

Section 7: Analysis of Needs

Community Needs

Immediately following the first OSRP community forum, participants were invited to review forum materials and meeting content online and to provide input on OSRP goals. Over 800 respondents provided feedback using the online OSRP Community Survey. Participants were also asked to rank the importance of a variety of open space and recreation priorities. The top priorities that emerged are listed in **Figure 24**. These priorities helped establish overall goals and objectives for the OSRP.

Figure 24: OSRP Open House Priorities

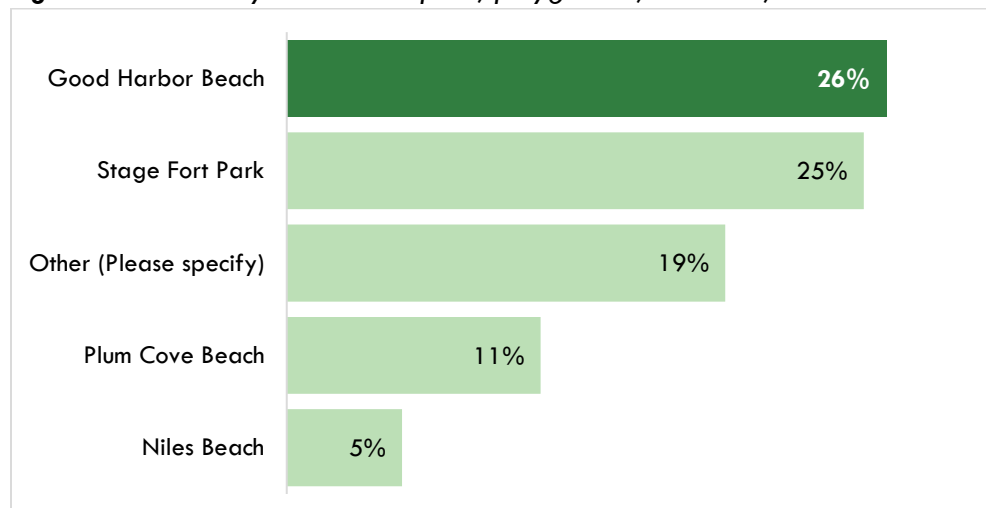
As Gloucester invests in its parks and open space system, what should it prioritize?	
<i>(Top 5 priorities)</i>	
1	Acquire land for conservation purposes (e.g., wildlife habitat and water supply protection)
2	Maintain existing parks and facilities
3	Acquire lands for protection of areas from storm surge and sea-level rise
4	Improve access to parks and facilities through trails, sidewalks, bike lanes, safer crossings
5	Acquire land for parks and facilities in areas that lack parkland

There was a strong interest in acquiring and preserving land for conservation purposes. Residents treasure having access to open spaces that support immersive nature experiences and provide vital environmental functions and benefits to the community. Another major community priority was managing and maintaining existing parks and facilities. Based on the open house and survey comments, several residents felt that maintenance should be a top priority for Gloucester's park and open space system over the next seven years. Acquiring land to mitigate the effects of climate change, installing additional walking and biking infrastructure to improve access to parks and facilities, and acquiring land for areas that lack parks and open spaces were also top priorities.

Gloucester residents are fortunate to have many recreational opportunities available to them. One key to providing quality programming is ensuring that parks, open spaces, and facilities also match community needs. The online OSRP community survey was designed to help uncover and better understand the community's recreation needs and interests. The findings of the survey are illustrated and summarized below.

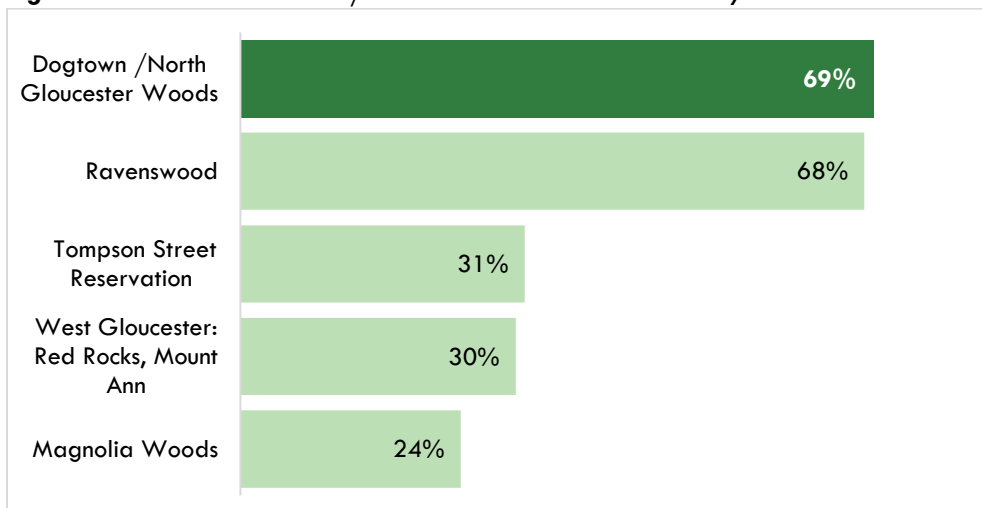
Gloucester has a rich mix of playgrounds, schoolyards, fields, beaches, and conservation areas that offer residents opportunities for a wide variety of active and passive recreation. Twenty-six percent of respondents ranked Good Harbor Beach as their favorite site among Gloucester's parks and open spaces. A close second was Stage Fort Park at 25%. Respondents enjoy visiting Good Harbor Beach for various reasons, particularly passive recreation. Walking along the beach, being in or on the water, picnicking, and enjoying nature were frequently mentioned activities. Respondents also said they enjoy participating in seasonal and special events like the Waterfront Festival at Stage Fort Park.

