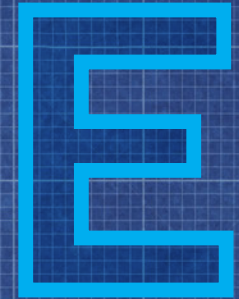


CHAPTER V



THE BLUEPRINT BINGHAMTON MINI-PLAN ON
ENVIRONMENT & OPEN SPACE

A PLAN FOR PRESERVATION AND PLAY

BLUEPRINT
BINGHAMTON

ENVIRONMENT & OPEN SPACE A PLAN FOR PRESERVATION AND PLAY

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The environment & open space chapter or **BLUEPRINT BINGHAMTON MINI-PLAN ON ENVIRONMENT & OPEN SPACE** focuses on the City's natural landscapes - rivers, riparian edges, and park spaces - as well as opportunities in daily life for Binghamton's citizens to contribute to a healthier City, region, and planet by reducing waste output, increasing the urban forest and flora, and strengthening the connection between people and the parks, playgrounds, rivers, and trails that welcome healthy play so long as they remain clean and safe spaces.



Confluence Park

EXISTING CONDITIONS

PARKS & OPEN SPACE

From its founding at the confluence of two rivers, and its subsequent growth along the river banks and in the surrounding valley, nature very much shapes the City of Binghamton. Along with the natural surroundings, man-made parks are the centerpieces of City neighborhoods, affording space for rest and relaxation, play and recreation. Wealthy residents of years past such as Erastus Ross and George F. Johnson were strategic and generous in the creation of new park space and unique amenities that present generations still enjoy at Ross Park and Recreation Park. Johnson gifted six carousels to the City's park system, which per his instructions, still spin from Memorial Day through Labor Day, free of charge or for an admission of "one piece of litter." The City's tradition of treasuring these common open spaces has continued over time, with City-sponsored grassroots campaigns such as the "Design Your Own Park" program and the ongoing push for more waterfront trails and access.

The Binghamton Parks and Recreation Department maintains 33 separate parks throughout the City. The parks range from large formal parks such as Recreation Park on the West Side to smaller temporary green spaces atop reclaimed City-owned vacant land such as Green Man Green Space at the corner of Court and State Streets.

DESTINATION PARKS

The City's major parks that draw residents from across the City and throughout the larger region include:

ROSS PARK: Located on the South Side and at the edge of the City, Ross Park hosts a wealth of regional attractions such as the historic Binghamton Zoo, The Discovery Center - a hands-on children's museum with a story garden, a carousel, a full playground, picnic area, basketball court, ample open green space, and a parking area for visitors.

RECREATION PARK: The West Side's Recreation Park is perhaps the most prominent park in the City, integrated within the neighborhood and offering a range of park and playground amenities. It consists of large, landscaped areas, a pool, athletic fields, a bandstand, and an iconic carousel that dates back to 1925 and was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1992. Recreation Park plays host to numerous citywide events throughout the year.

ELY PARK: Located within the neighborhood that bears its name, Ely Park is north of the First Ward on the slopes of Prospect Mountain. The majority of the Park is occupied by the City-owned municipal golf course, as well as large wooded tracts of land. The Park's name derives from S. Mills Ely, a local grocer and manufacturing

developer who donated his summer home on Mount Prospect to the City in 1907 for use as a park.

OTSININGO COUNTY PARK: Situated on the western bank of the Chenango River, just north of the City boundary along the I-81 / Front Street corridor lays Otsiningo Park. With a combination of bike paths, wooded areas, picnic and athletic areas, water features, community gardens, and riverfront park space, this County park has much to offer everyone and is a popular destination for City residents.

CONFLUENCE PARK: Located at the confluence of the Susquehanna and Chenango Rivers, Confluence Park provides an idyllic landscape from which to view the waterways and nearby bridges. It also serves as the Downtown termination of the Binghamton Riverwalk, a trail that, at present, extends north as far as Cheri A. Lindsey Memorial Park and connects from Confluence Park to the South Side via the South Washington Street pedestrian bridge.

CHERI A. LINDSEY MEMORIAL PARK: Located on the North Side on the eastern bank of the Chenango River and tucked behind Binghamton Plaza, the Cheri A. Lindsey Memorial Park features a recently completed skate park, pool, athletic facilities, playground equipment, and direct access to the waterfront and Riverwalk trail that extends south toward Downtown. The Park marks the starting point of the planned trail extension reaching north along the Chenango River to Otsiningo Park. The fenced dog park known as the Bark Park is a newer addition, built through the Design Your Own Park program and maintained by park users.

NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

Binghamton's smaller parks provide a range of opportunities for passive and active recreation within the City's neighborhoods. The list below highlights a key community park in each of Binghamton's neighborhoods:

COLUMBUS PARK: East of the Downtown urban core, Columbus Park serves as the neighborhood park for the residents of the Downtown area. The majority of the Park accommodates sports fields (a baseball field and basketball court), but the Park also offers playground equipment, with a small public pool, and a landscaped courtyard with a fountain that is no longer operational. Plans exist to demolish the fountain and install a spray pad, which will provide a unique amenity to the City's park system.

WEBSTER STREET PARK: In South Side East, Webster Street Park hosts a playground, pool, and tennis courts within a green space. The Park, which is located across from the City's water plant, has been a maintenance challenge in recent years, suffering from vandalism, most likely due to its location somewhat isolated from eyes on the street.

MACARTHUR PARK: MacArthur Park, damaged during the flooding of 2011, is the main park in South Side West. The park will be rebuilt with the support of funding from FEMA, and will once again serve the neighborhood and the new school being built on site with its playground, pool, track, ball fields, tennis courts, and exercise stations.

FAIRVIEW PARK: Fairview Park on Robinson Street is the main park on the East Side. It hosts a playground, pool, basketball courts, and baseball fields.

