

City of Newton

### APPLICATION FOR COMMUNITY PRESERVATION FUNDING



David B. Cohen  
Mayor

Submit to Jennifer Goldson, Community Preservation Planner  
Newton Planning and Development Department  
1000 Commonwealth Avenue, Newton, MA 02459  
jgoldson@ci.newton.ma.us  
617-796-1120 ext. 1131

Name of Applicant<sup>1</sup> Parks and Recreation Department

Name of Co-Applicant, if applicable CDBG Nonantum Advisory Committee and the Planning and Development Department

Contact Name Alice Webber, Chair, Nonantum Advisory Committee  
Tom Cahill, Parks and Recreation Department

Mailing Address 159 Adams St. City Newton State MA Zip 02458

Daytime Phone (617) 527-2896 Email \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Proposal Stearns Park Master Plan

Address of Proposal (or assessor's parcel id) Parcel ID # 11-0100-000700 and 11-0100-0002A0, Frontage on Jasset Street and Watertown Street, respectively

CPA Category (circle all that apply):    Open space    Historic preservation    **Recreation**    Community Housing

CPA Funding Requested \$51,000    Total Cost of Proposed Project \$51,000

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION:** Attach answers to the following questions. Applications will be returned as incomplete if all requested information is not provided. Include supporting materials as necessary.

1. **Goals:** What are the goals of the proposed project?
2. **Community Need:** Why is this project needed? Does it address needs identified in existing City plans?
3. **Community Support:** What is the nature and level of support for this project? Include letters of support and any petitions.
4. **Timeline:** What is the schedule for project implementation, including a timeline for all critical milestones?
5. **Credentials:** How will the experience of the applicant contribute to the success of this project?
6. **Success Factors:** How will the success of this project will be measured? Be as specific as possible.
7. **Budget:** What is the total budget for the project and how will CPA funds be spent? All items of expenditure must be clearly identified. Distinguish between hard and soft costs and contingencies. (NOTE: CPA funds may NOT be used for maintenance.)
8. **Other Funding:** What additional funding sources are available, committed, or under consideration? Include commitment letters, if available, and describe any other attempts to secure funding for this project.

<sup>1</sup> If the proposal is on City-owned land, either the applicant or the co-applicant must be the City Board, Commission, or Department in control of the land.

9. **Maintenance:** If ongoing maintenance is required for your project, how will it be funded?

**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.
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.
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.
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)
14. Evidence that the proposed site is free of hazardous materials or that there is a plan for remediation in place.
15. Evidence that appropriate professional standards will be followed if construction, restoration or rehabilitation is proposed.
16. Information indicating how this project can be used to achieve additional community benefits.

NOTE: If the requested funds are for a real estate acquisition, an independent appraisal will be required which the applicant will be required to fund. No funding decisions will be made without an independent appraisal. Contact Jennifer Goldson, Community Preservation Planner, at 617-796-1131 or [jgoldson@ci.newton.ma.us](mailto:jgoldson@ci.newton.ma.us) to arrange for an independent appraisal.

Refer to the City web site ([ci.newton.ma.us/Planning/CPA](http://ci.newton.ma.us/Planning/CPA)) for further information.  
*Form CPA-1 (Revised 9/11/03)*

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## **STEARNS PARK MASTER PLAN**

### **Application for Community Preservation Funding**

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Located on the site of the former Stearns School, Stearns Park is nestled in the village of Nonantum off of Watertown Street on Jasset Street. Approximately 3.5 acres, this neighborhood park currently contains both passive and active recreation areas including a large open lot with benches, game tables, and walkways; a basketball court; a little league baseball diamond; a tot-lot; swing sets; and tennis courts. The Parks and Recreation Department has partnered with the Nonantum Advisory Committee (NAC), a Mayoral-appointed group of neighborhood residents and business owners that makes recommendations on the use of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds in their neighborhood, to apply for the creation of a master plan for Stearns Park that may be implemented over a period of five years.

