XI. Fresh Pond Reservation Access Policies and Priorities

A. Introduction

Entrances to and access routes within the Reservation should be designed, constructed and maintained to provide for public convenience and safety, while protecting the water supply and preserving and enhancing the natural character of the Reservation. Pathway designs must protect the soil against erosion and prevent damage to plants and wildlife. *The Fresh Pond Reservation Natural Resource Inventory and The Fresh Pond Reservation Stewardship Plan* have documented many deficiencies in segments of the existing pathway system and propose a variety of solutions. Based on these data and recommendations, a comprehensive redesign plan for the whole system of pathways should be drawn up and implemented according to the priorities for action established in this Master Plan.

Principal entrances, primary pathways and parking areas within the Reservation should facilitate access for all, and particularly for under-served populations such as the elderly, small children and persons with disabilities. These access routes should meet standards set by the Americans for Disabilities Act and related Massachusetts legislation as summarized below and in Appendix 3.

Continued vigilance should be paid to the maintenance, development and enforcement of safe and convenient pedestrian and handicapped accessible roadway crossings to the Reservation. In addition, efforts should be made to improve transportation to the Reservation for residents of Cambridge neighborhoods lacking direct, convenient access to Fresh Pond by foot or public transportation.

The Fresh Pond Natural Resource Stewardship Plan accompanying this Master Plan offers many specific recommendations for designing a more accessible, ecologically sound and aesthetically pleasing Reservation circulation system that is also easy to maintain and can continue to handle necessary maintenance and emergency vehicles. Among the existing pathway conditions needing attention are erosion and compaction of pathway surfaces, inadequate handicapped accessibility, erosion and compaction of pathway edges and adjacent hillsides, and unmaintained trails that threaten vegetation, wildlife habitat and the user experience.

B. The Reservation Pathway System

Design and management of the Fresh Pond Reservation pathway system should permit appropriate educational and recreational use while at the same time protecting the Reservation's ecosystem against degradation. The Stewardship Plan (Section 2.6) presents a number of inexpensive and innovative techniques to improve and redefine the Reservation's

roadway, pathways, and trails to minimize ecological disturbance while maximizing the aesthetic experience of using them. Among the recommended techniques are uses of alternative surfacing materials, a variety of pathway edge treatments, and relocation and/or consolidation of some pathway segments to be in greater harmony with the surrounding topography and plantings.

1. Perimeter Road

The Perimeter Road, currently a 12-foot wide paved strip encircling Fresh Pond, was built many years ago to accommodate Water Department service vehicles and City emergency vehicles. This road has become a major recreational destination for residents wanting to stroll or exercise in a beautiful natural setting. This paved route generally follows along the shoreline except for stretches along the top and east edge of Kingsley Park, by the treatment plant site, and along Lusitania field. Roadway improvements and maintenance should be designed to accommodate Water Department maintenance and patrol vehicles while providing safe and efficient use by walkers, wheelchair users, baby strollers, joggers, runners and slow moving bicyclists without compromising aesthetics (See Stewardship Plan Section 2.7.2, p.34).

2. Connecting Pathways

Connecting paths include routes connecting the main entrances to the Perimeter Road and pathways connecting the roadway to program areas and special features of the Reservation. This system must also meet established standards for accessibility for persons with disabilities. The nature of those standards and their implications for an improved system are summarized below and in Appendix 3 "Handicapped Access: A Discussion of Program Accessibility and Pathway Accessibility."

3. Trails

The Reservation also should continue to include a small number of unmarked, unobtrusive trails intended for foot traffic only. These trails should be designed for extremely low impact on the natural areas in which they are located. Such trails, which are generally too narrow to walk more than one or two abreast, will serve as important routes for workers or volunteers updating the Fresh Pond Natural Resource Inventory and monitoring the health of Reservation ecosystems. The exact location, width and availability of such trails should depend upon seasonal and environmental factors. Excessive erosion or compaction may indicate that the trails should be replanted, left unmowed or be relocated from time to time to protect natural resources and preserve the secluded character of these areas. Due to the sensitivity of many areas through which unmarked trails may run, bicycles should not be allowed on trails. For further details on recommendations for trail management see the Stewardship Plan, Section 2.6.

4. The MDC Bikepath

Note: The location and design of the MDC Bikepath, a segment of which is being constructed along the northeastern side of the Reservation, was placed outside the scope this Master Plan. The MDC Bikepath is part of the MDC parkway project developed before the Fresh Pond Master Plan Advisory Committee was formed.

