

# Conceptual Plan Neponset Riverwalk Quincy & East Milton, MA



Fig. 1 Billings Creek looking east from Commander Shea Blvd.

Friends of the Neponset Estuary  
Neponset River Watershed Association

Partially funded by a grant from Quincy Sons of Italy

November 2002

## Acknowledgements

The Neponset Riverwalk has lived in the imaginations of many people for some time. Many of those who love the Neponset River and the environmental resources of the surrounding areas in Quincy and Milton want to see greater public access to the river and protection of its fragile ecosystem.

The recently completed Pope John Paul Park and Neponset Greenway on the west side of the Estuary are excellent examples of achieving the goal of public access, land reclamation, and resource protection. On the east side of the Estuary, the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) has already created a park at Squantum Point and preserved significant areas of salt marsh in Quincy and Milton. Trails at Squantum Point Park were included in the Neponset Master Plan, but have yet to be constructed ([www.mass.gov/mdc/NEP\\_PLAN.HTM](http://www.mass.gov/mdc/NEP_PLAN.HTM)). The Neponset Riverwalk is inspired by these landmark accomplishments.

To promote the Riverwalk concept, Quincy Attorney Bryan Stevens, Steve Perdios, Co-chair of the Friends of the Neponset Estuary and the Quincy Environmental Network, Tom Palmer, Board member of the Neponset River Watershed Association (NepRWA) and Friends of the Blue Hills, and Ian Cooke, Executive Director of NepRWA encouraged me to create a conceptual plan and report. As part of an independent study under the direction of Dr. Zong-Guo Xia at UMass/Boston Department of Earth and Geographic Science, I used data from MassGIS to assess the natural resources, environmental regulations, protected open space, and zoning and to illustrate a possible route for the Riverwalk. Britt Lundgren's diligent research for the report was funded by the Quincy Sons of Italy. Robert Flagg generously contributed funds for printing this report.

We now pass this conceptual plan on to local citizens and public officials to facilitate discussions toward developing the best plan and funding sources so that the Riverwalk can become a reality.

Wendy Ingram  
November 2002

Conversations are on-going with property owners about how they can contribute to various segments of the Riverwalk. Pedestrian improvements will be included in the renovation of the Route 3A Bridge over the Neponset which will be underway soon. Blue Cross Blue Shield has agreed to work to create a path across their property as part of the renovation of the building along the Neponset at Sagamore Creek west of Newport Avenue. In the spring 2004, Boston Scientific provided a dumpster for a riverbank cleanup along Commander Shea Boulevard.

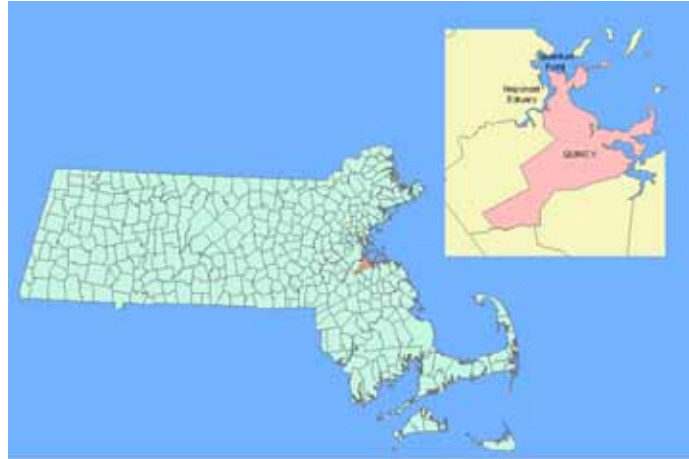
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Locus Map Neponset Estuary

Fig. 2

## **Conceptual Plan for a Neponset Riverwalk**

**Quincy and East Milton, Massachusetts  
Friends of the Neponset Estuary  
Neponset River Watershed Association**

### *Executive Summary*

This conceptual plan has been initiated by the Friends of the Neponset Estuary, a sub-group of the Neponset River Watershed Association. The Neponset Estuary is the tidal area where the Neponset River meets Boston Harbor. The area of concentration for the Riverwalk is the shoreline and adjoining land from Marina Bay in Quincy to Gullivers Creek in East Milton. This plan is inspired by the successful completion of the Neponset Greenway Trail in Dorchester from Port Norfolk and the Route 3A Bridge to the Lower Mills area of the Neponset River. The two parks in Dorchester on reclaimed land of a former drive-in movie theatre and landfill and the Neponset Greenway Trail are examples of what can be accomplished by citizens and public officials with a common vision working together.

The goal is to develop a conceptual plan for a multi-use trail along the Neponset Estuary to be presented to the Mayor, City Council, and Planning Board of Quincy. This report includes assessment of the existing paved walkways and well-worn foot paths, the natural resources, current land use, zoning, and land protection. The report also notes where there are gaps between paths on land that has public access either by public ownership, by easement, or owner permission. It concludes with an action plan of steps needed to implement the plan and bring the Riverwalk to reality.

**A Conceptual Plan for a Neponset Riverwalk  
Quincy and East Milton  
Friends of the Neponset Estuary  
Neponset River Watershed Association**

*Introduction*

How many citizens in Quincy enjoy the beautiful salt marshes and shoreline of the Neponset Estuary? How many know of the valuable fish and wildlife habitat that the Estuary supports?

