

## OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

### INTRODUCTION

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#### Purpose

The Open Space and Recreation element of Charlestown's Comprehensive Plan examines the current resources in light of Town goals and recommends courses of action to meet the goals of recreation and open space. Open space and recreation land are crucial to the town in several ways:

- o In supporting the tourism/recreation based economy of the town;
- o In maintaining the undeveloped, rural character;
- o In protecting important natural resources as well as providing access to them;
- o In providing a community focus for residents through organized programs and activities.

Open Space and Recreation and its relation to natural resource protection were among the most important categories of issues identified by the Citizen's Advisory Committee.

Certain characteristics of Charlestown set it apart from many other communities:

- o Its seasonal influx of visitors places a heavy demand on its natural resources and recreation sites;
- o A considerable amount of land is held for conservation and recreation. However, much of this land, such as Burlingame Management Area and East Beach, primarily serves regional users. Residents must often compete with visitors for the limited space at beaches or in parking areas;
- o Its year-round population is relatively small and scattered between the coast and inland areas, presenting difficulties in serving neighborhoods. Recreational facilities must be conveniently located to the different areas of the town;
- o In spite of its small population, the town has an extremely active Parks and Recreation Department, which develops many activities and programs in response to a high demand;

- o The rural nature of the town and its natural resources requires a balance between developed recreational areas, such as playing fields, and undeveloped recreational areas, such as fishing sites or hiking trails;
- o The town's elderly population is growing as retirees move into former summer homes.

**Organization of this Report**

- o Goals and Policies.
- o Inventory and Analysis: Inventory of sites and facilities; discussion of use; analysis of needs based on population, mapped resources, and stated goals/concerns; and other issues such as types of activities, location of facilities, coastal access, and natural resource protection.
- o Recommendations/Implementation.

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- o Recommendations/Implementation.

## **GOALS**

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The goals have been developed through reviews of other local and state planning efforts and discussions with the CPCAC, town officials, and members of the public.

The importance of protecting open space, habitats, and natural resources has been repeatedly emphasized in discussion of issues and goals.

### **Goals of the Town of Charlestown**

#### **Major Goals**

To promote appreciation and appropriate use of Charlestown's natural and cultural resources and a focus of community activity by providing a wide range of recreational opportunities for Charlestown's residents and visitors of all ages.

#### **Major Supporting Policies**

- Continue to provide and expand opportunities for organized activities including sports, field trips, and festivals.
- Provide opportunities for active and passive recreation throughout the town.
- Continue to provide and expand opportunities for access to fresh and salt water resources, while protecting the resources from adverse impacts of overuse.
- Continue to protect natural resources, cultural resources, and important views and visual corridors through open space acquisition or dedications.
- Promote safe pedestrian and bicycle travel.

### **Goals of the State of Rhode Island**

#### **Goal:**

The preservation and protection of open space.

#### **Goal:**

Protection of the Coastal Region.

#### **Goal:**

Adequate and diverse recreational opportunities and facilities to meet the needs of the state's citizens and to attract and serve tourists.

#### **Goal:**

Greater opportunities for water-oriented recreation.

## INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

### Existing Conditions

#### **Open Space Inventory**

An inventory of open space and recreation land was conducted in 1988. Tax assessor's records were used to identify tax-free parcels and their location. All town-owned and quasi-public parcels were included as potential open space or recreation resources. The inventory also includes private recreation or open space land. A student intern investigated each site for size, facilities, condition, and access. This plan element reviews the results of the inventory and related studies (e.g., earlier Open Space plans, South Shore Management Plan, Charlestown's Harbor Management Plan) and includes updated information on recent Town purchases.

Figure 1 and Tables 1 and 2 present the inventory of sites by type and ownership.

The largest amount of recreation/conservation land in Charlestown, over 4,000 acres, is owned by the state of Rhode Island. Burlingame Management Area comprises most of this land, and the state has several parcels adjacent to the salt ponds. These protect important water resources and provide public access.

The rest of the recreation/conservation land is divided approximately equally between the town, the federal government, and private parties. The Town owns many small parcels around the salt ponds. Ninigret Park, discussed below, is the Town's largest property. North of Route 1, the town owns fewer parcels, generally associated with services such as the school, Town Hall, and landfills. The Town also owns approximately 100 acres around School House Pond.

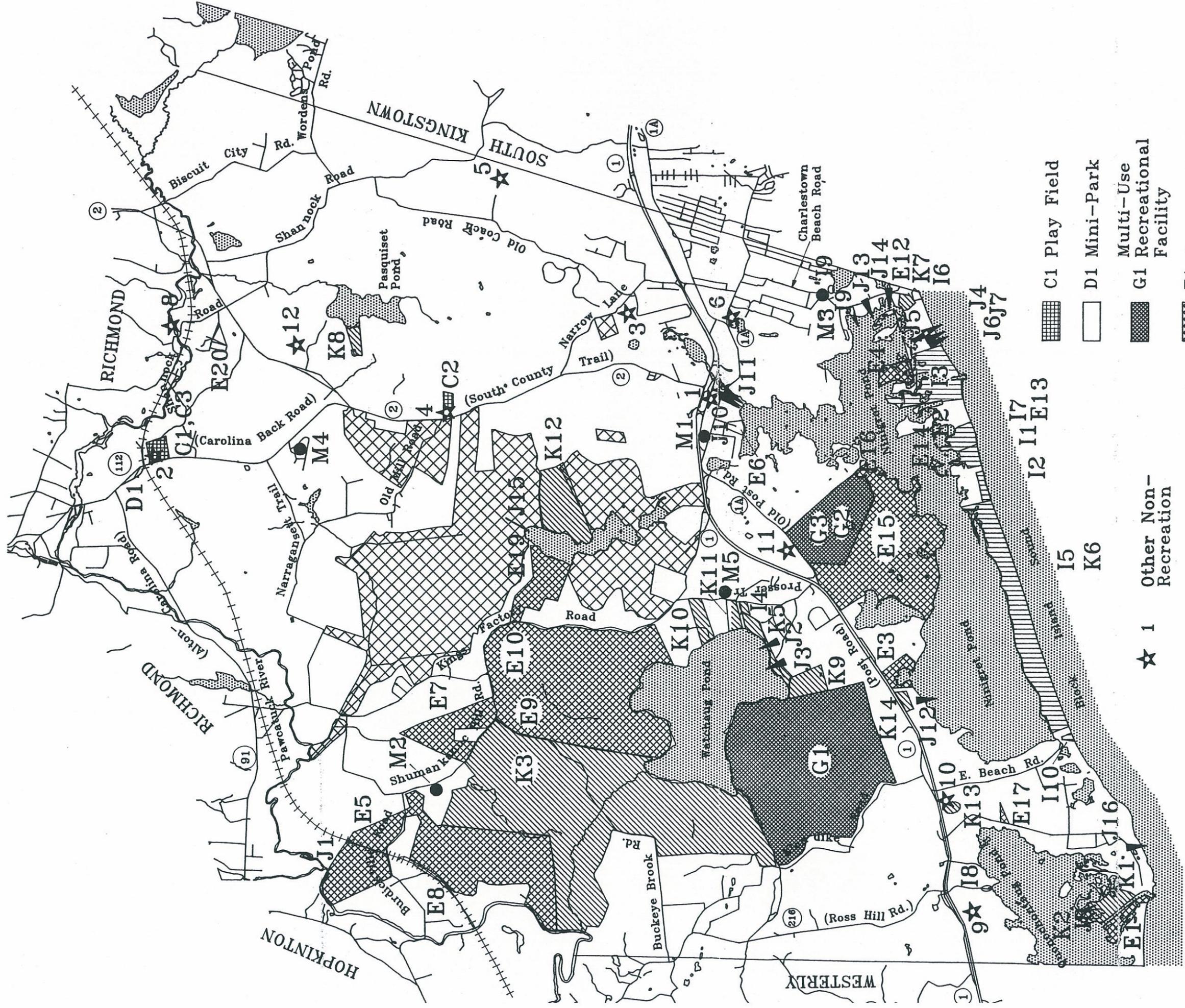
The federal government owns a few relatively large parcels around Ninigret Pond including the Ninigret Wildlife Refuge.

