

VIII. PARKS AND RECREATION

The City of Cortland is fortunate in that it has a wide variety of open spaces and parks that serve both City residents as well as much of the population of nearby communities. These are detailed below.

MUNICIPAL FACILITIES

The City's parks and recreational facilities fall under the jurisdiction of the City's Youth Bureau and Department of Public Works (DPW). Each facility is owned, operated and maintained by the City, with all of them being open to the public year-round, as weather permits. Certain amenities are limited to summer use only, such as swimming areas. The location of these parks and facilities is indicated on the Map 15 and each is detailed below.

Beaudry Park (Scammell Street) - This park consists of more than 10 acres, is located in the southern portion of the City, and borders the Town of Cortlandville. The park is located adjacent to what is primarily a residential area, with some commercial properties nearby. The existing park building is in poor condition and is slated for rehabilitation. The pavilion is also in need of repair. Within the park are the following features and spaces.

- Open space with baseball (1) and softball fields (2) with backstops
- Asphalt surfaced basketball courts (2)
- Playground (1)
- Picnic pavilion (1)
- Structure with office and bathrooms (1)
- Hillside serves as a sledding and tubing area in winter

Suggett Park (Homer Avenue and Madison Street) - This park contains 17.50 acres and is located in the northwest portion of the City. The park is located adjacent to a primarily residential area, with some small scale commercial properties nearby. It is also located immediately adjacent to Parker Elementary School, and is two blocks south of the Cortland Regional Medical Center. The park's Wickwire Pool is in poor condition and significant and costly rehabilitation is needed in order for the pool to continue to remain open to the public. In 2010, the Town of Cortlandville provided \$14,000 to undertake needed repairs as a "band-aid" approach. This park contains the following:



- Swimming pool with changing facility (1)
- Splash pool (now closed)
- Playground (1)
- Asphalt surfaced basketball courts (2)
- Open space with softball fields (2) with backstops
- Birch Building with office, recreation space, and bathrooms
- Semi-enclosed picnic pavilion (1)

Randall Park (Randall Street) - The park is located immediately adjacent to Randall Elementary School and contains six acres of space. It is in the south-central portion of the City and is flanked by a residential area, the school and a manufacturing facility. Within the park are the following amenities:

- Lighted tennis courts (4)
- Playground (1)
- Structure with bathrooms (1)
- Open space with softball field (1) with backstop

Dexter Park (Elm Street) - This park contains approximately six acres and is located in the eastern end of the City, with one side bordering River Street. The park is surrounded by residential and small scale commercial development. City Youth Bureau officials have indicated that the park is poorly designed and is in need of a master plan to improve its functionality. The park's recreation building is currently in need of major renovations, including a new roof. This building has been identified as a possible location for the City's East End Community Center, which had rental space in a privately owned building on Elm Street. The splash pool has been closed because it did not meet State Health Department standards. The park hosts the community's small fry football program, and was the location of a new farmer's market in the summer of 2009. This was very successful and will continue on a year-to-year agreement basis. The following facilities and uses are located in the park.



- Asphalt basketball court (1)
- Playground (1)
- Splash pool (1) (now closed)
- Structure with office, storage, and bathrooms
- Open space with softball field (1)
- Tennis courts (2)
- Small picnic pavilion (1)



Yaman Park (Kennedy Parkway) - This park contains 17 acres and provides the most unique setting of all the parks due to its location. Tucked into the northeast corner of the City, the eastern boundary of the park is the Tioughnioga River. The park is located adjacent to a residential area, with some professional offices to the west and Interstate 81 to the south. The park features include the following.

