

Section 10: Public Comment

A. INTRODUCTION

This section includes a list of charts and graphs from the two surveys and first public working session that were used to analyze open space needs and improvements. Included also is a short summary of the responses received at the second public working session and a summary of comments received during the public comment period from residents of Newton, City Councilors, and the Planning and Development Board.

The community survey was open from early February to late March of 2020 and received 1,360 responses. The youth survey was open for two weeks in March and received 27 responses. The first public working session meeting was held on February 6, 2020 with 50 participants. The second public working session meeting was held on March 4, 2020 with 25 participants. More information regarding the community outreach and vision process can be found in Section 6: Community Vision.

A full draft of the OSRP was released for public comment on April 30, 2020. The plan was presented to Newton's Planning and Development Board (P&D) and Zoning and Planning Committee (ZAP) 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.

B. ONLINE SURVEYS

Community Survey

While the community survey was heavily advertised, there were some villages that had a higher percentage of respondents than others. These villages included West Newton (21.4%), Newton Centre (15.7%), Newtonville (15.8%), Newton Highlands (11.5%), and Waban (10.3%). Not all residents responded to the questions that were followed by "other." All the question responses are displayed in bar graphs with short explanations below. Overall, the survey has been instrumental in guiding and determining Newton's needs for future open space planning, discussed in **Section 7: Needs Analysis**.

Most used areas include city parks, playing fields, residential yards, and school open spaces. The least used areas include golf courses, community gardens, and cemeteries (**Figure 51**). One method of increasing use of cemeteries that was proposed in the public forum was increasing access points into the Newton Cemetery and Arboretum to allow connections to be made from City Hall and Cold Spring Park.

As Newton's parks, playgrounds, and playing fields are all popular and highly used resources, it is fitting that many residents expressed that the quality of these three resources needs the most improvement (**Figure 52**). Though residents were somewhat neutral regarding the quality of signage and parking at predominantly parks and conservation areas, there were more residents who expressed that these should be improved in the open-ended questions at the end of the survey. Bike paths were also acknowledged as places that needed quality improvement for the "other" category.

