

## **Montpelier Parks 2014 Annual Report**

2014 was another productive year for our local parks in Montpelier. Balancing operations costs and capital projects is always a challenge, so we are delighted with the projects we were able to complete this year.

One project was to replace the old park pole barn/equipment shed that was built with help from Norwich Cadets for \$300 28 years ago which was leaning and in bad shape. We accepted an offer from a Yestermorrow Design Build school class to help build us a new one. The class, led by Shannon McIntyre, took lumber made from trees thinned from Montpelier parks and made a high quality timber frame replacement that, given its size, design and quality, is much better suited to meet our long term park needs. The roofing, siding and other finish work was done by a Department of Labor crew, the park caretaker and other park staff.

We were fortunate to get another group from the International Volunteers for Peace this last summer to help with general park improvements, with a focus on Blanchard Park. At Blanchard Park, the volunteers helped put in an impressive set of stone steps leading up into the park from Wilder Street. Additionally, the volunteers helped put in several new elements in a play area in the park, which required moving in over 8 tons of pea stone as a dry base to cover a wet clay area. Between the stone steps and pea stone, the volunteers, Department of Labor crew and park staff moved well over 20 tons of material by hand and wheelbarrow. Other projects completed by the group included improvements to a new handicap access trail to the outhouse at the new shelter in Hubbard Park.

To bring in the International Volunteers for Peace we need to provide housing during their stay. River Rock School was the hero this last summer, stepping up to host the International Volunteers. Without their generous help we would not have been able to take advantage of this opportunity.

Alec Ellsworth, the new parks caretaker living in Hubbard Park has been a great addition to the team. He brought a thoughtful and strong new touch to the park crew.

With patience and determination, park crews and volunteers pulled well over a thousand *invasive* barberry and honeysuckle plants from the North Branch Park this year. Some of these invasive plants, especially the honeysuckle, were very large in size and took considerable work to dig up the roots and pull out. A decade ago, removing invasive plants from the North Branch River Park seemed to be an impossible and overwhelming task. With dedicated staff, volunteers and groups, today we are making real progress. If we are able to continue making progress for another 4 years we will likely be able remove these invasive plants that had taken over a substantial and important part of the park near the river and wetlands. These areas are starting to regrow with a return of the understory plants and bushes we

would hope to see in our forest, a great relief for those of us who had observed how the invasive plants were displacing native habitat and wildlife.

Other projects to maintain the amenities in the park included work on the play area in Hubbard Park near the ball field, rebuilding of the leaning retaining walls in New Shelter area, and the replacement of four park benches. In total we have 16 miles of trails in the parks, and this year were able to work on restoration on about 3 miles.

Without volunteers, the ongoing maintenance of the park would be an impossible task, and again this year we were fortunate to have had a large number of big volunteer groups. We enjoyed the help of a substantial number of classes from our local schools, and it is very gratifying to see local students have a role in and build a relationship with Montpelier's public spaces. Some of the other groups that have provided substantial assistance to Park this year included the International Volunteers, Youthbuild crews, a school VYCC group, Barre VO Tech, Norwich University, NECI, and Yestermorrow. We also secured a very helpful Department of Labor summer youth crew through a jobs training grant.

To cap off a successful year we sponsored the Enchanted Forest event this fall, which was another well attended and very popular park event.

Changes put in place to policies and amenities at the end of last year had a positive impact on the experience of park users this year. Dog waste stations have significantly reduced the amount of dog waste left in the park and on trails, and a newly revised Dog Code of Conduct is also posted around the park. Park visitors are also beginning to use the incident reporting form for a variety of incidents, which is an essential tool for parks management and the parks commission to understand what is going on in the park and if there are issues that need to be dealt with. The commission would like to thank the many volunteers who provided valuable assistance to both projects.

The Montpelier Area Mountain Bike Association (MAMBA) approached the Parks Commission to request opening some trails in Hubbard Park for biking. The commission has started to explore this question and the issues involved, and will continue the process in the coming year.

The Park commission and Geoff want to thank both Cara Robeck and Aaron Brondyke for their service to the commission. Both stepped down this year after serving more than one term and, at different times, holding the position of Chair. Throughout her years on the commission Cara championed the parks as a space where children could explore nature, and was instrumental in bringing on board the parks caretaker. Aaron brought his expertise in land conservation to bear on the commission's work, and led the process to complete a Greenprint for Parks in Montpelier. Cara and Aaron made many important contributions to our local parks and to the commission, and we will miss their sage advice and good humor.

Citizen support for Montpelier Parks is always appreciated and donations help us leverage additional support from a variety of sources and volunteers. If you would like to contribute to the Parks or assist in any way, please contact Geoff Beyer at the Park office (223-7335) or speak with a Parks Commissioner.

For information on Montpelier's parks, including maps and natural history information, please visit the Park's web site: <http://www.montpelier-vt.org/department/81/Montpelier-Parks.html>. The Parks Commission appreciates and welcomes comments or suggestions from residents as we continue our work of protecting and improving Montpelier's park and trail system.

Commissioners can be reached by email at:

[parks-commission@montpelier-vt.org](mailto:parks-commission@montpelier-vt.org)

Park Commissioners (Elected)

Emily Boedecker, Chair

Lyn Munno

Bryan Pfeiffer

Kip Roberts