

Section 6: COMMUNITY GOALS

A. Description of Process

In an attempt to determine citizen preferences in regards to open space and recreation, the Open Space and Recreation Committee utilized two methods: a town-wide citizen survey and a public forum.

The survey was conducted in May 2006 with each household in Grafton receiving a survey containing eight questions dealing with open space and recreation. With 871 returned surveys, the response rate was 12.2%. Each question provided space for respondents to list their comments. A summary of comments from the survey effort can be found in Appendix A.

The public forum was held the evening of May 3, 2006 at the Brigham Hill Community Barn. At this forum, citizens were briefed on the Town's open space and recreation resources, and the goals and objectives from the Town's previous Open Space & Recreation Plan were reviewed to see if they were still valid or warranted modification.

In addition to the survey and forum, the Committee met monthly throughout the duration of this project starting in February 2006. All Committee meetings were open to the public. The draft plan was presented at a 2nd public forum held on the evening January 30, 2007. The draft plan was available on the Town's website www.town.grafton.ma.us from January 30, 2007.

A closer look at the survey and public forum results is presented below.

Results of the 2006 Open Space and Recreation Survey:

Question #1: Citizens were asked to rate the importance of open space needs. All of the choices received a high percentage of "important" ratings:

- Open spaces for water protection:
85% rated as important
- Open spaces for conservation/passive recreation:
75% rated as important
- Historical buildings and places:
68% rated as important
- Farmland preservation:
67% rated as important
- Land/facilities for active recreation:
64% rated as important

None of the choices even came close to receiving a significant amount of "not important" responses.

Question #2: Citizens were asked which measures they would support in regard to open space and recreation. All of the choices received a high percentage of "yes" responses:

- Support a requirement that all new development include open space:
90% yes
- Vote for town-supported open space acquisition:
89% yes
- Support the concept of limited development:
89% yes
- Support increased density in some areas in exchange for open space in others:
65% yes
- Sell or contribute a conservation restriction:
63% yes

Question #3: Citizens were asked to rate their satisfaction with Grafton’s open space and recreation resources. For all of the choices in Question #3, the majority of responses were neutral in regards to satisfaction with existing recreation programs/facilities.

- The variety and/or amount of existing recreational programs:
241 – satisfied 488 – neutral 119 – dissatisfied
- The variety and/or amount of existing recreational facilities:
176 - satisfied 423 - neutral 249 - dissatisfied
- The maintenance or condition of existing active recreation facilities:
204 - satisfied 474 – neutral 166 - dissatisfied
- The maintenance or condition of existing passive recreation facilities:
191 – satisfied 487 – neutral 149 - dissatisfied

The only choice where the number of “dissatisfied” responses outnumbered the “satisfied” responses was the variety/amount of existing recreation facilities choice (249 dissatisfied versus 176 satisfied).

Question #4: Citizens were asked to check off their top five most desired recreation opportunities. The top five responses were:

- Bike trails (445 votes)
- Conservation areas (404 votes)
- Hiking/skiing trails (373 votes)
- Fields for active recreation (309 votes)
- Local neighborhood parks (283 votes)

Question #5: When asked to rate the Town’s active recreation facilities, Most of Grafton’s recreation parks received good marks, but some did better than others:

- Grafton Common: 85% excellent/good response rate
- Norcross/Miner Field: 73% excellent/good response rate

- Silver Lake Beach: 63% excellent/good response rate
- Super Park: 59% excellent/good response rate
- Neighborhood Parks: 50% excellent/good response rate

Question #6: Citizens were asked how the Town should prioritize its open space and recreation expenditures. Roughly three quarters of the respondents indicated a preference for taking care of existing facilities, rather than purchase new properties or build new facilities:

- Improve/maintain existing recreation facilities:
78% of respondents rated this as important/very important.
- Improve/maintain existing conservation lands for passive recreation uses:
74% of respondents rated this as important/very important.
- Acquire conservation lands for passive recreation:
65% of respondents rated this as important/very important.
- Acquire land for new active recreation facilities:
49% of respondents rated this as important/very important.

Question #7: Citizens were asked which open space and recreation initiatives they would be willing to support. Most people are willing to support Town Meeting open space initiatives, and a sizable minority (318 responders) is willing to volunteer time for developing/operating recreation facilities:

- Support zoning proposals that favor open space/recreation initiatives:
80% yes 19% no
- Support proposals for acquiring land for conservation/passive recreation:
77% yes 22% no
- Support proposals for building active recreation facilities:
67% yes 31% no
- Volunteer to assist with developing/operating recreation facilities:
40% yes 60% no

Question #8: The last survey question asked how long the respondent had been a Grafton resident. The respondents were almost evenly divided between newcomers (49% people here less than ten years) and old-timers (51% people here more than ten years). This is good as it means that the results were not skewed towards either category.

