

## PORTSMOUTH OPEN SPACE PLAN

# Community Engagement Summary Report

August 2019



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION	4
COMMUNITY FORUMS	5
PISCATAQUA RIVERFEST	8
COMMUNITY FORUM/RIVERFEST MAPS	9
WIKI MAP RESULTS & MAPS	12
ONLINE FEEDBACK FORM	22
APPENDIX	23

# INTRODUCTION



Above: Hislop Field      Courtesy: Resilience Planning & Design

This report highlights the **key themes, findings, and feedback** collected during the public outreach phase of the Portsmouth Open Space planning process.

The purpose of Portsmouth's Open Space Plan is to improve public access to, increase use and stewardship of, and improve connectivity between open space assets city-wide. Open space can be defined as both privately and publicly owned undeveloped or lightly developed land and recreation areas. High-quality and interconnected green infrastructure offers tremendous potential to help the city increase its resilience related to climate change, food security, and the health of its ecosystems.

To strengthen the City's open space network, the Plan includes a prioritized list of undeveloped parcels for future acquisition and/or permanent protection, an evaluation of current open space assets, land stewardship and management guidelines, targeted open space improvements, and opportunities for increasing or protecting ecosystem services of open space in the City. To ensure that the Plan reflected the goals and priorities of the City's residents and visitors, the City and its consulting team (Resilience Planning & Design, Greenfire GIS, and Toole Design Group) developed a diverse community engagement plan utilizing a variety of outreach mechanisms. These included:

- Two Community Forums
- Interactive Table at Piscataqua Riverfest
- An Online Wiki Map
- An Online Feedback Form

The results from these engagement activities will directly inform the Plan and its implementation actions.

## WHAT WE HEARD:

**Access & Amenities:** Public access and safe biking and walking infrastructure to and within open spaces is a high priority to the public and should be considered when planning for Portsmouth's open space network. In this outreach process, community members said amenities such as seating, lighting, pathways, vegetation, wayfinding, signage, and restrooms should be located and maintained, where appropriate, in the City's open spaces. Open space should also be equitable in terms of accessibility throughout the City.

**Stewardship & Management:** Protecting the ecological integrity of open space assets in the City should be emphasized in management guidelines. Permanent protection of existing open spaces and continued exploration of new open space opportunities should be prioritized.

**Recreation & Programming:** Open space assets in Portsmouth should have high quality active and passive recreation facilities, flex space for diverse programming, access to the water, and connect to trails and nearby destinations.

# COMMUNITY FORUMS

The City hosted two community forums during the public outreach phase of the project. The first meeting took place on Saturday, June 1 at the Urban Forestry Center from 10-12 pm. The second forum was held Tuesday, June 4 at City Hall from 6-8 pm. The main purpose of the forums was to present the City's preliminary understanding of existing open space assets in Portsmouth and to learn from community members what their priorities were related to open space protection and infrastructure improvements. The consulting team and the City used the "World Cafe" format for the forums to engage participants.

The central ideas behind the "**World Cafe**" format is that the community members are considered the "experts" of the room and provide many opportunities for conversations to emerge and ideas proposed. Questions asked to community members are intentional, well-thought out, and compelling.

The "cafe" usually includes multiple tables set up to serve as "stations" that offer a variety of ways for individuals to participate. For these forums, six stations were created that each focused on a theme including:

- The vision for Portsmouth's Open Space network
- Land use and population density
- Existing open space and conservation lands
- What open space parcels need protection and why?
- Trail systems
- Access to the coast

Each station had materials designed to spark conversation, solicit feedback, and create a more interactive experience for attendees including guiding questions, maps, butcher paper, comment cards, and whiteboards. Approximately 20-25 people attended the community forums. The following page identifies key points, comments, and concerns related to the station themes above. On pages 9-11, three maps were generated that shows spatially where people are visiting open space in the city based on the feedback provided at the community forums and the Piscataqua Riverfest.



Above: Community Forum #1      Courtesy: Toole Design Group

## SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY FORUM COMMENTS

ISSUE	SUMMARY OF COMMENTS
<p><b>Vision for Portsmouth's Open Space Network</b> <i>What is open space to you?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wildlife habitat and corridors</li> <li>• Places with trees, sounds of nature, and pleasant views</li> <li>• Places that provide recreational amenities and ecosystem services to the community and that are resilient to a changing climate</li> <li>• Trails for walking, hiking, biking, and running</li> <li>• Greenery intertwined with built environment</li> <li>• Parks and gardens that are walkable to residences and downtown and accessible to people of all ages/abilities</li> <li>• Open spaces promote an ethic of stewardship</li> <li>• Accessible walking trails, sitting areas/benches, and other pedestrian amenities</li> </ul>
<p><b>Existing Open Space and Conservation Land</b> <i>Which properties do you visit and for what activities?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creek Farm- walking</li> <li>• Little Harbor Trust- biking, walking</li> <li>• Cemeteries- walking</li> <li>• Pierce Island- kayaking, walking</li> <li>• 4 Tree Island- picnicing, walking</li> <li>• South Mill Pond- walking, bird watching</li> <li>• Albacore Submarine Park</li> <li>• Prescott Park- picnicing, walking, concerts, views of water</li> <li>• Wentworth Coolidge- walking</li> <li>• Urban Forestry Center- hiking, walking</li> <li>• Sagamore Creek- hiking, walking, kayaking</li> <li>• Leary Field- walking, pickleball courts</li> </ul>
<p><b>What Open Space Parcels Need Protection and Why?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Old Stump Dump near Portsmouth Cove</li> <li>• South Mill Pond- needs better attention to walking paths</li> <li>• Calvaretta land near Elwyn Pond (connected to important wetlands)</li> <li>• Water Supply Protection Sources</li> <li>• Lands contiguous to already protected important lands</li> <li>• DPW site and future fields</li> <li>• Mountain bike trails that spider off Hampton Branch Trail</li> <li>• Albacore Submarine Park</li> <li>• HCA land near hospital- more trails</li> <li>• Land between Great Bog and Banfield Road</li> <li>• All waterfronts</li> </ul>
<p><b>What Open Space Improvements are Needed in Portsmouth?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Living green walls/building faces and rooftop green spaces throughout city</li> <li>• Downtown commercial properties need more green space to offset development impacts</li> <li>• Develop conservation land for open spaces</li> <li>• Downtown needs more green space in general</li> <li>• Hislop Field- more trail access along the river</li> <li>• Prescott Park gardens need maintenance; opportunities to add or convert gardens into a community vegetable garden/edible landscaping demo?</li> </ul>

