CHAPTER 4: OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

The City is lucky to have a scenic setting surrounded by open space with many outdoor recreation opportunities while also having many recreation facilities and parks in the downtown and neighborhoods. The goals and policies in this chapter focus on how the city can maximize economic and health benefits from these many assets through maintenance, connections, and marketing to improve access and use rates of city parks and recreation amenities and surrounding open space areas.

GOAL OSR1: OFFER A HIGH-QUALITY AND DIVERSE RECREATION SYSTEM TO SUPPORT THE HEALTH, ENJOYMENT, AND ECONOMIC NEEDS OF THE CITY.

Policy 1.1: Make the parks and recreation offerings of the city more visible to residents and visitors.

Action A: Develop Comprehensive North Adams Recreation Guide

While the city currently has a number of park and recreation amenities, some are less visible and therefore underused by residents as well as visitors. The city will work to develop a comprehensive guide of amenities and programs to facilitate access and use of these resources. This guide should be flexible to allow use in website, smart phone application, and other applicable technologies as well as paper hard copies. A trail map and guidance kiosk located in downtown will provide access to this information and help market it.

Action B: Improve Recreation Amenity Wayfinding Signage

There is a high degree of variation in the type and quality of recreation resource wayfinding signage, both to find resources and trail markers or other signage once on site. In order to promote increased use of the city's many recreation assets, a consistent system of signage should be developed to make use opportunities clear and inviting.

Action C: Coordinate and Maintain Comprehensive Trail Map Data

In addition to the City of North Adams, trails within the city's boundaries are managed by a number of different entities, including the Appalachian Trail Commission, Berkshire Natural Resources Council, and state Department of Conservation and Recreation. There is not a comprehensive and accurate map of trails in the city and surrounding lands. While upgrading this data is a regional priority, the city can work to help coordinate the data sharing and management for those players within its bounds to ensure the city has the best quality information available.

Policy 1.2: Maintain a high level of service for different user groups across the city.

Action A: Maintain an Up-to-date Open Space and Recreation Plan

The Open Space and Recreation Plan, which has been continuously updated since 1980, is a plan document defined and required by the state to be eligible to apply for certain state grants. Important components of this plan include a recreational demand survey to determine if all groups' recreation needs are being adequately met. It also conducts a facility assessment to identify a list of specific improvements needed at park sites. This makes the document very useful as a blueprint the city can use to plot and track maintenance and enhancement schedules for park and recreation assets. In order to be deemed current, this plan must be updated every five years. The city will ensure it maintains a current document and employ it to drive incremental improvements to the park and recreation system, including regular pursuit of funding through the state to facilitate these improvements.

Action B: Centralize the Organization of Recreation Facilities, Programs, and Outreach

At present, the aspects of the city's recreational system – field maintenance, scheduling, anchor facility management, etc. – are managed by different departments and commissions. In order to increase efficiency and equity, enhance and promote programming, and develop strategic planning for future needs, these functions should be brought under one central recreation department or office. Many similar models in Berkshire County are non-profit organizations which work collaboratively with municipalities, such as Berkshire South, the Dalton CRA, and the Lenox Community Center.

Action C: Prioritize Existing Facility Maintenance and Enhancement

The City should use the comprehensive inventory of the needs at its existing recreational facilities contained in the Open Space and Recreation Plan, to establish a prioritized work plan for maintenance and improvements. To the best of the City's ability, it should dedicate municipal funding to reduce or eliminate significant maintenance backlogs before making new capital investments. T he City should also look to improve and expand options at existing sites, such diversifying equipment to increase users, and reinvesting in lesser-used neighborhood parks.

Action D: Provide Safe Routes to Recreation

Safe routes to recreation assets are an important component of a healthy parks and recreation system. The city will build on preliminary accessibility assessments conducted in the fall of 2012 and create a list of improvements and timetable for achieving them. Recommendations from this assessment can include physical improvements such as ensuring that there are well-maintained crosswalks and sidewalks around parks and facilities, or the addition of lighting or pedestrian crossing signs to foster a safer environment.

Action E: Expand Use of Existing Recreational Facilities

- **Joint Use Agreements:** Support and facilitate efforts of Mass in Motion to explore use of all school recreation facilities by local residents outside of school hours. Where possible, enter into joint use agreements to enable use of indoor and outdoor facilities to the public while still maintaining priority and safety for the school operations.
- **Streamlined Special Event Permitting:** Encourage use of park facilities for art and entertainment by providing necessary spaces, streamlined permitting processes, and low fees. Expanding the use of facilities in this way will encourage additional use and experience of these community assets by more people.
- **Seasonal Use Changes**: Consider using the Peter W. Foote Vietnam Veteran's Memorial Skating Rink for non-ice uses during the warmest-weather months. Given the high cost of energy to cool the facility for continued skating, and a reducing in the use, the facility could be better utilized for indoor court games.

