

Prospect Hill Park: Its Creation, Decline, and Renewal

By Elizabeth M. Lowe

"In Waltham, to the north-westward of the centre of the city's population, lies the noble eminence of Prospect Hill..." (B45-46)

—Mr. Sylvester Baxter, Secretary to the Metropolitan Park Commission, Boston Metropolitan Park Report 1893.

"The life history of humanity has proved nothing more clearly than that crowded populations, if they would live in health and happiness, must have space for air, for light, for exercise, for rest, and for the enjoyment of that peaceful beauty of nature which, because it is the opposite of the noisy ugliness of towns, is so wonderfully refreshing to the tired souls of townspeople."(B82)

—Mr. Charles Eliot, Landscape Architect for the Metropolitan Park Commission, Boston Metropolitan Park Report 1893.

I. Introduction/Description

Created in 1893, Prospect Hill Park covers 250 acres, entirely within the City of Waltham. At this size, it is a significant open space, and "perhaps the largest municipally-owned park inside the loop of Route 128."¹ The park covers a ridge which features two significant peaks. At 485 feet above sea level, the higher of the two is the second highest point in the vicinity of Boston, only the Great Blue Hill stands taller. This peak has been called Great Prospect, but is more often referred to as Big Prospect, while its smaller associate, which stands at 435 feet, is known as Little Prospect. Both peaks provide excellent views of the Boston basin.

The Park suffered slow deterioration following World War II, as passive recreation became less important to the general population, funding declined, park land became occupied by non-park facilities, and vandalism and illegal dumping became more common.

Despite its decline, the park remained the most visited public open space in Waltham, other than the common. As the park neared its centennial, a group of citizens mobilized to revive it. This paper is a discussion of the reasons behind its rise, decline, and rebirth.

II. Creation

Geological History

The City of Waltham includes portions of two distinct geological regions, the Boston Basin, and the Fells Upland. The Boston Basin is relatively flat, with the exception of some glacially shaped hills, known to geologists as drumlins. On the other hand, the Fells Upland is quite hilly and is edged on the southeast by a steep escarpment that ranges from 100 to 300 feet in height. Much of the Fells Upland has also been modified by glaciers, resulting in deposits of glacial drift.

Big Prospect is the highest point within the Fells Upland. It is part of a large diorite batholith. A batholith is formed when a large body of magma cools underground. This means that the bedrock of Prospect Hill was formed during a period of volcanic activity. Most likely,

¹ Moroney, John, "Prospects for a City Treasure: Group Fights to Save Prospect Hill From Vandalism, Neglect", *The Daily News Tribune*, April 16, 1993.

this activity occurred during the Upper Precambrian period, at least 570 million years ago. Later, during another geologically active period, the underground batholith must have been thrust upward to become a hill.

More recently (only 20,000 years ago), the shape of the hill was altered by glaciation. The same continental glacier that formed the drumlins in the Boston Basin also shaped Prospect Hill. As the glacier moved southwards, it pushed and smoothed the north side of the hill, but as it receded, ice freezing on the south side pulled away large chunks of rock, leaving a hill that is steep on the south and more gently sloped to the north.

Inspiration

About fifteen years before Prospect Hill Park was created, Frederick Law Olmsted began work on Boston's Emerald Necklace. This was a time when the construction of parks for passive recreation was important to much of Boston's elite. In 1882, the Massachusetts Park Act became law. This act encouraged the creation of park commissions which would then have the power to buy lands on behalf of a municipality. Ten years later the Metropolitan Parks Bill was passed as chapter 342 of the Acts of 1892. This act dictated that a board of Metropolitan Park Commissioners be formed to "...consider the advisability of laying out ample open spaces for the use of the public, in the towns and cities in the vicinity of Boston..." They were also assigned the duty of devising "...a comprehensive plan for laying out, acquiring and maintaining such open spaces."²

The Metropolitan Park Commissioners were Charles Francis Adams, Philip A. Chase, and William B. de las Casas. They hired Sylvester Baxter as "...a secretary interested in the subject and familiar with the ground to be covered, whose duty it would be also to collect documentary information...", along with Charles Eliot, an associate of Frederick Law Olmsted, as "...a professional landscape architect, to devise a practical scheme of development and prepare the maps, plans and report to explain it..."³

The Commissioners published their report in January of 1893. In it they stated their belief in the importance of a metropolitan park system:

² Boston Metropolitan Park Report, prepared by the Board of Metropolitan Park Commissioners, January 1893, p. ii.

