

7. PARKS AND RECREATION

Recreation planning involves the coordination of public and private endeavors to provide a variety of leisure opportunities in suitable locations, which adequately meet the needs of the present and future community population. It involves program management as well as park development. More recently, the concept of recreation planning has been expanded to include all aspects of making a community a more desirable place to live.

This chapter inventories existing passive and active recreation amenities, identifies standards for the provision of recreation facilities, and sets forth short- and long-term objectives for meeting future needs.

7.1 Parks and Recreation Department

In 1971, a summer playground program was developed at the Essex Middle and Elementary Schools. The 1971 Town Report states that contributions were made to the Boy's Baseball League. The skating rink at Foster Road and Sand Hill Road was in operation. The usual contribution was made of \$7,500 to the Essex Junction swimming pool from the \$15,000 allotted in the budget for Recreation. In 1972, a part-time Recreation Department was created. Community recreation needs continued to develop, and a full-time Parks and Recreation Department was created in 1979.

As of 2010, the Parks and Recreation Department had responsibility for six areas of service: Recreation; Park Maintenance and Development; the Essex Senior Citizen Bus; Sand Hill Park Pool; Cemetery Maintenance; and the Extended School Program. The Town Parks and Recreation Department provides recreational opportunities for all Town residents, inclusive of the Village. However, the Department only maintains those facilities that are located in the Town outside the Village. The Village of Essex Junction also has a full-time Recreation Department, which maintains all of the parks within the Village. Both Town and Village Recreation Departments strive to provide programs that complement each other.

7.2 2008 Essex Open Space Plan

The 2008 Essex Open Space Plan, incorporated herein, defines public and private outdoor recreation areas (parks, recreation fields, trail corridors, golf courses) as a type of open space. The plan notes that up until the 1970s, local residents relied largely on the generosity of private landowners to access land for hunting, fishing, hiking and other traditional outdoor pursuits. As Essex developed from a rural to an increasingly suburban community, many large private holdings were subdivided for commercial and residential use and then developed or posted, barring continued public access. Fragmented ownership has made the process of gaining access to land for recreation increasingly difficult and expensive.

Since the 1970s the Town of Essex has actively acquired land and easements for public uses, with ongoing community support. Updates from the 2008 Essex Open Space Plan, regarding the Town's public and private recreation areas have been made to this chapter.

7.3 National Parks Classification System

An understanding of how the Town's parks are classified is necessary as a prelude to the inventory. Parks can be classified in a way that acknowledges service areas of varying sizes, the travel time it takes to reach the park, the means of access, and different levels of design and management. The practical aspect of park classification is that the classification of a facility implies a commitment of resources to develop and manage it to an adequate level. The following is a classification system adapted from the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) that describes the types of parks that serve residents of the Town outside the Village.

Community Parks – The community park is the largest of the various types of parks in the classification system. Typically at least 10 to 25 acres in size, this is generally a ride-to park. The community park should possess diverse environmental features such as a pond, some open space, and a forest. It should also be suited for intense recreational activities, and should have facilities for people of all ages. Such facilities might include a baseball or softball diamond, a basketball court, a tennis court, an ice skating rink, playground equipment, shuffleboard courts, a picnic area, and an outdoor nature study area.

Neighborhood Parks – Neighborhood parks provide passive and active recreation opportunities specifically suited to the population of the neighborhood the park is intended to serve. For example, a neighborhood park that serves a single-family residential area might consist of a softball field, playground equipment, and a picnic area. In contrast, a neighborhood park suitable for a condominium project with few children might contain a tennis court and a basketball court. A neighborhood park is smaller than a community park, ranging in size from one acre to about 15 acres. These spaces are often associated with an elementary school and are pedestrian-oriented.

Mini-Parks – A mini-park is a very specialized recreation space that is usually an acre or less in size. The mini-park provides recreational opportunities for a very concentrated and limited population, and may guarantee a reservation of green space within subdivisions. It usually serves a radius of several blocks and is almost exclusively accessed by pedestrians. Mini-parks should be low-maintenance facilities.

