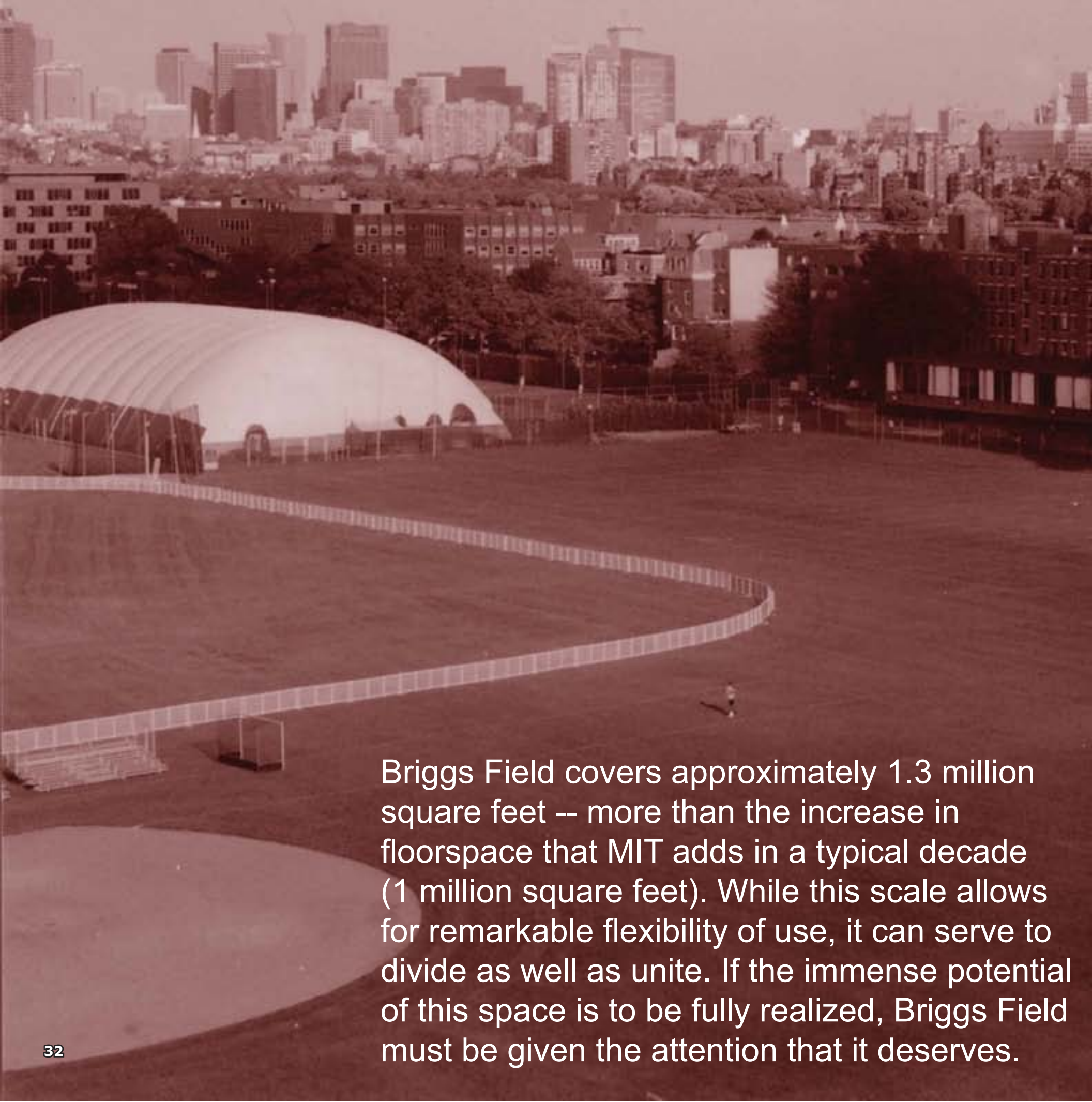
Briggs Field(s)



Briggs Field covers approximately 1.3 million square feet -- more than the increase in floorspace that MIT adds in a typical decade (1 million square feet). While this scale allows for remarkable flexibility of use, it can serve to divide as well as unite. If the immense potential of this space is to be fully realized, Briggs Field must be given the attention that it deserves.

