



Ocean City Open Space & Recreation Plan

This Open Space and Recreation Plan describes existing open space and contains a complete inventory of the City's recreation resources. It identifies the value of open space to the community and the need for additional open space, and includes an action plan and information about land acquisition, partners and funding.



Ocean City Environmental Commission

Robert Adams	Ken Cooper	Donna Moore
J. Peter Ault	S. John Loeper	Martin Mozzo
Marjorie Brooks	Sara Allison Maas	James Tweed

Ocean City Planning Board

Dean Adams	Gary Jessel	S. John Loeper	Joseph Sheppard
Michael Dattilo	Kenneth Jones	Antwan McClellan	Marc Shuster

Ocean City Government

Jay A. Gillian, Mayor

Anthony P. Wilson, Council President

Michael Allegretto	Peter J. Guinosso	Peter V. Madden
Michael DeVlieger	Keith Hartzell	Antwan L. McClellan

Michael Dattilo, Business Administrator

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Prepared By:



Randall E. Scheule, PP/AICP

New Jersey Professional Planner License No. 33LI00366600

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Executive Summary

Due to its unique physiography and heritage, Ocean City enjoys a treasure of natural, cultural and historic resources. From the miles of sandy beaches along the shores of the Atlantic to the biologically rich environs of the Great Egg Harbor Bay, this barrier island is home to a diverse community of natural amenities important to long-time homeowners and thousands of visitors. In addition, the City boasts first class recreation facilities and programs that are enjoyed year-round by individuals and groups of all ages and abilities. The primary purpose of this Open Space and Recreation Plan is to assure the maintenance of existing resources, and provide guidance for future land acquisition and recreation improvements.

Close-to-home recreation defines the role of municipal recreation providers. A park and recreation program is an intricate component of a municipality's quality of life. Municipalities also are responsible for recreation programming that satisfies the needs of preschoolers, teens, adults and senior citizens. Providing and maintaining park and recreation areas coupled with programming for diverse populations, makes municipal recreation very challenging.

Open space is the basic resource for the development of recreational facilities and for satisfying the recreational needs of Ocean City's citizens. If Ocean City is to remain a desirable place to live it is important that adequate open space be permanently protected. Without protection, it is likely that remaining unprotected open space will be converted to residential and other uses.

At the same time, the amount of open space required to satisfy recreational needs and to perform other vital functions, such as protection from coastal storms and flood attenuation, will increase. It is important for the City's future to recognize what its open space requirements will be, and to take steps to preserve the necessary lands now, before opportunities to do so are lost.

It has long been acknowledged that public parks and open space improve our physical and psychological health, strengthen our communities, and make our cities and neighborhoods more attractive places to live and work. Urban planners believe that parks improve public health, increase property values, and provide substantial environmental benefits. This Plan utilized a survey to evaluate resident's opinions regarding recreation and open space opportunities in Ocean City.



The need to permanently preserve open space is driven by several factors. As the most densely populated state in the nation competition for open land is intense. Municipalities must balance competing land use needs with protection of natural resources, critical environmental areas, and scenic beauty.

Municipal environmental commissions are the natural ally of municipal recreation departments and open space initiatives. Environmental commissions serve in an advisory role and have the statutory authority to create an open space index, study and make recommendations on water, air, waste, noise, landscape protection, environmental appearance, flora and fauna. Environmental commissions are the municipal advocate for open space preservation and initiate many open space preservation efforts. Lands that are acquired can be used for the development of recreation facilities, protect important natural resources and promote smart growth.

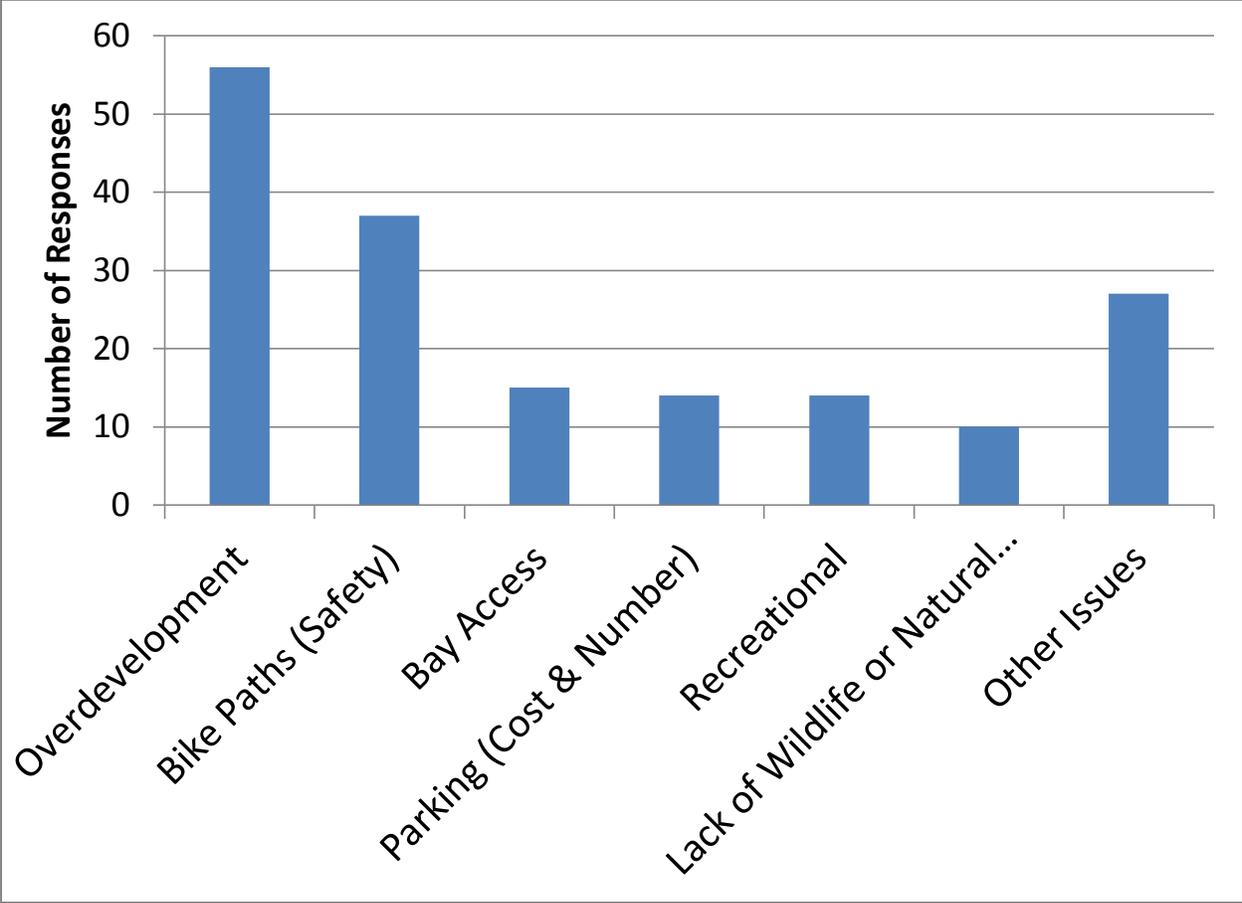
In 2011, the Ocean City Environmental Commission recognized the need for a plan to address open space issues in the City. Following a presentation to City Council on November 29, 2011 the Commission assumed the responsibility to oversee the development of an *Open Space and Recreation Plan*, which would focus on local efforts to preserve additional lands, and provide passive and active recreation opportunities. The generous support provided by the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions' *Sustainable Land Use Planning Grant* program was used to fund preparation of this Plan.

This *Plan* provides a structured evaluation process and criteria for potential property acquisitions. It also adheres to requirements set forth by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Green Acres Program, making the City eligible for future site acquisition funds under the Planning Incentive Grant program.

Results of a survey conducted by the Environmental Commission provide valuable insight regarding the City's open space and recreation. Overall, natural open space and passive recreational pursuits are considered very important by the vast majority of respondents. Nature enjoyment and relaxation are identified as the two top benefits associated with open space. The survey identified expanded bike paths and walking trails as the two top facility needs. **Exhibit 1 - Open Space and Recreation Challenges** indicates some of the obstacles as the City implements this Open Space and Recreation Plan. The City will need to balance the competing needs on open space described herein while accounting for the limited available open space and financial considerations. The survey and results are included in **Appendix A** of this Plan.



EXHIBIT 1
Open Space and Recreation Challenges



Source: Ocean City Environmental Commission

The purpose of an open space program is, in addition to preservation of the land and its resources, to provide access for public enjoyment. This Open Space and Recreation Plan acknowledges the dual goals of land preservation and development of recreational facilities and includes policies to accomplish both.

The necessity to protect Ocean City's natural resources, critical environmental areas, and open space has been extensively detailed in the City's 'Conservation Plan and Environmental Resources Inventory.'¹ The relevant goals and objectives from this document are reiterated and incorporated into the Goals and Policies chapter of this Open Space and Recreation Plan to inform decisions regarding the future purchase of open space in Ocean City. In addition, this Plan outlines goals and sets policies for the appropriate development, interconnection, and stewardship of open space lands for public access and enjoyment.



The City of Ocean City recognizes the many benefits associated with recreation and open space, and has established a mechanism through its capital improvement programming to continually update and improve recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. Like most communities, the City must balance the demand for open space and recreation with competing land uses and budgetary realities.

This Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) includes the following elements:

- A description of the public input utilized in developing the Plan;
- A demographic profile of the City;
- A summary of recent growth trends;
- An inventory of existing protected open space and recreation lands;
- An analysis of open space and recreation needs;
- A statement of goals and objectives; and
- An action plan with recommendations through 2017.

The ‘Inventory of Recreational Facilities and Open Space’ chapter of this Plan contains a comprehensive inventory of the existing open space and recreation areas in the City. An analysis of acquisition criteria for the purchase of additional lands is included in the ‘Resource Assessment and Ranking Criteria’ chapter. Collectively, this guidance will help achieve the long-term goals for open space and recreation planning in Ocean City.

A key feature of the Plan is the Action Program that describes the next steps towards implementing the *Open Space and Recreation Plan*. One of the first recommendations is to adopt the Plan as part of the City Master Plan and submit this plan to Green Acres for New Jersey’s Planning Incentive Program. The City should also establish an entity to monitor and assist in carrying out the recommendations of the *Open Space and Recreation Plan*.

Recommended actions in this *Open Space & Recreation Plan* include identification of important areas for resource protection, increasing public awareness of open space and recreation needs, encouraging donations of lands and/or easements or development rights with tax benefits, creating additional water access points along the bayfront. In addition to proceeding with the recommendations herein, the success of this *Open Space and Recreation Plan* relies on partnerships with local organizations, civic groups and non-profit entities. The City should encourage residents’ involvement in on-going efforts to maintain the special character of the community and the long-term benefits of open space protection through periodic updates regarding the successful implementation of this Plan.



Introduction

The Ocean City Environmental Commission has utilized a 2012 Sustainable Land Use Planning Grant from the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions to prepare this Open Space and Recreation Plan. This Plan has been prepared pursuant to the Municipal Land Use Lawⁱⁱ and the NJDEP ‘Open Space and Recreation Plan Guidelines’ to guide future open space acquisitions and recreational improvements in Ocean City. This Plan provides critical guidance for city planning and coordination with the Green Acres programs and non-profits to protect natural resources, advance sustainability goals and obtain funding.

Impacts of various recreational uses vary by property and by type of use. Many categories of open space and recreation overlap, and defining a property by use may not provide a complete picture of the environmental impact on the area. A detailed description of the City’s open space, recreation facilities and programs is discussed in the ‘Inventory of Recreational Facilities and Open Space’ chapter of this report. Ocean City’s *Recreation and Open Space Inventory*ⁱⁱⁱ indicates a total of 1,716 acres are held by the City “for recreation and conservation purposes.” According to the ROSI, this acreage is comprised of the following:

- ◆ 262 acres of beaches and beachfront
- ◆ 1,377 acres of freshwater and coastal wetlands
- ◆ 77 acres of developed and partially developed recreation and other open spaces.

Ocean City works diligently to preserve open spaces for the long-term protection of natural resources, and to make recreation available to residents and visitors. The Environmental Commission and Mayor’s Advisory Council on Physical Fitness assists with efforts to enhance natural resources and ensure that there are adequate recreation opportunities. Providing passive and active recreation offers the benefits of an active and healthy lifestyle and enhances the quality of life available to residents and visitors alike.

What is Open Space?

Open space can be broadly divided into two categories – active and passive. Active open space is usually defined as public parkland that provides facilities for field games and includes court facilities, running tracks, playground and tot lot facilities, as well as wide variety of other developed uses for public recreation and open space appreciation. Active recreation, as used in the plan, generally refers to outdoor recreation activities that require facilities and moderately-intensive use of the land. The Aquatic and Fitness Center, and Sports and Civic Center are included in this category.

Passive recreation open space is land that is generally acquired and maintained for natural habitat and/or natural resource protection, such as wetlands protection. Limited public access facilities



may be provided to these areas, such as hiking or bicycle trails, nature appreciation such as bird watching, and picnic areas, game tables, pavilions and waterfront facilities such as a boat ramp or a dock. An example of passive recreation space in Ocean City is Stainton’s Wildlife Area.

Prior Open Space and Recreation Planning Efforts

The Ocean City Planning Board adopted a “Conservation Plan Element, Environmental Resources and Recreation Inventory” into the Master Plan in June 2009. This document provides a thorough discussion of the City’s environmental features including polity recommendations. The conservation plan addresses the requirements of the Municipal Land Use Law and is supportive of the City’s open space and recreation goals.

Planning Process and Public Participation

This Open Space and Recreation Plan utilized the public input from public survey conducted in 2013. The survey was widely publicized and made available via the City’s website and Facebook page, Ocean City Chamber of Commerce Facebook page, via links to the Mayor’s weekly message and on-line media, and at the City Clerk’s office. Televised presentation regarding the open space plan by the Environmental Commission Chairman at the October 22, 2013 City Council meeting included a request for public input. A total of 308 questionnaires were returned.

The questionnaire asked respondents to rate separately from lowest to highest their opinion of both the importance of various issues and their satisfaction with that item. The items with the greatest relevance to the OSRP update are identified below.

- *Natural open space* was identified as very important (81% of responses)
- 18% of responses indicate that the City has adequate *natural open space*
- Additional open space is needed to *manage stormwater/prevent flooding* (69%); and for *habitat protection* (63%)
- Recreation and open space was deemed to be most beneficial in terms of *nature enjoyment* (74%), and *relaxation* (70%)
- Specific recreation facilities warranting expansion include: *bike paths* (83%), *walking trails* (78%), and *conservation areas* (75%)
- *Walking/jogging* (95%) and *bicycling* (87%) are identified as the most popular recreation activities

As development of the Plan progressed, the Environmental Commission weighed-in on issues including the site acquisition criteria, needs analysis and policy recommendations. As a means of informing the public and obtaining input, the Environmental Commission presented key concepts of the Plan via PowerPoint to City Council, civic organizations, and the Planning Board Subcommittee.



Upon completion and approval of the Plan by the Environmental Commission on September 9, 2014, the Ocean City Planning Board conducted a public hearing on September 10, 2014 to consider adoption of this Open Space and Recreation Plan. A draft version of the Plan was posted on the City's website and was available for public inspection at the Planning Office and City Clerk's Office in advance of that hearing. Prior to the public hearing, presentations on the *Draft Plan* were made to the City Council and the Planning Board at venues which were televised on a cable access channel. The Open Space and Recreation Plan was favorably received by the public and unanimously adopted by the Planning Board as an element of the City Master Plan.



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Community Profile

Location

The City of Ocean City is a barrier island located along the Atlantic Ocean coastline within the northeastern portion of Cape May County, New Jersey. It is bounded on the north by Atlantic County and the Great Egg Harbor Bay, on the east by the Atlantic Ocean, on the south-southwest by the Township of Upper and the City of Sea Isle City, and on the west by the Great Egg Harbor Bay, Beach Thoroughfare, Pecks Bay and Crook Horn Creek and Township of Upper.

Known as “America’s Greatest Family Resort” Ocean City has prohibited the sale of alcoholic beverages within its limits since its founding in 1879. The City offers seven miles of guarded beaches, a boardwalk that stretches for 2.5 miles along the beach, and a quaint downtown shopping and dining district. The boardwalk is one of the most recognizable landmarks in the resort and runs north from 23rd Street to St. James Place. This wooden walkway is lined with a variety of shops and amusements, and is popular area for exercise and to breathe-in the ocean air.



