

RECOMMENDATIONS

Initial Efforts



The master planning effort presents a unique opportunity for the Town of Columbia to assess their major park, recreation, open space, and athletic facility needs and develop a series of thoughtful and achievable enhancements to Recreation Park that will provide benefits to all members of the community.

The narratives that follow describe the basic scope of improvements proposed within the property. It is important to note that the potential scope of improvements has been presented to the public and the master planning committee at numerous forums. The Master Plan describes an approach to providing new and refurbished recreational improvements in a manner that improves conditions and opportunities for use and enjoyment by all prospective park visitors. The narratives describe and support graphic plan images that are included throughout the section. These plans are conceptual in nature and are likely to be refined and expanded upon during future permitting, final design and implementation phases of work.

The initial recommended effort for Recreation Park is shown at right. The plan that shows the preferred and recommended range of improvements for the entire property is shown later in this section. We use excerpts from that plan to identify and describe in more detail the full range of intended improvements. An 11x17 inch version of this same Master Plan drawing is contained in the Appendix.

The graphic at right indicates a preferred first course of action or “Phase 1”. There are seven areas of initial improvement as follows:

- Access Drive/Circulation and Parking
- Trails & Pedestrian Pathway Network
- Multi-use Rectangular Field Complex
- Softball and Little League Baseball Complex
- Existing Baseball Field
- Entrance and Basketball Court Area
- New Maintenance Area for equipment and supplies used at Recreation Park

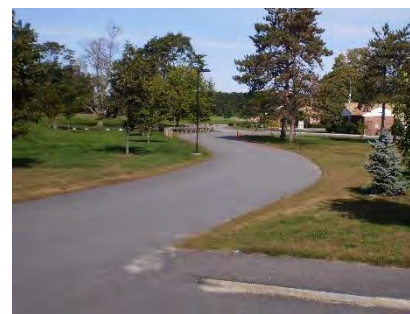


Access Drive/Circulation and Parking – An important improvement goal of the master plan includes provisions for new and improved access to the property, by foot and by car. This can be accomplished by providing convenient and appropriately scaled parking amenities, reducing conflicts between pedestrians and drivers, and providing logical ADA-compliant linkages between various site features and facilities within a given space.



The preferred master plans identify a series of improvements that focus on the primary park entrance to an exterior loop drive and parking areas near the perimeter of the property. Our primary recommendations for improvements to enhance park access and linkages include the following:

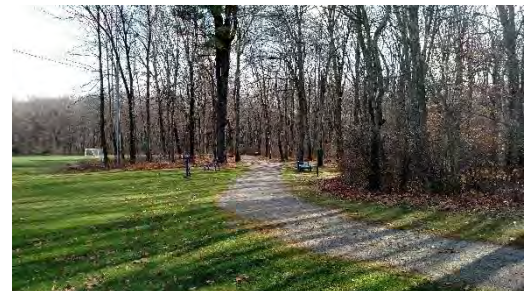
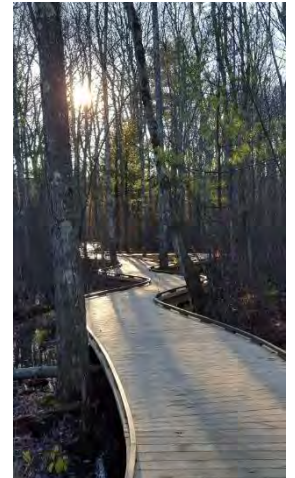
- Eliminate any badly deteriorated and difficult-to-maintain existing conditions
- Develop a new park entrance and reconfigure drives/parking areas to provide clear travel patterns, clearly defined parking spaces, more efficient use of the overall space, and more parking spaces
- Establish pedestrian connections from all reconstructed parking areas to provide safe, convenient, and ADA-compliant access to all major park facilities and park areas
- Reconstruct the parking areas to include new pavement or porous surfaces, low-impact approaches to storm drainage, curbing, edges, and striping to achieve ADA compliance
- Install traffic-calming measures to slow vehicular traffic and provide for safe pedestrian movement throughout the area (e.g., speed bumps, tabled (or raised) crossings, and special surface textures and colors to delineate areas of pedestrian use and traffic-related signage)



Pathways, Trails & Picnic Areas – Throughout the public input sessions of the master planning process, many stakeholders sought improvements designed for multi-generational use of the park. One consistent theme from the meetings was a request for amenities that would serve all ages. The preferred master plan calls for incorporating new and upgraded pathways and trails, as well as picnic areas at various locations. These types of passive recreational amenities provide opportunities for residents of all generations, backgrounds, and abilities to enjoy and they complement the traditional active recreational facilities located in the park. Pathways can be constructed in compliance with accessibility regulations. Pathways (especially pathways that form a loop around the perimeter of a property) are attractive for walking, jogging, skating, and biking and often become one of the most appreciated park amenities. We recommend the following improvements to enhance the park user experience, offer additional conveniences, and promote environmental stewardship in conjunction with the installation of new paths and trails.



- Install measured markers around loop paths to facilitate individual exercise programs, regardless of the varied overall length of the existing and potential loop paths at the site
- Provide multi-generational fitness stations either in “pod” areas or regularly spaced along the loop paths
- Place benches for rest and/or interaction at logical social gathering points along pathways and trails and within other peaceful and attractive settings
- Install interpretive signage to describe a site’s unique natural, cultural, and/or historical characteristics
- Provide tree plantings to lend greater shade to the pedestrian corridors, provide enhanced wildlife habitats, and improve overall site aesthetics
- Provide picnic areas where applicable and upon request
- Place drinking fountains with bottle filling stations within various park settings and along pathways, especially on longer trails where dehydration could be an issue.



