

11.0 PARKS AND RECREATION



MIDDLETOWN PLAN OF DEVELOPMENT

11.0 PARKS AND RECREATION

11.1 Introduction

Middletown's public parks and recreational facilities offer residents of all ages a wide range of outdoor activities. Parkland provides both active and passive recreational pursuits, enabling individuals and families to enjoy outdoor activities. Parks range in size from one-half acre for a neighborhood playground to over 100 acres containing sports fields, swimming areas, and boating facilities (Figure 11.1). In addition to outdoor active spaces, the Parks and Recreation Department runs swim programs, day programs for teens, adults, and seniors, and operates a number of summer camps. According to the 1999 residents survey, 60% of respondents indicated that they were "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with the Park and Recreation Department.

The chapter recommends the following goals:

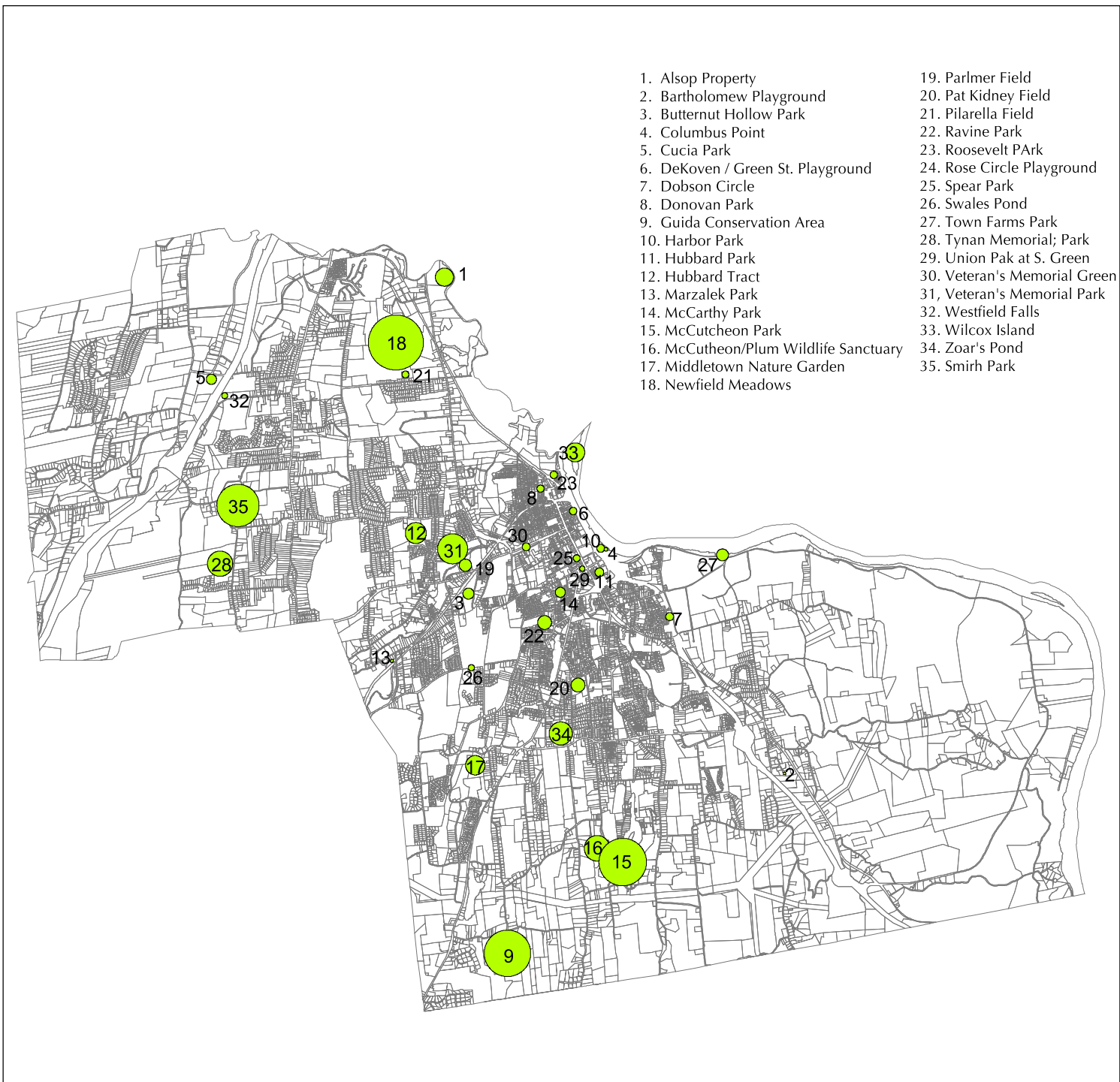
- *To provide for the optimal number and type of safe, well-maintained, active and passive recreational facilities in areas most suited to service the diverse population.*
- *Implement the recommendations in the 1999 Community Facilities Report.*
- *A strong commitment should be made to increase public access, recreational facilities, and parkland along the Connecticut River.*
- *Provide for safe, well-maintained and managed facilities that are accessible to the handicapped.*

