

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

SPRING NEWSLETTER 2000

Come Fly your Kite with *Kites Over Boston*

Saturday, April 22nd, 1 p.m. - 4 p.m.

Refreshments, Demonstrations!

Come to Clean-up Day at the Park

Saturday, May 6, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Bring Shovels, Rakes, Pruning Shears;

DPW will bring loam to repair erosion.

Summary of Radcliffe Design Student's Visions for the Future of Robbins Farm, along with Responses from Friends and the Public and Parks & Recreation.

Oakes Plimpton, Editor, 67 Coolidge Rd, Arlington, MA 02476 648 5117
Friends is a Membership Association started in October, 1998, for the purposes summarized above. Friends now has 76 active members. Membership dues are \$5. There should be a membership form enclosed in the Newsletter; otherwise contact the Editor. This is the 2nd Newsletter. *Robbins Farm, a Local History* is available at Robbins Library, or from the Editor for \$5.

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

Radcliffe Design Seminars Presentations

On January 19th at the new Brackett School, the Design Class gave four inspiring visions for the future of Robbins Farm Park. The students (almost all "second career" enthusiasts) visited the park often, talked to a lot of people, looked at all the Friend's materials. Here is a summary of their visions of the future:

First, all four presentations eliminated the tennis courts and the basketball court. The reasoning for letting go the tennis courts centered on what they saw as opportunity for constructions to celebrate the view, and their feeling that it was not an appropriate place for courts because of the lack of shelter and extreme wind conditions. Also advice was given that the courts would be expensive to replace and maintain, and lastly that courts elsewhere in Town were not utilized to the fullest extent. The basketball court they felt was too intrusive on the neighbors (too hard to regulate late play), and a new court has just been built at the Brackett which could be used by the public nights, weekends and vacations (the summer).

The 1st plan would replace the courts with a picnic grove; the basketball court would be replaced by what they're calling a "Junior Speedway" which would be an oval roadway with stop signs and actual Arlington street signs for young trikers and bikers. The 2nd plan plants the courts and court area with an antique apple orchard, excavating the foundations of the mansion (archeological dig) and setting up granite along its outline for sitting, and the barn site in the middle of the orchard would be hard topped for tricycling and for, for example, setting up a telescope. Also a spring would be uncapped by the barn site to create a stream flowing towards the hill and then down the hill into a catch basin by the gap. The 3rd plan creates a picnic grove through the whole area, and the 4th plan essentially just has grass with a grove of trees in the middle, and groves of trees separating that area from the lower playing fields.

For the famous view, the area in front of the present tennis courts, the 1st plan plans for a "Boston Skyline Terrace" in back with a low stone seating wall and a plaque illustrating the Boston skyline, and in front a longer low retaining wall with a plaque illustrating the constellations. The 2nd plan calls for a porch lookout, a kind of gazebo structure which you could sit under to look out at the city and the stars. The 3rd plan constructs earthen berms up to 3 or 4 feet high with grass which one can lie on and against to look out at the skyline. The 4th plan has a "sky terrace" with a low stone retaining wall, a compass embedded in the terrace, the terrace large enough for classes to gather or for a small concert.

Each plan has a different trail and planting scheme. The 1st plan has a 10 foot wide "fitness trail" going around the upper half of the park where one could bike or skate or jog. There is an elaborate entrance arch of wrought iron with figures of the park activities and the park name. There are hedge and tree plantings along Eastern Ave partly for safety reasons; there're also tree plantings around the playground, and a small pine grove up in the northern corner of the park in the back of the present baseball backstop.

The 2nd plan features birches along the Grandview Avenue edge of the park, witch hazel, mountain laurel, winter berry and sweet fern along the Hawthorne border of the Park (along the projected stream bed), a meadow of tansy and buttercups between the present cross park path and the end of the ball field, a field of clover and daisies planted on "Boston Hill", and Broom Corn planted at the bottom of the hill.

The 3rd plan has a lot of border plantings to differentiate the park from private holdings, plants the high field in back of the present baseball backstop in an "orchard" of Hawthorne trees; adds a trail from the playground to Longfellow Road and switch backs the exit to avoid the steep drop. There's also a trail from upper Eastern Ave. to Hawthorne Ave exits, which are enlarged.

