



# SUTTON PARK MASTER PLAN

SUMMER 2009

TOWN OF GROTON  
CONNECTICUT

Prepared by





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# I. INTRODUCTION





## INTRODUCTION

### PROJECT PURPOSE AND VISION

The purpose of this project is to develop a Site Master Plan for the Town of Groton's Sutton Park; a 17.8-acre park that is in a central geographic location and experiences a high amount of use from the youth and families of the Groton community. The vision for this project is to create a master plan and conceptual site design that emphasizes functionality, provides a unique sense of place, incorporate green principles and sustainable design and best meets the needs of the Town and its residents.

Sutton Park currently serves the community well, but has the potential to be an incredible community gathering place and recreation resource, not only for the current residents of Groton but also for future residents and visitors. In addition, future programming opportunities and connectivity to the surrounding neighborhoods and regional trails are of critical importance.

### INTEGRATED PLANNING

An important part of this process to analyze and integrate with previous and current planning projects; enabling the Town and its partners to streamline planning efforts and to maximize the use of resources. One key project that has been integrated into the Sutton Park planning and design effort is the **Groton Parks and Recreation Master Plan**, a plan focused on increasing the Town's quality of life through identifying the community's needs and desires, effective allocation of funding, and prioritized improvements to parks, trails, recreation facilities and open space.

In addition to providing a creative and thoughtful park design, understanding the Town's park and recreation system as whole, community need for programs and facilities and gaps in service is of critical importance to the success of both projects. These two projects were scheduled congruently, so as to utilize key findings and milestones throughout the projects in order to guide both recommendations for the system-wide Master Plan as well as the conceptual design of Sutton Park.

### PROJECT APPROACH

The consultant team's approach to this project included comprehensive information gathering and analysis, a community needs assessment (demographics, programs and services analysis, and public input), development of a draft conceptual site design and revisions, and cost estimations. The result of this approach is a Final Conceptual Design and Master Plan that documents the process, findings from the needs assessment, as well as phasing options and implementation strategies to put the plan into action. This master plan is intended to provide a conceptual design that will lead the development of construction documents and the physical renovation of the park site.





## 2. INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS



## INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

### INVENTORY

In order to gain a complete understanding of the needs and goals of the Town as well as the opportunities and constraints of the site, an on-site visit was conducted with Town staff and all team members on February 25, 2009. The team reviewed the conditional assessment of the park from the Groton Parks and Recreation Master Plan, as well as discussed the Town's vision and goals for the site and Master Plan. The team also physically walked the site to evaluate the existing programs, facilities and resources of Sutton Park, and discuss the opportunities and constraints of the site. The inventory included an assessment current facilities, amenities, and programs, including:

- Existing buildings and infrastructure
  - Skatepark
  - Playground
  - Ballfields (2)
  - Shelters (2)
  - Horseshoes (3 sets)
  - Basketball court
  - Open turf
  - Support assets (concession stand, restrooms, benches, parking, and lighting)
- Vehicular and pedestrian access
- Sensitive environmental areas
- Trail connections (designated and "social" trails)
- Facility signage
- Orientation of the ballfields
- Safety and security (lighting and vandalism)





Figure 2.1: Aerial Map of Sutton Park



### Figure 2.2: Conditional Assessment of Sutton Park Assets

[illegible]

## Opportunities Analysis

Some of the opportunities identified through the consultant team's analysis include the prospect of building on the park's key asset, the skatepark. This asset is a facility that has not only a local but regional draw for tweens, teens and young adults from surrounding states. Therefore a primary opportunity could be to expand the park's amenities for these age groups.

It was recognized that within the general community, there is a slight negative perception of what activities and types of users the park currently has. Therefore, it would be beneficial to establish a distinct "brand" or "identity" that increases the aesthetics and image of the park, so as to diversify the types of users the park attracts.

Tied in with the attraction of new users is the prospect to gain additional revenue from an increase in rentals of the pavilions. Sutton Park's central location and proximity to Poquonnock Plains Park makes it a great resource for the community. With improvements to the pavilions and the addition of complementary family amenities that can be used in during barbecues, picnics, family reunions and corporate events, the Department may want to consider slightly increasing rental fees and expanding the marketing of these facilities.

In regard to the south side of the park (where the ballfields are located) there are a number of opportunities to better meet the increasing demand for practice and game time on the Town's baseball and softball facilities. There is the potential to reorient the field so as to better shield the players from the sun as it sets. This would increase the functionality of the fields and improve the players' experience.

Increasing access to the park through additional local and regional trail connections is another strong opportunity for the Town. As indicated in the Groton Parks and Recreation Master Plan's community survey, residents highly desire to increase access to parks through walking and biking. Providing regional trail connections into and through the park would allow for recreation users as well as commuters to get from one side of Town to the other safely.

Another potential opportunity is the development of an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) between the City and the State for use and potentially repurposing the Grasso Technical High School's athletic facilities (track and multi-purpose field), which connects with the southern portion of the park and would allow for development of additional ballfields.

## Constraints Analysis

The constraints of the site identified through the site analysis and in discussions with staff include the shape and layout of the park. Sutton Park is a 17.8 acre site in the shape of a "bow-tie," resulting in two distinct areas within it- the north and south sections of the park. The north section contains the majority of the recreation assets and facilities (i.e. – skatepark, pavilions, basketball courts, etc.) and the south section contains the two ballfields. The odd shape of the site makes the placement of new facilities somewhat more challenging.

Another challenge resulting from the linear shape of the site is pedestrian and vehicular access, circulation and parking. The only entrance/exit to the park is off of Route 1. Therefore, all pedestrian, bike and vehicular access to the park is from the same location, which can lead to user conflicts and safety issues. For example, there is quite a bit of pedestrian foot traffic between Sutton Park and Poquonnock Plains Park as well as to the convenient mart, which leads to mid-block crossings across Route 1, rather than at the existing pedestrian crossing at the light. Additionally, the center of the park that connects the two sections is quite narrow and can only fit the roadway; resulting in pedestrians and bicyclists having to share the road with vehicles.

From a programmatic perspective, the alignment of the entrance from Route 1 and the fact that the road runs directly through the center of the park creates challenges for the design and integration of spaces. Additionally, this increases mid-block pedestrian crossings within the park in order to access different recreation amenities, such as getting from the basketball court to the skate park. This can result in concerns about safety, especially of the Town's youth, who are the primary users of this park. Additionally, there is no visibility into the south side of the park from Route 1, which means that police must drive through the park to the south side in order to patrol the park. Additionally, if any suspicious activity is occurring in that area, suspects can easily flee to the adjacent neighborhood on foot, where there is no vehicular access.

