

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

10.1 Introduction

Open space and recreation amenities are vital to the health and well-being of Cranston’s community members, the local economy, and the City’s natural resources. Many local businesses receive direct and indirect benefits from the recreation and open space assets within the City, therefore contributing to the economic health of Cranston. Recreation includes indoor and outdoor activities for health and fitness as well as general enjoyment, and it is the responsibility of local and state governments to provide places for recreation and open space amenities.

Having an effective recreation and open space management program provides both direct and indirect benefits to the community in that it contributes to a community’s emotional, physical, social, and economic health. Land that is classified as open space or recreational land includes protected agricultural land, parks, playing fields, playgrounds, water-related recreation, land set aside for conservation and water resource protection, cemeteries, undeveloped land, and private recreation or conservation properties.

This chapter of the Comprehensive Plan provides an inventory of existing recreational facilities and open space assets, and an analysis of the adequacy of these assets for future projected growth.

10.2 Existing Conditions Inventory

This section provides an inventory of existing recreation and open space facilities and amenities. Because providing recreation and open space is such an important component of a healthy community it is important to understand the status of existing resources so that the City can assess if these facilities are meeting the needs of the community. An important factor to consider in the future planning of open space and recreation amenities is where projected future growth is likely to occur so that open space and recreation amenities can be planned for accordingly.

10.2.1 Recreation and Open Space Facility Inventory

Recreational areas and facilities within the City include publicly owned outdoor recreational areas, privately-owned outdoor recreational areas that are utilized by both City and state residents, and publicly operated indoor recreational sites. These sites support recreational activities for all ages and feature opportunities for passive and active recreation. The City has over 60 recreational sites, including playlots, playgrounds, golf courses, athletic fields, fishing and boating access, and a variety of parks, conservation areas, and other facilities such as bike trails and community gardens.

The following tables provide an inventory of the open space and recreation facilities in Cranston. The tables are organized by categories of recreation and open space facilities and include the following:

- Table 10-1. Total Number of Active Indoor and Outdoor Recreation Facilities
- Table 10-2. Recreation Facilities with Regional and City-Wide Attraction
- Table 10-3. Open Space Recreation and Conservation Lands
- Table 10-4. School Department Recreation Facilities

Table 10-1 provides a list of active indoor and outdoor recreation facilities by type of facility and the number of each type of facility within the City.

Facility/Amenity Type	Number
Playground/Tot Park	35
Tracks/Walking Paths	7 (2.64 miles total)
Tennis courts	24
Lighted Facilities	4
Basketball	6
Baseball - Little League	18
Baseball - Big League	7
Softball	11
Pickleball Courts	6
Football	2
Soccer	7
Bike Path	1 (4.5 miles total)

Source: Cranston Parks and Recreation Department

Table 10-2 lists recreational facilities that are used by both City and regional residents. This list includes both land-based and water-related facilities as well as facilities of private, state and City ownership.

Recreation Facility Name	Size (Acres)	Ownership
Alpine Country Club	210	Private
Aqueduct Park/Field	35.5	Municipal
Chafee Complex/Briggs Farm/Hope Highlands School	75	Municipal
Cranston Country Club	177	Private
Cranston Stadium/Stebbins Field	11.7	Municipal
John L Curran Management Area	334	State
Edgewood Highland Elementary Tot Park	<1	Municipal
Edgewood Yacht Club	65 slips/moorings	Private
Fay Field and Pawtuxet Oxboes Park	63.7	Municipal
Knight Farm Conservation Area	48.6	Private
Meshanticut State Park	32.5	State
Pawtuxet Cove Marina	98 slips	Private
Rhode Island Yacht Club	55 slips/moorings	Private
Stillhouse Cove Boat Ramp	0.10	State

Table 10-3 lists open space, recreation, and conservation lands. Some these properties have been purchased by the State of RI and are currently leased to NGO's such as the Southside Community Land Trust (SCLT) who continue to operate them as active farms.