Privately held recreation/open space land occurs as relatively small parcels, often used for campgrounds or marinas. The Kimball Wildlife Refuge is the largest privately held conservation land.

#### **Recreational/Open Space Facilities and Location**

Ninigret Park. Ninigret Park is an important resource, serving a broad range of residents and visitors. The town owns 55 acres with no Federal restrictions on the Town's use. The other 172 acres were acquired as a prior public use (U.S. government surplus), which involves some restrictions. For instance, the difference between fees charged to residents and non-residents is limited, and the land must be used for recreation purposes. The two parcels together contain a 10 speed champion bicycle course, 4 regulation tennis courts, a basketball field, a multi-purpose field/festival area, a BMX track, a play lot, a fresh water swimming pond, a non-profit nature center and an observatory. A small building is used as the Charlestown Senior Citizens Center. Fees are charged for special events, such as bicycle races. All fees are returned to the park fund.

Other Coastal Sites. Many of the recreation/open space sites are found around the salt ponds, providing a degree of access and protection from development. Public access to the salt ponds or ocean is available at the state breachways, East Beach, and the town parcels of Blue Shutters and the Charlestown Beach.



0 4000  
Scale in Feet

Data Source: Map prepared by Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. from Town of Charleston and RIGIS data.

- ☆ 1 Other Non-Recreation
- M1 Vacant Land
- ⊠ Narragansett Indian Tribe Lands
- ▨ Water
- ▤ C1 Play Field
- D1 Mini-Park
- ▩ Multi-Use Recreational Facility
- ▧ E1 Conservation
- ▨ I1 Beach
- ◄ J1 Water Access
- ▨ K1 Other Recreation / Open Space

# OPEN SPACE / RECREATION Figure 1

## CHARLESTOWN COMPREHENSIVE PLAN - 1991

Table 1

## Public Land and Private Recreation/Conservation Land\*

	Acres
Federal:	
Ninigret Wildlife Refuge	381
Barrier Beach, Islands	182
Subtotal	563
State:	
Burlingame Management Area	3,762
Charlestown Management Area	79
Quonochontaug Fishing Area	22
Barrier Beach, Island	49
Other	54
Grandpre Park	3
Boat Launch Ramps (3)	-
Subtotal	3,969
Local:	
Charlestown School, Field	21
Charlestown Town Beach & Environs	16
Ninigret Park	227
Town Hall	13
Columbia Heights Playground	2
Blue Shutters Beach	3
School House Pond	100
Town Driving Range	3
Boat Launch Ramps (2)	7
Former Town Landfill	9
Subtotal	398
Subtotal Public land	4,930
Private Conservation/Recreation	
Camp Davis	65
YMCA Camp	48
R.I. Boy Scouts	10
Kimball Wildlife Refuge, Audubon	30
Marinas (4)	3
Subtotal Private Recreation	156
Total	5,086

TABLE 2

CHARLESTOWN OPEN SPACE/RECREATION LAND

Type/ Name	No.*	Owned**	Size (Ac.)	Water	Shore	Parking	Facilities	Comments
<b>PLAYING FIELDS</b>								
Wicklund Field C1		T	2			20-24	1 Tennis 1 Baseball no lighting	easily accessible Rte. 112 Sched. use thru Rec. Dept.
Town Hall Field C2		T	(13.3 incl town hall) 4.5 field			24	1 Baseball no lighting	easily accessible Rte. 2
Elementary School C3		T	10.5					
<b>MINI PARKS</b>								
Grand Pre Park D1		S	2.8					easily access Route 112 should be cleared of brush, could have grills, has unmarked cemetery

\* Refer to Figure 1.

\*\* Ownership Key: F = Federal; S = State; T = Town; P = Private; QP = Quasi-Public (e.g., library, ambulance, etc.)

Table 2 (cont'd)

## Charlestown Open Space/Recreation Land

Type/ Name	No.*	Owned**	Size (Ac.)	Water	Shore	Parking	Facilities	Comments
CONSERVATION								
Quon Breachway E1		S	1.9	Ocean	X			limited access
Island E2		S	1.13	Nin. Pond				access only by boat surrounded by water - Nin. Pond
Mud Cove E3		S	20.0	Nin. Pond				accessible via Route 1
Ward's Island E4		S	10.0	Nin. Pond				access only by boat surrounded by water - Nin. Pond
Burlingame-Burdickville Road E5		S	115.0					accessible via Burdickville Road
Fort Ninigret E6		S	2.6	View of Nin Pond				Easily accessible Route 1A. Monument
Burlingame E7		S	149.4					Off Shumankanuc Hill Road Interior not easily accessible
Burlingame E8		S	202.2					access from Shuman. Hill Road or RR; interior not easily accessible
Burlingame E9		S	39.0				Unpaved paths	Perimeter easily accessible - Buckeye Brook/Shuman Hill Road; interior poorly accessible

\* Refer to Figure 1.

