

## **11. Parks and Recreation Element**

### **11.1 VISION STATEMENT**

---

Parks and recreational facilities provide Riverhead residents and outdoor enthusiasts regionwide with opportunities to exercise, engage in team sports, and to access and experience the natural environment. Parks also provide balance to the built-up areas of the Town, adding to the visual character and quality of life in the community and enhancing property values. The Town should expand and improve parks in all parts of Riverhead and should establish a greenway system that links these parks together.

Riverhead residents love their parks and open space areas. In focus group discussions, participants cited many of the varied recreational activities that they engage in on a regular basis: sailing, canoeing, kayaking, fishing, hunting, swimming, hiking, bird watching, biking, golf, tennis, horseback riding, and all sorts of team sports. They also cited Stotzky Park, State and County parks, and other recreational facilities as community assets.

Riverhead has a variety of unique parks, recreational facilities, and beaches. What makes Riverhead so special is that the parks are strung together by the network of wooded lanes, open space, and farmland that occupy large portions of the Town. As Riverhead experiences more development pressure, and as some of the remaining tracts of farmland are inevitably developed, expansion and enhancement of the park system will be critical to maintaining the Town's rural character and quality of life. Moreover, parks are such an attractive amenity that they can bolster property values for nearby residences.

Riverhead is fortunate to have not only Town parks and schoolyards, but a variety of County and State parks, as well as several public golf courses and quasi-public camping and hunting facilities. In addition, a large portion of Enterprise Park at Calverton and adjacent areas are part of the Central Pine Barrens Core Preservation Area and provide a permanent open space area for residents to enjoy. An inventory of existing park and recreational sites is provided in Appendix G.

## **11.2 SUMMARY OF BACKGROUND RESEARCH**

---

Riverhead has more than 150 acres of Town-owned parks and recreational facilities. Stotzky Park is Riverhead's main park and recreational facility. Located in the downtown area, it has several tennis courts, baseball/softball fields, football/soccer fields, lawns, and picnic areas, as well as a new skate park. The Armory Building, located adjacent to Stotzky Park on Route 58, provides space for indoor basketball and tennis.

The Town has several other notable parks and recreational facilities. Grangebel Park is situated along the Peconic riverfront, and the Downtown Revitalization Strategy calls for expansion of the park. The George Young Community Center in Jamesport provides an indoor venue for recreational programs. South Jamesport Park and the Wading River Community Park provide playing fields and other recreational facilities, similar to Stotzky Park except smaller in scale. South Jamesport Park also has one of the few publicly accessible beaches on the Riverhead shore of Flanders Bay. Wading River Beach, Reeves Beach, and Iron Pier Beach are Riverhead's public beaches on the Sound.

When school sports facilities are not being used by students and school teams, they are often used by residents, particularly school children and their parents, for recreational purposes. There are seven school sites located within the Town boundaries. One of them, the Wading River Elementary School, is part of the Shoreham-Wading River School District; the remaining six are part of the Riverhead Central School District. School facilities are discussed in Chapter 12, the Community Facilities Element.

The Recreation Department sponsors recreational programs, exercise sessions, crafts and dance lessons, and sports activities in the parks, the George Young Community Center in Jamesport, and in the school gyms.

## **EVALUATION OF PARK NEEDS**

### **Amount of Parkland**

Currently, Riverhead has a relatively large amount of parkland for population levels. If Town, County, and State parks and schoolyards are all taken into account, Riverhead has approximately 71.1 acres of parkland for each 1,000 residents as of the year 2000.<sup>1</sup> The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) recommends that a municipality provide between 6.25 to 10.5 acres of parks per 1,000 residents. Riverhead is far above the minimum standard, meaning that it is providing residents with more than enough parkland.

However, if Town parks and school yards alone are counted — subtracting out County and State parks — then Riverhead has only about 6.6 acres per 1,000 residents. This number is just barely above the minimum NRPA standard. Because most of the Town's active recreational facilities are located in the Town parks and schoolyards, there is a particular need for more of such facilities. In the focus groups, participants noted that recreational facilities were overcrowded.

As the population continues to increase, overcrowding will continued to worsen unless additional recreational facilities are built. Based on the buildout estimate in Chapter 2, the Land Use Element, the Town's total ultimate population is be expected to reach about 48,400 to 49,100. If no additional parkland is added to the Town, population growth will reduce the ratio of total parkland per 1,000 residents from 71.1 to about 40.0. The ratio of Town parkland and schoolyards would be reduced from 6.6 to about 3.2. This suggests that at buildout, the Town will still have an adequate amount of overall parkland, but a deficient amount of Town parkland.

To meet NRPA standards for Town parks, Riverhead will need to add another 75 to 250 acres of active parkland in the future, over and above the Town park currently being planned for Enterprise Park. Some of this parkland may be provided by school districts in the form of school yards in conjunction with new school facilities. However, most of it would have to be provided by the Town. Fortunately, the Town has tax revenue and other funding sources available to purchase open space for the purposes of recreation.

---

<sup>1</sup> Based on a population of 27,680, as reported in U.S. Census of 2000. Source: [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov).

