

# **Recommendations for Enhancements to Williamstown’s Parks and Recreation Offerings**

Recommendations to the  
**Williamstown Select Board**

Developed by the  
**Williamstown Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee**

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## **PART I - Introduction**

### **A. Formation and Overview**

In late 2018, the Williamstown Select Board appointed an ad hoc committee, the Williamstown Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee (PARAC), with the task of developing recommendations for enhancements to Williamstown's parks and recreation offerings and activities. The committee was encouraged to consider recreation in a broad manner and to submit recommendations that would benefit residents and visitors of all ages and abilities. The committee operated under the expectation that recommendations should be grounded in community support and values, supported by data and research, and vetted through review and feedback.

The Select Board appointed the following seven members of the community to serve on the committee:

Tim Carr (Chair)  
Lisa Corkins  
Brian Gill  
Danielle Gonzalez  
Beth McLean  
Anne O'Connor (Vice-Chair)  
Brian O'Grady (Secretary)

### **B. Vision Statement and Goals**

The PARAC developed the following vision statement and four goals to guide their process:

Facilitating a process of inclusive engagement, PARAC will envision, curate, and present a diverse set of recommendations to catalyze further development of the Williamstown community's recreational opportunities.

- Design and recommend user-friendly resources that will serve as a clearing-house to inspire, include, enliven, and connect diverse interest groups represented in the town
- Research relevant resources, legacies, dreams, and developmental opportunities, both in Williamstown and elsewhere
- Recommend an inclusive, dynamic slate of adaptive, diverse, inspiring recreational offerings
- Present actionable recommendations that will sustainably steward existing resources and create a "vibe" that will engage all members of the community

### **C. Committee Processes**

In order to identify the top priorities for enhancements to the town's parks and recreation offerings, the Williamstown PARAC held biweekly meetings. All meetings were held in compliance with the Commonwealth's Open Meeting regulations. The committee invited presenters to each meeting, the list

of which included individuals from the community as well as representatives from organizations in Williamstown and surrounding areas. The committee heard presentations from over 20 different community groups over a roughly seven-month period. Presenters were given the opportunity to share information about the work that they or their organizations do in the community, offer suggestions for enhancements or requests for future committee research, and answer questions asked by the committee. Community members that attended the meetings were also given the opportunity to offer input or ask questions. The content of each meeting was taken into consideration as the committee developed this report.

Much of the committee's work also included research and study. This research focused on the current conditions and characteristics of Williamstown's existing parks and recreation offerings as well as on the offerings of comparable communities with exemplary infrastructure and services within Berkshire County and beyond.

450 responses from a community outreach survey constituted one of the committee's major sources of data. This survey was developed and conducted to collect information from different constituent groups about Williamstown's most popular offerings in which residents, visitors, and surrounding community members currently engage in recreation. Likewise, the survey created an opportunity for respondents to offer suggestions and ideas for enhancements and developments to Williamstown's parks and recreation provisions. Opportunities to fill out the survey were provided twice each at the Williamstown Farmers' Market and at the Open Houses of the new Williamstown Police Department building, as well as online through the Williamstown site. The information collected provided the PARAC with a view of public opinion and community perspectives, which played an important role in the prioritization of considerations to address in the recommendations for the report.

#### **D. Report Structure**

This report has been organized to offer a prioritized set of recommendations based on the data and information that the PARAC has collected throughout the past nine months. The recommendations include items that the committee deemed to be top priority based on frequency of mention in meetings and survey responses and the level of benefit to the town's residents and visitors. Twelve actionable themes emerged from the PARAC's extensive collection of community input. While the PARAC acknowledged all themes listed under the Top 12 Actionable Items as having merit and importance to the report, the items are organized in roughly descending order of priority as established by the committee through its process. While the vast majority of suggested items were included in the final recommended list, some of the ideas offered during the process were deemed too far outside our scope and were therefore not included. The raw data of the surveys and presentations heard by the committee are included in the attachments. When applicable, supporting data is included, which has been organized into the appendix that will be found at the end of the report.

While the PARAC has endeavored to be faithful stewards of the vast number of suggestions received, we recognize that there may be inadvertent omissions. If needed, each item in this report can be

accompanied with further explanation, and/or a brief description and explanation for context and specificity.

