

Mayor Martin J. Walsh
1 City Hall Square, Suite 500
Boston, MA 02201



Re: Parks and Open Space Budget FY'20
Dear Mayor Walsh:

January 10, 2019

Fenway Civic Association (FCA) is the Fenway's oldest all-volunteer organization, dedicated to sustaining a vital, livable neighborhood. We have a long history of working with the City to promote parks and programming and are grateful for the consistent support you have given.

Our requests this year spring from a history of open space budget allocations in the city and the ongoing need to recoup funding from cumulative cuts made to open space budgets during past years of economic downturn. In lean times, parks are considered 'low hanging fruit' with the rationale that deferring capital projects and cutting back on park maintenance does not have a deleterious effect on citizens – and may in fact not even be noticed. Such an approach, however, has long-lasting consequences for subsequent generations.

Today, real estate development continues at breakneck speed – a population estimated at 618,000 in 2010 is now over 685,000. Greater support for quality open space is needed more now than ever to address the needs of a growing population. Still, our city's parks budget has remained less than 1% of the total budget, a level considered to be vital to achieve and support world class parks.

The passage of the Community Preservation Act (CPA) has been a boon to parks across Boston, but it has exposed the capacity challenges of a Parks and Recreation Department with inadequate resources to oversee CPA applications and grant awards. Having requisite staff to handle the additional proposal reviews, project planning, community outreach, construction management, and subsequent maintenance is desperately needed in order to fully realize the benefit that CPA funding was meant to bring to green space in the city.

Additional pressure has been put on Boston parks from the ballooning opioid epidemic, where parks have become repositories for drug paraphernalia and homes for those whose lives are upended by drug use. These problems create considerable pressure on the resources needed to maintain security and reduce threats to public health. Although support for Park Ranger operations has recently increased, it has not reached its former capacity (prior to 2009 budget cuts) nor has it kept pace with the increased pressures created by the opioid problem.

For these reasons, this year, we ask for an increase in the Parks & Recreation Department funding especially to meet City-wide needs of increased CPA-funded activities, urban forestry, and park security.

- **Operations needs from increased capacity and CPA-funded projects**
 - Expanding maintenance second shift staffing
 - Adding contract maintenance positions
 - Funding a position to meet demand for CPA applications/approved proposals review and management
 - Adding Project Managers, Landscape Architects, and Designers to meet project demands, including large master planning efforts
- **Urban Forestry**

Trees are an important part of climate resiliency and public health. The City and its Parks would benefit from increased investment in urban forestry to meet the goals of Climate Ready Boston through:

 - Funding a tree inventory/survey and Urban Forestry Master Plan
 - Adding one additional Urban Forestry staff arborist
- **Park Security**

Crime deterrence and park security in the Emerald Necklace parks are best served by the Mounted Park Rangers who most effectively police large amounts of parkland and natural terrain. A full and ready force is vital to its ability to police these historical areas. In order to incrementally approach the size of its pre-2009 force and to meet the growing social demands placed upon the department, a minimum of at least one new position is needed this year.

- **Fenway-Specific Projects:**

- We thank you for funding support for the Westland Avenue Gateway Project, a signature landmark for the Fenway and the gateway to Olmsted's Emerald Necklace. We ask that your support extend to protections for the monument's trough components, which have been recommended to have curbing extensions added to protect against vehicular damage. With Parks' support, these funds can be approved within the PWD and BTB budget allocations as needed to perform these protections.
- Peterborough Playground: This bustling playground, housed at The McKinley School (corner of Peterborough and Kilmarnock Streets), is unprotected as open space. It is the only playground in the West Fenway and has been heavily used by young children and families for the last 20 years. Although informally supported by Parks Department, we ask your consideration to formally transfer this parcel from BPS to the Parks and Recreation Department so that its use can be adequately protected against development and its equipment appropriately upgraded to assure its ongoing enjoyment by families and children in the Fenway.

- **Maintenance:** We appreciate the city's committed support for Phase I maintenance and for the Phase 2 Muddy River Restoration work and associated management of invasives in the Emerald Necklace. We ask the budget adds anticipated funding for phragmites remediation as proposed by the Parks Department in their DEP filing.
- **Parks Programming:** Thanks to the City and ParkArts for support of arts and programming, and for partnering with Fenway Civic. As one of the fastest-growing neighborhoods in the city with the least amount of open space, the Fenway benefits greatly from these activities. Our annual Swingin' in the Fenway concert brings hundreds of attendees to Ramler Park, and our senior programs allow elderly Fenway residents to enjoy healthy movement opportunities at Symphony Park.

Future CPA Funding: In future cycles, we will be asking for your support to repair inaccessible pathways throughout the Back Bay Fens (photos attached).

We especially thank you and your Parks Commission for your understanding and vigilance in protecting our City's open space in the face of ever-increasing development. Leadership that respects the needs of parks - from sunlight to maintenance and cultural/environmental considerations - will keep these places thriving for residents and visitors. We look to your office to work with park supporters to ensure that these valuable assets are protected for its citizens, both now and in the future.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment as we offer our ongoing commitment to support parks and open space initiatives in our neighborhood and in the city.

Sincerely,



Marie Fukuda and Fredericka Veikley, Open Space Committee
Fenway Civic Association
P.O. Box 230435/Astor Station/Boston, MA 02123

CC: Christopher Cook, Chief, Environment, Energy, and Open Space
Councilor Josh Zakim
Boston City Council

BACK BAY FENS PATHWAYS

Veterans War Memorial Pathways,
Back Bay Fens, present conditions



BACK BAY FENS PATHWAYS

Basketball and Clemente Field paths,
Back Bay Fens, current conditions

