



CUSHING MEMORIAL PARK

MASTER PLAN UPDATE
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CUSHING MEMORIAL PARK MASTER PLAN UPDATE | 2013

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Acknowledgements

The updating of the Cushing Memorial Park Master Plan represents the culmination of a collaborative process between the Framingham Parks and Recreation Department, Framingham Parks Commission, Framingham Community and Weston & Sampson. The contents of the report and the recommended actions for continued improvement to this important public open space asset are a direct result of the information gathered at staff meetings, public hearings and through site walks.

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PART A

Cushing Memorial Park Master Plan Update | 2013



Introduction

Cushing Memorial Park is a remarkable place. The 67.5 acre property is dedicated to passive recreational pursuits and it has become central to the Framingham Park and Open Space system over a 20 year period. The grounds are unique as the property continues to evolve from its historical roots as an expansive state hospital with massive infrastructure (that included roadways, parking lots, utility systems and more than 100 buildings) into a major public park and open space asset. Today, defining park features include the grand pedestrian promenades (renovated former hospital roads), expansive open lawns and meadows, (former hospital building footprints) and mature shade trees. Hundreds of residents enjoy the park on a daily basis.

Twenty-two years after the former State Hospital was declared surplus, and 12 years after adopting the 2001 Master Plan, representatives of the Parks and Recreation Department determined that it was an appropriate time to step back and assess what has been accomplished to date and confirm that what remains to be accomplished still meets community needs and expectations. While much has been achieved, the collaborative vision established by earlier master plan participants has yet to be fully realized. The commitment by the Framingham Community to finish implementing basic improvement goals from the original Master Plan and newly articulated goals as identified in this Master Plan Update is clear and strong.

To continue forward progress, Weston & Sampson was retained by the Framingham Parks and Recreation Department to update the 2001 Cushing Memorial Park (then known as Tercentennial Park) Master Plan. “Update” is the key word, as this document is intended to:

- Revisit the articulated goals, objectives, recommendations and priorities that were established in the 2001 Master Plan
- Summarize what has been accomplished
- Summarize what remains to be accomplished
- Confirm that what remains to be accomplished is still valid
- Identify new goals, objectives, recommendations and priorities
- Identify potential phasing priorities and implementation strategies

The Evolution of a Passive Park at Cushing

The vision for a community park at the former Cushing Hospital site began to take shape more than 4 decades ago. Following is a summary of milestones in the park evolution process:

Year	Milestone
1980 +/-	Open Space Plan identifies the need for a “Central Park” with the Cushing Property noted as potentially meeting this need
1991	Hospital declared surplus/Cushing Hospital Property task force established
1992	Initial Master Plan for Cushing Hospital Property
1994	Conceptual property plan prepared Fall Town Meeting
1994	Fall Town Meeting votes to accept the majority of the lands from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for recreation purposes
1998	Village at Farm Pond Senior Living Community project approved by Planning Board
1999	Cushing Memorial Chapel restored and rededicated
2001	Cushing Memorial Park Master Plan adopted (then called Tercentennial Park)
2004	First significant round of capital improvements implemented (Phase 1)

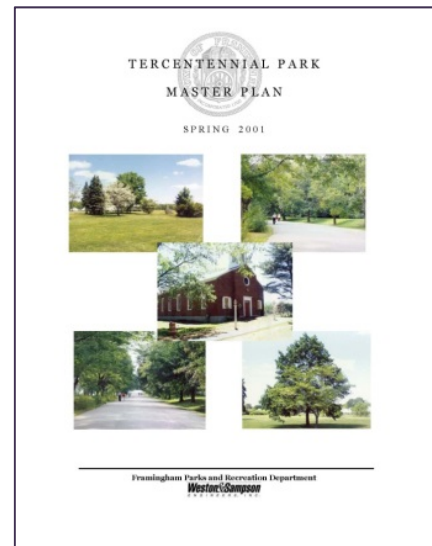
Participants in early planning initiatives deserve recognition for their collective foresight and their perseverance in the face of competing visions that would have accomplished something other than a passive park at Cushing. Today, a walk at Cushing by early visionaries would instill a great sense of pride and accomplishment and a depth of confidence that what has been accomplished is truly remarkable and will withstand the test of time. Like Central Park in New York or the Public Garden in Boston, great open space assets become defining elements of a community. While getting a late start compared to earlier “Olmstedian” Parks, Cushing Memorial Park represents a new generation of park designed to accommodate individuals in pursuit of simple, passive recreation pleasures in the midst of an increasingly frantic, harried and “wired” society.

The 2001 Master Plan

During February 2000, the Framingham Parks and Recreation Commission, as custodians of the former Cushing Hospital site, issued a Request for Proposals to qualified consulting firms to undertake a recreation master plan for the property. Weston & Sampson was retained to undertake this plan.

Over the course of 12 months representatives of the Parks and Recreation Department, Parks Commission and Weston & Sampson developed a variety of conceptual master plans. The various plans were generated in response to the needs and desires of property abutters and other representatives of the general public, as expressed at a series of meetings.

The final Master Plan that was approved and adopted by the Parks Commission, and presented to the Framingham Board of Selectmen in January 2001, reflects the desire of nearly all participants to enhance the site’s many beautiful natural features and develop primarily passive recreational opportunities with limited vehicular access.



As the pursuit of significant funds for implementing the Master Plan was of paramount concern, it was decided to undertake a phased approach and to promote three themes for improvement:

1. Open Space and Recreation
2. Good Health
3. Historical Significance

Several other simple goals from the 2001 Master Plan are listed below:

- Maximize safe recreational opportunities that meet town-wide interests and needs.
- Propose amenities that are economically practical and sustainable.
- Develop a plan that is sensitive to abutters and surrounding neighborhoods.

In addition, the 2001 Master Plan stated the following:

“...it became the basic desire of the Framingham Parks Commission to transform what visually appears to a former hospital site into a beautiful and memorable park that continues to support passive recreational opportunities.”



2001 Goals and Progress to Date

There were eight “Specific Site Improvement” goals identified in the 2001 Master Plan. Following is a listing of each of these improvement goals or themes and a reporting of the progress that has been achieved to date.

Goal 1 - Demolition and Site Preparation

Description- By 2001, all but 4 of the the buildings had been removed and the Town had enjoyed formal custody of the property for about 7 years. Many people had already discovered the benefit and joy of traversing the former hospital roads that formed the outer perimeter of the property. But the site was also somewhat blighted, with damaged vegetation, remnants of on old railroad platform, acres of unneeded and surplus asphalt pavement, stockpiles of debris and overhead service wires taking away from the aesthetic character of the site. Goal 1 was focused on the removal of all unneeded and unwanted vestiges of the former hospital site.

Progress- Who could forget the images included below? To those who worked for years to transform the property, these images in many ways represent the starting point of the process to create a passive park. Shortly after the images were taken the property began to be transformed, largely due to the receipt of four rounds of funding (matched with local funding) from the State’s Division of Conservation Services PARC (Parkland Acquisition and Renovations for Communities) Grant Program.



Images from 2001, prior to the writing of the community based master plan and the commencement of significant park improvements at the Cushing Property that began in 2003 and continue through this date.

Goal 2 - Park Edge Improvements

Description- characterized by chain link fencing, overgrown vegetation and a lack of signage, the goal was to achieve an upgraded, inviting and aesthetically compelling public face to Cushing Memorial Park in a way that is appropriate for a major public open space asset.

