

# THE BURLINGTON VERMONT PARKS & RECREATION MASTER PLAN

*strategic initiatives draft*  
MAY 2014



BURLINGTON  
PARKS  
RECREATION  
WATERFRONT

S A S A K I



## Recommendations

The following are Strategic Initiatives for Burlington Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront Department. The Recommendations span a 10 year period from 2014 to 2024. The Recommendations are listed as short term, midterm, or long term priorities. These time frames will provide the department with the opportunity to review the Master Plan at the end of each cycle: short, medium and long.

While the Plan should be reviewed each year in order to accommodate any changes in priorities that occur throughout each year, a more thorough review will be completed at the end of FY16-17 and FY19-20, or after every three years. The three year review will include an update to the Strategic Recommendations, noting work that has been completed and adjusting the Strategic Initiatives to reflect major changes. In addition, the three year review should include an update of demographics and revised inventory of parks and amenities. During the second review cycle following FY19-20, a Community Survey should be completed. It may also be helpful to have public input during these two review cycles to ask for resident response to the Plan's progress.

### Short Term FY14-15 to FY16-17

- Add Burlington Parks and Recreation amenity information in the PRORAGIS database.
- In development of new assets, consider the perceived imbalance between the north and south end of town.
- Increase capital funding: the median of capital spending for the PRORAGIS database is \$640,000. Burlington receives \$350,000 in capital funding annually. This is significantly below what other agencies spend.

- Align a significant portion of Penny for Parks funding for capital priorities developed by the Department, while leaving the remainder of funding for projects suggested by the community. Create a long term Capital Improvement Plan and Replacement Plan with dedicated funding for ongoing replacement of assets. Consider increasing the Penny for Parks funding in order to double the amount of capital dollars.
- Develop a Foundation to augment capital investment into the system. The Foundation could also oversee a scholarship program for financial support for residents with financial need.
- Allocate labor dollars toward marketing support. Agencies the size of Burlington typically have at least one full-time staff member dedicated toward marketing functions. The recommendation is to add a marketing position. At first, this can possibly be a shared position with other agencies in the region to provide a regional approach to parks and recreation service delivery. This position can also include dedicated time toward corporate sponsorships. Supplement with University of Vermont marketing interns.
- Develop design standards for park amenities including elements such as water fountains, fencing, playgrounds, etc. In addition, develop park lighting standards. This is currently being developed for identifying standard fixtures for pedestrian walks, parking, trails, etc.
- Work with the Public Works Department in identifying long term maintenance of park roadways and establish percentage contribution by Public Works and Parks Departments.
- There is a need to increase park maintenance staff as the average acres/FTE is 16.7 in the PRORAGIS database, for Burlington the number is almost 40 acres/ FTE.
- Develop a financial pro forma for Memorial Auditorium building alternatives, including selling, leasing, or renovating the facility.
  - Indoor space; multi-purpose recreation center. The Miller Center only has about 17,680 of programming

- space for the Department. Throughout the overall system, indoor multi-purpose space is below the average agency by 22,340. With the need for indoor activity space in the winter, a multi-purpose recreation center could be located close to the downtown area with easy access to the southern part of the City.
- Determine the success of leasing space in Memorial Auditorium and identify long term recommendations for the building, including selling or renovating the building.
  - Decrease the size of existing dog parks and develop an additional dog park in the southern end of the City.
- Develop a process to implement changes and improvements based on Community Survey results.
    - Implement recommendations in the Recreation Assessment to identify ways of increasing household participation in programs as 23% of households participate. 25% of households go to neighboring communities for recreation.
    - Households were asked what areas should receive the most attention:
      - Quality of lake, beaches and areas
      - Maintenance of Burlington parks
      - Number of walking/biking trails
    - Therefore, funding priorities should be aligned with these assets.
    - Another question addressed level of support for funding, and the two highest rated features include trails and neighborhood parks.
  - Perform a system wide accessibility audit.
  - Implement significant Recreation Recommendations. More tactical recommendations are included in the Recreation Assessment within the body of the Plan.
- The Department should do a cost of service analysis to determine true costs of programs, services, and events. This should also include subsidy level goals for core programs. Community events should also be analyzed for direct and indirect costs.
  - Create a virtual program guide for smart phone registration.
  - Dedicate labor resources to management of a special population's programmer.
  - This potentially could be a shared position with other neighboring agencies.
  - Increase staff programming support for the Miller Center.
  - Facilitate a series of focus groups with immigrant populations to determine their recreation needs and how to best service those needs.
  - One of the significant program priorities is outdoor winter recreation opportunities. Consider the development of an outdoor recreation park with a sled hill and toboggan run, outdoor ice rink with a warming hut.
  - Research the possibility of offering a World Events Day at Waterfront Park.
- There is a system wide shortage of storage areas. Identify areas to better accommodate Departmental storage needs, which will result in better efficiency. This includes storage for existing and additional equipment and vehicles.
  - Continue to improve technology. This was identified as one of the most significant areas needing improvement in the Department.
  - Brand and image: doing a better job telling the story
  - Create a city-wide map of parks and their associated watersheds. Develop stormwater priorities for parks based on this map.

