

City of Newton

**APPLICATION FOR COMMUNITY PRESERVATION FUNDING**



David B. Cohen  
Mayor

Submit to Jennifer Goldson, Community Preservation Planner  
Newton Planning and Development Department  
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Name of Applicant: **Newton Public Schools**

Name of Co-Applicant, if applicable: **City of Newton - Public Buildings Dept.**

Contact Name **Marilynne Quarcoo, Principal, Cabot School**

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Name of Proposal **Outdoor Classroom**

Address of Proposal **229 Cabot Street Newtonville MA 02460**

CPC Category (circle all that apply): Open Space ~~Historic preservation~~ Recreation ~~Community housing~~

CPA Funding Requested **\$24,270** Total Cost of the Project: **\$66,700**

*\$ 37,610*

*\$ 80,040*

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

**OVERVIEW**

Cabot Elementary School is proposing the development of an outdoor classroom on a currently neglected piece of land next to the school building through a multidisciplinary collaborative educational experience for students, teachers, and area neighbors. The improvement of this space from one of blight to one of passive recreation and education will allow students and teachers a deeper understanding of important ecological and design issues as well as community dynamics and needs. Because one of the educational project goals is for children to learn by doing, the final plan is still in the works. Cabot students are involved in envisioning, planning and designing the space while considering the environmental, community, physical, and fiscal realities. This is occurring with the help of an experienced consulting group called "Learning by Design". In spring/summer 2004, the construction phase will commence with substantial in-kind support from area contractors and a cash match of \$13,730. Ultimately, the space will be a place where students will learn about science and nature, where wildlife will find a habitat, and where neighbors can sit and relax or pass through on their way to Cabot Park.

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## 1. GOALS

1. *Develop an outdoor classroom for the purpose of teaching and observing nature and science.*

Cabot Elementary School has a vital natural sciences program, attracting national attention for its innovation (see Attachment 1). The school's lack of outdoor teaching space limits the school's ability to expand this program, to nurture wildlife reintroduction efforts, or to monitor the progress of wildlife the students observe. 24,270 In the past, students have travelled to other parks and woods to conduct nature studies. In 1998, students planted wildflowers at Edmunds Park in an effort to encourage the natural propagation of a threatened species. Each year, students raise Monarch butterflies from caterpillar to butterfly and travel to city parks to release the butterflies. An outdoor classroom on site would allow students to nurture these and other plants and animals as well as monitor their progress.

Cabot Park is across the street from the school, but the school cannot effectively use the park for several reasons. Because the park is owned by the city, the school cannot construct any buildings or fixtures on the land (e.g., children's benches). In addition, in order to use the park, the school must close the road between the school and park to enable students' safe crossing. Finally, because the park is primarily used for town sports, it is not-well suited for nature or science studies. The school's other outdoor areas consist of a small playground and parking areas.

2. *Provide a natural habitat for wild flora and fauna.*

Students will incorporate a wildlife garden in the plan, including native plants, shrubs, trees and a water feature to attract birds and other wildlife. Students will consider other ways to encourage wildlife, including food sources such as berries, wildlife corridors and shelter where wildlife can over-winter. In addition to providing a much needed natural habitat for wildlife in Newton, the wildlife garden will support the town's integrated pest management plan across the street at Cabot Park.

3. *Enhance the neighborhood by providing a pocket park for passive recreation and enjoyment of nature in a currently neglected area adjacent to the school building.*

Residents at the neighboring Cabot Park Village facility for the elderly as well as those of a nearby affordable housing development have few places within easy walking distance for passive recreation. Cabot Park offers sports fields and facilities, but it is not conducive to quiet relaxation. The proposed park would offer the community a quiet place for reflection, reading or observing nature.

4. *Provide neighbors easier access to Cabot Park.*

Cabot Elementary School blocks neighbors on Bridges Avenue and other streets behind the school from easy access to Cabot Park. This obstruction has worsened through the years (e.g., a 1950s expansion of the school and a 1990s addition of modular classrooms) such that only an obscured path alongside the school is available. These neighbors currently view the school parking lot, a dumpster, the

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rear of the school, and the neglected area designated for revitalization through this grant. The plan will include an attractive entrance for these neighbors and a clearly delineated path from the streets behind the school to Cabot Park.

