

Chapter 10. Open Space & Recreation

Pursuant to Chapter 126, Section 8-23 of Connecticut State law regarding the preparation of a Plan of Conservation and Development, the municipal planning commission must consider the following:

- the needs of the municipality including, but not limited to...recreation

A Plan of Conservation and Development shall:

- be a statement of policies, goals and standards for the physical and economic development of the municipality
- recommend the most desirable use of land within the municipality for recreational, conservation and other purposes and include a map showing such proposed land uses
- note any inconsistencies with the following growth management principles:
 - conservation and restoration of the natural environment
 - protection of environmental assets critical to public health and safety

Under the State's Plan of Conservation and Development, the third growth management principle regarding development and transportation lists a policy to "encourage a network of pedestrian and bicycle paths and greenways that provide convenient inter- and intra-town access, including access to the regional public transportation network pg14". The fourth growth management principle is an action to "Conserve and Restore the Natural Environment..." as a way to strategically maintain a green infrastructure rather than relying solely on man-made systems. The state plan links the natural environment with the recreational industry; an important economic engine for the state and its communities. But even more important, opportunities for recreation enhance an individual's and communities well being.

What follows is an assessment of what open space and recreation resources are currently available to the Town. The past plans are assessed to better formulate the current plan for the future development of the Town.



10.1 General Current Conditions of Open Space & Recreation

Currently, Town owned open space and recreation lands account for about 7.8% of the total land within the Town. If the federally owned McKinney Wildlife Refuge and all other privately held conservation land are included, the percentage increases to about 12.5. (Note: the analysis in the land use chapter of this POCD is not comparable to this one; the two are done using different underlying assumptions, each appropriate to the task at hand but not to the other.) Under 'The Green Plan: Guiding Land Acquisition and Protection in Connecticut 2007-2012', the state sets forth a strategy for approaching protection of its open space. It is the State of Connecticut policy to see communities and organizations preserve 11% of the state's land area as open space (in addition to the goal of the state to have 10%) by the year 2023 (Connecticut General Statutes Section 23-8(b)). The Town meets the state's goal for open space and recreation lands. However, it has yet to meet the mark set forth by the 2003 POCD, which recommended increasing the goal to 15%.

The Town has recognized many of its recreation facilities are in need of maintenance and has been working to upgrade them.

10.2 General Current Conditions of Trails

The Town is actively working to develop trails through its communities and along its waterfront. The Housatonic River Greenway has two sections in place in the Town. The first built was Sikorsky Estuary Walk in 2010 and the next section was between Main Street and Beacon Point Road. The East Coast Greenway Trail section through the Town has yet to be implemented. There is in place the interim on road trail following Stratford Avenue.

