

Eileen Sullivan

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Date: November 12, 2013

To: Town of Acton Community Planning Grant Committee
From: Eileen Sullivan, Elementary Curriculum Specialist for Science and Social Studies
Re: Planning Grant Application for CPA funds for 2014

We are please to submit this application for funding through the CPA grant process for 2014. We are fortunate that Acton believes in green spaces for recreation, and we hope that our vision, described herein, of creating nature-based place spaces on all of our elementary and pre-school sites, will be seen as providing a long-term benefit for the residents and schoolchildren of Acton.

Please feel free to contact me if you need further information.

Eileen Sullivan

- c. Deborah Bookis, APS/AB Director of Curriculum and Assessment
J.D. Head, APS/AB Director of Facilities
Dr. Steven Mills, Superintendent of Schools
Tom Tidman, Director of Natural Resources/



CPA PROJECT APPLICATION FORM – 2014

Applicant: Acton Public Schools **Submission Date:** November 12, 2013

Applicant's Address:

Purpose: (Please select all that apply)

16 Charter Road, Acton, MA

Phone Number: 978-264-3380

Contact: Eileen Sullivan esullivan@abschools.org

- Open Space
- Community Housing
- Historic Preservation
- Recreation**

Town Committee (if appropriate) Recreation Commission

Project Name: Nature Play Spaces Planning Grant

Project Location/Address: planning grant for a total of six school sites in the Acton

Amount Requested: \$30,375

Project Summary: In the space below, provide a brief summary of the project.

The Acton Public Schools’ outdoor play areas are a rich resource for students during school hours and for community members seven days a week. Current play areas and structures, while situated in the outdoors, do not invite children to interact with nature in independent ways. Several of our school yards offer easy access to wetlands and/or wooded areas, but those spaces are designed for group activities rather than individual nature exploration, and require supervision during recess times that is not available.

For many years now, the faculty in Acton have studied the recent research on the health and emotional benefits of children and adults having unstructured time in natural settings. Inspired by Richard Louv’s *Last Child in the Woods*, we want to move forward and expanding nature-play spaces on our school grounds.

Planning funds from the CPA would enable us to enhance schoolyards with professionally designed, handicapped accessible, simply constructed nature play spaces within easy reach of the school play structures and fields, and easily supervised by recess monitors. These nature play spaces will provide children places to dig in the dirt for worms, build with natural materials, gather for a story with a seat on a log, and have the chance to draw, paint, read or explore in a natural setting. Designs of each space would reflect the individual nature of each school’s outdoor spaces and take advantage of the unique opportunities of each site. Since the budget for the natural play spaces is limited, the design schemes will not rely on expensive elements such as grading and walls but rather will be light-handed on the site with elements that volunteers can install or donate to the school.

“These are just a few of the major findings to be found in a review of the research concerning the beneficial effects of the natural environment on children’s health and well-being.

Children are smarter, more cooperative, happier and healthier when they have frequent and varied opportunities for free and unstructured play in the outdoors.”

– Cheryl Charles, *Children and Nature Network*

See more at: <http://www.childrenandnature.org/research/#sthash.OMTG1QO7.dpuf>



In order to meet handicapped-accessibility guidelines, incorporate the ideas of teachers, parents and community members, and develop a long-range maintenance plan, we propose to engage the services of a nationally-recognized, local landscape architect who specializes in the design of natural outdoor play spaces. In preparation for this planning grant, we have met with Ms. Holly Ben-Joseph, Landscape Architect <http://www.hdbjlandscapes.com/>; JD Head, AB Schools’ Director of Facilities Management; Tom Tidman, Acton’s Director of Natural Resources, Deborah Bookis, APS/AB Director of Curriculum and Assessment and several elementary principals, to discuss the feasibility of such a project.

Estimated Date for Commencement of Project: April, 2014

Estimated Date for Commencement of Project: October, 2014

Project Narrative:

Rationale/Background Information

Along with the work of the individual school’s playground committees, the elementary teachers have noticed over the past decade or so, that very few students have opportunities for unstructured play-time in natural environments. In 2007, a group of teachers, along with the Elementary Curriculum Specialist for Science, became familiar with the “No Child Left Inside” movement while attending a conference at Wheelock titled *Connecting Children and Nature*. The Keynote speaker was Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods; Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*. His groundbreaking book has provided quite an inspiration for a national network of researchers, educators, and families, all of whom share the goal of making sure that children have the right to the time and space needed for unstructured, natural play.

As a district, we hoped to move this initiative forward for a number of years now, but our efforts always stall with the complexities of the design process and the desire/need to make areas accessible to children with disabilities. We hope that this planning grant can get us over these hurdles.

