

DRAFT MASTER PLAN
FOR THE
TOWN AND COUNTY-OWNED
VETERANS PARKS COMPLEX



*Maintaining the spirit
of a public partnership
and enhancing the synergy
of a linked community park system*



OCTOBER 2001

Introduction

In 1993 the Huntington Planning Board adopted a Town Comprehensive Plan that identified the need for the development of specific, resource-based park management plans. The purpose of this document is to implement the Comprehensive Plan goal, provide supporting information and prescribe specific strategies to maintain and improve the outstanding resources of the almost 200-acre Veterans Parks Complex, while assuring that the legislative intent of the Knolls Park cooperative acquisition is carried forward.

All four of the parks that comprise the Veterans Parks Complex were at one time holdings of the Federal Northport Veterans Administration Medical Center. The trails that traverse and bind these parks offer an opportunity unsurpassed in other Town parks and yet, use of each of the parks is limited by an ironic turn of events. Meadowlark Park is the only Town park designated for multi-use trails, and yet, no such trails have been developed. Veterans Nature Study Area, a park-preserve, is earmarked specifically for outdoor educational use, but such use has been hindered by the Brownfields investigation and other environmental concerns. Veterans Park is among the most active parks in the Town system, planned to maximize recreational space within its boundaries, but unsanctioned activities, such as all-terrain vehicle use and illegal use of alcohol, continue after authorized hours to the detriment of the property and residential neighbors. The newest acquisition, Knolls Park, was scrutinized for its prior use as a federal fill site when it was the subject of a rezoning request and its subsequent clean-up ran a parallel timeline with preparation of this plan. Neighboring residents fought for its protection as parkland, and yet, several continue to use it for illegal disposal of yard and household debris. Perhaps the ultimate paradox is that nowhere in this complex of four parks that was once owned by the federal Veterans Administration is there a veterans monument or memorial.

There are many issues facing the four parks in the complex, none of which are insurmountable and all of which offer starting points and opportunities for positive action. The clear consensus of the VPCAC is that a plan must be implemented to enhance recognition of the complex as a unified, safe family-oriented site with diverse appeal for users of all ages, to draw purposeful recreational use that is sensitive to the surrounding community, and to encourage appreciation of its natural environment.

This draft document is the culmination of six months of work by the Veterans Parks Citizens Advisory Committee with Town staff support. Six focus areas for sub-committees were identified and this plan follows the framework of those subject areas—Community Concerns, Natural Resources, Active Park Design, Trails, Maintenance and Security, and Implementation Resources. The plan results from 11 formal full CAC meetings, additional sub-committee meetings, multiple site inspections, and individual member involvement that included community outreach, as well as specific research. The support, assistance, and input provided by Town and County officials, staff, community members and other individuals and agencies are gratefully acknowledged.

It is the hope of the Veterans Parks Citizens Advisory Committee that the recommendations contained within this draft plan will be given primary consideration by the Town Board. In accordance with resolution #2000-842 of November 21, 2000, this document is presented as a draft implementation plan for the Veterans Parks Complex, to be subject of further public review that would be best received through a community planning session, the formal focus of which should be to derive the actual complete park development design. This would appear to meet the

recommendation of the Town Comprehensive Plan and be compatible with the Generic Environmental Impact Statement prepared thereon.

On behalf of the Veterans Parks Citizens Advisory Committee, this plan is submitted under cover memorandum of the Chairperson dated October 10, 2001.

Veterans Parks Citizens Advisory Committee

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Bill Bryde, representing Councilman Mark Cuthbertson

Margaret Fox, representing Councilwoman Marlene Budd

John Holihan, representing Supervisor Frank Petrone

Richard Holliday, representing Councilwoman Susan Scarpati-Reilly

Bruce Howe, representing the Huntington Park and Recreation Commission

Greg Lauri, representing Suffolk County Dept. of Parks Recreation and Conservation

Gerard McCreight, representing Suffolk County Legislator Jon Cooper

Herb McGrail, representing the Town Open Space (EOSPA) Committee

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MISSION STATEMENT

At its first meeting, the VPCAC prepared the following mission statement: *It is the charge of the Veterans Parks Citizens Advisory Committee to prepare a report that will support the best management of the Town's Veterans Parks complex.*

To accomplish this mission the CAC will:

- . *review the condition of the resources and facilities in the Veterans Parks Complex;*
- . *assess applicable policies and plans;*
- . *evaluate existing management obligations and anticipate future needs;*
- . *determine what management constraints apply;*
- . *establish goals to insure that neither quality of the recreational experience of park visitors, nor of life in the surrounding community are compromised by detrimental park use or management; and*
- . *draft a prioritized plan to include long-term policy considerations for public review, comment and Town Board action that identifies recommended positive actions that can be taken to mitigate adverse conditions, facilitate appropriate recreational use of the site, and maintain or improve the outstanding environmental characteristics of the area.*

The residential area closest to the Veterans Parks Complex along its west side is an early high-density nearly fully-developed community. Its infrastructure is established with several roads that terminate in the parkland. Several neighboring homes are at a higher elevation than the parks with views into it. Major changes at the Complex could have potential to affect homeowners. For this reason, it is recommended that *the Veterans Parks CAC should be considered an ongoing Ad Hoc Committee. This will allow the CAC to provide advisory guidance to the Town for any major management decisions the Town may face (i.e., new construction), to disseminate information to the community, and/or to support implementation of plan recommendations.*

Ground Rules for Park Planning

The Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Resources Section of the Huntington Comprehensive Plan was reviewed for general direction in planning site improvements to the Complex. Goals established in the Comprehensive Plan will be met at the Veterans Parks Complex by availing appropriate public access, enhancing the recreational complement of an existing active park, protecting and restoring natural resources, and by encouraging environmental appreciation. Additional simple goals to guide park decisions in the future are recommended as follow.

1. *The four parks should be considered part of a single related Veterans Parks Complex. No changes to any individual park should be considered in isolation of the others.*
2. *All park users, children and adults, should be provided a safe and secure environment. Ample security and maintenance are crucial to the major investment that will be made at the parks complex.*
3. *Growth within the parks should be sensitive to neighboring uses and community input should be considered and incorporated by shared visioning prior to implementing any major changes.*
4. *Enhancing the quality of public access, outdoor recreation, and natural resources should be primary elements of any future park plan to revitalize the entire park assemblage.*
5. *Conservation activities, such as identification of species, ecological habitat studies, and use for educational programs, should be encouraged. A comprehensive natural resources inventory must be completed.*

LAND ACQUISITION AND USE-HISTORY AND DESTINY

The four parks that are subject of this plan—Veterans Park, Meadowlark Park, Veterans Nature Study Area, and Knolls Parks—total almost 200 acres placing the complex among the Town’s largest recreation areas. The assemblage consists entirely of lands excised by the federal government from prior Veterans Administration holdings and held for the enjoyment of all residents of the Town of Huntington (see Figure 1 - Veterans Parks Complex Base Map). These lands were acquired with the assistance of local government capital program and open space program funding availed pursuant to public referendum. A small component was also set aside by land dedication through the subdivision planning process. Three of the parks in the Veterans Parks Complex (Veterans Park, Veterans Nature Study Area, and Meadowlark Park) are under the direct jurisdiction of the Town Board of the Town of Huntington. These three are recognized as parkland in the Town Comprehensive Plan (1993) and carried as such on Section VIII of the Town Assessment Roll. The fourth park (Knolls Park) was recently acquired as a partnership project with the County of Suffolk and is jointly owned and managed (as detailed on page 7).

As dedicated parkland, a municipal home rule resolution, an act of the State Legislature and possibly, replacement of comparable real estate, would be required to allow its use for any other purpose. In the case of the dedicated park-preserve (Veterans Nature Study Area), the Huntington Town Code requires a mandatory referendum before the land could be used for any other purpose.

Veterans Park

Acquisition

The first park acquired in the complex is the Town’s Veterans Park¹, a 12.5-acre active recreation area at the southernmost portion of the assemblage with frontage on Bellerose Avenue conveyed in 1959.² Prior to its federal ownership, this site was owned and operated by the Northport Farmers Club, a cooperative agricultural organization comprised of farmers from East Northport and Northport. It was used as a pickle processing site and later, as a creamery. A rail spur that existed on site was used to ship all processed products by rail. The deed³ specifies that the property be used “for public park and recreational purposes and for incidental purposes pertaining thereto, but for no other purpose.” The deed includes provisions that indicate that a 50% public benefit allowance was granted to the Town from the land’s fair market value at time of conveyance stipulated on satisfactory use of the premises for recreational purposes for a 20-year period. The federal government retained the right to reclaim the land if any of the deed conditions were abrogated.

Use

Existing recreational improvements in Veterans Park include: two Little League baseball fields, one lighted softball field (used primarily as a Pee Wee league field), two lighted regulation-sized soccer fields (one on the upper park level, the other at road grade that overlaps the outfield of the softball

¹ Veterans Park is identified on the Suffolk County Tax Map as parcel 0400-086.00-01.00-001.000, recorded in liber 4597, page 420 from the United States General Services Administration to the Town of Huntington.

² It was purchased for \$6,625.00 and transferred by quit claim deed dated February 10, 1959.

³ Copies of all referenced parks deeds are on file in the County Clerk’s office.

field), one hard-surface volleyball court, a beach volleyball court, four handball courts, two basketball courts, a 1/4-mile walking/jogging track, a restroom/storage building, and parking area striped for 62 cars within the park. An approximately 440-foot long cut-out area along the north side of Bellerose Avenue adjoining the parking area can accommodate another 19 parallel-parked cars.

The southeastern corner of the developed park is in the ownership of the Northport-East Northport School District, a component of the Bellerose Avenue Elementary School property. In 1983 an agreement was forged for a period of 50 years between the Town and Northport-East Northport School District, signed by the Town Supervisor and School Board President,³ enabling the expansion of the Veterans Park use to provide a softball field on this segment of district property. The agreement provides the Town residents the right to use the Bellerose Elementary School parking area during non-school hours to facilitate their use of Veterans Park and holds the Town responsible for any added security or maintenance such use might require. The agreement provides the school district the privilege of utilizing the park facilities for district students for regulated school activities during school hours. While the elementary school does utilize the park on an ongoing basis for its gym programs, the school district found it necessary to lock its gates at night and during weekends to reduce vandalism and illegal dumping that was occurring. It is important that the school district and the Town maintain open communication regarding any concerns that might have potential to affect the terms of the agreement. It might serve all parties to review the problems experienced and to develop a mutually agreeable response to these problems, e.g. identified hours of use and hours during which the gates should be locked to protect the property.

Recreation Programs

The Town does not track individual attendance at its recreational facilities; however, organized field use is allowed only by group permit issued by the Department of Parks and Recreation. In addition, several of the facilities at the park are scheduled for regular Town recreational programs. This use is not exclusive and the fields are available for informal “pick-up” play when not in use pursuant to an issued permit. Veterans Park has lighted fields and court areas that are openly accessible until 11 pm from April through November. While the facility is open for public use, only the front parking lot is lighted during the winter months. The recreational facilities are built into a hillside, situated in a tiered series of plateaus, which maximizes useable land area. Wallwork and slopes add interest and prominence to the site as a component of an open streetscape across from the LIRR tracks. Recreational use at Veterans Park is summarized below by amenity.

Little League fields

The two western fields are placed in a facing multi-use field configuration. They are programmed continuously from April through June by permit issued to Larkfield Little League. In the fall (September through November) the outfields are used together to form a junior soccer field, which is programmed by permit issued to the Northport Youth Center Soccer League.

Softball/Pee Wee field

The southeastern ballfield is used only for organized pee wee play (younger kids aged 5-7) on Saturdays and Sundays during the spring by permit issued to Larkfield Little League.

³The agreement was authorized directly by the Board of Education and was not the subject of a local proposition/districtwide vote.

Soccer fields

The two lighted regulation soccer fields are used in Town adult evening programs across three seasons—spring, summer and fall (April through November). Between 30 and 35 teams participate per season. The junior soccer field that spans the backfields of the Little League fields is programmed in the fall season only for Northport Youth Center Soccer league play. The hill that separates the two soccer fields is a popular winter sledding area.

Volleyball courts

The lighted hard-surface court is programmed at the same intervals as the soccer leagues, 7:00 pm, 8:15 pm, and 9:30 pm across three seasons—spring, summer and fall, but finishing earlier than soccer in October. It attracts between 8 and 16 teams per season broken into one or two leagues. In addition, the Town runs an adult pick-up volleyball program on Friday nights in the spring and fall. It has a steady registration of about 25 people per session. The lighted beach volleyball court (constructed in summer 2000) is not programmed, but is usually used as a warm-up practice court by teams waiting to use the hard surface court.

Basketball courts

The two basketball courts were at one time programmed in the evenings for adult league play in the same three time slots as volleyball. However, due to the condition of the courts and general preference for indoor court play, the Town has not programmed leagues at this site in two years. All present basketball play consists of pick-up games.

Handball Courts

The four handball courts are not programmed for specific use. All handball play consists of pick-up games. The complement of court games at Veterans Park distinguishes it as a quasi-urban park. Its handball courts are in more continuous play than those at any other Town park. They are often the first and last amenity in play on any given summer weekend.

Meadowlark Park

Acquisition

The second park acquired in the complex is the Town's Meadowlark Park, a 60.8-acre predominantly woodland area at the north easternmost component of the assemblage with frontage on Middleville and Old Bridge Roads secured in 1974. The deed⁴ specifies that the Town of Huntington must use the property for "public park and recreation purposes in perpetuity." It was conveyed through the U.S. Department of Interior for such purpose, subject to the prior easement granted to the Long Island Lighting Company.⁵ The utility corridor is a transitional (disturbed) successional meadow area.

Use

There are no existing recreational improvements in Meadowlark Park with the exception of woodland trails and a small gravel parking at the entrance from Middleville Road that coincides

⁴ Meadowlark Park is identified on the Suffolk County Tax Map as parcels 0400-060.00-01.00-001.004, 003.000 and 025.000, recorded in liber 7570, page 203, from the United States of America to the Town of Huntington.

⁵ The LILCO easement in Meadowlark Park was established by deed dated August 11, 1959 (recorded in liber 4698, page 554).

with the rear entrance to the Veterans Administration Medical Center⁶. The utility right-of-way that courses through Meadowlark Park is 100 feet wide. It contains underground utilities, including LIPA's four buried electrical transmission lines and a fiber optics line, and the Iroquois Gas Transmission System's natural gas pipeline. In 1976 when funding was readily available for major park improvements through the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, the Town Parks Department proposed a plan for development of an extensive active public recreational facility that would have altered the character of the site's woodland resources considerably. The surrounding community mounted a strong campaign in opposition and the project never moved forward. In 1981 Meadowlark Park was redesignated from active to passive recreational use. The 1977 USGS topographic map indicates that a series of over 20 (likely residential, Quonset hut-type) structures were placed at one time in a horseshoe configuration on this site.

