

To: Fort Williams Advisory Commission and
Cape Elizabeth Town Council

From: Michael K. McGovern

Re: Fort Williams Park
Looking Towards 50 Years of Municipal Ownership

Date: August 6, 2010

The Town of Cape Elizabeth has owned what is now Fort Williams Park for 46 years. The property has evolved from a ninety acre expanse of dilapidated buildings to one of Maine's finest municipal parks. The early years of municipal ownership saw great debate on what buildings to preserve, uses to allow and the degree to which the municipal government should invest property tax dollars in the park.

There have been a number of citizen committees who have studied the park over the years, most notably the 1975-1976 Fort Williams Study Committee which recommended the "predominantly park" status that was subsequently approved and implemented by the Town Council.



The "predominantly park" status has been reaffirmed several times over the years including earlier this year by the Fort Williams Advisory Commission.

The Fort Williams Advisory Commission recently presented to the Town Council a list of capital needs. The commission continues to look at means by which to

generate revenue within the park, but a broad based fee is not being considered at this time following the recent citizen vote against fees.

This update seeks to synthesize various recommendations and suggestions made over the last several years into a five year implementable plan of action. It also addresses a number of issues on how the park is managed and funded.

This update does not relate to the separate Museum at Portland Head Light or to the Portland Head Light property.

Park Funding

The maintenance and operation of Fort Williams Park is funded in the general fund with an appropriation of \$160,808. In addition, approximately \$30,000 is funded elsewhere in the municipal budget for employee benefits and for insurances. The purchase of mowers and equipment used in the park are separately funded. The Town also has a Fort Williams Park Capital Fund which currently receives \$45,000 in revenue generated within the park and which spends these funds on projects approved by the Town Council. Therefore, excluding equipment and administrative overhead, approximately \$236,000 is spent a year for Fort Williams Park of which 81% is paid for through tax dollars and 19% through revenues.

The Fort Williams Advisory Commission has identified approximately \$850,000 in capital needs to be paid for through the Fort Williams Park Capital Fund and the general fund over the next four years. Of this amount, \$500,000 is for new construction or for major new projects over \$100,000 in cost. The balance is for routine maintenance of stone walls, lawns, plants, trees, tennis courts, playgrounds, paths and buildings. The capital needs items total does not include \$6.2 million in estimated costs for Battery Blair, a proposed arboretum, the Goddard Mansion, a visitor center or the bleachers that have been envisioned to be paid for from private and grant sources.

Funding of Maintenance

It is recommended that routine maintenance be funded through the general fund budget. To make the park safer, and for better maintenance, the maintenance budget for Fort Williams Park needs to be increased by approximately \$80,000 per year. Assuming slight inflation, the Fort Williams Park general fund budget would increase from \$160,808 to \$247,000. This is 8/10th of 1% of the entire municipal and school budget. The increase to the tax rate would be 5 cents per thousand or \$15 to a taxpayer with a home valued at \$300,000.



Funding of Capital Needs

The total capital needs that have been identified amount to approximately \$6.7 million over the next five years. It is unrealistic to anticipate this level of funds being available. Excluding the arboretum, the amount is \$3.2 million which is also unrealistic as this amount is beyond the projection of what could be raised and it is thought that there will be some monies raised for the arboretum but not the full amount.

Activities within Fort Williams Park currently generate \$45,000 per year for capital needs. The Town Council has asked the commission to review ideas for generating revenue.

Many ideas have been discussed to raise revenues. Some of the proposed revenue sources need further review and analysis and would benefit from a review in the context of an update to the master plan. Staff believes that six ideas should be actively pursued in the short term prior to the update of the master plan being completed:

1. The group use policy for Fort Williams Park provides people intensive group uses pay a fee of \$1.00 per person. This needs to be increased and to apply to all large group uses. The group use policy should also be reviewed to determine if the approval process for special events could be streamlined and to review the fees for exclusive use of large fields/spaces.
2. The Town should more actively promote donations within the park with more signage and collection points.
3. Fort Williams Park has developed a reputation as a preferred location for weddings. A small wedding area should be constructed to accommodate wedding ceremonies and other gatherings.
4. A food concession opportunity through push carts should be offered in order to experiment with food service within the park, but any permanent arrangements should be after an update of the master plan.
5. The rental units in the park should be available for rent to appropriate for profit entities.
6. The Town should consider for 2012, pursuant to a recent Town Council vote, whether or not to have fees for vehicles with large numbers of passengers.

