

RECREATION, CONSERVATION AND OPEN SPACE

IV: Recreation, Conservation & Open Space

RECREATION, CONSERVATION AND OPEN SPACE

INTRODUCTION

The objectives and scope of this element are two-fold. First, to take an accurate inventory of all existing and potential recreation facilities, both public and private and, secondly, to establish balanced programs and policies for the updating and maintenance of existing facilities and the acquisition, development and use of possible recreation, open space and conservation areas within the town.

The task of contributing to the fulfillment of the emotional and physical needs of an individual or society as a whole, has been recognized as a responsibility of government, be it local, state or federal. This has resulted in establishing recreation as an essential and desirable function of government. This consists of the provision of both active recreational opportunities, such as sports fields and tennis courts, and less intensive passive recreational uses such as walking trails and nature appreciation areas. This Recreation, Conservation and Open Space (RCOS) element has been updated to guide town government in relation to recreation, conservation and open space.

This element includes an inventory of recreation resources, open space areas and recorded access to such resources and areas. Also included are analyses of forecasted needs, recommended policies for the management, development and protection of existing resources, and the recommended acquisitions of additional resources/land areas to satisfy the future recreation and open space requirements of the town.

The conclusions and recommendations of this element support the State's Recreation and Conservation strategies and policies in that they are intended to accomplish a specific goal within the Town of Middletown. The goal is **to preserve** present open space/recreational programs while **protecting** land and water resources by including needed open space for the watershed/water supply in the total community recreation plan. To accomplish the goal, the following objectives must be met:

- A. Meet water based recreation needs.
- B. Meet community recreation needs through the development, implementation and management of a program designed to fulfill the expressed interest of town residents.
- C. Administer and fund an active recreation program and ensure adequate maintenance and repair of recreation facilities.
- D. Support open space and community recreation concepts.
- E. Support conservation efforts by acquiring candidate sites, as they become available.

Locally oriented goal and policy recommendations are in consonance with the priorities established in the State Guide Plan and state rules and regulations. The guidelines issued by the Recreation Resources Review Committee (RRRC) have been used in assessing whether an adequate, well balanced recreation, conservation and open space program exists in Middletown. These standards have been adopted in accordance with the RRRC Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Manual.

Greenspace and Greenways are recognized as vital concepts for the development of RCOS programs and policies, as well as important components of the town's future land use.

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Preserving undeveloped areas as greenspace is essential for maintaining quality of life for Middletown's residents. Organizing open space along greenways such as the Sakonnet River and the Old Colony and Newport Railway, and creating linkages between existing greenspace areas, will be integral to planning for open space in the future.

CONTEXT FOR PLANNING

TOWN CHARACTERISTICS

The open space and recreational needs of a community are based principally on the characteristics of the community mainly climate, topography, scenic and historical landmarks, wildlife, and demographics. All of these characteristics have been addressed in previous Comprehensive Plans and since others are predictable, (i.e. population trends) the descriptions contained in the most recent plan are outlined below because they remain valid. Since the history and topography of Middletown were discussed fully in the Natural and Cultural Resources Elements, they will not be discussed here. The following characteristics continue to exert an influence on planning open space and recreation requirements for the town.

Climate

Because of the town's physical location along the coastline of the Atlantic Ocean, its climate is affected by the oceans thermal qualities. Warm gulf currents provide mild weather in November and winters that are milder than inland areas. Snowfall averages around twenty inches each year and rarely remains on the ground more than four days. The cooling ocean breezes in the summer tend to keep the average summer temperatures in the low seventies. Table 1 shows the climatologic character of the area.

Month	Temperature (Degrees F)
January	30
February	31
March	38
April	47
May	56
June	65
July	71
August	71
September	64
October	55
November	46
December	35

Geography

Middletown is bound by Portsmouth to the north and Newport to the south, with the Narragansett Bay, Sachuest River and Atlantic Ocean forming the other boundaries. The town has approximately seven miles of ideal shoreline property and a land area of approximately 8,427 acres (12.9 square miles). Approximately nine percent of the land is wooded (760 acres). Rapid

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development has changed some of the land from large open fields lined with tidy stone walls, to housing subdivisions. Within the town boundaries, there are areas of rock headlands similar to the Maine coast. Sand dunes and beach grass similar to the Cape Cod seashore are present at the beaches.

Water Supply

The four reservoirs located in Middletown are dependant upon the three main supply sources of Bailey Brook, Maidford River and Paradise Brook. According to the Urban Runoff Task Force Report, prepared for a statewide planning program in 1970, six locations in Middletown which receive pollutants from watershed runoff are:

- A. Bailey Brook and Green End Pond (Easton North Pond),
- B. Maidford River,
- C. Little Creek,
- D. Town Line Brook,
- E. No Name Brook
- F. Paradise Brook.

Water

Water that drains from watershed areas, or runoff, may be polluted by rural or urban activity in and around the watersheds. Some of the pollutants entering Middletown tributaries identified in the report included sediments carrying nutrients, pesticides, bacterial contaminants from animal waste, fertilizers, road salts and oil. The report recommended that preventive measures be initiated, particularly in the Bailey Brook Watershed area.

Historical and Scenic Points

Significant historical and scenic points include:

- A. Whitehall - shrine of America's cultural beginning, built in 1729 by Bishop George Berkeley, noted British philosopher.
- B. Purgatory Chasm - a narrow cleft in the rock ledges on the east side of Easton Point formed by the eroding action of sea water over thousands of years.
- C. Boothden - house of tragedian, Edwin Booth.
- D. Saint George's School - private co-educational school founded in 1896 by the Reverend John Diman.
- E. Green End Fort - built by the British in 1777 as the eastern - terminus of their Newport defense lines. Located on the west side of Green End Avenue at the Vernon Avenue extension.
- F. Norman Bird Sanctuary and Museum - museum exhibit includes mounted native species of birds. Several wildlife habitats are represented at the 450-acre refuge. Hanging Rock is located here.

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- G. Prescott Farm - The Newport Restoration Foundation has restored this colonial farm featuring a windmill, museum, and country store. Although most of Prescott Farm is in Portsmouth, at the Town Line, it is considered a significant site for Middletown.
- H. Sachuest Point U. S. Fish and Wildlife Preserve – 107 acres located at Sachuest Point
- I. Paradise Park – 14 acres located at Paradise and Prospect Avenues. Paradise School and Boyd’s Windmill are located here.
- J. Scenic Highway - Paradise Ave. Loop (Paradise Ave., Hanging Rock Rd., Indian Ave., Green End Ave.)

