

Village of Ardentown

Report and Recommendations from the Planning Committee Regarding Village Paths

For presentation at the Town Meeting of September 9, 2013.

Prepared by the Village of Ardentown Planning Committee

(Andrew Hansen [chair], Holly Custer, Ben Gruswitz, June Kleban, Gil Johnston, Enno Krebbers [ex officio])

The Paths and Their Purposes

Paths throughout the Village of Ardentown (the village) serve recreational and functional purposes for residents and visitors. They also serve an important cultural role.

Functionally, the paths provide routes for foot traffic that are often more direct and/or safer than the available roads. In this capacity they reduce dependence on vehicles, and also reduce barriers to accessing points of interest on foot within Ardentown and the neighboring villages of Ardencroft and Arden. For just one example, if existing paths are well-maintained and clearly marked, then residents at the bottom of Sconset Road can reach the New Candlelight Theater traveling largely on village paths, and avoid much of the steep climb up Sconset Road or the more frequent traffic on The Mall.

Recreationally, the paths provide access to wooded areas and opportunities to enjoy scenic aspects of the village that are not visible from the streets.

The village paths also reflect the town's history and culture as a place that encourages strong ties among village residents, active lifestyles, and appreciation for the natural world.

The Path Project

Recognizing the important role of the paths in village life, the Planning Committee of Ardentown (the committee) undertook the Path Project to accomplish four objectives:

1. Inventory and map the paths – what paths were planned, and what is in use today
2. Assess path conditions for visibility and passability (i.e., how easy is the path to locate and use)
3. Identify and prioritize needs to maintain or improve paths to ensure the village preserves not only the functional and recreational benefits, but also the cultural heritage they represent
4. Brainstorm recommendations for making paths more visible, passable, and community-friendly

The outcome of the project is a report and set of prioritized recommendations, captured in this document, for the community to consider and, if desired, to act upon.

A Note About Path Names in This Report

In its research the committee did not discover any formal or commonly accepted names for the paths in the village. Therefore, throughout this report there are names assigned to paths in an attempt to make them easier to reference without writing a more lengthy description each time. These names are not official designations, nor are they names that the committee necessarily recommends for common use.

For purposes of this report, the following names are used to describe particular paths:

- **The Harvey Road Path** encompasses the path that runs from Sconset Road in Ardentown to Lower Lane in Arden, and the access paths that connect to it from The Mall and Harvey Road
- **The Valley Road Path** encompasses the path that runs between Brae Road and East Mall, one terminus of which is at the intersection of Valley Road and Brae Road
- **The Sconset-Brae-East Mall Connector Path** encompasses the path that connects the bottom of these three dead-end streets (on older village maps, this path appears as an extension of Woodland Road)
- **The Creek Path** encompasses the path that parallels Naamans Creek on the south side, and its access paths at Brae Road and East Mall
- **The Glen Paths** encompass the several paths in The Glen between The New Candlelight Theater and the woods
- **The George & Petit Greens Connector Path** encompasses the path that runs between Millers Road and Appletree Lane, parallel to Orchard Lane and Loreley Road.

The Findings

While all paths serve both a functional and recreational purpose for the village, some paths seem to serve primarily one or the other need.

The paths that seem to serve the most functional purpose are:

- The Harvey Road Path, as it provides a safe alternative to walking along Harvey Road, especially where there are no shoulders
- The Valley Road Path, as it provides a means for traveling to/from the bottom of Brae Road or Sconset Road while avoiding a large portion of the steep incline on either road

The path that seems to serve the most recreational purpose is the Creek Path.

The paths that seem to be a hybrid, equally functional and recreational, are:

- The Glen Paths
- The Sconset-Brae-East Mall Connector path

Path Conditions

The committee looked at the passability of each path (i.e., the ability of a pedestrian to walk the path easily without needing to climb, duck, go around, or otherwise avoid hazards or obstructions), and also the visibility of each path (i.e., the ability of a pedestrian to identify a path's location and direction) due to the presence of mulch, exposed dirt, or other visual indicators.

In its assessment, the committee finds that the passability and visibility of paths varies widely throughout the village, ranging from paths that are wide, clear, mulched, and easy to traverse; to paths that seem to “disappear” into leaseholds because there is nothing to distinguish the path from the yard; to paths that have fallen into disuse or were never established and are now impassable.