Figure 51. Open Space Resource Use in Newton

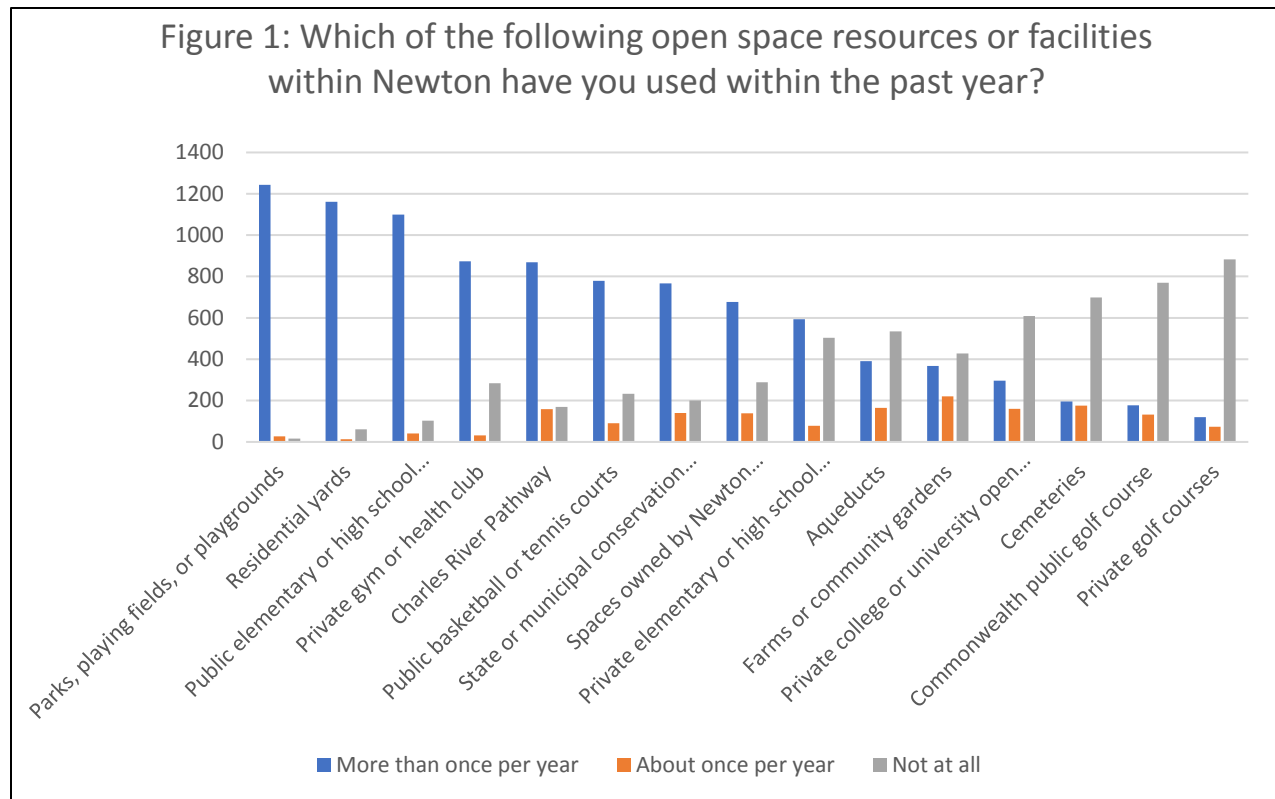
