

## Recreation, Parks & Open Space

State Goal: To promote and protect the availability of outdoor recreation opportunities for all Maine Citizens, including access to surface waters.

### Conditions and Trends

#### Recreation Programs

There are many recreational programs available for Windham residents of all ages. Some of these programs are run through the Town's Department of Parks and Recreation while others are organized and run by private associations or clubs.

The Parks and Recreation Department offers a variety of programs, including babysitting classes, dances, 4x4 basketball, ski and snowshoe programs, and their largest program, Summer Day Camp. The Parks and Recreation department coordinates an annual fishing derby and hikes associated with National Trails Day.

The number of programs offered by the Parks and Recreation Department has decreased over the last several years. For example, the Department used to offer many programs specifically for seniors, including day trips to regional destinations. These programs have not been offered since 2013.

Many of the recreational sports programs for youth and adults are offered through private programs organized and operated by Windham residents. Examples of youth sports organizations include soccer, basketball, and lacrosse. Windham Little League provides organized baseball and softball opportunities.

All of these programs are successful and growing, as Windham's youth population increases. ***Should get a comprehensive list of youth and adult sports programs, and participation numbers for each.***

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#### Recreation Areas & Facilities

Unless otherwise noted, these properties are all owned and maintained by the Town of Windham.

Please see **Map X-X** for the location of each of these areas and facilities.

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#### *Donnabeth Lippman Park*

This is a 123-acre park, which includes a 10-acre pond in North Windham commercial district. This was formerly a Portland Water District property, and was maintained in a natural state to protect the well heads used for a public water supply. The Town purchased the property in 2011<sup>12</sup> and was reimbursed for the cost by Martin Lippman, who requested the Park be named for his wife. The park contains several trails, including a loop around the pond. This park contains several types of natural habitats, which makes this an excellent spot for **bird watching** and enjoying nature. The access road was widened and a parking area was built in 2014, and that winter the Town plowed a small portion of the pond for informal skating and hockey use. A playground will be installed adjacent to the parking area in 2015. The park is open year round. No hunting is allowed.

***It should be noted that a Master Plan for the development and improvement of Donnabeth Lippman Park was adopted by the Town Council in 2012 (click here for the plan). There were several public***

meetings and an online survey designed to solicit opinions on community needs and suggested uses that should be incorporated into this facility. Reviewing the input from the public process that was part of the park Master Plan, residents seemed split on keeping the Park in more of a natural state with some additional amenities and creating a place for baseball and soccer playing fields. Based on the input received as part of this Comprehensive Plan, advocates for new field space may not have particularly cared where in Town the fields were, or what the environmental constraints of this property might be, as long as the Town was considering additional playing fields somewhere in Town. See “Facility and Service Needs” below, for more on the need for additional playing fields.

#### ***Dundee Park***

This 20-acre park was purchased by the Town in 1966. The park is located on the shore of Dundee Pond, and has long been a popular local swimming and picnic area. This park contains the only public beach in the Town of Windham. Dundee Park has also become a regional summer destination, drawing families and buses full of daycare and summer camp children from surrounding towns. The park is open from Memorial Day through Labor Day. No hunting is allowed.

#### ***Lowell Preserve***

This 308-acre property was gifted to the Town in 1999 with the stipulation that it be open to access and left in an undeveloped state. This large wooded property contains several miles of multi-use trails, which are cooperatively maintained with the Portland Chapter of the National Mountain Bike Association. This property abuts conservation land in Falmouth, and the trails are interconnected. This makes the associated trail network even larger and more valuable as a resource. The Preserve is open year round, and hunting is allowed in season.

#### ***Black Brook Preserve***

This 105-acre preserve is a Windham Land Trust property located in Windham Center. There are access points to the property from Windham Center Road, which includes a parking area that can accommodate half a dozen cars, and from Gray Road (Route 302), with parking available across Gray Road on School Road at the Town Office. The several trails and all signage are maintained by the Windham Land Trust.

#### ***Gambo Road Complex***

This 19-acre property is the Town’s playing field complex, located on the Presumpscot River and owned by the Portland Water District. The Town leases the property and has been developed by Windham Youth Soccer into a 6-8 field complex. The fields are accessed from Gambo Road. On Saturdays in the summer, this area is likely the busiest part of Town outside of North Windham with its summertime traffic. This facility is gated when not in use by Youth Soccer, though a hand carry boat launch has been approved at the far end of the existing parking lot, and the site is also a popular access point for the Mountain Division Trail.

#### ***Town Hall Playground & East Windham Playground***

Outside of school facilities, these are the only two playgrounds in Town. These playgrounds were both installed in 1999. They are both functional but aging and will be due for upgrades or replacement in the next several years.

