

City of Lowell



Open Space and Recreation Plan

January Kick-off Meeting Report

February 2018

INTRODUCTION

On January 24th, the City of Lowell Department of Planning and Development (DPD) hosted a kick-off meeting for the 2018 open space planning process. The meeting, held at the Senior Center, assembled over 40 residents and City of Lowell staff to discuss the purpose and importance of an **Open Space and Recreation Plan** (OSRP).



Members of the public engaged in small table conversations focused on how they use the City's open spaces and recreation programs today and made a wish list of things they would like the City to have in the future.

To increase transparency during this planning process, DPD staff have created this report, which details the ideas shared during the kick-off meeting. We invite you to review this report, fill out the **Open Space Survey**, attend future public meetings, and send questions or comments to Openspace@lowellma.gov.

WHAT IS AN OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN?

Massachusetts has established guidelines for OSRP's, outlining the information the state expects the plan to include. The state, Lowell's Planning Board, Conservation Commission, and City Council all must approve the draft OSRP. Having an approved OSRP gives Lowell access to state grants that support the maintenance and creation of open space and recreational opportunities in the City. An OSRP is also a powerful instrument to advance community goals, by identifying development patterns that will support those goals. In addition, the plan is an inventory for all the facilities and programs we have and offer in Lowell.

During this planning process we will create a five-year vision for our open spaces and recreation programs. We will create a plan to protect and improve the existing system of open spaces throughout the City through targeted investments, ongoing maintenance, and continued programming. We will also identify opportunities to create new open spaces and offer new programming.

TIMELINE

Type of Meeting	Date	Purpose
Kick-off Meeting (1st Public Meeting)	4/24/18 COMPLETE	Discover how people are using the existing facilities Learn how they would like to use these facilities
Neighborhood Group Tours	3/18	Invite residents to attend the public meetings Distribute surveys
Community Events	3/18—8/18	Increase awareness of the purpose of and importance of an OSRP Distribute surveys
2nd Public Meeting	5/17/18	Review what we have we learned Develop shared goals and strategies
3rd Public Meeting	8/6/18	Present the draft Open Space plan and open the public comment period on the draft plan
Public Comments	8/6-9/10	30 day public comment period open
Final Submission	9/24	DPD staff will incorporate comments from the public and edit document before submitting plan for approvals

WHAT RESIDENTS ARE SAYING

During the kick-off meeting, attendees discussed existing park facilities and the recreational programming offered by the City of Lowell. These conversations focused on the public's awareness and usage of existing programming and facilities and whether or not they use facilities and participate in any of the programs offered.

- People said they used parks in their neighborhoods, but also traveled to other neighborhoods for certain activities.
- People like the mix of facilities Lowell has to offer, but had lots of suggestions for new
- Some people were aware the city offered youth programming but were not aware the city offers programming for adults.
- Some people were not aware any recreational programming existed.
- Most people were surprised to hear that **programming is FREE for City residents**.

A few residents had signed their children up for a Health Camp or brought their children to various programs and free swim lessons through the city's recreation department. None of the adults present at the public meeting had ever participated in an adult recreational program. Upon learning more about the City's recreational programming, many residents expressed an interest in finding out more information. To increase awareness, residents suggested having a greater online/social media presence as well as more clarity about where they can find information about current and future programming and all the city's existing facilities.

Residents were also asked to share ideas for new facilities and recreation program opportunities that they would like to see in Lowell. Facilitators asked for a **Wish List** from residents. DPD staff have compiled and organized these wish lists into three themes: Information/Marketing, Uses/Activity/Programming, and Transportation/Access. Refer to pages 8-10 for the complete lists.

The wish lists also include several suggestions. Some of the suggestions could happen with a little investment, while others would require significant financial resources. Creating a wish list helps DPD understand the breadth of ideas people want to see realized in Lowell. While not all of the items on the wish list will be feasible to adopt during the lifetime of this OSRP, they will act as a way to prioritize our goals for the next five years.

The next couple pages highlight common responses to questions asked by facilitators during the kick-off meeting.

Which types of **Active** Outdoor Recreational Activities do you enjoy?

A word cloud of active outdoor recreational activities. The words are arranged in a roughly circular pattern. The largest words are 'mountain biking', 'basketball', 'walking dogs', 'football', 'volleyball', 'running', 'walking tours', and 'tennis'. Other words include 'cricket', 'cycling', and 'walking'. The colors alternate between teal and blue.

mountain biking basketball
walking dogs football
volleyball running
cycling tennis walking tours
cricket walking

Which types of **Passive** Outdoor Recreational Activities do you enjoy?

A word cloud of passive outdoor recreational activities. The words are arranged in a roughly circular pattern. The largest words are 'bringing children to park', 'events at the river', 'garden', 'picnics', 'attending community events at parks', and 'cookouts'. Other words include 'watching'. The colors alternate between teal and blue.

bringing children to park
watching events at the river
garden
picnics attending community events at parks
cookouts

Which types of Water-based Recreational Activities do you enjoy?