Photo – J. Peter Ault



The Travel Channel rated Ocean City as the *Best Family Beach of 2005*. It was ranked the third best beach in New Jersey in the 2008 Top 10 Beaches Contest sponsored by the New Jersey Marine Sciences Consortium. In the 2009 Top 10 Beaches Contest, Ocean City ranked first. The City was voted New Jersey's #1 Beach in the 2014 New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium and Richard Stockton College of New Jersey Coastal Research Center contest, and won first place in the categories for Best Destination for Family Vacation, Day Trip and Ecotourism. This is the first time in the history of the contest that one town has swept first place in all of the categories. The June 30, 2014 edition of *National Geographic's Intelligent Travel* segment identified Ocean City as one of the world's Top Ten Beach Towns.



With respect to the eastern population centers, Ocean City is approximately 150 miles south of New York City, 80 miles southeast of Philadelphia, and 130 miles due east of Washington, D.C. Moderated by the Atlantic Ocean, the City's climate is mild in comparison to most surrounding regions. The continuous ocean breezes that cool the beaches and surrounding areas during the summer season contribute significantly to the success of the City's tourism.

Growth/Development Trends

The City has a total area within its corporate boundary of 7,000 acres, with 4,048 acres of land and 2,952 acres of wetland areas and water (bays and inlets). Twenty-three (23) percent of the total area (7,000 acres) is comprised of undevelopable wetlands and beach areas. The Master Plan indicates that in excess of 300 wetland acres are privately owned. Developed lands account for 2,598 acres or 38% of the total land area. Residential uses comprise 45% of developed land.

According to NJDEP's Landscape Project^{iv}, over a 21-year period Ocean City has experienced urban growth of 85 acres; a change of 4%. This translates into about 1% of the land area of the



entire municipality urbanizing since 1986. According to NJDEP analysis, 71% of Ocean City has been identified as landscape habitat, 5,245 acres of *endangered and threatened species habitat*, and 15 acres have been defined as being of *special concern*. The area of *special concern* designation suggests that non-game wildlife in the vicinity of the golf course/airport warrant special attention because of the species' vulnerability to environmental degradation or habitat modification. As of 2007, NJDEP indicates that Ocean City had a total of 1,219 acres of impervious surface representing 28% of the municipality's land area.

Population, Households, Families

As of the 2010 United States Census, the City's population was 11,701, reflecting a decline of 3,677 (-23.9%) from the 15,378 counted in the 2000 Census, which had in turn declined by 134 (-0.9%) from the 15,512 counted in the 1990 Census. The decline in population is not reflective of the City's vitality. In fact, several other resort communities have seen a similar decline in population since 1990. The decline is most likely associated with the conversion of year-round homes to second homes.



Photo – J. Peter Ault

In summer months, with an influx of tourists and second-home owners, there are estimated to be 125,000 to 150,000 people within the City's borders on peak days. The demand on open space and recreation facilities is also affected by 1,200+ students, day visitors and the work force.



There is a need to better understand the dynamics of the City’s population and its impact on open space, recreation facilities and services. As indicated in the “Needs Analysis” chapter of this Plan, these fluctuations in population present unique challenges to the City in meeting demands for public services including recreation facilities.

Age

America is aging, and as a result, the elderly account for a larger percentage of the population every year. Approximately 12% of the current U.S. population is age 65 years and older. This figure is projected to increase to 16% by 2020 and approach 20% by 2030. These trends are evident in Ocean City. The percentage of the population 65 and over has increased from 26% in 2000 to 30% in 2010. The growing number of older adults can be expected to increase and/or change demands on the public health system, medical and social services, and community facilities (including recreation) and public services.

TABLE 1
Ocean City Population Age Cohorts

2010 Population by Age	Ocean City, NJ 08226	United States
Median Age	49.90	35.60
Age 0-5	4.45%	8.84%
Age 6-11	5.41%	8.41%
Age 12-17	6.17%	8.65%
Age 18-24	5.76%	9.94%
Age 25-34	9.29%	13.40%
Age 35-44	11.33%	13.74%
Age 45-54	15.49%	14.32%
Age 55-64	16.99%	10.80%
Age 65-74	12.15%	6.11%
Age 75-84	8.52%	4.04%
Age 85+	4.44%	1.75%



The increasing populations of senior citizens will pose challenges to park and recreation providers. It is expected that future senior citizens will be an active class of people and more physically fit, which means that they will continue to demand recreation programs and services. The sheer number of seniors, who are now maturing baby boomers, will mean that the demand for senior oriented services will be greater. Recreation planners will need to consider design features and programs that accommodate the physical capabilities and recreation preferences of this population.

This generation generally has a higher level of education, and will have access to better healthcare services. Wellness and fitness related recreation programs are likely to be in demand. Additionally, less physical activities such as educational programs and historic and environmental interpretive programming will be popular. Children from under five to 14 will continue to require open space and recreation resources.

Income

The Census Bureau's 2006-2010 American Community Survey showed that (in 2010 inflation-adjusted dollars) median household income was \$55,202 (with a margin of error of +/- \$6,710) and the median family income was \$79,196 (+/- \$11,239). Males had a median income of \$48,475 (+/- \$5,919) versus \$41,154 (+/- \$12,032) for females. The per capita income for the City was \$40,864 (+/- \$3,899). About 5% of families and 6.4% of the population were below the poverty line, including 4.3% of those under age 18 and 5.8% of those age 65 or over.

Housing

Between 2000 and 2010 the region experienced a loss of population and a decrease in the number of occupied housing units. Cape May County experienced a 5% reduction in population and a 2% loss in occupied housing units. Changes in Ocean City's population and housing are indicated in **Table 2**. These shifts in population (-24%) are similar to other shore communities including Sea Isle and Stone Harbor. The loss of occupied housing units (-21%) is similar to Cape May City and Sea Isle. Avalon lost 38% of its population and 34% of its occupied housing between 2000 and 2010.



TABLE 2
Ocean City – Population and Housing

Ocean City	1990	2000	2010
Population	15,512	15,378	11,701
Dwelling Units	18,880	20,298	20,871
Occupied Units	7,074	7,464	5,890
Household Size	2.19	2.02	1.98
Owner-Occupied Units	3,801	2,837	3,642
Vacant Units	11,806	12,834	14,981

The relationship between the aging of the population and owner-occupied housing units is illustrated in the following **Table 3**. This data indicates significant decreases in owner-occupancy for the 25-34 and 35-44 age cohorts and a substantial increase in owner-occupancy for the 55-64 age group in 2010. These statistics are consistent with the aging of the *baby boomers* and with the survey responses indicating a pronounced interest in passive recreation and open space opportunities.

TABLE 3
Ocean City – Housing Occupancy

Age Group	1990 Census Owner-Occupied	2000 Census Owner-Occupied	2010 Census Owner-Occupied
15-24	43 (1.1%)	24 (0.5%)	12 (0.3%)
25-34	353 (9.3%)	245 (5.3%)	66 (1.8%)
35-44	517 (13.6%)	626 (13.5%)	205 (5.6%)
45-54	492 (12.9%)	891 (19.3%)	640 (17.8%)
55-64	675 (17.8%)	901 (19.5%)	971 (28.7%)
65+	1,721 (45.2%)	1,940 (41.9%)	1,748 (48%)
Total	3,801	4,627	3,642



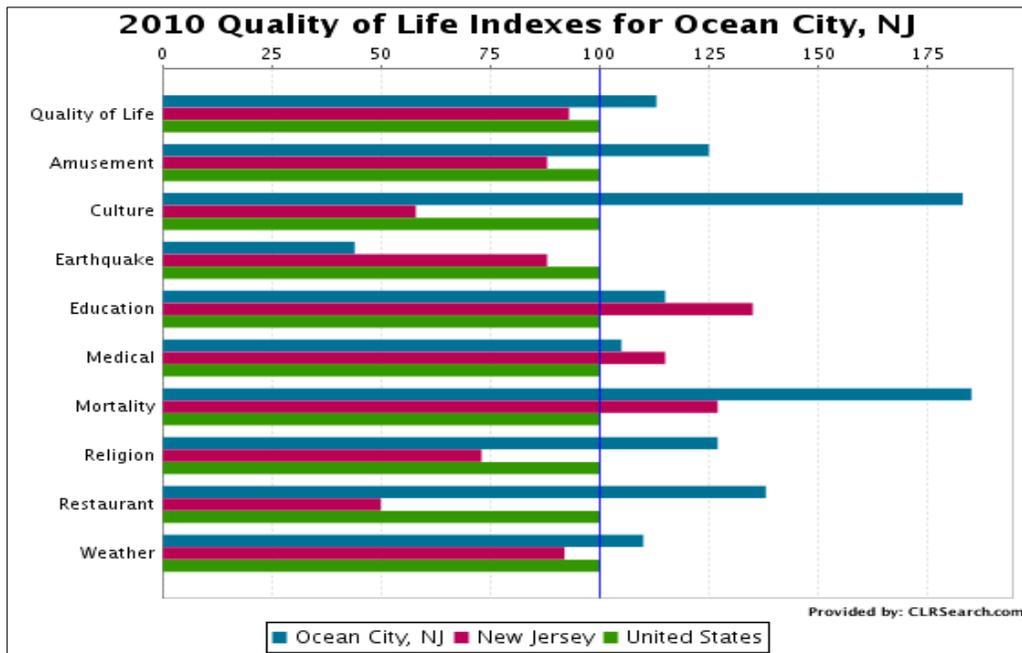
Quality of Life Indexes^v

Quality of life refers to the general well-being of individuals. Standard indicators of the quality of life include not only wealth and employment but also the built environment, physical and mental health, education, recreation and leisure time, and social belonging.

The indexes illustrated in **Table 4** have been calculated based on the variables that affect individuals as they search for a new home, how much they would enjoy living in a place and the impact of each selected variable. For example, the crime index affects the total quality of life index negatively and the amusement index affects it positively.

Table 4 compares quality of life indices for Ocean City with New Jersey and the United States. The City achieves positive rankings that exceed New Jersey and the United States in terms of overall Quality of Life, Amusements, Culture, Religion, Restaurants and Weather.

TABLE 4
Ocean City - Quality of Life Indexes



Source: CLRSearch.com



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Vision and Goals

Introduction

This chapter of the Ocean City *Open Space and Recreation Plan* is a guide for the City to conserve open space and create additional recreational areas. Ocean City remains committed to ensuring a high quality of life for residents and visitors. Important components of the City's vision include the conservation of important environmental resources and provision of well-maintained recreational facilities.

As a barrier island community, Ocean City recognizes the importance of conserving ecological resources, providing opportunities for passive/non-organized and organized/active recreational activities, preserving viewsapes, ensuring access to waterways, and maintaining diverse habitats.

This Plan describes properties used for four specific open space/recreational uses. Impacts of various recreational uses vary by property and by type of use. Many categories of open space and recreation overlap, so that defining a property by use may not provide a complete picture of environmental impact associated with one specific use. These uses are categorized as conservation, passive/non-organized recreation, organized/active recreation, and water access, defined as the follows:

- Conservation – properties dedicated to the preservation of natural resources and environmentally sensitive areas, such as vital habitat, wetlands, water bodies and recharge areas.
- Passive/non-organized recreation – properties dedicated to a mix of non-organized sport recreational uses, such as neighborhood parks, landscaped areas, ornamental gardens or fountains, picnic areas, trails, bike paths, playgrounds, and dog play areas, boating areas, marinas, fishing areas, and beaches.
- Organized/active recreation – properties that provide for organized sporting and recreational activities, including athletic fields, building or structures for recreational activities, concessions, courses and courts.
- Water access – general term that encompasses boating, crabbing fishing, swimming and/or other activities. All types of water access may not available at every site.

The Ocean City Master Plan Reexamination Report (2012) consolidates the goals of the Master Plan (1988), Land Use Plan amendment (2001), Master Plan Reexamination Report (2006 and 2012), Conservation Plan Element Environmental Resource and Recreation Inventory (2009),



and the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan (2001) to establish sound land use and environmental protection policies that will ensure protection of the City’s critical environmental resources. Consistency between these planning documents and the NJ “State Development and Redevelopment Plan” is further recognized in the City’s ‘Petition for Plan Endorsement’ approved by the State Planning Commission. The following open space and recreation related goals from these plans are relevant and incorporated herein. These goals, like the rest of the Plan, are to be viewed as organic elements that are flexible and responsive to the future changes and needs of the City.

Environmental Commission

The Environmental Commission was created by ordinance in 2006 and has the authority to conduct research into the use and possible use of open land, including beaches, bays, inlets and ocean of the City and coordinate the activities of unofficial bodies organized for similar purposes, and may advertise, prepare, print and distribute booklets, maps, charts, plans and pamphlets which in its judgment it deems necessary for its purpose. In addition, the Environmental Commission receives and reviews applications before the Planning Board and the Zoning Board in accordance with N.J.S.A. 40:55D-27(b).

The Environmental Commission assumed the functions of the Coastal Conservation Commission, an appointed commission formed in the 1970s that studied beach-related erosion and pumping, and also was concerned about development on the waterfront and new approaches to beach protection.

Mayor’s Council on Physical Fitness

In support of the City’s open space and recreation programming, the Mayor’s Council on Physical Fitness is involved in a wide range of recreation-related issues, and pursuant to City ordinance is responsible for advocating the following goals: develop, endorse or co-sponsor health and fitness activities, and to encourage wider public participation in good health practices; conduct health and fitness related workshops, clinics, conferences, and other special interest activities and public information programs; distribute information on health, fitness and sports; encourage and assist the private sector to organize fitness programs and to provide support for community health and sports activities; and provide recommendations and suggestions to the Mayor and Governing Body from time to time to better manage and operate the recreation facilities, including but not limited to playgrounds, recreational buildings, tennis courts and golf course, within the City of Ocean City. The Council has been extremely active in establishing Ocean City as a bike-friendly community.



Development Concept

The development concept of this Recreation and Open Space Plan recognizes past and present trends, existing sites, assumptions, future needs and desires, and the need for cooperative planning and development. The concept is to locate, acquire, develop and improve neighborhood and community recreation and open space areas that provide for a variety of recreation opportunities that are easily accessible. The improvement or development of neighborhood parks and playgrounds with their variety of features including play fields, play equipment, picnic facilities and other such features will provide residents with close-to-home recreation opportunities.

Improvement and expansion of Ocean City recreation facilities is necessary to improve recreation service. The improvement and development of recreation opportunities close to where people live will enhance the neighborhood environment. Provision of facilities which will accommodate recreation programs needed by special population groups, such as elderly or disabled people, is also necessary. This includes development of new facilities and/or upgrading of existing facilities.

This Plan recognizes Ocean City as a pedestrian- and bike-friendly community with the goal of increasing public access and public ownership of the waterfront. It also recognizes that Ocean City is primarily built-out with limited opportunities for acquiring unimproved land. Strategies for increasing the amount of public recreation and open space properties must employ creative strategies to advance the City's recreation and open space goals.

Recreation and Open Space Goals and Policies

Preservation of open space must be planned just like any municipal infrastructure, such as roadways, sewers, or schools. Development of an Open Space and Recreation Plan, and the governing body's commitment to carry out the Plan, are essential to maintain a community's character and to preserve and improve the quality of life for its residents.

The City's vision of open space and recreation is reflected in the following goals and policies which are intended to guide this Plan.

Goals

- Enhance the quality of life in Ocean City by developing and maintaining a high quality, balanced and diverse system of accessible public parks, active and passive recreational facilities, and open space which promote year-round healthy living and active lifestyles for all ages and abilities, and support the economic needs of the City.
- Continuously work to improve the health and integrity of environmental resources and open space and reduce the costs of mitigating adverse consequences.



- Promote protection of open space, important habitats, and environmentally sensitive areas through public and private action in order to maintain and improve the City's biodiversity, and improve protection from sea level rise and severe storm events.
- Protect and improve the existing system of open spaces throughout the city through capital rehabilitation, maintenance, programming, and other system operations.
- Link neighborhoods, public facilities, conservation and recreation lands and commercial areas through a system of safe pedestrian ways and bikeways, made available to the public through either acquisition or conservation easements.
- Provide outreach to increase awareness of the City's open space and recreational assets, and inform the community about the need for open space protection and good stewardship.
- Work to enhance the working relationship with all existing recreational facilities within the City, including schools and churches.
- Consider biking and walking safe havens along roadways whenever practical.
- Identify sites for public acquisition to respond to the existing and emergent needs of residents. Especially consider sites that are either adjacent to existing open space areas, provide linkages, or demonstrate possible use for both passive and recreational uses.
- Establish design and performance standards that will protect environmentally sensitive and critical habitat lands including floodplains, wetlands, sand dunes and beaches.
- Create a recreation and open space committee to monitor and implement the goals of this Plan.
- After approval of this Open Space and Recreation Plan it is intended that the Action Plan be re-visited and updated annually.

Policies

- All categories of open space acquisition shall be accommodated. It is recognized that the acquisition and preservation of land for conservation purposes is vital to a community, and that protection of environmentally sensitive lands is vital to the overall ecology of a community and a key factor in establishing a high quality of life.
- Ocean City shall have sound and adequate recreation facilities which are open and accessible to the public. Maximum effort will be made to ensure that facilities are available to meet the needs of all persons including youth, senior citizens and those with special needs.



