Stewarding a Public Gem: A Roadmap for the Future of Rye Town Park & Oakland Beach

May 2017

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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With Special Thanks

Judie Eisenberg, GPC, Founder, ProposalPro
Michael Keane, AICP, Capstone Advisor, Senior Environmental Planner, Langan Engineering
Clifford Frasier, Course Assistant, Capstone Program, NYU Wagner
Ellen Ryan, Senior Director of Strategy & Planning, Fairmount Park Conservancy
María Mónica Salazar Tamayo, Translation Assistance, Wagner ’17
Jimena Llopis Abella, Translation Assistance, Wagner ’17

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background & Introduction

This study was a collaboration between Team Sound View (a team of NYU Wagner Master of Urban Planning students) and the Town of Rye from October 2016 until May 2017. While currently neither a vision nor a master plan exists for Rye Town Park, the Town of Rye recognized that increased use of Rye Town Park and Oakland Beach may greatly impact the social good provided in the long term. The Town of Rye solicited the efforts of Team Sound View to help answer the question of how to steward and maximize access to this social good, while also working to protect it. This report documents the process Team Sound View undertook to formulate recommendations as well as an Implementation and Action Plan for these recommendations. This process required a study of the Park's existing conditions, as well as research of best practices and case studies. A large portion of data for this report was collected through extensive stakeholder and community outreach, which then directly led to an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the park. This comprehensive review further informed the recommendations laid out in this report that will assist in prioritizing park improvements and enhance visitor satisfaction, ensuring continued and future success of the Park.

Existing Conditions

Rye Town Park is a historic 62-acre public park and beach located in Rye City, in Westchester County, New York and was established in 1907. The park, while open and accessible to the general public year-round, is heavily used during the peak summer months when the beach is open for swimming. The current use trends of the park are for passive recreation. A third party operates the restaurant and two snack bars, three of 18 existing physical structures at the park, during the summer season. In 2003, the Rye Town Park Bathing Complex and Oakland Beach were added to the national Register of Historic Places. Currently, the park's revenue is generated from user fees, including permits, day passes, events, and space rentals, and concessions consisting of rent paid by the third party operator of the restaurant and snack bars. Since 2015, the Rye Town Park Commission has achieved an operating surplus. According to news sources, the park may have as much as $14 million in deferred maintenance costs.

Stakeholder Outreach

The recommendations produced for this study were informed by qualitative and quantitative data gathered from park stakeholders. Stakeholders were given an opportunity to participate via a survey, which had 1,000 responses, a public forum or open discussion, which had 61 separate attendees, by phone, or by email.

Findings

Residents of the City and Town of Rye visit the park throughout the year, as do non-residents from nearby villages, towns and New York City. People who come to the park use it for exercise, relaxation, dog walking, sunbathing, picnicking, and organized activities, among other recreational activities.

This report uncovered a range of opportunities and constraints for the park. While most park users feel that Rye Town Park is a successful park, over 90 percent of the study's survey respondents feel that there is room for improvement. While most park users consider the park to be passive, they would like the park to provide more contextual amenities and programming throughout the year. Users also expressed the need for physical improvements to the park, including bathroom upgrades, more seating options, and building renovations, among others. Many noted a lack of accessibility for people with physical disabilities, and expressed a need for improvements to meet legal compliance. In addition, limited parking capacity and the park's response to it appeared to be a main priority of many stakeholders. Finally, many respondents expressed worry over the park's resiliency and the need for a resilience and emergency management plan in the face of future coastal storms and other weather related events.

Rye Town Park is part of a connected waterfront area that continues north up until the border of Connecticut and includes the Westchester Children's Museum, Playland Park and Edith G. Reade Natural Park and Wildlife Sanctuary. The park's close proximity to these community amenities, as well as the convenient connectivity, offers many opportunities and resources for Rye Town Park to enter into and formalize collaborative events and programming, which can diversify revenue streams and enhance the visitor experience. Resiliency, emergency management, and parking alternatives can also be explored through a comprehensive, multi-organizational review and analysis.

As part of a historically designated complex on the National Register of Historic Places, and funded by user fees and concessions, Rye Town Park has unique challenges related to capital improvements. This historic designation comes with its own set of strict guidelines for acceptable modifications and repairs to both the structural integrity and existing façades of the improvements. This can limit the types of permitted repairs that the Rye Town Park Commission can perform, as well as affect the timeline for such repairs, without prior approval from the National Register. While user fees and concessions have been enough to generate an operating surplus at the end of the last two fiscal years, the surplus is not enough to cover the cost of the repairs and substantial rehabilitation of existing infrastructure.

SWOT Analysis

Figure 1. SWOT Analysis Matrix

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
• Public good to multiple communities • Natural beauty & resources • Historic character • Profitability	• Deteriorating infrastructure • Lack of ADA compliance • Limited financial resources • Limited parking options
OPPORTUNITIES	**THREATS**
• Creative programming & uses to increase activity for off-season use • Underutilized structural space • Area-wide collaboration • Engaged park users	• Fee-based revenue stream • Decision-making process • Extreme weather & coastal threats • Overuse • Competing interests

Recommendations[1]

GOAL 1. Define a vision

Strategy 1.1: Assemble a visioning task force*
Strategy 1.2: Develop a strategic plan*
Strategy 1.3: Increase and sustain community engagement*
  Strategy 1.3a: Establish a Citizens' Advisory Committee to assist the RTPC*
Strategy 1.4: Establish a conservancy focused on building & infrastructure restoration*
Strategy 1.5: Establish an area-wide partnership with neighboring facilities and organizations*

GOAL 2. Improve transparency

Strategy 2.1: Streamline the website
Strategy 2.2: Establish a direct line of communication for reservations and comments/concerns
Strategy 2.3: Automate payment systems for parking and fees
Strategy 2.4: Revisit park rules and regulations
  Strategy 2.4a: Communicate revised rules and regulations
Strategy 2.5: Identify relationship between park regulations and local laws
  Strategy 2.5a: Determine enforceability of park rules
  Strategy 2.5b: Enable and train park staff

[1] Starred strategies indicate high priority.

Strategy 2.5c: Develop a protocol for rule enforcement*

GOAL 3. Improve accessibility

Strategy 3.1: Revisit area-wide parking plan*
Strategy 3.2: Increase awareness of parking and transportation alternatives*
Strategy 3.3: Demarcate designated drop-off areas
Strategy 3.4: Consider alterations to parking regulations on local streets
Strategy 3.5: Repave and restripe parking lot
Strategy 3.6: Hire a consultant to recommend ADA upgrades
Strategy 3.7: Seek out funds to increase disability access

GOAL 4. Ensure coastal resiliency

Strategy 4.1: Establish a resiliency plan*
Strategy 4.1a: Implement improvements to landscape architecture
Strategy 4.2: Develop an emergency management plan
Strategy 4.4: Restore sea wall

GOAL 5. Invest in general improvements

Strategy 5.1: Increase trash pickup during peak hours
Strategy 5.2: Establish a fenced-off dog run
Strategy 5.3: Install additional drinking fountains
Strategy 5.4: Improve and expand seating options
Strategy 5.5: Enhance lighting
Strategy 5.6: Upgrade bathrooms
Strategy 5.7: Resurface paths
Strategy 5.8: Renovate buildings

GOAL 6. Expand and improve amenities

Strategy 6.1: Provide quality, affordable food options
Strategy 6.2: Extend the operating season for the restaurant
Strategy 6.3: Rent out beach chairs, umbrellas, or other equipment
Strategy 6.4: Build a playground
Strategy 6.5: Increase the number and type of live music events
Strategy 6.6: Develop local partnerships to expand exercise & yoga classes
Strategy 6.7: Repurpose the Administrative Building for educational or artistic use*
Strategy 6.8: Set up free Wi-Fi

I. BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

In August 2016, the Town of Rye solicited support from a team of second-year NYU Master of Urban Planning students to conduct research and develop a plan for the future of Rye Town Park and Oakland Beach (RTP). The 62-acre park located in Rye City is an important resource to the City and Town of Rye, but parking constraints, traffic congestion, and pedestrian use have become a prominent issue in recent years. Nevertheless, there is no long-term vision for RTP, specifically with respect to maximizing social benefits while also protecting RTP's natural resources and minimizing the environmental impact of park use.

In an effort to steward this historic open space for current and future generations, leaders from the City and Town of Rye collaborated with the team of graduate students to undertake a comprehensive analysis of existing conditions, gather input from park users and other stakeholders, and investigate best practices in park planning and management. This report is the culmination of that effort.

The report is structured as follows:

- **Section I** of this report gives background and an introduction to the study.
- **Section II** provides an overview of existing conditions, including park history, context, current use, and park user profiles.
- **Section III** outlines relevant stakeholder groups, and summarizes the stakeholder outreach process. It also synthesizes stakeholder input into a set of key findings.
- **Section IV** lays out the park's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, as defined through the stakeholder outreach process and existing conditions analysis.
- **Section V** presents a set of recommendations for the future of the park and beach.
- **Section VI** provides an implementation and action plan for those recommendations.
- **Section VII** highlights several best practices in park planning and management, from which the City and Town of Rye as well as the Rye Town Park Commission may be able to draw in the future.

Capstone Project

The NYU Wagner Capstone curriculum enables small groups of second-year graduate students to partner with organizations that have a public service agenda. In this case, a group of Urban Planning students chose to work with the Town of Rye to address challenges and identify new opportunities for Rye Town Park and Oakland Beach. The Capstone team, Team Sound View, worked with and collected information from over 1,000 park stakeholders over the course of the 2016-2017 academic year in order to develop recommendations and an action plan for the park.

Goals and Objectives

Officials from the Town of Rye approached Team Sound View with the question, "How do we [Rye Town Park] steward and maximize access to this social good while working to protect it?" This question captures a key tension that Team Sound View has gone on to further document throughout the course of the study: maintaining public access while preventing overuse. The purpose of the Rye Town Park and Oakland Beach Study is to capture the opinions of park users by summarizing how they think the park can be improved. By including details and discussion points from a park-focused survey conducted for this study and in-person discussions, the report identifies feasible opportunities for Rye Town Park, while aligning park users' visions to make data-driven recommendations.

To develop recommendations, the team first consolidated input from the more than 1,000 stakeholders who participated in this study. Team Sound View then conducted a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis to determine the park's internal strengths and weaknesses, while identifying the park's external opportunities and threats, based on input from stakeholders. The SWOT exercise enabled the team to develop a clear path forward into recommendations. The recommendations found in Section V of this report reflect the concerns and suggestions provided by stakeholders, but also the objectivity and expertise of Team Sound View as external consultants.

II. EXISTING CONDITIONS

A Brief History

Rye Town Park was established as a public park in 1907 after a long and drawn-out debate over creating a park at Oakland Beach in the Village of Rye. Prior to the vote, the land was privately held by Augustus Halsted, an early Westchester resident who owned other real estate throughout the area. In the late 19th century, Halsted built shacks for rent on his land along the Long Island Sound. Visitors from New York City, New Jersey and Long Island would rent these small barracks on an annual basis and come up to enjoy the beach during the summer months.

In 1909, Upjohn & Conable, a New York City-based architecture firm, and Brinley & Holbrook, a New York City-based landscape architecture firm, were hired to design the newly established public park. The park's architecture and design borrowed heavily from the City Beautiful movement, which was prominently featured at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. The architects designed several buildings – including the still-standing Bathing Complex – in the Spanish Mission style.

In 2003, Rye Town Park Bathing Complex and Oakland Beach were added to the National Register of Historic Places.[2]

Rye Town Park Commission

Rye Town Park and Oakland Beach are administered by the Rye Town Park Commission (RTPC), which is composed of elected and appointed officials from the City and Town of Rye. The Commission has six sitting members, including the following members:

- Gary Zuckerman, Supervisor of the Town of Rye, RTPC President
- Benedict Salanitro, P.E., Appointed Commissioner for the Town of Rye
- Joseph Sack, Mayor of the City of Rye
- Paul Rosenberg, Mayor for the Village of Rye Brook
- Richard "Fritz" Falanka, Mayor of the Village of Port Chester[3]
- Julie Killian, Appointed Commissioner for the City of Rye & Member of the Rye City Council

The RTPC meets publicly on the third Tuesday of every month to discuss park operations and functions. The Commission is responsible for resolving park issues and making decisions that suit the needs of the park, its users, and neighboring Rye residents, and for keeping constituents up to date on ongoing park projects and initiatives. The Commission, as a representative body, has

[2] NR #03000252.

[3] Dennis Pilla was Mayor of Port Chester during most of the study.

voting power and therefore the authority to adopt new initiatives or policies, including park rules and regulations. The RTPC affords the public time for open discussion during commission meetings, and all commission members are available for contact. All RTPC meetings are filmed and are made available via the Town of Rye website.

Context

Rye Town Park encompasses a 28.1-acre public park and 34.5-acre public beach situated on the Long Island Sound in Rye City in Westchester County, New York. RTP is bounded by Rye Beach Avenue to the north; Dearborn Avenue to the south; Forest Avenue to the west; and Oakland Beach and the Long Island Sound to the east (see *Figure 1*). The beach area of Playland Amusement Park, which has also been designated as a National Historic Landmark, is northeast of and adjacent to RTP. The City of Rye and the Town of Rye jointly fund park operations that are not covered by the revenue from the park itself.

