



City of Newton, Massachusetts Community Preservation Committee



David B. Cohen
Mayor

TO: Honorable Board of Aldermen
FROM: Community Preservation Committee
DATE: April 20, 2006
RE: **CPC Recommendation for Funding**

PROJECT TITLE: Upper Falls Playground and Newton Highlands Playground Strategic Design
CPA PROJECT ID: CPA-FY06-13
CPA CATEGORY: Recreation
RECOMMENDED CPA FUNDING: \$92,080

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

The applicant, Newton Parks and Recreation Department, request \$90,680 plus \$1,400 for legal expenses to hire a consultant to create a strategic design plan for the Upper Falls Playground on Pennsylvania Avenue and Newton Highlands Playground on Winchester Street. Both playgrounds have been identified as a high priority for improvements and redesign by the Parks and Recreation Department in its *Five Year Park Assessment and Development Planning and Evaluation*, January 2006. The scope of work for the strategic design project includes site inventory and assessment, a land survey, community participation (conducting a neighborhood survey, 6 meetings with City staff/departments and 3 community meetings for each site), design alternatives and a final design plan for active and passive recreational uses. The applicants trimmed \$16,480 off their original budget by eliminating the contingency and planning to use City departments for some project work.

FINDINGS

Community Preservation Act (MGL c.44B)

Recreation

The project complies with §5(b)(2), which allows the CPA to fund the **creation** and **preservation** of land for recreational use because the strategic designs will identify specific construction projects that will create new recreation facilities at this park and/or preserve existing facilities. Should the study identify any **rehabilitation** projects, these items would need to be funded with a non-CPA source unless c. 44B is amended by that time.

In terms of the eligibility of CPA funding for studies/designs, both the Department of Revenue guidelines (IGR No. 00-209) and the Community Preservation Coalitions report entitled *Potential Uses of CPA Funds*, list incidental project costs as allowable expenditures. Specifically, the Coalition states "CPA funds may be used for site surveys, environmental assessments, historic or housing consultants, architectural and engineering fees, permit processing fees, construction consultants . . . and similar costs associated with and incidental to the development of a CPA project."

Newton Community Preservation Plan

Overarching Goals

1. Contribute to the preservation of Newton's unique character, boost the vitality of the community and enhance the quality of life for its residents.	Yes
2. Serve more than one CPA category.	No

3. Demonstrate the highest cost/benefit value relative to other proposals.	No, see below
4. Leverage other public and/or private funds.	No, see below
5. Preserve a resource or opportunity that would otherwise be lost.	Yes, see below
6. Show that a project is the most reasonable available option to achieve the objective.	Yes, see below
7. Demonstrate strong community support.	Yes, see below
8. Serve to equitably distribute CPA funds throughout the City.	Yes, see below

Additional comments on selected goals:

Goal 3: Compared to other proposals, the cost for the Upper Falls Playground and Newton Highlands Playground Strategic Design is the greatest compared to other recreation strategic design plans. However, these parks are considerably larger than others previously studied. In addition, there are not CDBG funds available, as was the case with Stearns/Pellegrini. The table below shows the comparative costs for CPA-funded recreation project studies.

<i>Project Name</i>	<i>Fiscal Year</i>	<i>Total CPA Funds</i>
U. Falls & N. Highlands Playgrounds Strategic Design	06	\$92,080
Newton Centre Playground Pedestrian Access Improvement Plan	05	\$55,147
Renovations to the Central Corridor of Albemarle Park	06	\$33,400
Stearns/Pellegrini Park Renovation Study	04	\$30,000
Development of the Cheesecake Brook Greenway	06	\$25,100
Williams School Outdoor Intergenerational Classroom Study	06	\$23,633

Goal 4: The applicants hope that a design plan for the parks will help raise funds for the capital improvements from both public and private sources. At this point, they do have any other funding available for the study phase.

Goal 5: Upper Falls has been used for years as a snow dump. Newton Highlands has multiple amenities, but there are no pathways to make them accessible. A thorough survey by Parks & Recreation showed the parks ranked at the bottom in quality of amenities and citizen satisfaction of the park. Studying the parks' conditions, meeting with community stakeholders and devising draft plans are the necessary first steps to improve the Upper Falls and Newton Highlands Parks.

Goal 6: See response to Goal 5 above.

