OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN

I. INTRODUCTION

This component of the Skaneateles Master Plan is concerned with an appraisal of recreation and open space needs and potential in the Town and Village. A community richly endowed with a variety of natural features and open space opportunities must include this aspect of community development in its long-range planning program. Skaneateles is such a community.

In the later half of the twentieth century recreation has become one of the more important activities of life, ranking quite high on the list of things to which people are willing to devote time, energy and resources. Attendance at state, regional and local parks is at record highs. The provision of a variety of recreation opportunities to satisfy all age groups has clearly become one of the major responsibilities of government along with roads, utilities, safety, solid waste management and other services.

In addition to the more traditional and active recreation pursuits, preservation of natural resources and open space is also a primary objective of recreation planning. Growing population, expanding urban areas, increased mobility, park use, and health consciousness, when added to the current emphasis on outdoor recreation, have sharply focused attention on the need to preserve prime open areas for the future use and enjoyment of generations to come.

With its lake, hills, streams and parks Skaneateles appears to provide much in the way of recreation and open space. It can be argued that the wealth of natural resources with which Skaneateles has been blessed carries with it a major responsibility to make wise use of these resources and preserve and protect them for the future. In order to meet this responsibility effectively, a specific plan of action that identifies both need and opportunity is necessary.

Another important reason to emphasize this element of the overall Master Plan is related to the continuous infilling and outward expansion of the Skaneateles urbanized area. The tendency to consider every available vacant piece of land as potentially developable makes it important to take certain steps that will preempt some of the more suitable natural areas for public recreation purposes.

This open space and recreation plan contains an appraisal of facilities and programs in the Skaneateles communities. In addition to a consideration of general recreation and open space issues, special emphasis has been given to the unique recreational potential of Skaneateles Lake and its outlet. Recommendations and priority for action are presented in the final section of the report.

II. EXISTING FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS

The largest dry-land public recreation area in Skaneateles, and the center of recreation activities in the community, is C.M. Austin Park, located on the Village's northern boundary immediately west of the school campus. This large, Village owned park of approximately 50 acres contains a variety of indoor and outdoor recreation facilities including a covered skating arena as shown in Table I on page 3.

Four public parks enhance the lakeshore in the Village: Clift Park and adjoining Shotwell Park are west of the outlet and, F. Austin and Thayer Park abut at the north east end of the lake. These parks are heavily used in the warm weather months by local residents and visitors alike. Clift Park offers one of the few opportunities for controlled swimming in Skaneateles Lake. It is also used for band concerts, passive recreation and as the departure point for dinner boats. Summertime activity in this area is intense and both park and adjacent Genesee Street are often congested as a result. Because of their proximity to the Village Center, both Clift and Thayer Parks are extremely important urban open spaces. They provide both character and form to this end of the lake.

In the Town there are two small neighborhood type parks, one in Mandana and one in Skaneateles Falls. These are each approximately 2 acres in area and provide limited recreation opportunities for use by the surrounding neighborhood. Skaneateles Country Club is a private golf course located in the Town on the west side of the lake. This magnificent site has more water frontage than any public area along the lakeshore but its use is restricted. A nine-hole public golf course, called Pearl Lakes, is being developed on Old Seneca Turnpike.

TABLE 1: EXISTING RECREATION FACILITIES - SKANEATELES 1993

RECREATION FACILITY	AUSTIN PARK	SKANEATELES FALLS	SKANEATELE CENTRAL SCHOOL	s Mandana	CLIFT PARK
Playground	ı	.1 -	2		
softball Field/ Little League	4	. 1		•	
Baseball Field/ Major League	1 "		1		
Soccer Field	2		3		
Tennis Court Basketball Court/	4		2	···	
Outdoor Sand Volleyball	4 2	. 1	. 1		•
Horseshoe Pit Ice Skating Rink	4 1		_		*
Football Field Track Swimming	11		1		1
Boat Launch				1	

Source: Matthew Major, Recreation Director Town of Skaneateles, August 1993

Even though the lake is Skaneateles's most dramatic and exciting natural feature, there has not, as yet, been any concentrated marina activity. There is, however, constant and growing pressure for more opportunity to get to the Lake and to use it for swimming, boating and fishing. Response to this pressure has been limited, due in part to the cost of lakeshore land and to the steepness of the shore in many locations making vehicular access difficult and expensive.

