

# Birch Meadow Master Plan

Adopted by the Board of Selectmen 10/20/09

## OVERVIEW

At the request of the Board of Selectmen, an *ad hoc* Birch Meadow Planning Committee was formed to help reach consensus among stakeholders of the Birch Meadow Area on a community vision and Master Plan for recreation and open space, so that the community can more thoroughly benefit from this valuable resource.

### **Geographic Focus**

“Birch Meadow” is defined as the Reading Memorial High School (RMHS) site, the parks and playground surrounding the RMHS site, the Coolidge Middle School site, the Higgins Conservation property including the property extending along the Aberjona River to and including town owned property on Grove Street.

The focus of this Master Plan is placed where a long-range plan was deemed most appropriate. These areas included:

1. Three softball fields along Birch Meadow Drive
2. Former Imagination Station site
3. Field behind Coolidge Middle School
4. Grove of trees with circle of benches
5. Grove of trees with hill and ropes course
6. Basketball and volleyball courts
7. Castine Field
8. Higgins Conservation area.
9. Morton Baseball Field

### **Initial Analysis**

The following goals are established for the Master Planning process:

- Address the wants and needs of Reading constituents
- Make efficient, flexible use of the land in the Birch Meadow Area
- Make a long-term plan to help channel future funding appropriately

In an early part of the process a number of activities and issues were taken into consideration during the discussions. These included:

- Softball/baseball

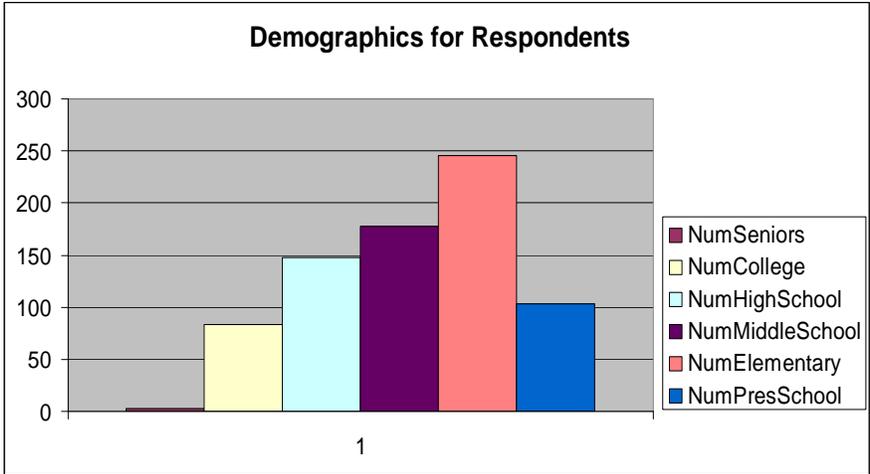
- Soccer/football/field hockey/lacrosse
- Kickball/dodge ball (gym class games)
- Ice skating
- Playground, target age group ages 8-14 (similar to Imagination Station)
- Rest rooms/snack shack
- Wiffle ball field
- Open play space
- Multi-purpose surfaces (street hockey, dodge ball, basketball)
- Water park/community pool
- Paddle boats
- Lighting
- Double sided scoreboard
- Tetherball
- Paddle tennis
- Parking
- Shade Trees/water fountains/benches
- Ropes
- Hiking/cross country skiing

### **BIRCH MEADOW AREA SURVEY**

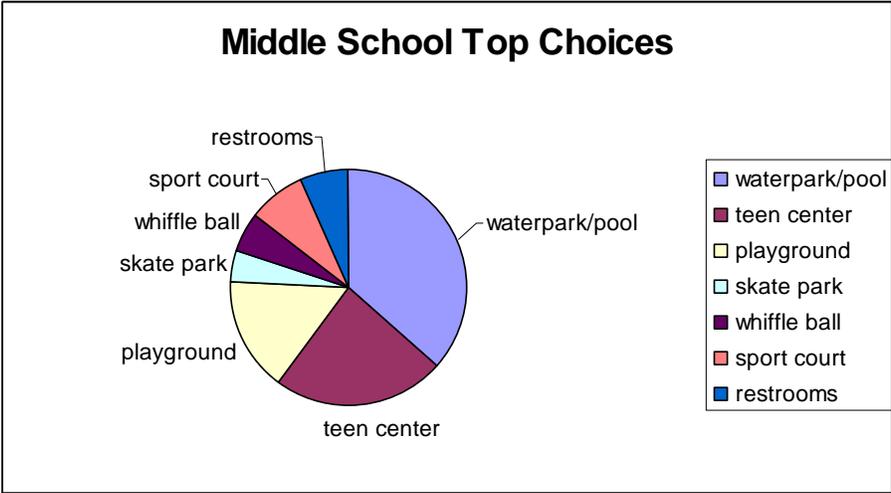
To understand the community's interests, the Birch Meadow Ad Hoc Committee produced a survey for completion by families and teens through the month of September 2007. Over 800 individuals responded either to the electronic survey on the Reading Recreation website or the form included in the Fall 2007 issue of the Reading Recreation Magazine. The survey asked questions to understand:

- Frequency of Use
- Desired Additions
- Top Choices

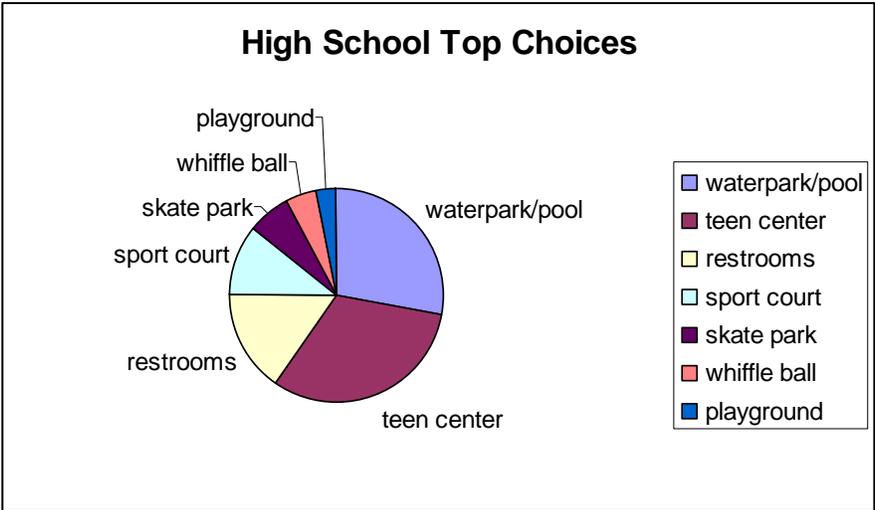
The survey also welcomed general free text comments from respondents.



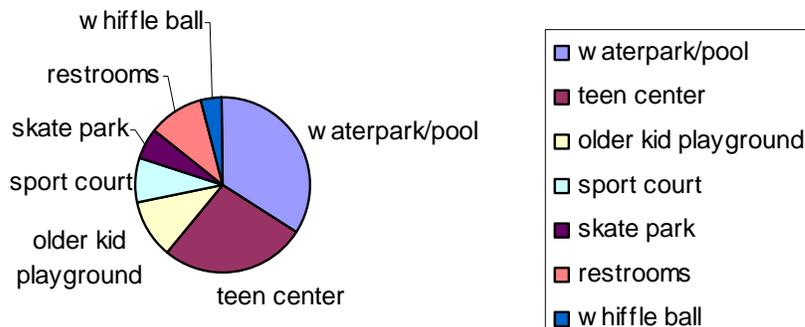
**Middle School (Ages 10-13) Top Choices for Area:**



**High School (Age 14-20) Top Choices for Area**



### All Top Choices



### **Highlights from the free text comments included:**

*"Please maintain the natural beauty of Birch Meadow and do not add more parking lots or buildings. Take special care of the undeveloped meadows and wetlands around the area."*

- Many people wanted the Birch Meadow area to stay **OPEN AND GREEN**, requesting that whatever is done not upset the ecological balance of the Castine area or over-develop the open space.
- Individuals of all ages responded very positively to the idea of cycling, hiking and walking **TRAILS** in this area. Many requested measured routes within and around the Birch Meadow Complex.

*"Keeping these grounds available for casual use is important and they serve as a valuable community resource."*

- People want **MORE FIELDS** – baseball, softball, soccer, lacrosse and wiffle ball – with **LIGHTING** for later in the day/older patron use.
- There was strong support for **MULTI-SPORT** areas that can be used for dodge ball, volleyball, roller hockey, or a skate park.
- People want a **BALANCE** between structured league sports or activities and drop-in activities that adults and kids can take advantage of when they have time. Popular new requests are Frisbee, wiffle ball and volleyball leagues, along with walking and cycling clubs.