Goal 7: A number of sports leagues and parks users support the application and have submitted letters of support. At a public hearing on the application, many citizens spoke in favor of the proposal and no one appeared in opposition. The League of Women Voters supports the CPA funding request.

Goal 8: The FY06 applications include funding requests for projects in Nonantum, West Newton, Newtonville, Oak Hill, Newton Centre, Chestnut Hill, Newton Highlands, Auburndale, Newton Upper Falls as well as citywide projects. In terms of geographic equity, the CPA has not yet funded recreation projects in Newton

Highlands or Newton Upper Falls. Therefore, these projects would increase the number and variety of neighborhoods that would benefit from CPA investments in recreation.

Recreation Goals

1. Address the needs targeted in the <i>Recreation and Open Space Plan 2003-2007</i> and priorities as identified by the Parks and Recreation Department and Commission and take advantage of other opportunities to meet the recreation needs of the residents of the City.	Yes, see below
2. Demonstrate that the proposal is planned with consideration for the current and future needs and vision of the park/recreation facility.	Yes, see below
3. Meet the recreation needs of the greatest number of residents possible. This means that when faced with a decision between two or more projects, all other factors being equal, the one that serves the largest number of residents will be selected for consideration.	Yes, see below
4. Meet the greatest variety of recreation needs possible. The committee will favor projects that provide multiple recreation opportunities in a given location.	Yes, see below
5. Serve passive as well as active uses. Finding ways to balance the range of recreational opportunities and serve the diverse recreation needs of the community is a priority of the CPC.	Yes
6. Preserve sight lines consistent with open space... decisions about scale and placement should be made with the objective of enhancing or enabling open views.	N/A
7. Access for disabled residents should be included in plans wherever possible.	Yes, see below

Additional comments on selected goals:

Goal 1: The *Recreation and Open Space Plan 2003-2007* cites the need to plan for the coordinated improvement of the City's parks through the development of master plans. In terms of active recreation, the plan states park improvements should focus on increased accessibility and the reconstruction of playfields throughout the City.

Goal 2: This is the first step in addressing priority park improvement needs as identified by the Parks and Recreation Department and Commission through the newly released *Five Year Park Assessment and Development Planning and Evaluation*. The strategic design process proposed through this project will result in an improvement plan that considers the current and future needs of the City's residents and a vision for the parks.

Goal 3: The Newton Highlands and Upper Falls parks are located in densely populated areas of the City. There have not yet been any CPA-funded recreation projects in either area.

Goal 4: The strategic design will focus on both active and passive park uses.

Goal 7: Access for disabled residents will be included in the strategic design plans. Both facilities' general shortcomings in this area have already been noted in the *Five Year Park Assessment*.

CPC RECOMMENDATION

The proposal is consistent with the CPA criteria and many of the plan's goals, as described above. Therefore, the Community Preservation Committee voted 5-2, with McMillan and Moss dissenting¹ to recommend funding this application to develop a plan to for public recreation at Upper Falls Playground and Newton Highlands Playground by appropriating and transferring the requested \$92,080 under the direction and control of the Parks and Recreation Department for purposes of this project as detailed in the application dated January 20, 2006, subject to the following conditions:

¹ McMillan stated he was concerned the proposal was not timely and would be too expensive for the capital phase. Moss wanted to see additional funding sources utilized at this stage.

1. The Parks and Recreation Department or its designee shall submit to the CPC an initial project timeline and a status report on a quarterly basis that describes work that is complete, work remaining, expenditures and target completion date.
2. Work shall commence no later than December 31, 2006 and shall be completed no later than December 31, 2007 or such other date(s) as may be approved in writing by the Director of Planning and Development. In the event of failure to meet the project start or completion dates as stated herein or as approved by the Director of Planning and Development, any remaining funds in the project account shall be returned to the Newton Community Preservation Fund.
3. Consideration of CPA funds for future phases will require the demonstration of a good-faith effort on the part of the applicant to substantially leverage other funding sources; provided, however, the applicant understands and agrees that CPC's recommendation of funding for this design plan does not imply any CPC support for, or any applicant expectation of, a further CPC recommendation for the funding of future project design or construction phases.
4. Promptly after substantial completion of the design work, the applicant shall submit to the Community Preservation Committee a final project development cost statement. Any portion of the grant not used for the purposes stated herein shall be returned to the Newton Community Preservation Fund.