

VISION CHELSEA CREEK

FOR A MORE RESILIENT & EQUITABLE WATERFRONT

NOVEMBER 2020







PROJECT BACKGROUND

WHAT IS VISION CHELSEA CREEK?

The communities of East Boston and Chelsea have been historically underserved by waterfront and open space access, and deferred transportation projects that could increase safety and connectivity along Route 1A and across the creek. Hundreds of years ago, these neighborhoods consisted of islands, marshes, and wetlands and have since been filled. Now these neighborhoods, some of the lowest lying areas in the region, face extreme threats of climate change that could exacerbate many of the challenges the communities already face.

Chelsea Creek emerges at the confluence of the Mystic River and Boston Harbor. The creek, which lies between the communities of East Boston and Chelsea, runs parallel to Route 1A and is characterized by its industrial shoreline. At the edge of the shoreline lies an abandoned railway within an MBTA easement. This area, which offers incredible waterfront access and spectacular views, is a tremendous opportunity to provide more equitable and resilient waterfront access to all.

WHO LED THE EFFORT?

Launched by The Harborkeepers, the project was driven by a public-private partnership between The Harborkeepers and Cargo Ventures. The Harborkeepers is a local, grassroots coastal and resilience-building non-profit based in East Boston and Cargo Ventures a long-time East Boston land owner, abutter, and primary funder.

The Harborkeepers collaborated with SCAPE, a landscape architecture and urban design firm bringing expertise in resilient waterfront planning and design. As design lead, SCAPE was supported by Utile, a Boston-based architecture and urban design firm, looking at land use, access, and regulatory issues with the expertise of Durand & Anastas. The project team also included a steering committee with members of the Boston Society of Architecture and the Boston Society of Landscape Architecture.

WHAT DID THE VISIONING PROCESS INCLUDE?

Vision Chelsea Creek was a six month-long visioning, planning, and stakeholder engagement process to re-imagine the abandoned railway site along the industrial shoreline of lower Chelsea Creek. From May to November of 2020, the team conducted a visioning process relying on inclusive community engagement practices, a framework plan and vision for the creek’s waterfront, and developed visualizations to help build momentum for future catalytic projects. Through this process, the project assessed opportunities for flood protection, ecological shoreline restoration and stabilization, equitable community access, pedestrian safety, historic preservation, and industrial re-use.

The team worked to address these social and environmental challenges through detailed analysis of previous studies, community advocacy, and site conditions – outlining strategies to mitigate negative environmental impacts and create a more resilient, accessible, and restorative waterfront edge. Building on prior visioning and community engagement, as well as the City of Boston’s overarching climate resilience goals, the team developed a set of four resilience and climate adaptation strategies for the site. Through both detailed technical analysis and a robust and transparent community and stakeholder engagement process, the project team worked together to design and develop a comprehensive vision for the site. The vision is inclusive of various community needs and priorities while building on waterfront and open space advocacy, industry and maritime uses, and the needs of municipal stakeholders.

WHAT ARE OUR PROJECT GOALS?

1. Create an inclusive and accessible waterfront for all;
2. Balance industrial and community needs along the waterfront;
3. Enhance Chelsea Creek’s ecology and promote environmental justice for all;
4. Foster social resilience and create a resilient waterfront that reduces risk from climate change.



PUBLIC STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

WHAT WAS THE STRATEGY?

The engagement strategy for Vision Chelsea Creek built upon existing outreach efforts and a desire to inclusively engage more community members while deepening an understanding of the site through the lenses of access, connectivity, ecology, and resilience. By engaging various working groups through different types of events and by using various outreach tools, the visioning process for Chelsea Creek was transparent, more collective, and better informed.

WHO WAS ENGAGED?

The Vision Chelsea Creek Steering Committee consisted of representatives from the client team, Boston Society of Architecture, and Boston Society of Landscape Architecture. The Steering Committee met on a monthly basis to guide and progress aspects of the visioning, planning and engagement processes. They also actively participated in the engagement strategy by leveraging and engaging with their local networks.

