

WINTER ISLAND COMPREHENSIVE PLAN - October, 1987

Description

Winter Island, a 38 acre, ½ mile long island, is situated on the western side of Salem Harbor, two miles from the center of Salem. Winter Island Park consists of 27.1 acres located at the south end of the island. The park is bordered to the north by the Plummer Home for Boys. Neighbors across Cat Cove include the New England Power Company generating station, the South Essex Sewerage District waste water treatment plant, and the Massachusetts Department of Natural Resources Marine Laboratory at Cat Cove.

Winter Island Park provides both passive and active opportunities for land and water recreationists. Current uses include walking, swimming, sunbathing, boat storage, windsurfing, boating and sailing, picnicking, overnight tenting and camping in trailers and/or recreational vehicles, evening concerts, and more traditional passive park uses such as reading under a tree or admiring the views.

Island facilities include a seasonally operated information gatehouse at the park entrance, a concession food building, a boat ramp, and chemical toilets. Several other structures are former U.S. Coast Guard facilities transferred to the City of Salem in 1972, predominant among them being the barracks building, seaplane hangar, radio shack, and powder house. On the east end of Winter Island, adjacent to the popular Waikiki Beach, are Fort Pickering and the recently restored Ft. Pickering Lighthouse. The Fort Pickering area, occupying approximately two acres, has been a fortified site since the mid-17th century and has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1973. Improvements (described later in this report) are currently being made or planned for many of the elements mentioned above.

Winter Island is easily accessible by car but can also be reached from within downtown Salem by a privately owned shuttle bus called the Salem Trolley. The trolley circulates through the day, picking up passengers at designated stops (including Winter Island) and letting them off wherever they wish. Winter Island is off of Fort Ave. which is an extension of Derby Street. Derby Street crosses Routes 1A/114 within a mile of Winter Island. Salem is also accessible via the MBTA rail line. Additionally, the closest bus stop on the MBTA bus route is less than a 15 minute walk to the island.

Goals

Winter Island represents a unique opportunity for the City to develop a waterfront public open space/recreation resource which will provide access to the water and water-related activities. This is particularly important in Salem where a large percentage of waterfront property is occupied by the New England Power

plant, the South Essex Sewerage District facility, the Cat Cove Marine Laboratory, the Boston Gas Co., the MBTA commuter line, and other non-recreational uses.

Although Salem is a waterfront community with miles of shoreline, the City is not easily accessible from the water and access to the water within Salem is very limited. Winter Island provides a valuable opportunity to secure waterfront property for public use. This effort was recently enhanced when the City defeated, in January, 1987, an attempt by the Salem Sound Corporation to construct a 150-slip private marina at Winter Island. Such private development would be incompatible with the City's goal to maintain the park as open space for all of Salem's residents.

An important dimension to Winter Island is its rich history as a military installation since the 17th century. This theme is important in the City that prides itself on its historic significance. Current plans for the island have been carefully developed to preserve and enhance its historic value. Particular care has been taken with the treatment of Fort Pickering to divert traffic from badly eroded areas and to protect the embankments with grass and other plantings.

Another element which enhances Winter Island's use as a recreational facility is Salem State College's Sailing Program. This program includes intercollegiate varsity level sailing and activities for handicapped and disadvantaged youths. In the summer of 1985 the Sailing Program renovated an existing building on Winter Island for use as a boat-house for vessel maintenance, class room space, and seasonal office space. This program is of tremendous benefit to area residents. The sailing opportunities for the blind, handicapped, and disadvantaged are particularly beneficial, and the City can take advantage of these at no cost. The construction of a pier and associated improvements at Winter Island will ensure that the program has a place to operate and grow to the benefit of all North Shore residents.

Uses suggested for Winter Island in Salem's Master Plan include boat launching ramps, recreation facilities such as playing fields and tennis courts, play areas, a trail system, a bathhouse and restrooms, and improved access to and around the island. These items are currently being addressed through present construction activity or are incorporated in future plans.

