WHARF DISTRICT PARKS ON THE ROSE KENNEDY GREENWAY, BOSTON

By Helen Graves

Approach Boston's new Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway from the city's Financial District and you're hugged by tall buildings on narrow, twisting streets until the sky, wharf and harbor views open across a swath of parkland fulfilling its purpose – to rejoin seaport to city while providing beautiful, actively used open space.

A few streets over, the Greenway serves not only as dramatic introduction east to west to the large plaza in front of the city's Aquarium, ferry lines and water beyond and but also as centerpiece to those traversing north-south. In other places, it's a refreshing pause from building after building, and in yet other areas, it's the representative glue for the adjacent neighborhoods.

Rewind to 2004, the last year Boston's monstrosity of an elevated central artery, called by some the "Green Monster," stood where the Greenway now wends its way through the city. The ugly metal skeleton hunkered above a jumble of streets and wasteland, blocking out sun and view, dividing neighborhoods and serving as eyesore in an otherwise charming city rich in history, from the first seawall built in 1646 to the birth of the American Revolution onward.

Elevated Highway dissecting the City of Boston, before the Greenway.
Photo Courtesy of the Mass Turnpike Authority

Since 1990, Copley Wolff Design Group has been instrumental in the greening of the one-mile, 23-acre stretch of new opportunity created once the raised highway was depressed in an underground tunnel.

Notes Fred Yolouris, chief architect for stakeholder Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, "Lynn Wolff and John Copley – probably more than any other landscape architecture firm, and we have dealt with about two dozen worldwide – have had more design input into the creation of this corridor than any other design team."

The Greenway was established as part of environmental commitments for what has been billed as the most ambitious highway project in American history. Dubbed the Big Dig, the $15 billion project encompassed the new central artery tunnel, a third harbor tunnel, the new Zakim Bridge and new roadways relieving the central artery that was clogged on any given day with 150,000 vehicles.

Think of the Greenway as the mammoth undertaking's crown jewel. It is the long-awaited grand finale, the visible, physical, aesthetic celebration of the renewed urban fabric after years of construction and disruption in and around Boston – not to mention the 45-year division by the old artery itself.

Mandated to replace the raised highway was a tree-lined boulevard for the local north-south roadways that traversed the city's length. What has evolved is more than a pretty thoroughfare. Three publicly funded parks embellish the Greenway, along with other smaller privately funded park pockets, making it a must-experience destination for people in the city, the region, the nation and around the world.

Native Perennials and shrub border, multi-seasonal interest, flowering shrubs.

Photo Courtesy of the Mass Turnpike Authority

The construction ratio was set at 75-percent open space and 25-percent buildings – a percentage still under debate even as preparations for the Greenway's October 2008 grand opening are underway.

John Copley and Lynn Wolff have been involved in the surface restoration – as complicated and controversial as the Big Dig project itself – since the get-go, first serving as civic group volunteers in the early 1990s.

They actively helped to convince officials that the Greenway was such a pivotal piece of the project that it should not be left to the three engineering firm primes handling the underground tunnel. Instead, they lobbied for a landscape architect prime.

"We fought hard along with other people in the community and said, 'The surface artery is too important. It needs to be done as its own project as opposed to: What are we covering the tunnel with?' " John Copley says.

In 1996, Copley and Wolff, then independent consultants, joined forces as Copley Wolff Design Group to win the $17 million surface restoration contract for the Greenway's overall final design and construction documentation involving all sidewalks, streetscapes and the interim condition of the park parcels.

"We brought a sensitivity to the pedestrian environment and the urban context," Copley says. "Engineers are all about getting people as fast as possible from A to B. We actually want them to go as slow as possible from A to B. It's a different mindset in how to reknit the city back together."

In 2003, CWDG was brought in as the Boston-based representatives for prime EDAW to help design the largest of the parks, the nearly five-acre Wharf District Parks, a $12.5 million contract. What ensued was Boston's most intense, often contentious, public process ever that included 133 public meetings, myriad diverse opinions, a battle between city and state and – ultimately – buy-in among participants, including civic groups representing business and residents.

