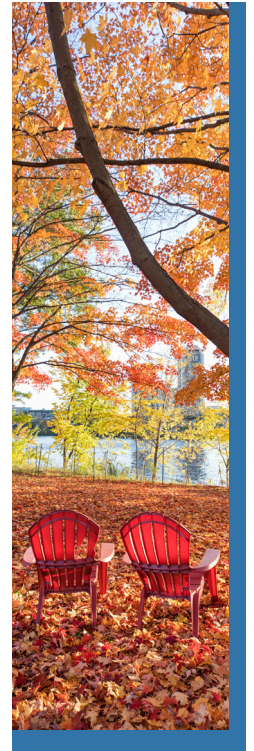




# Our Parks Our Plan



## City of Cambridge Parks & Open Space Plan

2023-2030



# City of Cambridge

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**From top, clockwise:** Charles River Park, Sacramento Field, Sacramento Field, Donnelly Field, North Point Park, Clement G. Morgan Park.



# Our Parks Our Plan





## Parks & Open Space Planning

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For more information and updates, visit:  
[www.cambridgema.gov/openspaceplan](http://www.cambridgema.gov/openspaceplan)

# Cambridge's Open Space System

Public open space is any space between buildings that is open to the public. Examples of public open spaces are: parks, plazas, sidewalks, and streets.

There are 109 open spaces in Cambridge covering over 490 acres of land. The City of Cambridge owns most of the public open space (321 acres), and the remaining 169 acres are owned by other agencies, non-profits, businesses, and institutions.

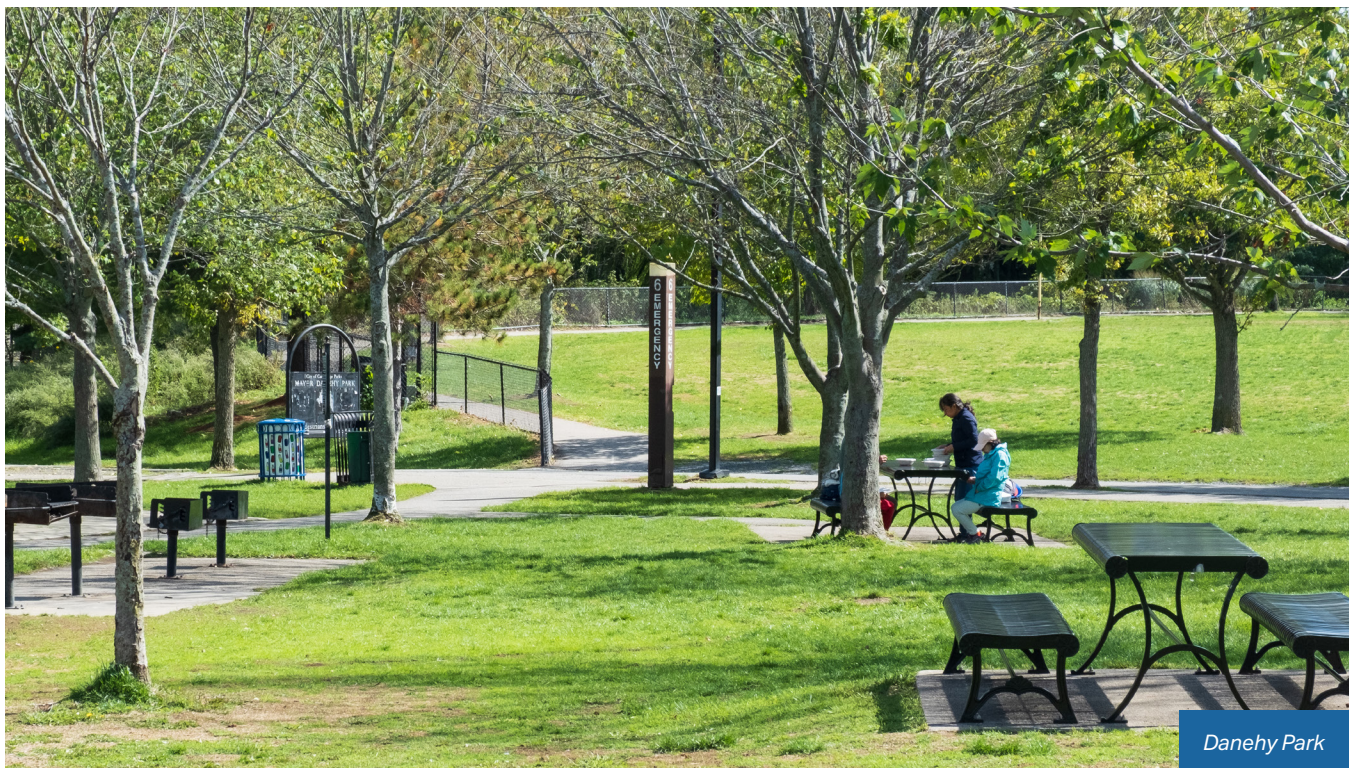
## Parks, Playgrounds, and Reservations

Cambridge has several large parks and nature reservations. Most parks are small neighborhood parks. Our large parks can fit many activities like sports fields,

playgrounds, walking paths, and restrooms. Danehy Park in Neighborhood Nine is a large park with walking and biking paths, six sports fields, and multiple playgrounds. Our small or medium parks have less space, but most still fit a few different amenities. For example, David Nunes Park in Cambridgeport is a small neighborhood park with a basketball court, lawn, and plaza.

## Plazas and Pocket Parks

Public plazas and pocket parks are often included on main streets or beside a busy intersection. People use these hard-surface spaces to sit, relax, people watch, and gather. Popular plazas in Cambridge include Carl Barron Plaza in Central Square, and Brattle Square in Harvard Square.



Danehy Park

### Sidewalks and Streets

Sidewalks provide comfortable places to travel and gather beside our streets. Most of our streets are spaces for car travel, but can also provide spaces to gather. Benches, street trees, landscaping, and bus stops all impact how we use our streets and sidewalks.

Streets and sidewalks can also sometimes be temporarily closed off so people can use them like parks. They can be places where people hold events and activities.