³ Ibid. p. ix.

The provision of ample open spaces for public recreation and the promotion of public health is now universally regarded as an essential feature in the proper equipment of urban communities. In all parts of the civilized world the leading cities are recognizing this necessity. The younger cities are perceiving the wisdom of providing amply for the future in this respect by securing lands in suitable locations and in sufficient amount, to be developed with the growth of their population. The older cities, like London, Paris and Berlin, though long possessed of extensive reservations of this description, are to-day finding their amount of open spaces inadequate, and are taking measures for securing extensive areas in addition that will meet the needs of the future.⁴

This report reviewed the numerous suitable locations for parks within the metropolitan area, and included a map revealing both existing and proposed public open spaces. Among the proposed open spaces was a park which would have included both Prospect Hill and nearby Bear Hill. Despite their interest, the Metropolitan Park Commission chose not to involve themselves in the acquisition of Prospect Hill. This was in part due to the fact that Prospect and Bear Hills both lay entirely within the City of Waltham, and thus Waltham's own Park Commission, formed in 1892, was already making plans to acquire the land that would eventually form the park. As described by Mr. Baxter:

In Waltham, to the north-westward of the centre of the city's population, lies the noble eminence of Prospect Hill, the greatest elevation in the neighborhood of Boston after the Blue Hills. Very fortunately it appears that the park commission of Waltham, lately constituted, promises to attend to the reservation of this very desirable feature, leaving as a subject for metropolitan consideration the immensely important matter of the Charles River, in which Waltham is naturally deeply concerned.⁵

Acquisition

The Waltham Park Commissioners took on the task of acquiring land for Prospect Hill Park in 1893. It was in February of that year that they requested an appropriation of \$20,000 from the Board of Aldermen. That granted, they acquired several parcels of land which included the peaks of both Big and Little Prospect. They did not meet with objection from the property owners: "So far as we know the price allowed was satisfactory to the parties interested and no recourse had to be made to the courts to settle the differences in the value of the land taken."⁶

This is not surprising when one considers that this land was owned by wealthy families who used them as woodlots. At the time, fossil fuels were becoming more available, so wood was losing value as a fuel. Some of the land had already been subdivided with the intention that it would be used as house lots. However, the slope of the hill was too steep and rocky, so the

⁴ Ibid. p. 1.

⁵ Ibid. pp. 45-46.

⁶ City of Waltham Annual Reports, Report of the Park Commissioners, 1893, p. 266.

attempt was unsuccessful. In the end, selling their property to the city for \$100 to \$200 per acre must have seemed like a fair deal to the landowners.

Although they only spent \$9,500 of the requested \$20,000, the Park Commission decided not to acquire much land beyond that which included the peaks, resulting in a total acquisition of 74.74 acres in 1893:

There are, no doubt, many friends of the park system who would have desired us to take even a greater area, extending to the south and east of the greater Prospect commonly called "Big Prospect," and to the west and north of the lesser Prospect, familiarly known as Prospect Hill, and including Bear Hill, so called. Excellent as this dream of our greater park system is, and much as we trust to see this hope realized, we deemed it inadvisable and inexpedient, in the condition of the city's finances, to recommend such a plan at the present time. For the present we have preserved for the use of the people the most desirable and necessary area of land, which we hope to make the nucleus of a chain of parks encircling the city and insuring adequate breathing spots.⁷

Despite this, more land was purchased the next year, and over the following decades acquisition continued. By 1927 the park covered 219 acres.

Original Design

The intention behind the creation of the park was to provide a naturalistic retreat for the people of Waltham. Charles Eliot may have drawn up a preliminary plan for the park, but it appears that he was not directly involved in the design of improvements once the park land was acquired. Instead, it was the Waltham Park Commissioners that oversaw construction of improvements to the park, and so it was that no overall plan was formed.

