



**CONCORD  
RECREATION**

*draft*  
February 2024

# CONCORD

## RECREATION FACILITIES STRATEGIC PLAN

## **Acknowledgments**

This Concord Recreational Facilities Strategic Plan was managed by the Town of Concord's Recreation Department and funded through the Community Preservation Committee. An advisory board helped guide planning work, and many community members, organizations and park users were involved in planning and offered feedback during the process. Thank you to everyone who participated!

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*Rideout Park &  
Playground*





South Meadow  
Field





*Emerson  
Playground*





*Baker Avenue  
Water Access  
Point*



COI  
RECI

PACIFIC STATES

CONCORD  
RECREATION







*Second Division  
Brook Water  
Access Point*





Emerson Park & Playground



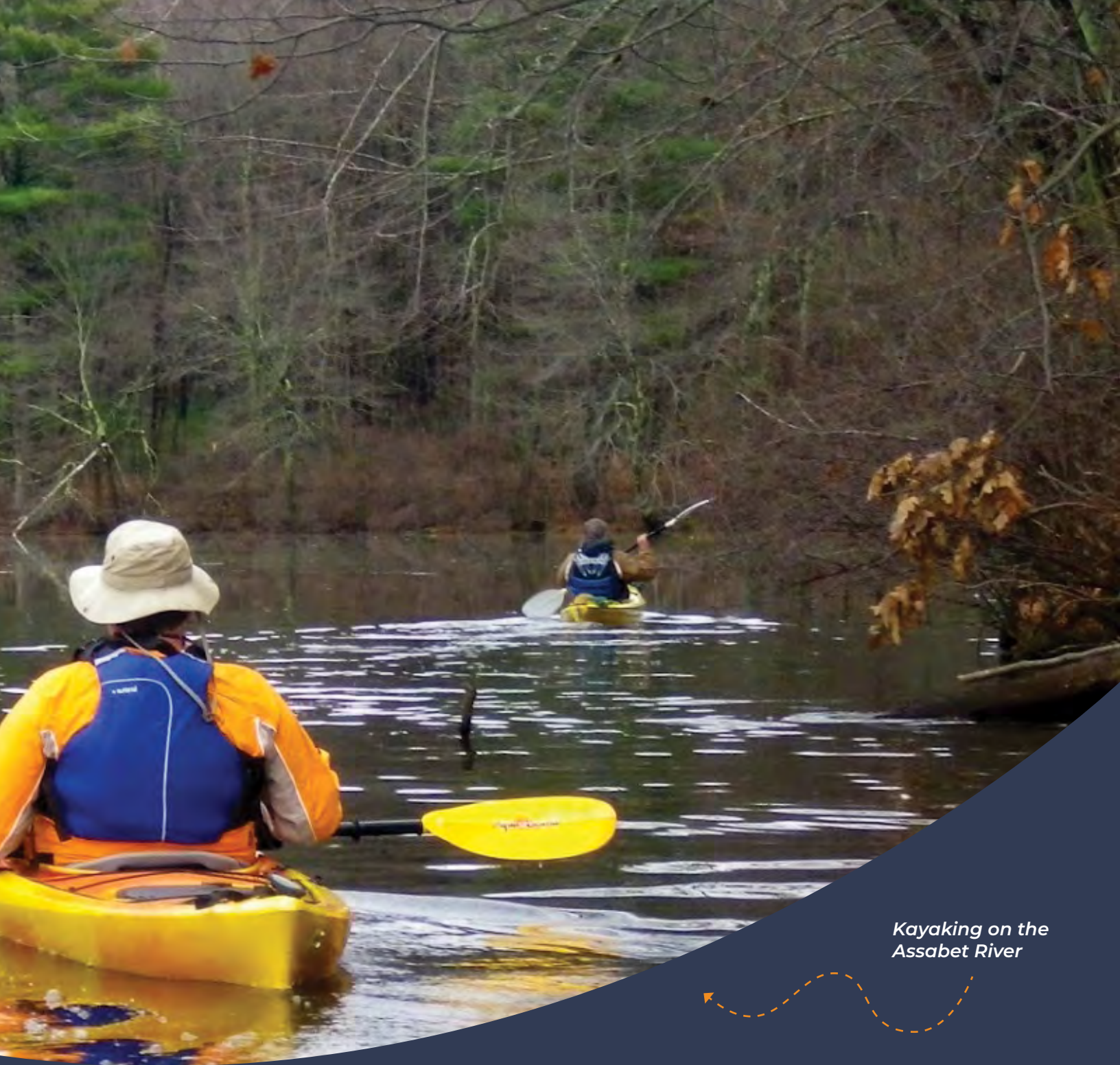


White Pond  
Beach









*Kayaking on the  
Assabet River*

# Executive Summary



*Emerson Park Track  
and Fields*

## Introduction

**Concord's recreational facilities are expansive, well loved, and well used by Concord residents and visitors alike.**

The Concord Recreational Facilities Strategic Plan (RFSP) serves as an update and refresh to the 2014 Concord RFSP. It does not seek to reinvent Concord's existing recreational facilities, character, or intent. Instead, it considers current sites, amenities and their conditions, reflects on future recreation opportunities for the town, and suggests ways to measure success in the implementation of recommendations from this plan.