Wildlife

The wildlife of Middletown is very similar to most of the rural areas in the state. Fox, raccoons, opossums, coyote, deer, rabbits, mink and other similar animals have been observed throughout the town. Salt marshes, swamps, ponds and streams host a variety of reptiles, fish, birds, amphibians and insects. During the breeding season, approximately seventy species of birds remain in the town. During the migration cycle, the town plays host to approximately 220 species of birds (as reported by the Norman Bird Sanctuary).

ASSESSMENT OF COMMUNITY FEATURES

Based on the town characteristics described on the proceeding pages, the following assessment of community features as they affect recreation facilities and open space planning is provided:

Climate

In general, Aquidneck Island's climate is a relatively temperate environment permitting a full and fairly comfortable use of outdoor recreational facilities and open space areas for 8 of 12 months of the year. The climate lends itself to a variety of outdoor sports, except for those requiring persistent snow cover, e.g. skiing or snow-mobiling. Climate/weather does not seriously affect a full-time comprehensive recreation, conservation and open space program, although adverse December, January and February conditions may limit utilization of outdoor recreation facilities.

Geography

Middletown's central location on Aquidneck Island and its accessibility to water areas make it an attractive recreational refuge between the northern and southern ends of the island.

Water Quality/Support:

An essential public need for any level of quality of life is to have a safe drinking water supply. The problems affecting Middletown's and Newport's safe water supply were recognized in the Urban Runoff Task Force Report. Recommendations in the Land Use Plan included permanent preservation of open land around watershed areas to protect them from intensive development. These areas should be subject to review and regulation under wetland, coastal and/or flood hazard regulations. In areas of new development, strong zoning laws, subdivision and other land use control mechanisms must be used to alleviate the potential for significant pollution of runoff and to protect against soil erosion and sedimentation of waterways.

Middletown's watershed sensitive district is represented by the flood plains around Paradise Brook, Maidford River, Bailey Brook and smaller tributary streams in the town. Construction should be prohibited and natural buffer zones created within these flood plains.

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Historic and Scenic Points:

Most of Middletown's scenic attractions are in pockets of quasi-public or privately owned RCOS resources. Accessibility to these areas affords the community the opportunity to participate in recreational activities centered on these landmarks. Isolating these areas through uncontrolled development of surrounding approaches would be detrimental to a well-balanced RCOS program since it would limit free access to these attractions. The obliteration of scenic and historical landmarks is highly unlikely given the New England tradition of preserving its past and its beauty.

Wildlife:

The observation of wildlife in its natural habitat provides the community with an important recreational pursuit. The loss of such preserves denies the community this form of enjoyment while endangering the species that live in open space areas used for recreational purposes. Infringement of new development on open space areas disturbs the ecological balance and dislocates wildlife. The value and attractiveness of open space areas will be affected by the absence of wildlife.

Demographics:

- A. The beneficiaries of adequate, well-balanced RCOS resources are the citizens of the community and those transient visitors who are drawn to town by those resources. An effective RCOS program provides direct and indirect benefits to the community, at large, in that it contributes to the fulfillment of the community's emotional, physical, societal and economic needs. Forward looking population trends are vital to a progressive program. To be effective, the program must anticipate and be responsive to future projections. In this context, the 1988 RCOS plan predicted an aging, graying, yet stable population. Therefore, the rational allocation of existing resources and acquisition of additional resources must be sensitive to the distribution of the projected population within the Planning Districts.
- B. Population in Middletown was characterized by a constant growth rate from 1900 until 1940. From then until the Navy cutbacks in April 1973, the growth rate accelerated and exceeded county and state rates. The reduced activity at the Naval Base caused a decrease in total population in the town between 1970 and 1975. Table 2 shows the population from 1900 to 2000 and the projected population to 2020. Previous studies of population changes indicated that most gains are the direct result of in-migration rather than natural increases. However, recent population decreases may be attributable to:
 - C. More homes have been purchased for use as second homes
 - D. Child population has shrunk.
 - E. The methodology used by the U.S. Census Bureau with regard to the numbers of Navy personnel.
 - F. The population projections shown at Table 2 for the years beyond 2000 were obtained from the State Department of Administration, Division of Planning. The accuracy of these projections decreases as: (1) the time period of the projections lengthens (2) the population of the area increases or decreases due to unexpected events; and (3) the population rate of change increases. Since Middletown is more susceptible to the

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Age Groups	<u>1990</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>2000</u>
Under 5	1,465	1,210	7.6	6.9
5-19	4,133	3,411	21.2	19.7
20-44	8,556	6,216	44.0	35.8
45-64	3,001	3,918	15.4	22.8
65 and over	2,305	2,579	11.8	14.8
Total	19,460	17,334	100	100
Total males	10,280	8,434		
Total females	9,180	8,900		
Median Age	31.2	37.7		

Table 0-4 Distribution of Age Groups by Planning Districts* (percent)

<u>Age Group</u>	Planning District**					
	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>
Under 5	516	218	105	371		
5-19	1,407	389	416	1,199		
20-44	2,511	876	756	2,073		
45-64	1,330	82	649	1,857		
65 and over	703	19	594	1,263		
Total	6,467	1,584	2,520	6,763		

*This information was taken from the 2000 Census
 ** Planning Districts 4, 5, & 6 are all within Census tract 404

Planning Districts:

The Census tracts of Middletown were used to establish the Planning Districts as follows.

