



# Recreation

Recreational amenities are important parts of life in York. Offerings include the Atlantic Ocean with its beaches and coastline, fishing and boating in the York River, parks and walking paths in town, and the trail systems and nature preserves of the forest lands surrounding Mt. Agamenticus. In addition, the Town offers recreational programming for various age groups, and golf, tennis, pickleball and other pursuits are available at both public and private venues. The preservation and expansion of recreational opportunities for future generations has historically been a priority in York and remains one today. Trends such as changes in population, capacity of Town-owned facilities, and balancing different, sometimes conflicting, uses at these sites will all need to be considered in planning for the future of these resources in York.

## This topic includes...

- Existing recreational facilities and programs
- Land and water recreation areas
- Other facilities and partnerships
- Recreation needs and recent/planned improvements
- Climate change impacts
- What the community said
- Key takeaways



## Existing Recreational Facilities and Programs

### York Parks & Recreation

Many of York's recreational resources are managed by the Town's Parks & Recreation Department, which operates out of the Grant House at Goodrich Park. The responsibilities of York's Parks & Recreation Department include operations and maintenance of public buildings, grounds, parks, beaches, and recreation facilities as well as school and community athletic fields and green spaces (Fig. 1). The Department's role in the maintenance of public facilities has increased over time as it has assumed tasks previously performed by the Highway Department, School Department, and private contractors.<sup>1</sup> The Department is also responsible for providing lifeguards at the beaches and services such as weekly water testing in coordination with the Maine Healthy Beaches (MHB) program.

### Parks & Recreation Board

The mission of the Parks and Recreation Board is to assist the Parks and Recreation Department in fostering community participation and improving the quality of life for citizens of all ages, by providing safe recreational facilities and programs, leisure time opportunities, and park development that will enhance the health, happiness, and morale of the citizens.<sup>2</sup>

### Mount Agamenticus Conservation Program

The Mount Agamenticus Conservation Program is run through the Parks & Recreation Department and oversees programming, trail management, and conservation efforts at Mount A. From Memorial Day to Indigenous Peoples Day, a Learning Lodge operates on the mountain. Two part-time positions and seasonal employees do the intensive hard labor that is required to remediate trails, protect important natural resources, lead a growing workforce of volunteers, and guide an increasing number of visitors.

### Friends of Mount Agamenticus (FOMA)

The Friends of Mount Agamenticus (FOMA) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit volunteer advocacy and stewardship group for the Mount Agamenticus Conservation Program. FOMA describes their role as assisting Program staff in carrying out educational, interpretive, community outreach and public use objectives without compromising the integrity of the region's sensitive ecological habitat.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Town of York Comprehensive Plan Update Volume 1*, adopted 1999, as amended through November 6, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Parks and Recreation Advisory Board Charter, March 12, 2019, amended August 25, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Friends of Mount Agamenticus, <http://agamenticus.org/foma>



## Mount Agamenticus Steering Committee Partners

Working together with community and conservation partners, the Mount Agamenticus Steering Committee Partners develop plans and guidelines for the Mt. A region. Their mission is to protect the region's water quality and wildlife habitat while managing sustainable recreational opportunities for the general public on over 10,000 contiguous acres.

Landowners that make up the Mount Agamenticus Steering Committee include: the Towns of York and South Berwick, York Water District, Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, Great Works Regional Land Trust, and York Land Trust. The *Mt. Agamenticus Public Access and Trail Plan* was prepared for the Steering Committee in 2012 to allow the Steering Committee to implement trail and public access development projects while maintaining protection of the area's ecologically significant habitats.<sup>4</sup>



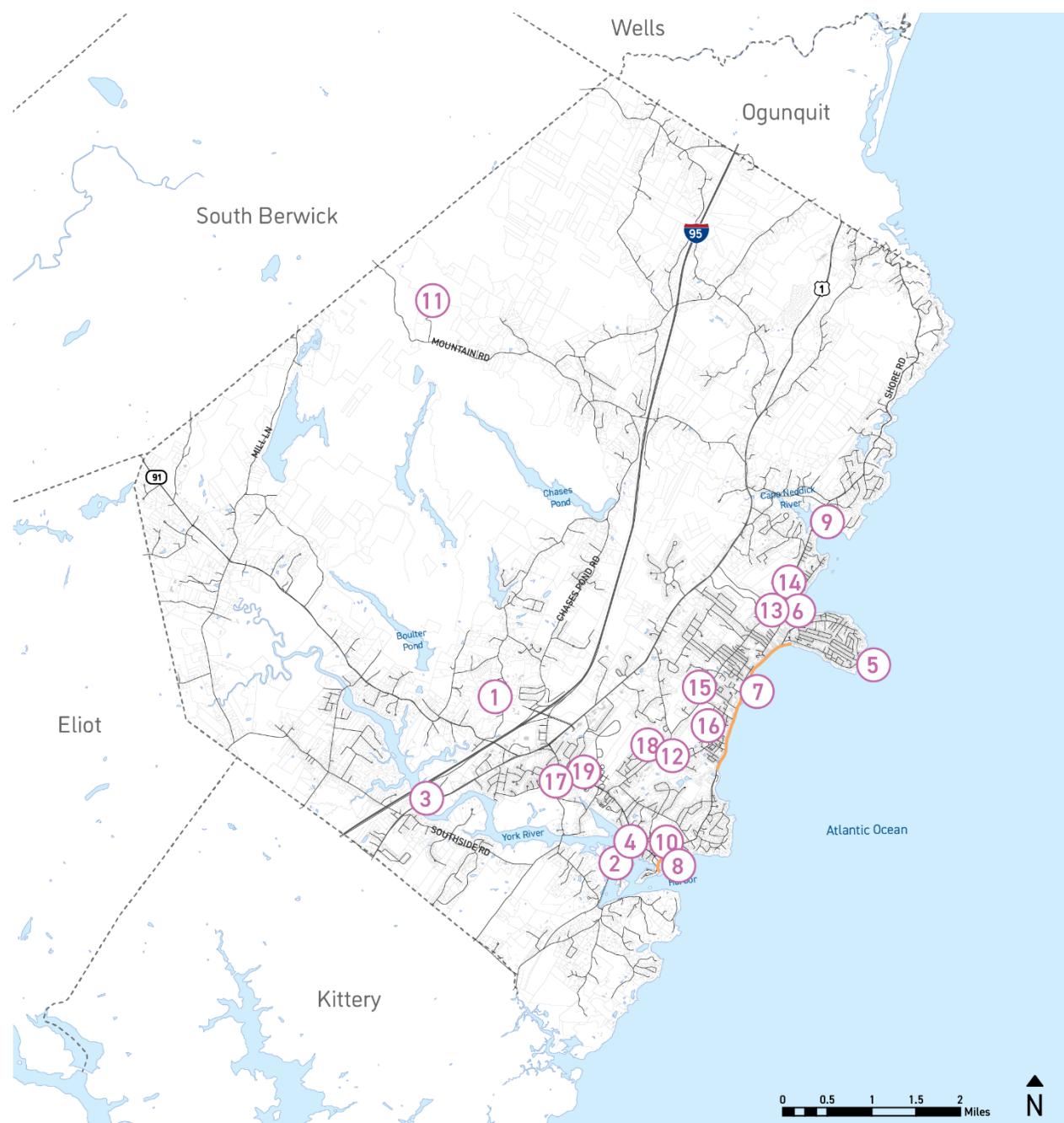
*The Learning Lodge at Mt. A*

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<sup>4</sup> *Mt Agamenticus Public Access and Trail Plan*, Prepared by SMPDC for the Mt A Steering Committee Partners, 2012.



Figure 1. York Parks & Recreation Facilities



Data Sources: Town of York OpenData, Maine Geobility, USGS National Hydrography Dataset. Map created by CivicMoxie.

① Bog Road Fields	⑧ Harbor Beach and Bath House	⑯ Smith Field (co-maintained by P&R)
② Strawberry Island (overseen & maintained by York Harbor Board)	⑨ Cape Neddick Beach	⑯ York High School (grounds maintained by P&R)
③ Goodrich Park	⑩ Hartley Mason Reserve (maintained by P&R)	⑰ York Middle School (grounds maintained by P&R)
④ Moulton Park	⑪ Mount Agamenticus and Mt. A Lodge	⑱ Coastal Ridge Elementary School (grounds maintained by P&R)
⑤ Sohier Park + Gift Shop	⑫ Town Farm & Community Gardens (overseen & maintained by community volunteers)	⑲ Village Elementary School (grounds maintained by P&R)
⑥ Ellis Park/Short Sands Beach and Bath House	⑬ York Beach Ball Field	
⑦ Long Sands Beach and Bath House	⑭ Center for Active Living	



## Land and Water Recreation Areas

Bolstered by abundant natural amenities and strong local programming, recreation in York takes many different forms and is a draw for residents and visitors alike.

### Water Access

York's four major swimming beaches (Harbor Beach, Long Sands Beach, Short Sands Beach, and Cape Neddick Beach) provide access to the Atlantic Ocean and there are six public boat launches for access to the York River and York Harbor.