*REPLACING IMAGINATION STATION was a top choice in the free comment area.*

- The majority of respondents agreed this playground should be for older kids. Within the existing Birch Meadow area is the Tot Lot adjacent to the tennis courts and nearby is the Birch Meadow School playground.

Teens requested **RESTROOMS AND A SNACK SHACK** in the area in greater numbers than those who filled out the family surveys!

PARKING is a concern among many who fear that any additions to the Birch Meadow area will aggravate an already tight parking situation.

There was strong support for a SPLASH PARK and for a COMMUNITY POOL, although people did not know where a pool could be situated in this already filled area.

*"Clean up trash on a regular basis. Have police bike/foot patrols, especially evenings and night. Make sure field lights go out on time. Enforce rules posted on signs at parks. "*

From these comments, the planning process focused on:

- Restrooms/community gathering place
- Multi-sport courts
- Additional fields
- Older kid playground
- Hiking trails
- Amenities: water bubblers, spray fountains, signage for trails, seating
- Clean up the creek area around the stadium track and imagination station – as in clean back dead/overgrown growth and plant appropriate greenery

## **The Hill**

The Hill between the High School parking lot and Morton Field is the only topographical relief in the area. It also acts as a natural barrier between the High School and other recreation portions of the Birch Meadow Area. The Committee could not determine if the hill is natural or man made. There is speculation that the core of the hill is old construction debris, but that is only a guess.

Currently the hill is overgrown with brush and small weed trees growing at the base of many larger full grown trees. This gives the hill an unkempt and unattractive appearance. The top of the hill is accessible from several directions. The underbrush on the hill provides cover from view and it is a hangout area for under-age drinking and other undesirable activities.

There is a high ropes course located at the top of the hill that is used by the High School. The ropes course was recently upgraded and is heavily used as part of the Athletic Department's curriculum. There is a low ropes course at the bottom of the hill near the tennis courts.

There is also an open area between the hill and the newly built softball field next to the tennis courts. There are some large trees in this area and undergrowth with a small open space of grass leading up to the newly created walkway that goes along the edge of new softball field's outfield.

The Board of Selectmen has decided to leave the hill for its natural and recreational attributes and will schedule minor "cleaning up" the some of the underbrush to neaten the hill's appearance and increase its accessibility and visibility. All of the large trees will remain.

The high ropes course will remain in place. However, the low ropes course will be removed or relocated for safety reasons. Until this becomes financially feasible and an agreeable location is found, the current low ropes

course should be enclosed with some type of barrier consistent with other barriers at the complex for safety purposes.

The Town will work towards hiring a landscape architect to create a proposal for landscaping the hill to take full advantage of its natural features.

### **Open Space Between Hill and New Field**

There is a small grassy area between the hill and the new softball field that is big enough to locate a small field or a hard top court. The area is not big enough for a full size softball field. Close to the hill there are several large trees and some underbrush.

Since this area will not be irrigated, grass is not likely to survive if this area is to be used for active recreation uses including use as a practice field. However, this site is well-suited to meet the potential need for a multi-use court in the Birch Meadow Area following completion of the tennis courts because only tennis will be allowed on the tennis courts. This, coupled with the ability to locate a multi-use court away from neighboring houses, made this concept for this space a natural fit. Further, lighting around the new softball field and on the multi-use court would greatly expand the use of this area.

### **Space Between Hill, Morton Field, and Practice Field**

The area where the batting cage is currently located is well traveled with pathways from the school to the tennis courts and to Morton field. This is also a major travel way connecting the neighborhoods, and serves as the major service road for maintenance of the entire Birch Meadow complex. In addition to the batting cage, there is a permanent small building housing electrical and water services for the field irrigation as well as a storage trailer for the Morton Field equipment plus a soccer kick wall. The space is flat with a few trees.

The batting cage should be moved toward right-center field of Morton Field and the softball field. This will allow easy access for both baseball and softball teams while maintaining a sufficient distance from residences to minimize noise. The kick wall will be removed, and the functions of the service building and storage trailer should be relocated.

Due to the central location of this space, a “Public House” with an open air pavilion could be built. The location will be closer to the hill to take advantage of the walking path and accessibility to a dumpster to alleviate trash concerns.

