Now More Than Ever!!
The Essentiality of Parks and Recreation

Why do we have to keep proving ourselves?
What is the best way to do so?
How has the pandemic changed our essentiality?

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Chair and Associate Professor
UNH Recreation Management and Policy
Essentiality

Just as public safety, water, sewer, public works are considered essential public services, parks and recreation are also essential services.
Our roots are in social reform and welfare

- Settlement and Playground Movements – evolved at the same time – Poor urban areas – established playgrounds and camps
- Response to industrialization, urbanization, immigration...
- Recreation Activities were a serious subject of social reform
- Recreation was a means by which life in urban, industrial society could be made tolerable
- The plight of NYC children became so destructive that formed a movement for play and playgrounds
- Child Saving Movement
Our very existence is based on answering a “need”....Does Need = Essential?
Pick a Social Issue or Challenge haven’t we been called on to solve or taken it on ourselves?

- Obesity Epidemic
- Silver Tsunami
- Climate Change
- Environmental Challenges
- Juvenile Delinquency
- Latchkey kids
- Teen pregnancy
- Out of School Time/working parents
- Homelessness
- Diversity

- Nature Deficit Disorder
- Gender Identity
- Title IX
- Americans with Disabilities Act
- Inclusion
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Military deployments, veterans, families
- Youth Employment
- Screen Time
- Natural/Man Made Disasters
Now more than ever.....? Did the pandemic “prove” parks and recreation are essential?
Outdoors Became the Safest Place to go....
Well, outside was “safer” in most cases....
The use of outdoor spaces – especially close to home spaces - including municipal parks and recreation outdoor facilities sky rocketed showing the essentiality of parks and recreation.
83% of adults surveyed find exercising at local trails and open spaces essential to maintaining their mental and physical health during the pandemic. (NRPA – Park Pulse The Essential Need for Parks)
When play spaces were closed during the pandemic – how many calls did you get asking when they’d reopen?

Currently Most Likely to Be Open*:
- Trails = 99% open
- Dog parks = 98% open
- Local parks = 97% open
- Indoor ice rinks = 86% open
- Outdoor ice rinks = 85% open
- Childcare for the public = 83%
- Outdoor sports leagues = 74%
- Indoor aquatic centers = 70% open
- Recreation centers = 63% open
- Indoor gyms = 60% open
- Races/running/walking events = 55% open
- Indoor sports leagues = 53% open

Currently Most Likely to Be Closed*:
- Senior centers = 67% closed
- Spring festivals/events = 66% closed

NHRPA Summer Camp#
- 2020 = 55% open
- 2021 = 86% open; 9% unsure; 5% not open

* = NRPA Parks Snapshot (https://www.nrpa.org/blog/nrpa-parks-snapshot-february-2-5-survey-results/)
# = NHRPA Summer Programming Survey
Outdoor Recreation Business = Economic boon – bikes, kayaks, skis, paddleboards, canoes...sold out
Essential?

- Programs suspended, eliminated
- Capital Projects put on hold, not funded
- Budgets cut
- Staff furloughs, re-assignments, lay-offs
- Did the same happen to other Essential Services?
- With all that happening are we really essential?
- What is our importance?

NHRPA Summer Survey 2020:

86.5% of park and recreation directors felt that it was LIKELY or VERY LIKELY that there would be reduced operating budgets due to General Fund cuts

AT THE SAME TIME...

77.3% of park and recreation directors felt that it was LIKELY or VERY LIKELY that there would be increased demand for park and recreation services
### Changes in Local Services Spending Resulting From Increased Or Decreased Local Government Budgets (Mowen et al., 2017)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government Service</th>
<th>Average % Added (Rank)</th>
<th>Average % Taken (Rank)</th>
<th>Net Allocation</th>
<th>Rank of Importance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>15.0 (2)</td>
<td>7.6 (10)</td>
<td>+7.4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Protection</td>
<td>14.8 (3)</td>
<td>9.0 (7)</td>
<td>+5.8</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>17.7 (1)</td>
<td>12.8 (3)</td>
<td>+4.9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Protection</td>
<td>10.0 (6)</td>
<td>8.1 (8)</td>
<td>+1.9</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hospitals and Healthcare</td>
<td>8.9 (8)</td>
<td>7.7 (9)</td>
<td>+1.2</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>13.8 (5)</td>
<td>13.6 (2)</td>
<td>+0.2</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parks and Recreation</td>
<td>14.7 (4)</td>
<td>15.2 (1)</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Welfare</td>
<td>9.0 (7)</td>
<td>11.4 (5)</td>
<td>-2.4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrections</td>
<td>6.4 (9)</td>
<td>10.9 (6)</td>
<td>-4.5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libraries</td>
<td>5.9 (10)</td>
<td>12.6 (4)</td>
<td>-6.7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings similar to Barrett et al. (2017); 2019-2023 NH SCORP (2019)
Yes we are Essential - P & R Stepped up – Big Time!