## DEMOGRAPHICS ANALYSIS

### Age Breakdowns

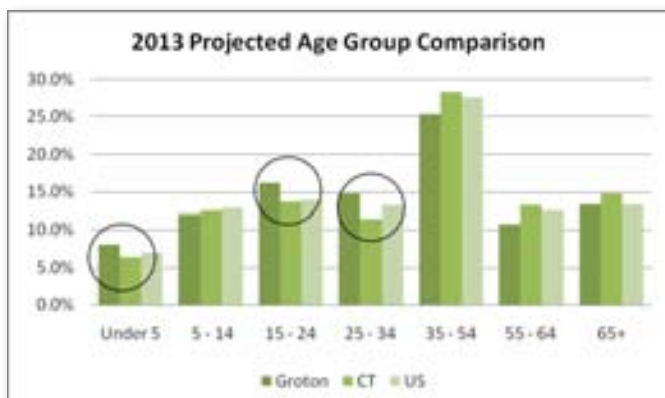
For the purpose of Parks and Recreation planning, there are seven age groups which are useful to classify the population. These age groups generally define how a group prefers to use parks and recreation facilities, physical abilities, types of programs they may be interested in and the amount of time available to spend participating in recreational activities. These groups are:



- **Under 5** – those with limited physical abilities and who need constant supervision;
- **5-14** – children’s needs and programming, and a this is a significant time to create habits of being active;
- **15-24** – young adults who use facilities and programs independent of their family, primarily with friends and as part of their social time;
- **25-34** – those whose needs primarily center on relationships and starting families;
- **35-54** – people whose needs generally revolve around their family, which likely contains children ranging from toddlers to young adults;
- **55-64** – empty nesters, those focused on new grandchildren and those preparing for retirement;
- **65+** – a group that is more active than at any point in history, has more leisure time, and whose abilities may be physically constrained.

When compared to the State of Connecticut and the United States in **Figure 2.3**, Groton’s population is still projected to be younger than both. In 2013, the Town of Groton is projected to have fewer persons in every age group over 35 years than both the state and country, and more persons in those age groups under the age of 34, with the exception of age 5-14. The projected median age in 2013 is as follows: Town of Groton – 34.4 years; State of Connecticut – 40.5 years; United States – 37.7 years. The 2002 Groton Plan of Conservation and Development cites the presence of the Naval base as a primary reason for Groton’s younger median age. The Department’s strategic planning and services should take into consideration the impacts of the alternative recreation services being provided to this institutionalized population, so as to avoid duplication of services. Yet, based on the community’s values to provide for both the youth and older adults, the needs of the Town’s young people are not being full met and should not be discounted.

**Figure 2.3: Comparative Age Group Projections- Groton, CT and US (2013)**



## PROGRAMS AND SERVICE ANALYSIS

The Groton Parks and Recreation Department is committed to providing quality leisure opportunities in a safe and healthy atmosphere and to enhance the quality of life through the responsible management of fiscal and natural resources. The Department offers a wide variety of programs, developed recreation facilities, natural areas and open space, as well as parks maintenance and urban forestry services to the community. These programs and services make available activities for a wide variety of interests and for all ages and abilities.

One of the Department’s core areas of service is the provision of recreation programs and services for the youth of Groton. These program and services include aquatics, boating, inclusive recreation, skateboarding lessons, environmental education, sports, preschool programs, gymnastics and summer camps. Unstructured activities and services provided to youth are through the open use of the Town’s park system, trails, the Groton Skate Park, picnic shelters, and the approximately 600 acres of Town-owned open space and natural areas.

Although the Town and its partner organizations are doing quite well to provide the youth of the community a fair number of sports activities and teams, there is a need for additional non-traditional programming to provide for the wide variety of interests of the Groton youth, such as extreme sports, fitness, environmental education, and cultural and arts programs. Drop in activities, one-time day trips or “sampler” programs might better serve to introduce youth to new activities and programs to be provided at Sutton Park.

In recent years, the Town has seen an increased demand and interest in growing activities, such as youth athletics. Stakeholders and elected officials expressed concern that the Town’s existing facilities are limited in providing for additional sports and athletic programs. Although there are a fairly high number of athletic programs and leagues provided, the Department could be offering even more if funding were identified to support the development of new facilities and an additional field at Sutton Park.

The prevalence of obesity, especially childhood obesity, has nearly tripled over the past 25 years, so that more than 1 in 6 children between the ages of 6 and 19 are obese today. The availability of neighborhood facilities for physical activity may be particularly relevant for youth, who are unable to drive and whose activity is often limited to the immediate distance they are able to walk or bicycle. Therefore, making Sutton Park accessible for pedestrians, bicyclist and skateboarders through local and regional trail connections will be critical to increasing access to the park.

The Groton Parks and Recreation Master Plan Community Survey indicated that an additional 15-20% of the community would like to participate in special events that appeal to the interest of a variety of user groups. Given its central location, this data may warrant consideration for providing additional community events throughout the year at Sutton Park (i.e.—Battle of the Bands, Concert Series, Farmers Markets, Easter Egg Hunt, etc.).

## PUBLIC INPUT

### Focus groups

During the week of February 23, 2009 Groton staff, elected officials, youth and residents were provided a number of opportunities in which to provide input on this planning effort. These forums included seven (7) youth focus groups, two (2) adult focus groups, a public meeting, interviews with Town Parks and Recreation, Planning and Administration staff.

**Town Staff** – Town staff shared their experiences programming and maintaining the existing facilities within Sutton Park as well as their vision for what the park could be in the future. Staff's greatest concerns with the park were in regard to high demand for the athletic fields, safety and security, and access to the park by bicyclists, pedestrians and skateboarders. It was stated that the layout and current design of the park result in a visibility issues (i.e. – sight restrictions due to the berm and trees at the entrance and the bow tie shape), as well as vehicular and pedestrian conflicts. Additionally, staff would like to decrease the need for maintenance through the incorporation of green design and sustainable materials.

The Department's vision for the Sutton Park Master Plan is to tie into findings of the Groton Parks and Recreation Master Plan in order to meet the highest needs of the community. It was recognized that Sutton is already a gathering place for the youth and families of the community and that this could be built upon and emphasized in the design and theming of the park. To improve the image and functionality of the park for these user groups could also allow for the provision of programs and activities that can act as revenue generators for the Town.

**Youth** – The consultant team met with seven (7) youth focus groups in order to what the youth of Groton like to do in their free time, how they currently use Sutton Park and what additional amenities they would like to see in order to enhance their use of the park. When participants were asked what they like to do in their free time, answers illustrated that Groton's youth has a wide variety of interests. Responses ranged from traditional activities including hanging out with friends, to play-

ing sports, going to concerts and skateboarding, to less traditional responses such as rock climbing, paintball and outdoor yoga.

From these discussions it appears that most of those who use Sutton Park are skateboarders, softball or baseball players or are there with groups for barbeques and rentals. Those who do not typically hang out at Sutton Park, often hang out at Washington Park, Esker Point Beach, Downtown Mystic, Noank or Misquamequet. The youth of the community indicate that they primarily get around by car via their parents or riding with teens that have their license.

The focus groups were concluded with a game using fake money to help prioritize what the participants felt were the most desired park amenities to be added to Sutton Park. Although some components are not physically or financially possible at Sutton Park, this information will be utilized to supplement the information gathered in the Groton Parks and Recreation Master Plan for the development of that plan's recommendations. Some of the key amenities that are potentially feasible and have been considered to be added into the design of the park include; a snack shack, amphitheater, climbing wall, sand volleyball, additional sports fields and trails. Detailed results are illustrated in **Figure 2.4**.

**Facility Users** – The consultant team met with representatives of the Fitch High School and Grasso Southeastern Technical High School athletic departments as well as some of the designers and users of the Groton Skate Park.

The Fitch and Grasso athletic departments use Town Park and Recreation fields as practice and game facilities for girl's softball. Both of these schools are quite limited in their access to athletic facilities. The lack of field time has limited the number of teams that Grasso is able to have - only allowing for a Varsity team and not for a JV team. This negatively impacts the students who would like to play, but may not have the opportunity to play on existing teams.

