

# Grafton Outdoor Alliance Outdoor Recreation Master Plan

REVIEW DRAFT

5/29/25

Prepared For:



THE WINDHAM  
FOUNDATION

+ Grafton  
Outdoor  
Alliance

Prepared By:

**CRO Planning & Design**

Communities | Recreation | Open Space



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# Introduction

This Master Plan will communicate the Town of Grafton's vision for outdoor recreation, the existing inventory of recreation and tourism assets in the region, critical gaps in the system that should be addressed, and future recreation opportunities. The plan aims to expand and improve access to Grafton's outdoor recreation and environmental education opportunities to make it easier for anyone to navigate and experience the community.

Grafton's lands, trails, and outdoor recreation assets are managed by several different organizations:

- Grafton Improvement Association
- Grafton Inn
- Grafton Outing Club
- Grafton Trails & Outdoor Center
- Nature Museum
- Windham Foundation
- Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association
- Town of Grafton

Recognizing the similarities between these groups' missions and work, the Grafton Outdoor Alliance (GOA) was born. GOA is a partnership between the Town of Grafton, the Windham Foundation, the Nature Museum, the Grafton Improvement Association, the Grafton Inn, the Grafton Outing Club, and the Grafton Trails & Outdoor Center. Formed in XXXX from a need to apply structure to the shared goal of wanting to enhance Grafton's outdoor recreation amenities and services, this plan is created for GOA to make Grafton a great place to live and work through the lens of sustainable outdoor recreation and environmental education.





# Community Profile & Market Assessment

Nestled among several state parks, proximal to several trail systems, and full of history, the Town of Grafton has many outdoor recreation opportunities to build on. Analyzing national and local outdoor recreation trends will help Grafton learn how to capitalize on these opportunities most efficiently and effectively.

## Grafton Community Profile



Population: **645**



Median Age: **57.3**



# of School Age Children: **139**



Household Median Income: **\$73,542**



Residents Below Poverty Level: **5. %**



**28.9 %** Residential Units in Seasonal/Recreational Use



Grand List Assessed Value: **\$1,523,005**



Number of Parks and Open Spaces: **2**



Miles of Trails: **20.5**



**51 %** Male **49 %** Female



**17.75 %** County Employment in Travel & Tourism



# of Playgrounds: **2**





## National Recreation Trends

The following data was acquired from the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) and the Outdoor Industry Association (OIA), both of which release annual reports analyzing outdoor recreation data in the United States.

According to the most recent OIA report, more than half of American women are participating in outdoor recreation for the first time: the female participation rate reached 51.9% in 2023, up from 50% in 2022. Another key finding was that more people than ever are participating in outdoor recreation, but less frequently (a decrease in the number of outings per participant). Other important data points include:

- Outdoor participation grew 4.1% to a record 175.8 million participants
- Members of the LGBTQ+ community continue to be the most active adult cohort at 60%
- 69.7% of participants are White
- Strong growth observed in the most popular recreation activities:
  - Hiking
  - Fishing
  - Running/trail running
  - Camping (car, backyard, RV)
  - Biking (all kinds)
- Older participants are likely to gravitate to wildlife viewing, birding, and/or fishing
- Folks are motivated to get outdoors to:
  - Spend time with friends/build community
  - Boost mental health
  - Connect with nature
  - Have awe-inspiring experiences (especially shareable ones)

The BEA report was focused on the most lucrative facets of outdoor recreation. The following activities generated the most revenue (in descending order) across the nation:

- RVing
- Boating/fishing
- ATVing/motorcycling
- Snow activities

## Vermont Recreation Trends

The State Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation embarked on analyzing outdoor recreation in Vermont for the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan in 2024 (referred to as Move Forward Together Vermont or MFVT). The data will be used to create a shared vision for Vermont's outdoor recreation future and a set of priorities and action steps for the next five years. The MFVT findings will be relevant and helpful for Grafton's plans to unify outdoor recreation opportunities in the area.

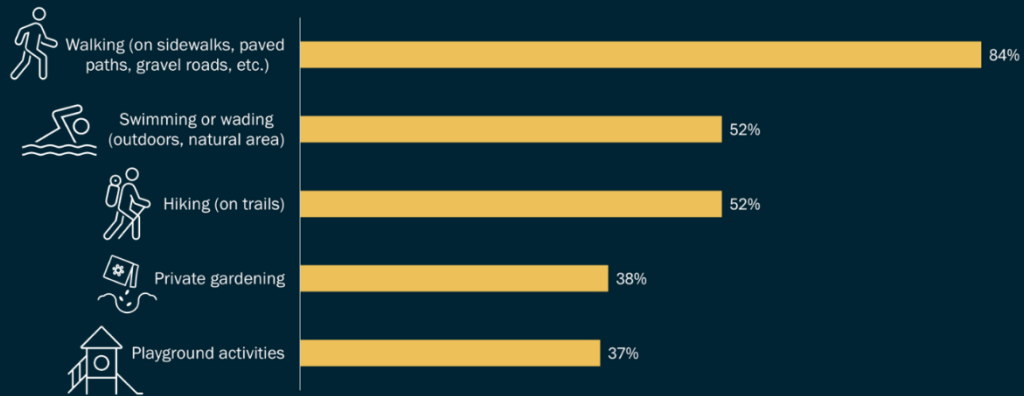
The data was collected utilizing two surveys: one for Representative respondents and another for Invested respondents. Representative survey results are your average Vermonter who may be mildly passionate about recreation and conservation but aren't your club presidents, GMC volunteers, VAST groomers, etc. that the Invested Users are more representative of.

Key findings are shared on the following pages. More information can be found [here](#)





## TOP FIVE ACTIVITIES BY PARTICIPATION: REPRESENTATIVE PANEL SURVEY



## TOP FIVE ACTIVITIES BY PARTICIPATION: INVESTED USER SURVEY



## OUTDOOR RECREATION INVESTMENT PRIORITIES

Rank	Representative Panel Survey	Invested User Survey
1	Programs that help Senior Vermonters to stay active outdoors	Support for non-profit organizations that steward trail systems
2	Outdoor recreation projects that serve low-income and historically underserved populations	Recovery funds for trails and other recreational infrastructure that experience significant damage from natural disasters
3	Programs that address mental or physical health needs through outdoor activities	K-12 programs focused on outdoor activities
4	K-12 programs focused on outdoor career pathways	Support for municipal organizations that maintain recreational resources
5	K-12 programs focused on outdoor activities	Investments in climate-resilient trails and other recreational infrastructure
6	Recovery funds for trails and other recreational infrastructure that experience significant damage from natural disasters	Programs that help Senior Vermonters to stay active outdoors
7	Support for non-profit organizations that steward trail systems	Outdoor recreation projects that serve low-income and historically underserved populations
8	Support for municipal organizations that maintain recreational resources	Programs that address mental health or physical health needs through outdoor activities
9	Recreational infrastructure to support people who use adaptive sports equipment	K-12 programs focused on outdoor career pathways
10	Recreational infrastructure or different levels of experience in activities	Recreational infrastructure to support people who use adaptive sports equipment



## BARRIERS TO RECREATION

Rank	Representative Panel Survey	Invested User Survey
1	The cost of gear, equipment, and/or appropriate clothing is too high	The cost of gear, equipment, and/or appropriate clothing is too high
2	I choose to do other things during my free time	There is limited or unsecure parking
3	I am concerned about sanitation, lack of bathroom facilities, or encountering human waste	It is difficult to find available sites
4	Use/entrance fees are too high	There are too many people/it is too crowded
5	Overall cost of trips to visit natural areas is too high	I do not have enough time due to work

## MOTIVATIONS TO RECREATE

Rank	Representative Panel Survey	Invested User Survey
1	Improve mental health	Improve mental health
2	Relax and recharge	Be close to nature
3	Experience calm & peace	Relax & recharge
4	View scenic beauty	View scenic beauty
5	Get away from the usual demands of life	Improve physical health





## Relevant Recreation Trends for Grafton's Assets

### Mountain Biking

According to a report from the Sports and Fitness Industry Association (SFIA), 9 million people rode off-road bicycles in 2022, representing 2.9% of the US population over age six. The survey data shows mountain bike participation growing overall (including amongst youth), but participation among those who report riding 13 or more times per year ("core riders") has been declining YOY since 2018. With more trails and bike parks being built, bike geometry and design making the sport easier, and the rise of electric mountain bikes, the overall growth checks out. The biggest barrier to entry has been identified as the significant cost of bikes and associated equipment. Regarding the drop in core riders, the study notes that the current trend is toward people spending a little time in many activities, rather than devoting a lot of time to one or two.

### Hiking/Walking

A report that reviewed hiking participation between 2015 and 2023 revealed key data about the direction of the activity. By 2023, the female-to-male ratio in hiking and backpacking had nearly equalized, with women representing about 48% of all participants, a growth of 40% since 2015. While young adults, particularly millennials and Gen Z, initially dominated the sport, there was a 40% increase in participation among older adults above 50 by 2023. The development of experience-enhancing technology (e.g. GPS, mobile apps) is expected to contribute to the significant increase in hiking participation. Social media is also expected to play a role in this growth, with the rise of influencers and the associated hiking destination exposure. Growth is expected to continue over the next decade, especially as more folks recognize the benefits that spending time in nature has on emotional and physical health.

### Winter Sports

The Snowsports Industries America (SIA) releases a Sports Participation Study each year that reflects trends in winter sports. The most recent 2022-2023 report showed growth of winter sports participation, including an increase in numbers across all race/ethnicity groups, revealing that 29.9 million people – a representation of almost 10% of the US population aged six and older – engaged in any winter sport activity for any number of days (up from 25 million people).

For downhill skiing, including alpine, freeski, and telemark, there was a 5% decrease in unique participants in 2021-2022. However, 2022-2023 saw this trend reversed, with the number of participants increasing by 2%.

The report also found there were 5,317,000 cross-country (XC) skiers and 3,837,000 snowshoers in the US in 2022-23. 2.5 million skiers were either new to XC skiing or returned after a year or more away. More than 75% of XC skiers earn more than \$50,000 annually.

Cross-over to other recreational activities showed 21% of XC skiers also went alpine skiing while 19% went snowboarding and 16% went snowshoeing. About 13% of XC skiers went fat biking, which declined from the previous year. Snowshoers have a 22% cross-over rate to XC skiing.

### History & Outdoor Recreation

The intersection of historic and outdoor recreational assets creates a powerful marketing and investment opportunity for communities,





including Grafton considering the Birchdale Camp and the African American Heritage Trail. Providing outdoor recreation amenities and an authentic experience are important to encouraging sustainable local business traffic and attracting tourists. Studies suggest Boomer and Millennial demographic groups identify their ideal community as being a town that offers historic character, enriching outdoor recreation, access to technology, and amenities within walking distance.

Another 2022 study from the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill examined relationships between museums working to interpret slavery and leisure tourism focused on outdoor recreation and scenic beauty. The study found that most folks who visited historic sites ended up there because they were drawn by the outdoor recreation/scenic beauty opportunities that were nearby. The reported crossover of history and recreation also both encouraged visitors to feel and think more deeply about history and, dichotomously, allowed them to “check out” and ignore the historical significance and instead focus on outdoor recreation.

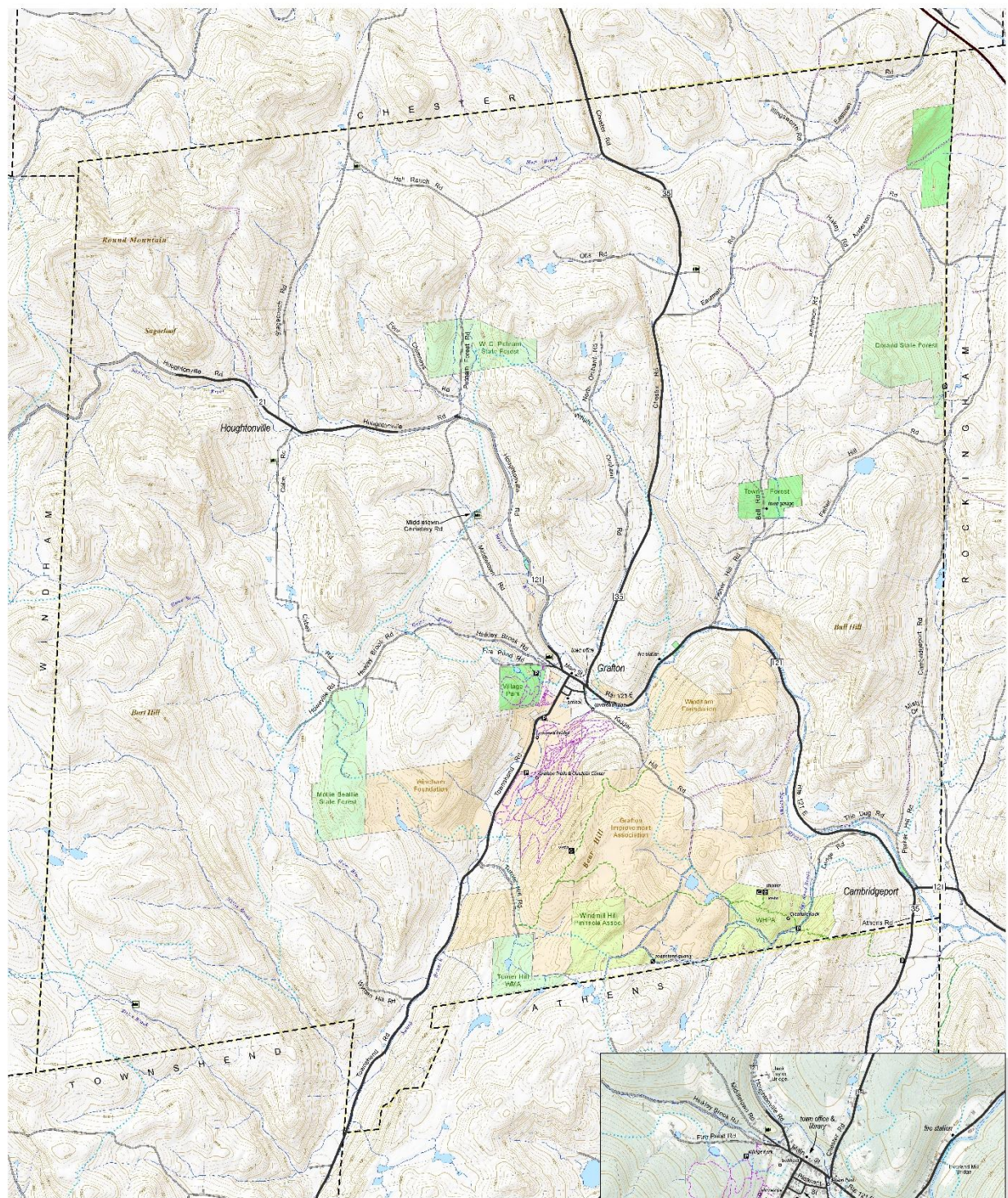
### **Nature Museums**

It is widely accepted that sustainable tourism has a positive influence on a community’s development. Nature and eco museums are classified under sustainable tourism, and the Grafton Nature Museum is undoubtedly a crucial asset to the Town. The museums are becoming increasingly popular around the world as a way to promote sustainable development, conservation, and cultural diversity. Studies have shown that eco museums have a significant impact on the economic activity of local communities, especially in mountain areas.

The future of eco museums looks promising, as they continue to gain recognition and support from the public and policymakers around the world. They represent a shift away from the traditional museum model that focuses on the preservation and display of objects in a static environment. Instead, eco-museums prioritize community involvement, sustainability, and a holistic approach to cultural and natural heritage.







