

**DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

MEMORANDUM

TO: Waterford Planning and Zoning Commission

FROM: Mark Wujtewicz, Planner

DATE: October 24, 2023

TITLE: Waterford Community Park
CGS § 8-24 revised #PL-21-15
PL-23-13

This request is to seek the Planning and Zoning Commission's endorsement of a modification to the October 2021 Waterford Community Park Master Plan and finding of consistency with the Waterford Plan of Preservation, Conservation, and Development (POCD). The Master Plan was initially endorsed by the Commission on December 14, 2021 as a CGS § 8-24 application through application #PL-21-15. As required by statute, the Commission found that the improvements proposed in the Master Plan were consistent with the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD). Presently, there are modifications proposed to the Master Plan for the Commission's consideration. These modifications were reviewed and approved by the Waterford Town Center Development Ad-Hoc Committee on October 3 and Oct 17, 2023 and are reflected in the revised CGS § 8-24 application currently before the Commission as application #PL-23-13.

- The addition of two regulation size pickle ball courts along with an adjacent pavilion and grass area. These proposed elements of the plan are located within the area previously identified as reinforced turf access for food trucks and vendors for Parks and Recreation activities.
- The establishment of a gravel access driveway from Rope Ferry Road west of the former Green Survival Garden Center to serve the Recreation and Parks Maintenance area.
- Modification to the universally accessible pedestrian entry and streetscape, located on Rope Ferry Road that leads into the park

The Commission previously approved the CGS § 8-24 application #PL-21-15 by finding the plan consistent with the following goals and implementation strategies of Waterford's Plan of Conservation and Development:

- Preserve Open Space
 - Establish a meaningful system of open spaces in order to protect important resources and enhance our overall quality of life (page 24).
 - Establish a coordinated Open Space/Greenbelt/Trail System (p. 26).

- Enhance Quality of Life
 - Promote events and activities which will enhance the overall quality of life in Waterford. (p. 38)
- Guide Overall Structure
 - Strive to maintain a community comprised of identifiable villages, neighborhoods, and locations with a strong “sense of place.”
 - Defining elements of Waterford’s community structure includes “the Civic Triangle area which acts as a community focal point.” (p. 48)

This request is to find that the modifications to the Plan as proposed are still consistent with the overall goals and strategies as identified in the Commission’s previous decision in addition to:

- Support Community Facilities
 - Provide adequate services and facilities to meet community needs. (p.66)

The Planning and Zoning Commission will continue to have future opportunities to review all designs before implementation when project elements are before the Commission for formal site plan review. A Site Plan application for construction of certain elements within the Community Park Civic Triangle Master Plan will be presented to the Commission later in the agenda for this meeting. Subsequent design and permitting work will be undertaken as funding allows.

Proposed Motion

To find that the modifications proposed to the Waterford Community Park Master Plan dated October, 2023 is consistent with the Waterford Plan of Preservation, Conservation, and Development and to recommend implementation of the plan pursuant to CGS § 8-24.

Attachments

1. Waterford Community Park Master Plan, October 2021
2. Waterford Community Park Master Plan revised, October 2023
3. Minutes of the October 3, 2023 Town Center Ad Hoc Committee
4. Minutes of the October 17, 2023 Town Center Ad Hoc Committee

PRESERVE

Open Space

GOAL

Establish a meaningful system of open spaces in order to protect important resources and enhance our overall quality of life.

This Plan defines “dedicated open space” as land that is owned by entities or otherwise restricted in some way where such land is likely to be preserved or dedicated as open space, hopefully in perpetuity (town park, state forest, land trust, etc.). The terms “managed open space” is used to refer to lands owned by entities or used in a way where it serves some open space function but it may not be preserved in perpetuity, may not allow for public access or use, or has another purpose (golf courses, water company lands, cemeteries, hunting clubs, some utility lands, etc.).

Preservation of open space can serve five important purposes:

- protection of community character,
- preservation of lands for parks and recreational uses,
- conservation of important natural resources,
- fiscal and economic benefits, and
- shaping of development patterns.

Approximately 3,230 acres of land (15 % of the land area) in Waterford can be categorized as open space since it has some measure of protection from future development through ownership, easement, or compatible use. Some of these areas (Harkness, Arboretum, etc.) are the most treasured places in Waterford and make a significant contribution to the overall character of the community. Other areas help protect natural resources or scenic resources or provide recreation opportunities.

However, not all the land that is perceived as open space in Waterford is in fact preserved as open space. Most people tend to perceive “open space” as including all vacant land. In other words, they think “open space” is any land that is not built upon. However, much of that land is in private ownership and subject to future development. One of the reasons that neighbors oppose new developments is over the loss of what they perceive to be open space.

There is little doubt that open space adds considerably to the overall ambience and quality of life of the community. Waterford should seek to continue to acquire and manage open space lands for the benefit of the Town and its population. Otherwise, open lands and familiar landscapes will continue to change as the development of the Town continues and opportunities to acquire these lands will be lost.

In the telephone survey, 58% of participants want the Town to acquire more land for parks and open space. However, residents were less willing to support increased taxes to fund open space preservation. Waterford residents are more strongly in favor of efforts to establish a trail system for pedestrians and bicycles. Overall, 79 percent of participants want the Town to devote efforts to establish a trail system.

B. Establish A Coordinated Open Space / Greenbelt / Trail System

Since the 1977 Plan of Development, Waterford has had a stated goal of establishing “a comprehensive greenbelt system which ... follows the town’s major streams and brooks.” This strategy should continue to be the basic foundation for Waterford’s open space strategy.

