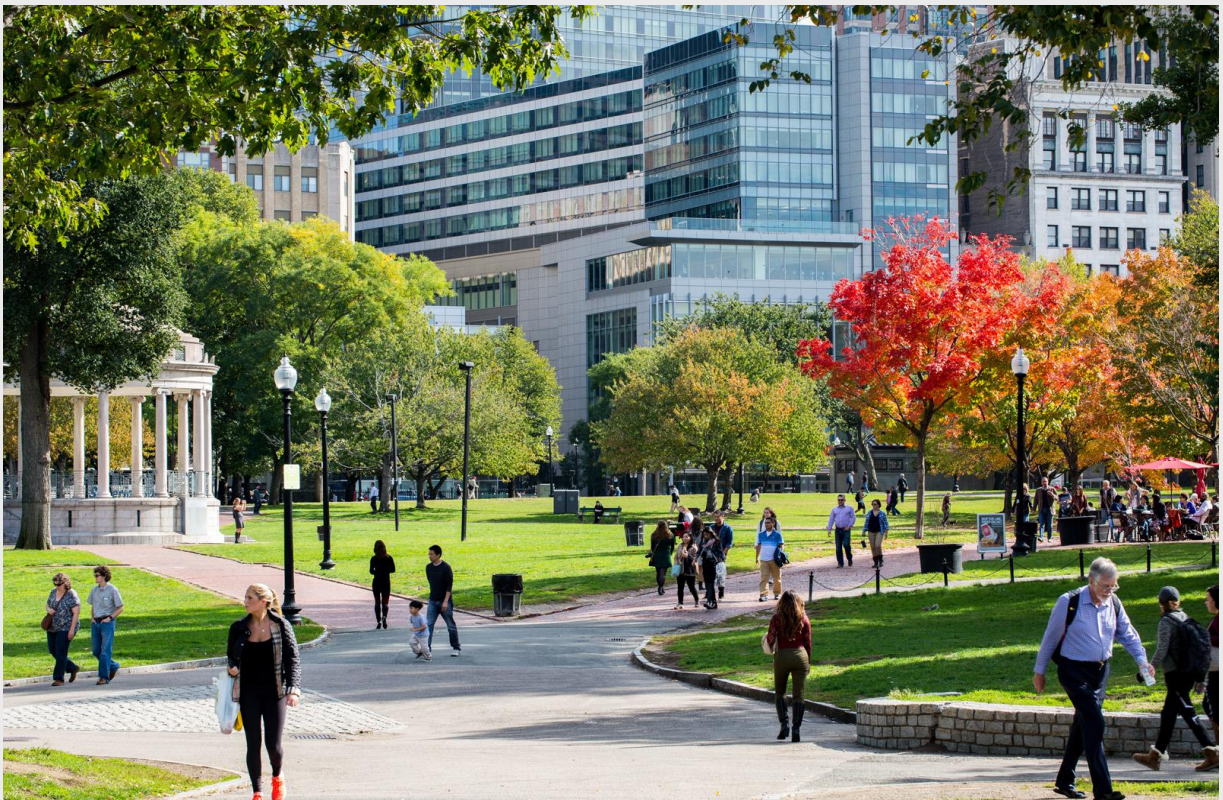# Park User Analysis of The Boston Common
2016

Report by:
People, Places & Design Research

Park User Analysis of
The Boston Common:
2016

Commissioned by
Friends of the Public Garden
Boston, MA

Consultant report by
People, Places & Design Research
Northampton MA
December 2016

Executive Summary

This research was commissioned by the Friends of the Public Garden to provide an empirically based perspective on the public use of the Boston Common. As a 'user analysis', the point was to systematically define and understand the patterns of how the Common is used and by whom. Four main questions guided this research:

- who is using the Common?
- what do people use the Common for?
- what do people think about the condition of the Common?
- do people have needs that they think the Common should fulfill?

Systematic data about these and related issues should be useful in understanding how this distinctive and historic open space in a densely developed downtown serves public audiences, and the findings should help to inform future planning, management and policy, as well as supporting the needs and experience of Boston residents and visitors in their use and enjoyment of this 50-acre site.

Methods

Three different research methods were used to collect information relevant to the questions raised by the Friends of the Public Garden:

1. Zip Code Survey: A total of 2294 people were randomly contacted in various places, at various times of day, and asked two brief questions – zip code and number of people in the group. Additionally, if people were walking when contacted, they were asked whether they planned to stop somewhere on the Common or were just passing through.

2. Behavioral Mapping: A total of 30,320 people were counted and their behavior was recorded (e.g., walking, jogging, sitting, standing, playing sports, taking a Freedom Trail tour, etc.). This systematic procedure was a lot more complicated than it sounds. The Common was divided into five sectors, and each sector was further subdivided into smaller areas, so that an observer could count everyone in that area from one vantage point (like taking a snapshot of the activity at that point in time). Each season (spring, summer, fall) counts were done to compile a full weekday and a full weekend day in each of the five sectors at five different times of day (8:15am, 10:15am, 12:45pm, 3pm, and 6pm). Thus, a fairly complete "composite" or "typical" day could be represented. (One "mapping" took from 15 to 60 minutes, depending on the size of the sector, and there were 50 "mappings" per season.)

3. Interviews: A total of 371 park users were interviewed about their perceptions and use of the Common. In order to make the length of the interview more tolerable (and increase cooperation), some questions were not asked of people who came from beyond New England. (The cooperation rate was 63%, which is good for an outdoor public place in a city.)

Highlights of the Findings

1. **The Boston Common has a local, regional, national, and international audience.**
   Supporting data: About one-third of park users are Boston residents, one-third are from other towns in Massachusetts or New England, one-fifth come from elsewhere in the U.S., and 14% are international tourists (representing 60 different countries)

2. **The audience is also diverse in terms of familiarity/frequency of use.**
   Supporting data: There are similar proportions of four user types: first-time visitors (27%), occasional visitors (23%), regular visitors (21% who come monthly or weekly), and very frequent users (29%) who use the Common multiple times per week or per day.

3. **The Common serves a wide variety of types of people.**
   Supporting data: There are equal numbers of men and women on the Common, reasonably diverse ethnicities reflective of the greater Boston Metro Area (69% white, 12% African American, 9% Hispanic), and people from all income levels. Young adults (ages 18-34) are a major contingent of the audience (45% of users), but there are also families with children (22%), and older adults without children (32%).

4. **The Boston Common is used primarily for leisure activities such as strolling, sitting, eating lunch, or "hanging out."**
   Supporting data: Half of the 30,000+ people who were observed were walking (strolling through a greenspace instead of walking on city streets, heading to work, walking for mild exercise, going to someplace in the Common or the Public Garden), and one-quarter were sitting (relaxing on benches, sitting in the sunshine on grass, people-watching, reading, hanging out, etc.). The proportion of users engaging in active exercise or sports was observed to be 11%. Use of the Common is greatest in mid-day.

5. **Many people use the Common for multiple purposes.**
   Supporting data: About 75% of local/regional visitors[1] said they have done three or more different types of activities here in the past year, including: walking, sitting, dog walking, jogging, taking kids to the playground, attending events, or seeing concerts or plays.

6. **Satisfaction with the Common is moderately high, in general.**
   Supporting data: Overall satisfaction ratings indicate that 47% of those interviewed think the Common is outstanding (a 9 or 10 rating on a 10-point scale). Boston residents also appreciate the Common but tended to give lower ratings than people from other Massachusetts towns, or from out-of-state. This

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[1] People from beyond New England were not asked the detailed questions such as what they had done in the past year, since most were either first-time visitors or had visited previously years ago.

makes sense in that locals who use the space more frequently tend to be more invested in the experience, see the variety of what goes on, and notice more of the downsides.

Most people are very satisfied with safety during the day (67% high ratings), and moderately satisfied with cleanliness, safety in the evening, and the condition of the paths. Due to the drought this year, the condition of the landscape got lower ratings than might be seen at another time (only 31% rated the condition of the landscape, the brown grass, highly). The two features receiving lower ratings were 'signs with information about where things are,' and restrooms.

7. **There is an unusually strong community feeling about the Common.**
    Supporting data: The second most-liked aspect of the Common is the people! (The first fondness is for being outdoors in the green space – in pleasant sunny weather.) Park users from anywhere like watching people, meeting people, and just being with people in the relaxing setting. Local residents seem to be particularly psychologically engaged in the value of, and uses of, the Common (whether through appreciation or complaints).

8. **There are some disappointments that affect people's enjoyment, including social as well as physical issues.**
    Supporting data: About 60% of users mentioned a disappointment (typically this figure is around 50% in green-space interpretive settings such as arboretums or botanic gardens), while about 40% couldn't think of any disappointment. Some people (13%) notice the homeless, but most accept it as part of city life (i.e., "it's not their fault"). There are some concerns about the drug dealers and users (11%).

9. **People indicated moderate interest in some ideas for potential improvements to the Common, although different user segments had different priorities.**
    Supporting data: The most interest was expressed in 'more maps & directional signs' (45% said they would have high or very high interest in that, although local-frequent users were less interested). Local residents, older adults, and families with children expressed significantly higher interest than other segments in 'more policing.' The two lowest interests were 'better maintenance of paths' (although 26% indicated high interest), and 'enforce the rule about dogs on leashes' (24% interested; the lowest of the eight ideas).

10. **The Friends of the Public Garden is known to a modest proportion of park users, especially local residents.**
    Supporting data: One-third of those interviewed said they had heard of FOPG. Local residents and very frequent users have higher awareness (~60%). Some FOPG signs were in place during much of the study period.

How to read and interpret the data tables in this report

In studies such as this one, there are two primary types of data: quantitative and qualitative. Tables representing both types are presented in this report, but each is interpreted somewhat differently.

Quantitative data (usually numbers)
The table below shows an example of quantitative data. As a general rule, the percentages will be presented to the right of the response categories. Percentages are computed based on column headings (shown above the data). For example, in the following table the first column of percentages refers to the heading "Overall," and the figures add to 100%. The interpretation is: "52% of the overall sample of visitors were by themselves."

Zip Code Survey	Overall (n=2294)	Spring (n=896)	Summer (n=675)	Fall (n=723)
Group size:		**		
one	52%	45%	48%	**63%**
two	31%	36%	29%	26%
three or more	17%	19%	23%	11%
	100%	100%	100%	100%

Asterisks (**) indicate statistically significant differences between columns of figures. This example shows a comparison between the three seasons, and the interpretation is: "group sizes were smaller in the fall, compared to spring and summer." Statistical significance tests refer to an overall pattern of differences, not just to one or two numbers.