The Friends of the Neponset Estuary and many others see the Neponset River as a spectacular recreational and natural resource. Envision a Riverwalk where citizens can get to know and enjoy the Neponset and its scenic vistas. The Cove Creek parcel (formerly Dickenson) owned by the City of Quincy is a logical welcome and orientation site for visitors to obtain a map of the entire five-mile Riverwalk and information about the Neponset River and its wildlife habitat next to a small parking lot. This site connects to a path heading north along a salt marsh.

The Riverwalk consists of sidewalks in developed areas and unpaved paths through woods and along extensive salt marshes which are vital breeding areas for fish and shellfish. The Riverwalk's marshes extend from Boston Scientific on Commander Shea Boulevard all the way to the Red Line Bridge, then from Adams Inn to the antennas on the Sonsinger Broadcasting Company parcel near Presidents' Golf Course, and again on Riverside Avenue in East Milton past the Neponset Yacht Club at Granite Avenue and along Gullivers Creek to West Squantum Street.

Another loop of the Riverwalk connects Commander Shea Boulevard by Billings Creek to Quincy Shore Drive and the sidewalk on East Squantum Street to the Cove Creek Parcel (formerly Dickenson) on Victory Road. This loop connects the Riverwalk to Moswetuset Hummock and Wollaston Beach. Thus the Riverwalk will provide connection to recreation well beyond the Neponset Estuary.

The Neponset River is an excellent place for fishing and boating from public docks. The enormous dock at Squantum Point Park is an ideal spot for a public boat ramp and a canoe and kayak rental business. Walking, jogging and bicycling are popular on the Riverwalk, as well as picnicking and bird watching. Trails near developed areas are increasingly popular for recreation and provide many benefits for the health and welfare of our communities.

### *Purpose of the Riverwalk plan*

#### **1. Protect the Neponset River and its shoreline**

By controlling growth along the riverbank, we can sustain the health of the river. Throughout the Neponset Estuary, in spite of dense residential, commercial, and industrial development, there is still some land that has been left undeveloped. Several lots that were formerly developed, such as the MDC's Squantum Point Park and Quincy's Cove Creek parcel, are returning to a natural state.

#### **2. Connect existing parks and open space**

There are six parcels of publicly owned land on the Quincy and East Milton sides of the Estuary. There are also several parcels with existing public access through Chapter 91, e.g., Boston Scientific and Adams Inn in Quincy, and the State Street Bank property in Milton.

#### **3. Increase recreational opportunities**

In addition to linking existing open space, the Riverwalk will provide access for recreational opportunities such as, walking, jogging, bicycling, kite flying, bird watching, fishing, and general enjoyment of unspoiled natural areas in close proximity to a highly developed urban area. By promoting public use of the riverfront, we are also promoting stewardship of the river.

#### **4. Define a vision to guide the efforts of the State, the City, and private landowners**

By looking ahead, there will be ways to plan limited future development, while still protecting natural resources. New development proposals can be considered within a larger context, rather than simply as a new project standing in isolation. The approval process should be smoother with more satisfying results for all parties.

### *Project Method*

This conceptual plan examines the project area, existing open space, zoning, natural resources, environmental constraints, and possible land acquisition with the purpose of developing a plan that links existing walkways and paths along the Neponset from East Squantum Street and Victory Road in Quincy to Granite Avenue in Milton. This report includes a series of maps that were created using the Geographic Information System (GIS). ArcGIS is a computerized system for integrating many types of information, both in graphic and in tabular form, to analyze land areas and present the results in the form of a map that can be easily understood by a broad range of the viewers.

This report, including the maps, was created by Wendy Ingram at the Laboratory of GIS at UMass/Boston.

### *Chapter 91*

Chapter 91 is a regulation that has been in force for many years that allows public access to filled tidelands for water-dependent uses, e.g., fishing, boating, digging clams, and walking along the shore. The regulations facilitate projects that provide public access to filled tidelands.

The Boston Harbor Survey map from 1857, Figure 3, shows the majority of Squantum Point as a salt marsh meadow used for grazing and harvesting salt marsh hay. Billings Creek was hydrologically connected to Boston Harbor, a connection that no longer exists. Most of the current buildings along the Estuary were constructed on filled land.

The Chapter 91 regulations were a factor in the decision of Boston Scientific Corporation to move a fence back several feet from the shoreline to provide a public walkway along their property from Squantum Point Park to Commander Shea Boulevard. Boston Scientific has lead the way in opening up access along the Neponset River.



