

## 5.7 Open Space and Recreation

### 5.7.1 Introduction

The Open Space and Recreation element evaluates the condition of existing facilities, the need for new facilities, the development of policies for the provision, management and protection of open space and recreation areas while presenting an implementation program designed to achieve the Town's objectives.

### 5.7.2 Existing Conditions

#### 5.7.2a Overview

Approximately twenty percent, (20%), of the land area in the Town of Exeter is designated as open space (see Map 5.7.A). Approximately twelve percent, (12%), of this land, primarily located in the western portion of the Town, is owned by the State of Rhode Island. The majority of the balance of open space is privately held, while less than two tenths of one percent (2/10 of 1%) is owned by the municipality. At the present time, approximately five percent (5%) of the total land area of the Town has been developed in association with residential, commercial or industrial uses. This leaves a balance of approximately seventy-five percent (75%) of the community, which could be subject to development in the future.

Table 5.7.A Open Space and Local Recreation Facilities Inventory

Facility Name: Metcalf Middle School

Location: RI Route 3

Planning District: 1 (One)

Ownership: Regional School

Type of facility: Playfield

Area served: Regional

Land area: 3.25 acres

Facilities and conditions:

- 2 baseball/softball fields - 60' bases (good condition)
- 1 baseball field - 90' bases, aluminum bleachers (good condition)
- 1 ½ basketball courts, asphalt, lighting (good condition)

Table 5.7.A (cont)

Facility Name: Exeter/West Greenwich Little League

Location: Town Hall Road

Planning District: 2 (Two)

Ownership: Town

Type of facility: Playfield

Area served: Town/Regional

Land area: 3.0 acres

Facilities and conditions:

- 1 baseball field – 60' bases, fenced, scoreboard, aluminum bleachers, toilets, drinking water, refreshment stand, field house (excellent condition)
- 1 open playfield 60' – 90' bases, cut-out infield, no backstop (good condition)

Facility Name: Wawaloam Elementary School

Location: Town Hall Road and RI Route 2

Planning District: 2 (Two)

Ownership: Regional School

Type of facility: Playground

Area served: Town/Regional

Land area:  $\frac{3}{4}$  acres

Facilities and conditions:

- 1 balance beam, 1 jungle gym, 1 slide, 2 monkey bars, 2 may poles, 12 swings, 1 chin up bar, 1 asphalt basketball court, paved play area (all equipment in good condition with exception of backboards and hoops)

Facility Name: William Reynolds Field

Location: South Road and RI Route 2

Planning District: 2 (Two)

Ownership: Town

Type of facility: Playfield

Area served: Town

Land area: 1 acre estimated

Facilities and conditions:

- 1 softball field – 60' bases, fenced (good condition)

Table 5.7.A (cont)

Facility Name:	“Old Home Days” Field
Location:	South Road and RI Route 2
Planning District:	2 (Two)
Ownership:	Town
Type of facility:	Fairgrounds
Area served:	Town/Regional
Land area:	4 acres estimated
Facilities and conditions:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Toilets, pavilion, concession stand, 10 booth type structures, 1 open playfield approximately 3 acres in size, lighting, water (fair condition)</li> </ul>
Facility Name:	“Unnamed”
Location:	South Road and RI Route 2
Planning District:	2 (Two)
Ownership:	Town
Type of facility:	Playfield
Area served:	Town
Land area:	1 acre estimated
Facilities and conditions:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 2 slides, 2 merry-go-rounds, 2 pieces of climbing apparatus (poor condition)</li> </ul>

5.7.2b Analysis

A review of the Town of Exeter's Local Recreation Facility Inventory and the Town's Theoretical Outdoor Recreation Needs results in the following tables showing projected requirements from 1990 to the year 2015 and the current outdoor recreation deficiencies based on projected 1990 requirements. (While the "Old Home Days" field was included in the Town's inventory, it has not been used to reduce recreation requirements due to its current limited use as a recreation resource.)

Table 5.7.B

Town of Exeter  
Outdoor Recreation Requirements - (In Acres)

<u>Year</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>1995</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2015</u>
<u>Facility Type</u>						
Playgrounds/Minor Parks	22.5	24.0	25.1	25.2	25.5	25.5
Playfields/Major Parks	37.5	40.0	41.3	41.9	42.5	42.5

Table 5.7.C

Town of Exeter

Outdoor Recreation Deficiencies (in 1990 acres)

Playgrounds/Minor Parks	<u>+ 21</u>
Playfields/Major Parks	<u>+ 30</u>

Since the development of this plan, the recreational facilities at the new Jr./Sr. High School have been completed and are now available. The facility includes four tennis courts, a softball field, a baseball field, combined football/soccer facility, a soccer practice field, two outdoor basketball courts and a general sports field. In all practical purposes, these facilities are new and in good condition, covering 20 acres of land. The addition of these facilities reduces the deficiency of Playfields/Major Parks to +10 acres.

