

## Recreation and Open Space

Windham is a great town to live in and raise a family. The sense of community and commitment to resident is reflected in the number of recreational opportunities it provides throughout the year. Whether you choose to walk the numerous town trails, cheer for a child participating in a sport at one of the many Windham fields, or go swimming at the Town Beach, people meet and stay connected to each other through these recreational activities. For this reason, recreation must continue to play an integral role in planning for Windham’s future.

Since 2005, Windham’s population has grown substantially. Historically, rapid population growth has been known to strain any town’s sense of community. The Recreation Department’s goal is to maintain that community spirit by continuously evolving programs and facilities that encourage a positive, ongoing interaction between all residents and their families. Residents are encouraged to participate in a choice of functions sponsored by the town every year such as Concerts in the Park, Harvest Fest, Easter Egg Hunt, Town Day, Fireworks, and Tree Lighting.



Harvest Fest at Griffin Park



Patriotic Parade at Town Day



Concert before Fireworks



Concert in the Park

The Town has both volunteer committee and a paid staff to focus on providing recreation programs. A full-time Recreation Coordinator position, established in 2005, is responsible for planning, organizing, and administering comprehensive recreation services for the community. The Coordinator is also responsible for overseeing the maintenance and management of existing facilities, for planning and development of new facilities to meet new demands, and coordinating the scheduling of all fields amongst the various leagues and programs. The Recreation Department's detailed plans and initiatives are maintained by the Coordinator in a separate Recreation Master Plan document. The latest revision was approved by the Planning Board in 2012, and it is the intent of the Recreation Department to update it every five (5) years. To view the plan, visit <http://www.windhamnh.gov/departments/recreation-department>.

Recreation continues to support the Windham Community Band financially and within the community. The band, established in 1997, is a volunteer non-profit organization made up of the Concert Band, Flute Ensemble, and Swing Band with over 80 members. Musicians of all ages from the local community are welcome to join. Free concerts for the community are offered in Windham at locations such as Searles Chapel, as well as in other local towns. The Concert Band plays at Town Day and the Tree Lighting annually, and the Swing Band performs at Griffin Park as part of the Concert in the Park series.



Concert Band at Tree Lighting

Key issues that should be considered over the next ten (10) years include:

**Field expansion is necessary to keep up with growing demand.**

Due to continuing population growth, particularly in the under 21 age group, new recreation fields will have to be seriously considered. Organized teams continue to strive for field time which can result in the difficulty to properly maintain the facilities. Based on league enrollment each season, the adding of programs, the need for additional practice time, and the increased interest in certain sports such as football, flag football, and lacrosse, it is recommended an additional 2-4 fields are needed to meet the Towns recreational needs. The existing fields are currently at their operational capacity and based on projected future plans, the additional fields will be required to meet current and future needs. The type of fields would be for multi-use, supporting activities, but not limited to, youth football, spirit, lacrosse, soccer, baseball, and practice fields.

Coordinated scheduling between the different sports programs will maximize the ability of current and future fields to meet the needs of program participants. The proposed fields could help with the current heavy usage on the fields right now. The fields would help support current programs as well as assist in the field maintenance rotation, which in the end would help preserve the fields. The additional fields could also eliminate the usage of the front part of Griffin, which is considered to be ‘temporary’ fields right now. The front part of Griffin could then return to its original intent of a passive recreation area.

The school programs and town recreation leagues currently support each other as much as they can by sharing fields. The Boys and Girls High School Tennis teams use the tennis courts at Griffin Park during the spring season for matches and practices daily. Insufficient parking to accommodate users can pose a safety hazard both for users and the surrounding area, and there are little or no options to expand parking at the current fields/facilities.

Recreation will continue to advocate for the development of additional field space. The Spruce Pond Field complex is currently the most feasible solution. This field option would provide the town with approximately an additional 20% of field space that could be utilized by multiple sports programs with expandable parking options. We will also continue to look at other opportunities for field expansion/addition as they present themselves, such as expanding Nashua Rd field, as well as new development opportunities.

**Management, enhancement, and improving access to, the Town’s trails and conservation lands is important.**

There is a continuing need to connect parks and trails to neighborhoods in order to provide easier access for users. There is a growing active senior population in the State of NH, and in Windham with an influx of 55+ housing. According to the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 2013-2018, seniors are becoming more interested in wellness, safe and easy access to recreation opportunities, and have an increased interest in social activities. As described in the SCORP, connectivity through trails and green spaces is a low cost solution to address the need for access to active recreation opportunities, and we have seen evidence of this in Windham based on the number of active seniors who currently walk at our parks and trails. To this end, The Recreation Department will support the Windham Rail Trail Alliance and the Conservation Commission on additions to the Windham Rail Trail and development of the new Greenway Trail.