Qualitative data (comments from open-ended questions)
The table below describes visitors' answers about what they liked most. As a general rule these percentages will be presented to the left of the response categories. The results are interpreted somewhat differently than tables of quantitative data. The rank order of comments is more important than the specific numbers because visitors could have said anything that they thought of "on the spot," and therefore the possible choices are numerous. In this example, the top two answers are "greenery" and "people." The less common answers represent ideas that are not at the forefront of people's thoughts.

What do you like most about the Common?

29%	nature, greenery, trees
21%	meeting people, watching people, community feeling
18%	open space, spacious (but didn't mention greenery)
17%	atmosphere, pleasant, nice place to hang out
11%	play areas for kids, Frog Pond, playground, carousel
8%	peaceful, quiet, oasis
8%	central location
8%	seeing animals, dogs, squirrels, pigeons
6%	off-leash dog areas

Technical Report
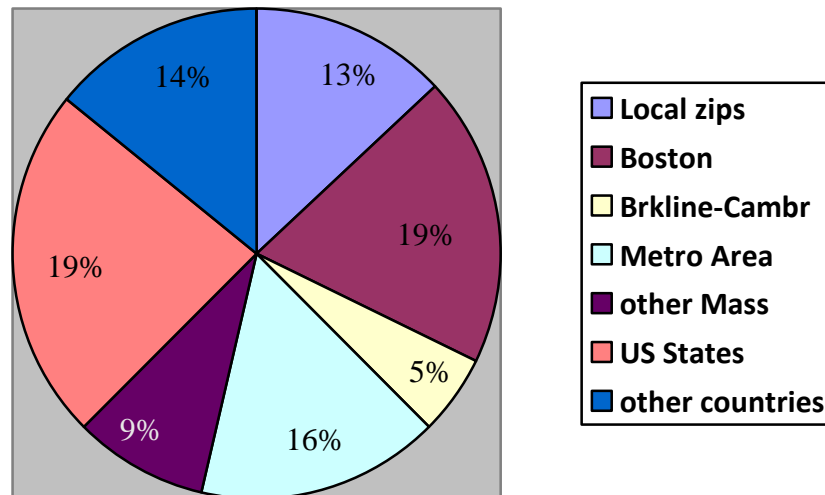
A. Who is using the Common?

An important issue for planning a multi-use site such as the Boston Common is to define the audience who use it. It is helpful to understand some basic characteristics such as where the users are coming from, the range of ages, and their frequency of use. The key findings from this analysis are:

❖ The Common hosts people from everywhere. About one-third are Boston residents, one-third are from other towns in Massachusetts, and one-third come from out-of-state.

❖ There are four different 'tiers' of frequency of use, each representing about one-fourth of the users: there are people seeing the Common for the first time, infrequent users, moderately-frequent users, and very frequent users (people who come at least once per week).

❖ Young adults are most prevalent on the Common (53% of people interviewed were aged 18-34).

❖ Most user groups (77%) did not include children, although more families were evident in the summer.

❖ About half of people encountered in the Common said they were there alone.

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A.1. Where people come from

OVERVIEW: Based on the zip code survey of 2294 users, about one-third (32%) of people in the Common were Boston residents, one-third (30%) came from other towns in Massachusetts, and 37% were from out-of-state (including 14% tourists from other countries). There was very little variation across seasons in terms of Massachusetts residents. There were more tourists from other countries in summer and fall.

Zip Code Survey	Overall (n=2294)	Spring (n=896)	Summer (n=675)	Fall (n=723)
Residence:				
local (4 adjacent zips)[2]	13%	14%	12%	13%
other Boston	19%	20%	19%	17%
Brookline/Cambridge	5%	5%	5%	6%
other suburban metro area[3]	16%	16%	16%	15%
other Massachusetts	9%	9%	10%	9%
New England	4%	4%	6%	4%
other US states	19%	22%	16%	19%
other countries	14%	10%	17%	17%

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[2] Local zip codes are 02108, 02111, 02114, 02116 (see map on next page). Another nearby zip code, 02110, is a few blocks away (harbor district) but very few people came to the Common from that area.
[3] The suburban area was defined as towns within or bordering 95 (route 128), including Peabody, Salem and Marblehead to the north; Weymouth and Hingham to the south.
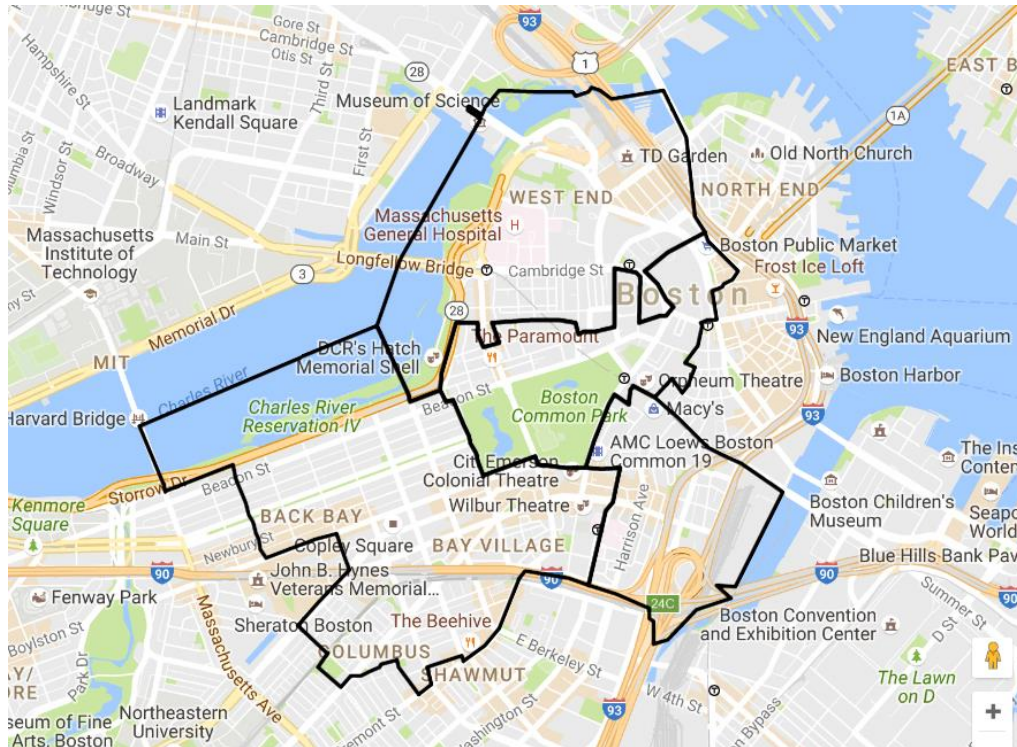
The 4 adjacent zip code areas are outlined

These 4 areas are defined as "local"

A.2. Frequent repeat users and first-time visitors (from interviews)

OVERVIEW: About one-quarter of the people interviewed on the Common were there for the first time. There are three other 'tiers' of frequency: infrequent users (have been to the Common 2-5 times in the past year), moderately-familiar users (people who come approximately monthly or as frequently as weekly), and very frequent users who come at least once a week (and some are there at least daily). The proportions of first-time and frequent visitors are fairly consistent (not significantly different) across the three seasons.
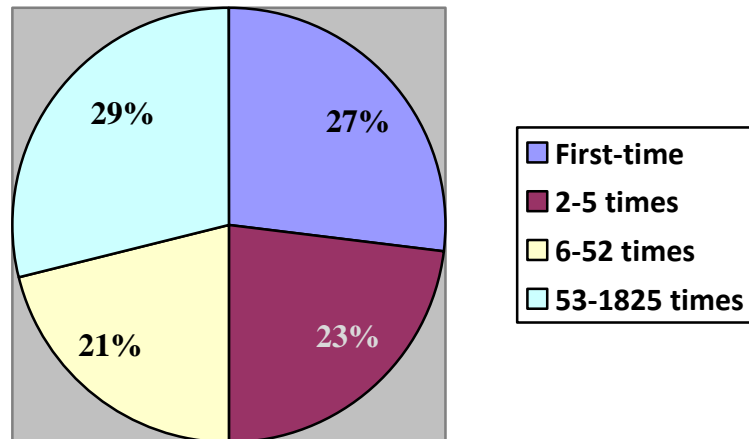
How many times have you been in the Common in the past 12 months?

	Overall Sample (n=371)		Spring (n=83)	Summer (n=166)	Fall (n=120)
first-time	27%		20%	31%	26%
2-5 times	23%		21%	22%	25%
6-52 times	21%		22%	21%	22%
53-1825 times	29%		37%	25%	27%

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A.3. Age profile

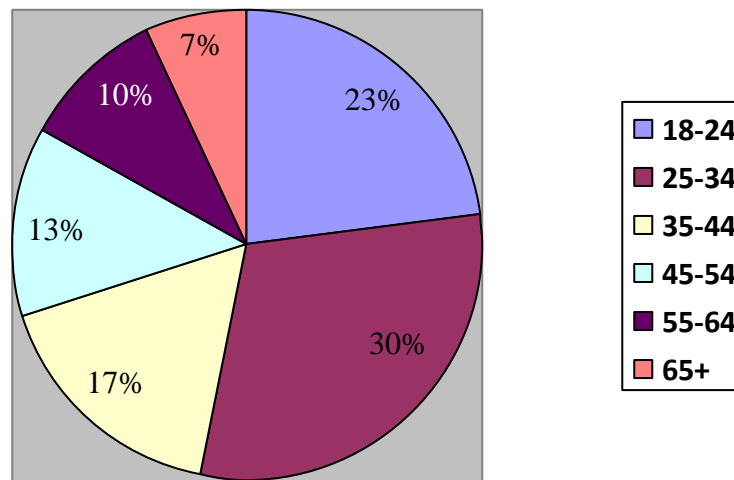OVERVIEW: People of all ages were interviewed in the Common; however, young adults are the most prevalent users. About one-quarter of the groups included children under 18. More families were encountered in the summer – they are more likely to be out doing things or traveling in summer when kids are not in school.