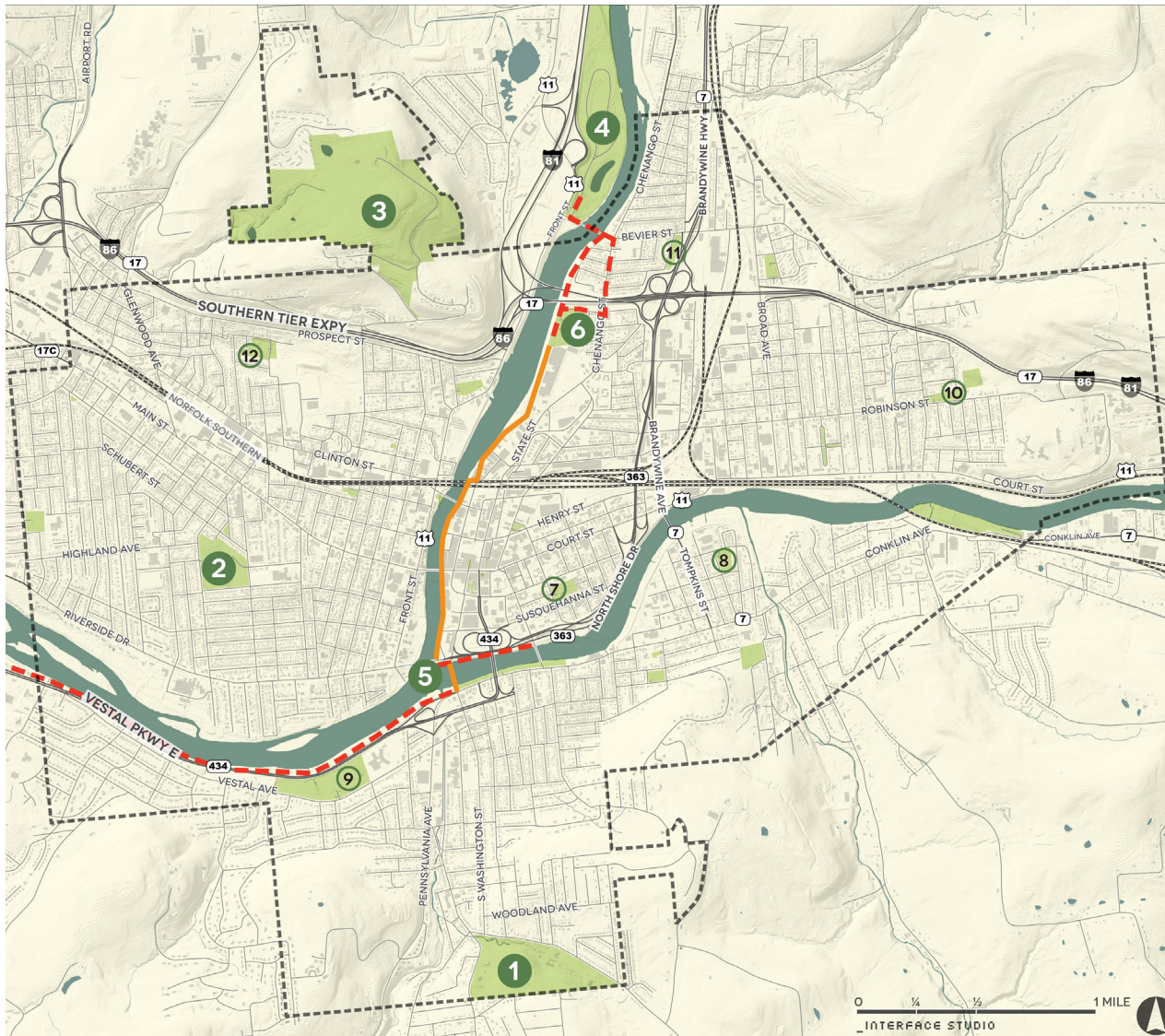
PHELPS PARK: On the North Side, Phelps Park, formerly known as State Street Park but recently rededicated and restored to its original given name, is a 24-acre park on State Street with a playground and swings, a picnic area, basketball courts and ample green space. The citizen-led effort to rename the park reflects renewed interest in this community asset.

VETERANS PARK: Veterans Memorial Park serves as the neighborhood park for the First Ward. The park provides athletic facilities and a playground, but its distinctive pool closed in 2009 due to deterioration and lack of funds for maintenance.



Detail from Walnut Street Park mosaic

OPEN SPACE AND TRAILS



SOURCE: CITY OF BINGHAMTON PLANNING DEPARTMENT
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS & RECREATION

- PARK/OPEN SPACE
- EXISTING TRAIL
- PROPOSED TRAIL

DESTINATION PARKS

- 1** ROSS PARK
- 2** RECREATION PARK
- 3** ELY PARK
- 4** OTSININGO PARK
- 5** CONFLUENCE PARK
- 6** CHERI A. LINDSEY PARK

NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

- 7** COLUMBUS PARK
- 8** WEBSTER STREET PARK
- 9** MACARTHUR PARK
- 10** FAIRVIEW PARK
- 11** PHELPS PARK
- 12** VETERANS PARK

FIGURE 57: Open space and trails - MAP

PROGRAMS

The Department of Parks and Recreation also runs the City's recreation programs, which include baseball and softball for ages five and older, youth tennis, pee wee football, soccer clinics, a youth wrestling club, adult basketball and volleyball, a Summer Fun camp program for children ages three through 10, and the First Ward Senior Center.

Through its pilot Design Your Own Park program, the Departments of Planning, Housing and Community Development and Parks and Recreation collaborated with community groups on a park/program hybrid that resulted in three revitalized community-driven park spaces: Sunflower Park in the First Ward, the Bark Park

at Cheri A. Lindsey Memorial Park, and Walnut Street Park on the West Side, north of Main Street.

