MEMORANDUM

TO: BELFAST COMPREHENSIVE PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE
FROM: NOEL MUSSON
SUBJECT: RECREATION
DATE: NOVEMBER 20, 2019

Information needing confirmation:

- Update on planned upgrades or enhancements (p. 1-2).
- Update on recent open space acquisitions (p. 2).
- Any additional access points to the water since 2009 (p. 3)?
- Confirm public and private active recreation programs (p. 3).
- Confirm recreational facilities available to the public (p. 4).

Maps referenced:

- Recreation
RECREATION

Introduction

The natural resources of Belfast and the region provide numerous outdoor recreational opportunities like hiking, hunting, horseback riding, ATV, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, fishing, canoeing, kayaking, and sailing. Open space includes Belfast Bay and associated coastal areas, rivers and streams, athletic fields, parks, farms, forestlands, wetlands, and ponds, many of which are described in the natural resources chapters of this plan. The City's goal is to preserve, strengthen and advance public recreation opportunities. The City should seek to provide a comprehensive range of recreational uses including open space, water access and recreation facilities and programs to meet the needs of the community's diverse population.

A. State Goal for Recreation

To promote and protect the availability of outdoor recreation opportunities for all Maine citizens, including access to surface waters.

B. Analyses and Key Issues

Belfast should look to maintain existing facilities and services and consider opportunities for new facilities and programs. The City should be bold in this effort, and should not limit its approaches to methods used in other towns and cities.

(1). Will existing recreational facilities and programs in the community and region accommodate projected growth or changes in age groups in your community?

Yes, existing facilities, in general, can meet the projected needs of the community over the next ten years. Allocating sufficient resources for the ongoing maintenance of all facilities is crucial.

(2). Is there a need for certain types of services or facilities or to upgrade or enlarge present facilities to either add capacity or make them more usable?

Upgrades or enhancements are recommended and many are planned for in the following city park facilities:

- **Belfast City Park** (20 acres): Lighting; buried electrical service; road paving; steps for the pavilion; grading of baseball field; pool bathhouse rehab; walkway repaired and enhanced.
- **Belfast Common** (2+ acres): Lighting; walkway to lower parking lot; drinking fountain.
- **Heritage Park** (3.5 acres): Rail removal; add grills; erosion control; construct Harbor Walk project.
- **Kirby Lake** (the Muck) (3 acres): Walkway maintenance.
- **Skate Park** (skateboards): Lighting; re-design and upgrade.
- **Sportsman Park** (21 acres): Entrance sign/marker; parking lot; trail development.
- **Steamboat Landing** (2.4 acres): Water service for event vendors; drinking fountain; access from Front Street to connect Steamboat Landing to Belfast Common; sidewalk repair and Harbor Walk.
- **Wales Park** (1.5 acres): Benches; ramp and/or steps for entrance off Congress Street.
- **Walsh Field Recreation Area** (Ballfields, Dog Park, Little River Trailhead): Boardwalk for bird watching; sidewalk and parking lot repair or replacement; small building for nature center and park office.
- **4-Season Ski, Bike, Hike Area** (former El Depot Ski Slope): Signage, parking lot upgrade; warming shed, tow bar.

(3). Are important tracts of open space commonly used for recreation publicly-owned or otherwise permanently conserved?

Yes, see the section Condition and Trends in this chapter for a listing of city-owned and permanently conserved facilities and the map titled Recreation.

(4). Does the community have a mechanism, such as an open space fund or partnership with a land trust, to acquire important open spaces and access sites, either outright or through conservation easements?

The City has worked with area land trusts, particularly the Coastal Mountain Land Trust, regarding the preservation of open spaces and access. The City also has aggressively pursued retaining public ownership of long established 'rangeways' that provide public access to coastal areas. Continuing, the City has worked cooperatively with Friends of Belfast Parks to maintain and fund improvements to many of the City's parks. While the City has not established a specific open space fund, the City has often committed taxpayer revenues to benefit public access and recreation. For example, in the mid-1980's the City created Heritage Park, in 1999 the City worked with MBNA to establish Belfast Common and Steamboat Landing Park, in 2008 the City purchased additional land to expand the size of Belfast Common, and in 2010 the City purchased the former Belfast & Moosehead Lake Railroad right-of-way to create an opportunity for a recreational trail. The City has adopted policies and Ordinances to help guide its activities, and recognizes that future amendments to such may be needed.

(5). Does the public have access to each of the community’s significant water bodies? Is the type of access compatible with the protection of public drinking water sources?

Yes, there is public access to the major water bodies in Belfast. Drinking water is supplied through groundwater wells, not surface waters. Accordingly, recreational access to surface waters does not threaten public drinking water sources.
The city owns or controls multiple access points to the water. These are either Range Ways or Rights-of-Way. A report in 2009 identifies these 17 locations in the city where there are access points to the water. The City routinely maintains most of these access points and is systematically working to make desired improvements.

(6). Are recreational trails in the community adequately maintained? Are there use conflicts on these trails?

Yes, in general, trails are maintained regularly by public or private efforts.

