

Town of Clifton Park, New York

TOWN PARK MASTER PLAN



DECEMBER 9, 2019

PREPARED BY



PREPARED FOR

The Town of Clifton Park

TOWN OF CLIFTON PARK TOWN PARK MASTER PLAN

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with



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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND & GOALS

THE BIRTH OF A NEW TOWN PARK



THE BIRTH OF A NEW TOWN PARK

The evolution of this land into a local town park did not happen on its own. It was the result of tireless efforts carried out by local open space advocates—with broad community support and leadership by the Town of Clifton Park Town Board—who ultimately partnered with the school district for the sale of the property to the town. The 37-acre property, formerly owned by the Shenendehowa Central School District, was deemed nonessential by the Board of Education and the property was put up for sale in 2016. The process for the proposed sale and subsequent steps that ultimately led to purchase by the town was well-covered by local media. It is a story important to this master plan and is summarized from local media reporting below.

Proposed Land Sale. In December 6, 2016, the *Schenectady Gazette* reported on the school board's vote to sell the property to an Albany-based development company: "Despite impassioned pleas from community members urging the board to keep the undeveloped land in the public domain to be used as a park, board members voted 4-3 to sell the land."

Petition to District-Wide Vote. Concerned that the last remaining wooded property in the town center would be forever lost to further development, the Friends of Clifton Park Open Space began a petition campaign to challenge the school board's vote to sell the district-

THE BIRTH OF A NEW TOWN PARK

owned land to a developer. Based on the number of eligible voters in the district, the group needed at least 5,100 signatures to force a referendum vote on the sale. In less than one-month's time, on Jan. 4th, the Friends of Clifton Park Open Space submitted petitions to the district containing 7,016 signatures—more than enough to require a referendum of the district voters.

Referendum to Overturn

Sale. On April 4, 2017, the voters in the school district voted to overturn the proposed sale to the development company 5,442 to 2,323.



Figure 1. Get Out the Vote. Cherrie Goodoff, left, signs petition while Walter Szwetkowski looks on. (Photo credit: Community News)

Yes Vote to Sell the Land to the Town. As described in a story by the *Schenectady Gazette* (Dec. 5, 2017), residents of the Shenendehowa Central School District approved a deal that allows the school district to sell the 37 acres of undeveloped land to the Town of Clifton Park. The final vote—which was 2,723 to 535—gave the district the green light to sell the land to the town for \$1.1 million.

Closing on the Land Purchase. In a report by the *Times Union* on Feb. 28, 2018, the town closed on the purchase of the property. “With this purchase, the future of the 37-acre parcel as a public recreational space for the entire community is ensured,” Supervisor Phil Barrett said. “It’s wonderful,” said Frank Berlin, President of Friends of Clifton Park Open Space. “I’m delighted. It’s seemed like a long haul, but we did it in less than a year’s time; 364 days. The stars were aligned.”

“The vote is in. The parcel was the subject of two referendums, and the people of this community have spoken loud and clear.”

~ Town Supervisor Phil Barrett

The Master Plan Begins

In 2018, with the park property finally secured, the Town of Clifton Park issued a request for qualifications to regional design and planning firms to assist it in the development of a master plan which would detail the future vision for the new town park. The chosen team would work with a local advisory committee and conduct a series of public meetings to discuss the vision and programming needs of the park. In February of 2019, the combined team of Behan Planning and Design and Elan Planning, Design & Landscape Architecture, PLLC, was selected to conduct the work.

WHAT IS A PARK MASTER PLAN?

WHAT IS A PARK MASTER PLAN?

This park master plan is a document that outlines the desired goals for the future of the public park. The plan synthesizes such information as the desired uses of the park based on community input, the surrounding context, the physical and ecological features specific to the site, and the existing uses of parks and open space within the larger community to create a cohesive vision for its future development. The plan is designed to determine the appropriate character of the land and provide clear guidance on what it should become, with some flexibility to adapt to changing needs and attitudes over time.

The Benefits of Parks

Parks can serve a variety of needs within a community. Passive recreation (such as hiking, picnicking, or bird watching) and active recreation (such as baseball, skateboarding, or tennis) provide opportunities for exercise, contributing to the physical and mental health of the user. They form an important part of larger open space networks in providing such opportunities to citizens and visitors.

In recreation planning for a town, it is important to recognize the idea that the community is creating a system of recreation resources and that each individual park facility can be unique in terms of how it addresses local needs. Ideally, the park system will be responsive overall to community needs by providing the appropriate mix of activities across the network of recreation sites—from active athletic fields to more passive parks and preserves.

Open space preservation also helps to support the functioning of natural ecological systems which local flora and wildlife rely on to survive, and from which human communities receive benefits called ecosystem services. Maintaining large areas of unfragmented natural land provides important habitat and corridors for wildlife. The trees and plants which live in these areas help to purify the air. Riparian buffers along streams and the filtration function of wetlands and forests helps to purify water runoff from pollutants before it enters back into the local water system. Parks and open space provide flood storage areas to keep surrounding areas from being inundated during flood events.

Open space also contributes to the social well being of a populace, by creating civic destinations, gathering spaces, and opportunities for chance encounters with friends and neighbors. Shared civic spaces and amenities help build a strong sense of community.

Tourism and recreation are an important part of any community, and having recreational opportunities which attract visitors and residents helps to provide revenue to local businesses.

THE MASTER PLAN PROCESS

Clifton Park has long been committed to providing open space, park, and recreational facilities for the enjoyment of local residents and to attract new families and businesses to the area. The town currently enjoys a variety of local parks and trails, including large preserves, athletic fields, and multi-use trails. The new park will help to expand the existing network of trail systems in the town center, forming an important link in the open space network as well as creating a meaningful community destination.

THE MASTER PLAN PROCESS

The consulting team facilitated the design process in collaboration with the town planning department, the town board, and the Town Center Park Planning Committee.

The town and the consultants compiled existing information about the history and existing conditions of the site, including previous surveys and topographic information, surrounding land uses, and an inventory of other existing parks and open spaces in Clifton Park. A biological survey was performed by ecologist Michael S. Batcher, MS, AICP, in the spring and summer of 2019 to identify soil types and vegetation, vegetation cover types, invasive species, and animal species observed on site.

Over the course of the spring and early summer, several site walks were scheduled which allowed the consultant team, town staff, committee members and the general public to tour the property and experience it firsthand. These site walks were instrumental in understanding the layout of the land and getting a sense of place.

On May 1, 2019, the town hosted a vision workshop at the senior center to solicit public input regarding the desired general character of what the park should be. Information about the history of the park was presented, along with existing site conditions and the biological survey results. Participants were invited to express their desires for the level of park development, the overall character of the park, and their opinions about the inclusion of various program elements. An online survey was also created and made available to the public for several weeks following the workshop in order to create an opportunity for those

SPRING 2019

SITE ANALYSIS

MAY / JUNE 2019

VISIONING
& DESIGN
WORKSHOPS

SUMMER 2019

DRAFT DESIGN
DEVELOPMENT

SEPTEMBER 2019

PRESENT
DRAFT PLAN

FALL 2019

FINALIZE
PLAN

THE MASTER PLAN PROCESS

who did not attend the workshop to provide input. This form was completed by more than 300 respondents.

Following the vision workshop and online survey, the consultants and the town met to discuss the results and identify patterns and priorities identified by the public. This information was used to develop the format and materials for the next public meeting, a design “charrette”—an interactive design exercise—held on June 5, 2019.

The purpose of the design charrette was to give each attendee the opportunity to design the park they would like to see. Following a review of the site analysis and the results of the vision workshop,

participants were each given their own blank map of the park and invited to brainstorm and sketch their ideas for the property, including general land use areas, activities and programming, and access and circulation. The results of the design charrette were synthesized by the team, and shared with the Town Center Park Planning Committee.



Figure 2. Site Walkthrough. Members of the public joined town staff, committee members and the consultant team for guided tours of the site to experience it and discuss ideas. These tours were instrumental in understanding the land and its characteristics.

Using the site analysis and input from the public, the consultant team created an opportunities and constraints map to identify which areas of the park were more suitable for different types of park programming, and which areas were best suited to be left alone. A vision statement was developed, along with specific goals for the property, and



Figure 3. Public Presentation. The public gathers on September 18th, 2019, at an open house presentation to see the draft design concepts for the new town park.

THE MASTER PLAN PROCESS

these were used as a guide to creating initial concept sketches for the park. Over time, these concept sketches were developed by the consultant team and refined by input and guidance from the committee.

On Sept. 18th, 2019, the draft plan was formally presented to the public, followed by a question and comment period. The opportunity to submit comments for several weeks following the presentation was also provided via an online comment form. The public input provided at the presentation and collected in the weeks after were used to refine the design before it was finalized.

The recommended plan illustrating the overall design concept for the master plan was then presented to the town board and advisory committee on Nov. 14, 2019. The community is very excited by the potential of this new park, and the years of enjoyment it will bring to the residents of Clifton Park and future generations.

CHAPTER 2

EXISTING CONDITIONS

HISTORY OF THE SITE

HISTORY OF THE SITE

Settled by Europeans in the 1600's, Clifton Park was an agricultural community until construction of the Interstate 87 "Adirondack Northway" in the early 1960's created an easy transportation link from the nearby cities of Albany, Saratoga Springs and beyond. Since then, the town has seen considerable growth, with a large concentration of commercial and residential development blossoming from the interstate exits.

A review of historic aerial photographs of the area illustrates the speed of surrounding growth and extent of natural changes over time on the property itself. In 1960, the town park property can be seen surrounded by fields and wooded areas, with Route 146 to the north largely undeveloped. At this time, the site itself is a mixture of cleared open fields to the west, and woods to the east following the line of the stream.

By the late 1970s, one can see the beginnings of commercial development along nearby roads, and a smattering of successional shrub and tree species had begun to appear in the open field portion of the property. By the mid eighties, surrounding commercial development was growing rapidly, and the red pine plantation on the property had begun to fill in the open field.

By the 2000's, the surrounding areas that had once been open fields had either been developed, or had grown into woodlands, including the park site itself.

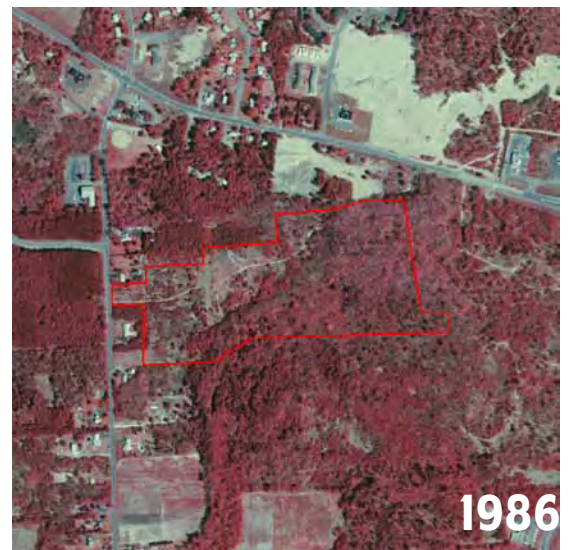
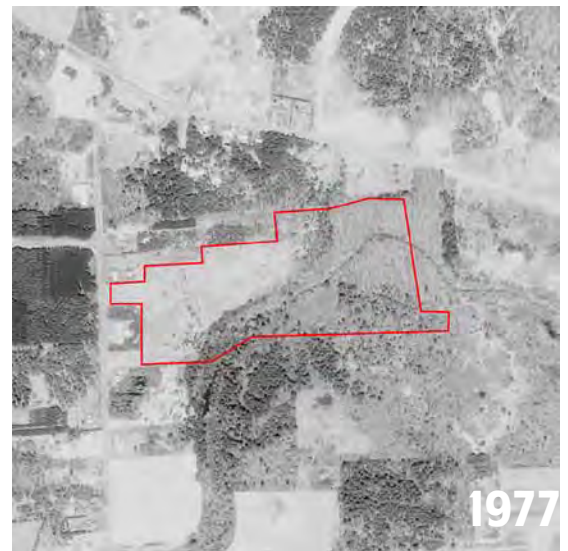
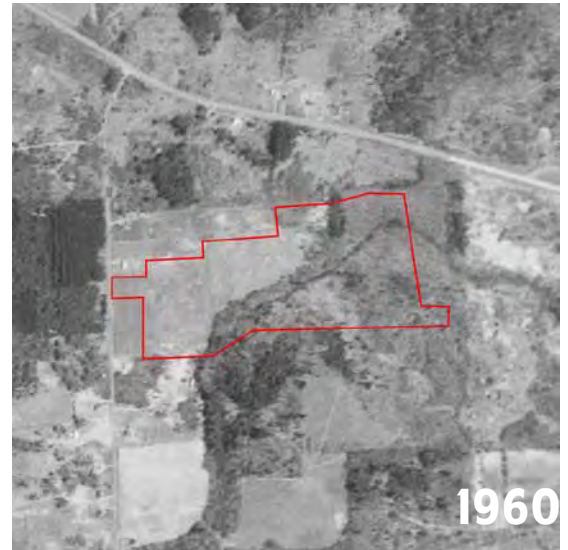


Figure 4. A Photo Timeline. Aerial photographs taken at various points since 1960 show the changes to the site and the surrounding areas of Clifton Park over the years. (Continued on next page)

EXISTING FEATURES & CONTEXT



EXISTING FEATURES & CONTEXT

The site today remains largely wooded, with oak and pine forests on the majority of the property and the mature pine plantation on the eastern side. Informal trails through the property have been created by citizens and are used regularly. Most of these trails travel along an east-west corridor, connecting Shenendehowa High School and Moe Road to Maxwell Drive and the town center.

