

until the friends group has a stronger footing.

The amount needed by this spring to keep the unit funded is \$155,000 – 10 percent higher than last year's requirement. That, coupled with less pledged support thus far from several major donors that drove last year's effort, may make this year's initiative more challenging, according to Crockford.

"The friends group will be much more reliant on a broader range of donor support," she said.

But the grassroots effort is hopeful last year's momentum will carry over when it launches its first of three major fundraising events at the end of the month.

"All municipal budgets are under tremendous pressure and it's incumbent upon us to help the city out," said the Friends co-chair Julia Donahue of Brookline, who used to live in Boston and who still enjoys the city's green space. "The parks change the dynamic of this city drastically. It gives the city places that a lot of other cities don't have."

"The mounted unit is very important from a safety standpoint," she added.

"The reality is the rangers can get around the parks' terrain a lot more quickly than they could on bicycles or motorized vehicles."

Founded in 1982 in coordination with the city's police force before becoming an independent entity of the parks five years later, the six-horse unit is stabled at Franklin Park and is composed of four- to nine-year-old horses that trot, canter, and gallop through all nine parks in the Emerald Necklace as well as neighborhood parks and cemeteries in Boston. The unit once boasted twice as many horses and almost four times as many rangers, conservancy officials said.

With municipal budgets strained, disbandment of mounted patrols has become a trend nationwide.

"The program is much reduced and the view of supporters is they can't let it shrink anymore," Crockford said.

The Boston Police Department's 12-horse mounted unit also patrolled city parks until it was disbanded last year for budgetary reasons after a 136-year run – which, according to supporters who unsuccessfully petitioned the city to keep the \$600,000 unit intact, was believed to be the oldest organized mounted patrol unit in the country.

Crockford said another benefit of being on horseback is that rangers are able to see and been seen from farther away, which provides a greater sense of security and comfort to park users.

"People absolutely see it as a safety issue," she said. "They are also good ambassadors and have an iconic role in the parks."

Donahue said she understands why some think the idea of using horse patrols is antiquated and she said is open to considering other ways of providing the same service through more modern and efficient means. But, she said, there is currently no alternative to the mounted unit that makes sense.

"We have to work with what we've got now," said Donahue. "In the meantime, we can think about other things that may make sense for the parks going

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