




NORTHAMPTON RIVER SWIMMING ASSESSMENT & DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

Submitted to the City of Northampton
Planning & Sustainability Department
August 23, 2021

WOLA

A landscape photograph showing a sandy area in the foreground, possibly a beach or a cleared area. In the middle ground, there is a stone wall or a low barrier. Behind the wall, several people are standing and talking. The background is filled with bare trees, suggesting a late autumn or winter setting. The sky is clear and blue. A white text box is overlaid on the upper right portion of the image.

This report is an independent assessment informed by city and community stakeholders and is not a final city policy or plan. The recommendations are not financially constrained, either for capital costs or maintenance costs and some of the improvements are beyond available and future resources. This approach, starting with what we want aspirationally, helps the city to set priorities in light of limited resources and competing demands, and hopefully helps the city and its partners find more resources in the future.

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INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

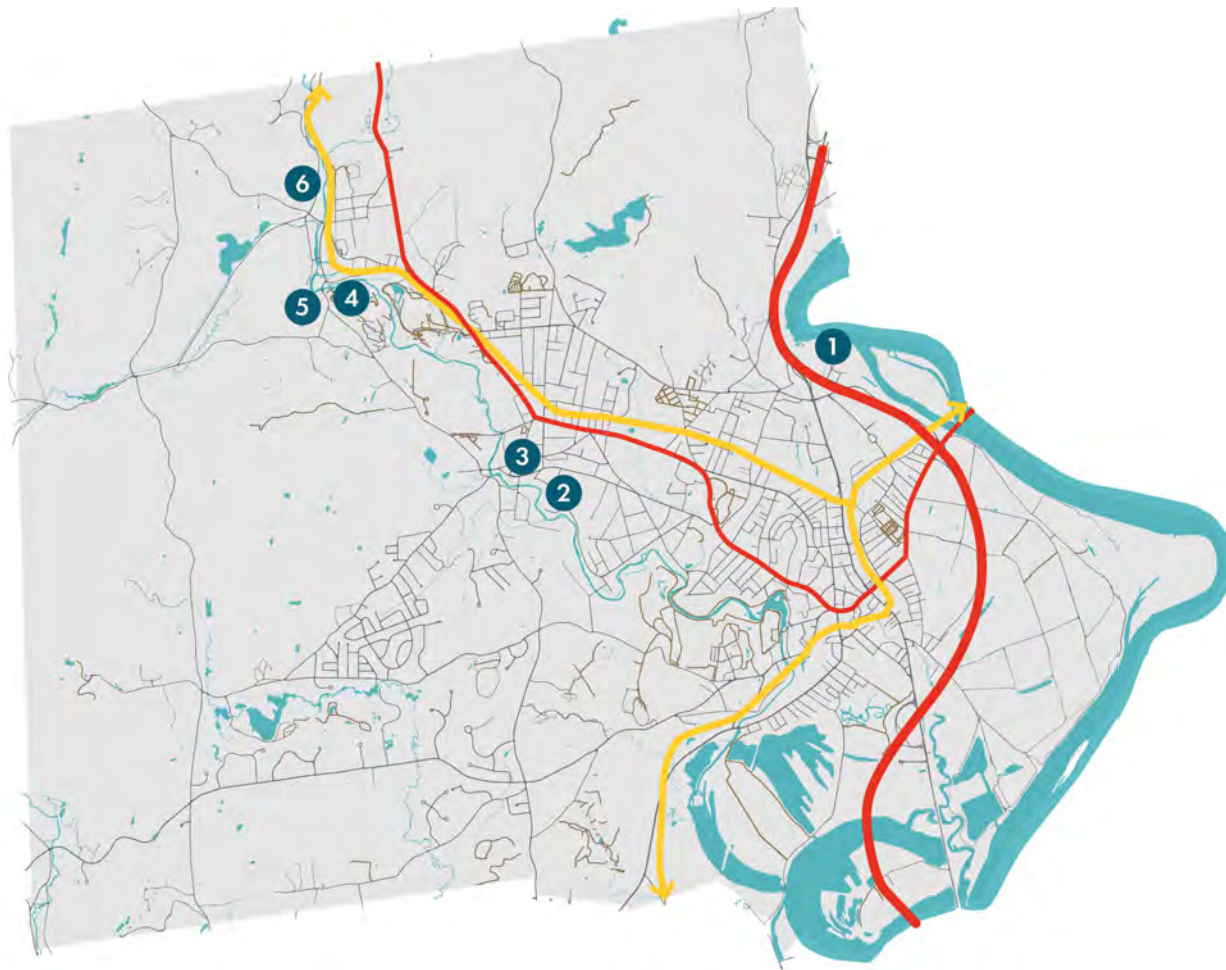
River swimming has become increasingly popular in Northampton as residents and visitors seek relief from the summer heat. Both the Mill River and the Connecticut River have seen heavy use, particularly during the summer months of the COVID-19 pandemic, as parks and open spaces across the country saw record numbers of visitors looking for ways to escape their homes and access fresh air.

With increased use of Northampton rivers came increased tensions with neighbors, city officials, and those concerned about the environment and equitable access to recreation. Noise, trash, and unsafe behaviors have led neighbors to feel frustrated. Community groups concerned about stream bank degradation also want to ensure that those who cannot afford a house in Northampton still feel welcome to swim. City officials are working to understand and help the frustrated neighbors while also addressing broader issues raised by local community groups and swimmers.

The purpose of this study is to understand and record the concerns of the concerns of those that use and have a stake in the future of Northampton river swimming areas. In addition to understanding the points of stress and opportunities of each swim area, this study is also intended to identify ways that these swim areas can be improved to mitigate some of the short and long term points of stress. While there are many informal swimming areas along the Mill and Connecticut Rivers, this study focused primarily on six swim areas identified by the City of Northampton. Study areas include one swim area along the Connecticut River; the Connecticut River Greenway, and five swim areas along the Mill River; Maines Field, the Nonotuck Dam, the upper and lower areas of Cook's Dam, and swim areas near the Orange Dam.

The study, completed by Wright Ostermier Landscape Architects (WOLA), is organized in the order that information was gathered and analyzed. *Section 2* focuses on a GIS based site analysis of each swim area, completed by WOLA and including volunteer work completed by Smith College Students

that takes into consideration how Northampton's swim areas fit into a larger network of ecological and social systems. *Section 3* includes information collected through an online survey, gathered from WOLA's meetings with town officials and community groups, and feedback gathered through a zoom public forum. In *Section 4*, WOLA examines how the feedback gathered in *Section 3* may inform future improvements to swim areas both at the Connecticut River Greenway and along the Mill River.



RIVER SWIM AREAS

Connecticut River Greenway 1



Maines Field 2



Nonotuck Dam 3



Cook's Dam 4 5



Orange Dam 6





2.0 SITE ANALYSIS

To inform recommendations for future improvements, each swim area was analyzed to understand how context and physical site characteristics shape access, use, and safety. Site visits and geographic information system mapping (GIS) allowed the study of each swim area to begin during the winter of 2021. Each swim area was studied to establish a basic understanding of the following features:

- Swim area features & amenities
- Vehicular, pedestrian, and bike access & circulation
- Contextual land use & ownership
- Regulated areas & floodplains
- Safety hazards & features that are points of stress

The focus of the study was to analyze the six swim area locations to understand how they can be improved to benefit both the health of the rivers and the community members that use and live near the rivers. The immediate context of each swim area was studied to gain a better understanding of the character, opportunities, and constraints of each swim area. This study did not focus on a watershed-wide or regional study of rivers and swim areas, although a study at this scale may be valuable. Thanks to the generous time of four Smith College students, some preliminary town-wide analysis is included to demonstrate the importance of additional study to understand and protect the health of our rivers, and to find a regional solution which provides equitable access to safe swim areas.

2.1 CONNECTICUT RIVER GREENWAY

The Connecticut River Greenway is located northwest of Damon Road and the River Run Condominium Complex. In 2015, the City added parking, a boathouse, accessible walk to the river, boat launch, and docks to provide greater access to the Connecticut River. The site also became home to Northampton Community Rowing, the City's primary partner in managing the property.

Storms over the past few years have deposited sediment to the southern shore of the river, creating a beach to the east of Barrett Brook. The beach is regularly used by those willing to cross Barrett Brook or hike through the nearby woods. While the addition of the beach has been welcome, storms have also caused damage to some of the boat docks and gangways originally installed in 2015.

Accessibility to the water and boat launches from the parking lot is currently an issue, which is one of the primary reasons for this project. When water in the river is low, the accessible route ends just short of the water. Currently, those with mobility issues are often driven down the boat launch and then helped into boats.

OWNERSHIP & LAND USE

- Owned by the City of Northampton.
- This portion of the Connecticut River is bordered by open space and conservation areas.
- The Connecticut River Greenway is directly north of an industrial land use and west of a residential land use, the River Run Condos.
- I-91 and Damon Road separate the Greenway from other nearby land uses.

CIRCULATION

- Wayfinding for vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists is unclear from

Damon Road and the private drive that connects the Greenway to Damon Road.

- Roadway and sidewalk improvements to Damon Road will allow cyclists and pedestrians from the nearby bike path to connect to the Greenway.
- Parking lots appear to adequately support Northampton Community Rowing and other Greenway visitors.
- The water and boat launch are not currently accessible to those with mobility issues.
- The newly formed beach is difficult to access from the boat launch area due to Barrett Brook.
- A trail in the woods extends from the River Run Condos to the beach. Because this trail is on private property, it is not widely known and accessing it requires trespassing.

REGULATED AREAS

- The Connecticut River, Barrett Brook, and nearby wetlands are regulated by state and local entities. Buffers shown on the adjacent plan indicate areas that cannot be altered without a permit.

SAFETY

- Accessing the beach is a potential issue of safety given that there is not currently a clearly defined path on the City's property.
- Currents and unknown water quality are also concerns for swimmers and boaters.

POINTS OF STRESS

- Lack of wayfinding likely creates confusion for those driving to the Greenway.



Accessible route to water's edge



Base of existing boat launch



Beach beyond Barrett Brook



End of accessible route to the water



View down Barrett Brook toward Connecticut River

CONNECTICUT RIVER GREENWAY: OWNERSHIP & LAND USE

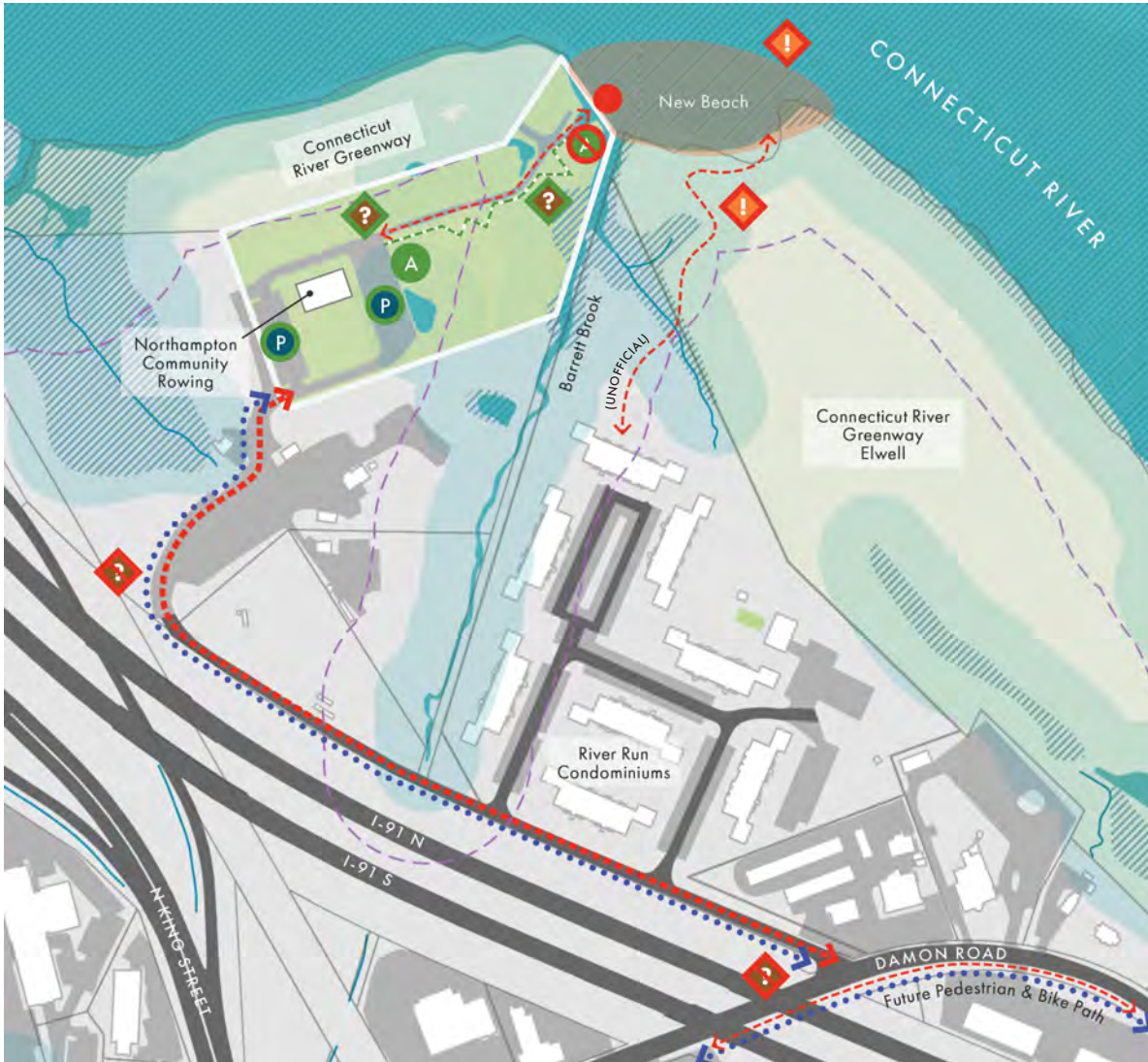


MAP LEGEND

- Recreation & Conservation
- Paved Road
- Parking & Driveways
- Building
- DEP Wetlands
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Open Space
- Residential



CONNECTICUT RIVER GREENWAY: CIRCULATION, REGULATED AREAS, SAFETY, & POINTS OF STRESS



MAP LEGEND

- Recreation & Conservation
- Paved Road
- Parking & Driveways
- Building
- DEP Wetlands
- Approximate Swimming Area
- Swimming Access
- 100' Wetland Buffer
- 200' Riverfront Buffer
- P / No Parking Public Parking / No Parking
- Vehicular Access
- Bike Access
- Pedestrian Access
- Universally Accessible Access
- A / No Access Universally Accessible / Not
- ? / No Wayfinding Wayfinding Clear / Unclear
- ! Safety Concern



2.2 MAINES FIELD

Maines Field is primarily accessed from Riverside Drive. It serves as one of several parks in the City with recreational fields and is the only park in town with a lighted field. Baseball, softball, and volleyball leagues use the facilities for use during summer weeknights, and pick-up games often take place on the weekend. The pavilion is rented by the public for gatherings including family reunions and yoga classes. Unpaved parking areas provide easy access to the nearby athletic facilities. While the park has bathrooms on site, they are not accessible, and are generally closed except when rented with the athletic facilities.