Improvements

The work of improving the park began in late 1893, as workers were hired to improve the roadway to Prospect Hill, clear out underbrush, and remove fallen trees. More than sixty men were at work by the end of the season.

Over the following decades, improvements to the park included the addition of:

- Hitching Posts
- Seats, Benches, and Settees
- Picnic Pavilions and Picnic Tables
- Swing Sets
- Trash Barrels
- Pedestrian Paths
- Stone Steps
- Camp Sites
- Sanitary Facilities
- Wells

⁷ Ibid.

- Fences

Once they were added, maintaining these amenities was also a priority for the Park Commission.

Over the years, vegetation management generally included clearing underbrush and fallen trees that could encourage forest fires. In 1903, small pines were planted amid the mostly oak forest. In 1912, reforestation efforts included the planting of pines, oaks, and chestnuts in areas that had been damaged by fire. The rest of the decade saw even more planting of pines, hemlocks, and maples. This effort was increased after approximately 4,500 trees were cut due to a fuel shortage in 1918. Through the 1920's and 1930's, tree planting continued.

The condition of the park was most vigorously maintained and improved during periods of unemployment. According to the master plan:

In 1915 the Commission assisted in combating the unemployment problem by employing 25 people per day for February and March to cut dead trees and underbrush. During February and March of 1931, 300 men recommended by the Emergency Employment Committee were employed clearing underbrush and repairing and improving roads. Clearing of 100 acres of underbrush, and trimming dead and overhanging wood were part of a 1933 Civil Works Administration project. A considerable amount of forestry work is done with the assistance of the WPA in 1935 And 1936.⁸

Although some maintenance continued, the overall effort put into improving and maintaining the park significantly dropped off following the Second World War. At this time, increasing interest in active recreation led to the acquisition of land at the northeast corner of the park. This land, obtained in 1948, was used to construct a ski slope, an endeavor that only partially succeeded, as it failed to be profitable, and closed about forty years later.

III. Decline

The park's slow decline began following World War II. As the local population's interests changed, along with their methods of transportation, inappropriate use of the park became more common. The increasing interest in active recreation at this time was reflected in the park by the addition of the ski slope. At the same time, interest in passive recreation was declining and less care was taken of park features such as the view. The last view clearing done in the 20th century was on Little Prospect in 1951.

⁸ *A Master Plan For the Restoration and Improvement of Prospect Hill Park*, prepared for the City of Waltham by the Walker-Kluesing Design Group, 1997, p. 11.

Transportation and the Park

When Prospect Hill Park was created, street railways were a vitally important means of transportation. They had brought new speed that allowed more distant commutes, and contributed to the creation of Boston's suburbs. In the 1890's they were used to define the Metropolitan district. According to the 1893 report of the Metropolitan Park Commission,

The limits of what the commissioners designate as the metropolitan district define themselves with sufficient distinctness. Within it are comprised generally all the cities and towns served by the system of local, suburban or accommodation trains on the railroads terminating in Boston. These are the twelve cities of Boston, Cambridge, Chelsea, Everett, Lynn, Malden, Medford, Newton, Quincy, Somerville, Waltham and Woburn, and the twenty-four towns...The cities and towns above named contain altogether eight hundred and eighty-eight thousand inhabitants, or close upon forty per cent. of the entire population of the Commonwealth. The proposed district is also, as respects both population and wealth, the most rapidly increasing part of Massachusetts. A city population is fast diffusing itself over it...a million and a half within a measurable time...that population will consist of the inhabitants of one large municipality.⁹

The cities and towns listed in this report include roughly those towns that are now encompassed by Route 128.

This definition of the Metropolitan district would not apply forever. As automobiles became more common, the street railways went out of business. A Middlesex & Boston Street Railway line once carried passengers from Watertown Square via Main Street in Waltham to the end of the line near Prospect Hill Park. Sadly, this company ceased to operate streetcars in 1931. Instead, individuals and families seeking recreation now drove their cars to sites they had not previously been able to reach.

Non-Park Uses/Encroachments

The decline in interest in the park has led to a number of uses of park land that are inappropriate, and contrary to the intent of the park.