### Beaches

York is home to four major swimming beaches: Cape Neddick Beach, Short Sands Beach, Long Sands Beach, and York Harbor Beach (Table 1). The Town of York Parks & Recreation Department serves as the steward of York's beaches and has recently implemented changes including additional lifeguard stations and carry-in/carry-out trash policies. Long Sands Beach is a busy tourist attraction from mid-June through Labor Day and gets as many as 3,000 – 5,000 visitors daily.<sup>5</sup> Historically, the larger Long Sands and Short Sands beaches have attracted more visitors during the summer, while Harbor and Cape Neddick have been used more frequently by residents. However, Town staff have reported that in recent years there has been an increase in non-resident visitation to Cape Neddick Beach due to pay-to-park options offered by private land owners.

Swimming at York's beaches can be impacted by high bacteria counts. The York Parks & Recreation Department performs weekly testing at the beaches in the summer months in coordination with the MHB program. Beach advisories are posted when results obtained from bacteria water quality samples exceed state and federal standards or conditions at a sample site indicate the possible presence of disease-causing organisms.<sup>6</sup> In 2020, more than 30% of monitoring tests at Cape Neddick Beach indicated bacteria levels above the state's EPA-approved safety threshold, ranking the Cape Neddick Beach as a Category 3 listing (one or more uses may be impaired).<sup>7</sup> Previous studies have identified that rainfall and runoff appear to be major contributors to bacteria exceedances and have identified particular challenges in the Cape Neddick River watershed from pet and animal waste and failing septic systems.<sup>8</sup> Precautionary rainfall advisories are posted if a beach receives more than 1.5 inches of rainfall in the past 48 hours, or, at the Cape Neddick Beach, more than one inch in the past 24 hours.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.yorkparksandrec.org/attractions/beaches/>

<sup>6</sup> Town of York Parks & Recreation website, <https://www.yorkparksandrec.org>

<sup>7</sup> 2018/2020/2022 Integrated Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Report Appendices, January 19, 2022 [https://www.maine.gov/dep/water/monitoring/305b/2022/2018-22\\_ME\\_IntegratedRpt-LIST-DRAFT.pdf](https://www.maine.gov/dep/water/monitoring/305b/2022/2018-22_ME_IntegratedRpt-LIST-DRAFT.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> FB Environmental, *Cape Neddick River Watershed Based Management Plan*, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> UNH, *Site-specific Precautionary Rainfall Advisory Framework for York, Maine Beaches*, April 2015 and coordination with Town of York Parks & Recreation Department.



More information on water quality can be found in Appendix A3: Natural Resources Current Conditions.



*York Harbor Beach*

**Table 1. York Public Beaches**

<b>Beach</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Associated Facilities &amp; Parking<sup>10</sup></b>
<i>Long Sands Beach</i> 1.5 miles of mostly sandy beach with some tide pools and rocky areas. Popular activities include swimming, sunbathing, volleyball, and surfing.	Privately Owned Town owns bathhouse area.	Seasonal public restrooms. Metered parking is available along Long Beach Avenue. Resident permit parking is allowed in metered spaces from Libby's Campground to Nubble Road. Handicapped parking and access ramps are located near the bathhouse.
<i>Short Sands Beach and Ellis Park</i> 0.25 miles long and located within Ellis Park. The Ellis Park trustees schedule free concerts and entertainment in the park through the summer.	Town of York. Gifted to the Town in the 1800s and is managed by a Board of Trustees known as the Ellis Park Committee. While the Committee has oversight, the Town has a shared responsibility to manage and maintain park facilities.	Seasonal public restrooms, lifeguards, metered parking, a playground, basketball courts, large grassy area, gazebo, covered bandstand, and a promenade walkway along beach.
<i>Harbor Beach</i> Located a short walk from Hartley Mason Park and the Cliff Walk path, Harbor Beach is a family-oriented beach with a high local population.	Privately Owned. There is a 2018 Memorandum of Understanding formalizing the relationship with the Town to preserve public access.	Seasonal public restrooms. Limited parking here requires a resident permit parking sticker. Two-hour parking spaces along Route 1A.
<i>Cape Neddick Beach</i> The smallest of York's beaches, Cape Neddick Beach is located at the mouth of the Cape Neddick River.	Privately owned. Available for public use through a tacit agreement between 3-4 property owners.	No bathroom facilities available. Town staff report that pay-to-park opportunities have increasingly been offered by private land owners in recent years.

*Source: information compiled from Town of York staff and Town website, Parks and Recreation website, Town of York Inventory of Certain Town Properties, Easements, Monuments and Partnerships, January 2, 2019.*

<sup>10</sup> Parking meters are in effect from May 15<sup>th</sup> through October 15<sup>th</sup> from 8:00 am until 10:00 pm annually. Carry-in/carry-out policies started in 2020; there are no trash receptacles at the beaches.



## Surface Water Recreation

### York River & Harbor

Both motorized and non-motorized boating activities are allowed on the York River, along with paddle boards, canoes, and kayaks. Flotation devices such as rafts and tubes are prohibited from the river, as are personal watercrafts, such as jet skis. The York River provides excellent fishing for striped bass, bluefish, and flounder (saltwater fishing requires a license and there are size and quantity limits to fish).<sup>11</sup> Fishing from bridges is allowed except over the boat channel.

The Town of York's system of moorings and slips in the river provides seasonal sites for nearly 500 boats (315 moorings and 158 boats on docks, slips, or dry storage, as of 2019), the majority of which are recreational in use.<sup>12</sup> These moorings and slips are in high demand with a long wait list through the Town.<sup>13</sup> Natural constraints limit the number of moorings that can be located in the York River. There are 45 docks on record from the mouth of the York River to the Scotland Bridge area.<sup>14</sup> Existing regulations in the Shoreland Zoning Ordinance and Harbor Ordinance are very restrictive and allow for very limited dock development on the river.<sup>15</sup> More information on docks and marine access can be found in Appendix A4: Marine Resources Current Conditions.

York depends on its harbor located at the mouth of the York River to support its commercial fishing industry and recreational boating. The harbor regularly silts (becomes filled with material from runoff and upriver activities and deposited as sediment) and maintenance dredging is a critical issue to enable its on-going use. Recreational demand in the harbor has created parking and mooring capacity challenges and the use of recreational boats, particularly paddlecraft, has created public safety challenges and conflicts with commercial fishing operations.<sup>16</sup>

### Cape Neddick River

The Cape Neddick River and the beach at the mouth of the river are used for swimming, boating, fishing and other forms of recreation. Bacteria counts, particularly after rain events, have been a concern for recreational use. The Town, in tandem with the grassroots organization, Cape Neddick River Association, has been working to identify and mitigate

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<sup>11</sup> York Harbor website, <http://www.yorkharbor.org/discover.html>

<sup>12</sup> GEI Consultants, Inc, *York Harbor & River Capacity Study*, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> York River Study Committee, *York River Watershed Stewardship Plan*, 2018.

<sup>15</sup> GEI Consultants, Inc, *York Harbor & River Capacity Study*, 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.



sources of contamination. Key issues being addressed include pet waste, geese deterrents, and regulated septic system pumping and maintenance.<sup>17</sup>

#### Scituate Pond

Located among the York and Kittery Water Districts' ponds, Scituate Pond (41 acres) is one of the few in the area that has remained open to anglers and is frequented for fishing. Parking is very limited. Non-motorized boating, swimming, and fishing are permitted.<sup>18</sup>

#### Lake Carolyn

Lake Carolyn is a 14-acre pond with opportunities for passive recreation. The Town owns the Lake and most of the shore frontage as well as three properties in very close proximity, and the York Land Trust owns two other pieces of land. As identified in a recent property and facilities inventory report, there may be an opportunity for unified planning and management of all these properties.<sup>19</sup>

#### Seabury Gut

Mud flats in this area are popular for recreational clamping.

### Public Boat Launches

There are six public boat launches for access to the York River and Harbor (Table 2).

**Table 2. Public Boat Launches in the York River and Harbor**

Boat Launch	Launch Type	Associated Facilities
Town Dock 1	Town dock	Approximately 12 parking spaces restricted to commercial fishermen. Two marked 15 min parking spaces. Portable toilet available.
Town Dock 2	Town dock	Harbormaster's shed is located here. Approximately 40 parking spaces along Harris Island Road.
Strawberry Island	Carry-in access for canoes, kayaks, other non-motorized boats during the summer	Launch site located between Town Docks 1 and 2 on Harris Island Road. Approximately 21 parking spaces along Harris Island Road. Dingy/Tender storage is located on the beach.
Scotland Bridge Boat Launch	Ramp access for small non-motorized and motorized boats	Gravel, public launch area next to Scotland Bridge, which sits at the upper end of the York River. Limited parking (approximately seven spaces, not delineated).
Rices Bridge Boat Ramp	Ramp access for small non-motorized and motorized boats	Narrow ramp allows for limited trailered launching. Located off the U.S. Route 1 York River Bridge almost directly across from the Grant House/Goodrich Park. Limited parking is available along U.S. Route 1 (15-16 spaces, not delineated).
Route 103 Kayak Launch	Carry-in access for canoes, kayaks, other paddle craft launching	New walkway and kayak landing installed adjacent to Route 103 in 2018, just 0.1 mile to the north of Strawberry Island. Limited parking (14 permit spaces).

