

City of Newton



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Community Preservation Committee

APPROVED MINUTES

April 11, 2023

The virtual meeting was held online on Tuesday, April 11, 2023, beginning at 7:00 P.M. Community Preservation Committee (CPC) members present included Mark Armstrong, Dan Brody, Eliza Datta, Byron Dunker, Susan Lunin, Robert Maloney, Jennifer Molinsky and Judy Weber. Committee Member Martin Smargiassi was not present for the meeting. Community Preservation Program Manager Lara Kritzer was also present and served as recorder.

Chair Jennifer Molinsky opened the Community Preservation Committee's public meeting and introduced the CPC members present at this time.

Athletic Fields Improvements Plan Construction Phase Public Hearing

Ms. Molinsky began with an overview of the proposal project and its scope. She noted that the \$9.2 million requested from CPC funding does not include the area proposed for a future synthetic turf field and explained that CPA funding could not be used under the State enabling legislation to purchase artificial turf. She stated that she understood the concern in the community about the potential artificial turf field in this location but reiterated that it was not included in the current proposal.

Department of Parks and Recreation Commissioner Nicole Banks introduced the project and noted that the other representatives for the project, Director of Parks and Open Space Luis Perez Demorizi and Chief Operating Officer Jonathan Yeo. She explained that they were asking for funding to restore and rehabilitate three playing field sites – Albemarle Park, McGrath Park, and the Burr School Fields. She explained that this work is part of a larger project to meet the needs of the community and also included pedestrian and walking paths, benches, and stormwater retention areas. She noted that they were also doing other work throughout the City including new lighting at the Newton South and Newton North fields. The City was also investing in all of its existing grass fields and has worked to increase its operating funds to provide more maintenance, in part by increasing fees. She explained that they wanted to note this work to show that there is a plan in place to care for the new fields as well as the City's existing ones.

Mr. Demorizi explained that over the last three years, their department has worked to improve and increase the number of available fields and noted the groups and individuals who had been involved with that work. He reviewed the project, the criteria they had used to develop in at the goals of their department that they were working hard to address with this work. He then explained how they had

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developed their overall plan and their objectives, including looking at staffing and maintenance needs. The goals and objectives had been developed to consider how they could improve staffing, the overall sustainability of their programs and sites, increase their accessibility, and create more equitable parks. Mr. Demorizi also showed a map of the City showing the lighting and other field project work completed to date.

Mr. Demorizi explained that the proposal included work on Phase I of Albemarle Park. He showed a map of the area and explained that the amount of grass in this area was challenging as the north section of the park was irrigated but the center of the park was not. While the Phase I work was primarily focused on the northern half of the park, some of this work would help the south side with new wells and other infrastructure improvements. Mr. Demorizi showed a plan of the new park with the new Gath Pool, repositioned courts, and new locations for the fields and light fixtures. He stated that there would be new multi-use pathways and lighting along the spine of the park and explained how much of the existing lighting was no longer operational. He also showed how the fields would be repositioned to avoid spring sport conflicts and to provide a larger uninterrupted multipurpose field. Mr. Demorizi noted how the project would work around those existing fields that did not need work at this time and would avoid disturbance where possible. He reviewed the connections and locations of the pathways and the scopes of both Phase I and Phase 2 work on the site as well as the types and locations of the different fields, tennis and pickle ball courts. In addition to the new lighting in the north half of the site, they were also proposing to install new furniture and gateway features and would install more trees where possible along the walkways.

Mr. Demorizi reviewed the anticipated lifespan of the assets at Albemarle Park as well as the timeline for the proposed work. He explained that they wanted to continue to work on the plans and on permitting with the Conservation Commission through the summer and fall of this year in order to be ready to begin construction in the summer or fall of 2024.

At the Burr School, the existing usable fields took up only a small portion of the available site. Mr. Demorizi explained that by improving and leveling this site they could increase the amount of useable space here to include a full size soccer/lacrosse field. The project would also include a new perimeter pathway and they planned to relocate and add new trees around the field and to install a new rain garden. Mr. Demorizi showed a table detailing the assets life cycle for improvements at this site as well.

Mr. Demorizi next explained that for McGrath Park they planned to improve the existing recreation amenities and expand its opportunities for use. The project would remove the underutilized ball field and replace it with a full-size multipurpose fields while also improving the other fields on the site. The project would improve the existing fencing and naturalize areas outside of the new pathway system as well. He presented a table with the life cycle of the new assets for McGrath Park as well.

