

**READFIELD FAIRGROUNDS
PROPOSED MANAGEMENT PLAN
1995**

I. Background

In the summer of 1993, a non-profit land conservation organization, the Trust for Public Land, acquired a purchase option on the Readfield Fairgrounds in order to give the Town of Readfield the opportunity to buy the property. Readfield residents spent the next several months discussing and evaluating the proposal. At a special town meeting in November, residents overwhelmingly approved the acquisition of the Fairgrounds property. In the spring of 1994, the Town took fee title to a 36 acre parcel on the Church Road. In addition, the Town received a recreational trail easement across adjacent lands located on Old Fairgrounds Road. Later that year, the Readfield Board of Selectmen directed the Conservation Commission, in conjunction with other interested parties, to develop a management plan for the Fairgrounds property. An ad hoc planning committee was established in the fall of 1995 to prepare this management plan.

II. History of the Fairgrounds

From 1856 through 1932, the Readfield Fairgrounds was the site of one of Maine's most prestigious agricultural fairs sponsored by the Kennebec County Agricultural Society. The History of Kennebec County printed in 1892 states, "It has good buildings, including a new grandstand, a half-mile track, and maintains the best county agricultural fair of any society in Maine." The Readfield Grange restarted a small fair at the site for a few years beginning in 1948, however it never achieved its former prominence. Remnants of the old fair are still visible on the property.

The Town acquired the property from Barbara Gilmour, a local real estate broker and developer who had owned the property for about twenty years. In the 1970's, Mrs. Gilmour proposed a major commercial development for the site which generated strong opposition from Readfield residents and was eventually withdrawn. Mrs. Gilmour made the property available to the community (through the Trust for Public Land) because she felt that it was a parcel of great historic, scenic, and functional value to the community.

III. Description of Readfield Fairgrounds Property

The property is located on the east side of the Church Road approximately one-quarter mile north of the village center. It represents the largest undeveloped tract of land in close proximity to the village. It is adjacent to the Readfield

Cemetery and Maranacook School District lands on the north and abuts residential development on its eastern and southern boundaries.

The property is approximately one third open field, one third mixed-wood forest, and one-third forested wetland (see map). All forest stands appear to be second growth, primarily due to natural regeneration of abandoned fields and pasture land. The terrain of the property is generally level or gently sloped. One intermittent brook runs north to south along the eastern portion of the property. The entire property is in the watershed of the northern basin of Maranacook Lake.

The only structures on the property are a small set of bleachers and small shed, both which are old and dilapidated, and do not have any historic value. An old rubbish dump on the property was cleaned up last year. Several field roads, wood roads, and trails traverse the property. There is a trail connecting to trails on MCS land.

Known features remaining from the property's heyday include the old horse racing track and oxen pulling ring, and scattered artifacts such as milk cans, pottery, and farm tools. The old exhibition hall was burnt down soon after the town's acquisition because it was a safety hazard.

Soils evaluation of the property indicate that the better drained soils--those most suitable for any type of development activity--are predominantly located in the open fields.

A network of trails already traverse most portions of the property and are regularly used by residents for walking, cross-biking, and cross-country skiing. There are no established snowmobile trails on the property, though there is a trail on the adjacent MCS property. A new rerouted trail has been cleared on north end of the property to avoid private property and connect to trails on MCS land. A trail easement area is located along Old Fairgrounds Road and includes field and forest land that are well suited to the development of a trail for non-motorized recreational use.

An environmental evaluation of the property was conducted for the previous landowner in 1990 by Eco-Analysts, Inc. The evaluation determined that the property "has a diversity of habitats and is good wildlife habitat". However, no unusual habitat or rare plant or animal species were identified. In addition, no fully developed mature softwood stands were found on the property that could be a deer wintering area.

The well for the Village Water District is located across the Church Road from the Fairgrounds property. The well's bedrock water supply is connected to a larger aquifer underneath the Fairgrounds property.

IV. Site Limitations on Use of the Property

The property is located in the Rural Residential District which allows for residential uses, home businesses, forestry, farming, and a range of other low intensity uses. The parcel is within the area proposed in the Town's Comprehensive Plan to be part of an expanded Village District which allows for a range of commercial and residential uses.

The wetland area on the southern portion of the property, as well as pockets of forested wetland near the northern boundary of the parcel, place a severe constraint on any development activities in these areas.