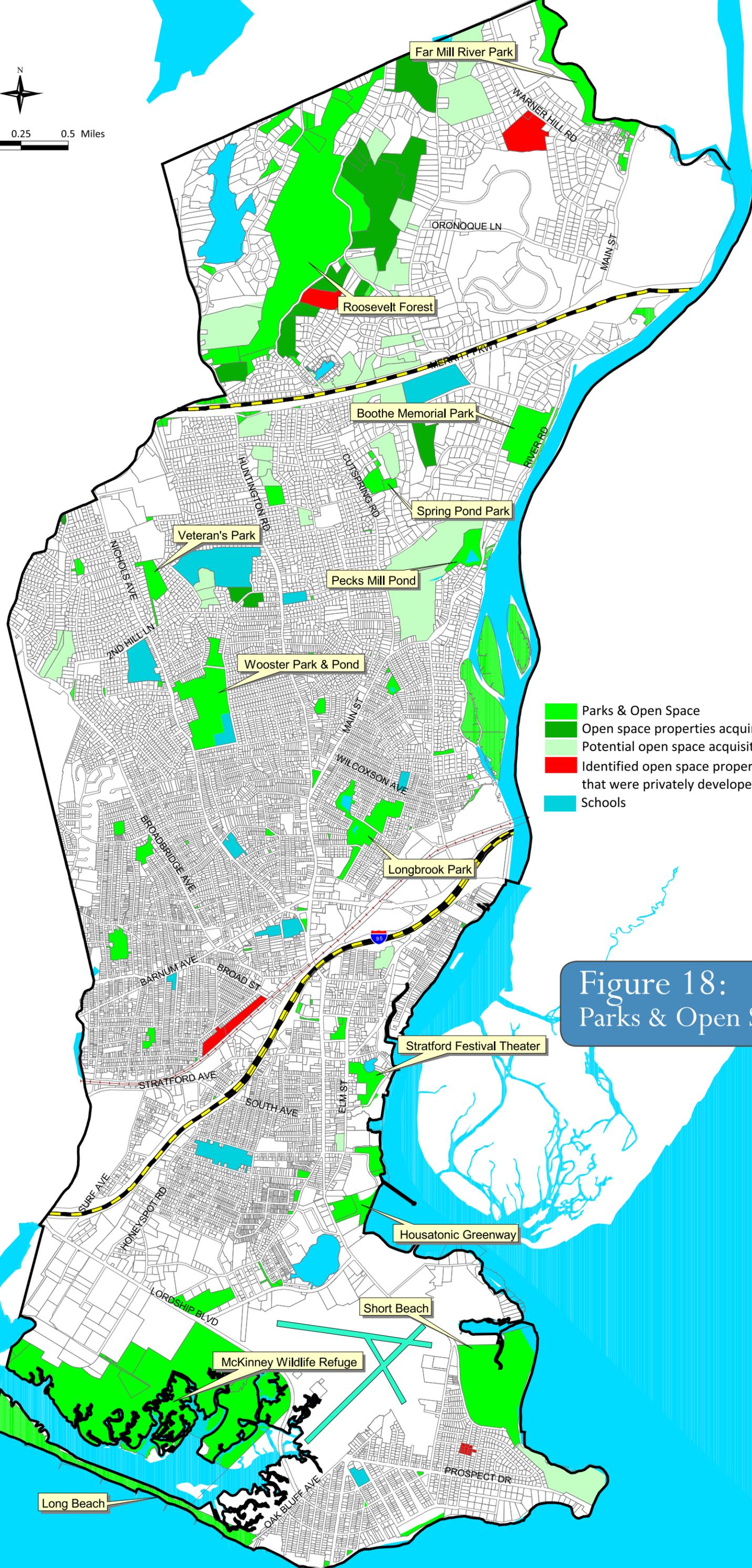
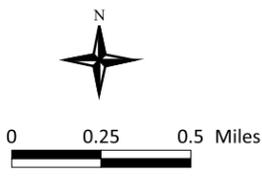
10.3 Detailed Inventory of Open Space & Recreation

Currently the Town organizes its parks into large (greater than 10 acres), medium (5-10 acres) and small (less than 5 acres). There are 12 large parks, 13 medium parks and 16 small parks for a total of 41 parks (one, McKinney Wildlife Refuge, is federally managed).