**Mid Term FY17-18 to FY19-20**

- Develop a plan for connectivity among facilities and parks and include Safe Routes to Schools plans and Local Motion bike path connection identification.
- Develop a marketing plan and business plan for major facilities
- Implement maintenance standards for parks, buildings, and facilities.
- Create a regional recreation roundtable to discuss partnership opportunities and other ways to have a more regional approach to recreation service delivery.
- As part of PRORAGIS, perform a calculation of economic benefits of Department services and events.
- Work with the Community and Economic Development office to develop a tourism plan for parks and recreation services and events.

**Long Term FY20-21 to FY23-24**

- Add an internal staff position to oversee the Department's use of technology as well as overseeing data analytics.
- Consideration for the installation of a spray ground in the downtown area.

**Other Considerations**

- Policy development for Recognition/Memorial Bench Policy
- Off-Leash Policy Recommendations
- Reference Imagine city Hall Park renovation conceptual planning effort
- Incorporate WAN/Skatepark

**Parks Recommendations**

Specific recommendations for parks within the system are included here:

**Regional Parks**

Leddy Park: This park is a beloved feature of the Burlington's New North End neighborhood. This park should be intensified as a focus of recreational activities in the City. Long term recommendations include:

- Expand the existing fields to include another regulation size Soccer/Football/Lacrosse field.
- Consider modifying one of the 60' baseball fields to be a regulation adult softball field.
- Formalize the trail system and strengthen visual connection to bike path. The latter will be addressed within the scope of the bike path redesign.

North Beach: This park recently underwent renovation to upgrade the camp facilities. Future modifications to the site's access are planned as part of the bike path redesign.

Oakledge Park (Blanchard Beach): This historic park offers a wide range of amenities for Burlington's South End residents, as well as city-wide and regional attractions. Recommendations include:

- The creation of an accessible playground in 2015.
- Relocate the existing softball field that suffers from poor siting on a wetland.
- Both projects will require an analysis of stormwater considerations. This analysis should cover the entire park to help guide future projects in the park.

## Community Parks:

Battery Park: This historically significant park serves as an intimate event space and scenic overlook near downtown. Long term considerations include:

- A holistic analysis and redesign are recommended to clarify and highlight the site's historical significance while improving its aesthetic and functional performance. Analysis should incorporate the 2013 Draft of the Archaeological Management Plan by the UVM Consulting Archaeology Program, and the site's historical relevance as part of the war of 1812 and Civil War.
- Redesign should consider future interment of remains within vault, re-organization of the existing memorials, playground renovation, the creation of a spray park, and the potential to reintroduce the historic road as a sunset lookout

Calahan Park: Calahan Park is a true community park, providing a wide range of amenities for the surrounding residents. Recent upgrades have introduced the City's only 90' baseball field.

- Opportunities should be investigated for reducing mowed areas around the park's perimeter. These areas could be converted to low-maintenance native planting.

Starr Farm Park: This park includes active recreation, community gardens and a popular dog park. Long term recommendations include:

- Expansion and formalization of athletic fields. This site could accommodate future youth softball fields.
- Upgrade the existing wooden playground.
- Formalize trail connections between east and west sides of the park.

Waterfront Park and Promenade: This park is incredibly important as the City's premiere performance and event space. It is also a beloved space for passive recreation. The recommendations for this site are

reflected in the Parks and Recreation Department's PIAP proposal. They include:

- Upgrades to electrical, sewer and water utilities.
- Upgrades to the existing boardwalk to stabilize the slope and introduce better public access to the water.
- Incorporating vegetation improvements to serve as stormwater infrastructure.
- Improved signage, wayfinding, lighting and gateways.
- Realignment of the bike path.