The condition of any given path may vary greatly along its length, depending on factors such as:

- Upkeep performed by the village and/or the residents
- Erosion
- Encroachment of nuisance vegetation such as bamboo, English ivy, and poison ivy
- Encroachment of trees, shrubs, or grass

Impassable Paths

A small number of paths that appear on village maps are essentially impassable to foot traffic. These include:

- Two paths that run between leaseholds and parallel to Sconset Road, Brae Road, and East Mall. If these paths were ever in use, they have not been for many years and do not appear to serve a recreational or functional community need at this time.
- The Sconset-Brae-East Mall Connector Path which is largely overgrown and unmarked along its length



Figure 1. Sconset-Brae-East Mall Connector Path – impassable between Sconset Road and Brae Road

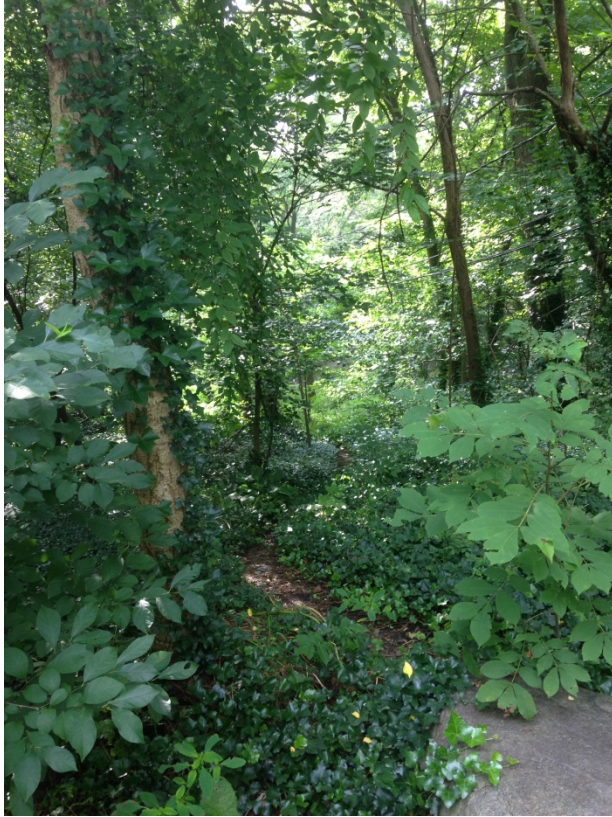


Figure 2. Sconset-Brae-East Mall Connector Path - Minimally passable between Brae Road and East Mall

- Portions of the Creek path. For example, along the creek, between Brae Road and East Mall, roughly under the high voltage wires, there is no accessible path. The path is also difficult to follow heading west along the creek from East Mall. (No picture available.)

- The access path to the Harvey Road Path, between 1513 and 1515 Harvey Road, where branches and bushes have grown across the path and now block it, forcing foot traffic into the leasehold at 1515 Harvey Road



Figure 3. The Harvey Road Path - Impassable access path where it intersects Harvey Road at 1515 Harvey Road

- The George & Petit Greens Connector Path between the leaseholds at 1603 and 1605 Millers Road



Figure 4. The George & Petit Greens Connector Path - Impassable for a portion of its length

- The access path to the Harvey Road Path, between 1506 The Mall and 1504 The Mall. While the path is visible and passable, large portions are infested with poison ivy and are unsafe for people with allergies or their pets (which may not suffer an allergic reaction, but will carry the plant oil on their coats).



Figure 5. The Harvey Road Path access from the east end of The Mall - poison ivy infested

Invisible Paths

Several paths, or portions of paths, are difficult or impossible to distinguish from the leaseholds that they border. This has the potential to cause confusion regarding where a path lies for those using the paths, and also for leaseholders/residents. Additionally, in cases where an “invisible” path terminates at or intersects with a road, path users may abandon the path in favor of the road rather than assume a path exists where it may not.

If allowed to persist, this confusion may cause otherwise valuable paths to fall into disuse, or further into disuse, potentially reducing the benefits that the paths provide with respect to health, safety, culture, convenience, recreation, and energy savings. Additionally, “invisible” or unused paths may result in leaseholders/residents assuming usage rights to land that is actually dedicated to paths.

Examples of “invisible” paths include:

- The Harvey Road Path at several points, including:
 - Where it follows the leasehold line between 1504 The Mall, the field around the high power line tower, and 1503 Harvey Road
 - Between 1511 Harvey Road and 1510 The Mall
 - Behind Ivy Gables



Figure 6. The Harvey Road Path - invisible behind Ivy Gables

- Between Swiss Lane and Loreley Road



Figure 7. The Harvey Road Path - invisible between Swiss Lane and Loreley Road

- The Valley Road Path near Brae Road, where it appears to enter the leasehold at 2308 Brae Road



Figure 8. The Valley Road Path at Brae Road enters a leasehold

Bridges

Several paths incorporate bridges to traverse wet and/or uneven terrain. During its study of the village paths, the committee identified that the bridges in The Glen require attention to determine the appropriate next steps for their maintenance.