## Park Location

Currently, parks are fairly well distributed throughout the Town. Stotzky Park, with the largest concentration of recreational facilities, is located in downtown. Wading River Community Park and South Jamesport Park provide similar facilities on a smaller scale; the former is located in the western half of town, and the latter in the eastern half. Town beaches are also well-distributed. The Town's only community center, however, is located in the Jamesport hamlet center, and it is a long trip for residents in the western part of town. If a second community center is to be built, sites in the western part of town should be considered first.

Generally, schoolyards are also well-distributed through Riverhead. The largest outdoor recreational facilities are found at the Pulaski Intermediate School, Riverhead Middle School, and Riverhead High School, and these sites are centrally located downtown. Two additional school sites — Riley and Wading River — are located in the western part of Town and serve the residents living in those areas. There is only one school site in the eastern part of Town — the Aquebogue School — whose small site provides a relatively limited school yard.

## Park Type

Residents need a mix of community parks / recreational facilities, schoolyard parks, and small neighborhood parks, each of which serves a different function:

- **Neighborhood Parks.** Neighborhood parks are generally less than 5 acres in size and provide a local place for residents to stroll, visit with neighbors, walk the dog, and take the kids to use the playground. Neighborhood parks have lawns, trees, playgrounds, and walkways, but typically do not have large recreational facilities like 90-foot baseball fields. Smaller facilities (softball fields, bocce courts, etc.) may be provided. Neighborhood parks serve nearby residents who are within a 5-minute walking distance of the park (about a 1/4-mile or 1,300 feet).
- **Schoolyard Parks.** Schoolyard parks have playing fields, tennis courts, basketball courts, and other recreational facilities that primarily attract residents from the surrounding neighborhood. They can range in size from about 5 to 20 acres. Schoolyard parks provide more space and a wider range of facilities than neighborhood parks. If the park is too far to reach on foot, people may drive or bike.
- **Community Parks / Recreational Facilities.** Community parks are generally 20 acres or more in size, and they have unique recreational facilities that are not found elsewhere in the community (e.g., a swimming pool, a golf course, a "regulation" soccer field, etc.). For most residents, driving would be the most convenient ways to reach this type of facility.

Table 11-1 organizes the Town's parks into these functional categories. Riverhead High School, Riverhead Middle School, and the Pulaski School are technically schoolyards, but they actually function as one large community park. Located adjacent to one another, they have a large combined land area and unique facilities (in particular, a track) that attract

residents during non-school hours. Grangebel Park and Lombardi Memorial Park serve as community parks, not because of their size or facilities, but because of their prominent location in downtown and their important influence on the Town's image. Because there are so few publicly accessible beaches in Town, parks with significant beach frontage end up functioning as community-wide parks during the summer.

**Table 11-1 Existing Parks and Recreational Facilities, by Function**

<i>Community Parks / Recreational Facilities</i>	<i>Schoolyard Parks<sup>1</sup></i>	<i>Neighborhood Parks</i>
-Stotzky Memorial Park	-Wading River Community Park	-Reeves Park Beach
-Grangebel Park	-Aquebogue School	-Millbrook Gables Park
-Lombardi Memorial Park	-Riley School	-Bear Estates Park
-George Young Community Center	-Roanoke School	-Unity Park
-South Jamesport Park	-Wading River School	-Horton Avenue
-Iron Pier Beach		-private parks
-Wading River Beach		-parks in new subdivisions <sup>1</sup>
-Pulaski School		
-Riverhead Middle School		
-Riverhead High School		
-Indian Island County Park		
-Murphy County Park		
-Wildwood State Park		
-Baiting Hollow NYS Conservation Area		
-Policeman's Park		

<sup>1</sup> The Town's zoning ordinance requires major residential subdivisions to provide 5 acres of parkland for every 100 lots and requires that all individual parks be no smaller than one acre in size.<sup>2</sup>

Table 11-1 suggests that Riverhead has an abundant number of community parks. The list of community parks includes County and State parks, which are mostly dedicated to open space suited to passive recreation, such as biking, hiking, boating, swimming, and walking. According to the table, there seems to be a need for more schoolyard and neighborhood parks. As noted, however, there are neighborhood parks that have been set aside as part of subdivisions or are maintained jointly by homeowners as private parks. In the future, the issue is not so much to ensure that enough neighborhood parks be provided, but that any neighborhood parks that are provided be placed in the best locations and be well-designed and well-maintained. Focus group participants called for additional small- and moderate-size parks and community centers in hamlet centers (i.e., in Wading River).

<sup>2</sup> If a subdivision would result in inadequate park space, then the Planning Board could allow the developer to pay a fee in lieu of providing park acreage.

## Recreation Facility Needs

As noted, the evaluation of national standards suggests that Riverhead needs additional land for active recreation facilities. This is consistent with the result of the focus groups, in which residents cited the need for fishing piers, night-time (i.e., lit) playing fields and courts, a senior recreational facility, an indoor playing facility, and restrooms in Town parks. During the Citizens Action Committee (CAC) meeting of January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2001, some participants also cited the need for an indoor pool. The Town's Recreation Director confirmed the need for an indoor gym facility that provides space for wintertime sports activities. Currently, indoor programs and lessons provided by the Recreation Department at the Armory Building and the Town's schools must be juggled around the schedules for other activities.

