



PHOTOS BY TIM BRIGGS

PITCH-A-BLANKET TOOLKIT

PITCH A BLANKET TO SUPPORT YOUR PUBLIC RIGHT TO THE PEOPLE'S HARBOR

Once one of the dirtiest harbors in the country, Boston Harbor is today a national jewel. But now it faces new risks. With private development and corporate neglect threatening to wall off the harbor to all but the wealthy, and climate change endangering public health and safety, we must do more to protect Boston's waterfront areas.



How to Use This Toolkit

This toolkit provides you with resources to help you organize a public Pitch-a-Blanket gathering, from checklists to sample invitations and press releases.

Your right to access Boston Harbor and waterfront land is enshrined in the Public Waterfront Act, also known as Chapter 91. In recent years, private developers and their political allies have ignored the commitments required under the law, putting some waterfront areas at risk of becoming exclusive enclaves for the wealthy. In other communities, corporate and industrial neglect have led to waterfront areas being confined behind commercial and industrial development.

Conservation Law Foundation (CLF) is committed to protecting Boston Harbor – the People's Harbor – from these threats. One of the most effective ways that you can help, either as an individual or an organization, is by exercising your legal right to use waterfront areas. CLF has hosted several "Pitch-a-Blanket" gatherings along Boston's waterfront, but it's easy to host one on your own. It's also an important way to reclaim these public spaces. The more active the public space, the more likely we are to maintain a vibrant Boston Harbor for everyone.

GET STARTED

Here's what you will need to host a Pitch-a-Blanket gathering:

- ❑ **People:** Gather friends, family, coworkers (and, if you're an organization, recruit your members and constituents) to spend a few hours together near Boston's waterfront.

We are encouraging you to organize people to come out and exercise their rights by enjoying one of our many public spaces along the waterfront. But that shouldn't be done in a way that excludes others from using that same space at the same time. In fact, that's what we're fighting against. Our waterfront should be welcoming and inclusive to all, not closed off and exclusive. (If you want to host a formal event along the waterfront that is not open to the public at large, you can – you just need to request permits from the City of Boston and the state.)

- ❑ **Place:** Pick a spot near Boston's waterfront that is open to the public. A great resource for finding that information is at bostonharborwalk.org.

Make sure you check on any restrictions on the use of the area first – we want to exercise our rights, not defy the law. Also, because some public spaces along the waterfront can be reserved for private events, you may arrive at your chosen spot and not be able to legally access that spot at that time. So be sure to have a backup location in mind, just in case!

- ❑ **Date and time:** Boston's weather is ever-changing, so make sure to have a rain date chosen, too.
- ❑ **Fun and games:** Some of the open spaces along the waterfront are big enough for a game of bocce, corn hole, or even giant Jenga or checkers.
- ❑ **Food:** Bring some food and drink, but keep in mind that alcohol is prohibited in these areas. And you will not be allowed to bring a grill. But boxed lunches, pizza, and other food are fine to bring in. And make sure you clean up after your party.
- ❑ **Information:** It's important for your guests to understand why they are enjoying their time near Boston's waterfront. So make sure you explain to them why you are hosting the gathering and give them our handout [[see page 11](#)], which provides an overview of the issues at stake.



I HAVE EVERYTHING ON THE CHECKLIST. WHAT'S NEXT?

You've picked a date, time, and location – it's time to invite people to join you.

- ☐ Send them an email
- ☐ Call or text them
- ☐ Hit them up on social media
- ☐ Create a Facebook event
- ☐ Message them on Slack



There is no shortage of ways to let your friends know that you are organizing a Pitch-a-Blanket gathering. You'll know best how to reach your people. You will want to let them know two or three weeks in advance, then send them a couple of reminders.

Remember, your gathering doesn't need to include a lot of people – a picnic on the Public Green (or other public spaces near the Harbor) with two or three of your friends is enough to help activate that public space.



Here are some other ways to get people to pitch a blanket with you:

- ☐ If you are an organization supporting the effort to preserve public access, you may want to give the media a heads up that you are organizing a Pitch-a-Blanket gathering. We have created a sample media advisory and press release [\[see page 9\]](#) to help.
- ☐ Make sure to promote your gathering on social media – both before, during, and after it. The more people see on social media that the waterfront is active, the more likely they are to organize a fun gathering themselves. Create a Facebook event to promote it in advance. Use the hashtags #PeoplesHarbor and #PitchABlanket when you post about your gathering. Or you can use one of the sample social posts [\[see page 12\]](#) we've created.

