

Project Brief

Owen Park

Prepared by the Owen Park Group and the Tisbury Vision Council

March 15th, 2015

William Barry Owen Park

(Owen Playground & Recreation Area)

The Playground

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The World at Play

“Working in the Vineyard” — A New Interpretation. — A spirit of generosity on the part of many people has provided a community play place for Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts. The Park which slopes down to a sandy beach, was given to the town by Mrs. William Barry Owen. The bandstand and the seats around were built by volunteers in the late afternoons and early evenings, the women of the town each night serving a free supper to the workers.

Through the same spirit of generosity the entertainment on the playground has also been provided, for the many people of note who visit the Vineyard are promptly pressed into service to give of their talent. Band concerts and fireworks vary the programs.

For the children there are play swings and sand gardens and a baby group in charge of a Red Cross nurse holds sway in the park each morning.

Through the provision of this community play place the summer life of the whole Vineyard has profited.

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Preamble

Owen Park has been an integral public open space serving many islanders and visitors alike. It functions for the town as a vital public connection to the harbor and beach. It sits on a sloping site at the end of Main Streets commercial district, marking the transition from storefronts to residential homes.

As Owen Park was identified as a town treasure during the 2014-15 visioning process, it is recognized as a important piece of our town to protect and improve.

Also out of the vision process came a goal to build a cohesive community with better participation between residents, businesses and government. The Vision Council has been an attempt to provide a public venue in which these groups can better contribute to the preserving and planning for our town.

Owen Park has gone through many changes since its public inception in 1919, but its original purpose is still much intact. It's a busy place. But heavy use has an impact. The park although still a wonderful place needs to be maintained and extensively repaired.

Recently a group of residents have been interested in how they may help to improve the park and maintain its function for all its diverse users. Both strong participation through the Vision Council and private fund raising efforts have provided a real catalyst for the town to look at the park and plan for the future.

This group worked with the selectman, planning board and department of public works(DPW) to compile a plan for how Owen Park can be better maintained, major repairs can be worked out in coordination with each other, and describe what improvements for the function of its users may be accomplished.

Park history

William Barry Owen, for whom the park is named, was born in a home on Main Street, grew up in Vineyard Haven and died at the young age of 54 in his William Street home, in 1914. The son of a whaling captain, he started the Tisbury Waterworks, and a planned development in West Chop, before moving to London for a number of years establishing subsidiaries of the Gramophone company across Europe. Upon his return to the Vineyard, he put his wealth and ideas to work, purchasing three houses on the site of what is now Owen Park, which were later relocated and not razed. The plan was to clear the view to the harbor for a proposed William Street manor, which never materialized. His vision for the town included moving the MV National Bank from Edgartown, founding a leather company, and raising fancy pure-bred poultry on multiple farms, occupying at their height, over 300 acres.

In July of 1919, five years after William Barry Owen passed away, his widow, Mae Montgomery Owen, gifted the property to be known as Owen Park, to the Town of Tisbury for the purpose of a public park and recreation centre. (The town was to pay off the remainder of the \$2500 mortgage)

Owen Park has been host to many celebrations over the years. The annual Memorial Day March to the Sea, as an example, has endured a similar program dating back to the late 20s and early 30s. On the Friday prior to Memorial Day, students from the Tisbury School march down Main Street to Owen Park, carrying flowers to toss in the harbor in a procession down to the dock. The students, band-members, veterans and their families gather around the flagpole at the head of the park, singing while the band plays.

There are a variety of memorials and donations installed at the park over time. The flagpole in 1929; a mast from a schooner that ran aground on south beach. A bronze drinking fountain in 1935, a gift from the local WCTU. There is a record of 42 trees planted in honor of veterans, with their service records buried in glass containers at the base. Today the plaque on the flagpole in memory of all those who served may be all that remains. A weathervane by Travis Tuck and lanterns installed in the early 80s.

