



Fitchburg Open Space and Recreation Plan Update VIRTUAL COMMUNITY MEETING

August 24, 2022



Agenda

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) Overview
3. Highlights from the 2014 OSRP
4. Developing the 2022 OSRP
5. Draft Action Plan
6. Q&A

What is Open Space and Recreation?



Conservation Land



Forest Land



Agricultural Land



Parks



Playgrounds



Public Plazas and
Commons



Vacant Land with
Conservation or
Recreation Interest



Programming

Parks and Open Space Benefits

Parks and open spaces are a key part of Fitchburg's infrastructure for maintaining and increasing quality of life



What are Open Space and Recreation Plans?



Serves as a road map for open space conservation, acquisition, maintenance, and improvement



Enhances quality of life by protecting environmental resources and community character



Establishes goals and objectives based on public input, and prioritizes actions over time to meet community goals and objectives



Makes the city eligible to apply for open space grants from the Commonwealth of MA

Goal 1: Develop and maintain a safe and sought-after park system in Fitchburg that provides a variety of recreational activities for all residents

Goal 2: Provide walking and biking paths for recreation and commuting

Goals + Successes from the 2014 OSRP

Goal 1:

- Coolidge Park – Dog park established
- DeCaria Park – Full park renovation with passive area and new basketball court
- Parkhill Park
 - Spray park upgrade (2017); Accessible and all-inclusive Sam Pawlak Community Playground (2022); Trail, BMX park, and Skate Park Upgrades (2022); Babe Ruth Field Renovation (2022); and additional playground renovation planned for 2022/2023

Goal 2:

- Twin Cities Rail Trail – Land purchase in 2017; Phase 1 construction completed 2022
- Complete Streets resolution adopted in 2016; prioritization process approved in 2017
- Continued progress on Rollstone Hill Trail
 - The “Rock Walk Trail”

Goal 3: Provide better access to recreational opportunities

Goal 4: Protect and promote Fitchburg's watershed

Goals + Successes from the 2014 OSRP

Goal 3:

- \$40,000 Recreational Trails Grant (2021/22) to provide kiosks and wayfinding signage for multiple trail systems
- \$225,000 in grant funding to support a performance stage at Riverfront Park
- Partnered with Reimagine North of Main to create a "Downtown Coordinator" to support city events

Goal 4:

- Development of a flood reduction plan for the Falulah/ Baker Brook watershed
- Progress made on city's Combined Sewer Separation project
- Green infrastructure highlighted at DeCaria Park and incorporated into the Pawlak Park project

Goal 5: Protect, promote, preserve open space and wildlife habitat

Goal 6: Develop and promote greenspace in the urban core

Goals + Successes from the 2014 OSRP

Goal 5:

- Completion of a trail to the top of the “Knoll,” (6.7-acre parcel part of Gateway Park, North County Land Trust and the Fitchburg Greenway Committee)
- Designated eligible properties as “Farmland of Local Importance” as a tool to preserve private open space
- Ongoing partnerships to encourage land preservation in the northern watershed (e.g., Jewell Hill)

Goal 6:

- Fitchburg added to *Greening the Gateway Cities Program* (2020); program in process
- CDBG funds used to support City's Farmers Market
- Side Yard Sales program implemented

DEVELOPING THE 2022 OSRP

- ☒ **March 2022:** Project Kick-Off with OSRP Advisory Committee
- ☒ **March-Present:** 2022 Plan Development + Advisory Committee meetings
- ☒ **April 2022:** OSR Focus Group + Survey/Map Launch
- ☒ **June 9th:** OSR Community Meeting
- ☒ **June-August:** Draft OSR Plan
- ☒ **August 24th:** Second Community Meeting
- ☐ **September-October:** Plan Completed; Local Agency and Board Review;
Submission of Plan to State for Approval

2022-2028 OSRP Survey Results

Parks and Open Space Community Survey May- June 2022

105 Responses

Open space that supports climate resilience
57% of respondents rated it as “Very Important”

Respondent rating of “Very Important” for *Organized recreational/ athletic activities (ex. sports leagues)* fell from 62% in 2013 to 44% in 2022

Respondent rating of “Very Important” for *Cultural/art events* fell from 60% in 2013 to 45% in 2022

Preserve, Protect, and Enhance (2022) – Top three topics rated as “Very Important” included *Nashua River* (74%), *Conservation Land and Wildlife Habitat* (73%), and *Forest Land and Natural Resources* (tied at 71%)

