
SECTION FOUR:

PARKS & OPEN SPACE

Introduction

History of Parks and Open Space in Somerville

Somerville's location in the Boston Basin coastal plain has guided its development over the last three and a half centuries. Glaciation left a series of drumlins, the "seven hills of Somerville," running west to east across the future city. Physical boundaries developed along waterways: the Mystic River to the north, the Alewife Brook to the west, and the Miller's River to the southeast.

By the 1600s, the ridgeline of hills had developed into overland travel routes, and agriculture occupied much of the rest of the landscape. As Cambridge and Boston grew, transportation needs fell along those points of connection, and the Miller's River and surrounding tidal flats were filled in. Railways and accompanying industry developed in the lower southeastern flats, and housing quickly spread throughout the rest of the area. In 1872, Somerville was incorporated as a city.

Only a few public parks were constructed before a massive housing boom at the turn of the twentieth century. In 1876, two major parcels were dedicated as permanent open space: Central Hill Park (current home of Somerville's High School, City Hall, and Central Public Library – see Figures 1 and 2); and Broadway Park (now Foss Park, owned and operated by the DCR).

Between 1890 and 1910, 50% of today's housing stock was constructed. This intense development and subdivision pattern resulted in Somerville's well-known status as the most densely populated municipality in New England¹. It also left Somerville with little remaining available land for public parks. Lack of strategy was seen at the state level as well – the Governor vetoed a 1900 bill for the extension of the Metropolitan Park System, including an appropriation for a boulevard across Somerville. The city of Somerville only dedicated one major park during this time of rapid expansion: Lincoln Park (1900).

The rest of the City's parks, playgrounds, community gardens and open spaces were constructed after the housing boom. For this reason, many of Somerville's open spaces are less than one half acre in size, and scattered throughout the city in a "patchwork" or irregular pattern (see Map 1). Today's sizeable parks each have an interesting land use history - many are former schoolyards or other municipal lands that were converted to parks as the public demand for open space grew and housing needs declined.



FIGURE 1: CENTRAL HILL PARK, 1913

Source: City of Somerville Postcard Collection

As a densely populated city, Somerville has made the protection and creation of open space a top priority. Only 123 acres, or 4.7%, of the City's 4.1 square miles meet the definition of public open

¹ 29.45 people/acre; 2000 U.S. Census

space²; yet these spaces, particularly the parks, playgrounds, and recreational paths, are intensively used by the City's nearly 80,000 residents. Maintenance is a top concern as the City seeks to make open space available to all residents and promote healthy living through the Shape Up Somerville campaign. Ultimately, the quality of life for all of Somerville's residents is enriched by the quality of the open space in each of the City's neighborhoods, whether the space is enjoyed for recreational activity or green tranquility.

A Parks Inventory was conducted for all of the City's open spaces in 2007 and resulted in a number of important findings. The 123 acres of current Somerville parks and open space support a variety of uses, including passive recreation, athletic fields, playgrounds, and natural habitat. Less than 40% (48.24 acres) of open space in Somerville is actually owned by the City. The remainder is owned and managed by the State Department of Conservation and Recreation (68.36 acres), the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (6.13 acres), and Middlesex County Courthouse (.50 acres). Not included in these figures are approximately 45 acres of privately held open space, such as Tufts University fields and small church properties



The inventory also found that although the City has limited open space, nearly all residents live within ¼ mile of an improved park (see Map 2).

Somerville retains a lean Parks & Open Space staff (2.5 positions) to manage the City's parks and street tree program; this staff works collaboratively with the Department of Public Works, Recreation Department, and the Office of Sustainability and Environment to maintain, renovate, and increase its holdings.

At the time of writing, the City is in the process of updating its 5-year action plan, the *Somerville Open Space & Recreation Plan*. The goals and strategies of this Consolidated Plan are intended to be consistent with the citywide goals of the Open Space & Recreation Plan. CDBG resources are vital to improving the open spaces in the eligible areas, as these residents are typically most underserved for access to open space.

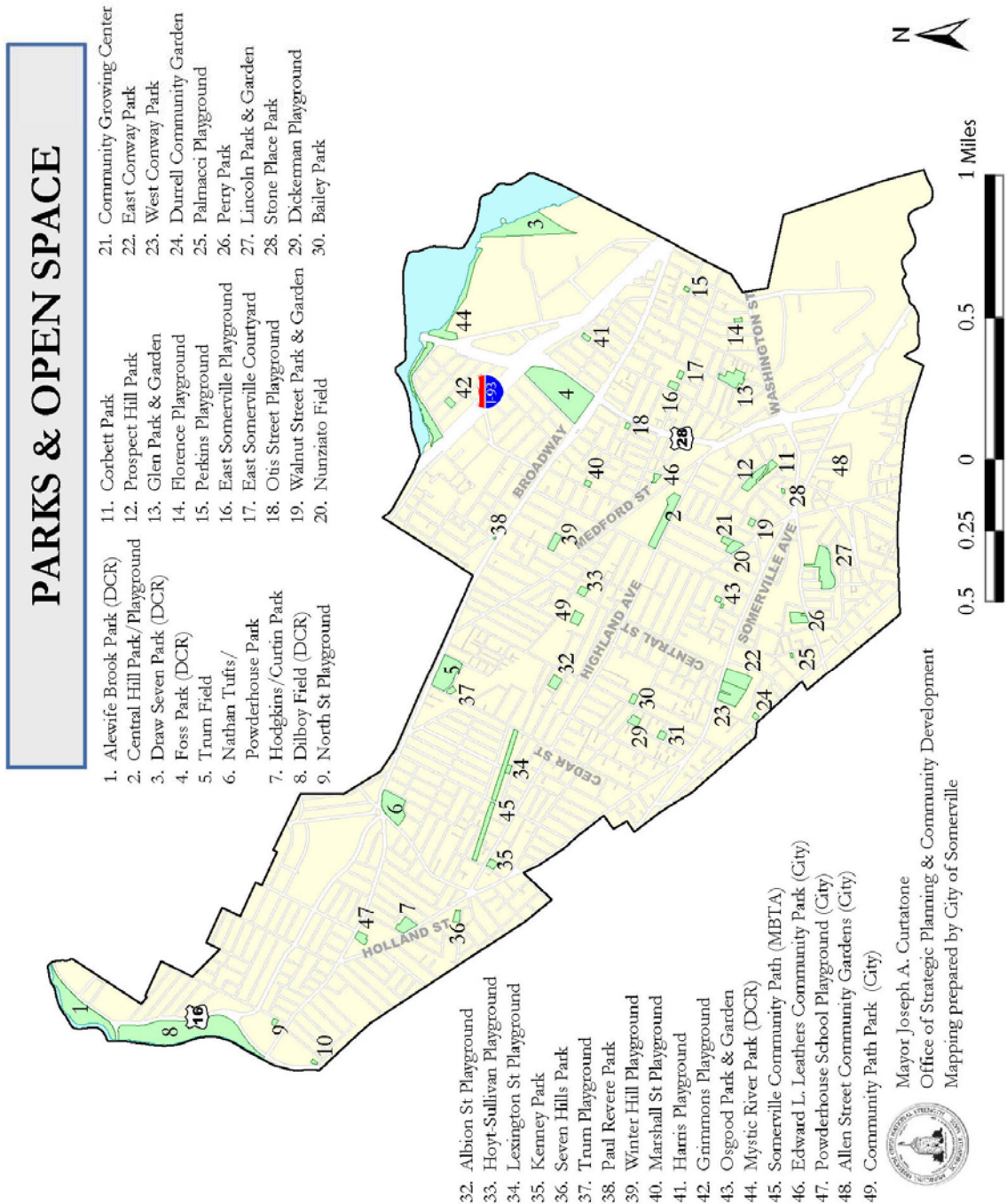
**FIGURE 2: CENTRAL HILL
CIVIL WAR MEMORIAL**