After the stormy hurricane season of 1954, the Playground and Recreation Committee started an initiative, requesting a new bandstand. Costly maintenance and the view seemed to be the main concerns. In 1961, a proposal was brought to the Annual Town Meeting. A thoughtful design and plan was crafted, and yet when it came time to build there was not enough money to accomplish the goal. The following year, the current bandstand was hurriedly built before the summer season in 1962.

The most recent changes to the park have been to the area around the harbormaster's building. In the early 90s, it was a small shed. In the late 90s the current building was built to include the bathrooms (2005) and showers (2011). The dormer was added in 2014.

Public value

A survey at the community meeting held in January 2016 asked participants to share what they liked best about Owen Park. The comments were organized under the 8 categories listed below.

Categories	Comment summary
Water access (15 comments)	The park gives regular people access to the harbor/water for swimming, and boating
Elevated view of the water (12 comments)	The upper section of the park provides a broad view of the harbor and waterfront. It is a wonderful place to sit, the view is both beautiful and interesting.
Sense of community (8 comments)	A place for public gathering that is open to all. It is family oriented and was a big part of my childhood. It was a gift to the community and has historic importance.
Activity (5 comments)	Owen Park supports a greater range of activities than any other park in the town.
Character (5 comments)	People appreciate the simplicity, charm, and beauty of the park
Location (5 comments)	The park connects the town to the harbor. Located on Main Street, it has a central location and many town residents are able to walk to the park.
Open space (4 comments)	The only open space for gathering and sitting in vineyard Haven.
That it exists (4 comments)	That we have this place, that it is on the water and that we care about it.

User groups, facilities and events

The park users are a diverse group

Boaters

This is a large group and is probably the heaviest daily user group from May to October.

- Boat owners on moorings
- Transient mooring and anchored users
- Transient dock users
- Dinghy dock & storage
- Kayakers, etc.

Fisherman

Commercial fishermen and recreational fishermen are often tied up at the main pier.

- Commercial
- Recreational

Beach users

The water, showers and bathrooms make this an attractive beach for parents with young kids. It is also a popular spot for teens. On a nice day there is a lot of activity on this beach.

- Swimming
- Sunning & relaxing
- Crab fishing / kid exploration and education

Fitness

- Beach walkers
- Morning fitness groups

Relaxing, picnickers, sightseers

Drop in neighborhood visitors generally walk to the park to enjoy the view and socialize.

- Tourists
- Lunchtime breaks
- Strolling and sightseeing

Model sailboat racers

A group of about 10 sailors, ages 60 to 88, they meet for races on Wednesdays and Sundays from 10 - 12 noon. In the summer they have had guest sailors, and have invited sailors and boats from off Island. In August, they have a regatta at which there may be a few more spectators. This group requires parking and water to clean their boats.

Vineyard Haven Band Concerts

A popular town event, the concerts have a long history at this site. The band has used the existing pavilion for their performances. Issues to consider in a new bandstand would be -- some type of cover or roof, good lighting and storage for chairs. It should be large enough to accommodate 50 musicians and their instruments. It would be desirable to make it handicap accessible.

Summer film events

MVFF conducted 4 Thursday events at the park that were designed for families, and kids. these popular events occurred four times over the summer and include activities, food, and

an evening film. The group needs electricity for the projector and popcorn machine, seating on the slope and the bathrooms are also a big help.

Children's playground activities

While the equipment is limited it is regularly used by kids who are swimming at the beach.

- Swingset

Special events

Some of these events have a very long history and tradition. They can draw large numbers of people and are very important to the town.

- Memorial Day March-to-the-Sea

- Regattas and races

- Camps, private parties, weddings and classes often make use of the park spaces

Parking

Parking is limited, takes up considerable space but is important to several user groups and it facilitates set up for special events. The following analysis is based on a survey conducted at the community meeting. Boaters and swimmers are more likely to drive to the park than other users groups. Travel distance and transport of equipment are the primary reasons for driving. There is some overnight parking for people using their boats. People who use the park for sitting and socializing tend to walk from the surrounding neighborhoods. People also come from a distance for special town events and concerts. Many travel by car and need parking. Special events require parking for event set up as well. People on occasion use the parking while they go to Main Street and beyond.

