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MYSTIC RIVER BASIN

The Boston Globe

## Revival for neglected riverside Businesses, advocates eye walkway to Boston

By Ron DePasquale, Globe Correspondent | August 13, 2006

Now that new residents are breathing life into the lower Mystic River waterfront, a push is on to boost public access and burnish the green spaces along the once-forgotten river.

The drive is modeled on the Charles River Conservancy, which spearheaded that riverfront's revival. State Senator Jarrett Barrios, a Democrat who represents much of the lower Mystic basin, has pulled together the advocacy groups along the waterway and plans a Sept. 6 caucus of the area's legislators, mayors, and neighborhood groups. The Department of Conservation and Recreation's Mystic River basin master plan has a budget of \$250,000, which advocates hope will increase.

"As the area grows increasingly dense, people are thinking differently about the river, and they want the amenities to be supported and enhanced," Barrios said. "We've seen how other communities and the Charles River Conservancy leveraged public and private dollars to bring about the Charles River's renaissance. The lower Mystic's industrial shores need just this sort of advocacy."

The nearly continuous riverfront path from Everett to Boston envisioned by advocates "won't just happen," Barrios said. When attention is paid to the Mystic, he said, it's usually "in fits and starts, and on bits and pieces."

The presence of industrial sites along the lower Mystic in Somerville, Charlestown, and East Boston complicates the riverfront's transformation. Kids who could be tempted to dive into a working port must be protected, said Vivien Li, executive director of the Boston Harbor Association, which represents the port's industrial users. More public access makes sense as the riverfront gentrifies, she said, but people can't expect continuous paths along dangerous industrial sites.

"If there's a harborwalk, people assume it's safe," she said. "But if kids run out into harm's way, there could be a problem."

Waterfront businesses are organizing through the Mystic River Watershed Collaboration and are planning a meeting in October. It will be hosted by Tom Flatley at the Flatley Co.'s Schrafft Center in Charlestown, which is surrounded by a harborwalk and playing fields.

Securing green space along private property is easiest when properties change hands, Barrios said, which takes "good planning."

"For businesses that own property, we can tell them they'll increase their property's value by improving the waterfront," he said. "They need to view the river as a public amenity as opposed to something that's solely industrial."

Ivey St. John of the Charlestown Waterfront Coalition said the possibility of a nearly continuous path looks more realistic as the state Department of Conservation and Recreation studies two missing links in Somerville and Charlestown. Both were part of a 2004 pollution settlement between the federal Environmental Protection Agency and the owner of the Mystic Station power plant in Everett. The state DCR will present the findings of feasibility studies in September.

In Somerville, pedestrian and bike paths over the Amelia Earhart Dam are being studied. Known as the Mystic Crossing, the paths would be paid for partly with money from the 2004 settlement. They would cut down the walk from Somerville to Everett from 3.5 miles to 900 feet, according to Walk Boston, the pedestrian organization. They would link Gateway Park, the Assembly Square development site, and Somerville's Draw 7 Park.

In Charlestown, the MBTA, which the EPA charged with excessive pollution in 2003, and the DCR are studying how to build paths along its bus maintenance facility. The T agreed to donate at least one acre of land, which would extend the riverfront path to Charlestown's Sullivan Square neighborhood and on to its harborwalks and the new Charles River parks. ■

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