Table 10-3. Open Space, Recreation, and Conservation Lands

Facility Name	Land Area (acres)	Service Type	Ownership	Public Access	Amenities
Confreda Farms and Greenhouses	200	Commercial grower of vegetables and nursery plants	Private/easement	Limited	Public access to farm market and garden center
Marine Drive Conservation Land	66	Conservation	City/Pawtuxet River Authority/ Private w/easement	No	-
Dimuccio Farm	44.5	Farm conservation land	State/NGO/Confreda Farms	No	farmland
Domenicone Farm	89.2	Farm conservation land	State/NGO/Confreda Farms	No	-
Furnace Hill Brook Historic and Archeological District	8.36	Historic archaeological site	City	Yes	-
Holscher Farm/The Good Earth Farm	20	Conservation/Farming Food System Training	State/RIDEM Leased to SCLT	Yes, through programs	Community gardens
John H Chafee Athletic and Recreation Complex	75.6 acres	Active recreation	City	Yes	5 full soccer fields, multiple clinic-sized fields, parking, 3 baseball fields, Marocco Playground, 2 T-ball fields, basketball, and tennis courts, 1 mile of walking trail
J. L. Curran Management Area	334 acres	Outdoor passive recreation/Conservation Land	State	Yes	Forest, reservoirs. unmaintained trails
Knight Parcels A, B & D	240 acres	Farmland conservation	West Bay land Trust/Audubon Society of RI	Via fee	Limited access
Meshanticut Brook State Park	0.8-mile loop trail	Conservation land	State	Yes	Hiking trail
Howard Conservation Area	44.8	Conservation land	Pawtuxet River Authority	Yes	wildlife, trails

Table 10-3. Open Space, Recreation, and Conservation Lands

Facility Name	Land Area (acres)	Service Type	Ownership	Public Access	Amenities
Pocasset River Wetland	.75	Conservation land	City	Yes	Walking, birding
Seidel Pond	1	Fishing access	City	Yes	fishing
Randall Pond Conservation Area	0.4	Fishing pier, kayak launch	Pawtuxet River Authority	Yes	Fishing, kayaking
Stone Hill Elementary	27.72	Tot park, forest	City	Yes	tot park, forest with no public access
The Urban Edge Farm	51.7	Conservation/Farming Food System Training	State/RIDEM Leased to SCLT	Yes, through programs	Community gardens

Table 10-4 provides a list of recreation facilities available at schools within the City.

10-4. School Department Recreation Facilities

School Name	Amenities
Arlington Elementary School	1 tot park
Dutemple, William Elementary School	1 tot park, 1 basketball court
Eden Park Elementary School	1 tot park
Edgewood Highland Elementary School	1 tot park
Orchard Farms Elementary School	1 tot park
Geroge J. Peters Elementary School	1 tot park, 1 basketball court
Edward S. Rhodes Elementary School	1 tot park
Stadium Elementary School	1 tot park
Hugh B. Bain Middle School	None at the school property but the school is located across the street from the Pastore Youth Center
Hope Highlands Middle School	1 tot park and 1 baseball field
Park View Middle School	School is across the street from Park View Park which has 4 tennis courts, 1 baseball field, 2 lighted softball fields, 1 basketball court and 1 tot park and an outdoor track.
Western Hills Middle School	3 tennis courts, 1 baseball field, 1 softball field
Cranston High School East	Basketball courts
Cranston High School West	1 outdoor track, 6 tennis courts, 1 lighted field, 1 football field, 1 baseball field
CACTC High School	Shares facilities with Cranston High School West
Apprenticeship Exploration High School	none

10.2.2 Overview of Recreation and Conservation Areas by City Region.

Map Figure 10-1 provides a geographic representation of Cranston's recreation and conservation areas including those lands in state and private ownership. The map also provides information

regarding waterfront access points that provide recreational opportunities to residents. The east side of Cranston is more densely developed than the west side, so the recreation areas in eastern Cranston consist of smaller parks, playgrounds, and facilities mostly adjacent to schools. One benefit of this pattern is that most residents in eastern Cranston live within a half-mile of a recreation or open space area. The open space conservation areas in eastern Cranston correlate to areas adjacent to ponds and riverfronts. Being less densely developed, western Cranston has a number of significantly large open space areas and natural landscapes that provide a variety of active and passive recreational activities.

