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Community Preservation Committee

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TO: Honorable Board of Aldermen
FROM: Community Preservation Committee
DATE: April 20, 2006
RE: **CPC Recommendation for Funding**

PROJECT TITLE: Renovations to the Central Corridor of Albemarle Park (Planning Study/Design)
CPA PROJECT ID: CPA-FY06-7
CPA CATEGORY: Recreation/Open Space
RECOMMENDED CPA FUNDING: \$33,400

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The applicants, Friends of Albemarle, The Playground Project at Albemarle and Newton Parks and Recreation Commission, request CPA funding of \$32,000 for project costs and \$1,400 for legal costs in order to implement the design phase of an estimated \$286,000 capital improvement project for the central corridor of Albemarle Park, located in Newtonville between Crafts Street and Watertown Street. This request has been reduced from the original request of \$60,000 submitted in October 2005 due to clarification of City department custody. Since original submission in October, the scope for this project has been changed to include only design for improvements on land within the Parks and Recreation Commission's custody, while a second proposal for \$24,000 has been submitted to include land in custody of the Department of Public Works.

Albemarle Park/Halloran Sports Complex is just under 25 acres (according to the City's *Recreation and Open Space Plan 2003-07*) and has a wide variety of primarily active recreation facilities: two ballfields, dual use football/soccer fields, tennis courts, a basketball court, Gath Pool and bathhouse and a small recreation building. In addition, the park includes two passive recreation amenities: a tot lot (the "Playground at Albemarle") and the "Community Commons," an outdoor classroom funded with \$99,931 of CPA funds in FY03.

The scope of work for this planning/design study for the central corridor of the Park was derived from the recommendations of the *Albemarle Park Master Plan: Meeting Recreational Needs with Sustainable Design* by Judith H. Kokesh of the Landscape Institute of the Arnold Arboretum, May 2005. The proposed scope of work includes the following design elements:

- Improving circulation and linkages through the central corridor (passive recreation component);
- Restoration of southern portions of Avery Woods (open space and passive recreation);
- New entry plaza (passive recreation); and
- New plantings, berms, lighting and furnishings (passive recreation).

FINDINGS

Community Preservation Act (MGL c.44B)

Open Space

The Community Preservation Act, MGL c.44B §2 defines open space, as including, "but not... limited to ...fields, forest land..." Avery Woods, a forest land, complies with this definition of open space. Furthermore, §5(b)(2) allows CPA funds to be used for the **preservation** of open space. The purpose of the Avery Woods component of this planning/design study is to restore a portion of Avery Woods including removing invasive species and non-compatible activities on the edges of the woods. The primary intent of this portion of the study is to define, improve and protect the transition area between the Park, Day Middle School and Avery Woods.

Recreation

MGL c.44B §2 defines recreational use as “active or passive recreational use, including but not limited to the use of land for ... noncommercial youth and adult sports and the use of land as a park, playground or athletic field.” §5(b)(2) allows CPA funds to be used for the **creation** and **preservation** of land for recreational use and prohibits the use of funds for **rehabilitation** of recreation land that was not acquired through CPA. The scope of work described for this planning/design study, as related to recreation primarily refers to creation of new passive recreation amenities (including new landscaping, benches, picnic tables, new entry plaza and relocation of pathways for improved circulation and linkages).

Studies

In terms of the eligibility of CPA funding for studies/designs, both the Department of Revenue guidelines (IGR No. 00-209) and the Community Preservation Coalitions report entitled *Potential Uses of CPA Funds*, list incidental project costs as allowable expenditures. Specifically, the Coalition states “CPA funds may be used for site surveys, environmental assessments, historic or housing consultants, architectural and engineering fees, permit processing fees, construction consultants . . . and similar costs associated with and incidental to the development of a CPA project.”

In addition, the Law Department issued an Opinion, dated April 16, 2004, in connection with the original proposal for the Stearns/Pellegrini Parks Master Plans. The Opinion stated, “The Act allows expenditures for preservation and creation of land for recreational uses. Planning and design services may be considered to be part of such preservation and creation.”

