

Simsbury Parks & Open Space Master Plan

Simsbury, Connecticut



June 2020



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**SIMSBURY
PARKS & OPEN SPACE
MASTER PLAN**

PAGE NO.

i Acknowledgments

1 Part One: Introduction of the Master Planning Context

7 Part Two: Demographic Profile of Simsbury

15 Part Three: Parks and Recreation Trends

37 Part Four: Public Engagement Summary

41 Part Five: Organizational, Marketing and Financial Analysis

47 Part Six: Recreation Programming Analysis

53 Part Seven: Facility Inventory and Analysis

65 Part Eight: Key Issues and Recommendations Matrix

77 Part Nine: Recommendations

87 Part Ten: Goals and Action Plan

111 Appendices

- Appendix A: Concept Plans
- Appendix B: Open Space Mapping & Inventory
- Appendix C: Public Survey Presentation
- Appendix D: Final Presentation
- Appendix E: Revenue Analysis

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PART ONE

INTRODUCTION OF THE MASTER PLANNING PROCESS

Purpose of the Plan

The purpose of the Simsbury Parks and Open Space Master Plan is to protect and maintain a healthy and diverse parks and open spaces network with amenities that serve the needs and promote the health of the entire community and environment. The citizen-driven plan establishes a clear direction for policy development, delivery of Town services, and the prioritization of demands and opportunities. The plan positions Simsbury to build on the community's unique assets while identifying new strategic initiatives to improve offerings. This effort has been rooted in an all-inclusive public engagement process and will seek to incorporate energy efficient strategies, accessibility, cost effective improvements and maintenance, and opportunities to reuse municipal and/or non-municipal sites for passive recreation. This document is meant to facilitate and guide the Strategic Planning Process for the future of the parks and open space facilities in the Town of Simsbury over the next 2, 5, and 10-year horizons.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PLAN

1. Develop a Vision: Preparing for the future, while retaining the past.
2. Develop implementable goals and priorities: Focusing efforts on transforming conceptual goals into achievable priorities.
3. Develop an implementation strategy for park and open space facilities and operations.
4. Develop a financially sustainable and innovative park and open space system.

History of Simsbury and Its Recreational Heritage

Pre-settlement

Simsbury, located in northern Hartford County, Connecticut is commonly considered as the first western frontier over Talcott Mountain from the Connecticut River Valley.¹ This area was originally inhabited by indigenous people, of the Algonquin Nation, who referred to the Farmington River as the Massacoh.² The term Massacoh may also refer to the tribe, the village occupied by the indigenous people and the land next to the river. Prior to the town's incorporation in 1670 settlers called present day Simsbury the Windsor Plantation at Masacoe³ or Massacoh Plantation.⁴

"Simsbury" was likely named after Symondsbury, Dorset, England as many of the first settlers emigrated from England.

Colonial Era

A trading post was established at present day Windsor by English colonists around 1634 near the junction of the Farmington and Connecticut Rivers. Early settlers began to migrate up the Farmington River from Windsor looking for land to set up homesteads and for employment in the manufacturing of pitch and tar. The flat meadows, rich soils, and stands of trees made this area ideal for homesteads and farms.

Lands inhabited by the Native Americans were gradually deeded over to the English between 1648 and 1661.⁵ By 1670 "town privileges" were granted as the settlement continued to grow. Originally, the land grant covered about 100 square miles, or 10 miles by 10 miles. Portions of what is presently known as Granby, East Granby, Canton and Bloomfield were included in

¹ Simsbury Historical Society, *Simsbury History*, <https://simsburyhistory.org/simsbury-history-2/>, accessed March 10, 2020.

² Also spelled "Massacoe" and "Massaco"

³ CT Humanities, *Simsbury*, <https://connecticuthistory.org/towns-page/simsbury/>, accessed March 10, 2020.

⁴ Town of Simsbury Connecticut, *A Brief History of Simsbury*, <https://www.simsbury-ct.gov/home/pages/history-of-simsbury>, accessed March 10, 2020.

⁵ *Ibid.*

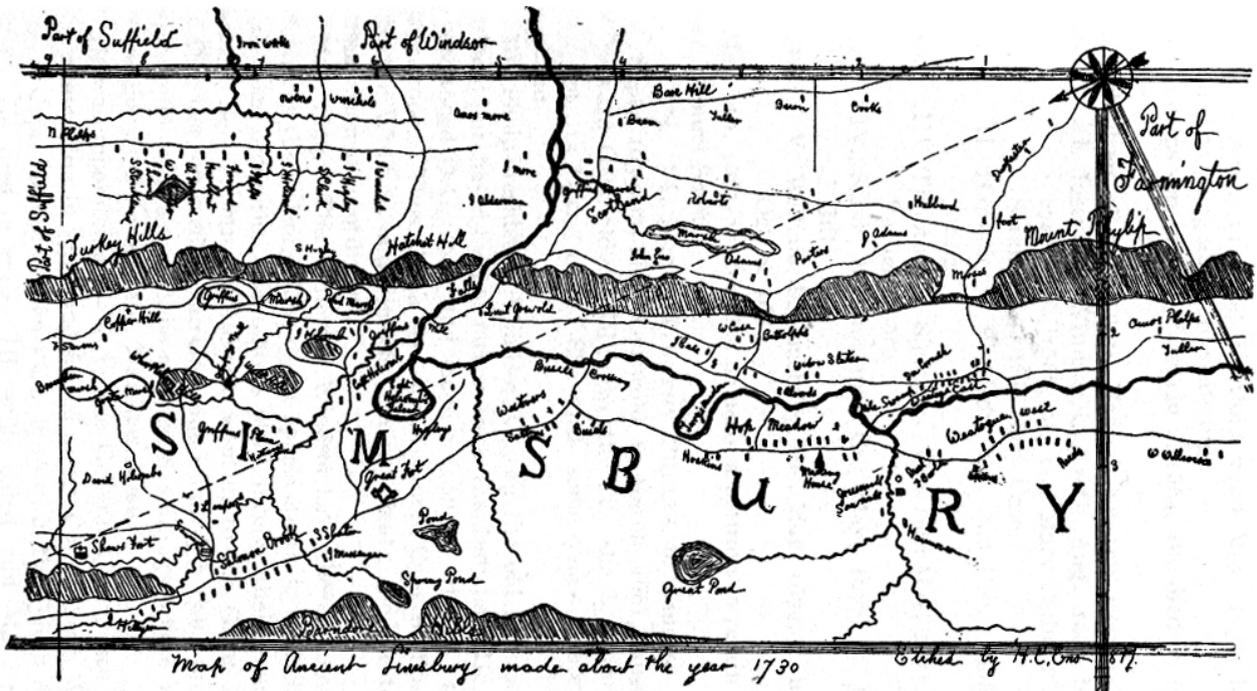


Figure 1.1: Simsbury, 1730
 Source: Oliver Seymour Phelps and Andrew T. Servin | Public domain

the land grant. As conflicts with the Native Americans decreased, more people settled in the Simsbury area to establish homesteads. Hopmeadow Street, roughly running parallel to the west of the Farmington River, was the main thoroughfare. Many of the residences and businesses settled along this corridor.

Communal activities like sawmills and blacksmiths developed along the brooks and streams.⁶ Copper mines were discovered in 1705. Dr. Samuel Higley in 1737 minted the Colonies' first copper coins with ore found in his mine. The mine, now part of East Granby, later became the infamous New-Gate Prison during the Revolutionary War and Connecticut's first prison.⁷ Around this time period, the nation's first steel mill began operation.

Industrial Development

In 1819 the Gazetteer listed "one small Cotton Factory, three Tin ware Factories, three Wire Factories, two Grain Distilleries, three Gristmills, four Saw Mills, two Carding Machines and two Tanneries"⁸ in Simsbury.

⁶ The Town of Simsbury Planning Commission, *Plan of Conservation and Development*, 2017, <https://www.simsbury-ct.gov/town-of-simsbury-plan-of-conservation-and-development>, accessed March 10, 2020.

⁷ CT Humanities, *Simsbury*, <https://connecticuthistory.org/towns-page/simsbury/>, accessed March 10, 2020.

⁸ Simsbury Historical Society, *Simsbury History*, <https://simsburyhistory.org/simsbury-history-2/>, accessed March 10, 2020.

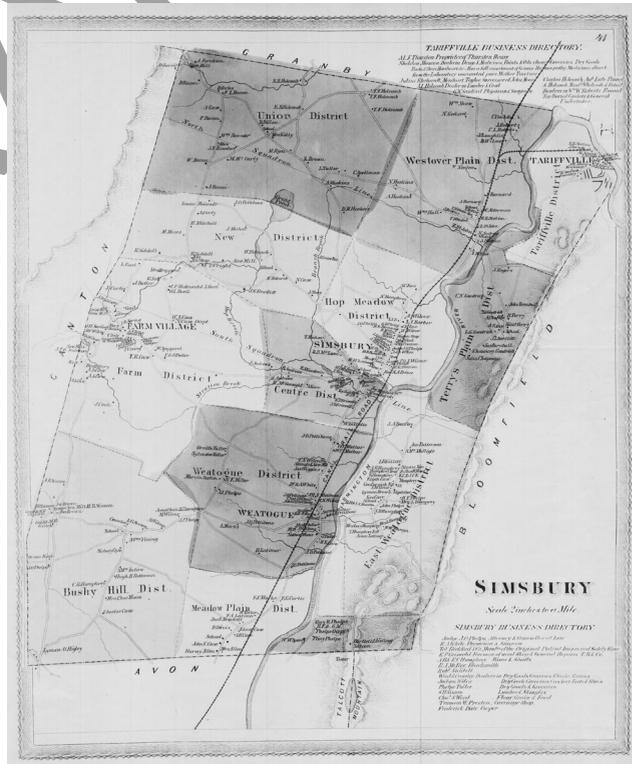


Figure 1.2: Simsbury, 1868 (Peterson Collection)
 Source: MAGIC Historical Map Collection - Connecticut Towns, UCONN Library Map and Geographic Information Center, http://magic.lib.uconn.edu/historical_maps_connecticut_towns.html.

These manufacturing activities were quickly outpaced by the construction of new fabric and carpet mills located in Griswold Village, currently known as Tariffville, near the northeastern segment of the Farmington River. Other notable developments during this period of growth include tobacco farming and the invention of safety fuses for use in blasting operations.

Early Transportation

The Farmington Canal, which was in use from 1828 to 1848, ran through Simsbury between Northampton, Massachusetts and New Haven, Connecticut. From the north the canal ran parallel to Hopmeadow Street, then continued between Hopmeadow and Woodland Streets before heading south to Weatogue.⁹ The canal was soon replaced by rail, which began crossing Connecticut in the 1840s and early 1850s. The New Haven railroad's Canal Line reached Simsbury in 1850.

The 20th Century

Some commercial and industrial development continued along the Hopmeadow Street and the railroad corridor in the late 1900s. Much of the town remained agricultural. In 1930 James L. Goodwin, a forester and conservationist, purchased 25 acres of a pond and 75 acres of an adjacent woodland. Over the next thirty years Goodwin added additional tracts to his original purchase, totaling 280 acres. In 1967 the property was deeded to the State of Connecticut and is currently known as Great Pond State Forest. This acquisition of land is a possible example of Simsbury's trend in protecting open space.

After World War II, Simsbury followed growth and cultural trends consistent with other communities in the region. Flexibility offered by the automobile and attractiveness of suburban living resulted in the subdivision and residential development of former farms. The population more than doubled between 1950 and 1960 and almost quadrupled between 1950 and 1970. By the 1980s the community has grown to over 21,000 people.

Simsbury Today

Today Simsbury is a suburban community with an active town center, excellent schools and involved residents. It offers an extensive open space and park system with widespread pedestrian and bicycle

⁹ *Historic and Architectural Resources Inventory for the Town of Simsbury, Connecticut*. April 2010, https://www.simsbury-ct.gov/sites/simsburyct/files/file/file/simsbury_hri_final_doc.pdf, accessed March 10, 2020.

infrastructure. Those who come to live here have been careful stewards of its architectural and natural heritage while enjoying the resources of a modern community.

Simsbury Culture, Parks and Recreation Department Overview

The Town's Culture, Parks and Recreation Department is a source of community pride and is responsible for the operation of parks, recreational facilities and programs which contribute to the community's environment, needs and interests. The services and programs provided by the Department are important factors in the quality of life in the community, and are integral to the Town's health, welfare and attractiveness.

The Department is one of eleven Town departments and strives to provide and enhance recreational opportunities for Town residents. The Department provides a variety of programs from arts and crafts to summer camps, athletics, music, and specialty programs. Many of these activities take place at various park facilities throughout the Town. Indoor programming primarily takes place at the Simsbury Farms Recreation Complex. Maintenance of the Town's parks, facilities and open spaces are managed by the Culture, Parks and Recreation Department.

In addition to the Director, there is one full-time recreation professional, one administrative secretary, nine full-time parks maintenance staff and four full-time golf maintenance staff. The department also employs approximately eighty seasonal and part-time staff. Most are hired as part-time help in the summer recreation period.

The mission of the Department is described below. The Department accomplishes this mission by coordinating a wide range of programs and activities and supplying exemplary service and maintenance of Town-operated facilities.

Culture, Parks and Recreation Department Mission and Goal

The Simsbury, Culture, Parks and Recreation Department seeks to provide quality leisure opportunities which contribute to the environment, needs and interests of the people of Simsbury. Recreation is recognized as a necessary service to the community and as an integral part of Simsbury's health and welfare.

The primary goal of the Department is to provide an environment which promotes and encourages the enhancement of individual lives through the social, physical, mental, and emotional benefits of participation in physical activity or passive involvement within the parks. The Director’s vision is to:

...“be fresh and relevant to by really successful and I want Simsbury Rec To Be Remarkable! We will be known for our innovation, customer service, superior events, programs and outstanding staff. Our customers should be curious about what we will do next. We want customers contacting us to find out when new programs open up and to be eagerly checking the website and social media pages for our news”.



Figure 1.3: Duck Race at Historic Flower Bridge, May 2019

Related Planning Efforts and Integration

The Town of Simsbury has undertaken several planning efforts in recent years that have helped direct the planning process for this plan. These documents include:

- The Farmington Valley Biodiversity Project: A Model for Inter-municipal Biodiversity Planning in Connecticut, 2006
- Management Plan for Ethel Walker Open Space Property, 2014
- Management Plan for Onion Mountain Park, 2014
- Ethel Walker Woods Master Plan Report, 2015
- Simsbury Conservation Commission and Open Space Committee Inventory of Town Owned Open Space, 2016
- Simsbury 2017 Plan of Conservation and Development, 2017
- Town of Simsbury Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan, 2018

These documents were reviewed by the consultant team and have been integrated into the analysis and recommendations of the Parks and Open Space Master Plan, where applicable.

Methodology of this Planning Process

The master planning project team was led by members of the master plan committee, which included the Culture, Parks and Recreation Commission, the Open Space Committee, the Culture, Parks and Recreation Director, Planning and Community Development Director, Parks Superintendent, and the Town Manager. This team provided 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 community members can provide. The project consisted of the following tasks:

- Community Engagement
- Facility Inventory
- Level of Service Analysis
- Assessment and Analysis
- Needs Assessment
- Operational and Marketing Analysis
- Recommendations: Goals, Objectives, and Action Plan

Community Engagement

- Review of previous planning efforts, town historical information.
- Extensive community involvement effort including focus groups, meetings with key stakeholders, and community-wide public meetings.
- Review of a community survey conducted by consultant team.
- Validation of major assumptions and learn if any priorities have changed since the Simsbury 2017 Plan of Conservation and Development.

Facility Inventory

- 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.

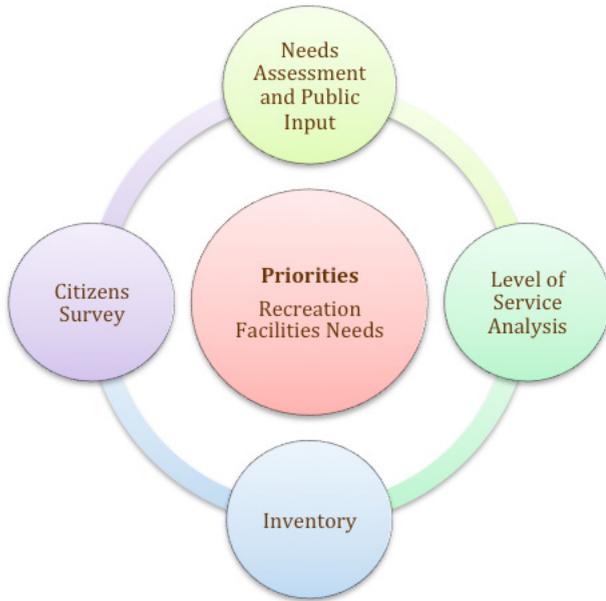


Figure 1.4: Master Planning Process

Level of Service Analysis

- Interviews with staff to provide information about parks, open spaces, recreation facilities and services, along with insights 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, open space, cultural affairs, and related services.

Assessment and Analysis

- Review and assessment of relevant plans, policies, documents, and reports related to each of the existing parks, recreation, and open space facilities to be considered, including entities offering parks, programs and/or other facilities not owned by the Town of Simsbury.
- Measurement of the current delivery of service for park, open space and recreation facilities using a level of service analysis and allowing for a target level of service to be determined that is both feasible and aligned with the desires of citizens as expressed through public input.
- Exploration of finance and funding mechanisms to support development and sustainability within the system.

Needs Assessment

- Consideration of the profile of the community and demographics, including population growth.
- Research of trends lifestyle trends related to help guide programming and facility development.

Operational and Marketing Analysis

- Analysis of departmental programming and service delivery.
- Facilitation of an organizational Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis.
- Broad assessment of overall operations.

Recommendations: Goals, Objectives, and Action Plan

- Identification and categorization of recommendations into themes with goals and objectives.
- Development of an action plan.
- Identification of potential funding sources.

Master Plan Timeline

- Community Event
(Pop-up table at Simsbury Mini Maker Faire)..... May 2019
- Community Event
(Pop-up table at Burgers on the Bridge)..... May 2019
- Community Event
(Pop-up table at Simsbury Duck Race)..... May 2019
- Project Kickoff Meeting..... June 2019
- Stakeholder Interviews/Focus Group Meetings..... July 2019
- Community Event
(Pop-up table at Hartford Symphony Orchestra Concert & Fireworks)..... July 2019
- Public Meeting #1
(Community Input)..... July 2019
- Public Input
(Online Survey)..... August – October 2019
- Public Meeting # 2
(Findings Presentation)..... October 2019
- Draft Recommendations Presentation..... January 2020
- Final Presentation to Boards..... TBD

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PART TWO

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF SIMSBURY

Recreation and Park Demographic Profile

By analyzing population data, trends emerge that can inform decision making and resource allocation strategies for the provision of parks, recreation, and open space management. This demographic profile was compiled in September 2019 from a combination of sources including the ESRI Business Analyst, American Community Survey, and the U.S. Census. The following topics will be covered in detail in this report:

- Population Summary
- Gender & Age
- Race/Ethnic Character
- Educational Attainment
- Household Data
- Employment
- Health Rankings

Below is a snapshot Demographic Profile Summary for the Town of Simsbury, which is further reviewed in this chapter.

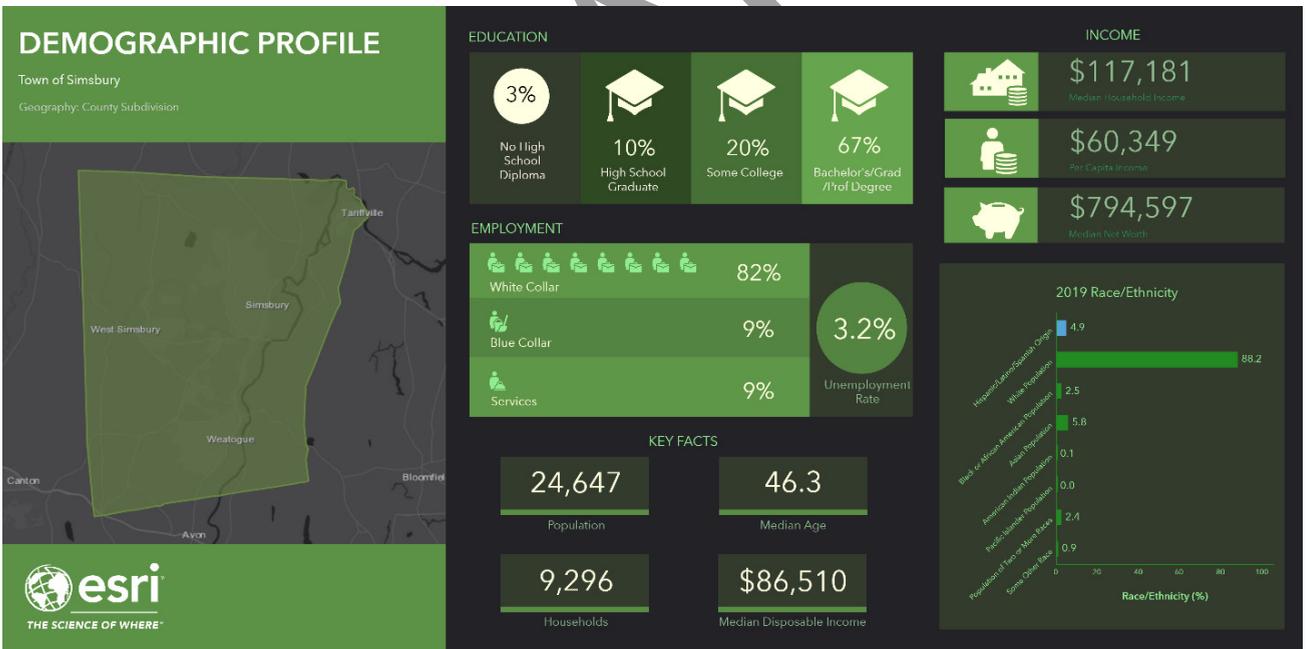


Figure 2.1 - Town of Simsbury Demographic Overview

Population

Growth rates can be a strong comparative indicator of an area’s potential for economic development. From 2000 to 2010, the population of Town of Simsbury grew 0.12 percent annually each year but is expected to increase to 0.51 percent from 2010 to 2019. The Town of Simsbury is growing at a faster rate than Hartford County (0.14%) and the State of Connecticut (0.18%). Figure 2.2 below shows a visual representation of the population growth rate between 2010 and 2019. The population will reach over 26,000 people in 2030 if growth rates continue as expected, as seen in Figure 2.3



Figure 2.2: Population Projected Annual Growth Rates (2010 – 2019)

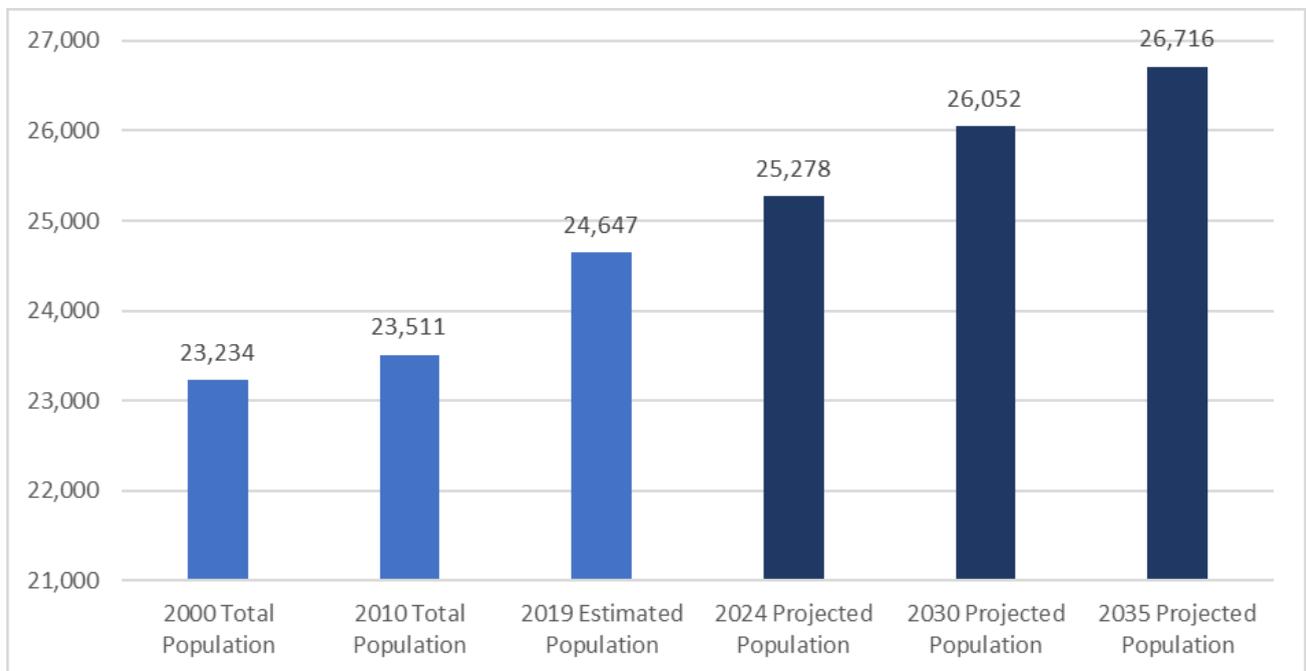


Figure 2.3: Projected Population Trends from 2000 to 2035
 Source: ESRI Business Analyst; Population Projections based on 2019 – 2024 growth rate of 0.51%.

Age and Gender Distribution

The Town of Simsbury has a slightly more females (51.26%) than males (48.74%). Gender is similarly distributed in Connecticut and the United States.

	Town of Simsbury	Connecticut	USA
2019 Female Population (%)	51.26%	51.19%	50.75%
2019 Male Population (%)	48.74%	48.81%	49.25%

Figure 2.4: Town of Simsbury Gender Distribution Compared to State and National Averages rate of 0.51%.

The median age in Town of Simsbury in 2019 was 43.3 years old, older than the State of Connecticut (41.5) and the United States (38.5). The median age in Simsbury is expected to increase to 47.7 years old in 2024.



Figure 2.5: Median Age of Town of Simsbury between 2010 and 2024

Looking at the population age breakdown by five-year increments in the Figure below, there are a few key conclusions.

- The Town of Simsbury has a high concentration of residents between 10 and 19 years old. This age range makes up 16 percent of the population. In addition, the age groups between 45 and 64 years old also make up a third of the population.
- The age distribution is expected to stay relatively the same from 2019 to 2024. The major changes that are expected are only within 2 percentage points.

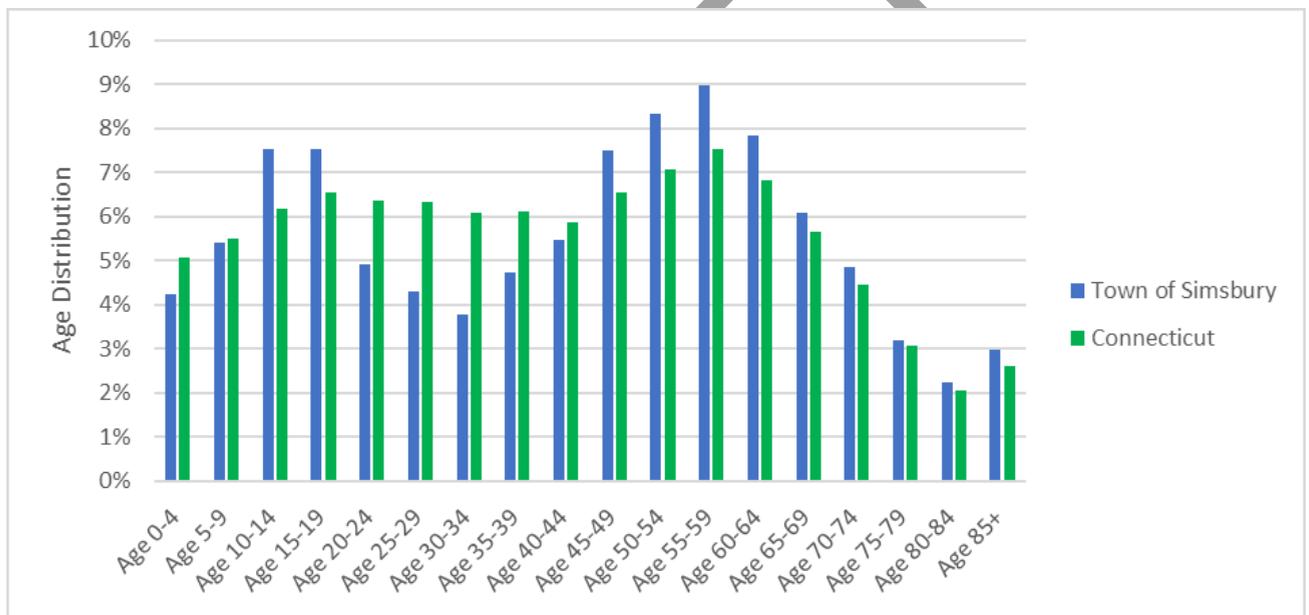


Figure 2.6: 2019 Age Distribution in Town of Simsbury

Race/Ethnic Character

In the United States, communities are generally becoming more diverse. Before comparing this data, it is important to note how the U.S. Census classifies and counts individuals who identify as Hispanic. The Census notes that Hispanic origin can be viewed as the heritage, nationality, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person’s parents or ancestors before arrival in the United States. In the U.S. Census, people who identify as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish are included in all of the race categories. Figure 2.7 reflects the approximate racial/ethnic population distribution.

- The Town of Simsbury is less diverse than neighboring geographies, with only 15.26 percent minority population, compared to Hartford County (40.39%) the State of Connecticut (34.55%).
- Those that identify as Hispanic make up only 5 percent of the total population. This is less than the Hispanic population of 17 percent in Connecticut.

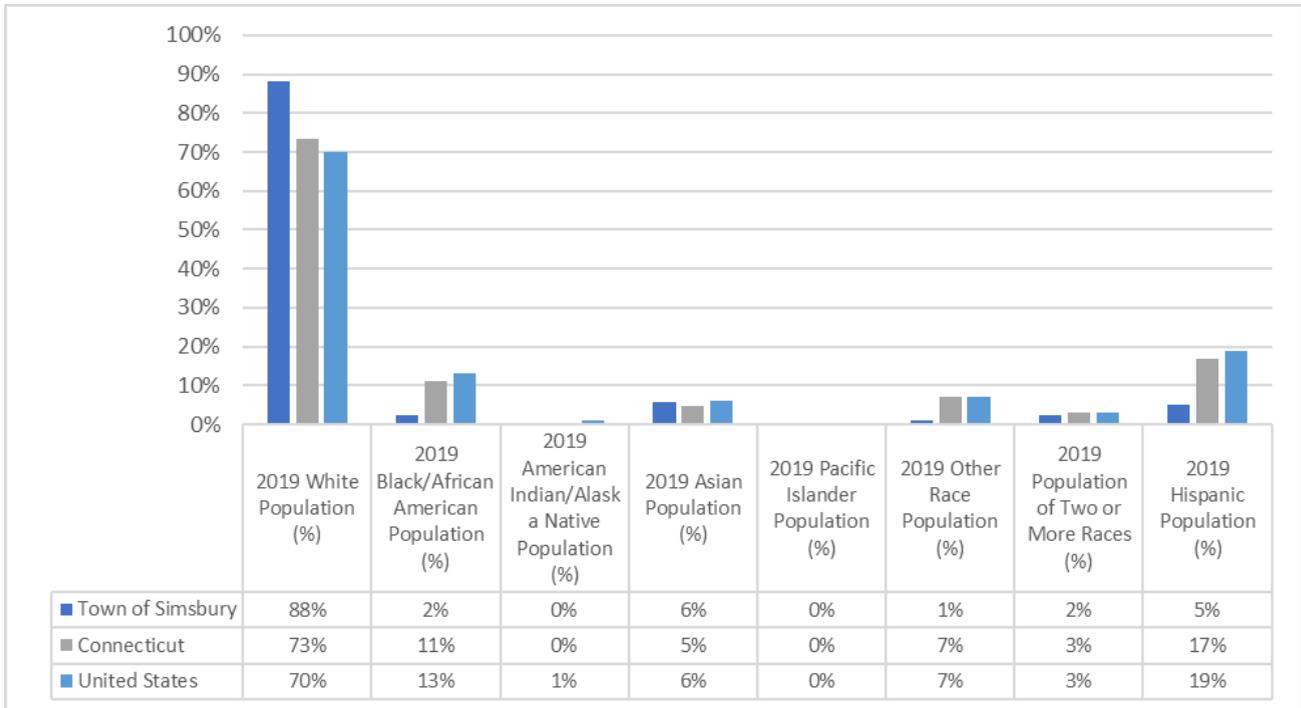


Figure 2.7: 2019 Racial/Ethnic Diversity of Town of Simsbury

Educational Attainment

The chart below shows the percentage of residents (18+) that obtained various levels of education. The Town of Simsbury ranked higher than the State of Connecticut and the United States when it comes to educational attainment. For instance, only 3.04 percent of Simsbury residents did not have a high school education or equivalent, compared to Connecticut (9.53%) and the United States (11.64%). Finally, graduate/professional level degree attainment was significantly higher in Simsbury (31.83%) than in Hartford County (16.71%), Connecticut (17.57%), and the United States (12.54%).

Level of Education	Town of Simsbury	Hartford County	Connecticut	USA
Less than 9th Grade	1.26%	4.42%	4.06%	4.90%
9-12th Grade/No Diploma	1.78%	5.95%	5.47%	6.74%
High School Diploma	9.27%	23.62%	23.96%	23.13%
GED/Alternative Credential	1.11%	3.34%	3.03%	3.90%
Some College/No Degree	12.45%	16.24%	16.32%	20.23%
Associate's Degree	7.06%	8.67%	8.31%	8.58%
Bachelor's Degree	35.24%	21.06%	21.28%	19.98%
Graduate/Professional Degree	31.83%	16.71%	17.57%	12.54%

Figure 2.8: 2019 Town of Simsbury Educational Attainment

Household Data

- The median household income in Simsbury in 2019 was \$117,181. This was higher than Hartford County (\$70,111), the State of Connecticut (\$75,402) and the United States (\$60,548). Roughly a quarter of the residents made over \$200,000.
- The median home value in the Town of Simsbury is \$332,257, compared to Connecticut (\$273,477) and the United States (\$234,154).
- The average household size is 2.62 in the Town of Simsbury, compared to 2.54 in Connecticut, and 2.59 in the United States.
- Only 2.62 percent of households in the Town of Simsbury receive food stamps, compared to the rate in the County of 15.16 percent, and the State of Connecticut at approximately 12.41 percent.
- Approximately 16.41 percent of residents live with some sort of hearing difficulty, vision difficulty, cognitive difficulty, ambulatory difficulty, self-care difficulty, and/or independent living difficulty. This is lower than the national average (25%).

