

THE RHODE ISLAND COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING STANDARDS  
GUIDANCE HANDBOOK SERIES

**GUIDANCE HANDBOOK #3:  
PLANNING FOR RECREATION**

Revised June 2018

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*The general assembly hereby establishes a series of goals to provide overall direction and consistency for state and municipal agencies in the comprehensive planning process [...] to promote the preservation of the open space and recreational resources of each municipality and the state.*

*The Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act, RIGL subsection 45-22.2-3(c)(5)*

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning Guidance Handbook Series is the result of over twenty-four months of cooperation and coordination among state agencies, local planners, and other professionals interested in helping cities and towns craft better comprehensive plans. The guidance development process was overseen by the Comprehensive Planning Advisory Committee, a dedicated group of planning, land use, legal, and community professionals who worked diligently to develop content on the comprehensive planning process and to review topical content as it was developed. Without this group the manual would not have become reality.

Additionally, the topical content for the guidance handbook series was developed in conversation with numerous experts. These knowledgeable individuals are the reason that the manual is helpful, user-friendly, and thorough.

The guidance handbook series was prepared by Chelsea Siefert, Principal Planner. Ms. Siefert was guided by Karen Scott, Assistant Chief and Kevin Nelson, Supervising Planner, and assisted by Caitlin Greeley, Principal Planner.

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### COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Sheila Brush, former Director of Programs, Grow Smart RI

Bill DePasquale, Director of Planning, City of Warwick

Ann-Marie Ignasher, former Town Planner, Town of Foster

Nancy Letendre, Principal Planner, Mason & Associates, Inc.

Sue Mara, Assistant Director of Planning and Redevelopment, City of Pawtucket

Martha Matchnik, former Director of Healthy Aging, YMCA of Greater Providence

Krista Moravec, Environmental Planner, Horsley Witten Group, Inc.

Bonnie Nickerson, Director of Planning and Development, City of Providence

Fred Presley, City Manager, City of West Warwick

Pam Sherrill, former Town Planner, Town of Johnston

### TOPIC EXPERTS

Angela Ankoma, RI Department of Health

Ken Ayars, RI Department of Environmental Management

Jim Boyd, RI Coastal Resource Management Council

Meredith Brady, RI Department of Transportation

Paige Bronk, Town of North Kingstown

Michelle Burnett, RI Emergency Management Agency

Kathleen Crawley, RI Water Resources Board

Teresa Crean, URI Coastal Resources Center/RI Sea Grant

Steve Devine, RI Department of Transportation

Joe Dias, RI Department of Environmental Management

Lauren Faria, RI State Council on the Arts

John Flaherty, Coalition for Transportation Choices

Elizabeth Francis, RI Council for the Humanities

Rupert Friday, RI Land Trust Council

Grover Fugate, RI Coastal Resources Management Council

Scott Gibbs, Economic Development Foundation of RI

Julia Gold, RI Department of Health

Rick Greenwood, formerly of RI Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission

June House, RI Office of Housing and Community Development

Paul Jordan, RI Department of Environmental Management

Lorraine Joubert, URI Nonpoint Education for Municipal Officials

Nate Kelly, Horsley Witten Group

Meg Kerr, Watershed Counts

Sarah Kite, RI Resource Recovery Corporation

Tom Kravitz, Town of Burrillville

Eliza Lawson, RI Department of Health

Mike McGonagle, RI Resource Recovery Corporation

Danny Musher, RI Office of Energy Resources

Bill Patenaude, RI Department of Environmental Management

Ken Payne, RI Agricultural Partnership

Amy Pettine, RI Public Transit Authority

Nicole Pollock, formerly of RI Department of Environmental Management

Leo Pollock, formerly of Southside Community Land Trust

Dan Porter, RI Airport Corporation

Lisa Primiano, RI Department of Environmental Management

Amy Rainone, Rhode Island Housing

Randy Rosenbaum, RI State Council on the Arts

Pam Rubinoff, URI Coastal Resources Center/RI Sea Grant

Rachel Sholly, RI Office of Energy Resources

Malcolm Spaulding, University of Rhode Island

Jan Reitsma, formerly of Governor Chaffee's Office

Jonathan Stevens, former State Historic Preservation Officer

Jessica Stimson, RI Emergency Management Agency

Elizabeth Stone, RI Department of Environmental Management

Valerie Talmage, Preserve Rhode Island

Michael Tondra, RI Office of Housing and Community Development

David Tremblay, RI Department of Labor and Training

David Vallee, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Marcel Valois, Commerce RI

