

CHAPTER 1

OPEN SPACE AND RESOURCE PROTECTION

Introduction

The Executive Order 418 Interagency Working Group exempted the Town of Wendell from creating an Open Space and Resource Protection section for the Community Development Plan, because of the recently completed Wendell Open Space and Recreation Plan (2002). The Wendell Open Space and Recreation Plan was approved by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, Division of Conservation Services.

The Open Space and Recreation Plan is an important document that helps guide and influence Wendell's planning priorities and initiatives, including the creation of this Community Development Plan. The Community Development Plan Committee consequently felt it was important to include the Open Space and Recreation Plan's main goals and objectives and the Open Space and Recreation Plan's Action Plan in the Community Development Plan. Those sections of the Open Space and Recreation Plan are provided in this chapter.

In addition, as is discussed in the mapping chapter of this Plan (Chapter 6), the Open Space and Recreation Plan's Action Plan Map was referred to extensively during the creation of the Development Suitability Map. The Action Plan Map identified potential greenways and priority areas for open space protection.

The Community Development Plan Committee supports the preservation of additional open space in Wendell. The committee also encourages working landscapes in which the economic activity occurring on open space parcels, such as farming and forestry, help these land areas remain undeveloped.

Open Space and Recreation Plan Goals and Objectives¹

Goals

1. Ensure that the Town of Wendell retains its rural character and sense of community and maintains or improves the quality of its air and water, and the diversity and integrity of native fauna and flora through the conservation of locally important natural, open space, and cultural resources.
2. Ensure that the Town of Wendell improves the quality, quantity, and accessibility of its recreational resources for current and future generations, especially for teens and seniors.

Objectives (not in any particular order)

1. Create and empower an officially appointed Open Space Committee that would be responsible for:
 - a) Prioritizing Town sponsored land protection projects that conserve forestland, drinking water, streams and ponds, open fields, scenic views, wildlife habitat, wetlands, and farmland.
 - b) Taking advantage of the Town's right-of-first refusal with Chapter 61 parcels or assigning the right to a third party.
 - c) Coordinating with regional and state land protection efforts, in and around Wendell, to ensure the continued conservation of important natural, recreational and open space resources.
 - d) Accepting land and easement donations and facilitating the local investment of land protection funding by private land trusts and state agencies.
 - e) Assessing whether particular open space areas like Bear Mountain and Whetstone Wood Sanctuary, which have public access are meeting demand and if not, identify the barriers and facilitate the implementation of potential solutions.
 - f) Working closely with the Recreation Committee to identify, and facilitate the acquisition of, additional lands for recreational activities and sports fields.
2. Empower the Recreation Committee to be effective in providing recreational facilities and programs for all of Wendell's residents. This objective may be executed by:
 - a) Determining the specific recreational programming and facility needs of Wendell residents of all ages.
 - b) Developing and publicizing desired recreational programming for residents of all ages.
 - c) Supporting the continued development of community arts festivals and events

¹Section excerpted from the Open Space and Recreation Plan.

3. Participate with the Watershed Basin Teams and the Millers River Watershed Council to facilitate a program of water quality monitoring for the rivers, brooks, streams, lakes, and ponds in Wendell.
4. Develop multi-user (walking, hiking, bicycling, cross country skiing) trail systems that tie into existing ones, which can be accessed from publicly owned land or private lands with trail easements.
5. Encourage broad public participation in the Master Planning process to ensure that appropriate solutions for land use and growth management are identified. These may include revising the zoning bylaws to help protect open space, natural resources, and ensure the maintenance of the small town character that Wendell residents have come to cherish.
6. Promote and help protect historically significant landscapes.

Five-Year Action Plan from the Open Space and Recreation Plan²

The Five-Year Action Plan fulfills the Open Space and Recreation Plan objectives. The objectives address both open space and recreation goals because the quantity and quality of accessible open space relates directly to the availability of recreational opportunities in Wendell. For example, 60% of the Open Space and Recreation survey respondents used Wendell State Forest at least monthly while the two most popular forms of recreational activity are walking and hiking, which can be facilitated by a network of connected open space.

The objectives are listed in the far left column of [Table 1-1] in the same order as they appear [above] and are followed in the same row by recommended actions, responsible board or group, and start date. By implementing the recommended actions, each objective will begin to be realized.