<u>Districts</u>	<u>Census Tract</u>
1	403.03/403.04
2	402 (Navy Property)
3	403.02
4,5,6	404 (divided into 3 districts)

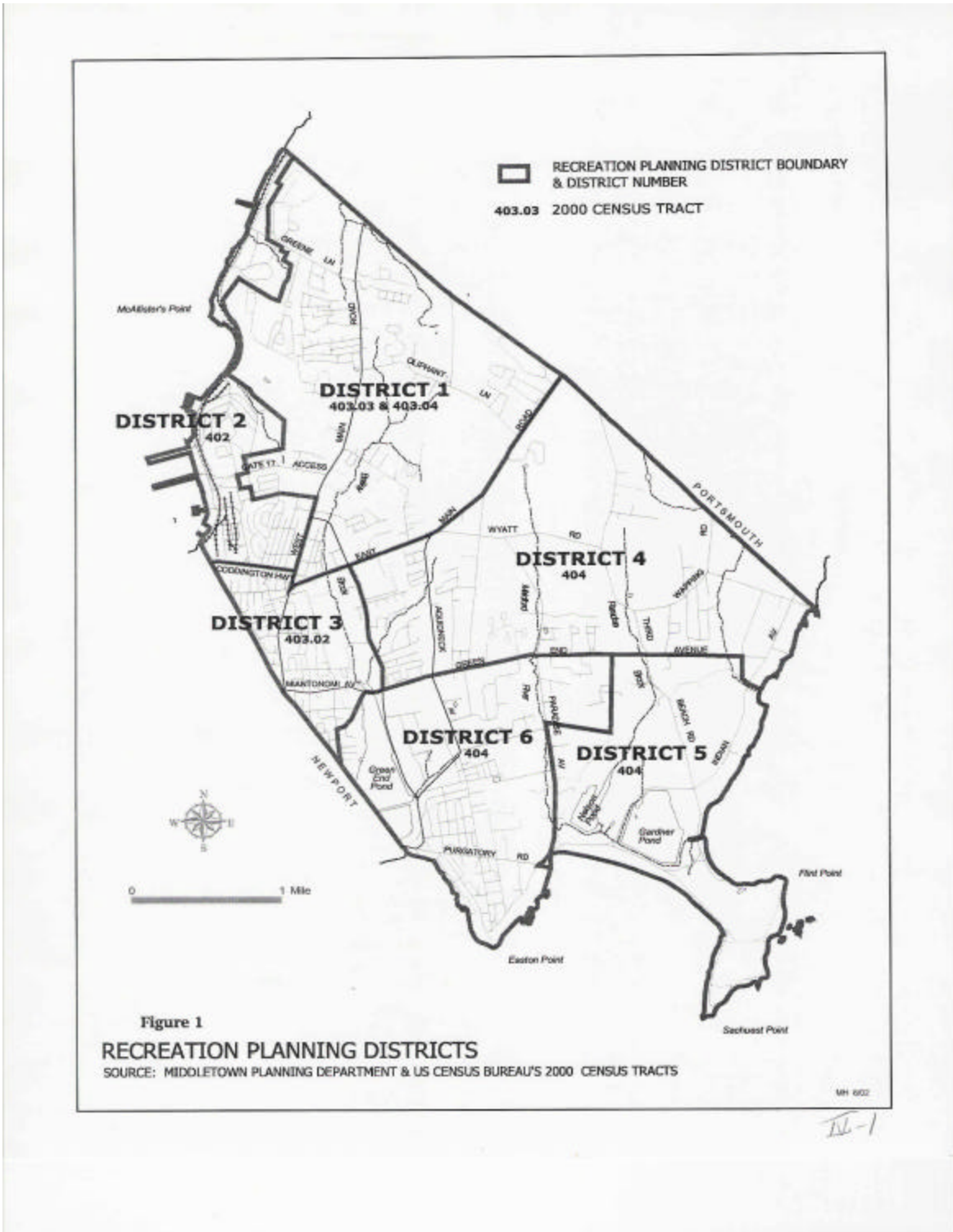
EXISTING CONDITIONS/FACILITIES INVENTORY

In compiling the inventory of existing open space and recreation facilities, which follows, the Standards for Public Recreation Facilities, shown at Table 4, were used to determine the adequacy of each facility. Open Space and Recreation Areas and facilities, available for public use, are listed by type and ownership/control at Tables 5 and 6. Table 7 is an inventory of public and privately controlled open space areas whose protection or preservation is in the public interest. With the exception of the Norman Bird Sanctuary, other privately owned RCOS sites

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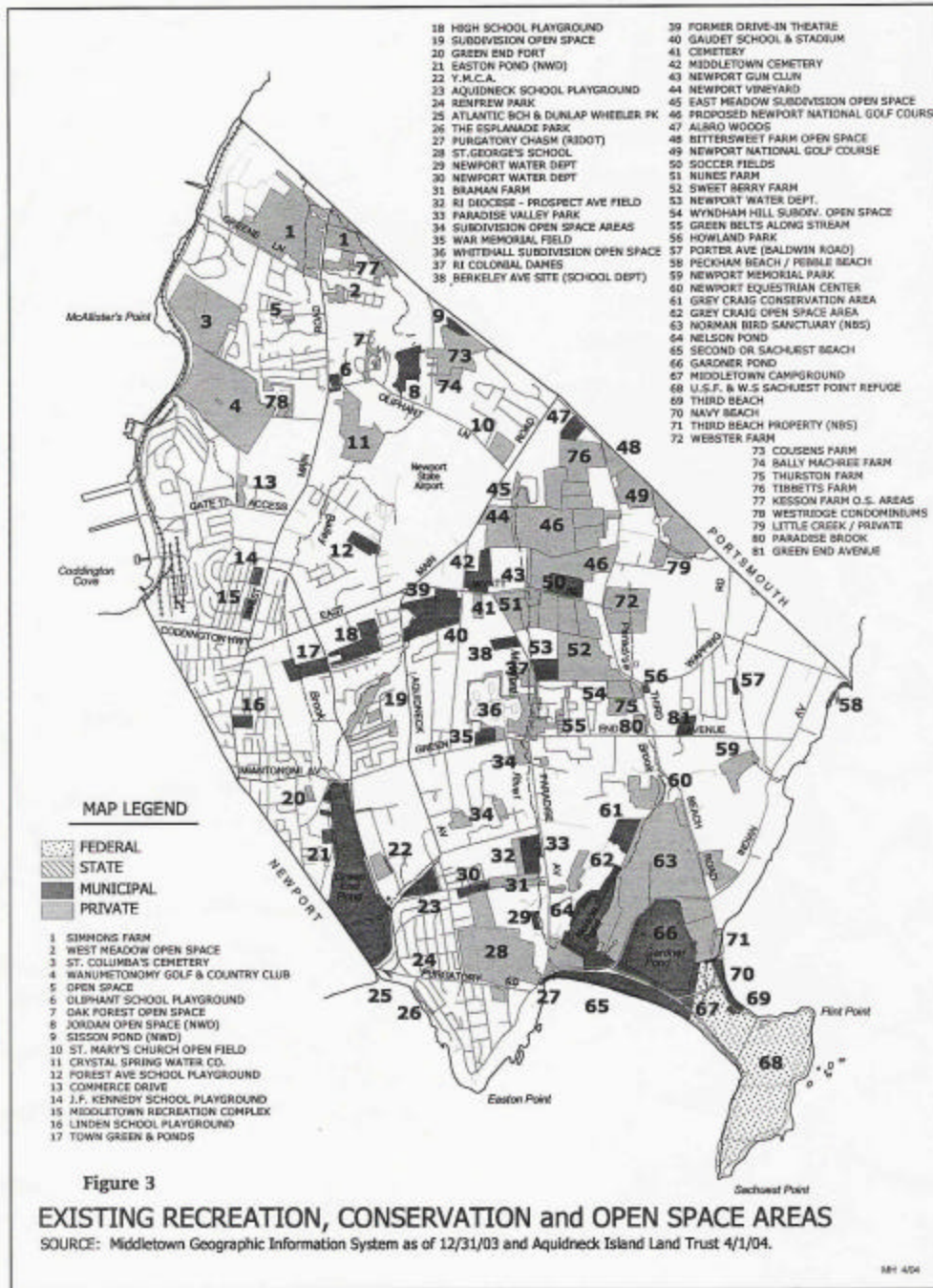
listed at Table 6 are considered not readily accessible (open). The locations of the significant sites listed in the tables are shown at Figure 2. Figure 1 depicts the Recreation Planning Districts.

