

Chapter

01: INTRODUCTION

This plan recognizes Point Pleasant Park as an important destination where many come to simply reconnect with nature.

1.1 Background

Point Pleasant Park is the largest park on the Halifax peninsula, occupying a 77-hectare promontory at the southern tip of the city. In addition to the refreshing ocean air and the simple charm of its trails and woodlands, the Park has also long been a destination for recreation and personal spiritual renewal.

Until recently, Point Pleasant was valued for its evergreen forest, which hid historic remnants of First Nations' occupation, as well as the city's military past and its early settlement. Decimation of the Park following Hurricane Juan in late September of 2003 required a comprehensive plan to guide the evolution of the Park over the next century. This plan reflects the shared values of the community and aims to maximize the Park's benefits for future generations, while restoring a more resilient and sustainable forest.



Many of the Park's destinations, experiences, uses and features will not change as a result of this plan. The Park has "succeeded" for generations with only small incremental interventions. This document recommends additional incremental improvements to raise the quality of the Park experience and preserve the deteriorating cultural resources. The one exception to this fine-tuning incremental approach is the sustainable forest-management plan. Here, more significant interventions are needed to ensure the long-term vitality of a diverse Acadian forest. The Point Pleasant forest of the future must

be far more enduring, resilient and robust than the red spruce-dominated forest of the past.

"There is a pleasure in the pathless woods. There is a rapture on the lonely shore, There is society, where none intrudes, By the deep sea, and music in its roar: I love not man the less, but Nature more."

Lord (George Gordon) Byron, from "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage"

Prelude to a Plan

Unlike many of its early contemporaries (Mount Royal, Stanley Park, Central Park, the Emerald Necklace), Point Pleasant Park was never “designed” following a comprehensive plan. Instead, its current layout is largely a result of domestic settlement patterns followed by early military infrastructure such as roads, fortifications, drainage and pathways, supplemented with smaller incremental design improvements, decisions and maintenance practices over the last 140 years. The lack of a comprehensive plan never diminished the appreciation of those who visited Point Pleasant; it has always been one of the nation’s great parks. However, it did result in a largely monoculture forest that was susceptible to certain types of catastrophic conditions, including invasive pests and certain natural disasters. Diversity is a forest’s best defence against adversity.

The lack of a plan also resulted in the following: key views have been lost over time; historic features such as the various batteries and fortifications have deteriorated; design and management decisions have been made without a long-term or co-ordinated vision; Park features have been added or eliminated ad hoc; potential new uses have not been realized; and vital coastal features such as Point Pleasant Bluff are being jeopardized by the encroaching sea. Furthermore, without a plan, a full understanding of the resources—including money and staffing, which are necessary to realize the vision—does not exist.



Figure 1.1. Location of Point Pleasant Park on Halifax peninsula

Despite the absence of a plan, past Park managers have done an excellent job responding to the needs and desires of citizens, often with limited resources. However, the public’s outpouring of grief over the Park’s destruction following Hurricane Juan crystallized the community’s resolve to invest in a long-term plan to help preserve the Park.

This plan is the first step in that investment. We hope future generations will reap the benefits of these efforts.

Embracing the Future

This plan outlines a vision, an approach and a structure for the management and design of Point Pleasant Park. A comprehensive Park plan must balance ecological and cultural values—values that can, and often do, conflict. It must also reconcile a broad range of competing activities, as well as anticipate future needs and demands. The plan must build upon the power of nature, historical artifacts and scenery to unite people with the past and to invigorate the human spirit.

of the historical development of the site and the desire to better manage human impacts on the landscape. The need for future adaptation of the plan will continue.

This Comprehensive Plan is the first in a series of steps needed to make positive changes to the Park. After HRM has adopted the plan, the city will then need to create an operational plan to secure the resources and staff to implement it. The administrative structure that oversees parks in HRM may need fine-tuning to improve its ability to deliver the requirements outlined in this document. Additional studies will be needed to address areas of focal concern, including long-term shoreline stability, archaeology and interpretation. Then, funds must be allocated to specific projects and construction drawings must be created to facilitate improvements. Over the next decade, as efforts and resources are co-ordinated, users will start to notice significant positive changes in the Park.

“The Park is an important relic space – derivative of a natural coastal ecosystem. It has mystery, magic and provides shelter, comfort and a sense of heritage.”

