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MEMORANDUM

TO: Thomas A. Golden, Jr., City Manager 

FROM: Yovani Baez-Rose, Assistant City Manager/DPD Director

CC: Jessica Wilson, Design Planner

SUBJECT: INFORMATIONAL: Open Space & Recreation Plan (OSRP) 2025 Update

The Department of Planning & Development is updating the City's Open Space and Recreation Plan. This Plan is an important document created in collaboration with the community to identify and prioritize needed park and open space improvements. The City is required to update its OSRP every 7 years to maintain eligibility for state grants to fund open space improvement projects. The City's current OSRP expires in February 2026.

DPD and partner entities have made significant progress on implementing the current OSRP, with 66% of the 120 actions started, in progress, or ongoing. Examples of projects that came out of the OSRP include the new shade structure and bocce courts built at Roberto Clemente Park in 2022, the new splash pad and rain garden built at Armory Park in 2024, and the improvements to South Common completed in 2023 and 2024. The attached presentation includes before and after photos of these transformative projects.

2025 will see even more park transformations with 10 park improvement projects and 1 brand new park scheduled for construction. This will represent the most park projects DPD has completed in a single year in recent history thanks to the ARPA funding allocated by City Council. These projects demonstrate the positive outcomes of a successful OSRP process.

Not Starting From Scratch

DPD has a strong foundation to build on previously completed work:

- **Lowell Forward:** In 2024 the City adopted the Lowell Forward master plan following an extensive 18-month community engagement process. The parks, open space, and trails goals identified by the community in Lowell Forward will become the framework for the OSRP Action Plan, which will identify specific actions to advance these goals.

"The City will be conducting extensive community engagement in 2025 to inform the next OSRP update. While the Lowell Forward Master Plan provides over-arching open space goals and some big-ticket actions, the OSRP will dive deep into assessing the current state of the City's open space and providing prioritized recommendations to guide the next 7 years of open space investments and initiatives." – Lowell Forward page 149.

- **Lowell Open Space Maintenance Plan:** In 2024, DPD also completed an Open Space Maintenance Plan in collaboration with the Parks Department (OSRP **Action 4.2:** *Conduct a comprehensive study of available maintenance staff time and all facilities currently being maintained seasonally to better inform staff deployment strategies;* and **Action 4.3:** *Create a preventative maintenance master plan for all parks and open spaces across the city*). This plan was funded by a \$50,000 Housing Choice Grant that DPD received from the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC). DPD hired consultant team WOLA (landscape architecture) and ETM Associates (public space management) who created a plan with recommendations to reduce the maintenance burden of our parks and increase Parks Department capacity.

This project also resulted in the creation of a park assessment template and scoring system to assess and prioritize park maintenance/capital improvement needs. DPD staff are working to adapt the assessment template into a user-friendly online survey and plan to mobilize volunteer groups to assess and rank parks as part of the OSRP community engagement process described below.

Link to Open Space Maintenance Plan:

<https://lowellma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/30196/Open-Space-Maintenance-Plan>

Community Engagement Plan

DPD recognizes that to engage a community as diverse as Lowell's, we must provide a diverse range of ways to participate. DPD Staff have created a thoughtful engagement plan for the OSRP update as outlined below and will translate all key materials into Khmer, Spanish, and Portuguese.

- **DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT STATION:** <https://tinyurl.com/37a2y2n9> The digital engagement station is a one-stop-shop for all things related to the OSRP. Here, community members can learn more about the OSRP, how to get involved, get in touch with the planning team, upcoming events, and what community feedback has been collected so far.
 - **Get Involved:** This is where residents can sign up to receive project updates via the OSRP **email newsletter**, access the “**Deep Dive Survey**,” participate in a “**Quick Poll**,” learn about **volunteer opportunities**, and download materials like the **OSRP Coloring Book**, and **OSRP Park Libs**.
 - **Get in Touch:** DPD has set up an email and a phone hotline as a low-barrier way for residents to share their input. Residents can reach out (in any language) to openspace@lowellma.gov, or leave a voice message by calling 978-674-4225.
 - **Calendar of Events:** This is where any upcoming in-person engagement events will be listed.
 - **Engagement Dashboard:** Here, the planning team will report back findings in infographic form.
- **MOBILE ENGAGEMENT STATION:** The mobile engagement station is the in-person version of the digital engagement station with physical materials that can be taken to different locations and events throughout the City. Anywhere the mobile engagement station goes, DPD staff will also facilitate park assessment training for volunteers.
 - **Lowell 2025 Park Count Tour:** DPD plans to make at least 6 stops at parks throughout the City with the mobile engagement station and park assessment training in 2025.
 - **Mobile Engagement Station:** The mobile engagement station features **informational boards**, **interactive boards**, a **participatory budgeting card game**, and physical copies of the **deep dive survey**, the **OSRP Coloring Book**, and **OSRP Park Libs**.