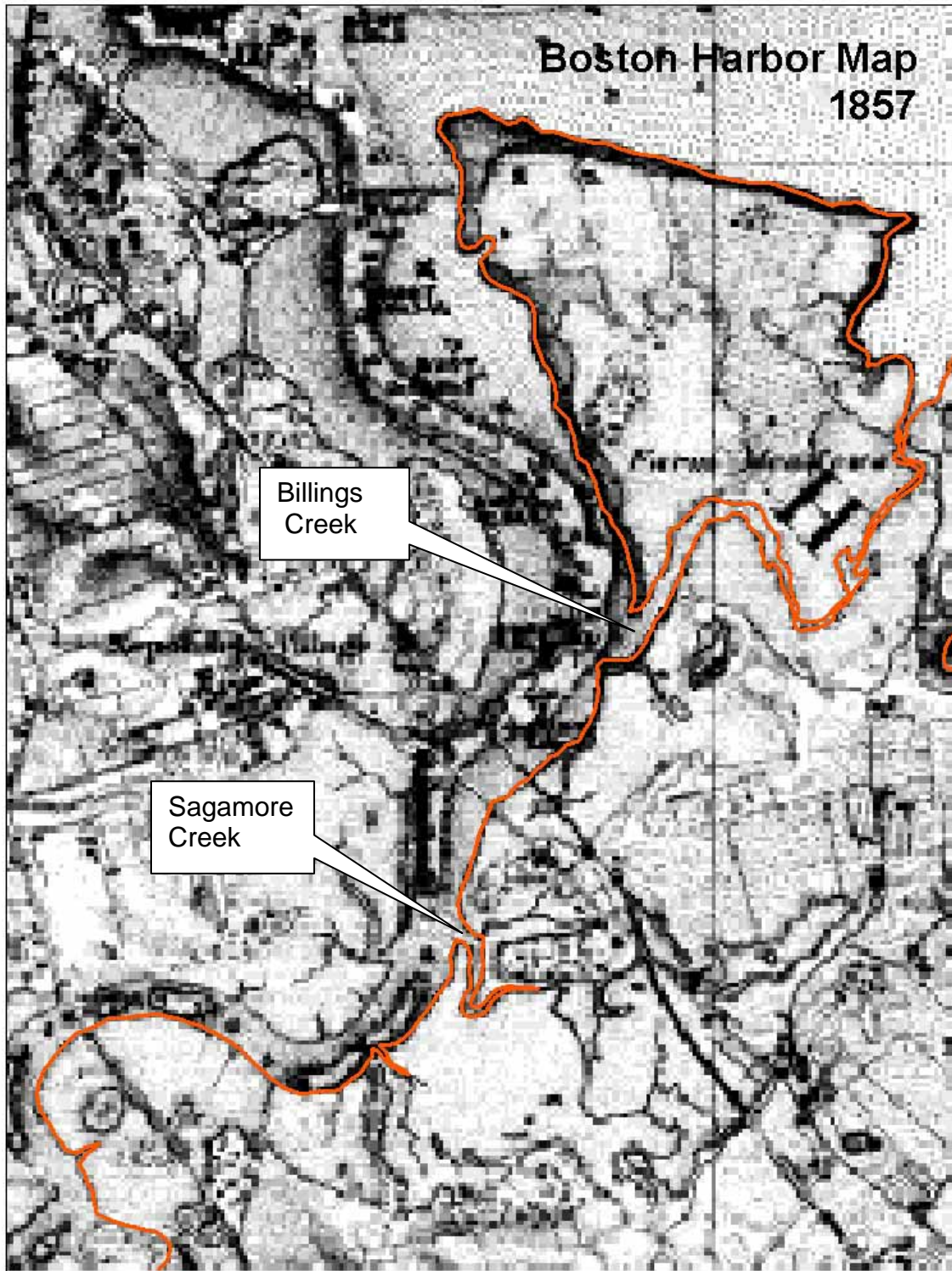


Fig.3

### *Conceptual Plan*

The main concept of the Riverwalk Plan is to connect segments of existing paths to form a continuous walk along the Neponset Estuary and beyond. It includes the areas listed below and shown in Figure 4:

- Cove Creek parcel (formerly Dickenson); owned by the City of Quincy
- Squantum Point Park; managed by MDC
- Walkway along the shore by Boston Scientific Corporation between Squantum Point Park and Commander Shea Boulevard
- Path along Billings Creek; managed by MDC
- Partial path at Adams Inn on the waterside of the building
- Path between the boundaries of Sonsinger Broadcasting Company parcel (antenna parcel) and Presidents' Golf Course; unpaved, informal path (former railroad bed)
- State Street Bank parcel on Granite Avenue, Milton

Undertaking this comprehensive plan presents opportunities and challenges to be understood and acted upon in the near future:

#### Opportunities

- Protect natural areas
- Connect public land
- Update zoning
- Restore riverfront and wetlands
- Increase and enhance recreation opportunities
- Create a visionary plan for Neponset waterfront
- Upgrade pavement to a pervious surface

#### Challenges

- Disconnected paths and rights of way
- Environmental regulations
- Incompatible zoning
- Physical barriers
- Visual barriers discouraging access
- Route to be finalized

Successful completion of the comprehensive Riverwalk Plan will aid future development. Individuals proposing new projects will know what is desired by the citizens and officials of the City of Quincy and can make them a part of their proposals. The approval process will be smoother and involve less acrimony if developers, citizens and officials plan ahead and work together.

