

Parks and Recreation



GOAL:

- **Continue to maintain the existing level and quality of recreational opportunities for Owasco residents, and enhance recreational opportunities as feasible.**



Residents Survey Highlights

- *Slightly more than 50% of the respondents perceived that no additional parks or recreational facilities are need in the Town. By comparison, 41% did perceive a need for more parks and recreational facilities.*
- *Survey respondents were presented with a list of recreational facilities, and asked to indicate the need for more of each type of facility in Emerson Park. Generally, the combined proportion of respondents who indicated "much need" or "somewhat needed" was about equal to the proportion who indicated "not needed." for each item. Skating/skateboard and swimming pool/water park facilities were the exceptions as the majority of respondents indicated such facilities are "not needed" in Emerson Park.*

Recreational Facilities and Programs

Town Playgrounds

The Town of Owasco maintains two playgrounds. One playground is adjacent to the Town Hall on property owned by the Town. The other playground is adjacent to Fire Hall No. 2 in the Hamlet of Owasco on land owned by the Owasco Fire District. Both playgrounds contain several pieces of relatively new playground equipment that are in very good condition.

The playground adjacent to the Owasco Town Hall is the most heavily used undoubtedly due to its location within the "Avenues," the area of Owasco with the highest density of residential dwellings. In contrast, the playground in the Hamlet of Owasco receives much less use due to the small population of the Hamlet.

The Town of Owasco provides a children's summer recreation program at both playgrounds from the time school recesses for the summer break until mid August. The program is provided free of charge and is open to all Owasco elementary school age youth. The program consists of an assortment of games, arts and crafts projects, and field trips supervised by two playground directors who are seasonal Town employees.

The program is provided Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the playground adjacent to the Town Hall. During July, the morning sessions are conducted in the Owasco Elementary School library with the assistance of the librarian whose services are paid for by the Town. Children are also permitted to check out books from the Library.

The program is provided on Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 9:00 a.m. to noon at the playground in the Hamlet of Owasco. Historically, participation in the summer recreation program at the playground in the Hamlet of Owasco has been much lower than at the Town Hall Playground. Participation in the Hamlet summer recreation program, however, has increased significantly during the past couple of years.

The Town also provides a summer swim program through arrangements with the Auburn YMCA. Owasco youth ages three and up are eligible to participate. There is no charge for youth to participate, but they must have their own means of transportation to and from the YMCA pool in the City.

Owasco Elementary School Playground

The Owasco Elementary School also has playground facilities for use by students. The playground is available for public use whenever school is not in session.

Emerson Park

Emerson Park, a Cayuga County Park, is located in the Town on Owasco Lake. Due to its location, the park provides Owasco residents with many recreational opportunities. The park, which is large, consists of 138 acres of land and contains the following recreational facilities:

- ◆ boat launch
- ◆ boat docks/slips
- ◆ swimming beaches
- ◆ children's playground
- ◆ picnic shelters and tables
- ◆ youth baseball fields
- ◆ the "Pavilion"
- ◆ Ward W. O'Hara Agricultural Museum of Cayuga County
- ◆ Merry-Go-Round Playhouse

Although admission to Emerson Park is free, there are parking fees and fees for the use of the boat launch, docking facilities, and picnic shelters. There is also a fee for the use of the "Pavilion" which is a large, enclosed building that contains a dining room, limited kitchen facilities and a ballroom. Each may be rented individually or together as a package.