The three questions this plan asks and seeks to answer are:

- Where are we?
- Where do we want to be?
- How do we know we've been successful?

The Strategic Plan recognizes that Concord's recreational facilities are living things, as is the community using them. The plan's proposals respond to demographic changes that have taken place over the last decade and seek to satisfy community desires now and into the future. To this end, the Plan aspirations are forward-looking and visionary but are based in practical and action-oriented recommendations.

This report leverages an analysis of each property's existing conditions and recent years' data of permitted use by sport, the latest in national recreation trends, and common themes in community feedback to put forward four (4) primary categories of recommendations for the renewed stewardship and continued evolution of Concord's treasured recreational resources. These categories of recommendations include:

- Acquire more property for dedicated recreation space, especially those that can support many types of recreational amenities.
- Increase connectivity to and accessibility within recreational facilities.
- Clarify the visitor experience and lean in to inclusivity.
- Expand resources to continue regular maintenance and upkeep of grounds and buildings.

The Plan's recommendations are far-reaching

and affect many Town departments and stakeholder groups, including sports leagues and private entities. As was the case through the planning process, continued coordination and communication across these groups moving forward will be key to the Plan's success.

### Where are we? / Existing Conditions

The Town of Concord is rich in recreational resources. In general, the Town enjoys more recreation resources than national averages for similarly populated American towns. Community feedback also suggests that people frequently use Concord's many active and passive recreation sites with 98% of all survey respondents having visited a Concord park or recreation facility in the last 12 months and 70% having visited a site within the recreation system 20 or more times in the last year! Sixty percent of community responses suggested that Concord's parks and recreation facilities were meeting people's personal recreation goals and interests.

### Where do we want to be? / Future Conditions

While most respondents felt satisfied by the town's current recreational offerings, forty percent did not, and it's here where we begin to identify unmet recreations needs in Concord. Many factors have driven the demand for more and different forms of recreation including emerging new sports trends in New England; more diverse Town population with different interests; broader participation in recreation by multi-generational user groups; and increased awareness of exercise and healthy lifestyle choices combined with enduring a recent global pandemic. Concord residents have also been influenced by the recreation resources found in neighboring communities. More information about identified needs that formed the subsequent recommendations begins on page 86.

### How do we know we've been successful? / Success Monitoring

Success at fulfilling the community's recreation needs can be measured in many ways and within several time frames. Success might be considered achieved when residents and visitors feel welcomed and can easily access facilities and parks. It could also be realized when individual and community-wide fitness goals are being met and public health and well-being is improved. Success might be achieved people feel more connected with each other when they visit their local parks and recreation

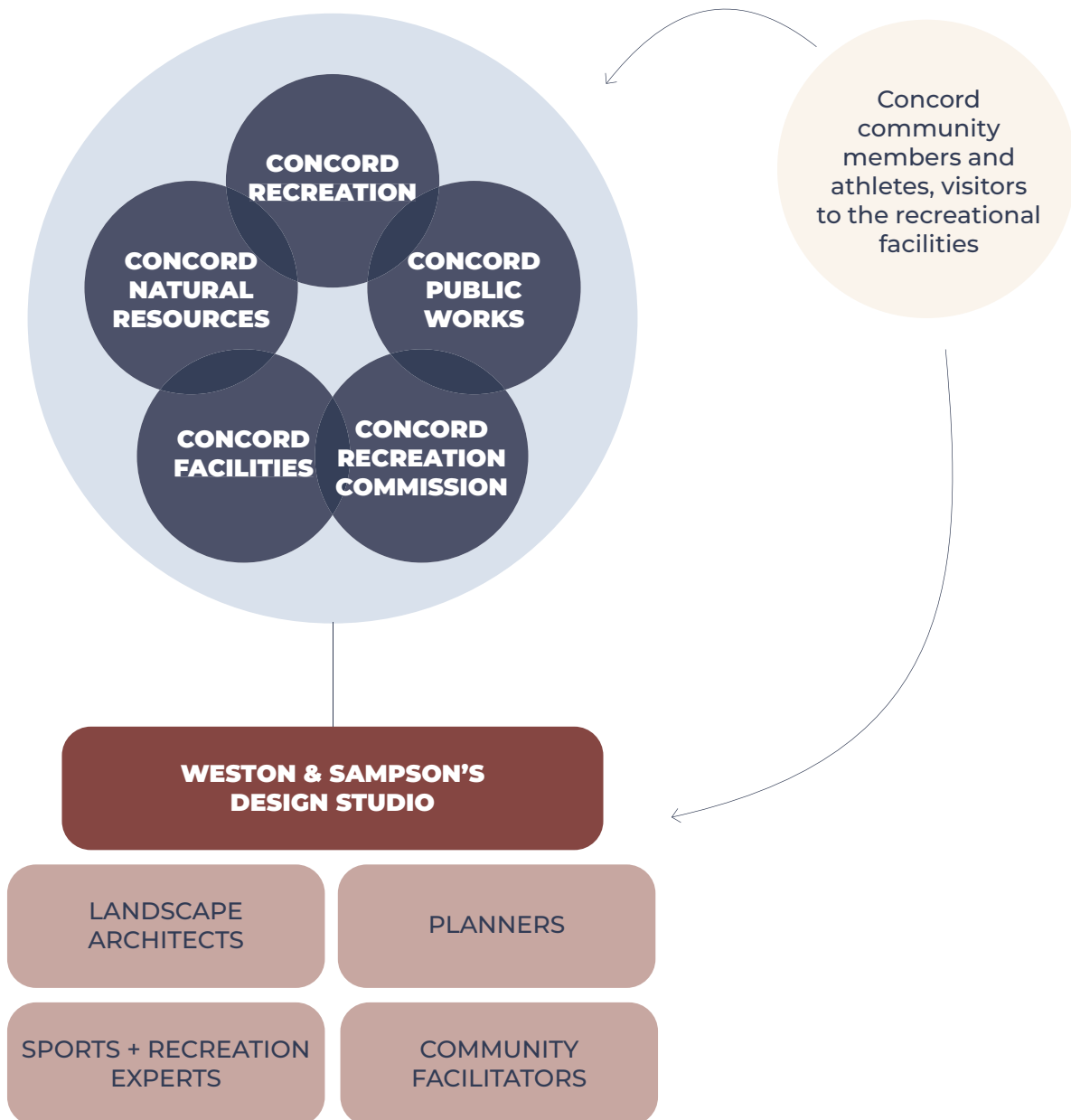
facilities. Success might be accomplished when Concord's active and passive recreation spaces boast high levels of environmental health and maintenance care. Success is done when Concord's community feels pride in its recreation sites.