Mr. Demorizi stated that the current construction budget for Albemarle Park was \$6.3 million, which did not include a potential synthetic turf field which was under consideration for the site separately from this project. McGrath Park was estimated at \$765,000 and the Burr School Fields at \$1.5 million. Mr. Demorizi reviewed the breakdown of these expenses and noted that the full construction and design costs came to just over \$9 million with \$8,575,424.52 in construction costs and \$524,362

in additional design costs. He added that this was slightly less than the amount in the pre-proposal materials as Mr. Yeo and Mr. Brody had found errors in the original spreadsheet.

Mr. Demorizi explained the department planned to move forward with Burr and McGrath immediately and to do Albemarle Park in 2024. He noted that the next step was to evaluate and finalize the plans for construction. He explained that sustainability was also part of the project as the new light fixtures would be dark sky friendly with minimal light spillage and improved performance. The project was also looking at stormwater management both in how water infiltrated through the fields as well as by providing more natural landscaping around the sites. Mr. Demorizi explained that the sites would include no mow areas as well as turf banks. He also explained how other improvements, such as the department's new GPS programmed lining machine, were increasing the efficiency of their programs as the new machine could now line a field in 20 minutes with just two staff members. Lastly, he added that they hoped to repurpose 500 cubic yards of structural fill already located on park department land for the Burr School Fields.

Ms. Molinsky asked what was left in the project to be designed. Mr. Demorizi answered that the current design fee will get the project to the 90% design point for McGrath and Burr and that the additional design costs will cover geotechnical borings for Albemarle Park and exploratory work for the wells and lighting. Mr. Maloney thanked Mr. Demorizi and Commissioner Banks for the presentation and asked to confirm if there would only be one baseball diamond at Albemarle Park. Mr. Demorizi answered yes that they were improving two existing ones but that only the large one would be reconstructed as it was also being reoriented to avoid conflicts with the surrounding fields. He added that they would be working around the second field to install new amenities but would otherwise be leaving it in place. Mr. Maloney urged the applicants to take care in choosing a contractor based on his experiences with the little league. Commissioner Banks stated that they were also looking at the safety buffer zones surrounding these fields and how to reconfigure the sites to better achieve them.

Ms. Molinsky opened the discussion to the public at this time. Cedar Pruitt, 2 Wyoming Street, stated that she was at Albemarle Park every day and was the president of the Friends of Albemarle which she helped to start in 2021. She encouraged the CPC to invest in Albemarle Park and appreciated the incredible work that had been done so far. She supported the project and thought that it was looking at ways to support all users while also being conscious of the wetlands and brook. She thought that it was great that this design was supporting walkers and bikes and would relate to many users and a diverse community.

Barbara Brousal-Glaser, 20 Albemarle Avenue, stated that she was excited by these improvements. She noted the woods and wetlands areas in the project and the importance of naturalizing these areas. She also noted that CPA funding could not be used to fund artificial turf and believed that this was because of its negative impacts. She knew this was a great project but would like the City to take away the artificial turf field which she felt was bad. She noted that the lifespan of the artificial turf field was only 10 years while a grass field could last 30 years.

Bara Litman, 59 Brookside Avenue, stated that the presentation had been interesting and that she was very concerned with the use of synthetic turf in the neighborhood. William Hartrant thanked Mr. Demorizi and Commissioner Banks for their work and spoke in support of the long overdue

improvements at these sites. He also noted the lack of lighting and the deterioration of the existing softball facilities. Mr. Maloney moved to close the public hearing. Mr. Brody seconded the motion which passed by unanimous vote.

Ms. Molinsky suggested that if the question was no longer whether or not to fund the project, then the next question was what amount should be funded through bonds and what amount through direct funding. She noted that the Committee had previously spoken with CFO Maureen Lemieux and confirmed that she was comfortable seeing up to \$5 million of work on this project authorized for a 15 year bond. Members discussed this option and the appropriate amount to be bonded and/or spent from existing CPA funds.

