

Executive Summary

The Town of Cape Elizabeth is fortunate to have the spectacular Fort Williams Park not only as a community resource but also as one of the most attractive and recognized scenic treasures in the state of Maine. With that good fortune comes the hard work of maintaining the park for local and global visitors, establishing operational guidelines to protect its natural and historic significance, providing for the safety of all of our guests, and delicately balancing its use by often competing stakeholders. As has been done since its inception, the Fort Williams Park Committee accomplishes this through regular public meetings, workshops and longer-term strategic planning in the form of this Fort Williams Park Master Plan Update.

More recent master planning efforts for the park were completed in 2003 and 2011. While the Town's Comprehensive Plan calls for the Master Plan to be updated every seven years, this was not possible due to an overriding focus over the past several years to bring more financial balance to the park through significant increases in commercial vehicle fees and through the implementation of a Pay and Display parking system. In many ways, these two efforts, while controversial, delivered on several of the critical outstanding themes from the 2011 Master Plan.

With those activities behind us, The Fort Williams Park Committee sought funding from the Town Council, issued a formal Request for Proposal, selected a consulting organization, and commenced the 2021 Master Plan Update late in 2019, throughout the pandemic year of 2020, and well into 2021.

Precisely as was the purpose for the last update, the intent of the 2021 Fort Williams Park Master Plan Update was:

- 1) **To reaffirm the overall vision, goals and objective for Fort Williams Park.**
- 2) **To continue to guide the Town and the Fort Williams Park Committee in its deliberations, and to establish a framework for decision making.**
- 3) **To identify new issues and concerns as well as future needs and improvements to the park.**
- 4) **To suggest recommendations and propose design concepts for various projects identified as part of the process.**

In support of those identified objectives and with extensive direction from comments received in our survey, the Fort Williams Park Committee established three goals for this Master Plan Update:

- 1) **Community: Prioritize and enhance Fort Williams Park for the year-round enjoyment of all local residents.**
- 2) **Access: Advance safe access, circulation and easy wayfinding for all Fort Williams Park guests.**

3) Resources: Preserve, protect, promote and enhance Fort Williams Park’s natural, scenic, and historical resources.

Additionally, although not a “goal” of the Master Plan Update, the Fort Williams Park Committee recognizes the need to establish a long-term sustainability budget or endowment to maintain the quality of the Fort Williams Park experience. Without such, Fort Williams Park will forever struggle to maintain its current natural, historic and scenic beauty, and will also be unable to build and support new safety, service and guest features.

The Process:

To assist us in accomplishing these three goals, the Fort Williams Park Committee hired a consultative landscape architectural and engineering firm that had not previously been engaged by the Town for Fort Williams Park. The concept was to engage a firm which had deep references in this type of work, was local, would be vested in the outcome, but would also bring a completely fresh perspective to their efforts for the park. After reviewing RFP responses and conducting vendor interviews, the Fort Williams Park Committee ultimately and unanimously selected Todd Richardson and his firm Richardson & Associates (with their partners) to support this effort.

The Fort Williams Park Committee and Richardson & Associates kicked off this effort with a half-day onsite workshop at Fort Williams Park to explore as many aspects of the park as possible. The focus of this extensive “Site Analysis and Assessment” was to identify use patterns, stakeholders, traffic (pedestrian, bicyclist, and vehicle) flow and density, competing interests, resources, and many other issues and opportunities. Part of that effort was to identify as many stakeholder groups as possible and then to set up meetings with representatives from each of those groups. These included, but were not limited to:

Organized Sporting users: Soccer, Little League, Ultimate, Tennis & Pickleball
Vendors: Food Vendors, Expressive Artists, UPP, Bus & Trollies
Dog Walkers and those without
Friends of Fort Williams
Portland Head Light - Gift Shop and Museum
Beach to Beacon: B2B Pres. David Backer and Dave McGilvery Sports
Cape Elizabeth Historical Society
Service Orgs: Cape Elizabeth Garden Club, Cape/SP Rotary, Cape Lions Club
Community Services, Public Works and Bob Malley, etc.

While this series of public (virtual) meetings was being held, the Fort Williams Park Committee also promoted and conducted an extensive survey for any and all guests of the park. This online survey was actively promoted on the Town’s website, and was also highlighted in several articles in the local newspapers. As such, the survey was completed by 637 people of all ages who not only answered over 30 multi-part questions but also showed their enthusiasm for Fort Williams Park by including thousands of specific write-in comments.

Results and Recommendations:

The overall survey results strongly influenced the three goals (see above) for the Master Plan Update effort with special focus on improving the multi-season appeal of the park specifically for local residents. Given the significant recent efforts around Commercial Vehicle Fees, Pay and Display Parking, the new Central Parking lot, and many other investments in signs, fencing and other safety initiatives, it was not a surprise that the tax-paying residents voted to see a shift in focus away from tourists to residential and multi-seasonal use enhancements.

More specifically, the survey showed an overwhelming (#1 ranked) opinion against the construction of a visitor's center, but interestingly had a strong (#4 ranked) desire to have some permanent restrooms facilities built within the Park. Also high on the list of desirable efforts was the preservation of selected military infrastructure (buildings and batteries etc.), the restoration of the pond, skating and the surrounding area, and the preservation of the Goddard Mansion. There was a prevalent theme against over-grooming the park and building new projects (ie. Children's Garden) without the capacity or funding for proper maintenance. While funding will continue to be an issue, the Fort Williams Park Master Plan Update includes specific recommendations around each of these desires as expressed by the survey respondents.