Few additional recreational facilities can be squeezed into Stotzky Park, without removing popular picnic areas, lawns, and trees.<sup>3</sup> Having recognized this need already, the Town Board has designated a portion of Enterprise Park as a Public Park and Recreational Area, in order to augment the facilities at Stotzky Park. The Recreation Committee of the Town is planning to survey the community relative to priority needs and to develop and plan for this 62-acre area. The Town has received a grant funding from the New York State Department of Parks to pay for both planning and implementation tasks. It is anticipated that the new facility will include soccer and lacrosse fields, a playground, tennis courts, a volleyball court, hiking and exercise trails, a picnic area, bocce courts, chess tables, and parking.

## Greenways

While Riverhead has an abundance of farmland and open space, it has little in the way of greenways. In community meetings, residents expressed great interest in creating a comprehensive greenway system that would connect the parks, nature reserves and historic sites located throughout the Town. Greenways are corridors of protected public or private open space that link together parks and other natural or cultural features for conservation, recreation, or transportation purposes. A network of greenways provides a coordinated system of seamless connections between parks, preserved open space, nature reserves, wildlife habitat areas, beaches and public waterways, recreational facilities, historic sites, and public transportation hubs. A greenway can take the form of a manmade trail on an abandoned railroad line, a bikeway running alongside a scenic road corridor, or a linear strip of open space that increases public access to a river or stream corridor. Greenways are typically publicly owned parcels of land, but they also incorporate private open space that is managed for the protection of ecologically sensitive habitats under voluntary agreements with property owners.

Greenways improve the overall quality of life and sense of place in a community by providing not only recreation and non-motorized transportation opportunities, but also environmental and cultural resource protection. Trails and bikeways, two of the most

---

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Jane van de Thoon, Recreation Department, September 11, 2000.

common forms of greenways, create new opportunities for outdoor recreation and encourage a healthy lifestyle. By connecting community, schoolyard and neighborhood parks with natural resource areas, greenways promote walking and hiking, along with running and biking. Moreover, greenways encourage non-motorized transportation, create walkable communities, and provide waterfront access.

The environmental and cultural benefits of greenways are numerous. Greenways protect natural habitats and wildlife refuges, minimize habitat fragmentation, improve air and water quality, and reduce the impacts of flooding in floodplain areas. For instance, riverine greenways capture runoff and filter-out pollutants, while providing habitat and migration routes for wildlife. Greenways situated along scenic road corridors are central to preserving the rural and visual character of a community. Similarly, greenways enable better access to areas of cultural heritage and historic precedence and integrate them into the public park system.

There are several areas in the Town of Riverhead that would be ideal places for greenways. Listed below and illustrated in Figure 11-1 are three potential areas for public greenways:

- *Sound Avenue* – Signed and striped bicycle paths can potentially run along Sound Avenue to provide recreation opportunities and protect the scenic character of the corridor;
- *Peconic River* – Greenways running along the Peconic River would increase waterfront access and preserve open space;
- *Greenways linking Wildwood State Park to the Central Pine Barrens Core Preservation Area* – The western portion of the Town contains a group of non-contiguous State, County, Town, and privately owned parks. Greenways could link these parks together and create an integrated public park system.

### **Waterfront Access**

Public access to the waterfront is a major issue. In Riverhead, public access is currently limited to a few locations on Long Island Sound, Flanders Bay, the Great Peconic Bay and the Peconic River. There are some current efforts underway to improve public access to the waterfront. Iron Pier Beach recently underwent a multi-million dollar restoration that included a new boat ramp, a raised parking lot, a new concrete sea wall, a new bathroom, a small concession area, a gazebo, and a drainage pond to collect stormwater runoff.

Access to the water and the waterfront in New York State is governed by the “public trust doctrine,” which states that the foreshore and underwater lands are held in trust by the State or the local government for the benefit of the public. The foreshore is defined as the area between mean high tide and mean low-tide. When the tide is in, the general public may use the water covering the foreshore for boating, bathing, fishing, or other lawful purposes. When the tide is out, the foreshore may be used to reach the water for those purposes or to lounge or

recline thereon.<sup>4</sup> All underwater and foreshore areas along Riverhead's shorelines (Long Island Sound, the Great Peconic Bay, and Flanders Bay) are owned by the State.

Increasing development pressures along the shorelines of the Town threatens to impede future access to the water and the waterfront by the general public. The Town can require developers to provide adequate public access points to the waterfront for the purpose of commerce, navigation, fishing, or even bathing.

Riverhead can learn from the experiences of other Long Island towns that have also sought to improve public access to the waterfront. In the Town of Oyster Bay in Nassau County, a number of initiatives have helped maintain public access to the waterfront. Several publicly owned sites have been secured over time — such as the Tobay Beach and JFK Wildlife Sanctuary — which provide formal public access to the waterfront. Currently, the *Comprehensive Management Plan for the Long Island South Shore Estuary Reserve* calls for an increase in property acquisition along the shore and for the establishment of "linear linkages" between preserved sites.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup>Town of Southold, Draft Local Waterfront Revitalization Program, July 2001. [www.northfork.net/southold](http://www.northfork.net/southold), downloaded August 2001.