By resolution of April 15, 1997 the Town Board designated Meadowlark Park as the first Town site for multi-use trail development in accordance with Town Code. The Town has secured a \$32,815 grant from the National Recreational Trails Program to enable development of such multi-use trails, including the Town's first handicapped-accessible ("whole access") trail. By resolution of August 3, 1999 the Town Board authorized the expenditure of up to \$35,000 of Environmental Open Space Program funding to serve as the Town's required match to the state grant. Development of the new trail system is pending completion of this master plan effort.

Veterans Park Nature Study Area

Acquisition

The third park acquired in the complex is the Town's Veterans Nature Study Area, a 34.1-acre property in the mideastern component of the assemblage with no street frontage. Title for 33.48 acres of the park was conveyed in 1976 by quit claim deed⁷ from the United States of America to the Town of Huntington. The deed specifies that the property is to be used for environmental education purposes pursuant to an agreement with the U.S. Department of Education. A 0.6-acre addition to the nature study area at its southeastern corner was acquired through subdivision set-aside from Gilder Estates. Edgar Gildersleeve deeded the 0.6-acre parcel to the Town of Huntington in 1976 (recorded in liber 8275, page 141).

Use

The only existing recreational improvements in the Veterans Nature Study Area are trails that traverse its woodland, successional meadow, and fern glen areas. This site was dedicated as parkland-preserve (preservation area) pursuant to §159-3(b)(2) of Huntington Town Code on April 14, 1992. Preservation areas are identified as "Nature centers providing outdoor laboratories in ecology and conservation; shall have guided walks; may cut some selective trails; no large buildings, or collecting of materials; to provide educational programs."

Pursuant to the terms of the federal conveyance of the property, the Town is required to provide a total of 40 organized educational visitations to the site per year and to file a report on a biennial basis with the U.S. Department of Education indicating same, along with site condition. The Town

⁶ The access easement to the USA from the Town of Huntington is recorded in liber 6391 page 281.

⁷ The Veterans Nature Study Area is identified on the Suffolk County Tax Map as a single parcel, 0400-086.00-01.00-005.001, recorded in liber 8046, page 74.

suspended this specific use in 1993 by formal notice to local school districts and the U.S. Department of Education in response to information received from the Suffolk County Department of Health Services (SCDHS). During the review of the rezoning of the former Benjamin property, the SCDHS informed the Town that a three-acre component of the site had formerly been used as an open incineration and dump site. The Town proceeded with an environmental site investigation, which is ongoing, supported by the first State Brownfields grant awarded to a municipality (enabling reimbursable funding up to \$131,670). Roux Associates is under contract to complete this site assessment, which is being coordinated through the Town Department of Environmental Waste Management (see discussion of property remediation under Community Concerns).

A marked 24-station interpretive trail was initially developed to correspond to a written trail guide to the Veterans Nature Study Area. In memory of Barbara Frost, a former school counselor, a separate trailhead sign and entrance was constructed and dedicated at a Town and Northport-East Northport School District-sponsored Parks Awareness Day in 1992, enabling students to directly access the trail from the rear of the Bellerose Avenue Elementary School property.

Knolls Park

Acquisition

The most recent addition to the Veterans Parks Complex is Knolls Park acquired jointly by the County and Town on December 29, 2000. Knolls Park is comprised of three components. The property was conveyed in three separate transactions that correlate to the areas identified on the base map. The southeastern 20 acres were acquired under the County Greenways/Active recreation program. While owned by the County, the Town has agreed to develop, manage and program this area for active recreational use, as an addition to Veterans Park. The Town and County acquired the southwestern 30 acres with funds provided by the County Land Preservation Partnership Program, from the Town Environmental Open Space and Park Fund Program and from the Town Environmental Capital Reserve Program. The northern 32+ acres were purchased under the County (1/4%) Drinking Water Protection Program. The Town's total investment toward the \$8 million purchase was \$1.5 million. Shared use and access easements enable Town management of the site as a whole and County residents use of the full property.

Acquisition of this property stopped a rezoning application that had been pending before the Huntington Town Board requesting one-acre zoning. At its existing R-80 zoning, 30 two-acre home lots could have been yielded. As was proposed in the applicant-generated rezoning request, up to 59 one-acre home lots might have resulted. During the course of review of the rezoning application, extensive environmental site investigation revealed that the federal government had utilized several areas within the site for fill disposal following cessation of use as a wastewater treatment facility. Therefore, a key condition of the County and Town proposal for acquisition and the contract of sale was the site clean-up as proscribed by the Draft Environmental Impact Statement adopted by the Town Board in May of 1998, and certified by the Suffolk County Department of Health Services. The Benjamin Development Company assumed responsibility for implementing the clean-up program with County Health Department oversight. \$3 million of the purchase price was held in escrow by the Town to ensure the work was carried out efficiently, effectively, and that there would be no unforeseen circumstances that require additional analysis or treatment.

The extensive site assessment, from which the clean-up program stemmed (conducted under the direction of the State Department of Environmental Conservation and County Health Department), did not identify any hazardous materials on the site. The site clean-up involved mainly removal of an extensive amount of metal, wood and concrete. It was required as a component of the negotiated purchase to ensure public safety. The clean-up work was completed during the course of master plan preparation, having spanned a general on-site work period from January 10-May 18 and completion of final inspection items from June 7-18. The areas disturbed by the clean-up operation will be restored further with topsoil and appropriate plantings during final park construction (see discussion of property remediation under Community Concerns).

Use

The three component areas within Knolls Park have different potential for public use; therefore, they are discussed as separate entities though part of the same holding.

Drinking Water Protection Parcel (Northern 32)

The northern 32-acre parcel⁸ acquired under the Drinking Water Protection Program and owned by the County is to be managed in accordance with the terms of the Suffolk County Nature Preserve Handbook. Such terms specify that no new hard infrastructure is to be introduced to the site. Existing trails that span this component of the park may be maintained, including a pathway to Middleville Road directly across the street from the Northport Middle School. The County Nature Preserve Handbook does recognize historic site uses, thus it is understood that trails and fire lanes existing prior to the County acquisition may continue to be maintained for passive use. The CAC has considered the use limitations for this section of the site as being an established framework for future management.

Land Preservation Partnership Parcel (Southwestern 30)

The 30 acres⁹ in the southwest component of the site, jointly owned by the Town and County, were not designated to a specific use category when authorized for acquisition, thus general park and recreation use is assigned. The intention of the County Legislature and the Town Board was that this parcel remain in passive use; therefore the CAC has regarded the potential use of this parcel as being primarily for trails and buffer to the high-density residential development to the west.

Greenways-Active Recreation Parcel (Southeastern 20)

This 20-acre rectangular parcel¹⁰ with its long axis situated parallel to the adjoining school property is owned by the County, but intended to be developed, programmed and maintained as an active recreational use facility by the Town pursuant to a cooperative agreement. Prior to acquisition of the property the Town Board committed to implementing a conceptual active use plan (see Figure 6). The plan depicted an array of facilities to include two regulation-sized soccer fields that could double as four junior fields, a Little League field, a hard surface bicycle path at the perimeter, and parking area to accommodate 150 cars. Following lengthy deliberation, the VPCAC is recommending a slightly expanded complement of new recreational facilities (see Active Park Design). The County Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation is drafting a cooperative agreement, which the Supervisor is

⁸ The Knolls Park/Drinking Water Protection Program parcel is identified on the Suffolk County Tax Map as 0400-086.00-03.00-001.001 (recorded in liber 12095, page 729).

⁹ The Knolls Park/Land Preservation Partnership parcel is identified on the Suffolk County Tax Map as 0400-086.00-03.00-001.003 (recorded in liber 12095, page 728).

¹⁰ The Knolls Park/Greenways-Active Recreation Program parcel is identified on the Suffolk County Tax Map as 0400-086.00-03.00-001.002 (recorded in liber 12095, page 727).

authorized by the Town Board to execute on terms acceptable to the Town Attorney. *No new improvements are to be undertaken on the parcel acquired under the Greenways Active Parkland Program until a written agreement between the County Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation and the Town of Huntington has been executed. The agreement shall specify the Town's commitment to construct, manage, and program the property for recreational use as required under the County Charter and specified by Town Board resolution.*

Future Expansion/Acquisition

There are no proposed efforts to expand the Veterans Parks Complex through further strategic land acquisition. However, the Town and other governmental agencies, particularly the County, should be prepared to add buffer and consider potential for additional recreational opportunities should any further lands from the adjoining Veterans Administration Medical Center or Bellerose Avenue School be considered for surplus sale. Several recommendations are offered relating to potential future physical expansion of the park complex:

- *As several trails continue from the parkland onto the federal property, a dialogue should be initiated with officials at the adjoining Veterans Administration Medical Center to ascertain whether there is any interest in either allowing use or having access to the parkland.*
- *Since a portion of Veterans Park is now developed on Northport-East Northport School District property, its future availability and uses should be defined more specifically by legal interest.*
- *LIPA should be contacted regarding the wedge parcel it owns adjoining Meadowlark Park, west of Old Bridge Road (possibly containing the park access path at this frontage). The Town identified this area during initial review of the Iroquois Gas Transmission System pipeline as a desired mitigation parcel. It is the only parcel in LIPA ownership in this area; the remainder of the utility right-of-way is by easement across Town property.*
- *The Town should inventory all privately-held vacant properties that adjoin the parks and consider whether they would have value (e.g. as buffer or trailways) as additions to the existing assemblage.*
- *Public and private funds and available planning tools should be applied where practicable to secure additional interests in property that will enhance and protect this Town park complex.*
- *As all of the four parks in the complex were excised by the federal government, the Town's federal representatives and the U.S. Veterans Administration should be informed that there is interest in maintaining as much of the surrounding open space in the public trust as is possible, preferably by public benefit conveyance.*

FIGURE 1 – VETERANS PARKS COMPLEX BASE MAP

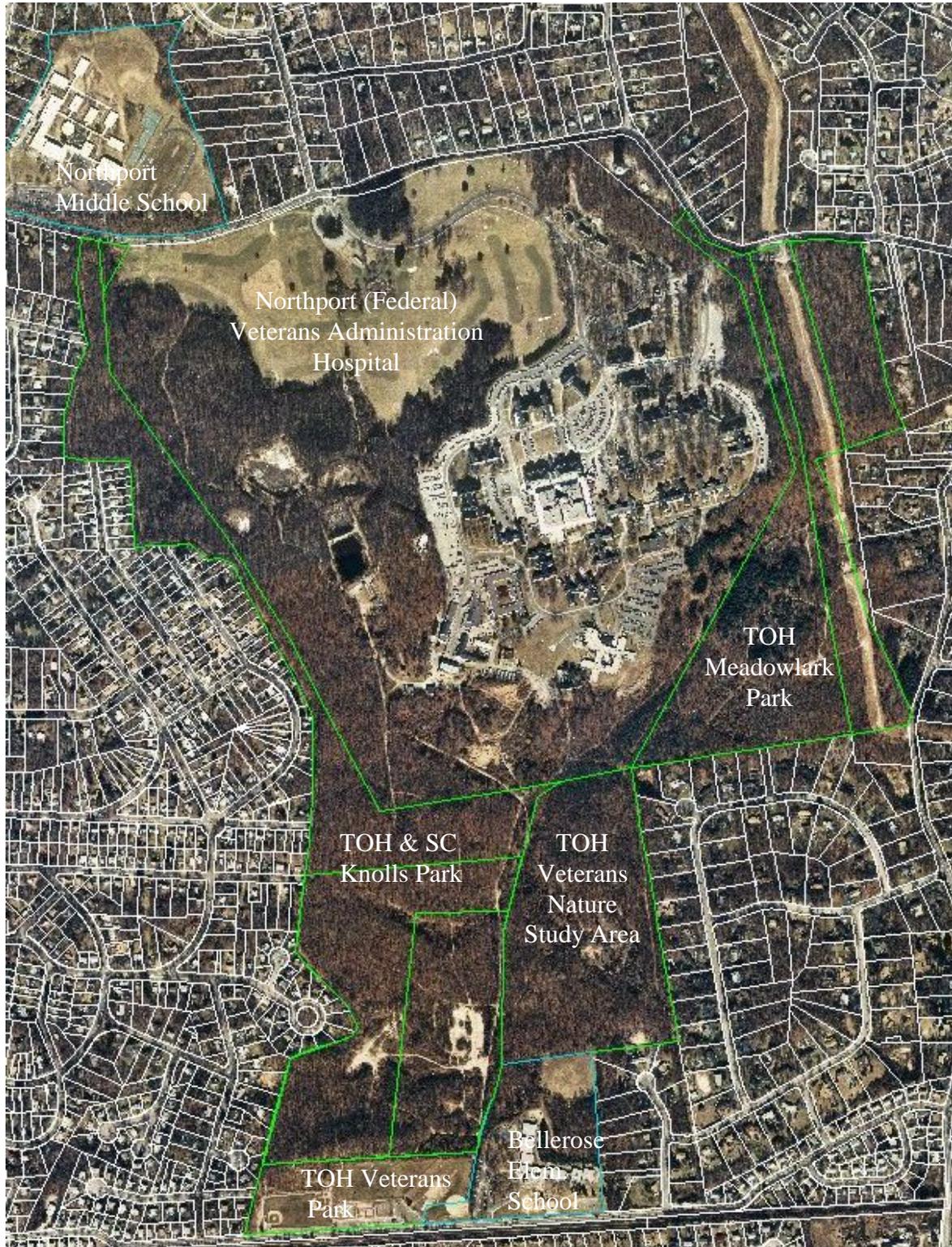


FIGURE 2 – EXISTING RECREATIONAL FACILITIES



COMMUNITY CONCERNS

Identified Veterans Parks Issues

Of the four parks in the Veterans Parks Complex, only the Veterans Park is used for organized Town recreation programs presently, though the others are open for general individual and/or family active and passive use year-round. While three of the parks in the complex are Town of Huntington-owned and managed primarily to serve municipal residents, the jointly owned County-Town Knolls Park is available to non-residents as well. The new Knolls Park facilities will be available to users from throughout the County. The Department of Parks and Recreation will control all organized group use by Town permit issued in accordance with local regulations (e.g., insurance to be provided).

