

## Symmes Parks and Woods

Excerpted from the Arlington Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2015-2022

On March 31, 2001, by a margin of 64 to 36 percent, Arlington voters approved a debt exclusion to allow the Town to acquire the entire 18-acre Symmes property off Summer Street from owners Lahey Clinic and HealthSouth, in order to be able to control development of the site. The property included several former hospital buildings, a vacant former nurses' residence, several acres of parking lots, and about nine acres of undeveloped land, mostly steep wooded slopes. The purchase and sale was completed in April 2002, and the property was put under the Arlington Redevelopment Board (ARB)'s jurisdiction. A Symmes Advisory Committee (SAC) created by Town Meeting held numerous meetings to help evaluate the project and the various private development options for it. The SAC submitted its final report to the ARB and Town Meeting in April 2003, and the ARB and private development entity Symmes Redevelopment Associates (SRA) finalized a Land Disposition Agreement in June 2007. Town Meeting subsequently approved zoning changes necessary for that development.

After a lengthy public process and delays associated with the downturn of the economy in 2008, a new owner began construction in the spring of 2012. By 2014 the developer, Arlington 360 LLC, had completed a 164-unit apartment complex and 12 townhouse condominiums. Arlington 360 sold a two-acre portion of the Symmes site half way up the hill to Shelter/Brightview Arlington for a 90-unit assisted living facility. Construction began in the spring of 2013 and was completed by the summer of 2014.

The most prominent features of the 8.7 acres of open space are two parks and about six acres of woods and buffer zones. The half-acre Hattie Symmes Park at the top of the hill has commanding views of Arlington and Boston to the east. Named for the daughter of Stephen Symmes who founded the hospital in her honor, the park features pathways, benches, and extensive landscaping. A second hillside park of almost two acres abuts the upper boundary of the Symmes Woods. It is designed for passive recreation with views of the Boston skyline framed through the trees. Named for Nora A. Brown, the long-time head of the nurses' facility at the hospital, it contains pervious pathways, mowed strips within an open meadow area, and landscaped beds, as well as some benches and picnic tables.

Both parks are maintained by the development company at its expense, but are open to the public under the same rules and regulations as those of other Town parks. The Symmes Woods covers the relatively flat area between Summer Street, the new Nora Brown Park, and the assisted living facility. This former municipal tree farm is dominated by Norway Maple trees. After the area is restored, this woodland will be accessible to the public for passive use.

The Arlington Land Trust and Arlington Conservation Commission have responsibility for guiding the long-term oversight of the woodlands and will foster the creation of a "Friends of Symmes Conservation Area" group including neighbors and new residents of the development who will participate in managing the woods. Management decisions likely will include whether and where to locate foot trails and what new species of trees should be planted to increase the health of the woods.

Management of the Hattie Symmes Park, Nora A. Brown Park, and Symmes Woods is governed by a management plan agreed to by the developers, the Arlington Redevelopment Board, the Arlington Land Trust, and the Arlington Conservation Commission. When all the construction work is completed, the parks and woodlands will be protected by a Conservation Restriction (CR) and Public Access Easement held by the Land Trust and Conservation Commission. The CR, which offers permanent legal protection for the land, was signed off by the Commonwealth's Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs and by the Town of Arlington in 2014. Small property markers designate the CR boundaries.