Eastern Cranston

Eastern Cranston is more densely populated and developed. This part of the City has a number of recreational field complexes, including Cranston Stadium, which is used regionally as well as by City residents. Eastern Cranston also has a number of open space and recreation areas along the waterfronts of the Pawtuxet and Providence rivers and some local ponds. These areas include Fay Memorial Field/Pawtuxet Oxboes Park on the Pawtuxet River, Stillhouse Cove along the Providence River, Aqueduct Field/Blackmore Pond area, Meshanticut State Park, and Dyer and Randall Ponds in northern Cranston.

Western Cranston

Western Cranston has more undeveloped open space and farmland, with some low-density residential developments. Significant open space areas in western Cranston include the John H. Chafee Athletic and Recreation Complex, J. L. Curran State Park, and two golf courses, Cranston Country Club and Alpine Country Club. These sites provide amenities for and benefits to the region. In comparison to eastern Cranston, western Cranston has more areas where residents are further than a half-mile from any recreation or open space area, making recreation access car-dependent for some. See Map Figure 10-2 Recreational Areas.

10.2.3 Trail Networks

Cranston has both bike and walking trails located throughout the City. A comprehensive list of trails in Cranston is provided in Table 10-5 below.

Table 10-5. Trails and Trail Networks		
Dedicated Bike Trails	Length	Ownership
Washington Secondary Bike Path	18.8 miles	State
Cranston Bike Path Section of Washington Secondary Bike Path	5.6 miles	state
Historic Scenic Farm Route (scenic drive)	NA	City
South Elmwood Spur Bike Path	Proposed	state
Pontiac Secondary Bike Path	Proposed	state
Edgewood Park	2.2	Municipal
Walking Trails	Length	Ownership
Briggs Park, H=John H. Chaffee Athletic Complex	1.0 miles	City
Cooney/Tate trail – Tate Field, Gansett Avenue	0.5 miles	City
Curran Reservoir Trail, J. L. Curran State Park	2.3 miles	State
Howard Conservation Area, Knight Street	1.0 miles	City
Knight Farm Trail, Laten Knight Road	1.7 miles	West Bay Land Trust
Meshanticut Park Trails, Dean Street	0.75 miles	City
Pawtuxet River- Stillhouse Cove Trails	1.5 miles	Friends of the Pawtuxet River

Table 10-5. Trails and Trail Networks

Spring Lake Trail, Laten Knight Road	1.2 miles	City
Tong Pond Trail, Garfield Avenue	0.6 miles	City

Source: <https://trailsandwalksri.wordpress.com/category/cranston-ri/>

10.2.4 Water Related Open Space and Recreation.

The Pocasset River and Pawtuxet River weave through the City, and the Pawtuxet River forms the southeastern boundary of the City. Most streams and water bodies within the City drain to the Pawtuxet River; a small area in northwest Cranston drains to the Scituate Reservoir.

The Narragansett Bay/Providence River frontage in the far eastern portion of Cranston is a potential asset, and has a few waterfront parks and access points, but most of the waterfront access is restricted by private land and not available to the public. In eastern Cranston, access points to shoreline areas include a number of rights of way that provide access to the Pawtuxet River and various small coves leading to Narragansett Bay and the Providence River. The few waterfront parks and access points provide important waterfront open space and access to water-related recreation for Cranston residents.

There are also shoreline access points to various ponds located throughout other parts of the City. In western Cranston, the Pocasset River is fed by Dyer and Randall Ponds and flows through the Cranston Print Works Pond southeast towards Blackamore Pond. Currently the only direct visual public access to the Pocasset River is through St. Anne's Catholic Cemetery. Table 10-6 lists the waterfront access points throughout the City.

