

# Farmington Parks and Recreation 2020 Recreation Needs Assessment Study



**Submitted by:**

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## Executive Summary

The Farmington Parks and Recreation Department is a full-time municipal parks and recreation department serving more than 7,100 residents in the town of Farmington and surrounding areas. The department provides recreation and community programming for children, youth, adults, and seniors, including afterschool programs, summer camps, community special events, and senior activities, trips, and meals. In addition, the department manages a range of natural and built facilities used for passive and active recreation. For example, the department manages several parks, a playground, and an indoor recreation and performing arts facility. The department also partners with the local public school for access to a variety of fields and facilities located on school property. In addition to the town's parks and recreation department, other recreation organizations help to provide the town with access to natural outdoor areas, hiking trails, youth sports, community activities, and a golf course. The town's parks and recreation department has been closed for operations since the spring of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Based on the activities associated with this project, including background research, benchmarking, trend analysis, stakeholder focus groups, and a resident household survey, the following findings/recommendations are offered for consideration by the Farmington Parks and Recreation Department:

1. Immediately address full-time and part-time staffing needs within the Parks and Recreation Department. This includes recruiting and hiring a full-time parks and recreation director, and planning to hire a full-time assistant director by Spring 2021.
2. Develop a "Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee" comprised of interested and dedicated citizens to assist full-time staff in organizing and planning a comprehensive parks and recreation program for Farmington residents. Work with dedicated volunteers to develop a "Friends of Recreation" 501c(3) group to assist with resource development and philanthropy.
3. Better utilize existing indoor recreation space to meet recreation programming needs, including the Town Hall/Opera House, and other town-owned facilities as needed and appropriate. Invest in facility upgrades to make them more functional for recreation programming.
4. Continue to fund and support a full-service youth recreation program, including afterschool, school breaks, and summer camp programming. Provide dedicated space, time, and staff support for non-sport teen-oriented programming.
5. Develop, fund, and support a full-service senior program, including providing dedicated space, time, and staff support for senior programs, activities, trips, and meals.
6. Provide opportunities for active and passive outdoor recreation, including parks, trails, athletic fields, and open space. Make improvements to Fernald Park to make the park more attractive to drop-in users and to support recreation programming.
7. Improve marketing and promotion for the parks and recreation program to include a comprehensive communication plan utilizing print and electronic strategies. Strengthen communication and partnerships with in-town partners such as the Farmington School District and Farmington 500 Boys and Girls Club.

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8. Provide support for activities that bring the community together, including re-vitalizing existing events such as Hay Day, with a focus on events that draw residents and out-of-town visitors downtown.
  9. Plan to upgrade indoor recreation and community activity space as needs and participation patterns demand. This includes investigating the feasibility for adding a 10-15,000 square foot community indoor recreation center with separate dedicated space for seniors and teens/youth.
  10. Finance park and recreation improvements and operations from a diverse mix of funding sources, including general fund support, user fees and charges, grants, sponsorships, and donations.



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## Project Introduction

The Farmington Parks and Recreation Department is a full-time municipal parks and recreation department serving more than 7,100 residents in the town of Farmington and surrounding areas. The department provides recreation and community programming for children, youth, adults, and seniors, including afterschool programs, summer camps, community special events, and senior activities, trips, and meals. In addition, the department manages a range of natural and built facilities used for passive and active recreation. For example, the department manages outdoor park and recreation facilities such as Fernald Park and James B. Edgerly Park, as well as the Town Hall/Opera House which includes space for indoor recreation and performing arts activities. The department also partners with the local public school district for access to a variety of fields and facilities located on school property. In addition to the town's parks and recreation department, other recreation organizations help to provide the town with access to natural outdoor areas, hiking trails, youth sports, community activities, and a golf course. The town's parks and recreation department has been closed for operations since the spring of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Having enough indoor and outdoor space to satisfy the needs for diverse, multigenerational recreation and community activities is a common issue throughout New England. Successful park and recreation agencies "tailor their services to meet the demands of their community" (National Recreation and Park Association, 2016, p. 1). Engaging the public through a formal needs assessment process provides valuable information that agencies can use to drive future planning efforts. Obtaining input from the public on their wants, needs, and priorities helps to ensure that citizen voices are incorporated into facility and program development.

The Farmington Board of Selectmen recognize the role of public engagement with regards to parks and recreation space and needs. The 2020 Farmington Master Plan Update specifically directs the Board of Selectmen to "undertake a recreation services study to determine what services, programs, facility improvements, and facility space needs are necessary for Farmington recreation" (2020 Farmington Master Plan Update). In addition, the Master Plan suggests that recreation is a "major component" contributing to quality of life for Farmington residents, and specifically calls out the importance of high quality programs and safe and accessible facilities and recreation areas as essential elements of the town's long-term economic, social, and public priorities.

The scope of this report focuses on the work of the planning and evaluation team from the University of New Hampshire. The team completed a parks and recreation needs assessment for the Farmington Parks and Recreation Department during the Summer and Fall of 2020. The study collected public input data addressing a broad range of park and recreation needs, with special attention given to park and recreation programming and indoor recreation space. The principal aims of this study were:

1. To examine the park, recreation, and community activity needs identified by the residents and key stakeholders of the Farmington Parks and Recreation Department;
2. To determine which park, recreation, and community activity needs expressed were deemed to be priorities for the Farmington Parks and Recreation Department;
3. To develop a set of recommendations that would allow the Farmington (NH) Parks and Recreation Department to meet the priorities that were identified throughout the study.

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The team from UNH has expertise in community planning and parks and recreation administration, and team members have conducted similar community planning studies in New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine, Massachusetts, and throughout the country. The team’s philosophy and approach in undertaking the study was one of “holding up a mirror” and reflecting back to the community what was heard during the data collection process. The results and recommendations presented in this report are a direct reflection of the data that was collected. While the team’s expertise in parks and recreation planning played a role in the final recommendations and discussion, all recommendations were informed by the data gathered during an extensive research and public input process.

## **Project Activities**

All project activities were designed to generate information to inform the recommendations contained in this report. In addition to background research and meetings with staff, this process included opportunities for public engagement. Public input activities were especially important to include broad citizen participation and input into the process. A description of project and public input activities precedes each section of the report. Project activities included:

1. Background research, benchmarking, and trend analysis
2. Meetings with town staff and elected officials
3. Focus groups with recreation stakeholders and the public
4. Development, distribution, and analysis of a town-wide survey of Farmington residents

## **Project Resources and Data Sources**

The project team reviewed key town and department planning documents including the 2020 Farmington Master Plan Update, the town’s 2019 Annual Report, and budget reports for the past 3 years. In addition, the team toured and observed park and recreation facilities, programs, and services as a component of project activities. The team also conducted trend analyses of town demographics and recreation activity participation. The team used a variety of sources to obtain this information, including the 2019 National Recreation and Park Association’s (NRPA) Agency Performance Review, 2019 Sport and Fitness Industry Association’s (SFIA) Sports, Fitness and Leisure Activities Topline Participation Report, 2019 State of Play report on youth sports trends and developments by the Aspen Institute’s Project Play, and Esri’s Business Analyst tool that allows for location-based market analysis. In addition, the project team conducted a variety of public engagement activities, including holding focus groups with stakeholders and the public and gathering needs assessment data through an online resident household survey.

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## Background Research and Trends

The town of Farmington is one of New Hampshire's classic small towns. Farmington is located in a desirable area of the state to live, with easy access to cities such as Rochester and Concord, the mountains, lakes, and Atlantic Ocean. Farmington's positive economic growth rates and diverse economic and housing mix, connectivity, and natural and cultural resources make it a desirable place to live, work, and play. Farmington has a downtown that still reflects its past in a quaint and attractive setting. Sports and other activities abound through the school district, the Farmington 500 Boys and Girls Club, and the town of Farmington Parks and Recreation Department. The town has access to a myriad of built and natural recreational resources, including municipal parks, ball fields, a golf course, indoor recreation facility, and abundant conservation areas, trails, and green space all within a short drive from the downtown.

### Farmington's Demographics

The most recent estimates show that Farmington has approximately 7,185 residents and 2,755 households. ***Farmington's population growth is increasing.*** Since 2000, the population of Farmington has increased by 24.4 % and the number of households has increased by 28.4%. The population is expected to increase modestly in the next five years to 7,409 by 2024, for an expected Five-Year Average Growth rate of 3.1% (Esri Community Profile, 2019). Approximately 21.5% of Farmington's population is under the age of 18, while 15.3% is over the age of 65. The current median age for Farmington residents is 40.6 years. Farmington has a higher percentage of adults ages 24-54 than the state of New Hampshire as a whole (42% vs. 37.9%). ***While Farmington is a relatively young town compared to other towns and cities in the region, growth projections show that Farmington is likely to get older over the next five years.*** For example, Farmington's percentage of residents over age 65 is expected to increase by approximately 3.3%. Farmington's percentage of residents under age 18 is expected to remain steady through the year 2024 (Esri Community Profile, 2019). ***These trends indicate that demand for youth, adult, and senior recreation programs and activities is likely to remain strong.***

Like much of the state, Farmington is a majority-white town, with approximately 95.9% of its population identifying as "White-Alone". Approximately 0.6% of Farmington's residents identify as Black or African American Alone, 0.8% as Asian Alone, 0.3% as Native American/American Indian Alone, 0.2% as Some Other Race Alone, and 2.0% as Two or More Races. Approximately 1.1% of Farmington residents identify as being of Hispanic/Latino origin of any race. ***Farmington has grown more diverse since 2010*** as the probability that two people from the same area will be from different race/ethnic groups has increased by 2.2% (7.8% probability in 2010 to 10.0% probability in 2019) (Esri Demographic and Income Profile, 2019). This is similar to trends seen in the state of New Hampshire as a whole over the past decade. In addition, ***approximately 11.5% of Farmington residents under the age of 65 have a disability*** (US Census Bureau Quick Facts, 2019).

***Farmington has a diverse economic and housing mix.*** The median household income in Farmington is \$60,562. Approximately 8.1% of Farmington residents are living below the poverty level, and 27.7% of households earn more than \$100,000 per year (Esri American Community Survey Population Summary, 2019; US Census Bureau Quick Facts, 2019). Most Farmington residents who work do so in another New Hampshire community (70.7%) or out-of-state (13.2%), and the average drive time to work is 34.2 minutes from home (NH Department of Employment Security, 2020). The table below shows the current and five-year projections for key demographic profiles in the town.

**Table 1: Town of Farmington – Key Demographic Profiles**

	2019	2024 (Projected)	5 Year Projected Growth
Population	7,185	7,409	3.1%
Households	2,755	2,846	3.3%
0-4 years	5.9%	5.7%	-0.2%
5-9 years	6.1%	6%	-0.1%
10-14 years	6.1%	6.1%	0.0%
15-24 years	11.3%	10.8%	-0.5%
25-34 years	12.6%	12.6%	0.0%
35-44 years	14.1%	13.4%	-0.7%
45-54 years	15.3%	12.6%	-2.7%
55-64 years	9.8%	14.3%	4.5%
65-74 years	4.2%	11.9%	7.7%
75-84 years	1.3%	5.3%	4.0%
85 over	15.3%	1.4%	-13.9%
17 years and younger	21.5%	21.2%	-0.3%
18 years and older	78.5%	78.8%	0.3%
65 years and older	15.3%	18.6%	3.3%
White Alone	95.9%	95.3%	-0.6%
Black Alone	0.6%	0.6%	0.0%
American Indian Alone	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%
Asian Alone	0.8%	1.1%	0.3%
Pacific Islander Alone	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%
Some Other Race Alone	0.2%	0.3%	0.1%
Two or More Races	2.0%	2.3%	0.3%
Hispanic Origin	1.1%	1.4%	0.3%
Diversity Index	10.0%	11.6%	1.6%
Male	3,570	3,687	3.3%
Female	3,615	3,722	3.0%
Owner-Occupied Housing	63.3%	64.3%	1.0%
Rental Housing	28.1%	27.3%	-0.8%
Unoccupied Housing	8.7%	8.4%	-0.3%

Esri Community Profile (2019); Esri ACS Population Summary (2019); NH Department of Employment Security (2020); US Census Bureau Quick Facts (2019)