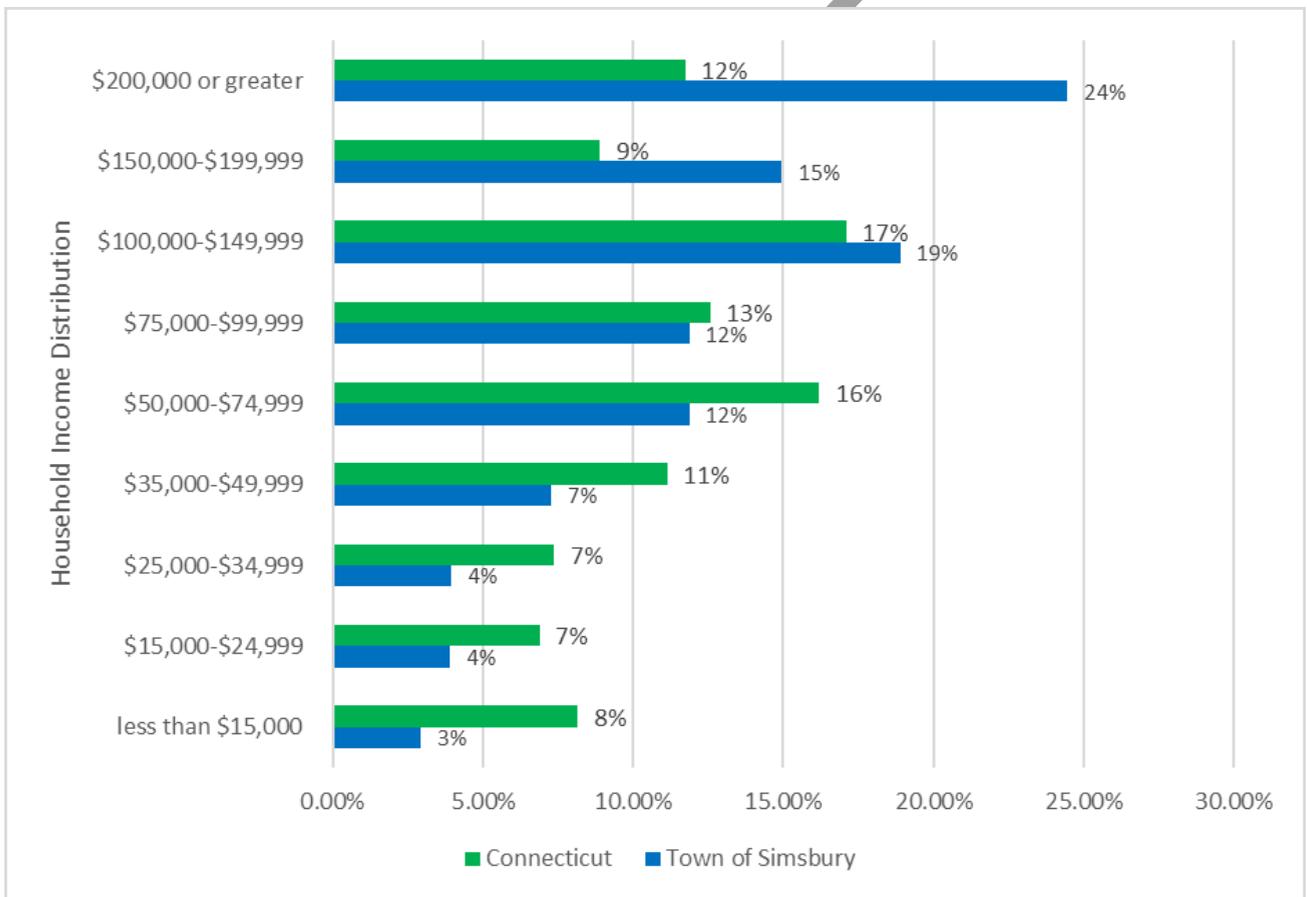


Figure 2.9: Median Household Income Distribution in Town of Simsbury
 Source: ESRI Business Analyst

Employment

- Roughly 82 percent of the population is employed in white collar positions, which typically performs managerial, technical, administrative, and/or professional capacities. Approximately 9 percent were employed by blue collar positions, such as construction, maintenance, etc. About 9 percent of residents were employed by the service industry.
- Only 3.2 percent of the population was unemployed in 2019, compared to the rate of Connecticut (5.4%) and the United States (4.6%).
- In terms of commuting, about 18 percent of workers spend seven or more hours commuting back and forth to work each week, and 84 percent of commuters drive alone in a car to work. This is higher than the national average (76.4 %) and the Connecticut average (78.7 %).

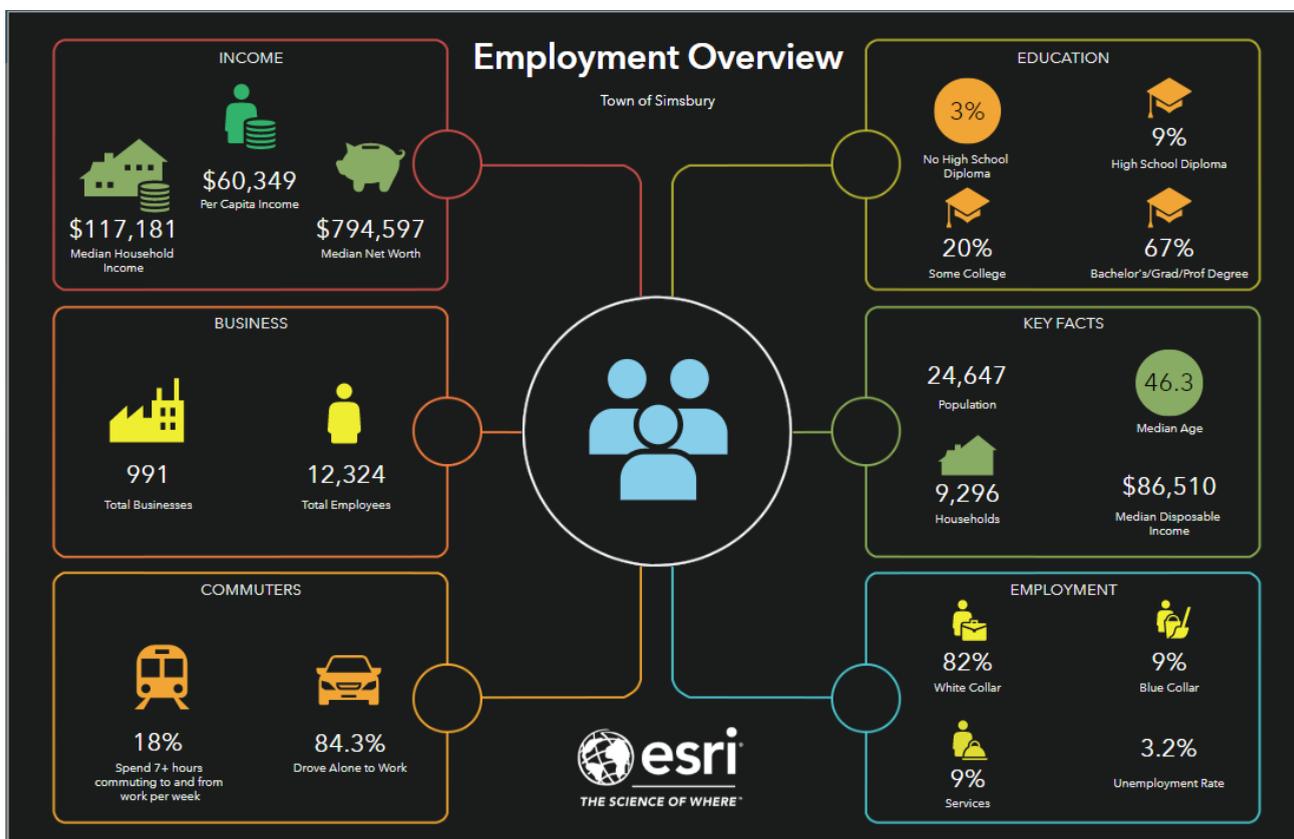


Figure 2.10: Employment Overview in Town of Simsbury, Connecticut
Source: ESRI Business Analyst

Health Rankings

Understanding the status of the community’s health can help inform policies related to recreation and fitness. Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s *County Health Rankings and Roadmaps* provides annual insight on the general health of national, state, and county populations. The 2019 *Rankings* model shown in Figure 2.11 highlights the topic areas reviewed by the Foundation.

The health ranking for gauging public health of the population is based on “how long people live and how healthy people feel while alive,” coupled with ranking factors including healthy behaviors, clinical care, social and economic, and physical environment factors.¹⁰

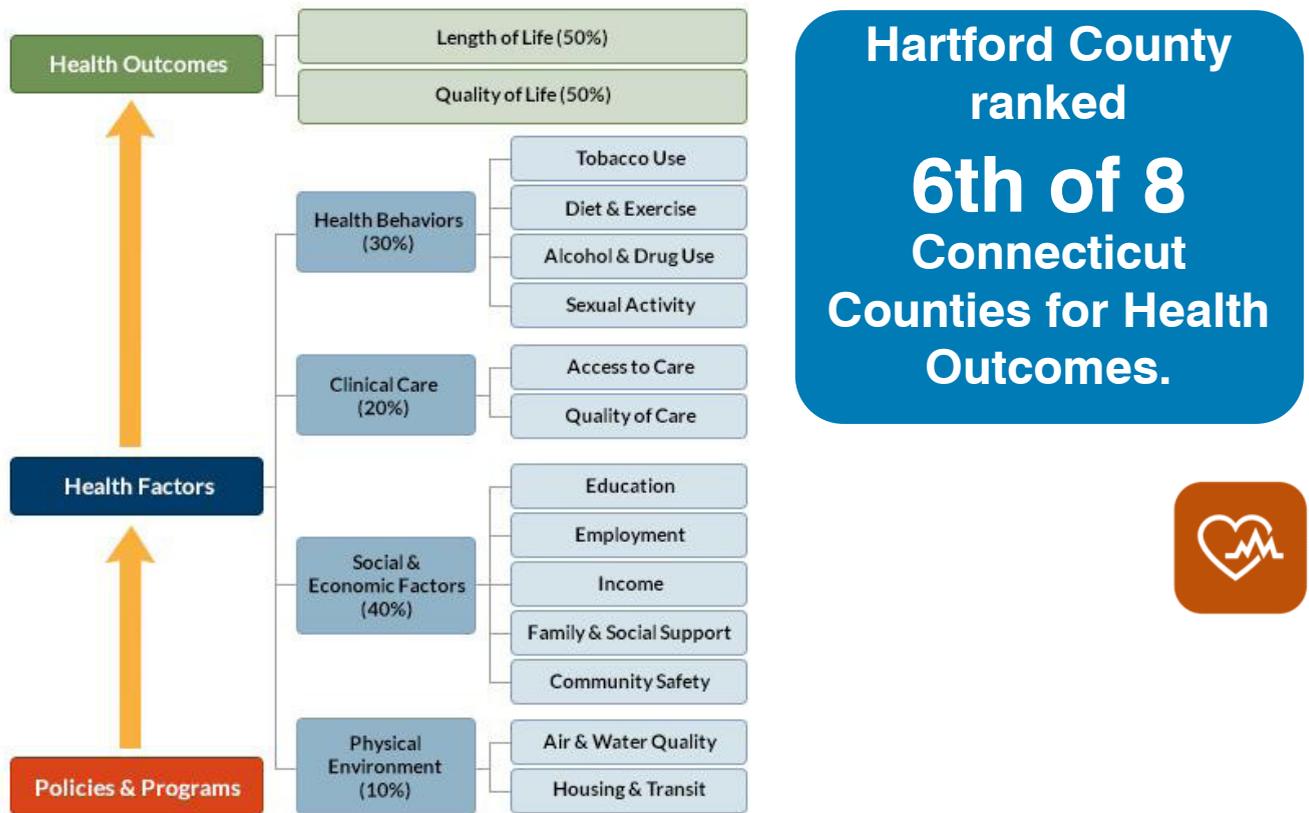


Figure 2.11: County Health Ranking Model
Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

¹⁰ University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute & Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, *County Health Rankings 2019*, <http://www.County-healthrankings.org>.

State Health Ranking

In 2019, the United Health Foundation’s America’s Health Rankings Annual Report ranked Connecticut as the 3rd healthiest state nationally. The health rankings consider and weigh social and environmental factors that tend to directly impact the overall health of state populations as illustrated in Figure 12. The state moved up two positions in the ranking since 2017.

CHALLENGES

of Connecticut health include:

- Low per capita public health funding
- High drug death rate
- High levels of air pollution

STRENGTHS

of Connecticut health include:

- Low prevalence of smoking
- Low percentage of uninsured population
- Low premature death rate

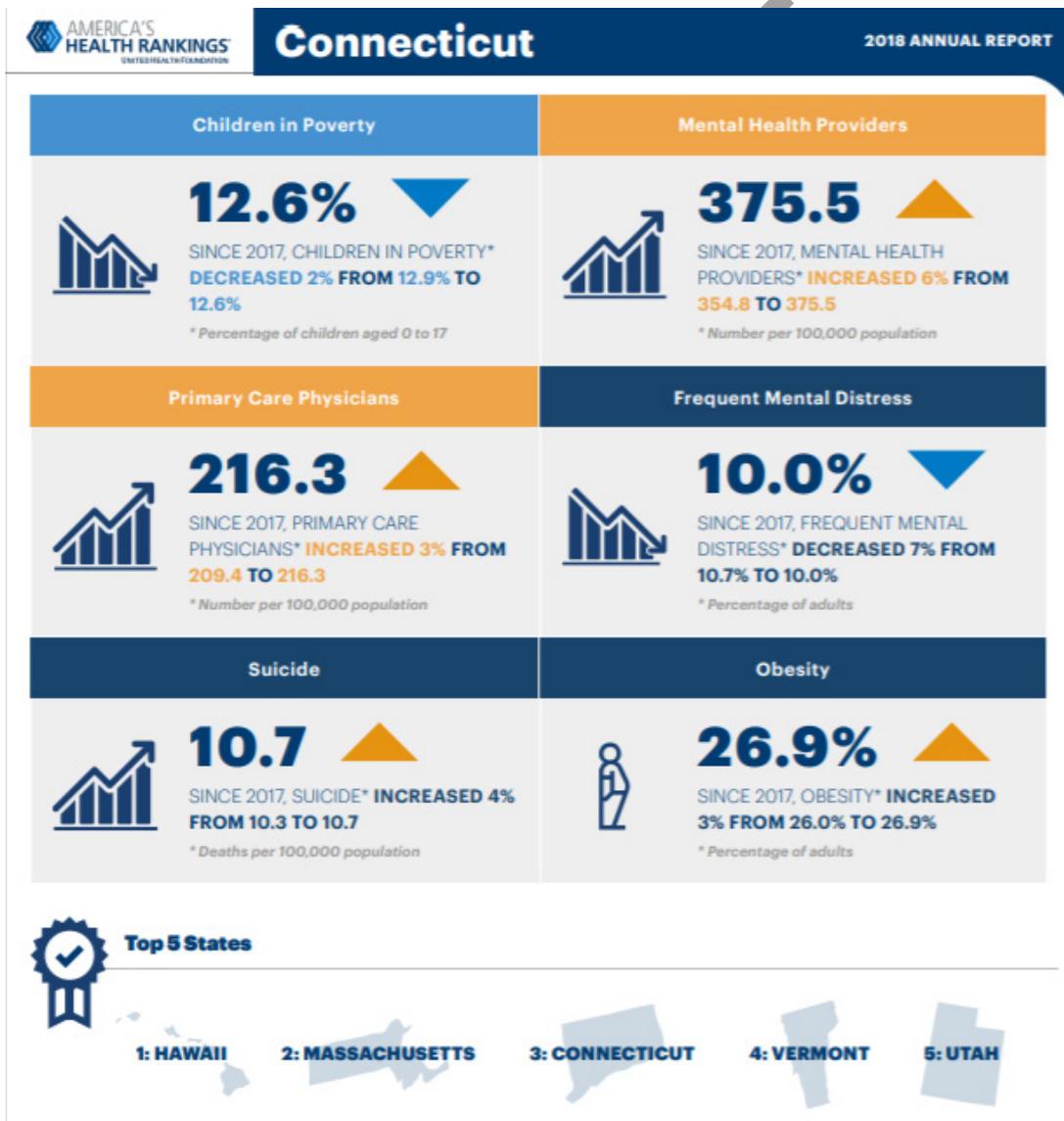


Figure 2.12: 2018 Connecticut Health Ranking Overview
 Source: United Health Foundation’s America’s Health Rankings Annual Report 2018

PART THREE

PARKS, RECREATION AND OUTDOOR TRENDS

The changing pace of today's world requires analyzing recreation trends from both a local and national level. Understanding the participation levels of town residents using data from the U.S. Census Bureau, combined with research of relevant national recreation and outdoor trends, provides critical insights that help to plan for the future of parks, recreation and outdoor spaces. These new shifts of participation in outdoor recreation, sports, and cultural programs are an important component of understanding and serving your community. The following is a sampling of relevant parks and recreation trends in Simsbury:

- Adventure Programming
- Aquatics & Water Recreation
- Bird Watching
- Community Events and Festivals
- Community Gardens
- Conservation
- Cross Country Skiing/Winter Recreation
- Cultural Tourism & Public Art
- Cycling
- Dog Parks
- Economic/Health Benefits of Parks
- Generational Fitness
- Golf
- Marketing and Social Media
- National Healthy Lifestyle
- Nature Play
- Older Adults/Senior Programming
- Outdoor Recreation (Fitness Trails, Adult Playgrounds)
- Pickleball
- Preventative Health
- Signage & Wayfinding
- Splashpads
- Sports
- Therapeutic Recreation

Local Recreational Expenditures

Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics provides insights about consumer expenditures per household in 2019. The following information was sourced from ESRI Business Analyst, which provides a database of programs and services where Simsbury residents spend their money. The table below shows the average dollars spent on various recreational products/services. Money spent on fees and admissions related to entertainment and recreation generated the highest revenues (\$13.5 million) in Simsbury.

Variable	Average	Total
Entertainment/Recreation Fees & Admissions	\$1,447.47	\$13,455,658
Membership Fees for Social/Recreation/Civic Clubs	\$493.43	\$4,586,956
Entertainment/Recreation - Sports/Rec/Exercise Equipment	\$384.65	\$3,575,693
Entertainment/Recreational Vehicles & Fees	\$363.65	\$3,380,460
Fees for Recreational Lessons	\$307.08	\$2,854,644
Camp Fees	\$205.19	\$1,907,479
Entertainment/Recreation Toys/Games/Crafts/Hobbies	\$197.19	\$1,833,059
Pet Services	\$130.41	\$1,212,312
Hunting & Fishing Equipment	\$122.39	\$1,137,718

Variable	Average	Total
Bicycles	\$53.29	\$495,357
Rental of Boats/Trailers/Campers/RVs	\$42.56	\$395,677
Camping Equipment	\$34.53	\$321,031
Water Sports Equipment	\$14.12	\$131,232
Winter Sports Equipment	\$11.36	\$105,562

Figure 3.1: Recreational Expenditures in Town of Simsbury, Connecticut

Outdoor Recreation Behavior

In Figure 3.2, data from ESRI Business Analyst shows popular outdoor recreation activity participation by households in Simsbury. Participation was also pulled from the State of Connecticut for comparison. The most popular activities in the Town of Simsbury included:

- Hiking (18%)
- Jogging or Running (17%)
- Road Biking (14%)

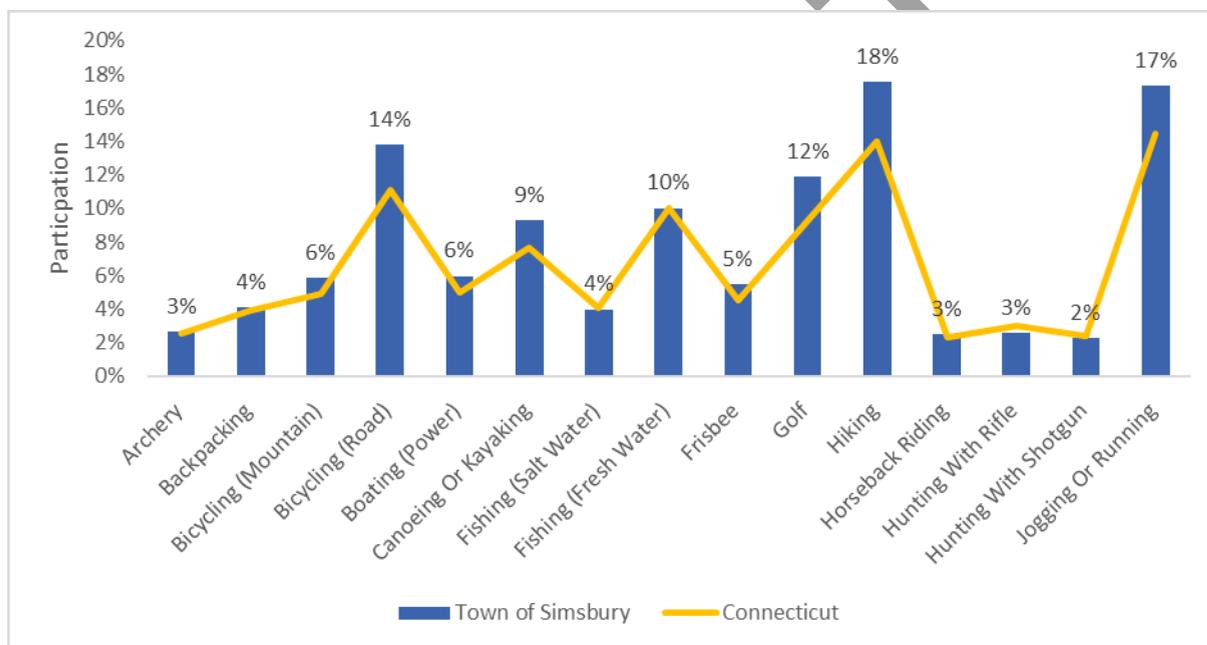


Figure 3.2: Outdoor Recreation Behavior of Simsbury compared to the State of Connecticut

Fitness and Health Behavior

The figure below shows household participation in various fitness activities. Participation was higher in the Town of Simsbury than the State of Connecticut, specifically for the following activities:

- Walking for Exercise (33%)
- Swimming (21%)
- Weightlifting (15%)

Team Sport Participation

Team sport participation and physical activity data is generated through an annual household survey conducted by the Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA), a Project Play partner that provides custom data on youth participation to the Aspen Institute.¹¹

¹¹ The Aspen Institute: Project Play, Sports Participation and Physical Activity Rates, <https://www.aspenprojectplay.org/youth-sports-facts/participation-rates>, accessed March 2020.

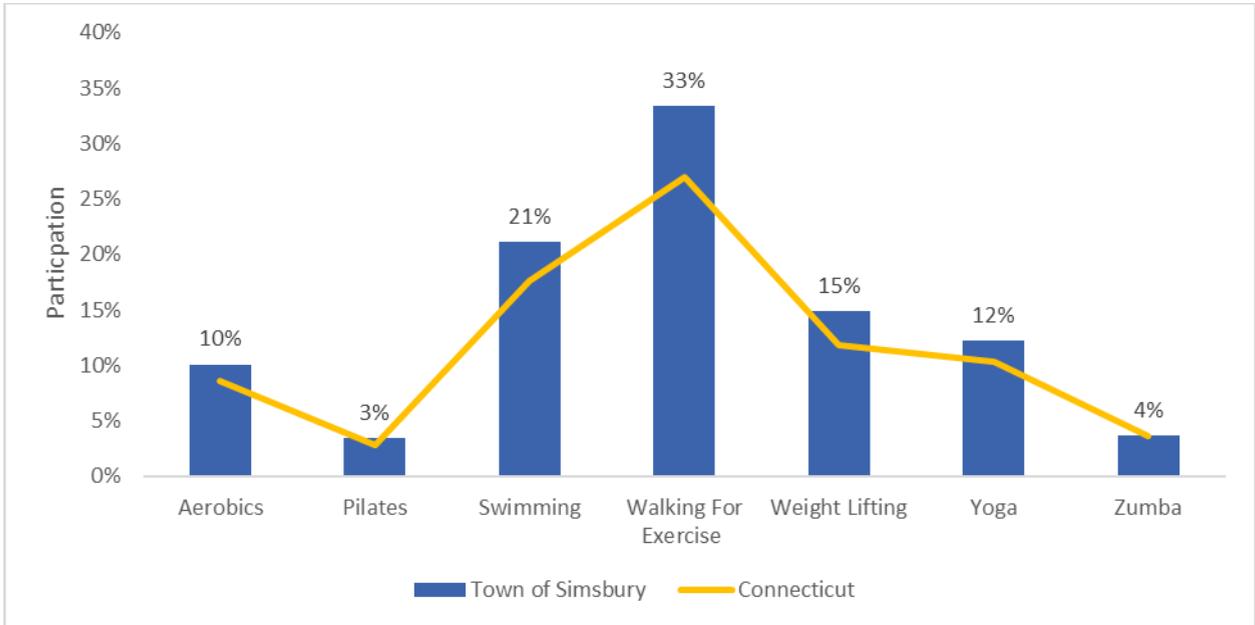


Figure 3.3: Fitness and Wellness Participation of Simsbury compared to the State of Connecticut

The following statistics have been developed through the 2019 study conducted by the Aspen Institute's *Project Play*:

- Approximately 70 percent of children ages 6 to 12 participate in team sports at least once a year.
- Kids between 6 and 12 years of age most often participate in basketball and baseball.

According to census data, households in Simsbury had the highest household participation in basketball (7%) and tennis (5%), with soccer, football, and baseball tied at 4%.

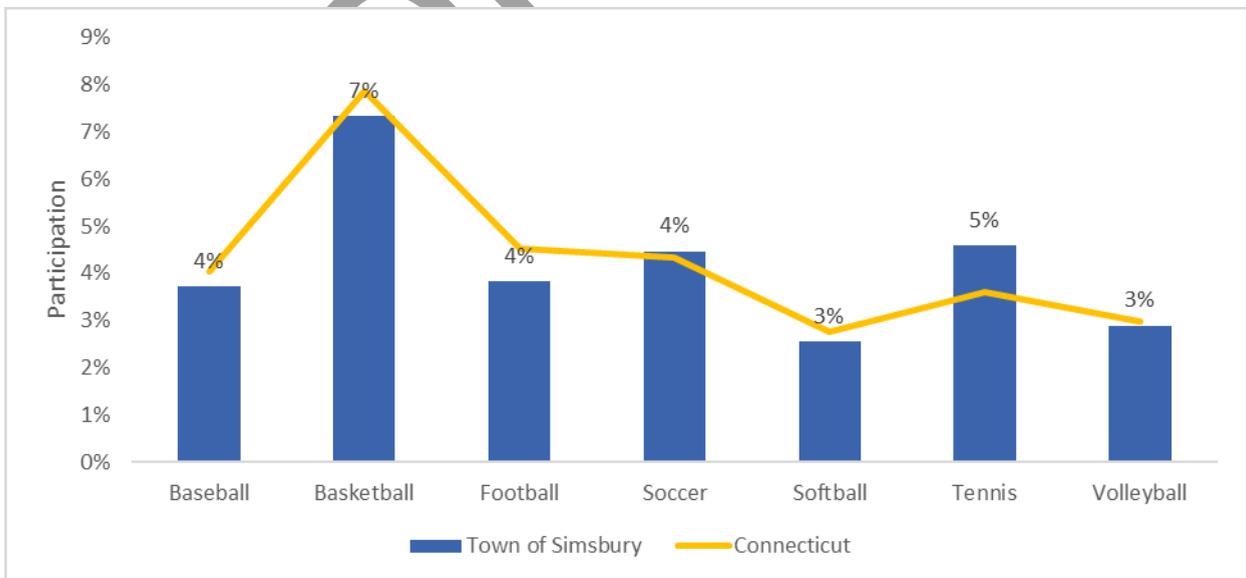


Figure 3.4: Team Sport Household Participation in Simsbury compared to State of Connecticut

Parks and Recreation Trends Relevant to Simsbury

Adventure Programming

Many local agencies form partnerships with companies that can offer adventure experiences that they otherwise may have not been able to produce. While a lack of resources, time, or expertise may inspire the partnership, both organizations can reap the benefits of providing one-of-a-kind adventure experiences. One example of an effective partnership for outdoor adventure is in Castle Rock, Colorado. The park is still offering an incredible example to how an adventure park can be effectively maintained and operated. While Philip S. Miller Park is owned and operated by the Town of Castle Rock Parks and Recreation Department, inside the park lies one of its largest attractions, complete with zip line tours, the EPIC Sky Trek, and the EPIC Adventure Tower. These elements are owned and operated by Castle Rock Zip Line Tours through a partnership. This company hires and trains its own staff, maintains its equipment, and does an impressive job at marketing the park through videos, social media, and other marketing tactics.

As for the adventure elements themselves, the zip line tours offer up to 10 different flying courses, some reaching 50 miles per hour. The second feature, the Epic Sky Trek, has three different levels, each for various abilities, which is perfect for team building. It even features some of the most popular Ninja Warrior elements. Beyond the adventure features offered through the partnership, there are also adventure elements throughout the park, managed by the parks and recreation department. On top of the 7.4 miles of single-track trails, the Challenge Hill outdoor staircase puts walkers and runners to the test with 200 timber steps to the top of the mountain. These stairs host unique community events, placing a spin on traditional 5k's. From the trails, you'll probably notice the impressive adventure playground that takes advantage of the topographic landscape.

On the East Coast, Roanoke County Parks and Recreation recently redeveloped Explore Park – an outdoor adventure attraction with trails, camping, zip lines, and challenge obstacles. A number of programs take place at the park – such as introduction to paddle boarding, stargazing and astronomy, wildlife classes, and much more. Riverfront Access provides fishing, boat launches, and tubing – managed by a local concessionaire.

Another example is the Gathering Place in Tulsa, Oklahoma, which was just named the Best New Attraction by USA Today. This innovative riverfront park is home to Chapman Adventure Playground, a 5-acre imagination zone. The playground elements are ripe with ground-breaking ideas and risk-taking features that offer adventure to a younger demographic. Slides, swings, climbing structures, suspension bridges, and sand pits invite kids of all ages to touch, climb, feel, and explore. The iconic seven towers, dubbed the Spiral Connector, offers a dizzying stimulation of play for all kids. Slide Vale is a set of five slides, one of which even goes underground! A manmade pond offers paddle boat rentals, just a short distance from the impressive splash pad named Mist Mountain, detailed with water cannons, mist areas, jets of water, and a water maze. The Gathering Place is truly an out-of-this-world experience and is considered the largest private gift to a community park in U.S. history – with a price tag of \$465 million dollars. Still, local parks and recreation agencies should be inspired by the possibilities and take note of the imaginative amenities that they might be able to bring back home.

Aquatics and Water Recreation Trends

According to the National Sporting Goods Association (NSGA), swimming ranked second nationwide in terms of participation in 2018.¹² Nationally, there is an increasing trend towards indoor leisure and therapeutic pools. Swimming for fitness is the top aspirational activity for “inactives” in all age groups, according to the Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) 2016 Sports, Fitness and Leisure Activities Topline Participation Report, representing a significant opportunity to engage inactive populations. Swimming as a fitness activity is attractive to people who are typically sedentary – hence the increase in design elements for water exercise including lazy rivers and vortexes and popularity in group water exercise classes.

Additional indoor and outdoor amenities like “spray pads” are becoming increasingly popular as well. In some municipalities spray pools are popular in the summer months. During winter months, spray pools can be converted into ice rinks. In this maturing market, communities are looking for atmosphere, an extension of surroundings either

¹² National Sporting Goods Association, 2018 Sport Participation Snapshot, 2018.

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.

Bird Watching

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife Associated Recreation estimated that 45.1 million people, 14 percent of the national population, participated in birdwatching in 2016.¹³ Of all participants, 86 percent of them observed wild birds around their home.

Approximately 30.5 million people (approximately 9 percent of the national population) participated in wildlife photography in 2016. In New England, 36% of the population enjoyed this outdoor activity.

Smart phone apps offered from organizations, such as the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, offer the opportunity to identify hundreds of bird species by size, color, activity, habitat, wing shape, voice, and tail shape. These tools offer unique new programming opportunities for passive recreation.

