

TOWN OF MIDDLETOWN, RI
RECREATION, CONSERVATION AND
OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN



SUBMITTED TO

*Town of Middletown,
Rhode Island*

SUBMITTED BY

*Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc.
101 Walnut Street
Watertown, Massachusetts*



Contents

Introduction	2
Goals and Objectives.....	3
Demographics	5
Overview of Middletown Open Space and Recreation Resources	7
Active Recreation	8
Passive Open Space Resources	10
Open Space Preservation.....	11
Facility Demand and Condition.....	12
Facility Standards	13
Facility Maintenance.....	20
New Facility Costs	21
Facility Needs and Recommendations.....	22
Goals, Objectives and Implementation.....	30

Appendices

Appendix A	Middletown Open Space Inventory
Appendix B	CRMC Rights-of-Way
Appendix C	Sakonnet Greenway Trail
Appendix D	Open Space and Fields Committee: Open Space and Recreation Acquisition Policy
Appendix E	Site Visit Notes and Photographs
Appendix F	Maps
Appendix G	Public Outreach Summary

Middletown Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Master Plan

Introduction

Rhode Island's Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan discusses the importance of assessing the needs as part of the recreation and open space planning process.

Effective analysis of needs and establishment of priorities are crucial in decision-making and resource allocation. Clear identification of public priorities and needs is basic to all good public decision-making and this strongly applies to choices in conserving natural environments and high quality community design. Priorities do shift and interests change somewhat over time and generations. Changes in the make-up and life-styles of our communities, families and households lead to needs for some adjustments in facilities and their support systems. Market driven threats to critical natural resources, such as fragile habitat and community open space opportunities, increase the urgency for conservation projects in key locations.

Managing, improving and expanding the recreation and natural resource system is always extremely challenging. The challenge is certain to become increasingly complicated as Rhode Island faces mounting pressures of land development, increasing property values and constrained state and municipal budgets. Setting priorities, making effective choices and maximizing resource use depends upon good information systems and sound analysis.¹

This Recreation, Conservation, and Open Space (RCOS) Plan was created by reviewing the initial work done by the Town in 2008, including the survey prepared by the Town, along with the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats analysis conducted as part of that planning process. Additionally, input was provided during the April 22, 2010 public forum and the stakeholder interviews carried out in February and March 2010. Site visits were also undertaken in March and April 2010 as part of the needs assessment in order to visually identify both the positive and negative attributes of Middletown's open space and recreation resources. This effort focused on the most visited recreational properties, particularly ones where the Town plays some role in maintenance and management of the facility. This analysis summarizes the major recreation and open space issues and concerns facing the Town in 2010 and beyond. The focus of this plan is on publicly owned or managed facilities rather than private ones that may have limited or no public access.

¹ Rhode Island Department of Administration Statewide Planning Program and Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, Ocean State Outdoors: Rhode Island's Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2003, p. 3.1

Goals and Objectives

VISION STATEMENT

Open space within Middletown includes an abundance of diverse natural areas which offer passive recreational opportunities while preserving agricultural lands, wildlife habitat, sensitive ecosystems and water quality. Residents value an active and healthy lifestyle and will take advantage of the many quality recreation programs, facilities, and trails offered by the town. Increased public access to the water, acquisition of additional open space lands, management of recreational facilities, and development of multi-use paths will be priorities for the town.

GOAL I **Identify and develop new recreational facilities to ensure that the Town meets the ongoing recreation needs of the community.**

- OBJECTIVES**
1. Meet community recreation needs through the development, implementation and management of a plan designed to fulfill the expressed needs of the Town residents.
 2. Reassess demand and needs for playing fields at least every two years.
 3. Work with potential partners to develop appropriate open spaces for playing fields to meet demand.
 4. Look for opportunities to establish parks and open spaces accessible to all neighborhoods.

GOAL II **Maintain and improve recreational facilities to meet needs identified during the planning process.**

- OBJECTIVES**
1. Continue to identify key maintenance and improvement needs in Town recreational facilities.
 2. Prioritize park maintenance and focus on neglected areas that experience the highest use.
 3. Administer and fund an active recreation program that ensures the efficient and effective maintenance and repair of recreational facilities.

GOAL III **Acquire additional open space sites for passive recreational opportunities.**

- OBJECTIVES**
1. Continue to look for opportunities to expand the passive open space inventory through collaboration with partners such as the Aquidneck Land Trust.
 2. Expand the inventory of preserved open space and natural resources that are beneficial to cultural, civic and environmental values while allowing for public access.
 3. Work towards providing additional connections between open space parcels to create an integrated network of green corridors.
 4. Provide opportunities for community gardens.

GOAL IV Properly manage and maintain open space sites.

- OBJECTIVES**
1. Develop a formal framework for conservation-oriented land management plans that address town-wide and site-specific use, maintenance, and improvement of open spaces.
 2. Increase public awareness and community stewardship of the Town's recreational and open space facilities.

GOAL V Expand public access to water based recreational opportunities.

- OBJECTIVES**
1. Acquire and develop key parcels and sites for west side access for boating, fishing, and passive activities.
 2. Preserve beaches at current level of development.
 3. Move forward with plans to improve the beach facilities as needed.

GOAL VI Expand and enhance the trail system in Middletown.

- OBJECTIVES**
1. Work with Aquidneck Land Trust and other landowners to expand and connect the trail network on open space parcels.
 2. Look for opportunities to establish multi-use trails such as the proposed path along Shoreline Drive.
 3. Establish bike paths/lanes that connect neighborhoods to the Town's open space and recreational resources.

GOAL VII Promote active and healthy lifestyles in Middletown.

- OBJECTIVES**
1. Develop and promote a varied active recreation program that is accessible to residents of all ages.
 2. Work with leagues and similar entities to reach out to families to promote organized programs for people of all ages.
 3. Promote the development of infrastructure that will encourage residents to exercise, such as bike paths.

Demographics

The beneficiaries of adequate, well-balanced RCOS resources are the citizens of the community and those transient visitors who are drawn to town by those resources. An effective RCOS program provides direct and indirect benefits to the community, at large, in that it contributes to the fulfillment of the community's emotional, physical, societal and economic needs. Forward looking population trends are vital to a progressive program. To be effective, the program must anticipate and be responsive to future projections. In this context, the 1988 RCOS plan predicted an aging, graying, yet stable population. Therefore, the rational allocation of existing resources and acquisition of additional resources must be sensitive to the distribution of the projected population within the Town's neighborhoods.

Population in Middletown was characterized by a constant growth rate from 1900 until 1940. From then until the Navy cutbacks in April 1973, the growth rate accelerated and exceeded county and state rates. The reduced activity at the Naval Base caused a decrease in total population in the town between 1970 and 1975. Table 1 shows the population from 1900 to 2000 and the projected population for 2010. Previous studies of population changes indicated that most gains are the direct result of in-migration rather than natural increases. However, recent population decreases may be attributable to:

- More homes have been purchased for use as second homes
- Child population has decreased
- The methodology used by the U.S. Census Bureau with regard to the numbers of Navy personnel
- Reduction of naval personnel at the base

The population projections shown at Table 1 for the years beyond 2000 were obtained from estimates prepared by the U. S. Census Bureau. Since Middletown is more susceptible to the various conditions and factors which affect the rate of growth, a deviation of the actual population from projected population is possible, but will be confirmed as soon as the 2010 census data becomes available.

