

Chapter 5

RECREATION

VISION

This chapter calls for a long-term commitment to provide a more comprehensive and professionally administered recreation program for Durham, which includes hiring a Recreation Director for the community. A strong recreation program can enhance Durham’s sense of community. A commitment to provide the resources to support ball fields, a community pool, accessible and maintained walking and bike trails, open space and waterways, and other recreational activities is vital. Recreation in Durham will go beyond the more active uses described above, but also include programs in the arts and theatre. It is envisioned that recreation in Durham will be provided by two main entities, a regional program such as Oyster River Youth Association, and a Durham-run recreation program that provides services in areas not covered by the regional program that is inclusive of all age groups. *Investment in recreation 1) projects a healthy Town image; 2) reflects our commitment to our children and our natural resources; and 3) ultimately brings the community together not only physically at a particular site, but also enhances the Town’s collective identity and connections through shared experiences.*

INTRODUCTION

In 1994 the Parks and Recreation Committee prepared a thorough and comprehensive analysis of existing opportunities for recreation, and a strategic plan (the “1994 Plan”) for the future. Unfortunately, many of the recommendations in the 1994 Plan have not been implemented and many of the problems identified in that report still exist today. There is a wide variety of unstructured recreation, but poor maintenance of trails and lack

of centralized and readily available information are of major concern. The University of New Hampshire (UNH) and Oyster River Youth Association (ORYA) offer many active recreation opportunities, but facility needs, limited access, and gaps in age groups covered compromise the strength of the programs. The challenge remains virtually the same as it was in 1994: to strengthen recreation in the areas of management, administration, facilities, programs, maintenance, and distribution of information.

Much of the hard work completed in 1994 is repeated in this chapter. The lack of implementation of the 1994 Plan can be attributed to many issues, the largest and most difficult of which are funding and lack of a recreation director. Without a point person to coordinate, promote, and administer Durham's recreation resources, any effort to improve the status quo will be futile. Increasing pressures on the Town's budget in recent years have not created a friendly environment for consideration of recreation expenditures. This chapter finds that for purposes of the Master Plan, a clear and unequivocal position on funding is necessary. Implementation of the strategies described in this chapter relies, in part, on the widely accepted planning principle that recreational programs are not self-sustaining, but rather, are taxpayer funded. In that regard, endorse efforts to strengthen and balance the tax base are necessary to implement these programs and improvements. Where appropriate, the need for user and other fees are noted, such as the sale of conservation easements, and the encouragement of private sector development is also discussed.

RECREATION DIRECTOR

BACKGROUND

For many years, the Town of Durham has wrestled with the concept of employing a recreation director. In the 1993 Recreational Needs Survey, only 48% of the respondents were in favor of a recreation director. However, the 1994 Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan identified a critical need to employ an individual to act as the Durham Recreation Advocate. The Town Council supported the plan, and in May of 1995 the position was filled.

The position of the Recreation Advocate was charged with developing a comprehensive recreation program for the Town. Failure to agree on the components and goals of such a program, lack of performance review, poor management, and budgetary restrictions resulted in elimination of the position.

Durham has historically relied heavily upon ORYA, UNH, and other private recreational services to provide for recreational needs in the Town. However, survey results indicate many residents are not satisfied with the limited programs these entities provide. Durham should decide what needs to be supplied for recreation services and decide what should be provided by private entities versus the Town. Feedback indicates a need for more pre-school, high school, adult, and elderly programs. In addition, participation in existing recreational programs has increased. ORYA will be at capacity within the next two years and UNH is unable to expand its recreation programs beyond the 200 community memberships currently offered. The Durham Parks & Recreation Committee has worked hard over the last few years to provide a few quality events, but the Town needs more programs than these volunteers alone can be expected to provide.

A strong recreation program promotes a sense of community. Over the past several years, there have been sporadic efforts to raise awareness of what recreational opportunities are available. Seventy-two percent (72%) of the respondents from the 1998 Master Plan telephone survey favor the development of a regular community newsletter. A vast majority of residents have little knowledge of what recreational opportunities exist in our own community. Many residents have turned to area communities and private recreation providers for recreational programs. Exercising these options may fill an individual void, but it does nothing to promote the Town's sense of community.

RECREATION DIRECTOR ISSUES, GOALS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ISSUE:

In the last decade ORYA has expanded its role in the tri-town recreational arena. It has developed programs in the arts and has begun programming for elder members of the community. ORYA has an existing infrastructure to offer cost effective and efficient recreation services. However, Durham needs its own recreation director to create a sense of community for Durham and to promote and manage recreational opportunities such as Wagon Hill. Overall, there is a need for better management and administration of recreational opportunities, with a focus on the needs of Durham residents.

GOAL:

Formulate the most efficient recreation program for Durham.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Enter into discussions with ORYA, Lee, and Madbury to provide a full spectrum of recreational programs for all age groups. Since ORYA is a tri-town organization, such negotiations would require the cooperation and financial support of Lee and Madbury.
2. Durham should also hire its own full time recreation director, possibly as part of the volunteer coordinator position recommended in Chapter 2 – Sense of Community and Town Facilities. This Director would:
 - Promote Wagon Hill Farm usage
 - Promote and establish recreation programs for Durham residents without competing with ORYA or other existing recreation programs
 - Maintain centralized trail mapping
 - Improve water access
 - Create/edit a community newsletter
 - Coordinate volunteer efforts for programs such as:
 - Easter Egg Hunt
 - Memorial Day Parade
 - Durham Days
 - Fourth of July Celebration
 - Father-Daughter Dance
 - Summer Concert Series
 - Halloween events
3. Durham should make use of the UNH intern and work study programs to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of the recreation program. It is critical to the success of an intern program that there be full supervision by the Director. To avoid the Town's previous experiences, this position must have clear and concise objectives and action strategies to accomplish such objectives. The Director must undergo periodic performance reviews and report to a single superior. It is imperative that the Director have a clear understanding and agreement that he or she is to work closely with, and not compete against, ORYA. The estimated cost for a Recreation Director is at least \$35,000 to \$60,000 per year, including benefits.
 - Priority: Within 2 years