- The City will develop partnerships to permanently protect existing public holdings and to acquire new private sector holdings that are determined to further the objectives of this *Plan*. The City understands that some properties will require a coordinated effort among public and private entities if acquisition is to be a realistic goal, and will continue to work with governmental and private sector entities and organizations in efforts to preserve existing public holdings and provide high quality recreational opportunities.
- Properties purchased shall meet the state requirements for open space purchases.
- Public participation, input, and support will also be sought for every action taken in furtherance of the *Open Space and Recreation Plan*.



Photo – J. Peter Ault

Ocean City Master Plan Goals, Policies, and Objectives

- To provide adequate light, air and open space.
- To improve the quality of life for residents and visitors.
- To provide for the maintenance of Ocean City’s resort character and posture as a recreation resource of the state and eastern United States including protection of beach and bay resources.



- To promote the conservation of open space through protection of wetlands, stream corridors and valuable natural resources and prevent degradation of the environment.
- To acquire, develop and maintain park and recreation facilities within the City to meet reasonable and affordable needs and demands for recreation by present and future residents.
- To consider and evaluate innovative development proposals that would enhance and protect environmental features, minimizing energy usage and encourage development densities consistent with existing patterns of development.
- Locating public, commercial, service and professional office uses in locations which are suitable for their use environmentally, economically and geographically and are compatible with existing uses, public facilities, roadways and natural features.
- Protection natural and environmental resources including floodplains, wetlands, marsh and aquifer recharge areas, and areas suitable for public and quasi-public recreational activities.
- Develop a comprehensive recreational, cultural and leisure activity plan.
- Land development should be designed to protect and enhance the environmental quality of the City.

Ocean City Conservation Plan Goals

- To preserve and maintain the ecological, historic, visual, recreational and scenic resources of the City; preserve the environment; avoid or minimize detrimental impacts of land development upon natural and historic resources; and enhance the overall quality of life for Ocean City residents and visitors.

State Plan Goals

Ocean City is recognized via its State-approved *Petition for Plan Endorsement*^{vi} as a Regional Center. The Regional Center designation facilitates decisions, investments and intergovernmental coordination related to land use, housing, economic development, transportation, resource conservation, recreation, redevelopment, historic preservation, public facilities and services. This designation also provides opportunities for the City and State to cooperatively promote and sustain an economy compatible with the natural environment, while minimizing risks from natural hazards, and maximizing public access to and enjoyment of coastal resources. Public access to the rich variety of available experiences will be enhanced, and redevelopment opportunities will be present to maintain and enhance the community's character.

Ocean City's Master Plan, development regulations and capital improvement programing recognize and are supportive of the following State Plan intentions for barrier islands:



- Accommodating growth in Centers
- Protecting and enhancing the existing character of barrier island communities
- Minimizing risks from natural hazards
- Providing access to coastal resources for public use and enjoyment
- Maintaining and improving coastal resource quality
- Revitalizing cities and towns

In furtherance of specific actions related to open space and recreation, Ocean City is committed through its acceptance of the State Plan Petition’s “Planning and Implementation Agreement” to the following:

- “Produce an open space and recreation element for the Master Plan to ensure provision of accessible regional and neighborhood level open space and recreation facilities. The plan must identify and examine open space and recreation resources important to the municipality, and map out an implementation strategy to protect, manage and improve them.”
- “Continue to preserve and acquire open space parcels through open space trust funds, Green Acres program, and other sources as available.”

This Open Space and Recreation Plan addresses these State Plan issues in the ‘Action Plan Recommendations’ chapter. The Plan Endorsement Process has confirmed that the City's initiatives are consistent with the principles of sustainability espoused in New Jersey's State Plan.



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Open Space and Recreation Inventory

Introduction

Ocean City owes its existence and livelihood to its natural resources: sand, ocean water and sun. The establishment of a city on an uninhabited barrier island was a successful enterprise because of the desire for a recreation area that was close to Philadelphia and inland New Jersey. Over the 125 years since the City's founding as a religious retreat in 1879, the barrier island was converted from sand, wetlands and maritime forest to a small city and then to a resort city of more than 20,000 dwelling units.

The inventory of Ocean City's open space and recreation lands includes municipally-owned and school sites, county and state-owned properties. The municipal open space sites include areas for active recreation opportunities with facilities such as sports fields and playgrounds, and passive recreation areas including beaches for walking and nature study. County and state lands include both passive open space and active recreation areas. Lands held by the City for recreation and conservation purposes (including wetlands and beaches) as documented in the "Recreation and Open Space Inventory (ROSI)^{viii}" total 1,716 acres (39%) of the City's land area.

Analysis completed as part of this Plan reveals that recreation facilities in the City occupy a total of 81.5 acres comprised of the following:

- 59.5 acres City-owned;
- 6.5 acres owned by the Board of Education; and
- 15.5 acres owned by Cape May County.

These recreation lands include all City-owned parks and recreation facilities listed in **Table 5**. State-owned properties including the Route 52 causeway and Corson's Inlet State Park, and the City's beaches and dunes are counted separately. The relative location and extent of these recreation facilities are illustrated on the *Open Space and Recreation Maps* included at the end of this chapter.

Open Space and Recreation Facilities

A series of three maps titled "Open Space and Recreation Plan" (North, Center City and South) identify and depict the location of the various sites that comprise the City's open space and recreation facility inventory. These maps are included at the end of this chapter. **Table 5** includes recreation sites owned by the City, City Board of Education, County and State. **Appendix B** contains additional detail regarding these recreation facilities.



TABLE 5
Recreation Facilities in Ocean City

<u>MAP</u>	<u>FACILITY/PROPERTY</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>
<u>INDOOR RECREATION</u>		
North	Sports and Civic Center	6 th and Boardwalk
Center	Aquatic & Fitness Center	1735 Simpson Avenue
North	Bayside Center	520 Bay Avenue
North	8 th Street Recreation Center	8 th and Haven Avenue
<u>OUTDOOR PARKS/RECREATION</u>		
North	Carey Field	5 th -6 th and Atlantic Avenue
North	5 th St. Baseball/Softball Complex (3)	5 th -6 th and Bay Avenue
Center	Tennessee Ave. Soccer Complex (3)	Tennessee Avenue
Center	Palmer Park (soccer, lacrosse)	15 th St. and Haven Avenue
South	Harry Vanderslice Baseball Complex	35 th and Haven Avenue
North	North St. Basketball Court	North St. and Haven Avenue
North	5 th Street Tennis Courts (10)	5 th Street and Ocean Avenue
North	5 th Street Volleyball	5 th Street and the beach
North	6 th St. Street Hockey (2), Shuffleboard	6 th Street
North	8 th St. Basketball Court	8 th St. and Haven Avenue
North	15 th St. Basketball Court	15 th St. and Bay Avenue
South	34 th St. Basketball Courts (2)	34 th Street and Asbury Avenue
South	34 th St. Tennis Courts (8)	34 th Street and Asbury Avenue
South	52 nd Street basketball/hockey	52 nd St. and Haven Avenue
Center	Golf Course	26 th St. and Bay Avenue
North	Memorial Park	5 th St. and Wesley Avenue
North	Wesley Avenue Park	400 Block Wesley Avenue
North	Gateway Park	9 th Street and West Avenue
Center	18 th Street tennis (6) /Basketball Courts (2)	18 th St. and Haven Avenue
North	Waterfront Park and Marina	2 nd Street and Bay Avenue
North	Bayside Center	520 Bay Avenue
<u>PLAYGROUNDS</u>		
North	Northend beach	Longport Bridge
North	North Street	North St. and Haven Avenue
North	6 th Street	Carey Field
North	6 th St. and Haven	6 th St. and Haven Avenue
North	8 th Street	8 th St. and Haven Avenue
North	15 th Street	15 th St. and Bay Avenue
Center	Airport Playground	26 th St. and Bay Avenue
Center	29 th Street	29 th St. and West Avenue



South	34 th Street	34 th Street and West Avenue
South	52 nd Street	52 nd St. and Haven Avenue
<u>MISCELLANEOUS</u>		
Center	Tennessee Avenue Boat Ramp	Tennessee Avenue at the bay
South	34 th St. Boat Ramp	34 th Street Bridge
North	Carey Field and Track	501 Atlantic Avenue
Central	Intermediate School Fields	1801 Bay Avenue
North	Route 52 (walk/bikeway, boat ramp, parking, scenic overlook)*	
South	Corson's Inlet State Park*	5898 Bay Avenue

As indicated **Table 5**, the City maintains a variety of well-equipped playgrounds and recreation areas including baseball, softball, football, soccer, field hockey and multi-purpose fields. Numerous basketball, tennis, street hockey, shuffleboard and volleyball courts complete the array of active recreation sites, many of them lighted to extend the time they can be used. Ocean City is also home to the Cape May County Dog Park which is located at 45th Street and Haven Avenue ([Ocean City Dog Park](#)).



The City's 12-hole par 3 golf course provides a popular recreation in a scenic meadow setting. Children can choose from a variety of recreational/educational programs throughout the year. Adults can take part in the full array of programs at the Aquatic and Fitness Center and compete in such activities as softball and volleyball. A listing of recreational programs and activities offered by the City is provided below. Additional detail regarding the recreation facilities and programs can be found on the City website at <http://www.ocnj.us/index.cfm?fuseaction=content.faq&faqTypeID=74>.



Photo – J. Peter Ault

Local Pedestrian and Bicycle Routes (Greenways)

A greenway is a corridor of land or open space. Greenways are often natural areas that conserve wildlife, but they can also be places that provide recreational opportunities, such as parks or biking trails. A prime example of a greenway is the Appalachian Trail, which runs from Georgia to Maine. However, not all greenways are vast, open trails. Greenways can also be a city's interconnected system of parks. Greenways provide accessibility so that each and every person can have the opportunity for recreation, or to view wildlife and also make communities livable and improve the quality of life.

The goal of providing interconnected and safe routes for bicyclists and pedestrians has long been a priority in Ocean City. Bicycle and pedestrian mobility are considered especially important in Ocean City because many residents and visitors are inclined to use alternative travel modes for transportation and recreation. An extensive bike path system has been developed in the northern section of the municipality south to 34th Street. Funding for the development of this network has come from grant funding through the Federal Safe Routes to School Program. As testament to the quality of the biking experience in Ocean City, the American League of Bicyclists ranks the City as the only south Jersey town to earn its bronze status. The bronze designation awarded in 2012 is given only to communities that meet the League's five priorities: engineering, education, encouragement, enforcement and evaluation. The City is working with NJDOT on a *complete streets* program which will accommodate the needs of all users. The survey results indicate a



great appreciation for existing biking opportunities, and also recognize the challenges in maintaining safe biking routes.

Route 52 Causeway

The new Route 52 Causeway between Somers Point and Ocean City is an example of a project that incorporates comprehensive street elements including a 10-foot wide pedestrian walkway and bike path separated from the shoulder by a railing. The walkway connects to a new Ocean City Visitors Center, fishing areas along the bridge and to other bicycle and pedestrian facilities in Somers Point and Ocean City. The Ocean City Visitors Center has been reconstructed as part of the new bridge's scenic overlook. Other amenities include boat ramps, fishing piers, parking areas and walkways.



Renderings of a driver's view and pedestrians using the shared use walkway.

Corson's Inlet State Park

Corson's Inlet State Park consists of 341 acres and was established in 1969 to help protect and preserve one of the last undeveloped tracts of land along the state's oceanfront. The area's natural habitats are rich in the diversity of its wildlife with primary and secondary sand dune systems, shoreline overwash, marine estuaries and upland areas in which hundreds of wildlife species live and breed. The park offers outstanding scenic beauty and one of the largest forested dunes, salt marsh, and undeveloped beach areas in the state. Corson's Inlet is extremely popular for hiking, fishing, crabbing, boating and sunbathing, with a boat ramp offering access to the coastal waters of Ocean City and Strathmere. Fishing is permitted from the Russ Chattin Bridge and the beach.

Bicycle Routes

A bike route known as the *Haven Avenue Bike Boulevard* opened in spring 2008. The first phase of the City's plan to create bike routes throughout the community extends from 9th Street to 34th Street. The *Haven Avenue Bike Boulevard* is a "Share the Road" facility. Automobile traffic is discouraged by the addition of traffic calming measures including reduced speed limits, 4-way stops at all intersections, the use of the "sharrow", and additional signage.

Additional bike paths are planned in the north end on Simpson Road and Simpson Avenue from Battersea Road to Fifth Street, then behind the primary school connecting to Haven Avenue. In the south end discussions between the City and County for extending the bike route on West



Avenue are on-going. Additional bike information can be found at <http://www.bikeocnj.org>. The new High Intensity crosswalk (HAWK) at the intersection of 9th Street and Aldrich Avenue provides a safer alternative for pedestrians and bicyclists to cross 9th Street.

Recreation Programming

Ocean City offers extensive recreational program opportunities throughout the year that are available to residents and visitors of all ages and abilities. These programs are developed, organized and coordinated by a knowledgeable and dedicated contingent of City employees.

Winter Programs

High School Indoor Field Hockey League

OC Rec Basketball

Travel Basketball

Street Hockey

Volleyball

Winter NYC Bus Trip

Spring Programs

Spring Swing Surf Contest

Indoor Field Hockey Clinic

Indoor Soccer

OCYAA Little League Baseball

New York City Bus Trip

Recreation Events – (Runs, Walks & Swims)

Step Into Spring 5K Walk/Run

American Heart Walk

OCNJ Triathlon/Duathlon

Stand Up For Seals Beach Adventure Race

Ocean City Police Chase 5k Race

Funs Runs - Beginning June



Independence Day 1 Mile Bay Swim

35th Annual Master's Swim

Guts & Glory 5K Run/Walk

OCNJ Labor Day Race

OCNJ Half Marathon & 5K and new non-competitive 10 Mile Walk

The Railroad Run 5K Run/Walk

Trail of Two Cities

Fast and the Furriest Turkey Trot

Summer Recreation Programs

Activities

- Playground Activities
- Morning Sports
- Fitness/Dance Class
- Recreational Tumbling Class
- Tiny Tots Tumbling
- Fun N' Fitness Summer Camp
- Swim Lessons
- Little Miss Ocean City Pageant
- Jr Miss Ocean City Pageant
- Ocean City Youth Theatre Camp
- Fun Runs
- Beach Exercise
- Ocean City Shuffleboard Club

Basketball Leagues

- Men's League
- Women's League
- High School Boys League
- Girls High School League
- Boys Jr. High Open & Team League
- Girls Jr High School League
- Boys Intermediate Open & Team League



- Girls Intermediate League
- Biddy League

Sports Camps

- Basketball Camp
- O.C. Football Camp
- Soccer Camp
- OC Soccer Clinics & Games
- Field Hockey Camp
- OC Field Hockey Clinics & Games
- Boys Lacrosse Camp
- Lady Raider Lacrosse Camp
- Girls Lacrosse Pick-Up Games
- Tennis Camp
- Golf Clinics
- OC Junior Lifeguard Camp
- Junior Lifeguard Program 14yrs - 16yrs
- OC Police Department Youth Camp
- OC Jr. Firefighter Camp

Bayside Center Camps

- Water Wars: Kraken vs Megalodon or Wilderness Survival
- Expedition: Ocean City or Marine Mammals
- Camp Competitions and Sports Science or Pirates
- Cool Chemistry or Awesome Automobiles or Fishing Fundamentals
- Elementary My Dear, African Adventures and Sensational Safaris
- Can You See It? or Trouble in the Atlantic and the Titanic
- Ecosystems Encounters or Slime, Goo and Poison Too
- The Hunt for Hidden Animals or Sharks, Rays and Skates
- Learn to Sail

Golf Course Clinics

Handicap Surf Chair Program

Tennis Tournaments, Programs and Clinics



Natural Resources

A detailed assessment of the City's natural resources is contained in the *Conservation Element, Environmental Resources and Recreation Inventory* (June 10, 2009), which is available at [https://imageserv11.team-logic.com/mediaLibrary/242/OC CONSERVATION PLAN ELEMENT-2009.pdf](https://imageserv11.team-logic.com/mediaLibrary/242/OC_CONSERVATION_PLAN_ELEMENT-2009.pdf). This document includes a comprehensive inventory of the City's environmental resources including geographic features, vegetation and wildlife. Goals and policies from the Conservation Element that pertain to open space and recreation have been incorporated into the "Goals and Policies" chapter of this Plan.



Historic and Cultural Resources

Ocean City was founded officially in 1879, after a number of years of seasonal occupation and before that, Native American summer occupation. The city was founded on the principles of a Methodist Christian community, with small-lot development suited to a summer religious retreat. The streets were laid out in a grid, with many of them being given the names of familiar Philadelphia streets. The block between 5th and 6th Streets, from the ocean to the bay, has been reserved for public uses and today houses a city parking lot, the Ocean City High School and its fields, Veteran's Memorial Park, recreation areas, the Tabernacle, the Fire Headquarters, the Ocean City Primary School, and the Bayside Center.