Anonymous, 2005 PPP questionnaire response



Figure 1.2. Point Pleasant Park - 2005

This plan recognizes that Point Pleasant Park is an important natural landmark where people reconnect with nature. Conservation biology and adaptive management principles have been employed to ensure the long-term health of the Park’s urban forest. A healthy and vibrant forest provides the essential backdrop for the many activities that occur in the Park, such as running, walking, picnicking or feeding the birds and squirrels. Since it takes more than a human lifetime to fully establish a forest, its vigour and longevity must be carefully planned to ensure that the goals for the Park won’t be forgotten in the years

to come. The plan provides a framework for balancing ecological needs with cultural priorities, and it suggests ways to make the Park less vulnerable to external forces and more responsive and relevant to its users.

The plan is not meant to be a static blueprint; rather, it aims to be a living document, adapting to the evolution of the Park, growing as we learn more about how it works. In the past decade, there have been many changes to park operations and management; this is in large part due to the impact of foreign diseases and pests that have invaded Park, new discoveries and improved understanding



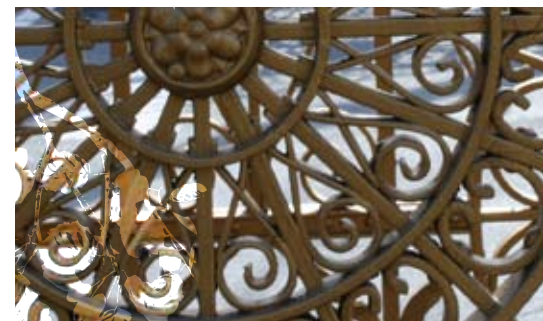
North West Arm Battery - circa 1880

1.2 Park Chronology

The Mi'kmaq named Point Pleasant Park Amtoukati, meaning “spirit place” or “power place,” which reflects the First Nations’ reverence for the site and an attachment to the Park that later generations would also share. Prior to European contact, the Mi'kmaq hunted, fished and celebrated their spring festival along the Northwest Arm, including the Park site in many of those activities. The spring festival was a great social event in the Mi'kmaq calendar, attracting clans from as far as the Miramachi and Maine (Awalt n.d.).

During the founding of Halifax in 1749, Britain’s General Edward Cornwallis initially directed the clearing and construction of the new settlement at Point Pleasant. The lack of a deepwater anchorage and fresh water prompted the relocation of the settlement to the eastern slope below the Citadel. Rather than becoming the heart of the new town, Point Pleasant was developed into a rural settlement on the periphery of the city. Given the ongoing threat of attack, Point Pleasant Park became an integral position for the city’s defensive works, which were built and renovated sporadically until the end of World War II. Over the centuries, the forest was repeatedly cleared to accommodate agricultural and military activities (Schwarz, 2005; Schwarz and Schwarz, 2006).

From the early years, Point Pleasant drew townsfolk seeking a retreat in the woodlands and fields, which offered views of the coastline and harbour mouth. In 1866 Point Pleasant Park was formally established, and the directors signed a 99-year lease from the Crown; in 1879 the lease was extended to 999 years. A flurry of activity followed, and many landmarks were created that remain in the Park to this day: roads and paths were built; trees were planted; and the summerhouses, the gates at Young Avenue and the Superintendent’s Lodge (now known as the Point Pleasant Park Lodge and called simply “the lodge” hereafter in this document) were all erected before the 20th century. Sir William Young and other early directors assumed an active role in the Park’s creation; Young lobbied for support, supervised improvement work and contributed his own capital to the effort (Kitz and Castle, 1999).



Community interest in the creation of Point Pleasant Park reflected a broader influence of the public parks' movement, signalled by the development of Birkenhead Park in England in 1847 and famously transplanted to North America with New York's Central Park, opened to the public in 1859. The Halifax Horticultural Gardens, the precursor to the Halifax Public Gardens, had been established in 1837, decades before Point Pleasant Park was created, although the Gardens were developed on an entirely different aesthetic ideal and scale. Many public parks of the era were shaped by practitioners of the newly minted profession of "landscape architecture." By contrast, Point Pleasant Park inherited a form generated by nature and modified by civilian and military occupation.