11.2 Current Facilities

The Park and Recreation Department maintains 23 parks with active recreational equipment including soccer fields, little league fields, picnic facilities, swimming pools, etc. In addition to the active facilities, the Department also maintains the eleven dedicated open space parcels in Middletown that offer passive recreational opportunities to residents, such as walking, fishing, and cross-country skiing. Table 11.1 lists the acreage, locations, and recreational opportunities for the thirty-four parks maintained by the City.

In addition to the City's parks, the State of Connecticut maintains two parks in Middletown: 1) Wadsworth Falls State Park, along the Route 157 corridor straddling the Middlefield-Middletown line, and 2) the Cockaponsett State Forest, in the Maromas area. Wadsworth Falls State Park enables residents to enjoy picnicking, swimming, hiking, and bicycling on the approximately 110 acres of park that extend into Middletown while the Cockaponsett Forest provides roughly 215 acres of trails for hiking, cross-country skiing, and mountain bicycling.

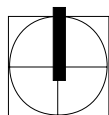
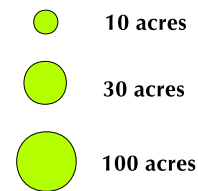
Thirteen of Middletown's parks each contain less than 2.5 acres. Unfortunately, these smaller parks are difficult to maintain, vulnerable to vandalism, and, due to their size, limited as to the activities they can offer. The 1990 Plan of Development and this Plan recognize the limitations of these neighborhood parks and advocate the building of larger, more centralized park complexes. As a result, active parkland acreage has increased by 31% over the past decade and two parks – Smith Park and McCutcheon Park – have been created or expanded, together accounting for over half of the total active recreation acreage.



- 1. Alsop Property
- 2. Bartholomew Playground
- 3. Butternut Hollow Park
- 4. Columbus Point
- 5. Cucia Park
- 6. DeKoven / Green St. Playground
- 7. Dobson Circle
- 8. Donovan Park
- 9. Guida Conservation Area
- 10. Harbor Park
- 11. Hubbard Park
- 12. Hubbard Tract
- 13. Marzalek Park
- 14. McCarthy Park
- 15. McCutcheon Park
- 16. McCutcheon/Plum Wildlife Sanctuary
- 17. Middletown Nature Garden
- 18. Newfield Meadows
- 19. Parlmer Field
- 20. Pat Kidney Field
- 21. Pilarella Field
- 22. Ravine Park
- 23. Roosevelt Park
- 24. Rose Circle Playground
- 25. Spear Park
- 26. Swales Pond
- 27. Town Farms Park
- 28. Tynan Memorial; Park
- 29. Union Pak at S. Green
- 30. Veteran's Memorial Green
- 31. Veteran's Memorial Park
- 32. Westfield Falls
- 33. Wilcox Island
- 34. Zoar's Pond
- 35. Smirh Park

**MIDDLETOWN PLAN OF DEVELOPMENT
Middletown, CT**

Figure 11.1 City Parks and Recreation Facilities



0 5000 10000 15000 Feet

BFJ Buckhurst Fish & Jacquemart, Inc.