"The challenge was to anticipate and design improvements in a place where the base conditions were yet to be determined, and therefore were unknown," Lynn Wolff says. "Nobody could anticipate the impact of the highway coming down, and that is 'the big idea' here, the 'of Boston.' When you see the sky open up and clearly defined open space in the middle of the architecture of a major urban core, it is just magnificent. And it is going to become more and more magnificent, more 'of Boston,' as the plants mature and as people use the place."

THE TREE-LINED BOULEVARD

Work on the Big Dig was typically led by large engineering firms as prime contractors for some 20 different contracts, and yet Copley Wolff won the overall design contract as a then two-person landscape architecture firm. Their subcontractor was a 350-person engineering company.

"This was not a normal practice in the 1990s," Copley says.

"It was like the tail wagging the dog, but it worked," Wolff adds. "We felt that the scope should be done by a landscape architect who was primarily concerned with pedestrian amenities rather than the engineering of it."

The restoration project included the coordination of all surface amenities: trees, lights, paving, benches, bicycle racks, trash receptacles and other furnishings for the mile-long stretch of streetscape in the heart of downtown Boston.

Driving CWDG's design was their philosophy of the public realm as the living room or gathering space for human communication, performance and celebration; as the outdoor places and spaces to work and live in; and as the definition of who we are, how we got here and where we are going.

Copley Wolff's guideposts for the properly planned public realm include:

- Pedestrian, not vehicular orientation, including the lighting;
- All-hours, no cost, no barriers accessibility;
- Visual interest with shaded places to sit, mingle and traverse;
- Safe, generous and interesting sidewalks connecting to larger civic spaces with unifying elements; and
- Seasonal variations in use, activity and appearance with many interpretive opportunities.

Complicating the original plan for a tree-lined boulevard were the tunnel below and its "spaghetti of utilities," as Wolff calls it.

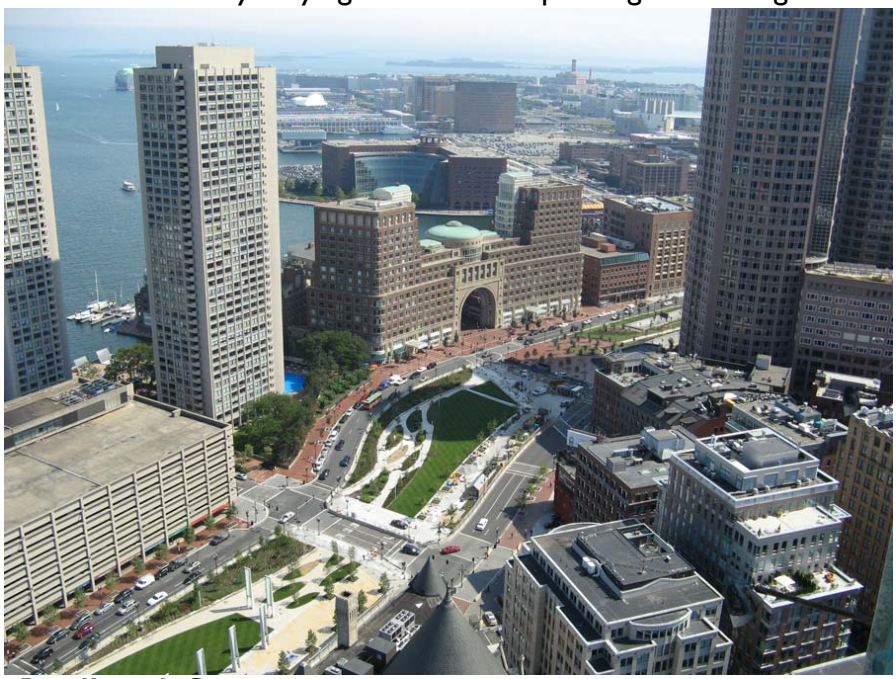
"We had to coordinate with two major engineering firms that were designing the tunnel underneath to understand the depth of the tunnel structure and where all the utilities were in order to locate our surface streetscape amenities," she says.