- **Park Assessor Training:** Volunteers who wish to participate on a deeper level can sign up for the Lowell 2025 Park Count. At the training sessions, volunteers will learn how to use the assessment template and receive an illustrated guide as a reference. Once trained, volunteers can collect data on their local parks on their own time.
- **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT:** Lowell is lucky to have many great non-profits (NPOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) collaborating with various City, State, and Federal agencies to improve parks and open spaces. These stakeholders offer a deeper level of expertise on the opportunities and challenges that come with creating and caring for our urban public spaces.
 - Interviews + Focus Groups: DPD Staff will organize and facilitate a series of stakeholder interviews and focus groups tailored toward specific topics like maintenance, accessibility, athletics, trails, and conservation.
 - Stewardship Summit: As the City seeks to transition to more resilient landscape types and implement more green infrastructure, a stewardship summit could offer an opportunity for the various agencies and CBOs involved in maintaining the City's parks and open spaces (Parks Department/DPW, Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust, MA Department of Conservation and Recreation, the National Parks Service, Lowell Litter Crewe, etc.) to participate in training and knowledge-sharing around best practices for maintaining the City's open space assets.
- **GET THE WORD OUT:** None of these participation opportunities will be worthwhile if nobody knows about them! DPD has devised a few strategies to ensure that we are maximizing our outreach efforts.
 - Yard Signs: Yard signs in each of the City's parks and public spaces will capture the attention of the residents who spend the most time in our parks. DPD also plans to take advantage of the new kiosk signs downtown to display banners advertising the OSRP.
 - Postcards: Postcards include a qr code and tinyurl to access the OSRP Digital Engagement Station, and also how to get in touch via the OSRP email and phone hotlines. These postcards will be handed out at all in-person events.
 - Social Media: DPD is working with the City's communications team to share information and updates about upcoming events via the City's socials. DPD will also work with non-profit partners to expand outreach through their networks.
 - Email Newsletter: Interested participants can sign up to receive OSRP project updates and announcements via the email newsletter. If successful, this newsletter can continue to provide updates throughout implementation after the new plan is adopted.
- **CLOSE THE FEEDBACK LOOP:** As important as it is to have a variety of ways to participate and get the word out, it is also important that DPD is reporting back the information gathered so that participants don't feel like their input is just being submitted into a vacuum.
 - Engagement Dashboard + Email Newsletter: As data is collected and feedback gathered, the planning team will occasionally report back on findings in infographic form. These infographics of results will be posted to the Engagement Dashboard section of the Digital Engagement Station and shared via the OSRP email newsletter.
 - Letters of Review: To receive approval from DCS, the OSRP must include letters of review from stakeholders and community members. The draft plan will be posted to the Digital Engagement Station so that participants can review and provide comments/letters. The planning team will edit the plan accordingly prior to submitting to DCS for final approval.

- o Open Space Open House: Following adoption of the new OSRP, DPD would like to host an event celebrating the accomplishments of the previous OSRP and sharing back the outcomes for the new OSRP. This event could be hosted in one of the parks upgraded as part of the previous OSRP, such as the new stage and amphitheater area at South Common.

JW/ ybr
Attachments



LOWELL OPEN SPACE & RECREATION PLAN
2025 UPDATE



WHAT IS THE OSRP?



OPEN



SPACE &



RECREATION



PLAN

The City is updating its **Open Space and Recreation Plan!** This Plan is an important document created in collaboration with the community to identify and prioritize needed park and open space improvements. The City is required to update its OSRP every 7 years to maintain eligibility for state grants to fund open space improvement projects.

WHAT IS “OPEN SPACE?”

OPEN SPACE INCLUDES:

- * Conservation Land
- * Forested Land
- * Recreation Land / Parks
- * Agricultural Land
- * Green buffers along roadways
- * Vacant Lots
- * Brownfield Sites