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## Education in Farmington

The Farmington School District operates 3 public schools, including 2 elementary schools (grades PK, K-3 and grades 4-8) and 1 high school (grades 9-12). There are 6 New Hampshire licensed childcare facilities and no private/parochial schools operating in Farmington. Public school enrollment trends are down approximately 43.4% since 2010, with declines more or less evenly distributed between elementary and high school. School enrollment declines over the last decade are a trend throughout the state. Despite the declines in school enrollment over the past decade, 21.5% of Farmington’s residents are under the age of 18. This is above the New Hampshire state average of 19.2%. *This suggests that youth programs will continue to be in demand, and the need for indoor and outdoor recreation space for youth activities will remain steady.*

**Table 2: Farmington School Enrollment Trends, 2009-2019**

Year	Elementary (Grades PK-8)	High (Grades 9-12)	Totals
2019-20	555	251	806
2018-19	596	267	863
2017-18	619	256	875
2016-17	661	263	924
2015-16	811	302	1,113
2014-15	861	386	1,247
2013-14	814	396	1,210
2012-13	854	428	1,282
2011-12	939	440	1,379
2010-11	982	441	1,423

Retrieved from <https://www.education.nh.gov/who-we-are/division-of-educator-and-analytic-resources/bureau-of-education-statistics/enrollments-by-grade>

## Recreation Facilities

Farmington Parks and Recreation operates one primary facility for indoor recreation – the Town Hall/Opera House. In addition, the department occasionally partners with the Farmington School District to use school gymnasium space for recreation programming. Exact square footage of town-controlled indoor recreation space is unknown. However, estimates based on the square footage of the building’s roof shows the Town Hall/Opera House to be approximately 8,000 square feet on the main floor, with comparable space downstairs. While this is just an estimate, the *town directly controls approximately 16,000 square feet of indoor recreation space.*

The *Town Hall/Opera House* was built in 1881 and is located on Main Street. The building is the home of the Farmington Parks and Recreation Department, and has two usable floors of activity space. The upstairs consists of staff offices, storage, a meeting room, and a multipurpose activity area with stage that was recently renovated for performing arts purposes. This room could accommodate a range of active recreation programs including pickleball, volleyball, badminton, table tennis, dodgeball, dancing, or group fitness classes. It could possibly accommodate pre-school basketball programs or instructional clinics, but is too small and the set-up is not suited to accommodate elementary, middle, high school or adult basketball. There is additional space in the basement suited for meetings, classrooms, and functions. This space has been used for youth programs, including afterschool programming and summer camps. There is a functional non-commercial kitchen with sink and stove/oven combination, and space to handle small-scale meals. The downstairs level shows the typical wear and tear and architectural features of a structure built in the late 19th century, including

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columns that break up activity space and pose potential danger for physical activity, exposed pipes and wires, low ceilings, and limited natural light due to being below grade. Aesthetically, the downstairs and areas in the main level of the building could benefit from fresh carpet, flooring, and interior paint. There is some concern about the building's entrance accessibility for persons with disabilities. The overall space in the building is adequate and can certainly function for basic recreation programming. The building has accessible bathrooms on both levels.

In addition to indoor recreation space, the parks and recreation department manages two outdoor recreation properties totaling approximately 3 acres. **Fernald Park** is a community park located on Central Street, and is approximately 2.5 acres and borders the Mad River. The park has open space, a playground which was last renovated in 2010, outdoor basketball courts, a bandstand, picnic tables, and storage shed. The location of the park's amenities (playground, gazebo, basketball court) limit the kinds of activities that can take place in the open field area, but there is space for small-sided pickup activities or basic drop-in activities such as tossing a frisbee, playing catch, or kicking a soccer ball. The amenities in the park are in generally good condition. However the playground area is limited and not conducive to a wide-range of ages or play styles. There is little in the park to attract adult or teen users besides the basketball courts, and given the park's hours (it is open from dawn until dusk), it is unlikely that they would be widely used by these age groups. The department also manages **James B. Edgerly Memorial Park**, a small (0.5 acre) pocket park located on Gray Avenue established in 1889. The park has perimeter fencing, a Civil War monument, cannon, hardscaping, picnic table and park benches, and is used primarily for passive recreation activities.

### **Other Indoor Facilities Available for Public Recreation in Farmington**

The town controls two additional spaces that could be used for recreation and community programming. The existing **Municipal Building** located at 356 Main Street has approximately 4,000 square feet of space available on the second floor that could be used for a variety of recreation activities, community meetings, or functions. The town currently has renovated several spaces. There is a fitness area that is being used for town staff, as well as a conference/meeting room. Additional rooms are either empty or are being used for storage. Like other town facilities, this space needs attention, including refinishing wood flooring and interior paint.

The town also owns the old **Court House** located next to the Town Hall/Opera House on Main Street. The building has multiple rooms, including a larger front room and a smaller space towards the back of the building that could be used as an office or meeting space. There is a second floor which we were not able to access. The exterior of the building shows considerable wear and tear, including wood rot on the soffits and fascia, and the siding needs painting. The structural condition of the building is unknown. The interior of the building has worn and outdated carpeting and is in need of interior paint. It did not appear that the building was accessible for individuals with disabilities. With some renovation, the building could be used in the near-term as a senior center, with space for senior meetings, book clubs, card games, classes, resource connections, etc. However, the building lacks features that are needed for a full-service senior program, including space for active recreation (fitness or other movement activities), kitchen, and function space for meals or large-scale programs and events.

In addition to the town’s parks and recreation department, there are a number of public and private providers of recreation services in the area. These include the Farmington 500 Boys and Girls Club, a non-profit organization founded in 1959 that provides youth sports programming for the town of Farmington. The organization operates two outdoor sports complexes. The complex on Paulson Road is home to one youth baseball and one youth softball field, as well as a multipurpose rectangle field with natural turf, as well as an approximately 1700 square foot indoor building. The complex on Summer Street has two youth baseball fields and one youth softball/t-ball field.

The Farmington School District has three (3) schools (Farmington High School, Henry Wilson Memorial School, and Valley View Community School. School facilities are used primarily for school activities, but they do partner with the community to share space for community recreation and youth sport activities. Facilities available include two gymnasiums, multipurpose rooms, a baseball field, softball field, multipurpose rectangle field with natural turf, and three (3) tennis courts.

The town also has a wide-range of conservation properties in town, including approximately 877 acres of forests, trails, and greenspace. A variety of outdoor recreation organizations help to manage the various conservation properties in town.



**Table 3: Farmington Park and Recreation Facilities**

Facility	Square Feet/Acreage
<b>(Dedicated) Indoor Recreation Facilities</b>	
Town Hall/Opera House	16,000 sq feet (approx.)
<b>Outdoor Recreation Facilities/Parks</b>	
Fernald Park	2.5 acres
James B. Edgerly Memorial Park	0.5 acres

**Facility Benchmarks - Indoor and Outdoor Recreation Space**

Approximately 56.9% of recreation agencies nationwide provide recreation centers, including gyms and fitness centers, for their residents. The Farmington Parks and Recreation Department controls and manages approximately 16,000 square feet of dedicated indoor recreation facility space, and has access to another 5,000+ if it were to use the space in the Municipal Building and Court House. *The national level of service benchmark standard for dedicated indoor recreation space is approximately 2 square feet per resident.* The local level of service standards for indoor recreation space in New Hampshire varies greatly by town, based on size, geography, support for community

recreation, and local needs. We calculated the average level of service standard for dedicated indoor recreation square footage in seven towns with indoor recreation facilities – Newmarket, North Conway, Conway, Barrington, Ossipee, Seabrook, and Meredith. These towns range in population from 2,284 to 10,266 and are comparable to Farmington in size and scope of park and recreation services. The average level of service standard for dedicated indoor recreation space in these seven municipalities is approximately 1.73 square feet per resident. Assuming 16,000 square feet of indoor space at the Town Hall/Opera House, ***Farmington's current level of service standard is 2.23 square feet per resident - above national and comparable local level of service standards.***

While the square footage per resident is above national and local service standards, it should be noted that the current indoor recreation facility lacks core activity areas and amenities such as a full-sized gymnasium.

***The town of Farmington provides access to approximately 880 acres of parks and outdoor recreation areas, for an average of approximately 122.6 acres of park land per 1,000 residents.*** Nationally, the average benchmark standard is approximately 10.1 acres per 1,000 residents - this is similar to the New England average of 10.0 acres per 1,000 residents. This puts Farmington well above the upper quartile in park acres per 1,000 residents in New England.

### **Park and Recreation Expenditure and Revenue Benchmarks**

Based on the FY 2019 approved budget, the Farmington Parks and Recreation Department received approximately \$152,150 in general fund allocations to cover Division expenses (e.g. payroll, benefits, administrative services, contractual services, rentals, printing, supplies, and utilities). ***Farmington's total park and recreation operating expenditure per capita was \$21.19 for 2019 - below the national and New England averages of \$81.19 and \$61.93 respectively.*** The parks and recreation department generated \$140,280 in revenue through recreation program fees and charges and other non-tax revenues. ***The park and recreation's cost recovery - or its non-tax revenue as a percentage of its operating expenditures - was 92.2% for FY 2019.*** Nationwide, the typical park and recreation agency recovers approximately 25.9% of its operating expenditures from non-tax revenue, ***putting Farmington well above both the national and New England averages.*** This demonstrates that the Farmington's parks and recreation department knows how to generate revenue from its programs and services, and has been able to successfully monetize existing facilities through program fees and charges. It should be noted that more than 80% of the department's revenues come from its afterschool programs and summer camps, with a smaller amount of revenue generated from senior programming.

**Table 4: Expenditure and Revenue Benchmarks**

<b>Averages</b>	<b>Park and Recreation Operating Expenses Per Capita</b>	<b>Recreation Revenue as % of Operating Expenditures</b>
National	\$81.19	25.9%
New England	\$61.93	47.1%
<b>Farmington</b>	<b>\$21.19</b>	<b>92.2%</b>

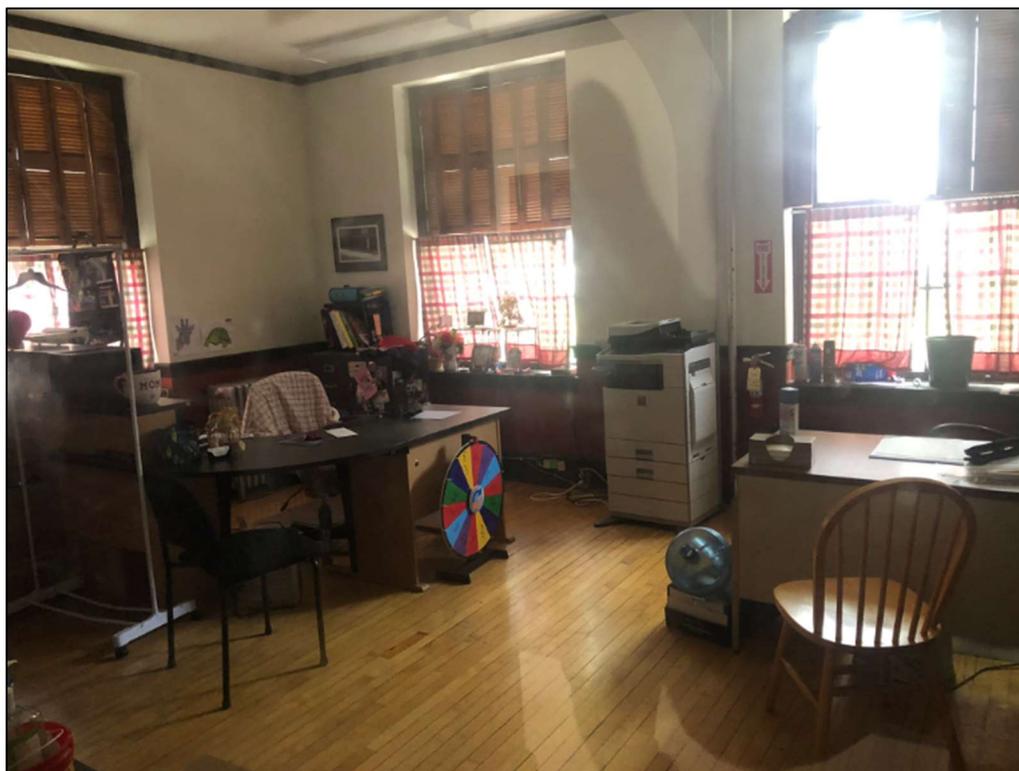
Retrieved from <https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/research-papers/agency-performance-review/budget/>

## Park and Recreation Staffing Benchmarks

Farmington Parks and Recreation currently has 2.0 FTEs (full-time equivalents) dedicated to its Parks and Recreation Department. Both the Director and Assistant Director were furloughed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Farmington Parks and Recreation’s staffing levels are below both national and regional average benchmarks for parks and recreation agencies and on par with other New Hampshire municipal parks and recreation departments.* Parks and recreation staffing needs vary widely by town and jurisdiction, and it can be difficult to directly compare towns to one another because of the differences in size, scope, and responsibilities associated with each department.