Progress- chain link fence is mostly gone, much of the overgrown vegetation has been pruned or removed, new plantings have been undertaken and wood rail systems and signage has come to define the edge of Cushing in a way that is consistent with the dramatically enhanced interior landscape.



View of a dramatically enhanced park edge at Winter Street.

Goal 3 - Vehicular Entrance Improvements

Description- the 2001 Master Plan identified the goal of creating two new, primary vehicular entrances into the Cushing Property, with one to be located near Dudley Road in the vicinity of the Chapel (northeast quadrant of park) and a second entrance to be located off of Winter Street in the vicinity of Keefe Tech (southwest quadrant of park). In conjunction with the park entrances, work would include lighting, landscaping appropriate signage and decorative “gateways” into the site.

Progress- As evidenced by the images below, both entrances have been constructed. The two entrances provide the only points of vehicular access into Cushing Park which helps to maintain a park landscape that is largely dedicated to the pedestrian, rather than to the automobile driver.



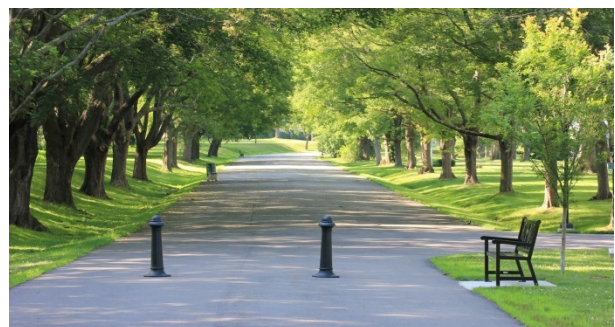
Dudley Road entrance (left photo) and the Winter Street entrance from Keefe Tech (right photo).

Goal 4 - Pedestrian Entrance Improvements

Description- as a public park it is critical to provide obvious and convenient ways for the public to access the property. The Master Plan identified the need to renovate existing entrances and to create new entrances.

Progress- in a phased manner, major improvements have been made at park edges in order to improve opportunities for accessing the park. Improvements have generally included the installation of park signage, stone entrance piers, decorative bollards, landscaping and park benches. Many of the entrances are designed to permit both vehicular and pedestrian access at that particular location. At present, pedestrians can access the park at nine formal locations as follows:

- Harvey Cushing Drive (2)
- Dudley Road (2)
- Barbeiri School (1)
- Keefe Tech (2)
- Winter Street (2)



Images of new park entrances from Winter Street and Harvey Cushing Drive. In the right photo, note the widths of the new perimeter park walkways (foreground) compared to the width of the former hospital roadways (background).

Goal 5 - Park Pathway Installations

Description- the 2001 Master Plan identified a series of new and renovated pathways that constitute the signature component of Cushing Park. The intent was simple, and included primarily the renovation of the former hospital roadways that formed the eastern, southern and western perimeters of the park in a manner that enhanced pedestrian use and enjoyment. To this end pathways would become narrower in width (18'-20' vs. 30' or more) to create a more appropriate scale, while retaining the grand promenade feel and look.



The signature element of Cushing Memorial Park is clearly the network of pathways including the renovated and narrowed former hospital roadways that form the perimeter of the property. Above, park patrons using a variety of modes of travel traverse a pathway heading north to the Cushing Chapel (left photo) and heading north toward Harvey Cushing Drive (eastern and western park edges respectively).

Goal 6 - Park Drives and Parking Areas

Description- another important goal centered on providing strategically located parking areas for the multitudes of patrons that travel by car from other parts of Framingham and beyond. New parking areas were intended for perimeter areas in a way that would keep drivers from penetrating deep into the park site in order to designate most park areas strictly for pedestrian use.

Progress- two phases of park improvement projects have included the installation of three major parking areas with spaces for approximately 300 vehicles. The parking areas have been designed in a manner that reflects and complements the passive park setting. To this end, parking areas include curved alignments, sloped granite curbing, landscaped medians, extensive tree plantings and strong connections to the pedestrian pathway network. Park drives provide access from new park entrances at Winter Street (from the Keefe Tech property) and from Dudley Road at the Chapel into the parking areas. The parking areas are located at the eastern and southwestern edges of the site, which reserves the core of the park for pedestrian use and enjoyment in a way that limits conflicts between drivers and walkers.



Concept plan of a parking area from the 2001 Master Plan

The parking area off of Dudley Road was intended to support special events at the Chapel and general park use. The parking area off of Winter Street was intended to support general park use and also relieve congestion from adjacent neighborhood streets caused periodically by special events at Keefe Tech.



The 90 space parking area at Cushing Chapel was constructed in 2003, the first parking facility designed to support the new passive park development.

Goal 7 - Utility Installations

Description- The master plan outlined the need to upgrade utility systems in a way that supported new park functions and removed visual intrusions that were remnants of the former hospital facility (particularly overhead utility services).

Progress- Phase 3 removed all overhead utility services (electrical, cable and telephone) to below ground and other major utility upgrades have been accomplished by Town forces (including water system upgrades) and by contractors during various park improvement projects. In particular, significant stormwater management improvements have been installed throughout the park and lighting system installations have occurred along new park drives and at new park parking areas.

Goal 8 - Landscaping

Description- with surplus former hospital drives, parking areas and former building footprints, the 2001 Master Plan established a broad and overarching goal of improving inherent landscape qualities throughout the site. In essence “greening up” the property become an important priority in a way that is consistent with the establishment of a “Central Park” for Framingham.

Progress- after four major phases of park improvements and many smaller initiatives, the park landscape at Cushing is gradually being transformed. Hundreds of trees and shrubs and acres of pavement have been removed, with more work identified in the 2001 Master Plan remaining to be accomplished.



Landscape enhancements have been undertaken throughout the Cushing property as part of larger capital improvement programs that have improved pathway systems, park entrances, drives and parking areas and related park assets.

Other 2001 Master Plan Priorities

The 2001 Master Plan identified other priorities including:

- Improve the landscape surrounding the historic chapel, which had been fully renovated in 1999.
- Place interpretive signage at key locations to describe the historical and environmental aspects of the site.

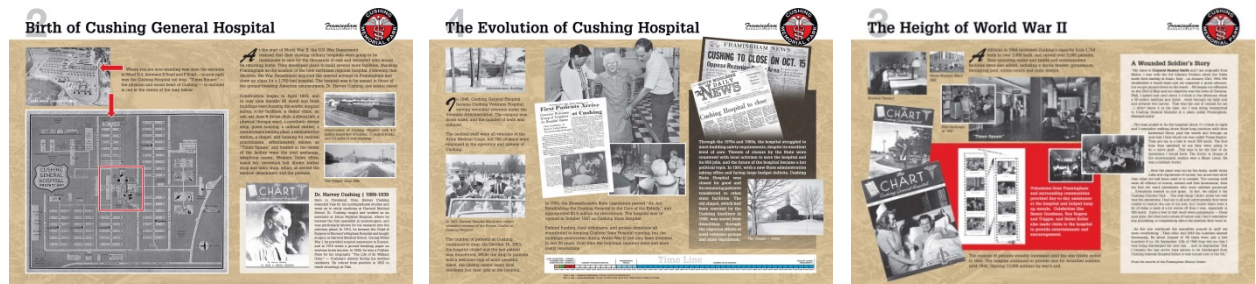


Photo showing a fully restored Chapel landscape (top) and images (bottom row) of interpretive signage that has been installed below an open air arbor along the Winter Street edge of the property. The signage conveys the unique history of the property.

