

A photograph of a harbor at sunset. Several white motorboats are docked along the shore. In the foreground, a small orange and white rowing boat with two people is on the water. The sky is reflected in the water, creating a warm, golden glow. The text 'A Plan for Prescott Park' is overlaid in large, black, sans-serif font.

# A Plan for Prescott Park

CITY OF PORTSMOUTH

WESTON & SAMPSON DESIGN STUDIO  
JANUARY 31, 2017



January 25, 2017



Mr. John Bohenko  
City Manager  
City of Portsmouth  
1 Junkins Avenue  
Portsmouth, NH 03801

Re: A Plan for Prescott Park (DRAFT)

Dear City Manager Bohenko:

It is our pleasure to present to you “A Plan for Prescott Park.” This master plan document is the culmination of over a year of effort and leadership by the Blue Ribbon Committee for the Prescott Park Master Plan. Thank you for entrusting us with this important work. The rejuvenation of this park is a legacy opportunity for the city, its residents and all who visit. We have had the pleasure of collaborating closely with the Blue Ribbon Committee whose guidance and representation on behalf of the City of Portsmouth has been clear and democratic. Throughout the project there has been a robust public engagement process that has shown an incredibly wide and deep passion for Prescott Park and all it represents to this community. We especially appreciate the commitment of those who fully engaged with the process, appearing at every meeting and articulating their concerns as well as their support for various plan developments.

Amidst all of the conversation and debate there is clearly hope and optimism for the future of Prescott Park. You will find that in response to the input we received, a Park First Approach which confirmed the tenets of design.

Key design tenets helping to define the future of Prescott Park:

- A waterfront park for Portsmouth residents, workers, and visitors
- A venue for the arts
- An opportunity for resilient design to mitigate the effects of climate change

We are proud of the work that has been accomplished by the Blue Ribbon Committee and believe that this master plan provides a strong framework with actionable outcomes for all future decisions and critical investments that are to be made within Prescott Park.

Sincerely,

WESTON & SAMPSON  
Design Studio

Handwritten signature of Cheri Ruane in black ink.

Cheri Ruane, ASLA  
Vice President

Handwritten signature of Eugene Bolinger in black ink.

Eugene Bolinger, ASLA  
Vice President

cc: Councilor Chris Dwyer, Blue Ribbon Committee Chair  
David Moore, Assistant City Manager



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# executive summary

Prescott Park is an incredible asset for the City of Portsmouth. Generations of memories have been made here with many more to come. Currently, park stewards face the growing challenge of supporting increasing demands for usage. As Portsmouth continues to evolve as a vibrant waterfront downtown, more and more residents and visitors gravitate here. Prescott Park, with all it offers, is an integral part of the Portsmouth experience and a “must visit” by any measure.

As one of the few points of access to the mighty Piscataqua River, Portsmouth Park is an open space and outdoor arts venue that is cherished by the community. However, the park’s physical infrastructure systems continue to age and endure a harsh waterfront environment. As elements wear and as usage increases it is becoming harder and harder to maintain and operate a safe and accessible waterfront park. The City of Portsmouth understands that capital investment is necessary to support the health, safety and welfare of its residents. With the intention of making smart investments that support a bright and successful future for Prescott Park, the master plan process was initiated.

Months of outreach, engagement, and listening were accessible to everyone who wanted to participate through a multitude of venues and formats. Results were compiled and assessed to generate a design approach we have termed “Park First”. The park first approach guides and informs all design decisions within the master plan. As a public open space, there is a desire to have the park be all things to all people, but this is rarely possible. With ten acres of land, sensitive natural resources immediately adjacent, and an incredibly diverse programming agenda, Prescott Park manages to support a significant volume of formal and informal use. It is critical to put the park first in our thinking, otherwise it will not survive its growing fan base.

The tenets of design that were derived from this park first approach are included below. With these assertions as our guide, we developed A Plan for Prescott Park.

1. Recognition of city-owned nature of the park
2. Use “for park and recreational purposes” per the trust
3. Pedestrian through-route accessibility at all times
4. Maximize waterfront connection
5. Integrate coastal resilience/adaptation strategies

6. Maintain and enhance maritime historical connection
7. Integrate into the neighborhood
8. Ensure presence for theater, dance, music and visual arts (including public art)
9. Maintain different areas for a variety of park experiences
10. Plan for gatherings (informal and formal)
11. Maintain a public forum area
12. Include meaningful invitations for youth to play
13. Precious waterfront space should not be taken up by parking
14. Protect and preserve historic resources

A democratic waterfront promenade serves as the organizing spine for the park. The park has been organized to support flexible programming with large open lawns, shade trees, civic plazas and a more connected and accessible waterfront. The Formal Garden remains an important design element in a new location. A new movable stage facility for seasonal use is proposed to support existing and future performing arts while playable sculpture, tributes to the Prescott sisters, and annual art shows expand visual art programming. Infrastructure systems will be upgraded to promote storm water management, energy efficiency and resiliency to the impacts of climate change.

These improvements, including permitting and design costs, are projected to cost about \$16,000,000 in today’s dollars. Unless the park is going to be renovated all at once, a phasing strategy is needed. We recommend starting with the areas of the park most under-performing and in need of improvement and working outward from there. Interface between renovations and existing conditions must be carefully choreographed to ensure smooth transitions and minimal disruption to park programming as well as recently built work.

While the time and money required to make this new vision for Prescott Park a reality is significant, the potential improvement in Portsmouth’s quality of life and city fabric is even greater. The outreach and engagement of this process has fostered an immense amount of good will and enthusiasm for what is possible here. As the quartercentenary of Portsmouth approaches the 2023, there is great momentum to realize much of this plan through concerted focus, fundraising, and investment. Now is the time to seize this energy and invest not only in the future of Prescott Park but in the future of Portsmouth.





introduction

Prescott Park is a special place. It is here, probably more than anywhere else in Portsmouth, that generations of memories have been made, photographed and cherished. From the Formal Garden to Four Tree Island, there are countless settings for meaningful time to be spent with friends and family. The park is steeped in maritime history with an incredibly unique aesthetic quality. Its location on the tidal Piscataqua River is a draw for those seeking a sea breeze and a breathtaking view of the water.

The city recognizes the incredible value that Prescott Park brings to Portsmouth's residents and visitors alike. Despite the impressive length of shoreline in Portsmouth, there is very little public open space immediately adjacent to the waterfront. This understanding and the realization that significant infrastructure investments were needed to keep the park functional spurred the city to make the investment in a master plan for Prescott Park.

Mayor Jack Blalock appointed the Blue Ribbon Committee of the Prescott Park Master Plan in January 2016 to manage this process. The Committee has been holding regular meetings to guide the master plan through to completion and ultimately make a recommendation to the City Council. The Blue Ribbon Committee members include:

- Councilor Chris Dwyer, Chair
- Mayor Jack Blalock
- Councilor Nancy Pearson
- Stefany Shaheen
- Phyllis Eldridge, Trustee of Trust Funds
- Dana Levenson, Trustee of Trust Funds
- Thomas Watson, Trustee of Trust Funds

This endeavor is not the city's first foray into a planning effort for Prescott Park. In 1964 Moriece and Gary, landscape architects from Cambridge, Massachusetts, authored a master plan report for Prescott Park. Hand drawn plans, axonometric and perspective sketches, supported by a few pages of text, showed an alternative future for the park. Making use of existing tree allees and converting

pavement into lawn, the plan proposed a band shell, colonial garden, open lawn and groves of trees, as well as a children's play area.

This master plan is intended to be a living document that guides both the operations and ongoing capital improvement at Prescott Park. By taking a constructive look at a facility in its entirety, resources can be allocated most efficiently and with greatest impact. This ensures that each effort of improvement, executed as resources become available, will contribute to the singular vision established through the master planning process. The sum becomes greater than the individual parts. In addition, investments are made in a logical sequence that responds to the current set of priorities.

It is important to note the primary purpose of a master plan and how best to make use of it going forward. The Plan for Prescott Park represents an approximate 12 month snapshot in time (early 2016 through early 2017) and it chronicles an expansive community conversation that took place during its evolution. That conversation and the community preferences garnered during that conversation helped to establish the community endorsed tenets of design and community preferences are reflected throughout the written document and within the physical plan. The master planning effort also inventoried the condition of existing park structures, features and systems to help prioritize the order of future refurbishment efforts based on need.

It is intended that The Plan for Prescott Park will be referenced and reviewed frequently, particularly as capital improvements are contemplated. Most importantly, a master plan is a general guide and intentionally intended to be flexible with specific phases, costs, and design precedents and details to be vetted and confirmed through future interactions with key stakeholder groups and the community at large. And as time passes, it is recognized that adjustments to the master plan may be required to comport with continually evolving community needs and desires.

Often a master plan will take a number of years to fully realize its completed vision. Sometimes, as phases of work are implemented, current issues and events can further inform the final master plan. Adjustments to the plan are not uncommon in vibrant, growing communities, and more often than not, the integrity of the original master plan remains the primary framework for decision making decades into the future.







one

# The History and Evolution of Prescott Park

By the 1930s, this area of Portsmouth had fallen on hard times, was quite rundown and had become home to the city's notorious red-light district. Two local schoolteachers—sisters Josie and Mary Prescott, who had grown up in this neighborhood—had a dream of cleaning up and beautifying this section of town to create a park that would be open to everyone.



Born on Marcy Street in the 1850's, the Prescott children attended Portsmouth public schools, and the sisters went on to teach. Their brother Charles found great success in business and died in 1932, leaving his \$3 million inheritance, a fortune the sisters later secured. By that time, the sisters were in their seventies and intent on giving back to their hometown. Unsatisfied with the condition of their neighborhood, the sisters, with the help of their lawyer Charles Dale, began to buy derelict properties along the waterfront.

Their goal was to create a public waterfront park, free and accessible to all, replacing what had become a run down and seedy industrial area. The first parcels of land were deeded to the city in 1940, and the Prescott sisters' trust was established in 1949, upon the death of Josie. The Prescott Trust continues to financially maintain and preserve Prescott Park. The city manages this money through the Trustees of Trust Funds. In addition to the brothels and saloons that populated the area in the early part of the 20th century, the district also included Puddle Dock, a multicultural neighborhood full of historic homes that would later become Strawberry Banke

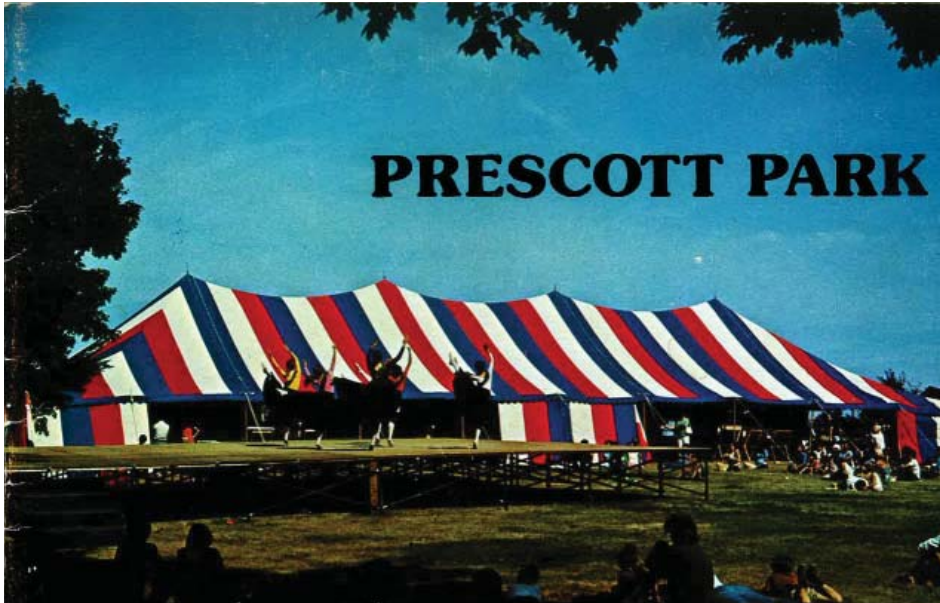
Museum in the late 1960s.

While no one disputes the pleasure derived from the more than 10-acre Prescott Park today, back in the early '50s when the city took possession of the trust and the park land, many grumbled about the stringent rules governing the "Prescott gift." Editorials mentioned many other better uses for the money - such as a new high school or the improvement of Peirce Island." reported Laura Pope on the 7/25/02 Seacoast Online website.

The Prescott Trust continues to manage, maintain and preserve Prescott Park, though increasingly in recent years the proceeds from the Trust have been unable to keep up with operating costs and certainly not capital costs.

The parklands began to be improved and converted from oil tanks and industrial yards into lawn and trees for recreational use. People began to use Prescott Park as the pleasure grounds they were intended to be. The neighborhood of the South End began to change because it wasn't just the Prescott Sisters who were intolerant of the debauchery that was pervasive in the area. Others began to take action to establish the South End and Prescott Park as a safe and vibrant community.





## PRESCOTT PARK ARTS FESTIVAL

In 1974 The Trustees of Trust Funds for the City of Portsmouth, led by Trustee Paul McEachern, and with the help of the New Hampshire Art Association, brought an outdoor theatrical summer production to Prescott Park. Spurred by the celebration of the country's bicentennial, with the assistance of several local arts groups, the inaugural year for the Prescott Park Arts Festival (PPAF) was a wonderful success. Every year since, there have been annual summer festivals of performing and visual arts to the delight of multi-generational audiences.

In the early 1980's the leadership and responsibility for making the summer arts festival happen shifted from the Prescott Park Trustees to The Prescott Park Arts Festival Inc. (PPAF), a not-for-profit corporation, whose sole purpose is to provide Prescott Park and the greater Portsmouth community with arts-based family entertainment. Forty years later, PPAF remains one of the city's premiere arts and cultural mainstays.

Over the years the Festival has grown and evolved with expanded programming attracting bigger acts, which in turn attract larger audiences. The PPAF's growing success supports much of its mission: "The primary objective of the Festival is to provide quality family entertainment, promote artistic excellence in the community and maintain quality presentations of both entertainment and educational events. Implicit in this charge is the exercise of cultural leadership, sensitivity to the community and fiscal responsibility." A tension has emerged recently between these goals and some in the South End neighborhood, which is arguably the most impacted by sounds and cars generated by the Festival.



## THE 1964 MASTER PLAN

In 1964 the landscape architecture firm of Moriece and Gary was commissioned by the Trustees of Trust Funds to come up with a comprehensive design for the park. As parcels were acquired and cleared of industrial residue, a master plan was needed in order to consider the park as one contiguous piece of land. Historic images clearly show the South End was a different place at this time with a strong industrial presence on this working waterfront.

A summary of this plan is worthy of review as it sheds light on the current thinking for public waterfront open spaces when the park was coming into its own. It also allows us to understand what has persisted over many years and what elements have come and gone with the times. Perhaps the most influential and important part of the document on Prescott Park today is the paragraph on Page 13 of the report that calls for the Trustees “to employ a superintendent or caretaker to supervise and coordinate the care and protection of the park.” This is an important recommendation that was realized from that report. It has shaped and changed and informed the nuances of the park and created a sense of place that is absolutely unique to Prescott Park.

The original goal set for the 1964 master plan was to create a design “having a distinct feeling of Colonial New England” and to meet the passive recreational needs of the community. The maritime history and traditions of the Piscataqua’s inland tidewaters were a strong influence over the plan. A maritime exhibit area and children’s play area were intended for direct interaction while models of the Ranger and Gundalow were intended to further “lend atmosphere” to the park. Wharfs in their original locations were to provide docking space for pleasure boaters and allow visitors clear views up and down the river from the decks.

The colonial elements of the design were based on the original architecture of the Shaw and Sheafe Warehouses as well as Strawberry Banke’s collection of buildings. What is currently known as the Formal Garden was identified as a “Colonial Garden” in this plan. It was noted that “no large New England Park would be complete without a Garden – an arrangement of flowers, sculpture, pools and walks.” The Master Plan shows the design of a garden in the traditional English “manor-style,” which is typically enclosed and includes formal lines with informal planting that all support a focal point of either a vista or garden structure. While not an exact replica of the Master Plan drawings, the current Formal Garden closely resembles the original Colonial Garden in location, scale, and quality of space. Of note is the comment in the plan that

suggests “in the center of the garden is placed the statue-fountain (now next to the Post Office) surrounded by a reflecting pool.” It is possible that this refers to the Hovey Fountain. This element was never placed in the Colonial Garden, but instead was relocated from two earlier Portsmouth locations to the entrance mall where it resides today.

A large oval lawn with groves of trees, identified as The Commons, was designed to mitigate the dearth of open spaces for public use in Portsmouth at the time. The Liberty Pole and central walk to the water existed when this Master Plan was written. The center walk was specifically identified to be removed and replaced with a large circular brick walk with benches around the perimeter of the lawn. Based on current conditions in the park, it appears this was never implemented.

The plan proposed a sloped lawn amphitheater facing the water with a band shell positioned at the water’s edge (facing the South End neighborhood). The band shell was intended for use in “simple dramatic productions or other civic events.” This element was never constructed, though performing and visual art events began occurring in the park in 1974.

The rows of Norway Maple trees that populate the northern side of the park and the formal entrance bollards were in place when the 1964 document was drafted. This area of the park was designed by the Prescott sisters themselves and the women could be seen watching the construction to ensure it was done correctly. The plan proposed an Entrance Mall with a viewing balcony or overlook into the park and down to the water replacing the paved ramp that existed at the time. This design element was never built.