**Table 5: Park and Recreation Staffing Levels**

Averages	All Agencies	Agencies w Population less than 20,000	New England Agencies	New Hampshire Parks and Rec Departments
Agencies	41.9	10.4	10.0	2.0
<b>Farmington</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>2.0</b>



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## Recreation Activity Trends

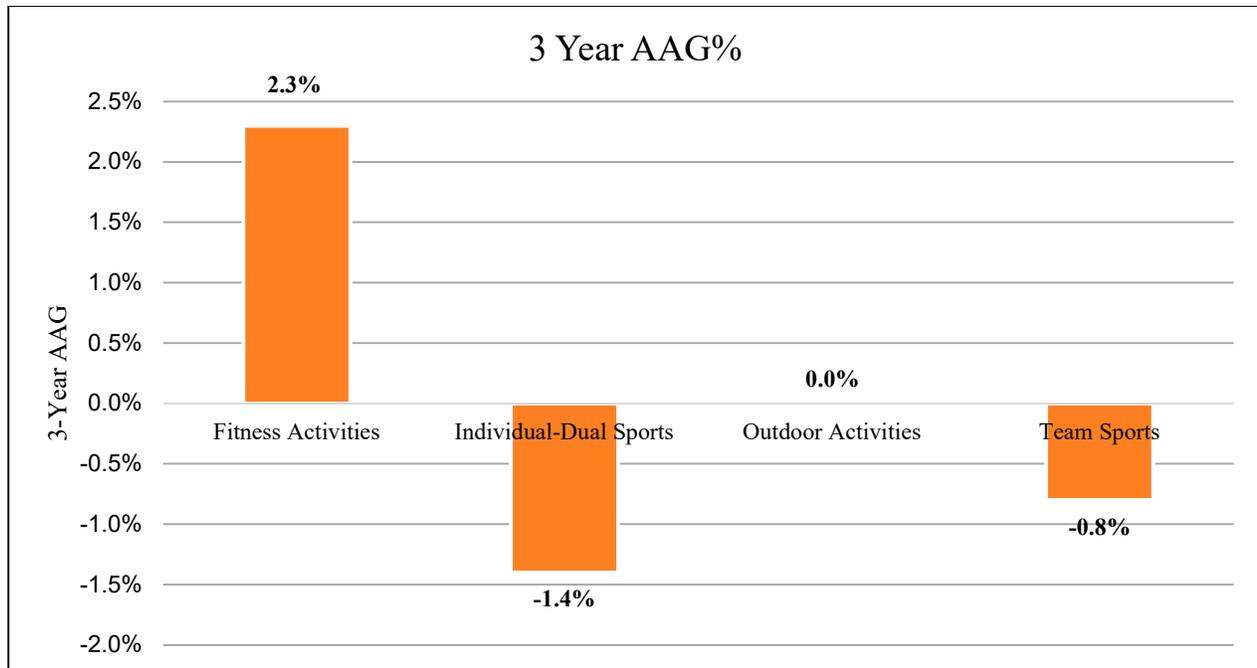
A large percentage of Americans participate in a diverse range of fitness activities, individual sports, team sports, and outdoor activities. ***In 2018, approximately 72.7% of Americans (ages 6+) participated in some form of recreation activity – a percentage that has held steady since at least 2013, indicating strong interest in recreation activity participation.*** Of the group of active recreation participants, 35.9% participated in some form of active high calorie activities, 18.9% participated in casual high calorie activities, and 17.9% participated in low or medium calorie activities (SFIA Topline Report, 2019). ***Approximately 71.8% of 6-12 year olds participated in a team or individual sport in 2018.*** The average number of team sports played by a 6-12 year old in 2018 was 1.87, and parents spent an average of \$693 per year per child on youth sports (Aspen Institute Project Play, 2019).

***The fastest growing category of recreation activities are fitness-related,*** while individual sport and team sport participation has shown a modest decline in participation over the past 3 years. Outdoor activity participation growth remains relatively flat. While individual-dual and team sports and outdoor activity participation categories as a whole are either flat or declining, individual recreation activities in each of these areas are increasing. For example, activities such as pickleball, cross-country skiing, trail running, day hiking, BMX bicycling, recreational kayaking, rugby, and baseball have all increased participation by 5.0% or more over the past three years. The fastest growing category – fitness activities – is not surprisingly comprised of activities that are primarily indoor-related. Activities such as kettlebells, rowing machines, aquatic exercise, cross-training workouts, stair climbing, yoga, bodyweight exercises, free weights, group stationary cycling (spin), treadmill running/walking, high impact/intensity training (HITT), pilates, fitness swimming, dance, tai chi, and resistance weight lifting are all growth activities over the past three years. Other indoor activities that show participation growth in the last 3 years include indoor soccer, team swimming, basketball, gymnastics, pickleball, and martial arts. Likewise, four of the top six fastest growing youth sports are activities that are played indoors – cheerleading, wrestling, gymnastics, and volleyball (SFIA Topline Report, 2019). ***This shows that the demand for indoor recreation activities remains strong.***

Farmington, in particular, is an active town. More than 6% of the population participated in the following activities in 2019: walking for exercise, swimming, overnight camping, freshwater fishing, jogging/running, hiking, weightlifting, bicycling, bowling, golf, yoga, canoeing/kayaking, basketball, dancing, and aerobics. Of these 12 activities, nine can be or are primarily offered indoors. ***Farmington’s Market Potential Index (MPI) – or the likelihood that adults in the household will exhibit certain consumer behavior or purchasing patterns – is higher than the national average for 28 of 35 recreation activities (80.0%).*** The recreation activities with a MPI over the national average include: archery, backpacking, baseball, basketball, bicycling (mountain), bicycling (road), boating, bowling, canoeing/kayaking, fresh and salt water fishing, football, Frisbee, golf, hiking, horseback riding, hunting (rifle and shotgun), ice skating, jogging/running, motorcycling, ping pong, skiing (downhill), swimming, target shooting, walking for exercise, weightlifting, and yoga (Esri Sports and Leisure Market Potential Forecasts, 2019). ***Farmington residents spent \$7.84 million on entertainment, recreation, and sports in 2019.*** Only housing, healthcare, and food were higher, and spending on recreation was the fifth highest (of 12) consumer spending categories (Esri Community Profile, 2019).

Summaries of the data reported above can be found in the figures and tables that follow.

**Figure 1: U.S. Recreation Category Trends – 3-Year Average Annual Growth (2016-2018)**



**Table 6: Fastest Growing Fitness Activities – 3-Year Average Annual Growth 2016-2018**

Recreation Activity	3-Year AAG (>1.0%)
Cardio Tennis	11.2%
Kettlebells	6.4%
Rowing Machine	6.2%
Aquatic Exercise	4.7%
Cross-Training Style Workouts	4.6%
Stair-Climbing Machine	4.5%
Yoga	4.4%
Bodyweight Exercise/Training	3.2%
Free Weights (Barbells)	3.1%
Stationary Cycling (Group)	2.8%
Treadmill	2.2%
High Impact/Intensity Training	1.9%
Pilates Training	1.9%
Swimming for Fitness	1.6%
Dance, Step, Choreographed Exercise	1.4%
Stationary Cycling (Recumbent or Upright)	1.0%
Tai Chi	1.0%
Weight Resistance Machines	1.0%

Sport and Fitness Association of America (2019) – Sport and Fitness Industry Association Sports, Fitness, and Leisure Activities Topline Participation Report – Ages 6+

**Table 7: Core Participation in Youth Sports - 3-Year Average Annual Growth 2016-2018**

Sport	3-Year AAG	# of Youth in 2018
Cheerleading*	18.20%	775,000
Wrestling	16.70%	218,000
Gymnastics	13.30%	1,000,000
Volleyball (court)	12.00%	846,000
Lacrosse	11.10%	296,000
Flag Football	10.00%	989,000
Softball (fast-pitch)	9.10%	359,000
Baseball	7.10%	4,100,000
Basketball	0.70%	4,200,000
Field Hockey*	0.00%	118,000
Golf*	0.00%	1,400,000
Ice Hockey	0.00%	324,000
Track and Field	0.00%	296,000
Tennis	-2.30%	1,300,000
Bicycling	-5.40%	4,700,000
Swimming (team)	-6.70%	417,000
Soccer (outdoor)	-12.90%	2,200,000
Tackle Football	-15.20%	839,000

\* Cheerleading, Field Hockey, and Golf participation reflects 2-year AAG (2017-2018)

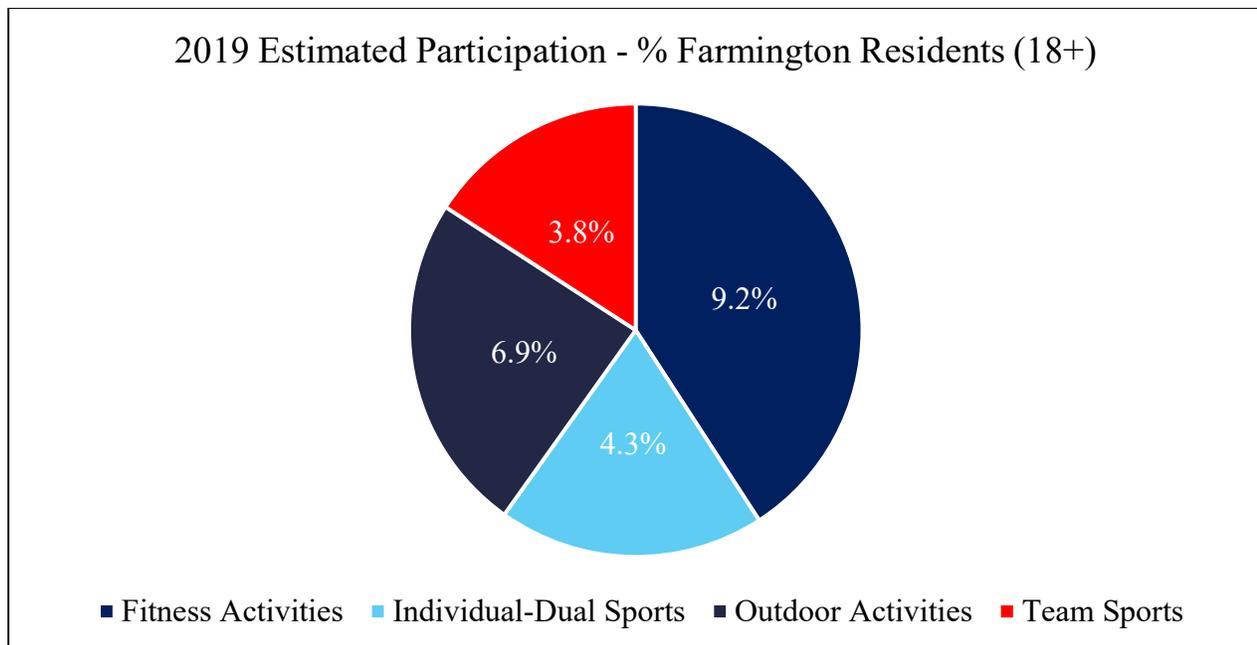
**Figure 2: Youth Sports by the Numbers**

**Youth Sports by the Numbers:**

- 1.87 = Average number of team sports played ages 6-12 in 2018
- 71.8% = % of 6-12 year olds who played a team or individual sport in 2018
- 33.4% vs. 9.9% = the % of kids in homes with incomes under \$25,000 who did not play sports in 2018 vs. kids in homes with incomes over \$100,000
- 10.5 years old = Average age of last regular participation in youth sports
- \$693 = Average annual family spending on sports for one child in 2018

Table and Figure: Aspen Institute Project Play (2019) – State of Play: Trends and Developments in Youth Sports

**Figure 3: Farmington Sports and Leisure Participation Market Estimates (2019 Participation)**



**Table 8: 2019 Farmington Sports and Leisure Participation – >8% of Population (18+)**

Recreation Activity	Percent of Residents Participating
Walking for Exercise	21.2%
Swimming	16.2%
Overnight Camping	14.0%
Fishing (Fresh Water)	13.9%
Jogging / Running	11.8%
Hiking	11.7%
Weightlifting	9.0%
Bicycling (Road)	8.9%
Bowling	8.9%
Golf	8.1%
Yoga	7.8%
Canoeing / Kayaking	7.6%
Basketball	6.8%
Dancing	6.5%
Aerobics	6.0%

