

## **SECTION 7     Analysis of Needs**

### ***Summary of Resource Protection Needs***

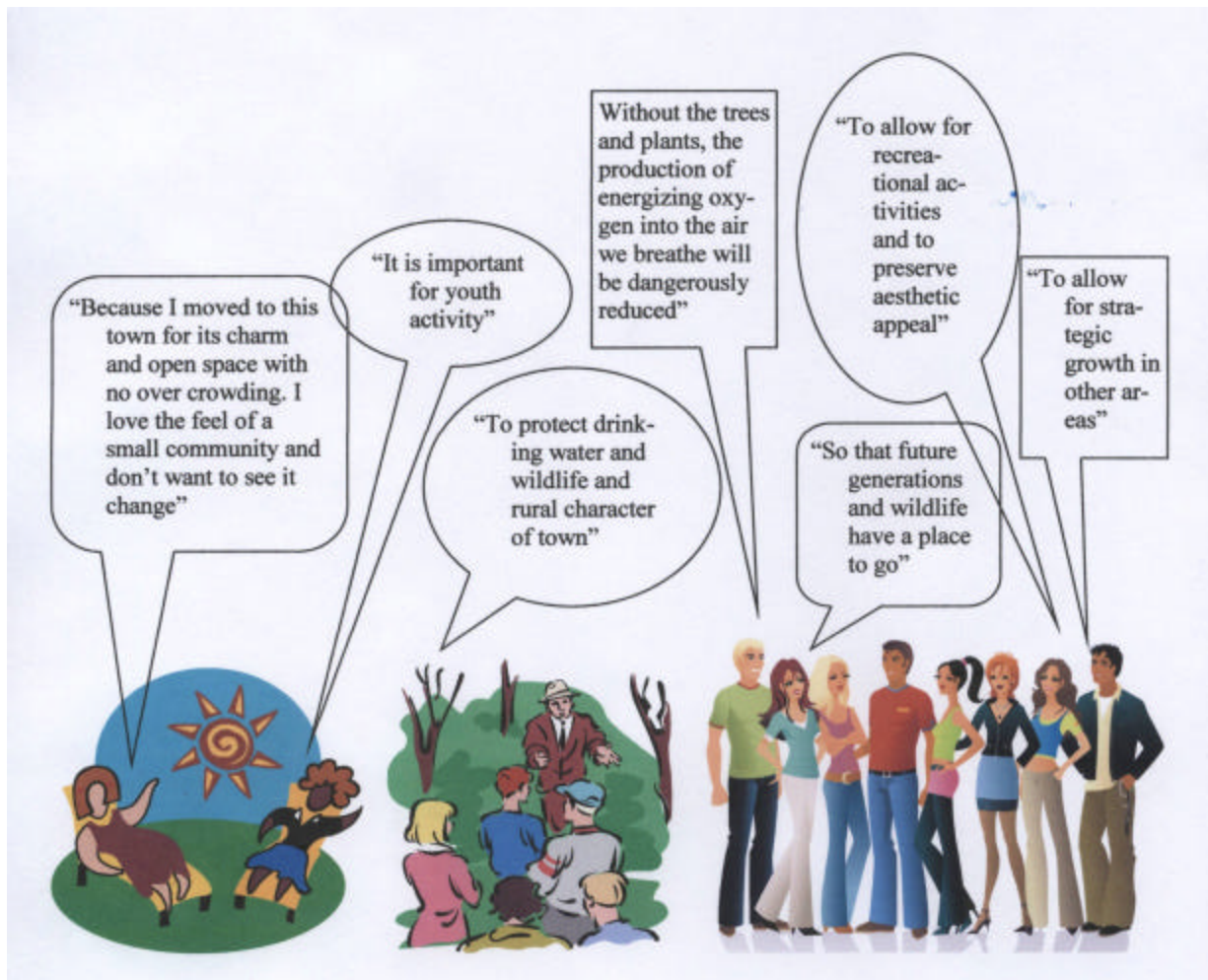
Ideas given by residents during public meetings and the survey reflect a variety of resource needs. Residents recognize the value of many different types of resources from physical resources like drinking water to more ethereal ones like the concept of people as town resources. The natural resource protection needs center around the drinking water supply and the buffer areas around them. Residents also value Norton's vast collection of waterbodies as an important resource and express desires to be able to utilize them better with parking and safe fishing areas. Norton's history and cultural past have not gone unnoticed either. Residents wish to keep the rural-suburban character of the town and preserve areas like local fields and farms to retain a small-town feel. Wildlife habitat features prominently in the protection needs for residents as much in this plan as in the last one. New programs like the Wild Backyards Program emphasizes resident's desire to be close to nature and to receive the benefits of stress release just by observing and viewing nature. Residents are more forward-thinking than ever, citing clean air/water and climate change as reasons for preserving wetlands and the surrounding uplands. Below is a sample of resource protection needs identified by the community.