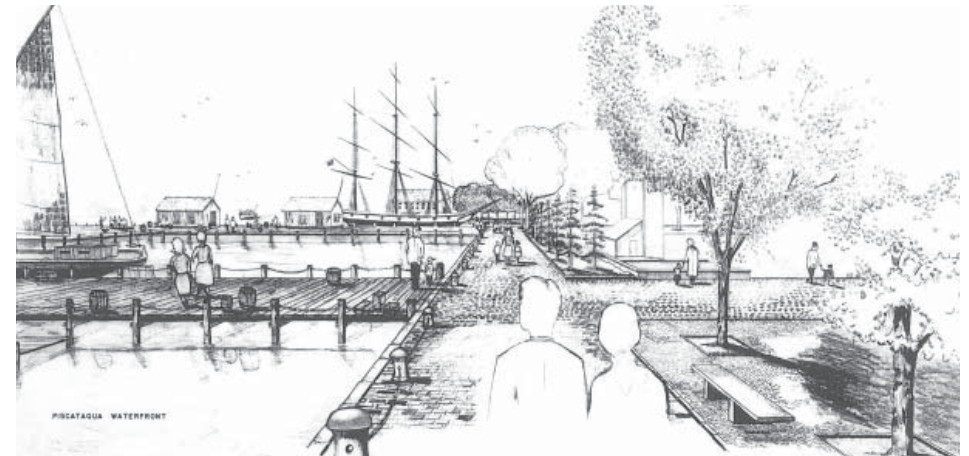
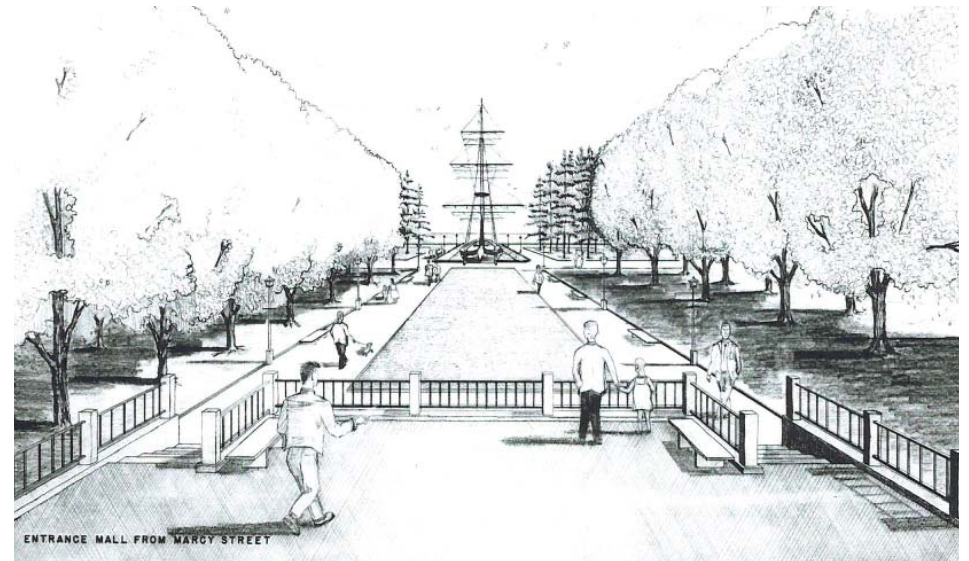
Four Tree Island was to be treated as part of the overall park plan. It was suggested that four large trees be planted to replace the remaining two failing specimens that earned the island its name.



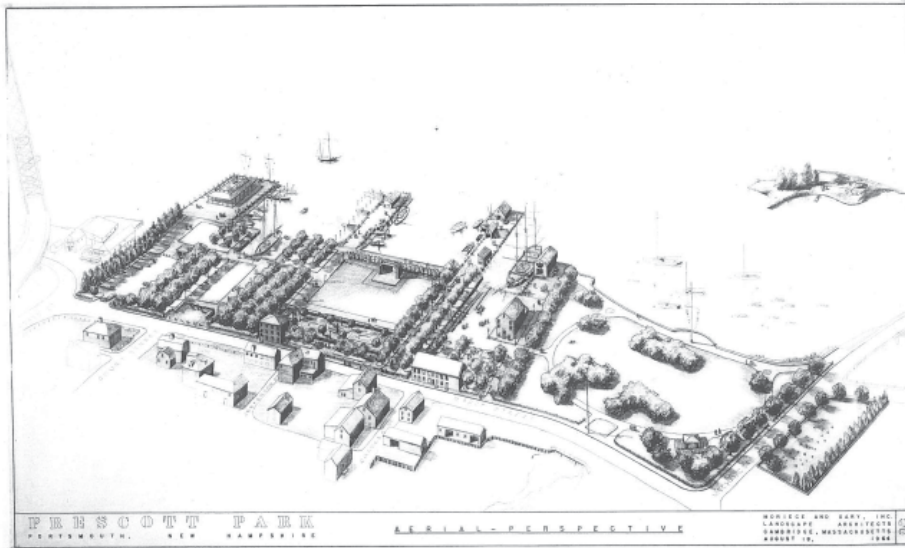
A few other notable recommendations from the plan:

- Planting, lighting and park structures such as benches, fencing, etc. were all to be in the “colonial style.”
- “Precious waterfront park land should not be used for general parking.” A minimum of off-street parking was proposed off of Marcy Street and all other parking should occur “nearby.”

The 1964 Master Plan provided a useful framework for improvements to be completed with the whole park in mind. While many of these features were not implemented precisely as described, several of them were built and merged with existing park conditions with current park use in mind to create the Prescott Park we know and love today.



Images from the 1964 Master Plan, Moriece and Gary Landscape Architects







two

Prescott Park Today

**P**rescott Park is located in Portsmouth, NH, on the banks of the Piscataqua River, about six blocks from downtown and Market Square. Where maritime industry once proliferated the riverbanks of the park, retail shops, restaurants, and above-market rate housing has infiltrated. Fishing piers with private fishing boats are still present along this stretch of shoreline, which makes for highly engaging views that emanate seacoast heritage. Prescott Park has evolved not from one singular vision but from a community of voices in service of the people of Portsmouth. People come from outside Portsmouth to enjoy this park as well, but it is the character of place that these visitors find compelling. That character was built brick by brick over many years by many different hands starting with those of the Prescott Sisters and continuing through the present with the passionate labor of the park superintendent on a daily basis.

By intentional design, public parks endure a great deal of concentrated use. The impacts of that use are compounded further in Prescott Park by density of population, exposure to New England's seasonal weather fluctuations, and proximity to the tidal marine conditions of the Piscataqua River. The initial investments that were made when the properties were first converted to parkland and the second wave of improvements that resulted from the 1964 Master Plan have reached a critical point in their lifespan. Specific park infrastructure that required urgent attention has been replaced when critical need arises. These projects have included the South Docks, electrical upgrades, sea wall repair, and building improvements, among others. The net result is park infrastructure that is stable and supporting daily use, but it is taking more and more resources to perform basic operational and maintenance functions.

Park-wide capital improvements are required on a regular basis in order to maintain a high level of service to the public and visitors alike. These improvements have not been consistently realized and as a result, the park has significant need for investment in improvement and repair. If the park were to be repaired in place,

with the conditions as they are today based on current construction pricing, it is likely that a comprehensive refurbishment would cost between \$10M and \$12M. This would include the full replacement of pavements and fencing, benches and lighting, seawalls, plantings and lawns. It would include sewer and drainage systems, water supply and electrical networks that are quickly reaching the end of their useful life. While this list is not complete, it gives a glimpse of the significant money that must be invested in order to sustain the gem that is Prescott Park.

In this chapter we take a closer look at these park elements and provide analysis and assessment of how they contribute to the whole of Prescott Park. More detailed information for each major system or component can be found in Appendix A.

In addition to the physical assets of the park, it is equally as important to assess how the park is used by the people that occupy it today. Together, this information will provide a clear picture of existing conditions and allow us to craft a plan that will not only meet today's needs but look ahead and embed flexibility for future uses.

## **PHYSICAL FEATURES ASSESSMENT**

This section has been organized by system or element within the park. As these features typically appear in multiple locations or span several areas, they have been grouped together by type versus geographic location. This assessment is intended as an overview of park conditions and not a deep dive into the details of Prescott Park today. This information outlines general current conditions as they relate to park operations and maintenance functions.

## **HISTORIC FEATURES**

Of importance is the collection of historic resources within the park. From structures to monuments there are several built features within the park that have been identified for special care, restoration and

preservation within the new plan.

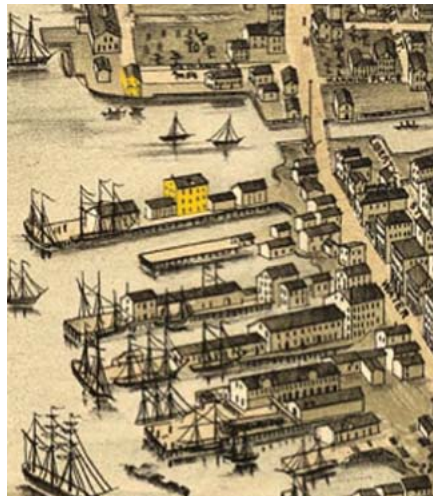
These features include:

- Shaw Warehouse
- Sheafe Warehouse
- Liberty Pole
- Hovey Fountain
- Anchor
- The Whale
- My Mother, The Wind

## WAREHOUSE BUILDINGS

The Shaw Warehouse was built around 1806 and was owned by Abraham Shaw, a merchant active in privateering during the War of 1812. It was later the home and storehouse of Portsmouth's notorious "Cappy" Stewart. Still on its original site, the western end is the warehouse. It now houses office and work space for the Prescott Park maintenance staff on the ground floor, while Prescott Park Arts Festival works out of the second floor and uses the third floor for costume and prop storage. There are public restrooms on the driveway side of the building. The eastern end of the complex is more modern and houses garage and shop facilities for the grounds crew in two single-story additions. The overall condition of the building is considered good though fire suppression has been identified as an important need to protect the wood construction.

The Sheafe Warehouse is a ca. 1740 timber frame warehouse with a waterside overhanging second story, useful for lifting cargo directly from the decks of smaller vessels into the building. The 1935 drawing to the right shows the original locations of the two warehouses. It was originally located on the southern side of



the park, near the present Peirce Island Bridge. Since its heyday, the building has been used as a boat building shop, a carpentry shop, a storage facility, and a museum of folk art. It currently hosts the New Hampshire Art Association summertime juried show, from late June through August and serves as storage for the park and PPAF in the other months. This building is also considered to be in "good" condition, but again, fire suppression is a prudent improvement that will protect the aging wood infrastructure.



This 1935 photograph, taken by Clement Moran for the Historic American Buildings Survey, shows the decrepit condition of the Sheafe Warehouse by the early 20th century.

## MONUMENTS, MEMORIALS AND SCULPTURE

The Liberty Pole is the oldest and most honored monument in the park. At one time much of the lower section of Prescott Park, where the Trial Gardens are today, was part of an open water inlet into what was called Puddle Dock. Puddle Dock continued west under a bridge on Marcy Street (then called Water Street) into a docking and residential area. During the Revolutionary War this bridge was patriotically named the Liberty Bridge by the local citizenry. In 1824, as part of a fourth-of-July celebration honoring the



revolutionary past, a very prominent Liberty Pole was commissioned. Today, Puddle Dock and the outlet to the channel have been long since filled in and the bridge replaced by asphalt roadway. The Liberty Pole, however, with its replica historical plaque and gilded liberty eagle atop remains. Every day this prominent Prescott Park feature flies the American Flag reminding all of the patriotic participation in events of the past and present the Portsmouth sons and daughters have played.

“The Whale” and “My Mother, The Wind” are both the work of Cabot Lyford. Four of his large public sculptures can be found in Portsmouth, two of them in Prescott Park. “The Whale”, sitting on the aptly named Whale Lawn, was carved from a massive block of black granite from Australia, which had originally been imported during the construction of a large Portsmouth high rise. Lyford had purchased the leftover Australian granite to create “The Whale,” as well as another landmark Portsmouth monument, “My Mother the Wind”, which was installed on Four Tree Island on the city’s waterfront in 1975, facing the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. “My Mother the Wind”, now a city landmark, is composed of seven tons of Australian black granite.



“The Whale” has become the prime destination for antsy children whose caregivers happen to be visiting the park. While there once was a children’s play area located near the Liberty Pole, those relics have long since been removed leaving no playful way to engage children. The Whale, an easily recognizable sea creature, with its smooth slide-like back and friendly features, has become a magnet for kids of all ages.



“Neptune,” more commonly known as The Emerson Hovey Fountain, was given to the City of Portsmouth by Mrs. Louise Folsom Hovey in memory of her son Charles Emerson Hovey who was killed in the Philippines. The fountain was first located at Daniel Street near the spot of today’s McIntyre Building and later to the sidewalk at the corner of State and Pleasant streets. Some years later,



Mrs. William W. Howells, the niece of Ensign Hovey, campaigned to have it moved to a more prominent location. In 1974, the proposed site of Prescott Park was accepted. The original marble base of the fountain proved too damaged by the move to retain, so it was decided to abandon the drinking fountain arrangement in favor of a new circular brick basin, which was designed by Portsmouth architect Chester P. Keefe II.

The Formal Garden was constructed in the 1960s and includes three fountains. These fountains are lit at night and have been the subject of countless photographs and paintings and the backdrop for infinitely more. They require significant attention to keep them clean and functioning throughout the season. The basins are starting to leak more frequently and the outer brick facades are showing decay.

A larger anchor was placed in Prescott Park at some point in the late 1960's. While the source of the anchor is unknown, it appears to have been installed in response to the 1964 Master Plan that called for "old anchors, figureheads and other seaport relics placed on exhibit" within the park.

There are countless memorial plaques and signs throughout the park. Despite several attempts to catalog them all, it's likely there are more beyond what has been recorded.



## PARK SUPPORT BUILDINGS

The Pavilion was opened in 2014 through the collaboration of the city and the PPAF. The building replaced the former concession and bathroom structure with an expanded footprint to accommodate park need. Accessible bathrooms for men and woman are maintained by PPAF from May through October 1st. The second floor of the building has storage space.

The PPAF Support Building was constructed with the permission of the Trustees in 2013 to house much of the control equipment for lighting and sound on the upper level. The lower level accommodates first aid, command and control for PPAF event operations, merchandise sales, as well as the rental of chairs and blankets for use during PPAF events. This building allowed for the demolition of two smaller "shacks" on site, which improved this area considerably.



The Sound Pavilion is an open air structure constructed with the intention of housing sound and light technicians during performances.

The Electrical Control Enclosure is an old structure that is quickly reaching the end of its useful life and has been identified for replacement as soon



as electrical systems are upgraded and a new stage facility is implemented. Currently it houses the main power switches for two different zones within the park and the PPAF's dimmer rack housing.

## STAGE PLATFORM

While originally performing art productions were held under a giant tent, more robust programming required a raised platform. This was originally built in the early 80's and over time, the stage has been bolstered with additional structural members and expanded to accommodate stage and set requirements of the PPAF. The platform is the base for PPAF's rigging that is erected and then removed each season. The rigging supports PPAF's lighting and sound equipment used during performances.



When the rigging and sets are removed at the end of the season, the stage platform remains in place year round. Though warning signs state that people should not climb on the stage, it's too compelling for kids and others. This makes it an attractive nuisance within the park when not in use and protected by PPAF. Its location and aesthetics are sub-optimal. Visually, without fancy sets and rigging, the stage is an unattractive wood conglomeration that is positioned in the midst of what are known as "Open Lawns B and

A." Its position cuts off what would be a larger contiguous open green space and creates a sense of segmentation.

## PARK ENTRANCES AND EDGES

In the planning and design world there has long been a debate about the front and back of an establishment. For example, some argue that your front door is not your formal mailing address but instead the door you actually use to enter and exit most often. Sometimes those are the same, but often, they are not. If this were the case for Prescott Park, the front door would be the driveway entrance on State Street, complete with a full frontal view of the dumpsters. Months of observation and pedestrian mapping confirm that this entrance is by and far the most well-used by pedestrians entering the park. The proximity to downtown and Market Square make it the fastest way to gain entrance to the park whether on foot or by car. This entrance was designed for cars to access the parking lot, but people will always find and employ the path of least resistance and the most direct route.



The adjacent entrance off of Marcy Street was designed as the intended primary formal entrance for pedestrians into the park. With the large granite bollards and bluestone paved plaza, the formal language is intended to draw you into the park to take in the



long vistas to the water. This, however, is not how it functions today. As a result, the space feels awkward and out of place.



The interface between the park and the public right of way at this prominent corner is dominated by evenly spaced 6' tall brick piers connected by a black metal picket fence. This creates an institutional aesthetic that is not in keeping with the overall feel of the park and functions more to keep people out than to create a feeling of security and enclosure within the park. This fence and pier treatment continues down Marcy Street and ends after the vehicular gate that secures the driveway that is limited to maintenance and concession delivery access next to 57 Marcy Street, the privately owned apartment building flanked by the park on three sides. Next door to the apartment building is a utility building that houses a substation for the natural gas distribution in the neighborhood.

The park frontage picks back up to the south of the utility building with an ornamental planting bed that frames the most prominent park sign and is backed by the white picket fence of the Formal Garden and fronted by a series of backless white benches along the sidewalk. The shrubs in the planting bed are overgrown and overpower the sign and other annual and perennial vegetation.

This planting bed provides a buffer between Marcy Street and the Formal Garden but also creates a barrier between foot traffic on the sidewalk and the park itself, including views through the park to the water.

The Marine Railroad Headhouse sits abruptly at the back of the public sidewalk. The two-story brick building is handsome and in good repair, thanks to the stewardship of the Players Ring. Immediately to the right of the building is a vehicular entrance used for deliveries and de-facto not de-jure parking. There are two handicap access parking spots at the end of this way that are used by the Gundalow dock for handicapped patrons. This entrance is blocked by a makeshift configuration of cord and a hook and signage noting "STAFF ONLY." The barrier is an operational headache, as it is often down allowing personal cars to enter. A brick sidewalk to the south offers an accessible route for pedestrians to traverse the site all the way to the water.

The drive itself bifurcates the site and reinforces the impression that the park is a series of different areas instead of one contiguous place. Where the drive terminates at the Sheafe is particularly awkward. This location is an important node of pedestrian circulation where historic buildings, waterfront views, access to the Gundalow dock, and a change in grade all occur.



A row of stately mature shade trees create a legible edge to Open Lawn C. Here we find sweeping views to the fishing pier and boats in the Piscataqua and often the tilted mast of the Gundalow is present, tying the maritime activities directly into the park experience. The Liberty Pole sits immediately behind the curb on Marcy Street, an awkward location, which begs revisiting while recognizing historic integrity.