## Strategic Plan Process

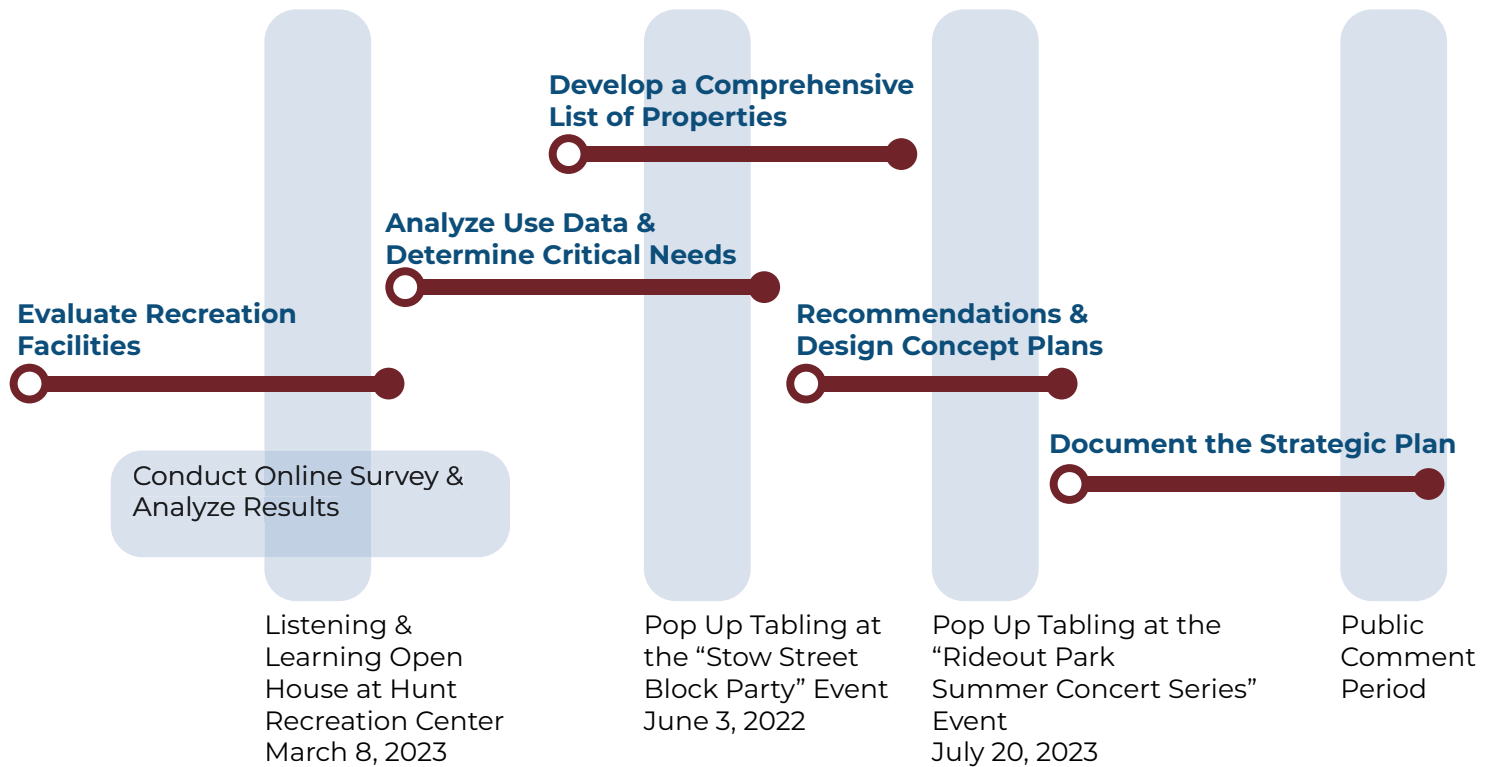
Working with Concord Recreation and in close collaboration with an Advisory Board comprised of Town staff and Recreation Commission members, the core design team at Weston & Sampson's Design Studio produced a strategic vision to guide investment in Concord's recreational facilities over the next 10 years. Together, the team generated comprehensive and actionable recommendations that honor