Source: City of Somerville Postcard Collection

² The term "open space" is defined as follows: Publicly owned, undeveloped land that is primarily vegetated, or paved areas that serve a recreational or cultural purpose. This includes, but is not limited to, parks, playgrounds, community gardens, walking or biking trails, cemeteries, civic plazas, and playing fields, regardless of the level of protection. Also included as open space are certain water bodies with recreational use, namely Alewife Brook and Mystic River. Not included in this definition, but recognized for their potential usefulness as open space are certain privately owned properties, such as lawns, memorial sites, and other landscaped areas.

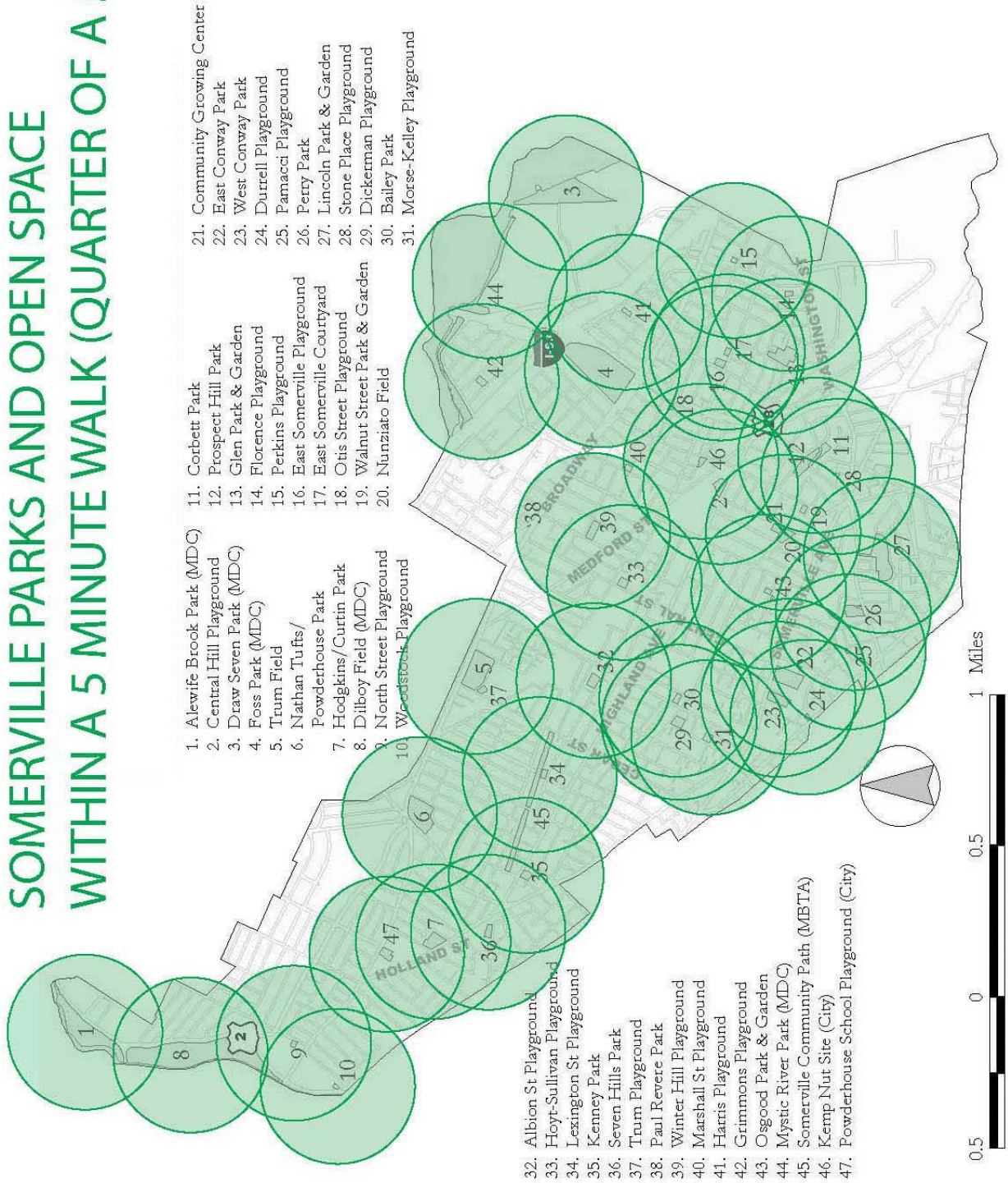
HUD FIVE YEAR CONSOLIDATED PLAN 2008 - 2013

MAP 1 SOMERVILLE PARKS AND OPEN SPACE



MAP 2 SOMERVILLE PARKS AND OPEN SPACE WITHIN 1/4 MILE RESIDENTIAL WALK

SOMERVILLE PARKS AND OPEN SPACE WITHIN A 5 MINUTE WALK (QUARTER OF A MILE)



I. Goals & Strategies 2003-2007

2003-2007 Strategies

For the 2003-2007 Consolidated Plan, the Parks and Open Space strategies were subdivided into two categories: “substantive” goals to improve open space and recreation in the City; and “organizational” goals to create the administrative structures necessary to achieve these ends.

Substantive Goals

Goal 1: Preservation and Stewardship

To manage, preserve, and otherwise steward our existing open spaces, recreational facilities, and natural resources:

- Preserve existing open spaces from development;
- Preserve water quality in the City and the watershed;
- Protect publicly- and privately-owned trees in the City;
- Develop and monitor environmental indicators for public and environmental health.