A common type of mini-park is the tot lot, which provides playground equipment for children living within a concentrated neighborhood area. A mini-park designed for senior citizens would contain horseshoes and/or a shuffleboard court in addition to walking and sitting areas.

Natural Areas – Natural areas offer the potential for multi-purpose recreational use for the entire community. These sites contain significant natural features such as forests, bodies of water and high elevations. These areas can be used for conservation purposes or, with proper management and use, can provide varied recreational opportunities without damaging the natural qualities of the site.

7.4 Inventory and Analysis of Town Recreation Facilities

A variety of public and private parcels are available for recreational use in the Town outside the Village. These sites are listed in Table 7-1 by classification, and their locations may be viewed on Map 4, *Parks and Recreation*.

Table 7-1 RECREATION AREAS INVENTORY, TOWN OF ESSEX OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE 2010			
Classification	Site Name	Map Key ¹	Acreage
Public Neighborhood Areas			
	Myers Park	11	1.00
	Pinewood Park	22	7.42
	Pioneer Park	23	0.18
	Saxon Hallow Park	28	1.29
	TOTAL	-	9.89
Community Public Parks/Play Areas			
	Essex Elementary School ²	2	2.00
	Essex Middle School ³	7	10.00
	Prairie Fields- Essex Middle School ⁴	4	8.00
	Fort Ethan Allen Parade Grounds ⁵	6	13.97
	Foster Road Park	7	9.00
	Founders Memorial School ⁶	8	2.00
	Pearl Street Park	20	13.20
	Sand Hill Park	24	23.75
	Tree Farm ⁷	25	99.10
	TOTAL	-	181.02
Public Natural Areas			
	Essex Elementary School- Open Space	1	8.59
	Forestdale Natural Area	5	21.77
	Indian Brook Conservation Area	9	575.00
	Lamell Natural Area	10	4.60
	Lussier Property (Private, deeded trails only)	35	
	Mathieu Town Forest	14	76.30
	Myers Natural Area	17	5.70
	Saxon Hill (E.J. School District)	26	89.61
	Saxon Hill Forest (Private, deeded trails)	27	-
	Shillingford Crossing	29	6.82
	Whitcomb Meadows	31	2.98
	TOTAL	-	791.37

Public Undeveloped Open Space			
	Land Farm Parcel I	34	7.50
	Lang Farm Parcel H	13	7.50
	Lang Farm Parcel H	12	34.72
	Meadows Edge Parcel	15	37.46
	Painesville Manor Parcel	19	5.50
	Petrie Parcel	21	6.20
	Skyline Parcel	30	6.70
	TOTAL	-	105.58
Public Miscellaneous Space			
	Essex Free Library	3	0.64
	Memorial Hall	16	0.12
Regionally-owned Spaces			
	Colchester Pond Natural Area (WVPD)	33	127.21
	Overlook Park (WVPD)	18	5.00
	Woodside Park (WVPD)	32	57.80
	TOTAL	-	190.01
Private Sites			
	Essex Country Club	-	-
	Family Fun Center	-	-
	Links at Lang Farm	-	-
	Racquets Edge Health/Fitness Centers	-	-
Source: Essex Recreation Department and Community Development Department			
*Acreage information taken from the 2006 Essex Town Plan, when available			
¹ Site numbers correspond to locations on Town Parks and Recreation Inventory Map (2009) and Map 4, <i>Parks and Recreation</i> .			
² Of the 11.95 acre parcel, an estimated two acres are used for recreational purposes.			
³ Of the 52.64 acre parcel, an estimated 10 acres are used for recreational purposes.			
⁴ Approximately 8 acres of on the Essex Middle School parcel are developed into recreational fields.			
⁵ This parcel is part of a 20 acre parcel managed cooperatively with the Town of Colchester.			
⁶ Of the 38.06 parcel, an estimated 2 acres are used for recreational purposes.			
⁷ This parcel of land was deeded to the Town Essex and Village of Essex Junction by the state on June 30, 1998 for a period of 10 years, with the option for renewal for two (2) additional terms.			
⁸ Acreage not included in "TOTAL" because public access is to the trails only.			

