

Realizing the Franklin Park Action Plan: Priorities for the FY 2024 City Budget

Franklin Park Coalition Board of Directors

February 17, 2023

In December 2022, the City of Boston launched the Franklin Park Action Plan, which articulates a vision for future improvements and maintenance of Franklin Park. The Action Plan is a generational vision and will take many years and significant new resources to realize (p.418). The Action Plan was the product of a long and intensive process of community engagement and input, and the plan has been endorsed by Mayor Michelle Wu, Chief of Environment, Energy and Open Space Rev. Mariama White-Hammond, Parks Commissioner Ryan Woods, and members of City Council. To enable the Action Plan's success, it is imperative that the foundations for the Action Plan are set in place in 2023-24 to build for the future.

This memo, prepared by the Franklin Park Coalition Board (FPC), highlights key pieces of the Action Plan that we believe should be prioritized in the FY 2024 City Budget. We recognize this is a significant request, yet believe it both compensates for years of disinvestment and reflects the recommendations of the Action Plan and the communities that use the park. We recognize that in addition to potential funding constraints, hiring new staff may take time, thus reducing the first year, FY 2024 annual costs.

For each item, we link to specific pages of the Plan for further details and context. In summary, based on the recommendations of the Action Plan, we believe the City's FY 2024 Operating Budget should provide for **\$1,393,750** in new maintenance and management funding for Franklin Park and up to **\$20M** annually for capital projects described in the Plan.

The FY 2024 Budget is an opportunity for the City to demonstrate its commitment to the Action Plan and to build momentum after a 3-year planning process. It is an opportunity to lay the groundwork for successful implementation of the Action Plan, ensuring management and maintenance capacity to support current and future improvements. For the first time, the Action Plan provides a clear sense of the park's operating needs, benchmarking Franklin Park against other major urban greenspaces. New resources are essential to ensure a dignified standard of care for the park's natural landscapes and physical infrastructure and to facilitate community use through a well-maintained park. As the Plan states (p.44): **"Franklin Park has been subject to under-investment for far too long and significant investment is needed now to protect and sustain this critical resource and beloved public space."**

New investments offer an opportunity for broader community benefit. We strongly endorse the Action Plan’s calls to “Contract with Local and Black & Latino-owned Businesses” and to “invest in training” (p.428). As the Plan calls for substantial new hiring, we call on the City to prioritize employing staff – wherever possible – from the communities surrounding the Park and who reflect the racial/ethnic diversity of these communities.

The **Franklin Park Coalition** (<https://www.franklinparkcoalition.org/>) is a non-profit organization dedicated to involving the community for work, play, and engagement in Franklin Park, Boston’s largest green space. The diverse FPC Board of Directors includes long-time park users from all neighborhoods abutting the park. FPC has been a partner to the City during the Action Plan development process, convening community meetings to support broad engagement in the plan. In addition to its community outreach and advocacy, FPC hosts the Elma Lewis Playhouse in the Park Concert Series, Franklin Park Kite and Bike Festival, Thanksgiving Turkey Trot, and other programs and activities throughout the year.

* * *

BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Expand Maintenance and Management Staffing as part of Operations Budget

A core element of the Action Plan is to “elevate the standard of care” for Franklin Park by “filling the maintenance gap” (p.422). Achieving this aim will require new and sustained support for dedicated park staffing.

1) Create a new funded position for a Franklin Park Administrator.

- p.412 “The City should hire a dedicated staff person for communication and coordination around all park activities: events, maintenance, programming, construction, and volunteer activities in Franklin Park. This ‘Park Administrator’ position would also continue to build community connections and partnerships to ensure continuity and responsiveness to feedback.”
- The Park Administrator should be located at the Golf Clubhouse or in the Maintenance Yard, on-site in Franklin Park.
- Budget: \$100,000 salary + 25% fringe = **\$125,000** estimated annual cost based on similar positions in the Parks Department.

2) Fund a major, long-term expansion of maintenance staff in Franklin Park.

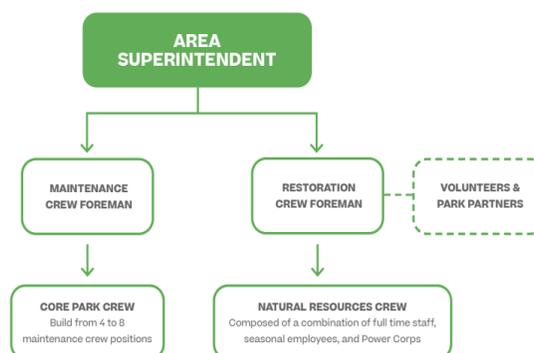
- P.422-423 “The existing maintenance team is incredibly dedicated, but with four staff (who have responsibilities in other parks as well) it is undersized for even basic maintenance needs.... Maintenance hours need to increase by 4-6x to meet existing demands and by 4-7x to meet future demands.”
- Shift responsibilities of the existing crew to provide full time work in Franklin Park. Add staff as may be needed for other parks currently maintained by the existing Franklin Park crew.
- Expand the core maintenance team dedicated to Franklin Park by at least 4 additional full-time staff to appropriately staff the needs highlighted in the Action Plan (p.426), including mowing and turf care, snow removal, and general grounds care (litter pick-up, emptying trash/recycling, surface cleaning, upkeep of benches and other amenities, minor repairs, and assistance to a natural resource crew, etc.).
- Budget: 4 FTE + 4 PT staff at **\$450,000** estimated annual cost based on a living wage of \$60,000 x 6 FTE (i.e., 4 full time + 4 half-time staff) + 25% fringe.

