



# A **Community** Vision for Six Lakes:

Nature, Education,  
Neighborhood Connections

Presented by the



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# The History of Six Lakes

Six Lakes is a 102.5-acre parcel in Hamden, Connecticut, featuring a mature oak-pine forest and six beautiful ponds. Early in the 20th century, the property was used by Winchester Repeating Arms Company for gunpowder storage and munitions testing. Later, portions of the site served as a dump for battery waste, solvents, and other industrial materials, leaving localized contamination. In 1931, Winchester was purchased by the Olin Corporation, which still owns Six Lakes, though operations there ceased in the 1960s.

The Hamden Land Conservation Trust first approached Olin about acquiring the property for a park in 1969. In 1986, the state Department of Environmental Protection (now DEEP) and Olin signed a consent order for cleanup, and Olin performed some work in the early 1990s. In the early 2000s, DEEP and Olin agreed to divert attention from Six Lakes to a cleanup of pollution in the adjacent Newhall neighborhood, whose marshes were filled with industrial and municipal waste by Winchester and the Town of Hamden over decades before the area was developed in the 1950s with modest single-family homes for predominantly Black, working class families. The Newhall cleanup was mostly completed, but the emotional legacy of contamination lingers.

Today, Olin is conducting new tests at Six Lakes in order to create a remediation plan, overseen by DEEP. Following the necessary cleanup, Six Lakes could safely become a public park—a green oasis connected to an extensive urban trail system that includes the adjacent Farmington Canal Heritage Trail. Six Lakes is the last remaining open space in heavily developed Southern Hamden with that potential.

## Access to public open space at Six Lakes would bring environmental justice to Newhall.



- 1986** Olin enters into consent order with DEP to clean up Six Lakes (aka Olin Powder Farm).
- 1990-91** Olin removes a portion of contaminated soils and debris from the site.
- 2000s** Hamden Land Conservation Trust leads public walks on the site to spark public interest.
- 2003** Olin enters into consent order for Newhall remediation.
- 2014** Olin conducts some groundwater and sediment sampling at Six Lakes.
- 2019** Six Lakes Park Coalition (SLPC) forms.
- 2022** Hamden Legislative Council passes resolution supporting a park at Six Lakes.
- 2023** Olin conducts new soil and groundwater testing in seven “areas of concern” at south end of Six Lakes property.
- 2024** Hamden mayor Lauren Garrett announces her support of remediation of Six Lakes and creation of a state park there.  
Community visioning process led by SLPC.  
Remediation in Newhall still incomplete; Six Lakes still does not have a remediation plan.

# The Visioning Process

In the summer of 2024, the Six Lakes Park Coalition led a two-part visioning process to learn more about the community’s desires for the end use of the 102.5 acres at Six Lakes. The first part, engaging 91 participants, was a series of workshops held in four Hamden locations; three were open to the greater New Haven community, and the fourth was held at Whitney Center retirement community.



Participants viewed a presentation, video, and maps of the site, then discussed their dreams for and concerns about a potential park at Six Lakes. Outcomes of breakout conversations were recorded and summarized. Gatherings also afforded the opportunity for community-building, volunteer signup, and petition distribution. Nearly all attendees also participated in the second part of the visioning process: a community survey. Over the following weeks, that survey was distributed at local events, via email and social media, and through a door-to-door campaign. In total, 462 community members responded. The overall vision expressed in this report is the result of both the community survey and the visioning workshops.

## COMMUNITY SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS:

- 80%** of survey respondents were white, and 20% were people of color.
- 30%** of respondents live in a neighborhood adjacent to Six Lakes.
- 31%** of respondents were over 64, due in part to strong participation from residents of Whitney Center retirement community, bordering Six Lakes.
- 7%** of respondents were under 25, while respondents aged 25-34, 35-44, 45-54 and 55-64 were roughly equally represented.
- 27%** of respondents reported attending a visioning session.



