

Section 8: Goals and Objectives

A. INTRODUCTION

With this update of the Open Space and Recreation Plan, the City of Newton commits, through efficient management, to developing, enhancing, and maintaining its open space resources as publicly beneficial resources that will improve public health, improve quality of life, increase ecological health and biodiversity, enhance climate resiliency, and connect the community.

Newton is a built-out urban/suburban community with 13 village centers. The structure and pattern of land use is well-established, but the City's open space is being challenged by a growing population, high usage, and the effects of climate change. All City-owned open space resources require increased maintenance, appropriate funding, and partnerships to ensure their long-term health.

The goals and objectives outlined below were informed by an analysis of existing conditions conducted by the Conway School team; discussions at community meetings; comments and responses to the 2020 OSRP on-line survey; work done by the OSRP Advisory Committee; review of City planning documents; and staff examination of existing open space resources.

B. GOALS

Six goals for Newton's open space resources emerged through the process of developing this update of the Open Space and Recreation Plan.

Goal 1: IMPLEMENTATION: Coordinated planning and adequate funding for the management and maintenance of the City's open space resources.

Municipal resources have always been and will continue to be limited. Through the establishment of a team focused on strategic implementation of this plan, however, immediate and longer-term priorities can be established, interdepartmental planning and coordination ensured, and limited financial resources most efficiently employed. A diversity of funding sources, such as Community Preservation Act, Community Development Block Grants, various state grants, and public-private partnerships, can be pursued and utilized for coordinated project implementation.

Goal 2: MAINTENANCE and IMPROVEMENT: Maintained and improved open space recreational resources (i.e., athletic fields, parks, playgrounds, trails, hard courts, off-leash areas, and other recreational facilities). Natural areas with intact native habitats, limited invasive species, maximized native plants, maintained or reestablished natural hydrology, and improved water quality. Optimized extent and health of the City's urban canopy.

The predominant interest of residents, as reflected in the on-line survey and public meetings, was in improving the stewardship/maintenance of Newton's open space resources.

Growing and competing needs and limited funds have led to a backlog of maintenance and improvement projects for open space resources. Clear guidelines are needed for prioritizing projects, balancing maintenance and acquisition, and ensuring efficient management. Concerns regarding the quality of parks, playgrounds, athletic fields, hard courts, natural areas, and street trees ranked high in the survey. Active recreation interests focused on athletic fields, aquatic facilities, and parks that are used intensively and have deteriorated over the years. Passive recreation interests focused on improving trail conditions.

Concerns about the overall ecological health of the City's natural areas focused on the need to protect and connect intact habitats, limit invasive species, maximize native species, optimize tree and shrub cover, maintain or reestablish natural hydrology, and optimize water quality.

Increasing the number of street trees and maintaining the existing stock of street trees also ranked high in resident interest.

Goal 3: ACCESSIBILITY: Maximized accessibility of as many of Newton's Outdoor Recreation Facilities and Natural Open Spaces as feasible.

Increasing the accessibility of Newton's open space resources is a critical and required step to accommodate residents of all abilities and to remove or modify barriers to existing recreational facilities. Newton will strive to incorporate universal design to maximize accessibility to and within as many outdoor recreation facilities and natural open spaces as feasible to provide equal access for residents of all ages and abilities.

Goal 4: MINIMIZED GAPS IN THE AVAILABILITY OF OPEN SPACE RESOURCES: New and improved open space resources in areas of greatest need including, but not limited to, Environmental Justice areas, areas affected by heat island effects, and areas lacking certain types of local open space resources.

Improving the distribution of Newton's open space resources was recognized as a priority for the City. The City is committed to providing for all residents of all ages and abilities, a diversity of quality outdoor recreation facilities and natural open spaces within a 10-minute walk, by providing municipal open space resources and connections and encouraging the provision of other public and private open space resources and connections.

Goal 5: CONNECTIVITY: Linked open space resources with accessible paths, bike lanes, and trails.

Connectivity was a theme that emerged as residents noted their desires for better bike and pedestrian access to Newton's open space resources. It was oft noted that better bicycle and pedestrian access would serve all of Newton: underserved areas, disabled residents, older residents, families, able-bodied residents, school age children, and local businesses. Many of Newton's open spaces are primarily accessed by cars. Improved, safe, "quiet" sidewalks, trails and paths that connect these resources and promote passive recreation would be a boon for Newton. Implementing wayfinding and navigation measures within these improved/expanded connections will be highly beneficial to the City. Newton will strive to continue to improve bike and pedestrian safety, bike and pedestrian linkages between open spaces and schools, and connectivity for populations with limited access to open space. Improved bicycle infrastructure and safe pedestrian routes will also promote fossil-fuel-free transit, thereby helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Connected natural areas also contribute to the area's overall ecological health by providing corridors for safe wildlife passage. Wildlife corridors ensure greater biodiversity, enabling the survival of species that are threatened by human development.