*Source: information compiled from Town of York staff and Town website, Parks and Recreation website, GEI Consultants, Inc, York Harbor & River Capacity Study, 2019, State of Maine Lake Surveys, [https://www.maine.gov/ifw/docs/lake-survey-maps/york/scituate\\_pond.pdf](https://www.maine.gov/ifw/docs/lake-survey-maps/york/scituate_pond.pdf).*

<sup>17</sup> Town of York website, Cape Neddick River <https://www.yorkmaine.org/174/Cape-Neddick-River>

<sup>18</sup> State of Maine Lake Surveys, [https://www.maine.gov/ifw/docs/lake-survey-maps/york/scituate\\_pond.pdf](https://www.maine.gov/ifw/docs/lake-survey-maps/york/scituate_pond.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> Town of York, Property and Facilities Inventory, "Lake Carolyn", July 2021.



Town Dock #1

## Visual Access

Visual access to the coast is widely available. York also has six waterfront parks that offer public views of the York River, coast and Atlantic Ocean: Hartley Mason Reserve, Sohier Park, Ellis Park, Goodrich Park, Steedman Woods, and Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge.

Many people view the ocean and tidal waters from public roads, including:<sup>20</sup>

- Route 1A, which runs along Long Sands and Short Sands beaches, is the most traveled and has a sidewalk for pedestrian views
- Shore Road, which connects York Beach with Ogunquit to the north, follows the coast and has several significant vantage points
- Cider Hill Road (Maine Route 91) and Birch Hill Road have magnificent views of the tidal marshes near the headwaters of the York River.
- The Fishermen's Walk and Cliff Walk are public walkways that begin in Steedman Woods and follow the York River downstream to Harbor Beach and the Hartley Mason Reserve (Fisherman's Walk), and then follow the rocky coastline for 0.5 mile (Cliff Walk). Walkers on this path have spectacular views of the river and ocean.
- From the summit and trails of Mt. A, one can have a broad view of the Atlantic Ocean following the coastline from Cape Porpoise to Portsmouth, with vistas of Boon Island, the Isles of Shoals, Cape Ann and more. From this vantage point one can spot local landmarks such as Cape Neddick Peninsula and inland ponds as well as distant mountains, including the White Mountains and its iconic Mt. Washington. This view is preserved through shrubland management which takes intensive annual labor efforts.

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<sup>20</sup> List from Town of York Comprehensive Plan Natural Resources Chapter, Adopted 2006 as amended through 2013.



## Access Limitations

Public access along the York River and Harbor is limited due to limited numbers of parking spaces, docks, and moorings. In addition, the need to maintain the ecological health of valuable natural resources also places limitations on use. More information on water access points, including a map, can be found in Appendix A4: Marine Resources Current Conditions.



*Hartley Mason Reserve*

## Land and Trails Access

### Trails and Paths

Maintained trails in York are located at Mt. A, York Land Trust's preserves, and the lands of Kittery and York Water Districts. There are additional walking paths along the water and in Town (Table 3). A map of York's existing sidewalks, paths, and trails can be found in Appendix A8: Transportation Current Conditions.

### Mount Agamenticus Conservation Region

At 692 feet tall with 40 miles of maintained trails, thousands of acres of unfragmented forest, and scenic views, Mount Agamenticus and surrounding lands are a recreational destination for over 50,000 area residents and regional visitors annually.<sup>21</sup> Trails allow for hiking, mountain biking, skiing, and snowshoeing, with select trails open to equestrians and ATV riders. A regional Steering Committee made up of representatives of the Towns of York and South Berwick, York Water District, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife, Great

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<sup>21</sup> Correspondence with Town of York Parks & Recreation Department



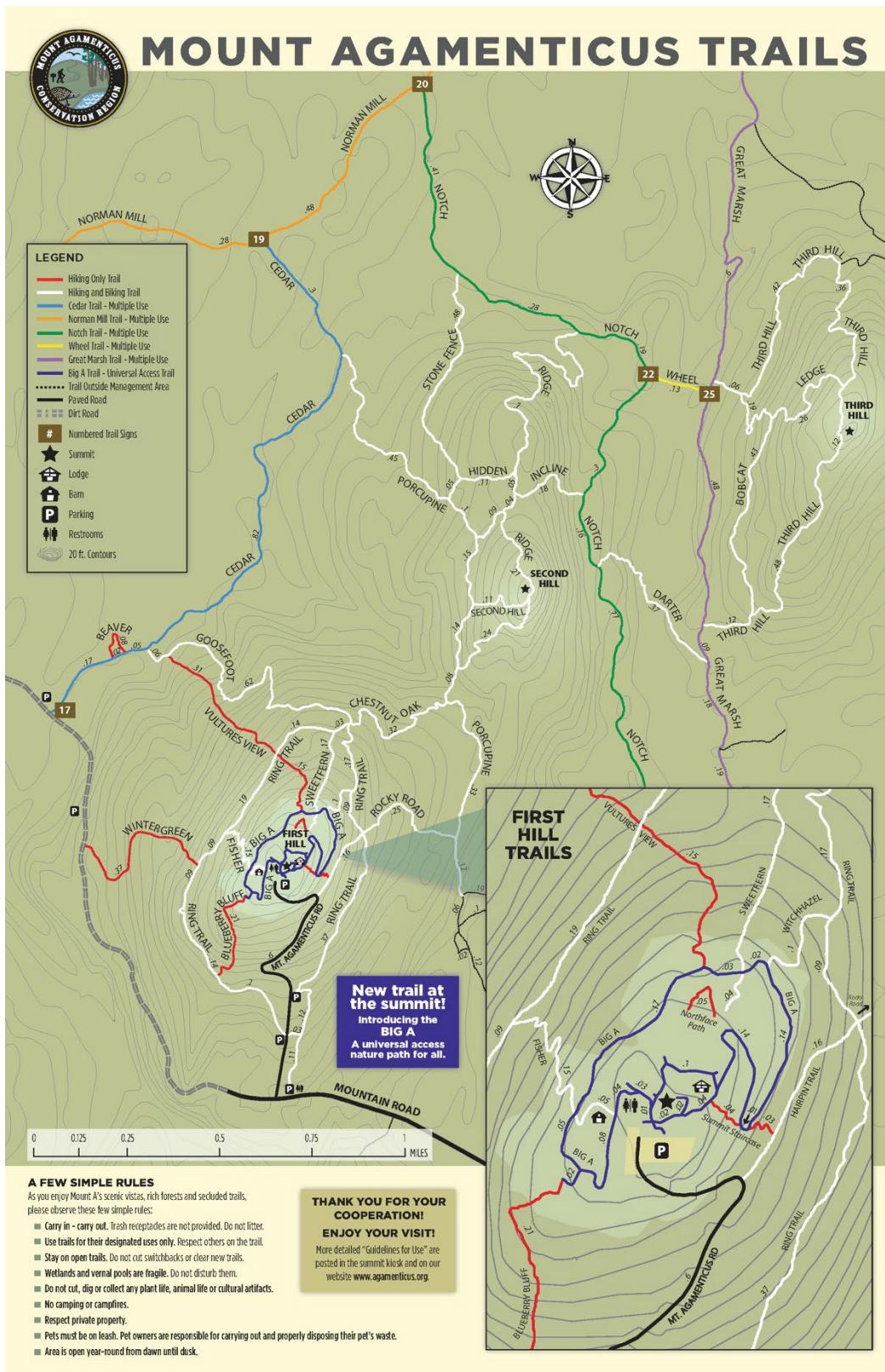
Works Regional Land Trust, and the York Land Trust strives to maintain safe, responsible, and enjoyable public access to trail systems without compromising the integrity of the area's ecologically significant habitat. The Universal Access Trail ("Big A Trail") was completed in 2016 and is intended to provide access to this recreational amenity for everyone, including people in wheelchairs and families with strollers, trail runners and birders, toddlers, and seniors. The trail system includes free but limited parking at the summit, base, and at some trail heads. Portable toilets (portalets) provide restroom facilities at the summit and base. Expanded, safe, off-street parking and improved restroom facilities are being added this year through a joint project between the Town and the York Water District. The project, which was granted final site plan approval by the York Planning Board in February 2022 and will now go out to bid for a construction contractor, aims to improve public safety, traffic flow, public restrooms, and parking. Voters approved \$1.2 million to fund the project in July 2020. The Selectboard will determine any future access fee.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Camille Fine, *Portsmouth Herald*, "York's Mount Agamenticus parking, facility upgrades approved. Fees to be added, too," February 28, 2022.



