



FRIENDS OF
Reinstein
WOODS

2017 - 2021 Strategic Plan Summary

Friends of Reinstein Woods was formed in August 2003 to support the environmental education programs offered by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation at Reinstein Woods. Friends of Reinstein Woods (FORW) provides vital financial and volunteer support for programs aimed at school children, teachers, youth from underserved neighborhoods, and the general public. FORW also supports stewardship projects designed to protect and restore the natural habitats at Reinstein Woods.

Since its inception, FORW has grown considerably. As the site, its programs, and local conditions continued to evolve, FORW embarked on a strategic planning process to help shape its activities which resulted in a 2012-2103 strategic plan. Through that process, the organization updated its mission statement, examined its strengths and weaknesses and determined five strategic goals. In the ensuing years, many of the objectives of this plan have been met, and the organization felt ready for a deeper dive into some specific organizational choices.

The current planning process focused on conditions of both the organization and the site. Through internal assessment, peer organization reviews, and a series of conversations with stakeholders, the organization has developed a plan focused around three key points: The Vision, Adapting the Facilities, and Strategic Resource Development.

“The Mission of Friends of Reinstein Woods is to promote knowledge of nature through awareness, appreciation, and stewardship of the unique and diverse environment of Reinstein Woods and its programs.”

THE VISION

The organization took a broad and aspirational look at what Friends of Reinstein Woods can accomplish as an organization and for the Reinstein Woods site in the coming five years. Several major considerations were raised, and multiple potential directions and priorities were explored. Themes that emerged from the process are each well aligned with elements of the organization's mission, and rather than compete with this mission statement, define ways to operationalize it.

For the coming five years FORW priorities are to:

1. Achieve Financial Independence & Develop Strategic Resources

Goal: Secure and expand the organization's financial and human resource capacity.

Financial independence and strategic resource development has become an even more critical need in light of uncertain resource availability from government, foundations, and even members and donors. Financial sustainability emerged as the number one priority for the organization as it continues to develop and mature. This will include setting goals and benchmarking around financial sources, and diversifying and enhancing revenue streams.

2. Expand Educational Initiatives

Goal: Enhance the organization's role as an education service provider, and increase FORW's ability to support teachers, academics, and the public.

An early impetus for the organization's founding was accommodating additional environmental education and research both on site and off site. This remains central to FORW's mission today. The expansion of these initiatives both as a direct education service provider and in coordination with other educators and institution has gained additional urgency in the context of climate change adaptation and mitigation.



3. Maintain and Enhance Stewardship of the Property

Goal: Adapt the facility and grounds to better serve FORW's clients and constituency and improve the environmental health of the preserve.

The current on site facilities limit the organization's ability to serve Reinstein Woods' constituency and client base. As such, expanding and adapting facilities has become a pressing concern. Climate change also presents increasing challenges in promoting species diversity and mitigating the impact of invasive species.



4. Promote Reinstein Woods

Goal: Increase knowledge of Reinstein Woods beyond its existing clients and constituency.

There is a sense that Reinstein Woods does not have the same level of visibility and awareness among the region's population as other nature centers and sites. The full extent of the programs and offerings available at the preserve are also not well known. In addition to enhanced outreach strategies, transportation and access may need to be addressed to help Reinstein Woods reach new audiences, particularly target audiences from underserved neighborhoods in the city of Buffalo, seniors, and people with disabilities.

5. Enhance and Maintain Relevance

Goal: Enhance the site's relevance and relatability with the public and with public officials.

For FORW, relevance cuts across multiple components of its mission and continued operations. This includes: 1) cultural relevance: aligning with trends in adult populations, and providing a youth or intergenerational focused alternative to screen-time and device omnipresence; and 2) political relevance: ensuring both political and resource support for the activities of the site and the organization.

6. Promote Nature and the Environment Beyond the Woods

Goal: Expand the organization's impact by connecting constituents to broader environmental, land use, education and recreational movements.

FORW's ability to transform people's relationship and engagement with nature provides a potential lens not just to advance environmentalism, but to expand the organization's impact and activate potential new constituencies. FORW can accomplish this by helping constituents find new ways to reduce their carbon footprint and enhance their positive ecological impact; by becoming a consistent voice or venue for pressing environmental issues like climate change; or by exploring partnerships with other organizations and municipalities to create a broader constituency for natural sites and the environment.



ADAPTING THE FACILITIES

The Nature Center, which opened in 2007, has limitations for existing programming and provides challenges for engaging in new initiatives. Its inadequacies also create operational liabilities and impact operational efficiencies. The same can be said for many of the ancillary facilities on site as well.

The current facilities also impact the impressions that visitors have — whether clients or donors. There are challenges from a lack of exhibit space; program areas; staff office, meeting and break space; event space and facilities; storage; as well as sales and promotional space.