- Land in the Canoe River Aquifer for drinking water protection
- Any land along a major water
- Remaining forested land in Great Woods
- Historic/archaeological/scenic resources
- Forestry projects at the Town Forest and the Lincoln Woods Conservation Area
- Wildlife habitat: Town-wide certification of NWF's Certified Wildlife Habitat project for Community Habitat status.
- Wetland with buffers
- Preserve rural character
- Open space land's value in beauty to town
- Clean air/water

As a result of the 2010 Open Space and Recreation Planning Survey, residents identified reasons why it is important to preserve land for open space. A sampling of the responses is quoted below.

- "Due to the increase size of development areas and population we need to create balance with preserved areas."
- "I feel that open space can benefit all town residents; not just for physical activity but also for the beauty it can provide. This, in turn, brings more value to the town and the area"
- "Without open spaces protected from development, we will end up with houses side by side without the calming effect of forests and fields. Without the trees and plants, the production of energizing oxygen into the air we breathe will be dangerously reduced"
- "For future usage as we never know what may be around the corner. Keep our options open for future endeavors is important"
- "We need to find a balance between preserving all of our open space and the ability to build taxable properties in Norton"
- "Norton youth sports programs are in dire need of additional space"

More on the next page



The following natural resource protection needs have been identified within the community. The following list itemizes the high priority land that Norton residents have identified for preservation. Please note that the presence or absence of listed land within this section does not mean that the town is actively pursuing a land acquisition. Most parcels are shown on the Action Plan Map on page 199.

- Canoe River aquifer resources, wetlands, and wildlife habitat
  - a. Any land next to Canoe River, particularly on East Main Street
  - b. Land near our aquifer protection zones
  - c. Land adjacent to Winnecunnet Pond
  - d. Cranberry bogs on Bay Road
  - e. Land adjacent to Hockomock Swamp
- Agricultural land, farms, cranberry bogs and large undeveloped parcels
  - a. Crane Farm
  - b. Houghton Farm
  - c. Balfour Farm
  - d. Morgan Farm
  - e. Lincoln Meadow on Meadowbrook Lane
  - f. Land behind Goosebrook garage

- g. Lincoln Street saw mill, agricultural land and equestrian area
  - h. Newland St. farm
  - i. Bogs on Meadowbrook Lane
  - j. Forested wetland between East Hodges St. and Dean St.
  - k. Commercial/industrial land on Eddy St.
  - l. Land near the intersection of Newland Street and Red Mill Road
  - m. Land between John Scott Boulevard, Harvey Street and South Worcester Street
  - n. Land on South Worcester Street
- Property adjacent to water bodies and water ways
    - a. Land at Rt. 140 adjacent to the Reservoir
    - b. Old Colony Creamery adjacent to Chartley Pond
    - c. East Main Street meadow land adjacent to Rumford River
    - d. Any land adjacent to the Wading River or Three-Mile River
    - e. Land on Freeman Street adjacent to the Reservoir
    - f. Any land around any bodies of water
    - g. Any land containing wetland to the Reservoir
    - h. Rear Pine Street at “the Falls”
    - i. Old Taunton Copperworks
    - j. Briggs Street land
- Specific parcels identified by residents in the 2010 survey
    - a. Rt 495 land owned by the Commonwealth of MA
    - b. Farm on Pine St
    - c. Former bogs on East Hodges St
    - d. Various vacant lands on Dean St
    - e. Property near the Reservoir
    - f. Parcel between Meadowbrook Lane and Crane St surrounded by river
    - g. Land abutting Canoe River on RT 123 before Red Mill Village
    - h. Land abutting Bay Rd cranberry bogs
    - i. Areas near Leo Yelle Conservation Area and W Main St
    - j. Non-conforming lots around Winnecunnet and Reservoir
    - k. Land behind Valentine Tools
    - l. Former bogs on Newland St (current proposed Comprehensive permit site)
    - m. 25 acres on Reservoir near Tsangs and the island