A number of small public and private facilities provide limited access to the water. The Town maintains a public boat launch ramp next to a small private marina on the west shore in the hamlet of Mandana. Also on the west shore, located about two miles south of the Village, New York State has constructed a heavily-used launching facility for smaller boats and the Skaneateles Country Club allows members to moor boats on a limited basis. Farther down the east side of the lake, Jones Beach is the location of the Skaneateles Sailing Club.

Designed to accommodate wheelchair-bound persons as well as walkers and joggers

To round out the inventory of existing outdoor recreation and open space facilities in Skaneateles, several other items should be listed: there is a private, regulation polo field located on Andrews Road with weekly matches in the summer; there are approximately 80 acres of wetland between East Street and Highland Avenue that presently serves as a games preserve; the Skaneateles Rod and Gun Club owns approximately 25 acres on Jewett Road. There is an area on Benson Road which is part of Dutch Hollow, a public golf course located mainly in the Town of Owasco; and, the Town owns several miles of right-of-way in the Skaneateles Creek valley, formerly owned by the railroad and now used as a nature trail as registered with the National "Rails to Trails" program.

In addition to the outdoor recreation areas and open space facilities listed above, and shown on Map 1, there are the extensive activities and facilities of the Skaneateles Central School District. The school campus occupies a large site in the northeast quadrant of the Village. Besides the four buildings located on this parcel there are athletic fields, tennis courts, a tract and nicely landscaped grounds. Programs and facilities provided by the school district are listed on Table 2.

TABLE 2: SKANEATELES CENTRAL SCHOOL ATHLETIC PROGRAMS & LOCATIONS

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Source: Mr. Timothy Chiavara, Assistant Principal Skaneateles High School October 1993 The Skaneateles Recreation Department is supported by both the Town and the Village. Operation of the department is a Town function and there are a variety of summer and winter programs provided for local residents of all ages. There is no lack of opportunity for those interested in more structured recreation activities and Town and Village officials have been able to find in this important public service a solid area for cooperative effort. Table 3 illustrates programs that are, or have been, available to the community in 1993.

TABLE 3: RECREATION PROGRAMS, - TOWN OF SKANEATELES, 1993

LOCATION

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PROGRAM	AUSTIN PARK	skaneateles Falls	N.Y. YHCA	CENTRAL SCHOOL	CLIFT
Baseball Clinic	T.M.C.	T. 1277779	, ARCA	х	PARK
Adult Winter Basketball	=	,		×	
Basketball Clinic	٠,	ě		X	•
Boys Basketball	×			*	•
Bill Delaney Basketball	×		•		
Girls Basketball	×				
Dog Obedience	×	•			
Babe Ruth Baseball	x			x	
Little League Baseball	×	•		x	
Golf Lessons	×				
CPR Class	x			×	
Horseshoes	×				
Karate	х	•		x	
Boys Lacrosse Camp		•		x	
Girls Lacrosse Camp				x	
Kids Playground	×				
Running Camp				ж	
Youth Summer Soccer				x	
Youth Fall Soccer	. **				
Mens Slow-Pitch Softball	x	:			
Learn-to-Swim			x		
Open Gym				•	×
Public Swimming	•				×
Tennis Lessons	x				
Beach Volleyball	X				
Adult Winter Volley					×
Youth/Adult Hockey	ж.				
Youth/Adult Figure Skatin	g x				
Broom Ball	×				
Public Ice Skating	x	,			

Source: Matthew Major, Recreation Director
Town of Skaneateles, August 1993

III. ASSESSMENT OF NEED

As a general rule towns and villages might expect to provide a community park and/or playground, several neighborhood parks and a number of so call "tot-lots." In addition, a recreation plan should incorporate school playgrounds and, when such features are available, focal points, lineal connections such as trails, and conservation areas. These outdoor areas would normally be supplemented by a variety of indoor recreation facilities.