The city maintains walking paths located within its parks. The City also maintains the Armistice Bridge, the original Route 1 Memorial Bridge, which provides pedestrian access over the Passagassawakeag River to connect the east and west sides of Belfast. In general, recreational trails outside parks are maintained by private entities. No known conflicts exist.

(7). Is traditional access to private lands being restricted?

A few property owners post their land to restrict hunting, for privacy or for other reasons, but this has not resulted in public complaints to date.

C. Conditions and Trends

(1). The community’s Comprehensive Planning Recreation Data Set prepared and provided to the community by the Department of Conservation, and the Office, or their designee.

This data set has been incorporated and updated in the Belfast Comprehensive Plan map titled: Recreation.

(2). A description of important public and private active recreation programs, land and water areas (including hunting and fishing areas), and facilities in the community and region, including regional recreational opportunities as appropriate, and identification of unmet needs.

The following publications are available: “The Green Emeralds of Belfast” (designed and distributed by the Friends of Belfast Parks); “Belfast, Naturally” (from Hartdale Maps) and “Belfast Bike Trails” (Hartdale Maps); “Trails” (Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition). These describe public recreational areas in the community. Programs designed to bring in visitors, families and friends are identified each year in annual reports and publications. The Coastal Mountains Land Trust also has trail maps and publications describing natural area and activities.

(3). An inventory of any fresh or salt water bodies in the community determined locally to have inadequate public access.

None known. Belfast has an extensive system of City owned and maintained Rangeways and public parks that support public access to Belfast Bay. The City notes that unlike many Maine communities there are few significant fresh water bodies (large ponds) in Belfast.

(4). A description of trail systems, trail management organizations, and conservation organizations that provide trails for all-terrain vehicles,
snowmobiling, skiing, mountain biking, or hiking. Include mapped information as available.

(see # C. 2 above)

(5). A map or list of important publicly-used open spaces and their associated facilities, such as parking and toilet facilities.

(see # C.2 above and list of local land trusts in C-6 below)

See the map titled Recreation. There are a number of recreational facilities in Belfast, which are available to the public:

- **Armistice Bridge (reconstructed in 2006)/Pedestrian Footbridge (Formerly known as the Veterans Memorial Bridge)**: This renovated span (about 800 feet in length) crossing the Passagassawakeag River provides scenic views of the harbor and downtown, and provides connectivity across the River between the east and west sides of Belfast.
- **Belfast Area High School**: This facility has an indoor swimming pool with spectator seating and a gymnasium, and is surrounded by 20 acres, which accommodate 1,320 feet of running track, as well as baseball, football, field hockey, and soccer fields.
- **Belfast City Park**: This is a 20-acre municipal park with a 10,479 square foot outdoor pool with dressing rooms, League baseball field, a full basketball court, two tennis courts, an innovative playground, sitting bench outdoor pavilion, and picnic tables with metal barbeque cookers adjacent to them.
- **Belfast Common**: Dedicated in 1999, this park is on the former site of a poultry processing plant. People fly kites, walk dogs, picnic, sunbathe, and, in the winter, go sledding. An amphitheater provides a beautiful spot for concerts. Area is gaining popularity for outdoor events.
- **East Belfast School**: This 3-acre area has a baseball and soccer field, and a playground. The facility also has an indoor gymnasium.
- **Eleanor Crawford Park**: This is a very small, triangular shaped park with benches.
- **Former Governor Anderson School**: This 5-acre site includes baseball, football and softball fields, a playground, and an outdoor ice rink. There are 50 parking spaces available.
- **Friendship Park**: This site is privately owned and contains a softball field and horseshoe pit.
- **Heritage Park**: This area is adjacent to the boat launching ramp and public landing. It provides an unobstructed view of the harbor and upper Penobscot bay, and is equipped with picnic tables and benches for the use of the public. It also supports public events.
- **Kirby Lake (The Muck)**: This is a half-acre area which is used for ice skating during the winter months. The area is lighted and has a shelter where skaters can put on their skates.
- **Public Launching Ramp**: This is a 1.5-acre area, which includes a paved boat launch ramp. It is bordered by floats, which provide temporary docking space
for boatmen using the ramp, a parking area for 32 cars and trailers, and toilet and shower facilities. Fuel and water are available at the adjacent public landing.

- **Skateboard Park:** This site has paved surfaces and ramps for skateboarding.
- **Sportsman Park:** This is a 21-acre site with a stream for fishing. Future development of its wooded setting could include walking trails, cross-country ski trails, and other outdoor recreation activities.
- **Steamboat Landing:** In 1999, MBNA donated a portion of its waterfront property to the City. A gazebo is used for weddings, concerts, poetry readings, and picnics. The City also owns the Boathouse at the park which it uses for public events and rentals to public and private parties. The park also is used for several events, such as Belfast Wienerfest and outdoor plays by the Maskers Theater.
- **Wales Park:** This two-acre plot accommodates a softball and soccer field. There are horseshoe pits, a picnic shelter, and swings and monkey bars for children.
- **Walsh Field Recreation Area:** Includes A) Dog Park - Open in 2008, this park was created by the Friends of Belfast Parks and members of the community as a gift to the City, its dog owners, and their dogs. B) Little League Baseball Field; C) Softball Field and D) Little River Trailhead, developed and maintained by the Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition.
- **4-Season Ski, Hike, Bike Area (former El Depot Ski Slope):** Re-opened in 2010 this former ski area has slopes for sledding, snowboarding, skiing, hiking mountain biking

