

RECREATION

Introduction

North Hampton, NH, located in the coastal region of New Hampshire, is home to an abundant number of recreational opportunities and facilities that are used by local residents, tourist, and residents of abutting communities alike. Private and publicly-owned recreational land holdings offer a diversity of recreational opportunities from tennis, golf to bird watching, all within town limits. With this wealth of resources, the North Hampton Recreation Commission, assisted by many active participants and volunteers, offers a variety of organized recreational opportunities. In addition to local recreational offerings, many residents are able to take advantage of nearby regional recreation opportunities such as swimming/picnicking at state beaches, boating/fishing in regional waters, and skiing/hiking in the nearby White Mountains.

Today and in the future, the role of recreation and exercise is closely linked with the health of the population, both physically and mentally. Promoting recreation and exercise is an important part of any community and this fact is reflected in the number of options offered and the high rate of participation.

In response to expanding citizens' requests for more organized recreational direction, the town added a full time Recreation Department position in 2000. The Director's office is currently located in the Town Administrative offices. A storage facility located in town holds the equipment, materials and supplies for summer recreation camp and other events. The Recreation Commission is an advisory board of volunteer residents that works hand in hand with the Recreation Department Director. Currently seven members serve on the commission and work together to bring quality programs and events, while enriching the quality of life for its fellow residents.

Description of Services

The Recreation Department runs all after school enrichment programs at the North Hampton School, while the YMCA remains intact as the Afterschool care provider. Programs such as the popular outdoor Coyote Club and Wolf Clan use the trails located on the rear of the school grounds. Piano lessons are also offered and are located in the Band Room. The Recreation Department partners with other non-profit organizations to offer quality programs which include the Seacoast Science Center, and Seacoast United, as well as hiring qualified program instructors for Fencing, Art Classes, Street and Broom Hockey, Homework Clubs, Red Cross Babysitter Courses, and more.

The Summer Recreation Camp provides three choices: Full Time, Part Time Only and Part Time with One Field Trip. Little Nippers (Preschool Camp) was added in 2008. All camps are housed at the NHS facility due to the large number of attendees. Dearborn Park does not provide indoor facilities during those occasions when inclement weather hits suddenly and doesn't provide sufficient room for the 150 children on average who participate. Other summer camp programs include: Surf, Lacrosse, Fencing, Pitching, Baseball and Softball, and Soccer. Golf Lessons are partnered with The First Tee at Sagamore-Hampton Golf.

PASA (Programs for Active Senior Adults) was created in 2009 and has proven to be a beneficial program to town residents. Monthly lunches, trips and weekly Tai Chi classes have brought old friends back together as well as providing opportunities for meeting new ones. This group is an important group to the town because they are the "roots" of this community. Many have lived here for more than 60 years, as did their parents. They are a close knit group and are extremely involved with town events. Monthly trips such as going to Portland and enjoying Magic of Christmas or taking a tour on the Duck boats in Boston.. A trip to Boston to watch the Rockettes was a huge hit and a wonderful memory. Mystery trips and visiting local wineries and breweries have made them feel young again. Zumba Gold swimming classes are planned for them using the Pool at Spinnaker Point in Portsmouth as well as line dancing classes and a singing group. Added for them is a Thanksgiving luncheon with entertainment and a Yankee Swap in December.

Existing Recreational Facilities

North Hampton School

The recently renovated North Hampton School has once again become an important recreational facility for the community. The school gymnasium is used for organized volleyball and basketball games. The land and trails behind the school are used for jogging, walking and cross country skiing. The local Boy Scout Troop 162 also uses the wooded areas behind the school for their inaugural camp out with new scouts. This "shakedown" campout allows new scouts to become part of the scout troop in a somewhat familiar setting and environment. The North Hampton Youth Association (NHYA), a private non-profit parent's organization, provides support for the Town's youth sports and organizes spring and fall soccer, T-ball, baseball and softball activities at the North Hampton School, Dearborn Park, and Knowles Field.

Dearborn Park

The other major town-owned recreation facility is Dearborn Park, a 5.4 acre parcel located on Route 111 just east of Interstate 95. Facilities at the park include two ball fields, four tennis/multipurpose courts, a playground, sliding hill and picnic tables. The ball fields are in good condition and the tennis courts are adequate as the surface has been repaired biannually. Both ball fields are used extensively during softball season by the School's teams and the NHYA softball teams. In the summer the North Hampton co-ed softball program uses the larger field several evenings weekly. Dearborn Park tennis courts were refinished in the summer of 2009 using Dearborn Park Capital Reserve Funds. The courts are used 24/7 by recreation instructors as well as residents and non-residents. Adult and children's tennis teams were formed in 2009 and have grown since then.