- Baseball field at Lafayette playgrounds is too muddy
- Creek Farm- managed by three different entities that all have different rules (not very convenient when recreating here)
- Clean polluted North Mill Pond (use innovative methods such as oysters and mussels?)
- Improve access to Great Bog- little maintenance currently and poor access points
- Ensure that low-income areas have access to open space
- Heaven Park (Livermore and Pleasant)- needs curb on Livermore to protect from damage from cars parking
- Focus future open space planning efforts on passive recreation rather than more athletic fields
- Consider non toxic lawn management guidelines for athletic fields
- Incorporate more naturalized green spaces into park designs, rather than planting so much grass
- Parks need lighting for safety reasons
- During development, limit removal of native species without replacing said species

### **Trail Systems**

*Which do you use and for what activities? Where are trails needing to be improved or constructed?*

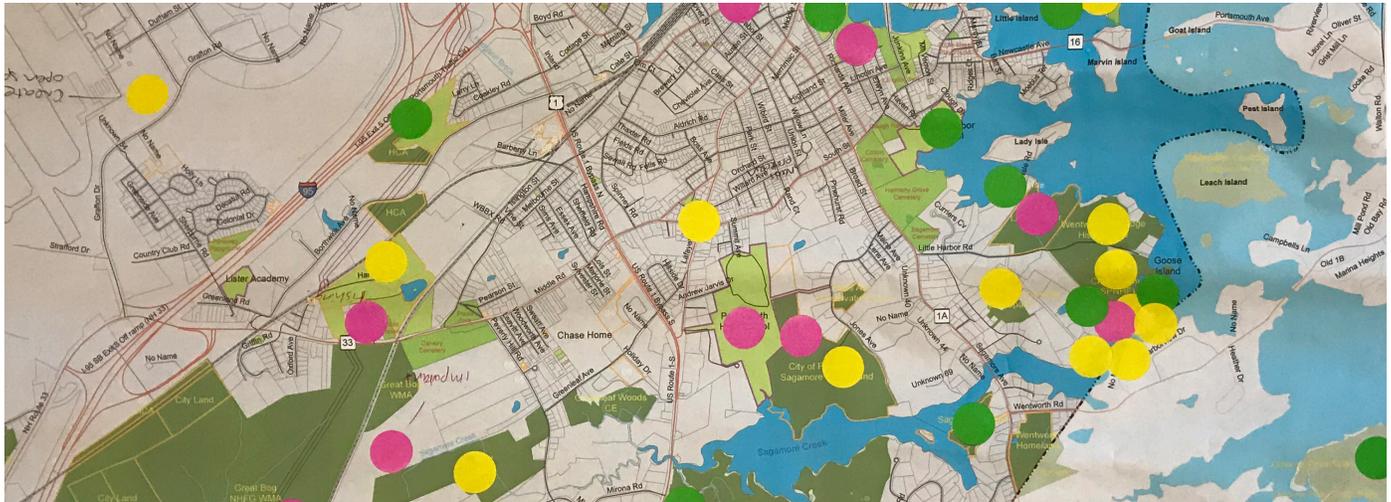
- Urban Forestry Center trails- walking/cross country skiing
- Construct Trails at the Wentworth Homelands parcel
- Better bike/ped crossing from Elwyn Park to Urban Forestry Center
- Jones Arc/Dump Trail to view vernal pools
- North Mill Pond trail should not be in the 25' buffer zone
- Make printable maps of trails and city owned land available for people to visit
- Pease Tradeport
- Cemetery Paths- running
- South Mill Pond- would love to see trail extend entirely around pond

### **Access to the Coast**

*Where do you go to gain access to the coast? For what activities? Are there improvements to be made?*

- Prescott Park- walking
- Urban Forestry Center- walking
- Four Tree Island- walking
- Goat Island- kayaking, walking
- Pierce Island- kayaking, walking, swimming at the pool
- Goat Island/Pierce Island need better parking solutions (lots fill up fast on weekends especially with commercial paddleboard/kayak rental companies)
- Pierce Island- bath houses need upgrading
- Motorcycle or bike along coastal roads
- Primarily through Portsmouth Marina- kayaking, paddle boarding, boating
- Need more opportunities to access coast downtown
- Could there be a water access closer to the Urban Forestry Center?

# PISCATAQUA RIVERFEST



As part of its outreach efforts, the City's consulting team tabled at the first annual Piscataqua Riverfest on June 1, 2019. This enabled the City to **bring community members into the local planning process who would not normally attend a public forum** and will result in a better, more informed planning document.

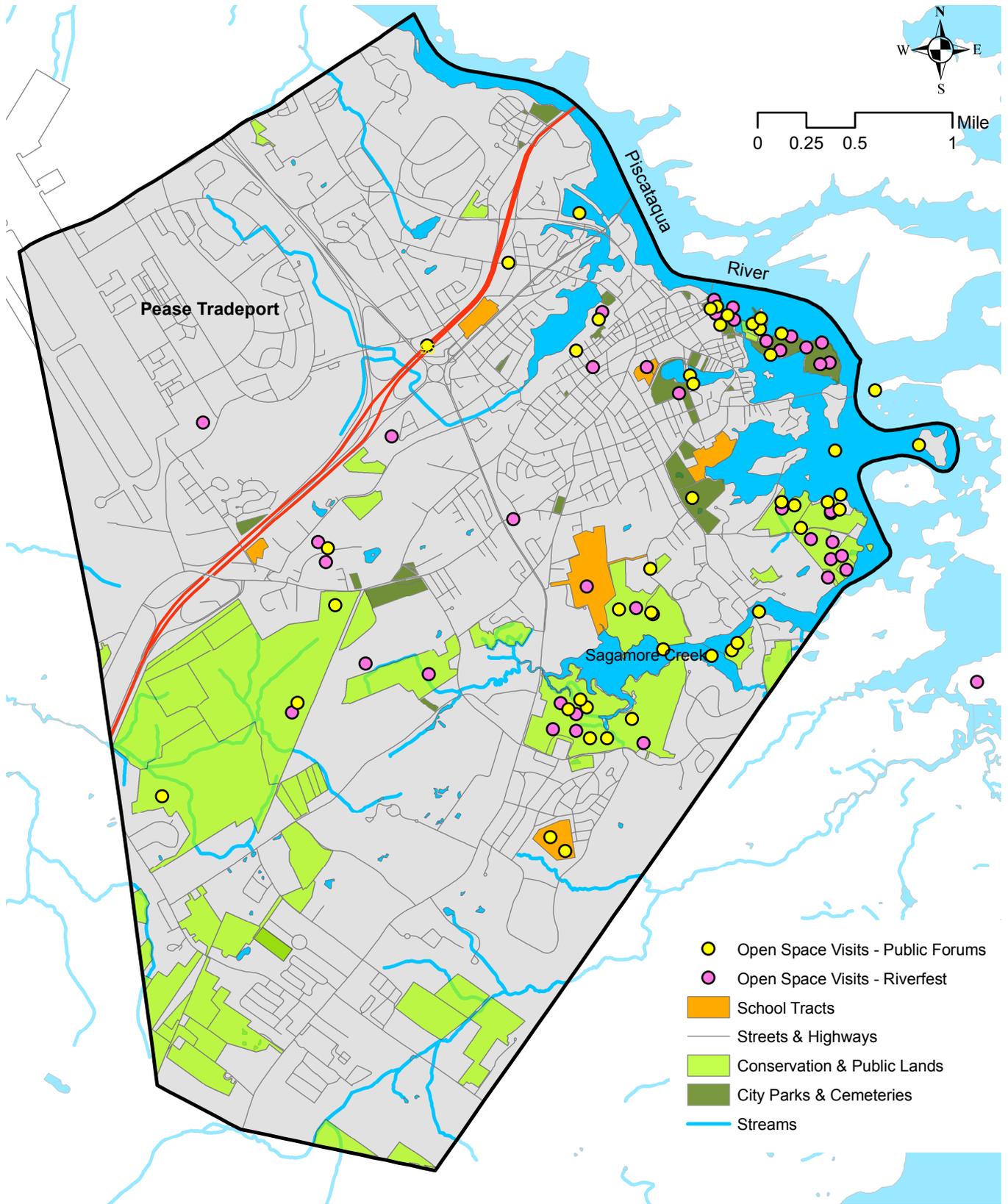
The Riverfest is a day dedicated to celebrating the heritage, ecology, and culture of the Piscataqua River, a major tributary that runs through the city. The consulting team asked passer-bys where they go to access open space in Portsmouth and to place a sticker on a map to indicate their answers. Approximately 40 people were engaged during the Piscataqua Riverfest.

