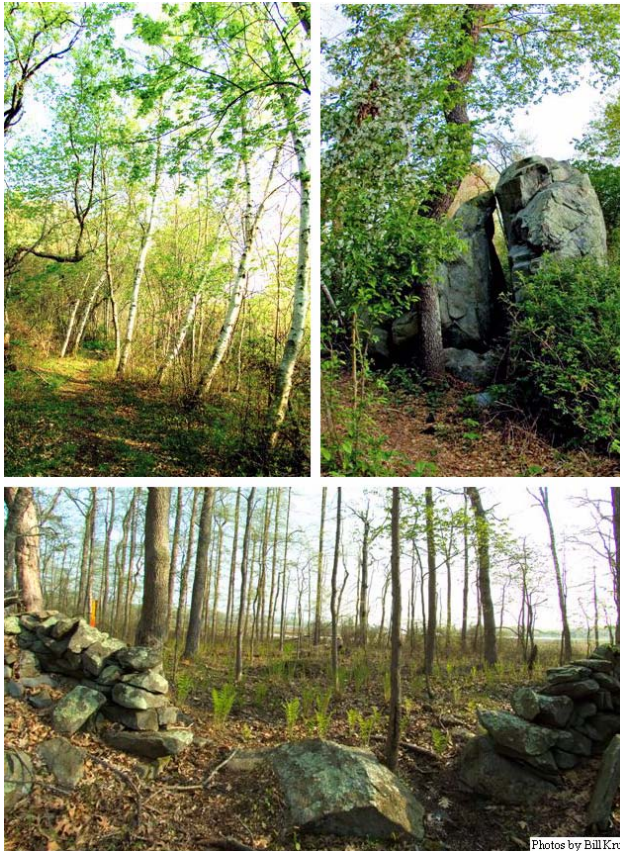


Canonchet Farm Master Plan Review Committee

Report to the Narragansett Town Council



Photos by Bill Kruel

Comment [FoCF1]: The Board of Trustees of the Friends of Canonchet Farm has prepared this annotated version of the Canonchet Farm Master Plan Review Committee Report to the Narragansett Town Council to respond to the report recommendations.

In a majority of cases, our marginal notes extract project descriptions from *Our Vision and Recommendations for Canonchet Farm, April 2009*, which we hope you've had an opportunity to review. *Vision and Recommendations* is available at <http://canonchet.org>.

Please note the following:

Our focus is on commenting on the Review Committee's recommendations, not on its deliberations or methods. Accordingly, we have not included the report appendices.

Several comments are repeated in the margins, as the report's recommendations are also repeated for different areas of the property.

In preparing these notes, we did not have access to the source file for the final report. We made every effort to ensure that our text matches the final report; however, there may be minor textual differences.

For an official copy of the report including maps, please visit: <http://www.narragansettri.gov>

We invite your comments and suggestions concerning these notes, and more importantly, urge you to attend Planning Board and Town Council meetings as the revised master plan is considered.

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March 2, 2009

Executive Summary

The following mission statement for Canonchet Farm summarizes the Canonchet Farm Master Plan Review Committee's vision for this unique 174-acre Town-owned property in the heart of Narragansett:

Canonchet Farm shall serve Narragansett residents and visitors as a public park offering a balance between diverse recreational and educational opportunities and the natural setting of the property.

This mission statement identifies the goals of increasing use by residents and visitors and preserving the natural beauty of the land. Achieving consensus on the balance between increased use and preserving Canonchet Farm's natural setting has been a difficult task for the Review Committee and will continue to present challenges into the future.

The Narragansett Town Council appointed nine individuals to the Review Committee in September 2007 with the charge to review and revise the 1993 Master Plan for the property. The decision to update the Canonchet Farm Master Plan was prompted by public awareness and attention brought by a proposal by a private group to clear land on Canonchet Farm for the purpose of hosting polo matches. This proposal highlighted the neglected state of Canonchet Farm and the land's potential value to investors and to the Town itself.

The Review Committee has done more than update the 1993 Plan. It has participated in a long and time-consuming process of gathering information, reviewing both the 1993 and 1979 Master Plans, discussing alternatives, and voting on specific recommendations. The process has been democratic and, at times, contentious. Identifying the point of balance between use and preservation has proved to be an elusive target and has underscored the need to create a governance model for Canonchet Farm that will draw from a broad range of experience and opinion.

The following recommendations (please refer to the report for a complete list) represent the Review Committee's best efforts to encourage Farm use and protect its natural beauty. A majority of the Review Committee approved the following:

- Selective clearing of the Upper Meadow (see map) and exposure of stone walls

Comment [FoCF2]:

The mission statement does not include the terms *preservation* or *conservation*. We believe the mission statement, and the master plan in its entirety, should emphasize conservation and preservation of the natural environment, beauty and historical significance of Canonchet Farm.

Comment [FoCF3]:

We oppose extensive clearing of the Upper Meadow or other areas on the property. Two Phase I projects in *Vision and Recommendations* offer a more limited approach:

Vista Enhancement: Selectively THIN the lower story of the forest of undesirable invasives and other species, weeds, and brush to enhance ground level vistas through the trees from a limited number of specified vantage points. Primary vistas could be to Little Neck Pond, Pettaquamscutt Cove and the ocean. Vista enhancement would be included in all phases.

Stone Walls: Recognize that there are many wonderful examples of expertly crafted stone walls of historic significance on the property but many are seriously overgrown with vines, weeds and other invasive species. Clear these walls of the debris, and place signs near the walls explaining their style and their original use.

