

Newburyport Parks Commission

10-Year Strategic Vision

Newburyport Parks Commissioners

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PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The Newburyport Parks Commission was established in 1996 under then Mayor Lisa Mead. The five-member Commission, with members who are appointed by the mayor to serve five-year terms, was established to serve as stewards of Newburyport's parks. Their charge is two-fold: to establish and implement plans for the maintenance, expansion, and betterment of our parks, and to monitor and officially act on issues affecting the use and management of our parks. The Commission engages the public in a democratic manner to allow for a continuous dialog towards meeting the intent of their mission.

In October of 2022, the Parks Commission embarked on an exercise to update its mission statement and develop a Strategic Vision for Newburyport's Parks Commission. Commissioners worked together and with the public to identify their priorities and broadly define the direction parks should take over the next 10 years. Over the course of three special meetings, Commissioners decided that this direction would largely be guided by a set of core values proposed by the Commissioners with input from community stakeholders. These core values would serve as the foundation of the strategic vision and a roadmap for decisions made by the Parks Commission now and into the future.

VISION

The Parks Commission envisions a future where residents and visitors alike have access to a robust city park system that provides ample opportunities for recreation, education, and community engagement. The decision-making of present and future Parks Commissions will be guided by an enduring set of Core Values that reflects the most vital aspects of our mission.

These Core Values are:

1. Environmental Conservation
2. Health & Wellness
3. Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
4. Community Engagement & Communication
5. Economic Vitality, Planning & Stability
6. Historic Preservation

Every decision that the Parks Commission makes should be grounded in one or more of these Core Values. These Core Values help define the scope of our work and guide our mission.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Parks Commission will maintain and celebrate the unique character of each of Newburyport's parks by upholding and shepherding our set of Core Values.

PART TWO: CORE VALUES DEFINED

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

This core value encompasses the preservation and responsible use of natural resources within our parks, focusing on the planting and care of appropriate tree and plant species, and fostering parkland as habitat for native plants, animals, and insects. We must implement improvements that are responsible and sustainable in the face of environmental challenges like climate change and sea level rise. Wherever possible, Parks should utilize green and organic resources such as gray water, alternative sources of energy, compost, permeable surfaces, and recycled materials whenever possible. The Parks Commission must anticipate environmental challenges and proactively guard public open space for the use of all.

HEALTH & WELLNESS

The primary purpose of city parks is to provide outdoor public space for both active and passive recreation. This value guides us to optimize our parks as venues that support good physical and mental health. A vast selection of athletic fields, courts, playgrounds and trails allow healthy exercise for people of all ages and abilities. Beautiful green spaces also offer opportunities for respite, relaxation, and the pursuit of hobbies. The Parks Commission should consider all avenues of promoting park use, including youth and adult programming, continuing relationships with local athletic leagues, and public-private partnerships that grant private organizations the use of public parks as venues for recreational activities.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

This value stresses the importance of making all people feel safe and welcome within our parks. Parks should provide pathways, equipment, and amenities that are universally accessible. Signage, maps, and interpretive materials should be easily translated for non-English speakers and those with visual impairments. Decision-making bodies should reflect a diversity of ideas, needs, and backgrounds. The Parks Commission should develop equity-centered policies to support inclusionary practices that will demonstrate that our parks are venues for a diverse public with dynamic needs and interests.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & COMMUNICATION

Parks are the collective property of the communities they serve. This value reminds the Commission of its role in promoting park use and in transmitting communications clearly and effectively to the community at large. All park locations, hours, policies, fees, rules, and permitting processes should be easily accessible by the public. Inquiries should be resolved in a timely manner. A master calendar should share recurring events, including public meetings, community events, and reviews of the Parks Master Plan, policies, and grant funding requests. Residents should easily be able to volunteer in or donate to their parks. Newburyport's Parks

Commission should not only communicate the most basic and vital information about our parks, but also actively promote parks through social media and other avenues.

ECONOMIC VITALITY, PLANNING & STABILITY

This core value reminds us that the economic support of parks should be stable, consistent, and robust. Accounting and budgeting should be transparent and straight-forward. Fiscal responsibility means that we must budget for the maintenance and upkeep of current parks and facilities, while accurately and realistically forecasting budget needs of the future. The Parks Commission should meet annually to review needs for capital projects and only accept monetary or in-kind donations if they are aligned with the Commission's priority projects.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Newburyport is rich in historical and cultural resources that give it a strong sense of place. This core value relates specifically to historical assets found within our parks, and in some cases the landscapes themselves that relate to important moments in history. Not only is it our responsibility to preserve local history, but also to proudly share that history with park visitors.