Danehy Park



Charles River Reservation



Pocket Park, Huron Ave



Brattle Square

**What is a Privately Owned-Public Space (POPS)?**  
Not all public spaces are owned by the City. Some parks are owned by businesses or institutions that are required to allow public access. These spaces look like other parks, but the City doesn't directly own them or handle maintenance.

# The Planning Process

## Why Write an Open Space Plan?

The purpose of the plan is to:

- Provide useful information about the variety of open spaces in Cambridge.
- Describe the goals and objectives that guide the City's investments into these spaces.
- Outline actions and projects that will help to protect and enhance Cambridge's open space resources for current and future community members.

Open space planning in Cambridge is an ongoing, collaborative process with participation from several different City departments. This Open Space Plan provides a "snapshot" of Cambridge's open space planning initiatives at this point in time. The Plan builds on many planning efforts that have been undertaken in the past. The Plan is also a look forward at initiatives that are planned for the next seven years.

## Benefits of Open Space

Parks and open spaces are a key part of the City's infrastructure for maintaining and improving quality of life.

Our work is rooted in the idea that parks and open spaces are essential to a healthy and vibrant city, and that they play a key role in climate and social resilience, encouraging healthy lifestyles, and community life.

Parks and open spaces have many benefits such as:

- Providing spaces for play and learning for people of all ages.
- Enhancing climate resilience.
- Providing a habitat for local flora and fauna.
- Building strong communities by giving people a place to connect.





Cambridge's parks and open spaces offer amenities and opportunities that improve the quality of life for all people in Cambridge. Whether you live, work, play, worship, or learn here, Cambridge's parks and open spaces offer a variety of spaces and activities to serve a diverse population.

# Open Space Needs Assessment

As a part of our planning process, we conducted an Open Space Needs Assessment. This Needs Assessment helps us begin to answer the complex questions, “what are our open space needs in Cambridge?” and “are the benefits of open space in Cambridge distributed equitably?”

We used Envision Cambridge core values to guide the Needs Assessment:

## Livability

We value a vibrant built and natural environment and support sustainable transportation with affordable and convenient access to daily needs and recreational resources.

## Sustainability and Resilience

We take responsible action to reduce our impact on the environment and build a resilient city and strong community.

## Diversity and Equity

We are a welcoming community that celebrates our diversity and ensures access to affordable housing choices and opportunities to succeed.

## Community Health and Wellbeing

We promote healthy and active lifestyles in a supportive, safe community with diverse opportunities to connect with our neighbors and nature and to engage in civic life.

## Economic Opportunity

We provide opportunity and stability through access to quality jobs, workforce development and training, and livable wages that support economic security for residents.

## Learning

We embrace lifelong learning and celebrate art and creativity in our culturally rich community.





### Categories

Guided by these core values, we used geographic data to take a deeper look in four categories:

- **Access and distribution**  
(where, how much, and what kind of open space we have)
- **Resilience**  
(how parks can help reduce our climate change risks)
- **Public health**  
(factors relating to health risk)
- **Community**  
(who we are)

### Why Do a Needs Assessment?

We use this data to understand how to improve existing parks. We use data to guide which parks and open spaces should be improved first, and what types of improvements best address community needs. It also helps us understand where opportunities to create new open spaces or expand access to existing open spaces would be especially beneficial.

### Using an Equity Lens

We examined these data through an equity lens. An equity lens acknowledges we do not all start from the same place and may have different needs. We must adjust imbalances and injustices so that everyone gets what they need. An equity lens helps us choose what data to collect, how to analyze it, and how we communicate our findings.

In examining need for open space, we looked at factors beyond just where existing open spaces are located. We also looked at information about our community. Different characteristics like income, race, ethnicity, disability, and others impact how we understand need. These characteristics are not spread evenly across the city. For example, our data showed us that households with very low incomes are concentrated in certain parts of the city. Using an equity lens means we acknowledge these differences. We categorize places with concentrated poverty as high-need, and use our resources to improve the parks and open spaces in these areas.

*See Appendix A for more information about the Open Space Needs Assessment.*

# Community Engagement

We developed this plan with people who live, work, play, and learn in Cambridge. Over fourteen months, the Community Development Department (CDD) led a community engagement process to understand people’s relationship to and opinions of Cambridge’s parks and open spaces. These conversations helped us craft the vision, goals, and strategies in the plan.

Engagement activities included:

- Four online surveys
- Four virtual community meetings and workshops
- Seven meetings with neighborhood groups, City advisory boards, and City-organized resident committees
- Three focus groups with Cambridge Youth Programs and the Cambridge Community Learning Center
- Seven pop-up events in parks
- Virtual office hours with the planning team

The planning team held most engagement activities virtually due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. When possible we also visited parks, youth centers, and the Community Learning Center. It was important to meet people where they are and speak to people who the City does not usually hear from.

The planning team divided the community engagement process into four phases, which aligned with four phases of the planning process.

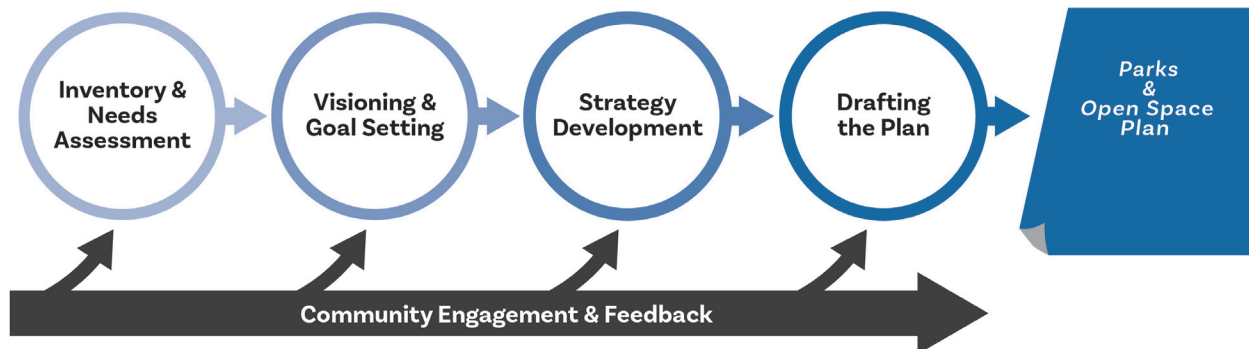
**Phase 1:** Inventory & Needs Assessment

**Phase 2:** Visioning and Goal Setting

**Phase 3:** Strategy Development

**Phase 4:** Drafting the Plan

*See Appendix B for more information about the community engagement for this project.*





Plan for *nature*

Take the **Park Use & Access** survey!  
[www.surveymonkey.com/r/OurParks3](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/OurParks3)

**Our Parks Our Plan**  
 Parks & Open Space Planning

**Middle School Program**  
**3P's AND 1V**  
 I want to take **PLIDE** in what I do  
 I want Middle School to be **PO**  
 I want school mil...