- Creation of a loop trail encircling the Farm with new access points and construction of a visitor center with restrooms
- Improvements to the land and ponds across Boston Neck Road from the Town Beach including creation of trails for the handicapped, clearing of invasive plant material, restoration of views, and support of passive recreation such as fishing and boating
- Construction of a bike path on a dedicated surface connecting the planned terminus of the William C. O'Neill Bike Path at Mumford Road with access to the South County Museum and the Town Beach through the property
- Town regulation of large gatherings.

Comment [FoCF4]:

Trail improvements are recommended in Phase I in *Vision and Recommendations*:

Widen the existing nature trail and extend it to the western portion of the property.

Create a network of spur and loop trails off the main trail. Install a uniform system of signage to direct walkers and highlight features of interest such as specimen trees, vernal pools and glacial remains. Design boardwalks and other structures to cross wet areas where needed. Improve the circular trail just north of the Beech Grove to highlight the glacial erratic, granite quarry and Little Neck Pond vista. Begin design of a boardwalk to Pettaquamscutt Cove for observing wildlife.

Comment [FoCF5]:

We believe that a visitors center should use existing facilities, as specified in our recommendation:

Develop, in conjunction with the South County Museum, a visitors center, picnic area and restrooms in the museum cluster. Explore the use of the Narragansett Community Center as another visitor resource. No new buildings are to be constructed.

Comment [FoCF6]:

We have serious concerns about construction of a bike path through Canonchet Farm. However, we cannot comment at this time, as we have insufficient information about the bike path and need answers about routing, usage, environmental impact, safety, accessibility and visibility. We plan to be active in the planning process.

A majority of the Review Committee voted against the following:

- Expanding the current parking lot across from the Town Beach and continued use of the fields as beach overflow and event parking (see map)
- Allowing through traffic from Anne Hoxie Lane to Strathmore Street
- Identifying Strathmore Street as the primary vehicular entrance to the Farm.

The members of the Canonchet Farm Review Committee respectfully present this report to the Town Council and citizens of Narragansett. Canonchet Farm is a unique parcel of land, and how we handle and manage its future reflects on all of us.



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I. Canonchet Farm

Canonchet Farm is currently an underutilized area of 174 acres in the heart of Narragansett. The Town acquired the land by eminent domain in 1974 for the public to use for “parks, recreation, and conservation purposes.”¹ Since that time two Master Plans have been commissioned with few concrete results, the South County Museum being the exception. The museum is currently the main reason people come to the Farm in spite of efforts to develop other attractions.

A. Current Use and Administration

Most visitors to Narragansett experience Canonchet Farm as the place to park when visiting the Town Beach or as the location of the South County Museum.

The Department of Parks & Recreation of the Town of Narragansett currently administers and maintains the Farm. Permit applications for Farm activities are handled by this department. Since the number of visitors utilizing the trail system is small and resources are scarce, maintenance of the trail system has not been a priority. The Boy Scouts and other volunteers have helped to clear and maintain trails, and the Friends of Canonchet Farm, a non-profit organization, is ready to take on projects.

B. Master Plan Review

Two Master Plans have been prepared for Canonchet Farm, both at the behest of the Narragansett Town Council. The first was submitted in 1979 by Albert Veri Associates and the second was prepared in 1993 by Clarkson Collins, Director of Planning and Community Development for the Town of Narragansett. The second plan builds on the first, but each reflects a very different point in time.

The 1979 Veri plan was prepared before the South County Museum moved from North Kingstown to Narragansett (1985) and before the Canonchet Farms neighborhood was developed (1993). The Veri plan recommendations that were never built include an interpretive center, a band shell, a gatehouse, a pedestrian overpass connecting the beach to the farm, a channel to allow for the passage of paddle boats between Little Neck Pond and Lake Canonchet (referred to in the Veri plan and elsewhere as *Beach Pond*), a picnic train, miniature golf, a store, and a

¹ Land Evidence Record Book No. 91 Oct. 3, 10, & 17 1974

clambake facility. Projects that were built but that are no longer in use include an exercise trail (abandoned), a swamp nature trail north of the Narragansett Elementary School (now a walking trail without signage), and a picnic area by the non-resident beach parking lot (vandalized and abandoned). Projects that were built and that are still in use include one fishing pier on Lake Canonchet and public gardens planted by the South County Museum.

The 1993 Plan was written after The South County Museum assumed a lease on three acres of Farm Property. Projects proposed but not built include a clambake facility in a different location than the Veri plan, a handicapped-accessible loop trail from the beach parking lot along the western shore of Little Neck Pond and back to the parking lot, and rebuilding the horse barn by the museum from its ruins. Sewer hookup for the museum was proposed but not built. The following projects were completed but have since fallen into disrepair: refurbishment of the picnic grounds by the beach parking lot, signage for the swamp nature trail, and erosion control on Anne Hoxie Lane. Completed projects still relevant include repairs and improvements to Museum buildings (also proposed by Veri), obtaining title to the land surrounding the horse barn ruins, obtaining rights of way to the Robinson Cemetery and to Canonchet Farm through Strathmore Street, and selectively clearing the slope north of the museum. Electric service to the museum was buried and the water line capacity increased.

The South County Museum was the main beneficiary of both plans. The museum has been the only well organized entity functioning on Canonchet Farm land and has been successful in obtaining support for its mission from many sources. The current challenge is to increase the use by residents and visitors beyond the museum and the beach parking lot to explore and enjoy more of the property.