This is a very popular point of entry into the park by people visiting Strawberry Banke. The programmatic and visual connections between these two historic assets cannot be overstated. As Strawberry Banke



proceeds with improvements to its campus, considerations for a stronger relationship to Prescott Park will be important. The brick sidewalk transitions to an asphalt pathway that is about 10 feet wide. It feels generous and is further formalized by an allee of flowering crab apples and a collection of benches and light poles. The terminus is a cobble plaza with a curbed planting bed and large anchor set on a mill stone. Memorial events happen here from time to time because of the ceremony of the space. The circular plaza is further reinforced by the seawall, which projects out into the river offering impressive views.

To the right of the Liberty Pole, the rectangular beds of the Trial Gardens create an impressive view of annuals and perennials on display. The beds closest to Marcy Street often host an artistic installation that changes seasonally.

The corner of Marcy Street and Mechanic Street had recent underground utility work performed. As a result the, shrubs at this corner have been impacted, but the large shade trees that line Mechanic Street remain intact. This is an important view into the park, but has never functioned as an entrance. The draw of the Liberty Pole only a short distance away is enough to keep people from cutting across the lawn here.

The Mechanic Street edge offers classic park views with the brick sidewalk, stately shade trees with benches in between, and long views into the park where flowers, lawn, and trees create memorable scenes. Recently the city removed the parallel parking spaces from this right-of-way, ensuring a strong visual connection into the park whether on foot or in a car.

The corner where the park meets the Peirce Island Bridge is lacking in definition and presence. This is an important gateway into the park for pedestrians who have parked on Peirce Island and are connecting back to the South End. In addition, drivers have a moment of interface at this point and a more clearly defined entrance with identifying signage would create a far more integrated park presence.

If you cross Mechanic Street at this point you come across a small triangular parcel of land that is enclosed by the Peirce Island Bridge and a two-story house. Vegetation has grown in towards the river blocking views of the water.

Identified in the 1964 Master Plan to be a “Spruce Grove,” this land is nothing short of forgotten by all but the park maintenance staff who continue to care for this lonely corner of the park. The city recently purchased some of the land and buildings adjacent to this site, creating potential for expanding park features and experientially reconnecting this area to the whole of Prescott Park.

Crossing Peirce Island Bridge can be a breathtaking experience. Visually, the sweeping views of the Piscataqua and the South End’s

historic architecture create a memorable journey. The pedestrian right-of-way, however, is narrow and separated from the two-lane road by a 6" curb and a recent installation of black metal post and chain fencing as part of the wastewater treatment plant project. The area for walking feels compressed and if there is a stroller or a dog on a leash when encountering a person heading in the other direction, it quickens the pulse as you navigate the passing. This connection is important to the overall master plan for Prescott Park because it is currently the only connection to Four Tree Island. While some have argued that Four Tree Island is better off as the best kept secret in Portsmouth, it is underutilized as a public waterfront open space.

Once you've made the crossing over the Piscataqua, the entrance to Four Tree Island is not immediately obvious. The gateway is hidden amongst the shoreline vegetation without proper signage and wayfinding. Those in the know arrive by car and park right at the entrance.

The current gateway structure reads as a bit hostile upon initial approach. The locked gates effectively keep out unwanted cars but also confuse first-time visitors as to whether or not they should even be there. This is an important threshold from Peirce Island back into the tranquil confines of parkland and potential for improvement abounds.



## CIRCULATION & ACCESSIBILITY

There are lots of pathways within Prescott Park to facilitate pedestrian movement. However, there is not sufficient alignment between how the park is used and where the paths are located. Pathway surfacing and widths are widely varied throughout the property.

Asphalt is used for wide paths that double as maintenance access. Brick is deployed for secondary pathways that are narrow and typically internal to the larger routes of travel. Stonedust surfacing is used as well, though given the intensive use, maintenance is a challenge.

Accessibility within the site is not universal and there are awkward moments between sections of pathway and lawn or the transition from one pavement to another that are patched periodically to eliminate vertical barriers.

There is parking within the park in the lot to the north, and spaces for park and PPAF staff exist along Water Street with two handicapped spaces near the Sheafe for guests accessing the Gundalow. A driveway for deliveries and maintenance access only sits next to the 57 Marcy Street apartment building. It has been noted that for major events in the park, cars tend to populate the small residential streets taking much needed parking for residents. Strawberry Banke has provided parking for major events and indicated in the public process that a more formal agreement can be reached to support parking for Prescott Park.

To reach Four Tree Island you must traverse a causeway that connects one island (Four Tree) to another (Peirce). There is a generous parking lot on Peirce Island at the entrance of Four Tree Island. This gravel way is mostly used for maintenance purposes but has been known to transport the occasional cooler of food and drink for large gatherings or mobility impaired visitors. The surface is relatively even and well graded with no signs of erosion. The brick pathways on the island have settled over time making them navigable by able-bodied visitors but would not they be considered universally accessible.

## PLAZAS AND PROMENADES

The most "grand" plaza is the formal entrance off of Marcy Street at Court Street. It is intended to be the "main entrance" of Prescott

Park, though it is rarely used as such. Heavy granite bollards are set within a field of bluestone pavement that slopes down into the park. On either side of this entrance are large brick piers and a tall, black metal picket fence. Very mature Norway maple trees populate the immediate area. The general experience does not seem to meet the design intention of grandeur. The 1964 Master Plan had called for a series of improvements at this location that were only partially realized. The best feature of this plaza is the view from Marcy Street to the beloved Hovey Fountain and then on to the water.

The public forum also functions as a plaza space. Its location on the water is desirable, but the rest of the infrastructure that makes up this space leaves much to be desired. The asphalt pavement is pervasive. Some of it has traces of green paint that was applied as a beautification effort. The surrounding sea walls are deteriorating slowly, allowing for tidal infiltration behind the walls, which then leads to settlement of the pavement creating an uneven surface that is constantly being patched by the city. The rusting chain link fence guard rail detracts significantly from the waterfront experience. As a result, this area is used informally and formally only about three or four times a year for public forum permitted events.

Prescott Park is a prime location for a public walk, or promenade, especially one along a waterfront. The current park layout includes a series of narrow paths that generally run perpendicular or parallel to the water, though none in an interrupted route nor wide enough to accommodate multiple strollers walking next to one another. Arts programming often spills beyond the lawn area and across walkways. Current crowd management practices include roping off a designated area for events. This almost always spans major pathways and pedestrian routes across the park. When an event is in progress, one cannot traverse the park unimpeded by a monitored gateway. Throughout the public engagement process this was a consistent criticism of current park conditions with respect to open circulation.

## OPEN LAWN AREAS

There are several zones of open lawn area. The largest have been identified for the purposes of permitting of formal events as Open Lawn A, B, and C. They include the lawns across the path from the Trial Gardens, behind the Players Ring building, and to the front of the stage. These areas provide endless enjoyment for visitors by supporting informal uses like picnicking, reading, kite flying, Frisbee throwing, and hula hooping, among other things. In areas that do not sustain repeated, heavy foot traffic, the lawn is in great condition. The front and back of the stage area endure far more use and are often compromised in quality as a result. This limits their usability by the general public outside of formal performances.

## SAND BEACH AREAS

There are two areas where people can currently interact with the water via a gently sloping sand beach. They sit on either side of the South Pier. The conditions at low tide welcome people of all ages to explore the beach and mudflats looking for treasures and sea critters.

## PLANTING AND VEGETATION

The park's stately mature shade trees contribute greatly to the overall experience and aesthetic. There are many specimen trees that provide great shade and habitat as well as create vertical structure that frame water views.

From the 1950s through the 1980s the infamous Norway maple was used prolifically throughout New England. As a fast growing, hardy, salt-tolerant tree it was particularly attractive



in replanting efforts after major storms and the Dutch Elm disease that decimated most of the elm and maple trees in the region. As a result, many areas of northern New England were reforested with this infamous species. Unfortunately, in addition to dense shade, the roots release a chemical that is toxic to many plants, making it very difficult to get anything to grow in the understory. They are also considered an exotic invasive due to their propensity to reproduce through seed distribution, take root in even the most hostile conditions, and then out-compete native tree species for light and water. Prescott Park is home to many mature Norway maple trees that are reaching the end of their healthy life.



There are a few evergreen trees that exist across the site. Most have been aggressively limbed up very high in order to allow for views through the site and appear scraggly. This compromises the aesthetics of these trees whose natural habit is pyramidal and often low branching. They do, however, provide year-round habitat for urban wildlife and effectively screen unwanted views to adjacent parcels.

There are several locations where shrubs have been used to provide woody structure and height to ornamental planting beds. These areas include the park sign garden along Marcy Street and the planting beds that flank the Liberty Pole. Historic photos show these shrubs in their early days as relatively small and understated. Today they are overgrown and towering. They have outgrown the space they occupy



and have created visual barriers in places that were not originally intended nor do they serve the park well.

Annuals and perennials are prolific in designated areas of the park. The Formal Garden is awash with color from May through September thanks to the artful combination of plantings that line the brick walks and surround the cultivar specimen Japanese crabapple trees. Artists and photographers are frequently seen at work along the brick paths that circle the three display fountains. White bench seating lines the perimeter for a quiet visit in the gardens. This is also a popular spot for wedding photos.



The Trial Gardens are so named for their function as the location for UNH Extension services to test out new varieties of annuals and perennials starting around 1975. The testing function is no longer, however the Trial Gardens of today are beautiful displays of color that host the annual Fairy House Tour, countless photo shoots, butterfly watching, and picnics. There are also ornamental beds around the Anchor in proximity to the Trial Gardens. These photogenic areas of the park are sought after, especially the Formal Garden where many prom, engagement, wedding, and family photos can be traced for generations.

The New England climate doesn't allow for a concerted planting effort until around Mother's Day which lasts until September due to frost, which is fatal for the annuals and ends the season for most perennials. The hands-on labor that is required to maintain these beds on a seasonal basis is intensive. Prepping beds, planting, weeding, watering, fertilizing, dead heading, staking, and pruning for individual plants by the thousands is no small feat, but the results are universally admired and photographed.



## NORTH AND SOUTH DOCKS

There are two dock structures in Prescott Park. They are owned and operated by the city. The South Docks, in the foreground of the image below, were recently replaced with electrical and water utility services upgraded. This dock accommodates all of seasonal slip rental with some overnight spaces. The North Docks are much older and in need of replacement in the not too distant future. They are used for one or two night stays.



## UNDERGROUND UTILITIES

During site assessment process, a team of engineers, architects, and landscape architects inspected each and every infrastructure system within the park. The ones that support important functions are the same ones that people often never think about when in the park. A network of pipes and conduit runs beneath Prescott Park delivering energy and conveying water from points of source to outlets of discharge. The subterranean system is critical for Prescott Park to support recreation, arts-based programming and tourism demand on a daily basis. These systems include: stormwater / drainage, sewer, water supply, electricity, and gas. While there were obvious and anticipated signs of their age, the underground utilities are in fair condition. They are stable, yet will require more and more attention and resources to keep them in working order.



The electrical network is made up of a number of smaller subsystems. Their coverage roughly matches general zones of use across the park though some features require dedicated power like the stage functions. While some recent improvements have upgraded specific service to stage-related facilities and new power was run to the recently rebuilt South Docks, the rest of the park requires similar attention.

Given the significant improvements called for in this master plan, removal and replacement of these systems is prudent. Reconfiguration will allow for more efficient service, ease of maintenance, and improved park resiliency in the face of climate change.

## SITE FURNISHINGS

Prescott Park has an admirably eclectic mix of site furnishings. In fact, this collection is part of what makes the park so uniquely grounded in Portsmouth. There are benches, lights, and fences in a myriad of materials and styles that have been aggregated over time in this one special place. Whether born of tribute and memorial or ingenuity and ergonomics, each and every site feature seems to have a story and at least one adoring fan willing to wax poetic. Selected examples of the site furnishings illustrating the wide variety of styles and aesthetics have been assembled to the right.

The large covered grill and surrounding sheltered picnic tables with individual grills out at Four Tree Island makes it an ideal spot for big family, church, or corporate gatherings. The views from this location are unbeatable and the seclusion from the main park and bustle of downtown creates a true sense of retreat.



## PARK USAGE ASSESSMENT

These acres serve hundreds of thousands of people every year. Location obviously plays a big part in the draw, but Prescott Park is so much more than that. There are four formal park licensees who currently make use of the park annually; they are the PPAF, The Gundalow Company, The Players Ring, and New Hampshire Art Association (NHAA). PPAF uses office space in the Shaw Warehouse as well as the third floor for costume and prop storage, the Sheafe for off-season lighting and rigging storage,



the Pavilion for concessions and bathroom facilities, the stage, and the Support Building for command and control, lighting and sound, and merchandise sales, as well as chair rentals and first aid. Parking on Water Street is used predominantly by the PPAF and park maintenance staff. The Gundalow Company makes use of the dock and ramp next to the Sheafe Warehouse, and their patrons walk down Water Street after purchasing tickets at their storefront on Marcy Street across from the Marine Railroad Head House. The Players Ring is the current tenant and steward of that building where its acclaimed black box theater productions are held. The NHAA uses the Sheafe Warehouse for the display of an annual juried exhibit by their members in the summer months.



Individual private boats are able to rent a slip for up to a couple of nights at the north or newly replaced South Docks. Seasonal slips are rented annually and often sell out. There has been a consistent call to maintain the capacity of the docks at Prescott Park. It has been cited as the one location in the area that is open to the public and offers one of the very few affordable places to dock overnight. Dozens of private permitted events also take place within the park; weddings, family reunions, public forum rallies, birthday parties, and yoga classes, memorial ceremonies, and the Fairy House Tour. The large grill and pavilion on Four Tree Island is a popular location that is routinely scheduled for events as is the Public Forum.

Informal daily happenings occur by the hundreds. These moments include hula hooping, picnics, moms with infants sharing time, meditation, reading, fishing, playing checkers, painting, school

field trips, Frisbee throwing, kite flying, stilt walking; it goes on and on. The conclusion is that there's a little something for everyone at Prescott Park; and what we heard repeatedly through the public process was "we don't want to lose that!" Mapping of current park usage can be found in Appendix B.

## SUPPORT FOR THE ARTS

It is important to note that support for the arts by the Blue Ribbon Committee, in its many forms, including public art and performance and, visual arts did not waver during this process. Inclusion of the arts was a mainstay of the public input, BRC discussions, and materials developed by the consultants throughout. The arts have become an inherent part of the park during the summer months and it is the intention of this plan to expand that vital relationship to be a component that improves the entire park experience. This evolution will deepen the sense of place that is so palpable within the park from June through October.



Elements that people noted were missing included children's play, access for dogs, and permission to ride bikes through the park. While dogs and bikes are part of a larger city-wide conversation and would be addressed through new policies being developed, meaningful opportunities for well-integrated children's play had traction with those involved in the engagement process.



## THE CARE AND KEEPING OF PRESCOTT PARK

Prescott Park has become the life's work of Superintendent Michael Warhurst. He started as an intern from the Thompson School at UNH in 1975 and has put his heart and soul into every square foot of this place since then. Having made his way through the ranks, Warhurst became the superintendent in 1988. Since that time he's had a number of right-hand men and women who have faithfully and quietly nurtured these grounds. The collective contributions made by this team cannot be overstated and the passionate tenacity in the care and upkeep of Prescott Park are part of what make this place so magical.







three

Community  
Engagement  
and  
Public  
Outreach

From the outset of this process there has been a keen focus on a robust public engagement component. The goal was to create multiple, meaningful points of engagement and to reach as many people as possible from all parts of the City. Public meetings, site walks, and working sessions were bolstered with a web-based comment forum.

The Blue Ribbon Committee began meeting in February of 2016 and continued to meet a total of 25 times over the course of its work. Each meeting typically included an update from the consultant team and was followed by a thorough discussion between the BRC members. These meetings were all open to the public and a public comment session was held at the end of each meeting.

The City also established a dedicated Prescott Park Master Plan website the project, which served as a repository of Committee documents, presentations, meeting materials and other background information. A list of meeting dates along with agendas were posted along with links to videos of the meeting on the City's YouTube channel. Meeting minutes and actions were posted to the City's main meeting calendar and linked to from the project page. Throughout the process, members of the public wishing



to submit comments to the Committee were able to do so via a web comment form, located on the City's. Over 200 comments were received through this tool and sent in batches to the Committee prior to each Committee meeting. A compendium of these comments were posted on the project website.

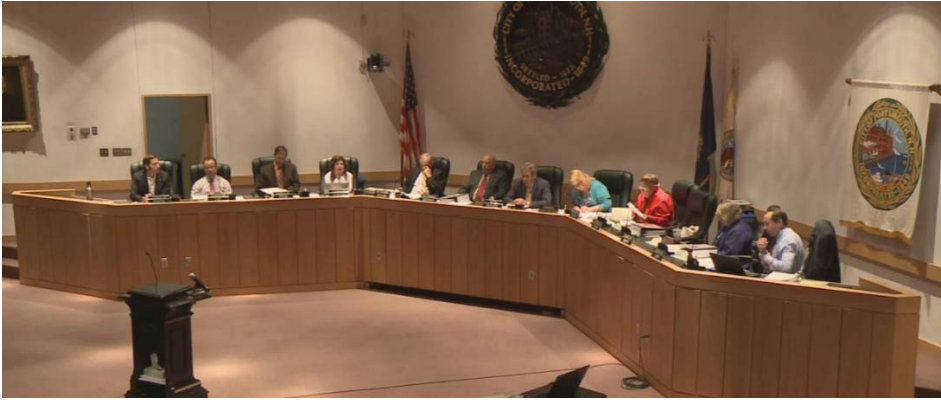


Several Committee-sponsored public input sessions were held throughout the process:

On Saturday June 12, 2016, two sessions were held in the park in the backstage tent behind the stage. The program – including a presentation and facilitated site observation walk – took place twice during the day (once in the morning and once in the afternoon). Each participant received a clipboard, pen and a “Walkabout Guide” to share personal thoughts about what was good, what needed work, what there should be more of and what could be reduced or eliminated. Over 100 Walkabout Guides (feedback forms) were returned that day and a few more trickled in afterwards.

