Fresh Pond Reservation Shared Use Assessment Memo
Prepared by the Consensus Building Institute
For the City of Cambridge, MA
Summer 2010

PART A. Background and Overview of Information Gathering Process

As one of the largest open spaces in the City of Cambridge, Fresh Pond Reservation attracts a diverse group of visitors who utilize the Reservation for an array of purposes. They walk, birdwatch, walk dogs, bicycle, visit with friends, jog, picnic, volunteer and more. Many users, including nature enthusiasts, volunteers, athletes, school children visiting the Maynard Ecology Center and people who go to Fresh Pond for casual recreation, have an interest in the Reservation, as do the more than 100,000 residents and businesses in Cambridge whose water supply the Reservation has played a key role in protecting for over a hundred years.

In recent years, Fresh Pond Reservation projects have focused on landscape restoration, including efforts to re-establish native species and encouraging biodiversity to protect the water supply and watershed, the addition of Maher Park (a new multiple use recreation area), and completed drainage and landscaping projects on the golf course. These projects have enhanced the Reservation’s reputation as a refuge within an urban setting. As a result, the number of visitors from varied user groups has steadily increased, and City staff has heard how much people love the Reservation for a diverse set of reasons. The increased visitor load has also resulted in more conflict among different types of users, as more people use the same limited space. Water Department staff has documented an increasing number of complaints regarding user behavior at the Reservation. The City and the Water Department are responsible for ensuring public safety, protecting the city’s water supply, maintaining the Fresh Pond Reservation and facilities, and providing recreational opportunities for diverse user groups.

In order to explore current perspectives of the many diverse users of the Reservation, the City of Cambridge started working with the Consensus Building Institute (CBI), a non-profit organization based in Cambridge that provides facilitation and mediation services on issues of public interest in the United States and abroad.¹ CBI carried out interviews for this assessment of current issues related to multiple uses of the Reservation between April and June 2010.² This document summarizes findings, themes and options identified during this brief and initial assessment, and is intended to provide a broad foundation for a future public engagement process to develop a shared use plan.

¹ For more information on CBI, please see www.cbuilding.org.

² The CBI assessment team was composed of Patrick Field, Managing Director, Ona Ferguson, Senior Associate and Meredith Sciarrio, Project Support Administrator.
CBI staff spoke confidentially with 28 people from a wide range of interest groups. These people included residents of Cambridge, Watertown and Belmont, runners, cyclists, walkers with and without dogs, city staff, local businesses, and people who have been coming to Fresh Pond Reservation for decades, as well as some who discovered the area more recently. City staff initially identified potential interviewees, seeking one or more people to represent a range of different interests or user groups. Interviewees then suggested others who would be valuable to speak with. CBI’s goal was to speak with a full range of users and to hear their experiences, concerns and ideas.

“User groups” of Fresh Pond are not fixed, easily definable categories of users. People we interviewed often fit into several different user groups, or had fit into different groups over time (for example, they had a dog they walked at Fresh Pond for years but not longer do, or they used to run but now only walk, or they used to be a user but now primarily serve on a related board.)

One-on-one interviews were carried out primarily by phone and took between 30 and 60 minutes. Participants were told that their names would be listed but that statements would not be attributed to individuals in order to promote frank and open sharing of ideas and concerns. The interview questions can be found in Appendix 1, and a complete list of people interviewed is included in Appendix 2. The rest of this document contains findings from our interviews. The statements are those we heard from interviewees, and have not been fact-checked for accuracy or weighted according to how many interviewees said what. This initial assessment is qualitative, rather than being a formal survey compiling quantitative data, and may not capture the full and nuanced range of all users of Fresh Pond Reservation.

Part B, Fresh Pond Reservation the Resource, describes some of the many things people said they value about Fresh Pond Reservation, one of the largest open spaces in the city with a wild character and multiple uses.

Part C, Current Challenges, reflects themes we heard during our interviews of where the biggest challenges are among users and uses of the reservation and ideas for addressing these challenges. We have not fact-checked the statements for accuracy; rather we reflect them as we heard them in our conversations. The points are grouped into five primary topics (in no particular order): (a) general conflict and too many users, (b) lack of awareness of reservoir/water protection needs, (c) dogs off-leash, (d) groups of runners, and (e) users fast cyclists.