**Support Greenway Recreational Trail.**

The purpose of this project is to address the need to further expand a growing network of paved trails aimed at supporting and encouraging non-motorized travel in Windham and other communities along the I-93 corridor through provision of an alternative transportation facility desirable to a wide range of bicyclists and pedestrians. As envisioned in the “2003 Salem to Concord Bikeway Feasibility Study”, this network is being

developed in efforts to reduce the dependence on motor vehicles on I-93 and other local roadways and to provide a transportation link for both work and non-work related trips.

Windham is looking to improve 2.5 +/- miles of the Greenway Recreational Trail located west of I-93; which is currently owned by the Town and runs over much of the abandoned Boston and Maine Railroad right-of-way. The improved trail would then terminate at North Lowell Road within a short distance of an existing 4.1 mile paved section of the Rockingham Recreational Trail, which is situated east of I-93; thus creating a corridor of nearly seven (7) miles of paved trail within Windham. Addition of the 2.5 +/- miles of trail as proposed herein would serve to interconnect our existing 4.1 miles, 3.3 miles in Derry, and an additional 1.6 miles currently being designed as part of a TE grant to add to the Windham Rockingham Recreational Trail and to begin improvements to the Salem Trail; thus establishing a vast network of trails spanning these communities that, overall, represents a portion of the “Southern New Hampshire Regional Rail Trail Network”.

In addition to providing alternate means of travel, this railroad bed affords users access to our scenic and attractive Foster's Pond Conservation area. Further, it allows movement along, and under, I-93 to the Rockingham Recreational Trail which passes by additional scenic areas including the Depot Historic District, Mitchell Pond and a Stone Arch bridge. Eventually, the trail connects to the pending Town of Salem's trail, thus providing quite a sizable artery for multiple modes of use. Those making use of the Rockingham Recreational Trail can also access an improved paved trail which will take them into the Town of Derry and to points further north.

The project specifics are anticipated to include site work, drainage improvements, and construction of an eight-foot (8') to ten-foot (10') wide paved path with two-foot (2') shoulders on either side that is not only accessible to pedestrians and bicyclist in non-winter months, but also provides recreational opportunities in the winter season. The project would begin at the intersection of Meetinghouse and Old Mill roads and run in a generally northeastern direction for approximately 2.27 miles (12,000+/- ft) to intersect with the westerly right-of-way line of I-93. It would then continue along a State-owned section of the trail which extends from the eastern edge of I-93 to North Lowell Road for a distance of approximately .19 miles (1,000+/- ft). The work proposed along this State-owned portion will be carried out under an agreement with the State Department of Resources and Economic Development (DRED) to manage and maintain the section being improved.

In an associated aspect of the overall I-93 improvements, the State Department of Transportation has be invested funds to install a twelve-foot (12') wide box culvert under the north and south bound routes of the interstate to facilitate connectivity between the Rockingham and Greenway recreational trails.

This trail network is part of the Granite State Rail Trail and is part of a vast network of already built or pending rail trails in the Southern New Hampshire area involving the towns of Derry, Windham, Salem, and beyond.

## **Support Windham Rail Trail and WRTA.**

2016 is an exciting year for the Windham Rail Trail Alliance (WRTA) as the final half mile of pavement that will connect to the Salem Rail Trail is completed. It is the 10<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the initial development and starts the WRTA off to a new era and new challenges.

Together with the Town, the WRTA has attained exceptional accomplishments such as the paving of 4.1 miles of trail, rehabilitation of the historic Windham Depot and buildings, and delivery of the C-16 B&M caboose. With the connections to Derry, the start of Salem work to the South, and over 4 miles in Londonderry Windham leads the effort to serve as the anchor for currently the longest stretch along an abandoned rail bed in New Hampshire. The success of this effort also led the State to establish a tunnel connection as part of the Route 93 expansion that will provide access to the Windham Greenway Trail.

Through vision and tenacity, the initial pavement established the Rail Trail as the benchmark for paved trails in New Hampshire. The designation of the Granite State Rail Trail, 52 miles of abandoned rail corridor from Salem to Lebanon confirmed the intention to promote this extraordinary opportunity.