5. *Include all students from Kindergarten to fifth grade in the planning and design of the project, to incorporate math, science and technology in a hands on curriculum which can be replicated by other schools.*

A process called Learning by Design engages students in experiential learning tied to the MA Curriculum Frameworks.

## **2. COMMUNITY NEED**

Cabot Elementary School in Newtonville consists of 281 families who send 352 students to the school's 18 Kindergarten through grade 5 classrooms. The school is an active participant in the METCO program such that 21 students from Boston attend Cabot. In addition, Cabot After School Program serves approximately 130 K-5 students. The school is located between Cabot Street and Bridges Ave.

### *Passive Recreation for the Community*

The outdoor classroom will include a quiet area for community residents to sit, read, admire the wildlife garden and birdsong, and possibly listen to the burble of a fountain. This area would greatly benefit elderly residents at the neighboring Cabot Park Village. While there are benches at Cabot Park, the Park consists primarily of sports fields and is not conducive to quiet relaxation.

The entrance and path from Bridges Avenue to Cabot Park will enhance the neighbors' enjoyment of Cabot Park and Cabot School. The project will also greatly improve their view of the rear of the school.

### *Community Involvement*

Aesthetically, the redesigned space will be a vast improvement over the previous use of the space. Over the years, several parent groups or classes have installed benches or planted gardens, but because there was no long range plan for the area, it was not well utilized or maintained. The area currently appears as a blight (see Attachment 2). The area's aura of neglect has occasionally invited vandals. With a well thought out long range plan and support from the neighborhood, the area will be well cared for and less susceptible to vandalism.

### *Education and Nature Study*

As stated above, the outdoor classroom will greatly strengthen Cabot School's innovative science and nature study curriculum. In addition, studies have shown that children have different learning styles, which makes it essential to provide a variety of ways for students to absorb information, including hands-on programs like our proposed outdoor classroom. Outdoor studies also create positive attitudes about nature and our environment. Researchers are studying the positive links between working in school gardens and increased academic achievement as well as good attitudes toward nutrition and improved social skills.

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Cabot is undertaking an innovative approach to the outdoor classroom plan and design. Students must consider community needs, logistical issues, spatial concepts, engineering, math concepts including project funding, planning for wildlife, and myriad additional challenges. The proposed project presents a wonderful way to integrate learning across the board in a way that challenges students to think creatively and integrate and apply curricular disciplines. It will result in a multiuse, multidisciplinary outdoor learning environment created by and for the entire Cabot community. It enhances the educational experience by bringing together different grades, disciplines, teachers, parents, students, and neighbors.

### **3. COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

There is a great deal of excitement and support for the project within the community. Many of the school's 62 staff and teachers have already been trained to teach the school's students how to plan and design the outdoor classroom. Eight enthusiastic teachers and the principal spent two and a half days over the summer with the District Curriculum Coordinators for Math and Technology as well as "Learning By Design", a Boston-based architectural design education program that designs hands-on projects that link together multiple disciplines. Please see Attachment 3 for photos capturing facets of the process. Learning By Design will remain available to Cabot School for advice during the design process. In Spring 2003, all students created models of what they wished to see included in the project. In September and October, teachers took their classes to the site to measure the area. The design for the project will be completed over the winter.

The strong Cabot PTO has dedicated more than \$10,000 to the project, indicating the school community's support of the project. Parent experts, such as architects and engineers will come to school during the next three months to speak with the students about the design process, and several are offering their services as in-kind contributions to the overall project budget. A committee of seven dedicated volunteers, including the Principal of Cabot School, an urban designer, an experienced contractor, three Cabot teachers, and an office support staff member will see the project through.

The Newton Schools Foundation indicated its support of the outdoor classroom with a grant of \$6,800 towards teacher development.

Neighbors abutting the school are quite happy about the proposed project, which will improve a blighted area and enhance the neighborhood. Letters from these neighbors are included in Attachment 4.

Other supporters include students, parents, a nearby facility for the aged, Newton Public School administrators, Newton Schools Foundation, and much more, as documented in Attachment 4.