Both Chart and Table: ESRI Sports and Leisure Market Potential Forecasts (2019)

**Table 9: 2019 Town of Farmington Consumer Spending**

<b>Consumer Spending Category</b>	<b>2019 Total Consumer Spending in Farmington</b>	<b>2019 Average Annual Household Spending in Farmington</b>
1. Shelter	\$44,212,778	\$16,048.20
2. Health Care	\$14,362,523	\$5,213.26
3. Food at Home	\$12,442,270	\$4,516.25
4. Food Away from Home	\$8,651,159	\$3,140.17
<b>5. Entertainment/Recreation</b>	<b>\$7,844,411</b>	<b>\$2,847.34</b>
6. Support Payments	\$5,901,342	\$2,142.05
7. Travel	\$5,360,556	\$1,945.76
8. Home Furnishings/Equipment	\$5,081,457	\$1,844.45
9. Apparel and Services	\$5,046,368	\$1,831.71
10. Education	\$3,818,678	\$1,386.09
11. Vehicle Maintenance/Repairs	\$2,731,840	\$991.59
12. Personal Care Products & Services	\$2,083,017	\$756.09

ESRI Community Profile – 2019 Consumer Spending (2019)

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## Focus Group Themes

The project team held 7 focus groups of residents and recreation stakeholders on October 27, October 28, October 30, and November 5, 2020. Stakeholder groups represented a range of interests including senior citizens, school staff, town staff, youth, parents, and youth sports organizations and volunteers. Meetings were scheduled through the town administrator and were facilitated by the project team from UNH. Meetings consisted of an open, guided conversation related to the recreation needs and priorities in Farmington. Detailed notes of public sessions were taken by the project team for each meeting. Guiding questions for focus groups consisted of the following:

- What do you like most about parks and recreation programs, facilities, and services in Farmington?
- What are the main drawbacks about parks and recreation programs, facilities, and services in Farmington?
- What new spaces do you wish you had for recreation activities in Farmington, or what new program ideas do you have?
- Is new park and recreation activity space a priority for Farmington, given other town priorities?

All of the focus groups together were attended by approximately 50 residents and stakeholders. At the conclusion of these activities, the project team met to review focus group notes and discuss salient observations and trends that emerged across the interviews. Specific information related to various stakeholder groups is presented in the tables that follow.



**Table 10: Focus Group Themes / Observations**

What Stakeholders Liked Best About Farmington Parks and Recreation	What Stakeholders Would Change/ Think Could be Better
1. Farmington Parks and Recreation offers a high-quality low-cost after school program that fills a great community need for after school childcare.	1. Need for a dedicated teen space or program for older children not engaged in sports through the 500.
2. Farmington Parks and Recreation offers a summer camp including multiple field trips for a very low cost to resident families.	2. Repeated concerns about new programs that maintain affordability for residents across the economic spectrum.
3. Residents have fond memories and reported high levels of enjoyment at special event programs such as Hay Day, Easter Egg Hunts, and Tree Lighting Ceremonies.	3. Residents want to see Hay Day rebranded and brought back to its former glory. Single day event, new activities, fireworks, and ways to engage the whole town.
4. Farmington has several well-liked outdoor recreation resources including trails and green spaces controlled by the conservation commission.	4. Many residents do not know all that is available through Parks and Recreation or other departments / commissions (conservation resources).
5. Longer-term Farmington residents have very positive memories of Parks and Rec activities including drop-in basketball, open gym time, dodgeball programs, dances, etc.	5. There is a strong desire for open gym time and/or drop-in programs at the Opera House / Town Hall.
6. The Farmington 500 Club is a strong local partner who seems to meet a majority of the town’s competitive sport needs.	6. Interest in Pre-K sports programs such as Lil’ Kickers Soccer programs.
	7. Lack of fitness facilities and programming in Farmington.
	8. Need for renovation of existing recreation facilities. Inefficient heating. Opera House is not conducive to active recreation / sports.
	9. More amenities at Fernald Park. Renovation of playground structure to make it appealing to a broader spectrum of children. Possibly separating the river from the park to mitigate safety concerns related to teens loitering.
	10. More diverse senior programs including fitness, educational programs, trips and senior meals.

Focus group themes derived from 7 stakeholder focus groups with representatives from Farmington School District, Farmington 500 Boys and Girls Club, Police Department, Fire Department, Public Works, adult recreation participants, senior citizens, parents of youth recreation participants, and youth/teens.

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## Household Survey Data - Overview

A link to an online recreation needs assessment survey was made available to Farmington residents through a variety of methods, including the town website, e-mails to recreation participants via the recreation user database, invitations to participate in local media, and posts on the department's social media accounts. Residents were invited to complete the survey online, or if they preferred, paper copies were available to complete and return at the Parks and Recreation office at Farmington Municipal Offices located at 356 Main Street. The survey was open and available for data collection for approximately 12 weeks in July, August, September, and October 2020. To maximize responses, two versions of the survey were offered – a long version consisting of approximately 155 questions, and shorter version consisting of approximately 85 questions. The long version of the survey was available in July and August, and the short version was available in September and October. Approximately 526 individuals clicked on the online survey link, and a total of 301 surveys were completed online with enough data for analysis (57.2% response rate). Two (2) additional surveys were completed on paper and returned to the Farmington Municipal Office. ***A total of 303 surveys were retained for analysis.*** The total number of surveys received was comparable to recent town master planning efforts. The number of responses varied per question, as participants were given the option to answer or not answer all questions on the survey.

Compared to the town of Farmington as a whole, survey respondents were more likely to be female (69.5% vs. 50.3%), had a higher median age (47.0 years vs. 40.6 years), were more likely to be over the age of 65 (16.4% vs. 15.3%), and were more likely to own their own home (85.6% vs. 63.3%) (US Census Bureau, 2010; Esri Community Profile, 2019). It is also likely that survey respondents were more likely to have children living in the home (48.5%) than the town overall. A summary of key themes from the survey data are presented below. Data for all responses received are indicated in the tables that follow.

- ***89.4% of survey participants used at least one park or recreation facility “frequently” or “regularly”***, while 10.6% did not use any of Farmington's parks or recreation facilities; the most frequently used facilities were Natural Recreation Areas such as trails, conservation areas, and green space (75.4%) followed by Outdoor Recreation Areas such as Fernald Park, playgrounds, gazebo, and basketball courts (66.6%).
- ***52.0% of survey participants participated in a parks and recreation program, activity or special event*** in the last 12 months.
- ***Participants had generally positive perceptions of Farmington Parks and Recreation programs and staff.*** 61.9% of respondents reported that programs, special events or activities were “Excellent” or “Above Average.” 59.0% of survey respondents were satisfied with the quality of recreation staff.
- Participants were less positive in their assessment of the quality of Farmington parks and facilities. ***Just 20.6% of survey respondents who reported using Farmington parks and recreation facilities rated those facilities as “Excellent” or “Above Average.”***
- ***The facilities that had the lowest percentage of residents rating them as “Excellent or Above Average” were all indoor facilities:*** Outdoor Recreation Areas (Fernald Park, playgrounds, gazebo, basketball courts), Outdoor Sports/Athletic Fields (baseball/softball diamonds, rectangle fields), Indoor Recreation Facilities (Town Hall).

- ***The highest rated barriers to participation in Farmington Parks and Recreation programs and facilities were related to facilities, time, and marketing and promotion.*** The top 5 barriers to participation were: “Better recreation opportunities available elsewhere”; “Not aware of available programs”; “Lack of time because of work and other obligations”; “Facilities needed are not available”; and “Lack of time because of other leisure activities.”
- ***More than half (58.4%) of Farmington residents drive outside of Farmington*** to use other town park and recreation facilities or programs, and ***most say that other town park and recreation facilities (60.7%) and programs (62.2%) are “Somewhat” or “Much Better” than Farmington’s.***
- The best ways for residents to find out about recreation program and facility offerings include: ***social media (62.3%); e-mail (36.7%); park and recreation office (29.5%); department website (29.2%); and word of mouth (28.9%)***. Printed flyers/brochures were still preferred by 26.9% of survey respondents.
- Facility spaces that were rated as “High” (needed in the next 0-3 years) or “Medium” (needed in the next 4-6 years) priorities by more than 60% of survey respondents included: Teen/Youth Center Space; Playgrounds; Outdoor Multiuse Trails; Indoor Senior Center Space; Conservation Areas; Outdoor Walking/Jogging Track; Indoor Multipurpose Gyms; Outdoor Space for Passive or Active Drop-In Recreation; Outdoor Bandstand/Performing Arts Area; Indoor Function/Events Room; Indoor Community Meeting Space; Indoor Gym or Athletic Courts; Indoor Performing Arts Stage.
- The program areas that were rated as “High” or “Medium” priorities by more than 60% of survey respondents included: Community Special Events; Non-Sport Teen/High School Programs; Senior Meals; After-School Programs for Middle School/Teens; Summer Day Camps; Senior/Older Adult Recreation Activities, Trips, and Events; Non-Sport Adult Recreation Activities; After School Programs for Elementary School; Musical Concerts and Performances; Summer Specialty Day Camps; Open Gyms/Drop-In Recreation; Youth recreational Sports; Family Programming; Recreation Programs for Persons with Disabilities; Arts and Cultural Programs; Group Fitness Programs, Nature or Environmental Education Programs. Many of these program areas are facility-based.
- The Top 5 largest importance-satisfaction gaps related to park and recreation facilities, programs, and amenities were: Community Special Events (-48.6%); Active Park/Outdoor Recreation Areas (-45.0%); Adult Recreation Programs (-42.4%); Trails and Connectivity (-42.3%); and Conservation/Passive Outdoor Recreation Areas (-36.1%). All of these, plus Indoor Recreation Space, Youth Recreation Programs, and Indoor Community Spaces showed statistically significant importance-satisfaction significant gaps.
- ***Respondents spoke to the need for dedicated, controllable, indoor recreation space, particularly for seniors and youth.*** Only 20.8% of survey respondents “Strongly Agreed” or “Agreed” that the Farmington Town Hall met the needs of themselves or their family, and 68.4% of survey respondents “Strongly Agreed” or “Agreed” that a town-supported multigenerational indoor community/recreation center is needed in Farmington. Most (53.1%) survey respondents preferred exploring possibilities for renovation and better utilization of existing town space to meet the indoor recreation needs of Farmington, while 38.1% of

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respondents preferred to build a new indoor community center open to all Farmington residents. Just 8.8% of respondents said that the town should continue to use existing space in its current condition for recreation programs and services.

- **Respondents were open to a variety of funding methods to build and maintain parks and recreation facilities.** Respondents were supportive of paying user fees for indoor recreation facilities (59.3%) and recreation programs (69.9%) and were supportive of using property tax dollars to build and maintain indoor (64.6%) and outdoor (59.8%) recreation facilities. Respondents were supportive of using tax dollars to offset the cost of recreation programs and activities (61.4%). They were less likely to agree to fees-for-use for outdoor recreation facilities (45.5%). Strong majorities of survey respondents thought it was a good idea for the town to partner with other organizations for parks and recreation delivery (80.5%)
- **A strong majority of survey respondents (74.2%) stated that the community benefits from town-supported parks and recreation programs and facilities in Farmington. A majority (51.4%) stated that their household benefited from parks and recreation in Farmington, yet only 44.8% stated that they personally benefited.** A ranking of potential benefits from parks and recreation as indicated by more than 60% of survey respondents included: Positive Youth Development; Increased Sense of Community; Access to Healthy Aging/Senior Activities; Improved Connectivity; Improved Health and Fitness; Improved Social Equity and Access for Everyone; Enhanced Environmental Quality; Increased Business/Economic Activity; Reduction in Neighborhood Crime; and Increased Real-Estate/Property Values.



