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Mayor Kim Janey  
1 City Hall Square  
Boston, MA 02201

March 25, 2021

Dear Mayor Janey:

We want to congratulate you on your historic appointment as Mayor of Boston, and we look forward to working with you this year. As you may know, the Friends of the Public Garden has partnered with the City for over 50 years to care, renew, and advocate for the Boston Common, Public Garden, and Commonwealth Avenue Mall. Over those years we have grown to be an essential partner with the Parks Department in caring for all of the parks' trees, most of its sculpture and fountains, and acres of lawns. We also conduct capital improvement projects such as revitalization of Brewer Fountain Plaza by Park Street station, which is now one of the most popular outdoor gathering places in the City, with tables and chairs, food trucks, free newspapers and magazines, and live jazz at lunchtime. Both housed and unhoused park users are able to enjoy this space together. Last year we signed a Memorandum of Agreement to formalize and deepen our close working partnership with the City.

Our parks are the neighborhood parks for nearly 60,000 people from Beacon Hill, Back Bay, Chinatown, Bay Village, and the increasingly residential Downtown Crossing. But they are much more than that; they belong to the entire City. Boston Common in particular is the City's most intensively used greenspace, where seven million people come each year to play, relax, protest, and celebrate. It has historically been and continues to be an important meeting ground where the City as a whole comes together, and over this last year tens of thousands of people gathered to speak truth to power during the Black Lives Matter protests. The Common and the Garden are iconic symbols of the City to many, where the Freedom and Black Heritage Trails begin, and where every visitor comes to ride the Swan Boats or visit the Ducklings sculpture.

This is both a challenging and exciting time for our City, as we work to address the multiple pandemics of Covid and racial inequity. Both of these pandemics revealed the vital role that parks play in our community, as free and open spaces available to all where people can safely gather together or come alone for solace during a difficult time. They are also the City's green lungs, filtering the air, recharging groundwater, sequestering carbon, mitigating the impacts of climate change.

The Friends invests an average of \$2 million annually to parks care and public programs. This is critical to the health and functioning of the Common, Garden, and Mall. Most importantly, it also supports the Citywide greenspace system, freeing up more of the City's funds for parks elsewhere.

We would like to recommend for inclusion in this year's budget the following items:

### **City-wide Tree Stewardship**

We applaud the funding of an Urban Forest Master Plan for the City. In addition to this important undertaking, it is crucial that the Parks Department have adequate arboricultural staff capacity and expertise to do the maintenance that is critical for a healthy tree population. This is a critically important equity issue particularly for our neighborhoods in need of greater tree cover.

### **Investment in Boston Common**

As a benefit of the Winthrop Square project, the City is investing \$28 million in the Common which will receive additional shadows once this project is completed. This funding has enabled the Parks Department to conduct a Boston Common Master Plan, a comprehensive vision of the Common's future for residents and visitors. As partners, we have been working closely with the City to complete this Plan. To protect the investment in this park as well as to successfully implement the Master Plan, the Common needs an Administrator dedicated to overseeing the maintenance and management of the Common, the most heavily permitted park in the City.

### **Public Safety**

The Friends works regularly with the Police Department, Park Rangers, social agencies, and the Downtown BID to address issues of drug trafficking, acts of violence (including two sexual assaults in the Garden this past year), and the challenges faced by the unhoused in our parks. We appreciate the patrols that the BPD has conducted in the Common, and periodically in the Garden. What is needed is an interagency plan for safety in both greenspaces that addresses these intersecting issues. Closely collaborating with the social programs the City has in place to address these chronic patterns, such a plan will improve the safety of these parks as well as the lives of those struggling with addiction, mental illness, and homelessness.

### **Public Garden Maintenance Facility**

We urge you to support the funding included in the Parks budget for design of renovations to the Public Garden Maintenance Facility. This historic structure is in dire shape, with rotted wood, missing slates, rodent infestation, and water damage. The building, which does not meet code in several respects, needs immediate attention to improve conditions for staff and storage. The space also offers an opportunity for the public to learn about the Garden's history and welcome and orient those new to the Garden. This interpretive opportunity in a sought-after historic botanical garden would be a major civic improvement for generations to come.

The Friends looks forward to continuing our decades-long partnership with the City, to achieve and maintain excellence in the Boston Common, Public Garden, and Commonwealth Avenue Mall. As we emerge from this difficult time of crisis, we can work together to make progress in both maintenance and capital investment to ensure that these parks serve the needs of our City and all of its residents.

Sincerely,



Leslie Singleton Adam  
Board Chair

cc: Christopher Cook, Chief of Environment, Energy, and Open Space  
Ryan Woods, Parks Commissioner  
Anissa Essaibi George, City Councilor, At-Large  
Michael Flaherty, City Councilor, At-Large  
Julia Mejia, City Councilor, At-Large  
Michelle Wu, City Councilor, At-Large  
Ed Flynn, City Councilor, District 2  
Kenzie Bok, City Councilor, District 8