The three maps shown on pages 9-11 also show where participants who attended Riverfest go in the city to access open space, what trails they use,

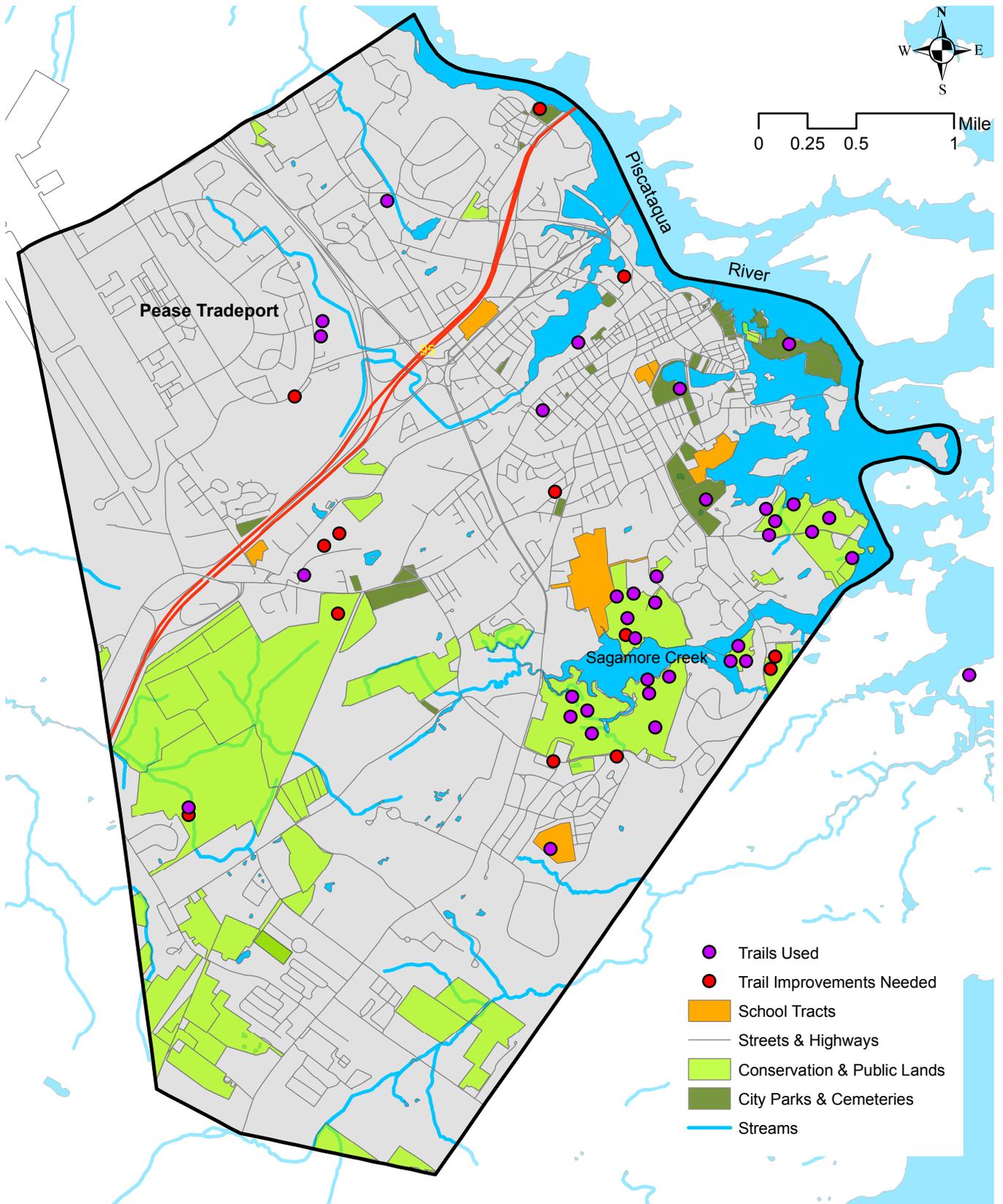
and where they access the coast. A summary of the results from these responses are listed below:

- 1) The Sagamore Creek Land, the Urban Forestry Center, Creek Farm, Prescott Prak, and South Mill Pond are among the most popular open spaces in Portsmouth for walking, cross country skiing, picnicing, accessing the coast, kayaking, and other outdoor activities.
- 3) Trail improvements were identified at Great Bog, Hislop Park, the Dondero School, and around Sagamore Creek.
- 4) Other notable open space parcels respondents visit include land adjacent to the Hospital and Pease Tradeport, which are less formalized open spaces in the City.
- 5) The open space parcels in the southwest corner of the City had few dots placed by respondents. This indicates that these parcels may not be as widely known as other open spaces in town or may need improvements.