Newton Community Preservation Plan

Overarching Goals

1. Contribute to the preservation of Newton’s unique character, boost the vitality of the community and enhance the quality of life for its residents.	Yes
2. Serve more than one CPA category.	Yes
3. Demonstrate the highest cost/benefit value relative to other proposals.	See below
4. Leverage other public and/or private funds.	No, see below
5. Preserve a resource or opportunity that would otherwise be lost.	Yes, see below
6. Show that a project is the most reasonable available option to achieve the objective.	See below
7. Demonstrate strong community support.	Yes, see below
8. Serve to equitably distribute CPA funds throughout the City.	See below

Additional comments on selected goals:

Goal 3: Compared to other recreation studies, the Albemarle Park project is the median. The table below shows the comparative costs for CPA-funded recreation project studies.

<i>Project Name</i>	<i>Fiscal Year</i>	<i>Total CPA Funds</i>
U. Falls & N. Highlands Playgrounds Strategic Design	06	\$92,080
Newton Centre Playground Pedestrian Access Improvement Plan	05	\$55,147
Renovations to the Central Corridor of Albemarle Park	06	\$33,400
Stearns/Pellegrini Park Renovation Study	04	\$30,000
Development of the Cheesecake Brook Greenway	06	\$25,100

Williams School Outdoor Intergenerational Classroom Study	06	\$23,633
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Goal 4: At this stage, the project is not leveraging other funding sources, but proposes to do so for the construction phase through private contributions of site furnishings and plantings. In addition, the project is leveraging the in-kind graduate student contribution to create a master plan for Albemarle Park that was completed for the community group in May 2005.

Goal 5: Albemarle Park is highly used greenspace in a densely populated part of Newton. The landscape is currently broken up by high chain link fences and has sparse vegetation. Avery Wood, by contrast, has become overgrown with invasive species and has no clear entrance or pathways. The design project would lead to improvements to the central corridor that would enhance the experience for park users.

Goal 6: Extensive study would be undertaken to inventory the park's conditions. A landscape designer would be hired to conduct the following activities: topographic survey and baseplan development; meet with stakeholders; create preliminary designs; finalize the design and draft documents.

Goal 7: The application includes support letters from the Mayor, Alderman Johnson, Newton North Little League, Newton Conservators, Day Middle School, Charles River Watershed Association, Newton Youth Soccer, Newton Girls Soccer and the League of Women Voters.

Goal 8: The FY06 applications include funding requests for projects in Nonantum, West Newton, Newtonville, Oak Hill, Newton Centre, Chestnut Hill, Newton Highlands, Auburndale, Newton Upper Falls as well as citywide projects. Albemarle Park is located in Newtonville.

Recreation Goals

1. Address the needs targeted in the <i>Recreation and Open Space Plan 2003-2007</i> and priorities as identified by the Parks and Recreation Department and Commission and take advantage of other opportunities to meet the recreation needs of the residents of the City.	Yes, see below
2. Demonstrate that the proposal is planned with consideration for the current and future needs and vision of the park/recreation facility.	Yes, see below
3. Meet the recreation needs of the greatest number of residents possible. This means that when faced with a decision between two or more projects, all other factors being equal, the one that serves the largest number of residents will be selected for consideration.	Yes, see below
4. Meet the greatest variety of recreation needs possible. The committee will favor projects that provide multiple recreation opportunities in a given location.	Yes, see below
5. Serve passive as well as active uses. Finding ways to balance the range of recreational opportunities and serve the diverse recreation needs of the community is a priority of the CPC.	Yes
6. Preserve sight lines consistent with open space... decisions about scale and placement should be made with the objective of enhancing or enabling open views.	Yes, see below
7. Access for disabled residents should be included in plans wherever possible.	Yes, see below

Additional comments on selected goals:

Goal 1: The Albemarle Park proposal meets some of the goals and policies for passive use recreation outlined in the *Recreation and Open Space Plan 2003-2007*. The plan cites the need for maximizing the use of existing facilities, which this proposal does, and to focus on recreation needs in underserved areas of the City. Newtonville has between 10 and 15 acres of open space available per 1000 residents, which is among the lowest compared to other sections of Newton. The park study would develop a plan to better connect the active recreational facilities to the passive recreation ones, a goal that is supported highly in the City's plan. However, according to the priorities identified by the Parks and Recreation Department and Commission in its newly released *Five Year Park Assessment and Development Planning and Evaluation*, this project is not a priority.

