

IV. RECREATION, CONSERVATION & OPEN SPACE



2014

Middletown, Rhode Island Comprehensive Community Plan

OPEN SPACE WITHIN MIDDLETOWN INCLUDES AN ABUNDANCE OF DIVERSE NATURAL AREAS WHICH OFFER RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES WHILE PRESERVING AGRICULTURAL LANDS, WILDLIFE HABITAT, SENSITIVE ECOSYSTEMS AND WATER QUALITY. RESIDENTS VALUE AN ACTIVE AND HEALTHY LIFESTYLE AND WILL TAKE ADVANTAGE OF QUALITY RECREATION PROGRAMS, FACILITIES, AND TRAILS OFFERED BY THE TOWN.

IV. Recreation, Conservation & Open Space

MIDDLETOWN, RHODE ISLAND COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY PLAN

Supporting Material

- Kempenaar Valley Management Plan, Town of Middletown.
- Middletown Harbor Management Plan, Town of Middletown, 2006.
- Middletown Recreation, Conservation, and Open Space Master Plan, VHB for Town of Middletown, 2010.
- State Guide Plan Element 152, Ocean State Outdoors: Rhode Island's Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. 2009.
- State Guide Plan Element 155, A Greener Path....Greenspace and Greenways for Rhode Island's Future. 1994.
- West Side Mater Plan, Aquidneck Island Planning Commission. 2005.

Introduction

The following Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Element was informed by the process recently conducted to complete a Recreation, Conservation, and Open Space (RCOS) Master Plan in 2010. The RCOS Master Plan was created with the assistance of a consultant and a Steering Committee comprised of Planning Board members, Open Space Committee members, representatives of the land trust, recreation leagues, and town staff.

The RCOS planning process included a significant amount of public participation and input including a public forum held on April 22, 2010 and stakeholder interviews carried out in February and March of 2010. Results of a survey prepared and conducted by the Town in 2008, along with the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis provided additional data which was utilized to establish the needs and desires of town residents in regards to recreation and open space. Site visits were undertaken in March and April of 2010 as part of the needs assessment in order to visually identify

both the positive and negative attributes of Middletown's open space and recreation resources.

RCOS Vision Statement: Open space within Middletown includes an abundance of diverse natural areas which offer recreational opportunities while preserving agricultural lands, wildlife habitat, sensitive ecosystems and water quality. Residents value an active and healthy lifestyle and will take advantage of quality recreation programs, facilities, and trails offered by the town.

Demographics

The beneficiaries of adequate, well-balanced RCOS resources are the citizens of the community and visitors who are drawn to the town by those resources. An effective RCOS program provides direct and indirect benefits to the community, in that it contributes to the fulfillment of the community's emotional, physical, societal and economic needs. Forward looking population trends are vital to a progressive program. To be effective, the program must anticipate and be responsive to future projections. In this context, the 2010 RCOS plan predicted an aging, graying, yet stable population. Therefore, the rational allocation of existing resources and acquisition of additional resources must be sensitive to the distribution of the projected population within the town's neighborhoods.

Population in Middletown was characterized by a constant growth rate from 1900 until 1940. From then until the Navy cutbacks in April 1973, the growth rate accelerated and exceeded county and state rates. The reduced activity at the Naval Base caused a decrease in total population in the town between 1970 and 1975. Table R-1 Population Trends shows the population from 1900 to 2010. Previous studies of population changes indicated that most gains are the direct result of in-migration rather than natural increases. However, recent population decreases may be attributable to:

- More homes have been purchased for use as second homes
- Child population has decreased
- The methodology used by the U.S. Census Bureau with regard to the numbers of Navy personnel
- Reduction of Navy personnel at the base

TABLE R-1: POPULATION TRENDS			
Year	Population	Numerical Change	Rate Change (%)
1900	1475	-	-
1910	1708	251	17.2
1920	2094	386	22.5
1930	2499	405	19.3
1940	3379	880	35.2
1950*	7382	4003	118.5
1960	12675	5293	71.7
1965**	19562	6887	54.3
1970	29290	9728	49.7
1975***	15400	-13,890	-47.7
1980	17216	1816	11.7
1990	19460	2244	13
2000	17334	-2,126	-10.9
2010	16150	-1,184	-6.83

Source: RI Department of Administration, Division of Planning, U. S. Census Bureau

* Military personnel prior to the 1950 Census were counted as part of the population of their respective hometowns.

** 1965 R. I. State count for reapportionment

*** Decrease caused by decrease in Navy population

Age groups listed at Table R-2 indicate that approximately 72.8% of the Town's population was below the age of 44 in 1990, while those aged 45 and above represented 27.2% of the population. The 2010 Census shows the percentage increased from 27.2% to 46.8% for those over age 45. Therefore, as the median age grows older (31.2 years in 1990 to 41.2 years in 2010), the diversity of recreation facilities must keep pace with the age trend: the user population. A secondary but related consideration is the distribution of the user population within the town boundaries and the access that neighborhood residents have to the Town's open spaces and park and recreation facilities.

TABLE R-2: MIDDLETOWN POPULATION - AGE GROUPS, SEX, & MEDIAN AGE			
	Population (% of Total Age Groups)		
Age	1990	2000	2010
Under 5	1,465 (7.6)	1,210 (6.9)	933 (5.8)
5 – 19	4,133 (21.2)	3,411 (19.7)	2,999 (18.6)
20 – 44	8,556 (44.0)	6,216 (35.8)	4,658 (28.8)
45 – 64	3,001 (15.4)	3,918 (22.8)	4,717 (29.2)
65 +	2,305 (11.8)	2,579 (14.8)	2,843 (17.6)
Total	19,460 (100.0)	17,334 (100)	16,150 (100)
Sex			
Male	10280	8434	7,763 (48.1)
Female	9180	8900	8,387 (51.9)
Median Age	31.2	37.7	41.2

Source: RI Department of Administration, Division of Planning and U. S. Census Bureau

Overview of Existing Open Space and Recreation Resources

The Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act defines open space as:

ANY PARCEL OR AREA OF LAND OR WATER SET ASIDE FOR PUBLIC OR PRIVATE USE OR ENJOYMENT OR FOR THE USE AND ENJOYMENT OF OWNERS AND OCCUPANTS OF LAND ADJOINING OR NEIGHBORING SUCH OPEN SPACE; PROVIDED THAT THE AREA MAY BE IMPROVED WITH ONLY THOSE BUILDINGS, STRUCTURES, STREETS, AND OFF-STREET PARKING, AND OTHER IMPROVEMENTS THAT ARE DESIGNED TO BE INCIDENTAL TO THE NATURAL OPENNESS OF THE LAND.

An alternative working definition for open space is “CONSERVATION LAND, RECREATION LAND, AGRICULTURAL LAND, CORRIDOR PARKS AND AMENITIES SUCH AS SMALL PARKS, GREEN BUFFERS ALONG ROADWAYS OR ANY OPEN AREA THAT IS OWNED BY AN AGENCY OR ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO CONSERVATION” , as defined by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs.

As detailed in the Open Space Inventory of the *Recreation, Conservation, and Open Space Master Plan (VHB, 2010)*, Middletown has approximately 2,254 acres of land that can be classified as open space or recreational land. This includes protected agricultural land; playing fields; parks; land set aside for conservation and water resource protection; private recreation or conservation properties; and undeveloped land. It is important to note that even though land may be identified as open space in the inventory, it should not be assumed that such land is protected in perpetuity. There are several levels of protection and the inventory identifies those parcels that are

permanently protected.¹ Typically, parks and ballfields, for example, are not permanently protected. Active recreational land comprises 563 acres, passive open space occupies 600 acres of land, and there is 1,090 acres of conservation land. The land may be owned and/or managed by the Town of Middletown, the City of Newport, the Middletown School Department, the Aquidneck Land Trust, the State of Rhode Island, the federal government, or other private individuals and entities. Map R-1 Existing Recreation, Conservation, and Open Space Lands Map shows the location of each of these properties.