3) Fund a Natural Resources Crew including a Restoration Crew Foreperson

- Foreperson would monitor the health of the ecosystems, accurately identify invasive species, supervise invasive removal, manage trail maintenance, correct areas of erosion, and direct landscape management efforts performed by BPRD staff, PowerCorps, outside contractors, and volunteers.
- Crew to include funding for Power Corps, seasonal employees, full time staff, and expert consultants as needed

A proposed org chart for park maintenance and restoration is provided on p.423. Budget: one foreperson salary of \$90,000 based on salaries of Tree maintenance and Park maintenance forepersons + 25% fringe = \$112,500. Power Corps or seasonal staff = \$45,000 (eight months at park keeper salary) + 25% fringe = \$37,500 x four staff = \$150,000. Total: **\$262,500**

Figure. Organization of Maintenance Crew as proposed in Action Plan (p.423)



5) Fund Two Park Ranger positions.

- Franklin Park experienced public safety concerns in 2022, which emerged after the Action Plan was already drafted. Although not specifically mentioned in the Plan, Franklin Park Coalition recommends expanding the complement of **park rangers dedicated to Franklin Park**, to ensure an appropriate public safety presence in the park.
- Budget: \$65K + 25% fringe x2 rangers = **\$162,500**

6) Fund one Senior Project Manager and one Project Manager, as well as a Contracts Manager within the Boston Parks and Recreation Department dedicated to Franklin Park to oversee and implement capital projects.

- The Parks Department is the “primary group facilitating the implementation of the Action Plan” (p.411). Implementing the Action Plan, especially the capital improvements, will require extensive planning, community engagement, and project management beyond current Parks Department capacity. We recommend hiring additional staff to support making the plan a reality.
- Budget: 1x \$130K + 1x \$100K +1x \$85K + 25% fringe = **\$393,750**.

Total estimated Operating Budget expansion for Franklin Park management and maintenance in FY 2024: \$1,393,750.

B. Capital Improvements

The Action Plan specifies a large number of capital projects to be carried out over a number of years. An overview of these projects is presented on pp. 63-69 of the Action Plan, in the section “Key Improvement Projects by Area”, which contains page numbers for further details in the report.

Top early priorities of the FPC Board include: restoration of the Overlook and Elma Lewis Playhouse (\$12-14 million); creation of a shaded pedestrian walkway along the southern edge of the Playstead to create a safe loop path for pedestrians and bicycles; expansion and rebuilding of the tennis courts at Ellicottdale (\$1 million); and investment in and improvement of the Bear Dens area. We would hope to see ongoing woodlands restoration begin in the coming year: invasive management, tree planting, trail design, and directional markers (\$7 million in total)

The full cost of capital projects in the Action Plan is estimated at \$150-200 million. If implemented over the course of 10 years, this means an **annual capital outlay of \$15-20 million**. The funds required are well in excess of the \$28 million obtained from the sale of the Winthrop Square garage and will require significant annual investments

from the City budget. While a philanthropic “Campaign for Franklin Park” could play a role down the line, it is essential that the City not only lead with dedicated public resources commensurate with the scale of the proposed work, but do so early to create the environment necessary for success.

We endorse the “Early Action Work” recommended by the Action Plan (p. 434), and encourage inclusion as appropriate in next year’s budget, including:

- Development of Maintenance Plan
- First Year Franklin Park Trust Work Plan
- Bear Dens Make Safe Project
- Ellicott Arch Lighting
- Circuit Drive crossings and traffic calming
- Overlook Design and pre-construction work
- Traffic and Parking Analysis including plans for major events at White Stadium
- Parkwide improvements in lighting, signage and restrooms
- Bear Dens designs for activation

We call for capital investments in the Franklin Park Action Plan of up to \$20M annually.

For the thousands of diverse users, many of whom are in Franklin Park daily or weekly through all four seasons, this Action Plan offers a long-sought and exciting investment with needed improvements in every section of our 527-acre park. Both a local neighborhood park and a regional resource, this gem of Frederick Law Olmsted’s Emerald Necklace deserves no less than the operating staff, maintenance, and capital projects outlined in this memo and the Action Plan.