The 4th plan devotes the backstop field to community gardens; plants the steep drop of Boston Hill towards the "gap" with grasses and bushes to attract butterflies and birds and also to prevent sledders from taking the steep drop-off down the hill towards the fence. All four plans would expose the rock ledges along the northern edge of the baseball field and plant low bushes along them.

As for recreation, two plans would reverse the baseball field putting the backstop at the northwest corner of the park (Eastern & Grandview) partly for safety reasons and partly to improve the northern border view. All four would retain the soccer field within the baseball field. Two plans would install a skateboard park to engage and empower our teenagers, one plan locating it below the playground, and the other between the top of the slides and the baseball field, both with plantings around it.

All four plans would leave the playground where it is and the slides as well. To solve the erosion problem around the slides, two of the plans would install a kind of climbing wall (rough cement with rocks embedded) with low growing junipers along the edges, one a climbing wall to one side, steps to the other, the fourth steps on both sides. The 2nd plan would feature farm animals in the playground, and create a frog pond below the playground for summer water play and winter ice skating. The 3rd & 4th plans would leave the playground pretty much as is; one would add a water spraying structure.

Finally, as the plans were designed as an entirety, you may want to follow the plans as envisioned — the 1st is the plan with the fitness walk and arched formal entrance gate by Pauline Stockman, Dorothy Benanto & Priscilla Murphy; the 2nd features the farm motif with a stream and a frog pond by McKee, Salatino & Tagg; the 3rd has the earthen berms and a lot of tree plantings, by Lynne Heath & Nina Slippen; the 4th includes community gardens and an emphasis on nature, by Jane Chatfield, Carol Donnelly, Christie Dustman & Deborah Edinger. The 1st and 2nd plans have written plans available, and the 3rd plan has some planting and paving information which we will copy.

As for implementation, we are looking towards the year 2002 when Robbins Farm Park is slated for a \$300,000 capital expenditure. There is a formal process of hearings to be conducted by the Parks and Recreation Commission before any capital improvements are undertaken. Meanwhile, we will continue to try to spruce up the Park. Look for our clean-up day announcement, and we're planning a kite flying day Saturday, April 22nd. Enjoy Nathan Robbins' legacy —
Robbins Farm Park!

FRIENDS OF ROBBINS FARM

Memo to Friends

As you requested, I attended last night's meeting (02/08/00) of the Parks & Rec Commission. Don Vitters and I hauled the Radcliffe presentation boards over to the meeting and Don quickly walked through them with the group. I then summarized some of our reactions to the plans based upon your notes from the post-Radcliffe Friends meeting. The Commissioners then voted to give the four plans to a local designer (I think his name is Andrew Leonard) to do some basic feasibility and cost assessments, with a directive to pay particular attention to the first plan -- the plan by Stockman, Benanto, and Murphy featuring a fitness walk. I should note that while the Commissioners liked the general layout of this plan, but they did not seem particularly interested in the Fitness Walk concept itself. They also agreed that there should be some further exploration about possibly moving rather than completely eliminating the recreational facilities at the top of the hill (tennis & basketball), and getting a water fountain installed somewhere at the Farm. Don will keep us informed of future developments.

Elaine Backman

Summary of 2/29 Friends Meeting

Good attendance — Judy Leich, Elaine Backman, Corinna Vanderspek, Sandy & Bud Carmichael, Brian Murray, Greg Porfido, Ken Reilly, Oakes Plimpton, and new attendees Ed & Marion Pierce — @ Library Conference Room.

Ken questioned the Radcliffe plans elimination of the tennis and basketball courts. As a child, he enjoyed those recreational opportunities — should it be denied to future generations! Greg, who lives near the basketball court, said he is not opposed to the park having a basketball court, just its location — less concern over the tennis court. Ken is skeptical of the compromise solution of moving the courts to the playground area — too great an expense, and it puts older kids next to the young ones at the playground. Ken is assured that everything is in preliminary stages. We will make sure that the option of leaving the tennis and basketball courts where they are will be considered by the planner who is evaluating the plans.

