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A WALK IN THE PARK

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BY BRINGING imagination, and perhaps an umbrella, those who walk along the Rose Kennedy Greenway tomorrow will get a strong sense of the project's potential. It is enormous — a significant part of the city's legacy “for hundreds and hundreds of years,” Mayor Menino said last week.

But those who tour the site will note both the promise and the uncertainty of the Greenway. Much planning has been done, and beautiful, boldly designed urban parks are now taking shape on several parcels. But the future is uncertain at best for seven other parcels, as well as for programming and funding issues that are crucial to the project's success.

From 9:30 to 2:30 tomorrow, rain or shine, guided tours will leave Causeway Street and circle the Greenway. Mostly it is dirt, fencing, and concrete barriers now, but staff will be on hand to describe the plans for the various parks and buildings winding for more than a mile from the North End to Rows Wharf, South Station, and Chinatown. The tours are being sponsored by the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, the City of Boston, the Rose Kennedy Greenway Conservancy, and WalkBoston.

It is a good time to get involved, both to appreciate the imaginative work that is ongoing and to lend thoughts and efforts to the unresolved challenges.

Some of the best will come first. The twin parks straddling an extended Hanover Street in the North End already contain some plantings and offer a visible sense of what they will look like when completed in the fall. Both of these parcels, 8 and 10, will have an elevated arcade and “porch” along the edge bordering the North End, and grass, flowers, and trees on the side facing Government Center. If, when finished, these parks are filled with active use not only by North End neighbors but also by people from all over Greater Boston and tourists as well, they will realize the ambitious dream of those who first imagined the Greenway more than two decades ago.

Problems show up on either side of these parks, however. Parcels 6 and 12 both contain ramps carrying traffic up from and down to the underground artery, making them unsuitable for parks and difficult for other development. A community center and YMCA have been planned for parcel 6, and a striking hull-shaped museum has been designed for parcel 12 by renowned architect Moshe Safdie, but estimated costs are formidable.

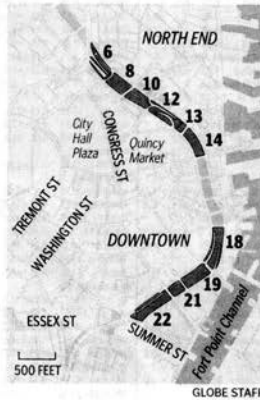
The state House of Representatives last month approved \$31 million to help with the ramp covers for these parcels and also for a third ramp parcel, 18, just south of Rows Wharf, where another famous architect, Daniel Libeskind, has advanced an ambitious box-in-the-air design. The state appropriation is deserved — the state or the Turnpike should pre-

pare the sites, not the nonprofit organizations working to create vibrant attractions there — but still must be approved by the Senate and Governor Romney. Even then, fund-raising for these projects will be a challenge.

The small parcel 13, just south of 12, presents another problem. The Turnpike has allowed a controversial Armenian Heritage Park to be designed for the site. Originally conceived as a memorial to the Armenian genocide, its backers have sought to give it broader appeal. They offer a design that many have found appealing. But the project still carries too much baggage as a memorial. Many believe the Greenway should be free of monuments to any

specific groups. And there is also a strong argument that the space should be designed more specifically as a forecourt to the museum.

Next door, on parcel 14, is a more hopeful sign. A Harbor Park Pavilion, run by the National Park Service and the Island Alliance, is expected to be the first building on the Greenway. Stephen Yablou, a New York architect, won a competition for the project by proposing a “shimmering glass box” to be located opposite the Long Wharf hotel. This pavilion will be crucial in drawing people across the Greenway to the waterfront.



Over time, the Greenway will have to work both “vertically,” along its length as tomorrow's walkers will see it, and “horizontally,” connecting the North End, Harbor, and Fort Point Channel areas to downtown and the rest of the city, from which they were so brutally separated half a century ago.

The rest of the Wharf District parks, parcels 14 through 17, will include a large fountain and gathering space. The design has received mixed reviews.

Farther toward South Station, parcels 19, 21, and 22 were designated 15 years ago for development by the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, but the group has so far failed to come up with a practical plan or anything like the funds to build. New leadership gives some hope the organization can make good on its dreams.

Beyond South Station, in Chinatown, a park that will be an extension of the Greenway has drawn considerable community support.

This week, various civic leaders proposed advances for the Greenway, including increased funding from public sources and from abutters, and greater clout for the Greenway Conservancy. Norman Leventhal, who helped create Rows Wharf, the Post Office Square Park, and other celebrated city spaces, pushed for excellence. “I don't see excitement yet,” he said. “We don't want the ordinary.”

Tomorrow, walkers can stretch their imaginations to see how the great potential of the Greenway may be realized. Afterward, indoors, they may want to contemplate the major funding, management, and programming issues that still need resolution.