Source: Middletown Parks and Recreation Department

**Table 11.1
Middletown Parks & Recreation**

			Handicap Access	Telephone	Electricity	Rsvd. Picnic Area	Picnic Facilities	Tennis	Playground	Basketball	Lttl. League Field	Soccer Field	Football Field	Baseball Field	Softball Field	Fishing	Swimming	Boating	Ice Skating	Hiking Trails	Hist. Monuments	Bathrooms	Open Space
Alsop Property	Newfield Street	15.20 acres																					X
Bartholomew Playground	Bartholomew Road	0.40 acres							(X)														
Butternut Hollow	Butternut Street	5.90 acres				X		X								X			X				
Columbus Point	Harbor Drive	0.75 acres	X		X	X															X		
Cucia Park	Smith Street	4.40 acres				X		(X)								X							
DeKoven/Green St. Playground	DeKoven Drive	2.25 acres						X															
Dobson Circle	Denison Road	3.30 acres																					X
Donovan Park	Stack Street	2.25 acres	X					X	X	X	X												
Guida Conservation Area	Coleman Road	100.00 acres																		X			X
Harbor Park	Harbor Drive	2.60 acres	X	X		X										X		X				X	
Hubbard Park Little League	East Main Street	3.50 acres	X								X												
Hubbard Tract	Westfield Street	22.00 acres																					X
Marzalek Park	Middlefield Street	0.50 acres						(X)															
McCarthy Park	Hotchkiss Street	2.40 acres						(X)				X											
McCutcheon Park	Livingston Road	104.60 acres	X	X	X	X	X				X	X			X	X	X	X		X		X	X
McCutcheon/Plum Wildlife Sanc.	Livingston Road	29.74 acres																		X			X
Middletown Nature Garden	Randolph Road	17.90 acres	X			X														X			X
Newfield Meadows	Mile Lane	144.00 acres																					X
Palmer Field	Bernie O'Rourke Drive	6.70 acres	X	X	X							X	X	X								X	
Pat Kidney Field	Farm Hill Road	9.00 acres	X		X			X	X	X		X		X	X							X	
Pillarella Field	Kaplan Drive	2.10 acres									X												X
Ravine Park	Highland Avenue	8.80 acres						(X)								X			X	X			X
Roosevelt Park	Miller Street	2.00 acres						(X)	X														
Smith Park	Country Club Rd.	80.00 acres	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X			X	X				X		X	X
Spear Park	Main Street	2.20 acres	X		X	X															X		
Swales Pond	Wadsworth Street	1.50 acres														X			X				
Town Farms Park	River Road	6.00 acres														X							X
Tynan Memorial Park	Higby Road	30.16 acres																		X			X
Union Park at South Green	Main Street	1.30 acres	X		X																X		
Veteran's Memorial Park	Newfield Street	41.00 acres	X		X	X	X		X							X	X			X		X	
Veteran's Memorial Green	Washington Street	3.30 acres																			X		
Westfield Falls	Miner Street	2.00 acres																					X
Wilcox Island	Connecticut River	16.50 acres																					X
Zoars Pond	Randolph Road	24.70 acres														X			X				

(X) indicates that City is removing the playground equipment from these parks.

The increase in parkland, however, has not outpaced the demand for active recreational space, particularly sports fields for soccer and little league. Middletown undertook a Community Facilities Plan in 1999. That report states that combined reservations for baseball, soccer, and football at Palmer Field increased from 140 in 1996 to 207 in 1997. Reservations for soccer fields throughout the town alone increased from 587 in 1996 to 1,143 in 1997. The Park and Recreation Department also reports heavy and increasing use of their little league fields.

As Chapter Two (Demographics) notes, Middletown’s population is expected to increase approximately 8% to 49,000 people by 2020. Population projections indicate that the numbers of all age cohorts are expected to increase, thus continuing to put pressure on the need for additional recreational space and for increased maintenance.

One of the reasons for the high demand of the fields is that the school district does not have adequate acreage for the various team sports. The high school, for instance, has one multi-use field, leaving schools and community groups to vie for the same facilities. Table 10.16 lists the facilities at the local schools. The demands placed on the fields have taxed the existing facilities and made maintenance difficult.