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Table 2 (cont'd)

Charlestown Open Space/Recreation Land

Type/ Name	No.*	Owned**	Size (Ac.)	Water	Shore	Parking	Facilities	Comments
Burlingame	E10	S	54.1					Perimeter accessible - Shuman. Hill Rd.
[No parcel E11]								
Green Hill Road/Marsh Lot	E12	T	0.28	Salt Marsh				easily accessible through neighborhood via Charlestown Beach Road
East Beach	E13	F	(NA)	Ocean	X			via sand roads (see I7)
Island	E14	F	4.1	in Nin. Pond				access by boat
Ninigret Wildlife Refuge	E15, E16	F	379.7	Marsh Salt Pond		33-40 gate closed; several hundred gate open	2 toilets 1 picnic table unpaved trails 1 bench parking observ. tower	good access Rte. 1
Audubon Society	E17	P	3.51					access via West Beach Road through neighborhoods
School House Pond Parcel	E19	T	100	Pond			boat launch	unpaved road in poor condition - Town to upgrade
Columbia Hts.	E20	T	5.3					access via Columbia Hts Road

\* Refer to Figure 1.

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Table 2 (cont'd)

Charlestown Open Space/Recreation Land

Type/ Name	No.*	Owned**	Size (Ac.)	Water	Shore	Parking	Facilities	Comments
<b>MULTIPURPOSE RECREATIONAL FACILITIES</b>								
Burlingame Campground G1		S	827	Watchaug Pond		1500 unpaved	4 open play fd 15,280 sq.ft. bldgs (wood) video arcade 18 toilets 50 drinking ftns. camp store (priv) 86 firepl. 750 cooking facilities unpaved paths interp. trails visitors ctr. 900 benches 6 toilets- H 2 showers - H 1 beach lifeguards 126 picnic tables 1 boat launch 900 camping fac. (tent/rv) naturalist 4 dump sites 2 shower rooms	\$6/night ref. \$8/night easy access via Rte 1

\* Refer to Figure 1.

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Table 2 (cont'd)

## Charlestown Open Space/Recreation Land

Type/ Name	No.*	Owned**	Size (Ac.)	Water	Shore	Parking	Facilities	Comments
BEACHES								
East Beach	I1	S	33.9	Ocean Salt Pond	X			access-4wd, walking See I5
East Beach	I2	S	6.31	Ocean	X	130 paved	toilet fac.	access-4wd, walking
Charlestown Breachway	I3	S	79.0	Breachway (both sides)	X	300 unpaved	1 toilet fac. lifeguards boat launch no bathhouse 75 rv sites - self-cont.	easily accessible via Charlestown Beach Rd;
Burlingame Picnic Area	I4	S	21.8	Watchaug Pond	X	100 paved	2 toilet fac 1 drkg ftn. 22 open grill 32 picnic tables unpaved paths beach/lifeguards no boat fac.	easily accessible via Prosser Tr/Rte. 1
East Beach	I5	S/F	150	Salt Pond Ocean	X	127 paved	8 chem toilets unpaved paths beach/life- guards shore fishing space for 20 self-cont. rv's.	access easy thru neighborhood drive to get on beach - by foot or 4wd

\* Refer to Figure 1.

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Table 2 (cont'd)

## Charlestown Open Space/Recreation Land

Type/ Name	No.*	Owned**	Size (Ac.)	Water	Shore	Parking	Facilities	Comments
Charlestown Beach I6		T	0.76	Ocean	X		1 volleyball court (space for 1 more) beach/lifeguards bathouse in pkg. area	access easy via Charlestown Beach Road neighborhood
East Beach I7		F	27	Salt Pond Ocean	X			access by 4WD or foot
Shady Harbor Beach I8		P	0.22	Salt Pond				easily accessible
Allen Cove I9		T		Salt Pond				right to use for beach and parking
Blue Shutters Beach I10		T	3.2	Ocean	X	250	bath house concession stand	easily accessible from East Beach Road
SHORE ACCESS								
Burlingame/Pawcatuck J1		S	115	Pawcatuck River				Not readily accessible
Burlingame-Watchaug Pond J2		S	4.6	Watchaug Pond		30 unpaved	boat ramp (remnant)	easily accessible Sanctuary Road
Burlingame-Watchaug Pond J3		S	2.9	Watchaug Pond				easily accessible Sanctuary Road

\* Refer to Figure 1.

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Table 2 (cont'd)

Type/ Name	No.*	Owned**	Charlestown Open Space/Recreation Land Size (Ac.)	Water	Shore	Parking	Facilities	Comments
Charlestown Beach - Ocean front lot J4		T	0.35	Ocean				easily accessible through neighborhoods - Charlestown Beach Road
Nin. Pond Right of Way J5		T	0.2	Salt Pond				easily accessible through neighborhoods - no vehicles can enter
Charlestown Beach - Ocean front lot J6		T	1.02	Ocean	X			easily accessible - Charlestown Beach Road
Charlestown Beach - Ocean front lot J7		T	1.05	Ocean	X			easily accessible - Charlestown Beach Road
Quon Breachway J8		S	11.2	Salt Pond		100 unpaved	2 chem toilets boat ramp shore fishing	easily accessible - West Shore West Beach Road
Nin. Pond Right of Way J9		T		Salt Pond				10 foot right of way
Ocean House Marina/ Town Dock J10 & J11		P/T	3.0	Salt Pond				
Saunders Marina/ Ninigret Boat Launch J12		P	--	Salt Pond				
Shelter Cove Marina J13		P	--	Salt Pond				

\* Refer to Figure 1.