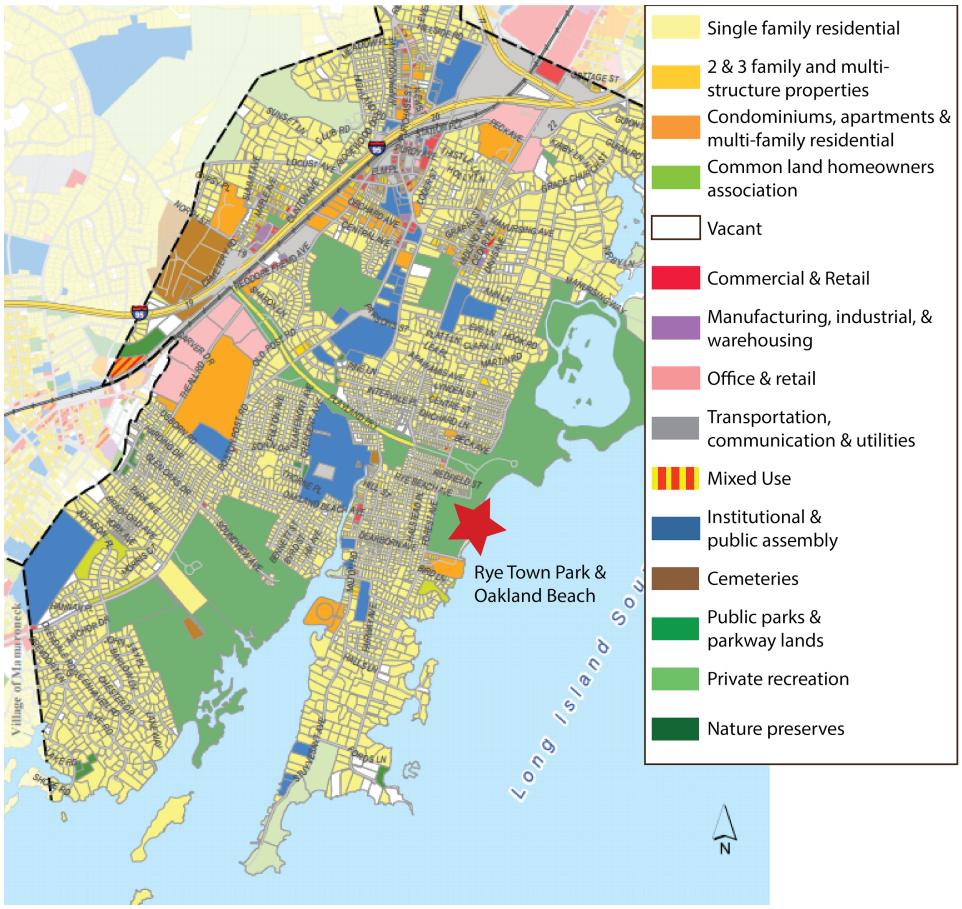
Figure 2. Rye Town Park Map Illustration

Source: Rye Town Park Commission

The green area of the park is elevated approximately 15 feet above the beach level, with riprap providing a foundation and retaining wall along the shoreline to the east. Landscape features include stone walls, a terrace, a stone bridge, outdoor lighting fixtures, staircases, ramps, paved and unpaved pathways, trees, plantings, lawns, and a small pond, the Duck Pond. There are 18 structures within RTP used for various purposes, including office space, a bathing complex, a restaurant, two snack bars, and storage space. Of these, eleven contribute to the historic significance of the site.

Land use surrounding the park and beach is predominantly low-density residential. The closest commercial centers are in Harrison, approximately two miles from RTP; Rye City, approximately two miles from RTP; and Port Chester, approximately three miles distant. Metro-North Railroad connects to all three commercial centers via the New Haven Line.

Figure 3. Land Use Surrounding Rye Town Park and Oakland Beach



Source: Westchester County Department of Planning, 2009

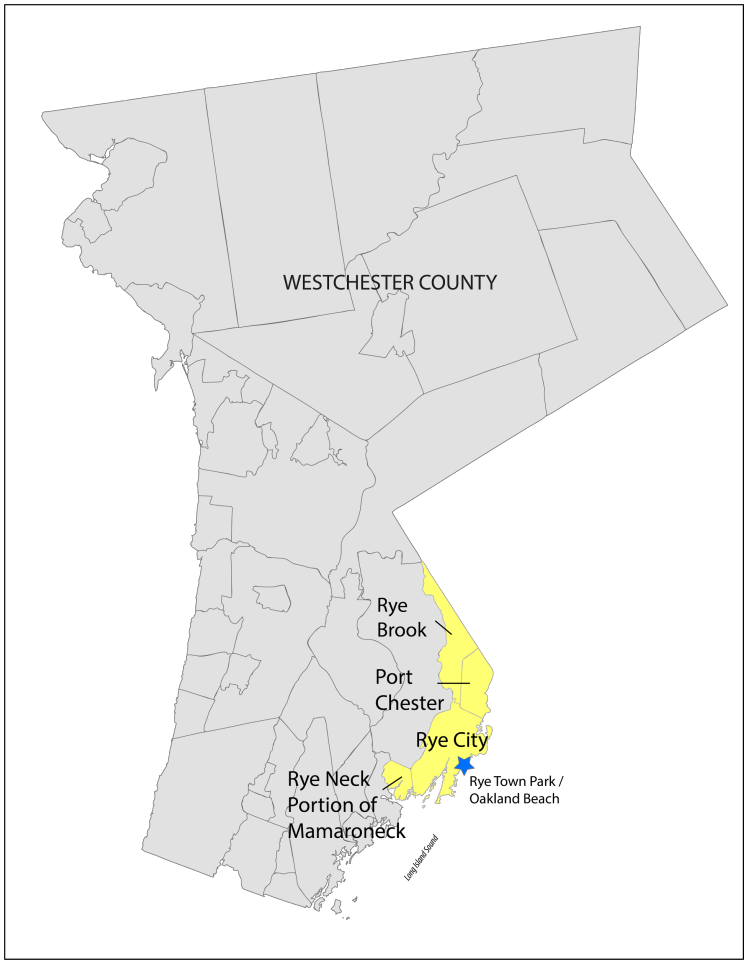
Westchester County operates three Beeline Bus lines that serve Playland and, by default because of proximity, Rye Town Park. These lines include the #13 bus, which operates daily between Ossining and Rye through Tarrytown, Elmsford, White Plains, and Port Chester; the #75 bus, which provides a daily shuttle service during the summer season between Playland and the Rye Railroad Station; and the #91 bus, which provides daily service during the summer season between Yonkers and Rye through Mt. Vernon, Pelham Manor, Pelham, and New Rochelle.

Figure 4. Bus Routes Near Rye Town Park and Oakland Beach

Source: Westchester County Bee-Line Bus

The administrative and government structure surrounding the park is complex, as the park is located in the City of Rye, but is controlled by leaders from both the city and the town. At the time of the park's establishment Rye City was an incorporated village within Rye Town. The village of Rye received its charter from New York State and was reincorporated as a city in 1942. The Town of Rye is composed of the villages of Rye Brook and Port Chester, along with the Rye Neck portion of Mamaroneck. Any person who lives within these communities or in Rye City is considered a "resident" and may purchase an annual permit or day pass for both parking and beach use at a reduced cost (*see Appendix L*). Approximately 61,650 people live in the City and Town of Rye, of which 47 percent live in Port Chester, 26 percent live in Rye City, 15 percent live in Rye Brook, and 12 percent live in the Rye Neck section of Mamaroneck.

Figure 5. City and Town of Rye



Demographic, Housing, and Income Profile

The City of Rye and the villages comprising the Town of Rye are distinct. Household characteristics, including housing composition, race, national origin, income, and educational attainment vary widely from one municipality to another, as do the level and type of public services demanded. The provision of public goods in such diverse areas, especially with the involvement of multiple municipalities, can often be a challenge, since variations in population characteristics can serve as an indicator of variations in preferences. The diversity of the municipalities involved with RTP was an important consideration throughout this study, specifically related to accessibility issues. Language, income, and predominant means of transportation factored heavily into the marketing and information-gathering stages of this study. The following paragraphs offer a snapshot of each resident municipality and its population.

Port Chester (Village in the Town of Rye)[4]

The Village of Port Chester has a total population of nearly 29,000, of which 63.8 percent identify as Hispanic or Latino. Port Chester has a high foreign-born population relative to the rest of the Town of Rye and Rye City, and approximately 64 percent of residents are fluent in English.

Families comprise 69 percent of households in Port Chester, and 43 percent of households are owner-occupied. Detached single units make up 31 percent of the housing stock, while the other 69 percent of housing units in small-scale multifamily buildings. The median residential unit is approximately 40 percent smaller than in neighboring municipalities by number of rooms. Median home value in Port Chester is $436,700, and median gross rent reaches $1,419. These statistics are consistent with a large presence of multifamily rental housing in Port Chester.

Median household income in Port Chester is $55,437, and unemployment is 7.2 percent. Nearly 20 percent of households lack access to an automobile, consistent with higher use of public transit (14.4%) and carpools (8%) for commuting in Port Chester relative to the other resident municipalities. The fact that a significant portion of the population, 12.9 percent, walk to work and that mean commute time is 23.5 minutes suggests that many residents work in the immediate area surrounding Port Chester. Educational attainment is relatively low compared to neighboring municipalities: approximately 68 percent of the population over age 18 have a high school diploma or GED, and 14 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher.

Rye Brook (Village in the Town of Rye)[5]

The population of the Village of Rye Brook is 9,347, one-third that of Port Chester. The population of Rye Brook is also significantly older than in Port Chester: median age is 44 ten years higher than Port Chester median age. A much larger percentage (79.4%) of Rye Brook residents identify as non-Hispanic white, and only 11.4 percent of the population self-describes as Hispanic or Latino. Rye Brook also has the highest percentage of Asian residents, at 5.8 percent of the village population.

The housing stock in Rye Brook is characterized by a prevalence of owner-occupied, single-family detached homes. Seventy-four percent of households are family households, and fully 80 percent are owner-occupied, almost double the homeownership rate of Port Chester. Detached single units comprise 66 percent of all units in Rye Brook, an inverse of the proportion for Port Chester. The median unit in Rye Brook is 47 percent larger by number of rooms than the median unit in Port Chester. Median home value in Rye Brook is $730,100, and median gross rent is $1,694.

Residents of Rye Brook also have higher incomes and higher rates of educational attainment. Median household income in Rye Brook is $131,488. The unemployment rate is 8.5 percent, 13

[4] 2010 Decennial Census, American Community Survey 2011-2015 5-Year Estimates.

[5] Ibid.

percentage points higher than Port Chester and 30 percentage points higher than Rye City. More than 89 percent of households have access to an automobile, and mean travel time to work is 33.8 minutes. Nearly 92 percent of adult residents earned their high school diploma or GED, and nearly 36 percent earned their bachelor's or higher.

Rye Neck (Area within the Town of Rye and the Village of Mamaroneck)[6]

Rye Neck is a section of the Village of Mamaroneck that lies within the Town of Rye. The Rye Neck Union Free School District serves this part of the Village of Mamaroneck, as well as a small part of the City of Rye. The Village of Mamaroneck has nearly 19,000 residents, of whom 7,614 live in Rye Neck.

Rye City[7]

With a population of 15,720, Rye City is approximately one-third the size of the Town of Rye. Over 85 percent of the Rye population identifies as non-Hispanic white, with 6.5 percent identifying as Hispanic or Latino and another 5.3 percent identifying as Asian.

Family households constitute over 73 percent of total households in Rye City, and nearly 73 percent of households are owner-occupied. Approximately 63 percent of residential units in Rye City are detached single units. Median home value is $1,055,100, and median gross rent is $1,878.

Of all resident municipalities, Rye City has the highest income and highest levels of educational attainment. Rye High School is the tenth highest-rated high school in New York State.[8] The median household income in Rye City is $155,273, twice as high as the median income in the Town of Rye, and three times higher than median income in Port Chester. Almost 93 percent of households have access to a motor vehicle, and mean journey to work time is the highest of all resident municipalities at 36.1 minutes. 97 percent of the Rye City residents age 18 or over have their high school diploma or GED, and 74 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher.