Multiple swim locations along the Mill River are accessed from Maines Field. Footpaths through the trees lead to small, cleared areas along the water. Summertime water levels are often low, allowing wading and play in the River, but no lap swimming. Foot traffic in the cleared areas has compacted the soils and prevented the growth of understory plants that would typically help stabilize the stream bank.

The Mill River once flowed directly through what is now the softball field at Maines Field, but was diverted in the 1930s or 1940s. As a result, the park floods every few years during heavy rain storms. In the past, flood waters have inundated much of the park, spreading debris and silt as far as the bleachers near the baseball fields. The pattern of flooding at Maines Field is likely to increase over time as storm events increase in intensity due to climate change. With that in mind, future improvements should be made to mitigate the impacts of flooding.

OWNERSHIP & LAND USE

- Maines Field is owned and managed by the City of Northampton.
- The park is surrounded primarily by single family residential neighborhoods. Many neighbors walk their dogs, swim, and play at Maines Field.

CIRCULATION

- The main entrance along Riverside Drive is the point of access that most pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles use to enter Maines Field. The park's prominent sign near the entry and clear visual connections to the athletic facilities make the park easy to access.
- The nearest PVT bus stop is located on Nonotock Street, a five to six minute walk away.
- A paved entry drive provides vehicular access to gravel parking areas. No bike racks are currently provided.
- From the parking lots and drives, informal footpaths have been created in the woods to access the swimming areas.

REGULATED AREAS

- The Mill River and nearby wetlands are regulated by state and local entities. Buffers shown on the adjacent plan indicate areas that cannot be altered without a permit.

SAFETY

- The pattern of flash flooding in this area is a potential safety hazard.
- Unknown water quality is also a concern for swimmers.
- The Mill River is currently cutting into the bank along the south eastern edge of the park. As a result, the drop-off from the top of the stream bank to the river below is 4-6 feet, depending on the level of the River. Since many park visitors and swimmers are walking the footpaths near the River, this sudden drop-off could be hazardous.

POINTS OF STRESS

- Residential backyards abut the swim areas at Maines Field. This is likely a point of stress, as many of the residences along Willow Street likely see and hear swimmers throughout the summer.



Existing bathrooms not compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)



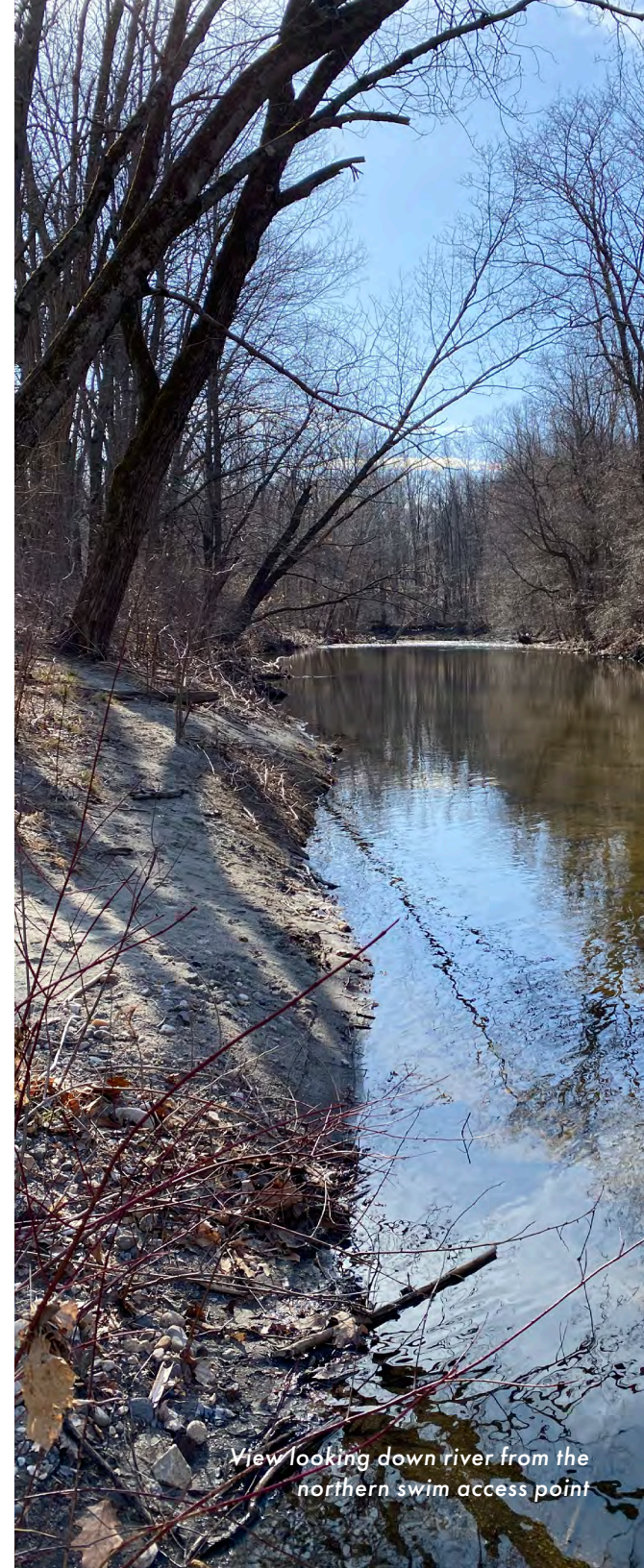
Paved entry drive and volleyball courts



Swim access point with compacted soils and minimal understory vegetation



Swim access point during late summer



View looking down river from the northern swim access point

MAINES FIELD: OWNERSHIP & LAND USE

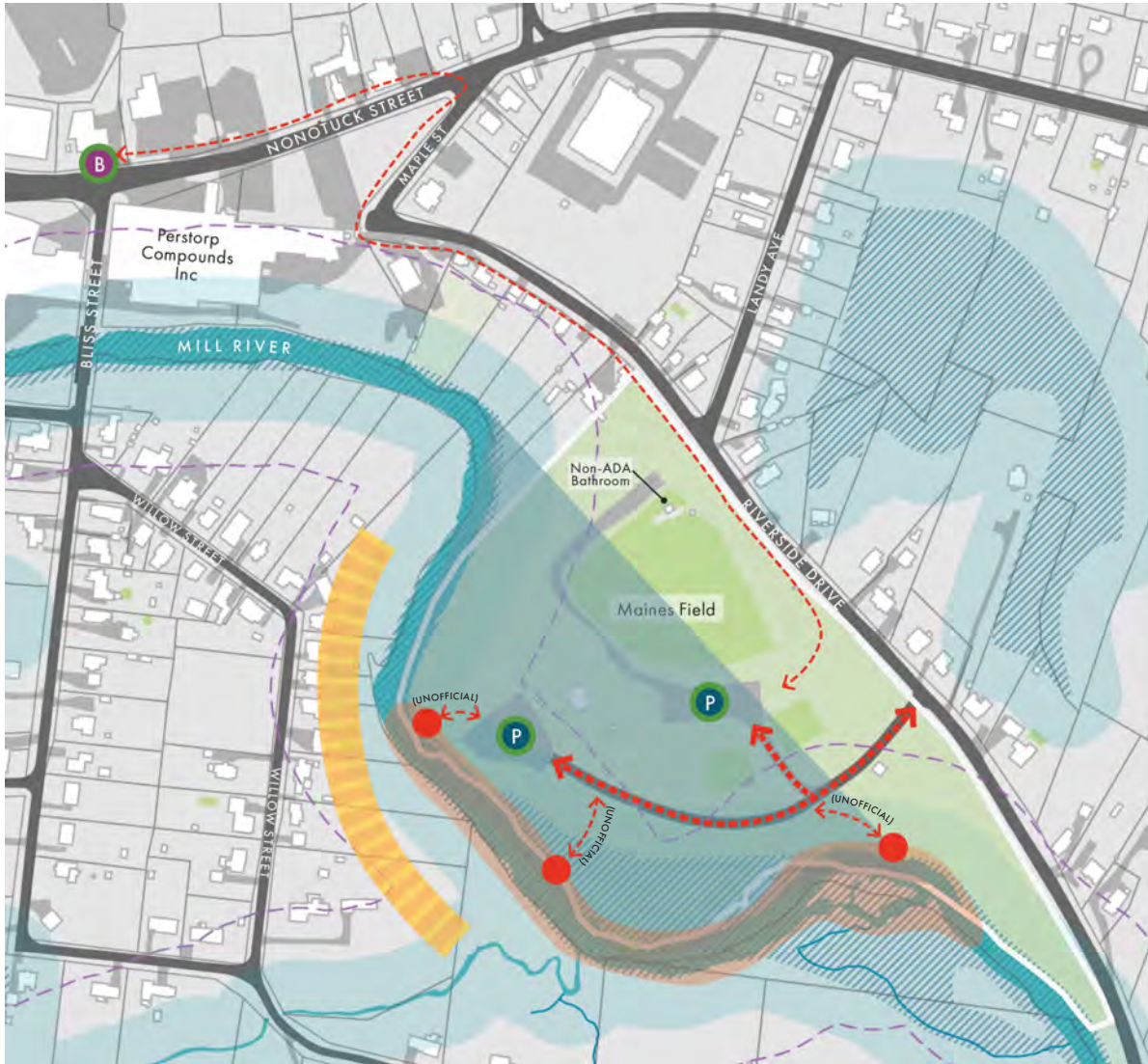


MAP LEGEND

- Recreation & Conservation
- Paved Road
- Parking & Driveways
- Building
- DEP Wetlands
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Open Space
- Residential



MAINES FIELD: CIRCULATION, REGULATED AREAS, SAFETY, & POINTS OF STRESS



MAP LEGEND

- Recreation & Conservation
- Paved Road
- Parking & Driveways
- Building
- DEP Wetlands
- Approximate Swimming Area
- Swimming Access
- 100' Wetland Buffer
- 200' Riverfront Buffer
- Public Parking
- Vehicular Access
- Pedestrian Access
- Bus Stop
- Visual and Sound Disturbance
- Flood Zone



2.3 NONOTUCK DAM

The Nonotuck Dam swim area is located between Pine Street and Florence Road. This swim area is not owned by the City of Northampton, but is a part of the study because of its popularity, safety concerns, and proximity to residential neighborhoods. The current property owner, National Grid, discourages swimming above or below the dam with no trespassing signs.

OWNERSHIP & LAND USE

- The Nonotuck Dam is currently owned by National Grid.
- The upper and lower sides of the dam are bordered by open space to the south and industrial uses to the north. While the Nonotuck Mill building is zoned as industrial, it currently serves as office space for several businesses.
- South of Florence Road is primarily single family residential properties.

CIRCULATION

- Swimmers access the upper area of the dam primarily via Florence Road and Pine Street.
- Swimmers park nearby on Florence Road or at the Bushworks parking lot. Both of these locations have no parking signs posted.
- There are three bus stops within a five minute walk of the Nonotuck Dam; Pine Street, Nonotuck Street, and Florence Road.

REGULATED AREAS

- The Mill River and nearby wetlands are regulated by state and local entities. Buffers shown on the adjacent plan indicate areas that cannot be altered without a permit. The existing Mill Building along the river pre-date river protection regulations and are located within the buffer zones.

SAFETY

- Swimming above or below the dam comes with inherent risks. Visually gauging the intensity of the water flowing over the dam is not a reliable way to determine the area is safe for swimming.
- Unknown water quality is also a concern for swimmers.
- While there are pockets of deep water on the low side of the dam, jumping from the dam is extremely dangerous.

POINTS OF STRESS

- The owner of the Nonotuck Mill, adjacent to the Nonotuck Dam, has posted signs and erected barriers to prevent people from swimming above or below the dam. Despite these efforts, swimmers can still be found here regularly during the summer months.
- Residential and commercial property owners nearby are frustrated by swimmers parking illegally along the street or in business parking lots.