An analysis of the adequacy of the Town's recreation facilities was performed in 2004 in association with an update of the Town's recreation impact fee program. The analysis included an inventory of major existing recreation facilities in the Town outside the Village (Table 7-2) and considered recreation needs through year 2010 based on random sample survey of Town residents (from the list of registered voters – see Table 7-3). A detailed analysis of the adequacy of existing facilities is available in the Parks and Recreation Department.

TABLE 7-2: INVENTORY OF RECREATION FACILITIES, DECEMBER 2009

	Regulation Ballfields	Youth/ Softball Fields	Run. Track	Trails	Soccer Fields	Multi Purpose Field	Tennis Courts	Basketball Courts	Playgrounds	Pool/Beach	Ice Rick – Indoor/Out.	Picnic Shelter	Restrooms/ Portalets(P)	Snack/Conc.	Picnic Tables	Boat Access	Camping	Golf	Batting Cages	Parking
Shillingford Crossing				Y																
Tree Farm				Y	12								1							Y
Whitcomb Meadows				Y																
WVPD – Colchester Pond Natural Area				Y																
WVPD – Overlook Park															6					Y
WVPD – Woodside Park				Y												1				Y
TOTAL	1	6	3	--	6+	8.5	9	4.5	8	2	2	2	5	1	31	3	1	--	--	--
Private Recreation Sites:																				
Essex Country Club													Y	Y				Y		Y
Family Fun & Entertainment Center													Y	Y				Y	Y	Y
Links at Lang Farm													Y	Y				Y		Y
Racquet's Edge Health/Community Fitness Center			Y				Y	Y	Y	Y			Y					Y	Y	Y

Source: Essex Recreation Department and Community Development Department

Notes:

* Soccer fields overlap with ballfields.

** There are 3 primitive campsites available.

Open only during scheduled activities.

In its annual evaluation of recreation projects to be undertaken, the Parks and Recreation Department uses two criteria – the condition of existing equipment and need based on the 2004-2010 Recreation Needs Assessment. Priority is given to upgrading existing parks where equipment no longer meets current safety standards. Development of projects where funding is not available is deferred to later years.

Projects recommended at the time this plan is being updated, not necessarily in priority order, are listed in Table 7-3. An updated Recreation Needs Assessment is scheduled for 2011.

Table 7-3 2004-2010 RECREATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT RECOMMENDATIONS	
Administration:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase software allowing on-line registrations and credit card payments. Online registration and credit card payment is available. 35 percent of registrations occur online. • Hire FTE (½ with P&R and ½ with DPW). Budget priorities have not allowed hiring of this staff. • Developed manual including policies, rules and regulations, and operational procedures. • Conduct resident survey every 5 years in collaboration with update to the Town Plan and Recreational Needs Assessment.
Programs:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a recreation program fund. A program fund proposed in 2005 and 2010 budgets. • Program offerings be coordinated with those of the Essex Junction Recreation and Parks Department. (Ongoing)
Facilities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a list of bicycle/pedestrian path projects recommended for completion between 2004-10. The Trails Committee is working with the Public Works Director to develop a priorities list for future projects. • Develop a strategy to educate residents on the location of all public recreation lands available to them. Trails and Recreation maps are available online and at the Town office. • Town staff continue to actively participate in the public/private collaborative effort to develop the former Tree Farm into a regional soccer facility. The Town has a representative on Tree Farm Management Board that oversees the management of the soccer facility. • Continue to place a high priority on finding a skatepark site. A skatepark was built at Maple Street Park in 2008. • Budget additional funding for the Sand Hill Sprayground to build a facility sized to accommodate the current level of use and evaluate its filtration system. A sprayground opened in June 2010. • Complete Foster Road Park and Founders Athletic Fields as planned. To begin in FYE 2012 • Study the feasibility for a community recreation center. A study has been put on hold while police and municipal building issue are resolved. • Evaluate the need for a dog park. A Dog Park Committee has been developed and potential sites are being explored. • Formally adopt a capital equipment program (CEP) to address long-term recreation vehicle and equipment needs. (Completed) • Consider whether maintenance of park vehicles, equipment, and the Senior Bus should be conducted by the Public Works Department. Not feasible with current staffing. • Ensure better compliance with ADA and plan for any needed modifications. Future playgrounds will be handicapped accessible. • Better assess the need for an Essex Tree Board including whether such responsibility needs to be committee-based or could be assigned to an existing Town department. The idea of a Tree Board was proposed to the Selectboard and at the time the decision was made that there was not a need for a Tree Board.