Minor enhancements have been made to Stearns Park over the years with funds from both the Parks and Recreation Department and the CDBG Program, which is administered by the Planning and Development Department (CDBG spent \$24,466 in FY2001 for new light fixtures, game tables, and benches.) Despite these piecemeal improvements, park abutters and members of the NAC are not satisfied with the condition of the park, nor do they feel that it is fully meeting the recreation needs of the community. Past projects were planned with budgetary constraints in mind, not with an overall assessment of existing conditions as they related to the established recreation needs of the neighborhood. As a result, area residents, the NAC and various City departments are calling for a change in the way parks are improved. In order to achieve the desired and long-lasting impacts, a community-approved master plan needs to be developed with the goal of making larger-scale, more significant, quality improvements that factor in existing conditions and community need. (Potential projects at Stearns Park are described in more detail later in this application.) Master planning at Stearns Park promises to raise the community's pride and enthusiasm for the park, to provide a clear and achievable action plan for the City, and hopefully to leverage additional funds to complete the project in a timely fashion.

Additionally, when planning improvements for a park, it is not only imperative to examine the amenities of that park and how it compares to nearby parks and established park standards, but it is also important to be sensitive to the activities occurring in the larger community. In Stearns Park's case, a new housing project is being developed adjacent to the site which will create 35 units of affordable rental housing for people 62 years of age and older. The project developer, CASCAP, is required to construct a walkway for residents to access the park from their apartment building, as there is currently no connection to the park. This increase in the number of elderly people using the park strengthens the argument for a master plan to analyze both current and projected park usage and needs.

In addition, the Planning and Development Department, at the request of NAC members, is investigating the acquisition of the adjacent vacant parcel that sits between Stearns Park and Watertown Street. At this point, it is unclear whether the property is available for sale, although initial conversations with the owner have been positive. If the property owner is willing to sell the property, the Parks and Recreation Commission will be asked to consider expanding Stearns Park onto this site, which is another reason why master planning at this time is crucial.

## 1. *Project Goals:*

As previously mentioned, the Parks and Recreation Department and the Nonantum Advisory Committee are partnering to request \$50,000 in CPA funding for the development of a master plan for Stearns Park and \$1,000 to conduct an appraisal on the adjacent vacant parcel (if needed). The combination of neighborhood residents expressing the need for additional park improvements, the desire for procedural change within the City, and the anticipated increase in park usage by seniors living at the new housing development substantiates the need for a master plan for the park. If approved, a Request for Proposals will be issued to seek a consultant who can develop a master plan based on consensus from a wide and disparate group of stakeholders. In general, the master plan would be divided into three main sections 1) an evaluation of current park conditions and uses, 2) a listing of community needs and input, and 3) an establishment of a plan for future park improvements.

Specifically, the consultant would be required to:

- Complete an inventory and assessment of existing park components including but not limited to:
  - Types, quantity and condition of play structures and equipment;
  - Size, quantity, and condition of trees, shrubs, and other plantings;
  - Size and condition of passive and active recreation fields;
  - Location and condition of walkways;
  - Location and condition of water fountains, benches, tables, trash receptacles, and other park fixtures;
  - Analysis of recreational activities by age category; and
  - Condition of drainage system and erosion controls (will require the services of a civil engineer).
- Meet regularly with City staff representing various departments to discuss and review project status.
- Conduct a general survey of residents within a .5 mile radius of park prior to start of community meetings that solicits information about residents' attitudes about the park, the quality and quantity of their household's park usage, and ideas for improvements.
- Facilitate four community meetings:
  1. Meeting 1 will occur after the resident survey has been conducted and analyzed and the inventory and assessment has been completed. Findings and facts will be presented. The community will provide input on the problems with the existing park and begin collecting ideas for additional or improved park components.
  2. Meeting 2 will be a design charrette that allows for direct input from the citizens and community stakeholders. The consultant will provide base maps for small group activity and instruct them to build their ideal park.
  3. Meeting 3 will be a presentation of the ideas generated at the charrette weighed against realities and ability to be implemented. The consultant will prepare schematics and present several scenarios to the residents, elected officials, and City staff. Ideally, one scenario will meet with a majority approval.
  4. Meeting 4 will be the unveiling of the master plan and a celebration of everyone's hard work.
- List and prioritize needs as obtained through the community participation process (needs are likely to encompass the areas of recreation, accessibility, lighting, evening usage, linkages/entrances, senior activities, play equipment, aesthetics, maintenance, parking, general infrastructure, etc.).

