

## Recommendation for the Future Use of One Old Bridge Road

To: The Board of Selectmen  
From: The Open Space Committee  
Date: August 5, 2015  
Re: One Old Bridge Road

The Open Space Committee has been charged with recommending a plan for the use and development of the town's property at One Old Bridge Road. For this purpose, we treat the 0.52 acre "Betty Hudson Property", the adjacent 1.8 acres between Old Bridge Road and Drake Hill Road ("the Right of Way Area"), and the pavement of Old Bridge Road itself as a single unit, referred to here as "the Parcel".



The Open Space committee held numerous meetings for public input, received email suggestions and staff gave multiple presentations on possible uses and opportunities for the Parcel. We want to particularly recognize the Flower Bridge Committee for their participation in meetings and their thoughtful suggestions. On June 17, 2015 we held a joint meeting of Open Space, Conservation, and Culture Parks and Recreation to discuss and listen to concerns and opportunities for the property. Our recommendation incorporates the idea that "less is more" with this property and careful consideration was given to operational costs, erosion and invasive species management, landscaping with native plants, passive use recreation with access to the river, and incorporating current Flower Bridge uses and needs. Our recommendation, respectfully submitted, is as follows:

### Highlights of the Recommendation:

- Demolish the entirety of the Betty Hudson house;
- Build a simple open air structure that is flood compatible to enhance the use, provide shade and cover, and take advantage of the river views;
- Provide canoe and kayak access via Hop Brook, utilizing the least amount of structure to ensure access and manage erosion;
- Pursue a plan incorporating native plantings for bank stabilization and site enhancement;
- Formalize the parking arrangements; and

- Furnish typical park infrastructure – possibly a water source, locations for garbage and portable toilets, simple seating or picnic tables, and bicycle racks.
- Storage for Flower Bridge tools – possibly keeping/moving existing shed.

### **Next Steps:**

- If you are in agreement with this general recommendation, we recommend the engagement of a landscape architect and other needed professionals like engineers to help us refine the details.
- We would then seek public input and coordination with Flower Bridge Committee and request your approval of a final plan subject to the approval of town boards.

### **Vision**

We see the Parcel as the town center's window on and doorway to the Farmington River. It can offer, within a short walk from downtown, a vista on the river in a fairly natural setting. The Parcel provides easy canoe and kayak access to the river and can serve as a venue for medium scale festivities, group gatherings and the least formal of picnics and frivolling. We say "a fairly natural setting" because the site is small and hemmed in by roads. It is near the environmentally important land between Iron Horse Boulevard and the river. We should strive to limit development with the "less is more" approach and in a way that balances public use with conservation and enhancement of the riverbank and its habitat.

### **The Betty Hudson House**

Much thought has been given to the question of what should be done with the Betty Hudson house. Public comment did not reveal a compelling use for the building. It is our view that it should be demolished. That view is shared by the Conservation Commission and the Culture, Parks and Recreation Commission. We do not think that the house is suitable for use as a public building. Its interior space is configured into relatively small pieces on multiple levels. Creating access for disabled persons would be difficult and costly. It appears that flood insurance premiums would be large and projected to rise. At the time of purchase the town expressed it is in the public interest to remove residences that are in the flood zone. The cost of maintenance generally would be high.

### **The Proposed Pavilion**

Most commentators have expressed the desire for a pavilion or open air structure. The Flower Bridge serves as a wedding venue, tourist attraction and valued location for other town events. A need was expressed that sometimes people need shelter from the rain or sun.

We could possibly site the pavilion atop the house footprint as close to the river as is consistent with the possible need to work on the retaining wall and the need for bank stabilizing plantings. Handicapped access is, of course, essential. There should be more discussion of the size of the pavilion. Our initial thought is that it should be large enough to accommodate three or four



standard sized folding tables (something like 3 by 6 feet) and accompanying chairs. Some have suggested picnic tables in the pavilion, but we think that we should preserve flexibility of use by leaving it unfurnished, except perhaps for built-in benches on two sides. We do not see a need for plumbing or wiring. We would favor something fairly simple, open, and economical to maintain. Many have urged that we be guided by the maxim *Less is More*. Beyond that, we would leave the design of the pavilion to those more qualified.

