

Summary of Park Evaluation Results: 2019, 2021, and 2022

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I. Park Evaluation Overview

What is the purpose of the Park Evaluation?

The goal of the Evaluation is to understand the use of Somerville parks, with a particular focus on equity in access to modern parks with engaging features for all residents. The Evaluation seeks to answer:

- Who uses the parks? During which times?
 - What is the perceived age, gender, race/ethnicity of park users?
- How active are people in the parks?
 - What features promote activity?
 - Which groups are most active?
 - Which parks need renovation or improvement, and what type of improvement?
- How do people use parks for unstructured recreation?
 - How does field permitting affect park accessibility for unstructured play?

How are the Evaluations completed?

What tools does it use to collect information?

The Evaluation uses tools adapted from the System for Observing Play and Recreation in the Community (SOPARC) technique. This is a tested method of gathering information through observation of people in parks. The method has the advantage of making an evaluation more feasible and less disruptive to park activity because it does not require intercepting park users to complete a survey. The drawback is that demographic characteristics are reported as perceived by observers and not self-reported by people in parks.

In addition to park observation data, information in this report comes from:

- US Census American Community Survey: Race, Ethnicity, Age, and Gender of the Somerville population.
- The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education: Race, Ethnicity, and Income of the Somerville Public School population.
- The Office of Public Space and Urban Forestry: Park type classification.
- The Department of Parks and Recreation: permitting records for spring 2022.

Who collects the information?

Staff members from the Office of Food Access and Healthy Communities (former Shape Up Somerville), graduate students in public health, and community volunteers have collaborated to complete the three evaluations summarized here. The Office of Food Access and Healthy Communities produced this summary and analysis. The Public Space and Urban Forestry Division (PSUF), Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development, has provided input throughout the evaluation process.

When was the information summarized here collected?

This information was collected over three years from 2019-2022. There was no evaluation in 2020 due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. The timeframes for data collection in each year were:

- 2019: mid-September through mid-October
- 2021: mid-May through mid-June
- 2022: June through early July

II. Key Recommendations

Several consistent themes have emerged over three years of evaluation. This section summarizes these themes and recommendations for improving park infrastructure, upkeep, and programming.

1. **People of color use the parks in Somerville. We should continue to work on creative ways to engage communities who use the parks in future design or other changes to park spaces.** Evaluations show that the perceived race/ethnicity of park users more closely matches the Somerville Public School (SPS) population, which is majority minority and about 50% low-income, than the general population.
2. **Offer more programming for older adults in parks.** Perceived older adults had lower levels of activity in 2021 and 2022 observations and were underrepresented compared to share population in some years, suggesting a need for more park programming aimed at this age group.
3. **Continue to build opportunities for young people who identify as female to be active in park spaces.** Perceived girls/women were more likely to be sedentary or only engaging in light activity compared to perceived boys/men, though the difference is less marked in the most recent year of observation.
4. **Prioritize upkeep and addition of features in parks near preschools and programming for children.** In addition to school-related park use, many childcare facilities rely on their local parks to provide outdoor recreation for young children. We should recognize this and work to keep up and improve parks near childcare centers.
5. **Provide opportunities for adults to be active while watching kids and conduct outreach to promote these opportunities.** Adults are frequently sedentary in parks, especially when accompanying young children.

III. Summary of Information Gathered

This section summarizes the data collected over the three evaluations on number of park users, activity level, perceived race or ethnicity, perceived gender, and perceived age of park users.

Park Evaluation Overview and Results 2019-2022

How many people did we observe and in which parks (Table 1 & Figure 1)?