Source: Essex Recreation Department

As part of past recreation planning efforts, the Town Plan Parks and Recreation Committee met with representatives of baseball, softball, soccer, lacrosse and other recreation programs. A common theme expressed by participants was that recreation programs in Essex benefit from a high level of youth participation and adult assistance. Recreation providers noted competing needs for available fields and scheduling difficulties. Requests were made both for more fields and greater Town involvement in field maintenance.

7.5 Natural Areas in Essex

The following is a description of natural areas located in the Town outside of the Village, which offer diverse recreation potential. These areas are illustrated on Map 14, *Significant Natural Areas*.

Private Conservation Areas

Saxon Hill Forest

This 743-acre forest offers the potential for carrying out all aspects of sound multi-use forest management. Resources in the forest include four reservoir areas, 12 miles of cross-country ski trails, numerous species of wild flowers and a proliferation of red, scotch and white pine trees. In 1977, the Forest was designated a Resource Preservation District-Industrial, and it was envisioned that limited industrial development in certain parts of the Forest would be compatible with its natural resources. Only 90 acres of the forest are under public ownership. The Essex Junction School District retained the top of Saxon Hill and the lands immediately east of Saxon Hill Road. In FYE 2005, the Town arranged a 25-year lease agreement with the Essex Junction School District allowing the 90-acre parcel to be used for outdoor non-motorized recreation, conservation, and school activities. The Town has worked with a non-profit group to develop a network of mountain bike trails within the 90 acre parcel. The remaining undeveloped portion predominately is owned by Forestdale Heights, Inc., a private development firm.

Protection of the trees is perhaps the primary means of preserving the amenities the forest offers. The trees enhance the recreational value of the trails and significantly contribute to the aesthetics of the area. Proper forest management techniques need to include harvesting for long-term forest growth. For these reasons, development within the forest should continue to consist of broad belts of trees and large contiguous blocks of forest. In addition, air pollutants for certain industrial processes which might be harmful to tree species should be restricted or prohibited.

The recreational potential of this area has been underutilized. Delineation between industrial and resource preservation uses has been completed by the Planning Commission, including delineation of some non-motorized, multi-use trails.

The Town possesses a network of trail easements within Saxon Hill Forest, which are designated by deed for use by residents and the Town of Essex for pedestrian and non-motorized access to Forest lands. If these trails are disturbed by construction of new industrial buildings, they are relocated by the developer.

The 12 miles of existing dirt roads in the forest serve a variety of purposes, depending upon the season. These trails are used for cross-country skiing and snowmobiling in the winter and hiking and bridle paths in the summer. Because recreational trails would generally be incompatible with roads and driveways in an industrial or commercial setting, they should be located separately. In certain instances, limited crossings may be necessary.

Public Conservation Areas

Indian Brook Reservoir

This approximately 575-acre tract of land lies in the northwestern portion of the Town and contains the 50-acre reservoir, which bears its name. The reservoir provided the public water supply of the Village of Essex Junction until 1973 when that municipality joined the Champlain Water District. The entire parcel was sold in 1977 to a private owner. In 1986, a dream that was held by many residents of Essex became a reality. A bond vote in the amount of \$750,000 for the purchase of the property, dam repairs and necessary property improvements passed overwhelmingly. The Town received a donation of \$16,000 from the Nature Conservancy toward the purchase price of \$435,000.

Renovations to Indian Brook Reservoir took place during 1988. Gates at the dam were in need of repair, which necessitated the lowering of water in the reservoir. No major structural damage was found but small cracks were repaired. Site improvements included upgrading parking lots and roads, establishing a boat launch and picnic site, razing the old water treatment plant and erecting a park sign and trail head markers.