2022-2028 OSRP Survey Results

Noted locations important for the City to protect and preserve included: Nashua River, Coggshall Park, and Coolidge Park

**Major Barrier:
Safety Concerns**

Other barriers: maintenance and trash, inappropriate/illegal activity, and better lighting

Percentage of respondents reporting hiking, walking, or running regularly (once a week or more) increased from 57% in 2013 to 70% in 2022

**What type of facilities/spaces are needed and where?
Common answers: conservation areas, disc golf, splash parks, and restroom facilities at existing parks**

Broken out by group, the majority of respondents felt that the City's recreational programs and facilities meet the needs of the community, but for mobility impaired: Children: 77% - Teenagers: 52% - Adults 60% - Seniors (66%) - Mobility Impaired (48%)

2022-2028 Draft Action Plan

GOALS: 6

Objectives: 34

Actions: 83

2022-2028 Draft Action Plan

GOAL 1: Develop and maintain a safe and sought-after park system in Fitchburg that provides a variety of active and passive recreational and cultural opportunities for all Fitchburg residents.

Objective 1. Expand City capacity (staff and resources) to maintain existing playgrounds and open space areas.

Action 1. Increase City funding for the Department of Public Works and the Parks & Recreation Department.

Action 2. Reinstate the Superintendent of Parks position to support meeting minimum maintenance requirements.

Objective 2. Evaluate, repair, and upgrade existing facilities to meet current needs.

Action 1. Create a formal capital improvement plan for parks and open space that is updated biannually at a minimum.

Action 2. Identify opportunities to adaptively reuse existing parks to meet current recreational needs.

Action 3. Create a formal maintenance plan for parks and open space that is updated biannually at a minimum.

Action 4. Schedule periodic park audits to evaluate and assess the condition of all existing playgrounds to accepted industry standards.

Action 5. Seek discretionary grants and commit City funds and entitlement grants for the renovation of parks.

Action 6. Provide and maintain restrooms at major parks.

Action 7. Provide additional seating areas at parks to meet current demands.

Action 8. Continue to have the Disability Commission review park improvement plans to ensure that accessible elements are incorporated.

2022-2028 Draft Action Plan

GOAL 1: Develop and maintain a safe and sought-after park system in Fitchburg that provides a variety of active and passive recreational and cultural opportunities for all Fitchburg residents.

Objective 3. Improve coordination and collaboration among departments, committees, local organizations, and businesses to support the maintenance of the parks and recreation system.

Action 1. Leverage and increase partnerships between the City and other organizations to assist with trail maintenance.

Action 2. Explore using District Improvement Financing (DIF) to fund downtown open space improvements.

Action 3. Reinvigorate the Adopt-a-Park program once a Superintendent of Parks is reinstated.

Action 4. Foster and support "friends of" groups to assist with maintenance at more existing city parks.

Objective 4. Continue recreational opportunities at City parks for individuals of all abilities and ages.

Action 1. Continue to provide and promote organized recreational opportunities at City parks.

Action 2. Provide additional recreational opportunities for adults to meet current demands.

Objective 5. Continue to include resident input, including youth, in the park renovation and design process.

Action 1. Continue to hold public meetings in the planning stage of projects.

Action 2. Develop systems with community-based organizations to increase awareness of public meetings.

2022-2028 Draft Action Plan

GOAL 1: Develop and maintain a safe and sought-after park system in Fitchburg that provides a variety of active and passive recreational and cultural opportunities for all Fitchburg residents.

Objective 6. Support efforts to foster outdoor learning and community service projects involving parks.

Action 1. Engage schools and community-based organizations to raise awareness and appreciation of parks and open space.

Objective 7. Encourage beautification efforts and other private investment in public facilities.

Action 1. Develop and pilot a model to engage local organizations/businesses in park upkeep and beautification.

Objective 8. Improve safety and the perception of safety in public parks.

Action 1. Add park safety elements to existing parks as appropriate, such as added lighting.

Action 2. Design parks based on crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) principles; when appropriate and feasible.

2022-2028 Draft Action Plan

GOAL 2: Provide enhanced and expanded walking and biking paths for recreation and commuting.

Objective 1. Continue to develop and enhance the Twin Cities Rail Trail.

Action 1. Continue collaborating with the Twin Cities Rail Trail Association for maintenance and enhancement of the Twin Cities Rail Trail.

Action 2. Continue to work with MassDOT to move the development of Phase II of the Twin Cities Rail Trail forward.