Sign near Florence Road



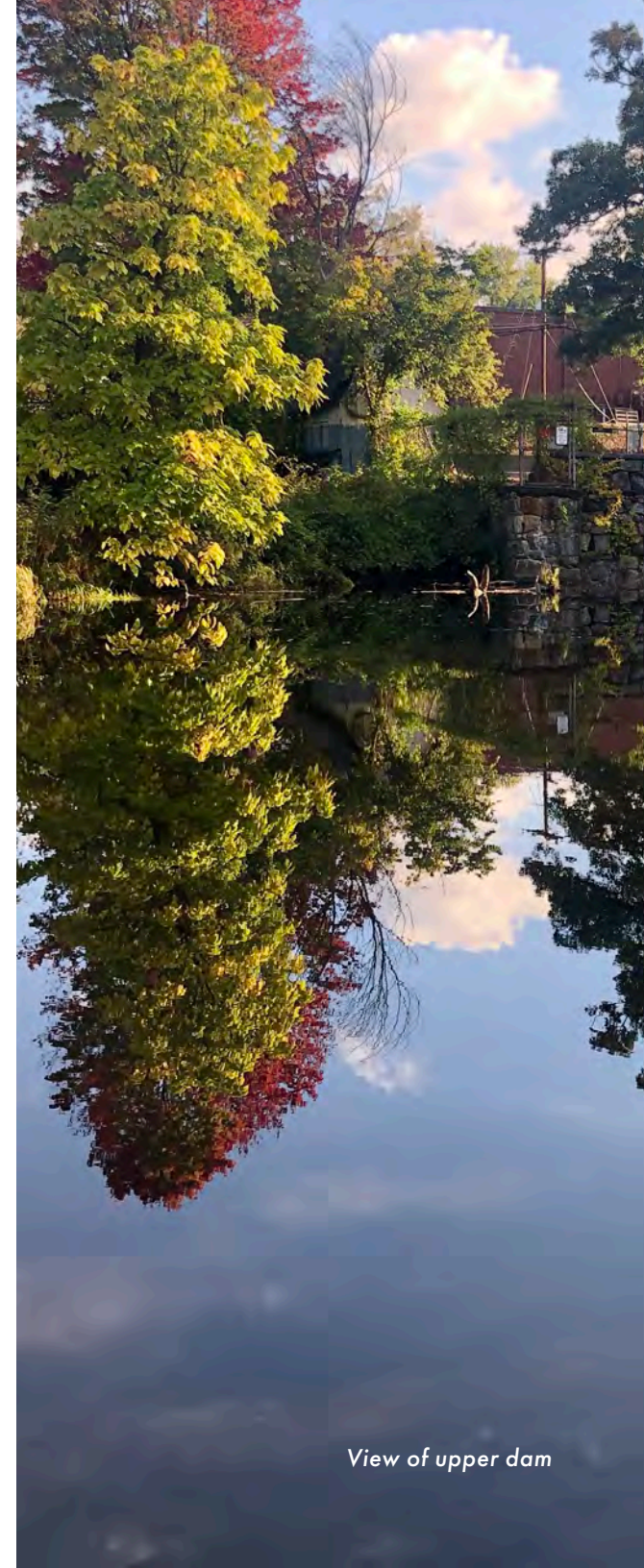
View of lower dam



View of upper dam

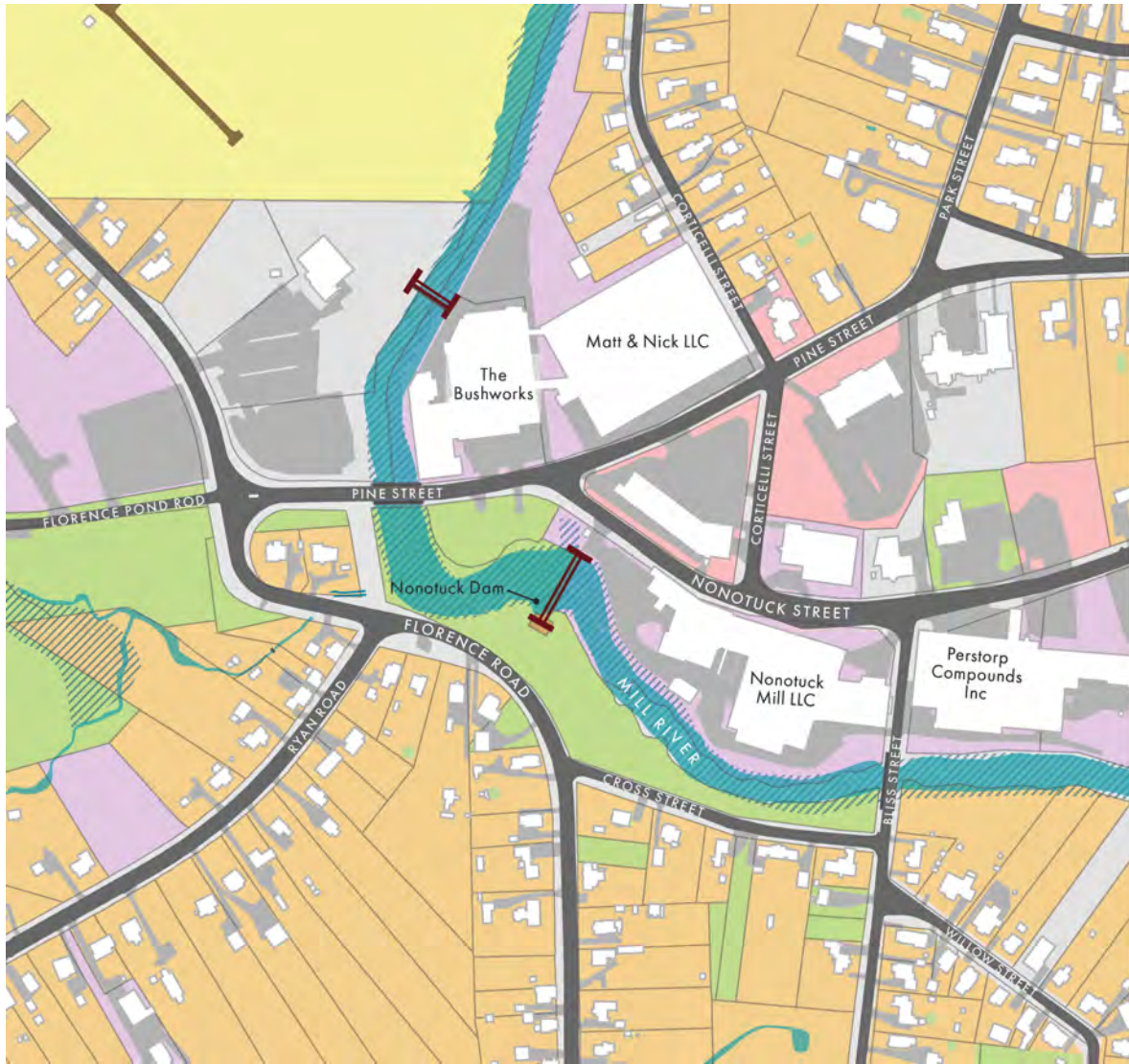


Jersey barriers to prevent drivers from entering



View of upper dam

NONOTUCK DAM: OWNERSHIP & LAND USE



MAP LEGEND

















- Recreation & Conservation
- Paved Road
- Parking & Driveways
- Building
- DEP Wetlands
- Dam
- Agriculture
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Open Space
- Residential



NONOTUCK DAM: CIRCULATION, REGULATED AREAS, SAFETY, & POINTS OF STRESS



MAP LEGEND

-  Recreation & Conservation
-  Paved Road
-  Parking & Driveways
-  Building
-  DEP Wetlands
-  Dam
-  Approximate Swimming Area
-  Swimming Access
-  100' Wetland Buffer
-  200' Riverfront Buffer
-  No Parking
-  Pedestrian Access
-  Bus Stop
-  Visual and Sound Disturbance
-  Wayfinding Unclear
-  Safety Concern



2.4 UPPER & LOWER COOK'S DAM

Cooks Dam is located along Main Street in Leeds near the Northampton Country Club. The lower portion of the dam is a popular swimming spot, especially among young people. Water cascading over the dam and pockets of deep water among craggy rocks are enticing on a hot day. The upper area of the dam is a less frequently used swim area due to the difficulty accessing it. Informal foot paths from both Main Street and Water Street wind up and down the hillside of the nearby conservation area where swimmers jump into the river from a ledge roughly 20' above.

OWNERSHIP & LAND USE

- The property along the lower swim area at Cook's Dam is owned by Look Park. Signs are posted discouraging trespassing.
- The upper swimming area at Cook's Dam is bordered on the north by a single family residential property and to the south by open space. Some of the open space is owned by a local utility company while much of the open space is City owned conservation land.

CIRCULATION

- Most people access the swim area at the lower side of the dam via Main Street and Arch Street.
- The upper side of the dam is accessed from Main Street and Water Street.
- Currently, no parking is allowed on Main Street or Arch Street. Only members are permitted to park at the Northampton Country Club.
- No bus stops are located near Cook's Dam.
- The Northampton Bike Path passes nearby, making this area an easy stop for cyclists.

REGULATED AREAS

- The Mill River and nearby wetlands are regulated by state and local entities. Buffers shown on plans on the next page indicate areas that cannot be altered without a permit.

SAFETY

- People jumping from the bridge and dam have been a cause for concern for some time. Tall fencing now prevents most from jumping from the bridge.
- Unknown water quality is also a concern for swimmers.
- Parking along Arch Street, a narrow, two-lane road with a minimal shoulder, is potentially dangerous.

POINTS OF STRESS

- Property owners, particularly the Northampton Country Club, have expressed frustration with people trespassing on their property, being noisy, and leaving trash.
- Increased traffic and parking along Arch Street have frustrated neighboring land owners.



View of upper dam

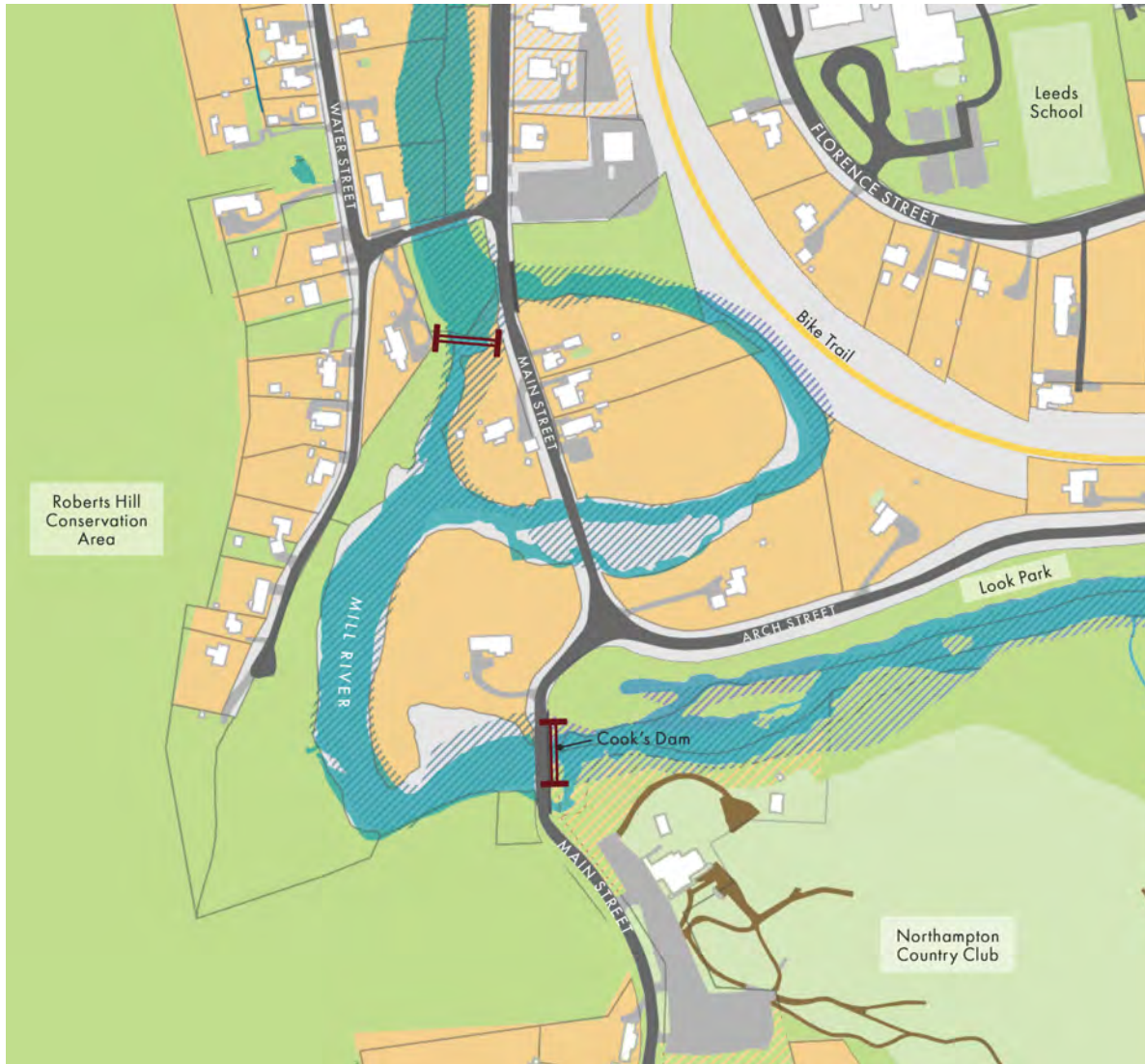


Foot path to upper dam



View of lower dam

UPPER & LOWER COOK'S DAM: OWNERSHIP & LAND USE



MAP LEGEND

- Recreation & Conservation
- Paved Road
- Parking & Driveways
- Building
- DEP Wetlands
- Dam
- Bike Trail
- Open Space
- Residential



UPPER & LOWER COOK'S DAM: CIRCULATION, REGULATED AREAS, SAFETY, & POINTS OF STRESS



MAP LEGEND

- Recreation & Conservation
- Paved Road
- Parking & Driveways
- Building
- DEP Wetlands
- Dam
- Bike Trail
- Approximate Swimming Area
- Swimming Access
- 100' Wetland Buffer
- 200' Riverfront Buffer
- No Parking
- Pedestrian Access
- Bike Access
- Visual and Sound Disturbance
- Wayfinding Unclear
- Safety Concern



2.5 ORANGE DAM

The Orange Dam swim area is located along the Northampton Bike Path between Grove Avenue and River Road. People swim in the Mill River near the Orange Dam, but also further upstream along multiple points off the bike path. Because of its easy access by bike, the Orange Dam swim areas are very popular in the summer.

Informal foot paths link the bike path with small, pebbly beaches. These areas are often packed with families picnicking and swimming on a hot summer day. The water at these swim areas varies in depth. Below the dam, the water is rather deep, while upstream, water levels range from wading to swimming depth.

OWNERSHIP & LAND USE

- The open space between the bike path and Mill River is primarily owned by Chartpak. The City of Northampton recently acquired a parcel that will allow people using the bike path to reach the river without trespassing on private property.
- On the east side of the bike path, the land use is primarily single family residential.
- On the west side of the river, much of the land is owned by Chartpak and zoned industrial, though it presently maintained as woodland.

CIRCULATION

- Most swimmers access the Orange Dam swim area via the Northampton Bike Path.
- On street parking is limited to Main Street. Recent restrictions have been put in place to prevent on street parking on Grove and Mulberry Streets.
- A PVTA bus stop is located at the intersection of the Bike Path and Mulberry Street and a Valley Bike Share station will be installed nearby soon.
- A Valley Bike share station was recently added nearby

REGULATED AREAS

- The Mill River and nearby wetlands are regulated by state and local entities. Buffers shown on the adjacent plan indicate areas that cannot be altered without a permit.

SAFETY

- People jumping from the Orange Dam run the risk of becoming seriously injured.
- Unknown water quality is also a concern for swimmers.
- Waste left behind by swimmers can result in unsanitary conditions.

POINTS OF STRESS

- Neighboring residences to the east of the Mill River and bike path hear noise from swimmers playing music and experience substantially more traffic on neighborhood streets during prime swim season.
- Waste left behind is a point of stress for many different groups. Neighbors feel frustrated about having to clean up after other people and swimmers are frustrated when they arrive to swim and the people before them didn't properly carry their waste away from the swim area.



