



December 19, 2019

Re: FY '21 Boston Park Advocates Budget Requests

Dear Mayor Walsh,

As Boston continues its rapid growth, we recognize your administration's dedication to the city's green spaces, reflected in record capital investments and leadership in the citywide climate resilience and waterfront park planning. Investments in planning (underway and completed) in parks throughout Boston such as Franklin Park, Jamaica Pond, Boston Common, Moakley Park, and Harambee Park are significant and transformative for the host neighborhoods and city overall. In addition, we applaud staffing budget increases to the Boston Parks Department to add capacity for projects funded through the Community Preservation Act, and the work your administration does to make our parks the best they can be.

The Boston Park Advocates network writes to request your prioritization of key funding areas for the Parks and Recreation Department in the City's Fiscal Year 2021 Budget. Our network of over 125 friends groups, community organizations, and nonprofits applauds the work you have done to advance safety and accessibility throughout Boston's parks. We are confident that with your continued support and targeted investment, we can collectively enjoy an even stronger, more vibrant park system for all.

There are key investments that can build on this work, and we request that your FY2021 Budget include:

- **Operations:** The City's support for park operations is significant, yet the pressure on our parks is higher than it has ever been before. With the city's growth, more people are using parks, community gardens, and athletic fields, and relying on them all hours and days of the week. Operational funds are foundational to a healthy park system, and we believe that increased funding is essential to help Boston maintain world-class parks for all. Per the City's FY20 budget, the projected percentage of park maintenance requests completed on time for FY19 was 77%; we would like to see the current target of 80% increased to at least 85% for FY21, with sufficient resources to support that level of service.
  - **Second Shift:** Currently, park maintenance teams work from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday through Friday. Yet, parks are used week-long and at all hours, particularly during weekends. A second shift to cover 1 p.m. to 9 p.m. maintenance, Wednesday through Sunday will ensure that parks stay safe, clean, and usable for all residents and visitors. Therefore, we advocate for increased funding to fulfill the staffing needs.

- **City Arborists:** In addition to managing hundreds of properties, the Parks & Recreation Department has responsibility for approximately 35,000 street trees. Currently, one tree warden works with four arborists to provide all tree inspections and emergency maintenance across Boston. Additional work, including tree plantings and removals, is contracted. The addition of two arborists would allow the City greater oversight of its tree planting program and better maintenance of the city's urban canopy, a critical component of climate resiliency and environmental health, particularly in environmental justice neighborhoods that have below-average tree cover.
  - **Park Rangers:** The current compensation for Rangers has negatively impacted staffing, leading to consistently low retention and training inefficiencies. At a time where park safety is an increasing concern across Boston, increasing pay for Rangers will improve retention, and the addition of two FTE staff will help assure that parks remain safe and welcoming.
- **Animal Care & Control:** We ask for direct appropriations for Animal Care & Control to provide more budgetary predictability to support the important work of this program.
- **Sharps Team:** In addition to the above requests for line-items within the Parks & Recreation Department budget, a related program is the Mobile Sharps Team within the Boston Public Health Commission. Many park friends groups regularly report to the City when there are discarded needles. According to the *Boston Globe*, from 2016 through the first half of 2019 there was a more than 45% increase in 311 requests to the City for removing discarded needles. We request an increase to this program to double the size of the Mobile Sharps Team from four to eight. This will better enable requests to be fulfilled in a timely manner and increase the team's ability to be proactive. This increased staffing will help provide safe spaces for active recreation as well as the passive enjoyment of nature.

We thank you for your generous support of the City's park system. Thank you for your consideration of our requests.

Sincerely,  
 Boston Park Advocates  
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cc  
 Budget Director Justin Sterritt  
 Chief of Policy and Planning Joyce Linehan  
 Chief of Environment, Energy & Open Space Christopher Cook  
 Boston Parks & Recreation Department Commissioner Ryan Woods  
 Boston City Councilors