

Open Space and Recreation

5

Introduction

Open spaces can be defined as “conservation land, recreation land, agricultural land, corridor parks and amenities such as small parks, green buffers along roadways or any open area that is owned by an agency or organization dedicated to conservation.”¹ Recreation generally refers to activities undertaken specifically for enjoyment purposes. Such activities can be passive – requiring minimal physical exertion and resources, or active – requiring considerable physical exertion and often special facilities, sources, fields, or equipment.

Westborough’s open space and recreation assets predominantly include an array of parks and fields, walking trails, and open spaces – both protected and unprotected, along with year-round programming administered by the Recreation Department. These assets positively contribute to the livability of Westborough, encouraging healthful lifestyles and social connectivity.

This chapter of the Master Plan reviews the Town’s open space and recreation assets, as well as explores opportunities for their preservation and enhancement. Much of the content of this chapter derives from the Town’s *Seven Year Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP)*, published in 2017.

Planning Context

Open space and recreation are integral to how Westborough plans for its future, as evidenced by several of its plans and studies. These reports include the 2003 Master Plan, the 2018 Strategic Plan, the 2017 OSRP, and the Westborough State Hospital Reuse Plan.

¹ Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. (1993). *The Open Space Planner’s Workbook*.

Additionally, the 2012 Massachusetts Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) has implications for open space and recreation in Westborough.

2003 Master Plan

The 2003 Master Plan goal related to open space and recreation calls for the continued “work for a cohesive system of open spaces through a combination of lands intended for conservation and/or recreation.” Objectives associated with this goal included:

- ▶ Continuing the Town’s open space acquisition program and seeking to acquire a variety of lands that will serve different functions in the community, such as farms, beaches, trails, and habitat conservation areas;
- ▶ Supporting the effort to complete the “Charm Bracelet” trail network throughout Westborough;
- ▶ Improving and promoting public access to Lake Chauncy as part of an open space and recreation initiative for the Lake and the State-owned lands that surround it;
- ▶ Working to gain neighborhood parks, trails, and conservation areas as part of development and redevelopment projects;
- ▶ Providing active recreation facilities for persons of various ages, interests, and ability levels;
- ▶ Creating a large “Central Park”-style gathering place for the community, perhaps close to the town center;
- ▶ Making parks and open space areas more accessible to residents, including those who do not drive;
- ▶ Working consciously to strike a balance between different demands for municipal land, such as conservation use, recreation use, and municipal facilities; and
- ▶ Exploring the full range of ways to pay for Westborough’s open space and recreation objectives, and implement the ones that will best work for the community.

Since the 2003 Master Plan, with respect to that plan’s implementation framework, the Town has accomplished the following:

- ▶ Re-zoned State-owned and Town-owned land to public/institutional and open space;
- ▶ Prepared land management plans for conservation areas;
- ▶ Initiated conversations around (but have not adopted) the Community Preservation Act (CPA);
- ▶ Continued implementation of the Charm Bracelet; and
- ▶ Explored the purchase of land and easements for conservation and recreation.

Recommendations from the 2003 Master Plan that have not yet been achieved, but are still relevant include:

- ▶ Revising the Open Space Communities Bylaw;
- ▶ Rezoning major wetland areas to Open Space;

- ▶ Establish a committee and commence feasibility study, programming, and site selection for a community park;
- ▶ Establish a committee to study needs and potential sites for recreation/youth center; and
- ▶ Develop additional active recreation facilities.

2018 Strategic Plan

The 2018 Strategic Master Plan's "Critical Success Factors" related to open space and recreation are to have a "Thoughtfully Planned Built and Natural Environment" and "Diverse Cultural and Recreational Opportunities." Goals and actions to achieve these include:

- ▶ Adopting the Community Preservation Act;
- ▶ Enhancing the Lake Chauncey Recreation Area;
- ▶ Strategically acquiring parcels identified in the 2017 OSR;
- ▶ Creating a dog park;
- ▶ Creating an intergenerational community center; and
- ▶ Accelerating the creation of a multi-use trail system.