Photographic evidence and military illustrations show how the Park's forest grew and matured through the 20th century, and how the mystique of the Park developed with few major intrusions on the landscape from the city outside. The paving of the parking lots in 1957 confirmed the importance of the automobile for people accessing the Park and marked a fundamental change in the patterns of Park use. In early years, access by foot and horseback limited regular use of the Park to nearby residents (Kitz and Castle, 1999).

The growth of port facilities along the harbour's edge has made a significant impact on the Park's landscape. In 1915, the creation

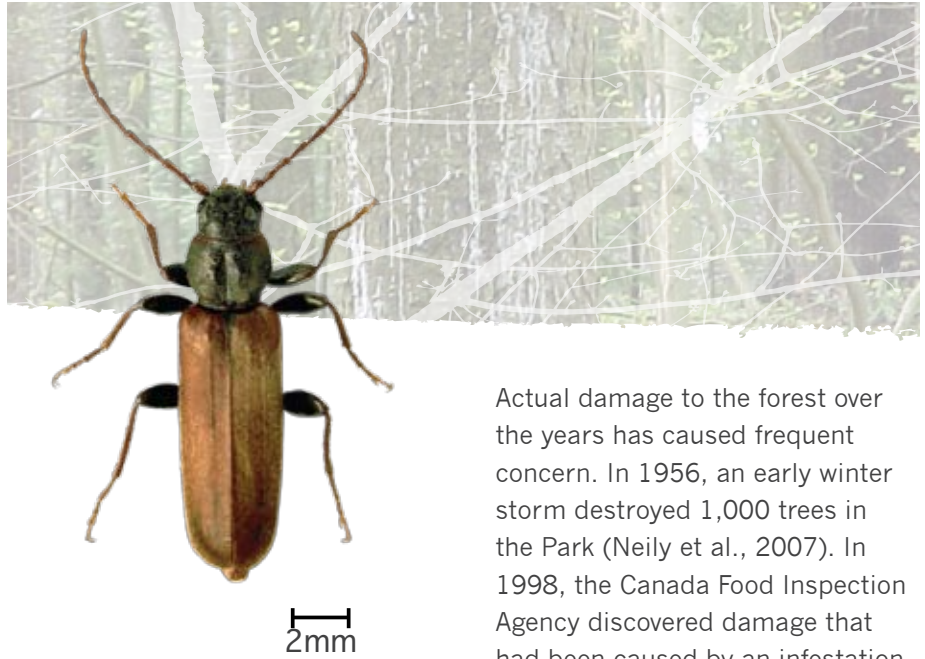


Encampment of Artillery and 76 Regiment - Point Pleasant 1855

of the ocean terminals displaced the Royal Nova Scotia Yacht Squadron, causing the clubhouse to relocate to the head of the breakwater within Point Pleasant Park in 1921, contrary to the wishes of the Park Commission. In 1929, the expansion of the terminals led to the closure of Pleasant Street, south of Inglis Street, and the eastward extension of Point Pleasant Drive to maintain

access to the Park and private lands. Further expansion of the port in 1968 created the area now occupied by Halterm for container shipping, as well as the expanded parking area nearby (Kitz and Castle, 1999). Infilling to expand the port has buried more than 1.8 kilometres of shoreline along on the harbour side of the peninsula, which has significantly altered the approach to the Park.





Brown spruce longhorn beetle

In recent decades, concern for the well-being of the Park’s forest was manifested in a series of forest and ecological studies and user surveys. Management, staff and dedicated users expressed their attachment and concern in efforts to sustain the Park’s character, perpetuate the forest and govern the ever-increasing public use of the Park. Many of these reports highlighted the potential for catastrophic loss of the Park’s forest, which sometimes marks the natural culmination of Acadian forest development.

Actual damage to the forest over the years has caused frequent concern. In 1956, an early winter storm destroyed 1,000 trees in the Park (Neily et al., 2007). In 1998, the Canada Food Inspection Agency discovered damage that had been caused by an infestation of brown spruce longhorn beetles (BSLB), an alien pest that may have contributed to the premature death of the Park’s spruces. In a move that sparked some controversy, more than 2,000 infested trees were cut and destroyed in an effort to prevent the spread of the BSLB (Natural Resources Canada 2007). In the spring of 2001, a severe spring ice storm damaged or toppled 10,000 trees in the Park (Halifax Regional Municipality, 2007). The most recent significant storms to affect the Park were Hurricane Juan in September 2003 and the “White Juan” snowstorm in February 2004.

