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TOWN OF WILBRAHAM

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION ACTION

PLAN 2011-2018

Prepared by the Wilbraham Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee:

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DRAFT

A community thrives upon its own character, those elements which make it a special place to live, work and play. A town must be able to sustain and nurture its long term residents as well as attract new citizens with an appreciation for what makes Wilbraham special.

In its 2011-2018 Updated Plan for Open Space and Recreation, the Town of Wilbraham seeks to balance the prospects for continuing human population growth with the need for town character preservation.

Wilbraham has been blessed, to date, with what has been characterized as New England rural charm. Visitors and residents as well speak glowingly of the town's quaint characteristics of colonial homes, stone walls, tree-lined roads and an atmosphere of relaxing serenity. We are fortunate to retain these characteristics, but as population increases and as housing developments encroach upon the town's open space, the rural charm will dissipate. To perpetuate for our own appreciation and to save for future residents the pleasurable environment which today's townspeople enjoy, it is urgently necessary for the town to act today to save open space which we are prone to take for granted.

There are still many acres of open space in Wilbraham which could be developed. How much actually will be developed in the years to come is, of course, not known. We cannot assume that the land owner of today who truly loves the land and wishes it to remain forever wild will not be tempted by the pressures of developers to sell it for development. If all these acres were in areas of one-acre zoning, we would have a potential increase of homes and a substantial increase in town services. Many studies have shown that the cost of development does not pay its way in new tax revenues. Without specific protection guidance in place, the development of Wilbraham's remaining open spaces will erode the natural landscape and harm the community's sense of place.

Open space most probably will not remain without active intervention. We must realize its value in preserving clean air and water, forest and agricultural lands, and wildlife habitats. The existence of open space enhances a community both aesthetically and economically. Property values tend to rise near open space. The value of open space will not depreciate through time while its benefits can only increase.

To retain the present character of the town, citizen support is a must. It is imperative to support land acquisition proposals at town meeting and encourage landowners to preserve open space when they consider the future of their land.

The Mission of the Wilbraham Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee:

Preserve significant open space by investigating, educating, planning and cooperating.

The Plan supports the following goals:

1. Maintain an **on-going base of support** for the Plan by key boards and the public at large through education **and** cooperation. **Communicate** through public meetings, newspapers and the Town website.
2. Promote **active growth management** to reduce residential sprawl and prevent open space/recreation land fragmentation. Seek zoning changes through the Planning Board to allow appropriate use of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission's Valley Vision 2 strategies.
3. Foster **interconnectivity of Town lands** throughout Wilbraham through formal well maintained trail systems.
4. Preserve and **protect environmental resources**, include wetlands, water resources, upland wildlife habitat and wildlife travel corridors. **Encourage synergy** among all community, state and regional partners for conservation and preservation.

Overview

The following action plan represents a careful reevaluation of the original five-year action plan laid out in the 2000 Plan. As the Committee has met monthly for the last nine years, it has become aware of the types of goals that are realistic and achievable in light of time and financial constraints. At the same time, by focusing on a few major goals (and continuing to build community support for the Committee's work through a variety of means) the Committee believes that its mandate will be better fulfilled.

The 2010 Plan Update continues to respect the need for inter-committee involvement in open space and recreation issue. Therefore the background to the achievement of this plan will be the close interaction of the Committee and the Planning Board, Conservation Commission, the Community Preservation Act Committee and Recreation Commission. With semiannual meetings and ongoing discussions and consultations among these boards, all of the major disciplines and town-based authority centers for deciding open space and recreation issues will be integrated.

Goal 1: *Develop an on-going base of support for the Open Space and Recreation Plan*

1. **Coordinated Meetings.** Hold semiannual meetings with OSPR Committee, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Community Preservation Act (CPA) Committee and Recreation Commission to discuss issues that arise involving the OSRP.

*OSRP Committee et al;
Ongoing.*

2. **Appoint Interested Members to the OSPR Committee.** Assure that committed and interested individuals with diverse viewpoints are appointed to the OSPR Committee.

*OSRP Committee, Selectmen;
Ongoing.*

3. **Publicize and Promote the Plan:** Take measures to publicize and promote the OSRP. Maintain OSRP on Town website and update as appropriate. Make note of OSRP in meetings of boards that are involved with land use issues. Utilize local media to feature "the Treasures of Wilbraham".

