



# Town of East Hampton Recreational Space Report

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## Executive Summary

As part of our 2013-2014 Priorities and Objectives in the area of Leisure, the Parks and Recreation Department was directed to accomplish the following project and measures:

RECREATION SPACE REPORT: Using the Town Owned Property Report review and identify additional recreational property needs.

Measures:

- Review current Town owned land report for gaps in service availability
- Develop a needs report and present it to the Town Manager and Town Council

## Introduction

Recreational space can be considered amenities such as public parks and recreational facilities. Our assessment of recreational needs will demonstrate a disparity in access to public parks and recreational facilities. The Town of East Hampton has invested in open space which serves to preserve a vital natural resource. However most of these open space properties have not been enhanced so as to maximize their appropriate use.

The 2006 Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) provided some guiding principles of things to encourage as a result of resident's input. Achieving a balance was the driving force in the following overall vision of the plan.

*Balance preservation of important resources with appropriate, diversified economic and residential development that meets community needs in order to protect East Hampton's rural small-town character and enhance the quality of life for its residents.*

To the residents of East Hampton that balance hinged on protecting important resources such as water and other natural resources, and preserving open space, historic and scenic resources. Maintain the rural small-town character. Address community needs by maintaining and enhancing quality community facilities and services.

Considering the value residents place on preservation it is worth noting that there are 5,897 acres of privately owned open space in East Hampton. This land is zoned residential and has the potential of being developed. These 5,897 acres are capable of supporting 3,530 additional housing units.

The recommendations in this report respect the POCD's vision and provide a plan to address the challenges of our residents by closing the gaps in services, as they correlate to recreational space needs.

## Methods Used

The Town Owned Property Report was prepared in November 2012 for the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board and the Town Council. For the purpose of this report, information was extrapolated from the categories identifying 3 types of Open Space: Parks, Usable and Limited Use.

Statistics and data from the 2006 POCD were also used.

Survey results from an online survey conducted by the Parks and Recreation Department at the end of 2012 were also used. These survey results were presented to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board and the Town Council in the "Parks and Recreation Summary for the month of November 2012". The survey sought input from residents with three major questions:



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1. What types of new recreational amenities do you think would benefit the Town of East Hampton?
2. What recreational activities have you or a family member engaged in over the past 12 months?
3. What park or parks outside of East Hampton have you or a family member visited in the last 12 months? What activities did you participate in?

The results from a second survey, geared toward recreational programming were also considered in developing the “needs” portion of this report.

In its advisory capacity, the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board support and guides the department in providing recreational opportunities for the community. The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB) has been engaged in ongoing discussions pertaining to recreational space needs over the years. The members recommendations, have also been incorporated into this report.

Statistical data from National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) was also used in researching national trends, benefits in the area of public parks.

Information from the Towns of East Lyme, CT and Hebron, CT was collected for the two case studies in this report.

### **Current Recreational Space**

As stated in the Town of East Hampton’s Property Report, ‘Usable and Park Open Space’ (66% Usable, 1% Park) accounts for 67% of the Town’s holdings. Board of Education’s Athletic Fields (5%) are the only sports fields for active recreation of this nature. The 1% park space is made up of Sears Park.

On average, the Parks and Recreation Department offers 240 classes or sessions of

recreational programming annually. Yet, the department does not have its own facility. This network of programming is offered within the confines of using others’ facilities.

The Parks and Recreation Department along with many other civic and sporting groups utilize the Board of Education’s (BOE) buildings and grounds for programming; particularly those that provide active recreation. This much appreciated partnership allows us to program during the after-school hours at no additional cost. Restrictions that lead to gaps in services include:

- Limited availability
  - Inability to offer programming while school is in session
  - Certain abatement projects require shut down of entire buildings by law
  - Gym floors are refinished and hall floors waxed in the month of August ending summer offerings in early to mid-August in schools
- Extremely limited gym space
  - Competing with High School and Middle School athletic teams; Soccer Club, Hawk Football and Cheerleading; East Hampton Little League; CYO Basketball and ourselves
- Limited open rooms for physical activities
  - Common or open areas have been reduced or eliminated
  - Lack of own space; Instructors haul all materials and supplies to and from programs
  - Utilizing classrooms is difficult and often not an option
- Confined to programming on custodial working hours
  - Prefer no Holidays, weekends or late evenings
  - During summer months programming must end at 3:00pm



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- Costs are incurred for weekend uses, when custodians are not on regular duty.