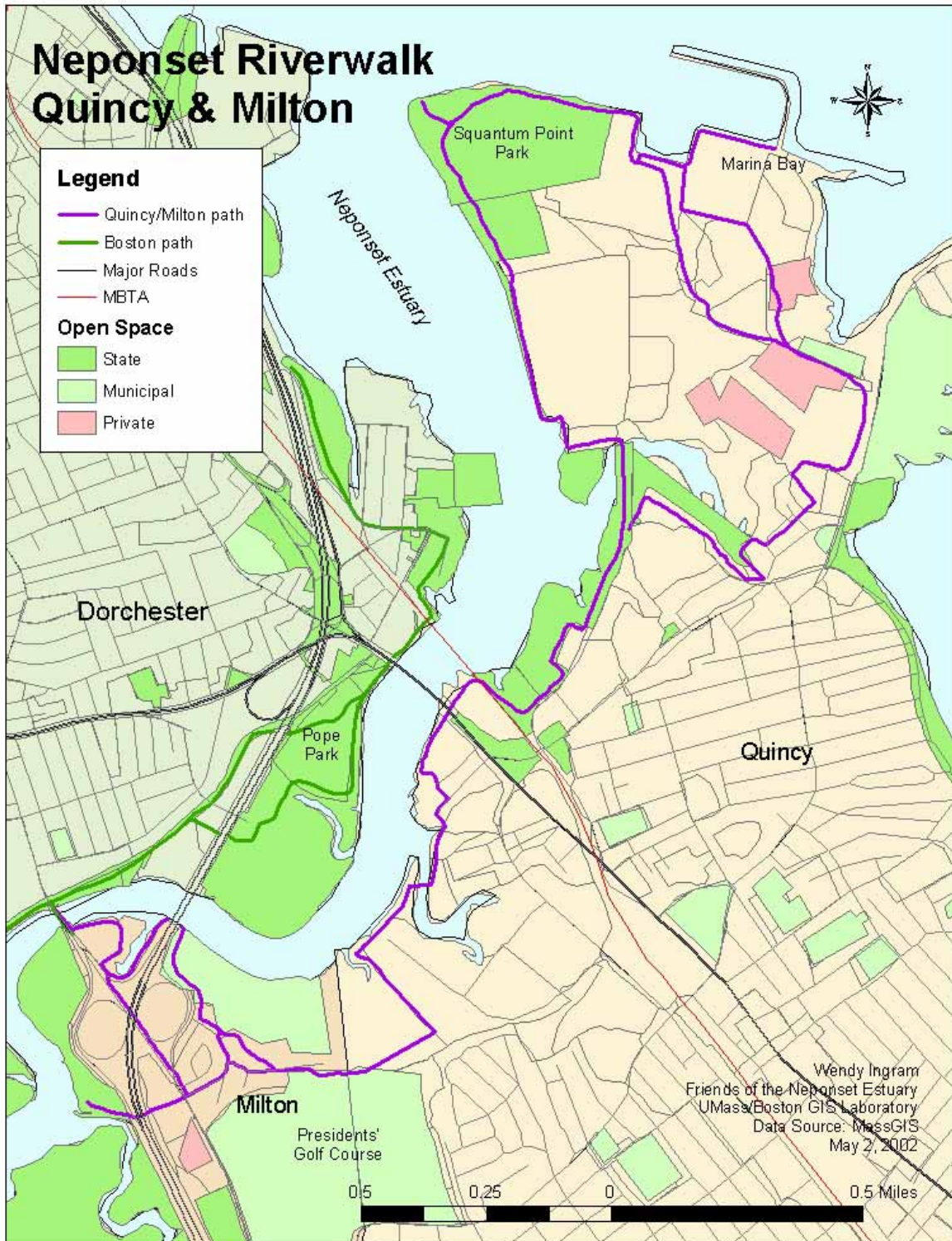


Fig. 4

### *Natural Resources*

The Neponset Estuary is one of several major environmental treasures of the City of Quincy, in addition to Wollaston Beach and the Blacks Creek area. In particular, the Estuary is valued and supported by the citizens, City of Quincy officials, the Quincy Environmental Network, the Friends of the Estuary, and the Neponset River Watershed Association. The natural resources are related to salt water and fresh water that support the salt marshes, wetlands and woodlands in the riverfront area (see Figure 5). The natural resources function to sustain and protect:

- The salt marsh buffer zone to maintain and improve water quality
- Songbird and waterfowl habitat
- Fish and shellfish habitat

The extensive Neponset salt marshes are vital breeding grounds for fish and shellfish and are especially rare close to a metropolitan area. The marshes also provide a food source for migrating waterfowl. Even a former paved airplane runway, on a parcel now owned by Boston Scientific Corporation, becomes a pond for a time after a rain storm. Wild ducks and other waterfowl frequent this temporary pond. Bird watching is a rewarding experience throughout the Neponset Estuary.



