

Haverhill's Ancestral Jewels

The Pond, the Park and the Castle



Imagine, if you will . . .



. . . a pristine place where generations gather to relax, enjoy and reacquaint among some of the most beautiful natural settings in New England.

A place where artists capture in a variety of mediums the same bucolic splendor that provides the backdrop for other artists to perform.

A place where budding athletes train, residents indulge their pets, visitors tour the waters in Castle Boats and people from all walks of life learn about the ecological balance of the precious natural resources that connect all of us as one.

A place where, all year round, one can enjoy the most physically demanding of competitions or the most sedentary of recreations.

A place where anyone can engage in sporting activities ranging from pinewood derby racing to canoeing and kayaking – a spirited game of tennis to a more casual round of the nation’s newest craze for all ages, Pickleball – a cross –country run to a cross-country ski.

A place that serves as a living picture postcard for a wonderful place to live and visit.

That place is here among us right now. We have something good in our midst. Now, we need a plan to make it *great* . . . for ourselves, our guests from across New England and around the world, and for future generations of Haverhill residents and visitors.

The Winnekenni Park/Plug Pond Recreation Area

An Improvements & Restoration Plan

The purpose of the Winnekenni Park/Plug Pond Recreation Area Improvement & Restoration Plan is to revitalize and expand the passive recreational opportunities, sports uses and cultural activities and programs for future generations of citizens of Haverhill and the many visitors who come to this area.

The plan is divided into three subject areas:

- **Winnekenni Park and Forest Trails**, including the Isaac Merrill trail and the trails surrounding Kenoza Lake
- **Plug Pond** (Lake Saltonstall)
- **Winnekenni Castle**

WINNEKENNI PARK and FOREST TRAILS



➤ **The Park Entrance:**

The entrance to Winnekenni Park is the gateway to Winnekenni Castle and over 700 acres of forest, trails and recreational facilities. The park and trails are utilized by hundreds of people every single day, and by thousands of people during warm weather months and when activities and events are being held either at the Winnekenni Castle or in the park. Yet the entrance itself is old and worn.

Improvements needed in the short term include more lighting, additional parking and signage at and along the entrance and roadway leading up to the castle. The stone piers at the entrance need to be repointed and the old, no longer used telephone poles located directly behind the piers need to be removed. In addition, the trees along Rte. 110 just inside the park and along the street need to be selectively cut and others pruned. Large amounts of vines including poison ivy need to be removed as well. Trees and brush also need to be selectively cut and removed along Winnekenni Basin to open up the view of the Basin. New park benches should be selectively placed around the open Basin facing the water for people to sit, relax and enjoy this beautiful vista. Additional parking spaces need to be created along the entrance roadway and in areas to be determined by the appropriate officials.

➤ **The Tennis Courts and Tennis Hut:**

The tennis court fence needs to be repainted and the tennis hut needs to be renovated. The restroom inside the hut requires replacement and/or extensive repairs. At present, this is the only bathroom located in the entire park other than the restrooms inside the castle. Those are open only during community castle events and private castle functions. In the long term, additional restroom facilities are needed in the park.

➤ **The Playground:**

The playground at the entrance of the park is used regularly by young children overseen by their parents and adults who sit and enjoy a warm - and sometimes not so warm - day at the park. This play area is among the most active in the entire city and could be expanded upon with additional equipment. Additional playground locations in the park, including one somewhere on the grounds of the Castle, should be considered. A water spray park could be located on the grounds as well.

➤ **The Sledding Hill:**

Located just inside the park, past the tennis courts, is a popular area for public sledding during the winter months. In recent years the City has placed bales of hay as a barrier to the road in order to improve the safety of the sledders. Parents and other adults also do a great job of monitoring the flow of cars past the site while sledding is taking place. However, in an effort to further improve the safety for sledders, a snow fence along the parameter of the road should be erected and then bales of hay added in front and in back of the fence for additional support and safety. A long term goal could be to find another hill in the park where sledding could be done more safely away from the road.

➤ **The Trails:**

Winnekenni Park has many miles of trails in various conditions. They are all in need of improvements to various degrees, particularly the most used trails around Kenoza Lake that lead to the Issac Merrill trail further along Rte. 110, and the trails that lead from the Park to the Pond. A long term trail improvement plan is needed, not just for the Kenoza Lake and Issac Merrill trails, but for all the trails in the park. Improved trails are vital to the continued safe enjoyment by walkers, joggers, mountain bikers, and in the winter cross country skiers and show-shoe enthusiasts.