## Base Map Town of Grafton, Vt.

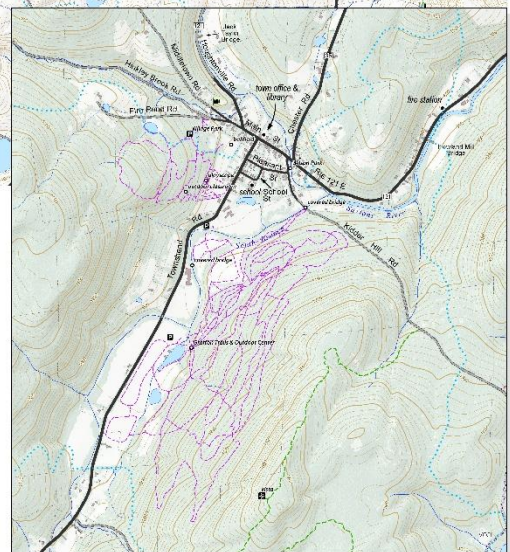
August 2024



0.5 0 0.5 1 1.5 Miles

- Public parking
- Cemetery
- Walking trail, longer distance
- Trail or path
- USFS scenic route
- Public Waters (Class 1 or legal 1)
- Paved roads
- Unpaved roads
- Other roads, "not state or town"
- State land
- Town land
- Conservation, and
- Other conserved org. land

Grafton only at this point.



Village inset

0 500 1,000 feet









# Grafton's Asset & Organization Inventory

A foundational step in strengthening Grafton's outdoor recreation system is understanding what assets and organizations already exist. The following inventory presents a comprehensive overview of the Town's outdoor recreation sites—ranging from multi-use trail networks and swimming areas to historic landmarks and nature-based education facilities—as well as the organizations that own, manage, or support these assets.

This inventory serves several important purposes. First, it offers a clear picture of the resources Grafton can leverage to expand access, improve coordination, and enhance the outdoor experience for residents and visitors alike. Second, it lays the groundwork for strategic planning by highlighting where recreation assets are concentrated, where potential gaps exist, and which entities are best positioned to lead future projects. Finally, by identifying the full spectrum of assets and organizational partners, this inventory enables the Grafton Outdoor Alliance to make informed decisions about maintenance, programming, marketing, and collaboration—ensuring that investments in outdoor recreation align with community values and long-term goals.

## Grafton's Outdoor Recreation Assets

Asset/Site Name	Owner/Manager	Size/Area	Activities/Programs Offered	Other Amenities/Notes
Grafton Trails & Outdoor Center	Windham Foundation	2,000 acres	Mountain biking, hiking/running/walking, snowshowing, cross-country skiing, snowtubing, sledding, swimming, disc golf	Swimming pond, restrooms, lodge, parking lot
Nature Museum	Nature Museum	4 acres	Trails for walking/hiking/running, after-school programs, youth camps, Fairy House Festival	Nature exhibits, play structures, pavilion
Village Park	Town	50 acres	Trails for walking/hiking/running, snowshoeing	Lean-to



Turner Homestead/Birchdale Camp (part of Turner Hil Wildlife Management Area)	Windham Foundation	1,052 acres	Hiking/walking /running, hunting	Birchdale Camp
Hayden Brown Forest (contains Bare Hill)	Grafton Improvement Association	840 acres	Trails for hiking/walking /running, snowshoeing	
Village Ball Fields	Grafton Improvement Association			
Creature Rock (part of Athens Dome)	Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association	207 acres		
Mollie Beattie State Forest	FPR	203 acres	Hiking/walking /running, primitive camping, snowmobiling, hunting	CCC Camp
Jonh Dorand State Forest	FPR	531 acres	Hiking/walking /running, hunting, fishing, snowshoeing	
Putnam State Forest	FPR	146 acres	Hiking/walking /running, hunting, snowshoeing	
Trail Around Grafton	Various		Hiking/walking /running	
Gravel roads	Town/State		Cycling	
Covered bridges	Town/State			

### Grafton's Outdoor Recreation Partners

<b>Name</b>	<b>Org Type</b>	<b>Location</b>
Grafton Trails & Outdoor Center	Nonprofit	783 Townshend Road
Nature Museum	Nonprofit	186 Townshend Road
Grafton Improvement Association	Nonprofit	No formal location
Grafton Inn	For-profit	92 Main Street
Town of Grafton	Municipality	117 Main Street
Grafton Outing Club	Nonprofit	No formal location
Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association	Nonprofit	No formal location
Windham Foundation	Nonprofit	225 Townshend Road
Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation (FPR)	State agency	Various offices around the State



# Public Visioning Engagement Feedback

## Online Survey

The online survey was another tool employed to gather crucial community feedback about Grafton's outdoor recreation future. There were 65 responses to the survey (40 complete and 25 incomplete). The full survey report can be found in the appendix and this section will focus on key takeaways.

The survey began by asking respondents where and how they recreate in Grafton. The key takeaways from this section are:

- Most survey respondents (both Grafton residents and non-residents) play outside at the Grafton Trails and Outdoor Center (76%)
- 22% of respondents recreate outdoors in Grafton daily, 33% weekly, and 32% monthly. This is evidence that parks, trails, and open spaces in Grafton are well-loved and used by the community.
- An overwhelming majority of respondents (both Grafton residents and non-residents) prefer to obtain information about trails and outdoor recreation online via Town, park, or trail manager websites
- 80% of respondents (both Grafton residents and non-residents) agreed that there is a lack of information about recreation opportunities (e.g. maps, signs, regulations, and closures)





Visioning questions were also included in the survey, and word clouds were generated to show the responses:

- 1) What word or phrase best describes your EXISTING experience with the trails and outdoor recreation opportunities in Grafton?

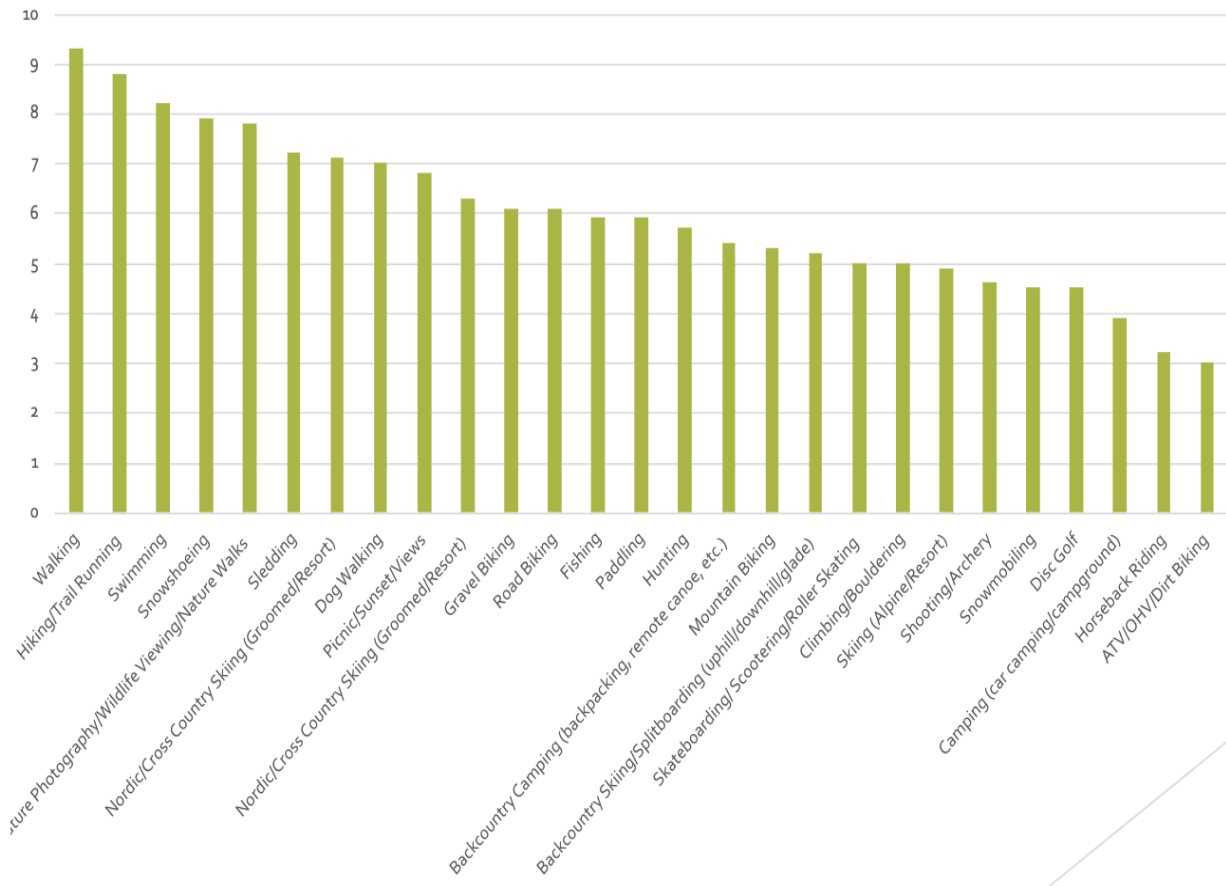


- 2) What word or phrase best describes your DESIRED FUTURE experience with the trails and outdoor recreation opportunities in Grafton?





The survey also asked about which outdoor recreation activities people want to see on the existing and any future trails and trail connections:



Foot-based sports (walking, hiking, and trail running) are the most desired activities. This is unsurprising given that these are the most financially accessible outdoor recreation activities (they require the least amount of equipment to partake). Swimming, snowshoeing, and nature walks/wildlife viewing also ranked highly.

When asked about types of outdoor recreation/environmental education programs and events they wanted to see in Grafton, respondents ranked festivals, outdoor concerts, and history/heritage events the highest (all tied at 72%).

Both Grafton residents and non-residents identified improved wayfinding signage, interpretive signage, winter trail grooming, and guided walks as the assets they most want to see developed to support outdoor recreation opportunities in Grafton.

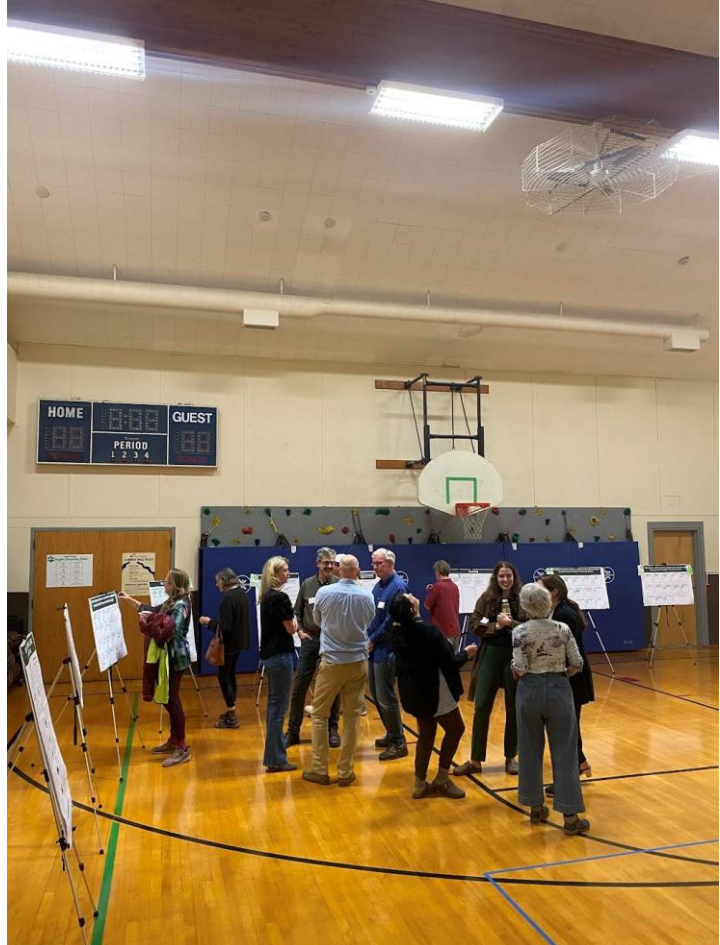




## Public Visioning Open House

To ensure we understand what the whole community wants for outdoor recreation in Grafton, a Visioning Open House event was held on November 6, 2024, with the express purpose of gathering public input about how people play outside in the area and what they want to see happen in the outdoor recreation space.

The event was held in the Grafton Elementary School gymnasium from 5:30 pm – 7:00 pm and had around 40 people participate. Poster boards that mirrored the questions asked in the online survey were created. Attendees partook in sticker dot exercises, going from poster to poster to place a dot in each box to reflect their opinions.



The poster board/sticker dot photos can also be found in the appendix. The key takeaway is that folks who attended the Visioning Open House had the same opinions as those who took the online survey.





# Analysis Findings & Recommendations

To help understand where people are recreating in Grafton, the Windham Planning Commission installed infrared trail counters at key trailheads and road intersections. Knowing where folks frequent can help decide what trails should be bolstered to accommodate more foot and bike traffic. These data showed where people are going and how often throughout Grafton:

## On-foot trail count data from the Windham Planning Commission

Site	Dates	Average Trips Per Day	Weekday Only	Weekend Day Only	Notes
Creature Rock Trail	June 7-16, 2019	7	8	3	
Bare Hill Trail	Aug, 9-19, 2019	1	1	0	
Bare Hill Trail	Aug. 29-Sept. 10, 2024	5	4	7	Peak count: 17 on Sun 9/8
South Branch Saxtons River Footbridge	Aug. 29-Sept. 22, 2024	32	29	37	Peak count: 64 on Sun 9/7
Grafton Trails and Outdoor Center	Aug. 29-Sept. 22, 2024	34	31	42	Peak count: 71 on Sat 8/31
Grafton Village Park	Sept. 14-22, 2024	5	5	5	Before trail improvements

Unsurprisingly, the GTOC and the river bridge received the most foot traffic since GTOC has the most trails to offer and the bridge is the main way for pedestrians to cross the river. Weekends also saw the most traffic, also unsurprising given most folks work Monday through Friday.