## *Household Survey Data – Data Tables*

**Table 11: Survey Demographics**

	Percent, Median or Mean
Gender	
Male	25.1%
Female	69.5%
Other	0.0%
Prefer Not to Say	5.4%
Age	Mdn = 47 years
Resident or Taxpayer	96.0%
Years Living in Farmington	Mdn = 17.0 years
Housing Arrangement	
Own Home	85.6%
Rent Home	9.9%
Other Housing	4.5%
Children 18 and Under Living at Home	
Children Ages 5 and Under	17.4%
Children Ages 6-12	36.3%
Children Ages 13-18	28.5%
At Least 1 Child 18 or Under	48.5%
Employment Status of Adults in Home	
Employed Full-Time	81.8%
Employed Part-Time	39.3%
Retired	31.4%
Not Retired, Not Employed	11.2%
Volunteer with Parks and Recreation	14.9%
Average Hours Volunteering for Parks and Recreation last year	25 hours

Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding

**Table 12: Use of Farmington Parks and Recreation Facilities**

Facility	10 or more x per year	1 - 9 x per year	% use	Unaware
<b>Natural Recreation Areas</b> (trails, conservation areas, green space)	35.3%	40.1%	75.4%	7.1%
<b>Outdoor Recreation Areas</b> (Fernald Park, playgrounds, gazebo, courts)	32.3%	34.3%	66.6%	3.7%
<b>Indoor Recreation Facilities</b> (Town Hall)	23.3%	34.5%	57.8%	6.8%
<b>Indoor School Facilities</b> (gyms, athletic courts)	31.2%	21.0%	52.2%	7.5%
<b>Outdoor Sports/Athletic Fields</b> (baseball/softball diamonds, rectangle fields)	29.0%	20.3%	49.3%	6.8%
<b>% of Survey Respondents Who Used at Least One (1) Farmington Parks and Recreation Facility</b>	59.8%	29.6%	89.4%	NA

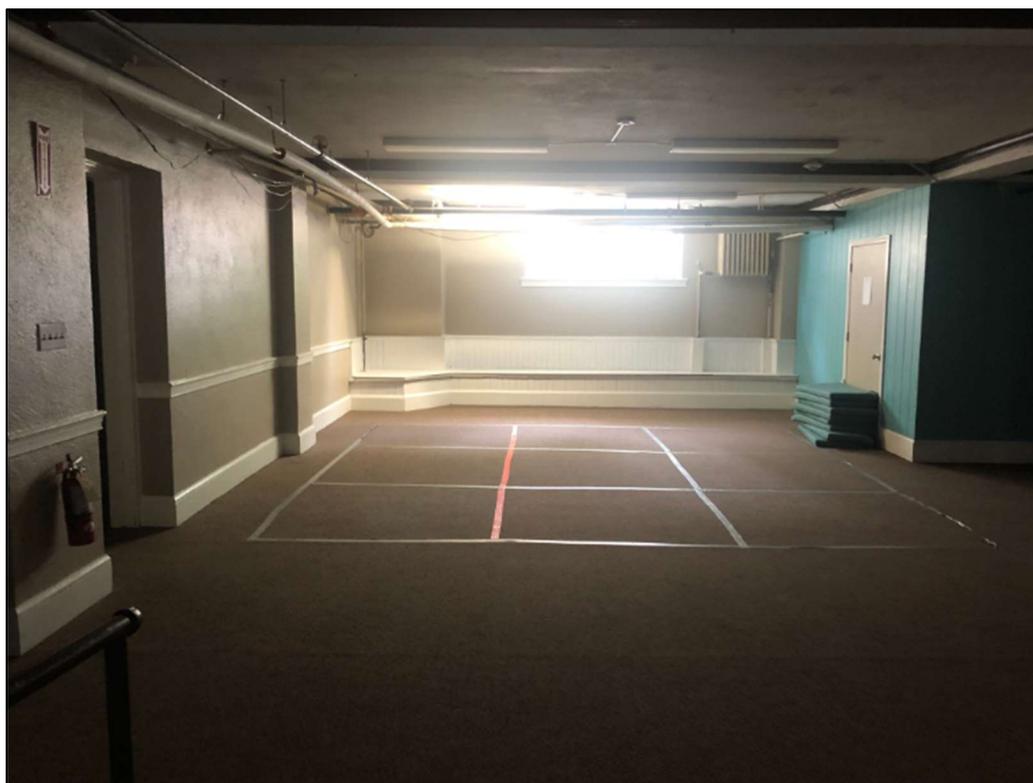
Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding



**Table 13: User's Perception of the Quality of Recreation Facilities**

Facility	Above Average or Excellent	Average	Below Average or Poor
<b>Outdoor Recreation Areas</b> (Fernald Park, playgrounds, gazebo, courts)	14.6%	56.8%	28.6%
<b>Natural Areas</b> (Trails, conservation areas, green space)	28.1%	59.2%	12.7%
<b>Outdoor Sports/Athletic Fields</b> (baseball/softball diamonds, rectangle fields)	19.1%	63.0%	17.9%
<b>Indoor Recreation Facilities</b> (Town Hall)	19.8%	48.8%	31.4%
<b>Indoor School Facilities</b> (gyms, athletic courts)	21.3%	63.7%	15.1%
<b>Averages:</b>	20.6%	58.3%	21.1%

Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding



**Table 14: Participation and Satisfaction - Recreation Programs**

Program Participation	Yes	No	Unsure
Have you or members of your household participated in programs, special events, or activities offered by the Farmington Parks and Recreation Department over the past 12 months?	52.0%	42.4%	5.6%

Program Participation	Excellent-Above Average	Average	Below Average-Poor
How would you rate the quality of programs, special events or activities that you or members of your household have participated in over the past 12 months?	61.9%	28.1%	10.1%

Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding



**52.0% of survey respondents participated** in recreation programs, special events or activities in the last 12 months



**61.9% of program participants reported** that programs, special events, or activities were “Excellent” or “Above Average”

**Table 15: Participation Constraints**

Participation Constraint	Strongly Agree-Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree-Disagree
Better recreation opportunities available elsewhere	51.8%	30.6%	17.6%
Not aware of available recreation programs	41.8%	25.6%	32.6%
Lack of time because of work or other obligations	37.2%	29.1%	33.7%
Facilities need are not available	32.2%	38.6%	29.3%
Lack of time because of other leisure activities	28.2%	41.4%	30.5%
Not aware of available facilities	27.9%	26.7%	45.4%
Facilities are not adequate to meet my/family's needs	25.9%	40.0%	34.1%
Inappropriate social environment	25.8%	34.1%	40.0%
Not interested in available recreation opportunities	24.7%	39.4%	35.9%
Lack of parking availability/convenience	23.4%	37.4%	39.2%
No one to participate with	23.4%	36.3%	40.4%
Not satisfied with the quality of recreation staff	18.6%	37.1%	44.4%
Programs get cancelled because of low enrollment	18.1%	57.3%	24.5%
Facilities are not safe	14.1%	33.9%	52.0%
Difficult/confusing program registration process	10.0%	51.5%	38.6%
Disability/accessibility issues	7.6%	43.3%	49.1%
Lack of childcare	7.6%	42.1%	50.3%
Lack of money/too expensive	7.6%	31.0%	61.4%
Facilities too crowded	6.5%	40.4%	53.2%
Lack of transportation/difficult to get to	1.8%	20.5%	77.8%

Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding

**Table 16: Promotion Ideas**

Best Ways to Find Out About Recreation Program and Facility Offerings	Yes	No
Social media	62.3%	37.7%
Email	36.7%	63.3%
Park and rec office	29.5%	70.5%
Department website	29.2%	70.8%
Word of mouth	28.9%	71.1%
Flyer Brochure	26.9%	73.1%
School announcements	23.9%	76.1%
Newspaper	8.5%	91.5%
Cable access TV	5.2%	94.8%



**Table 17: Facility Prioritization**

Facility	Hi Priority	Medium Priority	Lo Priority	Not a Priority
Teen/youth center	58.3%	24.5%	8.3%	8.8%
Playgrounds	46.3%	35.0%	12.6%	6.1%
Outdoor multi-use trails	50.0%	30.4%	12.6%	7.0%
Indoor senior center	42.5%	33.2%	14.5%	9.8%
Conservation areas	48.4%	27.0%	18.1%	6.5%
Outdoor walking/jogging track	36.0%	38.4%	17.5%	8.1%
Indoor multipurpose gyms	38.5%	35.7%	15.5%	10.3%
Green space for open recreation	31.6%	41.4%	19.5%	7.4%
Outdoor performing arts area	35.5%	37.4%	17.8%	9.3%
Indoor function/events room	32.4%	37.1%	19.2%	11.3%
Indoor community meeting space	27.1%	39.3%	22.9%	10.7%
Indoor gym or athletic courts	32.1%	33.0%	20.9%	14.0%
Indoor performing arts stage	28.8%	34.4%	25.1%	11.6%
Community dog park	25.1%	31.6%	26.0%	17.2%
Baseball/softball fields	22.0%	34.1%	28.0%	15.9%
Indoor weight room	22.0%	34.1%	27.6%	16.4%
Indoor walking/jogging track	25.0%	29.6%	30.6%	14.8%
Outdoor swimming pool	28.8%	21.9%	26.0%	23.3%
Outdoor games	12.6%	36.4%	33.6%	17.3%
Multipurpose athletic fields	16.3%	32.6%	30.2%	20.9%
Indoor swimming pool	29.6%	17.6%	22.2%	30.6%
Public boat launch	16.7%	21.8%	23.1%	38.4%
Outdoor volleyball	11.3%	26.8%	39.9%	22.1%
Indoor ice skating/ice arena	17.2%	20.0%	26.5%	36.3%
Outdoor tennis	9.9%	25.5%	35.8%	28.8%
Indoor climbing wall	12.6%	21.9%	31.2%	34.4%
Indoor multipurpose turf fields	9.0%	24.1%	35.8%	31.1%
Outdoor pickleball	4.7%	14.0%	36.0%	45.3%

Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding

**Table 18: Program Prioritization**

Program	Hi Priority	Medium Priority	Lo Priority	Not a Priority
Community special events	48.3%	37.4%	9.0%	5.2%
Non-sport teen / high school programs	50.0%	32.1%	5.7%	12.3%
Senior meals	48.1%	33.0%	9.0%	9.9%
Middle school / teen afterschool	51.4%	29.4%	5.1%	14.0%
Summer recreation camps	47.9%	31.8%	9.5%	10.9%
Senior / older adult activities	45.8%	33.0%	10.8%	10.4%
Non-sport adult activities	45.8%	33.0%	40.8%	10.4%
Elementary afterschool	49.5%	29.0%	7.6%	13.8%
Musical concerts / performances	38.7%	39.2%	14.6%	7.5%
Summer specialty camps	45.5%	31.9%	11.7%	10.8%
Open gyms / drop-in recreation	41.2%	35.1%	17.1%	6.6%
Youth recreational sports	42.9%	32.9%	14.3%	10.0%
Family programming	36.0%	39.3%	13.7%	10.9%
Programs for persons / disabilities	35.4%	37.3%	15.6%	11.8%
Arts and cultural programs	35.7%	35.7%	19.2%	9.4%
Group fitness programs	31.8%	39.3%	19.9%	9.0%
Nature / environmental education	26.4%	41.5%	22.6%	9.4%
Sports lessons / instruction	21.3%	37.4%	27.5%	13.7%
Adult recreational sports	19.4%	38.9%	25.6%	16.1%
Pre-kindergarten activities	26.9%	27.8%	23.1%	22.2%
Outdoor equipment rental	17.5%	36.5%	29.9%	16.1%
Aquatics / swim programs	25.2%	28.6%	25.7%	20.5%

Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding

**Table 19: Importance and Satisfaction - Recreation Programs and Facilities**

Park and Recreation Amenity	Importance	Satisfaction	Gap
Community Special Events	70.0%	21.1%	-48.9%
Active Park/Outdoor Recreation Areas	69.6%	24.6%	-45.9%
Adult Recreation Programs	53.8%	11.4%	-42.4%
Trails and Connectivity	75.9%	33.6%	-42.3%
Youth Recreation Programs	54.2%	17.5%	-36.7%
Conservation/Passive Outdoor Rec Areas	71.2%	35.1%	-36.1%
Indoor Recreation Spaces	53.4%	19.1%	-34.3%
Indoor Community Spaces	46.9%	21.6%	-25.3%
Senior Programs and Trips	38.5%	16.7%	-21.8%
Outdoor Sports Fields	37.4%	24.6%	-12.8%

Neutral responses were omitted from analysis.