C. Issues Affecting Development

Canonchet Farm has tremendous potential as a draw for tourism to Narragansett. It is located directly across Boston Neck Road from the Town Beach and is near the town's central residential and commercial areas. Developing the Farm's commercial potential was a major component of the Veri plan. Almost 30 years later, we are looking at the same land from an entirely different perspective.

Legal Constraints

The Town of Narragansett acquired Canonchet Farm in 1974 under condemnation proceedings enabled by state legislation and local ordinance. This purchase was funded primarily with a grant

from the U.S. Department of the Interior, resulting in additional constraints on the use of the property. Any proposed use or property modification may be approved by the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) Planning Department. Specifically prohibited are any uses that would prevent access by the general public and may restrict use for private profit.

Environmental Considerations

An official survey of the wetlands has not been performed but much of the 174 acres consists of freshwater and saltwater wetlands that are protected by state acts and local regulations. These laws require a scientific determination of the boundaries of these wetlands and establish setbacks from these boundaries of up to 200 feet, depending on the type of wetland and district. Additionally, DEM has established that Canonchet Farm is part of the Strategic Area Management Plan (SAMP) for the Narrow River Watershed, requiring special protection. Clarkson Collins, the author of the 1993 plan, estimated that up to 60% of the Farm is wetland, and therefore must be managed as conservation land. Between setbacks and other constraints, the land left for intensive use is limited.

Public Opinion

A majority of the public appearing before the Review Committee did not favor intensive development of the Farm. The most vociferous opponents of intensive use of the Farm were immediate neighbors. In addition, a larger group of interested residents has formed the non-profit Friends of Canonchet Farm, whose mission is to improve, manage and preserve Canonchet Farm in partnership with the public; intensive development of the property would be unlikely to win the Friends of Canonchet Farm's support. Joining opponents of intensive use are the Narrow River Preservation Association, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Rhode Island Audubon Society, the Narragansett Conservation Commission and the Narragansett Tree Board, and other residents from Narragansett who have attended Review Committee meetings. Passive use and preservation are their themes.

Financial Challenges

Management and development of the land will require considerable funding and that remains a challenge to the community. Given the current financial climate, the Review Committee recognizes the difficulty of obtaining funding for any project identified in this report. We urge the Town Council to recognize the importance of this property to the town and to the quality of life for the residents. We strongly encourage the Council to find a financial structure including

both public and private participation. We believe this challenge will be met.

II. Master Plan Review Committee Process

A. Public Forums

There are a surprising number of groups with interests in the future of the Farm. The Review Committee initiated its proceedings by inviting several groups to give their input on what to do with the Farm. Summaries of these presentations are included in the Review Committee minutes, available in the office of the Narragansett Town Clerk.

Narragansett Department of Planning and Community Development (Mike DeLuca 12/10/07)

Friends of Canonchet Farm (Tara Flaherty & Kathie Kelleher 12/19/07)

South County Museum (Jim Crothers, Daryl Anderson & Frank Maroni 12/19/07)

Narragansett Conservation Commission (Bill Bivona 12/26/07)

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Charlie Vandemoer 1/9/08)

Narrow River Preservation Association (John Boothroyd 1/9/08)

Rhode Island Audubon Society (Eugenia Marks 1/9/08)

Narragansett School System (Katherine Sipala 1/14/08)

Narragansett Chamber of Commerce (Debbie Kelso 1/14/08)

Narragansett Department of Parks & Recreation (Barry Fontaine 1/29/08)

Narragansett Parks & Recreation Advisory Board (Christine Sullivan 1/29/08)

Residents of Narragansett (public forums)

B. Identifying Recommendations

The Review Committee reviewed both Master Plans thoroughly, sifting through recommendations both old and new. Each member composed a document outlining the member's personal vision for the Farm and subsequently produced a list of his/her specific recommendations. The Review Committee spent several sessions evaluating 60 separate items, sorting each Review Committee member's list and consolidating recommendations where possible. Each member then ranked these consolidated recommendations in terms of priority. Although never taken to a formal vote, the items listed below received unanimous or almost unanimous support with high priority for implementation.

Entrance to the Farm

1. Improve vehicular and pedestrian access at Anne Hoxsie Lane, and the appearance of this area.
2. Design and build a new pedestrian entrance and trail at Sprague Park playground connecting to the existing trail system.

Trail System

1. Create a farm-wide loop trail connecting all entrances with side loops and spur trails to points of interest.
2. Upgrade, improve and expand the existing trail system. Manage wet areas by relocating trails and/or by erecting bridges and boardwalks. Improve the trailhead near Beech Grove.
3. Create boardwalk access with overlook to Pettaquamscutt Cove.
4. Create a handicapped-accessible trail system adjacent to Little Neck Pond, Lake Canonchet, or both, originating from the picnic area near the Beech Grove. The handicapped-accessible trail system could link a fishing pier, the vernal pool, and the glacial erratic.

Picnic Areas

1. Refurbish or relocate the existing picnic area adjacent to the Beech Grove and connect it to the proposed loop trail and to the ponds.

Land

1. Survey the wetlands and ponds.
2. Develop a plan to selectively clear trees and extensively clear invasive plants to open vistas and expose stone walls throughout the Farm. The priorities are: the ponds, areas visible from Route 1A (Boston Neck Road and Narragansett Avenue), trails, the Upper Meadow, and stone walls in areas with high visibility.
3. Obtain professional guidance to identify and evaluate the health of the Beech Grove, other stands of trees, and individual trees of particular significance to the Farm.
4. Obtain professional guidance on how to protect the vernal pools.
5. Evaluate the stone walls for historical significance and reconstruct the walls, if necessary, according to preservation guidelines and expert assistance.