The Design Team held four community workshops: two in English and two in Spanish. Workshops included the public, as well as community organizations, industry partners, government agencies, and funders, who provided input and expertise related to neighborhood connectivity, transportation, ecology, resilience, waterfront access, and policy. Recordings and materials presented during the workshops can be found online at: <https://scapestudio.mysocialpinpoint.com/vision-chelsea-creek>

The visioning process concluded with three stakeholder focus groups consisting of city agencies, local advocates, and land owners and port operators. Each focus group provided feedback on the framework plan and potential catalytic projects to build momentum for future work.

WHAT'S NEXT?

While this phase of the study is over, engagement will continue. Boston residents and visitors are invited to explore the site by joining the Harborkeepers on a site walk and/or participating in future focus groups. It is critical all voices are heard throughout this process.



PROJECT AREA OVERVIEW

The project area consists of three distinct neighborhood pockets: Orient Heights, Harbor View, and Eagle Hill. While the residential character of the three neighborhoods varies, all are similarly challenged by their lack of connectivity to the waterfront. Whether bifurcated by transit infrastructure or challenged by ease of access, varying infrastructural, topographical, and hydrological conditions affect one's ability to easily access Chelsea Creek.

By creating a connective network throughout East Boston and providing access across Route 1A and to the waterfront industry, Vision Chelsea Creek improves waterfront accessibility, resiliency, and equity for all. To do so, the project envisions four different visionary strategies:

- 1. A Network of Greenways
- 2. A Resilient Edge
- 3. An Urban Boulevard
- 4. A Working Waterfront



LEGEND:

| | | | |
|--------------|-------------|---------------------------|--|
| STATE ROUTE | RAIL | BIKE TRAIL | EX. GREENWAY |
| ROAD | FERRY ROUTE | HUBWAY STATION | PROPOSED GREENWAY EXTENSION |
| MBTA (THE T) | SEAPORT | RESIDENTIAL: MULTI-FAMILY | SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE: COMMUNITY CENTERS, SCHOOLS, CHURCHES, ETC |
| MBTA BUS | WATER TAXI | | |

A NETWORK OF GREENWAYS

'A Network of Greenways' envisions a community better connected to its waterfront, open spaces, and social infrastructure. The **East Boston Loop** builds on the existing East Boston Greenway by connecting Bennington Street with the new Suffolk Downs development, the Chelsea Creek Waterfront, segments of the East Boston Harborwalk, and the Chelsea Greenway. To improve East-West connectivity and multi-modal transit, **neighborhood connectors** link Orient Heights, Harbor View, and Eagle Hill to the Loop and waterfronts. In Orient Heights, where topographic conditions make waterfront access particularly challenging, a **connection** point navigates grade change by getting residents from the top of the drumlin down to the water. Along Boardman Street, a permeable streetscape, with improved planting and bioswales, reveals the neighborhood's **connection to Crooked Creek** by improving stormwater management.



STRATEGIES FOR A NETWORK OF GREENWAYS

1. CREATE THE EAST BOSTON LOOP
2. ESTABLISH NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTORS
3. CONNECT TO ORIENT HEIGHTS
4. REINTERPRET CROOKED CREEK
5. PROMOTE SOCIAL RESILIENCE

A HUB FOR A RESILIENT COMMUNITY

Building on the community's tremendous activism, the network of community nodes, such as schools, libraries, and churches, are connected via the greenways to improve **social resilience** while connecting East Boston with the project's hub: the historic Pump Station.



ORIENT HEIGHTS

EDUCATIONAL DOCK

COMMUNITY HUB

MARITIME MUSEUM

OFFICE SPACE

A RESILIENT EDGE

'A Resilient Edge' envisions a community better protected against rising seas, increased precipitation, and coastal storm surge. As the primary line of defense a **potential flood barrier alignment** ties into to high ground to prevent flood pathways from inundating low lying areas. To the North, a floodable landscape provides public open space and waterfront access, as well education and recreational opportunities. Additional points of **waterfront access** provide spaces for the community to view and interact with the creek, such as get downs to the water's edge, beaches, and opportunities for maritime recreation. Adjacent the waterfront access point at Addison Street, a **community hub** encourages social resilience and educational opportunities for youth, tying into sitewide strategies for **ecological restoration**. Through living shorelines, floating wetlands, and restorative landscapes, a soft edge will aim to adapt to future climate conditions while reducing the climate risks the community faces.