### ***Summary of Community Needs***

Residents identified many community needs on many different levels. Some comments were specifically about lack of certain types of recreational fields and age-specific programs like little league baseball, pop warner fields and youth and adult softball fields. Other comments were general comments about the town like needing better communication, more active community involvement, and ways to increase volunteerism. Some comments were about the need for remembering courtesy and manners and bringing back the feeling of a small town community. Comments about zoning were very specific and related to people’s perceived quality of life and a desire to prevent Norton from looking like another town (Stoughton, Mansfield were listed). The need to improve the town’s overall appearance with buried utilities, long-range planning and fewer signs and cars. Residents struggled with development pressures and finding a balance of keeping a rural feel to the town but not discouraging small business and the tax

dollars necessary to implement open space programs. The current economic situation has many residents frustrated at the decrease in town services.

Residents identified the following community needs:

- Residents would like to add places for ice skating, like the former Slattery property on John Scott Blvd and maybe at the Fernandes Park
- One resident requested that we add a dog park (1 ½-2 acres)
- Local sport teams' representatives identified needs for large high school complex, 4-5 more little league baseball fields, pop warner fields and softball fields, a centralized recreation complex with trails, food stand and bathrooms, skateboard park, neighborhood parks, and a rollerblade trail (bike trail)
- Mini-fenway
- Specific open space strategy: focus on buying open space with greatest access, small non-conforming lots, and 1-2 developed parking areas near the reservoir
- Improved zoning, strategic growth, balanced development/open space, IDC to attract businesses, walkable communities, buried utilities, fewer signs/cars/traffic/people
- Recreation areas for walking, sledding, skating, playgrounds, places for teens after school, senior programs, girls softball fields, bike trails, landscaped park with paved accessible trails, road biking, longer hours for pool in summer, safe boat/fishing access, parking, town picnic areas, library
- Greater participation and community involvement, manners, courtesy, communication, education
- Health benefits from stress release, exercise, unstructured play

There are four large parcels of land that may serve the town as a Town Park. These parcels are found on Newland Street, Reservoir Street, Briggs Street and Pine Street. They are ranked in order of potential to provide the most amenities requested by town residents. Norton should work toward securing those parcels for future development of a Town Park even if the actual park cannot be completed right away. The Town Park could have paved, lighted, universal access paths for seniors, handicapped individuals and parents with strollers. The path could be landscaped with native vegetation buffers and trees for shade, aesthetics and natural resource education. There could be several needed recreation fields including football, softball, baseball, a playground area and a small skate park. Depending on the parcel utilized, access to the Mansfield railroad could be used and eventually developed into the Rail to Trail bike path extension from the Town of Mansfield through Norton. The locations of these parcels scatter parks throughout the town so that all residents will have access to a park.

Small neighborhood parks are needed on North Worcester Street and in the Grove off Reservoir Street. These areas do not currently have a suitable open space area or a park. The goal of the open space committee is to create a park within ½ mile of these densely developed neighborhoods. Parcels can be identified for small parks with benches and trees for picnic and gathering areas.

The Conservation Commission has identified the following preservation priorities.

- Canoe River Greenbelt project
- Three-Mile River Greenbelt project
- Preservation of the Reservoir Islands
- Creation of a Bike Trail

The Recreation Commission has identified the following general recreation needs.

- Maintain existing park infrastructure to extend its useful life through the municipal Capital Improvements Program.
- Maintain existing active recreation facilities for local organized sports entities.
- Complete ongoing master plans and continue to consider elderly and physically challenged in design development.
- Implement completed master plans by means of the municipal Capital Improvements Program to develop existing property to provide townspeople with amenities outlined in the Municipal Park Needs Survey, such as a skateboard park, swimming pools and ice skating rinks.
- Create trails for leisure walks impassive recreation areas and maintain them in a serviceable condition with river crossings to accommodate pedestrian traffic.
- Expand the park system throughout the town using a decentralized satellite system, which encourages pedestrian traffic as opposed to vehicular traffic.
- Develop plans for the management of a restored Norton Reservoir as a recreational resource to include but not be limited to satellite park areas with adequate parking, lighting, public restrooms, fishing piers and boat launching facilities.

