



CPA Funding Application Pre-Application

City of Worcester

Submitted On:

Dec 3, 2025, 10:20AM EST

Project Name	Rehabilitation of the Nature Explore Playground at the EcoTarium
Project Location and/or Address	222 Harrington Way
Project Lead Organization (or Individual if Applicable)	Worcester Natural History Society dba The EcoTarium
Legal Status of the Organization	501(c)3
Current Property Owner (if Different from the Applicant)	(applicant)
Brief Project Description	The EcoTarium is requesting funding to rehabilitate the 7-acre "Nature Explore" Playground to restore safe, accessible pathways and play areas that have deteriorated due to weather, age, and usage.
Project Contact Information	Katie Chappell [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
What CPA category does this project fall under? (Check All that Apply)	Open Space and Recreation
What activity are you proposing to do in this category? (Check All that Apply)	Rehabilitate / Restore
What is the total project budget?	\$220,000
How much are you requesting in CPA funding?	\$220,000
What general budget line items will the CPA funds be used for? (CPA funds can only be used to fund capital expenses. Maintenance activities are not eligible.)	Personnel \$20,000 Contractors \$45,000 Other Direct \$10,000 Supplies/Site Preparation \$125,000 De Minimus \$20,000
Eligible Open Space and Outdoor Recreation Project location. Open Space and Outdoor Recreation projects funded with CPA must take place on land that is permanently protected for recreational or conservation use. NOTE: Projects that take place in the public right of way (ROW) are not eligible for CPA funding in this category.	This project takes place on public OR private property that is NOT a designated park (such as part of a school campus) OR does not currently have a deeded Conservation or Recreational restriction for the area where the proposed work is to take place.

Please Note: You do not need an existing deeded Restriction to apply for CPA funding. However, by initialing the following box, you recognize that a Restriction will be required as part of your Grant Agreement. More information on deed restrictions can be found in the Worcester Community Preservation Act (CPA) Funding Application Form Guidance for Applicants.

ERW

Is there anything else you would like us to know about your project at this stage?

The Nature Explore Playground is a critical resource for school-age children and their families. The EcoTarium is intentional about reducing and eliminating cost barriers to visiting, offering several free days each year for the whole community, and numerous eligibility programs for free and reduced admission year-round.

We are currently requesting a deed modification restricting the playground area for recreational use, as required. We are fully committed to the restriction.

With my initials below, I confirm that the above information is true to the best of my knowledge and understand that major changes to the project outlined above may void a positive Determination of Eligibility.

ERW

With my initials below, I understand that CPA funding is reimbursement based, and that, if awarded, my organization would have to cover some or all of the upfront costs of the project.

ERW



CPA Funding Application Form

City of Worcester

Submitted On:

Jan 6, 2026, 04:51PM EST

Project Name (Please make sure this corresponds with the Project Name on the Determination of Eligibility Form)	Restoration of the Nature Explore Playground and Outdoor Classroom at the EcoTarium
Project Contact Information	Katie Chappell [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
Please briefly describe your project.	The EcoTarium will restore our Nature Explore Playground area for improved functionality and safety. We will replace worn and hazardous walkway elements and revitalize this play place. Installed in 2014, the playground is made of natural elements which after ten years have begun to deteriorate resulting in uneven walkways, broken elements, rotted wood, exposed spikes/nails and other hazards. With restoration, this popular playground will continue to serve as a safe and valuable resource for self-directed play and nature exploration for children and their families.
What permissions, permits and plans will be necessary to carry out this project, and what is the status of their acquisition?	We will not need special permissions because we own the land, but we will need a building permit, which we will obtain in March 2026. We are seeking to modify our deed to restrict the area that the playground sits on for recreational use only. We are committed to applying that restriction.
Do you foresee any delays in acquiring these permissions within the next 6 months? If yes, please explain, otherwise, type N/A.	We have a very good relationship with the City and they have been very supportive in approving permits we need. We do not foresee any delays.
What is the desired start and end date of this project?	Start Date: March 31, 2026 End Date: July 22, 2027
Please attach a Timeline for the project.	Nature Explore Playground Timeline.pdf
Please upload a complete project budget (.xlsx or .pdf) that includes the source of the funding for each line item. CPA funds can ONLY be used on CPA eligible project elements. Please make sure to be specific about the use of all CPA monies requested.	Community Preservation Fund Budget.pdf

