

Soule Park Management Plan



Freeport Conservation Commission

Approved by Freeport Town Council, February 5, 2008

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Illustration:

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Appendix: (not included in draft)

A.	2006 Aerial of Soule Park
B.	2006 Boundary Survey
C.	Soule Park Conservation Easement

Purpose of the Plan

The Conservation Commission is charged with managing and maintaining Soule Park, consistent with the Soule Park Management Plan, for the Town of Freeport. The Conservation Commission reviews its management plan periodically and recommends any changes to the Freeport Town Council.

A draft of this plan was approved by the Conservation Commission and submitted to the Freeport Town Council for a public hearing and amendments or approval on February 5, 2008. This plan, approved by the Town Council on February 5, 2008, is the final result and replaces any previous management plans.

The Soule Park Management Plan includes background information, a description of the natural and cultural resources of the property, rules for the use of the property, and future management recommendations.

Overview

Soule Park is a small, primarily wooded neighborhood park permanently protected under a conservation easement held by the Freeport Conservation Trust. The park is a part of a larger lot of land which was given by George C. and Mildred L. Soule to the inhabitants of the Town of Freeport in 1954.

Consistent with the Soule Park Conservation Easement, the Conservation Commission will maintain Soule Park as open space with low impact recreational use, continuing to make it available to the Inhabitants of the Town of Freeport. The management objectives for the property, according to the easement, are to:

- protect the property in a natural, scenic, open and undeveloped condition for public use and enjoyment
- promote the conservation of the existing wetlands and natural watercourses
- allow construction and maintenance of unpaved pathways for low-impact recreational use and nature observation, and
- maintain the portion of the park adjacent to South Freeport Road as a public gathering place in a park-like setting.

Soule Park is located in South Freeport, a historic residential area of Freeport which dates back to the early 1800s. The Soule Park is a focal point of the Village of South Freeport, which is part of the Harraseeket River Historic District listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

This management plan has been developed with respect to the ecology of the site, historic use, neighborhood and public input, the Soule Park Conservation Easement, the Conservation Commission ordinance, the Freeport Comprehensive Plan, and the Freeport Open Space and Public Access Plan.

Location of the Site

The original Soule School Property is a rectangular 2.87 acre parcel of land bounded on the northwest by South Freeport Road, on the northeast by a right-of-way between South Freeport Road and Middle Street, on the southeast by several house lots, and on the southwest by additional house lots. Soule Park is a section of that property (see aerial photograph below).

The shape of Soule Park is irregular, an approximate “C” shape, enclosing the School Area and the Public Parking Area which have been reserved by the Town from the original Soule School Property.

The front part of the park is rectangular in shape. It extends for approximately 120 feet along South Freeport Road and is approximately 70 feet deep. It is primarily open lawn, with young trees at the northwest corner and larger trees along the southwestern property line.

The rear part of the park is also rectangular in shape, about 250 feet wide and 300 feet deep. It consists of forest which has been allowed to grow with little interference in formerly cleared pastureland.

The front part is connected to the rear part by a corridor of land along the southwest boundary of the property. This corridor is about 40 feet wide and 180 feet long. It is primarily wooded and includes large mature trees along the property line.

Soule Park is highly visible, as it is right next to South Freeport Road, a major local connector between U.S. Route One, the town harbor and downtown Freeport. A local church, day care center, store and post office are adjacent to it. The Public Parking Area is available for public parking.



2006 Aerial Photograph of Soule Park, South Freeport, Maine. Boundaries are approximate.

Management History

George C. and Mildred L. Soule gave a 2.87 acre lot of land in South Freeport to the Inhabitants of the Town of Freeport in 1954. The Town built the George C. Soule School on the land and opened it to elementary students in 1955. The school served as part of the town public school system until 1991, when students were moved to the consolidated Mast Landing School.

The Town then agreed to lease the building to a private school, which used the property until September 2003. During that time, the Town allowed public parking during the summer months on the small, gravel parking area associated with the school.

