

CITY OF NEWTON
LAW DEPARTMENT
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 19, 2008
TO: Community Preservation Committee
FROM: Daniel M. Funk, City Solicitor
RE: **Parks as Historic Resources – CPA funding**

Background

The City has applied for CPA funding in support of the preservation restoration and rehabilitation of three Newton Parks/ Playgrounds for historic purposes: Newton Centre Playground; Newton Upper Falls Playground; and Farlow and Chaffin Parks.

Question

Are these proposals, as set forth in the applications filed with the Community Preservation Committee (CPC), eligible for CPA funding based on the “preservation, rehabilitation [or] restoration of historic resources”

Short Answer

The Farlow/Chaffin Parks proposal is the only one of these three applications that truly sets forth an “historic resource” basis for CPA funding.

Discussion

I have reviewed the three applications as well as Alice Ingerson’s memorandum of March 11, 2008 to the CPC in which she evaluates these proposals as to whether they legitimately qualify as historic resources as currently proposed. I also note the definition of the phrase “historic resources” as set forth in GL c. 44B section 2, which reads as follows:

“A building, structure, vessel [sic] 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, archaeology, architecture or culture of the city or town”.

The key to the analysis is whether the facts set forth in each of these applications justifies the use of CPA funds for the preservation, rehabilitation or restoration of an historic resource. Although each of these parks and playgrounds contain historic aspects to them, a closer look at the actual work being proposed raises questions as to the legitimacy of using CPA funds based upon the “historic resource” rationale.

Newton Upper Falls Playground

Based upon the description of the proposed work which includes the reconstruction of the tennis courts, a children’s play area featuring new equipment and surfacing and the paving of a parking area, it is difficult to locate the “historic resource” elements of this application. If there are legitimate historical resources on site that can be supported by CPA funds, they would need to be more clearly articulated and described in order to qualify for CPA funding under the “historic resources” justification.

Newton Centre Playground

It is quite apparent when reviewing this application that the focus of it is on modifying the playground by creating improved access, including handicapped accessibility. While lip service is paid to the historic background of the playground, and emphasis is placed on the proposed work being performed in a manner consistent with the historic aspects of the playground, this application is not primarily about improving an historic resource.¹

Here, as above, in order to qualify for the “historic” category of funding, it will be necessary to match the work with the historic resource being preserved or rehabilitated. This may very well be do-able, but not pursuant to this application as currently constructed.

Farlow and Chaffin Parks

By way of contrast, this application is flush with historic bases for the proposed work. The bridge and pond designs and construction along with the restoration of the historic signage and wall all seem to fall squarely within the historic resource funding justification. Some of the proposed work might be more historically consistent than actually historic in nature, but the focus of the project is quite clearly to restore the historic aspects of the parks that have fallen in disrepair. Accordingly, I find that this application is currently eligible for CPA funding consideration.

¹ In fact, because this application has been filed previously on the basis of recreational use, the “Recreation” category is still marked off as a funding category on page one of the document.

Heritage Landscape Inventory

While the Heritage Landscape Inventory (HLI) proposal is still pending before the CPC, I feel compelled to mention it as a tool that, if approved, will certainly be an asset to revised proposals that can be developed for both the Upper Falls and Newton Centre Playground applications for CPA funding.² As set forth in the application for CPA funding for the HLI, it will “identify and evaluate significant historic resources in the city and ...present recommendations for preserving these important resources.”

Since the HLI will be performed by an independent contractor, his/her recommendations for such historic preservation will undoubtedly legitimize much of the CPA funding for the work being proposed at the Upper Falls and Newton Centre Playgrounds. These applications may be in better standing if they are refiled next year with these new justifications in hand.

attachment:

11 & 18 March 2009 A. Ingerson memo on parks as historic resources

cc: Fran Towle, Parks and Recreation Commissioner
Alice Ingerson, CP Program Manager

² Even if the item is not ultimately funded, there appear to be ample “historic resource” justifications for much of the proposed work at these two playgrounds. However, the applications need to contain a clearer and more direct connection between the proposed work and the historic elements being preserved or rehabilitated.



