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State awards grant to Framingham park

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By Matt Rocheleau, Globe Correspondent

Framingham's Cushing Memorial Park is one of 22 parks and recreational facilities in the state that will receive a portion of \$7.1 million in grant funding for enhancement projects.

The Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) announced Friday that the park located along Winter Street and Dudley Road will receive \$279,000 for the removal of the final vestiges of the state hospital, improvements to pedestrian access and the addition of new landscaping. The project will also place utilities underground, install new amenities, such as benches and picnic tables, improve site drainage and stormwater management and interpretive signage.

The grant awarded to Cushing Memorial Park is one of 18 totaling \$6.9 million in funding over two years from the Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities (PARC) program to help municipal parks and recreation commissions acquire parkland, renovate existing parks or build new parks and other outdoor recreation facilities, said a press release from the EEA.

Four other grants totaling \$378,000 from the Gateway City Parks program provide funding for all phases of park development, the release said. These four grants follow a round of \$8.9 million in FY10 grants that were awarded in September 2009. Another round of Gateway City Parks grants is expected to be awarded in early FY11.

"Demonstrating the Patrick-Murray administration's commitment to improving the quality of life for Massachusetts residents, these grants will go a long way toward helping communities across the Commonwealth provide safe, attractive places for families to gather and children to play," EEA Secretary Ian Bowles said in the release

Established in 1977 as the Urban Self-Help program, PARC grants are offered on a competitive basis and reimburse communities between 52 and 70 percent of the total project cost, depending upon the income level and other demographics of municipalities, with a maximum grant award of \$500,000.

Municipalities receiving PARC grants must have a current open space and recreation plan, an authorized parks and recreation commission, and the land must be under parks commission jurisdiction and be open to the public.

Grant applicants are assessed based on project quality, community demographics, and other criteria. Preference is given to park projects located close to urban centers and public transportation or serving environmental justice populations. Twelve of this year's PARC grants are in Gateway cities.

"Created in recognition of the fact that public parks are essential to the health and economic wellbeing of urban areas, but that cities often lack the resources to plan and develop them, the Gateway City Parks program is a hallmark of Governor Patrick's unprecedented commitment of state support for urban parks, habitat protection, and preservation of working landscapes," said the

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parks, habitat protection, and preservation of working landscapes, said the release.

Twenty-two Massachusetts cities are eligible for the program, which targets communities with population greater than 35,000 and median household incomes, per capita incomes, and educational attainment levels below the state average.

Gateway Cities is a program that provides municipal officials with a menu of funding options for all phases of park development. Funding can be used for activities and costs such as brownfield assessment and cleanup, park planning and recreational needs assessments – including the development of Open Space and Recreation Plans, activities not previously eligible for state parks funding. Cities can also use the grants for acquisition, design and construction of parks, greenways, and other recreational facilities.

Funding for both grant programs comes from the Energy and Environment Bond Bill signed by Gov. Patrick in Aug. 2008.

Besides Framingham's Cushing Memorial Park, the following projects were selected for PARC funding:

- Boston - \$469,220 for the renovation of existing little league fields, the addition of a new segment of the harborwalk, a new skatepark, and a new entry plaza at Barry playground.
- Burlington - \$470,245 the construction of two ball fields, a general purpose field, tennis courts, a perimeter path, restrooms and drinking water facilities, and parking for up to 100 cars at Wildwood Park.
- Chelsea - \$ 500,000 for the renovation of the Highland Park Soccer Field, including the installation of artificial turf.
- Haverhill - \$282,064 for the Urban Neighborhood Parks "Return to Relevance" Initiative. The project will add three handicapped-accessible waterless bathrooms and three secure tool maintenance sheds, as well as a boat landing at Cashman Field on the Little River. ADA-accessible gangplanks will be established leading from the downtown Boardwalk to the boat docks on the Merrimack River.
- Lawrence - \$424,920 for the Neighborhood Community Gardens Initiative, which calls for the design of community gardens, including raised beds and other amenities, and construction of structures for storage and farmers' markets.
- Lawrence - \$480,465 to install eight high-efficiency, low-energy lighting structures, and underground conduits to provide additional capacity for a scoreboard and sound system at Howard Playstead. The project also includes construction of a service building with two multi-stall bathroom facilities, an equipment storage area, and a concession stand. Benches, picnic tables and trash cans will also be installed.
- Lowell - \$499,940 for the Concord River Greenway. The project will create approximately 2,100 feet of paved greenway along the banks of the Concord River, including a bridge from Centennial Island and passage under the historic granite arch bridge at Rogers Street.
- Lynn - \$500,000 for the completion of the restoration of the tower base and all stairs and walkways to the tower at High Rock Reservation.
- Lynn - \$490,000 to install new athletic facilities at Flax Pond Park. This includes the installation of new play equipment, restoration of the tennis court, basketball court, and multi-use court surfaces, installation of a water play area, aerator, gazebo, and a boat dock.
- North Adams - \$222,180 for the acquisition of a parcel of land that abuts Noel Field, allowing for the expansion of the site's facilities and creation of the Noel

Field Athletic Complex.

- Peabody - \$329,417 for the construction of an entry plaza, pathways, benches, café tables, viewing platform, tot lots, and educational signage at Walnut Street Park, a former brownfields site.
- Provincetown - \$130,000 for the acquisition of Suzanne's Garden – a 5,620-square foot parcel.
- Springfield - \$496,202 for the renovation of Rebecca Johnson Park. The project will include the construction of a walking track around the ball field, two exercise stations, three playground areas, a splash pad, an outdoor classroom, and raised garden beds.
- Springfield - \$259,000 to renovate Johnny Appleseed Park. The project will include the installation of new site amenities, a basketball court, perimeter fencing, and pruning and removing hazardous trees.
- West Springfield - \$108,800 for Riverfront Park. The project will consist of parking, non-motorized canoe and kayak launch, interpretive trails, picnic facilities, on-shore fishing, and nature interpretation. Also, 20 parking spaces, bicycle parking facilities, and a bus shelter will be constructed.
- Worcester - \$500,000 for East Park. The project will install a new playground, benches, utility upgrades, landscape planting, shelters, kiosk and signage. Renovation of one tennis court and lighting will be included.
- Yarmouth - \$500,000 to replace the main camp building at the Flax Pond Recreation Area.

The following cities received grants through the Gateway City Parks initiative:

- Lynn - \$30,000 for design and construction documents for the rehabilitation of stone steps in and the provision of bus access to High Rock Park.
- Malden - \$193,000 for design and construction documents for the rehabilitation of South Broadway Park.
- New Bedford - \$125,000 for survey work, and design and construction documents for the North Acushnet River Walk.
- Springfield - \$30,000 for design and construction documents for Emerson Wight Park.

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