

Table of contents

- p. 1 Mission, Vision, What Stafford Wants
- p. 2 Recreation Current Perspective, Inventory, Youth Sports
- p. 5 Burgeoning Needs and Priorities Narratives
- p. 7 POCD Tasks for Recreation Development
- p. 8 Strategic Plan (under construction) – This is the target of the current exercise.

Recreation Department Mission Statement

Deliver recreation opportunities that meet the needs of citizens of all ages in a cost-effective manner. Identify offerings for leisure activities, exercise activities, socialization activities so residents of all ages can thrive, enjoy their discretionary time, and be proud to live in Stafford. Support tactical activities to responsibly fund staff and activities with appropriate fund-raising including grant, encourage volunteerism to foster community involvement, and maintain a 5-year and 10-year strategic roadmap to meet growth opportunities going forward.

Recreation Department Vision

Provide recreational opportunities that meet the needs of citizens of all ages in a cost-effective manner. Seek to make Stafford a desirable place to live with offerings for leisure activities, exercise activities, socialization activities so residents of all ages can thrive, enjoy their discretionary time, and be proud to live in Stafford.

What Stafford envisions in a Recreation Department

Stafford wants a robust Summer Recreation program.

Stafford wants robust youth sports programs available.

Stafford wants a diverse offering of non-sports activities for young people.

Stafford wants a wide range of offerings for young adults including pickleball, basketball, softball, crafts, arts, music, adult education, volunteer opportunities.

Stafford wants to collaborate with the senior center to participate in appropriate programming, group trips, advice seminars (education), technology assistance, AND with all other recreational organizations in town (arts, hiking, fishing, hunting, etc.).

Stafford wants a communication platform to expand advertising of recreational offerings to all residents with and without online technology.

Stafford wants to actively pursue all grant and fund-raising opportunities to maximize our ability to prepare for and receive funding for Recreational projects from State, Federal and benevolent organizations / societies.

Stafford wants knowledge about commercial offerings that are not offered by the Stafford Recreation Department to share with the community.

Stafford NEEDS a leader to spearhead the strategic planning, to administer and coordinate the recreation activities, to advocate for any and all improvement initiatives.

Recreation Programs Current Perspective

Stafford supports a limited offering of recreational programming. There is an active volunteer community that operates each of the youth sports programs. A part-time Recreation Director was in place for 15 years to assist facility / venue use coordination and to oversee and facilitate the summer recreation program. Staffing for the rec director ended in 2022. The town needs to expand staffing for a Recreation Director to properly address any growth in the recreation programming as well as facilitate existing programming. The challenges associated with supporting the numerous youth and adult activities with volunteers were exasperated by the pandemic and the diminishing capability of even the most well-intentioned volunteers in town. Note that this is an opportunity to leverage the skills of some of the more senior citizens if there is the proper leadership in place.

The Stafford Recreation Commission is a volunteer organization that looks after the betterment of town recreation. This Commission is responsible for the town Recreation budget line item that tracks spending for related expenses, a modest stipend for some of the youth sports programs, and summer recreation lifeguards and staff.

Ordinance 1-10 Establish a Recreation Commission September 25, 1963

Section 1 (paraphrased): The Commission will consist of 9 members serving 5-year terms all on a voluntary basis.

Section 2: The Recreation Commission shall conduct and supervise public playgrounds, play fields, indoor recreation areas owned or controlled by the Town or on properties leased by the Town for such purposes and on private properties with the consent of the owners thereof. It shall have the power to conduct any form of recreation or cultural activities that will improve the leisure time of the people of the Town of Stafford in a constructive or wholesome manner.

Section 3. Said Recreation Committee shall submit a recommended budget each year to the Board of Selectmen and said Board of Selectmen shall incorporate it into the annual town budget as modified by said Board of Selectmen for which purposes the Town of Stafford is hereby authorized to make appropriations.

Amended: December 13, 1967, to add three members and stagger the 5-year terms to best manage membership turnover.