- Virtual/Zoom classes
- Creative programming!!! Unbelievable stuff...to keep the community engaged.
- Expanded the reach of programming
- Emergency Child Care for essential workers
- Out of school time programs
- Food distribution
- Welfare checks
- Recreation/Community Centers turned into testing/vaccination centers
- Met guidelines and restrictions to continue....camps, lessons....
- Fought like hell to do so....
We will be holding coloring contests for Youth, Teens, and Adults. We are offering our K-4 North Pole Calling. Partnering with Libraries for a Winter Wednesday crafts, and a Santa's Tour through neighborhoods in Lebanon/West Lebanon.

Turkey Scavenger Hunt Santa's Holiday Parade (Santa on a fire truck) Virtual Tree Lighting Drive Thru Holiday Food Drive (with Santa)

We are modifying our Just for Kids shopping event, to be more like a scholastic book order/online form for purchasing their gifts.

Christmas tree lighting

Santa's Calling, Christmas Caroling, maybe Cookie Decorating

Picture taking with Santa; Food and clothing Drive; Outdoor Virtual Tree lighting


Letters to Santa Virtual Gingerbread House Contest

We are planning to offer a household holiday decorating contest, which can be done safely in a socially distanced environment

We have the "One Stop Christmas Shop for Kids" that we will run - it will be by appointment only this year. We will also run a very modified version of our very popular - 66th Annual Santa's Village event.

Tree lighting Santa drive through

Drive-thru Winter Wonderland Firemen's Luncheon (drive-thru)

Community Television TV Special

Virtual BINGO, Virtual Family Trivia, Candy Cottages "to go", Bear Factory "to go", Possibly a Kids Night Out on NYE for our school kids only.

We will be offering our annual "Deck The Trails" event where families decorate trees along one of our hiking trails. We will also be participating in a "Light up the Monadnock/Southern NH" area with houses decorating for the holidays.

For November and December we have gone virtual. We are not hosting our annual holiday parade or craft workshop. We are doing craft boxes to go, a scavenger hunt in our parks and right now Family November Kindness Bingo. We are also doing a Virtual countdown to the holiday break (23 day calendar of activities and things to do at home). We are still currently doing our fitness challenge - 100 mile challenge and will be starting to plan a COVID Safe Winter Carnival for Feb. We are hoping to host Feb and April vacation camps as long it works with the school's schedule.

Dorrs Pond Ice Skating Holiday Drive Through

Letters to Santa event
We can continue pat ourselves on the back and keep the secret of our essentiality or....
we can tell our story....
Data Based Storytelling –

- Participant numbers
- Program numbers
- Revenue
- Percentage of Cost Recovery
- Cost to tax payers
- Percentage of population
- Economic impact
- Number of volunteers
- Benchmarking comp communities
- Number of Youth Employed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Data from the 2021 NHRPA Summer Programming Survey</th>
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<tr>
<td>State-wide, approximately</td>
<td>13,000 children¹ are served by municipal park and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,058</td>
<td>recreation summer camps</td>
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<tr>
<td>The average number of people</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>served through park and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recreation sponsored special</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>events per NH town</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>426</td>
<td></td>
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<td>The average number of people</td>
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<tr>
<td>recreation sponsored</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concerts/movies per NH town</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The average number of senior</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>citizens served through</td>
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¹ 88% of respondents reported offering some type of summer camp program for children and youth. The median number of children served was extrapolated from the total number of agencies in the state expected to have summer camp programs (n=89).
Great data and great information – but it tends to speak to the already convinced!

The more local and specific the information, the better!
NH Local Government Perceptions of Parks and Recreation Benefits – Top 4

- Makes the community more desirable to live
- Provides children with safe place to play
- Promotes positive youth development
- Enhances sense of community

Elected officials significantly less likely to view parks and recreation as a contributor to economic development

2019-2023 NH SCORP (2019)
2019 Mountainfest Softball Tournament

• **58 teams** participated in the tournament in June 2019
• Approximately 13 players per team, 758 total travel parties, and **2,262 visitors** to the Conway and Fryeburg area
• **76.2% would not have visited** Conway/Fryeburg except to attend the Mountainfest Softball Tournament
• **12.4% stayed longer** because of the tournament (2 extra days)
• Non-local direct spending = approximately **$537,157 due to the tournament alone** (Top 3 = lodging, food/beverage, retail shopping)
• **93.6% were satisfied/very satisfied** with the tournament

