

Desert of Maine Reference Materials 12.15.20 Town Council Public Hearing

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Desert of Maine

where art and nature come to play



Reimagining a Classic Freeport Destination

Vision for the Future

The Desert of Maine has been an iconic Freeport landmark for over 100 years. While in recent years it has fallen into disrepair, the potential for this extraordinary place is far beyond what it has recently become. As we have learned more about the unique history of the Desert of Maine, its geological past, and the fragile native ecosystems that are thriving on the edges of the sand, we foresee a vibrant gathering place for educators, students, nature lovers, and families—including tourists and locals alike. We also wish to continue the tradition of providing fun, family-friendly activities but in such a way that

lines up thematically to what makes this place truly special. At the center of our vision is the restoration of the historic Tuttle Barn, which has acoustics to match the grandeur and artistry of its 18th century beams, and which will serve as an intimate venue for music and other events.

Inspired by the Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens and arts venues such as Yellow Barn and Stone Mountain Arts Center, we envision creating world class infrastructure, education, and arts programming that will draw visitors from far and wide.

Specifically, our plans for future investments include:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A fully restored, winterized barn to serve as an event and performance venue | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative programs with local arts and nature organizations |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-guided and guided tours for daily visitors with museum-quality signage and expert docents | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A one-of-a-kind outdoor recreation area for children |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecology, geology and history-focused educational programs for children and adults | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fun, family-friendly activities |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A fully modernized campground with eco-friendly, elegant turnkey shelters for campers |

With this enhanced infrastructure and programming, the Desert of Maine will add to Freeport’s rich cultural fabric as a destination and an enticing place to call home.

Education

We are developing immersive, integrated, and collaborative learning experiences that promote curiosity and inquiry-based study in the areas of geology, ecology, and history. We are especially interested in helping children find their innate connection with nature. In the words of Richard Louv, “passion is lifted from the earth itself by the muddy hands of the young; it travels along grass-stained sleeves to the heart. If we are going to save environmentalism and the environment, we must also save an endangered indicator species: the child in nature.”

Geology

What we know about the Desert of Maine is overshadowed by what we have yet to learn. We are working with geologist, Josh Smith PhD, who specializes in the glacial era when the dunes were first formed and Professor Emeritus, Roger Hooke PhD, whose area of expertise will help us understand the ongoing changes to the desert landscape. These findings will provide the basis for our geology programming.

Ecology

The landscape that encompasses the dunes, the surrounding forest, and boggy areas adjacent to the dunes may be known for the ecological devastation that occurred when the topsoil eroded in the 1800's, but that is not the full story. The Desert is also a place that demonstrates remarkable resilience, especially on the edges where native ecosystems have popped up and a variety of wildlife species have found a home. Well-known ecologist Tom Wessels and Staff Ecologist at the Desert of Maine, Deborah Perkins, have noted that the Desert of Maine is an ideal place to study ecological succession and reforestation. Far from being a wasteland, the Desert of Maine is a living testament to the ability of nature to heal and thrive once again.

History

The history of the Desert of Maine spans millennia and includes the Maine Wabanaki people, the Tuttle farm family of the 19th century, and the early 20th century entrepreneurs of Freeport's tourist industry. These stories of struggle, resourcefulness, and resilience are quintessential Maine stories. They are the kind of stories that help us understand why people made the difficult decisions that created the world we live in today. They are also the stories that will clarify the choices that help define our future.

Arts Programming

Art and education are the common threads that unite all of our hopes and ambitions for the Desert of Maine. We are, at our core, an arts and education-based organization. We plan to provide rich arts programming, and we hope to become a place of opportunity for local musicians, singers, visual artists, and sculptors to share their work and inspire our visitors.

Music

Maine is rich in talented musicians, and we hope to connect them with broader audiences through a year-round classical and folk concert series. Working collaboratively with other local arts organizations, we will embrace a spirit of community-centeredness, accessibility, and artistic rigor. To complement the performance series, we also hope to host visiting musicians-in-residence who would benefit creatively from the experience of setting aside time for their art and who would teach local youth and adults as part of their residency.

Visual Arts and Crafts

In addition to music at the Desert of Maine, we have designated part of our visitors center as a gallery and retail space for local visual artists, and makers of fine arts and crafts. We believe that our local artists would benefit from a high profile location to exhibit and sell their work. Visual artists will also have the opportunity to participate in our teaching artist-in-residency programs.

Sculpture

The rolling sand dunes are a perfect backdrop for local sculptors to showcase their work. We envision beautiful sculptures at various locations throughout the self-guided tour to bring another dimension to the rich history and science elements already present.

Our end goal is to create an arts center that will simultaneously serve visitors, artists, and residents of Freeport and one that will work collaboratively with other local arts organizations.

Continuing the Tradition of Fun, Family Friendly Activities

Barn Restoration

New England barns have long been gathering places where local culture has flourished, and we hope to continue the tradition by restoring the Tuttle Barn. This historic structure from the 1700s is framed using old English craft methods and constructed from the trees of Maine's old forests. It is a breathtaking historical structure that must be preserved.

The barn will be restored by Preservation Timber Framing under the expert direction of Arron Sturgis, President of Maine Preservation. Last fall, Arron's team performed a detailed assessment of the Tuttle Barn that was informed by years of experience and in-depth knowledge of historic New England architecture techniques. This assessment will form the basis for a historically authentic and beautiful restoration of the structure. Arron and his team will collaborate with architects and engineers that specialize in historical preservation to ensure the barn meets the highest standards of safety and architectural integrity.

