

Stratham Hill Park Signage Discussion 2022

Summary Notes

The Select Board initiated a discussion among various stakeholders in Stratham Hill Park concerning signage in the park. On April 20, 2022 volunteers from the Trail Management Advisory Committee (Kevin O'Brien, Kate Dardinski), the Conservation Commission (Allison Knab, Kyle Saltonstall absent), Stratham Hill Park Association (Gregg Blood, Alex Dardinski absent but submitted comments) and the Heritage Commission (Nate Merrill, Jeffrey Hyland) gathered along with Town Planner Mark Connors, Parks & Recreation Director Seth Hickey and Town Administrator David Moore. Background information and general framing questions used to steer the discussion can be found attached to this summary.

The group introduced themselves, viewed a picture slide show of currently deployed signage in the Park, and reviewed the signage projects coming up planned by the various groups represented that stem from various plans and initiatives. In addition, each attendee shared reactions, ideas, suggestions and steps going forward.

In total, the group understood the challenge of managing signage and the opportunity to make improvements. The group was comfortable with existing efforts moving forward, including the Phase I improvements in the TMAC report in that that work could do some critical pre-work on a larger signage strategy for the Park that the successive projects and ongoing management could benefit from.

This summary is an effort to capture the discussion.

Principles Identified

- The Select Board should remain the source of final approval for any new signage proposals, but planning should take place to guide Select Board decisions and to project expectations to stakeholders.
- There are three basic types of signs: a. regulatory (park rules and ordinances), b. trail markers (wayfinding and emergency), and c. educational (historical and other interpretive info and memorials/dedicated spaces). The goal is to make each sign type complimentary but distinct from each other in appearance, and to establish guidelines for where it is appropriate to utilize each type of sign.
- Signage can be important for wayfinding and to convey important messages but should be minimized in the Park everywhere to retain its tranquil function. The use of electronic means, including websites, social media, and mapping tools, may be more effective to convey some messaging than through signage. Some park signage, while well meaning, has not been adequately maintained over the years and has fallen into disrepair. When the Town approves new signage it should be prepared to accept the costs of regularly assessing its condition and adequately maintaining such signage.
- Existing signage should be evaluated to determine if it needs to stay and new signage should be approved formally by the Select Board (like any other proposed improvement).
- Signage is more acceptable in "developed areas" of the park (parking areas and recreation fields) and less acceptable in the Town Forest and other large undeveloped portions of the Park). Trail signage is important for safety and navigability, but should be limited to only key areas.

- Kiosks (concentrated area of signage at key hubs) may be effective in transmitting messages in a compact area instead of spreading messages out.
- Memorial and monumental plaques and small bronze markers associated with various community volunteer projects should be handled formally, but coordinating or changing them should not be an initial priority as part of this effort to improve the overall signage approach in the park.
- The style, size and color of signage needs to be determined by function, but not every sign has to match one another. For example, interpretative historic markers such as those proposed by the Heritage Commission are distinct in their function, visual impact, and limited number that they needn't match a new style (but should be assessed for complimenting or not detracting from a chosen style).
- A signage plan should be developed and it should address consistent branding across Stratham Hill Park and should be part of signage style across Town parks and recreation properties (Stevens, Smyk, and Municipal Center Field, but also Town-owned conservation properties on which the public is invited, Zarnowski etc.). The plan should prioritize what forms of signage are most important and signage that may no longer be relevant or necessary. The important work of the Trail Management Advisory Committee will provide a key framework for this plan.
- A challenge to limiting signage is the concurrent need to effectively mark property boundaries (of transition in property types, i.e. private-conservation land and the changes in rules that come with those boundary crossings).
- An Open Space Plan and a Stratham Hill Park Master Plan will be important part of maintaining signage discipline and organizing the types of properties (i.e. recreation, park, conservations, private lands) that might have a sub-identity, as will a style guide/signage standards plan/document to be used by decision makers.

Next Steps Identified

1. Trail Management Advisory Committee Recommendation for addressing and refreshing trail management signage should proceed. In developing the signage look, work should be done to plan for other types of signs needed for Stratham Hill Park (beyond the scope of trail management signage) and other park and recreational assets (regulatory, other wayfinding) at the same time.
2. The final visual look of interpretative historic markers should be informed by a check-in with staff about the Trail Management signage effort to see opportunities for ensuring a visual relationship (like ownership or funding message at the bottom or other common logo) and compliment.
3. A Community Volunteer Project Proposal form and policy (for use with Eagle Scout and other projects) that addresses signage for these types of projects (as well as an approval path, required consultations, etc.). Policy should address expectations for maintaining or retaining signage in perpetuity (i.e. the volunteer understands that any approved signage is subject to removal or replacement at the direction of the Select Board as it wears, becomes illegible, is damaged or as a result of impacts associated with improvements to the park or other unforeseen developments).
4. An inventory of areas and facilities that have been dedicated or named after people should be collected and maintained with the Select Board's Facilities and Areas Naming policy.

Invitation to Park Signage Discussion

Dear Reps. of the SHPA, Con Comm., TMAC, and Heritage Commission,

As either Seth, Mark or I have discussed directly with you, the Select Board has asked the staff to arrange a discussion among Park stakeholders about the future of signage in the Park.

Needs or ideas for new or replacement signage in the Park is a component of several master plan initiatives. As a result, Mark Connors Seth Hickey and I are assembling an initial conversation at **3:00 p.m. on Wednesday April 20th in the Hutton Room** with representatives of Park stakeholders (approximately two each from the Heritage Commission, Conservation Commission, Park Association, and TMAC) to share upcoming needs, ideas and the general direction of preferred sign approaches.

This is in part a response to concern about potential “over signing” of the park, but also reflective of the opportunity to coordinate and ensure an effective, coordinated and aesthetically pleasing approach to this necessary Park element.

This is not a Committee, but a beginning conversation to help inform the Select Board’s approach to authorizing and guiding signage efforts going forward. In coordination with the Chairs of the entities above one or two representatives have been identified to take part. Thank you all for your help.

Mark, Seth and I look forward to the conversation, which will be aided by a slide show of the myriad examples of signage currently deployed over time in the park.

If you are unable to make this meeting, please let your Board Chair (and me) know so they can identify another attendee.

Thank you,