With increasing use of Indian Brook Town Park, the Town has focused on management practices for the facility. All users of the park are required to purchase a permit from the Parks and Recreation Department. An attendant is stationed at the entrance to the park during summer months to ensure that users have the required permit. In the year 2000 the Town approved a detailed management plan for the park, prepared by the Conservation Commission. One major issue has been the spread of Eurasian Milfoil in the reservoir. The Town on an ongoing basis is exploring measures to mitigate the milfoil problem. Another issue has been beavers damming tributaries. While the Town had trapped beavers in the past, beaver baffles have been used on a trial basis since 2008. The Town has contracted with the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps in past summers to maintain the trail system. Finally, an effort by the Winooski Valley Park District to acquire lands around Colchester Pond has resulted in the acquisition of property that will allow a trail link between the two areas.

Winooski River Access and Park

A river-front park open to the public is located in the extreme southwest corner of Essex, between VT Route 15 and the Winooski River. Formerly part of Fort Ethan Allen, 68 Acres was acquired from the U.S. Government in 1973. This area was reduced to 58 acres, when 10 acres formerly dedicated to an old Army firing range was subdivided out and committed to the state for the Woodside Juvenile Rehabilitation Center. The remaining 58 acre property has been deeded over to the Winooski Valley Park District.

This park offers the only public access in the Town of Essex outside the Village to the Winooski River, which forms the entire southern boundary of the tract. Improvements include an access road and a launching ramp for small boats. The potential for development of active recreational facilities is limited because of spring flooding, during which the river temporarily claims some of the lower lands.

This area – which is easily accessible to residents of the western part of Town – is best suited for picnicking, fishing, canoeing, hiking and camping. An additional fishing access along the Winooski River in the vicinity of VT Route 117 in the Town outside the Village is desirable.

The Winooski Valley Park District was awarded a grant in 1985 from the Land and Water Conservation Fund for a scenic overlook off VT Route 15 in the vicinity of 68 Acres. Improvements include a small parking area and picnic tables.

Town School District Forest

The Town School District owns a 30-acre forested parcel contiguous to other school properties in Essex Center. This tract contains a small reservoir, which was originally used as a public water supply for the former Village of Essex Center. Founders Road, a private road owned by the School District, traverses this area and provides access to the Founders School and the Middle School.

This area is best suited for passive recreation, primarily because of steep gullies within its boundaries. The potential for picnicking could be enhanced by the addition of picnic tables and similar accessories.

Town Forest

The Town Forest, donated by Robert Mathieu, covers 76 acres in Essex Center between Sunset Drive and Birchwood Manor. Additional acreage adjacent to the Lang Farm has also been acquired by the Town. One of the most valuable resources on this property is Alder Brook and its associated tributaries and marshlands. The forest includes one small open area with the balance in hemlock, white pine, and related species. The area contains many steep ridges and deep gullies and is best suited for fishing, hiking and similar activities. A rough trail has been cut by the Boy Scouts.

There is presently a trail connection from Sand Hill Park to the Town Forest. Other trail connections to VT Route 15, the school property and the Lang Farm should be developed.

Tree Farm Recreational Facility

The 99-acre Tree Farm Facility, which until 1995 operated as a state tree nursery, was purchased by the Town of Essex in 2010. Formerly, the property was leased to the Town and the Village of Essex for recreational uses. The property was developed and managed by the Tree Farm Management Group, a non-profit organization, as a regional soccer facility.

Alder Brook

Alder Brook flows through the Town of Essex from Westford to the Winooski River. The southern portion of Alder Brook, located south of VT Route 15, is in an area where residential development will be concentrated during the next few decades. This creates a dual challenge: to prevent erosion on the steep slopes flanking the brook and to coordinate the recreational potential of Alder Brook with existing and proposed residential development.

The subdivision regulations presently prohibit construction on banks adjacent to bodies of water except where a road or utility is necessary. Revised subdivision and zoning regulations should include specifications for a suitable buffer strip along Alder Brook in which no construction may occur.

As proposed residential development abutting Alder Brook goes through the subdivision approval process, the Town should consider acquisition of the most sensitive areas and incorporating a greenway/trail system in the vicinity of Alder Brook. Prior to construction of the Circumferential

Highway, a very heavily used trail system connected the Middle School to residential development located in areas including and adjacent to Pinewood Manor.