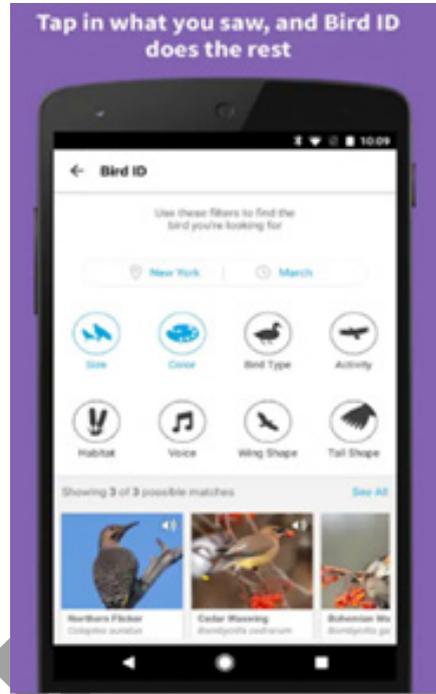


Figure 3.5: Audubon Bird Guide App
Source: Audubon Bird Guide App, National Audubon Society

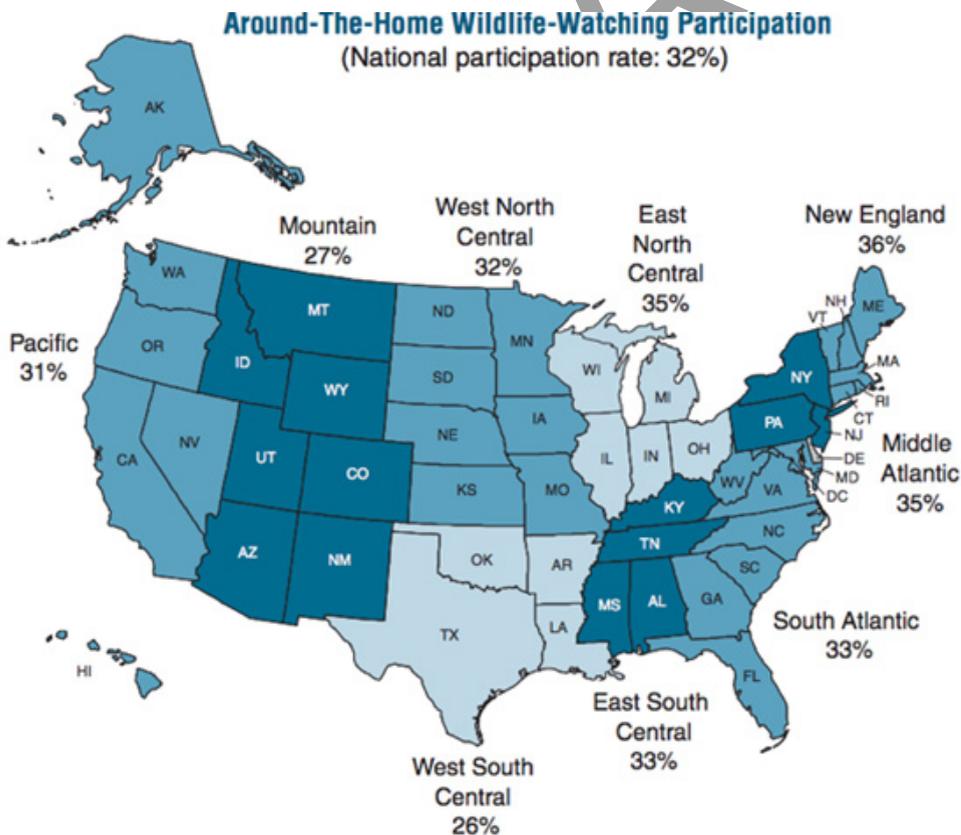


Figure 3.6: Participation in At-Home Wildlife-Watching

¹³ 2016 U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife Associated Recreation https://wsfprograms.fws.gov/Subpages/NationalSurvey/nat_survey2016.pdf

Community Events and Festivals

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 based on profit (sales), prestige (media profile), size (numbers of events). Research by the European Festival Research Project (EFRP)¹⁴ indicates evidence of local and city governments supporting and even instigating and managing festivals to achieve local or regional economic objectives. These objectives often have narrowly defined metrics such as increasing sales, resulting jobs, and attracting tourists. There is also a growing number of smaller, community-based festivals and events supported by local councils reacting to larger festivals that have become prime economic-drivers. These community-based festivals often will re-claim cultural ground based on their social, educational, and participative value. For more information on the values of festivals and events, see the Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre research guide¹⁵ on this topic.

Community Gardens

Communities around the country are building community gardens for several far-reaching environmental and social impacts. According to Greenleaf Communities, which supports scientific research in environmental and human health, community gardens offer benefits including¹⁶:

Environmental	Social
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce waste through composting • Improving water infiltration • Increase biodiversity of animals and plants • Improve air and soil quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase intake of vegetables and fruits • Promote relaxation and improve mental health • Increase physical activity • Reduce risk of obesity and obesity-related diseases

Some studies show that community gardens can improve the well-being of the entire community by bringing residents together and creating social ties. This activity can reduce crime, particularly if gardens are utilized in vacant lots. In fact, vacant land has the opposite effect of community gardens, including increased litter, chemical and tire dumping, drug use, and decreased property values. By creating community gardens, neighborhoods can teach useful skills in gardening, food production, selling, and business. The National Recreation and Park Association published an in-depth guide to building a community garden in parks through the Grow Your Park Initiative, which can be found on their website.¹⁷

Conservation

One of the key pillars of parks and recreation is the role that it plays in conservation. Managing and protecting open space, providing opportunities for people to connect with nature, and educating communities about conservation are all incredibly important. One of the key components of conservation is addressing climate change. Local parks and open spaces build climate resilient communities through the land’s ability to filter and store water, reduce urban heat island effects and promote biodiversity. A report by NRPA in 2017 titled “Park and Recreation Sustainability Practices” surveyed over 400 park and recreation agencies and found the top five ways that local departments are acting on conservation and climate change include:

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ Cooperative Research Centre for Sustainable Tourism, *Estimating the Economic Impacts of Festivals and Events: A Research Guide, 2002*, <http://www.sustainabletourisonline.com/1005/events/estimating-the-economic-impacts-of-festivals-and-events-a-research-guide>, accessed October 2012.

¹⁶ Greenleaf Communities, *The Many Benefits of Community Gardens*, <https://greenleafcommunities.org/the-many-benefits-of-community-gardens>, accessed January 2019.

¹⁷ National Recreation and Park Association, *Building a Community Garden in Your Park: Opportunities for Health, Community, and Recreation*, https://www.nrpa.org/uploadedFiles/nrpa.org/Grants_and_Partners/Environmental_Conservation/Community-Garden-Handbook.pdf, accessed January 2019.

- Alternative Transportation – 77% reduce carbon footprint through offering transportation alternatives
- Watershed Management – 70% adopt protective measures for watershed management
- Air Quality – 53% plant and manage tree canopy that improves air quality
- Sustainable Education – 52% educate the public about sustainability practices
- Stormwater Management – 51% proactively reduce stormwater through green infrastructure¹⁸
- Reduction of urban heat islands

Cultural Tourism & Public Art

Public Art is one aspect of cultural tourism that creates valuable revenue potential. According to the World Tourism Organization, cultural tourism involves visiting sites with historical and cultural value, which “creates admiration, national pride, and the rediscovery of our achievements of our ancestors.” A 2012 global survey by the World Tourism Organization identified six key categories for cultural tourism:

- Handicrafts and visual arts
- Gastronomy and culinary
- Social practices, rituals, and festivals
- Music and performing arts
- Oral traditions and expressions
- Knowledge and practices concerning nature

Cycling Trends

Cycling activities are attractive as they require little equipment, or financial investment, to get started, and are open to participation to nearly all segments of the population. For these reasons, participation in these activities are often promoted as a means of spurring physical activity and increasing public health. The 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 in a community can have a major impact on improving public health and life expectancy.

Public health trends related to bicycling and walking include:

- 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.
- Between 1966 and 2009, the number of children who bicycled or walked to school fell 75 percent, while the percentage of obese children rose 276 percent.
- Bicycling to work significantly reduces absenteeism due to illness. Regular bicyclists took 7.4 sick days per year, while non-bicyclists took 8.7 sick days per year.

Economic benefits of bicycling and walking include:

- Bicycling and walking projects create 8 to 12 jobs per \$1 million spent, compared to just 7 jobs created per \$1 million spent on highway projects.
- Cost benefit analyses show that up to \$11.80 in benefits can be gained for every \$1 invested in bicycling and walking.

National bicycling trends:

- 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.

¹⁸ NRPA, *NRPA Report: Park and Recreation Sustainability Practices, 2017*, <https://www.nrpa.org/our-work/Three-Pillars/conservation/client-resilient-parks/>.

- Bicycle touring is becoming a fast-growing trend around the world, including the United States and Canada. “Travelers are seeking out bike tours to stay active, minimize environmental impact, and experience diverse landscapes and cityscapes at a closer level.”¹⁹
- Urban bike tours, popular in cycle-friendly cities in Europe, are taking hold in the United States as well. Bikes and Hikes LA, an eco-friendly bike and hike sightseeing company founded in September 2014 offers visitors the opportunity to “see the city’s great outdoors while getting a good workout.” In New York, a hotel and a bike store are partnering to offer guests cruisers to explore the city during the summer of 2014.²⁰
- One of the newest trends in adventure cycling is “fat bike,” multiple speed bikes that are made to ride where other bikes can’t be ridden, with tires that are up to 5 inches wide run at low pressure for extra traction. Most fat bikes are used to ride on snow, but they are also very effective for riding on any loose surface like sand or mud. They also work well on most rough terrain or just riding through the woods. This bike offers unique opportunities to experience nature in ways that wouldn’t be possible otherwise.²¹
- Electric Assist Bikes, or e-bikes, are becoming commonplace on both paved and non-paved surfaces. For commuters, this option allows for a quick, convenient, and environment-friendly method of transportation.

Agencies around the country are working to proactively regulate E-Bikes on their trails and greenways. In September of 2019 the Department of the Interior’s land agencies – including the National Park Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Bureau of Reclamation – were ordered to allow E-bikes where other types of bicycles are allowed. According to this policy, E-bikes are no longer defined as motorized vehicles.²²

Dog Parks

Dog parks continue to see high popularity and have remained among the top planned addition to parks and recreational facilities over the past three years. They help build a sense of community and can draw potential new community members and tourists traveling with pets.²³

*Recreation Magazine*²⁴ suggests that dog parks can represent a relatively low-cost way to provide an oft-visited a popular community amenity. Dog parks can be as simple as a gated area, or more elaborate with “designed-for-dogs” amenities like water fountains, agility equipment, and pet wash stations, to name a few. Even “spraygrounds” are being designed just for dogs. Dog parks are also places for people to meet new friends and enjoy the outdoors.

The best dog parks cater to people with design features for their comfort and pleasure, but also with creative programming.²⁵ Amenities in an ideal dog park might include the following:

- Benches, shade and water – for dogs and people
- At least one acre of space with adequate drainage
- Double gated entry
- Ample waste stations well-stocked with bags
- Sandy beaches/sand bunker digging areas
- Custom designed splashpads for large and small dogs
- People-pleasing amenities such as walking trails, water fountains, restroom facilities, picnic tables, and dog wash stations.

¹⁹ Ethic Traveler, *Bike Tourism a Rising Trend*, <http://www.ethicaltraveler.org/2012/08/bike-tourism-a-rising-trend/>, accessed March 2014.

²⁰ Budget Travel Blog, *New Trend: Urban Bike Tours in Los Angeles and New York*, <http://www.budgettravel.com/blog/new-trend-urban-bike-tours-in-los-angeles-and-new-york,11772/>, accessed March 2014.

²¹ Minnesota Cycling Examiner, *Fat Bikes, How to Get the Most Out of Winter Cycling*, <http://www.examiner.com/article/fat-bikes-the-latest-trend-adventure-cycling>, accessed February 1, 2014.

²² Outside Online, *The Great Public Lands E-Bike Rush of 2019*, <https://www.outsideonline.com/2402117/public-lands-ebikes>.

²³ Recreation Management, *Tour-Legged-Friendly Parks*, accessed February 2, 2016.

²⁴ Recreation Management, *2014 State of the Industry Report, Trends in Parks and Recreation*.

²⁵ Recreation Management, *Gone to the Dogs: Design and Manage an Effective Off-Leash Area*, March 2014, http://recmanagement.com/feature_print.php?fid=201403fe02.

Economic and Health Benefits of Parks and Open Spaces

In 2017, the Outdoor Industry Association estimated that national consumer spending on outdoor recreation generated \$887 billion, and directly supported 7.6 million jobs. Additional economic and social benefits include:

- Trails, parks, and open spaces are among the most important community amenities considered when selecting a home.
- Nearly half of active Americans regard outdoor activities as their main source of exercise.²⁶
- 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.²⁷

The Trust for Public Land makes the following observations about the health, economic, environmental, and social benefits of parks and open space²⁸:

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

Generational Fitness Trends

Fitness Participation by Generation

- In 2015, over 80% of Gen Z were active, with a quarter being active to a healthy level. Gen Z had the least percentage of inactives.
- Almost half (49%) of all Millennials were involved in high calorie burning activities.
- 48% of Gen X participated at least once a week in an fitness activity/sport.
- The Boomer generation was the least active in 2015, 34% reporting no activity and only 37% involved in high calorie burning exercises.

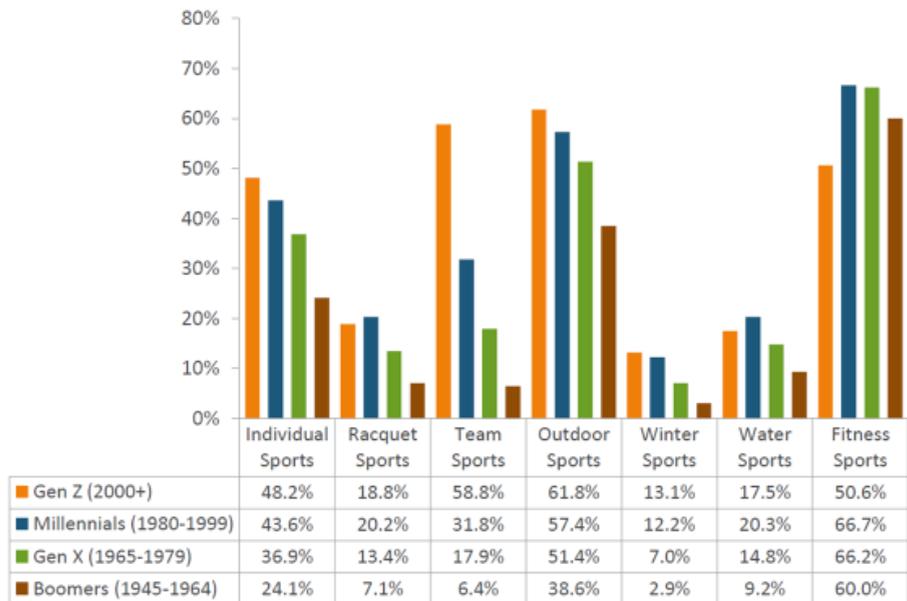


Figure 3.7: 2015 General Fitness Trends, Source: SFIA Topline Report

Golf

The recent decline in golf participation has agencies and stakeholders wondering about the future of golf. According to the National Golf Foundation (NGF), from 1980 to 2000, the number of golfers grew 50 percent to almost 300 million participants. Since 2000, participation has plateaued and declined. Youth Sports Organizations, such as *The First Tee*, are garnering support and engagement for golf, by starting with kids.²⁹ Although the National Golf Foundation is optimistic about the future of golf (they expect a 1% annual growth rate), variations of the sport are growing in popularity. It can be difficult to accurately compare the change in participation overtime, but Google Trends can provide an indication of the nationwide popularity of the following search terms in the search engine (data available from 2004 to present).³⁰

Marketing and Social Media

Awareness of parks and recreation services is critical to the success of any agency. According to a study by the National Recreation and Park Association in collaboration with GreenPlay Research Education and Development (RED), of the approximately 35,000 responses, one of the primary reasons that patrons do not participate in programs and services is due to lack of awareness.

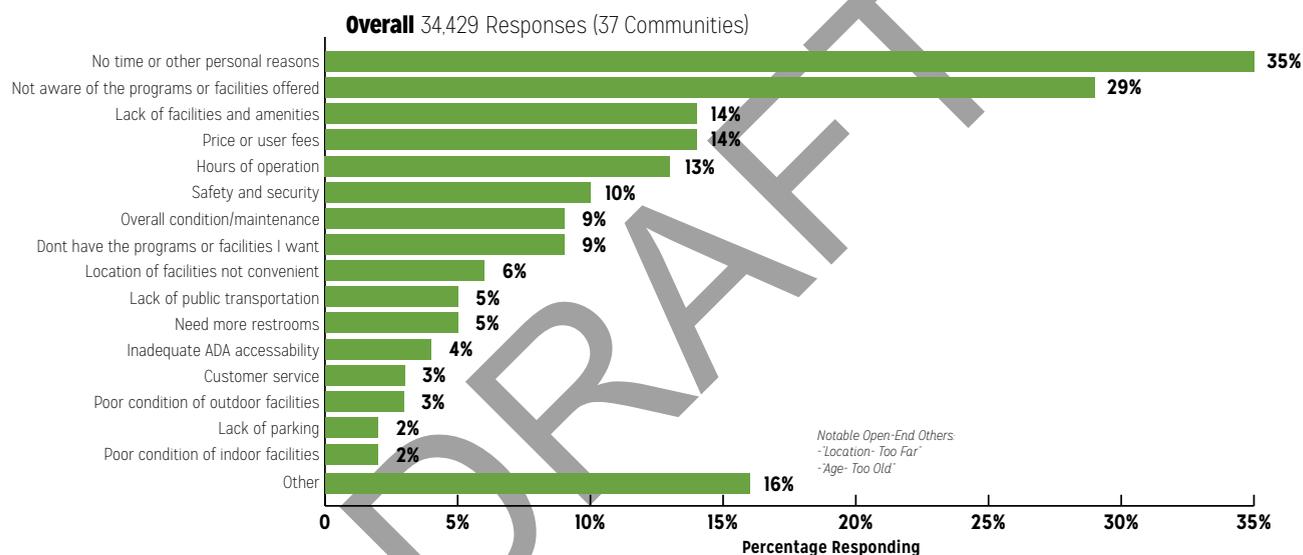


Figure 3.8 NRPA Participation Survey
Source: 2019 Awareness and the Use of Parks

In today's modern world, there is ample opportunity to promote and market parks and recreation services. It begins with a needs assessment that details how the community prefers to receive information. Then a marketing plan should be developed that is catered to the department's resources including staff, time and budget. The plan should guide the department for one to three years and be reassessed afterwards.

Technology has made it easier to reach a wide-reaching, location-dependent audience which can be segmented by demographics. However, it has also caused a gap in the way parks and recreation agencies are able to communicate. Agencies around the country have previously not dedicated substantial funding to marketing, however it is becoming a critical piece to receiving participants. Without dedicated staff and support, it is difficult to keep up with social media trends which seem to change daily. Furthermore, with an overarching desire to standardize a municipalities' brand, there may be limitations to the access and control that a parks and recreation agency has over their marketing. It is essential that professionals become advocates for additional resources, training, and education. Having a strong presence on social networks, through email marketing, and through traditional marketing will help enhance the perception from the community.

²⁹ Source: SFIA Topline Report

³⁰ Google Trends, Search Terms: Golf, Top Golf, Golf Driving Ranges, Golf Simulator, Mini Golf, January 2014 – June 2018, <https://trends.google.com/>

National Healthy Lifestyle Trends

The population of the United States is becoming more diverse. As demographics are experiencing an age and ethnic shift, so too are landscapes, daily lifestyles and habits. The number of adults over the age of 65 has increased, and lifestyle changes have encouraged less physical activity; collectively these trends have created profound implications for the way local governments conduct business. Below are examples of trends and government responses. More and more, local governments are accepting the role of providing preventative health care through park and recreation services. The following facts are from an International City/County Management local government survey^{31 32}:

- 89% of respondents' parks and recreation departments should take the lead in developing communities conducive to active living.
- 84% had already implemented recreation programs that encourage active living in their community.
- The highest priority selected for the greatest impact on community health and physical inactivity was a cohesive system of parks and trails and accessible neighborhood parks.

Nature Play

Playing in nature is an educational opportunity that has numerous benefits, from increasing active and healthy lifestyles, to developing a conservation mindset, to understanding the ecosystems and wildlife that depend on them.³³ According to the report, "Nature Play & Learning Places: Creating and Managing Places where Children Engage with Nature" there is a genuine need in today's society for learning spaces that spark creative play with natural materials, such as plants, vines, shrubs, rocks, water, logs, and other elements. This is the premise of the concept of Nature Play, which is defined as³⁴:



Nature Play

"A designated, managed area in an existing or modified outdoor environment where children of all ages and abilities play and learn by engaging with and manipulating diverse natural elements, materials, organisms, and habitats, through sensory, fine motor and gross motor experiences."

Nature Play spaces can provide valuable lessons for children, not only to learn about their natural environment but for personal development. These spaces, like playgrounds, provide safe spaces to take risks and understand behavioral outcomes. One of the most essential elements in planning Nature Play spaces is to conduct a risk assessment to reduce the unnecessary potential of injury. For instance, natural objects such as logs and boulders may be placed strategically for climbing as long the designer considers where the child might land if he or she were to fall or jump off. Similarly, trees can be used as natural climbing features, with consideration to removing shrubs and nearby smaller trees below. Nature Play can happen in forest-based schools, play zoos, gardens, and summer camps. American Camp Association reported that there are approximately 5,000-day camps that currently operate in the U.S.³⁵

³¹ *Active Living Approached by Local Government: Survey*, International City/County Management Association, 2004, <http://bookstore.icma.org/freedocs/Active%20Living%20and%20Social%20Equity.pdf>.

³² *Parks and Recreation, The Digital Transformation of Parks and Rec*, February 2019, <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2019/february/the-digital-transformation-of-parks-and-rec/>.

³³ *Nature Play & Learning Places. Creating and Managing Places where Children Engage with Nature*, 2014, Raleigh, NC: Natural Learning Initiative and Reston, VA: National Wildlife Federation.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Older Adults and Senior Programming

Many older adults and seniors are choosing to maintain active lifestyles and recognize the health benefits of regular physical activities. With the large number of adults in these age cohorts, many communities have found a need to offer more programming, activities, and facilities that support the active lifestyle this generation desires.

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. Boomers are second only to Generation Y and Millennials in participation in fitness and outdoor sports.³⁶

Boomers will look to park and recreation professionals to provide 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. Activities such as bingo, bridge and shuffleboard will likely be avoided because Boomers relate these activities with old age and associated stigmas.³⁷

Public parks and recreation agencies are increasingly expected to be significant providers of such services and facilities. The American Academy of Sports Medicine issues a yearly survey of the top 20 fitness trends.³⁸ Whether it's Silver Sneakers, a freestyle low-impact cardio class, or water aerobics, more Americans 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.

Outdoor Recreation

Outdoor recreation is becoming one of the most popular activities for individuals and families. Approximately 142 million Americans recreate outside each year. Simsbury is uniquely positioned to capitalize on this trend. Providing outdoor recreation opportunities can encourage people to visit and move to a community, both situations resulting in positive economic impacts for a community.

The Recreation's Economic Contributions (REC) Act, passed in December 2016, recognizes the outdoor recreation industry's enormous contribution to the US economy. Significant economic impacts for the U.S. economy include:

- \$646 billion annually is generated by the outdoor pursuits
- 6.1 million are employed annually in the outdoor recreation industry

A 2017 study from Outdoor Recreation Industry Association reported \$51.1 billion spent on outdoor recreation in the New England area, with a resulting in \$3.5 billion in state and local tax revenues. Approximately 432,000 jobs in this industry are found across New England.³⁹

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council adventure travel is the industry's fastest growing sector. They reported that 98 million Americans, half of all US Adults, took an adventure getaway within the last five year.

³⁶ Physical Activity Council, 2012 Participation Report, 2012.

³⁷ Parks and Recreation, *Recreating Retirement: How Will Baby Boomers Reshape Leisure in Their 60s?* October 2002.

³⁸ American College of Sports Medicine, *Survey Predicts Top 20 Fitness Trends for 2015*. <http://www.acsm.org/about-acsm/media-room/news-releases/2014/10/24/survey-predicts-top-20-fitness-trends-for-2015>, accessed January 2015.

³⁹ Outdoor Industry Association, 2017, *The Outdoor Recreation Economy*. Boulder: Outdoor Industry.



Figure 3.9: Economic Impacts of Recreation Industry

[Open Space & Public Access to Outdoors](#)

Publicly accessible open spaces create opportunities for users of all ages and abilities to walk, run, bike, or hike. The median age of Simsbury is 1.8 years older than that of the State of Connecticut. The Town has high concentrations of people between the ages of 10 and 19 and between 45 and 64 years old. By creating open space for these activities, exercise and healthy lifestyle habits can be incorporated into the daily routines of people of all ages. Established pathways can link neighborhoods together, providing a safer rural and urban landscape.

Pathways provide multiple benefits to the environment, from improving air quality by encouraging non-motorized transportation and reducing automobile use, to cleaning up abandoned rail lines and creating green corridors within the urban fabric for protection of wildlife, aquatic and terrestrial resources. Ultimately, well used pathways generate substantial benefits and will offer values beyond those quantified.

The figure below shows that the Outdoor Recreation Economy grew faster than the U.S. Economy during FY 2015-16.

Growth in Outdoor Recreation Compared to Growth in the U.S. Economy, 2015-2016

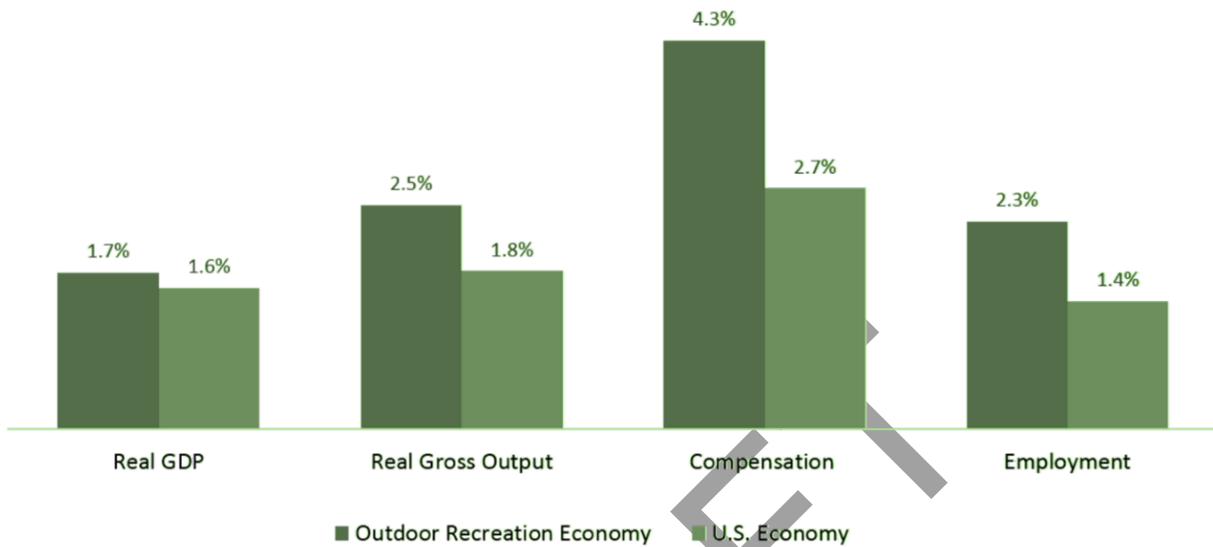


Figure 3.10: Growth in Outdoor Recreation Compared to Growth in the U.S. Economy

The figure below shows the most popular outdoor activities by rate of participation.

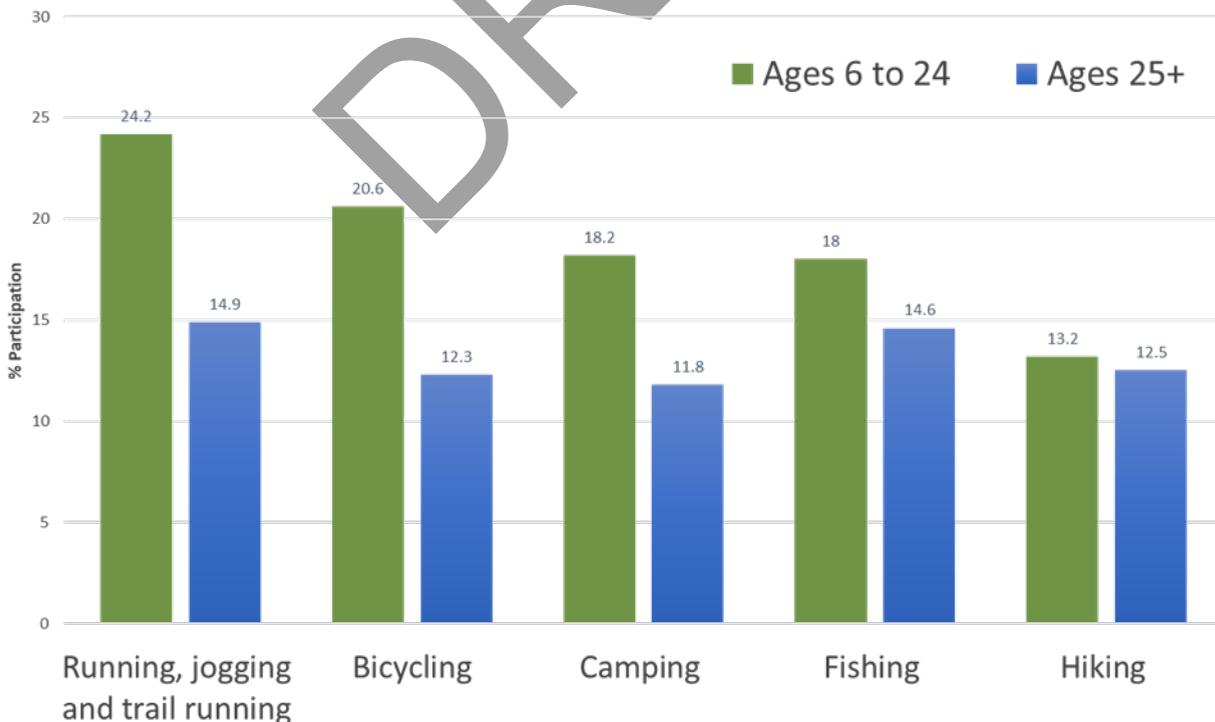


Figure 3.11: Most Popular Outdoor Activities

Fitness Trails

A popular trend in urban parks with trail use for health, wellness, and fitness activities is to install outdoor fitness equipment along the trails. These kinds of exercise stations have been modernized to withstand weather and heavy use. Fitness components can be spaced out or clustered just off the trail with a peaceful and pleasing view of nature or playgrounds. According to a recent survey by the American Heart Association, downturns in the economy affect our physical health, and our ability to go to the gym. Outdoor gym equipment at your local adult playground, on the other hand, is free to use -- no membership required. Workout areas designed for exterior spaces should typically include the kind of fitness equipment you expect at an indoor, membership-only gym. For example, benches, leg press and leg curl machines, recumbent and stationary bikes, and treadmills designed for outdoor use can be utilized. Entire fitness challenge courses are another popular option.

Adult Playgrounds

A new trend that has been rising for several years now: “playgrounds” for adults. The City Museum in St. Louis even boasts a jungle gym made of two repurposed airplanes, 10-story slides and a rooftop Ferris wheel.

Parks are no longer a place of physical activity just for the kids. Adult playgrounds allow the entire family to take part in fitness activities. In fact, these outdoor gyms are often placed in close vicinity to the kids’ playground, so parents can keep an eye out while accomplishing a quick workout. As busy as everyone is, fitness can fall off the radar, so being able to multitask increases the likelihood of both children and parents getting their 30 minutes of exercise (or more!) in for the day. In addition, parents are showing children that fitness and exercise are important at every age.

Pickleball

Pickleball continues to be a fast-growing sport throughout America. Considered a mix between tennis, ping pong, and badminton, the sport initially grew in popularity with older adults. However, now the sport is being taught in schools across the country. From 2016 to 2017, pickleball grew 12.3 percent to 2.815 million players. Judging by its growth in just the last several years, pickleball is expected to continue to become



Figure 3.12: Barrowford Memorial Park Adult Fitness area Source: Pendleparcs / CC BY-SA, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>



Figure 3.13: The City Museum in St. Louis Source: Raymond M. Reskusich, Uploaded by Kara11584 at en.wikipedia / CC BY-SA, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>



Figure 3.14: Pickleball Players Source: By The Villages FL - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=65975778>

Pickleball

2.815

million players
in the US (2017)

12.3%

increase since 2016

In 2016: 1.57 million were “Casual” participants who play 1-7 times a year, while 930 thousand were “Core” participants who play 8 or more times a year

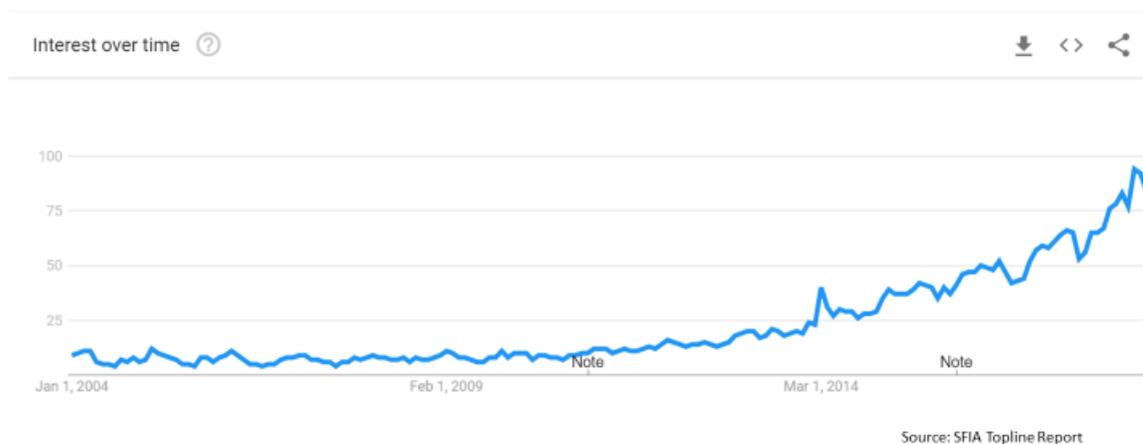


Figure 3.15: Pickleball Player Statistics

more popular. Dedicated pickleball courts are desired by avid players, rather than playing on striped tennis courts. Pickleball, a paddle sport mixing badminton, tennis, and table tennis, is gaining an average of 8 percent growth each year. Growing even slightly faster is Cardio Tennis at 9.1 percent. Cardio Tennis is a fitness program that focuses on combining a full body workout with elements of tennis.