The Parks and Recreation Department also manages major events and festivals within the City from the Chris Thater Memorial Bike Race to the Tennis Challenger Tournament. Other events, like the annual Juneteenth Celebration in Columbus Park hosted by the Broome County Urban League and the Broome-Tioga NAACP, the Stand for Children events in Recreation Park hosted by the Broome County Children and Youth Services Council, and National Night Out activities hosted by the Binghamton Police Department Crime Prevention Unit, are

important opportunities to activate the City's park spaces, both day and night. Bringing families and children together for festivals in the parks counteracts negative perceptions about public safety that can create deterrents to park usage. For the City's parks to remain healthy and heavily used community assets, people of all ages must feel safe in these spaces, and as they travel to and from. Law enforcement is critical to the public park system, but the police presence must strike the right balance, invoking feelings of safety and calm when a park is active and feelings of safety and protection when a park is not in use.



Juneteenth Celebration at Columbus Park



Juneteenth Celebration at Columbus Park



Stand For Children Event at Recreation Park

TRAILS

Binghamton's main trail is the Riverwalk along the Chenango River. In its current state, the Riverwalk runs from Cheri A. Lindsey Memorial Park on the North Side south to Confluence Park in Downtown, with the trail varying in character along its course. Near the northern end it is a multi-use trail on the river embankment. As it works its way south it meets Water Street and runs on an extended sidewalk path. The trail continues this way until it reaches the Clinton Street Bridge, where it adopts a more structured form, with signature places such as the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Promenade, the Fair Store Plaza, and the stepped embankment just south of Court Street. The Riverwalk then winds closer to the Chenango River along the backside of existing buildings and finally terminates at the confluence of the two rivers.

Additional trails in existing parks such as Otsiningo and Ross Parks provide other opportunities for walking, hiking, and biking.

Binghamton's trail network is poised to expand in the near future, in furtherance of the County's **BINGHAMTON METROPOLITAN GREENWAY STUDY** plan to develop a more extensive regional greenway system. The following alignments are moving forward:

- The City currently has a plan and design to extend the river trail east of Washington Street to the Exchange Street Bridge along the north side of the Susquehanna River. The City will bid the job in spring 2014. The proposed realignment of 363/North Shore Drive (see Transportation Recommendation 1.4) will increase access to this new trail segment.
- The Riverwalk extension to connect Cheri A. Lindsey Memorial Park with Otsiningo Park; while original designs drew the connection along the bank of the Chenango River, road reconstruction at Route 17 and Interstate 81 necessitated a redesign by the City Engineer. The new trail connection travels along Truesdell Street and then onto Chenango Street up to Bevier Street.
- Conceptual plans exist for a Vestal Parkway Trail to connect the Riverwalk and Washington Street Bridge with MacArthur Park, and Binghamton University three miles to the west; this project is currently in the planning stage with no set implementation timeline.



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Promenade



Riverwalk trail along Cheri A. Lindsey Park

TREE CANOPY

Lining its streets, providing shade in yards and parks, and blanketing the City's surrounding hills, Binghamton's tree canopy comprises an important part of its natural environment. Studies show the numerous benefits of urban tree canopies to include cleaner air and water, happier residents, and increased property values.

The Department of Parks and Recreation maintains all trees and is responsible for tree plantings and removals on City streets. The **URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN** completed in 2010 provides a basic framework for improving urban forestry, and the City sponsors multiple programs to help in that effort. In 2013, the City commenced work with an outside consultant

to undertake a sample inventory of trees and ultimately develop recommendations on new tree selection, a tree maintenance schedule, and an ongoing street and park tree survey to be implemented by the Department of Parks and Recreation during the course of its maintenance work.

The **SHADE TREE COMMISSION** is an advisory committee comprising seven members appointed by the Mayor and City Council. The Commission studies the problems and needs of the City's urban forest. They also help select the species of trees planted by the Parks and Recreation Department each season.

The **TREE DONATION FUND** accepts private donations to be used specifically for tree plantings and maintenance.

Residents can request new street trees through the **STREET TREE PLANTING PROGRAM** by filling out a form and submitting the form to the Parks and Recreation Department. The Department aims to plant at least 75 trees per year, though in some years that number reaches 300. Program funding comes through the Tree Donation Fund, Community Development Block Grants, and city tax dollars.



Columbus Park

A NOTE ON FRACKING

The **CITIZEN PRUNER PROGRAM** recruits and trains citizens interested in tree health with the goal of developing volunteers able to supplement the tree maintenance work undertaken by the Parks and Recreation Department. Program participants receive training in proper tree maintenance in exchange for a commitment of at least three volunteer hours a month over the course of a season.

Because of the dramatic topography that surrounds the City, the forest that blankets Binghamton's surrounding hills is also a critical part of Binghamton's tree canopy, providing beauty, natural habitat, and a root system

that stabilizes the areas steep slopes. In these ecologically sensitive woodland areas, construction is costly and challenging. In some places, there are winding roads that service low-density single family homes on large properties. Streams that run down the mountains add to the landscape, but are at times the culprit of flash flooding and runoff during large storms.

Fracking was not addressed in this plan because of litigation that was pending throughout the entire study process of the project, up until January 2014.

In the near future, the City should amend Blueprint Binghamton with a follow up study that explores fracking-related opportunities for economic growth, such as industrial development to accommodate materials storage and transport. The study and amendment should also research and document the possible negative externalities that will require careful planning for and mitigation measures, including increased traffic due to materials transport, road degradation by heavy trucks, disposal of contaminated materials, demand for temporary or rental housing, and demand for water, sewer, and other public services. Cornell Cooperative Extension has been studying the short- and long-term impacts of shale development, and should be consulted as a resource.



Riverwalk

SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

The environment and open space chapter of Blueprint Binghamton seeks to recognize and reinforce the importance of Binghamton's beloved parks and natural landscapes, with the understanding that each citizen can take steps to lessen his or her impact on the environment while also taking new steps to engage more directly with the City's trees and rivers, parks and open spaces.