LOWELL OPEN SPACE AT-A-GLANCE



90+
Public
Parks



700+
Acres of
Open Space

8+
Miles of
Trails

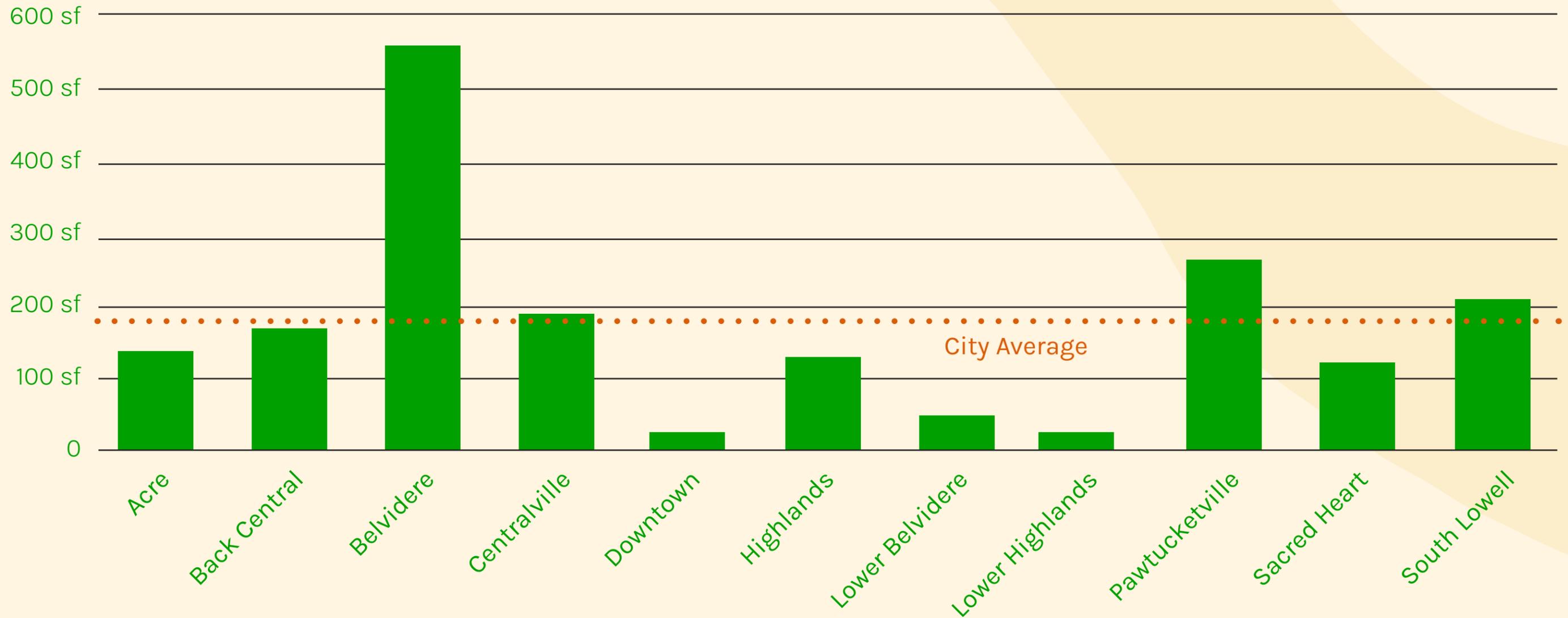


92%
of Residents
Live Within a
10-minute Walk
of a Park

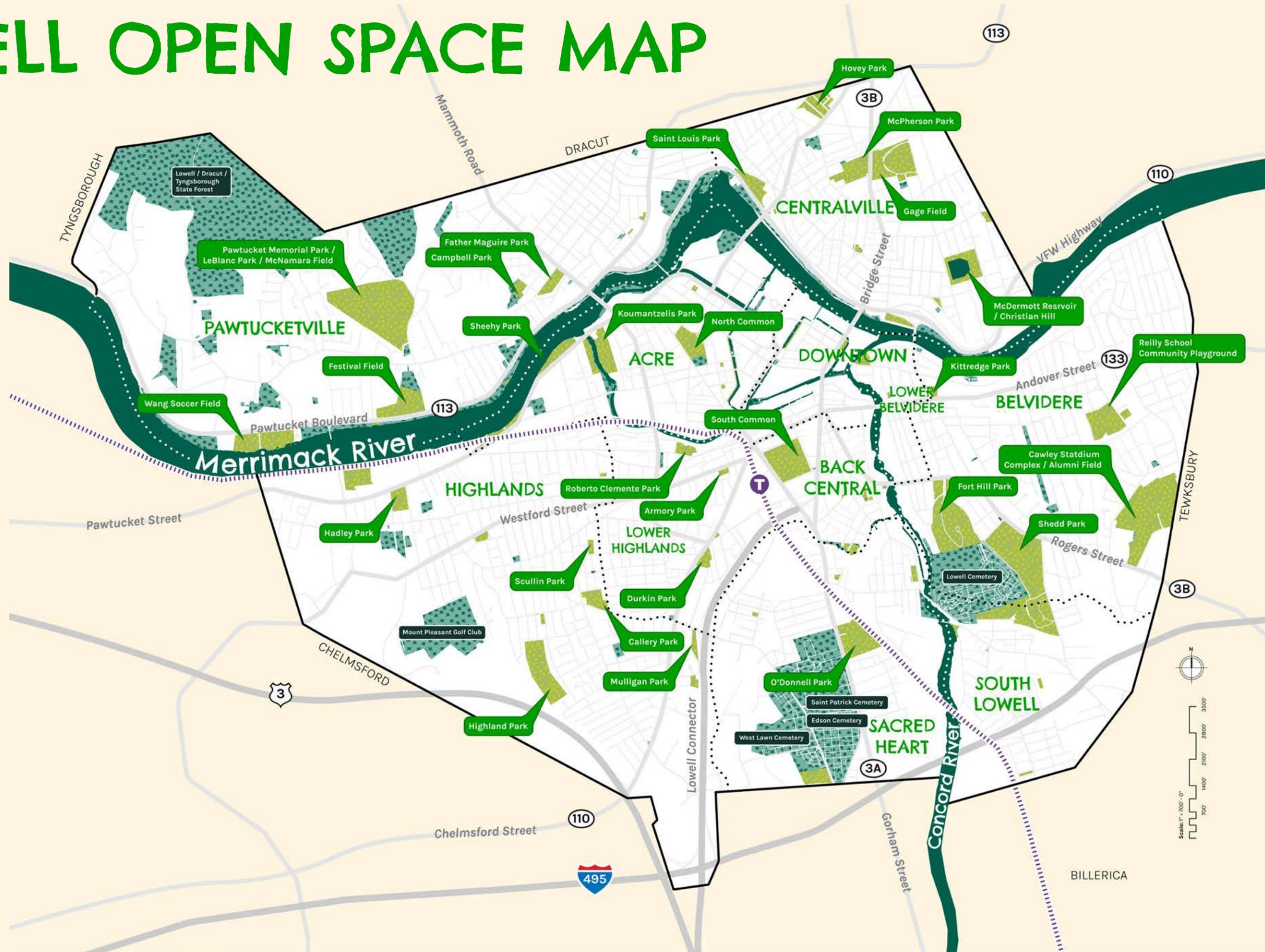


HOW IS OPEN SPACE DISTRIBUTED IN LOWELL?

PARK SPACE PER PERSON BY NEIGHBORHOOD:



LOWELL OPEN SPACE MAP



WHAT GOES IN THE OSRP?

WE ARE REQUIRED BY THE STATE (DCS) TO INCLUDE THESE SECTIONS IN OUR PLAN:

1. Plan Summary
2. Introduction
3. Community Setting
4. Environmental Inventory + Analysis
5. Inventory Of Lands Of Conservation + Recreation Interest
6. Community Vision
7. Analysis Of Needs
8. Goals + Objectives
9. **7-Year Action Plan**
10. Public Comment

WHAT IS THE 7-YEAR ACTION PLAN?

Goal 1: Strengthen pedestrian connections throughout all neighborhoods to provide residents safer access to parks, open spaces, and the opportunity to walk for exercise and leisure.

#	Action	Responsible Entity	Possible funding sources	Implementation year							
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1	Install appropriate signage, and/or rectangular flashing beacon signs at high traffic crosswalks across the City to alert drivers to pedestrians in crosswalks	City Engineering, DPD, City Electricians	State-MassDOT Complete Streets, City Capital Funds	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
2	Enforce ordinances against parking on sidewalks and parking too close to intersections to provide pedestrians full access to sidewalks and give drivers optimal views of pedestrians in crosswalks	LPD	City Capital	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
3	Extend the Vandenberg Esplanade to create the Pawtucket Falls Overlook	DPD, LNHP, DCR, MassDOT, NMCOCG	City Capital Funds, State MassDOT, Federal-LNHP			x	x	x			
4	Continue working to complete phases of the CRG	DPD	State-Recreational Trails, City Capital Funds	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
5	Continue support advancing the Bruce Freeman Rail trail Connection in Lowell	Bruce Freeman Rail trail, DPD	State-MassTrails, City Capital Funds	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