- Manmade lake with beach and swimming area with bathhouse
- Concession stand (1)
- Picnic pavilions (3)
- Individual cabana-style picnic pavilions with grills (11)
- Playground (1)
- Asphalt surfaced basketball court (1/2)
- Fenced skateboard park (1)
- Gazebo (1)
- Cartop boat launch (1)
- River shoreline for fishing

Courthouse Park (Church Street and Greenbush Street) -

This park is the smallest and consists of approximately 2.5 acres. The park, partly owned by Cortland County, is located in the center of the City and borders the downtown. The park is located adjacent to the County Courthouse and is surrounded primarily by governmental offices. It is maintained by the City via an intermunicipal agreement with Cortland County. Courthouse Park is the site of many community cultural events, such as the Pumpkinfest, Celtic Festival, and summer music series, to name a few. This park is the most passive of City parks, and provides the following:



- Open lawn with benches and trees
- Fountain with benches
- Historical Monuments
- Veteran's Memorial

Ted Testa Park (Starr Road, Town of Cortlandville) – This is not a City-owned park, but was developed by the Town of Cortlandville with significant input and cooperation from the City. It is managed by the City's Youth Bureau via an intermunicipal agreement. Phase 1 development of the 16-acre park began in 2006 and is now complete. A funding search for Phase 2 is underway and will include picnic facilities, walking paths, and landscaping. Sited on a hill just south of the City, the park currently includes the following amenities:

- Regulation Little League fields (2)
- Multi-purpose soccer/softball/Lacrosse fields (2)
- Softball field (1)
- Restrooms (2)



NON-MUNICIPAL FACILITIES

Although the City owns and operates a number of parks and recreational facilities, a number of amenities available to the public are owned and operated by entities other than the City of Cortland. These include, but are not necessarily limited to, the following:

- Cortland City Schools: various playgrounds, playing fields, basketball courts, and similar amenities, including indoor facilities such as gymnasiums.
- SUNY Cortland: numerous indoor and outdoor facilities.
- J.M. McDonald Sports Complex: Indoor turf fields, ice skating/hockey, and work-out facilities.
- YWCA: Playground, indoor swimming pool, gymnasium, and other indoor recreation.
- YMCA: Playground, indoor swimming pool, gymnasium, work-out facilities, and other indoor recreation.
- Millennium Bike Route: Signed route from Yaman Park to Lime Hollow Nature Center via Clinton, North Church, Grant, North Main, Madison, and Floral Streets, Broadway, Tompkins Street, and McLean Road.

There are also four 18-hole golf courses located just outside the City, as well as three ski resorts within a short driving distance. Unfortunately, Cortland County is one of only a few counties that does not have a State Park.

CONDITION, USE, and ADEQUACY

An inventory of existing facilities is essential in understanding and documenting the adequacy of available recreation and open space within the City of Cortland. The adequacy of parkland and open space in a given jurisdiction is calculated based upon the population. Both the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (AAHPERD) recommend a ratio of approximately one acre of parks and open space per 100 persons. Applying this standard to Cortland (2000 Census population of 18,740), the City should offer over 180 acres of parks and open space. The total cumulative acreage noted for the facilities detailed above, is only 75.0 acres. As detailed, there are other facilities serving City residents, but the NRPA recommendation is strictly limited to property dedicated to municipal recreation, and not school/college facilities and land. Accordingly, the City should have additional acres of parkland in order to meet national standards.

The overall condition of City parks is only fair. While routine maintenance is good, some park facilities are aging and in need of repair, replacement, or removal. It is essential that these fields, courts, and structures be in good condition, attractive, and well maintained so as to insure a positive public image, minimize risks, and maximize usage. Due to the associated nature and risks, some facilities require special attention and, often, additional funding. This is particularly true for swimming facilities as they frequently require more attention, and consequently, more expense to meet State and federal safety standards. Currently, Wickwire Pool is in need of



significant improvements in order to remain open and the splash pools are closed. To a certain degree, the same is true for playgrounds where the age and safety of the playground equipment is always a concern. With strict standards now in place for all new equipment, all of the existing equipment and facilities should be routinely evaluated to insure their safe usage.

It is apparent that all of the City parks maintain a strong identity within the community. There are three key factors that must be considered during any planning effort so as to ensure that this identity remains strong. They are:

Maintenance and Preservation - As mentioned earlier, the continued utilization of existing parks and open spaces will only be ensured if they are well maintained and provide the amenities desired by the community. By maintaining and improving these facilities, their full potential can be realized.

Present and Future Use - While the existing parks and open spaces experience significant usage, it is important to continually reevaluate recreational preferences and seek out all opportunities to maximize their potential. It is strongly recommended that the City acquire additional appropriate parkland, if and when available. With additional land and expanded facilities, the City can broaden the scope of programs, events and activities that it offers to the community at large (see also page 98). The City must continue to evaluate, maintain, and preserve its facilities so that they remain available in the future.