Ms. Datta asked the Parks and Recreation Department about the funding sources to be used for this project aside from the \$9 million requested from the CPA fund. Mr. Demorizi answered that the project would also use City ARPA and budget funds, staff time, CDBG funding, and donations from the Newton Little League and other team sports. Ms. Datta asked how they proposed to fund the synthetic turf portion of the project. Mr. Demorizi responded that this was not fully defined yet and that they were working with the Mayor's Office to identify that funding source. Ms. Molinsky asked what would be done there if synthetic turf was not installed here. Mr. Demorizi stated that the field would remain grass and that they would just protect the existing field surface during the construction on the site if there was no change. He added that the CDBG, ARPA, and earmarked funds were already secured and in place and that it was just the synthetic turf field funding which had yet to be determined. Ms. Weber asked to confirm that the applicants had all of the project funding in place with the exception of the synthetic turf field. Commissioner Banks confirmed that it was.

Ms. Molinsky said that with the exception of the potential synthetic turf, the CPC had heard nothing but support for this project. She added that she thought that this was a good project and use of CPA funds. Mr. Brody stated that his initial reaction to the synthetic turf was similar to many of the comments mentioned during tonight's meeting. He noted that much of the project proposed work that he supported and suggested that the motion to recommend funds also urge the City Council to study the issues raised about synthetic turf before they approve any funding. He was glad that the CPC was not being asked to fund that portion of the project and would prefer that the Committee vote to support the project but add the strong recommendation that the synthetic turf be studied. Ms. Weber asked whether there were studies and information easily available on this issue. Mr. Dunker asked if it would hold up the project to request that a study be completed. Mr. Demorizi stated that they would be able to keep going as the consultant would block off this area on the plan and if the synthetic turf was not funded, then they would leave the grass field in place.

Mr. Maloney asked to confirm that the synthetic turf field was separate from the current project. Ms. Molinsky answered yes, that the \$9 million requested from CPA funds was entirely for work separate from that field. Commissioner Banks stated that they would be moving forward with discussions on this issue with the City Council in late May/early June. She thought that what the Committee was looking for was already taking place and asked that they not hold up the funding to the project for further discussions on the turf. Ms. Molinsky reviewed the order of the additional reviews required for the project before construction could begin.

Mr. Brody read his suggested text for the CPC's recommendation and stated that he did not believe that this would hold up the rest of the project in any way. Ms. Datta felt like the CPC was being asked to fund a plan for everything except the turf as that was a separate project and its future was based on the City Council's review. Mr. Demorizi noted that their proposed layout would work with or without the synthetic turf field and agreed that the synthetic turf was reliant on other City Council funding. Commissioner Banks noted that the City Council had already asked for a study and analysis on these fields before this meeting. Ms. Weber asked whether it was appropriate for the CPC to comment on the synthetic turf fields when it was not part of the CPA funding request. Mr. Brody thought that it was the CPC's responsibility to let the City Council know that the Committee had received many letters of concern from the public. Mr. Dunker agreed with Mr. Brody but thought that the City Council was already working on this process anyway. Ms. Molinsky thought that if the CPC was not being asked to fund the work, then its use was better explored by other City committees and bodies. She did share the concerns of those who had written to the CPC and thought that it was fair to say that there was a lot of concern in the community about its use. Commissioner Banks believed an item had already been docketed to discuss synthetic turf concerns including safety.

Ms. Molinsky suggested that the Committee take a straw vote on the project funding. Members discussed the possibility of bonding \$5 million of the requested funds and taking the rest from existing reserves. Ms. Molinsky noted that based on a projected 5% interest rate, the expense would be at its highest in FY25 with roughly 15% of annual revenue going toward Recreation debt payments for both this and the Gath Pool projects. Mr. Yeo stated that it was more likely that the bond would be at the 4% range. Ms. Datta asked if it would make a difference to bond the project for 30 rather than 15 years. Mr. Yeo thought that it would still be in that interest range, noting that a recent 30 year bond had been issued at 2.93%. He added that Ms. Lemieux liked to use 4% as a conservative estimate and noted that it might be higher for 30 years but should be close to this for 15 years. He thought the estimated average used here worked well for the CPC's purposes.

