

## PURPOSE

Trails and open spaces - natural areas, parks, plazas, and greenspace – greatly enhance quality of life, beauty, and health of our towns and cities. These places are a true expression of the public good. They provide respite, recreation, and physical enjoyment, but more importantly, they can be centers of community pride and activity – like the public greens around which villages were originally built. Arleyn Levee, an Olmsted Historian summarized the value of public green space in communities this way: “A city without public open space is a city diminished.” While green spaces are recognized for their societal benefits, they serve critical environmental functions as well – they support wildlife, provide habitat, and offer opportunities for us to engage with nature. This chapter provides an overview of the existing trails and open space resources accessible to York Village and provides goal-oriented recommendations for adding more resources while enhancing the functionality and beauty of those important assets that already exist.

This chapter addresses:

- 5.1 Existing Conditions / Assessment**
- 5.2 Considerations**
- 5.3 Recommendations**

## 5.1 EXISTING CONDITIONS / ASSESSMENT

York Village is blessed to be a picturesque small town center located in a quintessential coastal Maine setting. The natural environment – collectively, the rocky shores and sandy beaches, wooded hiking trails, stately front yards, quiet sitting spaces, and historic burying grounds – is a large part of what makes York a wonderful place to live, work, and visit. The York River – soon to be designated as “Wild and Scenic” by the federal government – is recognized as an important natural and visual resource as is the nearby Mount



*Clockwise, from top left: View of the York River - a stone's throw from the Village; The front yard of the Old Gaol; The tree-lined street and rural setting of the Parson's Center; view of the oceanfront near the Cliff Walk; view across the old Burying Ground*

“All too often Placemaking is viewed as a luxury, something nice but not essential to a project’s success. This is especially true in lean times like these, when every dollar is precious and paying too much attention to “frills” can feel frivolous or even wasteful. However, the reality is that Placemaking actually generates a big return on investment.”

– Project for Public Spaces, “Placemaking Pays Off: How Greenspaces can Advance Economic Development.”

Agamenticus Conservation Area. The Village is supported by many outstanding cultural resources as well. Places like Steedman Woods, the Old Burying Ground, and the Wiggly Bridge speak to the community’s rich history and its unique sense of place. The Cliff Walk and Fisherman’s Walk have long been visitor attractions. The area is also fortunate to have an abundance of both formal walks and informal trails within tracts of undeveloped land. Near the Village Center, long views across the Davis fields provide reminders of the town’s agricultural heritage and soften the village setting.

## 5.2 CONSIDERATIONS FOR TRAILS AND OPEN SPACE

### ***Open Spaces Make Places***

Parks and open spaces in areas like York Village center are important places for community engagement and activity. They truly serve the public good – a shared environment for everyone. The City Parks Forum notes that “Parks are one of the quickest and most effective ways to build a sense of community and improve quality of life.” Public open spaces are magnets for walking, respite, and conversation between neighbors. Parks can revive a commercial center, while imbuing a sense of community and vibrancy. They

also represent visual assets that enhance character and human-scale. In short, “open spaces make places.”

### ***Trails and Open Spaces Enhance Quality of Life***

The Governor’s Council on Maine’s Quality of Place has called for an integration of parks, open spaces, and greenways into urban centers to provide “healthy, natural settings that make downtowns more attractive and invoke our natural heritage.” York Village center is poised to capitalize on its “Place-Making Dividend” by investing in physical improvements that both accentuate those qualities that make the Village special and invite increased use. Above all else, an investment in trails and open space enhances quality of life for residents, providing links to community destinations, opportunities for recreation, and connections with the natural world.

### ***Trails are Good for the Economy***

A 2006 study by the Outdoor Industry Foundation found that “Active Outdoor Recreation” contributes \$730 billion annually to the U.S. economy, supports 6.5 million jobs, and generates \$88 billion in annual state and tax revenue. Hiking is one of the fastest growing recreational activities. The USDA Forest Service predicts a 26% increase in backpacking and hiking in the next 40 years. Economic centers along trail networks stand to benefit from the increased consumer spending related to recreation, entertainment, and lodging associated with “trail tourism.” According to the American Hiking Society, “well-managed trails running through communities can foster substantial sustainable economic activity through business development and tourism.”

## 5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

### ***Capitalize on York’s Destination Resources***

York Village has a lot to offer. Within its compact center, one can find important civic anchors: the Town Hall, First Parish Church, Public Library, Post Office, and Museums of Old York sites, as well as locally-owned businesses. These destination resources are central features of the York community, and places where neighbors meet neighbors. York has an opportunity to capitalize on these important assets. There are many ways in which to do this, but there are two critical first steps.