Results of the May 3rd, 2006 Public Forum:

There were roughly 40 people in attendance at the forum. After being briefed on the purpose of the forum and going through an inventory of Grafton's open space and recreation resources, the attendees were asked to provide feedback on the five primary goals of the 1999 Open Space and Recreation Plan. A summary of the public comments is presented on the following page.

Goal #1 - Preserve and Enhance Grafton's Water Resources

Goal #1 - Objectives

- 1) Protect water resources vital for the sustainability of the community
- 2) Secure additional protection for groundwater resources
- 3) Take measures to improve the quality of Grafton's surface waters
- 4) Support regional efforts to improve and maintain the quality of the Blackstone River in order to maximize its use
- 5) Protect significant wetland areas

Public Comments:

- Goal #1 is even more important now than it was six years ago.
- The Town should protect the aquifer that supplies water to the new municipal well at the High School site.
- The Town should join with neighboring communities to implement a watershed approach to protecting the Blackstone River.
- The dam at Fisherville Pond needs to be fixed, and open space should be preserved around the pond as a means to improving its water quality.
- The Town should endeavor to maintain the good water quality of Silver Lake.
- The Town should try to determine if it would have enough water to service the Town at full buildout.
- The Town should reevaluate the effectiveness of its Aquifer Protection Bylaw.
- Objective #5 should be modified to both protect and restore significant wetland areas.
- The Town should do more to emphasize the need for water conservation and educate the public on water conservation techniques.
- The Town should encourage the reuse of “gray” water for irrigation.

Goal #2 - Protect and Conserve Grafton's Land Resources

Goal #2 - Objectives

- 1) Protect land resources vital for the sustainability of the community
- 2) Permanently protect those Town owned open space resources necessary for provision of recreation opportunities and/or preservation of natural/visual/cultural resources
- 3) Protect ecologically sensitive lands
- 4) Protect Grafton's farms through local actions
- 5) Provide education on the functions and requirements of land use regulations

Public Comments:

- Objective #2 should be modified to include historical resources.
- The Town needs to do a better job of identifying and marking those open space amenities available to its residents.
- The Town should review the open space lands created as part of the Flexible Development Bylaw and get them under municipal control.

- The Town should amend its Flexible Development Bylaw to make the open space lands created by this option available to all residents.
- The Flexible Development Bylaw should be amended to identify the resources that need to be protected as a first step in the process, rather than laying out the lots and interior roadways first.
- The Town should identify the land it wants to protect by establishing a set of criteria for new open space acquisitions, with assigned values for habitat, scenic resources, accessibility, potential for trails and other passive recreation use, and linkage to adjacent open spaces.
- The Town should build off of previous conservation efforts.
- The Town should educate citizens on the value of land conservation.
- The Town should look to assemble adjacent park and conservation areas.
- The Town needs to understand the legal restrictions on conservation lands, ensure that such restrictions are enforced, and that such restrictions are properly filed in the first place.
- The Town should have a standing Open Space & Recreation Committee.
- The Town should consolidate the various committees that deal with recreation, conservation, trails, etc., into one standing committee and annually fund this committee's work program.
- The Town needs to clearly differentiate between Town-owned land and conservation land.

Goal #3 - Preserve Grafton's Town Character

Goal #3 - Objectives

- 1) Encourage the continuation of Grafton's historic patterns of development where they are discernible
- 2) Address the preservation of Town character through comprehensive planning
- 3) Encourage the use of both Grafton's and the BRVNHC's design guidelines
- 4) Protect and preserve historic, cultural, and scenic landscape resources
- 5) Protect "special places" in town

Public Comments: No public comments were offered on this goal.