An inventory of properties was undertaken in 1988 and determination of the historic status of each of the buildings was done. The inventory identified 160 buildings that were built between the years 1880-1890. An additional 541 buildings were built between 1890 and 1909. Based on this inventory, hearings were held and a Certified Local Government (CLG) historic district ordinance was passed in 1989, with the final boundaries of the district determined in 1992. The Historic Preservation Element of the Master Plan was last adopted in 1989 and does not reflect changes and modifications to the CLG nor the National Register district. In 2003, a re-survey



was done and a smaller National Register district was also established. The Historic Preservation Commission is established in Chapter 25-1800 of the Ocean City codes in accordance with the Municipal Land Use Law and has a wide range of responsibilities and powers.

National Register of Historic Places

Tenth Street Station was built in 1898 by the Ocean City Railroad, which was acquired by the Atlantic City Railroad in 1901, and later by the Pennsylvania-Reading Seashore Lines. Trains last served the station in August 1981, when service was cancelled due to poor track conditions and limited funding from the New Jersey Department of Transportation. Tenth Street Station was added to the National Register of Historic Places on June 22, 1984. Now known as the **Ocean City Transportation Center**, the building is in use as a New Jersey Transit bus station.

City Hall was built in 1914 and added to the National Register of Historic Places on June 13, 1997.

Residential Historic District was added to the National Register of Historic Places on March 20, 2003.

The Flanders Hotel was added to the National Register of Historic Places on November 20, 2009 and is named after Flanders Fields in Belgium. The hotel was built in 1923 by the Ocean Front Hotel Corporation. The architect Vivian Smith designed the building in the Spanish Mission Revival style. The building was constructed using steel girders and concrete.

Life-Saving Station #30 - This Ocean City station was called Beazeley's Station until 1883. Rebuilt in 1885-1886, it is the only U.S. Life Saving Service station left in New Jersey that was rebuilt according to the Service's distinctive 1882-type design. This design is both stunning architecturally, with its gabled roof and lookout tower, and highly effective in the use of space to house boats and surf men. Built in 1886 by the United States Life-Saving Service, the Ocean City Life-Saving Station is of state and local significance in the area of transportation and maritime history and architecture as a largely intact example of a coastal rescue station that played an important role in the maritime history of New Jersey. It was listed on the *The National Register of Historic Places* in June 2013.



Ocean City Life-Saving Station #30

Music Pier – Although not listed on the Historic Register, the Ocean City [Music Pier](#) dates back to 1928 when construction began to create a new concert hall for the community that had just lost a large portion of the boardwalk to a fire in 1927. The Music Pier that you see today was dedicated on July 4, 1929 with much fanfare.

The Music Pier is an entertainment venue suitable for a great variety of shows from stand-up comedy to musicals, and from soloists to the Ocean City Pops orchestra. Nationally renowned musicians and music groups make appearances at the Music Pier and various pageants call the Music Pier their home including the Miss New Jersey pageant. The Ocean City Pops has a summer concert series from July through October that showcases the beautiful music of the orchestra as well as special guest appearances from critically acclaimed entertainers.

For more information on historic sites, refer to the Ocean City Master Plan at https://imageserv10.team-logic.com/mediaLibrary/242/Complete_Master_Plan_1.pdf and/or visit www.state.nj.us/dep/hpo. The Ocean City Historical Museum and the Ocean City Free Public Library, both located in the 1700 block of Simpson Avenue, have large collections of Ocean City history, memorabilia and books about Ocean City. The collection at the library may be searched from the website <http://oceancitylibrary.org/>. The wreck of the sailing ship Sindia on the Ocean City beach in December 1901 is featured at the Museum. The museum's website is <http://www.ocnjmuseum.org/>.



Ocean City Music Pier

Open Space and Recreation Maps

These three maps depict the locations of the City's recreation facilities and open space areas. The maps are accessible on the City's website in pdf format, and via an interactive ESRI ArcReader© application at <http://www.ocnj.us/index.cfm?fuseaction=content.faq&faqTypeID=16>. **Appendix B** contains a complete listing of all parcels used for recreational purposes. A detailed list of all open space parcels is included as an attachment to the Conservation Plan Element, Environmental Resources and Recreation Inventory.





Planned Acquisitions and Improvements

Three lots located behind the Boardwalk south of 19th Street are in the process of being acquired by the City with private and public funds. The 0.36-acre site is vacant and consists of sand dunes. Monies from the City, eight families whose properties border the site and Green Acres will make the acquisition possible. The use of Green Acres funds to acquire the properties will assure that these lots remain as open space in perpetuity.

In response to ongoing public interest, a site for a new skatepark has been tentatively selected at 5th Street and Asbury Avenue. The skatepark would occupy a portion of the municipal parking lot adjacent to the Ocean City Fire Department. The cost to build the skatepark is estimated at \$750,000 of which the City Council has allotted \$250,000 in their budget. The City has applied for a grant from the Cape May County Open Space Recreation Fund to provide additional funding for this recreation project.



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Needs Analysis

Introduction

Access to open space and recreation is necessary to maintain a healthy lifestyle. City parks and open space improve our physical and psychological health, strengthen our communities, and make our cities and neighborhoods more attractive places to live and work. What people do to recreate is a response to their internal needs and desires. The quality and quantity of recreational opportunities available to a community has a direct effect on the community's general quality of life.^{viii}

To satisfy the recreational needs and wishes of an entire community, many variables must be considered. It is important to realize that the recreational opportunities will serve a variety of different individuals. To ensure that Ocean City can provide residents and visitors with a variety of needed recreation programs and facilities, a core system of lands owned and controlled by the City and dedicated to local public recreation use is essential.

Ocean City is a highly developed community with less than five (5) percent (approximately 200 acres) of its total land area classified as vacant. The grid street and lot patterns established by the Ocean City Association in 1879 have generally resulted in few large tracts. As a result, opportunities to construct larger outdoor recreation facilities are extremely limited. Consequently, to ensure that the City can provide residents with a variety of recreation programs and facilities, short- and long-term strategies to reduce recreation shortfalls are necessary.

The City has evaluated current and projected future open space and recreational needs to determine what is required. Acquisition of key parcels and ensuring the protection of existing properties (both public and private) which currently serve conservation and recreational needs will ensure short-term and long-term public access to these critical community amenities.

This needs analysis is a compilation of information derived from several sources. It includes input from the 2013/14 survey conducted by the Environmental Commission, and takes into account previous studies and reports including:

- Ocean City Conservation Plan Element, Environmental Resources and Recreation Inventory (June 10, 2009)
- Ocean City Master Plan Reexamination Report (October 17, 2012)
- Ocean City Bicycle & Pedestrian Needs Assessment (February 2, 1999)
- Cape May County Comprehensive Plan
- 2008-12 New Jersey Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan
- Green Acres Program Open Space and Recreation Plan Guidelines



- ANJEC Resource Paper titled Open Space Plan
- City of Ocean City Recreation Survey (2000)

This needs analysis estimates the land area which should be owned and controlled by the City and dedicated for public use and access for outdoor recreation. To evaluate the need for parkland, generally accepted planning standards are applied based upon the City's population and land area and its existing inventory of recreation facilities and parkland. In addition, the needs analysis takes into account the community's demand for different types of recreation facilities and activities. This was accomplished through a series of public meetings and presentations, individual interviews and a public survey. Finally, consideration is given to the need for open space to protect the important natural resources of the City.

To analyze the current and future need for park and recreation land controlled by the City, three methods were used. The first method is based upon the allocation of land to different uses within the community. The second method is based upon total community population (seasonal and year-round). The third method emanates from professional judgment based upon interviews with Ocean City stakeholders, field investigation, existing demographics, citizen survey responses, and evaluation of services offered by the City's recreation programs.

The "New Jersey Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (2008-2012)"^{ix} ranks the ten most needed or desired facilities statewide as (1) swimming; (2) walking; (3) road biking; (4) playground activity; (5) tennis; (6) golf; (7) hiking; (8) mountain biking; (9) basketball; and (10) baseball. In the Southeastern region, which includes Ocean City, the highest-ranked needs were (1) road biking; (2) swimming; (3) walking; (4) golfing; (5) hiking and (6) playground activity. These findings are also factored into the City's needs analysis.

Outdoor Recreation

Based on the analyses of surveys, interviews and input received at open public meetings, the need for additional active and passive recreational and open spaces has been identified in this Plan. Residents have identified many specific needs, which are presented below based on the categories of conservation, passive/non-organized recreation, organized/active recreation and water access. This Plan endeavors to balance these competing needs given limited available open space.

Conservation Needs

As a barrier island, Ocean City is a particularly sensitive coastal ecosystem that the community seeks to preserve. In general, the City desires to ensure that sensitive, natural resources, such as beaches, sand dunes, wetlands, marshes, and tidal areas are protected from development. Survey results indicate that additional open space for conservation purposes is needed to manage



stormwater, reduce flooding, and for habitat protection. Areas of particular environmental sensitivity are identified in the Master Plan Conservation Plan Element. The Conservation Plan contains eighteen (18) recommendations which are included in this Plan by reference. The City has also prepared an Environmental Resources and Recreation Inventory (ERI). The Conservation Element and ERI provide guidance in the targeting and acquisition of sensitive environmental lands for open space conservation.

Passive/Non-Organized Recreation Needs

Residents identified a great need in the City for passive/non-organized recreation. The survey identified strong need to add or expand bike paths, hiking/walking trails, conservation areas, access to waterways and family picnic areas. The installation of a Hawk crossing signal on 9th Street will increase the safety for bicyclists crossing 9th Street. A joint effort between Ocean City and Cape May County to extend the Haven Avenue Bike Boulevard south of 34th Street on West Avenue is being considered.

Organized/Active Recreation Needs

The survey results indicate a lesser need in the City for organized/active recreation. Boat ramps, children's play areas, skateboard park, ice skating rink, and golf were identified as the top five recreational facility needs. Based on interviews with recreation staff, the demand for active recreational facilities in the City often exceeds facility availability. The high demand for outdoor play fields is particularly acute, and requires vigilant monitoring and scheduling to accommodate school teams, recreation programs and other activities.

Water Access Needs

Overall, City residents expressed a desire for greater public access to waterfront areas and more boat launching areas. Improvement in this area will provide much-needed access to the City's expansive bay area environment. The City has applied for an NJDEP grant to fund the preparation of a comprehensive municipal public access plan that will address waterfront access concerns.

Recreation, Park, and Open Space Standards and Guidelines

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) recognizes the importance of establishing and using park and recreation standards as:

- A national expression of minimum acceptable facilities for the citizens of urban and rural communities.
- A guideline to determine land requirements for various kinds of park and recreation areas and facilities.



- A basis for relating recreational needs to spatial analysis within a community-wide system of parks and open space areas.
- One of the major structuring elements that can be used to guide and assist regional development.
- A means to justify the need for parks and open space within the overall land-use pattern of a region or community.

The purpose of these guidelines is to present park and recreation space standards that are applicable nationwide for planning, acquisition, and development of park, recreation, and open space lands, primarily at the community level. These standards address minimum, not maximum, goals to be achieved and should be viewed as a guide.

A variety of standards have been developed by professional and trade associations which are used throughout the country. The standard derived from early studies of park acreages located within metropolitan areas was the expression of acres of park land per unit of population. Over time, the figure of 10 acres per 1,000 population came to be the commonly accepted standard used by a majority of communities. Other standards adopted include the "percent of area" approach, needs determined by user characteristics and participation projections, and area use based on the carrying capacity of the land. The Balanced Land Use Standard and the Core System Standard are methodologies that should be used with caution. They are intended to serve as a guide to determine the necessary open space in a community and are not an exact science. Although this Plan acknowledges the NRPA standards described below, the open space needs identified in this Plan are tempered by the survey results, interviews with City staff and stakeholders, and public input.

Balanced Land Use Guidelines

The Balanced Land Use Guidelines^x estimate the land area which should be owned and controlled by the City and dedicated for public use and access for outdoor recreation. The second analysis, known as the Core System Standard, predicts the necessary amount of open space to protect the important natural resources and to retain a high quality of life for City residents.

For purposes of estimating the amount of open space required for recreational purposes the Balanced Land Use concept has been determined to be the most appropriate for New Jersey, and uses the guidelines presented below to calculate the recreation open space requirements for county and municipal governments.

The Balanced Land Use approach recognizes land as a finite resource for which there are other legitimate competing uses. The Balanced Land Use requirements represent the recreation open space needs that will result from existing and new development. The need figures obtained



through these guidelines are long-term goals for public recreation land acquisition based on the extent of developed, developable and undeveloped land resources and the need to accommodate competing land uses such as transportation, commerce and housing.

Using developed and developable land as the basis for the calculation basis takes into account the fact that the demand for municipal recreation land is generated by development. In addition, this approach recognizes that, in many instances, municipal and county park agencies are competing with other legitimate local uses for the same developable lands. The Balanced Land Use Standard indicates that individual municipalities should set aside a minimum of three (3) percent of developed and developable area land for open space as indicated in **Table 6**.

Developable Areas excludes wetlands and federal and state-owned open space. Open space that is protected for environmental or agricultural purposes through conservation easements, land use regulation or other means that do not provide for direct public use is not considered as part of the public recreation land supply. These lands are, however, of considerable outdoor recreation value because they protect important natural and historic resources that are essential in maintaining an environment that is conducive to high quality recreation experiences. According to New Jersey’s Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, “the availability of suitable land resources is the single most important factor in providing opportunities for recreation activities.”^{xi}

TABLE 6
City of Ocean City
Open Space/Recreation Need per Balanced Land Use Guidelines

Developed Acres	2,598
Developable Acres	
○ Public Vacant	71
○ Private Vacant	<u>131</u>
Total Developed and Developable Acres ^{xii}	2800
Open Space/Recreation Area Need (3% of Total Developed and Developable Acres)	84
Existing City-owned Recreation Acres	<u>-60</u>
Open Space/Recreation Area Deficit (Acres)	24

Using the Balanced Land Use standard, the estimated land required for public open space and recreation area in Ocean City is 84 acres. Accounting for the existing 60 acres of City-owned recreation lands, the Balanced Land Use standards result in a deficit of 24 acres. Developed and developable area does not include City-owned beach and dune areas, nor does it include Stainton’s Wildlife Sanctuary.



It is important to recognize that the availability of suitable land resources is the single most important factor in providing opportunities for recreation activities. Although providing recreation open space for residents is usually a priority for local governments, preserving land for conservation purposes and maintenance of community character is equally important in Ocean City.

Core System Standards

A second methodology used to determine open space needs by the National Recreation and Park Association is a systems approach to open space and recreation planning. The Core System Standards^{xiii} look at the existing park and recreation infrastructure of a community, current and projected uses and needs, resources and trends to develop recommendations. It also relies on public participation to guide the process. Given the complicated nature of open space and recreation planning, it is apparent that a varied approach is warranted to ensure that the individual and unique needs of a community will be met.

The Core System standard is used to estimate need based on existing and projected population. The NRPA standards, published in the *NRPA Recreation, Park, and Open Space Standards and Guidelines*, provide guidance for developing a core system of developed open space for local (close-to-home) recreation uses. This system should consist of local spaces such as mini-parks, neighborhood parks and playgrounds, and community parks; regional space such as metropolitan parks and regional park reserves; and unique space such as linear parks, special uses such as golf courses or nature centers, and conservancy properties. The standards suggest public park and recreation areas be provided to local residents at the ratio of 6.25 to 10.5 acres per 1,000 people.

TABLE 7
Open Space/Recreation Need based on NRPA Core System Standards

<u>NRPA Standard</u>	<u>2010 Year-round Population</u>	<u>2010 Summer Population</u>
	11,701	125,312 ^{xiv}
6.25 to 10.5 acres per 1,000 people	73 - 123 Acres	783 - 1,315 Acres
City-owned Recreation Area	<u>60 Acres</u>	<u>60 Acres</u>
Recreation/Open Space Deficit	13 to 63 Acres	723 to 1,256 Acres

Based on the existing 60 acres of City-owned park and recreation lands and the year-round population, core system calculations result in a 13 to 63-acre deficit of open space and parklands. These standards suggest that parks and improved recreation areas available in the City on a year-



round basis are adequate to serve a population of 9,600 people, and that there is a 13-63 acre deficit relative to the 2010 population. During summer, the calculated deficit in parks and recreation increases dramatically, from 723 to 1,256 acres. The Core System calculations do not account for the recreation demands associated with off-season visitors and 1,200 estimated high school students.