2017 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP)

As mentioned, Westborough's most recent OSRP was published in 2017. Many of the goals and actions in this OSRP correspond to those established in the 2003 Master Plan and 2018 Strategic Plan, as well as those laid out by the 2012 Massachusetts SCORP described below. Goals of the 2017 OSRP include:

- ▶ Develop a Master Plan for Lyman Park;
- ▶ Protect open spaces;
- ▶ Provide and develop multi-use recreational facilities and opportunities; and
- ▶ Improve public access and awareness.

When an OSRP is completed and approved by the Massachusetts Division of Conservation Services (DCS), the community is eligible for grant programs administered by DCS to fund open space acquisition or enhance recreational facilities. OSRPs must be updated every seven years in order to be eligible for DCS funding.

Westborough State Hospital Reuse Plan

The State Hospital Reuse Committee, composed of representatives of Town Boards and Commissions, the Town Manager, Town Planner, and local residents, was formed in September of 2014. This group oversaw the development of a reuse plan to identify and assess possible options for the redevelopment of the site of the former Westborough State Hospital property, which the Town purchased from the State in July 2014. Open space was part of the underlying framework that informed the conceptual studies for this property,

and portions of the property were ultimately recommended for continued recreational and conservation purposes.

2012 Massachusetts Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)

The SCORP outlines four major goals for the inclusion of open space and recreation throughout the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. These goals include:

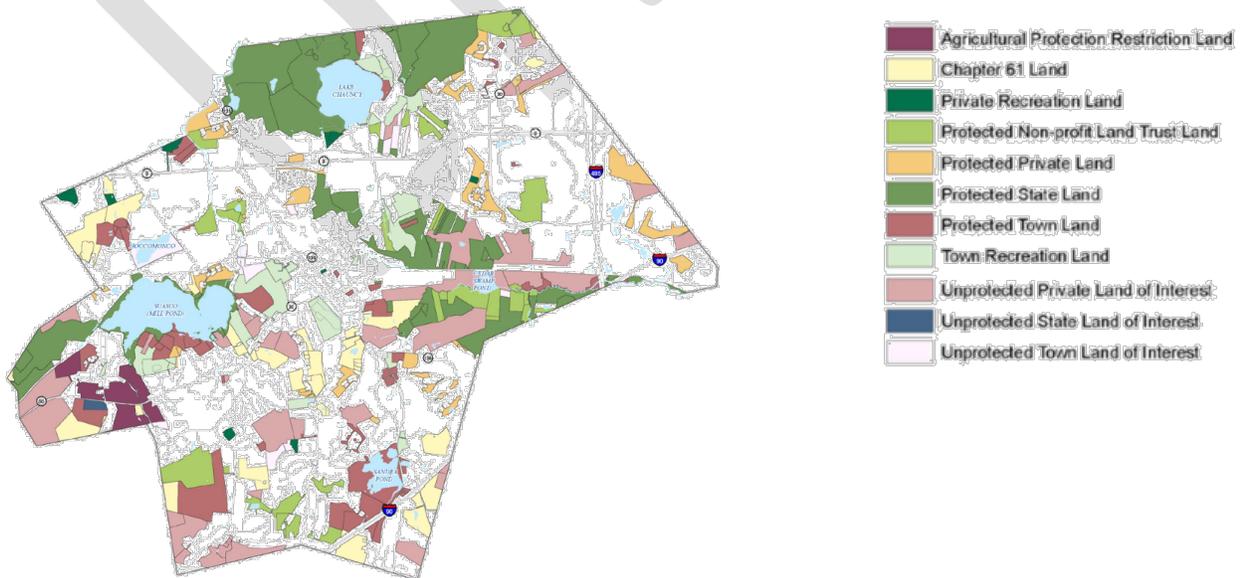
- ▶ Increasing the availability of all types of trails for recreation;
- ▶ Increasing the availability of water-based recreation;
- ▶ Investing in recreation and conservation areas that are close to home for short visits; and
- ▶ Investing in racially, economically and age diverse neighborhoods given their projected increase in participation in outdoor recreation.

Baseline Conditions Analyses

Open Space

Westborough has 5,791.4 total acres of open space, which amounts to 307.5 acres per 1,000 residents. According to the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA), municipalities should aim to have 10 acres of open space for every 1,000 residents. Based on this indicator, Westborough exceeds the NRPA's recommendation. As shown in **Figure 5-1**, Westborough has a substantial amount of protected and unprotected open space under various ownerships distributed throughout its jurisdiction.