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[6] 2010 Decennial Census, American Community Survey 2011-2015 5-Year Estimates. Rye Neck is an area in the Town of Rye. Data for Rye Neck specifically is not available through the Census, but is included in the data for the Town of Rye as well as for the Village of Mamaroneck.
[7] Ibid.
[8] 2016 U.S. News and World Report

Table 1. Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of Resident Municipalities

Race/Ethnicity	Rye City	Rye Town	Rye Brook	Port Chester
White / Caucasian	85.2%	46.9%	79.5%	28.6%
Hispanic / Latino	6.5%	44.4%	11.4%	63.8%
Asian	5.3%	2.7%	5.8%	1.4%
Black / African American	0.6%	4.7%	2.6%	5.0%
American Indian / Alaska native	0.3%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Two or more races	1.6%	0.9%	0.6%	0.7%
Some other race	0.5%	0.3%	0.0%	0.6%

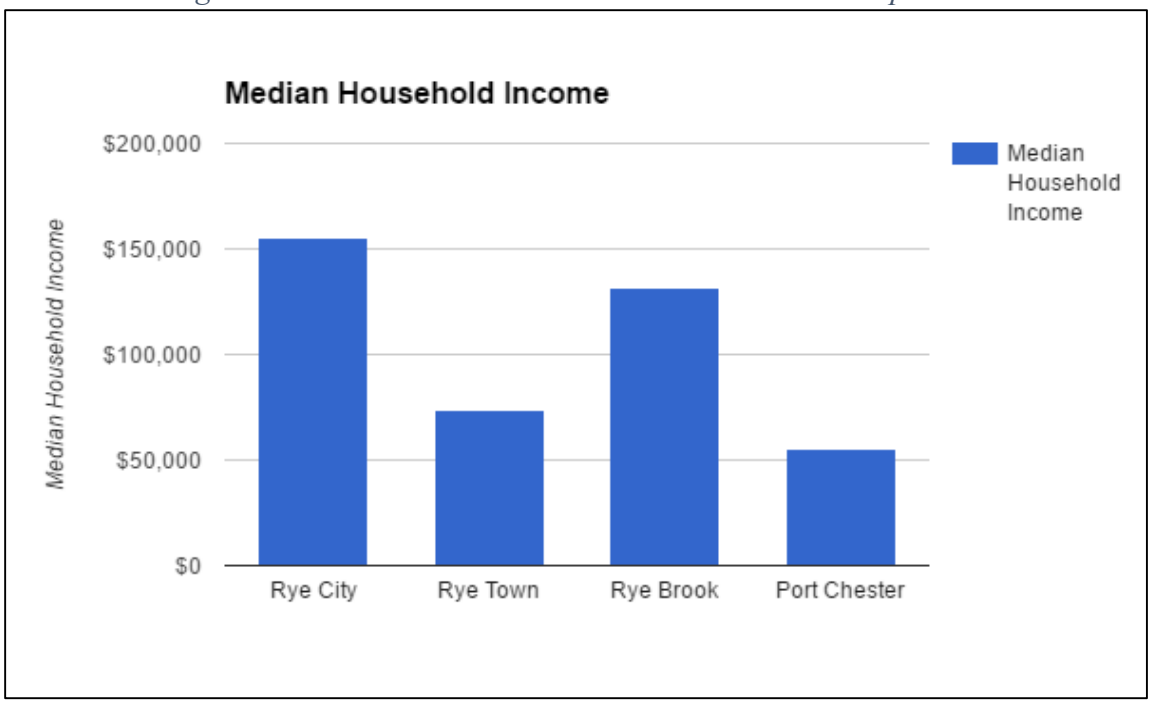
Source: 2010 Decennial Census

Table 2. Education Levels in Resident Municipalities

Education Level	Rye City	Rye Town	Rye Brook	Port Chester
High school diploma or higher	97.0%	76.7%	91.8%	68.3%
Bachelor's degree or higher	74.0%	17.8%	35.7%	13.9%

Source: American Community Survey 2011-2015 5-Year Estimates

Figure 6. Median Household Income in Resident Municipalities



Source: American Community Survey 2011-2015 5-Year Estimates

Current Park & Beach Uses

Rye Town Park is a popular summer destination. While the beach is only open for swimming from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend, residents and nonresidents utilize the park and beach year-round for other purposes and activities.

Many local groups utilize the park for events throughout the year. In 2016, the following events took place in the park:

- Polar Bear Plunge (January, 2016)
- Pancreatic Cancer Walk (May 2016)
- Angel Wing Walk (May 2016)
- Nami Walk (May 2016)
- Triathlon (September 2016)
- Turkey Run (November 2016)
- Rangers 5K Run (November 2016)
- Volunteer Clean-up Days (3rd Saturday of every month)
- Concert Series
- Shakespeare in the Park
- Breast Cancer Awareness Ribbons (October 2016)

In addition, the following local groups[9] often used the park for educational or recreational purposes:

- Rye Nature Center
- Local summer camps
- Elizabeth Mascia Day Care Center
- New York Institute for the Blind
- Corpus Christi Day Camp
- Rye YMCA
- Rye Presbyterian Church
- Milton School
- Rye Arts Center
- Rye Library

Rye Town Park is also a popular destination for dog-walkers. Permit-holding dog owners may have their dogs off-leash within a designated area on the north side of the park from 6:00 AM to 9:00 AM daily. Given the park's large size and numerous walking paths, many people also come to the park to exercise or simply use it for other passive, recreational purposes.

[9] This list is not exhaustive.

Park Finances

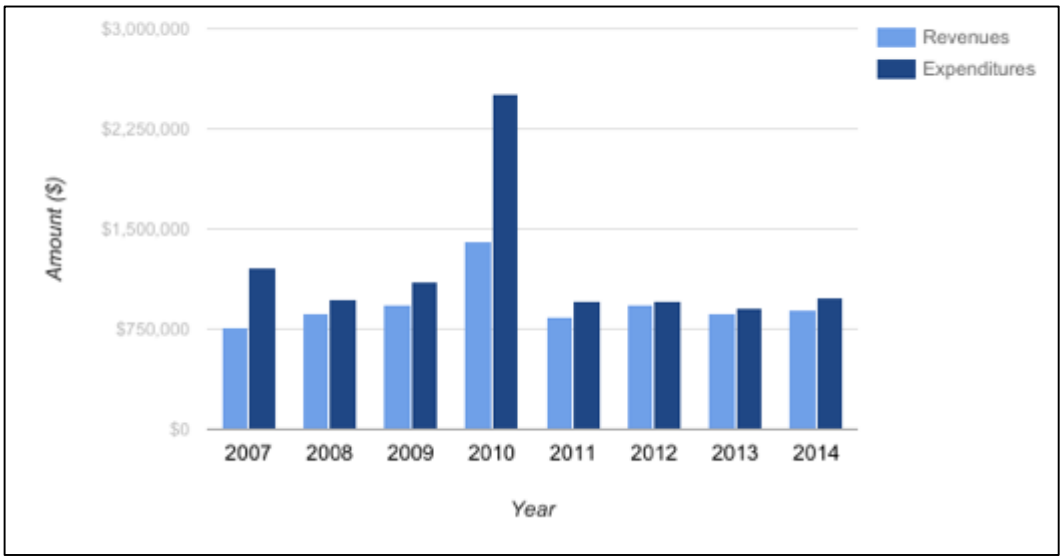
The Rye Town Park Commission receives revenue from user fees and concessions. User fees consist of: permits and day passes for parking and beach access, off-leash dog registration, event fees, and space rentals. Concessions consist primarily of rent paid to the Commission by the operator of the restaurant and snack bars. Since 2015 the Rye Town Park Commission has had an operating surplus.[10] In previous years, the operating deficit was covered by funds from the Town of Rye and City of Rye, which are obligated to finance operations not covered by revenue from fees and concessions. While the city and town are obligated to pay for park operations, the town is legally required to contribute approximately 60 percent and the city is required to contribute 40 percent to capital repairs. This is significant because Rye Town Park has an estimated $14 million in deferred maintenance costs[11], including deferred maintenance for park structures, the sea wall, the parking lot, and park landscaping.

Total revenues for the Rye Town Park Commission saw an 18 percent increase from 2007 to 2014.[12] Rye Town staff attribute this to a restructuring of user fees. During the same period, total expenditures and encumbrances for the Rye Town Park Commission decreased by 19 percent.[13] 2010 saw a notable increase in revenues, expenditures, and encumbrances due to a large influx of grant revenue and increased public spending for roof repairs of historic buildings.

Public funding from the Town of Rye and City of Rye for the Rye Town Park Commission decreased by 80 percent during the period from 2007 to 2014.[14] Again, 2010 was an exception and saw an influx of over $1 million in funds from the town and city. On average, the Town of Rye contributed 56 percent of the total amount of public funds during this period, while the City of Rye contributed the remaining 44 percent.[15]

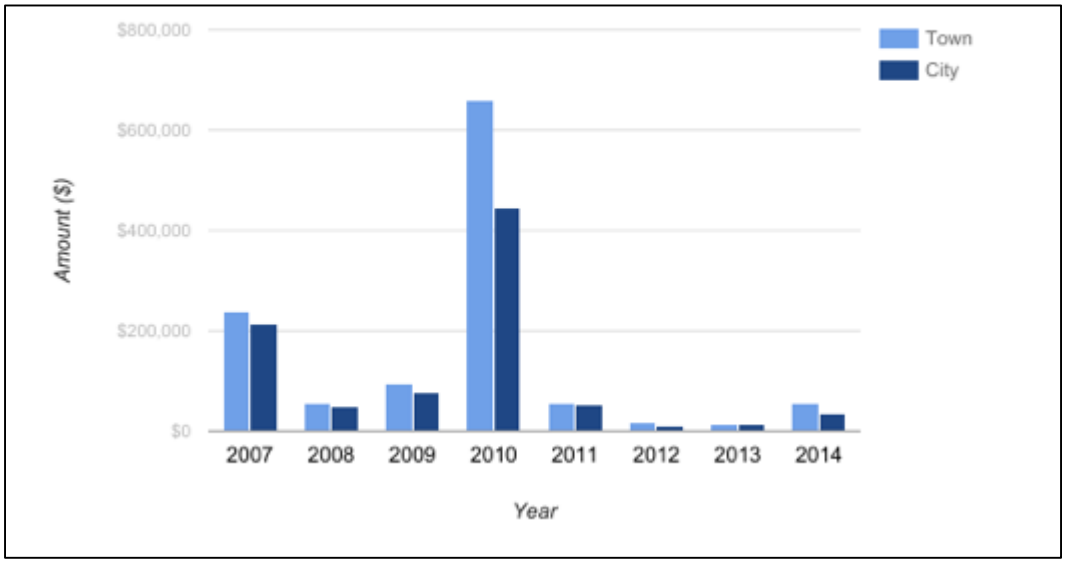
[10] Verbal report by Rye Town Supervisor.
[11] Journal News
[12] Rye Town Park Commission audited financial documents.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.

Figure 7. Rye Town Park Commission Revenues and Expenditures, 2007-2014



Source: Rye Town Park Commission

Figure 8. Public Funding from City & Town of Rye for Rye Town Park Commission, 2007-2014



Source: Rye Town Park Commission

Park Users

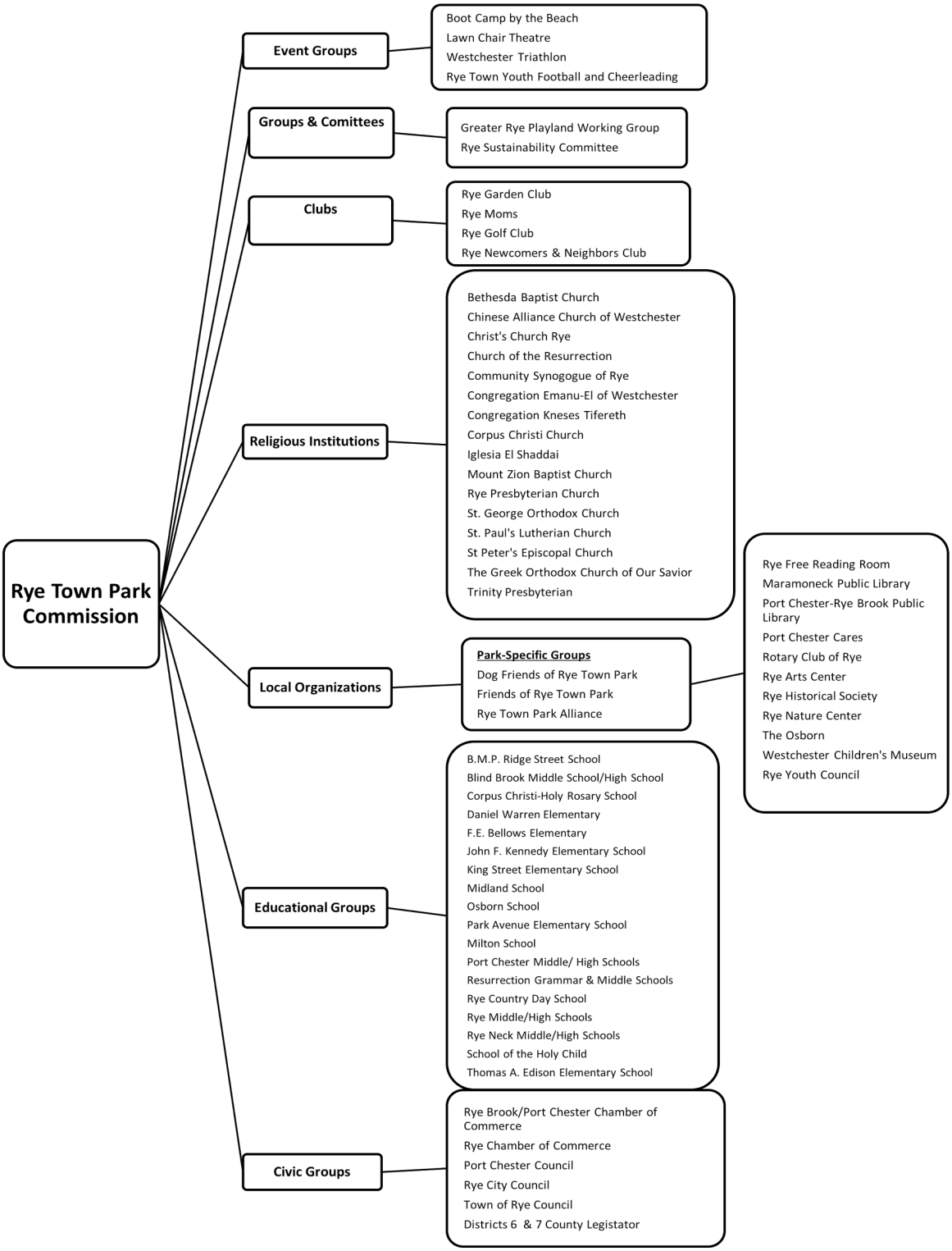
As a public park, RTP is open to the public year-round. Between Memorial Day and Labor Day, beachgoers are required to hold either an annual permit or pay for a daily pass to access the beach (*see Appendix L*). Residents of the City and Town of Rye are eligible to purchase annual memberships at a reduced price. In 2016, RTP issued 2,133 annual beach access permits, 81 percent of which were for park employees or residents of the City or Town of Rye. The remaining 19 percent were issued to nonresidents. Additionally, 47,048 daily beach access permits were

issued in 2016, of which 28 percent went to residents and 72 percent went to nonresidents. Rye Town Park generated $131,856 in beach access revenue from residents and $476,523 in beach access revenue from nonresidents.[16]

[16] These values do not include parking fee revenues from either residents or nonresidents.

