

Groton 2035: Building a Greater Groton

Summary of Topic Content plus Policies and Strategies

Chapter 5: A Place We Celebrate and Enjoy Living Together

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Chapter 5: A Place We Celebrate and Enjoy Living Together

Goal Statement

Foster a vibrant, connected community where residents and visitors can celebrate and enjoy life together through access to high-quality parks and recreational opportunities, cultural and historical resources, the arts, civic spaces, neighborhoods, and diverse entertainment. Groton will support inclusive, intergenerational experiences that reflect the Town's unique identity, including its Naval heritage, strengthen community pride, and enhance overall well-being.

Parks and Recreation

Ensuring that all residents and all neighborhoods have access to recreational opportunities and programs.

Key Points

- Residents are looking for recreational facilities and programs for **unmet needs of certain age groups and interests**.
- The Town needs to continue **regular improvements and upgrades** of recreational sites and facilities to ensure safe, high quality, and accessible opportunities for all residents Town-wide.
- To provide high quality recreation facilities and programs, the Town needs to **allocate resources** that give staff the capacity to meet current and future property management and stewardship obligations.
 - The Parks and Recreation Department manages many **municipal properties**, including Thrive 55+, the Community Center, Shennecossett Golf Course, Esker Point Beach, playgrounds, athletic facilities, open spaces, conservation areas, certain cemeteries, and others.
 - The **Parks and Recreation Department is taking on more responsibility** for municipal properties, including large open spaces and conservation areas. While the Department's budget has expanded and staff has increased in recent years, its overall capacity to meet these responsibilities is not increasing at a fast enough rate to meet demands.
 - The Parks and Recreation Department uses its **2023 Strategic Plan** to guide delivery of high-quality recreational opportunities that meet community needs. This includes supporting staff with tools and training.
- The Town has **additional plans** that measure progress towards meeting goals and guide investments in its recreational assets. These plans also support building knowledge and capacity of its staff to meet community needs.
 - Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2023)
 - Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan (2023)
 - ADA Transition Plan Progress Report (prepared annually)
 - Open Space Conservation Plan (revised 2024)
 - Complete Streets Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan (2025)

- An **Athletic Fields Task Force** has been lobbying for additional recreational fields and field upgrades and a four-phase plan has been presented to Town Council. The Town is pursuing funding through bond referendums to cover implementation expenses.

What We Have Heard

- There is a need for more **recreational opportunities for young adults, youth, and young children** (preschool).
- Residents would like to see **more walking and biking connections** (trails, sidewalks, bike paths, etc.) to link parks, recreational areas, conservation areas, and other public spaces and to residential areas.
- Most common **new amenities residents are looking for** include: a year-round aquatic facility or swimming pool, recreation center for indoor activities, lighting to increase the use of existing outdoor facilities, shade at existing parks and playgrounds, restrooms, and public boat launch areas.
- The northwest area of Town (**West Pleasant Valley**) lacks sufficient public neighborhood parks, playgrounds, and spaces.
- The Town needs to ensure it is communicating effectively with the community about its resources and activities. **Communication methods** should take into consideration accessibility, language, and medium (print, online, etc.).
- Overall, residents feel the Town is doing a **good job maintaining its parks**.
- The Town needs to continue to **upgrade its recreational facilities** to ensure safety, including safety fencing around playgrounds.
- Overall, there is a desire for **more inclusive parks and public spaces**. Improving accessibility is important for everyone, but especially people with different intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD), mobility disabilities, ages, and backgrounds.

Our Current Work

Below are some of the things the Town is already doing or will continue to do throughout the ten-year period of this plan related to Parks & Recreation.

- Make improvements at recreation facilities across Town, prioritizing those with known safety issues.
- Prepare an annual progress report of its ADA Transition Plan.

Maps

- Properties with high priority for investments; any long-range recreation facility projects.

Graphics

- Photographs of parks and recreation resources throughout the Town.

Policies & Strategies

Policy 5.1 Increase High Quality, Safe, and Accessible Community, Civic, and Recreational Facilities and Programs to Serve Residents of all Ages, Abilities, and Interests.

Strategy 5.1.a Evaluate, increase, and/or improve community, civic and recreational facilities in all neighborhoods, particularly those identified in the 2023 Parks and Recreation Master Plan, as revised.

