



Prospect Hill Park Rehabilitation

The City of Somerville's rehabilitation of Prospect Hill Park has transformed this historic site into a more accessible, sustainable, and engaging public space. As the location where General George Washington raised the first "American flag" – the Grand Union Flag - during the War for Independence, Prospect Hill holds deep historical significance. The 2017–2021 project revitalized the park, ensuring that its legacy is preserved while creating an inviting and inclusive destination for all visitors.

Before this renovation, the park had not been updated since 1982—before the Americans with Disabilities Act—leaving steep, narrow, and cobblestone walkways that limited accessibility. Historical interpretation was also lacking, making it difficult for visitors to appreciate the site's significance fully. This revitalization directly addressed these challenges. Existing granite was repurposed to construct new walls and redesign walkways, creating a more welcoming and functional lawn area. The park's name is now prominently engraved in granite along Munroe Street, reinforcing its identity. New interpretive panels and viewshed indicators were installed on the concrete tower wall and railings, providing rich historical context and highlighting regional Revolutionary War landmarks visible from the hill.

One of the most profound changes is the dramatic improvement in accessibility. Previously, the only accessible paths were along Munroe Street, which did not provide direct entry into the park. Now, visitors of all abilities can navigate the site with ease, thanks to new accessible walkways and two designated gathering spaces with seating. A newly added pathway wraps around the tower, connecting both ends of the park and offering panoramic views of Cambridge and Boston—mirroring the vistas seen from the top of the tower, which remains accessible only by stairs.

Sustainability was another key focus of the renovation. Traditional turf was reduced to lower maintenance demands and to decrease fossil fuel use for mowing. Steep slopes were transformed into naturalized landscapes with native plantings, such as little bluestem and a conservation seed mix, which helped stabilize erosion-prone areas. Reinforced concrete walkways with low albedo levels replaced asphalt to minimize heat retention and reduce the urban heat island effect.

Additionally, 35 new shade trees were planted, and invasive species were removed as part of an early-phase management program. Select trees removed from the wooded area were repurposed—black locust and Norway maple were stripped of their bark and used as brush wattles, while logs and wood chips were placed to stabilize the slopes.

The project also introduced site lighting to enhance safety while remaining environmentally friendly. Energy-efficient, dark-sky-compliant LED fixtures with direct cutoff were installed to prevent light spill into surrounding residential areas. To further promote sustainability, interpretive panels and viewshed indicators were made of recyclable and durable stainless steel, ensuring longevity with minimal environmental impact.

With these transformative updates, Prospect Hill Park has been reimagined as a space that honors its Revolutionary War heritage while embracing modern accessibility, sustainability, and educational opportunities. This revitalization ensures that the park remains an enduring and inspiring destination for generations to come.