Figure 2. Mount Agamenticus Trail Map



Source: <http://agamenticus.org>



## York Land Trust Lands

The York Land Trust (YLT) manages six preserves, as well as the lands around its headquarters, that are open for public access and recreation:

- Highland Land Preserve
- Hilton-Winn Preserve
- McIntire Highlands Preserve
- McFeely Preserve
- Fuller Forest Preserve
- Smelt Brook Preserve
- York Land Trust Headquarters

The YLT generally limits recreational use to existing trails and allows hiking, nature viewing, skiing, and snow shoeing; the YLT does not allow motorized vehicles. Hunting is allowed on many of the Trust's larger preserves with a permit.<sup>23</sup>



*Trail signs at Highland Farm Preserve*

## Water District Lands

There are extensive trail networks within the land owned by the York Water District (YWD) and Kittery Water District (KWD) surrounding their water supplies. The water districts allow use of the trails for hiking, biking, and skiing, and by all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) by permit. Use

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<sup>23</sup> York Land Trust, <https://yorklandtrust.org/explore/>



is limited to trails only and no recreational uses are allowed on the water supply ponds. Hunting is allowed on the Districts' lands. The Watershed ATV Permit is available and only issued to residents of the towns and areas that are served by the Kittery and York Water Districts. The YWD maintains "Rules of Use" signs that list what is expected on their property and recreational activities are enforced by the YWD's Watershed Patrol Program. The YWD and the York Police Department partnered to train a YWD employee to become a part-time officer and patrol the water district areas. The patrol officer has taken on additional responsibilities to patrol the KWD lands and the greater Mt. A conservation area. The YWD reports that in recent years there has been more passive recreation, fewer ATVs, and the overall number of hunters has declined.<sup>24</sup>

### Cliff Walk + Fisherman's Walk

Fisherman's Walk and the Cliff Walk provide scenic walking trails along the coast. These trails are for pedestrian use only. The Cliff Walk and Fisherman's Walk are made up of a series of easements across private properties. Loss of access to the path along certain properties has shortened the length of the Cliff Walk by about half its former length and reduced access points to the trail. Located directly along the coast, the Cliff Walk and Fisherman's Walk face additional risks from the impacts of sea level rise.



*Left: Portion of the Cliff Walk, Right: Sign along the Cliff Walk*

### Steedman Woods

Steedman Woods is a 17-acre area that includes scenic walking trails along the York River and is owned by the Old York Historical Society. The area includes walking paths on the west end

<sup>24</sup> Correspondence with York Water District, Summer 2021.



of Wiggly Bridge and forms the southerly end of Fisherman's Walk. The Wiggly Bridge and Causeway connect the public paths in Steedman Woods to Fisherman's Walk.

### Village Trails

There are a number of informal trails in York Village that offer opportunities for recreation but could be better utilized. This includes trail networks on land controlled by the First Parish Church, York Housing Authority, and York School Department. Trails that are part of the upcoming Davis Property/McIntire Woods development would become part of this village system. Village connections were identified in the 2017 *Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan* as priorities for trail development, particularly those connecting the elementary schools and the high school with the village center. A more connected trail system can support active transportation and recreational use. More information on the locations of these trails can be found in Appendix A8: Transportation Current Conditions.

**Table 3. York's Trails - Ownership & Associated Facilities**

Trails	Ownership	Associated Facilities
Mt. A (portions within Town of York)	Town of York, with the exception of the road and utility access, and some land at the summit (easements negotiated with YWD). Other ownership entities in York: Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, Great Works Regional Land Trust.	Limited parking at the summit, base, and at some trail heads. Portable toilets provide restroom facilities at the summit and base. Upgrades to parking and restroom facilities are underway. Access fee to be determined by the Selectboard.
Water District Lands	York Water District (YWD) and Kittery Water District (KWD)	Limited parking.
Highland Land Preserve	York Land Trust	Universal access, portable toilet, parking, viewing platform, 7 trails.
Hilton-Winn Preserve	York Land Trust	Two trails and a boardwalk through forested wetlands.
McIntire Highlands Preserve	York Land Trust	Limited parking.
Mcfeely Preserve	York Land Trust	Limited parking. Half-mile loop trail.
Fuller Forest Preserve	York Land Trust	Ample parking, more than four miles of trails.
Smelt Brook Preserve	York Land Trust	Trail accessible from Scotland Bridge boat launch.
York Land Trust Headquarters	York Land Trust	Parking, two lookout points with benches, educational signage
Fisherman's Walk/Cliff Walk	Series of Easements	Parking at Route 103 and Harbor Beach is Permit Parking.
Steedman Woods	Old York Historical Society	Parking along Route 103 has been limited primarily to permit parking only.

Source: Information compiled from Town of York staff and Town website, Parks and Recreation website, Town of York Inventory of Certain Town Properties, Easements, Monuments and Partnerships, January 2, 2019, York Land Trust website <https://yorklandtrust.org/explore>.



## Hunting and Fishing

Popular fishing spots in York include Long Sands Beach at high tide, Scituate Pond, several access points along the York River (particularly Sewell's and Scotland Bridges), Nubble Lighthouse, and the Cape Neddick River.<sup>25</sup>

Recreational shellfish harvesting of soft-shell clams is allowed in certain areas of the York River, as defined by Maine Department of Marine Resources (see Appendix A4: Marine Resources Current Conditions), on Sundays from December through April. The Town of York administers licenses in accordance with the Town of York Shellfish Ordinance.

Hunting is allowed with a permit at many of the York Land Trust's larger preserves. Hunting and trapping are allowed at Mt. A as well as on the Kittery/York Water Districts water supply land.

## Parks and Open Space

Parks and open spaces in York provide opportunities to recreate near the ocean, athletic fields and facilities, and large community parks, and smaller neighborhood parks.

**Table 4. York Parks & Open Space - Ownership and Associated Facilities (continued on next page)**

<b>Parks &amp; Open Space</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Associated Facilities &amp; Parking</b>
<i>Goodrich Park</i> Town-owned park that provides shoreline views and passive recreation along the York River. This park is also the location of the Grant House which is home to York's Parks and Recreation department.	Town of York	There is a large gravel driveway for parking, and a rough walking trail runs along the river behind the house. Public restrooms are available when Town offices located here are open.
<i>Hartley Mason Reserve</i> Four-acre seaside park with scenic views. Located adjacent to Harbor Beach, it is crossed by the Cliff Walk.	Privately held property established for perpetual public enjoyment, it is overseen by the Hartley Mason Board of Trustees.	Posted Two-Hour Parking along Route 1A/York Street.
<i>Gilman L. Moulton Park</i> Small neighborhood park that includes a large grassy area, a range of tree species, and benches. The park is located across from York's Art Association and is home to events including 'Art in the Park' and Firemen's Field Day events.	Town of York	Parking is limited.

<sup>25</sup> Chris Hayden, Seacoast Online, "Five Shore-bound Fishing Spots in York," July 23, 2014, <https://www.seacoastonline.com/article/20140723/NEWS/407230318>



Parks & Open Space	Ownership	Associated Facilities & Parking
<p><i>Sohier Park</i> Highly-visited park that serves as the gateway to the Nubble Lighthouse, a nationally-recognized attraction. Recreational activities include sightseeing, scuba diving, and fishing.</p>	Town of York	A Welcome Center houses public restrooms and a newly expanded and renovated gift shop. Sales at the gift shop support the upkeep of Sohier Park as well as the Nubble Lighthouse. Parking in the park is free and allows for tour bus and trolley visits as well.
<p><i>Bog Road Fields &amp; Benjamin Park Playground</i> Town-owned athletic fields and a playground.</p>	Town of York	Three multipurpose athletic fields, a Little League baseball field, and a playground aimed at 3-12 year olds. Free parking. Portable toilets from spring to fall.
<p><i>York Beach Ball field</i> Baseball/softball field and large grassy area, home to annual craft fairs and other events.</p>	Town of York	Baseball/softball field with two fenced dugouts, raised spectator benches and a powered concession stand with refrigerator Permit Parking and some free perimeter parking spaces surround this field with metered parking along Railroad Avenue and across the street, at an adjacent parking lot. Portable toilets available spring to fall.
<p><i>York Town Farm</i> The York Community Garden located at the York Town Farm has an estimated seven garden plots, run informally by a resident. There is no formal town process for applying.</p>	Town of York	Seven garden plots.
<p><i>Mackey Skate Park</i> On town land but not run by the Town of York. The cost is free. There are two skating areas, one is about 50 feet by 60 feet, and the other is about 50 feet by 75 feet.</p>	Town of York	There are two skating areas and a warming hut. Lights are turned on at dusk. A Dog Park is in the planning stage here.
<p><i>Smith Field</i> Located just off Ridge Road near York Beach, this field is home to York's Little League baseball teams.</p>	Privately-owned	Lighted field with two covered dugouts, a powered concession stand, practice pitching enclosure, and large, lighted dirt parking area. York Little League portable toilets located here.
<p><i>Wheeler Wildlife Refuge</i> Town-owned wildlife refuge on land donated to help facilitate dredging of York Harbor.</p>	Town of York	None.
<p><i>Rachel Carson National Wildlife Reserve</i> National refuge established in cooperation with the State of Maine to protect valuable salt marshes and estuaries.</p>	Federally-owned	Limited parking.