Ref: <http://www.staffordct.org/ordinances.php>

Inventory of Recreational Activities and Facilities

Youth sports. Baseball, softball, football, soccer, basketball, lacrosse (currently in hibernation), wrestling. Participation in other sports (ex. Hockey) can be found regionally. Each sport generally has more competitive and more costly offering with premier clubs in the region.

Nature activities, hiking, fish & game club, also see Conservation Commission

Adult sports - Women's softball active; Men's softball has been dormant for 18 years and likely to continue dormant; Adult basketball operates as a coed and as a women's pick-up league at Staffordville School during the winter months.

Senior Citizens - All organized activities operate out of the Senior center, albeit a limited offering for recreational activities as the center is service oriented.

Recreation Facilities and Venues

- Hyde Park
 - Tennis Courts (not in service)
 - Skateboard Park (dismantled)
 - Youth softball
 - Playground (very limited)
 - Pavilion
- Olympic Field
 - Youth football
 - Outdoor basketball courts
 - Former Men's adult softball (dormant)
 - Playground (recently renovated)
- Kealy Field
 - Little League baseball fields (3)
 - Indoor Batting cage
 - Tennis courts / Pickleball courts
- Staffordville Lake
 - Swimming / beach is also home of 6-week Summer Rec program
 - Pavilion
 - Playground
 - Open field
- Outdoor ice skating adjacent to American Legion

School buildings (activities shown are in addition to school functions)

- Stafford High School
 - Gymnasium for adult and youth basketball, winter youth soccer
 - Soccer fields (2) for youth soccer
 - Football field
 - Field Hockey field
 - Track
 - Baseball fields (2)
- Stafford Middle School
 - Gymnasium for youth basketball
 - Soccer Field for youth soccer
 - Softball Fields (2), used for youth soccer and women's softball
- Stafford Elementary School
 - Softball field, for high school softball
 - Playground
- West Stafford Elementary School
 - Gymnasium
 - Tennis Courts
 - Pickleball courts
 - Playground

- Hiking trail head
- Former Staffordville School building
 - Small gymnasium
 - Room for recreational office
 - Large rooms available for various adult programming events
 - Outdoor basketball hoop
 - Small playground
- Former Witt School building (not inhabitable)
 - Hiking trail head
 - Gymnasium (formerly)

Hiking

- Old Witt school parking lot trailhead
- Dennis Pond
- West Stafford School loop trail
- Shenipsit forest near JMH
- Other hiking

Fishing

- Dennis Pond, Mill Pond, Staffordville Lake, Willimantic River
- Private clubs: Fish and Game, Rod and Gun?

Narrative for existing activities

Youth Sports

Stafford Springs **Soccer** Club is a volunteer organization operating youth soccer for kids aged 3-18 years old and is affiliated with Connecticut Junior Soccer Association CJSA. The primary playing season is the fall and there are programs during the winter and the spring for year-round play.

Stafford Bulldogs Youth **Football** is a volunteer organization operating youth football for kids aged 8-14 years old and youth cheer for kids aged 10-14 years old. The program is affiliated with the NCCYFL (North Central Connecticut Youth Football League). The primary playing season is the fall.

Stafford Little League **Baseball** is a volunteer organization operating both youth baseball and youth **Softball** for kids aged 6-16. The programs are affiliated with Little League International. The primary playing season is the spring with some summer teams and fall teams playing regionally.

Stafford Youth **Basketball** is a volunteer organization operating youth basketball for kids aged 6-14. The primary playing season is the winter. Travel teams starting at age 10 play regionally. There is no state or national affiliation.

Youth **Wrestling** is supported by local volunteers for kids aged 10-14. The primary season is winter, with interest to expand to the spring and fall seasons.