**Monday, May 9, 2022**

8:35-9:45	Downtime	9:45-10:15	...
9:45-10:15	Focus Group	10:15-10:45	...
10:15-10:45	Let's Vote	10:45-11:15	...

**From top left, clockwise:** Focus group at Russell Youth Center, dream park drawing, pop up at Timothy J. Toomey Jr. Park, focus group at Gately Youth Center, pop up at Joan Lorentz Park, social media promoting a survey



# Our Parks and Open Space Vision

Through a variety of inclusive engagement strategies, the community developed the following vision statement. We are working to ensure our parks and open spaces meet the needs and reflect the values of our community.

***Cambridge's parks and open spaces are essential and interconnected spaces that welcome all members of our diverse community.***

***Our parks and open spaces:***

- ***Welcome people to engage in a wide variety of active or passive activities. In our parks and open spaces people can come to be together or spend time alone.***
- ***Are inclusive and accessible places for gathering, relaxing, being active, and playing in well-maintained facilities, landscapes, and nature.***
- ***Foster culture and the arts, providing spaces for spectacle and performance to express and inspire peoples' creativity.***
- ***Support our quality of life and provide places and moments where memories are made.***



# Our Parks and Open Space Goals

Through our community process, we developed a set of 12 goals, organized into four categories, to guide our progress toward the community's shared vision. The goals and recommended actions are outlined on the following pages.

## Expanding & Enhancing Park Access for All

page 13

**Goal A:** Make parks and park programs welcoming for all.

**Goal B:** Improve access to open space, with an emphasis in areas of high open space need.

**Goal C:** Make it easier for people to get to and travel through our parks and open spaces in ways that are active and sustainable.

## Providing Environmental Benefits in our Urban Context

page 19

**Goal D:** Protect and enhance natural areas.

**Goal E:** Use our parks and open spaces to make Cambridge more resilient to climate change.

## Activating & Enhancing Spaces

page 23

**Goal F:** Promote healthy play and active recreation for people of all ages, abilities, genders, and backgrounds.

**Goal G:** Increase active and passive activity in public spaces.

**Goal H:** Make comfortable spaces where people can gather and connect.

**Goal I:** Bring creativity, arts, and culture to parks and public spaces.

## Enhancing & Improving Design, Operations, and Management

page 31

**Goal J:** Build high-quality parks that embody our community's priorities and wide range of interests.

**Goal K:** Aim to keep parks clean and keep equipment in working order.

**Goal L:** Improve how we share information about parks and open spaces. Highlight opportunities for learning and community building.

## Goal A

# Make parks and park programs welcoming for all.

Cambridge's parks and open spaces are for everybody. That said, barriers to enjoying parks exist. These can take many forms, including physical or social barriers. Some barriers can be addressed through design. Others will need ongoing work and learning, and examination around how our parks function.

People can have different perceptions of or experiences in the same spaces. A park that feels comfortable and welcoming to one person may not feel the same way for somebody else. It will be important to continue to engage with a variety of park users about what is working well, and

what is not. We also need to be proactive in reaching out to groups who may be underrepresented in typical civic processes around parks.

It is not enough to remove barriers. We need to actively work to make parks welcoming to all. It is important for our parks to be inclusive, inviting, and encourage a sense of belonging.



# Actions

- 1 Expand community engagement with underserved groups about parks and open spaces.
  - 1.1 Pilot a youth engagement program/ partnership to continue engagement with young people about parks.
- 2 Continue to prioritize Universal Design principles and inclusive park design.
  - 2.1 Develop universal design best practices and inclusive design guidelines, and apply to park design.
  - 2.2 Identify possible locations for additional Universal Design parks and playgrounds that emphasize universal design principles in design.
- 3 Continue targeted capital improvements to improve park and open space accessibility.
- 4 Encourage language access and multi-lingual access to park information.
- 5 Prioritize inclusive park design and avoid defensive architecture.
- 6 Encourage new and existing privately owned public spaces (POPS) to provide signage clearly indicating public access.
- 7 Work with new Community Safety Department on park and open space safety.
- 8 Review park lighting practices to help nighttime safety.
- 9 Evaluate barriers to park and open space enjoyment on an ongoing basis.
- 10 Explore how design and management of parks can help serve people who are experiencing homelessness. Collaborate with the Cambridge Multi-Service Center on community engagement with people who are experiencing homelessness.

## Highlight



### Louis A. DePasquale Universal Design Playground

The Louis A. DePasquale Universal Design (UD) Playground is built around the idea that all parts of the space should be as usable as possible, without accommodations, by everyone. In addition to physical accessibility, UD takes sensory, cognitive, and emotional abilities into consideration.

## Goal B

# Improve access to open space, with an emphasis in areas of high open space need.



Cambridge is a dense, developed city. As such, opportunities to expand our open space system are limited. The City has used a variety of strategies to expand access to open space including:

### Leveraging new development

The City leveraged private development which led to three new parks in East Cambridge.

### Acquiring new land

The City recently purchased the BB&N School Field to be used as public open space.

### Privately-Owned Open Spaces (POPS)

POPS are privately owned but are open and accessible to the public. These can be created through agreements with private developers.

### Repurposing current land

The City can assess land it already controls including extra roadway that can be used as public space.

The City will continue to work toward expanding access to open space, but there should be a priority in areas where there is high open space need. See [Appendix A](#) to learn more about the Open Space Needs Assessment. The Needs Assessment also guides how the City can prioritize capital improvement projects. For more information, refer to [Goal J](#).



