

RECREATION RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Recreation provides opportunities for humans to exercise, socialize, build community, and access open space. Recreational resources include both the physical spaces for recreation and structured programming opportunities that help people gather and share interests.

South Burlington balances the need for recreational facilities (developed and natural) with other uses of land, and to provide cost-effective recreation to residents of all ages, interests, and abilities.

As the population continues to grow, especially in City Center and other higher-density areas, South Burlington intends to parallel that growth with growth in available recreation spaces and open lands. In the coming decade, we are projected to have a majority of all households living in multi-family dwellings; with that comes a greater reliance on accessible park space for basic recreational needs.

Maintenance and investment in the current system of parks, recreational facilities, and open spaces is required to keep those assets vibrant. Both new acquisitions and maintenance of existing areas needs to be done equitably and should factor in our climate change mitigation targets. We must also continue to develop recreation programming to meet the needs of our changing community.

OBJECTIVES

- Provide 7.5 acres of developed recreation land for every 1,000 residents
- Locate a recreational amenity within ¼ mile of every dwelling unit
- 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 investment in parks and programming

INVENTORY, ANALYSIS, & CHALLENGES

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

Spaces. South Burlington values collective, publicly-available spaces. Community building requires functional gathering space, both outdoor and indoor, to allow residents to form connections and share interests. This must include both unstructured space and reservable space for gatherings or events. These spaces must also be accessible to our whole community, including upgrading amenities to be ADA-compliant. Spaces must be walkable, bikeable and/or accessible via transit lines from homes to reduce the distances driven by personal vehicle. These goals are applicable to new construction and redevelopment, but also to spaces in existing neighborhoods.

As of 2023, 46% of dwelling units in the community are multi-family buildings, with 48% 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 infill within existing neighborhoods, increases the need for accessible park and public spaces.

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, 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. 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 and several other larger properties are not developed as park spaces. Large parks are critical for large-format sports and other large events, but we also need more supporting, neighborhood-scale parks for our residents. The distribution of parks, while generally widespread, does not provide for easy pedestrian access for all residents, so acquisition of new spaces must be prioritized in areas without existing park space.

Further acquisitions can be funded by a special dedicated property tax of 1 cent on the tax rate to purchase open space or development rights to open space, approved in 2000 as the Conservation Fund and expanded to include recreation space in 2008. Recreation is also supported through the Impact Fee Ordinance, which is strictly limited to how and when it can be spent.

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.

In addition to outdoor recreation space, City residents need indoor recreation spaces during inclement weather and for indoor-oriented activities. Currently, 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.

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.

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 shared interests. The Recreation and Parks Department offers a wide array of programs, including sports, art, hobby, 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 opportunities to more of our community.

The City will continue to adapt to changing needs amongst community members to equitably meet the need of our whole community. Access to recreation programming can also be limited by transportation barriers, economic barriers, and time barriers. In order to meet our objective of having 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.

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

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.

Additional outdoor playing fields are also needed to support the range of programming desired by City residents. Many traditionally seasonal sports programs have become three-season sports, which places additional huge demand on facility spaces and fields. The City needs to adapt to provide additional outdoor recreation programs as residents' desires and interests may shift. Additional actively-programmed City park land is needed to adequately provide facility space for various youth and adult sports programs that meet recreation needs for a wide range of South Burlington residents.

Strategy: prepare a Parks Master Plan for the City that assesses existing and needed park spaces and access to each from throughout the community.