Action F: Catalyze and Coordinate Development or Protection of Priority Sites

During the Open Space and Recreation outreach process a number of sites have been identified as high priorities or where an initiative is currently taking place, (see list, below). Creating connections between existing facilities has been noted as important to the overall future of the North Adams Open Space and Recreational system. There are areas where multiple initiatives have begun or are pending, indicating a need for the city to actively coordinate and plan these projects. Priority should be given to open space projects contiguous to already conserved land or contain high value resources, and projects which connect to other downtown assets or benefit underserved persons or areas.

OPEN SPACE & RECREATION PRIORITY SITES		
Linear and Connected Networks	***Connections Desired***	***Individual Sites or Projects***
• Ashuwillticook Rail Trail extension along Route 8, in particular between Hodges Cross Road and downtown North Adams • Shared use path development between downtown North Adams and Williamstown • Revitalization of the Hoosic River • Urban walking route in downtown • Avon/Alton Street river path to downtown • Bellow's Pipe Trail conservation	• Natural Bridge State Park to downtown • Bellow's Pipe, Cascades, downtown • Windsor Lake to MCLA Forest, recreational fields, MCLA towers	• Downtown green spaces, pocket parks • Natural Bridge State Park to downtown • Trail Information kiosk in downtown • Windsor Lake trail development • Mohican-Mohawk trail • Armory site amenities • Skateboard park (no site selected)

Policy 1.3: Leverage city park and recreation amenities to support business development, tourism, and resident attraction and retention efforts.

Action A: Cultivate System of Mountain Biking Trails

The Berkshire Chapter of the New England Mountain Biking Association (NEMBA) has great interest in creating a large network of trails throughout northern Berkshire County to serve as a location for races and a draw for avid mountain bikers. This is comparable to efforts in Vermont which served as the group's inspiration. With current trail systems on Mount Greylock and in Savoy State Forest, the city could become a centerpiece surrounded on all sides with trails in Clarksburg State Forest, Florida Mountain State Forest. Berkshire NEMBA currently partners with the Department of Conservation on trail creation and maintenance.

Action B: Increase and Leverage Presence of Winter Outdoor Recreation

The Snowmobile Association of Massachusetts (SAM) has three active chapters in Northern Berkshire County – the Florida Mountaineers, Savoy KanaryKats, and the Adams Snowdrifters. The activity from these individuals and groups can make a positive impact on economic development in the City of North Adams. Marketing of existing amenities and exploration of expanding offerings (such as Bascom Lodge in limited capacity during the winter) will be facilitated by working directly with the three local groups and the state-wide organization. Other winter activities include hunting, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and ice fishing. Each offers an opportunity to capture visits and customers to the city's lodging, restaurant and other businesses.

Action C: Market North Adams Businesses to Outside Racing Events and Attractions

Each year there are competitive races held locally and regionally which attract hundreds of visitors to or near North Adams. Take an inventory of such events and work with race organizers to market accommodations in North Adams to competitors and guests. One example is a cycling race up Mt. Greylock each year organized by the Northampton Cycling Club which boasts about 180 racers plus guests. Work with local businesses to incentivize visits by participants (i.e. % off a meal with race number).

NOTE: Also see the Economic section for additional actions related to marketing outdoor recreation in the City.

GOAL OSR2: IMPLEMENT WESTERN NEW ENGLAND GREENWAY COURSE THROUGH THE CITY

Policy 2.1: Implement Bikepath as Part of Western New England Greenway Vision

The Ashuwillticook Rail Trail has been incorporated into a large-scale vision for the northeastern US and Canada that would link bikepaths from New York City to Montreal into a continuous bikepath greenway. The city's planned scenic rail and adjacent bike path course up from the Town of Adams will achieve a significant step forward. The city will now need to continue to coordinate with regional and city partners to devise a course through downtown and east to the section of bikepath currently under construction in Williamstown. This project has the potential to be further enhanced by the incorporation of scenic rail travel along the corridor between Adams and North Adams.

Policy 2.2: Cultivate Riverway Multi-use Path as Asset for Recreation and Enjoyment

Action A: Focus on River Greening and Increased Access within Community Core

The majority of the outdoor recreation assets of the city are located in the open space lands surrounding the community core in the larger scale park and recreation facilities to the south and west of downtown. The river creates a central focal point and is a unique opportunity to integrate recreation space within the community core and downtown, while also connecting to the other assets west and south. The city will collaborate with Hoosic River Revival Coalition and other partners to continue implementing greenspace creation, community access, and improvement projects along the flood chutes in the city's core. Such projects should range from small, incremental improvements to provide access (such as fence locations) to larger, park-like developments in priority areas.