The Williamstown Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee has compiled this report with the values of the Williamstown community at the forefront of their vision. These values, as identified and presented by the Williamstown Economic Development Committee in 2015, include the preservation of open space, an effective and prioritized use of existing resources, a continued sustainment of the character of the town, and the importance of education and culture (Strategies for Economic Growth and Development in Williamstown, Massachusetts, Williamstown Economic Development Committee, 2015). These recommendations are presented with a focus on the town's greatest needs and an understanding of its available resources. With this report, the PARAC hopes to catalyze a process of enhancement, development, and expansion of offerings and activities that will give the town's residents and visitors more opportunities for enjoyable recreational experiences and increased community engagement.

## PART II - Recommendations of the PARAC

### A. Tagline

At the conclusion of our work, we settled on a tagline for our unified vision:

***“A lifetime of discovery”***

### B. Themes: Top 12 Actionable Areas

Members each composed their own “Top Ten” lists, which were sorted and collated:

1. Staffing, communication, partnerships
2. Multi-use field space options
3. Cycling opportunities
4. Accessibility, inclusion and safety
5. Walking & hiking trails
6. Outdoor playgrounds
7. Programs & events
8. Dog park
9. Indoor play spaces
10. Water play areas
11. Potential Spruces Park utilization
12. Eco-friendly community gardens

### C. Report: Actionable Recommendations

1. Staffing, communication, partnerships
  - **Designate appropriate staff coordinator for parks and recreation, in order to curate, prioritize, and advance this work.** This person would be the clearinghouse of information for parks and recreational spaces.
  - Identify, select and maintain comprehensive web-based resources (apps, sites, etc.)
  - Create better signage and more of a universal brand for recreation in Williamstown
  - List popular town destinations, fields, parks, beaches, river access, ball courts, playgrounds, campgrounds, dog areas (including information about, hours, uses, restrictions)
  - Include basic skills and information needed for a safe, successful visit
  - Remove barriers to participation for our diverse population
  - Compile and publish publicly available information about the uses and restrictions at the Spruces
  - Maintain and post a continuously updated calendar of events through effective communication channels
  - Purchase and supply gear rentals to allow newcomers to try things out
  - Clarify notifications about hunting seasons and areas
  - Develop a code of conduct for recreation on town properties
  - Further develop and leverage relationships with North Adams, Lanesborough, and Berkshires recreation-focused organizations for further sports/activities collaborations and cooperative efforts
  - Seek out grants to support & advance recreation and access  
<https://www.nrpa.org/our-work/Grant-Fundraising-Resources/>
  - Learn from apps, signage, communication of offerings from West Burke, Moab,

Manchester, and other small towns with robust recreational offerings

## 2. Multi-use field space

- Create/upgrade multi-use fields, to better accommodate current programs and allow room for future growth (soccer, lacrosse, baseball/softball, adult recreational use)
- Establish a regulation-sized field for youth/adult soccer
- Purchase/create new field space where adult sports can be played
- Clarify further usage parameters with Williams College to fulfill the recreational needs of both children and adults

## 3. Cycling opportunities

- Complete the bike path connecting Williamstown and North Adams
- Develop a multi-use path to connect Spring St. to the Clark Art Museum
- Initiate changes to make our community truly “Bike-friendly”
  - Emphasize safety and visibility to encourage cycling as transportation
  - Consider biking safety in all future construction/road-work
  - Advocate for bike/pedestrian safety in design work for future MassDOT Route 43/Water St. project
  - Develop alternative bicycle routes to common Williamstown destinations
- Construct dedicated, specific, public mountain bike trails
- Construct a “pump track” area to stimulate bicycle skill, use, and enjoyment (accessible from biking trails)

## 4. Accessibility, inclusion, safety

- Advertise ADA-compliant recreational opportunities utilizing web resources
- Install more benches and shade trees/shelter along popular walking routes
- Connect with communities of color, lower-income, and senior communities to better understand and remove barriers to participation, and share ways individuals can access town recreational information
- Provide a listing of free and low-cost recreational opportunities
- Adopt “complete streets” standards for sidewalks, crosswalks, etc.

