

2018 Strategic Plan Plan: Lake George Corporation

Adopted May 29, 2018



Lake George Regional Park



Executive Summary:

Lake George Regional Park is excited to share the 2018 Strategic Plan. In the Fall of 2017 and Winter of 2018, the Board of Directors underwent a planning process that valued data, community input and asset-based approaches to determining the park's future direction. The board recognized stakeholder input and direct engagement with several audiences as key to the planning process, specifically abutting land owners, educators, parents, current park pass holders, residents, local business owners, conservation groups, institutional partners and founding board members. Board members held individual and group conversations with representatives from all of the key audiences, and utilized an electronic survey to ensure broader input. In all, more than 150 individuals participated in person, and an additional 200 individuals submitted surveys.

Lake George Regional Park's Values:



The planning process resulted in clarifying the values that guide Lake George Regional Park's governance and planning: Access, Nature, Safety, Stewardship, Community and Sustainability. These values informed the planning process and supported the creation of this strategic plan and a capital plan prioritizing capital improvements and investments. Utilizing the communities' feedback and the Park's values, the board reviewed and adjusted the organization's staffing structure, planned programming and fundraising goals. Most notably, the planning process resulted in three clear priorities and goals that will support the Park's future and ensure the natural resources valued by so many in Skowhegan, Canaan and beyond are available for generations of memory making to come.

Lake George Regional Park's Strategic Priorities:

-  ❖ Ensure Lake George Regional Park experiences are positive.
-  ❖ Ensure the financial and ecological sustainability of the park.
-  ❖ Increase use and awareness of the park.

Our Mission:

Lake George Regional Park strives to develop, provide, and maintain affordable public access to the services and facilities offered at the park. The park is managed using principles of safety, stewardship, and service learning; and offers recreational, educational, and social opportunities for visitors. Our hope is that what people find and experience at Lake George will encourage their appreciation of each other and our natural world.

Our History:

Lake George Regional Park is a 320-acre lakeside park used for public recreation, which serves 26,000 visitors per year, from all over New England, Canada, and the United States. A mile and a half long, Lake George is a spring-fed body of water nestled within a steep valley surrounded by Foster, Goodwin, Pinnacle and Whittemore Hills. People have visited the shore of Lake George since the end of the last Ice Age. The first evidence of an early Paleoindian settlement was discovered during two archaeological digs undertaken in 1992. The primitive stone tools that were unearthed during these excavations date to the Early and Middle Archaic Periods (8,000-11,000 years ago). In 1892, George Washburn built the Mohican House hotel on the shores of the then, "Podooc Pond." Unimpressed with the original name of the pond, Washburn renamed the water body after himself. The hotel was converted to a dining facility in 1922 when the lands and buildings became Camp Modin, one of the oldest continually operating Jewish camps in the United State. After Camp Modin relocated to the Belgrade Lakes region (where it remains today), the property went up for sale and was purchased by the state in 1992 thanks to funding provided by the Maine Department of Conservation and the Land for Maine Futures (LMF) Program. Vigorous founder efforts prevented development of the property and preserved the open space for public recreation. This purchase filled a recognized need for nature and water-based recreation in west central Maine. A second LMF award added 37 acres and 2,000 feet of shoreline to the property. Presently, with its initial needs met for establishing an organizational structure, land acquisition, the building of public bathhouses, and program development, we celebrate 25 years in operation with a fully-engaged Board and staff committed to building capacity for preserving park operations into the future.

Throughout the year, community members enjoy the park for swimming, fishing, boating, hiking, cross-country skiing, mountain biking, ice-fishing, and as a job-training site for area agencies. They participate in the Winter Carnival held each February, athletic races held in the park such as mountain bikes races and triathlons, family reunions, weddings, volunteer opportunities in the park, as well as a children's summer day camp.

Our Values:

Lake George Regional Park's core values guide how the board governs and plans for the park, and how staff, volunteers and interns manage and run the park during daily operations.