Interview data:	Overall	Spring	Summer	Fall
	(n=352)	(n=81)	(n=156)	(n=109)
Age:		++		
18-24	23%	28%	20%	23%
25-34	30%	20%	27%	40%
35-44	17%	14%	22%	12%
45-54	13%	15%	14%	11%
55-64	10%	16%	10%	8%
65+	7%	7%	8%	5%
Lifecycle:		**		
young adults (18-34)	45%	46%	38%	**56%**
family with children	23%	11%	**34%**	16%
older adults (35+)	32%	**43%**	28%	28%

(**) Asterisks indicate statistically significant differences (p<.05) between columns of figures. For example on this page, there is a substantial difference in lifecycle groups across the three seasons. The figures should be read as percentages of the column heading, e.g., 56% of fall visitors were young adults.
(++) Plus signs are used in this report to indicate patterns of differences which are not quite statistically significant (milder differences, which may have occurred by chance), but which suggest a trend and may have some intuitive value in some circumstances.

A.4. Group size

OVERVIEW: Across the three seasons, about half (52%) of people contacted in the Common were by themselves. This proportion was even higher in fall, whereas larger groups of three or more people were more likely to be found in spring and summer.

Zip Code Survey	Overall (n=2294)	Spring (n=896)	Summer (n=675)	Fall (n=723)
Group size:		**		
one	52%	45%	48%	**63%**
two	31%	36%	29%	26%
three or more	17%	19%	23%	11%

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B. How is the Common used?

Information about how the Common is used focused on the activities that park users were engaged in. All three research methods contributed to this analysis:

<u>zip code capture</u> provided information about whether people were sitting, standing, or moving-on-a-path, and whether they expected to stop somewhere or were just passing through;

<u>behavioral mapping</u> noted the types of uses as encountered in any section of the Common –walking, jogging, sitting on a bench, playing in the playground or frog pond, and so on (16 different activities); and

<u>interviews</u> with randomly selected users investigated what kinds of activities they engage in at the Common using their own descriptions. Some highlights of these results include:

❖ The vast majority of park users (89%) were engaged in passive activities rather than active exercise. Walking is the most frequently observed activity (~50% of all users), followed by sitting (25%).

❖ The top reasons for being in the Common were: relaxing, sightseeing, meeting friends/family, getting outside for fresh air, or passing through on the way to/from another place.

❖ Most people use the Common for multiple activities – e.g., jogging today, hanging out or having lunch tomorrow.

❖ This research was not conducted during major special events and concerts, but a substantial proportion of people interviewed said they have attended concerts or plays (43%) or events (43%) in the past year.
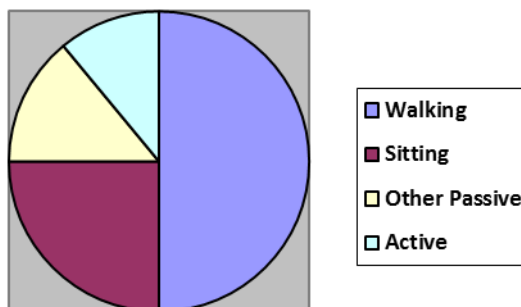
B.1. Categorizing activities of people in the park   (from Behavioral Mapping)

In park user studies, behaviors are generally categorized into two primary types of uses: Active and Passive recreation.

- ACTIVE USE is usually scheduled, perhaps programmed, involving facilities or equipment (i.e., use of ballfields, tennis courts), or involving a considerable expenditure of energy (i.e., jogging).
- PASSIVE USE (i.e., "leisure") is unscheduled, self-generated, requiring a minimum of facilities, and involving little exertion (e.g., walking, sitting on a bench, having lunch). Of course there are different reasons for walking, including exercise, travel from point A to point B, or just a casual stroll (but observers can't glean the meaning behind an activity).

OVERVIEW: The Common is used primarily for passive recreation (89%), and there is not as much jogging or exercising as seen in two other Boston parks: The Esplanade and Jamaica Pond. Biking is not allowed on the Common, there are more benches, and it's not situated on a long thin strip of land which is conducive to running. Also, the downtown location of the Common encompasses more people who are commuting or walking from one place to another.

Boston Common (2016)   **The Esplanade** (2007)
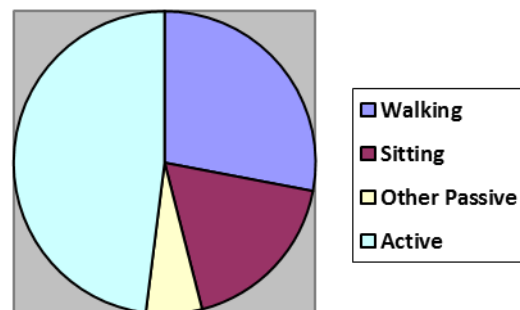
Emerald Necklace/Jamaica Pond (1986)

Observed activities of people in the park

OVERVIEW: Walking was the most frequently observed behavior (47% of all observations). About one-third of people were observed to be sitting on benches, structures or grass, or standing still. Other "active" uses such as jogging, bicycling, playing sports or tennis were less frequent (11% of observed behaviors overall).
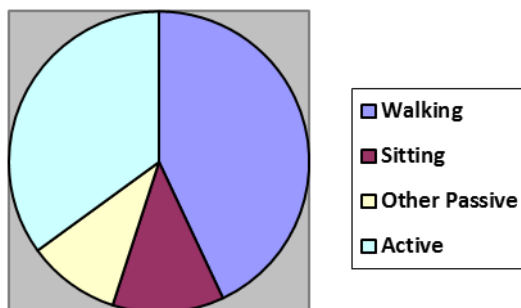
Activity	Spring Counts	Summer Counts	Fall Counts	Overall % Observed
♣walking	4708	5177	4493	47%
♣walking with bike/skateboard	49	61	42	1%
♣walking with dog	219	173	276	2%
♣wheelchair/stroller	8	2	9	<1%
jogging	79	114	115	1%
cycling/skateboard	133	148	88	1%
♣sitting on bench/structure	1875	1917	1163	16%
♣sitting/lying on grass	1449	979	181	9%
♣standing	755	891	689	8%
sports/exercise	43	32	98	1%
baseball	348	70	0	1%
tennis	21	44	12	<1%
active play	90	33	24	<1%
♣watching sports	74	12	37	<1%
playground/Frog Pond	409	528	236	4%
♣concessions/carousel	130	68	45	1%
♣food vendor	281	142	25	1%
♣Freedom Trail tour	220	52	218	2%
school/camp groups	190	141	156	7%
events/walk-a-thon	200	0	89	1%
♣playing music	82	3	2	<1%
♣photography	22	18	39	<1%
♣other: (sleeping, feeding squirrels, playing cards, picnic, etc.)	84	186	43	1%
TOTAL:	11,469	10,791	8,080	
"ACTIVE"	1513	1110	818	11%
♣"PASSIVE" / LEISURE	9956	9681	7262	89%

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B.2. Doing an activity vs. just passing through (zip code method)

OVERVIEW: According to the data from 30,320 observations of people in the Common, about half were moving-on-a-path (walking, jogging or cycling), and half were doing something else. Of the people who were moving-on-a-path and asked for zip code information, the vast majority (82%) said that they were just passing through the Common and didn't expect to stop anywhere. Local residents were most likely to be moving when contacted. Visitors from out-of-state were slightly more likely to say they expected to stop somewhere in the Common.

Status when contacted:	Overall (n=2211)	Spring (n=836) **	Summer (n=661)	Fall (n=714)
moving-on-a-path [4]	~50%	83%	51%	48%
sitting	~40%	14%	36%	43%
standing	~10%	3%	11%	8%
other (doing something)	1%	1%	1%	1%
		(see note 3)	(better data)	

(if moving) Are you passing thru or stopping to do something in the Common?

passing thru	82%	89%	79%	83%
stopping	18%	11%	21%	17%

Analyzed by residence:

**	Local	Other Boston	Other MA	Out of state
moving-on-a-path	**76%**	58%	58%	64%
sitting	16%	36%	34%	28%
standing	6%	6%	7%	8%
other	1%	<1%	1%	<1%
(if moving): ++				
passing thru	86%	82%	85%	78%
stopping	14%	18%	15%	22%

---

[4] Note that the proportion who were moving when contacted was much higher in the spring. This is due to a shift in the sampling procedures, not a change in visitor behavior: spring Behavioral Mapping data showed that only about half of the park users were observed to be moving, so data collectors were instructed to approach more sitters/standers in the summer and fall, in order to more accurately reflect park use. This change in sampling procedures did not affect the analysis of whether people-on-the-move were stopping to do something or not, nor did it affect the analysis of where people live.

B.3.   Types of uses described by people who were interviewed

OVERVIEW: The top five reasons for being on the Common were: relaxing, sightseeing, being with friends or family, getting outside, and passing through on the way to/from somewhere else. People also mentioned walking (with or without a dog), eating lunch, and going to the playground.

Why are you in the Common today?

16%	relaxing, recreation, hanging out
15%	sightseeing, Freedom Trail
13%	with friends/family, meeting someone
13%	get outside, fresh air, sun, break from office, enjoying nice weather
11%	passing thru on way to another site
9%	walk the dog
8%	walking
6%	eating lunch, picnic
4%	playground
3%	exercise (run, tennis, yoga, etc.)
3%	studying, reading, photography
3%	commuting to/from work
2%	nature, greenery, scenery
2%	Frog Pond /Carousel
1%	event
8%	other (Pokemon, people watching, etc.)