Active Recreation

The Town of Middletown has a very dynamic parks and recreation program. A wide variety of leagues and programs utilize the parks and fields on a regular basis through three seasons each year. Participation in the programs and leagues are at capacity for many sports and the fields are constantly in use. As demonstrated by the information provided by representatives from the various recreational leagues, demand for fields and facilities exceeds the supply in many cases. This leads to scheduling issues, particularly if weather conditions preclude scheduled games from being played, resulting in the need to find time for rescheduled games in an already crowded schedule.

The following is a list of existing public fields and recreational facilities in Middletown²:

- **Baseball/softball fields**
- **Two tee ball fields at Oliphant School**
- **One Minor M (Machine Pitch) baseball at Gaudet Middle School**
- **One Minor MM/MMM (Machine Pitch/Player Pitch) field – lower field at Aquidneck School**
- **Two Majors Division field – upper field at Aquidneck School (games and practice) and Gaudet Middle School**
- **One youth softball at Aquidneck School**
- **One men’s softball field (Pottsey Field at the West Main Recreation Complex)**

¹ There are generally three levels of protection for conserved land: perpetual conservation restriction, deed restriction, and conservation intent alone.

² Note that there are several private facilities in Middletown that include golf courses, tennis courts, pools, and athletic clubs but public access may be limited and may include a fee or membership if available for public use.

- One baseball field at Middletown High School
- One girls softball field at Middletown High School
- One Babe Ruth baseball field (War Memorial Field)
- One football field (Gaudet Middle School)
- One running/walking track (Gaudet Middle School)
- Five outdoor basketball courts (two at Gaudet Middle School, Forest Avenue School, Howland Park, West Main Road Recreation Complex) and one indoor court (Middletown High School)
- Five tennis courts (Gaudet Middle School)
- Seven playgrounds (Aquidneck School, Forest Avenue School, Linden Park, Howland Park, Kennedy School, Oliphant School, Gaudet Middle School)
- Five soccer fields (three at Wyatt Road, two Pee Wee fields at Middletown High School)
- Gymnasiums available for indoor recreation (limited to after-school hours) at Forest Avenue School, Gaudet Middle School, Middletown High School
- Miscellaneous multi-use/practice fields, broadly defined (Gaudet Middle School, Linden Park, Middletown High School)

Passive Recreation

There are numerous opportunities for residents and visitors to take advantage of the Town's open space resources for a variety of passive activities, such as walking, hiking, enjoying scenic vistas and observing wildlife. Middletown also has opportunities for equestrian riding along certain segments of the Sakonnet Greeway Trail and at Sachuest and Third Beaches during non-summer months. Middletown is home to a variety of preserved and undeveloped open spaces that offer protection of environmental resources, scenic vistas, trail networks, and passive recreational opportunities. This includes 28 properties conserved by Aquidneck Land Trust (ALT) that are located in Middletown (three include some portion in Portsmouth). Sixteen of those properties are accessible to the public, including those that have recreational fields used by Middletown residents. Other open space parcels are conserved by easement, some for agricultural purposes, which limits the public access.

Additionally, the Town is fortunate to have extensive beach areas and rights-of-way that provide access to the coast. The beaches are arguably the most significant open space and recreation resource in Middletown. They are heavily utilized and enhance the

quality of life for residents as well as visitors. Second/Sachuest Beach is a 1 ¼ miles long public beach and includes saltwater swimming, a picnic area, saltwater fishing, kayaking, a bird watching trail, volleyball, and kite surfing. Third Beach is also a public beach (along with some semi-private beachfront property) that also offers swimming, boating, windsurfing, kayaking, fishing, bird watching, and picnicking.

There are 65 moorings at Third Beach administered by the town’s Harbor Master, under the management of the Middletown Police Department. Currently, there is a waiting list for moorings. The Middletown Harbor Management Plan, completed in 2006, provides additional information regarding boating in Middletown.

The beaches, which are considered to be among the best in Southern New England, are heavily visited during the summer months and particularly on weekends and holidays. Based upon the sale of beach passes and parking data, beach usage increased substantially in 2007 and 2008, but fell to the lowest levels in the five year timeframe in 2009 (see Table R-3). This is likely due to the unusually cool and wet summer weather in 2009, as well as the fee increase coupled with the struggling economy. Given the dry and hot summer in 2010, the numbers rebounded – 2,206 resident passes and 2,789 non-resident passes. Seasonal beach pass fees were \$45 (resident) and \$90 (non-resident) from 2005-2008, but were increased to \$50 (resident) and \$100 (non-resident) in 2009. In FY 2011, the fees are \$70 for residents and \$140 for non-residents. Day passes are \$10 on weekdays and \$20 on weekends and holidays.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Resident Passes Sold</i>	<i>Non-Resident Passes Sold</i>	<i>Total Daily Parking</i>
2005	2,027	2,436	35,958
2006	2,144	2,615	35,767
2007	2,096	2,826	40,865
2008	2,194	2,961	43,841
2009	1,941	2,271	40,506
2010	2,206	2,789	52,721
2011	2,020	2,152	52,354
2012	2,103	2,195	59,291

Source: Middletown Recreation Department

Other notable large open space parcels include the privately-owned Norman Bird Sanctuary (263 acres) and federally-owned Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge (233 acres), both of which are located adjacent to the beaches. Smaller passive spaces

include the town-owned Paradise Valley Park (almost 15 acres) and Albro Woods (almost 9 acres).

Public access to the shore is also provided by several small parcels that have been designated as rights of way to the shore by the Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC). On January 6, 2000 the CRMC provided Middletown Public Works Department shoreline access markers, posts and signs to identify Middletown's ten designated rights of way, Y-1, Y-3, Y-4, Y-5, Y-6, Y-7, Y-8, Y-9, Y-10 and Y-11. The Town of Middletown carried out this posting action in the Spring of 2000. The letter and number on these rights of way have been assigned by CRMC as follows:

Y-1: Tuckerman Ave.: located on Tax Assessor's Plat 116SE. This 30 foot right of way to the ocean dates back to deeds written in the 1800s and identified by the CRMC, in June 1989, as right of way 4-1. The centerline of the way is the boundary between lots 104 and 105.

Y-3: Shore Road: located on Tax Assessor's Plat 116SE. This 10 foot right of way runs to the ocean and is identified as Lot 4.

Y-4: Third Beach Road: located on Tax Assessor's Plat 131. This unnamed right of way runs over 140 feet to the Sakonnet River. It lies between Lots 5 and 6 (6B & 6A).

Y-5: Intersection of the Southeastern end of Esplanade/Shore Rd: located on Tax Assessor's Plat 116NE. This 15-foot right of way to the ocean is identified as Lot 83 and is described in the deeds for both Lots 82 and 84.

Y-6: Indian Avenue: located on Tax Assessor's Plat 129. This road/right of way to the Sakonnet River lies between Lots 75 and 176, opposite Lot 65 and is known as Taggarts Ferry Road.