EXHIBIT 2

Core System Comparison

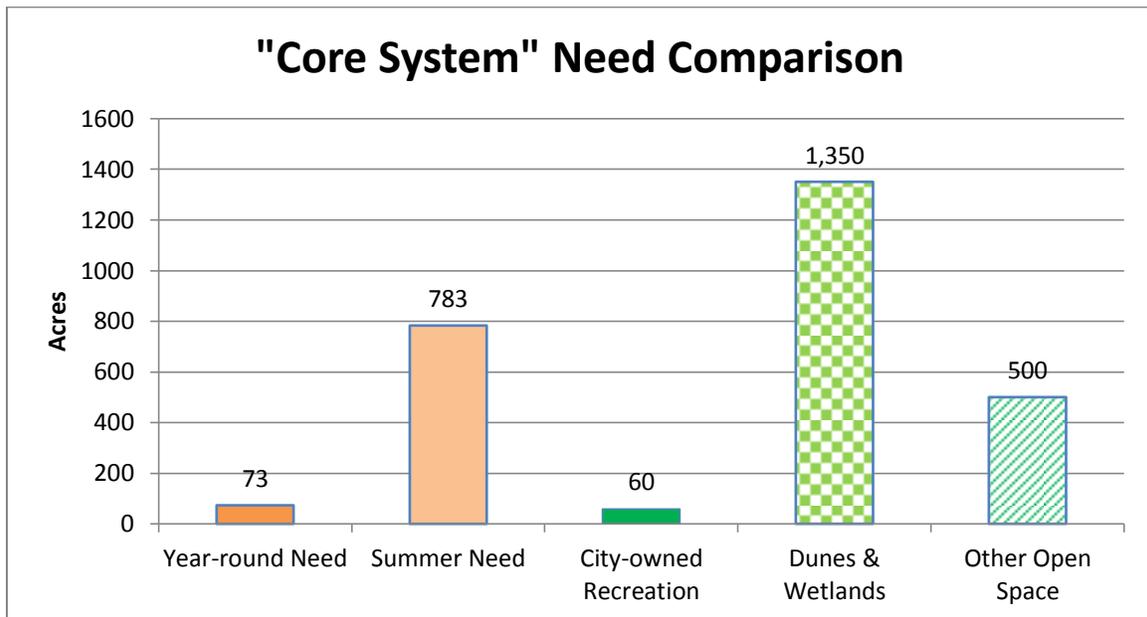


Exhibit 2 illustrates the Core System need, existing recreation and open space. Detailed information regarding City-owned recreation facilities is contained in **Appendix B**. Dunes and wetlands comprise 1,350 acres that are protected for environmental purposes through conservation easements, land use regulation or other means that do not provide for direct public access, and are therefore not considered part of the public recreation supply. These lands are, however, of considerable value because they provide flood protection, protect important natural resources, and provide recreational opportunities. The ‘Other Open Space’ consists of accessible beach areas and Corson’s Inlet State Park. In summary, the Core System approach suggests that the City’s existing recreation system is adequate to serve the year-round population, but exhibits significant deficiency when seasonal needs are considered.

Recreation Facility Standards

NRPA’s “Recreation Park and Open Space Standards and Guidelines” provides detailed standards for municipal recreation facilities. Ocean City’s recreation facilities are compared to these standards and guidelines in **Table 8**.



TABLE 8

Recreation Facilities

Activity/Facility	NRPA Standard Number of Units per Population	Existing Ocean City Facilities	
		Permanent ¹	Summer ²
Basketball (11)	1/5,000	1/1,000	1/11,400
Tennis (24)	1/2,000	1/500	1/5,200
Volleyball (6)	1/5,000	1/2,000	1/21,000
Baseball (5)*	1/5,000	1/2,350	1/25,000
Field Hockey (2)	1/20,000	1/5,500	1/63,000
¼-mile Running Track	1/20,000	1 track at High School	
Softball (3)	1/5,000	1/4,000	1/42,000
Golf ³ - (9-hole standard)	1/25,000	1/11,000	1/125,312
Swimming Pools	1/20,000	1 pool at Community Center	

- Includes two (2) baseball/softball/multi-purpose fields at OC Intermediate School

Estimates of Need Based upon Local Conditions

Site and Facility Needs

To determine future recreational needs, citizen surveys were analyzed, NRPA standards were considered, existing recreation and open space facilities were inventoried, stakeholders were interviewed, and informed judgment was applied to determine the nature of Ocean City’s open space need.

This Plan previously addressed standards developed on a national basis using criteria developed by the National Recreation and Park Association. However, to accurately describe the needs in Ocean City standards should be adapted to local circumstances and local demand levels. Facility standards should be perceived as flexible and subject to change in response to the needs and attitudes of the public. To be of greatest value, standards should reflect local interest levels, available land, population characteristics and anticipated future trends. The survey conducted by

¹ Permanent Population = 11,700.

² Summer Population = 125,312.

³ Ocean City Golf Course is 12-hole, par 3.



the Environmental Commission provides critical input regarding local perceptions of open space. Data indicating participation rates relative to the City's recreation facilities is not available.

This Plan identifies shortfalls of recreation and open space lands based upon the previously noted Balanced Land Use and Core Calculation methodologies. These standards suggest that the City's recreation facilities are generally adequate to meet the needs of the resident population, but do not meet the demand associated with the summer population. It is important to note that the City's beaches, dune areas and access to the Atlantic Ocean and Great Egg Harbor Bay provide intangible amenities and recreation opportunities for residents and visitors. Since NRPA Balanced Land Use and Core standards consider only *developed and developable lands*, it is difficult to establish a recreational value for the City's wetland, dune, oceanfront and bay areas.

Due to the scarcity of vacant developable property, acquisition of land to provide additional outdoor recreation fields may be the greatest challenge facing Ocean City's recreation and open space future. In a community where the population fluctuates dramatically on a seasonal basis and where the land is almost entirely developed, identification of additional land for active recreation will be extremely challenging.

Popularity of Sports

Recreation and open space planning must constantly react to changing needs and desires. The growth of such sports as soccer and lacrosse over the past decade is an indication of this trend. As a result, recreation planners are required to understand the facilities used for sports that scarcely exist today. Examples of new emergent recreation activities/facilities include: skate parks, dog parks, water parks, snowboarding, kite boarding and others.

Fishing - Participation in fishing is highest in the age groups of 44 years and younger. The sport, however, has appeal throughout life and participation through the late 50s is significant.

Nature Study/Wildlife Observation - The long-term trend for nature study and wildlife observation has been one of increasing participation. Interest has been stimulated by general concern over the environment as well as television programming that feature nature subjects. As an activity, it has broad age appeal and continues into the retirement years.

Bicycling – Based on recent trends, bicycling is expected to continue to increase in popularity. Participation rates are highest among those ages 54 and under and have appeal as both a weekend family recreational activity and as a fitness activity.



Golf - Golf enjoys stable participation from the ages 18 through 65. The demand for golf has increased with the "baby-boomer" generation. As this generation ages and enters its retirement years, the popularity and demand for golf is likely to continue.

Swimming - Swimming can occur in any waterbody including the ocean, bay and pools. Although participation in swimming declines with age, all groups participate in the activity. It is highest among children and youth, but participation rates remain substantial for all age categories. Its popularity is expected to continue with perhaps an increasing demand as the "baby-boomers" age.

Tennis - Tennis is most popular with the younger cohort's age 24 years and under. Participation then declines with age.

Roller Blading (In-Line Skating), Skate Park - Roller blading has enjoyed increasing popularity. As an activity, it appeals primarily to pre-teens, teens, students, and young adults.

Surfing - While the Jersey Shore is known for its beaches, boardwalks and vibrant ocean-side towns, it's also home to some of the best surfing on the East Coast. Although fall is the best surfing season, summer, winter and spring also draw surfers to Ocean City's beaches. Excellent fall surfing is the result of the Atlantic Ocean's hurricane season, which increases ocean swells. Guarded surfing beaches in Ocean City include: 7th Street, 16th Street and Waverly Beach. A number of local shops cater to surfer's needs supplying equipment, information and lessons.





Pickleball - Pickleball can be played indoors on basketball or volleyball courts and outdoors on just about any hard surface. The game can be played by all ages, requires minimal equipment and costs and is easy to learn. Though pickleball is played by all ages, it has found its niche in grade school PE programs and senior retirement centers. The first national tournament was held in at a retirement community in Florida. Ocean City has recognized an increasing interest from pickleball players and is accommodating them by retrofitting outdoor court areas.

Outdoor Team Sports - Outdoor team sports include soccer, football, volleyball, basketball, lacrosse, softball, and baseball. Participation in team sports is age-related and two periods of decline can be anticipated in a population. The first period comes at the end of the school years. For those no longer in school, participation drops off year by year. For those who continue team sports, a second period of decline in participation occurs between the ages 35 to 45. This second period is related to the increasing physical limitations and injury that come with age.

Shared Use of Recreational Facilities

Developing and maintaining partnerships with other government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector will be a critical component of the delivery of park and recreation services for the foreseeable future. Participants in the City's recreation programs would benefit from utilizing facilities at non-City recreation sites, which may include facilities at the Ocean City public school system. Historically, the Ocean City Board of Education has shared both indoor and outdoor recreation facilities when not in use by the school system. City Council has adopted a resolution memorializing a shared services agreement between the City and the Board of Education for use of the City's Aquatic and Fitness Center.

Cape May County Parks System

Cape May County updated its Comprehensive Plan in February 2005. The Open Space, Recreation and Conservation chapter of this Plan indicates that of the County's 163,328 acres (255.2 square miles), 62,735 acres were determined to be recreational open space by the 1994-1999 New Jersey Open Space and Outdoor Recreation Plan. Despite the fact that this area represents almost forty percent of Cape May County's total land area, the 1994-1999 New Jersey State Recreation Plan shows a county-wide open space deficit of 4,388 acres.

The County Open Space and Farmland Preservation Program in conjunction with the State Green Acres Program, the State Agricultural Preservation Program, the acquisition efforts of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and various non-profit land trusts, is expected to ultimately reduce this deficit.



Board of Education Facilities

There are three public schools in Ocean City. Recreation facilities at the Intermediate School include athletic fields totaling 6.5 acres. The City and Board of Education have established an excellent partnership that allows for the coordinated use and maintenance of their respective recreational facilities. A shared service agreement between the City and the Board of Education formally recognizes this arrangement with respect to the City's Aquatic and Fitness Center. This Plan supports a continuation of this relationship between the City and Board of Education so as to make the most efficient use of recreational facilities for all participants.

Opportunities and Constraints

Natural lands are a valuable recreational resource for such activities as walking, bicycling, bird watching and other activities. The survey results express strong public sentiment regarding the intrinsic value of natural open space in Ocean City. While less natural in character, parks that are improved with playground and sports fields may still retain some attractive natural features.

Due to the existing lot pattern and land uses opportunities for the acquisition of additional land for recreation is extremely limited. With a 2010 population of approximately 12,000 and 21,000 housing units, the City is essentially built-out. There is very little vacant land, and the vacant lands that do exist are generally small, scattered parcels. As indicated in 'Community Profile' chapter, the vast majority of the City's land area is developed. Aside from the City's facilities, parks, recreation areas and beaches, the Master Plan indicates that less than 2% of the total land area is City-owned vacant land; and less than 3% is privately-owned vacant land. Realistic opportunities for significant additions to improved recreation facilities may depend upon land swaps between the City and private landowners, or other public-private arrangements.

Findings

Based upon forgoing needs analysis, there is clearly a need for additional open space for conservation and recreational purposes in Ocean City. Calculated need based on the NRPA standards indicates the unmet demand for open space and recreational facilities is most significant during summer months. Existing basketball, tennis, baseball, softball and golf course facilities when considered in terms of the City's permanent and student populations are generally consistent with NRPA standards.

The unique demands placed on Ocean City's open space and recreation facilities are evident from the survey of Ocean City residents and visitors. Survey responses indicate very strong interest in the benefits of natural open space. Over 80% of respondents indicated open space was very important and that more open space is needed (refer to survey responses to **Q5** below). This finding is consistent with the NRPA calculations when the summer population is factored into



the calculation. The top five reasons identified in the survey for additional open space in order of priority (refer to survey responses to **Q6** below) are as follows:

1. Management of stormwater/flood prevention
2. Habitat protection
3. Recreation
4. Experience nature
5. Ecological diversity

The survey results also identify the need to add to or expand recreational facilities in the following order of priority (refer to survey responses to **Q10** below):

1. Bike paths
2. Hiking and walking trails
3. Conservation areas
4. Access to waterways
5. Family picnic areas tied with Year-round recreation programming
6. Year-round recreation programs
7. Boat ramps
8. Summer recreational programs
9. Children's play areas
10. Skateboard park



Photo – J. Peter Ault



Interviews with City staff^{xv} and individuals directly involved in recreation programming provide critical insight into the capacity and demand on existing recreation facilities. One common problem the Recreation Department faces season-to-season is field and gym availability to match high participation levels. The available field space is generally overused and not allowed a season of rest. This situation increases the maintenance required to keep the facilities serviceable.

Feedback from recreation staff reveal an overwhelming consensus that (1) additional play fields are the highest priority followed by (2) access to the bay, (3) safe walking and biking routes, (4) bicycle racks at street ends and businesses, and (5) improvements at the Sports and Civic Center. The public has also expressed strong interest in using fields for various adult leagues. The high demand placed on existing sports fields by school sports and City recreation programs necessitates careful scheduling to assure access. Due to the high demand from the school and City-sponsored programs there is limited opportunity for the general public to utilize these facilities.

Considering the outputs generated by the NRPA standards, survey results and interviews, there is a demonstrated need for the following:

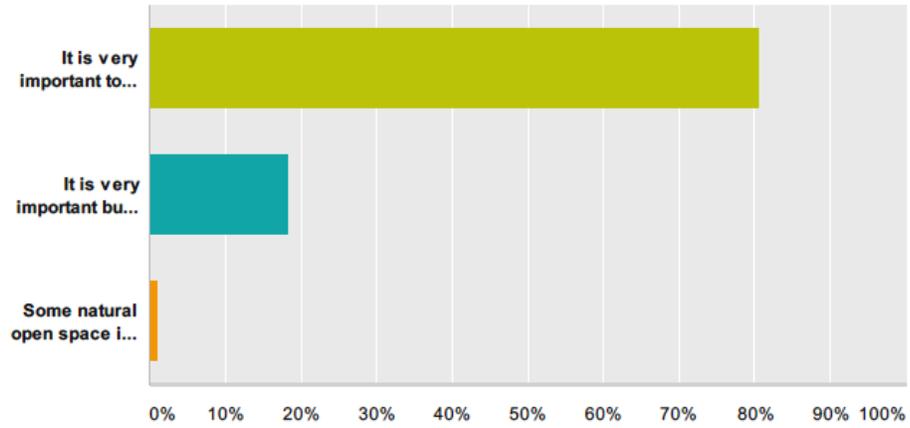
- Additional playing fields
- Bike routes
- Walking trails
- Access to waterways
- Areas where individuals of all ages and abilities can access and enjoy publicly-owned open space.

The trend toward increased participation in organized recreational activities continues to be strong in the community for both children and adults. In order to address the on-going need for open space and recreation facilities the City should continue efforts to acquire open space land for conservation and development of publicly-accessible recreational facilities as opportunities allow. Specific recommendations addressing the identified needs are described in the “Action Plan Recommendations” chapter of this Plan.



Q5 How would you rate the importance of natural open space?

Answered: 279 Skipped: 29

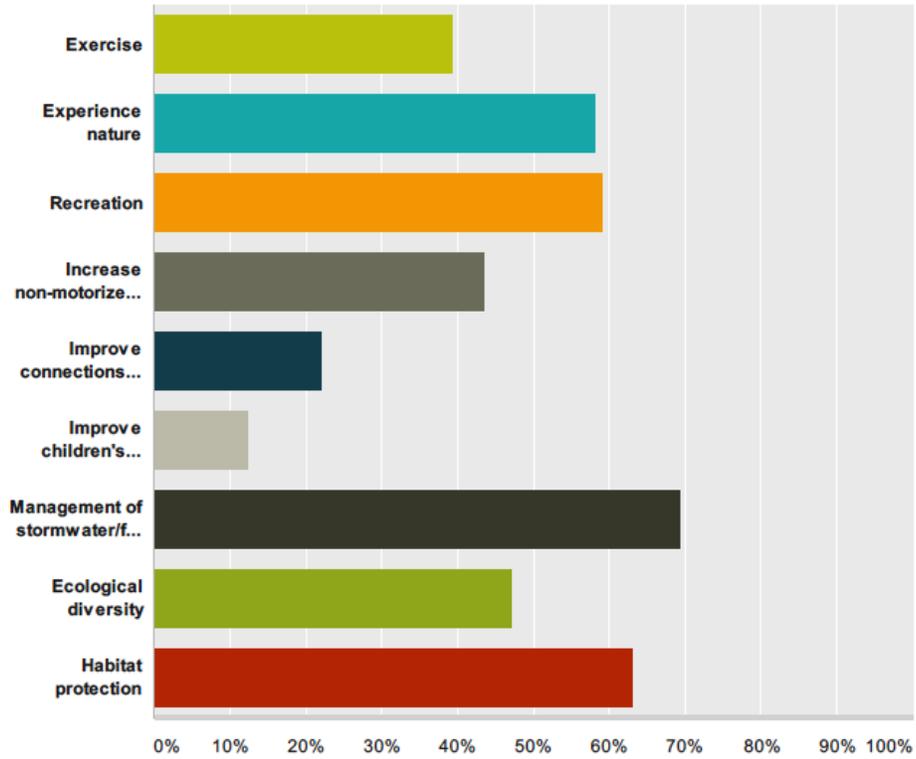


Answer Choices	Responses
It is very important to the community and more natural open space is needed;	80.65% 225
It is very important but the City has adequate open space;	18.28% 51
Some natural open space is nice, but the City has too much.	1.08% 3
Total	279



Q6 If you think more open space is needed in Ocean City what are the primary reasons for additional open space?