the town's heritage, expand and engage its users, and strengthen the connection of the park system with the Concord community.

**It is given that Town Departments will continue to collaborate and formalize coordination as recommendations are carried out from this plan. Representatives from all affected Town departments should be included in future discussions, particularly the School Department as recommendations relate to use of school properties. Other key stakeholders such as sports leagues should be included in planning and design discussions while creative partnerships with private entities might offer new ways for Concord to address recreational needs equitably.**



The planning process was divided into several tasks that sometimes followed linearly after one another and other times overlapped and informed each other. The process was broken into five distinct action-oriented phases outlined below. Community input and engagement happened throughout the process, regularly and at critical moments of inflection.



### Evaluate Recreation Facilities

Visited and studied twelve of Concord’s active recreation and water access points to develop a baseline understanding of the town’s current portfolio of fields, courts, and general recreational amenities, along with their current condition.

### Analyze Data & Determine Critical Needs

Extracted trends from various sources and aggregated the results together to develop a comprehensive list of needs for the future. Sources include facility use data from recent years, and understanding of changing demographics, feedback from stakeholders and the public, national standards and trends of similarly sized communities, and findings from the site evaluations.. Needs cover current inadequacies, new opportunities within current facilities, property acquisition and amenity types

### Develop a Comprehensive List of Properties

Define amenities within current facilities and outlined various categories of responsibility across Town departments. This list is intended to be dynamic as new properties and amenities are added to the inventory, along with potential shifts in responsibility amongst Town departments.

### Recommendations and Design Concept Plans

Connected ideas and conversations to establish specific strategies for protecting unique qualities of Concord’s recreation system, while proposing important changes.

### Document the Strategic Plan

Developed a framework for capital improvements and maintenance considerations that reflect community priorities to direct future funding.

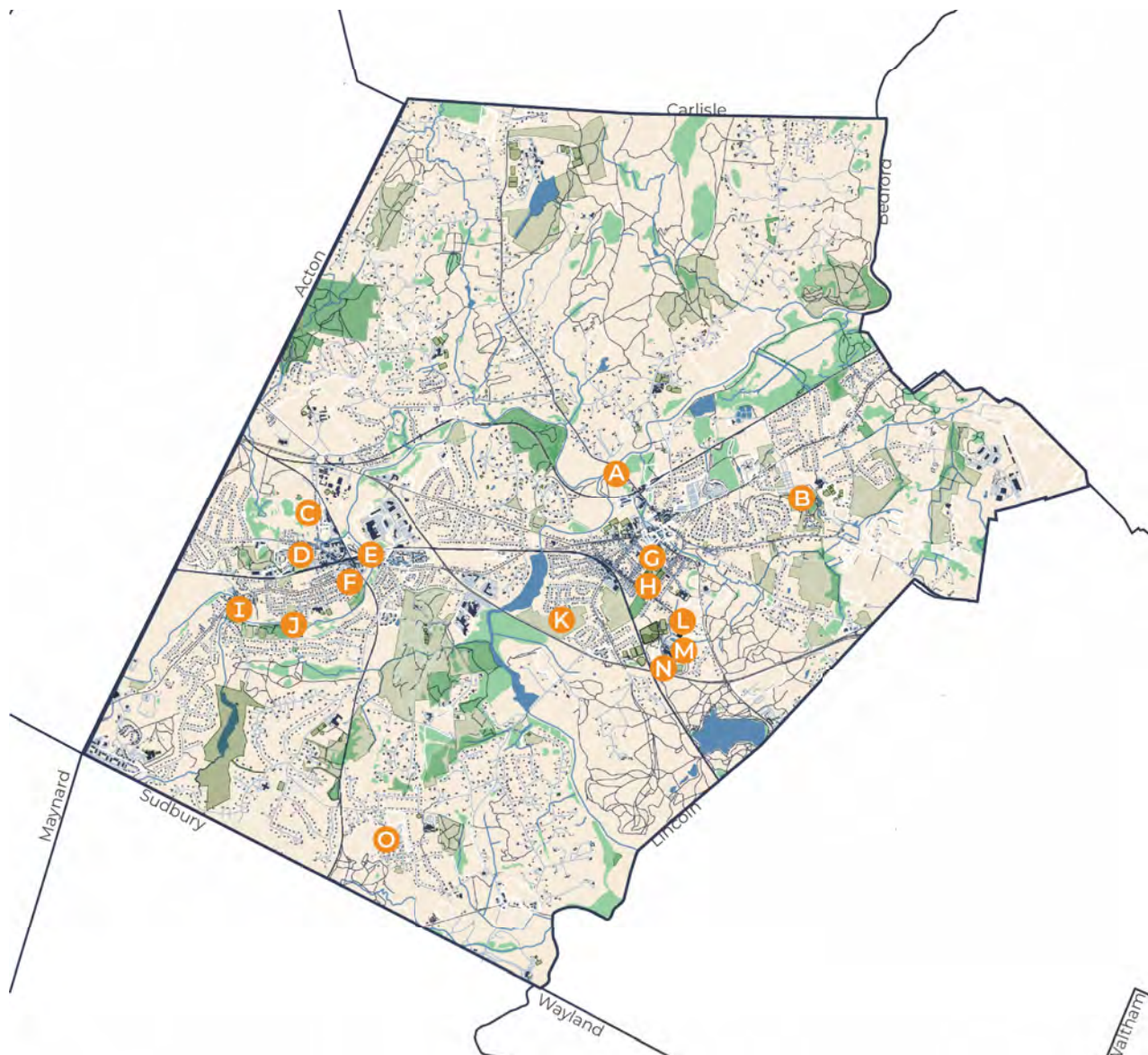
## Inventory and Assessment of Existing Recreational Sites

