

State revives long-stalled plans to redevelop Shattuck Hospital site at Franklin Park

Neighborhood groups are mobilizing against any proposal that would bring supportive housing and addiction treatment to the campus.

By [Chris Serres](#) Globe Staff, Updated February 27, 2026, 10:22 a.m.



Louis Elisa speaks near the hosts' table during a public listening session at the Brooke High School addressing redevelopment plans of the Lemuel Shattuck Hospital in Jamaica Plain, on Feb. 26. ANDREW BURKE-STEVENSON/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

For more than 70 years, the towering walls of the [Lemuel Shattuck Hospital](#) in Jamaica Plain have served as a sanctuary for society's most vulnerable, providing care and refuge to low-income patients battling multiple chronic health conditions. It also has been seen as a monument to poor urban planning, a brick-covered eyesore looming over the city's largest public park.

Now, the Healey administration is stirring life into long-dormant plans to [redevelop the 13-acre Shattuck Hospital](#) campus adjacent to Franklin Park, treading with care to avoid the fierce community backlash that two years ago derailed ambitions to turn the site into a sprawling campus for hundreds of people with mental illness and addiction.

But tensions are already rising. [Neighborhood groups](#) are once again mobilizing against any plan to bring supportive housing or addiction treatment to the site, fearing it would cause illicit drug use and crime to spill into a verdant park that has long been the lifeblood of the predominantly Black and brown communities that surround it.

On Thursday evening, nearly 100 residents from neighborhoods bordering Franklin Park — including Jamaica Plain, Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan — poured into the [Brooke High School](#) auditorium in Mattapan for the first in a series of state-led public listening sessions on the future of the Shattuck Hospital campus.

Residents brought a range of competing visions for the site. Some want to restore the entire tree-lined expanse to open green space, with a meadow lined with paths to walk dogs and relax. Others propose new housing for seniors or military veterans. Still others long for a recreation center with a pool or ice rink, a place to socialize and help keep youths off the streets. Suggestions have also included a community garden, an urgent care clinic, and a 24-hour pharmacy.

For their part, officials in the Healey administration said they are committed to hearing all viewpoints and have no set plans for the site, effectively restarting community outreach efforts that began in 2018. But the Shattuck grounds are restricted under [a 1949 state law](#) for “public health” uses, and the state has already said it plans to issue a new request for proposals focused on supportive housing, a service that helps people out of homelessness and addiction by pairing stable housing with counseling, case management and employment assistance.

For many residents who live next to the 527-acre Franklin Park, long considered the crown jewel of Frederick Law Olmsted’s network of public parks [known as the Emerald Necklace](#), any proposal with the words “supportive housing” is a non-starter.

“It’s going to be a fight,” said Louis Elisa, 76, who lives next to Franklin Park and heads the Roxbury-based [Garrison-Trotter Neighborhood Association](#), during one of his regular walks through the park on Wednesday. “There is deep distrust that the state truly cares what people who live here think.”



Louis Elisa, 76, is seen at Franklin Park. He is a longtime Roxbury resident and member of a group seeking to conserve Franklin Park. SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF

Much of this distrust traces back to [the last round of community discussions](#) about what to do with the Shattuck site.

The Commonwealth had called for 75 to 100 supportive housing units when it requested proposals in June of 2021 for redeveloping the Shattuck. But the state received [just one response](#) from a coalition of nonprofits led by Boston Medical Center. At 370 pages, [that bid far surpassed expectations](#): It called for 446 treatment and emergency shelter beds and 405 units of supportive housing for individuals and families, as well as outpatient programs serving up to 400 people a day.

The grandiose plan faltered in part because of its size and timing. It was introduced amid [mounting community reports of open-air drug use and discarded needles](#) along the western edge of Franklin Park. Neighborhood groups largely blamed those problems on the 2022 opening of [an 18-unit cottage village](#) on the hospital grounds for people experiencing homelessness and addiction, arguing the new housing drew illicit drug use to the park.

Public safety concerns were also heightened after Jean McGuire, a 91-year-old civil rights pioneer who was the first Black woman elected to the Boston School Committee, [was stabbed multiple times](#) in the fall of 2022 while walking her dog at Franklin Park. McGuire survived but the assailant was never caught.

The BMC-led plan also drew criticism from some addiction treatment specialists, who argued that housing hundreds of patients in one location was not therapeutic and echoed the outdated practice of isolating people in large state institutions, disconnected from society and support networks.