Y-7: Peckham Avenue: located on Tax Assessor's Plat 133. This extension of Peckham Avenue runs as a right of way/road over 600 feet to the Sakonnet River and is bounded to the north and south by Lots 4 and 5, respectively.

Y-8: Northwestern end of Esplanade: located at the juncture of Tax Assessor's Plats 116NW and 116NE. This right of way to the ocean was identified by the State of Rhode Island as Number 144 in an inventory of public rights of way to the shore published in March 1970 and is described as running parallel to the Esplanade, 290 feet from the intersection of Tuckerman Ave. to the ocean.

Y-9: Western end of Purgatory Road (Second Beach Avenue): located on Tax Assessor's Plat 116NW, Lot 45. This 40-foot right of way runs to the ocean between Lots 44 and 46, next to Atlantic Beach.

Y-10: Shore Road, west of Lot 107: located on Tax Assessor's Plat 116SE. This 10 foot right of way runs to the ocean and is identified as Lot 12.

Y-11: Tuckerman Avenue (opposite Wolcott Avenue): located on Tax Assessor's Plat 122. This is a 30 foot right of way to the ocean.

PRIVATE ROW

Y-2: Tuckerman Avenue/Tuckerman Terrace: located on Tax Assessor's Plat 116SE. This right of way/road to the ocean runs at least 369 feet from Tuckerman Ave. to the shoreline. The CRMC reviewed this site and based on the evidence submitted into the record at the time of the hearing; found that insufficient evidence existed to designate as public right-of-way to the shore. However, further review may occur given new evidence.

See Map R-1 to view the locations of the rights of way to the shore described above.

Walking and hiking trails are available at Albro Woods, Demery Memorial Park, Norman Bird Sanctuary, Paradise Valley Park, and Sachuest Point Wildlife Refuge. Of particular significance is the ALT's Sakonnet Greenway Trail, which is currently about 10 miles long and runs through several open spaces between East Main Road and Wyatt Road. This trail is the longest on Aquidneck Island and is a valued resource that creates a connected network through numerous open space holdings. The trail is open to pedestrians and on designated sections of the trail is available for equestrian use.

Conservation and Open Space Preservation

A number of the properties on the inventory are not publicly accessible and are preserved primarily for conservation purposes. This includes a number of parcels owned by either the City of Newport or the Newport Water Department for watershed protection purposes. As mentioned above, wildlife habitat is an important part of Middletown's open space, particularly the Norman Bird Sanctuary and the Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge. Additional parcels are preserved specifically for agricultural uses and may not be accessible to the public. A number of the conservation parcels are protected under ALT conservation easements. View Map R-2 Conserved Lands for an inventory of publicly and privately owned conservation properties within Middletown with conservation easement or deed restriction protections.

ALT identifies the following as primary benefits for conserving open space:

- Protecting agricultural land and fresh local farm products
- Preserving wildlife habitat and biodiversity
- Maintaining the Island's desirability as a place to live, work and visit
- Securing public recreational space and healthy fun outdoor opportunities
- Conserving water resource areas and clean drinking water
- Keeping scenic vistas and the charm and beauty of our Island
- Saving money for municipalities and taxpayers

The Town of Middletown has adopted an Open Space and Recreation Acquisition Policy used by the Open Space and Fields Committee when recommending potential acquisitions for open space and recreational purposes to the Town Council. Nine specific criteria were established from which each parcel is ranked using a point score assessment (0 to 3 points per criteria for a maximum total of 27 points). The criteria are as follows:

- 1. Groundwater and watershed protection potential**
- 2. Ecologically significant habitat**
- 3. Proximity to other protected land**
- 4. Farmland preservation**
- 5. Historic/cultural/scenic qualities**
- 6. Size of parcel**
- 7. Potential to offset the impact of residential development**
- 8. Leverage of Town funds in project acquisition**
- 9. Potential for recreational use.**

Facility Demand and Condition

The various recreational and league programs serve large numbers of residents and in some cases also residents from neighboring communities. For example, the Middletown Youth Soccer Club has approximately 800 players. The Middletown Little League has 500 participants and the Pop Warner football and cheerleading programs serve 250 – 300 children. This can put enormous strain on the fields and results in juggling of schedules in order to accommodate everyone. On the other hand, programs such as men's softball and pick-up basketball tend not to have too many conflicts in the scheduling of fields and courts, despite having to work around school activities, as is the case with the basketball program. Youth wrestling indicated the need for more time to use the gym at Gaudet Middle School.

Demand for the facilities is high and there is often competing uses for the playing fields. School uses have priority for fields, which limits community or league access at certain times – generally until 5:00 or 5:30 PM. School teams at different levels (varsity, junior varsity, etc.) sometimes participate in the use of a single field at the Middle School and High School. Salve Regina University's football program also uses the Gaudet Middle School facility. At the Aquidneck Elementary School, over 14 teams are vying to play games on two fields and nine softball teams play on one field. Middletown Babe Ruth uses the same field (War Memorial Field at Berkeley Peckham) that is used by Gaudet

Middle School baseball and Middletown High School freshman. Additionally, programs such as Island Youth Lacrosse and Pop Warner need to access fields as well. The available practice fields are scattered around the Town and are either inadequately sized or are in less than ideal condition for the intended use. Thus, scheduling the use of these various facilities is a juggling act between the different entities that can be complicated by two major factors:

- ❑ The popularity of the league programs results in the fielding of numerous teams.
- ❑ Weather related cancellations tend to multiply during the course of the season since many games and practices can be affected.

Facility conditions vary widely depending upon the use, level of activity, and maintenance schedule for each facility. Specific conditions for the Town's various facilities are noted in the inventory. In summary, the major concerns with the Town's open space and recreation facilities fall into the following categories:

- ❑ Drainage – a number of fields have poor drainage resulting in ponding of water in the fields, sidelines, dugouts, etc. (lower and main baseball fields on Aquidneck Ave., Little League field at Gaudet Middle School). As a result, games need to be rescheduled even when the weather is suitable for playing.
- ❑ Grading – some fields, tee-ball in particular, are not graded properly and are not level
- ❑ Bathrooms – some fields and parks have no restroom facilities
- ❑ Accessory equipment – most of the baseball fields have rusting or broken fences and backstops; benches or stands that are in a state of disrepair; no dugouts or benches for the teams using the field; and storage areas that are inadequate or have a leaking roof
- ❑ Parking – inadequate parking was noted at several locations
- ❑ Proximity of playing field to roads and homes – some fields are either improperly located or are sized too small for current use. As a result, potential hazards or conflicts exist between the field use and surrounding area. Netting has been used on some occasions to prevent balls from leaving the field and potentially damaging cars or homes.

Appendix E of the *Recreation, Conservation, and Open Space Master Plan* (VHB, 2010) provides photographs and detailed information for all major open space and recreation resources in Middletown. For each park or open space, notes are provided relating to the use and condition of each facility.

Facility Standards

During the Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Master planning process, a few sources were utilized for quantifying standards for recreation and open space facilities. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) established guidelines in 1995 used around the country for the size and number of different types of facilities, as well as their location in relationship to nearby residential areas that would be served by such facilities. A review of sources used by landscape architects in designing recreation and open space facilities reveals general consistency with the prior NRPA standards. Also utilized were previous statewide standards for local recreation, conservation, and open space were established by the RI State Planning Council/Recreation Resources Review Committee in June 1989 (see Table R-4: Local Recreation, Conservation, and Open Space Standards (1989)).

