



City of Newton, Massachusetts Community Preservation Committee



David B. Cohen
Mayor

MEMORANDUM

DATE: 25 March 2008, *revised 8 April 2008*

TO: The Honorable Board of Aldermen

FROM: Community Preservation Committee

RE: **recommended CPA funding for a Heritage Landscape Inventory**

1. **PROJECT TITLE:** Heritage Landscape Inventory
2. **CPA CATEGORIES:** Historic Resources, Open Space, Recreation Land
3. **PROJECT DESCRIPTION & FUNDING REQUEST**

The Planning and Development Department requests \$10,500 to create a Newton Heritage Landscape Inventory: a documented and prioritized list of landscapes in the City to be treated as historic resources for planning, funding and management purposes, including but not limited to parks, playgrounds and conservation areas.

This project will use as models the process developed by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation’s heritage landscapes initiative, used to produce inventories for about 50 other communities in the Commonwealth (www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship/histland/Inventoryprog.htm). The process combines extensive community participation with expert review and evaluation of sites. DCR reports that such inventories have become critical elements in community plans for open space and recreation plans, as well as historic preservation. This inventory will be completed in time to contribute to the next major revision of Newton’s *Recreation & Open Space Plan*, in 2008.

The DCR defines heritage landscapes as “special places and spaces that help define the character of the community and reflect its past,” including

cemeteries	mill sites	farms	scenic roads
commons	formal gardens	river corridors	village centers
estates	parks	archaeological sites	

The Planning and Development Department will contribute substantial time from the project manager, Community Development Program Manager Amy Yuhasz, for project outreach, coordinating community input and review, and distribution of the final report.

4. CPC VOTE & RECOMMENDATION

By a vote of 7-0 on 27 February 2008, the Community Preservation Committee recommended that the following amounts be appropriated from the fy08 Community Preservation Fund

Estimated consultant’s fee & reimbursable expenses	\$10,000
City of Newton Law Dept. services	\$500
TOTAL recommended appropriation	\$10,500

allocated as follows among allowable uses of community preservation funds:

historic resources	60%
open space	20%
recreation land	20%

5. OTHER CPC RECOMMENDATIONS

The Community Preservation Committee also recommends that:

1. Funds for this project be appropriated for spending under the authority of the Director of Planning & Development.
2. The project be completed within 1 year after appropriated funds become available. If at all possible, the project's final report should be available by November 2008, so that it can inform the preparation and review of proposals submitted for fy09 CP funding.
3. The project manager work with the Newton Purchasing Department to develop, review, and distribute an RFQ for the outside consultant.
4. The project manager submit progress reports to the Community Preservation Program manager monthly, or more often if requested.
5. The project's interim and final reports be posted on the Community Preservation Program website, and distributed as widely as possible to all project participants and other interested groups, agencies and individuals.

Finally, any funds not spent for the project's stated purposes must be returned to the Community Preservation Fund upon completion of the project.

6. ATTACHMENTS (delivered to the clerks of the Committee on Community Preservation and Finance Committee)

- ◆ Appendix: *DETAILED FINDINGS on FUNDING ELIGIBILITY & PRIORITIES*
- ◆ proposal
- ◆ letters of support
- ◆ CP staff memo on evaluating historic significance, with federal, state, & local criteria
- ◆ *upon request*: sample final Heritage Landscape Inventory reports from other communities

Appendix

DETAILED FINDINGS on FUNDING ELIGIBILITY & PRIORITIES

Community Preservation Act (MGL c.44B)

Definition of a historic resource: The sites to be inventoried by this project fit the CPA's definition of a historic resource as "a building, structure, vessel, real property, document or artifact that is listed or eligible for listing on the state register of historic places or has been determined by the local historic preservation commission to be significant in the history, archeology, architecture or culture of a city or town."

Criteria for listing on state register of historic places: These criteria, referenced in the CPA, are the same as for the National Register of Historic Places, which lists resources meeting at least one of the following criteria:

- associated with events that have made significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history
- associated with the lives of persons significant in our past
- embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, represent the work of a master, possess high artistic values, or represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction
- have yielded, or are likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history

The Massachusetts state Heritage Landscapes Initiative adds a fifth criterion or category:

- places that generate a strong positive reaction from the community for reasons of the heart

Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Properties: The CPA requires the rehabilitation of historic resources to follow these standards, which since 1995 have explicitly included standards for cultural landscapes, defined as any "geographic area associated with a historic event, activity, or person

or exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values.” The standards encourage assessing each landscape “as a continuum through history,” and preserving its multiple “chronological and physical ‘layers’.”

Assessing local significance: The broad state and federal definitions of historic resources referenced in the Community Preservation Act require each community to determine which sites are truly significant in its own “history, archaeology, architecture or culture” and thus merit treatment as historic resources.

The Heritage Landscape Inventory will provide a *model process* for evaluating historic significance by:

- ◆ soliciting nominations for heritage landscapes from the entire community
- ◆ providing an expert, outside consultant’s evaluation of those nominations
- ◆ revising and adopting the consultant’s recommendations, through citywide meetings and public comments

The final *products* of this process will be:

- a. a broad, inclusive list of heritage landscapes nominated by the community
- b. a shorter list of priority landscapes, evaluated by an expert outside consultant, then reviewed and adopted through a citywide community process
- c. a set of community-based but expert-reviewed *criteria* used to get from a.to b.