It is believed that these short-term recommendations would easily net \$75,000 per year in additional revenue above the \$45,000 currently being received. This would permit the Fort Williams Advisory Commission and the Town Council to annually address about \$120,000 in capital needs before any donations from the Fort Williams Charitable Foundation or from other sources. It is not intended to limit suggestions in the five year period for other revenue generating mechanisms, but is intended to encourage the Town to move forward with recommendations that have a consensus on desirability.

The Fort Williams Charitable Foundation and Other Fundraising

The Fort Williams Charitable Foundation, an independent 501 (c) 3 not-for-profit corporation was formed in 1999 for the preservation and improvement of Fort Williams Park. To date, the FWCF has donated a net of approximately \$30,000 to Fort Williams Park. This has funded interpretative signs, a study of the Goddard Mansion and funds for Battery Blair. The FWCF has recently reconstituted its Board and has leadership dedicated to effectively serving its mission. It has been active in studying suggestions for Battery Blair and in serving as part of the fundraising for the proposed arboretum project.

The Town has also received donations directly from individuals, service organizations and from the Museum at Portland Head Light. Over the last ten years, these amounts have totaled more than \$250,000.

Staff recommends the Fort Williams Advisory Commission meet with the leadership of the FWCF to determine priorities for fundraising and realistic expectations and timelines for what can be accomplished. It is also recommended that the Fort Williams Advisory Commission recommend a revised plan for capital needs based on the discussion and on an update of the master plan.



Funding Conclusion

Over the next five years, the above recommendations would fund an extra \$400,000 in enhanced maintenance and an extra \$375,000 in capital improvements for a total additional investment of \$775,000. The amount to be spent on capital improvements would total \$600,000 and the total amount on parks maintenance and operations would be approximately \$1.3 million. Any additional amounts raised privately would add to the amount available for capital improvements.

Maintenance Priorities

The Fort Williams Park budget currently has \$15,000 annually for maintenance projects. Continuing this amount over five years and with the proposed new \$400,000, the total that would be available over the next five years is \$475,000. Specific items recommended to be considered in the next five years and estimated amounts are as follows:

Tree Maintenance and New Plantings	\$ 65,000
Stonewall Reconstruction	\$100,000
Pedestrian Paths	\$ 70,000
Building Repair- Windows, Doors, Roofs	\$100,000
Athletic Fields and Tennis Courts	\$ 50,000
Miscellaneous	\$ 10,000
Playgrounds and Play Structures	\$ 50,000
Current Picnic Shelter Repairs	<u>\$ 35,000</u>
Total	\$475,000



The exact spending including the order of priority would be determined during the municipal budget process each year based on the Town Manager’s recommended budget.

Capital Priorities Using Funds Generated Within the Park.

The revenues estimated in this plan would provide \$600,000 over the next five years for capital needs exclusive of funds donated by the FWCF. The staff recommendation for these funds based on the report of the Fort Williams Advisory Commission is as follows:

Update of the Master Plan	\$ 25,000
New Wedding/Picnic Space	\$ 75,000
Goddard Mansion Site	\$100,000
Bleachers Demolition and Site work	\$100,000
Perimeter Fencing and Gates	\$130,000
Visitor Center Design	\$ 50,000
Invasive Plant Removal	\$ 75,000
Miscellaneous	<u>\$ 45,000</u>
Total	\$600,000



This list represents a staff recommendation and actual appropriations would be made by the Town Council each year after reviewing recommendations from the Fort Williams Advisory Commission and the Town Manager's recommended budget. The update of the master plan is recommended to be funded first with the balance of items to be prioritized in the future.

The Town Comprehensive Plan recommended the Fort Williams Park master plan be updated every seven years. The park master plan was completed in 2003. It is proposed that this update review potential sites for concessions, the visitor center, the wedding space and for reuse of the bleacher and Goddard Mansion sites. It is also recommended that it focus on pedestrian movement and safety within the park.

The funds for the Goddard Mansion and bleacher sites envision substantial demolition of these structures. Portions of each structure could be saved as potentially identified in an update of the master plan. Staff believes that the Goddard Mansion in its current form cannot be cost effectively renovated to a purpose that would be compatible with both the adjacent neighborhood and with uses in Fort Williams Park. Restoration of all of the bleachers is not cost effective.