After careful consideration of the outcomes of the onsite workshop, the survey results with its extensive comments, and the public stakeholder workshops, Richardson & Associates returned a list of close to 100 specific recommendations. After a line-item public review of each of these recommendations, each Fort Williams Park Committee member then ranked each of them privately, submitted them for averaging, and then reviewed and re-ranked each of them in a series of committee meetings before ultimately assigning a final ranking. The criteria used was:

- 1) The FWP Committee should prioritize and act on quickly (i.e. safety related)**
- 2) A strong candidate for action that the committee is recommending for action**
- 3) Something that is not yet necessary but could be needed or helpful at some time**
- 4) The FWP Committee will not support recommending to the CE Town Council**

Ultimately there are close to 80 specific recommendation that range from relatively simple and affordable to a handful that are complex; some of which could cost more than \$1 million dollars. While the Master Plan Update breaks each of these down into specific geographic areas within the park, several of them are thematic throughout all areas at the park. These include:

- a. Improve many of the lawns that have poor soil or grass. Remove potholes, old pavement and concrete foundations, remove stumps and grade as needed.
- b. Enhance the restroom experience through cleaner port-a-potties with better aesthetics, and potentially install shelters architecturally aligned with a permanent restroom facility to be centrally located within Fort Williams Park.

- c. Improve way-finding throughout the park with enhanced north-south pedestrian pathways, standardized signage, kiosks, and potential use of QR codes to access enhanced scenic, historical and ecological information.
- d. Create better four-season walking promenades with delineated edges, scattered seating, additional plantings and seasonal drinking water access.
- e. Continue and enhance existing programs around invasive species management, stonewall repair, and erosion control.
- f. Enhance enforcement of speed, trash and leash policies within Fort Williams Park.

In addition to these cross-park themes, and many other individual recommendations, there are about ten major recommendations included for short and long-term consideration:

- 1) Reengineer Powers Rd (central vehicular artery for Fort Williams Park) to enable safe access for pedestrians, bicycles, cars and commercial vehicles. Focus areas should include the narrow area above the sledding hill, the curves and dips past the beach parking access, and the confusing entry into Central Parking.
- 2) Enhance the Ship Cove beach area to provide a cleaner and more inviting lawn area with enhanced beach, picnic and parking facilities.
- 3) Stabilize and revitalize the Goddard Mansion with an effort to remove fencing, preserve the façade, and enhance visual aspects at an affordable cost. The Fort Williams Park Committee is recommending an approach similar to Bermuda's "Unfinished Church" which safely preserves an affordable fraction of that architecturally significant venue.
- 4) Stabilize and revitalize parts of Battery Keyes with potential for an ocean overlook and visual connectivity back up the hill towards the Goddard Mansion.
- 5) Reengineer and join the Parade Ground and Overflow parking areas to more safely accommodate existing and additional parking needs while establishing a safer and more intuitive traffic pattern.
- 6) Fix the Pond area including walls, filters, pumps and dam. Establish multi-season use patterns with focus on skating and inclusion of an open-air pavilion for education, gatherings, and a warming hut for skaters.
- 7) Better connect the north and south cliff walk trail systems along the ocean through enhanced way-finding, cohesive materials, and improved trail connector segments.
- 8) Create a new Vendor Promenade to centralize the food and expressive vendors on the Green under Battery Blair. Provide utilities and vehicular access as needed.
- 9) Explore the creation of a Mini-Theater to be used for Sounds By The Sea, performing artists, outdoor classroom, etc. in the natural ravine overlooking the Green and the ocean at the south end of the stone retaining wall under Battery Blair.
- 10) Set aside buildings, parking and land to create space for a Cape Community Campus in the areas of the Officers Row buildings, the Public Works facilities and the dirt parking lot (playground to be relocated).

Each of these recommendations is documented and aligned with specific areas within the park. In addition, conceptual sketches have been included where appropriate. There is one appendix which includes the summary and detailed survey responses and another which includes a spreadsheet that indicates the final rankings as assigned for every recommendation by the Fort Williams Park Committee, and a color-coded matrix showing low, medium and high cost bracketing.

Thank you:

The multi-year effort to complete this Fort Williams Park Master Plan Update sought the participation of as many residents, stakeholders and members of the general public as possible. Given the public nature of each of the 27 meetings, workshops and public forums held during the process, and exclusive of the 637 survey respondents, more than 100 people participated in the preparation of these recommendations. As such, the Fort Williams Park Committee would like to extend a special thank you to the Town Council and Town Manager for their support and guidance, to Community Services for their process leadership, to Richardson & Associates for their fresh perspective to Fort Williams Park, to Bob Malley, our retired Director of Public Works for his deep historical knowledge, to Jim Rowe from the historical Society and to all others who contributed to this effort.

The Fort Williams Park Committee believes that this 2021 Fort Williams Park Master Plan Update will provide a roadmap and framework to best guide the execution of ongoing efforts and the implementation of new investments. In addition, it will provide the governance to provision for the safety of all our residents and guests, and the direction to guarantee the preservation of the natural, historic and scenic areas within Fort Williams Park.

Respectfully submitted,

The Fort Williams Park Committee

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