

Canton Parks & Recreation Master Plan

Canton, Connecticut



Master Plan

January 2018



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INTRODUCTION

The Town of Canton Parks and Recreation Master Plan is intended to help meet the needs of current and future residents by positioning Canton to build on the community's unique parks and recreation assets, and identify new opportunities. The plan establishes a clear direction to guide Town staff, parks and recreation commission, advisory committees, and elected officials in their efforts to enhance the community's parks and recreation services and facilities over the next 2 to 5-year horizon.

The Town of Canton Parks and Recreation Master Plan was funded through the State of Connecticut 2014 Small Town Economic Assistance Program (STEAP) Grant.

Objectives

1. Assess current conditions of Town Parks and Recreation Facilities and Programs.
2. Identify current needs and wants of community, as well as national trends for recreation and programming.
3. Develop Recommendations: Focusing efforts on transforming conceptual goals into achievable priorities.
4. Develop an Action Plan to implement Park Facilities and Operations.

Scope of this document

The Town of Canton Parks and Recreation Master Plan is intended to assess and recommend improvements to properties which are owned, maintained, and/ or operated by the Town. This plan considers alternative service providers and facilities not under the oversight of the Board of Selectman, Parks and Recreation Commission or the Parks and Recreation Department; however, recommendations which may impact the physical conditions of these facilities and programs are not presented within this document.

This plan has been separated into four sections:

1. Background
2. Current Conditions
3. Community Input & Demographic Trends Analysis
4. Recommendations & Action Plan

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND

History

Incorporated in 1806, the Town of Canton is located in Hartford County, Connecticut. The Town includes the Villages of North Canton, Canton Center, Canton (Canton Valley), and Collinsville. It is bordered by the Towns of Granby to the north, Simsbury to the east, Avon and Burlington to the south, New Hartford to the west and Barkhamsted to the northwest. Running through the Town is the Farmington River. The Town is served by Routes 44 and 202, as well as Connecticut Routes 177, 179, and 309. According to the 2010 United States Census Bureau, the Town has a total area of 25.0 square miles and includes 10,292 residents.

Mission Statement

It is the mission of the Canton Parks and Recreation Department to provide a wide range of recreational and leisure opportunities in an effort to enhance the quality of life for all Canton residents and promote positive physical, social and emotional experiences. In our effort to achieve this goal we will continue to provide safe, attractive and well maintained facilities.

Related Planning Efforts and Integration

The Town of Canton has undertaken several planning efforts in recent years that helped direct the planning process for this plan. The documents related to these planning efforts include:

- 2014-2024 Town Plan of Conservation and Development (Planning & Zoning Commission)
- 2017-2018 Capital Improvement Plan
- 2018-2019 Capital Improvement Plan
- Fiscal Year 17-18 Chief Administrative Officer Preliminary Budget (2/3/17)
- Comprehensive Facility Use Policy
- Lawson Road Development Plan (11/12)
- Town of Canton Aquatic Center Feasibility Assessment at Mills Pond Pool (8/13)
- Canton Athletic Fields Master Plan and Feasibility Report (3/09)
- Town of Canton Dog Park Proposal/ Informational Packet

These documents were reviewed by the consultant team and have integrated into the recommendations of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, where applicable, with no conflicts within any of these existing planning efforts.

Methodology of This Planning Process

The project team, including Town staff, and the Parks & Recreation Commission guided this project by providing input to the consultant team throughout the planning process. This collaborative effort creates a plan that fully utilizes the consultants' expertise and incorporates the local knowledge and institutional history that only Town staff and community members can provide. The project consisted of the following tasks:

1. Facility Inventory and Analysis
2. Community Engagement (via online survey).
3. Needs Assessment
4. Recommendations and Action Plan

1. Facility Inventory & Analysis

- Inventory of parks and facilities using existing mapping, staff interviews, and on-site visits to verify amenities and assess the condition of the facilities and surrounding areas.
- Interviews with staff to provide information about park and recreation facilities and services, along with insight regarding the current practices and experiences of the Town in serving its residents and visitors.
- Identification of alternative providers of recreation services to provide insight regarding the market opportunities in the area for potential new facilities and services.
- Analysis addressing recreation, parks, natural resources, and related services.
- Review and assessment of relevant plans.

2. Community Engagement

- Review of previous planning efforts and Town historical information.
- Community involvement effort including meetings with key stakeholders, and an online survey.

3. Needs Assessment

- Consideration of the profile of the community and demographics.
- Research of trends related to Canton, and American lifestyles to help guide the efforts of Parks and Recreation over the next several years.
- Development of a broad assessment of the overall parks and recreation operations.

4. Recommendations and Action Plan

- Identification and categorization of recommendations with goals, objectives, and timing for implementation.

Master Plan Timeline

Startup Meeting	April 2017
Field Inventory & Analysis	April – May 2017
Stakeholder Survey (on-line)	May – June 2017
Findings & Recommendations Presentation	August 2017
Draft & Final Plan	September – October 2017
Final Presentation	February 2018

SECTION 2: CURRENT CONDITIONS

In order to properly develop a strategic plan for Canton's Parks, an assessment of existing parks and recreational facilities was completed utilizing existing mapping, staff interviews, and on-site visits.

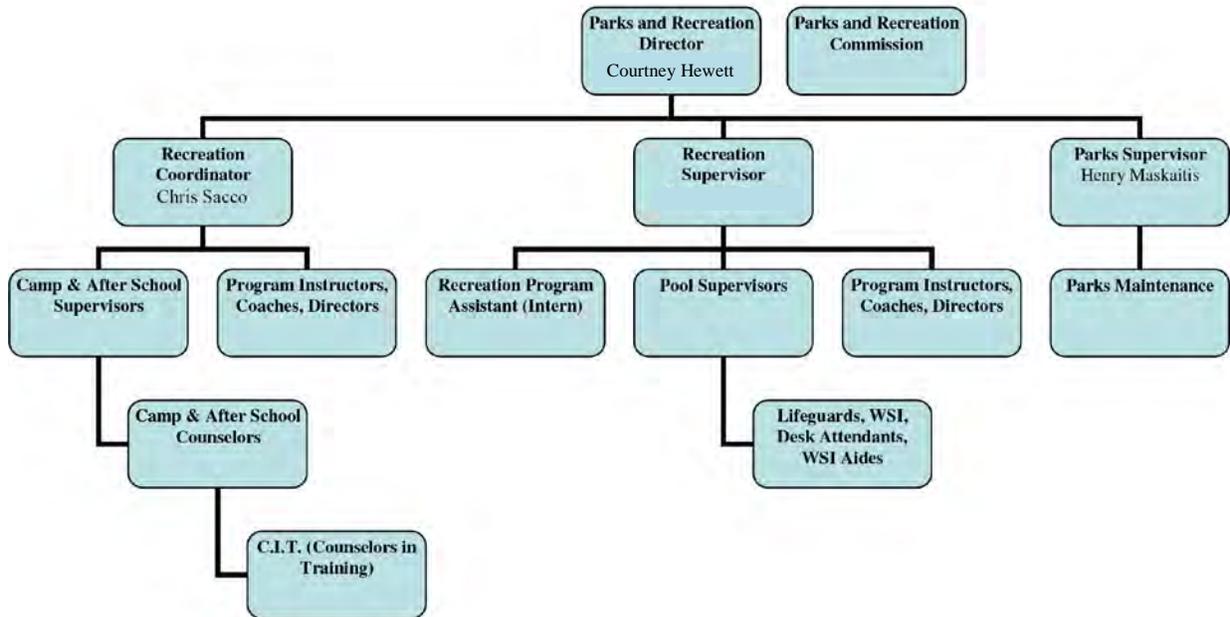
The Parks and Recreation Department offers an array of facilities and programs that seek to meet the needs of its community. This analysis examined information pertaining to program inventory and physical assets available to the community.

Parks & Recreation Department Administration & Staffing

The project team broadly assessed the organizational and management structure and staffing of the Town Parks and Recreation Department to determine effectiveness and efficiency in meeting current and future responsibilities as related to the community's needs.

The department currently consists of the following:

- Director of Parks and Recreation (currently interim)
- Recreation Supervisor (currently vacant)
- Recreation Coordinator
- Parks Supervisor (In conjunction with Public Works Department)
- Operations/ Maintenance Staff (1 Parks Supervisor and 2 - 3 part time seasonal assistants)
- Part-time/ Seasonal Support (up to 50 staff)
- Volunteers (basketball coaches, ski bus chaperons, volunteer organizations help out at select special events i.e. Lions Club and Rotary Club.



Current Department Finances

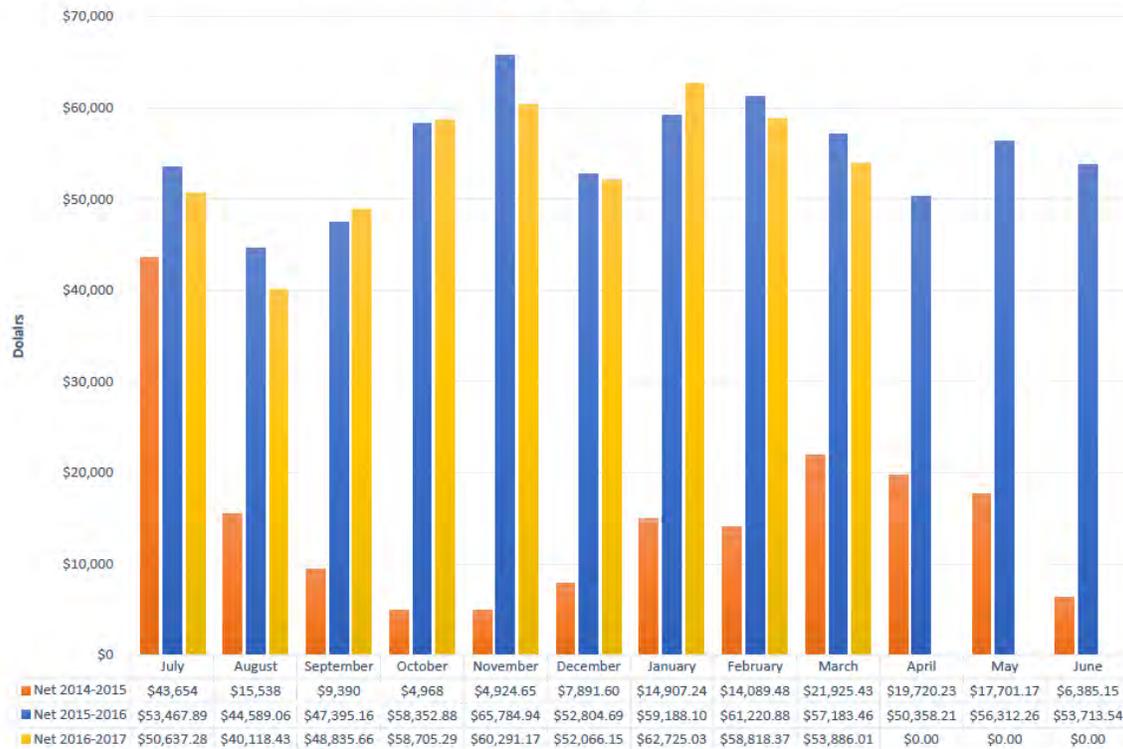
Canton’s Recreation Department operates on a cost recovery model where the department must bring in enough revenue to cover all program expenses, as well as expenses the town has moved from a general fund to the into the Parks and Recreation Department’s special revenue fund.

In general, activity levels for existing programs have increased, with significant expansions of programs and enrollment beginning in 2015. Such events include the development of multi-generational athletics, cultural, exercise and educational programming. Ultimately this suggests two major initiatives to increase revenues: 1) Increased activity through new, revised programs and populations and; 2) Increased community involvement and an aggressive development program. These items will be discussed elsewhere in this report.