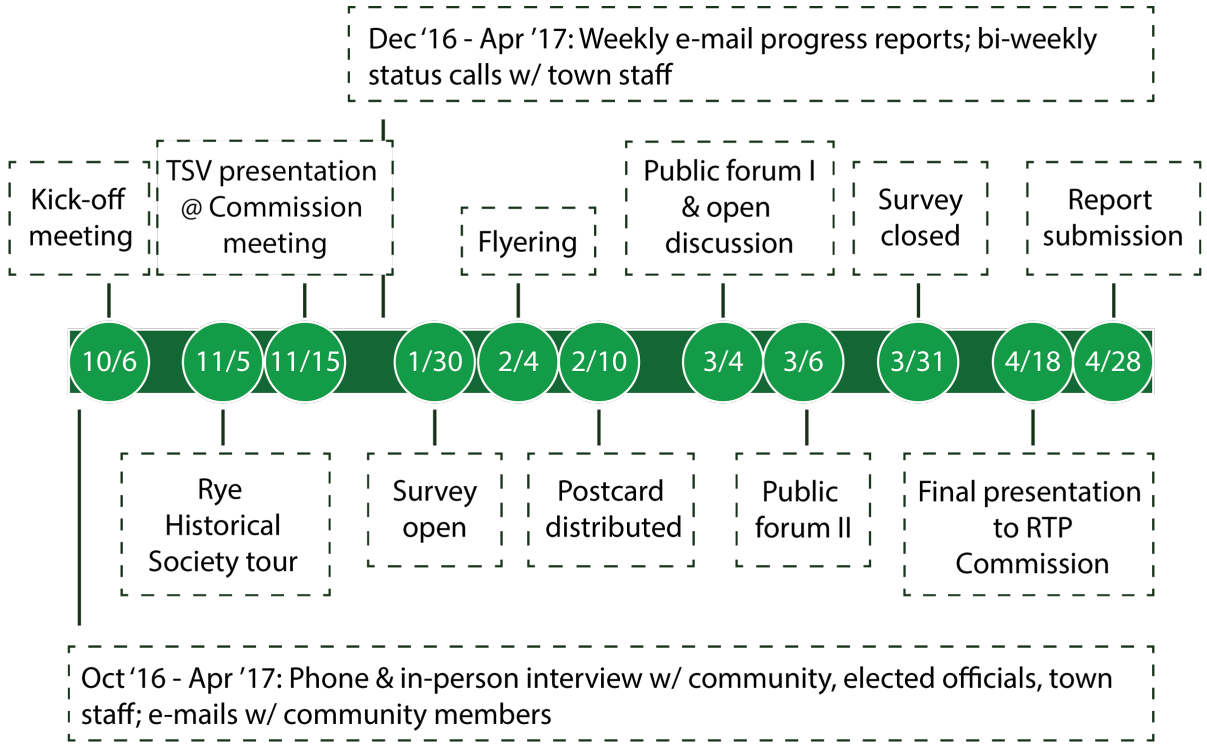
III. STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH

Park Stakeholders (Stakeholder Map)



Stakeholder Engagement Strategies

Figure 9. Project Timeline



Communication and Interviews

The first several months of the study consisted of regular communication with staff from the Town of Rye starting with a kick-off meeting in Rye on October 6, 2016. In November, two members of the team presented at the Rye Town Park Commission meeting to introduce the team to park administrators, define the purpose of the study for the local community, and discuss appropriate topics for study. Also in November, the team took a historical tour of the park with Sheri Jordan of the Rye Historical Society. This tour was helpful in giving the team a greater historical understanding of the park and its relation to both Rye City and the Town of Rye.

From November 2016 to mid-January 2017, the team conducted several interviews of community stakeholders and local elected officials. With guidance from town staff, the team sent out an email request to 21 community members and frequent park users in December 2016 and arranged for interviews with interested parties. The team received 12 responses to their request for assistance, three of which were the result of referrals by other community members. Five of these responders were engaged by phone, while seven were engaged exclusively through email.

Concurrently, the team sought guidance from each of the Rye Town Park Commissioners, and conducted phone interviews with four of the six commissioners, including the Mayors of Port

Chester and Rye Brook and the Rye Town Supervisor. In total, the team conducted over-the-phone or in-person interviews with 18 community members, local officials, and town staff. Including email communications, the team gathered information from over 30 community members during this stage in their research.

Marketing

A local marketing campaign advertising the study, survey, and public events spanned the entire month of February 2017 (*see Appendices B, C, D & E*). This campaign involved email marketing, a mass mailing of a postcard to all households in the City of Rye and Town of Rye, distribution of flyers around local commercial centers, announcements at local meetings, posts on social media and town websites, and a significant amount of press coverage. The marketing campaign sought to leverage contacts at community organizations, asking them to spread word to all members about the study.

Marketing Highlights

Postcard
25,000 households

Flyers
Rye City, Rye Neck, Rye Brook, Port Chester

Email
189 direct recipients
108 distribution lists

Social Media
RTP Facebook, Town of Rye Website, other misc. Facebook pages

Press Coverage
Journal News, Rye City Review, Rye Patch, Rye Record, Westmore News

Postcard

In early February 2017 the Town of Rye mailed out postcards to approximately 25,000 households in the City of Rye and Town of Rye with details about the study, including instructions on how to access the online survey and the date, time, and location of the two public forums and one open discussion. This information was provided to residents in both English and Spanish (*see Appendix B*).

In addition to the mailed postcard, an e-Postcard was also developed in order to increase survey accessibility. The e-Postcard, in PDF format, stated all of the information included in the mailed postcard with the addition of a live link that recipients could click to access the survey directly. There were two versions of the e-Postcard, one in English and one in Spanish (*see Appendix C*). The e-Postcard was included as an attachment on emails and posted on social media sites.

Flyer

Town of Rye staff and the team distributed flyers around commercial centers in Rye City, Port Chester, Rye Brook, and Rye Neck in February 2017. The flyers were posted or given to local business owners to post. The flyer listed information about the study, how to access the online survey, and details about the public meetings. There were two versions of the flyer, one in English and one in Spanish (*see Appendix D*).

Email

In the first week of February 2017, emails were successfully sent to 189 community members announcing the launch of the survey and the upcoming public events. Of those contacted, 108 were affiliated with a local organization[17] and were asked to forward the email to their members. In addition, the email was forwarded to everyone on the Rye Town Park Commission distribution list and the Rye Brook and Rye City resident email lists, which include contact information for several thousand residents.

Online Advertising & Social Media

The survey link and study announcement were posted to the homepage and the Rye Town Park page of the Town of Rye website on February 6, 2017. The link was also shared on the Town of Rye and Rye Town Park Facebook pages on the same date. The link was periodically reposted on both Facebook pages throughout February and March.

Local Meetings

Known announcements about the study were made at meetings of the Rye Town Park Commission, Rye Chamber of Commerce, and Rye Lions.

Press Coverage

The team and the Town of Rye collaborated on a press release that was distributed to various news outlets and community members on February 3, 2017 (*see Appendix E*). The study received coverage from various news outlets, including the Journal News, Rye City Review, Rye Patch, Rye Record, and Westmore News.

Survey

Through collaboration with community members and town staff, a survey was developed to gather information on park use and preferences. Community members, elected officials, and town staff suggested topics and suggestions that were incorporated into the content and flow of the survey. The team's faculty adviser and another NYU Wagner professor who specializes in data gathering provided guidance on question sequencing and survey flow. After numerous tests, the online survey was finalized and launched on January 30, 2017. The survey remained open until March 31, 2017, allowing respondents 61 days for submission.

Survey Highlights

47 Questions

1,000 Responses

~9,000 Long-Answer Comments

[17] Nonprofit organizations, civic groups, educational institutions, elected officials, public managers, media outlets, and religious institutions in Rye, Rye Brook, Port Chester, and Rye Neck.

The final Rye Town Park / Oakland Beach Community Survey was made available online in both English and Spanish, and included 47 questions.[18] Total estimated completion time for the survey was 14 minutes, but this estimated response time was also dependent on how the respondent answered certain questions. The online survey included three mandatory demographic questions asking for respondent gender, respondent age range, and respondent place of residence. Respondents were not permitted to complete the survey without providing information for these three fields. The printed version of the survey was available at each of the three public events and consisted of 19 printed pages in both English and Spanish. This version was identical to the online version.

Qualtrics software allowed respondents to complete the survey either on a desktop or laptop computer or on a mobile device. The software allowed respondents to access the survey via a shareable URL link, switch languages via a dropdown menu, go backward and forward, and save progress to continue later. The Qualtrics "Prevent Ballot Box Stuffing" setting[19] also prevented respondents from submitting multiple responses from the same browser.

The team received 995 online survey responses during the 61-day response period. In addition to the online survey responses, the team received five paper survey responses, four from participants at both public forums and one from an attendee of the open discussion event in Port Chester. The total number of survey responses totaled 1,000, of which 79.8 percent were completed responses, indicating that the respondent had arrived at the last page and clicked "Submit." The survey response rate, based on the combined population of Rye City and Rye Town, was 2 percent.[20] Of the total survey responses, all but one were completed in English.

Takeaways

Views on the park. Nearly 55 percent of respondents felt that Rye Town Park is a passive park, and 35.3 percent believed it was both active and passive. Only 7.9 percent of respondents stated that the park is an active park. Regarding park success, 63.4 percent of respondents felt that RTP is a successful park, 16.1 percent felt it is unsuccessful, and 20.5 percent were unsure. Just over 90 percent of respondents felt there is room for improvement at RTP.

Park finances. Just over 86 percent of respondents felt the park should be partially funded through

[18] This number excludes questions asking for demographic information about the survey respondent and questions asking for explanation of a previous answer. The questions on the online survey were not listed numerically and included questions from eight topic areas: patterns of use, activities and events, programming and amenities, accessibility, environment, financing, visioning, and demographics.

[19] "The Prevent Ballot Box Stuffing option helps keep respondents from taking a survey multiple times by placing a cookie on their browser when they submit a response. The next time the respondent clicks on the survey link, Qualtrics will see this cookie and not permit them to take the survey. Prevent Ballot Box Stuffing is a great deterrent, but can be circumvented by savvy participants clearing their browser cookies or switching to a different web browser" (Qualtrics Support).

[20] American Community Survey 2015 Population Estimates for residents of Rye Town and Rye City aged 15 and older.

concessions, 81.7 percent supported funding through user and event fees, 73.9 percent approved of funding from local tax revenue, and 70.3 percent felt the park should look for state and federal funding grants. Several respondents suggested leveraging funds through donations, fundraising, endowments, or sponsorships.

Park support. Sixty percent of respondents stated they would be willing to support the park by volunteering, 51.1 percent stated they would be willing to contribute to the park monetarily, and another 31 percent stated they would be willing to provide in-kind services or donations. Almost two-thirds of respondents requested future communication about Rye Town Park and Oakland Beach.

Park regulations. Nearly 39 percent of respondents reported that they walk their dogs at Rye Town Park. Fifty-two percent of total respondents felt that regulations concerning dogs and dog-walking are adequate, while slightly less than 21 percent felt that these regulations are inadequate.

Park access. Seventy percent of users access the park by driving. Fifty-two percent walk to the park and nearly 22 percent bike, which may indicate a high number of responses from residents in the immediate vicinity. Less than 1 percent of respondents access the park via public transportation. Sixty percent of respondents felt that that the impact of parking on the grass in the park is negative, with 31.1 percent of respondents stating that the effect is very negative. A sizeable portion of respondents, 31.1 percent, felt that the effect of parking on the grass is neutral. Sixteen percent of respondents stated that they would utilize a shuttle service to RTP from a nearby parking location as a way to reduce traffic congestion and free up parking.

Park amenities. Over 50 percent of respondents reported that the current condition of the beach restrooms is inadequate. Nearly 48 percent also felt the restrooms near the parking lot are inadequate. A total of 33.5 percent felt that seating options in the park are inadequate, while the pavilions and public art were mostly seen as adequate or neutral. Respondents complained about the lack or inadequacy of a bike path, dog park, fences, landscaping, playground, restaurant or café, showers, trash cans, and water fountains. Ninety-three percent of respondents would also like to see the empty building space in the park put to use. Concerning food options, a high percentage of respondents, 46.7 percent, desired a family-friendly option for the restaurant, 49 percent wanted to see a mid-level or casual option, and less than 3 percent wanted fine dining or fast casual, respectively. Nearly 77 percent of respondents claimed they would be likely to visit the restaurant in the off-season if it were kept open.

Opportunities for collaboration. Eighty and 81 percent of respondents also patronize Rye Playland and the Edith G. Read Natural Park and Wildlife Sanctuary, respectively. Over a quarter also patronize the Westchester Children's Museum and the Rye Historical Society. Almost 68 percent of respondents stated that they believe there is potential for collaboration among these

facilities/organizations.[21]

Public Events

Residents and nonresidents were invited to attend one of two public forums and an open discussion about RTP. The forums were held on Saturday, March 4 from 9:30 AM to 11:00 AM and Monday, March 6 from 7:30 PM to 9:00 PM at the Rye Free Reading Room. The agenda was identical for both forums (*see below*).

Figure 10. Agenda from March 4th and March 6th Public Forums

9:30 am – 9:45 am (7:30 PM – 7:45 PM)	Welcome & Introduction
9:45 am – 10:30 am (7:45 PM – 8:30 PM)	Breakout Discussions
10:30 am – 10:55 am (8:30 pm – 8:55 pm)	Large Group Discussion
10:55 am – 11:00 am (8:55 pm – 9:00 pm)	Wrap-up

The open discussion was held at T&J Restaurant and Pizzeria in Port Chester on Saturday, March 4 from 12:00 PM to 2:30 PM. Unlike the public forums, there was no agenda for the open discussion. Instead, it was designed to allow participants to openly share thoughts and insights about the park in a casual setting.