Connectivity to Other Assets and Activities - Connectivity of open space and parkland focuses on the broader view of the interrelationship between the various spaces and activities that take place in the area. Pedestrian links to the downtown and other recreational opportunities that may develop are essential.

RECREATION PROGRAMS

The City's Youth Bureau operates City recreation programs, in addition to management of the City's parks. The Cortland Youth Bureau, established in 1946, was the first youth bureau in New York State. This is testament to the City's long history of providing a high level of services, programs, and facilities. The Bureau also provides recreation for other municipalities via intermunicipal agreements. Its mission is to provide the community the opportunity to participate in a wide variety of recreational and educational programs. There is a large menu of offerings, with many organized sports for youth and adults, music, theater, arts, community gardening, social events, and more. The Bureau also runs the Cortland Youth Center on Port Watson Street. The variety and quality of the programs and services offered by the Bureau is excellent, although ever-tighter budgets are a continual threat to quality services. The City must remain aware that recreational opportunities and programs should be provided to all, including adults and senior citizens.



FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

As noted, the use of the Cortland parks is quite extensive and they appear to serve the community very well. Nevertheless, the City is lacking in overall acreage of parkland and opportunities for growth should be explored. The City must also consider alternative forms of recreational opportunities that meet the changing needs of its citizens and serve all segments of the population. Several opportunities include:

Tioughnioga River Trail - The possible development of the proposed River Trail project (See Section X. *Transportation*) would enhance and expand the recreational opportunities within Cortland significantly. The trail as designed would run from the Village of Homer southward along the River to Yaman Park in the City. The trail as designed would offer a range of uses (biking, walking, running, observing, etc.) that appeal to all ages and would be available to all segments of the population. The owner of Riverside Plaza has already constructed a portion of a gravel trail along that property where the Tioughnioga River Trail would run.



The trail is being developed by Cortland County. Approximately 75% of the project is funded via several grants. At this juncture, the project is dormant, and the County appears reluctant to move its development forward. Facilities like this are growing in popularity, and provide the type of recreational resource desired by today's population. Every effort should be made to continue to support and encourage the development of the Trail.

Tioughnioga Blueway Trail - The Tioughnioga River Local Waterfront Revitalization Plan proposed development of a Blueway Trail along the Tioughnioga River. A Blueway trail is a water based trail for boating use, as opposed to a land-based trail. As part of the trail development, car-top boat launches have been constructed in the Village of Marathon and in the City's Yaman Park. Although not wholly located in the City, this trail will provide an alternative recreational opportunity to City residents, and will help to draw tourists to the region. The City should continue to support its development and use.

Greenway/Linear Park – As detailed above, the City has a lack of parkland as compared to national averages. Rather than developing another large multi-acre park, the City should develop a linear park or greenway that would connect Beaudry Park in the City's south end to Dexter Park in the east end, to Yaman Park in the north. (see Map 16 following) A greenway or linear park is simply a park that is much longer than its width. The greenway could follow, more or less, an existing abandoned railroad right of way, and would vary in width according to existing development and available land. Depending on development rights, the greenway may not be continuous. In addition to an off-road pathway that would connect the various points, the greenway could accommodate playgrounds, community gardens (see below), exercise trails, sculpture gardens, picnic facilities and other amenities. Portions of the greenway may be



“urban” and heavily developed, while others may be naturalistic and relatively undeveloped. Plans for a prototypical greenway segment are included at the end of this Section.

The greenway would run through several of the City’s struggling neighborhoods. Studies have shown that property values increase in neighborhoods served by trails and greenways, so development would aid in revitalizing these neighborhoods. For example, the development of the High-line, a raised linear park in New York City, has spurred significant development interest in adjacent buildings. Due to costs, land ownership issues, and other factors, the City should create a master plan for development of the greenway, and develop the facilities over time as funding and land is available.