Significant Improvement Projects Completed 2003 through 2013

The Town of Framingham through the Parks and Recreation Department has completed improvements in excess of \$2,000,000 at Cushing Memorial Park. Improvements have been undertaken through a variety of means, including through the securing of grant funds offered through the Massachusetts Division of Conservation Services PARC (Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities) Program. The chart below summarizes the four major capital improvement projects that have been accomplished through this means.

Phase	Project Budget	Status / Description
1	\$420,000	Complete. Included construction of the new lighted parking area at the Chapel, new gardens and pathways in the Chapel vicinity, reconstruction of the major pedestrian corridor along the eastern side of the property.
2	\$420,000	Complete. Work included the new park entrance near Keefe Tech., new parking areas at the southern edge of the property, new pedestrian pathways and all associated landscaping and site furnishings.
3	\$420,000	Complete. Work included reconstruction of the major pedestrian corridors that run along the southern edge of the property near the Barbieri School and that link to Winter Street at the former hospital entrance and a new park entrance at Winter Street.
4	\$450,000	Complete. Work included reconstruction of the major pedestrian corridor that runs along the western edge of the property near Winter Street. New pedestrian entrances were constructed from Winter Street into the Park and a pergola seating area was created which includes a presentation of the property's historical timeline.

Using a variety of other means, a significant number of park improvements have been undertaken in an effort to achieve other basic objectives outlined in the 2001 Master Plan. A summary of these improvements is included below:

- Tree removals, tree pruning and tree planting through a major Arbor Day initiative.
- Construction of an 9/11 Memorial to honor those who were lost in the events of that date with Framingham connections.
- Water system and other utility improvements by Town forces.
- Buring of overhead utility lines and new three phase electrical service to the three remaining buildings located toward the south, central part of the property.
- Renovation of the Academy Building and the Middle Building into first rate meeting space venues in partnership with the carpentry, electrical, plumbing and metal labs at Keefe Tech.
- Renovation of the Long (Maintenance Building) including new roof, interior room renovations, new windows, heating and electrical systems in partnership with Keefe Tech.
- Installation of guardrails, fences, signage, informational kiosks, bicycle racks, walking trail milage markers, and other site furnishings throughtout the site through multiple phases of improvements.
- Installation of other landscaping at the property in partnership with Keefe Tech.

- Installation of Veteran’s group memorial, flag pole and night lighting.
- Installation of public art.
- Construction of a children’s Arbor Day Garden under a collaborative effort between the Framingham Garden Club, arborist groups and Keefe Tech.

Cushing Memorial Park Use Policy

To guide the use of the park and to ensure public enjoyment and safety, the Framingham Parks Commission established a Use Policy, as presented below.

Cushing Memorial Park Use Policy

Cushing Memorial Park presents the residents of Framingham and surrounding communities a unique central park experience. The park has been developed with three specific considerations as identified in the approved Master Plan: promotion of open space & recreation, health, and local history. The Parks primary purpose is to provide informal passive recreation for users. It is not the intention of the department to schedule the Park with organized activities. Exceptions may be made at the discretion of the Park and Recreation Director and/or Commission, when the Park contributes to events of widespread community interest that are compatible with the surroundings and the Park and Recreation Mission Statement.

Another significant policy accomplishment included the removal of the Barbeiri Elementary School bus drop-off from the southeastern quadrant of Cushing Memorial Park. For many years, more than a dozen school buses a day would traverse park pathways for the purposes of dropping and picking up students at the school. Students would walk through an opening in the fence between Cushing and the school property. This function was thought to be incompatible with pedestrian uses of these same corridors and the Parks and Recreation Department worked with the School Department to relocate the drop-off/pick-up activity to the Barbeiri School proper.

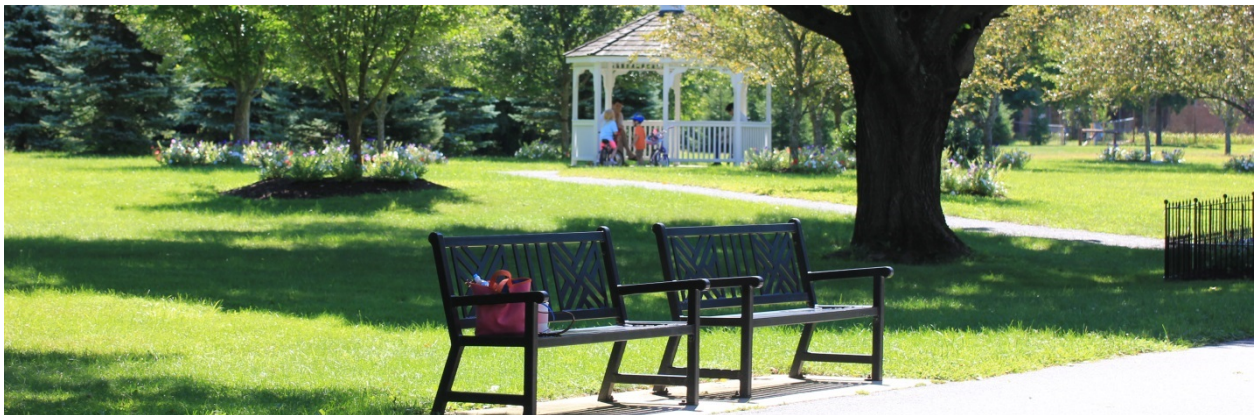
From a policy and programming perspective, the Parks and Recreation Department also cooperates and collaborates with Keefe Tech on the use of the shared parking areas at the southern edge of Cushing Park in a way that benefits both school and park use.



Ongoing Maintenance and Management Protocols

The Town has established a cost effective management approach that makes use of town forces, outside subcontractors and other resources to maintain and operate Cushing Memorial Park at current levels. While it is recognized that adjustments will have to be made as additional improvements are undertaken and visitation continues to rise, the existing program includes the following:

- Lawn mowing (using town forces and subcontracted forces), on a weekly and monthly basis to meet specific site requirements and contract specifications
- Trash removal at regular, seasonally adjusted intervals based on the extent of park usage
- Irrigation systems operation in high visibility areas and watering of new plantings throughout the park particularly during hot and droughty periods
- Yearly vegetation management to existing landscapes, including pruning and removal of dead trees
- Annual mulching of landscaped areas and planting beds
- Planting of flower gardens in partnership with other park supporters
- Seasonal plowing and snow removal
- On-going preventative maintenance to buildings and grounds (HVAC systems servicing, painting, roof repairs, parking lot striping and light replacements and repairs to other site furnishings)



Current Park Programming Activities

Many programs and special events are offered and promoted within the confines of Cushing Memorial Park. Following is a summary:

- A “Playgroup Program” promotes social interaction for toddlers and operates out of the Long (Maintenance) Building within a classroom setting
- Community festivals and special events are held within open areas of the park and include car shows, flea markets and colonial and military historical reenactments
- Pumpkins in the Park special event with face painting, costume parades, pumpkin carving, magic shows, storytelling and hayrides
- Recreation Program classes including crafts, dance, babysitting, CPR/first aid
- Parks and Recreation Commission meetings and educational/training sessions (Academy Building)
- Special Olympics activities
- Maintenance repair, storage and wood shop related activities (Long/Maintenance Building)
- Framingham Garden Club seasonal events to raise funds for horticultural students

The images below represent some of the programming and special event activities that have occurred at the park in recent years.



