



Setti D. Warren
Mayor

DOCKET ITEM NO.
#192-11

City of Newton, Massachusetts
Department of Planning and Development
1000 Commonwealth Avenue Newton, Massachusetts 02459

Telephone
(617) 796-1120
Telefax
(617) 796-1142
TDD/TTY
(617) 796-1089
www.newtonma.gov

Candace Havens
Director

Community Preservation Committee
FUNDING RECOMMENDATION

date: 13 June 2011

from: Community Preservation Committee

to: The Honorable Board of Aldermen

about:: **Recreation & Open Space Plan**

PROJECT GOALS & ELIGIBILITY

This project will accelerate completion of the new edition of Newton’s *Recreation & Open Space Plan* to replace the previous *Plan*, which expired in 2007. The City needs a current *Plan* to qualify for grants administered by the state’s Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, including Self-Help, Urban Self-Help, and the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The *Plan* also helps Newton to allocate its own scarce operating and capital funds for conservation, recreation, and natural resources.

This project is eligible for funding under the Community Preservation Act as a critical prerequisite for the “acquisition, creation and preservation of open space,” and for the “acquisition, creation and preservation of land for recreational use.” Newton’s 2007 *Comprehensive Plan* also counted on the next *Recreation & Open Space Plan* to “recognize, preserve and maintain the City’s important natural assets and resources; ensure an adequate amount, variety, and distribution of open space for both public benefit and biodiversity; integrate compatible recreation and conservation uses; protect and preserve remaining large open spaces; and assure well-informed and well-coordinated stewardship” for these resources.

RECOMMENDED FUNDING

On 18 May 2011 by a unanimous vote of 9-0, the Community Preservation Committee recommended that \$4,000 be appropriated to the control of the Director of Planning & Development, to hire a consultant to assist in completing a new *Recreation & Open Space Plan*. These funds should be drawn from the open space reserves of the Community Preservation Fund and may be used for any purpose listed or implied below:

SOURCES	
Community Preservation funds (recommended)	\$4,000
Planning Dept. staff time (from fy11 & fy12 General Fund budgets)	\$14,200
Total Sources	\$18,200
USES	
Data collection & analysis (work largely completed)	\$9,200
Community participation, report drafts & report distribution (remaining)	\$8,900
Total Uses	\$18,200

website www.newtonma.gov/cpa
contact Alice E. Ingerson, Community Preservation Program Manager
email aingerson@newtonma.gov phone 617.796.1144

SPECIAL ISSUES CONSIDERED BY THE CPC

Evaluating the Costs and Benefits of Land Acquisition Purchases of land for open space or recreation have been among the most expensive projects supported by Newton's Community Preservation Fund: over \$6 million for Kessler Woods, over \$4 million for land at Crystal Lake, over \$2.5 million for Angino Farm. There are many reasons for this: Land in Newton is expensive. The CPA requires communities to pay full market value unless a seller voluntarily accepts a lower price. When a priority parcel comes on the market, the need for a quick response often requires the City to use debt financing, making the acquisition even more expensive.

In short, high costs make it important, but time pressures make it difficult, to evaluate land acquisitions thoughtfully. Newton's thorough community participation process for its *Recreation & Open Space Plan*, which far exceeds state requirements, is critical for careful but quick action on individual acquisition proposals.

Obstacles to Completing & Implementing a Recreation & Open Space Plan Since the last *Plan* expired in 2007, the CPC has often noted the need for a new *Plan*. Recognizing competing demands for staff time in the Planning and Development Department as a significant obstacle to meeting this need, the CPC encouraged the department to submit this off-cycle request, which the Committee then recommended unanimously.

Several members, including Wally Bernheimer, Mike Clarke, Zack Blake, and Dan Green were concerned that this additional funding could not remove what was probably the greatest obstacle to creating a current, valid *Plan*: that City government as a whole, beyond the Planning Dept., did not see such a *Plan* as a top priority. Similarly, some CPC members, including Nancy Grissom, were concerned that future City budgets might not provide the resources needed to implement the *Plan's* recommendations for the ongoing management and maintenance of the City's open spaces, recreation land, and natural resources.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS & KEY OUTCOMES

The Community Preservation Committee will evaluate this project based on these key outcomes:

1. Funds will be appropriated to the spending authority of the Director of Planning and Development, with Chief Planner for Long-term Planning Jennifer Molinsky as the project manager.
2. The project manager will provide the CPC with regular updates upon request and with a final, in-person and written report summarizing the project's planned vs. actual expenditures, process, and results.
3. Newton's 2012-17 *Recreation & Open Space Plan* will be completed and approved by the state by the end of June 2012, or by any extension of that deadline granted in writing by the Community Preservation Committee.
4. The final *Plan* will be widely publicized and distributed, and will be posted online, linked to the CPC's website and other City webpages.
5. Any portion of the Community Preservation Fund grant not used for the purposes stated herein will be returned to the Newton Community Preservation Fund.
6. The Planning & Development Department will work with the Conservation Commission and Parks & Recreation Department to update the CPC, upon request, on the implementation of the 2012-17 *Recreation & Open Space Plan* and on steps taken to avoid any time gap between this *Plan* and its successor.

ATTACHMENTS online from www.newtonma.gov/cpa/projects/open-space/open-space.htm and delivered to the clerks of the Committee on Community Preservation and Finance Committee

- Proposal & attachments
- CPC staff presentation of open space & recreation maps, including selected maps from the 2003-07 *Recreation & Open Space Plan*