

Stearns & Pellegrini Parks Planning Meeting #1
Monday, May 16, 2005
6:30pm
Pellegrini Gymnasium, Hawthorn Street

City of Newton staff welcomed over 20 residents to the first of several park planning meetings and explained the intent of the master planning process. The Nonantum Advisory Committee, a resident-based group that provides guidance for the expenditure of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds in Nonantum, recommended that a comprehensive look be taken at the two main neighborhood parks in order to first establish a vision for each park and then work toward reaching that goal. The CDBG Program has been investing funds in Nonantum for over 30 years however many of the projects have simply addressed small isolated issues, particularly in the parks. This piece-meal approach has contributed to dissatisfaction by the residents and has left many unfulfilled recreational needs. The aim of this planning effort is to develop a plan that maximizes the recreational opportunities, minimizes any redundancies, and increases park user ship and satisfaction levels. Once the vision is created, it will be used to leverage the needed public and private dollars to execute the plans for both parks.

Staff relayed some of the results of the questionnaire. 127 of approximately 1450 surveys were received, about a 9% response rate (a 5% response rate is considered good so 9% is very positive). It was reported that the top three areas that need the most improvement at both parks are Landscaping and Beautification, Playground Equipment, and better Park User Equipment (such as benches, bubblers, picnic tables, etc.). The questionnaire responses were very useful in understanding the important issues at each park.

Staff then introduced Marion Pressley and Jay Emperor of Pressley Associates, Inc. who led the meeting by listing the current conditions of the park and took comments and suggestions from the residents.

STEARNS PARK COMMENTS

- Many area residents play at Casey Park in Watertown on Watertown Street. It is a good example of an ideal playground and ball field- has better safety surfacing, etc.
- Need to connect to the walkway next to the new senior housing and address the bad fencing, as parts of the fencing are inappropriately used as a retaining wall.
- The site has many entries all of which need study and improvement. The Sterns Place access is lighted to Watertown Street. Although the park has pedestrian lights, a desire to add more lighting in the park was also mentioned.
- There used to be a stairwell at the end of Los Angeles and Allison Streets- now the area is a mess.
- An area has been used for gardening in the past and the area is now derelict. Debris and garden equipment has been left in one area. The need to clean up/remove the debris and abandoned equipment was expressed.
- Address the damaged game table and consider a general upgrade of site furniture.
- Playground equipment needs more age diversity; especially for ages 7-11- should be more challenging. In the past, there used to be more things and games to play.
- Basketball can be a noise nuisance after dark- needs better police enforcement since all parks close at dusk. The group however felt that basketball is good for teens and is used. Also need to encourage more play at Forte Park where it is more private.
- Tennis courts are used and wanted but need to be rehabilitated. They are occasionally misused as people close the gate and let their dogs run around- maybe remove gate? Sometimes other people, both children and adults, use the courts for different activities like hockey and batting practice. The courts are also used for tennis.
- The playground equipment and the wood chips are not accessible. Some of the swings are missing the safety straps. Equipment needs general upgrade. New equipment should be accessible and the safety surfacing should be the flat, rubber style. It has been witnessed that people have stolen the wood chips for their own private purposes.
- One difficulty about this park is the passive sloped sections, which make it difficult to use for new uses or to relocate existing uses such as basketball or playgrounds, which require level areas-, might

need to think about taking out something to accommodate or expand another use or relocating some of the current uses.

- Grass throughout the park is in poor shape and there is no definition of the infield. The field is used and one neighbor said he played on it as a child and he hoped it would remain. The area of the field, however, does not allow for a full field and balls are hit into the play area and the two swing areas. It was also mentioned that the field might be appropriate for wiffleball league play. This past week a large tree came down and took-out the backstop.
- Overall trees are in good shape and provide a lot of shade- some minor pruning could be done to open up the areas and allow more light in to these passive areas. But if more room is needed, we might want to selectively remove some trees for a new use or expand an existing use.
- It was mentioned that the police do drive on the walkways when responding to a call, so the width of the walks and the quality of the pavement need to be considered.
- There is a good example of a little league field in Watertown if you follow Bridge Street to the end- fence has an orange top and defines the space well.
- The lunch crowd often leaves a big mess. Need more trash receptacles or need to empty them more often.
- Parking is a concern here. There are three spots on Stearns Place at the top of the hill that aren't well marked anymore. The remainder of parking is on the street. The streets get very crowded. Some possible parking locations are at the end of Allison Street on the private vacant lot or taking some of the parkland and indenting the side of the park to allow for limited angled parking.
- Someone thought that the Stearns will have special restrictions on the park but staff has not been able to find this information.
- Overall the fencing around the park is in poor condition and one perimeter area has no fencing.

PELLEGRINI PARK COMMENTS

- The majority of this park is active recreation in the form of field sports. The soccer and softball fields overlap. It is believed that baseball is not permitted- only softball and little league.
- The tennis courts are in decent condition, but the fence around it is in poor shape. They are used. There is only a small passive recreation area near the tennis courts.
- Overall the fencing around the park is in good-fair condition.
- The fence in the playground area is not consistent in height and not tall enough in some sections to control soccer balls and baseballs.
- The playground has old equipment and the wood chip safety surfacing- the residents would like the rubberized safety surfacing. The playground is used by area daycares frequently.
- The stonedust portion of the parking lot should be paved in bituminous concrete and line painted. The lot should be defined with curbing so that people cannot go onto to the fields.
- The residents thought that outdoor basketball is important, but finding a separate location for it that is not on the parking lot is going to be a challenge. One option is to move it behind the building, but it is not very visible there.
- It was suggested to construct an overhead pavilion next to the building to provide shade and shelter during concerts, events, cookouts, etc. as had existed in the past.
- Shade is needed in the open area by the building and playground- more trees?
- Remove pool in exchange for a water play section like in Waltham.
- It was questioned if the drinking water ever gets tested.
- More games are needed for the teens, e.g. game tables, etc.
- Bocce is played in the inner court area, but it is not designated.
- When planning for new or relocated activities, it is important to be mindful of the abutters.
- Update the boiler, bathroom fixtures, and community room in the Field house. (Pressley Associates will not be evaluating the Fieldhouse but will include any comments in the master plan.)

The next meeting is a design workshop on Thursday, June 2, at 6:30pm and the third meeting will be Wednesday, June 22 at 6:30pm. Notices will be mailed shortly.