STRUCTURED RECREATION

BACKGROUND

Oyster River Youth Association (ORYA)

The vast majority of organized recreational activity for Durham residents is offered through the Oyster River Youth Association (ORYA). The ORYA is comprised primarily of volunteers and offers programs to the residents of Durham, Lee, and Madbury, but there is no guarantee that the ORYA will continue in the long term to provide recreational services. The ORYA board of directors consists of volunteer representatives from each town. ORYA has one paid full-time executive director, as well as another part-time employee, and it offers approximately twenty recreation programs for children kindergarten age through eighth grade age. There are virtually no organized recreation programs for pre-schoolers, high school age children, or adults. Each town contributes funds to ORYA’s budget, with amounts that are based on each town’s percentage of children in the Oyster River School District (ORS D). Durham’s contribution for 1999-2000 was \$20,922. Durham also provides ORYA’s office space. ORYA’s primary funding comes from user fees. Durham’s contribution is approximately 8% of the \$249,218 ORYA operating budget. In 1998 there were 1,713 ORYA program participants from Durham, 1,142 from Lee, and 421 from Madbury. In 1996 there were 1,286;849,;and 275 participants respectively. Other ORYA operating funds are raised through participation fees, contributions, and fundraisers.

ORYA PROGRAMS	
Baseball	Basketball
Dance	Learn to Skate
Fun Camp	Golf
Hockey	Soccer
Karate	Lacrosse
Outdoor Ed.	Skiing
Soccer Camp	Softball
Swim	Swim Team
Tennis	Theatre
Track & Field	Skateboard

University of New Hampshire (UNH)

UNH offers some recreational opportunities to the Durham community. According to the 1993 Recreational Needs Survey, 63% of respondents used UNH recreational facilities. All programs involve user fees and access is limited. The UNH Hamel Recreation Center offers 200 memberships to Durham residents. Membership is offered on a first come first served basis, and membership is presently full with no capacity for expansion. There are also other seasonal programs, including the UNH outdoor and indoor pools, Mendum’s Pond (learn to sail programs), summer sport

**HAMEL CENTER
FACILITY**

- 104,425 gross sq. ft. facility
- 5 basketball/volleyball courts
- 3 badminton courts
- 2 floor hockey/indoor soccer rinks
- 4 racquetball courts
- 1 international squash court
- 3-lane indoor track
- Fitness center with 100 exercise stations
- Lounge
- Aerobics studio
- Multipurpose studio
- Locker rooms with saunas
- Meeting rooms
- Personal training Room

camp, youth swim programs and Camp Wildcat. Adult volleyball and softball leagues also exist but are limited to two and four community members, respectively.

Other Recreation Programs

Programs for seniors include Silver Squares, which offers primarily cultural activities, and the Active Retired Association, which covers both cultural and fitness activities. Thirty-five percent (35%) of respondents to the 1993 Recreational Needs Survey made use of these opportunities.

Other recreation programs available to Durham residents include a competitive soccer league known as “The Phantoms,” private programs offered by the Durham Boat Club for crew teams and individuals ages 14 and older, and a variety of exercise and dance programs offered by the Mill Pond Center to individuals ages five to adult.

Structured Recreation Facilities

There are limited Town facilities for structured recreation (see map of Structured Recreation Facilities). The Town maintains a playground consisting of two small outdated and insufficient play structures at the Father Lawless Fields. There are also three outdoor tennis courts and an outdoor basketball court at this site. These facilities are available on a first come first served basis. There is a new playground located behind the Jackson’s Landing Ice Rink. A citizen volunteer group raised funds to purchase the play structures and organized volunteers to build the facility. The Town will maintain the property.

The only privately owned recreational facility is the Hickory Pond Inn pitch and putt nine-hole golf course. In addition, a semi-private 18-hole golf course under private ownership has been approved for a location off Packers Falls Road.

The following is a list of facilities available for recreation programs offered by the ORYA:

- Jackson’s Landing Ice Arena. This is the sole capital asset owned by the ORYA, which holds a five-year lease from the Town for the

land on which the rink is located. If no amendments are requested by either party and neither party rescinds the lease, the lease automatically renews itself every five years.

- Father Lawless Fields in Durham.
- Lee baseball field, near the police station, which is also used for softball.
- One baseball, one softball, and two soccer fields in Madbury located on Town Hall Road.

With the exception of the ice rink, each of the facilities listed above is owned by the town in which it is located.

Additional athletic fields are located at the middle school and the high school. The availability of these fields is limited due to school usage. Other open spaces used as practice fields include two privately owned ungraded fields, Oyster River Park, and several backyards.

When possible, ORYA also uses the high school and middle school gyms and the multipurpose rooms at the elementary schools. UNH currently provides New Hampshire Hall for ORYA basketball free of charge on weekends, but that facility cannot be relied upon for the long term. The schools, ORYA, and private groups, such as The Phantoms and the Oyster River Travel Soccer Association (ORTSA), make maximum use of these resources. There is no excess time or space available to handle any increased recreational demand.

Currently, UNH makes its indoor pool available for the ORYA swim team, and the UNH outdoor pool is used for the summer instructional swim program.

The following is a list of locations that may be suitable for additional recreation sites (see map of Potential Structured Recreation Sites):

The Durham Landfill – points to consider:

- Due to be capped by the close of 2001.
- Need to determine how much land available for fields.
- Rural road traffic concerns.
- This may not be an appropriate location for recreation if the site continues to be used as a solid waste transfer station.

Durham Business Park – points to consider:

- Located near Jackson's Landing, ice rink and the community playground.
- All infrastructure in place except parking.
- Possibility for walking trail to connect to Jackson's Landing.
- If developed as recreational site, assurances needed that property not be sold for business development purposes.
- Traffic/entrance issues.
- Identified by ORYA as a potential site.