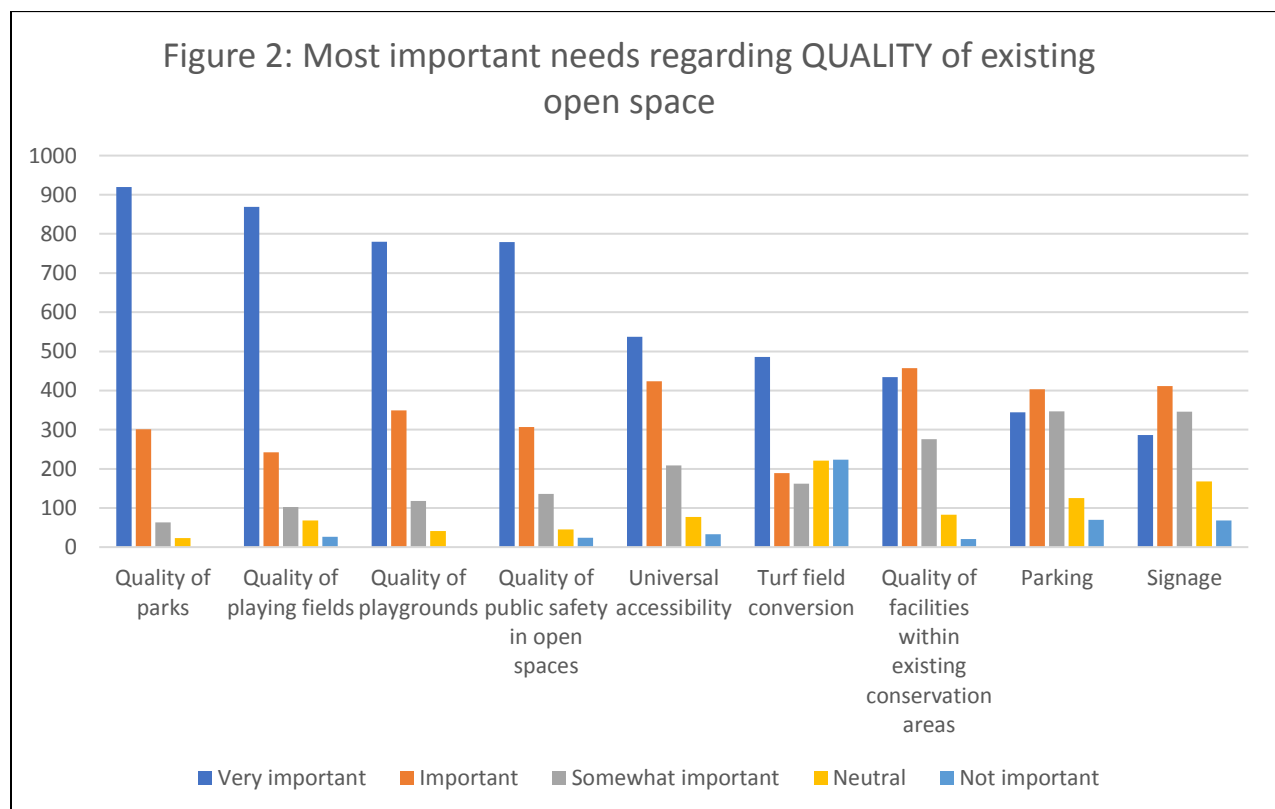
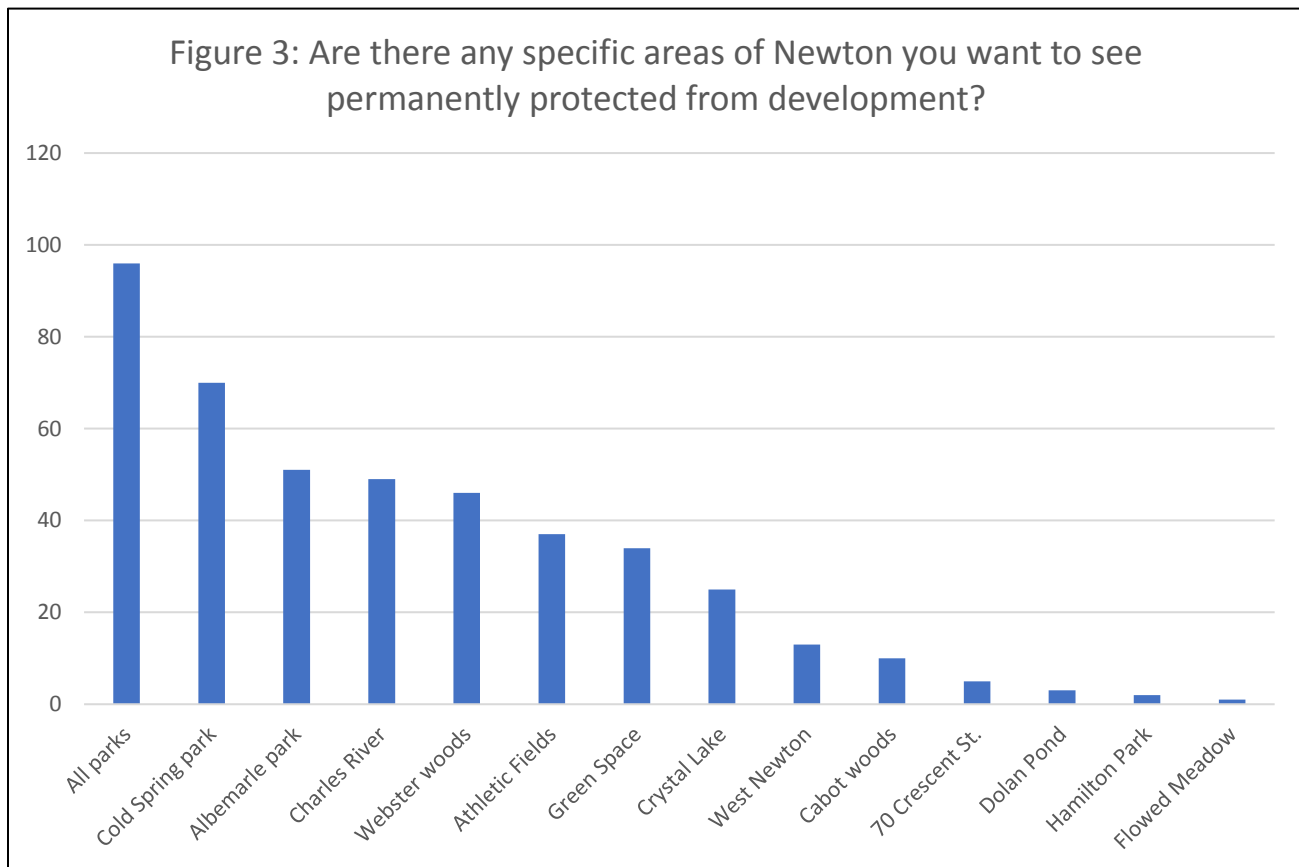