A playground was a welcomed addition in 2005, with a playground shade structure, added in the summer of 2010, both from funds donated by the Robie Mackin Charitable Foundation. Picnic tables and benches are placed amidst the playground area to further expand citizen use of the park. There is a softball field and a new K-2 baseball field with two dugouts and a pergola which were built and added to the pavilion to add more shade as a Timberland's Earth Day Project in 2010. The Pavilion allows for more shade and has a water faucet and bubbler. Dearborn is currently a carry in carry out park. People do not always adhere to the garbage rules and often leave behind their litter, which the Recreation Director often picks up.

Knowles Field

Another important recreational area in North Hampton is Knowles Field, located off Birch Road. Knowles Field is owned and maintained by the NHYA for residents of the town. The 4.91 acre parcel has a 200 foot by 300 foot playing surface that incorporates a Little League field and a junior soccer field. The playing fields are in good condition following recent improvements which included the installation of a second soccer field, as well as the construction of a concession stand that also provides for equipment storage. Initial ground work and plans have been made to increase the present size of the land available for use from 4.91 acres to 8.76 acres. The necessary approvals are currently being sought and the Youth Association hopes to have final approval in the near future. The NHYA also uses Dearborn Park and two private baseball fields

Woodland Road Conservation Land (Boise Forest)

The Town owns a 50 acre parcel of conservation land off Woodland Road that provides opportunities for passive recreational uses. Repairs and reconstruction of hiking trails have been completed as part of a Service Project by Jeff Bucklin, assisting him in achievement of the Eagle Scout rank. In the winter, when snow cover is adequate, cross country skiing is a popular use of the property. Several years ago the Conservation Commission prepared a pamphlet describing the land and mailed it to every resident to inform them of the parcel's existence and available uses.

Dalton Town Forest

Located on Exeter Rd. (Rt. 111), the town acquired the Dalton property as a part of the North Hampton Forever Land Conservation effort. It is made up of 8.9 acres of forested land. This parcel is a productive property and designated the town forest. It includes a recently improved access parking area and includes a beautiful old logging road which can now be utilized for walking.

Fogg Conservation Area

Located on Mill Rd., South of Atlantic Ave. (Rt. 111), this property was a gift to the town from the Fogg family. Made up of Tall Pines and Hemlock, the property has a nice logging road and can be utilized for a nice walk in the woods.

Marston Farm (Town Farm)

Located across the street from Dearborn Park, this parcel was acquired as a part of the North Hampton Forever Conservation effort. It has recently been put to work as a part of the North Hampton Agricultural Committee's focus on developing working farms in the town. This parcel now is hosting plots for town residents who wish to plant a vegetable or flower garden. Water and tilling is provided at a small cost.

Dustin Farm

Located on Winnicut road, this 51 acre parcel was acquired as a part of the North Hampton Forever Conservation effort. This beautiful parcel includes Barton's Brook, a tributary to the Winnicut River. With much gratitude, trails were developed with the assistance of the Boy Scouts. This trail allows for a wonderful stroll through forest and meadows and includes a loop trail.

Fuller Gardens

A non-profit facility which requires paid admission, this garden includes an amazing collection of roses, a Japanese garden and a tropical plant green house. It's a real gem along the Seacoast of NH, and while not a town owned facility, it is widely supported by the community.

State Beach

The State Beach in North Hampton is a regional recreation facility serving residents from throughout Rockingham County and tourists from many areas. Located on Ocean Boulevard, the 2.5 acre parcel includes a 1,000 foot sandy beach owned and maintained by the NH Park and Recreation Division. There is a small building with dressing rooms and restrooms on the site. Lifeguards and cleaning services are provided by the State. There are 110 metered parking spaces available for public use. The 1967 North Hampton Master Plan listed the lack of parking spaces reserved for town residents as a major concern. Convenient access and parking facilities are necessary in order to allow North Hampton residents to fully utilize the recreational opportunities available at the State Beach. In 1989 the State agreed to lease 16 parking spaces to the town at the State Beach. The town now sells parking stickers that are leased to the Town at \$600.00 per space. Residents can purchase beach stickers each year for \$20.00 from the town, but at times become frustrated when there is no parking or find that non-residents are parked there. Funds received offset the Recreation Commissions annual expenditure for rental of the spaces from the State.

In addition to the State Beach, North Hampton's remaining coastal shoreline provides many recreational opportunities. Bass Beach, north of Fox Hill Point, is a stone beach used in great part by surfers and saltwater fishermen. The shoreline around Little Boar's Head is a scenic area that attracts many people that come to watch the surf from the sea walls and walk the rocky coastline. There has been on-going concern on the service levels provided by the State, which has had difficulty maintaining the public restroom and as a pack in pack out beach, trash has been an issue, exasperated by the popularity of a seasonal eatery across the street from the State Park. A Citizen initiated organization called Friend's of North Hampton Beach meet monthly to clean up the beach of debris and trash left by individuals.