Bob Vanderslice, formerly of RI Department of Health

Mike Walker, Commerce RI

Scott Wolf, Grow Smart RI

Art Zeman, RI Department of Environmental Management

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## INTRODUCTION

This handbook is meant to be an accompaniment to the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning Standards Manual (“the Standards Manual”), providing additional information on the recreation-related standards contained within the manual, as well as general guidance on planning for recreation. The Standards Manual and the other guidance handbooks in the series can be found online at <http://www.planning.ri.gov/publications/comprehensive-planning-materials.php>.

This manual is split into three sections. [Section 1 - General Information on Planning for Recreation](#) provides general information, including the purpose of doing so, relevant documents to review and ways to connect recreation and the other topical areas. [Section 2 - Fulfilling the Standards](#) provides information on satisfying the specific requirements presented in the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning Standards Manual. [Section 3 - Craft a Better Plan](#) provides additional recommendations for addressing recreation within a comprehensive plan that are not required for State approval but would strengthen the plan’s overall efficacy.

## NOTES

In some cases, this guidebook presents “notes” that are relative to the content being discussed. Each note that occurs within the text will be tagged with a symbol to alert the reader to the note’s purpose, as shown below.



This symbol is used to identify references to the Rhode Island General Laws (RIGL). Blue text within this note provides a link to the actual RIGL citation.



This symbol alerts the reader to something that is required for State approval.



This symbol alerts the reader to potential data sources.



The text following this symbol provides additional suggestions to enhance comprehensive plans.



This symbol alerts the reader to sample goals, policies and actions that would fulfill the requirements.



This symbol indicates general information that is secondary to the main point of the text, but could be helpful to the municipality.



This symbol alerts the reader to a cross-reference within the guidebook series. If a concept is mentioned in the text area and more information on the concept is available elsewhere in the guidebook series, this note will point the reader to where to find it.

This handbook includes standards for complying with the requirements of the Comprehensive Planning Act. A standard may: 1) reiterate a requirement found in the Act; 2) provide specifics to clarify a requirement of the Act; 3) describe processes that if followed will help ensure State approval; or 4) identify information that while not specifically required by the Act, has been identified as vital to supporting the intents of the Act. Those standards that describe processes or information not *required* by the Act are listed as recommendations.

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**SECTION 1. GENERAL INFORMATION ON PLANNING FOR RECREATION**

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## WHAT IS RECREATION?

The term “recreation” refers to anything people do to relax, exercise or have fun, whether outside or indoors. Comprehensive plans should focus on recreational areas and sites that are publicly provided and/or are easily accessible to the public, as described throughout this chapter.

Recreation can broadly be categorized as “active” or “passive”. Active recreation is generally sports related and may be defined as activities that combine one or more of the following features: 1) formally organized teams and leagues, 2) require specialized sports equipment, or 3) are held at developed recreation sites, facilities, or fields. Examples include recreation associated with soccer fields, ball fields, swimming at pools, downhill skiing, tennis, and golf. Passive recreation is characterized by activities that are usually unstructured, require little use of physical facilities, and frequently involve interaction with natural resources. Examples include hiking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, fishing, canoeing, picnicking, nature viewing, or bicycling.

There are many places where recreation can occur within each community and many ways to have fun out-of-doors. For example, outdoor recreation can include walking along a sidewalk, hiking through a conservation area, playing at a playground, canoeing on a river or swimming at the beach. Indoor recreation may include playing basketball at the school gymnasium or taking a yoga class at the community center. Planning for recreation implies a need to acquire and/or create places where both active and passive recreation can occur, such as parks, sports fields, and open spaces. The opportunities for recreation that exist within each municipality may depend on many things, including the characteristics of the community and the natural environment, but every municipality should have a variety of recreational areas, spread throughout the community and serving a range of interests.