Community Gardens - The City of Cortland has two Community Gardens, one in the South End, organized by the Youth Bureau, and one at Barry Elementary School. As more people raise their ecological consciousness, become interested in purchasing organic produce, or grow their own food out of desire or economic need, the need for Community Gardens becomes more acute. Aside from the notion of creating a more sustainable community, Community Gardens serve a greater purpose than growing flowers or vegetables. In addition to the garden itself, a Community Garden can include other features such as places of quiet reflection or places where children can rock climb. Community Gardens can beautify neighborhoods, provide opportunities for intergenerational and cross-cultural connections, and create a living space for recreation, exercise, and education. A Community Garden can be the centerpiece or starting point of a community’s sustainability initiative, as well as becoming a focal point for community development and social interaction. A Community Garden can be one community plot, or it can be many individual plots. It can be located at a school, hospital, or in a neighborhood. There are endless varieties of Community Gardens (*see also Section II. Natural Resources*).



Emerging Trends – The recreation needs of a community are not static. For instance, skateboard parks were rare 20 years ago, but have now become commonplace, as interest in that sport has increased. The public demand for multi-use trails has grown immensely in recent years. Demographic shifts, like increasing renter populations, increase interest in amenities like community gardens or dog parks. The growing older population will increase the need for senior recreation facilities and programs, as well as handicapped accessible facilities. The City also has limited winter use facilities such as a skating rink.

The City must remain cognizant of emerging trends in order to ensure that its recreation facilities and programs meet the changing demands of its residents. It should work to find creative and cost effective solutions to provide the amenities that its citizens desire, and should be willing to retire facilities that have a declining demand.



GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES

GOAL 36: Identify underutilized spaces and facilities that have the potential to create additional and/or improved recreational opportunities for all age groups.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Develop and maintain a current inventory and database of all facilities, open spaces, and programs.
- B) Review and assess inventories on an annual basis to insure full coverage of all interests and ages.
- C) Regularly assess needs and match with City, School District, College or other nearby municipal facilities that could be utilized.
- D) Add additional facilities in existing parks, such walking path loops, exercise trails, dog parks, and community gardens.
- E) Exhibit sculpture and other art forms in public spaces, particularly in the downtown.
- F) Investigate the development of an outside skating rink, perhaps in Courthouse Park.
- G) Increase usage, understanding, and learning about the Tioughnioga River.

GOAL 37: Provide facilities that are safe, clean and well-maintained.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Identify all safety, cleanliness, and general maintenance concerns. Issues should include playground equipment types, dangerous or failing structures, un-mowed areas, deteriorating swimming pools, handicapped accessibility, poor lighting conducive to misbehavior, litter, etc.
- B) Review responsibilities and budget constraints to address these issues and establish a long-term maintenance plan.
- C) For specialized issues (playground safety, accessible surfacing, and slopes, etc.), ensure that all staff has appropriate information and training.
- D) Seek grant funding for park renovations and upgrades where appropriate.



GOAL 38: Increase the amount of parkland in the City.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Consider all land types for additional recreation facilities, such as brownfields, tax foreclosed properties, floodplain areas, and estate donations, to develop small open space or recreation facilities in close proximity to neighborhoods.
- B) Consider land contiguous to existing parks to expand such parks.
- C) Develop a multi-use greenway/linear park stretching from Beaudry Park in the South End to Yaman Park in the East End and continuing to the Tioughnioga River via old railroad right-of-ways and other available land.
- D) Maintain existing, and develop new, partnerships with other municipalities, the J.M. McDonald Center, local school districts, and SUNY Cortland to utilize recreational facilities.

GOAL 39: Remain current with meeting the needs of the public and provide facilities and programs to meet those needs.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Continue to conduct periodic needs assessments with the assistance of SUNY Cortland's Recreation, Arts, Sociology, and other departments.
- B) Evaluate programs and participation levels to anticipate and meet changing trends.
- C) Periodically review fees to perpetuate future programs and facility maintenance.

GOAL 40: Support and promote the development of school and/or community gardens, which will not only educate but also promote health and wellness.

IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES:

- A) Investigate all legal and/or Ag & Markets issues related to community gardens to understand the possibilities and limits.
- B) Provide input and assistance for locating sites for community gardens including City properties that are underutilized.
- C) Coordinate with the schools to insure continuity during the summer months when school is not in session.
- D) Seek grant funding to establish community gardens.

