

BETWEEN ARTERIALS AND FREEWAY RAMPS

design for daily life



Photo Credit: Kristen Fritsch



BEFORE

The future North End Parks site encompasses the bulk of the lower half of this photo (Before, left). The raised structure of the I-93 freeway severed downtown Boston from its waterfront and the historic North End neighborhood.

Over the decades after the freeway was built, adjacent buildings were demolished as property values declined next to the noisy freeway – or they were replaced with buildings providing minimal value to the ground level, such as parking garages. The legacy of this freeway corridor – redesigned as the Rose Kennedy Greenway – is thus one of extraordinary setbacks and low-value or mute building programming at the grade level.



AFTER

The "Big Dig" project's buried freeway replaced the raised barrier with a lidded, below-grade freeway. Long-severed sightlines were re-opened along the Greenway, but the project still imposed significant surface arterials along both sides of the Greenway, isolating the park parcels from adjacent building fabric.

These surface arterials bound the North End Parks on its lengthwise edges, and freeway ramp openings occur on both of the other edges. When combined with the vast setbacks and mute facades left along the former freeway structure, the landscape architects of the North End Parks were presented with the challenge of designing "islands of space, surrounded by traffic, infrastructure and detached from adjacent building programs.

The landscape architects focused on designing a continuous landform around the human scale and in constructing a positive version of a "crossing" of an anomalous urban feature. The team drew upon and celebrated the site's long history as an inconvenience, yet socially vibrant, crossing ground – over tidal water, a canal, railroad tracks, and, finally under an elevated freeway.



(Above) The Freedom Trail passes directly through the site requiring the design to accommodate large tour groups and heavy foot traffic while also being comfortable for individuals.

(Middle Left) At the foot of the Pergola, and running the length of the Porch edge, a thin scrim of water is an abstract representation of the many features that made the site into a crossing for past generations. From tidal flats, to a dredged canal, to railroad tracks, to the Central Artery structure, the site's lengthwise elements have always required bridging and the ritual of crossing. Water jets activate the space on quiet days, or the water can be drained allowing for large events.

GUSTAFSON GUTHRIE NICHOL

North End Parks

Location: Boston, MA

Client:	Massachusetts Turnpike Authority
Size:	3 acres
Completion Date:	November 2007
Design Landscape Architect:	Gustafson Guthrie Nichol
Project Landscape Architect:	Crosby Schlessinger Smallridge LLC
Fountain Consultant:	OMS Collaborative
Structural Engineer:	Earth Tech
MEP and Civil Engineer:	DMC Engineering, Inc.
Lighting Consultants:	Collaborative Lighting, LLC
Historical Consultant:	American History Workshop
General Contractor:	McCourt Construction Company

Project Description

The North End Parks are designed as human-scaled, useful spaces that both defy and define their immediate surroundings – a series of wide surface arterials and noisy freeway ramps. Part of the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway, the Parks are built as an intensive green roof over the tunnel of I-93, a portion of Boston's "Big Dig" project.

The landform of the Parks creates a positive experience of a "crossing ground" from the initial challenge of its traffic-isolated location. The "home to city" thresholds of the crossing ground include a canal-like water scrim, a water-side "porch," a series of central "yards," and locally themed "Home Gardens." Roads and walkways across these thresholds are subtly designed as bridges, to integrate the social and civic qualities of the site's long history as a meeting point and a landmark place of boundary, bridges, and shared passage.