Facilities

Harbor master offices

Main office space for harbormaster activities, with open sight lines to the harbor.

Information point for boaters and the public to interact with the harbormaster

Shoreside showers and bathrooms and water supply

Current functions for the public with free showers and public restrooms located in the harbormaster building and at the beginning of the dock

Dock and dinghy rafts

Vital town access to the harbor, used by both recreational and commercial activities

Dinghy and kayak storage racks

Organized storage for dinghy, kayaks, and other small watercraft for public use

Beach

The only in-town beach, primarily used by kids and families. But also used by the public as an easy to access beach

Swim raft

Recently added, but historically there, it creates a destination for swimmers separate from the dock

Swingset

Currently the only playground amenity (historically it has been there from the parks beginnings in different locations and forms)

Bandstand

Used by the Vineyard Haven band, and others, could be a gathering space

Flag pole

Currently being repaired, represents an important Memorial Day destination, as well as a tell tale for boaters of the current wind speed and direction

Benches

Located throughout the park for resting and enjoying the view and the park

Planting beds

Placed around the flagpole base, and around the harbormaster building. Could be improved with more native species that provide interest year round

Owen Park Way

Access road to the bottom of the park and three private properties

Parking

Paved area down the middle of the park to the dock

Trash dumpster and recycling

Located in the northwest corner, is a vital function for boaters, but also the public, could be better organized for compost separation and recycling

Boat holding tank pump out

Recently added to provide a vital public service to the boaters

Goals

Town wide visioning goals

- Better access to the waterfront
- Walkability
- Opportunities for expanded use of available open space
- Preservation of the natural environment
- Preservation and enhancement of park spaces
- Improved maintenance of public spaces

Owen park group goals

- Consider all the user groups
- Consider the bandstand - as it needs rebuilding. Look at options to improve its function as both a gathering space and band stand. Think about placement, design, functions and how it marks the park
- How do we improve access to Main Street? The upper part of the park, functions much differently than the lower part, this section is much more associated with casual strolling and resting and conversing. This should provide a safe and visually connected entrance to the park and Main street sitting area.
- Look at the different perceptions from different entering points : narrower from Main street, and wider from the beach and dock.
- Look at the slope as the challenge for access and events, but, it could be a strong design element
- Consider the Harbormaster building functions, look, and position. Alternative relocation or rebuilding can be proposed for future planning.
- Look at bathroom and shower facilities. How can these best support varying user groups, and address maintenance issues on different design options. May want to be separated from Harbormaster building, and could be more like an outdoor shower.
- Understand user group conflicts, different functions, better organizing, swimmers vs. boaters, dock space, dinghy storage, parking space turnover, etc.
- History, what aspects can be preserved, enhanced, recorded?
- What potential changes or enhancements will make the park a better place, plantings, space making, etc.?

- Implement a maintenance plan
 - Who is currently maintaining different aspects of the park and how can it be improved?
 - What are the maintenance objectives?
 - How is it monitored?
- Define long-term and short-term goals, achievable action steps
 - What can be accomplished in the short-term without impacting future development?
 - What is the direction for the park long-term?
 - How does sea level rise affect the parks functions?

Community Goals

The Committee identified the following goals to guide the development of the park plan. The goals were shared with community members at a public meeting held at the Tisbury Senior Center on January 28, 2016. At this meeting community members discussed the goals, suggested ways that they could be accomplished and prioritized the goals. The table below lists the goals in the order of the community ranking and shares community comments.

