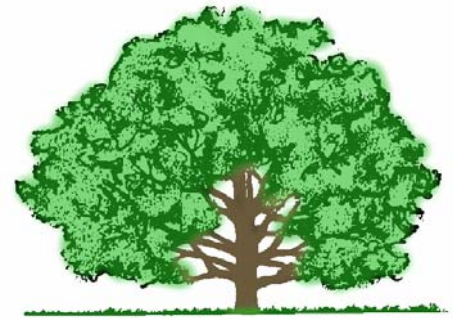


Newton Community Preservation Committee
c/o Jennifer Goldson

**Re: Renovations to the Central Corridor of
Albemarle Park**

September 30, 2005



Friends of Albemarle

Albemarle Park is one of the most-used and best-loved of Newton's open spaces. However it might best be described as "spartan" – amenities and vegetation are minimal, some portions are in severe disrepair, and Avery Woods is a well-kept secret.

Over the past year, the *Friends of Albemarle* has worked with Newton's Parks and Recreation Department and other community groups to develop a "Master Plan" – a vision of the future of Albemarle Park.

The Community Outreach Group for Landscape Design and the Harvard University/Arnold Arboretum program in landscape design selected this park to be the subject of a major (pro bono) project. Judy Kokesh, a talented graduate student, agreed to spend a year developing the attached plan. The Newton Conservators provided financial assistance.

The year-long project included historical research, walk-throughs with stakeholders, a charrette of park users, and public meetings. On its conclusion, the *Friends* met with senior management of Parks and Recreation, to discuss the Kokesh plan. We agreed that the whole "Master Plan" is too ambitious to take on at this time, but that components along the "Central Corridor" should be addressed at the earliest opportunity.

At this time, the *Friends of Albemarle* would like to submit this application for funding, for the design and engineering of renovations to Albemarle Park. We anticipate that on the conclusion of the design process, we will approach the Community Preservation Committee and other agencies for funding of construction.

Thank you for your consideration

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "CURTIS BETTS". The letters are slightly slanted and connected in a cursive-like style.

Curtis Betts

Friends of Albemarle

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in north Newtonville, for the enjoyment of everyone in the community*

Newton CPA Application

Renovations to the Central Corridor of Albemarle Park

Applicant: **Friends of Albemarle**

Co-Applicants: **Newton Parks & Recreation Commission,
The Playground Project at Albemarle**

Contact: **Margaret Albright 166 Edinboro St. Phone: 617-969-0497**
Curtis Betts 305 Albemarle Rd Phone: 617 965 1799

Name of Proposal: **Renovations to the Central Corridor of Albemarle Park**
Address: **Albemarle Rd, Parcels # 21022 0001 and # 21022 0002**

CPA Category: Open Space, Recreation

Funding Requested:

Design Phase: \$ 60,000

Construction Phase \$400,000, (estimate, not included in this application)

Bridge Construction: \$100,000, (estimate, not included in this application)

Total Cost: **\$560,000**

Project Description:

Design and engineering of improvements to the “Central Corridor” of Albemarle Park, including:

- Improving the linkage among the open spaces of north Newtonville, and from open spaces to schools, neighborhoods, and recreational facilities.
- Restoration of the southern-most portions of Avery Wood
- Replacement of the footbridge over Cheesecake Brook
- New entry plaza for the park and school, improvement to school crossings and bus loading area
- Re-alignment of the footpath from Albemarle Rd to F.A. Day Middle School
- New plantings, berms, lighting, and furnishings to complement passive recreation opportunities in the area and improve school access/egress.

The attached study by designer Judy Kokesh provides context, background, and proposed improvements. Ms. Kokesh’s specific recommendations have not been adopted, but based partially on her analysis, the sponsors selected the “central corridor” of the park for improvements at this time.

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Goals:

Albemarle Park is one of the most-used and best-loved of Newton's open spaces. However it might best be described as "spartan" – amenities and vegetation are minimal, some portions are in severe disrepair, Avery Woods is a well-kept secret, and the Cheesecake Brook corridor is a forgotten gem – a linear greenway linking the Charles River Pathway with the Newtonville neighborhood. This project will address a number of concerns:

Conservation values

Benign neglect and an almost 50 year old deed restriction have preserved Avery Wood as a small forest in a dense residential neighborhood. The wood, though small, is an old growth oak forest with interesting topography including a vernal pool and lovely views west over the fields toward the Fessenden property. However there has been some deterioration over the years, from the encroachment of invasive species, and non-compatible activities on the edges of the open space. This project will aim to define, improve, and protect the transition area between park, school, and wood. Improvements to Avery Wood will help to establish this area as an important open space of the city, quieting calls for use of this area for other purposes.

Cheesecake Brook provides a linear greenway connection between the Charles River and the park complex. A new footbridge will meet or exceed current environmental standards, and attention will be given to improvements to the brook to improve wildlife habitat (including linkages between the Charles River and residential areas) and mitigate flooding.

Aesthetics

The existing park is a large open field, broken up by high chain link fences. There is little visual interest in the park with most vegetation grouped around the perimeter providing little shade for most park activities. The Kokesh plan includes extensive use of berms and trees to provide visual interest, definition, and wildlife habitat while providing much needed shade.

