

BARNARD PLACE PARK: A SMALL GEM THAT SHINES BRIGHT

LOCATION: South Boston, MA

DATE COMPLETED: 2022

BUDGET: \$180,000 (inclusive of all hard and soft costs)

PROJECT SIZE: 2,000 sq ft

ROLE: Prime Landscape Architect

SUMMARY:

In the historic neighborhood of South Boston, a small community of homeowners banded together to block development on a plot of cherished land. They saved the plot and hired our firm to transform it into a hard-working pocket park with a small grant budget of \$180,000. Our team helped translate the initial concept sketches into a buildable park and bring it through finished construction. This little gem offers a small bocce court, a flexible permeable event plaza, an oversized underground reservoir for stormwater, native shade trees, a pollinator garden for outdoor learning and pollinator habitat, raised ADA-accessible herb and veggie gardens, and two engraved memorial benches.

The site is also situated in one of the most high-risk areas for climate-related impacts in the City of Boston. The site and its surroundings will be increasingly impacted by sea level rise, increased temperatures, and inland flooding. Our team kept resiliency at the heart of the design, especially with regard to stormwater management and planting strategy.



NARRATIVE

What Barnard Place Park lacks in size, it makes up for in outsize benefits to the community and the surrounding urban ecosystem. Barnard Place Park is a new 2,000 square foot pocket park in South Boston (Southie) that offers a wide array of programs and design features while acting as a proof of concept for how small parks can make a big impact. The space includes a robust program with a pollinator learning garden, flexible plaza space for events, gatherings, and movie nights, movable cafe seating, permeable paving, mini bocce court, raised vegetable garden, and fixed memorial benches dedicated to two local fallen firefighters. As part of the urban ecological benefits, the park's planting plan is focused on native and native-cultivar plants that have outstanding pollinator benefits. While some of the planting palettes include adapted plants, all are considered with regard to their benefits to pollinators. Planting selection also balanced the more traditional considerations such as being low maintenance, having four-season interest, year-round blooms, and aesthetically pleasing texture, color, and framing.

The design includes a unique paving pattern that disintegrates and feathers the paving as it opens into adjacent planting and seating areas. This provides a material indication of program changes while maintaining a flush surface with flexible uses being possible across it. Cedar is used in a rich variety of ways across the design. This was a pandemic construction project, which went to bid in 2021 and the design team had to make many changes to accommodate material shortages and massive increases in commodity prices. The fence on all sides of the park was supposed to be a beautiful custom design of horizontal cedar planks of varying sizes. Due to cedar being more than 3x its typical price, we had to pivot and redesign the majority of the fence to be a hogwire panel style of fence. This still provided a modern geometric look with high visual porosity that fit the overall aesthetic and stayed in budget.

While the neighborhood of Southie offers a lot of historic character, the dense rows of townhomes throughout this district have little space for permeable surfaces or urban canopy. The double and triple-decker housing typologies in South Boston are situated immediately against 6-10' wide sidewalks, which abut directly onto narrow two-lane streets. This tight cross-section and dense historic urban grid leave little room for nature-based resilience solutions such as rain gardens, plant beds, and street trees. This has a variety of negative impacts across all of South Boston which is illustrated very well in the City of Boston's Climate Ready Boston data and map collection. This area is prone to increased flooding due to low pervious surface coverage. There is nowhere for the water to go. These maps also reveal disproportionate increases in temperature for South Boston, as well as increased risk of damage due to sea level rise. Essentially, Barnard Place Park is in the heart of a flood-prone heat island that is at risk for worsening conditions due to sea level rise.

The site had been used as a parking lot in the 1970's and 1980's and had severe compaction. Knowing this history and the fact that the site had some standing water in a few locations, we decided to deepen and oversize the subsurface reservoir below the entire space to be 18" deep and allow it to take in additional overland and subsurface flows. We have trees and planting beds dotted throughout, and this additional reservoir of primarily sand-based structural soils can also serve as a passive watering mechanism for adjacent plant beds.

This project is deeply meaningful to Southie, and especially the residents in a 2-block radius to the site. Since the 1980's the 4000 square foot parcel on the interior of Barnard Place has served as a communal yard. Barnard Place Park is now in half of this original 4,000 sq ft area. In this highly developed part of the city, only a lucky few residents have outdoor space. This grassy lot was cherished as a flexible and hard-working public commons. For the last 40 years this vacant lot served as the neighborhood's informal yard. It acted as a playground, picnic area, spot for summer barbeques, place for frisbee or bocce ball, and flex space for social gatherings. This site has long served as a park, we simply had the honor of formalizing it and ensuring it fits the evolving needs of the neighborhood.

NARRATIVE (continued)

The major impetus of the project was that this communal yard was recently threatened by a potential condo development. The tenacious local residents came together with the common goal of blocking the condo development. This group established Barnard Place Park Corporation and managed to purchase the land from the City of Boston. They were successful and managed to block the developer and undertake the process of creating a park. According to the 1910 Sanborn maps of Boston, the homes that surround this vacant lot were owned almost exclusively by Italian and Irish immigrant families. Around the 1950's the South Boston Italian-American Clubhouse was established on the southwest corner lot abutting Barnard Place Park. The neighborhood is also home to many first-responders and two Boston firefighters who called Barnard Place home, actually passed away in the years leading up to the park's land acquisition. As part of the program of the park, we created two memorial benches with their names engraved, and quotes chosen by their family and friends. Among its many programs, Barnard Place Park is also a memorial landscape in this way.

The design embraces this rich immigrant heritage with the use of a mini bocce ball court (non-regulation) and an homage to Italian piazzas full of hardscape paving and movable chairs. We wanted to amplify the planting and create an unforgettable oasis of native pollinator plants. These gardens will be used by the local Boys and Girls Club as an outdoor classroom and learning garden to teach local students about native plant communities and the importance of pollinators to the environment. Similarly, we want this small site to set a precedent for a resilient design using permeable paving, gravel dry wells, and sand-based structural soils to provide a sponge-like permeable plaza that rapidly absorbs stormwater run-off. The park is fully compliant

with the Americans With Disabilities Act design standards. It includes an accessible ramp into the space, compliant slopes under 5%, and wheelchair-accessible raised vegetable planters for elderly members of the community.