Please upload any renderings and/or estimates for this project.	Nature Explore Play Area Description.pdf Scope of work.pdf
What is the status of the match funding identified in the budget?	Matching funds are secured and will cover our staffing for this project.
Please upload commitment letters and/or funding agreements demonstrating that match funding is in place.	Cost Share Commitment.pdf
Please explain why CPA funding is needed for this project. If CPA is the only proposed funding source for this project, please explain why.	The Community Preservation Program is among the most relevant funding opportunities for this project as our playground rehabilitation is in line with the City's plans. We will fund our staffing as cost-share for this project, but CPA is the only external funder identified at this time. Funding that our organization has historically relied upon has been reduced throughout significant changes in the recent public funding landscape. We humbly request the City's support for this project.
Please describe the experience of the project manager or project management team in completing a project like this one. Please include examples of similar projects pursued in the past, and why they are relevant.	Katie Chappell, Deputy Director of Museum Operations, has overseen the implementation of updates to our observatory through a partnership with NASA. Katie has coordinated and overseen a renovation of our observatory roof and upgrade of our telescopes to support exploration and discovery of space. This installation is also an outdoor exhibit area and is very popular with guests. Katie was able to facilitate improvements to the user experience and enhancements of our planetarium showings using the upgraded telescopes. She has been on time with deliverables and compliant with reporting requirements. Katie has overseen numerous rehabilitation and renovation projects throughout our Museum spaces with great success, recently overseeing the renovation of our guest bathrooms to become ADA compliant and repairing our entrance gate to be secure again.
Please describe the financial position of the organization and its ability to cover the upfront costs of this project. CPA funding is provided on a reimbursement basis.	The EcoTarium ended fiscal year 2024 in the green. We have the monetary ability to start work immediately once we know that all funding commitments are secure.
Please upload any reports that may be helpful in establishing a capable financial position.	2024 Audited Financial Reports - FINAL.pdf 2025 Operating Budget.pdf Ecotarium - 990 FY23.pdf
How will this resource/property/building be maintained in the future?	The Nature Explore Playground will be inspected for safety and wear by multiple teams weekly. We will conduct deeper inspections from April to October when the playground sees peak usage, but will maintain inspections throughout the colder months as well.
Please upload any maintenance commitments.	Maintenance Agreement.pdf
Please describe how this project/program will benefit Worcester residents in general, as	The Nature Explore playground offers numerous benefits, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for Social Development and Well-Being • Physical Fitness

<p>well as specific groups that will benefit from the project.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creativity and Imaginative Play • Inspiration for Collaborative Play • Stress Reduction • Increased empathy for Plants and Animals <p>Sixty percent of the families that visit the EcoTarium from Worcester and beyond are bringing a child aged eight or younger to their visit. These families will primarily benefit from the rehabilitation.</p>
<p>Please identify which of the Community Priorities identified in the Community Preservation Plan align with this project (check all that apply).</p>	<p>PRIORITY 1: Increase accessibility to historic resources, open space, parks, and in community housing.</p>
<p>Please describe how this project aligns with the above Community Priorities.</p>	<p>The Nature Explore Playground is a critical resource for school age children in the community and their families. This installation is one of several that provide a recreational exploration outlet in nature. It provides a unique play opportunity due to the combining of natural and educational elements, providing added fun and learning. Our youngest visitors use the playground when they visit making this an introduction to self-directed outdoor recreation. The EcoTarium in its entirety, is an established need as we are the only museum of science and nature within a 60-mile radius of Worcester. This sought-after establishment brings visitors from the Central Massachusetts area and beyond to Worcester, serving as a tourist attraction and source of revenue for the City. The majority of our visitors bring young children with them, and the Nature Explore playground remains a highly popular and highly utilized attraction for those younger visitors, despite its need for repair. The popularity</p>
<p>Historic Resource Category Goals</p>	<p>This project does not align with any of these Category Goals.</p>
<p>Open Space and Recreation Category Goals</p>	<p>GOAL 2: Refurbish existing park amenities to meet the city's changing needs.</p>
<p>Community Housing Category Goals</p>	<p>This project does not align with any of these Category Goals.</p>
<p>Please describe how this project aligns with the above Category Goals.</p>	<p>We seek to rehabilitate our playground in concert with the city's efforts to maintain and restore its parks and playgrounds.</p> <p>Our reach is wide and significant. The EcoTarium welcomes approximately 140,000 visitors each year and actively works to reduce cost barriers. Reduced or Free admission is provided year-round through the Special Community Outreach Programs of the EcoTarium (SCOPE), to approximately 40,000 people annually who qualify for WIC, EBT, or the Wonderfund, have Active Military status, or are a foster family. The EcoTarium offers several free admission days each year for the entire community to enjoy, partially funded by grants from organizations or companies.</p>
<p>Does your project align with any other City or Regional Plans? Please</p>	<p>The Worcester Now Initiative addresses the need to continuously maintain and restore city parks and playgrounds. The renovation of the Nature Explore Playground will complement the city's initiative by placing our desired</p>

be specific. See the City of Worcester website to view local plans.	renovation in lock step with the rest of the city's current maintenance efforts for playgrounds.
Does your project have community support? Please describe outreach efforts for this project.	<p>Yes, the Nature Explore play area has ongoing support from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature Action Collaboration for Children • Children and Nature Network • Outdoor Classroom Project • Keep America Beautiful • U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service • American Society of Landscape Architects • Nature Explore Organization
Please upload any letters of support.	EcoTarium_funding support letter.pdf
Is there anything else you want the CPC to know about your project?	<p>STEM career pathways begin with an early interest in science, sparked by opportunities for informal education and reinforcement of learning outside the classroom. The Nature Explore playground installation inspires education and provides age-appropriate self-directed play to encourage STEM learning and future STEM careers.</p> <p>Over 3,000 annual visitors who need increased accessibility to address mobility challenges will benefit from the rehabilitation. Increasing accessibility of our walkways and facilities is among our top priorities within our strategic plan.</p> <p>We have been advised that we are required to have a deed restriction that limits the playground area for recreational use. We have reached out to Eric Flint at the Economic Development office and are currently in the process of restricting our deed for recreational use. We are fully committed to the required restriction.</p>