Parking

1. Relocate Town employee parking and eliminate the current lot. Encourage the Town to explore an off-Farm location for employee parking.
2. Create dedicated parking for Canonchet Farm in the vicinity of Anne Hoxie Lane.
3. Designate handicapped parking for the South County Museum at Strathmore Street and

for Canonchet Farm at Anne Hoxie Lane.

Governance

1. Create a Canonchet Farm Park Board/Commission. In this model, the Farm would be managed through a partnership between the Town and other interested groups.

Funding

1. Allocate a portion of the beach overflow parking revenue to support the Farm.
2. Recommend that the Town allocate sufficient funds to begin implementing the recommendations of the Review Committee and augment town funds with grants, private donations, and volunteer work.

Please refer to the Appendix D for the working list of itemized recommendations discussed by the Review Committee.

The process of identifying recommendations revealed fundamental disagreement within the Review Committee on certain key issues and a workshop was scheduled to address these differences.

C. Refining Recommendations

The Review Committee conducted a daylong workshop for the purpose of “articulating an overall vision for the Farm. The positions of each Review Committee member with respect to specific uses and plans for the Farm were understood because of the proposal listing and ranking system [referred to above]. The final challenge of articulating an overall vision for the Farm needed to be addressed so that the uses and related committee member priorities could be molded into a set of recommendations and the committee could draft a report.”² The Review Committee met on July 19 in a public retreat to achieve these objectives.

Several “themes” for the property were identified. After much discussion and delineation, they were broken down as follows:

1. The Town Comprehensive Plan should integrate and include Canonchet Farm into its planning process.
2. The Farm should be kept as a natural place with public access.

² Canonchet Farm Master Plan Review Committee minutes, June 23, 2008, modified for clarity.

3. Canonchet Farm should be maintained as a public place with public access and use and as a site for public functions.
4. The public should have a major role as stewards in the maintenance and upkeep of Canonchet Farm.

The Farm was divided into three areas on the basis of current and projected use. Area A, approximately 20 acres, was identified as an area of intensive use. Area B, approximately 20 acres, would be an area of intermediate use. Area C, approximately 100 acres, was designated an area of low use. Potential activities for each section are listed below. *The activities in italics will be discussed under Areas of Controversy.*

Map identifying
Areas A, B, & C located in Appendix E

Area A

Area A is comprised of the current parking lot across from the Town Beach, Little Neck Pond and Lake Canonchet, the Beech Grove and abandoned picnic area, the vernal pools and glacial erratic north of the Beech Grove, and Anne Hoxie Lane.

The Review Committee identified the following activities as appropriate for this area of intensive use:

- Hiking
- Picnicking
- Trail development
- Handicapped-accessible trail development
- Educational activities
- Fishing
- Non-motorized boating
- Parking

Recommendations:

1. Improve vehicular and pedestrian access at Anne Hoxie Lane, and improve the

Comment [FoCF7]:
We are concerned that Area A could be overused leading to degradation of the environment. The area must be carefully managed.

Comment [FoCF8]:
Our *Vision and Recommendations* lists the following as Phase III projects:

- Improve existing gates in appearance, strength, security, functionality and location in compliance with the Town of Narragansett safety requirements.
- Recognize that Anne Hoxsie Lane, Strathmore Street and Sprague Park entrances should provide access to the park with Anne Hoxsie Lane as the primary entrance and visitor parking facility.
- Eliminate the existing beach overflow parking lot in the lower meadow and beach employee parking lot at the corner of Boston Neck Road and Narragansett Avenue, as both of these lots are environmentally unsound.
- Redesign the gravel parking lot on Anne Hoxsie Lane in an environmentally sound manner.
- Designate the Anne Hoxsie Lane gravel parking lot for park visitors only. Work with the Town of Narragansett to develop alternative beach parking such as the parking lots at the three Narragansett schools serviced by a shuttle service to and from the beach.

- appearance of the entry area.
2. Create a handicapped-accessible trail system adjacent to Little Neck Pond, Lake Canonchet, or both originating from the picnic area near the Beech Grove. The accessible trail system could link a fishing pier, the vernal pool, and the glacial erratic.
 3. Refurbish or relocate the existing picnic area adjacent to the Beech Grove and connect it to the proposed loop trail and to the ponds.
 4. Obtain professional guidance on how to protect the vernal pools.
 5. Relocate Town employee parking and eliminate the current lot. Encourage the Town to explore an off-Farm location for employee parking.
 6. Develop a pedestrian entrance to the farm at the junction of Beach Street, Narragansett Avenue and Boston Neck Road. Improvements in this area include clearing of invasive plants, enhanced gardens, opening vistas and development of a walkway, with the long-term goal of connecting the central commercial and residential areas to the Farm and the Town Beach.
 7. Create dedicated parking for Canonchet Farm in the vicinity of Anne Hoxie Lane.

Comment [FoCF9]: Improve accessibility by constructing short trails with firm but permeable surfaces to selected points of interest.

Comment [FoCF10]: The picnic area should not be located in the beech grove. We recommend more careful management of the trees on Canonchet Farm, as follows:
Develop a management plan to protect and care for selected specimen trees and groves throughout the park. Some examples are the beech, sassafras, birch and tupelo groves, elm trees and very grand English oaks. Identify key specimen trees and other plants with signage.
If there is to be a picnic area, it should be located elsewhere as stated in this Phase III project in *Visions and Recommendations*:
Develop, in conjunction with the South County Museum, a visitors center, picnic area and restrooms in the museum cluster. Explore the use of the Narragansett Community Center as another visitor resource. No new buildings are to be constructed.