Answered: 254 Skipped: 54

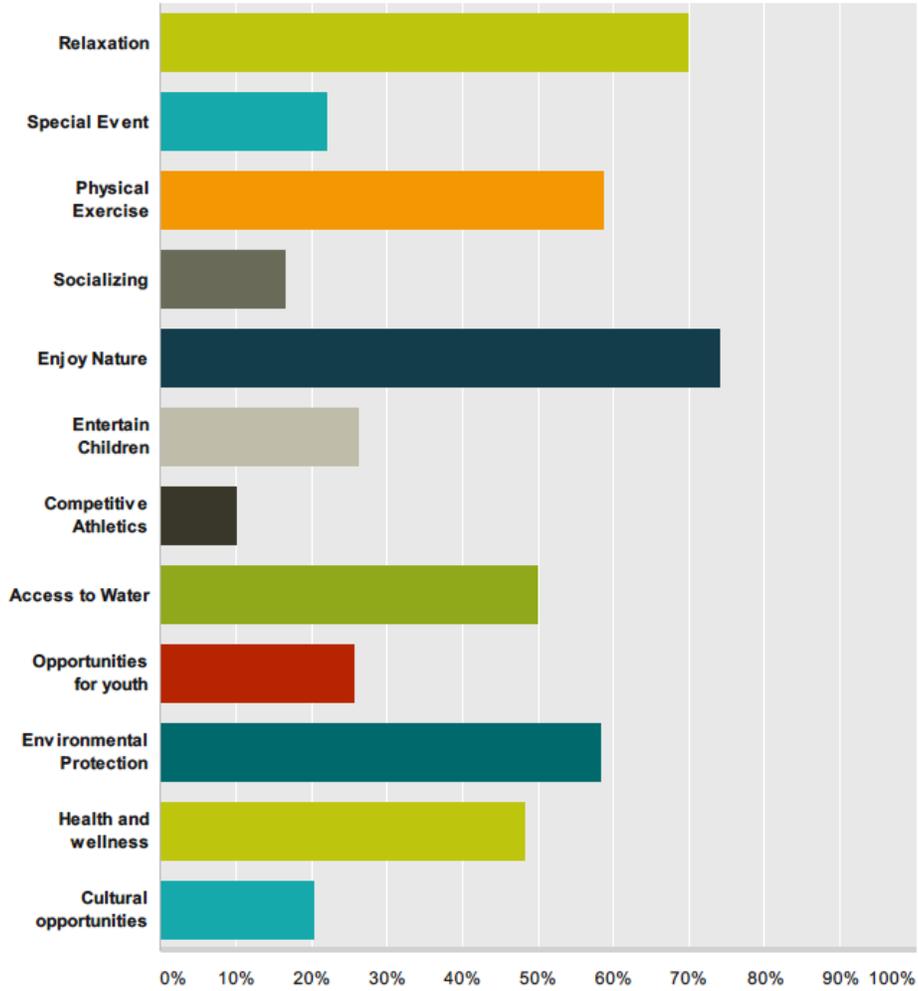


Answer Choices	Responses
Exercise	39.37% 100
Experience nature	58.27% 148
Recreation	59.06% 150
Increase non-motorized transportation options	43.70% 111
Improve connections between community destinations	22.05% 56
Improve children's access to schools	12.60% 32
Management of stormwater/flood prevention	69.29% 176
Ecological diversity	47.24% 120
Habitat protection	62.99% 160
Total Respondents: 254	



Q8 Which of the following benefits of recreation and open space are most important to you?

Answered: 293 Skipped: 15



Answer Choices	Responses
Relaxation	69.97% 205
Special Event	22.18% 65
Physical Exercise	58.70% 172
Socializing	16.72% 49
Enjoy Nature	74.06% 217
Entertain Children	26.28% 77

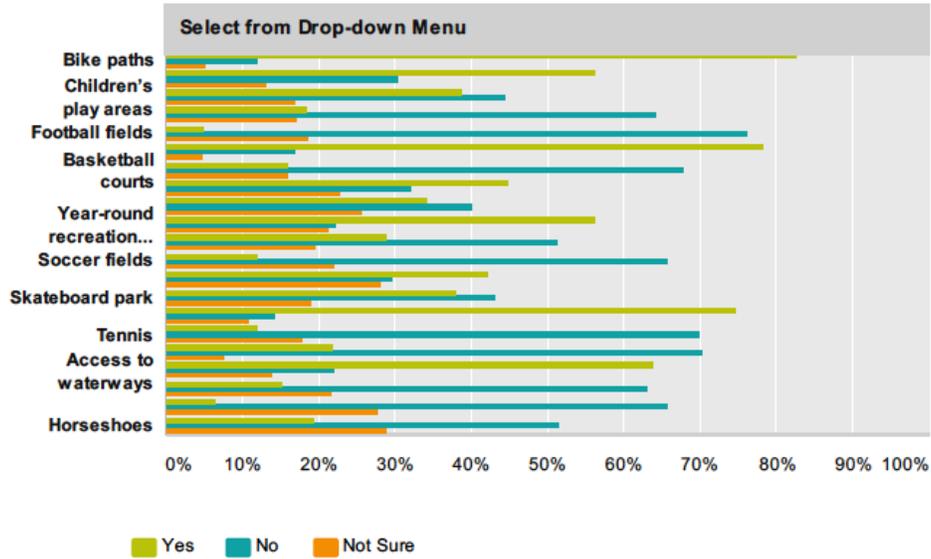


Competitive Athletics	10.24%	30
Access to Water	50.17%	147
Opportunities for youth	25.60%	75
Environmental Protection	58.36%	171
Health and wellness	48.12%	141
Cultural opportunities	20.48%	60
Total Respondents: 293		



Q10 Does Ocean City need to add or expand the following facilities?

Answered: 260 Skipped: 48



Select from Drop-down Menu				
	Yes	No	Not Sure	Total
Bike paths	82.68% 191	12.12% 28	5.19% 12	231
Family picnic areas	56.35% 111	30.46% 60	13.20% 26	197
Children's play areas	38.78% 76	44.39% 87	16.84% 33	196
Baseball/softball fields	18.62% 35	64.36% 121	17.02% 32	188
Football fields	4.97% 9	76.24% 138	18.78% 34	181
Hiking and walking trails	78.22% 176	16.89% 38	4.89% 11	225
Basketball courts	16.04% 30	67.91% 127	16.04% 30	187
Boat ramps	44.88% 92	32.20% 66	22.93% 47	205
Swimming instruction	34.22% 64	40.11% 75	25.67% 48	187
Year-round recreation programming	56.35% 111	22.34% 44	21.32% 42	197
Ice skating rink	29.10% 55	51.32% 97	19.58% 37	189
Soccer fields	12.15%	65.75%	22.10%	

12 / 17



Category	2017/18	2016/17	2015/16	Count
	22	119	40	181
Summer recreational programs	42.19% 81	29.69% 57	28.13% 54	192
Skateboard park	37.89% 72	43.16% 82	18.95% 36	190
Conservation areas	74.66% 165	14.48% 32	10.86% 24	221
Tennis	12.02% 22	69.95% 128	18.03% 33	183
Golf	21.88% 42	70.31% 135	7.81% 15	192
Access to waterways	63.85% 136	22.07% 47	14.08% 30	213
Street Hockey	15.22% 28	63.04% 116	21.74% 40	184
Ultimate Frisbee	6.42% 12	65.78% 123	27.81% 52	187
Horseshoes	19.35% 36	51.61% 96	29.03% 54	186

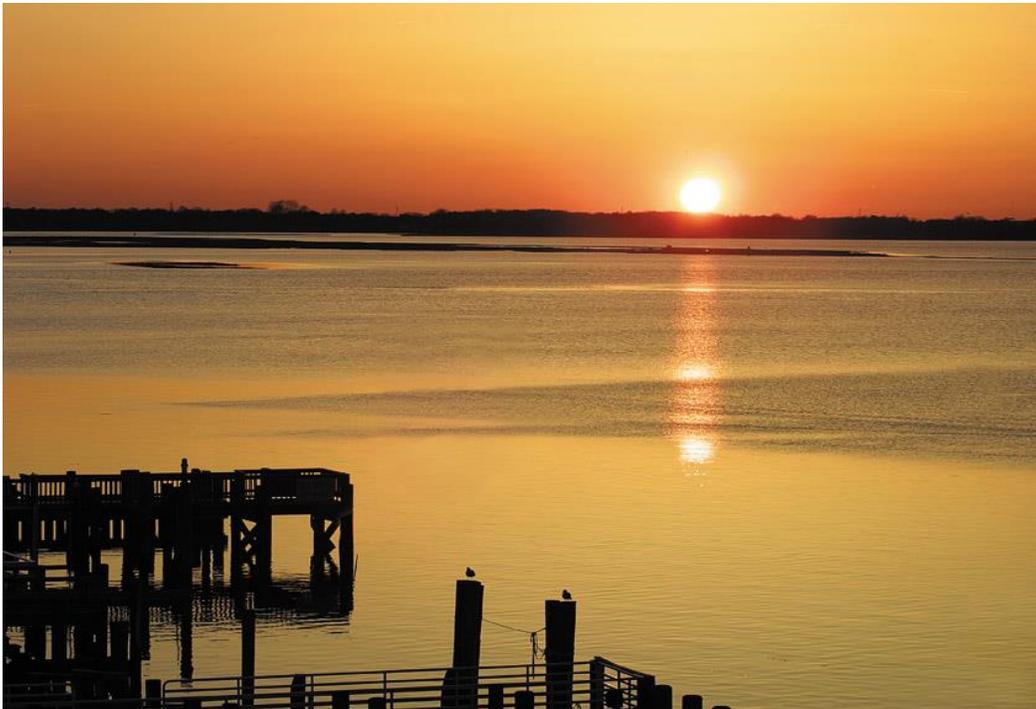


Photo – J. Peter Ault



Resource Assessment, Acquisition Guidelines and Ranking Criteria

Resource Assessment

Natural resources are useful materials from the Earth, such as coal, oil, natural gas, and trees used to manufacture or create a range of modern conveniences. Water and food provide humans with sustenance and energy, for example, and fossil fuels generate heat as well as energy for transportation and industrial production. Many of the same natural resources used by people are important to plants and wildlife for survival. Natural resources are vital to all forms of wildlife and the ecosystems in which they live. Ocean City is bestowed with an abundance of natural resources that provide diverse opportunities to experience natural open spaces, and participate in recreational activities that improve the *quality of life* for residents and visitors.

Public open spaces increase property values because they make neighborhoods more desirable by making them cleaner, greener, and more sociable. A growing literature documents the physical and mental health benefits of greening for various populations. Open spaces provide habitat for animals, ecosystem services such as filtering stormwater and help to balance the heat island effect. Open land, particularly spaces that easily soak up rain such as gardens, turn stormwater from a pollutant to a resource. Rain absorbed into the soil is water that is not washing trash and toxic particles into the storm sewers. Green spaces improve air quality because plants absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen. Trees are particularly helpful, since they are large and also because their leaves remove toxic particles from the air.

Acquisition Guidelines and Open Space Functions

The following guidelines provide a rational basis for the Ranking Criteria described below.

- ◆ Properties bordering waterways should be preserved through purchase or conservation easements where appropriate. The preservation of land adjacent to waterways is essential to protecting the water quality, providing recreational opportunities, and reducing the potential for flood damage.
- ◆ Acquisition of environmentally sensitive sites such as, freshwater wetlands and wetland transition areas, and flood plains. The Master Plan contains an analysis of environmentally sensitive lands in the City. Acquisition of these sensitive lands for permanent open space affords the opportunity to protect such areas from the negative effects of development.
- ◆ Acquisition of strategic “high visibility” sites that, if preserved, would have a significant beneficial impact on the character of the community. To a great extent,



these sites are recognized for their importance in defining the character of the community and our visual environment, and should be preserved to serve as permanent reminders of Ocean City's heritage for current and future generations to enjoy.

- ◆ Acquisition of properties or rights-of-way to establish or extend a system of pedestrian walkways and bike routes that provide opportunities to interconnect parks/recreation sites, open space areas, and community facilities.
- ◆ Acquisition of special historic or cultural sites or sites of special scenic value that should be protected to preserve or enhance the character of the community.
- ◆ Acquisition of sites that complement or provide linkage between existing open space areas, recreation areas, and community facilities or otherwise fulfills the goals of the Master Plan. Open space planning should remain flexible as opportunities may arise for the acquisition of sites that may bear an important relationship to the fulfillment of the Master Plan's goals and objectives.

The following important open space functions and other strategic aspects should be considered in identifying high priority lands for acquisition.

1. Avoidance of City Services - Open space demands very few public services commonly provided to developed lands. Generally, land increases in value when it is developed - thereby adding taxable value to a community's tax base. However, the development usually requires more public services - thereby increasing the budget. In many cases, especially in the case of residential properties, the cost of required City services exceeds the revenue generated through taxes.
2. Natural Resource Protection - Open space functions to preserve the various habitats within the City, provides a natural tool to maintain or improve water quality, and provides flood control.
 - a. Natural Systems Preservation - Open space lands can provide important habitat for plant and animal species whose habitat areas are decreasing due possibly to conversion of land to residential, commercial or other use.
 - b. Water Quality Protection - Open lands contribute greatly to maintaining the water quality in the community. The natural vegetative cover on undisturbed land shields the soil against the eroding impacts of rainfall, holding the soil in place and protecting against washing of soil into water bodies. Natural vegetative cover promotes infiltration of rain and snowmelt into the ground, providing protection against flooding and wide swings in surface water flow that can degrade water quality.
 - c. Flood Control - By promoting infiltration of rain and snowmelt into the ground, natural land helps protect against flooding. Wetlands and flood-



prone lands adjacent to water bodies provide storage volume for floodwaters. Infill of the floodplain and degradation of wetlands diminishes the water storage capacity of these areas, thereby exacerbating flooding.

- d. Maintenance of Groundwater Systems - By encouraging infiltration of precipitation into the soil, natural land cover promotes replenishment of natural groundwater supplies. Many wetland areas are fed by groundwater supplies.
3. History and Culture – Ocean City is known for its maritime heritage and provides many opportunities for education at well-known historical and cultural sites throughout the City. Some of these sites are located in or near open spaces.
 - a. Historic/Cultural Resource Protection - There are specific open space sites in the City with historical or other cultural importance that merit their retention as open space.
 - b. Education Enrichment - Open lands provide opportunities for learning more about the City’s natural surroundings and history.
 4. Quality of Life - Open space contributes to the quality of life in Ocean City by providing a buffer between urban and less developed areas, enhancing property values, and adding to the enjoyment of commercial or high density residential areas.
 - a. Aesthetic Quality Preservation - Natural lands have an inherent attractiveness and value to many people. Experiencing natural surroundings is an important activity enjoyed by many residents and visitors to the City who value relatively natural surroundings. Certain features of the cultural landscape are also valued by many, such as wetlands, sand dunes, beaches, Atlantic Ocean and historic sites.
 - b. Maintain a Buffer between Urban and Less Developed Areas - Open space provides a buffer between urban infrastructure and residential neighborhoods. Open space land can avoid the gradual loss of community identity that results from a sprawling development pattern.
 - c. Property Value Enhancement - Proximity to open space is an important criterion that affects the choice of residence location for many people.
 - d. Commercial or High Density Residential Areas - Open space adds to the character, value and aesthetic quality of commercial or high-density residential areas. Thus, areas suitable for development as pocket parks, public plazas and the like may improve quality of life rather than serve traditional open space functions and values.
 5. Strategic Planning for Future Open Space Acquisition - Practical decision-making enters into every discussion regarding the potential acquisition of open space, and these criteria



recognize the value of acquiring certain parcels of open space as part of an overall strategy.