The East Hampton Community Center houses the Public Library, a community room, and the Senior Center. Restrictions of this facility include:

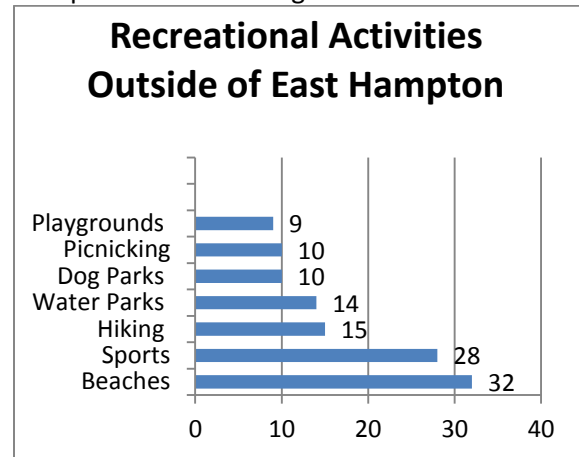
- The community room is heavily used by the public and the library for programing
- Library staff is often put in a position of aiding the program instructor with set up or questions
- The Senior Center does have a large room conducive to physically active programming. However funded with a grant; its use is restricted for the senior citizen age population only
- Other areas of the center are used daily by seniors. Projects, puzzles, books and other personal items are found throughout the rooms

Internal challenges that the Parks and Recreation Department faces involves the limitations of Sears Park, our only municipal park space. The park offers court sports, beach and waterfront, picnic areas an enclosed pavilion, boat launch and performing arts gazebo. Restrictions Include:

- The Pavilion is not heated and only usable from May – October
- The occupancy capacity is 80 and limited to one main room
- Lake Pocotopaug is plagued with algae blooms
- Sears Park Camp participants share the facilities with the public
- Sears Park has a residency requirement for parking; hindering opportunity for tourism

In our 2014 survey we wanted to find out: “What park or parks outside of East Hampton have you or a family member visited in the last 12 months? What activities did you participate in?”

On average families travelled 32 miles to gain access to parks beyond their community. The next graph shows the type of parks East Hampton residents sought out.



***What impact does the restricted access to recreational space have on our residents and community?***

### Underserved Demographic Groups

Whether you are a young parent looking for daytime programing, a baby boomer who wants to stay active, a latch key-kid, or a tween now too old for Sears Park Camp, there should be a service, program or facility that meets your needs. The reality in the Town of East Hampton is that for all of these demographic groups there are gaps in services because of various restrictions or lack of appropriate facilities.

According to the 1929-2000 U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010-2010 CT Office of Policy and Management, Series 95.1 Population Projections, School-Age children (ages 5-9) and young adults (ages 20-34) populations will be lower by 2020. Infants (ages 0-4), and middle ages (35-54) will be lower by 2020. Mature adults (ages 55-65) and retirement (65+) are significantly higher by 2020.

The following table shows the projected age distribution of the East Hampton residents in 2020.



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Population Age Breakdown 2020

Age	#	%
0-4	664	5%
5-19	1,820	14%
20-34	2121	17%
35-54	4,179	33%
55-64	2,087	16%
65+	1,971	15%

Currently the Town of East Hampton is faced with a number of social, economic, environmental and health challenges. We are no different than any other town, county or region when it comes to these factors. Where we are different is that we are not meeting national standards on park space per capita.

The impact of the baby boomer demographic on leisure services will be profound. In the United States there are 76 million baby boomers. By 2020 the percentage of residents 55 and older is expected to grow to nearly one-third of the total population. Less than 10% of recreation programs currently meet the needs of the boomer generation. The POCD refers to the important age trends and projections so that "East Hampton can plan to meet these varying needs through housing and other strategies as well as community facility and services improvements."

This generation is active and adventurous, has the financial resources to fund their recreation but often can't find local opportunities. They are caught between the "weekend warriors" and the "senior citizens" when it comes to appropriate programming.

Preschool age children's child care needs are well served in East Hampton with 3 large Day Care Centers and several home day cares. The East Hampton Public Library programs for this age group in their Children's Room and the Community Room with story time, and other related programs. When surveyed, the parents

of preschool age children were still looking for additional services from the Parks and Recreation Department. Currently the only programming we have for this age group is 3 options that are all only available during the summer.



*East Lyme Parks and Recreation Department's "Total Gym" Program*

The third area that is underserved according to survey results and staff experience is the Middle School age youth between 11- 15. Simply put these young people have limited options in the summer and after school while parents are at work. Historically this age group is best served by specific specialized programming by interests. There also has to be buy in or grouping of interest before enrolling. Lack of space has prevented the department from programming for this age group at the level we should be. Epoch Arts, on the other hand has been very successful at programming for these young people ages 11-15, who are often considered at risk. The practical side of their ability to do so is the fact that they occupy an old factory in the Village Center.