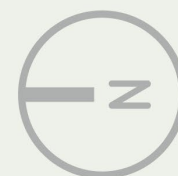
Working with the non-profit group, COG Design, the newly formed Barnard Place Park Corp. drafted a vision for a new park. In 2020 they received the title to the land, and were awarded \$150,000 in initial community preservation grant funding from the City of Boston to move forward with construction. They later landed a second \$30,000 in grant funding to help with lighting and irrigation.

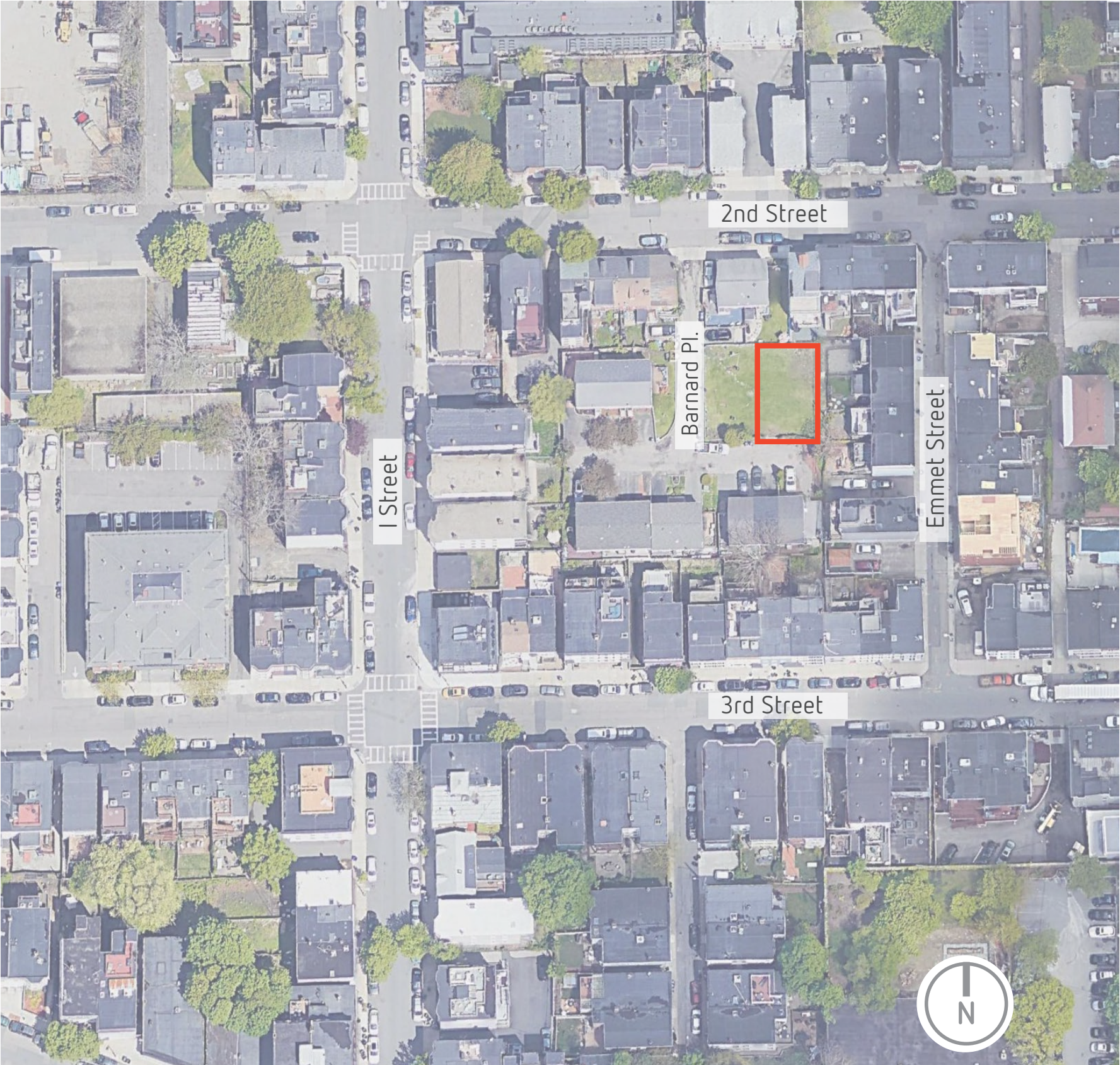
Shortly after their grant award, our firm was hired to work with the neighborhood stakeholders and previous team at COG Design to translate the initial concept vision into an evolved and buildable park design within their \$180,000 budget. Our scope included all design, documentation, and construction administration. This process involved extensive refinements to the design concept, detailing, planting, materials, and layout. We also had hurdles and redesigns due to material shortages and supply chain issues during the pandemic. Despite the challenges of working with a very tight budget, we have managed to deliver a stunning project that the client and community are overjoyed about.

We believe this project to be exemplary in how it has a huge social and ecological impact despite its small footprint and low budget. We are honored to help transform this vacant lot and communal yard into the verdant and resilient gem the community has long deserved.