There are also private health and recreational establishments that are available to Belfast residents. They include the Bay-Area Fitness, Belfast Dance Studio, the Game Loft, Waterfall Arts, and the YMCA. The YMCA opened its new facility in 2001 (including a walking track, gymnasium, and weight room) and its indoor pool in 2009. The City provides an annual subsidy to the YMCA, which allows income eligible residents to become YMCA members at no cost or at a reduced rate.

(6). A list of local and regional land trusts in the area.

- **Coastal Mountains Land Trust (active in region):** [www.coastalmountains.org/](http://www.coastalmountains.org/) The City has active agreements with this Land Trust.
- **Forest Society of Maine:** [www.fsmaine.org/](http://www.fsmaine.org/)
- **Friends of Unity Wetlands:** [www.friendsofunitywetlands.org/](http://www.friendsofunitywetlands.org/)
- **Maine Audubon:** [www.maineadubon.org/](http://www.maineadubon.org/)
- **Maine Coast Heritage Trust (active in region):** [www.mcht.org/](http://www.mcht.org/) The City has an easement agreement with the Heritage Trust to manage City owned Heritage Park.
- **Maine Farmland Trust (active in region):** [www.mainefarmlandtrust.org/](http://www.mainefarmlandtrust.org/) The Maine Farmland Trust also has offices in downtown Belfast.
D. Policies

Many policies are dictated by city ordinance. See Section 38 in the City Code of Ordinances for Parks and Recreation codes. Section 38-32 specifies the purpose of the Commission.

(1). To maintain/upgrade existing recreational facilities as necessary to meet current and future needs.

(2). To preserve open space for recreational use as appropriate.

(3). To seek to achieve or continue to maintain at least one major point of public access to major water bodies for boating, fishing, and swimming, and to work with nearby property owners to address concerns.

E. Strategies

(1). Develop/Create a list of recreation needs or develop a recreation plan to meet current and future needs. Assign a committee or town official to explore ways of addressing the identified needs and/or implementing the policies and strategies outlined in the plan.

(2). Include any capital needs identified for recreation facilities in the Capital Investment Plan. Explore the use of Federal and State money to fund expenditures for outdoor recreation.

(3). Work with public and private partners to extend and maintain a network of trails for motorized and non-motorized uses. Connect with regional trail systems where possible. Give particular attention to the need for City-owned cross-country skiing and nature study areas, and City-owned walking/jogging paths along Belfast Harbor. Key projects include:

- **Belfast Harbor Walk:** from the Boathouse at Steamboat Landing about 1 mile to Searsport Ave via the Armistice Bridge and Footbridge Road. This walkway provides connectivity along Belfast’s working waterfront and is scheduled to be constructed in 2013. The City has obtained $800,000 in state and federal grants and committed about $1,000,000 in City funds to its construction.

- **Belfast Rails-to-Trails:** from the Veterans Memorial Bridge (Route 1) about 3+ miles to Kaler Road via the former Belfast-Moosehead rail line. The City purchased the former railroad right-of-way in 2010 at a cost of $200,000 and in 2012-2013 it is conducting a feasibility study to provide a conceptual lay-out for the trail. The City has explored working with the Coastal Mountains Land Trust on this project (near and long term).
(4). Work with an existing local land trust or other conservation organizations to pursue opportunities to protect important open space or recreational land.

(5). Provide education regarding the benefits and protections for landowners allowing public recreational access on their property.

(6). Continue to maintain and improve the system of snowmobile trails throughout the City’s rural area. Inventory trails, natural areas, and open space corridors in Belfast.
Belfast Comprehensive Plan

Recreation

Map prepared by Eastern Maine Development Corporation
Sources: City of Belfast, OMLT, MDOT and MEGIS
Map refined: June, 2010

LEGEND

- State roads
- City roads
- Private/Undeveloped roads
- Belfast Municipal Airport
- Perennial streams
- Water
- Conservation lands *

SOURCES:  City of Belfast, CMLT, MDOT and MEGIS

Some conservation lands may not be publicly accessible.

RECREATIONAL FEATURES

- Belfast Free Library
- Belfast Historical Society and Museum
- Boat launch
- Water access
- YMCA
- Pedestrian Footbridge

Parks

A - Belfast City Park
B - Heritage Park
C - Back Bay Park
D - Little Lake ("The Muck")
E - Eleanor Crawford Park
F - Eastside Mini-park
G - Friendship Park
H - Spotted-Duck Park
I - Shinnecock Landing
J - Belfast Dog Park
K - Belfast Bay Park

Schools

1 - Belfast Area High School
2 - Belfast Academy
3 - Captain Albert W. Stevens School
4 - Belfast East
5 - University of Maine (Hutchins College Center)

Point locations are approximate