Table 35: Open Space & Recreation Resources

	Town Parks and Playgrounds	Category	Acres	Facilities
1	Roosevelt Forest	Large	400	Large tract of forest with trails
2	McKinney Wildlife Refuge (Great Meadows Marsh)	Large	399.38	Natural salt marsh, parking and trails
3	Short Beach	Large	107.28	Beach, picnic areas, playground, golf course, softball fields, courts for basketball, paddleball, tennis, and volleyball
4	Long Beach	Large	62	parking only (unimproved beach)
5	Wooster Park and Pond	Large	53.66	Natural Habitat of pond, stream, woods, trails and multi-use fields
6	Far Mill River Park	Large	38.78	Natural Area along Far Mill River, gorge, dams, trail
7	Boothe Park	Large	32.99	Boothe Memorial Museum (including various bldgs and structures), planetarium, Boothe Family Home, playground
8	James Farm Road Open Space	Large	32.3	Natural habitat of wood and streams
9	Longbrook Park	Large	30.17	Park bldgs, pond, trails, picnic areas, ball fields (football, soccer, baseball/softball), pool, playground, tennis courts
10	Pecks Mill Pond	Large	14.57	Natural Area with pond and woods
11	Veteran's Park	Large	11.91	Wetland area with loop trail
12	Spring Pond Park	Large	9.42	Natural habitat of wood, wetland and streams
13	Stratford Festival Theatre	Medium	12.07	Vacant theatrical complex, pond, wetland, parking
14	Birdeye Launching Ramp & Fishing Pier	Medium	9.25	Boat ramp, dock, fishing platform, parking
15	Clover Field / Janosko Park	Medium	9.16	Softball fields, basketball courts, Athletic bldg, parking
16	Pirhala Farm (Community Gardens)	Medium	8.63	Building, parking, compost bins and garden plot land
17	Stratford Greenway (behind DeLuca Field)	Medium	8.14	About 5 miles of asphalt paved trail along Housatonic River
18	DeLuca Field	Medium	7.53	Softball complex (1 field)
19	John Chanda (North End) Park	Medium	5.76	Ball field, basketball court, pond, wetland, trails, parking
20	Stonybrook Park	Medium	5.06	Playground, trail, woods, stream, parking
21	Academy Hill	Medium	4.04	Veteran's Memorial, trees and lawn
22	Elliott Street Park	Medium	3.52	Trees, lawn, channelized stream
23	Stonybrook Field	Medium	2.53	Softball field, parking
24	Raven Pond Park	Medium	1.4	Pond, monument
25	Seawall	Medium	0.48	Sand beach, benches
26	Motil Pond Park	Small	3.3	Pond, playground, parking
27	Russian Beach	Small	3.1	Sand beach
28	High Park	Small	3.03	Ball fields, basketball courts, playground
29	Exchange Park	Small	2.55	Woods, playground, basketball court
30	Great Meadows Park	Small	2.06	Trees, lawn
31	Paradise Green	Small	1.48	Trees, lawn, gazabo, path, plantings
32	Juliette Low Park	Small	1.43	Trees, lawn, gazebos, trails
33	George Force Park	Small	0.94	Basketball and handball courts
34	Town Hall Green	Small	0.83	Trees, lawn, paths, benches, flag pole, monument
35	Lyric Park	Small	0.76	Playground, seating
36	Mac's Harbor	Small	0.48	Memorial, bench
37	Greg Ackley (Rose Park) Park	Small	0.36	Trees, lawn, arbor, benches
38	Beach Drive Park	Small	0.33	Lawn, benches, sand beach, roadside parking
39	Bond's Dock and Fishing Pier	Small	0.27	Car-top boat launch, fishing pier
40	Woodend Park	Small	0.25	Playground
41	Lordship Park	Small	0.17	Trees, lawn, WWII memorial

Source: Town of Stratford web site, peter j. smith & company, inc.



- Parks & Open Space
- Open space properties acquired since 2001
- Potential open space acquisitions
- Identified open space properties that were privately developed
- Schools

Figure 18:
Parks & Open Space



The total open space and park acreage owned by the Town (excluding the McKinney Wildlife Refuge) is roughly 890 acres. The total open space and park acreage of all lands within the Town (excluding school grounds, cemeteries, and recreational lands such as golf courses, gymnasiums, and yacht clubs) is 1,435 acres. The total land encompassed by the Town, including rights of way, is about 11,500 acres.

10.4 Major Development Programs & Initiatives

The Town, with help from other organizations, is developing public access and waterfront recreation along its shoreline with the Housatonic River.

The East Coast Greenway, which is a National Millennium Trail running from Florida to Maine, has been planned to pass through the Town along Merritt Parkway right of way.

