



The Arboretum
at Fort Williams Park

A project of the Fort Williams Foundation

*“I think each town should have a park—a common possession forever, for horticulture and recreation.”
— Henry David Thoreau, from an 1859 journal entry*

Fort Williams Park— A treasured landmark on Casco Bay and gift for all

Everyone holds a favorite memory of this special place— family picnics and baseball games, early morning walks along salt-sprayed cliffs, vacation photos of Portland Head Light, or school field trips of discovery.

One of the most majestic coastal open spaces in the Greater Portland region, Fort Williams Park offers recreation and discovery in nature to over 800,000 annual visitors from near and far. For many families in the greater Portland area it is one of the few free coastal access areas and connection to nature.

Keeping it free comes with a price

Following a long maritime and military history, Fort Williams was purchased by the Town of Cape Elizabeth in 1964. Rather than develop the valuable coastal property, the Town created a magnificent 90-acre public park. A gift to the community and beyond.

Maintaining this unique open space has rested primarily on the generous shoulders of the citizens of Cape Elizabeth. Yet tax dollars have covered only the most basic of care of picnic and recreational areas, mowing, paving, and keeping the park safe and accessible. The community is committed to keeping the Park free, but with limited funding, the future of Fort Williams is at a critical point.

Over time invasive plants have taken a toll on the Park’s ecology and historical sites, crowding out native species, choking paths, and endangering the Park’s horticultural health, accessibility and beauty. Invasives are a visible reminder of limited resources. The Park is in jeopardy of losing what makes it most precious—its natural and historical resources.

Scientists note that invasive species are the second greatest threat to global biodiversity, after loss of habitat. Invading plants outcompete native species for sunlight, water, nutrients, and space. They change animal habitat by eliminating native foods, altering cover, and destroying nesting opportunities. Some invaders are so dominant that they leave no room for native species to reproduce for the future.



We’re seeing those dynamics at Fort Williams Park. Aging oaks and shagbark hickories, saplings when George Washington’s administration funded the Portland Head Light in 1791, are dying and their offspring can’t survive. In 2005, an Arbicultural Study recognized that without significant intervention, a horticultural crisis was pending. Without a specific plan and resources, the Park is losing its rich biodiversity, magnificent views are

being swallowed up, and historical sites are no longer accessible through tangled overgrowth. As the Park nears its 50th anniversary, Fort Williams is at a tipping point.

An idea takes root—

The Arboretum at Fort Williams Park

Now we have a chance to preserve and protect the Park's beauty and character. We can improve it by creating a living classroom demonstrating sound ecological practices, the importance of nature, and community involvement.

In 2007 a small group of citizens, concerned about the devastating encroachment of invasive vegetation in the Park, envisioned an arboretum project as a way to restore the Park's environmental health and beauty. Since then the initiative has blossomed with more than 400 volunteers and donors clearing land and providing leadership, administrative and financial assistance. A project of the Fort Williams Foundation, the Arboretum has full support from the Cape Elizabeth Town Council, the Fort Williams Advisory Commission, and complements the Park's recently updated Master Plan.

Incorporated within the Park, the Arboretum is the first major initiative to reclaim the Park's significant natural resources. The fourteen landscapes either showcase the Park's unique ecological and historic features or are at particular risk.

A team of renowned horticulturists, master gardeners, landscape architects, and community leaders created an Arboretum Master Plan and objectives, which include:

Planting for the future—Protecting the Park's environment means renewal of old stands of mature oaks, maples and birches and native vegetation while also fighting the relentless encroachment of invasive

plants. The Arboretum is pivotal in preserving and enhancing the Park by tending and stewarding its unique living ecology.

Plantings of native trees, shrubs and groundcovers will restore wildlife habitat and reverse damage done by invasives. By clearing away impenetrable thickets, exposed granite ledges will again become visible, old orchards will be rejuvenated, and ruins will provide the backdrop for sustainable landscapes.

Encouraging exploration and discovery—The Arboretum continues the Park's tradition of providing free open space and accessibility for people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds. Newly opened areas and views will entice visitors to explore the Park's diverse environments from the rocky coastline to fields, orchards, ponds, and shady glens.

Miles of walking trails will encourage wellness and discovery. Interpretive signage will profile New England's plants, highlight their horticultural connections, and illustrate their vital importance.

Connecting communities to nature—The Arboretum at Fort Williams Park is the only effort in Maine to focus on the restoration and education of native plants. With expanded opportunities for learning, volunteering and community engagement, we are advancing the understanding of the Park's distinctive coastal landscape and history.