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#### 4. TIMELINE

September - October

##### Students/Faculty Collect Data

e.g., determine perimeter area using standard and non-standard measurements

November - January

##### Students/Faculty Observations

e.g., soil conditions, weather patterns (sun, wind direction, precipitation), usage patterns

November - December

##### Community Engagement

1. Leaflet neighborhood and invite to morning and evening meeting to hear school idea for improving space adjacent to school
2. Identify shared needs and goals
3. Solicit input regarding design and use of outdoor space
4. Form Neighborhood Advisory Committee (including at least one person on Design/Review Committee).

December - February

##### Design Process

1. Students & faculty work with consultant group to make recommendations for design features
2. Design Review Committee works with groups of students to evaluate proposed ideas
3. Design Review Committee works with City departments (including Engineering, School, Parks & Recreation) to finalize plans

March - April

##### Site Plan

1. Architects/Engineers/Construction collaborate to develop site plan (3/04)
2. Community meeting held to share site plans, get feedback, discuss construction needs and timetable
3. Develop maintenance/security plan with community

May - August

##### Construction Phase

1. Removal of debris, clearing land, etc.
2. Construction

(continued)

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September - December

Completion

1. Students engage in appropriate activities - planting, adding artistic features (signage; other enhancements)
2. Students create brochure explaining process and community benefits

## **5. CREDENTIALS**

### **Project/Construction Manager**

Newton Environmental Design and Construction will manage the implementation of the project. Owner Mike McSally serves as Co-Chairperson of the Cabot School Outdoor Classroom Project. Mr. McSally is also an advisor to The Albemarle Playground and Community Classroom project. He is a licensed Construction Supervisor.

Formerly, Mr. McSally was a Co-Chairperson of the Cabot School Playground Committee and acted as the Project/Construction Manager on that project, which was completed in spring 2000. The project had a final cost of \$65,000 and included more active recreational features for the students at the school. Mr. McSally oversaw extensive excavation and re-grading; coordination of all necessary sub-contractors; and, negotiation of reduced costs and in-kind donations of labor, equipment, and services from these contractors. All of the efforts were done in cooperation with the appropriate city departments; specifically, the School and the Parks and Recreation Departments.

The Playground project was heralded by all City agencies involved as one of the most efficiently run, trouble and issue free community building projects of its type. We completed the project on time, under budget, with the endorsement and participation of the surrounding community and with no injuries. Part of the success of the project is due to the Committee holding evening meetings with neighborhood residents and incorporating their concerns into the final design plans. The City gave the group great latitude in performing major excavation and construction tasks due to the expertise of the team involved in the project. This entire team will be participating in The Outdoor Classroom Project. Please see Attachment 5 for more information.

### **Design Consultants**

*Learning by Design in Massachusetts* (LBD:MA) is a children's education program of the Boston Society of Architects. Master teachers and volunteer architects engage children and youth, in and out of schools, in hands-on, real-world design projects. In professional development workshops, teachers and youth program providers practice interdisciplinary ways of involving children in the design process. Since 1998 LBD:MA has given children the opportunity to express their ideas about the built environment, their community, and themselves. By giving children tools to make informed decisions about their environments, LBD:MA enables the next generation of designers, community leaders, and citizens to build a better future.

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Since 1998 LBD:MA has worked with 2,000 children, reached 300 educators and community youth service providers, and met 100 architects and designers interested in children's architectural programs. From 2000 to 2001, as contacts with architects, teachers and community organizations increased, program days increased from 24 to 55. The Boston Foundation for Architecture, the Dunn Foundation, the Boston Foundation's Schoolyard Initiative project, and the American Institute for Architecture have all contributed to LBD:MA program funds.

Jan Ham, a program director and a master teacher of LBD:MA, has nine years of experience in the development and delivery of built environment programs. She has taught children, from pre-school to age 18, in programs ranging from those for gifted-and-talented children to those for at-risk youth. Her book, *Designing Playgrounds*, is a hands-on mathematics project book published by Dale Seymour Publications. Ms. Ham has taught a 3-credit graduate course, "Teaching by Design," at the University of Massachusetts and Massachusetts College of Art, and is on the teaching staff for MassArt's Summer Studios programs for middle and high school youth.

Since 1986, architect Polly Carpenter, AIA, has done residential, educational, commercial, and institutional design work. In 1997, she opened her own firm while developing her interest in children's design education. As a master teacher with LBD:New York, Ms. Carpenter took part in school-aged design projects that included the City of Neighborhoods program. Since moving to Cambridge she has been actively involved as a lead master teacher in all LBD:MA program levels.