Figure 52. Open Space Resource Quality Needs in Newton



“Are there any specific areas of Newton you want to see permanently protected from development?” This was one of the open-ended survey questions. Not all residents who took this survey responded to this question. Most of the people who did respond said that all parks should be protected from development. Within that category, specific parks stood out, such as Cold Spring Park, Albemarle Park, and Webster Woods (**Figure 53**). As Webster Woods was recently acquired using Community Preservation Act funds, a Conservation Restriction will be required on the property to restrict all future development.

Figure 53. Priorities for Open Space Protection in Newton



“Are there any specific impediments or inconveniences you have encountered with access to open space?” This was another open-ended survey question that not all residents who took the survey responded to. Those who did respond to this question said that the greatest impediments or inconveniences with access to open space include bike paths, transportation and parking, and conditions of athletic fields. Residents expressed that bike paths were disconnected and unsafe (reiterated in **Section 3: Community Setting** and again in **Section 7: Needs Analysis**) (**Figure 54**). Also, difficulties traveling to open space and finding where to park posed another challenge.

Most residents said they would be in favor of the city purchasing land for open space as well as land conservation by both state agencies and non-profit groups, and many would support an easement on a part of their property to add open space (**Figure 55**).

Figure 54. Impediments and Inconveniences Accessing Open Space

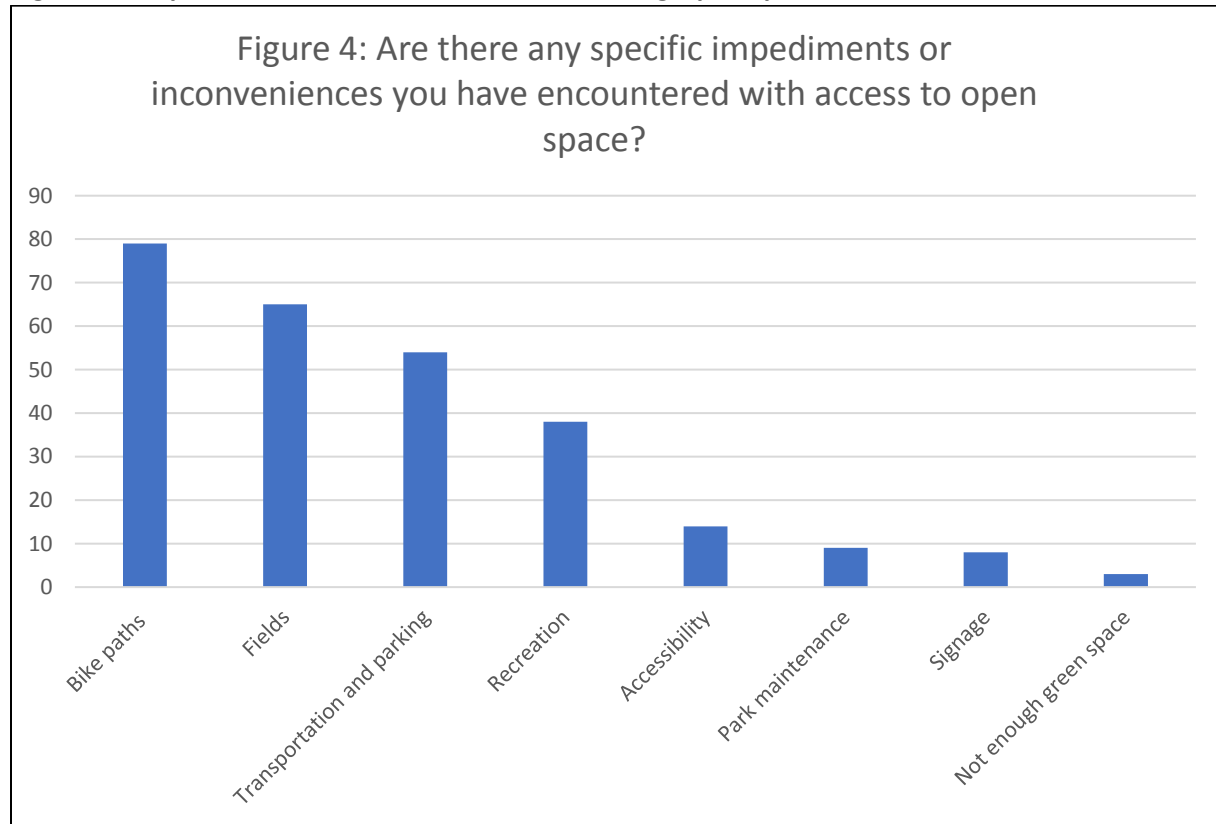
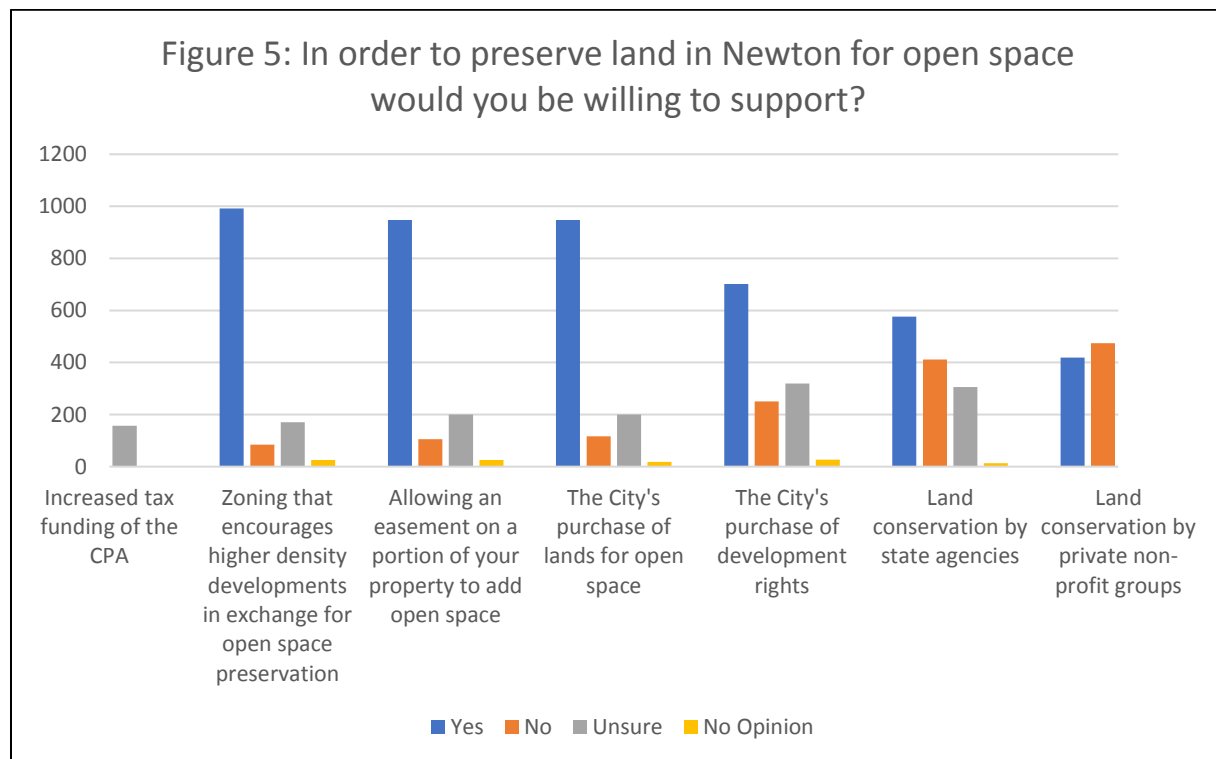