## 5. Walking & hiking trails

- Coordinate trail management and maintenance between all land managers with a central point of contact
- Train and retrain volunteer trail stewards
- Develop a comprehensive plan for trail management
- Provide resources and funding for trail management
- Connect existing trails to downtown origination and information points (ex: Spring St to Mt. Greylock), and create more loop hikes
- Connect Linear Park to Linear Park (and rename one of them!)
- Develop/adopt an updated communication system (perhaps an app such as Trailforks or REI), freely distributing information about trailhead access, relative difficulty, and information required for a safe and enjoyable visit
- Update maps, kiosks, signage, blazes, etc
- Diversify usage: mountain biking, nordic skiing, walking, ADA access

- Develop, build and publicize Universally Accessible trails that lead to iconic and memorable destinations
- Include benches at strategic/view spots and trash cans at entrances, where possible
- Provide gear loans for beginning hikers, such as BNRC's "loaner" backpacks with maps, trail and nature guides, that can be checked out of libraries (program exists in Pittsfield and North Adams; it could expand to Williamstown)
- Encourage walking in Town center by adding benches, shade trees, wayfinding arrows, distance signage
- Modify roads to improve safety for walkers/runners/bikers
- Add Elkay-style water fountain/bottle-filling stations to high-traffic walking routes
- Create walking route maps

## 6. Outdoor playgrounds

- Complete Phase 2 of Linear Park to provide a multi-use platform for events and other recreational activities
- Create a natural playground including natural climbing opportunities and less use of plastic equipment (see also: water play areas)
- Incorporate youth & adult outdoor recreation spaces in playgrounds or parks, such as basketball hoops, ropes course, pump track, bocce, horseshoes
- Develop and maintain playgrounds that are open to the public during school hours
- Include workout stations for both adolescents and adults within playground space
- Rename Linear Park playground
- Construct a bouldering wall (no ropes required, lateral climbing wall)

## 7. Programs & events

- Build a pavilion, stage, and outdoor event platform
- Develop instruction checklist for event organizers covering permitting and other rules and regulations
- Initiate or support existing community fitness/wellness events
  - Road races (e.g. host the Humane Race at Spruces)
  - Community fitness/wellness competition
  - 7 Summit hiking challenge (with Brian Gill)
  - Yoga - indoors and outdoors
  - Tai Chi
  - Zumba and dance classes
  - Running club
  - Family-friendly and dog-friendly events
  - General fitness indoors and outdoors
  - Pop-up outdoor winter ice skating
  - Pop-up summer games areas, volleyball, bocce, horseshoes, etc.
- Initiate or support existing community arts/nature/education/entertainment events
  - Guided educational tours, star gazing, butterfly hikes, nature walks, eco-exploring
  - Riverside festivities, with nature-learning opportunities (e.g. on birds, migratory animals)
  - Farmers Market and Holiday Farmers Market
  - Community clean-up events
  - Invasive species removal events

- Public art events
- Musical festival/outdoor concerts/dance party
- Community theatre
- Outdoor movies
- Summer Sunday/Third Thursday street festival events
- Parades
- Food truck festival

#### 8. Dog park

- Create a fenced-in space scaled for both large & small dogs, including parking and amenities for their owners, e.g. benches, waste bags & bins, rules-of-use signage
- Explore opportunities for this at the Spruces and/or Linear Park

#### 9. Indoor play areas

- Establish indoor play opportunities for toddlers and young children year-round, such as an indoor playground
- Create an indoor multi-use space for both youth and adult sports, specifically for winter (and extreme heat) seasons
- Maintain spaces that are currently receiving increased usage for indoor recreation
- Develop a database of usable indoor play spaces
- Fund existing spaces for usability and compliance, e.g. contracts and insurance coverage

#### 10. Water play areas

- Develop a nature playground with a water theme, such as a hand pump, sand, stones, logs
- Install a splash pad
- Highlight and enhance kayak/canoe access points to the Hoosic & Green rivers, including signage
- Create more riverside trails in downtown area (Hoosic & Green), including improvements to park at the end of Arnold St.
- Improve access from new Linear Park playground down to the edge of Green River
- Harness the potential of the future bike path by adding foot trails to reach the river, benches, interpretative signage, special plantings, and park/picnic areas
- Improve handicap accessibility of riverside areas
- Continue to support Sand Springs in its efforts to be accessible to all residents regardless of income (possible municipal/private partnership?)
- Enhance the amenities at Margaret Lindley:  
Open the bathhouses on weekends to 5pm; add trash cans; better toilets or service to Portapotties; add more play options for little kids; dredge the bottom and add sand to the beach; add a jump or a floating dock; regular clean-up/maintenance of nature trail
- Continue to support recreational fishing, including fish stocking and healthy water quality

#### 11. Potential Spruces utilization

- **Publish/post Spruces reuse constraints, since townspeople are still confused or unaware about the limitations**