Barnard Place Park Concept Design
October 2020

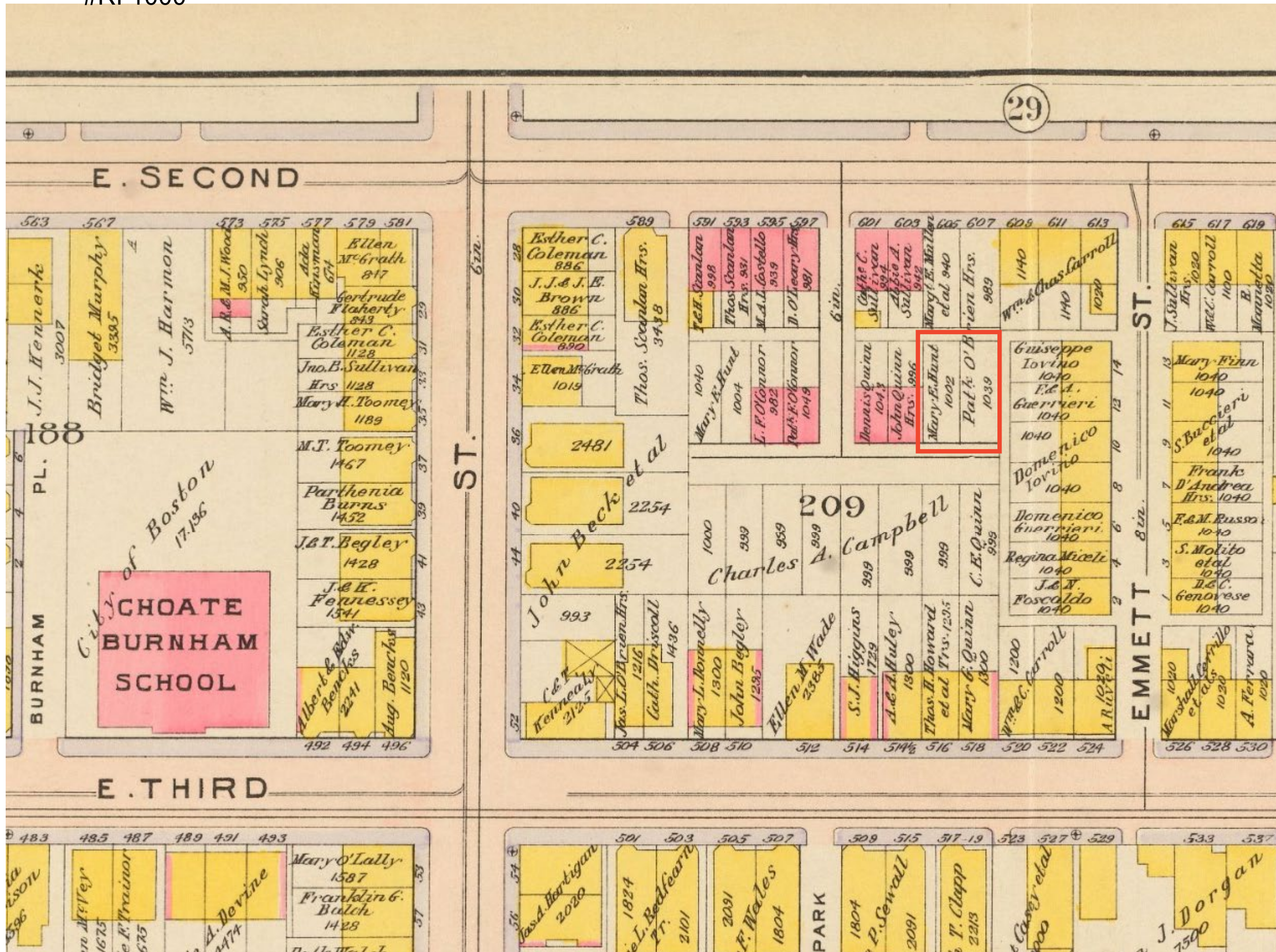




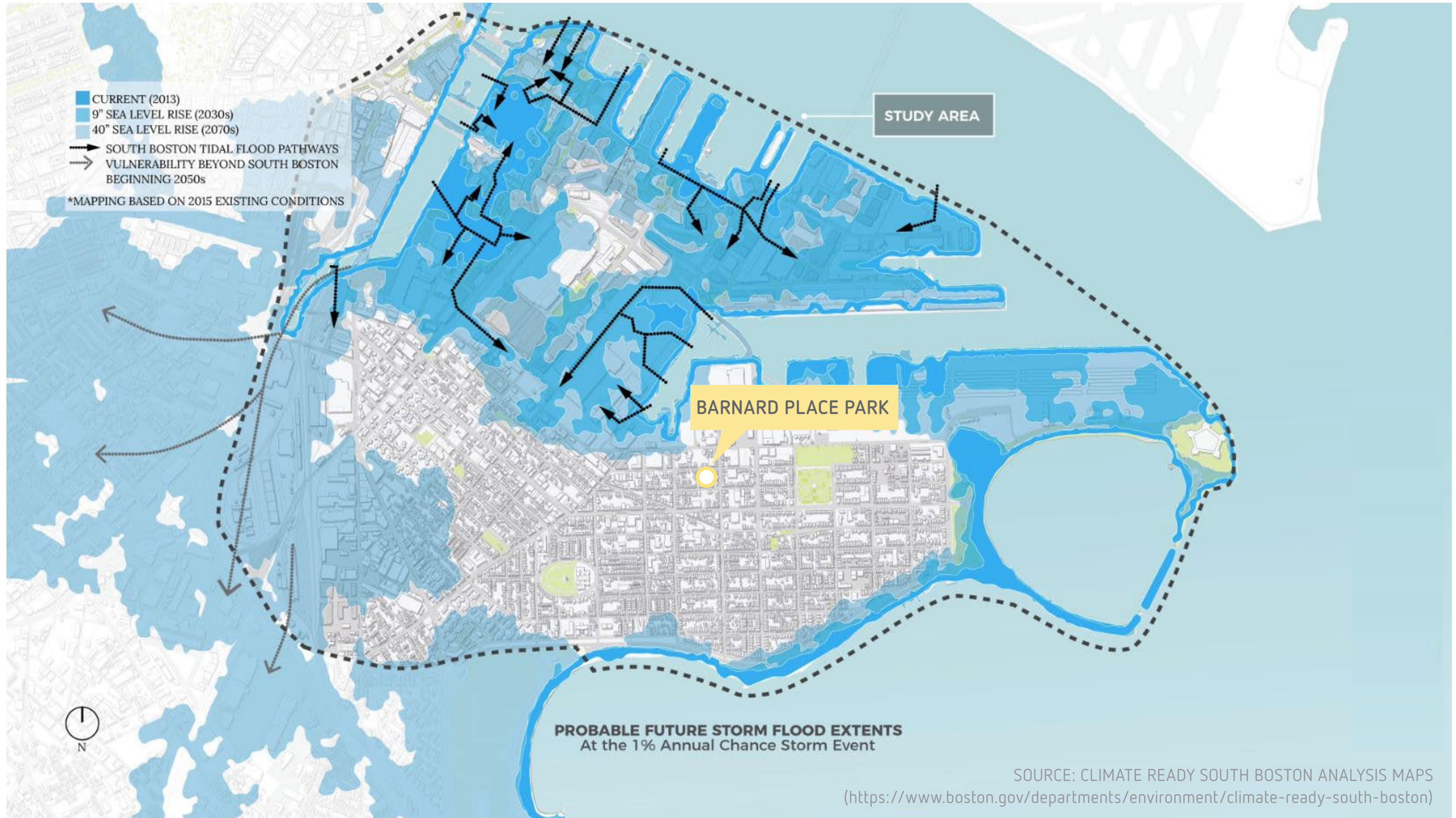
SITE LOCATION DIAGRAM

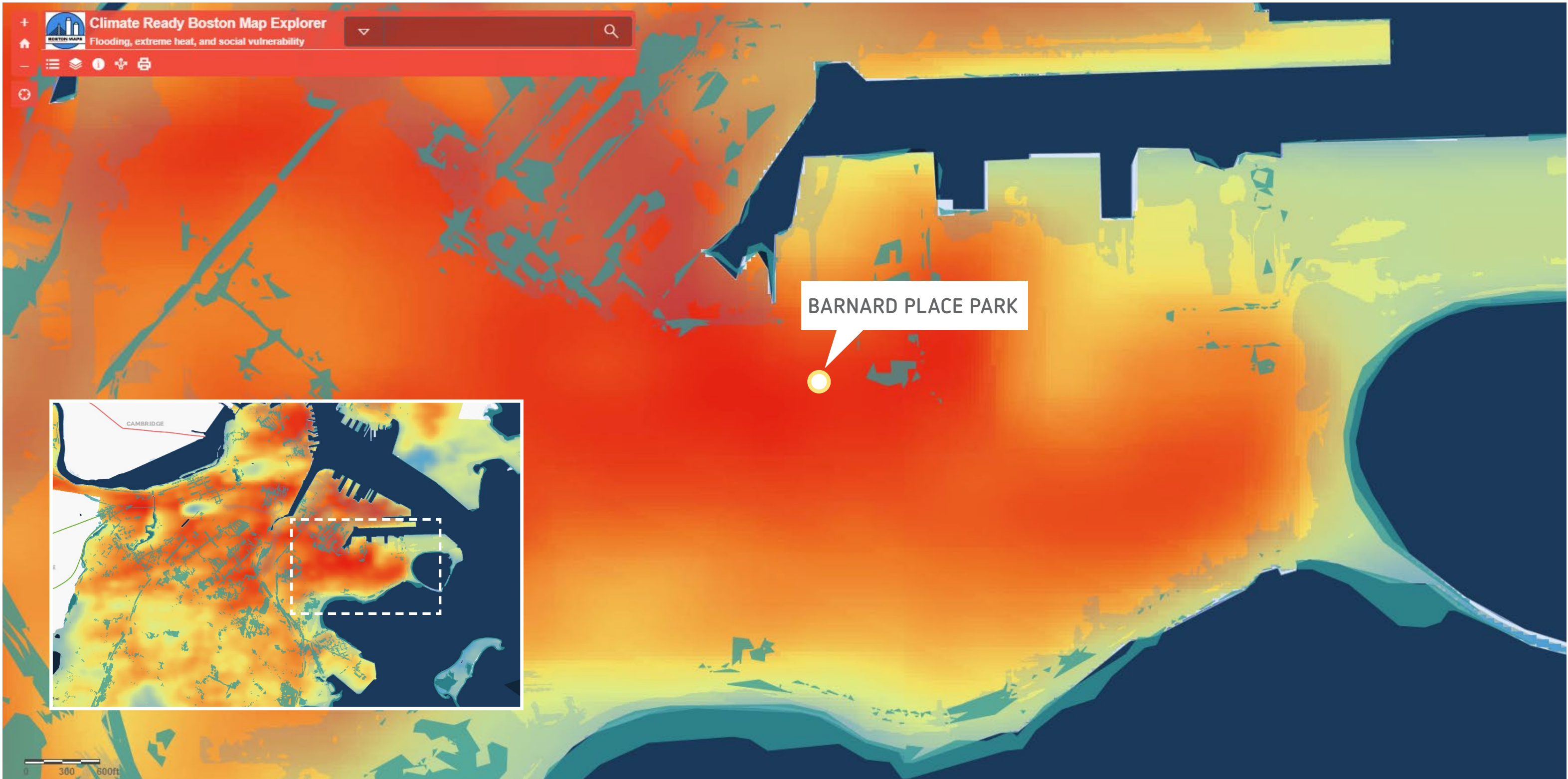


EXISTING CONDITIONS



1910 Sanborn Map of showing historic grid and plots surrounding Barnard Place Park