Important Current Partnerships and Collaborations

Critical to the success of managing, maintaining and improving Cushing Park in recent years has been the many partnerships that have been forged. These partnerships help to achieve a high level of service without over burdening the Parks and Recreation Department’s annual operational budget. Important park partners have included:

- Framingham Garden Club
- Verteran’s Association
- Individual private citizens
- Local financial institutions
- Landscape Contractors/Companies
- Massachusetts Arborists (Mass Arbor Day)
- Keefe Tech Vocational School
- Community Connections Summer Work Program (CCSWP)
- Rotary Club
- Interact Club
- Trial Court Coummunity Service Workers

2001 Improvement Goals That Remain to be Accomplished

The original 2001 Master Plan identified the need to undertake a wide range of site improvements at a total cost of \$2,450,000. Adjusted for inflation, the cost of this work increases to nearly \$4.4M in 2014 dollars. While the town has expended approximately \$2M to date, it is obvious that work originally envisioned remains to be accomplished.

The 2001 Master Plan also identified eight general improvement goals as described previously in this section. The chart below lists the goals and the status of the work that has been accomplished against those goals. The narrative that follows the chart provides an additional summary of the type of work that remains to be completed.

General Site Improvement Goals	Largely Complete	Partially Complete	Some Work Remains
1. Demolition and Site Preparation		✓	✓
2. Park Perimeter Improvements		✓	✓
3. Vehicular Entrances	✓		
4. Pedestrian Entrances		✓	✓
5. Park Pathway Installations		✓	✓
6. Park Drives and Parking Areas		✓	✓
7. Utility Installations	✓		
8. Landscape Improvements		✓	✓

While significant work has been accomplished against each of the primary goals listed above, there is still important work that remains in 6 of the 8 categories. A brief summary is included below:

1. **Demolition and Site Preparation-** some work remains in regard to improving former hospital roadway corridors and parking areas and in regard to improving lawn and meadow areas that exhibit poor quality vegetative cover due to poor quality soils.
2. **Park Perimeter Improvements-** work related to the pruning, removal and replacement of maturing deciduous and evergreen trees is required in order to maintain a healthy and vigorous green edge, particularly at Winter Street, Dudley Road and along the Keefe Tech and Barbieri School interface.
3. **Vehicular Entrances-** the two primary entrances have been constructed and work is complete.
4. **Pedestrian Entrances-** there remain opportunities to improve pedestrian access from Dudley Road, Harvey Cushing Drive and the Emeritus at Farm Pond Property and along the Keefe Tech and Barbieri School interface. There is also a new desire to link Cushing Memorial Park to other important open space assets that are located adjacent or nearby.
5. **Park Pathway Installations-** there are opportunities to construct a number of new, minor pedestrian pathways, including a new east-west pathway that would follow the northern property line and allow for park users to complete a loop within the park proper. Additional furnishings (shelters, benches, picnic tables, signage etc.) are also needed.
6. **Park Drives and Parking Areas-** while the drives and parking areas envisioned by the initial master plan have been constructed, parking is at a premium during peak periods and opportunities to increase parking at the site should be explored.
7. **Utility Installations-** work is complete.
8. **Landscaping-** while an impressive amount of landscape improvements have been accomplished, there is still significant work that remains. New tree plantings are required to provide shade and to break up the vastness of some of the open areas (former building footprints) and improvements to lawn and meadow areas are also required.



Surplus paved areas still exist within certain park locations (Goal 1) and the entrance from the Emeritus at Farm Pond property (Goal 4) has always been viewed as being less than functional and lacking aesthetic appeal.



PART B

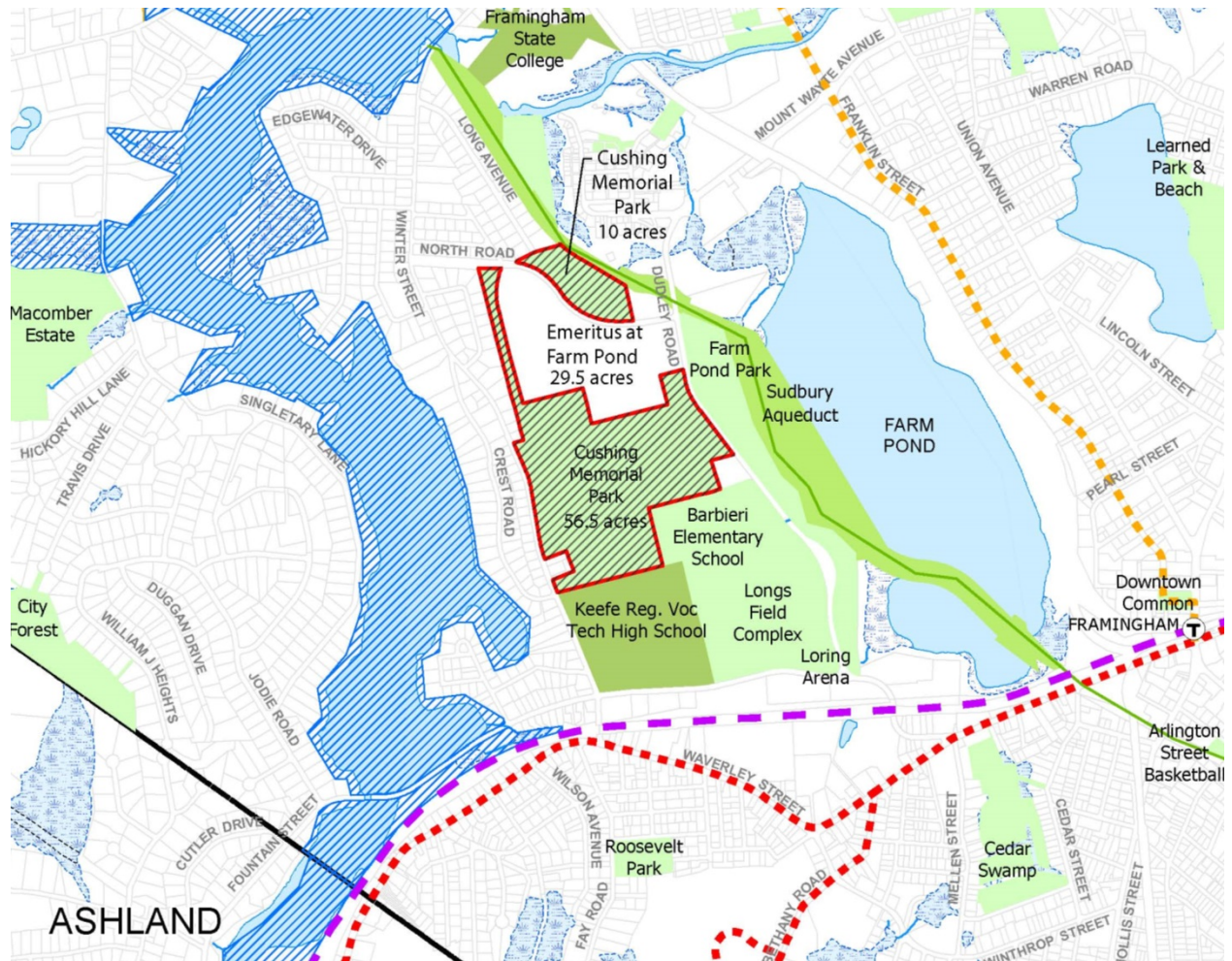
The Park Today

Cushing Memorial Park is located on the western side of Framingham and just northeast of downtown Framingham. The original Cushing Hospital property encompassed 97 acres. After declaring the hospital grounds surplus, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts sold off 29.5 acres of land for development of a private senior living facility (initially called Village at Farm Pond and now called Emeritus at Farm Pond). The eastern edge of the Emeritus at Farm Pond property (just north and west of the Chapel) has never been built out and it remains in a largely unimproved state similar to how it appeared after demolition of the hospital was accomplished in 1994.