Roads and Development

The Influence of Roads

The first non-park use of park land occurred in 1915 when a gravel pit was opened in the park. This gravel pit was created to accommodate an increased need for road maintenance. This

⁹ Boston Metropolitan Park Report, prepared by the Board of Metropolitan Park Commissioners, January 1893, p. xi.

need arose as automobiles became more common in the park, leading to more wear on the roads. The need for gravel was so great that the 1915 gravel pit was followed by a second pit in 1917.

The construction of Route 128 was significant to Prospect Hill Park in three ways. First, by running between Bear Hill and Prospect Hill, the development of Route 128 insures that Bear Hill will at no time in the future become a part of Prospect Hill Park, as had been proposed by the Metropolitan Park Commission in 1893. Second, it led to the construction of Totten Pond Road, which cut through the north end of the park, separating a large parcel of land, and the original north entrance from the rest of the park circa 1960. Finally, Route 128 led to development pressure, as office park after office park sprang up along its length.

Regional Business Development

The Polaroid corporation has long been one of the park's neighbors. In 1963, Polaroid managed to acquire a "Small area of inaccessible park property...". The following year, an easement was granted to Polaroid "...to allow the construction of roads and utilities at the southwestern end of the park."¹⁰ An additional utility easement was granted to Polaroid in 1975.

Additional development in the area included the construction of the Prospect Hill Executive Office Park, which was built circa 1980 to take advantage of the site's proximity to Route 128. The buildings in this office park were built with virtually no property line setback. As a result, they are a significant visual intrusion into the park—as one travels along the main road, especially in Spring, when the trees have not yet leafed out, one can not avoid noticing the very close presence of the buildings. This detracts from the park's ability to evoke the feelings associated with a natural setting (NT-D). Certain advocates of the park even suspect that the office park was built without careful regard for the property line.

In 1983, Prospect Hill Executive Office Park Developer, Arthur Nelson, proposed a major revision to the main park road. If the plan had passed, a large section of the road would have been shifted to the western edge of the park, and instead of solely serving the park, the new road would also provide increased access to the office park. The office park developers went to the trouble of distributing fliers, in their effort to convince the people of the neighborhood that this was a benefit. Proponents of the road revision claimed that it would relieve traffic

¹⁰ *A Master Plan For the Restoration and Improvement of Prospect Hill Park*, prepared for the City of Waltham by the Walker-Kluesing Design Group, 1997, p. 61.

congestion in the area, and without costing the city a penny. The developer would pay for it, and even donate \$150,000 in snowmaking equipment and other improvements to the ski area. The flier even included a misleading map which claimed "3.5 acres reclaimed for park use".¹¹ The land indicated was already a part of the park. Fortunately, this campaign was not successful. The residents of the park's neighborhood were able to see this for the terrible idea that it was and led efforts to reject the proposal, thus preventing a large piece of park land from becoming just another street. Their success may have paved the way for later community action that would revive the park.

Dumping and Destruction

While illegal dumping is not new to the park, it has certainly increased in recent years, as waste disposal regulations have become increasingly strict. According to the master plan, 181 separate dumping sites were found in the park—all in the Winter of 1993. The dumping does not appear to be systematic. Instead it appears to be perpetrated by individuals who wish to dispose of home improvement materials, or other items that can not be disposed of in regular curbside pickup. The dumping sites are usually found in portions of the park that are not visible from the most heavily used areas. The locations of the dump sites suggest that the people using the park as a waste disposal site are making an effort to avoid notice, something that is easier when the park is not in use. For this reason, the city has been keeping the all park gates closed at night and during the Winter. (People can still enter the park on foot when the gates are closed, but the illegal dumping is done by car.) Unfortunately, this practice has not been sufficient to prevent a substantial amount of dumping.

Other destructive uses have included vandalism, the use of off-road mountain bikes, and the driving of cars off the trails.

The City's Conflicting Interests

The City of Waltham has at times faced needs and budget constraints that have led to misuse of park land by the city itself.

¹¹ "Your Yes Vote on Referendum 1 is Worth \$500,000", a flier paid for by the Neighbors to Improve the Prospect Hill Park Area.