With expanded recreational facilities, the complex is expected to grow increasingly popular as a day visit site for families and individuals of all ages. In an effort to insure that present concerns be met prior to accommodating any new growth, community input was sought. A January 31, 2001 letter¹¹ was sent under the signature of the Town Board members to over 2,400 community residents living within the area bounded by Middleville Road on the north, Vernon Valley/Larkfield Road on the west, Pulaski Road on the south, and Bread and Cheese Hollow/Townline Road on the east. The letter announced the joint Town-County acquisition of the Benjamin property and invited comments for consideration by the soon-to-be convened VPCAC. Subsequently, a separate letter¹² was sent on April 17, 2001 by the VPCAC to over 20 other civic, school, recreation and environmental organizations requesting information and comments.

The responses and information conveyed by the Bellerose Avenue Elementary School PTA¹³, Huntington Conservation Board, Northport Runners Club, Nassau-Suffolk Horseman's Association, Old Bridge Estates Community, and East Northport Fire Department were of particular significance. Valuable input was received from several individual community residents as well, in writing, by phone and personal contact.

There are several volunteer park stewards that have been appointed by the Town Board for the parks in the Veterans Parks Complex since 1985. The Northport School District was the first Park Steward appointed for the Veterans Park Complex, the first school district appointed as a steward. This was viewed as an extension of the partnership established through formal agreement regarding shared use of Veterans Park and parking at the Bellerose Avenue Elementary School. The stewards' impressions, observations and concerns were shared in written park inspection reports that were submitted to the Conservation Board and later, transmitted to the appropriate Town departments with the ability to act on the issues identified. All inspection reports submitted by park stewards for the component parks in the complex were reviewed.

Common threads run through the comments submitted and key issues appeared evident to all that took the time to share their concerns. Clearly, this complex has had the benefit of substantial public input on existing conditions, as there were three public hearings held on the former rezoning proposal for the Knolls Park site. Foremost among concerns raised by the public was the questionable impact of the federal government's prior management. Second in level of concerns

¹¹ Town Board letter is contained in the plan appendices.

¹² VPCAC letter to community groups is among the plan appendices.

¹³ Letters received from organizations are in the plan appendices.

was the perceived questionable ability of the Town to manage the park property in the future as a community asset, and to not create a liability. Aside from property remediation, the issues are only summarized in this section. The Active Park Design and Maintenance and Security Sections focus more specifically on means to address and eliminate the problems.

Property Remediation

The Veterans Parks Complex is a truly classic “Brownfields” Cinderella story, a fortuitous outdoor classroom for land recycling. Every component of the complex was at one time affected by past human activity that was not restorative—land filling, wetland filling and wastewater/effluent leaching (Knolls Park), agricultural processing and rail transport (Veterans Park), waste incinerating (Veterans Nature Study Area), and residential land development (Meadowlark Park). While the land scars are not entirely evident due to years of natural succession, thorough environmental site investigation is a necessary prerequisite to enable planned family recreational site use of these federally-impacted properties. The known sensitivity of children to adverse environmental conditions warrants such caution.

Knolls Park

The natural integrity of three of the parks in the Veterans Complex—Knolls Park, Veterans Nature Study Area, and Meadowlark Park—was compromised by past decisions of the federal government while the land was part of the Veterans Administration holdings. The Knolls Park property once contained the wastewater treatment works for the hospital—an interconnected series of piping, pump stations, catchbasins, filter beds and lagoons. On abandonment of the facility in the late 1970s, the federal government filled a large portion of the southern component of the property (now part of the Land Preservation Partnership and Greenways/Active Recreation Area). Following the property’s sale into the private ownership of Alvin Benjamin in 1987, an application was submitted to the Town Board requesting consideration of a rezoning to higher residential density. The rigorous environmental review that followed over the course of over a decade was in direct response to community input and suspicion regarding the quality and nature of the fill and debris deposited on this site. The applicant/owner, Alvin Benjamin, participated fully and met the requests of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and the Suffolk County Department of Health Services for continued and extensive environmental site assessment. The studies revealed that the fill consisted mainly of wood, concrete, and metal debris.

At the time of acquisition in December of 2000, Town and County officials believed that there was not any hazardous condition at the site based on the extensive assessments conducted. However, they required that the public purchase be predicated on Mr. Benjamin implementing the same clean-up plan that would have been required for residential site use. Their intent was to provide the greatest level of caution due to planned future public active recreational use of the land. An escrow account in the amount of \$3 million was to be held to cover any contingencies that might arise during the course of the clean-up. It was established in the escrow agreement that: the Suffolk County Department of Health Services would provide oversight of the clean-up; an outside environmental consultant (H2M) would be on site at all times during the clean-up to observe, document, and respond in the event of any detrimental finding; and the Town would assist monitoring of the process as well. Site clean-up was initiated on January 10, 2001 and continued daily, weather-permitting, until May 18, 2001.

VPCAC members observed the total clean-up process closely and have played a vital role in reporting to the Town as it progressed. The Town requested specific changes in the original work plan as a result. During the course of site work, Town staff learned that removal of the existing concrete structures was not part of

the agreed-upon work plan and had requested reconsideration. Jim Pim of the Suffolk County Department of Health Services, responsible for clean-up oversight, conceded that the clean, crushed concrete and wood materials could be placed back into the excavated areas as long as the Benjamin Development Company removed the existing concrete structures. Town staff requested that this fill be placed primarily in the lagoon areas that will not be the site of future active recreation use. Based on the CAC members' review of the site, there was consensus that the retaining wall in the southeast corner of the 20-acre parcel should not be removed, nor should the differing topographic levels be graded through as originally discussed in the field. It was the CAC members' consensus that the cleared area to the south/above the wall could be a potentially suitable site for the Boundless Playground and that the change in elevation might assist in differentiating this section from field uses to the north.

Completion of final inspection items, including, but not limited to removing all surface debris, raking the graded area, and repairing severed electrical lines and concrete apron area in Veterans Park, was undertaken between June 7th and 18th. By memo of July 11, 2001 the Town's Open Space Counsel communicated Town satisfaction with the clean-up project to the Town Board following certification of site clean-up issued by James Pim, Suffolk County Department of Health Services Bureau of Environmental Quality on June 22, 2001. The Benjamin Development Company has informed the Department of Planning and Environment that the estimated cost of the comprehensive clean-up was approximately \$1,000,000, including professional environmental services, materials disposal, and the physical work component (excavation, grading, chipping, raking). While the negotiated cost of purchase excluded clean-up, it may be considered that private matching funding has already been committed to the site. A complete report summarizing the clean-up was submitted by H2M and is considered a referenced addendum to this plan.¹⁴ Some of the pictures taken during the course of the clean-up process (showing stockpiled materials that had been excavated from the five former lagoon areas) are shared for the purpose of impressing upon readers the extensive amount of material that the federal government had landfilled at the site and to foster appreciation of the requisite breadth of the clean-up program. The CAC recognizes the Benjamin Organization for carrying through its commitment to conduct site clean-up on the property it conveyed and the Suffolk County Department of Health Services for providing continued oversight of the clean-up.

Soils Management

Concerns remain following clean-up as to how deep the structures were removed (i.e., whether remnant piping and/or foundations remain) and how close to the surface buried materials may rise in the future. The initial direction of the SCDHS was that a specific depth of topsoil should cover the graded areas following the clean-up. However, the SCDHS later interpreted this to mean that sufficient cover material should be used, not that topsoil be trucked into the site. Based on the severity of disturbance throughout much of the Greenways/Active Use and Land Preservation Partnership parcels in Knolls Park, subsoil materials are encountered at the ground surface. This material tends to be clayey, dense, somewhat deficient in organic matter and potentially resistant to plant growth. Prior to the clean-up operation, there were certain areas within the Knolls Park that had been deeply filled and had not regenerated natural vegetative cover almost thirty years later.

It is recommended that the Town consider a management effort to create topsoil from the subsoil in place as an instructional exercise, perhaps in cooperation with the County Cooperative Extension. This could involve the deposition and continued mixing in of large amounts of compost to a depth of about one foot to correct low organic matter content. Based on the results of soil pH and fertility

¹⁴ The H2M Final Clean-Up Report is on file in the Town Department of Planning and Environment.

tests at numerous points across the disturbed areas (as mixing resulting from the earth-moving is likely to be variable), liming and fertilization could be employed to adjust for acidity and infertility as needed. Drainage and water saturation may become additional issues due to soil compaction that will require attention. Already there are some standing water areas following periods of heavy rainfall at the site that should be monitored. Fall would be an opportune time to begin, perhaps incorporating some of the leaf mulch collected by the Town from its other parks in the area since bagged leaves from residential properties should not be used. Any soil reconstruction project would require careful monitoring and control to avoid the introduction of any unwanted materials (e.g., litter) that could be inter-mixed.

Veterans Nature Study Area

During the course of Town environmental review of the rezoning request that provided the impetus for the Knolls Park acquisition, the SCDHS shared information that indicated that a three-acre section of the adjoining Veterans Nature Study Area had been used for open waste incineration and dumping. The Cornell Laboratory of Environmental and Remote Sensing (CLEARS) identified this use via air photo analysis. The study tracked successive aerial photos using stereoscope analysis and sought to identify potential hazardous waste sites. The Department of Environmental Waste Management secured one of the first state Brownfields grants to aid site investigation and is coordinating all activity related thereto. The investigation of the Brownfields site has resulted in some spot remediation of elevated levels of PCBs. Certain elevated metal levels in a confined area are pending further analysis and derivation of remedial alternatives (e.g., some removal of soils or capping the affected area).

The Town is cooperating closely with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and following the proscribed state process for Brownfields investigations, which includes substantial opportunity for public participation. A draft remedial investigation report has been prepared. Once the state provides its input, it will become a proposed remedial action plan and subject of local public hearing with general notification. This includes recording the contract with the County Clerk to assure the contracted clean-up program will be implemented in accordance with the provisions of the Clean Water/Clean Air Act. The Town has committed substantial funding already for consulting environmental professional services. Since initiation of the Town's site investigation in 1994, funds have been appropriated by Town Board resolutions already totalling \$186,000. This support was provided from a Town trust-in-agency account, the Neighborhood Park Fund. Reimbursement of approximately \$119,000 has been received to date from the state. *When environmental assessment and remediation of the Veterans Nature Study Area are completed, programmatic environmental education uses should be resumed.*

The Department of Environmental Waste Management has informed the CAC that an element of concern to the future remediation of the Brownfields site in the Veterans Nature Study Area is the need to plan for roadway access capable of accommodating very heavy machinery. *The CAC recommended that such heavy equipment access should be provided through the VA Hospital as existing asphalt drive could be used. This would require a temporary easement from the federal government. Whatever access is necessary should be planned for and provided as part of the park plan to accommodate the site clean-up to enable educational use to resume. The CAC urges immediate Town negotiations with the Veterans Administration Medical Center to discuss several issues identified in this draft plan, including potential for access.*

Meadowlark Park and Veterans Park

Unlike the prior two park properties that have been researched extensively, there is little information readily available regarding the prior histories of Meadowlark and Veterans Parks. It is recommended that the Town research the prior use of both of these park sites as practicable. The United States Geological Survey maps and 1955 aerial photographs show more than 20 structures, presumably temporary housing (e.g. Quonset huts), once existed in Meadowlark Park close to Middleville Road. During the course of the installation of the Iroquois Gas Transmission System natural gas pipeline in this area in 1991 some underground tanks containing number 6 fuel oil were detected and removed by a licensed waste hauler under supervision of the NYSDEC. Some limited soils testing for volatile organic compounds was also conducted. An abandoned well was also encountered during the pipeline construction. A 1957 survey of the Veterans Park shows that a railroad spur once ran into the site and that an early industrial site, initially a pickle processing facility, was situated there. Whether there could be any additional issues regarding these properties is a matter for further investigation only if there is to be any dramatic change posed to their land resources.

FIGURE 3 – PHOTOS OF KNOLLS PARK CLEAN-UP



3/29/01 photos

Security

Comments were submitted to the Town Board and copied to the VPCAC that described extended off-hours (weekend night time) partying at the western Little League field this past spring. In direct response the Second Precinct of the Suffolk County Police was requested to increase patrols at the site. The Town has received written notice that the police would implement greater patrol coverage immediately. [See Maintenance and Security Section].

Traffic

The concern for increased traffic generation once the park is developed and the potential for interference with the adjoining school operation was raised. Bellerose Avenue provides major road frontage for the Veterans Park Complex. It is a straight stretch of roadway from Gilder Court to the west that is posted generally at 30 mph and 20 mph at the school frontage. However, it is frequently traveled at greater speeds. It is a popular route to the Northport train station for commuters and a quick westbound route for other traffic. *There is an existing need for traffic control in the school vicinity and potential traffic calming and/or signalization should be further considered.* A dialogue was initiated with the Director of Engineering Services on this subject. It appears that a good case could be made for a traffic signal if access to the new park area were shared in some manner with the school entrance.

Maintenance

Facility Safety

Certain maintenance elements were identified to require more frequent attention, such as sweeping within the lots and on sidewalks and pathways, to remove broken glass and litter. The key to insuring safety, stemming vandalism, and preventing abuse is to have more eyes on the parks. The involvement of enforcement personnel, park staff on site, and neighborhood watch is likely to have a significant beneficial effect. [See Maintenance and Security Section].

Vandalism

Enhanced security is needed to protect the Town and County's investment and future goals for the complex. The gates at the Bellerose School are closed primarily to cordon off access to the rear of the school to prevent any potential liability of vandalism. There have been some problems at the school in the past, including a fire in the kindergarten wing. The active facilities at Veterans Park have been subject of some abuse, but the site's near constant use during peak warm weather has a beneficial influence. Vandalism, like all forms of property misuse, enters in two modes, by foot or by car. Proper design and limiting off-hours vehicular access into the park should go a long way to stem some of the issues inherent in unsupervised park areas.