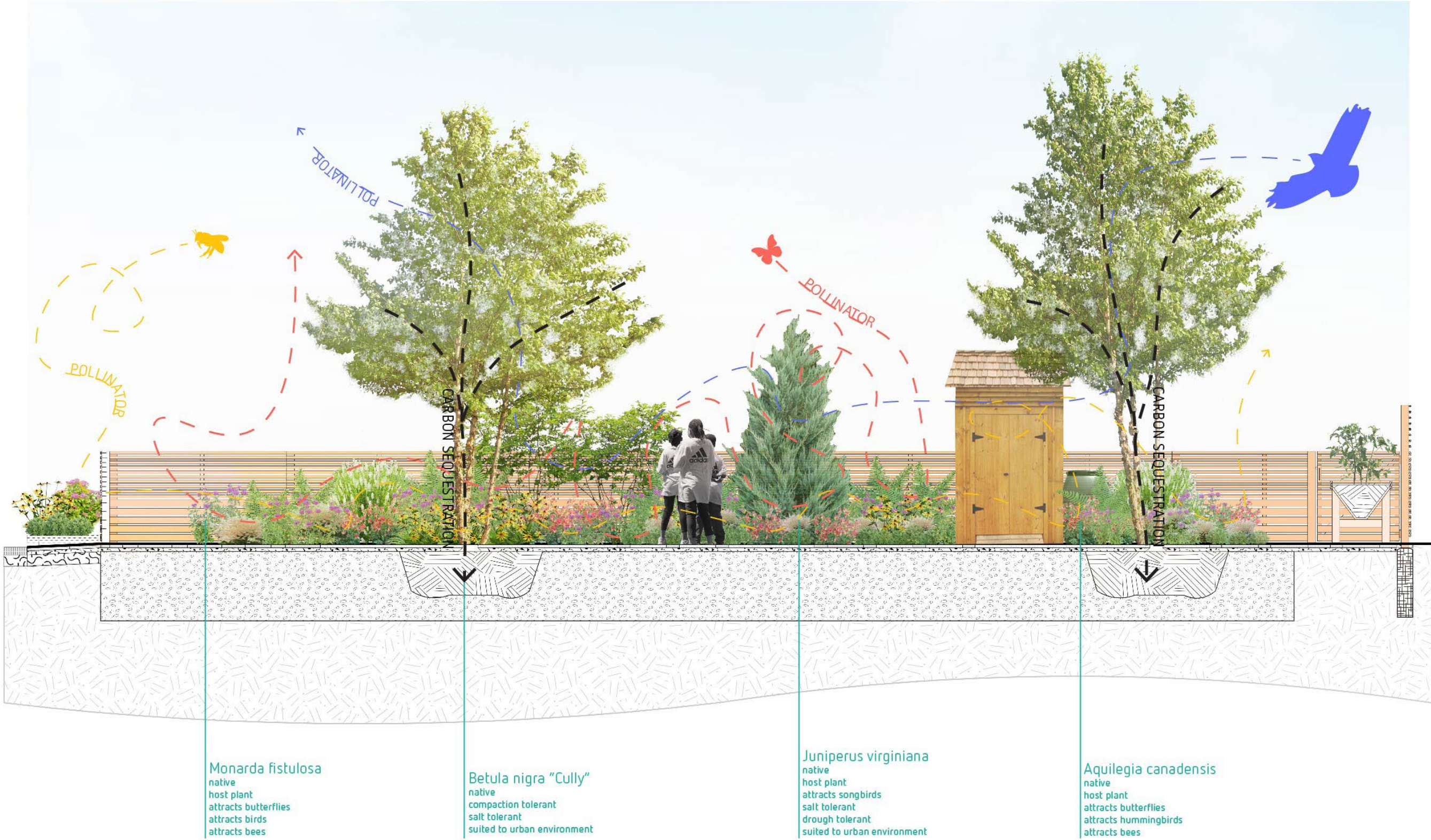
Our site is located in the heart of South Boston. This area of the city is one of the highest risk areas for increased sea level rise, more severe storms and inland flooding, as well as increased urban temperatures. This is in part due to the impervious surface cover of South Boston, combined with low tree canopy cover, and its situation as a coastal peninsula. This map is an overlay of the many climate risks in Boston (red being highest, green is lowest) of 1% sea level rise for 2050, increased stormwater by 2050, and rising temperatures.

SOURCE: CLIMATE READY BOSTON MAP EXPLORER (<https://arcg.is/5zm0v>)