Public Forum, March 4th. Source: Team Sound View

Takeaways

Thirty-nine people attended the March 4 public forum, 12 people attended the March 4 open

[21] See Appendix J for more detailed analysis of survey responses.

discussion, and 25 people attended the March 6 public forum.[22] Of these participants represented, 61 signed in with the team and some attended more than one event. The majority (72%) of attendees were from Rye City. A detailed breakdown of event participants is provided in the figure below.[23]

Table 3. Public Forum and Open Discussion Attendee Demographics

Race		Gender		Residence	
White	98.36%	Female	62.30%	Rye City	72.13%
				Port Chester	9.84%
				Rye Brook	6.56%
Asian	1.64%	Male	37.70%	Rye Neck	4.92%
				Harrison	3.28%

During the public forums, participants broke out into discussion groups across five topic areas: Maintenance & Upgrades, Natural Resources & Environmental Health, Parking & Transportation, Park Regulations & Programming, and Resiliency. At both forums, each of the five discussion tables was equally well-attended. Although participants selected one of five topics to discuss, the comments and conversations can be further divided into the following categories:

Natural Landscape. Many participants see the park's landscape and the view of the Long Island Sound as its key draws. As such, participants emphasized the importance of preserving open space, preserving the health of the pond and its inhabitants, and preserving the bird population. Further, participants suggested that the park replace dying plants or plants that have reached maturity with heartier and more resilient fauna, utilize organic or non-toxic fertilizer, and plant more trees. Finally, participants recommended that the park create signage that promotes park preservation and educates visitors about the park's natural resources.

Rye Town Park Lawn, 2016. Source: Team Sound

Structures & Built Environment. Attendees raised

[22] These numbers exclude reporters, cameramen, Rye Town staff, and elected officials.
[23] Based on 61 registered individuals who attended at least one event.

a number of maintenance concerns regarding the structures and built environment within the park. First, most attendees agreed that the administrative building should remain in place but is in need of rehabilitation so that it can be used throughout the year. Participants suggested several ideas for the building, including a public use (e.g. school, town offices, education center, etc.), art exhibit space, or a cafe. Additionally, participants cited the need for pathway maintenance and repaving, and requested that the paths connect more seamlessly with a longer walking network within and beyond the park. Participants also noted that the sea wall is in need of maintenance, but emphasized that it should not be rebuilt from the ground up. Also regarding maintenance, there was consensus among participants that the park's restrooms should be upgraded, maintained better, and remain open year-round. Additionally, participants also requested that the park be brought into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), citing specifically the pathways, entrance onto the beach, and bathrooms. Finally, several participants noted that the historic bridge is being overused by cars parking on the lawn and is at risk of collapse or disrepair.

Hole in attic floor of bathing complex, 2016. Source: Town of Rye

In addition to maintenance requests, participants also noted a desire for more art sculptures, more benches and tables, including in the pavilions, bike racks, and flashing pedestrian lights at the crosswalks near the park.

Coastal Resiliency & Climate Change. Participants determined that a number of the park's important features – including the seawall, the beach, and trees – are vulnerable to extreme weather resulting from climate change. To mitigate the destructive impact of extreme weather on park resources, meeting attendees suggested planting marsh grasses and native plants, building berms, and developing a resiliency plan with an environmental engineer. Meeting attendees also noted that sand is being replaced often and questioned whether erosion was such an issue that sand needs to be replaced with such frequency.

Programming. Among the participants there was consensus that Rye Town Park should remain "passive," meaning that the park should emphasize open space and preserve the natural habitat while allowing for low-level development like fixed seating, picnic areas, and walking trails. However, participants also requested a number of contextual programmatic activities that they felt would add to the character of the park and serve to build community. These include: a concert series during the summer months, yoga in the park, paddle boarding, kayaking, outdoor movies, a community art project, painting classes, shell collection days, art exhibitions, coordination with

the Westchester Children's Museum for educational programming, and "love your park" clean-up events. In addition, meeting attendees also requested the addition of a playground and a fountain, both of which would provide more opportunity for children to play. Some meeting attendees felt that RTP should rent out beach chairs and umbrellas, kites, games, and picnic blankets, and should sell sunscreen and other small items for beachgoers. The most common and unified request for the park was to have a good restaurant with healthy food options. Meeting attendees also cited the desire for a coffee shop or coffee stand as one of their highest priorities for the park.

Major Concerns. Meeting attendees identified six key concerns for the park:

- **Dogs**. Dogs are allowed to roam freely during the off-leash hours, and are getting into places they should not be and generating waste that is not being picked up. Additionally, dog owners feel that the off-leash hours should be extended.
- **Parking**. Parking has been a challenge at Rye Town Park during the summer months for many years. During the summer season, people drive to the beach and are directed to park on the grass once the paved lot is full. Participants noted that the "parking area" has expanded over the years so that an increasingly large portion of the grass is taken over for parking on popular beach days. To mitigate the parking concerns, participants suggested that RTP encourage visitors to utilize the Playland pool lot, extend the blacktop in RTP, and build a garage.
- **Trash**. Participants agreed that trash pick-up is inadequate, especially during the summer months. They suggested adding additional trash receptacles, emptying the cans more frequently, doing a more thorough beach raking at the end of the day, and encouraging a culture of park stewardship through activities at the park.
- **Payments and Fees.** At Rye Town Park, users are required to pay to park and access the beach, either by purchasing an annual permit or a day pass. Participants described that the fee collection structure is inadequate. Participants agree that the entire fee collection structure should be automated and cashless, which would also help to simplify the process of purchasing an annual or day pass. Some participants also requested that there be a distinction between resident and nonresident seniors in terms of permit price, and suggested that there should potentially be a discounted permit fee for people who do not drive to the park.
- **Rules and Regulations.** Participants felt that many of the park's rules and regulations are either not enforced or do not make sense. There were three examples raised at the forums. First, several park users with parking permits reported that they were prevented from parking between 6:00 AM and 9:00 AM by RTP staff, who believed that only dog-walkers were permitted to park during this time. Second, smoking is not allowed at the park, but people smoke and staff are not able to enforce the rule. Third, there has been vandalism of the bird feeders without any official response.
- **Park Vision.** Participants were very clear about two things: first, they value the park as an important public amenity; second, they do not want the park to be a revenue generator.

However, many meeting participants agreed that they did not want their taxes to increase in order to fund the park. Meeting attendees discussed the pros and cons of generating revenue via beach access fees, parking fees, and commercial uses, and determined that a vision needs to be set for the park so that decisions – about fees, parking, infrastructure, etc. – are made in accordance with that vision.

Funding & Financing. There is a significant tension among Rye Town Park user between the collection of fees (via parking, concessions, and beach access) and maintenance of the park's open space, which meeting attendees felt would result in reduced park patronage. Participants questioned whether the park can be revenue neutral, asked to be part of the decision-making about where and how to spend funds, and requested transparency about how fees are collected and funds are allocated.

General Operations. Meeting attendees drew up three key ideas to improve general park operations:

- **"Greater Playland" Integration.** Meeting attendees felt that by having a more collaborative relationship with Westchester County and Playland operations, RTP could work to solve its transportation and parking issues and also improve connectivity along the shoreline.
- **Fundraising.** Participants cited other parks that utilize fundraising to pay for major upgrades and maintenance. Ideas for fundraisers included an oyster roast, Oktoberfest beer garden, a night of dancing under the stars, family portraits on the beach, and "buy a brick" campaigns for building improvements. Attendees also noted that the park can leverage volunteer participation in park maintenance by better advertising monthly park clean-up days and creating additional events focused on park stewardship.
- **Park Staff.** Meeting attendees felt that the roles and responsibilities of park staff were unclear. They also suggested improving staff training to enhance park stewardship.

Park Users. Forum participants identified a tension at Rye Town Park, which is that the park is located in a small residential community, but draws large crowds from across the region during peak months. Many meeting attendees agreed that public access to the beach is a must, but some wondered whether access could be restricted or denied, which it cannot. Many local residents (primarily from Rye City) avoid the park in the summer months, preferring its quiet offseason state over its busy summer personality.

IV. STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES & THREATS

Data gathered from stakeholder outreach efforts, as well as from the existing conditions analysis and literature review of reports and case studies, was used to identify the perceived **Strengths**, **Weaknesses**, **Opportunities**, and **Threats** that affect Rye Town Park and Oakland Beach. This SWOT analysis is a strategic tool that can help the community and Rye Town Park Commission further understand major issues facing Rye Town Park and Oakland Beach, and was the basis for the development of the recommendations found in Section V of this report. The key objectives of this SWOT assessment are to:

1. Outline the existing conditions and key attributes of RTP as they relate to the strengths and weaknesses of the range of programming, services, rules and regulations, etc.
2. Document future and external possibilities that may influence the opportunities and threats to RTP's current and future programs, services, rules and regulations, etc.
3. Assess and evaluate needs and gaps that will ensure RTP's continued success and maintain its reputation as a valuable community resource.
4. Inform the development of the Recommendations section of this report.

For purposes of this analysis, the following definitions were utilized:

Strength: A positive quality internal to RTP that currently exists and is within the Rye Town Park Commission's control.

Weakness: A negative quality internal to RTP that currently exists and may impede the Rye Town Park Commission's ability to meet objectives.

Opportunity: A positive, external possibility that the Rye Town Park Commission should (or could) develop in the future.

Threat: A negative, external possibility beyond the Rye Town Park Commission's control that could place RTP at risk.

Figure 11. SWOT Analysis Matrix

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
• Public good to multiple communities • Natural beauty & resources • Historic character • Profitability	• Deteriorating infrastructure • Lack of ADA compliance • Limited financial resources • Limited parking options
OPPORTUNITIES	**THREATS**
• Creative programming & uses to increase activity for off-season use • Underutilized structural space • Area-wide collaboration • Engaged park users	• Fee-based revenue stream • Decision-making process • Extreme weather & coastal threats • Overuse • Competing interests

Strengths

Many of RTP's strengths were identified and can be divided into four key categories: (i) the public good RTP provides to the local community, (ii) the natural beauty and mix of natural resources that visitors enjoy, (iii) the historic character of the park, and (iv) the park's recent profitability. Discussions with experienced, professional park planners, as well as with public community members, confirmed that RTP is in a unique position by already possessing many benefits and positive qualities with respect to its location, size, and operational structure.

Public Good to Multiple Communities. RTP is a public good accessible to residents and nonresidents of the Town and City of Rye. As a public good, the park provides many benefits, including opportunities for community members to engage in passive recreation with their family and friends through existing programming such as the Tuesday night concert series, Shakespearean theatrical performances, Boot Camp by the Beach, and more, as well as through self-managed activities such as picnicking, relaxing on the beach or green space, sledding, sunbathing, flying kites, walking dogs, feeding ducks, and light exercise. This public good provides the community with a place to gather and enjoy fresh air, natural sunlight, and the Long Island Sound. Especially valuable is that Oakland Beach provides public beach access in an area that is surrounded by several private beach clubs, and that the current accessibility on foot allows visitors to easily go from the green space of the park to the beach, as well as to surrounding attractions like Playland, the Westchester Children's Museum, and the Edith G. Read Wildlife Sanctuary.

Natural Beauty and Resources. RTP is recognized by its community and visitors as a resource that highlights the natural beauty of the surrounding landscape. The sweeping views of the Long Island Sound, rolling hills, and open space are among the strongest assets of RTP and the largest

attractions drawing visitors to the park. The natural beauty creates a peaceful and tranquil atmosphere that can be especially enjoyed in the off-season. In addition to the Long Island Sound and green space, the Duck Pond helps foster an ecologically diverse environment that can be enjoyed by park visitors. The park, beach, and pond provide the resources for different wildlife to survive healthily. The Rye Town Park Commission, through partnerships with local organizations, has also preserved, planted, and catalogued a number of different species of trees at RTP. With this initiative, the Rye Town Park Commission is better able to sustain the natural resources the park provides because they will have all the data needed to make informed decisions related to natural resources.

Historic Character. The park's rich history has contributed to its success as a public open space for over 100 years. There is a general appreciation of the Spanish Mission architectural style of the park's buildings, accompanied with community pride that the RTP Bathing Complex and Oakland Beach are recognized for their history and character on the National Register of Historic Places. Tours of RTP led by the Rye Historical Society help to highlight the historic character of the park and beach, and keep the history of the park alive for visitors to enjoy.

Profitability. In recent years, the Rye Town Park Commission has increased its revenue significantly, through permit and daily fees, pavilion rentals, special events, and rent paid for use of the restaurant building, to generate a profit for the park. This profitability is uncommon for public parks and open space. The Rye Town Park Commission has been able to cover operating expenses with its generated revenue, and created a surplus at the end of the last two fiscal years. This surplus provides the Rye Town Park Commission the ability to strategically and realistically address certain specific and immediate needs for the park and beach from a financial perspective.

Weaknesses

Any public, open space serving multiple communities is confronted with its own distinctive set of challenges and issues. While RTP is described by many as a jewel in their community, findings identified certain issues that can be categorized as follows: (i) deteriorating infrastructure, (ii) lack of ADA compliance, (iii) limited financial resources, and (vi) limited parking options. These findings can guide the direction of the Rye Town Park Commission and are the core issues that informed the recommendations found in Section V of this report.

Deteriorating Infrastructure. The current conditions of the footpaths and buildings – including the Bathing Complex which is currently used by the Rye Town Park Commission for administrative purposes on the ground floor, the restaurant building, and the bathroom facilities – are inadequate and prevent maximizing the park's potential. Peeling paint and stucco, leaky and rusty roofs, broken flooring, and insufficient graveling of the footpaths contribute to unsightliness, vacant or non-leasable space, and safety hazards for visitors. The entire second floor of the Bathing Complex is unusable due to structural issues. The historic designation of certain buildings has potentially impeded the ability to make alterations and repairs to the facades and roofs of the

buildings in a timely and affordable manner that would alleviate some of these issues.