Each of these limitations restrict the ability to fulfill the emerging vision for the organization. For example, increasing staff capacity of any sort — such as hiring a grant writer or development director — could require additional office space. An ecological manager would require not just office space, but would need equipment and storage facilities as well. Even enhanced invasive species removal would require a disposal and / or processing area. Larger indoor facilities would help to engage additional populations and organizations by being able, for instance, to meet current levels of requests for meeting space and by being able to host additional events (such as a lecture/ panel series) that could raise the organization's relevance regarding pressing environmental topics. Outdoor facilities (such as a semi-enclosed teaching pavilion) would also create the ability to expand summer camp offerings and increase clients' interaction with nature.

Reinstein Woods Existing Facilities

Education Center
Garden Shed
Pavilion
Comfort Station
Log Cabin
Stone House
Garage

Shifting demographics also raise questions about accessibility and adaptability. Interventions for enhanced access can run the gamut from new mobility equipment to changes within the built environment — from accessible trails to larger indoor respite spaces, to more benches throughout the trails to offer opportunities for those with limited mobility to rest while hiking and more. In-house and local expertise (such as the University at Buffalo's IDEA Center) provide ample resources to consider the adaptation of the site to meet both programmatic goals and the needs of a changing population.

In general, the timing to pursue a deep consideration of facility adaptation is opportune. The state has recently earmarked money within the state budget for designing changes to the education center, and FORW's involvement (including potential financial involvement), may enhance the organization's ability to influence the final design of the site to better serve the needs of its various constituencies.



STRATEGIC RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

The organization's ability to make progress on its emerging vision will be dependent on establishing and implementing a plan to expand both its monetary and human capacity. Given the unique relationship to DEC — in particular the DEC restriction on state employees supporting fundraising activity — and FORW's relationships and constituencies in the local community, FORW needs to consider what resource development opportunities exist today, and which opportunities it can and should be moving toward in the future.

FORW is working toward a shared vision of financial sustainability and has discussed a spectrum of ideas of what this could mean for the organization. These options range from a reserve (rainy day) fund, to an endowment that provides the organization with resources to fund operations; or continuing to increase efforts to secure annual revenue such as a grant writer, enhanced membership program, or increasing earned income.

Ultimately, given the current capacity of the organization, a consensus is developing to pursue three concurrent strategies at this time:

Programmatic and Capital Grants

The organization is well positioned to secure a modest capacity building grant or raise initial funds to hire a part-time proposal writer or contract for proposal writing services in the short-term. The organization has also identified a series of steps that can be done in advance of this (i.e., developing a grant calendar, creating template language, formulating organizational policies about fund development and grant seeking) that can pave the way for enhanced resource development from foundations, government and other institutional sources.

Membership

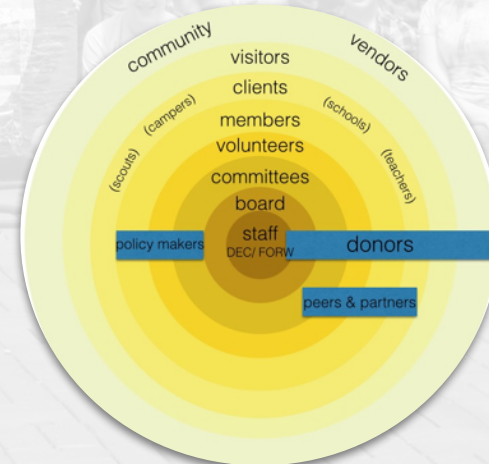
The organization has done a commendable job of increasing membership recently and has experimented with some changes to its approach. However, there is still to be an opportunity to increase membership revenue with an incentivized membership structure that includes forms of rewards for various levels of support. There is a

large potential for membership growth within corporate and institutional membership. In addition, this evolving structure and membership messaging can also highlight the direct benefit to the organization for increased levels as a way to make these annual contributions' impacts more tangible to members.

Individual Donations

The organization is also well positioned to develop deeper relationships with existing members and donors and build a broader base of support. There is an opportunity to improve FORW's appeal language and highlight the stories and voices of current donors in the FORW newsletter and in other communication materials. In particular, profiling the Tasa bequest and making soft asks (such as "remember FORW in your will") are early next steps.

Membership and individual donation strategies build directly on the vast constituencies that FORW can speak to, from birders to teachers, environmentalists to artists, and researchers to wellness enthusiasts, to name just a few. There are a broad array of people who engage with the organization in various ways already, from casual visitors to members, volunteers, committee members, program clients and more. A revised membership and individual donor strategy taps into the value that Reinstein already provides to these constituents and will establish a more robust means of deepening that relationship and the shared commitment to the site and its mission.



FRIENDS OF REINSTEIN WOODS

SHARE IN NATURE'S HARMONY

Fall 2017

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