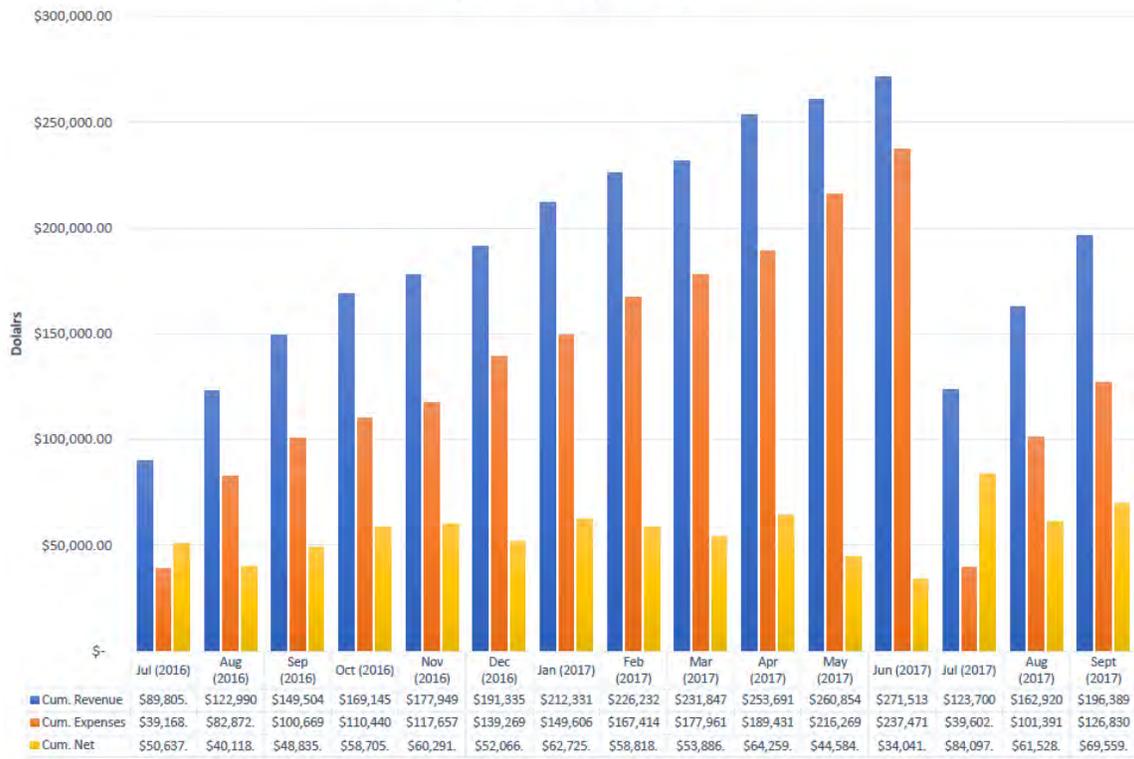
A broad review of the current financial condition of the department reveals that the department has been making significant progress since FY 2014-2015. In addition, the monthly revenue has incrementally grown starting in FY 2015-2016.

Finally, the department has continued to make strategic modifications to program offerings and operation procedures (brochures, concession items) to continue to recover costs and be as financially sustainable as possible.

**Parks & Recreation Special Revenue (Net)
(2014 - 2017)**



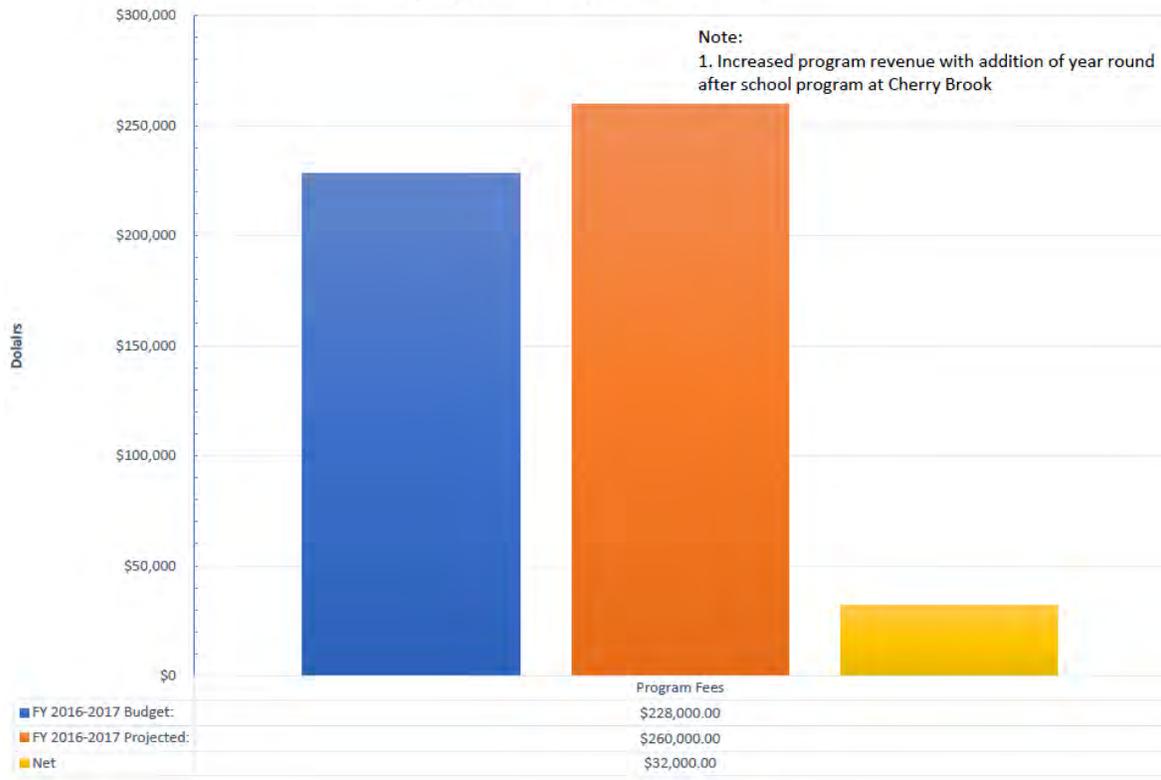
Parks & Recreation Special Revenue & Expenses (Jul 2016 - Sept 2017)



Parks & Recreation Special Revenue Fund (Excluding Programs) (2016 - 2017)



**Parks & Recreation Special Revenue Fund
(Programs Only) (2016 - 2017)**



It should be noted that multiple organizations contribute to the maintenance and operations, as well as financial investment in Town facilities. For example, in 2017, the Canton Little League purchased two scoreboards, enlarged two batting cages and installed a new gate at van Gemeren Field. Additional safety nets and new dugouts were provided at Bowdoin and Mills Pond fields.

Cantons Programs & Offerings

Core program and facility offerings at Canton’s parks include the following: (A complete list of athletics teams is included in Appendix B):

- Organized Sports/ Athletics:

Baseball	Football
Softball	Tennis
Basketball	Swimming
Soccer	Lacrosse
Playgrounds	
- Recreational Programming (diversity of offerings)
- Picnicking
- Walking, running and biking pathways
- Community Events/ Special Events/ Seasonal Offerings:
 - Winter - December Vacation Camp, Breakfast with Santa, Tree Lighting Ceremony, Holiday House Lights Contest, Valentine’s Parents Night Out, February Vacation Camp, Family Ice Skating Night

- Spring - Easter Egg-Stravaganza, April Vacation Camp, Earth Day/ Spring Clean Up (in conjunction with DPW and the Garden Club)
- Summer - Summer Concert Series, Movie Night at the Pool, Sundae Fun-Day, Teen Night at the Pool, Pooch Plunge
- Fall - Spook-A-Palooza: Halloween Carnival, Turkey Shoot Basketball Contest

Note: This list does not include community events and programs offered by alternative service providers within the Town.

Canton's Parks

The Town of Canton has seven park facilities described within this section, and has multiple other parks and recreation facilities operated by other agencies within the Town limits. The park system consists of nearly 120 acres, and serves a Town population of approximately 10,292 residents. Overall, the park system is highly regarded within the community, offering a wide variety of recreational opportunities with quality maintenance and operations of these facilities.

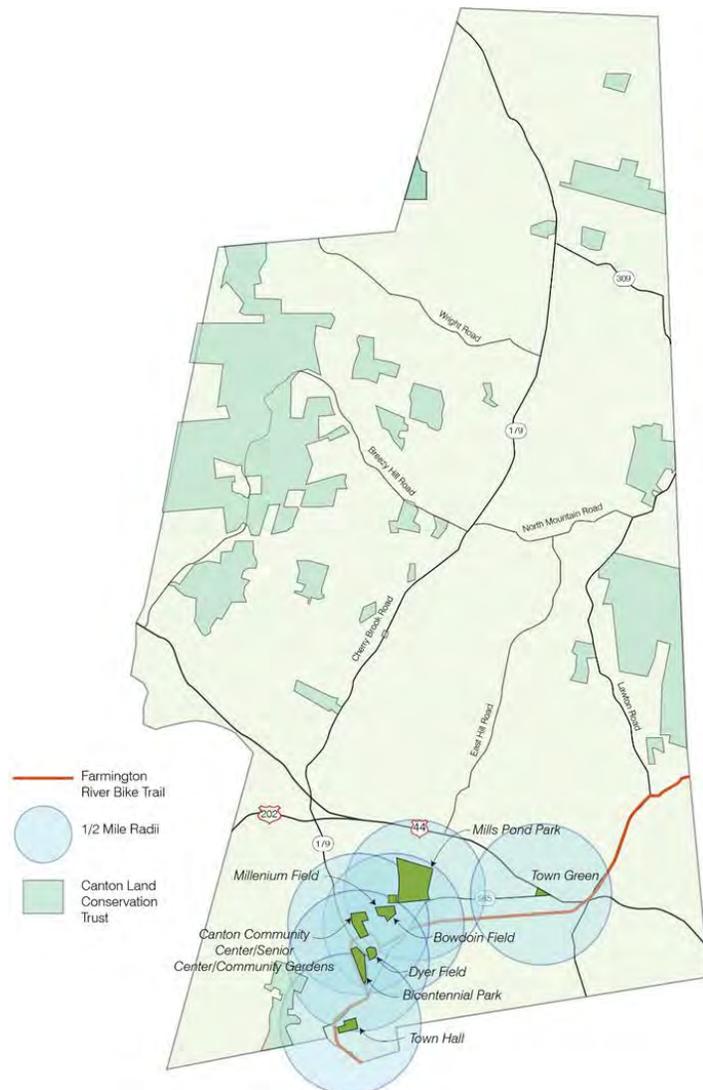
Level of Service Analysis

With an overall area of 25 square miles, Parks & Recreation facilities are located primarily in the southern quarter of the Town and are distributed along Simonds Avenue and River Road, close to Collinsville. Nearly all of the park facilities are located within 1/2 mile of each other and are relatively small (less than 10 acres), with a focus on rectangular and diamond athletic facilities.

Park lands located in the northern 3/4 of the Town primarily includes lands owned by Canton Land Conservation Trust.

Extending through the lower 1/4 of the Town from West to East is the Farmington River Trail, which is an 18.2-mile loop trail that links to the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail in the Towns of Farmington and Simsbury.

Most park areas are accessed by automobiles, within some barriers to bicycle and pedestrian travel.



The attached map illustrates each of the park facilities, the Farmington River Trail and Canton Land Conservation Trust parcels.

Following is a brief description of each park, and general recommendations for future improvements based on the inventory and analysis of each park. Additional inventory information provided by Town staff and various organizations are included in Appendix B. (Parks are listed alphabetically).

Note: The following list of parks and recreation facilities does not include alternative service providers or facilities not owned or operated by the Town of Canton Parks and Recreation Department. This report does not include an assessment of the Town Green, Community Center, Senior Center, and Farmington River Trail.

Bicentennial Park

Bicentennial Park is located at the end of Old River road, adjacent to the Canton highway maintenance garage and the Canton Wastewater Treatment facility. A multiuse trail connects Bicentennial Field (where baseball and dog disc golf are played) to a riverfront park and boardwalk at the intersection of Bridge Street and River Road. Bicentennial Field (baseball/softball) is fenced and buffered by steeply sloped woodland along River Road. Parking is available in a gravel lot at the entrance to the park, which can accommodate up to 20 vehicles. The riverfront park boasts impressive views of the Farmington River and is amply supplied with benches, picnic tables, and a pergola. Interpretive signs educate the public about waterfowl and fish found in the riparian corridor and the history of the Village of Collinsville.



Bowdoin Field

Bowdoin Field is located on Simonds Avenue directly across from Canton's High School and Middle School. The park functions primarily as a baseball facility in the spring and a soccer facility in the fall. Visitors and players access the site via sidewalks along Simonds Avenue and a gravel entrance on the southwestern side of the park. Parking is available at the High School/Middle School and the Canton Intermediate School when school is not in session. The field is visible from the road and is framed by woodlands and picturesque residential neighborhoods. The dugouts at Bowdoin Field were recently constructed.



Community Garden

The Community Garden is located on the southern side of the Canton Parks & Recreation Department on Dyer Avenue. The garden, provides families with the opportunity to rent plots during the growing season to produce fruits and vegetables for personal consumption and donation. The community garden may be accessed by a pathway from the southern side of the Canton Senior Center.