Figure 55. Policies to Support Open Space Acquisition



Youth Survey

While the youth survey was not as heavily advertised, thanks to the responses of the Youth Commission, we received responses from youth residents from all areas of the City. Along with the responses from Newton North and Newton South High School students, a number of similar themes are seen in youth responses to the overall community responses in regard to wayfinding, improved facilities through maintenance, and connectivity. Below are responses to some of the questions asked in the youth survey. (**Figure 56-60**) Please note that the students could select multiple options if they applied, hence why the total answers appear to be more than 27.

Figure 56. In what ways do you use Newton’s open space resources?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Organized sports (soccer, baseball, track, etc.)	44.44%	12
Personal exercise (running, hiking, etc.)	81.48%	22
Dog - walking	33.33%	9
Relaxation or spending time with friends/family	77.78%	21
Hobbies (bird watching, yoga, etc.)	22.22%	6
I don't use open space	0.00%	0
Other (please specify)	3.70%	1
Total Respondents: 27		

Figure 57. What do you value about Newton’s open space resources?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Socializing with friends and others	88.89%	24
Relaxing and being tranquil	77.78%	21
Connecting with nature	66.67%	18
Being active	88.89%	24
Accesibility	66.67%	18
Other (please specify)	0.00%	0
Total Respondents: 27		

Figure 58. What don't you like about Newton's open space resources?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
There aren't enough amenities (benches, tables, workout stations, water fountains, etc.)	52.00%	13
Athletic facilities are too crowded	8.00%	2
Not enough organized activities	24.00%	6
Open spaces are poorly advertised/marked	40.00%	10
Open spaces are poorly maintained	40.00%	10
Trails are too confusing to navigate	8.00%	2
Other (please specify)	12.00%	3
Total Respondents: 25		

Figure 59. How could Newton improve its open spaces?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Better signage	37.04%	10
Improved trails	25.93%	7
More amenities (benches, tables, etc.)	66.67%	18
More planned activities (performances, yoga, art shows, etc.)	40.74%	11
More facilities (courts, etc.)	37.04%	10
Improved facilities (bathrooms, fields, etc.)	70.37%	19
Better advertising	48.15%	13
Other (please specify)	3.70%	1
Total Respondents: 27		

Figure 60. What can Newton do to make Newton more accessible for students who walk/bike?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Better signage showing nearby natural recreational and natural areas	26.92% 7
Safer bike/pedestrian crossings, sidewalks, lanes, and trails	100.00% 26
Guides for open space in Newton with maps and nearby areas of interest	46.15% 12
Improved trails	34.62% 9
Other (please specify)	7.69% 2
Total Respondents: 26	

C. FIRST COMMUNITY WORKING SESSION

The first community meeting held on February 6, 2020, was conducted for the purpose of understanding the open space lands and resources that residents most value and those resources that should be improved.

Figure 61 shows the percentage of participants noting which type of open space resources/uses they value the most. These resources were grouped into general categories. Nearly 50% of participants said that passive recreation, which includes hiking, bird watching, fishing, nature walking, and swimming, was highly important to them. Open space resources with adequate passive recreation opportunities for all ages and abilities were most highly valued.

Participants were grouped into tables and were tasked first with writing down and marking places on a map that work well and places that do not work well. One person from each group presented to the larger audience what everyone had written down, and the Conway School students condensed this list into categories for improvement. At the end of the meeting, groups were tasked with coming up with general recommendations to improve open space resources.

Figure 61. Individual Attendee Values (% of attendees)