Sample of answers: SPRING
Headed to Swan Boats
Always stop here when in the city
For dog and dog park
Nice day
I work close by
Relaxation, nice weather
Take a break, get some air
Freedom Trail
Son in playground
Sightseeing
Visiting Common to hang out
Lose weight by walking
Eat lunch
Great weather, relaxing atmosphere, great place to study
Picnic
Browsing - chit chat
We meet son to go to aquarium
Dog walk, dog off leash
Meeting friends

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Go to Freedom Trail
Tour guide for a friend
Chill and hang out
Having lunch - entertainment
Dog park
Walking home
Keep granddaughter happy, picture with ducklings
Commuting
Getting some sun
To play tennis

Sample of answers: SUMMER
Trolley; sightsee
People watch
Walking around enjoying the weather
To catch Pokemon
We're on break, vacation day
Wanted to read a book
Leaving work, my route home
Meeting a friend
To start the Freedom Trail
Frog Pond
Lunch in park
Bringing boy to playground (nanny)
Hanging out
Swim/play
Kids football
Taking pictures
Enjoying nice weather
Playing tennis
Came for Swan Boats
Kids bike riding, see city
It's Sunday, wanted to visit Common, great place to meet people
Nice day to walk around
Get outside, enjoy the day
Walking back from movies
Catching Pokemon, being tourists
Nice place to walk around, free time, meet new people
Walking the dog
One of tourist stops on map
Kid, get outside, carousel, Frog Pond
Part of my 2.5 hour bike route and people watching

Sample of answers: FALL
Wandering through on way to movies
Sightseeing
Friends visiting, hang out outside
Freedom Trail
Dogs
So child can play
Have a day off, nice place
Touring around Boston, good place to start
Sightseeing
Visiting, holiday
To sit in sun, outdoor time
Taking some time off, big exam, need some air
Sightseeing
With baby, getting sunshine
Going to a rally at State House
Lunch with a friend
Reading
Hang out
Relax and read
Lunch
Hosting visitors
Sitting
Lunch hour walk
Break from work
Walking to work
Enjoying the weather
Nice place to walk, nice weather
Nice day, nice weather, see leaves, feed squirrels
Cutting through from movies
Visiting family, Pokemon
For pumpkin float
Picnic with dog, walk dog

Types of Uses / Interviews (continued)

OVERVIEW: Referring to a broad list of many activities, walking is the most frequently mentioned activity – almost everyone has walked and most have walked in the Common at least five times this year. Other relatively frequent activities are sitting/picnicking, and attending events and performances. About one-third of visitors reported doing at least 5 of these activities in the past year.

Which of these activities have you done here in the past year?
[tourists from beyond NE were not asked, since their history of use was negligible]

	A lot (5+ times)	Some (1-4 times)	Not in past year
walking	59%	37%	4%
sitting, reading, picnic	36%	42%	22%
events	7%	36%	57%
concerts or plays	5%	38%	57%
playground	8%	16%	76%
jogging, running	9%	14%	77%
dog walking	13%	7%	80%
spray pool at Frog Pond	3%	15%	82%
ice skating	2%	16%	82%
Visitor Info Center	1%	16%	83%
movies	3%	12%	85%
bicycling, roller blading	5%	8%	87%
baseball fields	2%	8%	90%
tennis	2%	3%	96%

Many people do multiple activities in the park

	Overall Sample
one	7%
two	21%
three	19%
four	18%
five or more	36%

Who is doing 5+ activities?

++ **49%**   of local area residents
    39%   of 'other Boston' residents
    28%   of suburban metro residents (including Brookline, Cambridge)
    26%   of people from other MA towns or New England states (outside 128 loop)

C. Intensity of Use

An important issue being addressed by this research was how much the Common is used. Two of the research methods provided information about this issue, including:

• the <u>behavioral mapping</u> method investigated the numbers of people observed in the park, counted by sectors and time of day; and

• <u>interviews</u> with randomly selected park users across a variety of locations yielded information about people's estimates of frequency and duration of use, seasonality, and use of facilities.

❖ Results show that between 3500 and 6300 people were observed on the Common in a typical day.

❖ Spring was the busiest season, Fall was less busy.

❖ Early morning (~8:15 am) is less busy, with activity increasing from lunch time to 3:00 pm, and then dropping off.

❖ The patterns are similar on weekdays and weekends.

❖ The vast majority of people said they expected to spend at least 30 minutes in the Common.

❖ The most used features are the food services, the concerts/plays and the events. The restrooms, playground, and Frog Pond get moderate use (primarily by families).

C.1. Counts of people IN the park, by section (from behavioral mapping)

DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLING METHOD: Observers walked through each of five sectors (see diagram on next page) at five different times of day to accumulate a composite weekday and a composite weekend day each season. They counted the number of people and recorded what people were doing (e.g., walking, sitting, playing, eating, etc.).

OVERVIEW: 30,320 people were counted over the course of this study. This graph shows the overall number of people observed in each of 5 sectors of the park across the three seasons. Spring was the busiest, and Fall was generally less busy.

Overall counts by season
(one "composite" weekday and one "composite" weekend day)
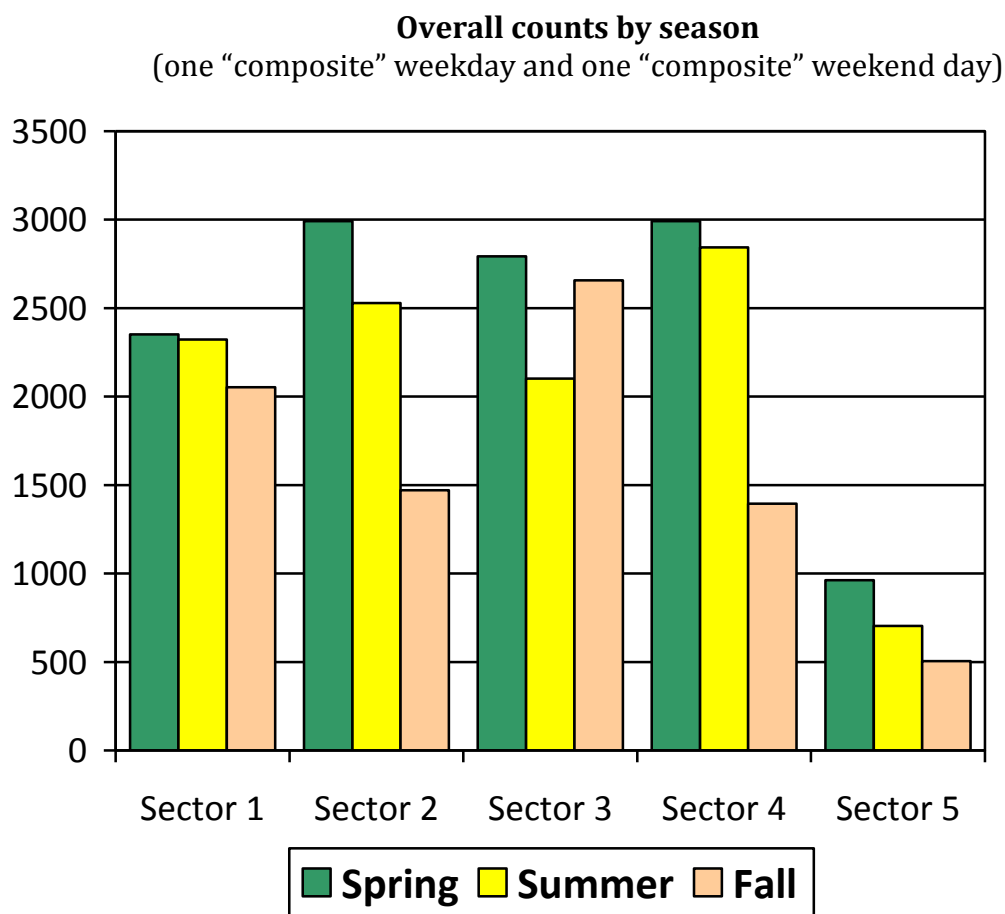
Diagram of Sectors
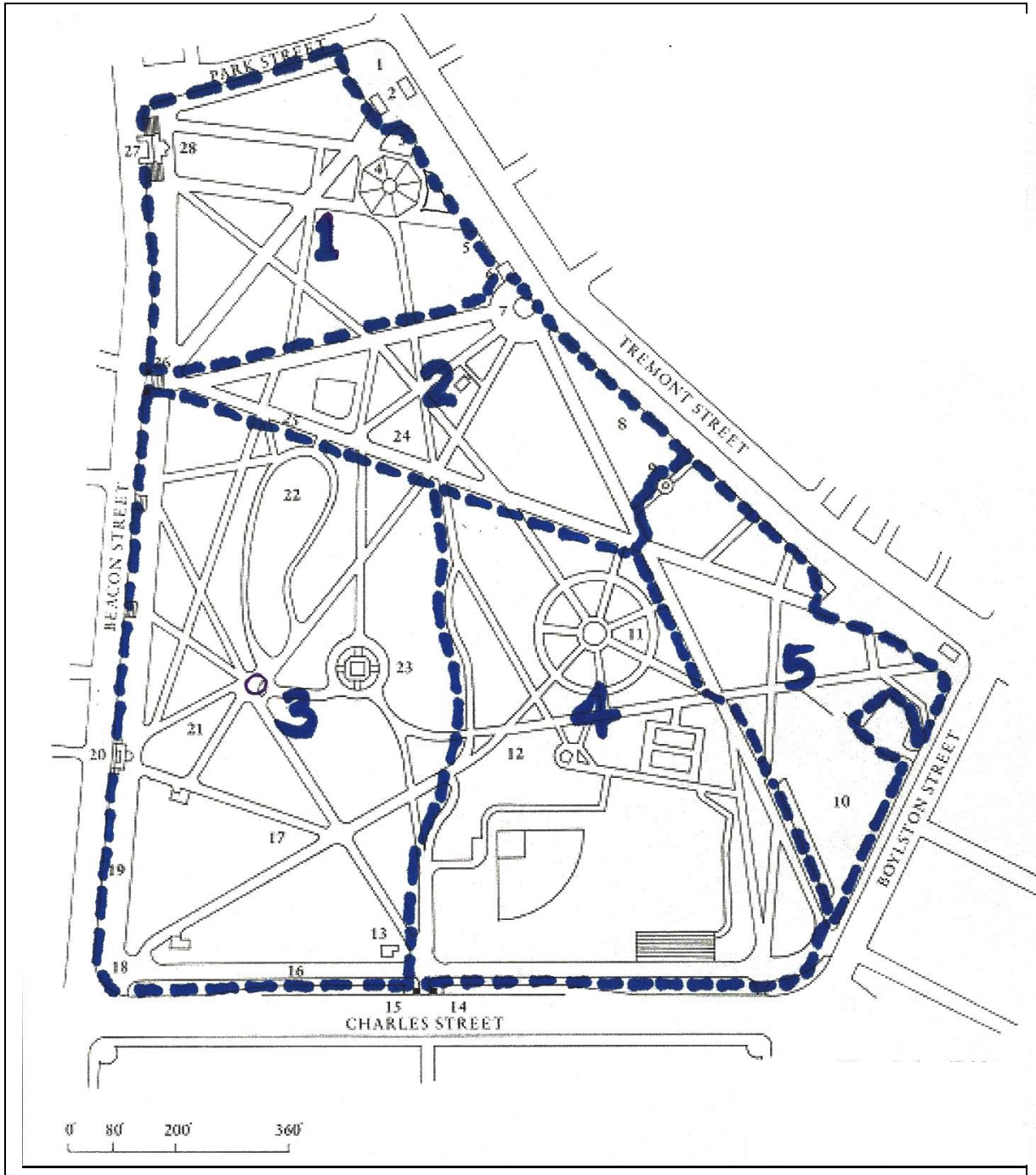
Spring weekday composite, by time
(5327 people counted)
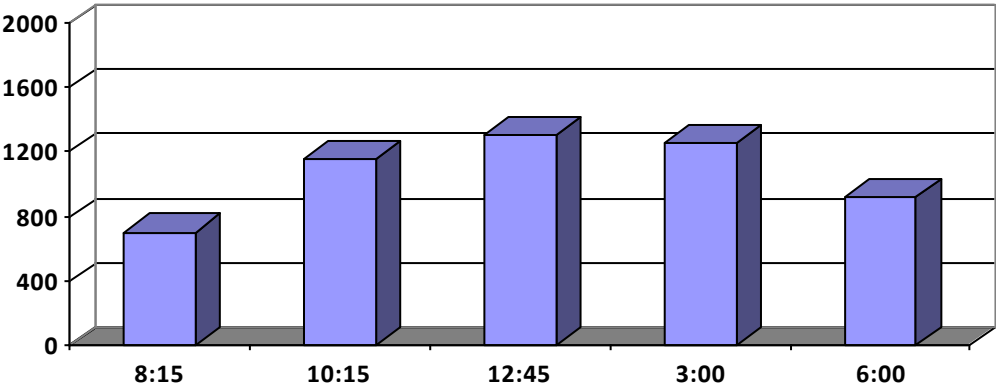
Spring weekend composite day, by time
(6321 people counted)