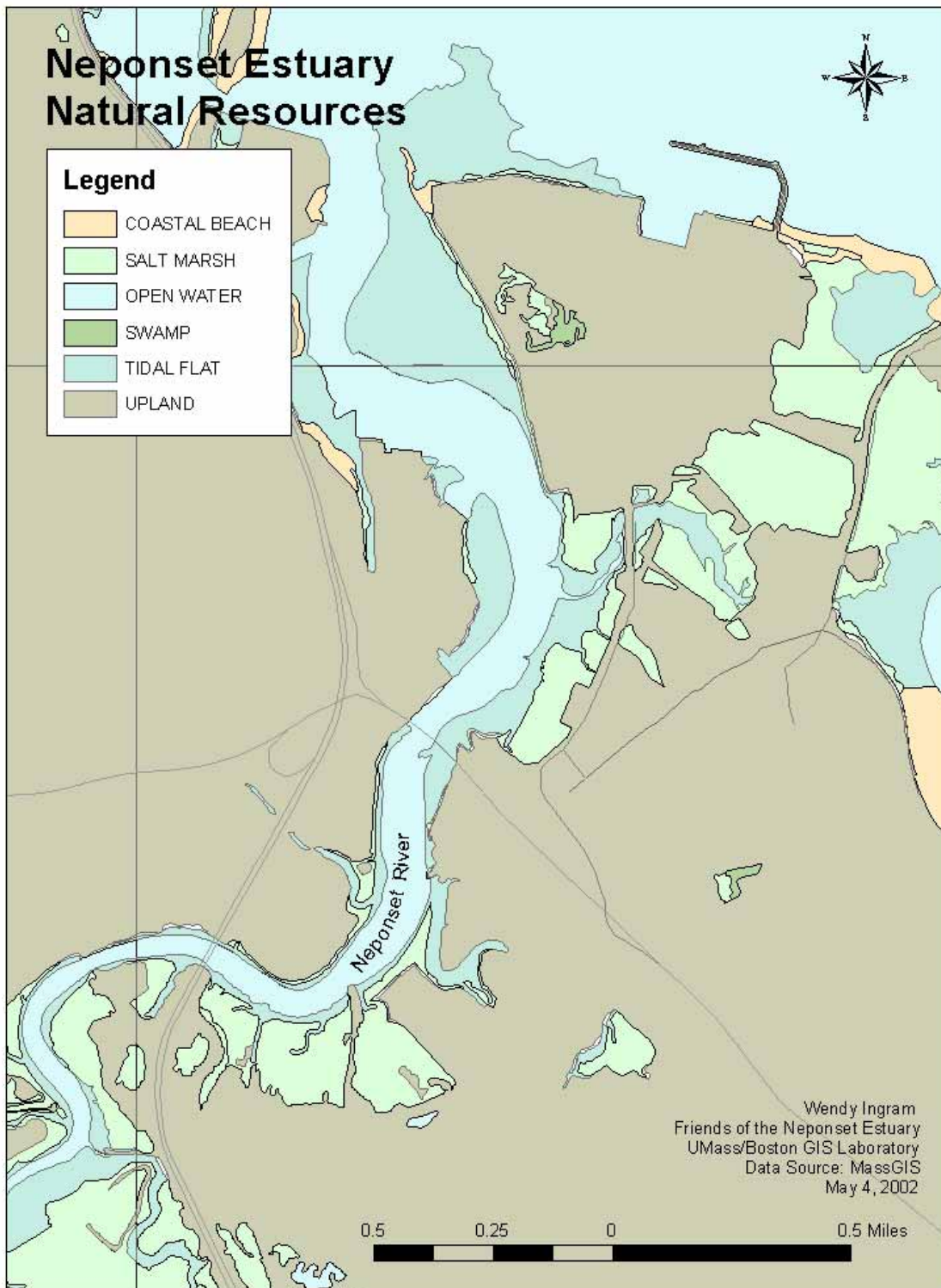


Fig. 5

### *Environmental Regulations*

The environmental regulations relate to the water resource areas of the shoreline, the salt marshes, and wooded wetlands. Some of the regulated resource areas overlap. The environmental regulations illustrated on the conceptual map of Figure 6 are:

- Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)
- Wetlands
- 200-foot Riverfront protection zone

The environmental regulations of the Rivers Protection Act (RPA) were formulated to protect the 200-foot Riverfront area is regulated by the Commonwealth. The boundaries of the ACEC, also under the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth, have been defined specifically to protect the Neponset Estuary and its associated wetlands.

(While the map maker has attempted to illustrate the information accurately, this conceptual map is not meant for legal definition of the regulated areas.)





### *Open Space and Zoning*

Open space and zoning of the land adjacent to the Neponset Estuary are not in alignment, as illustrated on Figure 7 and Figure 8. Parcels of land now owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and managed by the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) are zoned for Planned Unit Development (PUD), Residential or Business use. Two salt marsh properties owned by the City of Quincy are zoned Residential, one of which is part of a school property. A salt marsh in Milton is also zoned Residential.

Basically, land that has no development potential has been zoned for development. Zoning should reflect the environmental regulations and the policy determined by municipal officials to be the appropriate land use. Considering the Riverwalk area as a whole provides an opportunity to rezone parcels to comply with appropriate land use and environmental regulations and to facilitate the implementation of the Riverwalk.