We heard comment on the desirability of making it possible for private groups to reserve exclusive use of the pavilion. That seems a desirable goal if a proper balance between private use and public access can be attained. There would be an administrative cost in processing reservations and posting the site as reserved and this requires further exploration.

### **Canoes and Kayaks**

Many commentators spoke of their desire to launch canoes and kayaks from the Parcel. One advantage of demolishing the house and garage is that it would permit a larger sloping lawn down to a launch site. The southern boundary of the Betty Hudson Property is Hop Brook, immediately upstream from its mouth at the Farmington River. Prior residents of the property routinely launched canoes there, and it seems entirely suitable. We were advised that there is sufficient flow in Hop Brook year round. We see no need for a dock. Considerable foot traffic down the slope would create the risk of erosion, so something like stone steps and/or a gravel path would be needed. Whatever is built for a pathway, it must be designed to withstand occasional flooding. We acknowledge that the river is not safe for boating at times of extreme high water. Advice should be sought as to the content of a sign indicating the need for personal responsibility, the absence of a life guard, the need to obey state rules regarding personal flotation devices, and the like. We would not make provision for bathing in the river. We considered suggestions that storage for canoes and kayaks be provided but did not regard that as necessary or practical.

## **Plantings**

Plantings will have several functions. First, we need to contribute to bank stability. Particularly at the Betty Hudson Property there is a need for native trees that are adapted to life on the riverbank. They should be supplemented there by suitable native shrubs. Some existing plants will need to be removed. Existing vegetation along the riverbank of the Right of Way Area, north of the flower bridge, should be studied. There are many invasive and probably some other unsuitable plants there. That stand could be thinned of the undesirables and supplemented by suitable natives. Second, plantings should be strategically placed to guide pedestrians away from areas to be protected. We want folks to enjoy the view of the river, but we do not want them climbing up and down the bank, except at the established boat launch. If we can achieve that with obstructive plantings rather than fencing or signs, so much the better. Third, we can enhance the sense of place if we can somewhat screen the Right of Way Area from Drake Hill Road. A row of varied small trees and large shrubs along the road would very helpful in that regard. Thinning the stand of White Pine along the parking area would also help to tie to Parcel together. Finally, a few native shade trees in the Right of Way Area would make it a friendlier place and a suitable site for some benches and/or picnic tables. We strongly encourage the use of native plants throughout the Parcel. Even a developed tract such as this can provide valuable habitat if planted with desirable natives. Professional advice should be sought in selecting and siting species. It might be that the damp lowland at the western point of the Right of Way Area will be suitable for the butterfly friendly plantings sought by some commentators.

## **Parking**

We assume that the existing pavement will be retained, but some formalization will be needed. There should be parking spaces reserved for the handicapped. There should probably be a space at the top of the lawn sloping down to Hop Brook reserved for short-term loading and unloading of boats. (Perhaps the top few feet of the existing driveway could serve that purpose). Advice should be sought as to how to stripe the parking area so as to optimize its use.

## **Park Infrastructure**

Benches and tables should be placed throughout the Parcel. Flooding needs to be anticipated in their selection and installation. In general, we would limit the area behind the pavilion and the lawn sloping down to Hop Brook to benches alone, providing a mix of benches and tables in the Right of Way Area. This would facilitate carrying boats up and down the slope and also help to minimize neglected picnic trash reaching the river.

While we are sensitive to considerations of cost, it is our view that a handicapped accessible portable unit at this public facility should be considered. It should be tastefully placed and screened. Trash and recycling receptacles should be considered.