Water Towers

The most dramatic intrusion on the park's land was constructed in 1974, when the Waltham Public Works Department built two huge water tanks near the summit of Big Prospect. The reason for this imposition becomes apparent with an understanding of how water towers function.

By creating a large water supply that only depends on gravity, rather than direct pumping, a municipality can save a great deal of money on water pumping costs. Instead of selecting pumps for peak demand, the city may choose much smaller and less expensive pumps which meet only average demand. Water will be used up at a high rate at certain times of day, and the volume lost from the tank can be made up overnight when demand for water is extremely low. In addition, a water storage tank can continue to supply water even when power failure prevents the pumps from running.

In order to create the necessary amount of pressure within a municipal water system, the tanks must be high above all water consumers. With each vertical foot creating 0.43 PSI (pounds per square inch) of pressure, a water storage tank must be 116 to 232 feet above the user so as to provide the typical 50 to 100 PSI aimed for by most municipal water systems.

The large water tanks in Prospect Hill Park can store eight million gallons of municipal drinking water (NT-E), and their location near the top of Big Prospect guarantees that the city will not have any areas of low pressure. This water comes from the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA), which supplies water from the Quabbin and Wachusett reservoirs to many area communities. In 2002, the MWRA supplied Waltham with an average of 7.665 million gallons of water per day. This means that the large tanks on Prospect Hill would be able to supply the entire city with water for about a day even if a power failure shuts down the pumps.

It is clear that the city needed large water tanks, but did they have to build them in the park? The alternatives to building in the park would have been either the creation of large water towers, and/or locating the tanks on other (mostly privately owned) peaks within Waltham. Either of these options would certainly have cost the city significantly more money. Furthermore, the city may have felt that the chosen site was not significant to park users, since, at the time, the peak of Big Prospect was already occupied by the Air Force research station

(described below). In addition, the tanks covered over the gravel pit that had been opened on that site in 1917.

Parks often contain natural (or naturalistic) reservoirs (such as the reservoir in the Middlesex Fells Reservation), but these are being phased out by the MWRA in favor of closed storage tanks similar to those in Waltham. Unfortunately, large tanks such as these have a very different effect on the landscape. Prospect Hill's tanks are a massive blemish on the landscape. They do not fit the naturalistic setting of the park, the road up to the summit of Big Prospect passes between them, and no amount of clever plantings can obscure them from view. It is particularly disturbing to discover that the city did not obtain an easement for non-park uses, so the city did not get permission from itself to build the tanks.

Radar and Radio In the Park

Another of the city's conflicting interests has a longer history within the park. The use of radar and radio in the park is connected to the story of the fire towers. The first fire tower was built by the state in 1917, as part of the state-wide forest fire protection system created with the Office of State Fire Warden in 1911. This tower was constructed of steel, and situated at the top of Big Prospect. It stood 60 feet above the hill, and was initially open to the public. When used in association with other towers, it could help to triangulate the location of forest fires in the area.

The first radio site in the Park was also on top of Big Prospect. It was a small block building built by Sarducci Construction Co. when they were working on the construction of Route 128.

In 1951, the City of Waltham leased the top of Big Prospect to the United States Air Force for "observation and Radar experimental purposes"¹². The following year, the Air Force constructed a 1½ story research building on the peak.

The Air Force selected this location because it was the highest point near Hanscom Air Force Base. The City of Waltham agreed, probably because of the revenue the lease would generate. In addition, the city may have felt it justified by the declining public interest in the park at the time. However, it was the Park Commission's intention that the military site would not significantly restrict access to Big Prospect.

¹² *A Master Plan For the Restoration and Improvement of Prospect Hill Park*, prepared for the City of Waltham by the Walker-Kluesing Design Group, 1997, p. 60.

The main road began to suffer from heavy traffic due to the radar station. The rent for the radar station site went up in 1962 because of road repair costs.

Circa 1963, the Air Force added a large antenna to their facilities. This antenna included a 30 foot wide parabolic reflector dish that sat atop a 40 foot high tower. It was used to monitor radio emissions from the sun. This would allow the Air Force to study sunspot activity and solar storms which can be dangerous both to aircraft and space vehicles.