We envision a stage backdropped by a wall of windows and stained glass overlooking the dunes. The will be a balcony which will serve as a meeting place for educational classes and local organizations. The end result will be a safe, accessible, functional, and magnificent structure that will draw visitors to Freeport.



Outdoor Recreation Area for Children

While the Desert of Maine has been drawing thousands of visitors from all over the world for decades, few people from Freeport have had a good reason to go in recent years. We intend to change that. Starting in 2019, we commissioned local artist Steven Smith of Renaissance Timber to design and construct a natural materials playground with a slide, climbing wall, log jumble, see saw, balance beams, cargo net, lookout tower, swings, and a wooden moose climbing sculpture as the centerpiece. The playground area is situated next to where a shaded stone patio will be installed with ample seating for adults to relax as their children play. To realize our vision for the Desert of Maine to be a community gathering place, we have decided to make admission to the playground area and the desert (the world's largest sandbox!) free for residents of Freeport. We are in the planning stages of creating a number of fun, family friendly activities at the Desert to draw visitors and achieve sustainability.



The Desert of Maine Campground

Freeport residents are often unaware that the Desert of Maine also has a campground. In recent years the campground has fallen into disrepair, but in 2019 we began a multi-year renovation effort. The bath house was gutted and re-clad in cedar with modern fixtures. It is now a stunning bath house and virtually every camper comments on how beautiful it is. We reduced the number of campsites from 46 to approximately 28 to give campers more space, and we undertook the daunting task of cleaning up decades of trash and fallen trees from the surrounding woods. We are working with Central Maine Power to bury the electric wires that are currently attached to the trees to improve safety and aesthetics.

Most importantly, we are seeking to update the town campground ordinance to keep pace with industry trends, allowing us to build attractive, turn-key shelters in place of Recreational Vehicle (RV) sites. The shelters we have designed with the help of engineers and architects from Harriman are accessible and appealing to guests.



Addendum

Our team of Historians, Scientists, and Craftsman



With the help of **Holly Hurd** who has been a local historical researcher for over a decade, we have discovered much about the lives of the Tuttle family that farmed on the Desert of Maine land, beginning in 1821. We are still in the process of understanding how they farmed and what led to the erosion of their lands. We are also investigating the fascinating details of the lived experiences of the Tuttle family.



In the summer of 2019, we invited esteemed ecologist, **Tom Wessels**, to do a study of the ecology of the Desert of Maine. Mr. Wessels located several areas that he described as utterly unique and critical to protect. He was especially interested in the spots around the dunes in which co-evolving native species created resilient ecosystems. Tom's findings will be at the center of our educational programs for children, as they reinforce the importance of working with nature and caring for the environment.



Over the past year, we have worked with geologist **Josh Smith** to refine our understanding of when and how the dunes were formed. The various parts of the dunes tell a story how Maine was transformed by the last ice age.



Deborah Perkins, Staff Ecologist at the Desert of Maine, is a wildlife ecologist with over 25 years of experience in her field. Before settling down in her native Maine, she was a field biologist for many years, conducting fieldwork and research on bears, birds, and more—from the remote Arctic to the deserts of New Mexico. Deb has extensive experience in science education and working with youth, and is eager to inspire tomorrow's scientists and problem solvers while exploring the unique ecology at the Desert of Maine.



Roger Hooke, Professor Emeritus at University of Maine, is helping us understand the more recent changes to the dunes.



Arron Sturgis, owner of Preservation Timberframing and President of Maine Preservation, has been instrumental in reconstructing the history of the Tuttle Barn, parts of which date from the late 1700s. Arron's team is planning a full restoration of the barn so it can be preserved for future generations.



Mike Hughes of Hughes Inc. Arbor and Land Management is building a plan to ensure the long-term health and safety of the many trees on the Desert of Maine property.



Chris Toriello of Toriello Construction is the general contractor and visionary behind the structural upgrades of the grounds and buildings at the Desert of Maine. Chris previously served as Executive Director of the Travis Mills Foundation where she led a multi-year renovation of the Elizabeth Arden Estate



Stephen Smith of Renaissance Timber in Freeport, built the one-of-a-kind natural playground and continues to be involved in bringing his authentic style of craftsmanship to man projects at the Desert.

Renovations Completed in 2019

During 2019 and 2020, we completed over \$400,000 in capital improvements to the Desert of Maine. Here is a partial list of the renovations completed:

Safety Improvements

- Demolished maintenance building which had partially collapsed

- Demolished arts & crafts building which was rotting and unsafe

- Removed over two dozen standing dead trees

- Pruned dead limbs from trees in the campground and playground area to improve safety

- Removed damaged above-ground swimming pool

- Fixed numerous electrical safety issues



- Replaced failed plumbing and septic systems

- Removed Visitors Center annex which was partially collapsed

- Shored up parts of the barn where water damage threatened the structural integrity of the roof –full restoration needed as soon as possible

- Cleaned well for the first time in over a decade and upgraded pump

- Replaced aging vehicles

- Replaced railings, ramps, and stairs

Grounds

- Removed fences which blocked the view of the desert from the parking lot
- Removed ten 40-yd dumpsters of trash
- Installed new natural playground
- Removed and composted 25+ dump trailers of fallen trees
- Installed dozens of museum-quality interpretive signs



Interpretive Signs



Morty the Moose

Campground

- Completely renovated the bath house
- Reduced number of sites from 46 to 28 to give each campsite more space
- Demolished pump house building and replaced with a new one
- Increased water pressure available to campsites by a factor of 10