Report by People, Places & Design Research
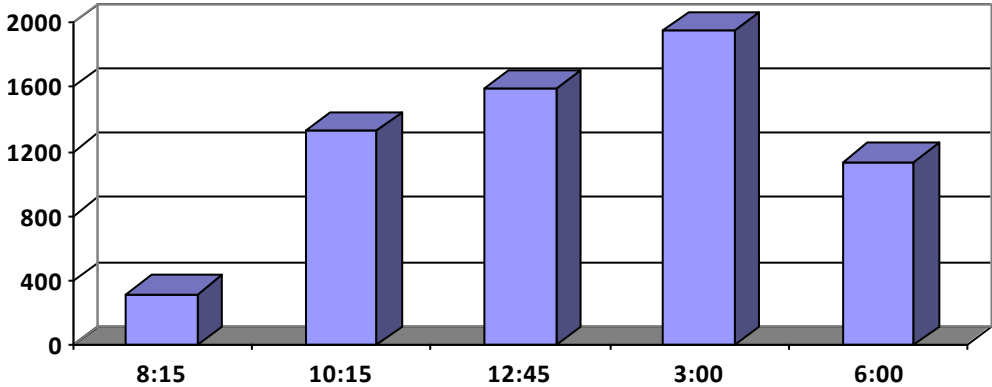
Summer weekday composite, by time
(5969 people counted)
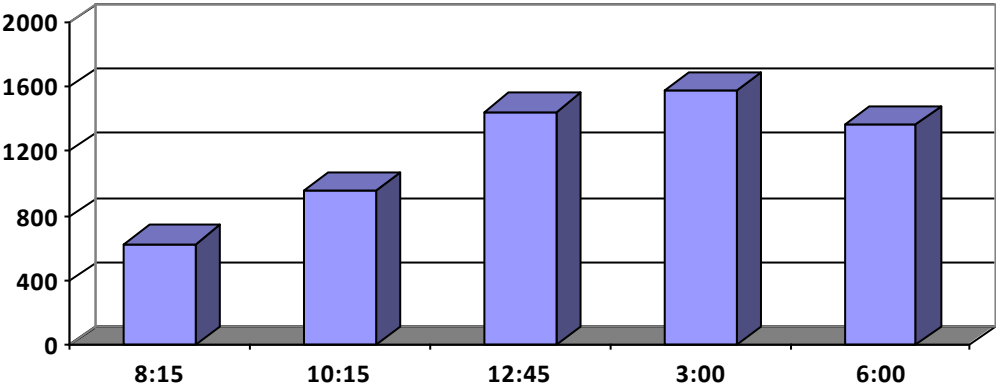
Summer weekend composite day, by time
(4825 people counted)

Report by People, Places & Design Research
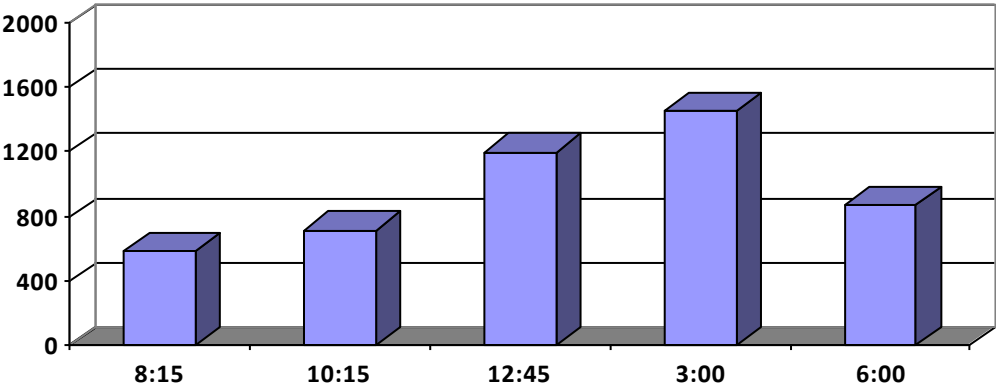
Fall weekday composite, by time
(3487 people counted)
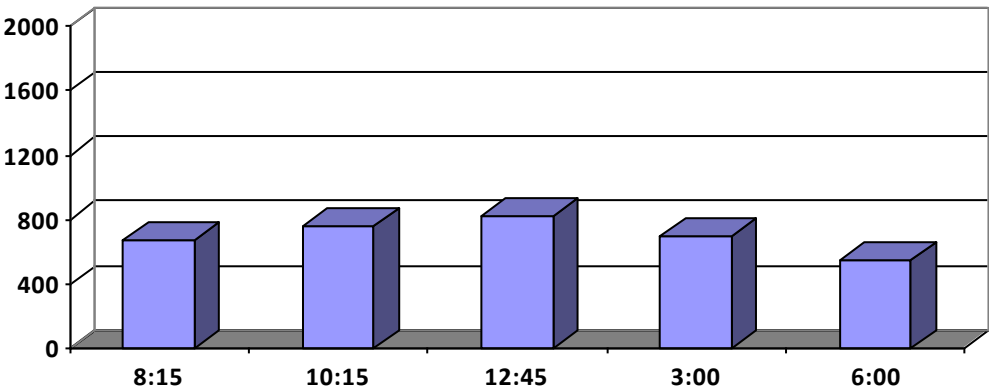
Fall weekend composite day, by time
(4563 people counted)
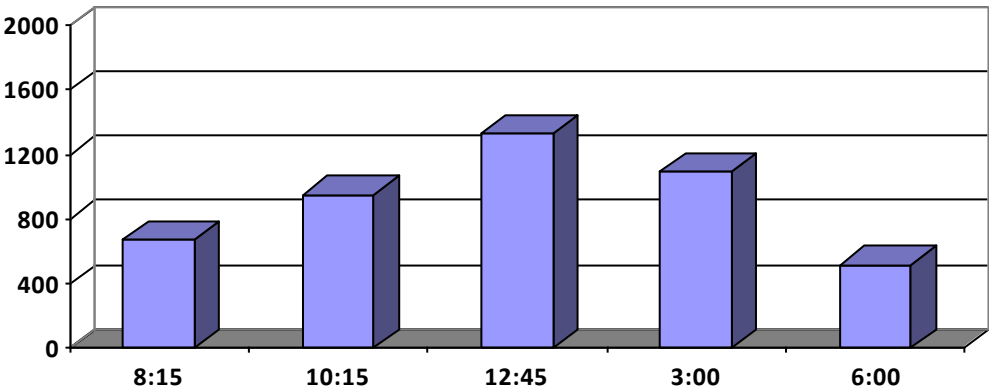
Spring weekday counts, by sector & time of day

Legend:
- 8:15 AM
- 10:15 AM
- 12:45 PM
- 3:00 PM
- 6:00 PM
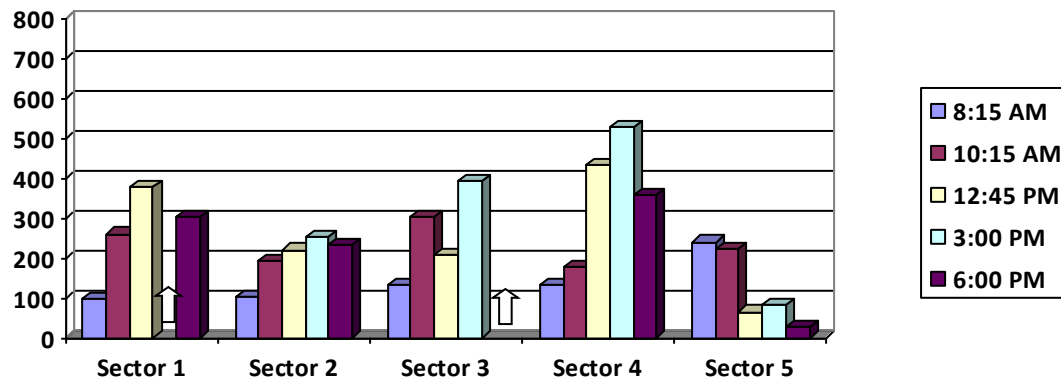
Spring weekend counts, by sector & time of day
('charity walk' in sector 2 (10:15 am), no unusual events in sector 3 or 4)

Legend:
- 8:15 AM
- 10:15 AM
- 12:45 PM
- 3:00 PM
- 6:00 PM
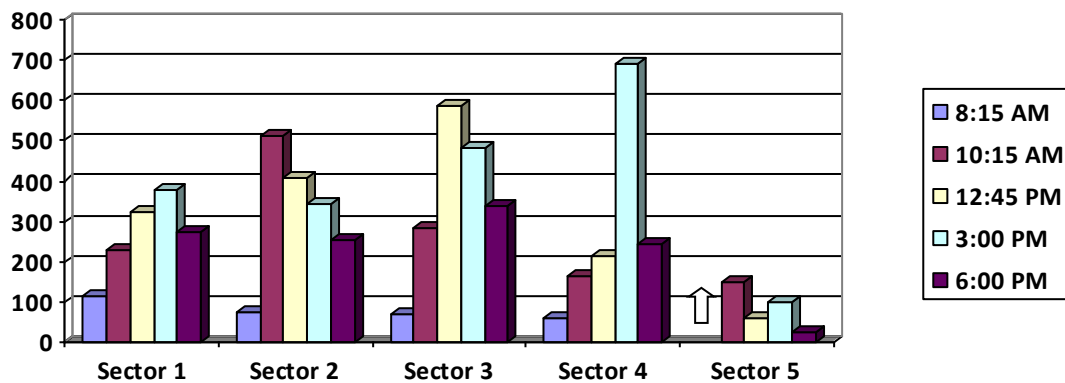
⇧ denotes missing data for that time period