A deed restriction on the property prohibits the development of roads or motorized trails along the southern portion of the eastern boundary. This restriction was placed on the property to prevent the construction of a road connecting the Church Road with Old Fairgrounds Road and to protect the privacy of homeowners in the Fairgrounds Subdivision.

V. Overall Management Objectives

When town residents were presented with the proposal to acquire the Fairgrounds, there was a great deal of discussion about potential uses, however no attempt was made to determine a specific use for the parcel. Supporters agreed that the acquisition was a wise investment in the town's future to meet public needs as the town grows. The strategic location of the land, its size, and its beauty offer unlimited potential for future public uses. The town's comprehensive plan calls for directing future growth to the village area. Wise use of the Fairgrounds property can help to achieve this goal. By providing open space, recreational opportunities, and other public amenities, the Fairgrounds can help to make the village area an attractive place to live and do business.

Based upon sentiments expressed at the special town meeting at which the acquisition was approved, Readfield residents favored the acquisition for two principal reasons. First, the property possess a wide range of conservation, open space, and recreational values which should be preserved. Second, the property's location offers the potential for the Town to develop portions of the property for public uses that are best located in the village area where they are easily accessible to residents.

This plan recognizes the validity of both of these objectives and recommends that they both remain a part of the vision for the future of the Fairgrounds property. The important conservation values of the property should be safeguarded, however this should not preclude the Town residents from considering future proposals for developing some portion of the

property for public purposes. A procedure for considering such proposals is outlined in this plan.

This plan, in accordance with the vote of town residents authorizing the Town's acquisition of the parcel, recommends against sale or transfer of any portion of the Fairgrounds property to private interests. Readfield residents approved acquisition of the property because they wanted to see it utilized for public purposes.

VI. Potential Uses of Property

A. Historic Preservation and Interpretation

The remaining visible remnants of the old fairgrounds, including the old race track and pulling stones should be preserved for historical and educational purposes. A plaque, similar to that erected at Factory Square, would be an appropriate way to commemorate and interpret the history of the site.

B. Scenic Values

The most important scenic aspect of the site is the view across the fields from the Church Road. In order to maintain this view, the field will need to be hayed, mowed, or bushhogged on a regular basis. In recent years, some sections of the field have begun to grow up. An effort should be made to restore these portions of the field and then establish a regular maintenance program to keep the field open.

C. Low-Impact Recreation

The existing trail system on the property is currently used by residents in all seasons and should be maintained. The primary trail opportunity which has yet to be developed is along the southeastern portion of the property and continuing on to the trail easement ending at the intersection of Old Fairgrounds Road and Route 17 across from the Town Beach. The Lukas family has offered the Town the right to construct a trail along Old Fairgrounds Road to avoid safety concerns regarding pedestrian use of the road. In developing this new trail, care should be taken to protect the privacy of abutting homeowners. A small bridge may be needed to cross the stream located near the corner of Sulky Drive and Old Fairgrounds Road. A map of the trail system should be developed for interested residents.

Recently, other landowners in the village area have begun to develop a network of walking paths. Wherever possible, trail linkages with these other landowners should be explored in a cooperative manner.

Consistent with traditional use of the property, trails should be designated for non-motorized use. The property does not currently fit in with the town's snowmobile trail network. If it were desired to utilize the Fairgrounds property to help snowmobilers safely access the village area (to purchase gas and supplies), the establishment of a trail could be considered at that time.

Currently, the property is occasionally hunted by town residents, primarily for upland birds. The property is located within a part of town designated for "shotgun only" hunting. Shooting restrictions apply within 500' of the school property and 300' of surrounding residences. At this time, no change is recommended in the availability of the property for hunting, however it is a situation that should be closely monitored to determine whether unsafe conditions exists.

D. Ecological and Wildlife Values

No critical wildlife or plant habitat has been identified on the property, however the mixture of fields, forest, and wetlands provides for a diversity of habitat on the property which should be maintained over time. The large wetland area along the southern portion of the property (approximately 10 acres) should be left in its natural state for wildlife.

E. Education

The property should be made available to the Maranacook Community School, as well as other schools and organizations for educational programs that do not adversely impact the conservation values of the property.