### *Use Counts*

In 2015, 2 formal trail use counts were completed by Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission and DOT. The first was a surface tube count conducted between August 24 and September 10 that recorded an unprecedented count of 6,486 trips. This type of counting detects wheeled users only. From October 9 to November 6 an eco-counter (visual and surface) picked up 11,511 trips, with a daily average of 397. Columbus Day weekend was an astounding 2,645 trips. Counts are important and used for many aspects of a trail such as publicity, community/economic development, and grant/sponsor requirements.

### *Programs/Activities*

The trail is used primarily by bicyclists, walkers, runners, dog owners, equestrians, roller blades, dry land skiers, and wheel assisted users, as well as for health rehabilitation purposes, photography, bird/nature observation and passive outdoor activities. The Trail draws many families, some spanning 3 and 4 generations from the community as well as rail trail and train fans from relatively long distances who want to experience the rail trail and historic Depot/Caboose area. The trail is certified both for 5 and 10K running distances and two WRTA managed rail trail races are in their 9<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years. They have attracted over 4,000 participants in that timespan and provide a major source of funding to the WRTA. They also host the Couch to 5K program, and to several outings directed by Northeast Passage adaptive cycling program for physically challenged individuals. Local businesses participate directly and indirectly in the programs at the Rail Trail and benefit greatly in increased traffic and sales.

## *10 Year Plan*

With the completion of the trail paving to Salem, the focus is on three areas, Connectivity, Usage, and Maintenance.

### *Connectivity*

Granite State Rail Trail connections from Salem to Derry are now fully established. . The connection serves as the prime example of a successful build, high pedestrian and bicycle usage within a rural setting providing safe connections from a Town center (Derry) all the way to shopping and entertainment (Salem) locations. . The trail serves mostly as recreational, however, there are some indications that it is also being used for community and health-related programs.

Most exciting is the opportunity for the connection to the Windham Greenway Trail, a Town-owned section of the abandoned Boston, to Maine Railroad, and the Worcester, Nashua Portland line. It was acquired by the Town in 1996 with the intent to eventually develop a passive recreational trail corridor. For safe and efficient access to the Rail Trail, WRTA envisions supporting a paved Windham Greenway Trail, and provide passive trail access to a larger section of the Windham Community. WRTA also supports a connection through a re-design of the North Lowell/Depot Road Intersection, and widening Depot Road to accommodate a sidewalk for safe passage of trail users and customers of Windham Junction.

### *Support of increased usage/ supporting amenities*

The major focus in the past 10 years was the development of the trail and the paving of the trail bed for use of the residents. However, parking, safety and other amenities were put off for a later date.

The connection to Salem has brought about increased usage and the need of additional parking at the Southern end of the trail. The Town's use agreement with the State recommended the development of the former Rodger's site as a parking lot, which has an previously approved site plan.

It is also recommended the replacement of the Depot portable toilet facilities with a more permanent offering. Additional toilet facilities were also proposed for the parking lot on the Southern end.

A growing safety issue is the bridge over the Governor Dinsmore Road crossing. This old railroad bridge appears structurally sound, however the decking over the steel beams continues to fail and is maintained with temporary measures. This is a risk to larger vehicles such as an Ambulance or Fire Apparatus safely crossing the bridge.

Continued attention to safety is required at the trail crossings at North Lowell, Frost, Depot and Roulston Roads. Speed and driver attention to the trail crossings are constant concerns