In keeping with the effort to keep the site "fairly natural", we would recommend against installation of further lighting except as needed for public safety.

The storage shed used by the Flower Bridge Committee should be retained, but it should be moved so that it does not obstruct the view of the bridge from the pavilion.

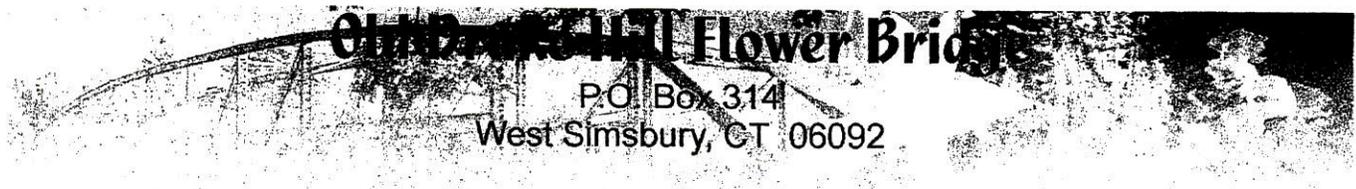
### **Business Use**

Commentators expressed varied views on whether business should be permitted on the Parcel. The Open Space Committee is not recommending commercial use of the property beyond approved events at this time given the limited space available on the site and the desire to maintain the Parcel as a fairly "natural" place.

### **Miscellany**

One commentator complained of confusion between Old Bridge Road and Old Barge Road, where he resides. It would seem that the entrance into the Parcel does not need to be a named road; it could merely be an address on Drake Hill Road.

The Flower Bridge Committee had noted several items on the Betty Hudson Property that it could put to use elsewhere. An effort could be made to accommodate that desire.



Old Drake Hill Flower Bridge  
P.O. Box 314  
West Simsbury, CT 06070

Town of Simsbury Board of Selectmen  
933 Hopmeadow Street  
P.O. Box 495  
Simsbury, CT 06070

Dear Mary, Lisa, Nancy, Sean, Mike, Cheryl

After the town's purchase of the Hudson property adjacent to the Old Drake Hill Flower Bridge, we wanted to share some of our thoughts. We would be happy to discuss any of these items in person with you. Attached are our thoughts and we hope that this is the beginning of a dialogue with the town and with the other interested organizations concerning the development and use of this beautiful, important property.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts and provide input.

Deeg Mackay

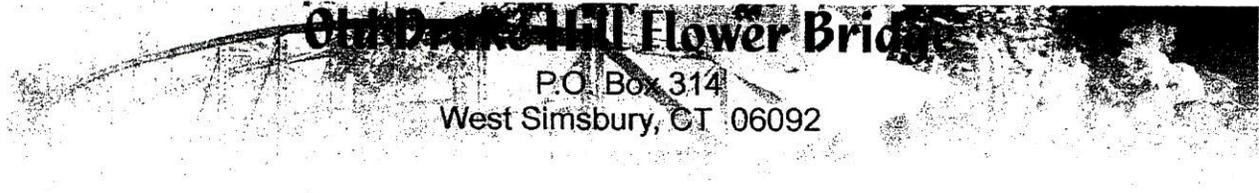
Co-Chairman

Sharene Wassell

Co-Chairman

Jan Lintner

Secretary



## **Old Drake Hill Flower Bridge's thoughts about the Betty Hudson property**

### **Natural Park**

- Place to connect with nature and history
- Place to access the river with canoes, kayaks, and row boats (car top only, no trailers)
- Place to stop on a trip: boat, bike, hike
- Place to view birds, animals, fish and flowers
- Use native trees/plants/shrubs
- Work on riverbank restoration
- Improve/maintain the area's ecology

### **Amenities**

- Picnic tables, handicap accessible, dark green metal to match those by the bridge
- Trash receptacles, dark green metal
- Benches, dark green metal or stone
- Bike rack
- Large brownstone seating rocks
- Bathrooms/Porta-potties
- Drinking fountain for bottle filling, handicap, and dogs
- Bird houses
- Visitor log book in weatherproof housing

