

### Introduction

Americans have increasingly been moving out of cities and in to the countryside, in search of a place where they can spread out, have a garden, and see a little wildlife. This drive for open space and nature is just one of the many reasons people make choices that contribute to sprawl.

Over the last 30 years Maine has seen levels of urban out-migration and suburbanization similar to other areas of the country. People have been leaving our cities for homes amidst farms and forests, with easy access to green space and nature. But with proper planning, urban dwellers can enjoy parks and open space right in town.

### In-town Parks and Open Spaces

Planned open spaces provide in-town residents with enjoyable outdoor spaces, recreation opportunities, and access to nature, reducing their need to escape the city. They make cities and villages more attractive and raise the quality of life for residents, thereby helping communities retain their current population and attract new residents and businesses.



Source: [www.pps.org](http://www.pps.org)

In-town parks and open spaces provide many community benefits, including:

- Opportunities for recreation and an active lifestyle – a place to play ball and exercise.
- An outdoor place for the enjoyment of nice weather, singing birds, and blooming flowers.

- A place for public events, such as art shows, summer concerts, or farmers’ markets.
- Public access to special places such as waterfronts, historic places, or viewpoints.

Planned open spaces can provide many other benefits to an area, depending on their size, function, and location. Such benefits can include:

- Wildlife habitat.
- Improved appearance of large paved areas.
- Surrounding property values increase.

### Types Of Open Spaces

Open spaces generally fall into these categories:

- Formal or Ambient Parks – Typically landscaped with meandering walkways, and benches, for activities such as strolling, sitting and picnicking.
- Active Parks / Playing Fields – Expansive open areas planned for team sports. Generally large with minimal landscaping.
- Common, Square or Plaza – The focal point of a city, village, or neighborhood. Used as a gathering area and a venue for public events.
- Nature Preserve or Sanctuary – Usually a sizeable and largely untouched area. Set aside for its value as wildlife habitat and water quality protection.
- Others – Areas such as gardens, memorials, rail-trails, historic parks, and waterfront parks.

#### **Successful Open Spaces in Maine**

The following are good examples of the many types and uses of open spaces in Maine.

*Bangor Woods, Bangor (nature, ambient)*  
*Brunswick Mall (common, ambient, active)*  
*Deering Oaks Park, Portland (ambient, active)*  
*Fore River Sanctuary, Portland (nature preserve)*  
*Harbor Park, Camden (waterfront, ambient)*  
*Kennedy Park, Lewiston (ambient, active)*  
*Town Common, Bethel (common, ambient)*

### In-town Opportunities for Parks and Open Space

In addition to planned open spaces that may have been created in the early development of cities and villages, there's almost always opportunity for more such amenities. Although cities and villages may not have as much room for parks and open space as suburban and rural communities, they generally have *some* space available, though it may be smaller and sometimes fragmented.



Source:www.pps.org

No matter where you live, it is likely that there is an opportunity for a planned open space in your city, village, or neighborhood:

- A vacant lot in an in-town neighborhood can be turned into a playground and landscaped to provide a neighborhood recreation area.
- Unused areas along a river can be used for a walking path that will allow residents to exercise while connecting to nature.
- Other waterfront areas can be used for public access to the water and/or as ambient parks.
- A vacant lot or little-used parking lot downtown can be converted to a 'pocket park' by installing benches and decorative lighting, with shade trees, to provide a place for people to sit, rest, have lunch outside and people-watch.
- A downtown area can also be converted to a plaza or a square and host a farmers' market, outdoor concerts, art shows, and other public events.
- Former industrial areas near downtown or neighborhoods can be converted into larger recreation areas, such as fields for team sports.

- Abandoned railroad corridors can be converted to 'rail-trails' providing residents with lengthy corridors for exercise and an alternative transportation route.



Source:www.pps.org

In addition, new subdivisions create opportunities to incorporate both small park type areas and open spaces to protect natural areas.

### Planning Your In-town Open Space

As a general rule all parks should:

- Be within walking distance of a significant portion of the population it will serve, and be accessible via sidewalk.
- Attract a variety of people engaged in a variety of activities.
- Be adjacent to places to buy food and drinks.
- Have comfortable seating in sun and shade.
- Be visible from the outside and be suitably lit.

**Involving the public in all stages of planning your in-town open space will ultimately assure its success.**

#### **Additional Resources:**

**[The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces](#) by William H. Whyte**  
[Portland Trails](#)  
[Friends of Midcoast Maine](#)  
[Project for Public Spaces](#)

#### **Related Topics:**

**Urban Design**  
**Landscape Architecture**  
**Downtown / Neighborhood Revitalization**