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Fort Williams Park - Independence Day Weekend

1 message

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Neighbors

I wanted to share with you my concerns about the recent growth in activity at Fort Williams park. I know we are all familiar with the recent changes which have been made to one of our town's cherished resources – the Fort. The additions of parking spaces, public events, walking paths, clear views, and greater public access are all offering up the Fort to many to enjoy. Unfortunately, as neighbors to the Fort, we are seeing firsthand the impact that the increase in usage can cause. Interestingly, our little park isn't the only park across the country experiencing this conundrum. Today in the Maine Sunday Telegram, there is an article about Acadia National Park where it is facing the same challenge of offering itself to ample visitors without allowing overcrowding and pollution to ruin its magic (*As popular Acadia turns 100, there's no room at the top*, July 3rd page 1). As we celebrate the 100th anniversary of our National Park system, we continue to hear how communities across the country are helping preserve their most valuable resources.

Having abutted the park for the last 8 years, we certainly see and expect the seasonal changes in the quantity of visitors. Over the last couple of years, however, we have arrived at an inflection point. With the new additions of parking spaces, the Ship Cove platform for parties and cookouts, upgraded Cliff Walk paths, and the plans for even more enticing reasons to visit such as the children's garden, waterfall, and enhanced pond, I am fearful we won't be able to handle the increasing numbers. While many of these initiatives provide a source of revenue they certainly come at a cost.

Yesterday (Saturday, July 2nd) as I was working in my backyard, I had a stark realization of what we are up against. There was a wedding at Goddard Mansion in the afternoon which included approximately 100 guests, a speaker system broadcasting music (classical, country, and rock-n-roll) along with the service itself, and all the guests' cars for the joyous event. I'm certain it was a lovely affair for the wedding couple and guests, but I don't believe the park can handle this deluge of people, noise, and cars. I have included some photos to show the event and the makeshift parking the guests had to utilize. Unfortunately, there aren't enough places for all the cars, so they parked all over the grass. The lack of safety with parking cars in the grass is only made greater by the fact that an emergency vehicle would have certainly had trouble accessing the park, let alone pedestrians trying to enjoy the swings and grassy lawn.

In the evening yesterday after the event and its attendees had departed, my wife and I took our dog for a walk through the Fort and ran into the park ranger. We asked him about the wedding and the parking and he shared his concerns about the overflow and over-use as well. As we pleaded for help on managing the traffic and attendance, he could only tell us that Community Services arranges these events and he has no control. He agreed with us about the limited access for emergency vehicles. As we walked away from our meeting with the ranger we couldn't help but notice the trash the wedding party (and likely many of our other non-wedding park guests) left behind. There were countless cigarette butts, water bottles, candy wrappers, etc - we couldn't carry it all. Unfortunately, this is not an unusual experience for us. We, like many other Cape residents, often choose not to visit the fort in the summer for all of these reasons. Is this how we, as a community, value our resources?

For us, we would like to understand how we find the equilibrium of sharing this lovely resource with others, but not overusing it to the point of exhaustion. Perhaps we are overly sensitive to this as immediate neighbors, or perhaps we are close enough that we are seeing things which those who live farther away do not yet see. It's not just the noise, the traffic (23 buses some days), the air pollution, and the smells – its an overall quality of life issue. Regardless, we believe there's enough risk here that we need to be cognizant as an entire town to what we may be letting slip through our fingers. If we can see this much change in just 8 years, what is next? Are these improvements?

If it were up to us this additional development to the Fort would not be happening, but it feels like the train has left the station. We are planning on sharing our voices and involvement to find out what the mission is behind these developments, but ask that you help us in keeping our park safe for this generation and usable for the next generations.

Sincerely,

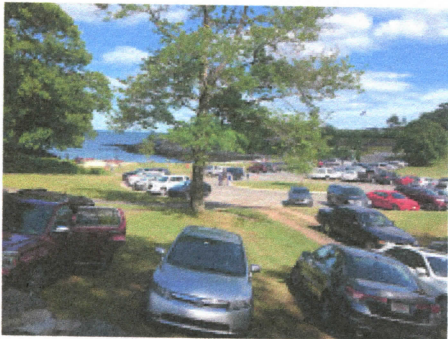
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4 attachments



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