### **Thoughts on the property**

- Remove all overgrown trees, bushes, shrubs, and vegetation
- Maintain beautiful view of the ODHFB
- Cut down dangerous, precarious trees
- Selective mowing so it does not revert to underbrush, poison ivy, bittersweet and junk tree growth
- Evaluate retaining wall at Hop Brook for safety

### **Items from the property that ODHFB would like**

- Natural stones (some are to the right of the shed heading down to an old water path) to use as edging along the pavement in the West Cottage Garden to keep the dirt from washing onto the parking lot
- Slate pavers and bricks
- The old, dwarf, weeping, red maple if it needs to be moved for repair of retaining wall. Keep the tree in memory of Betty Hudson
- The star magnolia if it is in the way of reclaiming the property
- The shed to be used for continued storage by the ODHFB

# 1 Old Bridge

Idea Submissions



**Keywords from 13 Submissions**

Sized according to frequency

<https://www.jasondavies.com/wordcloud/#%2F%2Fwww.jasondavies.com%2Fwordcloud%2Fabout%2F>

# BOATING



## Kayaks, Canoes, Boating

**7 of 13** submissions mentioned boating and some form of boat launch

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Connecticut\\_River\\_Greenway\\_State\\_Park#/media/File:Connecticut\\_River\\_Greenway\\_State\\_Park.JPG](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Connecticut_River_Greenway_State_Park#/media/File:Connecticut_River_Greenway_State_Park.JPG)



"A town beach area to play in the river, swim, drop kayaks, paddleboards, canoes in, and lie out to relax and sun bathe"

Craig Diamond

## Rentals & Storage

- 4 of 13 recommended kayak/canoe rentals
- Kevin Schultz also recommended a seasonal storage rental for owners to keep their kayak or canoe near the river



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/vastateparksstaff/5816683563/in/photostream/>  
<http://www.atterbery.net/funstuff/homemade-kayak-storage-rack/>

# STRUCTURES



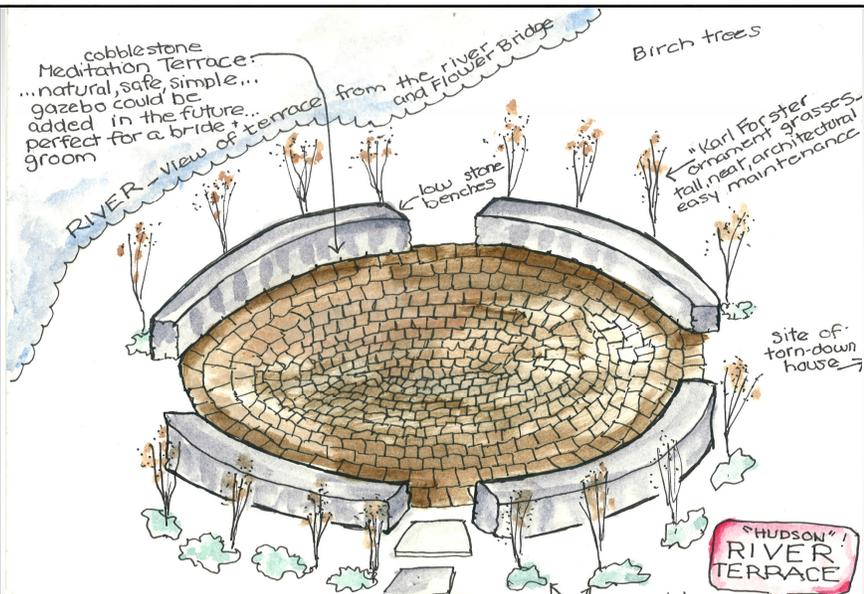
Gazebo or Pavilion

5 of 13 included either a Gazebo or Pavilion



"If an open air pavilion is selected...a talented architect might be able to capture some of the prominent features of the Simsbury Casino"