On Thursday June 22nd, an additional public meeting (this one offered during a weeknight) was held in City Council Chambers, with the same presentation from the Saturday event and Walkabout Guides.

In the run-up to these meetings, the Committee made special effort to spread the word about the Committee's work and opportunities for input. Weston & Sampson staff members along with Committee members attended Little League games, Market Square Day, and Chowderfest in Prescott Park in order to speak directly with members of the public. Unique Post cards were sent to the City's schools as part of this same effort at promoting the input opportunities.



A second set of special public input meetings sponsored by the Committee was held in October. On Thursday October 13th a presentation and feedback session was held in City Council Chambers and an audience response system was used to poll the attendees about particular design alternatives. On the following Saturday (October 15th) a presentation and site walk were held based out of the TYCO Visitor Center at Strawberry Banke, where the polling system was also used.

Questions that were posed at these three engagements included important considerations for the overall design of the park like “Given the information presented on the Formal Garden, do you support relocation of this park feature?” Results of the answers were tallied in real time and displayed immediately. This spurred a very strong dialog about specific design issues as well as governance ideas.

During the process, the project team and the Blue Ribbon Committee updated the City Council at two working sessions. There was one

at the City Council’s Saturday October 1st 2016 retreat held in the Levenson Room at the Portsmouth Public Library. Later, on December 19th, a work session with the City Council was held at which the project team, Committee members and City Councilors discussed the draft Master Plan and discussed the outline of Governance recommendations to date. Both sessions were well-attended by the public and televised.

A final public meeting was held on January 11th in the Council Chambers. The preferred master plan was presented and the audience participated in breakout sessions focused on particular elements of the plan. A recap of the breakout discussions was held in Council Chambers and the content from the meeting was discussed at the Committee’s meeting on January 25, 2017. At this meeting, the Blue Ribbon Committee voted unanimously to submit this report to the City Council for adoption.

Overall the process followed by the Committee was widely viewed as effective in promoting public participation and providing ample opportunity to raise important questions and introduce new ideas into the design for the Park and discuss the governance recommendations.



<u>2.) 2. What is your opinion of the boardwalk proposal for Prescott Park? (multiple choice)</u>	<u>Responses</u>	
I support the boardwalk proposal for Prescott...	27	77.14%
I do not support the boardwalk proposal for P...	7	20%
Undecided	1	2.86%
No opinion	0	0%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100%</b>

# PRESCOTT PARK PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

Date	Meeting	Content
2/18/2016	MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON THE PRESCOTT PARK MASTER PLAN	- Discussion of Firm Selection a. Review of RFQ/RFP Process b. Next Steps - Selection of Next Meeting Date
3/14/2016	MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON THE PRESCOTT PARK MASTER PLAN	- Staff Update on Firm Selection & Review of Draft Work Plan - Committee Discussion re: Committee's Needs for Background Information
4/13/2016	MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON THE PRESCOTT PARK MASTER PLAN	- Introduction of Weston & Sampson and Presentation - Discussion on Master Plan Process and Committee Next Steps
5/4/2016	MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON THE PRESCOTT PARK MASTER PLAN	- Legal Framework for Prescott Park - Review of Public Participation Plan and Schedule - Communications Plan
5/18/2016	MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON THE PRESCOTT PARK MASTER PLAN	- Discussion on kick-off meeting and other public input preparations - Update from Trustees of Trust Funds on park operations
6/8/2016	MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON THE PRESCOTT PARK MASTER PLAN	- Discussion on Kick-off Meeting and Other Public Input Preparations - Update from Trustees of Trust Funds on Park Operations
6/12/2016	PUBLIC FORUM	- First Public Outreach
6/22/2016	PUBLIC FORUM	- A opportunity for people to submit their ideas for the future of Prescott Park
6/25/2016	PUBLIC FORUM	- Park Presence Day
6/29/2016	MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON THE PRESCOTT PARK MASTER PLAN	- Master Plan Process Update & Next Steps - Public Comments
7/13/2016	MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON THE PRESCOTT PARK MASTER PLAN	- Presentation on Site Analysis, Opportunities & Challenges - Discussion
8/3/2016	MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON THE PRESCOTT PARK MASTER PLAN	- Presentation - Park Usage Analysis - Discussion
9/7/2016	MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON THE PRESCOTT PARK MASTER PLAN	- Presentation: Diagrammatical Concepts - Discussion
9/20/2016	MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON THE PRESCOTT PARK MASTER PLAN	- Work session with Weston & Sampson – Getting into detail on Concepts 2 and 3 - Discussion on Planning for Phase 2 Public Input - Discussion of Process Next Steps

10/11/2016	MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON THE PRESCOTT PARK MASTER PLAN	- Presentation: Diagrammatical Concepts - Discussion
10/13/2016	PUBLIC FORUM	- Presentation of Conceptual Development - Public comments for Developing Master
10/15/2016	PUBLIC FORUM	- Park Walk Through
10/19/2016	MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON THE PRESCOTT PARK MASTER PLAN	- Debrief on Concept Plans Presentations and Public Forums (Oct. 13th and 15th) - Discussion of Next Steps Based on Input Received to Date
11/4/2016	MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON THE PRESCOTT PARK MASTER PLAN	- Status of Draft Preferred Master Plan - Discussion of Governance and Committee Recommendations
11/17/2016	MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON THE PRESCOTT PARK MASTER PLAN	- Draft Preferred Master Plan Presentation - Follow-up Discussion on Governance and other Committee Recommendations - Committee Process: Next Steps
11/30/2016	MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON THE PRESCOTT PARK MASTER PLAN	- Follow-up Discussion on Governance and other Committee Recommendations - Committee Process: Next Steps
12/5/2016	MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON THE PRESCOTT PARK MASTER PLAN	- Presentation on Preferred Master Plan - Follow-up Discussion on Governance Recommendations - Review of upcoming Master Plan dates
12/12/2016	MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON THE PRESCOTT PARK MASTER PLAN	- Presentation on Preferred Master Plan - Follow-up Discussion on Governance Recommendations - Preparation for City Council Work Session
1/11/2017	PUBLIC DISCUSSION	- Public input into the Draft Preferred Master Plan for Prescott park - Governance Recommendations Prepared by the Committee
1/25/2017	MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON THE PRESCOTT PARK MASTER PLAN	- Discussion of Public Input - Discussion of Draft Report and Final Recommendation to City Council



four

A Park First  
Approach and  
Tenets of  
Design

**W**hen working on a beloved public open space, there is never a shortage of needs to be met. Prescott Park is no different. The volume of input that was collected throughout the master plan process is a testament to the many residents, groups, and event visitors and individuals with heart-felt interest in the park. Despite the incredibly varied and diverse interests at play, the goal of making Prescott Park the best it can be was shared by all.

First and foremost, Prescott Park is a waterfront open space for the people of Portsmouth. It is, in fact, one of the few places you can get close to the water and even touch it next to the South Pier. The city recognizes the value in making meaningful connections to the water that has informed so much of Portsmouth's sense of place.



Prescott Park is also an important venue for all arts. Currently, the PPAF is the primary permittee for arts-related programming within the park. The rise in popularity of these offerings brings increased park use, which inherently puts more pressure on the physical infrastructure. This development, coupled with deferred capital investment, creates a noticeable tension between programming and the sustainability of a well-maintained park.

Public waterfront access is also an immense opportunity to increase resiliency to the impacts of climate change for coastal cities. Portsmouth recently released a study on climate change and the impacts to the city. This report can be found at <http://www.planportsmouth.com/cri/CRI-Report.pdf>.



At just over 10 acres, this park cannot be all things to all people. The list of hopes, wants, and needs outweighs the carrying capacity of the park in its current condition and configuration. By developing the Park First approach, a framework for decision making was developed, which informed design strategy.

A park is a collection of public resources. Those resources are things like access to the water, green open space for passive recreation, public forum space for freedom of expression, and respite from the density of a busy downtown. A Park First approach puts these resources at the forefront of spatial planning and formal design.



**T**he tenets of design were developed over several months of project engagement. They are born out of the discourse that was generated by the findings, assessment, public engagement, community meetings, analysis and design proposals presented for Prescott Park.

### **Recognize City ownership of the park and its structures**

Prescott Park was assembled, built and improved with park amenities over many decades. The reality that the park's parcels were assembled and improved over-time adds depth to the story of the park. The park's programming has evolved overtime as well through the introduction of arts and culture programming and organizations who have run them. At times, these developments have blurred the lines to some about who owns the Park and some of its structures. Through the Master Plan process the city-owned nature of the land and structures has been clarified and emphasized as has the need to ensure future improvements are city-directed and controlled.

### **Use “for park and recreational purposes” per the Josie F. Prescott Trust**

Per the Trust, the land is to be used “for park and recreation purposes.” When the Trust was established, possible purposes were likely fairly limited given the ideology about parks and recreation at the time. As the park and community have evolved, definitions of recreation have expanded and now generally include passive and active outdoor pursuits as well as activities typically occurring indoors.

### **Ensure pedestrian through-route accessibility at all times**

Events within the park draw a significant crowd at times. These larger gatherings have been known to spill beyond designated lawn areas and extend to the edges of the park. Throughout the community process it was noted that this occurrence impedes pedestrian circulation within the park. Many comments provided to the city on how best to improve Prescott Park included the request to design a plan that facilitates an unencumbered path of

movement from one end of the park to the other, no matter the event happening at the time.

### **Maximize waterfront connection**

Prescott Park is the largest contiguous section of waterfront with public access in the city and can be leveraged in the new master plan. With proximity to downtown, this park has the unique benefit of frontage along the Piscataqua River.

### **Integrate coastal resilience/adaptation strategies**

The waterfront location makes the park a prime candidate to serve as the front line of defense for other low lying areas inland, including Strawberry Banke and much of the South End neighborhood. As our climate continues to change and sea levels rise, there is greater risk of storm surges, tidal inundation, and longer term flooding in these areas. Coordinated planning and resilient design can create much-needed defense within Prescott Park.

### **Maintain and enhance maritime historical connection**

Strong connections to the maritime history can be expressed throughout the park. From interpretive features around historic architecture to the current Gundalow operations, there is no shortage of opportunity for Portsmouth to celebrate her maritime past in a very meaningful way.

### **Improve integration into the neighborhood**

Prescott Park and the South End neighborhood have both evolved and adapted to meet contemporary societal needs. However they have done so largely independently. One goal of this master plan is to integrate the park and the surrounding neighborhood more effectively, both physically and programmatically.

### **Ensure presence for theater, dance, music and visual arts**

It has been clear from the very beginning of this master plan process that Prescott Park's identity and heritage have been influenced by the integration of the arts, to the great benefit of all. Despite struggles to balance performing arts programming with neighborhood quality

of life and park capacity, there is an overarching belief that arts belong in this park. In order to do this effectively, a stage facility is required.

### **Maintain a Public Forum area**

The Public Forum in Prescott Park is an outdoor plaza space designated for use by the public in their expression of freedom of speech and assembly. This space must be flexible and function as quality public park space even when not in use as a Public Forum.

### **Include meaningful invitations for youth to play**

There are currently no formal opportunities for youth to play within the park. The small beach areas near the Sheafe and The Whale sculpture have become the de facto play spaces. Many people commented that well-integrated play elements would be welcome to provide multi-generational interest within the park. It was made clear that the interest was not in a traditional post and platform play structure made of primary colored plastic panels. Instead, play can be combined with public art or site furnishings in a way that fits within Prescott Park.

### **Preserve active maritime recreation, including public docking structures**

The Gundalow Company is a vibrant presence in Prescott Park. Its operations contribute greatly to the aesthetic and cultural importance of the maritime recreation. The public docks are also incredibly popular and provide the only public accommodation for private boats to dock within the area.

### **Maintain/increase large open spaces for formal and informal activities**

There are hundreds of informal activities that take place daily across the park and Four Tree Island. They are best supported by large open lawn areas that are flexible and accessible to all. Ideal lawn areas are mostly flat and uninterrupted by trees and structures. Time and again residents highlighted the value of the park for informal uses that are welcomed by such open spaces.

### **Ensure that parking does not take up precious waterfront park space**

In general, there was acceptance of the approach to avoid surface parking within the park. Exceptions will be for handicap accessible parking and park vehicles, as well as access for deliveries and maintenance. A loading zone space will be included at the corner of State Street to allow people to drop people and belongings off at the park for events or to stock boats using the slips. Using nearby assets and partners like Strawberry Banke also seems to hold promise for the future.

### **Protect and preserve historic resources**

There are tremendous historic assets within Prescott Park. The three buildings are rare architectural relics that show early maritime construction for both wood and brick structures. Monuments, sculptures and fountains can be found through out the park. Each element is uniquely embedded in the park and contributes to its sense of place.





five

A Plan for  
Prescott Park



The preferred plan for Prescott Park is a comprehensive redesign of the full 10 acres including Four Tree Island. The goal of the plan is to create a well-integrated collection of beautifully designed flexible spaces connected through a main pedestrian waterfront promenade.

## PARK ENTRANCES

Entrances should be located strategically to take advantage of key pedestrian arrival points and other pedestrian desire lines and connections. The corner of Marcy and State Streets (described as the “Grand Entrance”, Strawberry Bank, the corner of Marcy and Mechanic Streets and the approach to the Pierce Island Bridge) are all key points of pedestrian origin. Correspondingly, these locations should be considered primary with highly visible and easily identifiable design precedents that reinforce their desired prominence.

Secondary park entrances should also be established, particularly to honor the stated stakeholder desire to create a partially porous and highly accessible condition along Marcy Street and Mechanic Street. From a design perspective, secondary and primary entrances should relate, yet secondary entrances should present a simpler form and more intimate scale.

## PATHWAYS AND PARK CIRCULATION

The main democratic pathway anchors a park-wide circulation hierarchy that will include a variety of surface types and widths to correspond with their purpose and anticipated level of use. While the Master Plan takes a position on pathway widths by graphically depicting a host of appropriate widths (from major 20'+ wide pedestrian promenades, which includes this main path, to far more intimate 5' connector paths) the type of surface has purposefully been left to be vetted during subsequent design phases.

A highly evolved pathway system is envisioned, with an emphasis on seamlessly integrating the various zones of Prescott Park. Pathways should be highly functional, with a possible approach that includes the use of specially detailed surface treatments in places of great prominence and larger gatherings with less elaborate and costly solutions employed throughout much of the remaining park. In a setting like Prescott Park it will be the vertical elements (buildings, monuments and memorials, lights, trees, fence and rail systems, benches) and the Piscataqua River itself that captures one's eyes. This allows for simpler solutions to pathway surfaces, which tend to be less visible and frequently lost in the landscape. Importantly, great attention should be paid to pathway alignments and in providing convenient, ADA compliant connections to all major park elements. In regard to park alignments, most pathways are envisioned to be gracefully curved or meandering and the level of elegance that this lends to this most elegant of parks will be significant.

## MARCY STREET AND MECHANIC STREET PARK EDGES

Marcy Street and Mechanic Street form two critically important sides of Prescott Park. A park edge is important symbolically and functionally in that it provides an invitation to enter and hints as to what is contained within and beyond. At a signature park, edge treatments need to be carefully articulated and design detailing must live up to the greatness of the open space asset itself. The Prescott Park edge will be characterized by entry gateways, fences, park benches, landscape plantings, signage and other design embellishments. To meet constituent preferences, the Marcy and Mechanic Street edges will be of the highest visual quality and be porous such that frequent, uninterrupted views to park features and the mighty Piscataqua River are provided.

Future improvements to both Marcy Street and Mechanic Street should be considered in context with the needs of adjacent Prescott Park. Currently, the corridors (Marcy Street in particular) are relatively narrow and challenging from pedestrian and ADA

conveyance/compliance perspectives. With Prescott Park being a huge destination, pedestrians seek to gain access across Marcy Street at interfaces with Hancock Street, Atkinson Street, Court Street and State Street and along the breadth of Strawberry Bank. Enhancing movement between Strawberry Bank and Prescott Park and along Marcy Street through the implementation of context appropriate upgrades to sidewalks, crosswalks, ADA ramps and other pedestrian accommodations can provide widespread benefit.

## GRAND ENTRANCE

Visitors coming to the park from Downtown will be greeted by a prominent gateway structure that will also clearly identify one's arrival into the park. This threshold will welcome people into the park and is one end of the waterfront promenade that will move down to the water, continue along the Piscataqua, and connect to the Peirce Island Bridge, which takes people over to Four Tree Island. The piers and walls may be architecturally finished masonry with ornamental metal accents. Lighting, plaques, and specialized finishes should all support the importance of this entrance. Pavement from the park should extend onto the sidewalk to further reinforce a strong sense of arrival.



Once inside the main entrance on State Street, there are sweeping views to the water. The existing mature tree canopy will be pruned to allow for more filtered light and some of the aging trees in poor health will be removed. The failing evergreen trees along the northern seawall will be removed and replaced when the wall is stabilized.

## FORMAL GARDEN

To the right of the path is the relocated Formal Garden. All design components from the existing Formal Garden have been recreated in this new position. The garden will be sunken into the ground by 12-18" and will be a replica of the existing configuration. Brick parapet walls with white picket fence will be buffered by plantings to their exterior with evergreen flowering shrubs. Entrance to the Formal Garden will be from the north side only in order to keep pedestrian pass-through to a minimum and to encourage only those who wish to intentionally visit this special place to enter. If possible, many of the perennials will be transplanted from the existing garden during construction. Planting plans and plant lists will be replicated from existing planting endeavors.



Views from within the garden will remain much the same except for a new relationship to the water down the long axial view. From Court Street the view into the park over the garden and down to the water will be striking and foster a greater sense of connection to the neighborhood. As the site slopes from Marcy Street to the water there is a grade change of about three feet. The garden will be nestled into the ground much as it is today.