Goal 2: Enhancement

- To improve the City’s open space and recreational facilities and programs to provide innovative, state-of-the-art, and accessible opportunities for all residents:
- Continue to renovate parks and playgrounds;
- Continue to plant street trees to reinforce the urban forest;
- Address remaining ADA issues in all parks, playgrounds, and recreational programs and facilities;
- Investigate opportunities to enhance existing open spaces through public-private partnerships and other innovative strategies.

Goal 3: Acquisition and Expansion

- To expand and increase the City’s inventory of permanently protected open space and recreation resources through acquisition (and other means) whenever feasible:
- Expand the City’s supply of publicly held open space through outright purchase or dedication whenever feasible;
- Expand the City’s supply of privately-held open space through zoning provisions, development agreements, deed restrictions, public-private partnerships, and other means.

Goal 4: Environmental and Public Health

- To safeguard and improve the health of our community, including consideration of physical, mental, social, economic, and environmental well-being:
- Research and inventory public health problems caused by environmental hazards in the community;
- Inform and engage the public in a discussion of the connections between environmental issues and public health.

Organizational Goals

Goal 5: Funding and Support

- To increase funding, staffing levels, and other support to meet existing management and programming needs;
- Investigate existing workloads and staffing levels to set priorities for allocating resources;
- Document ongoing maintenance scheduling and additional;
- Seek opportunities to pool or otherwise share resources between departments, agencies, commissions, and community groups.

Goal 6: Management and Programming

- To make the most of our limited supply of open space through the coordination of open space and recreational activities within the City;
- Establish a permanent Open Space Advisory Committee;
- Seek opportunities to pool or otherwise share information between departments, agencies, commissions, and community groups;
- Seek additional funding for open space and recreation staffing;
- Develop and commit to measurements of customer satisfaction and accountability.

Goal 7: Active Public Involvement & Ownership

- To promote and expect public awareness, utilization, and care of Somerville's open space and involve the public at all levels of open space decisions and stewardship;
- Provide educational opportunities about Open Space and Recreation issues;
- Involve the community at all stages of decision making and open space stewardship;
- Periodically review the changing needs of Somerville residents;
- Promote the Goals, Objectives, and Actions of this Plan, and remind all constituencies of their responsibilities in implementing them.

Goal 8: Regionalism

- To emphasize, investigate, and benefit from a regional approach to open space and recreation, including both cultural and ecological regions;
- Work with the DCR to address local and regional open space issues;
- Work with neighboring communities to address regional open space issues.

Top Strategic Priorities

From the Substantive and Organizational goals outlined above, the 2003-2007 Consolidated Plan chose two items as being absolutely essential for any future progress towards meeting the goals of this Plan:

The creation of an Open Space Advisory Committee. Although there are many groups and departments active in open space and recreation issues, their activities have not been coordinated or

focused; there was no single consistent voice for open space needs in the City. To achieve the goals of the 2003-2007 plan, it was felt that a single committee should be charged with overseeing this progress and coordinating the actions and priorities of the various groups.

Securing additional sources of funding and/or support for open space and recreation activities, staff, and programs. Open space and recreation departments in the City (OSPCD, Conservation Commission, DPW, and Recreation) did not possess the resources to implement all the actions of the 2003-2007 plan. Additional support was needed to do more than maintain the existing program. Support could be additional staffing and larger departmental budgets, or other, less conventional sources, such as local business sponsorship, donated community labor or park “adoption”, and greater reliance on private grants.

2003-2007 Parks Renovation Schedule

In order to meet the Substantive Goals outlined above, the City of Somerville proposed the following project schedule in the 2003-2007 Consolidated Plan:

Tier I:

- Restoration of Nathan Tufts (Powder House) Park
- Renovations to Corbett Park on Prospect Hill
- Renovations to Florence Park in East Somerville
- Renovations to Trum Tot Lot on Cedar Street and Franey Road
- Renovation to Trum Field on Broadway (Phase I)
- Renovation of Skating Rink on Somerville Avenue (DCR property)

Tier II:

- Renovation to Trum Field (Phase II)
- Renovation to Perkins Park
- Community Park on Walnut Street between Medford and Pearl Streets
- Renovation of Dilboy Field (DCR property)
- New Skate Park in Foss Park (DCR property)
- Renovation to Somerville/Milk Row Cemetery
- New Construction of proposed Allen Street Park
- Expansion and renovation of Harris Park

Tier III:

- Renovation of Trum Field (Phase III)
- Renovation of Palmacci Park
- Renovation of Perry Park
- Renovation of Stone Place Playground
- Renovation of Foss Park (DCR property)
- Renovation of Draw Seven Park (DCR property)
- Mystic Waterfront Park (DCR property)

II. 2003-2007 Accomplishments

The City's efforts accomplished many of the goals of the Consolidated Plan 2003-2007.

These include:

Projects: Construction/Renovation

The City of Somerville committed to an aggressive schedule for the renovation of parks and open space in HUD-eligible areas. To date, the City has not only completed 94% of the proposed renovations, but also expanded the amount of dedicated open space, including the conversion of two brownfields to community gardens. In total, 1 acre of new properties was created, and 11.95 acres of existing parks and open spaces were renovated (see Table 1).

CDBG funds were used to leverage other funding sources, including grant awards from the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, and the Environmental Protection Agency (see Table 2). These monies were partnered with additional city funds for a diverse funding strategy.

TABLE 1: SOMERVILLE PARKS & OPEN SPACE RENOVATION SCHEDULE*								
Project	Type	Acres	Class	Year Completed	2003-2007 Schedule	FUNDING		
						CDBG	State	City
30 Allen Street Community Garden	CG	0.12	new	2007	Tier II	X	X	
Corbett-McKenna Park	P/PL	0.61	existing	2004	Tier I	X		
Durell Pocket Park & Community Garden	CG	0.18	new	2007	NEW	X	X	
Leathers Community Park	P/OLRA	0.7	new	2007	Tier II	X	X	
Florence Playground	PL	0.26	existing	2004	Tier I	X		
Harris Playground	-----	-----	-----	on hold	Tier II	-----	-----	-----
Nathan Tufts Park	P	4.3	existing	2004	Tier I		X	X
Palmacci Playground	PL	0.08	existing	2005	Tier III	X		
Perkins Playground	PL	0.15	existing	2006	Tier II	X	X	
Perry Park	P	0.77	existing	2007	Tier III	X		
Stone Place Park	P	0.12	existing	2007	Tier III	X		
Trum Field Phase I	R	N/A	existing	2003	Tier I	X	X	
Trum Field Phase II	R	5.2	existing	2004	Tier II	X	X	
Trum Field Phase III	R	N/A	existing	2007	Tier III	X	X	X
Trum Playground	PL	0.46	existing	2003	Tier I	X	X	

* renovation schedule does not include Somerville properties owned by DCR or other holders.