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Table 2 (cont'd)

Charlestown Open Space/Recreation Land

Type/ Name	No.*	Owned**	Size (Ac.)	Water	Shore	Parking	Facilities	Comments
Sportsmen's Cove Marina J14		P	--	Salt Pond				
School House Pond J15		T						See E19
Fort Nimigret J16								See E6
West Beach Lot J17		S	6.3	Ocean	X			Easily accessible W. Beach Rd. - through neighborhoods
OTHER RECREATION								
Quon. Breachway (west side) Boat Launch K1		S	9.0	Salt Pond				limited access
Quon. Breachway (east side) Parking K2		S	(NA)			100 unpaved		See J8
Burlingame Camp, Trails K3		S	796	Poquaint Brook			Unpaved Trails	easily accessible - Buckeye Br. Road
Camp Pastore K4		S	693.0	Watchaug Pond		paved	SeeSaw, Slide	easily accessible- King's Factory Road
Burlingame/Watchaug Pond Boat Ramp K5		S	(NA)			30 unpaved		easily accessible See J2

\* Refer to Figure 1.

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Table 2 (cont'd)

## Charlestown Open Space/Recreation Land

Type/ Name	No.*	Owned**	Size (Ac.)	Water	Shore	Parking	Facilities	Comments
East Beach Camping K6		S	(NA)	Salt Pond			self-cont. camping	See J5
Charlestown Beach Parking K7		T	13			200-300 paved	bath house outside showers 1 ea toilet 1 drkg. fn. (salt intrusion)	easily accessible through neighborhood-Charlestown Beach Road bathhouse too small a concession stand could provide drinks
R.I. Boy Scout Camp K8		P	10	Pasquiset Pond				poor accessibility
Kimball Wildlife Sanctuary K9		P	26.9	Watchaug Pond				easily accessible off Sanctuary Road/Rt. 1
YMCA Camp K10		P	16.0	Watchaug Pond		25 paved	1 baseball wooden bldgs beach/lifeguards bath house docks cabins	easily access-Prosser Tr/Rt. 1
YMCA Camp K11			20	Watchaug Pond				easily access-Prosser Tr/Rt. 1
Providence Boys Club K12		P	65.0	School House Pond			beach/ lifeguards	fairly accessible Route 2 Camp Davis Road

\* Refer to Figure 1.

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Table 2 (cont'd)

Charlestown Open Space/Recreation Land

Type/ Name	No.*	Owned**	Size (Ac.)	Water	Shore	Parking	Facilities	Comments
Quon. Grange K13		QP	2.2					easily accessible Route 1
Driving Range K14		T	7.1				Golf clubs, balls, tees	easily accessible Route 1
<b>NON-RECREATION</b>								
State Garage 1		S	3					easily accessible Rte
Elem. School 2		T	15.5				Playlot Ballfield	easily accessible Rte 112
Former Landfill 3		T	8.6					easily accessible Narrow lane being monitored - could be used as ballfield
Town Hall 4		T	9.2 (13.5 incl. field)				Ballfield	See C2
Current Landfill - Dog Pound 5		T	67.9					easily accessible monitored for contamination
Cross Mills Fire Dept. 6		QP	33.3			100	1 basketball hoop	easily accessible Old Mat. Schoolhouse Road
Cross Mills Library 7		QP	7.0				40 unpaved	easily accessible Old Post Road

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Table 2 (cont'd)

Charlestown Open Space/Recreation Land

Type/ Name	No.*	Owned**	Size (Ac.)	Water	Shore	Parking	Facilities	Comments
Charlestown-Richmond Fire Station	8	QP	1.6					
Shady Harbor Fire District - Pumpphouse	9	QP						
Dunn's Corner Fire District	10	QP	.73					
Charlestown Ambulance	11	QP						
American Legion Downey Weaver Post	12	P						
Charlestown Historical Society	13	QP						
VACANT								
	M1	S	0.34					easily accessible Route 1
	M2	S	6.8					easily accessible Shamun Hill Road
	M3	T	0.7					easily accessible E. Shore Drive
	M4	T	0.29					easily accessible Skagerrak Road
YMCA	M5	P	11.5					easily accessible

\* Refer to Figure 1.

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- o Swimming and other beach activities. The Town contains over three linear miles of beach front on Block Island Sound that provides opportunities for ocean swimming. Most of this land is part of the Ninigret Conservation Area. The Town owns approximately 6 acres of beachfront land, half of which is used as public beach. Lifeguards are available at the Charlestown Town Beach, Blue Shutters, and the state Charlestown Breachway Management Area. The salt ponds offer quiet waters. However, the shallow water of the salt ponds is not well suited for swimming, and the salt pond shores are too narrow to accommodate many swimmers. The fresh pond at Ninigret Park is available for swimming. Both the fresh pond and coves in the salt ponds occasionally must be closed to swimming due to water quality problems. The beaches and most areas along the salt pond margins are available for passive recreation such as walking or bird watching.
- o Boating. Of the five public boat launch ramps in the Town, three are located along the coasts: one at each state breachway management area and one at the Town dock. Boaters face the difficulties of extremely shallow water in the salt ponds and strong currents in the breachways. However, the salt ponds offer the only realistic boat access, as launching into the surf of Block Island Sound would be quite difficult. In 1989, Ninigret Pond and the Charlestown portion of Quonochontaug Pond contained 205 moorings. The mooring users require access to the water to reach their boats. The two ponds contained 260 commercial/private slips, 9 private association docks, 145 private docks, and no public docks. Boaters may launch at the private marinas and at Charlestown Breachway for a fee. The ponds are also used for shallow draft sailing and windsurfing.
- o Fishing and Shellfishing. Access for these activities is more readily available than for swimming or boating. Fishermen can cast from the beaches and from the breachway walls. The margins of the salt ponds, including Ninigret Wildlife Refuge, provide access for shellfishing and crabbing. Boaters may fish in either the salt ponds or the ocean.
- o Visual Access. The ability to see the water is an important part of Charlestown's scenic coastal character. Visual access is provided at sites such as the Quonochontaug Breachway Management Area, Fort Ninigret, the Town Driving Range, Town Dock, and some private marinas. Visual access is available at many of the Open Space/Recreation sites in Charlestown. However, at certain sites, the water or shore is not easily visible, including along the road near the Town Beach, Ninigret Park, and much of the Ninigret Wildlife Refuge. Portions of certain roads provide visual access to the water, such as Route 1 and Charlestown Beach Road. However, unlike the Open Space/Recreation sites, these resources are not protected from development.
- o Conservation. Several of the coastal sites are used primarily for conservation, including Mud Cove, small Town-owned parcels, and state and federal properties such as islands off of East Beach and the western side of Quonochontaug Breachway. Many sites currently used for conservation could offer access to the water for small numbers of people. These sites are shown on Figure 1 and Table 1 as both conservation sites and shore access sites.