The remaining 67.5 acres of the property was given to the Town of Framingham. The 67.5 acres is divided into two separate, unconnected parcels. The largest parcel encompasses 57.5 acres and it is this area that forms Cushing Memorial Park “proper”. The remaining 10 acres of open space is located across Harvey Cushing Way to the north of the Emeritus at Farm Pond campus. This 10 acre area contains shade trees, open lawns and open meadows. While this area possesses important opportunities for creating connections between a series of open space assets, it is the 57.5 acre parcel that has become the focus of the vast majority of public park and open space improvements since 2001.

Surrounding Land Use Context

The plan diagram located on the following page identifies the Cushing Park and Emeritus at Farm Pond parcels of land in relation to surrounding open space assets and important local destinations and residential areas.



The plan diagram above identifies the limits of Cushing Park proper (57.5 acres) and the additional 10 acre open space parcel located just to the north (top in image). The dashed red and yellow lines identify regional bus transportation routes and the dashed purple line identifies the Framingham/Worcester Commuter Rail corridor.

Surrounding Open Space Assets

Other open space assets located either immediately adjacent or nearby (as referenced on the plan diagram above) include:

- Farm Pond Park
- Farm Pond
- Keefe Tech
- Barbieri School
- Longs Field Complex
- Loring Arena
- Sudbury Aqueduct

Combined, the properties referenced above encompass more than 300 hundred acres of land area and more than a linear mile in distance from south to north.

Also shown on the plan diagram and running generally southeast-northwest is a portion of the Sudbury Aqueduct. Recently, the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) authorized the use of more than 40 miles of aqueduct corridor for passive recreational use (generally walking, jogging or hiking). Framingham has successfully opened a one mile section of the Weston Aqueduct in Saxonville and town representatives are looking to build on this success by opening more lengths of aqueduct corridor.

The opening of the adjacent Sudbury Aqueduct would create opportunities for connecting from Cushing to Downtown Framingham (to the southeast) and to Reservoir Number 1, Foss Reservoir and the Framingham State College vicinity (to the north).

While the many open space assets identified above are in close proximity to each other, linkages between properties are not strong and conflicts such as fence lines and busy roadway corridors provide impediments to those seeking to easily and intuitively connect. Locally and nationally there is a big movement aimed at creating highly accessible and well-connected open space systems that allow users to travel long distances without the need for a car. Fully integrated and linked systems can provide active and passive recreational opportunities and yield very positive public health and environmental protection benefits.



A view (left image) from within the 10 acre open space parcel located to the north of Harvey Cushing Way looking northeasterly toward the Sudbury Aqueduct and a second view looking across Farm Pond Park and Farm Pond toward Downtown Framingham.

Other Important Local Destinations

Framingham State College is located less than one mile north of Cushing Memorial Park and Downtown Framingham is located less than one mile south. Other nearby institutions and destinations include the Keefe Tech Regional Vocational High School, Barbieri Elementary School and Loring Arena.

Transportation systems provide easy access to the site via a regional bus system and the MBTA Commuter Rail System and the town's roadway network that includes sidewalks throughout.

Residential Uses

Expansive neighborhoods located to the west and north have direct access to Cushing Park from Winter Street and from Harvey Cushing Way. Residents from these neighborhoods regularly walk, bicycle and jog/run from their homes into the park to enjoy a wide variety of passive recreational opportunities.

Physical Attributes of the Property

Cushing Memorial Park can be described succinctly as an expansive passive open space resource containing:

- Major pedestrian pathways and secondary pathways
- Park entrances, drives and parking areas
- Broad open lawns and meadows and deciduous/evergreen tree plantings in groupings and in linear alignments creating colonnade effects along major pathways
- Park support buildings (4)

During recent improvement programs, more than six acres of impervious surfaces (pavement from former hospital drives and parking areas) has been removed and replaced by lawns and other soft surfaces. Of the 67.5 acres of total parkland, ground surfaces consist approximately of the following:

Surface Character	Area
Major pedestrian pathways and secondary pathways	3
Park entrances, drives and parking areas	3
Open lawns, meadows and plantings	61
Building footprints	.5
Total Acreage	67.5

Topography

The site contains large expanses of gently sloping or nearly flat terrain. The only area exhibiting significant elevation change is located at the extreme northern part of the site across Harvey Cushing Way. This largely natural meadow and woodland area encompasses approximately 10 acres and it is completely separate and unconnected to the main, contiguous 57.5 acre Cushing Park proper.

The gently sloping nature of the site provides the venue for a fully accessible park pathway system. The subtle terrain also enhances the multi-generational aspects of the project by affording those with strollers and those with mobility challenges to more easily traverse the grounds.



Vegetation

The former Cushing Hospital site still contains many fine shade trees, flowering trees and shrubs that are remnants of the former hospital complex. In particular, many of the former drives are lined with mature or nearly mature deciduous trees (primarily maples and some oaks). Many of these specimen shade trees are exhibiting signs of slow but sure decline and each year a few more get removed. As much of the specimen shade tree growth is reaching full maturity, it is imperative to continue ambitious planting programs so that new trees take the place of the declining population of existing trees. Planting of more than a hundred shade trees in recent years has begun to create a visual impact and more meaningful shade although it is acknowledged that many hundreds of additional tree plantings are needed.



Old plantings from the former hospital grace the northern edge of Cushing Memorial Park and lawn areas have been improved due to turf maintenance efforts over the past two decades.

Along the Dudley Road and Winter Street park edges, significant stands of mature evergreens provide valuable separation between the park and the busy thoroughfares. As with the deciduous shade trees, many of the evergreens are in decline and supplemental planting programs must be continued.

Lawns are expansive throughout much of the property. In those areas that historically contained lawn, the quality of the turf is better with a thicker and generally greener appearance and less noxious weed growth. Several acres of land contain little vegetative cover due to the low organic content of soils used to fill former building footprints. While leaving grass clippings in place over the past decade has increased organic content within soils and yielded improved vegetative cover, there are still areas where conditions are less than desired.

Summary of Current Conditions and Remaining Opportunities

Cushing Memorial Park functions at a very high level and residents seem genuinely thrilled with the range of improvements that have been implemented between 2001 and 2013. On a typical pleasant weekend day hundreds of local residents will travel to Cushing Park by driving, walking, jogging, roller blading or riding a bicycle. The age of the visitors will range from a few months to 90 years of age or older. Some visitors will yield a cane, be pushed in a wheelchair or pushed in a baby stroller. And residents represent the diverse makeup of the larger community from an income and ethnic perspective and there are normally approximately equal numbers of men and women visitors. This makes Cushing Memorial Park a truly incredible and critically important resource for **ALL**.