** CG = community garden; P = park; PL = playground; OLRA = off-leash recreational area; R = recreational field.

A few featured projects from the CDBG-funded parks follow:

- **CORBETT – McKENNA PARK**

Located atop Prospect Hill, Corbett-McKenna Park enjoys a superb historic setting overlooking the City of Somerville. The old park was in poor condition for several years prior to the allocation of

CDBG funds for its renovation. With the funding in place, the City staff recognized the opportunity to provide a great new space for the community and focused the renovation plans on a new design that both updated amenities for the park and also featured the prominent scenic vista on site.

Re-opened in 2004, Corbett-McKenna Park is a brightly colored, historically themed project built on two levels that featured basketball, play features for different age groups, a water feature, and a balcony deck that overlooks both Somerville and the City of Boston.



FIGURE 3: ENTRANCE AND BI-LEVEL PARK STRUCTURE

Source: City of Somerville 2004

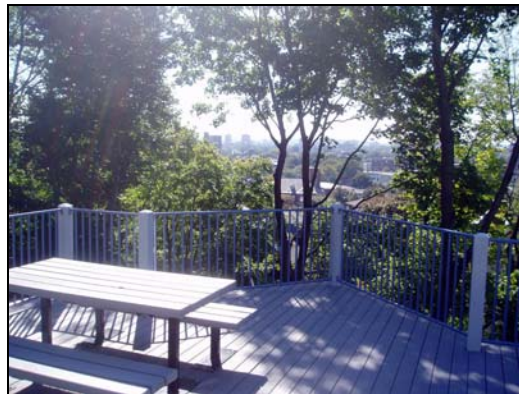


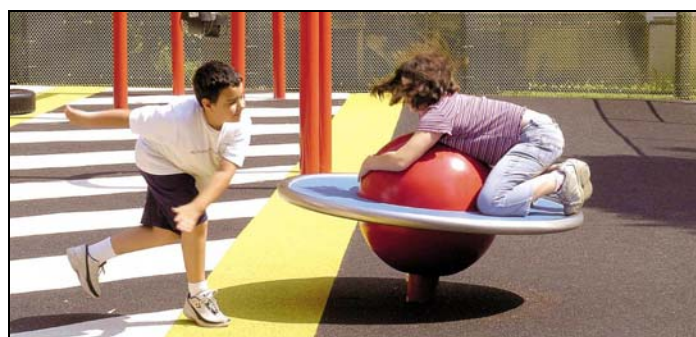
FIGURE 4: PICNIC AREA AND SCENIC VISTA

Source: City of Somerville 2004

- **PERKINS PARK**

Perkins Park is a highly utilized parcel of open space located in an Environmental Justice community in East Somerville. Given Somerville's classification as the most densely populated municipality in the Commonwealth, this specific neighborhood is particularly thickly settled and considered the home to the majority of the City's 27% minority population.

Prior to renovation, Perkins Park was an aging playground with crumbling surfaces, deteriorated picnic tables and benches, and playground equipment that was causing safety concerns. After the 2006 renovation, Perkins has been noted as an outstanding example of a successful urban park. Making the most of a small space, the park has superb graphic design elements and has been published internationally in landscape architecture publications.



FIGURES 5 & 6: GRAPHIC SURFACES DOUBLE AS PLAY ELEMENTS AT PERKINS PARK, ENHANCING CREATIVE PLAY.

Source: copyright StoSS

- **PERRY PARK**

Most of the City of Somerville’s parks were converted to open space from land previously occupied by schools, factories, houses, or commercial institutions. Perry Park was the location of the old Perry School and while it has been a park since 1974, it wasn’t until its recent renovation that its full potential was recognized. Perry Park is approximately one acre in size and is now recognized as one of the most attractive green spaces in the city. Whereas the earlier park was dominated by endless asphalt paving, this 2007 renovation features rolling lawns, stone walls, large caliper trees, an open plaza on the sidewalk and new lighting and play features that attract both new and long time residents to the park.



FIGURE 7: PERRY PARK LAWN
Source: City of Somerville 2007



FIGURE 8: RIBBON-CUTTING
Source: City of Somerville 2007

In addition to fulfilling the 2003-2007 renovation schedule, the City also made good on its two top strategic priorities: an Open Space Committee was established in 2007 and additional funding was secured to hire staff and support resources to meet goals and objectives.

- **LEATHERS COMMUNITY PARK**

Formerly the site of the old Kemp Nuts Factory, the Edward L. Leathers Community Park is the manifestation of a rare opportunity to acquire 0.985 of an acre of land, protect it as open space and create a “green” design for a new community park. It is even more rare that a park of this size can be constructed in a neighborhood with a history of absentee landlords, narrow busy streets, and triple-decker homes with no yards. Many residents are recent immigrants who rarely become involved in neighborhood issues due to time constraints or language barriers. However, after extensive community outreach and review by the City’s Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development, the vision of this community for a new “green park” has been realized.

The new park includes a large grassy open space, many substantial shade trees, flowering gardens, a variety of play opportunities for children, and tree lined walking paths that both transition into the surrounding neighborhood and provide circulation within the park. There is also a off leash recreation area for dogs, and elevated terrace down the length of the park that will not only serve as

a walking opportunity, but also as a viewing platform to watch trains go by, as a place to picnic, and a stage for community events and neighborhood cultural festivals.



FIGURE 9: LEATHERS BEFORE

Source: copyright Reed Hilderbrand Associates, Inc.



FIGURE 10: LEATHERS PLAN

Source: copyright Reed Hilderbrand Associates, Inc.

Projects: Acquisition and Expansion

In the past four years, the following new park spaces were dedicated to be retained as open space in perpetuity by the City of Somerville:

- 30 Allen Street Community Garden
- Community Path Park
- Durell Pocket Park and Community Gardens
- Edward L. Leathers Community Park
- Perkins Playground

These parks total 1.409 acres of dedicated land. Of the four dedicated parcels, the Community Path Park was also a City acquisition. This parcel of industrial land (0.259 acres) was acquired and dedicated as a neighborhood park. It also abuts the planned extension of the Community Path (see Brownfields section for additional information).

ADA Compliance

The establishment of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 resulted in refinement to Somerville's design approach to its parks and open spaces. The City ensures that all improvements meet the ADA Standards for Accessible Design, whether that is in new construction or the rehabilitation of existing spaces.

Recent projects have included the following modifications to improve accessibility:

- Handicapped ramps on public sidewalks;
- Accessible routes through parks and their entrances/exits;
- Safety surfacing in playgrounds, and accessible play structures;
- At least one provision for accessible planting beds in community gardens; and,
- Careful consideration of ground plane materials for durability, cost and access.

The City's ADA Coordinator helps the Parks and Open Space Department ensure that all new construction and renovation projects meet or exceed ADA requirements.