Dyer Field

Dyer Field is located at the intersection of Dyer Avenue and Allen Place, adjacent to the Farmington River Trail. The field hosts Little League softball in the spring, summer, and fall. Vehicular access is from Dyer Road, and the field is buffered from River Road by a series of evergreen trees and a greenspace. The field includes dugouts, an announcers' booth, a scoreboard, an irrigation system, and a snack shack. The Canton Fire and Police Station abut the field to the north and south, respectively.



The facility includes a large concession and storage facility, which borders the parking lot, and two sets of bleachers. Picnic tables, benches and a bike rack are also provided under a stand of mature shade trees. A bench is located along the Farmington River Trail.

It should be noted that this field is in jeopardy of being removed due to the proposed expansion of the Fire Station. To the extent feasible the field and sufficient parking should be preserved to provide a quality parks facility. However, if this is not possible, a field of the same quality should be constructed to replace this facility elsewhere within Town, including all of the existing facility features. The Canton Intermediate School parcel has sufficient space to accommodate the construction of a Little League field, and this parcel is recommended to be the new location for Dyer Field.

Mills Pond Park

Mills Pond Park is located at the intersection of Simonds Avenue and East Hill Road. The park contains wetlands, ponds, and streams which can be accessed via a limited network of walking paths. A broad range of recreational opportunities are offered by the park and the site has ample parking for visitors. Mills Pond Park is one of Canton's most heavily utilized park spaces.



Athletic Fields – The park includes several athletic fields, including the following: baseball (1), softball (2), and a rectangular field (1). New dugouts were recently added.

Basketball Courts – Two basketball courts are available along the entrance drive. The courts are fenced and are accessible via a ramp from the entrance drive. Improvements were recently completed at the basketball courts.

Pavilion Structures – Two pavilion structures are located adjacent to the pool, providing spaces for groups to cookout and picnic. The pavilions can be reserved by residents and Town of Canton-based organizations, and also shelter the departments main Explorers Day Camp program during the summer.

Volleyball – One sand volleyball court is located near the skate park.

Pool Facility – The 50-meter Olympic-sized pool and adjacent shallow wading pool is open daily from early June through Labor Day. A pool house with locker rooms, showers, and a concession stand is located at the entrance of the facility. Improvement were recently completed at the pool house.

Tennis Courts – Four tennis courts with lights. Improvements were recently completed at the tennis courts.

Skate Park – a popular skate park is located near the playground and volleyball court on the north side of the parking lot. Improvements were recently completed at the skate park.

Additional Park Resources – throughout the year the park provides a cross-country running course for the Canton School District. A small seating area and contemplation garden is located on the southern side of the park, adjacent to the smaller pond and woodland at the intersection of Simonds Avenue and East Hill Road.

van Gemenen Field (formerly Millennium Fields)

van Gemenen Field is located to the east of the Canton Middle School & High School along Simonds Avenue. Little league baseball is played on the two fields in the spring, summer, and fall. The fields are utilized for both practice and competition and are overall in very good condition. A wetland located on the southwestern section of the site absorbs storm water during rain events, and woodlands are situated to the north. Parking is available in a gravel lot adjacent to Simonds Avenue. A concessions stand is included at this location.



SECTION 3: COMMUNITY INPUT & TRENDS ANALYSIS

In order to understand the needs, opportunities, and constraints of Canton's Park system, a brief online survey was developed with questions ranging from current usage of park facilities to desired park amenities and improvements to Canton's Parks and Recreation facilities and programs.

The survey was conducted from the middle of April through the end of May 2017. The survey was shared via web link by the Town Parks and Recreation Department, as well as shared on the Canton's Parks Facebook page. Over the 1 ½ month period, a total of 439 responses were received.

Public Engagement Summary

This summary is a synopsis of the issues identified during the April 7th, 2017 (*Kick-off Meeting*), and the online survey. More than 400 community members, Canton Parks and Recreation staff, Town of Canton staff, and elected officials provided their input. Canton staff also reached out to various interested stakeholder groups including the Canton Little League, Canton Youth Soccer, Canton Youth Lacrosse, Canton School District, Department of Public Works, Canton High School Interim Athletics Director, and interested residents.

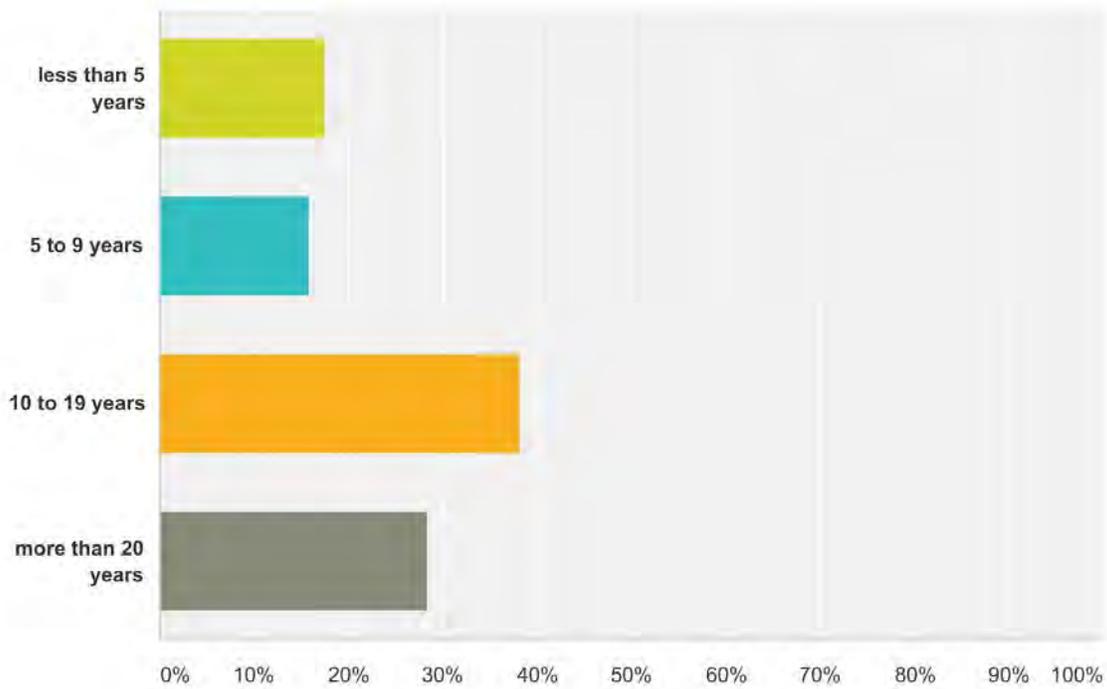
Online survey questions were developed by Weston and Sampson, with collaboration from the Canton Parks and Recreation Department and the Town staff. A summary of comments and responses from the stakeholder meeting and survey are listed below. Responses are not listed in order of importance and are meant to provide a representation of the desires and concerns of participants to support the planning process.

Note: The survey completed for this project is not a statistically valid survey based upon Canton's current population or utilizing various outreach methods. The survey was completed with the available budget and was intended to be a snapshot in time of user's feedback and input towards the current parks and recreation facilities and programs. It is recommended that prior to any planned improvement, the Parks and Recreation staff facilitate a public engagement process with the community to ensure proper and coordinated input is received.

Beyond the online survey described below, citizens were encouraged to submit feedback to Town staff throughout the master planning process. In addition, following the findings and preliminary recommendations presentation, the Town facilitated an open comment period for over 30 days.

Summary of Input

Figure 3.1: Survey Participants' Length of Residence



What are the current strengths of the department?

- Maintenance of facilities
- Aquatics
- Distribution of parks
- Concerts/movie nights
- Friendly, communicative staff
- Summer camps
- Seasonal events
- Lacrosse fields
- Diverse offerings
- Travel program
- Cultural programming
- Basketball/Tennis courts
- Proximity to multi-use trails
- Conservation of green space
- Picturesque landscape
- Recreation programs
- Skate park
- Rural quality of parks
- Rental facilities
- Senior programming

What are the weaknesses of the department currently?

- Communication – what programs/facilities are available?
- Poor ADA access
- Poor fishing
- Lack of river access
- Inadequate restroom facilities
- Too much emphasis on athletics
- Lack of year-round swimming
- Lack of nature programs
- Lack of winter facilities/programs
- Inadequate teen programming
- Poor athletic field conditions
- Outdated playground
- Lack of shade structures/trees
- Recreation program timing
- Inadequate site lighting
- Lack of soccer fields
- Lack of programming for girls
- Lack of parking
- Lack of trail connectivity
- Pool/bath house condition
- Poor basketball programming

Popular Recreational Activities

Participants were asked what activities draw them to the parks. Greater than 15% of participants responded with the following:

- Walking/jogging
- Swimming
- Education
- Bicycling
- Cultural
- Tennis
- Soccer
- Baseball
- Softball
- Cultural programming/Theater
- Camps
- Lacrosse
- Fishing
- Basketball
- Exercise Classes
- Movie nights
- Pavilion Rental

Town Park User Needs

Participants were asked to offer input about what is needed by groups that use the Town Park System.

- Better communication so users know what programs/facilities are available
- Upgrades to facilities/amenities
- Upgrades to pool
- Better maintenance
- ADA Accessibility
- More sports fields
- Better coordination of field use
- Restroom facilities
- Lighting at fields and parks
- Access to the river
- Playground expansion and upgrades
- Multi-modal access to parks
- Winter sports

Overall Quality of Current Programs Offered

Excellent	14.59%
Very Good	41.95%
Good	35.56%
Fair	6.99%
Poor	0.91%

Unmet Needs

Participants were asked if there are major unmet needs among park uses and youth sports organizations that warrant town investment.

- Improved/expanded soccer fields
- Improved/expanded baseball/softball fields
- Equal access for girls' teams
- Basketball courts inadequate
- Streamline reservation program
- Inadequate communication with various partnering organizations/leagues
- Teens/preteen recreation & education lacking
- Hours (availability) of programs conflict with work schedules
- Cost of programs
- Coordination with schools/existing fields to maximize use
- Soccer programs lacking
- Winter programming lacking
- Limited operation of pool
- Multi-generational bonding/recreation opportunities missed

Desire for Recreational Programming

Participants were asked to list the types of recreational programming they would like to see the Department add to its current offerings.

- Community festivals/events
- Swim lessons
- Movie night
- Pavilion rentals
- Art, science, and recreation classes
- Expand multi-modal trail network and nature trail opportunities
- Expand hours of classes
- Soccer programs
- Inclusivity of all sports and abilities, not just baseball/softball
- Multi-generational recreational opportunities
- Teen programs important to keep kids out of trouble
- Winter programming
- Girls' recreation programming

Overall Quality of Existing Parks & Recreation Facilities

Excellent	8.51%
Very Good	31.31%
Good	44.38%
Fair	13.68%
Poor	2.13%

Overall Quality of Maintenance of Parks & Recreation Facilities

Excellent	13.37%
Very Good	36.78%
Good	35.56%
Fair	11.85%
Poor	2.43%

Suggested Improvements to Existing Facilities

Participants were asked what improvements should be made to existing facilities.

- Playground at Mills Pond
- Field Enhancements at van Gemenen (Millennium)/ Dyer
- Parking at van Gemenen (Millennium)/ Dyer
- Bathroom improvements at Mills Pond
- Heat/ enclose Mills Pond pool
- Replace dugouts and bleachers at Dyer Field
- Improve site lighting
- ADA accessibility
- Provide shade structures Mills Pond pool
- Adult fitness stations
- Water fountains
- Splash pad at Mills Pond Park
- Cover crop at Community Garden
- Trail connectivity
- Improve seating
- Athletic field restoration

User Engagement

Participants were asked to offer suggestions for ways to attract more visitors to parks and programs.

- Better communication and marketing of programs
- More musical/cultural festivals to bring people together
- Programs for preteens
- Programs for teens
- Expand/enhance the CAST (Canton Amateur Seasonal Theater) program
- Better program & facility hours, particularly in the evening
- Walking paths for all ages
- ADA accessibility
- Better parking at ball fields
- Better seating for spectators and all abilities users
- Girls softball programming
- Connect bike paths to the parks/install bike racks
- Programs for aging populations
- Better lighting to encourage use in evening hours
- Opportunities for fishing at river and Mills Pond (if stocked)

Desire for New Facilities/Amenities

Participants were to describe the types of facilities or amenities they would like to see added in Canton. Note: Some of the items described below already exist in Canton.

