

WASHINGTON PARK MASTER PLAN COMMITTEE REPORT

OVERVIEW

Charge of the Committee

At the request of the Board of Selectmen, the ad hoc Washington Park Planning Committee was formed to develop a Master Plan for Washington Park. This process was to include: soliciting input from the neighborhood and other stake holders of the park; documenting current uses of the park; conducting a public hearing on the draft and final version of the Master Plan.

Committee Make up

The Washington Park Planning Committee consisted of 8 residents who represented the various interests of the park. Below is a list of residents and the group they represented:

- Jim Collins – Police
- Dawn Cunningham – Friends of Reading Recreation
- John Feudo – Staff liaison
- Rebecca Higgins – Neighbor
- Lynda Jean Michel – Neighbor
- Mark Nelson – Baseball
- Karen Stroman - Neighbor
- Nancy-Linn Swain, Chair, Recreation Committee
- Ben Tafoya - Selectmen

Initial Analysis

The following activities have occurred as part of the analysis:

1. **Walk through** - The Committee walked through the park identifying current status of the facilities, areas of concern and had a basic discussion on who uses the park. This walk through occurred in May and included Everett Blodgett, a member of the Reading Antiquarian Society.
2. **Historical Information** – Committee member Karen Stroman researched the history of the park. Additional historical information was gathered from Ben Nichols, Bill Brown and Everett Blodgett.
3. **RCASA** - Erica McNamara, Director of Reading Coalition Against Substance Abuse presented information from an environmental scan she did in conjunction with Rich Abate, School Resource Officer for Reading Police.
4. **Baseball** – In addition to Babe Ruth Baseball active participation on the committee, Pete Moscariello came to a meeting to discuss the needs of the high school baseball program.

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5. **Survey** – An online survey was created and put out for public input. The survey was open to the public but specifically targeted two user groups: Reading Babe Ruth Baseball and the surrounding neighborhoods.
6. **Neighborhood Meeting** – A neighborhood meeting was held in September 2008 to share survey results, present committee findings to date, share a conceptual plan for the park, get feedback from the community, and to answer questions. There were 14+ attendees from the neighborhoods.

History of Washington Park

1. Past

- Originally land was rented from Delia Sweetser for \$342 annually
- 1923 – Land was purchased \$7,500
- Early 1930's - improvements were made to all Reading parks. This included:
 - 1935 - 792 plants from 28 different varieties were planted and stone walls erected
 - 1936 – the baseball diamond was moved from the Parker Tavern corner to current location, this was done to create a greater space for other sports.
 - Lights and bleachers for 1,000+ were added for football
- Semi-professional baseball was played at park into the 1960's
- Activities were held at the park during the summers, this included: baseball, tennis, golf, archery, boxing, croquet, horseshoe pitching etc
- 1939 – wading pool was built
- 1950's outdoor movies on Friday and Saturday nights; children's theatre show, doll carriage parade and season carnival event were all held at the park.
- 1985 – wading pool was removed due to public health issues

2. More Recent

- Primary concerns – misuse of park space for drug and alcohol use; rundown playground equipment and unsafe courts; drainage issues in the playground and field; and parking issues.

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- Police issues identified
 - Reports of drug dealing, public disturbance, underage drinking
 - Stone wall obstructs sight line from street
 - No lighting at entrance or interior of park
 - Lack of reflective signage at all entrances
 - Dealing occurring within 100 feet of park, 1000 feet of school zone
 - Use of park after hours to hangout