Objective 2. Maintain and improve sidewalks/walking paths in developed areas, including accessibility improvements.

Action 1. Develop a Sidewalk Prioritization Plan.

Action 2. Continue to seek grant funds for additional projects.

Objective 3. Integrate the Pedestrian Generator Checklist into the park design and review process; Apply to Fitchburg Trails Vision Plan 2020 – 2024 to identify when and how to better accommodate pedestrians when designing projects.

Action 1. Identify which City departments should review the Pedestrian Generator Checklist during the park design and street upgrade process around parks and open spaces and support their usage of the tool.

Action 2. Identify which City boards, and commissions should review the Pedestrian Generator Checklist during the park design and street upgrade process around parks and open spaces and support their usage of the tool.

2022-2028 Draft Action Plan

GOAL 2: Provide enhanced and expanded walking and biking paths for recreation and commuting.

Objective 4. Improve connectivity – trails, sidewalks, and bike accommodations – among open spaces, recreational facilities, and other important city resources.

Action 1. Incorporate pedestrian and bicycle access into plans for new recreation facilities and modifications to existing recreation facilities.

Action 2. Install wayfinding signs and kiosks for existing trails.

Action 3. Identify highly used open spaces and design thoughtful connections between them.

Action 4. Complete design and secure funding for the Marion Stoddart Trail.

Action 5. Develop the North-South and East-West links identified in the Fitchburg Trails Vision Plan.

Action 6. Review all streetscape projects for suitability of Complete Streets.

Objective 5. Keep the Fitchburg Trail Guide updated.

Action 1. Continue supporting the Fitchburg Trails Vision Committee and encourage their collaboration with MRPC to assist with this effort.

Objective 6. Continue developing and expanding offroad pedestrian and shared use paths.

Action 1. Continue supporting efforts to develop and expand the Rock Walk.

Action 2. Continue efforts to resolve easement issues, seek out grant opportunities to expand trails and work with/engage community groups to assist with completing the Steamline Trail in West Fitchburg.

2022-2028 Draft Action Plan

GOAL 3: Provide equitable access to high-quality and inclusive recreational opportunities.

Objective 1. Improve marketing to increase awareness of Fitchburg's park and open space system.

Action 1. Enhance efforts to promote parks and open spaces through community-based organizations, schools, and the Senior Center.

Objective 2. Improve the process for implementing and marketing organized recreational and cultural opportunities provided at Fitchburg parks and open spaces.

Action 1. Integrate cultural competency and language access into marketing plans.

Action 2. Improve the City of Fitchburg's online presence to market recreational and cultural opportunities.

Action 3. Create a well-marketed and user-friendly permitting process for using public open space.

Objective 3. Provide park access and programming that is safe, inclusive, culturally relevant and welcoming to everyone.

Action 1. Partner with community-based organizations on programming that connects residents of Environmental Justice neighborhoods to parks.

Action 2. Provide programming that meets the demands of Fitchburg residents.

Action 3. Ensure language access is incorporated into programming.

2022-2028 Draft Action Plan

GOAL 3: Provide equitable access to high-quality and inclusive recreational opportunities.

Objective 4. Improve signage to and within City parks and trails.

Action 1. Review existing signage and develop a parks and open space wayfinding system to provide cohesive and recognizable signage.

Action 2. Continue improving wayfinding signs and maps on recreational trails.

Action 3. Integrate language diversity into the design of new and upgraded park signage.

Action 4. Secure funding for new signage.

Objective 5. Provide universally accessible facilities at existing parks.

Action 1. Identify opportunities to add universally accessible restroom facilities at parks.

Action 2. Continue adding universally accessible recreational areas during park upgrades.

2022-2028 Draft Action Plan

GOAL 4: Protect and promote Fitchburg's watershed.

Objective 1. Protect Fitchburg's watershed land within Fitchburg and adjacent communities.

Action 1. Identify and protect critical open space areas for temporary slowing of floodwaters.

Action 2. Ensure compliance with the land management plan(s) in place for land that is already protected.

Objective 2. Routinely assess the condition of dams, ponds, and reservoirs within Fitchburg and identify opportunities for restoration of the natural environment.

Action 1. Continue regular inspections by a registered professional engineer of dams that are the City's responsibility.

Action 2. Prioritize restoration of the natural environment when performing maintenance and upgrading dams and water resources.

Objective 3. Continue efforts that result in improved water quality of the Nashua River and its tributaries.

Action 1. Continue the combined sewer separation (CSS) project.