## Bike traffic count data from the Windham Regional Commission

Site	Dates	Average Trips Per Day	Weekday Only	Weekend Day Only	Notes
Townshend Rd between Turner Hill Rd and Zeller Camp Rd	April 24-28, 2024	5	1	11	Max 11 on Sun 4/28
Rte 121, west of Cambridgeport	Aug. 15-27, 2024	5	3	2	Max 21 on Sat 8/17
Rte 121, west of Village Center	Aug. 15-27, 2024	10	7	16	Max 20 on Sat 8/17
Townshend Rd, Outdoor Center	Aug. 15-20, 2024	7	6	8	Max 15 on Sat 8/17
Rte 121, west of Saxtons River (Town of Rockingham)	August 29-Sept. 10, 2024	9	10	9	Max 21 on Mon 9/1



The bike counter that was placed on Route 121 to the west of Grafton Village recorded the highest amount of traffic on weekends, suggesting folks are using that road for recreational gravel and other cycling,

The next sections will detail the gap analysis findings for the following asset categories in Grafton:

- Recreational assets
- Collaboration & Community Engagement
- Trail Connectivity
- Wayfinding & Trail Information/Communication
- Visitor Flow

## **Recreational Asset Gap Analysis & Recommendations**

The Town of Grafton has a variety of existing recreational assets that are already drawing visitors to the area. Between Grafton Trails and Outdoor Center, the Grafton Improvement Association trails, Village Park, and more, the Town is well-positioned to explore using outdoor recreation as a tool for economic development. The following section dives into outdoor recreation opportunities the community could lean into:

### **Extend the unique character of Grafton into the recreation system through interpretation of the historical & natural world in parks and along trails**

- Extend the nature interpretation of the museum and Grafton community history & character into the recreation system through implementation of all of this plan's strategies as well as leveraging existing self-guided walking tours, maps, apps, etc. that connect recreation with history and nature. Leverage opportunities to combine the three aspects into individual projects, branding, and the identity of Grafton's recreation system.
- Grafton's historically significant sites set it apart from other Vermont towns, and this should be leaned into. The Turner Homestead not only serves as an excellent example of a trail destination but also as an attraction in and of itself. The Town may consider investing in expanded, detailed, and weather-proof interpretive/educational signage to live indoors and outdoors of the homestead. The same goes for the various cellar holes, cemeteries, and other historically significant locations.
- The Grafton community should consider enhancing its interpretive signs, viewing areas, and programming for the natural world as well.
  - This could include self-guided walking tours, maps, phone apps, and more to effectively engage the community with natural world learning opportunities. Interpretive signs could depict information on things like natural communities, Native flora and fauna, Songbird migration, and Intersection of humans and the natural world (e.g. sustainable forestry and agricultural practices)







### **Invest in ongoing trail maintenance**

- Improve the quality and sustainability of the existing trails by investing more in ongoing maintenance, professional rebuilds/reroutes, and trail crew activities/staff time to conduct drainage improvements, trail tread repair in overly eroded/rooty sections, etc.
- Existing trails at the Grafton Trails & Outdoor Center are more of an “old school” design with many roots and rocks, offering a technical riding experience. Several sections of trails are “punchy”, characterized by short, steep climbs and descents that require riders to maintain a powerful, explosive style. These steep sections of trail can be more prone to erosion and can be rerouted and/or armored and reinforced with rock or other material.
  - 93% of survey respondents said they primarily use the trails for walking, hiking, and running. Maintaining the trails to sustain this foot traffic is imperative.
- The trails could benefit from upgrades to make them more environmentally sustainable and to improve the user experience. This could include:
  - Drainage improvements
  - Trail tread repair in eroded/rooty sections (e.g. adding soil to the surface of the trail)
  - Replacing old bridges and boardwalks
  - Build up corners into berms

### **Consider expanding the trail network to include mountain-bike optimized trails to offer a larger variety of riding options. This could include:**

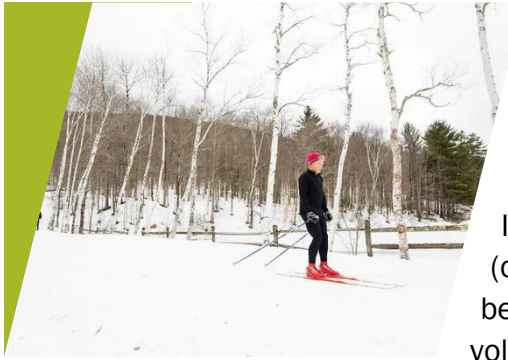
- A beginner-friendly trail (smooth and flowy trail as opposed to the punchy and technical trails that are prevalent at GTOC)
- Adaptive-friendly improvements/upgrades to accommodate adaptive mountain bikes
- Join a Vermont Mountain Bike Association Chapter to gain access to their associated benefits and build more awareness of the trails

### **Expand cross-country ski & fat bike grooming operations at GTOC**

- Currently, the Grafton Trails & Outdoor Center grooms a few kilometers of cross-country skiing trails in winter. GTOC is the only place in Grafton where recreators can ski on groomed trails but 70% of survey respondents identified cross-country skiing on groomed trails as an activity they enjoy in Grafton.
- Existing resources & staff capacity for grooming is limited but there is an opportunity to both invest more and change how resources are invested that may allow GTOC to scale down in the size of the groomer/groomed track while also empowering more activities by more significantly involving volunteers in grooming operations. and searching for funding for additional staff members to fill this grooming need.







- GOTC should pursue grants and additional resources to improve existing staff-led XC grooming operations primarily for cross country skiing but GOA should also explore snow dog/fat bike grooming for more diverse cross country and fat bike experiences on narrower trails. See the Interval Farm Trail System in Burlington as a good case study (can connect you with them!) and work with VMBA if GOA becomes a member to activate and support grooming volunteers.

### **Pond improvements**

- The pond at GTOC is a great asset for Grafton. Ideally situated for swimming, the floating dock, picnic tables, and fishing dock off the cabin are existing amenities that enhance the user experience.
- 82% of survey respondents listed swimming as one of their preferred recreation activities in Grafton. The GTOC pond is a perfect place to improve to meet this need. Upgrades that could be made to the pond include:
  - Build a sand beach to provide additional areas for swimmers to hang out
  - Conduct frequent water quality testing and result communications to protect swimmers
  - Consider eventual dredging to deepen the pond

### **Formalize trail destinations & install trail amenities**

- Grafton's trails currently have a handful of trail destinations, including the new lean-tos in Village Park, the cabin on the Big Bear trail at GTOC, the Bare Hill summit, and some cellar holes. These spots serve as points of interest and resting areas for those hiking, mountain biking, running, and more.
- Formalizing additional trail destinations and other gathering places throughout the trail networks in Grafton is another way to further enhance users' recreation experience. Suggestions include:
  - Hill summits
  - Scenic views
  - Historically significant sites
  - Pull-offs at key trail intersections/launching points
  - Other fun/significant natural features on the trails (Creature Rock is a great example)
- Outdoor recreation amenities include things like restrooms, benches, trash cans, and other assets to help make people more comfortable and supported during their adventures.







Grafton currently has two publicly available restrooms at the GTOC Cabin and the Windham Foundation building.

- 38% of survey respondents listed additional trailhead bathrooms as an opportunity to improve the outdoor recreation experience in Grafton, citing that the ones at GTOC are often closed/locked. Offering 24/7 access to the cabin restrooms or installing a porta-potty in the parking lot is recommended.

- 49% of survey respondents reported wanting additional trash cans at trailheads. Doing this would help reduce waste in parking areas and on the trails.
- Benches and picnic tables at key points/destinations along the trails to provide gathering and resting places would be a great addition the Grafton's trail networks as well. Trail destinations that could be developed into more could include:
  - The Turner Homestead
  - Big Bear Cabin
  - Bare Hill Summit
  - Fairbanks Farm Cellar Hole
  - Creature Rock

### **Self-guided, publicly available gravel loops**

- The dirt roads in and around Grafton offer an excellent gravel biking experience, especially since the town is so scenic! Ride With GPS is a tool that the Town can use to create gravel loops for locals and tourists to take advantage of Grafton's picturesque roads.

### **Events**

- Given the success of the Fairy House Festival, Grafton could capitalize on hosting additional special events. Outdoor concerts, festivals, and history were identified as highly desired events by survey respondents and would serve as ways to draw more visitors to Grafton.
- 60% of survey respondents also listed "guided walks and/or bike rides" as events they would be excited to see in Grafton. Staff and volunteers could consider hosting weekly or monthly group events around the trails. Examples include:
  - Women's-only mountain bike rides to offer an affinity space and cultivate community
  - Group rides that offer varying distances/paces around the







network followed by live music on the GTOC lawn or group dinner/drinks at the Tavern

- Weekly nature walks centered around bird watching, botany, or just simply being outdoors together
- Other events as identified by GOA and the community through engagement (see next section!)

### **Re-envision the Village Ballfields Area**

- Explore new conceptual designs for the Village Ballfields area that can bring in more multi-season and multiple uses. Could be more informal/open field space with more flexible "pick up/pop up" equipment and layout (movable nets/goals, winter ice skating, multi-sport court space for some public pavement in Town, etc.). Explore greater use for community events, sledding, and other activities.

## **Collaboration & Community Engagement Gap Analysis & Recommendations**

The enhanced communication resulting from the formation of the Grafton Outdoor Alliance has been helpful in moving Grafton toward its outdoor recreation and economic development goals. However, there are opportunities to further strengthen this collaboration and enhance engagement with residents and visitors alike:

- **Central Communication Platform**
  - Develop a shared communication platform to discuss and decide on real-time trail conditions updates (e.g., deciding when to close and reopen the trails after rain), volunteer/maintenance needs, and upcoming events.
- **Coordinated Volunteer Efforts**
  - Establish a unified volunteer program spanning all GOA organizations to facilitate volunteer recruitment/organization for trail maintenance, events, etc.
- **Collaborative Events**
  - Increase joint programming by hosting larger, multi-organization events such as outdoor festivals, classes, races, etc.
- **Ongoing Community Input/Engagement**
  - Host an annual Trails & Recreation Survey, use email newsletters, Front Porch Forum, social media, etc. to keep the community engaged with trail and recreation projects
- **Continue GOA Meetings**
  - Continue meeting as a group to share updates, address challenges, and plan collaborative projects, ensuring alignment and ongoing progress.
  - Seek continued funding & support for GOA initiatives.

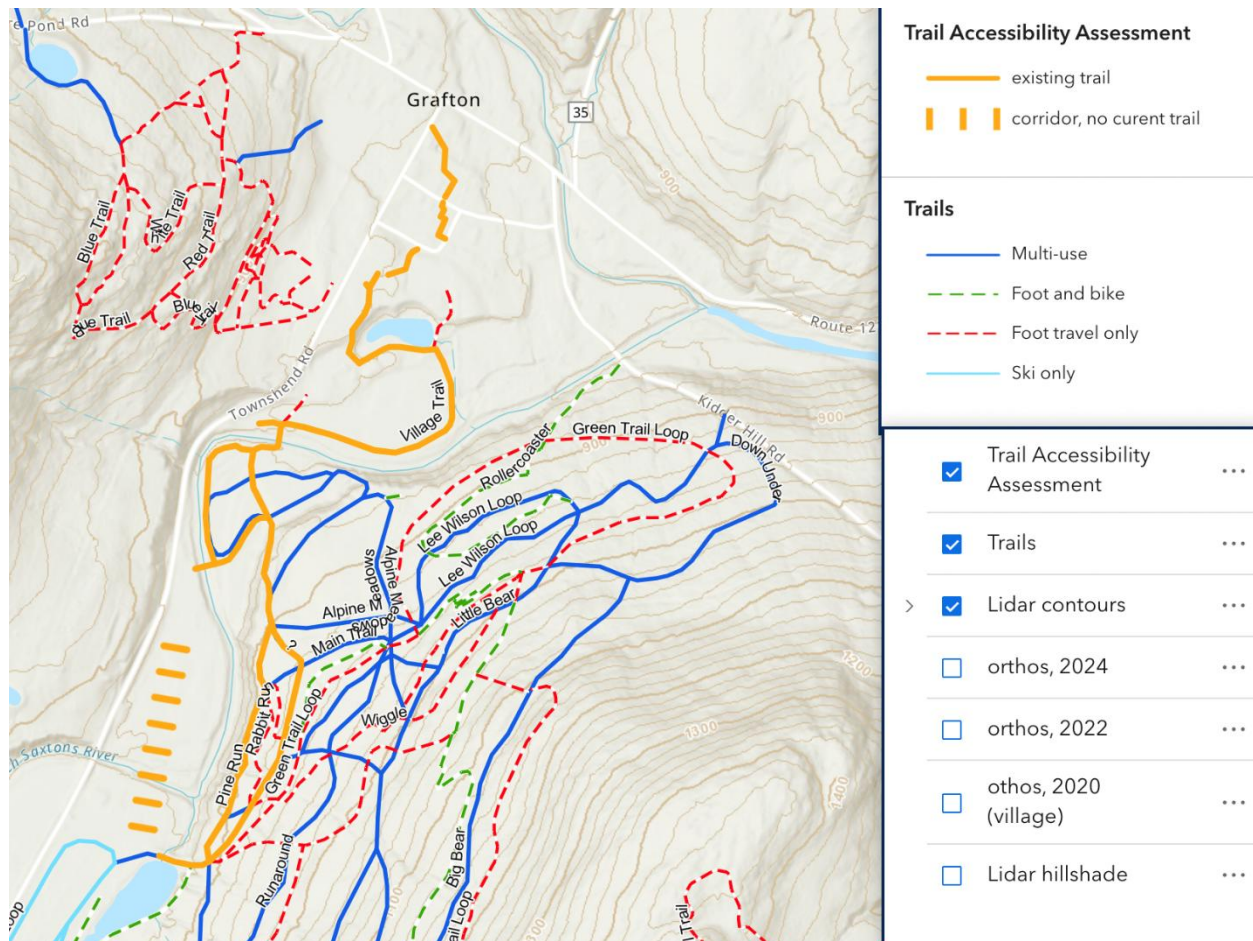




# Trail Connectivity Analysis & Recommendations

Grafton's impressive trails can be made even more outstanding by building connections between existing networks. Currently, the GTOC and GIA trails can be connected via Kidder Hill Road or Turner Hill Road. While this connection is better than nothing, most trail users prefer to remain on trails during their extended adventures. To enhance the user experience, GOA could consider building singletrack connections between GTOC, GIA, WHPA, and the Village Park trails:

- Pursue improvements to the Trail Around Grafton, including:
  - Conduct an accessibility assessment through the Trail Accessibility Hub program and use Universal Design Principles (the Upper Valley Trails Alliance conducts assessments for pedestrian walkways and trails and the Vermont Mountain Bike Association conducts assessments for mountain bike trails).
  - Close the loop by building a new north-south trail to the east of Townshend Road that connects GTOC's Main Trail to the existing foot-only Cheese Trail (depicted as the orange dashed lines on the map below):
- Explore building a connector trail that follows the topography line between GTOC's Blue Trail and GIA's Bare Hill Trail.
- Explore building a trail that connects GTOC's Pine Run or Green Trail Loop to Grafton Town Park's Red Trail.







## Wayfinding & Trail Information/Communication Gap Analysis & Recommendations

A lack of information about the trails and other recreation opportunities in Grafton was reported as the biggest gap by survey respondents and public meeting attendees. This section will dive into ways this can be improved.

### Unified Trail Map

Each recreation organization within the Town of Grafton offers individual trail maps for its networks. The GIA Town Trail Map does a good job of depicting most of Grafton's trails in one place, but it could use an update. To simplify navigation and encourage broader use of the Grafton's trails, we recommend continue working with the Windham Regional Commission on an updated, unified trail map:

- **Features of the Unified Map:**
  - Consolidates all of Grafton's trails managed by various organizations into one map
  - Consider including trails from the surrounding Vermont State Parks & Forests of Mollie Beattie (and the CCC Camp) John Dorand, & Putnam
  - Includes trail names, trail difficulty ratings, trail distances, parking areas, and topography lines.
  - Integrates the Visitor Flow Framework and categories by highlighting parking, points of interest, including historical sites, scenic views, etc.
  - Include "you are here" indicators so folks can stay oriented.
- **Map Distribution**
  - Print Version:
    - Distributed at key locations like trailhead kiosks, GTOC, the Grafton Inn, the Nature Museum, and major trail intersections.
    - Designed to be durable and weather-resistant for outdoor use with the kiosk design currently used in Grafton.
  - Digital Version:
    - Hosted on the Grafton Town website and integrated with the websites of the GOA members, local businesses, and others who want a map of Grafton.
    - Includes an interactive component that allows users to:
    - Find information about current trail conditions (e.g. closed due to rain, recently groomed in the winter, etc.).
    - Search for trails based on their desired experience, e.g., family-friendly, trail difficulty, length, or features.
    - View nearby businesses and other attractions.







## Cohesive Trail Markers & Signs

As identified through public input, the biggest need to improve outdoor recreation experiences in Grafton is better wayfinding and trail information. This encompasses both on-trail wayfinding and online resources for folks to plan their adventure.