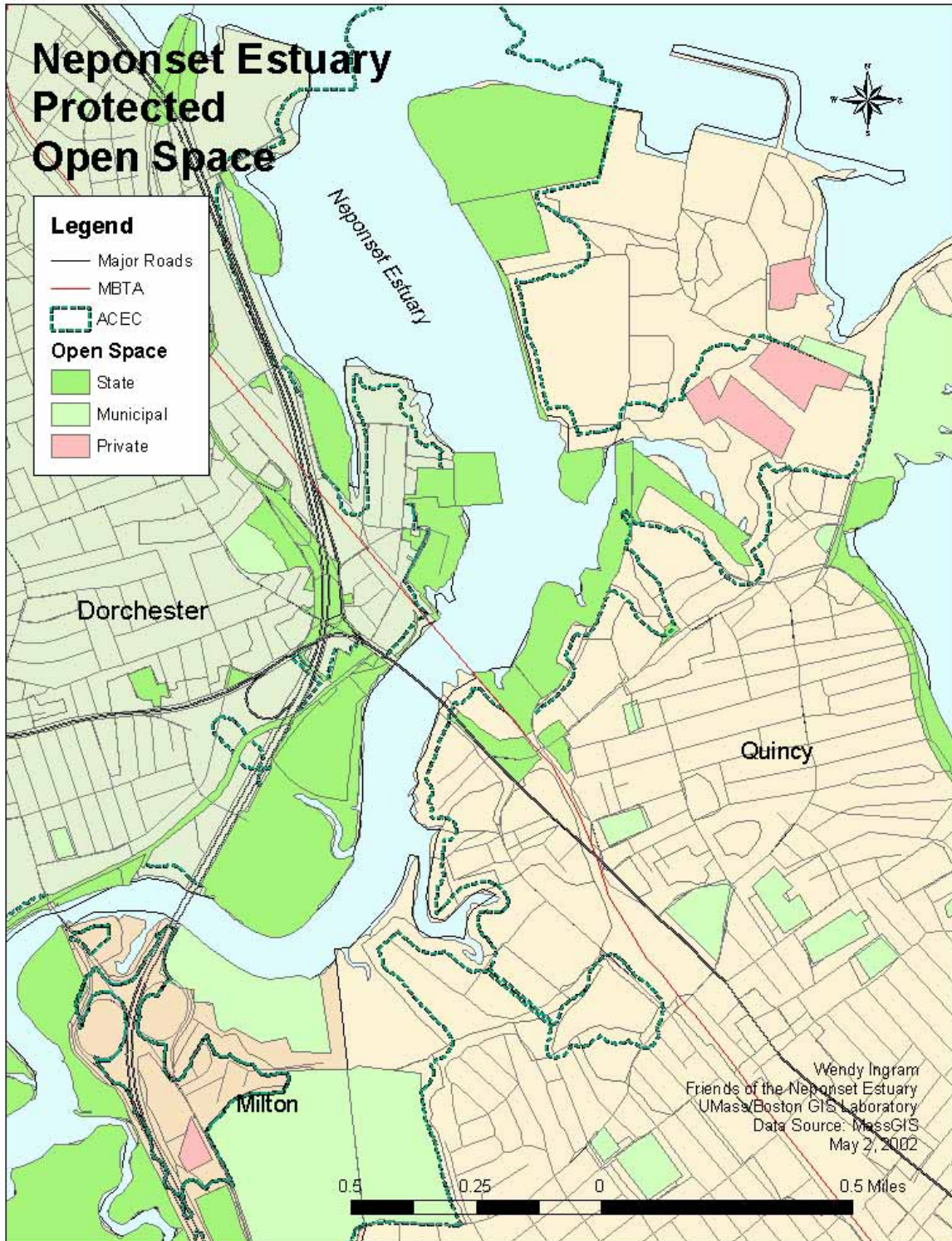


Fig. 7

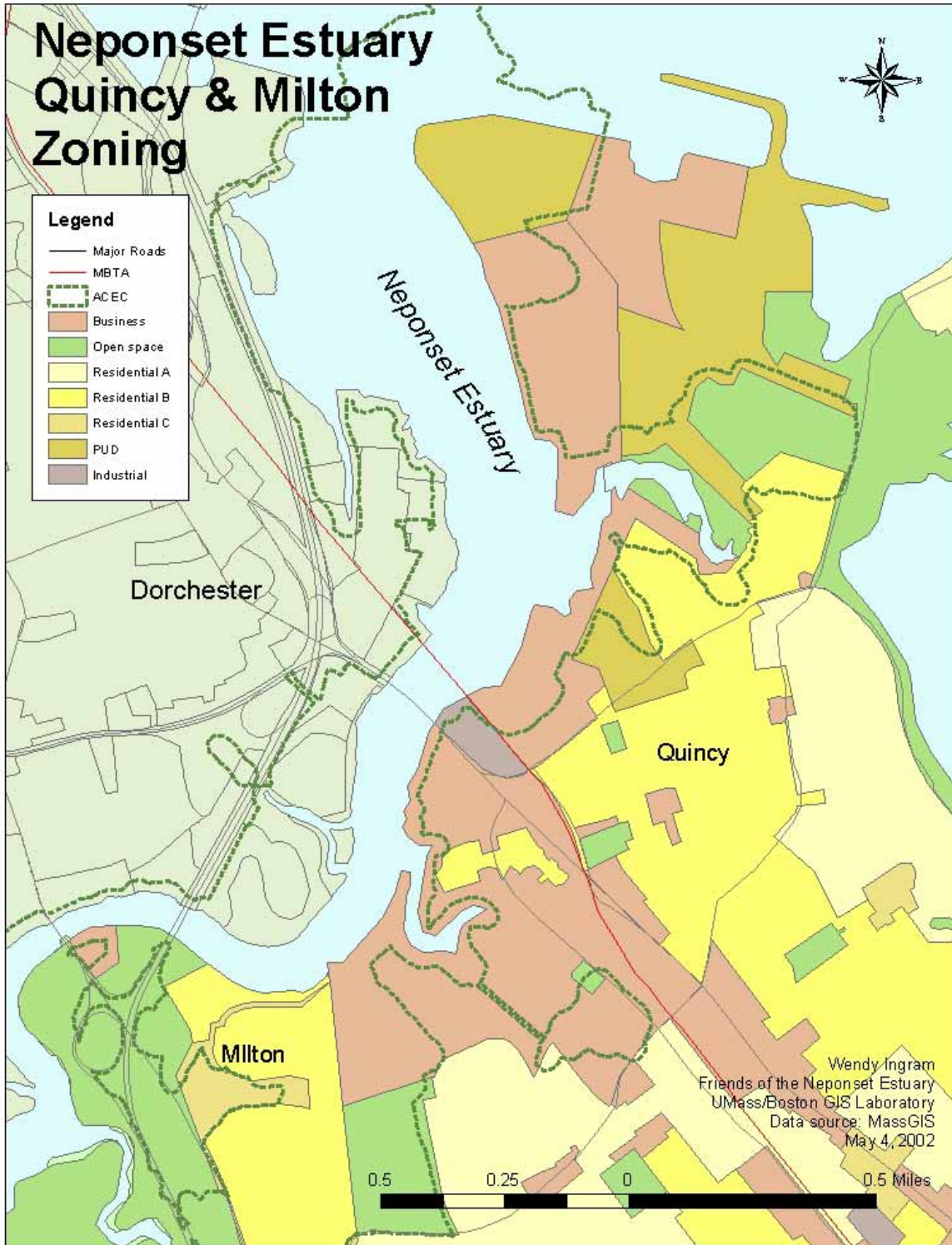


Fig. 8

### *Action Plan*

Key riverfront parcels that are a part of the Riverwalk or could connect existing sections of the Riverwalk fall into three categories:

1. Parcels to be acquired by the City of Quincy or the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
2. Parcels benefiting from rezoning