Lack of ADA Compliance. Currently RTP faces a major issue with the existing bathroom facilities and ramps at the park because they are not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act requirements for accessible facilities. This greatly limits accessibility from the green space to the beach for visitors who utilize wheelchairs or have other mobility challenges. The specifications of the existing ramps are too steep and create a safety concern for park visitors and their guests who require the use of the ramps because there is currently no other alternative available to them. This safety concern is heightened in winter months because rain and ice make the ramps too slippery. The lack of ADA compliance at the park and beach also leaves room for potential liability and insurance claims.

Limited Financial Resources. While the park has generated a surplus at the end of the last two fiscal years, this has been a very recent advantage for the Rye Town Park Commission and the surplus will not necessarily alleviate the need for additional funds. The financial resources at the Rye Town Park Commission's disposal for park improvements and maintenance are limited. Budgeting constraints contribute to the inefficient allocation of funds for improvements at Rye Town Park and Oakland Beach.

Limited Parking Options. RTP currently has two parking options on-site: the blacktop parking lot off of Dearborn Avenue, with approximately 300 spaces in the aggregate, and the parking overflow area on the green space adjacent to the parking lot. Parking in either location during the summer season requires that the user pay a fee. Limited parking options can make the park inaccessible to users who want to enjoy the public good RTP provides, and parking on the green space makes it difficult to enjoy that space by park visitors and also contributes to the deterioration of the park's natural resources.

Opportunities

The stakeholder outreach efforts provided a sense of not only the current conditions, uses, and behaviors of park- and beachgoers, but also of how the community would like to maximize RTP's potential. Opportunities for the park were identified and can be categorized in the following four groups: (i) creative programming and uses to increase activity for off-season use, (ii) addressing underutilized structural space, (iii) area-wide collaboration, and (iv) engaged park users.

Creative Programming and Uses. RTP sees a big shift in the number of users between the peak summer and off-peak seasons. Through new, creative programming and the expansion of uses at RTP, visitor traffic could be increased to make the park and beach an enjoyable place all year long. The accessibility of the park and beach at all times during the year is highly valued, but programming and other attractions can be created during the off-season to make visits more worthwhile beyond the summer months. Food truck festivals, arts and crafts fairs, public art throughout the park, a variety of exercise classes (including yoga), and movie screenings can bring

new visitors to the park during the off-peak season. Regulations related to dog walking at the park could be revisited, specifically with respect to evaluating the potential of extending off-leash hours in the off-season, by either making the morning hours longer or establishing a second period of off-leash hours in the afternoons, as well as the potential installation of an enclosed off-leash dog area or dog run that could be accessed at all hours of the day. The addition of a coffee cart or kiosk, which would require a very small footprint and low overhead, as well as the extension of the operating season for the restaurant into the off-season, can attract additional visitors during the off-season months.

Addressing Underutilized Structural Space. RTP has several structures, including the Bathing Complex (a.k.a. the "Administrative Building") and two pavilion spaces that can be renovated, repaired, and repurposed. The second floor of the Bathing Complex, if repaired, can be repurposed for a number of uses. Such potential uses for the space could be a catering or event hall, the offices of a local non-profit, art studio and gallery space, commercial retail space (in the way of a souvenir shop or even kayak, paddleboard, surfboard rentals), and educational or training facilities. The pavilions can also be repurposed for other uses besides private event space rentals during the summer season. These pavilion spaces could be evaluated to see if they could be a home for chair, umbrella, and other beach activity equipment rentals. By maximizing the currently underutilized structural space, new revenue streams could be created, and the Rye Town Park Commission could evaluate its dependency on the parking fees.

Area-Wide Collaboration. While RTP has been independent in areas such as parking and natural resource management for many years, there is an opportunity to be explored with in conjunction with several other surrounding community resources, including the Edith Read Wildlife Sanctuary, Playland, and the Westchester Children's Museum. Parking, programming, and coastal resiliency efforts can be maximized and made more efficient through cooperation among all of these organizations.

Engaged Park Users. The greatest asset RTP has at its fingertips is its passionate and engaged park users. These park users have established several civic groups for the benefit of the park and beach, and these groups have taken on initiatives with respect to landscaping, natural resource management, and maintenance efforts. RTP can leverage the passion and high level engagement of its users to build relationships with all sectors – private, public, governmental – and work to realize the park's potential and achieve the goals and expectations of its stakeholders. An opportunity worth exploring in great detail is the establishment of a conservancy for RTP.

Threats

Rye Town Park, under the management of the Rye Town Park Commission and care of its stakeholders, will always face a number of external threats beyond their control. Identifying these challenges can assist with planning for future success should these threats materialize. These external negative possibilities can be grouped into the following five categories: (i) dependence

on the fee-based revenue stream, (ii) the current decision-making process, (iii) extreme weather and coastal threats, (iv) overuse, and (v) competing interests of users and groups from various communities.

Dependency on Fee-Based Revenue Stream. Dependency on a single source of revenue can be risky and vulnerable. There are many reasons that could cause revenue derived from a single source, specifically through fees, to fluctuate from year to year. It is also difficult to change the prices with respect to such fees, even in an effort to increase revenue for specific purposes, because it affects the level of accessibility from an affordability standpoint for many visitors. Finally, dependency on a fee-based revenue stream means many decisions are made with only this revenue-stream in mind, and can cause missed opportunities for diversifying revenue streams and expanding the programs and services offered by the park.

Current Decision-Making Process. Currently, there is widespread misinformation with respect to the operations of the park and how decisions are made by the Commission. This can be attributed to the perceived lack of transparency community members believe exists between the Rye Town Park Commission and the public. The structure of the Rye Town Park Commission's decision-making process is unilateral in that, while decisions are informed by public comment, decisions are made among the commissioners only. For many of these commissioners, serving on the RTPC is only one of many of their obligations, and not a sole commitment.

Extreme Weather and Coastal Threats. The success and current profitability of RTP is derived from parking fees and beach permits, and extreme weather and coastal threats could greatly impact these two revenue streams from year to year. If the peak season has mild temperatures or more rain than previously anticipated, fewer visitors will access the park and beach, and thus not park in the lot. Extreme weather like hurricanes can also cause significant damage to the park and beach that could deplete the financial resources the Rye Town Park Commission has reserved, as well as take a long time after the fact to resolve.

Overuse. Overuse of the park has environmental effects on the green space, air quality, beach, and pond and typically leads to negative impacts on the natural resources. Additionally, with overuse of the park and beach, visitor behavior can become more unpredictable and harder to regulate and enforce. This can lead to safety concerns and potential hazards for visitors, and even to the surrounding wildlife inhabiting the pond and trees at the park.

Competing Interests. With the number of communities that RTP serves, it is unlikely that the decisions with respect to programming, events, use of buildings, maintenance and upgrade efforts, will unilaterally have support from the various stakeholder groups. There are diverse stakeholder classifications that go beyond residents and non-residents of the local communities, and include dog-walkers, non-dog walkers, seniors, families with small children, athletes, permit holders, non-permit holders, immediate neighbors of RTP, and non-English speakers, among others. The resources available to each stakeholder category vary, and thus the impact that these passionate,

stakeholder groups have on RTP varies. Stakeholders will always have different priorities that will challenge the process and procedures of the Rye Town Park Commission.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

This section lays out a comprehensive road map for the future of Rye Town Park, based on the stakeholder input received. These goals and strategies range from practical in the short term to aspirational in the long term. Within each goal, the highest priority strategies are The strategies within each goal are presented with the highest priority Other than Goal 1, which is the highest priority, these goals and strategies are not presented in any particular order.

GOAL 1: Define a vision for the park

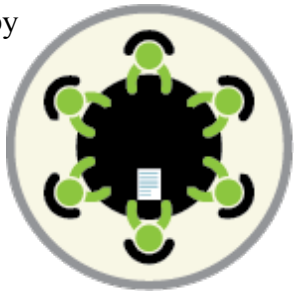
Since its inception as a public park in 1907, Rye Town Park has never undergone a visioning process. The stakeholder engagement during this study revealed that some users have a different vision in mind than others, while those people making decisions about the park may have an entirely different idea for the park altogether. To ensure that funding, maintenance, and other decisions remain consistent, the first goal is to develop a long-term vision and mission for the park.

Strategy 1.1: *Assemble a task force of elected officials, commissioners, civic leaders, business owners, and park users.* The task force will be the main body responsible for setting a vision and mission for the park. This task force should meet on a regular basis – every three to six weeks – while setting a vision, and should continue to meet on a regular basis to advise the commission, drive the development of a strategic plan (see Strategy 1.2), and establish the structure for a more permanent Citizens' Advisory Committee (see Strategy 1.3a). The task force should be in place for at least six months or however long it takes to accomplish Strategies 1.2 and 1.3. Because the role of the task force is key for the success of the park, this report recommends that the task force is established with the support of an external consultant that specializes in or can provide support with strategic planning. Town of Rye may want to consider applying for a group of students in NYU Wagner's capstone program - specifically those in the management program - to support this endeavor.

Strategy 1.2: *Develop a strategic plan.* In addition to setting the park's vision and mission, the task force should be integral in supporting the development of a strategic plan. This plan will lay out prioritized activities and match them directly with funding. Developing a strategic plan will ensure that decisions are not made arbitrarily. The strategic plan should be guided by the park vision.

Strategy 1.3: *Increase and sustain community engagement.* Rye Town Park has many highly engaged community members who care deeply about the park. While these community members already take every opportunity that they can to engage with the park, especially through the groups like the Friends of Rye Town Park and the Rye Town Park Alliance, efforts to engage community members should be more frequent, organized, and sustained.

Strategy 1.3a: *Establish a Citizens' Advisory Committee as a platform for park users to communicate directly with the Rye Town Park Commission.* A key recommendation for sustaining community engagement is to set up an advisory committee that will give park users a channel of communication with the Rye Town Park Commission. As the current Commission members represent place-based constituents, the Citizens' Advisory Committee would represent the concerns of park users in general. Members of the Citizens' Advisory Committee should be selected by Commission members and have a fixed term. In future years, term-limited committee members will play a pivotal role in recommending incoming members to be officially appointed by Commissioners. The exact process for applying to and serving on the Citizens' Advisory Committee should be laid out in the strategic plan.



Strategy 1.4: *Establish a conservancy focused on building and infrastructure restoration.* Encouraging park users to establish a private, nonprofit organization 501(c)(3) that works in partnership with the RTPC will enhance the park's capacity to undertake special projects, specifically improvement and restoration efforts. This strategy gains inspiration from New York City's Central Park Conservancy, which eventually inspired the founding of the nearby Greenwich Point Conservancy. The conservancy will play an integral role in capacity building and year-round fundraising to support restoration and preservation of the historic quality of the parkland and its buildings. A conservancy is unique to the park in that it will focus on capital improvements, will be governed by a board of directors, and will rely on the generosity of a mix of individual park users, foundations, corporate partners, and other supporters. Leveraging private partners and sponsors is a necessary step towards such fundraising and is more achievable through a conservancy model.

Strategy 1.5: *Establish a working partnership with Edith Read Sanctuary, Playland, and the Westchester Children's Museum.* Establishing a formal or informal partnership with surrounding facilities will enable RTP to take advantage of scale economies in response to the challenges and threats it faces, namely parking, transportation, and resiliency. Developing a working relationship with these organizations and others like the Rye Historical Society could also promote the integration of programming and events and increase benefits for all involved.

GOAL 2: Improve transparency

There is a perceived lack of transparency about park funding, financing, operations, and decisions. Although opacity is not the intention of the Rye Town Park Commission, the way in which information about the park is conveyed appears unclear to other stakeholders. Improving transparency will ensure that park users understand the issues at hand facing the park, as well as the decisions that the Rye Town Park Commission makes with respect to such issues, and will enable park users to better engage with park staff and the Commission.

Strategy 2.1: *Streamline the website.* As is, the Rye Town website is the primary location for information about Rye Town Park, including permits and fees, upcoming events, and Commission meeting details and minutes. Although the website underwent a redesign during the course of this study, the Commission should continue to upgrade the website to make information as accessible as possible, including providing information in Spanish.

Strategy 2.2: *Establish a direct line of communication.* Currently, park users do not have a fast and easy way to communicate with park staff, decision makers, and other stakeholders. The Rye Town Park Commission has begun the process of creating, and intends to launch, its electronic system for pavilion reservations prior to the kickoff of the 2017 season. In addition to establishing the online reservations system, creating an online form on the website and an easy-to-find phone number would enable park users to easily submit comments and concerns.

Strategy 2.3: *Automate all payment systems for parking and permit fees.* Beginning with the 2017 season, visitors will be able to purchase their electronic permits (e-permits) online, which will include the parking fees. The Commission is currently in the process of expanding its automated options to include purchasing of day passes and daily parking fees. By reducing cash exchange, the automated payment systems will more accurately track users and revenue inflow. These systems also provide visitors with additional methods of payment at their disposal, and increase the convenience and accessibility to the users.

Strategy 2.4: *Revisit park rules and regulations.* Many of the park's current rules and regulations are out of date, irrelevant, or loosely enforced. The Commission – with help from the task force in the short term and community members in the long-term – should revisit park rules on a regular basis to ensure that they are relevant for current park users. As an example, the rule requiring people who are picnicking to have a special permit is not being enforced and may not make sense given the current patterns of how people use the park. Rules of this type should be revisited and even eliminated.

> ***Strategy 2.4a:*** *Communicate revised rules and regulations.* When park rules are revised, these revisions should be communicated to park users via the Rye Town Park website, and should also be posted, as applicable, at the park (in both English and Spanish).