NOTE: Also see the Downtown Economy section for additional goals related to the Hoosic River.

Action B: Secure or Create River Access Points for Recreational Use

As bike path implementation moves forward, the city should ensure that the design incorporates the retention or creation of access points to the river for both boating and fishing. Trout Unlimited has been an active group in the city due to the presence of cold water fisheries. The Hoosic River Watershed Association and Audubon Society both have been active in highlighting canoe/kayak routes for paddling and wildlife viewing. These partners can help inform designers about key spots on the river and then help highlight these assets after construction to various sport and wildlife groups.

Action C: Recreation-Supporting Infrastructure

Implement, as part of the blueway and bikepath design, a system of pockets for alternate activities such as:

- Educational kiosks highlighting natural species, habitat types, or other stories from the surrounding landscape.
- Performance spaces.
- Picnic spots with tables, garbage and possibly bathroom facilities.
- Benches placed in scenic locations for passive enjoyment of the river.
- Periodic garbage stations with dog bags to facilitate individual behaviors to maintain quality of trail environment.
- A born learning trail[1] segment for a family-friendly experience for young children.
- Outdoor exercise stations for using the path as a workout space (below).

Policy 2.3: Employ the River Corridor Greenway as Wildlife Habitat and Movement Corridor

[1] Born Learning Trails provide young children with an opportunity to get active, have fun and boost language and literacy skills. The "trails" feature age-appropriate, simple-to-construct activities that can be set up outdoors or in, http://www.unitedway.org/pages/kids-get-fit-cac-bornlearning.

Action A: Employ Wildlife-Friendly Landscaping
The rivers and surrounding wetlands offer important habitat areas, including some for rare and endangered species. A greenway along the river can help keep these corridors open for shared use by humans and other species. This can be facilitated by ensuring that landscaping placed in these corridors as they are modified features context-appropriate native landscaping and the removal of any invasive species that may currently be present.

Action B: Ensure Conservation Commission Involved In Development Review Process
The Conservation Commission of the city, as with all municipalities, is in place to review development proposals that are within specified distances from protected natural features and habitats such as floodplains, wetlands, and waterways. The city will work to ensure that all proposals that should come before the Conservation Commission do. Supporting activities could include better GIS capacity at the city to map parcels and natural features for reference, flow-charts and process sheets to help volunteer board members, and periodic all boards meetings to improve communications flows and identify and address issues or challenges in a gradual and timely manner.

GOAL OSR3: PROMOTE YEAR-ROUND HEALTHY LIVING AND ACTIVE LIFESTYLES FOR ALL AGES

Policy 3.1: Promote healthy active living within the community.

Action A: Increase Healthy Activity in City's School System
Support Northern Berkshire Community Coalition's Mass in Motion program efforts to incorporate outdoor activity into the school day in North Adams' schools.

MAYOR'S FITNESS CHALLENGE

Communities across the country have created a Mayor's Fitness Challenge, an event centering around healthy eating, improving cardiovascular and muscular health, and identifying healthy options in the community.

Program features include a length of 2-3 months, pre- and post-challenge health screenings, free exercise and lifestyle classes, and prizes at the event's end. Entrance fees range in cost, and there are usually special programs for youth and seniors. Program partners may include the YMCA, private gyms, news outlets, medical service providers, insurance companies, health care plans and local restaurants. Gardening can be an additional focus, promoting it as an activity combining healthy exercise and eating; one program held a gardening demonstration in the kick-off week and culminated the challenge event at the first Farmer's Market of the season.

Most Mayors initiate the challenge by making their own pledge to exercise a certain number of times in a week and make healthy eating choices.

Action B: Establish Network of Walking Routes and Trails
Walking and running are two of the most popular recreational activities of local residents. The city will work to establish varied, safe and accessible options for all residents and abilities. A strong urban walking network, in collaboration with the Mass in Motion program will have positive implications for community health and wellness as well as local economic development. In order to create a culture of year-round outside activity, these routes will need to be a high-priority for snow clearing and regular street cleaning.

