

Robbins Farm Almanac

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Changes Planned for Robbins Farm

Spring 2001

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Robbins Farm Park is due for some major improvements over the next three years. Working with the Arlington Parks Commission and the Friends of Robbins Farm Park (FORFP), local landscape architect Andrew Leonard developed a preliminary plan for the renewal and restoration of the 10.5 acre park. Elements of the plan include replacing the existing wooden playground structures which have outstayed their 10-year lifespan, resurfacing the playing fields, adding a retaining wall on Boston Hill, and removing and resurfacing the abandoned tennis courts. FORFP developed a list of a dozen or so ideas, many of which Leonard used in his draft plan.

Leonard's initial plan was approved by the Park Commissioners February 13, 2001. This plan, although not finalized, will be submitted with the Parks Commission 2002 budget request to Town Meeting. The entire plan, which bears a price tag of about \$1 million, is fairly aggressive and will be pursued in installments over the next three years. If the budget is approved, financing would come available in July when the formal design and construction process will begin. Groundbreaking would likely be late 2001 or early 2002 for any major work approved.

We will provide updates in the Summer newsletter. Plus watch for informational booths at events at the Farm.

Friends List of Ideas

- *Rebuild playground*
- *Regrade and irrigate playing fields.*
- *Remove abandoned tennis courts.*
- *Add wrought iron fencing near playground.*
- *Construct a winding path through the park.*
- *Build a curved sitting wall on Boston Hill.*
- *Add an ice skating area.*
- *Build new tennis courts next to the current playground.*
- *Add trees and shrubs.*
- *Add picnic tables and benches.*

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FORFP Elects Board of Directors, Officers

Friends of Robbins Farm Park is currently in the process of incorporating and applying for not-for-profit status. The process of becoming a charitable corporation is ongoing but, as part of that effort, FORFP recently elected its first Board of Directors and Officers.

A nominating committee was selected at the January meeting. The nominating committee established criteria that potential board members had to meet to be considered. The criteria included:

- Attendance at at least one meeting during 2000
- Qualifications and experience
- Proximity to Robbins Farm Park
- Areas of committee interest/involvement
- Seniority within FORFP
- Family demographics

Based on the criteria and expressed interest from FORFP members, the following slate was presented and approved by the members present at the February 7, 2001 meeting.

Oakes Plimpton, Founder/Historian
Jennifer Rothenberg, President
Roly Chaput, Vice President
Sandy Carmichael, Clerk
Corinna Vanderspek, Membership Secretary
Chris Hall, Treasurer
Susan Bernhard
Bud Carmichael
Marc Dohan
Carole Kasper
Judy Leich
Rudie Lion
Jim Miller
Greg Porfido
Jack Rogers

These board members will serve until the 2002 Friends of Robbins Farm Park annual meeting, which will be held in the spring.

Plans for the 2001 Friends of Robbins Farm Park Annual Meeting and Field Day, which is June 10, are being finalized now. Flyers with information about the events and activities will be distributed so keep an eye out around the neighborhood!

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A Description of the Robbins Farmhouse



Founder's Corner

by Oakes Plimpton

"It had a big dome ceiling, like a cathedral, and it was painted with stars and the sky!"



The last Robbins Mansion shrub. Cared for by a Park neighbor.

Part of the uniqueness of Robbins Farm is that it has a history. At the top of the hill by the front of the abandoned tennis courts one can see the foundations of the Robbins home that once stood at the crest of the hill. And here's what one may find with a little digging--as described by Stephen Styles, interviewed in a local history of Robbins Farm:

In the cellar there was some kind of a machine which had a counter weight on it filled with rocks and supported by cables which looked to me as though it was cranked up and then released, and gradually settle down and turn wheels, perhaps a generator...

From another interview:

The house was beautiful inside. It had a big dome ceiling, like a cathedral, and it was painted with stars and the sky! There was a beautiful rosewood piano in the living room. And they had a very unique bathroom. That was on the second floor overlooking the city. There was a copper bathtub in a wooden frame, and on the toilet there were two little bins--one for toilet paper and one had a ball that you pulled up to flush the toilet. Then there was a marble sink in the corner.

Well, we won't recapture the beauty of the house. As another interviewee said, "Where was the Arlington Historical Society when the house and barn were torn down?"

