

October 18, 2021

To: Thetford Selectboard

From: Treasure Island Exploratory Committee

Re: progress report and proposals for future work

One year from its inception, the Treasure Island Exploratory Committee wishes to report out its activities to date, its shared vision, and proposals for future work.

Summary of Committee's Inception and Evolving Charge

- October 5, 2020 — Thetford Selectboard approves formation of Treasure Island Exploratory Committee and requests letters of interest by October 19. The charge to the committee: “To bring proposals forward to the Selectboard to address the financial, recreational, and conservation needs of the facility.”
- October 19, 2020 — Thetford Selectboard names seven people to the committee and one alternate (expanded on October 21 to nine members and no alternates), including residents of West Fairlee and Fairlee.
- October 29, 2020 — first meeting of Treasure Island Exploratory Committee
- with the reassignment of the supervisor of the Parks & Recreation Department (Nathan Maxwell) in December 2020, the hiring of a Town Manager (Bryan Gazda) over the winter, and the hiring of a new Parks & Recreation Supervisor (Amy Fahey) in the spring, the committee included in its charge short-term planning for the reopening of Treasure Island in the summer of 2021
- through October 14, 2021, the committee has convened 26 times

Range of Actions and Explorations

Getting Familiar with Treasure Island

- toured the facilities and property with Parks & Recreation Supervisor
- read and discussed assessment of caretaker house and advised Selectboard regarding proposed demolition
- read legal summary of Treasure Island purchase and limitations on sale of property
- reviewed revenue and expense spreadsheets
- surveyed residents in Fall 2020 through listserv, town Face Book page, in-person at Transfer Station
- invited employees from prior summers to describe their experiences and recommendations

Short-Term Planning and Involvement in Reopening for Summer 2021

- advised new Town Manager on hiring for the summer
- helped recruit applicants for lifeguard and coordinator positions
- oversaw fundraising \$9000 through LFA for part-time coordinator position (Brittany Burke)
- promoted and helped supervise community clean-up day on May 22

Direct Involvement in Improvements to Treasure Island

- drafted AARP Grant for AccessMats for seniors and disabled beachgoers (grant denied)
- advised Town Manager on writing VOREC* “Letter of Interest” for \$200,000 grant
- designed and ordered new entrance sign and planned fundraiser for its purchase

* Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative Community Grant Program

Long-Term Planning

- explored options for regional management and funding of Treasure Island through LFA
- discussed collaboration with the Aloha Foundation regarding joint efforts for summer 2021
- began initial investigations for long-range master plan with Town Manager
- gave input into creation of detailed property map by LakeWise and for eventual master plan

Treasure Island Conservation and Lake Fairlee Watershed Health

- convened “Nature Associates” Zoom meeting with potential conservation partners
- published two issues of *Lake Fairlee Nature Associates* newsletter
- began sending representatives to Thetford and West Fairlee Conservation Commission meetings to discuss joint interests
- advised Selectboard on Treasure Island enrollment in LakeWise program through White River Conservation District
- began mapping natural assets of Treasure Island and visiting neighboring wetlands for future involvement in state’s Lake Watershed Action Plan

Shared Vision and Proposals for Future Work

Over the course of many meetings, the committee members have arrived at a joint vision for the future of Treasure Island. These are shared here to guide the Selectboard in establishing the next charges for our committee.

1.) The committee sees the potential for multiple recreational and conservation activities year round on this 11-acre site with its extensive waterfront. This will likely require the expenditure of funds for architectural or feasibility studies by professionals. Grant funding should be pursued for this level of long-range planning.

PROPOSAL: The committee should work with the Town Manager to develop **a master plan** based on a multi-faceted mission statement for Treasure Island.

2.) The caretaker house is a valuable asset and its renovation and reuse should be part of any master plan.

PROPOSAL: The committee should give particular attention to **caring for and exploring uses of the existing building.**

3.) As one of only two public access points to Lake Fairlee, Treasure Island should be seen as a regional asset meriting tri-town management and joint financial support. A logical partner in this effort is the LFA.

PROPOSAL: The committee should continue its **engagement with the LFA and other regional partners** to establish Treasure Island as a regionally recognized public access to the lake.

4.) As the only public swimming access on the lake, consideration should be given to providing a free, direct access for swimming and non-motorized boating throughout the year. A solution would need to be found for how this use could coexist with the summer-only beachfront for which people pay a fee.

PROPOSAL: The committee should investigate the **feasibility and liabilities of offering ongoing public lake access**, including looking at ways that this is done at similar sites in the area (e.g. Storrs Pond, Union Village Dam site).

5.) Year-round activities and varied uses for the property beyond the summertime beachfront should be explored.

PROPOSAL: The committee should **encourage and initiate a variety of activities** that test out different uses for the site year-round and report on their success.

6.) The existing committee should evolve to become a standing advisory group under the auspices of the Selectboard to assist in the funding and management of Treasure Island. It should include members from the three towns that border the lake.

PROPOSAL: The committee should become **an ongoing Treasure Island advisory body** to the Selectboard and Town Manager, with members from surrounding towns and stakeholder groups.

7.) As a significant lakefront property contiguous with adjacent marshlands that constitute a unique natural habitat at the northern end of Lake Fairlee, Treasure Island can become a focus and entry point for preserving and exploring this aspect of our lake. The northern end of the property and its undisturbed waterfront should be carefully made available for educating the public regarding the overall health of the lake.

PROPOSAL: The committee should work with neighboring properties and area conservation organizations to **develop Treasure Island as a focal point** for preservation of the unique habitat of this end of the lake and for the health of the lake overall.

8.) Outreach and simple efforts such as better signage and improved parking will make a difference in helping the public to discover and make use of this hidden gem.

PROPOSAL: The committee should **develop a messaging campaign** to promote Treasure Island more broadly as a regional public recreation and conservation site while also identifying and removing obstacles to broader utilization of the property.