And remember, your gathering should be open to the public and not just to your invitees. Your gathering shouldn't prevent other people from using that same space at the same time.

AT YOUR PITCH-A-BLANKET GATHERING

The weather's perfect, and you've attracted a great crowd (large or small). Now what?

First and foremost, have fun! The best way for people to begin to use the public spaces along the waterfront is to know that they can enjoy themselves there. So make sure to relax and have fun.

Then, be sure to:

- ❑ Tell your guests what's at stake if we don't claim our rights to access waterfront areas. Use our talking points ([see page 10](#)) as a guide, or speak from your own experience.
- ❑ Give your guests information about why you're all there. The handout we've provided ([see page 11](#)) gives a brief summary on what issues are at stake on the waterfront and what they can do to help this cause.
- ❑ Call on people to act. The only way we can continue to preserve public access and promote climate resiliency is for more and more residents to become engaged.
- ❑ Share what's happening. Post photos from the gathering on social media in real time. See our sample posts ([page 12](#)) as a starting place, and don't forget to use #PeoplesHarbor and #PitchABlanket as tags on your posts.

You have every right to enjoy your public spaces. However, if you are approached by security or police and asked to leave, we suggest that you leave peacefully. When you get home, please report it to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) at waterways@state.ma.us. Also, contact info@clf.org, and tell us about your experience.

AFTER YOUR GATHERING

You've pitched your blankets, played games, and had a great time. How can you keep your guests active after your gathering?

Follow up with a thank you email or text. Include a reminder about what's at stake and how your guests can stay informed. You can also post photos of your gathering on social media with calls to action.

Here are a few calls to action to get you started:

- ▶ Visit CLF's [People's Harbor page](#) to learn more about protecting public access and promoting climate resiliency when it comes to the waterfront.
- ▶ Know your rights! Learn more with CLF's [People's Guide to the Public Waterfront Act](#).
- ▶ Plan your own Pitch-a-Blanket gathering with [CLF's toolkit](#).
- ▶ Take the People's Harbor [pledge](#), and encourage your friends to take it, too!

You don't have to stop with just one gathering. Boston's waterfront areas are important public assets, and people should feel free to use these public spaces whenever they want. Consider developing a regular series of gatherings, even if it's just an evening out with a few friends or family members.

Together, we can make sure that Boston Harbor remains the vibrant public resource that it is meant to be. Thank you for helping us keep the People's Harbor in the hands of all the people, not just the privileged few.

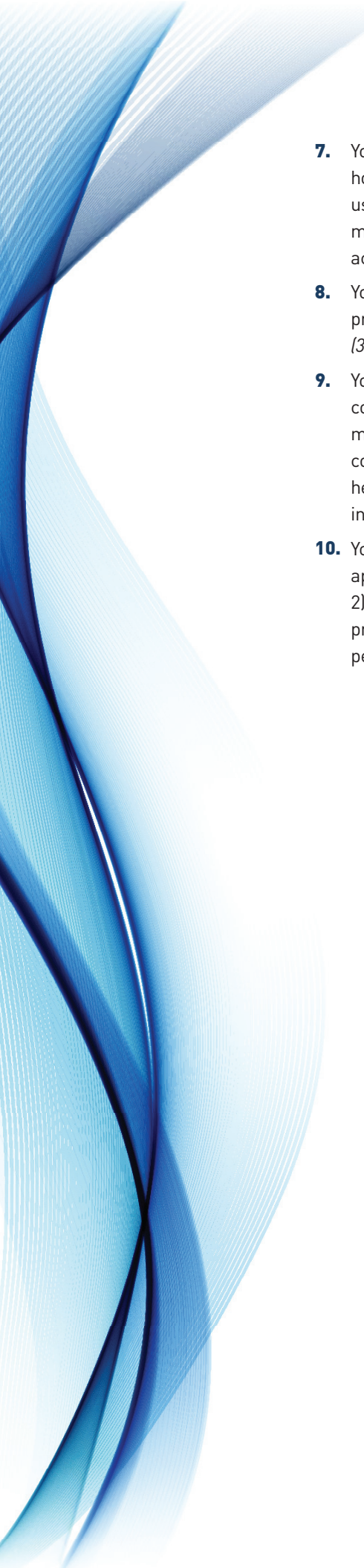
KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