Brownfields Conversion

Brownfields are real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant. Cleaning up and reinvesting in these properties takes development pressures off of undeveloped open land, and both improves and protects the environment.³ Somerville's industrial legacy and dense built footprint make the conversions of brownfields to public green space a logical and attractive option; it is a prioritized strategy for increasing the amount of municipal open space. Mass DEP lists 397 instances of reported contaminant releases in Somerville since 1993⁴, and the City prepared a list of 20 brownfield sites that was submitted to Mass EOE in 2005. One of these city-identified properties, 245 Beacon Street, was converted to Durell Pocket Park and Community Garden in 2007.

Somerville has worked with the EPA on several brownfields conversion projects, and the City has established an Executive Office of Sustainability & Environment, which works with the Parks and Open Space Department on the detection and evaluation of Underground Storage Tanks (UST's), and the conversion of brownfields into public open space. Recent collaborations have included:

- **30 ALLEN STREET COMMUNITY GARDEN**

This vacant lot was a former residential parcel that was abandoned in the 1950s, and prey to several decades of illegal dumping. It was remediated and converted into a community garden through an EPA Brownfields Cleanup Grant, an Urban Self-Help Grant from the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation, and matching CDBG funds



FIGURE 11: 30 ALLEN ST - BEFORE

Source: City of Somerville 2007



FIGURE 12: 30 ALLEN ST - AFTER

Source: City of Somerville 2007

⁴ <http://db.state.ma.us/dep/cleanup/sites/Results2.asp>, 11/15/07.

• **COMMUNITY PATH PARK**

This neighborhood pocket park is adjacent to the proposed Cedar-Central extension of the Somerville Community Path (see *Transportation & Infrastructure* section). Its history includes the acceptance of urban fill and trash. The Community Path Park is scheduled for construction in Spring 2008, through the generosity of an EPA Brownfields Cleanup Grant, a MA Department of Conservation & Recreation Urban Self-Help Grant, and matching CDBG funds.



FIGURE 13: EXISTING RUBBLE
 Source: City of Somerville 2006

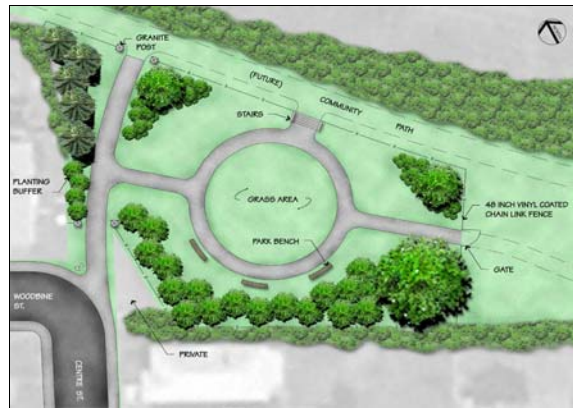


FIGURE 14: PHASE I DESIGN
 Source: copyright Stantec, Inc.

Somerville is proud of these two projects; both contribute to quality of life in low-income neighborhoods that have served as informal dumping areas in past decades. The City is enthused about this type of neighborhood revitalization, and hopes to partner with EPA and HUD on future brownfield conversion projects.

Leveraging Outside Resources

The City of Somerville has committed to an aggressive grantwriting program, in order to fully maximize the potential of the CDBG funds it commits to Parks and Open Space projects. The City has applied for and won several competitive Urban Self-Help Grants from the Massachusetts Department of Conservation Services (DCS), which have expanded project scope and design potential significantly. The Environmental Protection Agency has also been a dedicated partner on two recent brownfield conversion projects. Table 2 shows the breakdown of funding that leveraged more than \$1,500,000.00 in outside awards for our recent CDBG parks projects.

TABLE 2: LEVERAGED OUTSIDE GRANTS FOR CDBG PARKS PROJECTS				
Project	Grant Source	Year Awarded	Year Completed	Grant Amount

Trum Field Phase I	EOEEA, Department of Conservation Services Urban Self Help Grant 8	2002	2003	\$233,380.00
Trum Field Phase II	EOEEA, Department of Conservation Services Urban Self Help Grant 9	2002	2004	\$250,000.00
Trum Field Phase III	EOEEA, Department of Conservation Services Urban Self Help Grant 10	2004	2008	\$250,000.00
Perkins Park	EOEEA, Department of Conservation Services Urban Self Help Grant 11	2005	2006	\$235,294.00
Leathers Community Park	EOEEA, Department of Conservation Services Urban Self Help Grant 12	2005	2008	\$325,066.00
30 Allen Street and Durell Community Gardens	EOEEA, Department of Conservation Services Urban Self Help Grant 13	2005	2007	\$115,100.00
	EPA Brownfields Grant - 30 Allen Street Garden	2005	2007	\$100,000.00
Community Path Park	EOEEA, Department of Conservation Services Urban Self Help Grant 14	2006	Projected 2008	\$192,904.00
	EPA Brownfields Grant	2007	Projected 2008	\$100,000.00
Central Hill Memorial Park (playground approved for CDBG funds)	EOEEA, Department of Conservation Services Urban Self Help Grant 15	2007	Projected 2010	\$494,942.00
TOTAL PARKS AND OPEN SPACE LEVERAGED FUNDS				\$1,563,306.00

III. Needs Assessment

In preparing this Consolidated Plan, staff has analyzed the challenges and assets of the City of Somerville with regards to parks and open space and has evaluated the accomplishments made during the prior plan. This has identified several community needs. These include the need for:

Increased Open Space

Somerville continually strives to expand and increase its inventory of permanently protected open space and recreation resources. The City has the opportunity to build on the successful acquisition of dedicated open space and resultant 1+ acre of new parks and community gardens constructed during the 2003-2007 period. One need is to expand the City's public open space holdings through outright purchase or dedication. Map 2, *Somerville Parks and Open Space Within 1/4 Mile Residential Walk*, illustrates that the majority of city residents are within a five-minute walk of some type of park

or open space. However, a few areas of the city lie outside this boundary, and other neighborhoods are underserved in terms of relative acreage of open public space to population. A primary need is to analyze those neighborhoods most underserved, and develop a strategic plan to acquire additional parcels and construct new parks or selectively extend those existing parks identified as top priorities.

A second need is to expand the City's supply of privately-held public open space through zoning provisions, development agreements, deed restrictions, public-private partnerships, and other means. With less than 5% of the City qualifying as public open space, and the majority of the remainder dense residential neighborhoods, providing as much open space as possible is necessary to maintaining and improving the quality of life for all Somerville citizens. By considering both public and private open space opportunities, innovative ways can be found to bolster the physical and emotional health of City residents, and provide a long-term sustainable urban environment.