STANDARDS. Criteria established by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) are often used to assess, in quantitative terms, the adequacy of open space and recreation facilities (See Table 4). Some measurement of acreage by type of facility per increment of population is considered to be a logical determinant of recreation need. Although these standards are widely accepted in the industry as guidelines for determining minimal recreation needs in today's life style, situations often exist that require wide variation of the guidelines. Local attitudes, existing development patterns, population characteristics, availability of land, unique natural resources, unusual opportunities or threats, and fiscal resources are among the considerations that affect decisions about an area's recreation system and plans. Many of these modifiers exist in the Skaneateles area.

TABLE 4: NATIONAL RECREATION AND PARK ASSOCIATION STANDARDS*

Type	Acres per 1,000 People	Size <u>Range</u>	Characteristics
Playlot (Tot Lot)	Not Applicable	to	Convenient walking distance for residents from area served. Provides simple facilities to be used by small children.
Neighborhood Park	2.5	2 to 5 acres	Located 1/2 mile or less from the homes of most users. Limited equipment with informal layout.
Community or District	5 to 10	20 to acres	Provides varied recreation opportunities for all age groups in all seasons. Has space for team sports, picnicking, parking, and possibly swimming. Location within 15 to 20 minute drive from most patrons.

^{*}NRPA standards modified to reflect the Skaneateles community.

Because local conditions vary widely from community to community, there are no established standards for enhancement of special features such as focal points (Clift and Thayer Parks, for example), lineal connections (such as Skaneateles Creek) and conservation areas (such as the Gulley Road and Highland Avenue wetlands). The development of such features is related more to the value placed on them by the local community than on a specific identified need.

POPULATIONS PROJECTIONS. Population figures for the Town and Village over the past two decades indicate a dramatic change from the growth period of the 50's and 60's. Between 1970 and 1990 the Village's population declined by almost 11 percent and the Town, excluding the Village, increased by less than one percent. Census figures also show that age characteristics of the resident population in Skaneateles are experiencing changes that should be considered in this open space and recreation plan. The population is getting older, especially in the Village, and the number of young people, as a percentage of the total population, is declining substantially. Between 1970 and 1990 there was a 33 percent decline in the number of people under 19 years of age. The 55-and-older age category experienced a 21 percent increase during the same time period and the 19 to 54 year olds increased by 11 percent.

Given these trends, and taking into account the various development proposals currently under consideration in the Skaneateles communities, it is reasonable to assume that there will be modest growth of the resident population over the next ten to fifteen years. In developing and locating future recreation facilities consideration should be given to the needs and limitations of an aging population, as well as to the increasing demand for recreational opportunities by older citizens.

DEFICIENCIES. In terms of NRPA standards, Skaneateles provides a reasonably good array of recreation facilities and programs. Austin Park satisfies current and projected needs for a large community park for both Town and Village. In short supply, however, are the small, strategically located, passive neighborhood parks or play lots for people who live in the higher density residential neighborhoods.

Also in seriously short supply are park and recreation facilities related to the lake. This deficiency cannot be measured by any established standards but is based on the premise that a unique public water body should be made broadly available for use and enjoyment by the entire community. Opportunities to provide lake-related recreation areas are limited. Ideally, lakeside sites should be located relatively close to the greatest concentrations of population and be easily accessible to both pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

While no standards or specific "community needs" have been identified supporting the preservation of unique natural open space areas and special features such as lineal parks and trails, it is clear that good opportunities for such facilities can be found in Skaneateles. Large wetlands and related critical environmental features, as well as Skaneateles Creek, represent excellent targets for open space preservation or limited development.

IV. PLANNING POLICY

The policy determination for open space and recreation, as set forth in this strategic plan, will be incorporated into the overall comprehensive plan for the Town and Village of Skaneateles. Generally, each policy will contain three parts.

- 1. The GOAL a long-range view of what the Town and Village hope to accomplish by following specified course of action.
- 2. The OBJECTIVE intermediate or short-range targets that must be reached if the goal is to be achieved.
- 3. The ACTIONS specific activities that must be undertaken in a timely manner in order to satisfy the objectives.