TABLE R-4: RI LOCAL RECREATION, CONSERVATION, AND OPEN SPACE STANDARDS (1989)					
<i>Type of Facility</i>	<i>Age Group</i>	<i>Acres /1,000 People</i>	<i>Size (acres)</i>	<i>Preferred Location</i>	<i>Suggested Facilities</i>
PLAY AREAS /PLAYGROUNDS: Primarily a center for young children but may also include a park for passive recreation for all ages.	All	1.25	1-5	Adjacent to elementary school within ½ to a mile walking distance, or center of a neighborhood.	Space for a combination softball, baseball, football fields; basketball, tennis and badminton courts, an area for passive recreation for young and old; wading pool; informal play area.
PLAYFIELDS: An area for active, organized activities that require more space than a playground, yet including one section as a developed playground.	15 +	1.25	12 – 20	Adjacent to junior or senior high schools, or center of four or five neighborhoods.	Children's playground, game courts, lawn areas, swimming pool, special features, landscaped area, parking area, field house, facilities for highly organized sports, recreation building, diversified facilities.
NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS	All	2.5	Up to 25 +	Center of a neighborhood: may be connected with a school or community center; part of a playground or playfield.	Places for sitting, sunning, walking. May consist of landscaped "buffer strips" between uncongenial land uses: "greenways" or any natural or scenic features where possible to give a leisurely park feeling.
LARGE PARKS AND SPECIAL AREAS	All	5 – 8	Up to 100	Community wide	Picnic areas, swimming, boating facilities, winter sports, gardens, fishing, golf, camping, scenic drives, hiking, nature trails, bridle paths, camping facilities, marinas.

CONSERVATION AREA: Areas so designated to conserve unique natural resources of the area.	All	Based on availability	Based on availability	Community wide	Woods, beaches, rocky areas, marshes, and open fields containing farms and wildlife species that should be protected. To be used for passive recreation.
<i>Source: Standards for Local Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Plans. (R.I. State Planning Council/Recreation Resources Review Committee, June 1989)</i>					

The prior NRPA guidelines provide recommendations for the size of the playing fields. These can serve as useful comparisons with the inventory of facilities in Middletown listed above. The purpose of these guidelines is to present park and recreation space recommendations that are applicable for planning, acquisition, and development of park, recreation, and open space lands, primarily at the community level. **They should be interpreted according to the particular situation to which they are applied and specific local needs. Thus, even if the Town exceeds these guidelines, the ultimate demand is determined by the number of users and the degree to which there are waiting lists or scheduling pressures associated with certain facilities.** Therefore, it is recommended that future decision-making regarding specific recreational development needs of the community should be informed beyond set standards through additional information and level of service analyses. The guidelines relating to the parks, open spaces, and pathways found or potentially planned in Middletown are outlined in the Table R-5 NRPA Parks and Open Space Classifications below.

TABLE R-5: NRPA PARKS AND OPEN SPACE CLASSIFICATIONS (1995)			
Parks, Open Space, and Pathways Classification Table			
<i>Parks and Open Space Classifications</i>			
<i>Classification</i>	<i>General Description</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Size Criteria</i>
<i>Mini-Park</i>	Used to address limited, isolated or unique recreational needs	Less ¼ mile distance in residential setting	Between 2500 sq. ft. and one acre in size
<i>Neighborhood Park</i>	Neighborhood park remains the basic unit of the park system and serves as the recreational and social focus of the neighborhood. Focus is on informal activity and passive recreation	¼ mile to ½ mile distance and uninterrupted by non-residential roads and other physical barriers	5 acres is considered minimum size. 5 to 10 acres is optimal
<i>School Park</i>	Depending on circumstances, combining parks with school sites can fulfill the space requirements for other classes of parks, such as neighborhood, community, sports complex, and special use	Determined by location of school district property	Variable depends on function
<i>Community Park</i>	Serves broader purpose than neighborhood park. Focus is on meeting community-based recreation needs, as well as preserving unique landscapes and	Determined by the quality and suitability of the site. Usually serves two or more neighborhoods within a ½ to 3 mile distance	As needed to accommodate desired uses. Usually between 30 and 50 acres

IV. Recreation, Conservation & Open Space

	open spaces		
<i>Large Urban Park</i>	Large urban parks serve a broader purpose than community parks and are used when community and neighborhood parks are not adequate to serve the needs of the community. Focus is on meeting community-based recreational needs as well as preserving unique landscapes and open spaces	Determined by the quality and suitability of the site. Usually serves the entire community.	As needed to accommodate desired uses. Usually a minimum of 50 acres with 75 or more acres being optimal
<i>Natural Resource Areas</i>	Lands set aside for preservation of significant natural resources, remnant landscapes, open space and visual aesthetics or buffering.	Resource availability and opportunity	Variable
<i>Greenways</i>	Effectively tie the park system components together to form a continuous park environment.	Resource availability and opportunity	Variable
<i>Sports Complex</i>	Consolidates heavily programmed athletic fields and associated facilities to larger and fewer sites strategically located throughout the community	Strategically located community-wide facilities	Determined by projected demand usually a minimum of 25 acres with 40 to 80 acres being optimal
<i>Special Use Park</i>	Covers a broad range of parks and recreation facilities oriented toward single-purpose use	Variable – dependent on specific use	Variable
<i>Private Park/Recreation Facility</i>	Parks and recreational facilities that are privately owned yet contribute to the public park and recreation system	Variable – dependent on specific use	Variable

Pathway Classifications

<i>Classification</i>	<i>General Description</i>	<i>Description of Each Type</i>
<i>Park Trail</i>	Multi-purpose trails located within greenways, parks and natural resource areas. Focus is on recreational value and harmony with the natural environment.	Type I: Separate/single-purpose hard-surfaced trails for pedestrians or bicyclists/in-line skates.
		Type II: Multipurpose hard-surfaced trails for pedestrians and bicyclists/in-line skaters.
		Type III: Nature trails for pedestrians, which may use either hard or soft surfaces.
<i>Connector Trails</i>	Multipurpose trails that emphasize safe travel for pedestrians to and from parks and around the community. Focus is as much on transportation as it is on recreation	Type I: Separate/single-purpose hard-surfaced trails for pedestrians or bicyclists/in-line skates located in independent Rights-of-ways (ROWs) e.g., old railroad ROW.

		Type II: Separate/single-purpose hard-surfaced trails for pedestrians or bicyclists/in-line skates. Typically, located within road ROW.
<i>All-Terrain Bike Trail</i>	Off-road trail for all terrain (mountain) bikes	Single-purpose loop trails usually located in larger parks and natural resource areas.
<i>Cross-Country Ski Trail</i>	Trails developed for traditional and skate-style cross-country skiing	Loop trails usually located in larger parks and natural resource areas.

Source: National Recreation and Parks Association

Although Middletown has substantial open space and park land set aside, it is important to note that the Town has relatively few developed parks to serve community needs for its current and projected population. Based on the Town’s current population of 16,150, the Town would need at least 20 acres of playgrounds. The Town falls short of the facility guidelines in some cases, most notably with playgrounds and tot lots (neighborhood or mini parks), since there are seven playgrounds and no tot lots that are accessible to the Town’s population on a full-time basis. These playgrounds, many of which are located at or near school facilities, occupy over 35 acres of land, but this includes associated fields and other site amenities.

Several parks could be considered neighborhood parks, such as Paradise Valley (albeit slightly larger than the NRPA criterion), Albro Woods, Howland Park, and Demery Memorial Park. Additionally, a number of the parks are dominated by the playing fields located within it, and as a result, the park does not function as a true neighborhood or community park with a broader mix of active and passive activities.