Preventative Health

Research has shown conclusively that parks and recreation agencies have a beneficial effect on modifiable health factors by helping to address:

- Increase physical activity
- Enhance social and parental engagement
- Improve nutrition
- Better transportation and access to facilities and spaces
- Perceptions of personal and community safety
- Reductions of smoking, alcohol, and drug use

These factors can be addressed through collaborations with a variety of community partners or “actors”, such as schools, public health, medical, other governmental agencies, private and non-profit sectors (see Figure 3.18).⁴⁰

⁴⁰ North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC, Local Parks and Recreation Agencies Use of Systems Thinking to Address Preventive Public Health Factors, 2017, <http://www.gpred.org/resources/> under PhD Dissertations.



Figure 3.16: Healthy Communities

Signage and Wayfinding

To increase perception and advocacy, a parks and recreation professional needs to prioritize opportunities that impact the way the community experiences the system. This can start with signage, wayfinding, and park identity. The importance of signage, wayfinding, and park identity to encourage awareness of locations and amenities cannot be understated. A park system impacts the widest range of users in a community, reaching users, and non-users, across all demographic, psychographic, behavioral, and geographic markets. In a more narrow focus, the park system is the core service an agency can use to provide value to its community (ex. partnerships between departments or commercial/residential development, high-quality and safe experiences for users, inviting community landscaping contributing to the overall look or image of the community). Signage, wayfinding, and park identity can be the first step in continued engagement by the community, and a higher perception or awareness of a park system, which can lead to an increase in health outcomes.

Cary, NC provided samples shown on the following page of how they chose to implement a cohesive and comprehensive Wayfinding, Signage, and Identity Plan. The key elements are that each sign and wayfinding device provides a cohesive identity that help residents identify parks and recreation holdings and point to their awareness. In a city of trees, such as Cary, staff believes this has greatly helped resident knowledge and awareness.

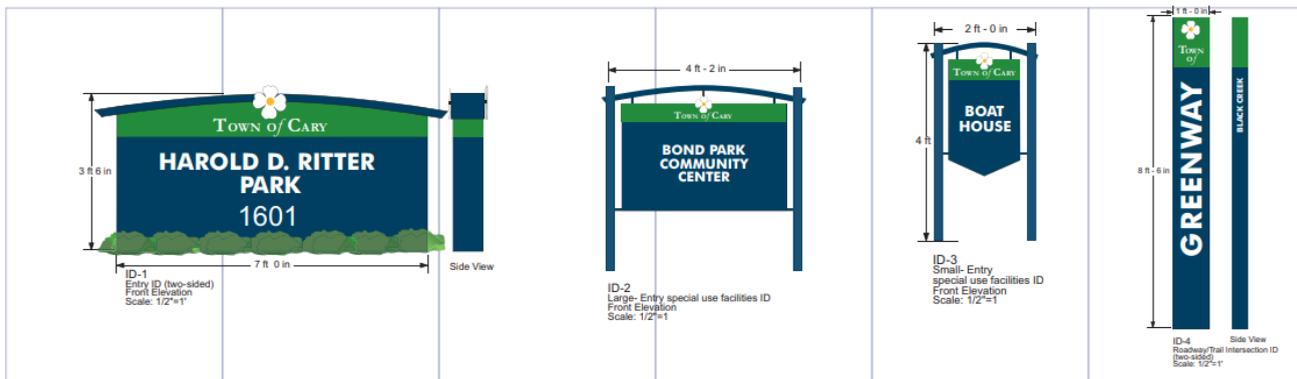


Figure 3.17: Cary, NC Site-Specific Signage

Skateparks

Wherever skateparks are created, they immediately start providing tangible benefits that can help address many of the community's other challenges. The Tony Hawk Foundation works with different communities and city leaders to realize the recreational and social benefits of skate parks. Here are examples of how skateparks and skateboarding can improve a community.⁴¹

1. Young People Need Community Support: People of all ages, and particularly adolescents, benefit from community engagement and a sense of belonging. Skateparks demonstrate that a community is committed to providing healthy options to young people.
2. Most Communities Have Skateboarders Right Now: There are millions of skateboarders across the nation, and even the smallest towns have a few kids that skate (about 18% of all youth skate at least occasionally). Without that local skatepark, those young people are riding their skateboards in places that are probably inappropriate.
3. Kids Are Seeking Fun Places to Go: Kids love having fun. Healthy play is one of the most enriching activities that a young person can engage in. If you visit any skatepark, you'll see dozens of young people all having fun together.
4. Friendships Are Being Formed at The Skatepark: Skateparks draw people from all walks of life and encourage relationships that often last a lifetime. If you ask a skateboarder, they'll tell you that they have an easier time relating to other skateboarders than to average people. The skatepark helps these people connect with each other.
5. Skateboarding Is A Good Fit for Risk-Seeking Teens: Skateboarding resonates with thrill-seekers because it offers exciting physical feats that can be safely attempted.
6. Skateparks Are A Worthwhile Investment: Concrete skateparks are atypical in that they require specialty design and construction services that can be more expensive than standardized facilities. Once built, however, skateparks immediately become one of the area's most-utilized attractions and are virtually maintenance-free. Trash-removal is the only regular maintenance a skatepark should ever need.
7. Your Skatepark Will Be A Community Landmark: Skateparks, once built, quickly demonstrate their incredible value and unmatched return on the community's investment. Even the nay-sayers often revise their negative opinions about skateboarders and skateparks after seeing typical skatepark activities.

⁴¹ Why Cities & Communities Should Support Skateboarding and Public Skateparks, https://medium.com/@daniel_stories/why-cities-communities-should-support-skateboarding-and-public-skateparks-6e23ba5da3fb, accessed March 2020.

Splashpads

Splash pads, or spray grounds, have seen enormous growth in popularity over the past decade. Simply looking at search terms over time (from 2004 to present), Google Trends show that more people are searching for this amenity.

The popularity of splash pads is geographical and is more common in the West. According to a feature article from Recreation Management, splash play areas were least common in the Northeast; only 31.9 percent of responding agencies had this amenity, compared to 55.8 percent of those in the West.⁴² Urban areas are more likely to have splash play areas than rural areas. This shift is most likely due to the benefits of splash play areas.

Interest over time 

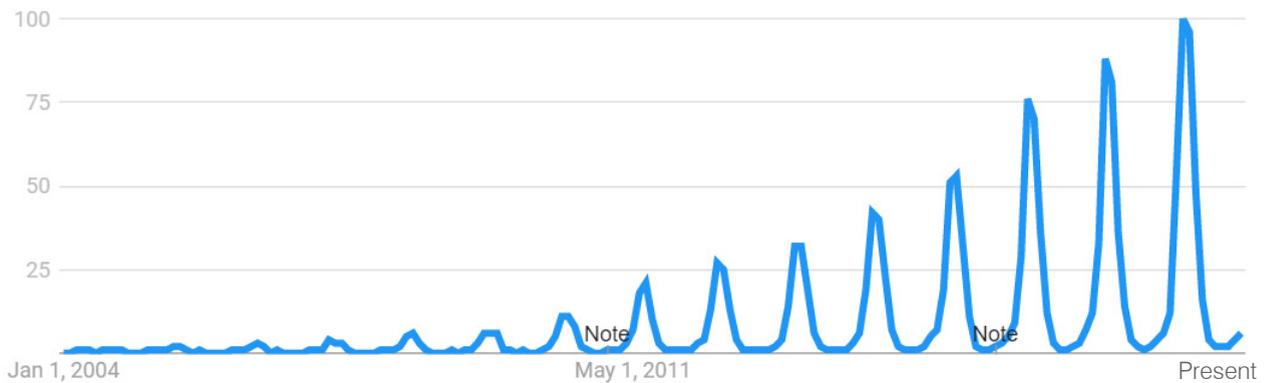


Figure 3.18: Splash pad (Google trends)



Figure 3.19: Nature-themed Splash Pad

Benefits of Splash Pads

- Access for All Ages & Abilities
- Cool Destination in Summer
- Easier Maintenance
- Reduced Staff
- Outdoor Exercise
- Sensory Development

⁴² Recreation Management, *Aquatics: A Look at Trends in Aquatic Facilities*, June 2016 <http://recmanagement.com/feature/201606fe03/1>.

Sports Trends

According to the Sports and Fitness Industry Association, high-intensity interval training (HIIT) and cross-training style workouts, or CrossFit, are two of the top trending aerobic activities. CrossFit combines elements of gymnastics, weightlifting, running, rowing, and other sports to create a varied fitness regime.

Trends in Outdoor Recreation by Ethnicity

- Participation among Asians has increased by 1.2% over the past five years while Caucasian participation has declined by 0.9%.
- Black and Hispanic participants went on the most average outings per participant.
- Running was the most popular outdoor activity for almost all ethnicities; however, white participants participated in fishing at a higher rate than running.

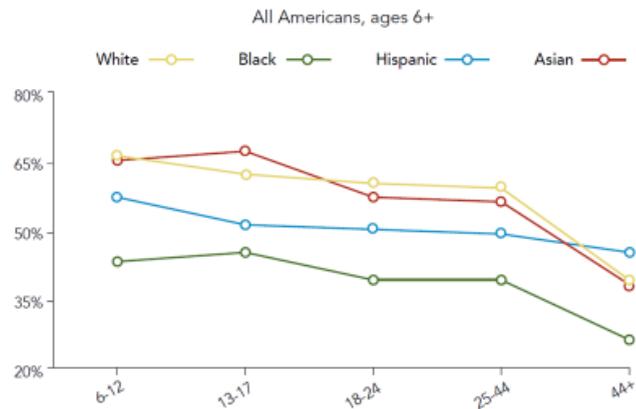
Ethnicity	Participation Rate in 2016	5-year Average Annual Growth
White	50%	-0.9%
Black	33%	0.4%
Hispanic	48%	1.8%
Asian	51%	1.2%

Most Popular Outdoor Activities

Hispanic

1. Running/Jogging and Trail Running **23%**
2. Road Biking, Mountain Biking and BMX **15%**
3. Hiking **13%**
4. Car, Backyard, Backpacking and RV Camping **11%**
5. Freshwater, Saltwater and Fly Fishing **11%**

participation rates among diverse groups by age



Source: 2017 Outdoor Participation Report

Figure 3.20: Trends in Outdoor Recreation by Ethnicity



With regard to individual sports, off-road triathlons have seen almost 17% average annual growth for the last five years. These races, such as XTERRAs, consist of a competitive combination of swimming, mountain biking, and trail running.

Engaging non-participants is one of the challenges of parks and recreation agencies. According to the 2018 SFIA report, income impacts activity rates; households making under \$50,000 are significantly less active than those making more. Having a friend/partner come along when participating in a sport for the first time was found to increase participation more than any other factor.

Sports Trends

Water Sport	5 Year Avg. Annual Growth
Stand Up Paddling	↑ 20.2%
Kayaking (whitewater)	↑ 6.0%
Recreational Kayaking	↑ 5.2%
Rafting	↓ -1.4%
Water Skiing	↓ -3.8%
Jet Skiing	↓ -5.0%

Team Sport	5 Year Avg. Annual Change
Rugby	↑ 16.5%
Baseball	↑ 10.4%
Swimming on a Team	↑ 10.1%
Fast Pitch Softball	↑ -2.7%
Touch Football	↓ -3.5%
Ultimate Frisbee	↓ -8.7%

Aerobic Activity	5 Year Avg. Annual Change
High Impact Intensity Training (HIIT)	↑ 9.3%
Cross-Training Style Workouts	↑ 6.6%
Row Machine	↑ 5.8%
Stair Climbing Machine	↑ 5.6%
Aquatic Exercise	↑ 5.0%
Tai Chi	↑ 5.0%
Strength Activity	5 Year Avg. Annual Change
Kettleballs	↑ 7.0%
Individual Sports	5 Year Avg. Annual Change
Triathlon (Off-Road)	↑ 17.1%
Martial Arts	↑ 11.2%
MMA for Fitness	↑ 11.1%
Trail Running	↑ 9.6%
Boxing for Competition	↑ 9.5%
Adventure Racing	↑ 7.3%
Boxing for Fitness	↑ 6.2%
Racquet Sports	5 Year Avg. Annual Change
Cardio Tennis	↑ 9.1%
Pickleball	↑ 8.5%

Source: 2018 Sports, Fitness, and Leisure Activities Topline Participation Report, 2012 - 2017

Figure 3.21: Sports Trends

Therapeutic Recreation

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) established that persons with disabilities have the right to the same access to parks and recreation facilities and programming as those without disabilities. In 2004, The National Council on Disability (NCD) issued a comprehensive report, *Livable Communities for Adults with Disabilities*.⁴³ This report identified six elements for improving the quality of life for all citizens, including children, youth, and adults with disabilities. The six elements are:

1. Provide affordable, appropriate, accessible housing
2. Ensure accessible, affordable, reliable, safe transportation
3. Adjust the physical environment for inclusiveness and accessibility
4. Provide work, volunteer, and education opportunities
5. Ensure access to key health and support services
6. Encourage participation in civic, cultural, social, and recreational activities

Therapeutic Services bring two forms of services for persons with disabilities into play, specific programming and inclusion services. Individuals with disabilities need not only functional skills but to have physical and social environments in the community that are receptive to them and accommodating individual needs. Inclusion allows individuals to determine their own interests and follow them.

⁴³ National Council on Disability, *Livable Communities for Adults with Disabilities*, December 2004, <http://www.ncd.gov/publications/2004/12022004>.

Many park and recreation departments around the country are offering specific programming for people with disabilities, but not as many offer inclusion services. In “Play for All—Therapeutic Recreation Embraces All Abilities”, an article in *Recreation Management Magazine*,⁴⁴ Dana Carman described resources for communities looking to expand their therapeutic recreation services. Parks and Recreation departments usually hire certified therapeutic recreation specialists to design programs that match participant needs. While these programs are exclusively for people with disability, inclusion services (also known as accessible recreation) not only benefit those with accessibility concerns but expose able-bodied people to a portion of the population that is often excluded from the greater society. By mainstreaming accommodations for people with restricted abilities the world of recreation becomes a more welcoming, safer environment for all.

Walk with a Doc

Also popping up in parks around the country are “Walk with a Doc” programs. These programs encourage people to join others in a public park to learn about an important health topic, get a health assessment, e.g. blood pressure and to take a healthy walk along a scenic trail, led by a physician, cardiologist or pediatrician. This is a great way to make the important connection between people, parks and physical and mental health. Cardiologist Dr. David Sabgir created this doctor-patient interactive program in 2004. With physicians ‘walking the talk’, the programs are getting people out in the parks, engaging in healthy physical activity, and reversing the consequences of a sedentary lifestyle “in order to improve the health and well-being of the country.”⁴⁵

Winter Recreation

Winter sports are gaining popularity in the United States, and their economic contributions are being tracked and monitored. According to a report in collaboration with POW (Protect Our Winters) and REI, in February 2018, snow sports such as snowboarding, skiing, and snowmobiling generated an estimated \$20.3 billion in economic value in the United States, primarily through ski resorts, hotels, bars, restaurants, grocery stores, and gas stations.⁴⁶ More than 20 million people participated in downhill skiing, snowmobiling, and snowboarding between 2015 and 2016.

One sport that is on the rise is cross country skiing, which saw a 12 percent increase in popularity. The numbers from the Outdoor Recreation Topline Report show that cross country skiing is on the rise.⁴⁷ Cross Country Skiing can be implemented in parks, trails, and on golf courses. According to an article in *Green Section Record*, published by the United States Golf Association (USGA), golf courses can be a year-round community asset. Managers must make a plan ahead of time, decide the appropriate routes for trails, and stick to a schedule for grooming. Snow machines with grooming attachments are commonly used to develop Nordic ski trails and are relatively affordable. According to the USGA, ski trails should “not traverse greens, tees, landing areas, or other sensitive areas of the course.”⁴⁸ There are many considerations when building and maintain Nordic ski trails; however, the impact of Nordic ski trails should be minimal and short-term, but certainly planned for. Overall, cross country skiing is increasing in popularity and supports an outdoor recreation economy. Golf courses can be a prime location for ski trails with proper planning, design, and maintenance.

44 *Recreation Management*, February 2007, <http://recmanagement.com/200710fe03.php>, accessed February 25, 2015.

45 *Walk with a Doc, Does your Doctor Walk the Walk*. <http://flowalking.com/2012/01/does-your-doctor-walk-the-walk/>; <http://www.walkwithadoc.org/who-we-are/walk-information/>, accessed September 13, 2012.

46 *Protect Our Winters and REI CoOp, The Economic Contributions of Winter Sports in a Changing Climate*, https://gzg764m8l73gtwx-g366onn13-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/POW_2018_economic_report-1.pdf, accessed April 2019.

47 *Outdoor Foundation, Outdoor Recreation Participation Topline Report 2016*, https://outdoorindustry.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2017-Topline-Report_FINAL.pdf, accessed January 2019.

48 *Green Section Record, USGA 2008 Ski Season: Golf Courses Provide Recreation Opportunities Throughout the Year, Even When it Snows*, <http://gsrpdf.lib.msu.edu/tic/pdf.py?file=/2000s/2008/080120.pdf>, accessed January 2019.

PART FOUR

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

Public engagement is fundamental to the master planning process. This input, whether received during a public forum, in a survey, or face-to-face, helps the team form a well-rounded, multi-faceted comprehension of the unique challenges and needs of the community. The Weston & Sampson team attended a variety of public events in the summer of 2019 to obtain informal feedback about parks, open space, and recreational programming in the Town of Simsbury. Parks staff joined the team to assist with distribution of paper surveys and to encourage locals to submit their ideas and concerns. These pop-up events included:

- [Simsbury Mini Maker Faire – May 4th, 2019](#)

This popular event was held at the Simsbury Public Library. It is an excellent opportunity for a wide variety of age ranges to come together to showcase the community's talents and aptitude for innovation. Showcases of inventions were held in the Library while various vendors and non-profit groups set up outside.

- [Burgers on the Bridge – May 29th, 2019](#)

Held on the famous Old Drake Hill Historic Flower Bridge, this event was a great cookout fundraiser. Plans for renovation to the bridge and surrounding properties were presented by the Town.

- [Simsbury Duck Race - May 31th, 2019](#)

This unique family event starts with food and music, and attendees proudly cheer on a decorated duck parade. The event culminates in a rubber duckie race down the Farmington River, whose finish line is stationed just south of the Old Drake Hill Flower Bridge. Visitors watch the race from the bridge and attempt to throw rubber ducks into floating goals in the river below.

- [Hartford Symphony Orchestra Concert & Fireworks – July 5th, 2019](#)

A festival of patriotic tunes, soundtrack favorites, and a fabulous fireworks display following the concert. Approximately 7,000 people were in attendance; however, this event had the lowest engagement because patrons set up picnic spots and did not wander around once the concert started.

Feedback from these events aligned with the results of more formal feedback sessions. The project team received approximately 30 paper surveys and extensive conversational comments. Booth visitors relayed the importance of providing programming for all age ranges, and the need for better multi-modal access to the various parks. Similar to the survey (discussed later in this chapter), users expressed a desire to keep open spaces open, and to increase passive recreational opportunities in the Town. Specific recommendations included improvements to the Simsbury Meadows parking lot and permanent restrooms in popular parks.

Formal public engagement meetings were held from July 24 - 26 with multiple stakeholder groups. Meetings included staff and community focus groups, stakeholder meetings, and an open public forum. Focus groups were by invitation extended through the Culture, Parks and Recreation Department staff with the goal of bringing together stakeholders with differing points of view to solicit broad based perspectives on their experiences, challenges, and ideas for enhancing the Town's parks and recreation facilities and programs. The stakeholder meetings included representatives from the local youth organizations, elected officials, Town Departments, and civic organizations. Each focus group meeting lasted approximately 60 minutes. All meetings were facilitated by the Weston & Sampson team and a series of questions was used to ensure adequate input was received by all attendees. A total of 9 focus groups and stakeholder interviews were held. A total of 49 individuals participated.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis

Conducted during the public input week, individual sessions were held with staff, stakeholders, officials, and the general public. A series of questions were asked of the participants, ranging from strengths and weaknesses; needed improvements to programs and amenities; and what the participants saw the priorities being for the future of the plan. A summary of the SWOT input follows:

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good customer service • Provide high quality of maintenance • Open space • Conservation • Sustainability • Parks are well used • Strong recreation programs • Great outdoor opportunities 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing and communication • Parking • Restroom access • Need programming for very young • Need indoor facilities • Need more resources for parks maintenance • Maps need updating • Need more access to school facilities • Facility scheduling
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities to attract other park users • Expand special events • Focus on Recreation, Parks, Arts – for economic benefits • Add/update wayfinding and signage • Opportunity to add more active recreational activities • Partnerships with other groups • Need to maintain what we have • Add indoor and outdoor facilities • Define desired level of service for parks • Add wildlife management plan • Improve open spaces and trails 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding • Pedestrian and bike safety • Transportation • Enforcement of ordinances • Lack of funding for staffing • Aging park infrastructure • Population growth • Invasive plants

In addition to focus group and stakeholder meetings, a public meeting was held on July 25, 2019 to allow for any interested member of the community to provide feedback and ideas for consideration during the planning process.

Survey Results

Online surveys are a great way to obtain input in an organized format where participants are asked to answer a range of questions developed by a collaborative process between the project team and the Town. A paper copy of the survey was also available at the Culture, Parks and Recreation Department and paper surveys were handed out at the pop-up events listed in the section above. The community participation in the Simsbury Parks and Open Space Online Survey was very strong, with 1,019 respondents. Out of these, 558 surveys were completed (others were partially taken). Ninety-two percent of surveys were completed by Simsbury residents. A copy of the survey is included in Appendix C.

Survey Demographics

- 94 percent owned a home in Simsbury
- 42 percent lived in Simsbury 20+ years
- 26 percent lived in Simsbury 10 –19 years
- 15 percent lived in Simsbury 5 –9 years

- 17 percent lived in Simsbury 0 –4 years
- 68 percent of respondents identified as female
- 95 percent of respondents identified as white/Caucasian
- Over 50 percent of respondents were between the ages of 35-54

Household Demographics:

- 46 percent of residents had children between 0-12 years old
- 28 percent of residents had children between 13-19 years old
- 63 percent of respondents were between 20-64 years old
- 19 percent of respondents were 65 years or older
- 37 percent of households had dogs

According to survey respondents the **most** frequently visited parks and open spaces were:

- Simsbury Meadows
- Simsbury Farms
- Curtiss Park
- Flower Bridge
- Memorial Park
- Town Forest

According to survey respondents the **least** visited parks and open spaces were:

- West Mountain
- Tariffville Park
- Meadow Pond
- Onion Mountain
- Schultz Park

Survey Respondents rated their **satisfaction with the quality** of parks and open spaces as a **3.7 on a 5-point scale**.

Several barriers to use of Town parks & open spaces were identified (in order of response):

- Not interesting
- Poorly maintained
- Insufficient parking
- Not easily accessible
- Too crowded/busy
- Safety

The following were the **most** popular recreation activities:

- Biking
- Playgrounds
- Aquatic activities
- Hiking
- Concerts
- Walking/jogging

The following issues were identified as the **most** important to improve:

- Restrooms
- Tables
- Benches

Survey Respondents rated their **satisfaction with the trails** as a **3.3 on a 5-point scale**.

The following trail priorities were identified:

- Connect to neighborhood/resources
- Nature trails
- Trails along water

Several barriers to trails usage were identified (in order of response):

- Poor connectivity
- Signage issues
- Trails too crowded
- Poor trail conditions
- Parking
- Not interested

Survey respondents indicated the following activities for future enhancement:

- Soccer
- Cultural
- Baseball
- Lacrosse
- Swimming

Survey Respondents indicated their **top park and open space initiatives** for future implementation:

- Preserve natural areas
- Develop and improve existing facilities
- Develop more water-based recreation (canoeing, fishing, etc.) opportunities
- Develop more passive recreation (hiking, picnicking, etc.) opportunities
- Develop more indoor recreation facilities (rink, indoor pool, community center, etc.)

Survey Respondents indicated their **top three items** that need the most improvement in Simsbury's parks and open space areas:

- Amenities (signage, fencing, seating, drinking fountains, shade shelter)
- Public access to water bodies
- Security (sense of security, lighting, etc.)

Survey Respondents indicated their desire for **new** recreation facilities and amenities:

- Walking/jogging
- Splash pads
- Winter use (cross country skiing, sledding)
- Passive recreation (benches, picnic tables)
- Community meeting space

Survey Respondents indicated their **top** future implementation priorities:

- Preserve natural areas
- Develop/preserve existing facilities
- Nature and historical programming
- Develop more water-based recreation facilities/opportunities (canoeing, fishing, etc.)

The survey responses listed above are not an exhaustive representation of each question asked or more nuanced responses; rather, these responses are a sampling of the types of questions asked and an overview of responses. A complete summary of the survey can be found in Appendix C.

PART FIVE

ORGANIZATIONAL, MARKETING, AND FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

Organizational Structure

The project team broadly assessed the management structure and staffing levels of the Culture, Parks and Recreation Department to determine effectiveness and efficiency in meeting current and future departmental responsibilities as related to the community's needs. Many observations were considered to determine if the Department had the right mix of staffing in the right places within the department.

The staffing analysis process included the observations and assessments of:

- Community input
- Staff focus group
- Facility tours
- Observations of quality of maintenance
- Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) Analysis
- Organizational chart

After considering the organizational observations and staffing assessment, the consultant team has determined that the Culture, Parks and Recreation Department does not have the correct number of positions to operate its current system. The Department should consider additional full-time staff to allow for the proper maintenance of parks, trails, and open space facilities. A minimum of one full-time staff maintenance position is recommended, and two would resolve a significant backlog of work and free up staff to make renovations. A sampling of deferred maintenance due to inadequate staffing levels includes tree care, invasive species control, and irrigation replacement. Additionally, the Department should consider safety measures such as periodic check ins and emergency alert systems to reduce safety concerns. Hiring of additional personnel will ensure that staffing resource levels can maintain existing and new facilities at or above acceptable standards as the Master Plan is implemented.

Rationale for Additional Full-time Maintenance Positions

Culture, Parks and Recreation	FY 17/18 Actual FTE	FY 18/19 Budgeted FTE	FY 19/20 Budgeted FTE
Admin			
Director of Culture, Parks and Rec	1.00	1.00	1.00
Recreation Supervisor	2.00	2.00	1.00
Admin Secretary I	1.00	1.00	1.00
Parks			
Parks Superintendent	1.00	1.00	1.00
Parks Foreman	1.00	1.00	1.00
Mechanic - Parks	1.00	1.00	1.00
Parks Maintainer I	1.00	1.00	1.00
Parks Maintainer II	5.00	5.00	5.00
Golf			
Golf Course Superintendent	1.00	1.00	1.00
Assistant Golf Course Superintendent	1.00	1.00	1.00
Golf Maintainer - PT	1.00	1.00	1.00
Golf Mechanic - PT	1.00	1.00	1.00
Golf Maintainers - PT (5@ 800 hrs)	2.00	2.00	2.00
Total	19.00	19.00	18.00

Figure 5.1: Culture, Parks and Recreation Department Current Position Table

Adequate Staffing and Scheduling

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) encourages employers to provide adequate staffing so night shift workers can take breaks and relax during their shift. The administration also recommends employers establish a quiet and secluded area for workers to rest. If a worker is new to a night shift, it can take up to 10 days to adapt to the new schedule. Employers should make arrangements during evening shifts to ensure workers new to the schedule receive additional rest periods if needed.

Financial Analysis

Current Circumstances

Culture, Parks and Recreation facilities, programs, and services are essential to maintaining Simsbury as a premier community. However, not all facilities, programs, and services are equal. In general, the more a facility, program, or service provides a community benefit to its citizens, the more that element should be paid for by all citizens as part of the Town’s general fund. Conversely, the more a facility, program, or service provides individual benefits, the more that element should be paid for by user fees. This funding and cost recovery philosophy acknowledges the tremendous public benefits of parks and recreation to the community. Culture, parks and recreation services also promote and support a community’s economic development, crime prevention, and community health. The Town should seek to leverage partnerships wherever possible to help fund the facilities, programs, and services that it provides to the community.

The community indicated satisfaction with access and affordability of programs and services. Culture, Parks and Recreation staff need to work diligently to continue to control expenses and improve revenues to maintain the access and level of affordability to which residents of Simsbury have become accustomed.

A review of the Revenue Survey March 11, 2019 Report provided by Simsbury staff comparing The Town of Simsbury Culture, Parks and Recreation Department with 25 other similar communities was reviewed. The key items identified were:

- Simsbury population ranked 11th out of the 25 communities surveyed
- Simsbury had the third highest revenue total
- Simsbury ranked 14th in General Fund Budget Allocation

A review of the per capita cost analysis for FY 17/18 of eight Town's similar to Simsbury shows the following:

PER CAPITA COST ANALYSIS

Town	Population	General Fund	GF P&R	Expenses in	GF All
		P&R Budget	Per capita Spending	GF Budget	P&R Admin.
Simsbury	24,348	\$949,343 *	\$38.99	33.1%	NO
Rocky Hill	20,021	\$2,093,146	\$104.54	76.7%	YES
Avon	18,414	\$801,425	\$43.52	68.3%	YES
Guilford	22,350	\$1,486,875	\$66.52	69.5%	YES
Newington	30,604	\$1,644,384	\$53.73	65.5%	YES
South Windsor	25,789	\$1,990,980	\$77.20	44.3%	YES
Cheshire	29,262	\$1,648,658	\$56.34	76.5%	YES
Glastonbury	34,768	\$3,587,276	\$103.17	70.9%	YES

* Includes \$185,616 Board of Education reimbursement for athletic field maintenance

Key findings from the comparison of per capita spending indicated:

- Simsbury has the 5th highest population
- Simsbury has the second lowest Park & Recreation budget
 - If the budget wasn't subsidized by a \$185,616 from the Board of Education as a reimbursement for athletic field maintenance, it would be ranked the lowest
- Simsbury's General Fund Park & Recreation per capita spending is the lowest
- Simsbury's percentage of expenses in the Town's General Fund for Park & Recreation is the lowest
- Simsbury's Park & Recreation Administration is the only Town not funded by the General Fund
- Simsbury's General Fund Park & Recreation per capita spending is \$29 below the average of \$68
- Simsbury's percentage of expenses in the Town's General Fund for Park & Recreation is 30 percent below the average of 63.1 percent

The financial analysis of Simsbury's Park and Recreation General Fund shows the Department is underfunded by more than 50 percent compared to the other similar towns. An additional \$706,092 could be added to bring Simsbury up to the average per capita spending.

A review of the Fiscal Year (FY)19/20 General Fund Expenditures shows the following most notable changes regarding the Board of Finance approved budget:

- The amount approved for most items was consistent with the FY19 estimates
- General Fund contribution to the special revenue fund for FY 19/20 was increased from \$100,000 to \$180,000
Note: the contribution level was sustained in the FY 20/21 budget.
- Special Programs – Recreation revenue was anticipated to increase \$40,800
- Revenue for Skating, Simsbury Farms Pools, Sponsorships, Concessions, Court Rentals and Golf Course Fees were all estimated to decrease by a total of \$63,247
- Funding for full-time staff for special programs decreased by \$34,169
- Contractual services funding increased \$23,376

Simsbury's Culture, Parks & Recreation Department's largest assets are its parks, facilities, and amenities. Adequate funding for staffing, operations and maintenance should be the highest priority to preserve these assets.

A review of the Six Year Capital Non-Recurring (CNR) Plans for Fiscal Year 2019/20 – Fiscal Year 2024/25 reveals the following funding:

- FY 19/20 \$281,200
- FY 20/21 \$589,500
- FY 21/22 \$509,500
- FY 22/23 \$528,000
- FY 23/24 \$577,000
- FY 24/25 \$427,000
- FY 25/26* \$372,000

A review of the Six Year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for Fiscal Year 2019/20 – Fiscal Year 2024/25 reveals the following funding:

- FY 19/20 \$100,000
- FY 20/21 \$900,000
- FY 21/22 \$2,100,000
- FY 22/23 \$300,000
- FY 23/24 \$300,000
- FY 24/25 \$300,000
- FY 25/26* \$200,000

*Notes:

1. FY 25/26 values based off of FY 20/21 to FY 25/26 anticipated budget.
2. The Department completed a Special Fund Analysis in January 2020 indicating key financial issues related to the Fund and recommendations for addressing those issues. Four overall recommendations were developed as a part of the analysis: 1. Accounting for Expenses, 2. Funding for Community Use Items, 3. Golf Course Management, and 4. Reconvene the Parks and Recreation Special Revenue Fund Work Group. A copy of the analysis is included in Appendix E.

Financial Sustainability for Program Delivery

It is important for the Town to develop a Resource Allocation and Pricing Philosophy that reflects the values of the community and the responsibility it has to the community. This philosophy will be especially important if the Town moves forward in the development of new programs and additional and/or expanded facilities, and as it strives for sustainability and determines how much operations can be subsidized with tax dollars.

One means of accomplishing this goal is applying a process using an industry tool called the “Pyramid Methodology” (see Figure 5.2). This methodology develops and implements a refined cost recovery philosophy and pricing policy based on current “best practices” as determined by the mission of the Department and the program’s benefit to the community and/ or individual.

Critical to this philosophical undertaking is the support and understanding of elected officials and ultimately, citizens. Whether or not significant changes are called for, the Department wants to be certain that it is philosophically aligned with its residents. The development of the core services and cost recovery philosophy and policy is built on a very logical foundation, using the understanding of who is benefitting from recreation services to determine how the costs for that service should be offset.

Recreation programs and services are sorted along a continuum of what delivers the greatest individual benefit to what delivers the greatest community benefit. The amount of subsidy for each level (not necessarily each individual program) is then determined to create an overall cost recovery philosophy.