Figure 25: What is your favorite park, playground, ball field, or beach in Gloucester?



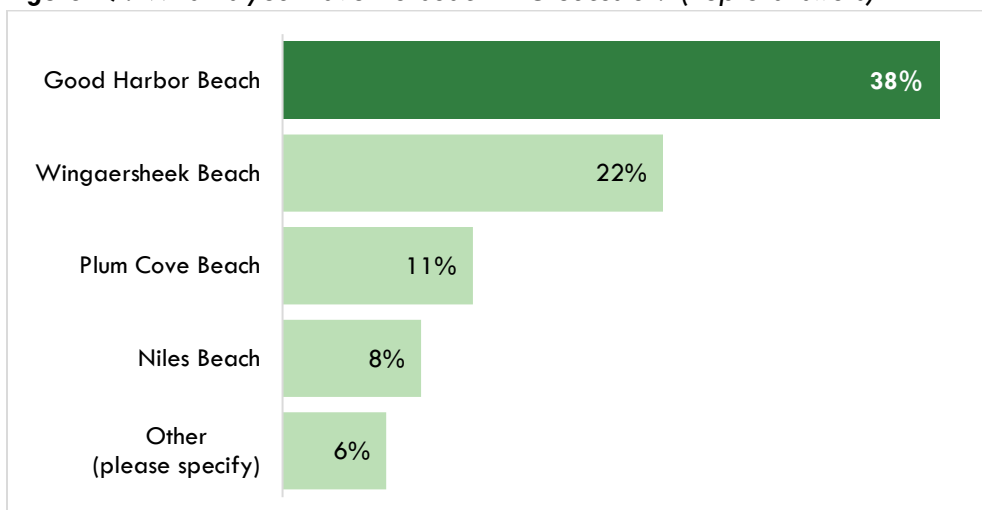
In terms of woodland and natural open space areas used for passive recreation, Dogtown/North Gloucester Woods is one of the City's most utilized and treasured sites. Ravenswood Park was also a popular passive recreation site among respondents. Residents and visitors enjoy birdwatching and hiking through the park's miles of wooded trails. Over 90% of respondents who visit Gloucester's woodland and natural open space areas were either very satisfied (29%) or satisfied (64%) with the quality of their experience. However, some respondents noted a need for better-maintained trails and trail markings, safety call boxes, and better lighting.

Figure 26: Which woodland/natural areas do members of your household visit? (Top 5 answers)



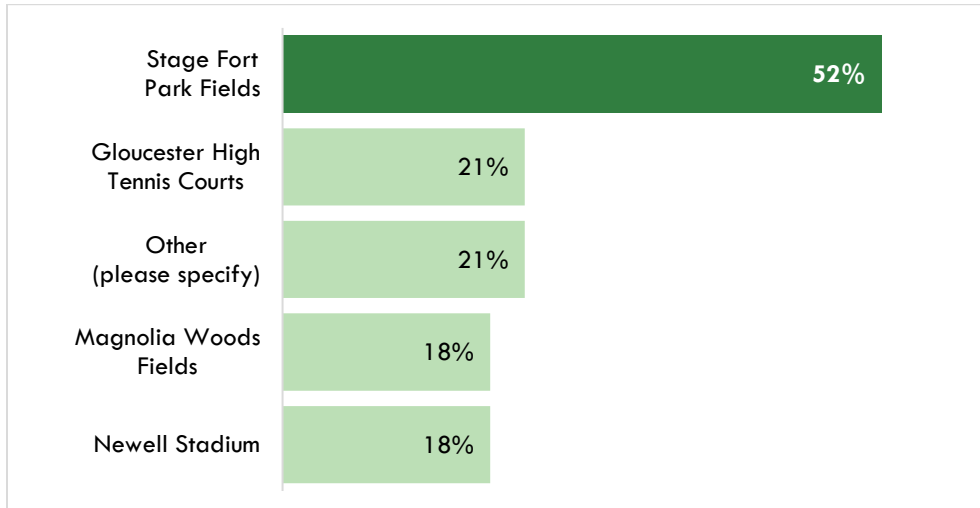
Gloucester's beaches are widely known for their scenic beauty. Good Harbor and Wingersheek beaches were among respondents' favorite destinations. Of the households that indicated that they visit Gloucester's beaches, 88% were either very satisfied (28%) or satisfied (60%) with the quality of their experience. Multiple comments from the survey expressed a need for accessibility improvements, restroom facilities, and litter collection at City beaches.