Selectman Jack Hurd showed up to tell about Millennium plans on July 4th — a musical by Friends of the Drama and a screen to simulcast the concert and fireworks. General approval, and Committee volunteers to help set up.

Kite day, co-sponsored by "Kites Over Boston," will be Saturday, April 22nd, 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Oakes has received license from Parks Director. Next meeting is scheduled Sunday, April 2nd at 4 p.m. at the 'tennis courts' to look over the Park in reference to clean-up day to be scheduled later.

Oakes Plimpton

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

RESPONSE TO RADCLIFFE PLANS — MEETING 02/01/00

Friends: Just a few of us (5) came to the follow-up meeting on the Radcliffe plans — I hope not because the first notice said 1/31 or because I wrote the library conference room only holds 20 (actually closer to 30). We held a lively discussion on the merits of the plans! Before getting to the substance, the procedure, discussed with Don Vitters of the Parks & Recreation Commission, we hope will involve Commission planning money to hire a consultant to do a feasibility study of the plans. Meanwhile he asked for some input from us. As you know, the plans are exhibited down at Robbins Library with a comment sheet; see separate page of people's responses.

To summarize our discussion, there was consensus that the Park should remain open, but that more shade planting in some locations such as the playground and along Eastern Avenue and at the top would be good so long as no interference with the view, so no trees along the Grand View border, nor Hawthorne or Pine plantings in the field above the baseball backstop. And no apple orchard at the courts (rotten apple problem — a few crabapples OK); some support for bird/butterfly plantings at the bottom of Boston Hill, concern over meadow / wildflower plantings looking bad some times of year, causing more maintenance in the end, and limiting public use (as in spreading picnic blankets over the hill). Picnic tables not approved — will bring beer and BBQ — a mess! Not much support for community gardens* as it limits recreational use, and in a way is a private use of public land — better for a bigger park. (Also look terrible in the winter). Definite support for Farmer Robbins commemoration — historic signs and at least some outlining and dig at the mansion site. Terrace and stone wall at Boston Hill approved with diarama of Boston buildings or stars or compass, as long as not interfering with sledding site — pavillion not liked. Unanimity versus skateboard park — noisy, and the older teenagers, it was felt, would intimidate the younger kids using the playground. Frog pond (and stream) everyone liked, but everyone also very skeptical of practicality! Yes to water fountains and perhaps a water sprayer at the playground. The climbing wall along the side of the slides people thought was a good idea. Farm animals in the playground good idea too (someone wrote live farm animals at playground a terrible idea, but of course the planner was talking about wooden ones (splinters?). More support for tennis court at site below playground, along with half a basketball court or one with junior baskets. No one liked switching the baseball field to put the backstop along Eastern Ave, nor putting stands on Baseball Hill (people bring blankets and picnic chairs). OK for some paths through the Park, especially between Brackett and Coolidge where there is one now, but not the 10 foot wide "Fitness" path, nor any path that would interfere with recreation such as sledding at Baseball Hill, etc.

Well, we touched on other topics (no one liked the "berms") but that's about it. Kite flying day is scheduled for Saturday, April 22nd, 1 to 4 pm — we'll plan that and Park Clean-up Day at next meeting, which will be Leap Year eve — February 29th, 7 p.m. at either at the Library or the Brackett School.

Cooperatively, Oakes

* Better an educational, public garden similar to Semenville's "Growing Center".

D.P.

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

RESPONSE TO RADCLIFFE PLANS IN LIBRARY NOTEBOOK

Basketball??