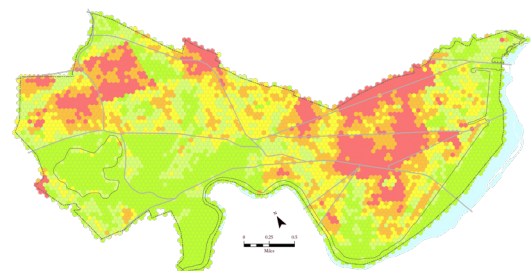
# Actions

- 1 Look for opportunities to acquire existing or create new open space, particularly in areas of high open space need per the Open Space Needs Assessment.
- 2 Evaluate feasibility of off-road path connections to parks and open spaces.
  - 2.1 Evaluate feasibility of connection across tracks near Rindge Avenue and Danehy Park.
  - 2.2 Study feasibility of an off-road path connection between Alewife Brook Parkway and Sherman Street.
  - 2.3 Study feasibility of Fitchburg path to Porter Square and Alewife station.
- 3 Advance zoning recommendations in Alewife Quadrangle area to create public open space.
- 4 Continue to work with private developers and community groups to expand access to public or publicly accessible open space.
- 5 Explore feasibility of pocket parks and similar smaller spaces through right-of-way-recapture.
- 6 Evaluate creating an additional public entrance to Rafferty Park.
- 7 Evaluate opportunities for Danehy Park vent trench area.
- 8 Evaluate reuse of vacant or underutilized City-owned property for open space or temporary park spaces.
  - 8.1 Create temporary park space at corner of Cambridge Street and Grand Junction Multi-Use Path.

## Highlight

### What are areas of high open space need?

We conducted an Open Space Needs Assessment that looked at geographic data on open space access, climate risk, public health factors, and community demographics. These help us identify areas where targeted interventions may be especially beneficial, and where these combine to help us prioritize areas of high need, as this map shows.



For more information, see [Appendix A, Open Space Needs Assessment](#).

## Goal C

# Make it easier for people to get to and travel through our parks and open spaces in ways that are active and sustainable.

According to our surveys, most people visiting parks got there by walking or biking. These active and sustainable modes of a travel encourage physical health.

Active modes will not always be feasible or the preferred choice for everybody or every circumstance. However, these actions aim to make the choice to walk or bike an easier option. This can include improving signage or creating places to stop and rest along the journey.



# Actions

- 1 Expand access to Bluebikes stations in and near parks.
- 2 Continue implementation of Bicycle Network Vision.
- 3 Continue development of off-road multi-use paths.
  - 3.1 Continue development of Grand Junction Multi-Use Path.
  - 3.2 Continue development of Danehy-New Street Connector path.
- 4 Continue development of walking loops and paths within parks and open spaces. Include seating and other amenities along paths.
- 5 Ensure availability of bicycle parking in and near parks.
  - 5.1 Adhere to bicycle parking guidelines when renovating parks.
  - 5.2 Include parking for different styles of bikes such as cargo bikes.
- 6 Explore wayfinding opportunities in and near parks.
- 7 Locate seating along streets, sidewalks, and paths that provide connections to parks.

## Highlight

### Grand Junction Multi-Use Path

The Grand Junction Multi-Use Path is a new off-street path currently under development. The path will run alongside the existing railroad tracks in the Grand Junction corridor from the Boston University Bridge to Somerville. This path will connect many neighborhoods with each other, MIT, business districts, and regional resources like the Charles River.

To learn more about the future path, visit:  
[www.cambridgema.gov/GrandJunction](http://www.cambridgema.gov/GrandJunction)



## Goal D

# Protect and enhance natural areas.



Parks and open spaces play an important role in supporting the environment and adding character to our neighborhoods. Many people enjoy visiting parks because it gives them an opportunity to experience nature. Natural areas like meadow plantings and ponds can encourage biodiversity and provide opportunities for learning and education. (See [Goal L](#) for more.)

In a dense urban setting like Cambridge, it's not always possible to incorporate natural areas into open spaces. (For example, it's

hard to plant a garden on a sports field.) However, even small pockets of nature can be beneficial. Our goal is to use strategic landscape design and planting approaches to protect and enhance our natural areas. The Fresh Pond Reservation in particular is a well-loved open space in Cambridge. The Reservation and other water supply areas are unique and important resources, and need careful stewardship to protect our water quality while also serving our open space interests.



# Actions

- 1 Continue to implement recommendations from the Fresh Pond Master Plan.
  - 1.1 Continue the Black's Nook Restoration Project.
  - 1.2 Continue the Huron Pine Grove Restoration Project.
  - 1.3 Continue the Kingsley Park Slope Stabilization and Accessibility Improvements Project.
- 2 Develop resources and/or programs that leverage parks, open spaces, and natural areas for nature-based learning.
- 3 Plant and maintain landscaped areas to support natural habitats. This includes planting more pollinator gardens, using a naturalized planting approach, and shifting to a more natural maintenance regime.
- 4 Where feasible, leverage parks and open spaces to improve water quality through green and gray infrastructure.
- 5 Establish and strengthen partnerships with non-City organizations to steward natural areas.

## Highlight

### Fresh Pond Reservation Master Plan

The Fresh Pond Reservation Master Plan - completed in 2000 - was the culmination of over two years of work by an advisory committee made up of Cambridge residents and City staff. The Plan includes a management plan for Fresh Pond Reservoir and the surrounding Reservation lands.



## Goal E

# Use our parks and open spaces to make Cambridge more resilient to climate change. Design and program open spaces for a changing climate.

We are already experiencing the impacts of a changing climate. This should factor into park planning and design. This could include designing spaces that provide respite from heat, or to prepare for more extreme storm events. It could also relate to the types of trees planted knowing that our climate patterns will be changing. We can also increase the amount of open space we have (see [Goal B](#)) or make them easier to get to using sustainable modes (see [Goal C](#)).

Parks and open spaces also play a key role in supporting community connections. These connections help to build our social resilience and help us be more prepared for emergencies. See [Goal H](#) for more information on ways parks can support social connections.