The (roughly 20’ x 30’) Public House could house restrooms, a snack shack, and the electrical and water services for the fields. A slightly larger foot print could potentially house the maintenance equipment for Morton Field as well.

The 24’ x 100’ open-air pavilion would hold roughly 100 patrons and could offer yearlong events, including a free summer concert series, Taste of the Town, Fine Arts Festival and seasonal ice-skating. This unique outdoor facility would be available to rent from April through mid-October for catered parties and dinners, business meetings, fundraisers and many other functions.



Based on information from area communities, the rental for the pavilion could be as little as \$35 for 5 hours or as much as \$150 a day plus application fee. Rental of Public House / pavilion should not negatively impact public access to other park amenities.

The circle of trees between the site of the pavilion and the softball fields could include picnic tables for outside picnics in the shade.

## **Coolidge Middle School**

Presently, the land behind the Coolidge Middle School is used as a playing field, mostly for soccer and lacrosse. This field area is uneven and the soil is poor making it very difficult to maintain.

The field needs renovation as a natural grass field. The intention is use by U-10 soccer or lacrosse teams.

## **Three Softball Fields**

The three skinned fields are used throughout the year by the following organizations:

RMHS-softball, track and field (shot put, javelin and discuss), soccer, football, field hockey  
RMHS girls softball team  
Reading Youth Softball  
Reading men's and women's leagues  
Reading POP Warner  
Reading Youth Soccer

All of the softball fields adjacent to Castine Field have serious drainage problems – the situation is most pronounced at the field alongside the driveway entrance next to the former Imagination Station site. Following a slight rain, the fields are extremely wet and saturated. Deep standing water following heavy rain renders them unplayable. The overall condition of the softball fields is poor due to frequent flooding and nearly constant use. Restoration is needed.

Several priorities were agreed upon for this area:

1. The drainage issue must be addressed to minimize down time on the fields since Reading has limited areas where softball can be played.
2. Reconfigure the softball fields (varsity field) so that all three fields can be used simultaneously and at night -- men (RMSL) and Reading Youth Softball (RYS)-- thereby reducing the interference from the RMSL players hitting into RYS field/games. Also, the infields of the softball fields need resurfacing in a similar manner to Morton Field. This would require excavating the existing infield areas and restoring with the same fill as used at the baseball field for optimum performance and maintenance properties.
3. It is recommended to place a scoreboard on Morton Field as well as the Varsity softball field, which will require extension of the current electrical utilities to power the equipment.
4. Include standing dugouts on the reconfigured softball fields.
5. Replace the batting cage and relocate it with a double cage to include electricity service for lighting – the site should be in the same area as the softball field scoreboard.
6. Bleachers protected by netting are needed for the softball fields to make the games safe and enjoyable for spectators.
7. Remove the green storage shed

## **Higgins Conservation Area**

Higgins Conservation Area is on the north side of Birch Meadow Drive, adjacent to Birch Meadow School and Birch Meadow Drive. As the name implies, the area is dedicated to conservation-related activities. The property is under the jurisdiction of the Reading Conservation Commission. The land is restricted by covenant to conservation purposes, which severely limits its use for activities such as active recreation.

The parcel is predominantly wetlands with the designation of Bordering Vegetated Wetlands and Land Subject to Flooding under the Massachusetts Wetland Protection Act. These wetlands border the Aberjona River which runs along the southern boarder of the site and exits the Higgins Area at Lowell St. near the P&S Convenience Store. The designation as jurisdictional wetlands and flood plain restricts modifications (e.g. filling, grading or construction) on most of the parcel. Even the upland (i.e. non wetland) areas of the Conservation Area are within the Buffer Zone of the wetlands and subject to restrictions.

There is a dirt trail through a portion of the area that is maintained by volunteers (most recently by David Hanson as part of his Eagle Scout project). The trail is used for exercise and nature study but because of its configuration, it is of limited use for access to the Birch Meadow Complex from residential areas. The existing trail also provides access to the interior of the site which supports quiet and undisturbed high quality wildlife habitat.

All of the alternative plans for the Higgins Conservation Area were considered in light of the overall Birch Meadow Planning objectives and limitations on the Parcel. Due to the combined constraints of the Conservation Covenant and the Wetlands Protection Act, active uses of the parcel were deemed infeasible. Of the passive recreation options, the expanded trail system was identified as preferable and thus the recommended use for the area.