<sup>5</sup> South Shore Estuary Reserve Council, *Comprehensive Management Plan for the Long Island South Shore Estuary Reserve*, April 2001.

Figure 11-1: Potential Greenway Locations to be considered.

Back of Figure

### **Other Park and Recreation Needs**

During focus groups on parks and recreation, participants cited a number of other needs. Many parks have inadequate parking for pedestrians and bicyclists. Participants also cited the need for additional security and enforcement at parks and beaches. There have been problems with violation of beach rules and loose dogs at parks and beaches. Some participants suggested that park rules be posted, so that users are informed about what activities are permitted in the parks.

Maintenance was identified as a need as well. In particular, focus group participants said that facility upgrades were needed in Stotzky Park (picnic areas, playground equipment), and that the bulkheads in Grangebel Park needed to be improved. The replacement of the deteriorated bulkhead is currently being planned, using a combination of \$1 million in grant funds through the Community Development Department and the Town's Recreation Development fees. A total of \$1.4 million will be spent by the Town to improve the park.

In addition, bulkhead replacement is proposed for the Peconic Riverfront east of Peconic Avenue in conjunction with an extension of the pedestrian boardwalk and a new bicycle path to connect the north and south fork bicycle facilities. The Community Development Department has secured \$2 million in grant funds for this project.

### **11.3 GOALS & POLICIES**

---

#### **Goal 11.1: Provide adequate, well-maintained outdoor and indoor recreational facilities.**

*Policy 11.1A: Continue the expansion of Stotzky Park onto the adjacent 8 acre parcel (SCTM: 600-125-1-5.2).*

Since the Riverhead Skate Park officially opened on 11 May 2002, Stotzky Park has had limited space for additional sporting facilities, such as ball fields and playing courts. Additional facilities will be needed in the future, as the population continues to expand. As part of the Suffolk County Greenways Program, the county legislature in April 2001 authorized the acquisition of the vacant 8 acre parcel abutting Stotzky Park on the east (SCTM 600-125-1-5.2), to provide for the expansion of recreational uses and parkland. Under this program, the Town of Riverhead is responsible for the construction of the proposed Little League fields and park maintenance.

*Policy 11.1B: Proceed with plans to design and develop a 62 acre community park in Enterprise Park, and set aside a significant portion of the park for active recreation facilities.*

The Town of Riverhead was awarded \$350,000 in grant funding through the New York State Environmental Protection Fund Program for the provision of recreational facilities and park

improvements on 62 acres of public lands at Enterprise Park. In addition, the Town appropriated \$350,000 in Town funds for the design and improvement of the park. The project is being planned and developed by the Town of Riverhead Community Development Agency (CDA), with the input from the Riverhead Recreation Committee and Recreation Department staff. The CDA is in the process of requesting proposals from engineering and landscape architecture and design firms for the development of the 62 acre community park. In addition, the Town Board is prioritizing the park improvements to determine the facilities that are most urgently needed. Since the Town is expected to need additional recreational facilities in the future, the newly planned Town recreational park in Enterprise Park should provide playing fields, courts, and other amenities. This is consistent with the Town's preliminary vision for the park, which is expected to include soccer and lacrosse fields, a playground, tennis courts, a volleyball court, a picnic area, bocce courts, and chess tables.

***Policy 11.1C: Continue to monitor the use of parks and recreational facilities, and identify future lands that can be acquired and used for recreational purposes.***

As noted, the Town may require at least 75 acres and as much as 250 acres of additional parkland for recreational facilities in the future. The Town should continue to monitor use patterns, in order to assess exactly how much land will be required and when new facilities may be needed. The best sites would be those located in hamlet centers, in the downtown area, or adjacent to schools. Sites in proximity to preserved open space areas, having waterfront access points or greenway connections, or with attractive scenic vistas should also be considered. The Town should consider purchasing and reserving preferred parkland sites in advance of development.

***Policy 11.1D: Add more schoolyard parks to the Town's parkland inventory, where appropriate.***

As noted, the Town has a large number of community parks, but fewer moderate-size schoolyard parks. Schoolyard parks provide active recreational facilities, particularly basketball courts, tennis courts, and playing fields (like community parks), but they are generally smaller and oriented to local neighborhoods. That is, they are not so large that they would attract residents from all over Riverhead.

***Policy 11.1E: Continue working with the Armory and the school districts in order to allow Riverhead residents to use their recreational facilities.***

The Town currently makes use of the Armory and school facilities for both indoor and outdoor sporting activities. In some neighborhoods, the school yard is the nearest recreational facility, and children make use of the playgrounds and playing fields after school hours. Riverhead residents should continue to have the option to use school yard facilities when they are not in use for school purposes.

***Policy 11.1F: Explore the feasibility of building a Town gym for indoor fitness and recreation, as well as an indoor pool.***

Currently, the Recreation Department relies on the Armory, the George Young Community Center, and school facilities for the use of indoor recreational space. The Recreation Department often runs into scheduling conflicts with the Armory and the schools, which sponsor their own events and programs. As the population continues to increase, there will be more demand for indoor sporting and fitness activities, and scheduling conflicts will likewise increase.

