

A Speak for the Trees
Project



North Dorchester Tree Canopy Report

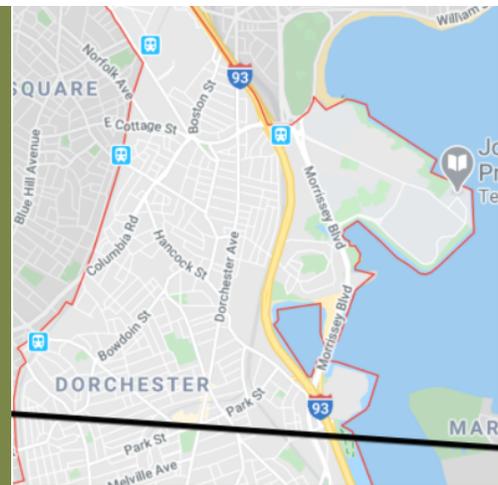
Anna Wilcox, Rose Bottorf, Jason Senecharles



Summary

The North Dorchester Tree Canopy Report is a project completed by interns for Speak for the Trees. Speak for the Trees is a non profit organization dedicated to increasing the tree canopy in Boston, particularly in underserved and under canopied neighborhoods. The North Dorchester Tree Canopy Report aims to educate residents of the North Dorchester area about the neighborhood's past tree canopy coverage, the current shortage of greenspace and trees, and a possible green future of the North Dorchester area is possible with motivated residents. This written report accompanies a video about the urban tree canopy in North Dorchester.

We are aware that Dorchester residents don't identify as being from North or South. The division is to account for the large population and geography of the Dorchester area. The North Dorchester area is defined in this project as the area of Dorchester above Fields Corner (above the black line on map right).



The North Dorchester Tree Canopy Report advocates for an increase in tree canopy for the health, aesthetic, and respite benefits residents enjoy from trees. This report explores Dorchester's history of redlining and underfunding, and the lasting effects of these issues, namely the poor tree canopy in the area. Today, there is often an assumption made about Dorchester as a whole that it's not a nice neighborhood but that isn't the case. In our residential interviews we received a myriad of reasons why people living in Dorchester love their neighborhood including its diversity, its proximity to a variety of recreational activities, and its overall tone. The only thing that is ailing North Dorchester specifically is underfunding in many public facilities including that of its urban canopy and greenspaces caused by the history of redlining. It is important that residents of North Dorchester recognize the changes they can make to the greenery in their community, such as obtaining street trees and advocating for parks in their neighborhood. We hope that this report contextualizes and expands upon the information provided in our video. Enjoy!

Past

Over the past 70 years, Dorchester has experienced a lot of change. One of the biggest changes is the population decrease that has taken place. From 1950-1980 the population dropped from 162,139 people to around 110,000 people. The population today is around 114,000 people, which is about a 4,000 person increase. With the change of population, known in history as the great migration, racial makeup of the city. The number of people of color in Dorchester has significantly gone up in the past 70 years. The percentage of people of color was close to 0% in 1950, and now is now around 76%. The racial breakdown of Dorchester today looks something like this: 46% African American, 20% White, 19% Hispanic, 11% Asian, and 5% other races.

During the 1930s, the historically large “infiltration” of Jewish people in Dorchester among other “undesirables”, such as Italians, led the federal government’s Home Owners’ Loan Corporation to classify areas of the neighborhood as either “definitely declining” or “hazardous”. This phenomenon is now known as redlining. Redlining resulted in a disproportionate amount of public and private capital being held by American born white families, to the disadvantage of immigrant and minority communities. The lack of funding and resources for Dorchester increased poverty in the area and thus made it easier for state officials to build I-93 in 1957, as well as other projects. The air pollution of the highway, combined with the high temperatures from the urban heat island effect, are harming residents at higher rates than wealthier areas. This is no surprise. Redlined neighborhoods are on average 5% hotter than neighborhoods that haven’t been affected by redlining. For Dorchester, the lack of public funding, combined with drastic population changes, resulted in a “stabilization” in the increase of green space from the 1950s until today. During this period of underinvestment, Dorchester was also not considered a priority for tree plantings. Trees provide numerous monetary benefits including shade, stormwater control, and erosion mitigation, as well as mental and physical health benefits.

Past cont..

The residents of North Dorchester could not experience these benefits at the extent they deserved to. Dorchester to this day has a poor tree canopy, although it has gotten better from what it used to be in the past; as the picture of Uphams Corner, a neighborhood in Dorchester, has greatly increased its tree coverage from this dated aerial photo.



Dorchester also has a more recent history of gentrification. The price of living in Dorchester has constantly been going up; rent continues to rise and people are not able to keep up with it. Over the past few years, the city has also been creating a lot of housing. On Dorchester Ave, the city had plans to build 500 units of residential housing, yet of those 500 units only 66 would be classified as affordable.