Wagon Hill Farm – points to consider:

- Room for sports fields.
- Parking and restroom improvements required.
- Traffic/ entrance issues.
- Environmental impact issues.
- Room to link fields with a recreation/pool facility.

Durham Gravel Pit (located in Lee, due to be reclaimed) – points to consider:

- Room for as many as 4 fields.
- Centrally located for the three towns serviced by ORYA.
- Within aquifer area - fertilizer issues.
- Identified by ORYA as a potential site.

There may be other suitable areas located on private land or UNH property. ORYA has standard templates for determining the number and type of fields these sites can accommodate. Any further examination of any site must include an analysis of the number of fields the location can accommodate.

Trends and Current Activities

ORYA has no plan to offer recreation programs for pre-schoolers, high school age children, or adults. ORYA has determined that with the exception of the ice rink, existing recreational facilities have been determined to be inadequate to meet the needs of the programs currently offered by the ORYA for children in kindergarten through eighth grade. The ORYA reports the need for four additional soccer fields and four more baseball/softball diamonds on a priority basis. ORYA also needs indoor facilities, including two full basketball courts and a multi-purpose room.

There is currently a plan under way to create two new soccer fields adjacent to the Moharimet Elementary School in Madbury. With the cooperation of the Army Corp of Engineers, development of these fields will begin in 1999/2000, and the fields will be available in 2001/2002. The Father Lawless fields in the Woodridge development will need to be closed for one and a half years for reseeding beginning in the year 2000. Due to lack of irrigation systems, ORYA must take one field off line every three years for maintenance purposes. Due to ORYA’s lack of proper equipment and personnel, the Town maintains the fields in Durham, which ORYA uses, with the exception of privately owned field areas.

The UNH outdoor pool is scheduled to close in by the end of 2000. This pool is used for the ORYA summer swim program. An alternative site will be needed for this program once the UNH pool is closed.

The Durham real estate market is undergoing a substantial increase in senior/retirement housing. Spruce Wood, a planned assisted living and senior community, has already received preliminary zoning approvals and there are more applications for similar types of senior housing coming before the Planning Board.

Top Three Structured Recreational Preferences by Age Group	
Ages 0-5:	Swimming/Pool Playground Ice Skating
Ages 6-11:	Swimming/Pool Soccer Base/Softball
Ages 12-18:	Swimming/Pool Tennis Soccer
Ages 19-30:	Swimming/Pool Hockey Tennis
Ages 31-50:	Swimming/Pool Tennis Golf
Ages 51+:	Swimming/Pool Tennis Golf
<i>Source: 1993 Recreational Needs Survey</i>	

There is also an increase in single family housing building permit applications. This trend creates additional potential for increased pressure on Durham's recreation facilities and programs.

Challenges Facing Structured Recreation

The demand on the ORYA program is growing significantly each year. Without additional physical and human resources in the near future, the ORYA program will not be able to continue allowing all children in the kindergarten through eighth-grade age range to participate in all programs. The current situation with the fields and indoor facilities makes it virtually impossible to consider adding programs for preschoolers, high school students, or adults.

Privately owned fields and backyards are not desirable for ORYA activities since their maintenance and availability cannot be assured. In addition, these fields are not designed and constructed as recreational facilities.

Neither UNH nor ORSD has facilities to absorb the additional recreational needs of the community.

ORYA would prefer to limit its ownership of capital assets to the ice rink.

ORYA does not have a business sponsorship program for team uniforms or field maintenance.

Presently, most of the recreational needs of persons not served by ORYA or unable to access UNH programs are met by memberships in athletic clubs outside the community. This trend works against efforts to build a strong sense of community, although it may satisfy individual needs.

A substantial increase in senior housing is expected to generate an increase in demand for senior recreation programs. Similarly, a sizable increase in family housing is expected to generate increased demand for playgrounds and other recreational activities.

STRUCTURED RECREATION ISSUES, GOALS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ISSUE:

Additional programs and resources are required in order to offer structured recreational programs to all age groups.

GOAL:

Develop the necessary additional outdoor and indoor recreational facilities and the funding for these resources. The additional facilities will be sufficient to handle the future growth of the existing ORYA programs, and provide programs to the age groups currently not covered by the existing ORYA. The ORYA should expand its programming to include other age groups and should continue to serve the towns of Durham, Lee, and Madbury. The cost associated with the development of additional recreation facilities and programs should be borne proportionately among the participating Towns.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Cooperate fully with the Town of Madbury and the Army Corp of Engineers to ensure that two additional soccer fields are developed this summer for use in 2000 or 2001.
 - Priority: Within two years
2. By the year 2001 develop two additional irrigated soccer fields and four additional irrigated baseball diamonds. The following sites should be considered:
 - Gravel pit owned by Durham and located in Lee,
 - Durham Business Park,
 - Durham Town Landfill, and
 - Wagon Hill Farm.
 - Priority: Within two years

3. Encourage and support ORYA in reducing Town field maintenance costs through the adoption of a business sponsor program and use of sustainable landscaping techniques. Businesses could support ORYA teams by adoption of fields. ORYA could also offset costs and increase fundraising efforts by permitting businesses to subsidize team uniforms.
 - Priority: Within two years
4. Encourage and support ORYA or another organization in expanding programs and related administration to include the age groups not covered by the existing ORYA. This should be done in conjunction with the creation of the new fields. This action will require the cooperation of Madbury and Lee, as additional services provided by ORYA would be open to all three towns. Please refer to the subsection entitled Recreation Director for further discussion.
 - Priority: Within two years
5. Construct a new pool, preferably fully outdoor or with an outdoor component, by the year 2001 to replace the UNH outdoor pool. Please refer to the section on Community Pool for further discussion.
 - Priority: Within two years
6. Study appropriate locations and funding opportunities for an in-line skate/skateboard park. Discuss the experiences other communities have had with these parks (e.g., Exeter). If found feasible, construct such a park.
 - Priority: Within two to six years
7. Construct a centrally located community recreation center by the year 2005. A recreation center would fulfill the need for intramural, adult, senior, and tot programs as well as needed space for ORYA activities. The facility could also include multipurpose rooms to serve a wide variety of community needs. Initial steps in constructing the recreation center must include conducting a feasibility study to examine possible sites and funding sources for the center. This study should be done in conjunction with the community center study recommended in Chapter 2 – Sense of Community and Town Facilities. Downtown Durham, Durham Business Park, Wagon Hill, and other areas should be considered as potential sites. Issues to consider include traffic safety, available infrastructure, and proximity to downtown. The study should also examine the possibility of private sector development and identify any

grant sources. The study must also explore the possibility of ORYA participation.