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### Health Implications

Increasing obesity rates in the United States fosters increased value on public parks and recreation centers as ways to improve public health. NRPA research shows that public health can be improved through the built environment with focus on safe, easy access to places and spaces to engage in physical activity. The national guideline on sufficient distribution of parkland ranges from 6 acres to 19 acres per 1000 of the population. They also report that creating spaces for physical activity has resulted in a 26% increase in the number of people that exercised at least three times a week.

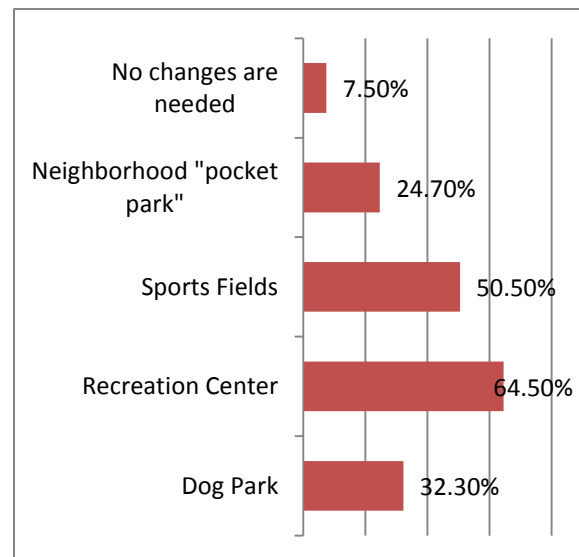
One initiative to improve the health of people and public parks that is gaining momentum is municipalities adopting ordinances or policies that make their parks smoke free. The ability to enforce these laws is supported by the State of Connecticut General Statute: Sec. 7-148, in which the state gives municipalities the power to (xvi) Regulate, on any property owned by the municipality, any activity deemed to be deleterious to public health, including the lighting or carrying of a lighted cigarette, cigar, pipe or similar device.

The Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) is spearheading "Tobacco Free Outdoor Spaces". Only 17% of Connecticut adults smoke. The Chatham Health District has received a grant from the State of Connecticut

to assist municipalities in Middlesex County make their parks "Smoke-Free". Tool Kits, complete with data, publicity, sample ordinances, free signage and smoking cessation tools will be provided to the 16 towns within Middlesex County.

### *How do we fill the gaps in serving our community's recreational needs?*

Based on survey results in the POCD we know how residents viewed preserving open space. The Parks and Recreation Department 2012 survey provided us with information on: "What improvements would you like to see made to East Hampton's recreational facilities"? We were interested in determining what areas of development the community would support. The next chart shows those findings based on 148 responses.



### *What would the benefits be of investing in public parks, and recreational facilities?*

- Nearly 1.2 million Connecticut residents expend more than \$500 million annually engaging in wildlife viewing, and recreational anglers in Connecticut annually





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contribute nearly \$250 million to the economy and support 4,400 jobs

- Residential property values are increased when homes are adjacent to protected open spaces or have a view provided by the preservation of open space for outdoor recreation
- New multipurpose trail development represent the single largest contribution to the new supply of outdoor recreation opportunities in the past six years
- The preservation of just 1094 acres:
  - Means 365 houses cannot be built (based on average density of subdivisions)
  - 365 houses would mean 1040 more people
  - Approximately 270 more school age children
- According to the American Farmland Trust's Cost of Community Services Studies (COCS) conducted in 25 states, for every tax dollar communities realize from residential development, they deliver an average of \$1.16 in services. The COCS studies also demonstrated that for each tax dollar communities received from privately held open and working lands, they only expended .35 cents in services.



Burnt Hill Park, Hebron CT

### Case Study #1: Municipal Parks for Active Recreation

In 1998 the Town of Hebron Connecticut established an Open Space Land Acquisition Committee. By ordinance (#98-1) the committee was charged with evaluating and recommending open space land purchases to the Board of Selectmen. The ordinance also created a land acquisition fund. The fund is financed mostly by an annual appropriation of up to ½ of a mil but is also funded by fees in lieu of open space dedications, grants and donations.

Hebron, CT Open Space Fund Balance Status  
(from July 1, 1998 to January 31, 2014)

Revenues	
Town General Fund	\$2,729,695.00
State Grants	\$397,300.00
Fees-in-lieu of Open Space	\$131,080.55
Donations	\$5,253.53
Investment Earnings	\$175,340.84
Total:	\$3,438,669.92
Expenditures	
Acquisition	\$2,871,404.52
Surveys	\$46,318.57
Site Assessments	\$28,039.41
Appraisals	\$30,290.00
Other	\$586.94
Total:	\$2,976,639.44
Fund Balance:	\$462,030.48



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Since the ordinance was established the Town of Hebron has acquired 448 acres of land. The State of Connecticut has preserved 195 acres and purchased the development rights of 411 acres of farmland, permanently preserving 1,094 acres or 22.8% of the land in Hebron.