- Athletic Fields
- Soccer
- Baseball
- Softball
- Lacrosse
- Farmington River boat ramp
- Dog park
- Concert area
- Walking/biking paths
- Restrooms
- Courts
- Basketball
- Tennis
- Pickleball
- Bocce
- Volleyball
- Playgrounds
- Improved parking
- Nature areas
- Skate park

Overall Quality of Customer Service

Excellent	28.83%
Very Good	36.86%
Good	28.47%
Fair	4.38%
Poor	1.46%

Seeking Community Feedback

Excellent	19.34%
Very Good	30.29%
Good	36.86%
Fair	10.22%
Poor	3.28%

Top Priorities

Participants were asked how the Parks Department should prioritize investments over the next 5 to 10 years.

- Prioritize effective maintenance over new construction
- Cost effective improvements to existing facilities
- Field expansion to match recreational programming demands
- Farmington River boat launch
- Multi-modal trail expansions
- Bathroom upgrades
- Upgrades to pool/pool house
- Parking upgrades
- Conservation of open space
- Multi-purpose fields

Community Profile & National Trends

In order to completely understand the regional context and current trends of the Canton Region, a community profile and a national program trends analysis was completed. The analysis and findings are as follows:

Community Demographics

Canton's Parks are distributed across the Town of Canton, located in the northwestern portion of Hartford County in Connecticut. Canton's population as of 2010 was 10,292.

Town of Canton demographics data indicate a stable, though aging population. According to demographic information available from the Census the median age was 43.9 years of age in 2010, which is slightly older than the average of Connecticut (40.6) and United States (37.8). Other population trends remain stable with insignificant changes in total population, race and gender composition between 2010 and 2017.

The 2010 racial makeup of Canton includes:*

Caucasian	95.7%
Hispanic	2.6%
Asian	1.5%
African American	0.9%
Native American	0.3%

**Totals are rounded thus do not equal 100%*

National Demographic Trends

It is a challenge and an opportunity for parks and recreation providers to continue to understand and respond to the changing recreation interests of serviced populations. In this fast-paced society, it is important to stay on top of current trends. The following highlights relevant local, regional, and national recreation trends relative to the Canton demographic and identified interests.

According to Recreation Management Magazine's "2013 State of the Industry Report", survey respondents from parks and recreation departments/ districts reporting about their revenues from 2009 through 2014 reveals the impact of the recession as well as the beginning of a recovery. More than 25 percent of respondents saw their revenues decrease from 2009 to 2010 and nearly 22 percent of respondents reported a further decrease in 2011. Over 44 percent of park and recreation respondents reported increases from 2011 to 2012.

In the last two decades, a sustainable urban park model that addresses both social and environmental issues was born. In addition to providing aesthetic value and a place for recreation, the emerging urban park model also plays a fundamental role in driving economic development, improving public health, providing employment opportunities, and being self-sufficient in the use of natural resources. Parks are indisputably becoming an essential component of the social fabric and ecological landscape of urban centers.

Increasingly, parks are becoming recognized for their ability to enhance the economic vitality of a community. Investments made to local and regional parks not only raise the standard of living in our neighborhoods, towns and cities, but they also spark activity that can ripple throughout the economy.

The following information highlights relevant regional and national outdoor recreation trends from various sources that may influence park planning in Canton for the next several years.

Adults – Baby Boomers (1946 - 1964)

Baby boomers are defined as individuals born between 1946 and 1964, as stated in “Leisure Programming for Baby Boomers”.¹ They are a generation that consists of nearly 76 million Americans. In 2011, this influential population began their transition out of the workforce. As baby boomers enter retirement, they will be looking for opportunities in fitness, sports, outdoors, arts and cultural events, and other activities that suit their lifestyles. With their varied life experiences, values, and expectations, baby boomers are predicted to redefine the meaning of recreation and leisure programming for mature adults. Emilyn Sheffield, Professor of Recreation and Parks Management at the California State University, at Chico, in the NPRA July 2012 Parks and Recreation magazine article titled “Five Trends Shaping Tomorrow Today,” indicated that Baby Boomers are driving the aging of America, with boomers and seniors over 65 composing about 39 % of the nation’s population.²

In the leisure profession, this generation’s devotion to exercise and fitness is an example of its influence on society. When boomers entered elementary school, President John Kennedy initiated the President’s Council on Physical Fitness; physical education and recreation became a key component of public education. As boomers matured and moved into the workplace, they took their desire for exercise and fitness with them. Now as the oldest boomers are nearing 65, park and recreation professionals are faced with new approaches to provide both passive and active programming for older adults. Boomers are second only to Gen Y/Millennials (born between 1980 and 1999) in participation in fitness and outdoor sports.³

Jeffrey Ziegler, a past president of the Arizona Parks and Recreation Association identified “Boomer Basics” in his article, “Recreating Retirement: How Will Baby Boomers Reshape Leisure in their 60s?”.⁴ Highlights are summarized below.

Boomers are known to work hard, play hard, and spend hard. They have always been fixated with all things youthful. Boomers typically respond that they feel 10 years younger than their chronological age. Their nostalgic mindset keeps boomers returning to the sights and sounds of their 1960’s youth culture. Swimming pools have become less of a social setting and much more of an extension of boomers’ health and wellness program. Because boomers have, in general, a high education level they’ll likely continue to pursue education as adults and into retirement.

Boomers will look to park and recreation professionals to give them opportunities to enjoy many life-long hobbies and sports. When programming for this age group, a customized experience to cater to the need for self-fulfillment, healthy pleasure, nostalgic youthfulness, and individual escapes will be important. Recreation trends will shift from games and activities that boomers associate with senior citizens, as Ziegler suggests that activities such

¹ Linda Cochran, Anne Roshshadl, and Jodi Rudick, “Leisure Programming For Baby Boomers,” Human Kinetics, 2009.

² Emilyn Sheffield, “Five Trends Shaping Tomorrow Today,” *Parks and Recreation*, July 2012, p. 16-17.

³ 2012 Participation Report, Physical Activity Council, 2012.

⁴ J. Ziegler, “Recreating Retirement: How Will Baby Boomers Reshape Leisure in Their 60s?”, *Parks and Recreation*, 10/02.

as bingo, bridge, and shuffleboard will likely be avoided because boomers relate these activities to being old.

Boomers will reinvent what being a 65-year-old means. Parks and recreation agencies that don't plan for boomers carrying on in retirement with the same hectic pace they've lived during their years in employment will be left behind. Things to consider when planning for the demographic shift:

Boomer characteristics and what drives Boomers?

- Marketing to Boomers
- Arts and entertainment
- Passive and active fitness trends
- Outdoor recreation/ adventure programs
- Travel programs

Adult – The Millennial Generation (1980-1999)

The Millennial Generation, generally considered to represent those born between about 1980 and 1999, and represent about 34% of the Canton population. In their book, *Millennials Rising, the Next Great Generation*, authors William Strauss and Neil Howe identify seven Millennials characteristics⁵. These characteristics were discussed in a 2010 California State Parks article entitled “Here come the ‘Millennials’: What You Need to Know to Connect with this New Generation”.

Below are seven key characteristics of Millennials:

- **Special:** Used to receiving rewards just for participating Millennials are raised to feel special.
- **Sheltered:** Millennials lead structured lives filled with rules and regulations. Less accustomed to unstructured play than previous generations and apprehensive of the outdoors, they spend most of their time indoors, leaving home primarily to socialize with friends and families.
- **Team Oriented:** This group has a “powerful instinct for community” and “places a high value on teamwork and belonging”.
- **Technically savvy:** Upbeat and with a can-do attitude, this generation is “more optimistic and tech-savvy than their elders”.
- **Pressured:** Millennials feel “pressured to achieve and pressured to behave”. They have been “pushed to study hard and avoid personal risk”.
- **Achieving:** This generation is expected to do great things, and they may be the next “great” generation.
- **Conventional (and diverse):** Millennials are respectful of authority and civic minded. Respectful of cultural differences because they are ethnically diverse, they also value good conduct and tend to have a “standardized appearance”.

In addition, the California State Parks article provides a broad range of ideas for engaging Millennials in parks and recreation⁶.

⁵ Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising, the Next Great Generation*, Vintage: Connecticut, 2000.

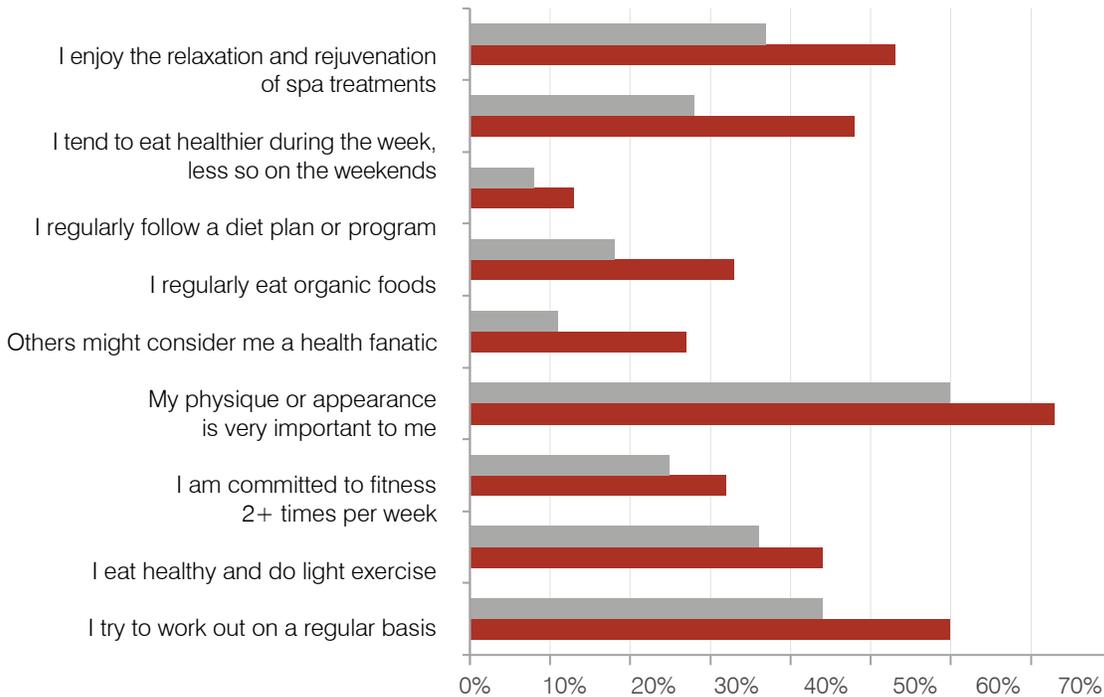
⁶ California State Parks, “Here come the ‘Millennials’: What You Need to Know to Connect with this New Generation,” *Recreation Opportunities*. (2010), pg 4-6, http://www.parks.ca.gov/pages/795/files/millennials%20final_03_08_10.pdf, accessed 1/12/15.

In a 2011 study of the Millennial Generation⁷, Barkley Advertising Agency made the following observations about Millennials and health/ fitness:

- Sixty percent of Millennials say they try to work out on a regular basis. Twenty-six percent consider themselves health fanatics.
- Much of this focus on health is really due to vanity and/or the desire to impress others - 73% exercise to enhance their physical appearance.
- Millennials are also fans of relaxation and rejuvenation, as 54% regularly treat themselves to spa services.
- Despite their commitment to health, Millennials stray from their healthy diets on weekends. There's a noticeable difference between their intent to work out regularly and the amount of exercise that they actually accomplish.

Table 3.1 illustrates contrasts between Millennials and Non-Millennials regarding a number of health and fitness topics.⁸

Table 3.1: Millennials (red) Vs. Non-Millennials (grey) on Health and Fitness



Source: *Barkley's Report on Millennials*.

⁷ American Millennials: Deciphering the Enigma Generation, <https://www.barkleyus.com/AmericanMillennials.pdf>, accessed 5/15.

⁸ Barkley report.

Youth – Generation Z (born in mid-1990's)

Emilyn Sheffield identified one of the five trends shaping tomorrow today is that of the proportion of youth is smaller than in the past, but still essential to our future. As of the 2010 Census, the age group under age 18 forms about a quarter of the U.S. population. Nationwide, nearly half of the youth population is ethnically diverse and 25% is Hispanic. In Canton, about 22% of the population is 19 and under.

