

Section 1: Plan Summary

Newton's 2020-2027 *Open Space and Recreation Plan* (OSRP) is built on an analysis of the City's diverse and precious open space resources and the City's complex open space and recreation needs.

This plan defines open space as both land in a relatively natural state and land used for active outdoor recreation. These resources range from public parks and conservation areas to small recreation areas and grassy medians. These open spaces are home to an assortment of native plants and wildlife, biodiverse wetlands, prized water resources, heavily used athletic fields and facilities, well-loved playgrounds, tot lots, community gardens, and a precious urban tree canopy. Open spaces provide considerable environmental and public health benefits and the presence of open space directly contribute to the aesthetic appeal and character of Newton.

This plan builds on the successes from the 2014-2020 OSRP, while acknowledging the ongoing need for improvement. There is continued diligence to protect the remaining open space resources in the community, including pursuing the acquisition of more open space, but there is also a great desire on the part of the community to improve the stewardship of both active and passive recreation areas.

The most striking difference between this Plan and the last is the clear acknowledgement of the challenges that climate change will bring to Newton. Over the past seven years Newton has written a *Climate Action Plan*, which outlines goals for a carbon-neutral Newton by 2050, and a *Climate Change Vulnerability and Assessment Action Plan* to identify and develop a mitigation plan that addresses the rising temperatures and increasing flood risks that threaten Newton. Protecting, stewarding, and connecting Newton's natural areas and recreation spaces, with climate change in mind, can bolster the resilience of valued green spaces and ensure that open space continues to benefit the city by improving air quality, intercepting stormwater, regulating surface temperatures, and encouraging bicycle and pedestrian use. Many of the action steps identified in this OSRP aim to support Newton's climate change resilience goals, for the health of its people and its environments.

Accomplishing the goals of this OSRP will require a wide array of actions. While some recommended actions are location specific projects (e.g., park improvements and trail creation), others call for creating community capabilities (e.g., strengthening public-private partnerships, reconsidering departmental management jurisdictions, and identifying creative funding strategies).

The following list outlines key themes of Newton's 2020-2027 OSRP Update. While many factors were discussed and considered during the update process, these factors emerged as warranting immediate attention and follow-through:

- Maintaining, improving, and protecting the City's open space resources including but not limited to natural areas, athletic fields, parks, aquatic facilities, water resources, and the urban tree canopy to ensure that healthy and resilient open space in Newton can persist for future generations. This will entail collaborations between City departments, community organizations, and volunteers to foster public-private partnerships, meet funding needs, and develop master plans.
- Increasing diverse, open spaces resources in the parts of the city that have fewer conservation areas and parks and reduced tree cover.
- Expanding universal accessibility, within parks and along pedestrian trails.
- Developing more bicycle and pedestrian linkages to open spaces by expanding existing trail networks and building new connections where possible.
- Permanently protecting natural areas and parks for wildlife and passive recreation.
- Continuing to integrate climate change mitigation and adaptation into open space stewardship, connectivity, protection, and accessibility efforts.