Resident Survey Highlights *(continued)*

- Respondents were also asked to identify the type of facilities most appropriate to have in Emerson Park. The results are summarized below. The percentage of respondents who indicated each facility as being appropriate for Emerson Park appears in parentheses.
 - ◆ picnic shelters and tables (96.6%)
 - ◆ children's playgrounds (89.7%)
 - ◆ open area for festivals and the circus (82.0%)
 - ◆ walking and bicycle paths (79.7%)
 - ◆ boat marina (60.7%)
 - ◆ outdoor ice skating rink (54.4%)
 - ◆ sports fields for organized leagues (48.6%)
 - ◆ fitness trail with exercise stations (47.0%)
 - ◆ sports fields for general public (43.8%)
 - ◆ tennis courts (41.7%)
 - ◆ basketball courts (37.9%)
 - ◆ swimming pool/water park (36.1%)
 - ◆ skating/skateboard facility (26.6%)

The Merry-Go-Round Playhouse produces live theater performances from early June through late August. The theater derives its name from the fact that the building originally housed a carousel when Emerson Park was an amusement park. The organization that operates the Merry-Go-Round Playhouse and produces the shows is a not-for-profit corporation. Four shows are staged each season, and performances occur each evening Monday through Saturday throughout the season with occasional matinees.

The Ward W. O'Hara Agricultural Museum is open daily June through August from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and by appointment at other times. Admission is free. The museum provides insights into the agricultural and rural heritage of Auburn and Cayuga County during the 19th and early 20th century, as well as artifacts reflecting rural life during that era. Although the museum falls under the jurisdiction of the Cayuga County Department of Parks and Trails, its day to day operation is supervised by a Board of Commissioners appointed by the Cayuga County Legislature.

Camp Columbus

Camp Columbus, originally a Catholic summer youth camp, is now owned and operated by the Seneca-Cayuga Chapter of the Association for Retarded Children (ARC). ARC operates the facility as a recreational day camp for ARC clients and for the developmentally disabled clients of other agencies in the area. The recreational program includes crafts, sports and games, music and drama, and a swimming program. The camp, which occupies a 6-1/2 parcel of land near the north end of Rockefeller Road, abuts Owasco Lake.

Public Access to Owasco Lake for Fishing

The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) does not currently have public access sites to Owasco Lake for fishing nor does the agency have plans to develop any. Due to the access to Owasco Lake provided at Emerson Park, there is not a great need for additional public access. The public can fish from the Emerson Park shoreline and/or launch fishing boats at the Park. DEC would, however, consider developing a public access site in the Town of Owasco if a property owner was willing to grant the agency a permanent easement or sell the property to the agency at a reasonable price.

Owasco Yacht Club

The Owasco Yacht Club is a private-membership club with property on Lake Owasco. The club's facilities include a clubhouse



with a restaurant, a boat launch, several boat lifts, a picnic area with a playground, and a swimming area.

Cayuga County Sportsman's Club

The Cayuga County Sportsman's Club is a private, membership club located on Rockefeller Road near the Niles Town boundary.



The Club has trap and skeet shooting facilities, an outdoor rifle range, and two club houses. Annually, in the fall, the Club sponsors the Hunters Tournament (a competitive shooting event), and a Horror Halloween Hay Ride.

Golf Courses

Three golf courses are located in the Town of Owasco, i.e., Owasco Country Club, Auburn Golf and Country Club and Dutch Hollow Country Club. All three are privately owned. Owasco Country Club is a private-membership golf course. The other two golf courses are open to the public.

Relevant Plans and Programs

Emerson Park Master Plan

The Cayuga County Parks Commission has prepared and issued a draft Master Plan for Emerson Park. The Owasco Comprehensive Plan Committee, in order to provide input during the planning process, shared the results of the Committee's resident survey with the County Parks Commission. The Town also has two representatives serving as members of the Planning Committee who participated in the developed the draft Master Plan.

The draft Master Plan proposes to upgrade existing park facilities and construct additional facilities. The intent is to expand recreational opportunities and to make Emerson Park suitable for year round recreational use. The additional facilities that are proposed include:

- ◆ year-round restaurant
- ◆ picnic shelters with rest rooms
- ◆ multi-functional conservatory/pavilion
- ◆ ice skating trail
- ◆ swimming pool
- ◆ lake shore promenade
- ◆ hotel/conference center
- ◆ nature trails
- ◆ trolley

The Master Plan proposes that a hardscaped median be installed on Owasco Road between the opposing lanes to calm traffic and enhance pedestrian safety. The Master Plan also makes the observation that the speed limit on Owasco Road by the Park entrance is too high for pedestrian to cross safely.