City of Newton, Massachusetts Community Preservation Committee



MEMORANDUM

David B. Cohen
Mayor

DATE: 11 March 2008, rev'd 18 March 2008
TO: Community Preservation Committee
CC: City of Newton Law Department
FROM: Alice E. Ingerson, Community Preservation Program Manager
RE: **evaluation of fy08 proposals for Farlow Park, Newton Centre Playground, Newton Upper Falls Playground, Edmands Park (Wall)**

This memo puts these four proposals through three, increasingly selective screens:

1. Does the proposal make a case for this park **as a historic resource** under the CPA?
2. Does the proposed work follow the **Secretary of the Interior's Standards** for Historic Properties, specifically, the subset of Standards for Cultural Landscapes?
3. How well does the project address **local, Newton goals & priorities**? Will it be managed efficiently? Will its results be sustained after CP funds have been spent?

None of these questions is simple to answer:

1. Under both the CPA and federal standards, defining a site as a historic resource requires carefully evaluating its history and articulating the "significance," "character," "associations," and "values" created by that history.
2. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards explicitly state that, in themselves, they "cannot be used to make essential decisions about which contributing features of a cultural landscape should be retained and which can be changed." Those decisions must be based on the evaluation in #1 above.
3. Newton is a complex community with multiple, and often conflicting, goals and priorities. This evaluation focuses on the basics: whether the project reflects priorities in citywide plans, potential project management issues, and sustainability of project results.

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ATTACHMENTS

- ◆ Summary of the Secretary of the Interior's *Standards & Guidelines for Rehabilitating Cultural Landscapes* (as Historic Properties)
- ◆ Summary of criteria for listing on the National Register of Historic Places & National Park Service thematic framework for assessing historic significance

EVALUATION OF CURRENT PROPOSALS for Parks as Historic Resources

PARKS	Farlow & Chaffin Parks	Newton Centre Playground	Newton Upper Falls Playground	Edmands Park Wall
ELIGIBILITY Is it a historic resource as defined by the CPA & federal standards?	YES, partly; listed on national (& therefore state) registers of historic places; but master plan evaluates history of passive landscape, not history of active recreation	YES, partly; but master plan focuses on history of passive landscape, much less on history of active recreation	POTENTIALLY, but master plan & fy08 proposal do NOT make the case for either passive or active landscape	PROBABLY, but historic significance has not been fully evaluated
ELIGIBILITY Does proposed work follow the Secretary of the Interior's standards?	YES, but this is undermined by incomplete evaluation of historic significance	YES, but this is undermined by incomplete evaluation of historic significance	master plan & fy08 proposal do NOT follow Standards, although they could be rewritten to do so, at least partly	fy08 proposal does NOT explicitly follow Standards, but could be rewritten to do so once historic significance is evaluated
SUSTAINABILITY Does the community value this site AS a historic resource? (Would historic features be maintained after CP funds were invested?)	questionable – Parks & Rec. priorities & private fundraising have focused on active recreation, no case made for historic significance of this use	questionable – Parks & Rec. priorities & private fundraising have both focused on active recreation, no case made for historic significance of this use	questionable – only anecdotal evidence provided, Parks & Rec. and users clearly value site for active recreation	no evidence provided of community interest in history; though restored stone wall wd require minimal maintenance
PRIORITY How well does it address Newton needs & priorities?	high priority for some residents, Parks & Rec. Commission has made it 5th on list of top 4 priorities	for active recreation, on Parks & Rec. Commission list of top 4 priorities	for active recreation, on Parks & Rec. Commission list of top 4 priorities	low to medium priority for Parks & Rec. Commission, no evidence provided for park users/ neighborhood
FEASIBILITY potential mgmt issues	lack of mgmt time in Parks & Rec Dept., resident concerns abt pond safety	lack of mgmt time in Parks & Rec Dept.	lack of mgmt time in Parks & Rec Dept.	no mgmt time in DPW, budget shld be updated, no evidence of community support

SEE ALSO ANALYSIS OF INDIVIDUAL PROPOSALS ON FOLLOWING PAGES.

DISCUSSION

RESOURCE DEFINITIONS The CPA defines a historic resource broadly, 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.” The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Historic Properties define a cultural landscape just as broadly: “a geographic area associated with a historic event, activity, or person or exhibiting other cultural or aesthetic values.”

FEDERAL STANDARDS The Secretary of the Interior's Standards explicitly state that they "cannot be used to make essential decisions about which contributing features of a cultural landscape should be retained and which can be changed." Rather, the Standards outline a process for making such decisions, in this order: "historical research; inventory and documentation; analysis and evaluation of integrity and significance; development of a ... treatment plan; development of a ... management plan; development of a strategy for ongoing maintenance; and preparation of a record of treatment and future research recommendations." In short, the evaluation of historic "significance," "character," "associations," and "values" is not optional: it is critical for identifying those "character-defining" or "contributing" historic features that are most important to preserve, rehabilitate, and restore.