All of **BLUEPRINT BINGHAMTON'S** environment and open space recommendations address one or more of the objectives listed below:

- Adopt new habits to **MINIMIZE** the **WASTE OUTPUT** of the City
- Invest in the **URBAN FOREST** and a new generation of citizen pruners who can support the City's efforts to add more green to the public realm
- **REENGAGE** with the **RIVERS**, both through waterfront parks and trails and water-based recreation
- Celebrate the City's **PARK SYSTEM** and ensure that each neighborhood has **SAFE** and **BEAUTIFUL PLACES** for residents of all ages to relax and play for generations to come

COMMUNITY VOICE

BLUEPRINT BINGHAMTON asked YOU for your thoughts and ideas, concerns and priorities related to the environment and open space, and you shared many specific ideas about our City's parks and rivers, trails and hills, trees and flowers.

COLLABORATIVE MAP COMMENTS

Thirteen percent (13%) of the **COLLABORATIVE MAP COMMENTS** addressed the environment: the floodplains, the parks, the riverfronts, trails, trees, and more general ideas about growing greener and lessening Binghamton's ecological footprint. Your comments ranged from appreciation for the City's efforts to beautify the public realm with new landscaping to new ideas for recreation; here is a small sample:

COLLABORATIVE MAP

IDEAS. INSIGHTS. BARRIERS

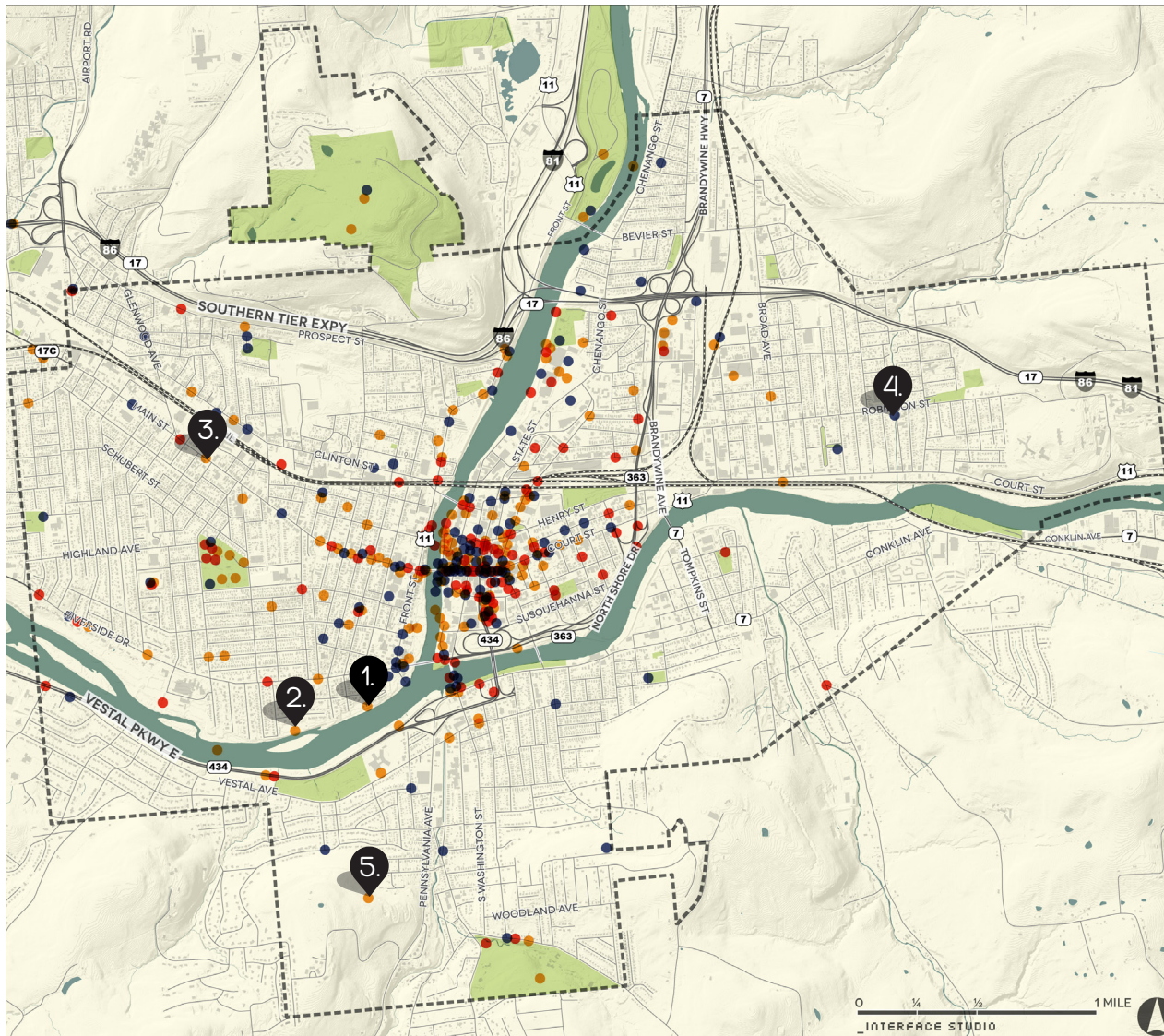


FIGURE 58: Collaborative Map Comments Locations

1. “ BOAT ENTRY (NON-MOTOR) SUCH AS CANOE LAUNCH - IS A VACANT WOODED AREA NEAR DEAD-END STREET. ”
2. “ THERE SHOULD BE WALKING TRAILS ALONG THE RIVER CONNECTING DIFFERENT NEIGHBORHOODS TO DOWNTOWN. ”
3. “ BINGHAMTON BLOOMS WITH SPRING FLOWERING TREES - WHAT A DELIGHT! ”
4. “ THE EAST SIDE NEEDS MORE COMMUNAL AREAS, PARKS, ENTERTAINMENT. ”
5. “ CITY-OWNED PROPERTY THAT COULD BE DEVELOPED INTO HIKING AREA - VERY NICE FOREST. ”

- IDEA
- INSIGHT
- BARRIER

POSTCARDS FROM THE FUTURE

Your **POSTCARDS FROM THE FUTURE** describe a commitment to preserving the City's natural environment, and adding to the tree canopy, the trail network, and the park system so that well into the future, residents



young and old can enjoy fresh air and play outdoors, taking full advantage of the area's unique open space amenities:

“THERE IS A NICE BLEND OF NATURE WITH THE CITY.”