Source: information compiled from Town of York staff and Town website, Parks and Recreation website, Town of York Inventory of Certain Town Properties, Easements, Monuments and Partnerships, January 2, 2019.



## Creation and Management of New Open Space

### Municipal Parks Ordinance

In 2021, York voters approved a Municipal Parks Ordinance whose purpose is to define and classify Municipal Parks; establish a public process for designating Town-owned properties as Municipal Parks; determine the specific authority to manage and regulate Municipal Parks, and; ensure compliance with deed and other legal requirements as may be specified for a particular Municipal Park.<sup>26</sup> The Ordinance defines a Municipal Park as “any designated Town-owned land to be set aside or used for public purposes for active recreation, passive recreation, education, culture, open space, wildlife habitat or protection of natural beauty.” The Ordinance establishes the following categories for classification of municipal parks: Traffic Islands and Pocket Parks; Neighborhood Parks; Community Parks; Regional Parks; Wildlife Refuges; and Special Use Areas. The Ordinance establishes that all Municipal Parks shall be managed by the York Parks and Recreation Department unless otherwise specified and identifies a public process for designation of Municipal Parks, including public hearing requirements and a town vote. As of 2021, the Town of York has identified eight designated municipal parks (Table 5).



*Bog Road Recreation Complex*

**Table 5. Designated Municipal Parks (2021)**

Name	Classification	Address	Acreage	Number on Map in Fig. 3
Flower Garden	Traffic Island and Pocket Park	U.S. Route 1 and York Street	N/A	1
Bog Road Fields	Community Park	40 Bog Road	12.52	2
Goodrich Park	Community Park	220 U.S. Route 1	15.43	3
Gilman-Moulton Park	Neighborhood Park	393 York Street	1.56	4
Mount Agamenticus	Regional Park	21 Mount Agamenticus Road	218.55	5
Wheeler Wildlife Refuge	Wildlife Refuge	9 Harris Island Road	25.08	6
Long Sands Beach Bathhouse Area	Special Use Area	178 Long Beach Avenue	0.29	7
York Beach Ball Field	Community Park	18 Railroad Avenue	2.44	8

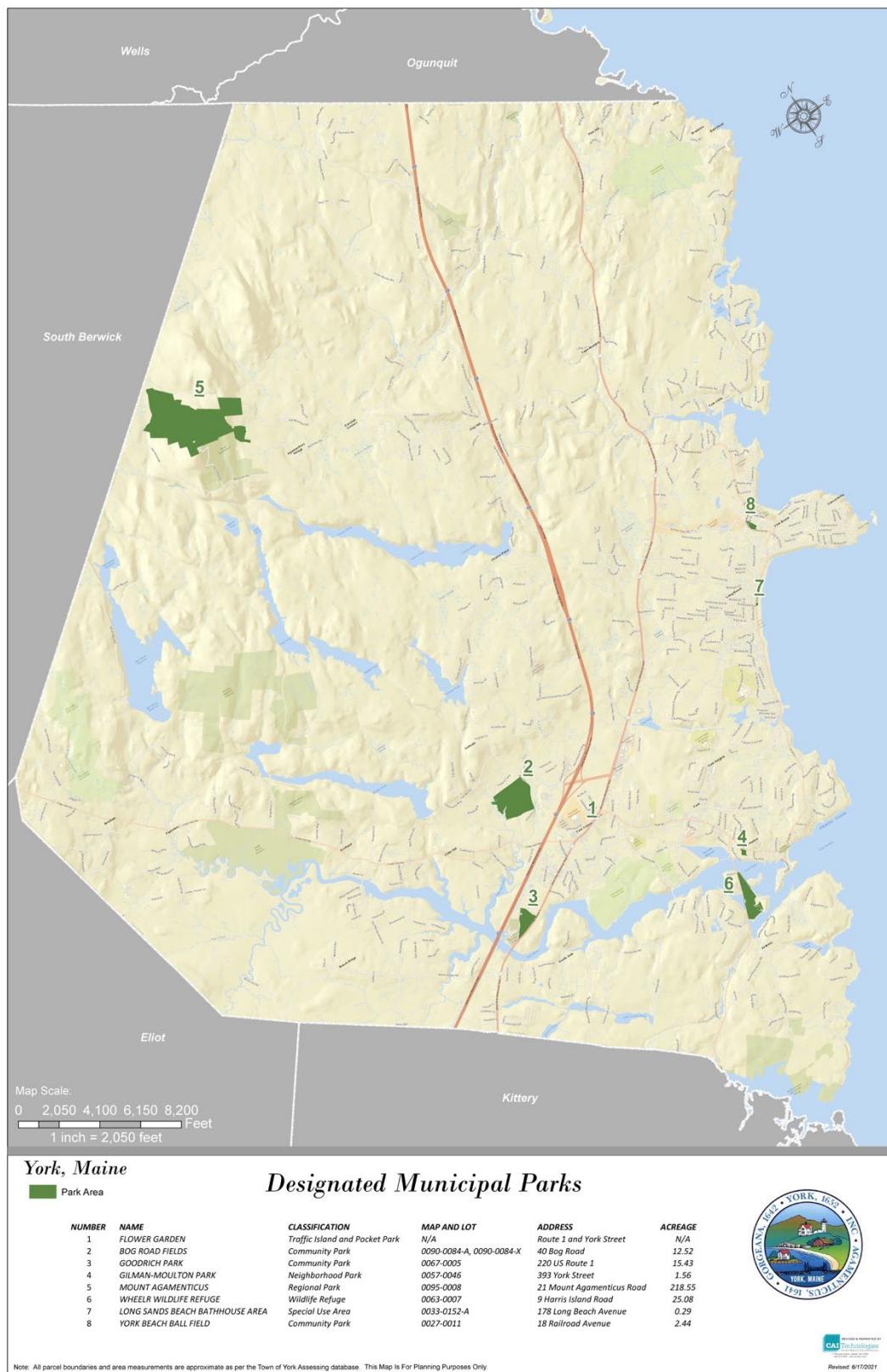
Source: *Town of York, Municipal Parks Ordinance, 2021*.

<sup>26</sup> Town of York, Municipal Parks Ordinance,

<https://www.yorkmaine.org/DocumentCenter/View/5138/Article-2-Municipal-Parks-Ordinance>



Figure 3. Designated Municipal Parks (2021)





## Current Use Programs

The Open Space Current Use Tax Program is one of the state's four "current use" programs that offer a reduction in assessed value and taxes owed as an incentive for property owners to register and protect their land as open space. To qualify, the parcel must be preserved or restricted in use to provide a public benefit. Recognized benefits include public recreation, scenic resources, game management, and wildlife habitat.<sup>27</sup> A map of York properties enrolled in this program as of 2022 can be found in Appendix A3: Natural Resources Current Conditions.

## Open Space Conservation Subdivision

Offering an alternative to conventional residential subdivision design, York's Open Space Conservation Subdivision design provides incentives to protect important components of the natural and cultural environment while encouraging quality residential neighborhood design. The primary mechanism to accomplish this purpose is the reduction of required individual lot sizes and dimensional standards when conserved open space is provided as part of the site design. This conserved open space must be set aside into a common open space. Eligible public purposes for common open space include (among others) the protection of large tracts of open space, corridor connections, and public access to shoreland.<sup>28</sup>

## Conservation Efforts

There are many organizations and initiatives working to protect and conserve land in York. The Mt. Agamenticus to the Sea Conservation Initiative (MtA2C) is a coalition of ten organizations working together to conserve fields, wetlands, and marshes in a regional focus area that includes parts of Kittery, Eliot, York, Ogunquit, Wells, and South Berwick. The York Land Trust (YLT) owns or maintains a number of preserves in York and also works to facilitate preservation of additional land. YLT's holdings include Public Access Preserves, Limited Access Preserves, and Conservation Easements on privately owned lands. More information on conservation efforts in York can be found in Appendix A3: Natural Resources Current Conditions.

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<sup>27</sup> State of Maine Revenue Services, Current Land Use Programs, <https://www.maine.gov/revenue/taxes/tax-relief-credits-programs/property-tax-relief-programs/land-use-programs>

<sup>28</sup> York Zoning Ordinance, 1.3.12.



## Other Facilities & Partnerships

There are a variety of partnerships, shared facilities, and programs that serve the recreational needs of residents and visitors.