6	River Meadow Brook Design Planning	DPD	City Capital Funds, State Earmarks							x	x
7	Planning and design of the Merrimack Riverwalk-North Bank	DPD, DCR	City Capital Funds, State LWCF							x	x
8	Build the Merrimack Riverwalk Phase II-Bridge Street Node	DPD, LNHP	City Capital Funds, State Earmark	x	x						
9	Continue to research viable solutions to connect Western Avenue Studios to Downtown and Acre neighborhoods.	DPD, Western Ave Artists Association	City Capital Funds	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
10	Continue to pursue viable solutions to connect Hawk Valley Farm, Pawtucket Memorial Park and Regatta Field.	DCR, LPCT, DPD	City Capital Funds	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

The 7-Year Action Plan is one of the most important chapters in the OSRP. It identifies which high priority open space projects the City will invest in over the next 7 years.

We need the community's help to align these priorities with neighborhood needs and desires!

WHAT ARE OUR CURRENT OSRP GOALS?



Goal #1: Strengthen pedestrian connections throughout all neighborhoods to provide residents safer access to parks, open spaces, and the opportunity to walk for exercise and leisure.



Goal #2: Install cycling infrastructure across the City; prioritize non-vehicular modes of travel and recreational opportunities for residents.



Goal #3: Increase the types and availability of water-based recreation opportunities for residents.



Goal #4: Prioritize improved maintenance, security, and preservation of parks and open spaces across the City and enhance these spaces with the new amenities requested by residents.

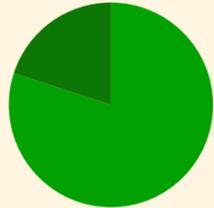


Goal #5: Streamline communication to the public about parks, open spaces, amenities, and events to increase knowledge of and access to these offerings.



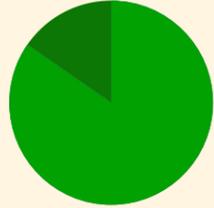
Goal #6: Increase recreational opportunities and modify existing parks and open spaces so that all residents regardless of age, ability, and neighborhood of residence can enjoy them.

HAVE WE MADE PROGRESS ON THESE GOALS?