A list of recreation land owned by the Town, State or other groups is provided as Table R-1. Each of the recreational land areas is shown on the Recreations Land Map that is attached.

Table R-1

North Hampton Recreation Lands/Facilities

OWNER	TAX MAP/LOT	ACREAGE	DESCRIPTION/LOCATION
State of NH, DRED	001-000	±2.5	State Beach,
State of NH	none	---	Little Boar's Head
State of NH	none	---	Fox Hill Beach area
State of NH	none	---	Bass Beach
Town	002-051	50.66	Conservation Commission Land, Hiking Trails, Picnic Area
School District	007-161	82.76	School Play Fields
North Hampton Youth Association	014-101	4.91	Off Birch Road, Youth Baseball & Soccer Fields
Town	014-103	5.4	Dearborn Park: Tennis Courts, Play Fields, Baseball fields.
Town	09-23	8.8	Dalton Town Forest. Trails, Exeter Rd
Town	06-039	13.7	Fogg Conservation Area, Trails, Mill Rd
Town	22-24	51.74	Dustin Farm, Trails, Winnicut Rd

Importance of Recreational Areas

Parks and recreation have three values that make them essential to communities.

1. Economic Value

- Parks improve the local tax base and increase property values. It is proven that private property values increase the value of privately owned land the closer it is to parks.
- A Texas A & M review of 25 studies investigating whether parks and open space contributed positively to the property values of surrounding properties found that 20 of the 25 studies found that property values were higher.
- Quality parks and recreation are cited as one of the top three reasons that businesses cite relocation decisions in a number of studies.

2. Health and Environmental benefits

- Parks are the places that people go to get healthy and stay fit.
- Programs and services contribute to the health of children, youth adults and seniors.
- According to studies by the Centers of Disease Controls and Prevention, creating and improving and promoting places to be physically active can improve individual and community health and result in a 25 % increase of residents who exercise at least three times per week.
- Parks and protected lands are proven to improve water quality, protect groundwater, prevent flooding, improve the quality of air we breathe, provide vegetative buffers for development, produce habitat for wildlife and provide a place for children and families to connect with nature and recreate outdoors together.
- A study by Penn State University showed significant correlations to reduction in stress, lowered blood pressure and perceived physical health to the length of stay or visits to parks.

Importance of Recreational Areas (Continued)

3. Social importance

- Parks are a tangible reflection of the quality of life in a community. They provide identity for citizens and are a major factor in the perception of quality of life in a given community.
- Parks and recreation services are often cited as one of the most important factors in surveys of how livable communities are.
- Parks provide a gathering place for families and social groups as well as individuals of all ages and economic status, regardless of their ability to pay for access.
- Access to parks and recreation opportunities has been strongly linked to reductions in crime and reduced juvenile delinquency.
- Parks present a sense of public pride and cohesion to every community.

Annual Recreation Events:

There are four community events per year beginning with Winter Fest, which had its inaugural celebration in 2008. The purpose of this event is to celebrate the winter by bringing the community out and together. It has become a popular event, especially with the fireworks and bonfire celebration at Dearborn Park. The second event is the Egg Scramble Eggstravaganza. It occurs the week before Easter. The department owns a bunny suit and visits the town children before and after they run around the park and fill their baskets with eggs containing prizes. The third event is Olde Home Days which will return during the summer of 2011. The fourth event is the trick or treat “drop in” which the department partners with the Local Fire Department Union and provides a warm shelter, cider and cocoa and treats for the youngsters to come in and enjoy. The children especially love sitting in the fire trucks. The fifth event is the Breakfast with Santa. Families reserve seats and enjoy a pancake breakfast while their children decorate gingerbread and sit on Santa’s lap. This is a family favorite.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Continue adding to the Town’s inventory of recreation and conservation lands when prudent and fiscally appropriate.

2. Continue to support the concept of Revolving Capital Maintenance Fund to ensure proper maintenance over time at Dearborn Park, and to avoid sudden spikes in maintenance cost.
3. Look for opportunities to enhance and or expand playing fields via either public financing and or through public/private partnerships.
4. Continue to work with the state and citizen groups to improve basic services provided at North Hampton State Park Beach, including proper maintenance of the public restroom and the addition of basic foot showers for people departing the beach.
5. Work with the recreation department to identify conservation and recreation lands which may accommodate additional walking trails and mountain biking trails. Citizen desire for increased off-road bicycle trails rated high on the 2010 citizen survey.
6. Monitor closely, regional efforts to convert the former Boston and Maine rail line, which passes through town, from an unused rail line to a rail to trails facility linking Hampton with Portsmouth. Support should follow due diligence of impact on the town, which ensures that the line could revert back to rail service if such a future need were to exist.
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