Strategy 5.1.b Develop a plan to renovate the community center complex to serve all of Groton. The plan may also include an aquatics facility.

Cultural and Historic Resources

Key Points

- Groton is home to a **diverse range of culturally important sites and institutions** open to residents and visitors. They are supported by a range of diverse municipal and regulatory bodies, local institutions, and nonprofit organizations, such as the Town of Groton Historic District Commission, the Thames River Heritage Park Foundation, the Submarine Force Library and Museum Association, among others.
- Since 1990 Groton has been a Certified Local Government (CLG), a designation from the National Park Service that means **Groton has committed to meeting national historic preservation standards**. The CLG program enables Groton to leverage benefits, such as federal funding, technical assistance, and preservation-focused collaboration opportunities with other local governments, state governments, and federal entities.
- **Challenges** facing Groton's cultural and historic resources include climate change impacts such as flooding and high heat, the loss of institutional knowledge as Town staff retire, and the risk of losing physical, undigitized historical records.
- There are many opportunities the Town can take to **preserve and promote Groton's cultural and historic resources**. These include reestablishing a historical society for all of Groton, and digitizing historical records.

What We Have Heard

- Public buildings and spaces should be **welcoming and accessible** for everyone.
- **Residents love Groton's historic and cultural heritage**, including its historic districts and buildings, submarine legacy, and many community traditions.
- Residents are still looking for **more cultural activities and events** that bring the community together.
- The Town and its partners need to find opportunities to **increase the accessibility** of the Town's historic areas for people with physical, intellectual, and developmental disabilities.
- The Mystic River Historical Society focuses primarily on the historic areas of the Mystic River in Groton and Stonington. The loss of the Groton Historical Society has left other historical areas of Groton without a **formal organization** for advocacy and promotion of and education about the Town's historical assets.

Our Current Work

Below are some of the things the Town is already doing or will continue to do throughout the ten-year period of this plan related to Cultural and Historic Resources.

- Historic assets and historic districts are included as critical features that merit protection and/or planning when considering Hazard Mitigation Plans, especially with regard to flooding, storm surge, sea level rise, and coastal erosion.
- The Town maintains an inventory of local cultural and historic resources, both protected and unprotected, and Town-owned or otherwise.

- Funding and technical assistance opportunities are pursued to maintain sites, including opportunities Groton is eligible for as a Certified Local Government (e.g., federal funding) and those through the Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office.

Maps

- Include the “Historic and Cultural Resources” map of Groton from the Baseline Report.
- Map of Groton’s historic districts and flood risk zone (this could be future SLR predictions with and without storms)

Graphics

- Include a page of photos of Groton’s cultural and historic sites (e.g., patrons engaged in activities at the Groton Public Library, Town-managed historic properties, etc.).
- A photo of the now disbanded Groton Historical Society’s collections could be helpful because it could illustrate the value the Society provided.
- Photos of local places that are relevant to the nation’s 250th anniversary (e.g., revolutionary war sites, stone commemorating George Washington’s visit to Groton, etc.).
- Photos of how climate change impacts have affected existing cultural and historic resources

Policies & Strategies

Policy 5.2 Increase the Town’s capacity to protect its local cultural and historic resources.

Strategy 5.2.a Revise the Historic District Commission Handbook to address historically appropriate improvements to mitigate effects of climate change.

Strategy 5.2.b Require archeological surveys prior to Site Plan or Subdivision approval on sites deemed significant.

Civic Spaces

Expanding and improving civic spaces where people can gather, such as libraries, Thrive 55+, common spaces in public buildings, amenities in public rights of way, and other public spaces.

Key Points

- Public buildings and spaces should be **accessible for people with a range of abilities**.
- Groton's historical settlement patterns have left it with no traditional town center, rather a series of crossroads, neighborhoods, and village centers. Efforts over the years have been made to **create a more cohesive civic center** in the Poquonnock Bridge area.

What We Have Heard

- Public buildings and spaces should be **welcoming and accessible for everyone**.
- Improving accessibility of parks, public buildings, and public spaces is important for everyone, but especially **people with intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD) and seniors**.
- Creating **inclusive public spaces** for children and seniors alike would improve the Town for everyone.
- **Public facilities available for community organizations** are a significant asset within the Town. Many groups use the Thrive 55+ Active Living Center and the Groton Community Center for programming, food and clothing drives, and connecting people to other resources and information.
- Groton **lacks youth-focused spaces**, such as a teen center.