- Priority: Within two to six years
8. Prepare a financial plan to identify and provide funding for recreational facilities and programs. The plan should include taxpayer funding and implementation of user fees. This recommendation is consistent with the 1993 Recreation Needs Survey results which show that 58% of the respondents favor a combination of taxes and user fees to fund recreational programs and activities. As noted in the 1994 Existing Conditions Report, recreational fees should be based on a pricing policy. Information on pricing policies in the recreation field is easily accessible, and development of Durham’s user fees should be based on these accepted standards. The Recreation Director should also explore grants as sources of funding as well as community fundraising. Grant and fundraising efforts are more likely to succeed if based on a comprehensive fiscal plan.
 - Priority: Within two years
 9. Strengthen the Town’s Subdivision Regulations by requiring new subdivisions to provide playground and/or recreational facilities at the time of construction or to provide a cash-in-lieu payment and pay an impact fee to fund recreation services. The Town could then use those funds to build, repair, replace or maintain other Town playgrounds.
 - Priority: Within two years
 10. Continually assess the level of recreational services provided by both the private and/or nonprofit sector and the town to ensure that adequate recreational services are provided.

UNSTRUCTURED RECREATIONAL FACILITIES NEEDS ASSESSMENT

BACKGROUND

One of Durham's greatest community assets is the wealth of unstructured recreational opportunities available throughout the Town (see map of Unstructured Recreation Locations and Water Access Points). Community members can use a number of Town, State, and University properties for many outdoor activities, including hiking, cross-country skiing, ice-skating, bird watching, horseback riding, fishing, and boating. Historically, Town volunteer groups and UNH have published trail and recreational maps, but the lack of a centralized dissemination point and changes in volunteer leadership have meant that consolidated and up-to-date information about Durham's unstructured recreational opportunities is either hard to locate or not available.

Use and Awareness of Unstructured Recreation Resources

According to a Durham Conservation Commission publication in 1991, the Town of Durham contains over 1,000 acres of publicly owned

lands (Durham, UNH, and State) crisscrossed with trails and providing access to numerous waterways. The 1993 Recreation Needs Survey shows very high usage of Durham's unstructured recreational opportunities. The 1994 Durham Recreation Strategic Plan identified four access limitations associated with Durham's trail system 1) lack of public knowledge; 2) difficulty in locating trailheads; 3) lack of parking at trailheads; and 4) improperly posted "No Trespassing" signs.

Virtually all recreational surveys, plans, and recommendations over the past ten years have strongly urged increasing awareness of and available information about Durham's trail and water access points. The 1993 Recreational Needs Survey clearly indicated that a large number of Durham residents are not aware of the Town's existing facilities, especially such areas as Langmaid and Doe Farms. Although it was suggested in the 1994 Recreation Strategic Plan and in other previous recreational plans that the

1991 Durham Outdoor Recreation Resource List

Adams Point Wildlife Area	Langmaid Farm
Cedar Point	MacDonald Lot
Colby Marsh	Mill Pond
College Woods	Old Reservoir
Davis Park	Oyster River Lndg.
Doe Farm Forest	Oyster River Pk.
East Foss Farm	Packers Falls
Horsehide Creek	Stolworthy Wildlife
Jackson's Landing	Sanctuary
Thompson Farm	Wagon Hill Farm
West Foss Farm	Wiswall Dam
Woodridge Recreation	Linn Ponds
	Area

Town produce an extensive booklet providing information about these recreational opportunities, no such publication has been produced for general community use.

Top Three Unstructured Recreation Preferences by Age Group	
Ages 0-5:	Hiking XC Skiing/Snow Activities Boating/Canoe
Ages 6-11:	Hiking XC Skiing/Snow Activities Ice Skating Outdoor
Ages 12-18:	Hiking XC Skiing/Snow Activities Biking
Ages 19-30:	Jogging Boating/Canoe
Tie:	XC Skiing/Walking/ Swimming/Ocean/River
Ages 31-50:	XC Skiing/Snow Activities Hiking Boating/Canoe
Ages 50+:	Walking XC Skiing/Snow Activities Boating/Canoe
<i>Source: 1993 Recreational Needs Survey</i>	

Existing Unstructured Recreation Reference Resources

Much information about Durham’s unstructured recreational resources has *already been collected and catalogued*. Important existing references, which document and catalog Durham’s unstructured recreational resources, include the following sources:

Conservation Commission Report on Durham Recreational Resources (1991). This publication maps and categorizes all of Durham’s public recreational resources according to activities, including state, UNH, and Town properties. Recreational categories include: bird watching, boating, cross-country skiing, fishing, historical sites, horseback riding, hunting, ice skating, mountain biking, open field games, picnicking, scenic viewing, tennis/basketball, and walking/jogging. This report doesn’t clarify access points or access restrictions and is not readily available.

“Outdoor Recreation” Pamphlet. Published by the Conservation Commission and a group of local volunteers in 1981 and revised in 1991, this useful pamphlet showing walking trails, parking, and water access points is not available to residents any-

more.

UNH Blue Pages. Published by the Office of Public Programs & Events. The Blue Pages list UNH resources available to the public, including unstructured recreational activities. It is mailed to Durham residents periodically but is not available through the Town offices.