Neither the original radio site, nor the state fire tower was compatible with the military facilities. As a result, the original fire tower was torn down, and a new one was assembled on Little Prospect in 1963. This tower was similar to the original, and was initially used in the same manner. However, this fire tower also became the new radio site for the city and later the Waltham Amateur Radio Association (WARA). Once the fire tower became home to radio repeaters, it had to be closed to the public. Furthermore, a fire set by a group of youths burned the top of the tower, and rendered the entire structure hazardous.

In 1997, as the city was beginning to make a commitment to the revitalization of Prospect Hill Park (see the master plan discussion below), the Air Force vacated the site. By this time, the site had been contaminated by lead, asbestos, semivolatile organic compounds and various hydrocarbons. From 2000 to 2001, a contractor for the Air Force removed most of the structures and replaced the contaminated soil. The one structure that remained was the 40 foot tower that had supported the 30 foot parabolic antenna. Although the 1997 master plan for the park (discussed below) had included the removal of all radio sites in the park, individuals with an interest in continued use of radio in the park had acted to maintain the radio tower.

By this time the Waltham Amateur Radio Association (WARA), like the city, had maintained their own radio equipment on the Little Prospect fire tower for about 30 years. The fire tower had become unstable and dangerous, and thus was clearly not a suitable location for long term radio operations. Prospect Hill Park however, remained an ideal location. This type of radio transmission requires a line of sight for effective transmission. If the radio equipment were relocated to another area of the city, Prospect Hill itself could block communications. For this reason, Andrew Donovan, Clerk and Treasurer for the WARA, contacted Waltham Mayor David F. Gately, with a proposal to move all of the radio equipment from the fire tower to the Air Force radio tower. Because of the practicality of this proposal, Mayor Gately agreed, and the radio

equipment was moved from Little to Big Prospect on March 9, 2002. At that time, 16 antennas were installed. They serve the Fire, Police, Public Works, and the Parks and Recreation Departments of the City of Waltham, as well as the Massachusetts Army National Guard, the Civil Air Patrol, The Waltham Amateur Radio Association, and Nstar. As a public utility (and provider of free electricity to the radio tower), Nstar is the only commercial use that has been allowed. According to Mr. Donovan, the tower does not have room for any additional equipment.

This turn of events was a blow to the park's advocates who had worked hard to create a master plan. They felt that the original intent of the park did not include this type of structure. Ideally, the top of Big Prospect would never have been leased to the Air Force, which would have meant that the peak would have remained an attraction through the years. However, at this point, the radio tower is a part of the history of the park, and is still in use by the city. It may not be attractive or open to the public, but its usefulness is significant enough that it is not likely to go anywhere.

IV. Renewal

The Advocacy Group

Although it was her neighbors that banded together to fight the 1983 proposed roadway changes, the story of the Park's renewal begins with Gloria Champion, a community resident who moved to the neighborhood in the early 1980's. In 1988, she led a park cleanup project for a group of cub scouts, but was disappointed to discover that there was no Park and Recreation Department framework for doing more. In February of 1992, she found three campsites where homeless people were living. The homeless residents of these campsites were storing flammables such as lighter fluid, thus posing a fire hazard. In addition, she felt that the park was in lousy condition, and most of her friends didn't feel safe there alone. These circumstances prompted her to start a fight on the park's behalf.

Along with some friends, she formed the Prospect Hill Park Advocacy Group. The group's first meeting was on June 10, 1992. The group's goals were to increase public awareness of and interest in the park, and lobby for a master plan. The group was formed in time to

promote the park's 1993 centennial celebration. In Gloria's own words, "Our purpose is to be advocates for the park as opposed to exploiting it. It's kind of a lofty idea, but we're looking as the big picture".¹³

The advocacy group is interested not only in protecting the park and improving its condition for its human users, but also in making sure that the park's natural resources, with its flora and fauna, are protected. The park is home to linear-leaved milkweed, and long-leaved bluet, which are both Threatened species, and sandplain flax, a Special Concern species, according to the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act. In addition, the park contains vernal pools and upland habitats which are essential to the survival of several amphibian species.

While the group still has work to do, continuing to promote the park by sponsoring events such as clean-ups and nature walks, its success is evident in the creation and subsequent implementation (of Phase I) of the master plan.

