

Brookline GreenSpace Alliance Celebrates 30 Years of Advocacy

By Frances Shedd-Fisher

Brookline GreenSpace Alliance was founded in 1987 in a climate of crisis. The town had agreed to allow the Country Club to use Larz Anderson Park as a parking area for attendees to the 1988 U.S. Open. Parks advocates, already concerned that maintenance in our parks had slipped since the implementation of Prop 2 ½ in 1982, considered parking for a private event an inappropriate use of a public park, and a call to arms. By the time the Ryder Cup rolled around in 1999 the town, under the leadership of Rich Kelliher, had learned how to successfully balance various interests. And the creation of a townwide organization in 1987 had focused Brookline residents as never before on the value of our community's legacy of expanses of public greensward and leafy streets.

Since its founding in 1987 BGSA has produced a commendable record of successful advocacy. Among the organization's many accomplishments: Saving Putterham Woods from being clear-cut; supporting its organizational member, Friends of Larz Anderson, in pushing for a major rehab of the historic park; assisting with a model townwide inventory of street trees; organizing a forum on climate change followed by the founding of Climate Change Action Brookline; lobbying for the Conservation

Commission's "no net loss" policy; regularly advocating for our parks through its publication PLACE; regularly defending the parks budget; publishing Landscapes of Brookline to celebrate our historic legacy of open space and advocacy; agreeing to hold a conservation easement for Fisher Hill Reservoir Park to assure its future and, very significantly, leading a collaborative



Brookline Reservoir Park. Photo Frances Shedd-Fisher

effort — the Task Force on Open Space, which has resulted in the beautifully maintained green spaces we enjoy today.

The Task Force process began in 1995 with a maintenance concern brought to the attention of

the BGSA board by its member, Mary Dewart. A neighborhood park, recently rehabbed, had not been maintained and had deteriorated to the point that it was poorly serving its users. If true in one park, what about others? We asked for a meeting with the Town Administrator, Rich Kelliher, and the chair of the Board of Selectmen, Donna Kalikow. With Mary's case history we were, in effect, questioning the overall efficacy of our parks maintenance program. Was the Town's maintenance program serving citizens and preserving tax-payer investments?

The town's leadership agreed a review was in order. We created a Task Force that drew in town management and staff and representatives of boards and commissions with any relevance to the management of our open spaces, along with open space advocates in a collaborative process. I, as president of BGSA at the time, and Donna Kalikow, representing town leadership, chaired the group. Over a period of more than three years the Task Force accomplished a review of parks and open space management in the town resulting in a re-organization and the creation of a new division to enhance service and assure proper maintenance to protect assets and investments.



Larz Anderson Park. Photo Frances Shedd-Fisher

Certain of the broad ranging recommendations made to, and approved by, the Board of Selectmen began to be implemented before the work of the Task Force was fully completed, while some recommendations would take years to fully implement.

In addition to creating a new division of Parks and Open Space, the resulting changes included:

- Re-establishing middle management layers lost as a result of cuts related to Massachusetts tax legislation in the early 1980s (middle management was eventually restored in other divisions as well);
- Increasing maintenance dollars to protect open space assets, including allocations for conservation lands;

- Establishing structural changes in maintenance, particularly with respect to historic landscapes like Larz Anderson, and with respect to street trees;
- Initiating greater transparency in process with more constructive communications among boards and commissions;
- Setting a longer term goal of creating master plans for all major open space assets;

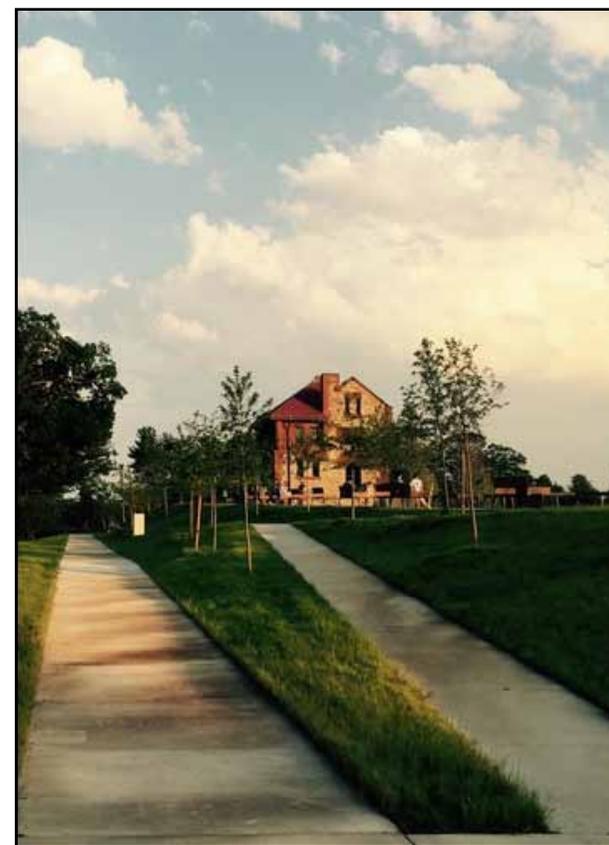
- And, finally, recommending that town personnel be encouraged to give support to worthy citizen initiatives.

Subsequently, BGSA was represented in the interview process for the new and broadened position of director of Parks and Open Space, which led to the hiring of the first director of the new division, Erin Chute Gallentine, who is still serving very effectively in that role today.

Since its founding in 1987, Brookline GreenSpace has continuously delivered leadership in the protection of open space. BGSA is rightly proud of these achievements, and of having created a Town-wide voice for open space through its broad-based membership. This could only have been accomplished in a community that values

its legacy of beautiful and historic parks, playgrounds, sanctuaries and fields. I am personally proud to have been a part of BGSA over its 30-year history of advocacy for a greener Brookline.

Frances Shedd-Fisher was the second President of Brookline GreenSpace Alliance and currently serves on its Advisory Committee.



BGSA Grove at Fisher Hill Reservoir Park on the grand opening day of the park. BGSA holds a conservation easement on the park land, one of its contributions to the community. Photo Frances Shedd-Fisher