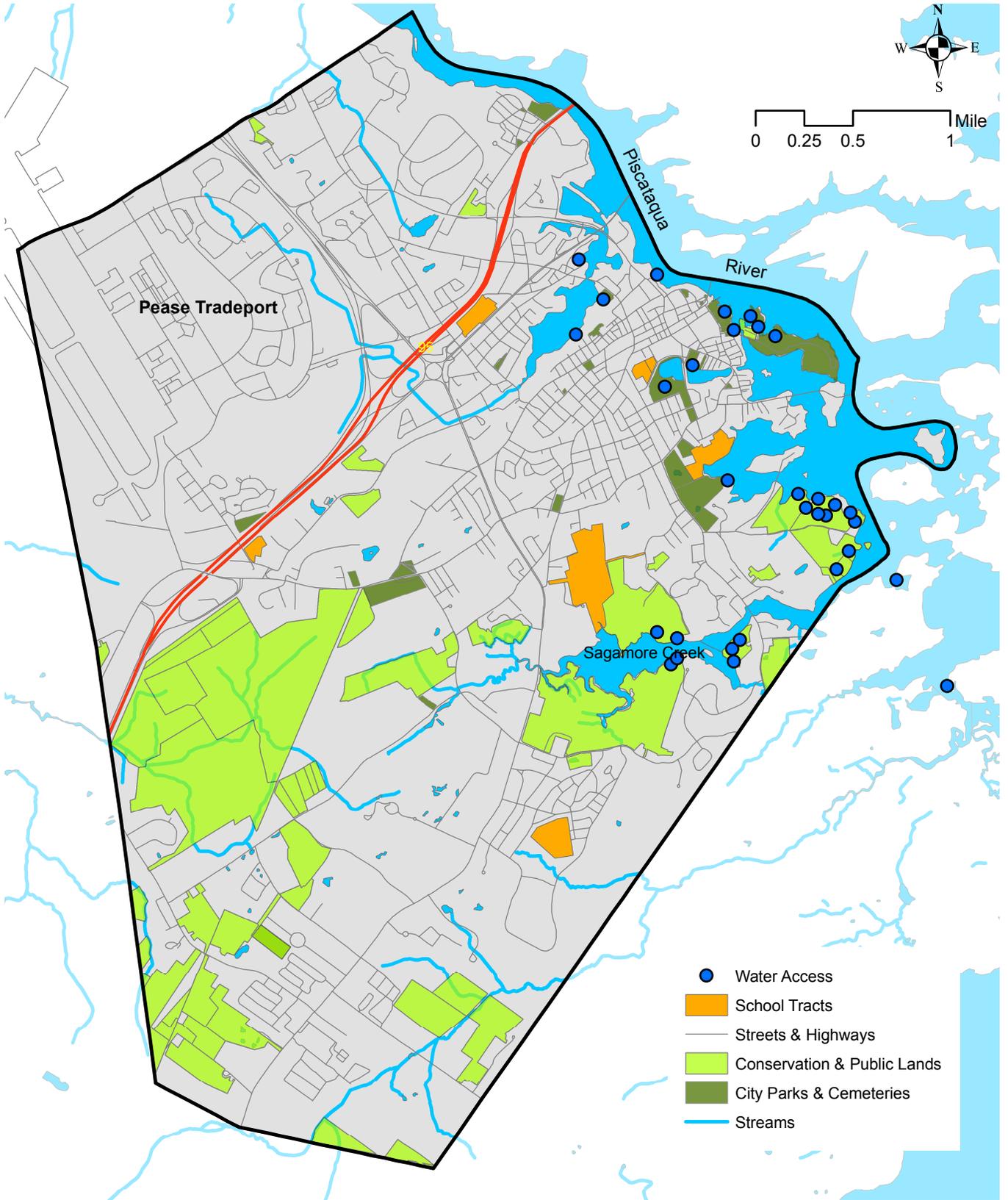
**The following maps depict feedback from both the Riverfest and the two community forums.**



# Forums/Riverfest Outreach Map: Open Space Visits



**Forums/Riverfest Outreach Map:  
Trails Used**



# Forums/Riverfest Outreach Map: Shoreline Access

# ONLINE WIKIMAP

A “wikimap” is a participatory online mapping tool used to collect digital, spatial feedback from the community on a particular issue or project. The data the City collected using this tool for its Open Space Plan represents local knowledge and was used to identify priorities related to open space access, use, and experience. The map included a simple questionnaire and allowed participants to “pin” open spaces that they use or visit and provide comments. 112 responses were collected through the wikimap tool. Below is a summary of key findings:

## WHAT STREET DO YOU LIVE/WORK ON?

Wikimap respondents live and work, primarily, in the downtown area and eastern areas of the City. Street segments are shown in green in the map below:



## HOW DO YOU ACCESS OPEN SPACE?

Respondents chose either bike, walk, or other to indicate how they travel to open space parcels in the city. In general, most of the respondents either walked or chose other for how they got to a specific open space parcel. Biking was the least selected mode of transport.

The following few pages show maps of how respondents access open space. The labeled parcels are the most visited properties by walking, biking, or other forms of transport. Below are key findings from analyzing these maps:

### Location:

Considering most respondents stated that they either lived or worked in the downtown area, it was not surprising to see that most parcels that people walked or biked to were also located near the downtown. However, it's important to still note that few parcels from the southern and northern parts of town were accessed at all by respondents. Great Bog is the only site in the western portion of town that is visited by some respondents.

### Infrastructure:

Sidewalks, crosswalks, and other pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure are prominent in the downtown area and provide people safe experiences traveling by foot or bike to open space parcels. Planning for future pedestrian and bicycle connectivity between open spaces and places of work and residences will prove to be important when thinking about how people can access open space.

### Multi-Functional Spaces:

The parcels that most people walked and biked to are open spaces that host a variety of activities for visitors ranging from walking trails to waterfront access to outdoor programming. The following page shows popular open space parcels visited by respondents.



**South Park and South Mill Pond** and the adjoining Leary Field provide a playground, athletic fields, a popular dog park, and a saltwater pond.



**Pierce Island** includes an outdoor swimming pool, a boat launch, walking trails, picnic areas, and scenic views.



**Prescott Park** provides waterfront access and views, flower gardens, walking trails, dock space, and flexible open space for events.



**Urban Forestry Center** provides waterfront access and views, flower gardens, walking trails, dock space, and flexible open space for events.



**Sagamore Creek Land** provides walking trails and cross country paths through a forested area near Sagamore Creek.



**Creek Farm and Wentworth Coolidge Historic Site** have a popular trail network for hiking, snowshoeing, water access, and other activities.

## DESIRED OPEN SPACE IMPROVEMENTS

Wikimap respondents noted the following types of improvements for Portsmouth's open space parcels:

### On-Site Infrastructure

Additional seating, more lighting, repairs to existing infrastructure, trail maintenance, more coordinated parking, better or clearer signage, and covered gathering spaces were all mentioned.

### Activities

Some respondents indicated that they would like to see additional activities and programming (such as environmental education and live music) at various open spaces. The monitoring and management of specific activities, such as dog walking, were noted as well.