Figure 27: What is your favorite beach in Gloucester? (Top 5 answers)



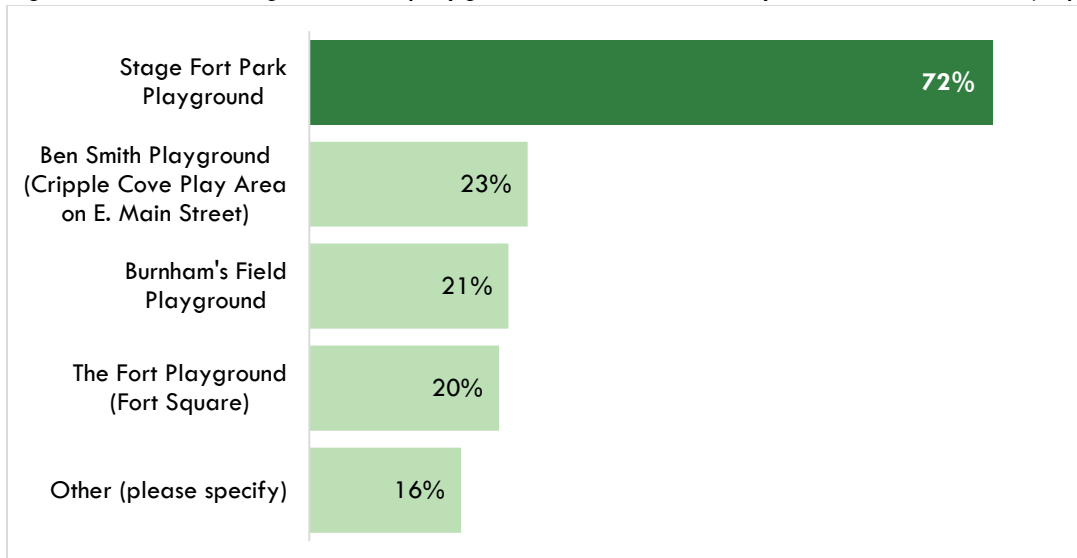
In regard to the City's active recreation facilities, the athletic fields at Stage Fort Park and the tennis courts at Gloucester High School were among the most frequently visited sites. According to the survey, 83% of respondents who visit Gloucester's playing fields, courts, and other recreation areas were either very satisfied (15%) or satisfied (68%) with the quality of their experience. Respondents did, however, express concerns about the poor condition of the tennis courts at Gloucester High School and the track and skate park at O'Maley Middle School.

Figure 28: Which playing fields, tennis, or basketball courts do members of your household use outside of school hours? (Top 5 answers)



Stage Fort Park, Ben Smith Playground, and Burnham's Field Playground were ranked among the most popular playgrounds in the City. Of the 55% of households that indicated that they visit Gloucester's playgrounds, 85% were either very satisfied (16%) or satisfied (69%) with the quality of their experience. Survey respondents did however, express concerns about the poor condition of playground equipment at Plum Cove School and Stage Fort Park.

Figure 29: Which neighborhood playgrounds do members of your household visit? (Top 5 answers)



When asked about Gloucester's park and open space system as a whole, 84% of survey respondents were either very satisfied (12%) or satisfied (72%) with the overall condition of properties. As previously mentioned, maintaining, and improving existing parks and facilities is a major priority of the community; the Action Plan in Section 9 prioritizes investments for repairs and renovations at the following parks, playgrounds and athletic facilities:

- **Parks:** Stage Fort Park, St. Peter's Park, Friend Street Playground/ Middleton Park, Head of the Harbor Park
- **Playgrounds:** East Gloucester School Field/ Parsons Playground Maxwell Parsons, Ben Smith Playground
- **Athletic Facilities:** Swinson Field, Magnolia Woods, Burnham Field, Beeman Basketball Courts, Green Street Recreation Area, O'Maley Innovation Middle School Fields, Track, and Skatepark, Gloucester High School Fields and Tennis Courts

Survey respondents were also asked a series of questions regarding park and open space amenities and recreation programs. In terms of new amenities and facilities, survey respondents would like more natural and conservation areas, bicycle and walking paths, accessible bathroom facilities, and more water access points for boating and kayaking.

