IX. Fresh Pond Reservation Land-Use Policy

"A large public reserve may include within its limits roads and paths, playgrounds, picnic grounds, and even gardens and buildings; but if these mar or destroy its landscape, the highest possible value of the reservation...is absolutely lost." (J.C. Olmsted, son and partner of F.L. Olmsted, writing about the Fresh Pond Reservation to Henry Yerxa, Cambridge Park Commissioner, in 1894)

A. Introduction

The Fresh Pond Reservation is a unique, irreplaceable resource in a large, densely populated and highly developed urban area; accordingly, it deserves rigorous, active protection in its entirety.

To ensure that the entire Reservation receives effective long-term protection is a key goal of the Fresh Pond Reservation Master Plan. For that goal to be achieved, a strong Fresh Pond Reservation Land-Use Policy must be established and followed.

The Master Plan calls for the adoption and implementation of a land-use policy embodying the provisions outlined below.

The Plan also calls for the creation of a Fresh Pond Master Plan Advisory Board (See Section XVI) to assist the City in achieving the goals of the Master Plan, including goals to protect the Reservation as water supply land and to preserve and enhance its natural landscape and its varied ecological, educational and recreational values. The Advisory Board would also assist City agencies, boards, commissions and committees in administering the Land-Use Policy.

1. Background

The Fresh Pond Reservation is a unique sanctuary within a densely populated and highly developed urban area, created beginning in 1894 when the Cambridge Water Board decided to restore a scarred and scoured landscape as parkland with a wild character that would protect the City's water supply. In the 1897 words of J.C. Olmsted, the Reservation would offer city dwellers a convenient opportunity to enjoy beautiful natural scenery and "obtain respite from nervous strain and the excessive artificiality of city life."

The City now makes far more varied use of the Reservation than Olmsted and the Water Board of 1894 envisioned. At over 50 acres, the Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr. Municipal Golf Course playing area occupies approximately one-third of the Reservation's greenspace. Other areas within the Reservation are also used for active recreation; and

the Cambridge Public Schools bring students to Black's Nook every year for nature study. But the importance of creating and maintaining parkland with a "wild character" and of protecting it against encroachment has only increased with more than a century of continued urban development in Cambridge and in Belmont, to its immediate west.

In 1997 the City of Cambridge appointed a Fresh Pond Master Plan Advisory Committee to prepare and recommend to the City Manager and City Council a comprehensive, integrated land-use and natural resource management plan for the Reservation. The Master Plan was to provide for protection of the watershed, look to the good of the Reservation as a whole, and plan for the preservation and enhancement of its natural landscape and its educational, recreational and wildlife habitat values.

The City was responding to a clear need. No comprehensive, integrated plan for the management of Reservation lands had existed since Olmsted's time; nor had any comprehensive, integrated land-use policy been established; nor had any public body existed with a charter to consider the good of the Reservation as a whole and to establish and maintain the collaborative relationships necessary to preserve and enhance it. In recent years, the result had been a series of misunderstandings and conflicts among citizens and City agencies alike, leading to aborted projects, bad feelings and a growing number of unaddressed problems.

2. Overview of Land-Use Policy

The Fresh Pond Reservation Land-Use Policy consists of public review, discussion and evaluation provisions, general land-use provisions and special land-use provisions. The general land-use provisions apply throughout the Reservation. The special land-use provisions apply to Glacken Field; to the municipal golf course and clubhouse, to the current Neville Manor site and the two sites into which it will soon be divided (See Special Land-Use Provision 3); to Lusitania Field ; and to the Community Gardens.

B. Public Review, Discussion and Evaluation Provisions

Protection of the Reservation will depend importantly on informed public review, discussion and evaluation of all plans and proposals for use and management of the land. Such public involvement will help ensure that all such plans and proposals are consistent with the goals of the Master Plan and with the general land-use provisions and specific land-use provisions set forth in the sections to follow. Public involvement will also result in improved plans and proposals to further the goals of the Master Plan and will help ensure that all plans and proposals for use and management of the land yield significant benefits to the Reservation when implemented.