### Access

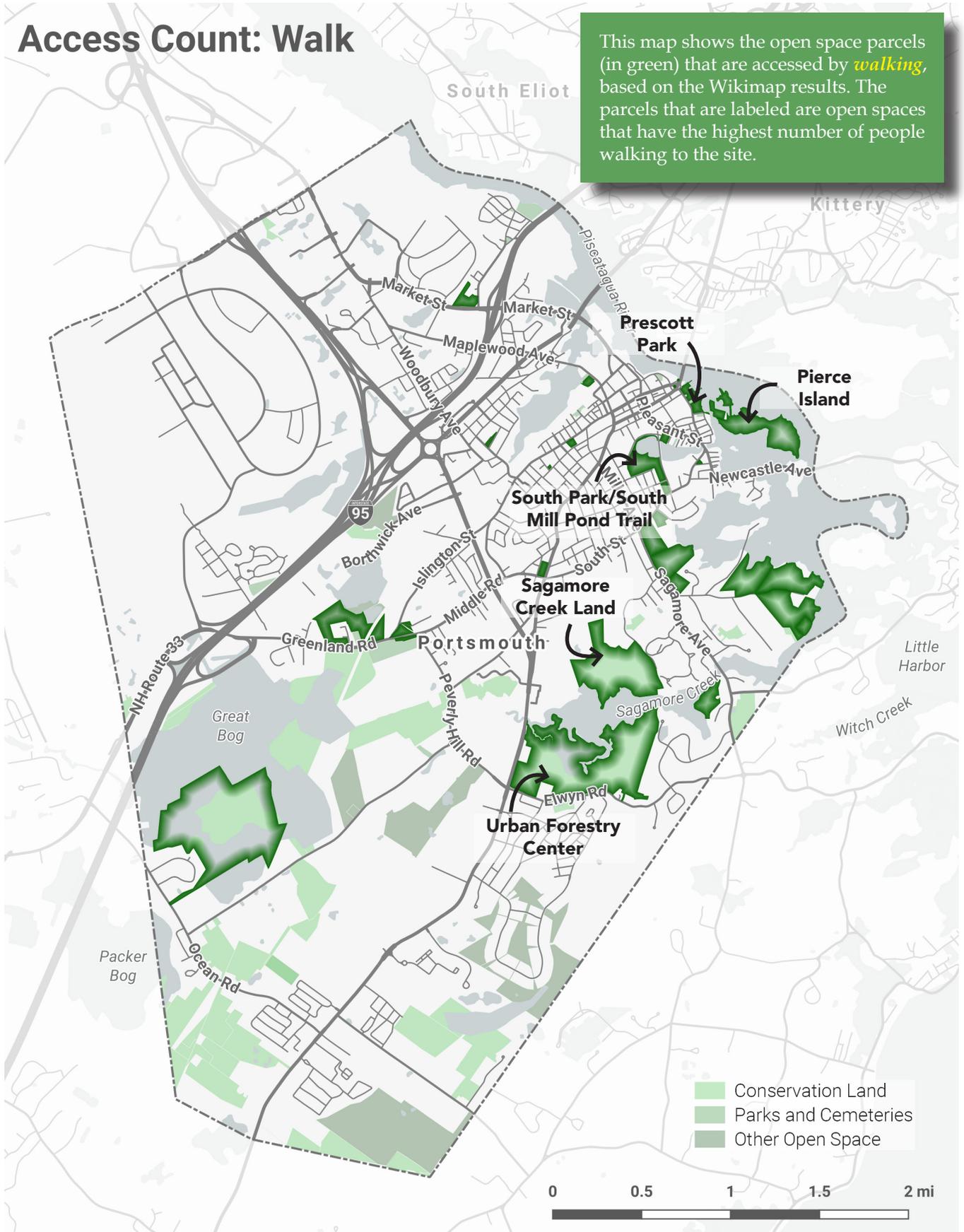
Pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, such as crosswalks and bike lanes, were suggested at various streets or intersections to improve the safety of walking and biking to an open space.

### Stewardship

Respondents emphasized that open space management protect natural resources on and off site.