PART THREE: A 10-YEAR VISION

Using their Core Values as a guide, the Parks Commission has outlined priorities and initiatives it believes will be most beneficial to Newburyport's parks over the next decade.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

- Whenever possible, plant native plant and tree species to better withstand climate change conditions such as drought and flood, and remove detrimental, invasive species from local habitats to make room for natives that support habitat
- Take appropriate climate resiliency measures in parks along the waterfront (Cashman Park, Joppa Park, CCRT) to meet the challenges of climate change and sea level rise
- Utilize sources of gray water and find other renewable water resources for watering trees and flower beds to cope with drought conditions during the hottest summer months
- Find and use renewable sources of energy to power parks facilities
- Use parks infrastructure and improvements like rain gardens, permeable surfaces, vegetated swales, and water collection devices like rain barrels or cisterns to capture and reuse stormwater
- Explore opportunities to find and develop more open space into city parkland

HEALTH & WELLNESS

- Transform all courts (tennis, basketball, pickleball) into multi-use courts to maximize use for a variety of users
- Explore possibilities of providing adult planned recreational programming within parks (yoga, exercise, environmental education), perhaps through public-private partnerships
- Install a fitness circuit location along the CCRT
- Develop clear rules and regulations regarding the use of e-bikes within parks, as well as the use of trails for commuting
- Dogs: develop methods to cut down on dog waste in parks and consider a fenced-in off-leash dog run within Moseley Woods

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

- Make all playgrounds and parks universally accessible
- Widen the view of Newburyport's history to include stories of all Newburyporters
- Provide the public with a comprehensive map of parks and their amenities
- Make sure that all neighborhoods have equal access to parks and park amenities such as playgrounds, courts, and fields
- Ensure all parks signage, maps, and interpretive materials are easily translated for non-English speakers and those with visual impairments

- Set policies around program offerings in our parks that support DEI initiatives

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & COMMUNICATION

- Create a revamped website that allows the public easy access to vital content: fee schedules, list and downloadable map of all parks and amenities, permit process, calendar of events, rules and regulations, rules for court/field access, established and proposed policies (bench, public art donations), etc.
- Develop a Master Calendar for recurring parks community events and annual Parks Commission reviews (Parks Master plan, grant funding requests, policy reviews, etc.)
- Support volunteerism by establishing a centralized location or organization such as the newly formed Port Parks Alliance to manage volunteer opportunities
- Develop a social media presence
- Effectively advertise outdoor recreation and parks programming opportunities

ECONOMIC VITALITY, PLANNING & STABILITY

- Develop a clear and transparent process for making donations to city parks
- Coordinate the Parks Master Plan and parks initiatives/improvements with other city agencies and commissions
- Align gift acceptances with Parks Commission priorities for capital improvement projects
- Develop a process to allow Parks Commission input into the use determination of “orphaned parcels”

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

- Archive documents related to parks history and historical assets found within parks in an easily accessible database
- Restore the Atkinson Common rock tower and commemorate the role of the WPA in its construction
- Develop a self-guided historical walking tour through Newburyport’s parks (Brown Square, Garrison Gardens, Bartlet Mall, Atkinson Common, Inn St, Newburyport Black History Initiative, etc.)

PART FOUR: ACTION PLAN

In this Action Plan, priorities have been separated into IMMEDIATE, ONGOING, and LONG-TERM.

IMMEDIATE PRIORITY

The following actions have been identified as IMMEDIATE priority, meaning that they should be completed as soon as possible for maximum benefit for both the city’s parks and the community.

PRIORITY ORDER	CORE VALUE	ACTION	PARTY RESPONSIBLE	FUNDING
1.	Community Engagement & Communication Diversity, Equity & Inclusion	Update Parks Website: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List and printable map of all city parks, playgrounds, courts, fields, bathrooms, historic sites, trails, programming, etc. • Rules and regulations • Fee schedule • Online permitting process • Established and proposed policies (bench program, art donations, court use policy) • Master calendar • Make website easily translatable 	Parks Commission & Manager of Special Projects Maintenance by Parks Manager/DPS Admin	Operating Budget
2.	Community Engagement & Communication	Develop Master Calendar: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recurring monthly tasks and responsibilities of Parks Commission (Review of Parks Master Plan, policies, etc.) • Community events • Parks Commission tasks (CPC requests, Morrill requests, grant deadlines, etc.) 	Manager of Special Projects/DPS Admin Events coordination with Port Parks Alliance	Operating Budget

3.	<p>Community Engagement & Communication</p> <p>Economic Vitality, Planning & Stability</p>	<p>Establish New Parks Nonprofit Organization:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize local volunteering in parks • Manage parks donations by aligning gift acceptances with Parks Commission priorities • Better transparency and reporting of donations to Parks Commission and City Council • Plan and manage landmark community events 	Port Parks Alliance & Parks Commission	Private Fundraising & Volunteers
4.	<p>Health & Wellness</p> <p>Community Engagement & Communication</p> <p>Diversity, Equity & Inclusion</p>	<p>Adult Parks Programming:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer more recreation programming for adults and youth within parks such as yoga, exercise, art, environmental education, etc. • Set policies around program offerings that support DEI initiatives • Explore public/private partnerships that allow recreation professionals to offer classes in public parks 	NYS/COA & Parks Manager	Revolving Fund

ONGOING PRIORITY

The following actions have been identified as ONGOING priorities of the Parks Commission. Regular decision-making regarding parks upkeep, maintenance, and improvements should always take these priorities into consideration.