Developing effective ongoing systems that help measure success in reaching cost recovery goals and anticipate potential pitfalls are dependent on the following:

- Understanding of current revenue streams and their sustainability.
- Tracking all expenses and revenues for programs, facilities, and services to understand their contributions to overall Department cost recovery.
- Analyzing who is benefiting from programs, facilities, and services and to what degree they should be subsidized.
- Acknowledging the full cost of each program (those direct and indirect costs associated with program delivery) and where the program fits on the continuum of who benefits from the program or service to determine appropriate cost recovery targets.
- Defining direct costs as those that typically exist purely because of the program and the change with the program.
- Defining indirect costs as those that would typically exist anyway (like full-time staff, utilities, administration, debt service, etc.).
- Program fees should not be based on ability to pay, but an objective program should be in place that allows for easy access for lower income participants, through availability of scholarships and/or discounts. In many instances, qualification for scholarships and/or discounts can mirror requirements for free or reduce cost lunch in schools.

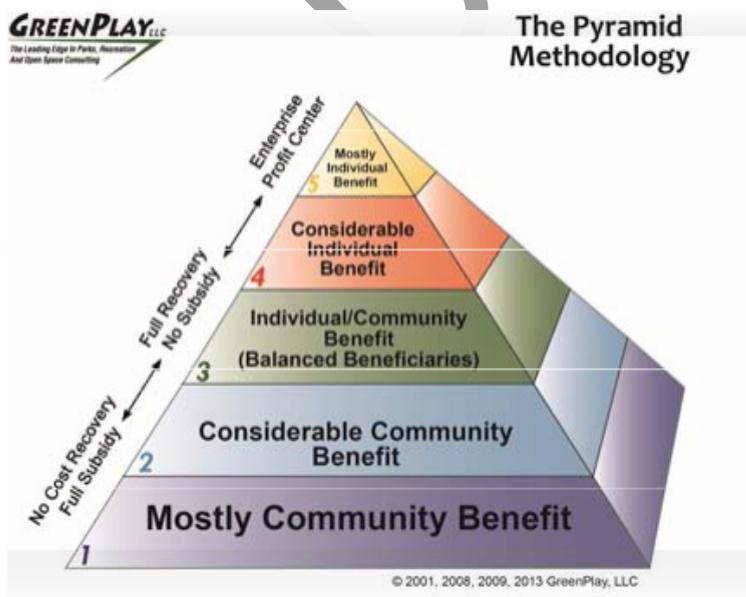


Figure 5.2: Pyramid Methodology

Marketing

The Department utilizes a number of effective marketing tools and strategies actively promoting culture parks and recreation services in the community. These tools include, but are not limited to, proactive use of social media platforms, Town and Department websites, the Culture, Parks and Recreation program guide, press releases, posters and flyers. The Culture, Parks, and Recreation Department frequently attends cultural events to interact with residents and visitors in person, which builds relationships and fosters trust. Survey respondents indicated that emails from the Town were the best way to reach them followed by internet/website and the parks and recreation activity guide. The Valley Press and Simsbury Patch were also identified as desired methods of communication, particularly for members of the community without access to a computer.

The Town Manager has expressed a desire to create a consolidated “Community Services” quarterly program brochure for the Culture, Parks and Recreation Department; library and social services. The Town has begun to explore options for contracting with a marketing consultant for developing program guides, social media, and assisting with greater utilization of Constant Contact.

Partnerships and Alternative Service Providers

Many groups in the community support current programming. Partnerships with the Land Trust, Simsbury Fish and Game Club, Old Drake Flower Bridge, Farmington Valley Racquet Club, Chamber of Commerce, Open Space Commission, Simsbury Historical Society and Tourism, Simsbury Meadows Performing Arts Center, Service Groups, area youth sports organizations provide programming and special event support.

Opportunities exist to partner with health care providers and hospitals to address health and wellness programming. Other partners include churches, public safety agencies, outdoor/environmental/conservation entities for nature-based programming, community gardens and increased partnering with the schools for out of school time and enrichment programming.

Potential Funding Support

Revenue Enhancement is one Key Theme in a Financially Sustainable Plan. The Department should continue to pursue funding strategies that include:

- Explore alternative funding sources that strategically align with targeted services.
- Expand alternative funding for strategic initiatives through grants.
- Explore additional Community Partnerships.
- Explore additional opportunities for (and use of) sponsorships.

Funding support is discussed in greater detail in Section 10: Goals & Action Plan.

PART SIX

RECREATION PROGRAMMING ANALYSIS

Historic participation levels and participant feedback can be used to determine if current programs should be continued. Analysis of trends of parks and recreation programming will help the Department determine future program needs. Sources of trends information used in the development of the report include:

- State Parks and Recreation Associations Publications
- National Recreation and Parks Association Studies
- International Health, Racquet & Sports Association Reports
- Parks and Recreation Trade Publications

It is important to look at recreation programming in a demographic context, to understand if current offerings are adequately meeting the needs of the Town. This analysis must be performed regularly, since socio-economic patterns and age range composition can change over time. Simsbury's Culture, Parks, and Recreation Department is fortunate to have a rich assemblage of programs that can be found on the Town's website.

Analysis of Current Programming Program Inventory

The Department offers programs in the following areas:

- After School Activities
- Camps and Outdoor Recreation
- Sports
- Health and Wellness
- Adult Activities and Fitness
- Children's Activities
- Paddle Tennis
- Camps
- Races/Triathlons
- Simsbury Celebrates – special events
- Ice-Skating/Hockey
- Trips
- Youth Sports
- Cooking
- Fishing
- Community Events
- Aquatic Activities and Lessons

Programming Opportunities

Current program offerings appear to be well received and well attended by the community. Input gathered from the public input process and a review of the program inventory resulted in the following observations:

Strengths:

- Responsive staff
- Good variety of programs
- Maintenance of facilities - clean and appealing
- Multiple parks, trails and pathways
- Balance of recreation and open space priorities
- Great partnerships with leagues and user groups

Areas for improvement:

- Marketing and communication
- Connectivity of trails and pathways
- Wayfinding and signage
- Staffing levels for programming and maintenance
- ADA accessibility
- Inadequate field space

Areas for additional programs include:

- Cultural programs
- Senior programs
- Pre-school programs
- Historical tours and interpretative programs
- Pickleball
- Outdoor adventure and recreation programs

Consistency with National Trends

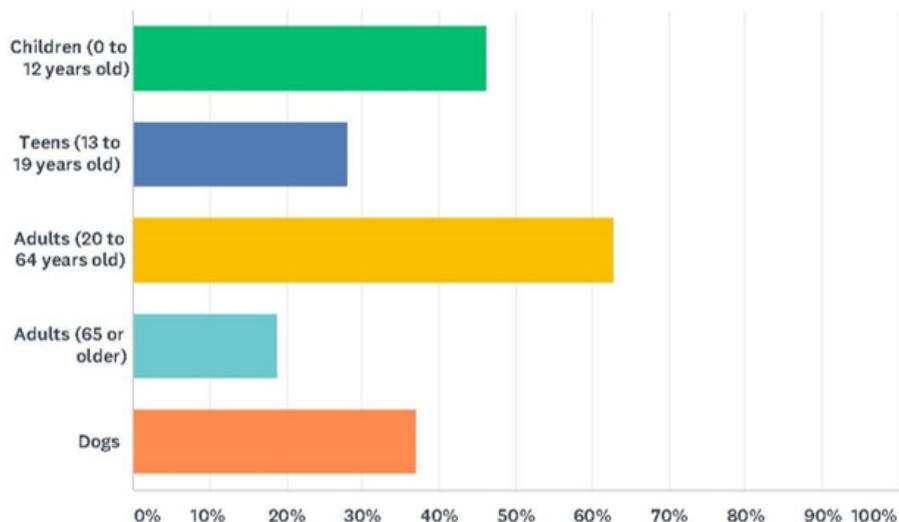
The Department offers many programs that are consistent with national trends, like:

- Events and festivals
- Fitness classes
- Aquatics programs
- Camps and outdoor recreation

Survey Results compared with Simsbury’s Demographics

A review of public survey results indicated the majority of respondents reported household sizes of people aged 20 to 64 years old. The second largest segment included households with children 0 – 12 years old.

Survey Household Composition



A separate demographic study showed the highest portion of Simsbury’s population to be 50 – 64 years old followed by the 10 – 19-year-old age group.

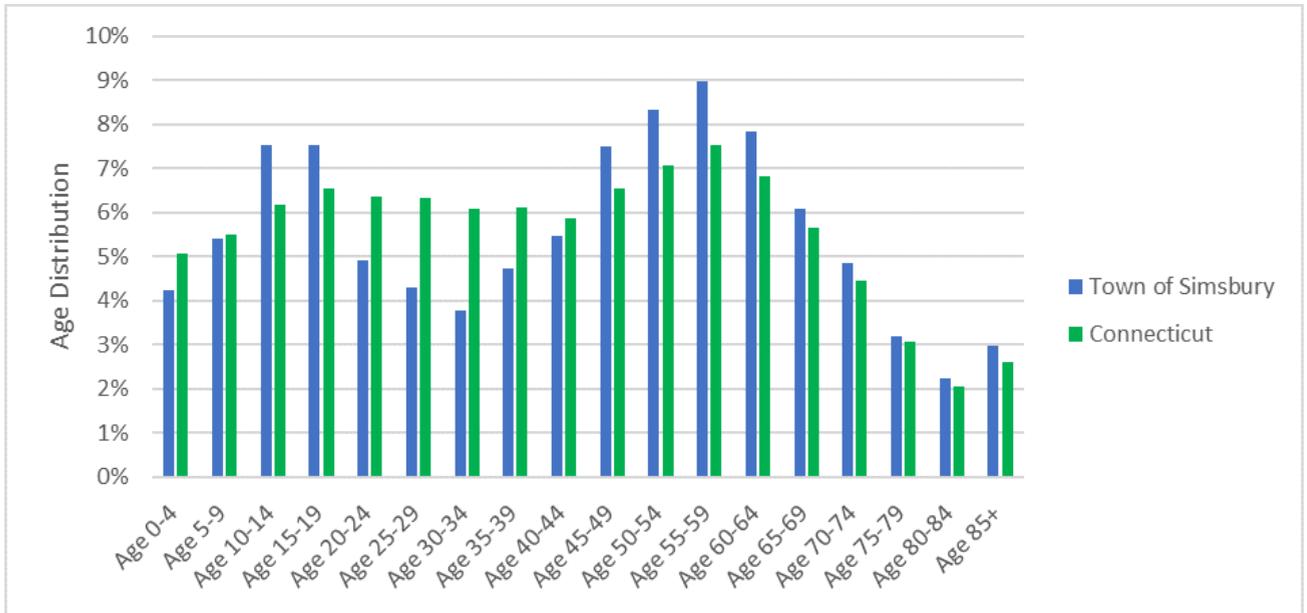


Figure 6.1: 2019 Age Distribution in Town of Simsbury

The top fitness and wellness activities identified in the demographics trends analysis were: walking for exercise, swimming, weight lifting, yoga and aerobics. Team sports ranking highest in the trends include basketball, tennis, baseball, soccer and football.

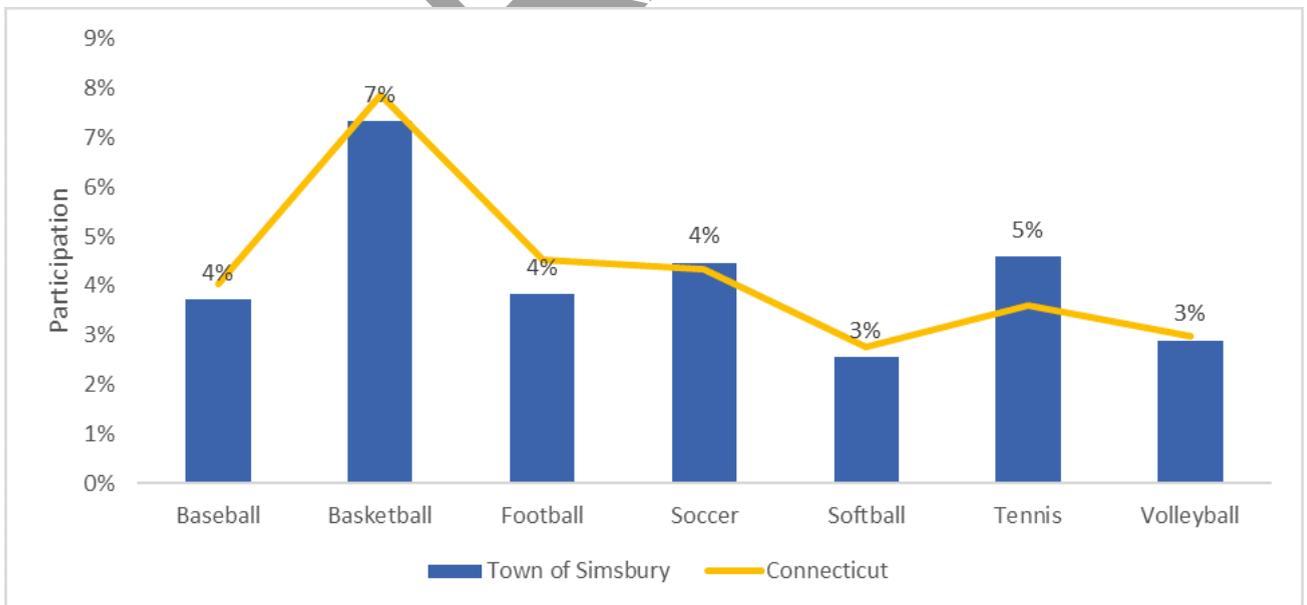
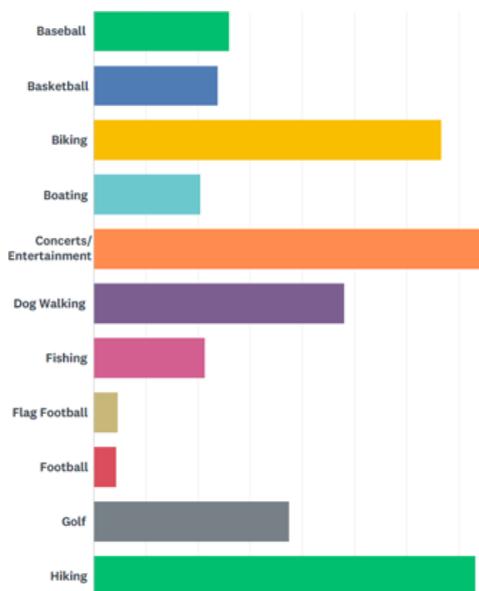


Figure 6.2: Team Sport Household Participation in Simsbury compared to State of Connecticut

Special events such as concerts, biking, aquatics and walking/jogging rated highest in activities pursued by residents in the public survey. Top responses for future recreational programs included cultural and swimming programs.

Passive Recreation scored the highest

- Followed by:
 - Biking
 - Playgrounds
 - Aquatic activities
 - Hiking
 - Concerts
 - Walking/jogging



This information would suggest that Simsbury should focus on these 50 – 64-year-old age group followed by the 10 – 19-year-old age group when developing programs. Special events such as concerts and cultural events along with aquatics programming should be a focus for Simsbury in the future.

Program Evaluation

All current programs should be evaluated annually to determine if they should be continued, changed or discontinued. The program evaluation should include both formal and informal methods of evaluation. Formal evaluation methods would include simple end of program surveys or feedback forms and instructor assessments. Informal evaluation methods would include drop in evaluations by the program supervisor, simple exit interviewing of participants and periodic participation by the supervisor in the program.

The following questions should be asked about each program:

- Is participation increasing or decreasing? If participation is increasing, then it could clearly mean that the program should be continued. If participation is decreasing are there any steps to take to increase interest through marketing efforts, change the time/day the program is offered and change the format or instructor? If not, it may be time to discontinue the program.
- Is there information contained in the participant feedback that can be used to improve the program?
- Are cost recovery goals being met? If not are participation levels sufficient to justify continuation of the program, if not, can fees be realistically increased?
- Is there another service provider for the program that could more efficiently offer the same service? If yes, the Department could provide contract with this service provider and provide a space or could offer referrals for its customers for programs not offered or discontinued.
- Is this program taking up facility space that could be used for expansion of more popular programs or new programs in demand by the community?

Future Program Development and Changes

It is very easy to focus on programs that have worked for a number of years, especially if they are still drawing enough interested participants to justify the program's continuation. Starting new programs, based on community demand and/ or trends, can be risky due to the inability to predict their success. The Department should pursue program development around the priorities identified by customer feedback, program evaluation process and research. This philosophy, as well as an ongoing effort to assess the changing needs of the community, provides the basis for developing and maintaining appropriate program offerings.

The following criteria should be considered when developing new programs:

- Need or enough demonstrated demand to successfully support a minimal start (one class to begin with)
- Budget: accounting for all costs and anticipated revenues should meet cost recovery target established by Department
- Location: appropriate, available and within budget
- Instructor: qualified, available and within budget
- Materials and supplies: available and within budget
- Marketing effort: adequate and timely opportunity to reach intended market, within budget or new funding available

If the program interest seems great, as with those identified in public input, then the programs should be expanded. Moreover, new leisure and recreation trends may drive different needs. Appropriate available space may hinder new or expanded opportunities in some cases.

Key Findings:

- Focus on programs for the 50 – 64-year-old and the 10 – 19-year-old age groups.
- Special events such as concerts and cultural events are a priority for the community.
- Cultural programs should be an area of focus.
- Developing historical and nature-based programming were a priority of survey respondents.
- Developing water-based activities such as canoeing, kayaking and standup paddle boarding.
- Partnering with local service providers and other organizations for program delivery.

DRAFT

PART SEVEN

FACILITY INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

Creating the Inventory

The inventory analysis process involved assembly of a detailed inventory of public physical assets available for use by the Simsbury community. This asset inventory was created to serve the Town in a number of ways; it can be used for a wide variety of planning and operations tasks including asset management and future strategic master plans. The assets inventory currently includes public parks, recreation, and selected trail and open facilities managed by the Parks and Recreation Department.

The Town of Simsbury has a park and open space system that covers 30% of the total land in the Town and serves a population of approximately 24,700 residents. This 30% includes all Town operated and non-profit holdings, such as the Land Trust and McLean. The Culture, Parks and Recreation Department maintains 535 acres of parks (with 40 athletic fields) and 2,400 acres of open space. Simsbury's parks, open spaces, and cultural offerings are highly regarded within the community and regionally by offering a wide variety of recreational opportunities with quality maintenance and operations of these facilities.

The park described below consist of seven parks with sports field/active recreation facilities (Curtiss Park, Memorial Park, Simsbury Meadows, Tariffville Park, Town Forest Park, Weatogue Park and West Mountain Park) two nature preserves (Ethel Walker Woods and Onion Mountain Park) and several neighborhood open spaces and smaller community parks. Belden Forest was recently received old-growth designation by the Old Growth Forest Network, while the Pinchot Sycamore Tree Area is the site of what is considered Connecticut's largest tree. Like many Connecticut communities, Simsbury strives to keep up with the demand for playgrounds, sports fields and facilities within its park system.



Figure 7.1: Pavilion at Curtis Park



Figure 7.2: Meadow Pond Park

Simsbury Parks

Following is a brief description of each park and open space facility based on the Level of Service inventory analysis scoring and comments. (Parks are listed alphabetically).

Curtiss Park

Curtiss Park spans Tariffville Road along the southern border of the Farmington River. At the northern corner of the park, Quarry Road forms a dog leg before framing the east side of the park on its southern journey to the center of Town. The park is mostly open lawn with forested patches along the river and to the south of the fields.

There are four soccer fields on the southern side of the park, heavily used by local soccer clubs. A pavilion overlooks the soccer fields and large partially paved parking lots serve visitors. A gravel and dirt road bring visitors to an informal fishing spot and canoe/kayak launch at the Farmington River on the north side of the park. A practice field and soccer wall are also located in this section of the park.



Figure 7.3: Athletic Field at Memorial Park

Meadow Pond

Meadow Pond Park is found on Hedgehog Lane just across from Saddle Ridge Drive. It's an easy park to miss if you aren't familiar with the area, as the surroundings consist primarily of single-family homes along the roadway. This 90-acre park surrounds Tuller Reservoir, also known as Meadow Pond; it is bordered by forests to the east and west, and wetlands and meadows to the south. Hop Brook divides Meadow Pond Park from Orkil Fields (a multi-sport field complex) to the south.

The park has a small playground, a wide hilly meadow with an informal playing field, and a pavilion. The pavilion has fallen into disrepair and is located in a wet spot which is difficult to traverse on foot. There is a large gravel parking lot just off Hedgehog Lane.



Figure 7.4: Pool at Memorial Park

Memorial Park

Memorial Park is ideally situated off Plank Hill Road, just west of the commercial hub along the Route 10 corridor. A large cemetery provides a buffer between the park and the road, and to the north the Simsbury Central School connects the park to residential neighborhoods. There is parking at the lower and upper levels of the park, and a school-maintained playground on school grounds. Where athletic fields aren't present the park is densely forested.

Athletic Fields – The Simsbury Little League has six excellent fields at Memorial Park. Four of these baseball fields are in the lower portion of the park, with the remaining softball and single baseball field in the upper portion. The upper portion of the park also has one adult softball and one baseball field. The fields within the park are lit, but those found to the north of the park are informal and designed for practice. They do not have traditional sport appurtenances such as back stops, bleachers, or dugouts. These two fields are across the parking lot from the Central School and are maintained by Department staff.

Aquatic Facility – The aquatic facility at Memorial Park consists of a pool house with lockers, a guard shack, restrooms and a single lap swimming pool. A small wading pool is sited to the north of the pool area. Pool goers enjoy camps during the summer and morning open swims.

Skate Park – The skatepark is behind the adult softball field in the upper quadrant of the park. Skateboarding and in-line skating are permitted with helmets. The facility is unsupervised and many of the amenities have fallen into disrepair.

Schultz Park

This is a delightful park tucked between the Simsbury Town Offices and the Simsbury Fire Marshall on Hopmeadow Street in the center of Town. This meticulously maintained park is cared for by the volunteers of the Simsbury Beautification Committee. Lovely brick pathways guide visitors through the park along a showcase of specimen plants and trees. Many species are labeled. The park is not easily recognizable from the street by car but would be readily found on foot or bicycle.

Simsbury Farms

Located in West Simsbury on Old Farms Road, the Simsbury Farms Recreation Complex is considered the Town's primary recreational facility. The complex includes an 18-hole golf course (not included in this study) and a wide variety of passive and active recreational opportunities. The park encompasses 235 acres of undulating open and forested terrain, much of which is accessible to the public via trails and outdoor activity facilities.

Apple Barn – Simsbury Farms was built on what was formerly the Orkil Farms apple orchard. The old Apple Barn sales area was renovated in the 1980's to provide a space for meetings and programming. The facility is available via reservation and can be



Figure 7.5: Seating Area at Schultz Park



Figure 7.6: Pool at Simsbury Farms



Figure 7.7: Apple Barn at Simsbury Farms



Figure 7.8: Fitness Trail at Simsbury Farms



Figure 7.9: Tennis Courts at Simsbury Farms



Figure 7.10: Performing Arts Center and Athletic Fields at Simsbury Meadows

rented by local civic and non-profit groups. It is conveniently located within the park with alternate access along Old Farms Road. Although the barn is aesthetically pleasing, the structure is not suitable for recreational programming.

Athletic Fields – Though across the street from Simsbury Farms, Orkil Field is often associated with the recreational complex. The multi-sport fields do not have permanent restroom or seating amenities and are shared with passive recreational users.

Aquatic Facility – Four separate outdoor pools are provided at the aquatic facility: a wading pool, a diving pool, a 25-yard eight lane pool, and a 25 by 50-foot training area. A adjacent modern indoor facility provides accessible restrooms, changing rooms, and showers, as well as offices for parks and recreation staff.

Basketball Court – The basketball court was recently relocated and renovated. The court is in excellent condition but lacks an accessible path from the parking lot.

Hockey Rink – The covered outdoor hockey/skating rink is situated just north of the aquatic facility and can be accessed through the same building. The rink is open for 20 weeks during the winter and is available for rental by the skating public. The Simsbury Youth Hockey Association, figure skating clubs and local schools practice and compete at the rink throughout the winter season.

Fitness Trail – The David Emott Memorial Family Fitness Trail forms a 2.5-mile loop around the perimeter of Simsbury Farms. There are 20 fitness stations with guidelines for a range of skill levels. The trail passes through open golf course land and along forested paths.

Pavilions – An accessible pavilion is located across from the tennis courts along a paved path. The pavilion was recently installed and four accessible picnic tables are available for use. A second covered pavilion is found in the playground area.

Paddle Tennis Courts – The paddle tennis courts are extremely popular across generations and offer a counterpart to the more traditional tennis courts. These two elevated courts have a fenced walkway between the play areas for spectators and visitors.

Playground – The playground is found behind the tennis courts. A variety of play structures for multiple age groups cover the site. The surface is a mix of wood chips and rubber matting and the facility is fenced entirely.

Ropes Course – The ropes course is located along the fitness trail northwest of the court facilities. The course is maintained yearly and is available for rental.

Tennis Courts – The four tennis courts adjacent to the paddle tennis courts were recently renovated and provide an open, high-standard space for players. The courts are lit and available for reservation. The Department offers lessons for both paddle tennis and traditional tennis for interested residents.

Simsbury Meadows

Simsbury Meadows is most widely known for its cultural programming, but the park is also home to a variety of passive and active recreational activities. This park is easily accessed from Iron Horse Boulevard and the parallel Farmington River Canal Heritage Trail. The park is right behind a commercial hub with shops, restaurants, grocery stores, and the Simsbury Historical Society.

Performing Arts Center – This outdoor venue is the second largest in the state, with a seating capacity on the adjacent lawn and play fields of 10,000. People come from miles away to view the fireworks show and the many music and cultural events held at the venue each year. The venue is maintained by the non-profit Simsbury Meadows Performing Arts Center; the events are carefully managed by volunteers and staff, who direct parking and entrance to the space.

Playground – The Rotary Park Playground is a delightful space for children of varied skills and ages. The playground is also accessible to children with sensory, developmental, and physical disabilities. Several benches and garden areas invite comfortable supervision, and a pavilion at the center provides shade and respite to guests. The playground has rubber surfacing and wide sidewalks.

Athletic Fields – The park has three striped soccer/lacrosse fields in the expansive lawn area north of the performing arts center. Removable goals and seating permits alternate use of the field when games and practice are not occurring. A small pavilion overlooks the fields.

Dog Park – The popular Paw Meadow Dog Park is sited to the south of the performing arts center. The park has two separate entrances and spaces for small and large breeds. Dogs and owners can enjoy play structures, benches, and shade trees. The park is surfaced with wood chips and has water stations for the dogs.



Figure 7.11: Rotary Park Playground at Simsbury Meadows



Figure 7.12: Paw Meadow Dog Park at Simsbury Meadows



Figure 7.13: Trestles at Tariffville Park



Figure 7.14: Town Forest Park

Nature Trails – A series of boardwalks and mowed paths guide visitors east of the formal park to the Farmington River. The wetlands and shrubby meadows are home to a plentiful array of amphibians and insects, providing rich opportunities for education and interpretation. These trails must be carefully monitored and maintained to avoid impacts to sensitive habitats, but they are an excellent resource for Townspeople looking to be immersed in the beautiful landscape of the region.

Tariffville Park

Tariffville Park is not visible from any main roads but is instead discovered by proceeding along the Main Street Extension just south of the Farmington River in Tariffville. The park is known for its entrance to the Tariffville Gorge, where the Metacomet Trail leads hikers to spectacular views of surrounding land features. The park has a few informal fishing spots, a beach, and an informal canoe/kayak launch off the main access road. One river access site has grand views of a series of dilapidated trestles spanning the river. The park is home to two tennis/pickleball courts, a softball field, a playground, and a picnic shelter. Surrounding wetlands and sensitive forest resources limit the expansion possibilities of the park but invite interpretation and passive recreation.



Figure 7.15: Weatogue Park

Town Forest Park

Town Forest Park is a delightful area with two primary modes of access, the Farmington River Trail and Town Forest Road. To the west, a large baseball field is sited at the base of a hill. Spectators can enjoy watching games from the surrounding terraced landscape. The park also has a renovated basketball court and a large pavilion at the entrance to Ethel Walker Woods. An accessible path leads to this covered picnic area and

extends to a wooden footbridge nestled in the forest. To the north a small pond and surrounding beaches are used for swimming in the summertime. A few pieces of play equipment are found uphill from the beach.

Weatogue Park

Weatogue Park is located in the southern part of the Town along Route 10, across from the new development of apartment buildings known as “The Ridge”. This 8-acre park has expansive lawns, two multi-sport fields (one lined for football and one for soccer) and a softball field. A small playground is situated in the northwest corner of the park near an unscripted open lawn area. The park is located along the Farmington River Canal Heritage Trail, making it an ideal destination for walkers, joggers, and bicyclists. Less known than some of the other parks in Simsbury, Weatogue does not have some of the updates and amenities that have been provided at the more popular facilities.

West Mountain Park

This neighborhood park is nestled between West Mountain Road and Nod Brook. The park is home to a small playground, a basketball court, and two tee-ball fields. Visitors can enjoy the picnic tables and view of the wetlands and forests beyond the park.

Simsbury's Open Spaces

Simsbury is blessed with a plenitude of open space, largely due to the progressive thinking of its citizens over the last 50 years. Fortunately, the Town has maintained much of its rural aesthetic and commercial areas are clustered centrally downtown. As with much of the country, the Town has succumbed to suburbanization. Fortunately, standards were enacted to preserve parcels of open space from over-development, and home values have benefited from protected views and greenspace.

The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection defines open space as:

Land or interest in land acquired for the protection of natural features of the state's landscape or essential habitat for endangered or threatened species; or land or interest in land acquired to support and sustain non-facility based outdoor recreation, forestry, and fishery activities, or other wildlife or natural resource conservation or preservation activities.⁴⁹

Open space protection is a critical conservation strategy to reduce the harmful impacts of fragmentation on the landscape. Housing, commercial, and industrial developments affect a much larger area than the actual footprint of the building and surrounding site. Low-density development (sprawl) infringes upon wildlife habitats and introduces invasive species to the landscape. Open space acquisition and protection, particularly where lands connect to larger conservation areas, provide key linkages for wildlife to move across the landscape. Large, intact landscape corridors provide the necessary habitat for species to forage and reproduce, increasing genetic diversity and building a more resilient population.

Simsbury's Eco-Regions & Resources

Along the western and eastern borders of the Town of Simsbury the traprock ridge ecoregion extends through the Farmington River Valley. The ridge was formed by ancient lava flows and is comprised of basalt. This ecoregion boasts rocky summits, tracts of intact contiguous forest, and talus cliffs. Rare plants, snakes, and lizards are found in traprock ridge habitats.

An extensive alluvial floodplain ecoregion is also found in Simsbury along the Farmington River and its major tributaries. Within these habitats natural communities are varied and specialized, ranging from marshlands to sand barrens. Rare insects, plants, amphibians, and wetland specialist birds are found in varied abundance within these zones.

The Farmington River Biodiversity Study identified primary and secondary conservation areas within the Town of Simsbury. This extensive study should be referenced to guide future planning development and to identify priority landscapes for property acquisition.⁵⁰ When considering open space protections, it is important to remember that wildlife, terrestrial, and hydrologic systems do not follow municipal boundaries. Planning should be expanded to consider the natural geographic range of species and the systems upon which they rely.

On a site-specific scale, the following items should be taken into consideration. In forests, vertical structural diversity is important. This applies to not only the diversity of the vegetation itself (tree, shrub, and herbaceous layering) but to the size of trees throughout the landscape. It is important to maintain large-diameter, older specimens while also appreciating that smaller trees contribute to the health of the system. Additionally, the cycle of growth, stability, and decay should be respected. Many organisms that contribute to the food chain begin their lives in fallen trees and in the detritus of the forest floor. The cavities of trees also provide homes for mammals, birds, and other

⁴⁹ CT Department of Energy & Environmental Protection, 2006.

⁵⁰ Gruner, H. J., M. W. Klemens, and A. Persons. 2006. *The Farmington Valley Biodiversity Project: A Model for Intermunicipal Biodiversity Planning in Connecticut*. MCA Technical Paper No. 11, Metropolitan Conservation Alliance, Wildlife Conservation Society, Bronx, New York.



Figure 7.16: Belden Forest

organisms. Along the edge of forests, it is important to provide a soft, shrub and low woody species layer to provide nesting and habitat for birds.

Grassland bird species have suffered the largest declines nationwide. The plowing under of fields, draining of wetlands, and conversion of grasslands to urban development have all contributed to the staggering declines of these species. The protection of these habitats is critical, as well as proper management of the spaces once they are conserved. Planning-scale objectives for this management strategy and others are discussed in Objective 7.8 – Develop policies/procedures for Open Space management practices.

It was not possible to visit all the open space across the Town of Simsbury during the development of this master plan. Instead, open spaces for field reconnaissance were recommended by Department staff, members of the Conservation Commission and representatives from the Simsbury Land Trust. Open spaces were reviewed for prevalence of invasive species, trail conditions, basic forest health, and management considerations. A list of open space reports, plans and surveys can be found in Appendix B.



Figure 7.17: Ethel Walker Woods

Belden Forest

Belden Forest is relatively unknown despite its proximity to the center of Town. The 42-acre forest is accessed via car at the entrance to the First Church of Christ and Boy Scout Hall on Route 10/Hopmeadow Street. Several footpaths link visitors to the forest from the Simsbury 1820 house and adjacent residential neighborhoods. Recently listed on the Old Growth Forest Network, this unique open space is composed of pine, beech, oak, and hemlock trees, some reaching over 100 feet in height. Several loop trails encircle the property, but inconsistent marking can make wayfinding a challenge.

Ethel Walker Woods

The 427-acre expanse of Ethel Walker Woods is found in West Simsbury, with primary trail access from the Town Forest Park on Town Forest Road. This important parcel of land is composed of forests and wetlands. The property recharges the Stratton Brook Aquifer, which is the primary source of drinking water for the Town. An extensive trail system invites hikers, equestrians, and cross-country skiers. The property is home to a unique set of habitat and plant life and provides a critical linkage to Onion Mountain Park.