The Massachusetts Public Waterfront Act ensures your right to access and use the Commonwealth's shores and the sea. When this principle was codified into Massachusetts law, it enshrined public rights that go beyond access to the water. You are guaranteed additional rights at sites licensed under the Public Waterfront Act and its regulations. Below is a summary of your rights on the waterfront. You can find more detailed information on each of these in CLF's [*People's Guide to the Public Waterfront Act*](#).

THE PUBLIC WATERFRONT ACT BILL OF RIGHTS

The following were compiled and paraphrased based on CLF's interpretation of the Public Waterfront Act (Chapter 91). Each of the rights below includes the relevant section(s) of the law in parentheses. For a more thorough and detailed summary of your rights, please consult the Public Waterfront Act directly.

1. You have the right to be provided with, and have free and unencumbered access to, public facilities and open spaces on the waterfront. The ground floors of most developments generally must be open to the public. This can be through retail stores, restaurants, or cultural centers, as required by the license. Developments may not place any structures that block your access to exterior open spaces or the Harborwalk. Owners cannot restrict access to public facilities in any way that contradicts the terms of their license or management plan, such as hours of operation or mandated uses. You are not required to pay a fee or make a purchase to access and use public open spaces (310 CMR 9.35, 9.51, 9.53).
2. You have the right to walk, pass freely, fish, and fowl on tidelands, unless the property's waterways license limits this activity or the state restricts access for public health and safety. Anyone can walk on and use private tidelands to fish and hunt birds. "Derivative" activities, such as birdwatching, may be allowed. You also have the right to walk on private tidelands or on an alternative passageway to reasonably exercise your rights (310 CR 9.35).
3. You have the right to demand that developments provide substantial public benefits and public purposes. Any private gains must be secondary to those public purposes and benefits (310 CMR 9.31).
4. You have the right to expect legible and clearly worded signs detailing the publicly accessible areas, permitted uses, and benefits provided by all licensed sites. Signs must include hours of operation, rules regulating the use of the facilities, the waterways license number(s), and where you can find a copy of the license (310 CMR 9.35).
5. You have the right to well-maintained and programmed public areas. All public facilities and outside open spaces must be maintained, well-lit, and cleared of snow and other obstructions. Many of them are also required to be programmed with activities and events that draw visitors year-round, as detailed in the property's waterways license and/or management plan. The site owner and MassDEP decide the nature and extent of programming, but it should attract the public and create interest in and use of the waterfront (310 CMR 9.51, 9.53).
6. You have the right to swim, float, boat, paddleboard, waterski, or use any watercraft on tideland waters seaward of the mean high-water line (called "flowed tidelands"). You have the right of free passage over and through the water without touching the bottom and, in Commonwealth tidelands, to walk on the bottom. You can also transport, load, and unload people or objects over all tidelands onto watercraft using a legal access point from the land (310 CMR 9.29, 9.35).

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- 7.** You have the right to use the shoreline for water-dependent activity. Most projects, such as a hotel, condo, or office buildings, must devote a reasonable portion of the lands to water-dependent use, including public access. Sites with a water-dependent use zone (as determined by the state) must provide at least one facility for that use (like a marina or fishing pier) and a pedestrian access network *(310 CMR 9.51, 9.52)*.
 - 8.** You have the right to view the waterways license or management plan at every Chapter 91 property. If it is not available online or at the site, you can contact MassDEP to ask for a copy *(310 CMR 9.53)*.
 - 9.** You have the right to meaningful participation in all Public Waterfront Act public hearings and comment processes. Public notice and comment opportunities in the affected city or town are mandatory for licensing any project on tidelands. Non-water-dependent projects, such as a hotel, condo, or office buildings, also require a public hearing. In addition, MassDEP may hold a public hearing on a water-dependent project at the agency's discretion or at the request of the municipality in which the project is located *(310 CMR 9.13)*.
 - 10.** You have the right to appeal a licensing decision made by MassDEP. Once a license has been approved, it can be appealed by either: 1) private parties who are aggrieved by the license or 2) a group of 10 Massachusetts residents, five of whom must live in the city or town where the project is proposed. To appeal a decision, you must have participated in the public comment period for the project at issue *(310 CMR 9.17)*.