Renovated Bath House

Visitors Center

- Converted upstairs storage area to a beautiful art gallery
- Replaced lighting, doors, flooring, cladding, and more
- Built café area
- Installed two modern, handicap accessible bathrooms with a new septic system
- Installed new metal roof
- Painted exterior and interior
- Restored and refinished 100-year-old wooden floor to reveal old growth fir boards



Planned Renovations for late 2020 and 2021

Pending zoning changes, we are planning to invest over \$2,000,000 in capital improvements for 2020 and 2021



Grounds

- Complete renovation of the parking lot to improve lighting, drainage, traffic flow, and handicap accessibility
- Re-routing of the campground route to create an overflow parking area
- Trail work to improve the accessibility and safety of trails including a series of bridges over the stream behind the dunes
- Landscaping throughout featuring native species
- Partially excavate buried springhouse and build a glass wall so visitors can see the layers of the dunes
- Widen and smooth the loop trail for improved safety
- Sculptures throughout the landscape
- Add a number of educational and family-friendly activities such as a fossil hunt and “Gemstone Village”

Visitors Center

- Wooden ramp and boardwalk from the Visitors Center to the dunes to improve accessibility for visitors with limited mobility
- Solar panels to offset annual energy usage for the campus
- Stone patio and trellis behind near the playground where visitors can eat/drink outside

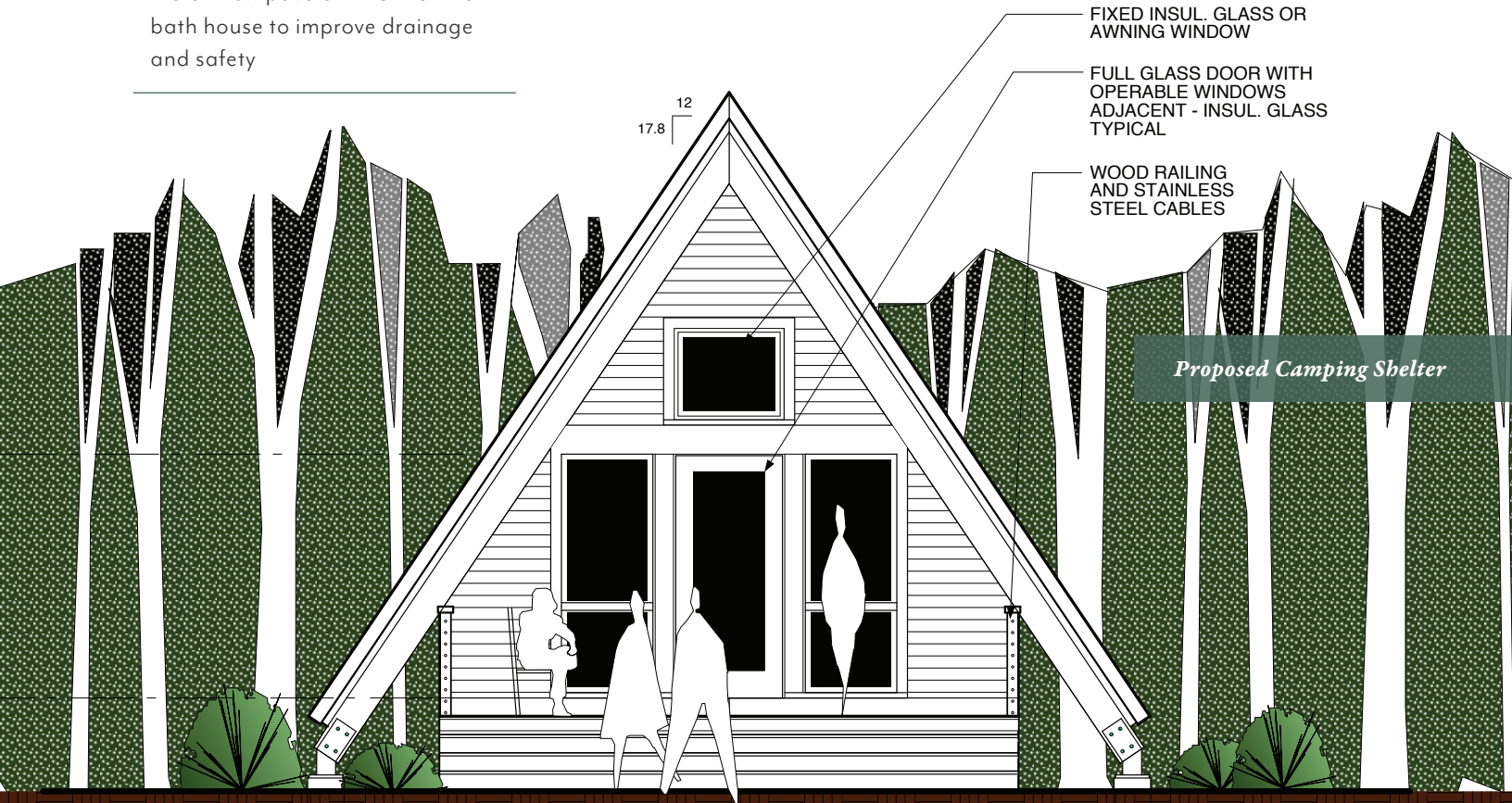


Barn

- Complete restoration by a team including a master timber framer, builders, barn preservation experts, architects, and engineers. Barn will have a stage, balcony, insulation for year-round use, and a basement to store all of the necessary infrastructure such as fire suppression tanks, bathrooms, etc.