➤ **The Forest Management Plan:**

In 2008, at my request to State Rep. Brian Dempsey and then Senator Steven Baddour, a \$500,000.00 authorization was included in the state's Environmental Bond Bill for a forest management plan for Winnekenni Park. Since that time the Mayor has created a Forest Management Committee led by our Conservation Officer, Rob Moore, who have identified, studied and proposed a plan, not only for Winnekenni Forest, but for other city owned forests, as well. These forests include the Clement Farm, the Tattersall Farm and the Millvale Reservoir areas.

The plan is advancing to the implantation phase and funds from the Environmental Bond bill could be used to advance these efforts, particularly at Winnekenni Forest. Lobbying for these funds is critical this year though, as the Bond bill will expire at the end of 2013. Even if the City were to realize a portion of the \$500,000 authorized by the bill, the timeline could be accelerated to remove dead and decaying trees and begin the process of selectively harvesting and replenishing the forest.

While foresting and harvesting takes place, we could conduct educational tours about forest management and what it involves, bringing in school groups and others interested in learning about forest management.

PLUG POND (LAKE SALTONSTALL)



➤ **The Name:**

Serious consideration should be given to marketing and advertising Plug Pond by its original intended name, which is Lake Saltonstall.

➤ **The “Bathhouse”:**

In recent years a series of small steps have been made to improve the facility at Plug Pond for swimming and fishing by the public during operating hours in season. However, the facility is still in need of major modernization, including a refurbished snack bar, new bathrooms, changing areas, and shower facilities.

➤ **Pond Grounds and Parking Areas:**

New benches and picnic tables are needed and could be spread out more throughout the area. In addition, the parking lots in that entire area need to be repaired and/or repaved, and spaces need to be more clearly marked to maximize the total number of parking spaces available.

➤ **Racquetball, Pickle-Ball, Badminton, Volleyball, Bocce Ball Courts:**

Any combination of the above type of courts would be a welcome addition to the Plug Pond recreational area, and we should pursue funding to create courts for public use in this area to attract more residents and visitors to Plug Pond.

➤ **The Trails:**

Not many people realize how close Plug Pond is to the Winnekenni Castle and Park. There are several trails in various states of disrepair that, if improved and with appropriate signage, could let people know they can hike from one area to the other in a relatively short amount of time. New signage is needed to direct visitors from one side to the other.

➤ **The Dog Park:**

A few years ago, a Dog Park Study Committee was created and its members issued a recommendation that an area in back of Plug Pond could be created for a dog park. At present, the Pond and Winnekenni Park areas are used heavily by the public and their pets. In truth, the area is one big dog park. There is certainly enough forest to create a safe, secure, off leash area for dogs and their owners to relax and enjoy. The Dog Park Committee's recommendation should be reviewed again by the appropriate officials.

➤ **The Castle Boats:**

One long term goal should be to pursue bringing paddle boats to either Winnekenni Basin or Plug Pond. Similar to the Swan Boats in the Public Garden, Castle Boats would provide rides to the public from Memorial Day to Labor Day during set hours.

➤ **Summer Camp Programs:**

In conjunction with private partners, the city should pursue establishing new Summer Day and Overnight Camp Programs in season at the Plug Pond Recreational Area. In a similar vein the city should pursue establishing a Summer Youth Forest Park Ranger program both at Winnekenni Park and Plug Pond.

WINNEKENNI CASTLE



➤ **The Castle:**

Winnekenni Castle was built in 1873 by Dr. Nichols as a private residence. It was sold to the City of Haverhill in 1895 and has remained under the city's control ever since. Forty-eight years ago the Winnekenni Foundation was formed to operate, maintain, and care for the Castle, the Castle Barn, the Caretakers Cottage and the immediate grounds surrounding those structures.

In recent years, the Castle has undergone a series of improvements, including a new castle roof, 47 new windows, and exterior repair and repointing of the castle stone in the worst areas. A number of new flower beds have been created as well. In 2013, the Foundation is working toward expanding the castle gardens around the facility as well as continuing to make small improvements to the interior of the castle itself.

However, in the long term the Castle needs a new heating and air conditioning system as well as further infrastructure improvements and exterior repointing in order to ensure its

use and enjoyment by future generations of citizens. In recent years, the number of community events and private functions has grown considerably and the Foundation's Board of Directors has become not only overseers of the castle but, also, event coordinators and primary volunteers at every event. It is becoming too burdensome to rely on Board members and a small group of volunteers to solely perform all of these roles and functions. Consideration should be given to hiring a professional management company to take responsibility for executing castle events as well as private functions during the season. This would allow the Board to concentrate once again on providing oversight, guidance, and long term strategic and capital planning.