Ms. Molinsky shared her screen to show a graph projecting the estimated percentage of the CPA annual funds that the two funding recommendations would use. She noted that the projects would be at their highest point, approximately 15%, in FY25 and that the percentage of CPA funding used would drop sharply after FY39. Mr. Brody stated that these projects were anticipated to use 5-6% of the total revenue on average over a thirty year period and that it seemed like a reasonable amount to use on their highest priority projects. Ms. Weber asked about the amount of Recreation spending over time. It was noted that this is the first time that that the City has come in for fields work. Mr. Brody noted that Recreation was different from the other funding categories as the largest spender would always be the Parks and Recreation Commission. Commissioner Banks noted that they had also done Open Space projects recently including Levingston Cove and Waban Reservoir. She thought that this project balanced out that work and would still allow them to look at other projects as well. She also noted that the Forte Park lights were already funded, that the department was working on maintenance improvements for the Brown and Oak Hill Fields, and that Braceland Park would probably be their next big project. Mr. Yeo stated that knowing how much Recreation funding is left, they would be conscious of looking for matching fund from other sources whenever possible. Ms. Datta thought that the question of leveraging the CPA funds is important. She thought that they were fortunate to have the ability to bond and noted that this would be a significant investment in the City's resources. She thought that they needed to consider the amount of bondable work to be done

and the amount of cash to be allocated as this would significantly draw down the amount of CPA funding now in reserve.

Mr. Maloney noted that the Weeks Fields were well used back when he was coaching there and asked what condition they were in. Mr. Demorizi answered that Weeks was one of their top sites for maintenance improvements and had received help and advocacy from youth soccer. Commissioner Banks noted that the grass fields needed continuous investment as well as ongoing treatments and overseeding and how they were focusing on this work at 13 sites throughout the City.

Mr. Brody thought that to Ms. Datta's point, the CPA program had underspent in recent years on Recreation projects based on their funding target. Now that these projects were coming forward, he thought that they were fortunate to have the funds available for the work needed. He added that if the CPC wanted to bring the Recreation category projects up to the 20% target, then the proposed \$4 million in cash allocations would do it. Other members agreed that the Committee was in a good position to fund these projects at this time. Ms. Molinsky noted the difference between what the CPA program had spent and what it had committed to date. Members reviewed the current figures in the Finances At A Glance document and noted that there was approximately \$8.2 million available at this time.

Ms. Molinsky believed that the CPC could expend the requested cash and still have a healthy funding balance remaining, and that even with the bonds that the program would be under its funding targets in the future. Mr. Maloney asked Mr. Brody about the availability of the funds in FY24 and FY25. Mr. Brody explained that the proposed bonding would have no impact on the program's FY24 budget as the bond would not be issued until mid FY24 and would not begin repayment until FY25. Mr. Brody moved to recommend the full funding of the proposal as submitted according to the recommendation as drafted in the meeting packet on page 53 with \$5 million of the project funding to come from a 15 year bond and the remainder from existing program funds. Ms. Weber seconded the motion. Ms. Molinsky asked that the recommendation also note the concerns expressed for the health impacts of synthetic turf and the Committee Members agreed. The motion unanimously passed with a vote of 8 to 0.

Councilor Malakie expressed her concern with the review process for the fields. She thought that the CPC was the one entity with the leverage to prevent the use of synthetic turf and asked the Committee to write a good letter to the Council. She stated that she had tried to docket another item on this topic and had been shot down and was concerned with the attitude on this issue.

Review and Approval of Length of Bond for Gath Pool Project

It was noted that the Gath Pool project had been reviewed by Ms. Lemieux since the last meeting and that she had agreed that a 30 year bond would be appropriate for the work to be done there. Members discussed the possible terms for the previously approved bond for this project and agreed that a 30 year bond would be appropriate. Ms. Datta moved to recommend that the Gath Pool project be approved for bonding for a period of 30 years. Ms. Datta seconded the motion and all voted in favor.

Approval of FY24 Budget for CPA Administrative Funds

Copies of the proposed FY24 budget had been sent out to members prior to the meeting. Ms. Kritzer reviewed the proposed budget and the changes in the budget since FY23 at this time. Ms. Weber moved to approve the budget as drafted. Mr. Armstrong seconded the motion and all voted in favor.

Status Report and Review of CPA Program Information Session

It was noted that the CPA Program Information Session was scheduled for Tuesday, May 1. Ms. Kritzer stated that additional information on the meeting would be sent out prior to that meeting.

Approval of February 14, March 7, and March 14 Minutes

Review of the minutes was postponed to a future meeting.

Mr. Maloney moved to adjourn. Ms. Lunin seconded the motion which passed by unanimous voice vote. The meeting was adjourned at 9:02 P.M.