

Section 2: Introduction

A. DEFINITIONS OF OPEN SPACE TERMINOLOGY USED IN THIS PLAN

The definitions of terms as used throughout this Plan are as follows.

- **Open Space Resources** = natural open spaces and outdoor recreation facilities.
 - **Natural Open Spaces** = areas that are predominantly wooded, or have meadows, wetlands, waterbodies, and waterways that provide habitat and ecological diversity value, recreational value, and services such as shade, slowing runoff and improving water quality.
 - **Outdoor Recreation Facilities** = areas predominantly developed and managed primarily for recreational purposes, including: multipurpose athletic fields, baseball fields, general use grassy areas, picnic areas, tennis courts, basketball courts, playgrounds, tot lots, and aquatic facilities such as pools, bath houses, spray parks, and canoe launches.
- **Accessibility** = ensures equal access for people with disabilities to the built environment, where feasible, in accordance with the requirements and guidelines of the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board (MAAB), the Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Standards, and the Forest Service Trails Accessibility Guidelines (FSTAG). Incorporation of universal design principles provides accessibility to all residents and visitors of all abilities. Accessible features include, among other things, parking, routes to amenities (beaches, pools, fields, courts, trails, etc.) and to and within facilities, restrooms, play structures, and much more. Firm and stable surfaces free of tripping hazards and protruding objects, at least 3 feet wide, and no more than a 5% slope are some of the accessibility guidelines for an accessible path/walkway.

B. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

This Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) “plan update” has been carefully crafted to meet the requirements of the State Division of Conservation Services and to create an actionable roadmap for the City of Newton to achieve its many open space and recreation goals.

This Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) is a “plan update” to the OSRP update completed in 2014. The greatest changes to the 2014 OSRP arose as a result of shifting demands for open space resources, a growing need to address climate change, and other environmental issues that threaten Newton’s open space. Fortunately, Newton contains a strong coalition of advocates across City government and nonprofit organizations who support protecting the City’s existing open space, enhancing bicycle and pedestrian connections between open spaces, improving recreational opportunities, and caring for the City’s vibrant and functioning natural communities.

Newton recognizes the vital role that open spaces plays in addressing the impacts of climate change, transportation, and public health. From the floodplains along the Charles River to neighborhood playgrounds, open space resources play a vital role in both the natural and cultural environments of Newton. Newton’s desirable residential character, convenient location, stellar school system, and cherished

open spaces, have led to intense development pressure and high real estate values. This desirability challenges the City's ability to maintain existing and create or protect new open space resources that will satisfy the broad suite of needs of residents of all ages and abilities. The complexity of ecosystems, growing development pressures, and increased interest in passive and outdoor recreation complicate the City's overall open space resource needs. This moves the City to continue assessing and improving the stewardship of Newton's wide variety of open spaces and guiding future development in ways that will benefit the public, preserve open space resources, and address issues of inequity in the distribution and access to open space.

This OSRP update builds on Newton's recent successes (see list below) and is designed to enhance and protect Newton's valuable natural and recreational resources in a time of escalating real estate values and tight budgets. The City of Newton recognizes the extraordinary value of open space resources and presents this Plan to help provide the passive and active recreational needs of its residents.

C. PLANNING PROCESS and PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Planning Process Overview

The Conway team and members of the OSRP Committee received public input through a variety of public forums, included the following:

- A Public Outreach Online Survey launched January 30, 2020 and open through February 14, 2020, which received 1,360 responses.
- A Youth Online Survey Regarding Open Space and Recreation, which received 27 responses.
- An initial Open Space and Recreation Plan Public Working Session, held at City Hall on Thursday, February 6, 2020.
- A follow-up Open Space and Recreation Plan Public Working Session, held at the Price Center on March 4, 2020.

All comments received were duly considered by the Conway team, the City staff, the OSRP Committee, the Zoning and Planning Committee (ZAP), the Planning and Development Committee, and City leadership in finalizing the Plan.

Open Space and Recreation Planner's Workbook (2008)

Newton's Open Space and Recreation Plan Update effort has been undertaken consistent with Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, Division of Conservation Services (EOEEA) guidelines as described in the Open Space and Recreation Planner's Workbook (2008).

OSRP Advisory Committee

Newton's OSRP Advisory Committee has been instrumental in leading the open space planning process. This committee was approved by Mayor Ruthanne Fuller and consists of a broad range of participants including representatives from City departments, recreation leagues, local non-profit organizations, Friends groups, and dedicated community members. All members were selected for their individual knowledge and their ability to reach out to and serve as a conduit to and from their respective broader constituencies (see **Table 1**).