The current Standards generally favor assessing and preserving multiple "layers" of significance or character created through time. This is particularly explicit in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Cultural Landscapes, which emphasize that "change is inherent in cultural landscapes," that a landscape should be assessed "as a continuum through history," with multiple "chronological and physical 'layers'," and that "changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved."

This principle explains why the Standards present "preservation" as the most conservative treatment, because it makes the fewest changes. "Rehabilitation," or adapting a historic site for new uses, may seem the most flexible and therefore the most radical, but it is actually presented as the second most-conservative treatment. "Restoration" to a single period is more radical, because it removes features from later periods that "may have acquired historic significance in their own right." The "reconstruction" of well-documented but no longer extant features is presented as the most radical treatment of all (all quotations from online Standards, www.nps.gov/history/HPS/hli/landscape_guidelines/).

EVALUATION of ALL PROPOSALS vs. DEFINITIONS & STANDARDS Although two of these proposals make some case for their parks as historic resources, *none* of these proposals evaluates the full significance of its park as a whole, following the emphasis in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards on evaluating "chronological and physical 'layers'".

The master plans and proposals for Farlow Park and Newton Centre Playground follow the Standards explicitly, but focus mostly on park features designed before 1910, and in the case of Newton Centre, never fully installed. For the most part, the Farlow Park master plan treats active recreation as an intrusion within a park originally designed for passive recreation. The Newton Centre master plan acknowledges that the playground was originally designed to support both passive and active recreation, but does not evaluate any active recreation sites as potential historic resources.

These emphases may be practical rather than philosophical: although Farlow Park is a partial exception, financial support for both parks – from the community and in the Parks and Recreation Dept. budget – has focused primarily on active recreation. These master plans may have focused on the passive landscape of each park in order to attract more resources to these neglected landscapes. However, this sets up a problematic either-or choice for investing CP funds: *either* in primarily passive park features, which have been evaluated as historic resources but seem less likely to attract city or private funds for adequate maintenance, *or* in active recreation facilities, which have NOT been evaluated as historic resources but seem more likely to attract adequate maintenance resources.

To avoid creating this either-or choice, future proposals should be encouraged to evaluate the "layered" historic significance of each park as a whole – giving equal attention to the passive or naturalistic landscape and to active recreation.

Of the other two proposals, the one for the Edmands Park Wall, although prepared by an amateur historian (Alderman Danberg), includes more historical background information than the proposal for Newton Upper Falls Playground, prepared by professional landscape architects and engineers. However, neither proposal provides an evaluation of its park's significance as a historic resource that is adequate to guide management decisions or the investment of CP funds.

SEE ANALYSIS OF INDIVIDUAL PROPOSALS ON FOLLOWING PAGES.

FARLOW & CHAFFIN PARKS Preservation/ Restoration, Phase 1

Determine feasibility of restoring this historic park's pond, using well water. If water is found, provide a restoration design for the historic pond, in preparation for future proposals to restore the bridge and other historic park elements.

ELIGIBLE for CP funding as a historic resource, but the park’s historic significance has been evaluated narrowly rather than broadly:

- ◆ Farlow and Chaffin Parks are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and therefore on the state register.
- ◆ The restoration plan follows the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards & Guidelines very closely, from the sequence of project steps to coverage of major landscape characteristics and features.
- ◆ Recommendations in the 2006 landscape restoration report, supported by community preservation funds, focus on a few discrete projects, designed to be “as maintenance free as possible.” This kind of compromise is allowed by Secretary of the Interior’s Standards provisions for considering “both management and maintenance ... when selecting a treatment.”

However, the tension between passive and active recreation that has been present throughout the park’s history raises questions about the sustainability of CP-funded restoration of passive design elements from a single historic period (the 1880s):

The 2006 landscape restoration report, supported with community preservation funds, documents a complex history that does not entirely support the choice of “restoration” to the 1880s as the only appropriate treatment for this cultural landscape. From the beginning, there were two competing visions for Farlow Park: Meacham’s “picturesque design with wide, meandering walkways” and Schinn’s “symmetrical design with a baseball diamond as the central element.” The City engineer’s design, which was ultimately installed, struck a compromise between these two visions.