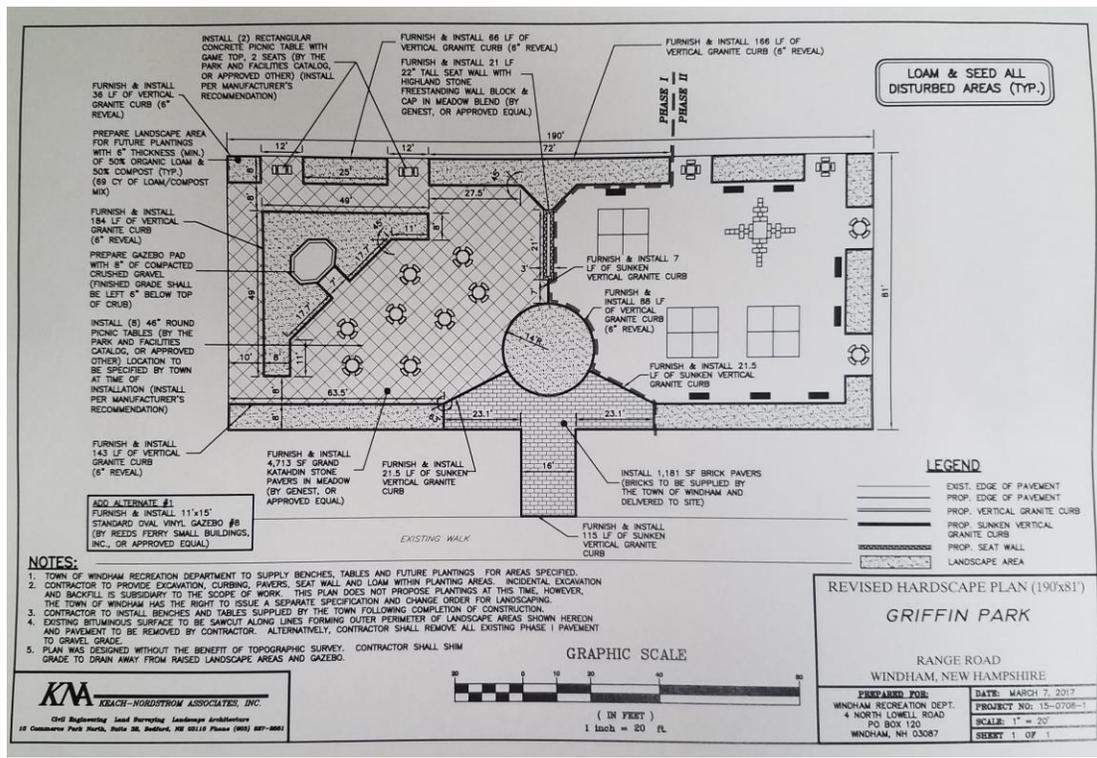
for users and the WRTA. In addition to the policing of driver speed, signage, upkeep of crossing paint are critical. Speed and shoulder access are safety concerns for those who walk and bike from Depot Rd to the Windham Junction. For the North Lowell Road crossing, notification and request for remediation is required by the state to come from the Town.

### *Maintenance/Infrastructure*

Typical pavement life span are 15 – 20 years and already some of the first sections are in need of repair due to drainage issues. Regular upkeep of the pavement is required to further its lifespan. A comprehensive maintenance and development plan is recommended to outline the scope and focus on the upkeep and longer term maintenance requirements. Work required at this time includes re-design of adequate drainage and re-paving through the Rainforest ledge, adding riprap along the south east facing bank along Mitchell Pond, and the repair of a culvert along the same section. Normal maintenance and upkeep includes brush and tree trimming, ditch line clearing, f aesthetic, and infrastructure operation and maintenance. For the most recent updates on the Rail Trail, go to <http://windhamrailtrail.org>.

## Complete the Griffin Park Passive Recreation Project.

In 2016, the voters approved funding to complete the first phase of the new passive recreation area at Griffin Park. This phase will include benches and tables for seating, shade trees, plantings and walls and a gazebo. Once this area has been completed, the Recreation Department will begin fundraising efforts to complete phase 2, which will include pavement game areas, as well as additional seating, trees, plantings and walls.



### **Develop recreation opportunities related to Windham’s Market Square Overlay District.**

With the implementation of this new District as a concept, there may be a need to develop other recreation activities and facilities. The Recreation Department will work with the various town committees to develop related programs to enhance the usage of this area.

### **Continue to evaluate and advocate for specialized facilities requests and programs.**

The Recreation Department received suggestions to address specialized facility needs and programs. As documented in the 2012 Recreation Master Plan, some new facilities requests include: integration of more elderly and disabled resident recreational areas, outdoor skating rink, and a community amphitheater. The Department will continue work with residents and town officials to strategize and implement financially viable facilities solutions and advocate for town voter support.

### **Continue to Update Programs and Policies.**

The Recreation Department will continue to promote and offer year round active and passive recreation opportunities for all ages and abilities. It will also continue to expand or adjust programs to meet the emerging needs of the residents as demands and interests change. Passive opportunities include, but are not limited to kayaking, paddle boarding, bird watching, chess/checkers, walking, archery, concerts, etc. Active programs include fitness, sports, swimming, tennis, sports, etc.

### **Our main program goals are:**

- Maintain the strong relationship we currently have with the School District and Youth Sports Leagues.
- Continue to offer and encourage passive and active recreation opportunities.
- Continue to offer activities for all ages.
- Continue to maintain and upkeep existing facilities.
- Continue to implement strict procedures regarding preservation of the fields.
- Explore the development of fields, possible artificial turf, and satellite/neighborhood parks, including completing Spruce Pond.
- Explore lands to purchase/acquire for the development of new fields.
- Work with the Conservation Commission to update the Walking trails in Windham booklet, a guide to Windham’s Open Space, and add information on interconnecting trails into the document.