Surrounding Context

Clifton Park contains over 2,000 acres of parks and preserves, and 20 miles of community trails. Many of the existing parks provide opportunities for active recreation, including Clifton Common and Collins Park, and many contain trails and walking paths, such as Kinn's Road Park and Garnsey Park.

The town center park is located in close proximity to the main commercial development area of the town, as well as the large Shenendehowa high school and many residential areas. Local residents of Clifton Park were adamant that this last parcel of land in the center of town should not be commercially

developed, like the surrounding town center. An important opportunity exists to create a protected open space in a highly developed location, one which could be a meaningful destination for residents, workers, and visitors.

The property is located between Moe Road and Maxwell Ave, directly north of Shatekon Elementary School, and south of route 146. Adjacent properties to the north include a retail and office development called the Town Plaza, a small commercial area which includes two preschools and two other businesses, and a handful of residential properties. Collins Park, which includes a baseball field, playground, and picnic areas, lies in close proximity to the north and has potential for a future link to the town center park.

To the west, opposite Moe Road, lies Shenendehowa High School, which is part of the large Shenendehowa school district. Along the east side of Moe Road is a multi-use trail,

EXISTING FEATURES & CONTEXT

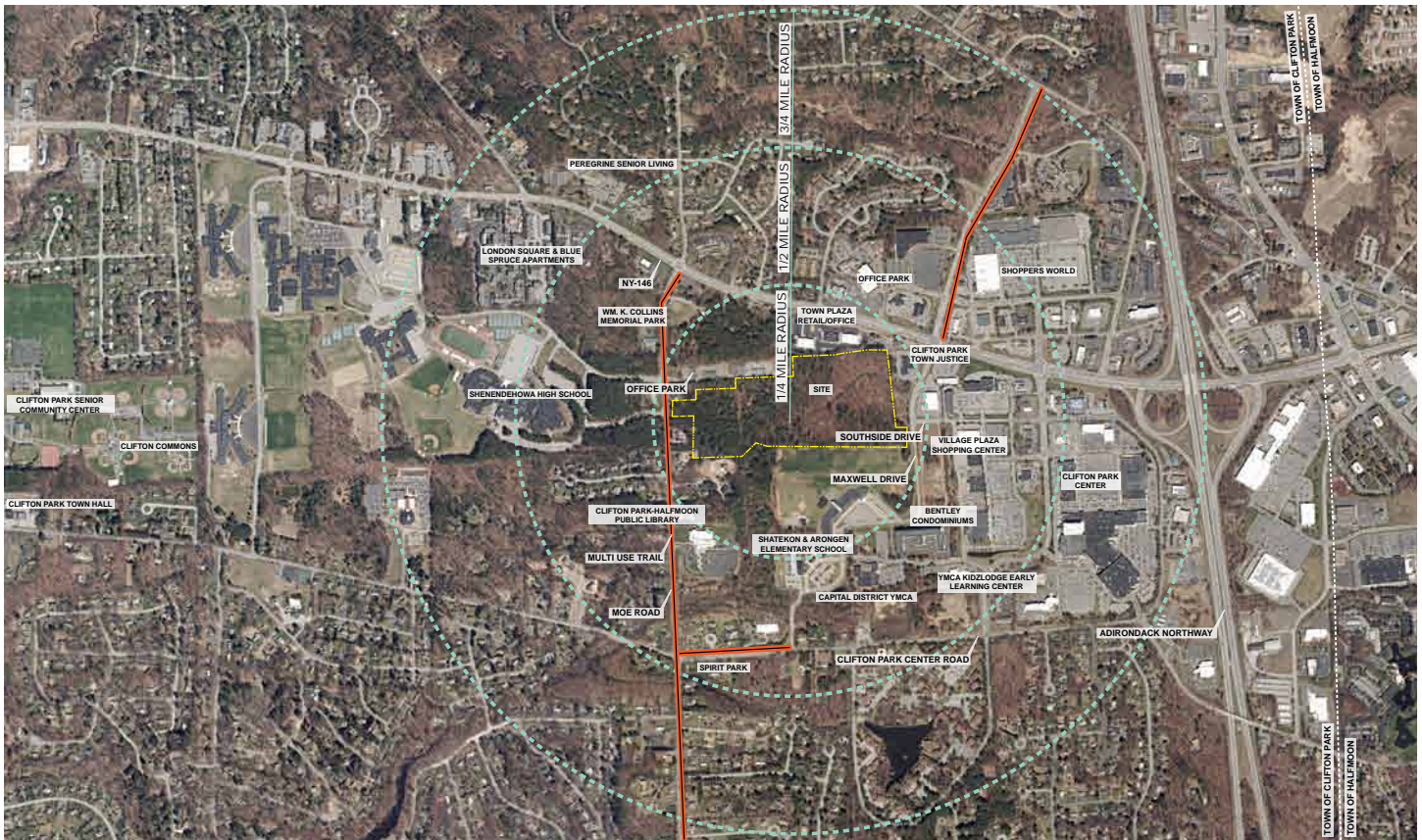


Figure 5. Surrounding Context. The site of the Town Center Park, centrally located within the heart of the commercial district, is one of the few remaining undeveloped parcels of land in this rapidly growing area.

providing a pedestrian route to the site from surrounding neighborhoods, and will create a link to the larger Clifton Park open space network.

Shatekon and Arongen elementary schools are directly south of the property, with open lawn and playing fields abutting the park land. A few residential properties also lie to the south. A quarter mile south on Moe Road is the Clifton Park Halfmoon Public Library. Behind the library is an existing trail segment which could be another opportunity for a future link to the park.

Adjacent to the property to the northeast is a town owned parcel which contains a public safety building which also houses a community services organization. South of this parcel, and directly to the east of the park property, is a stormwater retention basin serving with the commercial properties across Maxwell Drive. Southside Drive intersects with Maxwell Drive opposite the park frontage and leads to the Clifton Park Town Center, a highly developed commercial district.

ECOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Site Features

The town park property is generally flat or gently sloped and mostly wooded. It is drained by a small intermittent stream bordered by a shallow linear wetland which runs in a southwesterly direction through the site. It contains an informal network of footpaths created by years of public use. These paths are currently used by many local residents, as well as the Shenendehowa High School cross country team.

As two of the district elementary schools are located south of the town center park tract, and the land was previously owned by the school district, the facilities department continues to pass through the property on an easement in order to transport their maintenance equipment between school grounds.

ECOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

As part of the initial site assessment for this master plan, a biological assessment was completed in the spring and summer of 2019 by Michael S. Batchner, M.S., AICP, an ecologist and environmental planner, during a series of visits to the site.

Cover Types

Overall, the site includes nine acres of deciduous oak forest; 20.7 acres of white pine-mixed deciduous forest; 2.6 acres of red pine plantation; 1.7 acres of successional forest/shrubland, 1.5 acres of white pine successional forest, and 2.1 acres of wetland. The approximate areas of the cover types are shown in Figure 7.

Deciduous Oak Forest - The oak forest cover consists primarily of scarlet oak, red oak and white oak with some red maple, beech, black cherry, eastern cottonwood, quaking aspen, white pine and hornbeam. There is also scattered pitch pine south of the wetland in the eastern portion of the forest, as well as a patch of sugar maple. The shrub layer is limited and primarily witch hazel, though some lowbush blueberry and maple-leaf viburnum were found. There are few seedlings, with white pine and scarlet oak generally being the most abundant. There is extensive cover of Canada-mayflower, starflower, patches of



Figure 6. Site Walkthrough, April 2019. Site walkthroughs were important to understand the diversity on the property. As part of the design team, Michael Batchner visited the site at several periods over the changing seasons to provide a biological assessment of the plants and animals found on the property.

ECOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Pennsylvania sedge and partidge berry, dense patches of hay scented fern, and scattered wintergreen, goldthread, fringed milkwort, New York fern, whorled wood aster, and northern ground cedar.

White Pine-Mixed Deciduous Forest - This land cover type is very similar to the deciduous forest except that white pine is also dominant in the canopy and there are numerous white pine seedlings and saplings. Wild grape, a vine, was also found here. The herbaceous layer is like that of the deciduous forest. The closest New York Natural Heritage program type would be Appalachian Oak-Pine forest, which is also a broad type with a lot of variation.

Red Pine Plantation - This type is an obvious plantation of red pine, as the trees are clearly in rows. White pine seedlings and saplings are coming in, but the ground is lacking in numbers or variety of species. However, there is a difference between the plantation areas to the north and south of the east-west road. The southern area is dominated by red pine, and contains a small patch of lady slippers. This area would be classified as a Pine Plantation by the New York Natural Heritage Program.

The northern portion of the plantation is more diverse, with white pine mixed in, as well as red oak, eastern cottonwood, and red maple.

The branching patterns of some of the oaks and pines indicate that the plantation may have been planted around them. There are additional species, including scrub oak, gray dogwood, and Virginia creeper. The Natural Heritage Types that best fits this area would be a mixture of pine plantation and successional northern hardwood forest.

Successional Forest/Shrubland - This type contains white pine, poplar, black cherry, beech, and apple. Hazelnut and scattered blackberry are in the shrub layer, and goldenrod, butterfly weed, and strawberry are in the herbaceous layer. This area also contains some invasive species, including oriental bittersweet, bush honeysuckle, autumn olive, and privet. This would be characterized as a successional northern hardwood forest.

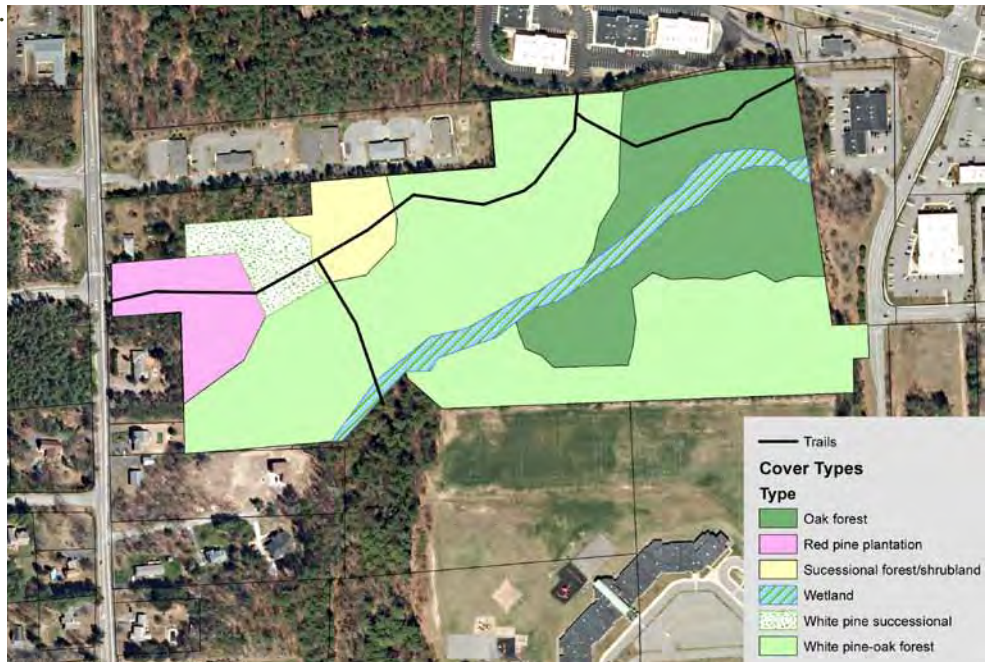


Figure 7. Land Cover Types. A majority of the site contains white pine-oak forest and oak forest.

ECOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

White Pine Successional Forest - This area is transitional between the successional forest/shrubland and the red pine plantation, with characteristics of both. The main distinction is a dominance of white pine, which appear to have been grown in the open, rather than in a dense stand as in other parts of the pine dominated forest. There is also some wisteria on the northern edge, which may be off the property. This area would also be characterized as a successional northern hardwood forest.

Wetland - This is a forested wetland that flows west and south toward Stony Creek and the Colonie Reservoir. Tree species are the same as adjacent forest types, with more red maple, occasional elms and swamp white oaks. The wetland is relatively open, with scattered highbush blueberry, elderberry, gray dogwood, and silky dogwood. Skunk cabbage is dominant in the herb layer, which contains a variety of addition species in smaller numbers. The wetland is a relatively narrow channel which widens to the west, especially off site. This area would best be characterized by the New York Natural Heritage Program as a shallow emergent marsh and/or red maple hardwood swamp.

Topography and Slopes

The site is found to be generally flat in most areas, with some gentle slopes. The western portion of the site is mostly level. There is one knoll in the north central part of the site, where a high point can be observed at elevation 320'. The wetland and seasonal stream running from the northeast to southwest creates a shallow ravine through the site which effectively separates the property into two distinct areas.

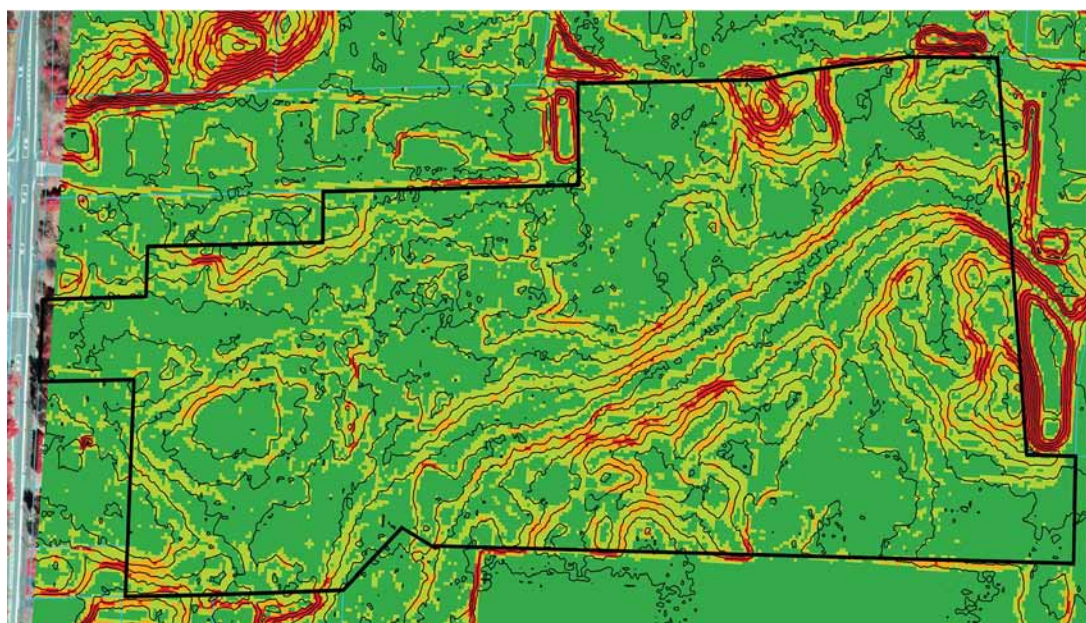


Figure 8. Topography and Slope. A majority of the property is relatively flat, with some gentle slopes down to the intermittent stream which passes through the site. Some areas of steeper slopes can be found in very localized areas, in particular on the east end of the property where a man-made detention basin was created for stormwater drainage.



ECOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Soils

The primary soil type is Oakville loamy fine sand, undulating, formed on glacial outwash and lake plains and is deep and well drained. There is a small area of Wareham loamy sand in the southwest border, mostly off site, that is deep, poorly drained, and defined as a hydric soil. This type may extend throughout the narrow wetland.

Animals Observed

Fifteen species of birds have been observed on the site, including many songbirds, woodpeckers, and a Red-tailed Hawk. Eastern chipmunk, gray squirrel, and white tailed deer have been seen, as well as evidence of weasels and woodchucks and/or foxes. American toad and treefrog larvae were identified on the site, and treefrog and spring peeper songs were heard.

Rare Species

A number of protected species were observed on the site, including common winterberry, pipsissewa, red baneberry, turtlehead, and wake robin.

Invasive Species

Invasive species found on site include autumn olive, bush honeysuckle, privet, and oriental bittersweet. The majority of these were concentrated in the successional areas, with the bittersweet also invading the interior forest. Wisteria and common reed were observed in isolated spots at the edge and off the site.

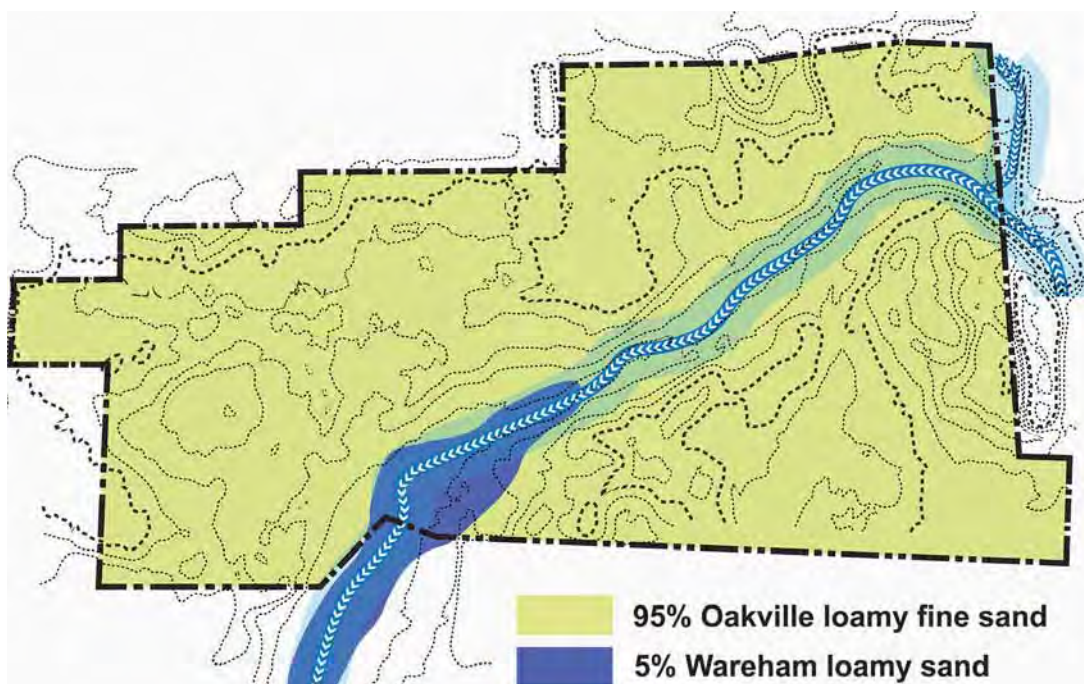


Figure 9. Soils. A large majority of the site consists of oakville loamy fine sand, except in the wetter areas along the stream and wetland areas.

ECOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

SITE ANALYSIS FINDINGS

The ecological analysis was conducted to determine which areas of the property would be more or less conducive to development of park features and disturbance, and identify interpretive education opportunities. The following is a summary of recommendations:

- Conservation efforts should be concentrated on the wetland and the intact forest on either side of the wetland.
- More appropriate areas for development or disturbance include the pine plantation and the successional forest/shrubland areas. If development on the east is needed, it should be kept close to the edge of the property to reduce fragmentation.
- Six invasive species were identified on or at the edges of the site. Management of these species is recommended to prevent them from invading the interior forest and wetland. Invasive species can harm natural ecosystems by out-competing native species, reducing biological diversity, altering community structure, and altering nutrient cycling.
- This site has a small forest remnant which is largely intact. There is some regeneration, which is likely negatively affected by white-tailed deer. To encourage regeneration of native species, it may be desirable to fence off small portions on a temporary basis, until the trees and shrubs become big enough to survive deer browse. This concept has interpretive possibilities as well.
- The forest contains a lot of natural, downed woody debris, which is an important part of the ecosystem. This material should be kept undisturbed to the greatest extent possible, as it provides essential wildlife habitat and is part of the nutrient cycle.
- There is one wetland crossing with a culvert that is located on the elementary school property. Depending on the types of vehicular use proposed, this crossing could be improved, which would probably involve raising the road. Careful design would be needed to avoid affecting the wetland hydrology. An alternative option would be a low water crossing, eliminating the culvert altogether.
- If a new wetland trail crossing is needed, it should be located as far east as possible. A bridge or boardwalk crossing is desirable, possibly with a viewing platform.

Details of the ecological report are provided in the Appendix for reference.

CHAPTER 3

PUBLIC INPUT

THE PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS

THE PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS

When you ask someone to envision a “park”, what do they see? Some people might imagine a sunny open lawn area, with some benches and trees for people to relax and have lunch or take a stroll. Another person might imagine kids playing baseball on a field near a playground with drinking fountains. Still others might imagine a secluded wooded area with dirt walking paths and nature trails. The word “park” can have many different meanings to different people. For this reason, the public input process for this master plan was developed as a conversation in two stages—Visioning and Design.

The “visioning” portion of the conversation was intended to understand what the residents of Clifton Park envisioned when they were asked to imagine what the new town park would look like. The goal here was to understand what the general character or atmosphere of the park should be. Should it be a natural wooded preserve left untouched? Should it be manicured lawns, flowers and fountains? Or perhaps something in between? To achieve this, the use of many different pictures was essential to ensure that people were speaking the same language. The visioning for this plan was developed with the use of a public visioning workshop, followed by an online survey.

The “design” portion of the conversation was intended to understand the layout of the land, what activities they might like to see, where things should go and how much of it



Figure 10. Shen Science & Health Discovery Fair. Cynthia Behan and Esvin Secaida staff a booth at the science fair to inform students and families about the upcoming master plan meetings and solicit input on the future town park.

there should be. This included asking people what areas of the property could be disturbed, and what areas should be left undisturbed. Similar to the visioning workshop, this conversation took place as part of a public design charrette. The input gathered from both the visioning and design

conversations was used to help shape the early design concept for the new park.

In addition to the public meetings, several stakeholder groups were invited to discuss the park at the early stages of the project to identify their ideas and concerns. These stakeholders included the school district, library, YMCA, Town of Half Moon, Bentley, Friends of Clifton Park Open Space, Chamber of Commerce and some adjacent property owners.

VISIONING WORKSHOP

VISIONING WORKSHOP

A visioning workshop was held at the Clifton Park Senior Center on May 1, 2019 where attendees were invited to share their thoughts on what the overall character of the park should be. A series of visual display boards were presented, and attendees were given colored stickers to apply to images they liked, including examples of different programming elements and activities such as playgrounds, restrooms or parking lots. In general, each series of images represented a range of design character from “natural/informal” to “designed/formal” style. The intent of these exercises was to show that there was a range of options, and get an impression of what people liked and disliked.

Future Park Land Use Options

Understanding that not all of the park property needs to be the designed the same, a separate exercise asked people what percentage of the land they would like to see devoted to different levels of use. Types of uses ranged from “Preservation Area” (kept natural) to “Low”, “Moderate” and “High Intensity” uses such as parking lots and facilities. Participants were also provided comment sheets to write their own ideas, observations and concerns.



Figure 11. One of the display boards at the vision workshop. Participants indicated they did not see a need for a playground, however liked the idea of an outdoor classroom. A “place for artists” and performance space for the “Not So Common Players” was also a suggestion.



Figure 12. Participants at the May 1st Visioning Workshop at the Clifton Park Senior Center. The visioning workshop was designed to discuss the desired general character and feel of the park, and discuss how much of the property should be disturbed vs. kept natural.

VISIONING WORKSHOP

Summary of Workshop Input

A number of key themes emerged from the vision workshop which were very helpful in understanding the community's expectations for the new park. Overall, a large majority of participants expressed their desire to keep a majority of the park property "natural" or undisturbed. This was reflected in the use intensity exercise, where people indicated they wanted to see an average of 43% of the site remain preserved. Low intensity uses scored second highest at 32%.