Action C: Make More Healthy Heart Trails Locally
The Healthy Heart Trails Program of the Department of Conservation and Recreation designated 70 trails across the state with the aim of promoting increased daily exercise. These trails are identified by a green heart symbol (see example, below), measure approximately 1.5 miles or less in length, and are easy to moderate in activity level. Currently the only designated Heart Healthy trail in the city is the Elder Trail in Natural Bridge State Park, although Ashuwillticook Rail Trail is also designated and so will count as a second trail as it is extended north from Adams. While the state may not designate any further trails, the city could develop a more local system using the same concept and similar signs.

Action D: Mayor's Fitness Challenge
Consider instituting an annual Mayor's Fitness Challenge. This type of program should tie into the existing recreational system, utilizing different sites and facilities. See the call-out box, right, for information about Mayor's Challenges in other communities.

GOAL OSR4: RESPECT THE CITY'S PLACE WITHIN IMPORTANT HABITAT AREAS BY PROVIDING WILDLIFE CORRIDORS AND CONNECTIONS TO SUPPORT BIODIVERSITY

Policy 4.1: Work with local conservation partners to implement the regional Conservation Framework within the city.

Action A: Refine and Adopt Conservation Framework
The conservation framework of the regional plan was intentionally general with the intent that local communities would each determine a more detailed approach to achieving the overarching intent of the framework. To achieve this for North Adams, the city will convene a 'Conservation and Recreation Roundtable' comprised of local boards and commissions involved in aspects of conservation and recreation. This should include representatives from the Conservation Commission, Historical Commission, Planning Board, Community Development Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Redevelopment Authority, and the Parks and Recreation Commission.

This group should take part in reviewing the proposed framework making recommendations on its final form and implementation steps.

Action B: Educate Landowners on Conservation Options
Work with conservation partners active in the North Adams area, such as Berkshire Natural Resources Council and the Hoosic River Watershed Association, to communicate potential conservation options to landowners. This could include land donation or conservation easements, prioritizing those lands identified as important to wildlife, water quality, and community aesthetics.

Policy 4.2: Develop appropriate tools and practices to support wildlife-friendly development, prioritizing important habitat areas as identified within the Conservation Framework.

Action A: Facilitate Safe Wildlife Movement Across Route 2
The Route 2 corridor west of downtown represents a strip of developed land between two large expanses of open lands offering important habitats. The river runs parallel to Route 2, providing an east-west movement channel, but north-south movement is more challenging due to the road and adjacent development. The city should work with Mass DOT to employ wildlife crossing best practices. The local organization BEAT may be a strong partner in these efforts.

GOAL OSR5: CONTINUOUSLY WORK TO IMPROVE THE HEALTH AND INTEGRITY OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN AND AROUND THE CITY

Policy 5.1: Improve the data environment to inform decision-making around environmental quality and natural resources.

Action A: Advocate for and Support a Hoosic Watershed Rare Species Survey
A detailed survey of rare species in the Housatonic River watershed was recently completed through collaboration between the Housatonic Valley Association (HVA) and the state Natural Heritage Endangered Species Program. The City should work with surrounding municipalities and the Hoosic River Watershed Association (HooRWA) to solicit the state for a more detailed study for the northern portions of the county. Such survey work is critical to having a better understanding of what species are present where to inform conservation and maintenance activities to support biodiversity.

Action B: Develop Comprehensive Understanding of Municipal Conservation Issues
Explore ways the city's public works department can improve their procedures and facilities to ensure a high level of protection for resource areas. This might include upgrading culverts for improved stream crossings, ensuring safe removal of snow away from water sources, and properly managing hazardous materials.

Action C: Continue Water Quality Analysis and Pollution Reduction Strategies
Recent efforts of MCLA and the Hoosic River Watershed Association to track bacteria and other pollutants in the river helped to identify sources of pollution into the waterway. The city supports the continuation of these data gathering efforts and will facilitate efforts to address contamination sources as they are determined.

Action D: Create and Maintain Comprehensive Brownfield Site Inventory
The City sits on the committee for the Berkshire Brownfields Program operated out of the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission. In 2013, the program will develop its first comprehensive brownfield site inventory to better access and direct appropriate funds to address brownfield concerns. This includes determining if contamination is present and remediating any environmental concerns if found. The city can support this inventory creation, and then work to keep a current list of properties within its boundaries to continue advocating for its sites to access brownfield program resources.

Policy 5.2: Protect and enhance the water quality of rivers and lakes throughout the city.

Action A: Work with Army Corps of Engineers and other River Partners to Improve Water and Habitat Conditions in Chutes
The southern, northern and main branches of the Hoosic River within North Adams currently provide or have historically provided cold water habitat, which has significant ecological as well as social and economic implications for the community and region. The City of North Adams should partner with the Army Corps of Engineers (who have jurisdiction over the chutes), the Hoosic River Revival organization, the Hoosic River Watershed Association, and other habitat supporting organizations to establish methods for mitigating in these water and habitat quality issues.