Beginning in 2002, the Town, working primarily through its Municipal Facilities Committee, held

public meetings and hearings on the future use of the Soule School Property, and voted in February 2005 to allow the following uses of the town-owned property. All three areas are collectively referred to as the Soule School Property:

1. The school, playground, and a limited parking area in front of the building would be leased for use as an elementary school (called the “school area”).
2. The graveled area along the northeast side of the property would be used by the town as a public parking area, with capacity for up to 24 non-commercial vehicles (called the “public parking area”).
3. A public park would be created from the remainder of the property (called “Soule Park”). The park would include land adjacent to South Freeport Road, land along the southwest side of the property, the wooded area comprising the southern end of the property. The Town Council directed that a conservation easement be placed on Soule Park, ensuring that the property would remain as open public space under town ownership. The rectangular area adjacent to the public parking area would not be included in the easement. This area would be available in the future for another permitted town use, or could be made a permanent part of Soule Park.

The Soule Park Conservation Easement (attached) was approved Oct. 3, 2006. A boundary survey completed by Owen Haskell, Inc. in 2006 delineates the boundaries between the three separate town uses of the Soule School Property, as well as the boundaries between the Soule School Property and its abutters. The boundary survey is recorded with the Soule Park Conservation Easement in the Cumberland County Registry of Deeds and is attached to this management plan.

The Freeport Town Council also voted that if the town should decide to tear down the school building, the School Area would become a part of the Soule Park, and either permanently protected under a conservation easement, or converted into another permitted town use. This preserves the options open for appropriate town use of the land which the Soules gave to the inhabitants of the town.

Current and Historic Uses

The land which comprises the Soule School Property (the School Area, the Public Parking Area and the Soule Park) was not built on until the current school building was constructed in 1954. Early maps of the Village of South Freeport dated 1857 and 1871 show that the land was vacant. The land was part of the holdings of Charles Bliss and then George Washington Soule, who lived in the Greek Revival home which still stands at 10 Main Street. The street leading from South Freeport Road to Middle Street, which is now a footpath, shows clearly as the eastern boundary of the property. A photograph of the village, taken in the early 1900s, shows that practically the whole village was open land. There were very few trees, and each house lot was bounded by fences. Photographs from the 1910s and 1920s, taken of the electric street railway and Casco Castle Hotel, also show a lack of trees. An aerial photograph of the Village of South Freeport, taken April 16, 1953, shows a few shrubs and small trees growing in four drainage ditches which run north/south through the property, parallel with the footpath. This land cover is consistent with an old field habitat marking the end of its pastoral use.

The land may have been used as pasture or garden land, or it may have been left fallow. The whole area is generally flat and wet, and would not have been suitable for construction. The woods which cover much of the site today are relatively recent and appear to have grown up naturally since the mid 1900s.

George C. Soule was a member of the Soule family, which came to the Freeport area in the 1700s. George and his wife, Mildred L. Soule, made a gift of the land to the Inhabitants of the Town of Freeport in 1954. It was the intent of the Soules to provide land for a village school. The George C. Soule School, a one story brick structure with five sides and a flat roof, was constructed and opened in 1955.

The land adjacent to the east side of the school was filled to provide a more level area for parking. Additional gravel and sand fill were added in the early 1990s to extend the parking area slightly further to the south.

The Soule School Property received intensive use from the time the school was built. A playground on the west side was used constantly during the school day, and by a local daycare and neighborhood children after school hours and during the summer. Students played in the wooded area nearest the school. Neighborhood children made use of the woods during afternoons, weekends and summers.

The town made the school parking area available for use during the summer beginning around 1990. The parking area is used year round, with heaviest use on holiday weekends.

Natural and Cultural Resources

Below is a summary of the Soule Park resources. Because the Soule School Property has undergone many alterations since 1954, as playgrounds and parking areas have been created and modified, the inventory includes materials which are not native to the site. The Conservation Commission may conduct further inventories of the Soule Park in the future as time permits.

Soils

According to soil mapping published by the United States Department of Agriculture – Soil Conservation Service (USDA-SCS), soils within this site are primarily made up of Belgrade and Walpole soil series. The Belgrade soil (BgB) is very fine sandy loam with 0-8% slopes and is moderately well drained. The Walpole soil (Wa) is fine sandy loam and is poorly drained.