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Figure 0-1 Recreation Planning Districts



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Figure 0-2 Recreation Facilities, Open Space Areas

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TYPE OF FACILITY	AGE GROUP	ACRES/ 1,000 POP	SIZE (ACRES)	PREFERRED LOCATION	SUGGESTED FACILITIES
PLAY AREAS/PLAY GROUNDS Primarily a center for young children but may also include a park for passive recreation for all ages.	All	1.25	1-5	Adjacent to elementary school within 1/2 to a mile walking distance, or center of a neighborhood.	Space for a combination softball, baseball, football fields; basketball, tennis and badminton courts, an area for passive recreation for young and old; wading pool; informal play area.
PLAYFIELDS An area for active, organized activities that require more space than a playground, yet including one section as a developed playground.	15 and up	1.25	12 to 20	Adjacent to junior or senior high schools or center of four or five neighborhoods.	Children's playground, game courts, lawn areas, swimming pool, special features, landscaped area, parking area, field house, facilities for highly organized sports, recreation building, diversified facilities.
NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS	All	2.5	up to 25 +	Center of a neighborhood: may be connected with a school or community center; part of a playground or playfield.	Places for sitting, sunning, walking. May consist of landscaped "buffer strips" between uncongenial land uses: "greenways" or any natural or scenic features where possible to give a leisurely park feeling.
LARGE PARKS AND SPECIAL AREAS	All	5 to 8 ^{1*}	up to 100	Community Wide	Picnic areas, swimming, boating facilities, winter sports, gardens, fishing, golf, camping, scenic drives, hiking, nature trails, bridle paths, camping facilities, marinas.
CONSERVATION AREA Areas so designated to conserve unique natural resources of the area.	All	Based on availability	Based on Availability	Community Wide	Woods, beaches, rocky areas, marshes, and open fields containing farms and wildlife species that should be protected. To be used for Passive Recreation.

SOURCE: Standards for Local Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Plans. (R.I. State Planning Council/Recreation Resources Review Committee, June 1989)

¹ This acreage based on large park requirement

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**Table 0-6 Existing Open Space and Recreation Areas - Facilities Available for Public Use
(Owned by the Town of Middletown, except as noted)**

DIST.	TYPE	DESCRIPTION	ACCESS/USE RESTRICTIONS	COMMENTS
1	Playground	Oliphant School Grounds 6.4 acres located at West main Road and Oliphant Lane. 3 baseball diamonds, open playing turf, & play equipment.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Facility closed to general public when school is in session and baseball diamond in use. (Little league). 2. Located in congested traffic area. 3. Requires adult supervised safety crossing. 4. No sanitary facilities. 	Playground equipment requires repair. Little League maintains the ball fields.
1	Playfield	Recreation Complex 2.5 acres located at West Main Road. Includes 4 tennis courts, 1 handball court, 1 basketball court, and 1 lighted softball diamond. Has sanitary facilities.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Area fenced in. 2. Inadequate parking. 3. Unlit areas limited to daytime use. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Basketball court has been upgraded. 2. Fields has been sodded and parking lot repaved. 3. Tennis courts and lighting needs upgrading.
1	Playfield	Forest Avenue School Grounds 14.3 acres at Forest Avenue. Includes children's play equipment. Gymnasium.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Poor Drainage. 2. Closed when school is in session. 3. Available for indoor recreation. 	
1	Playground	John F. Kennedy School Grounds 2.8 acres located at West Main Road. Includes children's play equipment. Gymnasium.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Closed when school is in session. 2. Available for indoor recreation. 	
3	Playground	Linden School Grounds 6.4 acres located at West Main Road. Includes children's play equipment and open play area. Gymnasium.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Closed when school is in session. 2. No lighting available. 3. Available for indoor recreation. 	1. Open grass
4	Playfield	War Memorial Field 6.4 acres located at Green End. Includes 1 baseball diamond (with bleachers), children's play equipment, and play area.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No lighting 	
4	Playfield	Senior Center Bocci Courts		
4	Park/ Conservation	Albro Woods 9 acres located at Mitchell's Lane. Includes pathway trails, nature activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Open during daylight hours. 	1. Potential Greenway
4	Playground	Wapping Road Soccer Fields		Potential for 3 fields

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**Table 0-6 Existing Open Space and Recreation Areas - Facilities Available for Public Use
(Owned by the Town of Middletown, except as noted)**