Many, many occasional park users have been surprised to learn that F.A. Day Middle School abuts the area – and that the entrance into the park is the front door! While the school's façade may not be an architectural masterpiece, aesthetics of the area will be improved by its integration with the park and wood, and delineation of the entrance walkway. The school is located in a lovely wooded setting, yet the "front yard" is a neglected space, bordered by invasive shrubs and weeds. This area will be blended into the rest of Avery Wood.

The existing footbridge might be charitably described as an eyesore. While no design for the new bridge has yet been proposed, the span is short enough to allow for a variety of design solutions. (One proposal calls for the preservation and re-use of an historic bridge from another location!)

The new bridge will serve as a focal point for the park and neighborhood – as a meeting place, and an appropriate gateway to the park and school. Landscape improvements to the brook corridor will enhance this open-space connector.

Passive recreation

The park, wood, and brook corridor provide a popular destination for walkers, cyclists, and joggers. The area is close to two senior housing facilities and its sidewalks and paths are popular walking areas for those residents. The proposed improvements will enhance linkage with other open spaces, and with the neighborhoods, schools, and recreation facilities.

Provision of benches, tables, and berms with sitting areas will provide additional opportunities for passive recreation.

Improvement of the southern edge of Avery Wood will encourage walkers, runners, (and perhaps dog owners) to make better use of this unique resource.

Active recreation

Albemarle Park and the Halloran Sports and recreation complex comprise the City's largest and busiest active recreation area. This proposal does not make substantive changes to any of the fields or other facilities. All of the proposed changes will enhance accessibility, safety, and aesthetics for active recreation users while creating an improved environment for spectators and passive users.

Safety

Avery Wood is a commonly traversed shortcut for schoolchildren. The southern edge is overgrown with invasive plants, with no sightlines into the wood. A "clean-up" and improved plantings in this area will enhance safety in this area and highlight the beauty of this old-growth oak forest.

The existing footbridge is an acknowledged safety hazard. The steep ramps lead directly into heavily traveled traffic lanes, with slopes of up to 25%. However, this bridge has been designated as the primary emergency evacuation route for F.A. Day Middle School. It also serves as a primary entrance to the park, from the public footpath to Wildwood Rd, and from the "drop-off" area on the west side of Albemarle Rd. Replacement of this bridge and improvement of the crosswalks MUST be a community priority.

Sightlines between the school and the bus loading area are inadequate; this proposal will include an evaluation of sightlines, and remediation as required.

Lighting of the pathway is ad hoc and inadequate. The pathway is routinely used by students, faculty, and park users after dark. New park-style lighting at frequent intervals will improve both actual security, and perhaps more important, pedestrians' comfort level in traversing the park at dawn and dusk.

Accessibility

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Existing bridge and crosswalks do not meet basic accessibility standards. Renovations to the central corridor will improve accessibility of the school and park; improved entrances into Avery Wood will enhance handicapped accessibility.

Community Need

This proposal meets many of the needs identified in Newton's *Open Space Plan*:

- Additional facilities and improvements in the more densely populated northern sectors of Newton,
- Enhanced linkages among existing and future recreational areas.
- Attention to flooding problems,
- Addressing water pollution in brooks and streams,
- Improved maintenance of outdoor public areas.
- Maintaining visual corridors,
- Paths and nature trails in park and conservation areas
- Preservation/improvement of sightlines
- Passive recreational facilities such as picnic and sitting areas within playgrounds and ball fields,
- Walks and sitting areas for the elderly and disabled, and removal of barriers which restrict access to recreation areas,
- Improved entry signage, pedestrian and parking access, educational signage, pathway surfaces and site furnishings
- Bike paths
- Master Plans for the coordinated improvement of parks,

Community Support

[Public comments and letters will be provided as attachments, as they are available]

Timeline

The Design phase is expected to require approximately 6 months, once funding is released and a designer has been contracted.

The Construction phase will require 6-12 months, once a contract is awarded.

Credentials

This project will be managed by the Department of Parks and Recreation. Co-applicants have worked with the Department on a number of similar projects.

Success Factors

Measurement of the success of this project will necessarily be subjective. Increased pedestrian use of Avery Woods, and more nature-watching from the footbridge may not be readily measured, but will be apparent to even a casual observer. Improved pedestrian traffic flows into and out of the park over the central corridor will benefit both active and passive user and will be measured by an increased use of the park for passive recreation.

Factors of safety and accessibility will be measured by the availability of multiple handicap accessible entrances into the park, including over Cheesecake Brook. Sight lines and lighting

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will be improved, providing a measure of increased safety at dusk and dawn for those using the park for passive recreation or in passing through the park to access the middle school.

Budget

Total Budget:	Approx. \$560,000
Design Phase:	\$60,000
Construction Phase	\$400,000
Bridge Construction	\$100,000

Other Funding

On completion of the design phase, a number of funding sources will be evaluated for construction.

Since replacement of the bridge will address security, safety, transportation, and accessibility issues, we expect that some or all of the construction funding will be available from state or federal sources.

Private individuals have expressed interest in providing some funding for site furnishings and plantings.

At this time we have not started to identify other private sources for passive recreation furnishings or other components.

Maintenance

Fields and lawns are maintained by a private contractor. The changes described in the Kokesh proposal would cause no significant change in maintenance costs for the area. Shifting pedestrian traffic off the playing fields will result in some reduction in maintenance, however this may be offset by the need for tree pruning/maintenance, every 5-10 years.