Topography

Overall, Soule Park slopes very gradually to a brook which runs across its southern end. The front part of the park is essentially flat. The corridor includes a slight depression which runs in a southeasterly direction along the southwestern boundary. The rear part, the woods, slopes gradually to the southeast. Another slight depression crosses diagonally near the midpoint and runs toward the south toward the brook. Just before the southeastern boundary, the rear part drops abruptly about 20 feet to the brook, then rises again, forming the bankings of the brook. Along the northeastern boundary of the woods, a slight ditch runs parallel with the adjacent path and then into the brook at the southern corner of the property.

Hydrology

The ditch which runs along the northeastern boundary is usually wet with an intermittent flow of water in the spring and after heavy rains. The depression which runs along the southwestern boundary is usually damp. The brook, which is located along the southern boundary of the park, runs during the winter and spring and during heavy rains. The brook runs under Park Street, into Spar Cove and Casco Bay.

Forest and land cover

The front part of the park, near South Freeport Road, consists of lawn and sandy soil. Mature

trees are growing near the corner of the northern boundary and along the southwestern boundary adjacent to the two neighboring house lots. The dominant trees are: red oak (*Quercus rubra*), white ash (*Fraxinus americana*), red maple (*Acer rubrum*) and sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*). Also present are white birch (*Betula papyrifera*), hophornbeam or ironwood (*Ostrya virginiana*), black cherry (*Prunus serotina*), white pine (*Pinus strobes*) and American elm (*Ulmus americana*).

The corridor supports additional mature trees, primarily red oak, white ash and red maple. One double trunked oak is particularly large. Also present are white pine, sugar maple, hophornbeam and Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*). Blackberries grow near the depression, and there is some light undergrowth, although much of the shaded ground is bare.

As noted in the Current and Historic Use section above, the rear section of the park has grown up in mixed forest during the last 50 years. The dominant trees are red oak, red maple, white ash and white pine. Also present are white birch, gray birch (*Betula populafolia*), white cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*), sugar maple, balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*), horse chestnut (*Aesculus spp.*), and apple (*Malus spp.*). Please see also the Invasive Species section below.

Wildlife habitat

The property includes several moist areas which provide seasonal habitat similar to vernal pools. Peepers have been heard in the spring and spotted salamanders have been observed nearby.

As the largest block of undeveloped land within the village, the property provides valuable habitat for local birds and animals. Also, the land is adjacent to the large amount of undeveloped land along the shores of Spar Cove. The land along the brook which flows out of the park forms part of a wildlife corridor, separated only by Park Street. Fox and deer have been observed in the park. The land also provides range and nesting space for various bird species, including pileated woodpeckers.

Invasive species

Three species considered highly invasive are present on the property. As noted in the management section, all of these species should be removed from the property, according to recommendations published by the agricultural extension office:

- multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*)
- Japanese knotweed (*Polygonum cuspidatum*)
- Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*)

Additional problem plants are also present:

- goutweed (*Aegopodium podagraria*)
- burdocks (*Arctium lappa*)

Cultural and historic features

The front area of Soule Park includes a perennial bed along its eastern boundary. The garden is the latest of several planted by schoolchildren over the years. Parts of the front area, the corridor and the woods, the edges adjacent to the playground, have been worn almost bare by children overflowing the playground. The woods are crisscrossed with narrow footpaths worn by playing schoolchildren and people taking shortcuts through the woods to the path which runs from Middle Street to South Freeport Road.

The gravel parking area was leveled and filled around 1990 and again in 2005, when the cedar

fence was installed along the eastern and southern boundaries and boulders were placed at the southern edge of the area.

At the easternmost corner of the property, there is a retaining wall of granite blocks surrounding the metal culvert through which the brook flows. Across the brook, along the southeastern boundary on the banking sloping down to the brook, there are glass and metal items which were probably part of old dumps behind the residences on Middle Street.