The Cambridge Water Department, Cambridge Human Services Department (Recreation Division), Cambridge City Arborist and Neville Communities, Inc. will have continuing responsibility for use and management of lands and facilities within the physical boundaries of the Reservation. Therefore, they can be expected to originate land-use and land-management plans and proposals regularly and routinely.

Representatives of these bodies will be invited to describe their land-use and land-management programs for the year at a public meeting of the Advisory Board early in the year, in such form and by such date as to ensure adequate, timely public review, discussion and evaluation. School Department representatives will also be invited to attend that same meeting to describe plans for the Maynard Ecology Center for the coming year.

From time to time, special proposals for land-use and land management may be made by other City agencies, by City-appointed committees and by citizen groups and individual citizens. Proponents of such proposals shall be required to apply for review, comment and evaluation by the Fresh Pond Master Plan Advisory Board at a regularly scheduled public meeting or special public meeting, after first submitting their proposals for assessment by all relevant City agencies.

All applications submitted to the Advisory Board shall be required to include both a project description and a summary of all responses received from relevant City agencies.

Applications shall be presented in such form and by such date as will ensure that proponents and all others concerned will gain the benefit of adequate, timely public review and discussion.

All project proponents should expect very careful public review of any project to develop any part of the Reservation by putting land under hard surfaces; by significantly altering landscapes, habitats and green vegetated open spaces; by constructing new buildings and facilities; by expanding existing buildings and facilities; by introducing new uses or activities to any part of the Reservation, or by significantly increasing the intensity of existing uses or activities. Such development is specifically prohibited in most of the Reservation under the general land-use provisions and specific land-use provisions of the Fresh Pond Reservation Land-Use Policy set forth below.

For good and sufficient reason regarding the water supply, the Water Board may, on occasion, wish to propose development of an area of the Reservation protected against development by the Land-Use Policy. Among the public bodies to which the Water Board will submit proposals for such development will be the Fresh Pond Master Plan Advisory Board.

C. General Land-Use Provisions

The general provisions of the Land-Use Policy cover: (1) Undeveloped Natural Areas; (2) Green Vegetated Open Space; (3) Alteration of Existing Structures; (4) Replacement Structures; (5) Open Space Restoration; (6) Approved Plant Materials; (7) Outside Lighting; and (8) Donations, Memorials and Monuments.

Provision 1. Undeveloped Natural Areas

No development shall be undertaken in the currently undeveloped natural areas of the Reservation, such as Black's Nook, the hardwood forest north and west of Lusitania Field, the softwood forest south and west of Fresh Pond, the grasslands and groves of trees bordering the golf course, the many specimen tree perimeters and significant tree features in non-forested areas, the natural shoreline of Fresh Pond and North Pond and several natural areas associated with water features on the golf course itself. These areas shall continue forever as undisturbed natural areas open to educational and passive recreational uses, if appropriate, but not to active recreation.

Provision 2. Green Vegetated Open Space

No development shall be undertaken which results in a net loss of green vegetated open space in areas devoted to passive recreation, such as Kingsley Park and Weir Meadow, and in areas devoted to active recreation, such as Glacken Field and the Municipal Golf Course, and in Lusitania Field, except as may be provided for under the special provisions for each area (to follow), and except as may be necessary to meet the City's needs for water and to protect the areas against environmental damage (e.g., erosion).

Provision 3. Alteration of Existing Structures

In the developed areas of the Reservation, appropriate alterations and modifications to existing structures serving historically-approved public purposes will be permitted in accordance with the special provisions for each area, and with the approval of such boards and commissions as may have jurisdiction in them.

Where the footprint of an existing structure appears unable to accommodate a desirable alteration or modification, creative use of existing footprints and land under hard surfaces will be considered. A significant increase in footprint or in land under hard surfaces will only be considered as a last resort. Such increase in footprint will be subject to the approval of boards and commissions that have jurisdiction over the area in question.