Action 2. Promote citizen education about water quality and collaborate with community organizations and stakeholders.

Action 3. Maintain collaboration with NRWA for protection of the Nashua River.

2022-2028 Draft Action Plan

GOAL 4: Protect and promote Fitchburg's watershed.

Objective 4. Integrate green infrastructure for stormwater management into planning and capital projects for parks and open space.

Action 1. Consider options for integrating rain gardens, permeable pavers, and other green infrastructure when capital projects are undertaken.

Objective 5. Continue to improve access to and awareness of the Nashua River and other waterbodies as City assets.

Action 1. Promote a public education campaign about water issues and collaborate with community organizations and stakeholders.

Action 2. Continue holding events at Riverfront Park and Gateway Park that showcase the Nashua River.

2022-2028 Draft Action Plan

GOAL 5: Preserve, restore, enhance, and promote open space and natural resources that increase Fitchburg's resilience to the effects of climate change.

Objective 1. Properly maintain City-owned forested areas.

Action 1. Develop and adopt forest management plans for City-owned forestland.

Objective 2. Implement or enforce regulations to limit sprawl and preserve/enhance natural resources.

Action 1. Continue to implement smart growth tactics when developing or updating plans and ordinances.

Action 2. Review Fitchburg zoning and conservation ordinances and incorporate green infrastructure and conservation of functioning natural ecosystems and other nature-based solutions as requirements.

Objective 3. Work with local, regional and state organizations to preserve open space and wildlife habitat.

Action 1. Support efforts of the North County Land Trust and other agencies to purchase and protect open space in the City.

Objective 4. Support continuation of environmental programming in parks and trails.

Action 1. Partner with and support the efforts of organizations such as the North County Land Trust and the Trustees of Reservations to provide environmental programming.

Action 2. Continue allowing groups to use City property and promote activities on City website and social media.

2022-2028 Draft Action Plan

GOAL 5: Preserve, restore, enhance, and promote open space and natural resources that increase Fitchburg's resilience to the effects of climate change.

Objective 5. Work to eradicate invasive species.

- Action 1.** Provide public education that invasive species include both flora and fauna (e.g., invasive trees and spotted lanternfly).
- Action 2.** Partner with groups such as the Fitchburg Greenway Committee to work toward eliminating knotweed & other invasives in parks.
- Action 3.** Ensure new plantings in parks and open spaces are selected appropriately.

Objective 6. Foster the permanent protection of privately-owned open space, including farmland and forests.

- Action 1.** Work with the City Assessor's Office to support and promote participation in the Chapter 61/61A/61B programs to help preserve forestland, agricultural land, and open space and recreational land.
- Action 2.** Develop notification procedure for City consideration of Chapter 61/61A/61B properties should the property owner decide to remove the land from the program.
- Action 3.** Provide public education about the value of open space and alternatives to forest cutting.
- Action 4.** Create a tracking system for Conservation Restrictions.
- Action 5.** Reinvigorate the Agricultural Commission.
- Action 6.** Identify and promote financial incentives for preserving farmland of local importance.

Objective 7. Work with local, regional and state organizations to preserve open space and wildlife habitat.

- Action 1.** Incorporate nature-based solutions into the design of new and improved open space and recreation facilities.
- Action 2.** Encourage native tree and vegetation planting in high pavement areas, like parking lots, to manage stormwater runoff & increase shade.

2022-2028 Draft Action Plan

GOAL 6: Promote green space in the urban core.

Objective 1. Create urban shade and a biodiverse urban forest system.

Action 1. Leverage the partnership with the Greening the Gateways Program working with the City to bolster the urban forest.

Action 2. When street trees are planted, ensure the proper species is selected and that they are planted properly for sustainability.

Action 3. Develop and adopt a street tree/tree replacement policy.

Objective 2. Support urban agriculture and the local food system.

Action 1. Develop a policy for starting and maintaining community gardens.

Action 2. Continue supporting community-based organizations that promote regional food access strategies and environmental sustainability.

Objective 3. Capture undervalued land for new recreational and open space purposes.

Action 1. Explore downtown and other densely populated, underserved areas where open space is limited to identify opportunities to capture under-performing properties for establishing pocket parks to provide both urban recreation opportunities and green space.

DRAFT ACTION PLAN COMMENT PERIOD

Please email comments on the draft Action Plan to:

Heather Gould – hgould@bscgroup.com

Amy Leblanc – aleblanc@fitchburgma.gov

DUE DATE: TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2022

Questions