Summer weekday counts, by sector & time of day
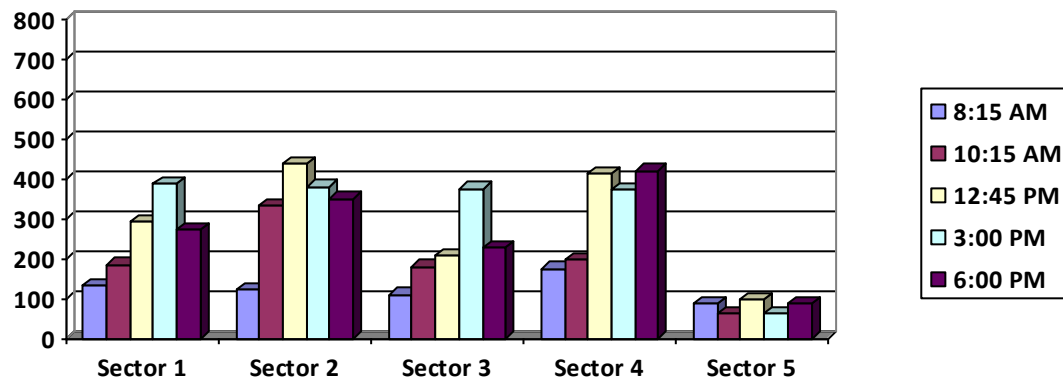
Summer weekend counts, by sector & time of day
(summer camp groups using facilities in sector 4, plus over 100 people dancing)
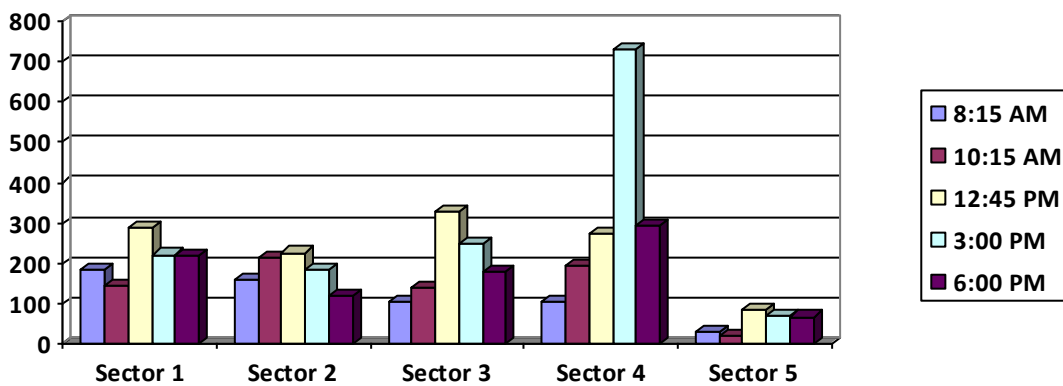
Fall weekday counts, by sector & time of day
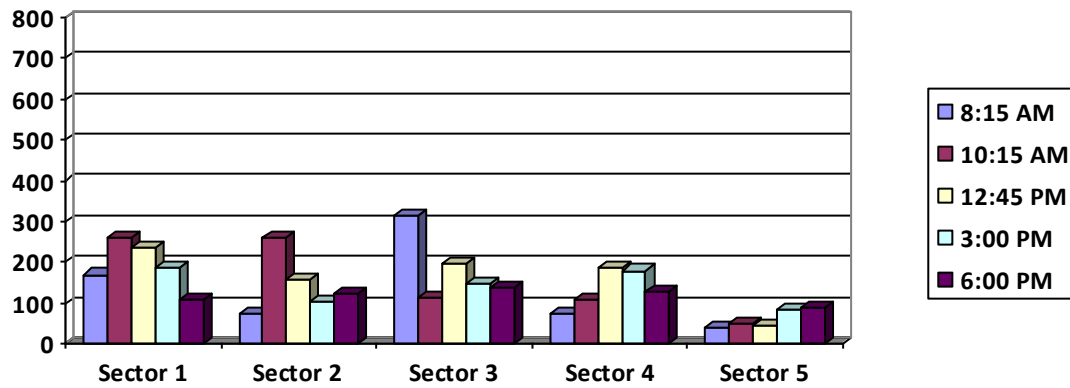
Fall weekend counts, by sector & time of day
(a charity walk in sector 3)

Report by People, Places & Design Research
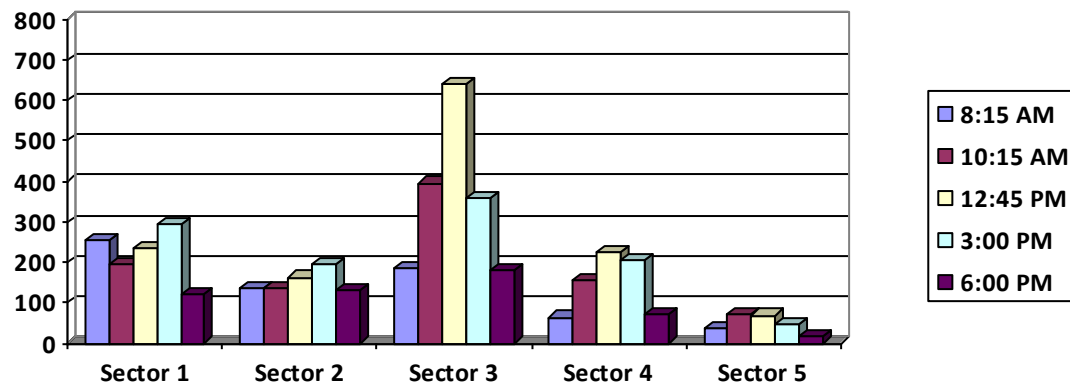
C.2. **Frequency of visiting** (from interviews)

OVERVIEW: About one-quarter (27%) of people interviewed were first-time users of the Common. Among repeat users there is a huge range of frequencies, some who have been a handful of times over the past year, some who came bimonthly or weekly, and some who come daily or multiple times per day. Local residents are the most frequent users. People say they come to the Common most often in summer and least often in winter, regardless of which season they were contacted. People on the Common have also visited the Public Garden, although not quite as frequently.

How many times have you been in the Common in the past 12 months?
(also presented earlier in section A.2; repeated here with additional context)

	Overall Sample (n=371)		Local (n=61)	Other Boston (n=88)	Sub-Metro /Oth-MA (n=103)	Out of State (n=117)
		**				
first-time	27%		1%	6%	15%	**68%**
2-5 times	23%		5%	20%	33%	25%
6-52 times	21%		20%	35%	27%	7%
53+ times	29%		**74%**	39%	25%	0%

In which seasons do you visit? (among those who have visited at least four times in the last year)

				Visit A LOT by Season		
	A lot	Some	Never	Spring	Summer	Fall
spring	37%	46%	17%	41%	39%	32%
summer	52%	40%	9%	52%	54%	49%
fall	34%	51%	15%	25%	36%	38%
winter	13%	49%	38%	13%	15%	11%

How many times have you been to the Public Garden in the past 12 months?

none	26%
1-5 times	36%
6-52 times	28%
53+ times	16%

C.3. Use of facilities (from interviews)

OVERVIEW: The three most used facilities/offerings are the food services, the concerts & plays, and the events – 43% of New England residents have done each of these in the past year. The playground and restrooms are moderately used. Locals are the most likely to have attended concerts/plays and events, and use the baseball fields or tennis courts. People from out-of-town are more likely to use the restrooms.

Facilities used in the past year

[didn't ask people from beyond NE]	Overall Sample		Local	Other Boston	Other MA
has used food services	43%		46%	44%	43%
seen concerts or plays	43%	**	**66%**	39%	35%
attended events	43%	**	**57%**	49%	36%
has used rest rooms	29%	**	25%	23%	**39%**
has used playground	24%		16%	28%	26%
ice skating	19%		16%	19%	22%
used frog pond/spray pool	18%		16%	18%	21%
has used Visitor Info Center	17%		21%	15%	17%
attended movies	15%		18%	17%	14%
has used baseball fields	10%	**	**16%**	11%	4%
has used tennis courts	4%	**	**13%**	1%	1%

Facility use analyzed by user's age/lifecycle

OVERVIEW: Families with children are more likely than adults to use the restrooms, the playground, the Frog Pond spray pool, and the Visitor Information Center. Events are more likely to be attended by adults without children. The older adults (who also tend to live locally) are more likely to attend concerts and plays.

[didn't ask those from beyond NE]	Overall Sample (n=259)		Young[5] Adult (n=123)	Family (n=58)	Older Adult (n=78)
has used food services	43%		40%	42%	49%
seen concerts or plays	43%	**	43%	24%	**55%**
attended events	43%	**	**46%**	28%	**47%**
has used rest rooms	29%	**	14%	**48%**	38%
has used playground	24%	**	11%	**62%**	18%
ice skating	19%		17%	22%	18%
used frog pond/spray pool	18%	**	9%	**45%**	15%
has used Visitor Info Center	17%	**	14%	**29%**	12%
attended movies	15%		18%	12%	15%
has used baseball fields	10%		10%	7%	13%
has used tennis courts	4%		6%	0	5%

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[5] Young adults are defined as aged 18-34, visiting without children. Families are defined as adults of any age visiting with children under 18 (usually these adults are in their 30's and 40's, but there are also some grandparent aged adults with children). Older adults are defined as aged 35 or over, without children in the group.

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C.4. Time spent in the Common

OVERVIEW: The vast majority of users (85%) said they expect to spend at least 30 minutes in the Common. A substantial portion (42%) expect to spend over an hour. People tend to stay longer in the summer, and families spend more time than adults without children.