- o **Parking and Other Facilities.** Shore access sites generally must have support facilities such as parking, sanitary facilities and trash disposal. Many of the coastal sites lack one or more of these support services. The Town beaches provide over 500 parking spaces, some of which are reserved for Town residents until 11:00 a.m. during the summer months. With this exception, the parking lots and beaches are open to the general public. During the winter, there are no fees or restrictions for parking or general beach use. Both Town-owned beaches have facilities for changing clothes and taking showers, rest rooms, and trash receptacles. The drinking water at the Charlestown Beach is reported to be brackish, and this Beach does not have a concession stand to serve other beverages. Blue Shutters Beach has a concession stand.

The state beaches and breachways have 600-700 parking spaces, 75 camp sites for 2 wheel drive recreational vehicles and 20 camp sites for 4 wheel drive off road vehicles (ORVs). The state also issues permits for daily ORV travel. The state beaches have rest rooms. Charlestown Management Area has clothes changing/sanitary facilities, but the Quonochontaug Management Area does not.

- o **Private Facilities.** Private recreational facilities provide coastal access for certain residents, owners, or members, but not the general public. The Town's 1989 Harbor Plan indicated that over 200 homeowners owned shorefront property on the salt ponds and nearly 1,500 homes had deeded use of rights of way to the salt ponds. Private rights of way provide access to the oceanfront for residents of several coastal neighborhoods. Many of these access ways accommodate only certain uses, such as boat use or salt pond access. These access points are not available to other Charlestown residents or the general public.

Inland Sites. The largest amount of Open Space/Recreation land north of Route 1 is found in Burlingame Park and Management Area. Burlingame provides good access to Watchaug Pond with boat ramps, beaches, and picnic facilities. Part of the Management Area also extends to the Pawcatuck River, providing a future opportunity for river access, although the site currently does not provide direct access to the river. Several private campgrounds are located around the interior ponds.

The Town owns over 200 acres of land north of Route 1:

- o 100 acres of Conservation land abutting Schoolhouse Pond;
- o 110 acres associated with Town recreation and other services, such as the school, Town Hall, and landfills. Currently the school and Town Hall properties each include a playing field. The school also has a gymnasium and cafeteria for community use. The former landfill could be used for open space or recreation purposes in the future;
- o 2 acres for future development of recreational facilities; the Columbia Heights property, which is scheduled for development as a play field;

The land available for active recreation north of Route 1 occurs along Routes 2 and 112 and in Burlingame Park along Watchaug Pond. Open space/recreation land west of Routes 2 and 112 is generally conservation land.

Recent acquisitions. The town has acquired several properties recently, including the Blue Shutters Beach, Town Driving Range, School House Pond property, and Columbia Heights property. These represent significant additions in acreage and the opportunities they offer:

- o Blue Shutters Beach represents an increase in beach-front property of 3.2 acres and an increase in parking of 250 spaces, which also produces revenues from fees;
- o The driving range is a new type of recreational opportunity for the town. Because it is lighted at night, it provides an evening recreation opportunity;
- o The School House Pond property helps protect an important natural resource. The pond is now entirely surrounded by Town Conservation land, a private campground, and Tribal land. Much or all of the land surrounding the pond is likely to remain in conservation or recreation uses. The property is the largest parcel of town-owned land north of the moraine and can provide valuable opportunities for passive recreation in a wooded environment. Access is currently limited. The Town's goals for the parcel include nature trails and other passive recreation;
- o The Columbia Heights parcel serves a densely developed residential area that lacks recreational sites. The Town's goals for the parcel include establishing a playground and ballfield.

#### Local Recreational Programs

The Charlestown Recreation Department coordinates the use of Town recreational facilities and develops programs for the various facilities. The programs include (See Appendix A):

- o aerobics;
- o youth and adult basketball;
- o senior citizen painting classes;
- o baseball, softball and T-ball;
- o ten-speed bicycle racing;
- o BMX bicycle races;
- o playground programs;
- o swimming lessons;
- o tennis league and lessons;

- o Special Olympics;
- o Special events and trips held throughout the year;
- o Circus and Seafood Festival.

Participation in the town's programs and activities ranges from 15-20 residents (painting class) to several hundred. In many cases, participation is restricted by limitations in facilities, such as playing fields or gymnasium space, which are generally in constant use. The School gymnasium is used for activities 7 evenings per week.

Except for the special events (e.g., Santa Calls, Easter Hunt, Special Olympics), most programs charge a fee, generating revenues for the Town's general fund. The annually held circus and seafood festival each generate \$1,000 - \$2,000 for the town.

### **Parks and Recreation Department**

The Parks and Recreation Department coordinates all activities at town recreation and open space sites. The responsibilities of the Department include:

- o coordinating organized sporting events and use of Town facilities;
- o developing and coordinating special events such as trips;
- o managing the Town's salt and fresh water beaches, including providing lifeguards, hiring staff, running concessions and parking lots, and handling fees. Maintenance and upgrading are performed by Parks and Recreation and the Department of Public Works;
- o managing the Town's Driving Range;
- o budget preparation and administration;
- o writing open space acquisition grant proposals.

The Parks and Recreation Director has also worked extensively with the staff of the Senior Citizens Center in developing activities and writing grant proposals.

The Parks and Recreation Department staff consists of one full time Director, a clerk shared with the Planning Department, and a year round volunteer at Ninigret Park. During the summer the Department employs an additional 32 full time staff and 5 part time staff. The Department uses volunteer services for special events and for help with year-round activities.

The activity and use fees pay for the Department's costs and generate additional revenues for the Town.

These additional revenues help to offset the cost of debt service being carried by the Town for recent open space acquisitions such as Ninigret Park, the driving range and Blue Shutters Beach.

### Analysis of Need and Opportunities

In evaluating the present recreation/open space facilities, it is important to consider the following:

- o Type of opportunities available;
  - access to the shore or water
  - organized sports - other recreational opportunities
  - passive recreation/conservation
- o Age groups served;
- o Location;
  - value for conservation
  - convenience to users.

In order to determine the need for recreational facilities, the available facilities are compared against the use or demand. Where demand is greater than the available facilities, a need exists, which the town should address. Standard formulas have been developed to determine recreational needs based on population. This approach is used below to highlight some of the recreation issues of the town. However, the formulas provide only a preliminary sense of recreation/open space needs. The standards do not address issues important to the town, such as natural resource/open space protection, access to the shore, and providing an equitable distribution of facilities throughout the town.