Based on the survey, the top three recreation programs respondents would like to see increase in Gloucester over the next 7 years include: boating activities like sailing, kayaking, and paddle boarding (44%), gardening programs (35%), and aquatic programs including swim lessons, lifeguard training, and swim teams (33%). Other activities included: group exercise and wellness programs (26%), pickleball (21%), and cycling (21%).

Figure 30: Select up to five (5) amenities or features that you would like to see more of in Gloucester’s parks, open space, and recreation areas in the next 7 years.

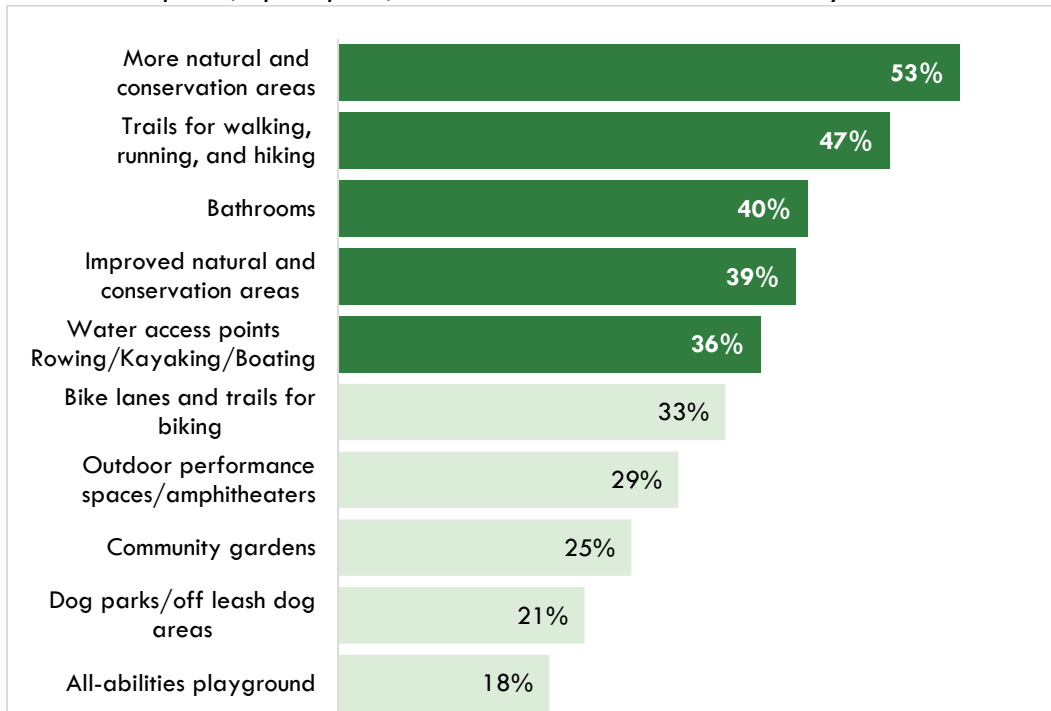
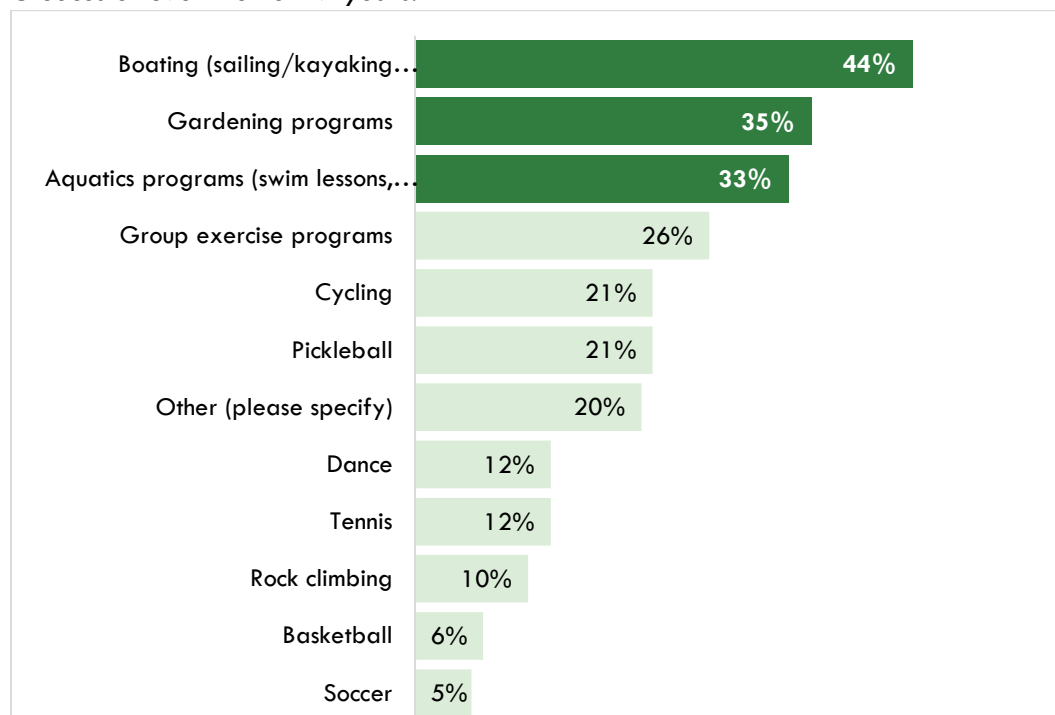