How much time do you expect to spend in the Common today?
("1 hour" and "2 hours" = most frequent answers; 22% each)

	Overall (n=363)		Spring (n=84)	Summer (n=161)	Fall (n=118)
less than 30 minutes	15%	**	12%	16%	14%
30-60 minutes	43%		**54%**	35%	47%
1½-2 hours	27%		29%	28%	26%
over 2 hours	15%		6%	**21%**	13%

**Time spent analyzed by
LIFE CYCLE**

	Young Adults (n=152)	Families (n=77)	Older Adults (n=109)
	**		
less than 30 minutes	13%	6%	21%
30-60 minutes	49%	36%	41%
1½-2 hours	26**%**	**35%**	24%
over 2 hours	12**%**	**22%**	14%

D. Opinions and Interests

During interviews with 371 randomly selected park users, several questions investigated people's opinions and interests about the Common. Topics and findings include:

❖ Satisfaction: People are quite satisfied with the Common – 47% rated it very highly (9 or 10 on a 10-point scale). Users like the greenery, the people /community feeling, the open space, and the pleasant atmosphere.

❖ Dissatisfaction: There were some complaints about the homeless ("but it's not their fault"), the drug dealers/users, and the condition of the grass (brown this year due to drought). However, 40% of park users didn't express any negatives.

❖ Future initiatives: There was moderate interest in some of the ideas for potential improvements, such as 'more maps & directional signs' (45% support) and 'more policing' (39% interest). The lowest priority improvement was to 'enforce the rule about dogs on leashes.' (There is a contingent of dog walkers, and some people who like to watch the dogs playing off-leash; the dogs are part of the "community feeling.")

D.1. What do people like most about the Common?

OVERVIEW: The greenery is the most appreciated aspect of the Common, followed by the people, the open space, and the pleasant atmosphere (e.g., it's a nice place to "hang out and relax"). People also mentioned the play areas for kids, the peacefulness, the central location, and the animals (dogs, squirrels).

What do you like most about the Common? (not asked of tourists from beyond NE)[6]

29%	nature, greenery, trees
21%	meeting people, watching people, community feeling
18%	open space, spacious (but didn't mention greenery)
17%	atmosphere, pleasant, nice place to hang out
11%	play areas for kids, Frog Pond, playground, carousel
8%	peaceful, quiet, oasis
8%	central location
8%	seeing animals, dogs, squirrels, pigeons
6%	off-leash dog areas
6%	activities, events
5%	accessible, variety, something for everyone
5%	place to walk/run/exercise
4%	clean, well-maintained
3%	safe
2%	fresh air
8%	other
3%	blank, no answer

Sample of answers
Seeing all the people, I like the foliage
Outgoing, social, focal point
Looks nice, well maintained
Open space, impressed how clean all is. Also squirrels and dogs.
Trees lining walkway, ballfields, chalk art, dogs, town crier, pianist
Peaceful, always have space to sit, events and free concerts.
Quiet
The no-leash dog area
Lots of space, we take laps around the Common
Park stays clean
Common place to meet, walk to areas, live on Beacon Hill, walk through
Grass
A lot of open space, events going on, play tennis for free
Best of both worlds; nature in urban environment
Green space, open space, good amount of trees vs. open areas, food around, courts

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[6] Some questions were not asked of tourists in order to maintain cooperation and keep the interview brief.

Lots to do for kids, people watching, family friendly
It's beautiful, take lunch break here frequently / street photography
Green space in middle of city, escape from places
Open space and socializing with other people
Spacious, room for kids to play, shade
Peace, calm, quiet
Kid friendly, gated area for kids
Historic value, continuity
Interaction with visitors, people that like dogs
Interact with diverse group of people
That it's a crossroads going places
Having outdoor space to sit, nearby office but no outdoor space, quiet
A lot of space, free, little spots to read or have to yourself
Gorgeous, sit on grass, relax, look at people, activities, concert
Big, green, nice, convenient
Frog Pond
Green space
Can have dogs off leash, no smoking, free events - tours, Shakespeare, puppets
We can sit down and eat here; it's nice
This oasis in the middle of a modern metropolis
I like the fountain and beauty of the place
I have kids, they like carousel, Frog Pond, park
All the things that go on, able to walk around
People watching
Love the ice skating. I got family membership. I like Shakespeare, musicians, kids, dogs.
The ducks, the birds, how well taken care of it is, it's a nice part of the city
It's big and places for children
Sitting, it's peaceful, watching
Frog Pond in all seasons
Trees, birds, animals
Events
Playground, merry-go-round is great, centrally located, liked bathroom, parking below
Peaceful
Quiet
Close to nature feeling, looking at dogs
Convenient, all the people, nature, buildings
Greenery, oasis in city
People watching, cleanliness
Diversity
Scenery, hills
Green space, it should be treated like a crown jewel and it's not
Close to the city, convenient location, big green space, everyone likes the playground
I prefer the gardens but it's nice to come to middle of the city and find solitude
Squirrels
Nice place to walk around, feel safe

Report by People, Places & Design Research

D.2. Disappointments about the Common

OVERVIEW: Most users (60%), regardless of where they came from, were able to think of something that could be improved about the Commo. The top two complaints were about the homeless population and drug users/dealers. People also mentioned a variety of other disappointments, including: the brown/dry grass (it was an unusually hot and dry summer), the litter, not enough restrooms, and safety concerns. Notice that the lack of directional signs is not a "top-of-mind" concern, but later when asked about interest in having more directional signs, this was an appealing idea [section D4].

What are the negatives – any disappointments or things that interfere with your enjoyment?

13%	homeless people, bums
11%	drug dealers and drug users, pot-smoking, riff-raff
9%	condition of grass, no flowers
7%	litter, cleanliness, not enough recycling bins
6%	not enough restrooms, hard to find
5%	safety concerns, fights, not enough police presence
3%	lack of directional signs, hard to navigate
3%	bikers or skateboarders, go too fast, need clearer signage
3%	sometimes too crowded, big events, noisy
2%	path maintenance, rough spots
2%	not enough seating
2%	complaint about dog area (needs fence, more poop bags)
2%	too many rules (about no smoking, no bike riding)
2%	more / healthier food choices
1%	not enough shade, need more trees
1%	more activities/events, advertise better
6%	other
40%	blank, nothing (Typically about 50% of respondents can't think of anything negative, on the spot.)

Sample of answers
Seeing the homeless people, but it's not their fault
Upkeep, condition of grass, need more public restrooms
Squirrels are aggressive
Worn out grass spots
Birds - pigeons flying at me
Characters, behavioral problems, not good for tourists
Drug dealers, riff raff, needles out here
Drug dealing by State House, dogs not allowed to play in Frog Pond during off season - even a single event?
Homeless people
Security / safety, beggars
Avoid at night, feel unsafe

Big place - took time to figure out where to go
Not enough shade
Grass is patchy, compared to Public Garden
The people here sleeping in the grass
Kind of confusing to know where we are
No posted signs, haven't seen public toilets, expect info on key monuments
Like any big city, homeless need a place to be
Not crazy about people on benches but no big deal
Smell of marijuana over there
Trash
Not enough Pokemon, no gardens
Needs public bathroom, clean, large, can't handle large groups of tourists
Want more seating
Grass is not very good
Derelicts, guys on drugs
Rowdy areas at night. Weed smoking event.
Hard to find recycling. Lack of green grass.
Playground is overcrowded, unsafe at night (Park St. corner)
Men walking that cat call, sometimes iffy about walking through, especially at night
Sometimes crowded
*The "no bikes" sign, I've been a very courteous bike rider for 40 years; would like not to
    discourage bike riders*
Sidewalks a bit broken down, hard with stroller; would be nice if more healthy food
When we came out of subway we saw drunk guys sleeping in the park
*Drug dealers & pot smokers take over benches in front of State House make it
    uncomfortable when alone. Embarrassing for tourists to see. Drug users trash the
    Common. Not supposed to ride bikes - no one enforces rule - dangerous. Trash cans
    should be cleaned more often. Concerts are really loud.*
Not really - wish I knew more about park events
More police presence
Looks run down
Frog Pond - thought it would be nice but disappointed, less grass, dirty
More bathrooms, squirrels trying to get in stroller
Lot of homeless people
More flowers, more color
I don't like signs in Frog Pond, looks bad
Pushing dope
Earl of Sandwich
People smoking pot - lack of bathrooms
*Would love to see more places for coffee or like a hub where you can grab a snack, stay
    longer; sign with nearest restroom, more signage in general*
Can get sketchy at night
Smoking and the folks who seem sketchy
*People sleeping, doing drugs, people find needles; other than that, can't control who's
    here, certain events too loud i.e. weed festival, had to avoid whole area.*

Report by People, Places & Design Research

D.3. Ratings of various features of the Park

OVERVIEW: About half of the users (47%) gave a very high rating of '9' or '10' (on a 10-point scale) for their overall satisfaction with the Common. Local and other Boston residents were less satisfied/more critical. Offered eight features to rate, the best ratings were given for safety during the day. People gave moderately good ratings for cleanliness, safety in the evening, condition of the paths, food services, and appearance of the landscape. (In other years, the landscape might have received higher ratings, but this year there was a severe drought.) Users expressed dissatisfaction with directional signage and restrooms. Ratings of all features were similar across various audience segments, except for safety (results presented on the next page).

Rate these aspects of the park on a scale of 1 to 10:[7]	High (9-10)	Medium (7-8)	Low (1-6)
your overall satisfaction	47%	41%	12%
safety during the day	67%	26%	7%
cleanliness, convenient trash cans, litter control	41%	39%	20%
safety in the evening	41%	34%	25% [8]
condition of paths	40%	40%	20%
food services (if used café)	36%	34%	30% [9]
condition of the landscape	31%	44%	25%
signs with information about where things are	22%	26%	52% [10]
public restrooms (if used)	21%	25%	54% [11]

Who has 'high' <u>overall satisfaction</u>?

**	38%	of local residents
	42%	of other Boston residents
	53%	of people from suburbs/other MA towns
	50%	of visitors from out-of-state

> Note that ratings of other features did not differ based on residence.

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[7] Interpreting visitors' ratings on 10-point scales is based on years of experience with visitors in leisure settings, using follow-up questions to ask what their ratings mean, or why they gave a particular number. Consistently over time and a variety of settings, we have found that '9' or '10' means an excellent experience which is completely positive, a '7' or '8' means a moderately positive rating which can be accompanied by some misgivings or not-so-enthusiastic support, and a '6' or lower number indicates a disappointing experience or one with substantial misgivings.