The Town may have in excess of the fifty total acres of what could be classified as neighborhood parks, but individually they tend to be less than 25 acres in size. Some of the parks classified as neighborhood parks are located beyond the ¼ to ½ mile NRPA recommended distance from a residential area. Middletown does not appear to have any park and recreation areas that meet or exceed the size criteria for community and large urban parks because there are no developed large parks that are at least 100 acres in size.

The beaches are considered to be among the most valued open spaces in Middletown based upon the public input received and the volume of visitors during the summer months. The parking lots frequently fill, although visitors tend to come in two “shifts”. The lots may fill in the late morning on weekends and holidays, but as the early arrivals depart, spaces become available for those that prefer the afternoon. The parcels that comprise Second/Sachuest Beach, Surfers End, and Third Beach occupy over 50 acres and include the parking areas, campground, play areas, and facilities. There is a boat ramp at Third Beach, the only one in Middletown. The beaches also provide a substantial revenue source for the Town through the sale of beach stickers and

concessions. However, major improvements to the facilities will require additional appropriations.

As mentioned above, the Sakonnet Greenway Trail is the largest free public nature trail in Middletown and it is a substantial resource for the Town. It is used for pedestrians and limited equestrian use. All-terrain bicycles are not allowed on this trail. There are no single or multi-purpose trails in Middletown that can be used by cyclists or in-line skaters and the general lack of connector trails between parks has been cited by various stakeholders as a deficiency and a possible safety issue.

Table R-6 NRPA Playing Field Guidelines refers more specifically to playing field guidelines as developed by the NRPA and Table R-7 compares the number of these facilities in Middletown with the NRPA guidelines.

TABLE R-6: NRPA PLAYING FIELD GUIDELINES				
ACTIVITY/ FACILITY	RECOMMENDED SPACE REQUIREMENTS	NO. OF UNITS PER POPULATION	SERVICE RADIUS	LOCATION NOTES
Basketball				
Youth	2400-3036 sq. ft.	1 per 5000	¼ - ½ mile	Outdoor courts in neighborhood and community parks, plus active recreation areas in other park settings.
High School	5040-7280 sq. ft.			
Collegiate	5600-7980 sq. ft.			
Tennis	Minimum of 7,200 sq. ft. single court (2 acres for complex)	1 court per 2000	¼- ½ mile	Best in batteries of 2-4. Located in neighborhood/community park or adjacent to school
Baseball				
Official	3.0-3.85 A minimum	1 per 5000; Lighted 1 per 30,000	¼ - ½ mile	Part of neighborhood complex. Lighted fields part of community complex.
Little League	1.2 A minimum			
Field Hockey	1.5 A minimum	1 per 20,000	15-30 minutes travel time	Usually part of baseball, football, soccer complex in community park or adjacent to high school.
Football	1.5 A minimum	1 per 20,000	15-30 minutes travel time	Same as field hockey.
Soccer	1.7 – 2.1 A	1 per 10,000	1-2 miles	Number of units depends on popularity. Youth soccer on smaller fields adjacent to schools or neighborhood parks.
¼ Mile Running Track	4.3 A	1 per 20,000	15-30 minutes travel time	Usually part of high school, or in community park complex in combination with football, soccer, etc.
Softball	1.5 to 2.0 A	1 per 5,000 (if also used for youth baseball)	¼ - ½ mile	Slight differences in dimensions for 16" slow pitch. May also be used for youth baseball.

IV. Recreation, Conservation & Open Space

Multiple Recreation Court (basketball, volleyball, tennis)	9, 840 sq. ft.	1 per 10,000	1-2 miles	
Trails	N/A	1 system per region	N/A	
Swimming Pools	Varies on size of pool and amenities. Usually ½ to 2 A site.	1 per 20,000	15 to 30 minutes travel time	Pools for general community use should be planned for teaching, competitive and recreational purposes with enough depth (3.4 m) to accommodate 1 m and 3 m diving boards. Located in community park or school site.
		(Pools should accommodate 3-5% of total population at a time.)		
<i>Source: Lancaster, R.A. (Ed.). (1990). Recreation, Park, and Open Space Standards and Guidelines. Ashburn, VA: National Recreation and Park Association.</i>				

TABLE R-7: MIDDLETOWN COMPARED TO NRPA PLAYING FIELD GUIDELINES		
<i>ACTIVITY/FACILITY</i>	<i>MIDDLETOWN</i>	<i>NRPA GUIDELINES</i>
Tee-ball	2	n/a
Baseball/Softball	9	4 baseball/4 softball
Basketball	6	4
Tennis	5	8
Football	1	1
Soccer	5	2
Running track	1	1
Field hockey	0	1
Multiple recreation courts (basketball, tennis, volleyball)	0	2
Swimming pool	0	1

Although baseball and softball fields seem adequate pursuant to the NRPA guidelines, and Middletown has more soccer fields than recommended by both the RI and NRPA standards, there is high demand locally for these three sports that outstrips the supply of field availability. Local demand should determine future decision-making regarding the number of fields needed. Although individual leagues may not have specific problems with field availability, there are some groups that have to compete to use the same facility. Given the number of teams/participants that require fields, the priority use by the School Department on its facilities, and the need to rework schedules after weather related cancellations, the Town should establish standards that specifically apply to Middletown’s needs. Moreover, a related issue is that when demand is high, the condition of the fields deteriorate over time, especially when maintenance efforts are under resourced.

Based on these guidelines, the Town will also need more tennis courts. Field hockey could potentially be played on existing multi-use fields although it was noted that they

already serve various functions, including as practice fields, and there is competition for the use of those fields. Although the Town has the extensive beach resources, a public swimming pool if located indoors could provide year-round swimming opportunities for all residents (the town does have a YMCA).

Facility Maintenance

NRPA has identified different levels of maintenance for park and recreation facilities with Level 1 being the state-of-the-art program applied to a high quality landscape setting and Level 5 being a minimum level program where severe budget restrictions are in effect (Level 6 – no maintenance – is for undeveloped natural areas with no maintenance except for safety concerns). Middletown is at Level 3 (moderate-level maintenance) which reflects the degree of activity at the various facilities along with the recognition that some budget restrictions prevent higher levels of maintenance. In some respects, Middletown exceeds the moderate-level maintenance protocol (i.e. more frequent fertilization of fields and overseeding of fields). Field mowing occurs at a rate that is considered typical for this level of maintenance.

Maintenance duties in Middletown are split between the School Department for its facilities (approximately 60 acres at seven school properties) and the Department of Public Works (DPW) for all town-owned property other than the schools. The School Department has established a schedule for field maintenance that begins with soil testing in March and continues through a winterizing fertilization in late November/early December. It includes five applications of fertilizer throughout the year and overseeding in April and September/October. In addition to mowing and seeding the fields, the School Department sweeps the football field, which is an artificial turf field, every two weeks and grooms it every seven weeks.

On School Department properties, much of the grass cutting and field maintenance is done by the School Department, although the DPW assists in some maintenance efforts. The School Department has two full-time year-round maintenance staff positions. The School Department estimates that it manages approximately 22 acres per week per full time employee. This is in the middle of the range identified by NRPA for communities of a size similar to Middletown in their 2009 Operating Ratio Report. DPW has established a property maintenance program that specifically outlines what generally needs to be accomplished at each facility every month (focusing on mowing and general landscaping). In addition to mowing and field maintenance, it includes a schedule for trash removal, irrigation of the facilities, and arranging for port-a-john maintenance. This allows the Department to determine how to allocate its staff in the summer. Staffing requirements are based on the actual time spent on each activity and are assigned accordingly.