Table 1. OSRP Advisory Committee Members		
Name	Represented Organization	Primary Local Constituents
Nicole Banks	Parks, Recreation & Culture Commissioner	Parks, Recreation, and Culture staff
Al Cecchinelli	Parks, Recreation & Culture Commission	Recreational sports leagues, playground advocates
Jayne Colino	Council on Aging	Council on Aging, NewCAL (new senior/community center) advocates
Rick Dinjian	Newton Little League	Youth Athletics, Athletic Fields Groups
Quinn Etchie	Youth Commission	Youth Commission
Jini Fairley	ADA Coordinator	Commission on Disability
Nicole Freedman	BikePed Connectivity/Complete Streets/Transportation	Safe Routes to School, Riverside Greenway Working Group
Doug Greenfield	GIS	n.a.
Michael Halle	Transportation/BikePed Connectivity	Transportation Advisory Group
Barney Heath	Director of Planning and Development	Planning staff
Gabriel Holbrow	Community Planning	Planning Department
Susan Lunin	Conservation Commission/Community Preservation Commission	Conservation Commission, Community Preservation Committee
Luis Perez Demorizi	Parks, Recreation & Culture Dept.	Parks, Recreation, and Culture staff, OLAWG, Friends groups and Adopt-a-Space
Claire Rundelli	Conservation Commission	Annual maintenance contractor, conservation area stewards
Carol Schein	Parks, Recreation & Culture Dept.	Parks, Recreation, and Culture staff
Jennifer Steel	Conservation Commission	Annual maintenance contractor, conservation area stewards
Justin Traxler	Newton Girls Soccer	Youth Athletics, Athletic Fields Groups
Beth Wilkinson	Newton Conservators/Tree Conservancy/Urban Tree Commission	Green Newton, Newton Conservators, Tree Conservancy, Urban Tree Commission
Jonathan Yeo	City of Newton Executive Office	Mayor's Office
Jeff Zabel	Agricultural Commission/Conservation Commission	Agricultural Commission, Conservation Commission

The OSRP Advisory Committee met 6 times. The first meeting, on December 20, 2019, was a kick-off meeting to introduce the Advisory Committee members to the OSRP and the update process. The following two meetings of the Advisory Committee, on January 14, 2020 and February 12, 2020, were attended by the Conway School students and included discussions about the previous OSRP, Jennifer Steel's preliminary revised goals, prioritization of open space needs. Subsequent meetings with the Advisory Committee were reviews of draft materials provided by the Conway School students and brainstorming related to specific actions and prioritization of objectives. It should be noted here that representation on the OSRP Advisory Committee was carefully considered to ensure representation of all City interest groups and geographic areas, including the City's environmental justice areas.

Early databases and drafts of the plan update were circulated to Committee members, who shared them with their constituencies and provided extensive comments, edits, and additions.

Information gathering, inventory updates, and data expansion and validation

City staff (primarily the Conservation Commission Office staff, the Parks, Recreation, & Culture Department staff, the ADA Coordinator, and the GIS Coordinator), worked with City databases and with community conservation and recreation organizations to ensure that databases were up to date, accurate, and complete. Inventories were expanded (such as adding detailed trails information). Field verification was undertaken.

Graduate Students from the Conway School of Landscape Design and Planning

A team of three graduate students from the Conway School of Landscape Design and Planning, Rowan Cignoni, Cara Montague, and Samantha Peikes, drafted the initial 2020-2027 OSRP update.

Public input and participation were maximized through a variety of channels, venues, and modalities.

Guidance from Jennifer Steel and Claire Rundelli

After every meeting and public session, the Conway School students met with these City staff to debrief, wrestle with challenges, and plan next steps. The Conway students gave their Winter Formal Presentations on February 28, 2020 at the Conway School of Landscape Design at 88 Village Hill Road in Northampton, MA. They shared their findings, conclusions, and suggestions. Following the presentation, final changes to the students' draft were discussed.

Public working sessions and online surveys

The first public working session was held on February 6, 2020 with 50 attendees. This working session was held at the City Hall War Memorial. The information gained from this working session formed a foundation for understanding the different open spaces that Newton residents value and which open spaces they felt should be improved.

The second public working session was held on March 4, 2020 with 25 attendees and was primarily focused on generating action steps and recommendations, building on issues discussed at the first public working session. This working session included a presentation from the Conway School students. The presentation summarized the aspects of open space that Newton residents value most, open space needs, how to plan and prioritize open space for the future in the face of climate change, and general recommendations. This material was accompanied with graphic analyses and maps. The presentation was followed with an opportunity for participants to provide specific actions they felt needed to be in the plan and their reasoning behind its priority.

The online community survey and the youth on-line survey, results summarized in Section 6 and available in more detail in **Section 10**, was administered from early February to mid-March 2020. The community survey received roughly 1,200 responses, with participants from all villages; the youth survey received 27 responses from the Youth Commission and Newton North and Newton South high school students.