2. FLOODABLE
LANDSCAPE

1. POTENTIAL FLOOD
BARRIER ALIGNMENT

5. ECOLOGICAL
RESTORATION

3. WATERFRONT
ACCESS

4. COMMUNITY
HUB

STRATEGIES FOR A RESILIENT EDGE

1. MITIGATE FLOOD RISKS
2. CREATE FLOODABLE LANDSCAPES AND PUBLIC OPEN SPACES
3. PROVIDE WATER ACCESS
4. BUILD SOCIAL RESILIENCE AND FOSTER STEWARDSHIP
5. ENHANCE THE ECOLOGY OF CHELSEA CREEK

A RESILIENT WATERFRONT PARK



GREENWAY

RESTORED WETLAND

BOARDWALK

NAVIGATION CHANNEL

Dredge Navigation Channel

FLEXIBLE
LAWN

BUTTERFLY
GARDEN

AN URBAN BOULEVARD

'An Urban Boulevard' envisions a safer, more pedestrian and cyclist-friendly corridor along Route 1A. As a congested regional highway, Route 1A serves as a barrier between communities and the waterfront. Through **traffic calming measures** such as improved medians, narrowed lanes, and increased signage, slowed vehicular movement can better assist pedestrians and cyclists in safely crossing the roadway. Additionally, nodes for neighborhood connections, create designated places for the community to access the water front, through traffic signals, cross walks, curb extensions, and clear signage. For those traveling along Route 1A, screened industrial buildings and a widened landscape and sidewalk create a buffered **urban edge**. Such improvements not only increase the safety of Route 1A, but also create an enhanced, shaded, and more pleasant experience for pedestrians and cyclists.

1. TRAFFIC CALMING

3. URBAN EDGE

2. NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTIONS

STRATEGIES FOR AN URBAN BOULEVARD

1. PROMOTE TRAFFIC CALMING ALONG ROUTE 1A
2. ENHANCE NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTIVITY
3. CREATE AN URBAN EDGE

AN ACCESSIBLE WATERFRONT SPACE



A WORKING WATERFRONT

'A Working Waterfront' envisions a waterfront in which the community and local economy support one another. An **industrial economy** supports local businesses while also providing local jobs. The site is part of the Chelsea Creek Designated Port Area (DPA) which protects maritime industrial uses in the area. A working waterfront preserves and enhances industrial uses while allowing for bike routes to access jobs, landscaping to prevent industry from flooding, and community open space where industrial uses are not viable. By incorporating **access and view corridors** across the industrial edge, increased **waterfront public access and space** better connects the community and its businesses to maritime assets and a stretch of the creek.