A comprehensive inventory of existing assets that make up Concord's open space, recreation, and park system is an excellent opportunity to confirm that the current inventory maps representing these holdings are up-to-date and accurate. This was accomplished in two parts: 1) a comprehensive inventory of Town-owned properties was developed and 2) Weston & Sampson staff assessed twelve (12) major recreational facilities through a two-day reconnaissance effort. Taken together, the findings from both efforts lay the groundwork to begin to identify features and amenities in need of improvement at existing recreational assets.

The 'Comprehensive List of Properties' is included as Appendix A. Findings from the site assessments are included in the following chapter and original fieldwork included in Appendix B.

### Recreation Sites

- A Lowell Road Water Access Point
- B Ripley School Fields
- C Warner's Pond Water Access Point
- D Rideout Park & Playground
- E Baker Avenue Water Access Point
- F Harvey Wheeler Community Center
- G Hunt Recreation Center
- H Emerson Park
- I Second Division Brook Water Access Point
- J Cousins Field
- K South Meadow Fields
- L Beede Swim & Fitness Center
- M Skate Park at CC High School
- N Doug White Turf Complex
- O White Pond Beach



## Data Analysis

Once an inventory and assessment was completed for several existing recreational sites, additional studies built upon that foundational work. Collectively, these studies revealed where future recreational need may lie, which led to the heart of this planning effort - several strategic recommendations. Four main areas of study were undertaken are listed below. These studies and the findings are detailed in the next chapter.

### EXISTING PERMITTED USE

A desktop evaluation of use as determined by number of permits pulled per field, court, facility, etc.;

### COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

Public outreach, both in person and through online survey to understand trends in existing use and community needs;

### NPRA BENCHMARKING

A benchmarking study of how Concord compares in number of recreational assets to towns with similarly sized populations through the National Recreation and Parks Association standards;

### FACILITY EVALUATIONS

A comprehensive inventory of all active and passive recreational sites, and an assessment of twelve (12) existing or newly acquired recreational properties;

## Ongoing Efforts and Accomplishments

Aligning the RFSP update with goals established in related town planning documents will ensure that this plan builds upon past efforts. Recognizing recent and ongoing improvement projects is similarly important given that any recommendations proposed in this plan will respect and incorporate those efforts into improvements moving forward.

### Envision Concord: Bridge to 2030 Plan

As part of the desire to develop innovative ways to address transportation needs and protect the environment, the RFSP supports the following Envision Concord recommendations:

- Provide bicycle parking at parks and trailheads.
- Explore opportunities to connect existing trails (both Town and privately owned) to improve walkability in Town while preserving the historical landscape and introduce residents and visitors to Concord's open spaces as well as connecting river access to bike access and parking.

Under the land use and zoning category, the following recommendations are supported by RFSP recommendations:

- Parks, Trails, and Open Space to promote trail connections and enhancements between resources and access to the Assabet River, Nashoba Brook, and Warner's Pond;

Under the open space and natural resources category, all Natural Resources and Recreation goals are supported by RFSP recommendations, as follows:

- Maintain and increase the amount of conservation land and protected open space in order to protect important ecosystems and natural systems.
- Protect rivers, wetlands, ponds, vernal pools, upland habitats, and other natural resources
- Ensure that all Concord residents understand the value of conservation lands and natural resources, including the ecosystem services these resources provide, protection of wildlife habitat, rare species habitat, and fisheries, and that actions outside of these resources play a role in their protection.
- Provide responsible management of conservation lands, including protection, preservation, and restoration.