Yet the tension between passive and active recreation continued to shape the park in every subsequent era. In the present, the Parks and Recreation Commission assigns highest funding priority to active recreational fields and playgrounds. Ironically, other funders seem to have similar priorities. Strong neighborhood support for Farlow and Chaffin Parks, including both private funds and Community Development Block Grant program (CDBG) funds guided by a neighborhood advisory group, have also tilted toward active playgrounds rather than the passive, “historic” landscape:

<i>as of December 2007</i>				
<i>Community Fundraising & Other Non-CP Funding for Underwood Playground, Chaffin Park Tot Lot, and Farlow Park</i>				
Date	PARK LANDSCAPES	PLAYGROUNDS & TOT LOT	Source	Use
1993		\$50,000	PTO	Underwood playground
2006		\$6,000	PTO	Underwood playground swings
2006	\$5,000		community	Farlow Park restoration design
2007		\$71,000	community	Chaffin Park tot lot
2007		\$13,000	CDBG	Chaffin Park tot lot
2008?	\$30,000		CDBG	Chaffin Park - committed to overall repairs & improvements
	\$35,000	\$140,000	Subtotals	

In short, the community is clearly right to describe its request for CP funds to restore the 1880s passive features of Farlow Park as “what we can’t do ourselves!”

Yet this park’s history, and the general history of Newton parks, both suggest that it may be hard to maintain or sustain historic restoration work done with CP funds. The example of the gazebo behind Chaffin Park and the Newton Corner Library, recently restored with a combination of City funds and volunteer labor from the North Bennet Street School, seems instructive. Within a few months of its installation, the gazebo was significantly vandalized. It has not since been repaired.

The 2006 Farlow Park restoration report itself observes that “currently, only about 1/3 of Farlow Park” – ironically again, the “non-historic” portion – “is actively used,” and suggests that “increased usage [of the

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other 2/3] would help to promote a sense of ownership and responsibility within the community,” better maintenance, and less vandalism. To achieve this goal, the 2006 report recommends adding “active” elements to the currently underused, “historic” park landscape, including both the pond (treated elsewhere in the analysis as an element of the passive, “historic” landscape) and a bandstand. In contrast, in the face of steady annual budget cuts, the priorities of the Parks and Recreation Commission and Department are focused tightly on restoring and renovating parks that are now *over*-used for active recreation, rather than attracting new users to essentially *under*-used passive parks.

Farlow Park never had a bandstand historically, so one probably could not be constructed with CP funds. A restored pond and bridge might accomplish two goals: restoring an aspect of the park’s historic character and attracting new users, thus discouraging vandalism. However, the neighborhood still appears to be divided over the pond – as it was in 1912. Interestingly, a 1912 meeting apparently produced a large majority vote in favor of keeping rather than filling the pond. Perhaps a quantitative survey in 2008 could help to break the qualitative deadlock that has persisted between pond proponents and pond opponents, in the numerous community meetings and public hearings already held about this project.

NEWTON CENTRE PLAYGROUND Restoration & Rehabilitation, Phase 1

Initiate and improve accessibility to and within the park, keeping natural character and historic design intact, as well as increase passive recreation opportunities.

ELIGIBLE for CP funding as a historic resource, but the park’s historic significance has been evaluated narrowly rather than broadly:

- ◆ The 2006 landscape rehabilitation report, supported by community preservation funds, positions the Newton Centre Playground strongly as a historic resource. It was “the first playground in the city and one of the earliest in the nation,” with an initial design “prepared by the firm of Fredrick Law Olmsted & Co.,” and as a result, “should be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, although no such attempt has been made to date.” The report also asserts, perhaps less credibly, that the Newton Centre Playground is “considered by many as Newton’s most important character defining public open space.”

The 2006 report and proposals based on it choose 1890-1915 as a single “period of significance” for this landscape. The three plans drawn up during this period (1891, 1908, and 1911), none of which was fully implemented, aimed “to *combine* [emphasis added] an ornamented ground with a playground ... securing as much beauty as practicable, of a natural character,” while also accommodating the active, organized play that national reformers advocated as a way of socializing otherwise rowdy urban youngsters.

The 16-page historical analysis and 10-page chronology in the 2006 report are a valuable foundation for evaluating the history of many other Newton public parks and playgrounds created during this period.

