



City of Keene, New Hampshire

Active and Passive Recreation Management Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | May 2012



Introduction

In 2011, the Keene Department of Parks, Recreation and Cemeteries and the Ad Hoc Active and Passive Recreation Management Plan Committee initiated a process of community needs assessment, visioning, and strategic planning to evaluate Keene’s present and future parks, recreation, trails, and open space needs. The City engaged GreenPlay LLC to develop the Active and Passive Recreation Management Plan, which includes a statistically-valid survey, demographic and benchmarking analysis, a community engagement process, review of existing plans, operations analysis, and GIS based Level of Service assessment. The Active and Passive Recreation Management Plan is a system-wide analysis, featuring recommendations for enhancing Keene Parks, Recreation and Cemeteries operations, level of service, and long-range planning efforts. Specific plans and detailed analysis for individual parks and facilities, such as playing fields, trails, and the recreation center are not included; however, recommendations, tools, and staff resource documents for conducting a more detailed analysis in-house have been provided.



The 2010 *Keene Comprehensive Master Plan* states: “Keene is a unique community that residents are proud to call home...in an age when many communities are losing their ‘sense of place,’ Keene has a firm sense of its identity, built on a foundation of the past and a clear vision of the future...the new plan also supports an established Keene goal – one with an official history stretching back to the 19th Century – of creating and protecting green spaces, trails, parks, and natural wildlife corridors.”

A particular highlight of the statistically-valid survey conducted for this report, which speaks to citizen support for parks, recreation, trails, and open space, is willingness to pay additional property tax for parks and recreation services. An impressive 73 percent of respondents indicated that they would pay additional property tax to increase recreation opportunities and quality of life services.

Purpose

The Active and Passive Recreation Management Plan will help guide the future development of Keene’s parks, trails, and recreation system, and provide strategic recommendations to measure how the system is meeting the needs of residents. This plan is intended to complement the City’s 2010 *Comprehensive Master Plan*, which has identified six Vision Focus Areas:

1. A Quality Built Environment
2. A Unique Natural Environment
3. Vibrant Economy
4. Strong Citizenship and Proactive Leadership
5. A Creative Learning Culture
6. A Healthy Community

The Active and Passive Recreation Management Plan will focus the City’s efforts towards strengthening the connection between people and parks, promoting the sustainable use of City resources and healthy lifestyles, identifying gaps in park infrastructure as well as opportunities for expansion, and ensuring the involvement of residents in the park planning process. It is recommended that the Active and Passive Recreation Management Plan be updated every five years.

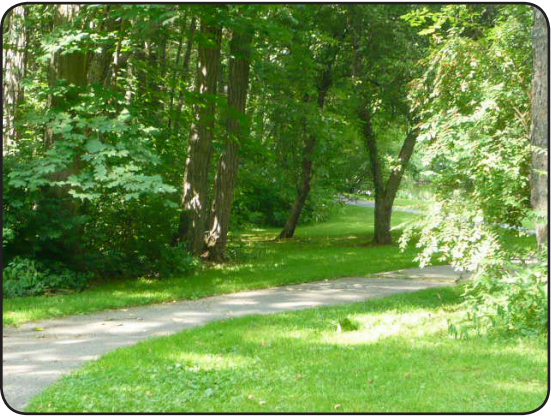
Tools for Decision-Making

The Active and Passive Recreation Management Plan project has created strong analysis tools for future decision-making:

- Current demographic information
- Local, regional, and national trends
- Benchmarking information on park acreage, staffing, facilities, and budgeting
- Community engagement with 586 survey and stakeholder participants
- Statistically-valid survey results
- Inventory of Department components, school properties, and alternative providers
- Level of Service Analysis for park system components, and analytical maps and Perspectives

Project Methodology

A project team comprised of staff from the Keene Parks, Recreation and Cemeteries Department, Planning Department, and the Ad Hoc Active and Passive Recreation Management Plan Committee, facilitated by GreenPlay, has guided this project. This team provided input throughout the planning process and participated in a day-long Visioning Retreat along with additional City staff. Citizen input through focus groups, a statistically-valid survey, and public meetings informed the plan and related recommendations. This collaborative effort has created a document that incorporates local knowledge and institutional history that only community members can provide.



Comprehensive master plans for parks and recreation consider three major focus areas to achieve a strategic direction for future improvements to the park system, departmental operations, programs, and services.

1. **Values, Vision, and Mission** – guiding philosophy
2. **Planning and Leadership** – scientific aspects, measurement, and strategic planning
3. **Participant Experience** – quality, creativity, and outcomes

Values & Vision Statement

The following values were identified by community members and stakeholders:

- **Access and Equity For All** – neighborhood access to parks, facilities, and programs.
- **Variety** – opportunities for all ages, interests, and skill levels.
- **Outdoor Play Spaces** – celebrating the community’s natural beauty and landscapes.
- **Active Living** – a built environment that facilitates daily physical activity.
- **Dedication** – by all community service providers.
- **Safety** – in both perception and reality to encourage participation.
- **Quality** – in services and facilities.
- **Sustainability** – meeting environmental, social, and economic needs today and in the future.
- **Collaboration** – working cooperatively with internal and external partners.

Building on the identified values, a vision statement for the Keene Parks, Recreation and Cemeteries Department was developed during the Visioning Workshop with City staff and members of the Ad Hoc Active and Passive Recreation Management Plan Committee.

“Our community works together to provide for life-long opportunities for active living and wise stewardship of natural resources. Keene has beautiful, well-maintained parks and cemeteries, a citizenry that incorporates physical activity into their daily lives, and a connected system of open space, parks and trails.”



KEY ISSUES

1. Support the City’s Sustainability Goals

2. Institute Long Range Capital Planning and Park Site-Specific Master Plans

3. Manage and Sustain Natural Resources

4. Address ADA Compliance

5. Coordinate Active Transportation/ Recreation and Trail Connectivity

6. Monitor Levels of Service for Parks, Trails, Open Space, and Facilities

7. Strengthen and Formalize Collaborations

8. Implement Cost Recovery Methodology and Service Assessment

9. Enhance Program Offerings

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Monitor progress on the City’s sustainability efforts pertaining to active transportation, open space acquisition, and stewardship of natural resources.

2. Implement Department-level sustainability practices.

3. Determine the best and most appropriate uses of each specific park and whether they should be repurposed or reconfigured to maximize their service to the community.

4. Develop a comprehensive capital equipment and park asset replacement plan.

5. Establish a park and open space amenity donation program.

6. Engage the community in additional outdoor and environmental activities.

7. Perform an ADA access audit and develop a transition plan.

8. Convene a cross-sector Active Recreation/Transportation Working Group.

9. Promote use of existing pathway and trails systems through public information sources, utilizing trailhead signage, print, and web-based resources.

10. Increase staffing dedicated to developing an active recreation/ transportation system.

11. Provide equal access and adequate mix of facilities, trails, and open space throughout the City.

12. Improve Level of Service in parks, facilities, trails, and open space.

13. Enhance communications and outreach efforts to increase community awareness of and involvement in Department programs, services, and facilities.

14. Align cost recovery and pricing strategies with values, vision and mission, and market position.

15. Conduct comprehensive service assessment to eliminate duplication of services and enhance resource efficiency.

16. Conduct a review of program offerings to evaluate program area balance and effectiveness.