An expanded trail system would have multiple advantages and would not adversely affect current uses or constrain future uses. In addition, an expanded trail system nicely satisfies one of the top requests for the Birch Meadow area as registered in the town-wide survey for walking, running, biking trails. The existing uses for nature walks, exercise, and nature study could continue with an expanded trail system. In fact, these uses would be expanded because more areas would be accessible and there would be greater exercise opportunities. In addition, an expanded trail system could provide walking opportunities for residents, particularly students, from contiguous neighborhoods to get to the area's school and recreational activities. Travel by bicycle or foot would minimize vehicular traffic and afford incidental nature observation opportunities.

Planning and implementation of the expanded trail system should take into account the area's resources. Exceptional wildlife habitat areas should be identified and trails designed to allow access, without adversely affecting the natural setting. The system should also be designed to facilitate travel to and from residential areas and sidewalk access points. Much of the trail system would be in jurisdictional wetlands, particularly along the river; regulations dictate the use of a raised boardwalk to minimize damage to the wetlands.

## **Castine Field**

### **Current Conditions**

Castine Field is an approximately one acre parcel adjacent to the Aberjona River just upstream of Birch Meadow Drive. The area is surrounded by a berm and the interior is approximately four feet below the adjacent playing fields and sidewalks. The low point in the interior space is the approximate elevation of the adjacent



Aberjona River. Castine is connected to the river by culverts with controls that allow river water to both enter and exit the area. These culverts were installed to create an ice skating pond in winter and to drain the area in summer.

Castine Field supports multiple and sometimes conflicting uses. As mentioned, it is flooded during winter and serves as a popular skating area. When the ice thaws, the area becomes a pond approximately 2 feet deep that is a wildlife habitat for water fowl and amphibians. During the summer, when the area dries out, it serves as a recreational field for both organized soccer and unstructured play. The attractiveness of the area for both soccer and skating is enhanced by the lighting surrounding the field. The area is also important as a flood storage area; when the Aberjona is at or above the banks, water can be diverted to Castine thereby relieving the potential for flooding elsewhere in the Birch Meadow complex. Downstream areas also experience flooding issues. Retention of water in the Castine Area mitigates the damage and inconvenience of high water associated with the Aberjona.

Although Castine supports active recreation, it is a jurisdictional wetland under the Massachusetts Wetland Protection Act. The low elevation of the area results in a groundwater elevation at, and sometimes above, the ground surface. This condition produces soils saturated with water during most of the year, a primary characteristic defining a wetland. Also, even though the grass is periodically cut, the area supports wetland vegetation (e.g. cattails), the other primary characteristic defining a wetland.

The characteristics that make the area a wetland and flood plain also compromise its value as an active recreation area. Especially during wet years, the soil is so saturated during spring and even into early summer that the field cannot be used. Later in the year, it is not uncommon for only a portion of the field to be dry enough for soccer or other active recreation. When the groundwater elevation is low, the area does provide a useful and enjoyable playing field. However, even at these times, a significant rainfall can render the field unusable for a time due to the poor drainage.

More time was spent by the Birch Meadow Master Planning Committee discussing and evaluating Castine than any other area. The area has significant potential for active recreation, including soccer and ice skating. Castine Field would be in high demand due to the limited field resources within Reading, especially in the spring. Any enhanced recreation use of the Castine Area would require filling the wetland to create a dry surface or placing *cooling coils* (to freeze the water for ice) on the bottom of the depressed land. This would be difficult given the area's significant limitations as result of wetland protection regulations and the area's role in flood control and protection. The committee explored these limitations and consulted and coordinated its discussions with the Town's Conservation Commission, which administers the Wetlands Act.

The mitigation requirement for fill placed in Castine proved to be the critical limitation for active use of the area. According to the State's Wetland Protection Act and Reading By-Laws, any jurisdictional wetland filled must be replaced on a two for one basis. The replacement area must be in close proximity to the filled area and cannot be in existing wetlands. Thus, filling of an acre for recreation in Castine would necessitate creating two acres of wetland adjacent to the Aberjona River. Additionally, the filling would require excavation of a comparable volume to create substitute flood storage volume. Even if non-jurisdictional land in the immediate vicinity could be acquired for wetland replacement, the cost would be prohibitive. Even with replacement, filling of Castine could exacerbate existing flooding issues and concerns for residents in the immediate area and downstream. Thus, enhanced soccer field and ice skating were deemed as infeasible alternatives. This conclusion was not reached casually and because of the high demand for reliable playing fields, many ideas to enhance Castine were considered. Ultimately all were rejected, primarily because of the constraints imposed by the State's and Town's wetland protection regulations.