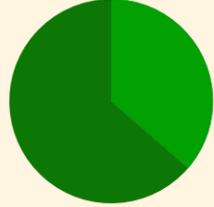
Goal #1: **12/15**

Actions COMPLETED, ONGOING, or IN PROGRESS!



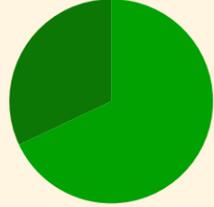
Goal #2: **11/13**

Actions COMPLETED, ONGOING, or IN PROGRESS!



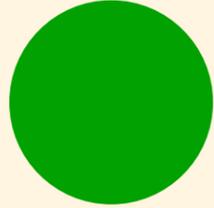
Goal #3: **4/11**

Actions COMPLETED, ONGOING, or IN PROGRESS!



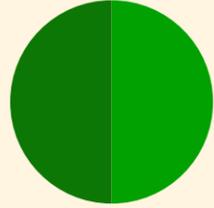
Goal #4: **17/25**

Actions COMPLETED, ONGOING, or IN PROGRESS!



Goal #5: **14/14**

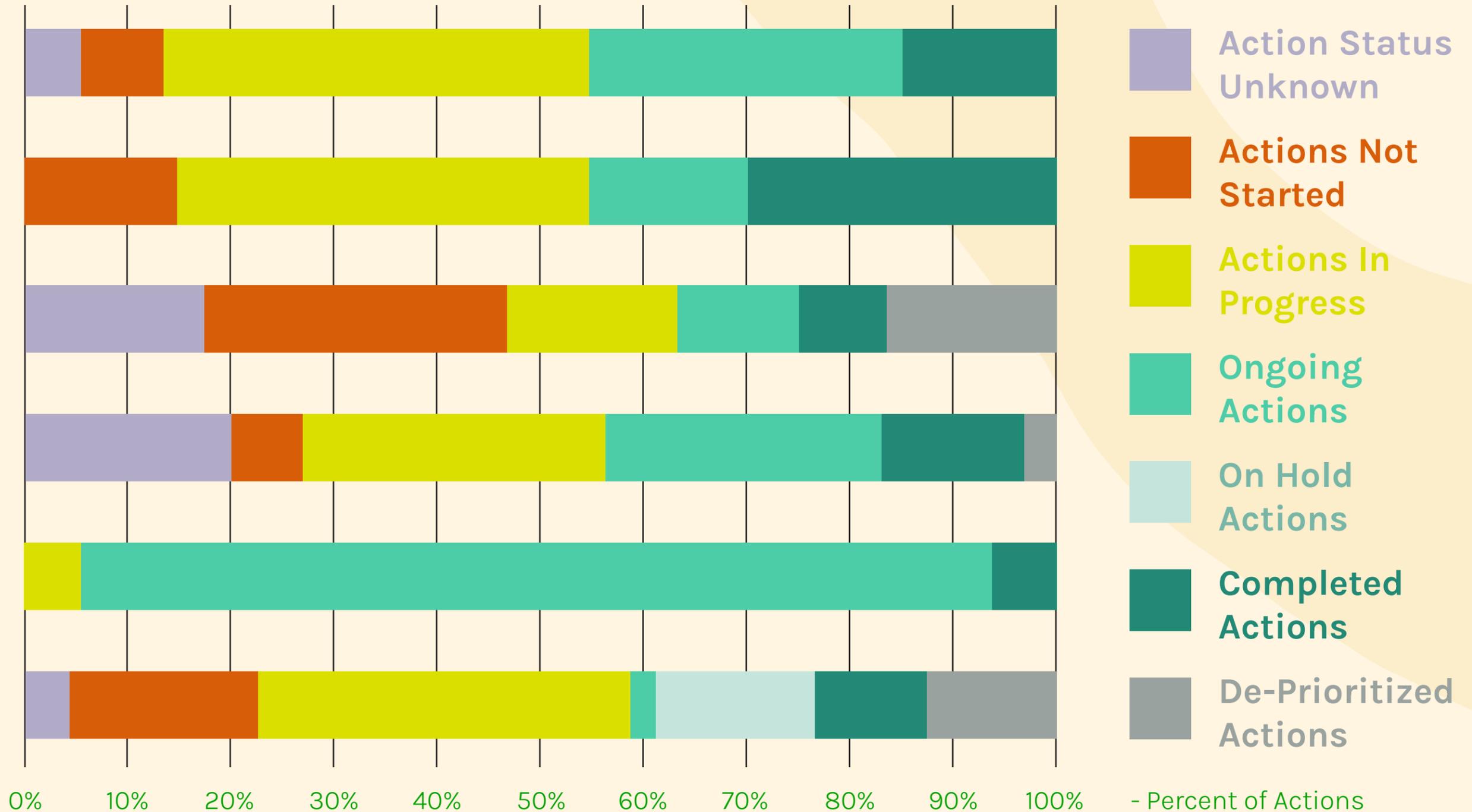
Actions COMPLETED, ONGOING, or IN PROGRESS!