Table 1
Population Trends/Projections

Year	Population	Numerical Change	Rate Change (%)
1900	1,475	-	-
1910	1,708	251	17.2
1920	2,094	386	22.5
1930	2,499	405	19.3
1940	3,379	880	35.2
1950*	7,382	4,003	118.5
1960	12,675	5,293	71.7

Year	Population	Numerical Change	Rate Change (%)
1965**	19,562	6,887	54.3
1970	29,290	9,728	49.7
1975***	15,400	-13,890	-47.7
1980	17,216	1,816	11.7
1990	19,460	2,244	13.0
2000	17,334	-2,126	-10.9
2010****	16,037	-1,297	-7.0

Source: State Department of Administration, Division of Planning and U. S. Census Bureau

* Military personnel prior to the 1950 census were counted as part of the population of their respective hometowns.

** 1965 R. I. State count for reapportionment.

*** Decrease caused by decrease in Navy population.

**** Projected population per the U. S. Census Bureau

Age groups listed at Table 2 indicate that approximately 72.8% of the Town's population was below the age of 44 in 1990, while those aged 45 and above represented 27.2% of the population. The 2000 census shows the percentage increased from 27% to 37.6% for those over age 45. Therefore, as the median age grows older (31.2 years in 1990 to 37.7 years in 2000), the diversity of recreation facilities must keep pace with the age trend: the user population. A secondary but related consideration is the distribution of the user population within the town boundaries and the access that neighborhood residents have to the Town's open spaces and park and recreation facilities.

Table 2
Broad Age Groups – Distribution by Age Groups

Age	Population (% of Total Age Groups)	
	1990	2000
Under 5	1,465 (7.6)	1,210 (6.9)
5 – 19	4,133 (21.2)	3,411 (19.7)
20 – 44	8,556 (44.0)	6,216 (35.8)
45 – 64	3,001 (15.4)	3,918 (22.8)
65 +	2,305 (11.8)	2,579 (14.8)
Total	19,460 (100.0)	17,334 (100)

Sex	1990	2000
Male	10,280	8,434
Female	9,180	8,900

Median Age	1990	2000
	31.2	37.7

Source: State Department of Administration, Division of Planning and U. S. Census Bureau

Overview of Middletown Open Space and Recreation Resources

The Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act defines open space as:

Any parcel or area of land or water set aside for public or private use or enjoyment or for the use and enjoyment of owners and occupants of land adjoining or neighboring such open space; provided that the area may be improved with only those buildings, structures, streets, and off-street parking, and other improvements that are designed to be incidental to the natural openness of the land.

By this definition, open space may be either permanently protected or subject to conversion (e.g., private golf courses, land enrolled in the Farm, Forest, and Open Space Program, etc.).²

A better working definition for open space is “*conservation land, recreation land, agricultural land, corridor parks and amenities such as small parks, green buffers along roadways or any open area that is owned by an agency or organization dedicated to conservation*”, as defined by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs.

As detailed in the Open Space Inventory (see Appendix A), Middletown has 2,322.30 acres of land that can be classified as open space or recreational land. This includes agricultural land; playing fields; parks; land set aside for conservation and water resource protection; private recreation or conservation properties; and undeveloped land. It is important to note that even though land may be identified as open space in this Plan, it should not be assumed that such land is protected in perpetuity. There are several levels of protection and the inventory identifies those parcels that are permanently protected.³ Typically, parks and ballfields, for example, are not permanently protected. Active recreational land comprises 635.5 acres and passive open space occupies 1,686.8 acres of land. The land may be owned and/or managed by the Town of Middletown, the City of Newport, the Middletown School Department, the Aquidneck Land Trust, the State of Rhode Island, the federal government, or other private individuals and entities. Map 1 in Appendix F shows the location of each of these properties.

² Rhode Island Department of Administration Division of Planning, Statewide Planning Program Land Use 2025, State Guide Plan Element 121, Report 109, p. 3-27

³ There are generally three levels of protection for conserved land: perpetual conservation restriction, deed restriction, and conservation intent alone. For more details on these tools, see <http://www.ailt.org/howconserve.asp?sec=2&rec=5>.

Active Recreation

The Town of Middletown has a very dynamic parks and recreation program. A wide variety of leagues and programs utilize the parks and fields on a regular basis through three seasons each year. Participation in the programs and leagues are at capacity for many sports and the fields are constantly in use. In addition, there are numerous opportunities for residents and visitors to take advantage of the Town's open space resources for a variety of passive activities, such as walking, hiking, and enjoying scenic vistas and observing wildlife. The beaches, which are considered to be among the best in Southern New England, are heavily visited during the summer months and particularly on weekends and holidays.

As demonstrated by the information provided by representatives from the various recreational leagues, demand for fields and facilities exceeds the supply in many cases. This leads to scheduling issues, particularly if weather conditions preclude scheduled games from being played, resulting in the need to find time for rescheduled games in an already crowded schedule.

The following is a list of existing public fields and recreational facilities in Middletown⁴:

- Baseball/softball fields
 - 2 tee ball fields at Oliphant School
 - One Minor M (Machine Pitch) baseball at Gaudet Middle School
 - One Minor MM/MMM (Machine Pitch/Player Pitch) field – lower field at Aquidneck School
 - One Majors Division field – upper field at Aquidneck School (games and practice)
 - One youth softball at Aquidneck School
 - One men's softball field (Pottsey Field at the West Main Recreation Complex)
 - One baseball field at Middletown High School
 - One girls softball field at Middletown High School
 - One Babe Ruth baseball field (War Memorial Field)
- One football field (Gaudet Middle School)
- One running/walking track (Gaudet Middle School)

⁴ Note that there are several private facilities in Middletown that include golf courses and tennis courts, but public access is limited and may include a fee if available for public use.

- Five outdoor basketball courts (two at Gaudet Middle School, Forest Avenue School, Howland Park, West Main Road Recreation Complex) and one indoor court (Middletown High School)
- Five tennis courts (Gaudet Middle School)
- Seven playgrounds (Aquidneck School, Forest Avenue School, Linden Park, Howland Park, Kennedy School, Oliphant School, Gaudet Middle School)
- Five soccer fields (three at Wyatt Road, two Pee Wee fields at Middletown High School)
- Gymnasiums available for indoor recreation (limited to after-school hours) at Forest Avenue School, Gaudet Middle School, Middletown High School
- Miscellaneous multi-use/practice fields, broadly defined (Gaudet Middle School, Linden Park, Middletown High School)
- Walking/hiking trails at Albro Woods, Demery Memorial Park, Norman Bird Sanctuary, Paradise Valley Park, and Sachuest Point Wildlife Refuge. The Aquidneck Land Trust established the Sakonnet Greenway Trail which is the longest trail on Aquidneck Island (approximately nine miles when completed). It connects a number of open space parcels in Middletown.

Additionally, the Town is fortunate to have extensive beach areas that provide access to the coast. The beaches are arguably the most significant open space and recreation resource in Middletown. They are heavily utilized and enhance the quality of life for residents as well as visitors. Second Beach is 1 ¼ miles long public beach and includes saltwater swimming, a picnic area, saltwater fishing, kayaking, a bird watching trail, volleyball, and windsurfing. Third Beach is also a public beach (along with some semi-private beachfront property) that also offers swimming, fishing, bird watching, and picnicking.

Based upon the sale of beach passes and parking data, beach usage increased substantially in 2007 and 2008, but fell to the lowest levels in the five year timeframe in 2009 (see Table 3). This is likely due to the unusually cool and wet summer weather in 2009, as well as the fee increase coupled with the struggling economy. Given the dry and hot summer in 2010, the numbers rebounded – 2,206 resident passes and 2,789 non-resident passes. Seasonal beach pass fees were \$45 (resident) and \$90 (non-resident) from 2005-2008, but were increased to \$50 (resident) and \$100 (non-resident) in 2009. In FY 2011, the fees are \$70 for residents and \$140 for non-residents. Day passes are \$10 on weekdays and \$20 on weekends and holidays.

