperative that adequate safeguards are in place to protect the critical root zones (CRZ) of park trees from undue harm. The CRZ contains the roots responsible for absorbing water, nutrients, and oxygen from the soil, as well as providing structural support to

the tree. Damage or disturbance to these roots can weaken the tree, making it more susceptible to disease, pests, and environmental stressors.

In the context of events such as the HOTC, where there are heavy vehicle load-ins, tent and equipment setup, and other activities taking place in the parklands, protecting the critical root zone of trees is crucial to minimize damage and preserve the health and integrity of the riverbank ecosystem. By implementing measures to safeguard this zone, such as using protective barriers or wrappings, the impact of large-scale events on trees can be reduced, ensuring their continued growth and contribution to the urban environment.

## **2. Structural lawn infrastructure to mitigate soil compaction.**

We urge greater attention to the lawn and turf compaction resulting from the regatta's significant (and recurring) vehicle, equipment, and foot traffic. Compacted soil restricts root growth and water infiltration, harming vegetation. We can already observe significant ponding on site, and the situation is only getting worse with climate impacts. To address this, we strongly propose investing in a structural lawn (such as a subgrade structure) to distribute weight evenly and minimize compaction in preparation for each regatta, as well as allocating resources for structure maintenance throughout the year.

Compacted soil poses risks year after year, including reduced soil fertility and increased susceptibility to erosion, as well as ponding of water on level areas which impose unpleasant soggy and muddy conditions for regatta spectators. Additionally, a soil study by the DCR would provide insight into soil composition and professional recommendations on additional mitigation efforts. Soil health is crucial to river parklands as it supports diverse vegetation, promotes water filtration, and maintains ecosystem stability, ensuring the long-term ecological balance and recreational value of these vital urban spaces.

## **3. Utilizing Soldiers Field Road for parking, staging, and loading equipment.**

The parking lots at Herter Park fill up quickly during the event, leading to overflow parking and heavy traffic use directly on the grass. To reduce and avoid this overflow, we propose closing down a lane of Soldiers Field Road. The pavement provides a more suitable area for parking, staging, and loading equipment, preventing damage to the park's more sensitive lawn areas within the park.

Moreover, dedicating a lane on Soldiers Field Road creates a natural traffic calming effect, enhancing safety for spectators and participants alike. It allows for efficient operations by streamlining the setup and breakdown process. Crucially, this approach helps preserve the park's natural landscape by minimizing the need for heavy vehicles to traverse lawn areas, reducing the risk of soil compaction, erosion, and other environmental impacts. Utilizing Soldiers Field Road prioritizes safety, efficiency, and environmental stewardship while hosting a successful event.

## **4. Greater transparency of risk mitigation commitment and process from HOTC and DCR.**

We seek enhanced transparency on agreements between HOTC and DCR regarding comprehensive site mitigation efforts. Clear collaboration is crucial for accounting for all stakeholder interests, including the community and environment. Mitigation should encompass the overall park impact, not just trees or turf. We simply ask that the parks be restored to pre-event conditions after each regatta; we have not observed that to yet be the case.

Moving forward, mitigation must be properly resourced and funded by HOTC to ensure full rehabilitation. Prioritizing transparency and a comprehensive mitigation plan with clear responsibilities allows minimizing environmental impact and preserving this valuable public space for the long-term enjoyment of the river and the regatta. The Charles River Conservancy is eager to support this effort through stewardship initiatives with appropriate resourcing and open collaboration with HOTC and DCR.

In closing, we commend the efforts undertaken to develop a strategic plan for the Head of the Charles Regatta and stand ready to engage in constructive dialogue to advance our shared goals of environmental stewardship and public enjoyment of our parklands.

We appreciate the steps that have already been taken towards a more thoughtful and sustainable approach to shoreline management. In past years, the diligent supervision of contractors by DCR staff has ensured that native plants are protected during cutting operations. This has made a significant positive impact on preserving the natural ecosystem. We commend the efforts made thus far and look forward to continued collaboration in finding responsible solutions that balance human needs with environmental stewardship.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Laura Jasinski". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Laura" being more prominent than the last name "Jasinski".

Laura Jasinski  
Executive Director, Charles River Conservancy  
[ljaskinski@thecharles.org](mailto:ljaskinski@thecharles.org)