The Appendices contain the interview protocol, the names and affiliations of those interviewed, and a list of places with multiple uses that might serve as a resource or model for Cambridge (Appendix 3).

Please note that this assessment is only an initial step in the City’s efforts to design and utilize a public engagement process to develop a share use plan. Thus, in the coming months, the City will notify interviewees and interested others of the development of that public engagement process and dates, times, and locations for initial meetings.
PART B. FRESH POND RESERVATION THE RESOURCE

Fresh Pond is a very special resource for citizens and visitors. People told the assessment team they value Fresh Pond Reservation for a variety of reasons. Many interviewees stressed the great value of the Reservation as a green respite, open space, and recreational outlet in a dense, dynamic City. The following is a summary of why and how interviewees value the Reservation.

• It provides recreational opportunities of all sorts:
  o Walking (with and without dogs)
  o Dog walking (on and off-leash)
  o Jogging
  o Bicycling and tricycling
  o Cross country skiing
  o Taking photographs
  o Bird watching
  o Being in nature
  o Meditating and enjoying quiet time
  o Picnicking

• It provides a green space in the city, enabling people to get outside without having to get into their cars.
• It is our Central Park, and of equivalent value to Cambridge as Central Park is to Manhattan.
• It provides wildlife viewing opportunities, and people observe salamanders, red fox, muskrats, groundhogs, rabbits, birds, coyotes and more.
• It is a place where people can easily run with their dogs.
• It is one of the few places that allow dogs off-leash in or near the city, which provides important value to both people and dogs.
• It provides solace for many in times of difficulty.
• It’s easy to walk around with a stroller, which is key for people with young children.
• It provides social and community time both for those who go to Fresh Pond daily and get to know each other and for those who go to Fresh Pond with friends.
• It is one of the few places in the area with something for everyone (kids, families, dogs, etc.).
• The air seems cleaner there.
• It provides safe places for people to bicycle, run, and walk away from motorized vehicles.

Other themes from the interviews, in no particular order:

General

• People value the Reservation so much that many who live nearby have chosen to buy or rent there largely because of their proximity to the Reservation.
• Many people (and dogs) come to Fresh Pond daily and have for decades.
Management and Planning

- Fresh Pond is very well managed, and visitors appreciate landscaping improvements from the past few years. People commented on the high quality of the facilities (restrooms, ranger stations).
- There was an extensive Master Planning process that involved many stakeholders in developing a Fresh Pond Master Plan that was adopted by the City Council 8 to 1.
- People described their appreciation for the accessible, knowledgeable ranger and other staff.
- It is a great challenge for those making decisions about Fresh Pond to simultaneously protect the water supply and provide for other uses of the space.
- Once a decision is made about how different areas of the Reservation should be used, all the signage, paths and staff should reinforce that message for consistency and to help establish habits.
- The city should keep creating and supporting places like Fresh Pond where people can be active together, as this is clearly in very high demand.
- Some indicated that there could be more effort to remind users that the Reservation is shared space and so users must work to be considerate of others.
- Because it is difficult to see the cumulative impact of one individual action combined with that same action by thousands of people, individuals may not understand why it matters if they break a particular rule.
- Some are afraid that the Water Department is seeking to prohibit dogs from Fresh Pond Reservation entirely.
- A few interviewees noted that the Water Department is more accustomed to managing and protecting resources than to managing people.
- Some feel anyone should be invited to use Fresh Pond Reservation, and that the resident-only parking area feels exclusive. They pointed to models in other communities where Cambridge residents are welcome to use local green spaces.
- The question was raised about whether Reservation use should be geared toward city residents or toward a broader community of people in the region.
- A few interviewees noted that there is a set of non-legalized, sometimes unspoken rules and norms of behavior for the Reservation and that these norms, in some sense, are most important to maintain and nurture for the benefit of the Reservation.
- Many interviewees noted that they understand that the Reservation is part of the City’s water supply. However, there were a range of views on how directly any one use adversely affects the Pond and its water quality.
- Several people mentioned that group events that require permits, especially cross-country school events, may have significant impact on the land and on other users’ experiences while the event is underway.
Uses and User Conflicts