### 5.7.2c Other Facilities

In addition to the public facilities listed above, there are a variety of private facilities for active recreation in Exeter, as shown on Map 5.7A. They include the Exeter Country Club, a full services golf course open to the public, Harbour's Driving Range, and the Yawgoo Valley Ski Area. A new golf course, the Cobblestone Golf Course is under construction.

There are also a number of state owned facilities for other types of recreation, including hiking, swimming, and fishing (again, see Map 5.7A). They include Beach Pond State Park, Arcadia Management Area, Austin Farm, and Queen's Fort Historic Site. Finally, there are private facilities, including the Mt. Tom Sportsmen Club, the Narragansett Gun Club, Camp Canonicus, the Warwick Sportmen's Club, and the Winchester Gun Club.

### 5.7.3 Issues

1. Exeter has a diverse heritage of natural resources, including rare and endangered plants, animals, and unique geologic and other natural features.
2. The analysis of the characteristics and availability of local recreation and conservation resources has led to the determination that the Town of Exeter should implement an acquisition and development program which blends active recreation opportunities with conservation activities.
3. Recreation has the potential of being a major force in the economy of any area. Sufficient open space for recreation opportunities make a community attractive for the establishment of businesses and as a place where people want to work, establish their homes and raise their families.

4. A major task, which the Town must face, is the challenge to protect its natural and open space resources and to maximize its recreation resources.
5. In satisfying the Town's open space and recreational needs, it is important to understand that the removal of privately held land from the local tax rolls, in contrast to the development of these lands for residential purposes, is in the long run, generally beneficial to the community. The public service costs (education, fire and rescue protection, public works), which invariably follow residential development, generally far exceed tax revenues produced.

#### 5.7.4 Policies

##### 5.7.4.1 Overall Policies

- a) Exeter recognizes the many values provided by its wildlife resources that thrive in open space areas, and will work to preserve and enhance species diversity and stability through continued research, management and education efforts, habitat protection and enhancement, and preservation or mitigation of adverse impacts of human activities.
- b) Exeter will work to preserve its rivers and their adjacent shorelines for recreational use, wildlife habitat, water supply, and the open space corridors they provide and will encourage expanded recreational usage to capitalize upon improved water quality.

##### 5.7.4.2 Open Space Preservation

- a) Exeter should establish a program for acquisition, development and conservation of open space areas, with priority on land that is of natural, historic or scenic value.
- b) The Town should also employ the opportunities for acquisition of rights less than full ownership and various regulatory devices, which would serve to supplement the supply of open space within areas, which are subject to development pressures.
- c) Exeter will make efforts to preserve the best farmlands in the state for active agricultural use.
- d) Exeter will make efforts to protect and manage its forest resources to meet the demands of recreation, water supply, wildlife habitat, and high quality environment.
- e) These actions include, but are not limited to, the purchase of scenic easements, access easements, conservation easements and such regulatory devices as surface water buffer districts and reservation of open space within large scale developments.

- f) The Town of Exeter should work closely with state and local agencies, such as the Nature Conservancy and the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, in an effort to secure conservation easements and for the protection of rare and endangered species.
- g) The Town will preserve important natural and cultural features as part of the development process for new residential developments and subdivision.

#### 5.7.4.3 *Recreation*

- a) Exeter will encourage imaginative use of the various land preservation techniques to supplement the supply of open space and outdoor recreation opportunities.
- b) Exeter will encourage desirable gifts of land and money from private individuals and organizations for recreation and conservation purposes.
- c) Exeter will support the formation of "Greenbelts," and continue to assess the need for additional recreation areas. Toward this end, the Town will develop a "Town-wide Map of Potential Conservation Lands".
- d) Exeter will support the continuance of privately owned recreation facilities - skiing, golfing, camping, etc.
- e) Exeter will support outright acquisition of land by the Town for preserved open space and recreational use
- f) Exeter recognizes the importance of community-based recreation resources and encourages the planing, development, maintenance and expansion of local recreation systems, which will meet the needs of its citizens.
- g) Future recreation facilities can be provided through expansion on existing Town-owned land and the acquisition of additional land for conservation and recreation purposes.
- h) The Town recognizes the need to provide recreation opportunities for all its citizens, including those who may have special needs such as the elderly and handicapped.
- i) The Town will preserve the ability of freshwater wetlands to perform their valuable natural functions.