Campground

- Bury and upgrade electrical lines which are currently strung along the trees to improve safety
- Build A-Frame shelters to give visitors a turnkey, "comfort camping" option
- Add water and electrical service to several sites
- Create a grassy area in front of the bath house for recreational use
- Install new pavers in front of the bath house to improve drainage and safety



Desert of Maine

where art and nature come to play

95 Desert Road | Freeport, ME 04032 | (207) 850-3025

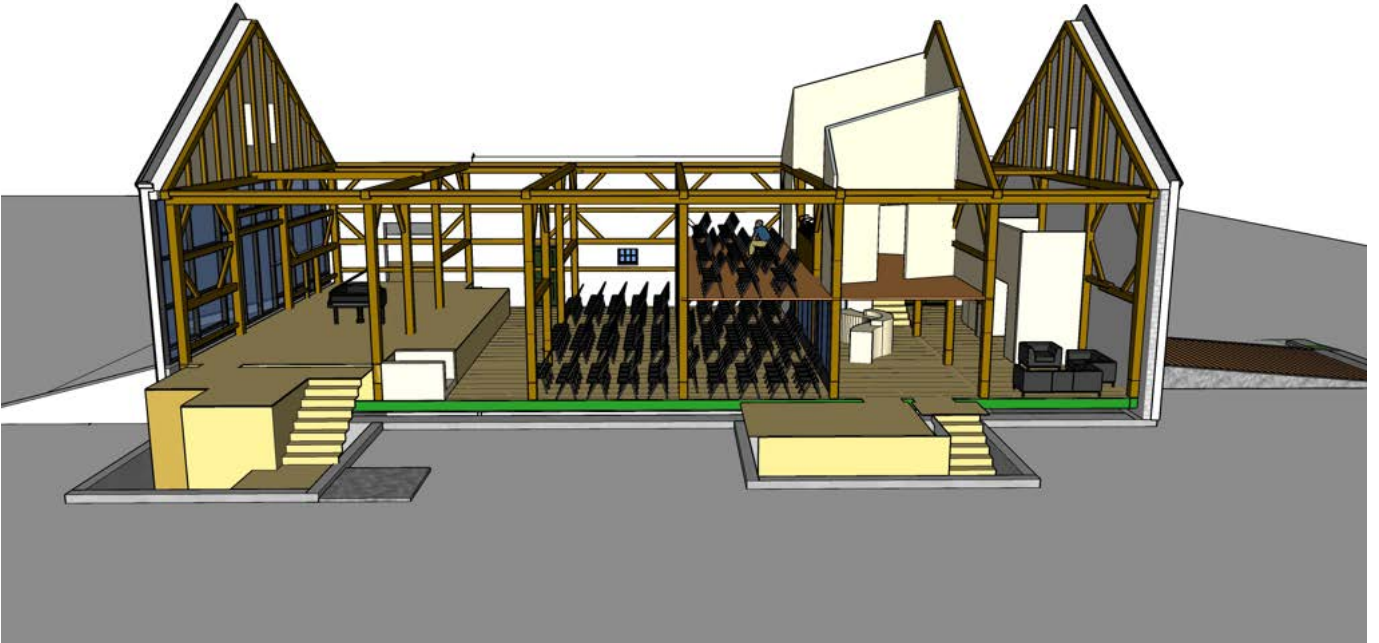
info@desertofmaine.com

Renderings - Tuttle Barn Restoration Exterior



Renderings - Tuttle Barn Restoration

Interior



From: [Stephen Smith](#)
To: [Caroline Pelletier](#)
Subject: Attn: Freeport Town Planning Board; Re: In Support of the Desert of Maine
Date: Friday, October 30, 2020 10:34:20 PM

**** CAUTION EXTERNAL EMAIL ****

Dear Ms. Pelletier and honorable members of the Freeport Planning Board,

My name is Stephen Smith, owner of Renaissance Timber, LLC. For the past two years I have had the pleasure of working with Doug and Mela Heestand as they have begun to transform the Desert of Maine into a true must-see destination for locals and out-of-staters alike.

My perspective is that of a heritage craftsman, a father of young children, and a local resident—but it is also the perspective of someone who has lived and worked for years in Indiana, Texas, and Ohio, and who has seen what other states have to offer in the way of recreation, hospitality, and natural wonders. I love my home state of Maine with a passion, and I want it honored and improved in ways that highlight its natural beauty while providing practical recreation and entertainment opportunities for both locals and folks from away. I believe that Doug and Mela's vision for the Desert of Maine will achieve both of those goals, while meshing seamlessly with the neighborhood fabric of Desert Road and surrounding subdivisions. More, it will create a destination-worthy attraction that will help balance Freeport's retail-heavy Main Street.

A bit of background. Though I grew up locally, my own family had never visited the Desert. There was no reason to. This is saying a lot, because as a kid my own dad took us to pretty much every local park or attraction worth seeing, and now as a father with young children I am always looking for family-friendly activities and have often driven through Freeport to visit the outlet stores. On many occasions I found myself sitting in a store on Main Street trying to entertain my young sons while my wife shopped...and shopped...and shopped. Inevitably I'd take out my phone and let the boys watch a video, all the while wishing that there was something exciting and active in Freeport that I could do with the boys besides shopping.

Doug and Mela Heestand have begun to solve that problem. The Desert of Maine is becoming a place that my own children beg me to take them to. Friends traveling from out of state see pictures of the Desert on my Instagram feed and suddenly want to visit Freeport on their way up to Bar Harbor. Their kids play at the natural playground, check out the dunes, and then the families head into town for a bite to eat and to do a little shopping.

As I worked on the natural playground for the past two summers, dozens of families stopped to tell me that they had never visited the Desert before, and now they didn't want to leave. Children ran squealing happily here and there while parents sat and relaxed. Several dads with kids confided that they were playing at the Desert while their wives shopped in town. Exactly as I would.