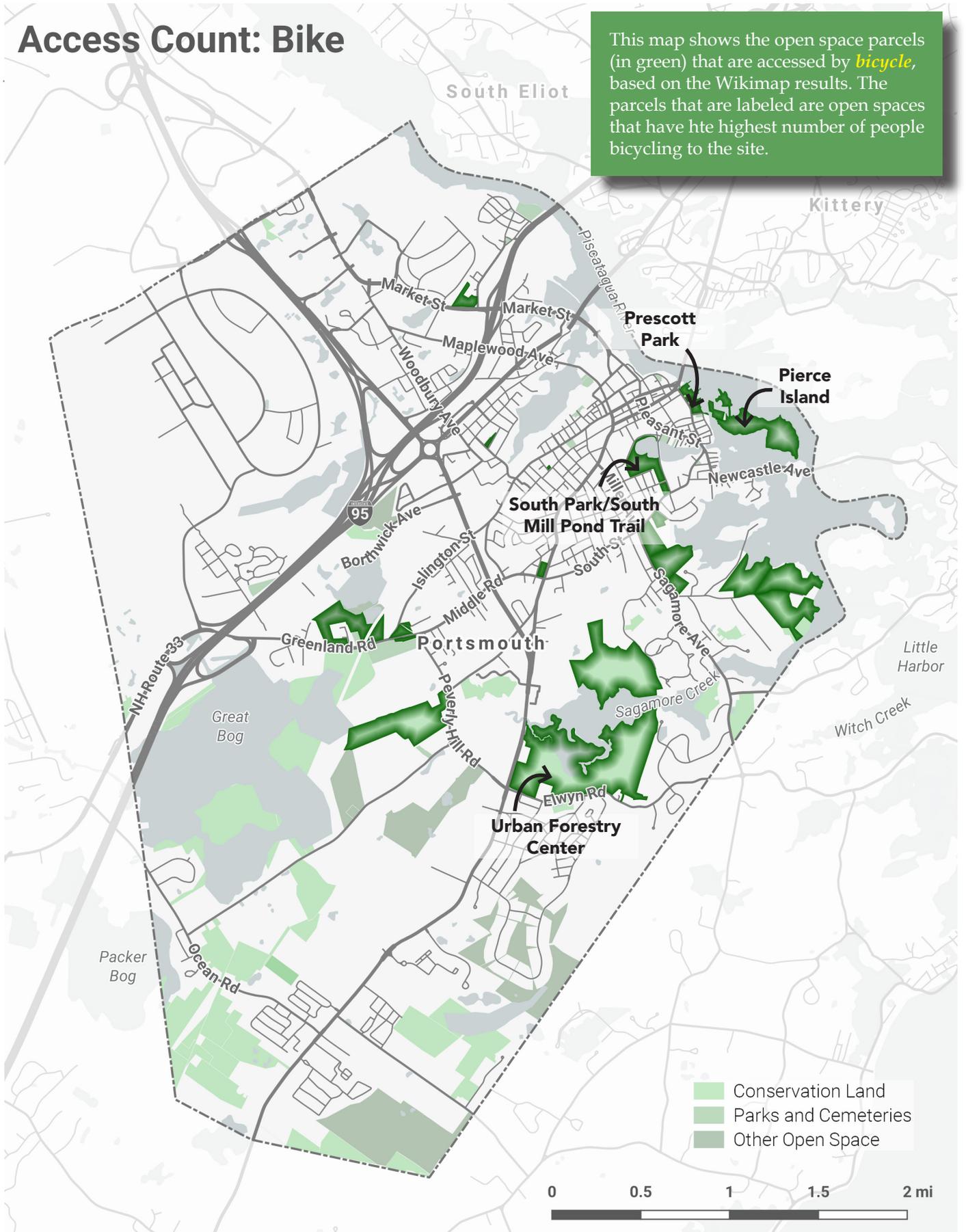
# Access Count: Walk

This map shows the open space parcels (in green) that are accessed by *walking*, based on the Wikimap results. The parcels that are labeled are open spaces that have the highest number of people walking to the site.



# Access Count: Bike

This map shows the open space parcels (in green) that are accessed by *bicycle*, based on the Wikimap results. The parcels that are labeled are open spaces that have the highest number of people bicycling to the site.



## WHAT ACTIVITIES DO YOU PARTICIPATE IN AT VARIOUS OPEN SPACE PARCELS?

Wikimap respondents participate in a variety of outdoor activities in the City's open spaces. Many people walk, hike, or stroll through properties like Pierce Island, around South Mill Pond, Prescott Park, and the Urban Forestry Center (which received the highest number of respondents who indicated they walked as an activity at an open space). Other properties that individuals noted that they walk through include Clough Field, Sagamore Creek Land, and Creek Farm. People also go to two City of Portsmouth properties (seen on the map as the green spaces above Market Street and above Greenland Road) that are less formalized than other open spaces but serve as neighborhood green space close to residences or work.

Respondents indicated that they participate in bicycling at properties such as Pierce & Four Tree Islands, South Park, Harmony Grove Cemetery,

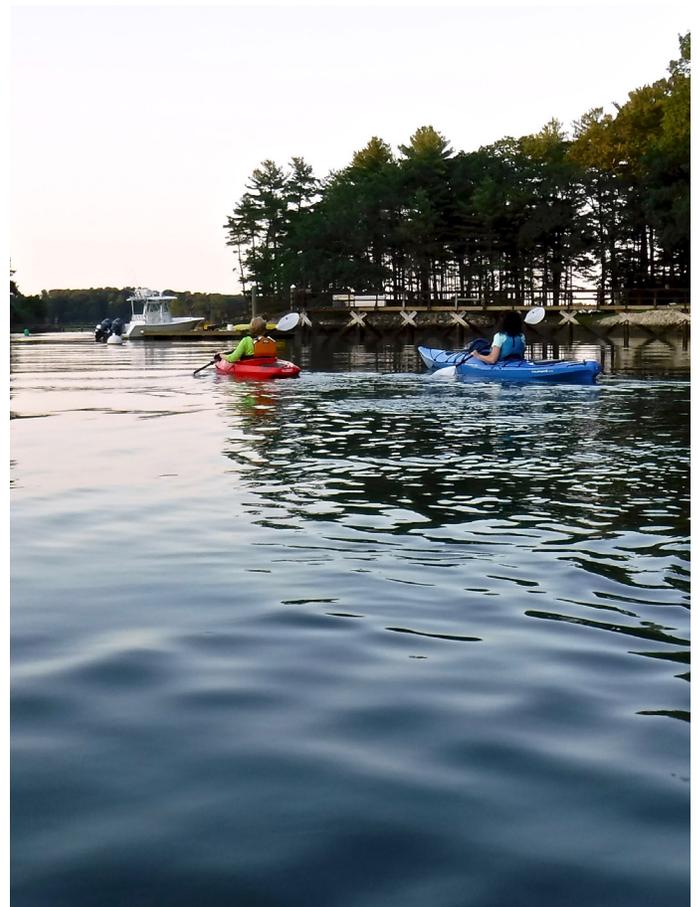
Prescott Park, and the Creek Farm/Wentworth-Coolidge Historic Site.

Walking is a more popular activity than biking is at open spaces in Portsmouth. Parcels such as Great Bog, Wentworth Homeland, and Sagamore Creek Headlands are popular for walking, but reported having zero respondents biking there.

Participants also indicated a number of other activities they participate in at Portsmouth open spaces including picnicking, visiting playgrounds, crosscountry skiing, horseback riding, fishing, swimming, kayaking, playing tennis or pickleball, and attending concerts. For example, respondents enjoy picnicking, sitting, and relaxing at Daniel Street Pocket Park. Harmony Grove Cemetery is popular for biking, walking, and cross country skiing. Pierce Island is popular for swimming and for kayaking. People enjoy live music, frisbee, the playground, and walking at Prescott Park.