#### 5.7.5 Goals

#### 5.7.5.1 Overall Policies

- a) Form an active acquisition, development and conservation program which will meet the existing and future recreation needs and satisfy the conservation concerns of the citizens of the Town of Exeter.
- b) A program of acquisition of land and the purchase of conservation easements should be immediately implemented to insure the protection of the Queen's River aquifer as a potential public water supply.
- c) The Town should amend its subdivision regulations to provide for the dedication of land for recreation or conservation by developers. These lands to be used for the development of tot lots, playgrounds or playfields as appropriate or to be left in their natural state when warranted. Specifically, the Town will amend its regulations to provide for conservation developments. It will also continue to require developers of subdivisions other than conservation developments to dedicate a portion of the land being developed for open space or recreation, or to require the payment of a fee-in-lieu-of land dedication.
- d) The Town should take full advantage of financial resources available for recreation and conservation purposes while encouraging private landowners to participate in such programs as the Farm, Forest and Open Space Act for the protection of private open space lands.
- e) Encourage desirable gifts of land and money from private individuals and organizations for recreation and conservation purposes.
- f) Coordinate open space proposals with other land use considerations and anticipate development to insure the Town's ability to effectively compete for State and Federal financial assistance.
- g) Evaluate the ecological determinate in planning for open space acquisition.
- h) Use the Town's Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations to effectively preserve and enhance historical and cultural locale by incorporating scenic, conservation and aesthetic controls. Adopt a procedure for identifying important cultural and environmental site features as part of the development review process for subdivisions and land development projects.
- i) Encourage and support private organizations in their work of supplying and enhancing recreation opportunities and in providing for the conservation and preservation of open space resources.

- j) Support the Conservation Commission and other public bodies and individuals and encourage them in their conservation programs and efforts to inform the public of the economic, social and cultural assets and advantages of recreation, conservation and open space resources.
- k) Establish a sound and continuous Capital Improvement Program to efficiently allocate funds for orderly acquisition and development of recreation facilities and open space resources according to the priority needs of the Town and in a manner to take advantage of Federal and State matching programs.
- l) Cooperate with neighboring communities and the State of Rhode Island in the identification and joint investigation of recreation and open space opportunities and, where appropriate, provide for the utilization of resources as joint ventures.
- m) Encourage the State Department of Environmental Management to continue to expand the Arcadia Management Area and to offer additional recreation opportunities.
- n) Encourage the State to improve its hiking trail system within the Arcadia Management Area.
- o) Exeter should identify highways that should be classified as rural and scenic (e.g., Route 165) to control strip development that could degrade the scenic attributes of these roads. Designate these routes for potential bike paths.
- p) The Town should make every effort to secure rights of first refusal on property currently designated as privately held recreation, conservation and open space lands, which are considered to be critical open space resources for the community.
- q) Consider Planned Development and conservation zoning techniques that combine zoning and subdivision controls to allow developers more flexibility in design.
- r) Provide information to the residents of the community to insure their understanding of the crucial role that water bodies and wetlands play in the recreation, conservation and open space program.
- s) Coordinate the Town's Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Plan with the State Land Use Plan and policies and the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan to prevent and avoid duplication of services, efforts and costs and take full advantage of those programs designed to aid the community.

#### *5.7.5.2 Open Space Preservation*

- a) A close working relationship should be established with the Wood-Pawcatuck River Association, the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, the State Department of Environmental Management and other public and private entities having a responsibility or interest in preserving open space lands for conservation purposes.
- b) Preserve open space "Greenbelts" to protect residential environments from conflicting land uses. Toward this end, the Town has adopted a Town-wide Map of Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Areas (Map 5.7.A).
- c) Strengthen the Town's efforts to acquire or otherwise protect all water bodies, wet areas, streams and other natural resources.
- d) Establish a progressive policy toward open space as a positive element in improving the Town's economy.
- e) The Town should encourage the establishment of land trusts to help preserve sensitive natural areas and open space.
- f) The Town should work closely with the State to preserve and protect prime farmlands.
- g) Increase in demands for out-door recreation has been accompanied by Federal and State legislation which provides funds for technical assistance and acquisition and development of sites. New forms of Federal and State legislation will continue to challenge the resources and imagination of the Town and State officials. The Town must be prepared to take advantage of these opportunities.