In the planning process, it is important for public officials to take a firm stand on basic planning issues such as open space and recreation. It is also essential to review policy statements periodically with the intent of making appropriate adjustments as conditions and attitudes change.

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION POLICY

GOAL: The establishment of an integrated open space and recreation system that protects critical environmental features, capitalizes on unique natural assets with recreation potential and provides a wide variety of active and passive recreation opportunities for all age groups.

OBJECTIVES:

- To meet the needs of the existing and expected resident population for community and neighborhood parks and recreation facilities.
- 2. To continue to work cooperatively to improve existing recreation facilities and support recreation programs provided for local residents.
- 3. To enhance public access to Skaneateles Lake for such activities as picnicking, fishing and boating in ways that will minimize future degradation of the lake.
- 4. To establish an interconnecting system of pedestrian and bicycle trails that incorporate natural features such as Skaneateles Creek, segments of the lake shore, stream corridors and ridge lines.
- 5. To make maximum use of Federal and State recreation programs and grants to supplement funding from local sources.

ACTIONS:

- Review the policies and recommendations set forth in the 1974
 General Plan and update and modify as necessary.
- 2. Identify areas of concentrated development that would warrant some type of neighborhood park or tot-lot if non exists.
- 3. Consider ways to increase public access to Skaneateles Lake and make this a high priority activity for funding.
- 4. Review existing study of the Skaneateles Creek lineal park and update as appropriate (See Appendix I of this report).
- 5. Investigate the possibility of creating a trail that follows the ridge line of Skaneateles Lake watershed and is integrated with the Finger Lakes Trail.
- 6. Develop a system of footpaths and bike ways that provide access to major recreation and open space features in Skaneateles.
- 7. Ensure a regular review of recreation programs sponsored by the Town, Village and School District to ensure that the needs of all age groups are addressed.
- 8. Work to enhance the recreation facilities in Austin Park as the need arises and funds become available.
- 9. Investigate the feasibility and desirability of protecting ecologically sensitive areas and rehabilitating depleted or defunct sites for recreation and open space purposes.
- 10. Modify existing land use and development regulations as necessary to promote environmental protection and the provision of recreation areas and facilities.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Three general categories of recommendations are appropriate in this Open Space and Recreation Plan:

- 1. Those aimed at providing existing and projected residents with a variety of recreation facilities and programs.
- 2. Those related to the preservation or conservation of sensitive environmental resources; and,
- 3. Those made in response to the unique natural setting of the Skaneateles area.

Recommendations listed below will be included as part of the overall Comprehensive Plan for the Village and Town.

Category 1.

1. To provide more localized recreation facilities for existing and expected residents in Skaneateles, one small neighborhood-type park is proposed and shown on the map. Such a park should be located and designed to serve many of the daily recreation needs of families living in the surrounding area. This type of park is generally minimally furnished but should reflect the needs and wishes of the neighborhood it serves.

Accessibility is a major consideration and, ideally, a neighborhood park should be within walking distance from most of their service area. It should provide at least a cleared open space for informal play but may also include a small apparatus area for children, picnic tables and small a parking space.

Neighborhood parks are usually the responsibility of the municipality but can also be provided by a private developer or homeowners' association. Land for this type of facility can sometimes be obtained through clustering or the open space provision of the subdivision regulations.

The proposed neighborhood park is located in the Town somewhere in the general vicinity of Mottville. The precise location has not been determined and is less important than is the principle of accessibility to the surrounding neighborhood. The park in Skaneateles Falls should be evaluated for possible additional seating and play equipment.

2. Several additional small recreation areas are included in the special study of Skaneateles Creek (see Appendix). While these have been considered Category 3 facilities for purposes of this plan, they could also be Category 1 proposals since they are, for the most part, located in developing areas of the Town. Eventually, it is hoped that the proposed Creekwalk would serve as a safe pedestrian/cyclist linkage between Mottville and Skaneateles Falls.

Category 2.

