**Circle of Parks - Intro Video – Draft Script
For the Southwest Corridor Park “Circle of Parks” lesson plans**

Imagine that you had the chance to design a whole city.

Think of a city like Chicago,

Altanta,

Savannah

or Boston.

What would you put in the city?

You might think first of buildings, homes,

schools

and roads.

Subways and buses to help people get around.

Bridges to travel over rivers.

Places to buy food. Places to shop. Places to park cars.

The city will need systems for water supply, electricity, and phone communications. A sewer system to take away wastewater.

In a healthy city, all these systems are in balance. The city is busy with people working and living and traveling

but there is also room for parks and greenspaces where nature can have a home in the city.

The city of Boston has a circle of parks and greenspace that stretches from the Downtown Boston area to the neighborhoods of Dorchester, Roxbury and Jamaica Plain, to Brookline and Back Bay, and to the South End and the Fenway neighborhoods.

This circle of parks is made up of the Emerald Necklace and the Southwest Corridor Park.

The Emerald Necklace is a string of parks, from Boston Common to the Public Gardens to the Back Bay Fens, Charlesgate, Riverway, Olmsted Park, Jamaica Pond, the Arnold Arboretum and Franklin Park. Through this string of parks, you could travel from the Franklin Park Zoo, then through the parkland of Franklin Park, through playgrounds and picnic areas, past the sailboats on Jamaica Pond, and along the water in Olmsted Park, and continue through this string of parks until you arrive at the Swan Boats in the Public Gardens.

Through all the Emerald Necklace parks, you notice Olmsted’s style, with paths travelling through trees and fields, and with arched stone bridges to cross as you walk along ponds and streams.

On the other side of this circle of parks, the Southwest Corridor Park is a 4-mile linear park that runs along the path of the MBTA Orange Line, with bicycle and walking paths, playgrounds, spray pools, basketball courts, tennis courts and gardens. On the Southwest Corridor Park you can travel from Forest Hills MBTA station to Back Bay MBTA station, and along the way you will see neighbors gardening; people walking their dogs; people bicycling; skateboarders skateboarding; children playing; and of course the Orange Line trains passing by.

The Emerald Necklace was designed in the 1800s, specifically because people wanted a better city, and they were thinking about what they wanted as the city was growing bigger and busier and the water was becoming polluted. Along the edge of the growing city, there was land that was marshy, and those marshes were polluted by wastewater and sewage from the city. The air around the marshes smelled worse and worse each year.

Citizens petitioned the local government, demanding that the government address the pollution and asking that the city start to build a system of parks. The city government responded, and commissioned plans to re-channel that water from the marshes, and to create a system of greenspace and parkland, which became the Emerald Necklace.

The Southwest Corridor was built in the 1980s, with a similar story. In the 1950s and 1960s and 1970s, more and more cars were coming into the city of Boston each day.

At the same time the whole country was growing, and the federal government was developing plans to build new highways throughout the country.

The federal government proposed to build a highway system through the middle of Boston, and worked with the state government to provide money for the highway, to start planning, and even to start taking down houses and buildings to make room for the highway.

But people in the neighborhoods protested, and eventually the governor of Massachusetts stopped the plans for the highway.

Instead, the Southwest Corridor Park, and a new route for the MBTA Orange Line, were built along the path that would have been the highway.

At that time, the MBTA Orange Line had an old system of elevated trains and needed to be re-built.

After lots of planning, all the groups agreed to build the subway line, and parkland, and a bicycle path, along the route that was going to be the highway. At the time, this was a huge decision, and this project was the first time that federal transportation money was used to build subway and bicycle transportation instead of roads and highways.

Who worked on these projects?

In both cases, the idea for the parkland came from citizens, responding to a rapidly growing city and building greenspace into the urban environment.

The design of the Emerald Necklace came from the landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted. Olmsted was one of the first landscape architects in the United States. When the city of Boston decided to create a system of parks, they commissioned Olmsted to be the designer. Olmsted had already designed Central Park in New York and other successful parks, after studying and developing design ideas along with other architects in the United States and in Europe who were learning about how to preserve nature and provide parkland for people in modern growing cities.

The design of the Southwest Corridor Park was the work of literally thousands of meetings, with input from neighborhood residents from each neighborhood along the park.

The people from the neighborhood groups who had protested the highway wanted to be part of the planning for the new park. The state government agreed. When the state government hired engineers and architects for the design team, they agreed that the design team should have meetings with the neighborhood residents to plan the park. So the design team organized seven Station Area Task Force (SATF) groups, with one for the neighbors near each MBTA transit station that would be along the new path of the Orange Line.

An advisory group, called the Parkland Management Advisory Council (PMAC) also helped with overall planning for the whole park. (PMAC still exists and created this video.)

Because of those meetings, the park has different features in each neighborhood. The people in some neighborhoods were especially eager for gardens;

some wanted playgrounds;

some wanted places for baseball, basketball and tennis.

That is why there is a little of everything along the length of the four miles of the park. The decision to include bicycle and walking paths was an important decision. There were not as many bicyclists in the 1980s as there are today, but the planning groups agreed that a bicycle route would be a good idea.

The park has won many awards for its thoughtful design and for the strong role of neighborhood groups in designing the project.

In both the Emerald Necklace and the Southwest Corridor Park, the tradition of neighborhood involvement continues. Many of the park activities and park improvements are led by neighborhood-based non-profit groups who bring together volunteers and community donations to work in the parks.

Visit the Southwest Corridor Park on a Saturday morning, and you may see groups of neighbors planting flowers and pushing wheelbarrows filled with compost and mulch.

Visit the Emerald Necklace and see volunteers planting wildflowers or working on a clean-up along the shores of the river.

Behind the scenes, volunteers meet in community meetings to study the needs of the parks and work with the city and state agencies.

Each year, thousands of hours of volunteer energy are contributed to the parks. Volunteers choose this work because it is a way to enjoy time in nature and because it is a way to help bring neighbors together to build a stronger and healthier city.