

## Section 2: Introduction

### Statement of Purpose

#### Why was this Plan Update Written?

The City of Gloucester's 2022 Open Space and Recreation Plan continues the work of previous open space plans completed by the City, updating and replacing the most recent version produced in 2011. This document will serve to guide the City's decision making around open space and recreation planning and implementation, including spending, for the next seven years. The Plan is designed to provide clearly defined open space and recreation priorities and goals, developed through a participatory public process, to ensure that the needs of residents and the community are met.

The Open Space and Recreation Committee was formulated to create and implement an Open Space and Recreation Plan for the City which will:

1. Ensure the existence, smart use, and access to open space in perpetuity
2. Ensure that contiguous areas, functions, and values that depend on them are maintained
3. Propose a process for agreements with abutters with shared use/conservation interests for enhancing open space
4. Recommend planned City growth and business development in a way that fully contemplates and strives to maintain the functions, values, uses, and vision for open space in Gloucester
5. Establish a criteria and process for ceding open space to development or dedicated use
6. Promote awareness and use of open spaces through a descriptive inventory of open spaces

This 2022 Plan Update has been compiled in accordance with the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA), Division of Conservation Services (DCS) requirements and guidelines. In order to be eligible for state and federal grant aid offered through the EOAA, an approved Open Space and Recreation Plan is required.

## Planning Process and Public Participation <sup>1</sup>

The City of Gloucester supported the development of this plan through the work of the Open Space and Recreation Committee. The members of the Open Space and Recreation Committee are listed below:

- Heidi Wakeman, Chair
- Noel Mann
- Daniel Morris
- Dave Sargent
- Mark Poulin
- Liam Anastasia-Murphy
- Richard Quateman

During this Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) process, the Open Space and Recreation Committee (OSRC), whose members represent the open space stakeholders in Gloucester, met regularly with Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) staff to review and contribute to elements of the plan and assist with community engagement.

### Virtual Community Forums and Open House

In cooperation with the OSRC, MAPC organized and hosted two virtual community forums, on April 26, 2021, and April 27, 2022. Due to the coronavirus pandemic and public health concerns, an in-person forum was not possible. Instead, using Zoom's teleconferencing platform and Qualtrics' online surveying software, MAPC staff created a virtual meeting space mirroring a traditional open house format. Recordings of the virtual meetings and copies of the meeting presentation were posted online to allow residents who could not attend the live sessions to view content and provide feedback at their convenience. Leading up to the community forums, the City of Gloucester and MAPC did outreach to spread the word about the event. Information about the forums and the OSRP Community Survey, was distributed through the following means:

- City of Gloucester website
- Press releases to local newspapers
- Social media
- Blogs
- E-blasts
- Flyers (Digital & Print)
- Individual outreach to nonprofits and community groups
- Individual outreach to recreation stakeholders and members of the community at large

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<sup>1</sup> Full documentation of the feedback collected through the various public participation strategies described in this section is included in Appendixes.

The first forum, which over 40 residents attended, was held on April 26, 2021, and started with an interactive presentation and live Q&A session via Zoom. The purpose of the first forum and open house was to introduce the OSRP planning process and gain insight into the community's open space and recreation use, goals, and needs. Immediately following the presentation, participants were invited to visit the Virtual Open House where they could:

- Review informational content about the plan
- Review goals from the previous plan and suggest new goals for the 2022 OSRP update
- Provide input on current strengths, deficiencies, opportunities, and challenges in Gloucester's parks, open spaces, and recreational facilities
- Provide feedback on park and open space use and priorities

Community feedback gathered from the Virtual Open House was used to help evaluate what the City should prioritize as it invests in its parks and open space, e.g., *Acquire land or partner with conservation organizations to preserve land for conservation purposes, Maintain existing parks and facilities, and Plan for climate change and sea-level rise*. Key priorities that emerged from the Virtual Open House responses included:

- Improve access to parks and facilities through trails, sidewalks, bike lanes, and safer crossings
- Maintain existing parks and facilities
- Acquire land for conservation purposes (e.g., wildlife habitat and water supply protection)
- Acquire lands for protection of areas from storm surge and sea-level rise
- Acquire land for parks and facilities in areas that lack parkland

The City and the OSRC hosted a second virtual community forum on April 27, 2022, which over 30 residents attended. During the meeting, MAPC, City staff, and the OSRP Committee presented the 2022 OSRP goals and discussed the objectives outlined in the 2022 Draft Seven Year Action Plan. In addition, participants at the forum asked questions, shared ideas, and offered insightful comments on the draft Seven Year Action Plan. A Working Draft of the 2022 OSRP was posted on the City's website and circulated for public review on May 12, 2022.

### **OSRP Community Survey**

Gloucester residents and other open space stakeholders also had the opportunity to communicate their opinions and preferences through a citywide online survey, administered from July 2, 2021, through August 6, 2021.

The survey allowed for open-ended comments and was designed to help measure and evaluate respondents satisfaction with the City's current park, open space, and recreation offerings; how frequently respondents visited particular park and open space properties; what factors limit their utilization of open space and recreation amenities; and the types of programs and amenities they would like to see in the future.

Notably, respondents under the age of 29 were not represented. Only 3% of respondents were between 21 and 29, and less than 1% of respondents were under 20. Given that 53% of respondents were over 60 years old, the survey results must be interpreted as skewing towards the preferences of this older demographic. Further exploration of the preferences of youth and young adults has been emphasized in subsequent public engagement efforts. Information and results from the survey were shared with the OSRC and used to inform reporting of Gloucester’s community needs and priorities in Section 7.

## Enhanced Outreach and Public Participation

The Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) and other state agencies have been implementing an Environmental Justice (EJ) Policy since 2002 to help ensure that all Massachusetts residents experience equal protection and meaningful involvement with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies and the equitable distribution of environmental benefits. This policy was instituted because the Commonwealth realized that low to moderate income residents in densely populated older industrial areas often lack open space and recreation resources and may live near old, abandoned, and/or contaminated sites that can pose risks to public health and the environment.

Environmental justice is an integral consideration in all EOEEA programs, to the extent applicable and allowable by law. The Environmental Justice Executive Order No. 552 requires Secretariats to take action in promoting environmental justice. The Executive Order requires new environmental justice strategies that promote positive impacts in EJ communities.

For example, EOEEA has now amended the PARC and LAND program regulations to incorporate environmental justice in the award scoring system. Similarly, the Division of Ecological Restoration and the Massachusetts Environmental Trust will work with EOEEA to develop systems for incorporating environmental justice as a criterion for awarding grants. The EOEEA also has determined to target its resources to more effectively create, restore, and maintain open spaces located in neighborhoods where EJ populations reside.

Gloucester is one of 137 communities in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts that includes an EJ population. The most recent analysis completed by MassGIS (Bureau of Geographic Information), using data from the 2020 Census, identifies 9 block groups within Gloucester that meet one or more of the environmental justice criteria, respective of minority population and income. These areas are generally located in central Gloucester, south of Route 128 in Wards 2 and 3. A map of the Environmental Justice block groups in Gloucester is included in Section 3: Community Context.

To specifically engage Gloucester's Environmental Justice populations, MAPC partnered with two organizations that serve, or whose membership is composed of, low-income or minority residents or residents who speak languages other than English. Organizations engaged through focus groups include the Wellspring House and the Gloucester Racial Justice Team. Interpreters were available at both focus groups for Spanish and Portuguese speakers. These conversations focused on creating safer and more welcoming environments in Gloucester and addressed ways in which the City can better serve its Environmental Justice populations in terms of communication and access to open space facilities and programming.