Therefore, the addition of a new ballfield at Sutton Park, as well as at other locations throughout the Town is much desired. Recommended improvements to the athletic facilities include a means to charge admission, lighted fields, a concession stand, bathrooms and storage facility. Although Sutton Park is adjacent to Grasso, both schools felt that if there was a recreation complex with multiple fields that this would better enable them to meet the demands of the community as well as attract a number of softball and baseball tournaments from throughout the state and region. One additional piece of property that was discussed for potential future use, following partnership discussions with the state and evaluation of drain-

**Figure 2.4: Youth Allocations for Possible Park Components**

Possible Components	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Group 6	Group 7	TOTAL
Go Carts	\$0	\$320	\$240	\$780	\$540	\$160	\$280	\$2,320
Snack Shack	\$360	\$640	\$240	\$160	\$140	\$100	\$240	\$1,880
Paintball	\$0	\$0	\$100	\$20	\$660	\$680	\$240	\$1,700
Swimming Pool	\$580	\$260	\$160	\$100	\$140	\$200	\$80	\$1,520
Batting Cage	\$0	\$600	\$240	\$100	\$40	\$0	\$0	\$980
Mini Golf	\$180	\$80	\$100	\$180	\$140	\$100	\$160	\$940
Amphitheater	\$340	\$120	\$0	\$100	\$160	\$0	\$100	\$820
Climbing Wall	\$100	\$140	\$0	\$100	\$0	\$60	\$260	\$660
Sand Volleyball	\$120	\$100	\$40	\$120	\$0	\$0	\$240	\$620
Sports Fields	\$220	\$20	\$0	\$60	\$80	\$60	\$0	\$440
Basketball Court	\$100	\$140	\$0	\$0	\$140	\$20	\$0	\$400
Trails	\$40	\$0	\$0	\$100	\$180	\$0	\$40	\$360
Skate Park	\$100	\$0	\$260	\$0		\$0	\$0	\$360
BMX Track	\$120	\$40	\$0	\$40	\$20	\$60	\$0	\$280
Playground	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$240	\$0	\$0	\$20	\$260
Spray Ground Splash Pad	\$80	\$40	\$0	\$20	\$0	\$100	\$0	\$240
Dog Park	\$0	\$180	\$20	\$40		\$0	\$0	\$240
Swings	\$20	\$160	\$20	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$200
Open Space (Undeveloped Land)	\$40	\$60	\$20	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$120
Tennis Court	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$80		\$0	\$0	\$80
Shelters	\$40	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$40
Picnic Tables	\$20	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$20

age issues, is Grasso's track and multi-purpose field which are adjacent to Sutton's existing ballfields.

In meeting with some of the designers and users of the Groton Skate Park, it was discussed what the most heavily used components are the skatepark, followed by the basketball court and then by the pavilions. A few improvements that these participants felt would benefit park users included the removal of at least a portion of the fence around the skatepark, the addition of signage and artwork, creation of a primary gathering point, amphitheater, increasing visibility from Route 1, expansion of the skatepark, connections from the skatepark to the rest of the park, better bathrooms and additional access to the park from local and regional trails.

**Public Meeting** – On February 26, 2009 the consultant team and department staff held an open public meeting in regard to the design and master plan of Sutton Park. This meeting was attended by residents of the neighborhood adjacent to the park, law enforcement officials and interested Town residents. The participants generally thought that the park serves the community well, is highly used and good gathering place for the youth and families of the community.

Some of the areas for improvement that were discussed include fixing what is currently in the park, replacing aging equipment, improving aesthetics and landscaping, lack of parking for the ballfields, poor orientation of the ballfields, the issue of graffiti and improvements needed for the ballfields. An additional concern by residents and law enforcement is safety and security within the park, such as pedestrian crossings, vehicle circulation, police patrol (visibility and one entrance/exit) and the low visibility of the bathrooms. If there was the opportunity to add new facilities and make major renovations,

some of the desired amenities include the addition of a third ballfield, lighting the existing fields, enhanced dugouts, a teen center, picnic tables and shelters, an ice rink and a regional trail connection.

### Community Survey

In mid-February of 2009, an online survey was distributed to a teen email list of Groton residents. This survey was completed by 40 respondents, whose ages generally ranged from 13-18 years old. Of these respondents, 34% live in the City of Groton, followed by 17% in Mystic, 10% in Poquonnock Bridge and a fairly equitable distribution throughout Groton Long Point, Noank, Center Groton and the Subase. Similar to the responses of the those who participated in the youth focus groups, these teens have a wide variety of interests and like to “hang out with friends, skateboard, play baseball, basketball and soccer, listen to music, create art, read, go hiking, dance, swimming and play video and computer games,” to name a few.

Recreation and leisure activities are very important to these young people, who stated that these opportunities make them happy, healthy, relaxed and are fun. Following are quotes from the survey respondents in regard to how recreation and leisure activities impact their lives:

*“They keep me in shape.”*

*“I have fun, get fresh air and they make me happy.”*

*“Gives me something safe to do, keeps me out of trouble”*

*“Help me to relax, keep in contact with my friends, and express myself”*

*“They make me awesome!”*

In regard to park usage, 44.5% of participants are regular users of Sutton Park. Those who use the park indicated that the primary amenity they use and like is the skatepark (81.3%), followed by a good place to hang out/socialize (62.5%), with equal appeal of the pavilions, sports fields, basketball court, greenspace and shade (all at 37.5%). Participants were also asked the reasons that those who do not use that park, which included “too far from where I live” (33.3%), “I’m not interested in what’s there” (33.3%), “the park needs more stuff” and “don’t feel safe there” (both at 2.9%).

These teens were also asked about what they did not like or changes they would make to the park. Some of the common answers included the fact that the bathrooms are not clean and are never open, the use of bikes in the skatepark is not wanted, concerns about safety and vandalism, as well as the fact that some respondents do not live close to Sutton Park (although several mentioned they’d like a park like it near their houses). Although not all of these are feasible for the Sutton Park site, the priorities of these teens indicate the need for the amenities listed in **Table 2.1**. Those amenities that are compatible with the site have been considered through the design process.

Through this survey it is evident that Sutton Park currently is highly used and known as a great place to socialize and to skateboard. It is also apparent that there are some concerns about the safety of the park. Increasing the image of the park and promoting its many different amenities and facilities may help attract new teen users. Additionally, the department should consider identified partnerships in order to provide the youth of the community that live in different areas of Town a means to get to and from Sutton Park.

**Table 2.1: Prioritized Additional Amenities**

<b>Sutton Park Teen Survey</b>		
If you had \$100 and you could split it up and spend it on what you'd like at Sutton Park, how much would you spend for each fun thing? (enter in whole dollars, e.g. 40)		
Answer Options	Response Frequency	Response Count
Indoor recreation center w/pool	69.00%	20
Youth/Teen Center	48.30%	14
Teen playground	44.80%	13
Bigger skatepark	41.40%	12
Amphitheatre/Outdoor Stage	34.50%	10
More sports fields	31.00%	9
Lighting at the sports fields	31.00%	9
More trails	31.00%	9
Better lighting around the skatepark area so I could use the park longer	27.60%	8
Place to hang out with my family	27.60%	8
More pavilions	24.10%	7
Sand Volleyball	20.70%	6
What else would you spend it on and how much would you spend on it?	17.20%	5





### 3. KEY FINDINGS







## KEY FINDINGS

### DESIGN FROM A PROGRAMMING PERSPECTIVE

Based on the needs of Groton's residents and youth, as well as the consultant's analysis of the Sutton Park (in context with the rest of the Town's park and recreation system), there is a great opportunity to making Sutton Park the "IT" place to be for Groton's youth, young people and families. Increasing the availability and variety of parks and recreation opportunities at Sutton Park to the youth and the community will provide something for everyone and likely help to increase resident's health, wellness, sense of community, and physical activity.