The Recreation Commission also has set some specific goals and needs including

- Upgrade facilities at the Everett Leonard Complex like replacing the pavilion and expand it for a working kitchen, bathrooms, 2-3 meeting rooms and office space. Expand athletic fields. Expand the pool shed and include bathrooms.
- Determine the feasibility for developing athletic fields at the Slattery Property on John Scott Blvd

The residents attending the public meetings and respondents to the on-line survey mentioned the need for programs for seniors. Most identified the need for walking trails on smooth surfaces and well lit locations. Accessibility for handicapped individuals was not identified as a need by residents; however, the Section 504 report shows that some areas need better access to playing fields.

Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)

The SCORP can be found online at <http://www.mass.gov/Eoea/docs/eea/dcs/massoutdoor2006.pdf>. Norton's goals of better access to its major water bodies and rivers meets the needs identified in the SCORP for the southeast region in regard to a preference for water based activities. The Open Space Committee offers a mix of monthly trips of nature hikes and canoe trips from March through October and meets the other highly preferential activities of walking, hiking, and nature study/wildlife.

### ***Summary of Management Needs***

Residents expressed significant concern over the growing complacency about littering and dumping materials on the sides of roads, in wetlands and in rivers. Damage to property from improper use of ATVs, particularly along Red Mill Road or on properties that post ATV use is not permitted is also a significant concern of residents, resembling the comments about lack of courtesy and consideration for other's land. Invasive plant infestations are not new to Norton but the recent spread of water chestnut (*Trapa natans*) into Norton is a serious concern. A method of rapid response to such infestations was noted as an important management need. Ongoing needs for reinstatement of funds for paid recreation staff and departmental budgets were mentioned but residents acknowledge that the town cannot afford this option presently. Maintaining existing fields and trails is listed as a need and residents suggested scouts and volunteers could help with this task. Residents had new concerns of traffic and noise

management resulting from previous development booms. Another concern not mentioned in the previous open space plan is the need for better communication and cooperation in town between groups with “conflicting” interests to work together for the benefit of the “whole” community rather than just for special interests. Residents identified the need for better ways for the town to advertise projects and send notification of events and ways to view the Open Space and Recreation Plan.

The primary management needs identified by residents are listed below

- Maintaining the athletic fields
- Local ATV damage particularly on Red Mill Rd. and illegal dumping
- New invasive plant infestations and long-term eradication program
- Sports teams’ representatives would like to add management of the use of fields between school and after-school organizations, and including gates/wood chips
- Trash, dumping prevention
- Traffic, noise prevention
- Keep options open for future uses
- Funding
- Paid staff
- Better communication, advertising and email reminders
- Easily accessible OSRP

Motorized vehicles are negatively impacting some property. Motorized vehicles are not a compatible use with passive recreational activities and cannot be permitted on conservation land per the Conservation Commission Act (Chapter 40 Section 8C). Only passive recreation activities are permitted on conservation land. The use of motorized vehicles on conservation and other sensitive areas has lead to soil erosion, disturbance of wetland areas and vernal pools, destruction of vegetation including rare plant species and harassment of wildlife including rare species of turtles. Properties have been posted for non-motorized activities only but recreational vehicle users take down the signs. The Conservation Commission has had to work jointly with the Environmental Police and the local law enforcement to stop motorized vehicle use on conservation properties. The Conservation Commission recognizes the desire of some to be able to use motorized vehicles but is obligated, by law, to prohibit its use on conservation land. The Commission also recognizes that all operators of motorized vehicles are not disrespectful of laws and that it may only be a few individuals causing the problems. Patrolling of conservation land would be one way to prevent the destruction of property from motorized vehicle operators. Also, providing an alternate location for the use of motorized vehicles could take some of the pressure off of the conservation land.