Present

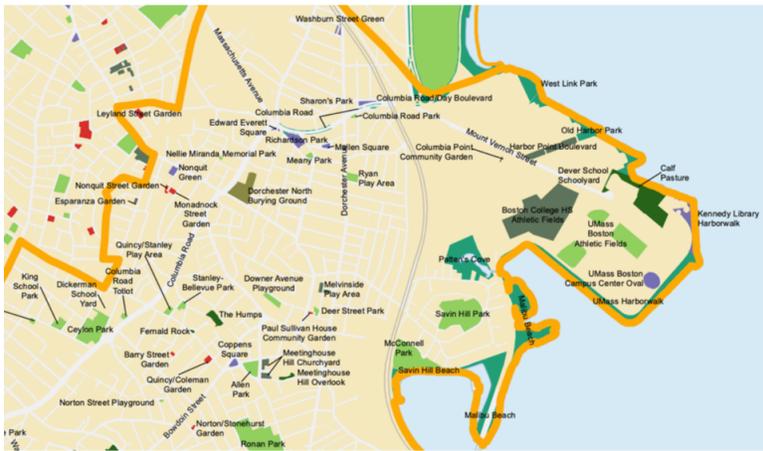
Currently in North Dorchester, there are areas that have a wealth of street trees and areas that don't have as much. This difference is reflected in the maps created by Raquel Jimenez from 2018 5-year American Community Service data, of greenery around this part of Dorchester. The amount of green space in North Dorchester bears a striking resemblance to the minority population percentages as well as the income percentages within these barriers which can be traced back to the history of redlining in Boston, which is the principle cause of the underfunding in Dorchester.



Green:
tree canopy cover (*darker indicates more tree cover*)
Blue:
% minority (*darker indicates more minority population*)
Purple:
Income (*darker indicates higher gross income*)

Present

Continued

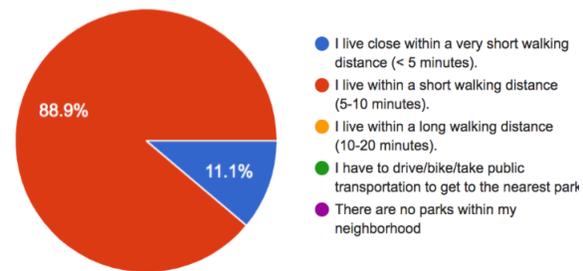


To gauge residents' interest in neighborhood trees and parks, we interviewed residents of North Dorchester and conducted a survey. All interviewees said that they wished they had more quality greenspace around where they live. Chris Cook, Chief of Environment, Energy, and Open Space for the City of Boston, stated in an interview that while all residents of Boston live within a 10 minute walking distance to open space, there are disparities in the quality of these parks and some parks are under more stress than others due to the population density of residents.

Survey results indicate that residents would like to see more green space and street trees in North Dorchester. The addition of this greenery would decrease the stress that parks have serving large amounts of residents, and provide more health benefits, both mental and physical, to community members. Residents who would like to see trees on their street can call 617-635-7275 or 3-1-1, or visit www.cityofboston.gov/311 to make the request.

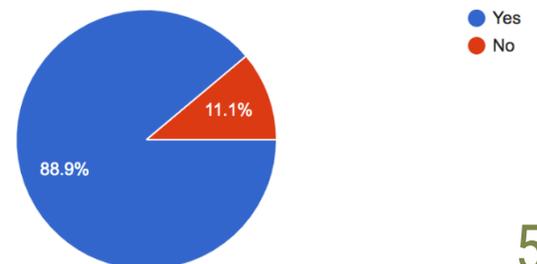
Where is the closest park to you?

9 responses



Would you like to have more trees around where you live?

9 responses



Future

The video includes how residents can take action to obtain parks and trees in their communities, because the future of greenery in their neighborhood is in their hands. It was mentioned in the video that a way to get open space in one's neighborhood is to visit boston.gov/parcel-priority-plan. At this site, residents fill out the survey to advocate for where they would like to see green space. The Parcel Priority Plan focuses on equity, the quality of open space, and climate resilience in the implementation of parks.

The gentrification of Dorchester, seen especially in the South Bay area, is expected to continue as Boston draws people across the world with its vast array of opportunities, healthcare, and universities. As new developments, such as the Andi Apartments, are constructed, it is important that there is a mutually beneficial relationship between those interested in renovating and increasing the amount of housing in Dorchester, with those concerned about the increasing pressure on green spaces in the community and continued existence of mature trees.



As the Boston Park and Recreation Department continues to improve the greenery throughout the city, with the support of nonprofit organizations and dedicated residents alike, employees at the BPRD are hopeful that more funding will be available to the Parks department following the 2020 Census. Cook encourages all Boston residents to complete the 2020 Census to increase the amount of federal spending Boston will receive; an increase that will hopefully be reflected in the implementation and renovation of quality, equitable, climate resilient open space and more trees.

Special Thanks to Our Partners



Boston After School
& Beyond



AMERICAN FORESTS
- SINCE 1875 -



EMVISION PRODUCTIONS



EVERYDAY BOSTON



SPEAK FOR THE TREES
Boston



MASSACHUSETTS
CLEAN ENERGY
CENTER



Greening Youth
FOUNDATION