10.5 Recommendations of Existing Town Plans

The Conservation & Development Plan Update in 2003 included the following primary recommendations as they relate to open space and recreation:

- Increased public access to the waterfront and the creation of a bikeway/walkway along the shore
- Protection of natural resources and open space

More specific recommendations included the following:

Table 36: Previous Plan Recommendations Chart

2003 Open Space Recommendation	Status	Impact	Still Valid?
Make conservation and waterfront lands a high priority for new acquisitions	Ongoing	Long Beach has returned to a more natural state	Yes
Increase Town's open space goal from 10% to 15% (approximately 500 additional acres).	Ongoing	Currently at 12.5% (need ~300 acres)	Yes
Continue to require a 10% open space set aside in new subdivisions and require homeowners associations to maintain this land	Completed (2009 Subdivision Regulations)	High	Yes
Consider the use of cluster development regulations to preserve more open space	-	Moderate	Maybe
Develop an assessment of existing open space by function (passive/active) and utilize this assessment and plan guidelines for new acquisitions	Incomplete	Moderate	Yes
Utilize State grants, local funds, and conservation easements to protect open space	Ongoing	Moderate	Yes
Land should be viewed as the most important and irreplaceable resource of the Town; special attention must be paid to additional open space conservation and public land acquisition programs before it is too late	-	-	Yes
Support open space preservation opportunities that minimize the outlay of Town general funds, relying on creative measures such as conservation easements, land trusts, homeowners associations, etc.	Ongoing	-	Yes
Maintain public open space as an asset of community pride	Ongoing	High	Yes
Promote the acquisition of open space properties that meet unmet community needs	Ongoing	High	Yes

source: peter j. smith & company, inc.

Other pertinent recommendations from the 2003 plan include:

- under Community Facilities Policies: Encourage aggressive maintenance of existing Town land, buildings and facilities to assure their long-term capability and to minimize future costs of replacement
- under Housatonic River and the Waterfront:
 - Encouragement should be given to the development of suitable sections of land bordering the Housatonic River and Long Island Sound for public and private marinas, parks and beaches
 - The Housatonic River should be recognized for its scenic and recreational value. The Town should promote efforts that will increase public access to the River's shores for recreational purposes
 - Manage the Town's waterfront as the community's most unique and valuable asset
 - Actively promote public access to, as well as use and enjoyment of, the Town's extensive waterfront opportunities
 - Maintain Town-owned waterfront property to a high standard

10.6 Summary of Other Relevant Town Plans

The 2001 Inventory of Open Space Potential for the Town identified 43 properties with a total of 697.5 acres as having potential for open space acquisition. The reasons for these acquisitions are resource protection, connection to existing protected open spaces and provide a needed buffer or neighborhood definition. Of these properties, 14 have been developed privately for a loss of 49.4 acres. Another 11 properties from the inventory have been acquired, adding 192.9 acres to the Town's portfolio of parks and open space. Much of this area is already included in the acreage presented in Table 36. Table 38 presents a list of the 2001 properties that were recommended for acquisition and their current status. The location of these properties are also shown on Figure 18.



