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Barney S. Heath
Director

MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 29, 2020

TO: Councilor Crossley, Chair of the Zoning and Planning Committee
Members of the Zoning and Planning Committee

FROM: Barney Heath, Director of Planning and Development
Jennifer Steel, Chief Environmental Planner

RE: **#178-20 Adoption of the Open Space and Recreation Plan Update**
DIRECTOR OF PLANNING requesting discussion of the 2020-2027 Open Space and Recreation Plan, a letter stating that the Zoning and Planning Committee reviewed the Plan, and adoption of the plan as an amendment to the 2007 Comprehensive Plan.

MEETING DATE: May 7, 2020

CC: Luis Perez-Demorizi, Open Space Coordinator
Nicole Banks, Commissioner of Parks, Recreation, and Culture
Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer

Background

The Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) is an important municipal planning document and required for state grant eligibility. It provides an inventory of all existing areas of recreational use and natural open space (City-owned and privately owned) and a list of goals and priorities for municipal actions regarding recreational facility and open space improvements, land acquisitions, and accessibility improvements. Each OSRP must conform with the state's required format and is reviewed and approved by the state Department of Conservation Services, a part of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. Once approved, the OSRP is valid for 7 years. The City's current OSRP is valid from 2013-2020 and has an expiration date of May 31, 2020.

The priorities for this update of the OSRP are updating the inventory of Newton's open space resources and establishing realistic priority goals, objective, and action items that align with the community's needs.

2020 - 2027 Update

To assist with this OSRP update, the City hired a team of graduate students (Rowan Cignoni, Cara Montague, and Samantha Peikes) from the Conway School for Landscape Design to manage the bulk of the OSRP update process. Additionally, the Mayor approved the formation of an OSRP Advisory Committee with representation from City staff, Boards and Commissions, and relevant community organizations.

Community Engagement

The Conway team worked diligently to collect information on Newton's current interests and needs with a robust community engagement process. This started with an online survey available to all residents' and a separate survey, sent out by City staff, to Newton's youth. The surveys featured a variety of questions designed to: (1) gather demographic information regarding family size, relative ages, and which village they resided in; (2) gauge current use of open space and recreational resources; (3) determine what residents feel is lacking from those resources; and (4) provide an opportunity for feedback about desired improvements to Newton's open space resources. The community-wide survey garnered over 1,200 responses in the weeks that it was open, and the youth survey garnered 27 responses from the Youth Commission and students at Newton North and Newton South High Schools.

OSRP Table of Contents

- Section 1: Plan Summary
- Section 2: Introduction – Provides definitions for frequently used terms and a statement of purpose for the plan. There is a summary of planning and public participation processes, which is detailed more in Section 6 and Appendix B.
- Section 3: Community Setting -- Provides demographic information about Newton and a history of its growth and development patterns.
- Section 4: Environmental inventory and Analysis -- Provides a detailed description of the environmental characteristics of Newton, along with a discussion of environmental challenges faced by the community. The majority of the Maps in the plan are found in this section.
- Section 5: Inventory of Lands -- Tabular data regarding open space resources, both publicly and privately owned, in Newton.
- Section 6: Community Vision – Provides a more detailed look at the public participation process and the first statement of goals.
- Section 7: Analysis of Needs -- Reviews public feedback from the surveys, public forums, and Advisory Committee input about Newton's open space needs. The second statement of goals.
- Section 8: Goals and Objectives – Describes in more detail the goals and identifies the objectives that will help the City achieve its goals.
- Section 9: Seven Year Action Plan -- Details prioritized actions that will help the City achieve its goals and objectives. A final table lists for each objective lead implementation bodies, potential funding sources, and timelines.

Summary of OSRP 2020-2027 Goals

The following list provides a title and a short description of each of the 6 goals of Newton's 2020-2027 OSRP Update. While many issues and needs were discussed and considered during the update process, these 6 themes and goals emerged as warranting immediate action and follow-through.

- Goal 1: Coordinated planning and adequate funding for the management of all open space resources

Continuing to ensure appropriate funding and integration of climate change mitigation and adaptation into open space stewardship, connectivity, protection, and accessibility efforts.

- Goal 2: Maintenance and Improvement of the City's open space resources
Maintaining and improving natural areas, athletic fields, parks, water resources, and the urban tree canopy to ensure that healthy and resilient open space in Newton can persist for future generations. This will entail collaborations between City departments, Friends groups, organizations, and volunteers to foster additional public-private partnerships, meet funding needs, and develop master plans.
- Goal 3: Maximized accessibility of Newton's open space resource.
Expanding universal accessibility, within parks and along pedestrian trails.
- Goal 4: Minimized Gaps in the Availability of Newton's Open Space Resources
Increasing diverse, open spaces resources in the parts of the city that have fewer conservation areas and parks and reduced tree cover.
- Goal 5: Connectivity to and between open space resources
Developing more bicycle and pedestrian linkages to open spaces by expanding existing trail networks and building new connections where possible.
- Goal 6: Protection and expansion of Newton's open space resource inventory
Permanently protecting natural areas and parks for wildlife and passive recreation.

Going Forward

The 4-30-20 OSRP draft is being released on April 30th to City Councilors and the general public for a 2-week review period which is due to end on May 14th. All public comment should be forwarded to concom@newtonma.gov.

The draft is in near final form, but please note that work continues on some text and on the maps and figures. Some figure number references are therefore out of order and will be corrected in the final draft.

During the public review period, the draft will be presented to Planning and Development and Zoning and Planning, on 5/4/20 and 5/7/20, respectively. The P&D meeting will be a public meeting. The ZAP meeting will be a public hearing, as required by the state. The request is for ZAP to support the OSRP's adoption as an amendment to the City's 2007 Comprehensive Plan.

Once public comment and Board and Committee comments have been received, City staff will incorporate needed edits, finalize Section 10: Public Comment, and provide the revised draft for ZAP for a vote to adopt as an element of Newton's Comprehensive Plan.

Electronic Link: City of Newton Open Space and Recreation Plan 2020-2027, dated 4/30/20
<http://www.newtonma.gov/gov/planning/lrplan/os/default.asp>