All IMP-SAT differences were statistically significant except Outdoor Sports Fields and Senior Programs and Trips

**Ideas for Recreation Programming (taken from the open-ended comments on the survey):**

- ✓ Zumba, Plays/Performing Arts, Cake Decorating/Cooking Classes, Craft Classes, Dances, Walking/Hiking Events, Kayaking, Food Truck Festival, Beer Festival, Running/5K Races, Golf Lessons, Skating Lessons, Swimming Lessons, Aqua Aerobics, Concerts, Movies, Historic Walks, Arcade Games, Pool Tables, Card Tables, Summer Camps, Wednesday Nights in the Park, Bingo, Blood Pressure/Flu Shot/Health Clinic Event, Wheelchair Basketball, More Afterschool Programs, Organized Volunteer Opportunities

**Ideas for Recreation Facilities (taken from the open-ended comments on the survey):**

- ✓ Updated Trail System, Water Access/Public Boat Launch, Community Recreation Center, Gyms, Basketball Courts, Indoor and Outdoor Volleyball Courts, Handball Court, Updated Playground, Splash Pad, Indoor and Outdoor Pool, Dog Park, More Parks, Ice Skating Rink, Skate Park, Climbing Dome, Gardens, Picnic Areas

**Table 20: Indoor Multigenerational Community Center**

Farmington Town Hall	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
To what extent do you agree or disagree: The Farmington Town Hall meets the indoor recreation needs of you or your family.	5.7%	15.1%	30.7%	28.8%	19.8%

Multigenerational Community Center	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
To what extent do you agree or disagree that a town-supported multigenerational community/recreation center is needed in Farmington	37.7%	30.7%	17.5%	8.5%	5.7%

Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding

**Table 21: Community Center Priorities**

If you could prioritize ONE of the options below, which would you choose?	% of Respondents
Build a new indoor community center open to all residents of Farmington (seniors, adults, teens, youth)	38.1%
Renovate/better utilize existing town space to better meet the indoor recreation needs of Farmington	53.1%
Continue to use existing town space in its current condition for recreation programs and services	8.8%

**Table 22: Funding Mix - Willingness to Pay**

Funding Source	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Pay a Fee for Indoor Recreation Facilities	15.9%	43.4%	23.4%	9.0%	8.3%
Pay a Fee for Outdoor Recreation Facilities	18.2%	51.7%	18.9%	4.9%	6.3%
Pay a Fee for Recreation Programs	22.9%	41.7%	16.7%	8.3%	10.4%
Property Taxes to Build and Maintain Indoor Recreation Facilities	21.4%	40.0%	17.2%	11.7%	9.7%
Property Taxes to Build and Maintain Outdoor Recreation Facilities	10.3%	35.2%	24.8%	16.6%	13.1%
Property Taxes to Offset Programs and Activities	17.4%	42.4%	20.1%	9.7%	10.4%
Good Idea for the Town to Partner with Other Organizations	36.4%	44.1%	14.0%	2.8%	2.8%

Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding



**Table 23: Perceived Benefits from a Parks and Recreation Programs and Facilities**

Level of Benefit	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Personal Benefits	21.7%	23.1%	25.2%	18.9%	11.2%
Household Benefits	21.8%	29.6%	23.2%	14.8%	10.6%
Community Benefits	36.4%	37.8%	21.0%	2.8%	2.1%

Totals may not add to 100 due to rounding

**Table 24: Perceived Benefit Types**

Rank	Benefit Type	% of Respondents Who Agree or Strongly Agree
1	More positive youth development opportunities	87.3%
2	Increased sense of community	83.7%
3	Increased access to healthy aging/senior activities	80.9%
4	Improved connectivity	80.2%
5	Health/Fitness	80.1%
6	Improved social equity and access for everyone	77.1%
7	Enhanced environmental quality	75.2%
8	Increased business/economic activity in town	73.6%
9	Reduction in neighborhood crime	65.7%
10	Increased real-estate/property values	64.3%

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## Summary Findings and Recommendations

Based on the activities associated with this project, including background research, benchmarking, trends analysis, stakeholder focus groups, and the resident household survey, the following findings and recommendations are offered for consideration by the town of Farmington relative to parks and recreation services:

**1. Immediately address full-time and part-time staffing needs within the Parks and Recreation Department. This includes recruiting and hiring a full-time parks and recreation director, and planning to hire a full-time assistant director by Spring 2021.**

- 1.1. The town's full-time staff, consisting of the parks and recreation director and assistant director, were furloughed in the Spring of 2020 due to concerns stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time, all parks and recreation programming and access to the town's indoor recreation facilities was paused out of an abundance of caution. Since that time, we have learned more about how to manage park and recreation programs and facilities during the course of the virus, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and state of New Hampshire (as well as other organizations) have created guidelines for the safe operation of recreation programs and facilities. At this point, a majority of New Hampshire towns have opened up indoor recreation facilities (65.8%) and most are offering winter outdoor activities such as ice skating, skiing, and holiday events (55.3%). Almost half of New Hampshire towns are offering indoor fitness programs (47.4%), and approximately one-third are offering afterschool programs (36.8%), senior programs (36.8%), and winter youth sports (31.6%). Those towns that are open are using a variety of strategies to mitigate virus spread, including reduced capacity, requiring the use of masks and social distancing, using reservation or appointment systems for facility use, limiting indoor activities, and monitoring current case counts (NHRPA COVID-19 Winter Programming Survey, 2020). Given the feedback received through this process, there is sufficient demand from the town to open up recreation programming and facilities. To do this, full-time park and recreation staff need to be in place as soon as possible.
- 1.2. The town should post a position for a full-time park and recreation director. This position should be responsible for the overall administration and oversight of the program, and have experience in the following areas (this list is not exhaustive): hiring and overseeing staff; preparing and managing the budget; generating revenue from non-tax sources; designing and delivering recreation programs and events; engaging in strategic and master planning; engaging the public and working with citizen advisory boards; conducting program evaluations; partnering with the school district, 500 Boys and Girls Club, other town agencies, and the business community; strategic marketing and communication planning; and overseeing facility development and maintenance. We recommend that this position be prioritized and ideally hired and in place in early spring, 2021.
- 1.3. To plan and facilitate summer programming, the town should post a position for a full-time assistant parks and recreation director. This position should be heavily focused on programming and event management, and should have experience in the following areas: (this list is not exhaustive): designing and delivering recreation programs and events; hiring, training, supervising and evaluating part-time staff; recruiting, training, and retaining program volunteers; engaging the public in understanding program needs and wants; conducting end-of-program evaluations; fundraising and soliciting sponsorship for

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recreation programs and events; overseeing facility scheduling; developing and implementing program marketing and communication plans; maintaining partnerships with key stakeholders; and equipment ordering and inventorying. We recommend that this position be prioritized and ideally hired and in place by mid-late spring, 2021.

- 1.4. Hiring these two positions restores Farmington Parks and Recreation back to 2.0 full-time equivalents, and puts the department on par with the average number of full-time staff employed by town park and recreation departments throughout the state (NHRPA COVID-19 Park and Recreation Program and Facilities Survey, 2020). It is important to point out that two full-time staff alone cannot provide a comprehensive park and recreation program to meet the needs of the town. Feedback throughout this process suggested that in the recent past, there was limited program offerings and limited recreation facility availability. As such, the parks and recreation director should develop a plan and the town should provide funding for part-time hourly positions that can be used to supervise open facility times during off-hours (nights, weekends), or assist with recreation program supervision. Comparable towns, such as Newmarket, Barrington, Hampton, and Exeter have three (3) or more full-time equivalents for parks and recreation, and Farmington should plan for adding additional FTEs as program demand requires.

**2. Develop a “Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee” comprised of interested and dedicated citizens to assist full-time staff in organizing and planning a comprehensive park and recreation program for Farmington residents. Work with dedicated volunteers to develop a “Friends of Recreation” 501(c)(3) group to assist with resource development and philanthropy.**

- 2.1. We recommend that the town petition the Board of Selectmen for the creation of a standing “Recreation Advisory Committee” or “Recreation Commission.” This committee’s membership should be diverse in terms of age, socio-economic status, children in home, and interests. We recommend that this committee be identified as advisory in nature (as opposed to policy-setting). The parks and recreation director should meet with and consult with this committee on a regular basis with input solicited in the areas of: evaluation of existing programming; creation of new programs; assistance in special event facilitation; development of recreation-based Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) requests; strategic and master planning.
- 2.2. The town administrator should gauge interest in forming a “Friends of Farmington Recreation” 501(c)(3) not-for-profit group. The organization must be separate from the municipality, but formed with the expressed intent to support the mission of the parks and recreation Department. Such a group would allow for fundraising, grant writing, and acceptance of donations without public hearing. The Friends group could then purchase equipment, land, services, etc. in the support of the parks and recreation department. This will require a core group of community members willing to complete the paperwork associated with acquiring 501(c)(3) status and engaging in fundraising activities. The Board must adhere to requirements set forth by the New Hampshire Secretary of State, Department of Justice, and IRS. Friends groups are particularly successful with specifically identified projects. Examples in Farmington could include improvements to Fernald Park, renovations to second floor of Municipal Building, or creating a scholarship fund for low-income families to access recreation programs.

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**3. Better utilize existing indoor recreation space to meet recreation programming needs, including the Town Hall/Opera House, and other town-owned facilities as needed and appropriate. Invest in facility upgrades to make them more functional for recreation programming.**

- 3.1. The national level of service benchmark standard for indoor recreation space is approximately 1 to 2 square feet per resident. Based on this, Farmington should have between 7,185 and 14,370 square feet of indoor recreation space available to town residents. New Hampshire towns with indoor recreation facilities manage, on average, approximately 6,000 square feet of indoor recreation space per town. Compared to these benchmarks, Farmington currently has adequate indoor recreation space for a variety of activities. The Town Hall/Opera House has an estimated 8,000 square feet of indoor space on the main floor, including a fairly large multipurpose activity area, conference room, staff offices, storage, and bathrooms, and the approximate equivalent amount of space downstairs, comprised of classrooms, a non-commercial kitchen, and bathrooms. The town also controls approximately 6,000 square feet of accessible space on the second floor of the town's municipal building, consisting of classrooms, meeting rooms, and a small fitness center. From a square footage and space perspective, the town has access to a reasonable amount of programmable space for a variety of indoor recreation activities.
- 3.2. While indoor recreation space in town is adequate from a programmable square footage perspective, there are challenges with existing facilities. For example, the multipurpose room/performing arts area on the main floor can be used for a range of active recreation activities, but is not functional for traditional youth or adult sports programming such as competitive basketball. The town lacks controllable gymnasium space suitable for these types of activities. The lower level classroom space is functional but lacks updated and modern finishes that make the space attractive as a space for in-house or rental programs. The space has columns that break up the activity space and make many of the areas not usable for physical recreation programming. The kitchen is also functional, but is not commercial-level and is limited in its capacity to handle large-scale cooking or catering functions. These limitations shouldn't prevent the town from offering basic recreation programming such as afterschool programs, summer camps, senior programs, community meetings, or a small-scale meals program. However, if the town wants to grow its program offerings and/or generate revenue from rentals to outside groups, then updated program space, including a gymnasium, commercial kitchen, multipurpose/function room, and meeting space would be needed.
- 3.3. The town should investigate how it can use existing indoor space to grow and sustain town recreation programs. This includes the Town Hall/Opera House (see above), as well as examining how available space could be better utilized in the town's municipal building. This space could be used for group fitness or martial arts programs, basic weight lifting and cardio workout areas, stretching areas, book clubs, scout meetings, or adult learning or education classes. This would require some investment in making the space more usable, such as refinishing wood flooring, upgrading lighting and interior paint, and purchasing equipment to facilitate programming. The town also owns the old Court House next to the Town Hall/Opera House. This building provides approximately 1,300 square feet of programmable space, and could be used as drop-in space for senior activities (see #5 below).