## CHILDREN'S PLAY AREA

Throughout the community process there were several requests for consideration of compelling opportunities for children's play that were well-integrated into the park. To the north of the Formal Garden, in the blue ellipse on the plan shown to the left, is one of two proposed locations for this programming. Examples of public art being used as a forum for active recreation were well received and resonated with citizens in attendance. Rubberized safety surfacing, seating, and trees for shade will create a welcoming environment for multi-generational enjoyment. The design of the actual feature can be accomplished with a call for artists or through the development of customized play features. Certified Playground Safety Inspectors (CPSIs) should be engaged to ensure compliance with product and consumer safety requirements.

## PUBLIC FORUM

The Public Forum has been reconfigured and activated to be an engaging plaza for all park users as well as the designated area for Public Forum events. This plaza space will have opportunities for seating, deciduous shade tree plantings, and a civic fountain for both aesthetic presence and an opportunity to cool off in the summer. The pavement will be ornamental and durable, possibly granite or architectural pre-cast concrete. Fountain jets will be flush with the pavement so that when the fountain is not active the plaza is fully accessible for flexible use. Fountain mechanics may include a recirculation system or wastewater may be captured for reuse in irrigation. Considerations for temporary event structures can be integrated as sub-surface footings if deemed appropriate.





## NORTHERN WATERFRONT

The interface of park and water adjacent to the public forum plaza will be constructed of terraced platforms that step down to the water and provide an opportunity to engage the water in a safe manner. This design feature was inspired by the consistent request for more connection to the water and selected areas within the park without fencing to separate people from the river. As an estuary, the Piscataqua River is subject to tidal fluctuation. In addition to an accessible route down the water, these stone terraces will also

provide a legible datum for visitors to register the daily regime. There have been reports of boats pulling into the quay and functioning as a stage for musical performances while people sat on the now defunct granite stairs and lined the top of the seawall. Events and programming that include the water will be a new possibility with this site element.



## NORTH PIER

Moving towards the northern edge of the waterfront, the North Pier will be redeveloped into a wider structure that will support a more park-like environment. Original piers out over the water were much wider in order to support the industrial operations of the times. An expanded pier will facilitate a depth of interpretive environmental signage and art that will communicate the rich maritime history and allow people to gather in these spaces above the water. As a deck structure over pilings within the water, plantings will be focused on smaller root-zoned vegetation, typically lawn and under-story trees. An attractive guardrail will surround the pier and enclose seating areas, lawns for lounging and perhaps a shade structure or pavilion for protected gathering space. Beneath the pier structure, flood walls can be integrated for deployment in preparation for an impending storm. Beneath the pier along the river bottom, oyster beds can be established to mitigate subaqueous wave action and further protect the park from storm surges.

Salt marsh terraces will be introduced in some of the interior corners of the seawall to expand habitat and improve resiliency through wave attenuation. The existing north pier boat docks would be rebuilt and the south dock structures would be relocated and secured to the proposed boardwalk infrastructure.





## BOARDWALK

A new boardwalk feature will create a riverwalk experience for park visitors. In addition to serving as a secondary route of travel along the waterfront, this boardwalk will provide people the opportunity to be out over the water river and enjoy views of the river as well as back to the park. The boardwalk starts at the North Pier and wraps along the edge of the park then projects out into the river and sweeps back to meet the land at the Sheafe Warehouse.

A seating terrace will be introduced at this location along the water's edge. Tables and movable chairs will offer flexible seating for groups or individuals. This is an ideal spot to enjoy lunch, read the paper, people watch, or simply take a moment's rest. From this vantage point visitors will have the unique choice of gazing back into the park with a full 180-degree view or out over the salt marsh, terraced seawall, and boat docks.

## WHALE LAWN

The Whale Lawn will be improved with new shoreline treatment, native plantings, and a guardrail that will frame the space. The pier that currently extends off of the this lawn would be removed and

the boardwalk feature will connect at the farthest point to allow pedestrian movement between North and South Piers. These facilities will provide plenty of fishing and viewing opportunities to mitigate the loss of the middle pier.

## THE BOWL

In the center of Prescott Park is The Bowl. This is an amphitheater lawn that supports informal use when not occupied by audiences enjoying a full complement of performing arts programming at the movable stage for seasonal use. The lawn will be sloped from north to south in order to support audience viewing, stormwater management, and provide flood storage capacity for major storm events that coincide with King Tides. Subsurface drainage and engineered root zone mix will facilitate the development of an athletic-quality grass surfacing that will endure intense use with proper maintenance and restoration practices. As the lawn slopes up to the north, granite stone terraces have been considered to provide a series of lawn steps that will accommodate large crowds, and offer an opportunity for reserved seating at the top level. The granite blocks, if wide enough, could also serve as routes for circulation and eliminate the need for paved pathways within this lawn area to support crowd management.





## **MOVABLE STAGE FOR SEASONAL USE**

The provision of a stage facility in Prescott Park, rightfully garnered a significant amount of attention. As a result, the description of the final recommended approach for this element is laid out in more detail than others in this section. The Blue Ribbon Committee's final recommendation for a stage facility is for a movable, seasonal stage that will provide the community with a vibrant performing arts presence in the Park, in balance with the Park First Approach.

During its formulation of its final recommendation, the Committee sought to make plain: the presence of Arts in the Park is recommended to be a permanent feature. The Committee's support for performing and visual arts in the Park did not waiver throughout the process. In other words, the recommendation for a movable stage for seasonal use does not diminish the Committee's deep commitment to maintaining a vibrant presence for Arts in the Park. The new stage facility has the promise to greatly enhance the current performing arts programs in the Park.

## **Background on Stage Discussion**

While the Committee's work began in February 2016, discussions in the City concerning a new stage in Prescott Park were raised in 2015. In summary, the Prescott Park Arts Festival proposed a new covered stage structure in the park in a different location. The proposed construction was permanent in nature and would have had a year round presence in the Park. In 2015, the City Council voted to permit the planning and land use reviews for a new stage to move forward, however, their vote also made clear no stage would move forward without another vote of the City Council. During this time, the Charitable Trust Unit of the State of NH Attorney's General office made known its concerns with the proposal for a permanent stage to City staff and other inquirers. It is around this time, the PPAF halted their land use reviews and this Master Plan process stewarded by the Mayoral-appointed Blue Ribbon Committee began its work.

Over the course of its work and gathering of extensive input from the public, the extent of needs of the physical infrastructure in the park and the many ways the park is used by many members of the public made clear the number of considerations needed for planning for the Park's future. In the end, water views from Marcy Street, the interest in year round park use, the need for compatibility of a stage structure adjacent to the historic park buildings, and the desire to avoid choice-limiting actions for the future (through the permanent location of a stage facility) led the Committee to favor a seasonal, movable stage, which would permit the vibrant arts programming on the stage to continue while preserving the overall Park First approach the community had articulated throughout the process. In the end these factors drove the final recommendation for the stage approach as opposed to any external regulatory guidance.

A great deal of consideration and research has gone into the movable stage proposal. As the master plan developed and the tenets of design were galvanized the movable stage offered

the most benefits in keeping with the Park First Approach. First and foremost, the valuable land on which the stage would sit is returned to open lawn for seven months of the year restoring views to the water from Marcy Street and allowing additional informal use of the space. A movable stage opens up the possibility that the stage could be relocated if needed for a myriad of purposes including sound mitigation. Prescott Park is home to two of the most historically significant maritime warehouse buildings in all of New England. Immediately adjacent is the Marine Railroad Head House building. Architecturally, these structures are special and an integral part to the design tenets regarding maritime history and historic resource preservation. The proposed location for the stage is in close proximity to these important structures. The presence of this movable structure is mitigated by its seasonal nature. A new permanent building will negatively affect the aesthetic and visual integrity of the historic buildings as well as the quality of the open space of the Park.

A few other important statements are relevant prior to describing the physical aspects of the proposed stage facility.

The Committee sought to state clearly that a stage, which does not have the physical description as “permanent” does not mean the Committee is recommending anything less than a permanent presence for the performing arts in the Park. The Committee in the design tenets and throughout its process prioritized the presence of arts and culture programming in the Park. As a result, the recommendation of a seasonal and movable stage should not be viewed as a less strong commitment to the presence and vibrant operation of a stage facility.

No new stage facility will be introduced into the Park, which does not meet building codes and is a safe feature of the Park.

Safety was raised repeatedly in this process. This new stage facility would be designed and engineered to meet all current building code requirements with special considerations for the waterfront

location and unique weather conditions present here.

Weston & Sampson sought guidance from a wide variety of professional sources as part of their extensive work on a proposed stage solution in coordination with the Committee.

Face-to-face meetings and consultations as well as follow-up e-mail communications with the Arts Festival deepened our knowledge of the existing operations as well as the performance requirements for a new stage. Production specialists with experience in outdoor productions provided expertise and perspective on the operations and maintenance of both permanent and movable stage facilities. Manufacturers of stages, rigging, trusses and sets offered information on design, engineering, safety and rental versus ownership logistics.

All told, there were many experts that contributed to the research and ultimate recommendation of a movable stage for seasonal use. Finally, the Weston & Sampson team consulted multiple times during the process with the City’s Building Inspector who was supportive of this final recommended stage approach and its ability to meet code requirements and ensure the public’s safety.



## Details of Proposed Stage Facility

Other characteristics of the proposed stage include support systems for the stage facility that would be integrated into subsurface infrastructure. Concrete footing blocks would allow the seasonal construction to be connected to secure foundations without the use of ballasts on the lawn area. Underground channels would accommodate electrical, sound, and lighting cables needed to connect control equipment with the stage. The stage would not be more than 30" off the ground to eliminate the need for barrier protection at the edges when not being used for a production.

The detailed design and engineering process will determine the feasibility of the integration of a cover over the stage as well as accommodations for back of stage elements required for marshaling during a performance.

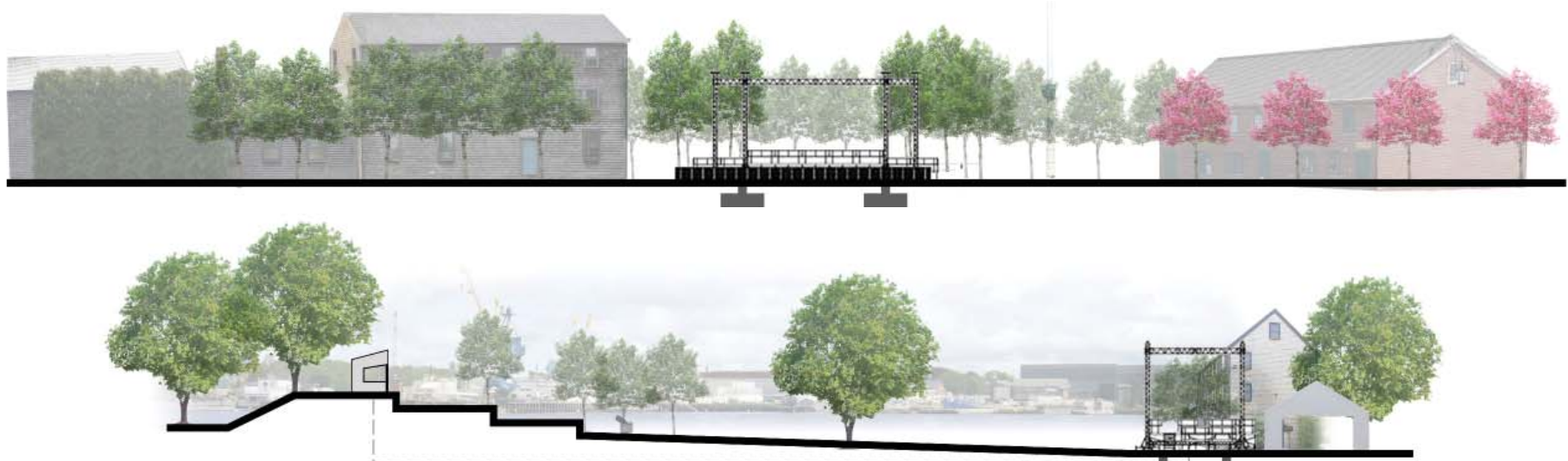
## Back of Stage Operations

Beyond the needs for back of stage support during performances, there are a number of structures, trailers, green rooms, and other utilitarian supports for the stage production. There was widespread agreement throughout the community that a new solution to this set-up should be sought as part of the Master Plan. This Master Plan

calls for the accommodation of back of stage uses within a portion of the existing first floor of the Shaw Warehouse, which could be reconfigured internally. This may require a reconfiguration of the maintenance facility in this portion of the building and relocation of other uses (such as office space).

The proposed stage implementation may include temporary ground coverings that will protect the landscape and support a seasonal tent that would not protrude above the stage and therefore be hidden behind the set.

The sections below include a conceptual representation of what may be possible. A thorough design and engineering process must be undertaken with industry experts in order to understand the full extent of stage, rigging, storage, covering, and equipment requirements. In the lower section, the seasonal tent is shown behind the stage. This area will function much as it currently does but with an improved tent structure to provide shade and protection during performances but also for summer camps and other stage uses.



## Other Support Buildings and Temporary Structures

Currently, the Park has a number of temporary structures used in tandem with the stage facility. These include a sound booth, a “VIP” deck for patrons renting tables and chairs, a control booth (which also houses merchandise sales on the first floor); and a former sound booth building now used for storage. In the Master Plan these buildings are relocated, recommended for removal, or shown as temporary in their existing footprint. The presence, final locations, and construction of these buildings are ultimately within control of future license agreements. In general, the Master Plan envisions reducing the footprint of these ancillary support buildings, which should be achievable through the removal of the outdated sound booth building, offering the VIP seating in a location within the bowl, and the introduction of a seasonal sound booth structure.

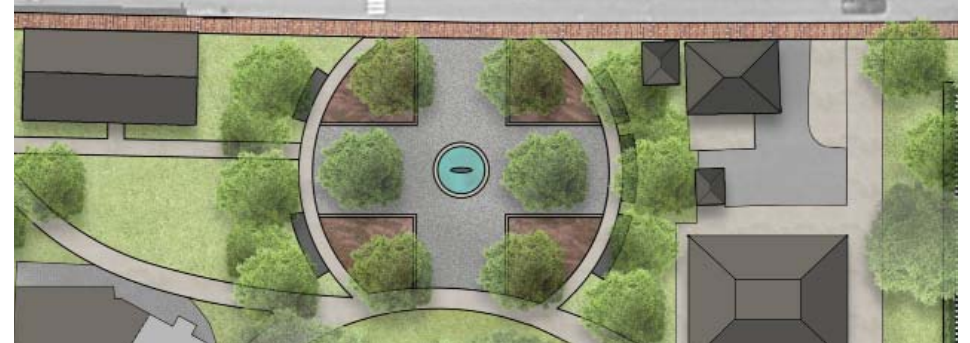
## Comparison with Existing Stage Facility

The proposed stage facility is a significant improvement over the existing stage in the Park. The proposed stage configuration:

- includes annual erection of the stage set as well as rigging and trusses for lighting and speakers, which is done currently. No change is anticipated here.
- includes built-in provisions for electrical and other stage related cabling, which will reduce visual impacts to the park.
- is in a location which will allow the audiences to congregate without violating the pedestrian through-path.
- has the promise of drastically minimizing the footprint of back stage operations
- allows for a thoughtfully-designed immediate backstage area for marshaling during performances (with plans for screening) that also benefits from adjacency to the reconfigured Shaw Warehouse space.
- ensures more effective sound mitigation (which will also be need to be addressed in license agreements).

## HOVEY FOUNTAIN GARDEN

The Hovey Fountain will be relocated to this new garden space. The restoration of the Hovey Fountain is an aspiration of this plan that potentially includes returning it to its original condition through finding a basin more in keeping with the original. Shade trees will be planted on a grid around the fountain, and lower planting beds for shrubs, annuals, and perennials will establish a formal bosque.



This threshold along Marcy Street will allow for a strong visual connection through the park and to the river that currently does not exist. Pavement on the walking surfaces will include additional texture like exposed aggregate or rolled stone in order to provide additional depth to the space. The fountain will be recirculating and include integral lighting for nighttime viewing.

## 57 MARCY STREET

If it were ever possible for the city to purchase 57 Marcy Street, it would provide a great benefit to Prescott Park. The building could be used by the city to support various park licensing opportunities. It appears the utility building is there to stay, at least for the foreseeable future.

## SOUTH PIER

The South Pier / Prescott Pier would be expanded similar to the North Pier to introduce a park experience out over the water. Widening and softening these structures will provide a great diversity of waterfront experience for visitors.

## GUNDALOW LANDING

A new wooden deck will be built around the front of the Sheafe Warehouse and connect to a seating area at the top of the Gundalow ramp. This will create a formalized area for Gundalow patrons to marshal before and after their cruise. This is also a great location for interpretive features that illustrate the maritime history so important to the region and the park.

The Gundalow docks will remain intact in their current location. Some discussion has been had about introducing a ticket booth at the top of the ramp for on-site sales and information.

## WATER STREET

Water Street will be shortened so that it does not bifurcate the site between the Sheafe and the Shaw warehouses. Access will still be provided for handicapped parking and maintenance trucks. Parking arrangements with Strawberry Banke will be made to accommodate park staff and arts programming staff parking.



## LIBERTY POLE

The Liberty Pole will remain in place for the time being. It is believed that this is the original location of the pole's installation. When the pole reaches an inevitable need for replacement, consider relocation 5-10' away from Marcy Street would ease pedestrian circulation at the street edge.

## THE OVAL

A large oval lawn replaces the existing central path that connects the Liberty Pole to the Anchor. This lawn will be subtly crowned at the center and will be suitable for picnicking and informal recreation like kite flying and Frisbee. This oval will be bordered by



a perimeter walkway that will have seating and trees alongside. Another opportunity for public art intended for children's play is shown at the northern corner of this lawn area.

## DISPLAY GARDENS

The Trial Gardens have been consolidated and reorganized into the Display Gardens. The planting approach and Fairy House Tour installations would remain the same, however the new layout will create a series of braided walkways with memorial benches for passive use.



