

TREASURE ISLAND MASTER PLAN

Proposal for Discussion 9/21/23

Overview

The Treasure Island Exploratory Committee was formed three years ago as an ad hoc committee of the selectboard with the initial charge “to bring proposals forward to the Selectboard to address the financial, recreational, and conservation needs of the facility.” This year it became a standing committee of the selectboard, renamed the Treasure Island Committee, with the charge “to develop a financially sustainable way to improve and maintain facilities and expand recreational and educational activities while adhering to best environmental practices.”

To move forward from discussion to action, the committee has been asked to present to the selectboard a master plan for their consideration and endorsement. Possible action ideas are shown below, divided into categories of conservation, recreation, infrastructure, and finances/administration, though there are frequent overlaps. The action ideas include proposals for maintenance, improvement, and expansion, reflecting the varied messages from a survey conducted in 2021 (*see attached*) that essentially said “Keep Treasure Island the same, but make it better.” It will be up to the selectboard and the public to determine how to balance the cost of sustaining current operations while funding new ventures on this cherished site. We have attached the “Treasure Island Vision Statement” presented to the selectboard in December 2021 as a reminder of the larger framework we had in mind when developing many of these ideas.

Implementation is paramount to giving meaning to any master plan. We propose that the selectboard, the town manager, town employees (i.e. recreation department staff and town crew), and the Treasure Island Committee need to work in concert and in a deliberate manner to maintain and improve Treasure Island in the coming years. We recommend an annual joint planning session each fall to develop a checklist of specific goals for the coming year. This would go before the selectboard for their approval as part of their budget development. Since short-term goals are usually clearer than those in the long-term, we have sketched out one possible action scenario for this coming year by way of example.

THE MASTER PLAN**CONSERVATION** — preserving a natural treasure

Restoration and conservation of Treasure Island’s natural qualities should proceed ahead of other projects. In particular, an accurate map with overlays referencing such features as wetlands and management units from the Stewardship Plan should be developed for guidance of all future work on the property. This would replace the Treasure Island map we initially developed (see enclosed). Whether the long-range intent is improvement or simply maintenance of existing services, stewardship and public education for this unique natural site is paramount.

Possible Actions:

- implement Action Items in Stewardship Plan and Lake Wise evaluation (*see attached*)
- obtain an accurate survey of the property with overlays of wetlands and management units

- develop education programs for the community, regular nature walks, and youth nature camps
- improve nature education facilities such as the “Art Shack” and a portion of the main house
- allow access to current trail from Art Shack to beaver lodge with two or three shoreline benches
- clean up brush pile, rebar, bottom-barrier plastic, old dock, discarded metal at north end
- sponsor invasives clean-up days to recruit and train local volunteers on how to clear invasives
- collaborate with VCES, VINS, Loon Conservation Program, and conservation commissions
- host a lake health center with the Lake Fairlee Association for testing and monitoring activities

RECREATION — “more than just a beach”

Treasure Island was originally purchased by the Town of Thetford to allow public access to the lake for swimming, picnics, nature study, tennis, tetherball, and other court-based sports. In recent years its public use has been limited to the summer months, primarily for beach activities, due to the lack of a year-round caretaker. Efforts should be made by the town to extend the variety of activities and safe year-round access.

Possible Actions:

- utilize the paved court area and playing fields for year-round sports and tournaments
- implement a lower fee system for non-beach sporting activities
- establish an open-water swimming pier for “at your own risk” year-round lake access
- extend the current swim area to the north with “lanes” for lap swimming
- place buoys marking no-wake zone along entire waterfront as a “safe swimming” area
- create a landing area or dock away from the beach for access with non-motorized boats
- promote evening activities such as musical performances, beach parties, or movies on the beach
- find more recreational uses for the playing field/former tennis court near the septic mound
- partner with local schools to host outdoor learning experiences, end-of-school parties, etc.
- sponsor off-season activities such as ice skating, autumn bonfires, snowshoe hikes
- explore safe ways to allow people to visit and utilize Treasure Island off-season
- post a large Treasure Island map at the entrance booth showing all the activities and facilities

INFRASTRUCTURE — “keep it the same, only better”

Facilities that support the current primary uses need to be better maintained or upgraded. This includes completing the paved court, repairing picnic pavilions, enhancing the boat rental areas, protecting the beach from washouts, replacing the bathhouse, and establishing a lightning shelter. Adding to the variety of activities and extending to year-round use will require further infrastructure improvements such as restoring the Art Shack and coming to terms with what to do about the caretaker’s house, which might serve as the base for everything from concessions/catering to becoming a Lake Fairlee Nature Center.