Browns River

Browns River flows northwesterly through the Town of Essex from Jericho to Westford. As the largest contiguous tract of open land in Essex, the Browns River basin is a keystone to the future economic viability of agriculture in Essex, and is critical to the open/rural element of the Town's character. Therefore, in keeping with the priorities outlined elsewhere in the plan, it is important that the continuation of agricultural land use in this area be encouraged. The other important resource use contribution of the Browns River Valley is for non-organized recreation such as snowmobiling, walking, horseback riding trails and fishing. Currently, land use is relatively stable due to restrictive floodplain zoning and the fact that ownership is in the hands of a few people. However, it must be recognized that the large landownership pattern also brings with it a degree of vulnerability to drastic future change as situations or priorities change for even a single landowner (e.g., amending town subdivision regulations could enable adverse change to the area's existing character). Also, stream bank instability is a concern and should be taken into consideration as land use patterns may change.

Currently, there are undeveloped public accesses to this river, in addition to potential access at each bridge, including parcels owned by the Town. At least one of the Town-owned parcels should be studied for locating a public canoe launch. This open land should be kept accessible because of the fishing and recreational potential of this resource. Therefore, any future development should include public access to Browns River.

7.6 Recreation Impact Fees and Park Land Dedication

Following a 2004 analysis of the adequacy of the Town's recreation facilities, by Burnt Rock Inc. in association with Michael Munson the Selectboard adopted a new recreation impact fee. The impact fee is charged to all new residential units and is intended to pay for recreational facilities that are needed to support growth in the Town. The fee is based on an inventory of existing facilities, the anticipated rate of population growth, and the additional facilities that will be needed in response to that growth. Funds raised from impact fees may be used for recreation expenses that are identified in the Town's Capital Budget.

In lieu of payment of an impact fee, the Planning Commission may require as part of subdivision approval that a developer dedicate land suitably located or reserved for public open space, park land or other recreational purposes. Sites reserved for recreation purposes should have suitable public access. While some of the reserved land may remain as undeveloped open space, at least some of the areas should be suitable for development for active recreational use. When necessary to provide level terrain for tennis courts, ball fields or similar facilities, sites should be graded by the developer.

7.7 Recreation Programs

The mission of the Town of Essex Parks and Recreation Department is to advance parks and recreation efforts that enhance the quality of life for the community of Essex. The Department

continues to offer programs to meet community needs and interests including: *Physical Fitness, Wellness, Hobbies, Personal Growth and Sense of Community*. Some of the listed benefits of these programs are building family unity, teaching vital life skills, elevating personal growth, providing space to enjoy nature, expanding knowledge and feeling great.

The department also promotes community wide events, including the Easter Egg Hunt, Halloween Celebration, Winter Carnival, and the Youth Fishing Derby.

The department continues to work with a number of volunteer boards that administer and run various youth sports organizations throughout Essex. Each organization is guided by the goal of providing a safe, fun atmosphere through which skill development is taught. Without the dedication and tireless effort of these volunteers, Essex would not enjoy such diverse and successful youth sports programs. Those programs include Babe Ruth Baseball, Essex Youth Football, Essex Youth Lacrosse, Essex Youth Soccer, Little League Baseball and Softball.

Future goals of the Parks and Recreation Department are to improve service to the community by expanding the number and variety of programs offered and by undertaking cooperative efforts with other organizations and associations.

7.8 Goals, Objectives and Strategies

Goal 7.1: The Town will facilitate recreational and non-motorized transportation options by further developing and maintaining viable trails.

Objective 7.1.1: Enhance the trail system (hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, and/or horseback riding) in the Town. Link residential neighborhoods to natural areas, schools, parks, recreation facilities, community centers, other neighborhoods, and neighboring municipalities.

Strategy 7.1.1.1: Identify and secure trail connections across and along the Circumferential Highway and Allen Martin Parkway rights-of-way from Pinewood Manor, Lang Farm and Forestdale to schools and the Town Forest.