- Implement suggestions from Spruces Land Use Committee’s August 5 presentation to PARAC, where possible:
  - signage
  - unimproved mowed area
  - natural playground
- Maintain Spruces pond for ice-skating and fishing
- Host public events (February Freeze, Egg Hunt), concerts, races, bulb planting, etc.
- Add sanitary facilities
- Groom trails for winter XC skiing, walking
- Install a disc golf course (if possible at the Spruces)
- Develop a “fitness” trail, e.g. along the Hoosic River (crossfit or par-course setup)

## 12. Eco-friendly community gardens

- Encourage Williams College efforts to develop a community garden
- Partner with existing gardening groups to support and grow their programming
- Support community tree planting opportunities
- Support efforts to develop pollinator gardens and bee-friendly zones, including plantings and pollinator walks

## D. Shortlist: “Low Hanging Fruit” Recommendations

1. Build natural play structure areas, logs, rock walls, berms, etc.
2. Create trail and measured walking route maps including bench, fountain and sanitary facility locations
3. Add benches and fountains added in strategic locations along walking routes.
4. Review sidewalk network for potential additions, improved or relocated crosswalks and connections and repair to damaged surfaces.
5. Utilize Spruces Pond as an outside skating rink
6. Develop Public Garden spaces/pollinator/bird watching areas
7. Add picnic tables/cookout amenities wherever appropriate w/trash and recycle cans
8. Devise family friendly events on Spring Street beyond Holiday Walk and July 4th
9. Groom XC ski trails, Spruces, Field Farm, and other locations, plowed walking loops at Spruces
10. Implement guided hikes, nature walks and other programs involving woodland areas
11. Add directional markers and signs along woodland trails
12. Add directional finder notations to sidewalks
13. Design better delineation for bike lanes
14. Provide bike/kayak/rental options
15. Create better access to the Green and Hoosac Rivers including riverside trails
16. Seek/provide open air theatre performances/ concerts
17. Designate Dog play areas, fenced or not
18. Develop alternative recreation area i.e volleyball, etc.
19. Develop a clearinghouse app as a resource for recreational options
20. Add pickleball courts with appropriate amenities
21. Evaluate collaborations with neighboring communities, town entities
22. Acquire a recreation coordinator to realize our plans, manage the app and recruit volunteers
23. Rename one of the Linear Parks!

## **E. Conclusions**

Williamstown is an extraordinary place. A small New England college town nestled in the northern Berkshires, it has a unique mixture of natural beauty, an array of world class artistic offerings, substantial demographic diversity among its population (for small-town New England), and a committed, largely cohesive community. Recreational offerings are abundant and well utilized by both residents and visitors. Given all of these positive features, it is laudable that the Select Board is looking to develop its recreational offerings further, with an eye towards further enhancements in the near future.

Gratefully, the Williamstown community responded enthusiastically to the opportunity to provide input on enhancing its parks and recreation offerings. Over 450 surveys completed, 20 presentations from interest groups, and countless conversations with community members over the course of nine months provided the PARAC with a wealth of perspectives and suggested enhancements. The committee learned a great deal and thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to provide a voice for our eclectic neighbors.

Based on the information received, the PARAC concluded that Williamstown has far more potential for development of recreational opportunities which would enhance the lives of its residents and visitors. The input provided fell into 12 thematic areas, listed in the report. Several of the suggestions appear to be straightforward and relatively low cost, which we included in a section called "low-hanging fruit." Others require more resources, deliberation, and/or further study to implement. All recommendations are meant to provide greater opportunities for our townsfolk and visitors to enjoy one another, this place in which we live, our community's natural beauty, and our fleeting lives on this planet all the more.

We hope that we've done justice to all of the voices that we've heard, and we trust that these recommendations will be useful to those who will decide the way forward for our fair town.

