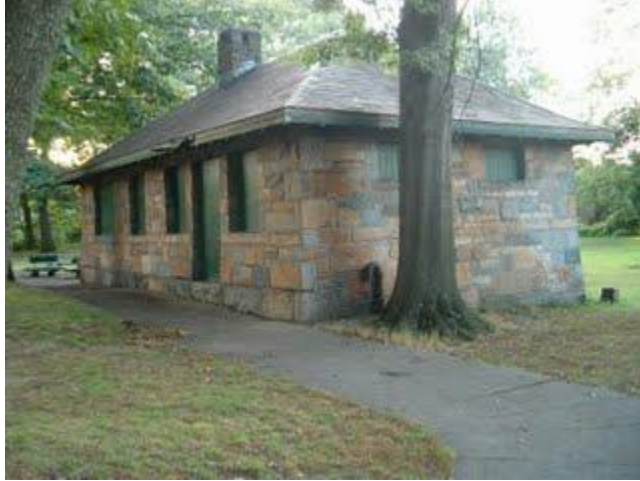


## Reviving the "Duck House"

4:36 PM Posted by Stephen Brophy



*The Agassiz Road Structure Known as the Duck House.*

*Image by Tracey Cusick*

BY ERICA MATTISON

Over the past year and a half some Fenway neighbors have been working on a project to revitalize the Back Bay Fens through restoring and putting into use the City-owned Duck House on Agassiz Road. Working with a wide range of stakeholders, it is clear that there is interest in turning this building into an asset for the community.

A recent charette brought together several design professionals and community members to explore possible scenarios for the building and site, which is on the bank of the Muddy River, a body of water expected to be dredged and restored in the next few years. Ideas echoed comments made at a November 2008 Fenway Civic Association annual meeting, where the Duck House was the main agenda item, and feedback collected through a spring 2009 online survey of community members.

On a recent trip to Paris, I was inspired to see several positive park amenities such as cafes, crepe stands, moveable furniture, and fountains. The parks were alive with people of all ages enjoying the outdoors, even when drizzle was falling. Families were gathered on the moveable chairs in the Jardin du Luxembourg having a picnic lunch. Children used sticks to push along small model boats in a pond, thanks to a nearby vendor renting out the equipment. A woman served up crepes from a hut that held a small sink, cabinets, and the basics needed to prepare various treats; fitted with a few stools outside the window. A cafe with dozens of outdoor tables attracted many diners, who had great seats for the high school students playing band classics (Sousa, etc.) in the nearby bandstand. A young boy and his brother and sister kicked around a soccer ball on the stonedust path, while their parents lunched. What a perfect Sunday afternoon in the park!

We can use a little of Paris in Boston. Restoring and putting into use buildings such as the Agassiz Road Duck House is positive for our parks and our communities overall. Having a business such as a creperie, coffee shop, or visitors center occupying the Duck House would help enliven the area, drive away negative activity, improve public safety, and provide a gathering place for area residents as well as park visitors. We have treasures from over 100

years ago that we must restore, take care of, and put into use for the betterment of our communities. This became even more apparent to me through my vacation in Paris, where spending time in well-maintained parks was one of the highlights.

City Councilor Mike Ross, who has been involved with this project since its inception, visited some of the public parks in New York City for ideas. He says "we want to bring life, activity, and more positive usage into the park. And we want it to be safe—to be safe, parks can't have abandoned buildings. With a little more activity brought in by developing this building for some public use, the Fens can become an even more attractive place to visit."

The Fenway Civic Association is pleased to work with the City of Boston Parks & Recreation Department, Ross, Historic Boston Inc., Wentworth Community & Learning Partnerships, The Fenway Alliance, and the many other stakeholders who are part of the process so we can make our vision for the Duck House become a reality in the near future. Through City investment and privately contributed dollars, the Agassiz Road Duck House can become a community asset and a more attractive part of our neighborhood. Soon, more data will be collected to gain a better understanding of the foot traffic and other access of the area.

Those who are interested in supporting this effort are encouraged to contact [fenwaycivic@aol.com](mailto:fenwaycivic@aol.com).

Erica Mattison lives in the West Fens and serves on the Fenway Civic board.

A version of this article was published in the September 2009 Fenway News.