



We are looking at the edge of the Belle Isle Marsh and the Boston Harbor, where these water bodies meet land in the East Boston neighborhood of Harbor View. Segment 1 is along the edge of the Casket site. Segment 2 is the edge of the MBTA rail yard. Segment 3 traces the marsh to the CVS site, and back out to the bridge. Segment 4 branches the Massport-owned end of Harbor View. Segment 5 runs along Bayswater. The varying conditions along this edge are representative of edges across East Boston, ranging from industrial, commercial, and natural.

We may think of edges as the place where land meets water. Because we're working in the marsh, that line isn't always so distinct. We're embracing the wetland characteristics of the edge, and thinking both beyond the shoreline and across property lines.

1 SIGNAGE

Much of the natural world works in cycles or seasons. Belle Isle Marsh also moves in a cyclical way. From the back-and-forth tides to migratory patterns of birds to the salty breeze at dawn, the marsh has its own beautiful cycles. While we have our own 24-hour clock, the marsh has multiple clocks—each on their own set time and space. The marsh's weather, temperature, tides, and seasons all change throughout the year. The marsh has its own way of keeping time with cycles, rituals, and repetition.

The new development at the Casket site should have multilingual signage along the marsh edge that describes these cycles. Posting this information publicly can help people to interact more with the marsh's land, tides, living beings, and changes.

The developer and landowner at the Casket site seem to want to engage with the marsh—in documents, they have centered restoration on their site and on the neighboring MBTA site. We're excited to see this, and encourage people to continue to advocate for the marsh's inclusion in the project plans.

Signage at the marsh edge

2 RESTORATION

Access to much of the marsh is restricted or extremely limited. Sites like these are a great opportunity to explore restoration. The MBTA yard offers space to explore a few key ideas:

1. We recommend starting with passive restoration along the site edges. Passive restoration means allowing nature to grow without—or with very little—active management by humans.
2. We suggest having a cleanup day—inspired by the Friends of Belle Isle Marsh cleanup days in the 1980s—along the edge owned by the City of Boston to help clear trash and debris.
3. In the trainyard, a ditch can be built along the edge to catch runoff and prevent it from entering the marsh.
4. We suggest managed, spontaneous growth of plants in the train turnaround. Right now, the land there appears empty and unused, paved with asphalt. Restoring this to a permeable surface will help address the runoff problem, by catching the rainwater where it falls. Our inspiration is the Naturpark Südgelände in Berlin, a patchwork of second-growth meadows and woods on an abandoned rail yard in southern Berlin.

★ WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SEE IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD?

Mark the edge that you're most interested in on this collage, and use the space below to describe and draw your vision for this place.



Check out an approach to imagining East Boston's future rooted in a neighborhood's history of solidarity and resistance in the companion toolkit, LATINO FUTURES FOR CONDOR STREET.

★ EXPRESS YOURSELF!

Write a poem or draw a picture about how you interact with nature in your daily life, along the marsh edge or anywhere!

5 COLLABORATING WITH NATURE FOR LIVELIHOODS

This proposal is about going beyond the edge, seeing the water as an environment for productive ecosystems and human livelihoods. Bayswater runs along the slope of the former drumlin, or ridge, 10 feet above the water, with a steep cliff down to the edge. Most of the residences are single-family houses with yards. Bayswater Street lacks a sidewalk on the water side. We propose installing a sidewalk, with access points down to the water, thereby creating an opportunity to interact with the ocean through kelp farming and subsistence fishing. The sidewalk will allow residents of Harbor View to enjoy water views safely.

Bayswater, looking toward the Yacht Club. We propose a sidewalk along the water-edge of the street (owned by Massport) and points of access down to the water. There is opportunity here to farm kelp and create habitats for oysters, critters who protect against storm surges and purify polluted water.

Access to water

Proposed Sidewalk

Road and existing sidewalk

Private homes

4 AN ACCESSIBLE EDGE

This lot is a vacant, grassy lawn owned by Massport. The agency argues that they have to keep it empty because it is the landing path of planes landing at runways 22L and 22R at Logan Airport and is home to some important landing equipment and monitors. In its current condition, it is a landscape with few signs of life. It's not permitted, apparently.

We suggest a use that would allow the land to stay in the lifeless state Massport supposedly requires while providing space for human use as well.

We think a walkway, built out into the shallows, would create spaces for humans and critters to walk and enjoy the views of the Harbor, while keeping them far away from the sensitive equipment on the site.

We also suggest signage on the fences along the site. Massport should let people know why they are not permitted on the site.

Connection to Bayswater

Elevated boardwalk with a view

Gradual slope from water's edge to height of bridge

3 LAND BACK

Given the circumstances, we ultimately believe that it is worth considering turning all of the CVS site into its natural state of marshland. We arrived at this conviction through a study of the stormwater runoff. In the existing state, rainwater (represented by the blue arrows) runs over the paved parking lot, collecting pollutants along the way, before being dumped into the marsh along the back of the lot. Interestingly, the greenspace of the lot is placed precisely where the water doesn't go—it seems to be for aesthetic purposes only.

The most radical response to this stormwater situation is to relocate the CVS to another location on Saratoga Street, and restore the entire lot to its marshy state.

This initiative is a form of land-back, where it is literally giving the land back to the marsh and larger community. A similar project has occurred this year in Manhattan Beach near Los Angeles, in which beachfront land was stolen from a successful Black family and now rightfully returned to their care. Similarly, some of the land in East Boston, particularly waterfront land, can be given back to the community for management. However, we would like to take this idea a step further by proposing for it to be returned to marshland. We would like to see a total restoration of the CVS and its parking lots into marshland. We reached this conclusion through a variety of considerations, such as climate change, encroachment of the marsh, species protection, and input from community members.

Existing impervious conditions—stormwater runs over asphalt of lot, collecting pollutants, and drops directly into the marsh.

The process of removing asphalt is intensive...

...but the proposed restored marsh will absorb rainwater where it falls, preventing polluted runoff from entering the marsh in such high quantities.