

CITY OF NEWTON

IN BOARD OF ALDERMEN

COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY PRESERVATION REPORT

TUESDAY, APRIL 25, 2006

Present: Ald. Linsky (Chair), Lennon, Hess-Mahan, Sangiolo, Yates, Parker (Vice Chair), Vance and Lappin

Also present: CPC Chair Andy Stern, Planning Director Mike Kruse, Parkas and Recreation Commissioner Fran Towle, City Solicitor Dan Funk, Carol Stapleton and Tom Cahill, Parks and Recreation Dept. managers, and Rob Ricci, Planning Department staff assigned to CPC.

CHAIRMAN'S NOTE: This evening, the Committee reviewed the proposed FY07 budget (in the Planning and Development Department) for administration of the CPA. Details of said discussion will be distributed under separate cover as the CCP FY07 Budget Review Report, in advance of the May 17th Committee of the Whole meeting.

The Committee then discussed the following appointment/reappointments:

Appointment by His Honor the Mayor

#145-06 ROHNA SHOUL, 9 Exmoor Road, Newton Centre, appointed as member of the NEWTON FARM COMMISSION to fill the unexpired term of the late Teresa Walsh, for a term to expire on July 30, 2006 (60 days 5-19-06).

ACTION: **APPROVED 8-0**

NOTE: Ms. Shoul was present this evening.

Committee Chair Linsky explained that Ms. Shoul was being appointed to fill the remainder of the term of the late Teresa Walsh, and that said appointment was referred to this Committee for approval because the Angino Farm project was a CPA project.

Ms. Shoul introduced herself to the Committee and explained that she does have some farming background (as she was a member of the Women's Land Army during WWII, working on a farm in Maine). She also explained that, over the years, she has worked in the Newton Public Schools (for 21 years). At Day Middle School, she worked with children and the care of plants as a means of curriculum for hyperactive students. She expressed her interest and enthusiasm to be a part of the Newton Farm Commission.

Committee Discussion

Ald. Hess-Mahan thanked Ms. Shoul for her willingness to serve the City in this capacity, as he believes that her educational, farming and Green Decade experience will assist her in working with the Farm Commission.

Ald. Lappin pointed out that Ms. Shoul has already attended some of the Farm Commission meetings, and, therefore, she is well aware of where the group is heading. She reiterated Ald. Hess-Mahan's comment that Ms. Shoul has great expertise to offer to the Commission, and stated that she looked forward to working with her in that capacity.

Ald. Lapin then moved approval of Ms. Shoul's appointment.

After receiving confirmation that Ms. Shoul would be filling the Citizen-at-Large seat appointed by the mayor, Ald. Parker also asked whether Ms. Shoul had yet gotten the opportunity to look at the objectives for the Farm Commission (as contained in the beginning of the Ordinance), particularly the educational and public access components of the program.

Ms. Shoul indicated that she had not actually had the chance to look at the Ordinance, but that she looked forward to doing that in the near future.

Ald. Lappin pointed out that all new members of the Farm Commission receive a packet of information from Martha Horn to review, and she believed that this information is contained in that packet.

That motion to approve Ms. Shoul's appointment carried by a vote of 8-0.

#189-06 KEN KIMMELL, 165 Elgin Street, Newton, re-appointed on March 28, 2006 as a full member of the Community Preservation Committee; said term to expire on February 16, 2008.

ACTION: **APPROVED 8-0**

NOTE: Mr. Kimmell was present this evening. He is being re-appointed to fill the seat for wards 1 and 2; with a substantive background in open space preservation. He indicated that he has seen the nature of the CPA program change in the two years he has been on the Committee. When the CPC was first formed, there were many more dollars available than projects, and now it is to a point where there are more applications for projects than there are dollars. He explained that the current situation creates a great challenge, particularly since the CPC has dealt with some rather controversial issues recently. He stated that he believes the CPC acts as a very professional committee in meeting its goals.

Committee Discussion

Committee Vice Chair Parker asked if Mr. Kimmell had any specific thoughts regarding balancing the applications received among the four categories of projects.

Mr. Kimmell indicated that he does not have any pre-set idea as to how much each category should carry, but that he is well aware of the ordinance/statutory requirements.

Vice-Chair Parker moved approval of Mr. Kimmell's re-appointment.

The Committee thanked Mr. Kimmell for his willingness to continue to serve the City in this capacity.

On the motion to approve, the vote was 8-0.

#190-06 JUDY JACOBSON, 289 Cypress Street, Newton, re-appointed on March 28, 2006 as a full member of the Community Preservation Committee; said term to expire on February 16, 2008.

ACTION: **APPROVED 8-0**

NOTE: Ms. Jacobson presented before the Committee. She serves as a representative of Wards 5 and 6 with a substantive background in affordable housing. Ms. Jacobson described her pleasure in serving on the CPC describing it as a top notch committee and in synch with the Committee in looking toward the long haul.

Committee Discussion

Ald. Hess-Mahan indicated he enjoyed working with Judy and found her scrutiny of projects to be very constructive and thorough.

Ald. Lappin moved approval, noting that she was very impressed with each member of the CPC.