Illegal Dumping

It has been reported that some adjoining property owners and community park users do not fully respect the park property and perhaps do not realize the potential repercussions of their actions in taking certain liberties (e.g., dumping yard waste and other debris and off-road vehicle use). The Bellerose School Principal reported that another reason the school access is gated and locked after hours is to stem the threat of dumping, particularly by landscapers. The CAC identified considerable dumping of yard waste and miscellaneous debris (e.g., fencing) along the western perimeter of the Knolls Park apparently from adjoining homeowners. Dumping any material in the park, including yard waste, is a criminal offense. *The CAC recommends that the Town Board send a letter immediately to the community surrounding the park complex to inform of park regulations and request individual cooperation.*

Unauthorized Recreational Pursuits

Off-Road Vehicles

The large open expanse of land that comprises the Veterans Parks has become a popular locale for off-road motorbike and all-terrain vehicle (ATV) activity. This use is not confined to the undeveloped park areas, but spills into the developed recreational area as well. During the course of this plan preparation the western Little League fields at Veterans Park were damaged by dirt bike activity. Park stewards have reported serious conflicts with ATVs and horse riders in Meadowlark Park. No motorized vehicles are permitted in Town parks, except in paved and/or marked areas and all off-road use is clearly unauthorized. *A public media campaign should be initiated against such motorized vehicle use in Town parks, essentially illegal trespass, and the dire effects it wreaks on the landscape, to wildlife and the public enjoyment of such areas. Public information is absolutely critical. The word must get out on what can and cannot be done in the park. Surrounding residents need to know that they can call 911 and ask for the County Park Police to report illegal ATV use in the park. ATV owners need to know that this is now parkland and that such unauthorized use is illegal and will be subject to fines and ATV confiscation. Simple signage should be introduced at all access points to the park [Typical County signs state: Suffolk County Parkland, Unauthorized Use Prohibited, Patrolled by Suffolk County Police].*

Sgt. Scott Grey of the Suffolk County Park Police met with the CAC to discuss control of ATV use in the Veterans Parks. Sgt. Grey indicated that the Park Police had already done a preliminary condition assessment of the area, which included surveying some neighbors. Their initial survey indicated abandoned vehicles, amounts of debris, evidence of partying spots, and a significant ATV issue. It is illegal to ride an ATV anywhere on Long Island, except with a landowner's written permission that can be produced on the spot in the field. The County Parks Police West Zone Patrol responds to calls relating to the Knolls Park. There are only four officers covering all county parks in the four western towns. The County's approach to enforcement is to implement special details involving 3 or 4 officers on quads with trailers and a four-wheel drive vehicle. A special weekend detail at the Knolls site in June resulted in confiscation of four ATV's. While owners can bail their vehicles out for \$250, this option is not available to repeat offenders.

While absolutely necessary to the success of future management, the County's limited resources are relatively ineffective at the Veterans Parks Complex. There are multiple access points into the complex that are largely unpatrolled. The County Parks Police have limited manpower and a large area to cover. Between Memorial Day and Labor Day is the peak demand period for police resources, but also the peak ATV use period. More ATVs could be impounded in a special detail, but there is a problem with storing them. In Brookhaven special details are run with Suffolk County Police (COPE and Park Police) and Town Code Enforcement. A similar cooperative effort might be formed between the Town and County such that the Town might be willing to hold confiscated ATVs. The County Park Police are willing to provide special ATV training to local security people. The County Parks Department will assist in providing special signage. It is imperative that strong cooperation of the County Park Police continues as the park plan is formally defined and implemented. The CAC views the establishment of a solid inter-agency security partnership with an on-site presence and more continuous patrols as crucial to the success of future park management. This action alone will stem most of the existing park issues identified by the surrounding community and discussed below.

Off-hours Hang-out Area

There are limitations on use of all Town parks between dusk and dawn, unless otherwise specified in Town Code. As Veterans Park has lighted recreational fields, its use period is extended already to 11 pm during peak recreational seasons. There are only limited opportunities for younger people, particularly teens, to gather after-hours. *Park access should be curtailed by design of new features to be self-limiting and readily evident when the facility is closed.*

Paintball Excursions

Huntington Town Code (§159) clearly prohibits the discharge of any air-propelled firearms in the Town parks, and yet, paintball parties are among the most frequent illegal users of the woodlands in the Veterans Parks Complex. While it appears from available literature that the paintballs are non-toxic, water soluble, and biodegrade, the appearance of firearms of any kind within a Town park is cause for concern and frightening to young park users. The Veterans Parks paintball users are mostly younger men, aged approximately 15-25, that drive to the park.

Free Running of Dogs

Town Code (§159) also specifically prohibits the running of dogs at large in Town parks and yet, such use is common within the Veterans Nature Study Area and Knolls Parks. While the Town Board recently added language to the Town Code to enable off-leash areas to be designated within Town parks, pursuant to individual site review, no sites have been formally designated for such use. *Due to the planned intensification of site use and known resident fox population at the complex, it does not appear prudent to displace recreational area with an off-leash area.*

Horses in Undesignated Areas

Similar to dogs, horses are only permitted in parks designated for such use by the Town Board. Meadowlark Park is the only component of the complex so designated. *There should be no equestrian use anywhere else in the complex as it could create dangerous trail conflicts, as well as problems related to trail damage, erosion, and animal waste.*

Campsites/Fires

The East Northport Fire Department has responded to several brush fires within the complex over the years. Campfire areas have been discovered at several locations, including within the pine plantation at Meadowlark Park and just north of Veterans Park at the crest of the hill. During a dry season, such use can be particularly damaging to facilities and nearby residential uses. Camping and campfires are not allowable uses within Town parks.

MAINTENANCE AND SECURITY

Land Management Issues

Comprehensive Maintenance

The Veterans Parks Complex is maintained by visiting General Services personnel that conduct either routine or special response maintenance. The Department of General Services is charged with full maintenance responsibility, including specialized trades, for Town parks (excluding beaches). Comments submitted to the VPCAC indicated that there is some existing concern with Town maintenance of the Veterans Park facility.

Key maintenance responsibilities necessary for the public's enjoyment of the recreational facilities at Veterans Park include, but are not limited to: sweeping and striping the parking lot, mowing, raking and lining the ballfields, removal of garbage and litter; placement, removal and maintenance of equipment (nets, lighting, etc.); cleaning of restrooms; replenishment of ballfields with topsoil and seeding, general facility repair. Staff limitations force the Town to focus on the most critical maintenance needs, which sometimes mean that smaller tasks may be delayed that have the potential to develop into greater problems. *The Town should make adequate provision for the parks, primarily the active use areas, to be monitored and/or tended daily to insure proper upkeep and to stem any problems that require immediate attention. Trails will need to be traversed and tended at least weekly to insure there is no potential for safety issues (e.g., erosion, downed tree limbs).*

Permanent Staff Presence

Although the total assemblage size of the Veterans Parks Complex is nearly 200 acres, it has no continuous staff presence. Unlike other Town parks, *there is a readily-available vacant space in the concession building at the entrance to Veterans Park that could be used to store maintenance equipment, to house permanent personnel, and to serve as a first aid station.* Establishing a permanent staff presence, similar to that of Park Supervisor at Heckscher Park, would be a show of faith to the community that the Town will make the necessary commitment to stewardship and safety within the Complex. The CAC identified this as a driving need behind forging any real partnership with the School District. The Town of Smithtown's operation at Hoyt Farm, a very intensely-used facility with active recreation and a passive nature preserve, has a support staff of five people. Having "eyes" on site will enable ongoing problems, such as litter (especially broken glass) in the parking areas to be handled immediately. *The need for permanent, full-time staff presence was deemed absolutely essential to implementing the VPCAC recommendations.*

Total Facility Review

The active park expansion can not be planned in isolation of the existing park complex. *A thorough review of existing facilities should be conducted with an eye to enhance the entire park experience at the complex. There are several items at Veterans Park that should be included among the priorities for park improvement, such as: resurfacing the two basketball courts so that they can be used for programmed summer league play; resurfacing the handball courts; adding a higher green mesh fence on the north side of the volleyball courts to block lighting from the adjacent soccer fields; replacement of benches next to the volleyball courts; provide at least one water fountain; top dress and roll the upper soccer field at least once a year; extend the fence on the north*

side of the upper soccer field past the steps and install a gate to prevent the ball from ending up in the parking lot.

Overall Site Aesthetics

The Town should evaluate the overall site aesthetics and take advantage of the opportunity to plan the active park extension as impetus to beautify the complex. From an aesthetic perspective, the bland streetscape detracts from the general site appeal. The building appearance could be made to look a bit more welcoming, also. Landscaping is sorely lacking and could provide some visual interest to the adjoining community, while adding shade, color, and windbreak in specific locations; however, it must be well maintained. There must be a commitment made for long-term perpetuation of new landscaping (weeding, watering, etc.). A volunteer community gardening effort should be coordinated to insure that this component of the site is well maintained. There are already such volunteers at work in the park with no recognition, including the mother of an Eagle Scout that constructed a tiered landscaping project at the Veterans Park frontage. The addition of new outdoor recreational elements may increase the Town's opportunities to secure outside grants for such aesthetic improvements.

Roadside Appearance

Where the Parks Complex is visible and immediately accessible from a road the Town should make an extra effort to maintain the immediate streetside in a sightly condition free of trash and yardwaste and natural debris, even if it means the removal of fallen limbs that would otherwise be discouraged in natural area management. Vegetation should be controlled, by manual or mechanical means only (not by herbicides), from interfering with roadway travel, including sight distance. Annual volunteer clean-up days could assist this endeavor and encourage community participation; however, they should not be considered replacement of the Town's responsibility to maintain its park resources in an appropriate manner.

Debris Removal

Having sat idle for so long a period the parks complex has been vulnerable to dumping and abandonment of materials and vehicles. Several relict automobiles must be removed, as well as pockets of dumped materials. The site must be kept debris/litter-free to discourage the attraction of further dumping.

Boundary Definition

All four of the Veterans parks are fenced to some degree; however, the boundary definition is not continuous or necessarily obvious in the field. Fencing is basic to future site management and should be installed at additional areas in the parks to define the edge of the park and prevent travel off-site, as well as to stem potential for vandalism, particularly from use of off-road vehicles. There should be coordination with the County Parks Police, Town Public Safety Department, and the federal Veterans Administration Medical Center to determine the most beneficial locations of new fencing. In addition, survey monuments must be placed at the corner points of the 20-acre recreation site to definitively demarcate this area.

Several encroachments were identified during the course of this study, most being minor and accounted for during the surveying for the acquisition of the Benjamin property, but one involves grading/filling, the construction of a horse corral, and the spreading of manure in a dedicated park-preserve area for which the adjoining property owner has been issued a summons. With such extensive linear perimeter as a complex, there will be an ongoing responsibility to conduct

boundary review. Park stewards could be trained to assist this endeavor. Survey monuments should be located at all turning points in the park boundary courses for future reference and checked annually by the Town. The Town Comprehensive Plan supports boundary survey review to stem such illegal encroachments. Any encroachments from off-site (e.g., private residences) should be identified and proper notification sent informing of the provisions for park use and management and a distinct timeframe in which to remove or to cease any encroachment (e.g., dumping of yard debris, placement of minor structures, storage of vehicles, improperly placed fences) prior to being fined for such activity. Town enforcement personnel should follow through on investigating any lingering condition.

Signage

In some areas of the Complex and its immediate surroundings, there is no way for uninformed individuals to know that they are on parkland, as opposed to the federal Veterans Administration or private property. *The exterior boundaries of the park property should be posted with small signs placed high (7 feet or more to minimize vandalism) that identify the land as Town parkland. Simple signage should be in place at all access points to the park, as well as on trails that lead into it, identifying the parkland and a general statement of expected responsible conduct. County cooperation is promised on posting and preparing signs.*

General Security Provisions

Park Watch Network

Rules of Use

All park properties are threatened when their users are not properly informed of the guidelines under which such sites are to be used and what the penalties are for offenses. *The Veterans Parks Complex requires better signage that clearly identifies prohibited activities and which gives notice to the Suffolk County Police under which section of Town Code an individual can be cited. A greater security presence at the Veterans Parks Complex could alleviate the ever-present threat of vandalism.*

On-Site Security Presence

There is only one building within the Veterans Parks Complex, a two-story concrete structure located in Veterans Park easily accessible from Bellerose Avenue. The structure contains individual restrooms accessible from outside the building. Inside the building there are two offices upstairs with a restroom and a single open storage/meeting room downstairs. While constructed from the same plans as other concession buildings in Town parks, it is not staffed or assigned by license agreement to any outside organization. *This building represents an opportunity for security personnel and/or park staff to be placed at the complex. It could serve as an adjunct office/substation for the Suffolk County Police, County Parks Police and/or Town Security, at the minimum serving as an ad hoc first aid station. (see existing facilities map next page). The Town should request that the Suffolk County Police and County Park Police consider becoming a more visible site presence. Increased patrols are more likely when there is a base of operation and the goal is to have enhanced site surveillance.*

Park Stewardship Program/Neighborhood Watch

The Town of Huntington owns and manages about 105 widely distributed parks and preserves, more than half of which are passive use open space/natural areas. The Town does not have 24-hour

management staff at any park except Dix Hills Park where the Town security force is based. *A network of observers is needed to help keep the Town informed throughout the year of crisis situations (e.g., liabilities/hazards), developing problems (e.g. trail erosion) and nuisance uses (e.g. dumping), and to make recommendations for improvement and simply report good news. The (adult) Park Stewardship Program and (student) Youth Rangers provide such an opportunity for interested park neighbors and visitors to serve as monitors in Town parks. Additional community volunteers are welcomed to participate in these programs to serve as the parks' "eyes, ears and mouths" in the field. Park Stewards and Youth Rangers should be alerted to potential concerns and be given priority consideration in reporting to the Department of General Services. Several VPCAC members enlisted as Park Stewards during the course of preparation of this plan. A formal Neighborhood Park Watch Committee to patrol the perimeter pathways regularly could greatly augment the Town and County's efforts at management.*

Potential Agency Partnerships

In addition to relying on the good faith efforts of neighborhood residents that are most exposed to potential issues at the parks complex and more likely to report them, there appears to be potential for forging several agency partnerships to make the Veterans Parks Complex a more secure area. *Increased patrols by the Suffolk County Police, the continued cooperation of the Suffolk County Parks Police, shared security with the Northport-East Northport School District and Town Public Safety Department, and perhaps even with LIPA and the Veterans Administration Medical Center, can result in far greater success in stemming problems at the site. Increased awareness of strong continuous security and commitment to enforcement of park regulation will go a long way to defray and discourage abuse before it can even start.*

NATURAL RESOURCES

The natural habitat of the Veterans Parks complex is predominantly second growth woodland, a major component of the property having been disturbed as farmland by the Fleet family in the late 18th century and later, by various uses imposed on the land by the federal government. The complex is situated on the Harbor Hill moraine, a geological formation caused by glacial action, which molded the several knolls and ridgetops that ripple through the property. Site elevations vary from 100 feet above mean sea level at the northernmost Middleville Road frontage to over 240 feet just north of the southernmost frontage on Bellerose Avenue. Groundwater elevations reflect the varied topography. The parks complex is part of a sizeable watershed area that extends three miles to the north to the Long Island Sound at Crab Meadow Beach.