Given Grafton's impressive number of trail networks, a cohesive wayfinding and trail marker system is needed. For example, consistency between the trail markers at the Grafton Trails and Outdoor Center and the trails maintained by the Grafton Improvement Association would reduce confusion for trail users, especially if a formal trail connection is built between the properties.

The Grafton Trails and Outdoor Center provides trail name signs at key trail intersections, though more markers could be dispersed around the trails to help users stay oriented. Trail maps at intersections featuring "You Are Here" marks would be helpful as well. A RTP grant could be used to pursue a trail marker project in coordination with WRC and the mapping effort (could also be combined with a kiosk project).

- Potential Sign Design:
  - Uniform, recognizable trail marker/sign design across all of Grafton's trails.
  - Clear directional arrows, trail names, and distances for each trail sign.
  - Color-coded markers (or the entire sign) that depict the trail's difficulty level.

## Additional Kiosks

Grafton's trails could benefit from more kiosks to spread awareness of the trails and help trail users plan which trails they would like to explore.

- Kiosk Features:
  - Build upon recent kiosk designs at Village Park, existing kiosks in Town, etc.
  - Utilize a print/plexi/pin format to allow for relatively easy map and content updates.
  - Large printed version of the unified map.
  - Unified etiquette and guidelines for trail use, e.g., mountain bikers yield to walkers, carry in/carry out, etc.
  - Information on nearby amenities, e.g., restrooms, parking, and picnic areas.
  - Notices for community events and updates
- Placement:
  - At trailheads, parking lots, and major trail intersections (e.g., on either end of a connector trail that would link the GTOC to the GIA trails).







## Extend Interpretive/Educational Signs at Historical Sites & Nature Areas

Grafton's historically significant sites set it apart from other Vermont towns, and this should be leaned into. The Turner Homestead is an excellent example of a trail destination and is an attraction in and of itself. The Town may consider investing in expanded, detailed, and weather-proof interpretive/educational signage to live indoors and outdoors of the homestead. The same goes for the various cellar holes, cemeteries, and other historically significant locations.

The Grafton community should consider enhancing its interpretive signs, viewing areas, and programming for the natural world as well. This could include self-guided walking tours, maps, phone apps, and more to effectively engage the community with natural world learning opportunities. Interpretive signs could depict information on natural communities, native flora and fauna, songbird migration, the intersection of humans and the natural world (e.g. sustainable forestry and agricultural practices), and whatever else deemed important by the Nature Museum and other GOA partners.

- Benefits of interpretive signs:
  - Encourages visitors to engage more deeply with the Grafton's history and natural communities.
  - Appeals to a broader audience, including families, history enthusiasts, and educational groups.
- Potential Content of Interpretive Signs:
  - Habitat, pollinators, natural communities, natural history, and geology (work with the Nature Museum)
  - Historical context and significance of sites, architectural history & preservation
  - Photographs, illustrations, and/or diagrams
  - QR codes linking to more in-depth resources or audio guides
- Potential Locations:
  - Turner Hill
  - Village Site
  - Cellar holes
  - The pond at GTOC
  - Wildflower fields
  - Forests with high quantities of native plants







## Trail Conditions Information & Communication

Trail users are subject to frustration when they arrive at a trailhead to play outside, only to realize that the trails are closed for one reason or another. Offering people the opportunity to learn what trail conditions are like in real time will help them plan their adventures and avoid these negative experiences.

- TrailForks is a great platform to update the trail conditions (e.g. if they are closed after rain), and serves as a self-navigation tool for trail users.
- Nordic Pulse is a platform that can be used to update real-time cross-country ski trails grooming and conditions.







## Visitor Flow Analysis & Recommendations

Visitor flow is defined as "the strategic process used to regulate and guide visitor movement within tourism destinations to prevent overcrowding and preserve natural and cultural resources." Using outdoor recreation as a strategy for economic development and tourism in Grafton is an exciting prospect.

Proper visitor flow ensures that residents and visitors alike will know where to park, eat, and recreate in a way that flows well with the layout of Grafton's village and recreation spaces.

Currently, people looking to recreate outdoors in Grafton can park at a select few areas like the Trails & Outdoor Center, Village Park, the Nature Museum, and other trailheads. Improving the visitor flow of the town to point people to the correct parking areas, public restrooms, businesses, and other points of interest will enhance their experience. Miles of multi-use trails also wind through Grafton but are relatively disjointed. Building connections between existing trails will reduce trailhead parking congestion and give users the opportunity for longer adventures outside. To help improve Grafton's visitor flow, we suggest an Anchor and Points of Interest model. Anchors are the main places in Grafton that we want to send people to:

- Grafton Trails & Outdoor Center
- Grafton Inn
- Grafton Village
- Nature Museum

Points of Interest (POIs) are the supporting locations where people can be directed in Grafton. The goal is to link all Anchors to POIs with physical connections, wayfinding, branding, signage, and nature/historical interpretation. To further guide folks and curate their Grafton outdoor recreation experience, we recommend categorizing POIs into the following themes:

- Outdoor Recreation (e.g. the Grafton Trails & Outdoor Center)
- Services (e.g. the restrooms at the Windham Foundation)
- Nature (e.g. Nature Museum)
- History (e.g. Birchdale Camp)

These Anchors and POIs will be listed and color-coded on the digital Interactive Map as well as the Unified Trail Map to help guide residents and visitors through Grafton, depending on what interests them most. For example, if a family is most interested in nature, they can elect to visit all the green POIs on the map. Clearly identifying services like parking areas and restrooms will help reduce unwanted vehicle congestion and business solicitation as well, while maximizing the positivity of the user's experience.





**VISTOR FLOW MAP BEING PREPARED BY  
JEFF @ WINDHAM REGIONAL COMMISSION**

**Will come prior to the June 18<sup>th</sup> public  
meeting for feedback**



# **Public Priorities Open House Feedback**

**TBD pending result of June 18<sup>th</sup> meeting**



# Strategy & Implementation Plan

The following table outlines actionable steps the Grafton Outdoor Alliance can take to implement the recommendations from this plan. It includes suggested timelines, partners involved, possible funding sources, additional planning needs, and more.

Draft Implementation Matrix below and linked here: [IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX](#). Will be finalized and formatted to match after results of public meeting are incorporated.

Task	Task Details	Timing	Community Priority	Development Costs Estimate	Maintenance Costs Estimate
<b>Recreation</b>					
Extend the unique character of Grafton into the recreation system	Extend the nature interpretation of the museum and Grafton community history & character into the recreation system through implementation of other strategies as well as leveraging existing self-guided walking tours, maps, apps, etc. that connect recreation with history and nature. Leverage opportunities to combine the three aspects in individual projects, branding, and the identity of Grafton's recreation system.	Short-Term		\$-\$\$\$	\$-\$\$\$
	Improve the quality and sustainability of the existing trails via drainage improvements, trail tread repair in overly eroded/rocky sections (e.g. adding dirt to the surface of the trail), build up corners into berms, etc. Invest in maintenance and trail crew resources.	Ongoing & Short-Term		\$\$	\$\$
Invest in ongoing trail maintenance	Consider trail network expansion to better accommodate all skill levels at GTOC by building a beginner-friendly trail (smooth and flowy), pursue adaptive-friendly improvements/upgrades to trails, consider joining a VMBA Chapter.	Medium-Term		\$\$\$	\$\$
Enhance multi-use & mountain bike trail experiences					
Expand cross-country ski & fat bike grooming operations at GTOC	Consider recruiting more volunteers and/or searching for funding for additional GTOC staff to increase frequency and distance of xc skiing grooming.	Medium-Term		\$\$\$	\$\$
		Long-Term		\$\$\$	\$
Pond improvements	Consider adding a sand beach and conducting frequent water quality testing incorporate more trail destinations throughout the Grafton network e.g. scenic views, historically significant sites, etc. Consider porta-potties at trailheads, benches, trash cans	Medium-Term		\$\$	\$
Formalize trail destinations & install trail amenities	Use Ride With GPS or another service to develop suggested gravel ride loops	Medium-Term		\$	\$
Create and distribute gravel ride routes	Consider hosting recurring on-trail events, and larger events similar to the Fairy House Festival	Short-Term		\$	\$
Host more events in Grafton	Explore new conceptual designs for the Village Ballfields area that can bring in more multi-season and multiple uses. Could be more informal/open field space with more flexible "pick up/pop up" equipment and layout (movable nets/goals, winter ice skating, multi-sport court space for some public pavement in Town, etc.). Explore greater use for community events, sledding, and other activities.	Medium-Term		\$\$	\$\$
<b>Re-envision the Village Ballfields Area</b>					
<b>Collaboration and Communication</b>					
Develop central communication platform for GOA	Create a centralized website to facilitate communications for the interactive map, trail closures, parking information, policies, volunteer organization, etc. One big group of volunteers will help avoid recruitment redundancy for volunteer needs	Medium-Term		\$\$	\$
Coordinate volunteer efforts		Short-Term		\$	\$
Host collaborative events	Increase joint programming by hosting multi-organization festivals, concerts, and other events	Medium-Term		\$\$	\$\$
Ongoing community input and engagement	Host an annual Trails & Recreation Survey Use email newsletters, Front Porch Forum, social media, etc. to keep the community engaged with trail and recreation projects	Ongoing & Short-Term		\$	\$
Continue Grafton Outdoor Alliance meetings	Continue regular meetings to maintain coordination and collaboration between member groups. Seek continued funding & support for GOA initiatives.	Ongoing		\$	\$
<b>Trail Connectivity</b>					
Pursue improvements to the Trail Around Grafton	Brand it as the main thoroughfare that connects all the trail networks in town, facilitate wayfinding for users, aim for full-town connectivity	Ongoing & Medium-Term		\$\$\$	\$\$
Explore building a connector trail that follows the topography line between GTOC's Blue Trail and GIA's Bare Hill Trail.	Work with a trail designer and builder to find the most sustainable connection route to improve connectivity between these popular existing trail networks	Long-Term		\$\$\$	\$\$
Explore building a trail that connects GTOC's Pine Run or Green Trail Loop to Grafton Town Park's Red Trail.	Work with a trail designer and builder to find the most sustainable connection route to improve connectivity between these popular existing trail networks	Long-Term		\$\$\$	\$\$
Conduct an accessibility assessment through the Trail Accessibility Hub program	Work with the Upper Valley Trail Alliance (UVTA) to identify and implement adaptive improvements to key trails. Use Universal Design Principles in improvement of the Grafton's trails and facilities.	Underway		\$	\$\$
<b>Wayfinding and Communications</b>					
Develop a unified trail map	This map will exist as a digital interactive version and a print version, updated over time by the Windham Regional Commission. It will contain anchors, themes, points-of-interest, and all Grafton's trails in one place. It should strive to reflect the integration of recreation, nature, and history in Grafton.	Underway		\$	\$
Develop cohesive trail markers and signs	A unified design for trail markers and signs across all trail networks will help users stay oriented on the trails	Short-Term		\$\$	\$
Additional kiosks	Install additional kiosks at key trailheads and parking areas that include the unified trail map, trail etiquette information, Leave No Trace principles, and other pertinent information.	Medium-Term		\$\$\$	\$
Grafton Interactive Map	Promote and leverage the unified trail map in website and phone applications of GOA members	Underway		\$	\$
Interpretive/Educational signs at historical sites and natural areas	Lean into Grafton's unique history and natural world by creating educational interpretive signs about habitat, pollinators, natural communities, natural history, & geology, historical context and significance of sites, architectural history & preservation, photographs, illustrations, and/or diagrams, and QR codes linking to more in-depth resources or audio guides at places like the Turner Homestead, wildflower fields, cellar holes along trails, etc.	Medium-Term		\$\$\$	\$
Improve and sync trail conditions reporting and communication	Use platforms like TrailForks and Nordic Pulse to update the trail conditions. Integrate with the central communications strategy.	Medium-Term		\$	\$



Partners Involved	Possible Funding Sources	Development Considerations/Constraints (e.g. permits)	Additional Planning Needs
All - Grafton Outdoor Alliance (GOA) + Grafton Trails & Outdoor Center (GTOC), Grafton Improvement Association (GIA), Grafton Outing Club (GOC), Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association (WHPA), Nature Museum (NM), Town	NBRC-C, USDA-RD		
GOA + GTOC, GIA, GOC, WHPA, NM, Town	RTP, Athletic Brewing, PayDirt		
GTOC	RTP, Athletic Brewing, PayDirt, Lintilhac	Potential need for wetland permits, potential for increased expense if there is steep topography	Trail planning, design, build
GTOC			
GTOC	Lintilhac, NRCC Clean Water Design, BGS Recreational Facilities Grants Program, LWCF, Better Places	Permits for sand beach	
GOA, GTOC, GIA, GOC, WHPA, NM	RTP, Athletic Brewing, PayDirt		
GOA	NBRC-C, USDA-RD		
GOA	NBRC-C, USDA-RD		
	VOREC, MPG		Park planning & design
GOA, GIA			
GOA	Better Places, VCF, NBRC-C, VT Arts Council		
GOA, GTOC, GIA, GOC, WHPA, NM	Better Places, VCF, NBRC-C, VT Arts Council		
GOA	Better Places, VCF, NBRC-C, VT Arts Council		
GOA, Town	NBRC-C, VOREC		
GOA	NBRC-C, VOREC		
Town of Grafton, GTOC, GIA, NM	RTP, Athletic Brewing, PayDirt, Lintilhac, Better Connections, MPG, VT Bike/Ped, BGS Recreational Facilities Grants Program	Potential need for wetland permits, potential for increased expense if there is steep topography; could combine into an overall trail connectivity project	Trail planning, design, build
GTOC, GIA	RTP, Athletic Brewing, PayDirt, Lintilhac, Better Connections, MPG	Potential need for wetland permits, potential for increased expense if there is steep topography; could combine into an overall trail connectivity project	Trail planning, design, build
GTOC, GIA	RTP, Athletic Brewing, PayDirt, Lintilhac, Better Connections, MPG	Potential need for wetland permits, potential for increased expense if there is steep topography; could combine into an overall trail connectivity project	Trail planning, design, build
Town of Grafton, GTOC, GIA, NM, UVT	RTP, Athletic Brewing, PayDirt, Lintilhac, VOREC	Depending on the recommendations that come out of the assessment (e.g. trail reroutes), additional permits/expenses could be needed to implement the trail improvements	Trail planning, design, build
GOA, Windham Regional Commission	RTP, Vermont Arts Council - Animating Infrastructure Grants		
GOA	RTP, Vermont Arts Council - Animating Infrastructure Grants		
GOA	RTP, Athletic Brewing, PayDirt		Kiosk design and site prep
GOA, WRC			
Nature Museum, Grafton Historical Society	RTP, Vermont Arts Council - Animating Infrastructure Grants		Sign design
GTOC, GIA, GOC, WHPA, NM	Better Places, VCF, NBRC-C, VT Arts Council		



## Grants & Funding Sources

There are several funding opportunities that would help GOA pursue the tasks identified in the matrix. Below are descriptions and links to the grant programs identified and the associated acronym or grant short name from the matrix.