- ◆ The 2006 report, and both the 2007 and 2008 funding proposals based on it, recommend “rehabilitation” as the most appropriate treatment for this landscape “because current conditions require acceptance of nonconforming activities.” The proposed rehabilitation follows the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards & Guidelines very closely, from the sequence of project steps to coverage of all major landscape characteristics and features. The proposals do include constructing some features envisioned but never actually installed from the three original plans (aspects of the circulation system, streams and stormwater, and plantings), but they focus primarily on discrete projects to “reconfirm historic character” – defined as the intended combination of an ornamented, passive landscape and active recreation facilities.
- ◆ The Newton Centre Playground’s history since 1920 revolves mostly around the installation of new facilities for active recreation, including archery, ice skating, and tobogganing, as well as an entire new elementary school. However, the 2006 report does not evaluate whether these changes ever “acquired historic significance in their own right.” For example, the Phase 2 work outlined (but not included in the 2007 or 2008 proposals) involves about \$100,000 worth of repairs to the existing tennis courts. Their significance as historic resources would need to be assessed carefully before such work could be supported with CP funds.

Yet the absence of evidence that the community as a whole values the landscape’s 1890-1915 history, and would support funding the Parks and Recreation Department to sustain features restored or rehabilitated from that period, raise questions about the sustainability of CP-funded restoration or rehabilitation focused on those features:

In many ways, the 2007 and 2008 funding proposals for the Newton Centre Playground, as presented, are less about “rehabilitating” or adapting a historic landscape for new uses than about improving access and active recreation facilities. The 2007 proposal aimed “to initiate and improve access to the park by ensuring a continuous and unobstructed path connecting main entries with the park’s accessible elements.” Actual project work proposed in 2008 aims “to facilitate access to the tennis courts, the basketball courts and the new (donated, accessible) play area while creating a sole access route into and out of the park over Hammond Brook for emergency, security and maintenance vehicles” and planting “trees ... to provide shade and erosion control.”

In some ways, the approach proposed in both the 2007 and 2008 proposals, where historic character and intentions from 1890-1915 are a *constraint* on the design of proposed park improvements, comes close to reversing the emphasis in the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards, which make preserving historic character the ends, and adapting the landscape for new uses, including new recreational activities, the means. In 2007 this was phrased as “increasing passive recreation opportunities.” One 2008 goal is phrased as “to create [sic] a mix of passive and active recreational opportunities, accessible to people of all ages and abilities.”

More importantly, however, neither the 2006 report nor the 2007 and 2008 proposals clearly document that playground users, or the Parks and Recreation Commission, strongly value or are committed to sustaining the intentions articulated in the 1891, 1908, and 1911 plans for Newton Centre Playground, if features that embody those intentions are restored or rehabilitated using CP funds. As for other parks and playgrounds, other private and public fundraising to date for Newton Centre Playground has focused primarily on active recreation and accessibility:

<i>as of December 2007</i>				
<i>Community Fundraising & Other Non-CP Funding for Newton Centre Playground</i>				
Date	PARKS	PLAYGROUNDS	Source	Use
2007		\$12,500	Boston Athletic Association	Newton Ctr universally accessible playground - access path from Mason-Rice Elementary School
2007		\$30,000	CDBG	Newton Ctr universally accessible playground - access path from Mason-Rice Elementary School
2007		\$380,000	community	Newton Ctr universally accessible playground
2008		\$17,500	Boston Athletic Association	Newton Ctr universally accessible playground - access path from Bowen Street
2007	\$8,000		community	under the guidance of the City’s Director of Urban Forestry, 40 volunteers planted 15 shade trees along Centre and Bowen Streets, just inside the park, as part of the Mass ReLeaf Program
	\$8,000	\$440,000	Subtotals	

In short, it is not clear that long-term management and maintenance of this playground, whatever its funding source, would sustain historic features restored or rehabilitated using CP funds.

NEWTON UPPER FALLS PLAYGROUND Restoration and Rehabilitation, Phase 1

Improvements to provide recreational benefits and aesthetic enhancements to this historic community park.

PROBABLY ELIGIBLE for CP funding as a historic resource, but the case is simply not made for that eligibility in this proposal:

The 2007 master plan for the Newton Upper Falls Playground, supported with community preservation funds, and the letter of support from the Newton Historical Commission both provide useful starting points for establishing the value of this playground as a historic resource, but historical research was clearly not, as recommended in the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards, the first step taken in the process of determining a treatment or creating a management plan for this playground. The master plan includes

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about 1.5 pages of fascinating historical background, but was clearly governed by the scope of services outlined on page 2, and as a result bases its recommendations first and foremost on the recreational needs and preferences of the playground's current users.