Figure 7.18: Holcomb Street/Barn Door Hills Road

Holcomb Street/Barn Door Hills Road

This 48-acre parcel forms a nearly perfect triangle between Holcomb Street, Barn Door Hills Road, and Firetown Road. The site is mowed periodically and is almost entirely meadow, with a small exception at the northern corner where a patch of forest remains. The site connects to McLean Game Refuge and provides important habitat for grassland birds and a variety of pollinators and insects. South of Firetown Road a series of tobacco barns and farmland remains, harkening to another era.

Farmington River Canal Heritage Trail

This extraordinary greenway was constructed on a former rail bed. Due to the level construction of the rail line many years ago, this path is now accessible throughout. The trail connects users to the center of Town and provides direct, non-motorized access to selected parks and open spaces across the region. Residents and tourists alike can use the trail for transportation and wide spectrum of recreational activities. Simsbury enjoys merely one section of this long trail, which spans 80.2 miles and passes through 11 towns across Connecticut and Massachusetts.

Farmington River Trail

The River Trail is a separate but connected trail that winds parallel to the Farmington River from Simsbury to Farmington. This 16.2-mile trail connects back into the Farmington River Canal Heritage Trail at both ends. It is considered the most scenic portion of the greenway system in the region.

Laurel Lane/Great Pond Road

At the intersection of Great Pond Road and Laurel Lane a small patch of open meadow and forest is regularly mowed and maintained by the Department. This open lawn area is flanked by an allee of trees on Great Pond Road and subdivisions to the east and south. The site is approximately 8.6 acres and is currently not heavily utilized by the public.

Onion Mountain Park

Found in West Simsbury, Onion Mountain Park envelops 190 acres of wooded terrain on the western edge of West Mountain Road. Wetlands and brooks are scattered across the property, and the forest is composed of a matrix of maple, pine, hemlock, beech, and oak. The park is home to a small former reservoir that is leased by the Town of Simsbury Fish and Game club for fishing purposes. The park is a birdwatcher



Figure 7.19: Laurel Lane/Great Pond Road



Figure 7.20: Onion Mountain Park



Figure 7.21: Pinchot Sycamore Tree Area

and hiker delight, especially given its proximity to municipal and diversity of trails. Unfortunately, adjacency to residential areas and ornamental plants has made the site susceptible to invasive species encroachment.

Pinchot Sycamore Tree Area

This Town-owned open space parcel is the site of the largest tree in Connecticut. The Pinchot Sycamore is an American sycamore whose trunk was last measured at 28-feet in diameter. Nearby, another large tree known as the Linn-Baker Sycamore balances the site and completes the canopy. The parcel is located along the Farmington River just after the aptly named Pinchot Sycamore bridge along Route 185. It is a popular destination for canoe and kayaking enthusiasts, who can utilize the informal launch into the river at the edge of the parking lot.

Town Maintained Open Spaces in Neighborhoods

The Culture, Parks, and Recreation Department maintains an extensive collection of smaller open spaces, ranging from less than one to 10's of acres, and created when land was developed into subdivisions over the years. These parcels are often embedded within the neighborhoods throughout the Town. Many of the open spaces have paths for the residents, which are mowed and maintained by Department staff each year. Unfortunately, these paths rarely provide connections to the greater community and are not regularly visited by people outside of the subdivisions. A sampling of open spaces assessed for this master plan follows:

- o Chestnut Hill Road/Madison Lane
- o Clifdon Drive
- o Hamden Circle/County Road
- o Hearthstone Drive/Firetown Road
- o Red Stone Drive/Adams Road

Facility Inventory Summary

The inventory for this Master Plan was conducted using a Composite Values Methodology (CVM). Each component in the inventory was given a score to be used in the analysis based apparent fit for its intended purpose:

- Score of 1 = the component does not meet expectations for its intended purpose at this particular location.
- Score of 2 = the component meets expectations for its intended purpose at this location.
- Score of 3 = the component exceeds normal expectations for its intended purpose at this location.

A complete Facility Inventory Summary Matrix is provided as a staff level document. This matrix represents the inventory and detailed assessment of each park component, completed by visiting every park and selected open spaces in the summer of 2019.

Level of Service Methodology

Overall Parks and Open Space System

The overall parks system level of service was developed through the analysis of existing park resources, variety of offerings, and considering the locations of alternative service providers. For purposes of this study, the town limit boundary was used as the extent of the study area, however it should be noted that park facilities just over the Town border provide services for Town residents or connect to nearby municipalities, i.e., Granby, Avon, Canton, and Hartford.

Park Catchment Areas

Park Catchment Areas, also called buffers, are used to display Level of Service areas in the community for each park. The overall level of service scoring from a driving standpoint was high and thus identified minimal need for improvement. The walkable coverage provided near park facilities varies considerably throughout the Town. This plan does not address improvements to access to parks beyond the limits of the park facility, however it is important to acknowledge that increased multi-modal access to parks improves neighborhood use of parks, provides health and safety benefits for the community, and reduces parking demands within park spaces.

Although people use a variety of transportation modes to access parks, walking and biking to park facilities are two modes of travel which can support park visitors of all ages and abilities. Studies show that in general park visitors will comfortably ride their bicycles between one-half and three-quarters of a mile, and comfortably walk between a quarter and half-mile to a park facility. This distance represents a travel time of 7 minutes based on an average walking speed of three miles per hour, accounting for longer actual walking distances due to indirect routes, as are commonly found in a disconnected street network. As a result, quarter-mile and half mile buffers were developed around each park facility to illustrate the access potential of each park. It should be noted that residents will walk and bike to park facilities as long as there are safe and adequate facilities for access (ie. sidewalks, multi-use pathways and/or on-road bicycle facilities).

Level of Service Analysis Findings

Through the level of service analysis, the park system was reviewed through several perspectives, including geographical distribution of park resources, proximity to neighborhoods, and variety of park resources.

In general, the map indicates that Simsbury has clustered park facilities to the east and west of Route 10/Hopmeadow Street. This route is heavily trafficked and passes through the center of Town. Most park facilities are located off connector streets branching from this primary corridor. Large tracts of open space can be found in the western portion of the Town and along the Farmington River Corridor. Smaller open space parcels are scattered throughout the Town. Insufficient sidewalks, on-road bicycle facilities or multi-use pathways inhibits non-motorized access to some of these park facilities. One notable exception is Simsbury Meadows, which is located to the east of the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail. The Town does have a fairly extensive multi-use path network that can be improved to provide expanded access to its many recreational and open space facilities.

Figure 7.22 illustrates the one-half mile and one-quarter mile catchment radii around each park.

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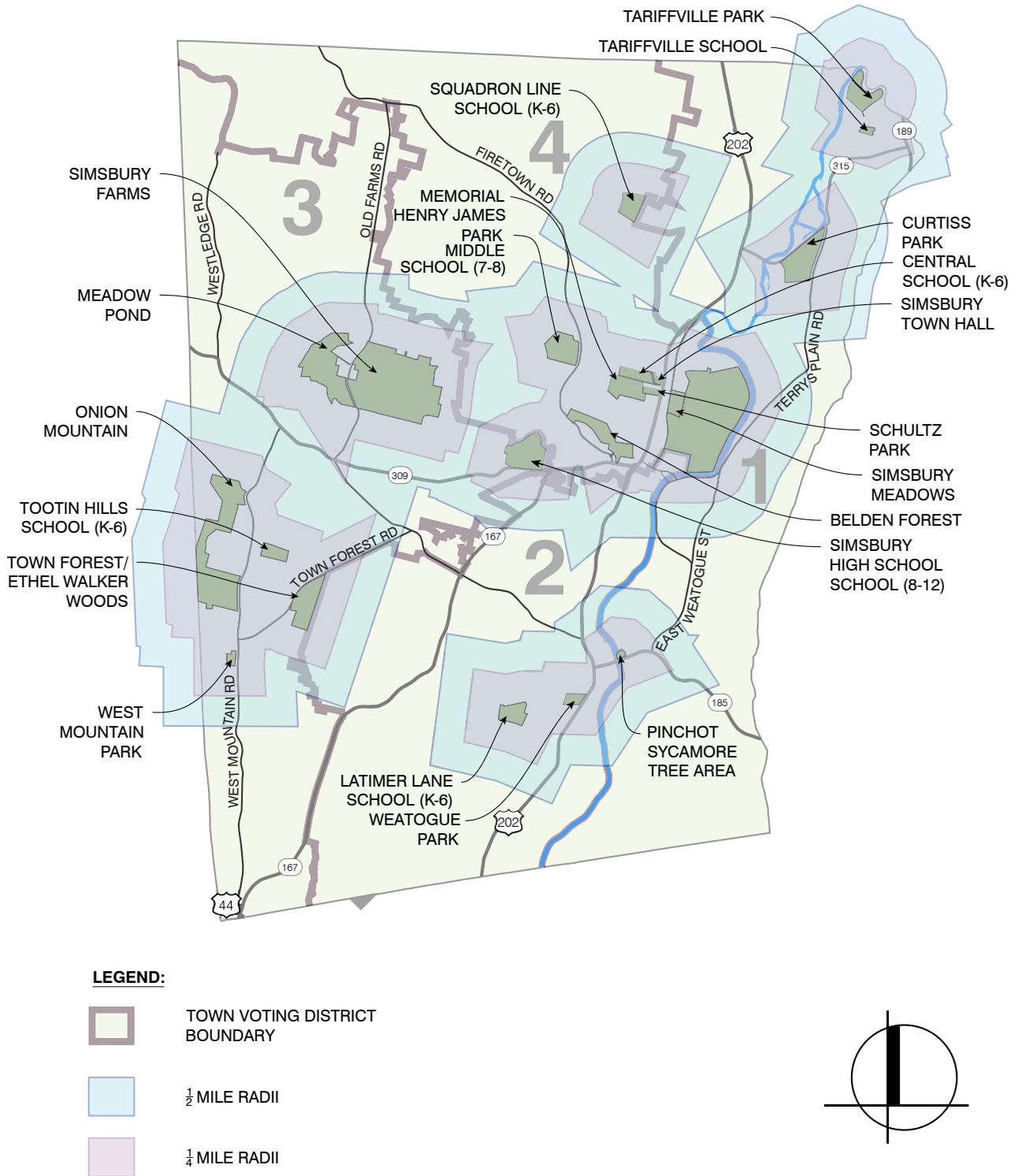


Figure 7.22: 1/2 Mile and 1/4 Mile Catchment Radii Level of Service Map

PART EIGHT

KEY ISSUES MATRIX

The Key Issues and Recommendations Matrix is a composition of Key Issues identified throughout the inventory, analysis and public engagement phases of the project. The key issues are categorized as follows: Organizational, Marketing & Financial; Programming; Facilities and Amenities.

The key issues were placed into categorized on the matrix:

Priority Issue	5
Opportunity to Improve	3
Minor or Future Issue	1

Blank means the issue didn't come up or wasn't addressed.

The qualitative data planning tools used to determine the priority of the key issues include:

- Public Input/ Stakeholder Meetings
- Public Input (Public Hearings, Public Comments, etc.)
- Existing Documents (plans, etc.)
- Consultant Team
- Simsbury Culture, Parks and Recreation staff input

The quantitative data planning tools used to determine the priority of the key issues include:

- Online Survey
- Facility Assessment and Level of Service Analysis

The Key Issues Matrix summarizes the areas that need immediate attention and determines the direction of the implementation of recommendations in the Master Plan. As the Key Issues Matrix demonstrates, these are the recurring themes that were common throughout the community input process, regardless of the method of communication.

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Town of Simsbury, Connecticut
Key Issues Analysis Recommendations Matrix

Weston Sampson
GreenPlay, LLC

Key Issues	Data Input							DATA INPUT RATING	Consultant's Analysis and Professional Expertise	Prioritization						
	Qualitative				Quantitative					Priority Level	PRIORITY	Factors				
	Stakeholder Mtgs	Public Input (Public Meetings, Public Comment, etc.)	Existing Documents	Consultant Team	Staff Input	Online Survey	Facility Assessment/ Level of Service					Ability to Meet Needs of Town	Staff Impact	Cost to Implement/ Maintain	Community Benefit	Ease of Implement
<p>Rating Scale</p> <p>5 - priority 3 - opportunity to improve 1 - minor or future issue</p> <p>blank means the issue didn't come up or wasn't addressed</p>																
Organizational & Marketing																
Improve method for users to report issues of maintenance related to parks, open spaces/trails, and facilities	5	3	1	3	3	3	3	21	2.2.1/2.2.2 - Develop or purchase a reporting App or use existing Town system if one exists	High	23	5	3	5	5	5
Need communication tools so local groups can advertise group activities	3	3		3	3		3	15	2.1/2.2.1/2.2.4 - Develop a link on website, assist local groups with communication methods to advertise activities	High	23	5	3	5	5	5
Improve marketing and communication of activities, facilities, and open spaces	5	5	1	5	3		3	22	2.1 - Develop Marketing & Communications Plan to improve awareness and communication. Utilize a marketing consultant for consolidated community services program brochure and to assist with social media. Utilize Constant Contact software more.	High	23	5	3	5	5	5
Improve marketing and communication regarding parks maintenance practices and standards	5	1	1	5	5		5	22	2.3 - Develop educational campaign regarding parks maintenance to improve awareness and understanding.	High	23	5	3	5	5	5
Need updated park and open space/trail maps, fix incorrect trail mapping	5	3	1	5	5		5	29	2.2.1/2.2.3 - Regularly update park and open space/trail maps, promote, add to website, consider an App.	High	23	5	3	5	5	5
Provide staffing for current and future facilities operations	5	1	5	5	5		5	31	1.1.2 - Hire and train staff appropriately for current and future parks programming demand.	High	21	5	3	3	5	5
Need Assistant Director staff support				5	5			10	1.1.3 - Evaluate organizational structure and evaluate/hire Assistant Director	High	21	5	5	5	1	5
Need part-time Programming Assistant(s)				5	5			10	1.1.5 - Hire part-time staff to fulfill programming need	High	21	5	5	5	1	5
Need updated/expanded website to include all parks with descriptions, make more user friendly	5	3	1	5	5		5	24	2.2.3 - Create interactive website with park and open space/trail maps, update regularly, and consider an App.	High	23	5	3	5	5	5
Trash being left in parks	3	1		3	3		3	16	1.5 - Analyze carry-in-carry out policies, increase promotion/ education/enforcement, promote of recycling/landfill drop-offs	Moderate	21	5	3	3	5	5
Provide continued staffing to meet current offerings and quality of park facilities	5	1	5	5	5		5	31	1.1.2/1.1.5 - Hire and train staff appropriately for current and future parks programming demand.	High	21	5	3	3	5	5
Town needs assistance with maintaining trails, and with specific trail, park and maintenance projects	5	1	5	5	5		5	31	1.3 - Hire state/federal volunteer groups, engage volunteer groups, consider hiring volunteer coordinator ; 4.4 - Assess current maintenance of pathways	Moderate	21	5	3	3	5	5
Provide appropriate maintenance staffing inc. evening and weekend operations (safety/proper coverage)	3	1	5	5	5		5	24	1.2 - Provide wireless safety/security/medical alert	Moderate	21	5	3	3	5	5
Maintenance of neighborhood trails, and open spaces very time consuming for Town	5	1	5	5	5		5	31	1.4.1 - Develop maintenance standards for level of service - alter mowing and maintenance practices with better information;1.4.2-Develop shared stewardships with local HOA/neighborhoods 7.8.1 - Allow underutilized spaces to revert to forest or meadow	Moderate	21	5	3	3	5	5
Maintenance of parks, fields, facilities trails, and open spaces very time consuming for Town	5	1	5	5	5		5	31	1.4.1/1.4.2/1.4.3- Consider altering current management practices, develop open space and trail stewardship partnerships with HOAs, evaluate whether open spaces are eligible for release to HOAs and/or volunteers	Moderate	21	5	3	3	5	5

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Town of Simsbury, Connecticut
Key Issues Analysis Recommendations Matrix

Weston Sampson
GreenPlay, LLC

Key Issues	Data Input							DATA INPUT RATING	Consultant's Analysis and Professional Expertise	Prioritization						
	Qualitative				Quantitative					Priority Level	PRIORITY	Factors				
	Stakeholder Mtgs	Public Input (Public Meetings, Public Comment, etc.)	Existing Documents	Consultant Team	Staff Input	Online Survey	Facility Assessment/ Level of Service					Ability to Meet Needs of Town	Staff Impact	Cost to Implement/ Maintain	Community Benefit	Ease of Implement
<p>Rating Scale</p> <p>5 - priority</p> <p>3 - opportunity to improve</p> <p>1 - minor or future issue</p> <p>blank means the issue didn't come up or wasn't addressed</p>																
Financial																
Utilize equitable user fees	5	1	1	5	5	3		20	1.6.3 - Develop Cost Recovery Policy.	Moderate	23	3	5	5	5	5
Expand funding options that provide dedicated revenue for parks & facilities maintenance (impact fees, tax levy, bond referendum, grant opportunities)	5		1	3	3	1	3	16	1.6.1/1.6.2 - Explore alternative funding opportunities.	Moderate	19	1	5	5	3	5
Department desires a balanced budget	3		1	3	5	1		13	1.6.3 - Analyze current user fees and expenses, look at Cost Recovery methodology to balance budget	Moderate	19	1	5	5	3	5
Programming																
Explore opportunities to develop alternative non-athletic programs	3	1	3	5	3	3	1	19	3.1 - Based on demand and trends consider developing alternative non-athletic programs for kids.	Moderate	23	5	5	5	3	5
Diversify/re-evaluate special event programming - number of community/ cultural events (festivals, farmers market, music, arts and events in the parks)	5	1	1	3	3	5	1	19	3.1.1/3.1.2- Analyze current offerings of community events/special events - make adjustments - retire under performing events	Moderate	23	5	3	5	5	5
Increase programming for families, teens, tweens, and seniors.	3	1	1	3	3	3	1	15	3.2 - Increase appropriate partnerships and collaboration with alternative service providers. Adjust recreational program opportunities for teens, families, and seniors to meet desired demands. Determine if duplication exists between Department and alternative providers.	Moderate	21	5	3	3	5	5
Develop outdoor/ nature-based/ environmental program offerings	3	1	1	3	1	3	1	13	3.1.1 - Based on demand and trends consider expanding outdoor/ nature-based/ environmentally focused programs.	Moderate	19	5	5	1	3	5
Park Facilities and Amenities																
Expand ADA access throughout park system	5	3	1	5	3	5	5	27	5.1 - Improve accessibility of paths, amenities, and existing park structures	High	19	5	3	3	5	3
Need more shade in playgrounds, along trails, and around fields	3	3		3	3	3	3	18	5.7.6 - Provide additional shade amenities; 4.3 - Promote native tree planting along pathways to provide shade	Moderate	19	5	3	3	5	3
Incomplete Trail Network/Connectivity	3	5	3	5	1	5	3	25	4.1 - Create connections from existing trail system to provide routes to Town Center and places of work; 4.2 - Evaluate underutilized neighborhood connections	Moderate	17	5	3	1	5	3
Improve signage for park entrances, trails, and within parks	3	1	1	3	1	1	3	13	5.4 - Improve/replace wayfinding and directional signage throughout town.	Low	17	5	3	1	5	3
Improve parking	3	1	3	3	3	3	5	21	6 - Develop Individual park master plans to shift pressure from parks and identify parking demands.	Low	17	3	5	3	5	1
Improve lighting in parks	1	1		3	3	3	3	14	5.8 - Upgrade lighting/security features in park areas	Low	17	3	5	3	3	3

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Town of Simsbury, Connecticut
Key Issues Analysis Recommendations Matrix

Weston Sampson
GreenPlay, LLC

Key Issues	Data Input							DATA INPUT RATING	Consultant's Analysis and Professional Expertise	Prioritization							
	Qualitative				Quantitative					Priority Level	PRIORITY	Factors					
	Stakeholder Mtgs	Public Input (Public Meetings, Public Comment, etc.)	Existing Documents	Consultant Team	Staff Input	Online Survey	Facility Assessment/ Level of Service					Ability to Meet Needs of Town	Staff Impact	Cost to implement/ Maintain	Community Benefit	Ease of Implement	
<p>Rating Scale</p> <p>5 - priority 3 - opportunity to improve 1 - minor or future issue</p> <p>blank means the issue didn't come up or wasn't addressed</p>									Preliminary Recommendations								
Park Facilities and Amenities continued																	
Maintain and improve existing facilities	5	5		5	5		5	5	30	5 - Maintain and improve existing parks, and facilities to enable improved access for all ages and abilities; upgrade existing structures and site amenities.; 5.7 - Improve/Replace Park Amenities; 5.9 - Improve drainage where needed across parks	High/Moderate	16	5	3	3	5	
Analyze field usage and scheduling	5	5	5	5	3		5	3	31	3.3 - Analyze field usage and scheduling to ensure appropriate number of fields are maintained and that fields are not built that aren't needed to meet current and future demands.	High	15	5	1	1	5	3
Need permanent restrooms at many locations	5	5		5	5		5	5	30	5.5 - Provide/ Improve/Upgrade Restroom Facilities	High	15	5	3	1	5	1
Improve access to river	3	3	3	5	1		3	5	23	3.1.1.2 - Diversify program offerings with water based activities; 5.14 - Improve access to aquatic resources	Moderate	15	3	3	3	3	3
Need pump track & mountain biking trails	1	3		1	1		1	1	8	5.11.1 - Develop pump track and mountain biking trails where appropriate	Low	13	1	3	3	3	3
Replace irrigation systems	1	1		3	5		1	5	16	5.10 - Replace irrigation systems	Moderate	13	5	3	1	3	1
Playgrounds need upgrade/replacement	3	3		5	3		3	5	22	5.6 - Improve/replace Playground Facilities	Moderate	13	3	3	1	3	3
Need aquatic play facility	5	5		5	5		5	5	30	5.11.2 - Create splash pad/ aquatic features for summer use	High	11	3	3	1	3	1
Skate park in disrepair	1	3		5	3		3	5	20	5.11.3 - Redevelop skate park	Moderate	11	3	3	1	3	1
Need indoor activity/program facility	3	1		3	3		3	1	14	5.2 - Conduct feasibility study for a Intergenerational Community Center for primary use by Culture, Parks and Recreation, and Community and Social Services at the Applebarn site.	Low	9	3	1	1	3	1
Need pickleball courts	5	3		5	3		5	5	26	5.11.4 - Develop pickleball courts at Tariffville Park	High	9	3	1	1	3	1
Replace Memorial Park Pool/Bathhouse	3	3		5	5		3	5	24	5.3 - Replace Memorial Park Pool & Bathhouse	High	9	3	1	1	3	1

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Town of Simsbury, Connecticut
Key Issues Analysis Recommendations Matrix

Weston Sampson
GreenPlay, LLC

Key Issues	Data Input							DATA INPUT RATING	Consultant's Analysis and Professional Expertise	Prioritization						
	Qualitative				Quantitative					Priority Level	PRIORITY	Factors				
	Stakeholder Mtgs	Public Input (Public Meetings, Public Comment, etc.)	Existing Documents	Consultant Team	Staff Input	Online Survey	Facility Assessment/ Level of Service					Ability to Meet Needs of Town	Staff Impact	Cost to Implement/ Maintain	Community Benefit	Ease of Implement
<p>Rating Scale</p> <p>5 - priority</p> <p>3 - opportunity to improve</p> <p>1 - minor or future issue</p> <p>blank means the issue didn't come up or wasn't addressed</p>																
Open Spaces																
Current mowing practices of fields and meadows do not protect avian or insect habitat	5	1	5	3	3	5	22	7.8.2- Develop mowing strategy for meadows and fields to promote avian and insect habitat	High	25	5	5	5	5	5	
Inappropriate use of Open Spaces	3	3	3	3	5	3	20	7.5 - Develop policy/procedure for evaluating development in Open Spaces	High	23	5	3	5	5	5	
Lack of partnership with local landowners (residents)	3	1	1	1	1	3	10	7.1 - Develop partnerships with local landowners to improve connectivity and protect open space	Moderate	21	3	5	5	5	3	
Current management of open space is resource-intensive and not supporting of habitat	5	1	3	5	5	3	27	7.8.1 - Allow underutilized open spaces to revert to forest/meadow	High	21	5	5	3	5	3	
Current development of open space and park parcels do not adequately protect aquatic resources	3	1	3	3	1	3	15	7.6 - Develop policy/procedure for management and development practices adjacent to aquatic resources (river, stream, ponds, wetlands) & sensitive ecological resources	Moderate	21	3	5	5	5	3	
Current forest management plans not reflective of ecological and community values	3	1	5	5	3	1	21	9.0 - Develop open space & forest stewardship management plans	Moderate	19	3	5	3	5	3	
Need to protect and enhance pollinator habitat	5	1	1	5	1	3	21	8.2 - Implement pollinator pathways program in Simsbury (private/public partnership)	High	19	3	3	5	5	3	
Inadequate funding for open space acquisition and maintenance	3	1	3	1	1	1	10	1.6 - Increase funding for parks, open space and facility maintenance/acquisition	Moderate	19	5	5	3	5	1	
Current management of trails creating issues	3	3	3	1	1	3	14	7.8.3 - Alter current management practices to reduce/eliminate degradation of trails	High	19	3	3	5	5	3	
Lack of adequate parking/access to open spaces	1	1	3	1	1	3	10	7.7 - Provide additional parking/trail access to open spaces and improve accessibility	Low	17	3	3	5	3	3	
Lack of accessible amenities in open spaces	3	3	3	1	1	3	14	7.7 - Provide additional parking/trail access to open spaces and improve accessibility	Low	17	3	3	5	3	3	
Current management and use of open spaces does not adequately protect sensitive/unique areas	3	1	3	3	1	3	15	7.6 - Develop policy/procedure for management and development practices adjacent to aquatic resources (river, stream, ponds, wetlands) & sensitive ecological resources	Moderate	17	3	5	1	5	3	
Lack of programming opportunities at Open Spaces	3	3	3	1	1	3	14	3.1.1.1 - Based on demand and trends consider expanding outdoor/ nature-based/ environmentally focused programs; 3.1.1.3 - Expand alternative recreational activities	Moderate	17	3	3	3	5	3	
Lack of signage and maps throughout trails and open spaces	3	5	5	3	3	5	24	8.1 - Improve/upgrade signage and maps; 8.1.1 - Outdoor risk education; 8.1.3 - Nature Interpretation; 8.1.4 - Agricultural interpretation	Moderate	17	3	3	3	5	3	
Current management practices overextends department resources	5	1	3	5	1	1	16	7.4 - Concentrate restoration efforts to receive maximum benefit; 8.3.1 - Create friends groups for local open spaces; 8.3.2 - Partner with local organizations for open space management; 9-Develop Individual Open Space Improvement Plans	High/ Moderate	15	3	3	3	5	1	

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Town of Simsbury, Connecticut
Key Issues Analysis Recommendations Matrix

Weston Sampson
 GreenPlay, LLC

Key Issues	Data Input								Consultant's Analysis and Professional Expertise	Prioritization						
	Qualitative				Quantitative					Priority Level	PRIORITY	Factors				
	Stakeholder Mtgs	Public Input (Public Meetings, Public Comment, etc.)	Existing Documents	Consultant Team	Staff Input	Online Survey	Facility Assessment/ Level of Service	DATA INPUT RATING				Ability to Meet Needs of Town	Staff Impact	Cost to Implement/ Maintain	Community Benefit	Ease of Implement
Rating Scale 5 - priority 3 - opportunity to improve 1 - minor or future issue blank means the issue didn't come up or wasn't addressed									Preliminary Recommendations							
Open Spaces continued																
Current development and open space protection plan does not incorporate climate resilience measures	3	1	3	3	1	1	3	15	7.2 - Develop Town-wide climate resilience plan	Moderate	15	5	3	1	5	1
Lack of public understanding about invasive species	5	1		3	1	1	1	12	8.1.2 - Improve signage/education of invasives/native plants	Moderate	15	3	3	3	3	3
Some trails in disrepair or in poor locations	3	3		5	3	3	5	22	7.8.3 - Repair and/or relocate trails where problems exist	High	13	3	1	1	5	3
Current distribution of open spaces does not facilitate habitat connectivity or effective management	3	1	5	5	3	1	5	23	7.1 - Acquire additional open space parcels to enhance connectivity and habitat quality	High	13	3	3	1	5	1

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PART NINE

RECOMMENDATIONS

This section describes recommendations to enhance the level of service and the quality of life through improvement of existing sites, future development of new facilities, organizational enhancements, financial improvements, increased programming, improved safety, and potential partnerships.

Although the Town of Simsbury system has great facilities and is well maintained, there are multiple recommendations to further improve the system. The recommendations are separated between general system-wide and site-specific recommendations. Site-specific recommendations are divided into parks and open spaces. The recommendations are outlined and analyzed in the Key Issues Matrix found in Part 8.

General Recommendations:

1. Improve/upgrade existing facilities and outdated amenities that do not function well
2. Increase number of parks maintenance staff
3. Expand walking pathways and trail connectivity to and within parks
4. Implement and update the ADA Transition Plan to address areas that are not compliant
5. Improve/upgrade/replace signage (wayfinding, directional and interpretative)
6. Improve communication and event/facility marketing
7. Increase funding for parks and facility maintenance
8. Develop maintenance standards of level of service
9. Improve access to athletic fields for existing and new/ growing user groups
10. Preserve and expand open space
11. Focus on conservation and sustainability
12. Conduct feasibility study for new indoor facility
13. Update park and open space/trail maps
14. Explore additional usage of school facilities
15. Increase special event programming
16. Review recreational program offering and adjust annually
17. Address invasive plants and wildlife management issues
18. Educate residents and visitors about the importance of natives, invasive species removal, and benefits of ecologically sensitive areas, pollinator pathways, and habitat buffers.
19. Develop and implement a system of park and open space plans for expanded recreational types/changing trends and conservation priorities

Note: Recommendations for the Simsbury Farms Golf Course are not included within this Master Plan. Additionally, several neighborhood open space parcels were not designated for field assessments and subsequent recommendations. More information about these parcels can be found in the Inventory of Town Owned Open Space developed by the Simsbury Conservation Commission and the Simsbury Open Space Committee (Simsbury Conservation Commission, 2016).

Park Specific Recommendations

Below is summary of recommendations for each park facility.

Curtiss Park

South of Tariffville Road

- Replace entrance signs (due to rotting) with model similar to the updated sign at Town Forest
- Regrade and restore parking areas; provide ADA parking spaces; pave heavily used parking areas and provide grass/gravel pave or similar impervious surface
- Provide energy-efficient sports field lighting
- Nets missing at the northern multi-use field adjacent to the road – analyze whether this may be necessary and install if so (nets are present at other fields along the road to prevent balls from entering traffic)
- Prune/weed landscapes at memorials
- Preserve and protect sensitive ecological resources (adjacent to wetlands and forests)
- Repair/replace roof of pavilion and paint
- Provide recycling in addition to trash removal
- Install permanent restrooms

North of Tariffville Road

- Reduce width of road; regrade and replenish gravel for vehicular use
- Preserve and protect sensitive ecological resources (adjacent to wetlands and forests)
- Convert mowed lawns to meadows wherever possible to reduce maintenance and facilitate habitat
- Formalize fishing area/Farmington River access; stabilize shore to protect aquatic quality
- Regrade turnaround area, fill potholes, and replenish gravel with large sized stones to protect roadway
- Replace damaged fencing along road or remove altogether

Meadow Pond

- Replace entrance sign with one similar to the updated sign at Town Forest
- Regrade parking lot to correct drainage issues and replenish with gravel
- Consider interpretive signage of unique ecological/historic characteristics of the pond
- Remove existing pavilion – relocate near play area or where conditions are drier or provide a shaded overlook at pond
- Replace or repair entrance gate
- Analyze use of playground/repair as needed
- Create low-mow meadows with mowed recreational paths in areas not heavily utilized for passive recreation
- Construct boardwalk/elevated path to fishing pier or relocate pier to a drier area so visitors don't have to walk across wet areas
- Remove unmaintained landscape areas and plant native shade trees
- Construct shed to protect and store field netting (netting found dumped in pond)
- Create rain gardens/bioretention areas to manage drainage and provide interpretive opportunities
- Analyze use of sport fields to determine if maintenance expenditures are warranted

Memorial Park

- Signage updates
 - Replace entrance sign with one similar to the updated sign at Town Forest
 - Put a field layout sign similar to that found in the lower level of the park
- Sport Fields
 - Repair/replace fencing & batting cage elements
 - Repair sport field netting
 - Replace irrigation systems
 - Paint and repair structures
 - Replace failing electric scoreboards
 - Replace backstops when needed
 - Install individual field signs where needed
 - Regrade multi-use field at school and replace turf

- Replace outdated field and overall park lights with modern, energy efficient (LED) models
- Plant native trees across park to provide shade and improve aesthetics
- Reduce width of roadways where possible to promote infiltration and reduce maintenance costs
- Stone dust paths - Replenish gravel and regrade paths
- Relocate flag to a more visible location
- Provide multi-use path to the park by making connections to existing trails to promote non-vehicular visitation
- Remove play equipment
- Reconstruct skate park
- Replace bike racks
- Install water fountains
- Remove invasive landscape plantings
- Renovate pool and bathhouse
 - Replace wading pool with a splash pad
 - Replace or remove pool
 - Replace all fencing, concrete sidewalks, concrete pads
 - Renovate building (including bathrooms)

Schultz Park

- As plants decline replace with native species to highlight local beauty and eco-friendly landscaping options
- Existing sign is very nice but not easy to see from the road
 - Replace roadside sign with legible model and relocate existing sign to another section of the park
- Replace tables and seating
- Repair pavilion and consider accessible design
- Repair water fountain

Simsbury Farms

- Analyze ropes course – if not being used remove or relocate
- Repair parking lot and install curbs where needed to keep cars from infringing on grass areas
- Replace bike racks
- Replace declining trees; prune hazard branches
- Replace outdated light fixtures with energy efficient (LED) models
- Update ice rink as funds are available to ensure safety and accessibility
- Opportunity for solar shaded parking lot
- Consider meadow establishment wherever mowing is unnecessary across park
- Consider relocation of playground to dry area
 - Replace/replenish mulch (consider rubber surface instead)
 - Repair roof at pavilion
 - Replace entrance sign
 - Replace sagging sections of fence
 - Replace unsafe drinking fountain
 - Add shade structures

Apple Barn

- Renovate or replace existing building to accommodate a wider variety of uses and programs. Conduct feasibility study for an Intergenerational Community Center for Culture, Parks, and Recreation; and Community and Social Services at the site. Potential for senior programming during day and recreation programming in evenings, (non-profit gathering space – gardening club, women's club, church groups)
- Replace missing plants and enlist friends' group to plant landscape in garden areas in front of building
- Provide accessible picnic tables

Ice Rink

- Reconfigure layout of entrances so accessible entrance is the same route as the conventional entrance
- Consider installment of wooden benches (warmer)
- Repair interior roof
- Repair/replace interior netting attached to roof
- Replace existing lights with energy efficient (LED) models
- Replace fencing
- Repair failing elements of the warming room – renovate interior to make more user friendly
- Repair low spot in loading area and to drain standing water
- Install alternative flooring to promote accessibility around the ice rink. Existing rubber mats are uneven and a tripping hazard.