Improved Open Space

In addition to expanding our open space acreage, a primary need is to continue to improve the quality of open space and recreational facilities and programs. Innovative, environmentally friendly, and accessible opportunities are needed for all residents. The City of Somerville manages 49 parks and open spaces; an estimated 20% are in need of renovation. Typical residential concerns with the aging parks are unsafe/inaccessible surfaces and play equipment, lack of trees, inadequate lighting, and programmatic elements that only serve one age group. Addressing these renovation needs, particularly in the prioritized East Somerville and Union Square NRSAs, is a top priority of the Parks and Open Space department and provides the most concrete local benefits to residents.

Somerville's current park system is aging. Many parks last renovated in the 1980s are typically paved recreational courts, with an accessory tot lot. These types of programmed spaces often do not reflect the programmatic needs of today's local residents, who clamor for open green space. The City also wants to make a commitment to 'green' practices in its public open spaces. Installing permeable park surfaces, whether lawn, groundcover, stonedust or unit pavers, serves many environmental objectives, including reduced stormwater runoff and increased groundwater recharge. Combining permeable surfaces with additional trees and vegetation serves to reduce the urban heat island effect, and has demonstrated benefits for mental and physical health. Good design can address both the active recreational needs of users and the need for tranquility and refuge.

Somerville's tremendous residential density makes the need for safe and engaging open space a priority. Without a ready supply of additional developable land, the pressure on the existing park system to provide refuge and recreational opportunities for 80,000 residents is intense. The need to renovate existing parks and open spaces is a clear mandate for the City to promote health, well being, and safety for all residents.



FIGURE 15: ALBION PLAYGROUND

Source: City of Somerville 2007



FIGURE 16: GRIMMONS PARK

Source: City of Somerville 2007

ADA Compliance

As part of the need for improved open space, it is critical to address those parks that do not fully meet accessibility for all potential users. A city-wide assessment is needed to determine which park properties need improvements to meet ADA Standards for Accessible Design. Improvements in these areas can then be prioritized as part of the City's ongoing ADA compliance effort.

In December 2006, testimony was given at a public meeting regarding the importance of considering children and adults with disabilities when designing parks and open space. The Somerville DisAbilities Commission has discussed the potential of equal-level playing areas and sensory stimulation additions to the existing Somerville parks system. There is a clear need going forward to examine residential needs and strive to ensure equal accessibility wherever possible.

Facilities and Programs to Address Fitness Needs

As obesity rates soar (see Fig. 17), access to public recreational areas has become even more critical. This is particularly true in economically disadvantaged areas where populations are most vulnerable (see Map 3). Somerville has responded to the national childhood obesity crisis by partnering with Tufts University to sponsor the nationally-recognized Shape Up Somerville program⁵.

Funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Shape Up Somerville: Eat Smart. Play Hard.* was a 3-year (2002-2005), environmental change intervention designed to prevent obesity in culturally diverse, high-risk, early-elementary school children. The Shape Up team developed and implemented strategies designed to create energy balance for 1st to 3rd graders in Somerville. In before-, during-, and after-school environments, interventions were focused on increasing the number of physical activity options available to children throughout the day and on improving dietary choices.

⁵ <http://www.somervillema.gov/Division.cfm?orgunit=SUS>; http://nutrition.tufts.edu/1174562918285/Nutrition-Page-nl2w_1179115086248.html

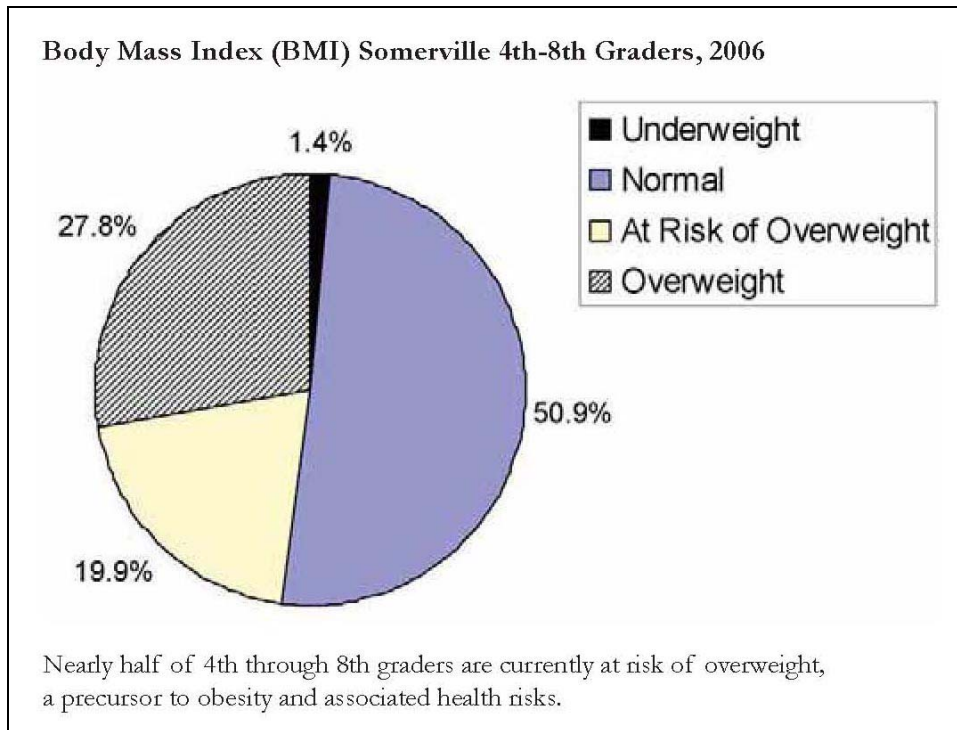


FIGURE 17: SOMERVILLE YOUTH WEIGHT RISK

Source: Somerville Health Department presentation, 9/18/07.

Original data: *Physical Education Program Grant 2006 BMI Report*; Institute for Community Health, Tufts University

In 2003, 46% of Somerville's 1st to 3rd grade population were at-risk of becoming overweight or were overweight. A BMI-z score (or BMI-for-age percentile) was recorded to report changes in weight gain among children who participated in the Shape Up Somerville (SUS) intervention, as compared to children in two socio-demographically similar communities in Massachusetts who did not receive the intervention.

