



CRYSTAL LAKE CONSERVANCY

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND FUND-RAISING PLAN FOR CRYSTAL LAKE, NEWTON “ONE GREAT POND!”

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I. Introduction

In response to the conditions set forth within the CPC’s funding approval and recommendation for the purchase of 230 Lake Avenue, it is with great enthusiasm that we outline a plan for creating an organization to raise private funds to support further improvements, maintenance, and programming at Crystal Lake.

The community acknowledges the request made by the CPC to have community participation, and is mobilizing to do so as efficiently and effectively as possible. The formulation of the fundraising efforts described below is now underway. Fundraising is a natural ‘next step’ that should follow the Master Plan (final report) from the Crystal Lake Task Force. However, the fundraising plan has now been moved forward so that it can be created in parallel, and in collaboration with, the work of the Task Force.

Individuals, families, community groups, and corporate sponsors will play an integral role in both creating and carrying out this plan. The goal of this plan is to identify a combination of community contributions and a dedicated municipal funding stream adequate to cover the maintenance of further improvements along the Lake. The plan outlined herein describes how this is to be accomplished.





William C. Foster

1932 City of Newton Civic Arts Water Pageant participants.

II. History

In 1924, the City of Newton was granted authority to govern activities on and around Crystal Lake. The lake is one of the Commonwealth's designated Great Ponds, defined as a natural body of water greater than ten acres in size. Since the Commonwealth of Massachusetts granted the City this authority, the lake has been a summer and winter tradition. The Lake had formerly been used by citizens for sailing in summer and skating in winter. Several generations of children from across the city have learned to swim here. Many thousands of Newton residents – of all ages, interests, and ethnic backgrounds – meet informally and enjoy passive and active recreation by the lake in a relaxed atmosphere.

More than perhaps any other City park, Crystal Lake has been a unifying centerpiece in Newton, drawing people together from across the City's distinctive villages. From the late 19th century to the present, it has been the site of many civic celebrations – from ice skating festivals to fireworks to community fundraising events (which in the 1930s included diving demonstrations and enactments of scenes from operas). Yet even as it hosted these very public events, Crystal Lake continued to provide a uniquely desirable location for both private residences and quiet nature walks.

III. Present and Future – Context for Growth and Change

The recent use of Community Preservation funds to purchase the property at 20 Rogers Street has already done much to resolve previous concerns of abutting owners and public safety issues at the City's Crystal Lake swimming beach. In the summer of 2007, 26,201 beachgoers – nearly 59% more than the previous summer – resoundingly endorsed this addition to the City's swimming area.

During summer 2007, the Parks Department provided additional space for swimmers and beach-goers. In the slightly more than 8 weeks that elapsed between the acquisition of 20 Rogers Street by eminent domain, and the opening of the public beach, the retaining walls were lowered and rebuilt. Additional space is available for gathering. More water area is now available for distance swimmers. The city has prepared the expansive, shaded lawn adjacent to the bathhouse for sitting, reading, and picnicking.



City employees work to rebuild the retaining wall in time for the 2007 beach season.

Building on that success, integrating the land at 230 Lake Avenue into the chain of public spaces at Crystal Lake will further

enhance public access to the lakeshore, and increase the flexibility needed to plan for the future and manage public use. An expanded, integrated Crystal Lake Park will protect and enhance what is universally recognized as one of Newton's "special places."

The addition of these parcels to the existing facility will enable and increase public and private enjoyment, and with it the opportunity for contemplation and community, for centuries to come.

IV. Community Interest and Expectations



Concerned citizens and public servants from the City of Newton review the Park.

Although there has always been a community of caring and appreciative users and residents around Crystal Lake, the city's commitment and options for significant changes and improvements were limited by the constraints of the old Gil Bathhouse site. Grass roots support for improvements and land acquisitions started in the Spring of 2006. After several years of tensions and disputes with the adjacent owner, a "Friends" group of nearby residents became active to address the concerns of public safety, maintenance, and environmental issues. Another grass roots effort resulted in the organization of "Citizens for a Better Crystal Lake," which approached the city officials and organized petition drives and community action to acquire the property with CPA funds and plan for improvements to existing facilities.

An open community meeting on the future of Crystal Lake was held at the Public Library in response to community interest. The Library Recital Hall was filled with hundreds of citizens ready to share their concerns and ideas for an expanded and renewed public open space and facility.

The community continues to show a strong following of supporters looking to both improve and expand existing community space at Crystal Lake. This is evidenced by substantial increase in the usage of the beach area since the acquisition of 20 Rogers Street, and also by the outpouring of communications (emails, letters, petitions, etc.) in support of acquiring both 20 Rogers Street and 230 Lake Avenue.