Strategy 2.5: *Identify relationship between park regulations and local laws.* Because the park is located in Rye City, there is some confusion among park users and park staff about which rules and regulations are set by the park, and which rules and regulations are set by the City. The rules and regulations set by the park should be clearly defined and delineated from the rules and regulations set by the City.

> ***Strategy 2.5a:*** *Determine enforceability of park rules.* Many park users recount having asked park staff to enforce a park rule only to learn that Rye City Police are the only

authorities able to enforce park rules. While this does not always seem to be the case, park staff should have a clear understanding of what they can and cannot enforce. Currently, park rangers have the ability to issue summonses, but that is the extent of their formal enforceability. Further, Rye City should work with the Commission to determine if some rules currently under the jurisdiction of Rye police can be enforced by park staff on park property, as well as exploring alternatives that do not rely on the City of Rye.

Strategy 2.5b: *Enable and train park staff.* Park staff should have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities with regards to park rules and enforcement authority.

Strategy 2.5c: *Develop a protocol for rule enforcement.* Park staff and users should know who is responsible for enforcing which rules and regulations, and a clear process should be laid forth in the strategic plan.

GOAL 3: Improve accessibility

This goal addresses physical accessibility to and within the park. The Rye Town Park Commission should focus efforts on ensuring that all people can get to the park, despite the limited parking availability, and that once in the park, all people can access the beach, the bathrooms, and other park resources.

Strategy 3.1: *Revisit the area-wide parking plan.* While a plan for parking with Playland already exists, parking constraints continue to pose an issue for park users. Revisiting the parking plan for the park in collaboration with surrounding facilities like Playland and the Westchester Children's Museum could potentially ease the pressure on the parking space at RTP. The parking plan should cover the other parking-related strategies under Goal 3.

Strategy 3.2: *Increase awareness of parking and transportation alternatives.* Many users stated that they were unaware of alternative modes of transportation available to them. The RTPC should make these alternatives clear on the park website and via signage at the park.

Strategy 3.3: *Demarcate designated drop-off areas.* While drop-off areas in locations around the park already exist, they are not clearly marked. Having demarcated drop-off areas will decrease confusion for park users and may ease traffic congestion around the park, since drivers will be made more aware of where they should and should not stop to unload passengers near the park.

Strategy 3.4: *Consider alterations to parking regulations on local streets.* One of the primary reasons that the beach lot fills up on summer days is that visitors cannot park nearby on local streets. The park should work with City of Rye officials to consider special summer parking allowances to prevent large numbers of cars from parking on the green space.

Strategy 3.5: *Repave and restripe parking lot.* The park can maximize parking efficiency by repaving the existing asphalt lot and restriping spaces so that a maximum number of cars can fit

on the asphalt before cars are parked in the overflow area.

Strategy 3.6: *Hire a consultant to recommend ADA upgrades.* Hiring a professional to survey the park's access points will help to ensure that every visitor has equal and safe access to all parts of the park, including the beach. Addressing these concerns in a preemptive manner may also shield the RTPC from liabilities and potential lawsuits.

Strategy 3.7: *Seek out grants and other funds to increase disability access.* Federal and state funds can help ease the financial burden of upgrading all park and beach facilities to accommodate disabled visitors and bring Rye Town Park into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

GOAL 4: Ensure coastal resiliency

This goal is concerned with the effects of climate change on coastal areas, and what can be done to mitigate the harmful effects of rising sea levels and severe weather. As Superstorm Sandy illustrated in 2012, storm surge and rising sea levels can have a very destructive and costly effect on park infrastructure and landscaping. Much of the damage from Sandy, specifically to the sea wall, has still not been repaired because of the prohibitive costs.

Strategy 4.1: *Establish a resiliency plan.* Developing a resiliency plan would put forward recommendations to help mitigate impacts of sea level rise, storm surges, and beach erosion. The Rye Sustainability Committee published a *City of Rye Sustainability Plan* in 2013, and can be a resource in helping to create resiliency recommendations specific to Rye Town Park, its waterfront, and open space.

> ***Strategy 4.1a:*** *Implement improvements to landscape architecture.* In addition to beautifying Rye Town Park and providing habitats for wildlife, strategic green infrastructure landscaping can both soften the shoreline and reduce impacts of flooding. Planting native plant species also helps keeps stormwater runoff from entering the Long Island Sound.[24]

Strategy 4.2: *Develop an emergency management plan.* The Park is responsible for developing an emergency plan to prepare for measures to be taken to minimize park damage during extreme weather events and other emergencies, as well as to establish pre-determined protocol measures to respond to plausible emergency scenarios. An emergency management plan will provide the safest measures for securing safety and protection of the parklands and its users and staff.

Strategy 4.3: *Restore the seawall and vital coastal infrastructure.* While patchwork is

[24] University of Connecticut Coastal Landscaping Guide for Long Island Sound. http://clear.uconn.edu/crlg/.

underway for the seawall portion that runs along Dearborn Avenue, a holistic plan can be developed to fortify the shoreline with a strong seawall, along with the incorporation of green infrastructure such as oyster beds that can help break up destructive waves before they reach the coast and adjacent neighborhoods.

GOAL 5: Invest in general improvements

Rye Town Park has significant deferred maintenance, not just of buildings, but also of other park amenities and infrastructure. Investing in general improvements should be a priority for the park so that users feel their basic needs are being met. Investing in early improvements also sends a signal to users that the Commission is willing to fund projects that are in high demand.

Strategy 5.1: *Increase trash pickup during peak hours.* Managing the trash that accumulates especially during the summer season is a high priority for park users. Increasing trash pick-up is a relatively low-cost solution to a problem that many park users cite.

Strategy 5.2: *Establish a fenced-off dog run.* Concerns from non-dog owners about dogs being where they should not in the park as well as concerns from dog owners about the strict and limited off-leash hours indicates that the current permit and off-leash system is not meeting everyone's needs. Building a fenced-off dog run would enable dog walkers to come to the park and let their dogs off-leash within the run at all times of day, and would ensure that dogs do not roam into areas of the park that they should not be in.

Strategy 5.3: *Install additional drinking fountains.* Access to drinking fountains is currently limited and should be expanded so that park users can access drinking water at multiple locations throughout the park. Not only will increase convenience for patrons, but could also have positive effects on preventing heat-related health emergencies in the summer months.

Strategy 5.4: *Improve and expand seating options.* Provide more seating – including benches and picnic tables – throughout the park. Friends of Rye Town Park have successfully installed Eco-friendly benches during the 2015-2016 park season, and can expand this program installing more carefully places seating and tables for the comfort and enjoyment of park visitors.

Strategy 5.5: *Enhance lighting.* Continue to increase the number of lighting fixtures located throughout the park and along the pathways. Additional and improved lighting will result in visitors wanting to stay at RTP and Oakland Beach for longer hours, especially in the off-season when there are fewer hours of natural daylight, as well as contribute to the atmosphere of a safe and peaceful park. This also presents an opportunity to explore the addition of functional art pieces that can also serve as lighting improvements.

Strategy 5.6: *Upgrade bathrooms.* The restrooms on the beach and in the park are currently

outdated and in disrepair. There is a strong desire in the community for the bathrooms to be updated, well-maintained, and expanded to provide adequate space for visitors to change.

Strategy 5.7: *Resurface paths.* Utilize sustainable and resilient building materials, such as resin bound gravel, which is porous, to resurface pathways.

Strategy 5.8: *Renovate buildings.* Work with the conservancy (see Strategy 1.3) to develop a plan for renovating the Administrative Building and renovating/weatherizing the restaurant building. Doing so will be a long process, but should be done in accordance with the vision set forth in the strategic plan (see Goal 1) and should rely on feedback from community groups, where applicable.

GOAL 6: Expand and improve amenities

Responses from surveys and event attendees illustrated an overwhelming consensus for Rye Town Park to a remain a passive park, while also stressing the responsibility of the park to provide robust contextual activities and amenities year-round to best serve the needs of park users while creating the most enjoyable park experience for the variety of users and visitors.

Strategy 6.1: *Provide quality, affordable food options.* Rye Town Park's restaurant task force has ensured that the new restaurant operator, Ocean Grille, will provide food that is varied, healthy, and affordable. As the Commission and task force continue to make decisions about the restaurant, they should ensure that the atmosphere of the restaurant is family-friendly and casual, and that the food available from the stands on the beach is also be healthy and affordable.

Strategy 6.2: *Extend the operating season for the restaurant.* Because the restaurant has a unique view along the Long Island Sound and local residents say they would use it all year, extend the operating season to increase the appeal for a potential tenant and encourage patronage further into the fall and earlier in the spring. The conservancy model described in Goal 1 could help to raise funds for renovations that enable the building to be open year-round.

Strategy 6.3: *Rent out beach chairs, umbrellas, or other equipment.* In addition to providing beachgoers with a service they've asked for, renting equipment has two primary functions. First, it helps to diversify revenue streams for the park. Second, it may incentivize some users to come to the park by public transportation or on foot since they do not have to bring chairs and umbrellas with them.

Strategy 6.4: *Build a playground.* This space would provide an outlet for children to play, a place for parents to congregate, and would serve to slightly diversify the park's uses without making it an active park.

Strategy 6.5: *Increase the number and type of live music events.* The concert series in past years has been highly successful, so leveraging that would encourage people to use the park at off-

hours when the park is usually not in use.

Strategy 6.6: *Develop local partnerships to expand exercise and yoga classes.* Expanding exercise partnerships with local exercise and yoga classes will allow local businesses to reach a larger audience, and create opportunities for new creative outdoor programming year-round. By sharing revenue with these local businesses that will be "renting" park time for a small per person or group fee, these partnerships will help diversify park revenue while bringing fun and exciting exercise opportunities to the Rye Town Park community.

Strategy 6.7: *Repurpose the administrative building for use as an educational space or art exhibit.* Using the building as an educational space (e.g. after school programming, adult education classes, pre-school) would steer the park away from a profit-making commercial venture, which park users are concerned about. The educational space would increase use of the park during the off-season, but not increase use during the busy summer season. In addition, whoever occupies the Administrative Building can draw upon the park's natural resources as part of its curriculum. The Administrative Building can also have space for non-profit art exhibitions with pieces from local artists. Rye Town Park can draw upon examples from Tod's Point and de Cordova Park, both of which have flexible art exhibition spaces. See Section VII of this report for more information on case studies.

Strategy 6.8: *Set up free Wi-Fi.* Wi-Fi in public spaces is becoming a standard across the country. Installing Wi-Fi is relatively low-cost and easy to accomplish.

Measuring Success

One of the key tasks for this study was to develop a framework for measuring success. Upon receiving community input and analyzing existing park case studies, the team has determined that developing a framework for measuring success should be under the purview of the recommended park task force (see Goal 1, Strategy 1.1). In lieu of putting forth a full framework, this report lays out potential considerations for developing a framework based on community input.

The survey responses, input at public forums, and best practices indicate that there is no single metric for success. Nevertheless, several distinct categories did emerge through investigation: financial success, patronage, activities, and maintenance. Given the importance of these four factors in contributing to the park's perceived success, a framework should likely take each into consideration. Further, the framework should be in line with the park's vision, and should help to guide the development of the strategic plan.

Financial Success

Utilizing financials to determine a park's success can take two distinct forms. According to some, a park is successful if it can generate enough revenue to be self-sustaining and not require public (i.e., taxes) funding. Others believe, though, that a successful park is one that has no need for any

external revenue stream.

The task force should have members representing both sides of this debate, and should work to determine a financial measure of success that serves to follow the vision and the strategic plan.

Patronage

Many people determine a crowded park to be successful, while an equal number determine an empty park to be successful. Like utilizing financial metrics to determine success, using patronage is complicated because of these opposing views.

Again, the task force should have members representing both camps, and should strike a balance between an overused and an exclusive park when determining how patronage measures success in the strategic plan.

Food Options

Because Rye Town Park offers food, the quality of that food is seen by many park users as a key determinant in the park's success. Rye Town Park is on its way to providing a higher quality food experience, and will benefit from considering Strategies 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3 when making decisions about food in the park. However, to ensure that park users' passion about the food experience remains at the forefront in decision-making, having food options as a measure of success is important.

Maintenance

Rye Town Park has significant deferred maintenance, which many park users find frustrating. The level of maintenance should be a key factor in measuring success and should help to guide the strategic plan for the park.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION & ACTION PLAN

The strategies in this action plan are considered high priority and are recommended focus areas in the short, mid, and long term. A determination on which strategies were highest priority was made in conjunction with the Rye Town Park Commission president, as well as with Town of Rye staff.

Strategies Currently in Process

Strategy 2.1 Streamline the website
Strategy 2.2 Establish a direct line of communication for reservations and comments/concerns
Strategy 2.3 Automate payment systems for parking and fees
Strategy 3.6 Hire a consultant to recommend ADA upgrades
Strategy 3.7 Seek out funds to increase disability access
Strategy 5.1 Increase trash pickup during peak hours
Strategy 5.5 Enhance lighting
Strategy 5.6 Upgrade bathrooms
Strategy 5.8 Renovate buildings
Strategy 6.1 Provide quality, affordable food options

Near-Term Priorities (1-year)

Strategy 1.1 Assemble a visioning task force
Strategy 1.2 Develop a strategic plan
Strategy 3.1 Revisit area-wide parking plan
Strategy 3.2 Increase awareness of parking and transportation alternatives

Medium-Term Priorities (2-3 years)

Strategy 1.3 Increase and sustain community engagement
Strategy 1.3a Establish a Citizens' Advisory Committee to assist the RTPC
Strategy 2.5c Develop a protocol for rule enforcement
Strategy 4.1 Establish a resiliency plan

Long-Term Priorities (4-7 years)

Strategy 1.4 Establish a conservancy focused on building & infrastructure restoration
Strategy 1.5 Establish an area-wide partnership with neighboring facilities and organizations
Strategy 6.7 Repurpose the Administrative Building for educational or artistic use

VII. CASE STUDIES & BEST PRACTICES

Arts in Parks: Balancing Public and Private Use

DeCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, Lincoln, Massachusetts[25]

Feature: DeCordova's vision for a Sculpture Park and commitment to open a natural dialogue between art and landscape. DeCordova is a leader among sculpture parks in the United States as they incorporate dynamic sculptures into the landscape with frequent change, site-specific works, and experimentation with artists and projects on indoor and outdoor display.