Table 37: Properties with Potential for Open Space Acquisition - 2001

Site	Acreage	2001 Description	2013 Status
1	27.97	Walker Estate; Cranberry Pnd Area; High Resource Value as Southernmost bog in New England; Low Development pressure; no utilities	Potential Acquisition
2	32.69	United Illuminating/Open Space. Being purchased with State funds by Town. High resource value, trails, woods, wetlands	Acquired
3	33.96	Kubic Property; No sewer or water lines, steep topography. Wildlife habitat	Potential Acquisition
4	22.83	Peterson Property; Flat, no wetland, sewer potential, high potential development pressure	Developed
5	8.61	Dawn Drive- Part of subdivision from 1980s; Almost all Wetlands	Potential Acquisition
6	97.19	Melnic Property- Adjacent to Roosevelt Forest; High resource value for wetland, Forest expansion potential	Acquired
7	9.55	James Farm Road- United Illuminating; Steep slopes. Moderate natural resource value	Potential Acquisition
8	15.41	James Farm Road- Colacurcio Property; High resource value / wetlands and Forest expansion	Potential Acquisition
9	9.68	North Peters Lane - Minatti Property; High resource value for wetland sand topography	Potential Acquisition
10	10.62	Pumpkin Ground Road - Some steep slopes, High resource Value, Low development pressure	Acquired
11	11.99	Pumpkin Ground road / Peters Land property. Wildlife habitat, steep topography; high resource	Developed
12	49.57	Huntington Road-Stupak Property; Desirable open space property; Forest access, wetlands	Potential Acquisition
13	5.68	Pumpkin Ground Road Property; Wildlife habitat, wetlands, steep slopes	Acquired
14	11.92	Town-owned property, part of Oronoque West Subdivision, 1980s	Acquired
15	6.35	James Farm Road property. Moderate/High resource value. Natural ridge line.	Potential Acquisition
16	5.345	Harvest Ridge Road property. Wetlands.	Potential Acquisition
17	5.11	Harvest Ridge Road property. Wetlands.	Potential Acquisition
18	11.95	Cutspring Road property. High development pressure and high resource value	Potential Acquisition
19	0.12	Cutspring/Circle drive. Access to pond	Acquired
20	7.26	Rear land of Harvest Ridge Road	Potential Acquisition
21	9.72	Huntington Road/United Illuminating property. Acquisition with State funds in process.	Acquired
22	14.74	Chapel Street property, adjacent to Flood School. High value for wetlands, buffer	Potential Acquisition
23	15.24	Rear land of Hickory Woods Condominiums. Wetlands	Acquired
24	11.13	Huntington Road/Tavern Rock Road. High Development pressure	Potential Acquisition
25	12.97	Chapel Street. Farm, Natural Ridge line, High resource value	Potential Acquisition
26	5.28	Chanda property. High resource value for wildlife habitat, neighborhood boundary	Potential Acquisition
27	3.43	Huntington Road/Chanda Road. Important for open long-term open space linkage	Potential Acquisition
28	3.5	Park expansion potential/adjacent to Wigwam Park, wetland enhancement	Potential Acquisition
29	33.58	Armory Road "Snake Pit" wetland complex, State-owned	Potential Acquisition
30	3.85	Wigwam Lane. Small private farm. High Development Pressure	Potential Acquisition
31	103.59	Main Street/Mill River Country Club	Potential Acquisition
32	0.97	Silver Land. Small neighborhood park	Acquired
33	6.13	Johnson Lane. Watercourse/wildlife protection. Adjacent to Bunnell High School	Potential Acquisition
34	5.8	Johnson Lane. Watercourse/wildlife protection. Adjacent to Bunnell High School	Potential Acquisition
35	4.6	Pirhala Farm. Town acquisition in progress	Acquired
36	4.15	Pirhala Farm. Town acquisition in progress	Acquired
37	18.05	No Description	Potential Acquisition
41	5.63	East Broadway property. Contamination issues, Transition to commercial area	Potential Acquisition
42	12.64	Rear land of Hudson Paper Company. Approved for affordable housing development which incorporates sensitive treatment of onsite resources	Developed
43	2.79	Elm Street Tree farm. High development pressure, near Birdseye Street	Potential Acquisition
44	1.95	Part of original McGrath Farm. High development pressure	Developed
45	33.94	Remington Gun Club property. Majestic views of Long Island Sound	Potential Acquisition

source: 2001 Inventory of Open Space Potential.

The last Parks & Recreation plan by the Town was completed in 2007. It was a five-year plan for the years 2008 through 2012. A major recommendation from the plan is to continue to support the Housatonic River Greenway Plan. Improvement of park, playfield and playground maintenance was also a priority. What follows is a list of other primary general action items developed by the plan:

- Have more programs such as music festivals, taste of Stratford, or outdoor art shows
- Provision for a swimming/teaching/therapeutic pool (separate from schools)
- Improvements to existing programs
- More picnic areas
- More neighborhood parks
- More bike paths

A Forest Management Plan for Roosevelt Forest was completed in 2011. It included multiple-use management recommendations for the next ten years. Recommendations relating to recreation are as follows:

- All boundaries should be signed and blazed, and signage throughout the forest should be made more consistent
- Improved trailheads should be developed at several entrances to the Forest
- The 1975 trail guide should be updated and expanded
- Greater access to trail mapping should be considered - both paper and interactive digital versions
- A series of Town-sponsored geocaches and/or letterboxes should be installed throughout the property
- A cooperative arrangement with a local mountain biking club should be considered for trail upkeep & maintenance



- A limited hunting program should be considered for the property
- Cooperative arrangements with an environmental organization should be sought for maintenance and operation of Roosevelt Forest’s currently unused nature center building
- Efforts should be made to increase overall public awareness of the Town of Stratford’s Roosevelt Forest and the property’s extensive recreational & educational opportunities.