“...a park, recommended equally by salubrity and beauty of its position, by its proximity to the city, and by the opportunities it would afford to all classes of the community for healthful recreation and exercise...”

– Act incorporating the Point Pleasant Park directors, 1861





Hurricane Juan

Hurricane Juan made landfall south of Halifax in the early morning of Sept. 29, 2003, as a Category 2 storm. The eye of the hurricane passed just to the west of Point Pleasant Park, producing sustained winds of 185 kilometres per hour. Nine-metre waves were measured in Halifax Harbour (Canadian Hurricane Centre, 2007). Hurricane Juan was the most damaging storm to affect Halifax in the past 110 years, leaving a path of destruction that stretched across the province and claimed eight lives. The violent storm transformed Point Pleasant Park overnight, levelling 75 per cent of its forest.

Following the hurricane, the Park was closed for nine months while forest crews performed clean-up operations. The removal of blowdown to permit the safe use of the Park and to reduce the



potential of fire was done with great care, effectively preventing damage to the forest floor (Keys, 2004). A team of archaeologists worked alongside forest crews to assess “treethrows” (areas of uprooted trees) for newly uncovered artifacts and to ensure the protection of cultural resources.

In January 2005, HRM invited residents to an information session and public workshop about the most effective ways to restore the Park. Residents received a questionnaire asking their opinions on the topic; it solicited more than 350 responses, a record response rate for an HRM survey. The citizens had one unanimous demand: give us back our forest. Respondents described Point Pleasant Park as “an oasis of calm”; “a forest oasis”; and “a green oasis in the city.” Park users stated that they appreciate the nature-infused landscape because it provides a



striking contrast to Halifax’s nearby urban core. They emphasized their appreciation of the urban forest, dramatic ocean views and seasonal changes in the Park.

The 2005 survey findings are consistent with an earlier Park-user survey completed in 1999 (summarized in Appendix A). The earlier survey found that “the Park is used by all age groups, all day and every day of the year and was consistently reported to be greatly valued for its natural state and tranquillity” (p. 2, Point Pleasant Park Advisory Committee, 2007).



Cambridge Drive

“The park means knowing what a forest is even if I can’t afford to leave the city”

Anonymous, 2005 PPP questionnaire response

Table 1.1 IDC Public Participation Questionnaire Summary

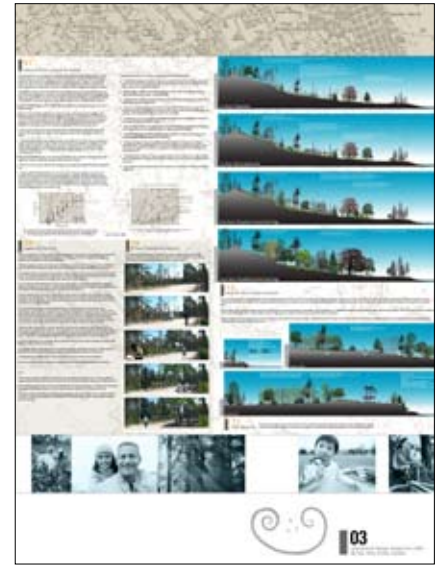
Subject Area	Qty
Age range	
55+	168
35 to 54	111
18 to 34	36
Age not declared	22
0 to 17	5
Total respondents	342
Features	
Forest/ecology/mentioned	246
Historic elements	45
Views	40
Subject Area	
Walking	270
Dogs/dog walking	130
Contemplative activity	60
Running/jogging	59
Picnicking	46
Skiing	38
Shakespeare by the Sea	34
Nature appreciation	32
Bicycling	21
Bird Watching	13
Children's activities	10
Tourism	10
Photography	9
Orienteering	4
Snowshoeing	4
Frisbee	3
Sledding/tobogganing	3

International Competition

Following the devastation of Hurricane Juan, the Halifax Regional Municipality, in partnership with Southwest Properties Limited, held an international design competition to generate ideas for the regeneration, restoration and renewal of Point Pleasant Park. Recognizing that the area was suffering from systemic management problems, the competition was a tool for HRM to identify an approach and find the expertise to develop the Park's first comprehensive plan. The design and management approach of the winning entrants were combined with key ideas put forth by other competition entrants to form this comprehensive plan.