The following sections discuss:

- o Recreational Standards based on population;
- o Types of activities;
- o Spatial Distribution of Facilities and Parcels by type;
- o Access to the Shore;
- o Other Opportunities;
- o Needs Identified by Town Officials and Residents.

### Recreational Standards based on Population

Standard proportions of various recreational facilities are published to guide communities. These formulas are difficult to apply in Charlestown: the town's population is small and dispersed, whereas the formulas are designed for compact neighborhoods (e.g., 5,000 people in a 1/4 mile to 1/2 mile radius).

The 1985 Recreation and Open Space Plan recognized these limitations and used a more general approach for determining recreation standards. The 1985 plan recommended the Town have 3.75 acres of playgrounds/play lots per 1,000 people and 6.25 acres of playing fields or major recreational facilities per 1,000 people. The 1985 Plan also recognized the regional nature of many of the recreational facilities in the town. However, the 1985 plan stated that much of the use was related to seasonal visitors, and that the town should focus on locally owned properties, which serve year-round residents.

Based on an estimated population for 1990 of 6,620 people, the 1985 plan recommended that the town establish 28 acres of playgrounds/play lots and 30 acres of playing fields or other facilities. The population estimate has proved quite accurate based on the 1990 census figure of 6,478 residents. Since 1985, the town has acquired the 5.3 acre parcel in Columbia Heights, with a plan to develop a playing field and play ground. The Town has developed a playing field and play ground at Ninigret Park. Of the 30 acres of playing fields recommended in the 1985 Open Space Plan, the town has developed approximately 15 acres and plans to develop 5 more at the Columbia Heights parcel. After developing Columbia Heights field, the Town should develop an additional playing field to meet the standards. The new and planned playgrounds begin to address the playground deficit identified in the 1985 Open Space Plan. However, in order to meet the standards for playgrounds, the Town must continue to develop approximately 20-25 acres of playgrounds throughout the Town.

### **Types of Activities**

#### **Organized Sports**

The Town offers a variety of organized sports including T-Ball, soccer, and basketball. The sports and recreation facilities at each school in the Chariho school district are available for use by all residents of the Chariho district. The town Parks and Recreation Director has stated that some groups who wish to use the sports facilities have been turned away due to space limitations. The Town's playing fields are not lighted at night, limiting their nighttime use. The Town plans to create a ballfield at Columbia Heights, which will allow more groups to participate. The Recreation Director identified the need for additional gymnasium space and lighting at playing fields.

#### **Other Sports Activities**

The abundant natural resources and parks in Charlestown allows for a variety of activities. The Town organizes tennis lessons and a tennis league at Ninigret Park and offers swimming lessons at the beach. The salt ponds and ocean provide opportunities for windsurfing, fishing, sailing, and other water activities.

Burlingame Park and other inland areas offer hiking and canoeing. Ninigret Park's abandoned air strips can be used for walking. Recreational bicycling is limited to road sides. Public tennis courts are available at Wicklund Field but are reported to be in disrepair. Ninigret Park contains volleyball, basketball, and tennis facilities and a children's playground. The Columbia Heights playground is in disrepair but is scheduled for upgrading.

## **Non-Sports Activities**

The Town and various organizations in the town offer activities other than sports. The Cross Mills Library offers weekly programs for children throughout the year including arts and crafts, story hours, and movies. During the summer the library offers evening films for adults and Saturday morning family programs. The high school sponsors dances and other activities for teens.

Residents may join the Frosty Drew Observatory or Nature Center at Ninigret Park. The Town sponsors occasional seasonal events such as Santa Claus, an Easter Hunt, and trips to see the Boston Red Sox, Boston Pops, and other regional attractions.

The Senior Center has held painting classes but is limited by the small space of the building.

These activities offer recreation alternatives other than sports for residents. However, the activities are infrequent, limited in appeal, or lack adequate space. Residents and local officials have emphasized the need for a community recreation center where alternative activities could be offered and community meetings or family events could be held.

## **Spatial Distribution**

The major recreational facilities are located at Ninigret Park, Town beaches, and the driving range. Two other playing fields are located in northern Charlestown at the Town Hall and elementary school. The Town's playground is located south of Route 1 in Ninigret Park. The Columbia Heights playground is located in northern Charlestown near Route 2 and will serve the Columbia Heights neighborhood when upgraded.

The improvement of the Columbia Heights parcel will provide a distribution of playing fields throughout the town that are relatively convenient to various residential areas. It will also place a playground in a convenient location to a densely developed residential area. However, other residential areas near the old mill village centers and coastal neighborhoods remote from Ninigret Park lack play lots or playgrounds.

The conservation/passive recreation land is concentrated in a few areas:

- o Along the margins of Ninigret Pond, several parcels are designated for conservation, including the federal wildlife refuge, state conservation area and other small town, state and private parcels;
- o West and north of Watchaug Pond to the Pawcatuck River;
- o School House Pond.

These conservation parcels help protect important natural resources from adverse effects of development. Other resources are protected by the actual use or allowed use of the land including fresh water ponds abutted by wildlife sanctuaries, summer camps, or possibly tribal land; private parcels on Ninigret Beach restricted by the state from development; and wetlands, also regulated by the state. Other important resources may also warrant this high degree of

protection, e.g., ground water recharge areas, river or stream corridors, remaining salt pond parcels, and other important habitats.

### Coastal Access

Access to the shore is limited both by a lack of sites and a lack of parking. With over 3 miles of ocean beach in the town, access to any beach is limited by a lack of parking, especially at the Ninigret Conservation Area which fills up by late morning. In addition, much of the conservation area is only accessible by foot or 4 wheel drive. On the other hand, access to Town beaches is limited by the small size of the beaches, as well as by parking. Charlestown Beach is less than an acre in size. The Town owns three sizeable tax lots along Charlestown Beach, but they are isolated from the parking area. The Blue Shutters Beach has expanded the Town's beach capacity by 1-2 acres of beachfront and 250 parking spaces, but the small size of the site restricts further expansion.

Of the other coastal open space/recreation parcels, State and federal properties provide direct access to the water: the two breachway management areas provide parking for several hundred vehicles and have boat launch ramps. Ninigret Wildlife Refuge abuts the salt pond. The Town Dock and the state Fort Ninigret abut the water, but offer no parking. Ninigret Park, with its ample parking, does not abut the water. Public demand for access to the shore continually increases. The need for improved access is demonstrated not by any number of parking spaces but by the large numbers of people turned away from closed beaches.