Recreation Needs Survey (1993). Indicates that unstructured recreational activities were four of the top five most popular recreational activities of Durham residents. The most popular recreational activities among Durham residents includes (in order): 1) pool swimming, 2) cross country skiing, 3) hiking, 4) boating/canoeing, and 5) walking.

UNH Web Site. Contains detailed, though hard to read, trail maps for all UNH properties. Web site and properties are maintained and managed by the UNH Office of Woodlands Management.

Water Access and Cycling Opportunities

Boating access points are available on the Lamprey River, Oyster River, Wiswall Dam, and Little Bay. Public launch sites include Adams Point, Cedar Point, Doe Farm Forest, Jackson's Landing, Wiswall Dam, Packers Falls, Oyster River Landing, Mill Pond and Wagon Hill Farm. The variety of water access for activities such as canoeing, kayaking, sailing, sculling, motor boating in both rivers and estuaries/ocean water is impressive.

Durham is a popular area for both off- and on-road recreational biking. The Strafford Regional Planning Commission and the Seacoast Area Bike Routes organization are promoting a regional bike and trail network which will link Durham with Portsmouth to the east and Newmarket to the south (see map of Seacoast MPO Regional Bike Network). A part of this network is the Wagon Track bike trail that crosses through Durham and Madbury.

UNSTRUCTURED RECREATION ISSUES, GOALS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ISSUE #1:

Durham needs to increase community awareness and use of the multitude of unstructured recreational opportunities. Many unstructured recreational opportunities in Durham are unknown and underutilized by Durham residents. Consolidating, publishing, and disseminating this information is an absolute necessity to improve access to both trails and water resources.

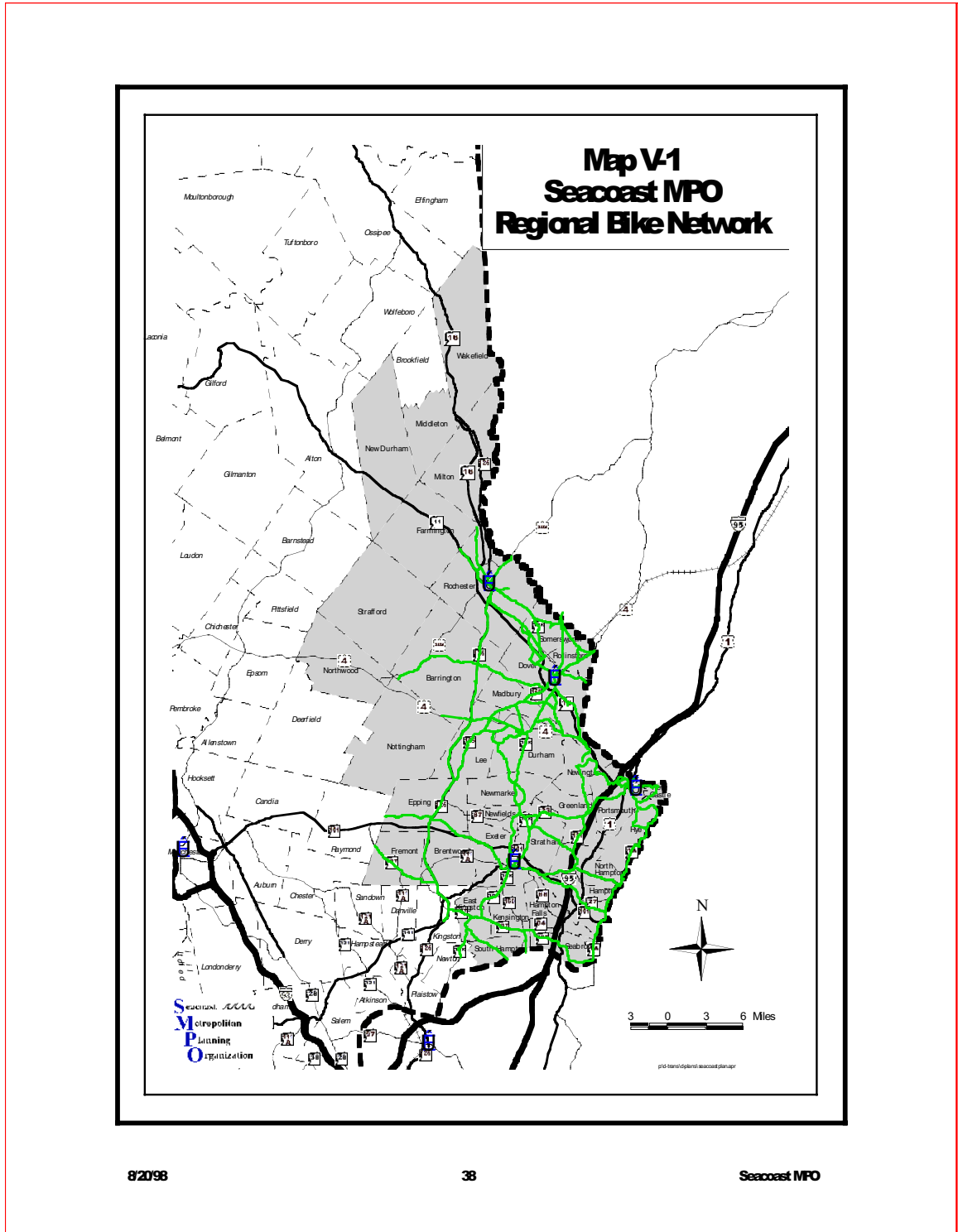
GOAL:

Increase circulation of information about and use of existing unstructured recreational opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Centralize all existing trail and water access information, including access for boating and fishing, in a handbook which would also include all other recreation opportunities outlined in this chapter. The handbook should be readily available at the Town Hall, on the Town’s Web site, at the library, through local real estate brokers, through the ORSD, and at a downtown information kiosk. This handbook should include a locator map for all Town, State, and UNH sites as well as parking areas and a list of recreational organizations (e.g., ORYA) with contact information, hours, and fees. The printing costs could be defrayed with a fee.
 - Priority: Within 1 year

Figure 5.1. SEACOAST MPO REGIONAL BIKE NETWORK



ISSUE #2:

The trail system is extensive. However, public comments in the 1999 master planning process note that UNH properties contain a large number of the walking and hiking trails in the Town. The Town has little assurance over the long term that these trails and lands will be preserved as publicly accessible natural areas for recreation. The Town of Durham is partially reliant on UNH for providing this very valuable community resource. In addition, current trail maps are old and incomplete.