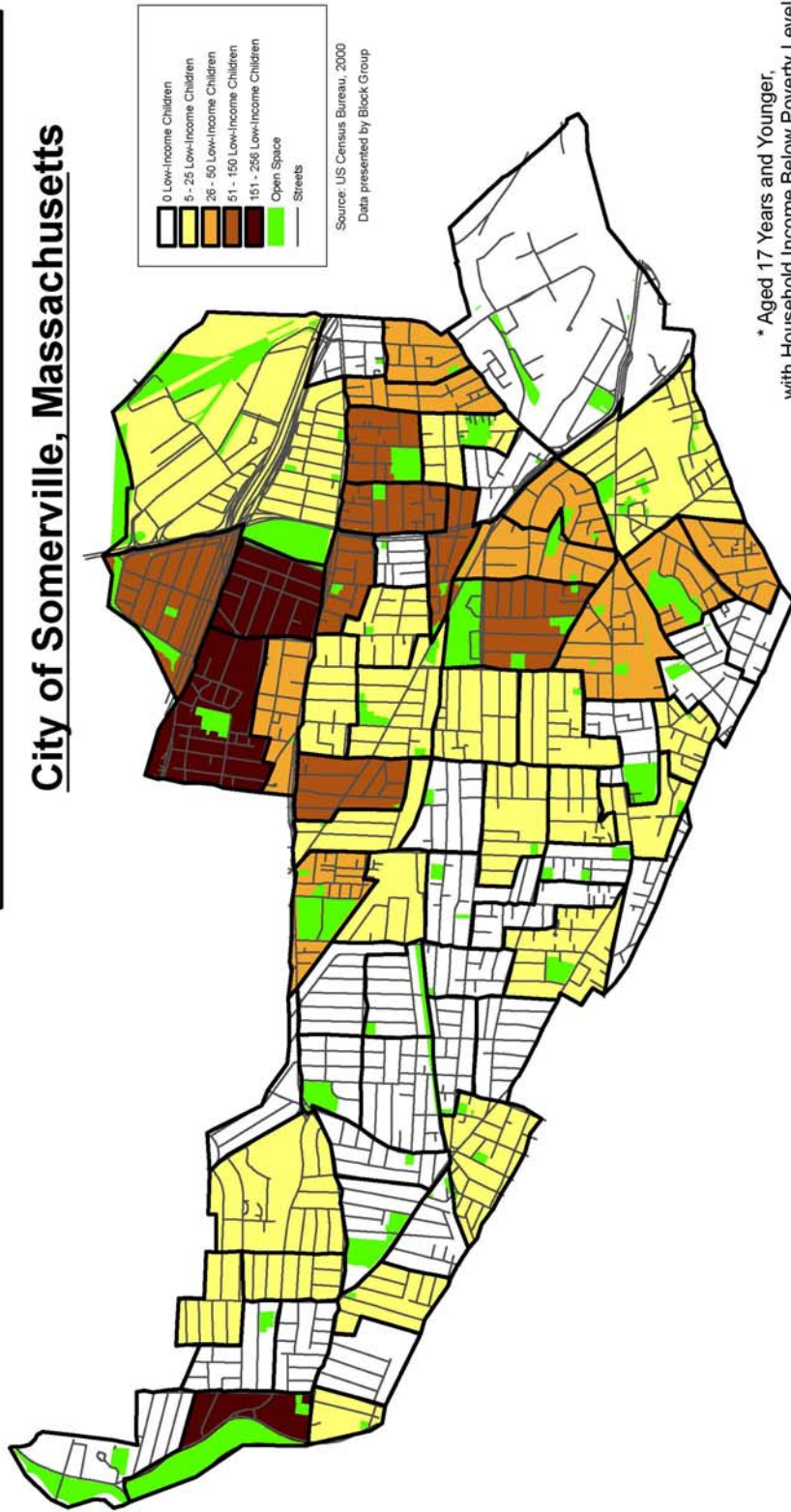
Findings of the study were that, on average, SUS reduced approximately one pound of weight gain over eight months for an eight-year-old child. This may seem small for an individual, but on a population level this reduction in weight gain, observed through a decrease in BMI z-score, would translate into large numbers of children moving out of the overweight category.

SUS is now working with Parks and Open Space to increase public education about healthy living choices by developing appropriate park signage and to create a parks map that shows walking distances/public transportation routes available from residential areas to the parks throughout the city. Improving access to parks and open space will be critical in order to continue the 2003 SUS results, and renovations to parks in SUS-target areas will be a priority.

MAP 3: DISTRIBUTION OF LOW-INCOME CHILDREN IN RELATION TO OPEN SPACE

**DISTRIBUTION OF LOW-INCOME CHILDREN*
IN RELATION TO OPEN SPACE**

City of Somerville, Massachusetts



* Aged 17 Years and Younger,
with Household Income Below Poverty Level



Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone
Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development
Mapping prepared by City of Somerville



IV. Prioritization of Needs

a. Methodology of Prioritization

The City has taken a number of steps to prioritize the many Parks and Open Space needs. These steps include:

- Internal analysis through weekly staff meetings, monthly mayoral meetings, and coordination with the associated City departments that work on Parks and Open Space;
- Review and revision of the *Somerville Open Space and Recreation Plan* (5-year action plan);
- Review of comments provided by the Chair of the City’s DisAbilities Commission;
- External assessment of needs and goals through the Open Space Committee; and,
- Evaluation of accomplishments during 2003-2008 Consolidated Plan.

The existing condition and strategic goals of Somerville’s Parks and Open Space was also a topic of discussion during the public hearings for development of the 2008-2013 Consolidated Plan. A specific focus group of stakeholders was held on October 25, 2007 to discuss parks and open space needs and strategies. Comments from participants at the focus groups included the need to:

- Develop a strategic plan for new park acquisition; and,
- Improve public outreach and surveys in design process for renovating and constructing parks.

b. Matrix of Needs and Relative Priority

Identified Need	Need Level	Units
Renovate Existing Parks and Recreational Facilities	high	project
Construct New Parks and Recreational Facilities	high	project
Acquire More Land to Expand Parks Acreage	high	project
Improve ADA Access to Parks & Open Spaces	high	tree
Conduct Tree Inventory & Expand Tree Planting Program	medium	project
Construct More Off-Leash Recreational Areas (OLRAs)	high	project
Create Green Performance City Standards	medium	revised city specs
Create a Brownfield Acquisition Strategy	medium	map

V. Obstacles to Meeting Underserved Needs

a. Monetary Gap Analysis

The greatest gap that the City of Somerville faces in meeting the City’s underserved needs for parks and open space is shortage of staff. Due to limited financial resources, the City has a limited number of parks and open space projects it can undertake in any fiscal year. The number of park renovation projects and other identified department needs exceeds the current staff and resources.

b. Additional Obstacles

- **Construction Inflation:** due to the increasing cost in utilities and construction materials, the City is finding the cost of its parks and open space projects increase significantly. This cost increase is an extra burden on the City's budget, since City funds do not grow at the same pace inflation does.
- **Acquiring Land:** with dense residential properties occupying nearly every square foot of the City, there is little available land left to purchase and convert into parks. Potential grants for new construction or brownfield conversion are missed opportunities without a City surplus of buildable land. The City needs to adopt a creative strategy to acquire and convert land to parks, looking at private partnerships and other resourceful tactics.

VI. Vision, Goals and Strategies

Vision

Provide a system of attractive, safe, accessible, and sustainable parks and open spaces for the City of Somerville.