Copley Wolff also worked with neighboring communities and key players along the length of the artery – collaboration that would pay off during the next, divisive park phase of the community design process.

Richard Dimino, involved in the Greenway since 1989 with the Artery Business Committee and now president and CEO of the restructured ABC, A Better City, notes, "We didn't want the open space along the Rose Kennedy Greenway to be a fancy-looking median strip. It wasn't good enough for the space just to look good from a distance. It actually needed to be a park populated with people, and people were a very synergistic element of a successful park."

Along with building in the north-south, east-west connections, Dimino says, a major goal was "creating a common ground for Boston residents and all visitors, hoping to make the future evolution of the Greenway be a destination that would be celebrated globally."

The Greenway traverses through five distinct neighborhoods: Bulfinch Triangle, the North End, the Waterfront District, the Financial District and Chinatown. Copley Wolff differentiated each district by varying materials and plantings according to context.



Aerial of the Rose Kennedy Greenway
Photo Courtesy of the Mass Turnpike Authority

"So, for example," Copley says, "in the North End, all the trees are red maples in our design and, in the Waterfront District, London planes were used because these trees existed on adjacent streets and parks. All the cross streets were planted with honey locusts throughout while in the North End, flowering pear trees were planted as a continuation of the trees along Hanover and Salem Streets. Trees were selected for their growth habits and hardiness in an urban setting. There was a lot of thought to all that. We did a lot of that work with the Boston Parks and Recreation Department."

Another reason for varying the types of trees planted on the Greenway was to avoid losing all trees to disease, which is what happened to the city when Dutch elm disease struck its stately elms. In fact, introduced to the Greenway is a new disease-resistant elm variety, Valley Forge. Of particular interest is the fact that all trees and plants were grown and harvested in Massachusetts in the Grow and Install program.

To comply with the tree-lined mandate, Copley Wolff studied every foot of the Greenway for any underground conflicts. "We would sit down with engineers and try to

get them to move their utilities in order to accommodate the trees," Wolff says. "There are more than 700 trees, and every one was pretty much fought for."

Even though planting a fully tree-lined boulevard was not possible, Copley Wolff worked with Cornell University to devise a special technology for planting in very shallow depths – a system ensuring many more trees than conditions would have ordinarily allowed. And then the firm had to work the permitting system to get approval for system's implementation.

The technology provides a minimum of 1,000 cubic feet of soil per tree with passive and active irrigation systems, an active drainage system and an active aeration system – "so that the tree has water and air and is never in too much standing water, which kills trees," Copley points out.

Meandering pathway through the greenway.
Photo Courtesy of the Mass Turnpike Authority

Like the plantings, paving materials change district to district. At Portal Park in Bullfinch Triangle, shaped to represent its original layout with the names of the original streets inscribed in their relative locations, the paving is concrete to match its industrial context. Walk to the Sea, serving as connector from Faneuil Hall marketplace to the waterfront's Columbus Park and, farther down, the Aquarium and Children's Museum, has brick and stone paving to stand up in quality to the intensity of 12 to 15 million tourists a year.

As with every other aspect in the surface restoration, Copley Wolff did not want the lighting to be the same along the length of the corridor – "that would have reinforced

the old artery," Copley says. At each intersection demarking the five districts, CWDG changed the otherwise standard double-headed Washington streetlight used throughout the city and the Greenway with pendant lights to serve as the gateway to the neighborhood.

Each neighborhood has a streetscape vocabulary consistent to the sidewalk width, the character of the architecture and the neighborhood, adjacent land uses and the amount and type of pedestrian circulation. Plantings and their planting in either grates or tree pits with curbs and fencing along with paving, bicycle racks and park benches vary according to district, but remain consistent in the types of materials used.