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- 3.4. The parks and recreation department should also explore potential partnerships with the Farmington School District for use of school gymnasium space when it is not in use by school or other town groups (i.e. the Farmington 500 Boys and Girls Club). More than 75% of survey respondents desired more opportunities for drop-in recreation or open gyms, and almost 60% of survey respondents wanted more opportunities for adult recreational sports, such as basketball or volleyball. Access to multipurpose indoor gym space was noted as a high or medium priority by almost 75% of survey respondents, and more than 65% of respondents rated indoor gym or athletic courts as high or medium priorities. It is possible that gym space in the schools might be available for town recreational use in the off-season. However, given the number of school and community youth programs that use the gym during the winter and shoulder seasons, and given downtime for routine maintenance schedules, it is unlikely that a partnership with the school would be able to meet all of these needs in the long-term.
  - 3.5. The town should also explore ways to make the multipurpose room on the main floor of the opera house available for drop-in or pickup activities in the evenings when it is not being used. Sport activities such as adult volleyball, dodgeball, pickleball, badminton, or table tennis could be viable adult activities offered in this space. The space is also perfect for dances, performing arts, or fitness classes.
4. **Continue to fund and support a full-service youth recreation program, including afterschool, school breaks, and summer camp programming. Provide dedicated space, time, and staff support for non-sport teen-oriented programming.**
    - 4.1. One of the strengths of the Farmington parks and recreation program is its afterschool and summer youth programming. These programs are affordable, and provide a safe space for youth to go to in their non-school hours. Parents, in particular, expressed concern throughout the process at not having access to these programs during the COVID-19 shutdown, and restoring this programming for the town's residents should be a priority. The town has space to accommodate afterschool and summer camp programming in the Town Hall/Opera House, and can utilize outdoor facilities at Fernald Park and the schools as needed. The department should also explore partnerships with the Farmington 500 Boys and Girls Club to use outdoor athletic field space particularly during the summer. The department should be proactive in offering full-day camp programs during school breaks (winter break, spring break).
    - 4.2. Dedicated space for teens and older youth was also noted as a need in this study. A "teen/youth center" was noted as a high or medium priority by more than 80% of survey respondents, and more than 80% said that "non-sport teen/high school programs" and "middle school/teen afterschool programs" were high or medium priorities. We consistently heard that there is little for non-athletes to do in the afterschool hours. Space should be made available for teens to gather to play cards and games, cook, bake, do crafts, participate in arts or drama programs, or hang out and socialize with friends. A popular activity that is being offered throughout the state now is E-sports through the New Hampshire E-Sports League, which many parks and recreation departments throughout the state are part of. Continuing to offer opportunities for teens to serve as "counselors-in-training" for the department's summer camp program provides useful work opportunities for high school students, and can help fill the department's part-time staffing needs. This model could also be used for other part-time positions throughout the town's parks and recreation department.

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- 4.3. The popularity of the positive youth development movement in the 1990s saw the construction of separate buildings for teens and youth (i.e. “teen centers”) to accommodate the educational, social, emotional, and physical needs of this age group. Separate teen centers have largely fallen out of favor, as they present a challenge to program, staff and finance (Adler, 2018). Teens and youth need their own space to hang out and interact with their peers. However, research shows that different generations benefit when they spend time together (Abrahms, 2017). To the extent possible, we recommend that space for teens and youth not be separated from other parks and recreation programming, but that it afford opportunities for multi-age and multi-generational connection where appropriate.
  - 4.4. The town should examine its pricing for its youth programs, and its summer camp program in particular. The town’s current price point is approximately \$100 per week for a full-service summer camp. This is less than comparable New Hampshire towns, and there could be opportunities to increase revenue. However, it would be important to maintain access to summer camp for families who cannot afford a higher price point.

**5. Develop, fund, and support a full-service senior program, including providing dedicated space, time, and staff support for senior programs, activities, trips, and meals.**

- 5.1. There was considerable support throughout this process for more senior programming, and for space to meet and gather to do shared activities. Focus group participants consistently mentioned the need for more diverse senior programming. More than 75% of survey respondents said that an “Indoor Senior Center”, “Senior/Older Adult Activities”, and “Senior Meals” were high or medium priorities for Farmington.
- 5.2. Seniors consistently mentioned a wide variety of programs that they would be interested in seeing offered, including fitness classes (tai chi, yoga, weight lifting, walking), sports (senior golf, pickleball), education programs (estate planning, technology/computers), cards and games (bridge, Bingo, chess), crafts (quilting, wood working, painting), diverse trips, and senior meals. Seniors also mentioned opportunities for multigenerational activities where seniors and young people can interact.
- 5.3. Space currently exists to offer many of these programs at the Town Hall/Opera House. One of the issues that was raised in this process is that the scheduling of programs and activities was often inconvenient, and there was little or nothing available on the weekends or during the day when seniors are most apt to engage in programming. Given the natural pattern of usage times in indoor recreation centers, it makes sense that senior programming could be scheduled in the mornings and early afternoons at the Town Hall/Opera House, and youth programming could be scheduled in the late afternoon and early evening hours. Adult drop-in recreation or programmed opportunities could take place in the evenings. This would allow for separate, dedicated programming, while still providing a common multigenerational space for indoor recreation activities.
- 5.4. The town owns the Court House building on Main Street, located right next to the Town Hall/Opera House. Several participants in the focus groups expressed interest in this space as a potential senior center. There is approximately 1,300 square feet that could be used as a base for senior activities, including meetings, games, arts and crafts, educational sessions, or many of the smaller-scale programs listed above. If the desire is there for separate dedicated space for seniors, the town could investigate the feasibility of renovating this space to make it usable for senior programming in the near-term.

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5.5. The town should add additional staff to accommodate senior programs as they grow and as demand requires. We recommend hiring a part-time senior program manager who would be responsible for developing and implementing a full-scale senior recreation and activities program. Two good program models are York, Maine and Exeter, New Hampshire. Both towns support robust senior programming through their municipal parks and recreation department, and both provide dedicated, full-time staff members to run their programs. York, in particular, charges a small fee (\$50 per year) for seniors to join their program, and this helps offset costs for senior programs, and provides all senior members with access to program information about upcoming activities and programs via a newsletter format. This model could address some of the concerns that were raised in this process about not having enough staff support for senior programming, and seniors not knowing what, where, or when programs were being offered.

**6. Provide opportunities for active and passive outdoor recreation, including parks, trails, athletic fields, and open space. Make improvements to Fernald Park to make the park more attractive to drop-in users and to support recreation programming.**

- 6.1. Study participants consistently mentioned the importance of outdoor recreation amenities and resources to themselves and their families. “Playgrounds”, “Multi-use Trails”, and “Conservation Areas” were mentioned as high or medium priorities by more than 75% of survey respondents, and “Outdoor Walking/Jogging Track” and “Green Space for Open Recreation” was mentioned as high or medium priorities by more than 70% of respondents. It was clear from this study that Farmington residents value outdoor recreation areas, and were interested in seeing more access to these spaces.
- 6.2. “Multi-Use Trails” and “Conservation Areas” are mostly the concern of the Farmington Conservation Commission, as well as of various land management and conservation groups operating in the town (Southeast Land Trust of New Hampshire, Moose Mountain Regional Greenways, State of New Hampshire). However, we address access to these resources in this report because outdoor recreation plays a significant role in enhancing the quality of life in communities, and has been recognized as playing a key role in a region’s economic development. The fact that these resources were rated so highly and were mentioned by so many people throughout this process shows their value to the residents of Farmington, and providing access to passive and active outdoor recreation resources should continue to be part of the town’s master planning efforts moving forward.
- 6.3. The Farmington Parks and Recreation Department controls and maintains Fernald Park, and is the site of a variety of recreation amenities and activities. Participants in this study expressed concerns about some aspects of Fernald Park, including the quality and usability of the playground, the lack of separation between the river and the park, and the overall perception that the park is not safe. While the Farmington Police Department regularly patrols the area around the park, residents still mentioned these as potential barriers to park use.
- 6.4. We recommend that the town upgrade the playground at Fernald Park. The existing playground was installed in 2010, and typically commercial playgrounds will be updated approximately every 10 years. A new playground structure should accommodate a wider range of ages and provide adequate age separation, incorporate inclusive or universal design principles, and be designed to facilitate a variety of types of play (active, sensory, creative/imaginary, social, reflective, etc.). Playground design should also take into

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amenities to accommodate parents and caregivers, including benches, tables, and clear sight lines. A good model is the newly installed playground at the Rochester (NH) Common. A potential funding model is Northwood (NH)'s playground located at the Northwood Athletic Fields on Route 4. This playground was financed through a combination of non-profit fundraising through the Friends of Northwood Recreation group, and supplemented by a grant from the New Hampshire Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) (see #10 below).

6.5. There are a number of other ideas for upgrading Fernald Park to make it more attractive to a wider array of users. For example, the town could consider incorporating outdoor fitness stations and other functional fitness elements to the park. This would capitalize on growing trends in health and fitness activities as mentioned earlier in this report, and would make the park a potential destination for teen or adult users. The basketball courts could be striped for outdoor pickleball. Pickleball is a fast-growing tennis-like sport, particularly for adults over age 50, and many New Hampshire towns have incorporated pickleball into their program offerings. Pickleball equipment, including nets and balls, are inexpensive and easy to acquire. Introductory clinics could be held at the park, and eventually organized leagues and tournaments could be offered. Other towns offer pop-up fitness classes in their parks (yoga, pilates, Tai Chi, etc.) and this could be a great use of the park's green space during good weather. The town could consider running movies in the park in the summer, or doing a mid-week concert series. In general, the more that a park is used, the safer and more attractive it becomes. Adding several of these amenities and programs could enhance the usability of the park and could be done with minimal impact on the town's budget, particularly if opportunities for grant funding (LWCF) are successfully pursued.

**7. Improve marketing and promotion for the parks and recreation program to include a comprehensive communication plan utilizing print and electronic strategies. Strengthen communication and partnerships with in-town partners such as the Farmington School District and Farmington 500 Boys and Girls Club.**

7.1. One of the consistent themes among study participants was their lack of awareness of park and recreation program and activity offerings. Almost half of survey respondents stated that they were "not aware of available recreation programs" and more than one quarter stated they were "not aware of available facilities." Focus group participants consistently mentioned the lack of easily accessible information about park and recreation programs as being a significant barrier to participation, particularly for those who do not have computer access.

7.2. There are a number of public and non-profit groups providing recreation and community programming in Farmington, and this patchwork of providers creates confusion as to which organizations are responsible for which activities, and what the most updated contact information is for each provider.

7.3. One of the clear suggestions from the focus groups and survey was the need for both print and electronic information related to parks and recreation opportunities in Farmington. Most survey respondents said they get most of their information about park and recreation programs via social media, but respondents indicated that they wanted to get information via email, through outdoor signage, on the department's website, through school announcements, and via print flyer and brochures. Seniors, in particular, were interested in a printed newsletter that would highlight senior activities and programs. This multi-media

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approach to communication is particularly important for connecting with a large range of diverse participants in town.

- 7.4. The town should consider providing maps and/or information of its conservation lands on the town's website, particularly for those properties with access to hiking and other public recreation uses. The town should also consider partnering with TrailFinder, "a mapping site designed to help Vermont and New Hampshire residents and visitors find hiking, walking, showshoeing, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, and paddling trails across the state" (<https://www.trailfinder.info/about/faqs>). UNH Cooperative Extension is a collaborative partner and would be a useful contact to assist with this effort.

**8. Provide support for activities that bring the community together, including re-vitalizing existing events such as Hay Day, with a focus on events that draw residents and out-of-town visitors downtown.**

- 8.1. Farmington has traditionally offered a variety of community special events that brought together town residents and attracted out-of-town visitors. Events such as Hay Day, the Halloween 5K road race, Memorial Day parade, Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony, Easter Egg Hunt, Touch-a-Truck, and the Farmer's Market were seen as largely positive for the community. Many of these events have been cancelled in the past year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and study participants wanted to see events such as these return. Study participants consistently said that the lack of community programming has led to a feeling of disconnectedness among town residents.
- 8.2. Focus group participants discussed Hay Day at length as being a symbol of some of the issues with community programming in Farmington. There was concern that the town had cut funding for the event, and this led to the event being more focused on commercial vendors and less focused on Farmington residents. Almost all focus group participants expressed interest in Hay Day or some variation, but with a stronger civic/community focus, including involving civic and municipal organizations, bringing in music, and possibly limiting the event to one day. We recommend that the park and recreation staff work closely with a new Recreation Advisory Committee to help plan community events that have the ability to connect residents and draw out-of-town visitors, particularly downtown.

**9. Plan to upgrade indoor recreation and community activity space as needs and participation patterns demand. This includes investigating the feasibility for adding a 10-15,000 square foot community indoor recreation center with separate dedicated space for seniors and teens/youth.**

- 9.1. It is our opinion that the town of Farmington has adequate indoor recreation space to build and grow a full-service parks and recreation program. The department has used its space effectively in the past. With creative thinking in concert with the results of this study, there are a wide variety of programs and activities that could be offered in existing town-controlled space in the near term. However, it should be noted that existing indoor recreation space is limited. For example, the town does not control gymnasium space suitable for competitive community athletic activities, and available space through partnerships with the schools is limited. This constrains what programs can be offered, makes offering drop-in or open recreation programs (like pickup basketball or volleyball) difficult, and limits the potential growth of the parks and recreation program. Further, existing indoor space is in need of updating to address deferred maintenance and general

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wear and tear that comes with facility age. If the town were to seriously consider using the second floor of the Municipal Building or the Court House, it is likely that significant dollars would need to be spent on upgrading the interior of those buildings so they are usable for programs and accessible for participants.