Loop Trail

- Install entrance/directional signage/reassurance markers
- Realign trail to promote accessibility
- Consider consistent stone-dust surfacing throughout
- Replace bridge with accessible model with handrails
- Replace damaged/collapsed culvert to protect waterway
- Correct grading along trail in order to facilitate proper drainage
- Wooden steps need to be replaced or trail re-aligned to a site that is flat and doesn't require stairs
- Incorporate cross country skiing along loop trail or in appropriate locations in the golf course

Orkil Fields

- Install entrance sign
- Provide accessible port-a-let
- Repair low spots in road; regrade to promote drainage
- Provide bleachers and benches during games

Pool Facility

- Construct additional shade structures
- Replace outdated concrete benches with accessible, matching models
- Provide healthy options at the concessions building
- Provide accessible, matching picnic tables on the lower pool deck
- Replace perimeter fence around pool with safe, updated design
- Replace shrubs in planting areas with small trees and native grasses for reduced maintenance
- Repaint and remove rust on fence around wading pool
- Replace deck at lap pool and replace fence, especially unsecure section on the side overlooking ice rink

Simsbury Meadows

- Consider permeable pavement or interlocking grass pave system in overflow parking lot; provide firm/stable accessible surface in parking area that is safe and maintainable for patrons (heavy use area).
- Construct permanent restrooms designed for event (high use) and everyday use with family accommodations
- Provide site/security lighting in areas frequented by visitors during events
- Provide fencing around perimeter of field (Anticipated to be completed Spring 2020)
- Provide connections and circulation paths throughout park
- Install additional bike racks to accommodate more visitors
- Multi-use fields
 - Correct drainage issues by regrading fields and building perimeter bioretention elements to absorb water
 - Repair netting
- Maintain landscapes and fill gaps with native shrubs
- Plant native shade trees

Farmington River Nature Trails

- Create a trail and maintenance plan that protects the habitat of sensitive amphibians and promotes insect/pollinator habitat
- Mowed path sufficient for current use – maintain this condition or convert to stone dust if use increases. Use of stone dust surfaces should be utilized on a case-by-case basis in an ecological sensitive manner.
- Promote and maintain diverse vegetative landscape – remove invasive species immediately as found to reduce risk of uncontrolled spread
- Consider biological method of mosquito control – reduce spraying and analyze potential negative effects of pesticide use on wetland habitat and effects on other animal populations (CT-DEEP BMP's should be followed)

Paw Meadow Dog Park

- Regrade and replenish gravel in parking lot adjacent to dog park (consider permeable paving or interlocking grass pave system)
- Protect sensitive wetland resources around the parkland by increasing wetland buffer
- Provide additional accessible benches in dog park
- Provide better maintenance of smaller dog park to promote use
- Provide variety of dog play structures
- Remove weeds along fence to protect structure

Rotary Park Playground

- Update play structures
- Repair rust at base of pavilion posts
- Provide additional accessible benches around playground
- Provide shade structure over playscape or sand box area
- Replace faded signage at the playground
- Consider rubberized surface inside of concrete play tube
- Maintain existing landscapes or replace with native shade trees
- Replace water fountain with model for children and adults with bottle filling station
- Provide lighting for evening use

Tariffville Park

- Replace entrance sign with one similar to the updated sign at Town Forest
- Stripe parking lot
- Construct formalized access to the river
- Potential for fishing pier/overlook to abandoned bridge structure in river
- Consider providing trash/recycling
 - Install no-dumping signage and patrol area
 - Provide security cameras/entrance gate to reduce illicit dumping.
- Renovate and relocate playground equipment; replace/remove unsafe features
- Repair fencing
- Replace damaged speedbumps
- Plant native shade trees
- Repair/replace scoreboard
- Repair or replace irrigation system
- Replace interior surface of pavilion and correct tripping hazards
- Protect adjacent wetlands and waterbodies from degradation, debris, and pollution by increasing buffer
- Conduct a formal analysis of environmental resources for the proposed trail alignment
- Incorporate 6 Pickleball into existing tennis courts. Resurface/repaint courts.



Figure 9.1: Town Forest Park Sign

Town Forest Park

General

- Regrade parking lot near pond; replenish gravel and provide accessible spaces
- Analyze pond and determine improvement plan (Dredging, Aeration, Vegetation Stabilization)
- Develop pump track and mountain bike trail connection
- Provide accessible path to pavilion
- Systematically eradicate burning bush and Phragmites per invasive species removal recommendations to reduce risk of encroachment into surrounding landscape
- Create vegetative buffer and swales around parking lot to reduce stormwater runoff into sensitive waterways
- If gravel entrance drive is not in use revert to natural landscape
- Improve informational signage for Ethel Walker Woods
- Repair cracking of asphalt at basketball court and reset leaning pole
- Remove/replace playground equipment
- Replenish beach sand as necessary
- Replace old grills and picnic tables with accessible models that match other park amenities
- Create rain gardens/bioretention on site to correct drainage issues coming from the gravel road
- Consider providing trash and recycling

Baseball Field

- Install entrance sign
- Provide accessible route to seating
- Convert mowed lawns to low-mow meadows or allow to revert to forest where possible
- Repair/replace scoreboard
- Replace beams at the older batting cage
- Expand or replace storage shed so netting can be stored indoors
- Replace storage shed roof
- Consider providing trash and recycling

Weatogue Park

- Replace entrance sign with one similar to the updated sign at Town Forest
- Replace informational signs with legible models
- Softball Field
 - Regrade softball field to correct drainage issues
 - Repair or replace irrigation system
 - Replace backstop
- Multi-use Field
 - Restripe fields
 - Provide seating
 - Restore turf
 - Replace storage building roof and repaint structure
- Playground – conduct assessment
 - Repair swings and correct issues with rust
 - Repair and replace play structures with updated, accessible models
- Restripe football field and replace benches/bleachers with accessible models
- Provide shade structures and native trees

West Mountain Park

- Replace entrance sign with one similar to the updated sign at Town Forest
- Replenish gravel parking lot and entrance roads and regrade lot
- Repair guardrails
- Provide accessible bleachers
- Repair/replace asphalt at basketball court, repair hoops and backboards
 - Analyze use of courts – if not frequently used replace with more appropriate amenity or remove court
- Renovate playground/replace surface or analyze use to determine if removal is an option
- Provide shade structures and native trees

Open Space Specific Recommendations

Below is summary of recommendations for select open space parcels.

Belden Forest

- Install entrance sign similar to that of Town Forest Park
- Install informational signage in parking area with trail map
 - Tick/bear education
 - Old growth forest education
 - Ecological uniqueness education
 - Bathrooms available at Library and Boy Scout Hall.
- Advertise presence of Belden Forest in local businesses and Town offices
- Create accessible path to pond near Simsbury 1820 House
- Install picnic area with benches and tables
- Consider partnership with Boy Scouts and see if scouts will do projects in the forest
- Provide accessible port-a-lets at parking lot
- Conduct invasive species removal and native plant restoration effort at entrance of property
 - Educate businesses and property owners nearby about importance of planting native
- Analyze existing trails and eliminate duplicate and redundant trails. Route visitors away from ecologically sensitive areas.

Chestnut Hill Road/Madison Lane

- Consider returning property maintenance to surrounding subdivisions/neighborhoods since open space is not shared by general public
- Asphalt path can be removed as it deteriorates; replace with stone dust or simple mowed path
- Allow forest to regenerate where possible and establish pollinator pathway program in mowed areas; reduce width of mowed areas

Clifdon Drive

- Consider returning property maintenance to surrounding subdivisions/neighborhoods
- Consider conversion of lawn area to meadow with mowed path and mowed picnic areas
- Enhance native shrub/tree layer at edges to provide wildlife corridor

Ethel Walker Woods

- Utilize and maintain beaver deceiver where culverts must be kept open
- If possible, do not use trucks for maintenance on trails – utilize ATVs, golf carts, or walk on trails to reduce damage to trail systems
- Relocate trail systems away from wet and fragile areas
- Consider accessible trail loop near bridge at Town Forest Park
- Conduct park-wide species analysis to determine where sensitive habitats exist
 - Monitor for invasive encroachment; remove invasive species and plant native species

Onion Mountain

- Monitor condition of pond and improve conditions as needed
- Review use and expand parking if needed
- Install interpretive signage about ticks, wildlife, fire safety, camping, and park rules
- Wayfinding, intersection, and reassurance markers needed along trails
- Consider abandonment of unsafe or difficult to maintain trails to dedicate resources to trails that accommodate the most users and are the most sustainable
- Install culverts wherever a water channel intersects the trail
- Relocate trails away from wet areas
- Forest show signs of normal succession after trees have fallen due to weather conditions which is a normal

and positive condition. Monitor forest for pests and chronic disease in trees to maintain healthy conditions

- Remove invasive species near entrance of parking lot to reduce risk of spread into surrounding landscape; replace with native species
- Repair/improve Stoddard Reservoir Dam.

Hamden Circle/Country Road

- Consider returning property maintenance to surrounding subdivisions/neighborhoods
- Asphalt path can be removed as it deteriorates; replace with stone dust or simple mowed path
- Allow forest to regenerate where possible and establish pollinator pathway program in mowed areas; reduce width of mowed areas

Hearthstone Drive/Firetown Road

- Consider returning property maintenance to surrounding subdivisions/neighborhoods
- Asphalt path can be removed as it deteriorates; replace with stone dust or simple mowed path
- Enlist neighborhood volunteer efforts to remove invasive species; replace with native species
- Educate nearby residents about importance of planting native species and reduction/removal of invasive species in private landscapes to reduce infringement on adjacent landscapes
- Allow forest to regenerate where possible and establish pollinator pathway program in mowed areas; reduce width of mowed areas

Holcomb Street/Barn Door Hills Road

- Maintain open quality of landscape – protect views
- Change mowing regimen to protect pollinators and avian habitat (ie. mow only 1/3 of landscape, or only after first frost/in early spring)(utilize BMP guidance)
- Provide gravel parking lot for birders
- Mow paths throughout site so people have access to it, but do analysis of ecology to determine if sensitive species are present that require habitat buffers before constructing

Owensbrook Boulevard

- Reduce mowed width to 3 ft. on north side of path to reduce maintenance expenditures
- Remove invasive plants and restore native species

Laurel Lane/Great Pond Road

- Maintain open vistas and tree allée at road
- Slice seed wildflower meadow
- Create mowing regimen to protect pollinator and avian habitat (see above)
- Picnic area/mowed paths possible on site

Pinchot Sycamore Tree Area

- Install entrance sign similar to that of Town Forest Park
- Consider installation of gardens/landscapes to enhance beauty of park
- Clean and maintain memorial plaques and stones
- Install accessible benches matching other Town parks and open spaces
- Stabilize shoreline/river access and Formalize boat launch with ramp
- Repair/rehabilitate Flower Bridge

Red Stone Drive/Adams Road

- Consider returning property maintenance to surrounding subdivisions/neighborhoods since open space is not shared by general public
- Asphalt path can be removed as it deteriorates; replace with stone dust or simple mowed path
- Allow forest to regenerate where possible and establish pollinator pathway program in mowed areas; reduce

width of mowed areas

- Remove phragmites to reduce risk of encroachment into adjacent landscape

Trails from Town Forest to West Mountain Park

- Make trail width consistent throughout
- Pursue community/volunteer efforts to assist with maintenance along trail
- When repairing damage to trail, ensure stone/gravel is of consistent size to reduce risk of falls/injury
- Correct drainage issues/grading along trail to minimize blowouts
- Clear limited width (approx. 3 ft) along sides of trail to reduce overall maintenance expenditures
- Enlist community members to remove invasives from adjacent yards to reduce spread of invasives along trail and into the forest.

In summary, parks across the Town of Simsbury are terrifically maintained, especially given limited operations and maintenance staffing. Areas for improvement are typically related to outdated amenities and facilities like pavilions, play equipment, and irrigation. In some cases, complete removal of unsafe or substandard facilities is recommended, while in others, repair to these features is recommended. In all parks, accessibility, tree planting/maintenance, and non-motorized access (where feasible) is recommended to increase usership and provide a safe environment.

Open space improvements generally fall into two categories: public access and ecological restoration. Not all parcels are appropriate for public access; sensitive habitats, wetlands, and riparian corridors can be negatively impacted by inappropriate use. Other sites are ideal for passive recreation, trails, and river access. Ecological restoration efforts should be carefully planned and performed only after a baseline assessment of biota is conducted. Invasive species removal should be tailored per the species and immediately followed by a reintroduction of native plant communities. Acquisition of new open space parcels is highly recommended – especially where these parcels provide further connectivity and protect watershed resources. Prioritization and consideration for implementation of these recommendations are further discussed in Part 10: Goals and Action Plan.

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PART TEN

GOALS AND ACTION PLAN

The following goals, objectives, and action items for the Master Plan recommendations are drawn from the public input, inventory, level of service analysis, findings feedback, and all the information gathered during the master planning process, with a primary focus on maintaining, sustaining, and improving the Town of Simsbury's Parks, Recreation, and Open Space offerings.

Goal 1: Continue to Improve Organizational Efficiencies

Objective 1.1 – Adjust Department Staffing.

As recommendations in the Master Plan for programs, services, and facility upgrades are implemented, it is important to maintain staffing levels to maintain current performance standards. This will require the addition of new positions in the Department. The project team recommends the following approach:

- 1.1.1. Define roles & responsibilities within Department. Employment descriptions and expectations will give the Town a better understanding of where resources should be allocated to best meet current and projected labor demands.
- 1.1.2. Hire two to three additional parks maintenance staff. The need for more parks and open space maintenance staff was consistently emphasized throughout the course of this study. A phased approach to supporting 2-3 staff persons over the next two years will give the Department time to allocate funds to support these positions and assess workload.
- 1.1.3. Hire and train Assistant Director to provide much needed support to the Director of Culture, Parks, and Recreation which will in turn, benefit the community as offerings are improved.
- 1.1.4. Hire and train Programming Assistant (part-time) to meet current and future recreation programming and facility usage standards.
- 1.1.5. Hire one additional (part-time) programming/marketing staff to improve and increase communication of Department offerings and facilities. This position could be a shared position with other departments within the Town to coordinate Town-wide messaging.

Objective 1.2 – Provide wireless safety/security/medical alert locator for contacting Police/Medical Assistance.

The provision of a device for emergency services will give solitary workers the ability to respond to situations where medical or police assistance is required. This is especially important for employees working the night shift, and those who might be in remote locations performing trail maintenance.

Objective 1.3 – Engage volunteer groups for specific projects.

It may be possible to enlist volunteer groups for certain projects, especially if the project has an educational component. Volunteering enables a sense of pride and ownership of shared resources and can guarantee long-term support. Internships are another great way to teach valuable skills in return for needed services. Simsbury has already benefited greatly from the continued efforts of organizations such as the Little League, the Simsbury Soccer Club, the Boy Scouts, and the Simsbury Land Trust. Other examples of national volunteer groups include: AmeriCorps/Student Conservation Association, Senior Corps, and Kiwanis International.

Objective 1.4 – Improve current management practices.

Simsbury's park and open spaces enjoy a high level of maintenance and cleanliness, especially given the limited number of staff. In addition to hiring additional staff to improve management of Town-owned properties, a few changes to maintenance protocols and routines will improve efficiency.

- 1.4.1. Develop maintenance standards. Alterations to mowing strategies, maintenance staff training, particularly for the development of meadow and grassland habitats, will reduce the total area and labor required for mowing. Trail maintenance standards and practices can be developed that reflect the use of each site. Snow clearing may become a higher priority as path use increases in the winter.
- 1.4.2. Develop a policy for evaluating open space parcels and neighborhood path connections eligible for release to HOA's, volunteer or neighborhood groups. In some cases, neighborhoods might have the capacity to assume ownership of open space parcels located within a subdivision. A careful evaluation of potential transfers will be required, as well as documentation assuring the original intent of the designation of the property as open space is guaranteed.
- 1.4.3. Develop shared stewardships with local HOA and/or neighborhood groups for open space parcels not shared by the greater community. Many subdivisions contain parcels of undeveloped land, which increase aesthetic and property values, which are currently maintained by the Town. Where possible, shared stewardships should be developed with careful consideration to the ecological integrity of the site. Maintenance responsibilities can then shift to HOA and/or neighborhood groups to reduce the burden on Department resources.

Objective 1.5–Review effectiveness of carry in/carry out policy.

The Department elected to discontinue trash pickup at town-owned facilities in 2017. This policy has effectively reduced time and expenditures dedicated to this service, and in most cases, visitors have assumed the responsibility with grace. In a few parks that have high volumes of users, trash containers are provided/maintained by the Town. These include Simsbury Meadows, and the Old Flower Bridge. The Little League provides trash and recycling at Memorial Park, and the Simsbury Soccer Club provides trash and recycling at Curtiss Park. These organizations have acknowledged the need for trash removal due to high participation at games and practice events.

Unfortunately, not all parks are treated equally. Tariffville Park, Weatogue Park, and the Town Forest baseball field all had significant accumulations of trash when the project team conducted field analysis in the summer of 2019. It is therefore recommended that the Department conduct a review of the effectiveness of the carry-in/carry-out policy across all parks and open spaces to determine if reversal of this policy in select Town-owned spaces is prudent.

Objective 1.6 - Increase funding for parks, open space, and facility maintenance/acquisition.

Revenue enhancement is a key theme for any financially sustainable plan. The Department should pursue creative funding strategies to diversify capital available for improvements to the system.

- 1.6.1. Explore alternate funding sources. The Department currently takes advantage of grant opportunities available for programming and facility improvements. The Culture, Parks and Recreation Department should continue to pursue any grant opportunities at the federal, state, regional, and local levels. Potential grant sources include:
 - The Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program (ORLP) offers grants to improve local parks and outdoor recreation areas. The program is funded through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).
 - Public-Private Fundraising: The Towns could work with non-public entities or the general public to raise funds through private fundraising or grant sources available only to the non-public entities to match public funds for the trail. It could be possible to provide some memorial that acknowledges the contribution.
 - Donations: The Towns could work to acquire donated funds, materials or services from local companies or residents to support the trail development. Acknowledgment of supporting companies or individuals could be included along the trail as desired.

- A new online tool developed by a partnership between the Alliance for Biking and Walking and the League of American Bicyclists helps find potential federal funding sources for alternative transportation projects. The site can be reached at <http://bit.ly/11xhEtr>.
 - The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation offers grants for community-based programs and interventions that positively affect the health.
- 1.6.2. Explore a tax increase. The community appears willing to explore the feasibility of a dedicated revenue source to pay for the improvements that come out of this Parks and Open Space Master Plan. A campaign for an increased community investment may be a successful way of implementing the long-term recommendations in the Plan. These funding opportunities may also include a bond referendum to support renovations and redesign of existing parks, construction on new facilities, and/or acquisition of new land for conservation or recreation.
- 1.6.3. Analyze current fees and develop a cost recovery/pricing policy. There is a consensus among focus group participants and survey respondents to implement and employ equitable user fees for Culture, Parks and Recreation activities based on a value received by the participant for the services with a personal benefit. Culture, Parks and Recreation should consider implementing a Cost Recovery Policy such as the Pyramid Pricing Methodology to determine a consistent method of pricing parks and recreation activities throughout the Department.

Goal 2: Enhance and improve internal and external communications regarding Department activities and services

The Culture, Parks and Recreation Department should develop a Marketing and Communications Plan that will guide its efforts in communicating and promoting its activities and facilities. This should include all the recommendations in the Master Plan for programs, services, and facility upgrades to promote awareness and be a focused effort on electronic communication. The Marketing Plan should be reviewed periodically, updated as needed and include marketing strategies that incorporate the efforts of partner departments and projects.

Objective 2.1 – Develop Marketing & Communications Plan to improve overall external awareness and communications of Department.

Provide continuity and consolidation in marketing of Culture, Parks, and Recreation Department facilities and offerings. People are increasingly overwhelmed by pervasive media and marketing campaigns, resulting in burnout and subsequent inattention to communication efforts. It is therefore recommended that the Town seek to streamline communications to make it easier for users to access information in a centralized, interactive location. In conjunction with other departments, utilize Constant Contact software and hire a marketing consultant for consolidated community services program brochure and to help with social media.

Objective 2.2 – Improve Department Website.

Update/expand department website with parks and open space locations, resources, amenities, and offerings to provide the public with a resource to better understand what is available across the Town. Create online tool (website/app) so patrons can report issues/concerns with maintenance in parks, trails and open spaces. This tool might be utilized to report potholes, fallen trees, broken structures, or vandalism. Create online interactive map of parks, open spaces and trails. Platforms available for this service include Esri, my rec, and independent website builders. Park and open space mapping should be updated periodically to reflect changes in trail routes, facility offerings, and seasonal attractions. Develop means for local groups to advertise/announce offerings to increase participation and visitation at Town facilities. Link with Main Street Partnership calendar for continuity.

Objective 2.3 – Develop plan for educating staff and volunteers regarding invasive species, best practices, and vegetation management training.

Comprehensive, research-based training for invasive species removal and other best management practices is recommended for all staff and volunteer groups. Proper education about vegetation management techniques will save the Department valuable time and money. Improper methods often contribute to the spread of invasive species and can damage desired plants. Formal trainings can be conducted in person, via webinar, via print materials, and through online learning portals with the assistance of invasive specialists. Utilize standard Best Management Practice materials from CT-DEEP and other regional resources.

Goal 3: Continue to Improve Programs and Services

Current program and service offerings are admired and appreciated by the community, who feel fortunate to live in a Town that values civic gatherings and recreation. It is important to stay informed and aware of changing recreation trends to ensure the Department stays relevant to an evolving demographic. Continued communication and opportunities for feedback is recommended.

Objective 3.1 – Review recreational program offerings and adjust annually.

The community would like to see new additional programs for families, teens, and seniors. Specialty fitness/wellness, cultural, and special needs programs are in high demand, and in order to ensure service delivery reflects the diversity of the community, the Department should engage the community in program development. To effectively achieve this objective, the Department should look to partner with other service providers in the community.

- 3.1.1. Diversify/re-evaluate program offerings. Varied offerings are more likely to attract participants from a wider demographic, fortifying the Department's relevance and continued support.
 - 3.1.1.1. Nature, educational, senior, multi-generational/family, teen/tween, and arts programming. Based on demand and current trends in the industry, the Department should explore opportunities to develop and expand programs that are outdoor/ nature-based/ environmentally focused. There are also opportunities to develop or expand on non-traditional sports programs such as disc golf, skateboarding and pickle ball. Community gardens are another way to engage multiple age groups in a common activity.
 - 3.1.1.2. Water based activities – swimming, kayak/canoe events, and fishing are pursuits that will develop the community's connection to the outstanding aquatic resources Simsbury has to offer.
 - 3.1.1.3. Active recreational activities are becoming increasingly popular across the country. A few possibilities include biking, hiking, and cross-country skiing at Simsbury Farms and Orkil Field, snowshoeing at Ethel Walker Woods and Onion Mountain, and running, disc golf, pickleball at Tariffville Park and Weatogue Park.
- 3.1.2. Expand special event offerings. Simsbury already attracts visitors from miles away for its unique and family-friendly special events. It is important to maintain time-honored traditions while looking to the future – the Town should work continuously with the community to obtain ideas for special events that delight and unite participants.
 - 3.1.2.1. Pop up concerts – provide local musicians with temporary venues in which to showcase their talents.
 - 3.1.2.2. Movies in the park – show a spectrum of movies for a wide assortment of ages and interests. Consider educational films and international audiences.

Objective 3.2 – Continue to collaborate with local alternative service providers for programming.

The Town of Simsbury Culture, Parks and Recreation Department currently partners with several agencies and departments to provide programs and activities to the community. The Department should continue to explore additional opportunities as well as build on its existing partnerships. Where not already in place, the Department should ensure that all existing and future partnerships are accurately portrayed in a signed partnership agreement. To assure efficiencies are benefiting each department, continuous communications and an annual review are essential.

Objective 3.3 – Improve access to athletic fields.

The Department should review the current field allocation policy and update it based on demand, residency, and equitable scheduling. As part of the review, the Department should consider existing and new/ growing user groups' needs. A careful, annual review of scheduling of various sports activities on existing fields is required to ensure the athletic fields are being utilized productively.

Goal 4: Continue to Improve and Enhance Multi-use Trail System

The Town of Simsbury has an excellent network of multi-modal trails throughout the community. Working with other Town Departments, Culture, Parks and Recreation should look for additional opportunities to develop shared-use paths and/ or sidewalks/ trails to connect neighborhoods to parks, open spaces, places of work, and commercial centers. Non-motorized transportation provides residents with opportunities to interact with their neighbors in a meaningful fashion and encourages active lifestyles. As new and existing trails and shared-use paths are designed and expanded, the Department should consider adding fitness stations, adult playgrounds and family fun stations in appropriate locations.

Objective 4.1 – Create connections to existing network to provide routes to Town Center and places of work.

As previously noted in this plan, Simsbury has a higher rate of single-car commuting than surrounding Towns and the national average. According to the 2010 Census over 40% of U.S. adults say they would commute by bicycle if safe facilities were available. Bicycle commuting has seen tremendous growth – between 2000 and 2016 there was a 51% increase of cycling nationwide. Trails provide important non-motorized transportation connections within the networks of roads, sidewalks, and transit facilities. These connections can provide people looking for transportation alternatives with a healthy, energizing option to get to work, run errands, and experience the landscape. It is therefore advised the Department utilize recommendations from the Simsbury Pedestrian and Bicycle Masterplan to create connections to business hubs across the Town, and implement a bike share program.

Objective 4.2 – Evaluate underutilized neighborhood connections.

Though perhaps valuable to homeowners, neighborhood paths constructed in open space parcels do not benefit the wider community in Simsbury. These paths frequently do not connect to larger systems, yet the trails are maintained by Department staff. An evaluation of these segmented paths is recommended to determine if connections can be maintained by alternative means through an evaluation of maintenance policies.

Objective 4.3 – Promote native tree planting along pathways.

Trees serve not only to enhance the visual quality of a community, but provide quantifiable air quality, stormwater capture, and climate moderation benefits. This master plan recommends a comprehensive native tree planting effort to provide shade and beauty along pathways throughout the community. It is important to choose the right tree for the right site – select species which can mature without obstructing powerlines or damaging valuable infrastructure. These trees may immediately beautify the Town, but to quote an infamous Greek proverb, “A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they will never sit in”.

Objective 4.4 – Assess current management practices of path system.

- 4.4.1. Assess current vegetation management practices along trails. This must be a site-specific approach, since some trails suffer from over management, while others are affected by vegetation encroachment. A standard three-foot mow-strip on either side of the path should be sufficient, with regular monitoring and removals of branches and obtrusive limbs.
- 4.4.2. Assess current surface conditions and repair/prioritize accordingly. Overall, the path system in Simsbury is well maintained; however, in some instances, ruts and potholes have been filled in with gravel. While this is an effective strategy to prevent further erosion, it can be dangerous for bicyclists to change from one surface type to another without warning. Some paved path systems have been overtaken by tree roots and heaving. It is recommended that the Department create a comprehensive plan for addressing varying surface condition concerns across the path network.
- 4.4.3. Assess current fencing along trails and repair/prioritize accordingly. Fencing repairs tend to fall to the bottom of the priority list, especially during the growing season when other maintenance needs are being met. It is recommended for the Department to develop a list of needed repairs and address issues relevant to public health and safety first.

Goal 5: Maintain and Improve Facilities and Amenities

There was notable public response to make sure that Culture, Parks and Recreation maintains and improves existing facilities. In conjunction with other Town departments, the Department should continue to improve and upgrade existing facilities and amenities as well as address low-scoring components through the Capital Improvements Plan. The Department should develop a Cyclical Maintenance Program to ensure consistent application of maintenance standards and cost efficiencies.

Objective 5.1 – Continue to improve ADA accessibility at all facilities. Conduct ADA compliance assessment and improve amenities based on recommendations.

According to the ADA.gov website, “Access to civic life by people with disabilities is a fundamental goal of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). To ensure that this goal is met, Title II of the ADA requires State and local governments to make their programs and services accessible to persons with disabilities... One important way to ensure that Title II’s requirements are being met in cities of all sizes is through self-evaluation, which is required by the ADA regulations. Self-evaluation enables local governments to pinpoint the facilities, programs, and services that must be modified or relocated to ensure that local governments are complying with the ADA.”

The Culture, Parks and Recreation Department currently does not have an ADA Transition Plan that identifies needed changes during a self-evaluation process. Using the inventory from the Master Plan, the Department needs to develop a comprehensive transition plan. Once the ADA Transition Plan is developed and adopted, it should be updated as recommendations from the master plan are implemented. Priorities for ADA improvements at park facilities follows:

1. Simsbury Meadows
2. Memorial Park (upper level)
3. Simsbury Farms (building, pool to courts, loop trail, and ice rink)
4. Weatogue Park (fields and playground)

Objective 5.2– Conduct feasibility study for an Intergenerational Community and Social Services Center at the Applebarn site.

Community members have expressed a desire for an indoor recreational facility with classes and events for seniors, teens, and families. This facility could also provide social services for those in need and would provide a central gathering location for the community. The current Applebarn site is underutilized and is ideally located within the Simsbury Farms complex. With relative ease, visitors could complete a 2.5-mile fitness course or walk over to the pool, courts, and hockey rink. A feasibility study would identify if the Applebarn building could be renovated or replaced to establish a Intergenerational Social Services Complex to accommodate a range of senior, cultural and recreational programming. Parking is already ample at the site and could be easily expanded if required.

Objective 5.3– Replace Memorial Park pool & bathhouse or install splash pad.

The Memorial Park pool and bathhouse were constructed many years ago; these facilities are suffering from issues ranging from a chronically leaky pool liner to dangerous rusty security fence with barbed wire. The bathrooms lack privacy and the bathhouse, though structurally sound, the facility is in need of a new roof. It is recommended that the Memorial Pool facility be replaced in its entirety with a new pool or splash pad. Splash pads are increasingly popular across the country. These amenities utilize spray and play features for an interactive aquatic adventure. Though initial costs can be high, maintenance and repair of these facilities is significantly less than that of a pool and require less staffing.

Objective 5.4 – Provide improved signage Town-wide to make it easier for patrons to find and use parks, facilities, and open spaces. Develop consistent wayfinding, directional, informational, interpretational signage network.

The Culture, Parks and Recreation Department should evaluate wayfinding signage to facilities on roadways and within parks. Improved wayfinding signage will contribute to a greater connectivity of parks and facilities. As parks are renovated or updated, the Department should replace, enhance and update existing park signs. A trail wayfinding signage design and implementation effort should be undertaken to establish a cohesive reassurance and intersection marker strategy across Town-maintained trails and multi-use paths. Statewide standards may be adopted to apply consistent distance, difficulty level, directional and informational interpretation.

Objective 5.5 – Improve/Upgrade Restroom Facilities.

Permanent restrooms are highly sought at specific Town-owned facilities. These include sites with high visitation, playgrounds, and proximity to bicycle/pedestrian facilities. A careful analysis of costs associated with the construction and maintenance of new restroom facilities will be required to determine what type of facility is best for each site. Composting facilities are recommended where feasible, which do not require septic/sewer connections and can be less costly to maintain. The following parks are listed in order of priority for the installation of permanent restrooms, based on community input:

1. Simsbury Meadows Rotary Park Playground (available to concert/events/dog park patrons)
2. Memorial Park (upper level)
3. Curtiss Park (north side)
4. Town Forest
5. Weatogue Park

Objective 5.6 – Improve/Replace Playground Facilities.

Like most towns, Simsbury's playgrounds reflect changing attitudes toward play and safety over the years. Many playgrounds are in good condition but show evidence of wear and weathering. Some are located in low-lying areas and are subject to flooding. In some cases, the Department should assess use to determine if the playground is valued enough by the community to remain in place. Other play structures should be removed immediately as they are deteriorated enough to pose a safety risk. Suggested playground removals and improvements follow in order of priority.

1. Town Forest (beach) – remove
2. Memorial Park (upper level) – remove
3. Weatogue Park – renovate/replace
4. Tariffville Park – relocate/renovate
5. Simsbury Farms – relocate/renovate
6. West Mountain Park – analyze use
7. Meadow Pond – analyze use

Objective 5.7 – Improve/Replace Park Amenities.

Demand for usage of Simsbury parks and athletic facilities continues to grow, and the Department should look for opportunities to add new amenities to enhance the experience for users. Some enhancements identified through the public process are straightforward and include the following:

- 5.7.1. Picnic Tables, Grills, Benches & Bike Racks. Though many parks in the Town have these amenities, they are often not accessible or have fallen into disrepair. Old styles of bike racks are difficult to use, and many amenities are mismatched.
- 5.7.2. Buildings/ Pavilions. Many pavilions and structures are in good repair, and some are even accessible to differently abled patrons. However, some require relocation or repairs to the foundation or roof. Many simple structures that house sports netting and other accessories would benefit from a coat of paint.
- 5.7.3. Fencing improvements. Where fencing is rusted, in disrepair, or posing a safety hazard repair or replacement might be warranted. Where possible, remove unnecessary fencing to reduce maintenance expenditures.
- 5.7.4. Water Fountains. Accessible water sources are important for public health reasons but also to reduce the quantity of plastic bottles and other single use items. These fountains can be designed to refill reusable water bottles and with additional spouts to fill water bowls for dogs.
- 5.7.5. Sports Appurtenances (ex. Bleachers, Dugouts). Where possible, repairs should be made to existing structures to reduce cost. If replacement is warranted accessible models should be incorporated wherever possible. Sports netting must also be repaired periodically, especially when stored outdoors.
- 5.7.6. Shade Plantings & Structures. Shade is important in any public space, not only to protect people from sun exposure but to reduce the overall heat island impact of impermeable surfaces such as parking lots, sidewalks, and structures.