Additionally, at two points along the Creek Path a bridge may help to improve accessibility and usability – along the creek at the bottom of Brae Road, and also at the bottom of East Mall. In both areas, the path becomes difficult or impossible to follow due to ground conditions.

The Recommendations

The Planning Committee recognizes that the Village of Ardentown has neither the financial means nor the volunteer resources to address all of the concerns raised in this report simultaneously. Accordingly, the committee's recommendations seek to prioritize the actions that are likely to have the greatest positive impact on the greatest number of the Village's residents and visitors.

Recommendations are provided below in three categories:

1. *The Top Three Priorities* – These are recommendations that the committee suggests the village address immediately to promote and protect public safety
2. *The Quick Hits* – These are recommendations that should require only a small effort to address, and will enhance the paths' accessibility and visibility
3. *The Preservation Initiatives* – These are recommendations that may require more concentrated effort over a longer period of time, but which will serve to protect the paths as an important component of Ardentown history and culture for future generations.

The Top Three Priorities

1. **Assess all bridges in the Glen due to possible safety concerns.** These include the bridge at bottom of the Glen by East Mall, the small bridge that has collapsed, as well as several smaller bridges built from railroad timbers. The condition of these bridges may represent a safety hazard and should be the subject of immediate inquiry by professionals qualified to assess their condition accurately and make appropriate recommendations to repair or replace the structures.
2. **Prioritize the Harvey Road path for mulching, clearing, and potentially marking** (see below) along its length, and including the area around the Stile, to improve public access and thereby safety by significantly reducing the need to walk along Harvey Road between Sconset Road and Lower Lane in Arden. As part of this effort, remove the limbs blocking the Harvey Road Path at 1515 Harvey Road to re-open the path and make it visible from Harvey Road – this will enable greater pedestrian access to/from the cross-walk at Veale and the bus stop at Veale and Harvey.
3. **Explore creating pedestrian access to the Sconset Road/Harvey Road intersection** for safety, via a path and cross-walk that would eliminate the need for pedestrians to approach Harvey Road by walking on Sconset Road. This intersection is used as a public school bus stop and crossed by students of Wilmington Montessori. Such access will require collaboration with DelDOT. This path would link into the Harvey Road Path.

The Quick Hits

4. **Prioritize the Valley Road Path for clearing, mulching, and potentially marking** (see below) to improve the path's visibility and reduce the frequency/severity of wash-outs along the path.
5. **Re-establish the Creek Path** in the obstructed area under the high voltage wires along Naamans Creek. This could be largely accomplished with volunteer labor.
6. **Re-establish the Sconset-Brae-East Mall Connector Path**, enabling path use from the bottom of Sconset to the bottom of East Mall. This could be largely accomplished with volunteer labor. Some expense may be incurred if the path requires bridge or boardwalk structures.

The Preservation Initiatives

7. **Name and mark all the paths in the village.** Recommendations 2 and 4 above reference "marking." Path marking could take the form of signs with path names and/or "blazes" to mark the paths, as are used in state and federal parks. Distinctive path names like "The Grocery Path" in Arden serve to deepen the community sense of ownership and history around the paths, which in turn promotes their continued use and preserves an important aspect of our culture. Naming could be accomplished through some form of contest to heighten community involvement.
8. **Explore options for path surfacing such as mulching, gravel application or paving.** Prioritize and schedule surfacing based on the type of use a path receives and the practicality of the surfacing options.

9. **Educate leaseholders and residents regarding paths and the responsibility for their upkeep.**

For example, as new residents arrive, any welcoming information they receive could include information about path locations and points of interest. Additionally, the varying conditions of paths in the village suggest that leaseholders may be unclear as to what responsibilities they have to keep paths clear and accessible. This information should be researched, clarified and/or codified as needed, then communicated regularly via town meetings and other channels as appropriate.

Next Steps

Following presentation of this report to the Village, the Planning Committee will meet with the Public Works & Safety Committee to answer questions, discuss options for pursuing the recommendations above, and identify specific next steps for each committee. Those discussions will include beginning to develop budgetary options. If those discussions are positive it is hoped to make specific proposals to a later town meeting (November?) for conceptual and financial approval.

Respectfully Submitted by the Planning Committee of the Village of Ardentown

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September 9, 2013