The Planning Process—Crystal Lake Task Force

With the public enthusiasm and eminent acquisition of the open space at 20 Rogers Street, the Mayor created a Crystal Lake Task Force. The Crystal Lake Task Force has had several regular meetings and is working with City departments in developing guidelines and limitations for the sensible use and development of the public land and facilities around the Lake. The Task Force is using the ideas and concerns expressed by citizens at last

year's public meeting to form a Master Plan for the uses of the park land and the Lake itself. The Task Force is drafting and will issue a report and recommendations in the Spring of 2008.

Although the Task Force was not given any fundraising mandate, the Master Plan that emerges from its work will be used by the city and the "Crystal Lake Conservancy" to plan for the future. This plan will be critical to motivating donors to participate in park fundraising.

V. The "Crystal Lake Conservancy" - Coming Together for 'Our One Great Pond'

The Crystal Lake Conservancy will exist as an official nonprofit organization, so that contributions to it can be considered tax-deductible. An executive committee will be established to identify private donors, organizations, businesses, and user groups that would be involved in contributing funds as well as planning and implementing community fundraising strategies. Criteria for involvement could include past involvement in using or advocating for Crystal Lake and their commitment to standards of excellence in both creating and caring for ongoing and future improvements.

This list of contacts already includes:

- Newton Conservators
- Newton Highlands Area Council
- Citizens for a Better Lake
- Green Decade Coalition
- Charles River Watershed Association

In parallel to the work of the Crystal Lake Task Force, the "Crystal Lake Conservancy" will foster existing alliances and work to build additional alliances with groups and organizations that will participate in an ongoing basis. In some cases, human resources will be gained from these alliances and will fulfill necessary functions and compliment the fundraising efforts.

The Newton Conservators have offered to assist in the effort by making their tax-exempt status available until the new non-profit organization is legally established. This shall allow donations towards the Crystal Lake efforts to be accepted and legally held.

Formalizing and Incorporating the "Crystal Lake Conservancy"

This Community Participation and Fund Raising Plan has been drafted as the beginning of the process of organizing and coordinating public efforts related to the new South cove Park and swimming facility. Legal resources have been consulted, and (pending the 'completion' of the public open space with the 230 Lake Avenue acquisition) a commitment of \$10,000 has been secured to help create the anew non-profit organization.

Selection process is underway to appoint an attorney to proceed with establishing an official nonprofit 501(c)3 organization under a unique name, the "Crystal Lake Conservancy." This organization will designate an executive committee to foster the evolution of the acquired space and oversee the associated fundraising.



Cooling off with friends.

The “Crystal Lake Conservancy” will advocate for the sensible and sustainable use of the lake and the park land. And, it will assist in the development and stewardship of this unique and precious community resource.

Other participants to be recruited throughout the City include:

- Private Donors
- Businesses
- Foundations
- Advocacy groups

Public Outreach and Publicity Opportunities

The Crystal Lake Conservancy will consider sponsoring a kickoff event at the Lake in the Spring 2008. The goals of the event will be to introduce the organization to the community, and gain additional support & momentum, via a fun and visible gala, and an opportunity to:

- celebrate the demolition of 20 Rogers Street, the acquisition of 230 Lake Avenue, and the reopening of the swimming beach with new open space
- involve/forged relationships among existing and potential users & supporters of this expanded public space
- reach out to businesses and other potential donors, forging relationships with the donors that will engage and assist in achieving the long term Plan
- update the public on the work of the Crystal Lake Task Force and encourage public input and ideas in the long-term vision for the park and beach.



The expanding shoreline.

With this expanded presence, Crystal Lake Conservancy will focus on identifying fundraising strategies and opportunities that appeal to a wide audience and that allow all interested community members to participate, regardless of the size of their potential contributions:

- Private and public foundations
- Local organizations (e.g., the Newton Highlands Area Council) that will sponsor revenue generating events
- Direct Private Donors, including nearby businesses
- Interested Organizations
- Research grants
- Neighborhood funds campaign (e.g., buy-a-brick campaign)

Finally, the Crystal Lake Conservancy will also pursue in-kind contributions of materials and services. The line between work and play at Crystal Lake does not have to be hard and fast. Many people and organizations might very much enjoy working together on educational programs, environmental and landscape stewardship, or community arts activities at the Lake – thus reducing the costs for which funds must be raised. Such volunteer efforts could be coordinated by the Crystal Lake Conservancy.

VI. Fundraising Strategy and Structure



Feeding the ducks at the Cove along the edge of Crystal Lake.