Goals	Community comments
Safety - Improve entrance safety, sight lines, crosswalks, and sidewalks	This is the number one priority. Establish a safe pedestrian entrance from Main Street into the park that provides sidewalk access and/or a designated pedestrian crosswalk. Remove/lower barriers (hedge) that currently block sightlines along Main Street. Improve lighting in park.
Bandstand - Identify options for replacement or renovation. Consider different locations, design, functions, etc.	Redesign for size, attractiveness, and handicap accessibility. Bandstand needs to support more activities and events than just music. Desire to reference history -- copy earlier version, incorporate roof lines in a new structure and use traditional location. There were comments about location, transparency of structure and its potential impact on views from top. Some suggested moving it higher and lower in the park. Some see it as the focus of the park and a place for community gathering. Make it useful on a daily basis, add chairs. There were suggestions that it could be a grassy area or a platform with a temporary roof. Lighting for evening events is important.

<p>Enhancements - Identify potential changes or enhancements that will make the park a better place. Consider space making (seating areas, flexible event space, etc.), amenities (benches, picnic tables, bike racks, etc.) and infrastructure (electricity, lighting, irrigation, etc.)</p>	<p>Improve seating and create seating areas where people can gather and talk. Build seating into the bank. Improve the benches. Improve lighting and possibly add motion sensitive lighting. Add a water fountain, bike rack at top and bottom, more picnic tables and better signage. Add some means of irrigation. Add More trash bins, recycling and increase trash collection. Develop storm drainage detention areas to prevent flooding contribute to irrigation. Incorporate more native plants.</p>
<p>Beach / Playground - Enhance and integrate the public beach and playground area to better contain and entertain youngsters eager to explore the water</p>	<p>The beach is a heavily used area and one of the only areas for swimming in the town. Life guards need to be more engaged in supervision - speak to parents who are not monitoring kids. Dinghies pulled up on the beach reduce beach space for swimmers. Designate areas for dinghy storage and enforce. People would like to see the beach enlarged (clearing around the harbormaster). Provide areas for kids to crab away from the dinghy dock. Improve the playground and strengthen connection to the beach so parents can monitor activities in both areas. Encourage water exploration through play. Add a first aid kit outside.</p>
<p>Upper Section & Flagpole - Improve access and visual connections to Main St. Establish an accessible overlook as part of park entrance</p>	<p>Improve vehicular/pedestrian visibility along Main Street. Establish a strong connection between Main Street and the park. Create a pedestrian entrance (ADA accessible) that leads to into the park to an attractive and welcoming overlook that celebrates the water view and provides a place to sit and linger.</p>
<p>Harbormaster building - Consider the Harbormaster building (including its functions, look, and location) to understand and plan for future changes that might be required.</p>	<p>Many feel that the harbor master building is poorly located. They feel that it blocks the water view from the top of the park, that it detracts visually and that it separates the beach and play area at the bottom of the park. People suggested that the building be moved to the other side of the park. Building appearance and maintenance was also mentioned as an issue to be addressed.</p>

<p>Enhance Waterfront use & dinghy storage - Understand the functions and needs of different user groups (swimmers, beach goers, and boaters), reduce conflicts between the different activities and enhance waterfront use.</p>	<p>Clean up area. Beach is too cluttered we need to sort out what happens where. This area is heavily used and the biggest issue seemed to be the fact that dinghies are scattered about reducing the area for swimming and beach activities. See Recommendation above in Beach/ Playground. Safety is very important we need better awareness of safety issues by boaters, swimmers and kids, better engagement by life guard and respect each other's activities. Bring back swimming lessons for kids. Maintain a balance between boat traffic, swimming safety and healthy water conditions. Post water conditions.</p>
<p>History - Incorporate site/ community history in the park redesign. Identify unique elements, characteristics, and relationships that can be preserved, enhanced or revealed to record the site history and its relationship to the harbor.</p>	<p>History is very important to many. History provides a sense of community for the average citizen. People would like to share park, town and harbor histories. Suggestions include: Displays of photos and text, bronze plaques to commemorate people and events, coordinated signs in park and town-wide, and technology using a website and app.</p> <p>Don't be too rigid, find ways to mark the past while meeting current needs. This is a small site.</p>
<p>Plantings, vegetation, and drainage - Add and use existing plantings to complement uses, control storm water runoff and create a naturalistic setting that adds to the visual appeal and creates shaded sitting areas.</p>	<p>Encourage use of native plants. Add more plants. Use plantings and grading to control drainage and contain flooding. Consider edible plants, herbs, community kitchen and medicinal plants. Use plants to provide shade and create more intimate seating areas. Prune back vegetation by the harbormaster's building to enlarge beach space.</p>
<p>Maintenance - Develop a proper maintenance plan.</p>	<p>A maintenance plan is most important. Know who is responsible to do what. The park needs proper/regular year round care. Coordinate activities by professionals, the DPW and volunteers. Increase trash pickup.</p>