History of Emerson Park

In 1889, the Auburn and Syracuse Electric Rail Co. developed a recreational facility on what is now known as Deauville Island. Shortly thereafter, the company built a terminal nearby in an effort to increase rail ridership.

The property was sold in 1899 and the new owner built the Deauville Island Hotel from which the island's name is derived. During the next 30 years, the property was developed as an amusement park and facilities were expanded.

In 1930, the Enna-Jettick Shoe Company purchased the property and renamed it Enna-Jettick Park. The shoe company used the park as a vehicle to promote its brand of shoes. In 1944 Fred Emerson, owner of the shoe company donated the park and some adjoining land to Cayuga County. The park was renamed in honor of Mr. Emerson.

By the early 1960's, the amusement park had significantly deteriorated. County officials redefined the role of the park to emphasize the accessibility of the lake and the park ceased to be used as an amusement park. Recently, County officials have taken the initial steps necessary to begin to refurbish and redevelop the park with the preparation of an Emerson Park Master Plan.

Issues and Opportunities

Owasco Playground

The playground in Owasco is located next to Fire Hall No. 2 on land owned by the Owasco Fire District. The Town has made efforts to acquire a small parcel of land elsewhere in the Hamlet in order to relocate the playground to a more suitable location. Town efforts have been unsuccessful, to date, as no property owner has been willing to sell property to the Town.

Summer Recreation Program

The Town's two playgrounds are in very good condition, and the Town has an established summer recreation program that is provided in both playgrounds. Many Owasco youth participate in the programs. Continuation of the summer recreation program in both playgrounds and maintenance of the facilities should present no difficulty to the Town.

Emerson Park Development

Concern was expressed during the comprehensive planning process that certain types of development being considered for Emerson Park would significantly increase the volume of traffic on Owasco Road. As Owasco Road currently carries large volumes of through traffic, significant increases in the volume would adversely impact on Owasco residents and the rural character of the community. Two representatives of the Owasco Comprehensive Plan Committee who serve on the Emerson Park Master Plan Planning Committee have had an opportunity to express the Town's concerns and to provide input into the development of the draft Master Plan.

Camp Columbus

Camp Columbus represents one of the few remaining parcels of land that abuts Owasco Lake which has not been developed for residential use. If the Seneca-Cayuga ARC ceases using Camp Columbus for the agency's programs and places the property up for sale, the likelihood is that private dwellings would be constructed on the property. In the event that the property were to become available and the Town was able to acquire it, the property could be preserved for public use either as open space or developed as a park.

Tools and Techniques

Grant Programs for Recreational Facilities

The NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) provides grant funding for the acquisition and/or development (or redevelopment) of property for public parks and recreational purposes, and for the purchase of recreational equipment. Grant funding is provided through the Environmental Protection Fund and the Clean Water/Clean Air Bond Act Fund.

Subdivision Regulations

The Town's Subdivision regulations authorize the Planning Board, when approving subdivision plats, to require subdividers to pay a fee for recreational development. The Town may use the fees at its discretion for future recreational development. Alternatively, the Planning Board may require subdividers to set aside a portion of subdivisions for future development as playgrounds, parks or for other recreational purposes.

Recommended Actions

1. Continue to maintain the Town's two playgrounds in good condition.
2. Continue to provide the playground summer recreational program, including the swimming and library components of the program.
3. Purchase land in the Hamlet of Owasco for relocating the Hamlet playground.
4. Continue to provide Town input into the Emerson Park Master Plan planning process.
5. Obtain the "right of first refusal" for the purchase of Camp Columbus.
6. Acquire the Camp Columbus property in the event that it is placed up for sale; maintain the property as open space for public use or develop it as a public park.
7. Require subdividers to pay recreational fees and/or to set aside land for future playground and park development as appropriate for the needs of the Town.