The alternative of a restored wetland and nature park could be consistent with limitations on the area imposed by wetland regulations. This alternative was retained as a possible long term use of the area. This final use is also consistent with comments by Reading residents participating in the town-wide survey who wrote in requests to

preserve the natural beauty of the Birch Meadow area. Current demand for soccer fields necessitates retaining Castine as a field even though its use is limited due to the high groundwater. If the Town acquires additional soccer fields, the alternative of converting the area to a nature park should be revisited. Thus, the recommendation for the Castine Area is no change: retain it as a field with limited use until such time as the Town has other adequate field capacity.

### **Bancroft Avenue/Tot Lot Area**

Presently, the area across from the intersection of Bancroft Avenue and Hartshorn Street, contiguous to the current tennis courts complex has a new state of the art playground for pre-school aged children, one basketball court and an unusable volleyball court. The Tot Lot is well used during the day until dusk by young children in town. The basketball court is also well used later in the day by middle and high school aged residents for pick-up games.

The basketball court should stay in its current location; however the court is in need of a new surface. The volleyball pad could either be removed and returned to open space or a second basketball court could be constructed depending on demand.

A second multi-use court is proposed in this area, directly behind the Field House and adjacent to the new softball/t-ball field as described above (see Open Space Between Hill and New Field). Lighting, combined with easy drive-by access behind the high school complex, will enable activities in this area to be monitored by police in the evening.

The Tot Lot has become an intricate part of the Birch Meadow Complex. This should remain in it's current location. The Tot Lot will remain unchanged. In addition, "No Parking" signs on Bancroft Street are difficult to see. To make them more visible, they should be lowered.

### **Morton Field and Batting Cage**

Morton Baseball Field is among the best fields in the Middlesex area. The newly designed infield and outfield fence give a polished look - more like a baseball field than a playground field (wide open). There is a backstop with a limited wing fence on both the first and third base side. There is a recently enhanced batting cage located in the right field area beyond the fence.



Leave Morton Field in its current location. Adding storage near the backstop, dugout structures for both participating teams and spectator seating. The dugout and spectator seating should have protective netting for players and fans. The Board of Selectmen has recently approved the installation of a fully functional electronic scoreboard to be placed in the left-center field area. The scoreboard will;

- be constructed and maintained at no expense to the Town of Reading

- be constructed with a 1 to 2 foot gap between the top of the existing fence and the bottom of the scoreboard
- be LED or equivalent lights, not larger than 18“ in height
- be black or dark green in background color, and may include accent colors
- have the name of “Morton Field” included on it
- be a maximum size of 24’ in width, by 10’ in height, with a maximum height above ground of 17’ to 18’, and 6” in depth, and shall be similar in design to Eversan catalogue # 9871
- be adequate in size of support structure to handle the size, weight, and height of the scoreboard and the support shall not deviate from the vertical plane.
- subject to receipt by the donor of any permits required including but not necessarily limited to Conservation, building, and wiring.
- will not display any advertisement or sponsorship

### **Imagination Station Area**

Replacing Imagination Station was a top choice of respondents to the Birch Meadow Area Survey. The majority of respondents agreed this playground should be for older kids. Within the existing Birch Meadow Complex is the Tot Lot adjacent to the tennis courts and nearby is the Birch Meadow School playground.

The footprint of land formerly filled by the Imagination Station playground has been reduced due to environmental setbacks required for the Aberjona riverfront. A 50-foot buffer must now be observed along the stream. In addition, the high school requires land for an emergency access road to the high school from Birch Meadow Drive.

Within the existing Birch Meadow Complex area is the Tot Lot adjacent to the tennis courts and across the street is the Birch Meadow School playground, designed for 5-10 year olds. Given that not all children mature at the same rate, this playground should extend play opportunities for children through 8<sup>th</sup> grade,. Trees will also be planted around the new Imagination Station.