Scope of Work- Concept Development, Preliminary Design & Final Schematic Plan:

In our goal to create spaces for all pre-K 6 students, we propose developing specific design plans for each of the elementary schools as well as the pre-school site at the “Administration Building”. These plans will provide enough information to develop a cost estimate for each school site, providing a basis for fundraising. Volunteers will need to be secured in order to begin fundraising and start construction. During the period of the planning grant, the funds will provide for the Landscape Architect, (in collaboration with school and town staff, community partners and parents) to accomplish the following:

Task One- Surveys and input:

- Walk each school site with stakeholders (school staff and playground committees, etc) to locate potential areas for a natural play space. An example of some elements that will be considered at each site will be: ease of access, sun and shade, existing vegetation, views into and out of the space, relationship to rest of the yard.
- Develop base plans for each site, either from scratch or using survey drawings provided by Client.
- Kick-off meeting with the play-space committees from each school to brainstorm ideas and review individual desires for each school. At this meeting a power point presentation of other examples of natural yards, and possible elements will be shown, followed by an interactive development of ideas and goal formation for each site.
- Develop a schematic design sketch for a natural play space for each site and proposed an accessibility route to the yard.

Task Two – Presentation of designs/review/revision

- Second Meeting: Present the design sketches to the play-space committees of each school and elicit feedback to guide revisions for the final master plan.
- Develop one final master plan for each school based on comments and feedback at the meeting.

Task Three – Development/presentation of schematic design

- Third Meeting: Present final schematic master plans for each school. Review the cost estimate, phasing suggestions and lists of tasks for volunteers and contractors..

Budget

6 Sites included in proposal: Douglas, Conant, Gates, McCarthy-Towne, Merriam and Administration Bldg (for pre-school)		
Tasks	Cost per site	Totals
Task 1: Walking the site, collecting information, taking photos. Develop base plans for each using surveys provided by the Schools’ facilities department. These surveys are scheduled for November, 2013	\$1500	Task 1 Sub-total: \$9,000
Task 2: Kick-off meeting - PowerPoint presentation & brainstorming	\$1500	Task 2 Sub-total: \$9,000
Task 3: Develop a schematic design sketches for each school and one meeting to discuss the designs with the committees.	\$1500	Task 3 Sub-total: \$9,000
Task 4: Develop a Final Master Plan for each school and one meeting to discuss the designs with the committees. Review cost estimates, phasing, and task lists for volunteers.	\$2,250	Task 3 Sub-total: \$13,500
Total		\$40,500
Cost-Sharing a minimum of 25% cost-sharing from non-appropriated funds		\$10, 125
Request from CPA funds		\$30,375

Appendix 1 Community Partners:

Acton Public schools will continue to collaborate with a number of community groups throughout the planning process, and will invite collaboration from additional groups.

Current connections include:

AB PIP STEM- ([Acton-Boxborough Parent Involvement Project](#) supporting Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.) This vibrant organization has been supportive of our efforts to reconnect children and nature for several years, offering book study on *Last Child in the Woods*, by Louv, and *Keeping a Nature Journal*, by Clair Walker Leslie, local artist/naturalist. AB PIP was a financial backer for the production of the Acton Naturally guide-co-designed by the Acton Public Schools and Tom Tidman. (on sale at EMS or through PIP). PIP also has connections with hundreds of high school volunteers who help at Science and math events. This volunteer base could/ would be tapped to help with small parts of the construction phase, once the planning work is completed.



Elementary School PTOs and Playground Committees- while we have yet to reach out to them, we have had discussions with Elementary principals as to the need for their support in the planning process. We hope to recruit members for the planning teams.

Town of Acton- Conservation Department- The schools have a long-standing working relation with Tom Tidman. We have also worked closely with Cathy Fochtman, (now Recreation Department) in her previous role as president of the Acton Garden Club. In preparation for this proposal, we have walked the Douglas and Gates sites with Tom to get advice on working near wetlands. Tom will continue to consult with us, and advise regarding any additional permitting that will be necessary.



Local vendors and contractors, Eagle Scouts and the Acton Water District – In our previous experience in developing the Outdoor Classroom, we found the generosity of parents who had contracting skills and equipment, local Eagle scouts with great organizational abilities and means to fund-raise, all to be critical to making things happen. In previous projects we have had bridges built, trees donated and planted, soil donated (Acton Water District). Eagle Scout projects have included benches, seating areas, gazebos, trails, plantings, and much more.