The Bikeway enters the Reservation at the Alewife Rotary, cutting through a forested area, running close to the shoreline and perimeter path, crossing the railroad tracks, moving out to the highway side of the treatment plant and following the sidewalk up to the intersection of Fresh Pond Parkway and Huron Avenue. The intersections of the Bikeway and paths to the Perimeter Road require traffic-calming measures that afford safe, convenient pedestrian and handicapped access to the Reservation. As detailed in the Stewardship Plan (Section 3.10.1), the "image" of this highly visible frontage should be "consistent with access points Reservation-wide." In addition, the Bikeway area should meet vegetation management standards set out in the Stewardship Plan (Section 2.4) and the Master Plan (Section VII) regarding control of invasive species, diversity of native plants, protection of specimen trees, and maintenance of vegetation health.

C. Reservation Access: Americans with Disabilities Act

The Fresh Pond Reservation is subject to two general requirements for "pathway accessibility" and "program accessibility" under the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) and the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (MAAB) regulations, 521 CMR. Further discussion of ADA requirements is presented in Appendix 3. Relevant citations from law and regulations are available from the Cambridge Commission for Persons with Disabilities, 51 Inman Street, Cambridge, MA 02139-1732.

Accessible roads and pathways at the Reservation should not exceed the ADA's maximum slope and cross slope grades or go below minimum pathway widths and surface stability standards. The standards will not apply to other existing pathways receiving routine maintenance or little or no maintenance, as long as "maintenance" does not become "reconstruction."

A priority in pathway redesign at the Reservation is to work with the Cambridge Commission on Persons with Disabilities to create a new accessible path in an aesthetically pleasing location. A strong candidate location for such a path is in the Neville Manor/Lusitania Field area, in which an accessible path could be developed without affecting the natural topography of the area.

Accessible pathways should be designed, constructed and maintained in such a manner as to preserve and enhance the natural character of the Reservation, protect the soil against erosion and prevent damage to plants and wildlife habitat.

Accessible pathways should be clearly identified by appropriate signage at entrances and intersections. As needed, non-accessible pathways should also be identified clearly. The Water Department should make available a map of all accessible pathways within the Reservation.

D. Internal Traffic Management Policy

The Internal Traffic Management Policy primarily concerns use of the Perimeter Road by pedestrians, persons with disabilities, joggers, runners, bicyclists, people walking dogs, and vehicles, both public and private. The policy also concerns the use of pathways.

In general, pedestrians have the right-of-way on the Perimeter Road and all other Reservation pathways, including those within the Reservation that intersect the MDC Bikepath, but not including the MDC Bikepath. Wheelchairs moving at a walking pace are treated as pedestrians and are equally afforded the right-of-way. Exceptions to the pedestrian right-of-way policy include occasional permitted and posted race events and public emergency or maintenance vehicles.

1. Privately Owned Vehicles

With the exception of motorized wheelchairs, no privately owned motorized vehicles — including contractor's vehicles and contractor employee vehicles — shall be operated in the Reservation, except as specifically allowed by the Water Department or by the Recreation Division on the golf course and Glacken Field.

2. Publicly Owned Vehicles

The Water Department and Recreation Division should determine what use of the Perimeter Road may be appropriate for golf course grounds-keeping vehicles. No other golf course vehicles should be permitted on the Perimeter Road.

No publicly-owned vehicles will be operated on the Reservation except for public purposes and as specifically allowed by the Water Department, Fire Department, Police Department, Recreation Division or Department of Public Works. The Water Department and Recreation Division will determine when, where and how other City or public agencies may operate vehicles on the Reservation, in order to avoid unnecessary conflicts and disruption.

3. Pedestrians, Wheelchair Users, Joggers, Runners, Dog Walkers and Bicyclists

Courtesy, common sense, safety, consistency, community enjoyment and protection of the Reservation's unique natural environment should guide overall traffic management policy.

Because the Perimeter Road and other pathways have limited sight lines and blind, vegetated curves, it is important for public safety as well as for wide enjoyment of the

Reservation's environment that faster-moving users watch out for and yield to slower-moving users on the pathways.

Thus, the generally enforced rule along all the Reservation's pathways is that slower moving users have the right-of-way. Because the Perimeter Road and connecting pathways are heavily used and have limited sight lines, slower moving users are expected to leave open lanes for users moving in the opposite direction and to afford space for individual faster moving users to pass safely. Dog owners are to take care that their dogs do not inadvertently create safety hazards for other users on foot, in wheelchairs or on bicycles.

Users who are stopped in the road are expected to take care not to block the roadway and paths for moving users, and to be aware of and avoid stopping on blind curves along the pathways. People walking dogs should make sure that their animals do not block the road. On the Perimeter Road and on other pathways, everyone desiring to stop, rest, converse, look at the scenery or study plants and birds should move as far to one side as possible, allowing traffic to pass in both directions.

The MDC Bikepath segment cutting through the Reservation along Concord Avenue and Fresh Pond Parkway is not treated as a Reservation pathway for traffic management purposes in this Master Plan. On the Perimeter Road and connecting pathways on which bicycle riding is explicitly permitted, such as vehicular entrances, bicycles must yield the right-of-way to slower-moving users. Bicycles may not be ridden on handicapped-accessible pedestrian pathways in ecologically sensitive areas or where the path segment cannot safely accommodate wheelchairs and bike riding. Riders can walk their bicycles along these connecting pathways taking care not to block oncoming traffic. Bicycles cannot be ridden or walked on trails.