Any alteration or modification permitted shall be built in accordance with best current construction management practices which shall ensure the preservation of the ecological health of the Reservation.

Provision 4. Replacement Structures

New structures serving approved public purposes shall be permitted in the developed areas of the Reservation, but only as replacements for existing structures and occupying no more than the combined footprint of all existing structures to be removed or renovated on the site. Existing structures shall be demolished or removed as necessary to make footprints available for the new replacement structures. No net loss of green vegetated open space shall be permitted to result from new construction.

Any replacement structures permitted shall be built in accordance with best current construction management practices which shall ensure the preservation of the ecological health of the Reservation.

Provision 5. Open Space Restoration

Throughout the Reservation, every opportunity will be taken to return land currently under hard surfaces to green vegetated open space, such as by removal of unneeded structures, parking spaces and paved roads and paths, and by relocation of utility yards to sites outside the Reservation.

Provision 6. Approved Plant Materials

The water supply land requires protection against plantings of invasive, destructive and ecologically inappropriate species; therefore, all species used within the Reservation and within the boundaries of the current Neville Manor site shall be selected from a list of approved plant materials prepared and periodically revised by the Water Department and Advisory Board. This list will include a special list of plant materials approved for use in designated areas such as the immediate environs of buildings, but not for use elsewhere. Land in the immediate vicinity of the new assisted living facility and the new skilled nursing home on the Neville Manor site will constitute a designated area. For further discussion, see Special Land-Use Provision #3.

Provision 7. Outside Lighting

Outside lighting will be permitted within the Reservation as required for the normal, regular operation of the Water Treatment Plant and the Neville Manor complex and for approved recreational purposes at Glacken Field. Such outside lighting will be designed to minimize upward light-throw. Outside lighting will not be permitted on the golf course or anywhere else in the Reservation except as may be required for public safety.

Provision 8. Donations, Memorials and Monuments

Proposals to donate appropriate plantings as memorials, celebrations or for any other good purpose will be welcomed. Application shall be made through the City Arborist to relevant City agencies and to the Advisory Board, in accordance with the City's recently established Memorial Tree Program. The Master Plan and list of approved plant materials shall govern as to species, location and landscape design.

Memorials, monuments and ornamental structures composed of stone, metal and other such materials shall be sited solely in designated areas in the immediate vicinity of buildings such as the Water Treatment Plant and the golf course clubhouse. Proposals to build or donate such structures shall be submitted first to relevant City agencies and then to the Advisory Board, prior to being submitted to the City Council for approval.

D. Special Land-Use Provisions

The special provisions of the Land-Use Policy apply to: (1) Glacken Field, (2) The Municipal Golf Course and Clubhouse, (3) The Neville Manor Site, and (4) Lusitania Field. Special provisions also apply to (5) the Community Gardens.

General Land-Use Provisions 2 through 8 of the Land-Use Policy apply to each of the above areas and to the Water Treatment Plant site. General Land-Use Provision 1 (Undeveloped Natural Areas) applies to parts of the golf course.

1. Glacken Field

General Provision 2 (Green Vegetated Open Space) applies to Glacken Field proper, which shall remain green vegetated open space for active recreation. General Provisions 3 (Alteration of Existing Structures), 4 (Replacement Structures), 5 (Open Space Restoration), 6 (Approved Plant Materials), 7 (Outside Lighting) and 8 (Donations, Memorials and Monuments) apply to the general area.

Comprehensive redesign, renovation and reconstruction of the area should be a top immediate budget priority for the City. Such comprehensive redesign should address the future of land under hard surfaces currently utilized for active outdoor recreation. Proposals for alternative use of that land should be considered during the process of redesign. No proposal for an alternative use should be considered separately from that process.