Table 10-6. Waterfront Access Points

Location	Designation
Aborn Street, south side	Public ROW ¹
Aborn Street, westerly side	Public ROW ¹
Seaview Avenue, west side	Public ROW ¹
Aborn Street Boat Ramp Seaview Park	RISG Public Access Locations ²
Arnold Avenue Still House Cove	RISG Public Access Locations ²
Ocean Avenue	RISG Public Access Locations ²
Seaview Park	RISG Public Access Locations ²
Stillhouse Cove	RISG Public Access Locations ²
Arnold Avenue	City Proposed access ³
Blackamore Pond	City Proposed access ³
Randall's Pond	City Proposed access ³
Norwood Avenue	City Proposed access ³
Ocean Avenue	City Proposed access ³
Printworks Pond	City Proposed access ³
Sheldon Street	City Proposed access ³
Spectacle Pond	City Proposed access ³

Table Notes:

1. Coastal Resources Management Council (CRMC) designated public right-of-ways (ROWs) to tidal waters (2014)
2. RI Sea Grant identified locations (2004)
3. Cranston 1992 Comprehensive Plan proposed public ROWs

10.2.5 Recent Additions for Recreational Areas and Open Space Areas

The City of Cranston has recently added the following recreational and open space areas, some of which are privately operated.

Itri Park – In July of 2023, Cranston celebrated the grand opening of Itri Park which is a small park in the Italian- American neighborhood of Knightsville. The park location is original from the 1930's and included a bandstand. The new park expanded on the current site and added amenities.

Edgewood Community Garden at Cherry Woods – Established in 2011 by the Friends of the Pawtuxet and The Pawtuxet Village Farmer's Market. These are community garden plots located at the reclaimed parking lot at Edgewood Highland Elementary School. <https://westbaylandtrust.org/edgewood-community-garden/>

Public Access to Waterfronts – The City of Cranston is planning for a public access point on the River near the industrial park off of Wellington Avenue. Other potential river access points include sites at Howard Industrial Park and Fay Field.

TopGolf – A privately owned facility that opened in November 2023 as a sports bar, restaurant, and recreational destination. TopGolf is located in eastern Cranston and provides year-round climate-controlled bays for a variety of golf related activities.

10.2.6 Parks and Recreation Department

The City of Cranston's Recreation Department is staffed by a Director, a Recreation Program Coordinator, a clerk, and a General Foreperson. Their responsibilities include organizing and running recreational programs and providing maintenance of recreational facilities for school sports, youth athletics and residents. The Recreation Departments posts special rules and regulations at each site to ensure a safe and enjoyable environment for everyone.

Their revenues for 2023 were \$375,000 and they have \$3,081,064 budgeted for expenses for FY2024. Their programs include the following:

- Saturday Morning Basketball is an instructional program for K-2.
- Playground Program summer camp
- Pickleball
- Women's Fitness Programs
- Summer Camps for youths

They also employ youth during the summer months to assist with recreation programs and parks and recreation maintenance. A complete overview of the Parks and Recreation Department can be found in Chapter 8.

10.2.7 Open Space Inventory

Open space areas in Cranston include active agricultural farmlands, state conservation lands, Municipal/NGO conservation lands, cemeteries and a variety of parks and fields. Active Agricultural farmlands include the following properties:

- Confreda Farm - protected (not public access)
- Domenicone Farm
- DiMuccio Farm

State conservation lands comprise a total of 984.3 acres throughout the City and include:

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- J. L. Curran State Park
- Meshanticut State Park.

Municipal/NGO-owned conservation lands include a total of 428.5 acres and includes several properties in western Cranston owned by the West Bay Land Trust.