Comment [FoCF11]: A goal of this project should be to restore the coastal environment.

Comment [FoCF12]:
Designate the Anne Hoxsie Lane gravel parking lot for park visitors only. Work with the Town of Narragansett to develop alternative beach parking such as the parking lots at the three Narragansett schools serviced by a shuttle service to and from the beach.

Comment [FoCF13]: Convert Anne Hoxsie Lane from the gate at the west side of the gravel parking lot to the South County Museum to a broad footpath restricted to pedestrians and emergency and park maintenance vehicles. In order to preserve the environment and protect the safety of visitors, allow no motorized vehicular traffic in the park except at the entrance parking lots.

Comment [FoCF14]: Develop, in conjunction with the South County Museum, a visitors center, picnic area and restrooms in the museum cluster. Explore the use of the Narragansett Community Center as another visitor resource. No new buildings are to be constructed.

Comment [FoCF15]:
Eliminate the existing beach overflow parking lot in the lower meadow and beach employee parking lot at the corner of Boston Neck Road and Narragansett Avenue, as both of these lots are environmentally unsound. Redesign the gravel parking lot on Anne Hoxsie Lane in an environmentally sound manner.
Designate the Anne Hoxsie Lane gravel parking lot for park visitors only. Work with the Town of Narragansett to develop alternative beach parking such as the parking lots at the three Narragansett schools serviced by a shuttle service to and from the beach.

Comment [FoCF16]: Larger events should foster appreciation of the natural environment, beauty and historical significance of the property. Larger groups should not infringe on the enjoyment of smaller groups. A member of the Friends of Canonchet Farm should be appointed to the management entity for the park.

Area B

Area B consists of 20 acres, including the High Meadow (an area of approximately seven acres bordered by stone walls), the Low Meadow (an abandoned orchard that currently serves as beach overflow parking) south of the High Meadow, and the gravel extension of Anne Hoxie Lane to the South County Museum.

The Review Committee identified the following activities as appropriate for this area of intermediate use:

- Hiking
- Vista/observation development
- Stone wall maintenance
- Providing access to the South County Museum
- Building a visitor center with restrooms (The Review Committee approved this facility for Area B, but has no objection to locating it elsewhere.)
- Parking³
- Hosting large gatherings⁴

³ See III. "Areas of Controversy"

⁴ See III. "Areas of Controversy"

Providing vehicular access from Beach Street and Boston Neck Road to Strathmore Street via Anne Hoxie Lane with gates and other measures for security

*The Review Committee approved extending the existing clearing of the Upper Meadow in Section B in like fashion to the limit of the stone walls.*⁵

Recommendations:

1. Designate handicapped parking for the South County Museum at Strathmore Street and for Canonchet Farm at Anne Hoxie Lane.

Area C

This area represents all other Farm land and is the largest parcel, consisting of approximately 100 acres. Much of this area is wetland, and not suitable for intensive use.

The Review Committee identified the following activities as appropriate for this area of low use:

- Hiking
- Fishing
- Observation platforms
- Non-motorized boating
- Educational activities
- Conservation activities
- Removal of invasive plants

Recommendations:

1. Design and build a new pedestrian entrance and trail at Sprague Park connecting to the existing trail system.
2. Create boardwalk access with overlook to Pettaquamscutt Cove.
3. Obtain professional guidance on how to protect the vernal pools.

D. Farm-wide Activities

Many of the activities noted above apply to all areas of the Farm. They include the removal of invasive plants, education and conservation programs, the observation of wildlife such as birding and animal tracking, vista and observation enhancement, and trail maintenance and development.

⁵ See III. “Areas of Controversy”

Comment [FoCF17]:

We propose: Convert Anne Hoxie Lane from the gate at the west side of the gravel parking lot to the South County Museum to a broad footpath restricted to pedestrians and emergency and park maintenance vehicles. In order to preserve the environment and protect the safety of visitors, allow no motorized vehicular traffic in the park except at the entrance parking lots.

Comment [FoCF18]:

We believe that this sentence is far too ambiguous and we strongly oppose the extensive clearing that the language would enable. A more selective and responsible approach is articulated in our *Vision and Recommendations* in two Phase I projects:

Vista Enhancement: Selectively *THIN* the lower story of the forest of undesirable invasives and other species, weeds, and brush to enhance ground level vistas through the trees from a limited number of specified vantage points. Primary vistas could be to Little Neck Pond, Pettaquamscutt Cove and the ocean. Vista enhancement would be included in all phases.

Stone Walls: Recognize that there are many wonderful examples of expertly crafted stone walls of historic significance on the property but many are seriously overgrown with vines, weeds and other invasive species. Clear these walls of the debris, and place signs near the walls explaining their style and their original use.

Fishing and non-motorized boating were approved for Areas A and C. The Review Committee voted to maintain the Farm's stone walls for safety and aesthetic purposes and with rebuilding the walls to historic guidelines.