### ***Windham Skate Park***

This facility was constructed in 1999 and located next to the Public Safety Building on Route 202 (Gray Road). This facility contains about ten ramps and a half pipe. Until the summer of 2013, the Town staffed the facility during operating hours. Since then the park has been an unsupervised facility. The skate park is open from April through October 31.

### ***Town Office Gymnasium/Haskell Hall***

This gym is a remnant of the days the Town Office building served as Windham's High School. It is used for senior exercise programs, for productions of the Windham Community Theater, and youth and adult basketball programs. It is also the venue for the annual Town Meeting every June. A stage with stage lighting and a small kitchen are part of this facility.

### ***Manchester School Basketball Courts & Ice Rink***

The two outdoor basketball courts located on the Manchester School property were repaved in 2013<sup>2</sup>. Access to these courts are unrestricted in the summer. In the winter, the courts are flooded and used as a skating rink. A fire pit is established in the winter, as well. The facility is lit for evening use in both summer and winter.

### ***Deer Hollow Sanctuary***

This 16-acre sanctuary is accessed from Mount Hunger Shore Road, and includes shoreline on Lower Mud Pond. It is owned by the Town. There is a trail from the small parking area, large enough for 3-4 cars, down to the Pond. At the end of the trail, there is an observation platform suitable for viewing birds and other wildlife at Little Mud Pond. The trail is very wet in the spring, and the observation platform is not accessible without knee-high boots or waders. There is one large property between Deer Hollow Sanctuary and Donnabeth Lippman Park.

### ***Otterbrook Sanctuary***

This Town-owned property is 41-acres and consists of the open land that was created through the approval of the Otterbrook cluster subdivision. This subdivision is just off River Road and the open space is accessible via Otterbrook Drive. There is a single trail on this relatively long and skinny parcel. Given the limited hiking options and the absence of public parking, this property likely serves primarily as a local neighborhood resource.

### ***Pringle Wildlife Preserve***

This 17-acre preserve is a Windham Land Trust Property located on the corner of Windham Center Road and River Road. There is a small parking area and an observation platform for viewing birds and wildlife at this corner of the property.

### ***Claman Preserve***

This 14-acre Town-owned Sanctuary is located on the eastern side of Route 302 in North Windham, just north of the Windham Assembly of God Church. There are no trails on the property and no parking available on the site. It is not uncommon to see cars parked on the shoulder of Route 302 over several weeks in the summer while people are picking blueberries at the while they are in season here.

## Regional Facilities

### *Mountain Division Trail*

This is a regional recreational asset, maintained by several towns within the state-owned Mountain Division Railroad right-of-way. After many years without active rail operations, the rail was removed and the trail was opened in 2002. The trail was paved by the state in 2009, from the Route 202 (Main Street) intersection in South Windham, through Gorham and into Standish. The trail continues south into Westbrook, but is not paved south of Route 202.

In 2014, MaineDOT conducted a count of walkers and cyclists using the trail on a Tuesday in August. This count was for two locations in Gorham, the closest station to Windham being the one just south of Shaw Park, on the Presumpscot River and close to the trail access in Windham on Gambo Road. The count showed a total of 90 southbound users, and 127 northbound users. Cyclists accounted for about 20% of the users. Peak usage hours were between 9-11 am, and 5-7pm. Usage can be much higher on summer weekends. The trail is open year round.

### *Snowmobile Trails*

The local snowmobile club, the Windham Drifters, coordinates and maintains the trail network of about 47 miles on 14 major trails in Town. Most trail miles utilize existing utility corridor rights-of way. That being noted, there are many sections of trail that are located on private property, which must be authorized by land owners annually, and every year there are changes to the trails based on changing property ownership or changes in permission for access.

### *Boat Launches*

There is one boat launch in Windham that can accommodate a trailered boat. This launch is owned and maintained by the State, and is located on Little Sebago Lake. It is accessed from Mount Hunger Shore Road.

There are several hand-carry launches in Windham, where one can park a car and carry a canoe or kayak to the water. These are primarily located on the Presumpscot River, and are provided by the SAPPI or Florida Power and Light as part of federal dam relicensing requirements. One is located below the North Gorham Dam with access from Windham Center Road and is maintained by the Town and the other is located at the South Windham Fire Station on Main Street (Route 202). There are several other informal access points to the Presumpscot River and its impoundments which provide access for a canoe and kayak users.

It should be noted that there is a hand-carry launch in Falmouth for Highland Lake access, and at least two hand-carry launches in Gorham for access to the Presumpscot River.

### *List of Publicly Used Open Spaces*

There are many access points to the Presumpscot and Pleasant Rivers, primarily at or near road crossings, where access is provided over private property. Rather than provide a complete list of crossings and property owners, selected examples include:

- the “fishing park” access on the Presumpscot River at Route 35, owned by S.D. Warren, located just below the Eel Weir Dam (fly-fishing only),
- the Route 302 crossing of the Pleasant River, owned by Charlie and Carol Hall (fly-fishing only), and
- the Pope Road crossing of the Pleasant River, owned by Andrew and Deborah LaFleur (~~fly-fishing~~ artificial lures only).