Cemeteries in Cranston are considered open space and include the following:

- St Ann’s Catholic Cemetery, CR001
- Pocasset Cemetery CR002 417 Dyer Avenue, Cranston
- RI Historical Cemetery Cranston No 34
- Mt. Saint Mary’s Cemetery, 80 Saint Mary’s Drive
- Bethany Lutheran Swedish Cemetery
- RI State Institution Cemetery CR061 – 3.4 acres

Refer to Chapter 7 for more information on cemeteries. In addition, the Rhode Island Historic Cemeteries Commission provides a database on their website with detailed cemetery information (<https://rihistoriccemeteries.org/webdatabase.aspx>).

The West Bay Land Trust maintains the Cranston Historic Farm Route Loop. This route is in western Cranston and is bounded by Hope Road, Seven Mile Road, Scituate Avenue, and Pippin Orchard Road. It incorporates the Knight Farm Conservation Area, several active farms, and the John L. Curran State Park as well as the western leg of the Cranston Bicycle Network. The Lippitt Hill Historic District is in the northwest corner of this loop. This Farm Route Loop was established in 2004 by the West Bay Land Trust to formally recognize the contributions of historic farms¹.

Since the 2010 Comprehensive Plan, the West Bay Land Trust has been involved in several land and natural resource preservation efforts in the City of Cranston. The acquisition of the 240-acre Knight Farm property in western Cranston, Ringrose Farm, Cloverdale Farm, and Good Earth Farm were all completed in collaboration with the West Bay Land Trust. As most of these farm sites are engaged in active farming, public access is either not allowed or public access is limited to marked trails Refer to Figure 10-3 which provides a graphic representation of open space conservation areas. Table 10-7 provides a list of open space areas with restricted public access.

Significant Natural Landscape Areas	Acres	Owner	Protection	Public Access
Fenners Pond	0.59	Audubon Society of Rhode Island	Fee	Limited
Margaret Robinson Knight Wildlife Refuge	48.60	Audubon Society of Rhode Island	Fee	Limited
Zaino Swamp	14.77	Audubon Society of Rhode Island	Fee	No
Confreda Farm	89.13	Confreda	Easement	No
DiMuccio Farm	44.46	Confreda	Easement	No
Domenicone Farm	44.12	Confreda	Easement	No
Pawtuxet River Kenney Road	5.29	Pawtuxet River Authority	Fee	Limited

¹ <https://westbaylandtrust.org/cranston-historic-farm-route-loop/>

Significant Natural Landscape Areas	Acres	Owner	Protection	Public Access
Walden Woods	26.81	Walden Woods Homeowner Association	HOA	No
TOTAL	273.77			

10.3 Analysis of Need

According to the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) metrics, a typical park and recreation agency provides one park for every 2,287 residents with 10.8 acres of park land per 1,000 residents. Using standards by NRPA (<https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/ParkMetrics/>) Table 10-8 provides an assessment of the adequacy of the City’s park and recreation facilities using the NRPA standards by population and shows that the City exceeds the recommended number of facilities and amenities for all types.

Facility/Amenity Type	Number of Facilities/Amenities in Cranston	NRPA Recommended Guidelines Based on Population	Recommended Number of Facilities Based on Total Population in 2021 (82,566)
Playground/Tot Park	35	3,779 residents per facility	21
Tracks/Walking Paths	7	NA	NA
Tennis courts	24	5,577 residents per facility	15
Lighted Facilities	4	NA	NA
Basketball	18	8,790 residents per facility	10
Baseball- Little League	18	7,237 residents per facility	12
Baseball – Big League	7	27,566 residents per facility	3
Softball	11	12,716 residents per facility	6
Pickleball Courts	6	11,150 residents per facility	7
Football	2	29,374 residents per facility	3
Soccer	7	7,207 residents per facility	11

10.4 Current Measures/Practices

10.4.1 Existing Regulations

The City has a Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee. The Committee is a nine-member advisory committee that consists of one City Council member, one School Committee member, one Planning Commission member, and six qualified electors appointed by the Mayor. This Committee has been inactive for many years, though in 2024 it has been reactivated. The School Department and the Recreation Department coordinate facilities maintenance for the City’s recreational resources.