The Town should consider the feasibility of building a gym (i.e. an indoor facility with multi-purpose playing courts and activity rooms) that would provide dedicated space for the Recreation Department's programs. A Town gym should be centrally located and could be co-located with other public facilities, such as a police substation, a school, a branch library, or a community center.

The Town should also look into the feasibility and practicality of building an indoor pool facility. The Riverhead YMCA proposal includes an indoor, Olympic-size swimming pool, and if built, it would not be practical for the Town to build a duplicate pool elsewhere. Also, although the Riverhead Central School District does not currently have a pool, it may make sense for the district to consider developing a pool in the future, particularly if a new high school is built. Such a facility could then be used by school swim teams, as well as the general public. Barring the development of a YMCA or school swimming facility, the Town should consider building its own public pool.

***Policy 11.1G: Explore the feasibility of installing outdoor lighting on existing or future sporting facilities, in order to allow nighttime use.***

During public meetings, residents discussed the need for outdoor lighting in conjunction with tennis courts, soccer fields, football fields, and other similar facilities. The Town should consider installing outdoor lighting on either existing facilities or new facilities that may be built in the future. Outdoor lighting should be designed such that glare is directed away from adjacent properties, and if necessary, vegetated buffers should be used to reduce glare impacts.

***Policy 11.1H: Explore the feasibility of building an additional community center, either in the downtown area or in the western part of Town.***

As noted, residents cited the need for additional community center space. The existing center is in the Jamesport area, inconveniently located for residents in the western part of Town. A location in the Wading River, Calverton, or downtown areas should be contemplated.

***Policy 11.1I: Explore the feasibility of expanding State and County park space in Riverhead.***

Work with State and County officials to explore the feasibility of expanding existing parks or establishing new parks. By adding parkland, State and County agencies can simultaneously conserve open space and scenic views, protect natural resources, and provide greater recreational opportunities for residents. Because the Town is not responsible for maintaining State and County parks, they provide a relatively low-cost amenity to the community. Moreover, the value of residential property located near parkland is typically increased, strengthening neighborhoods.

***Policy 11.1J: Strive for a high standard of maintenance and cleanliness at all Town parks.***

During focus groups and CAC meetings, participants cited Grangebél Park and the Wading River Community Park as having the most immediate maintenance needs. Improvement needs at these and other Town parks should continue to be identified periodically. The Town should continue to program improvements to Town Parks annually, preparing the annual budget.

***Policy 11.1K: Help the Peconic YMCA and another similar organization to identify a suitable site in Riverhead.***

It has become apparent that Riverhead is a viable community to support a self-sustaining YMCA. The Town should provide assistance with respect to identifying the most appropriate location for the facility.

**Goal 11.2: Promote neighborhood parks.**

Neighborhood parks are located in proximity to the places where people live, creating more opportunities to walk or bike to nearby recreational sites. Neighborhood parks, moreover, are particularly well-suited to the needs of young children, older adults, and seniors. Lacking the active recreation facilities sought out by teenagers and young adults, neighborhood parks provide a quieter location, where children can play and adults can stroll, read, and relax.

Park requirements for new residential subdivisions are described in § 108-97-B(14) of the Zoning Code. Under these requirements, subdivisions are required to provide five acres of park space for every 100 building lots. Developers are required to provide this park acreage within the subdivision in parcels no less than one acre in size. These provisions have already resulted in open space parcels being set aside in new subdivisions. In addition to setting aside park space, developers or applicants should provide a park maintenance plan in the subdivision review process and demonstrate the measures that will be taken to keep the park space in good repair.

***Policy 11.2A: Establish design guidelines for neighborhood parks.***

A neighborhood park should have adequate pedestrian and bicycle access from subdivision streets; paved walkways and bikeways; lawns for recreational activity; attractive, park-like landscaping; and benches. Small recreational facilities, like a playground or a softball field, may be provided as well. However, in general, large sporting facilities that attract a larger amount of recreational activity — like regulation baseball fields, soccer fields, and skate parks — should be avoided in order to maintain the majority of the park for strolling and other passive recreation. A well-designed park would also help bolster property values and would increase the willingness of property owners to use and pay for the park.

***Policy 11.2B: Restrict park dedication within the Agricultural Protection Zone (APZ).***

In order to maximize the preservation of farmland within the APZ, the Planning Board should not require park set-asides in the approval of subdivisions within the APZ.

**Goals 11.3: Establish a public greenway system with walking and hiking trails, along with bicycle lanes and bikeways.**

A public greenway system would provide recreation and non-motorized transportation opportunities, while protecting ecologically sensitive areas and preserving open space. Greenways would expand upon the recreational opportunities available to community residents and tourists, and would complement the Town's efforts to promote tourism. (See Chapter 7, the Economic Development Element) Potential greenway locations to be considered are shown on Figure 11-1.

