

# Starting a Park Friends Group

Most park friends groups are started by a small group of dedicated people in the neighborhood. Sometimes groups are started because they want to do something about the condition of their park, or there is a threat to the park of some kind. But park groups can also start as a way to celebrate the park. Holding an event that develops appreciation for our open space, planting bulbs or flowers, or utilizing the park as a way to develop closer ties in your neighborhood can be just as important. Over time, park friends groups become important allies for their parks, and can make the difference between parks that thrive, or parks that merely survive.

## Beginning Steps

Create a core group of people by talking to people you know in the neighborhood.

Hold a general interest meeting in order to find people who care about the park. Schedule the meeting in a public place if possible, invite everyone you know and post flyers around the neighborhood. You can also contact the BGSA to find the names of people who might live in your neighborhood. Use the meeting as an open forum to discuss the park and what people want done there.

**Public Meeting Spaces** The following is a list of meeting spaces available to the public for free or a small fee.

- Community Room of the new public safety building at 350 Washington Street in Brookline Village. Call 617-730-2249 to schedule.
- Conference room of the Brookline GreenSpace Alliance in Brookline Village. Call 617-277-4777 for more information.
- Public Schools in your neighborhood. Call the school you are interested in. On weekends or if there is no custodial coverage the cost is \$35/hour. If it's a weekday evening and a custodian is on duty there is no fee, but must be organized through a nonprofit organization.
- Library of the Public Health Department (holds 8-10 people at a conference table). Call 617-730-2300
- Brookline Public Library in Brookline Village. Hunneman Hall (holds 84), Conference room (holds 15), Coolidge Corner (holds 100). There is a \$25 fee for nonprofit organizations.

Continue to recruit people as you go along into both the general and core group of people.

## **Set Your Goals**

Decide what the basic mission of your group will be such as:

- Physically improving the park (cleaning and planting to major renovations);
- Programming in the park such as hosting regular and special events;
- Taking the park back from crime or misuse of some kind.

Set realistic goals that your group could accomplish over the next 6 months.

Some examples include:

- Removing graffiti
- Planting flowers
- Cleaning up trash
- Repair and painting benches, fences, etc.
- Repairing and replacing equipment
- Hosting a concert or other performance.

## **Examples of goals for your group**

- Meeting with the Director of Park and Open Space, Erin Gallantine
- Joining the Brookline GreenSpace Alliance
- Holding regular, well-attended meetings
- Creating a membership mailing list
- Creating a list of useful phone numbers
- Introducing yourself to your town meeting members, selectmen, schools, churches and other civic organizations
- Meeting the police
- Opening a bank account or talking to the Alliance about fiscal agent services.
- Writing your by-laws and electing officers
- Becoming incorporated

## **Contact Important People/Groups**

- Contact the Brookline GreenSpace Alliance to learn about joining the Alliance as an affiliated member. Annual membership fees are \$25. Benefits include fiscal agent services, invitations to Alliance meetings where relevant speakers and topics are discussed amongst other park friends groups, and potential grants of \$500 or less through our small grants program, Neighborhood Initiative for Parks.
- Contact the Park and Open Space Division to introduce yourself and set up a

meeting to discuss your goals for the park and to listen to their ideas for your park.

- Contact Town Meeting members in your precinct, as well as the Selectmen to let them know about the existence and purpose of your group.
- Network with people in the community. Your group will need the skills of many different types of people.

## **Host an event**

Host an event in the park to make your group visible, such as a clean up, a family picnic, planting, musical event or other event (see list below for other ideas).

(Adapted with permission from materials developed by Partnership for Parks in NYC)

## **Leadership & Committees Interim Leadership**

### **Your Core Group**

Newly forming groups are most often organized by several dedicated people who come together to create the group. These people aren't elected and don't need to be. Sometimes, just one person does this early planning stage, but it's better if you have at least three or four people. Though the group usually has a chairperson who leads meetings, everyone should be equally involved in decision-making. The core group should report back to and get feedback from the general membership (people who want to help the park but don't want to lead the organization).

### **Interim Committees**

The members of your core group should each be responsible for different tasks, particularly: working with parks, recruiting members, writing by-laws, planning your first event and contacting important people. If your core group is big enough, you can assign more than one person to each task, creating interim committees.

### **Elected Leadership**

Hold an election when the group feels stable and established, when you've got members who regularly attend meetings, and when you've found out who you can count on and who has strong leadership skills. All groups should have a President and a Treasurer, the rest is up to you. You may elect members to a general steering committee or to specific positions. Your by-laws should explain the group's leadership structure.

## **Standing Committees**

When your group as a whole decides on its goals, you may find that some things are so central to your mission that it makes sense to form standing committees. The existence of these committees is written into your by-laws. The assumption is that whatever happens, they will always exist. Examples of standing committees are Beautification (gardening and cleaning); Membership (recruitment and management); Fundraising, Finance, Publicity/Public Relations (deals with press, advertises events); Safety (locks the park at night, works with the police); Environmental programs (concerned with restoration and education in natural areas), Playground, Newsletter and Event Planning. A chairperson should lead each committee.

## **Ad Hoc Committees**

Some projects come and go, so the committees that deal with them should come and go too. These ad hoc committees can be formed by the steering committee whenever they're needed, and dissolved when they stop being useful. A chairperson also leads them.

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