The competition was held in two phases, the first of which included entries from 26 teams; five finalists were selected to develop detailed proposals for the second phase. Two winning proposals were selected by the jury: the entries of NIP paysage of Montreal and Ekistics Planning & Design from Dartmouth, N.S.

Neither of the winning proposals recommended radical changes to the Park; instead, both recognized the Park's existing attributes and recommended the restoration of its former character. (Summaries of the competition entries produced by the five competition finalists are provided in Appendix B.)





Heather Road before Hurricane Juan

1.3 The Way Forward

A “do-nothing” approach to forest regeneration is a risky option for Point Pleasant Park. Ecological conditions—for example, the lack of appropriate regeneration, vigorous competition and the presence of invasive alien species—limit the potential for regenerating a healthy mixed Acadian forest in some areas. Hands-off management could result in another red spruce–dominated forest that will be just as vulnerable to storms and diseases as the previous one. An active strategy is essential for creating a vibrant, diverse Acadian forest. Action is necessary; the status quo is not an option.

This is also a long-term project. Re-establishing a mature tree canopy will take the better part of a century. The Park’s forest must be effectively managed so it will be more resistant to disturbances far into the future, some of which could result from climate change.

Following Hurricane Juan, several conifer-dominated tree groves were left standing in the Park. These are the forest’s legacy because they existed prior to the hurricane, and they will serve as a point of departure for the redevelopment and restoration of Point Pleasant Park. These “witness groves” preserve mature fragments of the mixed Acadian forest within the Park.



Along the east–west bands of south-facing slopes crossing the Park, stands of deep-rooted broadleaved trees will be planted with needleleaved trees in the minority; in time, these stands will provide wind protection for the witness groves. Between the broadleaved bands and the witness groves, mixed-forest areas will be established. Throughout the park, trees will be planted where natural regeneration has proven insufficient or where the mix of species requires enrichment.

Young forests will be the most dynamic and dramatic spaces within the Park, as they evolve from almost barren areas into healthy and diverse woodlands. The introduction of early



1.4 Comprehensive Plan Vision and Objectives

Point Pleasant Park is a place of natural and cultural heritage, a memorial of the past and a commitment to the future. The Park should accomplish the objectives of as set out in Chapter 86 of the 1866 Acts of Parliament of Nova Scotia as a harmonious and resilient balance of:

- the ocean and the land;
- the natural, ecological functions of a diverse Acadian forest;
- the cultural, archaeological and spiritual significance of the First Nations and European presence in the park; and
- the recurring recreational activities and uses of a historically significant urban park.

Sailors Memorial Way before Hurricane Juan

successional trees, such as poplar, and specialized soil-building species within these areas will accelerate natural processes, allowing more shade-tolerant vegetation to develop and biodiversity to increase. Visitors will notice the growth of a diverse and robust forest canopy over time.

Historic sites will be preserved and made safe. Reforestation and other initiatives will not compromise cultural remains. A comprehensive but unobtrusive signage program will guide users through the park (“wayfinding”) and provide interpretation where helpful. Using natural materials and construction techniques will produce a subtle but modern aesthetic. All of these initiatives will combine to maximize the psychological impact of the various natural settings in the Park, the adjacent harbour and the headlands.





Point Pleasant Battery

The comprehensive plan’s vision for Point Pleasant Park is simple:

To improve the quality and resilience of one of Halifax’s most cherished urban parks for future generations.

The objectives below reinforce this approach to realizing the vision.

Ensure the long-term vitality of the forest and embrace long-term sustainable approaches

Any vision for Point Pleasant Park should embrace sustainability in a broad sense. A sustainable park balances the wide range of needs of a diverse group of users with the desire to conserve and renew economic, cultural and ecological features. The forest of the future must be resilient and enduring, since it creates the context for the park experiences. All future park infrastructure—buildings, systems, energy, waste—should be a model of sustainability. Design and management decisions must be made with a long-term view rather than simply being practical in the short term.