David Albracht is an involved parent volunteer and a Landscape Architect. His firm provides land planning and landscape design services for cadmic, institutional, and residential projects. Projects include master planning for Kimberton Waldorf School, Northfield Mount Hermon School, and Berkshire County Day School. Please see Attachment 5 for more information.

### **Cabot Elementary School Principal**

Marilynne Smith Quarcoo, Principal of Cabot Elementary School since 1990, has a Masters of Education degree from Boston College and anticipates receiving her Ph.D. in Educational Administration in spring 2004. Ms. Quarcoo has more than 30 years of experience in public school systems. At Cabot, she is responsible for site based management including curriculum and instructional leadership, program development, hiring and dismissal, supervision and evaluation of teaching and non-teaching staff, budget preparation, physical plant use and maintenance, and community relationships. She leads the schools in developing and maintaining core values for the school; establishing and co-chairing the school council, and overseeing all education services. Ms. Quarcoo's past experiences include METCO Director, elementary school teacher, and multicultural specialist.

Attachment 5 includes Ms. Quarcoo's resume as well as the resumes of several involved teachers.

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## 6. SUCCESS FACTORS

We have already begun to realize the success of this project given the financial support we have received from the Newton Schools Foundation. This money has enabled a teachers' lead team to learn about the design process and the engineering standards students in grades kindergarten to five should know and understand. The 2003 summer professional development sessions are enabling teachers to maximize students' educational gains as it relates to the project.

Another example of the success of the project is the active involvement and support of the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). The PTO has set aside more than \$10,000 for construction materials with the understanding that children will be taught the design process through an actual hands-on experience that results in the improvement of the community. The PTO wants the school to give our students opportunities to practice our core value of commitment to school and community.

The principal has engaged several abutters in informal conversation about the school's desire to improve the environment around the school. These conversations have been well received. Residents expressed most concern about the challenges in the neighborhood due to the existence of two dumpsters, an environmental clean-up project structure (note: not in the project's target area), and the parking lot. There is interest in upgrading the quality of this open area that could serve as a natural connector to Cabot Field. Letters of support are included in Attachment 4.

We anticipate improved relations with our neighbors/abutters as a result of the project. By creating a passive recreation area, residents who use nearby Cabot Park infrequently due to the high volume of athletic activity would have a suitable alternative. The formation of our Neighborhood Advisory Committee will further foster positive relationships between the school and its community. The Committee's buy-in and ongoing role in the project will help ensure the appropriate use and maintenance of this space.

## 7. BUDGET

### Projected Cabot Outdoor Classroom Budget

Site Preparation/ Demolition/ Excavation and Removal	\$7,500
Rough landscape, materials labor (stone, loam, concrete etc.)	\$6,000
Finish landscape, labor and materials (brick, granite, timbers etc.)	\$15,000
Seating, benches, birdbaths, shed. Pergola etc. (labor & materials)	\$13,000
Plantings labor and materials (Trees, shrubs, flowers, seed)	\$12,000
Design, Plans	\$4,500
Construction management/ Project management (15% of project cost)	\$8,700
<b>Total .....</b>	<b>\$66,700</b>

## 8. OTHER FUNDING

**In kind services** will be provided by contractors who support the project. Please see Attachment 6, which includes a funding commitment letter on behalf of these sources.

Site prep	\$4,500
Rough Landscape	\$2,000
Finish Landscape	\$4,000
Seating etc.	\$3,500
Plantings etc.	\$4,000
Design/ plans	\$2,000
Management	\$8,700
<u>Total</u>	<u>\$28,700</u>

**Matching Funds** are available as follows:

The Cabot Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) is committing \$10,230 to the project. Please see the funding commitment letter in Attachment 6.

The Disney Teacher Award is a grant for \$5,000 given to a teacher selected as a Disney American Teacher as a result of her work at Cabot woods/Edmund's Park. The teacher has also received recognition for her work on the Oprah Winfrey Show, the New York times, the Weekly Reader, and the Zoom Show. \$2,500 of this award will be applied to the proposed project.

Cabot Elementary School will commit \$1,000 to the proposed project.