Regarding the overall "character" of the park—based on a scale from fully natural to groomed and refined—most respondents liked the images on the natural side of the spectrum.

Some of the sample program elements and activities presented received clear input from the public, while others gathered only mixed results. Dog parks and playgrounds, for example, were not well received, and a majority of people indicated they did not want them in the new park. Program elements which were well supported at the workshop included on-site parking, picnic areas and restrooms.

Detailed results from the vision workshop are provided in the Appendix for reference.

ONLINE SURVEY

Immediately after the Vision Workshop was concluded, an online survey was made available which closely replicated the exercises found at the public meeting. The online survey was conducted to allow people who did not attend the workshop to participate in the same discussion, and was made available for a period of several weeks. With over 300 responses, the results of the survey generally mirrored those of the workshop.

Summary of Survey Results

When asked to select the images that best represent the desired "overall character" of the park, a majority of respondents (53%) were split between the first two images, which depicted a more naturalized, informal setting. An additional 22% preferred the other end of the spectrum, which represented a more formal or "groomed" appearance. The remainder

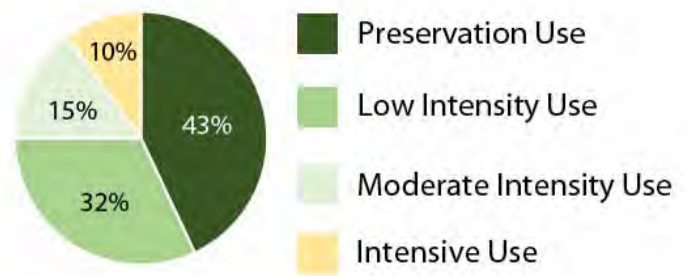


Figure 13. Results of the vision workshop survey, when asked what percentage of the property should be used for different purposes.

"A community space for gatherings and events. ...a reprieve for residents and workers."

~ Clifton Park Resident

VISIONING WORKSHOP

A SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INPUT ON PARK VISION

Use of Land Area

- There was broad consensus on keeping a large portion of the park property very natural in character.
- A smaller percentage should be set aside for low to moderately intensive uses.
- A small percentage of the park property should be set aside for high intensity uses.

Overall Character of Park

The three most popular images selected to represent the “overall character” of the park.

Desired Program Elements

- Picnic areas and pavilions
- On-site parking
- Restroom facilities
- Open recreation area
- Outdoor classroom and/or amphitheater
- Naturalized water feature
- Garden element
- Main entrances on Moe Road and Maxwell Drive
- Focal feature such as a gazebo or bridge

Other Suggestions

- Trail connections to Collins Park and the library
- Possible informal play areas
- Some paved, ADA accessible trails
- Preserve wild feeling in natural areas
- Interpretive elements
- Locations for photo opportunities
- Possible future civic use on adjacent town property



VISIONING WORKSHOP

of the respondents selected images which were somewhere in between.

Similar to the results of the workshop, a large number of participants expressed their desire to keep a majority of the park property “natural” or undisturbed. This was reflected in the use intensity exercise, where people indicated they wanted to see an average of 44% of the site remain preserved. Low intensity uses scored second highest at 24%.

There was strong support for picnic tables at various locations throughout the site, in addition to a few picnic pavilions. Unobtrusive parking areas on both sides of the park were considered highly desirable, as were restroom facilities. An open space recreational lawn area with a fairly natural character was supported. Some type of outdoor classroom or amphitheater was favored by many, with some pointing out that they could be used by the surrounding schools.

There was fairly high support for a central design element, such as a naturalized water feature or enhanced stream area, as well as for a focal feature such as a gazebo or bridge. An informal garden element also received support.

Program elements which received low to moderate support include a dog park, formal playground, and a health and fitness area. A summary of the workshop and online survey results is provided in the appendix.

Conclusions from the Visioning Process

The visioning workshop was successful in clarifying the public’s preferences for the overall desired park character and program elements. The design charrette was the next step toward determining which areas of the park are appropriate for the different elements, and further clarifying the public vision for their town center park.

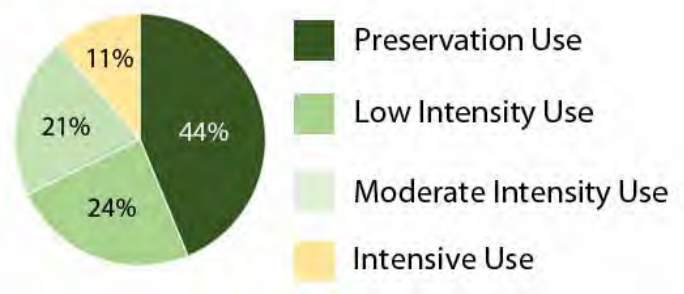


Figure 14. Results of the online survey were very similar to the results from the vision workshop.

DESIGN CHARRETTE

DESIGN CHARRETTE

A design charrette was held at the Clifton Park Senior Center on Wednesday, June 5, 2019. The goal was to continue the public involvement process by encouraging participants to think about what areas of the site they would like to see certain activities, and draw their ideas on a map.

Design Charrette Methodology

Arriving participants were directed to walk around the room and view a series of boards summarizing the results from the visioning workshop and online exercise. Next, each attendee was given an 11 x 17" map of the property and invited to draw out their own ideas for the park, including the specific areas where they envisioned general land use areas, various activities and programming, and access and circulation patterns.

After the charrette, the maps were reviewed by the consulting team to determine patterns and to identify next steps.

Summary of Public Input

Many of the findings from the design charrette were consistent with the results of the visioning workshop. A majority of participants expressed the desire to preserve the intact mature forest areas and the wetland. Many showed the Moe Road entrance as a primary



Figure 15. Participants at the June 5th Design Charrette at the Clifton Park Senior Center.



Figure 16. Participants at the June 5th Design Charrette at the Clifton Park Senior Center.



access point, and either the existing town safety building or the Maxwell Drive frontage (or both) as entries on the east side. Most proposed concepts include restroom facilities, often in multiple locations and generally near the park access points. Most people would like parking areas on both sides of the park, near the entrances.

DESIGN CHARRETTE



Figure 17. *The consulting team reviews the sketches created by design charrette participants.*

Many concepts featured a primary multi-use trail or laneway connection between the east and west sides of the park, with smaller divergent woodland paths throughout the property. Many people felt that the primary east-west connection should not permit vehicular traffic, with the exception of emergency vehicles. There was strong support for a trail design that minimizes tick habitat.

Provision for a future connection to Collins Park to the north was seen as desirable. Some indicated that Collins Park would be a preferable location for some of the more active recreational uses being considered for the park. Many concepts included either botanical gardens or native plantings with interpretive elements, generally located along the waterway, or near the entrances. Event spaces such as an amphitheater, gazebo or pergola, civic arts center, outdoor classrooms, farmers market, and community gardens were mentioned frequently. There was general support for locating higher intensity uses—such as structures or parking lots—in the pine plantation and successional forest areas of the park, rather than the oak forest or wetland areas.

A large percentage of residents felt strongly that the majority of the park should be kept very natural, with passive recreation being the primary use, no building construction, and minimal site disturbance. However, a significant number of people also felt that the park should be a strong civic *destination*—a place to bring the community together—with a variety of amenities where people will want to return. Finding the right balance of these visions will be the key to a successful park. A future vision of the park which includes more active attractions or civic functionality could potentially incorporate the adjacent town owned properties.

PRESENTATION OF DRAFT PLAN

On September 18th, the initial Town Park Draft Master Plan was publicly presented by the design team at the Clifton Park Halfmoon Public Library. The comments received at that meeting, as well as via the online comments in the weeks that followed, were used to refine the design with the help of the advisory committee and prepare the final plan.

DESIGN CHARRETTE

A SAMPLING OF PUBLIC INPUT FROM THE JUNE DESIGN CHARETTE

Overall Character

- ≈ There is a broad consensus on keeping a majority of the park property very natural in character.
- ≈ A lesser percentage can be set aside for low to moderately intensive programming and design.
- ≈ A small percentage could be set aside for low to moderately intensive programming and design.

Generally Supported Program Elements

- ≈ Picnic areas and pavilions
- ≈ Onsite parking
- ≈ Restroom facilities
- ≈ Open recreation area
- ≈ Outdoor classroom and/or amphitheater
- ≈ Naturalized water feature
- ≈ Garden element
- ≈ Main entrances on Moe Road and Maxwell Drive
- ≈ Focal feature such as a gazebo or bridge

Generally Supported Ideas

- ≈ Some paved, accessible trails
- ≈ Connections to Collins Park and the library
- ≈ Possible informal play areas
- ≈ Preserve wild feeling in natural areas
- ≈ Interpretive elements
- ≈ Locations for photo opportunities
- ≈ Possible future civic use on adjacent town property

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS & RECOMMENDATIONS

OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

Every parcel of land possesses its own inherent attributes which directly inform the appropriate potential uses for the property. These can include, but are not limited to, micro-climate, topography, soil types, vegetation, existing infrastructure and utilities, site access, environmental factors, site history, adjacent uses and structures, traffic patterns, noise, and views. An analysis of these characteristics reveals which areas of a site are best suited for certain uses and which areas should be conserved or preserved. Potential access points, circulation patterns, and exterior connections can also be determined.

The Clifton Park town park parcel presents an important opportunity to preserve an intact forest fragment in a highly developed commercial area. Because it contains a mature forest, the southeastern portion of the site is an especially high priority for preservation. The successional forest area and pine plantation on the eastern sides of the property have more development potential, as these areas are not as ecologically important as the mature forested areas. The northern part of the site, while also forested, is conspicuously close to Route 146, which is a noisy road with a high traffic volume. Some judicious development in this area may be appropriate, as opposed to developing the more removed forested areas, which better lend themselves to quiet contemplative spaces. The southwest

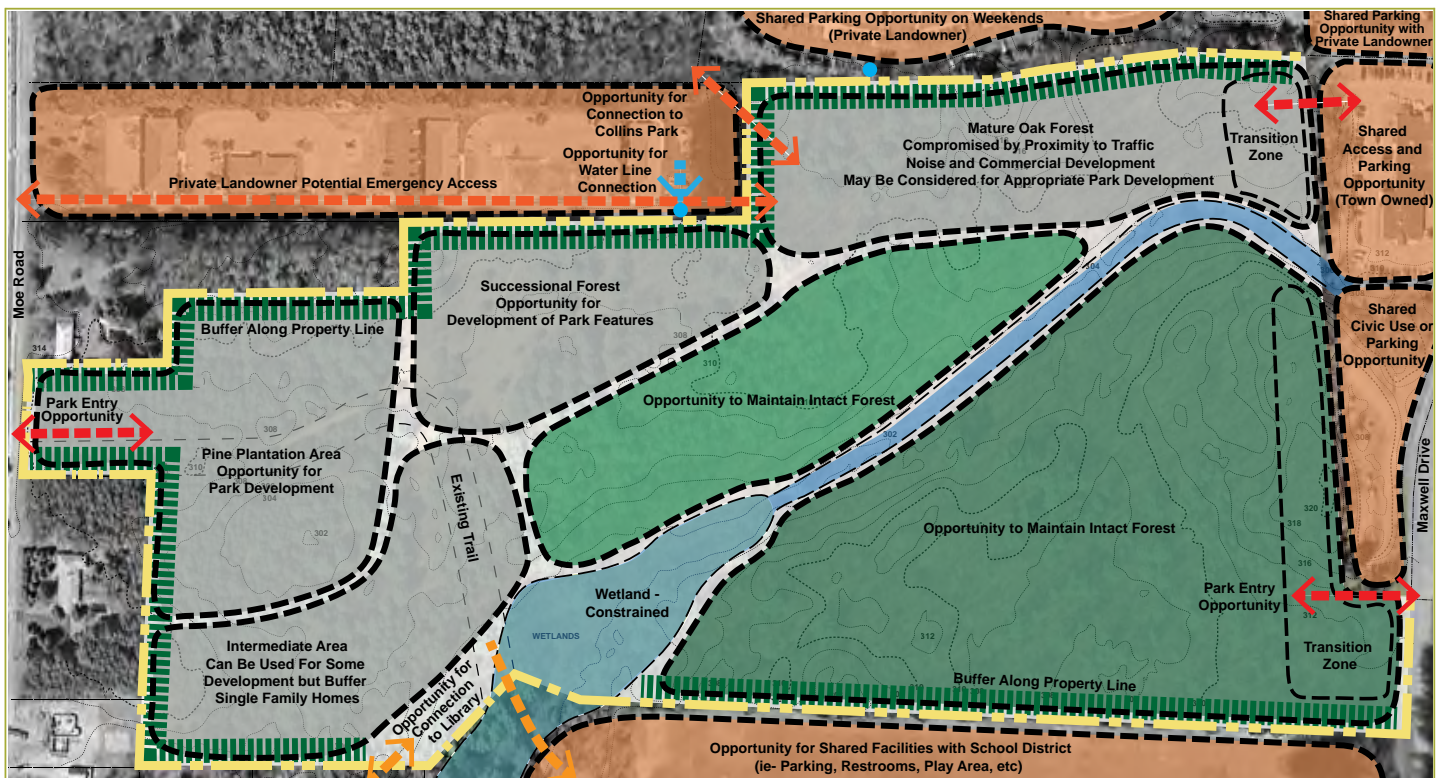


Figure 18. Summary map showing many of the site observations. It was generally desired to try and preserve the darker green areas of the property, while the lighter green or grey areas were found to be more suitable to programming or disturbance.