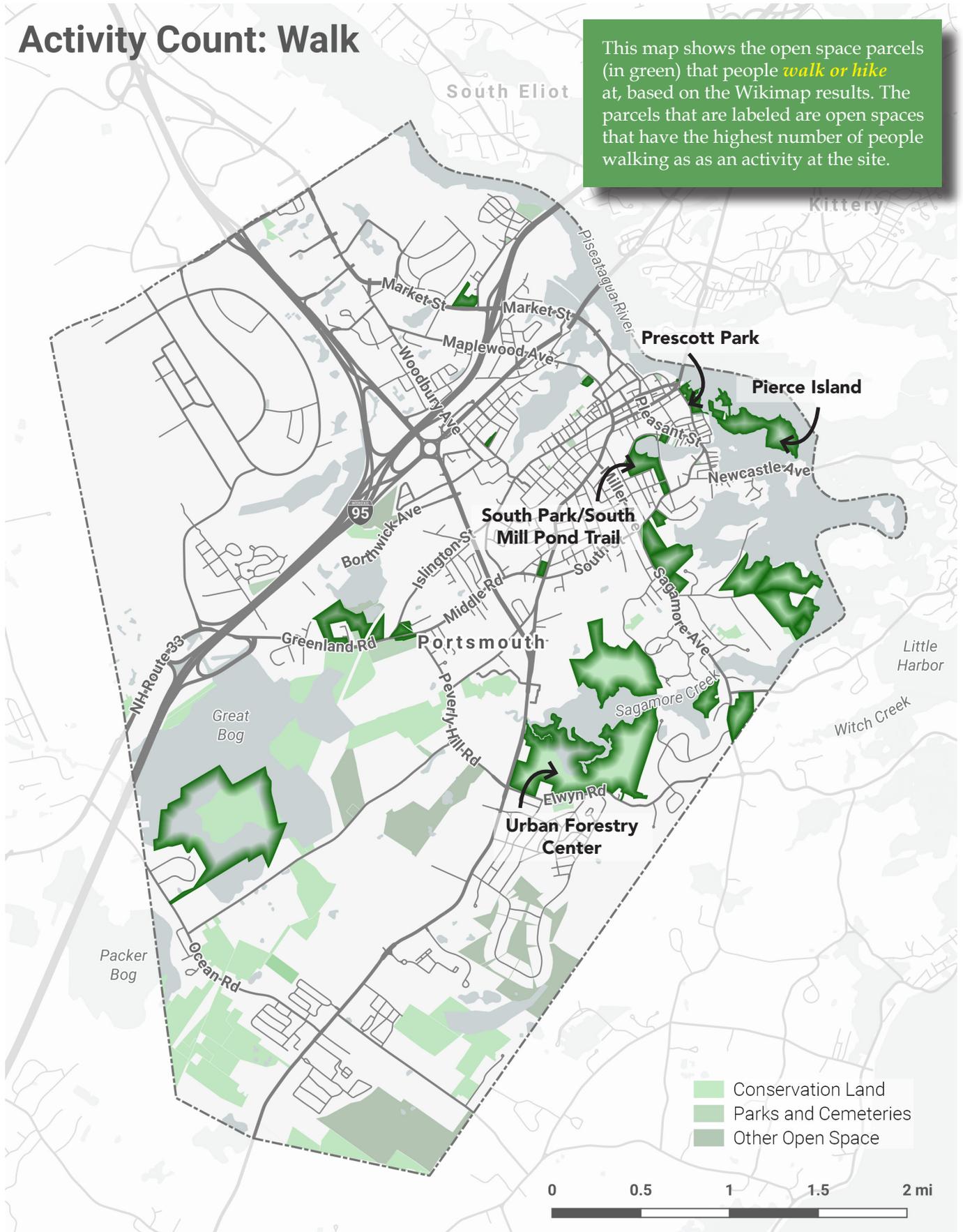
Above: Little Harbor Loop Trail in winter  
Courtesy: Society for the Protection of NH Forests



Above: Kayaking on Sagamore Creek  
Courtesy: Wilderness Girls Kayaking

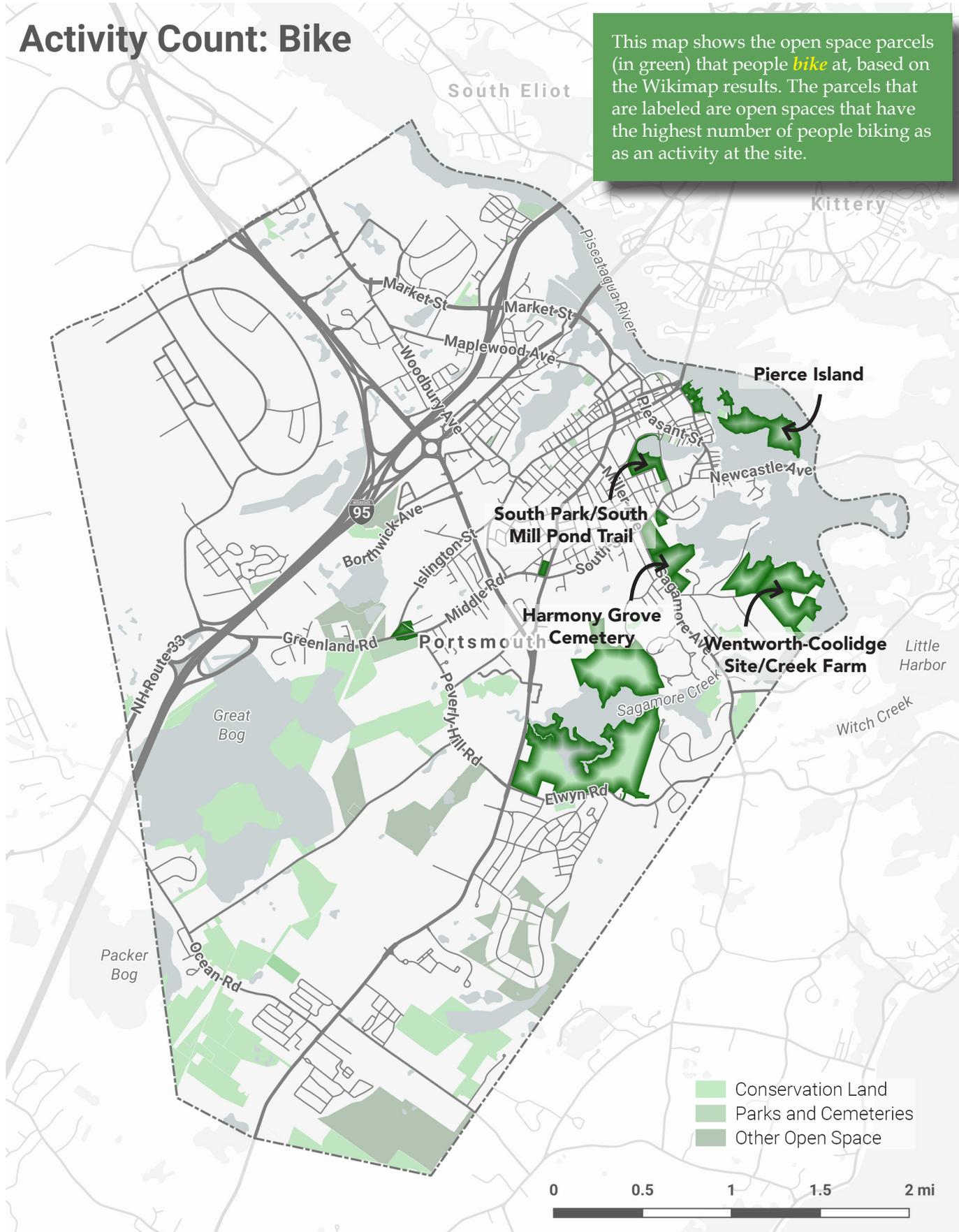
# Activity Count: Walk

This map shows the open space parcels (in green) that people *walk or hike* at, based on the Wikimap results. The parcels that are labeled are open spaces that have the highest number of people walking as an activity at the site.



# Activity Count: Bike

This map shows the open space parcels (in green) that people *bike* at, based on the Wikimap results. The parcels that are labeled are open spaces that have the highest number of people biking as an activity at the site.