Characteristics cited for Generation Z, the youth of today⁹, include:

- The most obvious characteristic for Generation Z is the pervasive use of technology.¹⁰
- Generation Z members live their lives online and they love sharing both the intimate and mundane details of life.
- They tend to be acutely aware that they live in a pluralistic society and tend to embrace diversity.
- Generation Zers tend to be independent. They don't wait for their parents to teach them things or tell them how to make decisions.¹¹

With regard to physical activity, a 2013 article published by academics at Georgia Southern University¹² notes that the prevalence of obesity in Generation Z (which they describe as individuals born since the year 2000) is triple that of Generation Xers (born between 1965 and 1981). It suggests that due to increased use of technology, Generation Z spends more time indoors, is less physically active, and more obese compared to previous generations. The researchers noted that Generation Z is a generation that seeks social support from peers more so than any previous generation. This is the most competent generation from a technological standpoint but Generation Zers tend to struggle in and fear some basic activities such as physical activity and sport.

National Healthy Lifestyle and Active Living Trends

Walking and bicycling-friendly communities have been emerging over the last 10 years. Bicycling has become a popular mode of transportation as people consider the rising cost of fuel, desire for better health, and concern for the environment. In addition, some people also use cycling as a mode of transportation just for the fun of it.

In 2014, the Alliance for Biking and Walking published its Bicycling and Walking in the United States updated Benchmarking Report.¹³ The report shows that increasing bicycling and walking are goals that are clearly in the public interest. Where bicycling and walking levels are higher, obesity, high blood pressure, and diabetes levels are lower.

⁹ Note: There does not appear to be a general consensus about the transition from Millennials to Generation Z. The range cited in various articles puts the transition year anywhere from about 1994 to 2000.

¹⁰ La Monica Everett-Haynes, "Trending Now: Generation Z," Arizona University UA News Blog, <http://uanews.org/blog/trending-now-generation-z>, accessed 4/30/15.

¹¹ Alexander Levit, "Make Way for Generation Z", *The Connecticut Times*, 3/28/15, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/29/jobs/make-way-for-generation-z.html?_r=0.

¹² David D. Biber, Daniel R. Czech, Brandon S. Harris, and Bridget F. Melton, "Attraction to physical activity of generation Z: A mixed methodological approach," *Open Journal of Preventive Medicine*, Vol.3, No.3., 310 – 319 (2013), <http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ojpm.2013.33042>.

¹³ *2014 Benchmarking Report*, Alliance for Biking and Walking, <http://www.bikewalkalliance.org/download-the-2014-benchmarking-report>, accessed 1/23/15.

Consequently, design of a community's infrastructure is directly linked to physical activity – where environments are built with bicyclists and pedestrians in mind, more people bike and walk. Higher levels of bicycling and walking also coincide with increased bicycle and pedestrian safety and higher levels of physical activity. Increasing bicycling and walking make a big impact on improving public health and life expectancy.

Some additional interesting health and economic indicators from the The Alliance for Biking and Walking updated Benchmarking Report includes:

- Quantified health benefits of active transportation can outweigh any risks associated with the activities by as much as 77 to 1, and add more years to our lives than are lost from inhaled air pollution and traffic injuries.
- Cost benefit analyses show that up to \$11.80 in benefits can be gained for every \$1 invested in bicycling and walking.
- There has been a gradual trend of increasing bicycling and walking to work since 2005.
- Infrastructure to support biking communities is becoming more commonly funded in communities.
- Bike share systems, making bicycles available to the public for low-cost, short-term use, have been sweeping the nation since 2010. Twenty of the most populous U.S. cities have a functional bike share system.

General Sports and Recreation Trends

In 2014, the National Sporting Goods Association completed a survey on sports participation and found that the top five athletic activities ranked by total participation included exercise walking, exercising with equipment, swimming, aerobic exercising, and running/ jogging.¹⁴ Additionally, the following active, organized, or skill development activities remain popular: hiking, bicycle riding, basketball, golf, and soccer.

Similarly, the 2013 Sports & Fitness Industry Association report on sports, fitness and leisure activities in the United States includes the following highlights¹⁵:

- Overall participation in sports, fitness, and related physical activities remained relatively steady from 2011 to 2012 with fitness sports having the largest increase in participation (2% increase to 61.1%).
- Twenty-eight percent of all Americans are inactive while 33% are active to a healthy level (engaged in high-calorie-level sport/fitness activities in a frequent basis).
- Outdoor sports participation remained stable at around 49%, while racquet sports participation increased (1% increase to 12.8%).
- Spending on team sports at school and lessons/ instruction/ sports camp was projected to increase in 2013 as it did in 2011 and 2012.

General Outdoor Recreation Trends

The Outdoor Foundation releases a Participation in Outdoor Recreation Report annually. According to the 2015 Topline Report, both the total number of outdoor outings and number

¹⁴ "2014 Sport/Recreation Activity Participation," National Sporting Goods Association, 2015".
<http://www.nsga.org>.

¹⁵ *2012 Sports, Fitness and Leisure Activities Topline Participation Report*, Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association (now Sports and Fitness Industry Association), <http://www.sfia.org/reports/all/>.

of participants dropped in 2014, with extreme weather and an unusually cold winter likely contributing to the decline.¹⁶ Bright spots in outdoor participation include paddle sports, with stand-up paddling remaining the top outdoor activity for growth, with participation growing by 38% from 2013 to 2014. Participation in snow sports, including telemarking, snowshoeing, freestyle skiing, and cross-country skiing, grew significantly as well.

The foundation reports that the top outdoor activities for adults in 2014 were running, fishing, bicycling, hiking, and camping. Birdwatching and wildlife viewing are also among the favorite adult outdoor activities by frequency of participation. The Outdoor Foundation's research brought the following key findings for the 2014 Outdoor Recreation Report.

1. Nearly 50% of Americans ages 6 and older participated in outdoor recreation in 2013. That equates to a total of 143 million.
2. Adventure racing, triathlon (off-road), stand-up paddling, kayak fishing, recreational kayaking were the top five participation outdoor recreation activities. Overall percentages increase in outdoor activities in the past three years (2014 Topline Report).
3. More than 70% of outdoor participants were motivated to recreate outdoors as a way of getting exercise.
4. Participation rates among girls and young women increased by two percentage points – bringing young women's participation to the highest since 2006.

According to the Outdoor Foundation's 2017 Topline Outdoor Recreation Participation Report the most popular outdoor activities for youth/young adults ages 6—24 are as follows¹⁷:

- Running, jogging, and trail running (25.3% of American youth participating)
- Bicycling (Road, Mountain, and BMX (22.6%)
- Freshwater, saltwater and fly fishing (19.5%)
- Car, backyard, backpacking and RV camping (19%)
- Hiking (15.5%)

The Outdoor Recreation Participation Report showed many Americans prefer outdoor recreation over traditional sports, leisure, and fitness activities, regardless of participation. Of those surveyed, camping was listed in the top three most desired forms of recreation amongst people who aren't currently participating in outdoor activities.

National Programming Trends

Outdoor recreation trends are also a recurring topic of study by the United States Forest Service through the Internet Research Information Series (IRIS). An IRIS report dated January 2012 notes that participation in walking for pleasure and family gatherings outdoors were the two most popular activities for the U.S. population as a whole.¹⁸ These outdoor activities were followed closely in popularity by viewing/ photographing wildlife, boating, fishing, snow/ ice

¹⁶ *Outdoor Recreation Participation Topline Report 2015*, Outdoor Foundation, 2015.

¹⁷ *Outdoor Recreation Participation Topline Report 2017*, Outdoor Foundation, 2017.

¹⁸ "Recent Outdoor Recreation Trends," USDA Forest Service Internet Research Information Series (IRIS) Research Brief, January 2012, <http://warnell.forestry.uga.edu/nrrt/nsre/IRISRec/IRISRec23rpt.pdf>, accessed August, 2012.

activities, and swimming. There has been a growing momentum in participation in sightseeing, birding and wildlife watching in recent years.

One of the most common concerns in the recreation industry is creating innovative programming to draw participants into facilities and services. Once in, participants recognize that the benefits are endless. According to *Recreation Management's* 2016 State of the Industry Report,¹⁹ the most common programs offered by parks and recreation survey respondents include: holiday events and other special events (63.4 percent); fitness programs (57.1 percent); educational programs (56.5 percent); day camps and summer camps (55 percent); mind-body balance programs (47.3 percent); sports tournaments and races (46.6 percent); swimming programs (45.8 percent); adult sport teams (45.2 percent); and programs for active older adults (56.2 percent).

About one-third (31%) of parks and recreation respondents indicated that they are planning to add programs at their facilities over the next three years. The 10 most common types of additional programming planned for 2016 include:

- Education programs (planned by 27.1 percent of those who will be adding programs)
- Fitness programs (26.1 percent)
- Mind-body/balance programs such as yoga and tai chi (25 percent)
- Teen programming (24.2 percent)
- Programs for active older adults (19.8 percent)
- Environmental education (19.7 percent)
- Arts & Crafts (18.8 percent)
- Day camps and summer camps (18.3 percent)
- Sports tournaments and races (18.1 percent)
- Holidays and special events (17.7 percent)

Older Adults and Senior Programming

The American Academy of Sports Medicine issues a yearly survey of the top 20 fitness trends.²⁰ It ranks senior fitness programs eighth among most popular fitness trends for 2015. Whether it's *SilverSneakers*, a freestyle low-impact cardio class, or water aerobics, more and more people are realizing the many benefits of staying active throughout life. According to the National Sporting Goods Association, popular senior programming trends include hiking, birding, and swimming.

Fitness Programming

There have been many changes in fitness programs in the last fifteen years. What clients wanted in 2000 is not necessarily what they want today. The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) *Health and Fitness Journal*²¹ has conducted a survey annually since 2007 to determine trends that would help create a standard for health and fitness programming.

Table 3.2 shows survey results that focus on trends in the commercial, corporate, clinical, and community health and fitness industry. Some trends first identified in 2007 have stayed

¹⁹ E. Tipping, "2016 State of the Industry Report, Trends in Parks and Recreation," *Recreation Management*, 6/16.

²⁰ "Survey Predicts Top 20 Fitness Trends for 2017", American College of Sports Medicine, http://journals.lww.com/acsm-healthfitness/Fulltext/2016/11000/WORLDWIDE_SURVEY_OF_FITNESS_TRENDS_FOR_2017.6.aspx, accessed 7/17.

²¹ Walter R. Thompson, "Worldwide Survey of Fitness Trends for 2012," *Health & Fitness Journal*, American College of Sports Medicine, 2011.

near the top of the list year after year while others came and went in popularity. Zumba made a brief appearance on the top 10 in 2012 but fell off the list of top 20 in 2014. Body weight training ranked number 1 in 2015 but fell behind wearable technology the following year, an unpredictable development in the industry.

Table 3.2: Top 10 Worldwide Fitness Trends for 2007 and Predicted Trends for 2017

Trends for 2007	Trends for 2017
1.Children and obesity	1. Wearable technology
2.Special fitness programs for older adults	2. Body weight training
3.Educated and experienced fitness professionals	3. High-intensity interval training
4. Functional fitness	4. Educated and experienced fitness professionals
5. Core training	5 Strength training
6. Strength training	6. Group training
7. Personal training	7. Exercise as medicine ®
8. Mind/body exercise	8. Yoga
9. Exercise and weight loss	9. Personal training
10. Outcome measurements	10. Exercise and weight loss

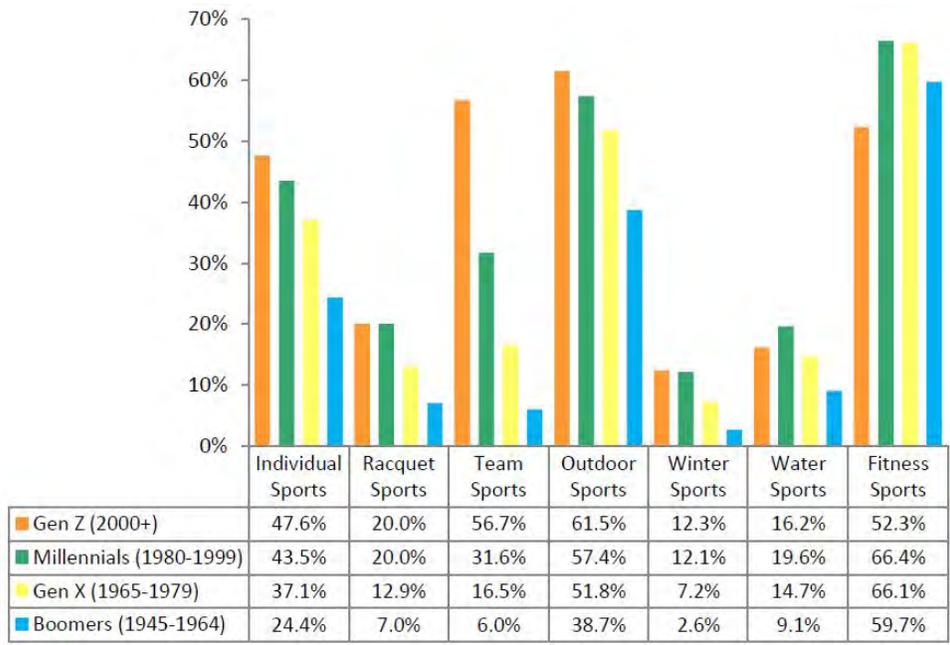
Source: American College of Sports Medicine

According to the 2017 Participation Report by the Physical Activity Council, over half of each generation participates in fitness sports and that team sports are more of a Generation Z activity while water and racquet sports are dominated by Millennials.²² Outdoor and individual sports tend to have younger participants with participation decreasing with age. *Figure 3.2* illustrates participation rates by generation.