The surface restoration design and construction documentation took a year and a half to complete – on time and under budget. Then came the bids for the parks.

The North End Parks at the north end of the Greenway and Chinatown Park on the southern end were envisioned primarily as neighborhood parks, and their designs were dictated by the neighborhood.

The Wharf District Parks had a variety of users to please and was to be the centerpiece for residents, workers, visitors and tourists alike, serving as meeting place and open space, reflecting the area's history and defining its future use. The total area of the Wharf District Parks was less than five acres divided into five individual parcels defined by vehicular crossroads. There would be a lot asked out of a relatively small space.

THE WHARF DISTRICT PARKS

Crucial to the Wharf District Parks design are the five wharfs to the east of the Greenway and so "wharfness," in a word, became an important concept. Boston's existing waterfront has been through an evolution of land building via the construction of wharfs reaching farther and farther out into the harbor to accommodate ships from afar. Long Wharf, for example, was built in 1711 and stretched over a third of a mile from the Custom House Tower out into the harbor.

Design elements here pay tribute to the wharfs' historic contribution to the city's international role in immigration, commerce and trade, and fishing and maritime industries. For example, at City Wharf, the theme of "A Landscape Fit for Commerce" illustrates how Boston was created by land-making and the wharfs and its role as a metropolis of New England. Engravings of regional trade routes portraying the transformation of the waterfront from 1775 to 2008 are carved into granite seating stones as part of the Children's Story Circle.

Plaza with LED light blades, grass mounds and trees.
Photo Courtesy of the Mass Turnpike Authority

At Central Wharf, "The Kingdom of Fish" describes the enormous, particularly in today's standards, magnitude and importance of the fishing industry and in particular the importance of cod fishing. Historic images and cod forms are carved into the granite that composes the stage and seating area here.

At Rowes Wharf, "All the Worlds' People" interprets the intermingling of natives and newcomers and four centuries of immigrants who primarily landed at this location. Here, brass replicas of letters, immigration papers and transport advertisements are inset into the paving along the path of commuters passing through the Rowes Wharf arch to the ferry beyond.

Designers of all three parks, the North End, Wharf District and Chinatown, worked together to determine common elements and materials that would help to create individual parks in a unified composition of the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway as a whole. The pedestrian promenade on the city side of the Wharf District Parks is also included, but in different forms, in both Chinatown and the North End. This promenade is a key feature in emphasizing the connections north and south along the parks, in contrast to the east-west connections from the city to the water.

The characteristics of the city and the harbor are clearly delineated in the Wharf District Parks' design. "People should be able to perceive west to east, east to west, this contrast between the more refined and the rough," Copley says.

The city side is formal and geometric in keeping with the tightly built architectural edge of the park. Its amenities are man-made and uniform. London plane trees are regularly

spaced in square planters that also create niches for seating and places for vendor carts during festivals. The pavement is also geometric and hard-edged.

In contrast, the harbor side is loose and wild. Its form is curvilinear and naturalistic with indigenous plantings indicative of a waterfront environment. Seawall stones discovered during the excavation of the tunnels serve as design elements and benches, and are ragged with iron still in them.

Native Perennials and shrub border, multi-seasonal interest, and flowering shrubs.
Photo Courtesy of the Mass Turnpike Authority

The landscape's seasonal interest purposely keeps the Wharf District Parks alive year-round. Curly barked river birch, red-berried winterberry, red-twig dogwood with its protrusion of straight red branches, the exfoliating bark of the London plane tree and the honey locust's contorted shape embolden the bleak landscape in the dead of winter. Snowdrops herald spring and its oncoming flowering of mountain laurel, daffodils, wild geranium, viburnum, cockspur hawthorn and flowering crabapple.

