

B. Introduction

The Town of Dedham, Massachusetts is a community that sits on the fringe of a mix of urban and suburban development as part of the southwest border of Boston. Over the past couple of decades communities like Dedham have seen a dramatic increase in the demand for recreational space and programs. Users are not looking for the same programs that they once longed for and change occurs rapidly. Shifts in the economy, education, and working life have modified today's definition of leisure time. Communities now need to provide a broad range of experiences that are both passive and active. Recreational space is critical to the daily life of a community providing a place for respite, socialization, and increasing quality of life.



The purpose of this Dedham Recreation Master Plan (the “Plan”) is to provide an understanding of the current level of service provided to the community and to identify unmet needs and gaps in service. The Plan becomes a framework for decision making with priorities for implementation based on the current and future capital and operating budgets under the guidance of community values, future needs, programs, and services.

Process

Site Reconnaissance

A full site inventory was conducted of all of the public open spaces within the Town of Dedham. There was an extensive review of the facilities including assessment of the use, size, quality, access, maintenance, and amenities provided at each facility. After the site review, GIS mapping was used to document potential opportunities and constraints at all of the facilities which include safety, environmental constraints, physical constraints, topography and boundaries. Maintenance practices were reviewed with those responsible for maintaining the facilities.

Public Meetings

Residents and users participated in their own assessments of the facilities at two public meetings. At the first public meeting (March 7, 2017), attendees were asked to provide their own evaluations of the facilities they currently use. They provided insight into the condition of the facilities, the amenities or lack thereof, and current and future needs for the public parks and open space of Dedham.

The second public meeting (June 6, 2017) allowed residents, users and stakeholders to develop goals and start to define the priority needs of the Plan. Attendees were presented with findings from the first meeting and asked to participate in activities attempting to define priority goals.



Dedham Recreation Flag Football

Surveys

A number of surveys were used to inform the project including:

- A Parks and Recreation survey was deployed before this project began, which targeted a dozen specific user groups to learn about the condition of facilities. (Appendix A)
- A community-wide survey was deployed early in the project to learn about usage, preferences, and general satisfaction. (Appendix B)
- A targeted user group survey called for detailed reviews of facilities from a wide variety of organized groups. User feedback provided insight into the use of the facilities, conditions at the facilities, and current and future needs. (Appendix C)

In some instances, targeted User Group Surveys and input from Stakeholder meetings were evaluated and factored into recommendations at a higher level than individual survey responses. The user group surveys provided input from small community groups to larger groups such as the Dedham Public Schools with hundreds of users.

Stakeholder Meetings

Following the user surveys, meetings were held with specific groups to further review the findings and provide more comprehensive feedback as to the specific current and future needs of their organization. Discussions included maintenance, hours of use, playability, quality of space, and communication amongst the Town and various organizations.

Draft/Final Recreation Master Plan

All of the information collected throughout the process was converted into graphic forms of data, which were used to complete the plan.

Data collected were then compared with the fiscal resources available to maintain the various parks and facilities, accessibility to the community, and demands of the organizations. Based on the data collected, goals and recommendations were developed with the Steering Committee to meet the recreation needs of the community.

New Parks and Reorganization of Facilities

As the Town continues to experience change in its demographics, recreational demands will change accordingly. These demographic shifts will likely create needs for new facilities, the reorganization of existing facilities, and adjustments to DPR's program offerings. These needs are especially challenging with current budgetary constraints and the current conditions of existing facilities. The Plan outlines service and facility standards for all town parks to provide equity and accessibility.

The Plan includes the addition of facilities over time, and the re-organization of existing facilities to better serve community needs. Major recommendations are made for improvements in Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility and the addition of amenities to increase the function of the facilities.

Park Types and Standards

The Plan also makes recommendations for the establishment of park types and definitions for the standard of care for development, maintenance and construction of facilities within the DPR. The Plan establishes parks based on the demands for high performance athletics, park/ passive recreation, and the need for general accessible open space. This overview will provide for the demands and needs of each type of park and the amenities and maintenance standards associated with them.

Operations and Maintenance

The operations and maintenance of parks and recreation facilities is directly tied to their use and contribution to the community. One of the strongest requests of the public for this plan and for DPR is to improve the quality of the facilities and the maintenance associated with them. This plan will develop standards for the short-term and long-term maintenance of the facilities and encourages accountability that is tangible, including the long-term replacement of athletic fields and playground equipment.

Financing

The long-term care of facilities and the demand for ever changing programs will require a long-term funding program. Preparing for these long-term budget appropriations will require programs that not only meet the requirements of the Town, but create long-term financial sustainability of the parks.

Recreation programs are staff intensive and pose a potential for revenue loss. The Recreation Master Plan identifies general strategies and long-term opportunities to enhance programs including a town wide survey, marketing/branding and communications, and a modified fee structure.