DIST.	TYPE	DESCRIPTION	ACCESS/USE RESTRICTIONS	COMMENTS
4	Playground	Howland Park 1.5 acres located at Howland Field/Third Beach Road. Includes basketball court, street, hockey rink, play equipment	1. Open during daylight hours.	Playground equipment needs replacement.
4	Playfield	Middletown High School Grounds 16 acres at Valley Road. Includes 2 softball diamonds, football field, open play area, 2 peewee soccer fields. Gymnasium.	1. Not available when school is in session. 2. Available for indoor recreation. Pee Wee Little League	
4	Playground	Gaudet School Grounds 33.0 acres. located between Aquidneck Avenue and Turner Road. Includes lighted football field, lighted track field, 1 baseball diamond (little league), playing turf, tennis courts, 2 basketball courts. Gymnasium.	1. Tennis courts and other unlighted areas open during daylight hours only. 2. No sanitary facilities available for people using outdoor recreation facilities. 3. Available for indoor recreation.	
5	Park/Campground	Sachuest Campground 8.4 acres located at Sachuest Point Road. Includes 44 RV campsites and sanitary facilities.	1. Fee charged 2. Open Memorial Day to weekend following Labor Day.	
5	Special	Second Beach 40 acres located at Sachuest Point Road. Includes sanitary facilities, concession stand, picnic tables (during the season)	1. Parking fee charged Memorial Day to weekend following Labor Day. 2. Expansion limited by sand dunes. 3. Open year round dusk to dawn	
5	Special	Third Beach 10 acres Third Beach Road. Includes 1 boat ramp, portable sanitary facilities.	1. Parking fee charged Memorial Day to Labor Day. 2. Open year round dusk to dawn	Acquired from the Navy Boat ramp needs upgrading
5	Conservation	Sachuest Point Wildlife Refuge 107 acres located Sachuest Point. Includes parking lot, walking paths, fishing off rocks.	1. Open year round dusk to dawn 2. Owned by the Federal Government (Dept of Interior.)	Currently undergoing a review of its Comprehensive Plan
5	Park/Conservation	Gray Craig Conservation Area 14 acres at the Northern edge of Gray Craig Village joins with the Norman Bird Sanctuary.	1. Open year round. 2. Nature trails for walking.	1. Lack of funds limit any type of development.
6	Park/Conservation	Paradise Valley Park 14 acres located at Paradise/Prospect Avenues. Site includes Boyd's Windmill and Paradise School, walking paths, open space and arboretum.	1. Open year round	Potential Greenway Headquarters of Middletown Historical Society

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**Table 0-6 Existing Open Space and Recreation Areas - Facilities Available for Public Use
(Owned by the Town of Middletown, except as noted)**

DIST.	TYPE	DESCRIPTION	ACCESS/USE RESTRICTIONS	COMMENTS
6	Playground	Aquidneck School 10.6 acres located at Aquidneck School Ground/Aquidneck Ave. Includes 2 baseball diamonds, children play area and equipment. Gymnasium.	1. Isolated in heavy traffic area. 2. Sanitary facilities not always open for outdoor activities. 3. Available for indoor recreation.	1. Fields recently upgraded.
6	Park	Dunlap-Wheeler Park. 1 acre located at Purgatory Road. Includes Beach and picnic area. Right of way to Atlantic Ocean through restaurant parking lot.	1. Limited parking. 2. Passive use	1. Town has grant money to improve park.

Table 0-7 Private Recreation Areas - Facilities Available for Public Use

Dist.	Type	Description	Access/Use Restrictions	Comments
1	Special	Island Skater Park located on West Main Rd. 12,000 sf building. Indoor skateboarding park.	1. Entrance fee	
4	Special	Newport Athletic Club on Valley Road. Includes swimming, physical fitness apparatus.	1. Membership required. 2. No outdoor activities.	
4	Special	Wanumetonomy Country Club 123 acres located at Browns Lane. Includes 18 hole golf course, clubhouse.	1. By invitation only.	
4	Special	Newport Rifle Club 2.7 acres on Wyatt Road. Includes gun range, clubhouse.	1. By invitation only.	
5	Special	Third Beach Club 6 acres on Sakonnet River/Third Beach Road. Includes swimming, cabanas.	1. Private. 2. Membership required.	1. Listed as Open Space according to Zoning Map
5	Conservation Area	Norman Bird Sanctuary 450 acres located at Third Beach Road. Includes 15 miles of paths with related classes/lectures.	1. Entrance fee/membership required. 2. Isolated not served by public transportation.	Small parking lot Recently acquired Paradise Farm.
6	Special	St. George's School located at Purgatory Road. Includes 2 ice skating rinks, tennis courts.	1. Fee for use of facilities. 2. Limited public use.	
6	Special	YMCA located at Valley Road. Includes swimming, basketball courts, physical fitness apparatus, and children's play equipment.	1. Membership required. 2. Available for indoor recreation.	1. Potential exists for YMCA to run town recreational facilities.

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Table 0-8 Open Space Areas Whose Protection is in the Public Interest - Potential/Recreation Sites

DISTRICT	OWNERSHIP	DESCRIPTION	STATUS/ATTRACTION	COMMENTS
1	Town	Prescott Farm Historical Site 29+ acres set aside as Open Space	Site of Gen. Prescott's Headquarters during Revolutionary War.	Funded by Duke Foundation
1	Private	Simmons Farm 46.2 acres located at West Main Road and Greene Lane.	Ideal site for passive/active recreation including recreation buildings.	Town has development rights Greenway Potential
3	Town/Private	Town Center Overlay District 60+ acres abutting Aquidneck Center	Partially zoned as open space Proposed mixed use development	1. Potential Greenway
4	Town	Former Drive In Theater 9 acres located at Starlight Open Air Theater. Aquidneck Avenue and East Main Road.	State plans to modify intersection. Land abuts Gaudet School.	Land should be set aside for future municipal use.
4	Town	Open Space 1.6 acres located at Porter Road.	Possible site for a small neighborhood park.	Passive recreation
4	Town	Open Space 6.2 acres located on the west side of Berkeley Avenue.	Controlled by the School Department. Could be a playfield.	Presently leased to a nursery.
4	Town	Demery Property. 12 acres located at Green End and Riverview.	Undeveloped	Willed to town for passive use.
6	Private	Open Space 7 acres on Prospect Avenue adjacent to Paradise Valley Park.	Belongs to the Catholic Diocese of Providence.	Could be added to Paradise Park, if available for acquisition.