Aerial view of DeCordova Sculpture Park & Museum. Source: Above Summit

Mission: To foster the "creation, exhibition, and exploration of contemporary sculpture and art through exhibitions, learning opportunities, collection, and a unique park setting."

History: Established in 1950, DeCordova Sculpture Park and Museum (501(c)(3) is located on the former estate of Julian de Cordova 20 miles northwest of Boston. It is the largest park of its kind in New England, encompassing 35 acres and hosting more than 100,000 visitors each year.[26]

Sol LeWitt Tower. Source: Over, Under

Programming: The Sculpture Park and Museum offer year-round activities, including snowshoe tours, yoga in the park, nature tours, curator and artist conversations, along with special talks, screenings, and events. Unique to DeCordova, their Corporate Program provides local businesses the opportunity to support the institution and regional artists through membership initiatives and art loan options. The park also rents out indoor and outdoor spaces for private events that generate revenue for the park.

Historic Features & Preservation: The DeCordova residence (1882, renovated 1910) largely dates to its 1948-1949 conversion for use as a museum of modern and contemporary art. The building now houses administrative offices for the museum and a school. Additional buildings have been constructed in recent decades to further the mission

[25] DeCordova Website. https://decordova.org/about/history; https://decordova.org/about
[26] Ibid.

of the museum. The park has grown to become the largest museums of contemporary American art in New England. In 1998, the institution completed the *New Century Campaign for deCordova*, an $8 million effort to upgrade its aging structures. Architecture firm Kallmann, McKinnell & Wood of Boston modernized and expanded DeCordova's educational facilities to include a new studio, a store, and a gallery dedicated to exhibitions by school instructors and students. The museum also expanded its exhibition space by 20,000 square feet and added a roof terrace with park views. The main galleries were renovated to install a climate control system, a café, and a library. Though the Park is managed by a private nonprofit, the town owns the land and buildings that compose the park. Park facilities serve the town in many ways, including by providing programs for the Lincoln Public Schools, other local schools, environmental organizations and seniors in the community.[27]

[27] Lincoln Historical Commission; Historic District Commission Meeting Minutes: October 6, 2015; Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS).

Access and Parking

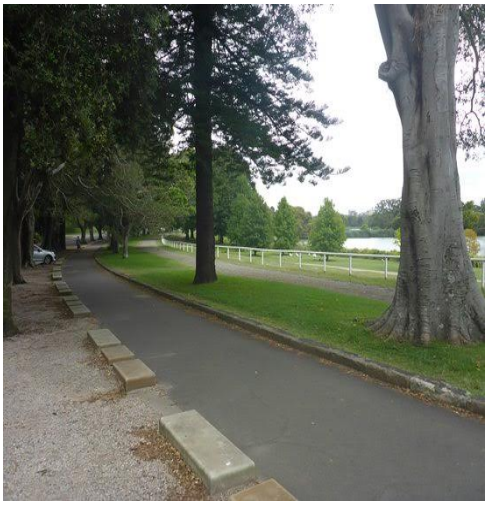
Centennial Park, New South Wales, Australia

Feature: The 2002 Centennial Parklands Transportation and Access and Parking Plan (TAPP) outlines solutions to improve access to parkland and how to manage parked vehicles improvements for connections to public transportation, access for people with disabilities, and seeks to mitigate the negative impacts of vehicles on the natural environment within the Centennial Parklands.

Transportation and Access Parking Plan. Source: Centennial Park

Mission: To "manage Centennial Parklands as a place of national significance for the enjoyment, social connection and wellbeing of the community."[28]

History: Originally swampland, Centennial Park is one of a group of three public parks in Centennial Parklands that opened in 1888. The park is large, over 467 acres, and is located in the middle of Sydney's densely populated eastern suburbs in New South Wales, Australia. The park's original vision was to create a "People's Park" through stewardship that would be for all to enjoy.



Paved walking path. Source:

Historic Features & Preservation: Centennial Park features heritage buildings and structures that provide a richness and history to the open spaces. While the Centennial Park weather station (built 1907) is no longer used for meteorological measurements, it has been restored to provide historical and educational information to visitors and school education programs. After a 2001 renovation, The Superintendent's Residence,19th Century Victorian-style residence (built 1891) opened to the public for the first time as a Visitor Information Centre. Today the residence is used primarily as an exhibition space as part of an adaptive reuse strategy to ensure that historic buildings are maintained for generations to come.[29]

Transportation Plan: The actions contained within the plan have been implemented over time

[28] Centennial Parklands Website. http://www.centennialparklands.com.au/places_to_visit/centennial_park

[29] Ibid.

as funding has become available. With increasing levels of use at Centennial Park, the park's trust undertook an integrated Transport Access and Parking Plan to better manage the impact of vehicles on the parklands, improve accessibility, and enhance the sustainability.[30]

Programming: The park website clearly lists park events and offers a "What's On" newsletter that keeps users up-to-date on future park events. Programming includes interactive self-guided walks, with mobile apps to guide participants in nature, wildlife, and history tours; weekly produce markets; group fitness classes; dog training; and outdoor cinema, among others.

Also see: "Park Management Action Plan For Balboa Park" San Diego which outlines current operations and a recommended parking management plan and shuttle plan with emphasis on wayfinding, pedestrian linkages, benefits and costs, and ways of monitoring success.

[30] Centennial Parklands Transport Access & Parking Plan summary. https://www.centennialparklands.com.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/1546/tap_brochure.pdf

Public-Private Partnership in Historic Restoration

Greenwich Point Park (Tod's Point), Greenwich, Connecticut

Source: Debra Bender, Friends of Greenwich Point

Feature: The Greenwich Point Conservancy, an official, public-private partnership model for a town with neither a budget nor a capital plan to save structures of historical and architectural significance in Greenwich Point Park. This model has proven successful for fundraising and restoration efforts of the historical buildings in the park, including the Innis Arden Cottage, now used for educational and community programming.

History: At over 147 acres**,** Greenwich Point was known as "Innis Arden" before its acquisition by the town in 1945 and is currently known to locals as "Tod's Point." The park was once a private rural summer retreat in a primarily agricultural area, and access was limited. In 1968, a Greenwich residents-only policy was instituted at the park, but that restriction was lifted when the Supreme Court of Connecticut overturned the restrictive legislation in 2001.[31] Longtime activities at Greenwich Point Park include swimming, nature walks, and birding.

Mission: The Greenwich Point Conservancy's mission is "to work for the restoration and preservation of the historic structures and other elements of Greenwich Point for the enjoyment of current and future generations."

Historic Features & Preservation: The Innis Arden Cottage was built as a guest house by the Tod family in 1903. The cottage fell into a state of disrepair for many years before the Greenwich Point Conservancy began its restoration effort, which was completed in 2011. The conservancy's restoration activities have received numerous awards for excellence in historic preservation and adaptive reuse.[32] After this restoration was completed, the conservancy placed more emphasis on preservation, and Tod's Point was designated its own historic district in Fairfield County (#07001355) in 2007 and has been nominated by the Greenwich Point Conservancy and the Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office to the National Register of Historic Places.[33]

Conservancy Model and Fundraising: Inspired by the restoration work of the Central Park

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[31] Greenwich Point Conservancy Website. http://www.greenwichpoint.org/history/#new-page

[32] The Innis Arden Cottage Restoration earned the following awards: Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation Award for Excellence in Historic Restoration, AIA award for Restoration and Adaptive Reuse, Greenwich Historical Society Award for Excellence in Historic Preservation.

[33] Innis Arden Grand Opening PR Package. https://brucemuseum.org/files/Innis_Arden_Environmental_Center__PR.pdf

Conservancy in New York City, the conservancy undertook a campaign to preserve the historic structures at Greenwich Point Park. The conservancy was founded in 2004 as a sister nonprofit organization to the Friends of Greenwich Point. The founding members of the conservancy began the organization after seeing that the town needed help maintaining the buildings when one of them was lost due to neglect. A year later it began its first project to renovate the Innis Arden Cottage. The conservancy organizes regular fundraisers, like the annual Beach Ball, a popular summer event held under tents on the bluff at the point, and managed to raise more than $1.3 million for the restoration project. In addition to successful fundraising and a strong mission, they have leaned on town officials and lobbied for donations of building materials. The annual Beach Ball continues to be an ongoing fundraiser, bringing in an average of $200,000 a year in donations.

Legal Framework for Construction: The conservancy entered into one-year leases with the town that gave the group the legal backing to work on restoration. Construction was completed in a three-phase plan, beginning with repairing and replacing the roof. The second phase focused on restoring the building's interior, and the third and final phase restored the interior. The Town of Greenwich remains the owner of the Innis Arden Cottage and all structures at Greenwich Point.

Adaptive Reuse: The town has transformed the cottage into the Floren Family Environmental Center, a learning and research facility that emphasizes the health and conservation of the Long Island Sound and coastal habitats. Use of the building is restricted to nonprofit or community groups. The interior space is used as a multi-purpose exhibition and gathering room and environmental education facility, including a laboratory and research space, a public lecture and meeting room, and an exhibit space.[34] The center is an ongoing collaborative effort between the Greenwich Point Conservancy, Town of Greenwich, specifically the Conservation and Shellfish Commissions, and the Bruce Museum. Additional collaborators include the Friends of Greenwich Point, Audubon Greenwich, Greenwich Public Schools, SoundWaters, Greenwich Historical Society, the University of Connecticut Stamford and others.

Sustainable: The cottage is one of the first public buildings in Connecticut to be Platinum LEED-certified and is a showcase for state-of-the-art green energy technologies. Green features include geothermal heating and cooling (which also provides chilled water for the aquarium in the Seaside Center), solar panels for generating electricity, a wind turbine that powers a web camera and video system to broadcast bird activity in Greenwich Cove, and a rainwater collection system that uses recycled water to supply toilets in the cottage's bathrooms.[35]

[34] Murphy Brothers Contracting Website.
https://www.murphybrothers.com/innis-arden
[35] Colasurdo, Christy. "This Land Is Your Land." Greenwich Magazine. June 2011 issue.

Resilient Shorelines

Haverstraw Bay Park, Village of West Haverstraw, Rockland County, NY

Feature: A maintenance plan for redesigning the shoreline. This redesign provides a wide buffer zone of native vegetation between the mowed park lawn and cobble beach at the water's edge, implemented after significant damage during Superstorm Sandy. The shoreline redesign helps protect and enhance the shoreline habitat, continues to accommodate public access to the water, and allows for recreational water activities such as fishing.

Source: Hudson River National Estuarine Research Reserve Case Study on Haverstraw Bay

History: The site was mostly vacant until it was purchased by Rockland County in 1999, which converted the space into a park. The riverfront park encompasses 27 acres of open space located on the widest part of the Hudson River: Haverstraw Bay.[36] The park was built between 2001 and 2003 and includes gazebos, playgrounds, a double-wide boat launch, a park office and a pedestrian bridge outfitted with fishing stations. The shoreline was protected by stone riprap and steel bulkheads capping the peninsulas, with planted beds and manicured lawn at the top of the banks. A September 11th Memorial was added to the park in 2003.

Source: Ibid

Superstorm Sandy Damage: Sandy flooded the entire park, including the park office building 100 feet from the river. A large amount of debris littered the park after the storm and plants were torn from the ground. The pedestrian bridge that crossed the southern embayment was completely destroyed. However, according to County Park Operations Manager Mike DiMola, "the northern section of the shoreline without riprap fared better (than other areas) after Sandy." As a result, the County ended its practice of cutting back plants on the shoreline.[37]

Practical Design: Rockland County Parks Department made the observation that natural beach areas were the areas that received the least amount of damage from Superstorm Sandy compared

[36] Haverstraw Bay Park Website. http://rocklandgov.com/departments/environmental-resources/county-parks-and-dog-runs/haverstraw-bay-park/

[37] Hudson River Sustainable Shorelines Project Haverstraw Bay Park Case Study.

to "hardened shoreline practices installed (like bulkheads and riprap)."[38] The Parks Department consulted with New York State Department of Environment Conservation and engineering firm McLaren to create a natural "soft shoreline" design that kept close to the shore aesthetic from before, but included native plants to help stabilize the banks to the Hudson River. Undercut banks caused by erosion were regraded to smooth the slope between the upland and lowland elevations using clean fill, compost, and sand mixture. Both the north and the south beach have low slopes. Native perennials and grasses were interplanted among the existing vegetation along the shoreline. Shredded leaf mulch was used as compost around all new plantings. Any exposed synthetic geotextile underlying the original armoring was cut away.[39]

Financing: Through a grant from the Hurricane Sandy Relief Fund and FEMA, the county planned to reconstruct the shoreline by replanting native vegetation and regrading eroded banks.

Lessons Learned: The Parks Department saved money on decreased maintenance efforts because of the sustainable nature of the native plants planted.

[38] Haverstraw Bay Park Website. http://rocklandgov.com/departments/environmental-resources/county-parks-and-dog-runs/haverstraw-bay-park/
[39] Hudson River Sustainable Shorelines Project Haverstraw Bay Park Case Study.