View from dam towards
Main Street



Small beach north of dam



Bike path looking towards
the Orange Dam

ORANGE DAM: OWNERSHIP & LAND USE

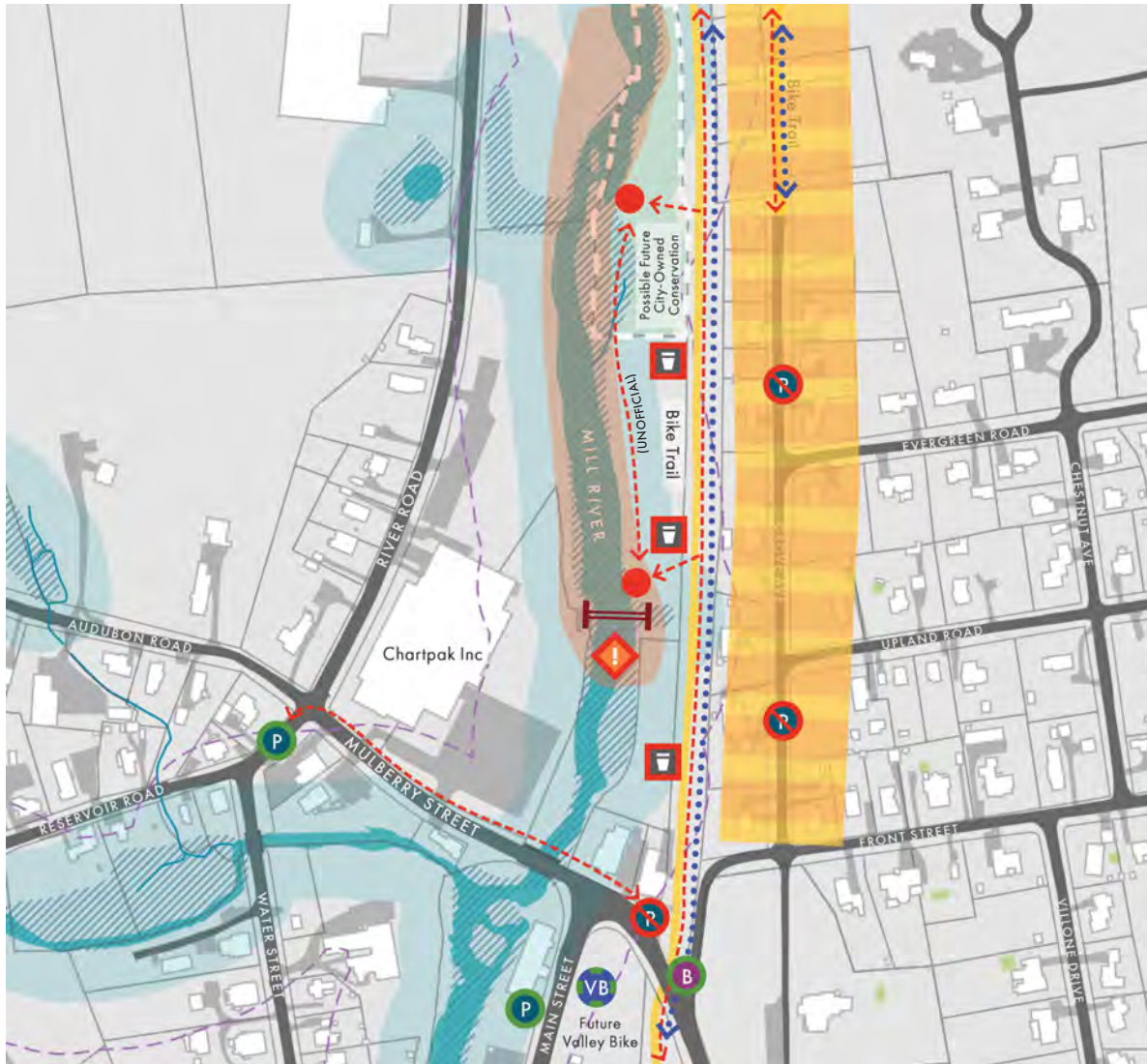


MAP LEGEND

- Recreation & Conservation
- Paved Road
- Parking & Driveways
- Building
- DEP Wetlands
- Dam
- Bike Trail
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Open Space
- Residential



UPPER & LOWER COOK'S DAM: CIRCULATION, REGULATED AREAS, SAFETY, & POINTS OF STRESS



MAP LEGEND

- Recreation & Conservation
- Paved Road
- Parking & Driveways
- Building
- DEP Wetlands
- Dam
- Bike Trail
- Approximate Swimming Area
- Swimming Access
- 100' Wetland Buffer
- 200' Riverfront Buffer
- Public Parking / No Parking
- Pedestrian Access
- Bike Access
- Future Valley Bike Share Station
- Bus Stop
- Visual and Sound Disturbance
- Littering
- Safety Concern







3.0 COMMUNITY DATA GATHERING

3.0 COMMUNITY DATA GATHERING

GOALS FOR COMMUNITY DATA GATHERING:

Gathering feedback from community members was a critical component of the study. In order to propose future improvements to Northampton swim areas, it was essential for WOLA to understand the following:

- Who is using and maintaining these swim areas?
- How are people accessing the swim areas, and what are the barriers preventing access?
- What are concerns and points of stress?
- What do people really love about these areas and how can we preserve these features?

A multi-pronged approach was used to begin to answer the questions identified above. First, we met with multiple City departments and community groups. These meetings included a Zoom public forum, and multiple meetings with Planning & Sustainability, Department of Public Works (DPW), and Parks & Recreation. WOLA also met with non-profits including Mill River Greenway Initiative; All Out Adventures, a non-profit that promotes outdoor activities for those with disabilities and limited mobility; and STAVROS, a non-profit that promotes ADA access and removal of physical barriers that prevent people with disabilities from living independently.

Incorporating feedback and information from previous stakeholder meetings, we developed an easy to access online survey in both English and Spanish to gather responses from as many constituents as possible. Finally, we conducted a public forum via Zoom that allowed us to hear directly from community members and to engage in a conversation about each swim area.

WOLA met with members of Northampton Planning & Sustainability, DPW and Northampton Parks & Rec in January and February 2021 to visit each swim area in the study and to gain a better understanding of how the City-owned swim areas are maintained. Information gained from these meetings that will likely influence future improvements to the City-owned swim areas is included in *Section 3.2 Connecticut River Greenway* and *Section 3.3 Maines Field*. Additionally, WOLA met with the Mill River Greenway Association, an organization of volunteers focused on creating a greenway along the Mill River while preserving the river's ecology and history. Information gathered from this meeting is included in *Sections 3.6*. Feedback from WOLA's meeting with All Out Adventures and STAVROS is included in *Section 3.2 Connecticut River Greenway*.

An online survey in both Spanish and English was developed to provide easy access for community feedback. Questions for the survey were informed by the conversations and feedback gathered during meetings with the City and previously mentioned community groups. A link to the survey was posted on the City's website, distributed through the City's and Mill River Greenway Initiative's listservs, and printed on flyers with both the web address and QR code for quick access. Flyers were distributed at local businesses, posted at public transportation hubs, and, thanks to the folks at the Mill River Greenway Initiative, distributed in local food pantry delivery boxes.

While feedback from the public forum and survey is valuable, there are limitations to our study that should be addressed with future public engagement. The timing of our study prevented us from interviewing people visiting the swim areas and observing how they are used during peak demand. We also understand that many swimmers coming to swim in Northampton rivers are from nearby towns. The survey and public forum were not widely publicized in towns outside of Northampton. Additionally, this study took place during the COVID pandemic, which likely limited some of the public engagement.

ONLINE SURVEY SUMMARY

The online survey, open from March 3 through April 3, 2021, was completed by 522 people. Summaries of the survey results are listed below and data from each of the multiple choice questions are shown throughout this section. A summary of the responses to the open-ended questions can be found at the end of this section. The full survey results can be found via the link below:

[Northampton River Swimming Survey](#)

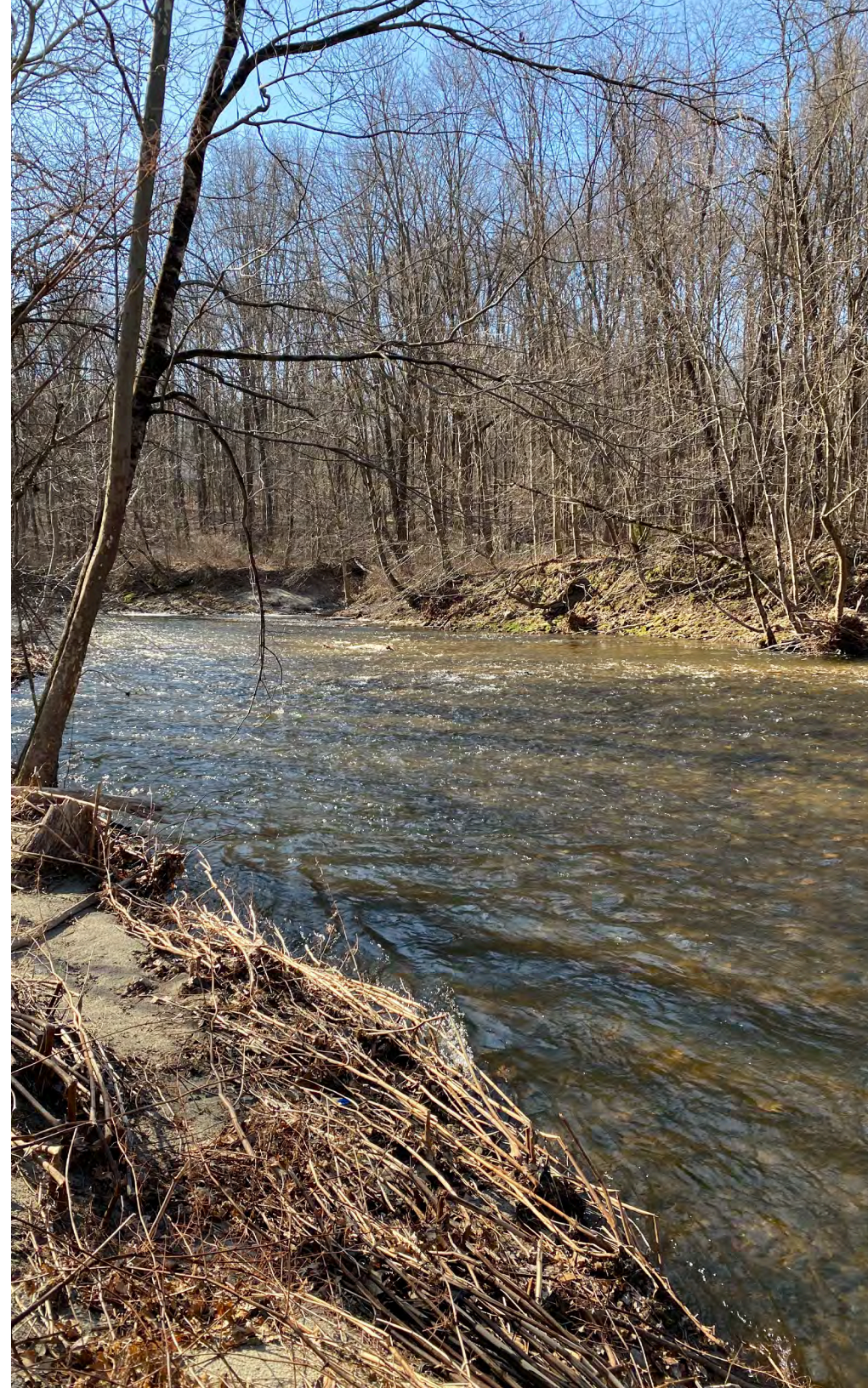
Overall, survey respondents were primarily Northampton residents 35 years of age and older. Most respondents swim with family and/or friends and travel to their favorite swimming holes by car. Almost 90% of respondents swim in the Mill River while only 38% swim in the Connecticut River. Among those that participated in the survey, the most popular places to swim in the Mill River are near the Orange Dam and near Smith College.

Recommended improvements identified by those that swim in the Mill River included the following:

- Trash removal
- More places to swim
- Access to bathrooms

Concerns identified by those that swim in the Mill River included the following:

- Water quality
- Harm to stream banks and wildlife
- Too crowded

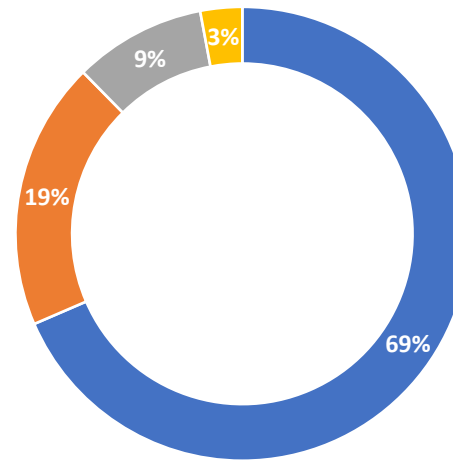


Recommended improvements identified by those that swim in the Connecticut River included the following:

- More places to swim
- Trash Removal
- Access to bathrooms

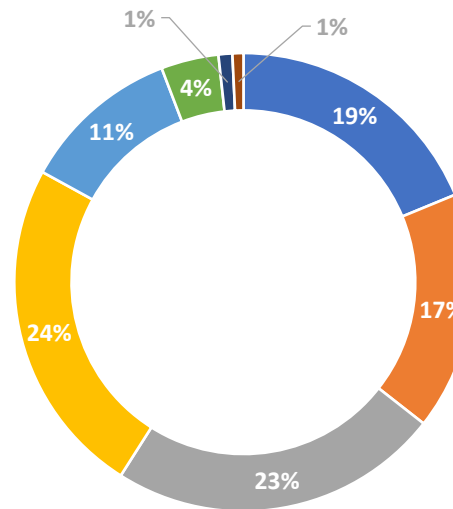
Concerns identified by those that swim in the Connecticut River included the following:

- Water quality
- Safety
- Harm to stream bank and wildlife



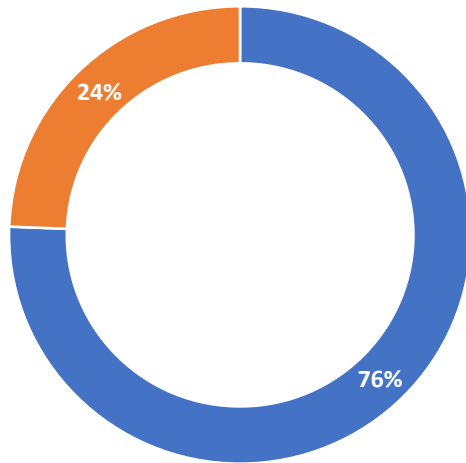
1. WHAT BRINGS YOU TO NORTHAMPTON?

- Live in Northampton
- Work in Northampton
- Other
- Attend School in Northampton



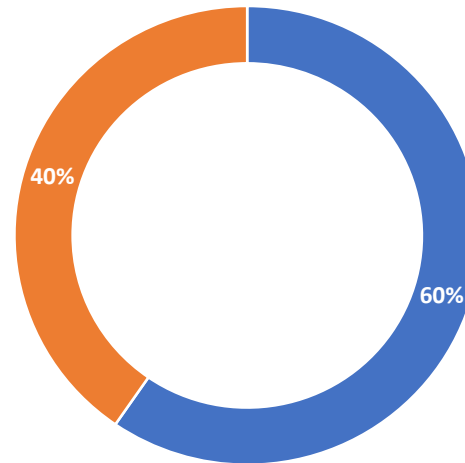
2. HOW OLD ARE YOU?

- 65 years or older
- 55 - 64 years old
- 45 - 54 years old
- 35 - 44 years old
- 25 - 34 years old
- 19 - 24 years old
- 13 - 18 years old
- 12 years old or younger



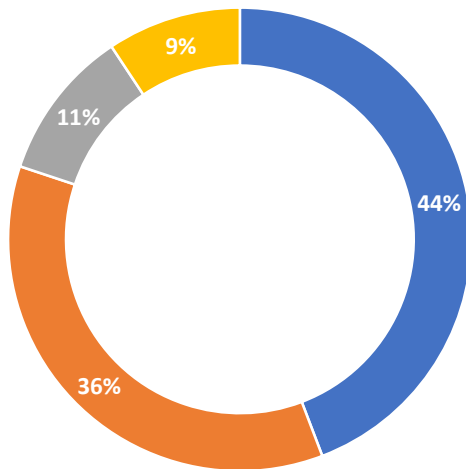
3. DO YOU SWIM IN SWIMMING HOLES (STREAMS, RIVERS, PONDS) IN NORTHAMPTON?

■ Yes ■ No



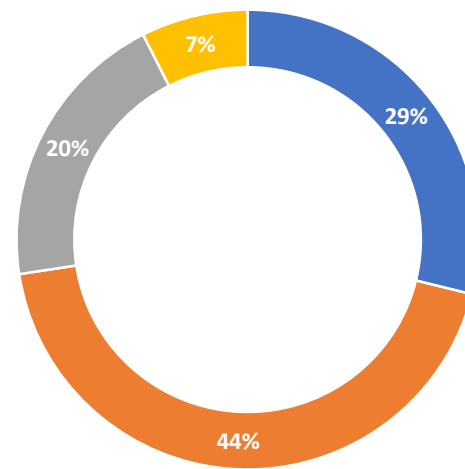
4. DO YOU BRING CHILDREN TO SWIM IN NORTHAMPTON SWIMMING HOLES?