Our Current Work

- Incremental improvements are being made at the Community Center to increase offerings.
- Parks and Recreation programs many events at public spaces including summer concerts at Esker Point Beach, holiday parades, and winter holiday celebrations at Thrive 55+.
- The Groton Public Library provides extensive programs for all ages.

What is the Universal Design?

Universal Design means designing buildings and spaces to be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability. A building or space should be designed to meet the needs of all people who wish to use it. This is particularly important for civic buildings and spaces, but is also important for housing, commercial spaces, and anywhere that should be accessible to the public.

Maps

Public and institutional spaces in the Poquonnock Bridge area.

Graphics

Images or graphics of universal design elements in public spaces.

Policies & Strategies

Policy 5.3 Ensure that public spaces are welcoming and accessible for all visitors.

Strategy 5.3.a Incorporate Universal Design standards into a policy for future investments and improvements of Town buildings and facilities.

Civic and Community Organizations and the Navy

Supporting and partnering with local organizations.

Key Points

- Residents love the **friendly, tight-knit community and small-town atmosphere** of Groton, but they want **more opportunities for social and community connection**.
- The Town should continue to **support and partner with local organizations** to further expand options for community gatherings, events, programs and activities to promote community cohesion and sense of place. The Town currently supports local community organizations by providing public facilities (i.e. Thrive55+, Groton Community Center, Groton Public Library, Parks & Recreation Department facilities) for public programming and events. The Town partners with local organizations on collaborative projects and community events.
- There are a number of active community organizations, including nonprofits, civic organizations, churches, and other faith-based groups, that organize a variety of events and programming in the Greater Groton area for people of all ages. However, residents may not know about these available resources and the Town could help **promote and create awareness** of these opportunities.
- There are many **houses of worship** in Groton across many beliefs. These institutions play an important role in Groton, building community and providing resources for families and individuals.
- Residents are proud of **Groton's Naval heritage** and there is a strong partnership between the Navy and the Town. Navy members and their families play a large role in the civic life of Groton.

What We Have Heard

- Residents want **more opportunities for social and community connection**. They expressed interest in **more cultural activities and community events**.
- A recurring theme in community engagement is that there is **not enough to do in Groton**. Youth and young adults (18-34), in particular, want more social spaces and entertainment options for themselves and their young children. They want to see a livelier and more cohesive community.
- Many young adults (age groups 18-24, 25-34, and 35-44) described **Groton as "boring."** They want to see a Groton that is fun, friendly, and family-oriented with a thriving, diverse, and vibrant community.
- At the same time, a number of people said that the thing they love best about Groton is that it is **family-friendly and age-friendly**, with many parks, playgrounds, community spaces, and activities for all ages. They love that Groton is a friendly, tight-knit community with a small-town atmosphere.

Our Current Work

Below are some of the things the Town is already doing or will continue to do throughout the ten-year period of this plan related to Civic and Community Organizations and the Navy.

- Reach out to civic and community organizations throughout Groton and establish and build relationships.
- Provide necessary support to the Council of Governments (SECOG) in the development of the Compatible Use Plan (CUP) as an update of the 2017 Joint Land Use Study (JLUS) with the Navy as well as the projects and funding that resulted from the JLUS.

Maps

- None

Graphics

- Photographs of social events or programs that show partnership between Town and community organizations.

Policies & Strategies

Policy 5.4 Be an Active Partner in Navy Developments and Programs to Increase Opportunities for both Civilians and Navy Personnel.

Strategy 5.4.a Promote and create better awareness of existing civic and community organization events and opportunities to promote community connection and social cohesion.

Spotlight on Resiliency

- **Parks and Recreation:** Parks can be designed to provide flood storage and prevent storm damage. *See more in Chapter 2.*
- **Cultural and Historic Resources and Climate Change:** Groton's cultural and historic resources are at risk of acute impacts from climate change, such as storms and severe flooding, as well as long-term, chronic stressors such as increased heat and high tide flooding.
- **Civic Spaces:** Civic spaces can be used as "Resilience Hubs." *See more in Chapter 1.* In addition, they allow residents to form social bonds and networks, which strengthen social resilience.
- **Civic and Community Organizations:** Civic and community organizations, like community service providers, enhance social resilience. *See more in Chapter 1.*