## WHY INCLUDE RECREATION?

Recreation is vital to the health and well-being of Rhode Island’s population. Recreation is one of the easiest and most fun ways to fit physical activity and stress relief into a busy life, and, when there are a variety of recreational opportunities, it is more likely that residents will find one that suits their interests.

It is the responsibility of the local and State governments to provide places where outdoor recreation can occur. Since not every resident enjoys the same types of recreation, it is imperative that communities, and the State, provide diverse opportunities for a variety of recreational activities. The comprehensive planning process allows communities to consider their recreational preferences, acknowledge their current and future needs related to recreation and the opportunities for expanding and strengthening the recreational offerings provided with the municipality.



The required content for related to recreation stems from the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act, RIGL subsections [45-22.2-6\(b\)\(2\)](#) and [45-22.2-6\(b\)\(6\)](#).

## A NOTE ON RECREATION AND “OPEN SPACE”

The Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act references “open space” and outdoor recreation together within the same section of the law (RIGL subsection [45-22.2-6\(b\)\(4\)](#)). This guidance manual has purposefully stayed away from using the term “open space” as it seems to be a bit confusing.



The Act defines “open space” as “any parcel or area of land or water set aside, dedicated, designated, or reserved for public or private use or enjoyment or for the use and enjoyment of owners and occupants of land adjoining or neighboring the open space; provided that the area may be improved with only those buildings, structures, streets, and off-street parking, and other improvements that are designed to be incidental to the natural openness of the land.” This definition seems to imply that “open space” is only land that is set aside for recreational purposes; however, many people interpret the term “open space” to also include natural or conservation areas that are not intended for recreational use. In fact, in another section of the Rhode Island General Laws, the “Taxation of Farm, Forest, and Open Space Land Act” (RIGL subsection [44-27-2\(3\)](#)) defines “open space” as “any tract or contiguous tracts of undeveloped land, where the undeveloped land serves to enhance agricultural values, or land in its natural state that conserves forests, enhances wildlife habitat or protects ecosystem health” that meets certain some additional criteria that are not related to use for recreation.

Because of this confusion between definitions, the guidance manual uses the term “open space” as sparingly as possible, however it addresses both definitions of “open space,” in its “Planning for Natural Resources” and “Planning for Recreation” chapters. The natural resources chapter focuses on conservation and protection of natural resources (including undeveloped lands), while the recreation chapter focuses on identifying and addressing needs related to recreation.

## RELEVANT STATE GOALS AND POLICIES

Every comprehensive plan must be consistent with and embody the State’s goals and policies for recreation as found in the State Guide Plan and the laws of the State. The goals and policies listed below represent the main themes of the State’s goals and policies for recreation and are intended to provide focus as to which aspects of the State’s goals and policies are most important for local comprehensive planning.



See the Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act, RIGL subsections [45-22.2-6\(b\)\(1\)](#) and [45-22.2-9\(d\)\(3\)](#).

## FROM THE STATE GUIDE PLAN

*Provide a diverse, well-balanced system of public outdoor recreation facilities.*

[Land Use 2025: Rhode Island’s State Land Use Policies and Plan, Objective 2C, page 5-9](#)

*Rhode Island will improve its system of outdoor recreation facilities and conservation areas to meet the needs of its residents and visitors.*

[Rhode Island’s Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, Goal 2, page 4.22](#)

*Preserve and expand public access to the shoreline.*

[Rhode Island’s Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, Goal 2, Policy RCOS-13, page 4.27](#)

*Preserve and expand access to the state’s, rivers, lakes, ponds, streams, and other inland waters for recreational use, while maintaining water quality.*

[Rhode Island’s Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, Goal 2, Policy RCOS-16, page 4.31](#)

*Maintain and expand the state’s network of trails and pedestrian paths, in natural and built areas.*

[Rhode Island’s Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, Goal 2, Policy RCOS-19, page 4.34](#)

*Strengthen and expand opportunities for open space and outdoor recreation for urban residents.*

[Rhode Island's Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, Goal 2, Policy RCOS-20, page 4.36](#)

*Strengthen and expand community-based recreation facilities and open spaces to meet close-to-home needs.*

[Rhode Island's Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, Goal 2, Policy RCOS-21, page 4.36](#)

*Insure a system that is accessible to all potential users.*

[Rhode Island's Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, Goal 3, Policy RCOS-25, page 4.40](#)

