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## **Boston City Council Committee on Ways and Means**

*Dockets #0524-0531, FY22 Budget*

*Parks and Recreation Department*

*Docket #0544 Parkman Fund*

***Working Session: Friday, May 21, 2021, 10:00 a.m.***

***Hearing: Wednesday, June 2, 2021, 2:00 p.m.***

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The following is a collection of questions that were asked by the Committee regarding the Parks and Recreation Department's budget at the Working Session on Friday, May 21, 2021 at 10:00 a.m.

Recording here: <https://youtu.be/Am13Vd97nuA>

The Administration is requested to respond to all questions in one of three ways:

1. Verbally at the hearing on Wednesday, June 2<sup>nd</sup>, at 2PM.
2. For factual questions, through written responses supplied prior to June 2<sup>nd</sup>, including budget book page numbers or other references where appropriate.
3. By deferring to a specific scheduled departmental budget hearing.

Please annotate and return this information request before June 2<sup>nd</sup>, indicating how each question will be answered.

### **Parks Department Budget Questions**

#### **Councilor Kenzie Bok, Chair, asked:**

- Councilors are obviously very interested in the Urban Forestry plan and the street tree planting initiative. The funding for the tree planting initiative was doubled last year, but given the reality of COVID-19 conditions, did we get that planting done? When will the Urban Forestry Plan be finished, and what is the timeline for implementation?
  - I have also heard that possibly the inventory is only including street trees, not trees in parks; is that true? Obviously it would seem that for a complete snapshot of the City's canopy, we would need both.
- It is crucial that we add trees, but very important also to preserve older trees; what are our resources and efforts around that?
- Where are we in filling out all the Arborist positions? Are we still at 2, with 3 vacancies?
- How much are we paying for tree pruning contracts yearly? Councilor Flaherty has suggested that this should be done in-house, with us having the tree pruning capabilities and equipment here in Boston, especially as we grow our urban forest.
- Relating to the conversations we are having with Environment and the Green Jobs Pilot program, how many of the Parks employees are BPS graduates? How can we work with Madison Park and community groups to create a pipeline for Parks jobs for our residents and students?



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- My constituents always want to know about the funding for the Park Rangers Mounted Unit; where are they relative to last year?
- Parks are essential to all of us at this time, and Park advocates are always asking about bumping the Park's budget to at least 1% of the City budget. That is a marker we still haven't hit. Parks is still well below its historic number of employees, yet Parks is adding to our Urban Forest and our Urban Wilds -- essentially adding to the portfolio. How is Parks thinking about that structurally and how are you exploring new funding options? Please talk about what your budget vision is.
- Do we have the adequate staff to maintain the Urban Wilds, especially as we grow this program?
- Please talk about the Parcel Priority Program and what is the latest news about acquiring parcels for open space around the City.
- Please address racial equity in procurement for Parks and also in your hiring practices?
- I am excited about the Mission Hill Playground project that is going to be under construction pretty imminently. Can you confirm the timeline on that?
- Similarly, can you confirm the timeline on the Clarendon St Playground project?
- What is the status of the Boston Common Master Plan? Have we managed to find space for basketball within the plan, since I know that is something our diverse young people from across the City had voiced a desire for?
- Can you confirm that there will be public bathrooms in the Boston Common Master Plan? This is such an urgent need that we have seen so strongly in this crisis.
  - Have we thoroughly considered adding a public bathroom in Copley Square as well?
- Where are we on the project timeline for the Kenmore Square block of the Comm Ave Mall? As things open back up, how can I be helpful with community engagement? There are a number of multilingual seniors who live at Kenmore Abbey who are interested and would like to be engaged in the conversations about the project.
- There is a staircase from Fisher Ave up to McLaughlin Park that is badly in need of repair, and I understand from Public Works that it falls under Parks' jurisdiction. Is it anywhere in your capital/repair plan, and how can we get it dealt with?
- If there is an opportunity at the federal level to add some funds for the environment-focused work that was cut from the scope of the Muddy River



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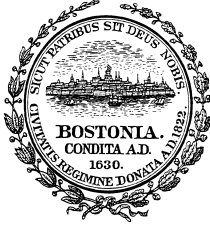
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project with the Army Corps of Engineers, what would we add back in? Are there things we currently anticipate having to pay for as a City because they aren't included in the federal phase of the project?