The current thinking is that equipment for this demographic should offer unlimited points of entry, unscripted play routes (as Imagination Station did), encourage stretching, upper body fitness, competitive spirit, and be fun. The play area should also be something unique to our community. Imagination Station was a leading-edge playground design when it was installed in 1990. Companies like Game Time and Landscape Structures offer “extreme” systems targeted at the 6-12 age group. In addition to offering creative play and a range of physical activities, these playgrounds are not made from pressure treated wood and they are open, so parents have the opportunity to see their children at play. These two issues had been noted deficiencies of the Imagination Station playground. Like Imagination Station, the Game Time and Landscape Structures systems are customizable to suit the imagination of our community. The area will also feature a skate park (50 X 50) to accommodate the elementary and middle school demand for skateboarding.



Accommodations will need to be made for protected land remediation. That needs to be included in any plans to reconstruct the playground. This will be done under the guidance of the Conservation Administrator and Conservation Commission.

## **Other Considerations**

One of the attractive features of the Birch Meadow area is the openness of the area. One guiding principal of the Master Plan is to minimize the use of fencing while at the same time developing the site for the purposes intended.

Additionally, the location and number of trees and other landscaping is an important feature of the site. The Board of Selectmen will work to secure the services of a landscape architect to guide the town in the placement of trees and other landscape features as the site is further improved.

Among the community comments entered on the Birch Meadow area survey was to clean up the area to maintain the natural beauty and preserve wetlands. The area around the wetlands between the stadium field and the Imagination Station plot is so overgrown that it traps litter that blows in from around the area. The current overgrowth needs to be trimmed back judiciously and plantings that are both visually attractive and suitable to the wetlands area should be added.

The committee also recommends designating an area under trees for gathering and waiting. Such an area could include picnic tables or several benches which could be used by individuals watching children at the playground or waiting for children who are finishing up games.

The committee also recommend adding a welcome gate or arch with a map and information about the Birch Meadow area.

## **Site Amenities**

Currently, there are many amenities at the Birch Meadow area. Unfortunately many of them are outdated or in need of repair or replacement.

There are currently three (3) water fountains servicing the Birch Meadow area. These fountains use an older style spigot that can be left on accidentally and cause puddling with many gallons of wasted water. One fountain is located along Birch Meadow Drive near the YMCA, one at the end of Bancroft Avenue between the tennis court and Morton Field, and another one between the Tot Lot and basketball court.

The use of signage in the Birch Meadow area is inconsistent and sparse. Morton Field has a plaque embedded in a stone at the field and there is a free standing sign at the entry of the field from Bancroft Avenue. There is also a plaque at Castine Field.

Benches are available inside the Tot Lot and tennis courts. Bleachers also exist at Morton Field, the lacrosse field, and football stadium. There are a few other benches sprinkled around the area.

Walking paths have been constructed as part of the high school construction project. These paved walkways connect the major areas of the Birch Meadow complex. Lighting in the area consists of field lights at the lacrosse field, football field, tennis courts, varsity softball field and Castine Field. There are no convenience or safety lights in the area. Trash receptacles are located throughout the area.

There are currently three cross-walks that allow pedestrians to safely cross Birch Meadow Drive to access the area. These cross-walks are located at Arthur B. Lord Drive, Birch Meadow School, and Coolidge Middle School.

Changes to the amenities at the Birch Meadow complex include:

- replacing the spigot-type water fountains to a new low flow water conserving fountain with an attached mister and dog bowl. Additional “mistifiers” could be placed in the following locations: Imagination Station, pavilion, near batting cage.



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- To make the Birch Meadow area more inviting, the existing signage should be replaced and new signage added as discussed above.
- The benches in the area are sufficient at the Tot Lot and field locations. The wooden benches throughout the area should be replaced and more added.
- The pathways in the area are well constructed and useable. However, adding lighting and adding a pathway from the end of Longfellow to the Tot Lot path would enhance the walking experience.
- While there are many trash receptacles throughout the Birch Meadow area, additional trash/recycling receptacles should be added with a well-documented removal plan in place.
- In addition to the play structure at Imagination Station, bike racks, water fountains, and clusters of low boulders should be placed in the Birch Meadow Complex for climbing and gathering.



The following general recommendations were made:

- Redirect current path that goes along side the Tot Lot and basketball court to travel in a straight line to the new parking lot; including a walking lane in front of the HS to help direct pedestrians and keep students off the new landscaping.
- Picnic tables in the area around the pavilion including the grove of trees and the hill. One picnic table near the Tot Lot.
- A walking path should be continued around, but not cut across, the Birch Meadow fields, and connect with the proposed walking paths in the Higgins Conservation area..
- Place several climbing structures or large rocks in the pavilion area.
- Acquire a fire retardant canopy to cover the turf fields during fireworks.
- Take out all outdated “Vita Course” signage.
- Remove old pressure treated telephone poles and replace with post and rail structures to match as the fencing (doubles as seating) on Oakland Road.

