

Camden Public Library Statement on Harbor Park

April 2024

Camden's Harbor Park was a gift to the people of Camden from Mary Curtis Bok nearly a hundred years ago. Its landscape, designed by Olmsted Brothers, is a historic and scenic treasure that is a defining landmark of the town and harbor. The Camden Public Library Board of Trustees is the steward of Harbor Park.

In recent years, more frequent and intense instances of extreme weather, such as higher tides and stronger winds and storms, are causing repeated and increasing degradation to Harbor Park's shoreline in the form of erosion and structural damage. One-time fixes are no longer financially responsible or sufficient in scope to maintain the safety and appearance of Harbor Park. The Trustees believe that a more extensive project – which may comprise repair, restoration, and / or renovation – is now required to make Harbor Park a safe and appealing public space that will be resilient in the face of projected extreme weather events and rising sea levels.

The Trustees are aware that the Town of Camden is presently investigating an extensive environmental project to address sea level rise in and around Camden, along with river and habitat restoration, which will impact Harbor Park. If such a project is approved by the voters of Camden, to assist the Town and other agencies engaged in the design of a comprehensive solution, the Trustees wish to express their priorities for any project which encompasses Harbor Park. Rather than directing or prescribing a specific solution or components thereof, the Trustees have identified the following important Harbor Park features and usage requirements considered necessary in any proposed design.

- Of utmost importance is fealty to the design philosophy of Olmsted Brothers and the expressed interests of Mary Curtis Bok, who desired to provide a space of beauty and enjoyment for all people. Olmsted's design approach was characterized by a deep appreciation for nature, a commitment to social and environmental values, and a belief in the transformative power of well-designed landscapes to enrich lives, strengthen communities, and harmonize human and natural systems. As noted in Olmsted's correspondence, instantiations of these sentiments in Harbor Park included open grassy grounds like a "New England Common," simple curved pathways, unadorned space, rugged native trees and plants (not flowering), grading that provided unobstructed views into and through the park from various points, and screening plantings to block the view of built structures, to create a place of respite set apart from the town. These features remain as desirable today as 100 years ago.
- Functionally, any proposed design must eliminate or reduce damage to the shoreline and Harbor Park grounds experienced due to weather and water-related events. Grounds and structures should be resilient and maintainable to meet year 2100 storm

and tide levels and should limit additional maintenance or cost. This is the immediate impetus behind any project, and as such is the Trustees' the primary goal.

- Ideally, any proposed design should conserve as much of the current Harbor Park grounds as possible. At the same time, the Trustees believe that a new opportunity exists to expand the usable footprint of Harbor Park into the intertidal zone, which has evolved from a site of industry into one of recreation. The Trustees favor a design that provides direct access to the shoreline, includes pathways and viewing areas as close to the shoreline as possible, and creatively expands the space for recreation and education in the intertidal zone.
- In support of the Library's mission, educational components – such as informational signs and a land acknowledgement – should be included in any proposed design, which must be compliant with the Maine Historic Preservation Commission.
- Aesthetically, any proposed design should adhere to the original plan's emphasis on creating an oasis of simple, natural beauty by: incorporating native plants and trees; seamlessly integrating the upper and lower parks; maintaining the simple curved pathways; obscuring unattractive built structures; providing an enclosed and framing view both of the harbor from the Library, Amphitheater and Park, and of the mountains from the harbor; and setting the park apart from its surroundings.
- Socially, any alterations to the park should improve safety and usability, including four-season considerations and accommodations for those with disabilities (ADA compliant). Steep pathways, stairways, utility protrusions, loose gravel, and geese all present hazards.