Goal #6: **21/42**

Actions COMPLETED, ONGOING, or IN PROGRESS!

2019 - 2026 OSRP IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS



OSRP PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS



OSRP Goal 6 / Action 13: Install a shade structure over the bocce court; renovate basketball court and skate park at Clemente Park.*

*This park is scheduled to undergo a \$1.8 million renovation in 2025! Further community engagement revealed a desire for better event space over upgrades to the skate park. The skate park and one basketball court will be removed to make space to support festivals and events in the park. The renovated park will include one upgraded basketball court, 8 new volleyball courts, and a new universally accessible playground.

OSRP PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS



OSRP Goal 6 / Action 11: Install a shade structure at Armory Park.*

*Further exploration of this OSRP Action determined that a splash pad and tree planting would be a more effective investment in cooling than installing a shade structure. The splash pad includes a rain garden to help sustainably manage water runoff and 13 new shade trees planted.

OSRP PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS



OSRP Goal 6 / Action 17: Construct Phase II of the South Common Master Plan.*

*The City has surpassed this action and completed phase 3 as well! A fourth phase is currently underway to explore introduction of a dog park at South Common. The before and after above shows the stage and rain garden that was constructed as part of phase 3. (The after photo was taken before the planting had a chance to grow in).

OSRP PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS



OSRP Goal 6 / Action 24: Continue efforts to increase green space and improve accessibility at JFK Civic Center Plaza.*

*The crumbling steps of the JFK Civic Center building were replaced with built-in planters featuring native pollinator-friendly plant species. A temporary ADA-accessible ramp is scheduled for installation in 2025. A permanent ramp requires further study due to the presence of a tunnel discovered underneath the plaza during surveying.

BUILDING ON **LOWELL** FORWARD

The City's Comprehensive Master Plan, *Lowell Forward*, was completed in 2024 following an extensive 18-month community engagement process.

The updated OSRP will adopt the seven open space goals identified in *Lowell Forward* as the framework for the 7-Year Action Plan. Through further community engagement, the OSRP will identify and prioritize specific actions to advance these goals.



“One of my great wishes for public space in Lowell is that it belongs to everyone, but that each person feels like it’s something that’s theirs, like an extension of their backyard.”
- Lowell Forward, page 150

LOWELL FORWARD OPEN SPACE GOALS

Goal 1: Strengthen Social Resiliency, Equity, Access, and Maintenance to, and of, Parks, Open Spaces, and Trails.



Goal 1.1: Equitably invest in and maintain open space facilities including recreational facilities, open spaces, and trails in alignment with OSRP priorities, and to ensure inclusivity and accessibility for all ages and abilities.



Goal 1.2: Improve physical access to parks and outdoor programs by improving pedestrian and bicyclist infrastructure along key routes.



Goal 1.3: Improve equitable communication about parks and outdoor programs by reducing barriers to participation. Examples include: developing a multilingual wayfinding strategy and a language access center.



Goal 1.4: Prepare an open space master plan for the Pawtucket Canal and surrounding industrial/non-residential lands (from Pawtucket Street at the Merrimack River to the Thorndike Street Bridge), considering both sides of the Pawtucket Canal.

LOWELL FORWARD OPEN SPACE GOALS

Goal 2: Strengthen Climate Resilience and Sustainability in Parks, Open Spaces, and Trails.



Goal 2.1: Plant trees along priority corridors and within urban heat islands in alignment with the City's Urban Forestry Plan.



Goal 2.2: Reduce impervious surfaces and install green infrastructure, where applicable, to manage stormwater runoff and mitigate flooding, and create a maintenance plan.



Goal 2.3: Initiate a public stormwater management awareness and education campaign, in partnership with universities and nonprofits, to inform businesses and residents about effects of stormwater pollution on Lowell's waterways and ways in which they can help reduce stormwater runoff.

HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?



REACH OUT TO SIGN UP
FOR PROJECT UPDATES
VIA THE OSRP E-MAIL
NEWSLETTER!



Email Hotline:
openspace@lowellma.gov



Phone Hotline:
978-674-4225



Digital Engagement Station:
<https://tinyurl.com/37a2y2n9>



Mobile Engagement Station:
Coming Soon to a Park Near You!

DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT STATION

CITY of LOWELL

GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS BUSINESS HOW DO I... Search...

Urban Forest Initiative
Rain Garden Initiative
Pollinator Garden Initiative

DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT STATION

LOVELL FORWARD

Get Involved!

- **BECOME A PARK CHAMPION**
volunteer opportunities coming soon!
- **TAKE THE DEEP DIVE SURVEY**
link coming soon!

TAKE THE QUICK SURVEY:

What park improvements should the City prioritize in the next ten years?

- Safety and Lighting
- Accessibility and Inclusivity
- Climate Resilience and Education
- Arts and Cultural Programming
- Sports and Recreational Programming

[Vote](#)

[See all available polls](#)

Get In Touch!

Email Hotline:
openspace@lowellma.gov

Phone Hotline:
Coming Soon!