Access to inland waters is also limited. The Town provides a fresh water beach at Ninigret Park. The State provides access for swimmers and boaters to Watchaug Pond. The School House Pond property offers access to the pond, but the site is not yet passable by vehicle. Visual access to Watchaug, Pasquisset, and other ponds is available along some roads, many of which are private. There are no Open Space/Recreation parcels in Charlestown that are designed to provide access to the Pawcatuck River. Access is limited to visual access along certain roads and bridges.

### Other Opportunities

In designating and acquiring land for Open Space/Recreation use, it is important to link resources where possible. Parks with vegetated buffers can help protect nearby streams and wetlands. Certain land uses may already form protective corridors that preserve undeveloped areas, such as power transmission lines and railroad rights of way. In fact, the transmission line in northern Charlestown is the location of an endangered plant species and a vibrant marsh community. The Town should be aware of existing and planned open space opportunities, as well as potential for new types of open space/recreation opportunities.

- o State north-south hiking trail. Recently, the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) has expressed renewed interest in developing a north-south hiking trail that would pass through western Charlestown. The Town could use the path as a focus for greenways and other Open Space/Recreation projects.
- o Pawcatuck River. This resource presents an opportunity for a new type of recreation/open space program in Charlestown. The River offers historic

villages and landscapes, natural scenery, and recreational opportunities such as canoeing or fishing. The Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association is actively working with various agencies to protect the river and its landscapes. The Town has the additional opportunity of working with the Watershed Association, accomplishing a great deal by sharing resources.

- o Beach frontage. The town owns two acres of beach frontage approximately a half mile west of the Charlestown Beach parking lot. The Town could accommodate a considerable number of beach-goers if the problem of access to the sites and parking could be addressed.
- o Ninigret Park. The Park, already one of the Town's most important recreational resources, still has a great deal of potential for use. The site can accommodate a large number of parked cars and large events such as the Big Apple Circus. The site has space for a variety of facilities such as a community center or an additional playing field.
- o Linear Greenways. Utility and transportation rights of way present opportunities for Open Space or Recreation Land. Northern Charlestown contains a transmission power line right-of-way. The AMTRAC train line is actively used but may contain enough right-of-way to provide a linear greenway.
- o Conservation. Opportunities for conservation, or resources that should be targeted, include wetland/upland buffer zones, groundwater recharge zones, important habitats or landscape and surface fresh and salt water bodies.

The draft South Shore Management Plan recommends that the State preserve several parcels around Ninigret Pond, including undeveloped land west of Tautog Cove, the northern edge of Mud Cove, land adjacent to the Quonochontaug Breachway and Pond, undeveloped land at the western edge of Ninigret Pond, and the privately owned parcels on East beach. The Town could target these areas for acquisition or link them with other conservation efforts.

### **Needs Expressed by Town Officials and Residents**

The Parks and Recreation Director and School Superintendent identified several unmet needs:

- o In spite of the numerous programs and facilities, many interested residents cannot participate due to inadequate facilities. Participation in activities such as aerobics and basketball is limited by a lack of available gymnasium space. Likewise, the participation of soccer and baseball teams is limited by a lack of usable fields;
- o Evening activities are limited by the space available at the elementary school and by unlit fields. Only the driving range is lighted until 10:00 p.m. For this reason, many residents (especially summer residents) seek their evening recreation outside Charlestown;
- o The current Senior Citizens Center is too small to allow program development. All activities are limited or unavailable due to the small size of the building;

- o The demand for all programs and activities is expanding.

The Town's 1989 Harbor Management Plan identified the need for additional public access to the shore.

These issues and several discussed above were reinforced through discussion with the Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Committee and members of the public, who identified the need for:

- o More ball fields, especially in northern Charlestown;
- o Better distribution of recreational facilities throughout Town;
- o A community center;
- o More family-oriented events;
- o More beach parking and access;
- o Protection of water resources;
- o Protection of open space, especially large undeveloped parcels.

## RECOMMENDATIONS/IMPLEMENTATION

### Prioritized Recommendations

#### **High Priorities**

1. **The town should continue to fund the Parks and Recreation Department programs.**
2. **Preserve important views and visual access to the water.**
3. **Continue requiring exactions of developers to preserve open space. Continue encouraging clustered developments with surrounding open space.**
4. **The town should continue expanding its recreational base.**
5. **Develop small scale access ways to the shore, which would allow a few visitors each, such as anglers, hikers, or people who wish to sit and look at the water.**
6. **Support development of North-South Hiking Trail**

#### **Medium Priorities**

7. **Provide safe routes for pedestrians and bicyclists using wide road rights of way, and low speed limits in coastal settlements.**
8. **Develop a land trust for conservation purposes.**

#### **Lower Priorities**

9. **Develop networks of paths for bicyclists and pedestrians.**
10. **Explore diverting some beach-goers from the Town Beach to other public beaches, including East Beach or the town-owned parcels west of the Town Beach.**
11. **Acquire additional open space land as the opportunities arise and budget allows, with a focus on providing buffers and/or limited access to natural resources.**

## 5-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM

1. The town should **continue to fund the Parks and Recreation Department programs.**

- Continue applying for recreation/open space grants.
- Continue funding salaried and hourly positions.
- Recognize volunteers who help support the programs.
- Continue interdepartmental cooperation in maintaining facilities.

**Time Frame:** Immediate and on-going

**Resources Needed:**

Annual allocation of funds; the programs are generally revenue producers.

2. **Preserve important views and visual access to the water.**

- **design standards** along Routes 1 and 1A, Charlestown Beach Road, East Beach Road, West Beach Road, and at important viewing locations along the Pawcatuck should specify preservation of views, design of buildings to be screened by topography or vegetation where possible.

Standards must be reasonable and objective, e.g., roof lines, vegetative screening where appropriate, use of topography to screen buildings, building materials, architectural style in keeping with historic or village character of surrounding buildings, preservation of views.

**Time Frame:** Concurrent with development of zoning

**Resources Needed:**

Staff/Board/Commission time to develop ordinances;

Design review function in town government possibly a design review board, to review development in design districts.

3. **Continue requiring exactions** of developers to preserve open space, especially as undeveloped buffers to natural resources. **Continue encouraging clustered developments** with surrounding open space.