Figure 3.2: A Breakdown of Fitness Sports Participation Rates by Generation

²² 2017 Participation Report”, Physical Activity Council, 2017.

Source: 2017 Participation Report, Physical Activity Council.



Nature Programming

Noted as early as 2003 in *Recreation Management Magazine*, parks agencies have been seeing an increase in interest in environmental-oriented “back to nature” programs. In 2007, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) sent out a survey to member agencies in order to learn more about the programs and facilities that public parks and recreation agencies provide to connect children and their families with nature²³. A summary of the results are as follows:

- Sixty-eight percent of public parks and recreation agencies offer nature-based programming and 61% have nature-based facilities.
- The most common programs include nature hikes, nature-oriented arts and crafts, fishing-related events, and nature-based education in cooperation with local schools.
- When asked to describe the elements that directly contribute to their most successful programs, agencies listed staff training as most important followed by program content and number of staff/staff training.
- When asked what resources would be needed most to expand programming, additional staff was most important followed by funding.
- Of the agencies that do not currently offer nature-based programming, 90% indicated that they want to in the future. Additional staff and funding were again the most important resources these agencies would need going forward.
- The most common facilities include: nature parks/preserves, self-guided nature trails, outdoor classrooms, and nature centers.
- When asked to describe the elements that directly contribute to their most successful facilities, agencies listed funding as most important followed by presence of wildlife and community support.

²³ “NRPA Completes Agency Survey Regarding Children and Nature,” National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA), http://www.narrp.org/assets/Library/Children_in_Nature/nrpa_survey_regarding_children_and_nature_2007.pdf, April 2007.

In his book, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*, Richard Louv introduced the concept of the restorative qualities of being out in nature, for both children and adults.²⁴ This concept, and research in support of it, has led to a growing movement promoting connections with nature in daily life. One manifestation of this is the development of Nature Explore Classrooms in parks. Nature Explore is a collaborative program of the Arbor Day Foundation and the non-profit organization Dimensions Educational Research Foundation, with a mission of helping children and families develop a profound engagement with the natural world, where nature is an integral, joyful part of children’s daily learning.²⁵ Nature Explore works to support efforts to connect children with nature. More recently, Scott Sampson advanced the cause in a book entitled, *How to Raise a Wild Child: The Art and Science of Falling in Love with Nature*.²⁶ Citing research supporting his case that connecting with nature is vital to the healthy development of individuals, communities, and the world, Sampson offers practical and helpful advice to parents, educators, and any other would-be nature mentors to kids.

“There’s a direct link between a lack of exposure to nature and higher rates of attention-deficit disorder, obesity, and depression. In essence, parks and recreation agencies can and are becoming the ‘preferred provider’ for offering this preventative healthcare.”
– Fran P. Mainella, former director of the National Park Service and Instructor at Clemson University

Festivals and Events

In the context of urban development, from the early 1980’s there has been a process that can be characterized as “festivalization”, which has been linked to the economic restructuring of towns and cities, and the drive to develop communities as large-scale platforms for the creation and consumption of “cultural experience.”

The success rate for festivals should not be evaluated simplistically solely on the basis of profit (sales), prestige (media profile), size (numbers of events). Research by the European Festival Research Project indicates there is evidence of local and city government supporting and even instigating and managing particular festivals themselves to achieve local or regional economic objectives, often defined very narrowly (sales, jobs, tourists).²⁷ There are also a growing number of smaller, more local, community-based festivals and events in communities, most often supported by local councils that have been spawned partly as a reaction to larger festivals that have become prime economic-drivers. These community-based festivals often will reclaim cultural ground based on their social, educational, and participative value.²⁸

²⁴ Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*, Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 2005.

²⁵ “What is the Nature Explore Program,” http://www.arborday.org/explore/documents/NE_FAQ_002.pdf, accessed August 12, 2012.

²⁶ Scott D. Simpson, *How to Raise a Wild Child: The Art and Science of Falling in Love with Nature*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Connecticut, N.Y., 2015.

²⁷ EFRP is an international consortium seeking to understand the current explosion of festivals and its implications and perspective. <http://www.efa-aef.eu/en/activities/efrp/>, accessed October 2012.

²⁸ Ben Janeczko, Trevor Mules, Brent Ritchie, “Estimating the Economic Impacts of Festivals and Events: A Research Guide,” Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Tourism, 2002, <http://www.sustainabletourisonline.com/1005/events/estimating-the-economic-impacts-of-festivals-and-events-a-research-guide>, accessed 10/12.

In 2014, festivals grew in popularity as economic drivers and urban brand builders. Chad Kaydo describes the phenomenon in the January 2014 issue of *Governing Magazine*: “Municipal officials and entrepreneurs see the power of cultural festivals, innovation-focused business conferences and the like as a way to spur short-term tourism while shaping an image of the host city as a cool, dynamic location where companies and citizens in modern, creative industries can thrive”.²⁹

National Facility Trends

According to *Recreation Management’s* State of the Industry Report, national trends show an increased user-base of recreation facilities (private and public).³⁰ Additionally, parks and recreation providers responding to the survey indicated an average age of 32.6 years for their community recreation facilities. To meet that growing need, a majority of the parks and recreation survey respondents reported that they have plans to build new facilities or make additions or renovations to their existing facilities over the next three years. Nearly one-third of parks respondents said they have plans to build new facilities, and 28.6% said they plan to add to their existing facilities. More than half are planning renovations to existing facilities.

According to the 2016 State of the Industry Report, the average amount planned for parks and recreation department construction in the 2016 budgets saw an decrease from an average of \$4,024,000 in the previous year's survey to an average of \$3,880,000 for 2016. Currently the most likely features included in park facilities are playgrounds, park shelters, restroom structures, walking and hiking trails, open spaces, gardens and natural areas, bleachers and seating, outdoor sports courts, natural turf sports fields, concession areas, and classrooms/meeting rooms.

The top 10 amenities listed by parks respondents were:

1. Playgrounds (83.7 percent)
2. Park shelters (83.5 percent)
3. Park restrooms (77.3 percent)
4. Outdoor sports courts (70.9 percent)
5. Community centers (55.5 percent)
6. Bike trails (50.1 percent)
7. Skateparks (41 percent)
8. Dog parks (34.8 percent)
9. Community gardens (32.9 percent)
10. Disc golf courses (31.4 percent)

Aquatics/ Water Recreation Trends

According to the National Sporting Goods Association, swimming ranked third nationwide in terms of participation in 2014³¹. Outdoor swimming pools are not typically heated and open year-round. Swimming for fitness is the top aspirational activity for “inactives” in six of eight age categories in the Sports & Fitness Industry Association 2013 *Sports, Fitness and Leisure Activities Topline Participation Report*, representing a significant opportunity to engage

²⁹ Chad Kaydo, “Cities Create Music, Cultural Festivals to Make Money,” *Governing*, January 2014, <http://www.governing.com/topics/finance/gov-cities-create-mucis-festivals.html>.

³⁰ Emily Tipping, “2016 State of the Industry Report, State of the Managed Recreation Industry,” *Recreation Management*, 6/16.

³¹ “2014 Participation – Ranked by Total,” National Sporting Goods Association, 2014.

inactive populations. Nationally, there is an increasing trend towards indoor leisure and therapeutic pools.

Additional indoor and outdoor amenities like “spray pads” are becoming increasingly popular as well. In some cities and counties spray pools are popular in the summer months and turn into ice rinks in the winter months. In this maturing market, communities are looking for atmosphere, an extension of surroundings either natural or built. Communities are also concerned about water quality and well as conservation. Interactive fountains are a popular alternative, ADA-compliant and low maintenance. Trends in architectural design for splash parks can be found in *Recreation Management* articles in 2014 and 2015³².

Trails & Multi-use Pathways

Trails continue to be of interest of non-motorized athletic and providing a connected system of trails increases the level of physical activity in a community has been scientifically demonstrated through the Trails for Health initiative of the Center for Disease Control³³. Trails can provide a wide variety of opportunities for being physically active, such as walking, running, hiking, wheelchair recreation, bicycling, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. Recognizing that active use of trails for positive health outcomes is an excellent way to encourage people to adopt healthy lifestyle changes; American Trails has launched a “Health and Trails” resource at www.americantrails.org/resources/benefits.

Additional Economic and Health Benefits of Parks

There are numerous economic and health benefits of parks, including the following: Trails, parks, and playgrounds are among the five most important community amenities considered when selecting a home.

Research from the University of Illinois shows that trees, parks, and green spaces have a profound impact on people’s health and mental outlook.³⁴ U.S. Forest Service research indicates that when the economic benefits produced by trees are assessed, the total value can be two to six times the cost for tree planting and care.³⁵ Fifty percent of Americans regard outdoor activities as their main source of exercise.³⁶

The Benefits of Parks: Why America Needs More City Parks and Open Space, a report from the Trust for Public Land, makes the following observations about the health, economic, environmental, and social benefits of parks and open space³⁷:

- Physical activity makes people healthier.
- Physical activity increases with access to parks.
- Contact with the natural world improves physical and physiological health.
- Residential and commercial property values increase.
- Value is added to community and economic development sustainability.

³² Dawn Klingensmith “Make a splash: Spraygrounds Get (Even More) Creative”, *Recreation Management*, April 2014 (and April 2015 updates). (http://recmanagement.com/feature_print.php?fid=201404fe01).

³³ “Guide to Community Preventive Services” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), <http://www.thecommunityguide.org/index.html>

³⁴ F.E. Kuo, “Environment and Crime in the Inner City: Does Vegetation Reduce Crime?,” *Environment and Behavior*, Volume 33, p. 343-367.

³⁵ Nowak, David J., “Benefits of Community Trees,” (Brooklyn Trees, USDA Forest Serv. Tech. Rpt, in review).

³⁶ *Outdoor Recreation Participation Report 2010*, Outdoor Foundation, 2010.

³⁷ Paul M. Sherer, “The Benefits of Parks: Why America Needs More City Parks and Open Space,” The Trust for Public Land, San Francisco, CA, 2006.

- Benefits of tourism are enhanced.
- Trees are effective in improving air quality and act as natural air conditioners.
- Trees assist with storm water control and erosion.
- Crime and juvenile delinquency are reduced.
- Recreational opportunities for all ages are provided.
- Stable neighborhoods and strong communities are created.

Researchers have long touted the benefits of outdoor exercise. According to a study published in the *Journal of Environmental Science and Technology* by the University of Essex in the United Kingdom, “as little as five minutes of green exercise improves both mood and self-esteem”.³⁸ A new trend started in China as they prepared to host the 2008 Summer Olympics. Their aim was to promote a society that promotes physical fitness and reaps the benefits of outdoor exercise by working out on outdoor fitness equipment.

The United States is now catching up on this trend, as parks and recreation departments have begun installing “outdoor gyms.” Equipment that can be found in these outdoor gyms is comparable to what would be found in an indoor workout facility, such as leg and chest presses, elliptical trainers, pull down trainers, etc. With no additional equipment such as weights and resistance bands, the equipment is fairly easy to install. Outdoor fitness equipment provides a new opportunity for parks and recreation departments to increase the health of their communities, while offering them the opportunity to exercise outdoors. Such equipment can increase the usage of parks, trails, and other outdoor amenities while helping to fight the obesity epidemic and increase the community’s interaction with nature.

Role and Response of Parks

Collectively, these trends have created profound implications for the way parks operators conduct business. Some park entities are now accepting the role of providing preventative health care through parks and recreation services. While discussing public sector providers, the following concepts are from the International County/ County Management Association and apply equally to non-profit providers as well³⁹.