**Enhance the Connectivity between Residential Areas, Schools, and the Village**

The Town should improve connectivity between neighborhoods and the Village center. Improving this connectivity between residential centers and the Village encourages people to drive less and makes it easier to support small businesses like the York Flower Shop, Berger’s Bike Shop, and Yoga on York. Local support is critical for sustaining local businesses. For example, a recent study of shoppers in East Village, New York revealed that people on bikes and on foot spend the most per capita, per week at local businesses. Walkers and bikers also tend to make more visits. Part of this, it can be assumed, is the experience and enjoyment of getting there, including seeing neighbors and enjoying the scenery along the way. To accomplish this, the town should:

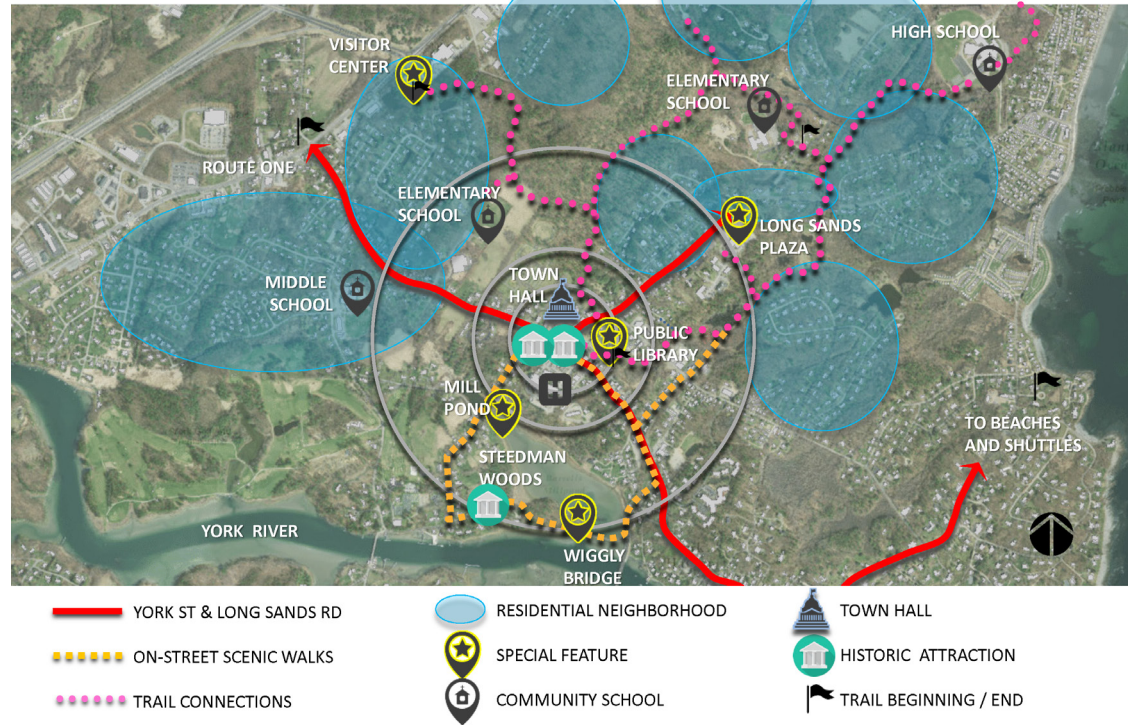
- **Improve Walkability and Connections to High Activity Centers**

As noted above, it’s important to improve opportunities for cycling and walking between neighborhoods and centers of community activity where people go to congregate and connect with their neighbors. The Public Library, the Bagel Basket, and the Village Scoop are important community-centric places that draw locals. Enhancements should support these places as important destinations. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1 – Streetscapes, Pedestrians, and Bicycles.

- **Create a Multi-Use Path Connecting the Route One Visitor Center and Route 1A Beach Area**

The Greater Village Strategy diagram illustrates the potential of a multi-use path to connect the Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center on Route One through the Village and on to the beaches. Greenways – both local and regional – provide safe and universal access to recreation. They connect community, encourage tourism, and contribute to local economy. A paved, multi-use

**GREATER VILLAGE STRATEGY**



path would offer an off-road route for cyclists, runners, walkers and families.

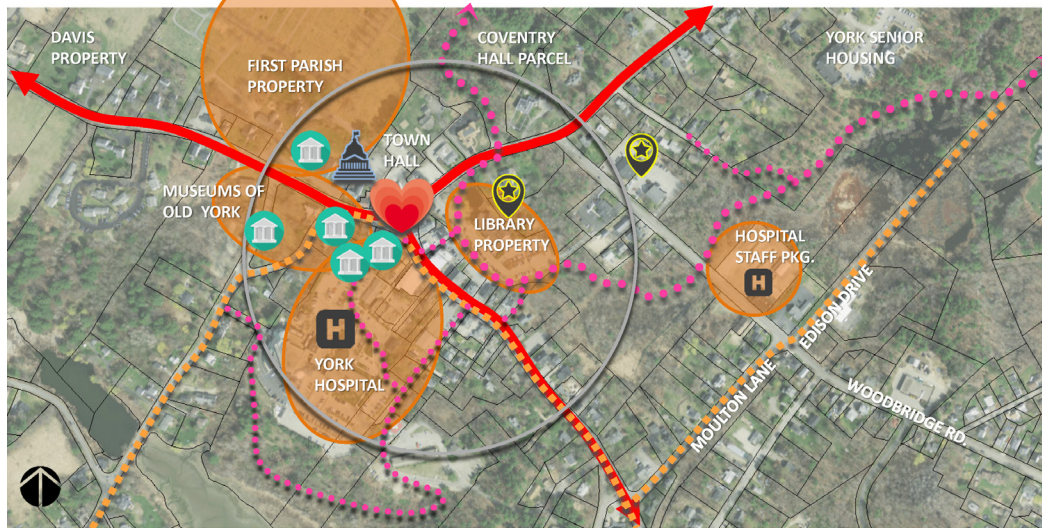
- **Link Schools and Neighborhoods to Multi-Use Path with a Secondary Trail Network**