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

corner of the property is adjacent to single family homes, which should be buffered from potentially noisy park uses. Maintaining a vegetated buffer around most of the property's exterior is important to protect the park's internal atmosphere from exterior visual or noise infringements.

Potential access points include the existing access point on Moe Road, the frontage on Maxwell Drive, and the parking area behind the public safety building.

The eastern boundary of the parcel borders town property, which contains existing parking associated with the public safety building, and a stormwater basin south of that property. There is potential to share the existing parking area, and/or redesign or relocate the stormwater basin so that parking could be constructed over it. An opportunity also exists for on street parking on Maxwell Drive.

The existing water main on the adjacent property to the north offers an opportunity for water access, which may be desirable for restroom facilities or potential water features.

Given the proximity of the park to local parks and trails, many opportunities exist for connections to the greater Clifton Park trail and open space network. Some of these links can't be completed within the scope of this plan, because segments of the necessary connection routes are owned or controlled by others. However, provision for future connecting segments is advisable.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the professional analysis of the site, as well as input from the public and town during the visioning and design process, the following findings and recommendations have been developed which will guide the design of the park master plan. These take the form of "design principles" and recommended program elements to be included in the design.

Park "Design Principles"

The following design principles have been developed as a guide for the desired design of the new Clifton Park Town Center Park.

- Create a destination for the Clifton Park community.
- Create a safe and attractive pedestrian route between the Shenendehowa High School and the town center.
- Enable future pedestrian connections to nearby Collins Park, Shatekon and Arongen elementary schools, and the library.
- Maintain a significant tree buffer around the park to the greatest extent possible to

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

mitigate noise and light from the surrounding land uses, and protect the privacy of neighbors where appropriate.

- Create safe, accessible and attractive park entrances.
- Maintain and preserve a majority of the mature forest and manage it with good forestry practices, where low intensity pedestrian paths and nature trails would be allowed through this area.
- Utilize the dense red pine plantation and successional forested areas for the development of higher intensity park programming, while preserving the more secluded areas of older growth forest that provide a tranquil setting.
- Create opportunities for outdoor education and interpretive exhibits of the natural features.
- Develop and utilize opportunities to share facilities such as parking and restrooms with nearby properties where appropriate.
- Create a hierarchy of trails, including some wider ones to serve as community gathering spaces, as well as smaller multi-use paths, walking trails and nature trails, with handicapped accessibility where feasible.
- Create opportunities for passive outdoor recreation and usable gathering spaces in a natural setting, respecting the site and the public's wishes to maintain it in a natural way.
- Utilize the adjacent town-owned property for shared facilities such as parking, bathrooms and opportunities for future civic functions which could be designed as an extension of the public park.

Desired Program Elements

Trails: Three different types of trails should be included in the design, as follows:

- *Shared-Use Path.* This path would be the primary pedestrian corridor which connects through the property from east to west. It would be designed as a wide (approximately 12-15 feet in width) pedestrian and bicycle laneway as the central spine of the park. This surface would likely be paved, handicapped accessible and able to accommodate limited vehicles for emergency or maintenance access only, as necessary. The surface should be permeable pavement. This should be designed as a promenade or concourse with occasional seating areas, benches along the route, display areas for artwork, interactive children's activities and interpretive education. It should include limited lighting, and have some maintained (mown) areas on both sides to keep the main path free of ticks.
- *Secondary Paths:* These paths would be secondary routes connecting to other activities within the park and connecting to adjacent areas of interest such as Collins Park and the library. Typically five to eight feet in width, with a groomed surface of either stone dust or porous pavement. This network would be designed to provide

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

loops which connect back around, providing a variety of walking route options. Opportunities for interpretive or educational interaction. Example: Children's Nature Encounter Trail.

- Nature Trails: These paths would be ungroomed, natural or woodchip trail surface routes which meander through the wooded areas of the park and provide quiet seclusion for walking. Opportunities for interpretive or educational interaction.

Parking & Access: Parking is desired on both sides of the park (east and west). The extent of necessary parking should be scaled over time: where little may be needed at first, but space is reserved for later expansion to meet future growth as needed.

- There are opportunities for nearby shared parking that should be explored. Utilizing the town's existing parking area at the public safety building seems to be an obvious workable shared parking option but that area may not be as accessible as others due to storm drainage channels that exist right off the edge of the parking lot. Sharing or utilizing existing parking could be a short term solution but would probably require some design and construction to facilitate it and to create a trailhead and paths to the chosen location(s).
- Parking and vehicle access should be provided within a reasonable proximity to any picnic areas to facilitate people bringing coolers and similar picnic provisions.
- Parking at the Moe Road entry point is possible and most suitable in the area noted as pine plantation.
- Parking on the Maxwell Drive side can be accommodated on the town owned parcel to the east, in the area currently being used as a stormwater detention basin. This approach is desirable to keep this side of the park in its natural vegetated condition, reduce removal of trees for parking areas, but it will require a redesigned storm drainage system. On-street parking could also be established along Maxwell Drive.
- The park entrance on the Maxwell Drive side should be welcoming, highly visible, with design elements aligning with the intersection with Southside Drive for vehicle and pedestrian circulation.
- Parking for higher demand uses such as an amphitheater, farmers market, etc. would be considered as part of each of those particular uses and each as a separate decision to include with the use or not (look for shared parking options).

Picnic Areas: Picnic areas should be located in quiet enclaves but within reasonable walking distance from parking areas, with one picnic area minimally at either end of the park property (east and west). All picnic areas should include tables, and at least one picnic area should include pavilions. If trash/recycling bins are not to be provided, then a carry-in/carry out policy would need to be established.

Restrooms: Many people expressed an interest in having restrooms available in the new park. Some people indicated they need to be located at either end of the property, similar

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

to the picnic areas. In the short-term, people could be directed to use the existing facilities at the Public Safety Building and Collins Park. In the longer term, a location for dedicated facilities should be established near the east and west ends.

Gathering Area: A central gathering area should be incorporated as the focal point of the park to provide a place for people to meet, a space to host gatherings or small events and develop a unique community identity. This feature could be relatively small—accommodating an area with a gazebo, pavilion, or water feature—or larger with an open lawn area and stage for performances. This area could be used for meetings, outdoor classrooms, musical groups, events and small scale theater in the park. Establishing this as an “informal” open area provides greater flexibility than a formal amphitheater would provide.

Outdoor Classroom: A small space devoted as an outdoor classroom should be provided to host small local school outings, library events, outdoor study or yoga. While this area could potentially be incorporated into the gathering area described above, ideally it should be intimate, peaceful and relatively secluded.

Interpretive Exhibits: Interpretive exhibits should be incorporated into the park design to provide interesting and educational info about the land and its ecological features. In lieu of large freestanding interpretive signs or plaques—which are static and expensive—these exhibit points could be designed to be minimalistic and dynamic, using simple “QR Codes” which link to website presentations on smartphones. The details of the different exhibits should be developed in coordination with local science teachers who can integrate the exhibits with course material.

Point of Interest Areas: These are aesthetic feature areas specifically designed or framed within the natural landscape to create points of interest and unique photo opportunities. These could include an attractive bridge, water feature, and/or art and sculpture located at various points along the pedestrian routes.

Additional Program Elements Considered

Amphitheater/Performance Area: In lieu of an open gathering/performance space described above, a more formal amphitheater arrangement could be established with tiered/stepped lawn areas where people could sit and enjoy an outdoor performance. The formal amphitheater arrangement however provides less flexibility than an informal gathering area, received less public support, and was therefore not included in the design.

Children’s Activity Area/Trail: Encountered features designed to encourage nature discovery, exploration and movement such as logs as a balance beam, boulders to climb

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

on, sand play area, etc. Formal playgrounds were not well supported in the visioning process, and it was felt that the natural elements of the park itself would provide the best play/exploration area.

Adult Activities: Bocci, pickleball, fitness trail and disc golf were among many activities suggested by local residents. Bocci ball could be incorporated informally into picnic areas, but it was felt that most of these facilities would be more appropriate to be added in other existing parks alongside similar active recreation activities.

Gardens: Areas of the park designed and planted to be aesthetic areas. These should be designed as naturalistic ‘gardens’ which are complimentary to the native and natural forest.

Farmers Market: A farmer’s market was suggested as a potential feature of the park, however the size and scale of this could become an issue in terms of access and parking. It was felt that having it nearby—rather than in the park itself—brings users to the park area without developing park lands for that use.

Complimentary Civic Uses: A complimentary civic use such as an Arts & Cultural Center was heavily advocated for, and it is noted as a community need in the latest Recreational Plan. Given the fact that the town owns the property to the immediate east of the park, it provides the unique opportunity for the future redevelopment of the site of the Public Safety Building into a more extensive public use. In that scenario, the design of the park could be “expanded” outwards to the east as part of a new Arts & Cultural Center on that site, rather than cutting down trees within the park property to accommodate it. This approach would also provide the opportunity to develop shared parking for both the park and new civic use. Other potential civic uses, such as a new town hall, were also suggested. Locating some of these uses on the park property itself may require an alienation of parklands process, so it may not be feasible. A complimentary civic use located adjacent to the property would however be a positive addition to the civic vitality of the town center and create another opportunity for shared parking. At this stage, the programming needs of any community arts center or town offices are largely unknown, and developing these elements are outside the scope of this park plan. It is recommended that a separate feasibility study be conducted to determine the actual programming needs of the community, including the required space, budget and analysis of different location options within the town including adaptive re-use of other buildings.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

Utilizing the findings of the ecological study, the public input and the team's analysis, the first step to developing the design was determining how to incorporate the east-west pedestrian passage through the site. The connection from the high school and Moe Road over to the town center / Maxwell Drive area was largely considered to be the most important design element, as it would guide much of the rest of the design. A number of different configurations were tested for this connection. Each configuration attempted to preserve a large area of the property as “natural/preserved” land, reduce habitat fragmentation and meet the “design principles” described earlier. Early attempts to



Figure 19. Early alternative concept for the park, providing a prominent pedestrian east-west connection from Moe Road to the Maxwell Drive / Southside Drive intersection. This approach helped to preserve a lot of the existing forest on the east side of the property, and kept most of the disturbance on the west side. However, the main path fragmented the woods in the southeast, which was a higher priority for preservation.