Dana Park

# Actions

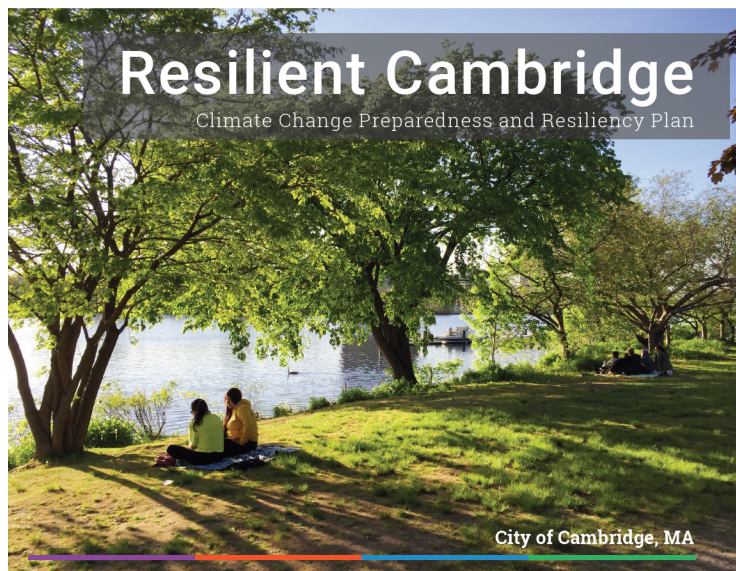
- 1 Continue to implement the Urban Forest Master Plan. Focus on planting more trees in low-canopy neighborhoods.
- 2 Evaluate and expand access to park and playground amenities that can provide relief from heat, such as splash pads, pools, and shade structures.
- 3 Design large-scale parks and open spaces to help with stormwater management.
- 4 Prioritize use of porous materials in new park construction and renovation.
- 5 Leverage parks as resilience hubs. Design parks and develop a system to use our parks to support residents and coordinate resource distribution and services before, during, or after a natural disaster or other emergency situations.
  - 5.1 Explore using parks to host temporary climate-related relief, such as pop-up shade and cooling centers.
  - 5.2 Identify the role of open spaces in emergency situations.
  - 5.3 Evaluate feasibility of pop-up waterplay activities to help keep people cool during extreme heat.

## Highlight

### Resilient Cambridge

The Resilient Cambridge Plan is our plan to prepare for climate change. The plan focuses on the threats from rising temperatures, storms, and sea level rise. Using predictions based on the best available science, the plan did a “stress test” of the city to see where we are at risk. These findings were used to inform this open space planning process.

For more information, visit:  
[www.cambridgema.gov/resilientcambridge](http://www.cambridgema.gov/resilientcambridge)



## Goal F

# Promote healthy play and active recreation for people of all ages, abilities, genders, and backgrounds.

Thoughtful park design offers a variety of ways for people to play. Play can take many forms. Active recreation such as organized sports is an important form of play. These opportunities should be available to all that want to take part.

Play could also take the form of climbing on play structures at a playground. Play can also involve creative thinking, like through building with blocks. Thoughtful park design offers a variety of ways for people to play.

Play is not only for children. We should offer play and recreation opportunities for people of all ages. Part of this is making sure parks support activities and programs that appeal to all ages.

While we often think of play as taking place in playgrounds, it can also happen outside of parks. Playfulness in urban design creates memorable places.





# Actions

- 1 Continue to offer and support a variety of recreational programming.
- 2 Continue to support and organize recreational programming that is accessible to all. Continue recreation programs such as The Cambridge Program that focus on serving people with disabilities.
- 3 Help people engage in sports locally by continuing to collaborate with sports groups and creating spaces that can be used for multiple types of recreation.
- 4 Continue to encourage play in the public realm and playful urban design.
- 5 Design parks to encourage a variety of types of play.
  - 5.1 Determine the feasibility of an adventure playground.
- 6 Design places to encourage play for people of all ages, especially adults and teenagers.
- 7 Design parks to encourage physical activity for a variety of people and park users.
  - 7.1 Continue to collaborate with the Cambridge Public Health Department and other partners to encourage physical activity.
  - 7.2 Design spaces and include equipment that encourage physical activity, such as workout equipment and walking paths.
  - 7.3 Develop programs to encourage physical activity for a variety of people and park users.
  - 7.4 Work with Public Health Department to evaluate access and assess barriers to physical activity.

## Highlight



### Healthy Parks & Playgrounds

Healthy Parks and Playground is a City initiative to provide a diverse range of play opportunities throughout the city that are fun, physically stimulating, and socially engaging. We aim to serve children and adults of all different ages, abilities, and interests.

For more information, visit:  
[www.cambridgema.gov/cdd/parks/osplanning/healthy](http://www.cambridgema.gov/cdd/parks/osplanning/healthy)

## Goal G

# Increase active and passive activity in public spaces.

Public space activation can take the form of cultural events like concerts or performances, activities like neighborhood days or play streets, and things in between. Not every park space makes sense to activate all the time. Part of the benefit of parks is the opportunity for quiet retreat or a calm space.

Quite a bit of park programming already happens, through a range of City departments, including:

- Recreation
- Arts Council
- Cambridge Public Libraries
- Several other City departments

Community partners like business associations and non-profits regularly hold events in public spaces. And through

the Neighborhood Planning Initiative, we are working to make it easier for people to program spaces. This can include park days or play streets to connect with neighbors.

Not every park space makes sense to activate all the time. Part of the benefit of parks is the opportunity for quiet retreat or a calm space.

Parks make great stages for these events, but they can also take place in other parts of the public realm, like plazas, and streets and sidewalks.

Part of the work around this is helping people find park activities that may appeal to them. For more information about this, see [Goal L](#).



# Actions

- 1 Continue Street Performer Program, Summer in the City, and other Cambridge Arts Council program and events.
- 2 Continue Danehy Park Day, Screen on the Green, and other Recreation programs and events.
- 3 Continue and expand Cambridge Plays program.
- 4 Continue and expand Play Streets program.
- 5 Develop toolkit and resources for residents and community groups to organize activities in public spaces.
- 6 Explore feasibility of activation of Riverbend Park.
- 7 Explore feasibility of a grant program to support community-led events in parks, open spaces, and other public space.
- 8 Conduct community engagement to assess neighborhood-specific interest in different types of events in parks and open spaces.

## Highlight

### Cambridge Plays

The City, community organizations, businesses, and residents all help bring programming and events to our parks and open spaces.