In addition, we should strive to use such greenbelt areas and other opportunities (including electric rights-of-way or sewer easements if possible) to establish an overall trail system throughout the community. Such a trail system will provide connections between different parts of Waterford as the trail system evolves and provide passive recreation opportunities for residents.

As part of preparing this Plan, the preliminary open space plan on the facing page (an overall vision) was prepared. This is not intended to be a definitive statement of the desired open space and greenway arrangement for Waterford. Rather, it is intended to be a starting point for further discussion and refinement of an open space and greenway system.

In the future, special attention should be devoted to increasing open space connectivity. Experience in other communities has shown that open spaces increase exponentially in value for nature, wildlife or people when they are configured to create continuous corridors.

Based on this vision, the policy preferences in terms of the preservation of open space include the following:

- Seek to establish an open space “system” as a major organizing element in Waterford by helping to define the villages, separate developed areas, and provide for transitions between different areas,
- Use the open space / greenbelt / trail system to help interconnect different parts of town and link open spaces and neighborhoods by trails (pedestrian path / bikeway / hiking trail system) or “greenbelts” that are accessible to residents throughout Waterford,
- Acquire or preserve parcels that contribute the most to the town’s open space and greenbelt system.
- Protect important natural, scenic, or other resources and improve wildlife habitat and wildlife “corridors”, especially stream corridors or riparian areas along watercourses.
- Increase opportunities for both active and passive uses both within the town and within the region.
- Contribute to the overall character of Waterford and to the enjoyment and quality of life for residents.

In order to guide future efforts, the Town should use the map on the facing page as starting point for creating an overall open space plan that:

- specifies the location of all existing publicly accessible open space, and
- differentiates between open space that is fully useable (such as public parks) and open space that is less usable (such as cemeteries or land trusts).

ENHANCE

Quality of Life

GOAL

Promote events and activities which enhance the overall quality of life in Waterford.

Residents of Waterford are very satisfied with the quality of life in the community. Impressively, more than 97 percent of respondents in the telephone survey reported that the quality of life in Waterford is good or very good.

Although everyone has their own definition of quality of life, the following table identifies some elements of a community that may contribute to people's perception of their overall quality of life:

Category	Resource	Description
Enhancing	Basic Needs	Physical safety, economic security, sense of community
	Local Events	Unique events (parades, fairs, and concerts) where residents join in a common activity
	Volunteerism/Philanthropy	Voluntary donations of time and money help make Waterford a special place
	Shared Visions/Goals	Establishing and attaining shared visions and goals
	Open Communication	Communication about community issues and priorities is an important part of maintaining community spirit
	Community Ambience	Overall appearance (including preserved natural resources and open spaces) enhances people's sense of quality of life.
	Positive Recognition	Positive recognition by others of local activities and events helps build community spirit and pride
Detracting	Negative Communication	A lack of communication or negative communication can undermine community spirit and pride
	Negative Recognition	Negative recognition of a community by others can undermine community spirit and pride

Waterford should continue to encourage activities that contribute to community spirit and pride. These activities will also contribute to the overall quality of life of Waterford residents. We must do more to promote events and activities which enhance the overall quality of life in the community.

GUIDE

Overall Structure

GOAL

Strive to maintain a community comprised of identifiable villages, neighborhoods, and locations with a strong “sense of place.”

The overall physical organization of Waterford (the structure of the community) is an important component of the Plan. Studies have found that the overall structure of a community and the amount of definition of areas within it are both strongly correlated with community character and community image. People identify strongly with communities that have a discernable structure and often identify these communities as having “character” and a “sense of place”.

The following features affect the perception of community structure and community character:

Features Which Tend To Enhance Character

Focal Points	Identifiable focal points or places with distinctive characteristics
Landmarks	Distinctive places or destinations
Clusters	Neighborhoods or areas identifiable by use, location, character, or style
Greenspaces	Open spaces, greenways, trails, streambelts or other natural elements
Gateways	Places providing a special sense of entry or arrival to an area

Features Which Can Enhance Or Erode Character

Roads	Roads to and through the community can enhance or detract
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Features Which Can Erode Character

Strip Development	Areas with linear development patterns, especially commercial
Sprawl Development	Areas with repetitive development patterns, especially residential

At the present time, the defining elements of Waterford’s community structure may be:

- the Civic Triangle area which acts as a community focal point,
- the areas of concentrated development in Quaker Hill, Mago Point, Pleasure Beach, Ridgewood Park, Jordan Village, Oswegatchie, and Cohanzie,
- greenspaces (open space or low-intensity areas), and
- major business areas such as Crystal Mall, Business Triangle, Millstone Point, and Route 1 at Clark Lane.

SUPPORT

Community Facilities

GOAL

Provide adequate services and facilities to meet community needs.

A Plan of Preservation, Conservation and Development reviews the physical aspects of community services (such as education, public works, public safety, social, and recreation) to ensure that they are appropriately located and sized to meet community needs. These services and facilities contribute to Waterford's character and quality of life.

Since the 1998 Plan, Waterford has undertaken a school consolidation and modernization program, built a community center, and upgraded some buildings and systems to meet community needs.

In the survey, residents indicated that they were very satisfied with quality and quantity of the following Town services:

<i>Service</i>	<i>Good And Very Good</i>	<i>Not Sure / Don't Know</i>	<i>Poor And Very Poor</i>
Fire services	93%	5%	2%
Schools	82%	12%	6%
Park/recreation facilities such as fields	80%	8%	12%
Park/recreation activities such as classes or programs	78%	11%	11%

Town Hall



Community Center