<p>Parking - Improve traffic flow, drop off, pick up, and parking layout.</p>	<p>People recognize the need for parking to support various activities but also note that the park is small and the space is tight. There is concern about safety with the parking, vehicular traffic and pedestrians all using the same entrance. Many feel it works the best it can but others suggested changing the location of the parking -- moving to the other side or to the grassy area on the north side of the park. Several suggested creating a designated drop off. Some thought it belonged at the top while others thought it would be better at the bottom of the slope. There was also a suggestion that the parking be reduced to give more space to the park and that we talk with VTA to discuss the possibility of a shuttle especially on days/ nights when there are events.</p>
<p>Bathroom & Shower Facilities - Improve bathroom and shower facilities to address the needs of different user groups (boaters, swimmers, and park users).</p>	<p>These are important facilities and people would like to see them improved. They need to be maintained on a regular basis. The hot water shower is an expense for the town. Consider installing a coin operated system for hot water showers. Many suggested improving the outdoor shower. Possibly a better designed and maintained outdoor showers (the addition of a family shower) would take pressure off of the indoor shower. There was a suggestion to maintain one of the showers year-round.</p>
<p>Accessibility - Improve universal access within the park.</p>	<p>Accessibility is a challenge given the slope at the site. There were suggestions that we try to develop pedestrian paths in the park and the desire to blend them into the site/landscape. Others felt that maybe the best way to go would be to provide drop offs at top and bottom with transition areas to provide handicap accessibility. This also needs to be addressed at the beach.</p>

Interest Groups

The Public input

- Public input builds support, feedback and ideas. The Owen Park Group which grew out of public involvement will provide direct public direction. This group will be instrumental in developing the plan.

Department of Public Works, the Selectman and Planning Board

- As the public stewards of the park they are critical to its success through their guidance during the planning process and their leadership role in implementing and maintaining the park projects as well as reflecting the views and goals of the public.

Tisbury Band

- The band has used the existing pavilion for their performances. Issues to consider in a new bandstand would be -- some type of cover or roof, though a design may be proposed without an enclosure for comparison, think views, good lighting and possibly storage for chairs. It should be large enough to accommodate 50 musicians and their instruments. It would be desirable to make it handicap accessible.

Harbormaster comments

- Provides important information on the parks functions as well as critical requirements that support the active and diverse boating community
- 90% of his responsibilities are below the high-water mark
- Does not have the staff for park maintenance
- Needs clear sight lines from harbormaster office
- Better organized dinghy and kayak storage
- Better communication will help improve functionality and scheduling
- Shower facilities need to be improved
- Laundry service might be a great amenity for boaters, and a possible revenue stream for the town
- Dredge the harbor edge for improved swimming
- Clean up debris left behind, clear vegetation
- More purposeful planting plans, improve look of the park

Various User Groups

- Identified above in section 4 this park attracts a number of different user groups. They each have different needs and, at times, their activities conflict. During the spring, summer and fall the beach and pier are the most heavily utilized areas. The following information was gathered at the community workshop.

User groups	Facilities used
Boaters	dinghy dock and storage rack, bathrooms, trash, water
Swimmers	shower, bathroom, picnic tables
Seating and socializing	benches, bandstand, bathrooms, trash receptacle, picnic tables
Concerts/town events	Bandstand, bathrooms, trash

Proposed Scope, public design process, schedule and funding

Scope

The Town is looking to develop an improvement plan that looks at current repairs and potential improvements to the park over the next 10 years.