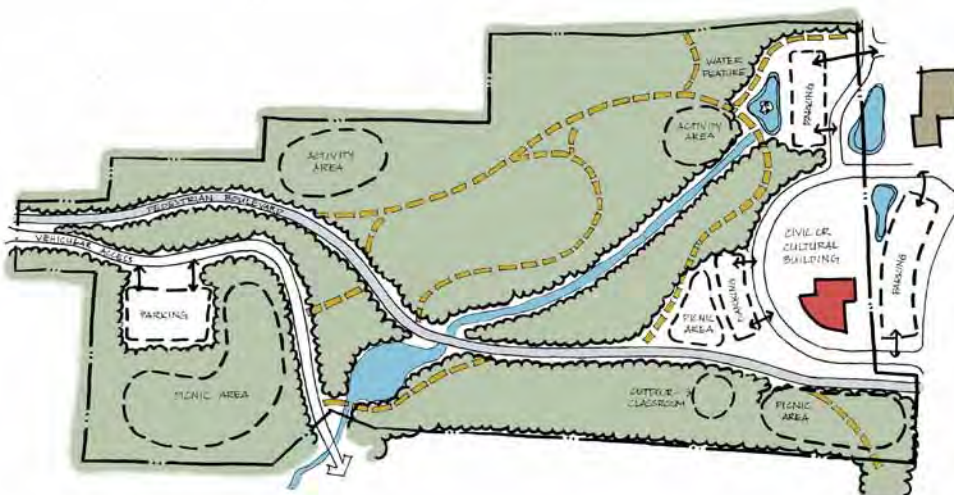


Figure 20. Early alternative concept for the park, providing an east-west connection and exploring the addition of a civic / cultural building on the east side which was integrated into the park. This approach helped to preserve the center of the property, with disturbance on either end. Ultimately, this concept was determined to be too disruptive. It did however provide parking on the east side which would replace the existing stormwater basin on town property without the need for parking directly on the park property.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

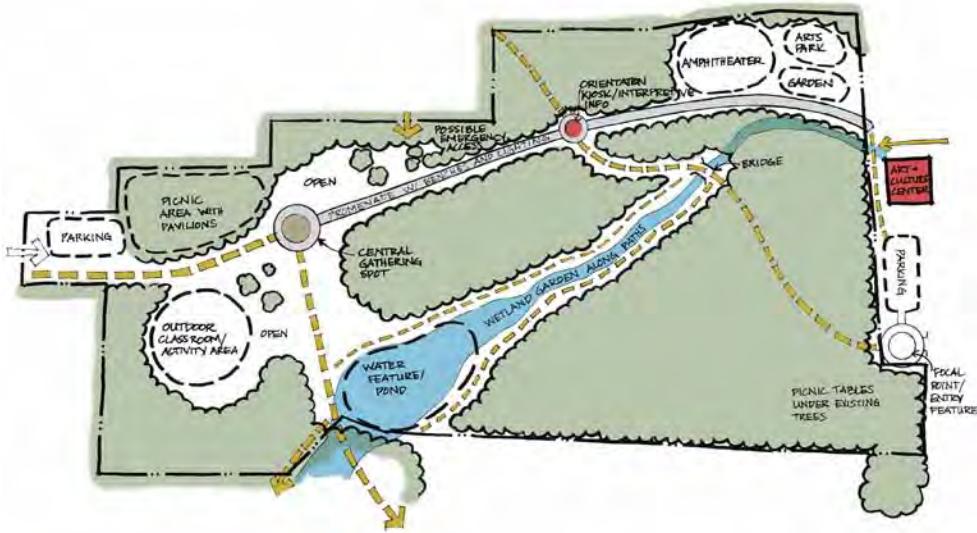


Figure 21. Early alternative concept for the park, providing an east-west connection from Moe Road to the existing Public Safety building. This option also explored the idea of a new arts / culture center being added on town property adjacent to the park. This concept was excellent at preserving a large portion of the older growth woods in the southwest without any fragmentation. The pedestrian connection, which would exit the park behind the public safety building, was not seen as strong, as it would be better connecting at the Southside Drive intersection.



Figure 22. Building off of the lessons from the previous concepts, this design idea keeps the main pedestrian path north of the waterway, however it extends out along Maxwell Drive to terminate at Southside Drive. This conceptual approach was seen as the best in that it preserved a large area of woods in the southeast without fragmenting them. In lieu of a formal amphitheater, a large open lawn is proposed which could be used for passive enjoyment or could host larger gatherings for music performances, stage theatre, etc. This concept was used as a starting point to develop the draft plan.

directly connect from the Moe Road frontage to Southside Drive typically resulted in the disturbance or fragmentation of the mature wooded area in the southeast corner of the property, which was not ideal. Eventually, a conceptual layout was developed that avoided disruption of these older woods, and instead brought the multi-use path out of the park just south of the public safety building and down along Maxwell Drive to the Southside Drive intersection. This approach was beneficial because it avoided disruption of the woods and showcased the pedestrian path in a highly visible way along a public road, drawing attention to the park. Unlike previous concepts, this design also replaced the idea of a formal amphitheater with a large open lawn which could host outdoor gatherings. For these reasons, this last schematic concept was viewed as the best approach, and was used as a starting point to development of the draft plan.

CHAPTER 5

PARK MASTER PLAN



PARK MASTER PLAN



This master plan is the culmination of work by many people who have over the years envisioned a special place within the heart of the Clifton Park Town Center, a retreat and respite from the usual, and a place where townspeople can gather as a community in a beautiful setting. This vision was created from an analysis of site conditions, ecological sensitivity, the surrounding context and the input of many local residents.

The synthesis of this information formed the basis for establishing goals and principles for the property—an overall vision for the park and a blueprint for future design decisions. It is anticipated that over time, public attitudes and the needs of the community may likely evolve. As this occurs, we anticipate that the details of this plan will have some flexibility, while the overarching principles shall remain sound and intact.

Figure 23.
The park is envisioned to provide a relaxing atmosphere, similar to this image from a park in Massachusetts.

PARK MASTER PLAN

THE PARK MASTER PLAN

The main feature of the park—"The Promenade"—a grand east-west pathway would be the highlight and focus of the park and a complement to the wooded areas. This shared-use path would provide a quiet walking route, with occasional benches and seating areas and other points of interest along the way, such as interpretive exhibits and outdoor sculpture. Thoughtful inclusion of nature-play features in which children could be engaged along the side of the path would add to the enjoyment and intrigue of the promenade for kids. The path would be designed to accommodate bicycles and wheelchairs and be gently illuminated for evening use. Constructed of a porous pavement, it would allow rainwater to pass through while being durable enough for wheelchairs, bikes and winter plowing.

The promenade would be aligned to highlight the mature forest and in the central-west part of the property would open up to and surround a wide lawn area—the "Glade"—with a mixture of both new plantings and existing trees to provide shade. The open lawn area would be perfect for relaxing for a picnic lunch, playing Frisbee, or enjoying a special community gathering listening to live music from the open-air pavilion.

Smaller, secondary paths branching off of the main trail would lead people to more secluded areas with picnic pavilions, an outdoor classroom area and bathrooms. Beyond that, informal nature trails would provide walking loops around the property and to other areas of interest. An informal picnic area, provided at the southeast corner of the property, would provide a quiet place for people in the town center to stop by on their lunch break with easy access in and out.

TOWN PARK VISION STATEMENT

A unique park and civic space is envisioned that creates a sense of outdoor community. People of all ages will recognize this as a place where natural areas are appreciated and interpreted. The property will serve primarily as a natural retreat. An interesting and attractive setting will serve visitors throughout the seasons. Large areas will be managed so ecosystem and environmental processes occur relatively unimpeded. In appropriate areas, openings in the tree canopy will allow necessary sunlight and lawn/naturalized garden areas (shade garden, butterfly garden, etc.). Groomed areas enhanced through inviting design are blended into the setting. Accommodations for activities that are of relatively low to moderate intensity will be made and necessary enhancements and support facilities will be carefully constructed.

A primary shared-use path corridor will be provided and sensitively designed gathering places will be established for appreciation of natural and community history and local art and culture and nature paths will be carefully placed to allow access to natural areas for quiet retreat. Collins Park will be made an integral part of the park complex. Shared-use path connections to adjacent public places including the library, school properties, and the town center area will help make the park a centerpiece of the community.

This property will be increasingly appreciated as a green haven woven into the fabric of the active town center area. It will serve as a source of continuing community pride and enjoyment for both current and future generations.



Figure 24. Rendering of the proposed Clifton Park Master Plan.

PARK MASTER PLAN



Figure 25. (Above) Photo rendering of the proposed view looking along the Promenade—the main multi-use path through the park. The precise route of the path should be established to work around significant trees which should be saved so that they are integrated into the design. A significant tree could even be kept in the middle of the route as part of a seating area, with the path splitting to go around it on either side.



Figure 26. (Right) Proposed rendering of the entry path leading to the Glade, framed by a canopy of trees.

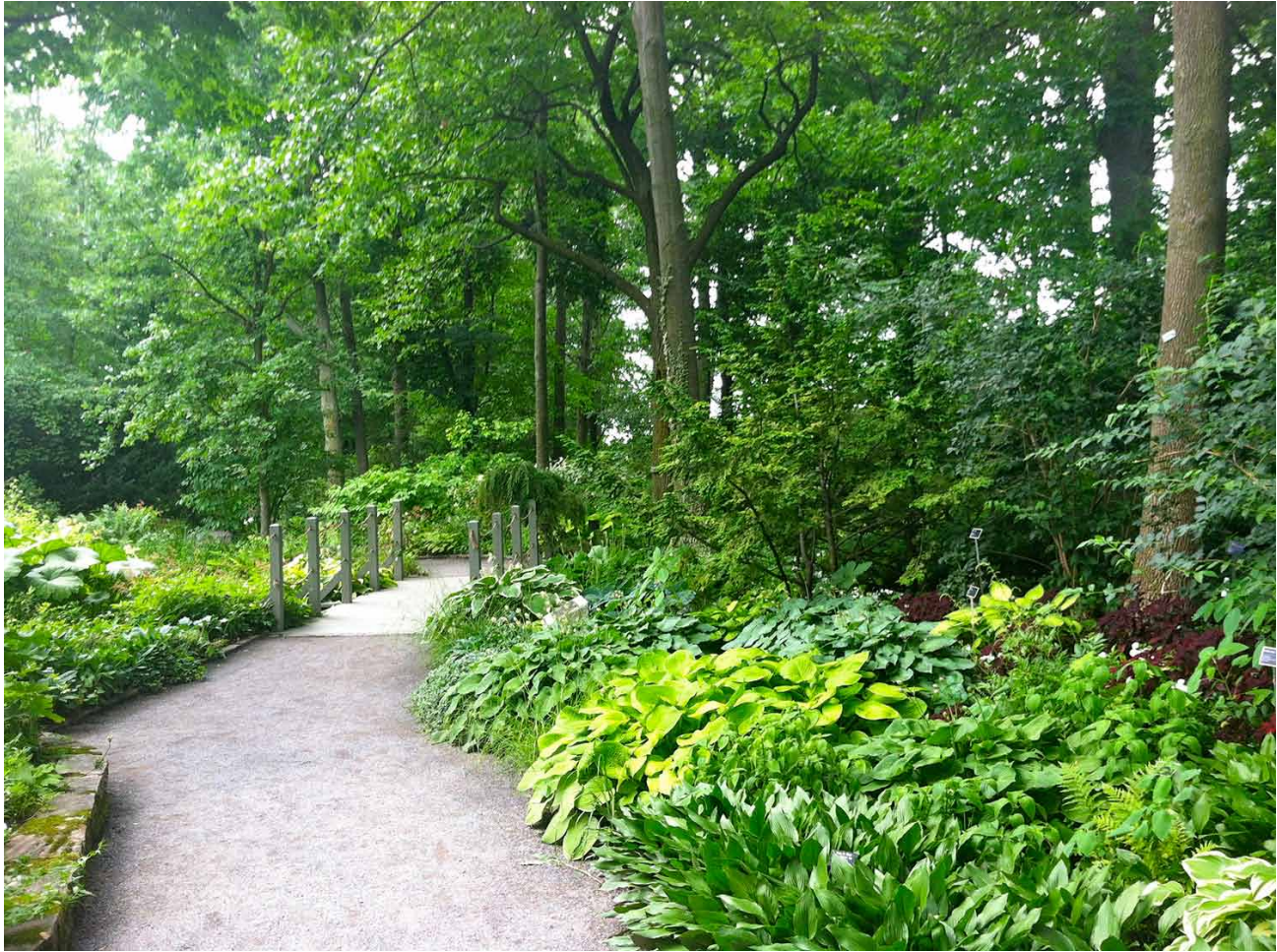


Figure 27. (Above) Photo of desired vision, showing how one of the side paths leading to a footbridge over the water could look, with new plantings along either side of the path.



Figure 28. (Left) The entry path leading into the Glade would be framed by a canopy of trees which create a gateway effect before it opens up to the wide lawn beyond.



Figure 29. (Right) Opportunities to leave the path and wander down to the wetland areas could be provided to give adults and children the ability to interact with the natural ecology.

PARK MASTER PLAN



Figure 30. Birds-eye rendering looking down on the Glade. Existing trees would be interspersed with new tree plantings in the lawn to provide shaded areas, with an open-air gazebo/performance structure at the far end.

FUTURE DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

Invasive Species

The ecological survey identified six invasive plant species found on the property, five of which are classified as “prohibited”. These invasive plants can harm the existing flora on the property, and will likely spread to other areas if left unchecked. It is recommended that a management plan be developed to control, remove and prevent the spread of these plants to the surrounding area as part of the implementation phases.