Implementing the Open Space and Recreation Plan requires appointing an official Open Space Committee and supporting the Recreation Committee. However, as is shown in the third column in [Table 1-1], the Select Board, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, the Historical Commission, and others are all necessary participants in the successful implementation of an Open Space and Recreation Plan.

Most of these actions may be constrained by a lack of volunteer time, rather than funding. Where money is required, such as to permanently protect open space, it does not have to be provided by the Town alone. State and federal governmental agencies, private non-profit conservation agencies, and foundations are potential sources of funding. In addition, these sources are more likely to invest in land protection projects that have a broad base of community support.

²Section excerpted from the Open Space and Recreation Plan.

The Wendell Open Space Planning Committee prioritized the thirty-seven action steps finding eleven that were felt to be the most important. These eleven action steps are represented in the Action Plan Map at the end of this section. The successful implementation of the Action Plan will be assisted by the appointment or, authorization of an Open Space Committee. An Open Space Committee, authorized by a Town Meeting vote, would help to ensure that all of the effort that went into formulating the Plan (as well as the past two open space planning documents) was well spent.

The Priority Action Steps are:

- ❖ Authorize an Open Space Committee (OSC).
- ❖ Identify funding sources for land protection.
- ❖ Identify focus or priority areas.
- ❖ Develop a Protocol for assigning the right-of-first refusal to a local land trust.
- ❖ Secure the services of a consulting forester or ecologist to review all Town lands and determine which would be most appropriate as a Town Forest or Conservation Land/Community Garden/Orchard.
- ❖ Ensure the training of Open Space Committee members in conservation alternatives.
- ❖ Explore establishing a Land Acquisition Fund.
- ❖ Determine if the Conservation Commission has the capacity to own and manage conservation land.
- ❖ With the input of all municipal boards, determining probable future uses of all Town-owned lands.
- ❖ Develop an ongoing program of ecological based recreational/educational opportunities for Wendell residents such as biodiversity days and wildlife monitoring (see also #3 ad hoc water quality monitoring & vernal pool identification).
- ❖ Develop management/ stewardship plans for each Town-owned property.

Table 1-1: Recommended Actions of the Open Space and Recreation Plan

| OBJECTIVE | ACTION | RESPONSIBLE BOARD/GROUP | START DATE |
|--|--|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Establish an Open Space Committee. | Authorize an Open Space Committee (OSC). | Town Meeting | 2002 |
| a. Prioritize land protection projects. | Identify funding sources for land protection. | Open Space Committee | 2002 |
| | Identify focus or priority areas. | Open Space Committee | 2002 |
| | Ensure the training of OSC members in conservation alternatives. | Open Space Committee | 2003 |
| b. Take advantage of the Town's right-of-first refusal with Chapter 61 parcels or assign the right to a third party. | Develop a Protocol for assigning the right-of-first refusal to a local land trust. | Open Space Committee | 2002 |
| | Explore establishing a Land Acquisition Fund. | Town Meeting | 2003 |

| OBJECTIVE | ACTION | RESPONSIBLE BOARD/GROUP | START DATE |
|--|--|---|-------------------|
| | Prioritize Chapter 61 parcels using their location relative to focus areas, value, acreage, and threat of development to compare between projects. | Open Space Committee | 2003 |
| | Work with local land trusts to identify potential conservation buyers. | Open Space Committee | 2003-2006 |
| c. Coordinate with regional and state land protection efforts, in and around Wendell, to ensure the continued conservation of important natural, recreational, and open space resources. | Have the Open Space Committee appoint a Liaison to the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership (NQRLP). | Open Space Committee | 2002 |
| | Conduct Conservation Options Workshop for landowners. | Open Space Committee in conjunction with regional land trusts | 2002 |
| | Attend Western Mass. Land Trust Meetings, the Annual Land Trust Conference, and coordinate with the EOEA Basin Teams. | Open Space Committee | 2002 |
| d. Accept land and easement donations and facilitate the local investment of land protection funding by private land trusts and state agencies. | Secure the services of a consulting forester or ecologist to review all Town lands and determine which would be most appropriate as a Town Forest or Conservation Land/Community Garden/Orchard. | Select Board | 2002 |
| | Develop and adopt a protocol at Town Meeting for determining, on a case by case basis, whether Wendell should own permanently protected open space in fee, accept a conservation easement, or encourage ownership by others. | Open Space Committee and Town Meeting | 2003 |
| | Determine if the Conservation Commission has the capacity to own and manage conservation land. | Open Space Committee and Conservation Commission | 2003 |
| | With the input of all municipal boards, determining probable future uses of all Town-owned lands. | Open Space Committee | 2003 |
| | Develop management/ stewardship plans for each Town-owned property. | Open Space Committee | 2004 |
| | Bring to Town Meeting a vote to transfer ownership of land to the Conservation Commission. | Open Space Committee, Conservation Commission, & Planning Board | 2004 |