The work as proposed is NOT eligible for funding – not because it could never be framed as rehabilitating a historic resource, but because it is not based on evaluating the landscape AS a historic resource in the first place.

As with other Newton parks and playgrounds, the Newton Upper Falls Playground – to some extent in the 1910 plan, but perhaps more importantly in community memory – combined active and passive recreation. Whereas in Farlow Park, for example, active recreation was inserted in an originally passive landscape, at Newton Upper Falls the reverse appears to have been true: passive recreation, including boating and pedestrian access to the Charles River, remained a hoped-for but largely unrealized feature at the edges of a landscape used primarily for active recreation, particularly baseball. A restoration or rehabilitation plan for Newton Upper Falls Playground as a historic resource would therefore need to establish the historic significance and landscape “layers” associated with active recreation on this site.

The 2007 master plan recognizes this implicitly on page 21, where it urges that “additional historical research should be pursued.” The work of the Newton Upper Falls Local Historic District Commission and local historians, most especially Ken Newcombe’s masterful history of Newton Upper Falls, *Makers of the Mold*, should make it entirely possible to demonstrate the historic significance of this landscape as an active recreation site, and as a place that has welcomed successive waves of residents from many countries, religions, and occupations. In fact, this playground’s community of users may well value it *more* as a historic resource than do the users of many other Newton parks and playgrounds with more “prestigious” histories.

The Newton Upper Falls Playground offers an enticing opportunity to apply the ideas in the current (1994) National Park Service thematic framework for assessing the significance of historic sites. That framework emphasizes “foster discussion of the fundamental social and economic structures related to a property” and “the stories of broad social trends and ordinary people.” Both the Register and the Massachusetts Dept. of Conservation and Recreation’s Heritage Landscapes handbook recognize as historic resources landscapes that

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

This playground also seems to fit the one category of significance that the DCR *adds* to those used by the National Register:

- ◆ places that have personal meaning to residents, places of the heart

EDMANDS PARK Wall Preservation

Restore historic stone wall - built by the Works Progress Administration in 1934-35 - surrounding this park, donated to the City by the Edmands Trust in 1913.

PROBABLY ELIGIBLE for CP funding as a historic resource, but the current proposal does not provide an adequate analysis of historic significance to guide future project work:

Considering that the only time invested this proposal was volunteered by a single alderman, the background historical research accomplished is admirable. That research does not fully evaluate the park’s historic significance, and is therefore not adequate to guide management decisions or the investment of CP funds, but it does identify some critical questions that such an evaluation should answer:

- ◆ How much if any of the park’s historic significance lies in its association with events prior to its 1913 donation to the City? How much in its long-lost appearance at the time of that donation, or in its use for the following 20 years? (Ald. Danberg’s background research makes it sound like the park was barely used at all during this time.)

- ◆ How much in the active recreation facilities built by the WPA in the 1930s, including the wall? Most of the WPA work was almost completely demolished within 15 years of its creation, by vandalism; and some of it – such as the skating pond – has since been re-built and re-demolished for a second time, through neglect. ? (Ald. Danberg’s background research makes it sound like the park was, yet again, practically and quickly abandoned after the WPA work was finished.)
- ◆ How much of the park’s significance lies in the apparently “natural” character of the landscape created, to a large extent and perhaps ironically, by neglect and non-management since the 1950s? If the community values the park primarily as an apparently “natural area” rather than as a historic, designed or managed landscape, how important is it to preserve the 1930s wall along one edge?

In addition, this project raises a number of “project management flags,” most of which reflect the limited time available to the project sponsor as an Alderman. She has done an admirable job, but an additional someone (or lots of someones) must become actively involved to keep the project from “stalling” after funding is appropriated:

- ◆ The project sponsor has not submitted any evidence of community or neighborhood support for the project (the proposal section requesting community contacts was not completed).
- ◆ The project sponsor has not explored opportunities for leverage through community fundraising, in-kind donations of materials, or volunteer labor.
- ◆ Work in or around Edmands Park is a medium-to-low priority for the Parks and Recreation Department (perhaps for the reasons suggested in the final bullet above?).
- ◆ Steve Tocci in the Department of Public Works, who is listed as the potential project manager, was not consulted in the preparation of the proposal, and does not currently have time to work on this project in 2008, nor do the masons he supervises.
- ◆ The submitted budget does not reflect the practice recently adopted by the Dept. of Public Works of billing other departments not only for labor at overtime rates, but for department overhead.
- ◆ The submitted budget does not include adequate resources for hiring an outside project manager, or labor.