As a result of the consultant's analysis and needs of the community, the following goals, components and improvements were identified as potential considerations for the design process:

- Improving the "image" of the park through aesthetics and signage
- Expansion of the skatepark
- Programming space for concerts and special events
- Improving bathroom facilities and location
- Improvements to the pavilions, picnic tables and amenities used for facility rentals
- Improvements and/or expansion of the ballfield facilities
- Improvements to the support facilities for the ballfields
- Increasing bike and pedestrian access through regional trail connections
- Improving vehicular circulation and parking
- Increasing visibility of the park from Route 1

The consultant team used the information gathered through the community input process, stakeholder interviews and discussions with staff to develop 4 conceptual designs (3 for the ballfields and 1 for the north section of the park). These concepts explored the potential for a variety of layouts for the ballfields, the placement of 2 or 3 fields on the south portion of the park, a variety of amenities to be added and/or upgraded on the north section of the site, as well as potential alternatives for pedestrian and vehicular circulation and parking. **Figures 3.1 - 3.5** depict the concepts that were developed and evaluated through the master plan process.



Figure 3.1: Improvements to Existing Ballfields - Option 1a

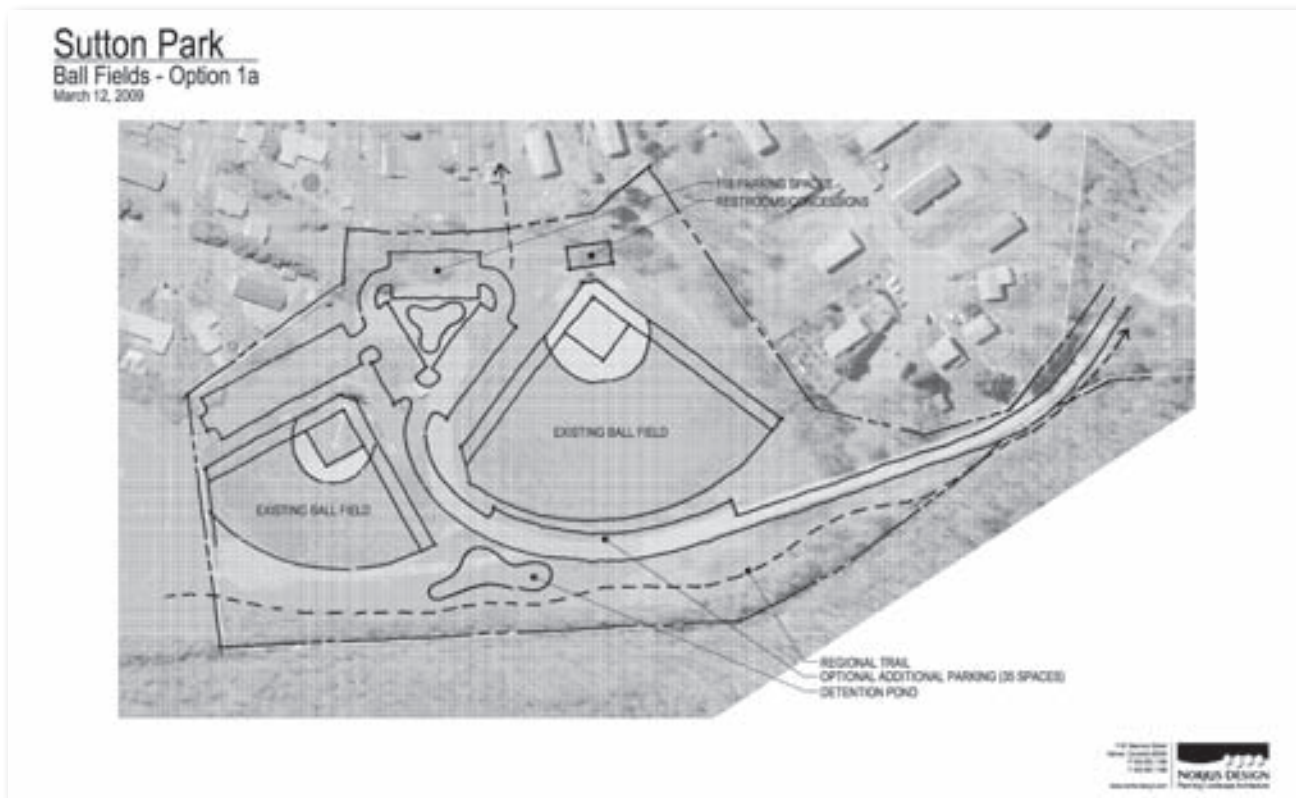


Figure 3.2: Improvements to Existing Ballfields - Option 1b

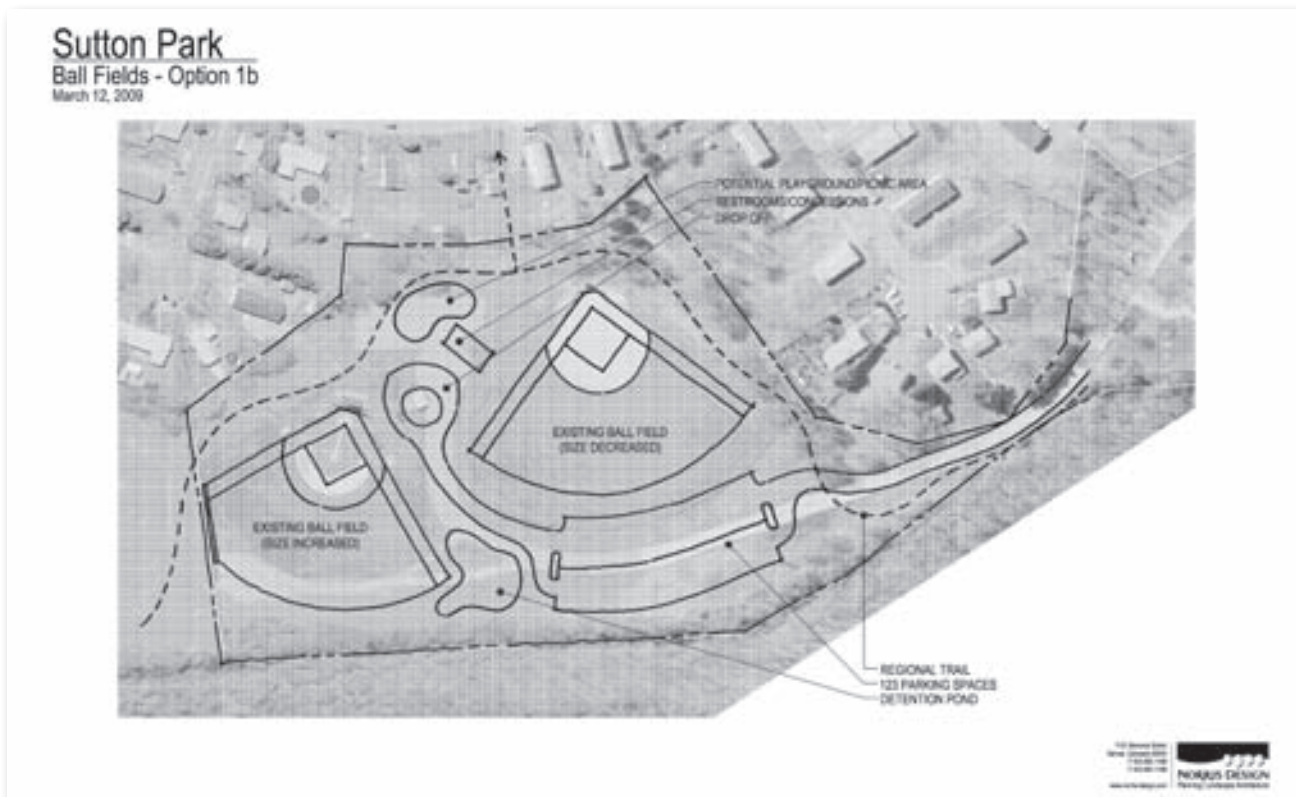


Figure 3.3: Improvements to Existing Ballfields - Option 2a

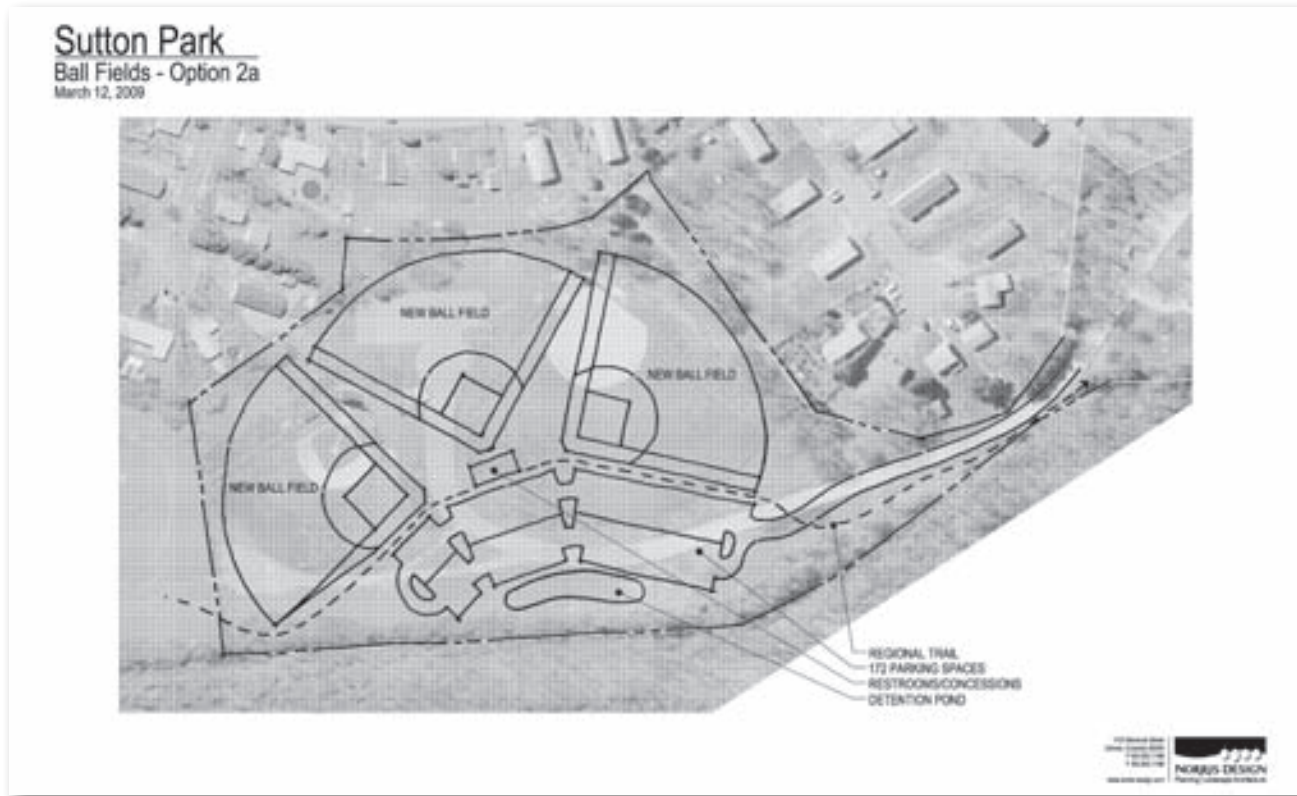


Figure 3.4: Improvements to Existing Ballfields - Option 2b

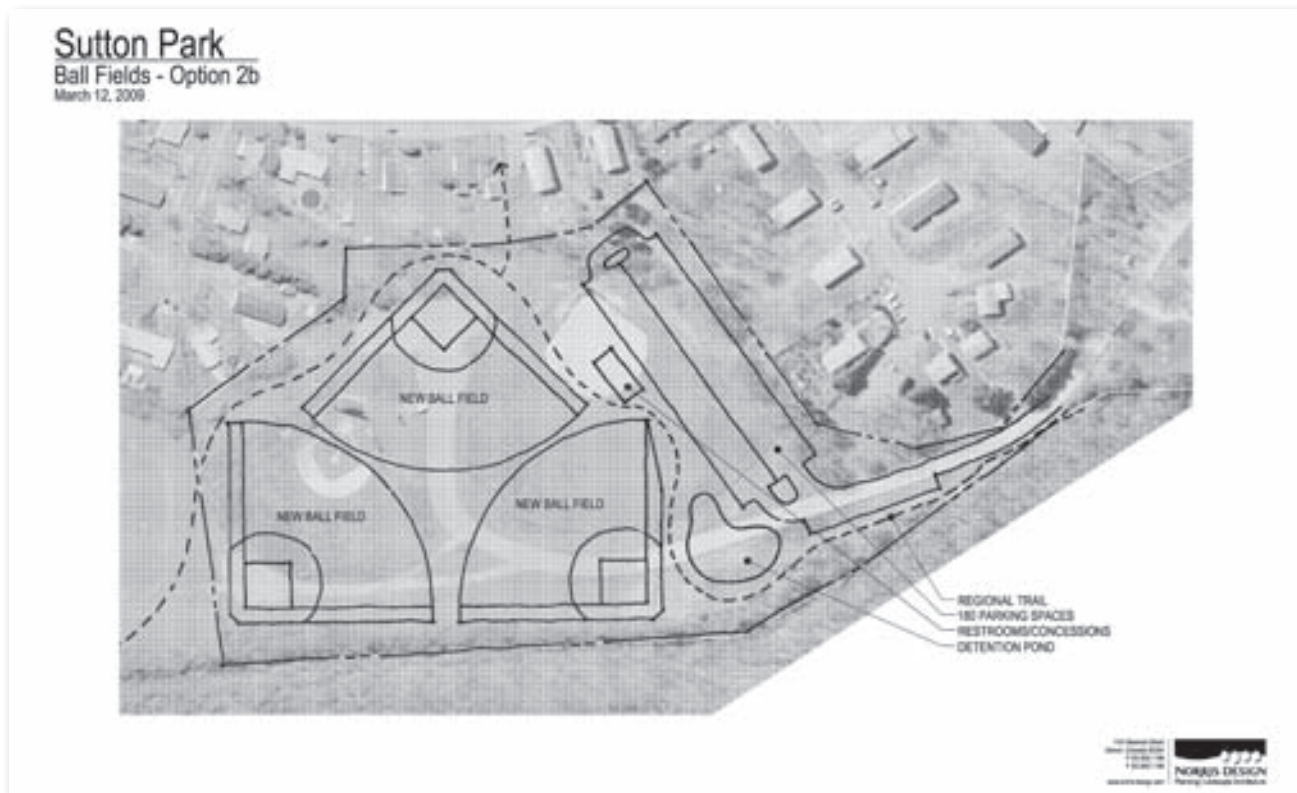
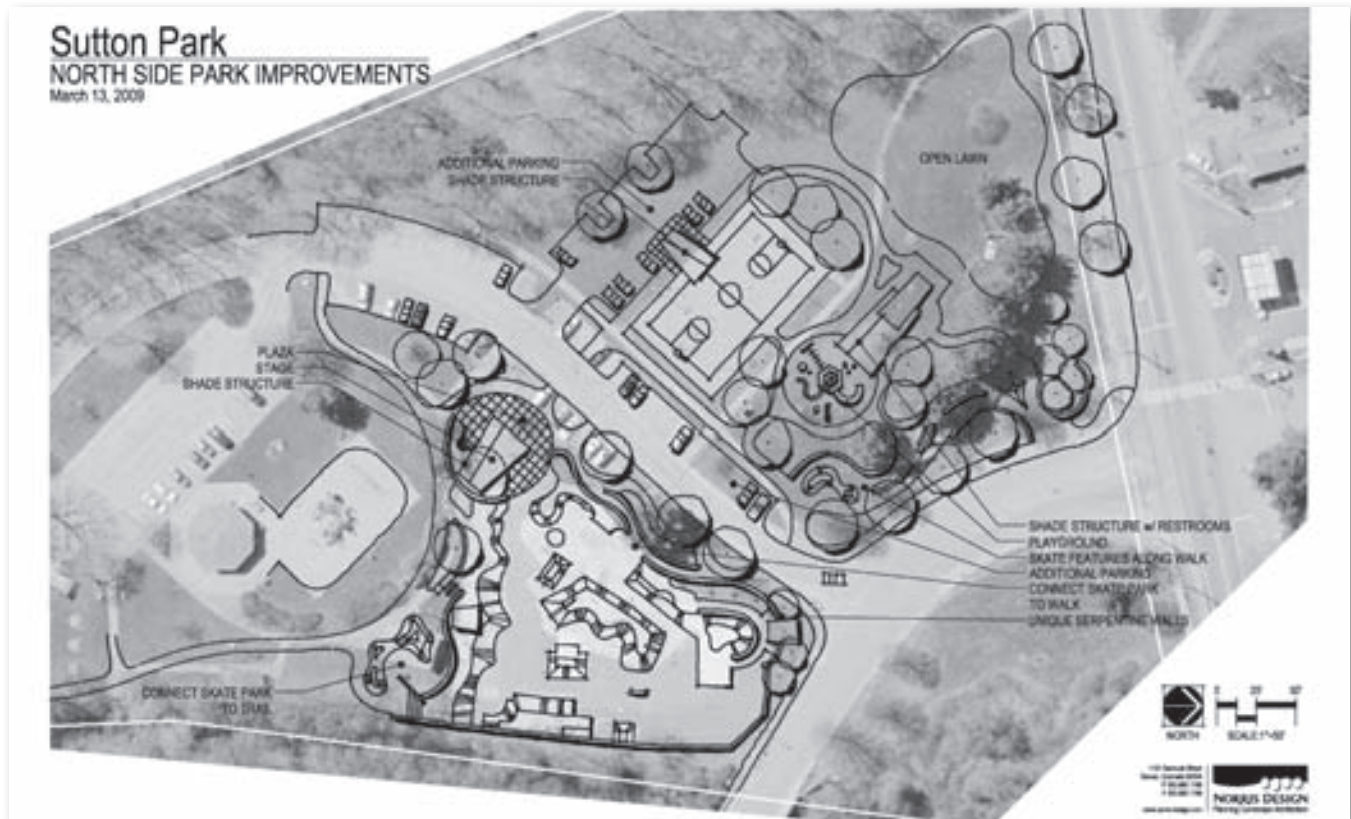




Figure 3.5: North Side Park Improvements



The consultants engaged Groton Parks and Recreation Department staff and a number of stakeholders through an interactive review process. This process resulted in two rounds of edits in order to result in the Preferred Alternative that is utilized in the Draft Plan and will be taken to the public for review and comments.