SAMPLE EMAILS

INVITATION

Did you know that Massachusetts law grants each of us the right to use open spaces on Boston's waterfront? Join us as we exercise that right and celebrate the Boston waterfront's public spaces on [DAY, DATE] at the [LOCATION].

CELEBRATE BOSTON'S PUBLIC SPACES
[DATE] | [TIME]
[LOCATION]

Pack a picnic, pitch a blanket, and enjoy games with friends and neighbors (and learn more about your rights along Boston's waterfront, too!). It's only by actively using our public spaces that we can ensure Boston Harbor remains vibrant and accessible to all – the People's Harbor we all deserve.

Let us know you're coming! Sign up for this free public gathering here. *[NOTE: Create a signup page if you want people to RSVP in advance. Otherwise, leave this out.]*

We'll look forward to seeing you there.

THANK YOU EMAIL AFTER YOUR GATHERING

More than [XX] people from across Boston joined us at [LOCATION] on [DATE] to celebrate Boston's public spaces. We heard from many others who couldn't join us but were with us in spirit.

Thank you. Together, we are showing what a vibrant, welcoming waterfront for all really means.

But we can't stop now. Our waterfront remains under threat. We won't let developers privatize our public spaces. And we won't let them ignore their responsibility to prepare for the climate impacts we know are coming.

Here's how you can help:

1. **Know Your Rights.** Put your public rights into action when a new development is proposed on the waterfront. [Download this guide to learn how.](#)
2. **Show Up.** Pack a picnic, grab a blanket, and enjoy our public waterfront spaces. It's by actively exercising our rights that we can best protect them. [This online toolkit can help.](#)
3. **Pledge to protect the People's Harbor.** Boston Harbor belongs to us all. [Sign our pledge](#) to show your support for creating a welcoming waterfront for all.

Thank you for taking action and for supporting our fight for the People's Harbor.

SAMPLE MEDIA ADVISORY

Send this to reporters a few days before your gathering date.

[ORGANIZATION LOGO]

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact:

[NAME]

[PHONE]

[EMAIL]

[ORGANIZATION] to Pitch a Blanket to Preserve Public Access to Boston's Waterfront and Promote Climate Resiliency

WHO: ORGANIZATION NAME

WHEN: DATE
TIME

WHERE: LOCATION NEAR WATERFRONT

WHAT: [ORGANIZATION] will host a Pitch-a-Blanket gathering at [LOCATION, DATE, AND TIME] to preserve public access to Boston Harbor and the waterfront and to promote climate resiliency.

The public's right to access Boston Harbor and waterfront land is enshrined in the Public waterfront Act, also known as Chapter 91. In recent years, private developers and their political allies have ignored the commitments required under the law, putting the Waterfront at risk of becoming an exclusive enclave for the wealthy. At the same time, these developers have also neglected to make their new buildings climate resilient or to work with elected officials to create more resilient open spaces.

This Pitch-a-Blanket gathering, modeled after gatherings held annually by Conservation Law Foundation, will highlight the need to protect the rights of the public to access Boston Harbor and the waterfront and to create a more resilient waterfront in the face of climate change.

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[ORGANIZATION BOILERPLATE]

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

Send this to reporters the day after your gathering.

[ORGANIZATION LOGO]

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact:

[NAME]

[PHONE]

[EMAIL]

[IMAGE FROM PITCH-A-BLANKET GATHERING]

[ORGANIZATION] Pitched a Blanket to Preserve Public Access to Boston's Waterfront

DATE, Boston, Mass. – [ORGANIZATION] hosted a Pitch-a-Blanket gathering at [LOCATION] to preserve public access to Boston Harbor and the waterfront and to promote climate resiliency. Attendees advocated for developers to work with public officials to create more resilient open spaces and build structures that can withstand flooding and climate impacts.

