

City of Cambridge

COMMITTEE REPORTS

1. A communication was received from D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk, transmitting a report from Councillor Jonathan S. Myers, Chairman of the Public Service Committee, for a public meeting held on Tuesday, March 22, 1994 regarding City parks, open space, sidewalks and snow and ice clearance.

City of Cambridge

The Public Service Committee held a public hearing on Tuesday, March 22, 1994 beginning at 5:30 p.m. in the Ackerman Room, for the purpose of discussing City parks, open space, sidewalks and snow and ice clearance. Present at the meeting were Councillor Jonathan S. Myers, Chair of the Committee, Councillor Katherine Triantafillou, Councillor Timothy J. Toomey, Jr., D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk, Richard Rossi, Deputy City Manager, Ralph Dunphy, Commissioner of the Department of Public Works and James Maloney, City Treasurer.

Councillor Myers convened the meeting and explained the purpose. He said that the Committee will start with two areas. The first area is discussion and inventory of City parks, open spaces and sidewalks. He stated that his sense is that the City has had an excellent program. Next the Committee will look back a bit at the snow and ice issues.

Richard Rossi, Deputy City Manager, introduced members of City staff and the Open Space Committee: Rob Steck, Community Development Department, Landscape Architect, responsible for park and playground design and construction management; Richard Medeiros, Superintendent of Parks; Steve White, Deputy Commissioner of Public Works; Bob Keating, Superintendent of Streets and Sidewalks; Paul Ryder, Recreation Director; Mary Flynn, Deputy Director of the Community Development Department; James Maloney, City Treasurer; and Lisa Peterson, Assistant to the City Manager.

Mr. Rossi explained the way in which open space planning is done, which is by joint venture and cooperation. The Open Space Committee involves all the relevant departments from planning through maintenance. Much work went into development of an open space and parks plan and inventory. He noted that these plans are on file with the state and federal government which has allowed the City to qualify for large grants in the past.

Richard Rossi explained that parks are viewed through a rating system, from F, a poor quality park, to A, recently renovated parks. It is done by neighborhoods, to be geographically fair. He stated that for the next decade, the cultural issue is the ability to spend the necessary money on maintenance - not just grass, but major equipment renewal, such as fences and playground.

Councillor Toomey noted that plow blades have damaged fences at playgrounds and asked if there was a solution. Mr. Medeiros responded that angled plows can help to prevent damage to fences.

Mr. Rossi said they are looking to put an annual amount of \$75,000 towards

this type of maintenance, capitol maintenance rather than ordinary maintenance.

Lisa Peterson, Assistant to the City Manager, said that the City has seventy playgrounds to maintain. She said the important part is to have someone from all of the relevant departments looking at the park together. This assessment is then used to decide which parks to renovate.

Mary Flynn, Deputy Director, Community Development Department, noted that existing neighborhood plans are also used in the process of planning renovations. In addition there was a City-wide open space planning process two years ago. Ms. Peterson distributed copies of the analysis of park conditions (Attachment 1) and a copy of the form used in the park evaluation (Attachment 2). The last systematic evaluation was in 1991, and it will be redone in two years.

Ms. Flynn described the planning and design process for new playgrounds and playground renovations. She described the neighborhood involvement, which varies somewhat depending on the site and complexity of renovations. New parks and large renovations have the most comprehensive involvement of neighbors.

Mr. Rossi said that the City has tried to cut contractor costs by using City departments such as the Water Department and the Department of Public Works wherever possible, for example for demolition.

James Maloney, Treasurer, discussed the financing mechanisms, a mixture of pay-as-you-go and debt financing. He described the financing for Danehy Park. Danehy has a mixture of \$6.5 million debt financing, \$2 million state government funds and \$3 million MBTA funds.

Mr. Maloney said that Hoyt will be a bond issue. The City has tried to use pay-as-you-go capital funding for the smaller parks. In the future, there will be serious restraints - the City has hit the levy limit and Senior Center debt will add \$600,000 per year debt repayment. Donnelly Field will probably also require debt financing. He said that the City tries to do one to three tot lots per year. For the coming year the City is looking at financing one park through pay-as-you-go, and debt for the Cambridge Park (Donnelly Field).