Despite the degree and variance of man-made influence to the four-park complex, the land is valued for its considerable natural resources. Contiguous woodland within the expanse of public lands contained on the four parks and the adjoining Veterans Administration Medical Center comprises almost 170 protected acres or about 87% of the total site acreage. It is the largest Town assemblage of contiguous woodland protected in an interior park (as compared to a coastal holding) in the Town. None of the components of the Veterans Parks complex have been designated as significant habitat by the state; however, there is a section within the Drinking Water Protection Parcel in Knolls Park that may not have been clear-cut in the historic past. This was reported in a cultural resource assessment for the prior rezoning application. While there are no longer any wetlands on the complex, wetlands were filled by the federal government in the 1970s. A pond area included on the New York State Freshwater Wetlands Map lies just west of Meadowlark Park on the Veterans Administration Medical Center site. The park complex's close proximity to high-density residential development in East Northport renders it optimally suited for outdoor recreation and nature appreciation.

While the CAC does not possess the expertise to prepare a scientifically-based agenda for the resource and its diverse component parts, it is recognized that Town professionals can build a better information base and initiate ecological management and educational interpretation of the resource that is not limited to facility and/or crisis management. Many tasks appear self-evident to protect, monitor and enhance the inherent beauty and function of the component parks. The General Services Department has only limited staff and time in which to manage all of the Town's active recreational resources. Its natural areas deserve, and all but demand, special attention. *The Town of Huntington should use a full complement of new technology, volunteer initiative, outside agency professional guidance and partnerships, and ambitious solicitation of grants to augment any staff limitations to insure appropriate ecological management.*

Natural Resource Inventory

A single baseline inventory of flora, fauna and habitat distribution for the parks is needed with a focus on determining any areas that have sufficient sensitivity to be avoided in trails construction or be designated only for specific use(s). Inventories on file in the Town for any of the component parks in the complex were reviewed and compiled into a single species listing that was augmented by CAC field visitation. While it is a preliminary starting point, a more technical analysis tied to geographic site data would enable focused site management.

It is recommended that the Town initiate a sensitivity survey by contract with an appropriate organization (perhaps the New York Natural Heritage Program). This could be followed up by a voluntary "bio-blitz" at which field experts representing the varied natural history disciplines (e.g., ornithology, botany) concentrate efforts to compile a very comprehensive resource listing in a relatively short period of time. Partners in such an effort might be other public agencies (NYSDEC), non-profit conservation organizations, and universities. This may be a means to provide mutually-beneficial information development and internship opportunities. Future follow-up natural resource inventories should be conducted on a fixed term (e.g., every five years) to analyze whether the area is changing and what forces may be at work to cause adaptation. Periodic contact with the New York Natural Heritage program will insure that both the Town and State have current consistent data. Any endangered, threatened or rare species or community type should be duly recorded, mapped and revisited annually. The inventory should be maintained as a series of database coverages in the Town's Geographic Information System for ease of retrieval and comparison over time. The inventory should describe and recommend means by which to continuously monitor hydrology (especially if formerly filled wetlands begin to re-emerge); geology and soils; vegetation; birds; mammals; reptiles and amphibians; and insects. Dynamic recommendations for short and long-term management objectives tied to the resource data should be prepared and revisited over short intervals, not to exceed two years.

Compatible Uses

Nature Preserve Components

There are two component areas of the Veterans Parks Complex where the natural setting takes absolute priority. These restricted use/nature preserve areas are the 34-acre Veterans Nature Study Area and the 32-acre Drinking Water Protection Parcel in Knolls Park. These areas will not likely see the introduction of new infrastructure, including trails, although existing trails will be maintained. Their purpose is to be used as natural outdoor learning laboratories and wildlife sanctuaries. Only very passive activities, such as hiking and bird-watching, should be conducted in these areas.

Passive Park Areas

In several passive park sections of the Veterans Parks Complex, it is likely that recreational use will intensify slightly; however, such uses must be consistent with the intent of the legislated acquisition purposes. Natural habitat will take on complementary importance, to facilitate appreciation of the natural surroundings as part of the outdoor recreation experience. *Careful placement of any new improvements, such as trails, within the designated passive park areas will assure that the habitat and buffer qualities of these areas will not be compromised.*

Future Goals

Habitat Restoration

The Veterans Parks properties have been altered and affected considerably from their natural setting through many forces, including, but probably not limited to, clearing, grading, filling, utility installation, roadway construction, stormwater diversion, bordering development, operation of the adjoining golf course, and introduction of non-native and invasive vegetation. While the natural characteristics of the land are to be appreciated, the area could benefit from restoration efforts under the guidance of experts. However, until there is a comprehensive site reconnaissance completed, it

would be premature to speculate on the scope of any such efforts. Potential sources of future assistance for such work might include the State Bond Act/Environmental Protection Fund or United States Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Wildlife. In addition, there is likely to be great potential to facilitate wildlife use of the site through specialized projects, such as the placement of bluebird boxes in the vicinity of the LIPA utility corridor.

Outdoor Environmental Education

Although there is a requirement for the Town to promote use of the Veterans Nature Study Area for outdoor education, there is no structured, programmed use of its resources. Prior to the Nature Study Area being restricted pending completion of the Brownfields investigation, it was subject only to occasional school group visitation. Primary users of the natural habitat areas within the complex are outdoor enthusiasts (birders and hikers).

Among anticipated opportunities of extensive trails planning, marking and development is the capacity to attract organized use for environmental education. In addition to a small introductory area at the trailheads that would be open for constant public viewing, the Town could begin to encourage the offering of an array of nature study programs on a limited registration basis. Such programs could be developed and offered in cooperation with local organizations, including, but not limited to the Huntington Audubon Society and the local school district. The Department of Parks and Recreation is willing to offer nature study programs in the appropriate areas similar to other programs currently offered at Coindre Hall and at other parks in the Town. Any such programs developed would benefit Town residents as well as the park complex' natural resources. The Town's overall programmatic goal should be to foster a greater sense of connection with the natural world so that individuals will act on their responsibility to protect our environment. In this process individuals may understand their role in maintaining the health of the global ecosystem.

Interpretation/Public Relations

All actions recommended to preserve the vitality of the Town resources in the area are grounded on the best ideals of public education--that learning leads to understanding and to positive responsible action. *The Town should make available the materials necessary to encourage visitation to the area for interpretive purposes. An attractive interpretive entrance should be designed and special signage, kiosks, interpretive posters and pamphlets should be provided throughout the site to educate visitors of its particular assets. School group visitation should be encouraged to build understanding of the need for proper land stewardship in the Town's residents. Such use should be coordinated/scheduled by the Department of Parks and Recreation prior to use to avoid conflicts.*

FIGURE 4 – 1955 AERIAL PHOTO SHOWING FEDERAL LAND BEFORE THE VETERANS PARKS



ACTIVE PARK DESIGN

Key Components

The CAC identified key elements of significance to the eventual success of the new 20-acre active park area from a recreational resource and community/neighborhood acceptance perspective—safe access, impact on natural resources, the complement of facilities to be provided, future security and maintenance, and impact on the surrounding community. Security and maintenance are covered in a separate section as related to the entire complex.

Provide Reasonable Safe Access

When the Town Board submitted its concept plan for development of the new active park area to the County, it was prepared quickly. The entrance to the 20-acre active recreation area was depicted to be by roadway through the eastern section of the existing Veterans Park. This was proposed as a logical extension of the Town's property, considering the topographic conditions/limitations at the park. However, it was not considered how this might potentially impact the existing agreement between the Town and the School District for use of the field area, or the actual soccer field. To implement the concept plan, the Town would lose/bisect a regulation-size soccer field that is presently lighted. Lighted soccer fields are in great demand throughout the Town park system. The loss of a single field will compromise existing group programming. There is a clear need to recoup any such field that might be lost to another use. To replace the field in the new 20-acre recreation area would mean the introduction of lights and additional clearing, which the CAC felt would impact residential neighbors and the park site in an adverse manner. Therefore, determining the main access point to the new 20-acre active recreation area became a primary issue for the CAC. ***It was the consensus of the CAC that a new road should not divide or be placed within the interior of the existing Veterans Park, unless absolutely necessary.*** The CAC sought other alternatives that might not result in the same level of impact to the park facilities and to the surrounding neighbors.

The CAC requested that a gap existing between the surveyed boundaries of the Town and School District properties be researched. This gap was identified in the environmental impact statement prepared for the former rezoning request for the Benjamin property. The investigation was turned over to the Suffolk County Real Property Tax Service Agency and it was determined that a 25-foot road right-of-way that showed on the 1906 and 1917 Belcher-Hyde Atlases should be depicted on the Suffolk County Tax Map (see Figure 5 – Pickle House Road). Thus, the Pickle House Road will appear on subsequent tax map revisions. The Pickle House Road ran north from Pulaski Road to the former pickle factory that existed within Veterans Park, then into the site of the Veterans hospital. It also provides legal access to the Town's Veterans Nature Study Area. As an alternative to losing the existing field, the CAC considered whether it would be beneficial for the Town to utilize the Pickle House Road for access. A major concern arose, as this would place a new access road in the immediate proximity of the entrance to the Bellerose Avenue Elementary School. The Department of Planning and Environment drafted several additional access alternatives through Veterans Park, including using the maintenance access on the west side of the park or skirting the existing field on the eastern side of the park. The CAC considered the possibility of sharing an access between the park and the school to avoid conflicting turning movements that might be caused by the close location of separate entrances. This option appeared to have the greatest potential benefits without adverse effects. An initial meeting to discuss access alternatives was held at the end of June with the Town Supervisor, School District Superintendent, and Bellerose School Principal present.

It is strongly recommended that the Town continue dialogue with the Northport-East Northport School District with the goal of forging an agreement whereby the Town would be allowed to share the school's access point onto Bellerose Avenue. The Town should evaluate the school's parking configuration and determine the safest layout that maximizes parking allotment. It is recommended that the Town and School District partner to provide parking and access that is secure and available to serve their respective needs. If the school fencing and gating could be relocated by the Town and new parking area on the 20-acre active recreation site could be accessed through the school property, it is likely that a case could be made for providing a signalized intersection. The signal could be specified for phasing to be activated only as necessary. Thus, if there were no cars waiting to turn from the school access, the light would remain green for through-traffic on Bellerose Avenue. In return for the access, the school would have use of the parking area during school hours, would benefit from Town security of the area availed after-hours, and the Town would maintain that section of the paved parking area and school entrance availed for its use. This alternative is consistent with the 1983 standing agreement and could serve all parties admirably.

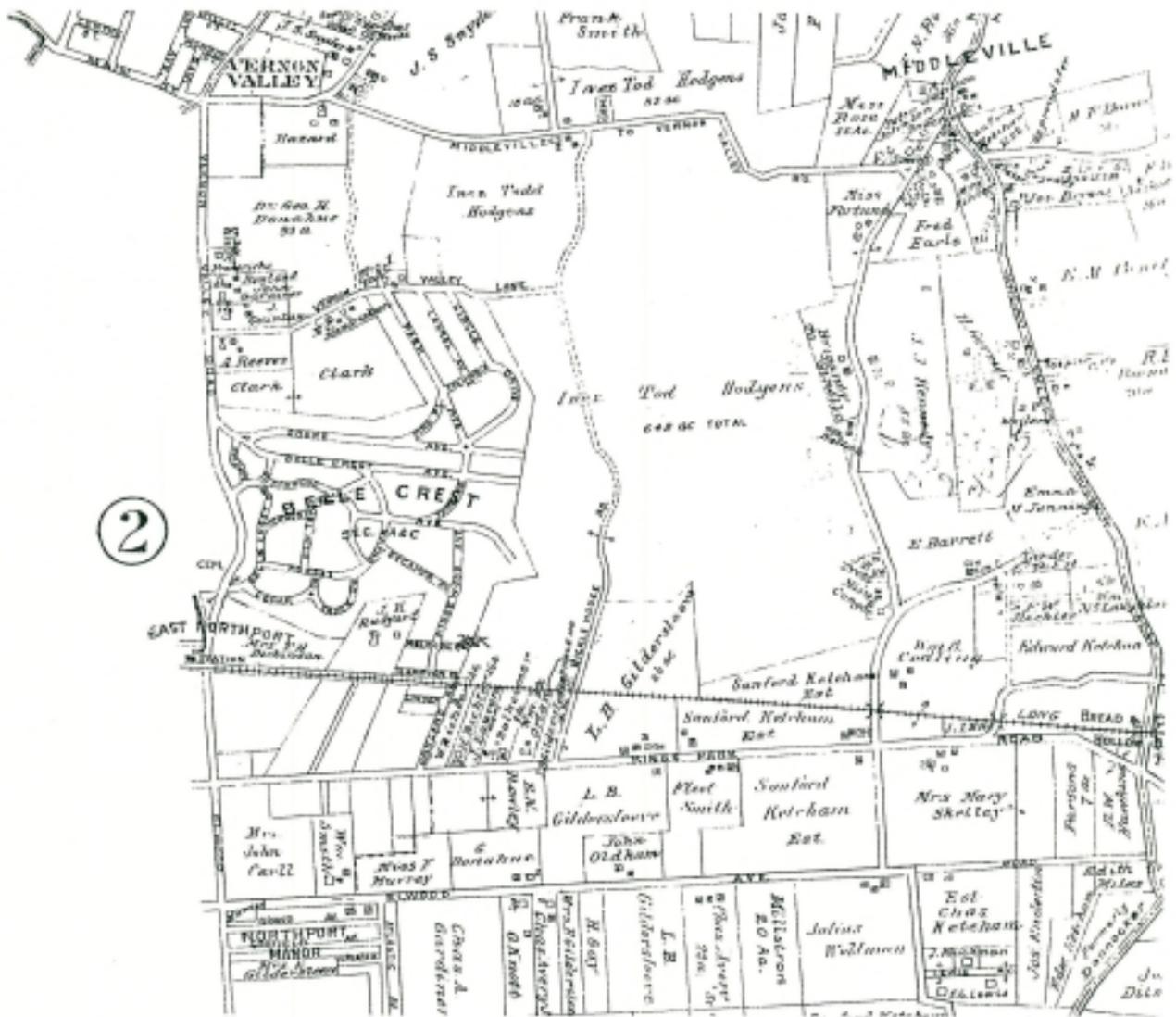
Vehicular Access

Bellerose Avenue and Middleville Road are the only identified vehicular access points to the Veterans Parks Complex. While there are several roadways that terminate at the park's western boundary (Loret Lane, Bellecrest Avenue, Soundview Avenue, Kalmia Street, Rowley Drive), they avail only local pedestrian and cyclist access at present. Bellerose Avenue provides direct frontage, parking and access to Veterans Park. Meadowlark Park can be accessed via Middleville Road. The rear entrance to the Northport Veterans Administration Medical Center actually crosses Meadowlark Park by perpetual easement granted by the Town. While it appears on the Town and Suffolk County tax maps as a fifty-foot right-of-way, Middleville Road is a narrow two-lane roadway with 24 feet of pavement at the Meadowlark Park entrance. The road width, height, curvature and access to park resources are important factors in planning future park use. *Consistent with community character issues that drove acquisition of the Knolls Park, only Bellerose Avenue and Middleville Road should be used for vehicular access, including Town maintenance, into the park complex. There should be no opening of any other streets into the site, except in dire situations that may warrant emergency vehicle access (e.g., life-saving or fire-fighting).*