*OSRP Committee, Planning Board, Conservation Commission;
Ongoing.*

Goal 2: *Actively monitor growth to protect rural atmosphere, scenic landscapes, historic sites and community character.*

1. **Flexible Zoning.** Encourage continued use of flexible, creative zoning to acquire additional protected open space. Work toward "cluster by right" and residential/commercial zoning approaches to strengthen neighborhoods.

*Planning Board, OSRP Committee;
Ongoing.*

2. **Historic District Zoning.** Support Historical Commission's goal of establishing historic district zoning in historic town center.
*CPC, Planning Board, Historical Commission, OSRP Committee;
Ongoing.*

3. **Identify Remaining Parcels of Town-Wide Interest and Prepare Portfolios.** Continue to work to review undeveloped parcels in Town for those with the most significance and potential impact on the Town values and goals. Prepare portfolio on each such parcel identifying key features of the parcel and suggesting development or preservation options compatible with Town goals.
*OSRP Committee;
Ongoing*

4. **Convene Landowner Groups.** Convene groups of landowners of large parcels in targeted areas. Involve Minnechaug Land Trust in meetings to acquaint owners with preservation options.
*OSRP Committee, Minnechaug Land Trust;
Hollow Road West Target Area (Spring-Summer 2011)
Stony Hill Road East Target Area (Winter 2011).*

5. **Input on and Review of Development Proposals.** Work with Planning Board and Conservation Commission to review proposed developments and comment on open space and recreation issues involved in such developments. Meet separately, as needed, with developers to work out open space and recreation issues.
*OSRP Committee, Planning Board, Conservation Commission;
Ongoing as needed.*

6. **Research Creative Development Options.** Analyze potential developments in terms of creative development options including limited development, targeted development and other such options that may maximize landowner return while serving Town goals. Mixed use development and neighborhood strengthening development should be encouraged.
*OSRP Committee, CPA Committee, Planning Board,
Conservation Commission; CPC
Ongoing.*

Goal 3: Preserve and Protect Key Town Resources

1. **Zoning Enhancements.** Work with Planning Board to develop new zoning by-law provisions governing building envelope requirements and open space dedication coordination for flexible subdivision property.
*Planning Board; OSRPC, CPC
Ongoing*

2. **Frontage Regulation.** Work with Planning Board and Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) to develop a coordinated regulatory response to threatened development of scenic and historic frontage in Wilbraham.
*Planning Board, PVPC; CPC
Completion Date: Fall 2012*

3. **Water Supply Protection.** Review plans for water supply development and move to protect area if needed for water supply.

*Water Department, Selectmen;
Fall 2013*

4. **Sewer Extension.** Analyze potential impact of extension of sewer system in Town on open space issues. Evaluate impact to rate of growth on parcels presently not developable or subject to limited development based on septic system limitations.

*OSRP Committee, Sewer Commission, Selectmen, Board of Health,
Planning Board;
Ongoing (in response to specific preliminary proposals for sewer line extension).*

Goal 4: Plan for Recreation Issues

1. **Public Lands Brochure.** Work with Conservation Commission to develop an update to the late 1970s brochure showing conservation and other public land in Town. Develop the document on the Town website.

*Conservation Commission, Selectmen;
Fall 2012*

2. **Trails and Bikeways.** Review all development proposals for possible links to trail and other pedestrian connections throughout Town. Assure trail and path continuity.

*OSRP Committee, Recreation Department, Planning Board,
Conservation Commission;
Ongoing.*

3. **Funding.** Actively pursue state and federal transportation funding for bicycle trails and sidewalks.

*Selectmen; OSRP
Ongoing.*

4. **Sidewalks.** Encourage sidewalks in subdivisions with linkage to existing sidewalks or other pedestrian ways.

*Planning Board, Selectmen; OSRP
Ongoing.*

5. **Ongoing evaluation.** Evaluate Recreation programs annually to ensure a good balance of athletic and cultural activities for all age groups.

*Recreation Department; OSRP
Ongoing.*

6. **Recreation Resources.** Review all development proposals for possibility of significant recreational opportunities (e.g., fields) and consider proposals for land swaps or other exchanges for increasing playing field potential.

*OSRP Committee, Recreation Department, Planning Board;
Ongoing.*