Drafted Updates for Newton’s 2020-2027 OSRP, Section 6 -- Community Vision; Part B.

At the time of Newton’s previous OSRP update, the city’s goals were directed toward:

1. Recognizing, preserving, and maintaining the city’s important natural assets and resources.
2. Ensuring an adequate amount, variety, and distribution of open space for both public benefits and biodiversity.
3. Identifying and integrating compatible recreation and conservation uses.
4. Exploring courses of action necessary to protect and preserve the large open spaces remaining in the city, including significant parcels owned by institutions and private entities.
5. Undergirding the city’s capacity for sound stewardship of its open spaces.

The process of updating the Plan is guided by the Open Space and Recreation Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee), appointed by the Mayor and consisting of representatives from regional and City agencies, and conservation, recreation, environmental, and neighborhood stakeholders with a community focus. The Advisory Committee has been instrumental in considering all inputs and comments received during these public participation events and opportunities and in reflecting them in the Plan Update as appropriate.

Since January, 2019, the Advisory Committee meets regularly to work on the Plan Update, under the guidance of Planning Department staff, and with the assistance of a team of graduate students from the Conway School of Landscape Design (Conway team).

The Conway team and members of the Advisory Committee received public input through a variety of public forums. All comments received will be duly considered by the Conway team, the Planning and Development Board, the Advisory Committee, and City in finalizing the Plan.

- A Recreation and Open Space Public Outreach Survey, launched January 30th, 2020 and open through February 14th, 2020.
- An initial Open Space and Recreation Plan Community Meeting, held at City Hall on Thursday, February 6th, 2020.
- A follow-up Open Space and Recreation Plan Community Meeting, held on March 4th, 2020.

These forums for input were publicized as broadly as possible through all available channels, including:

- Newton city website
- Postings at Newton City Hall
- Newton Conservators outreach
- Newton’s sports leagues outreach
- Public school newsletters
- Village “Area Council” updates
- Standard notification of public board and committee meetings and associated agendas on the City website
Major themes from the first community meeting:

Issues/Concerns (Fig. 1):

The deteriorating quality of Newton’s sport-specific athletic fields, and the pressing need for improved maintenance and upgrades where feasible necessary.

The deteriorating quality of Newton’s nature trails, specifically within wooded areas (like Cold Spring Park).

Growing community concern over the spread of non-native invasive plant species in natural areas (like Cold Spring Park and Purgatory Cove).

A lack of safe, pedestrian and cyclist-friendly transportation infrastructure connecting isolated open spaces to each other, to schools, and to village and population centers.

A growing interest in stronger park/open space protections, specifically in the form of Conservation Restrictions, following multiple development threats to existing open space (new schools, senior centers, etc.).

A need to expand Universal Accessibility into and within parks, playgrounds, and other open space amenities.

Assets/Values (Fig. 2):

The city’s variety of mixed-use open spaces (i.e. places that provide a diverse range of opportunities such as nature trails, playgrounds, community gardens, and playing fields).

The city’s open water recreational opportunities, including access points to the Charles River and Crystal Lake.

The city’s existing pedestrian/cyclist infrastructure, specifically the greenways and Carriage Lane.

The city’s conservation areas (specifically Webster Woods and the recent acquisition).

The array of public/private partnerships between city governance and civic groups, nonprofits, that aim to protect, preserve, and enhance open space.
Figure 1:

Issues/Concerns

- Inadequate Open Space: 4.3%
- Public facilities in disrepair: 8.7%
- Insufficient Park Protections: 4.3%
- Insufficient trail maintenance: 17.4%
- Athletic fields in disrepair: 26.1%
- Connectivity: 13.0%
- Invasive species spread: 21.7%
- Inadequate Accessibility: 4.3%

Figure 2:

Count of Positive Priorities

- Bike and pedestrian paths: 9.1%
- Good investment in Parks: 4.5%
- Greenways: 9.1%
- Quantity of Open Space: 4.5%
- City Acquisitions: 4.5%
- Existing Turf Fields: 4.5%
- Conservation Areas: 9.1%
- Mixed-use Open Space: 27.3%
- Public/Private Partnerships: 9.1%
- Open Water Recreational...: 18.2%
Community Meeting Agenda
Newton’s Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) 2020 Update
First Community Meeting -- February 6th, 2020, 7:00pm - 9:00pm
War Memorial Room, Newton City Hall, 1000 Commonwealth Ave., Newton, MA

This first community meeting serves as an information gathering session to solicit feedback from residents on ideas and visions for the future of Newton’s open spaces.

7:00 - 7:05: Guest arrival, sign-in, seating window.

7:05 - 7:20: Introductions and progress highlights (15 mins).

● Claire Rundelli and Jennifer Steel present on accomplishments since the last OSRP, goals moving forward, and introduce the Conway School team (10 minutes).
● Cara, Rowan and Sam (Conway team) present the OSRP update timeline and introduce the evening’s activities (5 mins).

7:20 - 7:25: Ice-breakers (5 mins)

● Meet your neighbor. Where do you like to take friends from out of town?

7:25 - 7:30: Individual activity (5 mins)

● Individual survey activity (working with handout sheets).

7:30 - 8:05: Small group/table activities (35 mins)

● Small working group activity; individuals explain their ideas, group selects a “reporter” to take notes and report back to the whole group.

8:05 - 8:50: Group activities and discussion (45 mins)

● Conway team facilitates grouping issues into larger themes.
● Group breaks into teams to brainstorm solutions to individual issues.
● Teams report solutions to the group. Discussion.
● Group votes on proposed solutions.

8:50 - 9:00: Closing (10 mins)

● Debrief.
● Statement of next steps.

Next meeting date: Wednesday, March 4th, 7:00 - 9:00pm (location TBD)

Take the OSRP Update Survey, online at forms.gle/YDChrou3ZJUp8M4g8

You can also find the survey on the City of Newton’s website by searching Open Space Survey