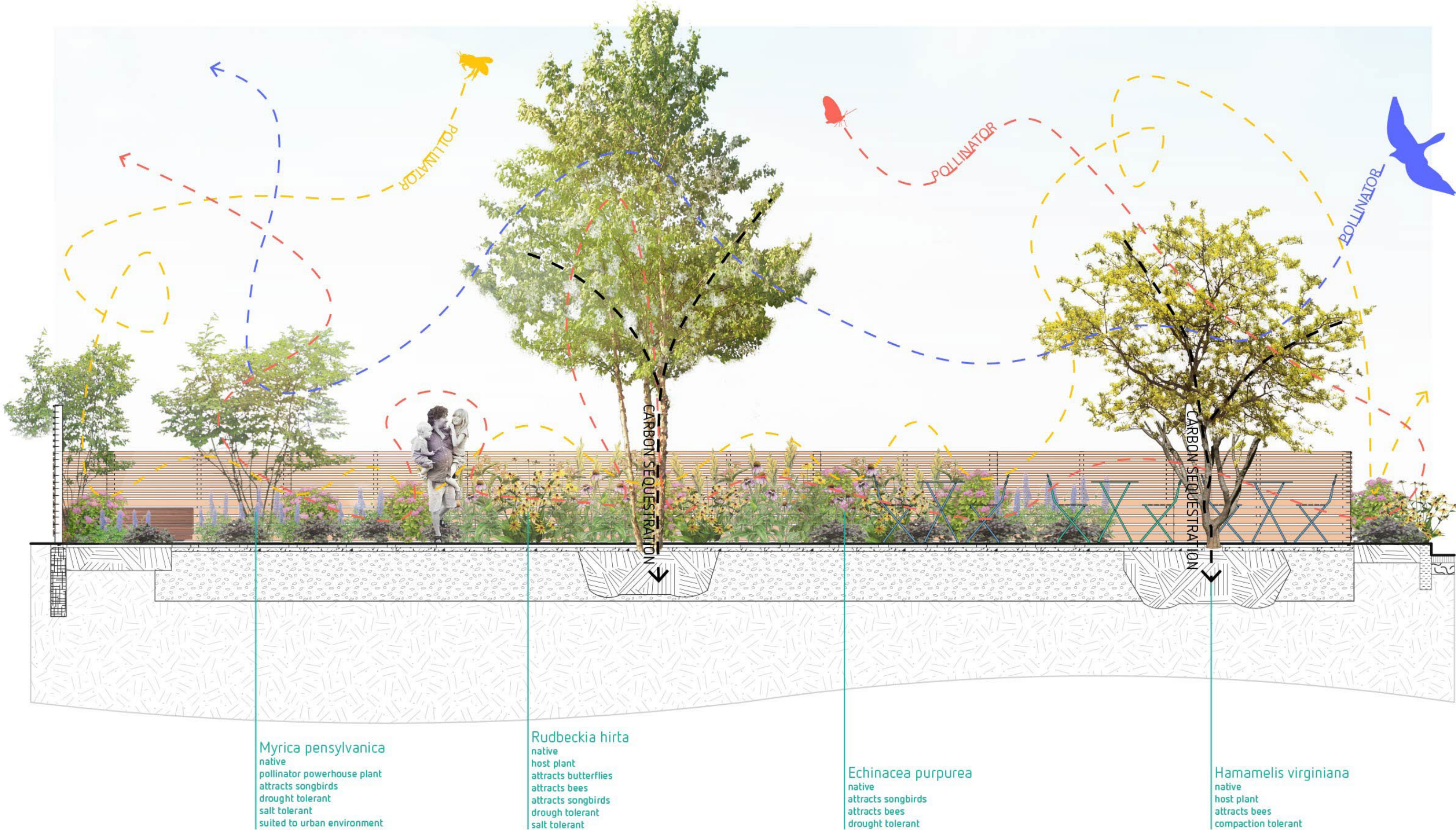
#RI 1000



Section-perspective view revealing stormwater flowing through permeable paving and plant roots spreading out inside sand-based structural soil.



Illustrative section diagram A, pollinator gardens serve as an immersive learning experience about native vegetation and pollinator species.



Illustrative section diagram B, pollinator gardens and native vegetation bring biodiversity and critical pollinator resources to this urban ecosystem.

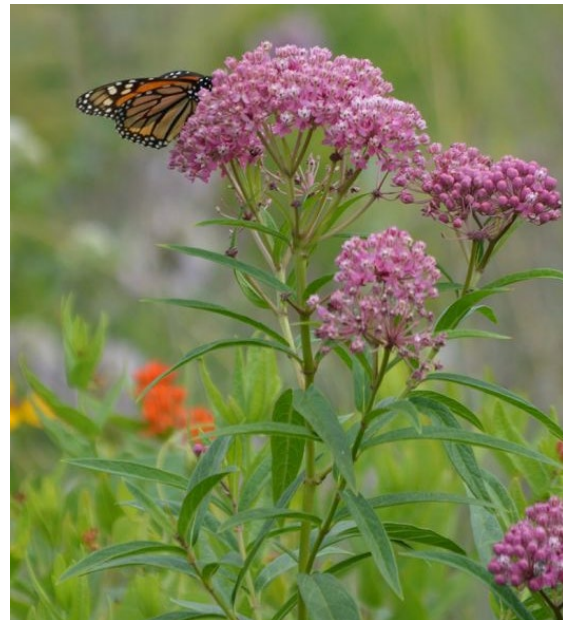
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Aquilegia canadensis
Wild Columbine
Size: 2-3'
Native



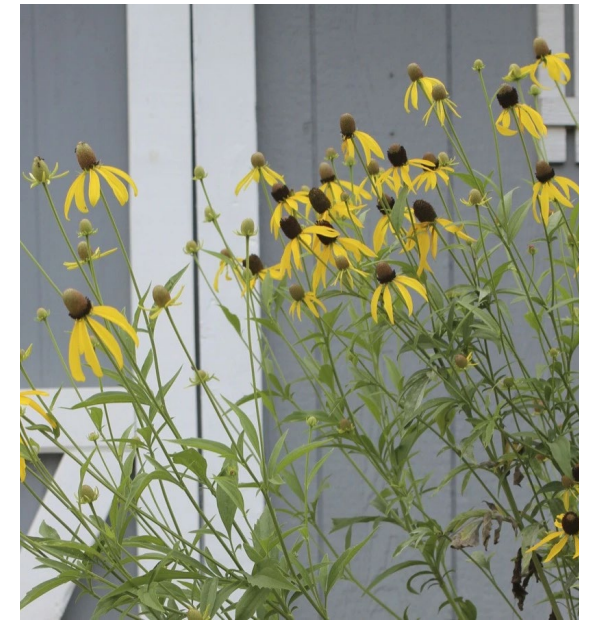
Lupinus perennis
Wild Lupine
Size: 1-2'
Native



Asclepias incarnata
Smooth Swamp Milkweed
Size: 2-5'
Native



Rudbeckia hirta
Bright Eyed Susan
Size: 1-2'
Native



Ratibida pinnata
Yellow Coneflower
Size: 5'
Native



Echinacea purpurea
Purple Coneflower
Size: 2-5'
Native



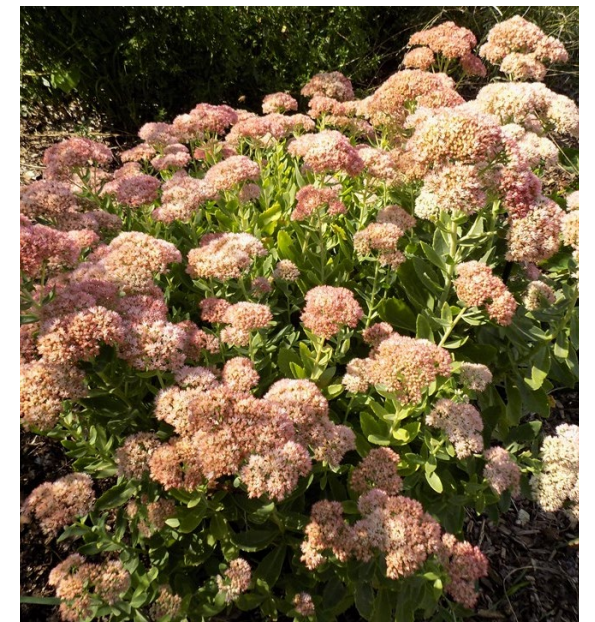
Monarda fistulosa
Wild Bergamot
Size: 2-4'
Native