*Avoid the loss of recreation and open space system land through conversion to alternative uses, and enhance open space recreation values, where possible, through the management of public lands.*

[Rhode Island's Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, Goal 3, Policy RCOS-29, page 4.44](#)

*To provide statewide recreational activities and promote tourism in forested recreation areas.*

[Forest Resources Management Plan, Forest Recreation and Tourism FRT Goal, page 39](#)

## FROM THE RHODE ISLAND GENERAL LAWS

*To promote the preservation of the open space and recreational resources of each municipality and the state.*

[The Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act, RIGL section 45-22.2-3\(c\)\(5\)](#)

*The general assembly hereby finds and declares that:*

*1) Providing land for public recreation and the conservation of natural resources promotes the public health, prosperity, and general welfare, and is a proper responsibility of government;*

*(2) The lands now provided for those purposes will not be adequate to meet the needs of the expanding population in years to come;*

*(3) The expansion of population, while increasing the need for those lands, will continually diminish the supply thereof and will tend to increase the cost to the public of acquiring lands suitable and appropriate for those purposes; and*

*(4) The state should act now to acquire and to assist local governments to acquire substantial quantities of those lands now available so that they may be used and preserved for future use for those purposes.*

[Green Acres Land Acquisition, RIGL section 32-4-2](#)

*The general assembly recognizes that open land with scenic, natural, and ecological value is important to the character of Rhode Island and provides opportunities for passive recreation.*

[Natural Heritage Preservation Program, RIGL section 42-17.5-2](#)



For more information on the goals and policies contained in State law, see Freedom to Fish and Marine Conservation Act, RIGL section [20-3.2-2](#); Metropolitan Park District, RIGL section [32-2-2](#); Towns Parks and Recreation Systems, RIGL section [32-3-2](#); Preservation of Open Space, RIGL chapter [42-17.9](#); and Rhode Island Greenways Act of 1995, RIGL subsection [42-125-2\(b\)](#).

## OTHER RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

Before beginning assessment of existing conditions, needs and trends, and before developing new goals, policies and actions, communities should review other state and local plans and other documents that are relevant to planning for recreation, including:

- Any local park and recreation plans that may be available; and
- “Ocean State Outdoors: Rhode Island’s Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan,” State Guide Plan Element 152, available at [http://www.planning.ri.gov/documents/guide\\_plan/scorp09.pdf](http://www.planning.ri.gov/documents/guide_plan/scorp09.pdf).

## STAKEHOLDERS TO INCLUDE

In addition to the general public, when discussing how best to plan for recreation, municipalities may benefit from involving:

- Representatives from the municipal parks and recreation department;
- Representatives from local sports leagues and/or teams;
- Representatives from local physical activity organizations and businesses, such as the YMCA;
- Representatives from the RI Department of Environmental Management’s Division of Parks; and
- Representatives from the RI Department of Health’s Physical Activity and Nutrition Program.

## MAKING CONNECTIONS THROUGHOUT THE PLAN

Though there are several specific topics that are required to be addressed within a comprehensive plan, it is important that municipalities not consider the topic areas as segregated elements, but rather as pieces of a larger system. Everything within a community is connected in diverse and varied ways, all of which should be considered when crafting a comprehensive plan. The information provided below is intended to highlight a few of the ways that municipalities should think about the connected nature of the topic areas.

### RELATIONSHIP TO LAND USE

The enjoyment of recreation, whether it be outdoor recreation, such as in sports fields, playgrounds, parks, or undeveloped areas set aside for hiking, fishing, or other similar activities, or indoor recreation, including indoor tennis and basketball courts, is an important part of the quality of life for a community. The Land Use section of the comprehensive plan must consider both the amount of land that the community desires to set aside for recreation and the most appropriate locations for these areas. In many instances, recreation areas can be combined with the protection of natural resources. The location of these areas should also take into account convenience to residents, especially disadvantaged areas where transportation may be an issue.

### RELATIONSHIP TO NATURAL RESOURCES

In many cases, the natural resources of a municipality are also used for outdoor recreation. Rhode Island boasts a multitude of ways to enjoy nature through recreation, such as boating or swimming in lakes, rivers and along the coast, and hiking or cross-country skiing in undeveloped, natural areas. When considering which natural resources are priorities for conservation, municipalities should consider the recreational value of the resources and how use of the resources for recreation could enhance residents’ quality of life.

