

Norton Tricentennial Park: a living legacy

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After a long snowy winter, lots of conversations and meetings, we are ready to make a major step: the Groundbreaking on Friday April 29, 2011. Join us at 1 p.m. for a brief ceremony introducing what should become a permanent memorial of our Tricentennial Year.

We have shared our vision several times in several venues and we realize it is a dynamic concept that changes as we learn more about what is wanted, what is needed and what is possible. Currently, our vision stated most succinctly (and only including the physical aspects) could be described like this: "A vine-covered arbor will serve as the entrance to the park. Along the pathway, we plan to display a variety of attractive native plants, ground covers and shrubs. We will include an innovative natural water feature, small grassy area, dedicated gardens and memorial benches."

I like the sound of that, but must admit there is a little more to it than what meets the eye. In this little plot of land (it is about 12,000 sq. ft.) we hope to bring together notions of Norton's past by using shrubs, vines and trees that have been here for three centuries (at least) and showcasing the 1697 Campbell House across the driveway.

We also want the park to have a contemporary feel, reflecting 2011. We are doing this by trying to be as "green" or ecologically informed in our planning as possible. For that reason, we are attempting to respect the notions of water conservation by using well-adapted plants and water purity by using no damaging chemicals. We will conserve water by planting native vegetation that can easily survive on about forty inches of rain a year.

We will be purchasing sturdy benches and an arbor constructed out of plastic lumber made from recycled bottles. Maybe as many as ten to fifteen thousand plastic bottles will be put to good use and not end up filling a landfill or swirling around in the Great Atlantic Ocean Garbage Patch. I wonder what Norton residents will think of these items in another hundred years – they should still be here and holding up well since plastic lasts forever (barring a volcano eruption or asteroid impact, of course.)

Finally, and probably most importantly, we want this park to be meaningful to current and future residents, specifically, our children, grandchildren and newcomers. It will be a little green space where they (and you) can sit and see a

butterfly or bird, maybe hear the trickle of water (if it has rained lately) and laughter from the children's playground or schoolyard nearby.

The trees and vines will provide shade, flowers and seeds. The ground cover and shrubs will serve as models of native plants that are quietly, secretly supporting the native wildlife you may or may not see. Besides the birds, small mammals and insects that live in the visible realm, other tiny residents will enjoy having their needs met, too, like small lizards, earthworms or salamanders. Even the microscopic residents in the soil (bacteria, yeast and other fungi) will be able to thrive if we do this right.



A Northern Mockingbird like this one was visiting the Tricentennial Park recently - who will be next?

How can we get it right? Given the environmental challenges we face now, we think our best bet is to use the criteria suggested by the National Wildlife Federation (NWF.)

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