In some ways, **c.** may be the Inventory’s most important product. These criteria will document how Newton residents define and value the city’s historic “community character,” and can be further refined to help set funding and management priorities for all types of historic resources, including but not limited to landscapes.

Newton Community Preservation Plan

This project addresses the following goals in Newton’s *Community Preservation Plan* (comments follow selected goals):

OVERARCHING GOALS

- ◆ Contribute to the preservation of Newton’s unique character

Many projects and proposals stress the importance of landscapes, both public and private, in defining Newton’s community character (most often by invoking its title as “the Garden City.”) Recent examples have included preserving or restoring the last remnant of the once-huge historic plant nursery associated with the Durant-Kenrick Homestead, rehabilitating various parks and playgrounds first established between 1880 and 1910, and expanding and rehabilitating the public landscape around Crystal Lake.

The CPC, the Historical Commission, and the Board of Aldermen have all expressed a desire to evaluate the historic significance of these sites in a citywide context, rather than case by case (when each site seems critical). Existing citywide plans do not generally meet this need, because the city’s historic property surveys have focused on buildings and architecture, open space plans have focused on places where the impact of human history is (or is assumed to be) minimal; and recreation plans have focused on active recreation facilities rather than park landscapes. This project will help to fill these gaps.

- Serve more than one CPA category.

This project will support future projects that cross the borders among historic resources, open space, and recreation land.

- Show that a project is the most reasonable available option to achieve the objective.
- Demonstrate the highest cost/benefit value relative to other proposals.
- Distribute CPA funds throughout the City.

By laying a common, citywide groundwork for evaluating landscapes as historic resources, this project will benefit numerous future projects and proposals throughout Newton, in a more consistent way and at a lower cost than would be possible if this work were done only on a project-by-project basis.

- Demonstrate strong community support.

This project is supported by the Historical Commission, the Conservation Commission, the Parks and Recreation Commission, the League of Women Voters, the Newton Conservators, and the Newton Historical Society.

HISTORIC RESOURCES GOALS

- ◆ Support the preservation and/or restoration of properties that are on the national or state historic registers ... or that are found to be “preferably preserved” or historically significant by the Newton Historical Commission.
- ◆ Encourage protection of resources that retain their historic integrity.
- ◆ Support the objectives and priorities of local historic preservation organizations, such as the Newton Historical Society, the Newton History Museum, local historic districts, and other such organizations within the City of Newton.

OPEN SPACE GOALS

- ◆ Expand existing open spaces.
- ◆ Enable the development of passive recreation opportunities, such as walking, jogging, cross-country skiing or community gardening.
- ◆ Serve as suitable sites for nature-related education, scientific study, or observation and enjoyment of nature.
- ◆ Protect natural features of special interest.
- ◆ Provide linkages between open spaces, both as wildlife corridors and for passive recreation.

RECREATIONAL LAND GOALS

- ◆ Provide multiple recreation opportunities in a given location.
- ◆ Serve passive as well as active uses, and the diverse recreation needs of the community.

Comprehensive Plan (2007)

This project also addresses multiple goals in Newton’s recently adopted *Comprehensive Plan*, many of which reflect goals in the *Community Preservation Plan*, or treat Newton’s Community Preservation Program as a model for planning in general:

EXCELLENCE IN PLACE-MAKING (broad goals for planning, preservation and development)

Implement the “Charleston Principles” for historic preservation, adopted nationally in 1990 and by Newton in 1992:

- ◆ Identify historic places, both architectural and natural, that give the community its special character and that can aid its future well-being.
- ◆ Ensure that policies and decisions on community growth and development respect a community’s heritage.
- ◆ Demand excellence ... in the stewardship of historic properties and places.
- ◆ Use a community’s heritage to educate citizens of all ages and to build civic pride.

In addition,

- ◆ Involve those who live, work, or have other stakes in places, [to create] guidance for which they feel real proprietorship and responsibility.
- ◆ Treat the investments that the city makes [as] a key way of achieving the community’s vision.
- ◆ Assure that the special characteristics of places are respected ... without stifling creativity [in their future use and development].
- ◆ Think and act from a comprehensive perspective. Many residents supported adoption of the CPA in the belief that it would lead to partnerships across ... open space, preservation, housing, and recreation – and that belief has been rewarded.

OPEN SPACE

- ◆ Create a master plan for the natural landscape of Newton’s parks – Newton’s first parks in Newton Centre and Auburndale were playgrounds. For a century active recreation has been the major focus for park use, but our parks are also landscaped areas of refreshment and scenic pleasure.

- ◆ Preliminary planning to meet multiple goals – Foster coordinated planning for open space, recreation, schools, and other cultural facilities. ... Other funding systems should reward that kind of integration, as does the Community Preservation Act.

PLANNING WITH & FOR HISTORY

- ◆ "Do more with history": make the ways in which Newton uses its historic resources match the depth and breadth of the resources themselves. This requires active community engagement and participation.
- ◆ Align Newton with recent trends in the national practice of historic preservation ... toward integrating historic resources into everyday life.
- ◆ Recognize and sustain both the connections and the contrasts among different parts of the City.