- Promote ecosystem health and biodiversity as critical factors to achieve town-wide long-term sustainability and resiliency goals.
- Ensure all Concord residents understand the value of open space and recreational amenities.
- Enhance the connections and access to (physical and programmatic) bike paths and walking trails between open spaces and the village centers, the locations of institutions and organizations, and recreation sites.
- Provide responsible management of recreation amenities, including programming of open spaces, public spaces, trails, and recreational facilities to allow ubiquitous and equitable opportunities to encourage use by all residents

### Recreation Facility Strategic Plan (RFSP) 2014

While many new recreation needs for facilities, amenities and programming have been identified, several of the same recommendations from the 2014 RFSP can also be found in this 2023 RFSP, suggesting some goals and needs have remained unmet in the ten-year interval. These recurring needs include:

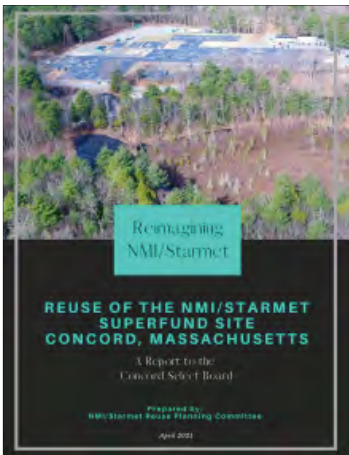
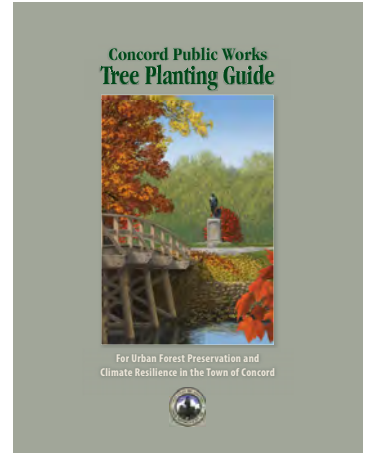
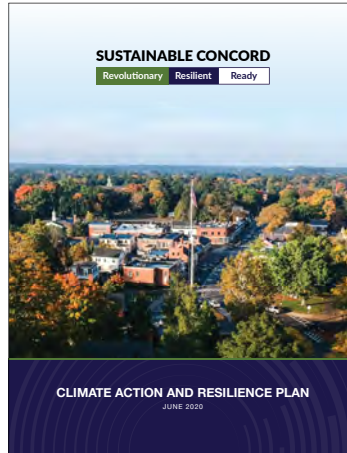
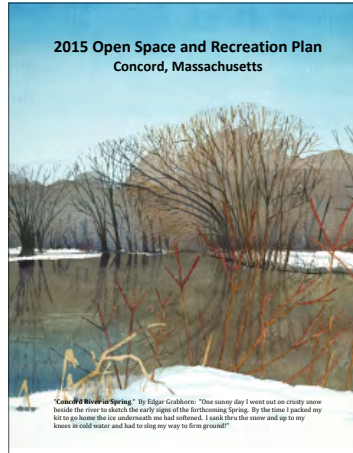
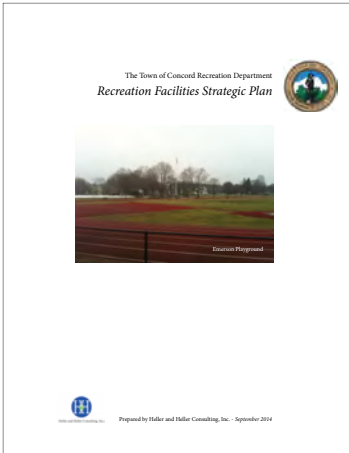
- High membership cost of Beede Swim & Fitness Center
- More parking at recreation sites
- More recreational programming
- Water-based programming and provisions for boat rentals
- Additional swimming pool
- Add dog parks
- Improve site furnishings at existing parks
- More softball fields
- More playgrounds
- More multipurpose and/or soccer fields
- More indoor recreation space

### Open Space and Recreation Plan 2015 (OSRP)

The 2023 RFSP supports the goals from the 2015 OSRP including:

- Protecting water resources and biodiversity.
- Improving connectivity and access to recreational resources.
- Improving collaboration and land management.

## Related Planning Efforts



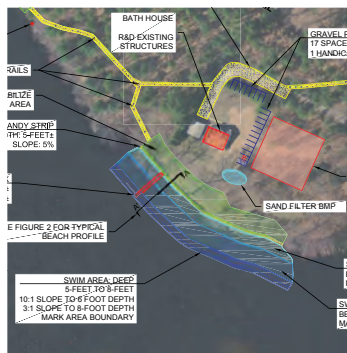
## Recently Completed or Underway Projects



White Pond Beach (2022)



Gerow Recreation Area (ongoing)



Warner's Pond (ongoing)



Fitness Park at Rideout Park (2019)



Updated Pathways and Parking at Rideout Park (2018)



Irrigation and Track Improvements at Emerson Playground (2022)



Baseball field was converted to softball field at Emerson Playground (2021)



Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (2019 and ongoing)

# Engagement Strategy

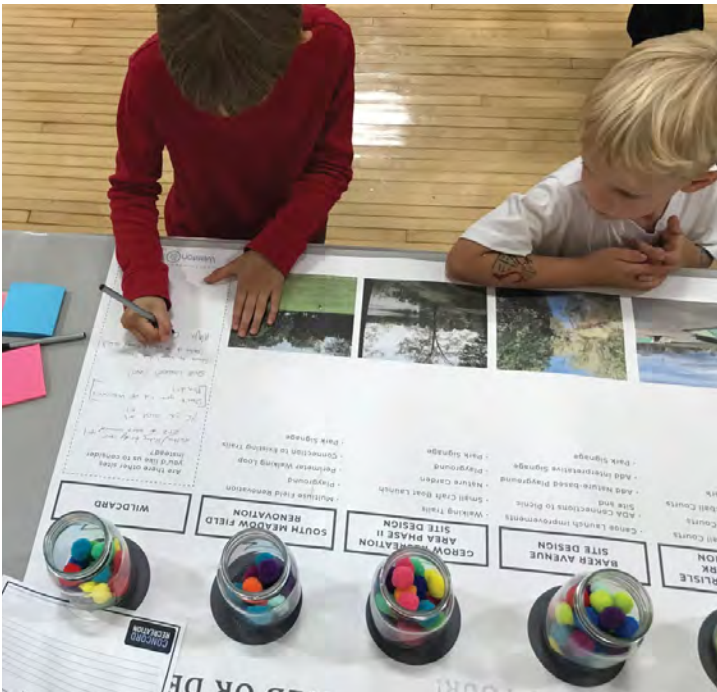
## Community Involvement Goals

The primary goal of the engagement strategy was to facilitate an equitable and inclusive planning process that results in a realistic and comprehensive collective vision grounded in the Concord community. To facilitate a diversity of candid conversations, the RFSP team hosted a kickoff open house and attended several community events to meet people where they were.

Engagement was intended to be fun and active, through a game-style approach that would appeal to kids and adults alike. Each event centered around an activity as the primary source of activity, that could be a quick encounter, or be the beginning of a conversation.

Flyers and event materials were translated into several languages -- and would have been made available in braille if requested -- to encourage new voices to join in on the conversation. Flyers and surveys were placed at Hunt Recreation Center, Concord Council on Aging, Beede Swim and Fitness Center, Concord Public Libraries, and other town spaces. Messaging was shared with Town Commissioners, the Recreation Commission, Concord-Carlisle School Department, youth sports leagues and many other community organizations.

Through active listening and conversation and the formation of an Advisory Board of staff and volunteers, the RFSP team hoped to inspire fresh ideas, educate Concord's residents on the Town's depth of recreational resources, and build future stewards of the Town's facilities. As champions of this effort, the Advisory Board formulated and refined questions used



Active and colorful games makes for fun engagement



Educating residents on their current recreational resources inspires continued stewardship of those facilities



Tabling at existing events allowed us to reach a wider and more diverse group of people to provide feedback

in the public online survey as well as other engagement materials and strategies used at the public meeting and other public events. They joined and advocated for community engagement at every event and provided feedback to the team on recommendations and conceptual ideas. Details on each event can be found in Appendix D, Community Involvement Efforts.

### Outreach Activities by the Numbers

In spring 2023, public engagement began with a trilingual online survey and an open house at the Hunt Recreation Gymnasium. As the official start and community kickoff to the project, the event and a six-week online survey together served as foundational 'listening sessions' to understand baseline experiences for people's experiences in Concord's recreational facilities today and what ideas they have for the future.

In the analysis and evaluation phase of the effort, the RFSP team joined the Stow Street Block Party in June to understand what facilities the public would like to see renovated or designed in their community. Several sites were offered, with ideas for proposed amenities appropriate to each location based on online survey feedback, site assessments, and Town staff input.

In the design phase, the RFSP team joined a July Summer Concert Series event in Rideout Park. Here, high level conceptual designs were presented for the four most popular sites chosen from the previous event. Suggestions for renovation of existing facilities, new amenities timeline and assumed expense were considered and evaluated by the public.

ONLINE SURVEY

567  
respondents  
provided their  
feedback

EVENT #1: OPEN HOUSE

197 bingo chips  
were dropped  
into jars to vote  
on preferences  
for future  
recreational needs

EVENT #2: STOW STREET BLOCK PARTY

277 pom poms  
cast a vote for  
which four sites  
were fit to test  
conceptual design  
idea

EVENT #3: SUMMER CONCERT SERIES

42 voting dots  
were stuck onto  
conceptual plans  
to prioritize  
improvement  
efforts at four  
sites

### Engagement by the Numbers:

Over the course of the project, the Town and the RFSP team were able to engage with nearly 720 people through in-person and digital means.

## Strategic Plan Themes

Over-arching priorities were identified through community feedback and the design team's analysis. These principles guide the tangible recommendations and proposed improvement projects, ensuring that they are rooted in shared values. They will continue to guide work as the Strategic Plan moves into implementation.