## **F. Acknowledgments**

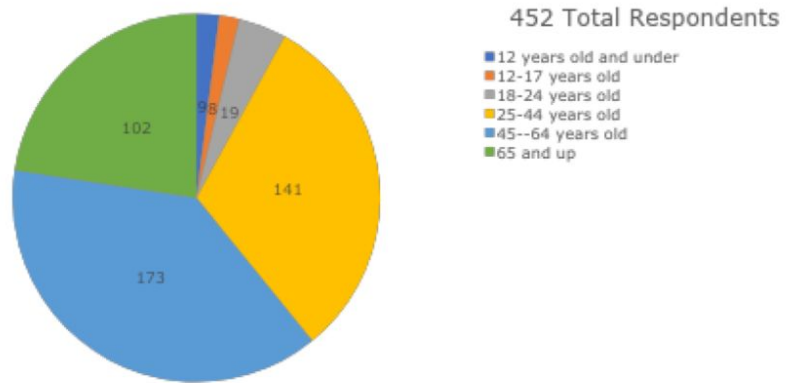
Convening the ad-hoc Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee (PARAC) to widely solicit community views on recreational possibilities was a brave democratic step by the Williamstown Select Board. The trust provided to the seven volunteers and the townspeople as a whole was much appreciated.

Special thanks to all who presented at our open meetings, to those who gave us advice and support, to our wonderful summer intern, Alex Bernard, to those who filled out surveys, and to those who bent our ears and cheered us on.