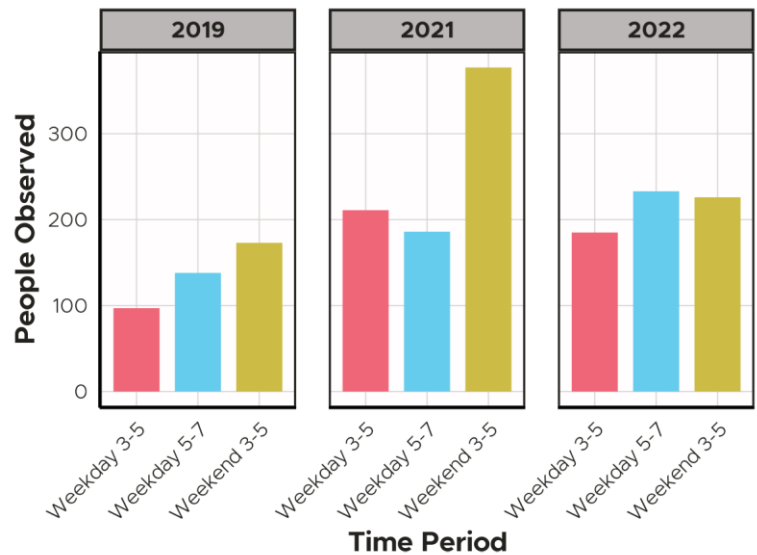
We observed a total of 21 parks over three years, 12 in 2019, 13 in 2021, and 13 in 2022. 5 parks were observed in all three years. Parks were chosen through a combination of renovation date and area income, with priority given to parks in neighborhoods with Environmental Justice populations*.

*Environmental Justice neighborhoods in Massachusetts are determined by meeting at least one of the following criteria: 1) annual median household income is 65% or less of the state's median household income; 2) minorities make up 40% or more of the population; 3) 25% or more of households identify as speaking English less than 'very well'; 4) minorities make up 25% or more of the population AND annual median household income for the municipality (in this case Somerville) is not more than 150% of the state's annual median household income.

Table 1: Parks observed and number of people observed, 2019-22

Park	Main Land Use Type	2019	2021	2022
Draw 7	Athletic Field	--	38	49
Foss	Athletic Field	104	323	217
Nunziato	Athletic Field	--	--	26
Junction	Passive	--	6	--
LouAnne David	Passive	--	--	36
MaxpacSquare	Passive	--	26	--
Partners	Passive	--	22	--
Prospect	Passive	--	--	55
Albion	Playground	63	63	--
Allen	Playground	1	--	11
Central Hill	Playground	14	--	44
Chuckie Harris	Playground	30	13	31
Corbett	Playground	--	--	19
Grimmons	Playground	36	31	--
Hoyt	Playground	75	93	51
Marshall	Playground	7	33	--
Mystic	Playground	26	23	--
North	Playground	36	78	69
Osgood	Playground	--	--	20
Deanna Cremin	Playground	7	25	16
Woodstock	Playground	9	--	--

Figure 1: Observations by Time of Day, 2019-22



Note: While Golden Source (PSUF Data) classifies Allen St as a community garden, only the playground portion was ever observed being used, and users reported it is regularly used as a play place for children from the nearby CAAS HeadStart. In light of these observations, we reclassified Allen as a Playground.

How active are people in Somerville parks (Tables 2A and B & Figure 2)?

Playground primary use parks have highest activity level, largely due to active children. For example, Allen Street Playground was observed when a HeadStart class was using it for outdoor recreation.

Figure 2: Activity Level, All Years and All Parks

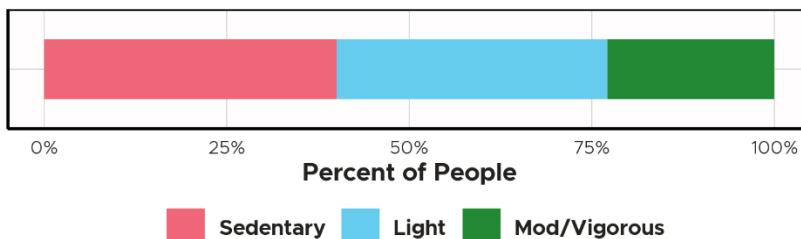


Table 2A: Parks with 25% or more moderate-vigorous

Park	activity		
	Mod/Vig	Total	Percent
Allen	8	12	66.67
Corbett	9	19	47.37
North	77	180	42.78
Mystic	14	48	29.17
Foss	170	636	26.73
Chuckie Harris	19	74	25.68
LouAnne David	9	36	25

