

Weymouth celebrates opening of King Oak Hill Park

By Ed Baker | October 22, 2018



Edward E. Schoenly, 65, said the sloping hillside of the Emery Estate was a great place to enjoy sledding as a 10-year-old when he and his grandmother lived for a period of time in the white Colonial home, at the 24-acre site.

"I used to take my sled up here and go down the bumpy road that leads into Weymouth Heights, which was a half-mile down the road," said Schoenly, a Clarkesville, New Hampshire resident. "It was a great place to grow up."

The property, now called King Oak Hill Park, was dedicated by town officials on Monday.

Mayor Robert Hedlund said the renovation of the Emery Estate into a park is a continuation of recent upgrades to town recreation facilities and efforts to preserve undeveloped land in Weymouth.

"Mayor (Susan) Kay had the foresight to make this purchase of the property," Hedlund said. "We felt it was time to create some access to this site. We see 24-acres preserved, which is equal to 18 football fields."

Weymouth purchased the Emery property when it paid \$1.9 million to the family of the late Allan C. Emery in August 2011.

Funding for the purchase was sought from town council by former Mayor Susan Kay under the state's Community Preservation Act, which Weymouth voters adopted at the ballot box in November 2005.

Town council approved purchasing the Emery Estate in June 2011.

James Clarke, a former planning director, said the purchase of the Emery Estate was the first time the town appropriated money from

the Community Preservation Act account.

"It is nice to be able to preserve it," he said. "It may create some more opportunities to do other things here."

Weymouth Recreation Division program supervisor Steve Reilly said he will be looking for ideas on what type of activities to have at the park.

"I feel the park will be another great amenity to the town," he said.

Town council approved a \$1.7 million bond in December 2016 at the request of Hedlund to fund the improvements at the Emery.

This expense was reduced to \$1.3 million when Weymouth received a \$400,000 grant from the State Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities program, shortly after the council's approval of the bond.

Nick Bulens, a former administrator coordinator for Hedlund and town grant writer, said he was "hooked" on the idea of the Emery being a park after reading some recommendations for the site by The Cecil Group, a Boston architectural firm.

"I grew up in Weymouth and did not know about this place," he said.

Bulens said creation of the park has been a two-year project that involved getting bids from contractors and architectural firms.

"This is a unique public resource for this town," he said.

A reuse plan for the Emery was designed by **Shadley Associates Landscape Architects**, a Lexington based firm.

Pamela Shadley, principal architect for the firm, said the final park design included input from neighbors who live near the property.

"We held our first public meeting at the end of February," she said. "We wanted to have a plan that was respectful of the neighbors. We had to create a site plan that would work if the home stayed or did not stay."

The house has remained unused since the Emery family vacated the property. An advisory committee is divided over whether to preserve the house or have it demolished.

Shadley said public input with developing a reuse design for the Emery was helpful to the architectural team.

"You can add to the park over time, should the community desire further amenities," she said. "We are happy with how it came out."

Town Council President Michael Smart said the park design looks amazing.

"I want to congratulate you on a great community program," he said. "It came out great. You executed a plan and it looks amazing."

The park also includes some purple leaf plume trees donated in memory of police Sgt. Michael Chesna, 41, and Vera Adams, 77, by MDR Construction Company President Michael Saccone of Tewksbury.

A pair of markers to honor the fallen officer and Adams were donated for placement at the park by James C. Canniff Monument Company of Quincy.

Allan C. Emery, III, said the Emery family is happy to see the property preserved for future generations of residents to enjoy.

"As a family, we were privileged to have occupied the site for some 95 years," he said.

Hedlund said over the years he heard stories about prominent guests visiting the home that included the Rev. Billy Graham, former president Richard Nixon and former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

Emery said Graham visited his father at the home, but Nixon and Kissinger were never guests at the estate.

"Corrie Ten Boom did stay here," he said.

Ten Boom, 91, a Netherlands native and author of "The Hiding Place" is best known among Christian circles for hiding Jewish people with her family during the German occupation of Holland in World War II.

The Gestapo arrested Ten Boom and her family in 1944 after being betrayed by a Dutchman. Ten Boom and her sister Betsy were sent to Ravensbruck, a Nazi concentration camp.

Betsy Ten Boom died of sickness while in the camp, but Corrie was released by the Germans in December 1944. She became an evangelist, who traveled throughout the world until her death in April, 1983.

Emery said the home and its massive property were enjoyed by generations of teens that attended Bible studies held by his parents.

"It is the land that holds many memories for me and our extended family and for many in Weymouth," he said. "It will be a place of joy and peace for centuries to come."