While the specific fundraising needs of the project will not be known until the Task Force issues its recommendations and City officials decide upon implementation steps, there is a clear need at the very least for significant work to upgrade existing facilities and a possible need for new facilities on the site. By the same token, the amounts that can be raised will depend upon what improvements are proposed. For these reasons, we suggest a three-tiered set of fundraising goals:

TIER ONE: Basic Site Improvements— Once the property acquisition is completed, we believe the area should be made available for public use and enjoyment. The conservancy will advocate and work with the city and task force to identify immediate needs for providing secure and functional open space along the expanded south cove. This will be the first opportunity to reach out to Newton residents and businesses, as well as the other organizations identified above, through direct fundraising appeals and events to raise \$100-150 thousand for paths, benches and other improvements and to seed a maintenance endowment for the new public park.

TIER TWO: Expanded Amenities— If significant expansion of public amenities or other tangible improvements to the park are proposed, those improvements will present a further fundraising opportunity, especially if combined with a mechanism to recognize the generosity of the donor or donor whose contributions are used to make the improvements. This recognition can include naming, plaques, or other acknowledgement. For example, an expanded beach area, children's play area, or other improved section of the park could be named for a donor. In these cases, the donor may choose to set up a fund that pays the ongoing maintenance costs of the area as well. The size of these gifts depends upon the nature of the improved amenity, but can range from a few thousand dollars up to hundreds of thousands.

TIER THREE: New Facilities— If a new bath house, guard house, or other facility is recommended for the site and the opportunity exists to recognize the generosity of donors with naming and other community acknowledgement, it may be possible to solicit one or more major gifts of the legacy donation level to fund a significant portion of the construction of the new facilities and to set up a fund for their ongoing maintenance. These major gifts usually require that the project be reflective of the priorities and values of the donor. Donors at this level are usually consulted in the design process and are honored with ceremonial recognition at ribbon-cuttings and other events. In some cases, the major donor plays a role in soliciting other donations to the project. These gifts can range into the millions of dollars.



Newton's Tenley Albright, the United States' first female Olympic Gold Medalist and two time World Champion, at age 16. Tenley prepared for the Olympics with practice sessions on Crystal Lake. (Photo courtesy of the United States Figure Skating Association, Colorado Springs, CO.)

To implement these fundraising programs will require the work of community volunteers and the ongoing advice and assistance of fundraising professionals. An active Board of Directors is also a key component of achieving these goals, as Board members not only contribute themselves, they also help to solicit contributions from friends and colleagues. While we are confident in our ability to achieve the first tier as a community group, the second and third will depend upon the active participation of public officials and other community leaders. Higher-level gifts will depend upon developing an inspiring vision for the site. For this reason, it is not possible to identify a specific fundraising goal (or even a range) for them until the master planning process is completed.

VII. Collaboration with City Departments and Resources

As with the existing Crystal Lake park space, the acquired property will fall under the daily care and management of the Parks and Recreation Department. The Crystal Lake Conservancy will meet regularly with appropriate city officials to facilitate the incorporation of the park space into the Parks and Recreation Maintenance Plan and to ensure the park's ongoing care. The Crystal Lake Conservancy will also advocate for a larger City budget for seasonal maintenance of this expanded public space.

In addition to the private fundraising efforts described above, the site itself has the potential to generate revenue to help pay for maintenance and operating expenses. With a year-round facility on the site, the possibility would exist of renting space for private functions. In addition, the existing house at 230 Lake Avenue could play a role in revenue-generating activities. However, since the fate of that structure is unknown at this time, further efforts to identify an organization with whom the City can enter into a lease agreement has been put on hold. Any potential tenant of the existing structure should be evaluated to ensure environmental sensitivity, allowance of continual use of the outdoor space acquired, and impact on the neighborhood.