The funds for invasive plant removal could be utilized independently of the arboretum effort or in concert with this effort.

The visitor center was envisioned by the Fort Williams Advisory Commission in their capital needs update as a multi-purpose center to potentially include function space, an information center, a location for restrooms and for concessions. The amount listed for design should proceed only after the master plan is updated.

Fort Williams Park Management

All policies for Fort Williams Park are the purview of the Town Council. The Fort Williams Advisory Commission was established in several iterations beginning in 1976. The outline of responsibilities of the Commission has not been reviewed in many years. Attached below is the current language with proposed changes shown in underlines and crossouts.

Sec. 4-8-3 Duties and Responsibilities of the Commission. The duties and responsibilities of the Commission shall be as follows:

- (a.) To review any proposed new use or structure within Fort Williams Park.
- (b.) To review and make recommendations to the Town Council on any new special event proposed for Fort Williams Park and to subsequently review and consider approval of any event that recurs each year or is an event similar to one approved in the past.
- (c.) To recommend a master plan for the park to the Town Council.
- (d.) To prepare, with the Town Manager and Director of Public Works, special reports relating to Fort Williams Park maintenance, policies and uses.
- (e.) To recommend policies regarding Fort Williams Park to the Town Council for consideration.
- (f.) To recommend to the Town Manager a proposed capital budget for Fort Williams Park .

(g.) To perform other responsibilities as may be requested by the Town Council.

The change in (b) is intended to streamline the approval process for events which occur each year. It is also intended to approve more quickly new events that are very similar to events that have been approved in the past. This would help to generate additional revenue. Adding (c) emphasizes the importance of the master plan. Adding (f) clarifies the role of the Fort Williams Advisory Commission in the budget process by bringing the park budget into conformance with all other budgets. It is recommended that a more complete review of the duties and responsibilities of the Fort Williams Advisory Commission be conducted in the next year.

Another aspect of park management that needs to factor into decision making is that more events and more activities will need more active park management, i.e. personnel. The suggestion to use the park for town sponsored events needs to recognize that such events will need both volunteer and paid worker support.

Conclusion

This update has attempted to set forth a process for the direction of Fort Williams Park as we move to its 50th anniversary of municipal ownership. The following is a summary of the recommendations:

- The master plan for Fort Williams Park should be updated as soon as possible.
- The Town should approve short term achievable actions that could generate revenues for Fort Williams Park while looking at the implementation of longer term measures following an update of the master plan.
- The park needs additional maintenance funds and an additional \$80,000 should be budgeted each year for park maintenance. This amount should be annually adjusted for inflation.
- A dialogue should occur between the Fort Williams Advisory Commission and the Fort Williams Charitable Foundation to prioritize projects that have potential for fundraising and to reassess suggestions to spend monies in areas which appear to have limited potential for fundraising.
- The Fort Williams Advisory Commission should update its capital project needs report to prioritize projects based on an assumption of \$600,000 being available from revenues generated within the park over the next five years.
- The staff recommends demolition of substantial portions of the Goddard Mansion and of the bleachers within the next five years with the sites partially repurposed based on the portions of the structures that remain and in conformance with the master plan update.
- Some of the rental space at Fort Williams Park should be available for lease to “for profit” entities as long as such uses do not detract from the predominant park nature of the property.

- The Town should review its approval process for events to be held in the park to free up the Fort Williams Advisory Commission and the Town Council to focus on longer term issues.

December 1, 2014 is the 50th anniversary of municipal ownership of Fort Williams Park. By that date, it is hoped that there will be a noticeable difference in the level of maintenance at Fort Williams Park. Boarded up buildings will be an aspect of the past. Walkers will enjoy continuous safe paths around the park. Long term issues relating to the Goddard Mansion and the bleachers will be resolved. Funding for capital needs will be available from revenue within the park and from other funds donated through the efforts of the Fort Williams Charitable Foundation. The Fort Williams Advisory Commission will focus on long term planning and less on maintenance needs. The Town Council and the citizenry will focus on policies for the park and its future. Most important, citizens and visitors will enjoy the park without worrying about the issues of funding and maintenance that have been unresolved for many years.