Pedestrian Access

Pedestrian access to the parks complex is limited by the road width, turns and discontinuous sidewalk on the main access roads, such as Middleville Road. Sidewalk along Bellerose Avenue is more complete, but not continuous between Old Bridge and Larkfield Roads. *There appears a need for a designated pathway to the trailhead entrances to the parks complex for runners, walkers and bicyclists. The Town should investigate available options for providing greater safety for such continuous recreational use that is recognized as directly related to park use. Appropriate signage should be placed on these main roadways to identify their shared use for cycling.* There are several other opportunities for pedestrian access into the parks complex. *Access to the park from the many tap streets that end at the public property should be by foot or bicycle only. There should be no parking on these streets for the purpose of accessing the park facilities. "No Parking for Park Use" signs should be posted at these dedicated pedestrian and cycling pathways into the park to enforce this requirement.*

FIGURE 5 – PICKLE HOUSE ROAD AS SHOWN ON SECTION OF E. BELCHER HYDE ATLAS, PLATE NO. 4, 1917



Handicapped Access

Handicapped-accessible parking stalls, drop curbs, and ramped access should be provided throughout the active park complex to insure easy access to facilities for participation and observance. As a Boundless Playground and Whole Access Trail are planned to be components of the active park plan, they should be readily accessible from designated handicapped parking. This is a key element to insure their successful use as children with disabilities will be transported to the site, presumably with their parents, to use the new playground and outdoor enthusiasts of all ages and abilities are likely to frequent the Whole Access Trail. The CAC anticipates that the Boundless Playground is likely to be recognized by the community as the most welcomed facility addition. The new playground will offer opportunities for a broader range of play abilities and entice expanded family use throughout the year. Accessible restrooms should be placed near these facilities to accommodate the needs of all visitors.

Emergency Service Access

Emergency service vehicle (fire, police, ambulance, utility) access is a concern that must be addressed as sporadic crisis situations may require access to interior portions of the parks complex and/or water service for fire-fighting. *Consideration must be given to facilitate emergency services due to the overall size of the complex. This may include, but not be limited to: placement of new hydrant(s) within the park; identification of multiple emergency access points (perhaps some to have crash gates); design of interior access paths and roadways sized to accommodate emergency vehicles; and coordination among all potential service providers (including LIPA, East Northport Fire Department, Town of Huntington, Northport-East Northport School District, and the adjoining Veterans Administration Medical Center).*

Limit Impact to Natural Resources

While the documentation submitted by the Town to the County in proposing the Benjamin acquisition project considered the potential development of 15 of the 20-acre recreation area, the site clean-up created an environment that the CAC chose to work within. Without benefit of an actual topographic survey or boundary survey of the clearing limits of the site clean-up, it not known whether all of the recommended facilities can be located within the existing cleared area. It was accepted that successional vegetation will be removed to bridge/open the existing active Veterans Park area to the 20-acre extension. *However, it is the strong consensus of the CAC that as much of the quality woodland habitat remaining in the southern and western component of the 20-acre recreation area should be reserved as possible for community buffer and resource protection. To accomplish this goal, updated aerial photography and topographic survey is required. The Town Board has already allocated funding for these items, which are likely to be contracted shortly.*

Install Diverse Array of Facilities

To secure County Greenways/Active Recreation Program funding as a component of the Benjamin property acquisition, the Town Board resolved to develop new recreation facilities consistent with a submitted concept plan. The submitted Town plan showed new parking area for 150 cars, a paved bicycle path at the site perimeter, one Little League field and two regulation soccer fields. The VPCAC deliberated extensively on the subject of new recreation facilities. The CAC recommends that the active park design should complement existing topography and diminish impacts to existing quality woodland areas. *The base array of facilities on the 20-acre parcel should be amended to incorporate a more diverse total complement of recreational opportunities, some of which should*

extend into the Land Preservation Partnership Parcel. These elements are discussed individually as follow.

Entrance Focal Point/Landscaping

There is no welcoming entrance to Veterans Park at present. The entrance parking area is up against a set of urban park amenities (the court games and an embankment). It is a stark focal point with pavement, concrete and fencing of court games most visible. While there have been several Eagle Scout projects implemented at the park frontage over the past few years, there is no unified landscape plan. *A unified comprehensive landscape plan must be developed as a crucial element of the active park plan. Its benefits will be multiple—providing aesthetic relief, creating buffer zones, availing shade, enticing wildlife, providing transition between uses and even slowing traffic. A suitable Veterans Memorial should be incorporated at the entrance, perhaps as a distinct component of the landscape plan (e.g., a memorial garden or plaza with flagpole), to identify the significance of the parks' shared origin.*

In addition to signalization and ongoing speeding surveillance by the County Police COPE Unit which may provide limited periodic relief to existing traffic conditions, improvements to the frontage of Veterans Park may provide long-term mitigation and traffic calming on Bellerose Avenue. Creation of greater landscaped edges, the planting of an allee, a monoculture of trees with capacity to reach substantial size and to shade the roadway, the installation of a continuous attractive board fencing along the MTA/LIRR right-of-way, and the introduction of pavement markings to define bicycle lanes could provide an illusion of street enclosure and slow traffic without major structural changes. If the same uninterrupted treatment were provided for the entire frontage of Veterans Park and the Bellerose Avenue School, it would unify the uses, soften the streetscape and clearly define the access point for the Veterans Parks Complex. Such a traffic calming project might be eligible for specialized transportation improvement funding, which could perhaps be supplemented through partnerships with the MTA/LIRR and the Northport-East Northport School District.

Skate Park

The Town Board appointed a Skate Park CAC at about the same time as the VPCAC was convened to meet the demand posed by the growing skateboarding community. Its primary purposes were to identify appropriate location(s) for such facilities, to determine the base elements that should be included, and to review potential funding sources. A Request for Proposal has already been prepared to enable installation of a skate park and the Town Board included \$200,000 in its capital budget program last year for such an endeavor. A letter to Supervisor Petrone suggesting Veterans Park as a potential site for a new skate park was received from Dr. Brosnan, Superintendent of the Northport-East Northport School District. Emerson Boozer, Town Director of Parks and Recreation, presented the recommendations of the Skate Park CAC to the VPCAC and expressed their interest in securing a 15,000 square foot area within an active park in which to develop such a facility.

The VPCAC members believe that a skate park could easily complement the existing urban park amenities at the Veterans Complex. Existing slope could soften the visual blending of standard skate park elements, such as halfpipes, ramps and rails into the site. It is understood that a skate park would be a supervised facility, staffed by the Department of Parks and Recreation. It would be secured by fencing and opened and closed on an established schedule. It will be gated and locked when closed. The skate park can be designed as a multi-use facility to accommodate rollerbladers, skateboarders and bicyclists.

CAC members support incorporation of a skate park into the active features in the southern area of the complex. However, this must be contingent on careful site planning to assure no impact on the surrounding community, final access road location or on the lighted soccer field that the Town programs for adult leagues and the Bellerose School shares for gym programs. To maximize security and safety, any such skate park amenity should be placed in an area where it can be lighted or lights already exist (if it is to have any evening use), where it is visible from an adjoining roadway and in close proximity of a first aid station. This leads potential placement to the southeastern section of Veterans Park, perhaps even utilizing a component of what is now parking area or the softball field infield (which would require the cooperation and support of the Northport-East Northport School District). The CAC does not support incorporation of skate park if it would require relocation of lighted soccer facilities into the 20-acre Knolls Park-Active Recreation Area.

Boundless Playground

A Boundless Playground can be among the premier features of the new 20-acre active recreation area. Boundless Playgrounds, Inc. is a non-profit organization that seeks to “increase awareness of the need for fully integrated, universally accessible and developmentally appropriate” playground design. The Town has contracted Boundless Playgrounds, Inc. as their consultant for design, which is awaiting completion of a topographical survey. The playground will use about a half-acre of the site.

The history of the Boundless Playground concept is significant. Students at the Dickinson Avenue Elementary School in East Northport initiated an effort (independent of this plan and coordinated through the Town Supervisor’s Office) two years ago to construct a Boundless Playground in a Town park. Meadowlark Park was initially selected for this playground to pair it with the Whole Access Trail project. It is the students’ desire to name and dedicate the playground as “Mr. P’s Playground,” for their extraordinary teacher, Chris Pendergast. A Dream Workshop was held on April 27, 2001 in which students worked in groups to conduct a hands-on visualization (using clay, Lego blocks, etc.) creating in miniature scale the different types of recreational elements they would like to have included at the playground. This information was compiled and forwarded to the Boundless Playgrounds organization for design synthesis. Funding has been secured in support of the Boundless Playground from the Town EOSPA Program (\$100,000) and from a state grant secured with the assistance of Senator James Lack and Assemblyman John Flanagan (\$50,000).

Early into deliberation on the proposed master plan, the CAC determined that the Boundless Playground and the Whole Access Trail should be more appropriately placed within the recently-acquired Knolls Park where they can be part of a greater facility assemblage and insured constant maintenance, rather than isolated in a less-accessible corner of the parks complex. The new playground should be placed in an existing clearing in the southern section of the active recreation parcel, basically in alignment with the kindergarten wing of the adjoining elementary school.

Trailhead Station

A starting kiosk for the trails network (except bridle paths) should be situated with maps of trails in the complex to enable users to orient themselves to site features, routes, and alternatives prior to embarking on the trails. Trail markers and signs must be provided along their routes to enhance the outdoor experience and orientation of users.

Whole Access Trail

A half-mile hard-surface handicapped-accessible nature trail should be placed with an initiation point close to the Boundless Playground. This pathway can extend into the passive preservation partnership area. It will avoid any areas of steep topography.

Regulation-sized soccer fields

The Town's initial plan depicted two new regulation soccer fields in Knolls Park. *If site conditions and active park boundaries allow, a total of three regulation soccer fields might be created, enabling them to double as six junior fields.* This could potentially offset the field closest to the school if it requires displacement due to a new access road. **The location of the main access road is key to determining final site layout, including field allocation.** *The CAC strongly recommends that every effort be made so as not to impact the existing lighted soccer fields at Veterans Park.* Demand for lighted facilities was considered and the potential for future demand for lighting to evolve, even if new fields are not planned for lighting at the outset. *The CAC believes strongly that lighted fields would impact surrounding neighbors, (not just by the effect of the lights, but also by the noise and activity generated by nighttime play) and it would be preferable if they not be installed in the 20-acre active recreation area.*

Little League fields

The initial Town concept plan showed a single Little League field. *If possible, two Little League fields should be placed in a multi-use configuration (like the existing fields at the west end of Veterans Park) so they can be used for Little League play in the spring and soccer (junior field) in the fall.* This might possibly offset use of the pee-wee field in the southeast corner of Veterans Park if the Town was to move forward with plans for another use, such as a skate park, in that area and the school district was amenable to the concept.

Restroom/storage building

A two-level restroom building should be built into the hillside separating the Boundless Playground area from the playing fields area. This could allow restrooms to be at grade and accessible to both levels, with area for equipment storage as well.

Paved bicycle path/fitness trail

A paved multi-use pathway should be created around the perimeter of playing fields complex to double as a fitness trail with set exercise stations. This pathway could connect to the Whole Access Trail, perhaps linking in the Land Preservation Partnership parcel.

BMX Bike course

BMX cycling is becoming increasingly popular with youth throughout the Town, yet there exist only makeshift opportunities for such a sport. BMX is short for bicycle motocross. BMX bicycles are small and ruggedly-built with a lower center of gravity than a traditional bike. BMX cyclists ride their bikes across a track that contains obstacles (e.g., jumps and moguls). Timed events can be staged through the course. *The CAC recommends that a BMX bicycle course should be created within the active recreation area.* Such a course should be set in open view of other park areas, can possibly utilize some of the more irregular landforms within the active recreation area, and would naturally be limited for daytime use. Special regulations would need to be established to insure users' safety (e.g., strict helmet requirement). This would be the first BMX cycling course

created in the Town. Location of the BMX course close to the skate park would insure that the activity is well supervised.

Orienteering Course

Intent on preserving as much of the northern woodland in the active recreation area as possible, the CAC sought an appropriate active use that would meet the County's recreational requirements and yet, limit physical impact by utilizing the natural terrain. Orienteering is a sport that involves use of a map and a compass to navigate through an area to find key control points or features within the landscape. Orienteering is challenge that can be met at a leisurely pace, but is more frequently a timed competitive sport. It is a wonderful way to introduce students to basic geography and land positioning. It is extremely low impact endeavor as the orienteer navigates on foot. The contiguity of forested area throughout the park components offers great opportunity to establish several course segments and proximity to both an elementary and a middle school would appear to avail a real opportunity to local students. The principal of the adjoining Bellerose Avenue Elementary School has used the parks for orienteering in the past. Presently, Caumsett State Park has the only formal orienteering course in the Town. The Town Department of Parks and Recreation would be willing to offer orienteering programs in cooperation with orienteering groups. *The CAC recommends that an orienteering course be created that has its start and finish sites within the active recreation area. Detailed maps of the parks complex will be needed to implement this use. The Long Island Orienteering Club should be contacted for assistance in defining the course and guiding map development.*

Landscaped berm

To delineate the western line between the active and passive use areas and to buffer the residential community to the west, a landscaped berm should be created. Planting with a mix of evergreen and deciduous trees can provide a living fence to separate the uses. Such a berm need not be higher than 3 feet, which would consume a 15-foot area (1:3 slope). The community on Norton Circle endorsed the installation of a berm, the homeowners in closest proximity to the planned playing fields area. It is recommended that this berm be created on the Land Preservation Partnership parcel so as not to reduce the active play area on the adjoining site component. Depending on its proximity to the playing fields and its height, its eastern side slope might serve a dual purpose as a sitting area for watching games.