The story of the advocacy group and its success leaves one with a few questions. How bad did conditions in the park have to get before someone took action? Would the master plan have ever been funded without Gloria Champion's leadership? Was it important that it was near the park's centennial, or would it have gotten funding if the right person had acted 20 years earlier?

The Master Plan

Led by Gloria Champion, the advocacy group pressured Mayor William Stanley to include funding for a master plan in the city's budget. It helped their cause that illegal dumping in the park had been an issue in the last mayorial elections. "Brasco charged the incumbent with ignoring the natural resource by allowing illegal dumping at the park. Brasco said he is pleased to know that the attention he focused on Prospect Hill has brought results from Stanley."¹⁴

In 1997, *A Master Plan For the Restoration and Improvement of Prospect Hill Park*, prepared for the City of Waltham by the Walker-Kluesing Design Group was complete. It summarized the park's history, and outlined a ten phase plan to improve the park's condition and encourage appropriate use. The phases follow a logical progression from enhancing the park's

¹³ Moroney, John, "Prospects for a City Treasure: Group Fights to Save Prospect Hill From Vandalism, Neglect", *The Daily News Tribune*, April 16, 1993.

¹⁴ Ibid.

prime assets, through resolution of public safety issues, use and resource enhancements, and concluding with possible ski slope restoration.

As outlined in the master plan, the phases are as follows:

- Phase I: Restoration and Enhancement of the Prime Assets of the Park
- Phase II: Resolution of Public Safety Issues
- Phase III: Use Enhancement of the Park
- Phase IV: Resource Enhancement
- Phase V: Improved Control of Park Perimeter
- Phase VI: Initial Steps in the Reclamation of the North end of the Park
- Phase VII: Recreation Facilities Improvements at the North end of the Park
- Phase VIII: Resolution of Public Safety Issues
- Phase IX: Parking and Maintenance Improvements at the North end of the Park
- Phase X: Road Improvement and Ski Slope Restoration

In order to fund Phase I, the city applied for an Urban Self Help Grant from the Division Of Conservation Services. They succeeded in raising state funding to pay for 2/3 of the project, while the city paid for 1/3.

As implemented, the Phase I improvements have already enhanced the park's prime assets. The view from Little Prospect has been cleared, the road has been improved, and accessible parking and paths have been laid down. In April, when the author visited the park, longtime park visitors commented that it was nice to have the newly cleared view.

V. Conclusion: The Future

With Phase I nearing completion, Phase II is in progress. On April 29, 2003 the author attended an open meeting to learn about the proposed implementation of Phase II. In order to fund the second phase, the city once again applied for and received an Urban Self Help Grant. Phase II will involve trail work, including steps, signs, vehicle blocks, and a trail map. In addition, historic boy-scout lean-tos will be rehabilitated, and a small, aging water tank will be removed.

The Prospect Hill Park Advocacy Group has clearly succeeded in improving the condition of the park, and prospects for the park's future continue to look good. However, some questions remain.

Will funding continue? Due to the current state budget crisis, the Urban Self Help Grants have had drastic budget cuts. Some of the communities that were awarded the grants will not

receive their funds for an additional year. Will the grant program still be there when the city applies to fund its next phase? If funding is available only in the short term, should some phases of the master plan be sacrificed for the sake of others?

Will physical improvements reduce abuse? Advocates believe that an increase in legitimate uses, which are encouraged by physical improvements, will lead to a reduction in abuses such as vandalism and illegal dumping. So far, dumping and vandalism are still issues, but not much time has passed since the implementation of Phase I began.

A final question: What happens after Phase 10? With any luck, the City of Waltham will have learned from past mistakes, and will maintain the park with a high standard of care, perhaps even funding a new master plan, so that the park will flourish for the next hundred years.

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Other:

In-person and telephone interviews with Gloria Champion, Founder, Prospect Hill Park Advocacy Group.

In-person and telephone interviews with Andrew Donovan, Clerk and Treasurer, Waltham Amateur Radio Association.

E-mail correspondence between the author and James E. Finlay, Assistant Clerk, Waltham Amateur Radio Association.

E-mail correspondence between the author and Otho Kerr, United States Air Force, Retired.