Figure 31: Select up to three (3) active/recreation programs you would like to see increase in Gloucester over the next 7 years.



Park Equity

Parks, trails, community gardens, and other urban green spaces serve as fundamental building blocks to create healthy, vibrant communities. In principle, public parks belong to everyone. In practice, access to parks and recreation areas is anything but equal. Many communities with low household incomes and communities of color have few or no green spaces, and existing parks and recreation areas may be poorly maintained, understaffed, unwelcoming, and unsafe⁴⁸. One measure of park equity is the geographic distribution of parks within a 10-minute walk of residents' homes.⁴⁹

ParkServe®, created by The Trust for Public Land (TPL), is a platform that identifies the locations and 10-minute walk service areas for all parks, playgrounds, and natural areas offering public recreational opportunities in almost 14,000 cities and towns in the US. The data platform measures 10-minute walk park access for over 80% of the US population. In Gloucester, 56% of residents are located within a 10-minute walk of a park, playground, or open space. This figure is slightly higher than the national average of 55% of residents within a 10-minute walk to a park.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Park Equity, Prevention Institute, <https://www.preventioninstitute.org/focus-areas/park-equity>

⁴⁹ National Recreation and Park Association, Trust for Public Land, Urban Land Institute. <https://www.10minutewalk.org>

⁵⁰ ParkServe® <https://www.tpl.org/city/gloucester-massachusetts>

According to an analysis performed by TPL's ParkServe®, low-income households and adults between the ages of 20-64 have the greatest access to parks in Gloucester. The Riverdale Park neighborhood and Ward 3, Precinct 2, an area with a significant concentration of residents who meet two of the criteria for environmental justice, are both considered underserved areas according to ParkServe®. Segments of Gloucester's population that would benefit from greater park access include minorities, seniors, and youth.

Many different groups in society struggle to be included in parks and recreation spaces, so it is important that Gloucester's parks and open spaces provide active, healthy, and engaging recreational opportunities for all users. In order to specifically engage the City of Gloucester's Environmental Justice populations, two focus groups were held with organizations who serve, or whose membership is composed of, minority, or non-English proficient residents. Organizations engaged through focus groups include the Wellspring House and the Gloucester Racial Justice Team. Discussions in the focus group sessions centered on which parks and open spaces attendees use most frequently, important issues they encounter while using the parks, and suggestions for how the City can improve its parks and recreation spaces and programming.

Age-Friendly Communities

In 2006 the World Health Organization began an initiative to create age-friendly communities throughout the world. While the initial goal was to address aging concerns in metropolitan and urban areas, it became clear that this ideology could be applied regardless of the size of the community. What was also quickly learned is that while addressing the needs of older adults, communities can actually create opportunities to ensure that the needs of individuals of all ages and abilities were addressed.

For the first time in the history of the Commonwealth, there are more residents over age 60 than those under age 20. In 2018, Gov. Baker designated Massachusetts as an Age-Friendly State, with the goal that all 351 communities would work towards this designation. As of 2022, there are 195 communities in Massachusetts in the process of or that have successfully acquired the age-friendly status. In 2018, the Governor also introduced this designation as an option within the Community Compact and by doing so, offered funding opportunities for those communities working towards this designation.

Of the 8 themes to be addressed as part of age-friendly initiatives, three are related to open space and recreation facilities and programs: Outdoor Spaces & Buildings, Social Participation, and Community & Health Service.

Gloucester is an active age-friendly community and a member of the Cape Ann Mass in Motion coalition, which comprises Gloucester, Rockport, Essex, and Manchester-by-the-Sea. Cape Ann Seniors on the GO is an Age Friendly Communities initiative of Cape Ann Mass in Motion. This initiative aims to increase access to healthful food and physical activity opportunities by reducing transportation barriers for at-risk older adults who reside in the four Cape Ann communities.