GOAL:

Formulate a strategy to protect and enhance the trails network on Durham and UNH property and in areas susceptible to development and/or transportation projects.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Recognizing the high value of Durham’s extensive unstructured recreational opportunities and the sense of community they help create, the Town should work to preserve the existing recreational trails and water access points (particularly in the downtown area) as new development or transportation projects arise. These trails (cataloged in the aforementioned documents) provide key connections between natural areas, neighborhoods, downtown, and work places and will, if advertised more clearly, continue to create a pedestrian-friendly sense of community for the Town of Durham.
2. Improve visual awareness of trails on Town lands with improved trail and parking signage and improved maps. Organize "map a trail" month and seek out volunteers to map trails with Global Positioning System (GPS), available free of charge from the Strafford Regional Planning Commission.
 - Priority: Within 2 to 6 years
3. In order to ensure that Durham’s excellent trail system and natural area system remains an important asset to both the Town and the University, the Town should actively pursue cooperation with UNH in long-term land protection of the natural areas owned by the University and located in Durham.
 - Priority: Within 2 to 6 years

ISSUE #3:

The trail system requires regular marking and maintenance and appropriate signage.

GOAL:

Create a trail maintenance schedule.

RECOMMENDATION:

Seek volunteers to prioritize the trails in terms of amount of usage and need for maintenance and to perform regular maintenance. Organize Town-sponsored trail clean up days with volunteers.

- Priority: Within 2 to 6 years

ISSUE #4:

There is no safe pedestrian or bike connection to Wagon Hill Farm, creating a conceptual separation between this important recreational resource and the heart of Durham. At this time, Route 4 is the only way of getting to Wagon Hill Farm (other than by boat, though this is often difficult due to tidal cycles), and walking or biking on Route 4 are not viable options for safety reasons.

GOAL:

Support development of a pedestrian and/or bike connection to Wagon Hill Farm.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Support the advocacy work of the Seacoast Area Bike Routes organization in developing a regional trail network.
 - Priority: Within two years
2. Link the regional trail network and the Wagon Track Bike Trail to Wagon Hill Farm, possibly through an underpass or bridge across Route 4.
 - Priority: Within 7 to 25 years

ISSUE #5:

Durham's paved bike route system is much more limited than its walking/hiking trail system. The 1993 Recreation Needs Survey indicates that a sufficient network of dedicated, safe bike routes for commuter or recreational biking does not exist in the Town. Vehicular speeds in excess of the

posted speed limit, increased traffic flow and an absence of paved bike paths are often cited as sources of this problem. This absence limits bicycle commuting and safe recreational bicycling within and through the Town.

GOAL:

Support development of a safe commuter and recreational bike network.

RECOMMENDATION:

Endorse and support the 1995 Durham Bike Plan. Updates to this plan should include an analysis of Durham’s long term transportation objectives and feasibility of bike path construction.

- Priority: Within 7 to 25 years

ISSUE #6:

Most water access points contain some limitations on boating, either involving long portage (e.g., Wagon Hill), limited parking, tidal complications (e.g., Adam’s Point), heavy siltation that requires maintenance of sediments/dredging for reliable access (e.g., Jackson’s Landing), or the lack of a ramp (e.g., Doe Farm and many other sites). These resources are underutilized, likely as a result of the lack of community awareness, signage, and the other issues listed in this section. None of the landing areas in Durham are on the list of future coastal dredging needs found in the document “Dredging in New Hampshire: A Review of Projects, State Permit Procedure, and Future Coastal Dredging Needs,” prepared by the New Hampshire Office of State Planning and New Hampshire Council on Resource Development in January 1999.

GOAL:

Improve water access with appropriate maintenance and improvements.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The Town should seek to have its water access points identified, evaluated, and reviewed by the State for placement on the list of future coastal dredging needs. Any such review should seek input from the UNH crew teams, the Durham Boat Club, appropriate conservation organizations, and other stake holders since these organizations use Jackson's Landing for access to the river. The evaluation should also examine other options if dredging is not feasible, and determine ways in which to improve parking and aesthetics of the landing area.

- Priority: Within 7 to 25 years

2. Refurbish the dock at Wagon Hill so that small craft (e.g., canoes and sculling) can be accommodated. There also needs to be a maintenance schedule and seasonal removal, storage and launch schedule, which could be a volunteer effort with support from the Department of Public Works.
 - Priority: Within 2 to 6 years

WAGON HILL FARM

BACKGROUND

Located on one of the major gateways to Durham, Wagon Hill Farm consists of 100 acres of land on the south side of Route 4 and includes a house, ell and barn, and 40 acres of land on the north side of Route 4. The Town acquired this property in 1989 at a cost of approximately \$3 million. The Town is obligated on a bond with annual payments of \$300,000, and the bond is due to mature in 2004. The purchase of the farm was a contentious issue and there is still little agreement today on how Durham should develop the property.

Wagon Hill Farm Master Plan

The use of Wagon Hill Farm has been the subject of many studies performed over the past ten years. In 1990 the Parks and Recreation Committee formed a Wagon Hill Farm Committee, which became inactive in 1994. In 1995 the Town hired a consulting firm to prepare a master plan for the property.

The 1995 Wagon Hill Master Management Plan was the result of a planning process involving the Recreation Committee, citizen workshops, public officials, and a consulting firm. The team prepared three development scenarios for public consideration, which were presented to the public for comment. The team then prepared a Preferred Plan based on the public comments (see map of Wagon Hill Master Management Plan). This plan called for limited development of the farm for unstructured recreational uses with the following short-term goals:

- Repair of the house for rental.
- Sale of the 40 acres of land on the north side of Route 4 (north 40).
- Improvements and protections measures for the trail system, shoreland, and marshland.
- Creation of an outdoor classroom area.
- Creation of an area for community gardening.