# Key Themes and Results

Three key themes emerged from the four community visioning workshops. First, participants clearly expressed their desire for a **park where they could walk, hike, picnic, bird watch, and simply enjoy the outdoors in a relatively undisturbed natural environment**. Second only to passive recreational activities were ideas about using a park at Six Lakes for **education, such as school field trips, afterschool and adult programs, creation of a nature center or discovery museum, and research by university students**. People were also eager to learn and teach others about the history of the property. Finally, participants in visioning sessions repeatedly spoke about how a park at Six Lakes could provide **physical connections in their neighborhoods**: to the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail, as a through-route, and as a green space they could access easily by foot or by bike. In talking about a park's ability to connect neighborhoods, the word "multigenerational" was used several times, and many invoked the idea of a family-friendly, kid-friendly space.

**"A quiet natural area of this size would benefit the neighborhood and region by providing a respite from the stress of civilization.**

**Nature is the great healer."**

Community Survey response

Results from the community survey told a similar story. People expressed a desire for an accessible park with some amenities, leaning toward a less developed environment that would preserve the area's natural beauty and resources (see Figure 1). Across demographic groups, a strong majority of respondents desire a park for **passive recreation** such as hiking, walking and birding. In addition, they shared consensus on their desire for a **community gathering space** for activities such as picnics and performances (see Figure 2). When asked about infrastructure outside the park, clear agreement emerged for small businesses such as **a farmers' market or a coffee shop** as well as **safe crossings of Dixwell and Putnam Avenues** for park access.