Possible Actions:

- create a building committee to explore renovation, removal, or replacement of the main house
- brainstorm shared uses for the main house, including money-generating functions
- consider adding a covered area at the back of the main house for a lightning shelter/concessions
- add a lockable boat storage area either to the back of the main house or near the waterfront
- develop an outdoor food concession and preparation area (or perhaps a permanent food truck)
- replace the bathhouse with an upgraded, handicapped-accessible, year-round facility
- improve the parking areas with better drainage, resurfacing, and more efficient use of the space
- add another shorefront gazebo on the south side of the beach
- finish closing in the paved court area and paint lines for various sports, including tennis
- repair picnic shelter at southern end near lagoon, add waterfront benches, and improve pathway
- upgrade or redo water diversion system at the top of the beach to prevent washouts
- utilize the southern road access for auxiliary events/sports parking or for catered functions
- put a locked gate at northern road access only for maintenance such as mowing the meadow
- add designated grilling/picnic areas and install shorefront benches to the island
- restore the clay tennis court or rebuild as a standard tennis court

FINANCES AND ADMINISTRATION — becoming a regionally supported public resource

Treasure Island is primarily administered through the town Parks and Recreation Department. This requires the attention of the part-time director and a seasonal part-time Treasure Island coordinator. While this is adequate for the usual beach-related activities, more ambitious plans for year-round use would require a volunteer board, hired consultants and fundraisers, and possibly an on-site caretaker/administrator. Revenue-generating enterprises to pay for such an expansion would necessitate a business plan and ongoing accounting services. Making Treasure Island a regional asset for both recreation and nature study could support this larger enterprise.

Possible Actions:

- consider ways to market Treasure Island as a regional resource rather than a single-town asset
 - similar to the Post Mills Airport, explore establishing a nonprofit entity to run Treasure Island
 - offer neighboring towns reduced-price access to their residents in return for an annual donation
 - do a “swim free” day once a year to introduce the entire Upper Valley to Treasure Island
 - employ a grant-writer to apply for public and private funding of major building projects
 - explore private fund-raising ranging from sponsoring benches to underwriting a building
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AN ACTION PLAN FOR 2024

Annotated specific goals that can be achieved or initiated in the coming year

CONSERVATION

- implement Action Items in Stewardship Plan and Lake Wise evaluation (*see attached*)
 - work with Lisa Niccolai to write a detailed plan for grant funding
 - list logistics, cost, time frame, methods
 - present the specifics and rationale for this at public meetings
 - identify items that volunteers can begin to implement in 2024, such as opening up the meadow area by cutting down alders
- obtain an accurate survey of the property with overlays of wetlands and management units
 - hire a licensed forester to catalog the major trees for removal because of safety concerns and others for ecological priority
 - have wetland specialist to take the T.I. committee and town manager on a tour of the wetlands and explain their ecology
- develop education programs for the community such as regular nature walks
 - assemble a small group of local nature educators to plan events and talks
 - designate a portion of the northern end as a “protected forest” limited to guided nature walks and put up signs indicating this
- clean up brush pile, rebar, bottom-barrier plastic, old dock, discarded metal at north end
 - in addition to usual Treasure Island Clean-up Day, schedule one day devoted to just the north end clean up
 - coordinate with town manager and town crew for hauling away or selling materials (utilize volunteers for loading rebar and bottom barrier plastic)
 - generate income by bidding out the rebar and use proceeds for other activities
 - sell bottom barrier material to local farmstands; offer any excess to residents
- sponsor invasives clean-up days to recruit and train local volunteers
 - create an Invasives Squad to hold regular walk-through targeting particular plants
- eradicate areas of poison ivy from areas where the public might encounter it
 - hire a firm that uses natural organic means to control poison ivy

RECREATION

- post a large Treasure Island map at the entrance booth showing all the activities and facilities
- sponsor off-season activities such as ice skating, autumn bonfires, snowshoe hikes
- promote evening activities such as musical performances, beach parties, or movies on the beach
 - engage a local food truck to cater the events