Overall, 24% of residents in the City are sixty five years or older. These residents need passive and active recreation parks with opportunities for games and benches for sitting. Parks need to

be located close to homes, so access is possible. In addition, Gloucester's Rose Baker Senior Center provides support services and a variety of recreational, social, educational, and health programs to older residents and their families. Programs offered through the Senior Center and Council on Aging include VNA health screenings; podiatry services; computer classes; games such as chess, Scrabble, bridge, cribbage, bingo, and activities such as yoga, Tai Chi, Zumba, enhanced fitness, Reiki, Parkinson's exercise, and swimming sessions at the YMCA.

Planning for youth and teenagers is also important to meet the needs of all residents. Nearly a third of survey respondents (32%) have someone under the age of 18 in their household. In addition, residents participating in the focus groups noted that local youth would benefit from more programmed events and recreational activities dedicated to teens. Some youth recreational programming needs are met through school and after-school sports programs, and others are met through private nonprofit leagues such as Gloucester Little League, Young Legends Street Hockey, Gloucester Youth Basketball and facilities like the YMCA of the North Shore. The recently constructed Glen T. MacLeod Cape Ann YMCA is very well-used and fosters an intergenerational culture where children, teens, young adults, families, and seniors can gather and interact.

The survey, community forums, and focus groups produced significant feedback about current community needs and interests. Across these hundreds of comments, the following themes emerged.

Cleanliness and Maintenance

Survey respondents were concerned that parks are not being adequately maintained and indicated that poor maintenance discouraged or prevented them from visiting some of the city's parks and open spaces. This includes issues around trash and recycling, athletic field and court maintenance, poor drainage, mowing, playground equipment, bathrooms, trails and tree maintenance, off-leash dog areas, and dog waste disposal.

Park and Open Space Management

Parks, open spaces, and school facilities are currently under the management of the City's Public Works Department. Several survey respondents noted that the absence of a Parks and Recreation Department in the executive organization represents the City's lack of focus and commitment for managing its parks and recreation system.

Environmental and Climate Challenges

Protection and stewardship of the City's conservation areas, waterbodies, ecological communities, and other natural resources were noted several times throughout the survey feedback. Respondents also expressed concerns about the environmental and social impacts associated with climate change and how the City's parks and open spaces can be leveraged to mitigate and adapt to these evolving conditions.

Trails and Enhanced Connectivity

Respondents expressed an interest in increasing multi-purpose trails and infrastructure for walking, hiking, and biking as well as better connectivity between parks, open space and regional greenways.

Safety

Safety is perceived as a major concern for several parks in the City. Respondents expressed concerns about the decrepit condition of the playground equipment, lighting, fencing, and the constant presence of trash, needles, and broken glass in the City's parks and open spaces. People also expressed concern about ways to address the issue of homelessness.

Improved Facility/Site Amenities

Responses on improved facility and site amenities varied from more access points for kayaking to increased parking and to additional resources for pickle ball. The lack of restrooms and trash receptacles, and the presence of litter were by far the most noted issues with parks and recreation facilities. When bathrooms were present at a site, many participants indicated that they were inaccessible or poorly maintained. Additional issues cited by respondents included rusty and dilapidated play structures and fencing, rainwater pooling within athletic field areas, a lack of seating and shaded areas and a lack of pet waste stations.

Expanded Programming and Events

Survey respondents expressed an interest in the City establishing recreational programs and services for the community. Ideas included kayaking, paddle boarding, gardening programs, extended hours for surfing, a farmers' market, outdoor yoga, Zumba classes, and more. Survey participants indicated a general need for expanded youth programming. Several respondents also expressed a desire for the city's parks and programming to be more inclusive by adding multi-generational programs and providing universal access to public spaces.

Improve System-Wide Information (Maps & Signage, Publicity & Marketing)

Several respondents commented that they wished there were an easily accessible event calendar, asset map, and user-friendly web interface they could access to get key information about programming and amenities in Gloucester's parks, open space, and recreation facilities. In addition, many respondents also note that improved signage between parks and wayfinding markers at entrances and along trails would strengthen pedestrian connectivity and help park and open space users navigate areas with safety and confidence.

Resource Protection Needs

Land and Water Resources

Gloucester has large quantities of land and water resources that require careful management and planning to ensure their long-term protection. These resources serve important functions and include priority wildlife habitat, watershed lands that supply Gloucester's drinking water, areas with large contiguous blocks of undeveloped open space, and critical areas of environmental and climate resiliency concern. The City and private trusts own over two thousand acres of permanently protected land in Gloucester. However, there are even more areas that remain threatened by development that should be considered for acquisition or further protection through conservation restrictions.