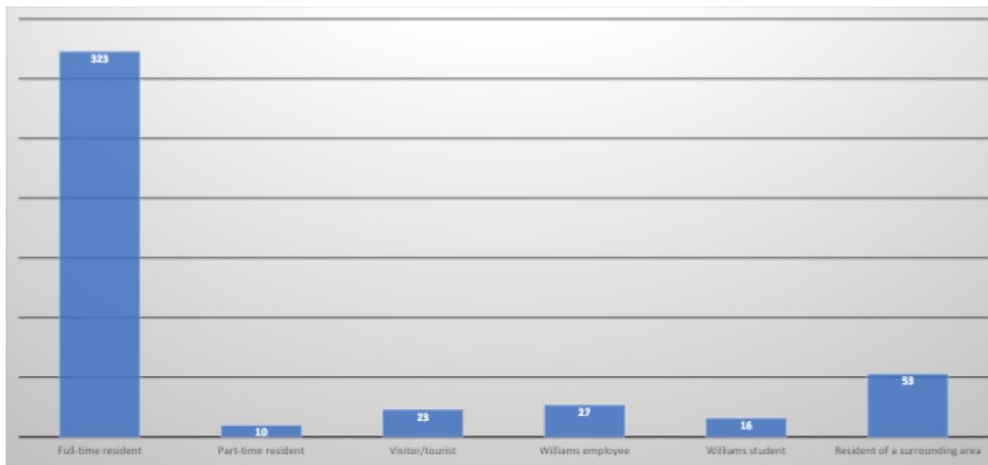
## PART III - CHARTS

### A. Survey Demographics

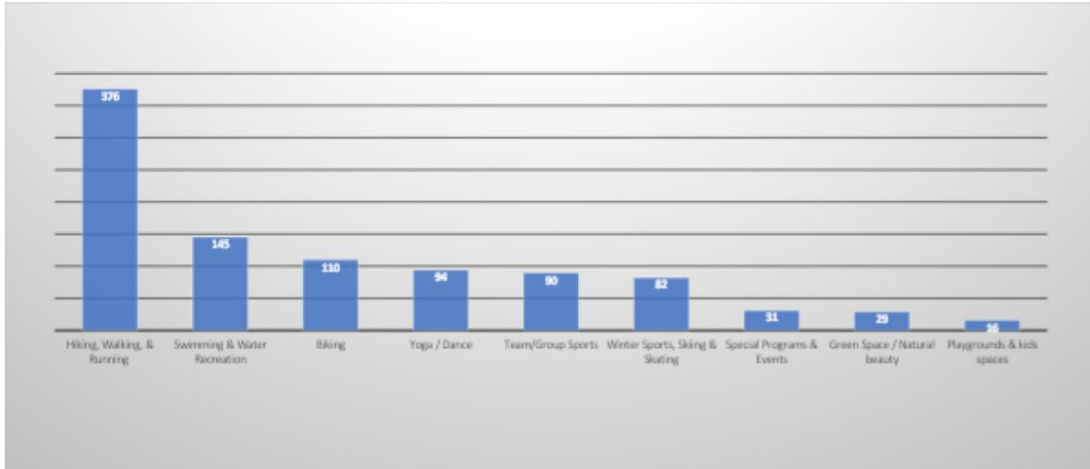
# Survey Respondents By Age Demographic



# Survey Respondents Relationship to Williamstown

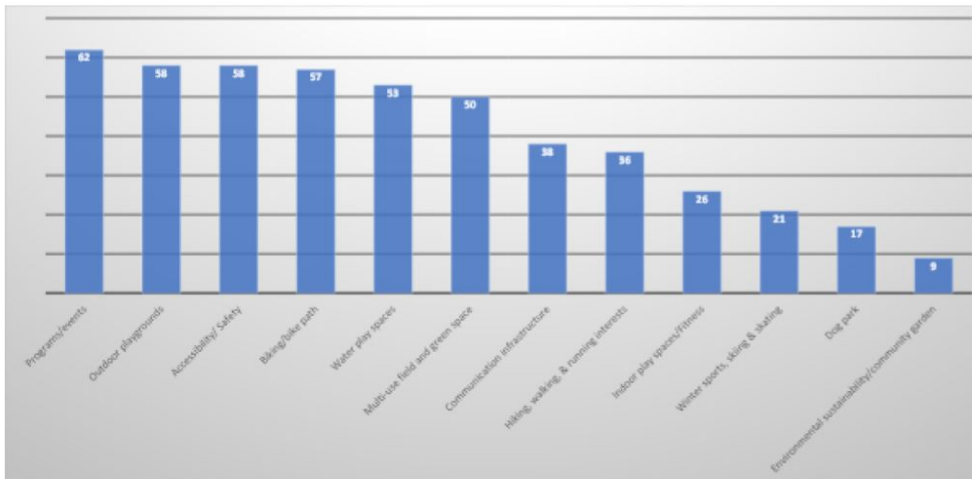


# Current Most Popular Recreation Activities



## C. Survey Suggestions & Ideas By Theme

# Survey Comments By Theme



Comment key – next slide

# Comment Key

Theme	Includes but not limited to
Programs/events	Concerts, food truck rally, fitness classes, Disc Golf, Fitness competitions and races, running club, cultural program, nature education, outdoor movies, family friendly events
Outdoor playgrounds	Youth playgrounds, natural playground, climbing structures
Accessibility/ Safety	Age, physical, and financial accessibility, bike lanes, restroom facilities, benches, shaded/covered areas, litter & trash receptacles, affordability of sands springs pool
Biking/bike path	Biking, mountain biking, pump track, bike pathways, and the bike path project
Water play spaces	Splash pad, river and swimming hole access, Margaret Lindley Park, indoor pool
Multi-use field and green space	Youth field space, community courts, and open green space for picnicking
Communication infrastructure	Web resources to inform the public about available resources and ongoing project updates
Hiking, walking, & running interests	Trail markers, diversity of trails, walking and running paths to connect key points of interest
Indoor play spaces/Fitness	Year round activity space, community fitness center, outdoor fitness park
Winter sports, skiing & skating	Ice skating outdoor and indoor, cross country skiing
Dog park	Fenced in dog park, dog guidelines
Environmental sustainability/community garden	Preservation of green space & natural beauty of the area, community garden, pollinator programs

## D. [Survey Printed Form](#)

# Williamstown Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee Community Survey

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## 1) What is your age?

- Under 12 years old
- 12-17 years old
- 18-24 years old
- 25-34 years old
- 35-44 years old
- 45-54 years old
- 55-64 years old
- 65-74 years old
- 75 years or older

## 2) How would you best describe your relationship with Williamstown?

- I am a visitor/tourist.
- I am a Williams College student.

- I am a Williams College employee.
- I am a part-time resident.
- I am a full-time resident.
- I am a resident of a surrounding area.

**3) On average, how many hours per week do you feel that you spend recreating, however you choose to define it?**

- 0-5 hours
- 5-10 hours
- 10-20 hours
- 20-30 hours
- 30-40 hours
- 40-50 hours
- 50-60 hours
- 60-70 hours
- 70-80 hours
- 80-90 hours
- 90- 100 hours
- Over 100 hours

**4) What recreational activities do you participate in most frequently throughout the year?**

- Biking
- Hiking
- Walking/Running Outside
- Swimming
- Participating in community or competitive sports
- Yoga
- Dance
- Ice Skating
- Gymnastics
- Skiing/Snowboarding
- Other (Please specify):

**5) What are your favorite recreational offerings in Williamstown?**

**6) What ideas and/or suggestions do you have for enhancements and developments to Williamstown's parks and recreation offerings?**

**PART IV - APPENDICES**

- A. [PARAC Public Web Site](#)
- B. [PARAC Summer Intern Research](#) (Alex Bernard)
- C. [Actionable Recommendations With Research References](#)
- D. [Raw Survey Data](#)