Cambridge Plays is an example of collaboration in public programming in parks. Various City Departments, community groups, and private partners offer free music, dance, yoga, and other activities from April to June.

For more information, visit:  
[www.cambridgema.gov/plays](http://www.cambridgema.gov/plays)



## Goal H

# Make comfortable spaces where people can gather and connect.



The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of parks as gathering spaces. According to our surveys, 64% of respondents said they used parks more often during the early course of the pandemic. 30% also expected this increased use to continue.

Some things we heard about that would make parks more comfortable include access to food and publicly accessible restrooms. (This can also include making it easier to find out where these already exist. For more on improving information about parks, see [Goal L](#)).

Another topic to consider is how parks can appeal to people of all ages. This overlaps with [Goal F](#) to encourage play and playfulness for people of all ages.

In addition, we can consider how to encourage use in four seasons. This can include both built and temporary approaches, including some that take advantage of the unique experience that winter or summer provide. Small hills are a built approach to encourage sledding in the winter. Water play activities are an example of a temporary way to encourage summertime use.

# Actions

- 1 Continue Public Space Lab projects and programming.
- 2 Explore a framework for a small business program to provide limited vending in certain parks.
- 3 Provide more restroom access in and near parks and open spaces.
- 4 Explore ways to increase food access in and near parks.
- 5 Design and program parks for four seasons of use.
  - 5.1 Use canopies, trees, and other structures to provide shade in the summer and sun in the winter.
  - 5.2 Develop winter programming, and support winter use.
- 6 Make it easier for people to gather and host events in our parks by improving our park permitting system.

# Highlight

## Public Space Lab

The Cambridge Public Space Lab is a testing ground for intentional community building. It seeks to cultivate inclusive and participatory public spaces using a spirit of partnership, experimentation, and collective learning. Public Space Lab initiatives include the City's Play Streets Program, Public Patios, and other public space activation projects.



For more information, visit: [www.cambridgema.gov/publicspacelab](http://www.cambridgema.gov/publicspacelab)

## Goal I

# Bring creativity, arts, and culture to parks and public spaces.

Our parks are a great platform to celebrate arts, creativity, and culture.

Public art is often integrated into park capital projects. Performances such as musical or theatrical performances can also bring arts into parks. Designing parks with features like access to power helps enable performances in parks.

Bringing arts and culture to parks provides opportunities to celebrate the diversity of Cambridge.

In addition to programs and events, creative and playful design invites people to engage with parks. It also presents opportunities for people to engage with parks in different ways.

For more on this, see [Goal L](#).



Lechmere Canal Park

# Actions

- 1 Collaborate with Arts and Culture staff to integrate art and performance in parks.
- 2 Continue City-led arts programming such as Summer in the City, dance and performance workshops, and temporary public art.
- 3 Prioritize funding for arts and creative programming in parks and public spaces.
- 4 Design and renovate parks to facilitate community events, cultural festivities, and programming.
  - 4.1 Site utilities (power, water, etc.) within parks in places that facilitate community events and programming.
  - 4.2 Explore feasibility of creating dedicated performance spaces.
- 5 Use public art and the artmaking process as community engagement for park and open space planning and design.
- 6 Continue to encourage a diversity of designers, artists, and landscape architects in public art projects.
- 7 Publish a directory of parks most suitable for community cultural events.
- 8 Encourage unique, creative, and memorable park design. Incorporate art into the design process.

## Highlight

### Public Art in Parks

City law requires that one percent of construction costs for City park projects go towards public art. Cambridge Arts Council and other City departments have used the Percent-for-Art program to help create and install many of the over-200 pieces of public art in our parks and public spaces.



## Goal J

# Build high-quality parks that embody our community's priorities and wide range of interests.



Clarendon Avenue Playground

As our parks change over time, we look at how to include new types of park features, such as pickleball or improving access to uses like dog parks. Not every park will have the same uses, but there should be access to uses people would like across the park system. Information from our public engagement will help us in analyzing the level of access to different uses, and identifying neighborhood needs.

Paired with good upkeep and maintenance, we can work toward a high quality park and open space system. For more about maintenance and operations, see [Goal K](#).

## Highlight

### How did we form this action plan?

This action plan was guided by our Needs Assessment. In addition to conditions of parks, we integrated data on the service areas of parks relating to demographics and risks of climate change. These data helped us to identify parks that we should prioritize for improvements in the next seven years.

For more on the Needs Assessment, see [Appendix A](#).



# Actions

- 1 Continue program of park improvements through renovations or targeted improvements in parks (see the “What’s Next” section for a map of planned park renovations).
- 2 Continue to evaluate and adapt park uses to popular demands and emerging trends.
  - 2.1 Use findings from the Needs Assessment and community engagement to inform park design.
  - 2.2 Design spaces that can accommodate multiple uses where appropriate.
  - 2.3 Consider incorporating uses that are increasing in popularity (e.g., pickleball and other emerging uses) when designing parks.
  - 2.4 Leverage the Neighborhood Planning Initiative (NPI) Action Planning process to review program-level concepts across open spaces in residential neighborhoods.
- 3 Conduct a community process around changes to the off-leash dog program and improve education and messaging about where and when dogs can be off leash.
- 4 Continue to expand access to gardening, including maintenance and accessibility improvements, shared/communal gardening approaches, or volunteer stewardship opportunities in landscape areas.
  - 4.1 Repair fence and gate at Maher Garden at Fresh Pond Reservation.
  - 4.2 Replace planter beds at Costa Lopez Taylor Park.
  - 4.3 Make accessibility and retaining wall improvements at Peggy Hayes Memorial Garden.
  - 4.4 Make accessibility improvements at Emily Garden.
  - 4.5 Conduct a community process to inform improvements to Watson Street Lot.
- 5 Develop design guidelines for privately owned public spaces (POPS).
- 6 Seek to have diverse design and construction teams on park and open space projects.

## Goal K

# Aim to keep parks clean and keep equipment in working order. Improve how the City manages park maintenance.

Our goal is to have a network of well-maintained parks so we can minimize disruptions in access to parks.

Commonwealth Connect is a platform that allows people to report repair needs or other issues. It has been an effective system, and we will continue to encourage park users to use it.