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WASHINGTON PARK SURVEY

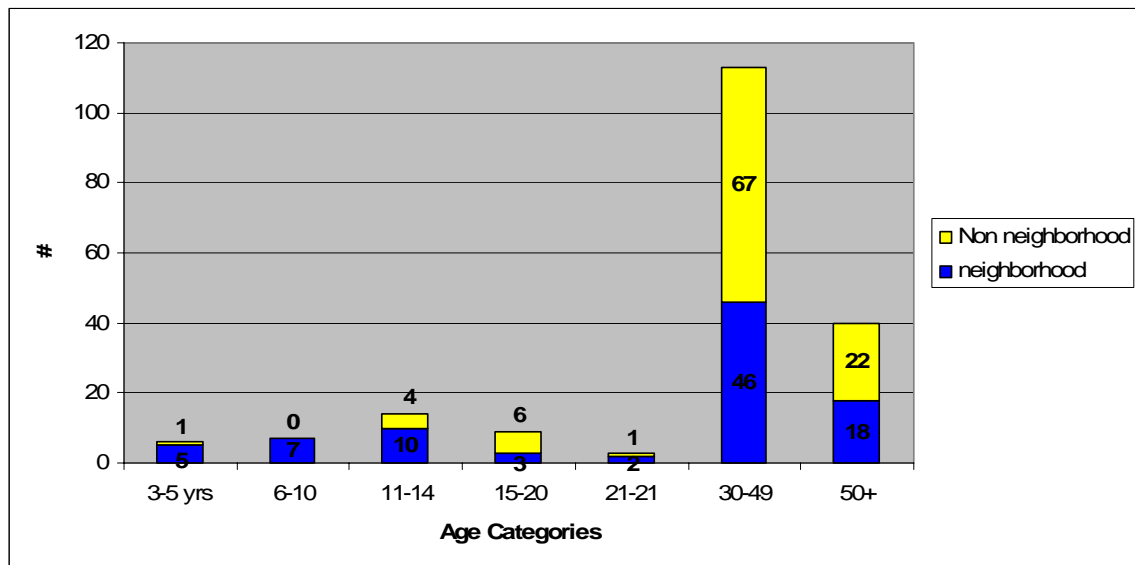
Process

An online survey was conducted July 18th – August 13th. The community was notified of this survey via postings in the local papers, notification on the town, school, and recreation web sites. Additionally, letters were sent out to park abutters and e-mails were sent via the baseball groups that use the park and a Washington Park neighborhood watch group.

There were 192 respondents to the survey. A summary of their responses follows. The question for each data set is in italics and underlined, above the data.

