

# **S o u t h o l d   2 0 2 0**

## **The New Comprehensive Plan for the Town of Southold**

### **Parks and Recreation Chapter**

**DRAFT: December 20, 2011 (incorporates initial public input)**

#### **Introduction and Purpose**

The Town of Southold offers numerous recreational opportunities on its land and waters, and has acquired and managed many acres of recreational lands through its diverse programs. Further opportunities have been established by the four Park districts: Mattituck, Cutchogue-New Suffolk, Southold and Orient-East Marion. The Southold Recreation Department offers many programs for the recreational experience of residents.

The County of Suffolk, State of New York, School Districts, and several private organizations also have landholdings within the Town for recreational purposes. A complete inventory of such holdings is described in an appendix entitled "Parks and Recreation Inventory."

This chapter addresses providing numerous activities and programs that offer recreational, educational and leisure opportunities that meet the needs, preferences and financial abilities of Southold's residents and visitors. An effort to determine future needs relating to these activities requires an examination of the existing inventory of programs and facilities. In addition it requires the engagement of the public to determine the types of recreational and leisure activities they envision for the future.

#### **Brief History**

In the past, the ability to avail of recreational activities and the utilization of parks and open space for recreational purposes was an informal arrangement. Unlike many chapters found within the Comprehensive Plan, there are limited studies and recommendations regarding parks and recreation. In 1981 the League of Women Voters issued a survey to assess recreational needs that reported that Town residents wanted more parks and trails along with an indoor pool/gymnasium complex. Two consultants also provided reports to the Town Board in the early eighties that featured concrete recommendations including the development of a "professional staff" for recreational purposes.

The Town established a recreation department in 1985. Currently the recreation staff consists of one full-time director and one part-time staff to develop and administer programs. In 2004 the Town transferred responsibility for all maintenance of public properties, including parks and recreation to the Department of Public Works. In addition, the Town created a volunteer committee (Parks, Beaches and Recreation) to make recommendations to the Town Board to promote recreational opportunities.

In 2004 the Town Board increased the collection of parks and recreation fees to \$7000 per lot that the Planning Board may collect if an applicant cannot suitably accommodate a park or public trail for recreational purposes within a subdivision plat (\$3500 per lot for conservation subdivision and no charge for affordable housing district). Fees are maintained in a separate trust fund and can be used exclusively for the acquisition of public parks, playground or recreation, and/or for the improvements of public park and recreational facilities.

In May 2008, the voters approved a referendum for the Town to purchase the site formerly known as “the Peconic School” situated on 4.3 acres on Peconic Lane next to the Town’s existing Recreation Department. The Town has utilized much of its Suffolk County Community Development Block Grant funding towards the rehabilitation of the site, now known as the Peconic Lane Community Center. The Center features three rooms holding up to 30 people for meeting space, educational classes as well as leisure activities and a small auditorium with stage.

### **Engaging the Public to Determine Perceived Recreational Needs and Gaps**

In an effort to determine what types of recreational activities the public would like for the future, a survey was developed and launched on the Town’s website. Respondents were solicited through the Recreation Department’s E-Newsletter, a link on the Town’s webpage and an advertisement in the Suffolk Times. Initially this effort provided 118 responses. Additional strategies of community outreach increased the survey response to almost 200. Surveys were also provided to students at local schools to ascertain the types of recreational and leisure activities that youth would like to see developed in Town. Seniors (55 years of age and older) comprise 40% of the Town’s population-- therefore the Special Projects Coordinator met with seniors at the Human Resource Center to discuss the Town’s Comprehensive Plan along with distributing surveys.

In addition to soliciting public feedback through surveys, three focus groups were conducted at the Recreation Center to elicit ideas about what types of recreation and leisure activities are needed in the Town, obstacles and impediments of current programming as well as a review of recreational activities offered in other East End towns not currently offered in Southold.