#### 5.7.5.3 *Recreation*

- a) The William Reynolds Field and adjacent fairgrounds and playfield should be upgraded to provide a greater variety of recreation experiences and the opportunity for a higher intensity of use.
- b) Encourage imaginative use of the various tools available in conjunction with outright acquisition of land, to supplement the supply of outdoor recreation opportunities.
  - Acquisition of rights less than full ownership.
  - Regulatory devices.
  - Assessment and tax policies.
  - Scenic easements
  - Access easements for hiking, fishing, etc.
  - Conservation easements to protect wetlands, streams, water bodies and ground water resources.

- c) Encourage public use of private lands by working out such arrangements as leases for fishing, scenic purposes and hiking and provide information regarding the Rhode Island Landowner Liability Law, which limits the liability of landowners who permit their land for recreation purposes.
- d) Encourage private investment, through the various Federal, State and local legislative devices and services, to develop and provide quality recreation facilities and services to the public.
- e) Coordinate the development of the school system to encourage maximum opportunity for indoor and outdoor recreation activity and to insure the provision of sufficient land to meet recreation needs.
- f) Establish the proper balance between outdoor and indoor recreation facilities for all age groups.
- g) Consider the establishment of a Recreation Commission and provide sufficient financial resources and direction to:
  - Organize the community for year-round recreation geared to the Town's needs.
  - Operate activities on property under public or private jurisdiction in conjunction with regular public activities.
  - Expand and maintain recreation facilities.
  - Facilitate coordination and cooperation with the school department.
- h) Raise the per capita expenditure for recreation to accommodate the Town's needs.
- i) Support the continuance of privately owned recreation facilities - skiing, golfing, camping, etc.
- j) Land to the south of the Exeter/West Greenwich Little League Field should be developed to maximize its recreation potential.
- k) Pursue the purchase of easements to allow public access to lakes, ponds, and rivers for canoeing, hiking and fishing. This easement could also serve to keep development set back from sensitive Town waters.
- l) The Town should continue to assess the need for additional recreation areas and develop appropriate sites as necessary.
- m) Whether expanding existing facilities, or developing new ones, the Town must at all times consider the particular needs of all special segments of the population such as the elderly and the handicapped.

### 5.7.6 Implementation

Each community is responsible to provide adequate recreation facilities and open space resources for its citizens and to provide the protection, conservation and development of these resources either through local action or through programs of cooperation with State and private entities.

Government agencies and private interests both participate in supplying or contributing to the recreation and conservation resources of a community. The appropriate role of each in meeting outdoor recreation needs and assuring the future quality of the environment is primarily differentiated by a mandate of responsibility. Government agencies provide this function as a government service while the private sector usually provides service not commonly recognized as a government responsibility. The appropriate roles of both, although generally clearly identified, must be coordinated to avoid areas of duplication and to insure maximum utilization of resources (see Table 5.7.D).

#### 5.7.6a Federal

The Federal Government's responsibility as it relates to local recreation, conservation and open space programs is primarily financial and supportive.

Federal financial assistance is an incentive to a local community to either purchase or develop recreation, conservation and open space sites. At the present time the most viable Federal financial assistance program is the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

#### 5.7.6b State

The State's primary responsibility is in providing major recreation, conservation and open space activities, which are regional, statewide or interstate. The State also has a role in supporting local communities' efforts in securing Federal funds.

The State also has the responsibility to develop and provide continuous updating of a State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan identifying sites and facilities it will provide so that local communities and the private sector can coordinate and plan local recreation and conservation projects. In addition the State, through the general assembly, is responsible for providing appropriate enabling legislation in support of the local communities' efforts to preserve open space.

#### 5.7.6c Town of Exeter

The Town of Exeter has the responsibility of providing for the current and future recreation and conservation needs of its citizens. The areas of recreation and conservation activities identified in this study as local responsibilities include Tot-Lots, playgrounds, playfields, parks and conservation areas.

It is also the responsibility of the Town of Exeter to protect its natural resources by adopting appropriate regulatory measures. Exeter is also participating in the South County Greenspace Project, which is inventorying recreational and open spaces resources with a goal of regional planning. The Town will use the information gained from this Project in developing a Town-wide Map of Potential Conservation Lands and in developing long-range plans for open space preservation and development of a system of greenways in the Town.

5.7.6d Private

The private sector provides recreation facilities, which are generally of a specialized nature and of a more limited interest than those provided by government. Rod and gun clubs, sportsmen's clubs and nature preserves are among these types of facilities. Other private organization that are key to the development of recreational programs and facilities are non-profit organizations such as the Exeter- West Greenwich Soccer Association, the Chelsea Park Group and the Pop Warner football organization.

It is expected that with the growth of the Town of Exeter additional private facilities may be provided and should be encouraged. In addition, the private sector may provide recreation equipment, facilities and land normally provided by the Town. Conservation lands have been made available through the private sector while private developers can be required, as recommended in this study, to provide recreation areas to serve the needs of their developments.