■ Yes ■ No



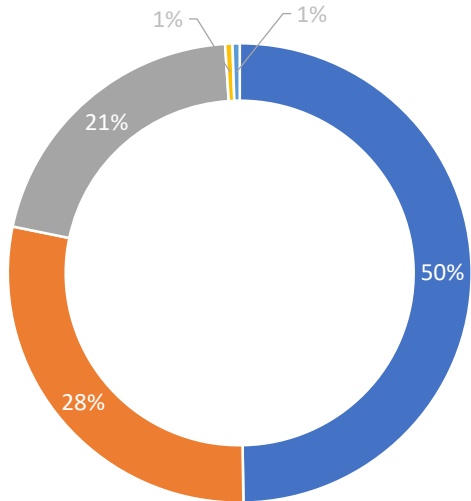
5. DO YOU TYPICALLY SWIM ALONE OR WITH OTHERS?

■ Swim with my family
 ■ Swim with friends
 ■ Swim alone
 ■ Swim with my dog



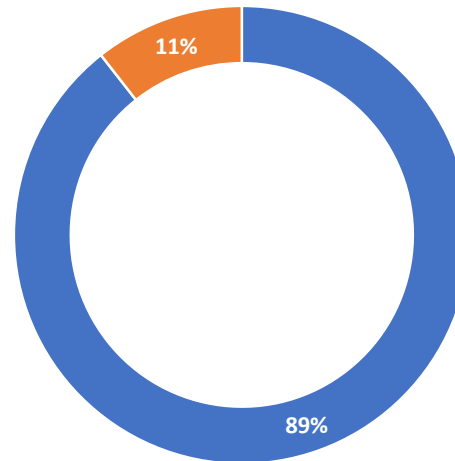
6. IF YES, HOW OLD ARE THE CHILDREN?

■ Over 12 years old
 ■ 7-12 years old
 ■ 3-6 years old
 ■ Under 3 years old



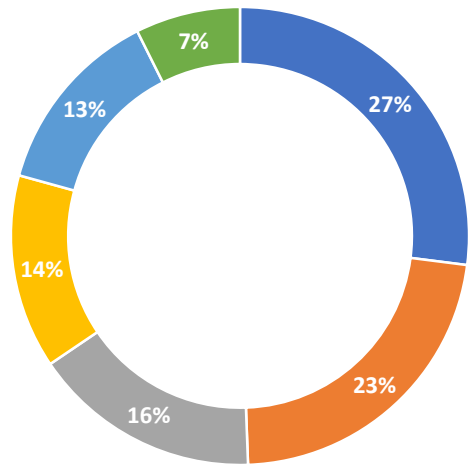
7. HOW DO YOU TYPICALLY TRAVEL TO YOUR FAVORITE SWIM HOLE IN NORTHAMPTON?

- Car
- Walk/Hike
- Bike
- Bus
- Other



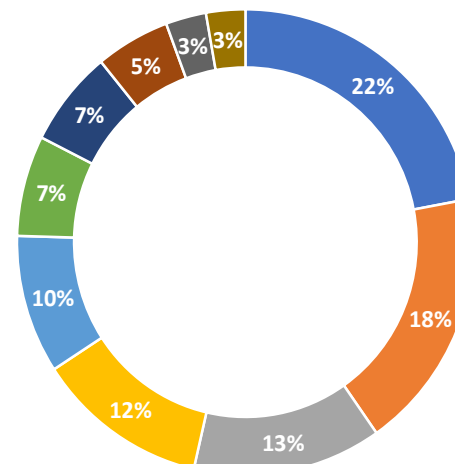
8. DO YOU SWIM IN THE MILL RIVER?

- Yes
- No



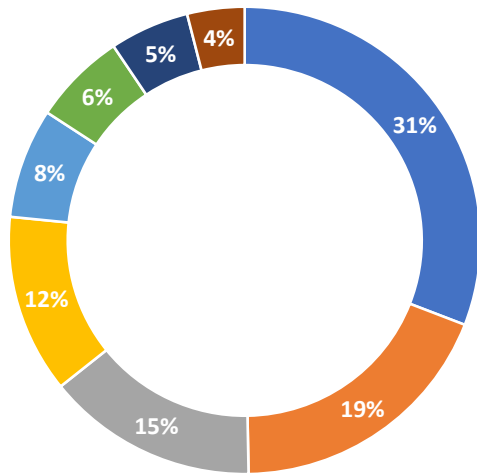
9. WHAT IS YOUR PREFERRED PLACE TO SWIM IN THE MILL RIVER?

- Orange Dam
- Smith College
- Nonotuck Dam
- Maines Field
- Other
- Cook Dam



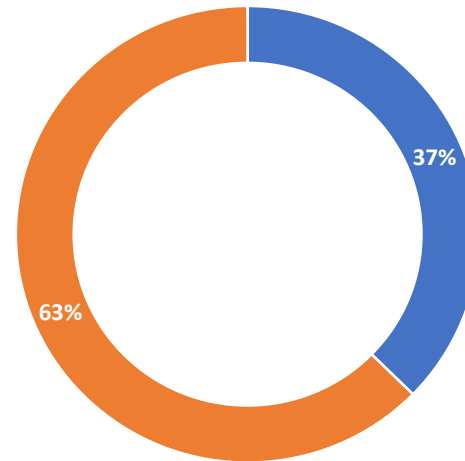
10. WHAT WOULD MAKE SWIMMING IN THE MILL RIVER BETTER FOR YOU?

- Trash/Recycling
- More places to swim
- Access to bathrooms
- Parking
- Other
- Easier to access by walking
- Easier to access by bike
- Access to changing rooms
- Easier access from bus stops
- Wheelchair access



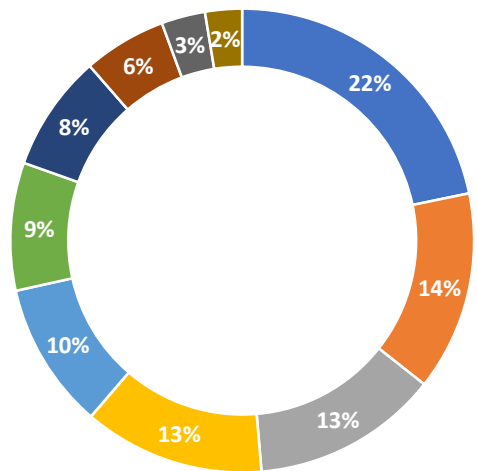
11. WHAT CONCERNS DO YOU HAVE ABOUT SWIMMING IN THE MILL RIVER?

- Unsure of water quality
- Harm to stream bank & wildlife
- Too crowded
- Affects on neighbors
- Not accessible
- Not safe
- Other
- No concerns



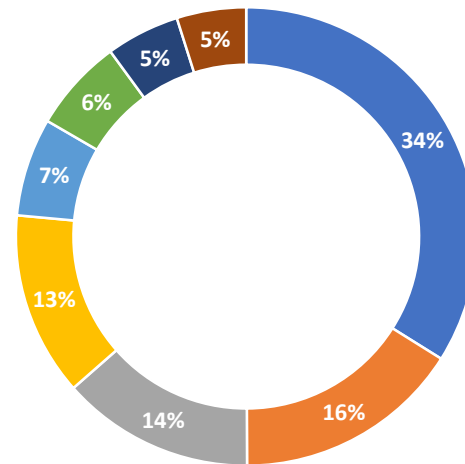
12. DO YOU SWIM IN THE CONNECTICUT RIVER?

- Yes
- No



13. WHAT WOULD MAKE SWIMMING IN THE CONNECTICUT RIVER BETTER FOR YOU?

- More places to swim
- Trash/recycling
- Access to bathrooms
- Parking
- Other
- Easier to access by walking
- Easier to access by bike
- Access to changing rooms
- Easier access from bus stops
- Wheelchair access



14. WHAT CONCERNS DO YOU HAVE ABOUT SWIMMING THE CONNECTICUT RIVER?

- Unsure of water quality
- Not safe
- Harm to stream bank and wildlife
- Not accessible
- Too crowded
- Other
- No concerns
- Affects on neighbors

OPEN-ENDED SURVEY RESPONSES

Many survey respondents provided feedback to our open-ended questions. These questions were designed to allow community members to provide additional thoughts and information to our multiple-choice questions. The open-ended questions are listed below as well as summaries of the most frequent response. To see the full survey responses, please click on the link below:

[Northampton River Swimming Survey](#)

IF YOU DON'T LIVE, WORK, OR ATTEND SCHOOL IN NORTHAMPTON, WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE?

- Shopping
- Visiting friends and family
- Grew up in Northampton
- Socializing
- Recreation
- Live in a nearby town
- Biking on the bike path
- Hiking
- Children attend school in Northampton
- Dog park
- Culture
- People watching

IF YOU DON'T SWIM IN SWIMMING HOLES IN NORTHAMPTON, WHY NOT?

- Sanitation concerns (trash, broken glass, diapers, feces)
- Water quality concerns
- Too crowded
- Don't know where they are located
- Prefer pools
- No parking
- No restrooms
- Don't want to trespass on private property
- Prefer deeper water for distance/lap swimming

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE NORTHAMPTON SWIMMING HOLE?

- Musante Beach
- Mill River
- Maines Field
- Orange Dam
- Boat dock on the Connecticut River
- Oxbow
- Near Smith College
- Leeds Reservoir
- Brassworks
- Where the Mill River meets Beaver Brook
- Arts and Industry
- Mill River by the Country Club
- River behind Florence Fields
- Nonotuck Dam
- It's a secret!

PLEASE TELL US HOW YOU TYPICALLY TRAVEL TO YOUR FAVORITE NORTHAMPTON SWIMMING HOLE IF YOU DON'T TAKE A CAR, BUS, BIKE, OR HIKE:

- Boat
- Kayak

IF YOU DON'T SWIM IN THE MILL RIVER, WOULD YOU TELL US WHY NOT?

- Sanitation concerns (trash, broken glass, diapers, feces)
- Water quality concerns
- Too crowded
- Don't know where it is legal
- Too many dogs
- Not deep enough

WHAT IS YOUR PREFERRED SWIM SPOT ON THE MILL RIVER?

- Haydenville
- Secret spot
- Behind a friend's house
- Near Meadow Street Bridge
- Near Florence Fields
- Brassworks
- Near Federal Street

PLEASE DESCRIBE WHAT OTHER FEATURES WOULD MAKE SWIMMING IN THE MILL RIVER BETTER FOR YOU (FEATURES OTHER THAN BATHROOMS, CHANGING ROOMS, TRASH/ RECYCLING, PARKING, MORE PLACES TO SWIM, WHEELCHAIR ACCESS, EASIER ACCESS FROM BUS STOP, EASIER ACCESS BY BIKE, EASIER ACCESS BY WALKING):

- Information about water quality
- Signs indicating hours for swimming and rules about noise and trash removal
- Picnic tables
- Signs indicating public or private ownership
- Outdoor pool
- No police
- More police
- More acceptance for minority groups
- Less crowding
- Designated noisy areas and designated quiet areas
- Supervision to prevent drinking and drug use
- Erosion control

IF YOU HAVE SAFETY CONCERNS ABOUT SWIMMING IN THE MILL RIVER, CAN YOU ELABORATE ON THEM?

- Slippery, rocky banks
- Alcohol and drug use among unsupervised teenagers
- Dog waste
- No lifeguard
- Concerns about kids getting hurt jumping off dams
- No clear rules

IF YOU HAVE ADDITIONAL CONCERNS ABOUT SWIMMING IN THE MILL RIVER, WHAT ARE THOSE CONCERNS?

- Concerned we are not creating a welcoming community
- Concerned about racism in my neighborhood
- Clearer rules
- Too crowded
- Too much noise
- Too much trash left behind
- People not following COVID-19 social distancing and mask-wearing

TELL US WHERE YOU LIKE TO SWIM IN THE CONNECTICUT:

- Boat dock near the Coolidge Bridge
- Beach at the Oxbow
- North of the Holyoke dam near the dinosaur footprints
- The beach at the Mill River Greenway (aka, the beach near River Run Condos)
- Rainbow Beach
- Other nearby towns (Hadley, Hatfield, Sunderland, Montague)

IF YOU DON'T SWIM IN THE CONNECTICUT RIVER, TELL US WHY NOT:

- Doesn't seem safe
- Water quality concerns
- It's not near where I live
- No clearly defined access points
- No information available about currents
- Boat traffic and boat wake

PLEASE DESCRIBE WHAT OTHER FEATURES WOULD MAKE SWIMMING IN THE CONNECTICUT RIVER BETTER FOR YOU (FEATURES OTHER THAN BATHROOMS, CHANGING ROOMS, TRASH/RECYCLING, PARKING, MORE PLACES TO SWIM, WHEELCHAIR ACCESS, EASIER ACCESS FROM BUS STOP, EASIER ACCESS BY BIKE, EASIER ACCESS BY WALKING):

- Water quality information
- Less boat traffic
- Lifeguard
- Information about currents and swim safety
- Clearly identified access points

IF YOU HAVE SAFETY CONCERNS ABOUT SWIMMING IN THE CONNECTICUT RIVER, CAN YOU ELABORATE ON THEM?

- Water quality
- Currents
- Sanitation concerns (trash, broken glass)
- Boat wake
- Too deep for small children
- Noise
- Alcohol and drug use

IF YOU HAVE ADDITIONAL CONCERNS ABOUT SWIMMING IN THE CONNECTICUT RIVER, WHAT ARE THOSE CONCERNS?

- Boats traffic and boat wake
- Unclear property ownership and public access
- Currents
- Water quality
- Sanitation concerns (trash, broken glass)

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO TELL US ABOUT SWIMMING IN NORTHAMPTON THAT WE MIGHT HAVE MISSED? FEEL FREE TO PROVIDE ANY ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS OR COMMENTS YOU HAVE BELOW:

- Frustrated about the trash left at the Mill River by swimmers
- Concerned about the safety of kids jumping of the Orange Dam
- Concerned about lack of parking during the summer in Leeds
- Concerned about drug and alcohol use at swim areas both at the Mill River and Connecticut River
- River swimming should not be a right of only the well-off, river swimming should remain open to all
- More access and more swim locations
- Concerns about survey bias
- Looking forward to sidewalk improvements on Damon road so that the beach at the Connecticut River Greenway is easier to access
- The Mill River belongs to everyone
- Confrontations with angry neighbors
- A public swimming pool is a clear community need (Amherst has 2)
- More public swimming pools in all of the towns around the Valley would help
- ADA access

- No Parking signs near Orange Dam will not solve the problems there
- More education and signage is needed to keep the rivers clean and safe
- Leeds residents are frustrated with noise and removing other people's trash and would like City assistance to keep things safe and clean
- A roped-off area would make swimming in the Connecticut feel more safe
- Sometimes there are too many dogs, many off leash, at Northampton swimming areas
- A larger, more regional plan needs to be put in place to protect the rivers and provide swimming access to more people - not just a Northampton issue
- Swimming will become more critical with more frequent heat waves due to climate change - the City should work to purchase more of the Mill River banks so more legal swim areas can be created
- People need clear rules and to feel safe
- Concerns about racism among those that want to prevent those outside of their neighborhood from swimming in the Mill River
- There are not many swim options for low-income community members in Northampton
- Less expensive entry fees at Musante Beach
- Concerned that too many rules will be put in place
- River stewards and trash removal are needed
- Concerned that only angry property owners voices will be heard and not the voices of the people that need access to swimming areas but don't own property
- The Mill River cannot accommodate all of the people that would like to use it

3.1 CONNECTICUT RIVER GREENWAY

CITY OF NORTHAMPTON FEEDBACK

Through meetings and site visits with Planning & Sustainability, DPW, and Parks & Recreation, WOLA was able to better understand the current conditions, maintenance, and use of the Connecticut River Greenway. From these meetings, we understand that an accessible route from the parking area down to the river is nearly complete. In 2015, extensive site work was completed to create a new home for Northampton Community Rowing and to provide a boat launch and ADA access to the Connecticut River. An accessible ramp connects visitors from the parking area to the river bank. However, the landing at the bottom of the accessible route is approximately 12 inches above the water, creating a barrier for people with mobility limitations to access the water. Additionally, a newly formed beach along the river bank is disconnected from the accessible route by Barret's Brook.