## DRAFT CONCEPTUAL DESIGN AND PLAN

The Preferred Alternative Design incorporates the public and users' desires to preserve and improve the existing infrastructure of the park, with some additional components that will increase the variety of activities available to users. The intent of the design is to increase the image of the park, so as to make Sutton Park a desirable place to go for all residents and visitors, with an emphasis on teens and young adults.

The following major improvements and/or additions are recommended and have been incorporated into the design of the north side of the park:

- Removal of the trees and berm at the entrance of the park (increase visibility and programming space)
- Expansion and improvements to the Skate Park (improve image and functionality)
- Creation of a plaza/amphitheater adjacent to the Skate Park (community gathering place and special events)
- Addition of street and freestyle skating components
- Addition of a climbing structure for tweens and teens
- Addition of a permanent restroom facility and shade structure adjacent to the climbing structure
- Resurfacing and improvements to the basketball court
- Replacement of the small picnic shelter
- Improvements to the large pavilion/picnic shelter
- Additional parking adjacent to the basketball court
- Addition of a regional trail and connections

The following improvements and/or additions are recommended into the design for the south side of the park:

- Reconfiguration of existing ballfields
- Addition of a third ballfield (all 245 foot fields with lighting)
- Addition of a concession/restroom/scorers box building
- Addition of a parking lot (164 spaces)

## Draft Plan Presentation - Public Meeting Input

On May 28th, 2009 the consultant team presented the Sutton Park Draft Master Plan and 3D Visualization images to Town of Groton staff, residents and stakeholders. The majority of the presentation attendees were representatives of the skateboarding community, with some representation of trail users and the general community.