Solidago speciosa
Showy Goldenrod
Size: 3-5'
Native



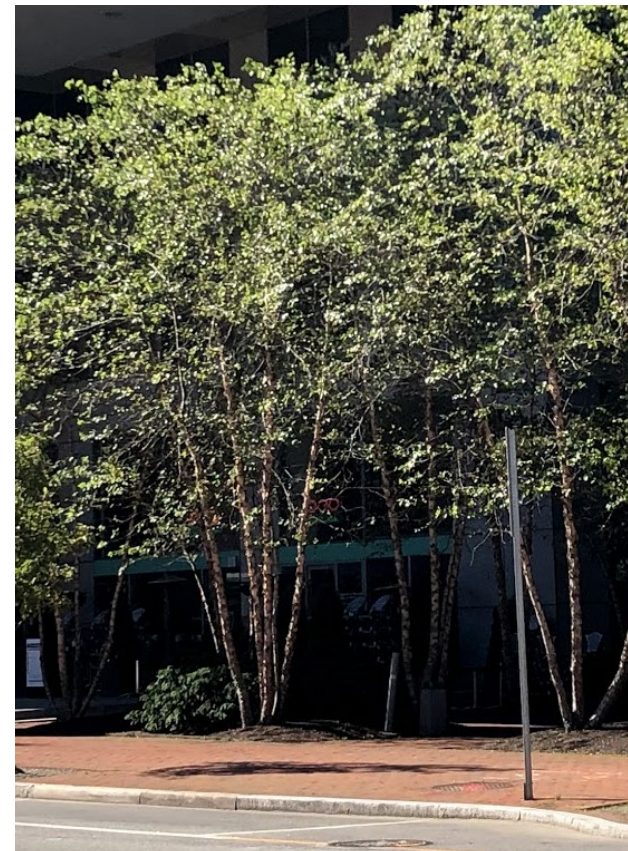
Sedum ternatum
Woodland Stonecrop
Size: 3-6"
Native



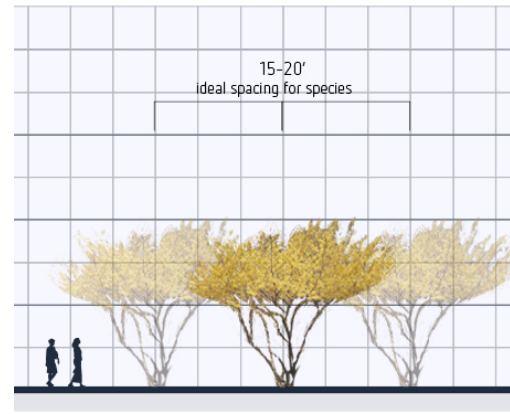
Sedum 'Herbstfreude'
Sedum Autumn Joy
Size: 1-2'
Native Cultivar



Betula nigra 'Heritage'
HERITAGE RIVER BIRCH (SINGLE STEM)



Betula nigra, 'Cully'
Cully Heritage River Birch
Mature Size: 35-45'



Hamamelis x intermedia 'Arnold Promise'
ARNOLD PROMISE WITCH HAZEL

BLOOM TIME: MARCH - APRIL
BLOOM COLOR: YELLOW



Hamamelis x intermedia 'Primavera'
Witch Hazel
Mature Size: 15-20'



Myrica pennsylvanica
Bayberry
Size: 3-5'
Native



Clethra anifolia
Sweet Pepperbush
Size: 5-8'
Native



Ilex verticillata
Winterberry
Size: 3-12'
Native



Drone aerial image of completed park construction.



Kids play, read, and study plants with parents and grandparents nearby. This flexible, shady, ADA accessible space is great for intergenerational gatherings.



These images highlight the oversized paving blocks that feather and disintegrate at planting beds and seating. This view highlights how the plant beds frame the space and provide a variety of sensory experiences and dappled shade. The custom cedar plank wall at the back of the park helps screen neighboring lots, and provide a consistent warmth alongside the cedar fence and bocce edging.



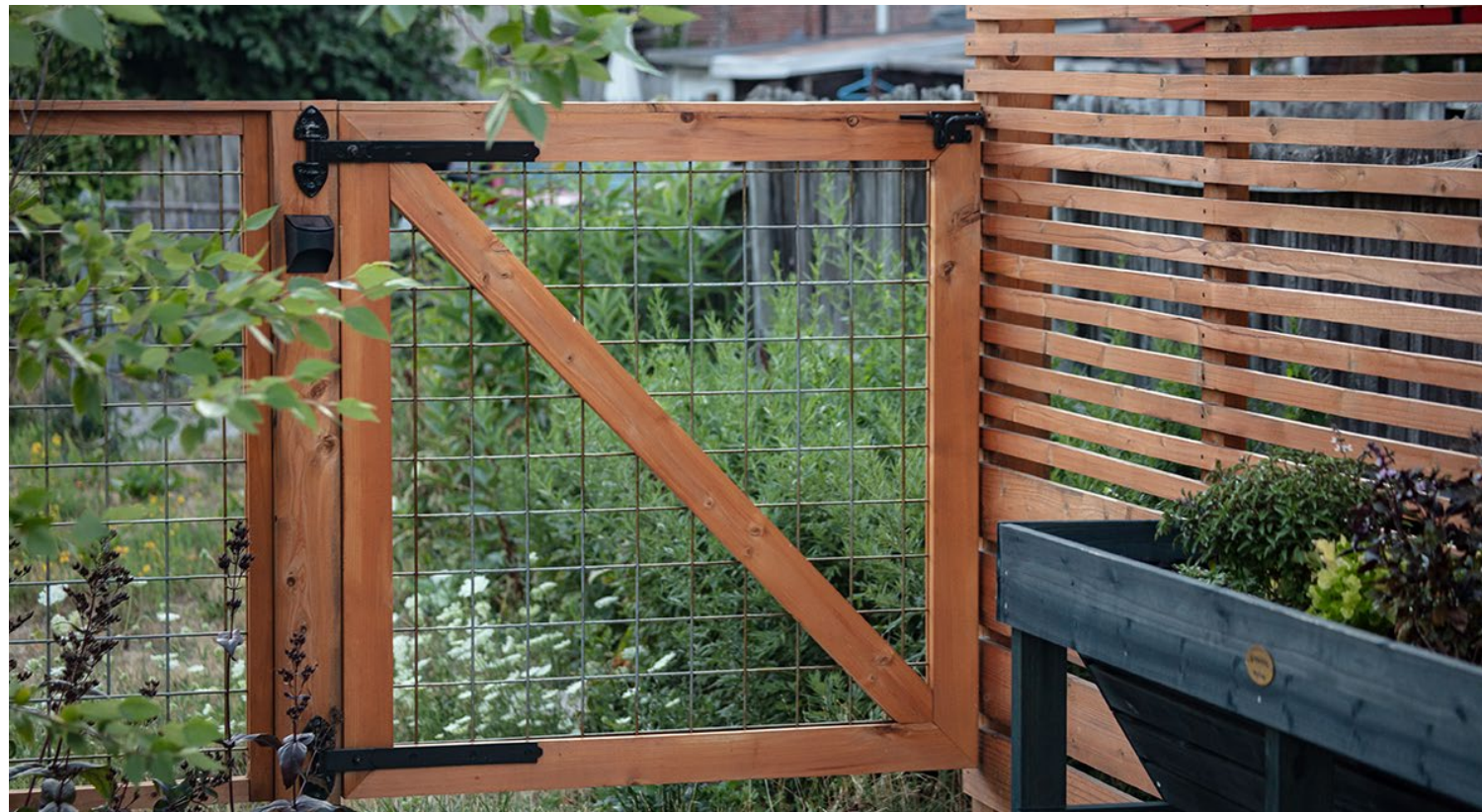
Movable and colorful bistro sets sit atop a permeable surface of oversized pavers with 1/8" open joints, decomposed granite, and planting beds. The fence panels are a simple cedar and hogwire system that allows for visual porosity and lower costs in a time of extreme material shortages.