## SUMMARY OF WIKI MAP COMMENTS

### WHAT IMPROVEMENTS WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE AT THIS OPEN SPACE?

OPEN SPACE PARCEL	SUMMARY OF COMMENTS
Portsmouth Fish Pier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This is a beautiful spot...but the Fisherman’s Memorial is unkempt.</li> </ul>
Harmony Grove Cemetery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Boundary walls need repair</li> </ul>
Goodwin Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Better lighting, particularly along the paths, would make the park feel safer after sundown. Also, one of the benches was removed earlier this year and hasn’t been replaced.</li> </ul>
Prescott Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“No dogs allowed” signs at all entrances</li> <li>Add screening around the dumpsters near the State Street park entrance or relocate them.</li> <li>Construct a covered stage</li> <li>More shade plants near water fountain.</li> <li>Allow for an area for dogs off leash.</li> <li>Keep bathrooms open in the winter.</li> <li>Better seasonal stage with roof for performers</li> <li>Along the water, there’s a need to improve the seawall and remove the chain-link fence</li> <li>Maintain park infrastructure regularly.</li> <li>Stop roping off the park when there is a concert there. This is a public park and the rope lines are unwelcoming and offputting.</li> </ul>
Clough Field	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Add a bike lane from downtown to Little Harbor School.</li> <li>Add bleachers for visitors.</li> <li>Expand the use of the field to other Portsmouth teams.</li> <li>Add weekend sports clinics to programming.</li> </ul>
Little Harbor Trail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a stone path or boardwalk over the muddy areas.</li> <li>Remove invasive species, such as oriental bittersweet (by hand).</li> <li>Ensure proper drainage control on trail, as portion can become flooded.</li> <li>Some trail maintenance and possibly improvements to the stream crossing would help.</li> </ul>
Cotton Cemetery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A crosswalk from Richards Ave to the Cemetery entrance.</li> <li>Boundary walls need repairs.</li> </ul>
North Cemetery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parts of these two cemeteries are litter-filled and look uncared for. Sad to see in such a history-laden area.</li> </ul>
Sagamore Cemetery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Boundary walls need repairs</li> </ul>
Pine Street Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Repair the sidewalks on Bartlett Street and paint the crosswalk regularly</li> <li>Put in place traffic calming devices on Bartlett Street</li> <li>Keep the bus stop on Bartlett Street.</li> </ul>
Aldrich Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Keep the adult swingset.</li> </ul>
Haven Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Needs more lighting to enhance safety and security.</li> </ul>
South Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construct 2 courts with pickleball height nets</li> <li>Extension up to Lincoln St. - needs a proper foot path, &amp; lighting, some benches.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Pierce Island Park</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No off leash dogs.</li> <li>• Playground is incredibly unsafe. Rusted and many areas smaller kids can fall through.</li> <li>• More bike racks at the pool</li> <li>• Bike lane</li> <li>• Continue to restrict parking to users of Peirce Island.</li> <li>• Consider replacement of playground with a natural playground (there is great potential for this due to existing topography for built-in slides, etc.)</li> <li>• Pedestrian walkway to pool from parking lot. Encourage bikes need to yield to pedestrian.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Urban Forestry Center</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paint cross walk on Elwyn Road.</li> <li>• Upgrade trail signs and paint better markers/ blazes.</li> <li>• At Grant and/or Taft Rd, paint a crosswalk and trail entrance to the UFC.</li> <li>• Need better signage (with distances) for various trails/loops.</li> <li>• Paint a bike lane down Peverly Hill and across RT 1 to Elwin road to access this space</li> <li>• Cultivate a partnership between UFC and schools (especially Dondero, as UFC is on current bus routes) for outdoor programming, possibly with a physical home at the Urban Forestry Center.</li> <li>• More interpretive signage or other descriptive elements that indicate what happens at UFC: invasives management, sawmill, etc.</li> <li>• More educational material about the trees, etc.</li> <li>• Improved enforcement of the dogs-on-leash rule; less timbering, more trees.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sagamore Creek Land</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice better stewardship of land and vernal pools.</li> <li>• Open the capped landfill up for access.</li> <li>• Implement recently completed Master Plan for this site.</li> <li>• Removal of oriental bittersweet (by hand pulling/pruning).</li> <li>• Keep land forested.</li> <li>• Improve wayfinding and access to the trails from the high school side. Trails behind the bleachers are often iced over for a large part of the year, even when most snow has thawed.</li> <li>• Improve enforcement of it being a dog-on-leash area.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sagamore Creek Headlands</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remove oriental bittersweet at the entrance of headlands.</li> <li>• Fix the ramp to the float (reattach netting).</li> <li>• We remove bottles and cans from this site weekly. Parties are held here and people aren't responsible.</li> <li>• Add a sign letting passers-by know that it is a public dock.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Wentworth-Coolidge Historic Site</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need additional benches.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Daniel Street Pocket Park</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More shade.</li> <li>• Connect it pocket park to Prescott Park and/or Ceres St.</li> <li>• Skateboarders love this gorgeous space, and ride here (LOUDLY!) at all hours of the day and night. Their boards scuff up the benches and create intolerable noise. Please install a "NO SKATEBOARDING" sign!</li> </ul>

Mark H. Wentworth  
Homeland

Four Tree Island

- The loudest peepers emerge at this pond every spring. It would be nice to have a short trail & bench to enjoy.
- A small acoustic music series 1x/mo would be nice.
- Continue to monitor the parking for Four Tree Island access (some downtown employees and Prescott Park visitors currently use the parking).

# ONLINE FEEDBACK FORM

The City launched an open-ended online feedback form as another mechanism of collecting feedback for the Open Space Plan. 35 responses were collected through this form. Key findings include:

## Overall, people thought open space was defined as:

- Natural areas with little development such as green space, forest, unobstructed skyline, waterways and shoreland.
- Recreation assets that are multi-functional including trails, community gardens, parks, fields, and flexible event space.
- Providing public amenities and services including universal accessibility, programming, shade, benches, picnic tables, vegetation, etc.
- An “escape” from city life that offers peace, quiet, and enjoyment of the outdoors.

## Existing open space and future open space:

- Popular open spaces include the parks downtown, the cemeteries, Pierce Island, Urban Forestry Center, the open space around North

and South Mill Pond, and Creek Farm.

- The McIntyre lot was identified as having potential for the incorporation of green space.

## What should the City consider when working on the Open Space Plan?

- Many respondents said that the City should put resources towards permanently protecting existing open space for recreation, relaxation, and habitat protection.
- Consider all users when planning for open space, including the elderly, when designing walking paths, lighting, and overall accessibility.
- Open space is valuable for property values, livability, health, and quality of life and should be emphasized to garner public support.
- Continue improving green space in downtown by considering pocket parks and other green infrastructure.
- Stewardship of open space in the City, such as North Mill Pond, must be a priority moving forward.



Above: Future Seacoast Greenway rail trail at the Route 33 Overpass

Courtesy: City of Portsmouth

# APPENDIX

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The following pages include the raw data and results from the community engagement phase of the open space planning process.