- a. Proximity or Contiguity to Open Space/Strategic Value - Location of property within a greenway corridor or proximity/contiguity to other open space enhances the value of otherwise lower functioning open space. Likewise, open space that may have little, if any, inherent function or value on its own, may provide access to other open space, public access areas or easements. In addition, open space with less inherent values and functions may later be sold to generate resources for the subsequent acquisition of more valuable open space.
- b. Vulnerability to Development - Some lands are subject to federal, state or local regulatory programs designed to protect wetlands, stream channels, wildlife or other environmental features, while other lands are not subject to any such regulatory protection.

Ranking Criteria

Open space serves various functions and values. In light of its development characteristics and historical context, the City must discern which of these functions have the greatest merit. These functions and values cover a broad range, from providing land for public recreational activities, to less tangible functions such as enhancing appreciation of the natural environment, and flood protection. Open space generally is less costly to the City. Property taxes generally do not generate enough revenue to pay for costly services, especially in the case of residential properties. Thus one important benefit of preserving and acquiring open space is the avoidance of future expenses to the City.

As previously noted, this document is a dynamic one, intended to suit a changing community. It is recognized that not all properties are available for purchase at the same time, and that the opportunity for a specific acquisition could be lost. Priority must be given to specific properties that meet the criteria when they become, or are about to become, available for purchase. It is recognized that these criteria may be subject to differing interpretations depending on the nature and circumstances of various opportunities for the acquisition of open space, and that any particular criterion may receive more or less weight depending on a variety of factors.

The Ocean City Environmental Commission has developed priority ranking criteria for open space acquisitions. These criteria are intended to advance the goals of this Open Space and Recreation Plan as cited herein. All targeted properties to be considered for acquisition are to be ranked and assigned a priority by an *open space and recreation committee* (as recommended in the “Action Plan”) according to the criteria described in **Table 9**.



TABLE 9

Ocean City

Priority Ranking Criteria for Land Acquisition and Recreation Improvements

Priority	Criteria	Definition	Weighting Consensus
1	Protects environmentally-sensitive lands and/or waters	Includes wetlands, dunes, habitat, flood retention area	12
2	Protects plant or wildlife habitat	Establishes new or enlarges existing habitat areas	12
3	Opportunity to maintain or increase public access to coastal or inland waterway	Provides or improves physical access to beach or bay	11
4	Potential to develop linear, or connect recreation network (bike routes, greenways, trails, beaches)	Provides for or improves linkage to other open space	10
5	Accessible to potential users	Free from easement and restrictions; accessible to general public	8
6	Improves ability to manage development	Favors open space over development	8
7	Cost considerations	“Fits” within budgetary and funding restrictions	8
8	Appropriate use identified	Addresses public “need” as identified in this Plan	8
9	Available for public purchase	Does the owner want to sell? Interest level, future use/plans	6
10	Adjacent to existing public open space or recreation facility	Parcel adjoins existing open space or recreation site	6
11	Opportunity for neighborhood improvement	Provides use that benefits the neighborhood, i.e., buffer	5
12	Absence of environmental constraints	No known hazardous conditions or other elements that limit its use	3
13	Preserves “key” or “contributing” historic resource	Protects historic site	3
Total			100%



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Action Plan Recommendations

Action Plan

This *Open Space and Recreation Plan* identifies areas for future acquisition and offers a set of strategies and a timetable to implement the Plans' goals. The recommendations and priorities of this Plan are guidelines and should not overburden the community's financial or work force resources. The recommendations contained herein provide a strategy for prioritizing action in the development of active and passive recreational facilities and open space acquisitions which should be implemented as opportunities and funding become available.

The activities listed for the "first year" after adoption of the plan are the most urgent and will further the City's Open Space program immediately. The "three year" recommendations are very important but will take more time to complete. The "five year" projects are important, but should take place in the appropriate time frame, as opportunities arise. The "ongoing" projects will ensure that the City maintains itself as a community that can continue to enjoy the benefits of its open space and recreational resources.

The Open Space and Recreation Plan is not a static document. The Action Plan should be reviewed annually by the *Open Space and Recreation Committee* and updated at least every five years. Progress in achieving the Plan's goals should be reported to the Planning Board, City Council and Green Acres. The need for future amendments to this Plan should be coordinated between the Open Space and Recreation Committee and Planning Board.

First Year

- Adopt the Open Space and Recreation Plan as an Element of the Ocean City Master Plan.
- Submit Open Space and Recreation Plan to Green Acres for the state's Planning Incentive Program.
- Establish an *Open Space and Recreation Committee* (OSRC) to provide recommendations with respect to open space planning, including the advocacy and oversight of all open spaces as defined by the Master Plan. The Committee will guide efforts to ensure the development of a holistic system of open space and recreation facilities that are attractive, functional and sustainable.
- In order to develop appropriate *level of service* standards for the City, establish a protocol for collecting and evaluating data indicating user participation rates for all recreation facilities and programs.
- Evaluate the feasibility of adopting a local open space tax to assist in funding future open space acquisitions and recreation improvements.



- Evaluate privately-owned beachfront and wetlands parcels, and properties adjacent to the Haven Avenue Bike Boulevard, and develop a prioritized list of potential acquisition sites.
- Examine tax exempt properties, properties in tax-foreclosure, privately-held wetlands and other properties as potential additions to the Recreation and Open Space Inventory (ROSI).
- Study feasibility of:
 - Creating new (and enhancing existing) paths or trails with fitness stations, and
 - Developing a playground on (or adjacent to) the beach.
- Incorporate the City’s pedestrian and bicycle programs into the Sustainable Jersey program to advance alternative transportation and clean energy.
- Produce a brochure that shows the location of recreation, conservation and other important public land in the City, and explains key recommendations of this Plan.
- Post this Open Space and Recreation Plan on the City’s website.

Within Three Years

- Acquire land adjacent the bayfront to provide public access and kayak launch areas.
- Work with the owners of key properties to establish conservation easements.
- Work with the Open Space and Recreation Committee to identify additional lands to increase active recreation fields.
- Sign existing pedestrian paths and bike routes (as appropriate) to increase ease of access and public safety.
- Work with historic organizations to expand local opportunities for historic conservation and education.
- Discuss the preservation priorities of other nonprofits active in the area to form partnerships.
- Investigate the feasibility of installing artificial turf on recreation fields to increase usable field time.

Within Five Years

- Identify opportunities to create and expand local neighborhood parks and open spaces.
- Investigate tax incentives and transfer of development rights for the preservation and adaptive reuse of historic buildings.
- Implement a park stewardship program to assist in maintaining and improving the functioning of lands within the City’s public spaces.



- Update existing field usage and design to ensure fields are being used efficiently and at a capacity to ensure future sustainability.
- Work with the local bicycling groups to promote the City as a regional destination for cyclists.
- Review areas in the City as scenic corridors or districts and apply these corridors and roadways for state and county designations.

Ongoing

- Investigate and apply for grants to protect and enhance the City's open space and recreation areas.
- Explore and identify opportunities for new recreational space and facilities.
- Continue to review undeveloped parcels and identify those with the most significance and potential impact on the City's values and goals. Prepare portfolios on each such site identifying key features of the parcel and suggesting development or preservation options compatible with City goals.
- Research Creative Development Options. Provide advice to other boards on potential developments in terms of creative development options that may maximize landowner return while serving the City's open space and recreation goals.
- In order to develop appropriate *level of service* criteria for the City, collect and evaluate data indicating user participation rates for all recreation facilities and programs.
- Monitor and address the City's needs for outdoor recreational facilities.
- Offer diverse recreational programs for residents and visitors.
- Where acquisition is not feasible, promote conservation easements on environmentally-sensitive lands.
- Promote historic easements through Preservation New Jersey and the New Jersey Historic Trust.
- Coordinated meetings. Conduct semiannual meetings with OSRC, Planning Board, Zoning Board, Environmental Commission, and Mayor's Council on Physical Fitness to discuss issues that arise involving the OSRP.
- Appoint Interested Members to the OSRC. Assure that committed and interested individuals with diverse viewpoints are appointed to the OSRC.
- Publicize and Promote the Plan. Take measures to publicize and promote the OSRP. Maintain OSRP on the City website and update as appropriate. Make note of OSRP in meetings of boards that are involved with land use issues.



Future Acquisitions and Conversions

The addition of land area to the City's existing recreation and open space inventory is intended to advance one or more of the following recreation and open space goals.

- Promote protection of open space, important habitats, and environmentally sensitive areas through public and private action in order to maintain and improve the City's biodiversity, and improve protection from sea level rise and severe storm events.
- Protect and improve the existing system of open spaces throughout the city through capital rehabilitation, maintenance, programming, and other system operations.
- Link neighborhoods, public facilities, conservation and recreation lands and commercial areas through a system of safe pedestrian ways and bikeways, made available to the public through either acquisition or conservation easements.
- Identify sites for public acquisition that respond to the existing and emergent needs of residents. Especially consider sites that are either adjacent to existing open space areas, provide linkages, or demonstrate possible use for both passive and recreational uses.

The acquisition of areas such as those identified below is consistent with the City's open space and recreation goals.

- ◆ Although a majority of the City's beach is identified for protection in the ROSI, areas exist that are not presently included in the ROSI. Protection of beach areas will assist in on-going efforts to minimize impacts from coastal storms, protect sensitive coastal habitat, and improve public safety. Parcels outlined in light green are currently listed on the City's ROSI. Beach and dune areas between the green-outlined parcels as shown on Exhibit 3 are recommended for preservation.

EXHIBIT 3

Beach Preservation





- ◆ The Recreation and Open Space maps indicate the location of open space and recreation lands in the City. On the bayside of the island, the maps highlight wetlands and sedge islands that are listed in the City’s ROSI. These wetlands and islands provide important habitat and attenuate wave action during storm events. The area outlined on Exhibit 4 is not on the ROSI and is recommended for preservation.

EXHIBIT 4

Bay Island Preservation



- ◆ The City’s Recreation and Open Space Inventory includes over 1,350 of wetlands. The Recreation and Open Space Maps indicate the location of these wetland areas. Due to land parcelization that occurred prior to the adoption of regulations to protect wetlands, there are wetland areas in the City that contain public rights-of-way aka *paper streets*. It is recommended that the public rights-of-way within wetlands be vacated to consolidate and protect the areas identified on Exhibits 5-6.



EXHIBIT 5

Wetland Preservation



EXHIBIT 6

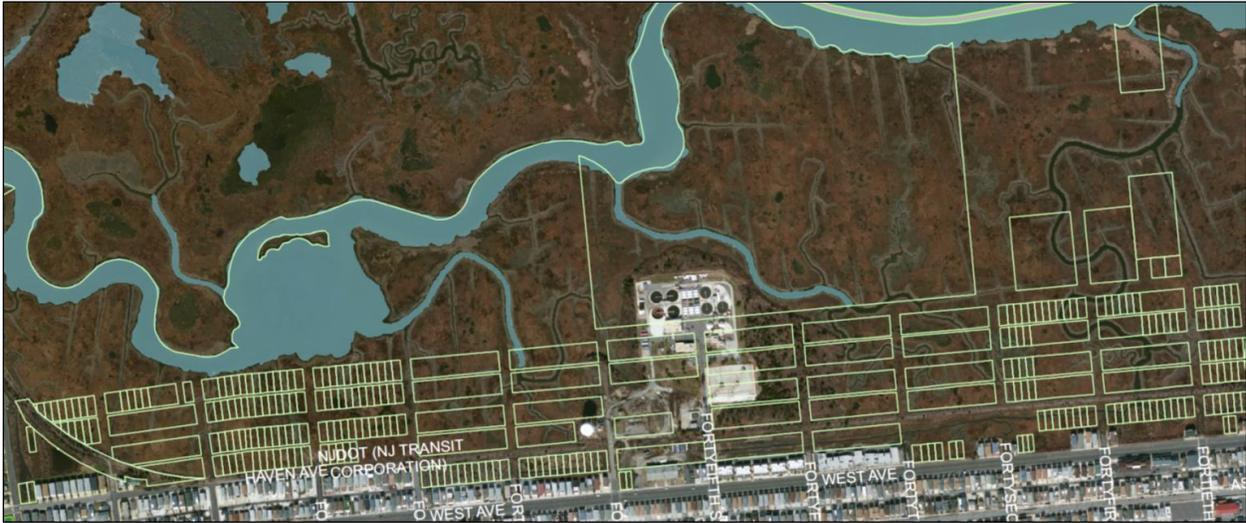
Wetland Preservation





EXHIBIT 7

Wetland Preservation





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PRESERVATION TOOLS, FUNDING SOURCES, AND POTENTIAL PARTNERS

This chapter provides a list of the tools and funding sources available to preserve open space. It is not an exhaustive listing, but it includes the most commonly used and most successful techniques.

PRESERVATION TOOLS

Fee Simple Acquisition

Usually, the most expensive way to preserve property is direct acquisition through fee simple. The title to the property changes hands from one owner to another. A disadvantage to this approach is the need to have the full purchase price available at the closing. Government agencies may not be able to raise the funds in time before an owner decides to sell the property to another buyer.

Municipal Preservation Tools

Ocean City may wish to establish an *Open Space Trust*, utilizing tax revenue of \$.01 to \$.10 per \$100 of assessed value to fund the Trust. This would provide the City with a dedicated source of funding and would qualify it for state funding through the Planning Incentive Grant Program of Green Acres. There are other ways in which the City can establish a dedicated fund for land preservation, however, including allocating funds from the regular budget each year.

A second preservation tool at the disposal of the municipality is *tax foreclosure*. If a parcel falls under the City's ownership through tax foreclosure, the municipality may want to consider holding the property as part of its lands for recreation and conservation purposes if it is within an area targeted for acquisition. Periodic examination of properties with *tax liens* upon them may also yield opportunities for the municipality to purchase the lien and preserve the land for environmental or recreational uses.

The *official map* is another tool available to a municipality. An official map as authorized by NJS 40:55D-32 is essentially an ordinance, in map form, that designates existing and proposed areas for protection. Once adopted, the official map gives notice to property owners and developers of the municipality's intentions to preserve land for flood control and other public purposes. The official map usually becomes effective when land development or subdivision is proposed. The municipality then has the option, for up to one year after final plan approval, to negotiate various ways to keep the land open, using all the conventional land preservation methods. Unless otherwise agreed upon, the law specifically states that the property owner is entitled to full-market compensation.



Other Non-Direct Acquisition: Easements

Another effective tool for preserving land is an easement. An easement grants an entity such as the City the right to use another's property for a specific purpose. There are easements designed for many purposes. Easements most appropriate for land in the Ocean City include:

- ◆ Trail easements: the right to traverse a specific path through a property
- ◆ Scenic easements: the right to maintain a view and ensure that view, usually from a roadway, is maintained
- ◆ Conservation easements: purchase of the development rights to a property to preserve the natural landscape of the site. These can be of the whole property or a part of it

The advantages of easements include the lower costs to the buyer to acquire a particular use on a piece of property. Conservation easements generally cost from 70 to 80 percent of the fair market value of the land. Trail easements may be used appropriately to create greenways along and around water bodies.

Another advantage of easements is that the land remains in private ownership. The City will still collect property taxes from the owner. The amount and type of easement right that is sold will typically lessen the owner's tax liability.

Written into the deed, an easement will be associated with a tract of land despite any ownership change. Public access is not necessarily a condition for an easement. Easements can provide a conservation solution for the municipality and the private landowner. They represent a flexible tool that can be written to satisfy public uses as well as a private landowner's needs.

Bonding

The municipality can issue bonds to borrow money to pay for acquisitions. Funds from a dedicated source of funding, such as an Open Space Trust could be used for the five percent down payment to issue bonds and for debt service over time. General obligation bonds require voter approval and can impair the tax credit of the municipality. The consistent, dedicated revenue from an Open Space Trust makes revenue bonds an attractive alternative, but these bonds typically have a higher interest rate than the general obligation bonds.

Lease-Back Agreement

If the land is not needed for immediate use, a municipality can purchase a piece of property and lease it back to the owner or another entity for use. Partial reimbursement of the purchase price can be repaid through rental fees, and maintenance costs are reduced. A variation of this technique is the use of life estate rights. The township would purchase a piece of property and allow the seller to continue to live on the property for a specified amount of time or until death. This technique is most useful when the township identifies an important tract and wants to



ensure its availability in the future. The landowner may realize estate tax advantages through these methods.

Donation/Bargain Sale

Selling land to a nonprofit organization or to a municipality will provide tax advantages to the owner. Landowners who own property that has escalated in value may reduce their capital gains liabilities through donating the property or selling it at a bargain sale for less than the appraised value. Estate taxes may also be reduced with proper planning. Conservation easements are effective tools for estate planning. The City may want to discuss land priorities with a nonprofit land trust. The land trust can contact owners to discuss general tax advantages of donations and bargain sales. These are cost effective methods of obtaining open space.

Long-term Lease

The City may be able to negotiate a long-term lease with a landowner unwilling to transfer complete ownership. This method may be a useful option for trail easements or athletic fields. The City will have to weigh the cost advantages of long-term rental payments over outright acquisition costs against lack of full and long-term control of the property.

