

# **Partners in Parks**

## **Celebrating and Restoring Massachusetts' Public Places**

Conference Workshop Reports  
June 9, 2007

A one-day statewide conference involving state and municipal agency staff, open-space users and advocates, non-profits and long-time volunteers working together to make progress toward seeing the Commonwealth's forests, parks and open space achieve their potential as wonderful places to work, play and be restored.

### **Workshop—Conserving the Commons**

What/who's Missing from the current vision?

- Municipalities
- Regional planners
- Historic preservation community
- Developers
- State needs to help promote, facilitate, fund effort
- Need more public relations, marketing

How do we articulate a vision that we can all get behind?

- Needs to be a collective vision of all constituents (urban, suburban, rural)
- Get wide range of participants to endorse final vision
- Speak to multifaceted benefits (economic, physical)
- Need good slogan backed up by maps and data.

How can we sustain buy in from Conservation Community, Public, Legislature, Leadership?

- Need real estate developers and conservationists working together.
- Focus on public health benefits, especially in urban areas.
- Insurers have vested interest in supporting healthy open space.
- Make this a commonwealth vision
- Strategic planning for our quality of life
- Mobilize the 151 land trusts covering 351 communities—each should help promote this vision of the state.

## Solutions to Issues, Impediments

- Encourage the state to be the convener with the possibility of a non-governmental entity being the champion
- Budget for a PR/marketing firm to develop a messaging campaign
- Need small group ASAP to decide on next steps
- Broad appealing vision, policy document, campaign.
- Begin with updating conservation plan we have
- On a parallel track, create a development plan for the state.
- Together: "Commonwealth's Conservation and Development Plan"
- Develop broad themes and apply to local needs

## **Workshop—Enhancing Public Private Partnerships**

### Successful modes/what works?

- Friends groups and the agency have clearly defined roles and responsibilities - Point persons on each side
- Shared public and private understanding of vision, goals, operating agreements and directions
- Clear communications – including annual meeting for goal setting and planning
- Friends groups need to communicate with each other
- Accountability – annual performance review of each side
- DCR support for Friends groups
- Funding – Equitable funding model
- Friends are advocates for sufficient public funding of parks
- Private group represent all shareholders
- Possible Friends "umbrella" group
- Creating a manual – DCR starter kit – online and hardcopy – identify roles and responsibilities – coordination between groups and DCR
- "Friends" as a name has positive value
- Agency has to be advocate for itself

### Top issues, challenges, obstacles—short list

- Funding
- Liability Insurance and requirements
- Communications between government agencies and Friends groups – lopsided partnership
- Pace of decision making is different between Friends and government

### Top issues, challenges, obstacles—the longer list

- Funding
- Access physical

- Safety and perception of safety in the park
- Liability Insurance
- Liability requirements
- Permitting – red tape for events
- Communications between government agencies and Friends groups – lopsided partnership 1
- Top down design of DCR policies
- No one listening to the Friends groups
- Inadequate distribution of resources and not enough funding
- Insurance
- Aspects of setting up a 501C group are daunting
- Long term viability of Friends group
- Misunderstanding and expectations of the Friends group with the agency they are working with
- Donors may have their own agenda
- Perception of competition for available funding
- Pace of decision making is different between Friends and government
- Volunteers are not valued appropriately
- Decision making authority is lacking
- Different park users have different perspectives.

## **Workshop—Green Dollars: Open Space Investment and Economic Development**

### Top Issues

- Disorganized movement / talk to ourselves
- Need to show benefits & market parks system
- No long-term vision
- Need to focus more on specifics (what to spend on)
- Don't reward good govt. by having investments stay in place – no incentives
- Don't invest enough in our youth

### Issues and Solutions

Issue: Need to show benefits & market parks system

#### Solutions:

- Market to groups outside of parks community working with youth (e.g. working with public health or violence prevention) (7)
- Market our treasures – e.g. Plymouth Rock – at the state level create a marketing campaign (7)
- Quantify economic benefits of successful parks and models to measure park's economic values (6)

Issue: Need to Focus More on Specifics of What to Spend On

Solutions:

- Power in numbers – can sell an idea better to elected officials and others as a large group – at the community level or state? (8)
- Take the larger reports and bring it down to the local community level, provide examples of local parks, regions, and areas (5)
- Clearly articulate the needs at the local level (6)

Missed opportunities to build on

- Frisbee golf—lots of kids playing
- Corporate donations—inclusion of open space in developments—difficult to do at the state level, may need legislative action—
- Market the DCR trusts which can accept corporate donations
- Lots of public open spaces being used by private entities—fines or rental fees
- Creative partnerships with corporations
- Better link up with sister agencies—supplemental environmental projects (violators)
- Raise the revenue ceiling so can retain more revenue
- More activities that bring in different kinds of users

## **Workshop—Keeping it Civil: Balancing Interests, Expectations and Impacts**

What makes for a wonderful parks experience?