- 9.2. It should be noted that only 20.8% of survey respondents said that the Town Hall/Opera House meets their indoor recreation needs, and 68.4% said that a town-supported multigenerational community center is needed in Farmington. When asked to prioritize, 38.1% of survey participants said that they would want to see a new indoor community center open to all residents of Farmington, and 53.1% said that they would prioritize renovating and better utilizing existing town space to meet needs. Focus group participants consistently talked about having a place that they could use for recreation; community gatherings; functions; and youth, teen, adult, and senior programming. There were considerable concerns with existing facilities, including the Town Hall/Opera House. Some of these concerns could be addressed through creative programming, making the building available for drop-in or open recreation, expanding building hours, and re-organizing building scheduling (i.e. seniors programs during the day, youth programs afterschool, adult/teen programs in the evenings). However, some of the concerns with the building's age, functionality (lack of gym space, no commercial kitchen), accessibility for persons with disabilities, and overall aesthetics (particularly downstairs) would need to be resolved through major renovation or new construction.
- 9.3. Participants expressed interest in recreation amenities that were centrally located and easily accessible to the downtown area. The town owns property that could potentially carry a new indoor community center on the site of the old fire department building. This could be a viable place for a new downtown community center, and would centralize recreation department activities in one location, creating a "one-stop-recreation-shop" for participants and families, and draw participants downtown. If this site is amenable to town stakeholders, we recommend that a site feasibility study be conducted in the near term with an architectural/engineering firm to determine the suitability of the site to carry an approximately 10-15,000 square foot indoor community center. In addition, the firm should provide a conceptual design, site plan, business plan, and cost estimate for the project.
- 9.4. Site plans for a new facility should take into account the various needs expressed in this project, including: gymnasium; multipurpose room/studio; kitchen and function room; conference/meeting space; staff offices; bathrooms; and adequate storage. Two potential benchmark facilities for Farmington to look at would be the North Conway Community Center, a 9,200 square foot facility constructed in November 2015 for \$1.3 million. The building has a middle school sized basketball court with two short cross courts for practice, conference room, 24'x25' multipurpose room, conference room, game room, 14'x14' weight/fitness room, commercial kitchen, and staff office space. Another larger facility example is the Meredith Community Center, an 18,000 square foot facility constructed in April 2006 for \$3.5 million. Meredith's facility has a full-sized basketball court with two cross courts for practices and games, drop curtain to separate playing areas, indoor climbing wall and performing arts stage, multiple function rooms separated by room dividers, commercial kitchen, game room, arts and crafts room, staff office space, and covered outdoor seating.

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9.5. Timing for such a project should be made with the town’s existing bond capacity and debt schedule in mind. Participants in this study expressed support for funding an indoor recreation facility through a combination of property taxes, user fees, and rental charges, and partnerships with other user groups. A majority of survey respondents were willing to pay a fee to use indoor recreation facilities (59.3%) or to pay for recreation programs (69.9%). In addition, a majority of survey respondents agreed that tax dollars were appropriate means to build and maintain indoor recreation facilities (64.6%), as well as to offset the costs of recreation programs and activities (61.4%). Indoor facilities such as the ones mentioned above can be economic drivers for communities, and can provide opportunities for business sponsorship, rental contracts, and referral services. Partnerships with non-profit groups, local youth sport organizations, and the School District are natural fits for a project such as this, and (80.5%) of survey respondents felt that it was a good idea for the town to partner with other organizations to provide recreation services. Recreation facilities and amenities are potential assets for towns. Parks and recreation staff should seek out private entrepreneurs who might be interested in renting space in such a new facility in order to build and grow their existing programs. This could provide a source of income for the new facility and add to the economic vitality of the town by providing opportunities for new “pop-up” businesses to grow and serve the community. For example, multipurpose space could be rented to a local martial arts, dance, or arts and crafts instructor to run these programs, and this could add to the range of program offerings to the town.

**10. Finance park and recreation improvements and operations from a diverse mix of funding sources, including general fund support, user fees and charges, grants, sponsorships, and donations.**

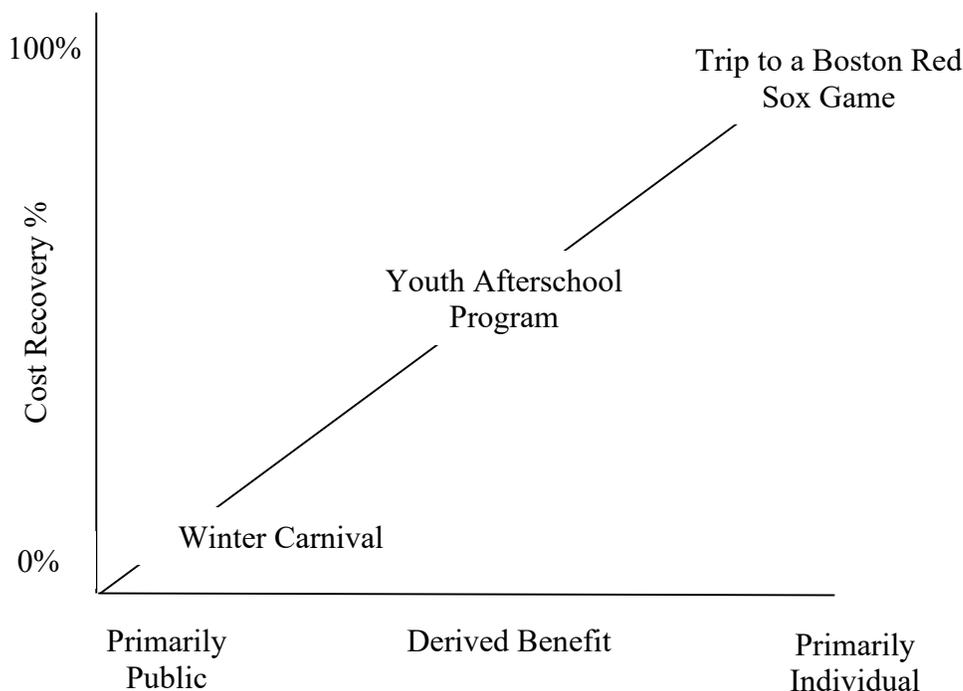
10.1. Municipal park and recreation departments are typically financed through a mix of funding sources, including the general fund (tax) allocation, user fees and charges, grants, commercial sponsorship, and donations. The parks and recreation department in Farmington has been a good steward of its general fund dollars, and has the ability to generate funding. For example, in 2019, the department generated approximately \$140,281 in revenue, while receiving \$152,150 in general fund support for operations. This means that the department recovers approximately 92.2% of its tax support through revenue generating programs and services. Most of this revenue is generated through the department’s youth programming, including its afterschool and summer camp program. For context, the national average of recreation revenue as a percentage of operating expenses is 27.3%, and the New England average is 29.2%. Farmington’s 92.9% is ahead of other New England towns such as Wakefield (71.5%) and Hampton (76.6%), and is higher than recently reported averages in towns such as Belmont, Conway, Franklin, Gilford, Meredith, Moultonborough, Ossipee, and Wolfeboro (Town of Moultonborough Recreation Needs Assessment, 2015). It is likely that expanding program offerings by better utilizing existing indoor facility space will increase the department’s generated (non-tax) revenue.

10.2. In addition to program fees and charges, the parks and recreation department should develop a financing plan consisting of a range of alternative financing methods, such as grants, sponsorships, and donations. While it is unreasonable to think that alternative financing will generate a majority of the department’s operating budget – statewide, these types of funding mechanisms contribute less than 10% of a town’s parks and recreation budget (2019-2023 NH Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan) – there are opportunities available for Farmington. For example, each year, the NH Division of Parks and Recreation solicits calls for Land and Water Conservation (LWCF) grant funding for the development and/or

acquisition of properties and/or facilities used for public outdoor recreation. LWCF funding provides 50/50 matching grants to finance projects that meet the state’s outdoor recreation priorities. Local municipalities such as Dover, Deerfield, Newmarket, Somersworth, and Moultonborough have current LWCF funded projects, and there are at least 27 open LWCF projects statewide. Renovation of Fernald Park would seem to be a perfect fit for LWCF funding, particularly if the town started a “Friends of Recreation” group to assist with fundraising the matching portion of the grant. LWCF applications are typically open each spring. More information can be found at <https://www.nhstateparks.org/about-us/community-recreation/land-water-conservation-fund-grant>. Other potential grant mechanisms include the USDA Rural Development Community Facility Grants, or Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). Both mechanisms have been used to fund recreation facility development in the state. Newmarket, in particular, was able to receive CDBG funding to help offset the cost of construction of their community recreation center. Information on these and other programs can be found at <https://www.nrpa.org/our-work/Grant-Fundraising-Resources/>.

- 10.3. While the town has been successful at generating revenue via program fees and charges, the parks and recreation department should develop a revenue generation model that takes into account the level of benefits derived from a recreation program or activity (purely individual, mostly individual, mostly community, purely community) in relationship to the subsidy the program receives (no subsidy, some subsidy, mostly subsidized, fully subsidized). This can help the department decide on appropriate pricing for programs to ensure equitable distribution of department resources for a wide range of diverse participants. Figure 4 shows how such a model might be used to plan for program cost recovery.

**Figure 4: Program Cost Recovery Subsidy Model**



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## Appendix A: Comparison Facilities

### FRYEBURG (ME) COMMUNITY CENTER

**Square Footage:** 22,000 square feet

**Opened:** 2019

**Cost:** Estimated between \$3.3 - 3.6 million when fully complete

**Operating Cost:** N/A

**Funding Source:** Fundraised by Fryeburg Recreation Committee, a 501c(3) non-profit. Donated materials and labor from local contractors.

**Managed By:** Town of Fryeburg, ME Recreation Department

**Features:**

- High school sized basketball court striped for multiple activities (basketball, pickleball, volleyball)
- Two 73' x 46' cross-courts
- Hardwood floors
- Scoreboards
- Mezzanine area with commercial kitchen
- Upstairs function room
- Multipurpose room with synthetic flooring
- Staff office space
- Ample storage and mechanical room
- Located at the town of Fryeburg's outdoor sports complex with multipurpose athletic fields, baseball/softball diamonds, outdoor walking/jogging area, outdoor basketball courts, covered picnic shelter/pavilion, and maintenance building.



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## Comparison Facilities (Continued):

### MEREDITH (NH) COMMUNITY CENTER

**Square Footage:** 18,000 square feet

**Opened:** April 2006

**Cost:** \$3.5 million construction,  
\$500,000 for the land

**Operating Cost:** Approximately \$102,700; facility  
generates approximately \$87,314

**Funding Source:** Fundraised \$400,000; bond  
funding for the remainder; capital  
fund was established in 2008 for  
maintenance and upkeep

**Managed By:** Meredith Parks and Recreation  
Department

#### Features:

- Full-sized basketball court with two cross-courts for practice and games
- Drop curtain to separate playing areas
- Synthetic flooring designed for flexibility
- Scoreboards, sound panels on gym walls
- Indoor climbing wall, performing arts stage
- Multiple function rooms separated by room dividers
- Senior center absorbed into parks and recreation department in 2014
- Commercial kitchen
- Game room and separate arts and crafts room
- Staff office space
- Ample storage and mechanical room
- Covered outdoor seating space
- Located in town and proximate to outdoor sports fields and playground. Pedestrian access to both the community center and fields; designed with "New England" aesthetic
- Serves multiple functions - town council chambers, emergency shelter, voting place



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## NORTH CONWAY (NH) COMMUNITY CENTER

**Square Footage:** 9,200 square feet

**Opened:** November 2015

**Cost:** \$1.3 million

**Operating Cost:** N/A; facility generates approximately \$38,000 annually in rental income and approximately \$71,000 in program services



Photo courtesy of Quentin Lewis (Google Maps)

**Funding Source:** Fundraising; town tax support of approximately \$65,000-75,000/year

**Managed By:** North Conway Community Center - 501c(3) Non-Profit

### **Features:**

- Middle-school sized basketball court with two short cross courts for practice
- Synthetic flooring designed for flexibility
- Scoreboard
- Conference room, 24' x 25' multipurpose room, game room
- 14' x 14' weight/fitness room
- Commercial kitchen
- Staff office space
- Limited storage space
- LED lights and sensors throughout the building
- Located in downtown North Conway adjacent to Schouler Park, a large greenspace/common area in town