Yarrow, agastache and pink coreopsis take over the rustic perennial beds along the more naturalistic wharf side of the Greenway in the summer, while summersweet infuses the parks with its spicy fragrance. In the fall, the flowerbeds give way to the late bloomers such as asters, the movement of the panicled heads of ornamental grasses, the bright yellows of goldenrods and sunflowers, and orange butterfly weed along with the decorative fruit of Blue Muffin Viburnum and the colorful foliage of sweetgum, red maple, and blueberry.

The parks subtly educate the public not only on the wide and varied opportunities of native New England plants that are commercially available and are able to endure urban conditions but also, for the perennial garden, color and variety combinations.

Each parcel within the Wharf District Parks reflects its intended use, from grand meeting place to quiet nook for reading or picnicking.

The north end of the Wharf District Parks is on axis with the historic marketplace, Faneuil Hall and the Walk to the Sea. This part of the Wharf District Parks is seen as an orientation place, a plaza where people can meet. It features the Children's Story Circle and the Mothers' Walk with its fundraising engraved pavers and will house a pavilion for the Boston Harbor Island National Parks.

"The space gives people an ability to get onto the Greenway and look down through the park and see other destinations," Wolff says.

Next, the two parcels between Long Wharf and India Wharf make up what has been called the "Great Room," the center of the Greenway and the place for festivals, celebrations and events per the city's request. Here, 24-foot tall light blades soar like the sails of the tall ships that once graced the harbor or remind of the cityscape and former elevated artery.

Aerial of "Great Room".
Photo Courtesy of the Mass Turnpike Authority

At the Great Room's core is a $1 million lighted, choreographed fountain shooting 30 to 40 feet in the air designed by Wet Design. The 64 nozzles are set in three circles of rose-colored stone inlaid at surface level. Since each nozzle works independently, there are innumerable design configurations possible with the jets of spray. The fountain is air powered vs. water-pressure powered, so the result is a light spray.

"Kids can get as wet as they want to and adults can get as wet as much as they don't want to," Copley points out.

The light blades and the fountain add activity and fun to the Great Room hardscape when there are no festivals or other programmed events taking place. The tunnel is so close to the surface at this juncture – there's only a 6-inch depth – that the fountain vault sticks above ground, and so a stage was created to conceal it. Steps and seawall stones serve as seating and additional interest to this central meeting place.

Farther down along India Wharf is a bosque of river birch trees and potential space for a small building, such as an art gallery, that would complement the three buildings planned for the Greenway elsewhere as part of the 25-percent ratio: a YMCA, the Boston History Museum and the Museum of Arts and Culture. Interestingly, these buildings camouflage ramp access and egress to the tunnel below.

The design of the last parcel, adjacent to the residential Harbor Towers as well as Rowes Wharf with its office, hotel, residential, restaurant and ferry uses, was influenced by the residents and so it is more park-like, with an informal planting of trees, a fog fountain inspired by navigational markers from the harbor and again, the promenade on its western edge. Here, with the elevated artery out of the way, the open archway of the mammoth building facing the Greenway on Rowes Wharf provides pedestrians with a view of the open water.

"One of the key elements of that park," Wolff says, "was to make sure that the arch was clearly visible and that pedestrian circulation was not obstructed at all because of the ferry boat terminal. A lot of commuters go there."

THE PUBLIC PROCESS

"We think that public open space is the most democratic place of all," Wolff says. "It is a place that attracts a multitude of people and accommodates a diversity of backgrounds and interests. An inclusive design process ensures that all those different types of people, or most of them, will be satisfied. They can express their desires and, as artists and designers, we can put our professional mark on that and make it into a design that is a functional and aesthetically pleasing composition. We feel that the more input that we get, the better the space is going to be because it's responding to the needs of the people. We're not in the business of creating open space for ourselves."

For 12 months, Copley Wolff engaged the public in the community design process for the Wharf District Parks in 133 public meetings. "During the public process, and as the physical structure of the 'Green Monster' was being disassembled," Wolff wrote to EDAW partner Barbara Faga, "the excitement, urgency and passion that participants felt was palpable. In their minds, this park had to be worth the long wait, worth the inconvenience of construction and worthy of their investment in time and energy. The Wharf District Parks was the most important, final reward the City of Boston had within its reach."