Ferg Jansen



**Meditation Terrace – in place of or before a pavilion**

Diane Phillips

## Uses with structures/furniture

- Bike racks
- Boat launch\*
- Boat storage\*
- Café\*
- Drinking fountain
- Educational display or kiosk\*
- Indoor gathering space (e.g. theater, museum, gallery, receptions, meetings)
- Nature Center
- Picnic tables\*
- Restrooms/changing rooms\*
- Trash cans\*

\* Possible temporary or seasonal installation

## Other Ideas

Building could be used for temporary housing until decision is made

Area restaurants could provide "River-special-prepackaged-picnics"

Educational kiosk on the Farmington River and its environment

Keep it maintenance free; flood-ready

Keep it "natural and peaceful"

Space to study the river, river quality

"Parking can be on one of the Iron Horse Blvd lots"

"Public restrooms and drinking fountain would be greatly appreciated and used by anyone using the rail trail"



Bike related flower displays for May – National Bike Month

Pattie Jacobus



# Town of Simsbury

933 HOPMEADOW STREET

P.O. BOX 495

SIMSBURY, CONNECTICUT 06070

Joseph Mancini - Director of Finance/Treasurer

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** The Board of Selectmen

**From:** Joseph Mancini - Finance/Treasurer

**Re:** **Open Space Recommendation on 1 Old Bridge**

**Date:** August 6, 2015

**CC:** Lisa Heavner - First Selectman  
Tom Cooke - Director of Administrative Services  
Robert DeCrescenzo - Town Attorney

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On August 5, 2015 the Open Space Committee voted on a recommendation for the future use of 1 Old Bridge Road, the property formerly referred to as the Betty Hudson Property. The Open Space Committee is also recommending that the Board of Selectmen hire a design consultant, and other experts as needed, for the property.

As a reminder, in November of 2014, the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Finance approved \$200,000 for the purchase, make-safe work, and costs associated with the site work including up to demolition of the property. Design work is an appropriate use for this funding. The purchase price of the property, including closing costs was \$152,253.24, leaving slightly less than \$48,000 to be spent on this property.

Thanks,

Joseph Mancini

Suggestions for the improvement of the Flower Bridge.

Current problems and improvements could be made to the Bridge irrigation and electrical systems by including them in the scope of work of the Hudson Property Project. Securing and protecting the irrigation system would clean up the visual clutter at the bridge and increase their reliability. I propose that relocation and installation of the irrigation and electrical services to the bridge be included in the Hudson project.

### **Irrigation System**

- We have been forced to lock the water faucet on both the east and west sides of the bridge to keep people from using the water. Problems were most prevalent on the west side as people were washing their cars in the parking lot. Having to lock the faucet isn't a problem but rather a bother when we need to get water when the irrigation system is down.
- The faucet itself is vulnerable to damage from the snow plows. Orlando made some decorative plywood shields to protect it but when the snow is piled high they can't be seen and last year the plywood was pushed into the faucet and the shield had a large hole from impact with the faucet. Luckily the faucet was not damaged.
- The back flow preventer is also located in the open and is similarly subject to damage and vandalism.
- Two years ago the ODHFB installed a water filter on the lines to prevent the drip lines from clogging. This device is subject to snow plow damage and potential theft.
- When the original irrigation system was designed and installed the controller valves were put under the bridge. This makes a dangerous situation for Growing Season, LLC who maintains our irrigation system. In order to work on or replace the controller valves, the workers have to climb down under the bridge and put a tall ladder in the river
- Access to the faucet, back flow preventer, filter and timer is only possible by walking through the Cottage Garden which takes a toll on the plants and flowers.
- The beauty of the west garden would be enhanced if this equipment were not up front and visible. This year we will be installing a fertilizer injector which will need a protective cover further cluttering the West Garden and the view of the bridge.