- [Better Places Program](#)
  - Better Places is a community matching grant program empowering Vermonters to create inclusive and vibrant public places serving Vermont's designated downtowns, village centers, new town centers, or neighborhood development areas. The program is led by the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) in partnership with the Vermont Community Foundation, and Patronicity, our crowdfunding experts. The program supports community-led projects that create, revitalize, or activate public spaces that bring people together to build welcoming and thriving communities across Vermont.
  - Match: Variable/Crowdsourcing
- [Building Communities Grants \(BCG\) Programs: Recreational Facilities Grants](#)
  - The Recreational Facilities Grants Program is administered by the Department of Buildings and General Services (BGS). The goal of the program is to provide competitive grants to Municipalities and to NonProfit Organizations for capital costs associated with the development and creation of community recreational opportunities in Vermont communities.
  - Match: 50%
- [Recreational Trails Program \(RTP\)](#)
  - RTP is administered by the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation annually, with funding coming from the Federal Highway Administration. For non-motorized trails, organizations can apply for \$35,000 grants that can be used for trail maintenance and/or building. This grant would be ideal for trail improvement projects such as replacing old bridges around GTOC and building a beginner-friendly flow trail.
  - Match: 20%
- [VOREC Community Grant Program Implementation Track](#)
  - The VOREC Community Grant Program is intended to fund community projects that leverage outdoor recreation, which VOREC defines as leisure, sport and therapeutic recreation activities pursued outdoors, mainly in a natural setting.
  - Match 0%
- [Northern Borders Regional Commission Catalyst Grant](#)
  - This program is designed to stimulate economic growth and inspire partnerships that improve rural economic vitality, including growing the outdoor recreation economy. The maximum award is \$3,000,000 and could fund several initiatives laid out in this plan.
  - Match: 50%





- USDA Rural Development
  - This \$50,000 grant is meant to promote economic development and job creation projects in rural communities.
  - Match: None.
- Athletic Brewing Two for the Trails
  - Also offered annually, this grant supports projects focused on trail construction and maintenance, waterway protection, environmental stewardship, and other outdoor conservation initiatives. It is another avenue to help fund trail improvement projects in Grafton like building connector trails between GTOC and GIA lands.
  - Match: None.
- Santa Cruz Pay Dirt
  - Offered through Santa Cruz Bicycles, this annual grant funds anything from trail maintenance to programming to new signs. It could be a good one to apply for funding for interpretative signs, wayfinding signs, and new kiosks.
  - Match: None.
- Lintilhac Foundation
  - This quarterly grant offers a maximum award of \$30,000 to Vermont-based organizations pursuing projects related to conservation and sustainable outdoor recreation, forest health and biodiversity, and several other project categories. It is another great avenue for implementing trail improvement projects across Grafton.
  - Match: None.
- Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)
  - The Land and Water Conservation Fund Program (LWCF) became effective in January 1965 to create parks and open spaces, protect wilderness and forests, and provide outdoor recreation opportunities. Funds are derived from federal recreation fees, Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) revenues from leasing oil and gas sites in coastal waters, federal surplus real property sales, and a portion of federal motorboat fuel taxes. Funds are apportioned to federal agencies, and to the 50 states and 6 territories through the U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service (NPS). In Vermont, LWCF is administered by the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation.
  - Match: 50%
- Vermont Community Foundation (VCF)
  - The Vermont Community Foundation supports nonprofit partners with nonprofit reserve and endowment funds, planned giving partnerships, grants, and integrated capital.
  - Match: None/Varies
- VT Arts Council Animating Infrastructure Grant
  - Animating Infrastructure Grants support community projects that integrate public art into





community infrastructure. Through this program, the Council strives to demonstrate the positive impact of art in helping communities to meet goals of livability, walkability, safety, economic vitality, and community vibrancy, and to support the creation of unique infrastructure projects where function and art are one and the same.

- Match: None
- Vermont Municipal Planning Grant (MPG)
  - The Municipal Planning Grant (MPG) program encourages and supports planning and revitalization for local municipalities in Vermont. Awarded annually and administered by the Department of Housing and Community Development, the MPG program works to strengthen Vermont by funding local planning initiatives that support statewide planning goals.
  - Match: 10%
- Vermont Bike/Ped Grants
  - The intent of the VTrans Bicycle and Pedestrian Program is to improve access and safety for people walking and bicycling through the planning, design and construction of infrastructure projects.
  - Match: 50%







## Maintenance Plan

To ensure Grafton's outdoor recreation infrastructure stays in great shape, we recommend following trail-building and maintenance best management practices (BMPs) and developing an ongoing maintenance/monitoring plan.

The Vermont Mountain Bike Association published their comprehensive Best Management Practices for Mountain-Bike Optimized and Multi-Use Trail Construction and Maintenance in January 2025. This document compiles existing BMPs from all over the world to help those managing trails in Vermont build and maintain sustainable, durable, and fun multi-use trails. We recommend GOA follow this guide for their trail improvement plans.

It is also crucial for GOA to develop and follow a maintenance plan for its trails and outdoor recreation infrastructure. Recognizing that GTOC's staff is already stretched thin, we recommend expanding volunteer efforts. This can be done in multiple ways, and is consistent with the earlier recommendation of GOA coordinating their volunteer efforts:

- Annual spring trail cleanup/workday
  - Vermonters are chomping at the bit to get out and enjoy the trails when spring rolls around, and a big volunteer trail cleanup day is the perfect way to use that energy! Once the trails are dry enough to work on, we recommend planning a weekend event to bring together volunteers to help perform spring maintenance on the trails, especially since post-winter trail cleanup can often be a big job. Suggestions for the event:
    - Host on a Saturday or Sunday morning for four or so hours. Folks are more likely to commit to a half-day event, increasing potential attendance.
    - Market the event widely! Use tools like email newsletters, social media, flyers, Front Porch Forum, and more to maximize attendance.
    - Break the volunteers up into groups by task e.g. one group of ten goes to fix a bridge, another to rake leaves off a trail, another to pick up down branches and sticks, etc.
    - Offer incentives and fun, like free snacks for while they're working on the trails and/or a pizza party at the end of the workday. This will also help show your gratitude for their volunteer work.
- Recurring volunteer trail days
  - Hosting frequent volunteer days throughout the spring, summer, and fall seasons will help reduce the maintenance burden on GTOC staff and help establish ownership over the trails amongst community members and volunteers.
    - Setting a consistent day of the week and time for these trail days with a clear project will help motivate folks to attend (it'll be on their calendars, they will know what goal their work will help accomplish, etc.). Depending





on the trail projects GOA is looking to accomplish, these recurring volunteer trail days could be hosted weekly, every other week, monthly, or at whatever cadence feels appropriate.

Examples include:

- Wednesday after-work trail days to help build a new trail from 5:30pm – 7:30pm
- The first Tuesdays of each month after work are dedicated to various maintenance projects e.g., restoring soil to eroded tread, cutting back brush, other frequently required trail maintenance tasks
- Trail steward program for spring, summer, and fall
  - GOA could consider developing a volunteer Trail Steward program, continuing with the theme of encouraging the community to establish ownership over Grafton's trails. Trail Stewards would be assigned trails or sections of trails to care for on their own time, reducing the burden on GTOC staff and other trail managers in Grafton, e.g. one person is responsible for maintaining and caring for the Chivers trail at GTOC. Components of this program could include:
    - An application process to ensure volunteers are a good match and dedicated to performing the necessary trail work, but keep it brief and approachable so as not to discourage interested folks
    - Basic training for those accepted into the stewardship program. This could include how to clear trail drains, how to cut back brambles, and other simple trail maintenance tasks
    - A reporting system for the trail stewards to communicate what work they accomplished with GOA personnel e.g. a Google Form, a tracking spreadsheet, or whatever tool GOA decides is best
    - A token of appreciation for trail stewards such as a special t-shirt or hoody.
- For winter trail maintenance and grooming, GOA could consider forming a specific committee or group of volunteers to help maintain and expand grooming operations. For example, creating a rotating roster of volunteers who are willing to groom the cross-country ski and fat bike trails after snowfall would help spread out the work and reduce the weight GTOC staff is currently carrying.

Another tool that could help GOA stay on top of trail maintenance is creating a monitoring form/template for trail conditions. This could be a Google Form or Survey123 for the trails that list the bridges, features, and trail amenities that should be regularly monitored and could include questions about the current conditions and prioritization matrix for when/if they should be replaced.





## Monitoring Plan – Annual Meeting for Work Plan Creation

To ensure meaningful and sustained progress on the priorities outlined in the Implementation Matrix/Master Plan, the Grafton Outdoor Alliance (GOA) should hold an annual meeting dedicated to reviewing plan progress. At this meeting, GOA would use the Implementation Matrix to define annual tasks and strategies to move the full Master Plan forward, creating an annual work plan.

The annual work plan could incorporate the matrix's timing and phasing recommendations and align with relevant grant timelines. For each task identified by GOA to pursue as part of the work plan, GOA could clarify the expected timeline (e.g., "3–9 months"), estimate resource needs, and assign clear responsibilities to relevant partners (GTOC, GIA, GOC, WHPA, and others). This collaborative planning approach will ensure that priority actions are realistically scoped and supported by the right mix of partners and accomplished within reasonable timelines.

The annual meeting should include a structured check-in on progress made during the previous year e.g., what tasks were accomplished? Were they completed within the desired timelines? What partners were involved, and did they show up as they needed to? GOA would revisit the prior year's selected tasks, evaluate accomplishments, and discuss barriers or adjustments needed for unfinished work. For example, if trail maintenance was prioritized but delayed due to volunteer shortages, the group could consider alternative support mechanisms or adjust future responsibilities accordingly.

This annual meeting and work plan creation will transform the Implementation Matrix from a static document into a dynamic planning and management framework. This work will support transparency and momentum among partners and ensure that the community's highest priorities are advanced year over year through shared leadership and accountability.





# Appendices

## Appendix A: Links to all GOA Project Presentations

[Grafton Outdoor Alliance–Kick Off Presentation.pdf](#)

[Grafton Outdoor Alliance - August 12.pdf](#)

[Grafton Outdoor Alliance - Sept 10.pdf](#)

[Grafton Outdoor Alliance - Oct 8.pdf](#)

[Grafton Outdoor Alliance - Dec 10.pdf](#)

[Grafton Outdoor Alliance - Feb 11.pdf](#)

[Grafton Outdoor Alliance - March 11.pdf](#)

[Grafton Outdoor Alliance - April 8.pdf](#)

[Grafton Outdoor Alliance - May 13.pdf](#)



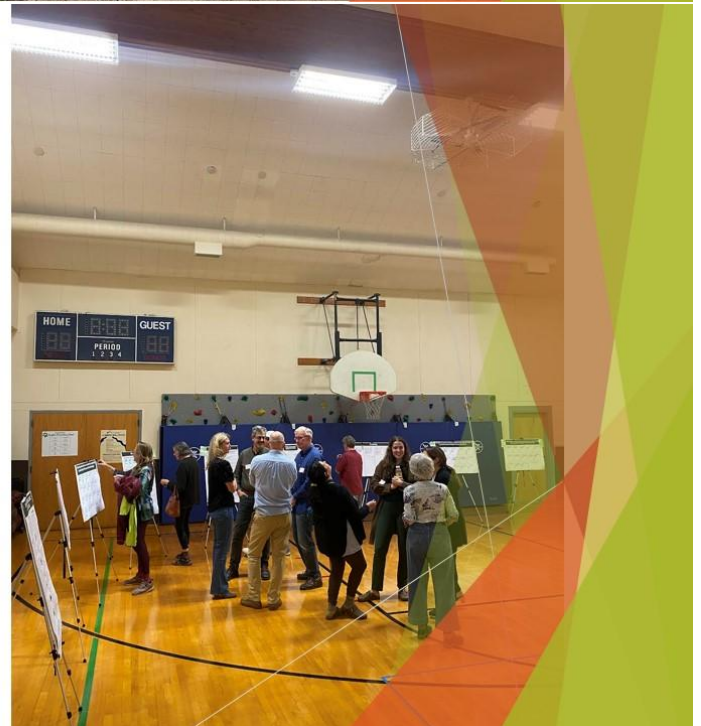
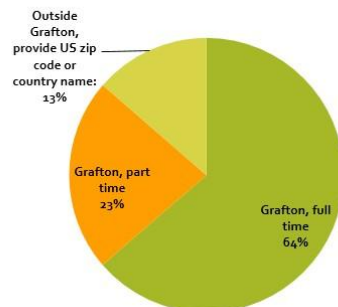
## Appendix B: Public Visioning Results (online survey results and public meeting boards)

### Public Visioning Questions & Open House Results



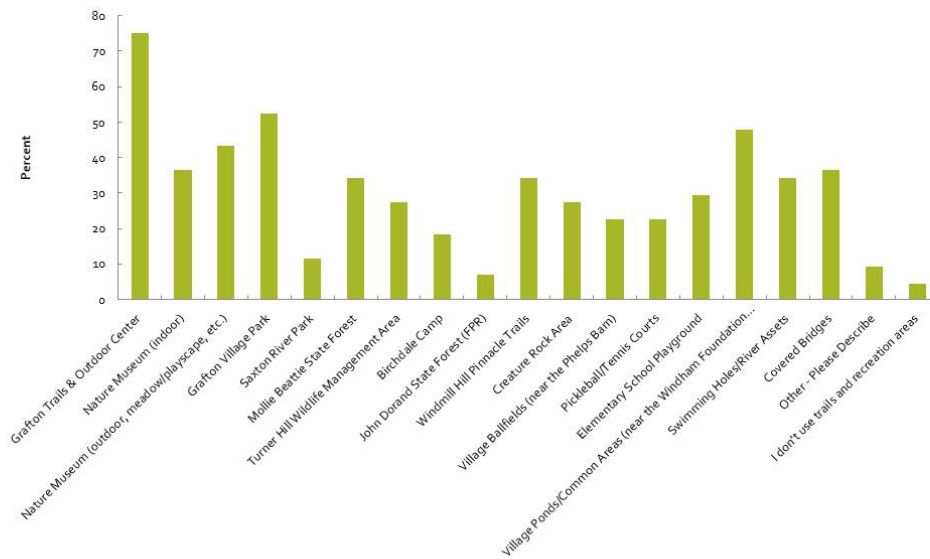
### Public Visioning

- Public Visioning Open House
  - Grafton Elementary School
  - Wednesday November 6<sup>th</sup> from 5:30 – 7:00pm
  - ~40 attendees throughout the course of the night
  - Thanks for the cheese!
- Online Survey
  - 40 complete responses
  - 25 incomplete responses





## What trails, parks, and recreation assets do you typically visit within Grafton?

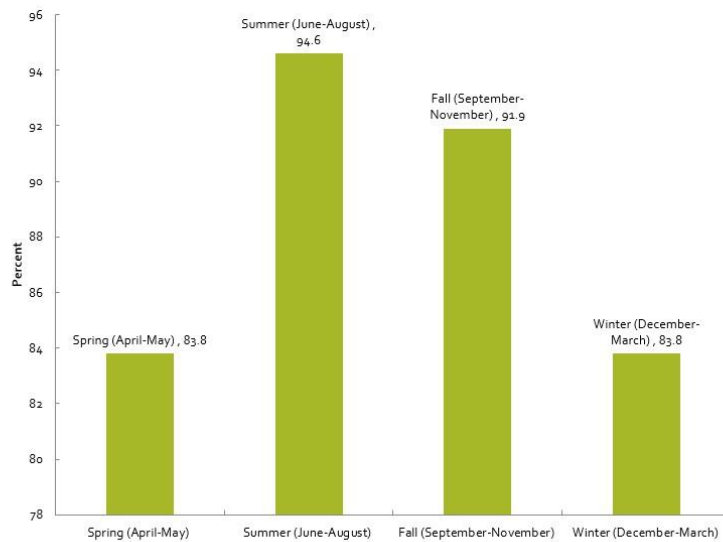


- Other:
- Grafton Walking Tour (PocketSights app)
  - My land abutts some VAT trails which I use once in a while to access parts of my land.
  - Private Lands, Hayden Brown Forest
  - Village Walk