Neighborhoods and schools could be directly linked via secondary trails. For example, the Master Plan concept shows a potential path connection from behind the Coventry Hall parcel across Long Sands Road through the Public Library park space – making an important direct connection to the Village center.

- **Develop Walking Loops that Begin and End in the Village Center**

Some people prefer to stay on-road and there are many pedestrian-friendly streets leading to scenic destinations. The

## VILLAGE CENTER STRATEGY



- |                         |                          |                     |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| YORK ST & LONG SANDS RD | RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD | TOWN HALL           |
| ON-STREET SCENIC WALKS  | SPECIAL FEATURE          | HISTORIC ATTRACTION |
| TRAIL CONNECTIONS       | COMMUNITY SCHOOL         | VILLAGE CENTER      |



Left: Concept diagram showing the planning approach for the Village Center. Above: Master Plan section showing a landscaped central plaza and public space in front of the Civil War monument. The monument is repositioned to a place of prominence in the public space.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Committee should consider developing a series of walking loops that begin and end in the Village Center. Routes could be color-coded and supplemented by distance markers and informational maps made available in local businesses.

### Create Public Open Space in the Village Center

The Town needs to invest in outdoor public spaces within the Village center. The Public Library landscape is an underutilized resource. The Town should work with the Library Board to upgrade the plantings, improve path connections, and restore the health of the pond, which would be perfect for winter skating. The proposed intersection realignment project also creates an incredible opportunity to establish a more formal plaza space within the heart of the village arrival zone and adjacent to the Library green space. These pedestrian and community-oriented spaces reinforce “sense of place” and become important centers of local activity.

### Identify and Secure Critical Connections through Undeveloped Land Tracts

Several large, undeveloped properties are especially relevant to the goals for improving connectivity and enhancing recreational opportunities. Within the Village, the 108 acre First Parish Church parcel is largely wooded with an established network of publicly-accessible trails. The Davis property, located directly to the west, is another critical property for trail access. To the northeast of First Parish land, the Town-owned Coventry Hall parcel, with its mixed forest and open land, offers an opportunity to extend the trail network to Long Sands Road and beyond.

Several more parcels should also be considered important for a cohesive trail network. Two Parsons Realty properties on the northerly and southerly side of Woodbridge Road and the York Hospital-owned parking lot offer the potential for trail connections

between the Library and existing trails behind York Senior Housing. These trails form a fairly extensive network linking area neighborhoods and Long Sands Plaza. The Town may also want to investigate an opportunity for a trail easement near 282 York Street as this parcel is redeveloped.

Much planning and cooperation will be required if the Town moves forward with routing a cohesive trail between Route One and Route 1a. The properties above represent the parcels that are especially critical for connecting Village-area neighborhoods, and schools with the Village center.

### **Form Strategic Partnerships**

Through its Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee, the Town should work closely with the York Land Trust, large land-holders, and conservation entities to plan and improve the trail network and to identify critical natural areas to preserve along the way. In the coming years, the Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee should spearhead a detailed inventory and detailed planning for both on-street and off-street improvements to further realize these conceptual recommendations.

### **Foster Sense of Place**

Open space – both public and private – greatly informs the Village’s character. Large undeveloped land tracts like the Davis property are reminiscent of York’s agricultural heritage. Mature street trees and front yards line the Village and establish an important visual rhythm and sense of human-scale. Together, this seeming patchwork of landscape and open fields and canopies works together to create a distinctive pattern language that says “village.” This Master Plan has been tasked with “Putting the Village Back in York Village.” One resident aptly noted that the Village center felt more like an intersection than a place. Re-establishing a sense of place for the Village center requires mindfulness to the details: designed spaces, materials, and features that enhance those qualities of place that make York Village special. The Visual Master Plan and the Appendix provide essential guidance.



*Images, clockwise from top left: A view across the Old Burying Ground to the First Parish Church; Open space events like the seasonal pumpkin sale reinforce a sense of community; Scenic waterfront at York River; A view across the public front yard space of the Library.*

## **CONCLUSION**

If developed, trails and open spaces would play a critical role in the revitalization of York Village. They would connect and define community and enhance quality of life. Particularly within the Village center, park spaces would serve the public good as centers of community pride and activity – like the public greens around which villages were once built. Green spaces also serve critical environmental functions by providing habitat and offering opportunities for humans to engage with nature. These goal-oriented recommendations are aimed at enhancing the functionality and beauty of these important assets.

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