More than this, I have seen Doug and Mela's vision for the Desert of Maine grow from a local curiosity to a true destination place that will provide an unequalled combination of natural phenomenon with meticulously-curated activities for families and children. And all done with remarkably good taste and respectful inclusivity.

When I look at Doug and Mela, I see incredibly capable people who have a heart for hospitality and community enrichment. They have worked tirelessly to include neighbors in decision-making, and have sought out experts in fields ranging from hand-hewn timber to geological errata. The Heestand family is part of Maine's bright future, bringing good business sense and artistic design into a landscape that has waited patiently for 10,000 years to be properly appreciated.

I know that with Town Planning Board approval, Doug and Mela's vision for the Desert as a place where art and nature come to play will continue to develop into one of Freeport's crown jewels. If the re-zoning is granted, the Desert will become the perfect complement to the shopping district and waterfront, providing an anchoring inland presence full of art and activities. I lend my full support to this carefully crafted vision as a local businessman, artist, father, and native Maine son.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if I can be of any further assistance.

Very respectfully,

Steve Smith

--

Stephen Smith, Owner
Renaissance Timber, LLC
Hand-Hewn Beams and Live-Edge Cutting Boards.
www.renaissancetimberllc.com
[Facebook](#) [Instagram](#)

207-370-5205 (Google Voice)
278 Tuttle Road
Cumberland, Maine



From: [jonalbertini](#)
To: [Caroline Pelletier](#)
Subject: Support for Desert Zoning Amendment and Overlay
Date: Saturday, October 31, 2020 11:31:07 AM

**** CAUTION EXTERNAL EMAIL ****

Dear Freeport Planning Board Members,

Please find this message confirming our eager support for the Desert of Maine zoning amendment and overlay district. Please recommend this change to the town council.

We support this for a number of reasons. This is a **safe, outdoor experience** that provides memorable recreation during all four seasons. The improvements already made showcase the Heestand family commitment to **preserving the natural environment** while **educating future generations** visiting from near and far.

They have vision for a better place. We used to be embarrassed when describing first what the Desert of Maine was, and second, the condition of its structure and grounds. Now, we're proud to recommend this as a Freeport destination. With these changes, we wouldn't only recommend The Desert of Maine to friends and family, we would actively promote it as an integral component of their Freeport community experience.

Thank you,
Jon and Susan Albertini
55 Dune Drive
Freeport, ME

From: [Mar Fprt](#)
To: [Caroline Pelletier](#)
Subject: Desert of Maine-Freeport Planning Board agenda item
Date: Saturday, October 31, 2020 1:44:38 PM

**** CAUTION EXTERNAL EMAIL ****

We would like to express our strong support for the proposed Desert of Maine project, and sincerely hope that the Planning Board will recommend that the Town Council approve adjustment to zoning regulations as requested by Mr. and Mrs. Heestand.

We have lived in the Desert Pines neighborhood since 1974, and have witnessed the gradual deterioration of the Desert of Maine complex under the various owners during that period. Unlike previous ownership, the current owners have reached out to our and other nearby neighborhoods to both describe their extensive plans for the complex and to request that we feel free to take advantage of the facility once construction is complete. Additionally, given the size of the proposed investment and the quality of the improvements already made, calling this a UNIQUE opportunity for the Town of Freeport would indeed be an understatement. The benefits of having a renewed attraction will undoubtedly lead to increases in business for Freeport retail establishments, restaurants, and other entertainment venues. These opportunities do not often come our way.

Thank you for your consideration.
Marty and Gaye White

From: [Diane Sleek](#)
To: [Caroline Pelletier](#)
Subject: Desert of Maine Planning Board Application
Date: Saturday, October 31, 2020 6:19:21 PM

** CAUTION EXTERNAL EMAIL **

We are writing in support of this application. We received some materials in the mail from the owners. They will obviously be doing a great job. It will be a real asset to Freeport. We live on Evergreen Dr. and see only positives and no negatives.

Diane and Jim Sleek

Sent from my iPhone

From: [Ed Robinson](#)
To: [Caroline Pelletier](#)
Cc: info@desertofmaine.com
Subject: Desert of Maine development plans
Date: Sunday, November 1, 2020 11:24:08 AM

**** CAUTION EXTERNAL EMAIL ****

I am writing in support of the proposed investments by the owners of the Desert of Maine. While I do not reside in Freeport my wife and I visit regularly because our daughter lives in the neighborhood.

Not only is the Desert of Maine a unique geological feature it is also part of an important wildlife habitat area. We enjoy the beautiful trails there and really appreciate the benevolent attitude of the owners in allowing public use of the trails.

The proposed additional investments should add considerable benefits to the town of Freeport in the form of entertainment, culture and dining. I salute the owners for having the courage to make such investments on top of the substantial funds already invested during the uncertain times of this pandemic.

Freeport is a fine town with much to recommend it to residents, neighbors and visitors and I firmly believe that this development of the Desert of Maine will significantly enhance the town.

Thank you,

--

Ed Robinson
Orr's Island, Maine
Cell: +1 207 522 9342
Email: erobin77@gmail.com

From: [michele gilliam](#)
To: [Caroline Pelletier](#)
Subject: Support of the nature-based and art overlay District ordinance amendment
Date: Sunday, November 1, 2020 3:24:23 PM

**** CAUTION EXTERNAL EMAIL ****

Hello Caroline,

I am reaching out to you as our town planner to provide written support of the zoning ordinance and map amendment NBAOD.