Ms. Flynn added that the City is applying for a \$250,000 grant for two Area 4 parks, Sennott Playground and Harvard Street Tot Lot.

Councillor Toomey asked whether Central Artery mitigation funds would provide some of the parks funding. Richard Rossi said that it was not settled yet, but that the

City had made requests, such as the lights for Donnelly Field, which would be about \$250,000.

He added that said the estimate for Donnelly was a total of \$800,000 - \$1 million, so the lights are a major cost.

Councillor Toomey asked about the Fletcher School. Paul Ryder said there are still conflicts regarding the basketball courts. Richard Rossi observed that disagreements about whether to have basketball courts have been a big issue in all renovations. Another issue is that some neighbors want the lights left on for 24 hours a day at all the parks. This is a big cost drain.

Gerald Bergman, Elm Street, said that he lives across from the Fletcher School and he would like to help to get neighbors together to resolve the issues so renovations could occur. He said that traffic and speed issues are very important here because Elm Street is a major cut through to Somerville. The park is well utilized by the kids and he would like to see the neighbors come together to work on it. Mr. Rossi stated that when new basketball equipment is put in, it is much less noisy than the old basketball facilities.

Mr. Bergman said that he wants to compliment Rob Steck and Mary Flynn for their work on the Sennott tot lot and Harvard tot lot. He is concerned about what will happen if the grant money does not come through.

Councillor Myers asked how often the park survey is updated. Ms. Peterson said that the plan is to do a review every five years. It is a significant expenditure of staff resources. However, play structures need to be reviewed more often. The goal is at least annually and perhaps biannually to look at the play structures. The FY95 budget reflects this plan.

Councillor Myers stated that Alberico Park does have some maintenance problems, even though it is rated a "B." He noted that the assessment list has a few parks that are rated "C." He asked how this issue can be dealt with.

Commissioner Dunphy agreed that this is a tough issue. The new budget item for capital maintenance will free up DPW to do more of the ordinary maintenance.

Mr. Rossi noted the City's progress in providing handicap access in parks and playgrounds.

Lisa Peterson stated that the City needs to look at more creative solutions to maintenance issues, such as adopt-a-park.

Councillor Triantafillou asked if the City utilized summer youth jobs. Mr. Rossi said that the City does. The biggest season for park work is Spring. Then during the dry months, there is a big dust problem at some of the fields such as Tobin and

Donnelly.

Councillor Triantafillou asked what are the summer programs that employ kids in the parks. Mr. Rossi said that there have been several programs, employing 50-100 people. Councillor Myers asked that a report with these statistics be supplied to the Committee. Commissioner Dunphy said that there are some limitations because the younger kids in the Mayor's Program cannot operate motorized equipment.

Councillor Myers said that he supports the proposed new maintenance budget item. He added that he encourages seed monies in the existing DPW budget to be used to involve the neighborhood, for example in neighborhood clean-up and adopt-a-park programs.

Paul Ryder said that Dana Park, Hancock Street and Hastings Square have been very successful examples of adopt-a-park.

Mr. Rossi said it would be good to be able to use these efforts to balance and augment City DPW maintenance.

Councillor Myers said that citizen impact can go a long way in the area of parks. Mr. Rossi agreed and said that the City has employed this technique many times in this area.

Councillor Myers asked about the planning process for the Cambridgeport Park. Mary Flynn said that MIT and the City seems to have arrived at a solution regarding site clean-up. Cleanup should be done some time this Spring. Mr. Rossi added that the biggest issue is how long can people be kept off the site to allow grass to grow. The soil has to be removed to a depth of four feet. It really cannot be used this Summer. They will try to have it available for use in September, for the interior use. Ms. Flynn said that the final use is dependent on resolving the other parcel issues. Councillor Myers suggested intermittent use above and beyond "clean and green" if there was going to be a very long delay before final development.

Councillor Myers asked whether chances for the grant for Sennott and Harvard were good, and Ms. Flynn stated that she was optimistic. The application deadline is April 15th and final decisions should be made over the summer.

Councillor Triantafillou asked about the Fletcher Park. Rich Rossi said they want to get started. Mr. Bergman is willing to work with the neighbors. There are issues with the school and issues about uses.