Strategy 7.1.1.2: Secure rights-of-way and encourage trail construction within corridors identified on Maps 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11.

Strategy 7.1.1.3: Develop and upgrade trails with an emphasis on access, improved signage and adequate parking.

Strategy 7.1.1.4: Encourage a routine maintenance and supervision plan for the public trail system and encourage users to assist in such efforts.

Strategy 7.1.1.5: Maintain a trail guide that maps out the Essex trail network, with access points and policies for use. Continue posting trail signs with handouts for trail users.

Strategy 7.1.1.6: Secure rights-of-way to encourage development of neighborhood trails systems in existing and future residential neighborhoods.

Strategy 7.1.1.7: Map secured trail easements, rights-of-way, etc. whether or not built upon to help in trail planning and linkage.

Objective 7.1.2: Work with Local Motion, to link the multi-use trail system to neighboring towns to expand recreational opportunities and provide safe options for traveling to areas outside of Essex via non-motorized vehicle routes.

Strategy 7.1.2.1: Work with adjoining municipalities, the CCRPC and the CCMPO to facilitate a county-wide path system.

Strategy 7.1.2.2: Collaborate with the Winooski Valley Park District to provide linkage improvements to areas between Indian Brook Park and Colchester Pond.

Objective 7.1.3: Provide adequate and safe opportunities to travel as a pedestrian or bicyclist, both for recreation and transportation purposes, within the Town of Essex.

Strategy 7.1.3.1: Inventory major arterials without sidewalks and prioritize development of new sidewalks along those arterials.

Strategy 7.1.3.2: Provide marked pedestrian crossings, with signals where appropriate, at major intersections.

Strategy 7.1.3.3: Work with the Planning Commission to ensure that new developments are designed and constructed with adequate sidewalks and pathways and have the necessary easements.

Strategy 7.1.3.4: Prioritize bicycle and pedestrian safety when designing or improving road intersections.

Strategy 7.1.3.5: Install traffic calming and other traffic control devices to enhance bicycle and pedestrian safety.

Strategy 7.1.3.6: Work towards the development of transportation-oriented bicycle and pedestrian paths along all major (arterial) highways.

Goal 7.2: The Town will increase the amount of recreational space, both indoor and outdoor, available to groups and individuals within the Essex community.

Objective 7.2.1: Increase indoor recreational opportunities, especially needed during the long winter months, by maximizing the amount of indoor space available to Essex residents.

Strategy 7.2.1.1: Improve coordination and cooperation within the Essex Town School District to make fullest possible use of public schools.

Strategy 7.2.1.2: Encourage more effective use of existing indoor public facilities such as Memorial Hall and the Essex Free Library.

Strategy 7.2.1.3: Encourage private and nonprofit groups (such as churches and service organizations) to make their facilities available for recreational use by Essex residents.

Strategy 7.2.1.4: Study the feasibility of building a community center to provide space for a senior center, an indoor playground for toddlers and preschoolers, and meeting space (especially daytime) for special interest organizations.

Objective 7.2.2: Increase outdoor recreational opportunities by increasing the amount of level field space available to Essex residents involved in team sports.

Strategy 7.2.2.1: Subject to fiscal capability, construct indoor recreation facilities identified in the 2004-2010 Recreation Needs Assessment.

Strategy 7.2.2.2: Acquire land within Essex that can be converted to multi-use fields. Adequate field space is critically limited at the current time. This constraint restricts the type and number of sporting activities that can take place during the outdoor non-winter season, and will only become more acute as the Essex population increases.

Objective 7.2.3: Pursue establishment of a land acquisition and preservation program in tandem with Strategy 9.2.1.1.

Goal 7.3: The vibrancy of the Essex community will be improved by increasing citizen involvement in all aspects of recreation.

Objective 7.3.1: Garner the support of talented and interested individuals in the planning and coordination of recreational activities in Essex, thus capitalizing on the enthusiasm and expertise of Essex residents on behalf of the community at large.

Strategy 7.3.1.1: Encourage the Parks and Recreation Director to continue to act as a facilitator for nonprofit recreational programs run by volunteers. The director's support as an advocate and liaison will enable program volunteers to focus more directly on other important aspects of their mission.