- 1.) CONTEXT! Need to have a small context plan — where in Arlington is this located?
- 2.) Plans not arranged in order according to write-up — confusing.
- 3.) Idea of fitness walk — we already have a bike path in Arlington; do we need to pave 10' wide path in this park for what we already have? If so, why not connect it with Minuteman bikepath?
- 4.) Earth berms — why earth berms? What are they symbolizing? Mowing earth berms is unnecessarily difficult. Can just lie on the ground to look at the skyline.
- 5.) Apple orchard — requires pesticides to produce good fruit — do we want this in Arlington? Could be more symbolic, less literal.
- 6.) Like the idea of community gardens and use of plants and overall simplicity in 4th plan. Consider maintenance.
- 7.) I am totally charmed by the McKee/Salatino/Tegg plans with its touches of times past — the pump, the low stone walls. Also the frog pond, with its opportunities for outdoor skating, is lovely. Thank you!

Great concepts — but the spelling and punctuation on the displays! “outcropping,” “label!”

Frog pond seems like a good idea, as does a skateboard park. I'd rather see a meadow / butterfly & bird friendly area instead of the fitness walk. People can use the bike trail

Robbins Farm is scenic, usable & beautiful as is. Do we have money we need to use up? Why are we discussing spending money to redo it?

Please continue to refer to this area as “The Farm” — not Skyline — Think twice about sledding into Mt. Vernon. All the plans are intriguing.

As an abutter, I am both intrigued and concerned. The ideas of pulling active recreation closer to Eastern Ave. makes sense. Some of the plans show landscaping that will block the view of home-owners on Grand View (aptly named!) and Hawthorne! I like the concept of using the Robbins house foundation for historic review and story telling. Why no tennis courts? This is a recreational facility; we should be able to find a place for at least one court. Can we depend on the basketball court at the Brackett School for use any time? A skateboard park may be needed in Arlington, but a more centralized facility would be more appropriate! The two level ramp on Longfellow is an excellent idea! Kudos to the 4 teams!

Wonderful!

Keep it very simple. Robbins Park already possesses its primary assets, the hill, the view, the air, the space. More trees in other areas of the park would be a plus. Don't overdo!!

Love, A Robbins Park Lover

These plans are very ambitious and well thought out. However, I am concerned about maintenance. The new playground that was built over ten years ago has not been well maintained. Also the tennis courts and basketball courts were not maintained. Why can't we keep it simple? New tennis and basketball courts would be well utilized. Please repair the existing Robbins Farm that we all use and enjoy!

Any revision MUST include and improve the safety for sledding. This is a unique and invaluable asset of the Town and deserves top priority in any plan. Wind screens or warming huts may be possible. Safety runouts at end of east hill are critical. I am glad the long hillside slide is to be included. Again it is a wonderful experience for youngsters.

I agree with hopes to keep it reasonably simple so that maintenance can be kept up. I like the idea of community gardens, but what about water, and easy access for carrying tools from cars?? Lets not pave over too much.

The tennis courts should be part of the plan.

Nice ideas. We need tennis courts. Wading pool / skating pond would be a huge asset. Skate-boarding is popular now, but . . . 10 years, 20?? Keep it simple and pleasant. Shade for playground areas on hot days is essential. Add water fountains (for drinking) — maybe one at the wading pool / sprinkler / pond area. I also like the idea of low walls for seating along the crests and in observation areas of playground. Keep abutters views, where possible, but if you buy a house next to a park, expect trees to grow that may essentially limit a view. How about a small pavilion near Eastern Ave. — for scouts, out door meetings, concerts, etc.? Moving ball diamond out of sun (for batters) a useful idea.

I don't think that site is good for tennis courts, and there isn't enough court space anyway. I would love to see community gardens there. What better tribute to Mr. Robbins? So many of us in Town don't have enough sun to grow veggies and flowers. Please give this full consideration. Thanks.

Please!! No skateboarding in the Park! — We don't need community gardens in the parks when nearly all houses in Town have yards. — What happened to the tennis courts??

I like the frog pond, but would this be too dangerous? Many families just leave their kids to have free reign at the Park. Also ponds are difficult to maintain properly. Arlington DPW can't even fix the current playground equipment, let alone maintain a pond. Tennis courts would be great! Please, no sprinkle park; we have one at Thompson already. — Like the community gardens idea. Not sure a skateboard park is a good idea. This Park is mainly used by families with young children. Do we want to attract teens? They already have to be chased out of the Park every Friday and Saturday night. — The area for bikes and trikes sounds interesting. — I wouldn't want to see too much in the way of plantings at Robbins Farm. Its big appeal right now is the openness for all sorts of games and sledding.