- People described a great variety of use patterns. Broadly characterized, the Reservation is busiest in the early morning, after work and on weekends. Seasonally, April 1-June 30 and September 1-November 15 are the busiest times.
- Some interviewees noted that the central physical constraint, and thus problem, for Fresh Pond Reservation is that through steep banks, thick vegetation, and wetlands, there is really only a narrow, circular path for users to congregate on and use. Thus people’s activities are generally concentrated into a very narrow area.
- Most users are very well behaved in all user groups. It is the outliers, whose dogs are misbehaved, who run inconsiderately taking over the path, who bike too fast given the corners they can’t see around, and the like who people believe cause conflicts. People told us of their general appreciation for being somewhere used by so many different people in so many different ways, and said that for the most part everyone gets along very well.
- Generally, most people said that dog owners are good about picking up after their dogs, with occasional exceptions when the snow is deep or when their dog is out of sight.
- Some noted that dog excrement is an issue for those who encounter it and also for water quality.
- Professional dog walkers were described as responsible, with their dogs generally under control.
- Some interviewees told us about people who have stopped using Fresh Pond because of either (a) fear of or actual negative interactions with dogs off leash, or (b) a desire to observe wildlife and the belief that dogs scare away other species.
- Interviewees noted that people are searching for good places to take their children to ride bikes, but that some people with young children feel Fresh Pond isn’t safe for children because of off-leash dogs and other uses such as speeding bicycles and large groups of runners.
- Some interviewees described being knocked down or jumped on by dogs at Fresh Pond, some indicating their frailty and fear that even a well-intentioned dog that physically interacts with visitors can cause them harm.
- Some interviewees expressed concern about speeding bicycles, groups of runners, and the use of motorized vehicles on the path as a cause of some concern, at least some of the time.
- Fairness is a big issue. Some dog owners feel dogs should be allowed wherever people are allowed, as both cause ecological damage (i.e. if an area is closed to prevent ecosystem damage to grasses, close it to everyone).
- Some suggested that Fresh Pond use should focus on activities that are otherwise typically prohibited or difficult in the larger metropolitan area.
- It was noted that the current busy nature of the Reservation might make it safer for solitary visitors than it used to be.
Developing a Shared Use Plan

• Most interviewees were enthusiastic about the idea of helping to develop a shared use plan for the Reservation if the process were fair, inclusive, and thorough.
• Interviewees suggested a range of ways to engage user groups and the public including signage, brochures, fact sheets, list serves, workshops, web-based surveys and other means.
• Interviewees generally expressed concern about plans that might be developed primarily by the Water Department or the City without careful and close engagement of users and the public.
• Some interviewees expressed concern about the last efforts at managing use, particularly dog walking, and cautioned against seeking to create too many rules, exclusions, and limitations for users.
PART C. CURRENT CHALLENGES, CAUSES AND OPTIONS