In 2010 MA enacted legislation acknowledging the inherently damaging nature of most recreation vehicles. Chapter 202 of the Acts of 2010 strengthens the regulations regarding recreational vehicles; increases penalties for violation of use; prohibits unauthorized use of recreation vehicles on public property like conservation or land trust land; imposes new operator age restrictions; and establishes a fund to support riding opportunities and law enforcement.

One suggestion from long-time resident Bruce Hicks is to require all off road vehicle (ORV) operators to register with the town for a riding permit. This will ensure that the ORV operators have a valid license and have registered with the Division of Conservation Services (DCR). A safety training class can be conducted each year at the time of the permit issuance to review safety, disposal of trash and land that is available for ORV operations. Other permitted riders then have a stake in the proper operation of ORVs on town property and will monitor the safe riding of others.

The DCR does provide some areas for riding ORVs. Use of ORVs is permitted provided riders only drive within designated State Forests, stay on marked trails, ride during the designated riding season between May 1<sup>st</sup> and the last Sunday of November, register all bikes with the Division of Environmental Law Enforcement (617-626-1610) per MGL c.90 or MGL c.90B and vehicles are not greater than 1000 lbs. For more information, contact each park because there are some limitations. Designated riding areas are located at:

- Savoy Mountain State Forest in Savoy and Florida, MA. 413-663-8469.
- Pittsfield State Forest in Pittsfield and Hancock, MA. 413-442-8992.
- October Mountain State Forest in Lee, Lenox, Washington and Becket. 413-243-1778.
- Beartown State Forest in Lee, Great Barrington and Monterey. 413-528-0904. *under 1,000 lbs.*
- Tolland State Forest in Tolland, Sandisfield and Otis. 413-269-6002.
- Freetown-Fall River State Forest in Freetown and Fall River. 508-644-5522. *in season.*
- F. Gilbert Hills State Forest in Foxboro, Wrentham and Franklin. 508-543-5850.
- Georgetown-Rowley State Forest in Georgetown and Rowley. 978-887-5931.

Some protected properties have become dumping grounds for people's junk. Abutting landowners use conservation and wetland areas as private compost areas, dumping all of their leaves and tree branches into the wetlands. Illegal dumping of solid waste along roadsides and in Norton's forests, wetlands, rivers and streams represents the largest current threat to the Town's natural resources, particularly to the sand and gravel aquifer of the Canoe River. Increasing costs associated with the disposal of wastes has resulted in paint, wood products, shingles, tires, automobile batteries, motor oil, major appliances, drums of waste materials, etc. being observed in areas which are vulnerable to pollution. This problem, unfortunately, is found in every municipality in the region. More public education efforts, penalties assessed to dumpers who are caught, and resident involvement in reporting suspected illegal dumping to the proper authorities might help.

### ***Possible projects for scouts and volunteers***

Residents, students and scouts seeking for volunteer projects may be interested in the items listed below. The Open Space Committee has drafted a list of potential projects to further the goals of the OSRP. Whether on Conservation property or the Land Preservation Society of Norton property, these projects will benefit the many people who enjoy hiking Norton's open space. These are only potential topics and can be expanded upon by any scout or student wishing to receive volunteer credit. Please contact the Conservation Office at 508-285-0275 or [conservation@nortonmaus.com](mailto:conservation@nortonmaus.com) for more information.

1. GPS conservation land trails, create maps
2. Stencil around catch basins within portions of town for 'no dumping'
3. Water chestnut removal projects
4. ADA compliant boardwalk in appropriate locations
5. Build boardwalks
  - a. Everett Leonard Conservation Area
  - b. Johnson acres
6. Build kiosks

- a. Everett Leonard Conservation area
  - b. Johnson Acres
  - c. Lincoln Woods
  - d. Rose Farm
  - e. Canoe River Greenbelt
- 7. Pick up slash at town forest after Forestry Project before Easter egg hunt
- 8. Perform tasks listed in town Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) on Barrows St
- 9. Block ATV/motorbike access
  - a. Canoe River Greenbelt
  - b. Lincoln Woods
- 10. Trail maintenance
- 11. Trash removal
  - a. Conservation Land
  - b. Streets
- 12. No Littering signs on public ways
- 1. New trail signs at Lincoln Woods and Gertrude Cornish Town Forest after Forestry Project