An ALTERNATIVE APPROACH for Future Proposals for Parks as Historic Resources

The historical analysis in these four proposals, however incomplete, reveals some disturbing shared patterns, summarized in the table on the following page. Many Newton parks have a history of combining passive and active recreation, but these activities have rarely been well integrated. Often, they have been managed by dividing the parks into separate passive and active zones. It may make more sense to “rehabilitate” and improve on than literally to “preserve” or continue this history.

Past assessments of the parks’ history have reflected this lack of integration. Active recreation has played an important role in defining Newton’s historic community character, along with nature appreciation and study, landscape architecture and garden design. Future proposals might identify more sustainable ways to invest CP funds in the rehabilitation of Newton’s historic parks and playgrounds by

- ◆ evaluating and integrating the historic significance active as well as passive park uses and users
- ◆ sharing those findings when organizing community support for the park as a historic resource, from fundraising to in-kind donations to volunteer time
- ◆ including in budgets some small amount for signage or other tools to help sustain support for the park as a historic resource, and thereby sustain the value of any CP funds invested on that basis

For example, since the 1950s Newton has built several new elementary schools in historic parks (largely to avoid land acquisition costs). Park histories often treat these schools as “intrusions” in historic landscapes. Park histories that include and integrate landscape design, environmental change, and active recreation might engage teachers, parents, and students as more active users and “stewards” of their surrounding historic parks.

Useful models include the “No Child Left Inside” initiative (www.mass.gov/dcr/gpp/index.htm or www.nochildleftinside.org/) and the National Park Service’s “Teaching with Historic Places” initiative (www.nps.gov/history/NR/twhp/). Another useful tool may be the National Park Service’s thematic framework for assessing historic significance, last revised in 1994, which strongly emphasizes “the stories of broad social trends and ordinary people” (www.nps.gov/history/history/hisnps/NPSThinking/themes_concepts.htm).

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SOME SHARED ELEMENTS in the HISTORY of NEWTON'S PARKS & PLAYGROUNDS

PARKS	Farlow & Chaffin Parks	Newton Centre Playground	Newton Upper Falls Playground	Edmands Park Wall
created by private donation/funds + public resources	1880 Farlow Estate donated; 1883 public funds to purchase add'l land; 1934 Chaffin Estate acquired	1889-91 public land purchase, using \$10,000 in public funds and \$15,000 in private funds	1909, 1924 purchases by public funds	1913 land donation
City-commissioned plans or designs	1883-85, 1922 plans emphasize passive landscape/aesthetics; 1983 community plan proposes restoration & additional features (incl. bandstand)	1890-91 (Olmsted firm), 1908 & 1911 (Kellaway) - both include active & passive features	1910 (Kellaway) - emphasis on active features	<i>info not available; who designed 1930s improvements? or later (1970s?) skating pond restoration?</i>
plans or designs installed incompletely	1885 plan installed; 1979-80 CDBG funds added Victorian-style benches & lights (only part of recommendations)	no single plan completely installed	<i>info not available</i>	<i>info not available</i>
new active recreation facilities added	over time, ballfields, etc. added individually rather than to orig. master plan; chain link fence used to divide passive from active landscape	1909-15, 1930, 1940s, 1960s, 1988, 2005	over time, ballfields, etc. added individually rather than to master plan?	1933-35, by WPA (dam, skating pond, picnic shelter)
passive features neglected/eliminated rather than repaired/restored (paths, benches, walls, plantings, water features)	1912 proposal to remove pond & bridge and fill in pond voted down at community mtg; but some time after 1931, winding paths straightened, orig. "rustic" bridge replaced w strictly functional one, then pond filled in	from 1910 onward	almost none installed	1913-1933, 1935-1970s, 1970s-present
active recreation features repaired/replaced with lowest-cost alternatives, or eliminated	<i>info not available</i>	1920s, 1950s, 1990s	<i>info not available</i>	<i>info not available (but skating pond built & abandoned twice)</i>
vandalism	mentioned for both parks in 2006 report, gazebo restored in 2007 vandalized w/i a few months of installation	mentioned in 2006 report	<i>info not available</i>	of all WPA built features within the park