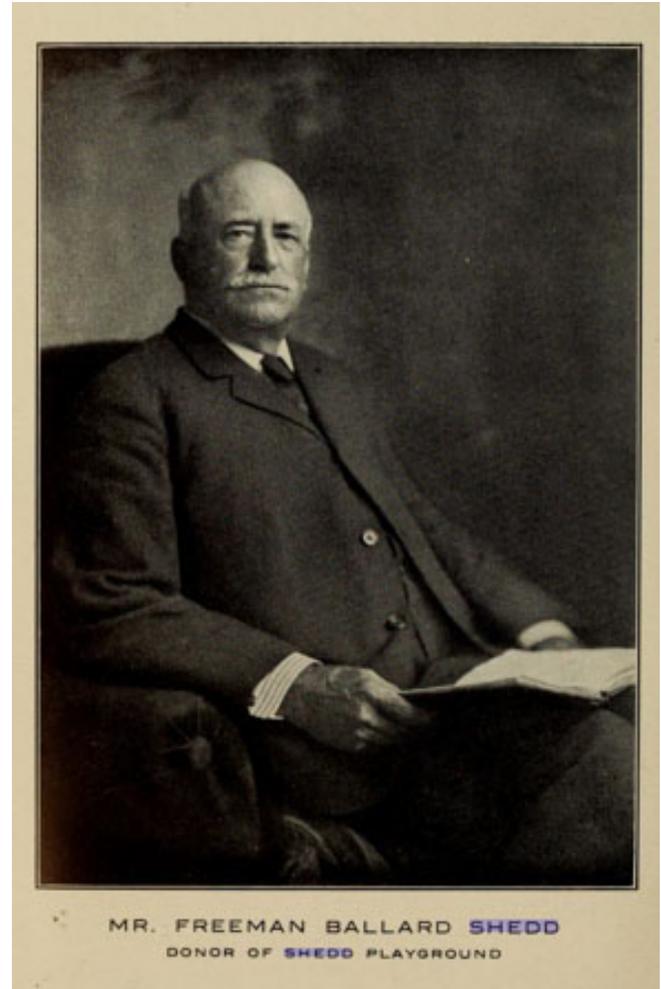
national park **canoeing**
boat tour **swimming**
attending community
events at parks
CREW **kayaking** **fishing** **ROWING**

SHARE your thoughts at the next public meeting or
Email OpenSpace@LowellMA.gov

WISH LIST

1. Information/Marketing

- Add signage at parks—explaining their names and history
- Create a go-to calendar site, app, or newsletter to advertise all outdoor activities
- Have cross-department promotion of outdoor activities and events on Facebook & Twitter
- Increase the marketing of events and programs occurring in the city
- Create an email list similar to the one used for cultural events but focused on health and recreation
- Make existing information easier to find on the City's website
- Improve LRTA marketing
- Provide a map of all parks and activities online
- Establish trail markers
- Install maps at parks that show the locations of other parks and green spaces in the area
- Prepare a “blue trail” map showing waterways river and canal walks
- Translate important signage into other languages
- Increase the clarity and transparency about the process for reserving spaces
- Assess whether boards about park reservations can be installed at the parks to alert residents to when they are reserved or available



2. Uses/Activity/Programming

- Add gardening programs
- Host adult splash pad nights (“splash pads are made for young children,” which limits adult access to City water recreation facilities)
- Install a climbing wall
- Facilitate bungee jumping
- Build an outdoor gym
- Dye downtown canals green for St. Patrick’s Day
- Schedule haunted hayrides and/or woods walks
- Acquire outdoor bumper boats, on ice
- Designate drone use locations
- Install pop-up art installations
- Invest in low-cost/maintenance recreation in Boardinghouse Park (e.g., corn hole, ping pong)
- Build a water spray park at Armory Park
- Sponsor intramural adult sports
- Provide more boating classes and rentals at launches
- Establish a non-university rowing club
- Activate Derby Park (Middle Street)
- Place a play structure at Kerouac “there’s nothing there”
- Increase access to Cawley Stadium—information about what can be used by the public
- Schedule more recreation classes—they fill too quickly
- Provide recreational programming for seniors
- Install a splash pad at Hadley
- Create a connection between Hawk Valley Farm, Pawtucket Memorial Park, and Regatta Field



Photo courtesy of Mill City Grows



Photo from <http://www.golocalprov.com>

- Build a bridge over VFW to cross over to Regatta Field from Boulevard

3. Transportation/Access

- Enhance connectivity and accessibility overall
- Offer public bikes and/or partner with the UML Freewheelers Program or Lowell Bike Coalition
- Prioritize cyclist lane safety
- Provide public bathrooms
- Install better or more consistent lighting throughout downtown
- Offer more parking at Shedd Park
- Ease traffic around Kittredge Park
- Focus on accessibility for people with disabilities
- Remove the poison ivy by the Riverwalk
- Maintain Decatur Way
- Maintain Armory Park (300+ needles found in one day of cleaning)
- Build a traffic fence for Callery Park
- Build a public boathouse for boat storage
- Host more events (weekly) that close streets to cars for marketplaces and cycling
- Sponsor more art in parks
- Complete the Concord River Greenway
- Provide lights at more basketball courts
- Have City staff conduct large park cleanups more frequently
- Create more scenic overlooks and pocket parks



Bourgeois Park, Photo courtesy of Nick Rivera

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