1. In the northeastern part of the Town of Skaneateles it is proposed that consideration be given to the creation of two large county, community or private recreation/natural resource areas. One of these spans Gully Road and includes wetlands and interesting natural features (steep slopes, wooded areas and wetlands) that could be incorporated into a multi-purpose wildlife and conservation area. The second area is long-range in nature and involves the reclamation of stone quarry land

south of Route 321. As the gravel resource is depleted, this area should be reclaimed and put to an appropriate community use which could include a variety of attractive recreation opportunities.

- 2. The attractive and unusual drainageway connecting the two areas described above marks the westernmost extent of the Nine Mile Creek watershed. It contains the Mud Lake wetland, extensive additional wetland areas stretching almost four miles across the Town and a falls. This entire stretch is proposed as a conservation area. Development of this environmentally sensitive area should not be considered. Purchase of development rights or use easements, or extensive zoning restrictions should be employed to preserve the natural state of this gully and its wetlands.
- 3. Less physically dramatic, but none the less important as a natural resource, in the large wetland between Highland Avenue and East Street which provides sanctuary for deer, birds, and other wildlife. This wetland spans a number of separate parcels and its degradation is unlikely. Nevertheless, it is recommended that the area be established as a conservation area with easements being obtained from the multiple owners to preserve its future.
- 4. Also to be conserved is the Town's land including wetlands, on Route 20 at the junction of Route 175. This 80 acre parcel could easily accommodate a number of ball fields, which are in increasingly great demand in the community by youngsters and adults.

Category 3.

1. If Skaneateles is to realize optimum recreational value of its lake, the basic elements of a lakeshore plan must be established and implemented before all opportunities for public ownership disappear. It is essential to identify those exceptional areas and features that have high recreation and open space potential, to gain control of them now and to preserve them as an inheritance for future generations.

Several lakeside park areas are proposed as part of this Open Space and Recreation Plan. The highest priority is placed on the 90 acre parcel located on the west side of the lake, just south of the Skaneateles Country Club. This area, known locally as Mile Point and Sandy Beach, is approximately 1 1/2 miles south of the Village center. The parcel contains farm land, wetland areas, drainage ways, woods and an almost level beach area with over 3,600 feet of shoreline. The land has been used primarily for agricultural purposes and thus preserved from development. As much of this site as possible should be secured for public recreation purposes including

picnicking, boating and fishing. It could also provide a rest area and scenic look-out for cyclist and hikers of the proposed ridge-line trail.

- 2. The marvelous attraction of the lake has tended to obscure another natural asset that offers great and varied recreation potential—the lake's outlet, Skaneateles Creek. This resource, stretching northward about 5 miles from the lake to the Town of Jordan, has been the focus of a special study, included in this Open Space and Recreation Plan as Appendix I.
- 3. From many points along the ridgeline of the Skaneateles Lake watershed dramatic views and vistas into the valley and over the lake can be had. Obviously, the ridgeline traverses a large number of individual properties that are used for a variety of purposes. Never the less, the opportunity to develop a Ridgeline Trail should not be missed and it is recommended that the feasibility of such a trail be studied at this time. Such a study would identify the various ridge parcels that would be involved, the current use of such parcels and an evaluation of the likelihood that trail easement could be obtained. Opportunities to connect a Ridgeline Trail to the Finger Lakes Trail system and to the local bikeway and pedestrian paths should be included in this study.

APPENDIX I

SKANEATELES CREEK

A significant natural resource with recreation potential that has been largely unexploited to date is the lake's outlet, known as Skaneateles Creek. Water flowing northward out of Skaneateles Lake eventually reaches the Seneca River and then continues into Lake Ontario. About 5 miles of this journey fall within the boundaries of the Town and Village of Skaneateles. For most of this length there is little evidence of the creek's presence, and almost no attempt to use it as a feature of the landscape, although it is well-known and well-fished by local anglers.

While limitations of this study made it impossible to do a complete assessment of the recreation and open space potential of the creek, it has been examined in some detail in an effort to identify in a general way the opportunities that may be present. A number of possibilities have come from this study and these are shown on Map 1.