The Southold Youth Bureau board and Youth Advisory Council convened a meeting devoted towards strategic planning in preparation for the Comprehensive Plan’s “Human Services” chapter regarding youth services. Over 90% of the respondents expressed that priority planning should include the development of a year-round multi-

purpose gymnasium and swimming pool complex with the ability to provide space for a teen center for afterschool activities.

#### Survey Responses:

Appendix \_\_\_\_ features a detailed response of surveys received by the public. Initially responses were collected online via Survey Monkey and later printed copies were made available.

The top five survey responses from the public regarding recreational facilities/programs that are most needed in Town are noted below in order of priority:

- Indoor swimming pool (80%)
- Bicycle trails (73%)
- Walking and jogging trails (68%)
- Bowling lanes (65%)
- Performing arts (55%)
- Indoor sports complex (55%)

In reviewing written comments/suggestions from the public, many emphasized combining functions to meet needs such as combining the swimming pool and gymnasium complex that could include teen activities as well as childcare. A few patrons noted the inferior condition of the dog park and the need for expansion and improvement of grounds. Also several comments referenced the need for diverse programming with additional instructors to offer “advanced programming.”

#### Focus Group Comments:

Three focus groups were convened to discuss recreation in the Town of Southold, with approximately twenty individuals participating. The content of the discussion strongly favored the development of additional cultural programming such as performing arts, theatre, movies, musical programs and arts and crafts activities within the newly acquired Peconic Lane Community Center site. In addition it was suggested that the name of the department responsible for administering programs should be changed from “Recreation” to another name such as “Recreation, Education and Leisure.”

#### Performance Standards:

The National Park and Recreation Association adopted standards for basic outdoor recreational facilities that provide guidelines for municipalities in planning recreational activities. While these standards may be applicable to other suburban or rural communities it does not imply that they are necessarily appropriate for the Town of Southold with its preserved farmland and semi-rural hamlets. Its reference is merely to provide guidelines for planning. They appear below:

<u>Facility</u>	<u>Standard per Persons</u> (Southold population approx 21,000)
Baseball	1 per 5,000
Basketball	1 per 5,000
Handball	1 per 20,000
Golf Course	1 per 50,000
Softball	1 per 5,000
Tennis	1 per 2,000
Swimming Pool	1 per 20,000
Ice Hockey	1 per 100,000
Volleyball	1 per 5,000
Soccer	1 per 10,000
Football	1 per 10,000
Field Hockey	1 per 20,000
Track (1/4 mile)	1 per 20,000

Existing Inventory in Southold:

The Town contains a range and diversity of parkland and other open space suitable for recreational purposes. However, not all of this land is in public hands. Private owners and operators provide recreational opportunities as became evident in the crafting of the Town's Local Waterfront Revitalization Program document. This includes private marinas and golf courses. The Inventory contained in Appendix denotes all land used for park and recreation purposes. A distinction is made between government- owned properties, school-district properties and private properties. Below is a listing of Town of Southold recreational parks with current sports activities:

- Robert Tasker Park
  - Tennis courts (3) with lights
  - Little League baseball fields (3) 1 with lights
  - T-ball baseball field (1)
  - Playground area (1)
  - Restroom facilities
  
- Jean Cochran Park
  - Roller hockey rink (1)
  - Baseball field, with lights (1)
  - Tennis courts (3)
  - Basketball Court (1)
  - Football field (1) (also used for lacrosse, Soccer)
  - T-ball baseball fields (2)
  - ½ mile walking track
  
- Laurel Lake Park
  - Little League baseball fields (2)
  - Playground area (1)

- Strawberry Fields Fairgrounds (leased from Suffolk County)  
Sports fields (3) used for soccer, lacrosse
- Old School House Park (leased from Orient/East Marion School District)  
Basketball court (1)  
Tennis court (1)  
Playground  
Little league baseball field (1) also used for Soccer

## **Town Goals and Objectives**

### **Facility and Program Planning as well as Adequacy Analysis**

To develop Town goals and objectives for the Parks and Recreation chapter the following methods were utilized:

- Review of previous studies
- Review of survey responses and comments
- Review of focus group discussions
- Review of National Parks and Recreation Association performance standards
- Review of existing inventory
- Interviews with recreation department staff and members of the Parks, Beaches and Recreation committee

#### **1. Diverse Programming**

Recreational, educational and leisure activities evolve with time and it is important to remain current as well as satisfy the needs of a diverse population of seniors, youth, part-time residents, etc. Technological advances require that the facilities and activities remain compelling and instructional for all Town residents.