### Facilities

#### Center for Active Living

Located in the lower level of the building at 36 Main Street, York's Center for Active Living is run by the Town of York Parks and Recreation Department and provides community members and non-residents age 50 and over with opportunities for socialization, learning, and recreation. The primary space consists of the dining room/kitchen, activity room, and card room. Much of the socialization at the Center is focused around a daily meals program offered Monday through Friday.<sup>29</sup>

#### Mount A Learning Lodge

The Learning Lodge is located in the old ski lodge at the summit of Mt. A and now functions as a year round office, event space, and seasonal nature center. Open Memorial Day weekend through Indigenous Peoples' Day weekend, the upstairs portion of the Lodge is staffed by an Outreach and Education Coordinator and volunteer docents. A possible renovation of this building, along with a proposed new welcome center at the base trailhead, is included in the Town's *Five-Year Capital Program*.<sup>30</sup>

#### York Public Schools

Through a long-term partnership with the Town school system, the Parks and Recreation Department runs many programs at York's four public schools. However, securing indoor recreational space in York remains a challenge and there is not sufficient capacity to meet demands. According to the 2017 *Recreational Needs Assessment*, scheduling is a particular concern at York High School and indoor gym space is in especially high demand for basketball and volleyball (Table 6).

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<sup>29</sup> Town of York, 2020-2021 Town Report.

<sup>30</sup> Correspondence with Mt. A Conservation Program, December 2021.



**Table 6. Recreational Facilities at York Public Schools**

<b>School</b>	<b>Facilities Used for Recreation</b>
Coastal Ridge Elementary	Gymnasium, cafeteria, larger classrooms, two playgrounds with wood chip base, $\frac{1}{4}$ mile stone dust walking track, three small outdoor basketball hoops, tetherball area, t-ball field, small multipurpose field
Village Elementary	Gymnasium, cafeteria, larger classrooms, two playgrounds with wood chip base, regulation baseball field, multipurpose field, small field area. Hosts several of York's summer programs, including the Junior Adventure Camp, science camp, arts and crafts, and jewelry making.
York Middle	Home to Outdoor Adventure Summer camp and other summer camp programs, gym used for basketball and wrestling program, adult daily walking program that is popular among seniors. Small playground, outdoor basketball hoops, softball field, large multipurpose athletic field.
York High	Indoor gym space is particularly popular for basketball and volleyball. Classrooms provide meeting space for afterschool activities as well as some independent groups. Five tennis courts (three of the five are multi-use for pickleball and tennis play), cross country course, regulation baseball field, softball field, football field, rubberized track, three multipurpose fields.

Source: York Parks & Recreation Department website [www.yorkparksandrec.org](http://www.yorkparksandrec.org) and interviews with Town staff.

## Local Programs

Many recreational programs are run through the York Parks & Recreation Department. The Department offers a wide array of programs for both adults and children. The most popular offerings include youth sports, summer camps, adult fitness programs, and older adult services. The Department maintains an online events calendar, which includes tournaments, road races, seasonal and holiday events, concert series, and more. Many programs are run in school facilities.

Most regular programs and special events that the Department operates are paid directly by user fees charged to program participants. The Town has established an enterprise fund to help the Department provide services and manage its budget. A community partnership with York Hospital helps to ensure that Parks & Recreation programs remain accessible to all residents through community scholarships.

Other popular organizations with community programming include York Little league, York Youth Hockey, York Youth Football, York Soccer Club, Seacoast United Sports Center, Agamenticus Yacht Club, and White Pines Programs. York's schools field multiple competitive teams for fall, winter, and spring sports. Town staff noted an overall trend toward privatization of recreational programming and activities.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Correspondence with Town of York Parks & Recreation and Mt. A Conservation Program Staff, July 7, 2021.



## Partnerships with Neighboring Towns

York Parks & Recreation partners with private entities and neighboring towns for facility use, including the Anchorage Inn for pool access and the Kittery Community Center for seasonal indoor pickleball. Many York residents take advantage of regional recreational facilities, including the Portsmouth Indoor Pool and the Kittery Community Center.

## Recreation Needs and Recent/Planned Improvements

### Planning for a Growing and Changing population

York's population swells in the summer months and is additionally amplified by thousands of day trippers, dramatically increasing demand for recreational resources in the community. Over the next 15 years, it is likely that York will continue to see slow but continual population growth of both year-round and seasonal residents.<sup>32</sup>

York has a higher percentage of residents ages 65 to 84 than the rest of the county or the State of Maine and the median age in York rose from 46.5 to 52.2 between 2010 and 2019.<sup>33</sup> As the population in York continues to age, the requests and needs for a range of facilities and programs will evolve. More information on population trends can be found in Appendix A1: Population & Demographics Current Conditions.

### Recent Planning Efforts

A 2017 *Recreational Needs Assessment*, completed by the University of New Hampshire, identified the need for a multigenerational community recreation/activity space in York with a diverse array of recreation activity spaces to meet the needs of York residents. This study also identified that many facilities in York are facing capacity limits and are in need of upgrades or expansion to meet the community demand. Nearly half of Recreational Needs Assessment survey participants agreed or strongly agreed that the "facilities needed are not available" in York and that there were "better recreation opportunities elsewhere." Survey respondents expressed preferences for dedicated space for older adult activities and dedicated space for youth/teen activities.

As part of engagement done during the 2017 *Recreational Needs Assessment*, a number of spaces were identified by survey respondents as unavailable or not adequate to meet the recreation needs of York. These included:

- Indoor swimming pool (63.4% of survey respondents)
- Indoor walking or jogging track (52.8%)
- Outdoor swimming pool (55.2%)

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<sup>32</sup> U.S. Census American Community Survey, Southern Maine Planning & Development Commission, and Levine Planning Strategies

<sup>33</sup> 2019 U.S. Census Five-Year American Community Survey



- Indoor recreation space (>40%)
- Indoor weight/fitness areas (49.9%)
- Indoor ice skating (48.5%)
- Indoor multipurpose gyms (48.2%)
- Teen/youth center (46.5%)
- Indoor gyms/athletic courts (43.3%)
- Outdoor Ice skating (46.2%)

## Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Demand for outdoor recreational opportunities in York soared during the COVID-19 pandemic. The York Parks & Recreation Department reports that Mt. A's summit park and trail system saw a dramatic increase in use in 2020 as people sought outdoor spaces where they could be active at a safe social distance. Town staff also report changes in programming interest since the beginning of the pandemic, particularly an increase in interest in non-athletic programming, such as cooking classes.<sup>34</sup>

## Maintenance & Capacity Needs

### Trails

With many different uses, histories, habitats, and stewards of trails in York, including the York Parks and Recreation Department, Mt. A Conservation Program, York and Kittery Water Districts, and York Land Trust, maintenance and capacity between trails varies. Public access and management for some trails on Mount Agamenticus is limited by where trails cross public land. Since these areas are not controlled by the Town of York, connections between trails can be difficult to coordinate. Some trails, particularly those of the Water Districts, are open for public use, but in an effort to mitigate harmful watershed impacts from overuse, these trails are not advertised, nor is use encouraged.

York Parks & Recreation and the Mt. A Conservation Program have inherited oversight of some trails with existing maintenance needs. Use of York's trails is increasingly year-round; volunteer and seasonal help is not enough to keep up with demands for year-round staffing and maintenance.<sup>35</sup>

Visitor user surveys have been used as a feedback tool at Mount Agamenticus since 2000. The most popular responses to a question about improvement needs at the site include clearer directional signage and greater maintenance for rocks/roots. Town staff have noted that particular conflicts on trails include dogs off-leash, pet waste, bikers and hikers leaving the designated trails, cutting of unauthorized trails, reopening of previously closed trail

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<sup>34</sup> Town of York, 2020-2021 Town Report.

<sup>35</sup> Correspondence with Town of York Parks & Recreation and Mt. A Conservation Program Staff, July 7, 2021.



sections, and the need for more outreach, education, and funding for maintenance and enforcement.

## Facilities

York already faces capacity challenges and increasing demands for its facilities. With many existing athletic facilities located at York's four schools, scheduling of space is a challenge. Attendance at the Center for Active Living frequently pushes or exceeds safety capacities, and the size of the facility, limited parking, and the small kitchen have all been identified as limitations to its use and prohibitive to expansion of programming.<sup>36</sup> The Parks & Recreation Department doesn't operate and program its own facilities and this can be a challenge; the lack of control over space is a limiting factor in offerings.

## Staffing

Capacity challenges are not limited to recreational facilities themselves. The York Parks & Recreation Department is responsible for providing recreational programs to York youth and adults and maintaining Town parks, beaches, playing fields, and most public facilities. Its role in the maintenance of Town facilities has increased dramatically over the years. Currently, the Parks & Recreation Department has 10 full-time, year-round employees, five part-time year round employees, and hires approximately 100 seasonal, part-time employees each year, while also working with many recreation instructors and contractors throughout the year. The Department describes securing employees for the work they already have as a challenge. Any improvements, even parking and restroom facilities, will need additional maintenance and staffing. The Department has identified that its most pressing staffing needs are the addition of full-time staff at Mt. A. The Department hopes to make two part-time positions full-time and permanent: a Mount Agamenticus Trails, Grounds, and Facilities Supervisor and an Outreach and Education Coordinator. In addition, there will be a need to hire part-time year-round parking attendants and custodians.<sup>37</sup>

## Parking

Parking is limited in waterfront areas and demand for these spaces far outstrips supply in peak tourist season. Particular challenges have been highlighted in the York Harbor area at Strawberry Island and Scotland Bridge launch sites on many summer days. Lack of availability of resident-only parking, including enforcement of existing resident-only parking areas, are concerns expressed by the community.