3. WATERFRONT PUBLIC ACCESS

2. ACCESS & VIEW CORRIDORS

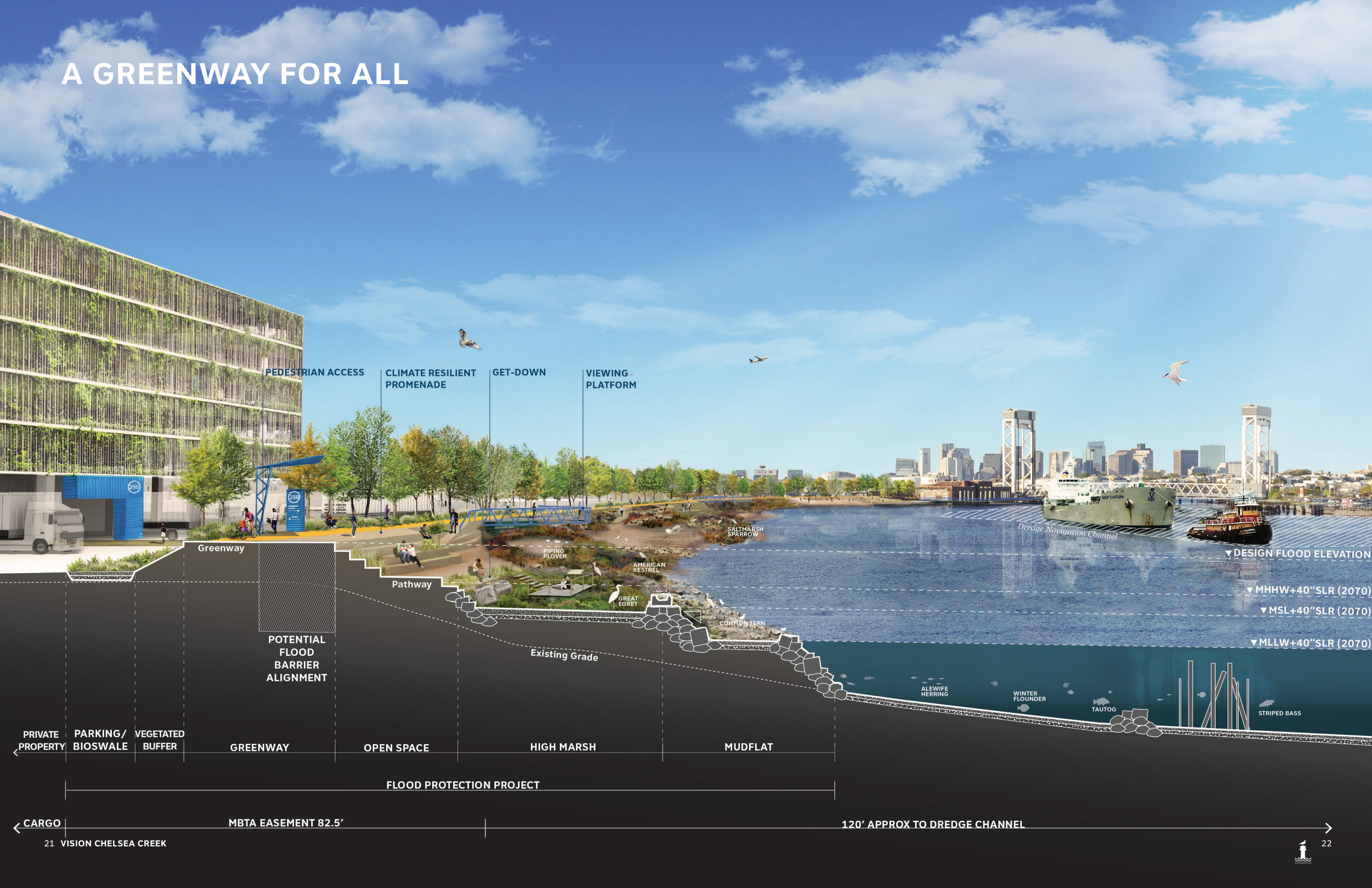
1. INDUSTRIAL ECONOMY

STRATEGIES FOR A WORKING WATERFRONT

1. SUPPORT LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
2. CREATE ACCESS AND VIEW CORRIDORS
3. PRIORITIZE PUBLIC ACCESS ALONG CHELSEA CREEK

Note: Hypothetical Building Massing Represents maximum envelope - For illustrative purposes only.

