

## **SECTION 1 Plan Summary**

In the 2010-2017 Open Space and Recreation Plan, the members of the Open Space Committee presented goals for meeting the open space and recreation needs of the residents of Norton and have recommended actions for achieving those goals. Although actions vary significantly, it is clear that recreation and open space needs are closely linked. Members have identified the need to maintain, improve and expand upon existing conservation and recreation facilities and programs and to protect and promote the natural resources of Norton. Several of the goals proposed in the 2010-2017 Open Space and Recreation Plan were achieved. Where appropriate, the unrealized goals have been incorporated into the current document and new goals have been added.

## **SECTION 2 Introduction**

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this updated Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) is to provide members of local boards and commissions, staff, and residents with the opportunity to work toward common goals in the areas of conservation and recreation on both local and regional levels. The document is a tool that can be used during permit reviews, long-term land use planning, grant writing and open space project planning. The Open Space Committee hopes that this plan will be used as an educational document to refresh our memories of the importance of our natural resources and how we are connected to them and have the ability to influence our world with our actions. This plan is a realistic look at the town's assets and the methods of obtaining the resources that we lack. It is a thorough discussion of the broad context of open space issues, a comprehensive view of Norton, and gives perspective to the magnitude of a task such as preserving the town's character and the residents' quality of life.

This document is not a discussion of the town's efforts to fight the rising tide of development but a call to arms for residents to take an interest in shaping the future of the town, of their home, by using the current momentum of growth and development and converting that energy to create a positive influence. It identifies the great potential and opportunity for residents to effect positive changes.

This OSRP continues the themes from the previous plan of protecting the town's drinking water source and balancing development and growth with environmental protection. The OSRP demonstrates the interconnectedness of the natural physical landscape, like the geology and soils, with the man-made features, like impervious surfaces and storm water pollution, to illustrate the importance of and the uniqueness of our natural resources, like our aquifers. The OSRP also shows the paradoxes of human nature. It demonstrates the desire of residents to live in a rural community with farms and cows in the neighborhood and the subsequent realization of the distaste for the agricultural smells and sounds. It recognizes the desire in human nature to change the very things that attracted residents to a certain neighborhood. This OSRP attempts to identify the things we take for granted. In reading the OSRP, residents are reminded, in section 4, of the natural and physical world and how our behavior and actions can change it significantly. The discussion of storm water illustrates how one action can influence the nature and function of our environment. The OSRP invites residents to investigate their own behavior and evaluate consequences and influences that result from those behaviors. By being reminded of the basic functions of our environment and by thinking about the consequences, residents can make small changes that will have a domino effect. In a complex and fast-paced world filled with job, family and other related stresses, sometimes we just need a simple reminder.

Some of the major accomplishments of the past five years demonstrate the residents' commitment to preserving the character of the town. The Town of Norton has continued to preserve land through its

partnerships with organizations such as The Nature Conservancy and The Land Preservation Society of Norton (LPS). The Conservation Commission worked with these organizations, as well as with the Taunton River Stewardship Council to secure the 40 acre Crane Farm Preserve and the 21 acre Erikson Conservation Land. The Conservation Commission, again working with the LPS, created a number of small wildlife refuge parks as part of its Wild Backyards Program.

A great deal of work was also done to address the environmental challenges of improving water quality, chronic flooding issues, and dealing with aquatic invasive plants in Norton's waterbodies. The Conservation Commission, with SRPEDD and Worcester Polytechnic Institute engineering students, led a project to assess and redesign the culverts at Walker Street on the Wading River (a chronic flood concern) in order to pursue a grant to reconstruct the culverts as part of a flood mitigation strategy. The Conservation Commission also worked with SRPEDD and the Horsley Witten Group to design and engineer a grassed swale and constructed wetland to address sediment and run-off into the Three Mile River along Crane Street, near the bridge. Town Meeting also appropriated funding to hire ESS to develop a plan to deal with aquatic invasives in Norton's waterbodies.

Norton also created a Transportation Alternatives Committee that worked with SRPEDD to develop a bike path concept plan along the existing sewer easement between the Mansfield War Memorial Trail and the Myles Standish Industrial Park, at the Norton-Taunton line. The Committee worked to secure local support and received Town Meeting funding to undertake the engineering and design for the Norton Bike Path. The overall plan calls for the creation of a paved bike and pedestrian trail with a separated, unpaved equestrian trail (similar to the Mansfield portion). The Massachusetts Department of Transportation, Mass DOT, has committed to build the Norton Bike Path upon approval of final plans (estimated to cost approximately \$3.7 million).

The Town worked with the Scouts to create a boardwalk at the Everett Leonard Conservation Area. In addition, the LPS extended trails on the Crane property and on property located on King Philip Avenue.

### **Planning Process and Public Participation**

A committee of interested residents, town officials and staff, and members of a local land trust, academic institution, and regional social/recreational organization, was formed in 2016 to update the Open Space and Recreation Plan. SRPEDD was contracted to provide technical assistance to the Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee. All planning meetings were held on the last Thursday of the month, at 6:30 PM, between January and August of 2017. Meetings were held in the Conservation Commission/Planning Board Meeting Room at the Norton Town Hall, which is centrally located and is accessible.

In March of 2017, a public opinion survey was issued by the Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee in both a paper and online format. Links to online versions of the survey were posted on the Town website, Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee member affiliate websites, and the SRPEDD website. Paper copies of the survey were available at the Town Hall, Norton Public Library, and through affiliate organizations.

The survey was advertised on local cable access, the Town website, in the local newspaper, at Town board, commission, and committee meetings, through Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee member affiliate organizations, and the SRPEDD website. In all, 213 responses were received by the

Items in *italics* are included in the Glossary found in Section 12.

Committee and were summarized in a report for a public meeting in April of 2017 at the Norton Town Hall. The Committee then worked to develop goals, objectives, and actions based on the survey and public comments. These items were presented at a televised Board of Selectmen's meeting in June. The Selectmen's meeting was also covered in the local newspaper.

The Conservation Agent and SRPEDD staff compiled all public and Committee comments on the draft sections of the plan and worked through the fall of 2017 to complete all text and required mapping. Also completed during the fall was an update to the ADA Section 504 Transition Plan, conducted by the appropriate Town officials and staff. The Transition Plan update also considered public and Committee comments received on the facilities subject to review.