## **RELATIONSHIP TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Comprehensive plans should reflect the direct and indirect influence that outdoor recreation can have on the local economy and ensure that the plan contains sufficient goals and policies to protect and manage these areas. Outdoor recreation may relate to economic development through tourism, the provision of private facilities, and by enhancing quality of life. Visitors may be attracted to the community for the opportunity to hike, bike, fish, sightsee, or otherwise engage in enjoying outdoor activity. They may also patronize local shops, eat at local restaurants, and stay at local bed and breakfasts. Additionally, some outdoor recreational facilities, such as golf courses, are economic generators in themselves. Areas where commercial outdoor recreation, such as golf courses, are feasible and desired should be displayed as such on the future land use map and supported by appropriate zoning. It should also be noted that the amenities provided by outdoor recreation can attract both businesses and workers to locate in a community by enhancing the overall quality of life.

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## SECTION 2. FULFILLING THE STANDARDS

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## STANDARD 3.1

### IDENTIFY EXISTING RECREATIONAL AREAS AND SITES

*(Recommend a. through c. to fulfill this standard)*

- a. Including one or more maps showing:
  - i. Publicly-owned outdoor recreational areas;
  - ii. Privately-owned outdoor recreational areas that have been deemed significant in meeting the community's recreational needs; and
  - iii. Publicly operated indoor recreational sites, such as schools and community centers.
- b. Identifying which of the mapped properties are municipally-owned and/or managed; and
- c. Including on the map, or in an associated table, clear identification of the name and/or type of each area or site.



## CRAFT A BETTER PLAN

Though not required, municipalities may wish to map designated public access points to natural and conservation areas intended for recreation, such as off-street parking areas, trail heads, access easements, and community boat ramps. Municipalities may map the recreational areas and sites to best suit their needs, but the map must clearly identify the various types of recreational areas that exist within the community. It may be beneficial to show these items on more than one map, depending on how the community intends to use the information in the planning process.



## DATA SOURCES

For more information on mapping for comprehensive plans please visit <http://www.planning.ri.gov/publications/comprehensive-planning-materials.php>

The following RIGIS data sets are recommended for this standard:

DATA SET NAME	DOWNLOAD LINK	ADDITIONAL NOTES
State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan Inventory of Facilities (SCORP)*	<a href="#">Download Here</a>	n/a
Conservation Lands: Municipal and NGO*	<a href="#">Download Here</a>	This data set must be queried as follows: Purpose = 'Recreation'
Conservation Lands: State of Rhode Island*	<a href="#">Download Here</a>	This data set must be queried as follows: State Acquisition Type = 'Recreation Easement'
Fishing and Boating Access	<a href="#">Download Here</a>	Mapping this data is optional.

DATA SET NAME	DOWNLOAD LINK	ADDITIONAL NOTES
Public Shoreline Access	<a href="#">Download Here</a>	Mapping this data is optional.

\*Please note: For complete coverage, the SCORP and both Conservation Lands data sets must be used in conjunction.

Communities may also want to use the following additional data sources:

- Data from the local Parks and Recreation Department.
- Data from the local land trust or other conservation organization.

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## STANDARD 3.2

### ANALYZE EXISTING AND FUTURE RECREATIONAL NEEDS

*(Recommend a. through c. to fulfill this standard)*

- a. Assessing whether there are any neighborhoods or districts within the municipality that do not have enough recreational resources in general or enough of a specific type of recreational resource;
- b. Discussing whether the existing recreational options within a municipality seem to suit the needs of current and anticipated future residents; and
- c. Determining and discussing whether any of the existing recreational areas, including conservation areas intended for recreation use, are in need of improved public access.

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All comprehensive plans must present an analysis of existing and future needs related to recreation. This assessment is primarily qualitative and should be based on the needs identified by residents, either through a community survey, during public workshops, or through other types of community engagement.

There are three areas of recreational need that should be assessed within a comprehensive plan:

- Geographic distribution of recreational resources;
- Suitability of recreational options; and
- Access to recreation.