I have lived on Desert road for near 20 years and feel that this ordinance and map amendment is a positive move for both the desert community and the town of Freeport. I have seen the desert fall into disrepair, and the increase in RVs in the summer on my road Has both increased traffic and noise in our quiet neighborhood. The movement away from RV campsites to turn key shelters would be a welcome change. In addition the transition to an educational and art focused center creates a positive cultural environment for the community for both adult and youth populations. Please feel free to share my support and endorsement of this ordinance and map amendment at the town planning meeting on Wednesday, November 4th.

I commend Doug and Mila Heestand for their passion and motivation to both engage the community and promote a positive experience for all in this proposal.

Sincerely, Michele Gilliam

From: [Mary Robinson](#)
To: [Caroline Pelletier](#)
Cc: info@desertofmaine.com; [robinson mary](#)
Subject: Desert of Maine Vision for Improvements
Date: Sunday, November 1, 2020 5:58:48 PM

**** CAUTION EXTERNAL EMAIL ****

Dear Town Planners of Freeport,
The new owners of the Desert of Maine have made substantial upgrades to the facility this year - it is fantastic! I was very excited to recently learn of the additional improvements potentially in store for the Desert of Maine.

Freeport has such a wonderful opportunity to become an even better community with such an enhanced resource being offered to the area:

- A fully restored, winterized barn to serve as an event and performance venue
- Self-guided and guided tours for daily visitors with museum-quality signage and expert docents
- Ecology, geology and history-focused educational programs for children and adults
- A one-of-a-kind outdoor recreation area for children
- Fun, family-friendly activities
- A fully modernized campground with eco-friendly, elegant turnkey shelters for campers

Wow - cultural, educational, recreational, and physical plant developments, what a gift to Freeport. I truly support these improvements and hope that the planning board will give the Desert of Maine owners their full backing to go ahead.

I am a resident of Harpswell, but come to Freeport frequently to shop, hike on your trails, go to L L Bean concerts, go to your restaurants and hopefully to go to the Desert of Maine more often once these developments become a reality.

Please make the most of this opportunity that has presented itself to your town for the benefits of both your residents and all your visitors.

Yours,

Mary H Robinson
7 Hamlin Lane
Orrs Island, ME

207-319-5271
mrobinuk7@gmail.com

From: [Gretchen Kruysman](#)
To: [Caroline Pelletier](#)
Subject: Support for Desert of Maine/Nature-based and Art Overlay District
Date: Sunday, November 1, 2020 6:09:46 PM

**** CAUTION EXTERNAL EMAIL ****

Dear Ms. Pelletier,

I am writing to express my support for the zoning application to allow my neighbors, Doug and Mela Heestand, to convert the Desert of Maine into an educational recreation area and musical venue.

I live on Dune Drive and I believe that the Heestand's vision for the Desert of Maine, as evidenced by the tremendous work and investment they've already made, will preserve it's natural beauty and create the kind of community experience that both local residents and visitors will enjoy. I jog the Desert trails regularly and I am very impressed by the educational signs they have put up to help students and visitors understand it's geological history. So much more valuable than digging up plastic trinkets!

They invited us to hear about the barn restoration and their plans to host acoustic musicians. We have no concerns about the noise level or crowds based on their plans. I would much prefer to have an eco-friendly campground there than the RVs coming down Desert Road.

We will be joining the Zoom call to voice our support on Wed evening but wanted to also be on record as well.

Thank you,
Gretchen Kruysman
81 Dune Dr
Freeport
207-239-8616

From: [Laura Lindblom](#)
To: [Caroline Pelletier](#)
Cc: info@desertofmaine.com
Subject: Message of Support for Desert of Maine
Date: Sunday, November 1, 2020 6:49:17 PM

**** CAUTION EXTERNAL EMAIL ****

Good evening Caroline,

I am writing in support of the zoning changes required to help the Desert of Maine to achieve their vision and make Freeport an even better place to reside. Doug and Mela have been incredibly thoughtful in their efforts and kept the residents of our town at the core of their endeavor for the past ~two years. Changing of the zoning would allow them to provide even greater value for our town. Their commitment to the town and allowing residents to visit as desired is a wonderful addition to Freeport. We live on Merrill Road and have no concerns about their plans. While I am unable to attend on Wednesday, I want to express my support for the Heestands and their plans for the Desert of Maine.

With thanks,
Laura C. Lindblom
18 Merrill Rd, Freeport, ME
207 522 6404

From: [Jeff Johnson](#)
To: [Caroline Pelletier](#)
Subject: My Support For The Desert of Maine Vision & Plans
Date: Sunday, November 1, 2020 8:57:17 PM

**** CAUTION EXTERNAL EMAIL ****

Hello Ms. Pelletier --

As a Freeport town resident and neighbor to The Desert of Maine, I wholeheartedly support the vision and plans that Mela and Doug Heestand have created for The Desert of Maine. We walk our dog regularly throughout the current trails and marvel at the beautiful, well-maintained trails, natural beauty and the informative signs that educate visitors on various, interesting geological facts about the Desert of Maine. A plan to combine education, recreation and classical/folk music performances provides a wonderful experience for visitors and a natural fit with Freeport's Comprehensive Plan.

With a restored historic barn as a centerpiece, the Desert of Maine will be an ideal setting for community and cultural gatherings. I have no concerns about crowd sizes, traffic, noise based on Mela's and Doug's thoughtful plans. I hope the Freeport Planning Board approves the necessary amendment details to update the Desert of Maine's zoning description. I am proud and excited to have the NEW Desert of Maine in my neighborhood and town.