“THERE ARE TREES EVERYWHERE, THE STREETS ARE CLEAN, THERE ARE COMMUNITY GARDENS IN EVERY NEIGHBORHOOD, AND THE LOCAL RESTAURANTS ARE MAKING FOOD WITH LOCAL INGREDIENTS – THE CITY IS FUN & VIBRANT!”

“NICE WALKING TRAILS, ESPECIALLY ALONG RIVERS.”

“THERE IS A VIBRANT RIVERFRONT WITH OUTDOOR CAFES.”

“THERE ARE GREAT TRAILS CONNECTING ALL THE PARKS. THERE'S A KAYAK LAUNCH BY CONFLUENCE PARK. THERE'S A COMMUNITY GARDEN. THE STREETS ARE SAFE AT NIGHT. IT'S A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE!”

When **5TH GRADERS** in the Binghamton City School District imagined their **DREAM NEIGHBORHOOD**, they too had thoughts about being good stewards of the environment and activating City parks for a full range of activities:

“PEOPLE ON MY STREET LITTER A LOT. I HAVE A DAY CALLED “LITTER DAY.” I HELP A LOT AROUND MY STREET WITH MY OLD PALS PICKING UP THE GARBAGE AND RECYCLABLES.”

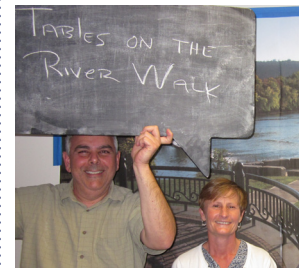
“MY PERFECT NEIGHBORHOOD WOULD ALSO HAVE NO ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS. TREES WOULDN'T BE CUT DOWN SO WE COULD HAVE MORE AIR AND HOMES FOR BIRDS. ABSOLUTELY NO POLLUTION BECAUSE WHEN YOU BREATHE IT YOU COULD GET SICK.”

“FOR RECREATIONAL SPACES I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE MORE OUTSIDE BASKETBALL COURTS. MY DRIVEWAY IS ON A HILL SO WE CAN'T HAVE A BASKETBALL HOOP. I THINK THAT WHEN IT IS LACROSSE SEASON, SOMEBODY SHOULD CHANGE THE NET TO A LACROSSE GOAL. THE PARK ALREADY HAS A SOCCER GOAL WHEN IT IS SOCCER SEASON. I ALSO THINK THAT THE PARK SHOULD HAVE AN ICE CREAM MAN AND HAVE MUSIC PLAYING.”

BIG IDEAS

You'll find your **BIG IDEAS** span a broad spectrum of topics related to the environment and the City's natural environment. Together, they inform many of the

recommendations for reactivating the Rivers and riverfronts for recreation, planting beautiful new landscapes, and maintaining City parks as centers of community:



Images from the "Photo Suggestion Booth"

CITYWIDE SURVEY

And your responses on the **CITYWIDE SURVEY** underscored your shared love for Binghamton's parks, hills, rivers, and trails but also indicated a desire for new ways to engage with the Rivers, as well as new and improved parks and trails for recreation:

- What are good things about Binghamton?

67% Parks (more than any other category)

34% Access to natural amenities

34% Trails

- Improvements you would like to see:

31% New waterfront connections

31% New and improved parks

30% An expanded trail network



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Promenade

ENVIRONMENT & OPEN SPACE GOALS:

The recommendations that comprise **BLUEPRINT BINGHAMTON'S MINI-PLAN ON ENVIRONMENT & OPEN SPACE** [a plan for preservation and play] are organized into four goal areas, each titled by a key environment and open space goal:

01

REDUCE WASTE

02

INCREASE TREE COVER TO IMPROVE AIR QUALITY AND THE PUBLIC REALM

03

IMPROVE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE CITY AND ITS NATURAL ASSETS

04

MAINTAIN PARKS AND PLAY SPACE IN EVERY NEIGHBORHOOD TO BRING RESIDENTS TOGETHER

Taken together, the Environment & Open Space Goals and their related objectives and strategies support the following themes of Blueprint Binghamton's vision for the future of our City:

- **RESILIENT & SUSTAINABLE** - with a commitment to treading lightly on the Earth, replenishing our tree canopy, and balancing the preservation and activation of our natural landscapes so that we can enjoy them for decades to come
- **HEALTHY** - with active citizens who make full use of the recreational opportunities along the City's rivers, among its hills, along its trails, and within its parks
- **ALIVE** - with residents who come together to play, delight in, and take care of the shared resources that are Binghamton's parks, playgrounds, and natural landscapes

**FOR FULL VISION STATEMENT,
SEE PAGE 40.**

GOAL:

01

REDUCE WASTE

Striving to reduce the volume of waste produced by the City and its residents and businesses is a best practice that will save the City money and engage all residents as stewards of the environment. Through citywide outreach and incentive programs, the City can continue its efforts to lessen the waste load traveling to landfills and play a role in educating residents and shaping their actions toward a healthier environment and future. The following environment and open space recommendations support Goal 1:



Compost for Brooklyn community composting project

1.1 INCREASE HOUSEHOLD RECYCLING THROUGH INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

The Department of Public Works (DPW) is responsible for Binghamton's waste management and recycling programs. DPW instated a "pay as you go" system in which residents must purchase trash bags or stickers to identify items for trash pick up with the intent of reducing solid waste by encouraging recycling instead. The fee-based program has succeeded in reducing solid waste by 20%. The fees generated also cover the City's tipping and transfer fees at the landfill. Residents currently recycle about 40% percent of the City's waste output, and DPW hopes to increase the rate to 50%.