But perhaps a photograph or two etched into the foundation stones, and a graphic drawing of the farm itself will recapture some of the past, done in such a way that it cannot be vandalized, unlike the sign depicting the farm as it looked in the 1930s which was stolen two weeks after installation in 1990. And it will be something if we can unearth this strange machine, and perhaps some other 1930s detritus left down in the basement.

Oakes' book, *Robbins Farm, a History*, is available at Robbins Library, the Historical Society, Jefferson Cutter House and the Town Barbershop or by email, robbins_farm@hotmail.com

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Community Preservation Act Impacts the Farm

By Roly Chaput, Vice-President

The recently enacted Community Preservation Act (CPA) can be a benefit to plans for upgrading and improving Robbins Farm.

Signed by Governor Celluci last September, the CPA enables cities and towns across Massachusetts the opportunity to tax themselves and receive three important benefits to the quality of life:

1. The addition of open space. There is a lack of open space due to new construction on fertile land.
2. The construction of affordable housing. Arlington along with most cities and towns does not meet the 10% rule for affordable housing.
3. Enhancement of historical issues. There are a number of sites in town that qualify for improvements towards their historical value.

Each year, at least 10% of CPA funds must be designated to each of the categories. The remaining 70% can be spent for any of the three.

Since the new plans for Robbins Farm include uncovering the old cellar hole and creating a historic segment to learn more about the Robbins family farm, we can submit a request for funding this portion of the proposed Robbins Farm improvements.

What will it cost each of us? The CPA is based on a tax surcharge of our local property tax. If the town chooses to spend at the 3% rate (there are also 1% and 2% plans), and your current taxes are \$3,000, the additional cost per year would be \$90.00. The state contributes a small amount of about \$25,000 annually in addition to the \$1.6 million the town estimates it could raise.

A warrant article proposing that a committee be established to review the act and make recommendation for the following year has been submitted for review to Town Meeting. We will keep you posted!

Big Family Fun Planned for Robbins Farm

By Jack Rogers, Board Member



Big plans for spring and summer events at Robbins Farm are in the works! Clean-Up Day is May 19 from 9am to 1pm. This is a great opportunity to get involved in the community and work with your neighbors. Bring the kids, too! Everyone can help!

Our Annual Meeting and Family Field Day is slated for Sunday June 10th (rain date June 16). There will be an update on what's happening with FORFP then lots of fun for the whole family including sack and 3-legged races, volleyball and other games, face painting, a bake sale, and an informational booth with the Robbins Farm plans. To help with the event, please contact Marion Magill at 643-3036 or email robbins_farm@hotmail.com.

Other events that are still in the planning stages: A "Food Court" will be held at the Farm on July 4th. A Family Movie Night is in the works to be held in August. The Friends will be raising awareness of its activities and fundraising with a booth at Town Day in September. Lastly, a Kite Festival is planned for October.

Plans are also underway to sell bricks to be used in the construction of the new playground. Individuals and families will have an opportunity to purchase a walkway brick bearing their name as a way to demonstrate their commitment to the Park. Watch this newsletter for more details!

We need your help! We need volunteers to help plan and staff these events as well as corporations interested in helping us with a financial support or in-kind donations. If you are interested, please contact either Jack Rogers or Carole Kasper at robbins_farm@hotmail.com.

The Friends of Robbins Farm Park Community Outreach Committee is comprised of individuals interested in organizing events designed to allow our community to enjoy this terrific resource. We are also focused on raising private dollars designed to improve our park and make it a more vibrant part of our community.

Around the Farm...

- Much to the delight of playground partons, the **Big Slide** has be reopened. Broken sections have been replaced or repaired. Weeeeeeeeeee!
- **Sledding season** was of course a big hit this year! Several whopper snowstorms brought friends from near and far to both ends of Robbins Farm for some awesome sledding.
- **Monthly meetings** of Friends of Robbins Farm Park are held on the second Wednesday at 7:30pm at the Jefferson-Cutter House, the white historical home on the corner of Mass. Ave. and Route 60 in Arlington Center. Park in the public lot behind the building and enter through the rear door. All are welcome!
- **New membership forms** will be in the mail soon! We are hoping to put all members on the same annual cycle to coincide roughly with our spring annual meeting. Please "re-up" and continue to support improvements at Robbins Farm!
- The FORFP **Annual Meeting and Field Day** will be June 10 (rain date June 16). Flyers will be circulated as plans become finalized, so watch your snail and email!