A Long Beach Habitat Management Plan was completed in 2013. It addressed the final chapter in the restoration of Long Beach; the development of a restoration plan and the removal of invasive species. It recommended the Conservation Commission and the US Fish & Wildlife Service develop protocols for the placement of fence, the location of walkways as appropriate, and the development of signage to balance the protection of the nesting birds, the regeneration of the dune, and appropriate public access.

10.7 Summary of Other Relevant Plans

State Planning

The state of Connecticut Conservation & Development Plan discusses the need to integrate open space and parks into the fabric of communities. It states that “Similar to the need to maintain the physical infrastructure of cities and Towns, there is a corresponding need to strategically invest in and maintain a system of “green infrastructure”, which relies upon natural landscape features and ecosystems to perform or supplement the types of functions performed by costlier human-engineered systems.” pg17.

The Connecticut Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2011-2016 gives a summary of the supply of outdoor recreational facilities in the state. It found a considerable majority of state residents have below average access to outdoor recreation opportunities in their local communities. This correlates with the requests by the residents of Stratford that the Town create more neighborhood parks. The state plan also found Statewide, the top two areas for funding allocation were identified as maintain and repair existing facilities, and purchase more open space; which are actions required by previous Town plans.

The Connecticut Audubon Society – Important Bird Area Conservation Plan, 2009 stated actions should take place regarding Long Beach in the Town of Stratford. “The site should also be considered for inclusion on the Connecticut Coastal Birding Trail, a project currently being developed by the CTDEP Wildlife Division.” pg ES-3

Greater Bridgeport Planning Region

The Greater Bridgeport Regional Planning Agency (GBRPA), Regional C&D Plan Update, 2008 has made it a goal to provide each developed neighborhood with an adequate and appropriate amount of recreation facilities that are accessible to its residents.

10.8 Findings

There is a need to organize the existing park system to make it function better as a component of the community’s infrastructure. Residents have expressed that parks and facilities are in need of maintenance and improvements, upon which the Town is steadily acting. Connections among the parks and the waterfront are lacking. However, there is a plan in place for public access to the waterfront along the Housatonic River and it has begun to be implemented. Residents also stated a desire and need for more neighborhood parks to make recreation easily accessible to all communities in the Town. All neighborhood parks should include activity areas not merely for the young, but also for adults and seniors. The Town has older median age and needs to provide facilities to adequately suit their needs as well.

Table 38: Parks & Open Space Findings

Finding	How To Incorporate			
	Goal	Policy	Action	Graphic Plan
1 The Town’s parks system is lacking in organization and structure and does not provide appropriate access or function for the Town’s needs or anticipate parkland acquisitions			X	X
2 Potential properties are identified for open space acquisition		X	X	
3 There is a need to improve the maintenance of existing parks and facilities			X	
4 The lack of GIS resources for open space and recreation is detrimental to planning and public awareness		X	X	
5 The Town presently lacks adequate staffing to maintain and operate public parks and open spaces to adequate levels.		X		
6 Continue the development of the Housatonic River Greenway Trail from Stratford Point to Roosevelt Forest			X	X
7 Determine priorities and work with the state of Connecticut to implement the East Coast Greenway trail section through the Town; coordinate with neighboring Towns to ensure trail linkages; work to secure funding for these projects	X	X	X	X
8 Work with the Shoreline Greenway Trail, Inc. group to explore extending the Shoreline Greenway Trail to the west, from its current terminus at East Haven, along the southern coastline of the Town	X	X	X	X
9 Work with the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to develop funding from the Recreational Trails Program administered through the Federal Highway Administration			X	
10 The Town should make use of the Charter Oak open space grant program for obtaining funding to acquiring land for open space and watershed protection			X	
11 The Town has important ecological areas; public access to these areas must be balanced by species protection		X		

Source: peter j. smith & company, inc.