| OBJECTIVE | ACTION | RESPONSIBLE BOARD/GROUP | START DATE |
|--|---|---|-------------------|
| e. Assess whether particular open space areas that have public access are meeting demand and if not, identify the barriers and facilitate the implementation of potential solutions. | Formalize public access to the Millers River for recreational purposes. | Open Space Committee, Conservation Commission, and Select Board | 2004 |
| | Develop a plan for formalizing access along discontinued roads and well-used paths. | Open Space Committee | 2004 |
| f. Work with the Recreation Committee to acquire/develop lands for recreational activities. | Conduct a parcel level analysis of all undeveloped land in Wendell that may satisfy short and long term recreational land needs | Recreation Committee and Open Space Committee | 2002 |
| 2. Empower the Recreation Committee to be effective in providing and promoting recreational facilities and programs for all of Wendell's residents. | Provide the Recreation Committee with a modest annual budget to facilitate the provision and promotion of recreational programming for all ages. | Recreation Committee and Town Meeting | 2003 |
| | Develop an ongoing program of ecological based recreational/educational opportunities for Wendell residents such as biodiversity days and wildlife monitoring (see also #3 ad hoc water quality monitoring & vernal pool identification). | Open Space Committee & Recreation Committee | 2003 |
| | Using the ADA Self Evaluation Report Inventory information in Appendix A as a guide, develop and begin to implement a plan for improving the accessibility of the playground and basketball court to people with disabilities. | Open Space Committee & Recreation Committee | 2004 |
| a. Determine the specific recreational programming and facility needs of Wendell residents. | Conduct a survey to find out the kinds of recreational facilities and programs people want. | Recreation Committee | 2003 |
| | Talk with School Officials, Parents, and Senior Center members to find out what types of recreational programs or facilities are needed. | Recreation Committee | 2003 |
| b. Develop and publicize desired recreational programming for residents of all ages. | Develop and promote recreational programming for residents of all ages based on survey results. | Recreation Committee | 2003-2006 |
| c. Support the continued development of community arts festivals and events. | Develop and implement a plan to bring additional cultural events to Wendell. | Recreation Committee and the Cultural Council | 2003-2006 |

| OBJECTIVE | ACTION | RESPONSIBLE BOARD/GROUP | START DATE |
|---|---|--|-------------------|
| 3. Work with the Basin Teams and the Millers River Watershed Council to facilitate a program of water quality monitoring for the rivers, brooks, lakes, and ponds in Wendell. | Form an Ad hoc Water Quality Monitoring Committee. | Select Board and Open Space Committee | 2003 |
| | Participate in local efforts to train volunteers in vernal pool identification and certification. | Open Space Committee | 2003 |
| | Seek technical assistance and funding from basin teams. | Ad hoc Water Quality Monitoring Committee | 2003 |
| | Collect existing water quality data and prioritize sites for future monitoring. | Ad hoc Water Quality Monitoring Committee | 2004-2006 |
| 4. Develop multi-user (walking, hiking, bicycling, skiing) trail systems, which can be accessed from publicly owned land or private lands with trail easements. | Create a trail map of existing trails in Wendell. Determine which types of uses occur on each trail. | Recreation Committee | 2003 |
| | Identify gaps between protected lands containing segments of regional trails and best methods for creating a network of trails. | Open Space Committee | 2004 |
| | Create a volunteer network of trail stewards to layout, cut, and maintain trails periodically. | Open Space Committee | 2005 |
| 5. Encourage broad public participation in the Master Planning process to ensure that appropriate solutions for land use and growth management are identified. | Incorporate the Open Space and Recreation Plan into the Master Plan. | Master Planning Committee | 2003 |
| 6. Promote and help protect historically significant landscapes. | Apply for State Historical Preservation Funding. | Historical Commission | 2003 |
| | Promote stewardship of historical sites, structures, and landscapes through quarterly field trips and tours. | Historical Commission/ Recreation Committee | 2003 |
| | Develop and adopt a Scenic Roads Bylaw. | Planning Board and Town Meeting | 2004 |

Source: Town of Wendell, Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2002.