As discussed in Chapter 9, the Transportation Element, Sound Avenue is a bucolic country road with scenic views of historic homes and farms. Designated as an historic corridor by the State in 1974, Sound Avenue is an ideal place for greenways. In particular, striped bicycle lanes and/or bike paths running along Sound Avenue would expand recreation opportunities and preserve the scenic character of the corridor. Since Sound Avenue runs in an east-west direction across the Town, it provides sufficient access to Town beaches, community parks private campgrounds, and public golf courses. Greenways would promote alternative modes of transportation to the automobile and increase pedestrian access to these areas.

Areas along the Peconic River are ideal settings for greenways because they would provide access to the waterfront and preserve open space. Under New York State's *Wild, Scenic, and Recreational Rivers Act*, the Peconic River is designated as "scenic" west of the LIRR bridge (located west of the Long Island Expressway), and "recreational" between the LIRR bridge and the dam in Grangebél Park in downtown Riverhead. New development along the riverfront is strictly limited, and if development is permitted at all, it is likely to be subject to permit approval by the State's Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). "Trails," "bridges" (provided they are for non-motorized recreational use), and "private or public

roads" are all permitted, with a DEC permit.<sup>6</sup> In sensitive resource areas (i.e., stream corridors and wetlands), greenway paths would be setback a minimum of 50 feet from the edge of the resource, in order to minimize human impact.

Another ideal place for greenways is in the western portion of the Town where there are several non-contiguous State, County, Town, and privately owned parks. Through a series of trails and bike paths starting at Wildwood State Park and terminating at existing trails in the Central Pine Barrens Core Preservation Area in the Towns of Southampton and Brookhaven, greenways would enhance recreation opportunities and act as links between Riverhead's parks and wildlife habits.

As Figure 11-1 illustrates, the greenway could begin at the entrance of the Wildwood State Park and run alongside Hulse Landing Road. It could then turn left and hug the northerly side of Sound Avenue adjacent to County protected farmland. The greenway could continue along Sound Avenue until it reaches the Boy Scouts of America Camp, located south of Route 25. Trails and/or bike paths could cross the camp property and enter the DEC property that abuts the camp on the south. The greenway could potentially link up to the Calverton Mountain Bike Trail, which is situated on the southeast portion of the DEC property. Finally, the greenway could cross the Pine Barrens Core Area on Enterprise Park at Calverton (EPCAL), and possibly connect to the Paumanok Path, which includes several separate trails that traverse the wilderness of the Pine Barrens. In particular, the western portion of the Pine Barrens Trail, which runs 15 miles from Route 25 in Rocky Point to Schultz Road in Manorville, is an ideal location for a link to the network of greenways in Riverhead.

***Policy 11.3A: Prepare a five-year greenway development plan, and update the plan periodically until the greenway system is completed.***

The five-year plan would identify and designate all on-road and off-road greenways, and provide a detailed implementation plan that outlines appropriate maintenance and management practices for the public greenway system. While the Town should use publicly owned land for the designation of greenways, it should also explore opportunities for voluntary agreements with property owners that would increase the amount of public greenways. Any liability issues could be dealt with at this time. The development plan should encourage voluntary participation through trail easements, dedications, and/or cooperative agreements, and specify what properties or easements meet the criteria for designation in the public greenway system. Voluntary participation efforts in the greenway system should be coordinated with efforts for farmland and open space preservation. Designation of private lands in the greenway system should be based on the following criteria:

---

<sup>6</sup> New York State Department of Conservation, *Wild, Scenic, and Recreational Rivers Permit Program*, <[www.dec.state.ny.us/website/dcs/wsrr/wsrr02.html](http://www.dec.state.ny.us/website/dcs/wsrr/wsrr02.html)>.

- *Connectivity.* The property would connect existing recreation parks, trails, natural resource areas, and/or scenic corridors, or it would complete a critical segment of a newly planned greenway.
- *Threat of Development.* The property would be under development pressure and/or a commonly used trail in danger of being eliminated.
- *Receptive Property Owner.* The property owner would be willing to place an easement on the property.
- *Scenic Quality.* The property would have scenic views of natural or historic features, such as farmland, woodlands, wetlands, bodies of water, historic farmhouses, or cemeteries.
- *Natural Resources.* The property would contain wetlands, creeks, or streams; significant habitat areas; endangered or threatened plant or animal species; or groundwater recharge capabilities.

The development plan should define minimum engineering, design, and safety standards for greenways. The design of a particular greenway could take a variety of different forms, depending on whether it is located on a roadside shoulder, along a waterfront area, in a freestanding easement, or elsewhere. The Town should adopt uniform standards that address the common elements of any greenway and ensure the safety of pedestrians, bicyclists, and other users. Design standards should address signage, trail paving, pavement striping, drainage, maintenance, landscaping, bike path width and alignment, sight lines, and other engineering and design features. Standards should be established prior to designation, so that the Town knows the amount of land needed to accommodate a typical greenway. Standards for greenway bicycle paths should be consistent with Town standards for on-street bicycle lanes.

***Policy 11.3B: Allow new major subdivisions to provide required park space in the form of a greenway.***

As noted, new subdivisions in Riverhead are already required to provide park space. The Town should allow subdivisions to provide a portion of the required park space in the form of a linear greenway, provided that the greenway meets established standards, is accessible to the general public, and fits into the adopted greenway plan.