Town staff have identified expanded and safe off-street parking and upgraded restroom facilities at Mt. Agamenticus as one of the most urgent recreational needs in York, stating that parking is well over capacity during periods of high use throughout the year and has become a

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<sup>36</sup> Correspondence with Town Staff

<sup>37</sup> FY22 Policy Item Requests, Town of York Parks & Recreation Department and correspondence with Parks & Recreation department, February 2022.



public safety concern. Currently underway, new parking and restroom facility upgrades at Mt. Agamenticus will ease capacity challenges but will also draw more visitors to the mountain.

### Capacity of Natural Resources

In York, recreational opportunities are closely tied with the health of natural and marine resources. Capacity limitations, such as parking, inevitably help to limit recreational use of these resources, and perhaps prevent overuse. Increased recreational demand could negatively impact fragile ecosystems and requires consideration of additional visitor management or protection. In addition, the shared use of resources, such as York Harbor, by both recreational and commercial users, can result in conflicts and public safety hazards, particularly the use of recreational paddlecraft in the Harbor. Balancing different, and sometimes conflicting, uses of these resources in the face of increased tourism and population growth was identified as a challenge in the last Comprehensive Plan and still remains a challenge.

### Current and Planned Capital Improvements

Two capital improvement projects at Mount A are underway to meet current and expected demands – the Mt. Agamenticus Parking Expansion and Improvement Project, which includes the construction and expansion of both the summit and base parking lots at Mount A, and the Mt. Agamenticus Public Restroom Upgrades, which include construction of public restroom facilities located at both the summit and the base. York voters approved funding for these projects in July 2020. The Selectboard will determine possible future access fees. Town staff report that any improvements, including parking and restroom improvements, will need more maintenance and staff and note the difficulty of securing employees for current needs.

Multiple phases of a historic restoration project of the Cape Neddick Light Station have recently been completed. Funds for the restoration project are generated from the Sohier Park Gift Shop.

Other upcoming potential Parks & Recreation projects listed in the *Draft FY23-FY27 Capital Program* include:

- Maintain Boat Ramp, Boat House, Stair at Nubble Lighthouse
- Mount A Welcome Center/Lodge/Viewing Tower – design
- Renovate 36 Main Street (Center for Active Living)
- Bog Road – Add Pickleball & Basketball Courts
- Bog Road – Septic System and Public Toilets
- Community Center – Design and Location Study
- Cliff Walk Repairs
- Mount A Welcome Center/Lodge/Viewing Tower - construction
- Various vehicle and equipment replacements, maintenance funds



## Climate Change Impacts

Climate change impacts will continue to affect York's recreation resources, maintenance costs, and resident and visitor behavior and needs. Some specific areas of impact include loss of dry beach area, increase in high heat days, and threats to water quality and ecosystems.<sup>38</sup>

### Loss of Dry Beach Area

Analysis conducted for the Maine Climate Council projected future erosion of York County's beaches under different sea level rise (SLR) scenarios (Table 7). With 1.6 feet of SLR, 42% of the county's dry beach (above the high tide line) will be at risk of inundation.

**Table 7. York County Dry Beach Loss with Sea Level Rise (SLR)**

SLR Scenario	Remaining Dry Beach (Acres)	Lost (Acres)	% Lost
Existing	143	-	-
1.6 feet	82	61	42%
3.9 feet	36	107	75%
9 feet	2	141	99%

Source: Adapted from Slovinsky (2020, unpublished). Maine Climate Council Scientific and Technical Subcommittee, *Scientific Assessment of Climate Change and Its Effects in Maine*, 131.

### Impacts on Water Resources

York's projected increase in rainfall and more frequent and intense flooding events will create a greater volume of stormwater carrying pollutants such as pet waste, failed septic system runoff, lawn fertilizers, trash, and fuel and oil from cars and boats.<sup>39</sup> These pollutants contain high concentrations of nutrients and other harmful substances that, along with shifts in species and rise in bacteria, can harm aquatic life and make water unsafe for swimming, resulting in closures to beaches and other swimming areas.

In 2021, York beaches were under pre-cautionary rain advisory for 19 total days and York Harbor Beach was under contamination advisory for 3 total days. There were no beach closures in York in 2021.<sup>40</sup> The incidences of closures could increase in the future due to climate change.

<sup>38</sup> The impacts listed in this section are taken from the Town of York's climate change planning efforts of 2021-22.

<sup>39</sup> Cities of Portland and South Portland, *Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment*.

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.maine.gov/dep/water/beaches/beach-status.html>



Harmful algal blooms (HABs) occur when toxin-producing algae grows out of control in fresh or marine water bodies. HABs can cause serious illness and sometimes death in people and animals when they release toxins into the surrounding water or air. HABs in coastal marine waters, commonly referred to as “red tide,” can contaminate shellfish and make them unsafe to eat,<sup>41</sup> impacting fishing activities and water recreation. Climate change is expected to impact the range, frequency, and severity of HABs, as well as increase associated illnesses in people. Among the climate impacts that can promote growth in HABs are higher water and air temperatures and more frequent heavy rainfall that increases the concentration of algae-boosting nutrients like nitrogen in water bodies via stormwater runoff. The State of Maine has indicated that robust monitoring of HABs in freshwater and marine environments and their associated public health impacts should be a priority.<sup>42</sup>

### Impacts on Forests

More extreme precipitation events, less continuous and more variable snowpack, and warmer temperatures are all expected to pose significant threats to trees, forest ecosystems, and forest management in Maine.<sup>43</sup> Approximately 60% of the land area in York is covered by forest. Changes in the forest ecosystem will impact key recreation areas such as Mount Agamenticus and trails throughout the Water District lands that are open for public enjoyment.

### Overall Summer and Winter Recreation Impacts

Climate change will affect York residents’ ability to enjoy the natural summer recreation amenities the town has to offer. Most notably, SLR and storm surge will erode beaches and dunes, tides will be higher, and the amount of dry beach area will shrink. This means there will be fewer opportunities to use the beaches and more crowding if the same number of visitors have less space and shorter tidal windows. Higher average summer temperatures and more extreme heat days<sup>44</sup> will also impact residents’ enjoyment of beaches as well as trails and other outdoor recreation areas in York. Further, higher temperatures will result in greater abundance and activity of disease-spreading ticks and mosquitoes, which will have public health implications and generally be of nuisance in wooded recreation areas.

Over the last century, late winter snowpack has changed significantly, decreasing in density and depth. Snowmelt-related runoff is occurring earlier and will continue to do so.<sup>45</sup> Lake ice-

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<sup>41</sup> [MCC-STS. \*Scientific Assessment of Climate Change and Its Effects in Maine\*.](#)

<sup>42</sup> [Maine Climate Council. \*Maine Won’t Wait\*.](#)

<sup>43</sup> MCC-STS. *Scientific Assessment of Climate Change and Its Effects in Maine*.

<sup>44</sup> Days that feel like 90 degrees F or above.

<sup>45</sup> MCC-STS. *Scientific Assessment of Climate Change and Its Effects in Maine*.



out dates, or days when a lake is free of ice, have also increased by an average of 4.5 days per year over the last 75 years, with larger changes occurring in southern Maine.<sup>46</sup> Warmer temperatures (particularly during March-April), increased winter rain, and associated changes to regional snowpack are all projected to impact winter recreation.

## What the Community Said

The summary of community feedback below represents the common themes heard during public meetings and events, as well as other outreach. When information is provided from the Fall 2021 Comprehensive Plan Community Survey<sup>47</sup> results, this is specifically noted with the percentage of respondents who replied in this way.

- Approximately 77% of survey respondents view recreation as very important to quality of life in York, second only to Natural Resources (90%). Another 19% of respondents view Recreation as somewhat important (1163 responses to this question).
- Approximately 86% of survey respondents said that they make use of York's recreational resources (1011 responses to this question).
- When asked how often they make use of these resources, about 62% of survey respondents said either daily or a few times per week. Less than 1% responded that they use these resources rarely (864 responses to this question).
- Survey respondents said they use the following recreational resources most regularly (864 responses to this question):
  - York's beaches and ocean (91%)
  - Mount Agamenticus trails (60%)
  - Cliff Walk/Fisherman's Walk (54%)
  - The York River and Harbor (52%)
- Approximately 66% of survey participants said they want more community/recreational facilities in York (1009 responses to this question). When asked what they would like to see, the top five responses were (661 responses to this question):
  - Multi-purpose recreational center (53%)
  - Indoor pool (41%)
  - Shared community center (34%)
  - More recreational trails (32%)
  - Dedicated boat launch for river recreation (27%)

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<sup>46</sup> Hodgkins, G.A. The importance of record length in estimating the magnitude of climatic changes: an example using 175 years of lake ice-out dates in New England. *Climatic Change* 119, 705–718 (2013).