Table 3

Number of Vehicles Visiting Second and Third Beaches: 2005 – 2009

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Resident passes	2,027	2,144	2,096	2,194	1,930	2,206
Non-resident passes	2,436	2,615	2,826	2,961	2,240	2,789
Total Daily Parking	35,958	35,767	40,865	43,841	28,996	52,721

Source: Middletown Recreation Department

Passive Open Space Resources

Middletown is home to a variety of preserved and undeveloped open spaces that offer protection of environmental resources, scenic vistas, trail networks, and passive recreational opportunities. This includes 28 properties conserved by Aquidneck Land Trust (ALT) that are located in Middletown (three include some portion in Portsmouth). Sixteen of those properties are accessible to the public, including those that have recreational fields used by Middletown residents. Other open space parcels are conserved by easement, some for agricultural purposes, which limits the public access.

In terms of passive use open spaces, the Town has several places that are currently accessible to the public, even though some are privately-owned. Notable large open space parcels include the privately-owned Norman Bird Sanctuary (263 acres) and publicly-owned Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge (233 acres), both of which are located adjacent to the beaches. Smaller passive spaces include the town-owned Paradise Valley Park (almost 15 acres) and Albro Woods (almost 9 acres).

In addition to the beaches, public access to the shore is provided through the wildlife refuge. Additionally, the Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) has designated several small parcels as public rights of way. A map and description of these parcels can be found in Appendix B. However, access along Narragansett Bay is limited by the presence of the U.S. Navy.

Of particular significance is the ALT's Sakonnet Greenway Trail (see Appendix C for the trail map), which is currently about five miles long and runs from Linden Lane and the Glen in Portsmouth to Newport National Golf Course along Wapping Road and then west to Mitchell Lane. By 2011, another four miles will be added to the trail network across Mitchell Lane, which will run through several open spaces between East Main Road and Wyatt Road. This trail is the longest on Aquidneck Island and is a valued resource that creates a connected network through numerous open space holdings. The trails are open to pedestrians and on designated sections of the trail, equestrian use.

Open Space Preservation

A number of the properties on the inventory are not publicly accessible and are preserved primarily for conservation purposes. This includes a number of parcels owned by either the City of Newport or the Newport Water Department for watershed protection purposes. As mentioned above, wildlife habitat is an important part of Middletown's open space, particularly the Norman Bird Sanctuary and the Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge. Additional parcels are preserved specifically for agricultural uses and may not be accessible to the public. A number of the conservation parcels are under the ownership of ALT.

ALT identifies that primary benefits for conserving open space:

- Protecting agricultural land and fresh local farm products
- Preserving wildlife habitat and biodiversity
- Maintaining the Island's desirability as a place to live, work and visit
- Securing public recreational space and healthy fun outdoor opportunities
- Conserving water resource areas and clean drinking water
- Keeping scenic vistas and the charm and beauty of our Island
- Saving money for municipalities and taxpayers⁵

The Town of Middletown has adopted an Open Space and Recreation Acquisition Policy used by the Open Space and Fields Committee when recommending potential acquisitions for open space and recreational purposes to the Town Council. Nine specific criteria were established from which each parcel is ranked using a point score assessment (0 to 3 points per criteria for a maximum total of 27 points). The criteria are as follows:

1. Groundwater and watershed protection potential;
2. Ecologically significant habitat;
3. Proximity to other protected land;
4. Farmland preservation;
5. Historic/cultural/scenic qualities;
6. Size of parcel;
7. Potential to offset the impact of residential development;
8. Leverage of Town funds in project acquisition; and
9. Potential for recreational use.

A copy of this policy can be found in Appendix D.

⁵ <http://www.ailt.org/whyconserve.asp?sec=2&rec=4>

Facility Demand and Condition

The various recreational and league programs serve large numbers of residents (and in some cases also from neighboring communities). For example, the Middletown Youth Soccer Club has approximately 800 players. The Middletown Little League has 500 participants and the Pop Warner football and cheerleading programs serve 250 – 300 children. This can put enormous strain on the fields and results in juggling of schedules in order to accommodate everyone. On the other hand, programs such as men's softball and pick-up basketball tend not to have too many conflicts in the scheduling of fields and courts, despite having to work around school activities, as is the case with the basketball program. Youth wrestling indicated the need for more time to use the gym at Gaudet Middle School.

Demand for the facilities is high and there is often competing uses for the playing fields. School uses have priority for fields, which limits community or league access at certain times – generally until 5:00 or 5:30 PM. School teams at different levels (varsity, junior varsity, etc.) sometimes participate in the use of a single field at the Middle School and High School. At the Aquidneck Elementary School, over 14 teams are vying to play games on two fields and nine softball teams play on one field. Middletown Babe Ruth uses the same field (War Memorial Field at Berkeley Peckham) that is used by Gaudet Middle School baseball and Middletown High School freshman. Additionally, programs such as Island Youth Lacrosse and Pop Warner need to access fields as well. The available practice fields are scattered around the Town and are either inadequately sized or are in less than ideal condition for the intended use. Thus, scheduling the use of these various facilities is a juggling act between the different entities that can be complicated by two major factors:

- The popularity of the league programs results in the fielding of numerous teams
- Weather related cancellations tend to multiply during the course of the season since many games and practices can be affected.

Facility conditions vary widely depending upon the use, level of activity, and maintenance schedule for each facility. Specific conditions for the Town's various facilities are noted in the inventory and the site visit notes (both appended to this Plan). In summary, the major concerns with the Town's open space and recreation facilities fall into the following categories:

- Drainage – a number of fields have poor drainage resulting in ponding of water in the fields, sidelines, dugouts, etc. (lower and main baseball fields on Aquidneck Ave., Little League field at Gaudet Middle School). As a result, games need to be rescheduled even when the weather is suitable for playing.
- Grading – some fields, tee-ball in particular, are not graded properly and are not level.
- Bathrooms – some fields and parks have no restroom facilities.

- Accessory equipment – most of the baseball fields have rusting or broken fences and backstops; benches or stands that are in a state of disrepair; no dugouts or benches for the teams using the field; and storage areas that are inadequate or have a leaking roof.
- Parking – inadequate parking was noted at several locations
- Proximity of playing field to roads and homes – some fields are either improperly located or are sized too small for its current use. As a result, potential hazards or conflicts exist between the field use and the surrounding area. Netting has been used on some occasions to prevent balls from leaving the field and potentially damaging cars or homes.

Appendix E provides photographs and maps of the major open space and recreation resources in Middletown. For each park or open space, notes are provided relating to the use and condition of each facility.

Facility Standards

There are a few sources available for quantifying standards for recreation and open space facilities. Rhode Island established standards through its statewide planning program. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) established guidelines used around the country for the size and number of different types of facilities, as well as their location in relationship to nearby residential areas that would be served by such facilities.⁶ A review of sources used by the landscape architects in designing recreation and open space facilities reveals general consistency with the NRPA standards.

Statewide standards for local recreation, conservation, and open space were established by the RI State Planning Council/Recreation Resources Review Committee in June 1989 (see Table 4).

Table 4
RI Local Recreation, Conservation, and Open Space Standards (1989)

Type of Facility	Age Group	Acres /1,000 People	Size (acres)	Preferred Location	Suggested Facilities
PLAY AREAS/ PLAYGROUNDS Primarily a center for young children but may also include a park for passive recreation for all ages.	All	1.25	1 - 5	Adjacent to elementary school within ½ to a mile walking distance, or center of a neighborhood.	Space for a combination softball, baseball, football fields; basketball, tennis and badminton courts, an area for passive recreation for young and old; wading pool; informal play area.