The Open Space and Recreation Committee has identified the following as areas that should be prioritized for permanent protection via conservation restrictions:

- Dogtown parcel cluster and North Gloucester Woods
- City beaches and adjacent marsh lands
- City parks and active recreation areas

The vacant parcels owned by the City of Gloucester, but not under the jurisdiction of the Conservation Commission or used for active recreation, also represent another type of resource protection. Prior to the disposal of any of these parcels, the City should consider if they have resource protection value, or if they may be suitable for future sites to bring additional geographic equity to users of parks and playgrounds.

Other sites that would benefit from increased protection include BioMap2 Core Habitat and Critical Natural Landscape areas that currently lack permanent protection. BioMap2 Core Habitat areas are critical for the long-term persistence of rare species and other Species of Conservation Concern and contain a wide diversity of natural resource communities and intact ecosystems. Most significantly, this includes parcels abutting Ravenswood Park and watershed lands in west Gloucester that contain important wildlife and habitat areas.

BioMap2 Critical Natural Landscape areas are large blocks of landscape that provide habitat for wide-ranging native species, support intact ecological processes, maintain connectivity among habitats, and enhance ecological resilience in a changing climate. In Gloucester, this includes the salt marshes abutting Good Harbor Beach, Wingersheek Beach, and along the Annisquam River. While some of this land is permanently protected, the City of Gloucester should consider acquiring additional adjacent areas that remain unprotected. Salt marshes are considered one of the most productive ecosystems on Earth and have proven to be an effective defense against coastal waves and high-water levels as the marsh plants reduce the energy of water as it flows through and around them.⁵¹

⁵¹ "Salt marsh plants key to reducing coastal erosion and flooding" (2014, University of Cambridge, <http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/salt-marsh-plants-key-to-reducing-coastal-erosion-and-flooding>)

Impacts of Climate Change

Our warming climate is bringing changes in temperature, precipitation patterns, and sea level. We will also experience more frequent weather extremes including heat waves, droughts, and severe storms. These changes will have wide-ranging impacts in Gloucester across natural resources, public health, infrastructure, and the economy. Approximately 65% of OSRP survey respondents said they were "extremely concerned" about climate change and the erosion of Gloucester's land base. Coastal flooding was ranked as the highest concern among respondents in terms of projected climate impacts.

The "2018 Gloucester Community Resilience Building Workshop Summary of Findings" identifies stakeholders' highest priority concerns about local climate change impacts. The top recommendations to improve resilience include:

- Watershed protection and forest management to address health of trees and pests and invasive species.
- Developing a citywide beach management plan that lays out dune and beach grass protection strategies.
- Streamlined permitting in support of allowing increased water flow in and out of the City's salt marshes to reclaim wetlands and marshes.

Parks, open space, and nature-based solutions such as green infrastructure can help to mitigate the impacts of climate change. Green infrastructure is a mechanism in which natural systems replicate engineered solutions to manage flooding, stormwater, extreme heat and other climate impacts. It is a cost-effective way to create climate resilience that also achieves multiple benefits of beautification, improvement of air quality and water quality, and community cohesion.

Some examples include raingardens, bioswales, pervious paving and bio-infiltration. "Nature-based Solutions" is defined by the International Union of Concerned Scientists (IUCN) as "actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural or modified ecosystems, which address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits." Examples of nature-based solutions include green infrastructure as well as protected land/open space, restoring natural areas to improve ecosystem function (forest management, wetland restoration, stream buffers, riverbank stabilization), and reducing and/or greening impervious surfaces.

Management Needs

The primary management needs in Gloucester relate to how the City manages and maintains its existing parks and open spaces. The ability of the City to maintain high-quality parks, open space and recreation opportunities depends on staffing, resources, and funding.

Maintenance

Ongoing maintenance of City-owned parks and open spaces is conducted by the Department of Public Works (DPW). The DPW is tasked with maintaining and protecting all public beaches, parks, playgrounds, cemeteries, and Gloucester's public shade trees. In addition, the department oversees the maintenance of city/school athletic fields, including mowing, trimming, fertilizing, and field marking for school and community groups. The DPW is also responsible for the operation and permitting of facilities like the Talbot Rink, Stage Fort Park, and Good Harbor and Wingaersheek Beaches.

Increased maintenance of parks, playgrounds, recreation fields, and conservation areas was a top priority mentioned in the community forums, the online open house, and the OSRP survey. Gloucester uses the SeeClickFix tool enabling residents to visually report any infrastructure damage or issues to City officials. To the degree it is not already used by the DPW as a maintenance management software and workflow system, it could be purposed in such a way to support parks maintenance. Any issue reported by DPW staff could be entered into the SeeClickFix system to ensure it is addressed. Signage at parks should also let residents know that they can relay any information about parks maintenance to City officials using the SeeClickFix tool.