Significant hunting access ~~points~~ on private property include land owned by Larry and Ann Clark on the Swett Road and Russell Hall on Walter Partridge Road. These spots are used as a pheasant release sites for fall hunting opportunities.

In addition to the above types of public uses on private property, there are a number of landowners enrolled in property tax programs that incentivize the preservation of open space and assist commercial forestry and agricultural operations by lowering local property taxes. These programs are generally referred to as “current use tax programs” which allow adjustments to local property tax levels based on the current use of a property as opposed to the market value of a fully developed property. Please note that public access is not guaranteed through these programs, but the programs do encourage undeveloped properties to remain undeveloped, which provides scenic and environmental value, as well as preservation of Windham’s rural characteristics.

These programs are authorized through state law, and include:

- Open Space. There is no minimum size for property to be enrolled in this program, but the property must provide public benefit, which is broadly defined in the law. The amount of property tax reduction is defined in the law, and increases based on criteria such as permanent protection as open space, “forever wild open space” limitations, and availability of public access. Through this program, land valuation can be reduced by 20% to as much as 95% of full valuation.
- Tree Growth. This program is meant for commercial woodlots, as the property must have a forest management plan in place that is updated every 10 years. A property must be a minimum of 10 acres to be eligible. The amount of property tax reduction is set by the State Assessor for each region of the state based on wood type on the lot, each local assessor applies this rate locally.
- Farmland. Land in this program must be at least 5 acres, and gross income from agricultural products must be at least \$2,000 annually. Eligible land can include pasture land, crop land, orchards, and more. The law provides guidelines for municipalities to use for reduced values per acre depending on the use, but it is up to each municipality to adopt their own values. Actual values can be higher or lower than state recommendations, but local assessors must justify the values that are chosen.

As of 2014, Windham had the following number of acres enrolled in each program:

- Open Space: 402 acres

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- Tree Growth: 2,940
- Farmland: 2,100
  - Farm Forest Land: 1,047 acres
  - Pasture Land: 811 acres
  - Crop Land: 241

Please refer to Map X-X which shows the location of these properties in Windham.

## Analysis

### Adequacy of Existing Facilities

One measure of the adequacy of existing facilities is based on how much the Town pays to run and maintain the Parks & Recreation Department each year. The Parks & Recreation Department received Parks and Recreation Community Standards Report from the National Recreation and Park Association in 2014. The report does not present standards or recommendations for the number of basketball courts or playgrounds based on population, for example, as presented in the 2003 Comprehensive Plan. Rather this report provides very broad data categories that compare Windham with national medians and with median data for communities with a population density of less than 500 people per square mile.

The Community Standards Report looks at expenditures both per acre of park & recreation areas and per capita. By either measure, Windham is far below national median expenditures, and still low but better when compared other “low density” communities around the country. It also looks at revenue generated by parks and recreation programming and entrance fees. In Windham, revenues come primarily from summer day camp fees and entrance fees to Dundee Park. Windham is again on the low side for revenue generation, which in Windham comes primarily from summer day camp fees and entrance fees to Dundee Park. Looking at revenue as a percent of expenditures, Windham seems to compare favorably, but this is in large part due to the relatively low expenditure levels compared to the more nationally comparable revenues.

### Facility & Service Needs

#### Existing Facilities

The Parks and Recreation Department completed a Facility Summary dated July 2012, which identifies necessary improvements to existing facilities to improve access and user experiences. The inventory includes all of the Town owned properties and facilities listed in the Conditions section above. The report can be accessed by clicking here (fix link). Recommendations relate to parking needs, trail improvements, and replacement/upgrade recommendations for equipment and amenities.

#### New Facilities

The public input received at the outset of this planning process gave shape to community needs that are not being met through current facilities.

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For several years, members of Windham’s youth sports communities have been expressing a desire for more outdoor field space. These community members are involved with Youth Soccer, Lacrosse and others, including Little League. As the community has grown over the years and the number of people participating in youth sports has grown, the number of playing fields has not. This has led to crowding and scheduling conflicts among these groups. There is a need for an outdoor athletic facility independent of the RSU schools, because the schools must prioritize scheduling for student athlete needs, must limit use during times of potential damage to the turf facilities and take into consideration liability and insurance issues. Examples of comparable facilities in the region include Twin Brooks in Cumberland and the Wainright Fields in South Portland.

Another major need seemed to rise to the top of several group’s priorities was for a Community/Recreation Center. There has been a long identified need for a senior center which would serve social and recreation needs. High School students noted that there was no place for them to go after school for social, recreation, and academic needs. Youth sports volunteers noted that there is a need for more municipal indoor recreation space beyond the single basketball court at the Town Office Gym. A well-conceived and well-located Community/Recreation center could meet the needs of all of these groups.