Recommendations:

1. Create a farm-wide loop trail connecting all entrances with side loops and spur trails to points of interest.
2. Upgrade, improve and expand the existing trail system. Manage wet areas by relocating trails and/or by erecting bridges and boardwalks. Improve the trailhead near the Beech Grove.
3. Survey the wetlands.
4. Develop a plan to selectively clear trees and extensively clear invasive plants to open vistas and expose stone walls throughout the Farm. The priorities are: the ponds, areas visible from Route 1A (Boston Neck Road and Narragansett Avenue), trails, Upper Meadow, and stone walls in areas with high visibility.
5. Obtain professional guidance to identify and evaluate the health of the Beech Grove, other stands of trees, and individual trees of particular significance to the Farm.
6. Evaluate stone walls for historical significance and reconstruct the walls, if necessary, according to preservation guidelines and with expert assistance.

Comment [FoCF19]:

We oppose extensive clearing of the upper meadow. Again, we recommend instead:

Vista Enhancement: Selectively *THIN* the lower story of the forest of undesirable invasives and other species, weeds, and brush to enhance ground level vistas through the trees from a limited number of specified vantage points. Primary vistas could be to Little Neck Pond, Pettaquamscutt Cove and the ocean. Vista enhancement would be included in all phases.

Stone Walls: Recognize that there are many wonderful examples of expertly crafted stone walls of historic significance on the property but many are seriously overgrown with vines, weeds and other invasive species. Clear these walls of the debris, and place signs near the walls explaining their style and their original use.

Comment [FoCF20]: We agree with the proposed name change.

E. Canonchet Farm Name

The Mission Statement refers to Canonchet Farm as a public park. Canonchet Farm is referred to as the Farm in this document. It is no longer a farm, and is more accurately described as a public park. Changing the name from *Canonchet Farm* to *Canonchet Park* would be a more accurate description of its current state and be less confusing to potential users.

F. Funding

A major challenge for the Farm will be finding the dollars to implement the recommendations contained in this document. Previous plans had laudable objectives for Canonchet Farm that were never implemented or that were built but not maintained. The South County Museum is the exception. A core group of dedicated supporters took ownership and continue to work on the museum's development.

The Review Committee has recommended that the Town allocate sufficient funds to begin implementing the recommendations of this Review Committee. Town funds will need to be

enhanced with grants, private donations, and volunteer work. Organizations, such as the Friends of Canonchet, which has demonstrated a commitment to the Farm, may play a role in implementing the recommendations contained within this report. The presence of a concerned group of citizens advocating for the Farm could make all the difference in developing the Farm's potential.

Comment [FoCF21]: We agree with this statement if projects are consistent with the recommendations expressed in *Vision and Recommendations*.

III. Areas of Controversy

While there were areas of the management plan that the entire Review Committee agreed upon, there were some key areas that represented points of contention from the beginning. The merits of these conflicting positions were debated in many meetings, and ultimately votes were taken to determine the will of the majority. However, the votes were either 5-4 or 6-3 on these issues, reflecting different positions between two factions of the Review Committee.

A. Parking

Canonchet Farm currently provides two parking areas for the Town of Narragansett. The parking lot in Area A at Anne Hoxie Lane accommodates approximately 100 cars. The second area parking lot accommodates approximately 300 cars in the Low Meadow.

It has been suggested by a town official to propose an expansion of the lot at Anne Hoxie Lane to 400 cars. Expanding this lot would relieve the pressure for beach overflow parking and presumably remove cars from the current overflow parking area.

A majority of the Review Committee approved a motion “to phase out overflow beach parking” and allow museum, event, and Farm parking in Area B. The Review Committee eventually approved the use of Area B for events subject to town review and approval. This motion was followed by the defeat of the motion to expand the current beach parking lot in Area A and the defeat of a motion to allow large gatherings of up to 2,000 people in Area B. Area B effectively becomes a designated parking area for visitors to the Farm and to the South County Museum.

Comment [FoCF22]: We are concerned that the current capacity is overstated here by at least 150 vehicles, and as such, biases the analysis of proposals to eliminate beach parking on Canonchet Farm. The Town should supply the correct number of spaces available. We oppose beach parking on the property and instead propose the following:

Eliminate the existing beach overflow parking lot in the lower meadow and beach employee parking lot at the corner of Boston Neck Road and Narragansett Avenue, as both of these lots are environmentally unsound.

Redesign the gravel parking lot on Anne Hoxsie Lane in an environmentally sound manner.

Designate the Anne Hoxsie Lane gravel parking lot for park visitors only. Work with the Town of Narragansett to develop alternative beach parking such as the parking lots at the three Narragansett schools serviced by a shuttle service to and from the beach.

Comment [FoCF23]: There should be no parking of any kind in Area B. There should be no beach parking on the property.

The defeat of the motion to expand the beach parking lot speaks to the larger parking issues facing the Town of Narragansett. Beach parking is a source of revenue for the Town and as such is a valuable resource. There is a shortage of parking both for Town employees and for non-

resident visitors on busy summer weekends, and expanding the beach lot would go a long way towards solving these problems. This solution, however, met opposition from many sources (see public comments in the minutes). The land earmarked for the lot expansion is close to wetland, if not defined as wetland. A larger parking lot across from the beach would detract from the vistas looking west from Boston Neck Road over Lake Canonchet and Little Neck Pond. The lot would be used primarily in the summer months, sitting idle for much of the year. Parking lots in public facilities such as the schools already exist and are underutilized at the time beach parking is at a premium. Shuttles from the public facilities such as schools to the beach were offered as an alternative to expanding the beach parking lot as well as a way to change the way non-residents pay to use the beach.

B. Vehicular Access to and through the Farm

A majority of the Review Committee voted against identifying Strathmore Street as the primary vehicular entrance to the Farm and against a through road from Strathmore Street to Anne Hoxie Lane. The proposed through road would have two gates constructed and maintained by the Town, one near the South County Museum and the other above Anne Hoxie Lane, open at the discretion of management.