A GREENWAY FOR ALL



PEDESTRIAN ACCESS

CLIMATE RESILIENT
PROMENADE

GET-DOWN

VIEWING
PLATFORM

Greenway

Pathway

Existing Grade

POTENTIAL
FLOOD
BARRIER
ALIGNMENT

PRIVATE
PROPERTY

PARKING/
BIOSWALE

VEGETATED
BUFFER

GREENWAY

OPEN SPACE

HIGH MARSH

MUDFLAT

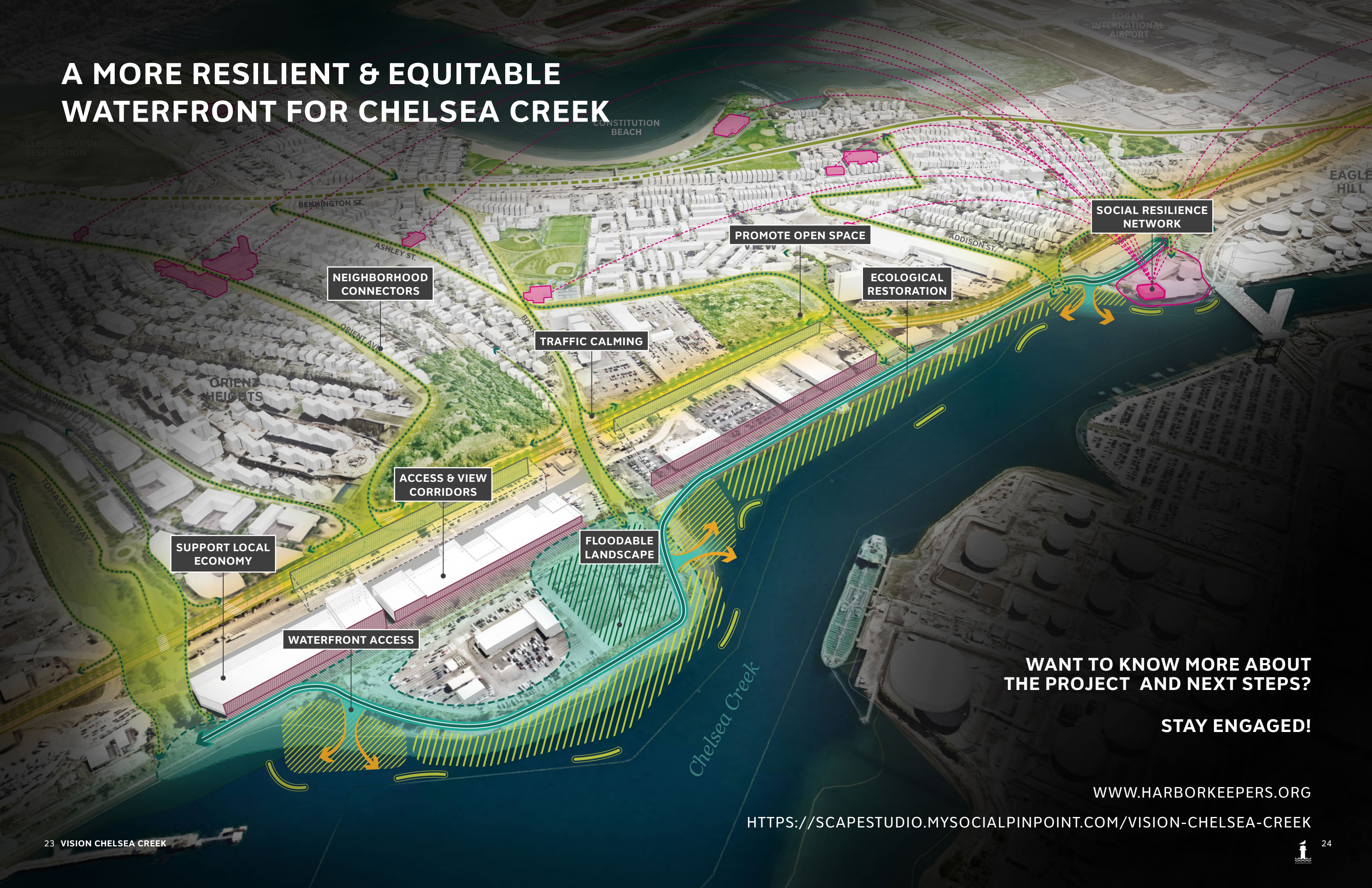
FLOOD PROTECTION PROJECT

← CARGO

MBTA EASEMENT 82.5'

120' APPROX TO DREDGE CHANNEL

A MORE RESILIENT & EQUITABLE WATERFRONT FOR CHELSEA CREEK



WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT
THE PROJECT AND NEXT STEPS?

STAY ENGAGED!

WWW.HARBORKEEPERS.ORG

[HTTPS://SCAPESTUDIO.MYSOCIALPINPOINT.COM/VISION-CHELSEA-CREEK](https://SCAPESTUDIO.MYSOCIALPINPOINT.COM/VISION-CHELSEA-CREEK)



Dredge Navigation Channel