- ❖ **Access:** To provide wellness opportunities and access to the natural environment, water, and trails of the park for all-including individuals, families and low-income community members.
- ❖ **Nature:** To conserve the natural environment of the Park and of Lake George, with a focus on maintaining the unspoiled wilderness and providing a sanctuary people appreciate and can expect at Lake George Regional Park.
- ❖ **Safety:** To ensure a safe park environment through maintaining trails, property and ensuring a family friendly atmosphere.
- ❖ **Stewardship:** To be good stewards of the Park's natural resources and ensure future generations of park stewards are developed through education and the provision of an ecological surround for creating memories for generations.
- ❖ **Community:** Develop and maintain the park and its programming as a community gathering spot for families, groups and community.
- ❖ **Sustainability:** Ensure the parks strong ecological and fiscal health to sustain the park's opportunities for future generations.

Our Priorities and Goals:

Lake George Regional Park's priorities and goals were determined with broad community engagement. Over an eight-month planning period spanning Fall 2017 through Spring 2018, the park's board of directors engaged hundreds of stakeholders in conversations about the parks current and potential uses, costs, value and ideals. The park is seen as a public resource and community treasure by residents, schools, parents and families, institutions of higher educations, area employers and local organizations. The priorities and goals ultimately selected by the board of directors reflect the input from community and will provide the strategic guidance and direction for the park's future.

Lake George Regional Park will seek to:



❖ Ensure Lake George Regional Park experiences are positive.



❖ Ensure the financial and ecological sustainability of the park.



❖ Increase use and awareness of the park.

Priority: Excellence in visitor experiences.

Goal: Ensure that visitors of the park enjoy a positive experience.

Key Objectives:

- ❖ Manage and operate park to ensure Park grounds are clean, well maintained and inviting to guests; and interactions with park staff, interns and volunteers are pleasant and helpful.
- ❖ Develop clear standards for park maintenance and customer services.
- ❖ Develop a capital improvement plan identifying amenities to maintain or add that will enhance park experiences and ensure standards of park maintenance and experience are met.
- ❖ Create and host programming and events at the park to enhance visitor experiences.

Priority: Excellence in financial and ecological sustainability of the park.

Goal: Ensure the park's financial and ecological health is sustainable for future generations.

Key Objectives:

- ❖ Develop new and enhance existing business practices and financial operations, specifically:
 - Review, revise and edit park policies, procedures and governance structures to ensure fiscal oversight and health.
 - Cultivate relationships with sponsors and donors to create new revenue.
 - Create a capital plan that builds the endowment, ensures revenue meets current and projected needs, and ensures park access is affordable to low income community members.
- ❖ Develop new and enhance existing conservation efforts and operations for natural resources within the park; specifically:
 - Assess park activities, systems and infrastructure's impact on the health of the park's natural resources.
 - Manage invasive species.
 - Steward the health of the park and forest.

Priority: Excellence in public partnerships that support increased use and awareness of the park.

Goal: Ensure increased use and awareness of the park's amenities and natural resources through creating new and strengthening existing partnerships.

Key Objectives:

- ❖ Create and strengthen strategic partnerships with employers, community organizations and others to explore, offer and create new opportunities for park uses.
- ❖ Support and train board members to be ambassadors for the park.
- ❖ Clarify and publicize the value received from park use and the fee structure that sustains the park.
- ❖ Expand the park's patronage- increasing the number of people and groups who use the park the number of times they use the park, and the geography of where patrons originate from, using social media, earned media and other methods of outreach.

Our Structures of Support:

Lake George Regional Park is a moderately sized park, whose day to day services and amenities are made possible through a network of volunteers, board members, staff and interns. Balancing a desire for positive park facilities and experiences with a strategic and sustainable investment of financial and human resources, Lake George Regional Park relies on a combination of employees, contractors and volunteers.