The following chart organizes the data from our interviewees into challenges, suggested causes, and possible options. Please note that the items are not ranked in any way. The first column of this chart describes the challenge as identified by interviewees, the second column contains their explanations of the cause(s) for that problem, and the third column lists solutions suggested by interviewees. Again, none of these points have been fact checked or evaluated by the assessment team; rather they reflect the variety of voices, opinions and knowledge we heard in our interviews.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Solution Options</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. General conflict &amp; too many users</td>
<td>People don’t know what is expected of them</td>
<td>Use international shared use best practices. Widen the path.</td>
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<td>Be clear about expectations through road markings and signs (keep right, slower people to the right and pass to the left, share the path, be considerate and tolerant of others, etc).</td>
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<td>Better outreach materials. Encourage courtesy and respect by all, to all.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A. General conflict &amp; too many users</td>
<td>Because Fresh Pond is lovely and so well managed, there is high demand</td>
<td>Enforce parking restrictions to Cambridge residents.</td>
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<td>Limit parking to 2 hours but allow anyone to park there, especially during low-use times during weekdays. Consider ways to make other green spaces in the city desirable to draw away some of the users.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A. General conflict &amp; too many users</td>
<td>High level of use, many people using one limited path, so conflicts among users arise</td>
<td>Have more rangers on-site, especially during high use time, to help with enforcement and education. Consider having a Fresh Pond Ombudsman. Create dog parks elsewhere and establish some parks as entirely dog-free. Have mediation type support available within 48 hrs of a conflict to help resolve issues without escalating them.</td>
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<td>B. Lack of awareness of reservoir / water protection needs – resent water protection measures and limitations</td>
<td>Unaware of reservoir/ water protection measures, people walk through or damage newly restored landscaping</td>
<td>Do on-site education through signage and general messaging – this is a reservoir first, ecological issues and education – our priority is to protect your drinking water, explain reasoning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>B. Lack of awareness of reservoir / water protection needs – decision makers occasionally undermine previous work</td>
<td>Unaware of history or Fresh Pond Master Plan, may not know about the reasoning behind certain decisions</td>
<td>Educate City Council regularly. Work with and educate Community Development Department and other city departments.</td>
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<td>C. Dogs off leash – density of dogs on path</td>
<td>Because there is no longer a field option for dogs to play in, all dogs are forced onto the path</td>
<td>Provide a field/flat or open area for dogs to play, which would free up lots of space on the path. Have off-leash times of day (e.g. 6-9 am and pm). Require all dogs to be on leashes during weekend days during the busy season (April-June and Sept-Nov) when rangers are on duty.</td>
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<td>C. Dogs off leash – rowdy/dangerous, people have been knocked over.</td>
<td>This occurs due to a particularly rowdy or difficult dog, an owner who does not have control of their animal, individuals unfamiliar with how to interact with dogs, or when several off-leash dogs are together.</td>
<td>Talk to dog owners when their dogs are off-leash, explain that dogs need to be under their control, etc. Require leashes. Or require leashes on the paths but allow dogs off-leash in areas where people aren’t trying to travel. Require dogs off-leash who misbehave to attend obedience training, or teach owners the rules (and that it isn’t ok for your dog to jump on a stranger) or pay a fine. Perhaps dogs could earn the right to be off leash, indicated by a medallion? Put a moratorium on off-leash dog walking until this gets resolved. Create specific off-leash area, and do not allow dogs in other areas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. Dogs off leash – causes erosion</td>
<td>Playing, rowdy, high level of use, fragile ecosystems</td>
<td>Prohibit dogs from sensitive areas, especially steeper slopes.</td>
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<td>C. Dogs off leash – scares birds and other wildlife</td>
<td>Dogs may frighten birds by their presence or by actively chasing them</td>
<td>Have one or more areas closed to dogs as wildlife area, perhaps Black’s Nook area. Consider whether other users also scare birds.</td>
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D. Groups of runners – in groups, fast, racing or training, can run people down, scare them or make others step off path, sometimes discourteous, sometimes leave waste like water bottles as litter.

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<th>Runners occasionally run in big groups, four abreast and take over the path, because it’s a social time, because there are no stripes indicating to stay right, because they can safely run in groups off highway (vs. around town or on city streets), because they are in a race.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Put up signage telling people to stay right except to pass. Put lines on the pavement. Put up signs at entrances to warn other users when there is a road race in progress. Don’t allow large groups to run at Fresh Pond.</td>
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E. Fast cyclists – where unpredictable children and dogs are; concern about potential collisions with kids/dogs, people w/ special needs, elderly.

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<th>One single paved area for all uses, rather than a separate paved bike path. People using the path as a place to bike fast, lack of a policy about where and how to ride.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Require cyclists to stay to the right. Add signage so bikers know the rules. Set speed limits. Create separate bike lanes. Prohibit bikes, as Cambridge now has other bike paths.</td>
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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Name and organization/affiliation
2. What do you value about Fresh Pond? Why is it important to you and your organization?
3. Tell us about how your members/constituents use Fresh Pond Reservation:
   - What kind of activities do they do?
   - What times of day, weeks, seasons?
4. What are some of the current challenges or problems around use today?
5. Do you have any recommendations for how these challenges might best be managed?
6. Do you know of examples or models for managing multiple uses on municipal open space that might be worth looking at?
7. The City wants to initiate a robust public engagement process on shared use to identify values, user challenges, options for managing uses, criteria for selecting among them, and the priorities of various users.
   - What do you believe would be key elements of robust public engagement process on this issue?
   - What key tools might be employed? Websites, public comment periods, workshops, public meetings, open houses, webinars, tours, surveys, focus groups, poster boards, a multi-stakeholder committee, other?
   - Which unaffiliated or hard to reach interests do you think use the reservation? How best might you engage these interests?
   - What’s the best way to publicize events or efforts?
8. Anything else you want to share with us?
APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEWEES

The following people were interviewed for this assessment.