[8] 31% don't go to the Common in the evening, so didn't rate this aspect

[9] 57% hadn't used any food services so couldn't rate this feature

[10] 19% hadn't seen any signs and didn't rate this feature

[11] 71% hadn't used restrooms and couldn't rate this feature, although some people said they didn't know there were any, or where to find them.

Satisfaction with various features, compared with the Esplanade

OVERVIEW: The Common and the Esplanade received similar ratings in terms of overall satisfaction, safety, litter control, and condition of the pathways. Ratings of the appearance of the landscape were lower on the Common (probably due to this summer's drought). Some features in the Common had higher ratings than the Esplanade: food services and restrooms.

High ratings of 9-10:	Common	Esplanade
your overall satisfaction	47%	52%
safety during the day	67%	70%
cleanliness, convenient trash cans, litter control	41%	34%
condition of paths	40%	45%
food services (if used café)	**36%**	10%
condition of the landscape	31%	**41%**
public restrooms (if used)	**21%**	5%

Ratings / Safety issues

OVERVIEW: Lower ratings for safety *in the evening* were given by people who brought children to the park. There were no significant differences in ratings of safety during the day. When asked to elaborate on safety issues, people mentioned the drugs, the homeless, and the need for more police presence, among other things. Some people, primarily local residents, were aware of specific problem areas such as internal paths, the monument hill, and the area along Park Street where the homeless sleep.

Safety ratings analyzed by

LIFE CYCLE:		Young Adults (n=152)	Families (n=77)	Older Adults (n=109)
high rating (9-10) of safety during the day		73%	60%	63%
high rating (9-10) of safety in the evening	**	**49%**	26%	**48%**

(if rated safety a '7' or below) *Are there some safety issues you think should be addressed?* (n=103 people who gave lower safety ratings)

8%	drug dealers and users, pot smokers, syringes
7%	homeless, bums
7%	need more police presence
4%	fights, crazies, crime
3%	at night, some areas need better lighting
2%	isolation of some areas, don't walk alone
1%	dogs loose, no fences
1%	bikers & skateboarders
3%	other
10%	no, blank
(54%)	not asked because gave a rating of 8+ on both safety items

Are there areas where you feel less safe, or that you avoid? (n=103 people)

22%	YES
5%	central paths, fewer people, less lighting
3%	monument, top of hill
3%	skid row along fence (Park St)
1%	T-stops
1%	along Tremont
1%	State House lawn area
1%	near ball fields
1%	at night – all of it
1%	Park & Tremont
1%	Boylston & Tremont
1%	other
15%	don't know, blank

D.4. Reactions to ideas for potential improvements

OVERVIEW: Offered a list of eight possible improvements to the Common, most of the ideas were moderately appealing to park users. The top idea was 'more maps & directional signs (45% expressed high or very high interest). There were also some different preferences among audience segments: non-locals had higher interest in 'maps & directional signs;' locals, older adults, and families had higher interest in 'more policing;' families liked the idea of 'more activities for children.' Three-fourths of the people interviewed did not think it's a priority to have 'better maintenance of the paths' or to 'enforce the rule about dogs on leashes.'

For each of these ideas for future improvements, tell me if you think it's a low, medium, high or very high priority:

	Very High	High	Medium	Low
more maps & directional signs	12%	33%	29%	27%
more policing, fewer unsavory people	11%	28%	32%	29%
more activities for children	8%	30%	33%	29%
better maintenance of trees & grass	8%	27%	37%	28%
better food options	7%	31%	36%	26%
more seating – benches or tables	7%	29%	32%	33%
better maintenance of the paths	6%	20%	39%	35%
enforce the rule about dogs on leashes	5%	19%	23%	53%

Who has HIGH or VERY HIGH interest in <u>more maps & directional signs</u>?

++   32%   of local residents (nearby zip codes)
      46%   of non-local Mass. residents
      53%   of people from out of state

Who has HIGH or VERY HIGH interest in <u>more policing</u>?

**   **55%**   of local residents
      44%   of other Boston residents
      33%   of people from suburban /other MA towns
      24%   of visitors from out-of-state

**   29%   of young adults
      47%   of families with children
      50%   of older adults

Who has HIGH OR VERY HIGH interest in <u>more activities for children</u>?

**   27%   of young adults
      61%   of families with children
      40%   of older adults

D.5. Familiarity with FOPG

OVERVIEW: One-third of those interviewed had heard of Friends of the Public Garden (only 1% were members). Those most likely to have heard of it are local residents and people who visit very frequently (more than once per week).

Have you heard of The Friends of the Pubic Garden?

a member	1%
yes	32%
no	68%

Who has heard of FOPG?

**	**59%**	of local residents
	42%	of 'other Boston' residents
	32%	of suburban /other MA towns
	15%	of people from out-of-state

**	**61%**	of people who come more than 52 times a year
	38%	of people who come 6-52 times a year
	18%	of people who come 2-5 times a year
	13%	first-time visitors

E. Characteristics of Park Users

Data from the zip code intercepts and interviews of randomly selected users are presented to describe the characteristics of people who use the Common. Some of this information is redundant with data presented earlier, but the point is to have it all collected concisely and to note the reliability across methods when comparisons are possible.

ZIP CODE SURVEY: These results were already presented in section A, but are included here as well for easy comparison with the interview data on the next two pages. Additional information about what countries people come from shows that 60 different countries were represented. The most visitors came from England, Canada, and Germany, followed by France, China, and Italy.

	Overall (n=2294)	Spring (n=896)	Summer (n=675)	Fall (n=723)
Residence:				
local (4 adjacent zips)[12]	13%	14%	12%	13%
other Boston	19%	20%	19%	17%
Brookline/Cambridge	5%	5%	5%	6%
other suburban metro area[13]	16%	16%	16%	15%
other Massachusetts	9%	9%	10%	9%
New England	4%	4%	6%	4%
other US states	19%	22%	16%	19%
other countries	14%	10%	17%	17%
Group size:				
one	52%	45%	48%	63%
two	31%	36%	29%	26%
three or more	17%	19%	23%	11%

Other countries:

Argentina – 4	Finland – 2	Mexico - 4
Australia – 12	**France – 24**	Morocco - 1
Austria – 5	**Germany – 30**	Netherlands - 8
Bermuda – 1	Greece – 1	Philippines - 1
Brazil – 14	Guatemala – 1	Poland - 2
Canada – 34	Honduras – 1	Portugal - 1
Cambodia – 1	Iceland – 1	Russia - 6
Chile – 2	India – 3	South Africa - 2
China – 23	Oman – 1	Ukraine - 1
Columbia – 5	Ireland – 7	Saudi Arabia - 2
Costa Rica – 1	Israel – 7	Scotland - 2
Cuba – 1	**Italy – 18**	Serbia - 1
Czech Republic – 3	Jamaica – 1	Singapore - 1
Denmark – 3	Japan – 3	Slovakia - 1
Dominican Republic – 1	Kazakhstan – 2	Spain - 9
Dubai – 1	Korea – 1	Sweden - 1
Egypt – 1	Kuwait – 1	Switzerland - 8
El Salvador – 2	Latvia – 1	Syria - 1
UK/England – 39	Luxembourg – 1	Taiwan – 4
Turkey – 3	Venezuela – 2	Vietnam – 3

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[12] Local zip codes are 02108, 02111, 02114, 02116)

[13] The suburban area was defined as towns within or bordering 95 (route 128), including Peabody, Salem and Marblehead to the north; Weymouth and Hingham to the south.

Sample characteristics (continued)

INTERVIEWS: The interview sample included a higher proportion of users who are Boston residents compared with the zip code sample (41% vs. 31%) and a lower proportion of people from beyond New England (26% vs. 33%), but there was adequate geographic representation to allow for in-depth analyses. Other characteristics of this interview sample are: primarily adults without children (78%), over half under age 35, equal proportions of men and women, ethnic diversity consistent with a New England city (69% white), and a variety of income levels. Slightly more than half of respondents (56%) were sitting down when contacted, which seems to fairly represent the proportion of active/passive users observed in the behavioral mapping method.

SEASONAL DIFFERENCES: Larger group sizes / more families with children were found in summer (similar to the zip code data). There was a larger proportion of 25-34 year olds in the fall. There were no significant seasonal differences by residence, gender, ethnicity or income.

	Overall (n=371)	Spring (n=84)	Summer (n=167)	Fall (n=120)
Residence:				
local (4 adjacent zips)	17%	20%	16%	15%
other Boston	24%	26%	23%	24%
Brookline/Cambridge	4%	9%	2%	3%
other suburban metro area	16%	13%	16%	17%
other Massachusetts	8%	4%	13%	5%
New England	5%	6%	5%	5%
other US states	14%	10%	15%	17%
other countries	12%	12%	10%	14%
Group size:		**		
one	38%	42%	33%	41%
two	35%	39%	36%	31%
three or more	27%	19%	31%	28%
Group Composition:		**		
adults	78%	89%	66%	84%
family with children	22%	11%	34%	16%
Gender of person interviewed:				
man	52%	54%	51%	51%
woman	48%	46%	49%	49%
Gender of all adults in group:				
men	49%	46%	51%	47%
women	51%	54%	49%	53%

Interview sample characteristics (continued)

	Overall (n=371)	Spring (n=84)	Summer (n=167)	Fall (n=120)
<u>Age:</u>		**		
18-24	23%	28%	20%	23%
25-34	30%	20%	27%	**40%**
35-44	17%	14%	22%	12%
45-54	13%	15%	14%	11%
55-64	10%	16%	10%	8%
65+	7%	7%	8%	5%
<u>Ethnic identity:</u>				
African American / black	12%	20%	9%	10%
Latino /Hispanic	9%	8%	11%	9%
Asian	5%	5%	3%	10%
White	69%	62%	72%	70%
other	4%	5%	5%	2%
<u>Household Income:</u>				
student	17%	16%	14%	20%
under $25,000	10%	11%	9%	9%
$25-49,000	17%	19%	15%	18%
$50-74,000	16%	13%	17%	17%
$75-124,000	22%	23%	24%	20%
$125,000 and over	18%	19%	20%	16%
<u>Day Type:</u>				
weekday	56%	84%	47%	51%
weekend	44%	16%	53%	49%
<u>Visitor Type:</u>				
sitting	56%	60%	51%	59%
standing	17%	23%	13%	19%
walking	26%	14%	35%	20%
biking	1%	3%	1%	2%
running	0	0	0	0