Major stakeholders in this centerpiece park were the state's Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority and, later, the Massachusetts Port Authority; the city's Mayor's Completion Task Force; and several civic groups, including the residents' Wharf District Task Force and the already noted business representation, the Artery Business Committee.

The city saw the Greenway as meeting place and the way to get people down to the waterfront. It would be a place where festivals, exhibits and celebrations could be held and that meant more paving than green space. The state was basically interested in how its money would be spent, with no strong opinion on the paving-greenery issue other than cost. The residents wanted parks they could enjoy with grass, trees, flowers, fountains – the traditional elements of a park.

"The local residents offered the counterbalance to the interests of the state and city, which was sometimes conflicting," Copley says.

Susanne Lavoie, spokesperson for the residents' Wharf District Task Force, agrees. "The residents' input was critically important because it enabled the Turnpike Authority, the designers and the city to have what the community was looking for, what the community wanted. In some instances, that was quite different.

"The residents viewed the park as our front yard," Lavoie continues. "It was a place where we were going to be walking through and traveling through and that we would look at and use. We wanted a park that would reflect our use, not just the Greenway's perspective or the city's perspective on how they were going to use the park. So it was important that they understood how we as a community would be using the park vs. how they anticipated using it and programming the park."

The first diagrams of the Wharf District Parks incorporated the city's desires and so there was a significant amount of paving to allow for the gatherings the city expected.

"People reacted negatively, saying 'There's too much pavement,' " Copley relates. "Residents expressed that, 'That's fine for the city to say, but we think the majority of this is neighborhood park, not city gathering.' So now we have a blend of hard spaces and soft spaces. Looking at the diagram, it's 50-50. Because of the city's desires, it was originally 75-25. Because of the balance of the residents, it's a better plan."

The community process in Boston is so intense that Wolff calls it "civic theater," where "advocacy in Boston is sport." People spend hours of their free time attending meetings and investigating and promoting their causes. They have deep, philosophical desires and they aren't the least bit afraid to express their opinions. And in no other planning process in recent history in Boston have they espoused so many opinions or spent so much time.

Partner EDAW was shocked by the depth of public involvement and the intelligence of the requests, not to mention the city-state political battles that blindsided them during the process. Barbara Faga, EDAW board chair, relates in her book, *Designing Public Consensus*, how, four hours into a meeting, a speaker expounded on why the parks should show Boston as the birthplace of the separation of church and state – in landscape design – to the nodding heads of the others present.

Faga also notes how Copley and Wolff are "adroit at producing award-winning work in the Boston environment."[1] And she further compliments the two principals. "Lynn Wolff became the project's voice, and she gently but adroitly articulated the troublesome points that people did not want to hear. John Copley applied his enviable ability to make controversial statements in public without giving offense."[2]

Lavoie is just as complimentary. "They were easy to work with and they cared about what the community had to say," she says. "They always spent the time that we felt we needed in order to convey what we wanted and to try to have them understand our perspective. The challenge they had was taking our perspective and having it fit into the design while not compromising the vision that others may have, so that it blended in with the design."

"You have to understand the political atmosphere and the audience," Wolff says. "It's a very intelligent audience. You don't want to spoon feed them. You need to respect that they know more than you think they know, and you have to reassure them by telling them what you know and not being insulted by that."

As for smoothing differences, Wolff advises, "You need to make people realize that they're saying similar things when often they think they're at odds, and so the skill is to meld differences of opinion and find similarities rather than accentuate the differences. Establish the common ground and overall mission and vision."

Copley explains the public meeting procedure with an example. The firm begins the community process with a site analysis plan, a context plan and photographs of comparable space so people realize the size of the project.

