

FRIENDS OF ROBBINS FARM

To promote preservation, restoration, recreational opportunities and safety, and to sponsor clean-up and other community activities at the beautiful park in Arlington Heights known as Robbins Farm!

NEWSLETTER #1

Dear Member,

October 19, 1999

This is the anniversary date of the formation of Friends of Robbins Farm! We thought we should communicate with our members as to our progress and accomplishments. The original mailing went out to the 200 plus members the Heights Tower Association (essentially responsible for the formation of the park back in 1942). 25 people answered the mailing sending along the \$5 dues. Since then the membership has grown to 74 members.

The first meetings were spent brainstorming the deficiencies and opportunities presented by the Park. We made lists of safety concerns — also suggestions for landscape design. A further list was made up after a Friends' tour of the Park on January 24th to submit to the Parks and Recreation Commission. The deterioration of the playground was of primary concern, particularly the serious erosion along the slides. Also the erosion along Eastern Avenue between the curbstone and the sidewalk, and on Boston Hill and by the baseball backstop. The abandoned tennis courts were on everyone's mind, along with various solutions ranging from fixing them up to creating an orchard or community gardens or a sculpture garden or just grass. There was general concern over the arc light over the playground, for it at once attracted teenagers to the playground overusing its equipment and interfered with viewing the city lights and night sky.

Then our group arranged to meet with the various Town officials and committees to find some answers to the Park problems. Our first meeting was with Richard Bento, DPW Head. He related some political history, that in the 1980s parks had their own department with 29 employees (1989) — now, due to the economies of Prop 2 and 1/2, there are 13, 10 a year ago! They do get some extra help in the summer, but mostly that replaces vacationing employees. DPW works closely with the Parks and Recreation Commission, meeting weekly with the Recreation Director. There is a consulting report on the upgrading of all the sports fields (including Robbins). We are in competition for the Town dollar with all the other parks. Robbins Farm is slated for a \$300,000 capital expenditure in 2002, which would include tennis court restoration or replacement, turf irrigation and rehabilitation, and playground fixing up. Upon our urging, Mr. Bento agreed to work on erosion and playground problems, and to turn off the playground arc light. He also agreed to put up some new signs indicating that the park was closed at 9 PM (to control youths gathering at the Park at night). The signs were put up and stolen and put up! The light was turned off — teenagers no longer use the playground at night, and the Park was dark for the school harvest moon and star gazing event last month!

Community Safety Director Eugene Del Gaizo was our next "guest". Our concern was the groups of youths that come up to the Park to drink and party and vandalize. Del Gaizo reported on their new community policing initiative — police officers in blue jeans talk and communicate with the kids. They have also started a letter writing strategy, writing owners of cars parked by the Park that their cars were where bad things were taking place (vandalism, etc.). This has proved quite effective. He promised to be cooperative with our group to try and curb youth problems. He understood our concern about the arc light, and had no problem with its removal.

On March 11th, 1999, we met with the Parks and Recreation Commission. Members explained the public process for any capital improvements for the Park — public meetings, etc. They were impressed with our photographs of the erosion and deterioration of the Park. The DPW does the work; they will push for Robbins Farm priority. Members of our group gave two versions of the future for the Park, one for the restoration of the tennis courts, the other alternative plans such as having a community garden or other passive recreation.

A clean-up day in cooperation with the DPW was scheduled for May 1st, 1999. At least 40

people showed up bringing along shovels and rakes and pruning shears to work on sprucing up the Park! The DPW trucks brought loads of dirt, and the crowd shoveled the dirt into the above described erosion spots, and spread with grass seed. We also picked up around the Park, raked leaves, and worked hard to improve the look of the abandoned tennis courts, sweeping up all the broken glass and pruning the bushes growing up along the fence. Wood chips were spread along the Coolidge and Puritan entrances to cover the roots, etc. People came out several following weekends to finish some of the seeding, and take on the task of painting the tennis court fence green! That's now complete, and the DPW has removed the weeds, and will fill in the cracks up there so that it will become a good surface for kids tricycling in the mornings and later boys and girls games in the afternoon.

Charlie Foskett of Capital Planning came to the next Friends meeting. He made it clear that the \$300,000 promised for 2002 was not a sure thing — our organizing would make it more likely. Private fund raising, he said, could accelerate public support. He related that restoring the tennis courts could be difficult as the past DPW director had said that there was unstable fill in the mansion cellar hole (the cellar is under the court nearest Boston).

On June 8th, Friends met with Professors John Furlong and Jean Cavanaugh of Radcliffe Seminars on Design on top of Boston Hill at the Park. They promised to give to their design class the task of drawing up a draft master plan for the Park, using input from the neighbors and friends of the Park. Our group is meeting with the class on Wednesday night November 17th. Later in June the core committee visited Corey Hill Park in Brookline to view a recently developed "view" park. The view was way inferior to ours, but the sun dial with kite design on the top was nice — standing at the center the sun shadow told the time, and a long low retaining wall was a pleasant place to sit or lean against.

Don Vitters, Parks and Recreation Commission chair, came to our next meeting. He showed us a 1977 master plan for the Park that was never brought to fruition. He thought well of our initiative in contacting Radcliffe Seminars, later indicating he'd come to our meeting with them. He plans to use their Commission's annually budgetted planning money to supplement the Radcliffe effort — the students would think up concepts, the planning money would be spent on how to implement. As an example, one Friends' member has urged that some of the steep slopes of the "Farm" be planted in meadow grass and wildflowers — the Radcliffe group might draw a map showing where the meadow grass be placed, the Commission planner would detail the specifics of how the meadow should be planted. The students will also inventory the trees and shrubs of the Park and make recommendations for new plantings; members of Friends tried to save the great elm at the Puritan Street entrance, split by a summer storm, but unfortunately it was determined the elm had to be cut down; its twin remains.

Future plans include another spring clean-up day, possibly a kite flying festival, a t-shirt for Friends with the photo of farmer Robbins with his workhorse; someone suggested serving cocoa and promoting Friends on a good winter sledding day! We enclose a renewal blank with return envelope. Membership remains at \$5, though extra contributions are welcome. [We are not planning to incorporate — if fund raising becomes a necessity, we can raise funds through the "Arlington Park Beautification Fund"]. As mentioned there is a core group* that meets regularly; we would welcome new blood — come to our next meeting with the Radcliffe students at the Town Hall 2nd floor meeting room, Academy Street entrance, 7:00 pm, November 17th. Also we enclose some extra membership forms to give to your friends — the more members we have, the greater influence we'll have with the powers that be!

**Oakes Plimpton, Roly Chaput, Sandy & Bud Carmichael, Corinna Vanderspek, Elaine Backman, Judy Leich, Greg Porfido, Jim Miller, Ken Reilly, Chris Culhane, Frank Willwerth, Dorothy Lally.*

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