Goal #4 - Provide Grafton with Varied and Geographically Well-Balanced Recreational Facilities and Opportunities

Goal #4 - Objectives

- 1) Develop a system of Town-wide trails to provide a variety of recreational opportunities, such as hiking, jogging, skiing, biking, and horseback riding
- 2) Improve and expand swimming facilities and water-based recreation opportunities
- 3) Plan for the development of more winter activity areas
- 4) Pursue the development of recreation facilities in inadequately serviced neighborhoods, or in areas where development will require additional facilities

- 5) Maintain fishing, hunting, and trapping opportunities
- 6) Support the BRVNHC and DEP's goals for the Blackstone River and Canal by facilitating the development of parklands and recreational opportunities in their vicinity
- 7) Encourage programs for all age groups and user groups within the population

Public Comments:

- The Town should find out the details regarding winter access for the golf course.
- The Town should educate citizens about Grafton's special places (brochure, website, etc.).
- Grafton needs a youth center.
- Grafton needs a dog park.
- The Town should work with the private sector to support the maintenance of recreation fields.
- The Town needs to have its recreation interests and conservation interests work together, especially for Dauphinais Park.
- The Town should improve boating access at Silver Lake.
- The Town should ensure that passive and active recreation areas are available within walking distance to all neighborhoods.
- Goal #4 should be revised to include opportunities for interaction with nature.
- The Town should promote year-round use of its recreation and conservation lands.
- The Town needs to have a full-time recreation director.

Goal #5 - Enhance Utilization of Existing Recreation and Conservation Resources

Goal #5 - Objectives

- 1) Prepare a recreational maintenance program that will improve the conditions of various fields
- 2) Expand use of facilities
- 3) Develop a funding program to finance better management of conservation and recreation lands

Public Comments:

- Objective #1 should be modified to include passive recreation areas, or simply call for a maintenance program for all recreation facilities and properties, both active and passive.
- The Town should expand the access and use of all recreation facilities and properties, both active and passive.
- The Town should encourage the creation of recreation-related businesses and partnerships.

The last agenda item for the public forum was to take suggestions from the attendees on which properties the Town should endeavor to protect and what recreation programs/facilities they would like to see in Grafton. Here are the public's suggestions (presented in no particular order):

Land Protection Suggestions

- Poler property
- Knowlton Farm
- Houlden Farm
- Land south of Hassanamesit Woods
- The Robinson & Pease properties west of Route 140 (opposite Silver Lake)
- The Robinson property on the east side of Route 140, bordering Silver Lake
- The Hughes-Cromwick property
- North of Milford Road
- The two Christmas tree farms
- Willard Clock Museum
- The land along the Grafton Trail Loop idea
- Grafton & Upton Railroad right-of-way

Recreation Facilities & Programs Suggestions

- Create the South Grafton Greenway as called for in the South Grafton Master Plan
- More open fields that aren't by "reservation only"
- A dog park near the Blackstone River
- Restore the water quality at Fisherville Pond
- The Riverview recreation plan should include both active and passive recreation opportunities and a nature study area
- Protect the wildlife at Dauphinais Park from Follette Street to the Blackstone River
- Identify and mark the Nipmuc Trail
- Rebuild and improve the Super Park
- Install a canoe launch at Silver Lake
- Improve canoe access to the Blackstone River and create a greenway along the river
- Reuse the Town's abandoned landfills for passive and active recreation
- The Town should marshal its resources to create an environmental education center
- The Town should adopt a Low Impact Development (LID) stormwater management bylaw and modify its subdivision regulations accordingly

Results of the January 30th, 2007 Public Forum

There were roughly 60 people in attendance at the forum. The attendees were briefed on the draft Plan, specifically the Goals and Objectives and the Action Plan. A presentation was also given on the Open Space Priorities. Throughout the presentations there were comments from attendees, and these are listed below.

- Add New England Village in North Grafton to the action item relating to pursuing historic designation for the three South Grafton Villages
- Add improvements to Whitney Park and the Stone Arch Bridge to the Action Plan
- The need for sidewalks leading from the neighborhoods to recreation facilities
- The need for a trail from the Town Common to Silver Lake

- Restore and maintain the waterway signs at road crossings
- Protect the Tufts properties
- Protect the Grafton-Upton Railroad right of way
- Protect the watershed around Parcel #32 on the open space inventory map.

B. Statement of Open Space and Recreation Goals

The Town's Open Space Committee used the results of the survey and public forum to formulate the following statement of open space and recreation goals:

- Preserve and Enhance Grafton's Water Resources
- Protect and Conserve Grafton's Land Resources
- Preserve Grafton's Town Character
- Provide Grafton with Varied and Geographically Well-Balanced Recreational Facilities and Opportunities
- Enhance Utilization of Existing Recreation and Conservation Resources

While the new open space and recreation goals are very similar to the goals of the 1999 Open Space and Recreation Plan, the issues of land and water conservation, the preservation of rural character and the need for recreation facilities are perennial concerns for Grafton residents. The Committee will focus on developing a set of action items aimed at addressing the above goals (see the Action Plan presented in Section 9 of this document).