Parks and recreation departments should take the lead in developing communities conducive to active living.

There is growing support for recreation programs that encourage active living and increase social equity within their community.

Effective outreach strategies include cost recreation programming and the dissemination of translated educational materials at, cultural festivals, community events, and neighborhood meetings.

In summary, the United States, its states, and its communities share the enormous task of reducing the health and economic burden of obesity. While numerous programs, policies, and products have been designed to address the problem, there is no magic bullet to make it go away. The role of parks and recreation as a health promotion and prevention

³⁸ Cited in: Sally Russell, “Nature Break: Five Minutes of Green Nurture,” Green Nurture Blog, <http://blog.greennurture.com/tag/journal-of-environmental-science-and-technology>, accessed 10/12.

³⁹ “Increasing Social Equity through Parks and Recreation” <https://icma.org/blog-posts/increasing-social-equity-through-parks-and-recreation>, accessed July, 2017.

organization has come of age. What matters is refocusing its efforts to insure the health, well-being, and economic prosperity of communities and citizens.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Compliance

On September 14, 2010, the U.S. Department of Justice issued an amended regulation implementing the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA 2010 Standards) and, for the first time, the regulations were expanded to include recreation environment design requirements.⁴⁰ Covered entities were to be compliant with design and construction requirements and the development of three-year transition plan by March 15, 2012.

Funding

According to *Recreation Management Magazine's* 2016 State of the Industry Report, survey respondents from parks and recreation departments/districts reporting about their revenues have mostly reported increasing revenues, year over year, since 2010. From 2014 to 2015, 44.1% of respondents reported that their revenues had either had increased and another 44.7% reported revenues staying steady. About 48.3 percent of respondents said they expected revenues to continue to increase in 2017, while 47% expected no change.

Marketing by Parks and Recreation Providers

The concept of marketing is rapidly evolving with the changing of technology and social media outlets. Every successful business from start-ups to corporations uses some form of marketing to promote their products and services. For parks and recreation, it can be difficult to stay current with the trends when the "formula for success" hasn't yet been defined for non-profits and governments.

Municipalities can use marketing to increase awareness of an issue, promote an upcoming program, encourage community participation, or to gain advocacy for a public service. Active Network offers expertise in activity and participation management. Their mission is to make the world a more active place. In their blog, they offered the following marketing mix ideas which came out of a meeting with park and recreational professionals in the Chicago area.⁴¹

- Updated booths and community event presence - Bring a tablet or laptop to show programs you offer and provide event participants the opportunity to register on the spot.
- Facebook redirect app - This application redirects people automatically to the link you provide. Add it to your Facebook page.
- Instagram challenge - Think about how you can use mobile and social tools at your next event. It could be an Instagram contest during an event set up as a scavenger hunt with participants taking pictures of clues and posting them on Instagram.
- Social media coupons - Research indicates that the top reason people follow an organization on a social network is to receive discounts or coupons. Consider

⁴⁰ U.S. Department of Justice, Americans with Disabilities Act, ADA Home Page, <http://www.ada.gov/>, accessed 7/2017.

⁴⁰ Emily Tipping, "2016 State of the Industry Report, Trends in Parks and Recreation," *Recreation Management*, 7/2016.

⁴¹<http://www.activenetwork.com/blog/17-marketing-campaigns-parks-and-recreation-marketing/>, May 2013, accessed February 26, 2015.

posting an event discount on your social networks redeemable by accessing on phone or printing out.

- Mobile marketing is a growing trend - Social websites and apps are among the most used features on mobile phones. Popular social marketing electronic tools include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn. Private messaging apps such as Snapchat and WhatsApp are being used more and more for live media coverage.⁴²

According to the Pew Research Center, ninety –five percent of Americans own a cell phone and most use the devices for much more than phone calls. Young adults engage in mobile data applications at much higher rates than adults in age brackets 30 and older. Usage rates of mobile applications demonstrate chronologically across four major age cohorts that millennials tend to get information more frequently using mobile devices such as smartphones.

A wide range of demographic groups own cell phones (94% of African Americans, 98% of Hispanics own a cell phone, and 94% of Whites). A growing number of Americans use their smartphones as a primary method of accessing the internet, even at home.⁴³ In 2016, reliance on smartphones for online access was common among 23 % of Hispanics, 15 % of African Americans, and 9 % of whites.

SECTION 4: RECOMMENDATIONS & ACTION PLAN

Although Canton has great parks and recreational facilities which are well maintained, there are multiple recommendations to further improve the Park system. The following recommendations and action items are drawn from the public input, inventory, findings feedback, and all the information gathered during the planning process, with a primary focus on maintaining, sustaining, and improving Canton’s Parks.

During the stakeholder input process and development of recommendations were prepared, several reoccurring themes emerged:

1. Acquired property should be developed wisely with recognition of future needs for open space in the community.
2. Expand opportunities for varied multi-generational/ gender-inclusive recreational activities (walking/ biking/ yoga/ classes)
3. Improve accessibility at all sites.
4. Expand connections to existing multi-modal trail systems and consider developing new trails in areas where gaps exist between parks.
5. Provide access to the Farmington River (on land and on water).
6. Construction of new recreation facilities and athletic fields to accommodate growing recreation demands.
7. Determine cost-effective maintenance & enhancement solutions for existing facilities

⁴² Jacqueline Woerner, “The 7 Social Media Trends Dominating 2015,” Emarsys Blog, <http://www.emarsys.com/en/resources/blog/the-7-social-media-trends-dominating-2015/>, accessed 2/15.

⁴³ “Mobile Fact Sheet,” Pew Research Center Internet & Technology January, 12, 2017, <http://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/mobile/>, accessed 7/17.

8. If park spaces become acquired for other Town uses, additional facilities of equal or greater capacity and quality should be provided within the Town to meet the current and future demand of the Town.

Each of the recommendations are separated into three categories:

- A. Administration/ Operations
- B. Programming
- C. Facilities

The improvements have been classified as near-term (0-2 years), mid-term (3-5 years), long-term (5-10 years) or on-going for implementation.

Note: The following does not include alternative service provider programs or facilities, rather these recommendations are for programs and facilities owned and operated by the Town of Canton Parks and Recreation Department. As a result, many recreation programs and organized sports within the Town of Canton utilize and operate at various facilities throughout Town; and therefore, all recommendations and improvements should be coordinated among the various stakeholders to ensure facility improvements are properly implemented to meet demands.

It is recommended that prior to each season all organizations meet to review and discuss anticipated field use within the Town of Canton Parks and Recreation facilities, and alternative service providers. Seasonal schedules should be updated annually to enable equitable use of all parks and recreation facilities.

A. Administrative/ Operations

After considering the organizational structure and staffing assessment, the opinion of the consultant team is that staff has done a remarkable job of delivering quality service, facilities, and programs to the residents of Canton. However, in their quest for continual improvement, the following items are areas of concern requiring attention:

Staffing – Full Time Recreation Coordinator

In order to providing quality services there is a need for the creation of a full-time recreation coordinator position. The Parks and Recreation Department has significantly expanded its program and event offerings and requires an enhanced professional staff to maintain (as well as develop new opportunities to meet the changing needs in the community. This position would support the expanding programming opportunities within the Parks and Recreation Department as well as provide some administrative support of the Youth Services Bureau and the Cave.

Based on a survey conducted by Town staff, there is a strong need for an affordable after school program. This program could generate substantial revenues. Presently it is being developed as a 3 day a week program (based on the hours of the Recreation Coordinator). Additionally, there is demand/ opportunity for more adult fitness including pickle-ball which is frequently requested. In addition, expanding opportunities for teens /adults, intergenerational programming is a priority.

Many departments in communities of similar populations have full time Recreation Coordinator's in addition to the Director, Recreation Supervisor and in many cases a full time secretary. Examples

include the towns of Colchester and Haddam-Killingworth, as well as Simsbury, Farmington, Guilford, Darien and South Windsor.

Action Item: Create full-time recreation coordinator position.

Priority: Near-term

Anticipated Costs (provided by Town Staff): Additional Funds Required \$11,416

Alternate methods to provide services

In an effort to free up staff for new tasks, alternative methods to provide services should be explored. One example to be considered is to contract with food trucks to provide food service at select parks or at community events. Food trucks are becoming ubiquitous and can provide time and location flexibility as well as a variety of food offerings.

Leverage in community support and utilizing the Friends group programs to assist in ongoing maintenance efforts, should be encouraged, but not limited to, Park Ambassador programs, Natural Resources work days, and park clean-up days.

In addition, new programs for interested volunteers and outside organizations to be involved throughout the park may include:

- Master Gardeners - assist with specialty gardens/ planting areas.
- Walking Rangers - assist with walking history or specialty tours of the parks (art, nature).
- Specialty Programs - weekly educational summer seminar/ educational series (Audubon, Colleges, Universities).

Action Item: Facilitate development of new programs for interested volunteers/ outside organizations.

Priority: Mid-term

Maintenance Operations

Continue current maintenance procedures: Look for operations efficiencies in order to cost effectively maintain a high level of service. Develop and document standard maintenance and park standards to ensure means and methods of maintaining parks are retained for future staff. Existing lawn mowing procedures should be evaluated to determine if no-mow zones during certain periods of the year would be a feasible cost savings alternative.

Action Item: Evaluate maintenance operations procedures and document procedures.

Priority: On-going

Field Allocation/ Scheduling

Optimize field allocation and scheduling: Organize and facilitate a coordinated effort with Town Parks and Recreation staff, High School Athletics Department and all interested user groups to develop equitable use and schedule of all fields within the Town. Scheduling should include all Town Parks, High School fields, and potential alternative service provider facilities.

Action Item: Organize and facilitate field allocation/ schedule for all facilities.

Priority: Near-term; On-going

Marketing Strategy

The park is in active competition, not only with public parks and recreation agencies but also with every other entity vying for the public's leisure time and dollars. To that end, it must adopt a strategic marketing plan. It is no longer sufficient to passively put out information

regarding the who, what and where of your programs and hope that the public will seek you out. It is necessary to more aggressively identify who you are selling to and understand what they want, then target the marketing activities to that audience.

A successful marketing plan includes an effective community outreach plan, as well as a platform for the community's needs and desires to be heard. Listening is important. Surveys, both formal and informal, open dialogue via website and other social media, and a presence at community events for successful marketing/ community strategy.

In order to stay relevant and competitive in the marketplace, a dynamic review of the plan, its' objectives, methods, target populations and results is important.

One major platform for marketing is through the parks and recreation website. While the website is good and has recently been improved, overall marketing, and the utilization of modern methods of communication and social media (such as eblasts, tweets, etc.).

With a consistent message, an educational tool to raise awareness of the unique position of the park and its programs can be developed. This tool will also be helpful in the fundraising activities.

Action Item: Develop a coordinated Marketing Plan, enhance website and social media presence to raise awareness of the parks & recreation system and offerings.

Priority: Mid-term

B. Programming

Providing innovative programs is an on-going endeavor in order to appeal to the existing client base, as well as attracting new patrons to parks.

Educational Partnerships

In addition to partnering with local private and public schools, partnering with colleges and universities in the development of the offerings is another opportunity to increase the reach of the park beyond traditional populations.

Some programs/ user groups to be considered are as follows:

- Senior Citizen Groups
- Environmental Awareness Organizations (*Colleges/ Universities, Audubon*)
- Orienteering/ Exploration
- Master Gardner and Invasive Species Removal Groups

Action Item: Develop Educational Partnerships.

Priority: Long-term

Millennial Sports Activities

The millennial age cohort does not seek competitive sports leagues, however they seek out opportunities to keep fit and socialize. For this reason, co-ed recreational activities such as kickball, dodgeball, ultimate Frisbee and pickup softball and flag football appeal. Offering opportunity to engage in these activities in a less formal setting than league play can attract the young adult population. It will be necessary for these millennial activities to be balanced

with existing scheduling of open spaces. Additional programs/ activities that appeal to this age group are geocaching, disc golf, and scavenger hunts.

Action Item: Organize and facilitate new activities.

Priority: Long-term

Continual Evaluation of Program Offerings

Complete performance and cost benefit analysis of program offerings annually in comparison to historical data. In addition to providing new programs, existing programming should be examined and marginal programs requiring time and resources disproportionate to their return should be eliminated in favor of new programming. Programming which should be provided by an alternative services provider should be identified.

Action Item: Continue to evaluate program offerings.