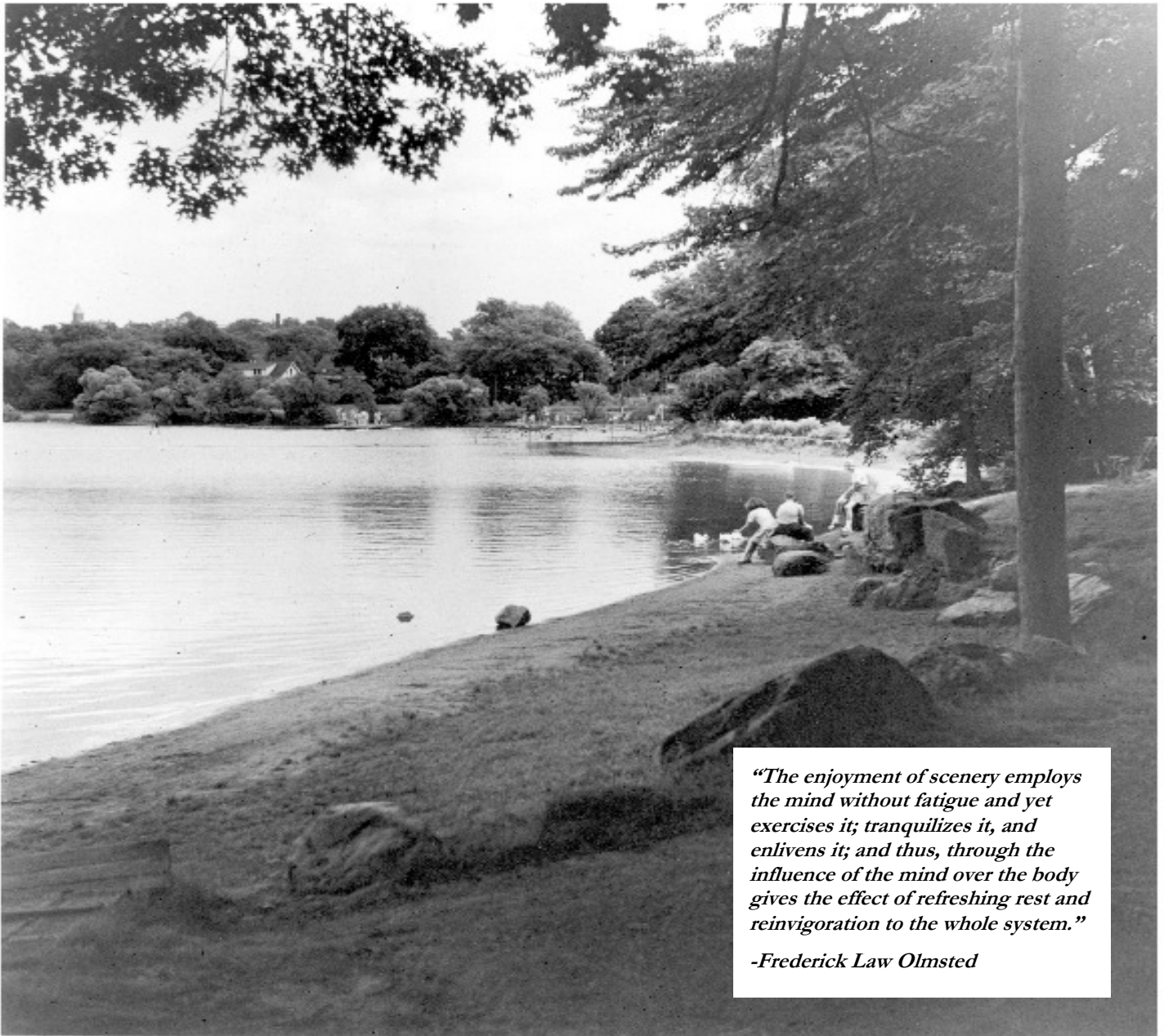
VIII. Conclusions

We are taking the first steps necessary to realize the full benefit of this opportunity to expand and enhance the recreational value of Crystal Lake. Our efforts are complimented by City-wide participation and interest to protect the unique natural beauty of this environment. With teamwork and collaborative support, we will be able to accomplish the renewal of the public facilities that exist and the creation of a beautiful, sustainable waterfront Park for sensible and safe water activities; and for year-round passive recreational use for all of Newton's citizens.

The many citizens involved in this effort recognize that enhancing Crystal Lake is an ongoing process and will evolve in the coming months. While it is not a simple task to solicit funding from a wide variety of resources, it is more feasible with a defined vision of the end product, namely an approved Master Plan for the park and its use. To date, the advocacy and actions required in order to purchase 20 Rogers Street and 230 Lake Avenue have taken precedence over the finalization of such a plan. The citizens of Newton wisely chose to participate in the Community Preservation Act; and this has allowed our CPC and community to respond to this opportunity, 'competing' in the marketplace to acquire this invaluable natural beauty to create a new "special place in the civic landscape."

IX. Attachments

- Commitment Letter from Solomon Fund
- The Lawrence and Lillian Solomon Fund, description
- Hurwit & Associates, letter of introduction
- Newton Conservators, Inc., Letter of Support
- Newton Highlands Area Council, Letter of Support
- Newton Conservators, Inc., Conservation Restriction Agreement Letter
- City of Newton Locus Map
- Crystal Lake Area Map
- Aerial View, Existing Gil Bathhouse and Adjacent Property
- Concept Plan for a Better Bathhouse and Park
- 230 Lake Avenue Photos



“The enjoyment of scenery employs the mind without fatigue and yet exercises it; tranquilizes it, and enlivens it; and thus, through the influence of the mind over the body gives the effect of refreshing rest and reinvigoration to the whole system.”
-Frederick Law Olmsted