Table 5.7.D Outdoor Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Identification of Resources for Implementation, Town of Exeter	
<u>Type of Action</u>	<u>Resources</u>
Acquisition and/or Development	Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund Rhode Island Open Space Bond Fund Exeter Open Space Bond Fund Private Agencies
Securing of Easements and Exeter Rights of First Refusal	Open Space Bond Fund Negotiation by the Town of Exeter with Private Interests Private Agencies
Acquisition of Land By	Amendment of Town of Exeter Subdivision Regulations to Provide for Dedication of Land in New Developments Negotiation by the Town of Exeter with

Private Interests	
Table 5.7.D cont	Private Agencies.
Protection of Water Courses	Amendments to Town of Exeter Subdivision and Zoning Regulations to Provide for Water Course Buffer Zone.
Protection of Privately Held Farm, Forest and Open Space Lands	The Establishment of an Educational Program by the Exeter Conservation Commission, which encourages private land owners to participate under the State Farm, Forest and Open Space Act.
Protection of Open Space Land	Amendments to Town of Exeter Subdivision Within Proposed Developments and Zoning Regulations to provide for planned unit development and related open space protection techniques.
Protection of Scenic Views, Historic Sites and Unique Natural Areas	The establishment by the Exeter Conservation Commission of a close and cooperative working relationship with public and private entities responsible for, or having an interest in, such areas.

A review of the Exeter Conservation Commission's Public Opinion Survey, State and National recreation standards, State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan Policies and an analysis of alternative arrangements in the availability and use of recreation resources, has resulted in the following identification (Table 5.7.E) of jurisdictional responsibilities by type of recreation activity. These responsibilities are primarily drawn from the ownership of the properties on which the activity takes place.

Table 5.7.E Town of Exeter Recreational Jurisdictional Responsibilities	
<u>Activity</u>	<u>Existing or Proposed Responsibility/Facilities</u>
Hiking, Walking, Jogging	State/Local
Baseball, Softball	Local
Fishing	State/Local/Private
Swimming	State/Local/Private

Boating, Canoeing Table 5.7.E cont	State/Local
Skiing, (Downhill and Cross Country)	State/Private
Biking	State/Local
Hunting	State/Private
Tennis	State/Local/Private
Golf	Private
Camping	State/Private
Basketball	Local
Bird-watching/Nature	State/Local/Private
Soccer	Local
Football	Local
Picnicking	State/Local
Horse Trails	State/Private
Sleighrides/Hayrides	Private
Skating	State/Local/Private
Snowmobiling	State/Private
Paddleball	Local/Private
Conservation	State/Local/Private

### 5.7.7 Consistency

It takes more than recreation space to give a community a desired feeling of openness. There is the open space, which is part of every house lot and residential development. The opportunity exists to make the most of this open space and to produce an overall development pattern, which is pleasant and efficient. In newly developing areas, where most building is by subdivision on multi-acre tracts of land, every effort should be made to avoid lot-next-to-lot development, which lacks sufficient open space. As development plans materialize, the community has the opportunity and responsibility to require the dedication of open space. With respect to court support of this principle, the following excerpt from an evaluation of a court case is worthy of note ..." if it is in the light of these basic principles that the reasonableness of the requirement sought to be imposed must be determined. If the requirement is within the statutory grant of power to the municipality and if the burden cast upon the subdivider is specifically and uniquely attributable to this activity, then the requirement, for dedication of land, is permissible; if not, it is forbidden and amounts to confiscation of private property in contravention of the constitutional prohibitions rather than reasonable regulations under police power."

### OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION AMENDMENT

The following amendment to the above open space and recreation element was adopted by the Exeter Town Council on January 8, 2001.

AMENDMENT:

To meet the existing deficiency of 25 acres\* in playgrounds/minor parks and 41 acres\* of playfields/major parks, the town of Exeter should develop new recreational facilities at the following locations: 1) The new library site on Route 102; 2) The William Reynolds Field; and 3) The town farm property including the fairgrounds should be upgraded and expanded to provide a greater variety of recreational experiences and the opportunity for a higher intensity of use. A master plan for these areas should be completed to maximize the efficient and effective use of these properties.

\* These numbers are incorrect. The correct numbers are as follows:

- Playfields - forecasted need (see Table 5.7.B) for 2000 was 41 acres with 27 acres are provided, leaving a need of 14 acres.
- Playground - forecasted need for 2000 was 25 acres and one acre is provided, leaving a need of 24 acres.