Water flow in the creek in August when the evaluation was made, was sufficient to support a reasonable width and depth. The City of Syracuse is required to maintain minimal flow volumes and, if this minimum was present in August, it would appear that this is sufficient to support a reasonably active stream. There are some

areas along the 5 mile length, in fact, where activity of the water in terms of velocity and agitation produce an exciting atmosphere; on Map 1 these are identified simply as "good stretches." It should be physically possible and relatively simple to achieve an almost continuous pedestrian connection, or footpath, from West Elizabeth Street in the Village to Long Bridge in the Town of Skaneateles. There are a number of points where access to such a lineal strip could be achieved; these are also shown on the three sections of Map 1.

A large part of this lineal park has already been achieved by making use of the right-of-way of the Short Line railroad, now abandoned south of Long Bridge. This roadbed makes an ideal pedestrian connection between the Old Seneca Turnpike and Crow Hill Road in the Mottville area. The railroad crosses the creek in three spots on trestles that are in reasonably good condition and also provides easy access to other points of interest along the way.

One such feature is located at approximately the 1 3/4 mile point where the crumbling remains of an old dam can be seen. It appears that this dam might have been used at one time as a source of waterpower. The creek is very picturesque at this point.

Just south of Mottville is another interesting area where steep shale banks give a sense of enclosure to the stream. The creek splits in this area forming an island and providing an opportunity for a natural conservation site.

The creek and its banks are already quite attractive in some locations in the Long Bridge area. This appears to be the end of the active part of the railroad line and it is also the point where the creek begins to meander more as it flows northward. Accessibility becomes a problem and the more intensive industrial land use in this general area detracts somewhat from the amenity that the creek could provide. In fact, the creek appears to be an important part of the industrial process for P & S Textiles and Welch-Allyn in the Skaneateles Falls area.

While it does not seem likely that the lineal park concept could be maintained north of Long Bridge it might be possible to develop some nodes of recreation activity, such as fishing and picnicking, focused on the creek in the Marysville-Skaneateles Falls area. Leadership in such an effort might well come from the industries and large employers which have located there.

Special mention should be made of the one mile of Skaneateles creek that lies within the Village limits. It is obvious that this stretch offers many untapped opportunities for a lovely natural amenity in the midst of an urban environment. It is also clear that the creek has played virtually no part in the development that has occurred to date.

This is particularly noticeable along that part of the creek between Genesee Street and Kelley Street. Development along Fennell Street has completely ignored the presence of the creek and, in fact, the stream has become a repository for old tires, bottles, cans, and miscellaneous junk and trash. Paved parking areas push practically to the waters edge; there is no reason why anyone should want to get near the creek or even be aware of its presence. That this should happen to an area that could be one of the most attractive natural spots in the Village is a waste that should be corrected immediately.

The area immediately north of the Genesee Street bridge is also one of great potential. This is the spot where the Livingston Parmalee Park provides benches and fishing access. A strong sense of enclosure and urban scale is provided by the rear walls of the buildings on the east side. On the west side the creek's bank is landscaped in a fáshion, but not maintained. With a little effort this area could be a very positive visual feature in the Village Center. The paved alleyway should be cleaned up and provided with decorative potted trees, umbrella tables and benches. Care should be taken to maintain the grass and shrubs on the west bank.

In the newly developing residential area north of West Elizabeth Street there is another great opportunity for use of Skaneateles Creek that should not be missed. This entire area might well become one of the most attractive residential neighborhoods in the community. The creek should become a major part of the overall recreation system for this area and the open space requirements of the subdivision regulations should be rigidly enforced as development occurs.

Suggested also is a self-directed fitness path to be located somewhere along the creekwalk. This would include distance markers and some simple training equipment such as chinning-bars, balance beams, stretching platforms, etc.

The entire creekwalk should be marked with historic and ecologic signs to help educate citizens about past industries and activities along the creek and about the fragile creek's environment.

A general clean-up operation all along Skaneateles Creek is needed. This could well become a major challenge for some local civic group. The results will not be worth the effort, however, until new awareness of the potential value of this natural feature can be instilled in Skaneateles residents. The purpose of this part of the General Plan study is to point up the opportunities that have been missed and to set the stage for a change of attitude that will bring this new awareness about.