Priority: On-going (annually)

Festivals/ Concerts

Continuing to offer and to expand special event programming, ethnic festivals, classic car events, and community concerts will draw additional, non-traditional customers to the park. As identified previously, the Park has increased the number of festivals/concerts throughout the park system. In an effort to increase attendance, it is recommended that the website effectively communicate when festivals can be expected, so patrons can plan ahead of time. In addition, as festivals become more regular, the potential for their natural growth increases.

Action Item: Develop special event programming strategy.

Priority: On-going

Adult Fitness Based Programming and Equipment

Many older adults maintain an active lifestyle and desire opportunities to remain fit. Providing a location for adult fitness programming and equipment can be an attraction for these individuals and will bring new customers to the park.

In a variation of the fitness trail equipment popular in years past, the current trend is to provide exercise equipment in clusters to foster socialization as well as fitness development and maintenance. Consequently, these installations appeal to older adults with active lifestyles, as well as providing opportunities for work site wellness programming for Park staff and the community. In addition, a new trend, closely aligned with outdoor exercise equipment is the provision of an adult playground.

Action Item: Provide adult fitness programming and equipment.

Priority: Near-term

Outdoor/ Nature Based Programming

Develop and expand outdoor/ nature based (hiking, mountain biking, canoe/kayaking, skiing, and nature education) programming within park areas and regional outdoor recreation facilities to meet the growing demand/ interest in such programs. Programming should be attractive to multiple user groups, and coordinated with alternative service providers/ organizations as appropriate.

Action Item: Provide/ expand outdoor/ nature based programming.

Priority: Near-term

C. Facilities

Facility improvements throughout Canton's Parks are needed at two levels: Park-wide and at Specific Locations. In addition, each of the improvements has an expected degree of importance due to current and expected conditions.

As a result, each of the improvements have been classified as near-term (0-2 years), mid-term (3-5 years), long-term (5-10 years) or on-going for implementation. In addition, each of the improvements has been classified as follows:

- **Compliance:** Improvements include audits or assessments necessary to identify needs within the park in order to comply with the latest codes/ standards.
- **Maintenance:** Improvements include repairs necessary to maintain and operate facilities to meet the current goals and objectives of the park system.
- **Upgrades/ Enhancement:** Improvements include facility modifications or rehabilitations necessary to improve efficiencies, expand programmatic offerings, comply with the latest codes/standards or introduce new park facilities without the need for a comprehensive reconstruction.
- **Comprehensive:** Improvements includes reconstruction or replacement of current park facilities to improve efficiencies, reduce financial burdens, or introduce new programmatic/ park facilities.

Each of the improvements are summarized below. Concept graphics are included in Appendix C.

Park System-wide Improvements

As the park continues to age, existing facilities will need to be replaced, rehabilitated and/ or restored.

General

- Acquired property should be developed wisely with recognition of future needs for open space in the community.
- Expand opportunities for varied multi-generational/gender-inclusive recreational activities (i.e. walking/ biking/ yoga/ classes).
- Improve accessibility at all sites.
- Expand connections to existing multi-modal trail systems and consider developing new trails in areas where gaps exist between parks.
- Provide access to the Farmington River.
- Construction of new athletic fields to accommodate growing recreation demands.
- Determine cost-effective maintenance & enhancement solutions for existing facilities.

ADA Audit/ Compliance

In order to comply with current Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA 2010 Standards), an existing facilities ADA compliance audit and transition plan is recommended. Facilities which are non-compliant should be renovated or replaced to comply with current regulations.

Action Item: Complete an ADA audit and develop a transition plan.

Priority: Near-term

Classification: Compliance

Gardens

Gardens in the park are a natural extension to the existing offerings at Canton’s Parks and provide the opportunity to enhance the experience for existing visitors and clients and attract a new population of visitors to the park. It is recommended that existing planting areas be identified for community groups and new areas should be created to encourage gardeners of varying interests.

Native landscaped gardens would be a natural addition to the Canton’s parks. Specific gardens may include butterfly gardens, rose gardens, wildflower meadows, or native plant shade gardens at visible locations and/or memorials. Gardens can provide locations for bridal party photography, engagement photography and even a site for ceremonies. Recommendations for gardens are further described within this plan.

Action Item: Develop a plan for new garden areas with volunteer interest groups.
Priority: Long-term *Classification: Upgrade/ Enhancement*

Signage

All park signs throughout the park system should consistently illustrate the Park brand and identity. Existing signs within the park should be classified as wayfinding, informational, directional, interpretative, regulatory or warning. In addition, all signs should be compliant with the latest standards and guidelines.

Action Item: Evaluate and replace park signs with latest standards and branding.
Priority: Long-term *Classification: Compliance*

Tennis/ Basketball Court Lighting Controls

Presently the tennis and basketball court lighting systems are operated on a schedule that requires the Parks Supervisor to re-set on a regular basis throughout the year. The lights are on during a set period of time regardless of whether or not anyone is on the courts or not. A remote controller that would allow users to activate the light system is recommended.

Action Item: Upgrade tennis/basketball court lighting controls.
Priority: Long-term *Classification: Upgrade/ Enhancement*
Anticipated Costs (provided by Town Staff): \$15,000

Town-wide Trails Master Plan

There are multiple trails that extend through the town on Parklands, and non-profit properties. A coordinated effort to develop a town-wide trails master plan should be developed to inform users of the existing trail network and potential trail connections to further enhance the growing interest in trails throughout the Town. The trail plan should include developing a coordinated trail identification and directional signage program. All signs should be compliant with the latest standards and guidelines.

Action Item: Develop town-wide trails master plan.
Priority: Near-term *Classification: Comprehensive*

Specific Facility Improvements

Bicentennial Park

Park Master Plan: Develop a master plan of the DPW facility and Bicentennial Park. As a part of the master plan, identify facilities which may need to be removed and relocated from the park area due to the DPW facility expansion.

Action Item: Park Master Plan

Priority: Long-term

Classification: Comprehensive

Accessibility Improvements: Improvements to accessibility in the parking lot and the installation of accessible benches and picnic tables.

Action Item: Accessibility improvements

Priority: Mid-term

Classification: Compliance

Facility Improvements: Improvements to softball field, develop restroom facilities for users of park area and river trail. Evaluate potential for seasonal ice rink at this location.

Action Item: Facility Improvements

Priority: Long-term

Classification: Upgrade/ Enhancement

Trailhead: Create a trailhead with a parking area and access to the Farmington River Trail. This improvement would be located at the main parking lot at Bicentennial Park. Installation of a water fountain would be welcomed by bicyclists, runners, and park visitors.

Action Item: Develop a trailhead at Bicentennial Park.

Priority: Mid-term

Classification: Upgrade/ Enhancement

Boating/ Kayak Launch: The site is ideally situated for the development of a boating/kayak launch along the Farmington River. Potential paddle share rental location should be considered.

Action Item: Develop a boating/ kayak launch

Priority: Mid-term

Classification: Upgrade/ Enhancement

Anticipated Costs (provided by Town Staff): \$340,000

Park Sign: Construction of an entrance sign directing users into park facility to reduce confusion with DPW facility.

Action Item: Park Sign

Priority: Long-term

Classification: Upgrade/ Enhancement

Bowdoin Field:

Accessibility Improvements: Improvements to accessibility in the parking lot and the installation of accessible benches, bleachers, picnic tables, and bathroom facility (*one porta-john is currently provided*).

Action Item: Accessibility improvements

Priority: Mid-term

Classification: Compliance

Facility Improvements: A warning track along the inside perimeter of the fence. Installation of a bike rack. Repairs to storage shed. Upgrade existing bleachers/ dugouts/ storage.

Action Item: Facility Improvements

Priority: Long-term

Classification: Upgrade/ Enhancement

Park Sign: Construction of an entrance sign along Simonds Avenue.

Action Item: Park Sign

Priority: Long-term

Classification: Upgrade/ Enhancement

Community Garden:

Facility/ Accessibility Improvements: Providing accessibility for all patrons through the construction of paths, designated parking, and appropriate benches, picnic tables, and garden amenities.

Action Item: Accessibility improvements

Priority: Near-term

Classification: Compliance

Dyer Field:

Park Master Plan: Develop a park master plan, including the potential impacts of the expansion of the Firehouse.

Action Item: Park Master Plan

Priority: Long-term

Classification: Comprehensive

Accessibility Improvements: Parking and park amenities, including accessible pathway to fields, handicap parking signage, seating, bathroom upgrades, and accessible picnic areas.

Action Item: Accessibility improvements

Priority: Near-term

Classification: Compliance

Facility Improvements: Park amenities improvements, including updated bicycle rack, and water fountains. Provide water service if currently not available. Repair parking lot and drainage conditions. Improve site security lighting. Provide multi-modal connection to Farmington River Trail.

Action Item: Facility improvements

Priority: Long-term

Classification: Upgrade/ Enhancement

Tree Evaluation/ Protection: The trees in the buffer between Dyer Field and River Road are suffering from a pest condition and should be evaluated by a certified arborist to determine if the trees can be preserved.

Action Item: Tree Evaluation/ Protection

Priority: Near-term

Classification: Maintenance

Dugout Cleaning: There is some evidence of vandalism in the dugouts, which should be cleaned and painted.

Action Item: Dugout Cleaning

Priority: Near-term

Classification: Maintenance

Park Sign: Construction of an entrance sign along Dyer Avenue.

Action Item: Park Sign

Priority: Long-term

Classification: Upgrade/ Enhancement

Lawton Road Recreation Complex

The Lawton Road Recreation Complex (55 Lawton Road) remains a longstanding priority of the Department and Parks and Recreation Commission. The need for additional field space as outlined in this master plan remains strong today as ever. Planning and land use approvals have been completed for additional recreational field space on the Town owned parcel. This particular site is one of the only Town owned sites that is conducive to active recreational development.

Action Item: Develop Lawton Road Recreation Complex.

Priority: Long-term

Classification: Upgrade/ Enhancement

Facility Improvements: Improvements to the softball and baseball fields, dugout repairs, backstop repairs, replacement of existing benches and picnic tables with fully accessible site furnishings. Improve site security lighting. Expand parking area to accommodate additional improvements as necessary. Provide landscape/ garden/ memorial areas.

Action Item: Facility improvements

Priority: Long-term

Classification: Upgrade/ Enhancement

Trail/ Pathway Network: Provide trail/pathway network within the park area with boardwalk system, and provide connection to nature areas and neighborhood. Pathway within nature areas should include interpretative signage.

Action Item: Trail/ Pathway Network

Priority: Mid-term

Classification: Upgrade/ Enhancement

Parking Lot: Restoration of the parking lot to correct drainage issues and to improve ADA accessible parking accommodations.

Action Item: Parking lot restoration

Priority: Near-term

Classification: Maintenance

Pool Repairs: The Mills Pond Park pool is in need of regular maintenance and repair. As a result, it is recommended that the pool basin/ marcite be replaced to reduce ongoing maintenance of the pool. Note: The entire pump house and mechanical/ filter system equipment was replaced a few years ago.

Action Item: Pool repairs

Priority: Near-term

Classification: Maintenance

Anticipated Costs (provided by Town Staff): \$75,000

Splash Pad: Convert shallow pool to a splash pad.

Action Item: Conversion of shallow pool to splash pad

Priority: Near-term

Classification: Upgrade/ Enhancement

Pool Area Improvements: Additional shade structures within the pool area are recommended.

Action Item: Install shade structures within pool area.

Priority: Long-term

Classification: Upgrade/ Enhancement

van Gemenen Field (formerly Millennium Field)

Accessibility Improvements: Accessible pathway to fields, handicap parking signage, seating, concession building, and accessible picnic areas.

Action Item: Accessibility improvements

Priority: Near-term

Classification: Compliance

Facility Improvements: Minor repairs to dugouts, fencing and batting cages. Tree planting to provide shade for patrons and improve park aesthetics. Provide shade pavilion and plaza area near restrooms and concession building.

Action Item: Facility improvements

Priority: Long-term

Classification: Upgrade/ Enhancement

Parking Lot Improvements: Resurfacing of parking lot.

Action Item: Parking Lot resurfacing.

Priority: near-term

Classification: Maintenance

Trail/ Pathway Network: Provide trail/pathway network within the park area, and provide connection to Mills Pond Park and High School.

Action Item: Trail/ Pathway Network

Priority: Long-term

Classification: Upgrade/ Enhancement

Playground and garden area: Develop inclusive playground and garden area for younger users and families attending ballfields.

Action Item: Develop playground and garden area

Priority: Long-term

Classification: Upgrade/ Enhancement

APPENDIX

A - Community Input Results

B – Existing Facility Inventory & Maps

C – Concept Plans

D – Findings & Recommendations Presentation