The state's Executive Office of Health and Human Services said in a written statement to the Globe Wednesday that the earlier proposal, which would have [cost \\$550 million](#) is "no longer feasible," because the BMC-led coalition behind the project was not able to identify a viable funding model.

Meanwhile, the state will work to relocate the Shattuck's 268 medical and psychiatric beds to the [East Newton Pavilion](#), a large medical facility in Boston's South End that is under construction, in 2027.

Many residents still fear that the state seeks to transform the land beside the storied Franklin Park into a catchall repository for the city's intersecting struggles with homelessness, untreated mental illness, and addiction.

"We are not against services and supports, but we are against dumping people behind a treasured park," said Renee Stacey Welch, whose family has lived next to Franklin Park for five decades and is chair of the [Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council](#). "Who wants to live next to a community of active drug users?"

At Thursday's forum, tensions occasionally flared as residents and park lovers sparred with several advocates pushing for more housing for those battling addiction, with speakers sometimes shouting at each other across the room. The debate carried on in the high school parking lot long after the meeting adjourned. "Why do all these programs have to be concentrated near our park?" asked Shawn Nelson, a Roxbury resident, his frustration evident.

A community coalition representing some 600 residents living near Franklin Park came to Thursday's meeting armed with data and detailed maps of Boston's wards showing that their communities are shouldering a disproportionate share of the city's homeless housing.

Members of the coalition carefully combed through property records and identified 167 facilities in Boston that provide supportive housing for people with substance use disorders. They estimate that 70 percent of those facilities are located in the neighborhoods bordering Franklin Park. As a percentage of their population, Franklin Park's adjacent neighborhoods have nearly five times as many supportive housing units as predominantly white neighborhoods of Boston, they calculated.

Sarah Horsley, left, and Clare Louise Okalany listen to Louis Elisa's comment during a community forum at Brooke High School on Feb. 26. ANDREW BURKE-STEVENSON/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

"We are witnessing a new form of geographic redlining: the hyper-concentration of statewide social burdens in majority-minority neighborhoods," said Rory Coffey, a resident of Jamaica Plain and founder of the Coalition for Region Wide Services Beyond Franklin Park, [or CORES](#), which did the property analysis. "True equity means every community in the state acts as a partner in recovery, so no single corridor is forced to become a sacrifice zone."

Several members of a [separate community coalition](#) — which is calling for at least 200 units of supportive housing and substance use recovery services at the Shattuck site — also spoke up at the hearing. Wearing purple shirts saying "Our Neighbors Are Dying!," they described the toll of the overdose crisis and the critical shortage of long-term supports for people struggling to maintain their recovery.

Shameeka Moreno, an addiction counselor from Dorchester and member of the coalition, described how access to supportive housing could have prevented the overdose death in 2023 of her 43-year-old cousin, who had long struggled

with cocaine and alcohol addiction and was chronically homeless. “The number of people dying because they lack adequate support systems is astronomical,” Moreno said. “The situation is dire.”

Some of the community’s opposition to supportive housing is rooted in Franklin Park’s long history, and the way state and local officials have carved it up over time for various uses. Beyond the Shattuck Hospital, the park is home to a zoo, a large golf course and a city parks maintenance yard. And the city’s plan to [redevelop the aging White Stadium](#) in Franklin Park and turn it into a 10,000-seat stadium for a women’s professional soccer team, has conservationists concerned that it will lead to the removal of more than 100 trees from the park. Today, 40 percent of Franklin Park’s land is inaccessible for free public use, according to the [Emerald Necklace Conservancy](#), a nonprofit park stewardship group.

Former state senator Dianne Wilkerson, who lives a mile from Franklin Park in Dorchester, fondly remembers walking the park’s paths with her two young sons and taking in the vibrant colors of the annual Caribbean and kite festivals. On summer days, her children would fly their own kites and mingle with the men playing dominoes on the benches. “That park has always been central to this community, and we deserve a voice in shaping what happens here,” Wilkerson said.

State representative Chris Worrell, a Democrat from Dorchester, has been among those pushing for a statewide strategy for addressing the critical shortfall of supportive housing.

“We want beautiful things too,” Worrell said, referring to some of the ideas being floated for the Shattuck site. “It’s not that my community is against [supportive housing] – but we already are bearing the brunt of it.”

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