- Planting of a wildflower farm.

Long-term improvements called for (a) repair of the barn for public meeting space and restrooms together with additional parking area; and (b) reconstruction of the Cider Mill for retail and storage space for the wildflower farm program.

With the exception of the items below, the Preferred Plan was not implemented.

- Repairs to the buildings have been limited to that necessary to prevent further deterioration.
- The house has been rented for residential use.
- Minor repairs have been made to trails and shoreland.

In addition, the north 40 acres has not been sold due to undocumented claims that poor soil conditions and extensive wetland may prohibit development.

In 1997, the Town hired a Recreation Advocate to expand activities at the Farm but that position was eliminated.

Trends and Current Activities

Today the Wagon Hill farm is used exclusively for unstructured recreation. The Park is a popular spot for dog owners throughout the Seacoast due to the “free run” status. This issue has been hotly disputed between those who wish to run their dogs on the property and those who seek limitations on that activity. In the winter, the park draws substantial numbers of sledders. The Farm has been the site for community gatherings such as Durham Day.

Wagon Hill Farm Assets and Opportunities for Use

Public open land and access to Little Bay are relatively rare features in Durham and the greater Seacoast area. The Farm is located on a major gateway to Durham and, as such, generates the open space feel and rural character that many value and seek to preserve.

The site is very large and could accommodate development of recreational and cultural activities uniquely connected to the Farm, while preserving areas for conservation. The topography of the site allows for recreational development to be screened from the road view.

A City of Portsmouth water main runs through the farm. The easement deed permits Durham to tap into the water main. Utility services run to the house.

The Seacoast Area Bike Routes organization seeks to connect the Wagon Track bike trail to the Farm via a trail spur, and potentially a Route 4 underpass or bridge.

A bequest was made to the Town in the amount of \$60,000 for the benefit of the Farm, from which funds have not been spent.

Challenges for the Use of Wagon Hill Farm

The Wagon Hill farm is located outside the central Town core and is not easily or safely accessible, except by car. Water access is limited due to the tidal cycle and poor navigation aids. These two infrastructure deficiencies greatly contributes to the underutilization of the Farm.

Traffic on Route 4 is heavy, especially at peak travel times. Increase in visitation to the Farm may require evaluation of access improvements.

Increasing recreational opportunities at the Farm will require substantial financial investment in administration, maintenance, infrastructure, and construction costs.

Environmental concerns exist with respect to grading and earthwork commonly associated with construction of ball fields and parking areas.

The trail system and sensitive wetlands require immediate attention to prevent extensive damage.

WAGON HILL FARM ISSUES, GOALS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ISSUE:

Wagon Hill Farm is underutilized as an active recreational site and community gathering place.

GOAL:

Formulate a cost-efficient plan to encourage greater use of the farm as a community gathering place and active recreational site with protected conservation areas.

OBJECTIVE #1:

Select a few short-term, low-cost, building block projects to provide the infrastructure for more recreation activity at Wagon Hill Farm and use the Recreation Director to generate community interest in the site.

PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Actively pursue and determine, once and for all, whether the north 40 acres is unmarketable (get an appraisal, prepare wetlands delineation and test pits, explore abutters' interests, and list with a broker). Estimated cost is approximately \$5,000. Study farm accessibility from Watson Road to minimize traffic impact on Route 4. If possible, sell the property with covenants and deed restrictions to ensure compatible development. Create conservation easement as a buffer along Route 4 frontage. All proceeds of the sale should be placed in a fund designated solely for Wagon Hill Farm improvements.
2. Implement user fees for non-Durham residents and provide adequate signage and enforcement.
3. Complete repair to wetland, shoreline, and trail system. The 1995 Wagon Hill Master Management Plan identified construction of a Davis Creek footbridge, resurfacing of trails, and shoreline stabilization with rip-rap and vegetation (see map of Wagon Hill Master Management Plan). Some of this work has been completed and new areas may need attention. Identify what areas require attention, the cost, and sources of funding. This work should also include an analysis of whether realignment of trails might avoid future shoreline degradation. The 1995 Wagon Hill Master Management Plan estimated the cost of such improvements to be \$82,800 (without donations). This figure will have to be reworked in light of actual conditions. Grants, volunteer efforts and materials donations should be a priority.
4. Conduct feasibility study for construction of a combined pool/recreation center at Wagon Hill Farm. This project should evaluate other sites in Town as well, and explore private sector involvement.
5. (A.) Add a parking area as shown on 1995 Wagon Hill Master Management Plan (Plan of Concept B) to provide parking for a capacity of 150 vehicles at an estimated cost at that time of \$140,000 (see map of

Wagon Hill Master Management Plan). The 1995 Plan identified the area around the house as most suitable for this purpose due to proximity of restroom facilities and museum or meeting space facilities. The Plan calls for the parking to follow the existing topography to minimize visual and environmental impacts. According to the 1995 Plan, increased parking will allow for events of 100 or more people. Suggested materials for the parking are gravel or crushed stone to maximize drainage and minimize storm water runoff.

(B.) Develop public transportation access.

(C.) Make required maintenance and repairs to the barn and provide additional temporary bathroom facilities.

6. Construct a simple stage for outdoor amphitheater area in the area behind the wagon.
7. Construct and maintain a small dock for canoes and other small watercraft. The responsible party could be either the Public Works Department or the Recreation Director.
8. Construct an outdoor classroom area in the gravel pit area as outlined in 1995 Wagon Hill Master Management Plan. The site would require some grading. Boy Scouts, conservation groups, and other volunteer organizations could provide logs or large stones for seating. The UNH Office of Sustainability may be interested in this as a joint project.
9. Designate a five-acre community garden area in the old apple orchard area as described in the 1995 Wagon Hill Master Management Plan. Prepare a portion of the area for a garden. Prior to conducting this work, assess the orchard area for contamination, such as lead arsenic.
10. Designate a wildflower garden area in the field north of the wagon. The Recreation Director, garden clubs or other interested organizations could be responsible for this project.
11. Investigate feasibility of a ball field area in the field currently used for overflow parking.