Objective 5.8 – Upgrade Lighting/Security Features.

While not a pressing concern, some park users expressed anxiety about using facilities at night due to insufficient lighting. Lighting is not appropriate at all facilities but may be a good investment at parks where patrons frequently stay late for festivals, sporting events, and specific facilities. Stakeholder and public engagement feedback resulted in the following list of sites recommended for lighting improvements:

1. Simsbury Meadows
2. Memorial Park
3. Curtiss Park
4. Simsbury Farms

Objective 5.9 – Improve drainage where needed across parks.

Many parks in Simsbury were constructed before wetland regulations and development standards were enacted. Subsequently, park facilities are frequently prone to soggy conditions and flooding. This is particularly true of parks constructed within drained wetlands, such as Simsbury Meadows. Similar problems exist at Meadow Pond Park, sites at Simsbury Farms, and areas within Tariffville Park. Where possible, it is recommended to facilitate drainage in wet areas to preserve park amenities. Green infrastructure (rain gardens, bioswales) are recommended to keep stormwater on site and to promote infiltration. In some instances, relocation of park amenities is recommended to remove the risk of flooding and improve the experience of park users.

Objective 5.10 – Replace Irrigation Systems.

The irrigation systems that keep Simsbury's athletic fields green were installed many years ago and require frequent maintenance. In fact, repair of these systems consumes a significant portion of staff time throughout the athletic season. These issues are a source of frustration to staff, who would rather devote time to tasks of greater benefit to the community at large. It is therefore recommended to replace irrigation in a phased approach by based on current condition and level of maintenance/repairs.

Objective 5.11- Provide new facilities within parks.

- 5.11.1. Develop pump track and mountain biking trails where appropriate. Mountain bike facilities can conflict with other uses and are perceived as being more intensive than hiking and other outdoor activities. It is recommended to locate facilities at parks that can withstand such demands. Pump tracks are popular facilities for a wide variety of age ranges and skill levels and are relatively easy to install. A pump track would likely be a popular venue for kids and teens alike.
- 5.11.2. Create splash pad/aquatic features for summer use. Simsbury Farms has an excellent pool facility, and Memorial Park's pool is utilized by morning swimmers and summer camps. A splash pad or other similar aquatic feature would provide a place to cool off without requiring lifeguards. This could be installed at an already popular facility or a site where the Department would like to see increased visitation.
- 5.11.3. Redevelop the skate park at Memorial Park. The current skate park facility is out-of-date and unsafe. Field assessments revealed cracked pavement, a lack of ramps and features, and gravel accumulations on the surface. Skate parks are popular destinations for kids and teens and provide a venue to practice a highly athletic skill in a social setting. While skate parks sometimes receive negative press due to perceived vagrancy and vandalism, communities find they provide a healthy outlet for groups often ignored and left to their own devices.
- 5.11.4. Develop pickleball courts at Tariffville Park. Pickleball is one of the fastest growing sports in the country. This active sport attracts a wide array of players and can easily be installed in existing tennis courts. Pickleball courts typically increase usership of facilities and would be a significant draw to the underutilized Tariffville Park.

Objective 5.12- Improve access to aquatic resources.

Simsbury enjoys an abundance of aquatic resources from the Farmington River to Meadow Pond, with an extensive network of brooks and wetlands across the Town. Access to these resources is often informal and results in muddy, destabilized shorelines and hazardous entry. It is recommended that access to these resources be improved/formalized by constructing launches for canoes and kayaks, stabilizing shorelines with natural measures, building fishing piers, and constructing boardwalks where wetland access and education is desired.

- 5.12.5. Improve the Old Drake Hill Road Bridge (Flower Bridge) over the Farmington River. Potential improvements may consist of spot repairs to full recoating of bridge. (\$500,000 to \$1.65 million).
- 5.12.6. Improve the Stoddard Reservoir Dam within Onion Mountain Park. Potential improvements may range from removal of the dam and establishing vegetation within the pond footprint and other disturbed areas to modifications to the dam, including improving the geotechnical stability of the dam, raising the height of the dam and replacement and expansion of the spillway. (\$932,000 to \$2.65 million).

Goal 6: Develop Individual Park Improvement/Master Plans

Through the master planning process, conceptual designs were developed for each of the existing parks. As a next step, the Town should refine each of the concepts and develop individual park master plans based on priorities from the public process, current and future needs of the community, and how the repurposed spaces can create better usage of the parks.

Goal 7: Maintain Existing Open Spaces Effectively and Appropriately

Objective 7.1– Acquire additional open space parcels to enhance connectivity and habitat quality. Partner with local landowners to protect open space.

As land becomes available or opportunities arise to acquire new parcels of land for parks and open space, the Town should strongly consider acquiring these lands to protect the scenic character and rural landscape of the Town. Where possible, partnerships should be developed with private landowners to enhance connectivity and preserve habitat cores and corridors. Collaborative preservation strategies keep properties on the tax roll and engage the citizenry to become active participants in the larger land conservation discussion.

A primary directive in this plan was to create an open space strategy that could be used to guide current and future land conservation across the entirety of the Town. While local planning is important, without connections to the greater landscape these efforts can result in an ecological island effect, which over time negatively impacts species diversity and resilience. Since wildlife and hydrologic systems do not follow administrative boundaries, geographic-scale thinking was used to develop open space recommendations that reflect regional and national conservation efforts.

Wildlife corridors are being developed in the United States, under the following directives:

- to encourage the genetic exchange of species requiring extensive ranges
- to minimize ecosystem fragmentation and habitat loss due to development/to minimize habitat fragmentation resulting from ex-urban development
- to provide habitat for species predicted to migrate in response to climate change

With the threat of mass extinction making headlines, corridors will be a critical strategy to prevent the loss of sensitive species, while facilitating genetic exchange by creating large swaths of protected lands. Weston & Sampson utilized mapping from the watershed-level Farmington River Valley Biodiversity Project and eastern United States habitat core and corridor research to create a vision for long-range landscape preservation.

Mapping of existing open space parcels and proposed lands for open space acquisition can be found in Appendix B.

Objective 7.2 – Develop Town-wide climate resilience plan to address heat island, open space protection, carbon sequestration, and flood mitigation.

A comprehensive resilience plan is recommended to prepare Simsbury for an uncertain climatological future. Elements of this plan should include adaptive measures for flood control, especially where infrastructure and structures are located adjacent to or within the flood plain. Steps taken now to address heat island effects (tree planting, solar canopies, green infrastructure) will pay dividends in the future. Open space preservation is paramount to offset carbon emissions. Long-range planning will designate Simsbury as a climate leader, which, in turn, will make the Town attractive for future sustainable investment.

Objective 7.3 – Conduct biodiversity assessments.

The Natural Diversity Data Base is a mapping module offered by the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT-DEEP). This database is an aggregation of approximate locations of significant natural communities, threatened and endangered species across the state. While the database is an excellent resource for conservation planners, it only represents what has been gathered to date. There are many areas that have never undergone a proper biological inventory and therefore do not have adequate information to be used for screening to identify potential impacts. It is therefore recommended to enlist the assistance of ecologists to conduct field and database surveys of Town-owned parcels to provide a complete picture for future management considerations.

Objective 7.4 – Concentrate restoration efforts in areas that will receive maximum benefit.

Invasive species removal efforts must only be conducted where restoration follows (prioritize species/sites). Invasive plants are found primarily in disturbed sites; the seeds, rhizomes, and roots can persist in the soil for many years. Removal techniques must be tailored to individual species to avoid wasting valuable resources and labor. Often, removals must take place over several years to ensure the affected site is completely free of the offending plant. It is not recommended to perform removals in areas adjacent to residential areas due to proximity of seed bank unless homeowners are convinced to remove the plants from their property.

There are two primary strategies for the removal of invasive species:

1. Site-based management (Large Populations) – removes populations of invasive plants in specific areas, to protect or restore an existing feature or to test removal methods for a specific priority species. The species targeted in this category are widespread throughout the study area, with many existing occurrences within the shoreline vegetation.
2. Weed-based management (Early Detection Priority Species) – focuses on the removal of small populations of invasive plants before they become heavily established.

Wherever possible, it is recommended to use a weed-based management approach. Catching species emergence early will save labor and financial resources over the long-run and has a higher chance of success.

Removal of invasive vegetation must always be followed immediately by landscape restoration - replanting with native species, light compaction of disturbed soils, and placement of onsite compost or woodland duff (from native species). Typically, restoration plant materials are small enough to prevent soil disturbance and reduce maintenance requirements. Restored sites must be monitored over the long-term to ensure invasive plants are not re-established.

A invasive species management plan with techniques, strategies, and technical resources should be created for staff and volunteers to follow. This document must be reviewed and amended regularly as more efficient techniques emerge and new problematic species present in the landscape. Utilize CT-DEEP Best Management Practices and other available technical resources.

Objective 7.5 – Develop policy/procedure for evaluating development requests within new and existing Open Spaces for active recreational purposes.

Over the course of the development of this master plan, staff received varying opinions from the public about how open space should be utilized. Some are in favor of developing former agricultural lands for soccer fields, while others would like to see that land preserved for bird and insect habitat. It is therefore advised that the Town develop a formal policy and procedure for any development request that would alter or undermine the ecological value of existing and future open spaces in the Town.

Objective 7.6 – Develop policy/procedure for management and development practices adjacent to aquatic resources & sensitive ecological resources.

State and federal regulations provide a degree of protection of aquatic resources (river, stream, ponds, wetland) and habitats from damage resulting from adjacent urban and infrastructure development. Municipalities may enact stricter regulations that expand the width of buffers, provide green infrastructure stormwater solutions, and restrictions on certain types of construction in proximity to sensitive ecological resources. It is recommended that the Town work with stakeholders representing varied interests to create beneficial policies and procedures to prevent development from causing irreparable damage to the Town's unique environment.

Objective 7.7 – Provide additional parking/trail access to open spaces. Improve accessibility.

Wherever possible, the Town should seek to increase access to open spaces via trail and multi-modal pathways. The establishment of interconnected paths will reduce the need for parking and will promote healthy lifestyles. The Department will need to evaluate parking demands for each open space parcel periodically to ensure unsafe overflow parking along roadways does not occur. Creation of formalized parking lots will also reduce the chance of negative impacts to trees and other landscape features. Accessible parking spaces should be included in the expansion and renovation of parking lots. Accessible features at open spaces, overlooks, interpretative amenities and along trails are also recommended.

Objective 7.8 – Develop policies/procedures for Open Space management practices.

- 7.8.1. Allow underutilized spaces to revert to forest or meadow. Permitting spaces to revert to pre-disturbance conditions is an effective way to not only provide habitat and enhance biodiversity, but it reduces maintenance costs for the Department. Where possible, mowed lawns not actively used by the public should be restored as meadows or forest, depending on the existing environmental context and adjacent use.
- 7.8.2. Develop a mowing strategy for meadows and fields to promote avian and insect habitat. Former agricultural lands have reverted to meadow and grassland at several open space parcels owned by the Town. These spaces provide critical habitat for migrating birds and a host of pollinators and other insects. Inappropriate mowing practices can interrupt the life cycle of these species and contribute to devastating declines in populations. It is recommended that careful analysis of these spaces to determine what time of year is the best for mowing, to protect these disappearing habitats. One strategy would be to mow 1/3 of particular space at a time, to allow life cycle succession/ stability. Often, annual (early spring), winter, or biannual mowing is all that is needed to keep these spaces open while providing much needed fodder and nesting territories for wildlife. (CT-DEEP BMP's should be followed)
- 7.8.3. Review/ alter current trail management practices to reduce/eliminate degradation of trails. Wherever feasible, the Department should seek to maintain trails on foot to avoid damage to the trail caused by vehicular access. This is particularly important along trails adjacent to waterbodies, wetlands, and low-lying areas. Use of vehicles not only widens the trail, but damages adjacent tree roots and creates ruts, compaction, and erosion. In some cases, repair or even the relocation of trails is advised to avoid further impacts to sensitive resources and to restrict the overall width of the trail.

Goal 8: Expand Open Space Opportunities/Offerings

One of the best ways to create interest in conservation is to provide constructive opportunities for the public to interact with nature. This can range from interpretive signage to formal nature walks and restoration volunteering activities. There are exceptions - certain landscapes are very fragile and should be protected from human activities. It is therefore recommended to create outdoor offerings only where the environment can support the infrastructure necessary to accommodate visitors.

Objective 8.1 – Improve/upgrade signage and maps.

- 8.1.1. Bears, Ticks, Poison Ivy, etc. Simsbury is home to a robust population of bears and other wildlife. Unfortunately, surprise encounters with bears can be risky. Informational signage is recommended to educate outdoor enthusiasts about proper behavior about wildlife and how to protect themselves from poison ivy, ticks, and other naturally occurring health and safety concerns.
- 8.1.2. Resident/visitor education of invasive species and native plants. Many parks and open spaces are already experiencing encroachment and subsequent environmental degradation from invasive species. A campaign to educate Simsbury residents about invasive species impacts is recommended, to shift homeowner landscaping preferences away from these harmful plants. Simultaneous educational efforts can be made to inform people about native plants and their role not only in the home garden but in the greater ecological community.
- 8.1.3. Nature interpretation is an excellent way to inform visitors about the role of what are commonly considered undesirable landscapes, such as wetlands, bogs, and shrub thickets. It is also a great way to teach about the types of wildlife that use these landscapes and their greater role in the web of life.

- 8.1.4. Agricultural interpretation. Simsbury has a rich agricultural heritage that is a point of pride to residents. Farms and farmers' markets can still be found across the Town, and locally sourced produce provides delicious and healthy sustenance to many in the region. It is important to realize the importance of this agricultural legacy as cultures and systems increasingly globalize and lose connections to the land.

Objective 8.2 – Implement a pollinator pathways program and community gardens (public/private partnership).

This northeastern pollinator pathway initiative began in Wilton, Connecticut in 2017. Since then, more than 85 towns have joined the effort to create habitats for pollinating insects such as bees, butterflies, hummingbirds, and other wildlife. These gardens (otherwise known as pollinator “waystations”) are located on properties within a half-mile of one another. This is the range of most native bees. The waystations host native plants, trees, clean water, and provide decomposing plant materials for nesting and egg-laying. A robust pollinator pathway program could be established across Town-owned properties with minimal effort. Distribution of native pollinator seeds and careful management of snags, downed trees and composted materials in select locations will create pockets of habitat for the benefit of people and critters alike.

Community gardens are a popular way to educate the public about the horticulture and the importance of healthy soils, pollinators, composting, and connection to food systems. Simsbury enjoys many small parcels of open spaces adjacent to subdivisions and other residential areas. Where the construction of such facilities would not damage existing habitat, the establishment of community gardens would be a great way to build private/public partnerships and foster learning. Due to the extensive labor involved in maintaining these gardens, it is critical that these tasks are adopted by those utilizing these spaces.

Objective 8.3– Partner with organizations for management/support of Open Spaces.

Interagency partnerships are an excellent way to share resources and knowledge. These collaborations promote inclusive planning and inspire participants with successful ideas and initiatives. Teamwork reduces financial and logistical burdens and promotes lasting connections.

- 8.3.1. Create and support friend's groups for local open spaces. Establishing local coalitions for the monitoring and continued maintenance of Town-owned open spaces not only reduces expenses but promotes civic engagement and stewardship of community resources. Examples of potential alliances include Ridgefield's Conservation Ranger Program, the Simsbury Land Trust, and the Simsbury Garden Club.
- 8.3.2. Partner with local organizations to support regional initiatives. Intensive restoration, sampling, and conservation efforts require resources beyond what the Department may be able to provide. To increase the capacity for open space stewardship projects, partnerships with established regional and national associations is recommended. The Farmington River Watershed Association, Sustainable CT, Sierra Club, the Nature Conservancy, and the Audubon Society are all examples of established allied associations that may be able to lend a hand.
- 8.3.3. Consider enrolling eligible land in suitable incentive programs for farmlands and forests when these programs align with the intent and purpose of the property. Carbon programs that pay landowners annually to keep land in a natural state are emerging. As these programs come online the Town can determine if any are suitable for the extensive network of open space.

Goal 9: Develop Individual Open Space & Forest Stewardship Management Plans

Through the master planning process, it was noted that current open space and forest management plans did not reflect the values of the community. Additionally, many feel that these plans are exploitative and will result in the degradation of the Town’s communal environmental resources. In the words of Gifford Pinchot, a native of Simsbury and conservation visionary of his time:

Without natural resources life itself is impossible. From birth to death, natural resources, transformed for human use, feed, clothe, shelter, and transport us. Upon them we depend for every material necessity, comfort, convenience, and protection in our lives. Without abundant resources prosperity is out of reach.

As a next step, the Town should reexamine open space priorities based on public process, current and future needs of the community, and how these spaces can serve the greatest environmental and public good for the longest time.

Recommendations with Actionable Planning, Cost Estimates and Prioritization

The recommendations have been prioritized based on the criteria described below. Each of the recommendations have been prioritized by the consultant team based upon which would be most beneficial to the Town (high, moderate or low). All cost estimates are in 2020 figures. Most costs are dependent on the extent of the enhancements and improvements determined. Capital project costs (including maintenance and enhancement projects) are typically greater than \$10,000 with a minimum life expectancy of 15 years.

The rating criteria are identified as follows:

Ability to Meet Needs of Town	Rating	Staff Impact	Rating
Completely Meets Needs of Town	5	Minimally impacts existing Department staffing	5
Moderately Meets Needs of Town	3	Moderately impacts existing Department staffing	3
Needs additional Recommendations to Meet Needs of Town	1	Highly impacts existing Department staffing	1

Cost to Implement/ Maintain	Rating	Community Benefit	Rating
Relatively Low Cost to Implement/ Maintain	5	Broad Community Benefit (most inclusive)	5
Moderate Cost to Implement/ Maintain	3	Balanced Community/ Specific Group Benefit	3
High Cost to Implement/ Maintain	1	Primarily Specific Group/ Individuals (least inclusive)	1

Ease of Implementation	Rating	Recommended Timing of Implementation	Rating
Minimal difficulty to implement	5	Near-term	1-2 years
Moderate ease of implementation	3	Mid-term	3-5 years
Difficult/ Challenging to implement	1	Long-Term	5-10 years
		As Opportunity Arises	

Goal 1: Continue to Improve Organizational Efficiencies

Objective 1.1 – Adjust Department staffing to meet current and future needs of Town and Level of Service.

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Define roles and responsibilities within Department.	\$0	High
Hire and train two to three additional parks maintenance staff to meet current and future parks maintenance demands.	Additional Staff Budget	High
Hire and train Assistant Director to meet current and future parks and facility usage demands.	Additional Staff Budget	High
Hire and train Programming Coordinator to meet current and future recreation programming and facility usage standards.	Additional Staff Budget	High
Hire one additional programming/marketing staff.	Additional Staff Budget	High

Objective 1.2 – Provide wireless safety/ security/ medical alert locator for contacting Police/ Medical Assistance.

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Subscribe to medical alert service for evening/weekend maintenance staff.	Annual medical alert service	Moderate

Objective 1.3 - Engage volunteer groups for specific projects.

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Engage volunteer groups (federal/state/local) for specific projects (ie. invasive species/vegetation removal, painting, trail improvements, plantings/enhancements).	\$0/ (reduction in maintenance needs if completed by volunteers)	Moderate

Objective 1.4 – Alter current maintenance/management practices.

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Develop maintenance standards of level of service and alter current maintenance/management practices (ie. mowing/pruning).	TBD/ (reduction in maintenance needs if open space areas/ trails reduced)	Moderate
Develop shared stewardships with local HOA and/or neighborhood groups.	TBD/ (reduction in maintenance needs if open space areas/ trails reduced)	Moderate
Develop evaluation criteria to determine whether certain open space parcels are eligible for release to local HOA, volunteer, or neighborhood groups.	TBD/ (reduction in maintenance needs if open space areas/ trails reduced)	Moderate

Objective 1.5 – Review effectiveness of carry-in/carry-out policy.		
Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Analyze carry-in/carry-out policy. Consider providing trash and recycling receptacles at parks with litter/trash issues. Promote use of recycling/landfill drop-offs (ie. Town Forest Baseball Field/ Park, Tariffville Park, Weatogue Park).	Additional staff time/ Increase trash removal/ maintenance at select parks	Moderate

Objective 1.6 – Increase funding for parks, open space and facility maintenance/ acquisition.		
Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Explore alternate funding sources. Consider contracting with a dedicated grant writer to research, submit, and track federal, regional, state, and local grants (ex. Sustainable CT).	Potential matching funds/ % of Successful Grants/ TBD	Moderate
Expand funding options that provide dedicated revenue for parks & recreation (impact fees, tax levy, bond referendum)	\$0	Moderate
Consider implementing a cost recovery and pricing policy and continue periodic evaluation of fees for programs and facilities.	\$0/ Additional Staff Time	Moderate

Goal 2: Enhance and improve communication tools for Department activities and services

Objective 2.1 – Improve overall external communications.		
Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Develop marketing and communications plan to improve awareness and communications of Department. Provide better communication while also providing more continuity town-wide and consolidation of messages.	TBD/ Additional Staff Time	High

Objective 2.2 – Improve Department Website.		
Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Improve Department Website to include descriptions and updated maps of parks and recreational facilities	TBD/ Additional Staff Time	High
Create on-line tool (website/app) so patrons can report maintenance issues in parks, open spaces and along trails. (ie. report a pothole, Hartford 311)	TBD/ Additional Staff Time	High
Create online interactive map of parks, open spaces, and trails (ie. Esri, My Rec)	TBD/ Additional Staff Time	High
Develop means for local groups to advertise/announce offerings (ie. website/app)	TBD/ Additional Staff Time	High

Objective 2.3 – Develop communications plan for educating staff and volunteers regarding invasive species, best practices, vegetation management trainings, etc.

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Develop communications plan to improve awareness and communications for staff and volunteers regarding invasive species, best practices, trainings, etc. Communication strategies to include website updates, trainings, signage, brochures, webinars, etc.	TBD/ Additional Staff Time	High

Goal 3: Continue to Improve Programs and Services

Objective 3.1 – Review recreational program offerings and adjust annually to diversify offerings.

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Diversify/ re-evaluate nature, educational & arts programs. Expand program offerings for seniors, multi-generational/ family, and teens/tweens.	Additional staff time/ (Potential Increased Revenue or Decreased Expenses)	Moderate
Expand water-based activity offerings (swimming, kayak/ canoe events, etc.)	Additional staff time/ (Potential Increased Revenue or Decreased Expenses)	Moderate
Expand recreational activity offerings (biking, hiking, x-c skiing, snowshoeing)	Additional staff time/ (Potential Increased Revenue or Decreased Expenses)	Moderate
Expand special event offerings (pop-up concerts, movies in the park, etc.) Retire underperforming events.	Additional staff time/ (Potential Increased Revenue or Decreased Expenses)	Moderate

Objective 3.2 – Continue to collaborate with alternative service providers for programming.

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Continue to collaborate with local alternative service providers and provide entry level programming to support advanced course offerings by alternative providers	Additional staff time/ (Potential Increased Revenue or Decreased Expenses)	TBD

Objective 3.3 – Improve access to athletic fields.

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Review existing field allocation policy and industry best practices to update current policy.	\$0/ Additional staff time	High

Goal 4: Continue to Improve and Enhance Multi-use Trail System

Objective 4.1 – Create connections to existing network to provide routes to Town Center and places of work.

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Work with other Town Departments to create connections to existing trail systems by implementing Bicycle/Pedestrian Master Plan and expanding accessible multi-use trails within Town and places of work.	Depends on size/ complexity	Moderate

Objective 4.2 – Evaluate underutilized neighborhood connections.

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Evaluate underutilized neighborhood trail connections and remove inefficient/ underutilized trail connections to eliminate maintenance needs.	TBD/ Depends on size/ complexity (reduction in maintenance needs if trails reduced)	Moderate

Objective 4.3 – Promote native tree planting along pathways.

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Add native tree plantings along pathways to provide shade and beauty.	TBD/ Depends on size/ complexity [Trees: \$250 - \$500 ea.]	Moderate

Objective 4.4 – Analyze current maintenance practices of path system.

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Assess current vegetation management practices along trails. Reduce over mowing/ reduce vegetation encroachment into pathways.	TBD/ Depends on size/ complexity (reduction in maintenance needs)	Moderate
Assess current surface conditions and repair/prioritize accordingly.	TBD/ Depends on size/ complexity (reduction in maintenance needs)	Moderate
Assess current fencing conditions along trails and repair/ prioritize accordingly.	TBD/ Depends on size/ complexity (reduction in maintenance needs)	Moderate

Goal 5: Maintain and Improve Existing Facilities & Amenities

Objective 5.1 – Continue to improve ADA accessibility at all facilities.

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Improve accessibility of paths, amenities, and existing park structures.	TBD/ Depends on size/ complexity	Moderate
Update the ADA transition plan every five years.	\$0	Moderate

Objective 5.2 – Conduct feasibility study for an Intergenerational Community and Social Services Center at the Apple Barn site.

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Conduct feasibility study for an Intergenerational Community Center for primary use by Culture, Parks and Recreation and Community and Social Services at the Apple Barn site. Explore options for developing cohesive community service and explore options for rentals.	Depends on size/ complexity [Study Range: \$40,000-60,000]	Low

Objective 5.3 – Replace Memorial Park Pool & Bathhouse or install splash pad.

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Conduct study/redesign of Memorial Park Pool & Bathhouse Facility to improve efficiencies and expand recreational opportunities for patrons. Upgrade bathhouse to current standards or include splash pad and new recreational offerings.	Depends on size/ complexity [Design/Construct: \$1 - 3M]	High

Objective 5.4 – Provide improved signage Town-wide to make it easier for patrons to find and use parks, open spaces, and facilities. Develop consistent wayfinding.

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Renovate and update existing park signs to increase awareness of facilities. Improve path, trail, and interpretive signage at park and open spaces.	Depends on size/ complexity	Moderate

Objective 5.5 – Improve/Upgrade Restroom Facilities.		
Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Improve/upgrade restroom facilities to current standards to minimize maintenance demands. Prioritized based upon user demand, conditions, location. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Simsbury Meadows Rotary Park Playground (make available to concerts/events/dog park patrons) 2. Memorial Park (upper level) 3. Curtiss Park (north side) 4. Town Forest 5. Weatogue 	Depends on size/ complexity [Restroom: \$80,000 – 160,000]	High

Objective 5.6 – Improve/Replace Playground Facilities		
Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Improve/replace playground facilities to current standards to minimize maintenance demands. Prioritized based upon user demand, conditions, location. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Memorial Park (remove) 2. Town Forest Beach (remove) 3. Weatogue (repair/replace) 4. Simsbury Farms (repair/replace) 5. Tariffville (remove) 6. West Mountain Park (analyze usage then remove/replace) 	Depends on size/ complexity [Playground: Range \$50,000 – 200,000]	Moderate

Objective 5.7 – Improve/Replace Park Amenities.		
Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Improve/replace park amenities to current standards to minimize maintenance demands. Prioritized based upon user demand, conditions, location. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Picnic Tables, Grills, Benches, Bike Racks • Buildings/ Pavilions • Fencing • Water Fountains • Sports Appurtenances (bleachers) • Native Shade Plantings & Structures 	Depends on size/ complexity [Budget: \$50,000 – 300,000]	Moderate

Objective 5.8 – Upgrade lighting/security features

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Upgrade/replace park lighting and security features with modern/sustainable equipment to improve site security lighting and reduce costs. Prioritized based upon user demand, conditions, location. 1. Memorial Park 2. Simsbury Meadows 3. Curtiss Park 4. Simsbury Farms	Depends on size/ complexity [Budget: \$50,000 – 300,000]	Low

Objective 5.9 – Improve drainage where needed across parks.

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Improve drainage in low-lying areas of park where patrons utilize fields and facilities. Relocate structures placed in low-lying, wet terrain to drier areas. Improve poor drainage conditions where needed across parks and along trails (ie. low areas adjacent to trails, within parking areas, etc.). Prioritize based upon user demand, conditions, location.	Depends on size/ complexity	High

Objective 5.10 – Replace Irrigation Systems

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Replace inefficient/ aging irrigation systems	Depends on size/ complexity [Budget: \$8,000 – 20,000]	Moderate

Objective 5.11 – Provide new facilities within Parks based on level of service analysis.

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Develop pump track and mountain biking trails where appropriate	Depends on size/ complexity [Budget: \$30,000 – 120,000]	Low
Create splash pad/ aquatic features for summer use (Memorial Park)	Depends on size/ complexity [Budget: \$80,000 - 350,000]	High
Redevelop/ Upgrade skate park (Memorial Park)	Depends on size/ complexity [Budget: \$40,000 – 200,000]	Moderate
Develop pickleball courts (6) (Tariffville Park)	[Full-depth reconstruction \$50,000]	High

Objective 5.12 – Improve Access to Aquatic Resources.

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Improve/ provide access to aquatic resources	Depends on size/ complexity (Construct \$5,000 – 80,000)	Moderate
Improve the Old Drake Hill Road Bridge (Flower Bridge) over the Farmington River. (Spot repairs to full recoating of bridge.)	(\$500,000 to \$1.65 million).	High
Improve the Stoddard Reservoir Dam within Onion Mountain Park. (Removal of the dam and establishing vegetation within to modifications to the dam, improving stability raising dam and replacement of the spillway.)	(\$932,000 to \$2.65 million).	High

Goal 6: Develop Individual Park Improvement/ Master Plans

Objective 1.1 – Adjust Department staffing to meet current and future needs of Town and Level of Service.

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Develop individual park master plans to shift pressure from parks and repurpose spaces.	Depends on size/ complexity	Low

Goal 7: Maintain Existing Open Spaces Efficiently and Appropriately

Objective 7.1 – Acquire additional open space parcels to enhance connectivity and habitat quality. Partner with local landowners to protect open space.

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Acquire additional open space parcels to enhance ecological connectivity and habitat quality.	Depends on size/ value	High

Objective 7.2 – Develop Town-wide climate resiliency plan.

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Develop Town-wide climate resiliency plan to address heat island effect, open space protection, carbon sequestering, flood mitigation, etc.	TBD/ [Budget: \$40,000 – 60,000]	Moderate

Objective 7.3 – Conduct biodiversity assessments.

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Hire ecologist to conduct biodiversity and habitat assessments at select open spaces.	TBD	Moderate

Objective 7.4 – Concentrate restoration efforts in areas of maximum benefit

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Concentrate restoration efforts in areas of maximum ecological benefit. Invasive species removal efforts to be conducted where restoration follows. Prioritize restoration efforts based upon location, ecological benefits.	Depends on size/ complexity	High

Objective 7.5– Develop policy/procedure for evaluating development requests/ demands within Open Spaces

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Develop policy/procedure for evaluating development requests/demands within Open Spaces for active recreational purposes.	\$0	High

Objective 7.6 – Develop policy/procedure for management and development practices adjacent to aquatic resources & sensitive ecological resources

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Develop policy/procedure for management and development practices adjacent to aquatic resources (rivers, streams, wetlands, ponds) & sensitive ecological resources.	\$0	Moderate

Objective 7.7 – Provide additional parking/ trail access to Open Space

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Provide additional parking and trails at select Open Space parcels.	Depends on size/ complexity [Budget: \$20,000 – 80,000]	Low

Objective 7.8 – Develop policies/procedures for Open Space management practices

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Allow underutilized open spaces to revert to forest or meadow to eliminate/reduce maintenance demands. Prioritize locations based upon conditions, size, and maintenance demand.	\$0/ (reduction in maintenance needs)	High
Develop mowing strategy for meadows and fields to promote aviary and insect habitat.	\$0/ (reduction in maintenance needs)	High
Review/alter current trail management practices to reduce/ eliminate degradation of trails and adjacent open spaces. Repair/relocate trails as necessary.	Depends on size/ complexity / (reduction in maintenance needs)	High

Goal 8: Expand Open Space Opportunities/ Offerings

Objective 8.1 – Improve/upgrade signage and education materials for Open Spaces

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Develop environmental educational signage (ie. bears, ticks, invasive species, poison ivy, etc.)	Depends on size/ complexity	Moderate
Develop resident environmental educational materials ie. invasive species, native plants.	Depends on size/ complexity	Moderate
Develop nature interpretation signs for Open Spaces.	Depends on size/ complexity	Moderate
Develop agricultural interpretation signs for conserved farmland	Depends on size/ complexity	Moderate

Objective 8.2 – Implement pollinator pathways program and community gardens.

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Develop and implement pollinator pathways program throughout Town (public/private partnership)	\$0	High

Objective 8.3 – Partner with organizations for management/support of Open Spaces

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Develop/expand friends' groups for Open Spaces to support restoration, monitoring and etc. ie. Ridgefield Rangers & Eagle Scouts	\$0	High
Partner with local organizations to support management of Open Spaces (Farmington River Stewardship, Sustainable CT, Sierra Club, Nature Conservancy, Audubon Society, etc.)	\$0	High

Goal 9: Develop Individual Open Space & Forest Stewardship/Management Plans

Actions	Capital Cost/ Operational Budget Impact	Priority
Develop individual open space and forest stewardship/management plans to improve ecological integrity and appropriate public access.	Depends on size/ complexity	TBD

APPENDIX A

CONCEPT PLANS



Schultz Park

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APPENDIX B

OPEN SPACE MAPPING



Town Forest Park

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APPENDIX C

PUBLIC SURVEY PRESENTATION



Rotary Park Playground at Simsbury Meadows

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APPENDIX D

FINAL PRESENTATION



Simsbury Farms

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APPENDIX E

REVENUE ANALYSIS



Ethel Walker Woods

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