## PLEIN AIR GARDEN

The triangular parcel across Mechanic Street will be redesigned as the Plein Air Garden. The intention will be to provide adequate seating for use by artists interested in sketching and painting outside. Plantings would screen the traffic on the bridge, and the volunteer vegetation that currently blocks views to the water would be removed. The shoreline would be reconfigured to allow for pedestrian access under the bridge and a boardwalk connection around back to the park proper. This pedestrian way would create a missing connection between the park and this parcel of land as well as extending public access along the river.

## PRESCOTT PASSAGE



The walkway over Peirce Island Bridge, as noted in section two, is narrow and harrowing at times. A more generous pedestrian right-of-way with vertical banners and lighting would create a far more welcoming connection between Prescott Park and Four Tree Island. Given the width of the bridge, it is possible this pedestrian walkway would have to be cantilevered along the north side of the bridge. There is a stone monument with a bronze plaque within the area of the new Plein Air Garden that memorializes the bridge as Prescott Bridge. This connection is widely known as the Peirce Island Bridge and perhaps the pedestrian passage would be a better opportunity for dedication to the Prescott family.

## FOUR TREE ISLAND



The entrance to Four Tree Island would be opened up with a removable bollard to replace the gate and still prevent unwanted cars on the causeway. Signage along Mechanic Street will be consistent with the wayfinding system within Prescott Park. The layout of the pathways on Four Tree Island will be finessed and resurfaced with permeable asphalt. The restroom facilities would be improved, including new sewerage mechanics. The grill facility would be rebuilt and all circulation will be universally accessible. Rip rap around the perimeter of point needs to be reset and stabilized. “My Mother, The Wind” sculpture will be cleaned and stabilized, and the pathway around the sculpture will be fortified. New site furnishings will be located strategically to endure increasingly frequent high tides and storm surging. The wood pier should be replaced in the same location. It is used for fishing on occasion. The only new intervention would be an at-grade boardwalk to be built along the south edge of the island to provide access for school groups, birders, and seal watchers to access the salt marsh without disturbing this valuable habitat.



## **SHEAFE & SHAW WAREHOUSES**

The Sheafe Warehouse is currently underutilized for all its historic maritime architectural prowess. Much discussion about creating a maritime history exhibit was had during the Master Plan process. Other uses bandied about included ticket sales for the Gundalow Company and permanent art installations. The building would remain unheated and unplumbed limiting possible programming. Fire suppression is highly recommended in this building.

The Shaw Warehouse should be stabilized and renovated to better accommodate immediate park needs. Several visits through the building confirmed that it is possible to consolidate maintenance operations and centralize the storage of supplies and equipment not used on a regular basis. PPAF office space on the second floor and storage on the third floor could also be more efficiently arranged to maximize spatial layout. Off-site costume and prop storage is highly recommended. There has been discussion about the reconfiguration of the first floor of the building to support both maintenance operations and backstage functions. A fire suppression system should be installed regardless of the final decisions about the programming of the building.

## **MEMORIALS**

There are dozens of memorials and tributes to individuals throughout the park. They range from plaques to fountains with locations ranging from highly visible to secluded and unseen. While there are small plaques with words of thanks to the Prescott Sisters, it has been noted that a more grand tribute is warranted. A public art component may be suitable for an appropriate homage to Mary and Josie for their foresight and tenacity.

## **RESILIENCY**

There is much consideration throughout this plan for resiliency in the face of climate change. From the boardwalk structure with deployable flood wall panels (shown below) to oyster beds along the river floor, there are many opportunities to integrate resilient features. Subsurface stormwater storage strategies will be integrated into every area of the park. Outlets to the river can be renovated with check dams to limit back flow into the park reducing capacity for rainwater coming from the land.

As each of the phases of work is designed and engineered it will be important to continuously build on the resilient features of Prescott Park as it is the sentry for many South End architectural treasures.



# Prescott Park Master Plan



# Formal Garden



view from Marcy Street

# Formal Garden



view to the water

# Hovey Fountain Garden



view from Marcy Street

# Liberty Pole



view from Marcy Street

## Display Gardens and The Oval



view from Mechanic Street

# North Waterfront



view from North Pier

# Public Forum and Civic Fountain



view from waterfront promenade



# The Bowl



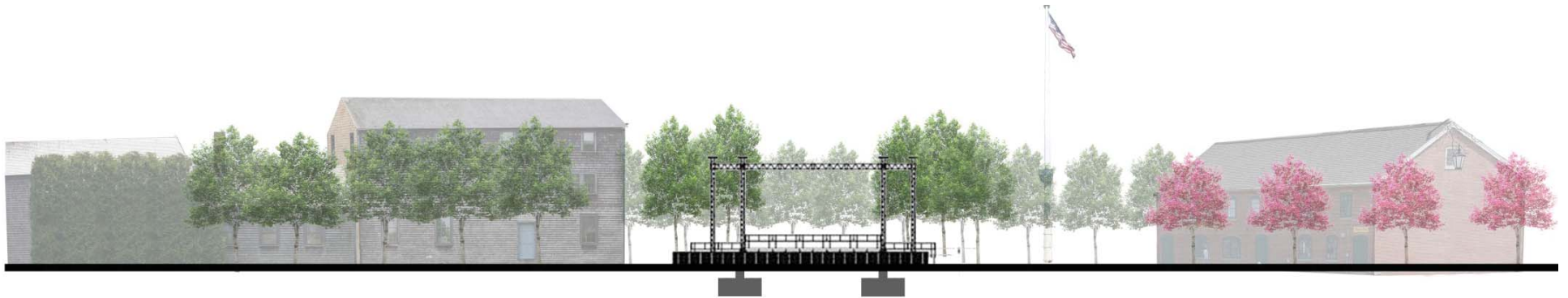
as open parkland

# The Bowl



as performing arts venue

# Movable Stage for Seasonal Use



cross sections





six

Park Usage,  
Capacity, and  
Governance  
Framework

The purpose of Park Use and Capacity Guidelines is to protect the park from overuse and damage but to ensure the overall park atmosphere is not negatively impacted by only one use or series of uses that compromise the park first approach. In general, all park areas are usable for both formal and informal events. However, some are better suited to support permitted programming than others. The following summary identifies those areas that have been historically or have the potential in the future to be sought after as an event location.

The occupancy numbers and description of intended uses of each section of the park are guidelines, which can be used to communicate to organizers of would-be permitted events. As mentioned below, in addition to numerical capacity of a space to hold attendees, the frequency of usage of a space as well as weather conditions are also important factors. The issues of capacity and use overlap with governance recommendations later in this report. For example, it is recommended future permits/license agreements specify areas allowed to be used on the license agreement and include plans for compliance with the capacity guidelines (in terms of number of people) of the areas.

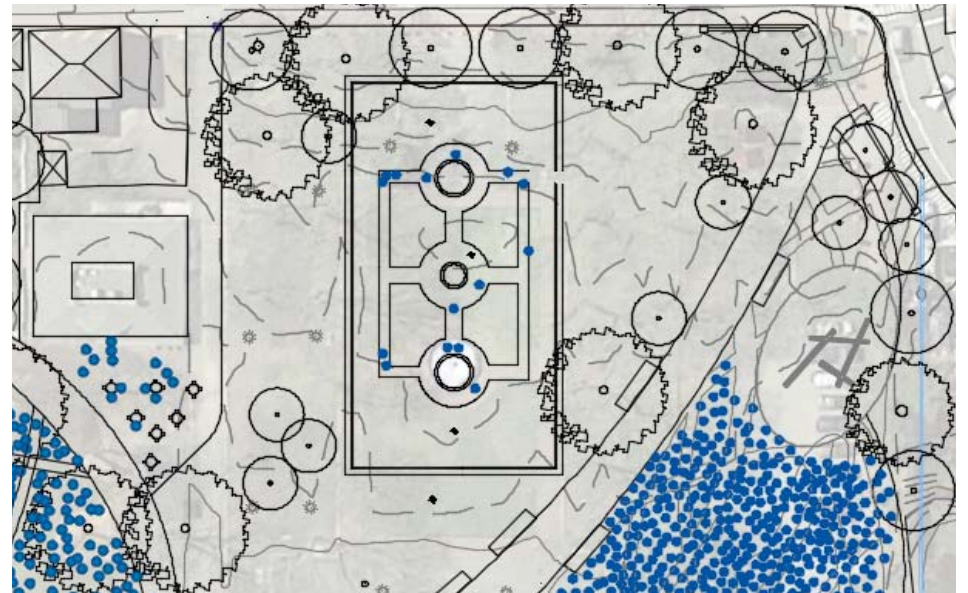
The physical design of the Master Plan is intended to reinforce compliance with the capacity and use guidelines. The size and shape of the “bowl” area and the concept of a through-way path are examples of the overall Park design working to reinforce preferred use patterns determined as a result of the Master Plan process.

When thinking about usage there must be sensitivity to the number of people, how often the events occur and weather conditions that might make spaces vulnerable to degradation more quickly. Each location should only be used for one event at a time and considerations for the resting of lawn areas must be integrated into scheduling. Turf management protocols have been included in Appendix C.

The park governance framework is intended to guide policies for park use into the future and to inform the terms of permits and license agreements.

## THE PROMENADE

This park feature serves as the spine of all circulation and organizes the site around the intention of unimpeded passage regardless of



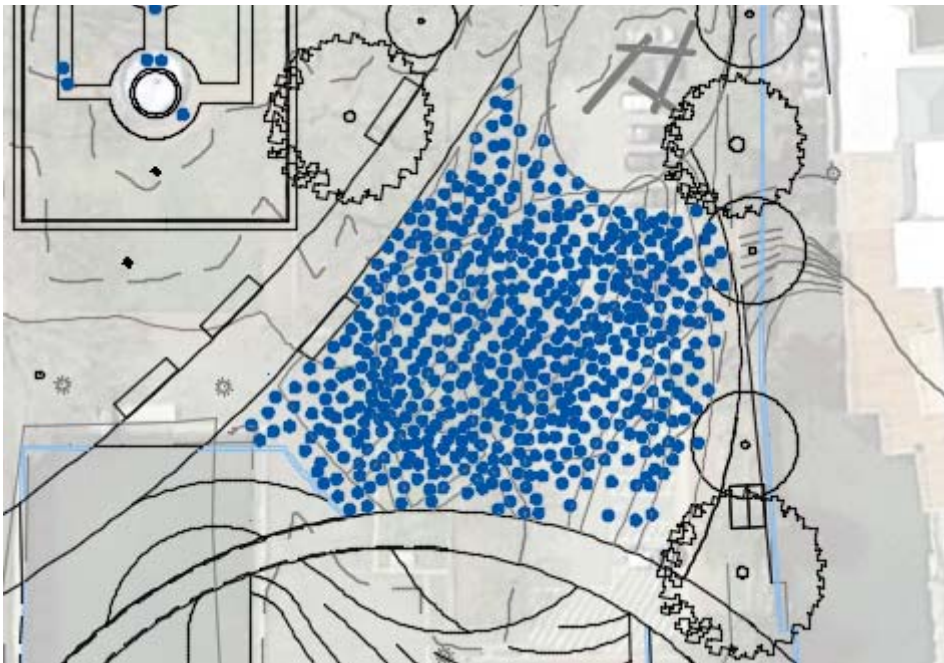
*Formal Garden with 10 people*

what is happening in the park. This area is to remain open at all times and shall not be impacted by any formal or informal park use. Crowd control must be employed for large events that have the potential of spilling into the walkway area. This is not only for the benefit of all users to have access through the park but to support public safety vehicles in emergencies.

## FORMAL GARDEN

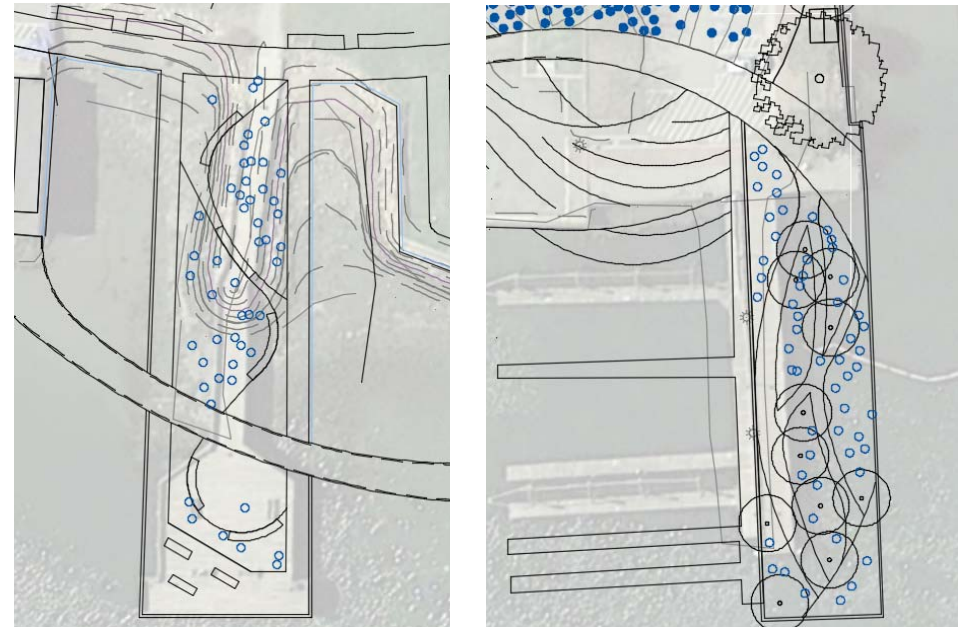
As in its former location, the Formal Garden will continue to be a coveted location for photography and very small ceremonies. Due to the fragile nature of the plantings and the narrow paths the maximum number of guests for any permitted event should be 10. No chairs or audio systems should be allowed. Small, portable archways that are commonly used in wedding ceremonies may be permitted.

## PUBLIC FORUM



*Public forum with 500 people*

This area has been designated to support civic expressions of freedom of speech and the right to assemble. Specifically, “The Trustees of Trust Funds of the City of Portsmouth desire to accommodate the public policy and constitutional considerations which support the use of some portion of Prescott Park for the purpose of protected expressive activity while at the same time maintaining the Park as a place for the public to quietly enjoy its lawns, gardens and scenic attractions. This policy is adopted to accomplish those goals.” The plaza space will accommodate about 500 people when used for a large assembly. When not permitted

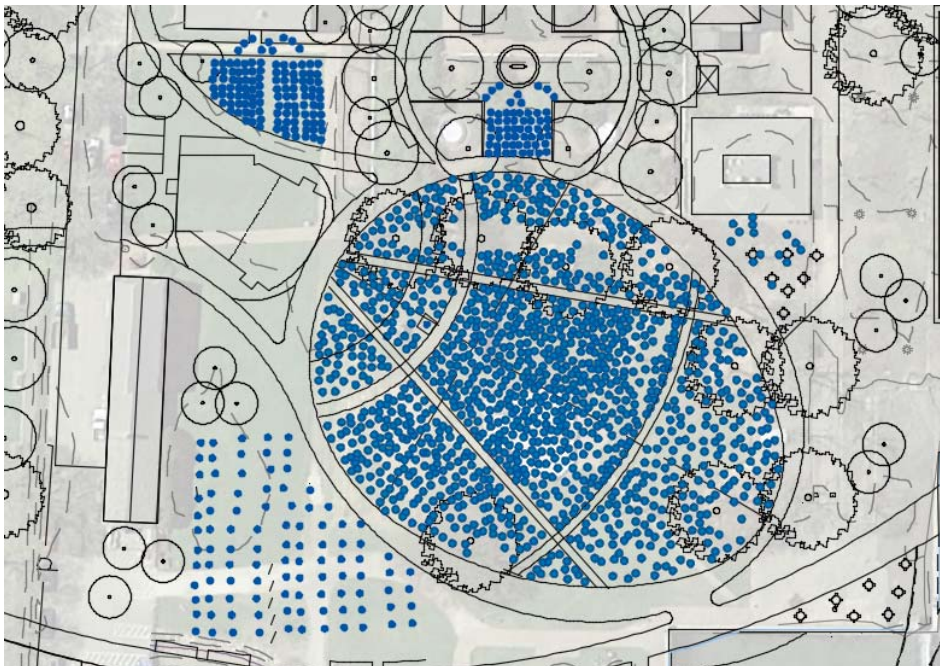


*Piers with 50 people each*

for a gathering, a civic fountain will be user activated to provide aesthetic benefit and a spot to cool off in the warmer months. The entire space will be a resilient hard scape surfacing constructed of specialized pavement. The new configuration invites reassessing the Public Forum policy in light of improvements to desirability of the space and functionality of the paved surface.

## NORTH AND SOUTH PIERS

With a widened pier structure that includes lawn and other landscape treatments, there will be an increased demand to have events out here. These piers can accommodate 50 people seated on blankets and on benches. These areas provide new spaces that assist in dispersing both formal and informal uses across more of the park. The lawn areas must be maintained per the turf management protocols outlined in Appendix C which will inform the frequency of events being scheduled.



*The Bowl with 1200 people, Hovey Garden with 50 people, Players Ring Lawn with 100 people, and yoga with 100 people*

## THE BOWL

The sloped and terraced lawn space will be designed, constructed, and maintained as a high-intensity use athletic-quality turf grass field. These specialized maintenance requirements have been

outlined in Appendix C. It is imperative that the lawn have time to rest between periods of intense use in order for the grass to be sustainable. The entire oval is a little less than one acre including the perimeter pathway. This space will support informal uses like picnicking and ball playing when not in use as audience space for a new seasonal stage facility. The lawn area within the oval walkway will accommodate about 1200 guests on blankets and lawn chairs. Permits / licensing agreements will specify strategies for delimiting permitted orders of occupancy.

It is anticipated, in practice, there may be occasional events which attract attendance in excess of guidelines noted below. As guidelines, these figures are not intended to exclude these occurrences or result in ejecting attendees from events. However planning for use of these areas should strive for compliance with the capacity figures. Events not in compliance with these guidelines should be viewed as permissible exceptions by permission as opposed to regular deviations by right.