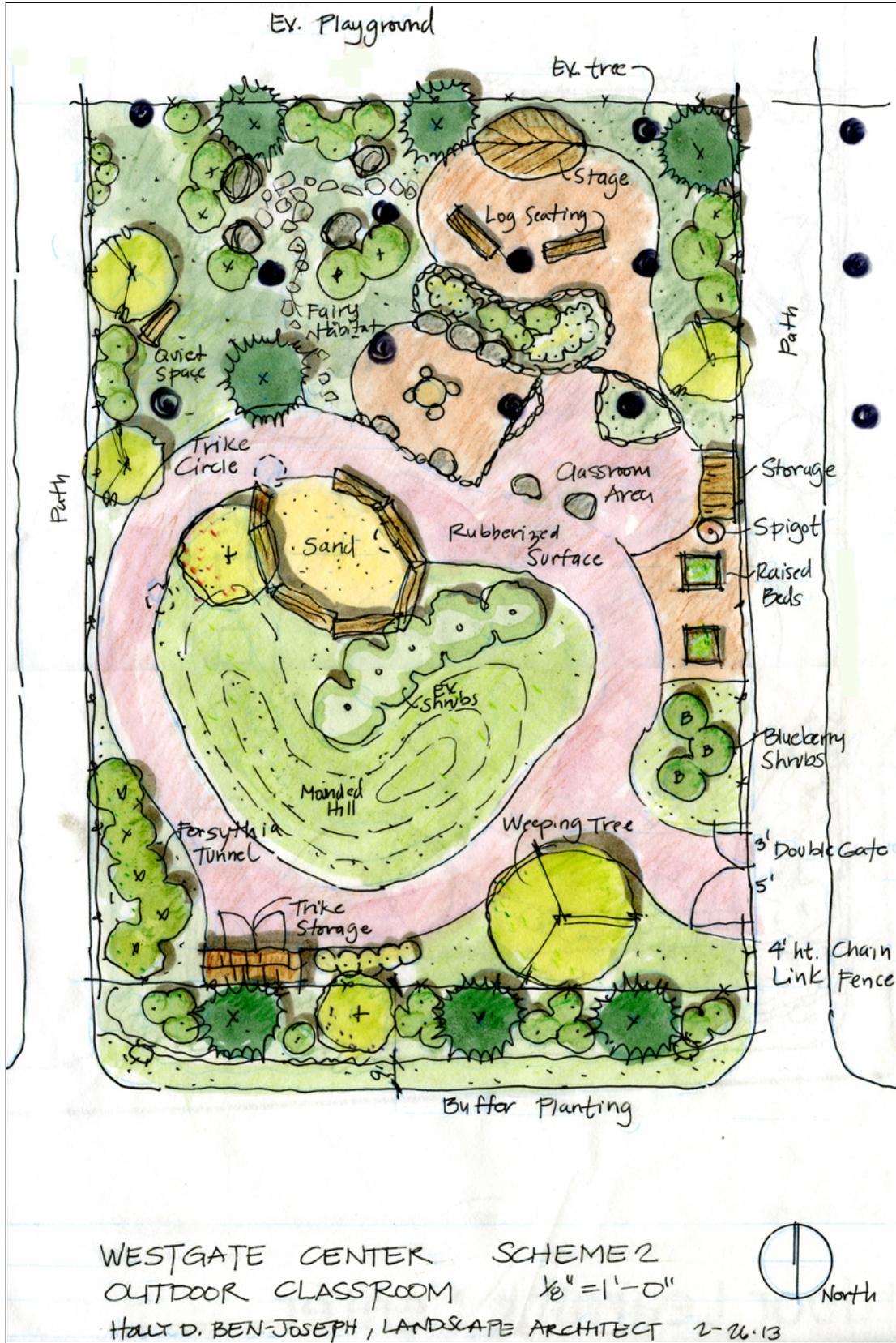
The Discovery Museums have partnered with us for many years, and, as they move forward with the development of their new outdoor spaces, Neil Gordon has offered to share any knowledge they gain along the way, particularly as it regards usage of new outdoor elements, which ones are working well, etc.

AB Facilities Department – JD Head, Director of the Facilities Department, has offered to make available any heavy equipment that he has at his disposal, in order to lessen the costs for creating accessible pathways.

Appendix 2 Background info on Holly Ben Joseph, Landscape Architect

These photos from [Holly Ben-Joseph](#)'s Landscape architecture projects in the New England area depict examples of her work. These are not specifically designed for Acton, but may inspire the decisions we make. Ms. Ben-Joseph has worked with the Douglas School in the past, supervising and playground design/build project. During the Planning grant process, all interested stakeholders will be involved to help to create usable, engaging natural play spaces for Acton's children.





Example of Schematic Plan