Existing site amenities

The town installed a flat wooden bridge over the drainage ditch which runs beside the path, just after the rear end of the parking area. Wood and wire fencing runs along part of the northern boundary beside South Freeport Road.

Management of Soule Park

The Town of Freeport Conservation Commission ordinance, Section 35-8, assigns the Conservation Commission responsibility for the ongoing management of the Hedgehog Mountain property. The Commission recommends that a similar section be added to the ordinance to assign the Commission responsibility for the ongoing management of Soule Park. Through periodic updates of the Soule Park Management Plan, the Conservation Commission will recommend to the Town Council administrative policies including, but not limited to, land use, rules for the public use of the property, use of dedicated funds for the property, and annual budgets. The Commission encourages the involvement of the community and neighborhood organizations to help maintain and improve Soule Park. Outlined below are the goals, rules, and future management actions for Soule Park.

Goals

Soule Park will be managed as a community park, used for low impact recreation appropriate to a residential neighborhood, offering an opportunity for people to come together and share a quiet natural area.

The management of Soule Park is supported by the objectives of the Open Space and Public Access Plan “to provide trails and natural areas for public enjoyment, conserve scenic views and landscapes, and to create a pleasing and vital open space system,” and “to encourage neighborhood groups ... to adopt trails and public use areas and take responsibility for their oversight and maintenance.”

The Soule Park Conservation Easement (attached), granted by the town to the Freeport Conservation Trust, protects the property in a natural, scenic, and undeveloped condition for low-impact recreational use and nature observation, and maintains the portion of the property near South Freeport Road for use as a public gathering place in a park-like setting. The easement reserves the following rights, among other (to the extent not otherwise restricted):

- The right to construct, maintain, and use fences, benches, trails, and signs
- The right to manage trees for trail maintenance
- The right to manage the vegetation to promote the health of the property consistent with its management plan, provided that the property be maintained in a natural, undeveloped state
- The right to allow the use of motorized vehicles for approved maintenance, emergency vehicles, and motorized wheelchairs.
- The right to permit the use of the property for supported or sponsored recreational activities by community organizations or charities, and
- The right to establish management regulations consistent with this easement.

The easement contains the following use restrictions, among others:

- no residential development or unauthorized improvements;
- no commercial, industrial or mining activities;
- no hunting, trapping, camping, or fires
- no placement, collection or storage of trash, junk, waste or other unsightly material
- no use or activity that is inconsistent with the protection of the scenic, recreational, educational and natural habitat values of the property, and
- any use on the property that significantly interferes with the property's natural resources or public access for tradition recreational uses and nature observation

Rules

The following rules will apply to the Soule Park:

1. The property is intended for day use only.
2. Camping and fires are not allowed.
3. All garbage, trash, waste and dog waste must be carried off the property.
4. Alcoholic beverages are not allowed.
5. Motorized vehicles are prohibited, except those used for approved maintenance.
6. Dogs are allowed but must be on leash.

Management actions

The following actions will govern the future management of the Soule Park:

1. Amend the Conservation Commission ordinance to assign the Conservation Commission responsibility for the ongoing management of Soule Park.
2. Plan and maintain paths and trails to minimize erosion and avoid wetlands.
3. Preserve the natural character of the woods which comprise the southern half of the Soule Park. Enhance wildlife habitat and forest health through sustainable forestry practices.
4. Eliminate invasive plant species and prevent introduction of invasive plants by implementing control techniques.
5. Allow for effective, natural drainage of the land within the Park. Minimize impermeable paving and surfaces.
6. Develop a signage system, including a welcome/identification sign, trail signage, park rules, and boundary markers.
7. Involve local residents and neighbors in the management, care and maintenance of the Soule Park.
8. Make as much of the Soule Park handicapped accessible as practicable.
9. Improvements to the Soule Park must be approved by the Conservation Commission and be in accordance with the conservation easement.

Budget

A Soule Park Account, dedicated solely to the Soule Park, was established in 2005 by the Freeport Community Improvement Association when the park was being created. This account is available to fund construction of, annual maintenance for, and improvements to Soule Park. The Conservation Commission may identify and pursue additional sources of funding.