## Neighborhood Parks

The following list includes recommendations for neighborhood parks. Any parks not listed should be maintained under the general guidelines set forth in this document.

Appletree Park:

- Remove failing tennis courts and rehabilitate the site's natural wetland functions.

City Hall Park:

- Continue developing plans for "Imagine: City Hall Park" in collaboration with the BCA and local partners.

Northshore Natural Area/City Beach:

- Improve pedestrian access and visibility of the site.

Roosevelt Park: Upgrades in 2014

- Perform upgrades planned for 2014, including renovation with Boys & Girls Club, court renovations, new lighting and new seating.

Schmanska Park:

- Renovation of the barn.
- Remove the existing tennis courts.

Smalley Park:

- Create a new entrance gateway into the park. Remove fencing and replace strategically with low, aesthetically pleasing wood fence

### Mini Parks

Mini parks should be maintained under the general guidelines set forth in this document - and with minimal investment of resources as they do not provide considerable community benefits.

### Implementation Guidelines

The following is a listing of suggestions for successful implementation of the Strategic Recommendations. It represents the commitment and discipline required to integrate the Master Plan implementation process into daily operations.

- The Values and Strategic Recommendations will become the guidepost for the Department. When decisions or responses to the community are needed, the Plan becomes the reference point for decision making and whether or not new issues or responses to the community are of higher importance than what's been established as existing direction.
- This information should be included as part of the new Recreation Commission member and employee orientation programs.
- Post the Executive Summary on the Website and track results on the site as well. It may also be helpful to print a short summary of the progress to distribute to interested partners and community members.
- A staff person or team should have responsibility of being the project manager or "champion" of the Plan's implementation to ensure success. This staff person is

responsible for monitoring the Plan's progress and works with staff to effectively integrate the Plan with operations.

- Each Strategic Recommendation should have a leader assigned to manage the process. Each Recommendation generally requires a cross functional team of employees to work on completing the initiative. A project manager should exist for each Recommendation.
- Regular reporting of the Plan's progress should occur. Break the Plan into separate fiscal years and report one year at a time, as an ongoing annual work plan. Each Recommendation for the year should include a list of tactics that support its completion. The tactics are developed prior to each year for the upcoming list of Recommendations. It is the project leader's responsibility to report on his/her initiative, included in a monthly or quarterly report. A suggestion is to input each year's data on a spreadsheet that lists the Recommendation start and completion dates, and which staff person is responsible for the Recommendation's completion.
- At the end of the year, perform an annual written review and documentation of the Recommendation.
- In addition to an annual review, a more comprehensive three year review will occur at the end of FY16-17 and FY19-20. This will include updating demographic information, updating park and amenity inventory, revising recreation program recommendations, and completing an additional Community Survey at the end of FY19-20.
- Update major stakeholders on the Plan's implementation and results on an annual basis.
- Conduct staff meetings on a regular basis, such as semi-annually to review the Plan's progress and results and report the Plan's progress to the Recreation Commission as well.
- Complete an annual just-in-time review of the next year's Recommendations to determine if priorities have changed. This can be included at an annual retreat in which successive years' Recommendations are discussed as part of the annual budget process. The Recommendations should tie into

the budget process. The Plan's action plan includes three timeframes: FY14-FY17, FY17-FY20, and FY20 to FY24. This schedule provides the opportunity for thorough updates during those timeframes.

- Post a chart of each year's Recommendations on office walls in administrative areas with a check-off column designating completion as part of a visual management program. Staff meetings should regularly include discussion of strategy. This will help to emphasize the Plan's importance and the Department's commitment to execution.
- If there are ideas for new strategies that arise throughout the year, include them on a written "parking lot" and review them as part of the annual just-in-time review to determine if they supplant any existing initiatives.

## Conclusion

Burlington Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront aspires to continue and build upon its legacy of providing excellent services to the community. The Department is poised to develop its brand and image, update its use of marketing and technology, and to further develop the park and recreation system according to the Initiatives of the Master Plan. This will ensure the Department's continued role of importance to the community. The Strategic Initiatives create a sense of direction and focus for the next 10 years. All of these efforts will result in leadership excellence in the provision of services and impactful results that will greatly benefit all of Burlington.