Summary of burgeoning needs and priorities (in no particular order)

Hire a full-time Recreation Director

The Recreation Director can fill multiple gaps while substantially enhancing what activities are available to the residents of Stafford. Recreation programming is nearly non-existent in Stafford. Youth sports administration is becoming a significant burden to citizen volunteers. Managing the Summer Recreation program has fallen on other already overburdened town employees. A Recreation Director can be charged with the responsibilities for enhancing revenue generation with overall programming, grant applications, and other creative cost-effective ideas. It is typical across the regional recreation departments that the salary of the Recreation Director, either full-time or part-time, be considered an expense to the town and that any additional staff and all programming be paid for by usage fees. Certainly, grant awards typically bring in much more money but that money doesn't explicitly offset budget line items.

Volunteer relief: For youth sports, the duties of the program volunteers have expanded over recent years as the protection of the playing atmosphere for kids has expanded to demand thorough vetting with background checks, addition of the responsibility to be a mandated reporter for every sort of harassment behavior, and the associated additional burden of operating with fewer volunteers because of these additional requirements. Automated systems to manage the administration of all this are helpful but the overall responsibility burden has increased tremendously. Stafford should include the overall youth sports administration as part of the duties of the Recreation Director to best enable those who volunteer to operate the youth sports activities.

Fitness trail apparatus in parks and along walking paths, especially as walking paths are expanded, are needed, and would be heavily used. Four apparatuses are in place along the Levinthal Run walkway. Other pedestrian friendly locations such as Hyde Park, Olympic Field and other locations at the school campuses, addition of physical and sensory stations can enhance overall residents' health. Other downtown locations such as Haymarket Common should be explored as opportunistic locations for such apparatus.

Ice skating is limited to the open-air skating pond adjacent to the American Legion. The facility was built for ice hockey with a pond that is approximately the size of a regulation hockey rink. With the warming winters, the number of days that is safe to skate is continually dwindling. With cold enough weather, this facility is very good with adequate parking and night-time lighting. There are no longer any hockey boards. It is important to establish a schedule for open skating and hockey skating. Proposals have been considered for a portable ice rink to be located at Olympic Field that would open additional skating days in the winter with the more shallow water surface. Recent efforts to enhance the legion rink are welcome as potential cost-efficient improvements. A permanent rink that would support roller skating at a location such as Staffordville school is a viable opportunity.

Playing fields are overworked with almost no ability to let fields rest for a season. An additional field is needed. Several ideas and their advantages and obstacles are shown below.

Build a field at Kealy field. There are 5 acres of land owned by the Town of Stafford adjacent to the existing Kealy Field complex. This would relieve the congestion at Olympic field for Sunday football days in the fall. Downside is cost.

Build a field on property owned by Stafford Cemetery, north of the cemetery and adjacent to Stafford high school. OR build a field on property owned by “unknown” and currently wooded adjacent to Levinthal Run and County Road. Implementation obstacles include an inability to acquire the property, the cost of the property, the cost to clear land and build playing surfaces.

Either of these two new properties open lots of opportunity to facilitate field resting, installation of a skateboard park, installation of a permanent skating surface (roller blades in summer and ice skates and hockey in winter) and growing the number of playgrounds for use during school hours.

Resurface the Stafford High stadium field with **artificial turf**. This would reduce the congestion at Olympic Field by allowing youth football to play weekend games at this venue without risking the quality of the field surface. Further, this would enable high school and middle school field hockey to play on the same surface as all their competitors. Cost to install is estimated to be \$1.8M but the overall cost of ownership and maintenance of a grass field versus a turf field is becoming comparable in price. There continue to be studies that find increased injury risk on turf fields for sports like football, and that must be taken into consideration.

A **skateboard park** should be constructed. It should be built using a concrete base as well as concrete skateboard features for maximum useful life and minimal park maintenance effort. The previous site on the former tennis courts at Hyde Park has a downside of being hard to reach by first responders in the event of a medical emergency. It is also hard to monitor by local police. It is a good location for enhanced camera surveillance (see **Safety and Security** below). A secondary location would be Olympic Field but the congestion wouldn't be tolerable until an alternate location is built for youth football. Other locations further away from the downtown Stafford area would be less desirable (such as Staffordville school beach area) in terms of access to the downtown population. Such a park would also attract families to the local downtown business district.