Forest Management

The wooded property contains a significant amount of downed trees, loose limbs and other organic debris which is part of the natural habitat and regenerative cycle of the forest. To preserve this cycle, it is recommended that a majority of the park property be left “as-is”, and cleanup of the forest floor be avoided in most areas. However, it is recommended that limited cleanup can occur along the travelled paths and activity areas where it may be beneficial to augment the natural landscape with new native understory plantings and groundcover. Likewise, it is recommended to prune low hanging limbs in pedestrian areas and have limited canopy trimming to allow more sunlight to reach understory growth that has been stunted by years of shade.

PARK MASTER PLAN

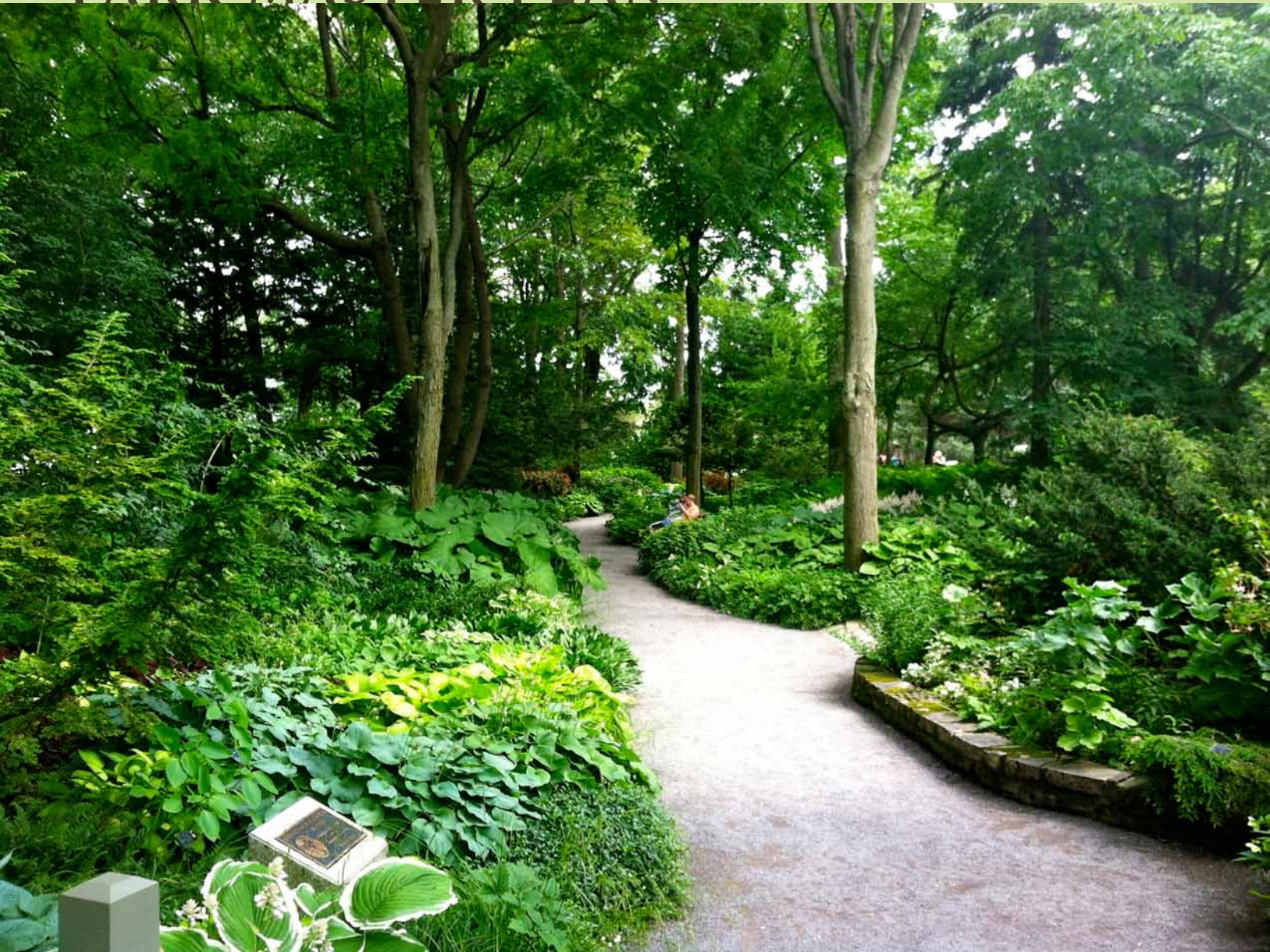


Figure 31. *Proposed vision for sidepath routes. The narrow pedestrian routes would be cleaned up of debris and low-hanging limbs, providing new native plantings on either side and small, unobtrusive identification plaques providing information on tree and plant species.*

Design Implementation

In looking forward to the next steps of implementing this plan on a more detailed level, the following considerations are highly recommended:

- A topographic survey of the property should be established which identifies and locates any significant trees, particularly in the proposed vicinity of the pedestrian promenade, the “Glade” and vehicle entry drives.
- The final route and extents of the shared-use path and western driveway should be determined in the field and staked out as part of design development. This would allow for the precise route centerline to be established while identifying trees to be preserved and incorporated into the design as much as possible.

PARK MASTER PLAN

- The final route of the main pedestrian path and western driveway can be arranged to meander around significant trees, or incorporate them in center islands, for best effect.
- There are three Red Maple trees along Maxwell Drive which are intended to be preserved and integrated into the final design, and should be preserved and protected (Figure 32). These trees were planted—along with assorted pine trees—between the road and the stormwater retention basin. The pine trees can be removed and replaced with new trees suitable for the sidewalk, however it is recommended that the red maples remain.



Figure 32. Red maple trees to preserve. Three red maple trees along Maxwell Drive, pictured at left, should be preserved and protected if possible as part of the tree-lined Promenade design along the road. The existing pine trees found in between can be removed and replaced with new tree plantings to create the formal entry path on the east side of the park.

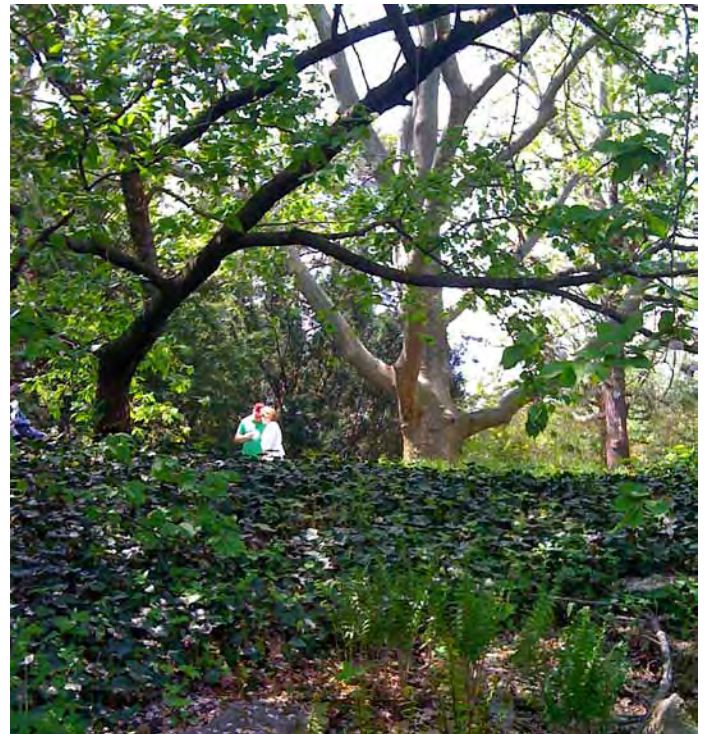


Figure 33. (Left and Above) Photos depicting the proposed vision and character of the park, with areas adjacent to footpaths cleaned up and supplemented with low plantings to frame the walk and provide interesting views.

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Figure 34. *Identifying significant trees to incorporate into the design along the route of the Promenade and Glade will be important to preserving the character of the park and providing ample shade as illustrated above.*

PLANNING “OUTSIDE” THE PARK - SURROUNDING AREA

During the course of this planning process, several issues arose which related to improvements desired *outside* of the boundaries of the town park property, or to other desired community needs. These items would require coordination and work outside of the park property, but were considered important and relevant enough that they should be addressed here.

The location of the site is highly favorable for forming pedestrian connections to other nearby places of interest. These future connections can only be made with cooperation from adjacent property owners, and possibly the procurement of easements or similar strategies, and are highly recommended.

- **Priority 1: Connection to Town Center.** The current master plan calls for a dedicated pedestrian path which passes through the site, terminating at the intersection of Maxwell Drive and Southside Drive. This intersection was chosen precisely because it would provide high visibility and potentially connects to the existing sidewalk infrastructure of the Town Center shopping area. It is highly recommended that this wide pedestrian path be continued eastward into the town center areas to link with existing shopping destinations, presumably on the south side of the existing road.

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- **Priority 2: Connection to Library.** It is recommended that a secondary trail connection be established between the park and the Clifton Park / Halfmoon Public Library. This trail connection should exit at the south of the park at the existing school district easement, cross the water, and then head south through the woods, following the water near the western edge of the school property. It would connect to the existing multi-use path which currently runs between the library and Arongen Middle School. (Figure 35)

- **Priority 3: Wetland Remediation.**

At the south end of the park, where the existing school district easement exits the property and crosses the waterway, there is a raised bed crossing the water with culverts underneath. This crossing and the undersized culverts have caused a backlog in the water drainage from the north that impedes the flow of water. It is recommended that this crossing be revised to improve the free flow of water, either by raising the path and replacing the culverts with sizes that would retain the seasonal hydrology of the water, or eliminate the culverts with a small bridge.



Figure 35. Yellow dashed line illustrates the recommended route for a new trail connection from the park to the library. The new trail would connect with the existing path and bridge south of the Arongen Middle School, which in turn connects with the library, Moe Road and Clifton Park Center Road.

- **Priority 4: Connection to Collins Park.** A future pedestrian trail connection to Collins Park in the north is recommended. Because this route would likely require more complex easements or acquisitions negotiated with private property owners, it is suggested that the town work on obtaining permission for this route over time as these adjacent properties are redeveloped in the future.

Community/Arts Center. During the course of the planning process, the community also expressed strong interest in the need for a community/arts center which could be located in the park. It was determined that locating this inside the boundary of the park would be too disruptive to the natural setting, and would likely require a large amount of parking and tree removal. There is still potential for such a facility to be located immediately adjacent to the park, or nearby. To conduct this effort seriously, it is recommended that a separate feasibility study be conducted to determine the actual community needs for such a facility, including programming types, required space, location options, ownership and a potential budget.

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PHASING

Development of the park may be completed in phases over a couple of years, rather than all at once. However, the residents of Clifton Park are very excited about this project, and throughout the planning process have repeatedly emphasized the importance of beginning work on the park as soon as possible. The feeling is that by making a strong start, the town residents will not get discouraged by lack of progress and lose enthusiasm or momentum for the project.

With that in mind, it is strongly recommended that the first phase of the project should achieve many of the primary goals identified for the park during the planning process. Once the initial framework has been established, the remaining park elements can be finalized and introduced in time. It is recommended that the town have all of the final design and construction documents completed for the entire park done up-front prior to construction. This gives the town the flexibility to put selected portions out to bid, or bid the entire package, as needed. If the town were to decide to construct the improvements in two phases, a potential approach would be recommended as follows.