Suggestions for each need area are contained below. Comprehensive plans should describe both existing needs and forecasted future needs. Determination of future needs should relate to the anticipated changes to the size and demographic make-up of the population, the level of need currently experienced by the community and the availability of resources to alleviate the need. For usability of recreation areas, only an assessment of existing needs is necessary.

#### **GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF RECREATIONAL RESOURCES**

*(Standard 3.2.a.)*

It is important that a variety of recreational options exist within every neighborhood of a municipality. Comprehensive plans should discuss any needs that currently exist relative to the geographic distribution of recreational resources, including distribution of recreational areas or of certain types of recreation. Specifically, the comprehensive plan should assess whether there are, or will be, any neighborhoods or districts within the municipality that do not have enough recreational resources in general or enough of a specific type of recreational resource.

When considering the geographic distribution of recreational resources, communities should consider the following guiding questions:

- Which recreational resource-types are intended to serve the entire municipality? Which resource-types are intended to serve only the surrounding neighborhood?
- Are any residential neighborhoods are lacking playgrounds or ball fields?
- Which areas of the community are underserved by passive recreational options, such as walking paths and community parks?
- Which commercial and/or mixed-use areas are lacking parks and/or plazas?



- Are there any areas of the community for which greater levels of development are being targeted?
- Are any recreational areas likely to be impacted by natural hazards over the 20-year planning horizon?

Using a map of recreational resources, the community can see if there are neighborhoods or districts of the municipality that are lacking places for recreation. Additionally, overlaying a map of recreational areas onto maps of other community characteristics can help the municipality come to other conclusions about the geographic distribution of recreational options. Mapping playgrounds against school-aged and/or under-5 population percentages can assist in determining areas where more playgrounds might be warranted. Mapping passive recreational areas against elderly population percentages may show needs for more low-intensity recreational options.

## **SUITABILITY OF RECREATIONAL OPTIONS**

### **(Standard 3.2.b.)**

The suitability of recreational options refers to how well the options provided within a community match the needs of the population. Comprehensive plans should discuss whether the existing recreational options within a municipality seem to suit the needs of current and anticipated future residents. To determine the suitability of recreational options, the topic should be discussed during the public engagement process or within a public survey, and discussions should be had with the Parks and Recreation Department and/or local sports leagues. In these conversations, consider the following guiding questions:

- Have there been any repeated requests for a certain type of recreational area or facility?
- Does one type of recreational facility have a long waiting list for access (e.g. are soccer games booking 3-months in advance?)
- Have there been any changes to the recreational options that have limited the availability of certain types of recreation?
- Are the demographics of the municipality changing in a way that would place more of an emphasis on certain types of recreational resources? For example, an aging population may require more passive recreational opportunities, whereas an increasing family population may require more playgrounds and sports fields.

## **ACCESS TO RECREATION**

### **(Standard 3.2.c.)**

Recreational areas are only beneficial to a community if residents and visitors can access them. There are many ways in which access to recreational areas can be impeded, including lack of sidewalks and bicycle racks, a shortage of designated parking, improperly placed fences, or lack of access easements. The comprehensive plan must determine and discuss whether any of the existing recreational areas, including conservation areas intended for recreation use, are in need of improved public access. To make this determination, communities should consider the following guiding questions:

- Are there any large natural resource areas that are intended for recreation but have no or very few public access points?
- Are there any recreational areas with low usage rates that would otherwise seem suitable for use?
- Are there any recreational areas where parking shortages are causing overflow parking on local streets?
- Are any recreational areas missing bicycle racks?

- Are any recreational areas cut-off from surrounding neighborhoods due to poor sidewalk conditions or lack of sidewalks?
- How can the municipality better link its existing recreational areas?
- Are there any current programs that would affect the future accessibility of the community's recreational areas or facilities?



## CRAFT A BETTER PLAN

Though not required for State approval, municipalities may also wish to discuss needs related to the general usability of recreation areas. Usability can be assessed in a variety of ways, but primarily relates to the functionality of the space and equipment and the general level of maintenance. Comprehensive plans should discuss whether there are any specific concerns related to the functionality and/or maintenance of recreational areas. To determine usability concerns, it may be best to assess each recreational area individually, considering the following guiding questions:

- Is the vegetation and pavement well maintained?
- Is the area well-lit for nighttime activities?
- Is the recreational equipment run-down or in need of repair or replacement?
- Is the area designed in a way to allow multiple users and/or types of recreation to occur simultaneously?
- If the area is designed for use by children, are there areas for parents to sit and monitor their children's activities?
- Are there shaded areas?
- Are there other public amenities, such as benches, trash cans, water fountains and restrooms?
- Are walking paths clear of vegetation and other types of debris?