Visitors enjoy the flat, and smoothly surfaced pedestrian walkway system, filtered light shining through the canopies of mature shade trees, expansive vistas of green lawns and meadows, and a pace of life that is at odds with the busy fray that surrounds the peace and quiet of Cushing.

By fulfilling the original mission defined in the 2001 Master Plan, the property will perform at an even higher level and accommodate an even greater array of passive recreation pursuits. There is great momentum after more than a decade of improvement, and the chance to create one of the finest public open space assets in Massachusetts by following through on a diminishing, yet important list of remaining site improvements.



At present there are parts of the park (perhaps 20-25% of the total land area) that are unimproved and underperforming. By restoring the landscape within these areas, public access, use and enjoyment will be fostered at an even higher level. Major work items identified in the 2001 Master Plan that have yet to be accomplished are summarized below:

- A large area that forms the northern edge of Cushing Park proper near the Emeritus at Farm Pond property remains unimproved and generally inaccessible. There is interesting vegetation and signs of wildlife habitat within this area. Constructing a path that would run generally east west through this area would provide opportunities for completing a loop within the park proper. This internal loop option would be approximately half the length of the complete Harvey Cushing Way loop.
- The area located to the south and east of the Academy Building also remains largely unimproved. The area consists primarily of an open lawn (with poor quality vegetative cover) and chain link fence lines that take away from the views of the Barbieri and Keefe Tech School properties and limit potentially important connections to other nearby open space assets. In this same vicinity, meandering paths were proposed to link to the Barbieri schoolyard through a naturalized area that separates the two properties. The installation of interpretive information that conveys the unique environmental characteristics of the area was also suggested as part the total vision for this area of the park. To date, none of this work has been accomplished.



Much of the interface between Cushing and the Barbieri Elementary School property is blighted and unappealing (left photo). The north central section of Cushing Park remains unimproved and generally inaccessible (right photo).

- A driveway connection from Dudley Road and the entire southern park perimeter along the Barbieri School edge is visually blighted by rusted chain link fence, deteriorated outdoor recreation facilities (on the school side of the chain link fence) and a lack of vegetation resulting in the least appealing length of Cushing pedestrian corridor. Upgrading this area through a collaborative school department/park department partnership would have great positive impact on the overall park and school landscapes.



PART C

The Park Tomorrow

The Public Process

Under the initial Master Planning effort in 2001, more than a dozen public meetings were held in order to develop, refine and adopt the goals established in that document. In conjunction with this master planning update process, additional interactions have been held in order to guide future improvements to Cushing Memorial Park and to establish remaining priorities. Among those who frequent Cushing, there is a sense that while many amazing transformations have occurred within the park over the past decade or so, there is still work to be done in order to achieve the goal of a fully restored park landscape that offers the highest level of passive recreational opportunity. The focus of this part of the Master Plan Update is the articulation of the work that remains to be done.

A summary list of the public meetings and other interactions that helped formulate the remaining improvement priorities is included below. It is important to note that informal and continuous feedback received by Parks and Recreation Department personal on a nearly daily basis has also greatly helped to supplement information received in the other more formal settings.

Meeting	Date
Meetings with Parks and Recreation Department Staff	Multiple
Town-wide Public Hearing (hosted by the Parks Commission)	March 16, 2013
Spring Town Meeting	May 2013
Town-wide Public Hearing (hosted by the Parks Commission)	September 9, 2013
Fall Town Meeting Presentation of Final Master Plan	October 2013

A summary of public comments received and recorded at the various interactions (major themes) is included below.

- Strong and nearly unanimous agreement that the Town has done a good job using park improvement funds in a way that preserves and enhances the quality of this passive open space and recreation property.
- Support for the continued leveraging of alternative funding sources through the judicious use of Town funds for wide ranging property improvements.
- Support for the establishment of the general use policy that helps to ensure the enjoyment of park patrons.
- Support for implementing a new children’s play grove, a unique naturalized play environment that would promote creative and individualized play in a way that complements the passive nature of the park and fits within the inherent landscape character and quality of the park.
- Support for expanding the northern borders of Cushing Memorial Park in order to protect the Chapel and surrounding Chapel landscape from encroachment and in order to create strong and contiguous linkages to other important open space assets located to the north.
- Support generally for improving connectivity between Cushing Memorial Park and other open space assets located to the north, east and south.
- Support generally for completing other improvements consistent with the original master plan in the areas of open space and recreation, promoting good health and historical significance.

Priority Opportunities

Based on field work, staff meetings and public input, three priority opportunities have been identified as part of this Cushing Memorial Park Master Plan Update.

Priority One | Children's Grove

During the public input process, there was great support for the establishment of an enhanced children's play environment that would provide additional educational and recreational programming opportunities within Cushing Park. At present, the Town operates some children's recreation programming out of the park maintenance building and a modestly sized playground with traditional equipment supports certain outdoor activities.

The Children's Grove is a proposed natural outdoor space, gathering area, picnic destination and children's playground. There is nothing traditional about it, and it would be unique within the Framingham community. A Children's Grove would incorporate natural play elements within the core park center. The fluidity of the Children's Grove design will allow park visitors to move through the space with ease. Play spaces will be found along the pathways and in close proximity to existing walkways; drawing people into the spaces and engaging patrons as they pass through.



The design of the spaces will allow children of all ages, and in fact all park patrons, to enjoy a unique and compelling environment. Inherent to the design is an element of surprise and the opportunity for children to create and express their own types of play. Proposed elements will be handicapped accessible and encourage participation from all. Today, children have limited exposure to nature. The design of the Children's Grove at Cushing Park will present a play environment where children will be able to discover the natural play experiences by weaving through paths, climbing on large rocks, balancing on logs, playing with sand or searching for twigs among the groves of trees. Unlike traditional manufactured play equipment, the natural play features will allow children to imagine their own play to hone their mental and physical development. The proposed play elements will allow kids to run, climb, slide, roll, balance, crawl, build and play within a magnificent landscape setting. The images below and above identify the basic landscape qualities that would be achieved.



Based on strong support from the Framingham community, the Town of Framingham submitted a grant application to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Conservation Services for funding through the PARC program for construction of a new children's grove and other site improvements within the central core of Cushing Park. Grant Awards are expected to be made by the State during the late fall of 2013.

Priority Two | Land Acquisition for Park Expansion

It has become clear that the acquisition of land to the north of Cushing Chapel would provide enormous benefit to park users. The land that has been identified for potential acquisition is part of the 29.5 acre parcel set aside by the Commonwealth for the development of the senior living community. While original plans approved by the Planning Board in 1998 identified a comprehensive build-out of the entire 29.5 acre parcel, in fact only about one half of that area has been developed and twelve buildings have never been constructed. The plans below identify the section of the senior living community property that has never been improved.



Diagram at top identifies the current condition of the senior living community property. Note the expanse of land that has never been improved and the proximity of the Cushing Chapel to the shared property lines. Diagram at right identifies the potential build out within the eastern section of the senior living community property. Note the proximity of major new buildings to the Cushing Chapel.