OBJECTIVE #2:

Provide good management for the projects listed above. Without a point person to organize and direct activities relating to this site, the farm will remain underutilized.

RECOMMENDATION:

Hire a Recreation Director (per previous section) to manage and develop these projects. Duties must include coordination of interested parties, organization of volunteer groups, fundraising, grant writing where applica-

ble, and marketing (via newsletter with section devoted to Wagon Hill, flyers etc). The estimated cost for a Recreation Director is at least \$35,000 to \$60,000 per year, including benefits.

OBJECTIVE #3:

Set aside areas of Wagon Hill Farm to be retained in perpetuity as conservation areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Set aside for conservation all of the area north of the house and wagon to Route 4 and all of the area from the shoreline north to the trail abutting the old apple orchard and extending east to the property line (see map of Wagon Hill Conservation Areas). This set aside property should be planned with the assistance of the Conservation Commission and other interested members of the public. Approach conservation organizations to purchase these easements at fair market value and use proceeds for improvements to the farm. Ensure that recommended recreation activities will not be jeopardized or restricted by terms of the conservation easements.

OBJECTIVE #4:

Select long-term, capital-intensive projects to continue the improvements to Wagon Hill Farm in conjunction with strong marketing efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS (LONG TERM):

1. Add restroom facilities as part of repair of the barn for community meeting space. This project was part of the “Preferred Plan” in the 1995 Wagon Hill Master Management Plan. This plan determined that the most cost-effective solution was to replace the barn. The estimated cost per the 1995 Plan is \$207,520, which includes public restrooms. The \$60,000 bequest to the Town could be used as seed money to start these projects.
2. Improve the amphitheater to include lighting, seating, hatch shell, etc. Continue renovations to house, ell, and barn, and study best use based on an analysis of how the public is using the farm (i.e., is there interest in more community meeting space, wildflower shop, museum or history and ecology exhibits, or concession area).
 - Priority: Within 7 to 50 years

COMMUNITY POOL

BACKGROUND

The UNH outdoor pool was built in the 1930s as a federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) project. Originally known as the Town “swimming hole,” it was closed due to a high levels of bacteria and converted to a more modern sanitary chlorinated pool. Though owned by UNH, the pool is used predominantly by Durham residents and recognized by many as Durham’s most important summer public gathering place. In 1998 the average daily attendance was 289 people of whom 79% were Durham residents not affiliated with UNH. The annual operating costs for the 1998 ten-week season is \$80,000, of which Durham paid \$38,000.

The pool is an integral part of the Durham summer community. It is an important community gathering place. The present location allows many residents to walk or bike to the pool as they have since the turn of the century. Having a pool in this location keeps people in Durham supporting the downtown summer economy. It is central to the summer recreation programs in Durham, and it is used widely by local day camps.

Trends and Current Activities

The pool will be closed by UNH, possibly this year. Recently the Department of Environmental Services mandated the pool be brought into compliance with several standards. UNH and the Town of Durham have agreed to share the cost (\$70,000) of addressing and repairing the most pressing problem, chlorinated water discharging into the Pettee Brook. The DES has given permission for the pool to remain open for two years; thus the pool will close at the end of the year 2000. During this timeframe, options and alternatives to the pool need to be explored. Though there are many in the community who wish to save the current pool, UNH has not included the updating of this facility in its master plan and has stated that the summer of 2000 may be the last season.

Building a new pool or repairing and upgrading the present pool is estimated to cost from 3 to 5 million dollars.

Some of the options available to Durham with respect to the pool include:

Option #1: Construct a new pool on present location or other UNH site. A new pool built on the same site, Garrison Avenue, or other UNH site adjacent to the UNH Recreation center and the Whittemore Center, will continue the shared tradition of UNH/Durham summer recreation. This allows both parties to share the cost of construction and yearly maintenance. By building a new pool with UNH, a long-term relationship can be formed ensuring a pool in Durham for years to come. This type of state-of-the-art swimming facility could cost \$5-10 million.

Option #2: New pool owned and operated by Durham. If an agreement for a new pool cannot be reached between UNH and the Town, Durham will need to research another site for a pool. Currently, Durham owns no centrally located land conducive to a pool. There is, however, sufficient Town- owned land located at Wagon Hill Farm and the Durham Business Park. Both these sites should be the subject of a feasibility study. Suitable sites on privately owned land should also be considered. In addition, construction and maintenance of the pool will be entirely Durham's responsibility, though the project will probably cost less than a joint UNH/Town project. Durham will have total control over hours of operation, design and similar issues associated with a swimming pool.

Option #3: New pool with adjacent community partnership. A partnership with adjacent communities would allow for shared costs of building and maintaining a pool. Finding a mutually acceptable site may take the pool site out of Durham proper. Also, operational issues would need to be negotiated with the other communities.

Option #4: Privately owned community pool. Durham could explore a community pool owned and operated by a private entity. This would free the Town from any initial capital outlay and yearly maintenance responsibilities. Membership would be based on individual user fees.

COMMUNITY POOL ISSUE AND RECOMMENDATION

ISSUE:

Durham needs a pool.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Durham Town Council has agreed to share the cost of repairing the discharge problem of the present pool. This will allow Durham residents the use of the outdoor pool until it closes. Four Durham residents have been appointed to a commission to work with UNH representatives to study the feasibility of a new pool on the same site or another site in Durham. This study will be funded by UNH and the results should be available by the end of the summer of 1999. If it is determined that it is not in the best interest of both parties to build a shared facility, the Town should appoint a committee to further investigate the above listed "Options" for a pool. If possible, the Town should try to locate such a facility on Town land that has available infrastructure.