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Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway Conservancy plans to construct a carousel with a 2013 opening

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Within 18 months, city-area children will ride through downtown astride seals, squirrels, even skunks, if all goes according to the Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy Greenway Conservancy's plan.

The conservancy is developing a custom, Boston-themed carousel and hosted a meeting to update the community on its progress. Despite past opposition to aspects of the plan, no critics were in attendance at the meeting, which was advertised on the conservancy's website and its email list but ultimately drew only a small group of staffers, board members, and other supporters.

The project is budgeted at \$2.965 million, including all planning, design, and construction costs, though the conservancy hopes those will come down when money designated for contingencies doesn't have to be spent. Funding comes from an anonymous donor who gave \$1.6 million to begin the planning process, along with \$250,000 from the Mass. Cultural Facilities Fund, \$100,000 from the Mabel Louise Riley Foundation, \$50,000 from the Clarendon Group, \$10,000 from the Lawrence and Lillian Solomon Fund, \$7,625 raised through the 2011 Greenway Gala Vision Fund, and \$5,000 from Fidelity Investments/Pembroke Real Estate.

The conservancy is working to raise the remaining \$942,375 through donations from private donors. The new ride will replace a temporary carousel sited just below Mercantile St., between Faneuil Hall Marketplace and Christopher Columbus Waterfront Park, with the Boston Harbor Islands Pavilion to the south and the future Armenian Heritage Park to the north.

Conceptual design work for the carousel was completed last fall, followed by a site redesign for the surrounding area from the same team that designed the adjacent pavilion: landscape designers from Watertown-based Reed Hilderbrand Inc. and architects from the downtown firm Utile Inc.

The conservancy decided early on to create a new carousel that would be unique to Boston and celebrate local wildlife and sought input from children at four local elementary schools. Not all of them got with the program: "We had a few SpongeBob Squarepants kinds of things and a few Red Sox players," said Linda Jonash, director of planning and design for the conservancy. But they also had enough ideas for indigenous animals that they were able to develop a final list that includes a barn owl, a whale spouting water from its blowhole, a peregrine falcon, a fox, and more.

Newburyport-based sculptor Jeffrey Briggs is designing the animals while Carousels and Carvings, a Marion, Ohio-based firm that constructs new carousels and restores old ones, builds the frame. For each figure, Briggs adapts concepts from the children's drawings into detailed sketches and then constructs a plaster model. A cast from that model is used to make the fiberglass creature, which is then sanded and painted in eye-catching hues. "The idea is to have all the animals really pop with bright colors," Jonash said.

The conservancy worked with the Boston-based Institute for Human Centered Design to develop a

chariot accessible to people with disabilities, with an adjacent harbor seal figure that a companion can ride. The carousel will be about the same size as the temporary one, with 10 sets of figures that run three across, as well as the accessible chariot on one side, balanced against a sea serpent gondola on the other. To keep the carousel true to indigenous wildlife, the conservancy satisfied the children's demand for a sea serpent by basing the figure on the giant oarfish once found in Boston Harbor.

The top will be angled to shed snow in the winter and made of a flexible polypropylene fabric that allows light to shine through. When the carousel is closed for the winter â€” probably beginning on New Year's Day each year and lasting until April school vacation week â€” it will be enclosed by clear glass panels. "It'll be like a lantern at nighttime in the winter," Jonash said.

Around the carousel will be a railing set at a comfortable height for waiting parents to lean on, and the area will be enclosed by a seat wall and an inner grove of shade trees. The Mother's Walk on the lower end of the park will continue through the site on its east side, and the promenade that runs through all the Wharf District Parks will continue on the west.

Music will be provided not by a traditional steam-powered calliope but by a modern sound system, though recorded calliope music will be one of many options. A lighting and sound designer will create a custom plan including flexible music options for everyday use and special events, with the volume no louder than that of the temporary carousel currently on the site.

Nancy Brennan, executive director for the conservancy, said they had heard requests for more variety in the music from National Park Service rangers working outdoors at the adjacent Boston Harbor Islands Pavilion, and the conservancy would try to accommodate those.

The price per ride will remain \$3, but there will continue to be a discount for bulk ticket sales. The conservancy may offer lower prices through promotions such as a \$2 Tuesday and hopes to find funders who will sponsor groups from schools or boys and girls clubs.

The conservancy expects the new carousel will generate more than the \$80,000 in revenues the existing one takes in each year. That income is expected to cover its operations and maintenance costs and to pay for additional greenway programs. The conservancy still needs to develop an operations plan for the carousel, which could be run internally but will likely be handled by a subcontractor. Brennan noted that the conservancy is "in the park business, not in the ride business."

Jonash said it will take a while for Briggs to hand-carve all the animals and the decorative panels for the central motor housing and the canopy edging. The conservancy expects landscaping work to begin at the site in fall 2012 and continue into the following spring, with the carousel sited and open to the public in summer 2013.