The consultant team presented an overview and key findings of the Draft Plan development process, reviewed the conceptual design alternatives, discussed the evaluation and decision-making criteria used to establish the preferred alternative and the presented the series of 3D visualization images that were developed for the preferred alternative.

Public feedback was very positive in regard to the general conceptual design. Attendees liked the "wave" theme and thought that it gave the park an identity. The expansion of the skate park and the addition of the freestyle components were well received and thought to be needed, given the high use by the youth of the community. Also, the inclusion of an amphitheater and access via a regional trail were seen as great additions that will truly make the park a community gathering place. Lastly, the addition of a third ballfield was regarded as a much needed community asset that will be heavily used by the Town, schools and athletic leagues.

Given that attendees were users of the park they also had specific recommendations for making the design more functional. It was explained that this is a conceptual design and when the project moves into the development of construction documents, these concerns will be directly addressed. Some of the functional considerations discussed included concerns about the number of access points into the skate park and whether this may result in user conflicts and safety issues. One recommended solution was the addition of planting pockets on the edge of the skate park boundary. Skate park users also requested that the wall be "skateable" and not just a design aspect as well as more seating to provide for spectators. Also, there were concerns about the color chosen for the wall, users wanted a more authentic, "grunge" look. Some others suggestions included moving the freestyle skate components to the far side of the walk to allow for pedestrians as well. Lastly, it was suggested that the addition of a trail along the outfields on the south side of the park would increase access from the adjacent neighborhood.

These discussions and recommendations were used to make minor adjustments and transition into the Final Sutton Park Master Plan conceptual design (illustrated in **Figures 3.6 - 3.12**).

