

## STATE GRANTS KEY TO CITY'S OPEN SPACE PLANS

Kids shooting a basketball, parents watching their youngest enjoy the twisting ride of a slide and seniors engaged in bocce or relaxing under a shade tree in Chelsea's new and existing inventory of parks all have a recreational benefactor in common: the State. For the last decade and a half, the City's efforts to rehab and expand its park systems have been universally advanced by funding through the State's Parkland Acquisition and Renovation for Communities (PARC) Program and its related programs.

"It's been a rewarding and fruitful partnership," described Representative Eugene O'Flaherty of the collaboration between the City and State on more than \$10 million of park improvement projects. "Even in these difficult financial times, we've been able to keep park improvement funds flowing to cities and towns because we recognize the connection between open space and quality of life."

"And Chelsea's been at the head of the line, taking advantage of the funding," added Representative Kathi-Anne Reinstein. "While we continue to prioritize items like PARC funding on the State level because it makes Massachusetts a better place to live, it's great to know that Chelsea regularly secures funding to improve existing and create new parks to both support park patrons as well as the City's overall revitalization strategy."

This past month, City Manager Jay Ash reported to the City Council two new park initiatives: one that provides for the renovation of Highland Park, including a new artificial surface there, and another that could see the development of a neighborhood park in the newly created Box District.

"We're having a tremendous amount of success on our open space agenda, and the State's commitment, as advocated by Representatives O'Flaherty and Reinstein, is a difference maker on that," boasted Ash. "And that doesn't include what the State has done on its own, including delivering a spectacular new pool which is the talk of the region."

The City has five citywide parks with recreational facilities that can host athletic play. Sixteen neighborhood parks, playgrounds, and play lots of various sizes, and six such spaces under the control of the Chelsea Housing Authority provide active and passive recreation outlets as well.

"Each of them has had some level of State contribution," reported Ash. "Without Reps. O'Flaherty and Reinstein continuing to be the effective champions they are, it is fair to say that none of the new parks we have would have been created here, and our hopes for even more to come would never be realized."

Over the last decade, the City has added three new parks, Bellingham Hill, Chelsea Commons and Eden's Edge, and has a fourth under construction at Admiral's Hill. A fifth in the Box District is looking even more likely, with O'Flaherty and Reinstein informing the City that the new funding should be available soon.

“It’s remarkable in a community that was fully built-out more than one hundred years ago that we continue to find ways of creating new open space,” reflected Council President Leo Robinson.

“And there is much more to come,” revealed Councillor Roseann Bongiovanni, who has developed a reputation in statewide circles for her environmental advocacy and open space championing.

The future projects of which Bongiovanni and Ash referred include potential projects on the abandoned railroad right of way adjacent to the Box District along Gerrish Avenue and a new community space along Marginal Street.

“The Marginal Street project could be a classic win-win,” emphasized Councillor Marilyn Vega-Torres, who has been instrumental in negotiating for it. “We could be seeing a polluting set of asphalt tanks come down and new community space providing access to the waterfront that hasn’t existed here in generations then creating such a totally different look and feel to our waterfront.”

Several planning documents, including the City’s Open Space Plan and annual Capital Improvement Plan, continue to show the commitment the City is making to parks and open space, and continue to demonstrate the reliance the City has on State funding to realize that commitment.

“That’s okay,” advised O’Flaherty of the pressure put on Reinstein and him to continue to deliver State funding back to Chelsea. “Nothing’s ever a guarantee, other than the resolve of our advocacy. However, I’m sure we’ll continue to have success in delivering more and more funding, in large part because Chelsea continues to show that it knows what to do with the funding when it arrives.”

“I’m not ashamed to be such a vocal advocate,” confessed Reinstein. “Every time I drive by a new park and see another little kid laughing it up as he or she comes down the slide, I know that my efforts to secure more funding for similar projects is well worth it.”

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