Addressing the various key functions required for positive park experiences and a sustainable future, the park will:

- ❖ **Employ a Park Administrator-** A part time year-round position responsible for providing administrative support, project management and coordination, and financial management. The Park Director will also be the park's relationship builder and community liaison, providing leadership and responsible for public relations and outreach.
- ❖ **Employ a Park Resource Manager-** A full time seasonal position responsible for managing physical and natural resources, the day to day operations of the park, and supporting park interns. The Park Ranger will also be responsible for providing customer service in the park and ensuring positive park experiences for all.
- ❖ **Contract with individuals and businesses-**
 - To provide financial services including payroll management, bookkeeping, and tax preparation and filing.
 - To provide project oversight and labor for projects to repair or improve the physical conditions of the park.
 - To ensure the park is maintained during the four seasons, including plowing, snow removal, and trail grooming.
- ❖ **Coordinate and support volunteers-**
 - To maintain, enhance and improve park trails, grounds and facilities.
 - To conduct education programs and physical activities.
- ❖ **Govern-** Members of the board of directors will be responsible for financial and ecological sustainability of the park-
 - To plan and support park programming.
 - To engage in fundraising.
 - To provide oversight of the finances, park staff, park condition and relevant systems.
 - To provide leadership to staff, interns, volunteers and support the organization at all levels.

Appendix A- Results from Community Engagement

Summary of Themes from Strategic Planning Community Engagement

PARK USE

How often do you use the park, when do you use it the most, what activities do you use the park for?

In person:

Water based: 46% (Swimming 64%, Fishing 16%, Kayak/boating 2%, Other 18%)

Nature/trails: 28% (Skiing/Snowshoeing 52%, Hiking/trails 26%, Horseback 11%, Reflections/tranquility 11%)

Education: 14% (School based 57%, Volunteering 43%)

Events: 12% (Wedding/reunions/parties 42%, Camp Podooc 42%, Work events 16%)

Water based: (Swimming 75%, Boating 36%, Fishing 26%)

Nature/ Trails: (Hiking 53%, Biking 7%, Skiing 5%, Trail riding with Horse 2%)

Organized events (20%)

Alone (23%)

With spouse/significant other (47%)

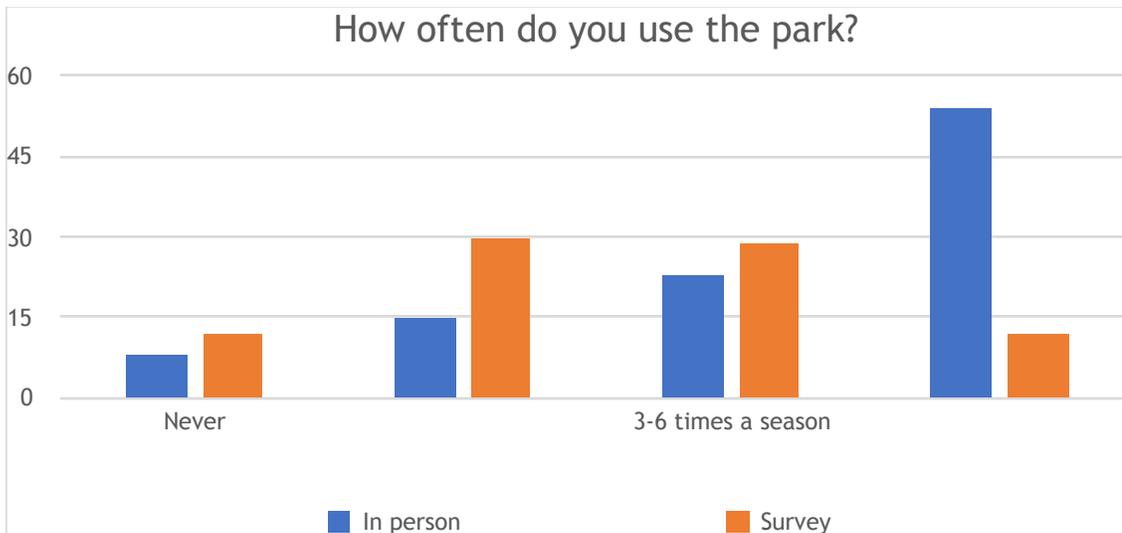
With children (54%)

Coworkers (8%)

At work (5%)

Survey results:





Frequency (in person %, survey %)

- Never (8%; 12%)
- 1-3 times (15%, 30%)
- 3-6 a season (23%, 29%)
- Weekly or multiple times a week (54%, 12%)

“Keeping the park open is very important to me and my family. Communication with the public and assistance when needed to help in any way the community can is important.”