Councillor Triantafillou asked how new space gets created. She said that she has heard a great deal from the public about the need for open space in Area 4.

James Maloney said the problem with Area 4 is that it is mostly residential. There is one large lot, owned by a developer, for which he overpaid, so the selling

price would be unrealistic. Mr. Rossi noted that there are 21E cleanup issues as well, which add to the expense. Ms. Flynn said there are similar issues for the Wellington-Harrington neighborhood.

Gerald Bergman stated that there was a discussion about creating new open space as part of the Blouin site deposition. The question was between affordable and parks, and the community decided in favor of affordable housing, with the recommendation that the existing parks be renovated. From this has come the efforts for Sennott Playground and the Harvard Street tot lot.

Mr. Rossi noted the need to help kids from all neighborhoods get to Fresh Pond and to Danehy Park when there are tremendous renovation opportunities that are meant to be available to all kids in the City, not just the neighborhood.

Mr. Rossi noted that with the building of the new treatment water site, there may be new open space opportunities. He said the issue really deserves serious explanation because it is an important opportunity.

Councillor Triantafillou brought up the issue of crossing the street to get to Fresh Pond. Mary Flynn stated that there are Community Development Department projects to work on this issue, especially in the context the Alewife Neighborhood Study.

Councillor Myers then moved to issues of snow and ice. He stated that plowing and cleanup were done well. There were some issues regarding notification. Councillor Myers asked Commissioner Dunphy to discuss the issue.

Commissioner Dunphy stated that most complaints that he had heard at the City Council hearing involved notification and that fact that even though DPW issues citations, it may not result in getting the sidewalks cleaned. DPW has a snow manual. The snow emergency was really not used in recent years as a tool for snow clearance. It only makes sense if there is more notification. DPW is committed to making the snow manual more user friendly and getting it out early in the season. DPW wrote to all the people who spoke at the City Council's snow hearing. Mr. Dunphy said that he has been encouraged by the attitude of many citizens that they want to help on the issue.

Mr. Rossi said that the City has tried to announce the snow emergency several hours before it goes into effect. They try to consider churches and businesses and cars. This was the worst winter in ten years.

Councillor Triantafillou suggested that information be put in the resident sticker information and that residents get coupons for being able to park at night during snow emergencies. She agreed that there is an issue of how to motivate people to shovel, and that it is not clear that fines work that well.

Mr. Rossi states that to a certain extent , there is a problem with absentee landlords. There also appears to be more of a problem in some wealthier neighborhoods.

Councillor Triantafillou asked about the possibility of adding a lien on tax bills. James Maloney said that it is not presently allowed, although liens for unpaid bills is allowed. She asked whether the City had considered raising the fines. Mr. Rossi said perhaps the City could publish the names of those who do not pay the tickets in the newspaper.

Councillor Myers said that an easy-to-read booklet would help the public. A key word is "interactive." The public needs the information and wants to be involved.

Mr. Rossi said that creativity is necessary. Rich Medeiros suggested encouraging sharing driveways during snow emergencies.

Councillor Myers suggested looking into automated technology for Public Works information.

Commissioner Dunphy said that putting the "public" back into the Public Works is a real priority. Councillor Myers agreed with the importance of this concept and said that he wanted the Committee to be able to assist in this endeavor.

Councillor Myers thanked all of those present for their attendance.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:03 p.m.

For The Committee


Councillor Myers

Table 10

**Summary of Park Conditions
for which City has responsibility**

	<u>Totals</u>				
	<u>F</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>A</u>
Neighborhood 1	-	2	-	1	5
Neighborhood 2	-	-	-	-	-
Neighborhood 3	1	-	2	-	-
Neighborhood 4	1	1	1	2	2
Neighborhood 5	-	-	1	5	3
Neighborhood 6	-	-	4	3	-
Neighborhood 7	-	-	3	3	2
Neighborhood 8	-	1	-	1	-
Neighborhood 9	-	1	1	1	3
Neighborhood 10	-	-	1	5	1
Neighborhood 11	-	-	4	3	-
Neighborhood 12	-	2	-	-	-
Neighborhood 13	-	-	2	1	-
	<u>2</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>16</u>

A = Excellent in terms of all condition evaluation factors

B = Good in terms of most condition evaluation factors

C = Fair. Some minor problems

D = Poor. Serious Problems

F = Totally unsatisfactory in most respects.