Based on the Town of East Hampton's Property report (November 2012) we have preserved 751 acres of open space, but only 4 acres of that is municipal park space with active recreation opportunities; Sears Park or 1%.

Out of the 448 acres of land preserved by the Town of Hebron 194 acres offer access to active recreation, or 43%.

One example of land purchased for multi-use, active recreation is Burnt Hill Park, located at 148 East Street, Hebron.

Burnt Hill Park is 171 acres and includes:

- 2 baseball fields
- 2 football/Lacrosse Fields
- 1 soccer field
- Walking trails
- Pavilion
- Bathrooms
- Park Operations Building

According to Parks and Recreation Director Rich Calarco the design and construction of this park cost \$4,200,000.00. During the 3 sporting seasons on average 1500 to 2000 people use the park per week.

Other municipally owned parks for active recreation in the Town of Hebron:

Veterans Memorial Park

This is a town-owned park located on a 17-acre site. It contains the following facilities:

- Soccer field
- Two children's Playscapes
- A skateboard park
- A small baseball field

- A walking trail
- Bathrooms and concession
- An outdoor basketball court
- A softball field

### Old Colchester Road Field

This is a town-owned field located on a 3.8-acre site with a baseball/softball field with 60-foot baselines, and a small soccer field that is superimposed over the outfield of the baseball/softball field.

### St. Peter's Field

This is a baseball field is on land leased from St. Peter's Episcopal Church, and consists of 70-foot baseball field.



### Case Study #2: Municipal Recreation/Community Centers

The Town of East Lyme, Connecticut has a "Community Center" that is occupied by the Parks and Recreation Department, Youth Services, the Senior Center and the Library. The Community Center is approximately 35,948 square feet. The Parks, Recreation and Youth Services Department have approximately 5700 square feet. This includes an Activity Room which is 3200 sq. ft. and a Youth Center that is 1500 square feet.



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The Activity room is an open space (that can be partitioned) used for fitness classes, dance lessons, yoga, drama classes, crafts, and movement classes. The Youth Center is used for cooking, instruction, drama, clubs, DARE, music and theater. Programming is offered 6 days a week, daytime and evenings.

Based on programs ran solely in the Community Center, annually the East Lyme Parks, Recreation and Youth Services serves approximately:

- 118 Pre-School Age Children: Offering 280 classes/sessions
- 335 Middle School Age Children and 120 Teenagers: Offering 112 classes/sessions
- 915 Adults: Offering 512 classes/sessions

### Recommendations

Create an Open Space Committee or charge the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board with the responsibility of establishing goals and objectives regarding the perseveration and enhancement of open space for active and passive recreation as well as conservation. The committee would create a strategic plan intended to result in recreational spaces necessary to expand services for the underserved population of the community.

The committee and/or plan will:

- Make regular recommendations to the Town Manager and Town Council
- Continue to research best practices for open space preservation
- Work with staff and land use boards and commissions
- Identify important parcels of land for preservation within the guidelines of state and local planning. Foster an



*East Lyme Youth Services "What's Cooking For Kids" Program for youth*

understanding of the value and benefits of parks and recreational spaces

- Make citizens an integral part of the public decision making process
- Plan for appropriate improvements to existing open space properties for passive recreation
- Invest in amenities such as signage, picnic shelters, and trail systems appropriate for passive recreation (think of the simple amenities in Hurd State Park)
- Create a respectful mechanism for approaching land owners about future land acquisitions
- Plan for the development of multipurpose parks and community center(s) for active recreation
- Recommend funding mechanisms on local, state and federal levels; i.e. fee-in-lieu of open space; grants and development rights

### Sources:





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A Vision for East Hampton 2006 Plan of Conservation and Development

Town of East Hampton-Fiscal Year 2014-2015 Town Council Budget Policy Statement

National Parks & Recreation Association; Parks and Recreation in Underserved Areas; A Public Health Perspective

National Parks & Recreation Association; From Interest to Commitment: The Citizen Connection

National Parks and Recreation Association; Parks Build Healthy Communities: Success Stories

National Parks and Recreation Association; Parks and Recreation: Essential Partners in Active Transportation

Leisure Programming For Baby Boomers

Connecticut Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2011-2106

Hebron, Connecticut Open Space Land Acquisition Committee; Presentation on Open Space Land Acquisition Plan, Policies, Accomplishments, Benefits & On-going Activities March 2014

East Lyme's Events Magazines; Volume 1; Quarters 1, 2, 3 and 4: 2013