#### Status of Publicly Used/Private Owned Areas and Facilities

None of the access noted above for snowmobile trails, hunting or fishing access is guaranteed. The Clark Farm property is currently for sale and the continued use of this property for hunting is not certain.

#### Water Access Needs

The following Great Ponds (defined by the State as 10 or more acres of surface area) are entirely or partially within the Town and have no public access:

- Collins Pond – 42 acres
- Little Duck Pond – 43 acres
- Forest Lake – 198 acres
- Pettingill Pond – 42 acres
- Sebago Lake – approximately 30,000 acres, no public access in Windham
- Highland Lake – 640 acres, no public access in Windham

#### Policies & Suggested Strategies to Implement Policies

**State Policy 1: To maintain/upgrade existing recreational facilities as necessary to meet current and future needs.**

Strategy 1.1. Create a list of recreation needs or dDevelop a rRecreation and Open Space plan to meet current and future needs. Assign a committee or community official to explore ways of addressing the identified needs and/or implementing the policies and strategies outlined in the plan.

Note: The 2012 Facility Summary identifies needs and required maintenance for existing facilities. This should be used as a starting point for a Recreation and Open Space plan

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which would take a more comprehensive look at new recreation facilities and how to identify and prioritize land for to be preserved for environmental, scenic, cultural/historic, or agricultural and forestry purposes.

**Strategy 1.2.** Work with public and private partners to extend and maintain a network of trails for motorized and non-motorized uses. Connect with regional trail systems where possible.

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Note: Coordination is ongoing for trails like the snowmobile network. However, the Town should examine how it might be possible to connect parks, recreation facilities, and conserved land with bike lanes or off-road trails as appropriate.

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**Strategy 1.3.** Prioritize the build-out of Donnabeth Lippman Park per the Master Plan.

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#### State Policy 2: To preserve Open Space for Recreational use as appropriate.

**Strategy 2.1.** Identifying land for preservation should be included as part of the recreation and open space plan suggested in Strategy 1.1. See Strategy 1.1 above.

~~Strategy 2.~~ See Strategy 1.2 above.

~~Strategy 3.2.~~ Work with an existing local land trust or other conservation organizations to pursue opportunities to protect important open space or recreational land.

**Strategy 4.2.3.** Provide educational materials regarding the benefits and protections for landowners allowing public recreational access on their property. At a minimum this will include information on Maine's landowner liability law regarding recreational or harvesting use, Title 14, M.R.S.A. §159-A.

#### State Policy 3: To seek to achieve or continue to maintain at least one major point of public access to major water bodies for boating, fishing and swimming and work with nearby property owners to address concerns.

**Strategy 3.1.** Use the list of water bodies identified in the "Water Access Needs" section of this chapter as a starting point to prioritize proactive Town efforts related to additional public access See Strategy 1.1 above.

**Strategy 3.2.** Work with land trusts, lake associations, and landowners to establish new access points to Windham's lakes and ponds. See Strategy 2.3.2. above.

#### Local Policy 1: Increase access to Great Ponds in Windham

~~Strategy 1.~~

~~Strategy 2.~~

~~Strategy 3.~~

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**Local Policy ~~42~~ – Build new facilities to serve an expanding demand and a growing population. ~~Build a Community/Recreation Center~~**

**Strategy 4.1.** Build a Community/Recreation Center. Note that his effort required to determine the size, services, and facilities of such a Center may or may not be part of a Recreation and Open Space Plan.

**Strategy 4.2.** Identify and obtain land in order to build an Outdoor Field complex as part of a Recreation and Open Space Plan.

**Strategy 4.3.** Build more playgrounds within walking distance of existing neighborhoods. This can be implemented through the subdivision process, or through the Recreation Capital Plan for properties identified in a Recreation and Open Space Plan.

**Local Policy 35 – Preserve important open space, forests, and agricultural land important to the residents of Windham. ~~Prioritize the build-out of Donnabeth Lippman Park per the Master Plan~~**

**Strategy 5.1.** Develop a Recreation and Open Space Plan to further detail and prioritize recreation needs and to create a framework for evaluating land to be preserved for environmental, scenic, cultural/historic, or agricultural and forestry purposes..

**Strategy 5.2.** Establish a program for the preservation of land important to the people of Windham, similar to the state’s “Land for Maine’s Future” program, in order to contribute to the conservation of high priority conservation lands, establish points for public access to water and preserve agricultural land. This program should receive funds from the Town every budget cycle.

**Strategy 5.3.** Maximize property tax reduction programs to the full extent allowed by state law to encourage and incentivize the private provision of open space, forested lands, and agricultural operations.

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