



Charles River Alliance of Boaters

Strategic Plan 2020

The purpose of CRAB is to provide communication between the boating clubs, boating programs, and boating based businesses operating on the Charles River, Boston, Cambridge, Watertown, and Newton Massachusetts, to improve boating safety for all boaters and to promote boating opportunities to the public.

The activities of CRAB shall be to coordinate multi-boathouse communication and events; to promote boating safety; to promote opportunities on the Charles River; to maintain and publicize the CRAB calendar of boating events on the Charles River; to encourage a cooperative boating environment among and for all boating disciplines using the Charles River; to participate in public processes of state agencies on construction projects and other events and issues that may impact boating on the Charles River; and to keep public officials and state agencies aware of boating concerns and activities.

- From the CRAB Articles of Organization, 2013.

Seven years ago, The Charles River Alliance of Boaters [CRAB] started a process to change from the ad-hoc group of long standing to become a more formal organization. We've made great progress. CRAB is now a 501(c)3 non-profit. CRAB continues to be the leader in setting guidelines and rules for people to use the river. CRAB led the charge to get a new depth chart of the Charles River Basin. The CRAB website gets more than 500 visitors a month looking for all sorts of information about the river. To better represent the needs and concerns of our community of river users, CRAB needs to continue on this path and increase its prominence in the community.

CRAB should be the primary voice for users of the river. This has never been more evident than during the planning of the Allston Multimodal Project. Many of the recent meetings and discussions on the MassDOT Allston Multimode Project involved other river organizations well before CRAB and the users of the river had an opportunity to weigh in. While the meetings with MassDOT at the Watertown YC and Community Rowing went well, it is disconcerting to realize that CRAB's involvement was a bit of an afterthought and a reflection of the lack of prominence of CRAB within the greater Boston community. While there are many organizations that advocate for the river, for the shoreline parks, or for a segment of the river community, CRAB is the only organization with a focus on the many users of the watershed.

To that end, the officers of CRAB are committed to the following improvements:

1. Better Communication.

CRAB has done a good job sending out notices to the network of point persons at each boathouse. This has included our weekly notices as well as more timely notices about changes or incidents on the river. Many boathouses do a good job forwarding those notices to their members. Unfortunately, many users of the river don't get the word. To augment our current communications, we have also established an email list-server for individuals to get notices directly from us. To subscribe to the CRAB Email List-Server, fill out this [form](#). Our notices will also be posted on CRAB's [Facebook page](#). And CRAB now has a Twitter presence [[@CharlesBoaters](#)].

2. Outreach to Every River Organization

CRAB is more robust when we try to involve every user and every organization on the river. That's a Big Tent philosophy. CRAB includes rowers, sailors, paddlers, motor boaters; private boathouses, college boathouses, public boathouses, and commercial operators. We're all in this together and we need to encourage every organization on the river to participate.

3. Outreach to Individual River Users

Beyond the river organizations, every user of the watershed should consider themselves a part of CRAB. While the majority of people using the river are rowers, the other users are just as important. Surprisingly, questions about fishing are among the most common internet searches leading to our website.

4. Annual Meeting for Everyone

The annual meeting of CRAB is held in November each year. As the principal meeting of the year, it should be attended by representatives of every river organization as well as individual users of the river. We need to do a better job of publicizing this meeting and to encourage better attendance. As part of the meeting, we need to elect (or at least, re-elect) officers annually, so that we develop a tradition of people taking their turn helping to run CRAB. A standing

nominating committee would be useful in this, by identifying potential new officers.

5. Increased Participation by the River Community

Much of what CRAB does happens because of the hard work of a small number of people. For many years, CRAB has glided along with the steady hand of a very small group of people. When some of those people left the area during the past two years, it was quite difficult to find replacements. It is unrealistic for CRAB to continue to function solely on the officers. CRAB needs to develop a larger pool of volunteers to carry out its mission. If you have the time and energy, please consider stepping up to the plate to donate some of your time.

6. New Survey of River Use

It's been several years since we measured how many people are using the watershed. The figure of 4000 rowers a day that we've been using is clearly out of date. This needs to be updated and expanded to include sailing and paddling so that the information can be used in discussions of how proposed changes might impact river users. A good first step would be to quantify membership and participation levels at each river boathouse. It would be nice to develop a heat map based on how many people use various sections of the river.

7. Governance

CRAB is run by volunteers and we don't see that changing. We should continue with our current governance model where each boathouse or organization selects a representative or point person to communicate with CRAB. This has served us well in the past and there is no reason to alter it. We do need to update who is representing each of the boathouses and organizations, as the current roster is quite out-of-date.

8. Membership and Supporters

CRAB is an odd organization in that membership is poorly defined. When CRAB first registered with the state and federal governments in 2013, there were a handful of clubs that put money up to hire a lobbyist for the DCR leases. In a very real sense, these clubs became the only formal members of CRAB. At the same time, this was a step away from the concept of the preceding ad-hoc organization that every boathouse on the river was a member. Fortunately, we have continued to make decisions based on input from anyone that attended meetings. As we work to more fully include all boathouses and organizations on the river, CRAB should explore the concept of annual membership for individuals and organizations. While CRAB doesn't have many financial needs, it does need some funds to cover its minimal expenses every year, and we have not had a mechanism to generate such modest funds. Perhaps as important is the need for a contact list of people. As the Allston Multimode Project approaches, it will be important to be able to marshal people to write letters regarding the impact of the project on the river users. Today, we can only do this through the representatives of the clubs and not directly to individuals. Not having a mailing list of individuals severely hampered our ability to raise funds to support the depth chart project. We should discuss the concept of both individual and organizational membership in CRAB, the benefits and the cost, and how it might affect our governance.

9. Encourage more use of CRAB Calendar

We need to encourage everyone to post their events on the CRAB Calendar so that it serves to notify everyone within the river community of events on the river. People have gotten out of the habit of posting events and we need to keep our eye on this once the COVID-19 restrictions are

eased.

10. Develop Partnerships to Improve River Ecology

We should develop partnerships with other organizations to improve the ecology of the river. Presently, cyanobacteria and invasive plant growth pose risks to boaters on the Charles River Basin. When feasible, we should work with organizations such as the Charles River Watershed Association, the Charles River Conservancy, and the MIT Sea Grant Program.

All of this is a healthy progression of the transition that we started seven years ago, moving CRAB from an ad-hoc affiliation to a more formal non-profit organization. CRAB is THE ORGANIZATION to speak for the thousands of people that use the river every year. We represent thousands of people that use the river. Let's work together to make our voices heard.

[Comments and suggestions](#) about the Strategic Plan are welcome.

Respectfully Submitted June 24, 2020