3. Parcels requiring an easement from a cooperative land owner

Parcels to be acquired by a public agency will fill in gaps between existing sections of the Riverwalk and allow public access to the Neponset River.

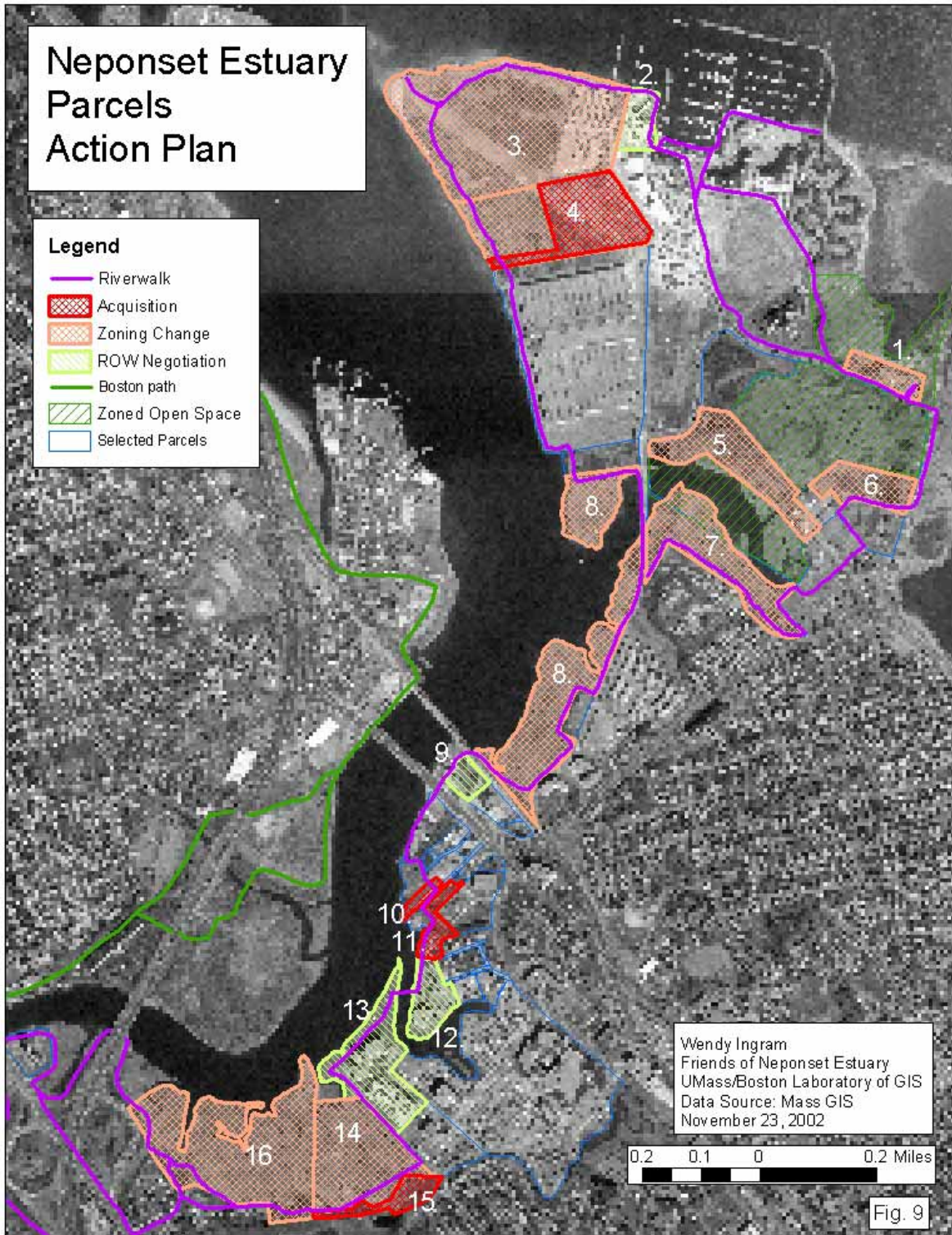
Parcel to be rezoned will protect existing open space from future development. These parcels are wetlands and natural resource areas that deserve perpetual protection.