We will work to design spaces thoughtfully so that upkeep is easier. We will also work to build a database of park equipment and features to help us keep up maintenance

needs as our park system becomes more complex.

Some relatively recent technologies are already helping us manage parks more efficiently. For instance, web-connected trash and recycling bins enable us to more closely monitor when they need to be emptied. Smart irrigation systems help us to manage water use in parks. We will continue to roll these technologies out in parks across the city.



# Actions

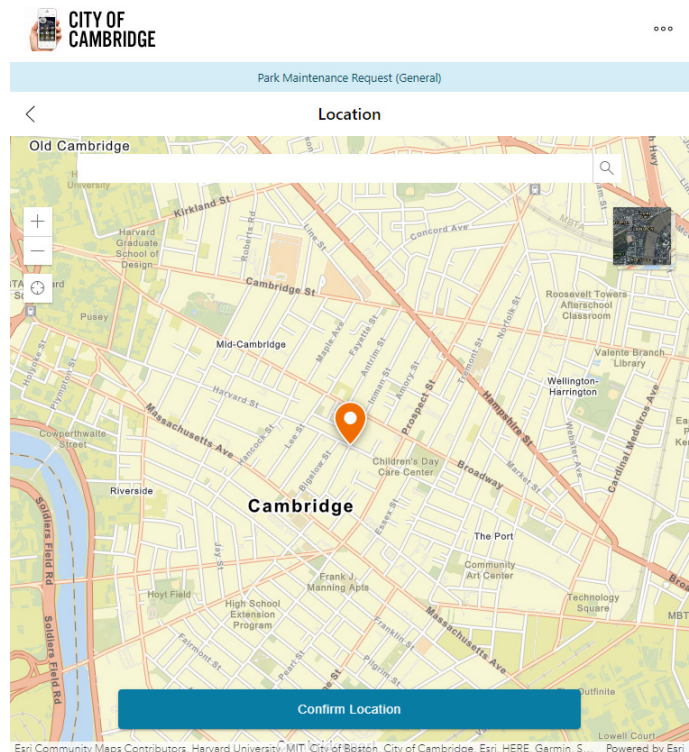
- 1 Continue use and promotion of Commonwealth Connect for reporting park maintenance needs.
- 2 Develop a detailed database of park furnishings.
- 3 Increase our capacity to maintain innovative and unique parks.
- 4 Establish a system to coordinate with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) about open space.
- 5 Continue integration of "smart" devices to improve park operations (such as rodent control, network-enabled irrigation, and trash/recycling).
- 6 Identify opportunities for increasing access to storage for maintenance needs, and for park programs and other temporary uses.

## Highlight

### Commonwealth Connect

Commonwealth Connect is a platform to report maintenance needs or other issues. The City has been using this platform as a way for people to let us know about issues in parks.

To explore Commonwealth Connect, or make a report, visit:  
[www.cambridgema.gov/commonwealthconnect](http://www.cambridgema.gov/commonwealthconnect)



## Goal L

# Improve how we share information about parks and open spaces. Highlight opportunities for learning and community building.



Cambridge has a diverse park system with a variety of different uses, features, and events. This work aims to help people engage with Cambridge’s park system in different ways. We also want to support learning about—and through—parks. For example, this could involve learning about the types of trees planted at a park, or the history of a park site.

We also heard enthusiasm for getting more involved in our parks. We will explore ways to engage with our parks in different ways, including ways we can help care for parks.

Our hope is that making it easier to learn about our parks will make them more enjoyable.

# Actions

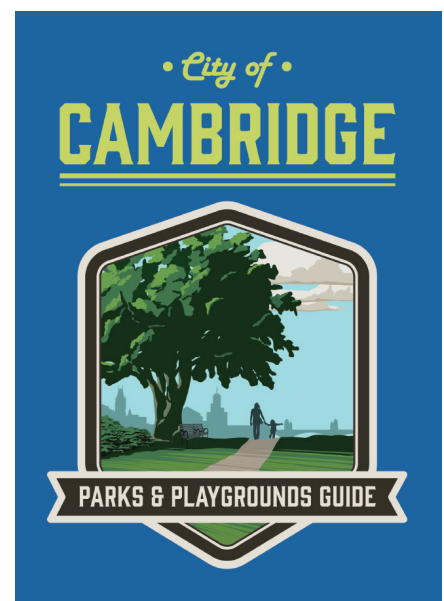
- 1 Expand and improve information on the City's online calendar about public events in City parks.
- 2 Improve parks website and interactive parks map.
- 3 Identify opportunities for community members who want to engage/volunteer with local parks.
  - 3.1 Develop framework for "Adopt-a-Plant Bed" pilot program or "Friends of..." groups.
  - 3.2 Use Public Space Lab to foster community involvement in re-imagining, improving, and activating public spaces.
- 4 Encourage learning about parks, and use parks to support learning.
  - 4.1 Identify opportunities to work with schools and youth-serving organizations to connect parks and learning.
  - 4.2 Find well-designed and creative ways to share information about parks on-site (e.g., signage).
  - 4.3 Find creative and interesting ways to share information and stories about our parks (e.g., social media posts about art in parks).

## Highlight

### Cambridge Parks and Playgrounds Guide

The Cambridge Parks and Playgrounds Guide is a pocket-sized guidebook to the various offerings in our city's parks system. The parks guides includes maps, amenity information, and fun facts about different parks in Cambridge, including DCR parks and certain privately-owned public spaces (POPS).

For more information, visit:  
[www.cambridgema.gov/parksguide](http://www.cambridgema.gov/parksguide)



# What's Next

Parks are important civic spaces. They provide important places to connect with neighbors. They offer opportunities to make and appreciate art. Our parks are places to celebrate our diversity. They are key places for helping us to prepare for and live with climate change. Our parks help support and encourage healthy lifestyles.

In Cambridge, several different City departments work on parks and open space. This plan presents a shared roadmap for improving our parks and open spaces. It includes a variety of types of actions:

- Areas we can focus on to improve park access
- Capital projects and park improvements
- Ways to better connect to parks
- Programs to improve how we use parks

There are limited opportunities to create new parks and open spaces, but there

are ways to work with others to create new parks. This can include working with developers when they are coming forward with projects. It can also include purchasing land, though opportunities in Cambridge can be rare. Finally, we can also look at land we already own and how we can use it better.