Table 2B: Parks with 50% or more sedentary activity

Park	Sed.	Total	Percent
MaxpacSquare	18	26	69.23
Nunziato	18	26	69.23
Junction	4	6	66.67
Prospect	33	55	60
Draw 7	44	87	50.57

While passive parks like Junction and Prospect Hill have high levels of sedentary activity, when a passive park is available to a group, it can easily be used actively. For example, Lou Ann David Park was observed just after the daycare ended at the Tufts Administration Building, leading to higher activity levels.

What are the perceived ages of park users and how does activity level differ with perceived age (Figures 3 & 4)?

Observations show that perceived older adults are underrepresented in parks, compared to their share of the population, and were much less active than perceived adults in 2021 and 2022, and than children and teens in all

Figure 3: Park users by perceived age, 2019-22

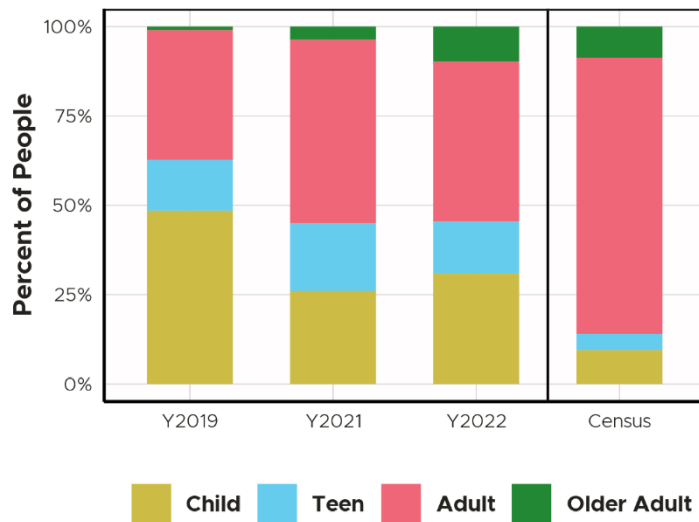
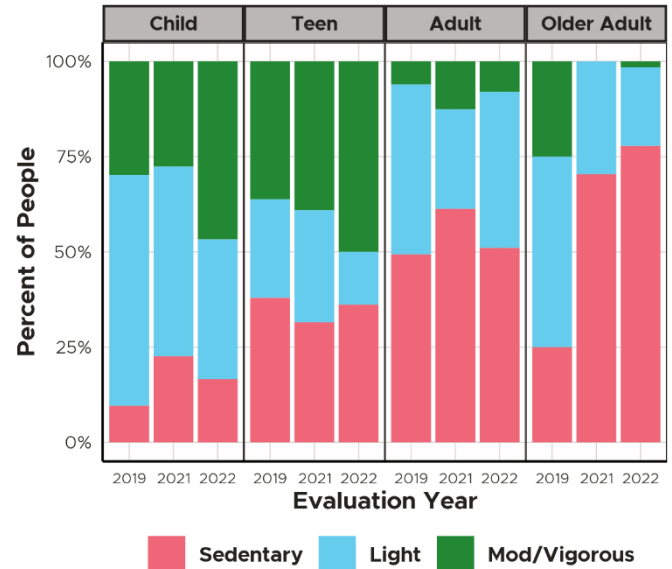


Figure 4: Perceived age of park users and activity level, 2019-22



years. This points to an opportunity to offer more programming for older adults in parks. Perceived adults are also underrepresented in parks and have low levels of activity. Many observations noted adults sitting while children played actively, suggesting there may be an opportunity to build infrastructure that would encourage guardians to be active when accompanying children.

What are the perceived races or ethnicities of park users and how does activity level differ with perceived race or ethnicity (Figures 5 & 6)?