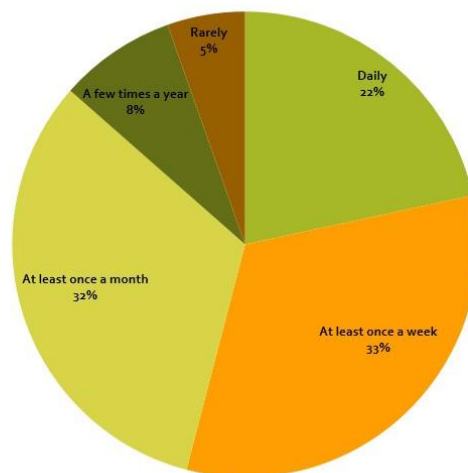




## In what season(s) do you recreate outdoors in Grafton?

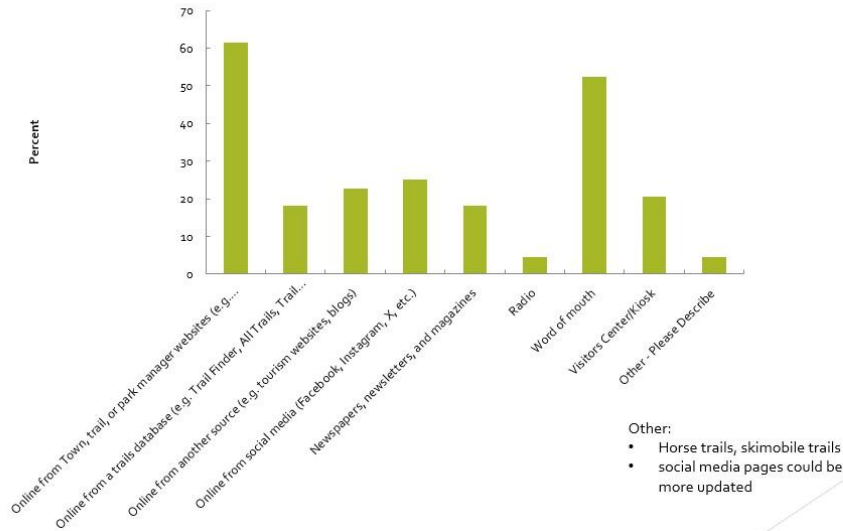


## How often do you or members of your household visit Grafton's parks, open spaces, or trails?

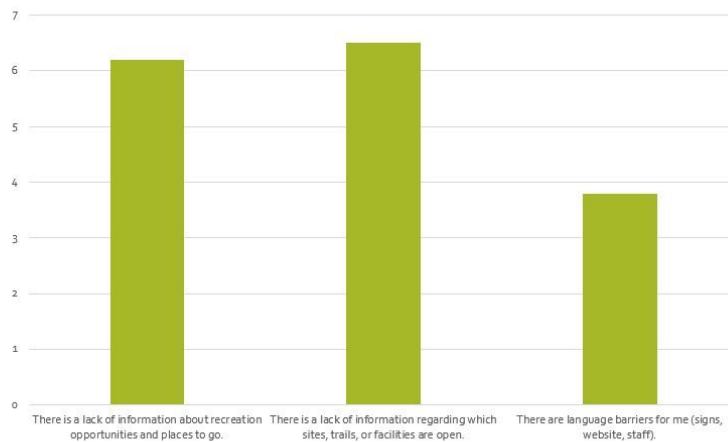




## Where do you prefer to get information about outdoor recreation opportunities and conditions before you go outside?



## Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements:





## YOUR RECREATION

### What Seasons Do You Play Outside In Grafton?

Winter

Spring

Summer

Autumn

### Where Do You Prefer to Get Information About Outdoor Recreation? Place a dot on all that apply.

**Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements. Place a dot on the line where it illustrates your feelings:**

Disagree
Neutral
Agree

There is a lack of information about recreation opportunities and places to go.

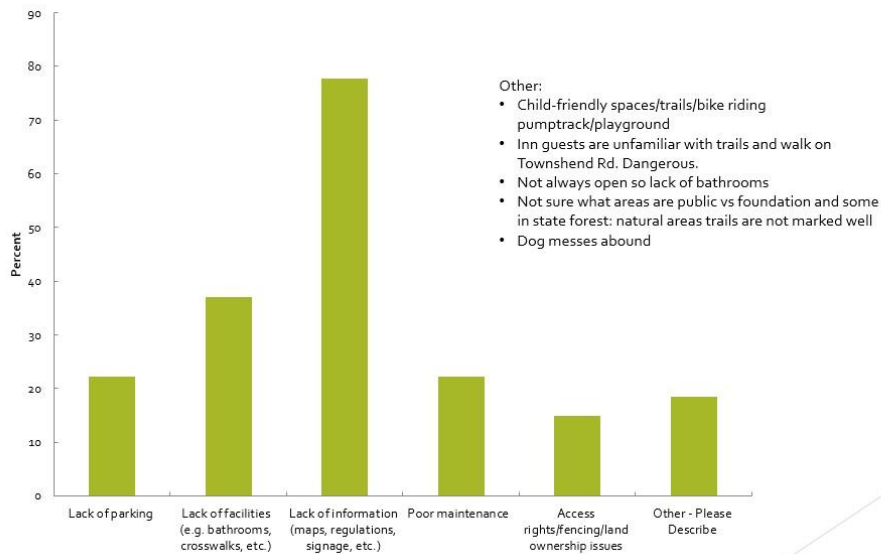
There is a lack of information regarding which sites, trails, or facilities are open.

There are language barriers for me (signs, website, staff).

**How often do you or members of your household visit Grafton's parks, open spaces, or trails?**

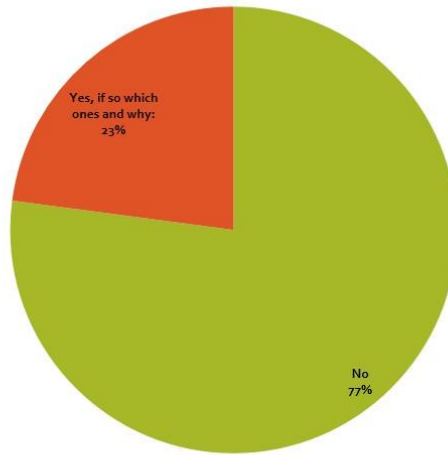
Daily
At least once a month
A few times a year
Rarely

## Do you know of any issues with access to Grafton's parks, open spaces, or trails?





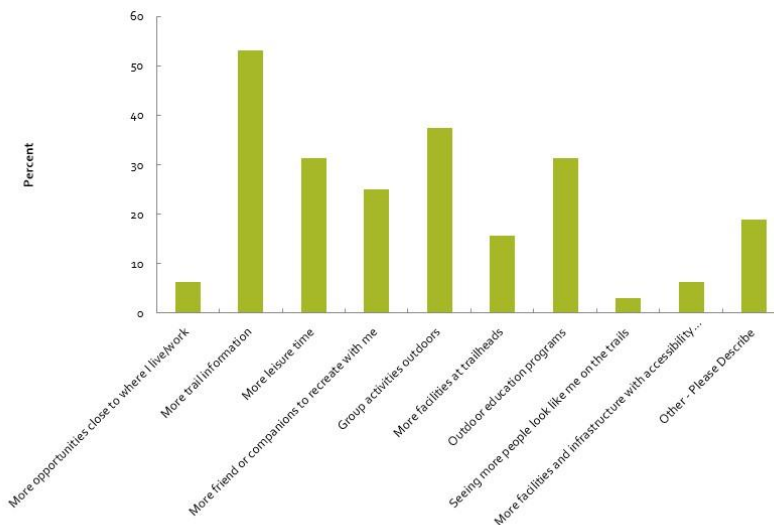
## Are there any recreation areas you avoid?



### Why do you avoid:

- Concerned about cleanliness of Grafton Outdoor Center Pond
- Dorand - trash; all parks in hunting season
- During school hours we can't use the school playground. The community would benefit from a playground at Grafton Ponds or child-friendly pump track for kids to ride their bikes on. The bike trails at Grafton Ponds aren't child-friendly which makes it hard for families to go together. Usually one parent is riding the trails while the other parent is entertaining kids at the base /field. It would be nice if there was a playground and child-friendly activity /area for kids to play. Perhaps where the volleyball court is?
- I walk with 2 dogs off leash, so I avoid crowded spaces and walk in the woods.
- Only ones that are too steep.
- If poor signal for my phone, then I try not to visit that location in case of emergencies

## Is there anything that would make it more likely for you to participate in outdoor recreation in Grafton?

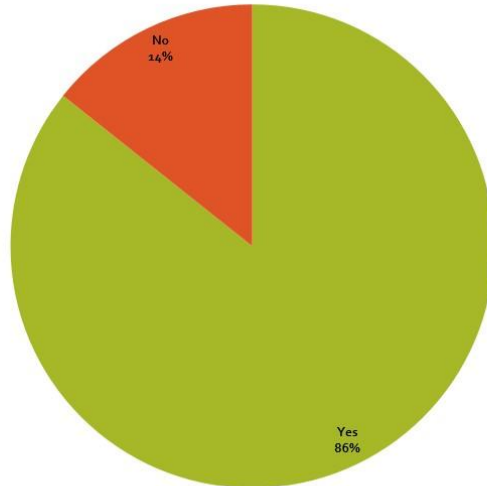


### Other:

- Making things more child/family-friendly.
- More general info and better signage and info on hikes with distances and difficulty
- Paved areas for strollers/making it possible to enjoy with young children
- Places for friends to stay when they visit to take advantage of these recreational opportunities. (And don't say "Airbnb." Until the Saxtons River Inn reopens, there won't be a local place for visitors to stay.
- More information about how to deal with wildlife encounters or off-leash dogs



## Is there enough of a range of trail types and ability levels here in Grafton for the type of activities you like to do?



### ACCESS AND BARRIERS

Is there enough of a range of trail types and ability levels here in Grafton for the type of activities you like to do?

Yes ☒ No ☐

Do you know of any issues with access to Grafton's parks, open spaces, or trails? Place a dot on all that apply.

Crowding ☒

Lack of parking ☒

Lack of facilities (e.g. bathrooms, crosswalks, etc.) ☒

Lack of information (maps, regulations, signage, etc.) ☒

Poor maintenance ☒

Access rights/fencing/land ownership issues ☒

Not easily accessible in a shelter ☒

Is there anything that would make it more likely for you to participate in outdoor recreation in Grafton? Place a dot on all that apply.

More opportunities closer to where I live/work ☒

More trail information ☒

More secure time ☒

More friends or companions to recreate with me ☒

Guided activities outdoors ☒

More facilities at trailheads ☒

More affordable gear ☒

Tools to gear ☒

Outdoor education programs ☒

More gear rental programs ☒

Seeing more people have fun on the trails ☒

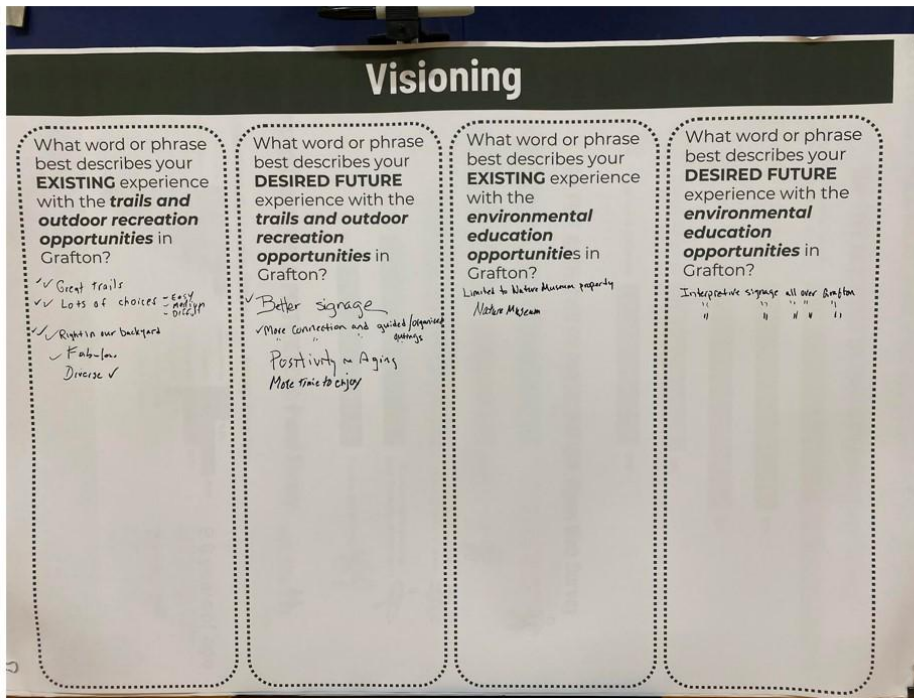
More facilities and infrastructure with accessibility accommodations ☒

Other (Please describe below) ☒

Are there any recreation areas you avoid? Yes, and please describe which ones and why: ☐

No ☒





## Visioning:

**What word or phrase best describes your EXISTING experience with the trails and outdoor recreation opportunities in Grafton?**









[illegible]

It is good but better information would make it better

Beautiful

Just learning. Been here 3 years.

grateful to people who maintain the trails

Good

Enjoyable, I have young children so lack of bathroom facilities can be a challenge at this stage

Children need to be accommodated in the community as well.

Quiet

Wishing there was more accommodations for families with small children like stroller paths, fenced in areas, play space for 0-5, etc.