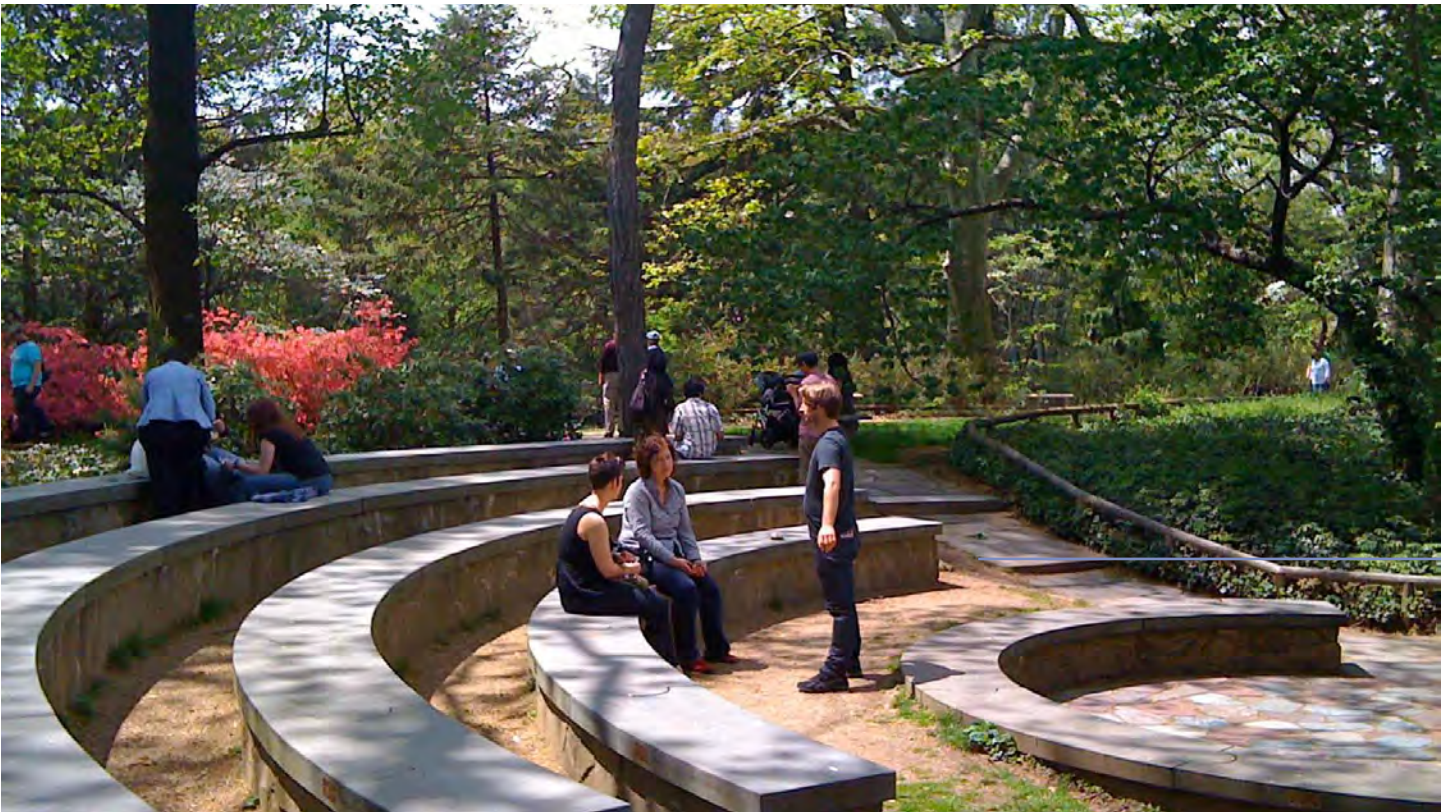


Figure 36. (Above) The outdoor classroom would be an asset to the nearby schools, the library, youth groups and a point of interest to visitors.

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PHASE ONE:

- Establishment of the primary east-west pedestrian passage—the “Promenade”—a +/- 15-foot wide path made of porous pavement material connecting Moe Road to Southside Drive, including associated seating, lighting, entry designs and related amenities. The promenade should be built and maintained to a high standard for longevity and to reduce maintenance costs, signaling to users that this is an important and well cared for park.
- Establishment of the “Glade”, landscaping and open-air performance structure.
- Establishment of the vehicular entry and access drives from Moe Road and Maxwell Drive.
- Establishment of the informal picnic area in the southeast corner.
- Establishment of utility connections on either end of the park.
- Establishment of parking areas at both the east and west sides of the property including reconfiguration of the existing stormwater management area along Maxwell Drive. Initial parking areas can be smaller, approximately 15 - 20 spaces each, but have the ability to be expanded over time to meet future needs.
- Establish temporary restroom facilities (e.g., port-a-potties).



Figure 37. Groundcover and new undergrowth tree plantings can be used to help infill the park setting. This approach also helps to create a low-maintenance park.

PHASE TWO:

- Establishing the secondary trails including pedestrian bridge(s) for stream crossings within the park.
- Construction of picnic pavilions and open-air structure in the glade.
- Establishing the outdoor classroom.
- Establish restrooms and other facilities not constructed in phase one.
- Expanding of any parking areas, if needed.
- Coordination with the school district on stream bank/wetland restoration and potential trail connections.

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FUNDING PARK IMPROVEMENTS

Master Plan as Foundation. The master plan will serve as the basis for development of more detailed area-specific and element-specific construction documents including erosion control and stormwater pollution prevention plan (SWPPP), tree protection plan, layout, grading and drainage, planting plans, construction plans, details, and specifications which would be developed to facilitate future park improvements. The phasing of the park construction will help spread costs out over time.

State and Federal Grants. The town has been fortunate to have secured support for the initial development of the park through a \$250,000 grant secured with the help of NYS Senator James Tedisco. The Dormitory Authority of the State of New York (DASNY) administers the state and municipal facilities (SAM) grant program which is well-suited to assist in funding facility development related to the park. Another DASNY program that may also be applicable is the Community Enhancement Facilities Assistance Program (CEFAP).



Figure 38. Senator James Tedisco (left) announces \$250,000 state grant award with town board members (from left) James Whalen, Amy Standaert, Supervisor Phil Barrett and Linda Walowit. The grant award will go toward the creation of the new Town Center Park. Photo credit Senator James Tedisco - NYS Senate Newsroom.

Some of the other grant programs that are recommended for consideration by the town. The New York State Consolidated Funding Application (CFA) process is a competitive grant program that puts several state funding sources in play including parks development grants from NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. Other programs accessible under the CFA process include:

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's (NYSDEC) programs. These may be able to assist with stormwater management improvements if the project can demonstrate improvement to water quality to downstream areas. The state's water quality improvement program (WQIP) has opportunities for "Nonagricultural Nonpoint Source

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Abatement and Control Funding”. NYSDEC also offers an Urban and Community Forestry Grants Program to support tree planting or tree maintenance projects.

Similarly the NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation Green Innovative Grant Program to support clean up, restoration and creating a green infrastructure asset out of the existing stormwater management facility and potentially other green infrastructure aspects of park development including:

- Permeable pavements—designed to reduce stormwater runoff by conveying rainfall through the pavement surface into an underlying reservoir where it can infiltrate.
- Establishment or restoration of floodplains, streams or wetlands provides greater storage of excess water in large storm events, reduces volume through infiltration and evaporation, and filters sediment and nutrients from the water.
- Bioretention systems are shallow vegetated depressions (e.g., bioswales, rain gardens, etc.) and are very effective at removing pollutants and reducing stormwater runoff.

Federal grant programs include the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) among others. The LWCF has been the major source of federal funding for park development and provides matching grants to states and local governments for the acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities.

Volunteer Services and Donations. Continuing to foster community support will be a key to completing the vision set forth in the park master plan. The park presents opportunities for volunteer efforts to supplement park maintenance and beautification and for capital contributions for park construction from willing donors.



Figure 39. Key park features could be sponsored by willing donors. This gazebo at Thousand Island Park was built to host a wedding and donated in memory of a community member.

Similar sponsored features could be provided for amenities such as benches, picnic pavilions and park entry features.

Groups will organize to help keep the park neat and free from litter and provide light maintenance support (e.g., maintain entry plantings) and contribute to outdoor education activities. (For example, organizations such as the Town of Clifton Park Open Space, Trails and Riverfront Committee offer nature-based education programs and events for young people and other interested community members.)

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The Town of Clifton Park. Many of the grant programs listed above require some kind of a match either cash and/or in-kind contributions of material, labor and equipment. For example, as the park master plan calls for placement of fill for construction of parking areas and the promenade and site grading improvements, the fill material (if donated) along with the labor and equipment required to prepare the subgrade for improvements may all be eligible as a match for a grant from NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. There are potential opportunities for the town to undertake improvements to the park through the use of town equipment and professional public works staff.

In addition, as budgets allow, the town can allocate funds for capital improvements or bond for a larger capital project.

Saratoga County. The Saratoga County Farmland and Open Space Preservation Program may be a source of funding including the relatively new Trail Grant Program.

The School District. There are several opportunities for collaboration including an opportunity to construct a shared-use path facility along the elementary school property to connect to the park (and thus linking westerly across Moe Road to the Shen High School campus) would offer many benefits to the students in terms of access to the natural resources of the park for outdoor education and the planned outdoor class room in addition to the recreation and health benefits for the use of the park for activities such as cross-country running.

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COST, OPERATION & MAINTENANCE

A schematic cost assessment estimates that the total cost of the park construction to be in the range of \$3.5 - 3.8 million dollars. Phase 1, which is assumed to include a majority of the work for the purposes of this report, is estimated to be approximately \$3.4 million. The town however has the flexibility to divide the work into different sized phases as needed. A copy of the detailed assessment is provided in the appendix for reference.

The projected costs of operation and maintenance for this community facility, once fully constructed, are estimated as outlined below. These estimates are in 2019 dollars, and subject to change.

I. PARK FEATURE MAINTENANCE COMPONENT (labor)

A.	Turf grass mowing: 16 employee hrs./week x 24 weeks x \$25/hr. =	\$ 9,600
B.	Turf grass fertilization, aeration and repairs: 16 employee hrs./week x 4 weeks x \$25/hr. =	\$ 1,600
C.	Spring clean-up, Fall leaf collection, and tree limbing: 32 employee hrs./week x 6 weeks x \$25/hr. =	\$ 4,350
D.	Trash collection: 4 employee hrs./week x 32 weeks x \$25/hr. =	\$ 3,200
E.	Restroom and other facility maintenance: 8 employee hrs./week x 32 weeks x \$25/hr. =	\$ 6,400
F.	Snow removal: 16 employee hrs./week x 12 weeks x \$30/hr. =	\$ 5,760
G.	Seasonal summer staff: 16 employee hrs./week x 12 weeks x \$20/hr. =	\$ 3,840
	<i>Annual Maintenance Labor Subtotal =</i>	<i>\$34,750</i>

II. SPECIAL EVENTS

A.	Assume 12 events per year requiring additional staff for safety, operations, and set-up/take down 16 employee hrs./event x 12 events x \$25/hr. =	\$ 4,800
	<i>Annual Special Events Labor Subtotal =</i>	<i>\$ 4,800</i>

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III. UTILITIES

A.	Electrical service at \$200/month x 12 months =	\$ 2,400
B.	<u>Water, sewer at \$100/month x 8 months =</u>	<u>\$ 800</u>
	<i>Annual Utilities Subtotal =</i>	<i>\$ 3,200</i>

IV. EQUIPMENT and MATERIALS

A.	Turf Grass: Grass seed, fertilizer and mulch	\$ 3,000
B.	Path wood chips	\$ 2,000
C.	Promenade chip stone	\$ 2,000
D.	Waste-can liners	\$ 1,000
E.	Maintenance equipment fuel and oil	\$ 2,000
F.	Rest room supplies	\$ 3,000
G.	Seasonal flower plantings	\$ 5,000
H.	<u>Other</u>	<u>\$ 4,000</u>

Annual Equipment and Materials Subtotal = \$22,000

V. ANNUAL SET-ASIDE for REPAIRS and REPLACEMENT

A.	Scheduled facility component replacement: Light standards, Pavilion and restroom roof replacement, pavement repairs, Foot bridge maintenance, tree and shrub replacement, park sign maintenance, bench replacement and repair, other misc./vandalism repairs. Yearly amount to maintain to establish approximate \$100,000 capital reserve:	\$ 5,000
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VI. OTHER UNDEFINED ITEMS

A.	Miscellaneous Category	\$ 4,000
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ANNUAL PARK OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE TOTAL \$73,750

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CONCLUSION

The Clifton Park community has taken action. In just a few short years we have come together to not only preserve a valuable open space asset in the heart of town, but put in motion the process by which this property can be sensitively enhanced into a unique and inviting town center park. This is an investment in the future and part of the town's overall goal of having a network of active and passive recreation areas, working farmland and natural areas coupled with an interconnected trail system that contribute to our quality of life. It is our shared hope that the completion of this master plan will provide significant continued momentum to solidify the public's vision and strike the desired balance between preservation and enhancement. The thoughtful implementation of this plan will help us realize the full potential of this new park; adding significantly our open space and recreation assets and experiences for both current and future generations.

Let's keep moving forward!



APPENDIX

Ecological Assessment Report Workshop and Online Survey Results Schematic Cost Estimate