**Goal 1:** Provide for a variety of recreational, educational and leisure experiences and programs to meet the diverse needs of the community in an efficient and cost-effective manner

#### **Objectives:**

- 1) Issue annual surveys to assess parks and recreational needs of the community. Meet with participants of the Human Resource Center and Youth Bureau to further ascertain the needs of seniors and youth.
- 2) As follow-up to survey responses, facilitate focus groups to garner additional information of what the community wants to satisfy recreational needs.
- 3) Establish the capability to register and pay online for parks and recreational programs
- 4) Provide exit surveys to participants who take classes and partake in recreation activities.

- 5) Promote ongoing feedback regarding existing parks and recreational offerings via social media such as dedicating a Facebook page for Parks and Recreation.
- 6) Continually research and assess recreational programs of other municipalities in the region as well as throughout the country.
- 7) Develop and enhance cultural programs and activities to be contained in the Peconic Lane Community Center.
- 8) Partner with existing entities (East End Arts Council, Peconic Landing, North Fork Community Theatre, Southampton Cultural Center, Northeast Stage, etc.) that provide cultural programming to offer educational classes, performances, art exhibits, concerts and other leisure activities.
- 9) Enhance technological capacities of Recreation Center and Peconic Lane Community Center to promote cutting edge program offerings.
- 10) Utilize social media as a tool to learn about new programs and activities at the Recreation department as well as a method to provide feedback on program offerings.
- 11) Increase staffing of recreation department to include skilled and experienced full-time staff and part-time staff that could research funding opportunities and resources. Staffing could also include employment opportunities for youth
- 12) Change the name of the Town's Recreation department to something else (e.g. "Recreation, Education and Leisure". ) The newly named department can raise its profile through branding.

**Responsible Parties:** Southold Recreation Department, Southold Parks, Beaches and Recreation Committee, Department of Data Processing and Information Technology, Planning Department, Southold Human Resource Center and Southold Youth Bureau

**Possible Partnerships:** Peconic Landing, Fishers Island Community Center, Historical Societies, Libraries, East End Arts Council, North Fork Community Theatre, etc.

**Timeline for Implementation:** 2014

## 2. Facilities and Grounds

The Town has an impressive inventory of park lands and recreation facilities. Through aggressive efforts to preserve farmland and open space, the Town has acquired land suitable for the development of passive and active recreation. This conversion of land requires some expense to promote safety, access, trails, etc. It is important that existing resources are maintained and protected to prevent overuse and degradation. While existing resources may appear adequate at present, it is imperative that the Town continually assess whether recreational needs are being met and purchase additional land and develop sites when warranted.

**Goal 2.1:** Enhance utilization of existing park lands, open spaces, beaches and recreational facilities through ongoing maintenance, stewardship and facility improvement