The exception, as stated above, to the right-of-way standard is that individual users must yield the right-of-way to emergency and maintenance vehicles and to users whose Water Department permits afford them the right of way for the duration of a particular posted event, such as an authorized race.

The Water Department should publicize the traffic management policy through signs, leaflets and appropriate personal contact with visitors. In so doing, the Water Department should establish that adhering to the policy is critical to everyone's enjoyment of the Reservation within this sensitive, multi-use resource.

4. Races

Pathways open to cross-country and other authorized racing events will be displayed on a map and identified by appropriate signs. A comprehensive review of the existing Perimeter Road and pathway system, described above as a major priority, will result in designation of pathways open to these uses.

E. Accessing the Reservation

Entrances should reflect the wild, natural character of the Reservation. All major access points and other access points will be designed, constructed and maintained to provide for public convenience and safety, while protecting the soil against erosion and preventing damage to plants and wildlife.

1. Major Entrance Points

Vehicular access will be available to the general public at the new Water Treatment Plant. Major pedestrian access points conforming to Massachusetts Architectural Access Board standards will be constructed and maintained on Concord Avenue at Black's Nook, on Concord Avenue at Lusitania Field, and on Fresh Pond Parkway at the Water Treatment Plant.

Bicycles may be ridden into the Reservation at the new Water Treatment Plant vehicular access entrance. At busy pedestrian access points, bicycles should be walked into the Reservation. Bicycles may also be ridden into the Reservation along the MDC Bikepath segment that runs inside the Reservation boundary. After yielding the right-of-way to slow-moving traffic, bicycles may move from the MDC Bikepath to the Perimeter Road along a connecting link if it is marked open to bicycle riding. The Perimeter Road will be open to bicycling as provided in Internal Traffic Management Policy section above.

2. Pedestrian Access

Currently, pedestrian access for the general public crossing Huron Avenue at Glacken Field is good. Pedestrian access along Concord Avenue and Fresh Pond Parkway has been poor, but should improve markedly with the installation of new crossings currently underway. Although crosswalks along Fresh Pond Parkway and Alewife Brook Parkway are controlled by the MDC, it is important that City officials remain vigilant in insisting that pedestrian safety and convenience be paramount in the design, location and operation of these crossings.

Safe, convenient pedestrian access between the Reservation and Danehy Park is currently lacking. The City should work with the MDC to establish a safe, convenient pedestrian link. Any proposal for redevelopment of the New Street area should include provisions for establishing and maintaining such a link.

3. Public Transportation to the Reservation

The Reservation is currently well served on weekdays and minimally served on weekends by public transportation from Harvard Square. However, no direct bus route serves the Reservation from Porter Square, Central Square, Inman Square, East Cambridge or the Alewife Subway Station.

The City should study the feasibility of running shuttle buses to the Reservation serving the elderly, families with small children and persons with disabilities, with particular attention to service from areas lacking a direct bus route.

As part of its education outreach effort, the Water Department should prepare and distribute leaflets explaining how to use existing bus routes to reach Fresh Pond.

4. Vehicular Access and Parking

Private passenger cars will regain access to Reservation parking areas once the new Water Treatment Plant is completed. But parking spaces will remain limited. To ensure that Cambridge residents have access to the parking spaces reserved for them along nearby streets and within the Reservation, there should be vigorous, on-going enforcement of parking regulations by the Cambridge Water Department and Traffic and Parking Department staff.

In the past, the use of buses and private cars to bring cross-country race participants to the Reservation has resulted in conflict and chaos in the parking lot at Kingsley Park. The Fresh Pond Recreation Policy (See Section XII) limits cross-country meets to three teams, including the host Cambridge team. The policy further specifies that buses be used for all race participants, and that buses be restricted to the parking lot at the Water Treatment Plant. The Recreation Policy document recommends that three dedicated spaces be made available for buses in the lot at the plant and that these spaces be available for use by shuttle buses, should the City decide to improve resident access to the Reservation.

5. Access and Dedicated Parking for Persons with Disabilities

As previously stated, persons with disabilities will have access to the Reservation through two major pedestrian access points on Concord Avenue and one major vehicular access point on Fresh Pond Parkway.

Persons with disabilities will have access to the Municipal Golf Course from the parking lot on Huron Avenue, and to the Community Gardens, Lusitania Field and the Perimeter Road from the Neville Manor site. Neither of those two points of access for persons with disabilities will be designated as a major access point for the general public.

Dedicated parking spaces will be made available to persons with disabilities at the Water Treatment Plant, at Kingsley Park and at Neville Manor. Dedicated spaces at the golf course parking lot will be reserved for golfers with disabilities.