Action B: Implement Urban Tree Program along River
Shading provided to rivers from trees is one important tool for controlling water temperatures and thermal pollution impacts. The City should work with, or provide incentive for, community-based groups to plant appropriate tree species along the river to begin greening the river way and creating shade. Consideration should be given to the requirements for planting as required by the Army

Corps of Engineers. If possible, collaborate with the Corps to determine the most advantageous locations for tree planting and redefine agreements as necessary.

Action C: Address Dams and Other Sources of Stream Fragmentation
Preserve and recreate coldwater habitats for Eastern Brook Trout and other species. The greatest disturbance to brook trout habitat in the region is stream fragmentation caused by dams, which prohibit movement of fish and other aquatic organisms. The city will work to inventory its dams and determine which ones can and should be removed, and which should be reengineered to reduce impacts on water flow and habitat while maintaining flood control.

Action D: Engage in Local Education About Non-point Source Pollution
Engage in local and regional efforts to educate residents and businesses about sources and mitigation methods of non-point source pollution. Such sources may include fertilizer and other agricultural and lawn treatments, urban pollution runoff such as oil and gas, bacteria and nutrients from septic and treatment facilities, and sediment from improper protections during construction and other disturbances.

Action E: Offer Programs and Incentives for Property-Owner Runoff Reduction
The single largest problem for surface water quality in the city and region is the impact of stormwater runoff into waterways. This flushes pollutants into the water from yards, farms, and pavement. The topography of the city means that runoff can be particularly fast-moving, the reason the flood chutes were constructed in the first place. Runoff can be reduced or slowed through a number of easy tools and techniques such as rain gardens (left) and rain barrels (right). Programs such as rain garden workshops in partnership with local greenhouses or MCLA can help expand their use in the city's neighborhoods. Rain barrels, which capture water from roofs that would otherwise flow into the streets from downspouts, can be sold to residents at a discounted cost as a means of increasing use. In addition, municipal programs to improve water quality include oil recycling to offer an alternative to allowing it into the sewer system, composting to reduce and reuse waste materials, and encouraging use of porous pavement to help water infiltrate on site.

GOAL OSR6: BROADEN RANGE OF TOOLS AND PARTNERS TO ACHIEVE EFFICIENT RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE MANAGEMENT.

Policy 6.1: Diversity funding and stewardship resources to benefit open space and recreation amenities.

Action A: Adopt Community Preservation Act
Engage in a community discussion, with comprehensive education, about adopting the Community Preservation Act locally. This adoption can provide a consistent funding stream for acquisition and improvement of open space in addition to historic preservation and affordable housing.

Action B: Pursue Corporate Sponsorship Arrangements
While they remain the City's responsibility, private organizations are taking on a renewed role of corporate community stewardship. Local banks, large employers, and major corporate entities with sites in the city are all potential partners to help sponsor parks and recreation improvements. This can include financial contributions as well as day-of-service events where corporate employees volunteer their labor for a day on a specific project.

Action C: Gradually and Consistently Pursue Grants to Implement Improvements
There are a number of state and other grants to help municipalities maintain and improve their recreation facilities. The city will work to consistently apply each year to successfully implement improvements as outlined in the OSRP.

Action D: Encourage Community Members to Adopt a Park or Trail
Encourage community groups, area businesses, and general residents to adopt a park or trail to perform general maintenance and monitoring. Connect this effort to the community volunteer day.

Action E: Engage Local Youth to Care for their Recreation Facilities
Provide opportunities specifically for youth to take ownership and greater use of their local recreational facilities. Work with the Youth Commission, Berkshire Natural Resource Council, Mass in Motion, the school system's service learning program and other groups to develop youth-oriented service programs. A model program may be "Greenagers" in Great Barrington. Such programs should include opportunities to care for the park and recreation system, experience more of the recreation options in North Adams, and provide them opportunity for greater input about the future of parks, recreational facilities and natural sites.

Policy 6.2: Coordinate Maintenance to Maximize Impact of Scarce Resources

Action A: Coordinated Recreational Resource Management
Combine priorities across disciplines and jurisdictions wherever possible. For example, preservation and conservation concerns are combined in heritage landscape conservation. Also consider incorporation of needed community facilities. Pooling resources and priorities will enable greater funding potential and encourage better engagement of the community in these efforts.

Action B: Identify and Promote Financial Benefits for Private Owners
Develop a toolkit for all types of owners and users providing clear information about funding sources and resources to enable conservation efforts, such as tax benefits for conservation restrictions.