## FINAL CONCEPTUAL DESIGN & MASTER PLAN

The Final Master Plan is a result of the data gathering process, community and programming analysis and design process. The following 3D Visualizations, recommendations, phasing options and action plan were formulated based on the key findings of the planning process and based on community and staff input. It is the goal of the Master Plan to provide the Town with a functional design that best meets the needs of the Groton community, cost estimates, as well as funding and phasing recommendations that promote sustainable development and operations of the park.

### 3D Aerials and Photo Composites

The consultant team prepared the Preferred Alternative Design and Concepts through renderings, placed these into AutoCAD and then utilized this data to create 3D Visualizations (aerials and photo composites) of the preferred design for Sutton Park. This added-value service allows the design to be “brought to life” so that Groton’s elected officials, residents and stakeholders can see what the preferred alternative would look like following construction. **Figures 3.6 - 3.12** illustrate the 3D Visualizations created to represent the Preferred Alternative Design for Sutton Park.

**Figure 3.6: Aerial View of the North Side of Sutton Park**





Figure 3.7: Entrance into Sutton Park



Figure 3.8: Sutton Park Plaza and Stage



**Figure 3.9: Sutton Park Skate Park and Stage**



**Figure 3.10: Sutton Park Street Skating and Climbing Wall**





**Figure 3.11: Aerial View of the Southside Ballfields**



**Figure 3.12: Ground-level View of the Ballfields**



## Final Master Plan Cost Estimates

**Table 3.1: Cost Estimations - North Section Improvements**

North Park Area		361,941	sf		
Item	Quantity	Unit	Cost	Total	
Demo/Clearing & Grubbing	1	l.s.	\$12,000.00	\$12,000.00	
Demolish & Remove Buildings	1	l.s.	\$12,000.00	\$12,000.00	
Grading Allowance	1	l.s.	\$15,000.00	\$15,000.00	
Utilities Allowance - Storm Sewer	1	l.s.	\$0.00	\$0.00	
Utilities Allowance - Sanitary Sewer	1	l.s.	\$15,000.00	\$15,000.00	
Utilities Allowance - Water	1	l.s.	\$20,000.00	\$20,000.00	
Utilities Allowance - Electrical	1	l.s.	\$12,000.00	\$12,000.00	
Granite Curb	845	l.f.	\$15.00	\$12,675.00	
Asphalt	6,738	s.f.	\$2.50	\$16,845.00	
Parking Lot Stripping & Signage	1	l.s.	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00	
Raised Pedestrian Speed Bumps	4	ea.	\$1,500.00	\$6,000.00	
Restroom Building/Shelter	1	l.s.	\$125,000.00	\$125,000.00	
Stage Canopy/Power	1	l.s.	\$80,000.00	\$80,000.00	
Small Shelter	3	ea.	\$35,000.00	\$105,000.00	
Existing Shelter Improvement Allowance	1	l.s.	\$20,000.00	\$20,000.00	
Skate Park Metal Railing/Fencing	425	l.f.	\$200.00	\$85,000.00	
Concrete Flatwork	35,074	s.f.	\$3.25	\$113,990.50	
Enhanced Paving	2,801	s.f.	\$9.00	\$25,209.00	
Formed Concrete Skate Features - NE Corner Improvement:	1	l.s.	\$160,000.00	\$160,000.00	
Additional Formed Concrete Skate Features	3,540	s.f.	\$18.00	\$63,720.00	
Rolling Walls (avg. height 3.5')	980	l.f.	\$100.00	\$98,000.00	
Steps w/ Railing	307	s.f.	\$20.00	\$6,140.00	
Playground to Replace Old Playground	1	l.s.	\$75,000.00	\$75,000.00	
New Playground	1	l.s.	\$85,000.00	\$85,000.00	
Basketball Court Resurfacing (Colored Asphalt)	8,005	s.f.	\$3.00	\$24,015.00	
Replace Basketball Court Lighting	4	ea.	\$2,500.00	\$10,000.00	
Skate Park Lighting	6	ea.	\$2,500.00	\$15,000.00	
New Sod w/ Soil Prep & Fine Grading	30,289	s.f.	\$1.00	\$30,289.00	
Shrub Bed/Perennial Beds	4,384	s.f.	\$3.25	\$14,248.00	
Trees	38	ea.	\$400.00	\$15,200.00	
Prefabricated Skate Park Amenities Allowance	1	l.s.	\$35,000.00	\$35,000.00	
Site Amenities Allowance	1	l.s.	\$35,000.00	\$35,000.00	
Signage Allowance	1	l.s.	\$10,000.00	\$10,000.00	
			Subtotal	\$1,353,331.50	
			Mobilization (5%)	\$67,666.58	
			Contingency	\$135,333.15	
			Total	\$1,556,331.23	
			Cost per square foot	\$4.30	
			Surveying/Construction Testing (3%)	\$46,689.94	
			Estimated Design Fees (10%)	\$155,633.12	
			Estimated Construction Administration Fees (2%)	\$31,126.62	
			Soft Cost Total	\$233,449.68	
			Grand Total	\$1,789,780.91	

**Table 3.2: Cost Estimations - South Section Improvements**

<b>Ball Fields</b>	<b>415,070</b>	<b>sf</b>		
<i>Item</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Unit</i>	<i>Cost</i>	<i>Total</i>
Demo/Clearing & Grubbing	1	l.s.	\$7,000.00	\$7,000.00
Demolish & Remove Buildings	1	l.s.	\$12,000.00	\$12,000.00
Grading Allowance	1	l.s.	\$65,000.00	\$65,000.00
Utilities Allowance - Storm Sewer/Detention Pond	1	l.s.	\$45,000.00	\$45,000.00
Utilities Allowance - Sanitary Sewer	1	l.s.	\$15,000.00	\$15,000.00
Utilities Allowance - Water	1	l.s.	\$15,000.00	\$15,000.00
Utilities Allowance - Electrical	1	l.s.	\$25,000.00	\$25,000.00
Granite Curb	1,637	l.f.	\$15.00	\$24,555.00
Asphalt	54,819	s.f.	\$2.50	\$137,047.50
Parking Lot Stripping & Signage	1	l.s.	\$1,500.00	\$1,500.00
Concessions/Restroom Building/Scorer's Box	1	l.s.	\$175,000.00	\$175,000.00
Dugout Structures	6	ea.	\$15,000.00	\$90,000.00
Bleachers	4	ea.	\$2,500.00	\$10,000.00
Backstops	3	ea.	\$20,000.00	\$60,000.00
Chain Link Fencing 8' (Black Vinyl Coated)	2,265	l.f.	\$25.00	\$56,625.00
Foul Posts	6	ea.	\$1,500.00	\$9,000.00
Concrete Flatwork	29,690	s.f.	\$3.25	\$96,492.50
Enhanced Paving	2,000	s.f.	\$9.00	\$18,000.00
Seat Walls	462	l.f.	\$60.00	\$27,720.00
Parking Lot Lights	6	ea.	\$2,500.00	\$15,000.00
Pedestrian Lights	4	ea.	\$3,000.00	\$12,000.00
Ballfield Lights	14	ea.	\$18,000.00	\$252,000.00
Infield Mix / Warning Track	45,985	s.f.	\$1.00	\$45,985.00
New Sod w/ Soil Prep & Fine Grading	183,830	s.f.	\$1.00	\$183,830.00
Shrub/Perennial Beds	5,651	s.f.	\$3.25	\$18,365.75
Trees	45	ea.	\$400.00	\$18,000.00
Site Amenities Allowance	1	l.s.	\$15,000.00	\$15,000.00
			<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$1,450,120.75</b>
			<b>Mobilization (5%)</b>	<b>\$72,506.04</b>
			<b>Contingency (10%)</b>	<b>\$145,012.08</b>
			<b>Construction Total</b>	<b>\$1,667,638.86</b>
			<i>Cost per square foot</i>	<i>\$4.02</i>
			<b>Surveying/Construction Testing (3%)</b>	<b>\$50,029.17</b>
			<b>Estimated Design Fees (10%)</b>	<b>\$166,763.89</b>
			<b>Estimated Construction Administration Fees (2%)</b>	<b>\$33,352.78</b>
			<b>Soft Cost Total</b>	<b>\$250,145.83</b>
			<b>Grand Total \$1,917,784.69</b>	

