

State of Vermont**Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation**

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Lowell Lake State Park Master Planning Process Summary

The Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation (FPR) committed to developing a Master Plan for a portion of Lowell Lake State Park to thoroughly study current levels of recreational use and existing infrastructure conditions while identifying responsible and sustainable changes and improvements.

In summer 2018, FPR issued an RFP for master planning services for Lowell Lake State Park and selected the SE Group of Burlington, Vermont, for this project. The master planning project includes assessment, conceptual design, and final design. There is opportunity for public input built into all phases.

On December 10, 2018, FPR held a public input meeting to introduce the master planning process and provide an overview of the assessment work done to date. The purpose of the meeting was to continue the process of collecting information from the public, as no conceptual designs have been prepared yet. The focus of the Master Plan is the existing developed portion of the property that includes existing parking, boat launch, interior roadways, gravel surface trails, cabins and support buildings, a log lodge and a few other pieces of infrastructure. This is the same area that has housed a hotel, cabins, and a summer cabin camp at different periods over the last 135-plus years.

FPR and SE Group staff and subconsultants presented an overview the master planning process and initial assessment work that has been completed (fact-finding) with the primary purpose to collect feedback, questions and comments before any conceptual design work begins.

Lowell Lake State Park was acquired in several phases beginning in 1977. The “White Parcel” (the northern half of the park) was acquired with assistance from the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board and the Vermont Land Trust in 1996 after a 12-unit housing development, which received an Act 250 permit in 1986, did not come to fruition.

FPR’s goals for Lowell Lake State Park:

- Develop and improve recreational opportunities while maintaining and protecting infrastructure, historic sites, water bodies, and shorelines.
- Protect and enhance important wildlife habitats and features.
- Produce a diversity of wood products and create forest age class and habitat diversity through sustainable management and harvest practices.
- Protect and improve the condition of important ecological resources.

Goals of the Master Planning Process are:

- Provide for multiple types of outdoor recreation that function together to provide access to trails, waters, and, if feasible, overnight use.
- Maintain and preserve the historical character, rustic nature and low impact feel of the park.
- Abide by all applicable local, state and federal laws, rules and regulations, including but not limited to local zoning, shoreland development, life safety, historic preservation, and health codes.
- Have the park function as a net-zero energy consumer, with structures capable of achieving LEED silver certification, and host renewable energy generation on site.
- Meet Vermont's voluntary Lake Wise program goals.
- Incorporate local building materials into renovations and construction whenever possible.
- Provide high-quality, durable and low maintenance structures.
- Phase any potential design options for funding or other reasons.
- Structures will blend in with their surroundings.
- Provide facilities that meet requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Natural and forest resource, recreation, lake and historic preservation assessments were completed during preliminary planning work. Carrying capacity, site, facility, financial feasibility and accessibility assessments are being conducted now. Once the master planning process is complete, additional natural resource assessment work will be conducted based on specific elements before eventual implementation.

Throughout FPR's management of the park, there has been support and opposition for moving forward with the stated goals. Goals have been adjusted based on public comment over the last 22 years; Master Planning is being undertaken now to more carefully and thoroughly study and define any potential improvements.

There are many realities and responsibilities that make the Master Planning work complex and challenging. These include, but are not limited to:

- Rapidly increasing attendance, and a desire to curb the increase and define limits
- Inadequate parking, stormwater control and visitor comfort facilities for existing uses
- Impacts to natural resources and local infrastructure like roads, on unchecked attendance growth and overnight use
- Deteriorating condition of cabins and support buildings
- Local Zoning
- Potential Act 250 jurisdiction
- State Historic Preservation Act (22 V.S.A. ss 743: this requires state agencies to consult the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation before demolishing, altering or transferring any property potentially of historic significance)
- Protection and access of the town-owned Lowell Lake Cemetery
- Balancing the needs of the state park system to reflect local opposition and support for any changes with statewide responsibilities to provide recreational opportunities
- The State's and community's desire to maintain the unique and rustic character and feel of the park
- Economic feasibility and justification of investing in renovating cabins for overnight use
- The need to improve accessibility of facilities to all visitors



As we move toward the next phase of the Master Planning project and begin defining concepts, balance must be achieved among these factors. We have had open dialog with citizens, committees, boards and elected officials and welcome the opportunity to continue the conversations.

FPR realizes the importance of creating a Master Plan that strikes a balance of providing for the needs of current and future visitors while protecting the ecological integrity of the resources and the unique character of the park while addressing concerns. We appreciate the level of concern expressed thus far and that the dialogue has been professional and considerate.

Separate from the planning process is the need to offset some operational costs of the park. The Vermont State Park system has long relied heavily on revenue generation to support operations and maintenance to place the least burden on taxpayers of Vermont. There are number of ways to pay for a state park system, and this is the model that Vermont chose decades ago. Standard day fees, which begin at \$4 per adult per day, can be reduced in many ways. For example, an individual annual pass (\$30) allows the passholder unlimited entry to every state park for the entire season. There are other options for reduced, and even free entry. Vermont State Parks provides family passes to every public library in the state that can be checked out and used for no-cost entry. There are other models and ways to offset these fees, such as philanthropic underwriting, donations or town-paid entry which several communities have opted to pursue. We are open to these and other ideas to keep fees affordable for all. The potential for charging entrance fees at Lowell Lake has been publicly discussed for several years to help offset current operating costs. The park currently has approximately \$40,000 in annual operating expenses at recent attendance levels.

For more information, please contact:



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