One way to further increase household recycling is to incentivize it with rewards rather than savings in fees. Recyclebank is a program that is gaining popularity across the nation; the company partners with municipalities, purchasing the City's recycled waste and providing rewards to residents for their volume of recycled output that can be claimed at local and national businesses, thus driving foot traffic to area stores. In other cities, the program has a track record of saving money for the City government and its residents, as well as significantly increasing the rate of recycling.



Construction and demolition recycling

1.2
ADD RECYCLING CONTAINERS TO PUBLIC TRASH RECEPTACLES IN BUSINESS DISTRICT, AT PUBLIC FACILITIES, AND AT PUBLIC EVENTS

Recycling will increase if recycling is made easier and more convenient. The City should install permanent and temporary recycling bins in areas with heavy pedestrian traffic. Permanent receptacles should be added next to existing trash bins at locations throughout the Downtown core, as well as along some of the major commercial corridors like Main Street

on the West Side and South Washington Street on the South Side. Placing the bins adjacent to existing garbage cans will increase the likelihood that recyclables are diverted from the landfill. Large citywide events can generate large volumes of refuse, and temporary recycling receptacles should be provided in tandem with trash bins at these events too.

1.3
LAUNCH A CITY COMPOST PROGRAM

Composting is an environmentally sound method of converting food and yard waste into nutrient rich organic matter than can be used to enrich soils throughout the growing season. Composting requires education on why, what, and how to compost to help residents effectively and responsibly dispose of their natural waste. The Broome County DPW website provides basic information on composting, but in many cities this has created learning opportunities in schools, community

building opportunities at local gardens, and small business opportunities for entrepreneurs looking to launch a green business that picks up and processes compostable materials and then resells nutrient-rich organic matter for mulching and soil incorporation. The City should continue to support grassroots efforts of composting and tie in educational awareness with City operations such as a mass mailing jump starting the City's yard waste pick up in the spring.

1.4
ADOPT A CONSTRUCTION AND DEMOLITION RECYCLING ORDINANCE

The construction and demolition process is a significant source of new waste, much of which can easily be recycled or reused. Binghamton should institute a recycling ordinance that emphasizes deconstruction over demolition and aims to reduce the amount of building materials that enters the landfill. The ordinance could include a mandatory building inspection prior to demolition intended to evaluate a structure's

potential for material reuse and recycling, a minimum percentage of waste sorted for reuse or recycling, or credits for construction crews who recycle a large percentage of their waste. The advantages of such an ordinance include cost savings for contractors who must pay tipping fees at landfills, as well as environmental benefits for the region.

GOAL:

02

INCREASE TREE COVER TO IMPROVE AIR QUALITY AND THE PUBLIC REALM

The environmental benefits of urban trees are numerous, with studies showing a positive effect on air and water quality, increased property values, lower cooling bills in the summer months, beautiful streetscapes, and even happier city residents. Through its **URBAN FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN**, and various tree planting and maintenance programs, Binghamton has already laid the groundwork for increasing tree cover for the benefit of air quality, the public realm, and the public good. The following environment and open space recommendations support Goal 2:

2.1 **EXPAND THE TREE INVENTORY DATABASE, AND ADD TO THE TREE INVENTORY WITH SIZE- APPROPRIATE SPECIES IN UNDER-PLANTED AREAS**

Currently Binghamton is working with an outside consultant to conduct a sample inventory of City street trees. This inventory database will help the City map its tree cover, and identify maintenance needs, areas without shade trees, and areas where street trees are approaching the end of their life expectancy and will require new plantings to maintain healthy succession in the urban forest. While the sample inventory is an important first step, a full inventory of all street trees should be completed in the course of ongoing maintenance work by the Department of Parks and Recreation. The results of the inventory should then be used by the City to inform annual street tree planting decisions.



Shade trees on Washington Street (left) and the Riverwalk (right)

2.2
CONTINUE TO SUPPORT EFFORTS BY SHADE TREE COMMISSION AS A KEY PARTNER FOR PARK AND RECREATION

Beyond the stewardship of City parks and the administration of recreation programs, the Department of Parks and Recreation is charged with tree planting and maintenance. The Shade Tree Commission is an advisory board of appointed and knowledgeable volunteers in place to support Parks and Recreation's work to maintain a healthy urban forest. The Shade Tree Commission makes recommendations on tree selection and planting locations - expert decisions that guide expert implementation by Parks and Recreation.

The Shade Tree Commission also offers advice on how and where to best incorporate trees and greening in private and public development projects. To reduce confusion about the Shade Tree Commission's role with regard to decisions by the Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals, future updates to the zoning ordinance should clarify the role of the Commission and its recommendations for projects of different scales.

2.3
ENLIST THE COMMUNITY IN TREE PLANTING EFFORTS THROUGH EDUCATION

In addition to Shade Tree Commission volunteers, members of the public can be tapped to help the City grow greener on every block. The Shade Tree Commission is charged with dissemination of news and information regarding tree selection, planting, and maintenance, and the Citizen Pruner Program goes a step farther in providing hands-on training to interested residents who would like to donate their time and energy toward maintaining Binghamton's

trees. The Citizen Pruner Program should proactively reach out to civic associations across Binghamton, recruiting new participants each growing season. Graduates of the program should receive priority status through the Street Tree Planting Program, ensuring that they can put their new skills to work. Businesses can be partners in maintaining the streetscape too; as a model, the City has worked with Burger Mondays to help with watering street planters.