F. Expansion of Readfield Cemetery

According to the Town Sexton, there are very few burial plots remaining in the town cemetery abutting the Fairgrounds property. It is recommended that the area adjacent to the cemetery be made available for expansion as the need arises.

G. Protection/Use of Water Supply

Based upon information from the Village Water District, bedrock groundwater supplies below the property near the Church Road flows into the existing Water District well. Reportedly, the groundwater supply under the Fairgrounds is larger than that which supplies the current well.

No activities or development on the Fairgrounds property should be allowed that could adversely impact the ground water supply. Should there ever be a need or desire to expand the Water District system, the Fairgrounds property would make a logical site for an additional well.

H. Farming and Forestry

The property does not lend itself to commercial forestry operations. Less than 25 acres are forested and a significant portion of this is forested wetlands.

If a farmer could be interested in haying the fields, this would be a cost-effective way to keep the fields open. It is likely that any haying arrangement would involve improving/maintaining the productivity of the soil through spreading of manure or other soil supplements. Such management should be carefully monitored to avoid conflicts with other uses of the property.

Also, should there be interest in developing community gardens, the Fairgrounds property should be considered as a potential site.

I. Site for Local Events

The fields of the Fairgrounds property along the Church Road could potentially be a useful site for local public outdoor events such as fairs, cook-outs, farmer's market, or celebrations. Parking arrangements for such events will need to be carefully planned. Currently, the Town Beach is available to Readfield clubs, school groups, and organizations for gatherings on a permit system. There is the potential for similar use of the Fairgrounds property in the future should the need arise, however it would first require developing a management structure similar to that which currently exists at the beach.

J. Developed Recreation

The field areas, particularly those in the central portion of the property are potentially suitable for development as recreation fields. If there were a need for additional recreation fields in the future, and no suitable sites on school lands (or other public lands) were available, the Fairgrounds property could be considered for this purpose.

K. Town Common/Park

If the Town were interested in establishing a town common or park (other than the beach) near the center of the village, the Fairgrounds property could serve as an appropriate site. The most logical site for such a development would be near the Church Road.

L. Site for Public Buildings

At this point in time, there is no anticipated need for new public buildings in Readfield for the foreseeable future. If such a need were to arise in the years ahead, the Fairgrounds

property ought to be considered along with other potential locations in accordance with the criteria included in Section VIII.

VII. Criteria for Developed Uses of the Property

All of the uses identified in Sections VI.A. through VI.I. are all generally compatible with one another and in maintaining the natural character of the property. The potential uses described in Sections VI.J through VI.L. represent more developed uses of the property which could conceivably conflict with other uses and objectives for the property. With this in mind, it is recommended that any proposal to develop the Fairgrounds property be carefully evaluated utilizing the following criteria:

- * the need and/or advantages of locating the development in the village area and on the Fairgrounds property
- * the availability of other sites that would be suitable for such development
- * potential conflicts with other existing or potential uses of the Fairgrounds property

Any proposal to develop the Fairgrounds property should be thoroughly discussed at public hearings and should require voter approval at town meeting.

VIII. Management Responsibilities and Costs

Like other town properties, it is recommended that the Conservation Commission be responsible for overseeing the management of the Fairgrounds property. It would be desirable to have a group of interested residents take on stewardship responsibilities for the property. To the greatest extent possible, volunteers should be utilized for management activities such as trail construction and maintenance of fields. Already, there has been a Maine Conservation Corps project (dump clean-up) and an Eagle Scout project (trail maintenance) completed on the property.

Management costs and responsibilities for the Fairgrounds will depend upon the actual use and development of the property. The only projected costs at this time include mowing the fields (if volunteer help cannot be found), trail markers, trail construction materials (e.g. lumber for bridges) and signs. Currently, there is not a need to construct parking facilities, as it is possible to park along the side of the Church Road or to pull onto the field area of the property. If use on the property increases in the future, additional consideration may need to be given to parking requirements. Any costs for the Fairgrounds property should be budgeted through the Conservation Commission's annual expenditures.

IX. Proposed Short-term Management Activities

- * Keep the fields open through annual or biannual mowing.
- * Encourage the Readfield Historical Society and the Little Town Club to erect a plaque about the history of the Fairgrounds.
- * Maintain existing trails, complete reroute of trail to MCS land, and establish new trail to beach. Mark trails and create a trail map.
- * Put up sign identifying area.
- * Identify property boundaries.