Parking area

There appears to be insufficient parking to serve present programming demands and existing uses. Parking at Veterans Park is at a premium and sometimes in competition with the adjoining school use. Sufficient parking, accessible to the areas of greatest use, must be provided. *New parking should not extend beyond the cleared area in the southeast corner of the site (the potential Boundless Playground area). Potential for sharing parking in a more secure and efficient manner with the adjoining school should be further explored and the intent of the initial 1983 agreement upheld.*

Presently Town Code does not define a parking standard for recreational uses within a Town park; therefore, it is difficult to determine an appropriate future parking need. The Town Zoning Code requires 1 parking stall per 75 feet of gross floor area for a commercial place of amusement, plus 10 spaces for each acre used for outdoor amusement or recreation facilities. Thus, applying the outdoor standard for development of 15 acres of the 20-acre active recreation parcel would require 150 stalls. *Off-street parking must be provided to meet the demand for the new recreational amenities*

to be added to the complex. No pressure for parking should be added to any adjoining streets. Additional handicapped parking should be provided in close proximity of the Boundless Playground and the Whole Access Trail.

Athlete Drop-off Area

A drive into the planned new field complex will be necessary to enable equipment and player drop-off, as well as to provide handicapped parking.

Street Furniture and Amenities

Care should be taken to select, identify proper placement for, and install an array of street furniture and accessory amenities to enhance the experience of park users, such as benches, bicycle racks, drinking fountains, garbage receptacles. Benches for rest and passive observation should also be provided at suitable locations and intervals on walking trails.

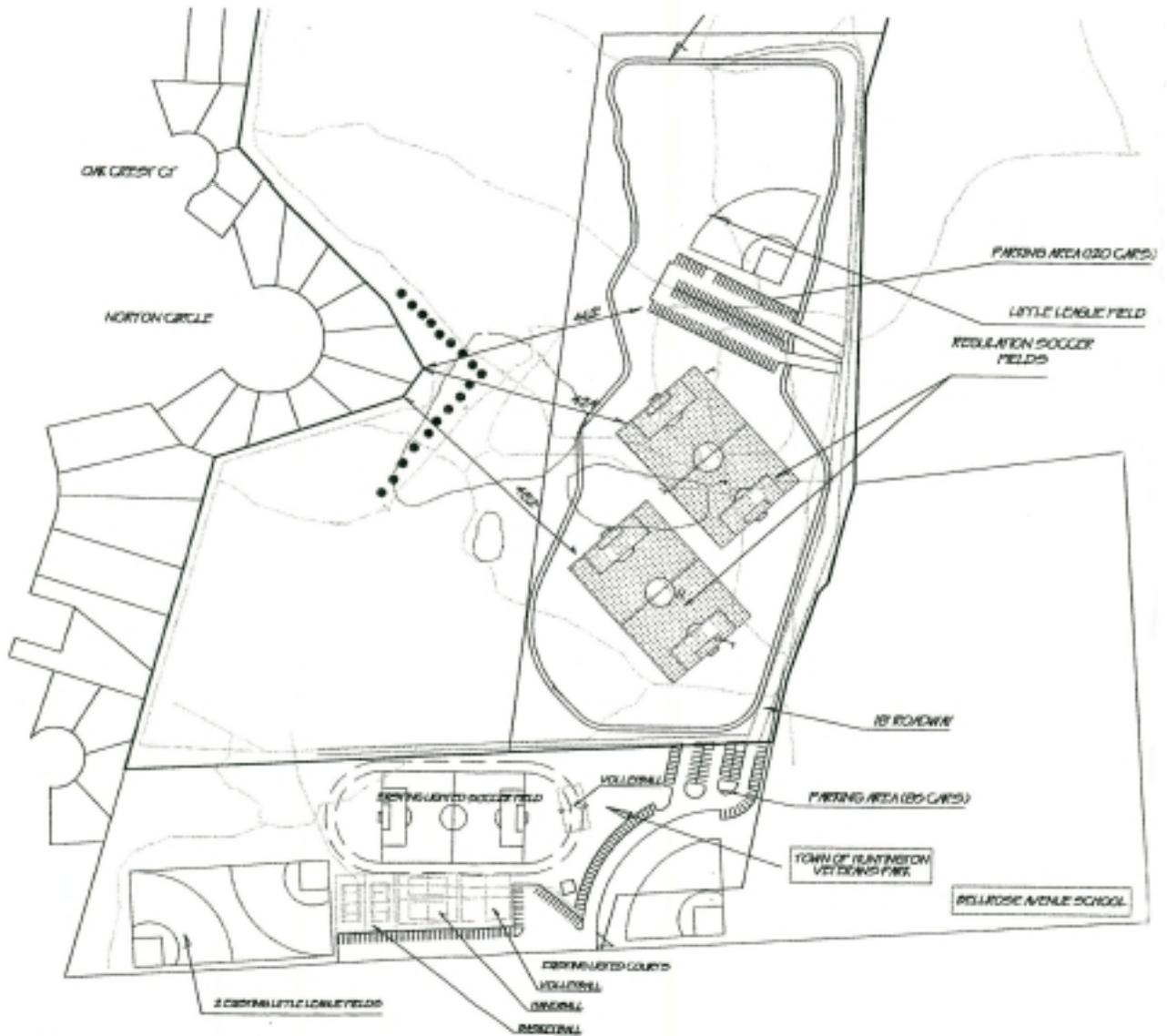
Potential for Camp Program

While there is presently no camp program at the Veterans Park Complex, the existence of new recreational facilities might potentially lead the development of such a limited summer program at the site. The Town Recreation Supervisor has indicated that the Town can and will increase outdoor recreation programming where such opportunities arise.

Putting Course

Some community members proposed including other recreational facilities, such as an indoor multi-purpose facility, a swimming pool, batting range and golf putting course for the active park. While the batting range and putting course were well received, it appears that these facilities would create a larger regional draw to the park and would clearly require the presence of staff supervision and/or a concessionaire agreement to operate. Additional dedicated parking would be required as well. *If there is sufficient area on the active recreation parcel to allow its placement along with the other planned amenities, a putting course should be included.*

FIGURE 6 – INITIAL CONCEPTUAL ACTIVE PARK PLAN SUBMITTED TO SUFFOLK COUNTY



Community Visioning/Preferences Poll

Early in 1999 when acquisition of the Benjamin property was first being considered and it appeared that County Greenways/Active Recreation funding might be necessary to enable such a purchase, Legislator Jon Cooper held a community meeting at the Bellerose Avenue Elementary School. A draft conceptual plan was shared with the audience of about 300 residents that showed recreational use of 52 acres, including 4 lighted Little League fields, 2 regulation-size soccer fields, a full baseball field, a hard surface bicycle trail, an accessible playground, a concession/storage building, and parking area. There was almost unanimous opinion expressed that the plan was too ambitious and would affect too much woodland. What resulted from the community sharing session was an amended concept plan showing only 20 acres to be used for active recreation. A synopsis of concerns (desires/dislikes) identified at the session was prepared by Legislator Cooper's staff and is presented below. While those responding at the public session are a small segment of the total community, because of their proximity to the park complex, they are among the most likely prospective park users. Thus, this information was considered pertinent to consideration of new recreational facilities as primary input.

In priority order their identified concerns were to provide or insure:

- . least amount of active parkland;
- . disturb few trees and/or plant new trees;
- . no access from Soundview for either development or park;
- . large handicapped-accessible playground;
- . larger buffer;
- . fitness/heart trail;
- . dog walk;
- . close park at dusk;
- . bicycle and roller blade trail;
- . active patrols and security;
- . no dirt bikes or ski mobiles;
- . skateboard park;
- . traffic study or traffic signal lights;
- . no lighted fields; and
- . water fountains.

A further, more structured community planning session to incorporate trails visioning should be held as soon as a consultant is hired for this purpose. The Town Board has already allocated funding for this. The CAC is prepared to aid in facilitation of such a session to insure community involvement and that a plan is developed that best exemplifies community engagement. Significant funding will be required to implement the plan; therefore, it is imperative that the surrounding community embraces and encourages proper implementation. Whether a firm is selected to do all or part of the design, community planning session, or engineering of the project, professional assistance needs to be secured quickly in order to begin implementation of a plan this year.

Implementation Requirements

The Town of Huntington will need to complete all necessary reviews and receive appropriate approvals prior to implementation of the proposed recreational site development. This may include outside agencies (e.g., sanitary disposal application approval from the Suffolk County Department of Health Services if new restrooms are to be installed) and in-house agencies (e.g., building permits

from the Town Engineering Services Department and curb cut from Highway Department). As the County Legislature issued a Negative Declaration for the acquisition of the former Benjamin property (Knolls Park) anticipating active recreational area development and based on a coordinated review for a Type I action, no further determination of significance will be required pursuant to SEQRA. No further approvals are required for the Town to proceed with framing a Request for Proposals and selection of a design consultant and /or contractor.

TRAILS

Potential Connections

There are approximately four miles of undesignated trails already existing in the Veterans Parks Complex. These trails unify the component parks in the complex and have tremendous potential to associate to other features. They already link to additional trails that run through the adjoining federal Veterans Administration Hospital Complex, which might be availed for the benefit of veterans' (resident patients, visiting outpatients) and employees' outdoor appreciation, as well as public use through formal agreement with the Town. They could link two public schools, the Bellerose Avenue Elementary School and the Northport Middle School providing opportunities for outdoor recreation and education. They course a utility corridor that continues north to Long Island Sound, potentially linking to an additional 600 acres of Town and County parkland to the north of NYS Route 25A that could be accessed by formal agreement with the Long Island Power Authority. With roadway improvements (e.g., bicycle lanes defined) on Bellerose Avenue, they could link to the hamlet center of East Northport, potentially connecting the railroad station and opening up the possibility of the park serving as a regional destination for family outings. This could have spill-over economic benefits to the East Northport business district as users frequent stores, and potentially, could create new recreational cottage industries (e.g., bicycle rentals).

The most exceptional component of the planning effort for these four parks is the opportunity to open them for constant organized trail use. The demand for such trail use is a growing national trend and the options to expand such use in such a broad manner are limited in Huntington. Development of such a trails network in the Veterans Parks complex is imperative to insure best management of the system, to establish pathways for use (thus retain natural habitat), and to stem illegal use of the parks (e.g. by off-road vehicles).

While there is considerable area that has been disturbed and regraded by the recent clean-up project, the changed site condition does not show on any of the Town's surveys or aerials. It was decided that the trails layout can not be completed until the 20-acre active recreation area is planned to assure proper connections. The CAC requested funding from the EOSPA Program to be used for a baseline topographic survey and updated aerial photography. These tools are essential for the future mapping, planning and engineering of trails and new improvements in Knolls Park (particularly the Boundless Playground), Veterans Park, Veterans Nature Study Area and Meadowlark Park and also, potentially for a community trails planning session. *A dialogue should be initiated with the VA Medical Center's administration regarding the trails that extend into the federal property and their potential use as part of a coordinated trails network.*

There is real potential for future users groups to assist in future trails management. *The Town should seek the assistance of outside organizations, such as the Suffolk County Youth Conservation Corps. to clear new pathways. The Concerned Long Island Mountain Bicyclists (CLIMB) and the Nassau-Suffolk Horseman's Association are two potentially important organizations that could possibly provide periodic monitoring and work sessions on key trails to make sure they are kept open and free of problems, such as erosion. New trails should be developed with the oversight of qualified naturalists (Town staff or volunteer) as trails should be placed and designed to avoid sensitive areas and species and serve to confine visitor activity to areas that can tolerate such use without long-term maintenance requirements (e.g., erosion and soil compaction).*

Design Priorities and Criteria

The CAC established design priorities for planning the trail network in the Veterans Parks Complex. To accommodate public safety, fire roads must have first priority. Equestrian trails should be second because they must fit within the limited space of Meadowlark Park. Hiking trails would then be designed to take advantage of as many natural features as possible. Mountain bike trails can be fit between other trails but should have the most difficult terrain reserved for them.

The CAC identified simple generic criteria to guide trails planning as follows:

- *Two major trailhead stations should be established, a southern one close to the park entrance at Veterans Park and a northern one at the Meadowlark Park access from Middleville Road.*
- *Trails should utilize existing roadways, pathways, and corridors whenever possible to diminish effects to natural resources.*
- *Multi use (shared purpose) trails should be avoided wherever possible (exceptions might be fire roads that could be used for cross country training, walking and family bike trails or where the property narrows).*
- *Bicycle and equestrian trails should be one way wherever possible.*
- *Intersections should be minimized and a good sight line should be maintained to avoid conflicts.*
- *Trails should be low impact, constructed as narrow as possible with a minimum of cutting and no man-made materials.*
- *Maps should be available at trailheads (Knolls Park and Meadowlark Park) and be downloadable from the Internet.*
- *Trails must be clearly marked by standard convention tree markers.*
- *Each type of trail needs a uniquely colored marker.*
- *Arrows should be visible at turns and intersections rather than conventional trail markings in anticipation of inexperienced users.*
- *Bailouts (short cuts) back to the trailhead should be marked with a note of the distance.*
- *Signs explaining right of way rules and trail etiquette should be posted in a kiosk at all trailhead stations.*

There are specific needs for the various types of trails under consideration, including fire roads, cross-country running, horse, hiking, biking, and whole access trails. Additional criteria specific to trail type is identified below.

Fire roads

The CAC contacted and met with key representatives of the East Northport Fire Department to determine if any of the park paths have been identified/required to be kept open as fire lanes. There have been periodic fires within the woodlands of the complex. *Based on input from the Chief, Fire Marshall, and a Commissioner regarding firefighting equipment limitations, it is recommended that no point in the park should be more than 500' from a fire road so that the entire site can be accessed.* The trucks carry a maximum hose length of 500 feet so the lanes should not be more than 1,000 feet apart. There is a need for continued 10-foot wide fire road access (on lanes previously designated by the VA Hospital) for fire trucks and emergency response vehicles. Many of the old fire road segments are overgrown or eroded and need to be re-cut. A 1971 survey of the VA Hospital holdings shows the location of all of the former roadways. It appears as if sufficient fire roads already exist. The fire lanes must be trimmed back for minimum ten-foot width and sufficient overhead clearance. Adequate turnarounds must be provided. To provide immediate fire lane access, some gullies need to be filled and some steep spots need to be graded. A hydrant will be

needed if there will be any buildings within the new active recreation area, preferably to be placed at the northernmost point within the site. Continued communication with the East Northport Fire Department and Veterans Administration Medical Center is recommended to insure that access is acceptable to meet the need.