For safety and security, it seems that we could better protect our investment if this equipment could be relocated to the Hudson property (shed) and included in the scope of that demolition/construction project.

I have spoken to Gene Gill who maintains our irrigation system and he can see no impediments to such a relocation but, rather, it would allow us to keep the equipment safely under lock and key. The required piping could go under the pavement or under the bridge and would require no modification of the system itself but would allow us to fix some deficiencies and safety concerns in the old original system. We could continue to keep the connection to the water meter which is in the west garden, north side. The ODHFB pays the bills for the water.

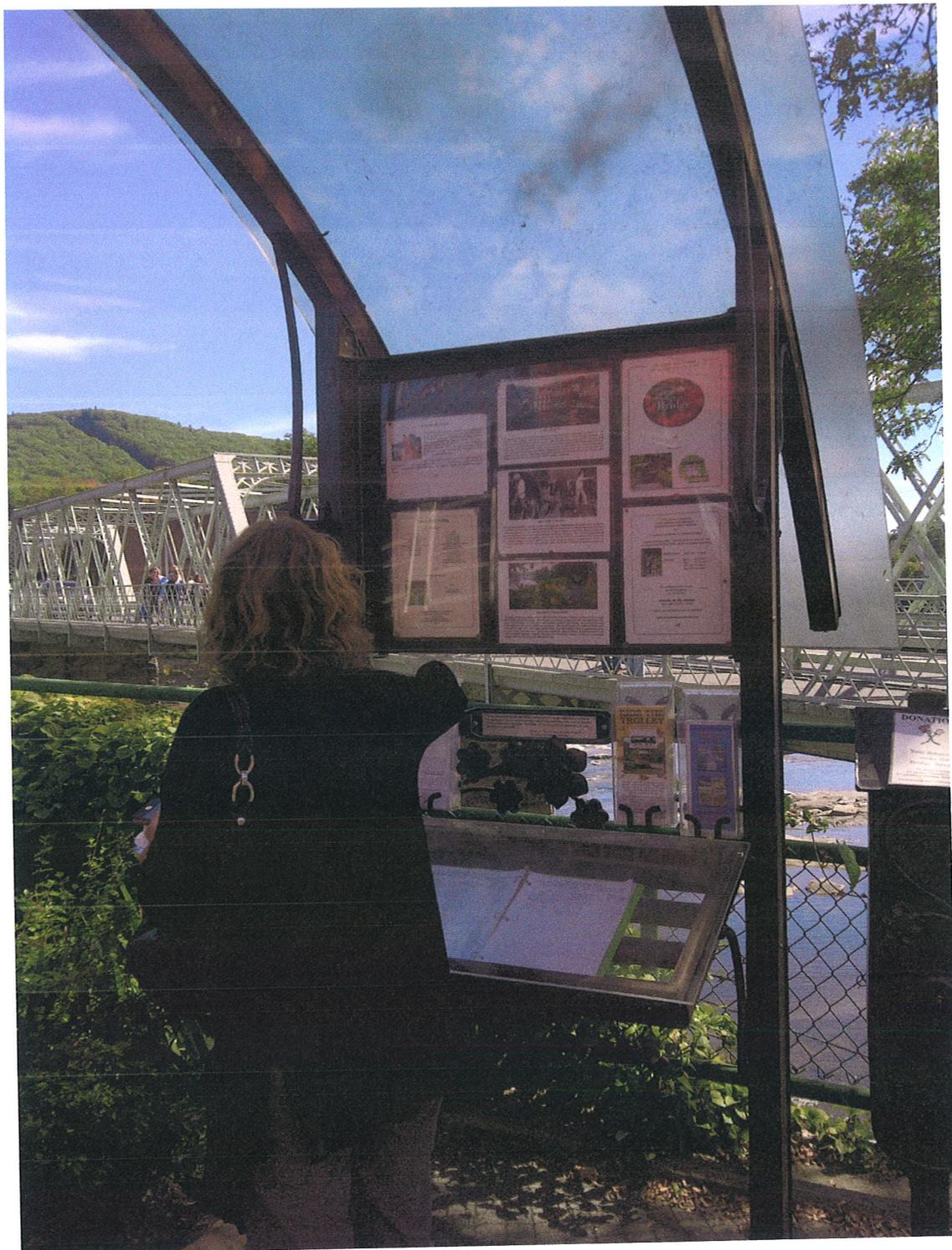
### **Electrical System**

The timer for the irrigation system is located on the pole in the north side of the west garden. The electrical lines for the bridge come from the main pole on the south side (Hudson property).

Suggestions for the improvement of the Flower Bridge.

- The electrical breaker boxes are located on a pole in the west garden and while they are in waterproof boxes moisture does seep in and short circuits the breakers which resets the timers for both the irrigation and lighting systems. We have had to replace transformers and breakers due to moisture problems.
- Remove the pole which is out of keeping with the beauty of the bridge and would allow us to add 8 additional flower boxes. As the bridge becomes more widely known, our waiting list keeps growing. Last year there were 20 people on the waiting list. We added 14 additional boxes and with some non-renewals wiped the waiting list to zero. But this year it is back to 9.
- The electrical meter is mounted to the pole and is an eyesore.