⁶ These standards are generally adopted by other reference materials for landscape architects and recreational facility design.

PLAYFIELDS An area for active, organized activities that require more space than a playground, yet including one section as a developed playground.	15 +	1.25	12 – 20	Adjacent to junior or senior high schools, or center of four or five neighborhoods.	Children's playground, game courts, lawn areas, swimming pool, special features, landscaped area, parking area, field house, facilities for highly organized sports, recreation building, diversified facilities.
NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS	All	2.5	Up to 25 +	Center of a neighborhood: may be connected with a school or community center; part of a playground or playfield.	Places for sitting, sunning, walking. May consist of landscaped "buffer strips" between uncongenial land uses: "greenways" or any natural or scenic features where possible to give a leisurely park feeling.
LARGE PARKS AND SPECIAL AREAS	All	5 – 8	Up to 100	Community wide	Picnic areas, swimming, boating facilities, winter sports, gardens, fishing, golf, camping, scenic drives, hiking, nature trails, bridle paths, camping facilities, marinas.
CONSERVATION AREA Areas so designated to conserve unique natural resources of the area.	All	Based on availability	Based on availability	Community wide	Woods, beaches, rocky areas, marshes, and open fields containing farms and wildlife species that should be protected. To be used for passive recreation.

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

Additionally, the NRPA guidelines provide recommendations for the size of the playing fields. These can serve as useful comparisons with the inventory of facilities in Middletown listed above. The purpose of these guidelines is to present park and recreation space recommendations that are applicable for planning, acquisition, and development of park, recreation, and open space lands, primarily at the community level. They should be interpreted according to the particular situation to which they are applied and specific local needs. Thus, even if the Town exceeds these guidelines, the ultimate demand is determined by the number of users and the degree to which there are waiting lists or scheduling pressures associated with certain facilities. The guidelines relating to the parks, open spaces, and pathways found or potentially planned in Middletown are outlined in the Table 5 below.

Table 5
NRPA Parks and Open Space Classifications (1995)

Parks, Open Space, and Pathways Classification Table			
Parks and Open Space Classifications			
Classification	General Description	Location	Size Criteria
Mini-Park	Used to address limited, isolated or unique recreational needs	Less ¼ mile distance in residential setting	Between 2500 sq. ft. and one acre in size
Neighborhood Park	Neighborhood park remains the basic unit of the park system and serves as the recreational and social focus of the neighborhood. Focus is on informal activity and passive recreation	¼ mile to ½ mile distance and uninterrupted by non-residential roads and other physical barriers	5 acres is considered minimum size. 5 to 10 acres is optimal
School Park	Depending on circumstances, combining parks with school sites can fulfill the space requirements for other classes of parks, such as neighborhood, community, sports complex, and special use	Determined by location of school district property	Variable depends on function
Community Park	Serves broader purpose than neighborhood park. Focus is on meeting community-based recreation needs, as well as preserving unique landscapes and open spaces	Determined by the quality and suitability of the site. Usually serves two or more neighborhoods within a ½ to 3 mile distance	As needed to accommodate desired uses. Usually between 30 and 50 acres
Large Urban Park	Large urban parks serve a broader purpose than community parks and are used when community and neighborhood parks are not adequate to serve the needs of the community. Focus is on meeting community-based recreational needs as well as preserving unique landscapes and open spaces	Determined by the quality and suitability of the site. Usually serves the entire community.	As needed to accommodate desired uses. Usually a minimum of 50 acres with 75 or more acres being optimal
Natural Resource Areas	Lands set aside for preservation of significant natural resources, remnant landscapes, open space and visual aesthetics or buffering.	Resource availability and opportunity	Variable

Greenways	Effectively tie the park system components together to form a continuous park environment.	Resource availability and opportunity	Variable
Sports Complex	Consolidates heavily programmed athletic fields and associated facilities to larger and fewer sites strategically located throughout the community	Strategically located community-wide facilities	Determined by projected demand usually a minimum of 25 acres with 40 to 80 acres being optimal
Special Use Park	Covers a broad range of parks and recreation facilities oriented toward single-purpose use	Variable – dependent on specific use	Variable
Private Park/Recreation Facility	Parks and recreational facilities that are privately owned yet contribute to the public park and recreation system	Variable – dependent on specific use	Variable

Pathway Classifications		
Classification	General Description	Description of Each Type
Park Trail	Multi-purpose trails located within greenways, parks and natural resource areas. Focus is on recreational value and harmony with the natural environment.	<p>Type I: Separate/single-purpose hard-surfaced trails for pedestrians or bicyclists/in-line skates.</p> <p>Type II: Multipurpose hard-surfaced trails for pedestrians and bicyclists/in-line skaters.</p> <p>Type III: Nature trails for pedestrians, which may use either hard or soft surfaces.</p>
Connector Trails	Multipurpose trails that emphasize safe travel for pedestrians to and from parks and around the community. Focus is as much on transportation as it is on recreation	<p>Type I: Separate/single-purpose hard-surfaced trails for pedestrians or bicyclists/in-line skates located in independent Rights-of-ways (ROWS) e.g., old railroad ROW.</p> <p>Type II: Separate/single-purpose hard-surfaced trails for pedestrians or bicyclists/in-line skates. Typically, located within road ROW.</p>
All-Terrain Bike Trail	Off-road trail for all terrain (mountain) bikes	Single-purpose loop trails usually located in larger parks and natural resource areas.
Cross-Country Ski Trail	Trails developed for traditional and skate-style cross-country skiing	Loop trails usually located in larger parks and natural resource areas.

Source: National Recreation and Parks Association

Although Middletown has substantial open space and park land set aside, it is important to note that the Town has relatively few developed parks to serve community needs for its current and projected population. Based on the Town's current projected population of 16,037, the Town would need at least 20 acres of playgrounds. The Town falls short of the facility guidelines in some cases, most notably with playgrounds and tot lots (neighborhood or mini parks), since there are seven playgrounds and no tot lots that are accessible to the Town's population on a full-time basis. These playgrounds, many of which are located at or near school facilities, occupy over 35 acres of land, but this includes associated fields and other site amenities.

Several parks could be considered neighborhood parks, such as Paradise Valley (albeit slightly larger than the NRPA criterion), Albro Woods, Howland Park, and Demery Memorial Park. Additionally, a number of the parks are dominated by the playing fields located within it, and as a result, the park does not function as a true neighborhood or community park with a broader mix of active and passive activities.

The Town may have in excess of the fifty total acres of what could be classified as neighborhood parks pursuant to the RI standards, but individually they tend to be less than 25 acres in size (again applying the RI standard). Some of the parks classified as neighborhood parks are located beyond the ¼ to ½ mile NRPA recommended distance from a residential area. Middletown does not appear to have any park and recreation areas that meet or exceed the size criteria for community and large urban parks because there are no developed large parks that are at least 100 acres in size.

The beaches are considered to be among the most valued open spaces in Middletown based upon the public input received and the volume of visitors during the summer months. The parking lots frequently fill, although visitors tend to come in two "shifts". The lots may fill in the late morning on weekends and holidays, but as the early arrivals depart, spaces become available for those that prefer the afternoon. The parcels that comprise Second Beach, Surfers End, and Third Beach occupy over 50 acres and includes the parking areas, campground, play areas, and facilities. There is a boat ramp there as well, the only one in Middletown. The beach also provides a substantial revenue source for the Town through the sale of beach stickers and concessions, but major improvements to the facilities require additional appropriations.

As mentioned above, the Sakonnet Greenway Trail is the largest free public nature trail in Middletown and it is a substantial resource for the Town. It is used for pedestrians and limited equestrian use. All-terrain bicycles are not allowed on this trail. There are no single or multi-purpose trails in Middletown that can be used by cyclists or in-line skaters and the general lack of connector trails between parks has been cited by various stakeholders as a deficiency and a possible safety issue.