[QUOTE FROM ORGANIZATION LEADER *(feel free to personalize)*: "Boston Harbor belongs to everyone, and it especially belongs to those who worked long and hard to pay for its cleanup. We are here today to make sure that not only the wealthy enjoy this important public asset, but that all [MASSACHUSETTS] residents do," said X from X ORGANIZATION. "We are happy to be part of the movement to protect the People's Harbor, preserve public access, and promote more climate resilient neighborhoods."]

The public's right to access Boston Harbor and waterfront land is enshrined in the Public Waterfront Act, also known as Chapter 91. In recent years, private developers and their political allies have ignored the commitments required under the law, putting the waterfront at risk of becoming an exclusive enclave for the wealthy.

In particular, communities of color feel they have limited access to the Seaport – according to one 2019 survey, only 6 percent of Boston's Black residents felt welcome in the Seaport. At the same time, developers have also neglected to make their new buildings climate resilient or to work with elected officials to create more resilient open spaces.

[QUOTE FROM PARTICIPANT AT GATHERING *(sample quote)*: "Boston Harbor is beautiful, and I was so happy to be able to experience the waterfront," said X, a participant at the gathering. "I didn't realize how much open space there is in the waterfront or that I could come out here every day to use this public space. I will be coming back and bringing my friends, because everyone should be able to enjoy this neighborhood."]

This Pitch-a-Blanket gathering, modeled after gatherings held annually by Conservation Law Foundation, highlighted the need to protect the rights of the public to access Boston Harbor and the waterfront and to create a more resilient waterfront in the face of climate change.

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[ORGANIZATION BOILERPLATE]

AT THE GATHERING: SUGGESTED TALKING POINTS

Pitch-a-Blanket gatherings are designed to bring awareness to the fact that the public has as much of a right to access and enjoy Boston Harbor – the People’s Harbor – as those who live in the Seaport’s pricey condominiums and work in its towering office buildings. As important, these gatherings highlight the fact that Boston’s waterfront is vulnerable to the ravages of climate change – and that there is much more we can do to make Boston and waterfront communities more resilient.

Below are the key takeaways that anyone attending your Pitch-a-Blanket gathering should come away with:

- The public’s right to access Boston Harbor and waterfront land is enshrined in the Public Waterfront Act, also known as Chapter 91. But in recent years, private developers and their political allies have ignored the commitments required under the law, putting some of the waterfront at risk of becoming an exclusive enclave for the wealthy.
- Other parts of the waterfront have been walled off behind industrial and commercial development through corporate and industrial neglect.
- We know that communities of color feel they have limited access to the Seaport neighborhood – according to a 2019 CLF survey, only 6 percent of Boston’s Black residents felt welcome there.
- At the same time, developers have neglected to make new buildings resilient in the face of rising waters and extreme weather caused by climate change.
- The public spaces near Boston’s Waterfront belong to everyone here. Residents of Massachusetts paid to clean up Boston Harbor, which helped it to become the tremendous public asset that it is today. We’re here today to make sure that these spaces are activated and active for everyone, not just those living and working nearby.
- We’re also here to highlight how vulnerable waterfront areas are to the impacts of climate change. We know that the Seaport and other neighborhoods are at risk from the flooding, intense storms, high winds, and driving rains that will come with climate change.
- For example, more than 13 acres of open space within the Seaport will be vulnerable to flooding by the end of the century. Developers and officials need to do more to ensure that these buildings and open spaces are made more resilient so that public health and safety across Boston and neighboring communities are preserved.
- Boston’s Downtown, East Boston, and Dorchester are all in the process of redeveloping their waterfront areas. We must work to ensure that the waterfront in those neighborhoods is open and welcoming to all and both the open space and buildings there are built for resiliency.

What can you do?

- ▶ Visit CLF’s [People’s Harbor page](#) to learn more about protecting public access and promoting climate resiliency when it comes to the waterfront.
- ▶ Know your rights! Learn more with the [People’s Guide to the Public Waterfront Act](#).
- ▶ Plan your own Pitch-a-Blanket gathering with CLF’s [Pitch-a-Blanket toolkit](#).
- ▶ Take the People’s Harbor [pledge](#), and encourage your friends to take it, too!

SAMPLE FLIER TO HAND OUT AT YOUR GATHERING

BOSTON HARBOR IS THE PEOPLE'S HARBOR

Boston Harbor and the Waterfront Belong to You. You Have the Right to Access Them.