- “Parks are where life is”
- Safety, well maintained, healthy parks with clean air and water
- Quiet enjoyment of nature and wildlife, solitude, peacefulness, tranquility, no interruptions by bikes, dogs, vehicles
- Diversity of useage, various user groups respect each other, including dog walkers, mountain bikers, birders, etc.....
- Active and passive uses that contribute to a sense of history and community
- Urban park—walking, dogs under control
- To be in a place that is purely open space, nature, not built space
- Recapture childhood experiences
- I don't have a yard. Parks are important for me to have open space.

## Issues and Solutions

Issue: Preservation of nature; Preservation, conservation, especially in urban areas... balance uses with managed land

### Solutions:

- management plans for all parks; consult users and experts in design of plans
- more education in schools re: natural resources
- state assistance (\$ and advice) for management plans
- expanding and promoting friends groups
- environmental designs to protect areas
- partner with other organizations for interpretive work
- designating distinctive uses, separate more/less active areas\*\*

Issue: Active vs. passive recreation

### Solutions:

- look for all potential uses
- separate solutions/paths for separate uses
- physical controls for enforcement
- self-enforcement by user groups and volunteers; non-contentious way of offering warnings

Issue: Lack of respect or understanding between user groups e.g., Cultural differences, people not understanding each other. Sense of power or entitlement from some long-time users. Need to reconcile differences with newer users, being respectful that there is no one way to use any of the resources

### Solutions:

- distinctive uses
- hearing out the other side, understand concerns on all sides
- educate re: what responsible behavior looks like
- more balanced press coverage
- reaching all users effectively, bringing everyone to the table who has a stake in solving the problem
- use pilot programs, adjust on the basis of evaluation
- include newer users; DCR to take a strong role in bringing people to the table
- help raise funds, develop new ways to raise funds (e.g., user fees), bring in more volunteers

Issue: People not taking responsibility for themselves (Cleaning up after dog, use designated areas for bikes, etc.) and adhering to the rules. Conflicts probably most prevalent within user groups

Solutions:

- creating volunteer groups as ambassadors to public as a whole
- creating peer groups by interest, hopes for self-policing
- creating signage, brochures that clearly state rules. "Please do" vs. "Do not"
- encouraging compliance rather than enforcing the rules

Issue: Enforcement: e.g., Western MA: abuse of state parks, including illegal ATV use. not enough resource to enforce. Perception and/or real lack of safety Illicit activities at some parks (e.g., illicit sexual activity, drugs, etc.)

Solutions:

- echoes in education group
- do something about the fines; e.g., levy based on % of income
- public involvement of volunteers, neighbors, public policing
- greater presence: rangers, management, volunteers
- alternative sentencing for violators
- directed patrols
- seek avenues for good/poor behavior recognition
- increase training for police officers re: environmental issues
- increase training for park rangers
- more park rangers

Potential Areas of Compatibility

- Clean ups
- Groups forming for user groups, coming together for mutual things
- Corridor parks: walking, cycling, dog walking
- Urban: Single uses or single times
- Ways to recognize the need and the truth that the parks are a shared resource... respect for appropriate use of certain venues.

Win-win or lose least-lose least solutions

- Design
- Signage
- Enforcement
- Education
- Silencers for ATVs and motorcycles
- Find place for each activity

- Forming user groups
- Meetings between user groups and regulatory bodies
- Designated times for different uses (trails)

## **Workshop—Making Places Matter: Exercise, Events, Education and the Arts**

Top issues, challenges, obstacles—the longer list

- Getting previously untargeted groups into the parks (HS students)  
Engaging a wider user base
- User group conflicts
- Lack of Money for programming, personnel, maintenance  
Competition for funding
- Changing ppl from park visitors to stewards/volunteers
- Technology vs. parks (get outside)
- Need more activities and organized plans for park use
- Fear of outside
- Lack of access to parks
- Kids are over-scheduled (organized sports)
- MCAS focus; lack of time for outdoor activities
- Administrative barriers for private orgs
- Seasonal issues and weather
- Lack of interest
- Not knowing where to get information on parks
- Language differences
- Trained interpreters
- Lack of parental and school admin support for trips to parks
- Need for evidence of value of PBE, time spent outside

Top issues, challenges, obstacles—the short list of group priorities

- Getting previously untargeted groups into the parks (HS students)
- Engaging a wider user base
- Lack of Money for programming, personnel, maintenance
- Competition for funding
- Fear of outside
- Kids are over-scheduled (organized sports)

Solutions/strategies for addressing

Issue: Getting previously untargeted groups into the parks (HS students)  
Engaging a wider user base

