

MARKET ANALYSIS

*Town of Westford, MA
Recreation Master Plan*



Section I – Executive Summary

The Westford Parks and Recreation department worked with Ballard*King and Associates to develop a Parks and Recreation Master Plan. The purpose of the plan is to provide a planning document that assesses recreation values of the community, assess current program and facility needs for recreation activities and to provide a strategic direction and vision for recreation services.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the Town of Westford is their resourcefulness and efficiency in which they operate and provide recreation services to the community. The volume and programs offered with limited resources is impressive and although the School District has been generous with their support of youth sport activities in Westford it is clear that the existing inventory of space within the School District is no longer sufficient to meet the growing needs of the youth sports programs and expanding school activities. The need for more gymnasium space, aquatics, indoor track, indoor ice skating swimming pool and fitness component was validated through the public input process used during the market analysis process and community survey results.

The Town of Westford primary service area population is growing at a modest rate with the population projected to grow about 8% over the next five years to reach a population of 26,036 by the year 2020. Growth in the secondary service area that surrounds the primary service area is estimated to increase less rapidly than the primary service area with a projected 3.5% increase in population over the next five years to 308,586 people in the secondary service area. The demographic profile of the community indicates that the age group distribution is somewhat mixed. There is a higher concentration of under 5-17, 44-55 and 55-64 age groups and less in the under 5, 18-14, 25-44, 65-74 and over 75 age groups than the national levels. The median age of the Town of Westford is significantly higher than the national level of 37.9 years while the median household income is higher. Age and household income are two determining factors that drive participation in recreation and leisure activities. The demographic profile suggests that there will be continued support and demand for recreation activities and programs in the future.

Statistics from the National Sporting Goods Association (NSGA) were overlaid on to the demographic profile of the service areas to determine the market potential for a variety of indoor and outdoor activities. The market analysis concluded that the Town of Westford is underserved for indoor recreation and leisure opportunities, especially for family activities, youth fitness and aquatics.



Community Input Process

An integral element of the master plan process included a series of public meetings with community residents. The consultant led process was structured to gain an understanding of interest and needs in the community. Over the course of the community meetings more than 100 residents participated in the process. The public input process identified a list of Park and Recreation improvements and enhancement to the Town and the top responses included; a 50-meter swimming pool, ice arena, rowing center, indoor track, indoor turf field and 25-yard swimming pool.

In addition to the community input process, a community wide survey was distributed to residents in order to obtain more information from the residents of Westford. Surveys were distributed through the mail and collected using a web-based survey instrument. It must be remembered that this survey is not statistically valid from a scientific perspective but still provides information on how respondents are feeling and their opinions. A total of 559 survey responses were recorded by the Recreation Commission.

Survey respondents were asked about how well the existing recreation, sports, fitness, meeting space or aquatic facilities met their households needs. The facility that had the highest number of respondents indicate that existing facilities meet 100% of their needs include in order, field space, beaches, nature trails, baseball/softball fields and walking/biking trails.

The survey respondents indicated a strong interest in both sport activities and self-directed outdoor recreation opportunities. When asked to list the most frequently visited Park amenities in Westford, the top five responses and their corresponding number of responses include; soccer fields (143), baseball fields (71), natural outdoor area (70), walking, hiking and biking trails (66) and beaches (63).

The community signaled a significant message about the importance of maintaining the Town of Westford's existing facilities. When survey respondents were asked to identify the most important action the Town could take on to create or improve Parks and Recreation areas, facilities, programs and services, the number one response was fixing up and renovation to existing park facilities. The top five responses to this questions were:

1. 419 survey respondents indicated that fixing up and repair of existing park facilities, shelters and restrooms was either very important or somewhat important.
2. 366 survey respondents indicated that developing a new recreation center with aquatics, gym, fitness, walking track and rowing tank was either very important or somewhat important.
3. 361 survey respondents indicated acquiring land to protect open spaces and the environment responded that this issue is either very important or somewhat important.

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4. 357 survey respondents indicated that acquiring land for preservation and developing trails was either very important or somewhat important.
 5. 356 survey respondents indicated that developing new walking and biking trails that connect to neighborhoods was very important or somewhat important.

Results from community input, the community survey results, level of service analysis and statistical information led to the development of strategic recommendations listed below. The recommendations have been listed according to two time frames, short-midterm, mid-long term. The Town of Westford should employ the most appropriate and timely means of implementing and financing projects to meet present and future needs.

Short-Mid Term

Continue working closely with the large number of youth association and community organization in the Town of Westford to deliver of recreation programs. These collaborations help expand program opportunities with minimal impact on existing staffing levels.

Renovate and maintain existing facilities. An overwhelming percent of the survey respondents (almost 76%) reported that maintaining the existing park facilities was either a high priority or very high priority.

Conduct a needs assessment and feasibility study for an indoor recreation center that includes an aquatic component, gymnasium, fitness, rowing tank training, community meeting room space and classrooms for programs. This item scored very high in interest with the community survey and public input process.

Mid-Long Term

Expand focus for active adults age group as the Westford continues to age, including fitness and wellness opportunities.

Explore parkland development expansion; according to the survey results, a very high level of interest was recorded for acquiring land to preserve space and protect the environment and acquiring land for preservation and developing athletic fields and recreation facilities.

Expand WFOR (Westford Friends of Recreation) Foundation to increase funds for Park and Recreation Department. A parks foundation can be a valuable asset that can raise money and garner support for development and stewardship of the park and recreation system. A parks foundation can leverage its non-profit status to make the most of tax-deductible donations, and can use its independence from the Town to put on a range of fundraising events.