Goals

1. Renovate existing parks and open spaces to improve condition of Somerville's recreational areas and ensure attractive, safe, and accessible public lands.
2. Secure more land to expand Somerville's total open space acreage and ensure access to open space in every neighborhood.
3. Analyze and improve access for persons with disabilities to parks and open space, as part of ongoing ADA compliance.
4. Increase tree canopy and green spaces to promote urban health and sustainability, and reduce the heat island effect.
5. Increase Off-Leash Recreational Area (OLRA) opportunities throughout the city.
6. Raise the bar for sustainable design and building practices in city parks and open space projects.
7. Reduce brownfields and convert to more desirable uses.
8. Improve accountability and set departmental vision through a series of strategic planning documents.

Strategies

Renovate Parks and Open Space

- 1.1 Analyze Somerville's parks and open spaces; rate condition and accessibility to underserved populations.
- 1.2 Develop a renovation schedule.
- 1.3 Improve community involvement/outreach in park renovation projects.
- 1.4 Leverage additional funding resources for park projects.

Secure Additional Land

- 2.1 Develop a strategic plan for acquiring parcels of land.
- 2.2 Leverage additional funding resources for land acquisition.

- 2.3 Increase open space opportunities through public/private partnerships.
- 2.4 Identify other creative strategies for increasing open space.

Analyze and Improve Access

- 3.1 Identify priority locations for ADA improvements, with the Somerville ADA Coordinator.
- 3.2 Fund reconstruction of improvements at key locations.

Increase Tree Canopy

- 4.1 Coordinate and execute complete tree inventory.
- 4.2 Expand and strengthen street tree planting/replacement program.
- 4.3 Work with DPW on best practices for maintenance and long-term tree health.
- 4.4 Private homeowner environmental education campaign on economic and health benefits of street trees and open space, and the importance of permeable surface area to reduce stormwater runoff and increase groundwater recharge.

Increase Off-Leash Recreational Areas

- 5.1 Identify areas of the city that would best be served with additional OLRAs.

Raise the Bar for Sustainable Practices

- 6.1 Identify and mandate sustainable practices in landscape projects.
- 6.2 Create a maintenance database for new environmental technologies installed in city parks.

Reduce Brownfields

- 7.1 Identify potential brownfields for City acquisition.
- 7.2 Continue to support brownfields programs to facilitate the clean up of privately-owned parcels.

Set Vision through Strategic Planning Documents

- 8.1 Revise and submit *Somerville Open Space and Recreation Plan* (OSRP).
- 8.2 Participate in the creation of the *Union Square Open Space Plan* and integrate into OSRP.

VII. Performance Measures

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE PERFORMANCE MEASURES		
Goal	Strategies	Benchmarks
1. Renovate existing parks and open spaces to improve condition of Somerville’s recreational areas and ensure attractive, safe, and accessible public lands.	1.1. Analyze Somerville’s parks and open spaces; rate condition and accessibility to underserved populations.	1.1.1 Report with prioritized recommendations for renovation schedule finalized within next 2 years.
	1.2 Develop a renovation schedule.	1.2.1 Renovate 6 parks/recreational areas in next 5 years.
	1.3 Improve community involvement/outreach in park renovation projects.	1.3.1 Regularly provide multilingual announcements of public meetings for park design.
	1.4 Leverage additional funding resources for park projects.	1.4.1 Secure 3 state grants over the next 5 years.

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE PERFORMANCE MEASURES		
Goal	Strategies	Benchmarks
2. Acquire more land to expand Somerville's total open space acreage and ensure access to open space in every neighborhood.	2.1 Develop a strategic plan for acquiring parcels of land.	2.1.1 Report with prioritized recommendations for land acquisition finalized within next 3 years.
	2.2 Leverage additional funding resources for land acquisition.	2.2.1 Secure at least 1 outside grant to purchase new land within next 5 years.
	2.3 Increase open space opportunities through public/private partnerships.	2.3.1 Create 5 acres of open space in Assembly Square within next 5 years (<i>see East Somerville NRSA 3.1.1</i>)
	2.4 Identify other creative strategies for increasing open space.	2.4.1 Expand zoning requirements for publicly usable open space within the next 3 years.
3. Analyze and improve ADA access to parks and open space, as part of ongoing ADA compliance.	3.1 Identify priority locations for ADA improvements, with the Somerville ADA Coordinator.	3.1.1 Report with prioritized recommendations for park accessibility improvements finalized within next 3 years.
	3.2 Fund reconstruction of improvements at key locations.	3.2.1 Complete specific ADA improvements to 5 parks in next 5 years.
4. Increase tree canopy and green spaces to promote urban health and sustainability, and reduce the heat island effect.	4.1 Coordinate and execute complete tree inventory.	4.1.1 Compile electronic database with prioritized planting strategy within next 3 years.
	4.2 Expand and strengthen street tree planting/replacement program.	4.2.1 Plant at least 100 trees per year with CDBG funds and 50 trees per year with City funds.
	4.3 Work with DPW on best practices for maintenance and long-term tree health.	4.3.1 Conduct workshop with DPW on tree program goals and best maintenance practices within next 2 years.
	4.4 Implement private homeowner environmental education campaign on economic and health benefits of street trees and open space, and the importance of permeable surface area to reduce stormwater runoff and increase groundwater recharge.	4.4.1 Implement homeowner environmental education campaign within 2 years.
5. Increase Off-Leash Recreational Area (OLRA) opportunities throughout the city.	5.1 Identify areas of the city that would best be served with additional OLRAs.	5.1.1 Construct 2 new OLRAs within 5 years.
6. Create Green Performance Standards to raise the bar for sustainable design and building practices in city parks and	6.1 Identify and mandate sustainable practices in landscape projects.	6.1.1 Revise city specs for parks contracts to strengthen environmental accountability and quantify green products and practices used in project construction; within next year.

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE PERFORMANCE MEASURES		
Goal	Strategies	Benchmarks
open space projects.	6.2 Create a maintenance database for new environmental technologies installed in city parks.	6.2.1 Require contracted designers to submit a best practices manual for completed park projects to DPW and Parks & Open Space departments within next 2 years.
7. Craft a City brownfield acquisition strategy, with a goal of future brownfield conversion to parks and open space.	7.1 Identify potential brownfields for City acquisition.	7.1.1 Map locations of existing brownfields, rated according to City purchase potential and strategic location within next 5 years.
8. Improve accountability and set departmental vision through a series of strategic planning documents.	8.1 Revise and submit <i>Somerville Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP)</i> .	8.1.1 OSRP completed within 2 years.
	8.2 Participate in the creation of the <i>Union Square Open Space Plan</i> , and integrate into OSRP.	8.2.1 <i>Union Square Open Space Plan</i> completed within 2 years (<i>see Union Square NRSA 3.1.1</i>).