



Fresh Pond Shared Use Public Engagement Process Overview

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Consensus Building Institute

This fact sheet was created in partnership with the Consensus Building Institute (CBI), a non-profit organization based in Cambridge, MA, recognized globally as a leader in the field of stakeholder engagement and dispute resolution.
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INTRODUCTION

Fresh Pond Reservation is an important open space for Cambridge residents and visitors. It is the terminal reservoir in the water system that provides drinking water to everyone who lives in, works in and visits Cambridge. The Reservation also provides recreational opportunities of all kinds, including the chance for people to walk, bicycle, run, bird watch, picnic, walk dogs off leash, and be in a natural setting in the midst of the city. In addition, volunteer groups work to improve the health of the reservation, nature programs are provided by the Water Department and the Friends of Fresh Pond, and the Maynard Ecology Center provides an informal science learning resource for Cambridge schoolchildren. Because of these many opportunities, people love Fresh Pond, and use has increased in recent years. Increased activity for a variety of purposes has led to increased conflict among users and uses. To provide a shared and effective plan for use of the Reservation in the coming years, the City is engaging the public in seeking creative ideas for improving the experience at Fresh Pond, maintaining diverse uses, and protecting the water supply.

ASSESSMENT

In Spring 2010, the City started working with an impartial facilitation team from the Consensus Building Institute (CBI) to assess across the many user groups of the Reservation what was working and what could be improved at Fresh Pond. CBI produced a memo summarizing the range of views documented through the interviews.

PUBLIC WORKSHOPS

Based on the findings of the assessment, the City decided to explore options for improving the public's experience at Fresh Pond through a series of public meetings facilitated by CBI from Fall 2010-Spring 2011. The City determined that development of a Shared Use Plan by a diverse stakeholder group would provide needed guidance for City staff and Fresh Pond visitors to manage uses at the Reservation. All Fresh Pond users are encouraged to attend these public workshops and to collaborate in developing recommendations for the City. A core group of participants representing about ten different user groups have committed to attend all meetings to ensure diverse representation and to be responsive between meetings. The CBI facilitation team is responsible for facilitating meetings, preparing working documents, communicating with participants and notifying the public of meetings. For current information about the process and related meeting summaries and documents, see cbuilding.org/freshpond.

OUTCOMES

The City intends that this collaborative work will lead to recommendations for new and improved policies, regulations, and/or education for consideration by the Water Board, City Manager and City Council. There could be very simple new guidelines, or recommendations for different types of signage, or other solutions yet to be imagined. The City is eagerly awaiting input from the many people who utilize and benefit from the Reservation.

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Fresh Pond Shared Use Public Engagement Process Overview (continued)

HISTORY

Occupying an area of 365 acres, Fresh Pond Reservation encloses and protects the Fresh Pond Reservoir, an ancient glacial kettle pond that formed during the last ice age about 15,000 years ago. The pond and the surrounding woodland and marshes were used as a rich source of food by Native Americans and later by European settlers. In the 1600's, Europeans began haying the meadows, and in the early 1800's the area became a retreat for wealthy Bostonians. Fresh Pond was also a source of ice; every winter the ice was cut and shipped for sale as far away as England, Singapore and India. In 1852, the private Cambridge Water Works Co. was established and began supplying water a few years later; the City of Cambridge purchased the company and its distribution system in 1866 and the Reservoir has served as the source of drinking water for the City of Cambridge since.

In an effort to protect water quality, the ice harvesting infrastructure was removed and a master plan for the Reservation was created. The City of Cambridge contracted the office of Frederick Law Olmsted to create the first formal plan for the use and protection of the Reservation between 1894 and 1909. The plan conceptualized the Reservation as a refuge from the city and proposed significant changes to the landscape, including a circular path around the pond and a natural landscape. Much of the Olmsted plan was never realized due to disagreements between the firm, the public and the City.

RECENT MANAGEMENT HISTORY AND REGULATIONS

Beginning in 1997, a committee of City staff and Cambridge residents collaborated to create a Master Plan for the Reservation which was adopted by the City Council in May 2000. The vision of the Master Plan is to protect the water supply, enhance the open space and naturalistic character, and contribute immeasurably to the quality of life for the community. Since 2000, the aspects of the Master Plan that have been completed include: a new water treatment facility, over 8 million dollars in landscape restoration and enhancement, and an increase in education and outreach.



Fresh Pond Reservation is managed by the Cambridge Water Department under the general oversight of the City Manager with advice and direction from the Water Board, consistent with the regulatory authority of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection and the Cambridge Conservation Commission. Over 100,000 Cambridge residents are provided with potable water from City of Cambridge reservoirs.



In recent years, Fresh Pond Reservation projects have focused on landscape restoration; specifically, re-establishing native species and encouraging biodiversity. The projects and priorities were established in the Fresh Pond Master Plan and are guided by the Fresh Pond Advisory Board. These projects have enhanced the Reservation's reputation as a refuge within an urban setting. As a result, the number of visitors from varied user groups has steadily increased.