Special

tranquility

exciting

Minimal

Familiar

Same old stuff

Good

Happy

Sporadic (only because I have 100 A right out my door. I'd like to see more)

some

physical ability

Balm for the soul

Relaxing

enjoyable

Great, but limited

Enjoyable

great accessibility

Appreciate the opportunities we have. Would like clarification on whether the pool behind the town office (the 2

unpredictable

Great

Life-giving



## Visioning:

**What word or phrase best describes your DESIRED FUTURE experience with the trails and outdoor recreation opportunities in Grafton?**

More options
Better maintained trails for walking, hiking, skiing
Preserve
Timely information on opportunities
more integrated maps and signage
Good
Would love a natural play scape for children. GE5 playground is nice, but news faculty open to families outside of school hours. Nature museum has a wonderful play area, but can be difficult to navigate with toddlers and younger.
Fun for everyone in the family!
Peaceful
peacefulness
fun adventure
Unlikely to in rease
Wheelchair accessible
Maintenance of facilities and group activities
More
Needed
Increased.
more time
time and physical abilities to do them
Continue quiet and uncrowded
enjoyable
More varied, more open
Stay well maintained, multi generational
hope to access more
Erastus
safe
Keep them groomed
Success for me is people walking on trails, not on major roads

## Visioning:

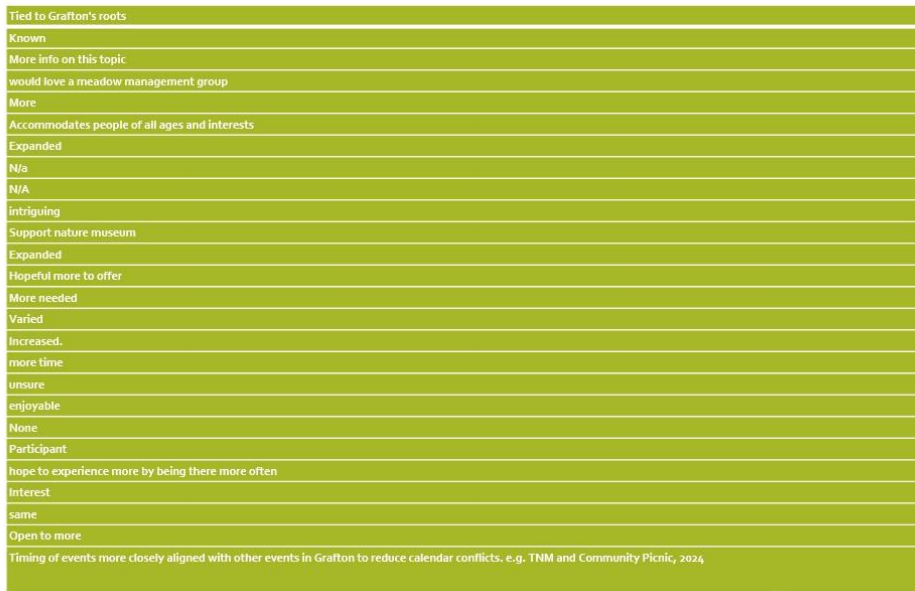
**What word or phrase best describes your EXISTING experience with the environmental education opportunities in Grafton?**

Good
Have not engaged
unknown
Nature museum
love grafton nature museum environmental ed
Good
Satisfied with Nature Museum's offerings.
Okay
Unaware
Hopeful for future acomodations for kids who live here
Surprisingly good
N/A
phenomanal
Available
Supportive
Non-existent
Unaware
Minimal
Close (I'm on the tnm board)
very little
lacking information of them
informative
okay
None
Limited
we re not in town enough to do as much as we would like
Neutral
Yes
Fine
TNM's programs are excellent

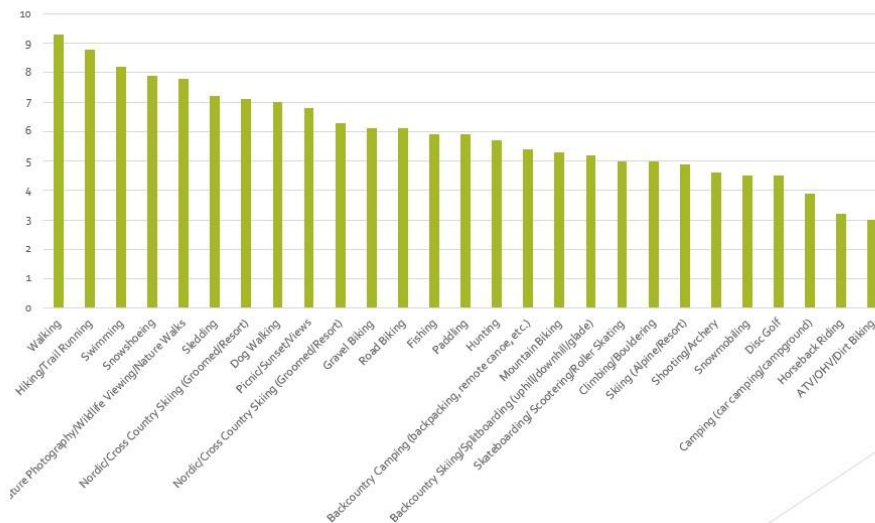


## Visioning:

**What word or phrase best describes your DESIRED FUTURE experience with the environmental education opportunities in Grafton?**



## What types of activities would you envision on the existing and any future trails and trail connections?

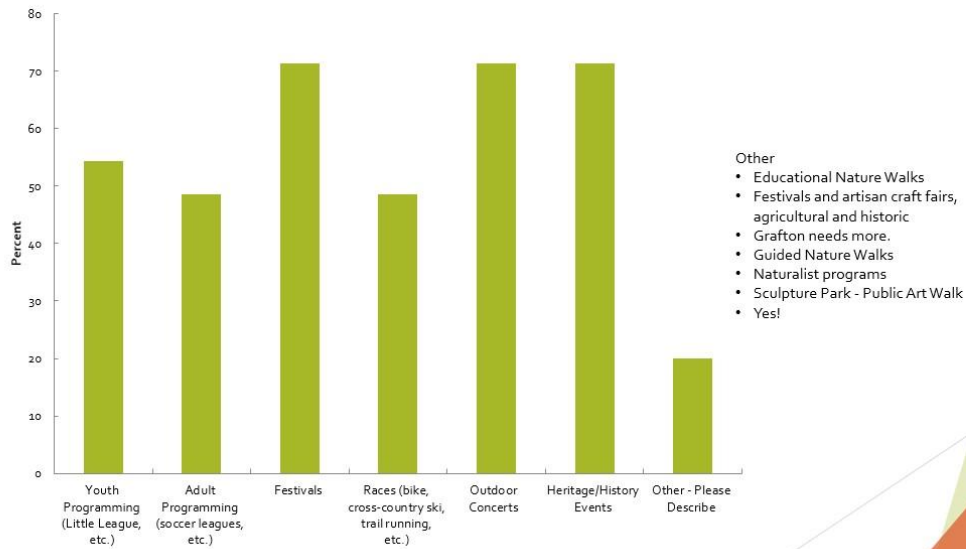




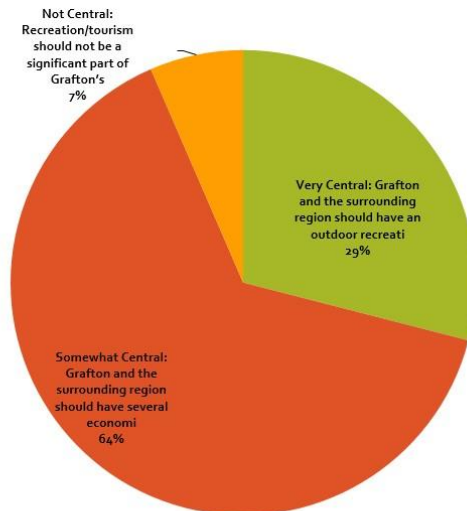




## What types of outdoor recreation/environmental education programs and/or events do you envision in Grafton?



## How central should outdoor recreation and tourism be to Grafton's local economy?





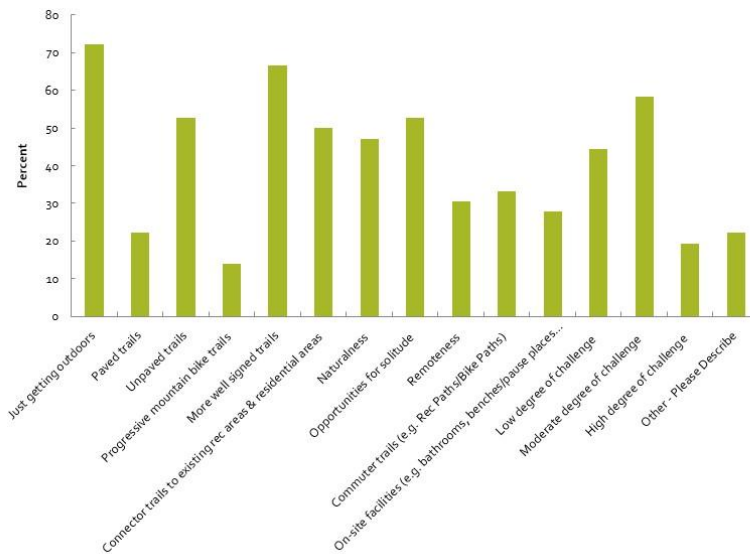
**What types of outdoor recreation/environmental education programs and/or events do you envision in Grafton? Place a dot on all that apply.**

<b>Youth Programming (Little League, etc.)</b> ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	<b>Adult Programming (soccer leagues, etc.)</b> ● <i>Soccer in the U.S. with friends = (K-12 separately)</i>
<b>Festivals</b> ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	<b>Races</b> ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
<b>Outdoor Concerts</b> ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	<b>Heritage/History Events</b> ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
<b>Other - Write In</b> <i>Nature programs outdoors for all ages</i> ●	

**How central should outdoor recreation and tourism be to Grafton's local economy?**

<b>Very Central: Grafton and the surrounding region should have an outdoor recreation/tourism-based economy</b> ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
<b>Somewhat Central: Grafton and the surrounding region should have several economic divers, including recreation/tourism</b> ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
<b>Not Central: Recreation/tourism should not be a significant part of Grafton's local economy</b> ●

## What types of recreation experiences should be expanded in the future trail system?

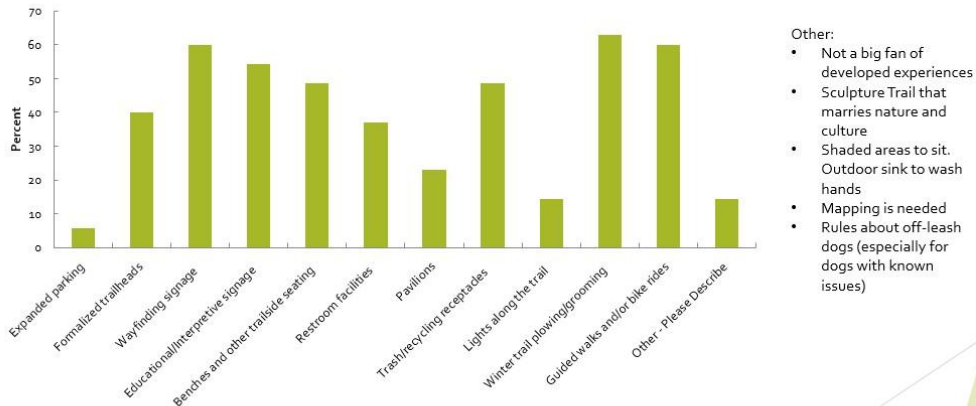


### Other

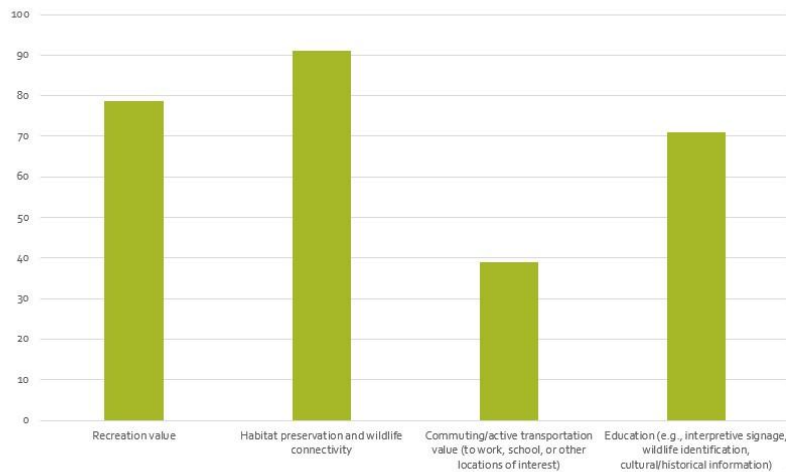
- I think all access ability is important. Portion of trails handicap access by wheel chair.. like my independence and
- Paved trails might be useful for those with young kids so strollers, bikes, scooters could be used.
- Prefer not to have more trail networks developed
- Road biking routes/trails
- Stroller friendly.
- Bike trails to use with children
- Mapping is needed
- Well-maintained trails



## What assets would you like to see developed to support the envisioned outdoor recreation/environmental education opportunities?



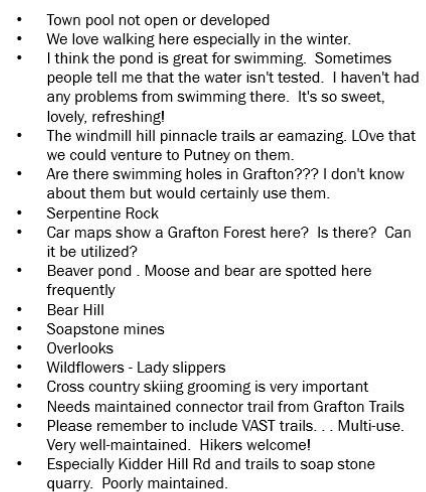
## How important are the following factors when developing trails and other outdoor recreation/environmental education opportunities?





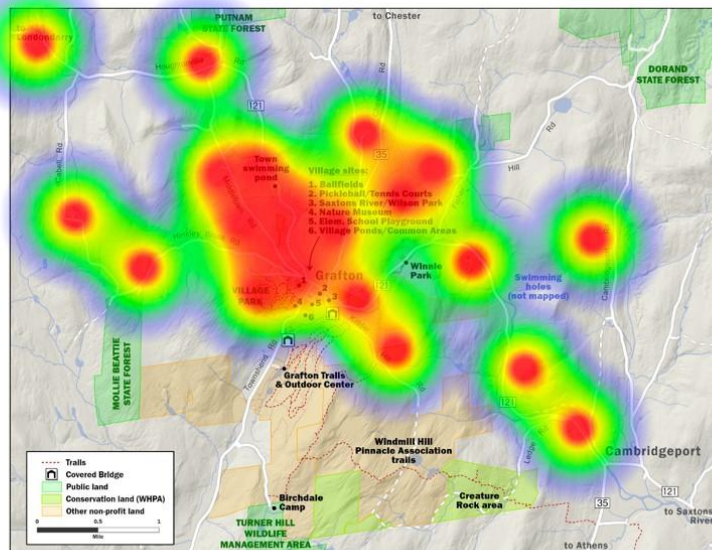


Age Group	Male (%)	Female (%)
18-24	~85	~75
25-34	~75	~65
35-44	~65	~55
45-54	~55	~45
55-64	~45	~35
65+	~35	~25





## What kind of wildlife do you see in Grafton? Show us on the map!



- Bear, moose, deer turkeys
- Bear; moose; bobcat; deer;
- Bear, coyote, wild turkeys, deer, woodchucks, fox
- I have often seen a blue heron walking here.
- We see foxes and sometimes coyotes and often hawks and vultures and many birds and wild turkeys around here.
- Our house - bear, moose (tracks), wood turtle, wild turkeys, fox, porcupine, coyote, deer, chipmunks, bats, hawks and an occasional human who decides to drive up our way.
- Moose, beaver, deer, ruffed grouse, bear
- Bear
- Brook trout
- deer, bear
- Bears, deer, turkey
- Bear, skunk, deer
- owl
- Turkeys
- Bears, Turkeys, Deer
- Black bear Red Fox Gray/Silver Fox
- We go to the pond every time we are in town to look for turtles, frogs, and birds. In the winter we ice skate there when it is frozen
- Our front porch is across the road from the river and we often sit and watch many birds in the adjacent trees that come to drink and bathe.
- Fox, deer, ducks
- Hardly ever see wildlife, except for small animals and birds.

## Do you have any concerns about the enhancement/expansion of outdoor recreation and environmental education opportunities here in Grafton?

- What we have is good and I think if we develop more, it would help both residents and visitors alike
- None
- No porta potties, increase in tourists could cause congestion, litter. This town and surrounding area is a gem that needs to be protected.
- Right sizing for the community and over abundance of Airbnb's vs. folks who are here "running" things.
- There are a lot of young families that are new to the area and who have been here for a few years that travel to other towns for more kid friendly options . It would be nice and beneficial for the community of Grafton if we had a playground that was accessible 7 days a week. When school is in session families can't take their kids to the school playground. The school playground also isn't safe for kids younger than 5. Driving to Chester where they have a small playground rated for ages 2-5 is bothersome that we have to go 24 minutes to a park when we could have that easily at Grafton Ponds. I know a lot of young families outside of Grafton who wish there was a playground here too. Our whole family bike rides and it would be nice if the trails had a pump track or some kid friendly trails . I think far too often Grafton thinks of the needs of the adults and it feels they forget the needs of the little kids in town and those who visit. Grafton could become an all day family adventure where everyone could have their needs met if we provided a safe and fun space for kids to play. The nature museum trails are wonderful but they aren't stroller accessible, therefore not little kid friendly.
- Yes, traffic, potential increased real estate pricing.
- There's something authentic and organic about our "place" that we as townspeople can enjoy and be proud of, that is at the same time shareable with visitors. That asset is much better for us than an event that turns out to be exclusive and private
- Just what I mentioned earlier. If you build it, and people come, where do they stay? Or are we saying it's "daytripping" only?
- Way ability is a huge issue
- I don't believe town financial resources should be used beyond maintenance of what we have
- Under utilized as far as I can see
- No
- General safety is a concern. Our roads and road edges are narrow and crumbly. With population so small and beauty so LARGE we should have lots of things for visitors to do and to enjoy. A coffee house at Grafton Trails is an obvious need.
- Only that it be done well and with an aesthetic sensibility.
- beaver management in the Grafton area should be expanded and explored with Skip Lisle's knowledge
- I love the quiet here and am afraid we are catering to tourists rather than letting the locals enjoy why they live here
- none
- More formalized, clean, trails would be helpful.
- Preserving natural habitats
- no
- The impact on neighbors who reside here in peace. We chose here for a reason. Concerned about campgrounds impacting areas that have been used for generations as hunting, hiking, and finding peace being impacted by greater. Volume. Importance of preserving and maintaining ecosystems
- Do not destroy the nature that is there
- No concerns, only full support!



