

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MASTER PLAN FOR MEMORIAL PARK

There are several issues that the Town needs to consider as it thinks about the development of a Master Plan for Memorial Park. A few of the more important ones are briefly discussed below.

More Than Active Recreation

The current organization of Memorial Park focuses on active recreation. There is little in the way of amenities that foster passive recreation or quiet enjoyment of the Park. While the Town already has the Quiet Path, the Town Green and several other smaller passive recreation areas in the Village area, we believe there is a need for the consideration of passive uses in Memorial Park as well. It should be an attractive and pleasant park for all types of users - Town residents and visitors alike.

The layout of Memorial Park should also be an inducement for individuals or small groups to engage in their own spontaneous recreational activities. Number eleven of the Foundational Statements and Principals of the Stowe Recreation Commission supports this; it states, "Recreational facilities and Parks should be an attraction for unstructured activity to multi-aged groups of users as well as supporting developed programs." Well located, attractive facilities can foster such unstructured activities.

The Town should consider developing a Master Plan that will be attractive when implemented, even if the passive recreation needs to happen in a series of small intimate spaces knit together between the larger active recreational areas. The stream passing through the site offers an excellent location for these, as well as the wetland areas in the southeast portion of the Park.

Too Many Uses; Too Little Space

In addition to Jackson Arena, Memorial Park currently contains three ball fields, a playground, a basketball court, two tennis courts, a skateboard park, a recreation center, a community monument, an empty historic building, and maintenance facilities, as well as automobile parking and circulation space, a stream, and open fields. An adjacent hill provides sledding in the winter. In the last few years, various committees or resident groups have suggested that the Memorial Park also house an indoor skateboard park, an indoor community space in the Rotary Barn, a new ice rink to replace the Jackson Arena, a community center, and a senior center. Most, if not all, of the existing facilities have their champions in the Town who consider them beloved and/or an essential portion of the future Memorial Park Master Plan. The proponents of the recommended new facilities also believe that they are important additions to the Memorial Park and the Town.

In reality, it is likely that all of these facilities will not fit comfortably into the limited area of Memorial Park, even when using the open area in the southeastern portion of the Park. The process of developing the Master Plan will need to examine each of the facilities, existing or proposed, to determine its appropriateness in the future of the Park. Numerous factors will need to go into the evaluation, including:

- The mere fact that some of the facilities exist now and the expense of removing and rebuilding elsewhere may not be the most cost effective way for the Town to proceed,
- It may be more cost effective to place specialized uses such as the baseball field in other portions of the Town where they could be closer to potential users and be located on space that is not as limited as that in the center of the Village;

- The presence of playing fields in the center of the Village brings Town residents into the Village, increasing its overall vibrancy and character;
- The projected difficulties of the permitting process for some facilities; and
- The support of the community for the various different potential uses.

The Master Plan process should first include the establishment of an evaluation process for the various different elements then apply the evaluation to the uses and facilities that have been or will be proposed for Memorial Park. Such a method, established before the evaluations start and after public review, will also help carry the master planning process through the various and variable interests of the Town's citizens.

Community Support

An important part of the overall evaluation of the various elements that may be included in the Master Plan will be the discussions held with the "champions" of the various existing or proposed elements to be included in Memorial Park. Gauging the opinions of the rest of the Town's residents related to the placement of recreational facilities in the Park is also an important part of the process. Ultimately, they will need to embrace the plan so that it can be successfully implemented. Consequently, the Town residents should also be involved as much as possible in the development of the Master Plan. A variety of methods can be used to allow input from the Town on the Master Plan, either directly, through meetings, surveys, or suggestions boxes, or indirectly through representatives on the Project Advisory Committee.

Part of a Larger Recreation System

Memorial Park is just one of the public recreational facilities in the Town of Stowe. By far the most popular facility is the Rec Path, but the Town's recreational system also includes other parks, forests, play fields, and trails. The master planning of Memorial Park must take the existence and needs of these other facilities into consideration. The ability of the Town to realistically implement the recommendations in the Memorial Park Master Plan in light of other recreational needs in the Town will need to be included in the decision making process.

A survey completed as part of the Stowe 10-Year Recreation Master Plan (un-adopted) indicated that the top five most needed recreational facilities in the Town according to the Town's residents were for:

- Nature and outdoor activities,
- Fitness and wellness activities,
- Teens,
- Seniors, and
- Individual and team sports.

While the Master Plan for Memorial Park can address several if not all of these, it cannot completely meet these needs on its own. Other recreational facilities will need to be upgraded as well to adequately meet them all.

The survey also indicated that the Rec Path is generally the most valued Town recreation facility by both full time and second home Stowe residents. The path is now considered by many to be crowded and greatly in need of widening and expansion. Funds that may be used to upgrade

Memorial Park may need to “compete” with those used to upgrade the Rec Path, so the uses included in the Memorial Park Master Plan will need to be very thoroughly examined and justified.

Additionally, the Town has voted to allocate funds to the Jackson Arena upgrade (or replace) and a Skate Park potentially located indoors to allow year round use. Fundraising for the private donation portion of the cost is still incomplete, but the fact that there are allocated funds approved by the Town for these facilities indicates a good degree of Town support for including them in the Master Plan, or in finding another location within the Town where these facilities could become welcome additions to the Town’s larger recreation system.

The development of the Memorial Park Master Plan must include the acknowledgement of the larger context of Memorial Park in the Town of Stowe’s recreational system. Acknowledging this position will help the Town to develop a pragmatic and practical plan that could actually be funded and implanted within a reasonable amount of time.