**Objectives:**

- 1) Collaborate with schools to explore the feasibility of adding a shared sports turf (artificial turf) field with lighting to an existing Town park that is centrally located for field sports such as lacrosse and soccer, and a regulation track. School teams need a field that can be intensively used in all seasons where big games can be hosted, and natural turf is easily overused and destroyed. Other athletic club teams could rent the field. The Town would manage the field and its schedule.
- 2) Promote compatible and multiple uses of parks and recreational sites.
- 3) Develop database of existing parks and recreational facilities that notes the condition of the site and what needs to be improved upon to enhance utilization and when enhancement needs to take place (e.g. replace sod on baseball fields in spring.)
- 4) Establish point-in-time surveys to assess utilization rates of parks and recreational facilities during different times of the year, month and day.
- 5) Increase collaboration and communication with schools and Park Districts to coordinate the use of fields and facilities to maximize recreational opportunities for residents to prevent overuse and degradation.
- 6) Install permanent bathrooms at Jean Cochran park and Strawberry Fields and consider installation of portable toilets at other locations if warranted.
- 7) Expand and improve current facilities at dog park behind recreation center.
- 8) Through land preservation stewardship offer more bicycle and walking/jogging trails.
- 9) Finish the restoration of the Pavilion at Laurel Lake.
- 10) Upon additional facility improvements to the old school house at Downs Farm, provide public viewing hours and educational programs.
- 11) Continue participation in the Bay to Sound trails project.
- 12) Ensure seasonal installation of receptacles to collect refuse and timely removal of refuse from public beaches. Educate the public on the maintenance of parks and beaches such as “carry out what you carry in.”
- 13) Install lighting with timer on tracks in Jean Cochran park to enable recreational activities in winter hours.
- 14) Increase law enforcement patrols to improve the quality of public beaches through elimination of illegal parking, camping, littering and fishing practices.
- 15) Develop document for public distribution and for the Town’s website that illustrates the existing inventory of parks and recreation facilities (active and passive.)
- 16) Develop recreational offerings devoted to seasonal outdoor activities such as bird watching, cross-country skiing, paddle tennis, fishing and deer hunting.
- 17) Provide an alternate to local ponds through creating a safe ice skating rink in winter with lights.
- 18) Utilize volunteers and community groups for clean-up of beaches and trails.

- 19) Develop community gardens with vegetables and flowers within designated Town facilities.
- 20) Create an exercise trail with exercise stations.
- 21) Establish greenways in hamlet centers.
- 22) Connect the west end bike path to the east end recreational trail on Fishers Island.

**Responsible Parties:** Southold Recreation Department, Department of Public Works, Land Preservation Committee, Southold Police Department, Parks Districts, School Districts and Fishers Island Community Board.

**Possible Partnerships:** Suffolk County Department of Parks and Recreation, Peconic Land Trust, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, Village of Greenport, Youth Service Groups (Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, etc.) the Nature Conservancy, Southold Garden Club, Cornell Cooperative Education and New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

**Timeline for Implementation:** 2014.

**Goal 2.2:** Obtain additional land for recreational purposes where feasible and necessary.

**Objectives:**

- 1) Enhance communication and coordination with the Parks, Beaches and Recreation Committee and the Land Preservation Committee to cultivate opportunities to purchase land with Community Preservation funding that will provide scenic benefits to residents and visitors as well as provide needed recreational activities. Trail systems should be designed, developed and maintained to provide passive recreational activities for hiking and biking.
- 2) Enhance existing trails or create new hiking trails through the subdivision process by having them dedicated to the Town without having to spend Community Preservation funds.
- 3) Conduct feasibility study that would include researching the availability of funding (public and private) , operation (public and private) and suggested location of a year-round gymnasium and swimming pool facility. The proposed multi-purpose complex may include extensive gymnasium with exercise equipment, weights, indoor heated swimming pool to permit lap swimming, indoor basketball court, bowling lanes, lockers, etc. Feasibility study will include possibility of creating collaborations of for-profit and non-profit partnerships that could make the creation and operation of the proposed multi-purpose complex financially viable.
- 4) A separate or integrated youth center containing ping-pong, pool tables, foosball, entertainment lounge, snack bar and rooms suitable for counseling, career development and other recreation programs.
- 5) Addition of indoor swimming pool at the Community Center on Fishers Island.

- 6) The recreation director reports that there is an overuse of fields in Town and specifically the many requests to use Strawberry Fields for soccer, baseball and lacrosse games. It would be prudent to acquire two additional fields of approximately 15 acres (each) to support additional recreational activities (fields) and parking.
- 7) Within existing recreational sites, develop a supervised skate park that requires participants to wear appropriate gear to promote safety, parental permission, hold Town harmless for liabilities, etc.
- 8) Work with Peconic Estuary Program to design and construct a Blueway trail system throughout the Peconic Estuary.