"And then we start doing the design work," Copley says. "For every meeting, we bring all the same drawings and then we keep adding on to them, so we basically paper the

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[1] Barbara Faga, *Designing Public Consensus*, (John Wiley & Sons, 2006) Page 6
[2] Ibid, Page 13

walls from left to right and keep on adding. What that allows is for people to see the progress they've all made and also allows, as we get to the end of the public process, to develop some champions."

The champions, Copley continues, are important when "parachuters," the people who come to the process late in the game, voice complaints that have already been resolved. "The local champion will say, 'We've been through all of this. What you just said was good. We talked about that four months ago. Here's what we discussed and looked at, and here's why we didn't do that.' So you recognize the parachuter's good idea but you let them know we've moved on and why."

Adds Wolff, "You have to answer the questions. You have to say, 'I heard what you said and here's why we don't think it's a good idea.' Don't just dismiss it. Say, 'Here's why we think this is a better idea.' "

In the end, not every design idea can be implemented. As was noted during the public process, if every request were to be put into the Wharf District Parks, it would look like an 18-hole miniature golf course. And so herein lies the importance of working to achieve a satisfying outcome.

"When you put up the wish list, it's 10 pounds for a five-pound bag," Copley points out. "We can't put everything in there, so we have to weed through with the public what the program is and why some things aren't there and why some things will have to come later."

WHAT'S TO COME

Even though the Greenway is now taking root, the debate for more building vs. open space wages on. The naysayers believe that the way to reknit city to seaport is to extend the buildings. Others see no economic value in open space.

"It is such a shortsighted viewpoint about what the benefits of open space are," Copley says. "If you look at the city from afar, there really isn't much open space in it, and it was a very good idea to use open space to reunite the city."

Not only does the Greenway serve as compelling connector and public participation magnet, it is the draw to a developing renaissance in the oldest sections of Boston.

The 27 acres at the northern end of the Greenway in what is now called the Bridge District because of its spectacular views of the Zakim Bridge – Boston's new landmark designation – are starting to see "incredible investments in architectural elements," Dimino says, "where the highway structure, the elevated Green Line, substations, parking and funky structures once stood. The reconfiguration of the street grade there has opened up great parcels that can be filled in. It's going to be one of the most

amazing areas of transformation of the city. Some people liken it to the same significance of filling in the Back Bay."

Existing buildings are also changing now that the Greenway spreads outside their doors – whether literally changing face to front the Greenway or changing use in keeping with new demand for home and work. Long before the footprint of the Green Monster elevated highway became a scourge on the urban fabric, a railroad ran along the same path, dissecting historic wharf buildings along its way. Evidence of these truncated blank walls can be seen today.

The ABC's 2005 Edge Study, Dimino says, identified with property owners the ways in which they could change the facades of their buildings' backs to face the Greenway. That work is now underway.

Wharf Park District with view of Custom House Tower.
Photo Courtesy of the Mass Turnpike Authority

In fact, considering the Greenway as frontage is not confined to this current time period. The Chiofaro Company broke ground alongside the raised artery with its two-tower high-rise International Place in 1985, when the Greenway was just a proverbial gleam in the Big Dig's eye.

"When we first started working on that site, the presence of the elevated highway caused us to think of that frontage as being our back," says Chiofaro co-founder Ted Oatis. "Going through the planning process with the city, their forethought of what the

Greenway could be forced us to essentially treat that frontage as though it could someday be our front, so we had no back all these years.

"One of my favorite stories," Oatis continues, "is we had a whole series of at-grade truck docks that we placed along the area where the Greenway is today and we were told it was going to be park someday so we'd have to put all of that underground, which was unheard of at the time but which we did – and they were right."

Commercial development interest was high even during the tunnel construction years of dust, noise and constant traffic rerouting. "The reality was," Dimino says, "you had smart and wise developers and real estate investors saying, 'Wow, this is really happening and I want a piece of that property because this property in relationship to this new Greenway is going to be a great asset in the future.' "

Lisa Campoli, EVP at Colliers Meredith & Grew, notes the change of use from office to residential for one particular building the commercial real estate firm recently sold – and the change of name from 199 State Street to Greenway Place.