Table 6 refers more specifically to playing field guidelines as developed by the NRPA and Table 7 compares the number of these facilities in Middletown with the NRPA guidelines.

Table 6
NRPA Playing Field Guidelines

ACTIVITY/ FACILITY	RECOMMENDED SPACE REQUIREMENTS	NO. OF UNITS PER POPULATION	SERVICE RADIUS	LOCATION NOTES
Basketball		1 per 5000	¼ - ½ mile	Outdoor courts in neighborhood and community parks, plus active recreation areas in other park settings.
1. Youth	2400-3036 sq. ft.			
2. High School	5040-7280 sq. ft.			
3. Collegiate	5600-7980 sq. ft.			
Tennis	Minimum of 7,200 sq. ft. single court (2 acres for complex)	1 court per 2000	¼- ½ mile	Best in batteries of 2-4. Located in neighborhood/community park or adjacent to school
Baseball		1 per 5000	¼ - ½ mile	Part of neighborhood complex. Lighted fields part of community complex.
1. Official	3.0-3.85 A minimum	Lighted 1 per 30,000		
2. Little League	1.2 A minimum			
Field Hockey	1.5 A minimum	1 per 20,000	15-30 minutes travel time	Usually part of baseball, football, soccer complex in community park or adjacent to high school.
Football	1.5 A minimum	1 per 20,000	15-30 minutes travel time	Same as field hockey.
Soccer	1.7 – 2.1 A	1 per 10,000	1-2 miles	Number of units depends on popularity. Youth soccer on smaller fields adjacent to schools or neighborhood parks.
¼ Mile Running Track	4.3 A	1 per 20,000	15-30 minutes travel time	Usually part of high school, or in community park complex in combination with football, soccer, etc.
Softball	1.5 to 2.0 A	1 per 5,000 (if also used for youth baseball)	¼ - ½ mile	Slight differences in dimensions for 16" slow pitch. May also be used for youth baseball.
Multiple Recreation Court (basketball, volleyball, tennis)	9, 840 sq. ft.	1 per 10,000	1-2 miles	

Trails	N/A	1 system per region	N/A	
Swimming Pools	Varies on size of pool and amenities. Usually ½ to 2 A site.	1 per 20,000 (Pools should accommodate 3 to 5% of total population at a time.)	15 to 30 minutes travel time	Pools for general community use should be planned for teaching, competitive and recreational purposes with enough depth (3.4 m) to accommodate 1 m and 3 m diving boards. Located in community park or school site.

Source: Lancaster, R.A. (Ed.). (1990). Recreation, Park, and Open Space Standards and Guidelines. Ashburn, VA: National Recreation and Park Association.

Table 7
Middletown Compared to NRPA Playing Field Guidelines

ACTIVITY/FACILITY	MIDDLETOWN	NRPA GUIDELINES
Tee-ball	2	n/a
Baseball/Softball	8	4 baseball/4 softball
Basketball	6	4
Tennis	5	8
Football	1	1
Soccer	5	2
Running track	1	1
Field hockey	0	1
Multiple recreation courts (basketball, tennis, volleyball)	0	2
Swimming pool	0	1

Despite the fact that the baseball and softball fields seem adequate pursuant to the NRPA guidelines, and there are more soccer fields than recommended by both the RI and NRPA standards, there is high demand that outstrips the supply of field availability and that should determine future decision-making

regarding the number of fields needed. Although individual leagues may not have specific problems with field availability, there are some groups that have to compete to use the same facility. Given the number of teams/participants that require fields, the priority use by the School Department on its facilities, and the need to rework schedules after weather related cancellations, the Town should establish standards that specifically apply to Middletown's needs. Moreover, a related issue is that when demand is high, the condition of the fields deteriorate over time, especially when maintenance efforts are understaffed.

Based on these guidelines, the Town will also need more tennis courts. Field hockey could potentially be played on existing multi-use fields although it was noted that they already serve various functions, including as practice fields, and there is competition for the use of those fields. Although the Town has the extensive beach resources, a swimming pool if located indoors could provide year-round swimming opportunities.

One overarching concern expressed by the Town is to ensure access to open space and recreation resources across all neighborhoods in Middletown. To that end, an initial attempt has been made to divide the Town into 20 neighborhoods, which is shown on Map 2 in Appendix F. Map 3 overlays the inventory map on the neighborhood map. However, that map does not show the types of facilities that are publicly accessible, so an additional analysis is required. In order to ascertain the distribution of open space and recreational facilities across the Town, Map 4 was prepared, which illustrates the type of activities that are offered on any property that is accessible to the public. Thus, while there is a fairly good distribution of open space and recreation resources throughout the Town, certain neighborhoods as identified on Figure 2 have less access and therefore need to travel further to utilize those resources. Those neighborhoods include Navy and Maple Avenue (generally the west end of town), and to a lesser extent, Gate 17. Most other neighborhoods have some nearby amenities, although as shown on Map 4, some travel time will be required to access certain types of activities.

Facility Maintenance

NRPA has identified different levels of maintenance for park and recreation facilities with Level 1 being the state-of-the-art program applied to a high quality landscape setting and Level 5 being a minimum level program where severe budget restrictions are in effect (Level 6 – no maintenance – is for undeveloped natural areas with no maintenance except for safety concerns). Middletown is at Level 3 (moderate-level maintenance) which reflects the degree of activity at the various facilities along with the recognition that some budget restrictions prevent higher levels of maintenance. In some respects, Middletown exceeds the moderate-level maintenance protocol (i.e. more frequent fertilization of fields and overseeding of fields), while falling short in other categories such as repairs or replacement of broken equipment. Field mowing occurs at a rate that is considered typical for this level of maintenance.

Maintenance duties in Middletown are split between the School Department for its facilities (approximately 60 acres at seven school properties) and the Department of Public Works (DPW) for all town-owned property other than the schools. The School Department has established a schedule for field maintenance that begins with soil testing in March and continues through a winterizing fertilization

in late November/early December. It includes five applications of fertilizer throughout the year and overseeding in April and September/October. In addition to mowing and seeding the fields, the School Department sweeps the football field, which is an artificial turf field, every two weeks and grooms it every seven weeks.

On School Department properties, much of the grass cutting and field maintenance is done by the School Department, although the DPW assists in some maintenance efforts. The School Department has two full-time year-round maintenance staff positions. The School Department estimates that it manages approximately 22 acres per week per full time employee. This is in the middle of the range identified by NRPA for communities of a size similar to Middletown in their 2009 Operating Ratio Report. DPW has established a property maintenance program that specifically outlines what generally needs to be accomplished at each facility every month (focusing on mowing and general landscaping). In addition to mowing and field maintenance, it includes a schedule for trash removal, irrigation of the facilities, and arranging for port-a-john maintenance. This allows the Department to determine how to allocate its staff of two full-time year-round employees and one seasonal worker in the summer. Staffing requirements are based on the actual time spent on each activity and are assigned accordingly. DPW could assist in lining ball fields upon request, but the priority is to be able to respond to emergencies that need immediate attention. Grass cutting takes priority over other maintenance activities.

A number of the league programs that utilize the fields also participate in the maintenance of the fields they use at their own expense – usually thousands of dollars per year. Examples include the lining/stripping of fields, making repairs after rainfall on poorly drained fields, as well as building and maintaining storage sheds and concessions. The Middletown Youth Soccer Club even replaces the turf every fall. Some programs purchase playing and maintenance equipment for use by their participants.

A recently added feature to the town website is the ability to place a service request to address a maintenance problem.

