

PARKS, OPEN SPACE, AND RECREATION PLAN

2025-2030



Acknowledgements

The ***City of Fitchburg Parks, Open Space, and Recreation Plan: 2025-2030*** was prepared by the City of Fitchburg Planning and Zoning and Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Departments with guidance and oversight provided by the following:

City of Fitchburg Parks Commission

Sue Easterday – Chair
Dave Herbst – Alder
Sam DiMaggio
Christopher Peguero
Heidi Reynolds
Sarah Schroeder
Christopher Sina

City of Fitchburg Common Council

Julia Arata-Fratta – Mayor
Gabriella Gerhardt – Council President
Jay Allen
Donald Dantzler Jr.
Dave Herbst
Bill Jetzer
Joe Maldonado
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Jim Wheeler

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City of Fitchburg Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Department

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Mayor Arata-Fratta
Introduced by

PLANNING
Prepared by

Park Commission, Plan Commission
Referred to

November 12, 2024
Date

RESOLUTION R-208-24

APPROVAL OF THE 2025 - 2030 PARKS AND OPEN SPACE, AND RECREATION PLAN

WHEREAS, to create an ideal system of parks, open spaces, trails, forest, and other natural areas, along with high quality recreational opportunities that enhance the health and quality of life for all ages and interests and promote a strong sense of community, and

WHEREAS, to facilitate the decision-making process related to parks, recreation, and resource conservation, and

WHEREAS, to create a park and open space system that meets the desires of the community, and


WHEREAS, to be eligible for county, state, and federal funding; and

WHEREAS, the City of Fitchburg 2025 – 2030 Comprehensive Parks, Open Space and Recreation Plan has been prepared by City of Fitchburg Staff with input from City Committees and community members through public open houses and presentations; and

WHEREAS, the City of Fitchburg 2025 – 2030 Comprehensive Parks, Open Space and Recreation Plan has been reviewed and recommended for approval by the City of Fitchburg Parks Commission and City of Fitchburg Plan Commission;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Fitchburg Common Council that it approves the attached 2025 – 2030 Comprehensive Parks, Open Space and Recreation Plan, effective December 10, 2024.

Adopted this 10th day of December 2024.



Julia Arata-Fratta, Mayor



Tracy Oldenburg, City Clerk

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Section I: Executive Summary

What is the City of Fitchburg Parks, Open Space, and Recreation Plan?

The *City of Fitchburg Parks, Open Space, and Recreation Plan: 2025 – 2030* (hereafter “*Plan*”) provides a holistic and integrated vision, and recommended action items to achieve that vision, for the City of Fitchburg parks, open space, and recreation system (hereafter “*system*”) over a five-year period. This *Plan* is intended to guide and evaluate City decision-making as it relates to parks, open space, and recreation. As such, City *system* proposals and initiatives are to be consistent with this *Plan*. This *Plan* is a three-part document consisting of the following sections:

1. **Section I – Executive Summary:** This section introduces and overviews of the *Plan* and its Sections II and III.
2. **Section II – Existing Conditions Report:** This section is a contextual overview of relevant existing conditions affecting Fitchburg’s *system*, including *system* stakeholder perceptions, classification and standards, assessment, inventory, and implementation tools. This section also identifies *system* issues and opportunities through analysis of the existing conditions.
3. **Section III – Action Items:** This section identifies City *system* goals and associated action items to implement those goals over the *Plan* horizon, 2025 to 2030.



The following provides further detail on Sections II and III:

Section II – Existing Conditions Report

This section provides a contextual overview of various relevant existing conditions affecting Fitchburg’s *system*, including *system* stakeholder perceptions, classification and standards, assessment, inventory, and implementation tools. This section goes on to identify *system* issues and opportunities, as identified through analysis of the existing conditions.



Park, Open Space, and Recreation System - Stakeholder Perceptions

Fitchburg Planning and Zoning and Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Departments staff developed and coordinated a comprehensive public stakeholder engagement process to ensure appropriate feedback and input during the *Plan* development process. Major components of this process included:

1. Presentation of overview of *Plan* development process to relevant City bodies
2. Public meeting and workshop
3. Presentation of draft *Plan* to relevant City bodies and public
4. Presentation of final *Plan* and *Plan* public hearing/adoption process (Public, relevant City bodies, Plan Commission, and Common Council)



Major feedback components from the stakeholder engagement process included the following:

- Expand the user profile of the City *system* through development of new recreational opportunities that reflect current trends and demands.
- Explore opportunities for public-private partnerships on City *system* properties.
- Accentuate Fitchburg's unique attributes, including trails/biking, natural resources, and agricultural lands, to enhance the City *system*.
- Ensure appropriate placement, size, and composition of new City *system* properties to derive maximum benefit.
- Ensure the multi-functional aspect of the City *system*, including both active and passive recreation opportunities.
- Ensure park requirements are aligned with the City's vision and goals.
- Address climate change, equity, and accessibility.

Park, Open Space, and Recreation System – Classification and Standards

Fitchburg utilizes classification categories for its *system* properties as follows:

- Community parks
- Area parks
- Neighborhood parks
- Natural areas
- Special-use areas and civic spaces
- Trails/paths
- Ecosystem management features (stormwater facilities and wetland buffers)

The City also utilizes standards to encourage desirable size, uses/facilities, and distribution of select *system* properties throughout the City.

