

Southwest Corridor Park Stewardship Guide Spring 2018 (DRAFT)

Thank for your volunteering to be a Park Steward. Your support allows us to maintain a vibrant park!

We have a long tradition of community volunteers gardening in the Southwest Corridor Park (SWCP). This SWCP park stewardship guide provides a supplement to the DCR Volunteer Guide, with guidelines and best practices specific to the Southwest Corridor Park.

Official policies for volunteering in state parks are found in the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Volunteer Guide, found on the DCR website at <http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dcr/volunteer/volunteer-guide-2014.pdf>.

Volunteers fill in a volunteer release form, available online and onsite during volunteer days:

<http://www.mass.gov/eea/docs/dcr/volunteer/volunteer-release-form1.pdf>

Southwest Corridor Park volunteers use an online volunteer log to track our volunteer hours and fulfill DCR's requirement for volunteer service logs: <http://swcpc.org/volunteerhours.asp>

BECOMING A SWCP VOLUNTEER

There are several ways to become a volunteer in the Southwest Corridor Park. Community involvement in the park is supported through the Southwest Corridor Park Conservancy (SWCPC), which is a nonprofit group, and the Southwest Corridor Park Management Advisory Committee (PMAC), which is the advisory board, in partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

Email info@swcpc.org or come to a volunteer day or attend a PMAC meeting to get involved. SWCPC volunteer days, DCR Park Serve Days, and PMAC meetings are posted on our calendar at <http://swcpc.org>. Additional volunteer days in the Jamaica Plain section of the park are shared via email; email info@swcpc.org to be added to this list.

[1.] DCR PARK SERVE DAYS. Volunteers work on designated volunteer days, such as the annual spring Park Serve Day, directly under the supervision of DCR staff.

[2.] SWCPC VOLUNTEER DAYS. Volunteers work under the umbrella of the SWCPC or a partner organization. Neighborhood volunteers typically work directly under the umbrella of the SWCPC; other volunteers typically work under the umbrella of BostonCares, Northeastern University or other schools, colleges or universities corporate groups, or other private or nonprofit group, supervised by the SWCPC.

[3.] SWCPC GARDEN STEWARDS. Volunteers can become garden stewards and care for an assigned space within the Southwest Corridor Park. Volunteers typically start out by attending a volunteer day or helping another garden steward and then request a spot as a garden steward.

[4.] CHILDREN'S GARDENS. Informal children's gardens welcome children to help plant and water flowers, herbs and vegetables. Children are supervised by family members or after-school program staff.

[5.] BOARD AND COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP. In addition to hands-on volunteer work in the park, there are also numerous opportunities to get involved with board and committee work through the SWCPC and PMAC.

ABOUT GARDEN STEWARDSHIP

Garden stewards volunteer to take care of a specific garden bed or garden area in the park. Most gardens already have shrubs, trees and perennials; others may be newly established garden spaces. Stewards provide maintenance and improvements, such as filling in empty spots with new plants; dividing perennials; transplanting plants; adding accent plants and borders. Stewards weed, water and remove trash as needed throughout the garden season. If the steward will be away for part of the season, the steward can ask a friend or another garden steward to help during that time or check with the volunteer coordinator. We try to match the location to the interests of the volunteer; many of the locations are easy-to-care-for gardens, needing just some weeding and watering during the summer.

- Volunteers are free to choose annuals, perennials, herbs and decorative vegetables for the garden beds we steward.
- Volunteers are encouraged to talk to each other and share plants. The more we exchange plants the more there will be consistency and common elements among gardens.
- If you purchase plants, you can submit invoices to the SWCPC for reimbursement. Pre-approval is requested for larger purchases. You will find details and the reimbursement form on the gardening page of the swcpc.org website.
- Avoid invasive plants and remove invasive plants as much as possible, seeking advice from other gardeners. Similarly, volunteers should not introduce potentially harmful plants to the park (i.e., stinging nettles, poison oak) and should be careful not to transplant plants from other gardens that might have roots or seeds from invasive or harmful plants in the soil. We post updates about invasive plants on the SWCPC.org website in the gardening section of the site.
- Wherever, seek native plants; consider plants that are drought-tolerant and suitable for the soil and setting.

- Edible plants can be planted if they enhance the landscape and if they do not create any unintended nuisance factors. Herbs, berries and vegetables used in landscaping are typically considered shared plantings, with park visitors welcome to pick and take vegetables, berries or pinches of herbs. (This is a key difference between the garden stewardship gardens in the park and the fenced-in community gardens.)
- Work with others to look for visual balance in the garden you maintain.
- Respect the work of other garden stewards and do not weed, prune, remove or add plants to other gardens unless you are collaborating with the steward of that garden. Stewards do not 'own' the gardens but enjoy pride-of-garden in having a space they care for and nourish.
- Any shrubs in the garden that you tend can be gently pruned. Ask the volunteer coordinator or DCR staff for advice on pruning methods.
- Consult with other volunteers and with PMAC and DCR about any major pruning or changes to trees or shrubs.
- On volunteer days, small groups of volunteers work together on projects throughout the park. Depending on the goals of the day, volunteer groups may sometimes pick up trash or remove invasive vines in gardens tended by garden stewards. If you want extra help from a volunteer group on one of these days, talk to the volunteer coordinator. The dates for volunteer days, typically Saturday mornings, are posted on the swcpc.org website on the calendar.
- Since 2004, the Southwest Corridor Park has been designated as organic (free of chemical pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers).
- Consult the DCR Volunteer Guide for additional policies, including guidelines on use of vehicles and power tools and other safety guidelines.

