

Treasure Island Exploratory Committee

Community Survey
January/February 2021

The Treasure Island Exploratory Committee consists of seven citizens of Thetford, West Fairlee, and Fairlee empanelled by the Thetford Selectboard to consider approaches to rejuvenating Treasure Island as an inviting, affordable environment for public recreation on the shores of Lake Fairlee.

(www.thetfordvt.gov/government/treasure-island-exploratory-committee.)

The Town of Thetford owns the 11.5 acre Treasure Island site, which actually is located in West Fairlee and a small portion in Fairlee. Thetford has operated Treasure Island under the auspices of its Recreation Department, employing a site manager and seasonal staff including lifeguards, swimming instructors, and youth activity leaders. In recent years, the town's operating costs for Treasure Island have exceeded revenues from user fees by an average of \$25,000 annually.

In January 2021 the Exploratory Committee invited community members to express their thoughts regarding the past and possible future operations of Treasure Island through a survey circulated online via the Thetford listserv, various facebook pages and in print form. The survey was devised by Committee members Megan Dubuque and Ann Jane Kemon and completed by 250 respondents. The Committee thanks everyone who took the time to complete the survey.

As we reviewed the surveys a common theme that came across was that a majority of residents wish for Treasure Island to remain somewhat the same as what it always has been. Another common theme was that residents felt the biggest asset that Treasure Island holds for us is a sense of community and a safe place to gather with friends and family. The public access that Treasure Island provides for us was also very important to keep. In addition to those three things, residents also had a strong tie to the beach, nature, picnicking and the swimming lessons that Treasure Island gives us. A few residents even spoke to the importance of the summer jobs that Treasure island provides for our youth.

It probably comes as no surprise that the residents of Thetford thought there needed to be driveway and parking lot renovations in addition to bathroom and basic upkeep improvements that would give Treasure Island a cleaner look. Other things that several residents felt could be improved upon were the prices of season passes and day tickets, longer hours and to bring back the tennis court. A few residents thought that the swim area could be improved with a third area added for using floats in deep water, and for some deep water swimming.

When asked what ideas residents had to bring in some revenue to Treasure Island several people thought weddings and other events would be a great idea. Other ideas included camp programs, a snack bar or food

trucks, boat moorings and rentals, other lessons (tennis, yoga, adult swimming), camping and to use the existing building as a rental property.

When asked what other seasonal activities residents wanted to see the most popular idea was ice-skating. Other ideas included ice-fishing (including lessons and guided tours), educational winter programs, beach parties/carnivals, polar plunges, snowshoeing, XC skiing and group kayak tours.

Residents also gave fantastic ideas of ways to raise money. Some ideas included setting up a trust or a 501c3. Other ideas were to fundraise, collect donations and to ask for more volunteer work.

By the numbers, respondents replied to the survey questions as follows:

What things do you like?

- 47 said the memories and the community aspect
- 46 said swimming
- 36 said the access to the water and beach
- 22 said nature
- 16 said swimming lessons
- 10 said cookouts
- 2 said local jobs for teens

What improvements need to be made?

- 23 said it was too expensive
- 20 said to keep a cleaner facility
- 10 said to improve the bathrooms (some wanted hot water and showers)
- 9 said the parking lots and driveway
- 11 said they wanted longer hours
- 10 wanted the tennis courts back
- 8 said they wanted more food options
- 5 said better shade
- 5 said they wanted another area to swim for deep floats or swimming
- 4 said wanted year round access and to keep it plowed
- 3 wanted the basketball courts updates and painted with other games
- 2 said needed hiking trails and educational
- Other single mentions:
 - Open air pavilion
 - Better boats
 - Full marina
 - Variety of hours in swimming lessons

Ideas for revenue

- 44 said events and weddings

- 27 said camp programs
- 23 said snack bar/food trucks
- 19 said a boat mooring/rentals
- 15 said other lessons
- 12 said camping
- 9 said asking for money/donations
 - Set up a 501c3
 - Set up a trust
 - Fundraising
 - Donations
 - Volunteers
- 9 said to rent out the building
- 4 said rent swim gear
- 4 said ice-skating
- Other single mentions:
 - Sell swag
 - Contents/triathlon
 - Less swag

What seasonal activities?

- 23 said ice-skating
- 15 said ice-fishing
- 2 said winter programs/educational
- 2 said snowshoeing
- Other single mentions:
 - Winter carnival
 - Beach parties
 - Group kayak tours
 - Polar plunge
 - Treasure hunt
 - XC skiing
 - Beach volleyball
 - Fishing derbies
 - Outdoor classroom

On Wednesday, January 6, 2021, Dale Gephart and Douglass Tiffit held their first “nature associates” conversation regarding Treasure Island. Here are a few ideas gleaned from that conversation.

- Conduct a natural inventory— do this for either the Treasure Island property alone or for the entire Lake Fairlee area. Involve campers, local students, interested residents. Instruct participants in the use of I-Naturalist. Learn from how the UVLT does this when they take on a property. Perhaps model this on the FLORA AND FAUNA OF LAKE MOREY booklet. Then after we have gathered information from many sources, put the inventory on-line. Perhaps on the new LFA website. Also use the information in the inventory for several purposes: 1)

decisions about research on endangered species, food chains, climate change, etc.; 2) education via many venues — crowdsourcing community scientists is educational in itself.

- See our ecologically intact site as an educational tool — this could be just the Treasure Island property or the adjacent lands that make up the ecologically rich "quiet end" of the lake. Involve educators from Montshire Museum.
- Ask the essential question of "How do we garner support from stakeholders?" — identify unmet needs such as a rustic boat launch for non-motorized craft; an entry point for open-water swimmers. Make access to the lake easy. Target educational programs for various interest groups. Make the lake available to the public in all seasons including for winter sports activities.
- Promote the LakeWise program by producing a "before and after" video of the northern part of Treasure Island — do a video showing the current sorry state of the northern section of Treasure Island and then record its transformation into a sort of naturalist pocket park and demonstration planting area for appropriate shoreline management. Other transformative projects that might be undertaken with volunteers could include: a shoreline walking path (with benches, observation blinds, simple shelters for outdoor classes); parking area with permeable surface; rustic boat launch.
- Offer a range of programs open to the public at no charge — guided bird-watching; bog-walks; invited speakers (start with some of our associates); offer a lakeside venue for programs by local conservation commissions.
- Downtime for camp counselors — provide free or reduced-price passes to area camp counselors for use on their day's off. Especially needed this coming season with anticipated off-site restrictions due to the pandemic.

—Compiled by Dale Gephart and Doug Tiffit