Figure 5-1. Open Space Lands in the Town of Westborough [Figure to be Expanded]



Source: Town of Westborough Open Space and Recreation Plan, 2017

The majority of Westborough’s open space is protected (69 percent) including properties such as the Sandra Pond Watershed Conservation Area (Town-owned), Libbey Property (Town-owned), and the Westborough Wildlife Management Area (State-owned). However, there is still a significant amount of land that has not yet been permanently protected (31 percent). **Table 5-1** breaks down the Town’s open space by protection status and ownership.

Table 5-1. Land Ownership and Protection in Westborough

	Acres	Percent (%) of Total
Protected State Land	1,853.81	32.0
Protected Town Land	803.22	13.9
Protected Town Recreation Land	291.04	5.0
Protected Non-Profit Land Trust Land	541.78	9.4
Protected Private Land	339.72	5.9
Agricultural Protection Restriction Land	167.60	2.9
Protected Total	3,997.17	69.0
Chapter 61 Land	548.88	9.5
Private Recreation Land	51.4	0.9
Unprotected State Land of Interest	11.4	0.2
Unprotected Town Land of Interest	141.85	2.4
Unprotected Private Land of Interest	1,040.71	18.0
Unprotected Land Total	1,794.24	31.0
Total (Protected and Unprotected)	5,791.41	100.0

While the Town has excelled at building its open space inventory, it continues to look for opportunities to expand this inventory to improve the community’s access to its natural environment. As indicated in **Table 5-1**, there are unprotected areas of Westborough that are of interest to the Town – whether owned by the State, Town, or by private entities. Some of the priorities among these properties are described below, while the full list can be found in the OSRP. [Note to Sub-Committee: Please review the 2017 OSRP and identify five or so priority properties for protection. Based on conversations to date, we’ve included the following subject to your input. Please note any specific challenges concerning the protection of these properties or open space in general.]

- ▶ **Hocomonco Pond:** In 2000, this area was upgraded from an active Superfund and cleanup site to an area where passive recreation was allowed. This area is underutilized and could provide great passive recreation potential. A study committee recommended this property for canoeing, fishing, and possible development of trails linked to the Charm Bracelet.

[Insert picture of Hocomonco Pond]

- ▶ **St. Luke's Cemetery:** This privately-owned property of 100 acres sits along Hopkinton Road and consists of several trails. There is potential for a trail easement to connect to land owned by the Westborough Community Land Trust.
- ▶ **Lane Property:** Adjacent to the Upton State Forest and the Arnold Orchards, this privately-owned property of 27 acres offers opportunities for trail development. Although there are trails extant on this property, there is no public access.
- ▶ **Eli Whitney Property:** Offering primarily passive recreation opportunities, this privately-owned property of 63.8 acres is centrally located within Town. Connections to the Town-owned properties off Wayside Road and to Fay Mountain are possible.

As noted in **Table 5-1**, nearly 550 acres of land in Westborough falls under the State's Chapter 61 program – 25.8 acres are under the Chapter 61 program (Forestry), 517.2 acres are under the Chapter 61A program (Agriculture), and 5.93 acres are under the Chapter 61B program (Open Space and Recreation). Chapter 61 lands are not fully protected, though the Town does have first right of refusal for their purchase.

One of the obstacles in acquiring and protecting land in Westborough is the lack of available funding, coupled with a strong real estate market that demands high values for properties. The Town has initiated community conversations around, but has not formally adopted, the CPA. Through a surcharge on property tax bills, accompanied by a State match, the adoption of the CPA in Westborough could help fund the preservation of open space and the development of outdoor recreational facilities, in addition to creating affordable housing (see **Chapter 2, Housing**) and preserving historic sites (see **Chapter 4, Natural, Cultural, and Historic Resources**).

It has been noted, through public input during the development of this Master Plan, that an opportunity exists to better integrate open space with commercial developments – namely office park developments. Having open space connected to or within such developments provides many benefits such as increasing access to open space resources, promoting a healthy lifestyle for residents and employees, and attracting investment. An example of integrating open space into an office park development is the Westborough Office Park. This master planned office park comprises 1500, 1700, 1800, 1900, 2000, and 2200 West Park Drive, and is embedded within a wooded area that offers jogging and walking trails.

