

Arboretum at Fort Williams Park

Since 2010, the Fort Williams Park Foundation has undertaken the planning, funding and management of the Arboretum Project, a citizen-initiated project approved by Cape Elizabeth's Town Council and Planning Board in 2008. With several objectives in support of the Town's 2003 Fort Williams Park Master Plan, the Arboretum was later incorporated into the 2011 Master Plan Update. Developed to improve and sustain landscapes throughout the Park, key objectives of the Arboretum Project include:

1. Reverse damage done by invasive plant species.
2. Restore native plant communities, biodiversity and wildlife habitat.
3. Improve open space, amenities, and access for visitors.
4. Foster educational resources, community participation and stewardship.

Following a strategic and phased approach for implementation, the Foundation develops Arboretum landscapes as afforded by its financial and organizational resources. "Cliffside" and "Lighthouse View" – with their visibility along the north and south ends of the highly popular Cliff Walk Trail - were ideal locations to demonstrate the vision of the Arboretum Project. By removing exotic invasive plants and showcasing the potential of our native flora, these initial phases helped raise public awareness and inspired an expanded stewardship of the Park.

After several years of community outreach and fundraising, the "Children's Garden" was created in a seldom-used interior area of the Park to provide opportunities for children to explore their relationship with nature and one another in safe and developmentally beneficial ways. A love of nature, built upon years of imaginative outdoor play, fosters an understanding of environmental stewardship that will always guide them. The Foundation engaged children in numerous landscape activities on the site in the years building up to construction, and since its opening last September, the Garden has already become a popular destination for families and school groups.

Cliff Walk Landscape

Linking the completed arboretum sites at either end of the Cliff Walk Trail are two acres of densely vegetated and rugged terrain on the wild side of Battery Knoll. Invasive plants are at their most prolific here, dominating beneficial vegetation, degrading wildlife habitat, and negatively impacting the succession of native plant communities.

As with all naturalized areas within Fort Williams Park, the ecological health of the Cliff Walk Landscape depends upon the successful control of invasive plants. In 2015, landscape architect Regina Leonard developed a Landscape Management Plan to guide a more gradual transformation of this landscape that is based upon a thorough assessment and understanding of its ecology, particularly the inter-relationships between the physical site, vegetation, wildlife, and habitat. This phase of the Arboretum Project presents an opportunity to hone a strategy for landscape management throughout the Park that closely aligns with the stated ecological objectives in both the Arboretum Project and the Town's Master Plan for the Park.

The Management Plan also offers suggestions that support the cultural uses of the landscape, with light-handed development of informal trails and destination areas to improve access, preserve view sheds, and offer more opportunities to appreciate the flora and fauna of this unique coastal site.

Cliff Walk Landscape Project Components (please refer to maps for locations)

1. **Destination Areas:** 3 of these 4 areas currently exist informally as picnic areas and overlooks. This plan calls for maintaining their function and improving them as formal destination areas that are linked by a new secondary trail network.

Phase I: Late Summer – Fall, 2017

DeHart Overlook: East of Battery Dehart in the uphill southern part of the site, this natural promontory will be defined by rounded coping stones with varying gaps and plantings to create a barrier at the top of the slope. Includes installation of 2 or 3 informal native stone benches.

Sullivan Overlook Picnic Area: This little-known gem with spectacular views in the heart of the site is tucked behind an existing sumac grove east of Battery Sullivan, and will be improved with plantings to control erosion along the top of the slope. Coping boulders will provide a safety barrier and limit access to the restoration area, which is sensitive to foot traffic and erosion.

Oak Dell: This will be a simple, quiet sitting area under a signature oak tree growing in the northern interior of the site, recently opened by removal of a large thicket of mature Asiatic honeysuckle shrubs. Nearby native stones will be repositioned and the ground covered with erosion-control mulch. This area will be reached by a stepped path.

Phase II: Summer, 2018

Williams Picnic Area: Located at the northwest section of the site, east of the northern parapet of Battery Sullivan. We will strategically plant shrub groupings to discontinue non-designated pathways through planned Aster-Goldenrod Meadow on east side of path. This area already has a grill, and the plan calls for additional picnic tables and an interpretive panel, as well as modifying the mowing regime of existing lawn and incorporating small flowering forbs; to be mowed at a height of 5-7" to maintain as a greensward.

2. **Trail Network:** Improvement and expansion of existing social footpaths to help visitors explore the landscape safely and without damaging fragile new plantings or eroding steep slopes. These trails are designed to connect the destination areas and to bring a heightened sense of exploration and adventure to Park visitors. Whereas the Cliff Walk Trail is defined by its breathtaking vistas, this natural surface path will offer a more tactile interaction with the landscape, playfully meandering through sumac groves and winding downhill around ledges and boulders to highlight the terrain and the diversity of native oak, birch, cherry, cedar, and ash trees.

Trail surface will be 36" wide compacted $\frac{3}{4}$ "-gravel (natural brown color) over nonwoven geotextile. Trail beds will be retained, as needed, by stone cribbing. Granite blocks will be set into sloped areas to serve as steps, with "gargoyle" stones along sides of steps for safety.

A stone-armored swale will be installed where trail segment 1 approaches DeHart Overlook, as the path crosses a low point that receives major stormwater runoff from Battery Knoll.

Phase I: Late Summer – Fall, 2017

Trail segments 1 through 6.a, beginning at the top of the existing wooden steps from Lighthouse View, and leading north through the top part of the site through Dehart and Sullivan Overlooks, to Williams Picnic Area, and down into the Oak Dell destination area.

Phase II: Summer, 2018

Trail segments 6.b, 7, 8 and 9, connecting Oak Dell and Williams Picnic Area to the Cliff Walk Trail and to the arterial path at the south end of the Cliffside Arboretum site.

3. **Signage:** This project offers an exciting opportunity to showcase native flora for their adaptability, beauty, sustainability, and wildlife enhancement. Fort Williams Park's prominence as a signature landmark of rugged beauty leverages opportunities for environmental education and outreach by reaching a broad and diverse audience. (see map for locations)

Phase I: Fall, 2017

Interpretive Panels (Qty 2, 24x36"): One placed midway along the Cliff Walk Trail, to be read while facing the heart of the landscape (reader's back to trail and ocean), and one placed along the upper trail network, possibly in the Williams Picnic Area (reader's back to Battery Knoll). The purpose for these panels is to help visitors understand this multiyear effort at restoring the native landscape, and the web of connections between animal species and their habitats.

Phase II: Summer, 2019-2022

Plant Labels (3x5): White lettering on dark-brown plastic, held on black metal stakes 18" above ground. Used to identify native plants along the trails and destination areas. Info includes plant family, genus, species, variety or cultivar, common name, hardiness zone, and native range.