Despite tremendous efforts by the DPW to keep up with facility maintenance and other service requests, the department is faced with funding and staffing constraints. Funding to maintain, expand, and upgrade parks and recreation facilities in the City is an important issue. Historically, park funding for routine upgrades and maintenance is funded through the City budget. Funding for major upgrades has been derived almost exclusively from grants, which has limited the City's ability to make planned improvements to match the available funding.

Approximately 73% of survey respondents said they would be willing to pay more taxes to allow the City to better maintain its existing recreation facilities and conservation lands. To successfully implement the actions in this updated OSRP, better serve youth and seniors, and fully meet the potential of active and passive recreation, additional staffing capacity and alternative funding mechanisms may be needed.

Although the overall state of Gloucester's parks and recreational areas is strong, effective long-term maintenance could benefit from adopting a number of recommended organizational and operational practices. First among them would be establishing a Parks and Recreation Division within the Department of Community Development to support the management, programming, and operations of the City's recreation lands. The Parks and Recreation Division would oversee all programming, permitting, and event planning at Gloucester's parks, playgrounds, athletic facilities, beaches, and public landings.

The City would also benefit from the development of a 10-year Parks and Recreation Capital Improvement Plan that addresses facilities maintenance and programming needs for city-owned athletic fields, courts, and playgrounds. To better monitor and track park condition information and to communicate needs with the community, the City should develop a standard inventory form or report that assesses the status of each park, its equipment, surfaces, and overall environment. These forms should include metrics that evaluate:

- ADA accessibility, bathroom facilities, and trash pickup
- Overuse and inappropriate use
- Safety and lifespan of existing equipment
- Maintenance procedures in regulated areas

The individual site assessments could then be consolidated into a Capital Improvement Plan and used to develop annual maintenance work plans, budgets for capital expenditures, and maintenance schedules.

Management Plans

The City of Gloucester owns several special open space parcels that can support more than one activity. These areas are typically devoted to conservation and include woodlands, forests, beaches, marshes, trails, and vista points. Plans for these areas, prepared historically by volunteer effort, encourage use while preserving natural function and beauty. The 2022 Seven Year Action Plan calls for the development of Land Management Plans for priority parcel clusters to guide the protection and management of Gloucester's conservation lands. In addition, the Action Plan also proposes developing Beach Maintenance and Management Plans to assess capital improvement needs and routine maintenance protocols to enhance and protect Gloucester's beaches.

Partnerships

Gloucester has a number of strong public-private partnerships that have contributed to the preservation and stewardship of numerous open space resources. Key partners include, but are not limited to, Greenbelt, Trustees, Mass Audubon, and Cape Ann Trail Stewards. Many of these nonprofit organizations provide great assistance to the City in terms of volunteer labor, fundraising, environmental monitoring, and communicating with the public. The City should continue to nurture and strengthen these relationships to implement elements of this plan.

Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)

The Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) is the Commonwealth's equivalent of a municipal open space plan. SCORP plans are developed by individual states in order to be eligible for federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grants.

In 2017, the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs completed the Massachusetts SCORP to help guide the distribution of federal funding to state agencies and municipalities for the acquisition of open space, renovation of parks, and development of new parks. The SCORP is a planning document that discusses the available recreational resources in a state, as well as its needs, and identifies the gaps between the two. The goals and objectives of the 2017 SCORP are shown in **9**. This Plan is consistent with these goals and objectives.

Figure 32: 2017 SCORP Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Improve Access for Underserved Populations
Objectives:
1. Support the acquisition of land and development of new open spaces in areas that lack existing or useable open spaces, such as Environmental Justice neighborhoods
2. Develop parks and open spaces that offer amenities that go above and beyond ADA requirements for people with disabilities
3. Consider the needs of underserved demographic groups — senior citizens and teenagers — in park and open space designs
4. Encourage establishment of programming endowments
Goal 2: Support the Statewide Trails Initiative
Objectives:
1. Support the acquisition of land and development of new open spaces that can provide a trail network
2. Fill in the gaps of existing trail networks
3. Ensure that any existing or new trails are fully accessible to people with disabilities

Goal 3: Increase the Availability of Water-based Recreation

Objectives:

1. Support the acquisition of land that will provide for water-based recreation
2. Support the acquisition of land that will increase drinking water supply protection
3. Develop water-based recreational facilities, including swimming areas, spray parks, boating facilities, fishing areas, etc.

Goal 4: Support the Creation and Renovation of Neighborhood Parks

Objectives:

1. Promote the acquisition and development of neighborhood parks where none currently exist
2. Develop amenities supported by neighborhood parks, such as playgrounds, off leash dog parks, and community gardens
3. Work with community development organizations to improve walking access to local parks