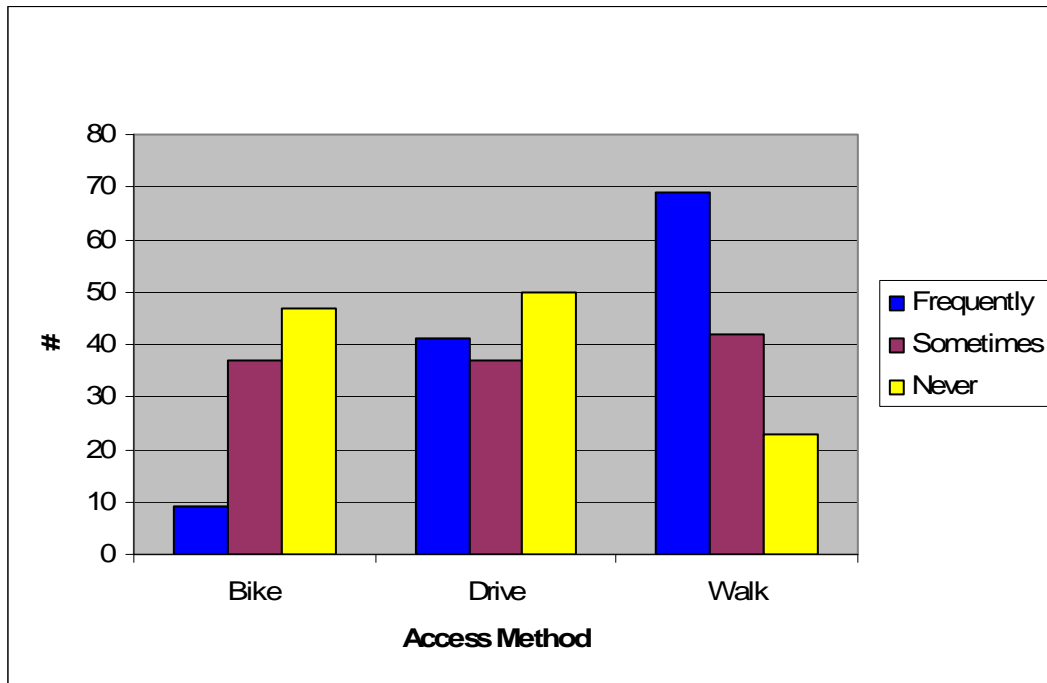
Data Results

Please identify your age group

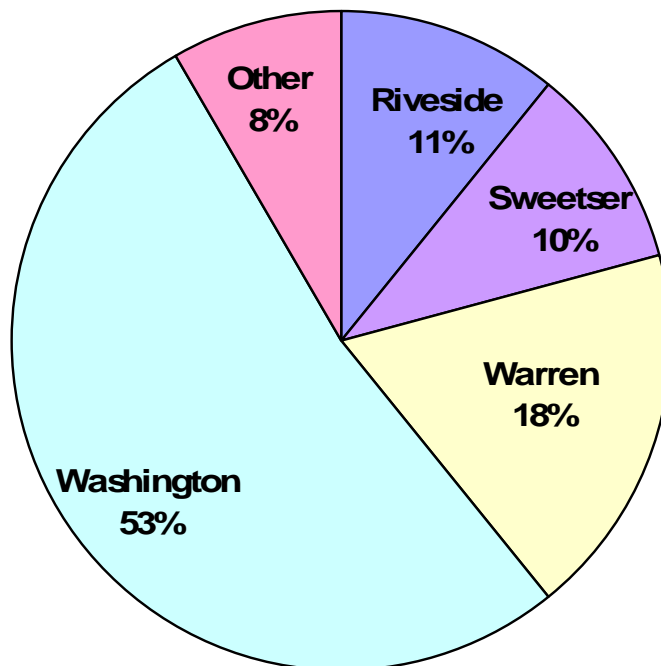


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How do you access the Washington Park?



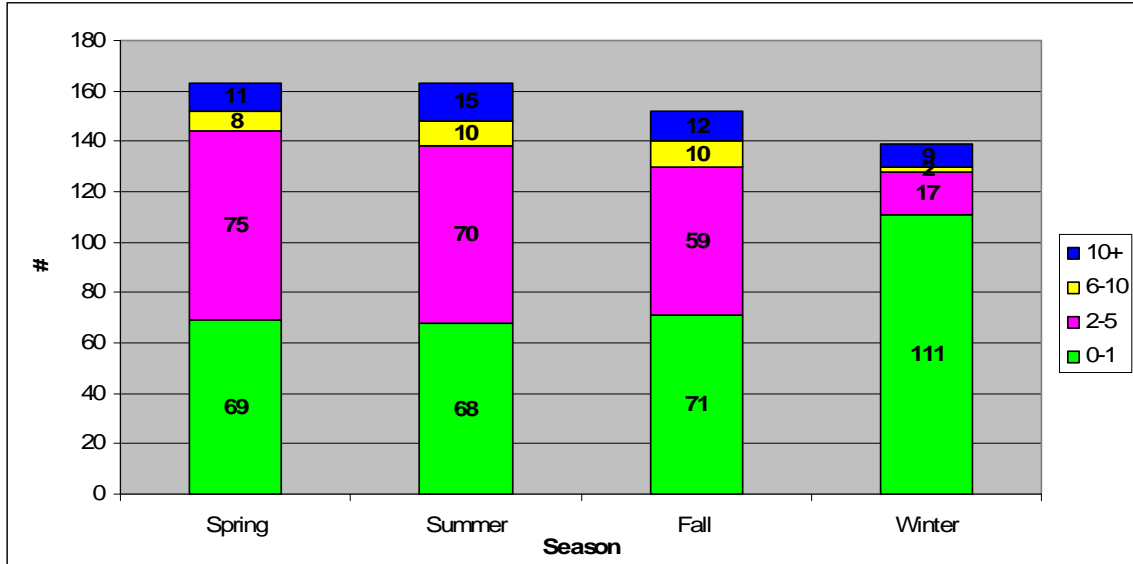
If you drive where do you park?



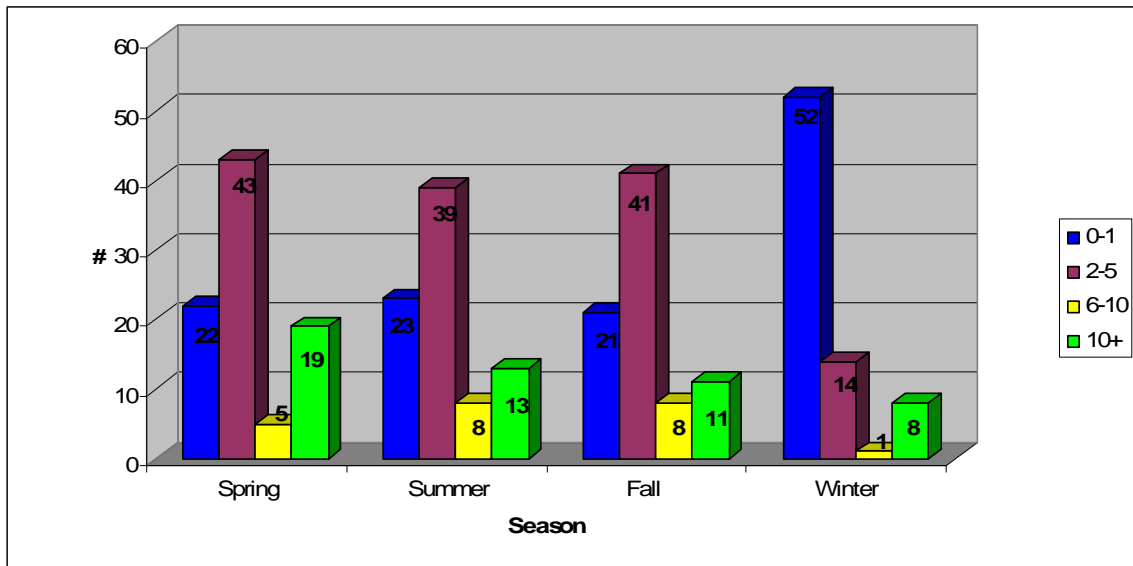
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On average how many times per week do you use Washington Park?