## HOVEY FOUNTAIN GARDEN

This new garden space is designed as a passive area of quiet contemplation, with ornamental annual plantings to surround a restored Emerson Hovey Fountain complete with a new basin to collect the spray of water with the hope of returning the sculpture to its former glory. This garden area, much like the Formal Garden, is a place for passive use and limited gatherings. It is estimated that about 50 people could use the space for an event, making it a good alternative to the Formal Garden for groups of this size. If people are standing, there is capacity for up to 100 people to occupy paved areas around proposed shade trees and the relocated fountain. Chairs, ceremonial arches and other temporary appurtenances may be brought in to support gatherings but must be kept on paved areas and should not be physically secured to the ground with hardware.



## PLAYERS RING LAWN

Already a popular spot for weddings, a renovated lawn area will support events of up to 100 people. Aside from the brick access path running behind the Players Ring, the rest of the surface area for events is, as the name suggests, lawn. Temporary tents can be erected and staked into the ground here as long as lawn is repaired following the breakdown of the event. Chairs and other furniture can be used but it should be noted that after a sustained rain event the ground will be soft and damage will be more likely. Appendix C has more specific turf-related guidelines that apply here.

## YOGA

On the lawn behind the Shaw Warehouse, outside The Bowl, you can fit 100 people with ample spacing for mats and movement. This area is flexible lawn space to be used informally but can also support existing uses previously relegated to left-over lawn zones.

## THE OVAL

The oval is about a half-acre of lawn area that supports any use deemed appropriate by the governance documents. Hundreds of people could gather as a group or several small picnics or a few people throwing a Frisbee. A high quality, resilient turf grass will be specified for ground cover. This area could also support the installation of a tent with tables and chairs for up to three days. After that the tents and other furnishings must be removed to allow air, light and water to return to the lawn surface and to rest and recover the turf. Roughly 500 people could occupy The Oval with relative ease assuming no other significant structures were in place to take up space. The diagram below shows a crowd of 150 people seated in chairs. There is additional flexible lawn area outside the perimeter walkway that can be used for larger crowds or protected for informal use when an event is taking place inside The Oval.



*The Oval with 150 people*

## PLEIN AIR GARDEN

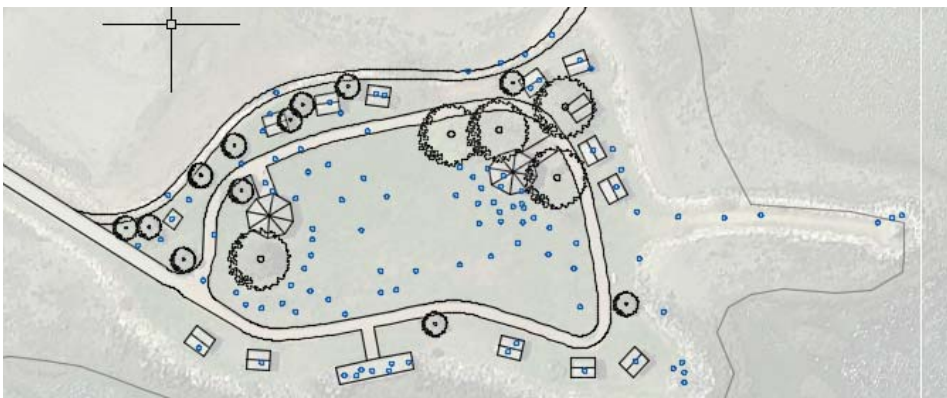
Open lawn with shade trees that will buffer the Peirce Island Bridge traffic from a quiet green space is an ideal location for painting, with views opened to the river through pruned vegetation that has grown in along the shoreline. This space could also be used for small gatherings and simple events. The lawn surfacing will be able to accommodate small temporary tents secured to the ground with stakes. This area will accommodate about 20 people with chairs and easels for painting or about 40 for a gathering.



*Plein Air Garden with 20 people*

#### **FOUR TREE ISLAND**

Permitting for Four Tree Island will remain largely the same. Currently the maximum group size is about 100 people with a few exceptions through-out the year. It is our recommendation that no private cars ever traverse the causeway and only park staff vehicles access the island proper for maintenance and event support. Given the exposure of the site, tents and other temporary covers shall not be permitted. The picnic shelters and large pavilion covering the main grill will be refurbished and will provide adequate cover. A golf cart with a trailer may be considered for both maintenance and event support operations to ensure the least amount of damage.



*Four Tree Island with 100 people*

#### **GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK**

Throughout the Committee’s work, issues pertaining to activity and operations within the park were raised repeatedly. These discussions informed many design decisions having to do with the physical space planning and drove the need for establishing usage and capacity guidelines. For example, the creation of the walkway that connects each section of the park from State Street to Mechanic Street was an important design characteristic that helped ensure unimpeded access for park users without regard to the schedule of any formal park programming. In other words, operational concerns translated into physical improvements.

The Committee also addressed Governance more generally as part of this Master Plan, and its recommendations appear below. A series of understandings related to the Governance Framework appear first, followed by Recommendations for Governance Going Forward, followed by Principles for License Agreements, Recommended Provisions for License Agreements and Other Recommendations.

##### **I. Governance Framework**

Early on the committee established the need for a set of facts on which discussions surrounding the governance of the park could be based. Below is a series of understandings, which was the basis for all discussions about governance by the Committee.

1. The City Council is the policy making body of the City of Portsmouth and controls City-owned land and its uses.
2. The City of Portsmouth owns the land that makes up Prescott Park.
3. The Portsmouth City Charter Article V; section 5.3, charges the City Manager to oversee all City property.
4. Deed restrictions establish the eligible uses of the property (“parks and recreational purposes”).

5. The Will of Josie F. Prescott establishes a Trust (financial) whose income “shall be used for the maintenance” of the Park.
6. Current proceeds from the Trust are insufficient to fund the annual operating costs of the Park (full and part time salaries, supplies, and maintenance costs, etc.).
7. The City’s Trustees of Trust Funds oversee the Trust (financial) in their role as defined in State statute.
8. The City’s Trustees of Trust Funds have provided the supervision and oversight in the Park as a matter of tradition as opposed to a requirement of any document or law.
9. The Charitable Trust Division at the State of NH Attorney General’s Office oversees Trusts and property held in trust to ensure they are used in a manner consistent with the intent of the maker of the Trust.

## II. Recommendations for Park Governance Going Forward

The Committee makes the following recommendations to the City Council concerning Park Governance.

1. The Blue Ribbon Committee on Prescott Park (BRC PP) recommends governance of the Park be carried out in a manner consistent with the deeds for the park parcels and city ordinances.
2. BRC PP recommends the City Council commit to implementing the physical space Master Plan for the future of Prescott Park, elements of which should be identified in the City’s Capital Improvement Plan.
3. BRC PP recommends Prescott Park come under the management control of the City Manager (as set forth in the City Charter) effective upon adoption of this report. As a result, the City Manager would be responsible for the day-to-day operations and maintenance of the Park facility (including upkeep of fountains, lawns, gardens, trees, paved surfaces, buildings, drainage and

- electrical systems and all other structures and facilities); negotiation and implementation of license agreements (currently known as operating agreements); on-site management; management of dock operations and reservations for Four Tree Island as well as weddings); the development of administrative and personnel structures necessary for operations; general oversight of licensed activities within the Park; and, in coordination with the City’s legal and public safety departments, ensure the enforcement of City policies, ordinances, and compliance with applicable deed restrictions and life, safety, and health codes.
4. The BRC PP recommends the City Manager assume the duties of the Trustees of Trust Funds as referenced in existing agreements and leases with the exception of investment management.
  5. BRC PP recommends the City Manager work immediately with park licensees (those with leases, operating agreements and other formal agreements) and the community to plan for 2017 in the Park (during which time new park licenses will be negotiated). As examples, the planning will include addressing schedule and frequency of Park activities, impacts on the neighborhood (including sound levels generated by park activities), signage, and general compliance by licensees and all users with park polices, deed restrictions, and City ordinances.
  6. The BRC PP Committee recommends the City establish a separate Special Revenue Fund, which will reflect the costs of running Prescott Park and show the various revenue sources available to support park operating costs.
  7. BRC PP Committee recommends the City assess a variety of models for ensuring desired activities and services within the Park (i.e. visual and performing arts; maritime history & culture; and refreshments/food, etc.). This may include the City providing programming;

authorizing programming through contracts, licenses, and/or vendor permits with qualified entities; or a combination of both or some other method. Examples include operation of the concession stand for a longer number of hours or revisiting the model whereby one organization programs the Park for all arts and culture activities.

8. BRC PP Committee recommends replacing existing operating agreements with Park Licenses to be entered into with effective dates beginning no later than January 1, 2018. The City Council will approve park licenses.
9. BRC PP Recommends the Mayor appoint a Blue Ribbon Prescott Park Policy Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee) soon after the adoption of this Report to advise the City Manager with respect to park policies; events, activities, and services in the Park; and operations of licensees and serve as a communication forum. Representation on the Advisory Committee should be made up of at least one member of the City's Trustees of Trust Funds, a City Councilor, two residents of the City (at least one of whom should reside in the area surrounding the park), and a member of the City's Cultural Commission, Art-Speak. The City Manager shall appoint up to two staff advisers and staff from specific city departments as needed.  
Recommended charge for the Blue Ribbon Prescott Park Policy Advisory Committee: Using the 2017 Final Report of the Blue Ribbon Committee on the Prescott Park Master Plan as a guide, provide advice to the City Manager with respect to park policies, events, activities, and services in the Park; help oversee operations of licensees; and serve as a communication forum.
10. Because Blue Ribbon Committees expire with each City Council two-year term, the Committee recommends the City Council evaluate the Advisory Committee structure in December of 2017. Examples of questions, which may be asked at that time, could include: Should the

Committee continue to be organized as a Blue Ribbon Committee? Should the Committee's duties be joined with other City Committees? Should the Committee be created via ordinance?

11. BRC PP recommends construction of park improvements and facilities be planned, funded (acknowledging a combination of funding sources including grants and private donations) and owned by the City in conformance with this Master Plan, including compliance with Park Usage and Capacity Guidelines in the 2017 Weston & Sampson Final Report and duly adopted future updates. Participation by private donors or organizations is not intended to convey ownership or control.
12. BRC PP Committee recommends the City encourage and permit a variety of formal programs within the Park. Priority should be given to programs which celebrate the visual and performing arts, the City's maritime connection and history; Portsmouth's history & culture.
13. BRC PP Committee recognizes the value and function of the Public Forum area in Prescott Park and recommends it be retained and improved to make the area more attractive.
14. BRC PP Committee recommends the City provide and/or permit others to provide amenities, which directly enhance users' experience of Prescott Park as a park; including availability of restrooms and food and refreshments (this does not include alcohol, which is prohibited via Ordinance and deed restriction). This includes times outside the hours of formal programming.
15. BRC PP Committee recognizes the value and purpose of open green spaces and urban parks as places of respite, recreation and enjoyment. Maintaining this special status includes limiting commercialization, which unchecked, can disrupt the park atmosphere. In this vein, the City Manager should apply the following criteria when negotiating the terms of financial

transactions in the park by licensees for three types of transactions (food and refreshments; services; other goods):

- a. Exchange of funds for goods and services should be limited.
- b. Exchanges of funds for food, goods or services which are permitted should be expressly addressed in license agreements (the type of items for sale shall be enumerated in the agreement) including area where transactions are permitted.
- c. Any proposed sale of goods should enhance the experience of the user in the park and not detract from a park atmosphere.
- d. Each proposal for the sale of goods or services should be reviewed through the lens of ensuring a high quality presentation in keeping with the aesthetic goals of the park. Square-footage, types of displays, and materials to be sold are all appropriate details to be considered in managing this type of activity.

16. Limiting commercialization in the park in order to maintain a park-like atmosphere also extends to park signage. Signage should be limited in the Park and, signage approved through license agreements, should be in keeping with aesthetic goals of the Park and not detract from the Park atmosphere.

17. BRC PP recommends the City Manager develop formal materials (such as park user request forms, guidelines for users, and other documents) to assist the City administration and potential users who may seek to hold events in Prescott Park. Documentation may vary for different types of events: major users that operate/reserve space in the park on a regular basis; occasional users requiring designated space (e.g., yoga, informal/spontaneous use (no approvals needed)).

18. BRC PP Committee recommends the City Manager evaluate City ordinances (such as prohibition on bicycles in the park) in light of the adopted Prescott Park Master Plan and propose recommended ordinance changes accordingly.

### III. Principles for Future License Agreements

1. License agreements should be in compliance with this Master Plan (narrative, recommendations, and physical space plan) and consistent with the Governance recommendations above, including Park Usage and Capacity Guidelines.
2. License should clearly outline the benefit to the public for the proposed use (public benefit) and how licensee's use and operation within the Park is consistent with Trust language.
3. License agreements shall make plain all City ordinances will apply (in addition to deed restrictions).
4. License agreements should require that unimpeded pedestrian access through the park be maintained at all times.
5. Revenues generated through license agreements and permit fees in the park should be used to fund maintenance costs and capital improvements for the Park.
6. License agreements for scheduling the stage should address the expectation and terms for use of the stage by community-based performance groups seeking to perform on the stage. License Agreements should include the terms of access to the stage by community groups including (for example) the number of community-based performance groups that will be provided access to the stage; description of the time the stage should be made available; process for making selections by the Licensee; description of artistic standards criteria; and terms for sharing revenues of

any type.

7. The stage facility shall continue to be controlled by the municipality and shall not be established as a public forum.

#### IV. Recommended Provisions of License Agreements

1. Explanation of public benefit
2. Description of areas to be used, including dimensions of indoor and outdoor areas
3. Provisions for public access
4. Type and nature and schedule of activities (type, frequency, # per day, etc.)
5. Hours of operation
6. Plan for compliance with Park Usage and Capacity Guidelines
7. Responsibilities of the tenant
8. Responsibilities of the City
9. Sound/noise
10. Liability/insurance
11. Limitations or prohibitions
12. Signage approval protocol
13. Enforcement mechanisms and penalties
14. Risk Assessment and Plans for managing risk (public and weather emergencies; risk of non-compliance with City ordinances by patrons; other risks)
15. Required reports/Evaluation of Licensee's performance on License terms.
16. Rent/Payments/Fees. A clear explanation of the basis for the value of the rent/payments should be considered in the development of this section (i.e. public benefit to the City, operating costs of the park; impacts of the use on the park; value of real estate)
17. Term (duration)
18. Requirements for sub-agreements (relationships with/accommodations for/supports for other users)
19. Other terms and provisions agreed to by the parties.

#### V. Other Recommendations

1. The BRCPP recommends the City Manager and City Council evaluate the need for a Committee with a City-wide perspective on policies related to Parks and Recreation. The discussions pertaining to City policies in Prescott Park are not unlike considerations needed for other parks and recreation assets in the City. As new and improved parks and recreation assets come on-line (Prescott Park to be managed by the City Manager; Sagamore Creek Recreation Area; Rockingham Branch Rail Trail; the North Mill Pond Multi-Use path, etc.) now may be the time rethink the structures and policies related to Parks and Recreation.
2. The BRCPP recommends the City work closely with adjacent property owners to implement concepts in this plan and coordinate future improvements to maximize the adjacency of key parcels. This includes coordination with Strawberry Banke on the future of the Marcy Street frontage nearest the Park.





seven

Opinions of  
Probable Cost  
and Phasing

The following section identifies work efforts related to implementing the new master plan for Prescott Park. The dollar amounts outlined herein are educated opinions of probable costs. These numbers were generated using current pricing information but are not cast-in-stone. Final construction estimates must be honed and require confirmation and refinement as actual improvements are scheduled. Cost estimates will also reflect the manner in which the improvements are grouped as well as the time that it takes to implement all phases. The more time that passes from this date of issue, the more costs will escalate due to inflation.

We have parsed out the overall master plan improvements into six phases of work. These are simply a point of departure and intended to create manageable stages of funding and active construction work within the context of the larger city. It is likely that as funding becomes available and construction estimation is completed based on actual bid documents, there will be shifting of some scopes of work from phase to phase. Transitions between new and existing park conditions will also inform final phasing strategies as well the goal of protecting park programming from major disruption. For example, phases 1 and 2 may be done together.

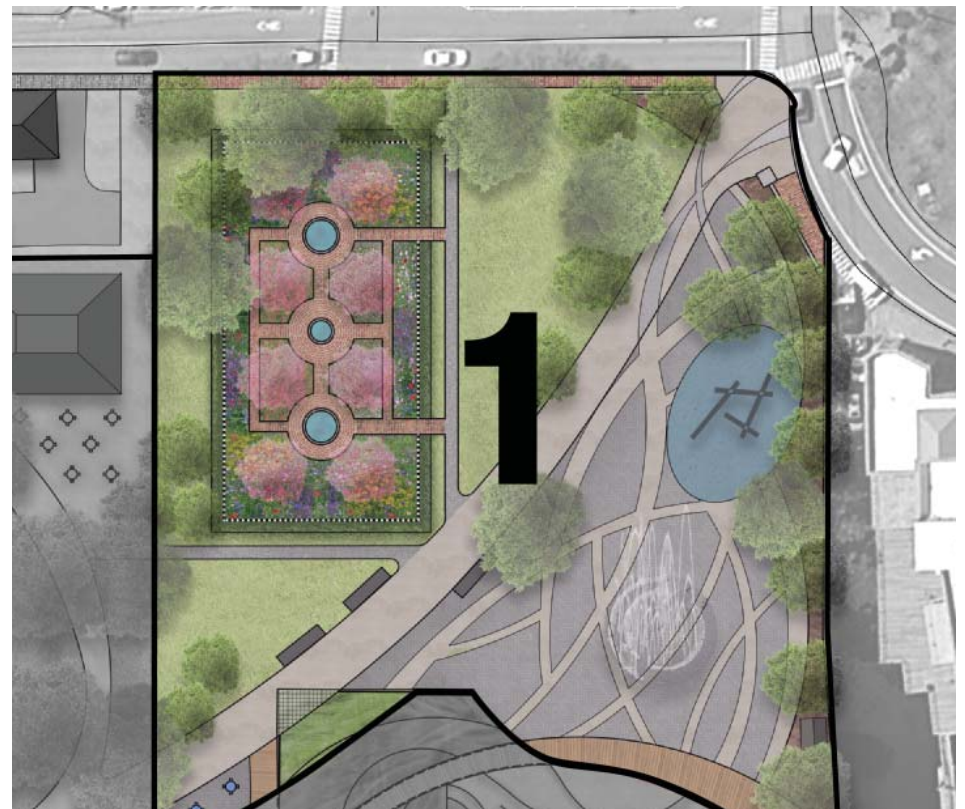
It is important to note that Prescott Park is beginning to show signs of aging and wear. Deficiencies will become harder and harder to maintain without a concerted capital investment program. If the park were to be improved as it sits today, with exactly the same walks, fencing, seawalls, drainage system, etc., the costs would be upwards of \$10-\$12 million.