**Table 11 Analysis of Park Conditions
for which the City has responsibility, 1991**

Facility	Design	Construc- tion	Mainte- nance	Program- ming	Composit Rating
1 Gore Street Playground	A-	A	B	A	A-
1 Silva Playground	D	C	D	F	D
1 Costa Lopez Playground	A	A	A	A	A
1 Kennedy School/Ahern Plg.*	A	A	B	A	A-
1 Front Park	B	B	A	N/A	B
1 Lechmere Canal Park	A-	A	A-	N/A	A
1 Charles Park*	A	A	A	A	A
1 Hurley/VFW Memorial Park	C	D	D	D	D
3 Warren Pals/Gannett Plg.**	F	D	D	F	F
3 Donnelly Field	C	C	C	B	C
3 Elm Hampshire Park	C	C	C	N/A	C
4 Fletcher School	F	F	F	D	F
4 Sennott Playground	B	B-	B	A	B
4 Market Street*	A	A	C	A	A-

**Table 11 Analysis of Park Conditions
for which the City has responsibility, 1991**

Facility	Design	Construc- tion	Mainte- nance	Program- ming	Composite Rating
4 Maynard School	F	C	D	D	D
4 Harvard St. Tot Lot	B	C	C	C	C
4 Columbia St. Park*	B	B	C-	B	B-
4 Pine St. Park*	A	A	C	A	A-
5 Central Square Library	B	A	D	N/A	C
5 Dana Park	A	B	B	B	B
5 Hastings Square	A	C	A	N/A	B+
5 Alberico Playground	A	A	C	A	B+
5 Old Morse Playground*	A	A	C	B	B+
5 Fulmore Playground*	A	A	B	A	A
5 Fort Washington	A	A	A	N/A	A
5 Lindstrom/Morse School Playground	A	B	C	A	B

**Table II Analysis of Park Conditions
for which the City has responsibility, 1991**

Facility	Design	Construc- tion	Mainte- nance	Program- ming	Composite Rating
5 Lopez St. Playground	A	A	B	B	A-
6 Maple Ave. Tot Lot	C	D	D	B	C
6 Library Park	B	B	A	D	C
6 Paine Playground	C	C	C	C	C
6 Longfellow School	B	B	C	B	B
6 Wilder/Lee Street	C	B	B	B	B
6 Hancock Playground	C	C	C	B	C
6 Vellucci Plaza	A	B	B	N/A	B
7 Hoyt Field*	A	A	N/A	N/A	A
7 M.L. King School	B	A	B	B	B
7 Corporal Burns Plg.	D	C	C	C	C-
7 Franklin Street Park	D	B	C	N/A	C
7 Riverside Press Park	B	B	B	A	B

**Table 11 Analysis of Park Conditions
for which the City has responsibility, 1991**

Facility	Design	Construc- tion	Mainte- nance	Program- ming	Composite Rating
7 Michael Sullivan Park	B	B	A	N/A	B
7 Macelroy Park	A	A	C	N/A	A-
7 Cronin Park	D	B	B	N/A	C
8 Alden Playground	B	B-	B	A	B
8 Sacramento St. Field**	C	D	F	D	D
9 Corcoran Park	B	C	C	C	C
9 St. Peters Field *	A	A	A	A	A
9 Peabody School Playground	D	C	D	C	D
9 Danehy Park	A	A	A	A	A
9 Cambridge Common	A	B	B	B	B
9 Flagstaff Park	A	A	A	N/A	A
10 Winthrop Square	A	B	C	B	B
10 Longfellow Park	B	A	B	A	A-

**Table 11 Analysis of Park Conditions
for which the City has responsibility, 1991**

Facility	Design	Construc- tion	Mainte- nance	Program- ming	Composite Rating
10 Lowell School	C-	C	C	D	C-
10 Lowell Park	B	B	B	N/A	B
10 Larch Road Park	A	C	B	B	B
10 Tobin School/Callahan Park	B	A	B	B	B
10 Commonwealth Park	B	B	B	N/A	B
11 Parkway Tot Lot**	B	C	C	C	C
11 Sleeper Park	C	D	B	C	C
11 Rindge Field/Bergin Plg.	B	C	B	B	B
11 Cameau/O'Callaghan Field	C	D	B	B	C+
11 Clarendon Avenue	C	B	B	D	C+
11 Russell Field	B	B	B	B	B
11 Linear Park	B	C	B	C	B
12 Sancta Maria**	D	C	C	D	D

