

Stearns & Pellegrini Parks Planning Meeting #4
Monday, September 26, 2005
6:30pm
Pellegrini Gymnasium, Hawthorn Street

Between 15-20 residents attended the meeting to view the unveiling of the master plans for Stearns Park and Pellegrini Park. Attendance was low due to some unrelated factors. It was a rainy evening and a vigil was scheduled at the last minute for the resignation of Father Cuenin of Our Lady Help of Christians (parishioners come from the Nonantum area). The vigil was a controversial gathering and drew many residents to that event instead of the park planning meeting.

Marion Pressley, Jay Emperor and Hongfei Chen of Pressley Associates, Inc. facilitated the first half of the meeting. Danielle Bailey of the Planning and Development Department of the City of Newton led the second half. The Parks and Recreation Department representative was Carol Schein. Refreshments were provided.

The first part of the meeting was an overview of each of the master plans. The master plans were created with input from the questionnaire responses, resident comments at three public meetings, and feedback from a host of city staff. The implementation packages were discussed. Both parks are separated into two construction phases. Phase 1 for Stearns Park encompasses the tennis courts, the playground and the half basketball court and improvements to universal accessibility. Phase 2 for Stearns Park covers the remainder of the park and addresses the little league field, open space improvements, new border fencing, walkway regrading for universal accessibility and reconstruction, providing a safe accessible entry from the new housing units, and seating upgrades. Phase 1 for Pellegrini Park focuses on the parking lot, improved universal accessibility, dressing up the entrance to the park and activity building, and reorganizing the courtyard and play area, which will include a half basketball court, a picnic area, swings, playground, large pavilion, water features, and multi-use stonedust area. Phase 2 at Pellegrini Park replaces the tennis court fencing, creates a passive recreation nook, improves the softball and soccer fields, improves universal accessibility, provides bleacher seating, and provides new border fencing and buffer planting in selected areas. Attendees were given color rendered master plans for both parks. Staff stated that they would be willing to mail the plans to anyone who could not attend this meeting.

Overall, the residents expressed satisfaction with the plans and the process. Some clarifying questions were asked of the master planners. Staff reminded the group that the larger concept of the master plans will remain, but that some of the details could change as needed or requested during preparation of construction documents. The details can be worked out later after funding is received. However, at this time, the focus is on obtaining implementation funds.

The second half of the meeting covered the implementation plan and the formation of a "Friends" group for each park. Staff reported that the Phase 1 construction improvements for Stearns Park are estimated at \$600,000 and the cost for Pellegrini Park is \$822,000, for a total of \$1,422,000. Because the scope of the two projects is very large, it is recommended that a consultant prepare the specifications and construction documents for public bid. The additional design work is estimated at 10% of the construction costs, or \$142,000. Adding in bidding and construction administration costs, the total Phase 1 cost is \$1,635,000.

Staff reported that, upon the recommendation of the Nonantum Advisory Committee, there is \$140,000 presently available in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds. This represents about 9% of the total cost. The remaining amount- \$1,495,000- will be requested from the City's Community Preservation Act (CPA) fund. Staff is currently preparing the application which is due October 3, 2005. Per CPA protocol, there will be a public hearing as well as one or more working sessions. Having supporters present during these meetings gives the application more credibility. Staff emphasized the importance of having visible and vocal community support during this process. Staff encouraged the

attendees to sign up to be listed on the Interested Citizens list for the Nonantum Advisory Committee so they can be notified of these CPA meetings.

Staff provided the audience with a rough project timeline. The City would ideally like to implement the master plans in a five-year period. If the Phase 1 project is awarded with the needed CPA funds, the money would not become available until spring of 2006. The remainder of 2006 would be dedicated to finding a consultant and the preparation of the bid package. In January 2007, the project would go out to public bid (this is the most advantageous time to bid construction projects as contractors are trying to fill up their season so their prices are more competitive). The project would likely last the entire 2007 construction season.

Staff relayed that according to the responses of the questionnaire, approximately 40% of the respondents chose "Yes" or "Maybe" to express their interest in getting involved with a "Friends" group. There are clearly untapped resources within the neighborhood. It appears timely for the neighborhood to coalesce with the creation of the two park master plans. At each of the past three meetings, a sign-up sheet has been provided that allowed people to indicate their interest in a "Friends" group and to state which park they are most concerned with. There are approximately two dozen names on those lists. Staff explained that the City is willing to assist in the early stages of formation but that the City cannot act as the leaders. Staff invited anyone who is interested in helping to establish a "Friends" group contact Danielle Bailey, Community Development Planner, to obtain the list of interested persons.

Creating a "Friends" group is important for the successful implementation of the plan. As mentioned at the third meeting, the water play area at Pellegrini Park can only be installed if the community is willing and able to pay the water bill. The rising cost of water has resulted in the inability of the Parks and Recreation Department to continue paying. If a Friends of Pellegrini Park does not form, it will be difficult to raise funds for the water play.

Also, in both parks, there will be opportunities for additional beautification and landscaping. The "Friends" groups could formally adopt the spaces which can add significantly to making the parks warm and inviting.

The residents had no additional questions for Pressley Associates or the City. The group was thanked for their interest and attendance.