## DATA SOURCES

To fulfill this standard, communities may want to use the following data sources:

- The RIGIS recreation data sets referenced under Standard 3.1.
- Data from the local Parks and Recreation Department.
- Data from the local land trust or other conservation organization.
- Demographic data from the U.S. Census Bureau.
- Discussions with community members and sports leagues.
- Discussions with the local Parks and Recreation Department.

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## STANDARD 3.3

### IDENTIFY AREAS FOR THE POTENTIAL EXPANSION OF RECREATIONAL FACILITIES.

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The expansion and strengthening of the recreational system is a primary goal of the State. To support this goal, comprehensive plans must identify areas of the municipality where expansion of outdoor recreational facilities would be feasible. The identification of appropriate areas for expansion will depend heavily on the context of the municipality, as each municipality will present different opportunities depending on geographic location, level of development, etc.

Depending on the municipality, the areas identified could include:

- Neighborhoods in which expansion of the park system would be possible and/or beneficial;
- Specific parcels that will be targeted for recreational use or access easements;
- Areas or parcels that would help to better link existing recreational areas;
- Areas in which conservation of open space would be desired; and/or
- Areas in which additional access to natural areas could be obtained.



#### DATA SOURCES

To fulfill this standard, communities may want to use the following data sources:

- Discussions with the local Parks and Recreation Department.
- Discussions with the local land trust or other conservation organization.
- Discussions with community members and sports leagues.

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## STANDARD 3.4

### INCLUDE GOALS THAT EMBODY THE STATE'S GOALS FOR RECREATION AND POLICIES TO SUPPORT EACH GOAL.

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The goals and policies of the State related to recreation collectively affirm the importance of recreational resources for the health and welfare of Rhode Island's residents and the value these resources provide for tourism and community character. As such, the State's goals and policies call for the expansion and improvement of recreational resources and access to said resources to meet the needs of the State's population.

Comprehensive plans must include goals that further the State's goals of expanding and improving recreational resources and access to those resources and policies to support the identified goals. Each municipality should develop recreation goals and policies that are appropriate to its context, geographic location, level of existing development and future population forecasts.

To determine the recreation goals and policies that may be appropriate for your municipality, consider the following guiding questions:

- What level of recreational access is appropriate for your municipality?
- What types of recreational areas are most appropriate for the municipal context?
- How can the municipality achieve a variety of recreational options in every neighborhood and district?
- How can the municipality better support the continued protection of recreational areas and open spaces?



For more information on the difference between goals, policies and implementation actions, see Guidance Handbook #1 - The Comprehensive Plan 101.



#### SAMPLE GOALS

- Our community will have recreation facilities that are state-of-the art and meet the needs of all residents.
- Maintain a sustainable, high-quality parks and recreation system that reflects the unique identity of our community.



#### SAMPLE POLICIES

- Promote, maintain, and enhance a broad range of community-wide and neighborhood recreational facilities to meet the needs and desires of residents.
- Provide the necessary resources to build and maintain a park and recreation system that offers a diversity of recreational opportunities for all residents.
- Connect neighborhoods and open spaces through a network of bicycle and pedestrian friendly streets and trails.

- Increase access to park and recreation facilities.
- Ensure the success of public spaces by involving the community in planning and maintenance efforts.
- Encourage community ownership of neighborhood parks and other civic and public spaces through “friends of...”, “park watch dogs” and similar programs.
- Maintain a database of open space parcels, public parks, boat launches, and beaches within Special Flood Hazard Areas and projected sea level rise areas to monitor impacts to these areas from storm events and incremental sea level rise, and develop strategies to preserve the availability of these areas for continued public use.

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## STANDARD 3.5.A

Include implementation actions within the Implementation Program that address:

### THE PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT OF EXISTING RECREATIONAL RESOURCES AND ACQUISITION OF ADDITIONAL RESOURCES IF APPROPRIATE.