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-013-0766-8>

<sup>47</sup> There were 1163 responses to the survey. Not every question had a 100% response rate; the number of responses for questions listed below are noted.



- In response to this same question, 44% of survey takers under 18 would like to see a skate park in York and 42% would like to see more athletic fields/practice spaces, compared to only 16% and 11% of all survey responses (69 responses to this question from survey takers under age 18).
- When asked about priorities for planning for the York River and Harbor, access for recreational users (such as paddlecraft, recreational boaters, clamming, etc.) ranked third (30% of respondents), behind protection of marine ecosystems and reduction of contamination and runoff from surrounding properties were identified as the top priorities, with (52% and 50%, respectively) (1016 responses to this question).
- Approximately 67% of survey respondents would support the Town purchasing riverfront property to expand recreation access to the York River (1003 responses to this question).
- Use of outdoor recreational resources has expanded in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Social media has increased demand on lesser-known recreational sites in recent years.
- Capacity is a challenge and a hindrance to recreation in York, particularly in relation to Town-owned facilities for programs and staffing. Simultaneously, recreational users are developing higher expectations.
- Recreational needs that have been expressed in outreach events include an indoor pool, fitness center, affordable gym for seniors, ice skating rink, and more community gathering spaces with flexible areas for programming for varied age groups. There is concern about older adults losing dedicated spaces. Simultaneously, there are members of the community who are concerned about the multigenerational nature of the proposed community center and don't want to lose dedicated senior space (Center for Active Living). There is disagreement about the need for additional facility spaces in York and concern about the potential cost to taxpayers.
- The demand for indoor pickleball space has increased tremendously in recent years.
- Not all spaces used for recreational activities in York are publicly-owned or otherwise permanently protected, including the majority of York's beaches and traditional walking paths such as the Cliff Walk.
- Many recreational assets also serve valuable ecological or commercial functions, and balancing needs of different users at these sites can be challenging.
- While used by many, many trails in York do not currently connect to each other and are not widely publicized. Opportunity exists to create connections between trail segments and better promote York's systems of trails.
- Conflicts between recreational and commercial users of York's marine resources is a concern.



## Key Takeaways

### Balancing Uses

Recreational amenities in York are closely tied with natural and marine resources. Increased recreational demand on these resources could negatively impact fragile ecosystems and require additional visitor management or protection. Balancing different and sometimes conflicting uses of these resources in the face of increased tourism and population growth was identified as a challenge in the last Comprehensive Plan and remains a challenge. Possible strategies to mitigate impacts of recreational trails on natural resources include relocating some trails from sensitive areas, controlling public access points, and providing more public education to residents and visitors.

Abundant recreational use of York's water bodies has created conflicts between commercial and recreational users and also presented public safety issues. The Town has expressed the need for stricter management for boats and other paddlecraft and clear rules for both residents and visitors about use of marine resources. Increased Town capacity will be needed for additional management of marine resources. While there is a need for more parking to meet demand, limited parking also serves as method of controlling the number of users at one time. Demand management and resource protection will need to be factored into any increases to public access points or access capacity.

### Accommodating Population Changes and Accessibility

Over the next 15 years, it is likely that York will continue to see slow but continual population growth of both year-round and seasonal residents.<sup>48</sup> On top of seasonal peaks and growing demand, York will need to plan to accommodate increased use of its recreational resources.

In addition, York has a higher percentage of residents ages 65 to 84 than the rest of the county or the State of Maine and the median age in York rose from 46.5 to 52.2 between 2010 and 2019.<sup>49</sup> As the population in York continues to age, the requests and demand for a range of facilities and programs will evolve, and considerations such as accessibility and universal access and range of programming offerings will become increasingly important to meet the needs of the community.

In line with the recent Universal Trail improvements at Mount A, York should continue to think about how to make existing trails more accessible to all York residents and should prioritize

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<sup>48</sup> U.S. Census American Community Survey, Southern Maine Planning & Development Commission, and Levine Planning Strategies

<sup>49</sup> 2019 U.S. Census Five-Year American Community Survey



universally accessible trails when possible. The Town should consider incorporating Universal Design<sup>50</sup> principles into all of its capital investments and improvement projects.

### Increasing Capacity and Funding

As year-round use of recreational resources and demand for programming increase, the Parks & Recreation staffing and facility capacity does not exist to support prolonged changes. Town staff have expressed the need for care and maintenance of existing recreational trails, through stewardship funds or a recreation maintenance fund for Town-owned properties. This funding might support additional staffing needed to maintain existing facilities and trails.

### Sharing Clear and Accurate Information

Expanded use of social media and crowd-sourced websites has increased demand on less well-known recreational sites. The informal sharing of site information, conditions, and access points may be inaccurate or have negative impacts on natural resources. Clear, up-to-date information on recreational sites should be prominently available to help to mitigate some alternative sources of information and mis-information. This should be supplemented by abundant, clear signage on location with QR codes and easy access to maps where applicable.

### Completing Trail Connections

Trail connections in York are segmented. Many trails in York are distinctly separate from each other and others cross private property, providing no way to connect segments. No unified public trail map exists. Segmented trails with no unified map include trail systems within Mount Agamenticus, York Land Trust properties, trails on York and Kittery Water Districts' lands, and walking paths along the water and in town. Improved connections that allow users to travel between trail systems could expand recreational opportunities in York and, by allowing connections to trails without a vehicle, could help to ease parking capacity constraints. Any development of additional trails should take into account potential impacts to natural resources and neighbors/abutters and will require coordination with other parties of interest. Adequate funding and staffing for maintenance will be necessary to support any expansion of trails.

### Protecting Traditional Access to Private Lands

The last Comprehensive Plan identified an emerging trend in York: public access to the shore across private property was becoming increasingly scarce. This issue is still prevalent and risks exist for further reductions in these pathways that have been used by the public. There continue to be important tracts of open space commonly used for recreation that are not

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<sup>50</sup> Universal Design is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability, <https://universaldesign.ie/what-is-universal-design/>



publicly-owned or otherwise permanently conserved. A few notable examples are described below:

### Beaches

York has four major swimming beaches (Short Sands Beach, Long Sands Beach, Cape Neddick Beach, and Harbor Beach), but the Town only has direct ownership of one (Short Sands Beach). Particularly at Long Sands Beach, the Town has been actively engaged in conversations to acquire land for public ownership.<sup>51</sup> Public versus private rights to the shore in Maine, including ownership of the intertidal zone (stretches of beach between the high and low water marks) are contentious issues statewide, with a lawsuit currently pending at the Cumberland County Superior Court seeking increased public access to private beaches.<sup>52</sup>

### Cliff Walk/Fisherman's Walk

The Cliff Walk and Fisherman's Walk are made up of a series of easements across private properties. The last Comprehensive Plan identified that the Town "should preserve use and access to the entire length of Fisherman's Walk. York's coastal walk is a jewel that few coastal communities enjoy and this pathway warrants preservation."<sup>53</sup> Loss of access to the path along certain properties has shortened the length of the Cliff Walk by about half its length and reduced access points to the trail.

### York + Kittery Water District Lands

There are more than 5,000 acres of land in York owned by the two Water Districts and this acreage has not been permanently conserved for public use. Efforts should be made to coordinate with the Water Districts on any opportunities to establish permanent protections on these lands and secure them for future public use.

### Protecting Water Quality

Bacteria contamination at the beaches, particularly at Cape Neddick Beach, is a threat to quality, safe recreational opportunities. Efforts should be continued around addressing issues of contamination and control of runoff. Public education regarding use of fertilizers and disposal of pet waste should be increased, and additional oversight and testing of private septic systems in this area should be considered.

### Adapting to Sea Level Rise and other Climate Change Impacts

Many of York's recreational resources are located along the coast, including its beaches, the Cliff Walk and Fisherman's Walk, and its waterfront parks. Planning for sea level rise and

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<sup>51</sup> Bangor Daily News, March 18, 2019. "Town's Hope to Buy Private Beach Highlights Complicated History of Public Access to Maine Coast." <https://bangordailynews.com/2019/03/18/news/towns-hope-to-buy-private-beach-highlights-complicated-history-of-public-access-to-maine-coast/>

<sup>52</sup> Portsmouth Herald, February 10, 2022, "'Historical Mistake': Beachgoers Suing for Public Access to Maine Coast Want Day in Court." <https://www.seacoastonline.com/story/news/local/2022/02/10/maine-public-access-private-beaches-lawsuit-day-court-awaited/6648314001/>

<sup>53</sup> *Town of York Comprehensive Plan Update Volume 1*, adopted 1999, as amended through November 6, 2018.



other impacts of climate change will be an important part of future recreational planning. While there are many impacts to be considered, the loss of dry beach area would have some of the most devastating effects on quality of life, town character, and the visitor economy, which is central to the fiscal health of the town. Reduced water quality in the ocean and the town's lakes and rivers would also have significant negative impacts on recreation. Addressing climate change impacts should be a key consideration for the Town given its reliance on visitors and the coast as a major draw for living and visiting in York.