Comment [FoCF24]: Convert Anne Hoxsie Lane from the gate at the west side of the gravel parking lot to the South County Museum to a broad footpath restricted to pedestrians and emergency and park maintenance vehicles. In order to preserve the environment and protect the safety of visitors, allow no motorized vehicular traffic in the park except at the entrance parking lots.

The Town has a long history with issues of access to the Farm and to the South County Museum. Strathmore Street is used to access the Museum and it is now possible to drive from Strathmore Street by the Museum and through the Farm to Boston Neck Road on Anne Hoxie Lane. The Town maintains gates to prevent through traffic and provide security for the Museum and the residents of the Canonchet Farm neighborhood.

Comment [FoCF25]: It may be physically possible to drive from Strathmore Street through Canonchet Farm to Boston Neck Road in dry seasons but this was never the intent when Strathmore Street was extended to the entrance of the museum. There is no town record of Strathmore Street connecting with Anne Hoxsie Lane. See previous comment.

The Town fought hard to protect the right of way on Strathmore Street to the South County Museum through the housing development approved in 1993. According to members of the Review Committee, the Town does not want to give up the ability to drive through the Museum and the Farm from Strathmore Street to Boston Neck Road.

The South County Museum has recently completed a new Master Plan that essentially eliminates the through road. The majority of the Review Committee in effect supported the Museum by voting against identifying Strathmore Street as the primary vehicular entrance to the Farm and against maintaining the current gravel road from Strathmore Street to Anne Hoxie Lane.

Those in favor of maintaining vehicular access through the Farm point to public safety issues, to

optimal traffic flow in the event of large gatherings in the Upper Meadow, and to the Town's reluctance to jeopardize the legal access they fought so hard to protect. Those opposing a through road feel that vehicular access to the Farm through Anne Hoxie Lane is sufficient.

C. Public Events

Every member of the Review Committee believes that increasing the number of users of the Farm is essential. There is unanimous support to increase those activities, such as hiking, fishing, and educational programming that would have minimal environment impact. The proposal to host large events in the Upper Meadow, however, met with significant opposition and the initial motion to hold gatherings up to 2,000 people was defeated.

Those opposed to large gatherings are concerned about the adverse effects on the land, especially at times when the ground is more vulnerable to harm, such as in the spring. The scheduling of events in quick succession could also be detrimental, as the land would not have time to recover. The desire of the Review Committee to restrict parking and traffic flow within the Farm might be sorely tested by the hosting of large public events.

Proponents of hosting events point to the success of the South County Museum's annual fall festival, with an attendance approaching 2,000. The Upper Meadow is a logical space to host large gatherings, and parking could be restricted to the current lot at Anne Hoxsie Lane and the beach parking lots.

The Review Committee reached a compromise:

- Gatherings of 100 or fewer will follow the current permitting process through Narragansett Parks & Recreation.
- Sponsors of gatherings of more than 100 must appear before the governing board of Canonchet Farm. This board will make its recommendation to the Town Council, which will have the final authority to approve or deny permits for these larger events.

Comment [FoCF26]: Larger events should foster appreciation of the natural environment, beauty and historical significance of the property. Larger groups should not infringe on the enjoyment of smaller groups. A member of the Friends of Canonchet Farm should be appointed to the management entity for the park.

D. Clearing

The majority of the Committee approved “to extend the existing clearing of the field in Area B in like fashion to the limit of the stone walls.” The field is the Upper Meadow, an area of approximately seven acres. A portion of the meadow is field-like, devoid of underbrush, with

solitary trees scattered about. The field can and must be maintained by mowing to keep it from reverting to forest.

Clearing in the Upper Meadow will create a large area on the highest point of the Farm. The purposes of additional clearing are to enlarge an existing open space, to improve vistas to Pettaquamscutt Cove, to expose the perimeter stone walls, and to enhance the existing space as a venue for events.

Comment [FoCF27]: We oppose extensive clearing of the upper meadow. A more judicious approach is articulated in our *Vision and Recommendations*:

Vista Enhancement: Selectively THIN the lower story of the forest of undesirable invasives and other species, weeds, and brush to enhance ground level vistas through the trees from a limited number of specified vantage points. Primary vistas could be to Little Neck Pond, Pettaquamscutt Cove and the ocean. Vista enhancement would be included in all phases.

Stone Walls: Recognize that there are many wonderful examples of expertly crafted stone walls of historic significance on the property but many are seriously overgrown with vines, weeds and other invasive species. Clear these walls of the debris, and place signs near the walls explaining their style and their original use.

E. Bike Path

A feasibility study for constructing a spur connecting the planned terminus of the William C. O'Neill Bike Path on Mumford Road to the South County Museum was performed in 2000 by the engineering firm Fay, Spofford & Thorndike, Inc. at the request of the Rhode Island Department of Transportation. Five alternative alignments for the Bike Path were identified and evaluated for financial feasibility and environmental impact.

The route ultimately recommended by this study begins at the intersection of the bike path and Mumford Road. It then enters Town property adjacent to the driveway serving several Town facilities including the Narragansett Elementary School, Sprague Memorial Park, and the Community Center. The proposed path runs through school property and Sprague Park to the intersection of Strathmore and Wanda Streets, and then along Strathmore Street, terminating at the Museum.