Goal 2: The park renovation study aims to improve the aesthetics and utility of the recreation facilities. No additional major parks maintenance would be necessary after the proposed renovations were complete.

Goal 3: The Albemarle Park/Halloran Sports Complex is located in a densely populated area and attracts visitors from across the City.

Goal 4: The park renovation study will consider ways to maximize and improve entryways and aesthetics for both active recreation uses on the fields and passive ones in the forest.

Goal 6: Avery Wood, in particular, will be studied to plan for the removal of overgrown, invasive vegetation and to improve the quality of the pathways.

Goal 7: Renovation plans for the park will improve accessibility to the school, park and woods.

Open Space Goals

1. Provide protection for land listed in the <i>Recreation & Open Space Plan 2003-2007</i> .	Yes, see below
2. Expand existing open space.	No
3. Enhance biodiversity or wildlife habitat and reclaim natural resources.	Yes, see below
4. Protect wetlands, mitigate flooding and improve groundwater recharge.	Yes, see below
5. Create small pocket parks.	No
6. Enable the development of passive recreation opportunities.	Yes, see below
7. Serve as suitable sites for nature-related education, scientific study or observation and enjoyment of nature.	Yes
8. Protect a natural feature of special interest.	Yes, see below
9. Enhance public access (where access does not seriously threaten habitat).	Yes
10. Provide linkages and wildlife corridors between open spaces.	Yes

Additional comments on selected goals:

Goal 1: The Renovations to the Central Corridor of Albemarle Park meet the plan’s general goals in terms of improving passive recreational opportunities and improving current tracts of open space in the City.

Goal 3: Part of the project involves removing invasive vegetation that has grown uncontrolled in the woods area, hindering public access and making it unsuitable for walking.

Goal 4: Avery Wood contains a vernal pool, which will be part of this proposed study.

Goal 6: Enhanced entrances and pathways at Avery Wood will improve passive recreational opportunities for schoolchildren and City residents.

Goal 8: Avery Wood, though small, contains an old growth oak forest with interesting topography, including a vernal pond.

CPC RECOMMENDATION

The proposal is consistent with the CPA criteria and many of the Plan’s goals, as described above. Therefore, the Community Preservation Committee voted 6-1, with McMillan dissenting¹, to recommend funding this application to study the conditions and develop a plan to improve the condition of recreation and open space at Albemarle Park by appropriating and transferring the requested \$33,400 under the direction and control of the Parks and Recreation Department for purposes of this project as detailed in the application dated February 6, 2006, subject to the following conditions:

¹ McMillan stated he believes the application has merit, but questions the priority and timeliness of the proposal.

1. The Parks and Recreation Department or designee shall submit to the CPC an initial project timeline and a status report on a quarterly basis that describes work that is complete, work remaining, expenditures and target completion date.
2. Work shall commence no later than December 31, 2006 and shall be completed no later than December 31, 2007 or such other date(s) as may be approved in writing by the Director of Planning and Development. In the event of failure to meet the project start or completion dates as stated herein or as approved by the Director of Planning and Development, any remaining funds in the project account shall be returned to the Newton Community Preservation Fund.
3. Consideration of CPA funds for future phases will require the demonstration of a good-faith effort on the part of the applicant to substantially leverage other funding sources; provided, however, the applicant understands and agrees that CPC's recommendation of funding for this design plan does not imply any CPC support for, or any applicant expectation of, a further CPC recommendation for the funding of future project design or construction phases.
4. Promptly after substantial completion of the design work, the applicant shall submit to the Community Preservation Committee a final project development cost statement. Any portion of the grant not used for the purposes stated herein shall be returned to the Newton Community Preservation Fund.