Overall response

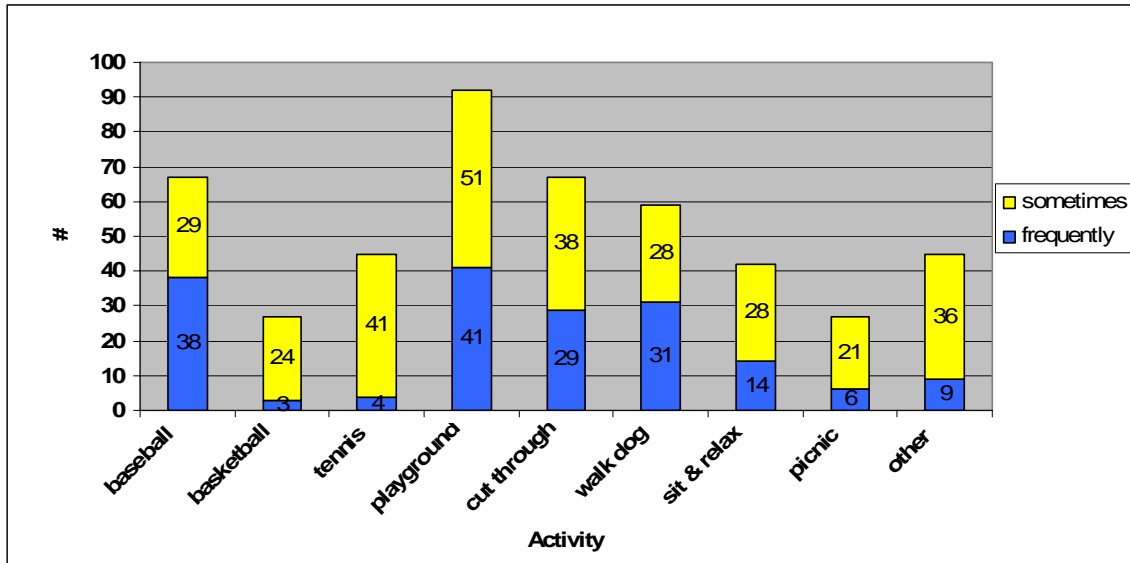


Neighborhood response



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How do you currently use Washington Park?



If you don't use Washington Park, can you tell us why not?

- **Atmosphere/Safety**
 - “I don't like that it seems unsafe at times with kids hanging out on the wall smoking, yelling at people, etc”
 - “Teen Hooligans”
 - “The park does seem creepy. It gets written up in the Reading Advocate for bad activities. I walked by there once with my child and I didn't feel safe.”
 - “There are no sidewalks providing easy access for me to get there with kids/strollers. It is not easily visible from the road either so it is not apparent that it is there.”
 - “Kids hanging out intimidates me”
 - “Looks old”
 - “Tennis courts in poor condition, not good visibility”
 - “Heard that the area is seedy and can be dangerous at night. A lot of police blotter incidents.”
 - “Alcohol bottles around basketball court, Rough crowd hangout place in the late evening.”
 - “tennis courts in bad condition”
 - “It is a little slummy”
- **Parking**
 - “I don't know where to park, or what is available there”
 - “parking is troublesome”
- **Playground**

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- “The playground is small and not very interesting”
- “climber not shaded”
- “Since other playgrounds in town have been refurbished I take my children to those instead”

What leisure and recreation activities would you like to be able to do in the park?