A number of the league programs that utilize the fields also participate in the maintenance of the fields– usually thousands of dollars per year. Examples include the

lining/stripping of fields, making repairs after rainfall on poorly drained fields, as well as building and maintaining storage sheds and concessions. The Middletown Youth Soccer Club even replaces the turf every fall. Some programs purchase playing and maintenance equipment for use by their participants.

A recently added feature to the town website is the ability to place a service request to address a maintenance problem.

New Facility Costs

The costs associated with the designing and construction of new recreational facilities can be significant and typically must be considered over multiple years to be accommodated by the municipal capital improvement planning process. It is difficult to determine precisely how much a given facility may cost the Town of Middletown as it seeks to implement the recommendations of the RCOS Plan. There are a number of variables that need to be factored into an estimate that could impact the ultimate cost of a field or playground. These variables include:

- Site considerations such as environmental constraints, soils, topography, the presence of ledge and other factors that may affect the cost of site preparation
- The presence of hazardous materials that may require remediation
- Drainage requirements for the fields
- Stormwater management
- Parking, including the manner in which it is constructed
- Furthermore, there are a number of options to consider when designing and constructing a new facility such as:
 - The type of surface material used (i.e. artificial vs. grass turf for playing fields, playground protective surfaces, asphalt vs. cushioned tennis court, etc.)
 - The extent of accessory structures and amenities included with the facility such as dugouts, bleachers, lighting, concessions, scoreboards, type of playground equipment, etc.

An additional consideration when designing a facility is the short- and long-term maintenance costs. For example, an asphalt tennis court is relatively low maintenance, but a clay or grass court requires regular maintenance.

With those considerations in mind, the following is an estimated range of costs for different types of recreational facilities. These 2010 estimates are for construction only and do not include site acquisition and design expenses.

- SOFTBALL/BASEBALL FIELDS: \$150,000 - \$250,000 PER FIELD
- TENNIS AND BASKETBALL COURTS: \$20,000 - \$40,000 PER COURT
- SOCCER/MULTI-PURPOSE FIELDS: \$150,000 - \$300,000 PER FIELD
- SWIMMING POOL: \$250,000 - \$500,000
- PLAYGROUND: \$80,000 - \$125,000

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE MIDDLETOWN RECREATION, CONSERVATION, AND OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN

Based upon a review of the Middletown open space and recreation resources and conditions, an analysis of all the available data and information from Middletown departments and committees, field observations, data on facility usage, facility standards, existing concept plans, and the public and stakeholder input received during the planning process, the following needs and recommendations were identified in the Recreation, Conservation, and Open Space Master Plan.

NEW BALLFIELDS. To meet existing demand, the Town should add an additional three baseball/softball fields, perhaps by creating fields that can serve both Little League and adult leagues. Not including the tee-ball fields, the Town has nine baseball or softball fields that are used by multiple user groups including the Middletown Little League, the schools, and other leagues. The men's softball league plays on Pottsey Field at the West Main Recreation Complex, which is a less than ideal location given its proximity to a major roadway and the orientation of the field. It is recommended that this field be relocated. An additional soccer field should be considered in the future as well. At least some of the additional fields should be lighted to extend the length of field availability.

One option to consider is a consolidated field complex which has the advantage of simplifying maintenance. However, these facilities would be large and could impact nearby residents, so it will be important to find a suitable site that allows for mitigation of those impacts. Moreover, such a centralized complex would preclude the creation of a more neighborhood-based park and recreation program.

PRACTICE FIELDS. More practice fields should be provided for soccer and lacrosse in particular in order to reduce conflicts with other uses. Using soccer fields for both practice and organized matches reduces the amount of available time for either activity. Additionally, it further strains the ability of the field to recover between uses, thereby increasing maintenance concerns.

INDOOR GYM/FIELD HOUSE. Between the use of the gyms for a variety of school related activities and community-based league programs, an additional gym or field

house with a swimming pool should be considered in the future. Middletown residents use “The Hut” in Newport and if one were to be established in Middletown, it would provide additional space and resources to minimize scheduling conflicts and would provide more up to date facilities. Given the population of Aquidneck Island, a public swimming pool would be a valuable addition to the recreational options for area residents (NRPA recommends one swimming pool per 20,000 people). Such a facility could also include other non-sports related activities and programs for children after school and on weekends. The YMCA and Newport Athletic Club, both in Middletown, provide access to indoor pools through membership. The Town should determine if the need is being met by these facilities prior to developing its own indoor pool facility.

WEST MAIN RECREATION COMPLEX. The West Main Recreation Complex is in a location that is poorly situated for recreational uses due to traffic and the proximity of a major roadway and housing. This area is potentially better suited for a mix of housing, commercial, and institutional uses that are typical of a village center. A planning study (West Main/Coddington Development Center Master Plan) is underway which encompasses the area in the vicinity of the intersections of Coddington Highway and West Main Road including the recreation complex, the public library, the recently closed Kennedy Elementary School, and a three-acre parcel of Navy land expected to be declared surplus. The Navy parcel, site of the former Navy Lodge, will be disposed of through the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process. The West Main Road Recreation Complex is likely to be redeveloped. The displaced recreation facilities must be accommodated elsewhere in town due to restrictions imposed when the town acquired the land from the federal government.

POSSIBLE LOCATIONS FOR NEW RECREATIONAL FACILITIES. The Town should evaluate its properties and identify parcels appropriate for recreational development to meet the needs of the community, including the anticipated relocation of the facilities at the West Main Road recreation complex to a more suitable location.

KEMPENAAR VALLEY. The Kempenaar Valley property is a key piece of potential open space land. Middletown purchased the property in March of 2004 using local bond appropriations, Rhode Island Open Space and Recreation Grants from the RIDEM, funds from ALT, and appropriations from the RI Water Resources Board through the City of Newport. A Management Plan for the property was prepared by The Louis Berger Group, Inc. in 2004.

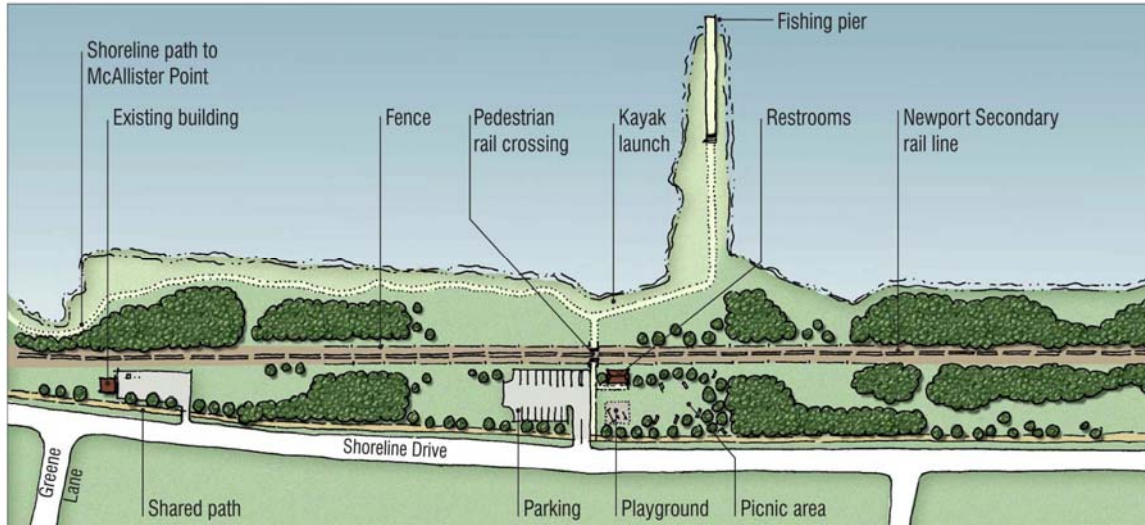
Of the total 46 acres, the Town has set aside approximately 21 acres for use as open space for conservation purposes. Some of this land would be preserved for wildlife habitat and water resource protection. Educational activities consistent with that purpose, including potential trails, will be allowed. Approximately 12.5 acres is reserved by the Kempenaar family for agriculture until they are no longer willing or able to maintain that activity. When that life tenancy ends, a portion of this area may be used for meadow habitat, public trails, education, passive recreation, and/or

agricultural use if consistent with the subject conservation easements and the Management Plan.