One way to use existing parks better is to improve how we do park renovations and improvements. The map on the facing page shows the major park projects that have been completed in the last seven years, projects that are currently in progress (either under construction or that have a community design process underway), and recommendations for the next seven years. This work will be guided by what we learned through the Open Space Needs Assessment and this Parks and Open Space Plan.





Ultimately, we are working toward our parks system being more welcoming to all. This consists of ongoing engagement around barriers to park use. It also entails building community through our parks. Community engagement will continue to be a vital part of all our parks and open space work.

We invite you to stay involved with our parks. For updates about our open space initiatives and to learn about ways to get involved with Cambridge's parks and open spaces, visit [www.cambridgema.gov/openspaceplan](http://www.cambridgema.gov/openspaceplan).

### Open Space Action Plan Recommendations



#### Recently Completed

- Amigos School Playground (2018)
- Cambridge Common (2015)
- Cambridgeport School Playground (2016)
- Clarendon Avenue Playground (2021)
- Elm & Hampshire Plaza (2015)
- Flagstaff Park (2015)
- Glacken Field (2021)
- Haggerty School Playground (2015)
- Morse School Playground (2019)
- Pacific Street Park Dog Run (2016)
- Russell Field (2020)
- Sacramento Field (2018)
- Timothy J. Toomey, Jr. Park (2021)

#### In Progress

- Binney Street Park
- Carl Barron Plaza
- Clement Morgan Park
- Danehy-New Street Connector
- Gold Star Mothers Park Court Area
- Grand Junction Multi-Use Path
- Harvard Square Plaza
- Hoyt Field
- Linear Park
- Peabody School Playground
- Pine Street Park
- Rafferty Park
- Raymond Park
- Sennott Park
- Tobin School
- Triangle Park

#### Plan Recommendations

- Comeau Field
- Costa Lopez Taylor Park Community Garden
- Danehy Park
- Dana Park
- Emily Garden
- Kennedy Longfellow School Playground
- Maple Avenue Playground
- Market Street Park
- Old Longfellow School Play Areas
- Paine Park
- Peggy Hayes Garden
- Reverend Williams Playground
- Watson Street Lot
- Wilder-Lee Park
- William Maher Community Gardens



# Glossary

## **Accessible**

Something or somewhere that is easy to approach, reach, or participate in for people with disabilities.

## **Acre**

A unit of land area equal to 43,560 square feet. Just over 9 basketball courts can fit on one acre.

## **Advisory board**

A group of experts who support and guide a City planning process or project. Advisory boards usually include people with a mix of roles and experiences. Many Cambridge advisory boards include Cambridge residents and City staff.

## **Amenities**

A useful feature of a park or open space. Examples of amenities are benches, splash pads, basketball courts, or water fountains.

## **Barriers**

Things that prevent or limit access or use. These can be physical, like a railroad track that you cannot cross easily, or have to do with

## **Biodiversity**

All the different kinds of life you'll find in one area.

## **Capital improvement projects (capital projects)**

Projects that help improve or maintain City-owned places, materials, and objects. Park projects are an example of a capital project.

## **Civic**

Having to do with a city or town.

## **Collaborative**

When two or more people work together.

## **Defensive architecture**

When places are designed in a way to intentionally guide or limit how people use the space.

## **Equity**

This is different than equality. Equality means providing the same to all. With equity, however, we recognize that we do not all start from the same place and may have different needs. We must adjust imbalances and injustices so that everyone gets what they need.





**Feasible**

Possible to do easily.

**Flora and fauna**

Plant and animal life.

**Geographic data**

Information having to do with where things are located or characteristics about a place or area.

**Initiative**

A fresh approach to something. An act, strategy, or program intended to resolve a difficult situation.

**Lawn**

An open area that is mostly or entirely grass.

**Leverage**

Using something to address a problem.

**Livability**

Adding up all the factors that make up a community or place's quality of life. A community or place that is livable could be described as enjoyable, tolerable, bearable, or worthwhile.

**Meadow**

Planting areas that are usually more open and have fewer trees. They can be similar to lawns but usually have more types of plants such as wildflowers or different types of grasses.

**Participatory**

Providing the opportunity for people to participate.

**Pickleball**

An increasingly popular sport where two or four players use paddles to hit a ball back and forth over a net. Pickleball is played on a court similar to tennis.

**Play Streets**

A City program that temporarily closes a street to traffic to create safe space for children to play freely and for neighbors to gather.



## **Plaza**

A public square where there may be gathering or a market. These places usually have a lot of hard surface instead of grass or other plantings. Some examples in Cambridge are Carl Barron Plaza in Central Square, and Brattle Square Plaza in Harvard Square.

## **Pop ups**

Community engagement activities that happen at community gathering spaces. Meeting people where they are, pop ups try to reach people who may not typically participate in more formal public meetings.

## **Public open space**

Any space between buildings that is open to the public. Examples of public open spaces are: parks, plazas, sidewalks, and streets.

## **Public space activation**

Leading or encouraging activity in public space. Public space activation can lead activity by organizing an event, or encourage activity by placing movable furniture so can gather.

## **Resilience**

The ability to recover quickly. We often talk about climate resilience, which is the ability to recover quickly from a hazardous event like floods or heat waves. Resilience can include physical recovery of our parks and buildings or a social recovery of our community connections.

## **Smart irrigation systems**

Equipment to water plants that uses sensors to detect how much water is needed and when.

## **Stewardship**

Taking care of something, such as a place or an organization.

## **Sustainable**

Using materials and resources in a way that allows us to continue using them in the future. Climate sustainability is focused on using natural resources in a way that does not exhaust what earth can supply.

## **Universal Design**

Designing the built environment to be maximally usable by everyone without any special adaptations or retrofitting.

## **Vision statement**

A shared set of ideas for what an ideal future will be.

# Acknowledgments

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**CDD** = Community Development Department  
**DPW** = Department of Public Works  
**CPHD** = Cambridge Public Health Department

## Additional Thanks

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**Kyle Klein**: Front Cover, Pages 1, 2, 4, 14, 23, 25, 27, 29, 33, 35  
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