Data based on UNH Recreation Management and Policy survey taken onsite in June 2019
| ME Town A | 17,147 | $360,616 | $21.03 | $185,370 | 51.4% | 6 |
| ME Town B | 9,644  | $1,233,819 | $127.94 | $750,000 | 60.8% | 10 |
| ME Town C | 9,246  | $970,000 | $104.91 | $350,000 | 36.1% | 9 |
| ME Town D | 25,577 | $2,458,226 | $96.11 | $222,701 | 9.1% | 7 |
| ME Town E | 10,071 | $94,495 | $9.38 | $359,927 | 380.9% | 3 |
| ME Town F | 3,675  | $365,000 | $99.32 | $456,000 | 124.9% | 3 |

### Averages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Park and Recreation Operating Expenses Per Capita</th>
<th>Recreation Revenue as % of Operating Expenditures</th>
<th>Park Operating Expenses Per Park Acre</th>
<th>% of Overall Operating Expenses Dedicated to Parks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>$78.69</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>$6,750</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New England</td>
<td>$60.61</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>$5,831</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NH Town</td>
<td>$16.39</td>
<td>76.6%</td>
<td>$1,446</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
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New Hampshire's outdoor recreation sector is 3.2% of the State's economy, the 9th highest of any state."
- Granite Outdoor Alliance
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State-wide, approximately **13,000 children**\(^1\) are served by municipal park and recreation summer camps.

Approximately **2,000 children receive scholarships** to attend summer day camp in NH.

**9:1** = the average staff-to-camper ratio in municipal day-camp programs in NH.

**67.8%** = the % of agencies who hire staff under the age of 18 as camp staff.

\(^1\) 88.1% of respondents reported offering some type of summer camp program for children and youth. The median number of children served was extrapolated over the total number of agencies in the state expected to have summer camp programs (n=86).
Random Data From NRPA

• 82% of adults believe parks and recreation is essential
• 83% personally benefit, 81% felt their household benefits, and 92% believed their community benefits from parks and recreation
• Benefits are consistent across ethnicity, race, gender, income, political affiliation, and user vs. non-user
• U.S. Residents visit local park and recreation facilities more than 2x/month
• 3 in 5 U.S. residents – more than 190 million people – visited a park, trail, public open space or other recreation facility at least once during the first 3 months of the pandemic and over ½ of US residents maintained or increased park, trail and open space usage during those months
• 32% used local park and recreation programs or services in the last year
• 59% of respondents say it is very or extremely essential to exercise in parks and greenspace to relieve stress and remain healthy during the crisis
Data alone is not enough... You need the narrative as well....
Who can best tell “your” story?

• Whenever possible and wherever possible – have someone else tell your story – You be the back up; the question answerer; the fact provider; corrector.

  • Rec Commission/Advisory Board
  • Friends Groups
  • Volunteers
  • Participants

• Position your “story” with the priorities of elected officials
Data will drive the decision making – but the narrative will swing the support – tell the stories that resonate

• The special needs child who thrived in your program
• The “Behavior challenged” youth who found success with the Rec
• The widowed senior citizen who found friendship on your senior trip
• The teen who recognized that your rec program changed the direction of their life
• The recognition of the number of youth in your community who had their first job with you
• The parent that “needs” your program because they can’t afford traditional child care/their child is too old for
• The youth sport speaking of the passion of helping a youth athlete to succeed....
• Your stories are endless....
They are also the community’s stories....
You can have the best story – narrative and data – and still be challenged

• Data not believed
• Opposition
• Incorrect data as “fact”
• How are those “facts” spread....
• How is it countered

Bowling Green State University – Live Counts of Rec Facility
https://www.bgsu.edu/recwell/student-recreation-center/counts.html
How do you convey what didn’t happen

- Communicating risk is always easier than communicating strengths...
- The child that didn’t drown because he learned to swim in “Your” program
- The accidents that didn’t happen because your lifeguards were on duty
- The teen who didn’t turn to destructive behaviors because he found a home at the Rec
Where and how do you tell your story...times have changed

• The old ways still work....letters and email to the powers that be
• Letters to the editor
• Speaking at meetings – i.e. council, board, town
• Definitely have a more immediate reach!
• But times have changed....
• Social Media....
Essentiality

• Defining a municipal service as essential depends on one’s interpretation. A municipality can exist without parks and recreation just as it can without libraries, historical societies and a myriad of other things that make strong healthy communities but is it truly a community – and who wants to live there?