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SUMMARY OF FACILITY INVENTORY

An analysis of existing recreation facilities and an examination of the inventory taken for each site reveal the following:

- A. Several public recreation facilities lack equipment or need to have equipment repaired. The condition of the equipment has improved in recent years but requires continued attention. Town must develop, implement and maintain a viable preventive maintenance program for its recreational areas.
- B. There are five passive recreation areas (Albro Woods, the Gray Craig Parcel, Dunlap-Wheeler Park, Purgatory Chasm Area, and Paradise Valley Park) in residential areas. All other passive recreation is at the Norman Bird Sanctuary, Sachuest Point Wildlife Refuge and the beaches.
- C. Most facilities are not lighted for use at night. No tennis courts are lighted; one football field and one softball field have lights.
- D. Most facilities provide minimal recreation for the adult population of the community.
- E. Although existing facilities are within walking distance, they tend to be isolated from residential areas by physical barriers. (i.e. The Recreation Complex at West Main Road is not easily accessible.
- F. Existing rights of way to waterfront areas are identified and, sometimes, are made impassable by abutting property owners.
- G. Existing playgrounds do not have shelters or equipment storage facilities.
- H. Many small parcels of land belonging to the town, which could be used for recreational purposes, are not.

ADEQUACY OF EXISTING FACILITIES

From studying the demand on existing recreation programs and facilities, and comparing it with the existing recreation facility summary of this report, the following conclusions on the adequacy of the existing types of recreation have been reached:

Playgrounds/Play Areas: Most of the playgrounds/play areas are adequate in size, but the equipment provided is limited and requires maintenance and/or replacement.

Playfields: As with the playgrounds, the playfields are adequate in size, but require maintenance of the equipment provided. Additional baseball diamonds are needed.

Neighborhood Parks: Presently, there are four neighborhood parks (Howland Park, Paradise Valley Park, Dunlap-Wheeler park, and Albro Woods) in Middletown.

Major Parks: The Town Center Overlay District would fit this category. 60+ acres are designated for open space and could be part of the AILT's Greenway.

Conservation Areas: There are several conservation areas within the town. The Norman Bird Sanctuary and the federal government (Sachuest Wildlife Refuge) own these areas. Paradise Valley Park and Albro Woods have been developed to be both parks and conservation areas. The Gray Craig and Demery parcels should be considered conservation areas.

Special Recreation Areas: Special areas such as campgrounds and beaches are available and used

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fully. Second and Third Beaches and the campground provide special recreation for town residents. Additional recreation sites on the west side of the town are needed.

NEEDS ANALYSIS

Community Standards

The standards that will guide Middletown's recreational activities and environmental programs conform to those developed by the National Parks and Recreation Association, as they relate to the town. The prime policies from which the RCOS plan have been formulated are:

- A. Adhering to the standard of a minimum of nine acres of public recreation land per one thousand. (Based on National Parks and Recreation Association suggested 6.25 to 10.5 acres per 1,000 population.
- B. Locating playgrounds within one half-mile walking/bicycling distance of every major residential area.
- C. Locating playfields within one mile walking/bicycling distance of every major residential area.
- D. Having each site adequately sized for the function and purpose for which it is intended.
- E. Locating all proposed neighborhood recreational facilities, whenever feasible, in the center of their service areas and away from major traffic arteries and other barriers which impede pedestrian movement.
- F. Locating proposed facilities on sites with other public facilities. (i.e. school sites)
- G. Classifying unique areas of open, natural or undeveloped lands as open space and/or conservation areas (i.e. the Town Center Overlay District)
- H. Utilizing open space and conservation areas for passive recreation in a manner that will guarantee preservation of the natural beauty of the site while ensuring that the delicate environmental balance of the area will be preserved.
- I. Designing all active recreation facilities to ensure preservation of the aesthetics of the neighborhood.
- J. Designing all facilities without architectural or physical barriers to the handicapped.
- K. Reviewing the demographics of each planning district biannually to determine the types and number of recreation sites required to fulfill the changing needs of each neighborhood.
- L. Including playlots for pre-school children in plans for all future playgrounds and playfields.
- M. Promote alternatives to the automobile to allow residents to utilize multi-use paths, bikeways, sidewalks and other non-motorized pathways that connect with each other and are integrated into the street system.

In addition to the preceding policies, the standards shown at Table 4 shall be considered in establishing an adequate well-balanced recreation, conservation and open space program. These standards have been adopted in accordance with the Recreation Resources Review Committee (RRRC) Standards for Local Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Plans.

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Present and Projected Needs

The summary of existing recreation acreage listed at Table 8 indicate, that based on the standards in Table 4 there is sufficient acreage on which to establish an adequate, well balanced recreation program. Shortfalls do exist for public parks and conservation areas; however, the Norman Bird Sanctuary and Sachuest Point Wildlife Refuge more than compensate for the shortfalls. The most significant inadequacy is the disproportionate distribution of recreational facilities throughout the town. Tables 8a - 8f provide a comparison of the existing acreage (in each planning District) to the present and projected acreage requirements.

By comparing the available acreage per facility type to the projected requirements, obvious deficiencies in the acreage requirements in certain Planning Districts become apparent. Tables 8a - 8f confirm that a significant deficiency in neighborhood park area exists throughout the town. The surplus of playground area is marginal; however, utilizing playfields to accommodate playground requirements may compensate for this situation. The acquisition of additional land to satisfy neighborhood park requirements is reasonable and would be practical since it would resolve both quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (age group) population needs. Another anomaly obvious from a review of Planning District inventories is the inequitable distribution of RCOS areas among the five Districts (excluding District 2, which is on federal land). However, development of RCOS areas within District 2 should be planned for in the event that the Navy excesses the land. Town support for the AIPC's West Side Master plan is essential to meet this end.

The allocation of available RCOS areas among the Planning Districts should also consider the potential users. Assuming that the relative distribution of age groups within a planning district will remain constant, RCOS areas should be planned to satisfy requirements of those age groups. The highest percentage of users in all Districts is gravitating toward the older age group which suggests that RCOS resources suitable to less organized, more relaxing, recreational pursuits are needed in areas without neighborhood parks or special areas.

The most undesirable distribution of RCOS lies in Planning District 3, which has only 6 percent of the town's available recreation area. All of the RCOS area in District 3 is allocated to playgrounds, while only about 20 percent of its population are in the primary age group to be served by playgrounds. Thus, 80 percent of the population in that district is denied ready access to appropriate RCOS facilities. To correct this situation, in this and other districts, recreation facilities should be modified to serve the users. The Town Center Overlay District encompasses 60+ acres to be designated as Open Space. This area will have pedestrian and bike paths, picnic areas and playground areas for the enjoyment of all.