Pedestrian/maintenance circulation at Newman Conservation area in Needham, MA | Cushing Park in Framingham, MA (Weston & Sampson) | Existing trail at Recreation Park | Below: An artist’s rendering of a proposed boardwalk | Nature Trails at the Montreal Botanical Garden, Montreal, Quebec



Athletic Facilities – The master planning process identified the critical need for new and refurbished athletic facilities (i.e., fields, diamonds, courts, etc.) to better support the myriad of sports programs that operate within the community. Based on participation rates for various activities, Recreation Park does not have enough fields to accommodate the large number of users. The resulting problem is two-fold; with heavy programming/overuse and limited facilities, the town cannot serve their recreation programs adequately, and appropriate field conditions cannot be maintained. To this end, we have structured the preferred master plan to:

- Recognize the desire of community members to provide attractive, first-class sports facilities that can be maintained with reasonable ease in a manner that fits the town’s (and league’s) operation and maintenance abilities
- Identify the need to develop facilities that are properly oriented, properly designed, and contain appropriate setbacks and buffers to ensure user safety
- Recognize the surrounding land use context and the need to be a good neighbor by developing safe, attractive park and recreation amenities that respect the needs of abutting property owners
- Provide perimeter fencing and appropriate gates to enclose the facilities, limit access, control use, and help maintain high-quality court, turf, and infield surfaces

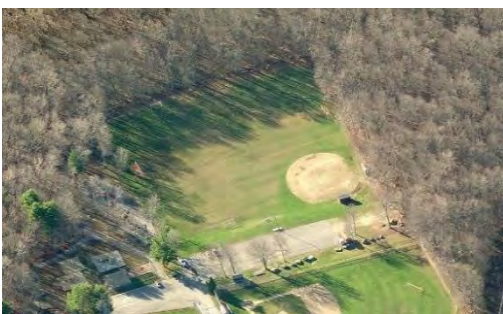
Multi-Use Rectangular Field Complex

The recommendations for this area include removing (and relocating) the girls’ softball field and parking area allowing for the expansion of the multi-use field into two full size (330’x180) athletic fields. This will allow for additional play by all “rectangular field” sports. The installation of a pavilion and picnic area would add a venue for events, barbeques, after game functions, and other town activities. The improvements would include:

- Renovating the natural turf field, with an amended loam root zone mix and drainage where needed.
- Incorporate spectator seating at edges
- Create new pathways for access to all amenities
- Install a new shade shelter with adjacent picnic areas and expanded children’s playground area
- Integrate trees throughout the site to provide shade



Multi-use rectangular field Complex



Aerial photo of the existing softball field at Recreation Park | New athletic field at Blackstone Valley Vocational School, Upton, MA (Weston & Sampson) | Princeton Soccer Complex, Princeton, MA (Weston & Sampson)

Softball and Baseball Complex

One of the main goals of the master plan was to create gender equity and general equity among all sports. Through the master planning process the need to develop a dedicated fenced in girls' softball field materialized. The improvements to this area would begin with the conversion of Little League Field 3 into a fully fenced-in girls' softball field and the construction of a new little league field in the location of the southern parking area and playground and the renovation of the full-size baseball field. The current 2-5-year-old play area would be either relocated or rebuilt adjacent to the newly installed play structure. The Concession, Storage and restroom building will provide a much-needed support building for these facilities. The overall program would include:

- New backstops
- New player's benches/dugouts with canopies
- Spectator bleachers on concrete pads
- Grading improvements throughout
- New drainage systems
- Improved loop pathway with connections to new parking and new/refurbished facilities
- Concession, Storage and Restroom Building

The Existing Little League baseball field 1 would remain until the future renovation of the entrance area. Refer to the future full build out plan shown later in this section.



Softball and Little League Baseball Complex



New little league field at Newman Elementary School, Needham, MA (Weston & Sampson) | Support buildings at Lowell Park, Barnstable MA



Improved softball field at Rockwood Field in Worcester, MA (Weston & Sampson)



Renovated baseball field, Ware, MA, Existing dugout shelters can be relocated to a more appropriate location. Leary Field, Waltham, MA

Entrance and Court Area

A renovated entrance at Hennequin would allow for the safe access to the site. The drive would be two-way to allow for easy entrance to and exit from the existing parking area. The existing parking area would be expanded by adding perpendicular parking stalls to the northern side of the lot. The entrance would lead to the narrow one-way park circulation drive that will access all features and traverse the outer edges of the park. The circulation drive will exit at a new location just south of the main entrance.

At the northern edge of the property, a new basketball court complex would be created. One court would be constructed during the initial effort while leaving room for a second court. This would better serve the community with the potential for 2 new basketball courts (which represents a net gain of 1 court). Under the initial effort, or "phase 1" the barbeque and volley ball area would remain in place.

The existing tennis court would remain in place and possibly be resurfaced depending on the timing of the construction of the new proposed tennis court complex.

The basketball court would be reconstructed with:

- Paving and color sealcoating
- New basketball standards
- Fencing at court ends
- New spectator seating
- Potential court lighting for extended use
- Universally accessible path connections



Basketball Court and Entrance Area



New basketball facilities at Sandy Pond Beach in Ayer, MA, Waltham, MA and Portsmouth, NH (Weston & Sampson)

The park entrance would be enhanced with identification features such as walls, signage, gates and fencing to give it the identification deserving of a major town park property.



Example park entrance in keeping with the character of Recreation Park