GOAL:

03

IMPROVE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE CITY AND ITS NATURAL ASSETS

Binghamton's natural assets - its rivers and hills - can at times feel both at hand or beyond reach. Inside the City, nature's presence is both felt and seen, with hills framing the views and bridges crossing the two waterways to connect Downtown with other neighborhoods. However, with the local topography and presence of heavy road infrastructure and flood walls, reaching the hills or accessing the rivers can seem impossible. Removing some of these barriers to Binghamton's natural landscapes has great potential for the City - offering improved connectivity and progress toward implementing BMTS's Binghamton Metropolitan Greenway Study, new green spaces for parks and programs, and a stronger relationship between residents and nature. The following environment and open space recommendations support Goal 3:

3.1 IMPROVE EXISTING RIVERWALK

The Riverwalk travels through a variety of different and unique spaces throughout Downtown and the North Side, from Cheri Lindsey Park to the north to Confluence Park and the South Washington Street Bridge to the south. The Riverwalk is a great asset to the City but it has not yet realized its full potential as a vibrant urban space due to a lack of programming, uneven maintenance, difficult pedestrian crossings and properties that are vacant or turn their back to the Riverwalk.

MAINTENANCE

- Some parts of the trail would benefit from additional maintenance, particularly the trail immediately to the south of Court Street. Maintenance work by the Parks and Recreation Department can be supplemented by the Downtown Business Association (see Recommendation 4.4).
- Other creative maintenance ideas should be explored, such as an "adopt a garbage can" program, and "adopt a mile" program, hiring high school students on a part-time basis throughout the school year, and creating a youth cleaning program with CDBG funds. To involve community members in efforts to maintain the Riverwalk, the City should also update its website to make information about clean-ups more accessible.

PROGRAMMING

- The plaza outside River Read Books and the former Fair Store is perfect for outdoor markets, local beer festivals, and other types of programming. It will be important to coordinate programming with events taking place at the Metrocenter Plaza to prevent overlap.
- The steps down to the River just south of Court Street could be programmed for various uses such as small concerts, outdoor movies, or anything else that takes advantage of its amphitheater style seating.

PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS

- The lack of a pedestrian crossing at the Court Street Bridge breaks up the continuity of the Riverwalk. Pedestrians must travel a block down to the intersection of Court and Hawley Street or take the steep steps down to the River and walk underneath the bridge, a barrier for the elderly, disabled, or bicyclists. The City should look into the feasibility of creating a pedestrian crossing across Court Street to create one, continuous trail.

VACANT & BACKSIDE OF PROPERTIES

- Any future investment in Binghamton Plaza should incorporate the Riverwalk Trail and River through its design and site plan.
- The redevelopment of the Fair Store building has catalytic potential. Plans for adaptive reuse as housing should activate the ground floor with commercial space that can take advantage of the ample room for outdoor seating and the large mature trees.
- Similar to Binghamton Plaza, the buildings south of Court Street turn their back to the River and Trail. Measures should be taken to activate the rear of those buildings and enhance their relationship to the Trail.



FIGURE 59: Improve the Riverwalk



Left to right: The plaza outside the Fair Store Building; steps south of Court Street (middle), the trail behind Binghamton Plaza

3.2 EXTEND THE RIVERWALK TRAIL NORTH TO OTSININGO PARK AND EAST/WEST ALONG BOTH BANKS OF THE SUSQUEHANNA RIVER



Potential space for a trail on the south side of the Susquehanna River

Plans exist to extend the Riverwalk north past Cheri A. Lindsey Memorial Park to Otsiningo County Park, connecting Downtown and the North Side with a major regional open space amenity. While the original plans proposed an alignment along the existing riverfront levee to the memorial plaza at the corner of Chenango and Bevier, meeting up with bike lanes and sidewalks on the Bevier Street Bridge to Otsiningo Park, construction at the Route 17/Interstate 81 interchange created a need to redirect the trail in the near term. The new trail connection proposed by the City travels along Truesdell Street to Chenango Street and then connects with Bevier. As this connection is achievable with funding in the near term, it is a good option to improve connectivity along the Trail. However, the original alignment, which offers a dedicated path along the River and removed from the automobile roadway, remains an attractive option to be advocated for in the future.

Currently the Riverwalk Trail exists solely on the eastern bank of the Chenango River, while the Susquehanna River is blocked off from public access by highways and floodwalls. On the north side of the Susquehanna, there

is ample room to place a trail between the floodwalls/levees and the River, extending the trail from the Washington Street Bridge east to the Rockbottom Dam. Designs for this Trail segment have been drafted, and the City will bid the work in spring 2014. Transformation of North Shore Drive into a greener boulevard in the future (see Transportation Recommendation 1.4) will allow for additional trail configurations and greater access to the northern bank of the Susquehanna.

On the south side of the Susquehanna, the floodwalls are closer to the River, making it difficult to add a trail. However, there is currently a large green space between the floodwall and Conklin Avenue with an existing sidewalk. The sidewalk should be widened to create a trail that allows for two-way bicycle traffic, extending from the South Washington Street Bridge to the Exchange Street Bridge. This investment will create a continuous trail loop on both sides of the Susquehanna between bridges. Additional investments in improved landscaping will make this large green space on the south side a more inviting, active, and beautiful space.

3.3 REACTIVATE THE RIVERS WITH WATER-BASED RECREATION



Kayaking on the Milwaukee River in Downtown Milwaukee

Source: Chelsey Lewis, www.wisconsintrails.org

3.4 ACQUIRE EASEMENTS ALONG ENTIRE WATERFRONT AND REQUIRE EASEMENTS AS A CONDITION FOR FUTURE WATERFRONT DEVELOPMENT

Boating and fishing activities are a great way for residents to interact with the rivers, and despite great interest voiced by residents throughout the planning process, there are presently no dedicated boat launches or dedicated fishing locations within the City. Calmer water sports, such as canoeing, paddle boating, or paddle boarding, are recommended on the Chenango River rather than along the Susquehanna, which has multiple falls at Rockbottom Dam and Confluence Park. While thorough outreach and a feasibility study would need to be done before locations for waterfront recreation are decided, Cheri A. Lindsey Park would be an ideal place as it is already owned by the City, has road access for trailers, and enjoys a moderate grade down to the River. Fishing piers do not face the same restrictions as boat launches, resulting in more options for placement.