## Potential Funding Sources

- The Town of Groton has the ability to issue General Obligation Bonds for capital funds for the development of public projects. Given these tight economic times, it is believed that a strong educational campaign and grassroots effort would be needed to pass it. It will also be important to consider what Department priorities a campaign should be used for, given that voters are often hesitant to approve multiple bond referendums within a short timeframe.
- The Town has land dedication requirements for developers, at no less than 10% of the gross area of the subdivision as well as definitions and standards for the suitability of that land. This regulation also allows for payment of **fees in lieu** of parks, playgrounds, and public area reservation and land dedication, which could be used for implementation of the Sutton Park Master Plan.
- **Sell Existing Town-Owned Property** –The Town of Groton owns a substantial amount of parkland and open space, approximately 38 acres/1000 residents compared to NRPA guidelines of 6.25 acres/1000 to 10.5 acres/1000. There is the potential to rezone and sell small parcels of Town-owned lands and use this revenue for use of park improvements and development.
- **Dedicated Property Tax** - Groton Parks and Recreation presently does not have a steady funding source that could be dedicated for major repairs, renovations, or improvements to park facilities and recreation amenities. The largest capital project that the Town has done in recent years out of its operations dollars was \$800,000. The lack of adequate capital investment threatens the quality of existing assets and the situation will likely worsen over time. A dedicated property tax would generate stable annual funding to support the ongoing capital needs of the park system. In the community survey, 60% of Groton residents were willing to spend at least \$5 a month to support new or improve parks and recreation programs and facilities. With 15,473 (2008) households in the Town a tax that generates \$5.00 per month would generate \$928,380 annually for capital park projects.

- **Benefit Assessment Districts** are separate units of government that manage specific resources within defined boundaries. Districts vary in size, encompassing single cities or several counties. They can be established by local governments or by voter initiative, depending on state laws and regulations. As self-financing legal entities they have the ability to raise a predictable stream of money, such as taxes, user fees or bonds, directly from the people who benefit from the services and are often created specifically for parks and recreation. Benefit assessments can be used to fund capital improvements, land acquisition and related long-term debt service, as well as the costs of ongoing maintenance.
- **Fundraising** - Local fundraising is a mechanism that has worked effectively for park and recreation agencies around the country. Although a vast amount of local effort is involved, this mechanism typically generates a vast amount of support and publicity. Local businesses, organizations, and private individuals can pledge funding over a specific period of time.

The Groton Parks and Recreation Commissioners should play an active role in fundraising for the Department, which could include a campaign dedicated to implementing the Sutton Park Master Plan. The Commission can be proactive by initiating a variety of fundraising tasks, such as more extensive use of the Groton Parks Foundation, an existing nonprofit organization, to send direct mail letters, promoting sponsorship of programs and naming rights, seeking in-kind donations, hosting special events (i.e. – golf tournaments, fundraiser dinners, events to honor volunteers, silent auctions, and themed socials), and soliciting charitable donations of money and in-kind services.

- **Grants** - Grants are available to park and recreation agencies from both public and private sources. Grant opportunities exist for a wide variety of purposes including parks and recreation. Groton should look for the alignment between its request and the objectives of the grant program. The request for funds should provide a solid basis for a positive response from the funder. There are numerous sources of information and assistance available to grant-seekers. Initial efforts should be on Connecticut-based foundations.



- **Corporate Sponsorships** - In the past the Town of Groton has hosted a limited number of tournaments and other revenue-producing special events. The opportunities for revenue generation and corporate sponsorships associated with the redesign of Sutton Park are significant and could greatly supplement existing funding and revenue sources. The Department should put efforts into developing corporate sponsorship program and naming rights for the development of new facilities and programs (i.e. – the Skate Park, 3-Field Baseball Complex) that would support these types of revenue generation. These sponsorship opportunities should be offered with a tiered level of benefits, should quantify marketing exposure for each level, bundle packages on a system-wide level, and bundle the assets of sponsors (i.e. - money, marketing, and product supply).

### Phasing Options

Tying in with the findings of the Groton Parks and Recreation Master Plan, the recommended facilities in the Preferred Design Alternative for the both North and South sections of Sutton Park are very important to address some of the gaps in service currently existing in regard to specific individual assets (i.e. - picnic shelters, playgrounds and ballfields). Therefore, it is challenging to prioritize what components should be completed first.

However, it is important to consider the user groups and distribution of benefits associated with the facilities that were agreed upon for the Preferred Alternative Design. The inclusion of facilities such as a plaza/amphitheater, a regional trail, expanded skating amenities, resurfaced basketball court parking expansion, as well as improvements to restrooms, pavilions and picnic areas on the North side of the park are generally more “community” facilities that benefit a wide variety of users and interest groups. The ballfields, although are much needed facilities for this active and sports-oriented community, serve a smaller niche group within the community. Therefore, it is recommended that the North side, as well as the regional trail, be implemented as Phase I of the Sutton Park Master Plan and the South side of the park be implemented as Phase II.

### Recommendations and Implementation Strategies

The implementation of the Sutton Park Master Plan also needs to be done in context with the priorities identified in the system-wide Groton Parks and Recreation Master Plan (i.e. – Aquatics Center, Recreation Center, Trails, etc.). Therefore, the employment of a bond referendum for Sutton Park which has a moderate cost associated with it (relative to other system-wide priorities) may not be beneficial to the Department in the long run. It is recommended that the Department utilize a combination of the Potential Funding Sources listed previously, such as dedicated a portion of property tax/operations dollars for improvements, establishing a grassroots fundraising campaign, applying for and allocating money for grant matches, and soliciting corporate sponsorships to gain revenue through paid advertisements, product supply, and naming rights for the different facilities within the park, which also helps promote local businesses. Additionally, it will be important to work with the Public Works and Planning Departments to develop the regional trail connections within the parks, as well as to exterior walks and streets.

Through the community input process of the both the Sutton Park and system-wide Parks and Recreation Master Plans, it became evident that gaining public support in the Groton community is challenging without a strong group of “Champions” and a formalized grassroots campaign. Therefore, it is recommended that the Department establish a *Sutton Park Implementation Committee* that involves a wide variety of dedicated and influential community members, including but not limited to Town Council members, Parks and Recreation Commissioners, RTM representatives, trail advocates, school athletic department representatives, as well as skatepark users and the youth of the community to work together in order to gain funding through the budgeting process, fundraising and sponsorships.

The development of Phase II should be done in partnership with both Grasso Technical Vocational and Fitch High Schools to pool capital as well as maintenance funds in the development of the three (3) ballfields on the south portion of the park site. This partnership should be established through the use of a formalized Intergovernmental Agreement to document financial and maintenance responsibilities, as well as established scheduling and use of the fields. Additionally, revenue generated from special events (i.e. – concerts, farmers markets, festivals, etc.) held in the North section of the park should dedicated towards funding Phase II.