- Determine the feasibility of top priorities. The plan should be able to be executed, i.e. creative yet not too grandiose.
- Hire a surveyor to perform a formal site survey, given that the varied topography directly affects potential projects.
- Submit a final master plan that describes the community planning process, lists all comments received, details the major components to be addressed, presents recommendations for phasing, prescribes a maintenance plan, includes a map of concept plan for community distribution, etc.
- Furnish a cost estimate for implementation of the plan as well as ongoing maintenance costs.
- Show a detailed timeline delineating the necessary steps to implement the plan in five years.

The primary desired outcomes of the master plan would be 1) the development of specific improvement projects that can be implemented in phases as appropriate to specific funding sources, 2) a detailed timeline for these improvements, and 3) a cost estimate that includes contingencies and factors in inflation. Because the projects will have already been conceptually designed and approved by the community, a significant amount of time, effort and money will be saved allowing the Engineering Division of the Department of Public Works to easily prepare the necessary working drawings and specifications for public bid. This master plan should generate several projects over the next five years that would culminate in a community-designed and community-approved park.

As shown later in the project timeline, this request for Community Preservation funds for the development of a master plan, if approved, will be the first of two (potentially three) requests. After the completion of Phase I, the development of the master plan for the park, the Parks and Recreation Department and the NAC will again partner to submit a Phase II request for funds to implement the CPA-eligible work as outlined in the master plan. Another CPA request may be made to acquire the adjoining parcel that fronts on Watertown Street and expand Stearns Park if: 1) the Planning and Development Department is successful in negotiating with the owners of the parcel, and 2) if the Mayor, the Parks and Recreation Commission, and the Parks and Recreation Department agree that the acquisition is a priority and that there are sufficient resources to maintain it.

**2. Community Need:**

The most recent needs assessment for Nonantum was developed in 1999-2000 as part of the City's FY01-05 Consolidated Plan for Housing and Community Development, the plan that guides the use of CDBG and other federal funds in the City. Within the Nonantum needs assessment section of the plan, Stearns Park is identified as having the following needs: Tennis courts are in poor condition, signage is lacking, landscaping is overgrown in many places, and there is the need for a new activity area for neighborhood teens.

Since the time when the Consolidated Plan was developed, the residents participating in Nonantum Advisory Committee meetings have expressed the desire for additional improvements to the Park. Potential improvements are as follows (see the attached photos for examples):

<b>Potential Improvements to Stearns Park</b>
Investigate the acquisition of the parcel adjacent to the park which fronts on Watertown Street
Collaborate with developer to create a new accessible pathway linking the new senior housing to the park
Rebuild existing pathways to improve accessibility and to better connect people to park features
Create more senior-friendly activities (bocce court, etc.)

Reconstruct tennis courts, including new fencing
Control/prevent erosion
Develop an updated drainage system
Assess basketball court lighting (install something more neighborhood scale)
Fence basketball court
Install new basketball equipment
Make improvements to little league-sized ball field to make it usable
Evaluate and plant new trees/remove trees where appropriate
Address flagpole (remove or install new pole with flag)
Remove all wooden benches and replace with new recycled plastic benches
Replace existing non-functioning bubblers with new accessible bubblers where appropriate
Remove metal shelter, replace with new and more attractive structure

**3. Community Support:**

Numerous residents, City of Newton departments, and elected officials strongly support the preparation of a master plan for Stearns Park. The Nonantum Advisory Committee consists of 11 formal members, 3 Aldermen, and more than a dozen interested citizens. For nearly 30 years, the NAC has been committed to bettering Nonantum’s parks and infrastructure. The NAC, which comprises a representative sample of Nonantum residents, voted in favor of this application submission at their meeting on October 9, 2003.

In Spring 2003, an event was held at Stearns Park to celebrate the improvements made at the park through the CDBG program. The event drew a record number of Nonantum residents, demonstrating that people truly care about this community resource.

There is a broad base of support within the City of Newton for Stearns Park Master Planning, including the Office of the Mayor, the Parks and Recreation Department, the Parks and Recreation Commission, and the Planning and Development Department. At the October 20, 2003, meeting, the Parks and Recreation Commission voted in favor of submission of this application. Furthermore, all three Ward 1 Aldermen have earnestly offered support for this initiative. Please see the attached letters of support.

**4. Timeline:**

The Parks and Recreation Department and the Nonantum Advisory Committee are eager to develop a master plan at Stearns Park for many reasons. The Housing and Community Development Program of the Planning and Development Department will begin drafting the next five-year Consolidated Plan for Housing and Community Development in the summer of 2004. The upcoming Consolidated Plan will cover fiscal years 2006-2010. Projects will need to be identified for this period by January 2005. Certain facilities at Stearns Park are in need of maintenance, foremost are the tennis courts which have been listed in the City’s Capital Improvement Program for many years and continue to deteriorate. Completing a plan soon is important so that these maintenance items are factored into the “big picture.”

<b>Activity/Event</b>	<b>When</b>
Phase I CPA application submitted (master planning)	November 2003
Planning Department negotiates with adjacent parcel owner for acquisition	November 2003 – February 2004

Phase 1 CPA application approved	April 2004
RFP issued for master planning	May 2004
Consultant identified	June 2004
Consultant begins work	July 2004
Consultant conducts series of community meetings	August- September 2004
Master plan finalized and adopted	October 2004
Phase 2 CPA application submitted (implementation of CPA-eligible projects as presented in the master plan)	November 2004
CDBG-eligible projects identified for Consolidated Plan FY06-10	January 2005
Phase 2 CPA application approved	April 2005
Specifications are prepared by Engineering Division for CPA-eligible improvements	July- October 2005
CPA project bid	January 2006
CPA project construction period	April- August 2006
Specifications are prepared by Engineering Division for CDBG-eligible improvements	Summer 2007
CIP request submitted for outstanding items not addressed by CPA or CDBG	Fall 2007
CDBG project bid	January 2008
CIP approved	Spring 2008
CDBG project construction period	April –August 2008
Master Plan realized	Fall 2008

**5. *Credentials:***

Staff of both the Parks and Recreation Department and the Planning and Development Department, the department that administers the City’s CDBG Program and staffs the NAC, have the experience needed to secure and oversee the appropriate consultant to perform the requested master planning work and to bring the plan to fruition in a staged effort. Both departments regularly administer contracts for professional services and construction work. Additionally, the community relationships developed by both departments will help facilitate the level of citizen participation needed to make this planning effort meaningful.

The NAC also will play a sizeable role in developing and implementing the proposed master plan. This savvy and vocal neighborhood group serves as a conduit for expressing the needs of the neighborhood. Their community connection will play a key role in the citizen participation process, as they will encourage residents to participate in the development of the master plan. Also, through past work with CDBG-funded projects, they are intimately familiar with governmental procedures and can help educate their peers on these processes.

**6. *Success Factors:***

Project success will be measured by determining how well the master plan and subsequent improvements meet the recreation needs of neighborhood residents. Parks and Recreation and Planning and Development Department staff will monitor the master plan development work closely with the consultant to obtain the appropriate level of citizen participation needed to ensure that the changes proposed to the park meet community needs.

The City will also measure the success of the master planning effort based on how well the resources available (funding, staff, etc.) match the improvements proposed for the park.

Also, City staff will conduct a follow-up survey to measure the changes in attitude and quality of life since the improvements were made at the park. The City anticipates a greater usage by neighbors, increase in pride and comfort level at the park, and a reduction in littering and vandalism.

#### **7. Budget:**

The Parks and Recreation Department and the Nonantum Advisory Committee are requesting \$50,000 for the creation of a master plan for Stearns Park and an additional \$1,000 for an independent appraisal of the adjacent vacant parcel, if needed. If funds are awarded to this project, it is the hope of the applicants that, where appropriate, CPA and CDBG funds, as well as other City resources, will be used in a Phase II project implementation to make the improvements delineated in the plan.

The grant request of \$50,000 was substantiated from several phone quotes received from landscape architectural firms. The firms were asked to provide a lump sum quote for all the master plan components as listed in Section 1: Project Goals. The range of the submissions was from \$40,000 to \$56,000. The request of \$1,000 for an appraisal is based on past appraisals conducted for Community Preservation projects.