Currently, if the Planning Board deems that the required parkland would be inadequate and unsuitable for use as a park, then the developer can pay a fee in lieu of providing the park space. The fees are then deposited into a special fund. The Town should consider allowing the developer to use this fee to purchase a greenway easement or improve a greenway near the subdivision. This provision would help bolster the greenway system and would ensure that subdivisions without neighborhood parks have access to a nearby greenway.

***Policy 11.3C: Designate major greenway entrances, where parking is provided and greenway maps are posted. Post roadway signs that direct motorists to major greenway entrances.***

Not all Riverhead residents would live within walking or biking distance of a greenway, and they would be expected to drive to a major greenway entrance, park their cars, and walk or bike from there. Also, out-of-town visitors would most likely arrive by car. In order to accommodate these users, there must be adequate off-street parking for greenways in designated locations. This parking could potentially be provided through shared parking arrangements with the owners of existing commercial parking lots in business districts. At all other entrances, on-street parking should be permitted but off-street parking should not be provided. Roadway directional signs should direct motorists to entrances where parking is available. Pedestrian and bicycle access should be convenient and safe at all entrances.

**Goal 11.4: Coordinate park development with open space preservation.**

***Policy 11.4A: Conversion of the KeySpan property.***

In 2003, the State of New York and KeySpan entered into an agreement whereby the State would purchase the development rights from approximately 518 acres of agricultural land on the site and would purchase in fee title of the woodlands and disturbed area for inclusion in the State park system.

Given the uniqueness of the property and its remote location, the Town should work with the State to improve the property to support the Town's tourist economy, elaborated in Chapter 7, the Economic Development Element, of this plan. Such improvements could include a lodge, equestrian center, or a public beach. Further, the Town and State should explore ways in which such recreational facilities could be franchised in order to provide that revenue lost to the Town of Riverhead by the State purchase of the KeySpan property. In the event that the property is not conveyed to the State, the property should be developed in accordance with the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) legislation, which could support a mixed-use development of residential development and tourist related facilities.

***Policy 11.4B: Provide incentives to homeowners associations or neighborhood corporations for establishing and maintaining public trails through open spaces areas in clustered subdivisions, when appropriate.***

According to § 108-90-A through C of the Zoning Code, clustered subdivisions can either dedicate open space to the Town or create associations or corporations to own and maintain the open space areas. The Town would have the right to create trails through dedicated open space, but not through association/corporation-owned space. Incentives could be used to entice associations and corporations to provide and maintain trails. Incentives can be in the form of property tax benefits to all property owners in the association or corporation. As an

alternative, the Town could agree to pay for a portion of open space maintenance, in exchange for opening up the trail to public access.

**Goal 11.5: Improve access to community parks.**

*Policy 11.5A: Explore the feasibility of expanding the parking lots at Iron Pier Beach, Wading River Beach, Stotzky Park, and other community parks.*

Parking demand at beaches and community parks at times exceeds lot capacity. Additional parking spaces would provide residents and tourists with better access to community parks and recreational facilities. If expanding existing parking lots beyond their current footprints is unfeasible, re-striping is a way to derive more spaces from the existing paved area, provided that the width of each stall is not reduced.

*Policy 11.5B: Extend greenway connections to community parks.*

As stated above, greenways would promote alternative modes of transportation, such as walking and biking, and provide better access to community facilities. Pedestrian trails and bicycle lanes and/or bike paths would help alleviate the parking problems at community parks and beaches.

**Goal 11.6: Improve public access to waterfront areas.**

*Policy 11.6A: Ensure that an existing public right-of-way that provides waterfront access is not obstructed as a result of private development.*

There are public right-of-ways throughout Riverhead that give access to waterfront areas. In some cases, those access points have been grown over and no longer have the appearance of a public right-of-way. The Town should endeavor to identify all such right-of-ways and ensure that they are kept free and clear, continuing to provide access to the waterfront.

*Policy 11.6B: For large subdivision applications for properties that have frontage on the Great Peconic Bay, Flanders Bay, the Peconic River, or Long Island Sound, consider requiring developers to provide an access point to the waterfront for the purpose of providing access to the water, pursuant to New York State's "Public Trust Doctrine."*

The general public has the right to use the water surrounding Riverhead, as well as the foreshore (the area between the mean high-tide and mean low-tide). To safeguard that right, the Town should require that access points to the waterfront be provided. These access points should provide people with the ability to reach the waterfront for the purpose of boating, fishing, and swimming. However, the Town cannot require developers to dedicate or otherwise provide access to beach areas above the mean high tide line for use by the general

public. Vehicle access to beach areas should be maintained within the designated areas, pursuant to Chapter 48 of the Town Code.

By "large subdivisions", this policy does not mean all "major subdivisions", which are defined in the Town zoning code as any subdivision with 5 or more proposed lots and/or where a new street or street extension is involved. The policy is intended to apply only to large-scale subdivisions, in which significant pieces of open space or farmland are being converted into residential neighborhoods. The Town should determine an appropriate definition of a "large subdivision," based on the sizes of currently vacant parcels along waterfront areas. However, the minimum size should be no less than 15 to 20 lots, so as not to create an undue burden on the owners of small lots. On such small-size parcels, provision of public access to the waterfront would be more likely to complicate overall site planning.