## Are there any other thoughts, concerns, or comments you'd like to share about our trails, parks, outdoor recreation, or environmental education in our community?

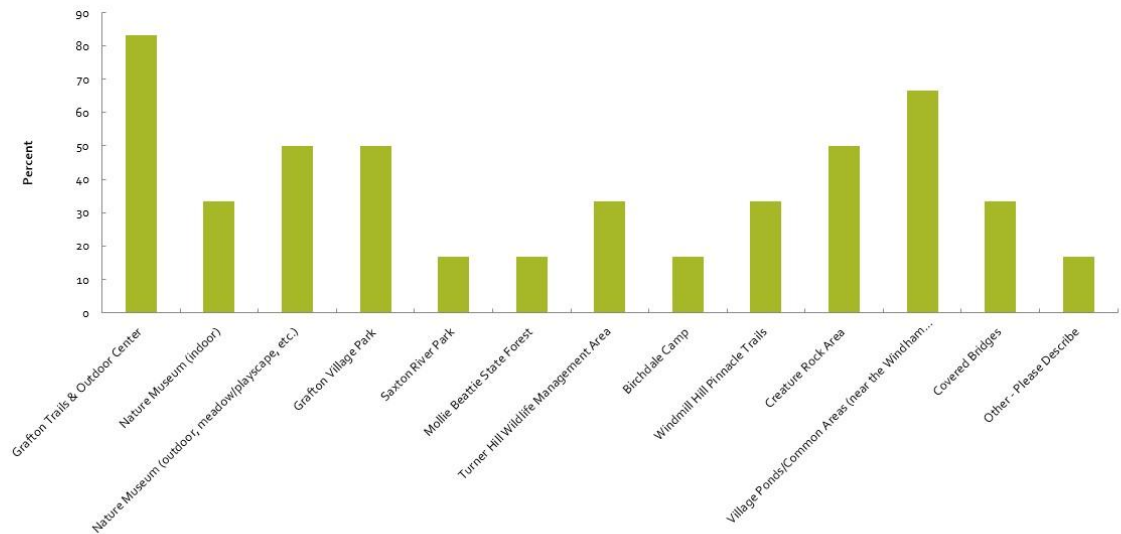
- Although we have recently moved from Grafton, there is so much that Grafton could do to maximize passive recreation, art, history and culture that would draw visitors . We will be visiting next summer for a week!
- I would love trails or maps of existing trails for the Turner Wildlife management area. Thank you!
- Include local merchants
- Many places have been irreparably damaged by making them destinations. Let's consider all ramifications of what is put in motion for Grafton.
- I am very interested in restoring flood plains. It would be great to have environmental education about possible flood plain restoration in our area and also community organizing around restoring flood plains. In many communities that have bodies of water or streams/rivers, there are community groups that work together to keep the resource healthy. I would be interested in that kind of group. I guess that I am suggesting that you think about combining environmental organization with making active civic groups—strengthens the community and the environment :)
- I would like to see the cabin at Grafton ponds being used for more educational workshops or events for families/children!
- How can these potential opportunities create livable-wage jobs for our young people?
- Community pool or fountain pad
- Not that I can think of.
- connectivity of all
- I think we have more than ample outdoor recreation
- Out of state bear hunting
- I moved here for the outdoor opportunities
- explore the beauty of nature we have here in Grafton with respect
- none
- We live on Pleasant Street and make frequent use of all of the areas marked on the map with the exception of the ballfield.
- Thank you for the work invested and the transparency and respect and willingness to listen to the voice of the residents and taxpayers. Historical preservation, environmental preservation needs to be balanced with wellness of our community
- we love dogs, but it is very unclear when and where dogs may be on or off-leash. some dogs are not safe off-leash, so when they are in a walking area, that's a no-go.
- Leave as much land wild and without trails as possible
- Thank you! Grafton's outdoor recreation is integrated into our daily lives. So important for fun, physical health and spiritual well-being

## Visitor/Tourism Responses

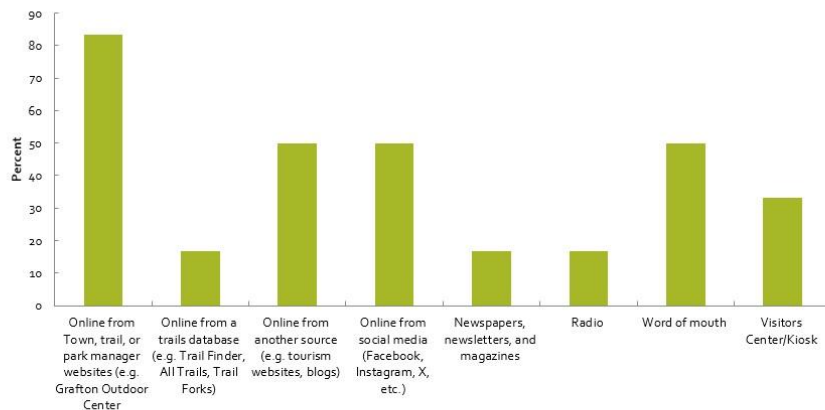




## What trails, parks, and recreation assets do you typically visit within Grafton?

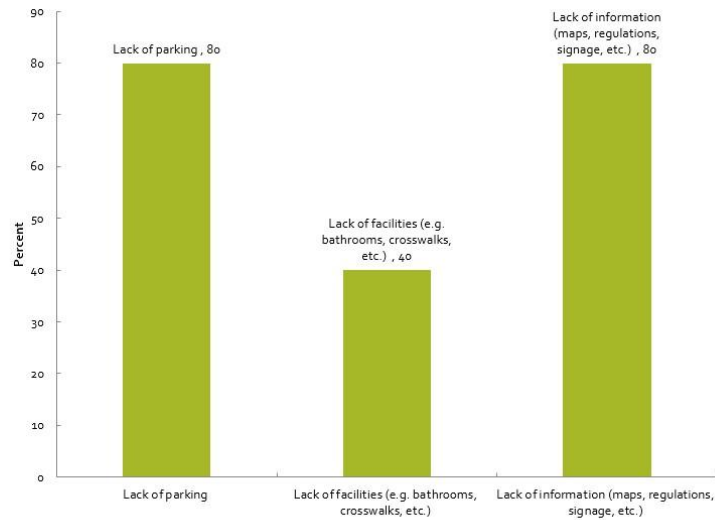


## Where do you prefer to get information about outdoor recreation opportunities and conditions before you go outside?

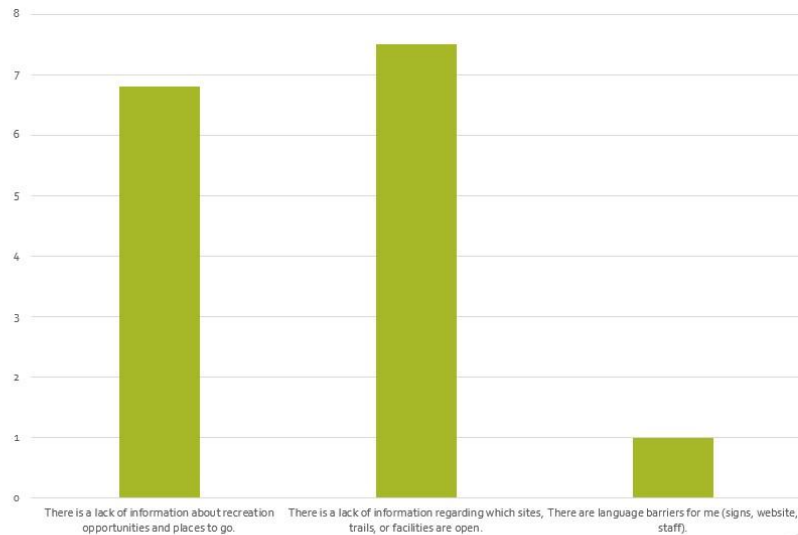




## Do you know of any issues with access to Grafton's parks, open spaces, or trails?

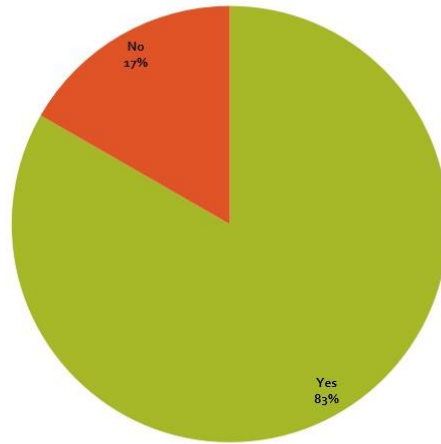


## Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements:

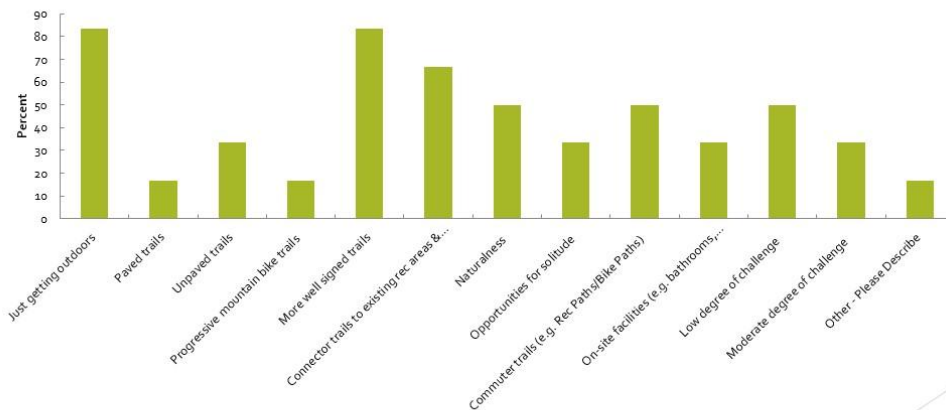




## Is there enough of a range of trail types and ability levels here in Grafton for the type of activities you like to do?

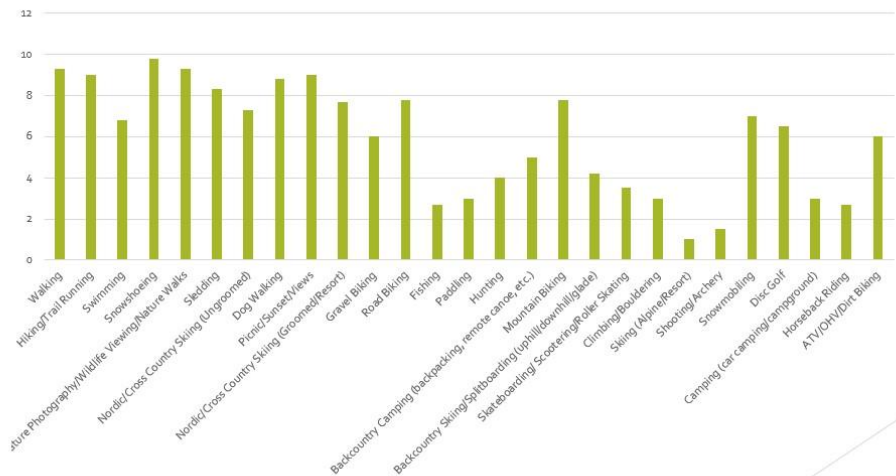


## What types of recreation experiences should be expanded in the future trail system?

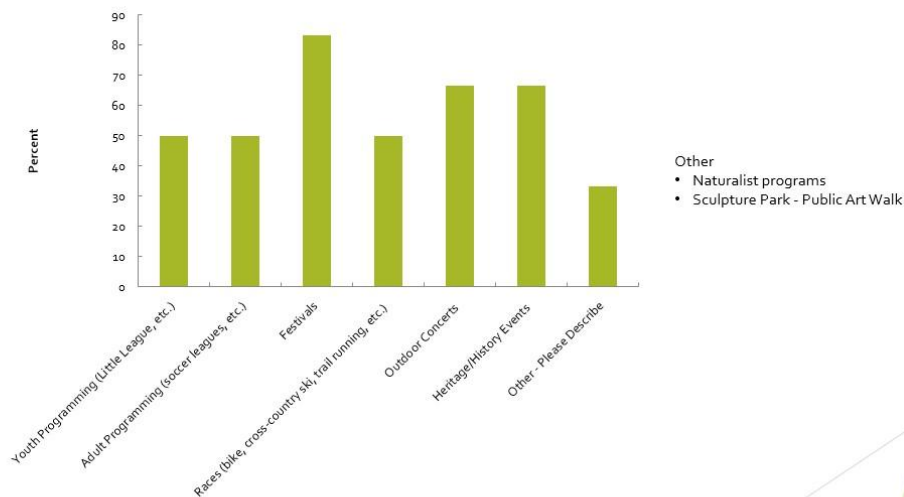




# **What types of activities would you envision on the existing and any future trails and trail connections?**

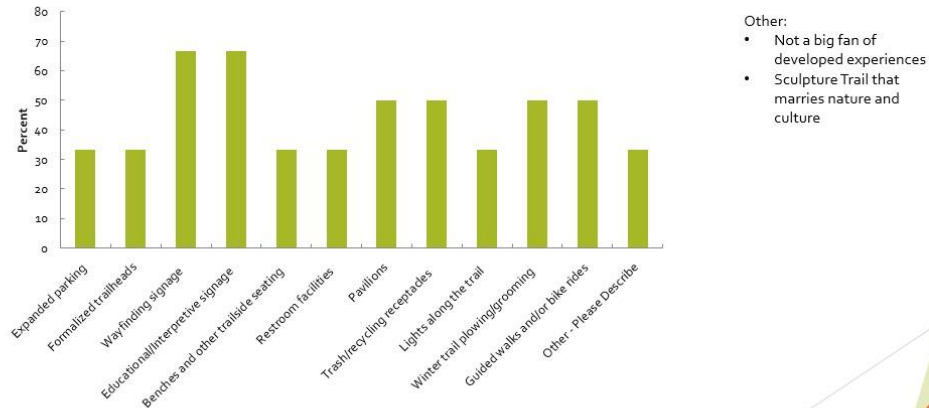


# **What types of outdoor recreation/environmental education programs and/or events do you envision in Grafton?**





## What assets would you like to see developed to support the envisioned outdoor recreation/environmental education opportunities?



### Additional Resources

- [International Mountain Bike Association Guidelines for a Quality Trail Experience](#)
- [Vermont Mountain Bike Association Best Management Practices for Trail Construction and Maintenance](#)
- [Kootenay Adaptive Sports Association Adaptive Mountain Bike Standards](#)