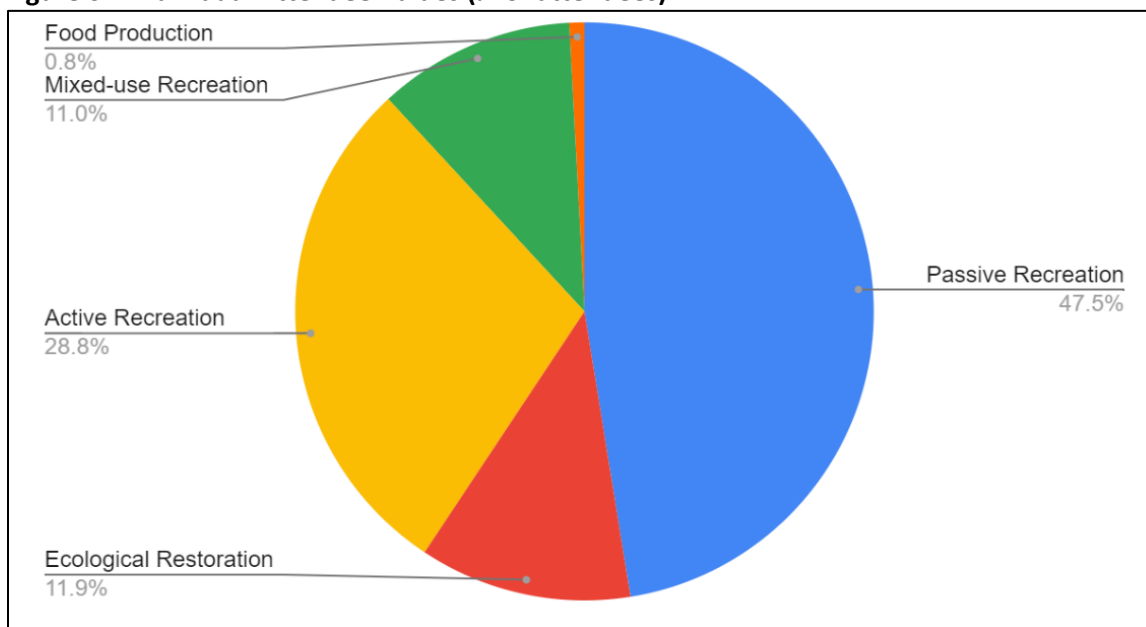


Figure 62 shows percentage of participants and their priority selection of open space resources that are working well in Newton and which resources should continue to be prioritized in the city. The top three priorities include public/private partnerships (which are further discussed in **Section 7: Needs Analysis**), mixed-use open space, and open water recreational opportunities. As discussed in **Section 3: Community Setting** and in **Section 7: Needs Analysis**, Newton’s population is growing and diversifying, which means that having mixed use open space resources that suit the needs of multiple age groups and abilities is imperative. Residents have expressed strong interest in water resource areas, such as the Charles River, both the reservation and pathway, Hammond Pond, and Crystal Lake for the passive recreation opportunities and the presence of ecological communities.

