



29 Elk Street
Albany, NY 12207
518-434-1583
518-427-0067 FAX
www.ptny.org

Parks & Trails New York
Preliminary Comments on the Development
Of the Master Plan
For Caumsett State Historic Park
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Please accept the following comments from Parks & Trails New York on the development of the master plan for the Caumsett State Historic Park.

Parks & Trails New York commends Commissioner Ash and the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) for undertaking a concerted effort to address the master plan backlog that currently exists in the State Park System. By proposing to complete five master plans in each of the next five years, OPRHP is undertaking an aggressive planning campaign that will help ensure the health and vitality of the State Park System for future generations. We also applaud Governor Paterson, the State Senate and State Assembly for their leadership in providing the largest infusion of capital funding in the history of OPRHP, as well as much needed additional staff for the agency, which includes the planners and biologists required to take on the ambitious master planning schedule.

At the recent public information meeting on the development of the master plan for the Caumsett State Historic Park OPRHP outlined a list of priority themes and initiatives that have been developed to guide the agency's decision making as the master planning process moves forward. Among those priority themes are: Revitalizing our Parks and Historic Sites, Natural Resource Stewardship and Interpretation, Creating Connections and Sustainability. Parks & Trails New York agrees with OPRHP's assessment of the priority issues that must be addressed, not only in the master plan for the Caumsett State Historic Park, but in every master plan the agency develops. We also recognize that one of OPRHP's greatest challenges is balancing the stewardship of our natural resources with providing opportunities for a wide range of recreational activities. We believe, however, when developing a master plan, that responsible stewardship of our natural resources, and in the case of Caumsett our cultural resources, must be OPRHP's primary concern.

The Caumsett State Historic Park offers an extraordinary combination of natural beauty, man-made improvements and historic and cultural amenities that create a truly remarkable park experience. This wide array of attributes, however, can present challenges when seeking to develop a master plan that will meet the needs of all of the populations served by the Park, while at the same time remaining true to OPRHP's guiding principles as set forth in Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Law – Article 3, § 3.02

The office shall operate and maintain the state park, recreation and historic site system to conserve, protect and enhance the natural, ecological, historic, cultural and recreational resources contained therein and to provide for the public enjoyment of and access to these resources in a manner which will protect them for future generations.

The information packet distributed by OPRHP at the public information meeting contains a good summary of the characteristics of the Caumsett State Historic Park (hereinafter the Park) and the issues of concern that planners must address in the master plan. Parks & Trails New York shares many of the same concerns, and offers the following recommendations.

Natural Resources - The Park, with its 1600 acres of Long Island Sound waterfront property and unique mix of natural and cultural resources, is truly a gem among the many outstanding facilities operated by OPRHP. A study conducted by the state's Natural Heritage Program identified 13 distinct ecological community types in the Park, four of which are considered significant. These significant communities are the coastal oak-hickory forest, the low salt marsh, the maritime beach community and the oak-tulip tree forest which occupies more than 490 acres of the park. Moreover, the bays and coastal waters bordering the Park have been designated by the New York State Department of State as significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife areas. Additionally, the Park is home to the Piping Plover and Roseate Tern, both listed as endangered in New York State, as well as the Least Tern and Common Tern which are listed as threatened in New York.

The master plan being developed for the Park must include specific provisions to ensure the protection and preservation of the Park's rare plants, animals and ecological communities. Additionally, the plan should also include provisions to eradicate or manage invasive species, both terrestrial and aquatic, in a way that will prevent or control their encroachment into other areas of the Park.

Interpretation/Education – With people spending less time outdoors in their formative years it becomes increasingly important that the stewards of our natural resources provide education and guidance to the public as to how we can best protect and enjoy our environment. All master plans for State Parks should address how visitors will be educated about the features of the park that make it special. This can include signage, interactive displays, or a nature center. The master plan should also provide opportunities for education and interpretation of the natural world as a whole, a big picture approach to learning about the environment and global environmental issues. At Caumsett additional emphasis must also be given to educational programs focused on the history of the Park, its buildings and landscape.

Connections – Parks & Trails New York urges OPRHP to acquire lands abutting or near the Park if the opportunity arises and funding allows. We also recommend creating links between existing trails in the Park and any that may exist outside the Park.

Infrastructure –As is the case at many, if not all, of the state's 213 State Parks and Historic Sites, years of underinvestment and deferred maintenance have taken their toll on infrastructure. As OPRHP has embarked on a multi-year program to overcome its backlog of capital projects and revitalize the State Park System, it is imperative that the master plan include an accurate assessment of all of the infrastructure needs in the Park including buildings, roads, bridges, water systems (both drinking and sewer) and any other man made improvements in the Park. The more hard evidence

the agency can present to the public, the Governor and the Legislature regarding capital needs, the more likely it will be that the necessary capital funding will be provided in future state budgets. Parks & Trails New York also recommends that when assessing the infrastructure needs of all State Parks for which master plans are being developed, and particularly for Caumsett State Historic Park, that consideration be given to the re-use and retro-fitting of existing structures as a way of keeping capital costs down and maintaining historical integrity.

Sustainability – The principles of sustainability should be incorporated into every component of the master plan. This includes employing sustainable building practices that conform to the requirements for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification for new buildings, and the use of energy conservation practices in existing buildings. The master plan should also provide for the use of energy efficient lighting and alternative fuel vehicles wherever possible. Finally, the master plan should evaluate the use, if any, of chemicals on the Park’s grounds to determine if less toxic, yet effective, means of weed and pest control may be used.

Conclusion – Parks & Trails New York appreciates the opportunity to submit comments early in the master planning process. We look forward to working with OPRHP on this and many other projects. And, we look forward to the release of the Draft Master Plan/Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Caumsett State Historic Park.