

Scituate Land Trust Site Visit Esek Hopkins Park

Corner of Danielson Pike and Battey Meetinghouse Rd.,
N. Scituate, 02857

1:00 p.m., Saturday, November 19, 2022

**NOTE: No votes will be taken. Guests are welcome.
MEET AT BLEACHERS NEAR BALLFIELD**

AGENDA

- I. Land Trust (LT) Site Visit Call to Order
- II. Pledge of Allegiance
- III. Roll Call
- IV. Welcome Guests
 - A. Denyse Wilhelm, RI Governor's Commission on Disabilities
- V. Land Trust Business: Federal Appropriation Discussion
 - A. Proposed Location of Landing/Nature Trail and other Universally Accessible Trails
 - B. Possible Alternate Locations
- VI. Adjournment

ESEK HOPKINS PARK REFORESTATION AND REVITALIZATION

Brief Summary

This project will reforest and revitalize land in Esek Hopkins Park, located in Scituate Rhode Island. Two new, fully accessible trails (one forested, one nature trail) will be developed with educational features to engage all visitors in learning about climate change, native plants and trees, pollinator gardens, conservation, and the reforestation process. Funding will also be used to manage the reforestation process, necessitated by the clearing of hundreds of trees killed by the spongy moth infestations of the past five years. Improvements at the site will include accessible parking, restrooms, and seating areas.

Justification

The Esek Hopkins Park Reforestation and Revitalization Project will:

- Address reforestation needs in a natural area that was severely damaged by spongy moth infestation;
- Capitalize on an opportunity to manage this natural area in a way that mitigates and adapts to climate change;
- Create ADA compliant, accessible opportunities that will allow and encourage all Rhode Islanders to enjoy and benefit from this area; and
- Provide accessible, interactive educational opportunities for visitors to learn about adapting to climate change and the reforestation process.

The Town of Scituate is known as a tranquil, rural environment of unspoiled forests and pristine streams and ponds. Home to the Scituate Reservoir, the largest freshwater body in Rhode Island, the Town bears an elevated responsibility to care for the environment and preserve the benefits for the state and future generations.

Land use influences the water quality in the reservoir. Maintaining forest cover and practicing and promoting wise stewardship helps ensure cleaner water entering the reservoirs. Protecting the source of the water supply also saves taxpayer money by reducing treatment costs, while providing many other benefits.

Like many areas in northwest Rhode Island, the spongy moth infestations of 2015 through 2017 resulted in severe defoliation of tree canopies, leading to extensive tree mortality. The forested area of Esek Hopkins was particularly hard hit, resulting in a need to remove hundreds of dead trees early in 2021. As a result large swaths of Esek Hopkins require intensive and timely intervention to repair the damage and manage the reforestation process.

Adapting and responding to climate change is also a key concern. While there is much uncertainty, there are things we can do right now to help mitigate and adapt to possible changes. Some examples would be:

- Favoring species of trees that are expected to do better as warmer temperatures and summer droughts become more common.

- Planting tree seedlings that are found more to our south that should be more accustomed to the anticipated weather conditions.

There are very few accessible nature or recreational trails in Rhode Island, or even in nearby Connecticut and Massachusetts; and there are NONE in Providence or Kent Counties. Adults with disabilities are more likely to be inactive, have high blood pressure, smoke, and be obese. Health care costs associated with disability are estimated at \$1.8 billion every year in Rhode Island alone.

The additions and improvements at Esek Hopkins Park will open up 1,000 feet of fully accessible trail through two habitats (forested and nature trail). Upgrades to the park entrance and facilities will ensure residents of all Scituate and beyond will have access to the natural and recreational benefits so key to leading and maintaining a healthy lifestyle and family.

Project 1 – Landing Area

The landing area is an area of roughly 7,240 square feet that was clear cut in February 2021 as part of the dead tree removal operation at Esek Hopkins. Funding will be used to clear, grade, and prepare this area as the site for the new nature trail. A small parking area will be developed with access off Battey Meetinghouse Road with 4 spaces, including 2 handicapped accessible slots. A 500 linear foot nature trail will be added that will be fully ADA compliant (5' wide, properly graded, with a stable stone dust surface). The trail will provide access to native plants, trees, and pollinator gardens to be installed at the site. Informational and educational signs will be installed. Benches and seating areas will be strategically placed for visitors.

Project 2 – Improvements to the Softball Field Area

The main entrance of Esek Hopkins Park has a children's playground, softball field, concession stand, and associated seating. As part of this restoration and upgrade we will add two designated handicapped parking spaces to the existing parking lot, grading and preparing an accessible path from the parking lot to the trailhead at the back of the softball field. This accessible path (stable stone dust) will also provide access to the playground, the softball field, and the concession stand. Improvements to the area will include an accessible composting toilet and a new addition to the children's playground, an accessible merry-go-round. Informational and educational signs will be installed. Benches and accessible seating areas will be strategically placed for visitors.

Project 3 – Quarry Trail and Improvements to Existing Trails

A new, fully accessible trail will be established behind the softball field, near the trailhead for the existing trails. This 500 linear foot trail (stable stone dust) will traverse a forested area and loop around an abandoned stone quarry. Informational and educational signs will be installed. Benches and accessible seating areas will be strategically placed for visitors. We are also adding trail markers and tree identification signs along the existing trails in Esek Hopkins and purchasing and planting tree seedlings in areas that were cleared as part of the dead tree removal process.