- I know the Back Bay Fens Pathways project has to be coordinated with that Muddy River project; what is the timing looking like on that front?
- What are we doing to address the Canadian Geese population in the Back Bay Fens area?
- What is the typical timeline to clean up the graffiti on our historic bridges?
- What are the coordination efforts to clean up the weeds on property that are on the margin of City-owned and MDC-owned properties?
- Although it's not in my district, as Chair of Ways & Means I was a bit concerned to hear that a whole bridge could be built in Franklin Park without being listed in the capital budget for our approval, nor any community process; can you update us on what line item that work came out of?
- It was great to be at the relaunch of the Swan Boats a few weeks ago, and the Public Garden has been looking splendid lately, thanks to the tireless efforts of the Parks workers. I'm very grateful that a renovation of the maintenance building was included in this year's capital budget; can you speak to the plans for that building?

### **Councilor Liz Breadon asked:**

- What is the status of the McKinney Park Master Plan as the plan is getting old and there haven't been any recommendations implemented.
  - There appears to be a shortfall in funding. How short are we? How much funding do we anticipate will be needed to get the project moving forward? What is the timeline to start the project?
- Can you provide an inventory of all of our cemeteries?
- Due to COVID we have seen an increase in burials in our cemeteries. I think the space is going to run out in the next 20 years or so. Are we exploring alternative ways as opposed to the traditional way of laying our loved ones to rest in our cemeteries, maybe exploring some green options or other options?
- We are losing tree canopy in privately owned properties and the City is trying to plant more trees and it seems it is a losing proposition right now because we are losing a lot more trees on private property. Are we looking at educational programs to try to educate the public about the huge benefit of having trees and to get more buy into the concept of preserving our tree canopy?



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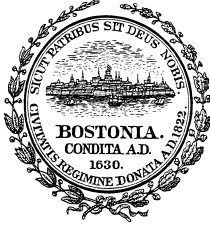
- It's been reported to me that it can take two years to get a new street tree planted, why such a long process and can we expedite that process?
- How many dog parks do we have in the City, and can you provide an update on establishing more?

### **Councilor Ed Flynn asked:**

- What is important to me and my constituents is the funding upgrades to Moakley Park. What are the upgrades around the recreation fields such as baseball fields and the Babe Ruth Field so that there is not a lost season for the kids and what are the planned resiliency measures as well.
- Update on swing set renovation at the Flaherty Park.
- Neighbors are concerned with conditions at the Blackstone, Franklin Park, and the Medal of Honor Park in South Boston regarding unleashed dogs at the parks. The parks are being used as an unofficial dog park. What measures can we take for residents who are concerned about off-leash dogs in the parks as this is a quality of life and public safety issue for kids who play in the parks.
- There is a need for signage to clarify what the rules are for dog owners and leash laws in parks. Please provide an update on those measures.
- Please inform me of any tree cutting in the district and discuss what the community notifications process entails regarding the cutting and replacement of trees.
- My constituents asked me to address the public safety and public health issues in and around the Boston Common and the Public Garden. Please provide some information around that.

### **Councilor Matt O'Malley asked:**

- Franklin Park is of utmost interest to me, and I am happy that the Mayor called for a task force which I am on. I have worked to secure \$25M for a Franklin Park renovation project that is well underway. Please discuss the immediate needs that need to be addressed.
- Jefferson Park is a small playground on the end of Grotto Glen, it has a rope climber that is only accessible to older children and abled body children so, looking forward to seeing it being revitalized to see more kids use it. Please provide an update on the Jefferson Park Playground improvements plan in Jamaica Plain.
- We were able to secure funding for Billings Field in West Roxbury. When is the calendar commitment for the first site community meeting?



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- I would like to continue to see the partnerships with Boston Parks and Recreation and advocates of the Parks around programming for children and seniors as well.
- Animal and Care and Control has been moved from the Inspectional Services Department (ISD) to the Parks Department. In speaking with the people at the MSPCA there has been a huge adoption rate during the pandemic, however in direct correlation there has been a large number of animals that have been returned. What trends have you seen in the Animal Care and Control Department?
- Can we find the funding for a Parks Ombudsman that can help answer questions on related issues like parties, loud ATVs, and permitting, etc. Additionally, having an additional staff member to help oversee and be a point person for our 143 Urban Wilds we have across the City is something that I would advocate for also.
- For our Urban Forest Master Plan and agriculture capacity, we were able to secure funding several years ago for a LIDAR study to measure our green canopy which is decent, but still needs a lot more room for improvement. Please provide more specificity on that?
- Please talk about the stonewall maintenance south of Jamaica Pond at the Prince Street edge as well as Francis Park Memorial between Perkins and the Arborway.
- Everyone on this body is a fervent supporter of the Park Ranger Mounted unit which provides education, information and security; please provide an update on their budget.
- I would like to see as part of our Parks plans, getting more water fountains and water filling stations that include dog bowls at the bottom at our parks and playgrounds. This is a service that is good for the taxpayers and good for the environment.