Cambridge Battery



Black Rock Beach - circa 1940



Cambridge Battery



Fort Ogilvie

Protect, celebrate and interpret important cultural resources

Point Pleasant Park can be likened to a rich historic document for the community. Some chapters of this history, such as those recording the First Nations’ history and the British domestic landscape of the 18th century, have become almost too faded to read. Later chapters dealing with Point Pleasant’s military role in the British Empire, and the defence of both Halifax and Canada, have been so disrupted by the erosion of structures and random tree growth that those who don’t know the history will no longer be able to find it. Point Pleasant’s role as a densely forested recreational park fills a more recent chapter in its centuries-old history. In the wake of Hurricane Juan, renewed archaeological and historical research has rediscovered many details of the Park’s past. It is time to protect, interpret and treasure the material remains and traditions of that past.

The restoration of Point Pleasant Park is an opportunity to create a distinctive landscape in which stabilized, clearly presented historic features such as ruined forts, cellars, walls and wells allow visitors to imagine and access the past in a predominantly woodland setting—a landscape in which cultural heritage and the natural environment enhance each other.

At other historic sites in Canada, cultural resources are usually the main focus. Conversely, in many nature-oriented parks, cultural resources are sometimes neglected. In Point Pleasant Park, the goal is to achieve a balance between its cultural and natural resources.

The historic views from the Park are important features that have been lost over time. Re-establishing these important views and protecting them for the future will be central to this strategy.

Provide meaningful incremental improvements

During the past 150 years, incremental improvements have been made to the remains of the fortifications within the Park. Committing to additional high-quality improvements will raise the quality of this already great park. Replacing features of questionable quality (washrooms, parking areas, signage, benches, drainage) with high-quality durable features that speak to the unique design vocabulary of Point Pleasant Park is central to this objective.

The careful use of materials and form inspired by existing and historic Park elements will help create a harmonious feel and strengthen the Park's identity. Avoiding an incongruous mix of landscape and architectural styles will unify the Park's composition and create a coherent, pleasing psychological impact.

Provide a wide variety of user experiences

In the future there will be great variety in the Acadian forest, as the vegetation responds to the local landscape, micro-climatic conditions and time. This will create a range of tree-stand and meadow mosaics that will contribute to the personality of each trail in the Park.

The Park must be effectively managed to recognize the psychological importance of "setting" in some spaces. The settings should be designed to heighten the user experience, including the play of light and shade, seasonal considerations, distant views and microclimate.

The vision must recognize the needs of current Park users while understanding that future visitors will want to leave their own mark and establish their own priorities.

Become a model of urban park best practices

Point Pleasant Park should strive to be one of the world's leading urban natural waterfront parks. To do this, it must be relevant to and cherished by its users; it must protect and interpret the resources that do not have a voice (artifacts, cultural history, nature); it must showcase local quality and ingenuity; it must educate and inform; it must continue to be a place of discovery for a broad audience; and it must speak to the widest variety of human experiences and conditions. The Park must be among the top "must-see destinations" of Halifax, just like Central Park, Mount Royal Park, Stanley Park, Birkenhead, St. James's Park, Hong Kong Park and Parc de la Ciutadella are in their respective cities.

Point Pleasant Battery





Summerhouse

1.5 Organization of this Report

This Point Pleasant Park Comprehensive Plan consists of six chapters:

- 1) Introduction
- 2) Inventory & Analysis
- 3) Guiding Principles
- 4) Management Plan
- 5) Park Development Plan
- 6) Implementation Strategy

The first three chapters serve as the basis for decision-making, while the fourth and fifth chapters describe how to best protect and enhance the Park’s resources, provide quality visitor experiences, create an enduring legacy and serve as a blueprint for future development.

Chapter 4 establishes a long-term strategy for cultivating and managing sustainable resources in the Park. These resources are broken down into three main areas: the forest, the shoreline, and the cultural resources.

Chapter 5 describes an overall park development plan framework for dealing with the various Park zones. It also explains an aesthetic approach to “designing” the various forest zones. It moves from the scale of the entire park and how it fits into the city to the scale of specific

spaces, to the scale of specific park elements such as signage. This chapter also addresses design and planning policies that must be considered in order to realize the comprehensive plan.

Chapter 6 details costing, phasing and steps to realize the plan over the next century. It also outlines an organizational structure for HRM to consider in administering the comprehensive plan, the next steps in the implementation process and the recommended phasing of the various comprehensive plan elements.



Heather Road and Cambridge Drive before Hurricane Juan