Strategy 7.3.1.2: Create a Council for the Arts to initiate and facilitate opportunities for Essex citizens of all ages to participate in theater, dance, music, and the visual arts.

Strategy 7.3.1.3: Encourage ad-hoc committees (such as Extended School Program, Little League, soccer, children's programs) to support the work of the Parks and Recreation Director.

Strategy 7.3.1.4: Create an Essex Tree Board to work with the Town Tree Warden to educate and assist local residents in planning and maintenance of trees, landscaping, and natural areas. Residents also can participate in the care of public landscaped areas via "Citizen Pruners" and "Adopt an Island" programs.

Objective 7.3.2: Increase public awareness and use of the vast array of recreational amenities (conventional and natural) and programs available to Essex residents.

Strategy 7.3.2.1: Regularly identify Essex parks and trails in the Recreation Guide sent to residents.

Strategy 7.3.2.2: When necessary, update the guide that specifically maps out the Essex off-road trail network and identifies access points and policies for use.

Strategy 7.3.2.3: Improve signage for Essex Town parks, trails, and parking to create greater familiarity with their existence and location.

Strategy 7.3.2.4: Publish in the Essex Recreation Guide the names and phone numbers of contact persons for sports and recreational activities not formally administered by the Town of Essex. In this way the Town can facilitate residents' involvement in a greater variety of endeavors while assisting volunteer, nonprofit programs with publicity.

Objective 7.3.3: Increase citizen involvement in recreational programs by sustaining a wide variety of program options, so that residents of all ages, abilities, and interests have an opportunity to participate in healthy pastime activities.

Strategy 7.3.3.1: Solicit the input of residents via surveys, Essex Reporter ads, and course evaluation forms to discern the effectiveness of the content, timing, location, and structure of Essex programs meeting individual needs.

Goal 7.4: The Town will continue to improve management of its existing recreational facilities and programs.

Objective 7.4.1: Improve the maintenance of Essex parks and fields.

Strategy 7.4.1.1: Increase the maintenance budget and staff to more adequately care for athletic fields including such activities as fertilizing and liming playing fields, fence repair, etc. The intense scheduling of playing fields, due to the shortage of flat space, has taxed Essex field facilities to a degree that requires more oversight and management.

Strategy 7.4.1.2: Explore the concept of impact fee assessment to new commercial and industrial development.

Strategy 7.4.1.3: Enlist the help of recreation user groups to help maintain the facilities they use.

Objective 7.4.2: Improve the facilities at each of the parks or fields owned currently or acquired in the future by the Town of Essex.

Strategy 7.4.2.1: Prepare a master plan to assess the assets and needs of each park or field in the Essex inventory, then prioritize improvements.

Strategy 7.4.2.2: Improve the number and/or quality of such amenities as picnic tables, benches, trash/recycling receptacles, playground equipment, covered outdoor meeting areas, lighting (especially for fields, tennis courts, and basketball courts), bleachers, backstops and goals, fences, equipment storage barns, attractive landscaping, and irrigation (for grass athletic fields which endure intense use).

Strategy 7.4.2.3: Update the Indian Brook Management Plan every five years.

Strategy 7.4.2.4: Develop a Trail Maintenance and Management Plan for Indian Brook.

Objective 7.4.3: Develop and maintain more trails in parks and natural areas in Essex.

Strategy 7.4.3.1: Apply for state and federal funds to develop and maintain trails.

Strategy 7.4.3.2: Encourage active public involvement in trail construction and maintenance.

Strategy 7.4.3.3: Continue volunteer trail work day events and Trail-Keeper program.

Objective 7.4.4: Work with experts to determine when and how wood might be harvested, as fossil fuel prices escalate. Set guidelines as to who could gather the wood, whether it would be sold by the Town for pelletization, etc.

Objective 7.4.5: Maximize coordination with the Village Recreation Department to provide a full range of recreational opportunities in an efficient and cost effective manner.

Strategy 7.4.5.1: Explore options for improving coordination with the Village Recreation department, including the potential for merging the Town and Village Departments into a single entity, regardless of whether a full merger between the Town and Village occurs.