Solutions:

- Build bridges with currently organized groups that serve the poplns we want to reach

- Park user study (Who? Why?) Neighborhood assessment – who's not using it and why?
- Give groups more responsibility – make them teachers of younger kids, for example (leadership and training)
- Diversity training among our own orgs (boards of directors and staff)
- Creating and upgrading existing recreational opps in the parks
- Flexible outdoor facilities
- Citizen-organized groups such as walking clubs
- schedule public mtgs when working ppl can attend
- Nature/exercise as prescrip
- Using technology to get word out
- Events and contests to attract young ppl
- Using schools to get the word out to young people

Issue: Lack of Money for programming, personnel, maintenance Competition for funding

Solutions:

- Smaller advocacy grps join together; coalition bldg, listserv
- Coordinate funding requests
- Documentation – collecting data to prove the need
- Accessing recreation committees for \$\$\$ for transportation
- Instituting user fees
- Returning greater % of gate receipts to parks themselves
- Encouraging perm. Private endowment to support parks
- Cultivate several revenue sources

Issue: Fear of outside

Solutions:

- Easy, comfortable, basic programming
- Addressing safety issues (lighting, pruning, etc.)
- Offering regular options (consistent)
- Educate people that scary things are from ppl, not outside itself
- Utilizing young people to pass on word to their peers
- Education
- Programming from familiar activities in the outdoors
- Multilingual outreach and Interpretation
- Supervised time for youth in parks to reassure parents that it's safe outdoors
- It's normal and good to spend time outdoors



- Redesigning parks to have areas for creative play and supervised areas
- Schoolgrounds – exploration to ease fears

Issue: Kids are over-scheduled (organized sports)

Solutions:

- Booklet of things you can do in your park – guide to your local park
- Parents and kids doing things together
- Family events
- Co-scheduling organized events (piggybacking interpretive activity with organized event like baseball)

### **Workshop—Planning for Resilience, Managing for Excellence**

Combined Issues and Solutions

Issue: Strategic plans are needed at all levels and integrated as needed

Solution: Start with DCR

Issue: Resources for planning & managing/maintenance

Solution: Building public support to increase state appropriation

Issue: Protecting natural resources

Solution: Planning and public support & COMMUNICATION

Issue: Lack of understanding by users of regulations and plans that guide management of parks

Solution: Reestablish citizen advisory committees by law; actively solicit input from user groups & others for regulations and plans; enforce regulations/consequences

Issue: Lack of clarity in planning “tracks” both within the agency and the public

Solution: Effective statewide strategy for government/NGO's, etc. (SCORP); two-way, simpler communication element to all planning and implementation; telling the story of why we need regulations and plans.

Issue: Lack of resource inventories

Solution: Utilize stakeholder groups to assist, including existing protocols; two-way, simpler communication element to all planning and implementation; telling the story of why we need regulations and plans.

Issue: Lack of site-specific plans

Solution: Pull together existing general guidance for site; seek money for planning from non-traditional sources, e.g. grants; two-way, simpler communication element to all planning and implementation; telling the story of why we need regulations and plans.

Issue: Lack of implementation as part of the planning process

Solution: Adopt DCR Watershed Plan elements of funding and implementation plans

Issue: Resources are not allocated appropriately

Solution: Synthesize program and prioritize allocations

Issue: There is a disconnect between goals and interests of friends, groups & agencies

Solution: Memorandum's of Agreements – site and/or issue specific

Issue: Plans are too often unrealistic in aiming at perfection

Solution: Prepare prioritized plans within allocated resources

Issue: Agencies incur high expenses because of emphasis on infrastructure over programs and events

Solution: De-emphasize infrastructure and focus on natural resources and experience

Issue: Lack of Strategic Plan

Solution: Create continuity & consistency in organizational leadership; development of strategic plan and educate upper level management of critical value for strategic planning & taking long term view

Issue: Persistent internal conflicts and dysfunctional organizational structure

Solution: Better public relations & marketing to general public/constituencies; create continuity & consistency in organizational leadership; development of strategic plan and educate upper level management of critical value for strategic planning & taking long term view

Issue: Need for public & political support from outside agency

Solution: Create continuity & consistency in organizational leadership; development of strategic plan and educate upper level management of critical value for strategic planning & taking long term view; conduct critical analysis of organizational structure & functions

Issue: Lack of funding

Solution: Better public relations & marketing to general public/constituencies

Issue: Crisis management with minimal resources

Solution: Better public relations & marketing to general public/constituencies; pursue dedicated funding

Issue: Funding for planning

Solution: Petitioning and campaign to increase public awareness

Issue: No prioritization of tasks and goals in the state parks and forest

Solution: DCR should prioritize balancing between field staff maintenance issues and strategic planning issues to do both

Issue: There is no clear definition for forest versus park lands

Solution: Send to legislature a request first to clarify definitions and uses of state parks and forest lands, etc. and what are the most appropriate functions for each, and second, designate which units are park, which units are forests, etc.