Cushing Park stakeholders and the master planning team believe that the acquisition of a portion of this unimproved property would allow for a dramatic enhancement of the northern park edge and yield enormous benefits as follows:

- **Protect and enhance the Cushing Chapel Grounds-** there is a risk that the Chapel would be overshadowed by a proposed senior living community building that would be situated immediately to the west. In addition, the northern property line of Cushing is just 30' from the Chapel entrance. Most people do not realize that a significant extent of the lush green lawns, majestic shade tree groupings and planted gardens are actually located off Cushing property and likely would be removed under a full build-out of the adjacent senior living community.



The conceptual image above identifies the approximate massing of an additional building on the adjacent property that was approved during site planning review process and the visual impact that it might have on the adjacent Chapel if constructed.



The conceptual elevation above identifies the Chapel in relation to potential new buildings that were approved during the site planning approval process. These large scale buildings could negatively impact the character and surrounding of the historic Chapel.



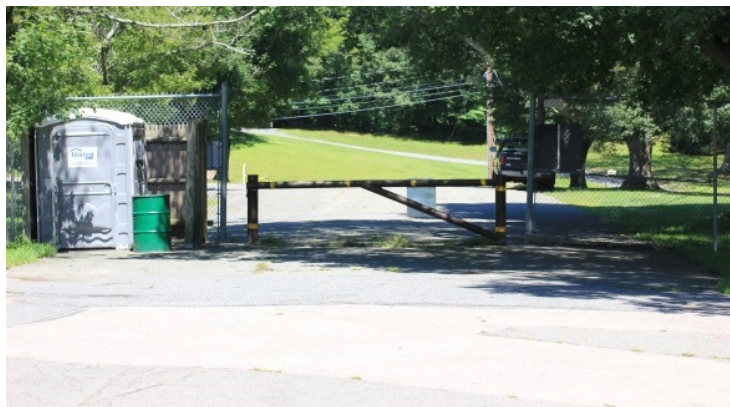
The artist illustrations above highlight changes that might occur if the adjacent senior housing facility were to be built out in accordance with the prior site plan approval process. The Chapel is shown to the far right in all three images.



The illustration above showing the conversion of the unimproved eastern sections of the adjacent property to park land with a strong pedestrian connection to other open space assets to the north and to the east and other general park landscape enhancements.

- **Aesthetic Enhancements-** the image on the following page represents existing conditions at the entrance or gateway into Cushing Park from the adjacent senior living community property, just to the north of Cushing Chapel. While nearly all other park edges and entrances have been dramatically upgraded, this entrance is unimproved and it adversely impacts the landscape qualities and character of the park. Through the acquisition of additional lands, this high visibility location has the makings of being the most prominent visitor access point into the entire park.

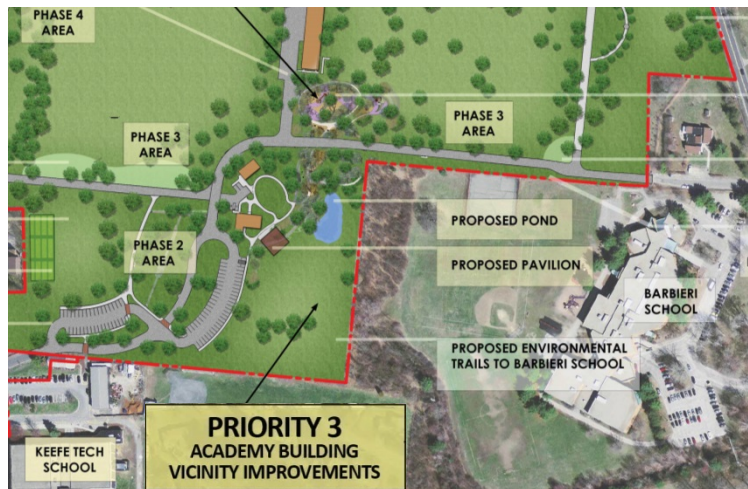
- **Other Park Enhancements-** acquisition of a portion of the lands located to the north and/or west of the Chapel would provide potential open space and recreation benefit in the form of additional pedestrian pathways and activity nodes, additional park landscaping, and tree planting and new site furnishings including park benches and shade shelters. A new loop drive and drop-off area in front of the Chapel.



- **Additional Parking-** with parking at a premium during peak periods, acquisition of additional land would also allow for the development of formal and overflow parking amenities at a highly visible and highly functional park arrival point. This would also greatly enhance the hosting of special events at the Chapel, where parking for functions is sometimes limited.
- **Streetscape Enhancements-** the expansion of the park would also provide enhanced streetscape conditions along Harvey Cushing Way Dudley Road and dramatically upgrade the image of the park to passersby.

Priority Three | Academy Building Vicinity Improvements-

The image to the right shows the Academy Building and the extreme southeastern corner of Cushing Park and western edge of the Barbieri Elementary School. This part of the park is perhaps the most visually unappealing and it remains largely unimproved since the close of the former hospital facility. There is a terrific opportunity to finish restoring the landscape in this area by creating a campus like landscape setting and environmental education zone that would include:



- A serpentine pond with landscaped banks
- An outdoor, open air pavilion to accommodate community events
- Meandering pathways
- Site furnishings including benches, picnic tables and interpretive signage
- Strong pedestrian connections to the Keefe Tech and Barbieri School properties
- Interpretive signage geared to environmental education for use in park and school programming activities
- Community Gardens

These outdoor improvements combined with recent improvements to the two adjacent buildings (including the Academy Building) and earlier restoration of the Chapel would create new opportunities for civic functions and special events, corporate outings, educational seminars, professional organizational outings using both indoor and outdoor venues within a beautified park/pond landscape. Anticipated uses would all comply with the Academy Building Use Policy which was established in 2007.

Other Continuing Opportunities

In addition to the three major, priority goals that are previously described, there are many other improvements that would help transform Cushing Memorial Park to the finished condition that is envisioned by park advocates and stakeholders. A summary of these additional undertakings is presented below.

Stand-alone public restrooms- since visitors to the property represent a multi-generational cross section of society and since many of these same visitors travel to the site to enjoy an hour or more of passive recreational pursuit, the need for restrooms to enhance comfort and enjoyment is apparent. A loop around the outer perimeter pathway network is in excess of a mile and can take half an hour or more for many patrons. There would be great benefit in providing one or two strategically located restroom buildings along the outer perimeter of the park.



Additional Activity/Gathering Nodes- a seating area formed by a fieldstone seating wall, the pergola with interpretive signage setting forth the history of the property, the 9/11 Memorial and the Cushing Memorial are all examples of existing gathering nodes that have been added to create interest and passive recreational opportunity. There is an opportunity to establish 2-4 additional activity nodes around the outer perimeter of Cushing Park. Artwork, interpretive signage, picnic areas and other sculptural or landscape elements could be integrated within the design of these activity nodes to create attractive views and the chance to congregate to chat or to read a book.

Other Site Furnishings and Park Visitor Accommodations- the installation of additional park furnishings will help create a more finished and consistent appearance throughout the property. It is envisioned that new park bench and picnic bench installations, drinking fountains (pet friendly), decorative lighting (at strategic locations) and related site furnishings would greatly enhance the park and be well used by visitors.