- Use natural resources constraints maps, plans, and site visits to identify resources that should be protected on-site.

**Time Frame:** Immediate and on-going

**Resources Needed:**

Staff/Board/Commission time to review proposals;

Natural resources/constraints mapping (Natural Resources element).

4. **The town should continue expanding its recreational base by:**

- **developing a community center;**
- **developing additional playing fields** (Columbia Heights, Ninigret);
- **making improvements to the Columbia Heights, Grand Pre, and Schoolhouse Pond parcels** to encourage the uses for which they have been acquired.

**Time Frame:**

Community center - 0-5 years

Playing fields - 0-10 years

Improvements to parcels 0-8 years

**Resources Needed:**

Funding for improvements (Capital improvements budget/municipal bond, federal/state grants, general fund, fundraising for specific improvements);

Staff/volunteer time to make certain improvements, clear brush, develop trails, etc.

5. **Develop small scale access ways to the shore**, which would allow a few visitors each, such as anglers, hikers, or people who wish to sit and look at the water.

- Use currently owned tax lots and easements to provide limited shore access.
- Provide limited parking (if any) at or near each.
- Notify residents of sites and any restrictions. For example, through regular town mailing or when they get their beach or landfill permits.
- **Investigate historic rights of way to the shore** through deed research. Re-establish them as necessary.
- Continue to work with CRMC to identify rights of way to the shore.

**Time Frame:** On-going as possible

**Resources Needed:**

Staff or volunteer time to clear brush, maintain trail or site;

Staff/intern/volunteer to investigate deeds.

**6. Support development of North-South Hiking Trail.**

**Medium Priorities**

**7. Provide safe routes for pedestrians and bicyclists.**

- Consider reducing speed limits in densely developed coastal neighborhoods.
- Where possible, require a large enough setback to provide a pedestrian way in front of new businesses.
- Evaluate the feasibility of widening/improving road rights of way to provide a safe pedestrian/bicycle route.

**Time Frame:** 0-10 years

**Resources Needed:**

- Enactment and enforcement of a speed ordinance;
- Staff/board/commission time to develop and review design standards;
- Funding/staff time for right-of way/sidewalk studies, improvements.

**8. Develop a land trust for conservation purposes.**

See Land Use section

**20-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM**

**1. The town should continue to fund the Parks and Recreation Department programs.**

On-going

**2. Preserve visual access to the water through design standards along Routes 1 and 1A, Charlestown Beach Road, East Beach Road, West Beach Road, and at important viewing locations along the Pawcatuck.**

Revise as necessary

3. **Continue requiring exactions** of developers to preserve open space, especially as undeveloped buffers to natural resources. **Continue encouraging clustered developments** with surrounding open space.

On-going

4. **The town should continue expanding its recreational base:**

- **developing additional playing fields** (Columbia Heights, Ninigret);
- **making improvements to the Columbia Heights and Schoolhouse Pond parcels** to encourage the uses for which they have been acquired.

Time frame: 0-10 years

- **Develop small playgrounds in neighborhoods.**
- Consider providing lighting at ballfields to allow use of the ballfields beyond sunset.

Lighting should not disturb neighbors, increase light pollution of the night sky.

- The Parks and Recreation Director should monitor the need for and Consider **developing additional tennis courts and improving existing ones.**

**Time Frame:** 5-20 years

**Resources Needed:**

- Funding for play grounds;
- Survey of ballfield users and neighbors;
- Funding for lights;
- Funding/staff/volunteer time to develop play lots, improve tennis courts;
- Funding, materials needed to upgrade equipment, develop new tennis courts.

5. **Continue to develop small scale access ways to the shore.**

On-going as possible.

Continue to evaluate the need for access ways and identify any problems with existing ones e.g., in Plan updates.

**7. Protect important views through design standards or acquisition of development rights or easements.**

Continue implementing design standards.

Over the long term, the town or non-profit agencies (e.g., land trust, Wood Pawcatuck Watershed Association) should target important views to protect through acquisition, acquire development rights or scenic easements as the opportunities arise to protect the most important areas.

**Time Frame:** As possible

**Resources Needed:**

Staff/commission/board review to determine most important sites;

Coordination with non-profit preservation societies;

Funding to acquire development rights or easements.

**Medium Priorities**

- **Provide safe routes for pedestrians and bicyclists** using wide road rights of way, and low speed limits in coastal settlements.
  - Continue to develop safe pedestrian and bicycle ways along roads.

**8. Land trust for conservation purposes.**

Provide technical assistance, cooperation as needed.

**Lower Priorities**

**9. Over the long term, develop paths for bicyclists and pedestrians, connecting with features such as state trails, village centers, and water access or views.**

- Consider using existing corridor rights-of-way, such as railroad right of way.
- Identify roads that can handle mixed traffic.

**Time Frame:** 5-20 years as possible

**Resources Needed:**

Staff/Board/Commission/Citizens group time to identify potential paths and/or privately performed study;

Means of acquiring easement or other rights to develop path;

Development of paths will require time of staff/volunteer/private company to clear path;

Paved path will require asphalt, grading, signs;

Staff time to maintain path;

Possible sources of funding or land include Federal Rails to Trails program, donations, RIDEM grants, exactions from major developments.

10. **Investigate diverting some beach-goers from the Town Beach to other public beaches**, including East Beach or the town-owned parcels west of the Town Beach.

- investigate and develop transportation or parking solutions, possibly allowing visitors to park at Ninigret Park for a fee and shuttling them to beaches.

- work with the state DEM if appropriate to arrange for shared use of Town shuttle and/or state beach.

- In investigating the possibilities for a shuttle, consider including routes to Burlingame Park.

**Time Frame:** 10-20 years

**Resources Needed:**

Parking facilities (fee could be charged);

Shuttle bus and drivers;

Additional lifeguards if other town parcels are used.

11. The Town or non-profit agencies should acquire **additional open space land as the opportunities arise and budget allows**, with a focus on providing buffers and/or limited access to natural resources.

- Use natural constraints mapping to identify resources to protect.
- Cooperate with Wood Pawcatuck Watershed Association and/or Land Trust in identifying parcels and possible funding sources.

**Time Frame:** On-going as possible

**Resources Needed:**

Funding for town or non-profit to acquire land or development rights;

Staff/board/commission/non-profit agent time to identify parcels, write grant proposals.