Calendar of Events

Upcoming Events:
More events coming soon!

Event:	Location:	Date:	Time:
MRWCP Community Conversation	Saint Anne's Episcopal Church, Edson Hall (8 Kirk Street)	Tuesday, February 4, 2025	6:30 pm - 8:00 pm

DOWNLOADS:

[2025 CALENDAR OF EVENTS JUNE](#)

At the Digital Engagement Station you will find ways to **get involved** like taking a survey or volunteering to collect park data, kid-friendly downloads like the OSRP Coloring Book and OSRP Park Libs, ways to **get in touch** with the planning team, upcoming community engagement **events**, and a **dashboard** where engagement results will be reported back in infographic form.

MOBILE ENGAGEMENT STATION



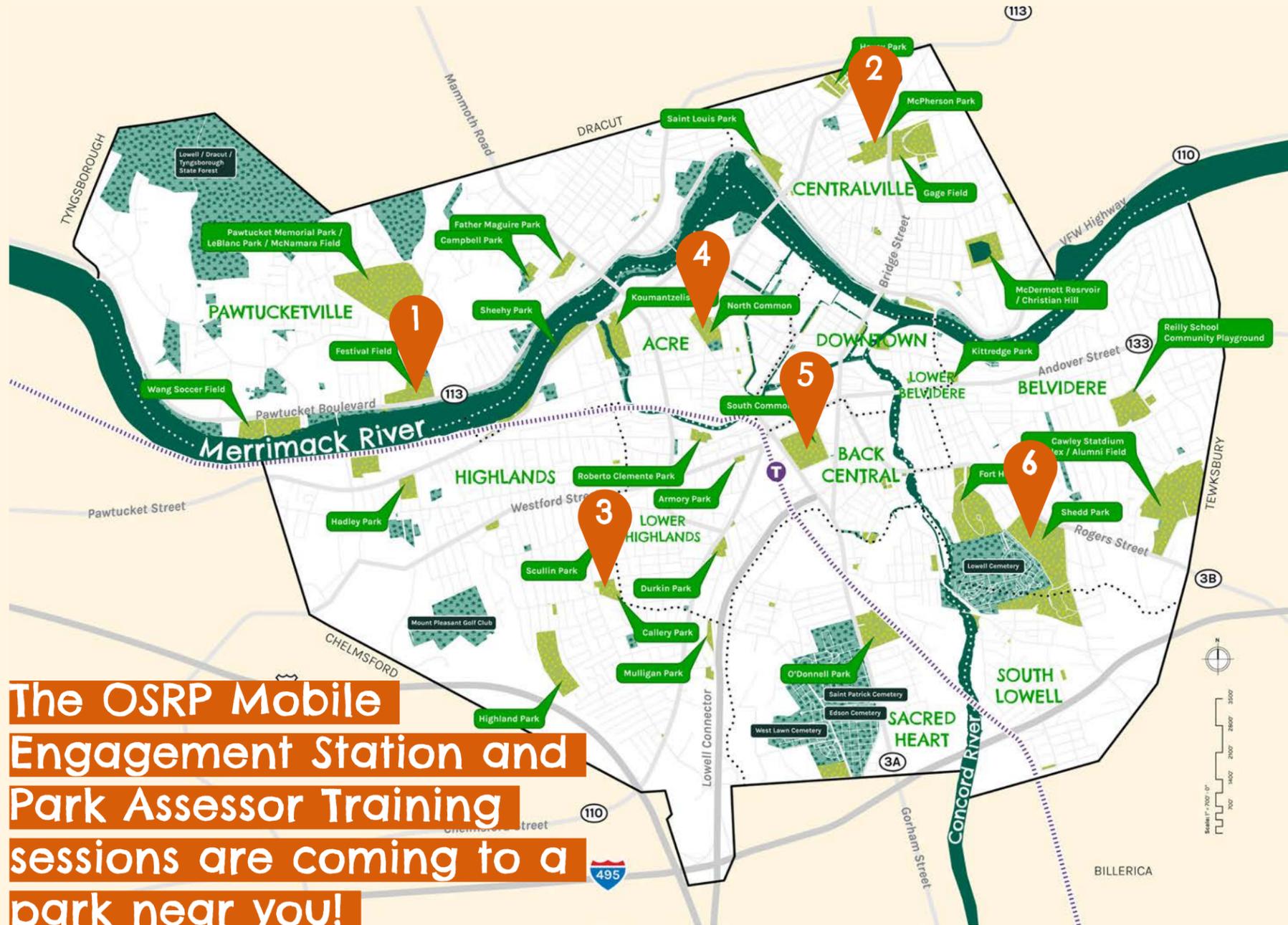
The Mobile Engagement Station features informational and interactive boards, a participatory budgeting activity, and physical versions of the activities offered at the digital engagement station including the **Deep Dive Survey**, the **OSRP Coloring Book**, and **OSRP Park Libs**. All materials will be translated in Spanish, Portuguese, and Khmer.

PARK CHAMPIONS WANTED!