Goal 6: PROTECTION: Protected and expanded open space resources.

Better protection of Newton's open space resources was identified as a priority. This theme reflects four clear interests: (1) putting stronger legal protections on portions of existing park and conservation lands, (2) planning for the protection of portions of large, privately owned open space parcels, such golf courses and schools, (3) ensuring that sound land use planning and design practices are implemented, and (4) ensuring that the myriad benefits of open space are provided to all of Newton's residents.

Natural areas improve air quality, help capture and manage stormwater, absorb carbon and mitigate the effects of climate change, and enhance ecological biodiversity and so should be protected from possible development. Recreational resources are critical for supporting physical and emotional health and so should be protected from development. Open spaces contribute to public health, community livability, property values, and a sense of community.

Large privately owned open spaces, such as golf courses and schools, are not currently protected from sale or development, so the City should develop response strategies for the possible disposition of one or more of these prime open space resources to protect its interests and ensure an appropriate balance of development and protection.

The recognition that climate change will both adversely impact the City's open space resources and be mitigated by those same resources caused there to be a clear desire to ensure that all design and management efforts take into account increased precipitation and heat, and more severe storm events. Newton will strive to maximize the City's ability to cope with climate change by designing and siting facilities with changing temperature regimes and changing precipitation and flooding patterns in mind.

C. OBJECTIVES

To accomplish the goals listed above within the lifespan of this Plan, the following objectives (concrete ideas for accomplishing the goals) were developed through discussions at public meetings, by the OSRP Committee, and by City staff.

Specific actions that will help the City achieve these objectives, are listed in Section 9.

Goal 1: IMPLEMENTATION

Objective 1A: An OSRP Strategic Implementation Team to promote implementation of this plan through coordination, prioritization, and fiscal planning.

Goal 2: MAINTENANCE and IMPROVEMENT

Objective 2A: A comprehensive City-wide plan to develop an assessment for existing and future active recreational facilities (i.e. sports fields, hard courts, aquatics and other athletic facilities) to optimize playability, expand utility, and ensure public safety to meet the changing needs of Newton residents and the year-round character of athletics in Newton.

Objective 2B: Improved City parks, playgrounds, and other recreational facilities.

Objective 2C: Improved trails, paths, and infrastructure (e.g., bridges and boardwalks).

Objective 2D: Natural areas with optimized overall ecological health, native species habitat, stormwater management capacity, and passive recreational potential.

Objective 2E: Increased street and park tree canopy coverage throughout the City, especially in Environmental Justice communities, to increase native habitat and compensate for impending hotter temperatures, increased precipitation, and urban heat islands.

Goal 3: ACCESSIBILITY

Objective 3A: Increased accessibility in the City's Park land.

Objective 3B: Increased accessibility in the City's Conservation land.

Objective 3C: Improved accessibility to the City's open space resources, including accessible parking.

Goal 4: MINIMIZED GAPS IN THE AVAILABILITY OF OPEN SPACE RESOURCES

Objective 4A: Improved existing open space resources where need is greatest.

Objective 4B: Expanded and diversified park and playground assets where need is greatest.

Goal 5: CONNECTIVITY

Objective 5A: Enhanced bike network that includes not only higher traffic “spines”, but also low-stress components and connections to local open space resources, especially in under-served areas, and is consistent with regional plans, e.g., the Landline (MAPC) and East Coast Greenway.

Objective 5B: Safe walking routes to the City’s schools.

Objective 5C: New and/or enhanced trail/path connections to less-served parts of the City.

Objective 5D: Expanded trail/path connections throughout the City that are consistent with regional plans, e.g., the Landline (MAPC) and East Coast Greenway.

Objective 5E: Improved publicly available bike/pedestrian wayfinding and navigation measures.

Goal 6: PROTECTION

Objective 6A: A strategy/plan for addressing the potential of one or more of the City’s golf courses to be offered for sale/development with the goal of protecting appropriate portions of the golf courses as open space.

Objective 6B: Communication between the City and private owners of key parcels with high ecological or recreational value to consider protection/stewardship of portions of these parcels through CRs, easements, purchase, or lease. See Chapter 5, Table 13 and 14 for full listing of parcels with significant open space.

Objective 6C: Legal restrictions on priority/high-value Conservation and Parks parcels, where appropriate.

Objective 6D: Policies that ensure that new multi-family residential, commercial, and industrial developments create an appropriate scale and nature of public open space.