10.4.2 Existing Policy

In recent years, the City has placed a higher priority on its recreational facilities and has invested millions in expansion and upkeep of its amenities. The City has doubled its average capital investment over the past four years.

10.5 Issues and Opportunities

The 2010 Comprehensive Plan addressed issues voiced by residents concerning the loss of open space to residential land uses. The City addressed this issue through a variety of planning and zoning actions that include using land use and development tools to protect open space as well as programs that created greenways and blueways for connection open space and recreational areas.

The 2024 Comprehensive plan looks to continue its support of those earlier programs and capitalize on current opportunities while also recommending actions that address the issues and challenges that the City currently faces.

10.5.1 Issues

Access and Equity

Cranston faces challenges in providing equitable access to open spaces and recreational facilities. Western Cranston is car-dependent to access open spaces, with several neighborhoods more than half a mile from designated areas, creating barriers for residents without vehicles. The limited riverfront public access restricts opportunities for water-based recreation and enjoyment of natural resources. Additionally, the lack of clear information about ADA compliance at recreation facilities potentially hinders access for individuals with disabilities. These issues collectively highlight the need for improved connectivity, increased access points, and better communication about facility accessibility to ensure all residents can enjoy Cranston's open spaces and recreational offerings.

Preservation and Development

Open spaces and agricultural lands in Cranston, particularly in the western part of the City, face preservation challenges.. Broader development pressures, especially in western Cranston, could lead to the loss of open spaces and recreational areas. The tension between land preservation and development highlights the need for a balanced approach to land use planning that protects valuable open spaces and farmland while accommodating necessary growth and renewable energy initiatives. Addressing these challenges will be crucial for maintaining Cranston's forested lands, preserving its agricultural heritage, and ensuring adequate open spaces for future generations.

Information and Wayfinding

Lack of information and wayfinding hinder the ability to fully utilize available facilities. It would be beneficial to have City websites updated with information about recreation facilities, and on-site information. This is compounded by poor wayfinding and insufficient signage at the facilities themselves, making it difficult for residents to locate and navigate these spaces effectively.

10.5.2 Opportunities

Connectivity and Green Networks

Capitalize on the large, protected areas of open space in western Cranston by creating a network of greenways and blueways to connect farmland, trails, and other natural areas. This could enhance recreational opportunities and improve access to nature for residents.

Waterfront Access

Implement a River Corridor Overlay District to increase public access to the waterfront, particularly along the Pawtuxet River. This could create new recreational opportunities and enhance the City's connection to its water resources.

Diverse Recreational Facilities

Consider strategic additions to recreation opportunities, such as dog parks and outdoor skate parks. These facilities could cater to diverse interests and age groups within the community.

Walkability

Leverage the walkable communities in eastern Cranston to promote pedestrian-friendly recreation and improve quality of life for residents.

Educational Partnerships

Utilize the city's quality educational system and associated facilities to benefit the community and region. This could involve shared-use agreements for recreational spaces or educational programs related to nature and conservation.

Collaborative Conservation

Forge partnerships with allied organizations to enhance open space conservation and increase recreation opportunities. Potential partners include:

- Pawtuxet River Authority
- Catholic Cemeteries
- Audubon Society
- West Bay Land Trust

Regional Cooperation

Develop partnerships with nearby cities and towns that share interests in conservation and recreation, such as Johnston, Providence, Scituate, and Warwick. This could lead to regional trail networks or shared recreational facilities.

Cultural Integration

Incorporate cultural events, such as the Festival of St. Ann in Knightsville, into open space and recreation planning to create multi-use spaces that serve both recreational and cultural purposes.

Sustainable Development

Balance open space preservation with development needs, particularly in western Cranston, by implementing conservation subdivisions and other sustainable development practices.

Improved Information and Access

Enhance the Recreation Department's website and on-site information to improve awareness and utilization of existing recreational facilities.