The City of Salem has developed a two-pronged approach to the enhancement of Winter Island: Urban Self-Help funding for landside improvements and Coastal Zone Management Funding for marine improvements. These two components, described in the following pages, are designed to complement each other so that

Winter Island can reach its potential as a comprehensive marine/recreational facility.

Urban Self-Help Grant

The City has received \$731,550 in Urban Self-Help funds to make landside improvements to Winter Island. This money has been supplemented by \$120,000 in the form of a city appropriation and \$150,000 in Community Development Block Grant funds. These monies cover design, construction, and associated administrative costs for this phase of the project.

Plans were developed by Rizzo Associates of Natick, Mass. in conjunction with Wallace Floyd Associates of Boston. The project was put out to bid twice, coming in over budget each time. Upon a third round of bidding, Gaffny Corporation Contractors of Middleton, MA was selected as the lowest eligible bidder and a contract was awarded for \$965,000.

In general these improvements are geared toward making Winter Island more useable for passive and active recreation and to enhance the park's appearance. The project is now 85% complete. New plantings have been installed. Three additional picnic areas have been added. A concrete path and handicapped accessible wooden walkway now lead from beach parking to Waikiki Beach. Stonedust paths have been defined around much of the perimeter of the island. A new parking lot for 26 cars have been added and the existing lot paved and striped for more efficient use. Additions on the island include a new gatehouse, a new bathhouse with restrooms and showers, and an all-purpose playing field on the site of the old tennis courts. The bathhouse has been tied into the City's sewer system and overhead utilities have been placed underground. The island's entire road system will be overlayed. The old radio shack is being rehabilitated for future use as the harbormaster's headquarters and the powderhouse will be secured against further damage.

Specifically, the breakdown of the project is as follows:

Demolition

- Removal of tennis court and surrounding chain link fence
- Removal of concrete pads and foundations
- Removal of gatehouse and guard shack
- Removal of existing deteriorated bollards along Winter Island Rd.
- Removal of powder house roof and misc. debris
- Removal of some of the island's concrete paths (to be replaced with stonedust paths)

Site Preparation

- Grading of new 26-car gravel parking lot
- Blasting and grading of playing field site
- Grading of new walks and paths
- Setting of base to widen Fish St. to 20 feet
- Preparation of bathhouse site
- Clearing and grubbing various sites around the island
- Removal of debris at various sites around the island

Building Construction/Rehabilitation/Restoration

- Radio shack rehabilitation (conversion to harbormaster's office)
- Securing of powder house
- Gatehouse construction (14' x 8')
- Bathhouse construction (42'6" x 21') with two men's toilets, two women's toilets, two men's showers and two women's showers

Utility Work/Infrastructure Improvements

- Placement of electrical service underground
- Installation of sewer line, sewerage ejector station, and water service to bathhouse

Site Improvements

- Paving of roadways
- Installation of stonedust paths
- Loaming and seeding of playing field
- Construction of 26-car gravel parking lot
- Paving and striping of main parking lot
- Installation of bollards along Winter Island Rd. and Fish St.
- Installation of new picnic tables
- Construction of pergola to shade one of the picnic areas
- Installation of trash receptacles near picnic areas
- Installation of path atop Fort Pickering
- Installation of RR tie steps at various sites to facilitate pedestrian circulation around the island
- Fence construction at playing field and main entrance

Landscaping Improvements

- Loaming and seeding of various sites around island (playing field, along Winter Island Rd., around picnic areas, etc.)
- Planting of trees, shrubs, vines and other groundcover, and perennials distributed across island to enhance and expand park's natural features

Coastal Zone Management Grant

In order that Winter Island can fully reach its potential as a marine/recreational facility, funds from CZM will be used to construct a public pier with associated improvements. The purpose of the pier will be to service

recreational vessels for the general public and to provide facilities for the Salem State College Sailing Program.