Thank you.

Jeff Johnson
81 Dune Drive
Freeport, ME
207-720-0828

Sent from [Mail](#) for Windows 10

From: [Caroline Sinclair](#)
To: [Caroline Pelletier](#)
Subject: Say No to zoning change for large development
Date: Monday, November 2, 2020 8:28:25 AM

**** CAUTION EXTERNAL EMAIL ****

Hello,

I am writing to express my concern for the large development proposed for Desert Road, including the Freeport Golf Course, that is requesting zoning changes.

The project seems out of scale for the area and not in keeping with the nature of the town. Just say no to this rezoning request.

I would like to give my support for zoning changes to support the Desert of Maine request. Their effort seems to be well thought out, properly funded and would be a positive cultural improvement for Freeport. Please give this plan serious consideration.

Please share my concerns with the town planning board.

Thanks for all you do.

Caroline Sinclair
21 Merrill Road- Freeport resident since 2002

From: [Liz](#)
To: [Caroline Pelletier](#)
Subject: Support for Desert of Maine Zoning
Date: Monday, November 2, 2020 9:44:48 AM

**** CAUTION EXTERNAL EMAIL ****

Freeport Planning Board,

We are the McDonald family and our backyard abuts the Desert of Maine. We want you to know that we **fully support** the zone change to allow improvements sought by the owners, Doug and Mela Heestand. Under their ownership, the trails in the Desert have been cleaned up, marked, and opened to the public. They've built a playground that local children can use for free and have continued the tradition of hosting educational activities for local schools and summer camps. They've put up high quality, informative signs around the desert so that all who use it can learn more about the history, ecology and geology of the location. In all, they've done an absolutely fantastic job of taking this iconic place and turning it into a destination that residents will want to visit and be part of again and again. In fact, we feel very lucky to live right next to the Desert and very much hope that Doug and Mela are able to fully realize their vision.

Additionally, there have been several musical events at the Desert, and I can attest to the fact that we heard absolutely no music from our yard or house. The events were very low key and there was no disturbance to our street whatsoever. We do not feel that their plans will violate Section 515 of the Zoning Ordinance at all.

Doug and Melas plans for the Desert are fully in line with Freeport's plan to diversify away from retail and into the more creative economy, so it only makes sense to allow the zone change request.

We agree with other neighbors who've stated that we should all thank Doug and Mela for their vision and generosity. We are excited about the direction of the Desert and hope the Council will approve the request.

Best,
Liz, Terry and Ethan McDonald
130 Dune Drive
Freeport ME

From: [Nancy Kieran](#)
To: [Caroline Pelletier](#)
Subject: Desert of Maine
Date: Monday, November 2, 2020 10:09:59 AM

**** CAUTION EXTERNAL EMAIL ****

Hi Caroline,

As residents and business owners of Freeport we want to express our full support of the plans and zoning changes for the Desert of Maine. We feel it will be a great opportunity for Freeport to engage more visitors. We know we need to change the identity of Freeport from just shopping to include other activities. Our downtown vacancies are proof of that. Their plans seem to be sound and well thought out.

Sincerely,
Nancy Kieran
Mark Provost
Kendall Tavern Inn B&B

--

Kendall Tavern Inn B&B
213 Main Street
Freeport ME 04032
207-865-1338

Nancy Kieran
cell - 978-766-5280

Mark Provost
cell - 978-914-5214

From: [Jim Cram](#)
To: [Caroline Pelletier](#)
Subject: Letter in Support of the Desert Of Maine's application
Date: Monday, November 2, 2020 10:50:32 AM

**** CAUTION EXTERNAL EMAIL ****

To: Members of the Freeport Planning Board

RE: Application of the Desert of Maine:

I have written you previously on this application and would again like to express my support for this effort by the owners of the Desert of Maine to preserve and improve on it's Historic and in some ways, Iconic role as a part of our town's legacy in the evolution of Maine.

After all, we don't call it Desert Road for nothing!

But, seriously, we do want to encourage the preservation of important old buildings like the Tuttle Barn that will become a place to tell the stories of how farming was an important part of how Freeport residents sustained themselves for hundreds of years. Nearly all of those barns are gone now, and few are accessible for the public to visit, let alone become educated on their usefulness.

Likewise, the story of how mid century entrepreneurs turned a geological oddity into a tourist attraction for travelling families is an integral element in our town's evolution and notoriety today. As the proposal seeks to enhance Freeport's offerings of visual and musical arts, I would like to encourage their investment in making Freeport ever more attractive as a place to visit and to live.

Best regards, Jim

James C. Cram
Executive Director
Freeport Historical Society
207-865-3170
www.freeporthistoricalsociety.org

Thank you to our **2020 Annual Sponsors:** George and Joyce Denney, L.L. Bean, Bath Savings Institution, Taggart Construction, Strouts Point Wharf Co & Brewer South Freeport Marine.

From: [LANCE HALL](#)
To: [Caroline Pelletier](#)
Subject: Desert of Maine
Date: Monday, November 2, 2020 2:45:24 PM

** CAUTION EXTERNAL EMAIL **

Hello Ms. Pelletier

We are writing to voice support for the zoning changes submitted to the Planning Board by the owners of the Desert of Maine. We believe that the physical improvements they envision, as well as the expanded cultural and educational use of the property as described in the proposal, would result in a greatly improved tourist destination and a tremendous resource for Freeport residents.

As near neighbors of the site we believe the project as described in the proposal will have virtually no negative impact on the neighborhood or property values in the area.

We sincerely hope the Planning Board will look favorably on this proposal.