The adequacy of community facilities can be measured against national standards. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) issues benchmarks for the type and quantity of recreation facilities and acreage that should be provided based on the population and size of a city. According to the NRPA guidelines there should be 10 acres of parkland for every 1,000 residents. Based upon Middletown’s 2003 estimated population of 44,654 (1998 Market Statistics), the City’s 700 acres exceeds the minimal federal guidelines of 446 acres of parkland.

**Table 11.2
Recreational Survey**

Would you like to see more recreational facilities for the following activities in the city? (Please circle all that apply)	
Bicycling	38%
Playground/Picnic Space	36%
Boat Launch	28%
Golf	27%
Swimming	27%
Ice Skating	26%
Fishing	20%
Horseback Riding	18%
Tennis	15%
Baseball	9%
Soccer	9%
Basketball	8%
Softball	7%
Skateboarding	7%
Football	4%

The 1990 Plan included an existing facilities inventory listing 30 recreational sites within the city. The Plan noted that, based on statewide comprehensive outdoor recreation plan (SCORP) standards, the city was in need of additional baseball fields, tennis facilities, and picnic areas. Additional outdoor swimming pools and a public golf course were also cited as future needs for Middletown. The 1990 Plan also noted the need for additional soccer fields, softball diamonds, and improved maintenance of existing Little League fields.

The 1999 residents survey sought information on which recreational facilities residents would like to see expanded in the city. Table 11.3 ranks the different answers according to the percentage of residents who indicated a preference for specific facilities. Although an existing bike trail connects the Westlake development to the Aetna complex, residents would like to see the trail extended and connected to other potential routes.

Additional playground and picnic facilities were also noted as a need, and many residents feel that the lack of a boat launch along the Connecticut River limits the use of this unique asset. In addition, support was voiced for additional active recreational areas such as golf and soccer facilities.

In addition, several respondents wanted to see an increase in the availability of walking and hiking trails within the City. Some respondents also indicated that they would like to see the Park and Recreation Department expand their day programs rather than concentrate on providing additional active sports programs.

11.3 Summary

A number of priorities exist in relation to Middletown's existing parks and recreational resources. Future needs are listed below. Many of these priorities were noted in the *1999 Community Facilities Report*.

Major Assets

- Active residential population.
- Twenty-three parks with wide-ranging facilities and acreage.
- Significant amounts of undeveloped land for park expansion.
- Bicycle and pedestrian trails.

Issues and Opportunities

- Identify innovative programs and funding sources for park maintenance. Maintenance of facilities will continue to be an issue as park acreage is expanded but the number of employees remains constant. Centralizing park facilities within large acreages makes maintenance more efficient. The Park and Recreation Department may also consider private agencies "adopting" parks to help pay for their maintenance. This would be especially helpful for the smaller park facilities.
- Expanded soccer and little league facilities are needed to allow for reasonable use and adequate maintenance of the fields. In the short-term, the City may want to consider using some of the Long Lane land acquired by Wesleyan for this purpose. Possible long-term solutions include new fields at property south of South Plumb Road, adjacent to Spencer School, in the area of Randolph Road and Arbutus Street, and near the Guida Conservation Center.
- Plans are already underway to expand the bike path system that now exists in the Westlake area. Further expansion to create a city-wide network of bike paths should remain as an important long-term goal. Such a network should include links to the river, downtown, and to Wesleyan University. Convenient parking areas will need to be provided to encourage use of the paths.
- Improve and expand facilities along the Connecticut River. Harbor Park represents the City's only park that is located along the river. However, the potential redevelopment of the River Road area to the south of Harbor Park presents a special opportunity to expand the riverfront park and to create new recreational opportunities such as boat launching facilities and a marina for this area of the city.

- Improve and expand facilities at Veteran’s Park. An array of improvements and additional recreational facilities should be considered for the park, including:
 - Additional car parking, improved lighting, and an expansion of walking trails to serve the park area.
 - provisions for compact sports activities such as handball and volleyball courts, bocce courts, horseshoe pits, etc.
- Efforts should be made to establish greenways and open space linkages that encourage pedestrian and bicycle connections to recreational facilities, parks, and other open space amenities.