INFRASTRUCTURE

- finish closing in the paved court area and paint lines for various sports, including tennis
 - add a small garden shed near the court for storing pickleball equipment, etc.
- repair picnic shelter at southern end near lagoon, add waterfront benches, and improve pathway
- improve the parking areas with better drainage, resurfacing, and more efficient use of the space
 - do this in coordination for Stewardship Plan action items, including tagging onto their funding grant
- put a locked gate at northern road access only for maintenance such as mowing the meadow
 - also need to remove large fallen tree from that northern entrance

FINANCES AND ADMINISTRATION

- do a “swim free” day once a year to introduce the entire Upper Valley to Treasure Island
- consider ways to market Treasure Island as a regional resource rather than a single-town asset
 - recruit an ad hoc Task Force of residents with experience writing business plans

AN ANNUAL PROCESS FOR SETTING GOALS

With an expanded role for the Treasure Island Committee

A commitment to implementation of any plan is what turns mere talk into achievements. As part of this master plan, we recommend that all parties responsible for Treasure Island convene in September every year to outline specific goals for the coming year. This process would be overseen by the Treasure Island Committee and involve the town manager, the recreation department director, the Treasure Island coordinator, and possibly a town crew representative. This would involve a review of progress made on that current year’s action plan and developing a list of specific, achievable objectives for the coming year. It would detail who would be responsible for each item, the likely cost, and the source of funds. It might also describe an objective that requires engaging an outside entity for expert consultation (e.g. an architect) or grant writing. And the group might recommend establishing an ad hoc committee to focus on a multi-year challenge, such as a Building Committee to refurbish or replace the caretaker’s house. This annual plan would be presented to the selectboard in October of each year for their endorsement and so that any funding requirement can be included in the next year’s budget.

The Treasure Island Committee would also have an expanded charge that goes beyond just planning. It would also encompass actions on each year’s list of goals that involve community volunteers. This might include organizing the annual clean-up day in May; overseeing an “invasives squad” that patrols for and eradicates invasive species; coordinating citizen-led nature education programs or a nature camp; sending out an annual fundraising appeal targeted to specific projects; or seeking out and vetting proposals from the community for new activities at Treasure Island (e.g. pickleball). In implementing any of these actions, the Treasure Island Committee would do so in consultation with the town manager and that season’s Treasure Island Coordinator.

A POSSIBLE TIMELINE FOR THE NEXT 10 YEARS

Years 1–3

- Accomplish action items on the Stewardship Plan and Lake Wise Evaluation to stabilize and restore the shoreline environment. Attain a Lake Wise certification and serve as a model for other shoreline properties in this regard.
- Achieve key maintenance and improvement goals for the current activities and facilities at Treasure Island, including funding and initiating infrastructure projects (e.g. bathhouse replacement)
- Engage the public in targeted volunteer efforts beyond the annual clean-up day, including using the site for on-going nature education.
- Sponsor multiple off-season events (e.g. skating parties, bonfire, movies on the beach) with regional appeal

Years 4–6

- Convene a Building Committee to explore options for the caretaker's house, including preliminary architectural plans, projected costs, and outside funding options. Define clearly for the public the multiple uses for this building. Seek outside funding, including "naming opportunities," for the building.
- Engage the public in discussions of expanded, year-round activities at Treasure Island. Begin to implement those that have the most support, including necessary infrastructure changes (e.g. off-season parking area).
- Begin conversations with other organizations (e.g. Lake Fairlee Association; Vermont Center for Ecostudies) and neighboring towns for collaboration and joint financing of Treasure Island

Years 7–10

- Fund and act on Building Committee recommendation for renovation or replacement of caretaker's house.
- Explore and act on re-branding aspects of Treasure Island defined by the new, regional uses for the site (e.g. Littoral Zone Research Center on Lake Fairlee)
- Fully engage new, regional funding for the multiple ventures hosted by Treasure Island, including an endowment as well as income from private functions (similar to the Aloha Foundation off-season use of facilities)
- House a year-round caretaker in refurbished building for greater security of the site.

enclosures:

- Treasure Island Survey Results, January/February 2021
- Treasure Island Vision Statement 12/13/21
- Lake Wise Evaluation for Treasure Island 8/10/22
- Action Items excerpted from Stewardship Plan 6/8/23