On the motion to approve, the Committee voted 8-0 to approve Ms. Jacobson's re-appointment.

REFERRED TO CMTE. ON COMM. PRES. AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

#188-06 COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE recommending that the sum of \$92,080 be appropriated from the Community Preservation Fund for purposes of funding the *Upper falls & Newton Highlands Playground Strategic Design* recreation project.

ACTION: **APPROVED 8-0**

NOTE: CPC Chair Andrew Stern presented the item to the Committee. Commissioner Towle, Carol Stapleton and Thomas Cahill of the Parks and Recreation Department joined him for the discussion.

Mr. Stern stated that the Parks and Recreation Department did a five-year needs assessment for all of the facilities under the direction of the Department. The document is helpful in determining priority for CPA projects. Mr. Stern addressed the general issue of using CPA funds for studies. The Community Preservation Committee shared the Aldermen's concern about the proliferation of studies and the public perception that every study that is approved for funding is going to be funded and implemented. As a result, the CPC has set a temporary moratorium on studies until the preparation of the FY'07 Community Preservation Plan.

The project consists of a \$90,680 request for the combined design study money, plus \$1,400 for legal expenses. The Community Preservation Committee asked the Parks and Recreation Department to combine the two parks as one project to achieve economies of scale. The original amount has been reduced due to the ability of other City departments to provide in-kind services. The Parks and Recreation Department is well equipped to handle this project. The Community Preservation Committee took special note that the City has degraded the Upper Falls Park by dumping snow in the park. The Newton Highlands Park has had a temporary construction trailer on the land for the past thirty years. Upper Falls Park ranked 70th out of 71 parks, the Newton Highlands Park ranked 68th on the Parks and Recreation Department's needs assessment. Both of the parks have been neglected and there is a pressing need to preserve the parks.

Committee Discussion

Ald. Yates stated that he was pleased that the parks will be improved, as he receives calls from constituents about the condition of the parks. Ald. Yates asked why the two parks were being looked at as one project similar to Stearns and Pellegrini when there is little relationship between these two parks.

Commissioner Towle indicated that, since both parks need work, it is more cost effective to group them together for the design phase.

Ald. Hess-Mahan indicated his support for this project and thanked Mr. Stern for his perseverance with this project in “getting the ball rolling”.

Mr. Stern stated that he is always pleased to see projects of this type (that have community input and support) come to fruition.

Ald. Lappin asked Mr. Stern if anyone had any idea how much the overall cost for this improvement project would be or if it was too early to tell.

Mr. Stern indicated that it is difficult to assess that at this time, and this is the reason why the project is being approached with this study; so that the overall costs can be learned well in advance.

Ald. Vance explained that there has been ongoing concern (discussed at the Board level on frequent occasions) about future maintenance for Parks and Recreation assets added to the City’s inventory. He asked whether one of the components of the study would be suggestions as to how to address the issue of ongoing maintenance for these parks (if the project were to be carried out in full).

Mr. Stern indicated that the CPC has similar concern, as does the Parks and Recreation Department. He indicated that a significant element of the project application is the requirement for an explanation of the maintenance responsibilities and obligations. He pointed out that the CPC is in the business of moving forward in support of projects that have great success potential.

Ald. Vance indicated that, when the study is completed, one of the elements that he will specifically look for will be how the proposal addresses the maintenance component. He stated that the community preservation element is key in evaluating these projects.

Vice Chair Parker voiced his concern that, no matter how well these projects are planned out, there is always a need for some staff maintenance. The issue is that, in his opinion, the Parks and Recreation Department is currently grossly understaffed, and he was concerned that the City would be adding more assets to the Parks and Recreation Department but not providing proper staffing. Vice Chair Parker added that there has to be a point in time at which the Parks and Recreation Commission needs to accompany some of these recommendations with a voice of serious concern for staffing issues. He was concerned that the City is not providing the resources necessary to properly maintain its fields and parks. He also indicated that the study should allow for community input as to what is to happen to these fields because, ultimately, the community will need to decide whether the CPA is to be revoked or increased.

Ald. Lennon inquired whether the designer had been hired and whether it would go out to bid.

CPC Chair Stern indicated no designer had been hired and that the hiring process will meet legal requirements.

Ald. Sangiolo asked whether the Parks and Recreation Department has already begun working with the community groups.

John Rice, member of the Newton Highlands Area Council, indicated that the Council has complete support for this project. He indicated that many neighbors have come forward to voice their concern over the condition of these parks and some offer their efforts to see this project move ahead.

Elliott Loew, president of the Newton South Little League (who is also one of the directors of the Babe Ruth League) was present this evening. He explained that these groups have been working with Commissioner Towle and are very excited to see these fields being upgraded and put back into regular use.

Robert Staulo, member of the Newton Highlands Area Council, was also present this evening. He reiterated the group's support in moving forward with this project.

Jack Neville, president of the Upper Falls Council informed the Committee that this group has been very active in fundraising for community-based projects, and they are very concerned about the playground. Several other members of the Upper Falls Council were present this evening to show their support for this project.

Ald. Yates moved approval of this item.