In order to keep the Rivers and riverfronts publicly accessible, an easement should be applied along all of the City's waterfront parcels. This easement, which would require land owners and developers to allow a public right of way adjacent to the waterway, is integral to the

The falls along the Susquehanna River present a different opportunity for waterfront tourism and recreation, an idea first explored in the 2006 Rock Bottom Dam Site Assessment, which evaluated the potential for whitewater recreation. If the Dam were to be made passable, the River offers over 20 miles of continuously navigable water for kayakers or other vessels, and an investment in a whitewater course could prove a significant recreational attraction and economic development opportunity for the City. The concept and feasibility study received wide support from the County, the City, BMTS, and NYSDOT as well as from NYSDEC and the US Army Corps of Engineers. Transportation Recommendation 1.4, which calls for the deconstruction and transformation of North Shore Drive and the 363 cloverleaf, would support enhanced riverfront access for this kind of recreational destination.

success of riverfront trail extensions as well as other potential access points. As noted in Land Use and Zoning Recommendation 1.5, updates to the zoning ordinance should include an edit to the subdivision regulations to require public easements for improved access to the Rivers.

GOAL:

04

MAINTAIN PARKS AND PLAY SPACE IN EVERY NEIGHBORHOOD TO BRING RESIDENTS TOGETHER

Parks can serve as important community gathering spaces and give neighborhoods a sense of place and pride. But parks are living spaces, changing with the weather, and over time they require a blend of City resources and care as well as resident use and stewardship to thrive as healthy and vibrant places. The following environment and open space recommendations support Goal 4 to maintain parks and play space in all of Binghamton's neighborhoods:

4.1 IMPROVE ACCESS, VISIBILITY, ACTIVE RECREATION AT TARGETED PARKS

Some of Binghamton's parks feel beautiful and safe, easily accessible to pedestrians, bicyclists, and persons traveling by car. Others suffer from being cut off from surrounding residential areas or being surrounded by deteriorating blocks. Cheri A. Lindsey Park is tucked away behind a residential block and Binghamton Plaza. The North Chenango BOA presents a major opportunity to improve connections to the Park as the Plaza is redeveloped and riverfront access is prioritized. Truesdell Street, which leads to the Park and the River, can be improved as part of the plan to route the Riverwalk Trail along Truesdell and Chenango Streets to Otsiningo Park. Columbus Park's north and eastern edges evidence distressed conditions and offer few



Story Garden

eyes on the street which negatively contributes to perceptions of the Park's safety. The Webster Street Playground is another park where it is acknowledged that its design, location across from the City Water Plant, and poor illumination at night contribute to vandalism and unsafe/criminal use.

As the **BLUEPRINT BINGHAMTON** planning process showed, residents have many ideas about their community park spaces - ideas that encompass programming, new elements for passive recreation, as well as trees and flowers for added beauty. As park improvements are undertaken across the City, community groups and neighborhood residents should be invited to

collaborate in brainstorming ideas for change as well as take ownership in helping to build and maintain such improvements. Partnership with the Binghamton Police Department's Crime Prevention Unit should also be sought, as the City and community members work to keep the City's parks safe and active to all to enjoy.



FIGURE 60: "BIG IDEA" Comments - Veterans Memorial Park



FIGURE 61: "BIG IDEA" Comments - Columbus Park

4.2
**FORMALIZE AND PROVIDE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
TO FRIENDS OF PARKS GROUPS TO MAINTAIN AND
PROGRAM NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS**

A lesson learned through the Design Your Own Park program is the power and importance of community partners who are invested in park stewardship. Neighbors who take on projects to beautify, customize, and maintain their community open spaces breathe new life into these gathering places, encouraging new programs and patterns of use to take root. The Bark Park, with a committed group of dog owners, had been a success story; grassroots leaders have succeeded in asking for and collecting donations to support ongoing maintenance and add necessary features. Similarly, with

Sunflower Park in the First Ward and Walnut Street Park on the West Side, neighbors have made great improvements in public art and park facilities through partnerships with the City. To formalize these relationships and help build capacity for sustained stewardship and activity, the City should develop a technical assistance program that encourages neighbors and park lovers to form “Friends of” groups to take partial ownership of public spaces and complement City efforts. Seed funding for small projects would incentivize program participation.

4.3
**EXPAND COMMUNITY SERVICE MAINTENANCE
PROGRAM TO SUPPLEMENT PARKS AND
LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE**

The Department of Parks and Recreation runs the day-to-day operations of the City’s compulsory community service program, managing crews of workers sentenced to provide between 14 and 80 hours of community service. The majority of crews are assigned to street cleaning duty in Downtown, but the community service arrangement should be expanded and coupled

with training and labor opportunities that benefit the City’s parks and landscapes as well, offering crews exposure to and experience with additional skills, building pride for neighborhood-based parks maintenance projects, and increasing the man-power of the Parks and Recreation Department.

4.4
**CONTINUE TO EXPAND BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS
FOR LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE IN BUSINESS
DISTRICTS**

Some of the City's most unique park spaces are the urban open spaces integrated within denser business districts that provide room for people to gather and socialize - a backdrop for streetlife and the best of urban living. Indeed, the Parlor City Commons and Chenango River Promenade are listed among the City's "parks," and the streetscape along Court Street in Downtown appears parklike too. Southside Commons on South Washington Street is another such park space in close proximity to a business district. These well-manicured landscapes provide great amenities for local businesses, but they also require much maintenance. The City should replicate business partnerships such as those successfully achieved with Gorgeous Washington Street Association, Downtown Business Association, and Security Mutual Life, to explore shared maintenance opportunities where businesses could contribute to enhanced streetscape elements or cleaning efforts, in exchange for coordinated marketing and upkeep.



South Side Commons



Court Street



WANT TO KEEP
READING?

BLUEPRINT BINGHAMTON
HAS 7 MAIN CHAPTERS

A ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT

B HOUSING

C TRANSPORTATION

D INFRASTRUCTURE

E ENVIRONMENT &
OPEN SPACE

F LAND USE &
ZONING

G COMMUNITY
BUILDING