Sufficient RCOS acreage is available in the town, as a whole, and will be adequate into the 21st century unless the community experiences an explosive population increase. An increased Navy presence and/or extensive economic growth may require the acquisition and development of additional recreation areas to adequately serve the needs of the town.

There is ample evidence that the agricultural base of Aquidneck Island is disappearing along with uncultivated farmland. In the future, as large parcels of land are subjected to development, the availability of land for open space and recreation will decrease.

Table 5 lists the 20 sites, belonging to Middletown, which are accessible to all residents, with minor restrictions. These 20 sites are not in jeopardy; however, action such as imposing deed

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restrictions on the site, must be taken to ensure that they are kept as recreation and open space in perpetuity

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Table 0-9 Summary of Acreage Requirements							
	YEAR	1990				2000	
POPULATION		19,460				17,334	
TYPE OF FACILITY	EXISTING ACREAGE	Req	Diff			Req	Diff
Play Areas & Playgrounds	27.7	24.30	+3.40			21.66	+6.04
Playfields	72.2	24.30	+47.90			21.66	+50.54
Neighborhood Parks	16.5	48.65	-32.15			43.33	-26.83
Conservation and Special Areas ²	82.4	97.30	-14.90			86.67	-4.28

Table 0-10 Acreage Requirements - Planning District 1							
	YEAR	1980		1990		2000	
POPULATION		6,865		7721		6467	
TYPE OF FACILITY	EXISTING ACREAGE	Req	Diff			Req	Diff
Play Areas & Playgrounds	9.2	9.65	-.45			8.09	+1.11
Playfields	16.8	9.65	+7.15			8.09	+8.71
Neighborhood Parks	-	19.30	-19.30			16.17	-16.17
Conservation and Special Areas	-	38.60	-38.60			32.34	-32.34
TOTAL	26.0	77.20	-51.20			64.69	-38.69

² Does not include: Norman Bird Sanctuary, Sachuest Point Wildlife Refuge and Wanumetonomy Country Club, a total of 680 additional acres.

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Table 0-11 Acreage Requirements - Planning District 2*							
	YEAR	1980		1990		2000	
POPULATION		2003		2263		1584	
TYPE OF FACILITY	EXISTING ³ ACREAGE	Req	Diff			Req	Diff
Play Areas & Playgrounds	-	-	-			-	-
Playfields	-	-	-			-	-
Neighborhood Parks	-	-	-			-	-
Conservation and Special Area	-	-	-			-	-
TOTAL	-	-	-			-	-

Table 0-12 Acreage Requirements - Planning District 3							
	YEAR	1980		1990		2000	
POPULATION		2653		2997		2520	
TYPE OF FACILITY	EXISTING ACREAGE	Req	Diff			Req	Diff
Play Areas & Playgrounds	6.4	3.74	2.66			3.15	+3.25
Playfields		3.74	-3.74			3.15	-3.15
Neighborhood Parks		7.50	-7.50			6.30	-6.30
Conservation and Special Areas		15.00	-15.00			12.60	-12.60
TOTAL	6.4	29.90	-23.50			25.20	-18.80

³ This entire Planning District is on US Navy land. There are not public recreation facilities available.

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Table 0-13 Acreage Requirements - Planning District 4							
	YEAR	1980		1990		2000	
POPULATION		2806		3170		2937	
TYPE OF FACILITY	EXISTING ACREAGE	Req	Diff			Req	Diff
Play Areas & Playgrounds	1.5	3.95	-2.45			3.68	-2.18
Playfields	55.4	3.95	+51.45			3.68	+51.72
Neighborhood Parks	1.5	7.90	-6.40			7.35	-5.85
Conservation and Special Areas	9	15.85	-6.85			14.70	-5.70
TOTAL	67.4	31.65	+35.75			29.41	+37.99

Table 0-14 Acreage Requirements - Planning District 5							
	YEAR	1980		1990		2000	
POPULATION		1,086		1227		473	
TYPE OF FACILITY	EXISTING ACREAGE	Req	Diff			Req	Diff
Play Areas & Playgrounds	-	1.50	-1.50			.59	-.59
Playfields	-	1.50	-1.50			.59	-.59
Neighborhood Parks	-	3.10	- 3.10			1.18	-1.18
Conservation and Special Areas ⁴ **	72.4	6.15	+66.25			2.35	+70.05
TOTAL	72.4	12.25	+60.15			4.71	+67.69

⁴ Does not include Sachuest Point Wildlife Refuge and Norman Bird Sanctuary, a total of 557 acres.

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Table 0-15 Acreage Requirements Planning District 6							
	YEAR	1980		1990		2000	
POPULATION		1,843		2082		3353	
TYPE OF FACILITY	EXISTING ACREAGE	Req	Diff			Req	Diff
Play Areas & Playgrounds	10.6	2.60	+8.00			4.19	+6.41
Playfields	-	2.60	-2.60			4.19	-4.19
Neighborhood Parks	15.0	5.20	+9.80			8.38	+6.62
Conservation and Special Areas	1.0	10.40	-9.40			16.75	-15.75
TOTAL	26.6	20.80	+5.80			33.51	-6.91

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Summary of Present and Projected Needs

- A. Although the recent census indicates that the younger population is shrinking the town should maintain the existing facilities to meet current demand and to diversify into new recreational trends for future use. These facilities also require lighting to extend their usage into nighttime hours. The town has budgeted for and has undertaken a program to upgrade the recreation complex on West Main Road and Howland Park.
- B. The Norman Bird Sanctuary has excellent nature trails for use by its members and the general public (for a small donation). Public conservation and nature sites have been developed at Albro Woods and Paradise Valley Park. The land at Gray Craig and the Demery Property should also be developed as a passive recreation/conservation site, widely advertised and open for public use.
- C. Mooring and boating facilities at Third Beach are adequate and should not be expanded any further. There is a need to improve the condition of the boat ramp and to locate a new boat ramp on the west side to access Narragansett Bay.
- D. Present playgrounds and playfields should be upgraded and developed to their fullest potential.
- E. As passive recreation is an integral part of any recreation program, this type of recreation should be expanded throughout the town for the enjoyment of all, but especially for the older residents.
- F. Presently, there are approximately 397.6 acres of public recreation land in the Town of Middletown.
- G. Private (Norman Bird Sanctuary) and semi-private facilities were not included in the available recreation and open land calculations since the general public does not have free and open access to those facilities. However, when the Norman Bird Sanctuary and the Sachuest Point Wildlife Preserve are considered as town open space and recreation land in the acreage requirements, the town has significantly more land dedicated to the recreation and open space than will be needed for the foreseeable future.