"You can look along the Greenway and see other conversions from office to residential, such as Folio [luxury condominiums] and 89 Broad Street," she says. "You have a series of buildings taking advantage of the Greenway and a strong condo market."

It's no surprise then that real estate values are up significantly along the edge of the Greenway, perhaps in keeping with real estate values in general, Campoli tempers, but she adds that the smaller buildings are definitely benefiting value-wise.

Oatis says that no one could anticipate the drama of the effect of the old artery coming down. Not even his company. Before the highway was demolished, the seven-story concrete garage filling an entire block beside the Aquarium wasn't viewed in the least as redevelopment potential. Earlier this year, Chiofaro purchased the garage and is in the formative phase of replacing it with what Oatis says will be a mixed-use project.

"Once the artery came down in 2004, we stood there and stared and said, 'Just think of what this could be now, what, if we thought outside the box a little bit, it could be if we redevelop it,' " Oatis says. "Given what we witnessed from International Place, we were focused on the potential of the properties adjoining the Greenway."

"Potential" and "evolution" are the key words here, and positive change isn't only happening with the economics of the area. The Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway Conservancy, established to maintain and plan for the Greenway, is in the midst of developing the all-important people part of the park.

"If activation is missing, the urban space is less than it could be," says Nancy Brennan, the Conservancy's executive director.

The first order of immediacy for the Conservancy is the grand opening set for the first weekend in October this fall. Plans so far include hot air balloon rides to give people a bird's eye view, a "green" tent to highlight the organic maintenance practices the Greenway is implementing as only the second park in the U.S. to do so, and hands-on gardening and local-produce cooking demonstrations.

To come are educational and environmental stewardship programs that can include after-school programs for middle schoolers in engineering, the environment and science; adult ed programs done in partnership on such topics as urban history and design and technology and transportation. Green Tours of the city's open space will one day originate from the Greenway. The Green and Grow youth workforce apprenticeship program is slated for a 2009 start.

All of these grand and glorious changes taking place in and around the Greenway are just the very beginning of what is to come. "It's going to take time," Dimino says. "We decided purposely instead of coming right out of the gate with all the gidgets and gadgets that we'd set the stage with a template – with the notion of filling in and creating open spaces over time that would have the benefit of being influenced by the new dynamic of having the elevated structure down and what that space would eventually mean to Boston."

For those who look at the Greenway and cannot see the possibilities, just wait. The trees have yet to mature and the plantings, for that matter, to bloom for a full season, the Greenway is so new. Copley likes to point out that the city's celebrated Commonwealth Avenue, Public Garden and Boston Common began 100 years ago with wisps of trees that now tower and shade and attract people to their grounds.

Lavoie is already enjoying the Greenway. Although the Wharf District Parks was still under construction during last year's good weather, she finds herself walking through the park instead of traversing the sidewalk as was her custom. She's waiting for better weather to take her lunch out there, and she has high expectations for the Greenway in the future.

"We're a community that shares our neighborhood with visitors and tourists and business people so we understand that this park is not just a tiny little neighborhood park, but we would hope that it would maintain the neighborhood aspects while it evolves and as the neighborhood evolves," she says.

Notes Wolff: "I am proud of this park because it is a very flexible space that will accommodate a multitude of uses, anticipated and unknown. The program will evolve. We have anticipated that there might be a need for a small skating rink, for example. The promenade is a great place for an extension of Art in the Park, for festivals to be created, for performances and small concerts and plays. There are already spaces set up for stages."

Adds Copley: “These parks will be overlayed for years and years, and these trees will grow, people will change things. The programming potential is endless. We can add all sorts of things to it. There are power plugs everywhere, irrigation and water, so basically what we have provided is an infrastructure for people as well as a great framework for people to look at and use right now. These are wonderful parks today because of the commitment and the process and what everybody went through to get them to where they are now, so this really is an inspirational starting point and not an end point.”