## **Conclusion and Final Word**

The Board of Selectmen would like to thank the Ad Hoc Birch Meadow Planning Committee and all those who have provided their time, expertise and opinions. We are especially grateful to the residents who took the time to complete the survey, which played a very strong role in guiding the Committee in many of its decisions.

The concerns of all ages of Reading residents were taken into account in the process of drafting these recommendations, and though we do not expect every resident to be happy with all aspects of this plan, we are confident that, if implemented over the long-term, the recommended improvements will lead to a higher (**more efficient**) utilization of the area, and a greater overall enjoyment.

*Note: Comments from the October 20, 2009 Board of Selectmen hearing have been incorporated into the following section.*

## **Board of Selectmen / Park Commissioner Comments**

The Birch Meadow Area is a unique and wonderful community wide asset. All types of sports and open space activities have coexisted cooperatively and successfully for decades. This coexistence of competing demands has relied on the resource's flexibility to accommodate organized activities while maintaining the open space and natural beauty of the area.

As this Master Plan illustrates, the demand on the Birch Meadow Area is increasing. Each of the stakeholders that compete for this space naturally tends to focus on the specific details that enhance the experience of their particular activity. This document is an attempt to understand and manage the inter-relationship between all activities in the area. By default, it becomes a balancing act of needs versus wants versus all other stakeholders. One goal of this overall approach to space use is that one particular use will not unintentionally preclude another use from occurring within the Birch Meadow Area. Ultimately, this approach will yield the most positive benefits for the most residents.

The following are worth considering as this Master Plan is implemented:

1. Strive to enhance/protect the natural environment
  - a. no tree removal without prior approval from Board of Selectmen (Park Commissioners)
  - b. add trees when possible (providing shade, cooling, vertical green space)
  - c. consider requirement to plant new trees with each new "build"
2. Strive to minimize "built" environment
  - a. build (fences, structures, etc.) only when there is a compelling "need" (more than just a "want")
    - structures create hidden spaces where undesirable activities can occur
  - b. limit impervious surfaces where possible
3. Strive to minimize negative impacts such as
  - a. loss of visual and actual open space inter-connectedness
  - b. noise
  - c. lighting
  - d. traffic

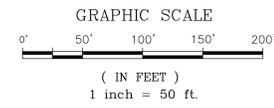
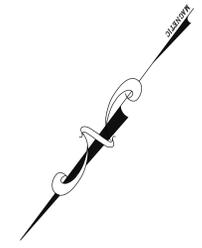
Additionally:

1. All proposed modifications must:
  - a. obtain Conservation Commission approval (where applicable)
  - b. obtain all other pertinent approvals/permits (Building Inspector, etc.)
  - c. hold a Board of Selectmen public hearing to review project specifics
2. "Gifts" of structures, etc., need to address funding for future care, maintenance and utilities (refer to Board of Selectmen "Policy on Gifts")
3. No advertising or sponsorship permitted in the Birch Meadow Area without prior approval of the Board of Selectmen
4. Rental of Public House / pavilion should not negatively impact public access to other park amenities
5. Refer to site layout plan titled "Birch Meadow – Proposed Site Improvements"



**LEGEND:**

- EXISTING FENCE
- EXISTING HEAD WALL
- EXISTING ELEC. POLE
- EXISTING OVERHEAD LIGHT
- EXISTING BENCH
- EXISTING TREE
- EXISTING SHRUB
- EXISTING TREE LINE
- EXISTING OVERHEAD WIRES
- EXISTING DRAIN MANHOLE
- EXISTING SEWER MANHOLE
- EXISTING WATER GATE
- EXISTING HYDRANT
- PROPOSED SHRUB
- PROPOSED TREE



<b>TOWN OF READING DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS</b>		
SCALE : 1" = 50'	APPROVED BY : G.J.Z	DRAWN BY : C.C.
DATE : JULY 30, 2009		
<b>BIRCH MEADOW IMPROVEMENTS</b>		
REVISION DATE : SEPT. 17, 2009 OCT. 16, 2009	<b>PROPOSED SITE IMPROVEMENTS</b>	DRAWING NUMBER : <b>1 OF 1</b>