The Management Plan outlines best management practices for water use, fertilizer application and sediment and erosion control during construction of the recreational facilities. The goal is to ensure long-term habitat and water resource preservation in conjunction with other passive recreation activities on the property. The development of playing fields is not feasible due to slope and grading requirements. Thus, upon completion of required hazardous waste remediation of the site, the Town should move forward with both the conservation and passive recreation aspects of the Management Plan.

UNDERSERVED NEIGHBORHOODS. The Town should seek opportunities to acquire land for multi-purpose fields in neighborhoods with limited access to recreational opportunities and those that are lacking in open space resources.

ACCESS TO NARRAGANSETT BAY. Narragansett Bay is known for its sailing, boating and recreational appeal, but the residents of Middletown currently have no public access to this valuable amenity. When land is made available by the U.S. Navy, the Town should implement the development of the Greene Lane Park at Midway Fishing Pier (a concept plan for the proposed park was endorsed in November 2007 by the Town Council). The 5.64 acre Navy property is currently located on an unpaved parking lot between Burma Road and the Newport Secondary rail line and includes approximately 6,100 feet of shoreline. The park would create a multi-use recreational destination point for residents and visitors alike, offering numerous outdoor and waterfront activities including fishing, kayaking, access for small boats, biking on the proposed new shoreline bike path, picnicking, a children's playground and hiking trails along the shoreline.



Greene Lane Park at Midway Fishing Pier Concept Plan

PARTNERSHIPS. New facilities at Gaudet Middle School were developed through a public/private partnership between the town and Salve Regina University. This relationship should be fostered so that similar projects can be implemented that provide high quality athletic facilities available for use by Salve, town/school athletics, and private leagues. This type of partnership offers a “win-win” scenario for both parties as the university has more financial resources and the town has land.

MAINTENANCE MANAGEMENT. Management plans or Best Practices plans should be developed for each major town-owned facility. In addition to planning for the routine maintenance of the facility and grounds, long-term capital needs and repairs can be identified and scheduled. This should be a joint effort between DPW and the School Department.

Maintenance/Best Practices plans should be prepared that establish standards designed to achieve specific results. A number of municipal governments have instituted such standards to include the following:

- THE CONDITION OF EACH FACILITY AFTER SATISFACTORY COMPLETION OF ROUTINE MAINTENANCE WORK
- THE TASKS REQUIRED TO ACHIEVE THAT RESULT
- THE PROCEDURES FOR COMPLETION OF THOSE TASKS
- THE TIME NECESSARY TO COMPLETE A PARTICULAR TASK, AS WELL AS FREQUENCY (WHICH IS COVERED IN THE DPW PROPERTY MAINTENANCE PROGRAM)

- THE RESOURCES REQUIRED TO MEET THE STANDARD
- THE EQUIPMENT NEEDED TO COMPLETE THE TASK
- THE MATERIALS AND SUPPLIES NEEDED TO COMPLETE THE TASK

A cooperative arrangement between the Town and the various leagues and sports associations will enhance this effort. This would create a shared understanding of what it takes to accomplish certain tasks, how to ascertain staffing needs, how to identify specific needs, and how to rectify any deficiencies. It would also be useful to track the costs involved with the various items in the maintenance plan so that long-range projections could be made for allocating staff and fiscal resources.

Similar to the efforts undertaken by the various leagues to maintain the fields they use, the Town should encourage the creation of “friends of” groups to provide stewardship of other parks. These groups can help to sponsor cleanups and similar activities, as well as flag issues that the Town may need to address but may not be aware of.

MEET ADA REQUIREMENTS. New facilities are required to meet the accessibility standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Upgrades to existing facilities should include an assessment as to ADA compliance and a timetable to make the necessary improvements.

INVENTORY PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT. Playground equipment generally has a life expectancy of fifteen years when used under normal conditions. If playgrounds are heavily used or if the equipment is routinely used by children that are older than for which it was designed, that lifetime may be shorter. The Town should inventory playground equipment and the dates of installation to determine when equipment replacement may be necessary.

PROVIDE SAFE ACCESS. Better defined walkways between facilities and fields, particularly at the school complexes would provide safer access to the fields. A good example is the need for a better connection between the high school fields and the ones at Gaudet Middle School. The Town submitted an application for a Safe Routes to School grant in early 2010 for the The Gaudet Middle School: Connector Paths Project. It seeks to connect a number of town facilities, recreational spaces, and neighborhoods. The major infrastructure improvement of this project is the development of a multi-use path that will better connect adjacent neighborhoods and student populations to the Gaudet Middle School and Gaudet Learning Academy. The trail would primarily be off-street, passing through public school grounds, town facilities, and preserved open space. It would link the schools with recreational and open space lands and provide the requisite recreational and health benefits.

EXPAND PARADISE VALLEY PARK. The Town should explore the options for developing the RI Diocese land adjacent to Paradise Valley Park in order to expand the

park and create additional walking trails, picnicking areas, and/or a playground for small children.

CONTINUE COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE AQUIDNECK LAND TRUST. ALT and the Town have worked cooperatively for a number of years and some of the properties conserved by ALT are used by the Town for a variety of open space and recreation purposes.

ESTABLISH CENTRALIZED FIELD SCHEDULING/PERMITTING. Given the complexity of scheduling for the use of all the fields and facilities, the Town should charge a central entity with responsibility for scheduling and permitting field and gym use, including non-league community users. Information regarding the scheduling and permitting (including a calendar) for fields should be more prominently displayed on the Town's website.

IMPROVE SECOND/SACHUSET BEACH PAVILION. The Recreation, Conservation, and Open Space Plan recommended the town begin design for a new facility at Second/Sachuest Beach. The current building does not have enough office space, the first aid station is inadequate, and the locker room is in a deteriorated state. Storage containers occupy valuable parking spaces that reduce potential parking revenue. The concession area is not considered to be an inviting space and provides no shade.

One option considered by the town was a proposed \$7.5 million facility to be located where the current building stands. In addition to serving as the beach pavilion, the new building was to include a 125 – 150 person capacity multi-purpose room to be used for meetings and events such as weddings. In 2011, the town completed the Sachuest Town Beach Event Center Business Plan which concluded that including the proposed meeting space in the pavilion facility would not be economically feasible. Anticipated revenue from use of the meeting space would not be sufficient to cover the cost of construction and operation of the space. Construction of the meeting space will not be pursued.

In 2012, the Town Council established a Beach Facility Advisory Committee to study and report back about matters related to the potential renovation and/or replacement of the Sachuest Beach building. It is anticipated that this committee will produce a final report that will include recommendations regarding the improvements to the current facility and current operations at the beach. The town is currently considering renovation and expansion of the existing facility rather than building a new beach facility.