COSTS OF FUTURE PROJECTS

Estimated costs of future projects are unknown at this time. In 2000 the voters overwhelmingly passed an Open Space bond for \$500,000, with the intention of acquiring land for watershed and wetlands protection, for recreational use and to purchase development rights. The Town Council, the Planning Board and the Aquidneck Island Land Trust must work hand in hand to ensure the success of this bond. Other future projects should be funded as part of the annual Capital Improvement Program (CIP) as proposed by the Recreation Director. The Open Space potential of the Town Center Overlay District offers the town a unique recreational opportunity that must be pursued. The Town must insure that the recreational/open space potential of the Town Center Overlay District be protected from encroaching development and stand ready to commit funds for recreational/open space use.

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CONCLUSIONS

The acreage presently available for RCOS requirements and the candidate parcels for RCOS augmentation appear sufficient to satisfy the community's RCOS requirements for the next two decades. A reassessment of acreage sufficiency by Planning Districts will be required when a demographic analysis is received from the Census Bureau.

There is an inequitable distribution of RCOS acreage among the Planning Districts. Other deficiencies include a lack of neighborhood parks. The requirements, at certain "private" RCOS facilities to be a member or pay a fee to use the facility, detract from extensive usage by the public.

The inequitable distribution of RCOS areas should be addressed in conjunction with an effort to acquire sensitive watershed areas to protect water resources.

The acquisition of additional RCOS area and the expansion of existing facilities, especially passive recreation facilities, should be oriented toward the needs of an aging population.

Maintenance and preservation of existing RCOS facilities must be a goal of a comprehensive recreation program.

The manner and timeframe for acquiring additional RCOS parcels must be prioritized in the implementation of a comprehensive RCOS plan.

The implementation of a comprehensive RCOS program requires dedicated management by a town Department of Recreation under the supervision of a director and staffed sufficiently to maintain an ongoing program.

The town must be prepared to protect its RCOS interests by competing with land developers or by requiring in its codes/ordinances the protection, preservation, and access to existing and candidate RCOS areas.

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GOALS/POLICIES/IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of the goals of this element will require continuing attention to their scheduled yearly progress (or lack thereof). Success will depend on financial assistance from outside (i.e. state or federal funds, private/public partnerships) as well as within the town. The first step in the implementation process must be the reestablishment of a full-time Recreation Department whose Director will be the prime mover responsible for accomplishing the long-term goals set forth in this element.

GOAL I: Recreation Needs

Ensure the Town meets the ongoing recreation needs of the community.

POLICIES :

- A. Meet community recreation needs through the development, implementation and management of a program designed to fulfill the expressed needs of the Town residents.
- B. Administer and fund an active recreation program that ensures adequate maintenance and repair of recreational facilities.

IMPLEMENTATION:

- C. Establish a Recreation Department with a full-time Director.
- D. Fund the Recreation Department from the town's general fund, revenue from beach operations.
- E. Institute a time-phased repair, replacement, expansion and conversion, or acquisition plan for RCOS resources.
- F. Repair and/or replace damaged recreational equipment and facilities.
- G. Make existing recreational facilities handicapped accessible when that facility is expanded or modified.
- H. Provide safe use of and access to RCOS facilities.
- I. Expand or convert RCOS facilities to accommodate their principal user groups.
- J. The Recreation Department should coordinate efforts with other departments to meet the ongoing needs of the community.

GOAL II: Individual and Social Needs

Develop recreation facilities to serve individual and social needs, and afford outlets for creative expression that contributes to the quality of life of the residents.

POLICY:

Provide equal recreation opportunity for the entire community that includes passive as well as active forms of recreation.

IMPLEMENTATION:

- A. Conduct a needs analysis for facilities and programs to serve the residents.

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- B. Establish a program and schedule for providing needed facilities and programs, incorporating these needs into the Capital Facilities planning process as appropriate.
- C. Ensure that handicapped accessibility is included in development plans of all recreation facilities and that they offer recreational possibilities for varying degrees of skill and ability.

GOAL III: RCOS Sites

Properly manage RCOS sites and acquire additional RCOS sites as appropriate.

POLICIES :

- A. Acquire and preserve RCOS sites that protect land and water sources while allowing for public access.
- B. Expand the inventory of systematically preserved open space and natural resources that are beneficial to cultural, civic and environmental values

IMPLEMENTATION:

- A. Acquire additional RCOS sites in the planning districts where shortfalls exist.
- B. Amend Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances to require neighborhood parks in all new subdivisions.
- C. Establish bike paths throughout the town and the island. Collaborate with the AILT, AIPC, Newport and Portsmouth to establish Greenways and bike trails throughout the island.
- D. Reestablish the Parks & Fields Committee, with one of its tasks to be developing criteria for the use of open space funds and to acquire additional RCOS sites.
- E. Charge the Parks and Fields Committee with the task of recommending changes in the management of the town's RCOS sites.
- F. Support the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission's West Side Management Plan if and when Navy property is surplus.
- G. Recognizing the importance of the Normal Bird Sanctuary, support their efforts, to the extent possible, to preserve open space.
- H. Establish a stream of revenue specifically earmarked for open space preservation, acquisition and maintenance.
- I. Provide a series of new public spaces and facilities to enjoy Narragansett Bay, including a scenic overlook and fishing pier at the Midway Pier area near Greene Lane (West Side Master Plan proposed Greene Lane Park), with access to the shoreline and walking trails to McAllister Point.
- J. Expand the inventory of systematically preserved open space and natural resources that are beneficial to cultural, civic and environmental values. (Preserve Lawton Valley Brook Corridor and other brooks – Gomes, Normans and Barker).

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GOAL IV: Water Based Recreation

Expand water based recreational opportunities.

POLICY:

Provide public access to water based recreational activities.

IMPLEMENTATION:

- A. Clarify ownership of Rights of Way to the shoreline (See Appendix I), and defend public access to “public” rights of way
- B. Acquire waterfront property on the west side to accommodate a boat ramp for access to the Narragansett Bay.
- C. Create and market a Blue Trail of kayak and small boat put-in locations, shoreline destinations, and facilities along the West Side.