- **Path** - around park for walking, bike riding, running, fitness training loop
- **Playground**
 - Multi age playground, shade, gazebo area for parents, sprinkler/water area;
- **General appearance** – picnic tables, more child friendly space, seating, dog park, water fountain, more visibly appealing & child friendly
- **Athletics** - Tennis, basketball, volleyball, baseball
- **Passive Activities** – concerts, movies, benches for sitting & relaxing
- **Parking** – angled parking

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SUMMARY

Current Conditions and Committee Recommendations

Area of Park	Current Conditions	Recommendations
Baseball Field	<p>Safety Concerns</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Balls leave park and go into surrounding yards and walkways 2. Bullpens are located behind away team and behind spectator bleachers 3. Players have no protection from stray balls 4. Water fountain is too close to the field. <p>Field Status</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Infield has recurring flooding issues when it rains 2. Field is in generally poor condition 3. Field in general is extremely large and the outfield areas could be utilized for other activities. 4. Storage space is very limited, thus equipment gets chained to the backstop 5. When games are being played there is limited ability to utilize the open areas of the field for other activities. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Move home plate in about 10 feet and angle it slightly towards left field. Goal would be to get the balls away from the 1st baseline neighbors' yards 2. Rebuild the infield to improve drainage, functionality and safety 3. Rebuild backstop when adjusting home plate, and in doing so, increase protection of players on the benches 4. Build a 10 x 10 storage shed out in far left field where tennis courts are currently located 5. Create two bullpen areas near shed in the current tennis court space 6. Add a walking path around the perimeter of the field with a pervious material. This can be used for children to ride their bikes, people for general walking. Recommend that the path be marked off for distance for those who want to measure their walks. 7. Remove the double fencing between the field and the courts/playground areas. 8. Add passive activity area for horseshoes, bocce in space between field and courts/playground 9. Put up a mesh netting along the property line along the first base side to stop balls from going into the yards along that property line.

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<p>Tennis & Basketball Courts</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Courts have significant cracks in them, thus making it dangerous to play on them. Courts have not been updated since originally built 30+ years ago. 2. Court equipment and fencing is in disrepair 3. Trees hang over the courts dropping leaves and sticks onto them, thus damaging the surfaces and making it difficult to use them safely. 4. Signage on courts is not current and conflicts with other signs about park use 5. Tennis court has only one entrance/exit 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reconfigure the courts so that there is: 1 tennis court, 1 basketball court and 1 multi-purpose court. 2. The tennis & basketball court would be put in the space currently occupied by the playground with the tennis court being closest to the house. Please see attachment B. 3. Fencing around the two courts will be shared. 4. Provide benches for the tennis and basketball courts.
<p>Playground/Multi-purpose Court</p>	<p>Safety</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wood boards containing the mulch are loose 2. No gate on Washington Street entrance to contain children, gate to field does not close properly 3. Little to no shade available in area <p>General</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Area is large compared to other playgrounds, especially given the small amount of equipment. 2. Current equipment is old and limited in quantity and quality. 3. Old green storage building located in corner of playground. This currently houses the electrical for the sprinkler system. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Move the playground to the current basketball space. See attachment B. 2. The inside space would contain the multi-purpose court. There will be a small fence between the two. 3. Playground would be fenced in with a low fence. 4. Replace and expand the playground equipment to meet current town standards. 5. Add bench seating in the playground 6. Add picnic tables in the area of the playground/multi-purpose courts
<p>Parking/Entrances</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sweetser Street – limited parking occurs on Sweetser. There is a wide entrance coming off the end of Sweetser Street, which is utilized by DPW at times. Signage at this entrance is located too high for anyone to see. 2. Washington Street – Parking occurs on both sides of Washington Street when there is a game, which leaves no place for other cars to 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sweetser – no change 2. Washington Street – remove the stone wall, leaving the the main entrance to the park. Create diagonal parking and a sidewalk in the space and put up a wrought iron fence to replace the portions of the stone wall removed. This will allow people to see into the park and also address the parking and safety issues.

