

Rustic Ridge Association
Annual Report
Town of Northfield Representative
August 2013

Towns have good years and bad years and so far, 2013 has been a good year for Northfield. You may be surprised to hear this. After all, the Campus continues to lie dormant, Main Street businesses are struggling, voters have not been happy with Town government. However, there is a positive, energetic fervor in the town characterized by increased citizen participation in community planning and problem solving and by new endeavors that hold great promise.

Master Planning

Last fall, the Board of Selectmen, working with the Planning Board, hired Martha Lyon Inc. to consult on the development of a Master Plan for the Town of Northfield. The last Master Plan was done in the 1970's and updated in the 1990's. With all the challenges impacting the town—like the abandoned campus, businesses closing--it was time to take a fresh look at all the elements that make up the Town: History and Culture, Schools, Transportation, Economic Activity, Open Space, Recreation, Commerce, --and to craft a new vision for our future. This Spring, many residents participated in the Master Plan Roundtable community forums, voicing their visions for a more economically vibrant town that values its history, architecture and natural surroundings. Some of you have participated in these sessions. It has been great to hear ideas voiced by Rustic Ridge residents. If you missed these forums and want to read some of the Master Plan Roundtable documents that have been compiled by Martha Lyon and her staff, you can read them online at:

<http://www.northfield.ma.us/index.php?id=1154>

There will be another forum this fall.

Open Space

Northfield residents almost universally value a peaceful and quiet town with clean water, open fields, trails and scenic views. A new Open Space Plan for the next seven years has been drawn up and approved by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Approval of the plan makes the Town eligible to apply for state grant money for land acquisition and recreational facilities. A copy of the Action Plan is attached. To read a draft of the entire Open Space Plan go to:

<http://www.northfieldmass.org/open-space-plan.html>

After learning that NMH had listed for sale the Northfield Golf Course and Schell properties, the Open Space Committee met much of the Spring to discuss the possibilities for the Northfield Golf Course and the Schell properties and recommended to the Board of Selectmen that they ask Northfield Mount Hermon School to separate the two parcels because the Town of Northfield would be interested in acquiring the Schell property, currently called the Mill Brook

Conservation Area. As a taxable property, the Northfield Golf Course is of great value to the Town of Northfield. No one has expressed a desire to alter this valuable recreational asset.

The Open Space Committee has also been involved with helping to find a solution to the problem of the closing of the trail to Crag Mountain. It is hoped that it will be resolved soon.

Schell Bridge

In May 2013, a surprising opportunity was presented to Town of Northfield to pursue the replacement of Schell Bridge with a bikeway similar to the North Bridge on the Cheshire Rail Trail in Keene NH. The North Bridge was modeled after the Schell and opening in 2012. At the suggestion of our state government representatives in Boston and Massachusetts Department of Transportation District 2 director-- and with the support of Friends of Schell Bridge, the Northfield Selectboard has voted to pursue funding for the replacement of the historic Schell Bridge with a new pedestrian and biking bridge at the same location at no cost to the Town. The new structure will incorporate, as much as possible, actual elements reminiscent of the beautiful original Schell. We are awaiting word that this project will be approved. Friends of Schell Bridge anticipates a role in developing and maintaining the area around the new bikeway. This should be good news for Rustic Ridge families looking for nearby recreational opportunities for children and grandchildren.

Northfield Emergency Medical Services

Ambulance and emergency services are always a concern to Rustic Ridge residents and you should have been pleased to see their new headquarters on Main St. The group of EMT's who planned and executed this project deserve recognition and would be worthy recipients of your donations.

Historical Commission Inventory of East Northfield

This summer, East Northfield residents got a first look at the inventory of many homes and cottages enabled by a Community Preservation grant and a grant from the Massachusetts Historical Commission. Bonnie Parsons, an architectural historian worked with Joel Fowler of the Northfield Historical Commission to survey all the homes that grew up around the Northfield Campus from the time of its founding through the first couple of decades of the twentieth century. While the records are by no means complete, they represent a good start toward sharing information with future families who will own these homes and cottages. The Northfield Historical Society plans to create a file to add new information on these buildings. Take time to read the records online at: <http://mhc-macris.net>

Businesses

Northfield businesses are struggling without the campus to support them. They have formed a coalition of business owners called Northfield Area Tourism and Business Association (NATABA) under the leadership of Joan Stoia at Centennial

House. They meet regularly, have speakers, plan special events for Northfield and have recently published a new brochure on Northfield. As seasonal visitors to Northfield, you could be helpful to this group by sharing ideas you may have.

Schools

Northfield is immensely proud of its schools, both public and private.

The elementary school has an outstanding reputation and has brought many new families into town. Pioneer Valley Regional School has a high number of “School Choice” students from Greenfield, Gill and Vernon, VT and has experienced leadership, great athletics and a happy student body.

Linden Hill School, which closed in June 2011 has now become the Northfield campus of **Redemption Christian Academy** in Troy NY. Elder John Massey is its leader and would love to show you around. Redemption has students from the inner city and from many countries learning skills for life. You may have met some of them at the Farmers Market—some make and sell cakes and cookies as part of their learning program. Others are acquiring knowledge in agriculture and mechanics. Redemption Christian basketball is top notch in the New England Prep world.

Northfield Mount Hermon School is determined to move all its operations (including faculty housing) to its Mount Hermon campus. It has sold some small parcels this past year (including one to Rustic Ridge!) and will sell the golf course and other parcels as soon as possible. Although they promised otherwise, NMH has left the Town in a difficult position. After years when the Town thought it would become a “college town”, the Town appears to be trying to move ahead without the economic engine that a campus provides. The Collaborative that met for so many years has taken a break until National Christian Foundation can determine what to do with the Green’s gift. Many have faith that NCF will find an institution suitable for the Town of Northfield—and many are praying about it on a regular basis. Perhaps that’s what has Northfield looking more optimistically about the future!

Thank you for the privilege of serving you.

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