### Summary

Total Budget:	\$66,700
- In kind Support	\$28,700
- PTO funds	\$10,230
- Disney Award	\$2,500
- Cabot funds	\$1,000

Balance Sought - Community Preservation Act: \$24,270

Cabot Elementary School will continue to work with the Newton Public Schools Grants Coordinator to identify and apply for additional funding sources as needed.

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## **9. MAINTENANCE**

There is shared responsibility for the maintenance of the proposed space. Parks and Recreation has historically assumed responsibility for snow removal, fall debris removal and some structural maintenance (fencing). The PTO and faculty will maintain an Outdoor Classroom/Space Committee to regularly monitor and maintain the space. As with the playground and other projects funded with the support of the PTO, money will be earmarked in the budget for maintenance and replacement costs. The Cabot After School Program will make the upkeep of the outdoor space a part of their offering to students. Finally, the Neighborhood Advisory Committee will work with the school to ensure the upkeep and appearance of the area.

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**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:** Provide the following additional information, as applicable.

10. Documentation that you have control over the site, such as Purchase and Sale Agreement, option, or deed.

Please see Attachment 7.

11. For projects that include construction or rehabilitation, include the existing and proposed site plan, floor plans, elevations, and any other drawings as necessary to visually describe the proposal.

Please see Attachment 8, which depicts the current site and Attachment 3, which shows the children's design process. A site plan will be available in March 2004.

12. Evidence that the project is in compliance with the zoning ordinance, Architectural Access Board Regulations, or any other laws or regulations. Or, if zoning relief is required, specify what relief is needed and when an application will be made to the City for zoning review.

We are not currently not aware that any such ordinances apply. However, the Project Manager (Newton Environmental Design & Construction) will ensure that the project is in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations, as was the case with the successful and comparable playground project at the Cabot site in 2000. The Project Manager will work closely with Mike Cronin, Newton Public Schools' Building Manager, and all other relevant city employees.

13. Evidence that the appropriate City Boards and Commissions have approved the project (for example, proposed new uses on Parks & Recreation land requires approval from the Parks and Recreation Commission)

We are not currently aware that any change in usage or other approvals will be necessary. The Public Buildings Department, which has control over the land, is aware of the proposed project and is the co-applicant for these funds.

14. Evidence that the proposed site is free of hazardous materials or that there is a plan for remediation in place.

Please see Attachment 7.

15. Evidence that appropriate professional standards will be followed if construction, restoration or rehabilitation is proposed.

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16. Information indicating how this project can be used to achieve additional community benefits.

*Passive Recreation for the Community*

The outdoor classroom will include a quiet area for community residents to sit, read, admire the wildlife garden and birdsong, and possibly listen to the burble of a fountain. This area would greatly benefit elderly residents at the neighboring Cabot Park Village. While there are benches at Cabot Park, the Park consists primarily of sports fields and is not conducive to quiet relaxation. It is also expected to be accessed by residents of a nearby affordable housing development.

The entrance and path from Bridges Avenue to Cabot Park will enhance the neighbors' enjoyment of Cabot Park and Cabot School. The project will also greatly improve their view of the rear of the school.

*Community Involvement*

Aesthetically, the redesigned space will be a vast improvement over the previous use of the space. Over the years, several parent groups or classes have installed benches or planted gardens, but because there was no long range plan for the area, it was not well utilized or maintained. The area currently appears as a blight (see Attachment 8). The area's aura of neglect has occasionally invited vandals. With a well thought out long range plan and support from the neighborhood, the area will be well cared for and less susceptible to vandalism.

*Provide a natural habitat for wild flora and fauna.*

Students will incorporate a wildlife garden in the plan, including native plants, shrubs, trees and a water feature to attract birds and other wildlife. Students will consider other ways to encourage wildlife, including food sources such as berries, wildlife corridors and shelter where wildlife can over-winter. In addition to providing a much needed natural habitat for wildlife in Newton, the wildlife garden will support the town's integrated pest management plan across the street at Cabot Park.

*Replication*

One completed, the project may be replicated by other schools or nonprofit community-based organizations. The concepts of "Learning by Design" and the active involvement of children in the process, fostering positive school-community relationships, and improving public spaces are applicable to a wide range of organizations for which Cabot School representatives could act as advisors based on this successful experience.

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