### **Workshop—Toward Equity and Environmental Justice: Parks and Open Space for All**

High leverage issues, challenges, obstacles

- Making parks affordable
- Mixed use and conflicts of different uses
- Interpretive programs
- Employment bringing in younger people to encourage interest in parks
- Staff should reflect park users
- Overcoming apathy
- Hard to get access to decision makers
- There is little information from the community about priorities, programs
- There is distrust between the community and developers and the community and government
- Groups that work on youth violence, affordable housing, etc. are not at the table with park advocates (and vice versa)
- Allocation of resources
- Communication between community members and agencies
- Lack of education for community members and staff
- Availability of resources for having enough parks (how much is in the pot)
- Availability of vacant lots for community groups – often owned by BRA in Boston, for example

High leverage solutions, strategies

Issue: Mixed use and conflicts of different uses

### Solutions:

- The community defines the priorities. Community meeting to bring all parties together in a fair and equitable process for park use; define designated areas
- Education and outreach in conjunction with consistent signage (across all parks) and enforcement (including warnings and maybe fines)

Issue: There is distrust between the community and developers and the community and government

### Solutions:

- Culturally competent education in all directions
- Transparent, inclusive process that's based on common goals, commonly arrived at, with neutral facilitation at key points
- Commitment to following plans and communicating results
- Lots of alcohol in informal social situations that bring people together

Issue: Groups that work on youth violence, affordable housing, etc. are not at the table with park advocates (and vice versa)

### Solutions:

- Directly invite as many stakeholders as possible to the table.
- In an EJ community, have a town hall/panel discussion in a local setting and have one rep from each stakeholder group sit on the panel; invite an open audience; have Q&A
- Outreach to students – different agencies or programs related to parks should have education programs that go into schools across the state about the park system works in the state

Issue: There is little information from the community about priorities, programs

### Solutions:

- Inclusive meetings with the goal to understand the community vision and go to the next step
- Train and empower decision makers to do the above
- Train and empower people to present and implement their vision

Who else should we involve?

Mixed use and conflicts of different uses:

- Park users, including special interest groups
- Community leaders
- State leaders, legislators
- Nonprofit and business groups
- Abutters
- Friends groups
- Advisory groups
- School groups and other youth groups
- Senior groups
- Law enforcement
- Media
- Health care groups
- Day trippers (not locals)
- Environmental and land trust groups
- Immigrant groups

There is little information from the community about priorities, programs:

- New Americans
- Associations for new Americans in the US
- The "real" leaders

There is distrust between the community and developers and the community and government

- Neutral facilitator

Groups that work on youth violence, affordable housing, etc. are not at the table with park advocates (and vice versa)

- Youth violence
- Housing advocates
- Frame it to attract others who care

Sponsored by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs and Department of Conservation and Recreation, state legislative leaders and dozens of non- governmental organizations, including: Alternatives for Community and Environment, Appalachian Mountain Club, Bay State Trail Riders, Berkshire Environment Action Team,

Berkshire Natural Resources Council, Blackstone Valley Heritage Homecoming, Inc., Blue Hills Observatory, BostonDOG, Boston Natural Areas Network, Callahan Canine Owners Association, Chestnut Hill Reservoir Coalition, Cochituate State Park Advisory Committee,

Community Preservation Coalition, Connecticut Valley Summit Conservation and Recreation Campaign, Environmental League of Massachusetts, Environment Massachusetts, Essex Country Greenbelt Association, Forest and Parks Partnership, Forest Guild, Friends of Buttonwood Park,

Friends of Mt. Misery, Friends of the Public Garden, Friends of Ringer Park, Friends of Rumney Marsh, Friends of Willard Brook State Forest, Greater Worcester Land Trust, Groundwork Lawrence, Kestrel Trust, Legislative Parks Caucus, Massachusetts Appalachian Trail Committee,

Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions, Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition, Massachusetts Recreation and Park Association, Massachusetts Sierra Club, Mass Audubon, MASSBIKE,

Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust, National Park Service, The Nature Conservancy, Neponset River Watershed Association, New England Mountain Bike Association, New England Trail Rider Association, NewtonDogs,

The Orion Society, Religious Witness for the Earth, Sheffield Land Trust, SomeDogPark, Inc., Somerville Dog Owners Group, Traildogs, The Trustees of Reservations, Trust for Public Land, Urban Ecology Institute, Wachusett Greenways, Watchdogs for an Environmentally Safe Town, Westport River Watershed Alliance.