Eminent Domain

The City has the right to condemn and acquire privately owned property for a public purpose, with acquisition at fair market value. However, this technique should be considered only in rare situations, such as when negotiation options have been exhausted. For one thing, the total cost of the property is likely to be considerably higher than a negotiated price because of increased legal fees and court determination of the land value. In addition, this “tool” is often unpopular with residents or viewed with suspicion, especially if there is any possibility that the acquired property may be turned over to private ownership, such as with some redevelopment or economic development plans.

FUNDING SOURCES

To accomplish all of its open space goals, Ocean City should consider funding from a variety of sources including a municipal open space tax. Reference in the following entries to Green Acres funding and other State resources will only be fulfilled if the Garden State Preservation Trust, which is the source of State monies, is renewed by ballot or other funding source. Presumably, if the Trust is renewed, the programs that have relied on this funding source will continue in their current form.

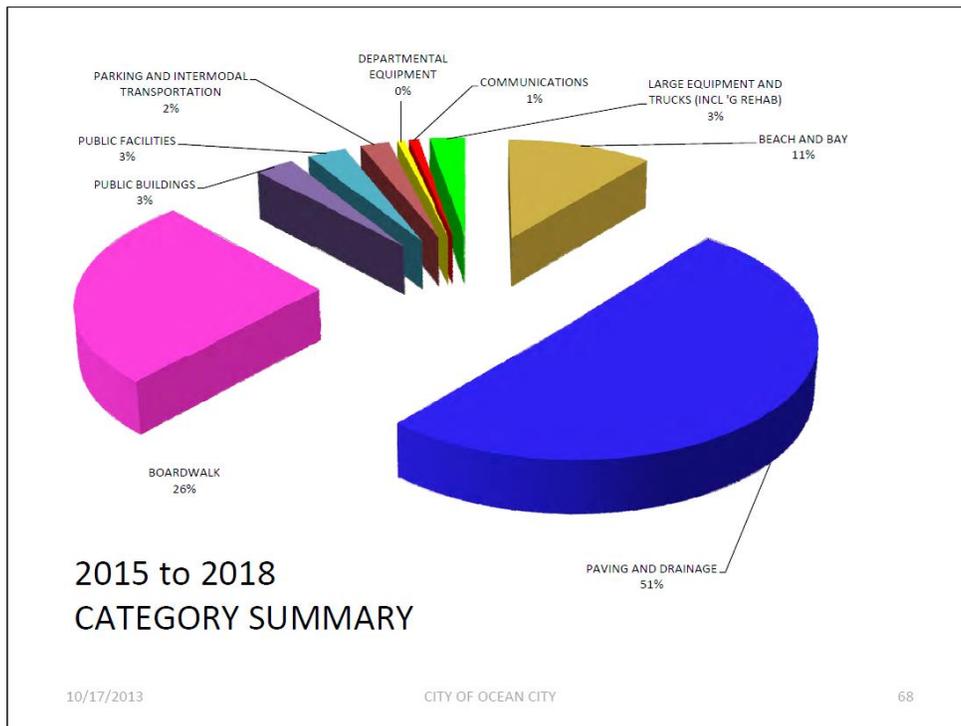
Capital Improvement Program

Capital improvement programming for recreational improvements is incorporated into the City’s overall budget considerations. Recent recreation improvements include the 34th Street tennis courts, fence repairs at Tennessee Avenue and West 52nd Street, track repair and turf replacement



at Carey Field, lighting at 5th Street softball field, restoration and safety improvements at 15th Street and 6th Street playgrounds. Funding allocations for recreational improvements are included in the *Public Facilities* and *Parking and Intermodal Transportation* categories, which over the next four years (2015-2018) earmark \$1.5M for recreation facility improvements and upgrades.

Exhibit 3
Ocean City - Capital Improvement Program



Source: October 17, 2013 - Sandy Related Project Update, June 2013

Nonprofit Land Conservation Organizations

Nonprofit land conservation organizations are eligible for nonprofit grants from the state Green Acres program. Nonprofit grants may total \$500,000 and require a dollar for dollar match. Land trust associations are good partners for land acquisition in the sensitive and natural areas in the City. These organizations have experienced staff that are knowledgeable about benefits to a landowner interested in preserving property as well as strategies for open space preservation. Nonprofit land trusts can also “sign on” to the City’s *Open Space and Recreation Plan* registered with Green Acres. This process makes nonprofits eligible for Green Acres’ funding to acquire land important to the City.



Historic Preservation

In November 1998, voters approved a ballot initiative to preserve open space, farmland, and historic sites, with funding from state revenues guaranteed for the next decade. This legislation created The Garden State Preservation Trust, which was signed into law on June 30, 1999. This source of grant funds allows the Trust to address the preservation needs of properties throughout the state through fiscal year 2009. In 2007 and in 2009, voters approved referendums to provide additional funding for the preservation of open space, farmland and historic preservation projects.

State Land Management Agencies

The state is a likely partner to help the City protect important resources. The New Jersey Division of Parks and Forestry and the Division of Fish and Wildlife have access to Green Acres funds. The Garden State Preservation Trust Act, passed in 1999 and the source of Green Acres funds, includes funding for historic preservation, farmland preservation, and public parkland acquisition. Almost a third of the public parkland allocation goes to state land management agencies, with the rest to municipalities and nonprofit organizations. The City should make its open space priorities known to the state land managers and make a case for state acquisition of important sites.

New Jersey Green Acres and State Agricultural Development Committee

The Green Acres program provides funding assistance for the acquisition of park and recreation areas listed in the *Open Space and Recreation Plan*. If a municipality has an approved source of open space funding and an approved Open Space and Recreation Plan, the Green Acres program, administered by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, provides a larger match for land acquisition. The Planning Incentive Grant, for municipalities with an Open Space levy and an approved Open Space and Recreation Plan, provides a 50% matching grant. Urban Aid municipalities can receive a 75% matching grant. The balance of the funds can be provided as a loan at 2% for 30 years. If a municipality does not have an Open Space levy or approved Open Space and Recreation Plan, Green Acres only provides 25% of the acquisition cost.

All state funds from the 2009 bond measure for Green Acres, Blue Acres, farmland and historic preservation have been allocated. There is no long-term funding for the Blue Acres program to buy out properties suffering from repeated flooding. The Green Acres Program doesn't have the funds necessary to purchase the more than 650,000 acres of land that the draft State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan indicated are needed to protect drinking water resources and provide outdoor recreation to a growing population.

New Jersey voters will get to decide in November 2014 whether to dedicate a portion of the state's business tax revenue to protecting farmland and open space. New Jersey's voters have approved 13 ballot measures on the issue since 1961. Most recently, in 2009, they agreed to use



\$400 million for the cause. Currently, 4 percent of New Jersey's corporation business tax is set aside for environmental programs. Under the latest proposal, a portion of that would be redirected to open space preservation. And starting in 2019, 6 percent of the revenue would go toward open space and other environmental projects.

The Office of Legislative Services says the open space funds would initially tally \$32 million annually. But by 2019, it projects the funds would get \$117 million a year — and more if the state collects more in business taxes

Federal Land & Water Conservation Fund

Federal funding from the Land & Water Conservation Fund is channeled through the Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA). This is a comprehensive, bipartisan effort to provide money to New Jersey for a variety of purposes including open space acquisition, urban park and recreation recovery, coastal conservation, wildlife conservation, historic preservation, payment in lieu of taxes, and conservation easement/species recovery efforts. Large, environmentally significant areas will be likely candidates for funding and will most likely be distributed through the Green Acres program.

Cape May County Open Space and Farmland Preservation Trust

On November 9, 1989, the voters of Cape May County approved, by a two to one margin, a ballot question endorsing the establishment of a trust fund to preserve open space and agricultural land. The trust is funded by a County property tax of \$.01 cent per \$100 assessed valuation (known as the Open Space Preservation Tax) and currently generates approximately \$5 million annually. In 1997, the State of New Jersey passed a number of laws which expanded the potential function of the Open Space and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund programs to include recreation and historic preservation. The purpose of the Cape May County Open Space and Farmland Preservation Program is to permanently preserve public land of county significance to support current and future regional conservation, recreation, community enhancement, and historic preservation needs throughout the County. The Program will interact with municipal officials and other stakeholders to identify community and regional needs and will utilize program funds to establish a diverse yet interconnected network of public spaces.

Program objectives are as follows:

- Permanently preserve regionally significant public open spaces and natural resources for recreation and/or conservation purposes
- Preserve active farmland throughout the County to maintain the viability of the County's agriculture industry
- Provide amenities at regional parks and recreation areas to meet local service needs
- Preserve and enhance historic resources



- Provide needed spaces and amenities for community enhancement
- Partner with local municipalities to provide funding for local open space, farmland preservation, recreation, or historic preservation initiatives, including the repayment of local debt service for these purposes

For each for the last eight years Ocean City’s contribution to the County’s Open Space and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund has exceeded one million dollars annually. Since the program’s inception in 1990, the City’s total payment exceeds \$17M. To date, the County’s open space funds have been used in Ocean City to acquire the marina site on Bay Avenue between 2nd and 3rd Streets, Bayside Center, and Palmer Park at 15th Street and Simpson Avenue.

Transportation Enhancements Program of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act

Transportation Enhancements is a set-aside of federal highway and transit funds for the funding of projects designed to mitigate the impacts of transportation facilities on the environment and to enhance community character. Examples include bicycle and pedestrian trails, restoration of historic train stations, downtown streetscape improvements, roadside beautification, and preservation of scenic vistas. The amount of funding for these purposes is substantial, and funds for trail development and enhancement and for land acquisition are available. An eligible project must show that the trail is part of the community’s overall transportation system. Funds can be used for improvements such as signage, bike racks, and surfacing, as well as acquisition of land through easement or fee simple.

National Recreational Trails Act Projects

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Parks and Forestry, Office of Natural Lands Management administers this trail development program. Funds are available to public agencies and nonprofit organizations. Proposed trails must be located on land that is publicly-owned or privately-owned with a government agency holding an easement or lease for public access. A special category of funding is dedicated to enhancement of National Recreation Trails.

Environmental Infrastructure Trust

The New Jersey Environmental Infrastructure Financing Program administered by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection provides low interest loans to acquire open space that will preserve water quality. This program is a partnership between the New Jersey Environmental Infrastructure Trust and Green Acres. The mission of the Trust is to assist in achieving a cleaner and healthier environment by providing low interest financing for projects that enhance and protect ground and surface water resources, and ensure the safety of drinking water supplies.



POTENTIAL PARTNERS IN OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION

Several regional efforts to preserve open space and provide stewardship activities are relevant to Ocean City. These regional initiatives include the following participants:

New Jersey Natural Lands Trust

The NJ Natural Lands Trust was created in 1968 by the state legislature as an independent agency. The Trust's mission is to preserve land in its natural state to protect wildlife habitat and provide residents with passive recreation. The Trust preserves land primarily by donations of title in fee simple or conservation easements. The Trust manages its properties to conserve endangered species habitat, rare natural features, and significant ecosystems.

Cape May County Department of Planning

The County Planning Department oversees the open space and farmland preservation programs in Cape May County. County funding for farmland preservation and open space comes from the Cape May County Farmland Preservation Trust.

The Nature Conservancy

The Nature Conservancy's mission is to preserve plants, animals, and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. They have been awarded funds from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation to acquire and preserve endangered species habitat in New Jersey.

New Jersey Conservation Foundation

The Foundation's mission is to promote conservation of land and natural resources throughout New Jersey. The Foundation supports local municipalities in their efforts to establish or increase Open Space and Farmland Preservation Funds and conduct multi-municipal preservation efforts. It also supports efforts by local land trusts to acquire specific properties.

New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection

The New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife manages many of the properties that have been preserved by the State Department of Environmental Protection and will also accept donations of title in fee simple of certain properties. Such donations are usually acquisitions made with Green Acres funding by land trusts or other nonprofit private conservation organizations.



Rails to Trails Conservancy

This national conservation organization focuses its efforts on converting old railroad beds into trails. The railroad bed running through the center of the township, if abandoned, would represent an opportunity for additional outdoor recreation. The trail could also connect preserved parkland.

South Jersey Land & Water Trust

South Jersey Land & Water Trust is a regional land trust and watershed association whose mission is to protect and preserve the natural, cultural, and historic heritage of southern New Jersey. South Jersey Land Trust preserves land through fee simple acquisition and conservation easements. The organization also assists state, county and local entities in open space planning, acquisition, and management.

Stewart Land Trust

This small trust provides funding for land acquisition in Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, and Ocean counties. To be eligible, a property must either contain water or be adjacent to water. The Stewart Trust was established in the 1950s with the goal of preserving wildlife habitat and has assets of \$5 million. The Trust provides support for the acquisition of properties that can be purchased solely with Stewart Trust funds. Title to any such acquired property is held in perpetuity by the Trust.



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Appendix A – Open Space & Recreation Survey

The Open Space Survey and the Survey Summary may be accessed online at <http://www.ocnj.us/index.cfm?fuseaction=content.faq&faqTypeID=16>

Appendix B – Recreation Facilities

BLOCK	LOT	FACILITY NAME	DISTRICT	PARCEL SIZE (acres)
70.61	1	North Point Beach	Open Space - North End	0.36
1506	2	Palmer Park (CMC)	Open Space - Center City	2.2
501	1	Former High School Site (Tennis Courts)	Open Space - North End	3.2
807	1	9th Street & West Ave. Park	Open Space - North End	0.18
502	1	Memorial Park	Open Space - North End	2.9
1806	1.01	18th Street Tennis/Basketball	Open Space - Center City	1.6
405	4	Wesley Avenue Park	Open Space - North End	0.48
2903	11	29th Street Playground	Open Space - Center City	0.25
3403	1	34th Street Playground	Open Space - Center City	1
3403	2	34th Street Playground/Recreation Center	Open Space - Center City	1.1
1408	1	15th Street Playground	Open Space - North End	0.66
3505	2	Harry Vanderslice Youth Baseball Complex	Open Space - Center City	1.5
3505	1	Harry Vanderslice Youth Baseball Complex	Open Space - Center City	1.6
3350	13	Airport Playground	Open Space - Center City	0.13
3350	14	Tennessee Ave. Boat Ramp & Parking	Open Space - Center City	0.9
3350	13	Tennessee Ave. Soccer Complex	Open Space - Center City	6.5
5204	2	52nd Street Playground	Open Space - South End	0.11
5204	3	52nd Street Playground	Open Space - South End	0.11
5204	4	52nd Street Playground	Open Space - South End	0.11
5204	5	52nd Street Playground	Open Space - South End	0.11
5204	6	52nd Street Playground	Open Space - South End	0.11
5204	8	52nd Street Playground	Open Space - South End	0.11
5204	7	52nd Street Playground	Open Space - South End	0.11
5204	1	52nd Street Playground	Open Space - South End	0.13
5204	9	52nd Street Playground	Open Space - South End	0.11
5204	10	52nd Street Playground	Open Space - South End	0.11
5204	11	52nd Street Playground	Open Space - South End	0.11
5204	12	52nd Street Playground	Open Space - South End	0.13
709	1	8th Street Playground	Open Space - North End	0.76
506	1	5th St. Baseball/Softball Complex	Open Space - North End	3.6
506	2	5th St. Baseball/Softball Complex	Open Space - North End	3.2
508	2	Bayside Center (CMC)	Open Space - North End	3.1
3350.01	17.01	34th and Bay Avenue dock (CMC)	Open Space - Center City	0.55
3350	13	Ocean City Golf Course	Open Space - Center City	25
1907	2	OC Intermediate School Fields (BOE)	Open Space - Center City	2.2
1906	1	OC Intermediate School Fields (BOE)	Open Space - Center City	3
1807	1	OC Intermediate School Fields (BOE)	Open Space - Center City	1.3
1706	1	OC Community Center	Open Space - Center City	1.4
1706	2	OC Community Center	Open Space - Center City	1.4
500	1.02	Carey Field	Open Space - North End	4.6
12	2	North Street Playground	Open Space - North End	1.1
500	1.02	5th Street & Beach Volleyball	Open Space - North End	1.2
215	3	Bayfront Park and Marina (2nd and Bay)	Open Space - North End	0.28
215	4	Bayfront Park and Marina (2nd and Bay)	Open Space - North End	0.38
4405	1	Cape May County Dog Park (45th Street)	Open Space - South End	1.32
4405	2	Cape May County Dog Park (45th Street)	Open Space - South End	1.32
Total Acres (Gross)				81.63
Cape May County Acres				-15.65
Ocean City BOE				-6.5
Ocean City Acres (Net)				59.48



REFERENCES

- ⁱ Conservation Plan Element, Environmental Resources and Recreation Inventory, June 10, 2009, https://imageserv11.team-logic.com/mediaLibrary/242/OC_CONSERVATION_PLAN_ELEMENT-2009.pdf
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