On a motion to approve, the Committee approved the motion by a vote of 8-0.

REFERRED TO CMTE. ON COMM. PRES. AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

#143-06 COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE recommending that the sum of \$25,100 be appropriated from the Community Preservation Fund for the purpose of funding the *Cheesecake Brook Greenway Design* open space project in Newtonville.

ACTION: **APPROVED 8-0**

NOTE: CPC Chair Andy Stern presented the item to the Committee and was joined by three representatives of the applicants, Margaret Doris, Curtis Betts, and Margaret Albright. He explained this project represents the last link of an existing CDBG project and was split because the proposed bridge work existed within the control of Public Works, not the Parks and Recreation Department. The project seeks to restore a previous greenway along the Albemarle.

Commissioner Rooney has pledged that adequate funding sources (aside from CDBG funds) will be will be used in the future; therefore, it is not anticipated that this project will re-appear for future appropriation of CPC funding.

Margaret Albright, 166 Edinboro Street, noted that the greenway was one of the original Olmstead projects.

Mr. Curtis Betts, 305 Albemarle Road, explained that the existing foot bridge is located in the vicinity of the Gath Pool and the pathway used to get to Day Middle School. He stated that the slope of the bridge is very steep and kids like to ride their skateboards across it; the City has gone so far as to post signs on either side of the bridge that indicate that it is “unsafe for wheelchairs and strollers”. Aside from the steep slope, there is a gap between the end of the bridge and the pavement onto which pedestrians need to cross.

Margaret Doris, 119 Fair Oaks, noted that re-design of the area is necessary because traffic often goes much faster than 25 miles per hour posted speed.

Committee Discussion

Ald. Hess-Mahan indicated his support for improving the quality of life along Albemarle Road as well as safety for pedestrians that traverse this area every day.

As there was a question as to whether or not this was merely a structure or also a point of entry to this recreation space, Vice-Chair Parker suggested that the Law Department be consulted as to the legality of using CPA funds to improve the footbridge, since it is a structure. Otherwise, he was 100% in support of this project.

Ald. Sangiolo asked whether a designer had yet been selected and whether there has been outreach to environmental groups.

Mr. Betts indicated that DPW has a designer in mind who had performed work on another area of this Albemarle greenway. Parties concerned with the planning aspect of this project are confident that this designer will be able to incorporate the suggested improvements in this vision.

Ms. Doris indicated the Newton Conservators and Charles River Watershed Association had been supportive.

Committee Chair Linsky indicated his support for this project.

Ald. Hess-Mahan moved approval of this item.

On a motion to approve, the Committee approved the motion by a vote of 8-0.

REFERRED TO CMTE. ON COMM. PRES. AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

#142-06 COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE recommending that the sum of \$33,400 be appropriated from the Community Preservation Fund for the purpose of funding the *Albemarle Park Central Corridor Design* open space and recreation project in Newtonville.

ACTION: **APPROVED 8-0**

NOTE: CPC Chair Andy Stern presented the item to the Committee and was once again joined by three representatives of the applicants, Margaret Doris, Curtis Betts, and Margaret Albright.

This portion of the project is controlled by the Parks and Recreation Department. A graduate student had prepared a so-called master plan for this area. One component involved improvements to the entrance to the park. This park is used as a main entrance point to the school. The challenge was to develop a corridor and have a passive recreation area in the midst of a very active recreation area, including access for passive recreation to the Avery Woods area.

Despite the fact that this project was not high on the Parks and Recreation Commission's list of priority areas, this project was supported by the CPC and by the Parks and Recreation Commission because it was deemed particularly unique (given the intensity of the use of Albemarle for active recreation for the City and as an alternative to potential paving of the Avery Woods area for parking for the school and park use).

Committee Discussion

Ald. Sangiolo asked whether the Avery Woods area was being looked at for a potential dog park. Ms. Albright suggested it would be a very difficult area to build a dog park.

Ald. Vance noted the lack of enthusiastic support by the CPC, as evidenced by CPC member McMillan's concerns.

Ald. Hess-Mahan indicated his support for the preservation of the Avery Woods area. He stated that he was pleased that the current plan allows for pathways without relocation of existing playing fields. While this plan is not a master plan, he wished to voice his concern that future plans not include relocation of the existing fields. Ms. Albright noted there would be no net loss of fields in conjunction with this project – the plan did not did not necessitate or prohibit any changes.

Vice Chair Parker stated that while this was not on the high list of priorities, it was a worthy project and moved approval of this item.

Ald. Sangiolo asked whether there was any in-house work that could be done by the City for a better price on some of the services listed for the project (contract documents and survey).

Mr. Stern indicated that the contract documents and survey line items were removed from the request by the CPC to be included later as part of the construction phase. He stated that the survey work would be minimal, as the site is fairly flat.

Ald. Hess-Mahan inquired as to the existence of any private matching funds. Ms. Doris indicated the Day PTO was very interested but that a plan was needed to attract further funding such as that given by the Grace Episcopal Church for the playground project.

On the motion to approve, the Committee approved the motion by a vote of 8-0.

The Committee adjourned at approximately 10:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Stephen M. Linsky, Chair