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May 24, 2018

Councilor Mark Ciommo, Chair  
Ways and Means Committee  
Boston City Council  
1 City Hall Square  
Boston, MA 02201

Dear Councilor Ciommo,

Thank you for giving us all the opportunity to speak on behalf of the FY19 budget for the Parks and Recreation Department.

I am Liz Vizza, Executive Director of the Friends of the Public Garden. We are in our 48<sup>th</sup> year of partnership with the City to care, renew and advocate for the Boston Common, Public Garden, and Commonwealth Avenue Mall. The downtown parks are the neighborhood parks for over 35,000 people in five neighborhoods – but they are much more than neighborhood parks, they are greenspaces that are used intensively by the entire city and beyond.

The Friends invests over \$1 million of private dollars directly into the parks. However, it is critical that private support not be seen as a rationale to not adequately fund our partner, the Parks Department.

We are pleased that the Parks Department's budget has grown over the recent years, particularly for capital projects.

This year, as we know, increased funding in the budget is coming to the Common and Franklin Park, as well as completion of the Emerald Necklace, as a result of the Winthrop Square agreements. We look forward to engaging in a master plan process for the Common with the Department to hear from the community about their vision for Boston's oldest and most heavily used park.

Most of the Parks Department's budget money is capital, however, and the parks are in need of increased operations funding. Every year, you have heard this from the advocacy community. The Department needs significantly more funding to keep up with the level of maintenance necessary for these heavily used greenspaces, and meet the Mayor's vision of having the best system in the country. Two years ago the Mayor's budget has

added a second maintenance shift on the Common, which has been very helpful. However, if there is an emergency in another park, that shift has to be pulled off to deal with that need.

In the capital realm, I would point out one pressing need. There is a historic building in the Garden that serves an important function for the Garden's maintenance crew as well as storage for the Swan Boats. It is way past overdue for renovations. We know it competes with every other structural need in the City, but it is an important building in an important greenspace, and should be renovated before it sees further deterioration.

On the Citywide level, there is a need for more tree cover, including ongoing care for them – on the streets as well as in the parks. Trees manage stormwater runoff, cool the earth, and store carbon. They are our single best mitigators of climate change. This year's Parks Department budget for the first time has \$100,000 for maintenance of park trees, which is wonderful. I can imagine that the ask was many times that amount, given the need in our parks, as well as our city streets. So, let's keep that trend going, and raise the budget to where it needs to be, so we can ensure that our city's trees have a sustainable future.

It's worth noting that the Parkman Fund appropriation, which this year is \$1.2 million, is used primarily for Parks maintenance staff. This was a practice begun in crisis in the 1980s during Proposition 2 ½. It has since then become routine. The City should be funding this need from the budget, and using the Fund's resources for parks care and improvements, according to the Funds' purpose.

And lastly, we applaud the addition of a permanent Park Ranger position this year, but the force is half the size it was 10 years ago. It just doesn't have the capacity to deal with the needs in the parks it serves. The Police are primarily charged with public safety, but the Rangers provide critical support for security, which is becoming increasingly necessary. There are also many park regulations that are routinely violated in the Common and Garden, and we are not able to get the level of Ranger presence we need.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Vizza  
Executive Director

cc: City Council President, Andrea Campbell  
City Counciler, Josh Zakim  
City Councilor, Michael Flaherty  
City Councilor, Ed Flynn  
City Councilor, Michelle Wu  
City Councilor, Annissa Essaibi-George  
City Councilor, Ayanna Pressley