- The power line which drapes across the bridge could be eliminated and would enhance the view of the bridge.
- The timer for the electrical is also located on the pole and is likewise subjected to weather.

Ferg Jansen has spoken to Mark Jacobs of Valley Electric who maintains our electrical system and he can see no downside to relocating the electrical devices and controllers to a more secure, waterproof location.



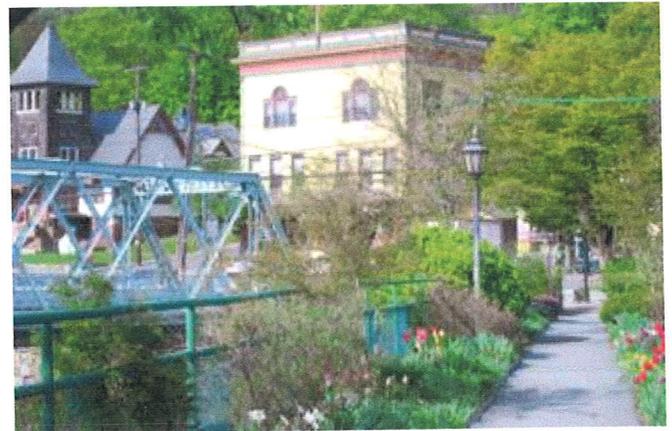


## Welcome to the Bridge of Flowers

The Bridge of Flowers in Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts is free and open every day from April until the end of October.

We invite you to stroll across the Bridge from Bulb Season, to Dahlia Season and every bloom season in between. Thousands of bulbs, perennials, annuals and flowering shrubs come into bloom over the course of the year.

Sit in the sun on the Buckland side surrounded by bright plantings before you even step foot on the Bridge. Pause for a few moments in the middle of the Bridge to take in views of the river and flowers, continue on and then enter the cool shade of the Shelburne side where you can enjoy our Stone Spring and River Bench.



*Visit once – then come again.*

*We're sorry ... we can't allow dogs on the bridge, even if you carry them. We appreciate your cooperation.*

*Our Facebook page features lots of photos. Visit us and share your Bridge experience!*



**Be a friend of the Bridge of Flowers**  
[Click for details](#)

Consider becoming a Friend of the Bridge of Flowers. It's easy ... make a donation of \$25.00 or more with our secure online donation form or see other [ways you can give](#) to make the Bridge of Flowers continue to bloom.

[Contact Us](#)

[Directions](#)

Bridge of Flowers, P.O. Box 335, Shelburne Falls, MA 01370