Preliminary design work has been completed on the project. To meet the City's budget limitations, the engineers for this project, Maguire Group Inc., are proposing the following:

- Construction of a fixed 16' x 150' pier supported on concrete filled pipe piles. This pier will be used by the general public for recreational purposes such as access to boats, viewing the harbor, and fishing.
- Placement of a set of floats and an aluminum gangway ramp at the end of the pier. This float and ramp will make boats more accessible than use of the boat ramp alone.
- Repairs to the boat ramp
- If funding allows, extension of the pier by another 30'
- If funding allows, installation of a crane and hoist for the launching and retrieving of boats.

Intergration of Urban Self Help and Coastal Zone Management Projects

The City has always considered the Winter Island landside improvements and the public pier as Phases I and II of a single project. The comprehensive landside improvements (Phase I), funded by the Urban Self Help Grant, are necessary and vital to the development and future success of a public pier (Phase II). In the same manner, the Phase II pier project has been designed to take full advantage of the Phase I Urban Self Help improvements.

Throughout the development of Winter Island, it has been the intention of the City to provide a comprehensive marine/recreational facility in which both phases of the development successfully interact. Such interaction will occur in two (2) ways. First, the varying uses of the two phases will complement each other well. The Phase I improvements will provide facilities for swimming, picnics, sightseeing, walking, and athletic games. The Phase II improvements will provide complementary facilities for boating, fishing, and sailing.

Second, the various improvements will mesh together through the following conjunctive usage:

1. The bathhouse to be constructed through Phase I will be used by Phase II pier users;

2. The parking improvements of Phase I will be used by the Phase II pier users;
3. The radio shack proposed to be reconstructed through Phase I for use by the Harbormaster, will become a functional component of the pier because of the Harbormaster's relationships with boaters of the Phase II pier.
4. The picnic areas and walkways of Phase I will be utilized by boaters of the Phase II pier while their boats are docked.

It is evident that there will be a substantial degree of interaction, and the City will work to encourage such interaction to the maximum degree.

Future Plans

Upon completion of the construction of the landside and pier improvements, two remaining issues need to be addressed: treatment of the former Coast Guard hangar and barracks buildings. When the initial planning was conducted for park improvements, complete restoration was proposed for the barracks building for use as possible office or museum space or for a marina related activity. Rehabilitation options for the hangar included boat storage, boat repair, indoor recreation, a maritime museum or other educational use, and craft boat building. Demolition of the hangar was also considered as an alternative in order to enhance the view of the harbor from the high ground around the barracks building. This proposed improvement would, however, eliminate a tie to the most recent historical use of the island.

During the planning stage, the National Park Service showed some interest in renovating these buildings and becoming a managing partner with the City in the operation of Winter Island. Improvements to these buildings were then eliminated from the plans and were not later reinstated when the National Park Service decided not to participate in this project. Another factor in the decision not to renovate the hangar and barracks buildings at this time is that Urban Self Help funds may only be used for outdoor recreational purposes. Funding is not allowed for structures not in direct support of an outdoor recreation facility.

A current option being explored is the listing of the entire island on the National Register of Historic Places. This would make the City eligible to apply to the Preservation Projects Fund operated by the Massachusetts Historical Commission for money to renovate these buildings.

Another option is to seek the assistance of Salem State College in the renovation of the hangar since as a boat building and storage facility, it would be a tremendous asset to their sailing program.

The City's immediate goal for the barracks building is to secure it from further damage. The structure is currently open to the weather. Not only is at risk of deterioration, but it also poses a safety hazard to island visitors, especially curious children. The building also has plumbing insulated with asbestos. The City is currently developing cost estimates for asbestos removal and for stabilizing the structure.

Consistent with the City's goal of maintaining Winter Island as a public recreational facility, the City is exploring potential civic and cultural uses that will enhance the attractiveness of the island to local residents and visitors. Museum space is one possibility as the barracks building is being considered as a potential location for a North Shore Childrens Museum. Renovation as City office space, housing perhaps the Park Department, is also under consideration.

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