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	<p>get down the street and no place for people to walk. There are no side walks to allow people to safely access the park. Additionally there are public safety concerns because of poor sightlines into the park due to the stone wall.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Riverside – some parking occurs during ball games on Riverside, this does not appear to interfere with the neighborhood access 4. Warren – Parking occurs on Warren & Maple during ballgames, at times the street is difficult to negotiate given where cars are parked. Warren also has an issue with people driving down the street quickly to get to a game. 5. Warren/Riverside occurs via easements which are fenced off from the surrounding neighbor's property. This entrance is not ADA accessible due to muddy walkways and the multiple step entrance 	<p>To accomplish the above parking plan some of the current space on the park side of the stone wall will need to be utilized for parking/sidewalk creation. Add benches in the Washington entrance area for people to relax and enjoy the park</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Riverside/Warren – move the entrance over some to make the entrance ADA accessible. Pave the Riverside & Warren access paths into the park. Request that the Board of Selectmen pursue parking restrictions on Warren Ave.
<p>Monuments/Dedications & Amenities</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Vietnam Veterans Memorial flagpole is in disrepair 2. Ball field dedication rock is too close to the playing field 3. Water Fountain is left over from the wading pool 20+ years ago. Water comes gushing out in a wasteful way. Location of water fountain is not ideal due to proximity to field. 4. Washington entrance dedications to Mudville & Doucette's – gets vandalized 5. No recycling options available for trash. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Move the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to behind the baseball backstop. This is a more visible and prominent location, additionally baseball is interested in raising the flag during games. 2. Move the water fountain from the 3rd baseline to behind the backstop or close to the Warren/Riverside entrance. 3. Add an additional water fountain in the central area between the courts & playground 4. Move the Pacino dedication rock to space near the Warren/Riverside entrance. 5. Leave Mudville & Doucette dedications in current locations. 6. Support recycling efforts in the parks.

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Border fencing/stonewalls	Fencing along the perimeter of the park is in need of repair/replacement. Additionally there is a low stone wall which runs along the Warren & Riverside abutters. There are areas of this wall which need to be repaired as it is falling apart	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Repair stonewalls 2. Repair/replace fencing
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Implementation Suggestions

From the Committee’s discussions 3 possible phases to renovating Washington Park were identified. These phases are:

1. Parking & sidewalk on Washington Street
2. Relocate/rebuild the courts and playground
3. Renovations to the ball field, entrances and amenities

An engineering analysis may allow for further breakdown of the suggested phases.

Conclusion

We have enjoyed the opportunity to serve the community through the master planning process for Washington Park. We appreciate the confidence of the BOS in entrusting this task to us and we look forward to working with town boards and staff on the acceptance and implementation of the plan.

We believe that Washington Park is an important resource for the Town of Reading and a critical component of a stable neighborhood. However, it is time for a significant revision of the facilities in the park in order to realize its full potential as a resource for the community. The overall goal of the plan is to improve the amenities of the park to increase the number of children and adults who use the park and to insure its viability for generations to come.

Development of the master plan has sparked excitement among the neighborhoods and groups that use the park. Special thanks to Paul Millet, a neighbor and engineer at Environmental Partners Group in Quincy, MA for the current and conceptual schematic drawings

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Master Plan Adoption

The Board of Selectmen held a Public Hearing on the adoption of the *Master Plan for Washington Park* at its meeting on April 28, 2009.

The Board of Selectmen adopted the Washington Park Master Plan Committee's recommendations as contained in the report with the exception of the recommendation that the wall along Washington Street be removed and angled parking, curb, sidewalk, and fencing be installed. The vote of the Board of Selectmen was 3-2 in favor of the Master Plan adoption with the conditions as noted.

The revised plan and a detailed plan of the Washington Street frontage are included in this report.

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Entrances



Washington Street
entrance

Washington Street
stonewall



Washington Street
entrance way

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Washington Street
wall from the park
side



Riverside Avenue
easement

Warren Avenue
easement



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Playground



Playground from
Washington Street
entrance

Playground view
from the field
entrance located
near the storage
shed



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Storage shed
located in corner of
playground near
tennis courts

Memorials/Monuments



Pacino Memorial
Field marker located
near third base line
of ball field

Mudville Plaque &
Doucette memorials
located in Washington
Street entrance



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Vietnam Memorial
located at base of
the flagpole



Flagpole on 1st base
line against Warren
Avenue residences

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Baseball field

3rd baseline, bleachers,
home team bench



1st baseline ball
field



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Water fountain
located on the 3rd
base side of the ball
field



Fence dividing ball field
from playground and
basketball court

Dead space located
between tennis courts and
abutting neighbors' yards



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Tennis Courts



Two tennis courts located in corner of the ball field.

Cracks running thru the tennis courts



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Basketball Court



Basketball court with major cracks running down the middle of it.



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Above - Unused space between basketball court and ball field
Below – view of basketball court from Washington Park entrance way



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APPENDIX