Season of use (Survey)

- Summer (88%)
- Fall (49%)
- Winter (30%)

- Spring (33%)
- Never (7%)

“We have favorite rocks, lilies, wild ferns. It is the most valuable place we have in our community.”

PARK EXPERIENCE

What would improve or increase your experiences at the park?

In Person

Amenities: 43%

- Food/Concessions 21%,
- Improve/increase signage 21%,
- Family/Social activities- Horseshoes, volleyball, playground 21%,
- Boat/Site rentals 13%,
- More picnic tables 10%,
- Water enhancements -dock, wharf, float, slides 8%,
- Improved Facilities/Maintenance 6%

Trail improvements: 22%

- Trail maintenance/Winter grooming 40%,
- Remove horse feces 15%,
- Provide maps 15%,
- Dog friendly 10%,
- Other 20%

Event space: 17%

- Provide rental opportunities 60%,
- Allow alcohol for events 20%,
- Improve current facilities- safe and accessible 20%

Programming: 13%

- Group walks & hikes 42%,
- Contests/derby 33%,
- Educational 25%

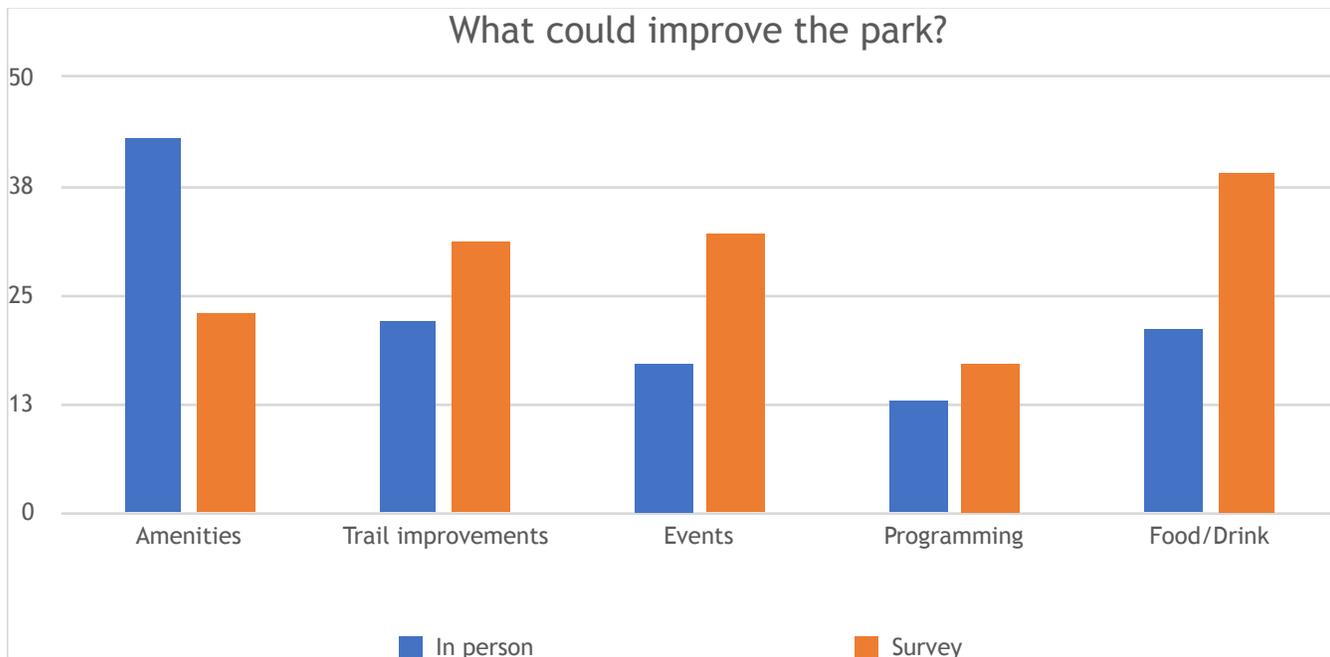
Affordability: 4%

Survey Results:

- Ability to purchase food and drinks in the park (39%)
- Extended Hours (18%)
- More trails (31%)
- Increased summer programming (17%)
- More Events (32%)
- More adventure activities (23%)

"People will be more eager to support if they are emotionally invested, have some ownership, and can participate in projects physically."

- Other (37%)



VALUE

Aside from the value you think Lake George adds to your life, what value do you think Lake George Regional Park contributes to the local communities?

In person:

- Place for social gatherings- picnics, work, community: 32%
- Place for families- Camp Podooc and education: 26%
- Access to swimming/nature: 20%
- Affordable nature recreation: 12%
- Health/Healthy lifestyle opportunities: 6%
- Volunteerism/Civic engagement: 4%

- Access to nature 95%
- Access to water activities 98%
- Access to hiking 90%
- Access to a place for outdoor learning 80%
- A place for groups of people 87%
- An amenity for employees 14%
- Safe environment 69%
- Other 11%

Survey Results:

I would be willing and able to pay up to \$100 for a year-round season pass if I could break my payment into two payments over the summer.

In person: Yes 58; No 22%; Comments 20%;

Survey 22%

I would be willing and able to pay for food and drinks bought at the park.

In person Yes 84%; No 12%; Comments 4%

Survey 64%

I would be willing and able to pay for special events and races if they interested me.

In person: Yes 100%; No 0%; Comments 36%

Survey: 58%

I would be willing to give financially in addition to my use costs.

In person: Yes 51%; No 6%; Comments 13%

Survey: 19%

I or someone I know would be willing to sponsor the park or trails.

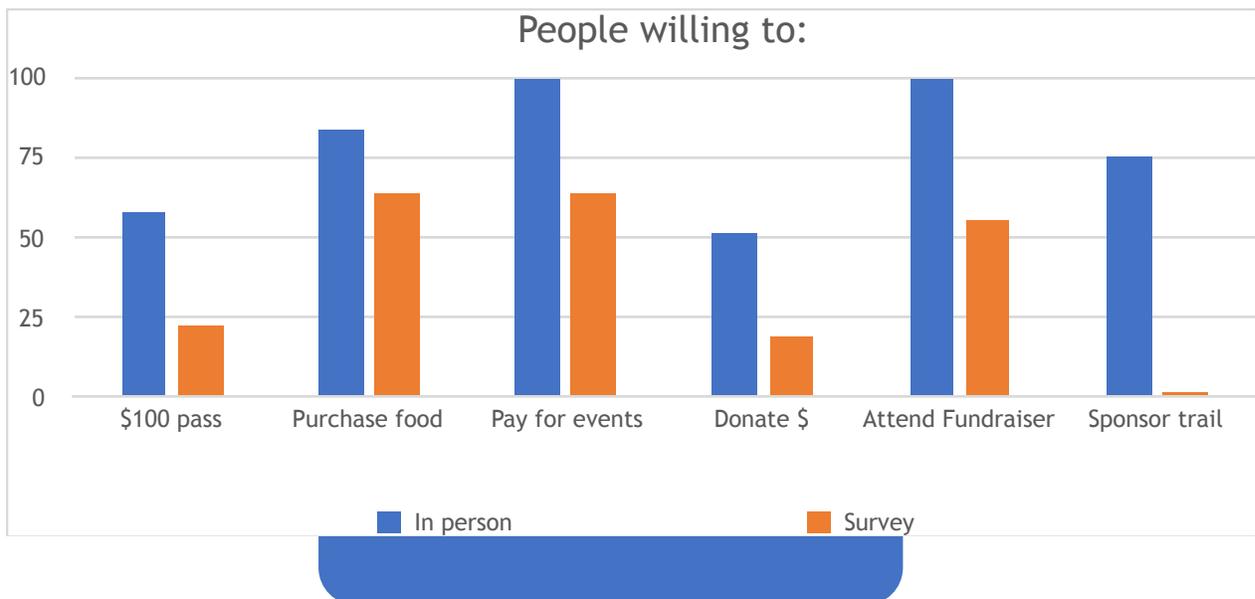
In person: Yes- 75%; No- 25%; Comments- 10

