

SECTION 6: COMMUNITY VISION

A. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCESS

The Open Space Committee sought input for the updated Open Space and Recreation Plan from the citizens of Norton through a series of open, monthly working meetings, held between January and October of 2017, as well as through the distribution of an Open Space and Recreation Survey during the month of March, 2017. The survey was available on Survey Monkey via a link on the Town website, and in hard copy at the Conservation Commission Office in the Town Hall, and at the Norton Public Library. Links to the survey were placed on the Town's website, Conservation Commission website, Recreation Commission website and Facebook pages, and was advertised in the local newspaper/website, and local cable station.

The information obtained in the responses to the survey was used as one of the means of gauging the public's needs and concerns. With this iteration of the survey, the Open Space and Recreation Planning Committee also asked if surveys were being completed as an individual activity, or as a family activity. The survey received 211 responses, 43% of which were answered on an individual basis, while 57% were completed as a family activity.

The total number of responses also represented a significant increase over the 2010 survey. Also of interest is the response of those aged 65-74, which accounted for 18% of the total (perhaps reflective of an active older population in town). Once again, as was the case in the 2010 survey, respondents listed protection of water supply protection related land, as well as critical habitat areas, as the most important conservation priorities, along with the overall need to continue to increase the amount of land in conservation. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix A of this plan.

In addition to the survey, SRPEDD, on behalf of the Open Space and Recreation Planning Committee, participated in a number of activities as a means to collect public opinion and develop supplemental data. These activities included: open working meetings; community goals, objectives, and action plan meetings hosted by municipal, local, non-profit, and regional groups, and; conversations with municipal staff and others directly associated with the major issues raised by the public through the survey and public meetings.

Progress Report from the 2010 Open Space and Recreation Plan

In the course of developing the Action Plan for the 2018 Open Space and Recreation Plan, there was a great deal of discussion and review undertaken in the public process in order to assess the progress made in implementing the previous Open Space and Recreation Plan's Action Plan. The Town, through its various departments, partnerships, and the efforts of several individuals, has been able to address and implement several of these Action Plan items, or items that are related to specific recommended actions.

A list of these items includes:

- The Crane Farm Preservation project was completed with assistance The Nature Conservancy, the Town of Norton, and The Land Preservation Society of Norton (LPS);
- The Eriksson Property Preservation project was completed;
- The Crane Street LID Stormwater Project was completed with assistance from SRPEDD and the South Coast Rail Technical Assistance Program;
- The Walker Street Culvert Design Project was completed with assistance from SRPEDD and the Worcester Polytechnic Institute Senior Capstone Program;
- Town Meeting funding was appropriated for Aquatic Invasives/Water Quality Study and Program;
- Town Meeting funding was appropriated for the engineering and design of the Norton Bike Path;
- Town Meeting funding was appropriated to hire ESS to develop a plan to deal with aquatic invasives on Norton's waterbodies;
- A boardwalk was completed at Everett Leonard Conservation Area through a Scout project;
- The Town worked with the Scouts to label storm drains to promote watershed awareness and protection;
- The Town continued the water chestnut removal project with local volunteers;
- The Conservation Commission updated the booklet of conservation lands;
- The Conservation Commission created small wildlife refuge parks as part of the Wild Backyards Program (with the LPS);
- The Conservation Commission added more information and links to the Town website;
- The Town conducted hikes and events coupled with public outreach during the year leading up to the Tri- centennial celebrations
- Wheaton College cleaned up the walking trails in Wheaton Woods
- Tri-centennial Park was refurbished with native plants
- The LPS extended trails on the Crane property and on property located on King Philip Ave.

B. STATEMENT OF OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION GOALS

Norton is facing renewed pressure on some of its larger parcels of open space at this point in time. Some of these areas, such as the Houghton Farm, located near highway access, are contrasted by more rural areas, with large parcels of passive and active open land. Agricultural parcels, forestland, wetlands, streams, and ponds, located throughout these less developed areas, have been important in the overall preservation of the more rural characteristics of the town. Unique landscapes, such as the Canoe River Aquifer ACEC, Hockomock Swamp ACEC, and the Three Mile River Watershed ACEC, are not only local resources, but significant to the entire Commonwealth as well.

In 2017, the stewardship of existing assets, coupled with the challenges of developing new opportunities for the public, makes establishing sound conservation and recreation planning strategies a necessity. With a growing, and aging, population, fewer financial resources with which to operate, and more competition for those remaining financial resources (competitive grants, etc.), the Town and its citizens need to be organized, creative, and resourceful. The Town

has been very successful in maximizing partnership opportunities and developing prioritization criteria for addressing the future open space, conservation and recreation needs, and should continue to pursue this path going forward.

Below is a broad brush list of Conservation and Recreation Goals based upon the results of the process described in Section 6A above.

Goal 1: Protect the quality and quantity of the Town's ground and surface water Resources

Goal 2: Preserve critical natural resources and retain the integrity of existing intact habitat areas and fisheries/wildlife corridors

Goal 3: Prevent the loss of the rural, cultural, scenic, and historical qualities and assets of The Town

Goal 4: Develop a coordinated wayfinding and signage model for town-wide, multi-use Conservation and Recreation properties, assets, and opportunities

Goal 5: Promote coordinated, responsible land use management through continued partnerships and planning

Goal 6: Expand and improve outdoor (i.e. community gardens), and passive and active recreational opportunities that promote healthy, life-long experiences for residents of all ages and abilities

Goal 7: Expand recreational opportunities on waterways and waterbodies