New Facility Costs

The costs associated with the designing and construction of new recreational facilities can be significant and typically must be considered over multiple years to be accommodated by the municipal capital improvement planning process. It is difficult to determine precisely how much a given facility may cost the Town of Middletown as it seeks to implement the recommendations of this Plan. There are a number of variables that need to be factored into an estimate that could impact the ultimate cost of a field or playground. These variables include:

- Site considerations such as environmental constraints, soils, topography, the presence of ledge and other factors that may affect the cost of site preparation
- The presence of hazardous materials that may require remediation such as on the Kempenaar property

- Drainage requirements for the fields
- Stormwater management
- Parking, including the manner in which it is constructed

Furthermore, there are a number of options to consider when designing and constructing a new facility such as:

- The type of surface material used (i.e. artificial vs. grass turf for playing fields, playground protective surfaces, asphalt vs. cushioned tennis court, etc.)
- The extent of accessory structures and amenities included with the facility such as dugouts, bleachers, lighting, concessions, scoreboards, type of playground equipment, etc.

An additional consideration when designing a facility is the short- and long-term maintenance costs. For example, an asphalt tennis court is relatively low maintenance, but a clay or grass court requires regular maintenance.

With those considerations in mind, the following is an estimated range of costs for different types of recreational facilities. The estimates are for construction only and do not include site acquisition and design expenses.

- Softball/baseball fields: \$150,000 - \$250,000 per field
- Tennis and basketball courts: \$20,000 - \$40,000 per court
- Soccer/multi-purpose fields: \$150,000 - \$300,000 per field
- Swimming pool: \$250,000 - \$500,000
- Playground: \$80,000 - \$125,000

Facility Needs and Recommendations

Based upon a review of the Middletown open space and recreation resources and conditions, an analysis of all the available data and information from Middletown departments and committees, field observations, data on facility usage, facility standards, existing concept plans, and the public and stakeholder input received during the planning process, the following needs and recommendations have been identified and should be addressed.

- **New ballfields.** To meet existing demand, the Town should add an additional three baseball/softball fields, perhaps by creating fields that can serve both Little League and adult leagues. Not including the tee-ball fields, the Town has eight baseball or softball fields that are used by multiple user groups including the Middletown Little League, the schools, and other

leagues. The men's softball league plays on Pottsey Field at the West Main Recreation Complex, which is a less than ideal location given its proximity to a major roadway and the orientation of the field. It is recommended that this field be relocated. An additional soccer field should be considered in the future as well. At least some of the additional fields should be lighted to extend the length of field availability.

One option to consider is a consolidated field complex which has the advantage of simplifying maintenance. However, these facilities would be large and could impact nearby residents, so it will be important to find a suitable site that allows for mitigation of those impacts. Moreover, such a centralized complex would preclude the creation of a more neighborhood-based park and recreation program.

- **Practice fields.** More practice fields should be provided for soccer and lacrosse in particular in order to reduce conflicts with other uses. Using soccer fields for both practice and organized matches reduces the amount of available time for either activity. Additionally, it further strains the ability of the field to recover between uses, thereby increasing maintenance concerns.
- **Indoor gym/field house.** Between the use of the gyms for a variety of school related activities and community-based league programs, an additional gym or field house with a swimming pool (currently unavailable anywhere on Aquidneck Island) should be considered in the future. Middletown residents use The Hut in Newport and if one were to be established in Middletown, it would provide additional space and resources to minimize scheduling conflicts and would provide more up to date facilities. Given the population of Aquidneck Island, a public swimming pool would be a valuable addition to the recreational options for area residents (NRPA recommends one swimming pool per 20,000 people). Such a facility could also include other non-sports related activities and programs for children after school and on weekends.
- **West Main Recreation Complex.** The West Main Recreational Complex is in a location that is poorly situated for recreational uses due to traffic and the proximity of a major roadway and housing. This area is potentially better suited for a mix of housing, commercial, and institutional uses that are typical of a village center. A planning study (West Main/Coddington Development Center Master Plan) is about to get underway which encompasses the area in the vicinity of the intersections of Coddington Highway and East Main Road with West Main Road. This is a mixed-use commercial/residential area, which features retail, restaurants, single and multi-family residential, the Recreational Complex, the public library, the recently closed Kennedy Elementary School, and a three-acre parcel of Navy land expected to be declared surplus. The Navy parcel, site of the former Navy Lodge, will be disposed of through the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process, along with other surplus parcels in Middletown, Newport and Portsmouth. The West Main Road Recreation Complex is likely to be redeveloped. The displaced facilities should be accommodated elsewhere.
- **Possible locations for new recreational facilities.** There are at least three parcels in Middletown that have potential for the building of new fields and playground areas. These

include Boulevard Nurseries, Albro Woods, and Tibbett's Farm. The Town should move toward consideration of design options for these parcels. Since each one has substantial acreage, land can also be planned for more passive recreation and can serve as neighborhood or community parks as described by NRPA. Community gardens would be another option for a portion of these parcels, particularly Boulevard Nurseries.

Based upon the needs identified in this plan options for future recreational uses include:

- Including the relocation of Pottsey Field, the Town needs a total of four new baseball/softball fields. All can be accommodated at either the Boulevard Nurseries (not along the East Main Road frontage) or Tibbet's Farm sites while still setting aside land for other purposes such as a community garden and playground. The advantage to the Tibbet's Farm side of the parcel is that access and parking can be located away from the busy East Main Street corridor (this is true for Albro Woods as well). Soccer fields and multi-purpose/practice fields can be considered there as well.
- Given the total of more than 68 acres of land between the adjacent Boulevard Nurseries, Albro Woods, and Tibbett's Farm parcels, this area has the potential for a major recreational center for the Town. If plans proceed in the future for an indoor recreational center and gym, a site of this size would be appropriate. Therefore when planning baseball/softball, soccer, or practice fields and other uses on the site, the possibility of an indoor recreational facility should be considered when assessing overall site layout. Recognizing that a major centralized facility may not necessarily serve all neighborhoods directly, it should be noted that this location is relatively close to the neighborhoods on the east side of Middletown (Wapping Road and Indian Avenue) that has fewer facilities in close proximity to residents than other areas.

It will be important to conduct detailed site evaluations to ultimately determine the suitability of any of these sites for future field use.

- **Kempenaar Valley**. The Kempenaar Valley property is a key piece of potential open space land. Middletown purchased the property in March 2004 using local bond appropriations, Rhode Island Open Space and Recreation Grants from the RIDEM, funds from ALT, and appropriations from the RI Water Resources Board through the City of Newport. A Management Plan for the property was prepared by The Louis Berger Group, Inc. in 2004.

Of the total 45.8 acres, the Town has set aside approximately 21.07 acres for use as open space for conservation purposes. Some of this land would be preserved for wildlife habitat and water resource protection. Educational activities consistent with that purpose, including potential trails, will be allowed. Approximately 12.5 acres is reserved by the Kempenaar family for agriculture until they are no longer willing or able to maintain that activity. When that life tenancy ends, a portion of this area may be used for meadow habitat, public trails, education, passive recreation, and/or agricultural use if consistent with the subject conservation easements and the Management Plan.