**When you visit a park, do you prefer it to be natural and undeveloped or fully developed and widely accessible?**

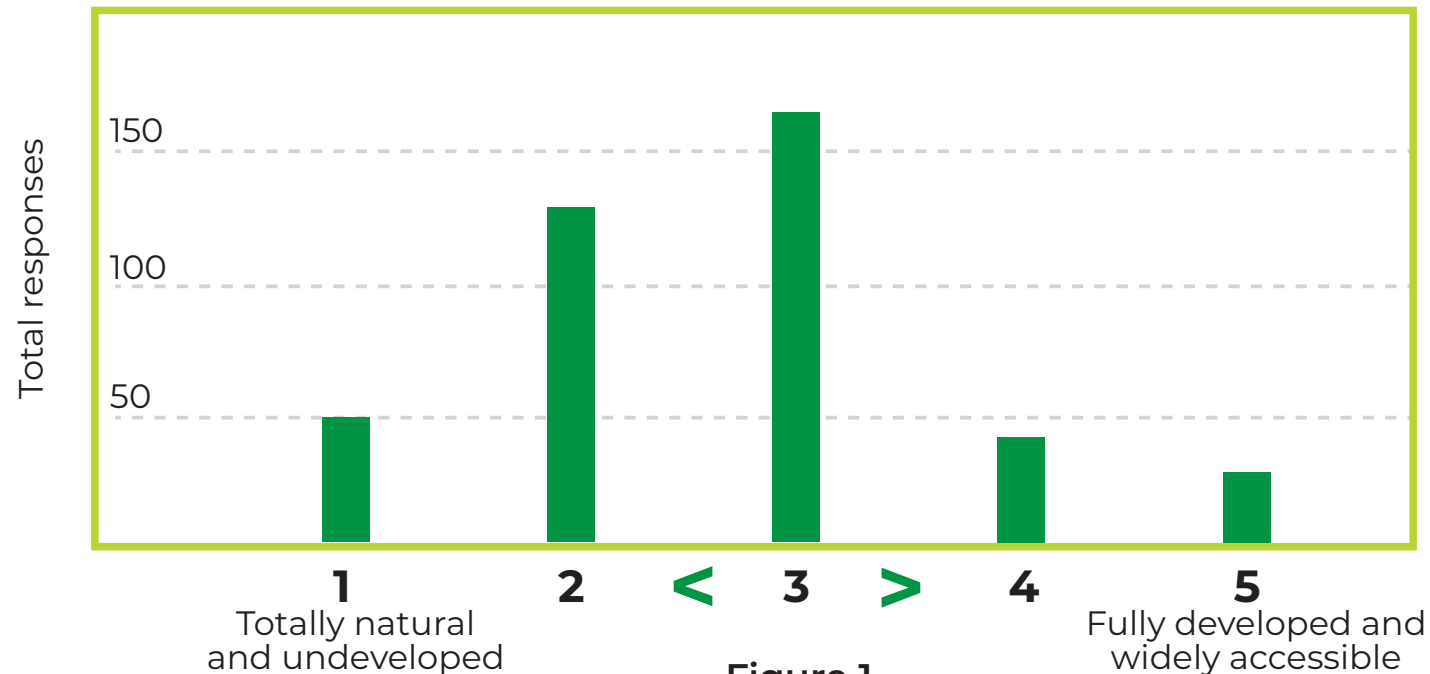


Figure 1

**Which of the following activities would you do at Six Lakes if they were available?**

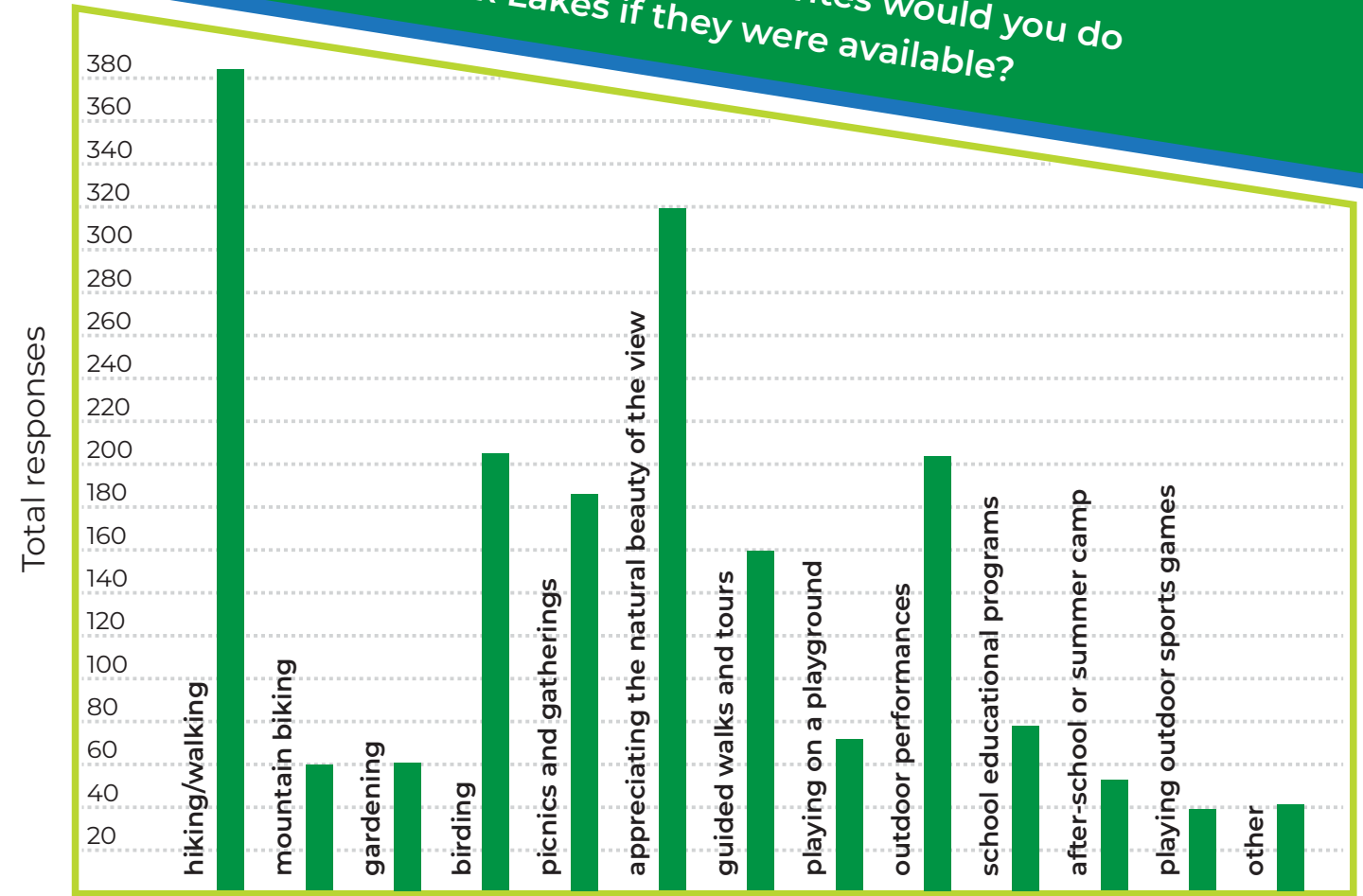


Figure 2

The data collected from this process should be considered descriptive rather than representative. Neighborhoods adjacent to Six Lakes were not all equally represented in the visioning process. Residents of whiter, more affluent Whitneyville outnumbered residents of Newhall, the majority of whom are less affluent people of color, more than four-to-one. The Six Lakes Park Coalition is developing a plan for engaging more of the property's Newhall neighbors as this project continues.

Despite these limitations, SLPC can state with confidence that neighbors desire **public open space at Six Lakes that will allow them safe access to a quiet, natural area and provide a gathering space for the local community**.

**"More people living nearby would be within walking distance (or short driving/biking distance) to a park...**

**It would bridge the several different communities that surround [it] and would share it."**

Community Survey response

# Recommendations

People care about Six Lakes. Community engagement has been strong, with about 100 people attending each event over the past year and a half, including two DEEP Community Updates, a fall 2023 perimeter walk, and in-person visioning workshops. The Coalition's growing email list reaches more than 1,000 supporters. The time has come to bring this property to the people.

The community wants this polluted property to be cleaned up by its owner, the Olin Corporation, swiftly and thoroughly. Steps must be taken to expedite the process after 50 years of little action.

**“A beautiful opportunity to provide a safe, vibrant, clean space for people to share. As summers continue to warm, a space to cool off and enjoy a natural environment will be crucial.”**

Community Survey response

### Steps should include:

- Expanding testing beyond the initial seven areas of concern to the entire property in the next round of testing in 2024