The public's right to access Boston Harbor and waterfront land is enshrined in the Public Waterfront Act, also known as Chapter 91. But in recent years, private developers and their political allies have ignored the commitments required under the law, putting the waterfront at risk of becoming an exclusive enclave for the wealthy. And we know that communities of color in particular feel they have limited access to the waterfront – according to a CLF survey, only 6 percent of Boston's Black residents felt welcome in the Seaport.

THE WATERFRONT IS NOT READY FOR CLIMATE CHANGE

Boston's Seaport is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change – more than 13 acres of open space, including Fan Pier, are in danger of flooding due to rising seas. But some developers who are trying to limit public access to the waterfront have neglected to make their new buildings climate resilient or to work with elected officials to create more resilient open spaces.

THE DANGER IS TO MORE THAN THE SEAPORT

Boston's Downtown, East Boston, and Dorchester are all in the process of redeveloping their waterfront areas. We must work to ensure that the waterfront in those neighborhoods is open and welcoming to all and that both the open space and buildings there are built for resiliency. No home or business should be threatened by flooding because condominiums or workplaces were built without climate adaptation measures in place.

How Can I Help?

- ▶ Support the people's rights to access Boston Harbor and the waterfront.
- ▶ Speak up to ensure buildings along the waterfront are prepared for climate impacts to protect public health and safety.
- ▶ Get out and enjoy your public spaces along the waterfront – and invite your family and friends to join you!

But What Can I Do?

- ▶ Visit CLF's [People's Harbor page](#) to learn more about protecting public access and promoting climate resiliency when it comes to the waterfront.
- ▶ Know your rights! Learn more with the [People's Guide to the Public Waterfront Act](#).
- ▶ Plan your own Pitch-a-Blanket gathering with CLF's [Pitch-a-Blanket toolkit](#).
- ▶ Take the People's Harbor [pledge](#), and encourage your friends to take it, too!

SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

Hashtags to keep in mind:

1. #PitchABlanketDay
2. #PeoplesHarbor
3. #Seaport
4. #MaPoli (Use sparingly, only when discussing legislation)
5. #BosPoli (Use sparingly, only when discussing development and local policy)

SAMPLE POSTS

Before your gathering:

- We're reclaiming our space from developers and private interests on Boston's waterfront. Join us for #PitchABlanketDay on [DATE] to claim the #PeoplesHarbor for the public! [LINK]
- Boston's waterfront belongs to the people by law – but corporate entities and developers would have us believe otherwise. Join us to reclaim this public space on #PitchABlanketDay: [LINK TO GATHERING PAGE]
- Ever feel out of place in the #Seaport? Us too. But Boston's waterfront belongs to the public by law – and we're coming together on #PitchABlanketDay to reclaim that space. Join us: [LINK TO GATHERING PAGE]

At your gathering:

- The #Seaport doesn't belong to developers or corporate entities – our waterfront belongs to US. We're reclaiming this public space on Boston Harbor at #PitchABlanketDay.
- No Bostonian should ever be made to feel out of place in public spaces like Boston's waterfront. We're reclaiming the #PeoplesHarbor as the people's space it was meant to be. #PitchABlanketDay
- Boston's failure to create a neighborhood that is accessible and welcoming to all in the #Seaport won't stop us from reclaiming our public space. We have a legal right to enjoy our waterfront, and we're here to do that today. #bospoli #PitchABlanketDay
- Bostonians paid the price to clean up America's dirtiest harbor – and we should be allowed to enjoy it, no matter where we're from or how much money we make. It's our legal right to take up space along the #PeoplesHarbor!
- Boston's waterfront is vulnerable to rising seas and increased storms from climate change – and we need to make sure that this public resource is preserved and developed so that the people can enjoy it for years to come. #PeoplesHarbor

After your gathering:

- Did you know that Boston's waterfront belongs to the people by law? We set out to reclaim this space for the public on #PitchABlanketDay – and here's how we're pushing for inclusive public spaces moving forward: [LINK]
- Boston's waterfront belongs to the people, not the highest bidder. We exercised our rights to our public spaces on the #PeoplesHarbor on #PitchABlanketDay: [LINK]