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To fully embody the goals of the State related to outdoor recreation and open space, comprehensive plans must include implementation actions that address protecting and managing recreational resources, as well as expending recreational resources as appropriate. Municipalities can decide which implementation actions best suit their context, and may wish to consider the following guiding questions:

- What is the protection status of municipally-owned recreational areas? How can the municipality preserve into perpetuity areas that are not currently preserved?
- What programs are currently in place to assist with open space conservation? How can these programs be better utilized to protect recreational resources?
- Are there organizations within the municipality that could become partners in recreational preservation efforts?
- How are recreational areas currently managed? Can improvements be made in the management process?
- Is the local recreation department funded to a level that ensures protection and proper management of recreational resources?
- Has acquisition of recreational resources been included in the municipal Capital Improvement Program?



### SAMPLE ACTIONS

- Strategically acquire parcels to link existing recreational areas.
- Assess existing recreational programs and facilities.
- Explore opportunities to create new open spaces along waterways (rivers, ponds, streams) where none currently exist.
- Establish a priority list for park and recreation facility renovation efforts.
- Incorporate sea level rise projections and data into criteria for acquisition, easements, protection and restoration of open space, recreation, and public access areas.

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## STANDARD 3.5.B

Include implementation actions within the Implementation Program that address:

### MEETING IDENTIFIED RECREATIONAL NEEDS.

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The required assessments outlined in this chapter should help municipalities identify their needs related to recreation. Once identified, the comprehensive plan must include implementation actions that would help to meet identified needs. The comprehensive plan does not have to address all of the identified needs with implementation actions in order to receive State approval, but must address those needs that are of greatest importance to the municipality.

To determine which implementation actions are appropriate, the municipality must first identify the needs that are of greatest importance and therefore require action. Once identified, the following guiding questions may help in determining the best policies and implementation actions to include:

- How can the municipality work to improve the condition of recreational areas?
- What design standards can be put in place to improve the usability of recreational areas?
- Is there a program in place to maintain recreational areas? If so, how can the program be made more effective? If not, how could a program be implemented?
- Are there any “easy wins” that the municipality could implement to meet identified needs, such as adding public amenities or fixing sidewalks?
- How can the municipality begin to better geographically distribute recreational opportunities throughout the community?
- What policies can be implemented to require new development to set aside recreational area?
- Can any existing recreational areas be retrofitted to accommodate resources in high demand or to allow use by multiple types of recreation?
- How can existing barriers to access be overcome? What policies can be put in place to support better access to recreational areas?



### SAMPLE ACTIONS

- Expand and diversify park use opportunities.
- Establish consistent park signs.
- Amend local ordinances to permit enclosed off-leash dog parks.
- Acquire parcels to use as recreational resources in areas that have been identified as deficient.

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## SECTION 3. CRAFT A BETTER PLAN

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## RECOMMENDATION 3.6

Include implementation actions within the Implementation Program that address:

### IMPROVING ACCESS TO NATURAL AREAS THAT ARE SUITABLE FOR RECREATION.

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One of the best ways to improve recreational access within a community is to increase the number of ways in which residents and visitors can access natural areas. Regardless of size, scale, or geography, every municipality in the State contains natural areas that are suitable for recreation. Forested areas, ponds, lakes, rivers, and streams can all provide opportunities for recreation when there are designated access points, such as parking areas, trail heads, and boat ramps. Comprehensive plans should include policies and implementation actions that will help to increase access to the municipality's natural areas.

The following guiding questions may help to determine which policies and implementation actions are appropriate for the community:

- Which natural areas that are not currently being utilized for recreation would be suitable for recreation uses?
- How can the community better support land owners who may want to make their open space areas accessible by the public?
- Are there any ordinances or regulations that could be strengthened to increase public access to natural areas?
- Are any existing access points currently being overwhelmed by visitors? Is there a need to increase access to any particular natural areas?



#### SAMPLE ACTIONS

- Install parking areas at trail heads, boat launch areas and other areas identified by the public as access points to natural areas.
- Work with the local conservation commission to determine whether any existing conservation lands would be beneficial as recreational resources.
- Reach out to the owners of conservation lands to discuss opening the lands to the public for recreational purposes.