

Recreation

Recreation resources enable us to exercise, socialize, build community, and access open space. These resources include both physical spaces for recreation and structured programming that help people gather and share interests. Community resiliency increases when people have more local friends and neighbors to turn to when they need help. Building community begins with fostering person-to-person connections, which the City can encourage through recreational spaces and programs.

South Burlington must balance the need for recreational facilities (developed and natural) with other uses of land and must provide cost-effective recreation to residents of all ages, interests, and abilities. Our residents use both our developed parks and our natural areas for recreation and we need to plan for use by the public to continue increasing into the future for varied user groups. The City must also maintain and invest in the current system of parks, recreational facilities, and open spaces to keep those assets vibrant.

As [the city's](#) population grows [and diversifies](#), especially in City Center and higher-scale areas, we intends to parallel that growth with growth in available recreation spaces and open lands. In the coming decade, we project the majority of all households will be living in multi-family dwellings, which increases reliance on accessible park space for basic recreational needs. Both new acquisitions and maintenance of existing areas needs to be done equitably and should consider our Climate Action Plan targets.

Recreation Goals

- Provide for the varied recreational needs and interests of our community members by providing spaces and facilities for passive recreation, active sports, cultural and educational programs, and civic gatherings, distributed geographically and appropriate for surrounding context
- ~~• Provide 7.5 acres of developed recreation land for every 1,000 residents~~
- ~~• Provide 20 acres of natural recreation land for every 1,000 residents~~
- ~~• Locate a recreational amenity within 1/4 mile of every dwelling unit within our residential and mixed-use neighborhoods~~
- ~~• Increase annual recreational programming and event participation to 40% of the total population~~
- Have recreational programming and event participation mirror the city's demographic mix
- Improve accessibility in recreational spaces and programs
- Provide equitable access and [further](#) investment in parks and programming

Recreation Actions

- Prepare a Parks Master Plan [establishing-identifying](#) the need and location of new parks, [the](#) function of existing and planned parks, and [identified](#) amenities to serve the City's current and future population
- Construct a Community Recreation Center
- Complete ADA transition plan for public infrastructure, equity, and accessibility, including appropriate investment in parks and programming
- Pursue acquisition and investment in recreation spaces to meet goals of this Plan
- [Target resources to reinvest in parks in city's older neighborhoods](#)
- [Provide 7.5 acres of developed recreation land for every 1,000 residents](#)

- Provide 20 acres of natural recreation land for every 1,000 residents
- Locate a recreational amenity within ¼ mile of every dwelling unit within our residential and mixed-use neighborhoods
- Increase annual recreational programming and event participation to 40% of the total population
- Create 40 garden plots in each of the four quadrants of the city

Recreation Inventory, Analysis, & Challenges

As South Burlington continues to evolve, the recreation space and programming needs of our residents will also continue to evolve.

Recreation Spaces.

South Burlington values collective, publicly-available spaces. Community building requires functional gathering spaces, both outdoor and indoor, to allow residents to form connections and share interests. This must include both unstructured space and reservable space. Our community members use recreational spaces differently due to a range of ages, lifestyles (including single people, families, dog-owners, and those with unorthodox schedules) and interests (including community gardening, team sports, individual sports, passive recreation, and socialization, and natural areas). Providing spaces for a range of community gathering styles and needs will strengthen our community as a whole.

Commented [RV1]: inconsistent

Our recreational spaces must be accessible in every sense and be ADA-compliant. Spaces must be walkable, bikeable and/or accessible via transit lines from homes to reduce the vehicle travel distances driven by personal vehicle, both for to mitigate climate change mitigation and to for reduction reduce of physical and financial barriers to access. Spaces must feel safe and welcoming to all community members. These goals are applicable to new construction and redevelopment, but also existing spaces.

Commented [RV2]: Making places more accessible by active transportation makes places more accessible for all ages and abilities.

As of 2023, 46% of all dwellings-units in the community are in multi-family buildings, with 48% are in single-family homes and the remainder in duplexes. Over the past two decades, two-thirds of all homes built have been in multi-family buildings, and this trend is anticipated to continue. This change, alongside decreasing lot sizes for single-family homes in new neighborhoods and more infill development within existing neighborhoods, increases the need for varied accessible park and public spaces throughout the city.

A range of park sizes and functions creates a vibrant park system. The park system must include a mix of city-wide parks, neighborhood parks, and even regional parks (like Red Rocks Park) to serve the varied needs of our users. Large, city-wide parks are critical for large-format sports and other large events. Inclusion of complementary commercial spaces adjacent to park spaces potentially creates new neighborhood destinations. Determining what a neighborhood park should include and what amenities (including community gardens, playgrounds, dog facilities, etc.) should be located in varying kinds of parks will be a core question for a Parks Master Plan.

The Parks Master Plan will also aid with meeting the current and future recreation needs of the city. South Burlington's outdoor park spaces are not meeting current need and will not meet the needs of a

growing population. South Burlington owns significant acreage of park space, and ~~XX~~ miles of shared-use path, but currently does not meet the goal of 7.5 acres of developed recreation land per 1,000 residents.

Commented [RV3]: Insert number

Additional outdoor playing fields are needed to support programming desired by City residents. Many traditionally seasonal sports programs have become three-season sports and place huge demand on facility spaces and fields. Additional actively-programmed City park land is needed to adequately provide facility space to meet recreation needs for a wide range of South Burlington residents.