The town has deep connections with this busy and important park. Though it is in need of some major repair work as well as improvements to enhance park use and maintenance, though the public likes it much the way it is, the public also sees the need to improve its appearance, function and maintenance for the future. An effort should be made to maintain the character and feel as we contemplate change.

The design should take into account phasing, priorities and cost as it looks at solutions.

Pieces of this plan may be further refined as they are identified for further study or implementation. In this regard the improvement plan will be used more to show and explain intent, define relationships and spatial qualities of the park, as well as show how different user groups can better interact as they overlap in the park.

Public Design process

To achieve a successful plan, it is important to have an open public process that allows for the designers to best understand the how the town, public, and users see the park's future developing. Public participation throughout the design period will provide thoughtful feedback to help designers address concerns as well as refine their creative solutions for our park.

This feedback will happen in public meetings, where early on, broad stroke conceptual concepts can be properly vetted and explored, before moving towards more concrete plans.

We envision a series of public meetings held jointly at the Vision Council, Planning Board and Board of Selectman meetings, as well as intermittent site visits.

Initial Site Visit:

Once the design work begins, a site walk with interested group representatives and the designers can familiarize themselves with the conditions before starting the design work.

First public meeting:

As a first step we are asking the designers to develop three or more different conceptual plans, which will be shared and reviewed during a public meeting. Based on feedback at this meeting we may ask the designers to look at other concepts, combine certain aspects of the concepts presented or move to develop one conceptual idea.

At this level we expect to see basic sketches in plan and section form, and any other diagrams that describe the conceptual intent.

Second Meeting:

Once an approved conceptual plan is developed to a fairly complete level another public meeting will be held to review this plan. This feedback will be critical for either refining or rethinking parts of the plan.

The drawings will likely be more complete, include perspectives, vignettes and other presentation level drawings that show both the broad intent but also levels of detail that support the design goals.

Third Meeting:

A third public meeting will be held to present the completed plan.

These drawings will likely be displayed in the town and used for further fund raising and public input.

It should be noted that the finished plan is to be regarded as an operating document, not necessarily set in stone, but something that encompasses the intent and goals for the future of the park, which will be updated as projects within the park are implemented and adjusted.

Based on the design team's proposed phasing plan, specific projects will be identified for further design development and construction documentation. This work will be completed under a separate contract.

Schedule

Mid August 2016, goal for completion

- It will allow summer residents to add to the public discussion
- It will allow for fundraising events to be held
- It also will allow us the necessary time required further develop drawings for implementation in the fall as well as prepare proposal for future CPC funding

Based on this the following timeline would need to be roughly adhered to:

First public meeting: Beginning of May, 2016

Second Public meeting: Mid to late June, 2016

Third public meeting: Beginning of August, 2016

Note: The scope, process and schedule will need to be adjusted and finalized in consultation with the designers.

Funding Options

- DPW maintenance will fund some parts of the project this spring
- CPC funds have already been secured for planning and first stage implementation
- Private donations through fundraising have secured funds
- Future funds from the town, CPC and grants

Conclusion

Owen Park has a rich history in downtown Vineyard Haven. It already provides many functions that we hold dear to our community; connections to the water, a piece of open space just off Main Street, community gatherings and events, and a town beach.

But, as we grow, the park will need to keep up with changes to better confront the conflicts of greater use and the pressure of greater maintenance demands.

We need to keep it functioning well, but also keep it beautiful. We also should strive to create a resilient and regenerative park, one that decreases both burdens on our environment, and burdens on our town.

Owen park represents a space for the town to build upon a rich history, provide amenities to many users and become a welcoming entry point to our town.

Planning plays a central role in whether we are ready for the future and taking care of the present. The energy of an active, and interested community bodes well for the future of Owen park.