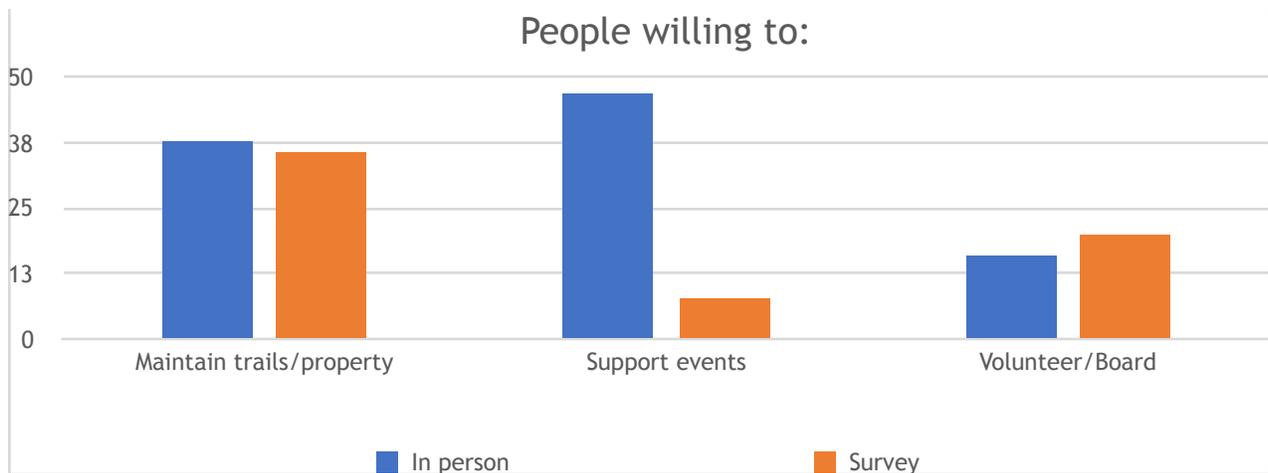
Survey 1%

I would be willing and able to attend a fundraiser like the Winter Carnival, Celebration Dinner and Silent Auction, or Pizza with a Purpose

In person: Yes 100%; No 0%; Comments 28%

Survey 55%





What are some of the non-financial ways that you or others would be willing to support the park?

In person:

- Maintenance- trail and property 38%
- Collaborate for events/grants: 18%
- Volunteer 16%
- Donate items/space 29%

Survey Results

- Volunteer 64%
- Maintenance- trails 36%
- Maintenance- property 12%
- Host a fundraiser 8%
- Serve on the board 20%

“Work with us to develop park PROGRAMS, with a printed schedule-like nature craft, wildflower/mushroom/plant species ID, naturalist book signings, landscape designers, and camp fire cooking classes”

What else would you like us to consider as we plan and look ahead over the next 5 years?

- **Promotion and host park events: 24**
- **Change staffing or schedule: 12**
 - Shorten season
 - Add volunteer component
 - Reduce staff hours
- **Financial: 10**
- **Rentals- cabins, sites, boats: 8**

“It is a true gem! The quintessential Maine. Everyone is friendly, which I believe is an indication of your successful balance -- you provide amenities, but not so much that the park feels overdone.”

- **Transportation: 5**
- **Clean up day: 4**