Wherever the mobile engagement station goes, DPD will also be conducting **Park Assessor Training sessions!** At these sessions you will learn how to use the Park Assessment Tool to collect data on your local park/s to help the City prioritize the most critical park improvement projects. We need as many volunteers as we can get to collect data on the City's 80+ public parks!

LOWELL 2025 PARK COUNT TOUR

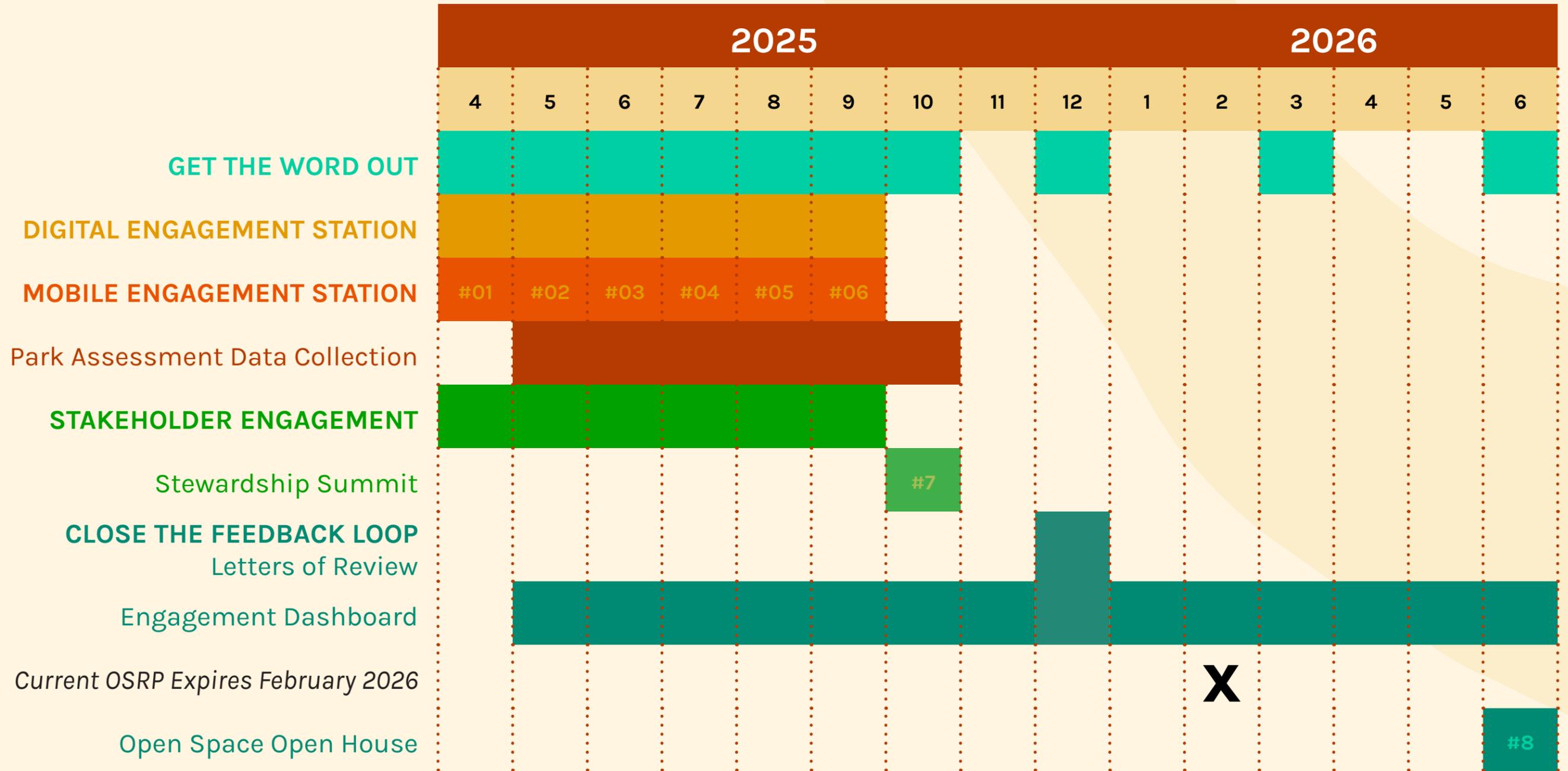


The OSRP Mobile Engagement Station and Park Assessor Training sessions are coming to a park near you!

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:

- 1 **APRIL** Pawtucketville Festival Field
- 2 **MAY** Centralville: McPherson Park
- 3 **JUNE** Highlands + Lower Highlands: Callery Park
- 4 **JULY** Acre + Downtown: North Common
- 5 **AUGUST** Back Central + Sacred Heart: South Common
- 6 **SEPTEMBER** Belvidere + Lower Belvidere + South Lowell: Shedd Park

OSRP PROJECT TIMELINE



OSRP PROJECT BUDGET

Translation & Interpretation Services

Engagement Materials

Consultant Services (Mapping; Plan Writing)

Total OSRP Project Budget

\$150,000

This project is funded through City of Lowell Capital Funds.