On average urban, waterfront open space improvements range from \$10 to \$50 / square foot. These costs are affected by construction complexity, material finishes, and the magnitude of the overall scope being bid at one time. Based on our estimates, improvements to Prescott Park will cost an average of \$30/square foot.

## PHASING

### Phase One - Grand Entrance - \$3,250,000

The first phase of any significant multi-phased project must generate significant excitement and create momentum that will carry future phasing through to implementation. With this in mind, phase one includes meaningful improvement to the north side of the site, which is currently the most underperforming section of the park. The parking lot will be removed and a pedestrian point of entry created. This is the start of the democratic waterfront walkway that sweeps through the park, remaining open at all times regardless of other permitted events taking place. A relocated Formal Garden will be constructed complete with new specimen Japanese Crabapples and fountains. An artful opportunity for play will be integrated into this area of the park. The Public Forum has been redesigned to





include a civic fountain / plaza that offers flexibility of programming for both permitted events and informal enjoyment. Much of the subsurface infrastructure will be addressed in this phase of work as well, increasing overall costs.

#### Phase Two - The Bowl + Hovey Garden - \$1,400,000

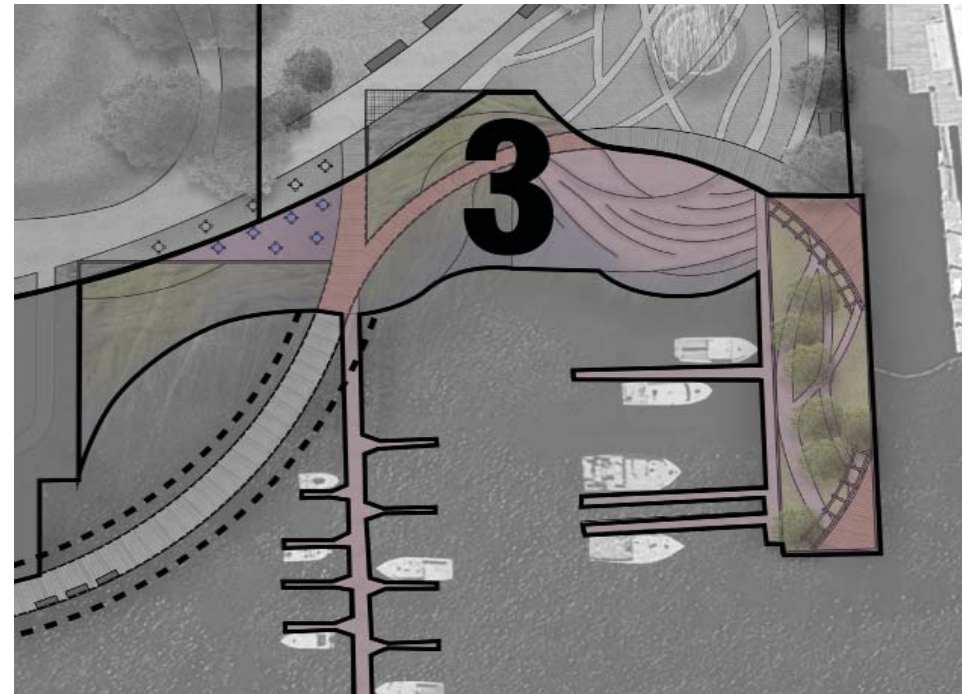
While the existing permanent structures remain in place the rest of the landscape will be reconfigured to create contiguous areas of lawn organized with clear pedestrian circulation to support both best and highest use of the park for 12 months of the year. This area includes the removal of the existing stage platform and the investment in a seasonal stage facility that is completely movable and will vacate the park after the performance season is over. A “plug and play” strategy will be engineered to ensure appropriate foundational ballasts are installed below grade along with power and other digital lines required for production. Existing mature shade trees will be retained and a large sloped lawn area will support audiences and informal park users alike. The Pavilion (concession building) will remain in place and the merchandise and control room structure will be relocated. A seasonal sound pavilion will be installed in support of stage operations. The waterfront walkway will be



continued through this section along with site lighting and other site furnishings. The Shaw Warehouse will require improvement and reconfiguration to accommodate back of stage requirements in part of the first floor of the building.

#### Phase Three - North Waterfront - \$2,350,000

The seawalls in this area of the existing park are in most disrepair and in need of stabilization. The master plan proposes the rebuilding and widening of the North Pier to create more of a park-like experience over the water for visitors. This area is also the start of the boardwalk feature that extends beyond the physical limits of this phase (seen on the plan below) and projects out over the water. Docking for private boats will remain. The North Docks will be rebuilt and the South Docks will be relocated ensuring that docking capacity for pleasure boats is maintained. Landward of the North Docks shows a terraced edge of stone that will create a safe way for people to navigate down to the water's edge by mitigating the large drop present at low tide. Lengths of seawall to the southeast



will be stabilized and fortified with salt marsh terracing. This feature will soften the interface of park and water, introduce more marine habitat, and increase the resilience of the park as sea levels and storm intensity continue to rise.

#### Phase Four - The Oval and Plein Air Garden - \$2,100,000

Water Street will be renovated to read as primarily pedestrian with paved connections of circulation and connective lawn area between the Shaw and the Sheafe warehouses. Access will be limited to park staff and permitted event-related access. Three handicapped parking spaces will be installed adjacent to the Marine Railway Head House to support the Players Ring, the park, and Gundalow Company operations. An opportunity for active play will be integrated into the landscape through some form of artistic expression. The Gundalow docks remain in place with an improved deck area that provides organized space with tables and chairs for seating and marshaling of the Gundalow guests. The riverfront walkway continues along the top of the seawall with new, more elegant guardrail.



The former Trial Gardens will be reorganized and consolidated as Display Gardens along the pedestrian path. A large open lawn oval will be centered between the Liberty Pole and the Anchor. The perimeter walkway will be supported by benches and lighting. Lawn and shade trees will offer informal gathering and picnic spaces. A boardwalk structure will extend the pedestrian walkway down to the water and under the Peirce Island Bridge, which will connect to the newly designated Plein Air Garden. This is the triangular piece of land located across Mechanic Street, which has largely been forgotten as a part of Prescott Park. Gently sloped lawn will support quiet contemplation and painting while one views the Piscataqua.

#### Phase Five - Four Tree Island - \$1,250,000

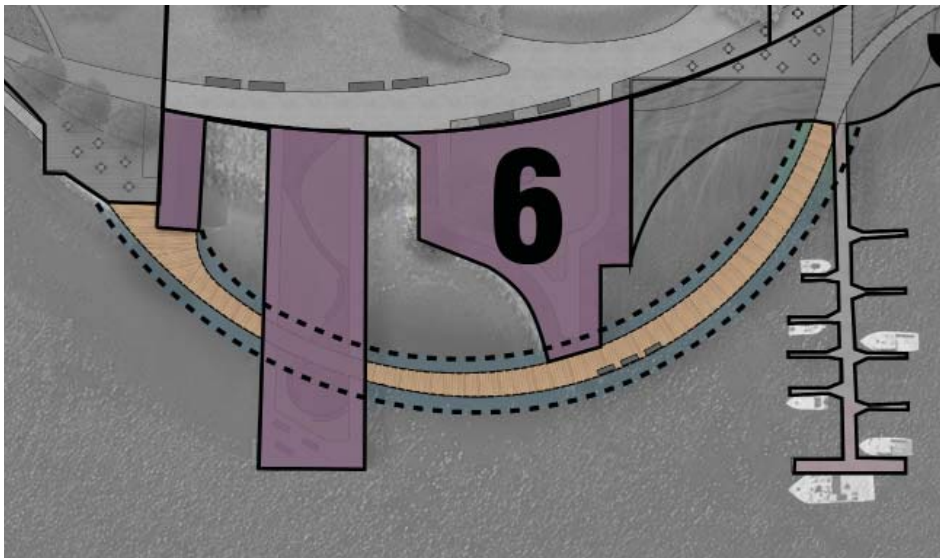
While there are not significant reconfigurations of space or amenities happening out at Four Tree Island, there will be basic infrastructure improvements and universal accessibility will be achieved. A new, more welcoming gateway and sign will grace the entrance to the island. The causeway will be graded and stabilized as a walking surface with limited access for park vehicles only. The culvert that makes the hydrological connection of the tidal river water is in need of lining or replacement. Walkways and picnic shelters as well as the main grill pavilion and the dock area will all be upgraded to promote optimal site access and drainage while supporting picnic-based gatherings both large and small. Site furnishings will be chosen and positioned to endure inundation by the rising tides. Lengths of rip rap will be restored and the land it protects stabilized for pedestrian access. The “My Mother, The Wind” sculpture will



be cleaned and shored up to ensure resilience to storm surge. The one addition to current site features will be a boardwalk structure that will run along the bottom of the southern edge of the island to provide access and environmental education potential for visitors to explore the salt marsh and mud flat areas sometimes visited by harbor seals.

#### Phase Six - South Waterfront - \$1,800,000

The South Waterfront includes the Whale Lawn area and surrounding seawalls, the South Pier and the Sheafe Warehouse foundations. The South Pier will be rebuilt and widened to support lawn and low plantings as well as seating and boardwalk features to expand the park experience over the water. The two beach areas on either side of the South Pier will be stabilized and have salt marsh beds seeded in this area.



#### The Boardwalk - \$1,000,000

This has been identified as a stand-alone feature that can be implemented or not depending on current thinking, resiliency enhancement technology, and funding availability. The structure

will consist of piers that run out into the water, connect with the end of the Whale Lawn (where the middle pier exists now) and onto the South Pier and then onto the Sheafe Warehouse. Decking and guardrails will be designed to accommodate pedestrian flow as well as seating opportunities. The boardwalk feature will be at the same elevation as the park and will enhance park user experience by facilitating movement of visitors out over the water. Tidal surge skirts and wave attenuators will be integrated into the structure and be deployed in preparation for storms during seasonal high tides. This feature will protect the park and help to stem potential storm damage within the park and further protect historic architectural assets inland.

Additional riverbed floor interventions are possible under the pier and include installations of oyster and mussel beds to support sub-aqueous wave attenuation and riverbed stabilization.

#### Peirce Island Bridge Pedestrian Connection - \$900,000



Further study is required to understand what is the best solution for safe and comfortable pedestrian experience from Prescott Park

over to Four Tree Island. Current thinking includes a cantilevered steel walkway that provides more separation between cars and people.

## INTERIM CONDITIONS

Unless the park is constructed in one fell swoop there will be interim conditions where new work and existing park interface. These areas will need to be carefully considered to ensure that transitions are safe and maintainable until the next round of improvements are underway. Further, the Blue Ribbon Committee and city leadership are highly motivated to time construction so that the arts venue does not lose a season of performances. This will require a highly coordinated construction effort and no matter how well orchestrated there will be typical construction inconveniences. Temporary fencing will reroute pedestrians to new routes of safe access, and large areas within the park will be closed to use.

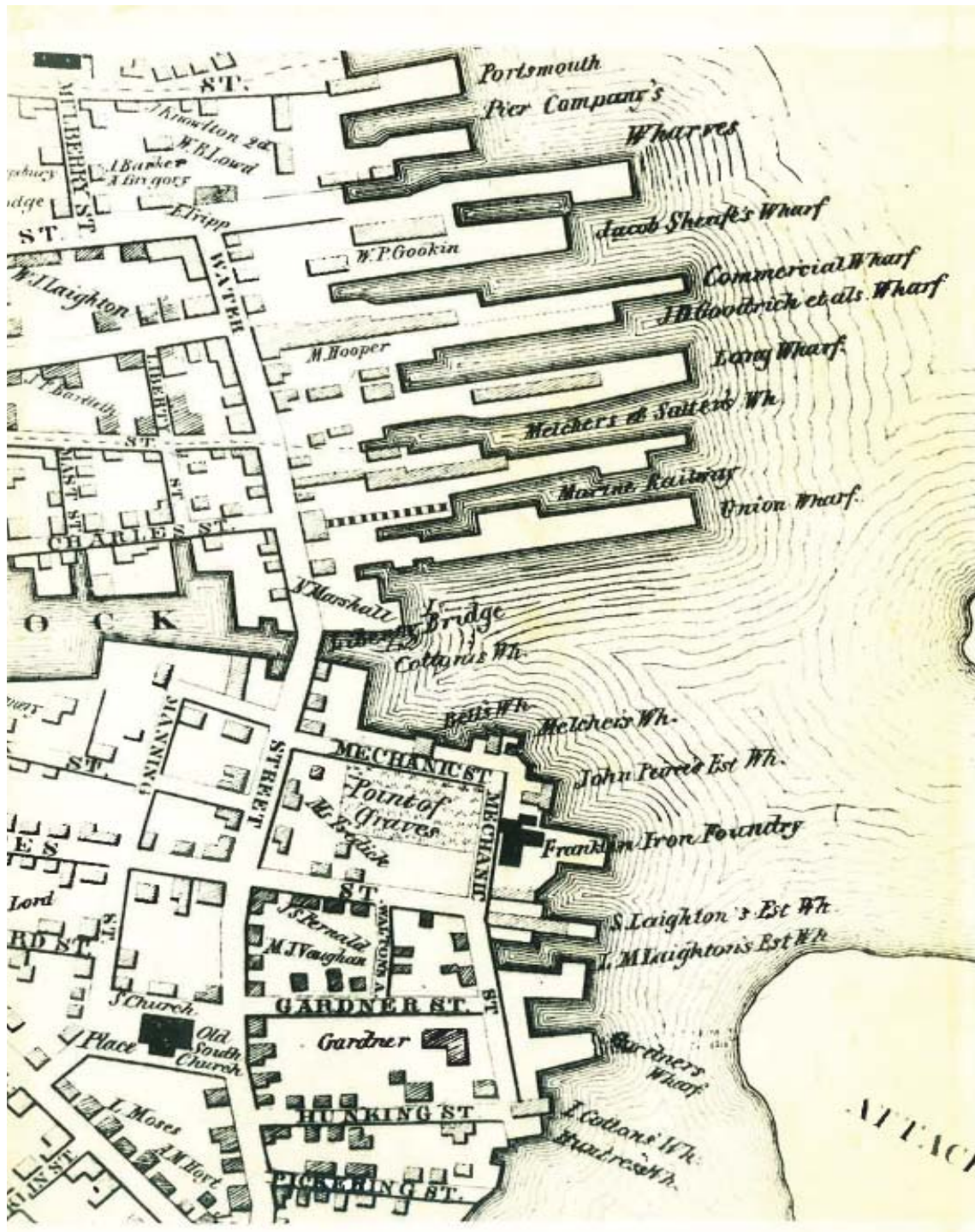
## FUNDING

The proceeds of the Josie F. Prescott Trust are insufficient to support operating costs on an annual basis. In addition, these funds are not available for capital costs per the order of the Trust.

Multiple funding sources have been identified for initial phases of work. 2023 marks the 400th anniversary of Portsmouth. This event has triggered many aspirational investments and improvements within the city. Prescott Park has been identified as a primary focus for this effort. Donations will be sought for major improvement projects, and fundraising efforts will be coordinated. Proceeds from park activities and permit fees will also be collected for capital expenses. As climate change and resiliency efforts are becoming more and more urgent, federal and state funding sources are being funneled to these specific efforts. Other funding initiatives that may be successful in attracting grant monies include accessibility, stormwater management, green infrastructure, shellfish farming, waterfront access, and arts programming. Finally, the city may

appropriate annual budgets for both improvement and operating costs within the park.





conclusion

This is a legacy project with great possibility. Prescott Park is a beloved city asset that serves an incredibly diverse cross-section of people. From locals to workers and tourists, this place is a destination, haven, respite, and happy place for thousands of people each year.

As we examine the full breadth of work to be done here it is obviously significant. A full commitment of time, energy, and money is necessary to evolve this vision into reality. Portsmouth has never been a city to shy away from a worthy challenge though. As the 400th anniversary approaches, there is momentum and enthusiasm for investment in Portsmouth's future. The time for action is now and Prescott Park is poised for transformation.

As this park's infrastructure continues to age and crowds of visitors continue to grow, a tension has developed between the joy of this place and the ability to operate and maintain this important asset. The longer capital investment is deferred, the harder it is to keep up with maintenance and repairs that impact sense of place and park experience.

Through the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Committee for the Prescott Park Master Plan, a robust process of engagement and critical thinking ensued. The result is a comprehensive master plan that not only addresses today's needs but looks to a bright and prosperous future as a vibrant public waterfront park.

At the outset of the process the question was asked, "How would you define success for Prescott Park?" The answers were many. They came from across the city, from institutions, business people, elected officials, and residents. They ranged from simple improvements to visions of grandeur. However, they all had one thing in common; Prescott Park must be an amazing waterfront open space that serves the people of Portsmouth.

With that goal in mind we embarked on the development of a plan that was shaped by a Park First Approach. Along with the tenets of

design, each decision about the design followed this framework for a successful outcome.

This plan for Prescott Park is aspirational. It is the culmination of nearly a year of intellectual investment of the Blue Ribbon Committee, city staff, an invested public, and Weston & Sampson. It represents a process that embraced difference of opinion and critical conversations and always ensured that the answer, whatever it was, put Prescott Park first.

In honor of Josie and Mary Prescott and their incredible gift to the residents of Portsmouth, the City can move forward with a strong and clear vision dedicated to the success of Prescott Park.