2. Municipal Golf Course and Clubhouse

General Provisions 1 (Undeveloped Natural Areas) and 2 (Green Vegetated Open Space) both apply to the golf course, the latter to the field of play and the former to several important natural areas within and on the borders of the course. Together, they constitute landscape of key value to the Reservation as a whole and to the general public; therefore, no change of use for any of the golf course land should be considered unless the City decides to abandon the golf course as a whole. In that event, the City should undertake a comprehensive study to determine how best to put the land to other active and passive recreational purposes without construction of any new buildings.

General Provision 3 (Alteration of Existing Structures) applies to the clubhouse, especially in regard to creative use of the existing footprint and land under hard surfaces to accommodate increased usage. However, a minor increase in clubhouse footprint into what is currently a small utility yard may be justified to accommodate changes in the City's golf program.

General Provisions 4 (Replacement Structures), 5 (Open Space Restoration), 6 (Approved Plant Materials), 7 (Outside Lighting) and 8 (Donations, Memorials and Monuments) apply to the clubhouse and the surrounding area.

3. Neville Manor Site

In 1928, with the agreement of the Cambridge Water Board, the Cambridge City Council transferred the current 8.3-acre Neville Manor site to the City for use as the location for a City Home. In 1999, Governor Paul Cellucci signed legislation under which the 8.3-acre site is to be divided approximately in half.

About four acres will be devoted to a new assisted living facility to be created by rehabilitating the Neville Manor building and to a new skilled nursing home to be constructed to the east of the entrance to the current site from Concord Avenue. General Provision 6 (Approved Plant Materials) will apply to this new Neville Manor site.

About four acres will be formally returned to the Fresh Pond Reservation and to the control of the Cambridge Water Board. General Provisions 2 (Green Vegetated Open Space), 5 (Open Space Restoration), 6 (Approved Plant Materials), 7 (Outside Lighting) and 8 (Donations, Memorials and Monuments) will apply once the land is formally returned.

4. Lusitania Field

Most of Lusitania Field is currently being used as a staging area for materials and a parking area for workers while the new Water Treatment Plant is under construction. Construction is expected to be completed late in the year 2000.

When Lusitania Field is no longer needed for staging, the City will rehabilitate and return the entire site to the Reservation as a natural area in accordance with the Stewardship Plan.

General Provisions 1 (Undeveloped Natural Areas), 6 (Approved Plant Materials), 7 (Outside Lighting) and 8 (Donations, Memorials and Monuments) will apply. Provision 2 (Green Vegetated Open Space) will apply as appropriate.

5. Community Gardens

Community gardens provide important recreational and learning opportunities for Cambridge residents, particularly tenants and property owners with no other land on which to plant. The City therefore supports and permits the limited use of public land for community gardening. Two community gardens currently operate within the Fresh Pond Reservation; one is located along Fresh Pond Parkway between the Water Treatment Plant and the Concord Avenue Rotary, while the other is located just east of Neville Manor. This Land-Use Policy provides for continued community gardening within the Fresh Pond Reservation under its General Land-Use Provisions, under the City of Cambridge Community Garden Policy, and under the Fresh Pond Reservation Community Garden Policy, presented in Appendix 2.

General Land-use Provisions 2 (Green Vegetated Open Space), 6 (Approved Plant Materials), 7 (Outside Lighting) and 8 (Donations, Memorials and Monuments) will apply to the Community Gardens, as appropriate.

The gardens shall continue to adhere to the City of Cambridge Community Garden Policy. This policy specifies, among other things, that gardeners must be Cambridge residents; that the City will provide water, fencing, and composters; that the gardens must comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act; and that they must be kept clean.

The Fresh Pond Reservation Community Garden Policy, presented in Appendix 2, gives the Conservation Commission, the Water Department and the Advisory Board the authority to approve the size, location and creation of community gardens in the Reservation, so as to protect the water supply and enhance the enjoyment of all visitors. The policy calls for close monitoring of species planted, to prevent the introduction of invasives. The policy also bans the use of pesticides and herbicides.