Amidst the densely-built urban forms of Cambridge and Boston, the massive scale of Briggs Field is particularly striking. At times, however, the vastness of the Field can be daunting and uninviting, overwhelming potential users. This tendency is particularly strong during Boston's extensive winter months, when Briggs Field stands as an open expanse of windswept tundra.

Potential users of Briggs Field must also negotiate the barriers that line its edges. Separated from its neighbors by chain-link fences and tall hedges, Briggs Field has little relation to anything outside its clearly-defined boundaries. Without connections to its surrounding neighborhoods, the Field is essentially an isolated object, disconnected from both the remainder of the MIT campus and accessible via larger neighborhood open space and recreation networks.

The seclusion of Briggs Field runs counter to one of MIT's cherished values: universal access to and participation in athletic or recreational activity. Historically, MIT's focus on accessibility has led to decisions to both maintain existing facilities and locate new facilities as close as possible to the heart of West Campus. However, the recent construction of MIT graduate dorms along Albany Street and Pacific Street has started to exert an outward pull upon this center of gravity.

As MIT's development continues to spread outward, some degree of redistribution of field space may be necessary or beneficial to ensure that athletics and recreational opportunities remain convenient and accessible to these new residences. Such redistribution would also increase the accessibility of MIT's fieldspace to the broader Cambridgeport community.

Boundary

Existing conditions

Volume

To the average person, the name MIT is more likely to bring to mind images of science and technology than athletics and recreation. However, in contrast to its "academics-only" image, MIT is actually a very athletically-oriented campus. MIT students take part in 42 intercollegiate varsity sport programs -- the largest number of NCAA-sponsored programs in the nation. In addition to varsity athletics, MIT also fields club teams in over 40 sports and intramural teams in over 20 sports. 1 in 5 MIT undergraduates competes in at least one varsity sport, and the majority takes part in intramural club sports at some point on campus.

MIT meets the extensive needs of these sports and activities through the use of both indoor and outdoor athletic facilities. The bulk of outdoor non-aquatic athletics and recreational activities take place on Briggs Field. To maintain the maximum flexibility for athletic use, the Field is largely unstructured. Apart from the football stadium, a turf field, tennis facilities, and baseball and softball backstops, the remainder of the Field is left as open grass, none of which is designated for the use of any particular sport. Field usage is regulated largely by a system of scheduling and reservations, and individual teams provide their own equipment.

Briggs Field serves a number of purposes beyond athletics, such as providing expansive views for surrounding buildings. Another commonly overlooked benefit of Briggs Field is its capacity to act as a reserve for future MIT development. Such development could take place either above-ground (academic or residential buildings) or below (underground structured parking). In fact, the Field's potential to allow for a vast, relatively cost-effective parking lot may in the long-term prove to be its greatest strength.

Any design strategy that addresses Briggs Field should and its surrounding environment must include the following crucial components:

>Connection. Through connection to its surroundings, the Field changes from an isolated object into a part of a larger network of open space, recreation, and pedestrian movement. This transition also positions Briggs Field to serve as an amenity for the greater Cambridgeport community.

>Subdivision. By restructuring the layout of playing areas and creating a hierarchy of spaces, Briggs Field's currently overwhelming scale can be reduced to more manageable proportions.

To maximize athletic and recreational accessibility, any design strategy should also give consideration to the potential for redistribution of some field space into the surrounding Cambridgeport neighborhood.

Possibilities

>Improvement of crossings at Ft. Washington Park to create a Cambridgeport 'entrance' to MIT
>Removal of fences and hedges surrounding Briggs field to brings dorms 'into' the field
>Installation of consistent and attractive street trees along Vassar Street and Amherst Alley, as well as at key points of connection to other pedestrian networks
>Reorganization of Briggs field along a landscaped outdoor 'extension' of the infinite corridor.
>Create north-south connection across fields joining Burton-Connor and Simmons Hall
>Interchanging the locations of Steinbrenner Memorial Stadium and the Jack Berry Turf Field to maximize efficiency of land use.
>Insertion of parking garages beneath Briggs field in order to facilitate the development of surface parking.
>Relocation of the tennis courts and tennis bubble to a new tennis center built on the Westgate parking lot.
>Creation of a new playing field in place of the parking lot located to the southeast of the Sidney-Pacific dormitory
>New at-grade railroad pedestrian crossing at the intersection of Sidney and Pacific streets

Design strategies

connecting

restructuring

synthesizing

redistributing