Cross-country training trails

In the past the 5K open cross-country Veterans Day Race was run on some of the trails now included in the parks complex. However, over time the race has been confined to the golf course and trails at the VA Medical Center. It is the longest standing fully off road foot race in the Northeast. In 2000 the Veterans Day Race drew 371 runners to the site. The race proceeds benefit the Medical Center. The Northport Running Club has expressed interest in seeing the development of cross-country running trails in the parks complex. In 1998 when the Town was seeking state funding for the development of multi-use trails at Meadowlark Park, every school superintendent in the Town of Huntington declared support, in writing, for the creation of a practice cross-country running course at Meadowlark Park to save travel time. The closest cross-country running course exists at Sunken Meadow State Park in the Town of Smithtown, which is quite a distance from most of the Huntington school districts. *The CAC recommends that a cross-country running course be developed and dedicated.*

The fire roads would be ideal for cross-country training use. Their uniform 10-foot width would allow runners to traverse them side-by-side. Based on the existing configuration of fire lanes, it appears that loops of ½, 2 and 4 miles should be possible. Wood chips or dirt are acceptable surfaces. *The fire roads should be the major recreational pathways in the parks complex that can accommodate multi-purpose use; however, care must be taken to restrict their potential for adverse use by off-road vehicles. As the essential outer circuit in the trails system, appropriate continued use of the fire roads is important to long-term site monitoring and discouragement of potential vandalism.*

Equestrian trails

Meadowlark Park is the only park within the Veterans Parks Complex that is designated for bridle path use. Variety is desirable for horse trail use. These trails need not be wider than 18" at ground level; however, overhead clearance of 10 feet is needed. The northern trailhead at the parking lot near Middleville Road needs substantial improvement to enable it to serve as the horse trail entrance. Among needed items will be a turnaround that will accommodate 20'-30' trailers and the extension of the gravel parking area. *Due to the potential for damage to other trails and the dangerous situation that might result from trail conflicts if paths were shared, horses must be kept on dedicated trails within Meadowlark Park and the horse trails should not be extended into the other park areas. Horse trails should continue to be allowed only at Meadowlark Park and be dedicated solely for such use.* While there are some adjoining neighbors that have horse barns and corrals with gates that lead into other park components, restricting their use to Meadowlark Park is important for the safety of the riders and horses. A CAC member identified a sizeable residential encroachment involving a corral, grading, and the spreading of manure in the southeast corner of Veterans Nature Study Area. The CAC's report resulted in a summons being issued by the Department of Public Safety, Code Enforcement Division. The encroachment has begun to be remedied.

The Town should investigate whether some special connection might be made that would avail access to the nearby Ketcham Farm and Day Camp on Old Bridge Road and/or the Stoney Hollow

Riding School on Route 25A for their riding use. The steep incline and sharp turn on Middleville Road from points east and west of Meadowlark Park makes horse access very difficult. A second access point to Meadowlark Park on Old Bridge Road further south might be formalized through cooperative agreement with LIPA as a possible ingress/egress route for riders, but not for trailers.

Hiking trails

Hiking trails are narrow walking trails, likely to be the new trails created. These should be placed away from the perimeter of the parks to create a wilderness experience for users. These need to be mapped in the field by qualified users to assure that the diverse features of the parks are covered. An on-going maintenance task will be to insure that trail markers remain in place.

Bike trails

There is a tremendous opportunity for a diversity of bike trails to be created at the Veterans Parks Complex, including:

- Family: wide and flat, shared usage on fire roads.
- Beginner: narrow, moderate slopes and turns.
- Intermediate: more strenuous hills, tighter and twistier.
- Advanced: require strength and skills.
- BMX (Bicycle Motocross): a tight circuit of less than ¼ mile with many technical features such as moguls, jumps and steeply banked turns.

Simple guidelines should be followed in design of these bike trails. Obstacles and advanced loops should have bypasses or short cuts. Helmets must be required for all users. Eye protection should be required for all users. CLIMB (Concerned Long Island Mountain Bicyclists) should be utilized to assist design and construction, as the club has a proven track record for environmentally conscious trail design and stewardship.

Bike paths

Bike paths are paved trails and would be suitable for the very young and very old. An ideal location would be surrounding the active fields. These paths could be shared with rollerbladers and strollers.

Whole Access trail

A whole access trail is a handicapped accessible pathway that should provide an experience within the natural environment. It should be located very close to parking and consist of a defined loop west of the Boundless Playground where terrain permits. A paved surface is preferable, unless off-road chairs are provided. The trail slope should be no greater than 1:12.

Fitness trail

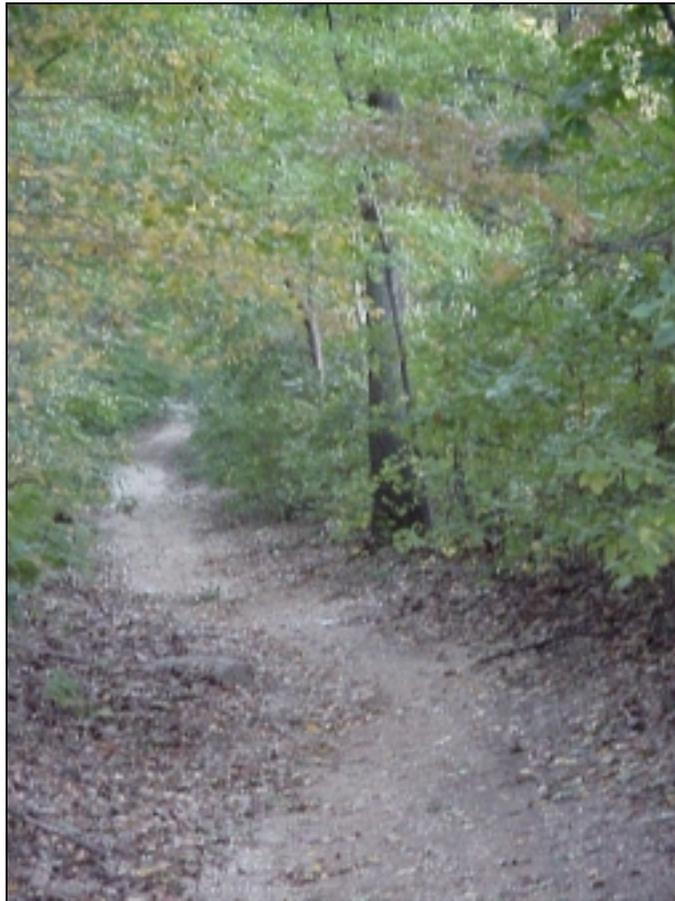
A fitness trail is a pathway upon which users jog or walk from station to station to perform various exercise tasks such as crunches (sit-ups), push-ups and pull-ups. It is recommended that a fitness trail should be located in the meadow west of the Boundless Playground and active park area.

Community Trails Planning Session

The Town Board approved the CAC's request for EOSPA funding up to \$30,000 for an updated aerial photo, topographical survey and a Community Trails Planning Session. *The VPCAC believes the success of the Veterans Parks complex lies in the validation of trails planning and that a one or two day, public "charrette-type" session should be hosted by the Town with professional assistance this fall.* Unlike a

typical charrette where the community completely derives the plan, the firm that the Town might employ would be responsible for drafting alternatives prior to the session, incorporating the CAC's recommendations, instructing participants on the basic elements of trail planning, and facilitating the compilation/mapping of optimal trails locations. While the CAC initially considered primarily a trails planning session, this would also be an opportunity to garner input on all aspects of the conceptual plan for integrated recreational use. Holding the session at the adjoining school would enable direct access to the park resources.

FIGURE 7 – FIRE ROAD/POTENTIAL CROSS-COUNTRY TRAIL



10/08/01 photo

IMPLEMENTATION RESOURCES

There are several opportunities for funding that must be pursued for further support of development of the active recreation area once the final plans are engineered and there is a clear indication of the total need. It has long been the Town Board's intention that Town projects be leveraged to the greatest extent practicable by forming public and private partnerships. *There appear to be several ready-made opportunities for sharing cost, management, and outreach that are explored below. The burden of forging such partnerships must fall to the Town and be clearly vested in a specific department for there to be ongoing accountability. It is the recommendation of the VPCAC that the Department of Planning and Environment continue to assist this networking endeavor and that all potential funding sources be explored to avoid having to place the burden for funding on any single program.*

Capital Resources

Town EOSPA Program

In 1998 Huntington voters overwhelmingly approved a \$15 million Environmental Open Space (EOSPA) Program with the goal of acquiring environmentally-significant land (\$10 million) and making improvements to Town parkland (\$5 million). Funding from this program has already been appropriated to support the acquisition of Knolls Park, the former Benjamin property (\$1 million), and improvements to and planning for the Veterans Parks complex (\$65,000 total). The EOSPA Program has no set deadlines; it receives nominations for consideration on a rolling basis and forwards its recommendations to the Town Board. *As the Town's plans for development of the new recreation area are finalized and bids are awarded for construction, the EOSPA Committee should be approached to aid this major active park improvement project.*

Town Capital Budget Program

The Huntington Board and Department of Planning and Environment coordinate the capital budget planning process for the Town of Huntington on an annual basis. Requests for capital budget funding of special projects are due by August. A Town Board-appointed Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) reviews the requests and prepares a draft preliminary capital program for Planning Board review. The Planning Board carefully deliberates the draft preliminary program and holds a public hearing to receive community input prior to submitting its final recommended capital budget program to the Town Board. Then the Town Board initiates its own review process and amends and adopts a final capital budget program. Among the items of potential pertinence to the Veterans Parks initiative is \$200,000 approved in the 2000 Capital Budget Program for a skate park.

Town Environmental Capital Reserve Fund

The Huntington Town Board established an environmental reserve to fund key land acquisition and improvement projects prior to the establishment of the EOSPA Program. The fund source is Town operating budget surplus monies. Approximately \$1 million has been placed into the account each year since its inception. \$500,000 from this fund enabled acquisition of Knolls Park.

County Greenways Capital Fund Matching Program

There is Suffolk County matching funding available to assist development of new active recreation facilities on lands acquired by the County under the Greenways Program. A local County Legislator would need to initiate a request for such funding for capital improvements to County Greenways

property. *Once a fully engineered plan is designed and bids are received for implementation, the Town should immediately seek the assistance of the local legislator to attain matching funds under the County Greenways Program to leverage local costs.*

Grant Opportunities

Many opportunities exist for outside grant funding that should be researched and applications prepared to enable implementation of the project in the timeliest fashion. *Among key grant funding possibilities are the Federal ISTEA/TEA 21 Program (administered by Department of Transportation) to aid in trails development, the Federal Urban Park and Recreation Program (administered by the National Park Service). On a state level, the Clean Water-Clean Air Act/Municipal Park Program and the Recreational Trails Program (administered by the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation), as well as local member item funds, might be secured to aid the Veterans Parks Complex project.*

Funding Committed to Date

A significant amount of funding has been committed to the Veterans Parks Complex already. This funding is likely to benefit the Town twice over as it can be used as a potential match in securing grants from outside agencies. It shows the Town’s firm commitment to carry through with a plan of action to create a premier park resource.

<u>Amount</u>	<u>Source</u>	<u>Project Component</u>
\$ 100,000	TOH EOSPA	Active Recreation - Boundless Playground*
\$ 50,000	NYS Grants [Assemb. Flanagan & Sen. Lack]	Active Recreation - Boundless Playground*
\$ 32,815	NYS Recreational Trails Grant	Active Recreation -Whole Access Trail*
\$ 35,000	TOH EOSPA (match to trails grant)	Active Recreation -Whole Access Trail*
\$ 30,000	TOH EOSPA (planning needs)	Active Recreation – Topo survey, aerial photo, community planning session*
\$247,815	Sub-Total – Park Improvements/Planning	
\$ 190,214	TOH Neighborhood Parks Fund	Veterans Nature Study Area – Brownfields
\$ [131,670]	NYS Brownfields Reimbursement	Veterans Nature Study Area – Brownfields
\$1,000,000	Benjamin Development Company	Knolls Park clean-up (in-kind)
\$1,058,544	Sub-Total – Remediation/Investigation	
\$1,000,000	TOH EOSPA	Knolls Park Acquisition
\$ 500,000	TOH Environmental Reserve Fund	Knolls Park Acquisition
\$2,000,000	SC Greenways/Active Recreation	Knolls Park Acquisition
\$3,000,000	SC Drinking Water Protection	Knolls Park Acquisition
\$1,500,000	SC Land Preservation Partnership	Knolls Park Acquisition
\$8,000,000	Sub-Total – Land Acquisition	
<u>\$9,306,359</u>	TOTAL	

*-appropriated, not spent to date

Private-Public Partnerships

Several potential partners to the Veterans Park Complex are evident, including, but not limited to:

- LIPA with four buried electric cables and a fiber optics line in Meadowlark Park
- Iroquois Gas Transmission System with the natural gas pipeline in Meadowlark Park;
- the Suffolk County Water Authority, with an adjoining public wellsite (Middleville Road);
- the American Legion, Northport Chapter (responsible for operating the VAMC golf course);
- the federal Veterans Administration Medical Center;
- the MTA/LIRR; and the
- Northport-East Northport School District.

The Town should continue to keep potential partner agencies informed of progress of the project and solicit their support on key initiatives that might be mutually beneficial (e.g., shared security with the school district where Town security patrols the school property when it checks the park and vice-versa for school security).

Community Resources

Volunteer Cultivation

There are many special projects that would benefit the Veterans Parks Complex by volunteer action. As an example, *the Town should develop a cadre of leaders that can provide short interpretive walks at the site to enhance others enjoyment of the site. Reciprocal relationships with local environmental organizations, agencies and schools might assist the training process. Slideshows and specialized trail guides might be developed by volunteers who can get out and speak to groups throughout Huntington and give a glimpse of the Veterans Parks environment from afar.* The Bellerose Avenue Elementary School and East Northport Middle School are positioned to truly take advantage of the site's resources and could perhaps help to develop student facilitators for the site. *Local school users should be encouraged to develop interpretive displays to highlight features of the site most interesting to them to share their sense of wonder with others.*

Community Service Projects

Eagle Scout Candidates

Several candidates have completed their Eagle Scout requirements through community service projects within the Veterans Parks Complex. Included among these are three landscape projects along the front slope at Veterans Park and an information kiosk at Meadowlark Park. Once an overall plan is developed for the site, it should be analyzed for small components that can be implemented with the aid of Eagle Scout candidates to coordinate appropriate community service projects.

Not-For Profit Advocacy

Potential Friends Organization

Due to the size and complexity of the park assemblage and planned amenities, it may be helpful to have a formal "friends" organization that can aid day-to-day fundraising, advocate for park needs, and support marketing of the effort. A separately-incorporated not-for-profit organization with only the park complex' best interests in focus could drive plan implementation and establish a strong precedent for replication elsewhere in the Town park system.

APPENDICES

Town Board letter to the surrounding community
VPCAC letter to community groups
Letters received from organizations