Perceived black and Latino/a/e residents are over-represented in public parks; perceived park demographics more closely resemble the demographics of the Somerville Public Schools, which are majority minority. Notably, Somerville Public School children are also majority low-income, suggesting the importance of investing in our parks to achieve our cities' goal of equitable access to active and healthy lifestyles.

The 2021 Park Evaluation also assessed attendance at community meetings and showed that representation in the park planning community engagement process did not typically reflect park user demographics. The analysis included a focus group with Spanish-speaking parents, who used parks but did not engage with the planning process because meetings are in the evenings, far from home, time-consuming, and offered primarily in English. As a result of these findings, the Public Space and Urban Forestry Division and other city partners are working to make the process more accessible and equitable.

Figure 5: Park users by perceived race/ethnicity, 2019-22

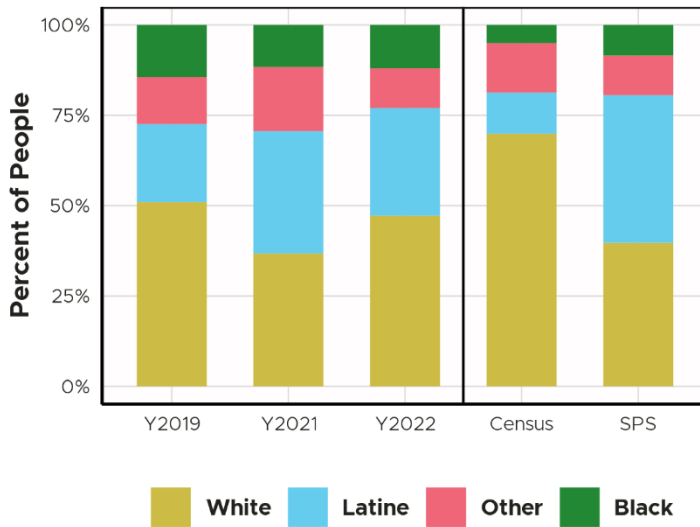
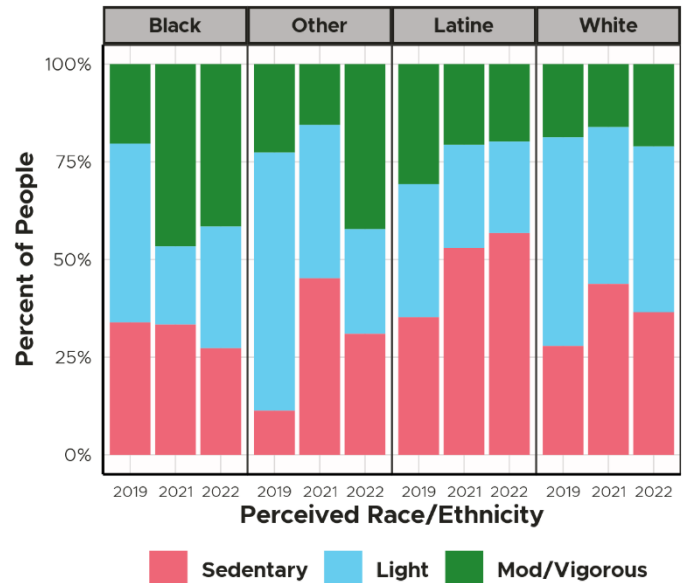


Figure 6: Perceived race/ethnicity and activity level, 2019-2022



Note: Census questions distinguish race and ethnicity, asking residents to indicate both, e.g. Black Hispanic or White Hispanic. The Park Evaluation perceived Latine category is designed to capture anyone who would identify as Hispanic on the census, regardless of race. However, depending on the cultural competencies and experience of observers, folks who would identify as Hispanic and Black on the census may have been observed as Black.