Currently, no utilities are present within the Connecticut River Greenway property aside from stormwater drainage structures that daylight on site. In their partnership with the City, Northampton Community Rowing removes trash and recycling generated by their program and handle removing and storing the floating docks. DPW worked with Northampton Community Rowing to install barriers at the boat launch to prevent the public from driving down to the boat launch.

While the Connecticut River Greenway is used primarily by Northampton Community Rowing, many community members use the beach and boat launch in the warmer months, and trash left by people visiting the beach is sometimes left behind.

COMMUNITY GROUP FEEDBACK

WOLA met on site with a representative from All Out Adventures and conducted a Zoom meeting with a representative from STAVROS to understand how the Connecticut River Greenway is currently used by people with disabilities and limited mobility and how it could be improved. All Out Adventures currently provides kayaking, canoeing, and paddle boarding programs for people with a range of abilities,

using the Connecticut River Greenway boat launch as their starting point. STAVROS support initiatives that promote independence and access for people with disabilities. Both STAVROS and All Out Adventures recommended looking for ways to enhance independent access to swimming and launching a boat.

PUBLIC FEEDBACK

The public forum provided opportunities for community members to join break out rooms to discuss their thoughts about each swim area. The breakout room discussions were structured around questions about features of enjoyment and points of concern, both current and future. Summaries of the breakout room questions for the Connecticut River Greenway are listed below and the following link will take you to a video recording of the session:

[Northampton River Swimming Forum: Connecticut River Greenway Breakout Room](#)

What do you currently enjoy the most about swimming at the Connecticut River Greenway?

- Amazing, sandy beach
- Walkable
- A nice place to relax
- Lots of parking
- Close to the rail trail

What do you want to enjoy about swimming at the Connecticut River Greenway in the future?

- Would like to see more investment in this area since it is an Environmental Justice Neighborhood
- Greater accessibility
- Better amenities
- Lots of potential to better serve people with disabilities

- Fewer neighbors in close proximity to be disturbed by noise and activities
- Possible connection to the beach from the east side of Barret Brook
- Changing facilities
- Bathrooms

What concerns do you currently have about Swimming at the Connecticut River Greenway?

- Unclear access from Damon Road
- Beach isn't accessible to people in wheelchairs
- Trash left behind by people visiting the beach is an issue
- Northampton Community Rowing would like help managing trash and recycling
- Speed of people driving down private drive near River Run Condos
- Boat traffic
- Alcohol use
- Lack of lifeguard
- River currents

What concerns do you have about the future swimming at the Connecticut River Greenway?

- Concerned that if this is made a formal swim area, admission fees will price people out of being able to use the swim area
- Concerned that if there isn't a comprehensive plan for this area, it's quality as a swim area will decline
- Doing nothing will be more expensive in the long run than creating a comprehensive plan now



3.2 MAINES FIELD

CITY OF NORTHAMPTON FEEDBACK

Through meetings and site visits with Planning & Sustainability, DPW, and Parks & Recreation, WOLA was able to better understand the current recreational programming, available facilities and utilities, and maintenance strategy for Maines Field. From these meetings, we understand that Maines Field is heavily used during the summer for recreational softball, baseball, and volleyball leagues. The softball field and volleyball courts are typically utilized on weeknight evenings for leagues and used informally during the day by the neighborhood. On the weekends, the volleyball courts are used for pickup games and the softball field is used for both league and informal softball and kickball games. The pavilion is rented for group exercise and for family gatherings.

While a functioning restroom is available for those that rent out the athletic facilities for league sports, the restroom is generally not open to the public on a daily basis. The Parks & Recreation Department does not have the staff available to clean the bathroom daily and the bathroom is not currently accessible to those in wheelchairs or with limited mobility.

The Northampton DPW works closely with Parks & Recreation to maintain Maines Field. DPW mows the lawns, removes trash, and maintains the lights, fencing, irrigation system, and utilities. Utilities available in the park include water lines, electrical lines, sewer, and water. One of the most challenging aspects of maintaining Maines Field is the routine flooding of the Mill River. According to DPW, the Mill River flash floods significantly every five or six years, pushing water across much of the park and scattering debris across the softball field. As a result, DPW has worked diligently to reduce damage to the existing structures during flooding by modifying the baseball fence so it is less likely to be damaged by floating debris and adjusting electrical equipment to be above the flood zone. To see the approximate extent of the flooding at Maines Field, see *Section 2.2*.

PUBLIC FEEDBACK

The public forum provided opportunities for community members to join break out rooms to discuss their thoughts about each swim area. The breakout room discussions were structured around questions about features of enjoyment and points of concern, both current and future. Summaries of the breakout room questions for Maines Field are listed below and the following link will take you to a video recording of the session:

[Northampton River Swimming Forum: Maines Field Breakout Room](#)

What do you enjoy about swimming at Maines Field?

- Undeveloped and Natural aspects of the site
- Accessible to a lot of residents
- Park is underutilized and has capacity for more users
- Wild, trails
- Large Trees for shade
- Pavilion for use and shade
- Welcoming space, available parking
- Open Space for multiple activities

What do you want to enjoy about swimming at Maines Field in the future?

- Facilities unlocked for use/toilets
- Bike Racks
- Stop using for snow storage- bad for river

- Picnic tables
- Trash receptacles
- Interpretive signs for trails, wildlife habitat, story walks.

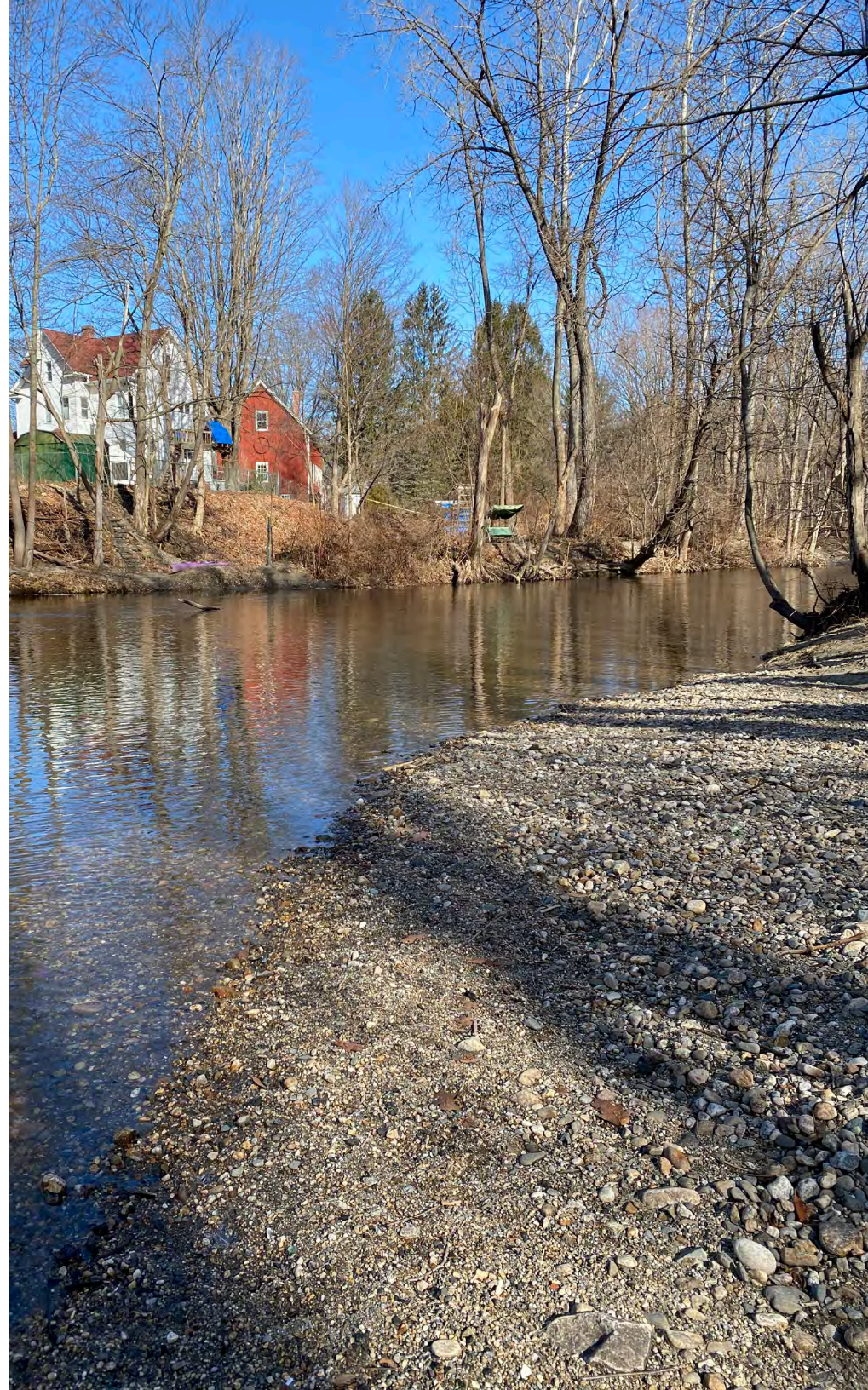
What concerns do you currently have about swimming at Maines Field?

- Bank Erosion
- No Bike Racks
- Invasive Plants
- Pedestrian unfriendly for access/no sidewalks on Riverside/
speeding?
- Water Quality a question due to snow dump
- Potential for increased noise with increased use

- Flash flooding impacts

What concerns do you have about the future swimming at Maines Field?

- Accessibility for all types of users (concern for all swim sites)
- Leash law



3.3 NONOTUCK DAM

CITY OF NORTHAMPTON FEEDBACK

While the City of Northampton does not own the property near the Nonotuck Dam, WOLA visited the property with representatives from Planning & Sustainability to understand how swimmers access the upper and lower levels of the dam and to understand potential points of stress within the neighborhood as a result of swimming in this location.

PUBLIC FEEDBACK

The public forum provided opportunities for community members to join break out rooms to discuss their thoughts about each swim area. The breakout room discussions were structured around questions about features of enjoyment and points of concern, both current and future. Summaries of the breakout room questions for the Nonotuck Dam are listed below and the following link will take you to a video recording of the session:

[Northampton River Swimming Forum: Nonotuck Dam Breakout Room](#)

What do you currently enjoy the most about swimming at the Nonotuck Dam?

- Swimming above the dam is terrific; classic NE old mill vistas. Lots of adjacent of open space with potential
- Swimming
- Sitting by the river in silence or prayer or reading, enjoying peace, loves this area!

What do you want to enjoy about swimming at the Nonotuck Dam in the future?

- Development of Maines field would be good for folks from Florence Heights - seems safer than Nonotuck Mill Dam. More amenity at Maines Field.
- Have fun and swim
- Additional open space acquired, parking

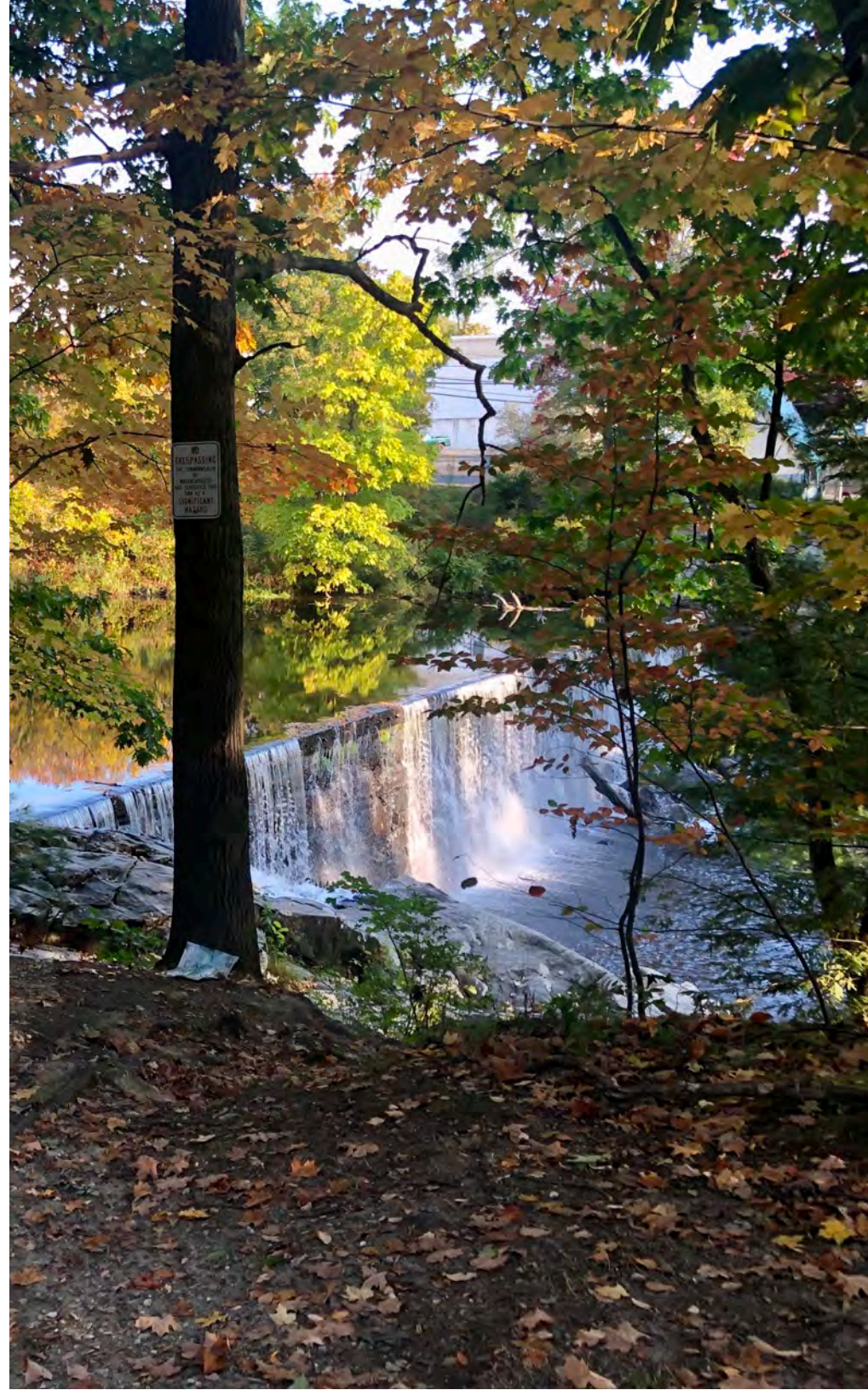
What concerns do you currently have about swimming at the Nonotuck Dam?