[Insert picture of the Westborough Office Park]

Open Space Partners

There are several groups within Westborough or that work in Westborough that have a focus on the preservation and protection of open space. These primarily include the Westborough Conservation Commission, the Westborough Open Space Preservation Committee, and the Westborough Community Land Trust.

Conservation Commission: From an open space perspective, this commission – comprised of seven members as of April 2020 – is the custodian of numerous land holdings in the Town such as the Libbey Property. It develops and implements management plans for these properties, which are to remain undeveloped in perpetuity. The Conservation Commission has been the recipient of numerous Conservation Restrictions throughout Town, which protect privately-owned properties, including the Carmax facility at 170 Turnpike Road

(received in 2016), Sawink Reservation (received in 2001), and the former Avalon residential development off Flanders Road. At times, the Conservation Commission has the right to inspect properties under a Conservation Restriction.

The Open Space Preservation Committee: Created in 1987, the Open Space Preservation Committee is tasked with:

- ▶ Updating and writing the Open Space and Recreation Plan;
- ▶ Advocating for the protection and use of open space in Westborough; and
- ▶ Providing recommendations to the Board of Selectmen related to Chapter 61A land (i.e., agricultural and horticultural lands under the Chapter 61 program).

Westborough Community Land Trust: The Westborough Community Land Trust, a private, non-profit, was created in 1997 in response to increasing development pressures. It has a mission “to safeguard land to meet the environmental, recreational, agricultural, and scenic needs of the Town of Westborough and to preserve open space and the natural character of the land.”² The organization meets this mission through stewardship, education, and advocacy. It also serves as partners to other organizations with influence on open space lands in Westborough, such as the Open Space Preservation Committee, Board of Selectmen, and the School District.

The Westborough Community Land Trust has accomplished much in its lifetime, including the conservation of 173-plus acres of land and assisting in the stewardship of nearly 400 acres. Since 2000, in coordination with the Open Space Preservation Committee and the Conservation Commission, the Westborough Community Land Trust has developed and maintained over 60 miles of trails associated with the Westborough Charm Bracelet. The Westborough Charm Bracelet is a beloved Town-wide trail network that is envisioned to cover up to 85 miles with links to neighboring towns.

[Insert picture of the Westborough Charm Bracelet]

In addition to the Westborough Community Land Trust, the Town coordinates with other owners of open space in the Town, including land trusts and state agencies. Land trusts with ownership in Westborough include the New England Forestry Foundation, Southborough Open Land Foundation, and Sudbury Valley Trustees. At the state level, relevant agencies include the Department of Conservation and Recreation, Watershed Management Division, Quinsigamond State Park, and Division of Fisheries and Wildlife.

Recreation

Recreational opportunities are abundant in Westborough. Residents and visitors can participate in passive recreation activities such as walking and biking along numerous miles of trails (e.g., Westborough Charm Bracelet, Hocomonco Pond), fishing at local waterbodies (e.g., Mill Pond/SuAsCo Reservoir, Sandra Pond), and wildlife viewing at local preserves (e.g.,

² Westborough Community Land Trust. (2020). About Westborough Community Land Trust. Retrieved April 29, 2020, from <https://westboroughlandtrust.org/aboutWCLT>

Westborough Wildlife Management Area). In addition, the Town offers opportunities for active recreation, such those listed by facility in **Table 5-2**.

Table 5-2. Public Recreation Facilities

Facility	Recreational Use/Activities	Address
Annie Fales Elementary School	Playground, Softball fields, Soccer fields	50 Eli Whitney Street
Armstrong Elementary School	Playground, Softball fields, Basketball courts, Tennis courts	18 Fisher Street
Bay State Commons Park	Tot lot, Outdoor bandstand	Off Union Street
Chauncy Fields	Lacrosse, Soccer fields	10 Hospital Road
Hadley Field	Soccer fields	54 Haskell Street
Haskell Street Recreation Facility	Playground, Softball field, Soccer field, Basketball Courts, Tennis Courts	50 Haskell Street
Hastings Elementary School	Playground, Softball field, Basketball courts	111 E Main Street
Hennessy Field	Soccer field, Cricket pitch	1 Upton Road
Hyder Street Park	Playground	28 1/2 Hyder Street
Greg's Field	Little League Field, Soccer field	66 Upton Street
Gibbons Jr. High School	Softball field, Soccer field, Baseball field, Football field	20 Fisher Street
Lake Chauncy Beach	Playground, Swimming, Boating	60 Lyman Street
Mill Pond School	Multi-purpose	Mill Road
Roger's Recreation Facility/Field	Playground, Softball fields, Basketball court, Soccer fields, Baseball fields, Trails	4-6 Rogers Road
State Hospital Recreation Lands (Parcels B & C)	Multi-purpose	Off Lyman Street and Hospital Road
Veteran's Freedom Park	Tennis court, Walking trails	169 West Main Street
Westborough Country Club	Public golf course, Private recreational trails	121 West Main Street
Westborough High School	Playground, Softball field, Field hockey field, Baseball field, Football field, Tennis courts, Running track	90 West Main Street