The **varsity soccer field** at Stafford High was built with the intention of installing **lights** and bleachers and a scoreboard. Underground conduit and electrical feed are in place. Lights would extend the ability to use the field in the fall for evening activities such as youth soccer and high school fall sports. State or federal grants should be leveraged to fund the completion of this project. A scoreboard has since been installed.

Safety and Security are paramount for all the recreation venues, especially those where youth activities are played. Building access for indoor facilities and security camera surveillance for

both indoor and outdoor venues facilitate the security posture. Continued expansion and maintenance of the availability of AED devices solidify Stafford as a HeartSafe Community.

Bicycle friendly paths? Walking paths downtown? Disc golf course? Therapeutic Ropes course? Pickleball? Indoor Pickleball at Staffordville School? Adult Education curriculum? Home finances, investment finances? Dog Parks at Staffordville school, Hyde Park, other locations? Swimming instruction at Staffordville Lake in the summer months.

Ref: Stafford Plan of Conservation and Development [pocd final 11-3-2022.pdf \(revize.com\)](#)
[pocd final 11-3-2022.pdf](#) items are embedded into table on page 62, taken from the following:

Tasks for Recreational Development

Tasks	Leader	Partners
Seek Opportunities to relieve youth sports volunteers' time commitment especially for overall registration administration	BOS	REC
Hire and maintain long term funding for a town Recreation Director / Department	BOS	REC
Expand presence of Fitness Path apparatus	G&M	
Expand and maintain safe walking and bicycle paths especially in downtown districts	DPW	
Identify and procure land to add additional playing field surfaces	REC	P&Z, G&M
Resurface lighted field at SHS with artificial turf. A wider surface area is needed for soccer, which implies a larger track.	G&M	BOE
Extend open-air ice-skating season. Consider improvements at Legion rink; OR building a permanent rink for summer and winter use; OR procure material for portable hockey rinks to be erected annually.	DPW G&M	
Rebuild skateboard park with fully concrete structure for long term durability. Olympic Field or Hyde Park are ideal locations.	G&M	REC
Enhance safety & security at all recreational venues. Take advantage of security cameras for surveillance, accessibility for emergency services and law enforcement personnel, AED placement and training, etc.	REC	G&M
Complete SHS Varsity field lighting and bleachers project	BOE	G&M
What else? Staffordville school recreation center (elsewhere in POCD)	BOS	
Adult Education curriculum, arts, crafts, home finances, etc		
What Else?		

Strategic Plan, 5- & 10-year Vision, Obstacles to Overcome

Q. What does the public at large really want? A. See survey results and focus group feedback.

Q. What is the public at large willing to pay? A. Often nothing so this is to appeal to the balance of the population in Stafford. More realistically, something that brings good value and some return.



Where do we want to be in 5 years?

How do we get there? Funding opportunities?

How best to leverage volunteers, volunteerism...

Where do we want to be in 10 years?

How do we get there? Funding opportunities?

How best to leverage volunteers, volunteerism...

Identify Physical venue obstacles, Funding obstacles, Staffing obstacles, Logistics obstacles
 For example, deployment of an online registration and payment system is a pre-requisite for any new recreation programming events. Further, as programming starts to be operated by the town, appropriate insurance coverage will be required.

Identify the nature of actions to take to address each obstacle

Future State by relevant activity:

Recreation Programming for adults:

- Arts & Crafts, Hobbies
- Exercise, Entertainment
- Education (finances, taxes, civics, etc)

Programming for senior citizens:

Non-sports programming for youth from teens through young adults:

Summer recreation camp:

Swimming Lessons:

Town Facilities and Fields:

- Hyde Park, Olympic Field, Kealy Field
- Staffordville School
- School properties

Grant Application and Award Activity:

Fund Raising:

Communication including townspeople, regional activity, commercial recreational offerings:

- Paper and Electronic Newsletter (similar to Tolland or Somers or Woodstock)

Youth Sports coordination:

Youth Sports registration, volunteer recruiting and volunteer vetting: