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Community Preservation Committee Funding Recommendation for WABAN HILL RESERVOIR

date: 22 December 2014
from: Community Preservation Committee
to: The Honorable Board of Aldermen

PROJECT GOALS & ELIGIBILITY

The Waban Hill Reservoir, on a five-acre parcel bordered by Ward Street, Woodlawn Drive, Reservoir Drive, and Manet Road in Chestnut Hill, was originally built by the City of Newton in the late 1870s and sold to Boston's Metropolitan Water Board in 1900. When the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority recently decommissioned the Reservoir, the state legislature authorized its sale to the City of Newton, with a restriction limiting its uses to public open space and recreation, for a price to be set through an independent appraisal. The current funding request includes both the acquisition cost and initial site improvements such as dam safety compliance, new fencing, an access road, parking, and a path. The project is eligible for CPA funds as the acquisition, creation and rehabilitation of either open space or land for outdoor recreation.

RECOMMENDED FUNDING

On 11 December 2104 by a vote of 6-1, the Community Preservation Committee recommended appropriating \$980,000 for this project to the control of the Commissioner of Parks & Recreation. All CPA funds for this project should be treated as "recreation" and be appropriated first from the Community Preservation Fund's open space fund balance and current reserve, then as needed from its general (unrestricted) funds.

Waban Hill Reservoir – Sources	
CPA Funds	\$ 980,000
TBD	\$ 136,946
Total \$ 1,116,946	
Waban Hill Reservoir – Uses	
Acquisition (determined by state-commissioned appraisal)	\$ 404,800
Conservation Restriction (CR) Monitoring & Enforcement Fund	\$ 30,000
Master Plan Design/Public Process	\$ 30,000
Initial Site Improvements (dam regulatory compliance, gatehouse, water quality, public safety & accessibility)	\$ 461,488
First-year Site Mowing (not CPA-eligible)	\$ 4,500
Design & Construction Contingency: CPA Funding (≈ 11% of costs other than acquisition & CR fund)	\$ 53,712
Design & Construction Contingency: Non-CPA Funding (≈ 27% of costs other than acquisition & CR fund)	\$ 132,446
Total \$ 1,116,946	

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SPECIAL ISSUES CONSIDERED BY THE CPC

Site Acquisition & Conservation Restriction

The CPC received approximately 105 letters, emails or public hearing comments about this proposal, from approximately 85 unique households—all in support of acquiring this site and converting it to a public park. All CPC members supported recommending the funds requested to acquire the site and to assist the Newton Conservators in monitoring and enforcing the conservation restriction (CR) required by the state as a condition for selling the site to the City of Newton.

Site Uses, Planning, Design & Construction

The proposal's contingency is listed as 20% of total costs, including acquisition, but is approximately 37% of listed planning, design and construction costs. Most CPC members saw this large contingency as evidence of significant uncertainty about both costs and priorities for long-term improvements at the site. Some letters and public hearing comments also highlighted this uncertainty. For example, hearing speakers suggested replacing the gatehouse with a simpler structure or lowering the dam, to reduce maintenance costs, improve safety and increase the site's usable land area. If these options were chosen after certain improvements listed in the proposal had already been made (gatehouse repairs, fence, access road, parking, path), those improvements might need to be rebuilt or relocated.

For these reasons, many CPC members initially preferred to consider funding for these improvements only when a completed master plan could support clearer site-specific cost estimates, with a smaller contingency. Ultimately, however, 6 CPC members were persuaded that guaranteeing the immediate availability of design and construction funds might be critical for final approval of the acquisition itself. CPC member Beryl Gilfix voted against the final funding motion because she continued to prefer phased funding.

Finally, the amount of funding recommended reflects all CPC members' preference for a contingency smaller than that in the current proposal. The Committee cannot enforce this as a requirement, but it hopes that stating its preference clearly will encourage the Parks & Recreation Dept. to complete a master plan for the Waban Hill Reservoir prior to constructing significant site improvements.

CPA Eligibility: Maintenance vs. Capital Improvements

The CPC recognizes that it is not always easy to distinguish CPA-ineligible "maintenance" from CPA-eligible "capital improvements." However, all CPC members agreed that lawn mowing falls under "maintenance." The Committee urges the Parks & Recreation Dept. to avoid spending any CPA funds on lawn mowing, even in the short period immediately after site acquisition.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Deadlines & Extensions**, starting from the date CPA funds are appropriated: site acquisition will be completed, and planning/design work will begin, within 6 months; and initial site improvements using CPA funds will be completed within 2 years. Both deadlines may be extended by the CPC or its officers in response to a written request by the Parks & Recreation Department.
- 2. Reporting:** The Parks & Recreation Department will provide project updates to the CPC and Board of Aldermen upon request, and prior to spending the final 10 percent of CPA funds, will present to the CPC an in-person and written final report, including a clear comparison of budgeted to actual expenditures.
- 3. Return of Unspent Funds:** Any CPA funds appropriated but not used for the purposes stated herein will be returned to the Newton Community Preservation Fund.

KEY OUTCOMES

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

- Completion by the deadlines listed above of both the acquisition and any CPA-funded site improvements identified as high priorities in a completed master plan.
- Adequate future maintenance of the site, using a combination of the City of Newton operating budget and additional resources provided on a voluntary basis by the community.

ATTACHMENTS See detailed list on the following page.

ATTACHMENTS (delivered to the clerks of the Programs & Services Committee and Finance Committee)

- **draft Board order**
- **CPC project webpage**, including links to the full text of all documents and community feedback for which the Board is receiving only summaries in this packet:
 - www.newtonma.gov/gov/planning/cpa/projects/waban_hill.asp
- **Excerpts from the Community Preservation Act** (MGL Chapter 44B) re: open space vs. recreation land, maintenance vs. capital improvements, requirement for permanent restrictions
- **Maps & photos** presented at 11 December 2014 CPC public hearing on this proposal
- **Project budgets:** acquisition & capital improvements; 10-year projected operating/maintenance costs
- **Proposal** submitted November-December 2014, **plus selected attachments:**
 - Listings for this project in City of Newton *Capital Improvement Plan* and *Recreation & Open Space Plan*
 - State legislation authorizing sale of the reservoir to the City of Newton and state-commissioned appraisal (summary page)
 - Waban Hill Reservoir Advisory Group – executive summary of final report
 - Waban Hill Reservoir - Planning Dept. staff report
 - Engineering Evaluation (Stantec) – executive summary
- **Community feedback:**
 - Full letters from organizations: Newton Conservators, League of Women Voters, Waban Hill Reservoir Advisory Group, Friends of Waban Hill Reservoir, Chestnut Hill Neighborhood Association
 - CPC staff summary of individual letters: supporting households by village/neighborhood, valued site features/desired uses

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