Alka Bhaskar, Passive Recreation User and Dog Walker
PJ Blankenhorn, Passive Recreation User
Gail Breslow, Cambridge Sports Union
Dan Crane, Passive Recreation User
Stuart Dash, Cambridge Planning Board
Henrietta Davis, Cambridge City Council
Helen Fairman, Passive Recreation User and Dog Walker
Susan Jenness, Passive Recreation User
Richard Knowlton, Passive Recreation User
Mark McCabe, Cambridge Animal Commission
Diane McLaughlin, Passive Recreation User
Jamie McWilliam, Neville Place
Peter Marron, Passive Recreation User
Sgt. Kathleen Murphy, Cambridge Police
Betsy Myer, Friends of Fresh Pond
Charlie O’Rourke, Buckingham Browne & Nichols School
Evan Olsen, Owner of Laundromutt
Jean Rogers, Cambridge Water Department
Ann Roosevelt, Cambridge Water Board
Rich Rossi, City of Cambridge
Paul Ryder, Cambridge Recreation Department and Fresh Pond Advisory Board
Cara Seiderman, City of Cambridge Community Development Department
Denise Simmons, Cambridge City Council
Janice Snow, Fresh Pond Advisory Board
Claudia Thompson, GrowNative Cambridge
Louise Weed, Fresh Pond Advisory Board
Peter Wilkins, Passive Recreation User and Dog Walker
Jennifer Wright, Conservation Commission and Fresh Pond Advisory Board
APPENDIX 3: POSSIBLE SOURCES FOR SHARED USE MODELS

The following were suggested by interviewees as possible sources of models for shared use. They have not been evaluated to determine the ways in which they might or might not be appropriate models for the situation at Fresh Pond Reservation.

Minuteman Bikeway  
http://www.minutemanbikeway.org/Pages/guidelines.html

Walden Pond, Concord, MA

Rocky Woods (Trustees of Reservation site, with a public process around multiple use)

Middlesex Fells, Winchester, MA

Prospect Park, Brooklyn, NY

Central Park, New York, NY  

Seattle, WA Off Leash Areas  
http://www.seattle.gov/parks/offleash.asp

Chestnut Hill Reservoir, Brookline, MA

Minneapolis, MN – Shared use policy around three lakes, off-leash areas

Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board - Off-Leash Recreation Areas Permits  

Bloomington, MN Parks and Recreation Facilities - Off-leash dog area  
http://www.ci.bloomington.mn.us/main_top/2_facilities/rec_facility/offleash/offbromp.htm

Woodland, CA - Sec. 3-1-2. City amendment to County Animal Control ordinance.  
http://www.ci.woodland.ca.us/cityhall/code/_DATA/CHAPTER03/Article_I__Animal_Control_/Sec__3_1_2__City_amendment_to_.html

UnBoise Idaho parks  
http://www.ci.boise.id.us/parks/dogdefinitions.asp

City of Toronto, City Council Legislative Documents  

Gotham Gazette -- Park Turf Wars  
http://www.gothamgazette.com/iotw/parkuse/
Notes From the Vet
http://www.fenixresearch.com/vet/dosand2.shtml

Piedmont Parks
http://www.ci.piedmont.ca.us/html/visitor/parks.htm

City of Middleton Dog Exercise Area
http://www.ci.middleton.wi.us/Lands/Dog.htm

Parks for Paws
http://www.gov.edmonton.ab.ca/comm_services/parkland_services/parks/parks_for_paws.html

Chicago: Animal Care and Control
http://www.ci.chi.il.us/AnimalCareControl/Pets/Etiquette.html


Boulder, CO Dog Regulations
http://ci.boulder.co.us/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3050&Itemid=411