The majority of the Committee voted to extend the bike path on a dedicated surface through the interior of the Farm to the beach with access to the South County Museum believing that this would significantly increase access and activity within the Farm. The bike path would connect Boston Neck Road (Route 1A), a popular biking route, with Kingston. A path connecting the parking lots at the Elementary School to the beach might also serve to transport beachgoers in the summer months and provide access for emergency vehicles.

Comment [FoCF28]: We have serious concerns about construction of a bike path through Canonchet Farm. However, we cannot comment at this time, as we have insufficient information about the bike path and need answers about routing, usage, environmental impact, safety, accessibility and visibility. We plan to be active in the planning process. The Town should consider use of the abandoned Sea View Railroad bed that borders the north edge of Sprague Park.

Opponents of this plan are concerned about the extreme cost of construction and wetland disruption. They have safety concerns for walkers and doubt that the path will receive extensive use.

F. Governance

The Review Committee has supported three models pertaining to governance of Canonchet

Farm. In each model the Review Committee considered instituting a framework that is based on the current committee structure that assists in the management of the Towers and the Land Trust/Sunset Farm. In each, the committee is appointed by, and reports to, the Town Council while discharging its stated duties.

Under this general model, the committee is responsible for administering the provisions of the Canonchet Farm Master Plan. Its responsibilities include advising Town staff on the preparation of budgets, administering the finances of the Farm, monitoring the progress of the fundraising efforts, organizing planning efforts, coordinating volunteer activities, and advising the Town Council.

Model 1: “Create a Canonchet Farm Park Board/Commission, managing the Farm through a partnership between the Town and other interested groups.”⁶ (Not formally adopted).

Model 2: “Create a Commission/Committee with members appointed by Town Council and composed of relevant representatives from town departments and town committees, relevant representatives from independent organizations, and individuals with relevant professional experience.”⁷ (Adopted)

Comment [FoCF29]: We support Model 2.

Model 3: “Establish a Committee with five voting members, one from the Town Council, one from the Planning Board, one from the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board, one from the Conservation Commission, and one representative from the Friends of Canonchet Farm; and two non-voting members, the Director of Parks & Recreation or the Director of Community Planning, and a representative from the South County Museum. This Committee will be appointed by the Town Council to advise the Town Council and staff on the management of the property.”⁸ (Adopted)

These models are not as dissimilar as they might appear at first glance. Models 1 and 2 broadly outline the composition of a commission/committee that would include representatives from

⁶ See Item List in the Appendix D

⁷ Committee Minutes, August 25, 2008

⁸ Committee Minutes, August 25, 2008; wording revised by author for clarity

interested groups as well as individuals with relevant experience. Model 3 does not make allowances for individuals with relevant professional experience to serve on the committee. They could be called in for expert advice.

The Town Council will ultimately decide on the constitution of the governing body for Canonchet Farm and whether to expand appointments to residents with special expertise.

IV. Conclusion

The Review Committee has learned that any discussion of Canonchet Farm engenders strong views and passionate debate. Those who care about the future of the Farm care a great deal and they make their voices heard. Some want to see the Farm stay almost as it is, a wild place, undisturbed. Some want to see increased activity of a passive sort, such as hiking, fishing, and birding, with a focus on education and conservation. Others want to see town residents using the Farm much more intensively, for concerts and festivals, and biking, walking and rollerblading on a path through the Farm.

The challenge ahead is to strike that balance between increasing use of the Farm and preserving the land, as desired by the residents of the Town of Narragansett. They own it.

One of the greatest challenges facing Town Council will be to settle on a governance model that will promote the priorities of the residents of Narragansett. Another huge challenge will be to find funding to support the improvements detailed here.

The report touches on many of the opportunities and issues facing Canonchet Farm. Recommendations which are contained in the report reflect in-depth public input in addition to positions cultivated through a year and a half of Review Committee education, debate and reflection.

This report will be submitted to the Town Council for its review and approval. The Review Committee anticipates that prior to approval the Town Council will distribute the report to various town departments for comment. In addition, the report will be submitted to the public for informational purposes as well as gathering additional public comment.

It is anticipated that upon completion of this process the Town Council will approve an amended report. Recommendations in the final report will be included in the Town of Narragansett's Comprehensive Plan subject to further approval by relevant state authorities. The Town would then move forward with implementing the recommendations.

The Review Committee believes that the final amended report should be used as the guideline for writing a Request for Proposal (RFP) to hire a landscape architectural firm. The landscape design firm's mandate would be to design, phase, timeline, and budget the recommendations described in the Town Council's Canonchet Farm Master Plan. The design would assure the Town that the features of the Master Plan would conform to Federal, state and local ordinances. The firm's work would also:

- Develop a long-range implementation program
- Establish construction standards for trails, bridges, boardwalks, and fishing and observation platforms
- Specify signage
- Define wetland setbacks
- Produce guidelines for stone wall restoration including brush clearing along the walls, vista enhancement, pond restoration, parking, entrances and Park access
- Set up maintenance schedules.

The Review Committee believes that a "best practices" standard of modern park design and the description of operating standards are critical for producing a first-class facility tied to accurate management and capital budgets.

We are fortunate that Canonchet Farm has remained relatively untouched. Today Providence is a beautiful city, filled with old and historic buildings that might have been torn down had funding been available during the era of Urban Renewal. Canonchet Farm, although neglected, has not been ruined. In this case, less has perhaps resulted in more.

Comment [FoCF30]: We agree with this final recommendation of the Review Committee, subject to our own *Vision and Recommendations* document.

Comment [FoCF31]: The following list should include "Inventory wildlife, plants, and geological and historical features."