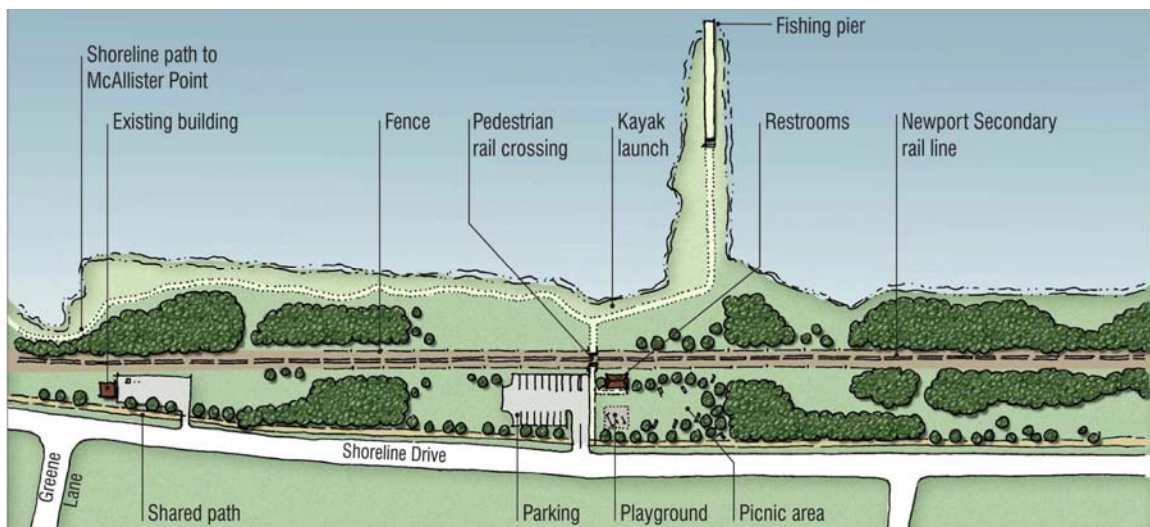
The plan outlines best management practices for water use, fertilizer application and sediment and erosion control during construction of the recreational facilities. The goal is to ensure long-term habitat and water resource preservation in conjunction with other passive recreation activities on the property. The development of playing fields is not feasible due to slope and grading requirements.

Thus, in accordance with this Management Plan and upon completion of required hazardous waste remediation of the site, the Town should move forward with both the conservation and passive recreation aspects of the Management Plan.

- **Underserved neighborhoods.** The Town should seek opportunities to acquire land for multi-purpose fields in underserved neighborhoods such as Wapping Road, Indian Avenue, Easton's Point, Maple Avenue, and Navy. These areas have little or no open space that is publicly accessible or with recreation potential, although the Greene Lane Park concept plan, if implemented, will provide valuable access for west side residents.
- **Access to Narragansett Bay.** Additional access to the water is needed on the west side of Middletown. Narragansett Bay is known for its sailing, boating and recreational appeal, but the residents of Middletown currently have no public access to this valuable amenity. When land is made available by the U. S. Navy, the Town should implement the development of the Greene Lane Park at Midway Fishing Pier (a concept plan for the proposed park was endorsed in November 2007 by the Town Council). The 5.64 acre Navy property is currently located on an unpaved parking lot between Burma Road and the Newport Secondary rail line and includes approximately 6,100 feet of shoreline. The park would create a multi-use recreational destination point for Island residents and visitors alike, offering numerous outdoor and waterfront activities including fishing, kayaking, access for small boats, biking on the proposed new shoreline bike path, picnicking, a children's playground and hiking trails along the shoreline.

The concept plan is shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 - Greene Lane Park at Midway Fishing Pier Concept Plan



- **Salve Regina University.** The University worked with the Town to develop the new facilities at Gaudet Middle School. Salve Regina University found the arrangement to be a positive one – for both parties. This relationship should be fostered so that similar projects can be planned in the future. There appears to be interest in doing this because both the school and the Town could continue to benefit. The University has more financial resources and the Town has land.

The Town and Salve should continue to cooperate on mutually beneficial projects that provide high quality athletic facilities that will be available for use by Salve, town/school athletics, and private leagues. This type of public/private partnership offers a “win-win” scenario for all parties.

- **Maintenance priorities.** A number of needed repairs and improvements have been identified through the needs assessment process based upon site visits and interviews with interested parties. In no particular order, the following improvements should be planned in the immediate future:

- Provide additional parking at War Memorial Field; Aquidneck Elementary; Demery Memorial Park; Forest Avenue School; Surfers End
- Renovate/repair accessory buildings at War Memorial Field
- Repair/replace storage building roof at Aquidneck Elementary
- Repair or replace bleachers at Aquidneck Elementary and Oliphant School
- Repair field fencing, benches and dugouts at Gaudet Middle School
- Correct drainage and grading problems at Aquidneck Elementary
- Upgrade the playground at Oliphant School
- Replace tee-ball field surface at Oliphant School with a surface suitable for young children
- General landscaping maintenance

- **Maintenance management plans.** Management plans should be developed for each major town-owned facility. In addition to planning for the routine maintenance of the facility and grounds, long-term capital needs and repairs can be identified and scheduled. This should be a joint effort between the DPW and the School Department.

Maintenance plans should be prepared that establish standards designed to achieve specific results. A number of municipal and county governments have instituted such standards to include the following:

- The condition of each facility after satisfactory completion of routine maintenance work
- The tasks required to achieve that result
- The procedures for completion of those tasks
- The time necessary to complete a particular task, as well as frequency (which is covered in the DPW Property Maintenance Program)
- The number of people required to meet the standard
- The equipment needed to complete the task
- The materials and supplies needed to complete the task

A cooperative arrangement between the Town and the various leagues and sports associations will enhance this effort. This would create a shared understanding of what it takes to accomplish certain tasks, how to ascertain staffing needs, how to identify specific needs, and how to rectify any deficiencies. It would also be useful to track the costs involved with the various items in the maintenance plan so that long-range projections could be made for allocating staff and fiscal resources.

Similar to the efforts undertaken by the various leagues to maintain the fields they use, the Town should encourage the creation of “friends of” groups to provide stewardship of other parks. These groups can help to sponsor cleanups and similar activities, as well as flag issues that the Town may need to address but may not be aware of.

- **Meet ADA requirements.** New facilities are required to meet the accessibility standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Upgrades to existing facilities should include an assessment as to ADA compliance and a timetable to make the necessary improvements.
- **Inventory playground equipment.** Playground equipment generally has a life expectancy of fifteen years when used under normal conditions. If playgrounds are heavily used or if the equipment is routinely used by children that are older than for which it was designed, that lifetime may be shorter. The Town should inventory playground equipment and the dates of installation to determine when equipment replacement may be necessary.
- **Provide safe access.** Better defined walkways between facilities and fields, particularly at the school complexes would provide safer access to the fields. A good example is the need for a better connection between the high school fields and the ones at Gaudet Middle School. The Town submitted an application for a Safe Routes to School grant in early 2010. The Gaudet Middle School: Connector Paths Project seeks to connect a number of town facilities,

recreational spaces, and neighborhoods. The major infrastructure improvement of this project is the development of a multi-use path that will better connect adjacent neighborhoods and student populations to the Gaudet Middle School and Gaudet Learning Academy. The trail would primarily be off-street, passing through public school grounds, town facilities, and preserved open space. It would link the schools with and recreational and open space lands and provide the requisite recreational and health benefits.