Park, Open Space, and Recreation System – Assessment

Fitchburg utilizes an assessment framework, for the following *system* components, to evaluate its *system* based on the standards:

- Total parkland (Community, area, and neighborhood parks)
- Community parks
- Area parks
- Neighborhood parks
- Recreation facilities
- Civic spaces

The assessment indicates the City generally has adequate total parkland and associated recreation facilities to serve its population, based on its current standards. However, a few notable *system* deficiencies exist, including available parkland in select City neighborhoods, and staff to provide for programs and services in said neighborhoods.

Park, Open Space, and Recreation System – Inventory

Fitchburg's *system* consists of land and facilities as follows:

- Five community parks, varying in size from two to 80 acres
- Eight area parks
- Twenty-seven neighborhood parks distributed throughout the City
- Twenty-four natural areas including marsh/wetland, prairie, and forested upland
- Six major bicycle/pedestrian trails/paths, including three State trails, and other neighborhood shared-use paths totaling approximately 54 miles
- Six special-use areas including a community/senior center, 9-hole golf course with 18-hole disc golf course, and a mountain bike park
- Numerous ecosystem management features including stormwater management facilities
- Various recreation programs and services including classes, leagues, and outings

Park, Open Space, and Recreation System – Implementation Tools

Various tools, organized into the following categories, are available to Fitchburg to potentially be utilized in maintaining and enhancing the City *system*, as well as implementing the recommended action items contained in Section III of this *Plan*:

- Regulatory
- Acquisition
- Funding
- Partnerships and inter-governmental cooperation

Park, Open Space, and Recreation System – Issues and Opportunities

Fitchburg *system* issues were identified from an analysis of the previously identified existing conditions categories. Major issues and opportunities are identified as follows:

- Future Park Uses
- Future Park Sizes and Locations
- Trails/Paths
- New Recreation Programs and Services
- User Groups
- Upland Resources
- Water Resources
- Facility/Landscaping Maintenance and Improvement
- Deficiencies
- Past Uncompleted Initiatives
- Governmental Partnerships
- Financial Resources

Section III – Action Items

This section identifies a broad vision for Fitchburg’s *system*, *Plan* goals, and associated recommended action items to ensure sufficient maintenance and enhancement of the *system* over the *Plan* horizon, 2025 to 2030. This section concludes identifying the *Plan* monitoring, updating, and amendment process, stipulating that the *Plan* should be updated every five years through a comprehensive public stakeholder engagement process.

The *Plan* vision and goals were developed from feedback gathered during the stakeholder engagement process, goals, objectives, and policies contained in the 2015 – 2020 *Plan* update, City staff expertise, and feedback from the Park Commission and Mayor.

Vision

The City of Fitchburg Park, Open Space, and Recreation System (hereafter “*System*”) strives for an appropriate balance of passive and active recreational/social opportunities, and responsible preservation and sustainable stewardship of the City’s natural environment and resources.

The *System* works to achieve these ideals through adherence to the City’s Growth Principles of *Sustainable, Equitable, Vibrant, and Cooperative*, and the *System’s* Three Ss Framework of *Sociable, Solitude, and Seams*.

Goals

- Goal 1:** **Distribute** Fitchburg’s park, open space, and recreation lands, and uses and facilities therein, in an inclusive, accessible, and equitable manner that reflects existing and future recreational demands, trends, and population demographics (including age, race, ethnicity, disability status, socioeconomic status, language, and gender).
- Goal 2:** **Protect** Fitchburg’s natural, cultural, and historical resources.
- Goal 3:** **Develop** Fitchburg’s park, open space, and recreation lands, and uses and facilities therein, in a manner that provides identity and economic development opportunities for the City.
- Goal 4:** **Integrate** Fitchburg’s park, open space, and recreation land, and uses and facilities therein, with a comprehensive City-wide trail/path system, stormwater management system, quality tree canopy, and environmentally sensitive area system.
- Goal 5:** **Provide** recreational program and services in an accessible and equitable manner that reflects existing and future recreational demands and trends and population demographics.
- Goal 6:** **Manage** Fitchburg’s park, open space, and recreational lands, and uses and facilities therein, in an efficient and sustainable manner that optimizes benefit and minimizes cost.
- Goal 7:** **Serve** as the face of Fitchburg’s park, recreation, and open space system through public interaction and service.

Action items implement the goals and were developed to address issues identified in Section II of the *Plan*. These action items are summarized as follows:

1. Designate *Signature Themed Parks* that focus on one or a few related uses and amenities at specific City *system* properties
 2. Develop partnerships with private entities that enhance and expand the user profile of the City *system*
 3. Explore revision of the *system* classification and standards, parkland dedication/open space requirements for development projects, and process to identify future *system* properties
 4. Continue planning and implementation of community-scale facilities and uses on *system* properties
 5. Assist in development and implementation of a comprehensive City trail/path plan and network
 6. Encourage expansion of existing *system* community gardens and development of new gardens on suitable *system* properties
 7. Explore opportunities for addition of staff within the Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Department to address City *system* and neighborhood needs
 8. Design, landscape, maintain, and manage City *system* properties in a manner that adds value to the City and its *system*
 9. Strengthen partnerships with existing City and other governmental/non-profit entities that own or manage outdoor recreation land or facilities, or provide outdoor recreation programs and services
 10. Maintain and enhance the City's urban tree canopy, forests, savannas, and prairies
 11. Maintain and enhance the City's stormwater facilities and waterways
 12. Continue to explore opportunities for new recreation programs and services
 13. Continue to manage and maintain the *system* to provide identity for the City and its *system*, expand the user profile of the *system*, and encourage optimal and efficient land use
 14. Monitor opportunities to implement *system* concepts, initiatives, and projects
 15. Maintain adequate levels of City financial resources and explore opportunities for non-City financial resources to maintain and enhance the system
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