Additionally, the Westborough Recreation Department offers year-round programming for youth sports, adult programs, music and arts, and more. There are over 150 yearly programs offered by the Department, 90 of which are spring/summer and 60 of which are fall/winter. This programming takes place at several of the facilities listed in **Table 5-2**, as well as at the Bowman Conservation Area, Hocomonco Pond, and Mill Pond/SuAsCo Reservoir. The Town does not have a dedicated community/recreation center. More information on the Recreation Department can be found in **Chapter 7, Public Facilities and Services**.

Recreational opportunities are also available at privately-owned facilities. These include the Target Little League fields, Fay Mountain Recreation Facility, Hundreds Road Swimmer

Association, Indian Meadow Golf Course, Westborough Tennis and Swim Club, Boroughs YMCA, YWCA of Central Massachusetts, and Wayside Recreation Facility.

As part of the public engagement process for this Master Plan, the community identified several recreation needs. These needs included more playing fields, an intergenerational community center, a dog park, gym space not on School property, and a skate/bike park.

Recreation-Focused Committees

There are several committees in Westborough focused on improving recreational opportunities for residents. Descriptions of each committee can be found below.

Tot Lot Committee: Formed in September of 2013, this committee addresses the lack of playgrounds in Town. Extant playgrounds are associated with School property and cannot be utilized when school is in session. This Committee picked the Baystate Commons Public Park located in the heart of the downtown area to build a new playground.

Veteran's Freedom Park Committee: This committee is charged with managing the 23.6 acres of prime open space located at 169A West Main Street that the Town received as part of the requirements of the Transient Oriented Village Zoning requirements. This land is a major recreational resource close to the downtown area.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee: Created to improve bicycling and pedestrian access and conditions in the Town, this committee has been tasked with creating a Feasibility Study for the Boston and Worcester Air Line Trail (BWALT). More information on this committee can be found in **Chapter 8, Transportation**.

Westborough has a diverse population both in terms of racial and ethnic backgrounds, as well as age. Keeping this diverse population in mind it will be important to provide a wide variety of activities and opportunities to meet the various needs of these groups. Accordingly, the Diversity & Inclusion Administrative Committee – created in 2016 – is tasked with reviewing and ensuring Town services are provided equally and are accessible to all, as well as promoting increased diversity and inclusiveness in such services. Further, the Senior Center/Council on Aging offers an array of recreational activities for the Town's senior population including, but not limited to, Strength and Balance Training for Independent Living, Qigong Tai Chi, Pickleball, Line Dancing, and Chair Yoga.

Regional Opportunities for Recreation

The Town of Westborough is collaborating with neighboring towns to create the BWALT, a multi-use trail that will connect Shrewsbury, Northborough, Westborough, Southborough, and Framingham. The BWALT will run along an old trolley line along Route 9. More information on the BWALT can be found in **Chapter 8, Transportation**.

Another regional recreation opportunity is the Boroughs Loop Trail. Led by the Sudbury Valley Trustees, this trail will be 33 miles when complete. It will connect the trail networks of the Towns of Westborough, Northborough, Southborough and Marlboro. As of April 2020,

the Boroughs Loop Trail consists of approximately 24 miles that include wooded walking trails, bike paths, aqueduct trails, and sidewalks.³

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³ Sudbury Valley Trustees. (2020). Boroughs Loop Trail. Retrieved April 29, 2020, from <https://www.svtweb.org/properties/page/boroughs-loop-trail>