Making Room

Managing Parks and Open Space During a Pandemic

Unless otherwise noted, all images courtesy of WestCOG Flickr
Zoom Meeting Guidelines

- Muted upon entry
- Video optional
- Chat function available for questions
We Are Living In An Extraordinary Time

• The COVID-19 pandemic, state lockdowns, and social distancing regulations have upended open space use throughout Connecticut
• Even as lockdowns are eased, the effects will be felt indefinitely
• Let’s explore methods for managing open space facilities to accommodate social distancing regulations
This Project's Origins
Today’s Panelists

Shawna Kitzman, AICP | Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.
Deputy Project Manager, ActiveCT
Member, West Hartford Parks & Recreation Advisory Board

Jim Wood | Aspetuck Land Trust
Park Ranger, Fairfield Police Department (Retired)

Dan Rosenthal | Town of Newtown
First Selectman

Stephanie Brooks | Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.
Project Manager & ActiveCT Team Member
Exploration

Open Space Management
Digital Communication Tools
Creative Campaigns
Best Practices
Open Space Management

“DO” rather than “DON’T”
Extraordinary Increase in Open Space Use During COVID-19

- Parks, trails, and beaches are more popular than ever
- Unfortunately, overcrowding can lead to closures
- Latest studies indicate we are significantly less likely to get coronavirus while outside
- Adds pressure to reopen parks and beaches
- But…How to do it safely?
Understanding and Compassion Go a Long Way

• This is our “new normal”
• Right now, enforcement can seem scary
• Personal, empathetic approach
• Focus on the “DO” rather than the “DON’T”
Establish Ground Rules

- Slower moving people to the right
- Groups in single file
- One way in/one way out
- Require signed agreement on open space guidelines
- Leverage existing trail etiquette
- Notifications at trailhead
Enforce with Friendliness and Creativity

- Hire staff or enlist volunteers to serve as ambassadors
- Post user-friendly signage throughout
- Collaborate with neighborhood groups or park beautification organizations
- Chicken poop (for real!!)

Swedish city of Lund used chicken manure to encourage social distancing
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Digital Communication Tools

There is a lot out there!
State Park and Forest Resources

- CT DEEP “What’s Open Outdoors” [website](#) & [Twitter](#)
- Connecticut [Outdoor Recreation Alliance](#)
- CT Forest & Park Association [website](#), [Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#)
- CFPA Tips and Tools for #CTTrailsLessTraveled
- UConn CT Trail Census [website](#) & [Facebook](#)
- To come: CT Trail Finder!
Get the Word Out

- Website updates, social media, e-blasts, and press releases
- Text or automated call alerts
- Signage
Trail Website and iOS/Android Mobile Applications (free)

- AllTrails alltrails.com
- TrailForks trailforks.com
- TrailLink traillink.com
- ViewRanger viewranger.com
- MapMyHike mapmyhike.com

From the AllTrails website
Crowdsourced Interactive (free) Mapping and Gamification Tools

- Open Street Map [openstreetmap.org](http://openstreetmap.org)
- OsmAnd [osmand.net](http://osmand.net)
- Strava [strava.com](http://strava.com)
- Geocaching! [geocaching.com/play](http://geocaching.com/play)

From *Connecticut Weekender* (04/02/2018)
Best Use of Trail and Mapping Applications

For land managers

- **Criteria to identify a trail**: start/end in a parking area (even a couple of spaces), must be on public property
- **Get the word out**: use these resources to get your park/trail data into a map (especially for municipal land trusts)

For the public

- **Find less crowded trails**: use trail apps to sort according to popularity rating
- **Try something new**: geocaching, anyone?
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Creative Campaigns

Think outside the box
Focus on Wellness

- Visiting parks, trails, and open space helps people feel better
- Mental wellness campaigns
- Use art as a mental health PSA
- Alone, but together
Promote Local Community Exploration and Education

- Promote hashtags (#InOurBackyard, #ExploringHome)
- Local tourism (my favorite neighborhood)
- Native plant challenge (all ages)
Promote “Non-Park” Use

Lakeview Cemetery, New Canaan, CT (source: newcanaancemetery.com)
Highlight Local Farms and Unique Community Resources
Use Creative Social Distance Tactics

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Best Practices

Doing a lot with a little
Case Studies (30,000-foot view)

- Shared Streets Project | Burlington, Vermont
- “Code Red” System | Newtown, Connecticut
- Aspetuck Land Trust | Southwestern Connecticut
Burlington, VT
Shared Streets Project

- Led by Burlington, VT Department of Public Works
- Designed some streets as local traffic only/others as shared streets
- Cars, bicyclists, and pedestrians share same street, slow, cautious driving
- Temporary parking restrictions to widen bike/ped corridors
- Developed “Shared Streets for Social Distancing” Campaign

Images: burlingtonvt.gov/dpw/covid-19/shared-streets
Rollout and Considerations

- Used existing mayoral and gubernatorial executive orders
- Streets must have sidewalks on both sides and no transit route
- Used existing traffic plans to identify local road usage/best routes
- Volunteers checked on cones, lawn signs, conducted outreach
- Community feedback surveys used to adjust as needed

Images: burlingtonvt.gov/dpw/covid-19/shared-streets
Town of Newtown, CT

CodeRED® System

- Usually used solely for municipal alerts
- Adapted to notify people about social distancing in parks and on trails
- Worked with trail counting data sets to determine popular hours (2-4 pm)
- Encouraged users to explore during morning/evening outside of peak hours
- All parks stayed open

Image: newtown-ct.gov
Aspetuck Land Trust

- Developed policy using Federal and State requirements
- Stayed open when surrounding towns and land trusts closed
- Hired part-time workers and volunteers to address crowds/parking
- Requested visitors attend weekdays, explore other ALT properties
- Temporary ban on dogs; people are observing rule
- Bike use

Image: aspetucklandtrust.org
Rollout and Considerations

- Parking logistics – managing and communicating
- Weston Office of Emergency Management and Weston Police
- Internet resources (DEEP) and trail apps
- Recovery
- Membership
Changing the Parking Maps in Real Time
Key Case Study Takeaways

- **Use existing bike/ped and traffic plans**: to help determine best routes to use or modify
- **Phased approach**: start small, and expand as people become accustomed to the changes
- **Creative campaigns**: use signage, murals, develop campaigns with advocacy groups
- **Work quickly**: use executive orders to bypass traditional processes
Key Case Study Takeaways

• *Engage advocacy groups & partner agencies:* to volunteer and to help get the word out

• *Feedback surveys:* social media, emails, phone calls and/or texts, advocacy group mailing lists

• *Consider the vulnerable:* are any of the plans limiting access for some residents?

• *Consider next steps:* can some of these changes be permanent?
Thank you!
QUESTIONS?