PRIORITY ORDER	CORE VALUE	ACTION	PARTY RESPONSIBLE	FUNDING
1.	Diversity, Equity & Inclusion	Universal Accessibility: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure that all city playgrounds are universally accessible• Accessible pathways and ramps in all parks• All parks signage, maps & interpretive materials are easily translated for non-English speakers and those with visual impairments	Parks Manager & Parks Commission	Operating Budget Grants Private Donations
2.	Environmental Conservation	Native Species: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wherever possible, plant native tree, shrub, and flower species to provide habitat and better withstand climate change• Remove invasives	Parks Manager & Parks Commission	Operating Budget Grants Private Donations
3.	Health & Wellness	Multi-Use Courts: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whenever courts are refurbished, line them as multi-use for tennis, pickleball, and basketball, to maximize user groups	Parks Manager & Parks Commission	Operating Budget Grants Private Donations

4.	Environmental Conservation	<p>Climate Resiliency:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any improvements to waterfront parks (Cashman Park, CCRT, Joppa) must take into consideration sea level rise 	<p>Parks Manager & Parks Commission</p> <p>Manager of Special Projects/Planning Dept</p>	<p>Operating Budget Grants</p> <p>Private Donations</p>
5.	Environmental Conservation	<p>Earth-Friendly Products and Practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use organic products whenever possible Limit and eliminate chemical fertilizers, weed and insect killers Utilize rain gardens, permeable surfaces and green infrastructure where possible 	<p>Parks Manager & Parks Commission</p>	<p>Operating Budget Grants</p> <p>Private Donations</p>
6.	<p>Diversity, Equity & Inclusion</p> <p>Health & Wellness</p> <p>Community Engagement & Communication</p>	<p>Park Accessibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that all neighborhoods/user groups have equal opportunity to access parks, playgrounds, and courts Widen the view of Newburyport's History to include stories of all Newburyporters Ensure that Parks Commission and Department participates in city discussion of "orphaned parcels" to determine best community use 	<p>Parks Commission, Parks Manager, Mayor's Office, & Other Departments, Boards/Commissions as appropriate</p>	<p>Operating Budget Grants</p> <p>Private Donations</p>

LONG-TERM PRIORITY

The following actions have been designated as LONG-TERM priorities of the Parks Commission. These projects, while important to our mission, do not require immediate action. They should be fulfilled as opportunities arise, resources become available, and community needs dictate.

PRIORITY ORDER	CORE VALUE	ACTION	PARTY RESPONSIBLE	FUNDING
1.	Historic Preservation Diversity, Equity & Inclusion	Parks History Archive: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Compile archive of historical documents and assets related to Newburyport parks, including history of all Newburyport groups• Develop a self-guided historical walking tour through Newburyport’s historical parks	Future Community Development Planner	Operating Budget
2.	Environmental Conservation	Renewable Water Sources: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Find and develop sources of gray water for watering of flower beds and park trees	Parks Manager	Operating Budget Grants Private Donations
3.	Environmental Conservation	Renewable Energy: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Find and develop sources of renewable energy to power parks facilities and equipment	Parks Manager	Operating Budget Grants Private Donations
4.	Community Engagement & Communication	Social Media <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Establish social media presence across multiple platforms to connect with various parks user groups	Parks Commission & Port Parks Alliance	Volunteers

5.	Health & Wellness Environmental Conservation	Fenced-In Off-Leash Dog Run Moseley Woods: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage off-leash dog areas with fenced-in off-leash dog runs that are large enough to offer play space for dogs and their owners while maintaining safety for other park users and preserving green space 	Parks Manager & Parks Commission	Operating Budget Grants Private Donations
6.	Health & Wellness	Biking: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop off-road bike trails and pump track at appropriate site • Develop clear rules and regulations regarding use of e-bikes within parks 	Parks Manager, Parks Commission & Manager of Special Projects	Operating Budget Grants Private Donations
7.	Health & Wellness	Fitness Circuit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install a fitness circuit location along the CCRT 	Parks Manager, Parks Commission & Manager of Special Projects/Planning Dept	Operating Budget Grants Private Donations
8.	Historic Preservation	Atkinson Tower Restoration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restore Atkinson's stone tower • Tell the story of the tower's place in the history of WPA, Atkinson Common, and Newburyport 	Parks Manager, Parks Commission & Manager of Special Projects/Planning Dept	Operating Budget Grants Private Donations