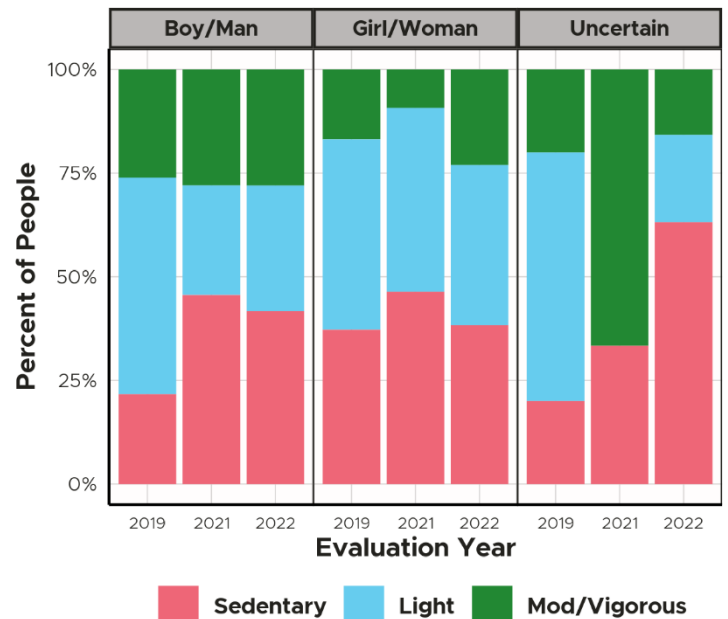
How does activity level differ with perceived gender identity (Figure 7)?

2019 and 2021 found a disparity in activity level between female-appearing and male-appearing park users, although the difference was minimal in 2022 observations. These observations point to a need to continue to grow programming, policies, and messaging that support active recreation for all gender identities, especially among teens where the disparity is typically greater.

How frequently are parks with fields permitted for specific uses and not open for unstructured recreation (Table 3)?

Due to Somerville's limited acreage, field space is at a premium in the city. Fields are often permitted for specific group uses during peak times, limiting access to spaces for unstructured recreation. People were frequently observed working out and playing in fields during unpermitted times on weekends indicating a need for more unstructured field time. Additionally, permitted activity does not always occur as planned. For example, during our 2022 weekday observation of the Winter Hill Field from 5-7, it was permitted for Somerville Youth Soccer, but was open for a family who was playing there.

Figure 7: Perceived gender and activity level, 2019-22



These observations suggest there may be a value in preserving some field time for unstructured access for the public. This intervention could consider adding lighting to create a welcoming and safe space. The 2019 Evaluation showcased several missed opportunities for recreation due to lack of lighting in mid-fall.

How do people use our schoolyards (Table 4)?

Observations of our schoolyards show that many of these spaces are heavily used throughout the week, especially if they have facilities like fields and basketball courts. Investing in these spaces benefits both our youth and the broader community.

Table 3: Permitting of Popular Fields, April 1, 2022-
June 18, 2022, Weekdays 5-8 PM

Field	Percent of Time Permitted
ESCS Field	100.0
Winter Hill Field	99.4
Capuano Field	95.8
Nunziato Field	75.0
Trum Diamond A	73.2
Trum Diamond B	58.9
Lincoln Park Field	50.0

Table 4: Schoolyard Use by Time Period, 2019-2022

Park	2019			2021			2022		
	Weekday	Weekday	Weekend	Weekday	Weekday	Weekend	Weekday	Weekday	Weekend
	3-5	5-7	3-5	3-5	5-7	3-5	3-5	5-7	3-5
Argenziano	122	46	301	57	185	132	--	--	--
Brown	32	0	0	18	0	0	--	--	--
Capuano	51	28	74	42	60	30	27	29	11
East Somerville	58	61	27	93	25	30	69	16	18
Healey	57	11	6	26	9	2	--	--	--
Kennedy	8	1	15	52	17	8	47	13	28
West Somerville	33	0	5	20	0	0	0	5	34
Winter	40	33	17	30	16	9	71	17	55

References:

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2021-22). Enrollment by School/Grade/Race and Enrollment for Special Populations by District. Retrieved from <https://www.doe.mass.edu/infoservices/reports/enroll/>

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