### What we heard and learned:

- Improve and add to the current stock of existing walking and biking trails.
- Expand opportunities for public art, events and performances that bring people together.
- Add more indoor / outdoor recreation spaces, particularly pickleball, tennis and basketball courts, swimming pool, skating rink and play spaces.
- Continue improvements to existing park facilities, particularly those projects currently underway.



**ACQUIRE MORE PROPERTY FOR DEDICATED RECREATION SPACE, ESPECIALLY THOSE THAT CAN SUPPORT MANY TYPES OF RECREATIONAL AMENITIES**

- Improve and add more accessible restrooms, seating and picnic tables
- Improve ADA curb cuts, add ramps where needed, and ensure the experience of walking on sloped pathways is positive
- Strengthen access and awareness of water areas for swimming, fishing, and boating.
- Improve connectivity between business districts (Concord Town Center and West Concord primarily) and recreation sites, and between recreation sites as well.



**INCREASE CONNECTIVITY TO AND ACCESSIBILITY WITHIN RECREATIONAL FACILITIES**

- Add more amenities to existing facilities and diversify new amenities to be added.
- Standardize park signage and site furnishings for a predictable user experience.
- Consider changing demographics (backgrounds, ages, etc.) in Town and cultural needs of those backgrounds (i.e. interest in sports like cricket, futsal, and padel). Ensure recreational offerings cater to multi-generational interest.
- Dedicate hang out spaces for teens, in particular.



**CLARIFY THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE AND LEAN IN TO INCLUSIVITY**

+



**EXPAND RESOURCES TO CONTINUE REGULAR MAINTENANCE AND UPKEEP OF GROUNDS AND BUILDINGS**

# Overall Recommendations

These are overall recommendations that should be applied to all existing facilities and future improvements and property acquisitions. The themes that are satisfied through these recommendations are identified by the corresponding colored circle.

## 1. Conduct Specialized Studies

### A. Town-wide Water Access Plan

Access to healthy rivers, ponds and other natural water bodies as well as pools and splash pads by residents can improve fitness and well-being, while connecting Concord to its past and ensuring climate resiliency in the future.

### B. Multi-modal Transportation Planning

Pedestrians, cyclists and paddlers be prioritized through a multi-modal transportation plan that seeks to improve connections for foot, paddle and bicycle traffic in particular between the town centers and recreational sites and facilities.

### C. Rectangular Field Use Study

With significantly more rectangular fields than the NRPA average, there is a disconnect between the amount of fields available and permitted hours. With rectangular field use on the upward trend, a focused study can discern why this is happening and ways to better utilize existing field space.

## 2. Improve or Expand Current Recreation Facilities

### A. Consistency of Facility Signage and Site Furnishings

Well-placed park and wayfinding signage within Concord's parks and along Concord's many waterways and water bodies are needed to ensure users are able to move easily between and within sites.

Implement standard site furnishings at all park sites for brand consistency, economy of scale, ease of maintenance and repair. Locate benches and picnic tables along accessible pathways.

### B. Annual Inspection Program

Implement a systematic annual facility inspection process, with a particular focus on Certified Playground Safety Inspector (CPSI) playground inspections Indoor Recreation Upgrades

## Strategic Plan Themes



## Recommendations, continued

### C. Indoor Recreation Upgrades

Better utilization of existing Town-owned indoor recreation spaces through regular maintenance and capital investments upgrades such as installing air conditioning at Hunt Recreation or re-surfacing at the Ripley School Gymnasium.

## Strategic Plan Themes



### D. More Outdoor Courts of all Types

Add at least two (2) more basketball courts. Consider locations where amenities oriented toward basketball can also be included or currently exist. Add at least six (6) dedicated outdoor pickleball courts to the current stock, preferably separate from Rideout Park.



### E. More Diverse Play Opportunities

Add two more playgrounds for ages up to twelve and one more dedicated tot lot oriented toward the 0 to 5 year age group. Renovate the playground at Rideout Park and add a splash pad.



## 3. Develop New Recreation Facilities

### A. Indoor Recreation Facility

Add an indoor recreation complex that focuses on indoor courts and multipurpose field spaces. Add a dedicated community center that serves all ages, particularly teens. Consider existing properties as potential locations for these facilities (e.g. Peabody Middle School and 2229 Main Street).



### B. Outdoor Civic Gathering Spaces

Create more outdoor civic gathering spaces that vary in scale and purpose within Concord's parks and recreation system.



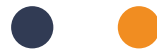
### C. Trailhead Nature Education / Maker Space

Build at least one, but preferable two small nature-focused educational spaces that connect to and support Concord's extensive trail system and confluence of waterways.



### D. Outdoor Four-Season Multipurpose Pavilion

Consider adding a town-run outdoor all-seasons pavilion for ice skating, pickleball, community events, and other uses.



### E. New Dedicated Dog Runs

Add at least two dedicated dog parks, with at least one located near town center (e.g. lean into the informal dog use at Emerson Park)





*Obstacle Course Challenge  
Playground at Rideout Park*