

Manchester Town Common Renovation



The Manchester Town Common is a small parcel of land but an important public place in the historic center of town. In its past the Common has been home to three Town Meeting Houses, the first built in 1656 and the last that stands today was built in 1809 and converted in 1844 to the First Parish Church. Following the conversion of the Meeting House, the Common welcomed two Town Halls, the first torn down in 1969 to make room for the current Town Hall.

Also on the Town Common today are reminders of the town's history. The Towne Fountain was gifted by the Towne Family as part of the "Water Celebration" marking the installation of the first municipal water supply in Manchester. Plaques to honor the town's veterans in the Civil War, World Wars I and II, the Korean War and Vietnam are affixed to large boulders amid planting beds. Five large canopy trees were donated by Dorothy Rice, the proprietor of Floyd's to replace the grand Elms that succumbed to Dutch Elm disease in the mid 1900's. At one time there were two other structures on the Common – a dry goods store on the northeast corner where the towering evergreen now reins and a small bandstand at the northwest corner.

While the Common has generally remained a quiet green space celebrating community, changes have gradually eroded its design and beauty. Pavement and pathways are more prevalent than grass, trees have aged and declined, and the furniture, lighting and plantings are worn and tired.

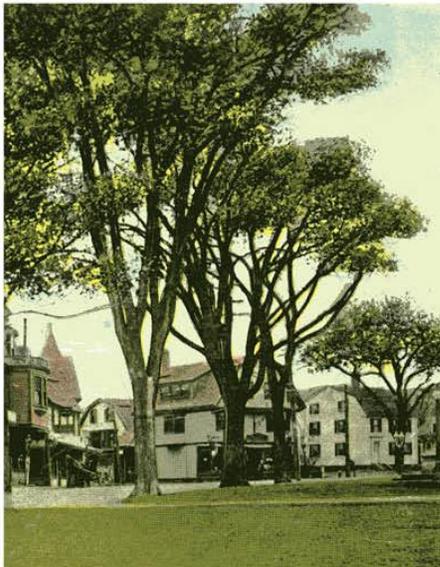
In spring of 2017, Town Meeting voted to approve \$15,000 for design services for the renovation of Town Common. Late in 2018 the Town secured the services of Landscape Architect, Toby Wolf to update the Common to reduce the amount of paving, improve circulation and accessibility to Town Hall, and create a healthy and beautiful park that would include a new Veterans Honor Roll. At the 2019 Town Meeting voters approved \$100,000 in CPA funds for construction. While the Veterans Honor Roll is being designed and funded separately, Mr. Wolf is coordinating with the Honor Roll design team to assure this new element on the Common is integrated in the overall design.

After meetings with representatives of the First Parish Church, Manchester Fire Department, Manchester Department of Public Works, Historic District Commission, Conservation Commission, Veterans Honor Roll, Friends of Manchester Trees, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Committee, the Tree Warden and Town Administrator, Mr. Wolf developed and presented a concept plan to the Board of Selectmen on March 21st.

The Renovation Plan included a reduction in paved areas, circulation paths around a central oval green, high canopy trees, two ADA compliant parking spaces with a sloping walkway to Town Hall and a switchback ramp to provide ADA access at the front of Town Hall. The Plan was favorably received and -

Board Members asked Mr. Wolf to prepare a sketch or set of sections to more fully illustrate what the Common would look and feel like as redesigned. The Board also asked that the design be specifically shared with abutters and nearby business owners so these stakeholders could provide input on the direction of the design.

It is anticipated that on May 6th, the BOS will discuss how the plan has progressed, given any additional input, and further information and coordination with the Veteran's Honor Roll. Following this meeting Mr. Wolf would make any further changes requested, prepare construction documents and apply for permits and hearings as needed with the Conservation Commission, Tree Warden, and Historic District Commission. A fall construction schedule is anticipated.



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