The public working sessions and the on-line community survey were publicized as broadly as possible through all available channels, including:

- Newton city website
- Postings at Newton City Hall
- Newton Conservators outreach
- Newton's sports leagues outreach
- Other community group outreach
- City and public school newsletters

- Village “Area Council” updates
- Standard notification of public board and committee meetings and associated agendas on the City website
- Notices in the local newspaper, the Newton Tab

Newton’s Planning & Development Board (P&D) and Zoning & Planning Committee (ZAP)

P&D and ZAP received the first presentation regarding the Open Space and Recreation Plan on May 7th, 2020 at a joint public hearing (public hearing was held remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic). The meeting started as a joint public hearing opened by the Chair of the Zoning and Planning Committee. After hearing from the public and the members of both P&D and ZAP, P&D moved into a breakout room. P&D voted to close their public hearing and hold continued discussions until May 19th, 2020.

In consideration of comments from the public and City Councilors, ZAP came to consensus to extend the public comment period through Monday May 18, one day ahead of the next meeting at which the OSRP would be discussed. Many Councilors lauded the quality of effort and resulting OSRP, noting the Comprehensive approach and dramatic improvement over previous Open Space Plans. At this meeting ZAP voted to close their public hearing and hold continued discussions until May 19th, 2020, when the public comment period had closed.

At the May 19th, 2020 meeting, which began as a joint meeting between P&D and ZAP, the public comment received was reviewed and further comments from the bodies were received. P&D voted 6-0 in favor of signing a letter of review and support for the OSRP for the state submission, the letter was drafted by the Chair after the meeting was closed. ZAP voted 8-0 in favor of drafting a letter of review and support for the OSRP for the state submission. ZAP will review the drafted letter at the June 8th, 2020 City Council meeting.

Newton’s City Council

Is reviewing the draft that is submitted to the state in order to discuss and vote on adopting the OSRP as an amendment to the City’s Comprehensive Plan. They may provide a letter of review and support for the state submission, but their review will mainly be centered on the adoption of the plan as an amendment to the City’s Comprehensive Plan and the process of implementation of recommended actions.

More details of the public participation process are found in **Section 10: Public Comment**.

D. ENHANCED OUTREACH and PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Along with the extensive general outreach and public participation efforts and avenues of outreach and communication described in section C. Planning Process and Public Participation, above, several efforts were made as part of Newton’s enhanced outreach effort to engage residents of Newton’s environmental justice (EJ) communities.

- Members of the OSRP Advisory Committee reached out directly to their constituents broadly and in EJ communities,
- City staff reached out directly to several of Newton’s Area Councils in areas under-represented in the community survey responses, especially those in the City’s EJ communities, to encourage involvement in the on-line survey, public working sessions, and direct input to City staff, and
- The second public working session was held in Newton Upper Falls, an EJ community, to encourage participation by local residents.

By engaging directly with underserved communities, the City was able to focus discussion and ultimately recommended actions on the equitable distribution of open space resources and services.

E. SUMMARY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS SINCE THE PREVIOUS PLAN

Since the publication of its 2014-2020 OSRP, Newton has accomplished many things, including the following highlights. See Appendix A for a complete listing of accomplishments over the past 7 years.

Acquisitions

- Webster Woods from Boston College
- Waban Hill Reservoir from MWRA
- Upper Falls Greenway Rail Trail 99-year leasehold interest from MBTA

New Conservation Restrictions

- 30 Wabasso Street, a parcel adjacent to Flowed Meadow Conservation Area
- 20 Rogers Street, a parcel adjacent to Crystal Lake
- Waban Hill Reservoir, Chestnut Hill

Conservation Area Improvements

- Installation of accessible boardwalk ramp at Dolan Pond
- Installation of signs and maps at all trailheads
- Flowed Meadow Eagle Scout trail enhancement
- Helen Heyn Eagle Scout bridge construction over Country Club Brook
- Invasive species management at Norumbega Park Conservation Area
- Slope restoration and trail creation at Norumbega Park Conservation Area

Parks, Recreation & Culture Property Improvements

- Installation of playground and tot lot, accessible fitness station area and benches, repair of tennis and basketball courts and addition of pickleball to tennis court at Auburndale Park/Playground
- Final design and construction of accessible pedestrian bridge over refurbished historic pond basin at Farlow Park
- Final design and construction of Phase I of Newton Highlands Playground
- Final design of Newton Corner traffic islands, construction underway
- Master Plan and Phase I final design for Waban Hill Reservoir, construction underway
- Rehabilitation of tennis courts at McGrath Park including an accessible route from accessible parking, and a new off-leash area
- Design and construction of Waban Common, a new pocket park, in Waban village
- Grass mats added to Lower Falls Playground, Hyde Playground, and Underwood School Playground for accessibility
- Rehabilitation of Emerson Playground play equipment and tot lot
- Repairs to tennis and basketball court at Waban Playground
- Renovation of 12 tennis courts at NSHS
- Completion of athletic field drainage feasibility study and drainage improvements (underway) at Lyons Park
- Invasive species management at Cold Spring Park and Kennard Park

Newton intends to build on this record of success and achieve new goals and objectives over the next seven years.