ESTABLISH COMMUNITY GARDENS. Community gardens strengthen community bonds, provide food, and create recreational and therapeutic opportunities for a community. They can also promote nutrition, environmental awareness and provide community education. The Town has a number of parcels preserved as agricultural land. Opportunities to create community gardens through partnership programs on these parcels should be explored.

ENHANCE WAYFINDING. The Town should create a wayfinding program for the parks and open spaces through a new uniform-styled sign that identifies places that are frequently visited.

MONITOR GRANT PROGRAMS. The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management has offered opportunities for grants to cities and towns for open space, parks and recreation. The Town should continue to monitor RIDEM's grant programs and others to determine eligibility for recreation projects or open space acquisition/preservation.

RECREATION, CONSERVATION & OPEN SPACE – Goals, Policies, & Action Items			
GOAL R-I: Provide new recreational facilities to ensure that the Town meets the ongoing recreation needs of the community			
Policies	Action Items	Responsible Department	Timeframe
R-I.A. Develop, implement, and manage a plan designed to fulfill the needs of the community	R-I.A.1. Implement the recreation plan and update as necessary	Town Administrator; Open Space and Fields Committee; Planning Board	Ongoing
R-I.B. Look for opportunities to establish parks and open spaces accessible to all neighborhoods	R-1.B.1. Seek funding and develop town-owned properties that have been acquired for recreational use as needed	Town Council; Open Space and Fields Committee; Planning Department	Ongoing
	R-1.B.2. Identify and design potential sites for new playing and practice fields	Planning Department; Open Space and Fields Committee	Short-term (1-2 years)
	R-1.B.3. Consider relocating the West Main Road Recreation Complex	Town Council; Open Space and Fields Committee	Short-term (1-2 years)
	R-1.B.4. Develop concept plan for new gym/field house possibly with swimming pool considering current facilities available	Planning Department; Open Space and Fields Committee	Long-term (6-10+ years)

GOAL R-II: Maintain and improve recreational facilities to meet needs identified during the planning process			
Policies	Action Items	Responsible Department	Timeframe
R-II.A. Continue to identify key maintenance and improvement needs in Town recreational facilities	R-II.A.1. Explore coordination of maintenance efforts between School Department and Public Works	Public Works; School Department	Short-term (1-2 years)
	R-II.A.2. Develop management plans for town properties, including maintenance standards for facilities and staff	Public Works; School Department	Short-term (1-2 years)
	R-II.A.3. Encourage stewardship through “friends of” groups and continue to work with leagues to enhance maintenance efforts	Public Works; School Department	Ongoing
R-II.B. Administer an active and efficient recreation facilities maintenance program	R-II.B.1. Increase resources for maintenance activities if management plans demonstrate need and as budget allows	Public Works; School Department	Medium-term (3-5 years)
	R-II.B.2. Establish an efficient and accessible scheduling and permitting system for field use	Public Works; School Department	Short-term (1-2 years)
	R-II.B.3. Improve access to town facilities for persons with disabilities.	Public Works; School Department	Medium-term (3-5 years)
	R-II.B.4. Monitor availability of grant funds	Planning Department	Ongoing

GOAL R-III: Acquire additional open space as appropriate for conservation and passive recreation			
Policies	Action Items	Responsible Department	Timeframe
R-III.A. Expand the inventory of preserved open space and natural resources that are beneficial to cultural, civic and environmental values	R-III.A.1. Using the Open Space Acquisition Policy criteria, identify potential sites for acquisition	Open Space and Fields Committee; Planning Department	Ongoing
	R-III.A.2. Work in collaboration with partners to leverage acquisition efforts	Town Council; Open Space and Fields Committee; Planning Department	Ongoing
R-III.B. Work towards providing additional connections between open space parcels to create an integrated network of green corridors	R-III.B.1. Review status of existing open spaces to find opportunities to provide connections between them, including strategic acquisitions	Planning Department; Open Space and Fields Committee	Short-term (1-2 years)
R-III.C. Provide opportunities for community gardens	R-III.C.1. Support efforts to establish community gardens on appropriate town properties	Open Space and Fields Committee	Medium-term (3-5 years)
GOAL R-IV: Properly manage and maintain town-owned conservation and passive recreation land			
Policies	Action Items	Responsible Department	Timeframe
R-IV.A. Develop a formal framework for conservation-oriented land management plans	R-IV.A.1. Prepare management plans for key open space parcels	Open Space and Fields Committee; Planning Department	Medium-term (3-5 years)
R-IV.B. Increase public awareness and community stewardship of the Town's recreation and open space facilities	R-IV.B.1. Provide maps and wayfinding signs for open space and recreation parcels; publicize on Town website	Planning Department; Open Space and Fields Committee	Short-term (1-2 years)
	R-IV.B.2. Establish a site steward policy and program	Open Space and Fields Committee	Short-term (1-2 years)

GOAL R-V: Support expanded access to water based recreational opportunities through maintenance of existing facilities and, where appropriate, expansion of facilities			
Policies	Action Items	Responsible Department	Timeframe
R-V.A. Acquire and develop key parcels and sites for west side access for boating, fishing, and passive activities	R-V.A.1. Implement Greene Lane Park concept plan	Town Council; Planning Department	Long-term (6-10+ years)
R-V.B. Preserve Third Beach by maintaining the current facilities and level of use	R-V.B.1. Formalize beach management plan	Beach Commission; Public Works	Short-term (1-2 years)
	R-V.B.2. Make improvements to existing beach facilities as necessary	Town Council; Beach Commission; Public Works	Ongoing
	R-V.B.3. Provide quality facilities, amenities and programs for user enjoyment	Town Council; Beach Commission; Public Works	Ongoing
R-V.C. Support public access to the shore	R-V.C.1. Recognize and publicize public rights of way and commons to the shore	Public Works; Volunteers	Ongoing

GOAL R-VI: Expand and enhance the trail system in Middletown			
Policies	Action Items	Responsible Department	Timeframe
R-VI.A. Work to expand and connect trail network	R-VI.A.1. Support expansion and enhancement of trails in conservation lands and the network between properties	Planning Department; Open Space and Fields Committee	Ongoing
R-VI.B. Look for opportunities to establish multi-use trails and bike lanes to connect neighborhoods to the Town's open space and recreational resources	R-VI.B.1. Support development of Shoreline Drive /Burma Road multi-use path	Town Council; Planning Board; Open Space and Fields Committee	Long-term (6-10+ years)
	R-VI.B.2. Promote the use of the Blue Trail and kayak and small boat launch locations, shoreline destinations, and facilities along the West Side	Planning Department; Open Space and Fields Committee	Ongoing
	R-VI.B.3. Look for opportunities to provide better pedestrian connections between park facilities	Planning Department; Open Space and Fields Committee; School Department	Ongoing
	R-VI.B.4. Incorporate bike lanes into future road improvements when feasible	Planning Board; Public Works; Engineering	Ongoing
GOAL R-VII: Promote active and healthy lifestyles in Middletown			
Policies	Action Items	Responsible Department	Timeframe
R-VII.A. Promote recreation programs that are accessible to residents of all ages	R-VII.A.1. Conduct a community health needs analysis and partner with appropriate organizations to meet those needs	Recreation; School Department	Ongoing
	R-VII.A.2. Work with leagues and similar entities to educate residents about leading healthy lifestyles and to promote organized programs for people of all ages	Recreation; School Department	Ongoing