Wonderful — life long resident, former State Rep., Town Meeting Member, Chair of Precinct — WE MUST DO IT! Joe Daly 641-1245.

NB: Underlining by typist to emphasize concepts. . . Comments Jan. 22nd — Feb 7th, 2000.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 02/07 — 02/22

I like: — the Stockman sign — keeping a sledding hill and a skating pond — community gardens! This truly creates community and would be a beautiful addition. — The Chatfield plan to provide habitat for butterflies, etc. — Let's make some natural space in Arlington for children to explore. How about some area meadows? — Make it as natural as possible. All plans are very impressive.

It's good to see that all plans eliminate the tennis courts, which have become an eyesore — even for tennis lovers, this is a ludicrous spot for a court. Plans should take into account maintenance, particularly for high-traffic areas such as the brow of the hill, where erosion is a persistent problem. The view is the unique characteristic of this spot; plans should preserve the open space, and harmonize man made structures.

I love Robbins Farm as is, but would like to see the tennis courts / basketball revitalized. Also sledding could be safer with modifications. Otherwise don't change too much.

Sky terrace plan lovely. Don't eliminate tennis court and basketball court. This is supposed to be an active-use park. Also, since erosion is such a problem, that needs to be kept in mind. I love the serpentine brick wall with seating for that beautiful view. The various plans represent a lot of carefully thought-out work and the students should be commended for their presentations.

I agree (!) (with the above). My favorite elements of the various plans include: making the sledding hill safer; the skating pond; the palette of plants from which abutters could design the plantings along their property lines; all the spots for sitting and looking at the views; the paths connecting various parts of the park; and the "wild" woodland and meadow areas. The gathering spot for Brackett students at the entrance is also helpful. If surveys show people want tennis and or basketball, there's room to restore them.

I like the Stockman, etc. bike path / fitness walk. Orchard and skating pond and sledding paths are also great ideas — also community gardens, which I'd like to participate in (I have organic gardening experience). Would there be an interest in an outdoor theater / performance area?

No pond; its dangerous for kids. Do not obstruct the view of Boston from the hill.

I would like most of the current simple beauty of the park maintained. Rearranging softball / soccer fields to decrease glare when playing is good. Too much tree / foliage will disturb time honored and loved views / winter sledding. Frog pond is too much (!) (maintenance and safety issues, and we have a skating pond a few blocks away). Playground and picnic areas are good as is. Basketball and tennis courts should remain, be maintained. Ramp at base of hill is a good idea to make park accessible to strollers and w/c. Skate park would be good for teens. A covered seating area at the sky terrace would be nice for seniors and others resting and enjoying the view.

FINAL COMMENTS (THROUGH FEBRUARY 29)

Great idea to plant more trees. Sledding trails a good idea — picnic tables — apple orchard — I like 1st plan (Stockman & McGee).

“Rosebud!” ‘Citizen Kane’s’ last word in the movie serves to remind me of good memories of youth. Having just spent many recent outings sledding at Robbins Farm with my children, I hope others join me in reminding any designers of a renovated “Farm” to leave the sledding possibilities there. This park has the best sledding of any park in the area. The upper hill is wide with variable inclines, accomodating kids and adults of all abilities without too much crowding. The lower hill offers — besides the fabulous view — easy sled runs to fast and dangerous. Look at the hundreds of people who have flocked there after the recent snowstorms and you’ll see that this is a very important use of the park. . . Childhood memories are being made there! Please don’t take them away!

I think the Chatfield / Donnelly/ Dustman / Edinger plan combines the public needs in the park with a bit of nature. Concerns have been raised by abutters about too much nature blocking their views or harboring undesirable activities, but the perimeter and edge plantings they propose seem to address these issues. If people can learn to use a Bird—Bug—Butterfly habitat as those creatures have learned to live with us, that section will be a success. This plan seems to require less maintenance than some of the others, and its goals are more realistic than others.



Photo by Robin Plimpton-Moyle