



City of Newton, Massachusetts Community Preservation Committee



David B. Cohen
Mayor

TO: Honorable Board of Aldermen
FROM: Community Preservation Committee
DATE: January 13, 2006
RE: **CPC Recommendation for Funding**

PROJECT TITLE: Bowen Park Initiative
CPA PROJECT ID: CPA-FY06-8
CPA CATEGORY: Open Space, Recreation
RECOMMENDED CPA FUNDING: \$205,000

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The applicants, Bowen Elementary School PTO and Newton Schools, are requesting \$205,000 of CPA funds to improve the schoolyard and an adjacent park by installing a new drainage system and new shaded seating areas, creating an amphitheater, a new full-size basketball court, replacing play equipment, installing landscaping and new walkways, as well as restoring the woods with native plantings and removing invasive plants. The total project cost is estimated to be approximately \$255,000 and breaks down into roughly \$40,000 for professional project management services, including landscape architects and site engineers, \$98,000 for demolition and construction, \$17,000 for plantings, \$78,000 for playground equipment and amenities, a \$21,000 contingency and \$2,000 for legal costs. The Bowen Elementary School PTO has committed funds from other sources, for \$54,000, leaving the CPA request at \$205,000.

The Bowen Schoolyard has significant drainage problems that leave the play field unusable for much of the year. In order to address this problem, the PTO and School Department have been working with the City Engineering Department to design improvements to the drainage system. The new drainage system is estimated to cost \$24,000 and will be funded through the School Department. This drainage system is not included in the CPA application. The applicants have also secured volunteer labor and some donated materials in their efforts to improve the Bowen Schoolyard and adjacent park. The Bowen Park Initiative application links the need for this project to negative impacts on the neighborhood's character that have resulted from various large and small developments. The application states that these developments have resulted in loss of privately owned open space that was previously accessible to the public, increased traffic and projected impacts on the school population and utility services. The project proposal, as put forth by the Bowen Elementary School PTO, offers significant improvements to the schoolyard and neighborhood park.

FINDINGS

Community Preservation Act (MGL c.44B)

Open Space

MGL c.44B defines open space in part as "... fields, forest land...nature preserve and [land] for recreational use". The application states that Bowen Woods will be restored with native plants, removing invasive plants, which would qualify as *preservation* of open space in accordance with Section 5(b)(2).

Recreation

The restoration of Bowen Park complies with the definition of recreational use under MGL c.44B Section 2 which includes, "...active or passive recreational use, including but not limited to the use of land for

community gardens, trails, and noncommercial youth and adult sports, and the use of land as a park, playground or athletic field.” This project would *preserve* existing recreation facilities through the drainage work and *create* a variety of new passive and active recreation facilities including the amphitheater, full-size basketball court, shaded seating areas and new playground equipment.

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.	Yes, see below
5. Preserve a resource or opportunity that would otherwise be lost.	Yes
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 projects, the Bowen Park Initiative is among the most expensive. However, the project scope and number of schoolyard and park improvements are numerous.

<i>Project Name</i>	<i>Fiscal Year</i>	<i>Total CPA Funds</i>
Senior Center Park	05	\$271,210
Forte Park*	03	\$250,000
Bowen Park Initiative	06	\$205,000
Albemarle Community Classroom	03	\$99,931
Cabot Outdoor Classroom	04	\$68,270
West Newton Common Irrigation	04	\$65,968
Wellington Park Improvements	05	\$64,000
Bowen Ballfield	03	\$56,805
Houghton Garden	04	\$50,000
Stearns/Pellegrini Park Renovation	04	\$30,000
Kayla’s Garden	03	\$23,718
Williams School Outdoor Community Classroom	06	\$23,633

* The Forte Park project was awarded a total of \$500K under the condition that \$250K be returned to the CP Fund after reimbursement through a state/federal grant. Therefore, this table represents that \$250K of CP funds was awarded to this project.

Goal 4: The table below shows the ratio of CPA funds requested to other funds available for project use. The project budget proposes almost \$27,000 of in-kind goods and services, almost \$27,000 of revenue from the PTO, individuals and Marathon funds and projects just under \$10,000 of pending grants and donations.

<i>Total project cost</i>	<i>CPA funds requested</i>	<i>Leveraging (CPA as % of total project cost)</i>
\$255,000	\$205,000	80.4%

Goal 6: The Bowen Park Initiative consists of a mix of different approaches to solve drainage and turf issues. The CPC expressed concern over the portion of the plan that seeds a lawn that is in constant use by children. Committee members felt this approach would not guarantee the field condition improves. With constant foot

traffic and no irrigation, the new lawn would likely not survive. The applicant was encouraged to devise a new way to protect the lawn and field in this area of the park, perhaps using materials like engineered wood fiber or to irrigate grass by tapping into an existing well line.

Goal 7: The Bowen Park Initiative has strong community support. Letters in support of the project were submitted to the CPC from the Bowen Thompsonville Neighborhood Association, Green Decade, the Newton School Committee, Newton Public Schools, the Bowen After School Care Program, the League of Women Voters and the signatures of approximately 80 citizens of Newton. No opposition has been expressed publicly.

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

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
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.	No
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: Although not specifically mentioned in the *Recreation and Open Space Plan*, the Bowen Park Initiative does meet the *Plan's* general goals in terms of improving passive recreational opportunities and preserving current tracts of open space in the City. See goal 6 below.

Goal 3: Part of the project involves removing invasive vegetation and reducing poison ivy that has grown uncontrolled in the woods area, making it unsuitable for children's play. Native tree and plant species will be planted in this area once invasive species are removed.

Goal 6: Enhanced trails in the woods of Bowen Park will improve passive recreational opportunities for schoolchildren and residents of the City.

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
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.	No
7. Access for disabled residents should be included in plans wherever possible.	Yes

Additional comments on selected goals:

Goal 1: See the open space goal 1 response above.

Goal 2: As described thoroughly in the application, the Bowen Park has suffered from persistent drainage problems and the unrestricted growth of invasive species. The Bowen Park Initiative will help ensure that the park and the schoolyard are useful to the neighborhood for years to come.

Goal 3: While the schoolyard is primarily a neighborhood amenity, as opposed to citywide, the project will improve recreational opportunities for both schoolchildren and local citizens who might enjoy the playground, basketball courts, open space, trails and woods behind the school. The plan incorporates the needs of disabled visitors by planning for accessible pathways to link the school to the woods behind.

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 unanimously to recommend funding this application to improve the condition of the recreation facilities and open space at Bowen Park by appropriating and transferring the requested \$205,000 of project costs to be expended under the direction and control of the Newton School Committee for purposes of this project as detailed in the application dated October 3, 2005, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the release of any CPA funds, the City Engineering Division shall identify a project site manager who will work as liaison to the Newton School Committee, but report to the Engineering Department and be responsible to issue the request for proposals and consultant contracts, authorize payments of invoices and generally oversee the project.
2. The School Committee or its 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.
3. The School Committee shall be responsible to coordinate with the primary community applicant, Bowen Elementary School PTO, to ensure its continued involvement as a stakeholder in the project.
4. 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.
5. Promptly after substantial completion of the project, 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.