Under Chapter 91, the public has a right of access to riverfront land for water-dependent uses. Several property owners need to be made aware of the Chapter 91 provisions and the public right of way needs to be negotiated and enforced.

These three categories are illustrated on Figure 9 with ownership and parcel number information on Action Plan Parcels, Table 1.



<b>Neponset Estuary Riverwalk Action Plan Parcels</b>				
<b>No.</b>	<b>Map &amp; Plot#</b>	<b>Parcel Name</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Action</b>
<b>QUINCY</b>				
1	6080-27	Cove Creek (formerly Dickenson)	City of Quincy	Rezone to Open Space Open to public Signs & Riverwalk orientation map
2	6076C-69	Waterworks	Boston Harbor Marina	Waterfront access
3	6076-27	Squantum Pt. Park	MDC	Rezone to Open Space Decrease size of parking lot Install boat ramp Remove debris block existing trail
4	6076-70	Wetland parcel	Boston Scientific	Rezone to Open Space Arrange transfer to MDC
5	6076- 62,63,64	Subdivided Lot 23	O'Connell	Rezone remaining undeveloped land to Open Space Restore wetlands
6	6080-20	Billings marsh next to school	City of Quincy	Rezone wetland area to Open Space
7	6068-67	Billings marsh	MDC	Rezone to Open Space
8	6076-66	Neponset marsh	MDC	Rezone to Open Space
9	6171-21&28	Former Matthewson Machine	?	Negotiate right of way Enforce removal of illegal fence blocking access along filled river edge Remove pier
10	6167/6168- 26	Riverside lot	Leon	Rezone to Open Space Purchase for public access Restore wetlands
11	6167/6168- 27	Riverside lot	Leon	Rezone to Open Space Purchase for public access Restore wetlands
12	6166-22	Office Tower	?	Negotiate right of way
13	6161-33	State St. Bank Complex	State St. Bank	Negotiate right of way
14	6161-5	Antenna Parcel	Sonsinger Broadcasting Co.	Rezone to Open Space Restore wetlands
15	6161-18	Zero Harriet Ave.	Gardner Family Trust	Conservation restriction
<b>MILTON</b>				



## *Priorities*

### **1. Land acquisition and protection**

Boston Scientific Corporation, owner of a wetland parcel adjoining Squantum Point Park, may be willing to transfer the land to the MDC. Because of substantial wetlands, the land is unbuildable. This property has limited value and, by transferring the land to public ownership, the company would gain tax benefits.

Zero Harriet Avenue, title held by the Gardner Family Trust, currently has a well-worn, unpaved path between the Presidents' Golf Course and the salt marsh on the Sonsinger Broadcasting parcel. This property deserves permanent protection by conservation restriction or other method.

### **2. Rezoning**

Rezoning is another action that will further the plan of the Riverwalk. Rezoning usually takes place for a single parcel that is being developed. This plan presents the opportunity to rezone land to reflect its current use and to protect valuable natural resource areas. It will also help to ensure a long term commitment to the Riverwalk by the City of Quincy.

### **3. Rights of way**

The City has leverage to negotiate a public right of way when new development projects are proposed. The Riverwalk plan will aid this process in the future. It can also be used to illustrate the public benefit when negotiating with landowners regarding ways to live up to the provisions of Chapter 91 public access to filled tidelands for water-dependent uses.

## *Conclusion*

The Riverwalk Plan provides a comprehensive view of the land on the Quincy and East Milton sides of the Neponset Estuary, the tidal area where the Neponset River meets Boston Harbor. Although some land is heavily developed for residential, business, and industrial purposes, there are also important natural resource areas. An extended public walkway could serve to provide public recreation and natural resource protection. GIS has made it relatively easy to assess the existing conditions and to present a proposal for the Riverwalk in graphic form.

For a closer view of the Riverwalk, the Action plan has been divided into two maps that can join together, Riverwalk Action Plan Part 1 (Figure 10A) and Part 2 (Figure 10B).

## APPENDIX

### *Project Organization and Data Sources*

Much of the data is from MassGIS, an agency of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts that provides geographic information and maps to the public from its web site: [www.state.ma.us/mgis/massgis.htm](http://www.state.ma.us/mgis/massgis.htm). Many planners, engineers, architects, environmentalists, public safety officials, and others use this information to complete their work. The 1857 Boston Harbor Survey was acquired from the web site of the University of New Hampshire: <http://docs.unh.edu/nhtopos/nhtopos.htm>. The parcels, rights of way, and the existing paths were digitized (drawn using a computer) over aerial photos from MassGIS.

### Project Organization & Data Sources