#### **8. Other Funding:**

The CDBG Program is the most significant resource available to partner with Community Preservation funds. As mentioned earlier, the CIP provides another potential source of funds for this project.

Newton's CDBG Program receives approximately \$3 million dollars each year, of which \$200,000 has been set aside for neighborhood improvements. These funds rotate annually between neighborhoods with the highest concentration of low- and moderate-income people (target neighborhoods). Nonantum has been designated as a target neighborhood since the CDBG Program's inception. In addition to neighborhood improvement funds, the CDBG Program allocates roughly the same amount annually for accessibility improvements for people with disabilities.

In the past, parks in Nonantum, including Stearns Park, have received CDBG funds for improvements. Generally funds have been divided among a few projects, so the entire \$200,000 was not used for park improvements. This has resulted in limited improvements being achieved.

In FY05, the next time the Nonantum target neighborhood will receive CDBG funds, the Nonantum Advisory Committee desires to concentrate this limited allocation of funds on one project in order to achieve the maximum desired outcome. Improvements at both Stearns Park and Pellegrini Park were the NAC's highest priorities for funding, however, it appears that the NAC will recommend focusing FY05 CDBG funds on Pellegrini Park because of several pressing needs. Consequently, there will be no funding available for Stearns Park in FY2005. However, CDBG funding is available for Stearns in future fiscal years.

This is an ideal time for master planning because having a vision with an associated cost estimate will ensure that Stearns Park will receive CDBG funds in the future. It is the hope of the Parks and Recreation Department and the NAC that CPA funds can be used for master planning work, and the result, a blueprint for improvements, can be implemented using CDBG funds to leverage additional



CPA, CIP and perhaps even some private funds. As previously mentioned, private funds will be used to create a pathway into the park from the new senior housing development.

**9. Maintenance:**

Maintenance for any improvements made as a result of this planning effort will be funded through the Parks and Recreation Department, as is currently the case with the routine maintenance that is performed at the park. As with CPA funds, CDBG funds are prohibited from being used for maintenance costs. The master plan will outline suggestions for maintenance for the improvements, as well as provide a cost estimate for the Parks and Recreation Department to include in yearly budgets.

**Additional Information:**

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

Stearns Park is City-owned. The Parks and Recreation Department has jurisdiction over the site.

**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.**

This request is for master planning only.

**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.**

N/A

**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).**

As stated earlier, the Parks and Recreation Commission approved the proposal at their meeting on October 20, 2003. Minutes of that meeting may be obtained upon request.

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

Numerous past construction projects have not revealed any hazardous materials at Stearns Park.

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

This request is for master planning only.

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

The master plan will not only result in change to this valued neighborhood park and positively affect residential attitudes and quality of life, but the planning effort may also produce two other community benefits. Improvements to the park, especially accessibility improvements, will directly benefit the new users of Stearns Park, the residents of the affordable elderly housing project being developed adjacent to the site.

The effort may also result in the creation of additional parkland. As stated earlier, the Department of Planning and Development has begun preliminary negotiations with the owners of the parcel immediately adjacent to the park, fronting Watertown Street. Based on an initial conversation with the owner of the parcel, he is open to proceeding to the next step of determining fair market value for the parcel. The Planning and Development Department believes that the highest and best use for this vacant parcel is parkland, though the current zoning is Multi-Residence 2, which allows for the construction of two housing units by-right. As negotiations progress, the Planning and Development Department will discuss the creation of a half an acre of parkland with the Mayor, the Parks and Recreation Commission, and the Parks and Recreation Department. Having a more observable presence in Nonantum's village center will only strengthen Stearns Park's position as an important neighborhood park and will help preserve additional open space in Nonantum, a goal consistent with the City's Open Space Plan and the Community Preservation Act.



**Reconstruction of Tennis Courts and  
Establishment of Walkway to New Housing Developments  
(walkway is proposed for area behind fencing)**





**Accessibility Improvements Needed on Walkways and Entranceways**





**Replacement of Old Equipment with New and Preservation of Ball Field**





**Analysis of Existing Conditions and Recommendations for Change**