***Policy 11.6C: For large subdivision applications for properties that have frontage on the Great Peconic Bay, Flanders Bay, the Peconic River, or Long Island Sound, provide incentives for developers to provide a publicly accessible promenade, park, beach, and/or trails along the waterfront.***

Many Riverhead subdivisions have been designed such that some of the resulting properties extend right up to the water, with a private beach or seacliff. While these properties have wonderful waterfront views and access, other properties in the subdivision and the public at large are cut off from the waterfront. Public access to the beach and the waterfront should be maintained to the greatest possible extent. This helps bolster property values not only for a few properties, but for the subdivision as a whole, because the entire neighborhood ends up having access and proximity to the water.

The Town should encourage developers to set aside publicly accessible land along the water's edge for the purposes of beachfront recreation, with regular access points from local roads. One type of incentive could be a density bonus that would allow the construction of additional housing units. Another incentive could be in the form of greater flexibility in terms of site planning, bulk, or other subdivision requirements.

***Policy 11.6D: Work with other agencies towards acquisition of lands for parks or nature preserves.***

The Town of Riverhead entered into an agreement with the Nature Conservancy to prioritize parcels to be purchased by the Town for open space values.

***Policy 11.6E: Explore the feasibility of expanding and improving existing boat ramp facilities.***

Because cars have to pull up to a boat ramp to unload, boat ramps require adequate space for automobile movements. With increasing demand for waterfront access and public access to the Sound currently limited to three sites, back-ups at Town boat ramps are expected to

increase. The Town recently completed a renovation of the boat ramp at Iron Pier Beach and residents in the Wading River area have cited the need to restore the ramp at Wading River Beach as well. Further improvements and expansions may be needed in the future.

***Policy 11.6F: Explore the feasibility of building a public marina on Long Island Sound.***

Currently, there is no public marina on Long Island Sound, and the construction of a marina could enhance the public's ability to use the Sound.

***Policy 11.6G: Continue to provide a high-quality facility at East Creek.***

The site currently provides the only public boat ramp and docking facility on Riverhead's bayside. In addition, a municipal pump out station is located at East Creek. Some participants of the CAC meetings cited maintenance as an ongoing concern at this site. The Town and the State should continue to ensure that the facility maintains a high level of quality services. Similarly, as stated in Chapter 4, the Natural Resources Conservation element, the Town should pursue the acquisition of a marine pump-out vessel, with the financial assistance of the State, County, or federal agencies, if possible. This would minimize the potential for boats improperly discharging their wastewater directly into the Sound or the Peconic Estuary

**Goal 11.7: Enhance funding mechanisms for parks.**

***Policy 11.7A: Consider the feasibility of establishing park districts throughout Riverhead.***

A park district would own and operate private parks and would have the authority to collect fees from residents living within the district for purposes of park operation, maintenance, and security. Riverhead already has private homeowners' associations that own and maintain private parks and beaches, but so far, this mechanism has been utilized primarily in conjunction with new subdivisions. This policy suggests that larger districts could be established independent of the subdivision process, as in Southold. The Town of Southold has four park districts, the oldest of which — the Southold Park District — was established in 1907. Encompassing most of the Southold hamlet, the four parks within the district are the private property of the residents who reside within the district. All who use those parks are subject to the rules and regulations set forth by the district's board of commissioners. Use of the parks is free to district residents and their guests, although non-residents can obtain permits to use them.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Town of Southold, *Guide to Southold's Parks & Beaches: Park District Beaches*, <[southoldtown.northfork.net/Parks\\_Beaches.htm](http://southoldtown.northfork.net/Parks_Beaches.htm)>, visited June 2002.

***Policy 11.7B: In conjunction with large subdivisions (see Policy 11.6A) and clustered subdivisions, consider requiring the establishment of a Homeowner's Association to own, operate, and maintain neighborhood parks and to collect fees from residents living within the subdivision for the purposes of park operation, maintenance, and security.***

While neighborhood parks are attractive from a user's perspective, they can be more costly for the Town to maintain, as compared to larger parks and recreational facilities. Currently, in the Town's zoning ordinance, clustered subdivisions can create associations or corporations to own and maintain open space areas, but it is not required. A Homeowner's Association should be established for large subdivisions that are clustered or otherwise required to set aside open space or park land. The association would collect fees from homeowners and would have the ability to decide whether open space areas would be made accessible to the general public or whether use would be limited to residents.

***Policy 11.7C: Explore the feasibility of requiring out-of-town residents to obtain permits to use any Town park or recreational facility.***

This is already done for Town beaches, but the permit requirement could potentially be expanded to other parks as well. The downside of this policy is that it could discourage use of Town facilities by potential tourists, contrary to the goals of Chapter 7, the Economic Development Element. To this end, the Town should monitor the use of Town parks and recreational facilities by out-of-town visitors, in order to determine whether use levels are such that permits and the related fees are warranted.