Additional Pedestrian Pathways- the installation of other minor pathways that provide ADA compliant accessibility in accordance with the Master Plan would provide the opportunity to visit more remote sections of the park for recreational pursuits that might include wildlife observation and environmental appreciation.

Pedestrian/Vehicular Circulation Improvements- at the core of the park, drivers traveling north through the park to the Long (Maintenance) Building for recreational programming and for Garden Club sale events share the same corridor as pedestrians. Explore ways (with signage, pavement markings) to articulate dedicated vehicular travel ways from pedestrian travel ways in order to enhance safety for all visitors.

Other General Landscape Enhancements- continue to aggressively plant deciduous and evergreen trees and to upgrade lawn and meadow areas, especially at central gathering points and other high visibility locations. The tree canopy at Cushing continues to age toward maturity and many deciduous trees within interior areas and evergreen plantings at perimeter edge areas continue to show signs of decline.

Maintenance, Management and Operations Adjustments- as the park continues to be improved and as attendance continues to increase it will be important to adjust the approach to managing the property in order to provide the desired level of service. It is anticipated that there will be a continued evolution from a fairly low level management/maintenance approach that has creatively made use of town,

contracted and volunteer forces to a new and more intensive approach that will require additional resources. With the possibility of new bathrooms, other additional park amenities and a desire to continue to create a safe, attractive and pleasant environment for increasingly large numbers of park visitors there will be a need to expand site maintenance, security and operational efforts. This will require more staff (including the potential for site-based personnel) and/or the redirecting of staff with the potential drawing of resources away from other parts of the town’s park and open space system. To avoid reductions in maintenance and management efforts, proper planning and appropriate resources will need to be identified in order to ensure that Cushing Memorial Park and all other park related assets continue to receive the desired level of service.



Budget Considerations

Detailed cost estimates have not been prepared as part of this master planning effort, however, the following budget parameters have been established based on the general scope of work identified under Priorities One, Two and Three and “Other Continuing Opportunities” and also based on the costs incurred for other recently completed park improvement initiatives. Importantly, the cost for all future improvements should be reconsidered and confirmed as the Town moves forward with each particular improvement effort.

Of particular note, the budget for Priority One has already been examined in some detail as part of the filing of the PARC Grant application to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. For Priority Two, the cost of potential land acquisition associated with a potential park expansion initiative is unknown, and a feasibility study should be undertaken to determine the potential cost of creating a pond as part of the Priority Three improvement effort.

Basic Budget Parameters	
Potential Project Improvement Initiatives	Potential Budget
Priority One Children’s Grove	\$665,000 (*)
Priority Two Possible Land Acquisition and Land Improvement	\$1,500,000 (**)
Priority Three Academy Building Vicinity Improvements	\$650,000
Other Continuing Improvements	\$500,000

(*) This budget was identified in the Town’s July 2013 PARC Grant Application

(**) Budget Estimate represents potential \$1,000,000 acquisition cost and potential \$500,000 site improvement cost. Property needs to be appraised by a Certified General Appraiser

Implementation and Funding Strategies

The 2001 Cushing Park Master Plan identifies a very detailed approach to securing improvement funds that has proven successful during the 12 years since the document was adopted by the Parks Commission. While the basic approaches our briefly outlined in this master plan update the original document should continue to serve as a reference when considering various funding scenarios.

In general, the three priority projects will require a significant amount of funding and it is suggested that the Division of Conservation Service’s (DCS) PARC Program continue to be pursued. This program requires Town matching funds. A typical breakdown includes 60% state PARC funds matched by 40% in town funds. The maximum state PARC award equals \$400,000 for any given fiscal year and this would require a minimum town match of \$266,000 for a total potential improvement project program budget of \$666,000. There is no limitation as to the amount of the town contribution as long as the minimum match is met. For instance, the town might choose to contribute \$400,000 to a potential improvement program. With a potential state PARC grant award of \$400,000 this would yield a total potential project budget of \$800,000.

To this point in time, the DCS has endorsed a phased approach to the development of passive park improvements at Cushing by participating in four major phases of improvements at a total cost of almost \$2M. At the time of this writing, an application for a fifth phase of PARC grant funding is now under consideration by the DCS.

Importantly, the DCS also offers the LAND Grant Program, which will offer up to \$400,000 in funding toward the acquisition of land by a municipality for park and open space use.

Smaller initiatives should continue to be achieved through the same creative approach that has been employed. In all, eight potential project funding approaches have been identified as follows:

Summary of Funding Strategies	Notes
1. DCS PARC Program Federal L+WCF Program	400K maximum state/federal award per fiscal year
2. DCS LAND Program	400K maximum state award for park land acquisitions
3. Other State Grants	DCR (formerly DEM) and others (typically small amounts), Mass Office of Tourism, Mass Secretary of State’s Office
4. Community Development Block Grants	Directed toward ADA upgrades and enhancements
5. Special State Legislation	Specific earmarks in the annual state budget sponsored by local legislators
6. Other Grants and Foundations	Private and/or Public to promote good health, environmental awareness and environmental protection
7. Local Source In-kind Services	Keefe Tech, Framingham Garden Club, Rotary Club, Framingham DPW with in-house staff or through annual procurement
8. Mitigation Funds	Mitigation proceeds from large-scale development projects having been approved through the Framingham Planning Board site plan review process
9. Local Appropriation	Local capital or operational funds authorized by Town Meeting on an annual basis based on a town endorsed prioritization

Conclusions

This update of the 2001 Cushing Park Master Plan has been incredibly useful as the following has been confirmed and validated:

1. The Town of Framingham is generally on the right path and should continue to implement important capital improvements that were originally identified in the 2001 Plan.
2. New capital initiatives and priorities identified during the 2013 Master Plan Update process are now equally important and these new opportunities reflect how best to support and sustain the passive recreational preferences of the Framingham community.
3. The acquisition of private land located to the north of the Cushing Chapel is of paramount concern in order to ensure the protection of the restored Chapel itself and in order to protect other work that has been accomplished at Cushing Memorial Park. The acquisition is also critical in relation to the establishment of clearly defined and town controlled connections between Cushing Memorial Park proper and the myriad of open space assets located to the north and east.
4. The Town should also continue to seek opportunities to implement maintenance, operational and recreational programming enhancements through the use of creative management techniques, financing and partnerships.

While accomplishing meaningful projects within the public realm is often expensive and time consuming, the progress made at Cushing Memorial Park in regard to transforming a former state hospital into a beautiful public park is proof that a focused and creative approach that enlists the support of a community can achieve remarkable results.

While much work remains, those who have contributed to the success of this wonderful place can take pride in the good work that has been done and anticipate the eventual completion of improvements at what has become one of the most important and cherished park and open space resources in Massachusetts. This Cushing Memorial Park Master Plan Update 2013 is intended to serve as a roadmap for continued park improvement and evolution.

The creation of a “Central Park”, now known as Cushing Memorial Park, is far greater than half way there, and the Framingham community continues to express an eagerness to get to the finish line. In the meantime, we can all celebrate the diversity of the park patrons who will continue to come in droves to stroll, sit, read, bike, jog, roller blade, skate board, cross country ski and pursue other simple forms of recreation and enjoyment within a unique and wonderful setting that is pleasant and safe and rejuvenating.





Cushing Park Master Plan showing the three priority improvement areas and other continuing property improvements.