

Future View of the Fairgrounds Property Readfield Conservation Commission

Brief History of the Management of the Fairgrounds

In 1994, the Readfield Select Board, directed the Readfield Conservation Commission (RCC), along with other interested parties, to prepare a Management Plan for the Fairgrounds Property. In 1995, RCC presented a proposed Management Plan to the Select Board, which was approved. The plan has guided RCC's management of the Fairgrounds property since that time including the implementation of numerous activities suggested in the plan including:

- Development of a highly-popular trail system;
- Expansion of the Town Cemetery;
- Use of the property for local events (Heritage Days);
- Maintaining the open fields for their scenic and ecological values including implementation of management practices that maintain old field habitat, rich in wildflowers for pollinators, many of which are in decline;
- Preserving the historic features of the property and erecting interpretive displays commemorating its history; and
- Constructing a ballfield and associated parking area.

Most of these activities involved collaboration between RCC and other town groups including the Trails Committee, Recreation Committee, Cemetery Committee and the Readfield Historical Society.

At times, there have been other proposed uses for the property, such as a solar energy development, which were inconsistent with the Management Plan, that were not pursued.

The Future of the Fairgrounds

By all accounts, the acquisition of the Fairgrounds property in 1994 was a tremendous investment that has paid huge dividends to the residents of Readfield. Moreover, the Fairgrounds Management Plan has proven to be a sound guiding document that has resulted in greatly expanded public use of the property while preserving its natural, cultural and scenic values.

Looking to the future, RCC seeks to have the Fairgrounds continue to be a multi-use property that maintains a balance of the uses outlined in the Management Plan, including the conservation of scenic and natural resources, low impact recreation (walking trails), developed recreation (ballfield), community events (Heritage Days, Trunk or Treat) and interpretation of local history (pulling stones, old race track, etc.). As stated in the Plan, RCC believes that, "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."

RCC strongly believes that no one use should dominate the property in a manner that significantly diminishes other existing uses or values of the property. The property is treasured by walkers, runners,

families, naturalists, young ball players and their parents. It is also essential to the plants and animals that make their home there. The limited land and resources need to be carefully allocated in a manner that serves these diverse needs.

We continue to support the directives in the Management Plan that calls for any development proposal for the Fairgrounds be carefully evaluated utilizing the following criteria:

- The need and/or advantages of locating the development on the Fairgrounds;
- The availability of other suitable sites; and
- Potential conflicts with other existing uses of the Fairgrounds.

RCC's priority goals for the future include:

- Preserve the natural and scenic character of the Fairgrounds;
- Maintain the infrastructure and natural aesthetics of the current trail system; and
- Conserve, and where possible, enhance key habitats including open fields and wetlands.

RCC recognizes that other interests may have differing priorities. Our responsibility for managing the Town's conservation properties requires that we give due consideration to those views and accommodate them in a balanced manner. That has worked for the past 26 years for the Fairgrounds and we hope that can continue into the future.