

The Arboretum at Fort Williams Master Plan

Part I: Mission, Goals & Objectives

Overview

Fort Williams Park is a 90-acre, town-owned public park located on the Atlantic Ocean. Home to Portland Head Light in Cape Elizabeth, Maine, the Park is a treasured oceanfront space with matchless scenic views, natural beauty and a long military history. It was decommissioned as an army fort in 1960 and still retains several officer quarters and batteries. The majority of the park is in turf and naturally vegetated areas, often containing invasive plant species.

Background

In March 2007, a group of current and former residents with an interest and background in native species formed an Ad Hoc Arboretum Committee. The group shared a concern that the native landscape at Fort Williams Park was in jeopardy as native trees were aging and invasive species were taking hold. The committee received an endorsement from the Fort Williams Advisory Commission to pursue an arboretum project, consistent with the goal to remove invasive species included in the Fort Williams Park Master Plan. After several years of discussion and debate, this idea has gone from a few people's brainstorm to a viable project under the auspices of the Fort Williams Charitable Foundation (FWCF).

The project's volunteer steering committee is a diverse and impressive team of experts. In addition to a group of master gardeners and renowned educator and horticulturist, there are several executives with extensive business experience, landscape architects, contractors, community leaders and local business owners. The committee represents a cross section of many communities in Southern Maine and throughout New England. All share a love of Fort Williams Park and are committed to implementing the project for the enjoyment of Cape Elizabeth residents and visitors.

Project Description

•The Arboretum at Fort Williams Park

The Arboretum at Fort Williams Park is a project dedicated to creating an arboretum of 15 individual landscapes around the perimeter of the park. A trail system will link these landscapes and provide greater accessibility as well as enhanced recreational and educational opportunities. The invasive plants which are currently choking the native species and obscuring the awe-inspiring views will be removed and replaced with native and sustainable plantings.

The Arboretum programs will encourage people to control invasive plants and understand the importance of using more native plants on their own property. Each of the park's 15 landscapes will have a unique design encouraging visitors to explore and learn about coastal New England's diverse and native species. These plantings will provide year round beauty and seasonal highlights, enhancing and preserving the magnificent setting of Fort Williams Park. The Cape Elizabeth Town Council, Planning Board, Fort Williams Charitable Foundation, and the Fort Williams Advisory Commission all support the Arboretum project.

•Mission Statement

It is the mission of the Arboretum at Fort Williams Park to preserve and enhance Cape Elizabeth's historic site by creating sustainable landscapes which will inspire, educate, and be a continual reminder of the importance of the natural world.

•Project Objectives

The overall project plan is based upon several key objectives that are in support of the Fort Williams Park Master Plan created by the Cape Elizabeth Town Council in 1990:

- Reverse damage done by invasive species
- Create native and sustainable landscapes
- Restore native wildlife habitat
- Enhance the outdoor recreation experience
- Identify educational resources and opportunities

Invasive plant species have become a major concern throughout the United States. Many of these plants were originally used for erosion control purposes in government projects such as the highway system expansion during the Eisenhower administration. Without the diseases and pests that keep these plants under control in their native lands, they overpower and destroy native species. Today, impenetrable thickets of invasive plants are destroying the park's native ecosystem. They will be cleared away and replaced with primarily native trees, shrubs and groundcovers. The landscape will be designed and cared for to enhance the views and encourage visitors to experience the park's diverse environments.

Part II - Sites

Overview

Fifteen sites have been selected throughout Fort Williams, each with different challenges and opportunities. All have some form of invasive plant species which must be controlled or eradicated. The sites fall into one of two categories: sites to be designed by a landscape architect (Designed), and sites to be reclaimed and maintained (Maintained).