In addition to outdoor playing fields, the community is in need of more community gardens. Community gardens are steadily becoming popular in the community. However, currently, the city has 35 garden plots, all of which are located in [insert quadrant or location]. With the rise in multifamily housing throughout the city, community members will desire more spaces to work in the land.

Commented [RV4]: Fact check?

Commented [RV5]: Insert quadrant/location

The distribution of parks in the City, while generally widespread, does not provide for easy pedestrian access for all residents. A large percentage of the total City-owned park acreage is in a single location – Veterans’ Memorial Park and Wheeler Nature Park on Dorset Street. Several other larger properties the City owns are not developed as park spaces. Looking ahead, acquisition of new neighborhood-scale spaces must be prioritized in areas without existing park space.

In addition to outdoor spaces, City residents need indoor recreation spaces during inclement weather and for indoor-oriented activities. The City has indoor space at City Hall, including the library and the senior center, but, as fully discussed below, most other programs rely on the school system for indoor space.

South Burlington’s outdoor park spaces are not meeting current need and will not meet the needs of a growing population. South Burlington owns significant acreage of park space, ~~XX~~ miles of shared use path, and improved facilities, but currently does not meet the goal of 7.5 acres of developed recreation land per 1,000 residents.

Commented [RV6]: Insert number

Commented [RV7]: vague

The City considers both developed parks and natural recreation areas to be valuable and intends to improve and maintain significant amounts of both types of areas into the future. ~~We also should~~The City strives to provide for 20 acres of natural areas per 1,000 residents, for both passive recreation and conservation. A large percentage of the total City owned park acreage is in a single location – Veterans’ Memorial Park and Wheeler Nature Park on Dorset Street. Several other larger properties are not developed as park spaces. ~~The City considers both developed parks and natural recreation areas to be valuable and intends to improve and maintain significant amounts of both types of areas into the future.~~

A range of park sizes and functions creates a functioning park system. The park system must include a mix of city wide parks, neighborhood parks, and even regional parks (like Red Rocks Park) to serve the varied needs of our users. Large, city wide parks are critical for large format sports and other large events. The distribution of parks, while generally widespread, does not provide for easy pedestrian access for all residents, so acquisition of new neighborhood-scale spaces must be prioritized in areas without existing park space. Inclusion of complementary commercial spaces adjacent to park spaces potentially creates new neighborhood destinations. Determining what a neighborhood park should include and what amenities (including community gardens, playgrounds, dog facilities, etc.) should be located in varying kinds of parks will be a core question for a Parks Master Plan.

~~Additional outdoor playing fields are needed to support programming desired by City residents. Many traditionally seasonal sports programs have become three-season sports and place huge demand on facility spaces and fields. Additional actively programmed City park land is needed to adequately provide facility space to meet recreation needs for a wide range of South Burlington residents.~~

~~Further a~~Acquisitions can be funded by the Open Space Fund, a special dedicated property tax of 1 cent on the tax rate to purchase open space or development rights to open space. Recreation is also supported through the Impact Fee Ordinance, ~~which Funds collected through the Impact Fee Ordinance is strictly limited to~~ how and when it can be spent.

In addition to publicly-owned spaces, private associations and neighborhoods provide additional recreation space for their residents. Development projects are now required to provide Civic Spaces and/or Site Amenities when they are subject to Site Plan and/or Subdivision rules. This requires some amount of space on a site to be dedicated at the time of construction or applicable re-development to amenities that serve the residents/users of site or the public at large.

Commented [RV8]: Is this for acquisitions or maintenance?

As the City's resources age, maintenance and safety are becoming increasingly important. The City will need to maintain facilities in an equitable way – making sure that all members of our community are being adequately and appropriately served by maintenance projects over time. The Conservation Fund was expanded in 2010 to allow for up to five percent to be used for maintenance perpetually. Improvements for three major natural areas have been authorized for 50% funding through FY 2026.

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Recreation Programming.

The City provides recreational programming and will continue to do so. These services, like youth sports programs, senior programming, and community events, provide opportunities for people from different parts of our city to gather and interact. They also provide structured exercise opportunities, mental health and cognitive support, and connection between people ~~of with~~ shared interests. The Recreation and Parks Department offers a wide array of programs, including sports, art, hobbies, and educational programs, play groups, and fitness, and serves community members from pre-school to seniors. Programming is primarily targeted for school-age kids and seniors, so expanding programs for younger kids and adults would provide more opportunities to ~~more of~~ our community.

In addition to its own direct programming, the City works with area community groups, nonprofits, neighboring municipalities, and the school district to coordinate and enhance programming available to the City's residents.

The City will continue to adapt to equitably meet the needs of our whole community. Access to recreation programming should not be unreasonably limited by transportation barriers, economic barriers, and time barriers. To have program and event participation reflect our community, the City should continue offering community events free-of-charge and explore options to remove financial barriers to participation in other types of programming. Locations should also be varied in the city and especially include locations that are accessible by transit or to provide assistance for access.

With the changing community needs, City recreation programs and events will need to continue to adapt to demand and interest. New sports and new interests may become popular in our community. Reevaluating programming periodically will ensure our community's needs are met.

A major obstacle to recreational programming is the very limited indoor space available. The City Recreation and Parks Department depends on spaces within the schools for most of its indoor programs. The City programs receive the second highest priority for school spaces (after the schools themselves), these spaces are limited in space and time. The City lacks scheduling control and cannot provide recreational activities for young children and the elderly during the school day. Alternative building space to provide for these types of activities is essential.

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Recreation: Additional Resources

- South Burlington Parks Access Improvement Study (2014)