Respectfully,

Lance and Victoria Hall
7 Lady Slipper Lane
Freeport, Maine

Sent from my iPad

From: [Sarah Victor](#)
To: [Caroline Pelletier](#)
Subject: In support of Zoning overlay request for the Desert of Maine
Date: Monday, November 2, 2020 3:18:49 PM

**** CAUTION EXTERNAL EMAIL ****

Dear Caroline Pelletier and fellow members of the Freeport Community,

We are writing as directly abutting neighbors of the Desert of Maine property to offer our full support of Mela and Doug Heestand's inspired vision for the Desert of Maine. Our community needs revitalization, and we need nature and science-based family friendly fun, with safe outdoor options for nature-based learning, art, and music.

We closed on our house on Desert Rd. on May 11th, 2010, when our children Alexander and Rachael were just four and two years old. We chose Freeport because we already had friends embedded in the community who reassured us that the schools and community were wonderful. We bought into the promise and potential of a warm, welcoming community with opportunities for nature-based learning alongside a healthy balance of commerce and the arts available for all to enjoy. While this promise has turned out to be largely realized, our experience as abutting neighbors of the Desert of Maine has been mixed at best, until Mela and Doug Heestand took guardianship of the property and began implementing much needed improvements.

The first summer we lived on Desert Rd., it was made clear to us that the priority of the previous owners was to promote the Desert of Maine as a tourist attraction, not as a welcoming place for neighbors and the community to learn, play, and grow together. Requests by our family and other neighbors to have paid regular access were denied, while RV camping, pollution-creating tours and toxic land management were prioritized over nature and community. The tours offered were with outdated and dangerous equipment; the previous owners used herbicides to keep the land from reclaiming the sand dunes, in the name of preserving their way of doing business. RVs regularly rumbled past our house and continued to create air and noise pollution from the campsites behind our house, smoke from campfires from all the campsites in use drifted into our

yard, and the loud screams and other sounds from too many campsites and an outdated above ground swimming pool lacking an adequate safety enclosure could be heard at all hours of the day and night, with little regard for the impact on neighbors.

What appeared to be drug deals in the parking lot were tolerated for years, along with lots of random cars with people hanging out smoking at all hours of most days. Cars and motorcycles sped past our yard at alarming speeds, while our children played under our close watch. Our calls to the Freeport police department yielded no meaningful changes. During the last several months before Mela and Doug took over stewardship of the Desert of Maine, there was a large campsite stationed just barely beyond our property line, clearly visible from our driveway and yard, where someone was apparently living full time. We didn't feel safe allowing our kids to play in their own back yard.

Since Mela and Doug Heestand have been the stewards of the Desert of Maine, our neighborhood and community has been made to feel welcome and wanted, with good, clear, open communication, tasteful development plans that honor the past, preserve the natural beauty, and promise years of wholesome, nature-based community fun and learning for years to come. Our community is growing and changing, and our kids need safe, healthy spaces to play and grow. The vision Mela and Doug have for the Desert of Maine is beautifully aligned with our town vision and our values as a community. With fewer campsites, ecologically sound development, educational opportunities, tasteful and respectful artistic and musical offerings, and prioritization of harmonious alignment with our town vision and community standards, the Desert of Maine could fully realize its potential as the gem of Freeport that it is. Please update the zoning to accurately reflect the best potential use of that land, and allow the Heestands to bring their vision for the property to fruition, for the benefit of our community.

Kind regards,
Sarah Victor and Ryan Meader
89 Desert Rd.
Freeport, ME 04032

From: [JOHN ALBRIGHT](#)
To: [Caroline Pelletier](#)
Subject: Desert of Maine rezoning Request
Date: Monday, November 2, 2020 3:28:39 PM

**** CAUTION EXTERNAL EMAIL ****

Hello Caroline,

I am writing this note to express my *strong support* for the Desert of Maine's application for an overlay zone for that property.

This particular overlay zone makes all kinds of sense and is a win-win for the Desert of Maine and the Town. The Desert of Maine owners will be able to reclaim and rejuvenate a pre-existing commercial enterprise that will add little or no new infrastructure cost burden to the town. It will enable the Desert of Maine to deliver arts, educational, historical, and cultural programming that is entirely consistent with and supports goals and objectives specifically stated in Freeport's Comprehensive Plan, and also in FEDC's Vision 2025 *.

The scale of their plans are prudent and efficient, restricted to their own property, and will not impact major ecological assets, such as forest canopy, open lands, wetlands, etc. either on their own land or on adjacent lands. In fact, their proposed plans for the property are specifically designed to enhance the unique ecological values that are already present.

I encourage the Planning board to take note of one sure bright spot in Freeport's arts, cultural, historical, and economic future, and also to take advantage of the care and commitment that the owners of the Desert of Maine have demonstrated to their land and to the Town of Freeport, and approve their application for rezoning post haste.

With Respect,

John Albright

* "...the economic research found that opportunities exist in the following sectors: Health Care and Life Sciences; Professional, Scientific, and Technical; Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate; Value Added Food Production; Small, Niche Manufacturing; **Arts, Culture, Entertainment and Recreation**;" Page 4

"Promote the Town's high quality of life including: access to the train, **recreation resources, cultural resources** ..." Page 5

"ACTION B.8. EXPAND CURRENT CULTURAL OFFERINGS
Additional cultural offerings will encourage tourists to stay longer and will improve the quality of life for current residents." Page 12

"Continue and **expand on current events such as the Winslow Park Summer Concert Series and other events...**" Page 12

"... the Plan calls for support for cultural and historic resources as well as working to attract more events throughout the year..." Page 13