- Water quality; wonders how safe it is to swim.
- Crowded with people from out of town, without masks - ppl from Florence Heights (Latino community) stopped coming
- Huge amounts of trash left behind
- Kids jumping from top of dam into water
- Huge increase in crowds when COVID happened
- Empathy for folks on Cross Street; not what the private property owners expected
- Safety concerns; no supervision - seems easier to supervise on CT River
- People have gotten hurt and died there in the past

What concerns do you have about the future of Swimming at the Nonotuck Dam?

- City sponsored swimming makes them responsible for the swimmers
- Latino community of here and Holyoke needs and deserves open space for swimming - they are part of the community

- Enormous revitalization potential, existing parking and space underutilized: do not want to miss this opportunity
- City needs to come up with something temporary to
- Would like to harness energy and ideas of young people for what we can do in the future
- Dam safety and intakes
- Mill owner has expressed a lot of concern and calls cops when ppl jump off the dam; concerned about liability



3.4 COOK'S DAM

CITY OF NORTHAMPTON FEEDBACK

While the City of Northampton does not own the property near the Cook's Dam, WOLA visited the property with representatives from Planning & Sustainability to understand how swimmers access the upper and lower levels of the dam and to understand potential points of stress within the neighborhood as a result of swimming in this location.

PUBLIC FEEDBACK

The public forum provided opportunities for community members to join break out rooms to discuss their thoughts about each swim area. The breakout room discussions were structured around questions about features of enjoyment and points of concern, both current and future. Summaries of the breakout room questions for Cook's Dam are listed below and the following link will take you to a video recording of the session:

[Northampton River Swimming Forum: Cook's Dam Breakout Room](#)

What do you currently enjoy the most about swimming at Cook's Dam?

- Scenic, quiet during off-season, bucolic
- Access to/from Look Park
- Fishing
- Large rocks to sit on

What do you want to enjoy about swimming at Cook's Dam in the future?

- Peace and quiet returned to the river

What concerns do you currently have about swimming at Cook's Dam?

- Lack of infrastructure to support swimming
- Trespassing on private property
- Trash, alcohol, marijuana, broken glass
- Noise at all hours, music, screaming
- Impact on residents and abutters
- Not "family friendly"
- Mostly under-aged kids drinking, college-age
- Rowdy behavior
- People are drawn here because there is no supervision
- Police called frequently June-September
- Club members at pool disturbed
- Safety of swimming near dam
- Parking congestion on narrow streets
- Parking illegally in Country Club lot
- Country Club fence vandalized every summer
- Towing
- Camp fires

- Erosion to streambank
- Graffiti on rocks
- Defecation

What concerns do you have about the future of swimming at Cook's Dam?

- Spot becoming more popular
- Continued policing concerns



3.5 ORANGE DAM

CITY OF NORTHAMPTON FEEDBACK

While the City of Northampton does not own the property near the Cook's Dam, WOLA visited the property with representatives from Planning & Sustainability to understand how swimmers access the area and to understand potential points of stress within the neighborhood as a result of swimming in this location.

COMMUNITY GROUP FEEDBACK

WOLA met with members of the Mill River Greenway Initiative in early March, 2021. The group conveyed their concerns about the limitations of the swim study and recommended that a continuation of the study be conducted this summer while the swim areas are actively in use. They recommended that local volunteers, perhaps Smith students, interview swimmers to gather more information. They also recommended that the study be expanded to include neighboring towns to identify neighborhoods with limited or no access to swimming. The Greenway Initiative members also communicated their frustrations regarding no parking areas near the Orange Dam. They see these measures as reactive to complaints made by neighbors, unfair to people that have no other place to swim, and inadequate in solving the larger problem of creating more access to swim areas for more people.

PUBLIC FEEDBACK

The public forum provided opportunities for community members to join break out rooms to discuss their thoughts about each swim area. The breakout room discussions were structured around questions about features of enjoyment and points of concern, both current and future. Summaries of the breakout room questions for the Orange Dam are listed below and the following link will take you to a video recording of the session:

[Northampton River Swimming Forum: Orange Dam Breakout Room](#)

What do you currently enjoy the most about swimming at the Orange Dam?

- Place to take children and grandchildren
- Easy access on foot and from the bike paths
- Can walk along the river
- Explore
- Near public transit
- A joy when the site is not overcrowded

- Multiple access points

What do you want to enjoy about swimming at the Orange Dam in the future?

- Less crowded
- Less noise, litter, fires, fecal matter
- Can walk without needing to bring a trash bag
- Have a restroom
- Have trash cans at the river and at Main Street
- Have a river steward for public education
- A nearby ValleyBike station
- Designated new parking for swimmers
- Leeds Elementary School designated as parking for swimming
- Adopt a pack in pack out education program, perhaps with trash cans at Leeds Elementary
- Bicycle racks
- Accessible for all populations, neighbors and those who travel to

the site

- Monitor water quality
- An open minded community that can support diverse users and habits
- A community that is not questioning the motives of those unhappy with the use on the site

What concerns do you currently have about Swimming at the orange Dam?

- Fecal matter
- Trash
- Noise
- Fires
- People jumping off the dam
- Excessive police enforcement and police presence
- Police vehicles on the bike path
- Not adequate police and department enforcement of rules

What concerns do you have about the future of swimming at the orange Dam?

- Overuse
- Drug use
- Fires
- Over-loved and overused



4.0 DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

THE BIG PICTURE

Through the online survey and public forum, community members provided helpful feedback about swimming in Northampton that shaped the recommendations made in this report. While the questions in our survey and forum were focused on six specific swim areas, community members provided responses that identify larger issues that they would like addressed. These issues include the following:

- Can the rivers in Northampton accommodate all of the people that would like to swim in them?
- Is an affordable public pool or outdoor public swimming a way that we can supplement river swimming and take some of the burden off of local rivers during peak swim season?
- Could a regional swimming plan be created to identify neighborhoods that don't have access to public swimming pools or swimming holes? And could that plan be used to determine where to invest in building public swimming pools or investing in facilities to make river swimming more accessible?

In order to create truly equitable, accessible, sustainable swim areas, these questions should be addressed. The scope of this study does not include a regional analysis of public swimming locations, nor does it analyze the number of swimmers that want to swim in Northampton compared to the amount of available swim space. For that reason, our primary recommendation is that the City of Northampton join neighboring communities and the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, to develop a regional study of swim areas to determine where to prioritize future investments in swimming infrastructure.

A LOCAL COALITION

River swimming is simultaneously an asset and a liability in many communities across New England. Swimming in a river is a wonderful, memorable experience that everyone should be able to access. However, too many people swimming at once in one location can adversely affect river ecosystems, anger neighbors, and negatively impact water quality downstream. How is a town to manage this careful balancing act?

In addition to participating in a larger, regional study, we recommend that the City of Northampton support a local coalition that connects existing community groups including the Leeds Civic Association, Friends of Northampton Trails, Northampton Community Rowing, the Mill River Greenway Initiative, and City sponsored stewardship programs. This group should reflect the demographics of the swimmers as well as the neighboring property owners. Goals for the coalition could include the following:

- Organize volunteers to do routine maintenance
- Work with the City to develop fair and reasonable parking rules
- Work with the City to develop clear guidelines for swimmers related to swimming hours, trash removal, noise, etc. and post these guidelines near swimming access points.
- Work with the City to develop a river steward program that would allow paid or volunteer interns to monitor water quality and educate people about trash removal and safety at swim areas. Interns or volunteers should be trained to understand the inherent conflicts associated with river swimming, to understand how to de-escalate tensions between neighbors and swimmers, and to speak both English and Spanish fluently.

SITE SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

This study is intended to provide information for the City of Northampton to consider as they determine what improvements can be made to the six swim sites chosen for the study. Improvements that the City is equipped to make include those related to capital improvements; accessible walkways, benches, picnic tables, accessible boat launches, etc. The City is also in a position to consider future land acquisitions to make river swimming more accessible.

Improvements that are more challenging for the City to make include those that require labor and expertise from trained individuals. The majority of organized programming at city facilities, managed by Parks & Rec, are self-supporting. The Northampton DPW, Forestry, Parks and Cemetery division is responsible for the maintenance of facilities and funded through the general fund portion of the city budget. Until the City designates additional funds for park and open space maintenance, adding City services like trash and recycling pickup to swim areas is not likely to happen in the near future.

Recommendations for each swim area are divided into two components: capital improvements and expanded services. Prior to pursuing capital improvements at any swim area, we recommend that the City work closely with local community groups and neighbors to establish a plan for addressing the service and maintenance needs that will be required to ensure the longterm success of the capital improvements. All of the improvements recommended for each swim area are directly related to the feedback collected from the online survey and public forum.

TRASH, RECYCLING, AND RESTROOM RECOMMENDATIONS

Currently, the City has a carry-in/carry-out policy for trash removal, making each person that visits a Northampton swim area responsible for removing their waste. This policy is effective when everyone participates and creates tension when some do not participate. This policy is one agreed upon by the Northampton DPW, Mayor, and Parks and Recreation and is the same approach used in state parks. This policy not only helps the City direct resources to other projects, it also creates a partnership between swimmers and the river environments they enjoy.

Recommendations for improvements to swim areas include placement of signs reminding people to carry out the waste they bring into each swim area. Community groups will likely need to continue trash pickup during peak season use and River Stewards should be utilized to educate swimmers about trash removal expectations and to encourage people to preserve the rivers they enjoy visiting.

Should the City elect to provide ADA restroom facilities, it would likely be in partnership with non-profit or community partners to operate and maintain these facilities while they are on-site.

4.1 CONNECTICUT RIVER GREENWAY

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK INFLUENCING DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

Feedback from community members indicated that many people feel uncertain about swimming in the Connecticut River due to concerns related to currents, water quality, boat wake, and simply not knowing where swimming is allowed. Among those that do regularly swim in the Connecticut River, using the Connecticut River Greenway as a point of access, many said they would like to see better access to the beach for those with limited mobility, trash and recycling pickup, improved wayfinding to the site, and posted signs with guidelines about using the space. To see the full set of comments and data from the community data gathering process, refer to *Section 3* of this report.

DESIGN CONCEPT CONSIDERATIONS

Design concepts show how the recommended capital and service enhancements might take shape. The existing docks are owned and maintained by Northampton Community Rowing (NCR), with public access allowed through their generosity and as a condition of their lease. All four design options involve modifications to the existing docks to provide an accessible route to the boat launches and the beach. Improvements in each design concept would require significant investment, due to the changing water levels of the Connecticut River and coordination between the City and local community groups to accommodate service enhancements. Modification to the docks would involve exploration of a cost and project share between the City and NCR.

Some of the proposed improvements include bathrooms and water fountains. These improvements require both capital and service investments. Because of the lack of water and sewer lines on site, any future toilets would need to be composting toilets or portapotties.

Drinking water fountains would require constructing a new water line, a process that would likely come with significant expense.

Prior to investing in any capital improvements, we recommend that the City partner with Northampton Community Rowing, the River Run Condos community, and community members that swim at the Connecticut River Greenway to develop a plan for expanded service and maintenance associated with future improvements. These partnerships will be critical to maintain capital improvements and to supplement recommended service enhancements like cleaning bathrooms and water fountains.

CONSTRUCTABILITY & PERMITTING

Due to changing water levels of the Connecticut River, any future improvements from dock and gangway enhancements to No Wake Zone markers will require engineered structures that come with significant fees for design, permitting, and investment. Each of the proposed design concepts for the Connecticut River Greenway involve modifying the existing concrete pad at the end of the ADA route in an effort to provide access to the water for people with limited mobility. The existing concrete landing appears to be in suitable condition for re-purposing as the landing for a new boat ramp/dock system. It is anticipated that a dock system or gangway could be secured to the concrete landing without substantial modifications. Further evaluation of the existing concrete pad should be performed to determine the total pad thickness and subbase materials prior to installation of any dock or gangway system.

Drinking water fountains or access to potable water would benefit visitors to the Connecticut River Greenway. Water service to the property would require new water distribution infrastructure from Damon Road. It is assumed that water service would be available in the vicinity of the adjacent apartment complex, approximately 2,000 feet away



Connecticut River Greenway, Spring of 2021

from the existing boathouse facility. Any drinking water fountain will also require a greywater discharge system in compliance with local and state regulations.

Permitting requirements for all Concepts would require, at a minimum, an Order of Conditions from the Northampton Conservation Commission due to work within a jurisdictional buffer zone to Bank and Bordering Vegetated Wetlands. In addition, work within navigable Waters of the Commonwealth would require a Chapter 91 filings with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) as well as a 401 Water Quality Certification. It is not anticipated that the proposed work in any concept will require a Site Plan Review by the Northampton Planning Board or a Stormwater Management Permit from the Northampton Department of Public Works as the project area is limited.

RECOMMENDED CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

- Modify existing dock to connect to existing ADA route
- Accessible walkway to the beach
- Wayfinding signage to help drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians find the Connecticut River Greenway (see plan on the next page)
- Clarify ADA parking (new signage to be installed 2021)
- Composting toilets
- Water fountains
- Picnic tables
- Accessible boat launch
- Accessible swimming
- Creation of no-wake zone
- Signage indicating guidelines for users and swimmers

- No-wake zone (requires channel markers which are challenging in this portion of the Connecticut River)

RECOMMENDED SERVICE ENHANCEMENTS

- Water quality testing
- Monitor river currents and post signs when conditions are unsafe for swimming
- Removal/adjustment of temporary docks during storms and periods of low and high water
- Clean and maintain bathrooms & water fountains
- Winterize all amenities to avoid damage
- River steward presence to educate swimmers about trash removal, river health, and equitable swim access

WAYFINDING PLAN

Wayfinding is an important component to any successful public open space. While the Connecticut River Greenway offers great access to the river and beach, many community members expressed surprise to know that both are open to the public. Signage along Damon Road would help those driving, cycling, and walking by to know that swimming and boating access is nearby. Additionally, signage along the private drive near the River Run Condos is recommended to help visitors to the Greenway avoid trespassing on nearby properties. Signage placed on properties not owned by the City would need to be negotiated and coordinated with nearby property owners. In addition to wayfinding signage, a sign near the boat access and ADA ramp indicating guidelines for swimming, boating, and trash removal would help visitors to keep the Connecticut River Greenway clean and safe.