Figure 62. Areas of Success for Newton’s Open Space Resources

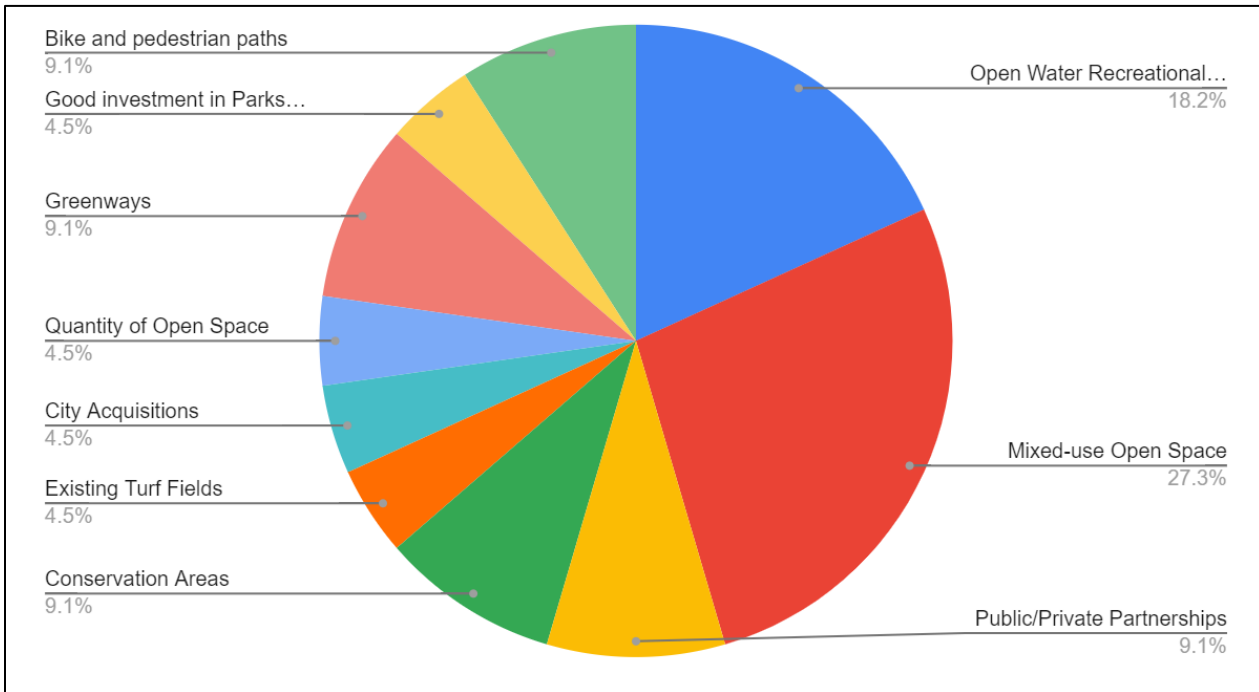
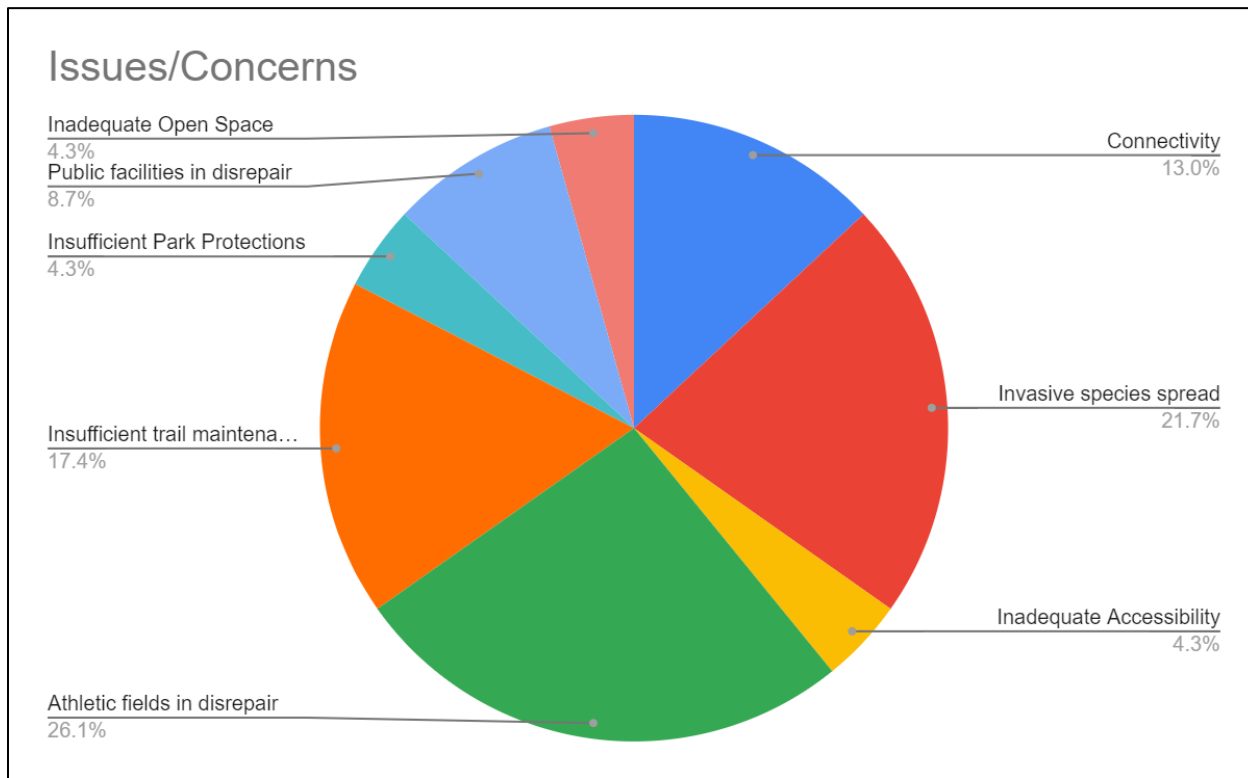


Figure 63 shows the top issues or concerns regarding open space resources from participants in the first public forum. The top issues include athletic fields in disrepair, insufficient trail maintenance, and invasive species spread. Further discussions about athletic fields can be found in **Section 4: Environmental Inventory**, **Section 7: Needs Analysis**, and **Section 9: Action Plan**. Many athletic fields were constructed on former wetlands and near floodplains, so they can become quite wet and unplayable during certain conditions. Residents expressed that trails appear to be poorly maintained and are poorly connected, which limits their usage. Cold Spring Park was discussed as one of the main open space resources in need of trail improvements due to drainage conditions and the growing presence of invasive species.

Figure 63. Top Public Concerns Regarding Open Space Resources in Newton



D. SECOND COMMUNITY WORKING SESSION

The second community working session held on March 4, 2020 was conducted for the purpose of generating recommendation and action plan items. Students from the Conway School began the meeting by sharing the formal presentation that they had put together, which included a summary of the open space resources Newton values, what Newton needs in regard to open space, how to preserve open space for the future in the face of climate change, and broad recommendation themes. Each of these recommendation themes (connectivity, urban tree canopy, trail maintenance, funding, protection, athletic fields, etc.) were placed on large maps for the residents to draw and write action steps. All the information gathered was duly considered and informed the actions in **Section 9: Action Plan**, which was then edited further after the public comment period.

E. PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Comments were solicited through a number of forums including e-newsletters to those who attended the working sessions, notes in the Mayor’s newsletters, notes in the Newton Conservators (non-profit) newsletter, the Planning Department’s Friday Report, and on our website. The Advisory Committee also informed the groups that they represented during the update development.