COMMUNICATION AND DECISION-MAKING

While SWCP volunteers enjoy considerable freedom in gardening and choosing plantings, it is important for volunteers/neighbors to remember to follow official channels of communication through DCR and PMAC with respect to any proposed landscaping and infrastructure changes. Volunteers and neighbors should not take on any changes independently.

There are several organizations involved in supporting the park:

DCR is the state parks agency, responsible for care of the park, while the MBTA is the owner of the land.

PMAC is the lead community group and provides a forum for official community input and decision making. The Care and Control Agreement between the MBTA and DCR establishes PMAC as the official advisory committee for the park. PMAC seeks to provide an avenue for community voice through meetings, surveys, committees and other dialogue.

SWCPC is the non-profit organization that can raise funds as well as coordinate volunteer activities, working in partnership with PMAC and the DCR.

PMAC and the SWCPC work together and seek to have a seamless organization to support volunteers and to support the park.

Note that while PMAC can make recommendations about changes to the park, DCR, along with the MBTA, has final say over recommendations., with the following considerations:

- **Official public input:** For major changes that involve long-term changes to the park and/or changes that may affect abutters and/or changes to park amenities, DCR may hold official public meetings in addition to community input provided by PMAC.
- **Insurance and liability:** DCR is responsible for insurance and liability, and therefore we cannot take on do-it-yourself projects on tasks that could create liability issues, such as

changes to stairs, walkways, sports/recreation amenities, tree removal, plumbing or electrical features, etc.

- **Engineering issues:** For changes involving any significant construction or engineering, DCR works with the MBTA to review plans, because of the potential that projects could affect the MBTA infrastructure, such as the addition of new structures and trees or changes in drainage.
- **General stewardship:** As we support DCR in stewardship of the park we (as volunteers and neighbors) cannot remove features that were paid for with public dollars, unless there is a review of the proposed changes, consensus and approval by DCR, which is coordinated with PMAC and the SWCPC. This includes removing shrubs, trees, fences or signs, for example.

INTERACTING WITH PARK VISITORS

The Southwest Corridor Park is an intensely-used urban park, one of the most-used state parks in Massachusetts. Over 10,000 commuters per day at each of the orange line stations, thousands of bicycle commuters, and countless neighbors, visitors, school and community groups and others visit and travel through the park daily. As park stewards, we are part of the welcoming experience of the park, and we all have good stories about conversations that we have had with neighbors and visitors while gardening in the park.

We are committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all who work in and enjoy the park. Our non-discrimination policy is an intrinsic part of a standard of welcome.

NON-DISCRIMINATION: Southwest Corridor Park volunteers shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, age, national origin (ancestry), disability, marital status, sexual orientation, military status, situation of homelessness, or economic status in any of our activities or operations. We are committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all who work in and enjoy the park.

HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES

While most of our experiences are positive, volunteers in the park will sometimes observe issues including littering; off-leash dogs; drug or alcohol consumption in the park; individuals who are homeless camping out in the park (a concern because it poses health and safety issues); or other issues related to health and public safety.

The DCR volunteer guide states that *“Volunteers may not engage in any duty or activity that may be considered direct enforcement of park rules or regulations or other state regulation or law. Volunteers should report any enforcement concerns or issues to park staff.”*

- Call 911 or state police (617-727- 6781) when you are worried about someone’s well-being or the safety of others. Do not confront a person whose behavior is worrying you.
- If you see blankets, sheets of cardboard or other materials that indicate that someone is sleeping in the park, report what you see to DCR or police (directly or through the volunteer coordinator) so that they can address the situation, based on health and safety concerns. Do not take it upon yourself to remove the sleeping materials. Do not confront people about sleeping in the park.
- Note that while some cities have restrictions on ‘loitering’ during the day we do not have any such restrictions.
- You can get gloves from the SWCPC on any of the volunteer days or purchase your own gloves. Gloves are important if you are picking up litter or working in soil, or if you are working where you might accidentally touch hazardous items.
- The general rule is that as a matter of policy and best practice, volunteers should not take on enforcement of park rules, regulations or standards of behavior, and should consult with DCR staff and/or attend a PMAC meeting if concerned about health and safety issues in the park.

- See the ‘Public Safety’ page on the swcpc.org website for recommendations about safety issues, including needle pickup, contacting state police, 911 and 311 and other information.

DOGS, PEOPLE AND GARDEN SPACES

- You may address people who allow dogs into a garden space if you can do it in a way that is neighborly and not confrontational. For example, if you see a dog walking into a garden bed, you might say to the owner, “We have new plants coming up and we are trying to keep dogs out of the gardens.” However, in your role as park volunteer, you should not take on the responsibility of enforcing park rules (i.e., dogs off-leash, etc.)
- We can put up low fencing (permanent fencing or temporary rope-and-post fencing) if people or dogs frequently walk on a garden space. In high-traffic areas we can plant a border of durable plants to create a natural fence for a garden space.
- Do not use anything other than simple fencing to keep people or dogs out of the garden space you work in. Do not create any physical barriers that could result in injury to park users.

SUMMARY

Urban parks are an essential resource for individuals, families, children, pet owners, visitors, students and others in the city. Our work as volunteers in the park helps to create an atmosphere of welcome and a feeling of strong community. ***Thank you for all that you do for the park and the community!***

One more thing.... Share some photos of your park stewardship! We enjoy posting photos on social media, and we also use photos on our garden map on the swcpc.org website. You can email photos to info@swcpc.org or visit the maps page on the website to learn more.