CONNECTICUT RIVER

Connecticut River Greenway

Beach

Connecticut River Greenway Elwell

Northampton Rowing

River Run Condos



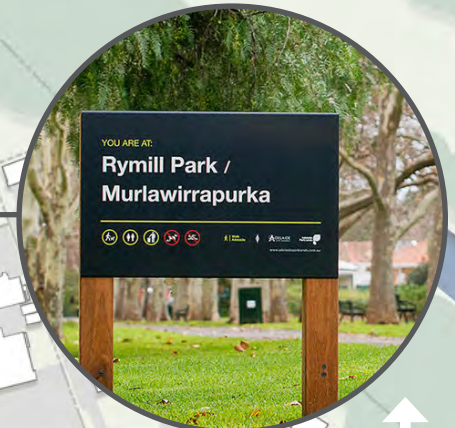
SWIMMING AND BOATING GUIDELINES SIGN



GATEWAY SIGN



VEHICULAR / PEDESTRIAN SIGN



GATEWAY SIGN

CONNECTICUT RIVER GREENWAY WAYFINDING PLAN



CONNECTICUT RIVER GREENWAY: CONCEPT 1

The first option is intended to provide ADA access to the beach with temporary, minimal structures. This concept provides clear ADA parking and ADA access to the beach along with amenities that community members requested including toilets, water fountain, and changing rooms. A no-wake zone is identified to improve boater awareness and safety of swimmers. A temporary dock and sand mat connect swimmers from the ADA ramp to the beach. Composting toilets are recommended to minimize disturbance to the site and to prevent the City from incurring the cost of adding sewer line utilities that are not currently present on site. Additional amenities include picnic tables and benches.

While these recommendations reflect feedback from community members, it is important to note that maintenance would be essential to ensure that the temporary floating dock provides adequate access to the beach with changing water levels. Additionally, daily cleaning of toilets and removal of trash and recycling would need to take place in order for these facilities to adequately serve community members during peak swimming season.



COMPOSTING TOILETS &
CHANGING STRUCTURE

CONNECTICUT RIVER

PROPOSED NO WAKE ZONE

MODIFY EXISTING DOCK TO
CONNECT TO ACCESSIBLE ROUTE

Connecticut River
Greenway

Beach

Barrett Brook



SAND MAT



TEMPORARY FLOATING DOCK



ADA PARKING SIGNAGE

Parking



CONNECTICUT RIVER GREENWAY: CONCEPT 2

CONNECTICUT RIVER GREENWAY: CONCEPT 2

Like Concept 1, this option is intended to provide clear ADA access to the beach with temporary, affordable structures. In this concept, the structures are expanded to connect swimmers to the beach and to create an enclosed swim area. Most people enjoy swimming in open water as long as there is a touch point nearby to take a break. By creating an expanded floating dock, more touch points are created, enabling more swimmers to feel safe as they venture into open water. Sand mats are recommended to provide access across the beach and an accessible boat launch is incorporated into the new dock, allowing those with limited mobility multiple options for launching a kayak or canoe. Additional amenities include toilets, water fountain, changing rooms, and trash and recycling, picnic tables and benches.

As previously described with Concept 1, maintenance would be essential to ensure that the temporary floating dock provides adequate access to the beach with changing water levels. Additionally, daily cleaning of toilets and removal of trash and recycling would need to take place in order for these facilities to adequately serve community members during peak swimming season.



**COMPOSTING TOILETS &
CHANGING STRUCTURE**

CONNECTICUT RIVER

PROPOSED NO WAKE ZONE



ACCESSIBLE BOAT LAUNCH

Connecticut River Greenway

Beach



SAND MAT



TEMPORARY FLOATING DOCK



ADA PARKING SIGNAGE

Parking

Barrett Brook



CONNECTICUT RIVER GREENWAY: CONCEPT 3

Rather than providing a temporary dock to connect the ADA route to the beach, Concept 3 connects swimmers to the beach via a pedestrian bridge over Barret Brook and an elevated boardwalk through the woods. An accessible boat launch is incorporated into the new dock, allowing those with limited mobility multiple options for launching a kayak or canoe. Additional amenities include toilets, water fountain, changing rooms, and trash and recycling, picnic tables and benches.

The proposed bridge and boardwalk would require significant investments in design, engineering, and construction. New concrete abutments would be required at each side of the bridge, and construction access to the opposite side of the bridge could be prohibitive. A boardwalk supported by a helical pier system could be constructed on the opposite side of the brook to provide an accessible walkway to the River, following the existing topography. While the helical pier construction is relatively low impact, the steep, wooded slopes would make construction challenging and expensive.

As previously described with Concept 1, maintenance would be essential to ensure that the temporary floating dock provides adequate access to the beach with changing water levels. Additionally, daily cleaning of toilets and removal of trash and recycling would need to take place in order for these facilities to adequately serve community members during peak swimming season.



COMPOSTING TOILETS &
CHANGING STRUCTURE

CONNECTICUT RIVER

PROPOSED NO WAKE ZONE



ACCESSIBLE
BOAT LAUNCH

Connecticut River
Greenway

Beach



BOARDWALK



PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE



ADA PARKING SIGNAGE

Parking



CONNECTICUT RIVER GREENWAY: CONCEPT 4

Concept 4 is intended to provide ADA access to the beach with temporary, minimal structures. This concept provides clear ADA parking and ADA access to the beach along with amenities that community members requested including toilets, water fountain, and changing rooms. A no-wake zone is identified to improve boater awareness and safety of swimmers. An accessible boat launch and dock is proposed to replace the existing NCR dock, as it may be near the end of its useful life. A temporary lateral dock and sand mat connect swimmers from the ADA ramp to the beach.

Composting toilets are recommended to minimize disturbance to the site and to prevent the City from incurring the cost of adding sewer line utilities that are not currently present on site. Additional amenities include picnic tables and benches.

While these recommendations reflect feedback from community members, it is important to note that maintenance would be essential to ensure that the temporary floating dock provides adequate access to the beach with changing water levels. Additionally, daily cleaning of toilets and removal of trash and recycling would need to take place in order for these facilities to adequately serve community members during peak swimming season.



COMPOSTING TOILETS &
CHANGING STRUCTURE

CONNECTICUT RIVER

PROPOSED NO WAKE ZONE



ACCESSIBLE BOAT LAUNCH & DOCK

Connecticut River Greenway

Beach



SAND MAT



TEMPORARY FLOATING DOCK



ADA PARKING SIGNAGE

Parking

Barrett Brook



4.2 MAINES FIELD

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK INFLUENCING DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

Feedback from community members indicated that many people enjoy swimming in the Mill River, but most have concerns about water quality and overuse. At Maines Field, people enjoy wading in the Mill River and using the park for league or pickup volleyball and softball. However, the bathroom facilities at Maines Field are not ADA compliant and are often closed. Because the Mill River is prone to flooding in this area, City investments should be made to mitigate damage from floods, maintain the health and stability of the stream bank, and to make clear to visitors expected guidelines for swimming. To see the full set of comments and date from the community data gathering process, refer to Section 3 of this report.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

We recommend that prior to investing in any capital improvement projects for this area, the City work with neighborhood and community groups to establish a maintenance plan for removing trash, cleaning bathrooms and water fountains, and testing water quality.

RECOMMENDED CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

- ADA compliant bathrooms outside of the flood zone
- ADA parking near bathrooms
- Signage reminding people where they can find the nearby restroom
- Signage letting people know of steep drop-offs
- Signage indicating guidelines for swimming in the Mill River
- Stream bank stabilization in high use areas

RECOMMENDED SERVICE ENHANCEMENTS

- Water quality testing
- Clean and maintain bathrooms & water fountains
- Winterize all amenities to avoid damage
- Alternating swim access points to allow for stream bank stabilization plantings
- River steward presence to educate swimmers about trash removal, river health, and equitable swim access



STREAM BANK RESTORATION

COMPOSTING TOILETS & CHANGING STRUCTURE



Maines Field

Riverside Drive

100' BUFFER

200' BUFFER

Parking

Volleyball

Volleyball

Parking

MILL RIVER



ADA PARKING SIGNAGE



ACCESSIBLE WALK TO TOILETS



4.3 LOWER COOK'S DAM

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK INFLUENCING DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

Lower Cook's Dam is characterized by small, deep pockets of water among large boulders. Water crashing down from the dam above creates a dramatic backdrop. Many swimmers jump from the high boulders into the water below. A tall fence was added to the east side of Main Street, which runs directly above the dam, to prevent swimmers from jumping from the street as they did in the past. While this swim area is popular during the summer, many neighbors and community members have concerns about safety and littering.

The City of Northampton owns the land along the lower portion of Cook's Dam; this area is under the control of the independently operated Look Park. The Saw Mill Hills Greenway-Roberts Hill area, also owned by the City of Northampton, extends from Main Street west, providing access to the upper portion of the dam. In an effort to take some of the pressure off of the lower dam area, we have made recommendations for capital improvements and service enhancements at the Upper Cook's Dam area. See Section 4.4 for additional information.



Lower Cook's Dam in winter of 2021

4.4 UPPER COOK'S DAM

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK INFLUENCING DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

Upper Cook's Dam is one of the few wide, deep areas along the Mill River. The area is difficult to access, due to the steep topography and unmarked trails through the woods. While this swim area is significantly less popular than the lower side of Cook's Dam, neighbors are still concerned about safety and littering.

In an effort to take pressure off of the lower area of Cook's Dam, we recommend some minor improvements to the upper area that include clarifying trails and providing way finding signage.

RECOMMENDED CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

- Way finding signage to help swimmers identify public property and trails from Old Shepherd Road and Main Street to the upper dam swim area
- Signage indicating guidelines for users and swimmers related to trash carry-in/carry-out policy, noise, and hours for swimming
- Bike racks at the trail head near Old Shephard Road

RECOMMENDED SERVICE ENHANCEMENTS

- Water quality testing
- Monitor river currents and post signs when conditions are unsafe

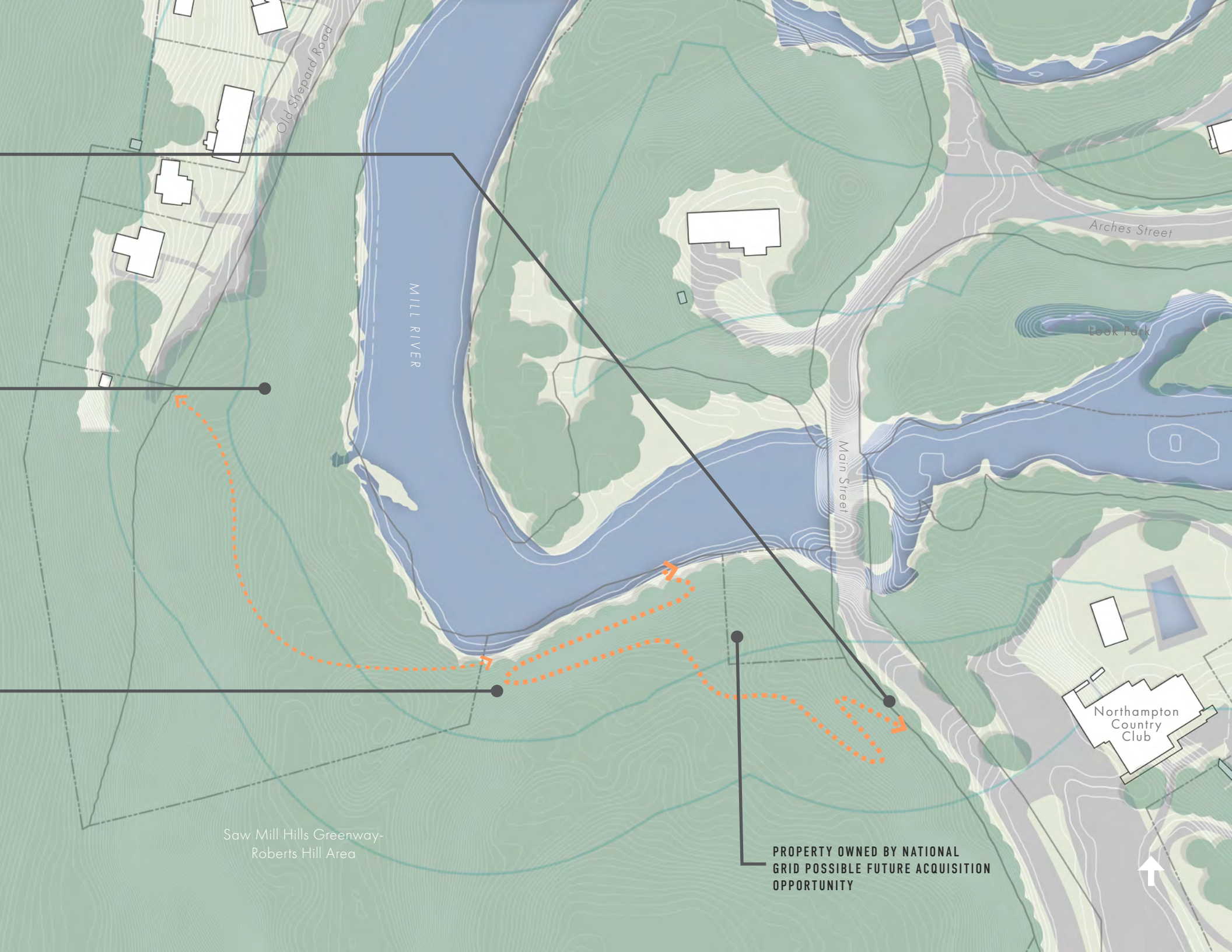


ADD TRAIL HEAD SIGNAGE ON CITY OWNED PROPERTY

PROPERTY OWNED BY NATIONAL GRID POSSIBLE FUTURE ACQUISITION OPPORTUNITY



ESTABLISH TRAILS ON CITY OWNED PROPERTY



Old Shepard Road

MILL RIVER

Arches Street

Look Park

Main Street

Northampton
Country
Club

Saw Mill Hills Greenway-
Roberts Hill Area

**PROPERTY OWNED BY NATIONAL
GRID POSSIBLE FUTURE ACQUISITION
OPPORTUNITY**



4.5 ORANGE DAM

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK INFLUENCING DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

The Mill River north of the Orange Dam is a favorite swimming spot among many people that responded to the online survey. The popularity of this swim area has created strain related to noise, littering, parking, and equitable access.

Improvements to this area should be handled carefully and in coordination with neighbors and community groups, as described in the beginning of this section. Improvements should strike a balance between conserving the existing stream banks, improving water quality, and providing amenities for swimmers. We recommend creating new swim area access points along the bike path north of the Orange Dam to allow for small groups of swimmers to spread out, reducing the impact on one or two centralized locations. In order to prevent the swim areas from causing significant erosion, we recommend alternating which access points are open or closed in a given swim season to allow bank stabilizing plants to grow.

We recommend that a coalition of community groups and neighbors work with the city to determine appropriate amenities to the newly owned City property and develop a plan for maintaining these improvements. We also recommend an education effort that includes signage and the regular presence of river stewards to remind swimmers that each person should carry out the waste they bring to a swim area.

RECOMMENDED CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

- Additional trails and river access points
- Signage indicating guidelines for users and swimmers related to carry-in/carry-out trash policy, noise, and hours for swimming
- Bike racks at key trail heads
- Picnic tables at key trail heads
- Composting toilets
- Stream bank restoration in heavily degraded areas
- Signage and temporary fencing explaining temporary swim area closures for stream bank restoration

RECOMMENDED SERVICE ENHANCEMENTS

- Water quality testing
- River steward presence to educate swimmers about trash removal, river health, and equitable swim access
- Maintenance program for stream bank restoration and strategic swim area closures



COMPOSTING TOILETS & CHANGING STRUCTURE



SWIMMING GUIDELINES SIGN



PICNIC TABLES



NEW SWIM ACCESS POINTS



WRIGHT OSTERMIER
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

WO-LA.NET