Below is a summary of all content comments received during the public comment period, which ran from April 30, 2020 until end of day on May 18, 2020 and includes the public hearings held by both the Zoning and Planning Committee and the Planning and Development Board. Comments regarding grammar or spelling have not been included in this list, though were addressed. Comments are organized by the goal or objective they relate to, but some comments are overall plan comments or comments on introductory sections (i.e., Sections 1 – 5). City staff reviewed, responded to, and incorporated as appropriate each public comment submitted. Guidance was received from City leadership on some of the comments received.

Please find the complete reports/minutes for the Zoning and Planning Committee and Planning and Development Board of their discussions regarding Newton’s 2020-2027 Open Space and Recreation Plan on their respective webpages shown here.

Zoning & Planning Committee: <http://www.newtonma.gov/gov/aldermen/committees/zoning/2020.asp>

Planning & Development Board: http://www.newtonma.gov/gov/planning/bc/board/2020_agenda_n_minutes.asp

Overall/Introductory Chapters

- Connectivity may not be feasible
- Geology corrections
- Note OS’s contribution to public health
- CLC wished to have been part of the Advisory Committee
- Emphasize accessibility more
- Address the need for watershed management as it pertains to water quality
- Don’t mention the COVID-19 situation in a 7-year plan.
- Connect this plan with the City’s climate minded plans (e.g., CCVA, HMP, CAP)
- Acknowledge the silt build up in the Charles River specifically between Rte9 and Washington Street
- Keep this as a living document
- Acknowledge Newton’s Age Friendly designation

Goal 1: Implementation

Implementation/Management

- Eliminate the idea of transferring management of Bullough’s Pond away from the PRC.
- Establish a coalition of "Friends" groups to work together and seek multiple sources of funding.

GOAL 2: MAINTENANCE AND IMPROVEMENT

Improvement of Open Space Resources

- Complete the stone dust renovation of the Cold Spring Park Life Course trail (this same comment was received from a number of residents)
- Elevate the importance of investment in the improvement, maintenance and protection of recreation, green and open spaces, including but not limited to] natural areas, athletic fields, parks, [the city's outdoor pool,] water resources, and the urban tree canopy. Athletic fields were top-ranked as a concern and yet aren’t discussed in detail.
- Elevate the fact that nearly 70% of respondents said that the quality of parks were poor
- Ensure that all laws and plans address the need for trees, habitats and an end to fossil fuel consumption
- Develop and implement priority plans to greatly reduce invasive species
- The dire needs for Gath pool must be noted
- Ensure expansion of tennis courts is noted as potential opportunities to provide more diverse recreational resources
- Athletic fields concerns were watered down from where they were in the survey and public meetings
- Details of further improvements to Wellington Park and request to add Wellington Park to the list of improved accessible paths
- Add “consideration of conversion of CSP softball field to other uses.”

GOAL 3: ACCESSIBILITY

- Emphasize accessibility more.

GOAL 4: MINIMIZE GAPS

- No comments were received that only related to Goal 4.

GOAL 5: CONNECTIVITY**Connectivity and Safe Transit**

- Complete the stone dust renovation of the Cold Spring Park Life Course trail (this same comment was received from a number of residents)
- Provide protected bike lanes on south-to-north routes in the city
- Connect Memorial Spaulding Sch. to Kennard Park via a multi-use shared path along to Dudley Rd (concerns were raised by others that Dudley Rd is too narrow for this endeavor and any path would be unsafe with current traffic)
- Provide a sidewalk on Nahanton Street (with Nahanton Park and Heyn Conservation area and Cutler Park on the other)
- Quinnobequin Road needs safer access
- Provide a sidewalk along Vine Street for safe access to Kessler Woods from Oak Hill neighborhood
- Provide a pedestrian crossing on the Sudbury Aqueduct over the T tracks next to the Eliot T station
- Acknowledge Newton’s Age Friendly designation
- Mark trails, add directional signs, add "you are here" stickers to the maps at the trailheads
- Address connectivity problems at Exit 17 Rotary
- Do a better job of describing the “significant capital improvement needs” of the Crystal Lake Bath House.
- Add language that better reflects Crystal Lake, including “Conservancies” when discussing friends groups, “bath houses” when discussing assets, and “lakes” in the purpose section.
- Incorporate stronger language referencing safe and protected bike routes along main corridors.
- Explore opportunities to create off-road bike trails in existing parks and conservation land.
- Add the need for bike racks.

GOAL 6: PROTECTION**Protection of Existing Parks and Conservation Areas**

- Elevate the desire for legal protections for parks
- Provide permanent protection for Cold Spring Park and other city parks (this same comment was received from a number of residents)

New Open Space Resources

- Consider the possibility of converting old landfill area on Pine Street to a recreational area
- Consider Pine St lot, next to the Burr School, for cleanup and conversion to park, playing field, etc.
- Lobby the golf courses for PILOT payments and suggest voluntary donation of CRs on portions of the golf courses
- Expand public open spaces (don’t just preserve and protect) – convert parking lots to green space
- Ensure that Newton’s golf courses and open space on college and other institutional campuses remain open space permanently. (two respondents)