The Arboretum project will offer budding gardeners and naturalists educational resources, a docent tour program, children's programs and volunteer opportunities. Horticultural programs and resources will encourage people to take control of invasive plants and understand the importance of using native plants on their own properties.



Cliffside progress—before, during and after completion. Rick Churchill photos.

Growth over time—A multi-phase project

The Arboretum is a multi-phase project, and it is fitting that restoration plans coincide with the 50th anniversary of the Park in 2014. Design and construction of Arboretum landscapes will take several years to complete. In 2010, the Arboretum launched an ambitious fundraising campaign to restore 14 sites throughout the Park and establish a sustainability fund. In concert with fundraising and construction, the campaign is being coordinated in three phases.

Phase I: Groundbreaking for the first site, Cliffside, occurred in 2010 and was completed in Summer 2012 after successfully raising \$405,000 in gifts and in-kind donations. The site was designed by Terrence J. DeWan & Associates with Bruce John Riddell, a landscape architectural team that also played an important role in the creation of the Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens. A thick jungle of overgrown plants and vines has been restored into a beautiful setting of indigenous plantings and stone walkways and paths with spectacular ocean views.

Phase II: Planning for the next four priority sites has started and the Foundation launched a \$2.5 million campaign in Fall 2012 to fund these compelling landscapes and their sustainability. These sites are:

Children's Garden—a place to engage the mind, inspire imagination, wonder and curiosity, and exercise the body throughout the year. The design intention for the Children's Garden is to create an accessible, educational oasis where children of all

ages and abilities can climb, explore and discover, while learning about environmental stewardship, native plants, and the Park's natural and historic significance. Preliminary ideas for the garden include a child-friendly lighthouse and fort, quiet hide-away spaces, a willow maze and adventure paths.

Cliff Walk Promenade and Entrance—This dramatic coastal trail links Cliffside to the popular Portland Head Light and is significantly overgrown with invasive plants. When completed, the largest site will offer unparalleled vistas, horticulture selected for coastal extremes, and enhanced accessibility for visitors. Energetic volunteer teams are clearing invasive plants in preparation for further improvements.

Lighthouse View—The landscapes around Portland Head Light, the primary tourist destination at Fort Williams, are heavily trafficked and showing serious overuse. Restoring native plants and installing interpretive signage will inform visitors of the junction of horticulture and history.

Fort Williams Gateway—The Park's entrance will showcase native plantings and welcome visitors from near and far.

Phase III: With the completion of Phase II, we will launch fundraising efforts for the design and restoration of the Pond, Dogwood Park and Point, Meditation Point, Edible Nut Grove, Fruit Orchards, Shaded Secret Garden, Tree Succession Demonstration Site, Goddard Mansion Windbreak, and Battery Keyes.



The Arboretum at Fort Williams Park is funded through private donations and grants. We count on our donors and volunteers to protect and reclaim one of Maine's most important natural and historical landmarks and make the Arboretum a reality. Join us in our efforts!

***“The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now.”
– Chinese Proverb***

Phase II Sites: Design, construction, planting and interpretive signage	
Children's Garden	\$500,000
Cliffwalk Promenade, Cliffwalk Entrance, Lighthouse View, Gateway Entrance	\$1,690,000
Cliffside sustainability fund	\$80,000
Horticultural management, administration & fundraising	\$230,000
Total	\$2,500,000

**All Phase II and future sites will include a sustainability fund to ensure ongoing maintenance.*

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The Fort Williams Foundation was chartered in 2001 by the Cape Elizabeth Town Council. The Foundation's mission is to preserve and enhance Fort Williams Park's natural and historic resources for future generations by providing funding support and stewardship for selected improvements and maintenance at the Park. The Arboretum project is the Foundation's first major restoration effort.

The Arboretum at Fort Williams Park is creating sustainable landscapes which will inspire, educate, and be a continual reminder of the importance of the natural world.

Fort Williams Foundation and the Arboretum at Fort Williams Park

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1791 Portland Head Light lit • 1872 Land purchased for fortification • 1899 Named Fort Williams • 1962-63 Fort decommissioned and purchased by Cape Elizabeth • 1979 Named Fort Williams Park • 2006-2009 Community citizens commit to keeping the Park free in three voter referendum • 2012 Cliffside, the first Arboretum site completed • 2013 Construction start date for Phase II sites • 2014 The 50th Anniversary Celebration