**Table 11 Analysis of Park Conditions
for which the City has responsibility, 1991**

Facility	Design	Construc- tion	Mainte- nance	Program- ming	Composite Rating
12 Lusitania Field	C	D	D	D	D
13 Haggarty School**	C	C	C	C	C
13 Fresh Pond/Kingsley Park (Neigh. 13)	B	C	B	C	B-
13 Glacken Field**	D	C	C	D	C-

*** Renovated/constructed after 1991.**

**** Renovation scheduled.**

NAME: _____

Neighborhood name: _____

Street location: _____

Surrounding land uses: _____

Proximate institutions: _____

Date of visit(s): _____ Total Size (acres): _____

FACILITIES INVENTORY

(include # and square feet, where appropriate)

Baseball fields: _____ Softball fields: _____

Soccer fields: _____ Football fields: _____

Basketball courts: _____ Tennis courts: _____

Tot Lots (1-5 yrs.): _____ Playground (5-12 yrs.): _____

Passive open space: _____ Shelters: _____

Natural wooded areas: _____ Public gardens: _____

Exercise/fitness station: _____ Night lighting: _____

Historical monuments/features: _____ Parking: _____

EQUIPMENT INVENTORY

Picnic tables: _____ Park benches: _____

Park lights: _____ Public art: _____

Trees: _____ Shrubs: _____

Trash receptacles: _____ Drinking fountain: _____

Water play feature: _____ Sand play area: _____

Swings: _____ See-Saws: _____

Spring Animals: _____ Bulletin Board: _____

Wheelchair accessibility: _____

Other special needs equipment/features: _____

- 1 = poor
 2 = below average
 3 = average
 4 = above average
 5 = excellent

DESIGN

Architectural barriers	1	2	3	4	5
Organization/layout of space	1	2	3	4	5
Relation to adjacent land use	1	2	3	4	5
Access/circulation	1	2	3	4	5
Aesthetics/attractiveness	1	2	3	4	5
Value of play equipment	1	2	3	4	5
landscaping/use of plant material	1	2	3	4	5
Resistance to vandalism	1	2	3	4	5
Playground safety/ease of supervision	1	2	3	4	5
Appropriateness of current use	1	2	3	4	5

Comments: _____

CONSTRUCTION

Quality of materials/products	1	2	3	4	5
Quality of installation work	1	2	3	4	5
Appropriateness of materials/products	1	2	3	4	5

Comments: _____

MAINTENANCE

Ease of maintenance	1	2	3	4	5
Service Access to site	yes			no	
Level of maintenance	satisfactory			unsatis.	
Maintenance	contract			city	
Design related problems: _____					
Construction related problems: _____					
Programming related problems: _____					
Comments: _____					

PROGRAMMING

Level of use	light	moderate	heavy
Appropriateness of programming	1	2	3 4 5
Utilization	under		over
Use of spaces	formal		informal
Use classification	A	B	C
Use	neighborhood/city/regional		
Types of programming: _____			
Special populations served: _____			
Comments: _____			

OVERALL PARK EVALUATION RATING (A,B,C,D,F):

A = Excellent in terms of all condition evaluation factors

B = Good in terms of most condition evaluation factors

C = Fair. Some minor problems

D = Poor. Serious problems

F = Totally unsatisfactory in most respects

DESIGN: _____

CONSTRUCTION: _____

MAINTENANCE: _____

PROGRAMMING: _____

General Observations/Summary: _____

Committee Report #1

5-130

A Comm. was received from D. Margaret Drury
transmitting report from Councillor Myers
Chairman of the Public Service
Committee for a public meeting held on
Tuesday, March 22, 1994 re: City parks,
open space, sidewalks and snow and ice clearance.

In City Council March 28, 1994

Report accepted

Placed on file