➤ **The Castle Barn:**

The Castle Barn is in serious disrepair. The Foundation has discussed a long term goal of renovating the Castle Barn for the purpose of making it functional again as a small performing arts center, gift shop and café. This will require extensive planning and even more extensive fundraising and/or grant funds.

➤ **Parking Areas and Picnic Grounds:**

Improved parking spaces and parking lots are badly needed around the Castle, particularly in front of the Castle and behind the Castle Barn. New lighting and signage to designate parking areas and improve public safety is also needed. The Foundation has discussed with a local lending institution a plan to improve parking areas as well as the Picnic Grounds located adjacent to the Castle Barn. A cost analysis is needed for the design of the parking areas and to determine the cost of refurbishing the picnic grounds.

➤ **The Caretakers Cottage:**

The Caretakers Cottage is occupied by the castle caretaker who reports to the Board of the Foundation and is responsible for cleaning, maintaining and repairing the castle as needed throughout the year. The caretaker's job responsibilities have grown significantly in recent years due to the volume of events and private functions held at the venue. We are at the point where the caretaker can no longer perform all the duties necessary to ensure the smooth operation of the castle, and contracting with a private event management company could help alleviate this situation.

FUNDING IMPROVEMENTS to the PARK, the POND and the CASTLE

In order to improve and enhance the Park, the Pond and the Castle, significant revenues would have to be generated. At present, the Winnekenni Foundation supports its own operations through public donations, private gifts and state cultural council funds for certain community programs. The Foundation does not have an endowment and is badly in need of benefactors in order to create one. As mentioned prior, the Foundation's focus is just one limited area of the park.

Various revenue streams are needed to fund improvements to both the Park and the Pond. In addition to seeking state grants and bond monies, such as the \$500,000 for forest management, a park and pond access fee system should be created, similar to the system used in the New Hampshire state parks program. The access fee could take the form of a seasonal pass system at rates to be determined by the city, e.g. \$5.00 per season for Haverhill citizens and \$10.00 for non-residents and out of state visitors.

People would only pay once per calendar year for a season pass and enforcement would have to be passive in the sense that it would take staff to monitor the entrance area and collect the fees, say from Memorial Day to Labor Day from the hours of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. If people don't wish to contribute, they could either enter the park on foot at no charge, or they could enter the park during off hours when the fees are not being collected. ***The key to successfully implementing this system would be to create an Enterprise Fund to ensure that all funds raised from the fees are spent on implementing park and pond improvements.***

LONG TERM GOALS

Most of the ideas outlined above could be accomplished in the short term with a modest influx of revenues from the City and support from potential private partners and contributors. Over the longer term, we need a more reliable stream of revenues for this entire area, perhaps including a seasonal fee as outlined above. We also need a multi-functional facility located somewhere close to the entrance of the Castle, perhaps the white house adjacent to the Parks Department barn facility, located just before the castle entrance. This house is currently vacant. With extensive renovations it could become a first-class visitor information center, a rest room facility and a community meeting center in the future. It could also be the headquarters for a Summer Youth Forest Ranger program in the city, where we could employ our teenaged youth to help clean up the trails and make repairs and improvements to the park, pond and castle.

Other long term goals could include:

- Hiring a Parks and Recreation Assistant Director to further pursue and implement these ideas, as well as oversee the city's other public parks and playgrounds
- Restoration of historical monuments, including the Dudley Fountain, the Carleton Fountain, the Tyler Shelter, and the Birchwood Estate
- Converting an existing structure or building a new structure for a horse stable on site to be leased to a private entity which in turn could offer horseback riding through certain designated trails.
- Castle Barn Restoration to a Performing Arts Center, Café & Gift Shop with Administrative Office Space
- Outdoor Amphitheater
- Creating a second access road to and from the Castle with a one way traffic pattern to improve safe access to and from the Castle

SUMMARY

It should be emphasized that the ideas and proposals outlined in this plan are just what they are—ideas and proposals. Others may have additional ideas or may want to expound upon the ones raised in this plan. What is clear is this: Winnekenni Park, Winnekenni Castle and Plug Pond area are one of Haverhill's greatest natural resources and assets. No other city or town in the area has a park like ours and it is up to all of us to determine how to maintain, enhance and improve it in the future in order to continue its use and enjoyment for generations of our citizens and visitors to come.

I stand ready to work with the Mayor, my fellow Councilors, department heads and staff, the Winnekenni Foundation, the Trails Committee, the Tennis Court Committee, and citizens of Haverhill who want to work together to make improvements to this special area.