- Engaging all involved parties—Olin, DEEP, the Town of Hamden, and the community as represented by the Coalition—at regularly scheduled meetings to negotiate a solution that will open this property to the public

### The Six Lakes Park Coalition commits to the following Action Plan:

- Create a working group of local professionals to oversee negotiations regarding ownership, management, and funding for a future park
- Hold DEEP and our state legislators accountable for requiring Olin to conduct comprehensive, expeditious testing and remediate this site to a standard appropriate to the community's desired end use
- Conduct additional outreach to community members who were under-represented in the visioning process in order to refine our understanding of the community's end use vision
- Increase overall community involvement by continuing to grow the Coalition's individual and organizational membership
- Explore solutions to concerns raised by the community, including parking, safety, maintenance, pollution, and funding
- Continue to keep all stakeholders informed of progress via monthly email updates and annual DEEP Community Update meetings



## The Six Lakes Park Coalition urges the following timeline:



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## Members of the Six Lakes Park Coalition:

Christian Tabernacle Baptist Church  
Congregations Organized for a New Connecticut (CONNECT)\*  
Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC)\*  
Farmington Canal Commission  
Hamden Alliance for Trees  
Hamden Chamber of Commerce\*  
Hamden Land Conservation Trust\*  
Newhall neighborhood representatives\*  
Save the Sound\*  
South Central Regional Land Conservation Alliance (SCRLCA)  
Spring Glen Church  
Town of Hamden  
West River Watershed Association  
Whitneyville Civic Association

*\*represented on the Six Lakes Park Coalition steering committee*

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## Learn more about Six Lakes

View additional reporting from our visioning process at:

[sixlakespark.org/about-six-lakes/](https://sixlakespark.org/about-six-lakes/).

Sign up for our monthly email news and volunteer opportunities at

[sixlakespark.org/contact-us/](https://sixlakespark.org/contact-us/).