**Responsible Parties:** Southold Parks & Recreation Committee, Southold Land Preservation Committee, Southold Town Board, Department of Public Works, Southold Youth Bureau and Fishers Island Community Center.

**Possible Partnerships:** Peconic Estuary Program, YMCA, other non-profit or private entities

**Timeline for Implementation:** 2016.

### **3. Accessibility and Costs**

In the past the Town's recreational needs were primarily met by school districts and autonomous park districts that did not afford access to all geographic areas of the Town. In recent years the Town has taken a more proactive stance and has sought to increase its land holdings and recreational facilities that are available to all residents and visitors. Waterside access is provided by way of public beaches, public road ends, private association beaches, public and private boat ramps, marinas and moorings. Most recreational facilities and programs have been offered at no charge or priced where revenues offset expenses.

Access to Town beaches is provided by purchase of passes and stickers at the office of the Town Clerk. Year-round residents and property owners may purchase a sticker for \$6 while guests and lessees pay \$30 per vehicle. Non-residents may purchase a sticker for vehicle and trailer for \$150 and visitors pay \$25 for a daily pass for access to three beaches.

The recreation department provides the use of Town fields and facilities at no charge for non-profits, local schools, charitable groups, little leagues, etc. Such groups are considered "tier 1." Other tiers include charging \$25 for up to four hours of utilization for residents to \$50 for non-residents.

**Goal 3:** Ensure access to beaches, parks and recreational facilities and participation in recreational programs by residents and visitors.

**Objectives:**

- 1) Provide recreational opportunities to residents that are centrally located as well as geographically tailored for all ten hamlets.
- 2) Partner with existing sites and facilities (i.e. Peconic Landing in Greenport West hamlet, Human Resource Center in Mattituck) to offer programs in different geographical areas in Town for residents who do not want to travel to Peconic
- 3) Utilize Parks and Recreation fees to ensure that recreational facilities comply with the Americans for Disabilities Act.
- 4) Deliver programs and activities that are reasonably priced that most households would be able to participate.
- 5) Promote discussion with Parks Districts to enable all Town residents the ability to access Parks Districts such as a town-wide “beach pass” that residents could purchase.
- 6) Engage the residents of Fishers Island (surveys, focus groups, etc.) to ascertain their needs in order to develop activities and programs to be offered on Fishers Island.
- 7) Enhance the promotion of recreational activities through continued advertising in local papers as well as email notification, social media and website postings.
- 8) Create a central database of recreational offerings that include activities not sponsored by the Town and post on the Town’s website.

**Responsible Parties:** Recreation Department, Southold Town Board, Town Clerk, Peconic Landing, Human Resource Center, Parks Districts

**Timeline for Implementation:** 2014.

#### **4. Promoting Health and Wellness**

As the Southold Parks and Recreation Department evolves into providing greater educational opportunities for the public, opportunities exist to introduce people to many ways to optimize healthy lifestyles.

**Goal 4:** Initiative a town-wide wellness campaign to improve physical and mental health

**Objectives:**

- 1) Work with School Districts to develop a “fit pass” allowing residents the opportunity to use school facilities (playground, gymnasium) during evening hours.
- 2) Offer educational classes throughout Town with topics relating to stress management, obesity, smoking, depression, etc.
- 3) Provide recreational activities in conjunction with classes to maximize the ability to promote better health. This could include posters, information packets and resources.

- 4) Work with schools and human service providers to tailor more programs towards local youth and tweens that supports a lifestyle absent of alcohol, tobacco and drugs.
- 5) Work with Human Resource Center to tailor programs towards seniors.
- 6) Sponsor monthly contests and activities that will offer prizes for changing behaviors to more healthy lifestyles

**Responsible Parties:** Recreation Department, Suffolk County Department of Health, Southold Youth Bureau, Schools, Human Resource Center

**Possible Partnerships:** School Districts, Eastern Long Island Hospital, Southampton Hospital, Peconic Bay Medical Center, Stony Brook Hospital, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Suffolk County Department of Health, New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services, Suffolk County Prevention Resource Center.

**Timeline for Implementation:** 2015