- **Develop Paradise Valley Park.** The Town should explore the options for developing the RI Diocese land adjacent to Paradise Valley Park in order to expand the park and create additional walking trails, picnicking areas, and/or a playground for small children.
- **Continue cooperative relationship with ALT.** ALT and the Town have worked cooperatively for a number of years and some of the properties conserved by ALT are used by the Town for a variety of open space and recreation purposes. A number of parcels that could become important open space and recreational assets to the Town, including the three parcels (Boulevard Nurseries, Albro Woods, and Tibbett's Farm) on the northern end of town that can serve as an open space gateway to Middletown. ALT has indicated it is willing to work with the Town to realize this vision for the area. ALT is continuing to work towards completion of the nine-mile Sakonnet Greenway Trail, which will create a network of valuable open space resources in Middletown.
- **Establish centralized field scheduling/permitting.** Given the complexity of scheduling for the use of all the fields and facilities, the Town should charge a central entity with responsibility for scheduling and permitting field and gym use, including non-league community users. Information regarding the scheduling and permitting (including a calendar) for fields should be more prominently displayed on the Town's website.
- **Move forward with the new facility at Second Beach.** The Town should begin design for a new facility at Second Beach so that the building can be ready for construction when funds become available (this project is on the Capital Improvement Plan for 2014). The current building does not have enough office space, the first aid station is inadequate, and the locker room is in a deteriorated state. Storage containers occupy valuable parking spaces that reduce potential parking revenue. The concession area is not considered to be an inviting space and provides no shade. The proposed \$7.5 million facility would be located where the current building stands. This will provide an upgrade to the restroom, lifeguard locker room, first aid station, management offices, and concessions. The new building will also include a 125 – 150 person capacity multi-purpose room that can be used for meetings and events such as weddings.
- **Establish community farms.** The Town has a number of parcels preserved as agricultural land. Opportunities to create community farming programs on these parcels should be explored.
- **Enhance wayfinding.** The Town should create a wayfinding program for the parks and open spaces through a new uniform-styled sign that identifies places that are frequently visited.

- **Monitor grant programs.** The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management has offered opportunities for grants to cities and towns for open space, parks and recreation (see <http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bpoladm/plandev/grants.htm>). At this time, it is anticipated that there will be an open funding round for recreation development in mid-fall 2010 and open space grants in mid-spring 2011. The Town should continue to monitor RIDEM's grant programs to determine eligibility for recreation project or open space acquisition/preservation grants and loans. A separate program (no specific timing announced for funding at this time) is the Greenways Land Acquisition and Bikeway Development Grants.

Goals, Objectives and Implementation

The following tables present the implementation action items for this Plan along with notations identifying the parties responsible for each step in implementing the plan and the timeframe for implementation. Note that short term is 1 – 3 years; medium term is 4 – 7 years; and long term is 8 years or more. The status of each item can be tracked in the last column.

Goal I - Identify and develop new recreational facilities to ensure that the Town meets the ongoing recreation needs of the community.

Objectives	Necessary Steps	Responsible Party	Timeframe	Status
Reassess demand at least every two years	Review data from leagues and other sources to assess demand	Recreation; Open Space and Fields Comm.	Ongoing	
Work with potential partners to develop playing fields	Meet with potential partners such as ALT and Salve Regina University to discuss future needs and to acquire and design sites	Planning; Recreation; Open Space and Fields Comm.; School	Short term	
Look for opportunities to establish parks accessible to all neighborhoods	Identify and design potential sites for new playing and practice fields	Planning; Recreation; Open Space and Fields Comm.	Short term	
	Relocate West Main Recreation Complex	Planning; Recreation; Open Space and Fields Comm.	Short term	
	Develop concept plan for new gym/field house with swimming pool	Planning; Recreation; Open Space and Fields Comm.	Long term	

Goal II - Maintain and improve recreational facilities to meet needs identified during the planning process.

Objectives	Necessary Steps	Responsible Party	Timeframe	Status
Identify key maintenance needs	Coordinate maintenance efforts between School Department and DPW	DPW; School	Ongoing	
Prioritize park maintenance	Develop management plans for each facility	DPW; School	Short term	
	Establish maintenance standards for facilities and staff	DPW; School	Short term	
	Encourage stewardship through "friends of" groups and continue to work with leagues to enhance maintenance efforts	Recreation	Ongoing	
Administer and fund program that ensures efficient and effective maintenance and repair of facilities	Increase staffing levels for maintenance activities if management plans demonstrate need and as budget allows	DPW; School	Medium term	

Objectives	Necessary Steps	Responsible Party	Timeframe	Status
	Establish a central scheduling and permitting system for field use	Recreation; School	Short term	
	Look for opportunities to provide better pedestrian connections between park facilities	Planning; Recreation; Open Space and Fields Comm.; School	Medium term	
	Upgrade facilities to meet ADA requirements	Recreation; School	Medium term	
	Plan for and schedule needed repairs and renovations identified in this Plan	Recreation; Open Space and Fields Comm.; School	Ongoing	
	Monitor availability of grant funds	Planning	Ongoing	

Goal III - Acquire additional open space sites for passive recreational opportunities.

Objectives	Necessary Steps	Responsible Party	Timeframe	Status
Expand passive open space and natural resource inventory beneficial to town values in a collaborative manner	Using the Open Space Acquisition Policy criteria, identify potential sites for acquisition	Planning; Open Space and Fields Comm.	Ongoing	
	Work with ALT to leverage acquisition efforts	Planning; Open Space and Fields Comm.	Ongoing	
	Monitor availability of grant funds	Planning	Ongoing	
Create integrated network of green corridors	Review status of existing open spaces to find opportunities to provide connections between them, including strategic acquisitions	Planning; Open Space and Fields Comm.	Ongoing	
	Develop plan for expansion of Paradise Park on RI Diocese land	Planning; Recreation; Open Space and Fields Comm.	Short term	
Provide opportunities for community gardens	Look for potential locations for community farming	Planning; Open Space and Fields Comm.	Medium term	

Goal IV - Properly manage and maintain open space sites.

Objectives	Necessary Steps	Responsible Party	Timeframe	Status
Develop framework for use, maintenance, and improvement of open spaces	Prepare management plans for key open space parcels that are publicly accessible	Open Space and Fields Comm.; Recreation; School	Medium term	
Increase public awareness and community stewardship	Provide maps and wayfinding signs for open space and recreation parcels; publicize on Town website; prepare and disseminate maps	Planning; Open Space and Fields Comm.; Recreation; School	Ongoing	

Goal V - Expand public access to water based recreational opportunities.

Objectives	Necessary Steps	Responsible Party	Timeframe	Status
Acquire and develop west side access for water-based activities	Implement Greene Lane Park concept plan	Planning	Long term	
Preserve beaches at current level of development	Prepare beach management plans	Beach Comm.	Short term	
Improve beach facilities	Design and construct new facility at Second Beach	Beach Comm.	Short to medium term (on CIP for 2014)	

Goal VI - Expand and enhance the trail system in Middletown.

Objectives	Necessary Steps	Responsible Party	Timeframe	Status
Work to expand and connect trail network on open space parcels	Complete expansion of the Sakonnet Greenway Trail	Planning; Open Space and Fields Comm.	Short term	
	Expand and enhance trails in conservation lands and the network between properties	Planning; Open Space and Fields Comm.		
Establish multi-use trails	Design and develop Shoreline Drive multi-use path	Planning; Recreation; Open Space and Fields Comm.	Long term	
	Monitor availability of grant funds	Planning	Ongoing	
Establish bike paths that connect neighborhoods to the Town's open space and recreational resources	Incorporate bike lanes into future road improvements	Planning; DPW	Long-term	

Goal VII - Promote active and healthy lifestyles in Middletown.

Objectives	Necessary Steps	Responsible Party	Timeframe	Status
Develop and promote a varied active recreation program accessible to Middletown residents	Plan recreational programs and assess location and age of participants	Recreation; School	Ongoing	
Work with leagues and similar entities to reach out to families to promote organized programs	Publicize league and similar programs in mailings, website pages, and local media	Recreation; School	Ongoing	
Promote the development of infrastructure that will encourage residents to exercise, such as bike paths	Incorporate bike lanes into future road improvements	Planning; DPW	Long-term	
	Design and develop Shoreline Drive multi-use path and look for similar opportunities elsewhere in town	Planning; Recreation; Open Space and Fields Comm.	Long term	