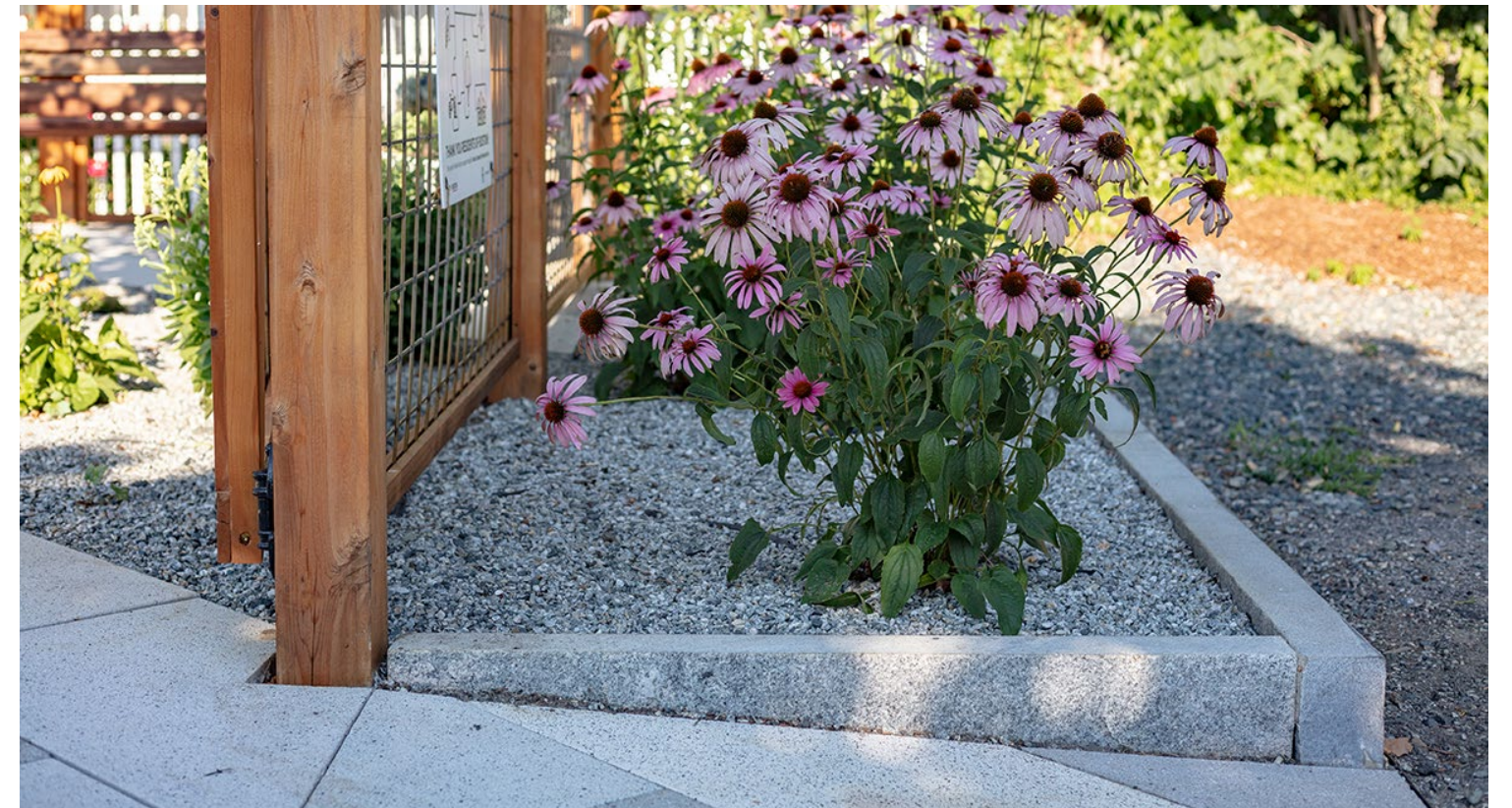
Custom engraved memorial bench dedicated to a fallen firefighter who lived on Barnard Place.



Corner detail for oversized concrete pavers meeting cedar bocce framing.



Custom cedar feature wall with horizontal members meeting the hogwire gate.



ADA ramp entry with oversized pavers cut and graded around posts, ramp, and curbs.



The new plant material significantly increased the biodiversity and pollinator habitat for the site and it's immediate surrounds. We have more songbirds, butterflies, bees and other pollinators showing up in abundance. Above is a selection of our installed plants including *Hamamelis x intermedia* 'Primavera'(left), *Echinacea purpurea* sp. (middle), and *Amsonia hubrichtii* (right).