

Town of Grafton Open Space & Recreation Plan

Presented by the Grafton Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee

October 2021

Open Space & Recreation Plan

- ▶ Identifies open space and recreation goals & objectives, based on community input, and presents an action plan to achieve them
- ▶ Open space and recreation are included in the Comprehensive Master Plan, but a separate, standalone plan is required by the state to qualify the Town for certain grants
 - ▶ Local Acquisitions for Natural Diversity (LAND – formerly Self-Help)
 - ▶ Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities (PARC)
 - ▶ Land and Water Conservation Fund
 - ▶ Conservation Partnership Grant
- ▶ Scope is limited to open space and recreation

Timeline

- ▶ This is an update of the 2007 Open Space & Recreation Plan

July 2014	Initiated, but stalled due to staff changes and lack of resources
March 2017	Re-initiated
May 2020	Submitted to state (Division of Conservation Services)
June 2020	Received conditional approval from DCS
February 2021	Revisions completed
June 2021	Received final approval from DCS

Who Did the Work?

- ▶ Our community, through public input and representatives on the OSRP Committee
- ▶ OSRP Committee
 - ▶ Representatives from Select Board, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Recreation Commission, Grafton Land Trust
 - ▶ Two at-large members
- ▶ Staff Support
 - ▶ Planning, conservation, and recreation departments
 - ▶ Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC)
- ▶ Nearly complete committee and staff turnover; at completion:
 - ▶ Only one committee member from 2014 was still on the committee
 - ▶ Only three committee members from 2017 were still on the committee
 - ▶ Only one Town staff from 2017 remained
 - ▶ No original CMRPC staff remained

Development Process

- ▶ Background and context information updated to reflect post-2007 changes
 - ▶ Community setting (history, population characteristics, growth patterns)
 - ▶ Environmental inventory & analysis
 - ▶ Inventory of lands of conservation & recreation interest (e.g., town owned, land trust, Chapter 61)
- ▶ Identify community goals
 - ▶ Starting point: goals & objectives of previous plan
 - ▶ Community surveys & forum
- ▶ Committee members developed goals, objectives, and action plan based on input from community and from the boards they represent, and analysis of needs

Goals, Objectives, and Action Plan

▶ Goals

- ▶ Preserve and Enhance Grafton's Water Resources
- ▶ Protect and Conserve Grafton's Land Resources
- ▶ Preserve Grafton's Town Character
- ▶ Enhance Grafton's Existing Recreation and Conservation Resources
- ▶ Expand Grafton's Recreation and Conservation Resources
- ▶ Connect Grafton's Recreation and Conservation Resources

▶ Objectives

- ▶ Specific objectives for each goal

▶ Action Plan

- ▶ Action items for achieving each objective

GOAL 1: Preserve and Enhance Grafton's Water Resources

Objectives:

- ▶ Continue to support regional efforts to improve and maintain the quality of the Blackstone River and its watershed in order to maximize its use
- ▶ Manage, protect and improve public access to water resources vital for the sustainability of the community
- ▶ Secure additional protection for groundwater resources
- ▶ Protect and restore significant wetland areas
- ▶ Take measures to improve the quality of Grafton's surface waters

GOAL 2: Protect and Conserve Grafton's Land Resources

Objectives:

- ▶ Permanently protect those Town owned open space resources necessary for provision of recreation opportunities and/or preservation of natural/visual/cultural/historic resources
- ▶ Protect ecologically sensitive lands
- ▶ Protect Grafton's farms
- ▶ Protect land resources vital for the community

GOAL 3: Preserve Grafton's Town Character

Objectives:

- ▶ Encourage a holistic approach to protecting and preserving Grafton's historic, cultural, scenic landscape resources and other "special places"
- ▶ Encourage the use of both Grafton's, the BHC Inc.'s and Historic Commission's design guidelines
- ▶ Encourage the continuation of Grafton's historic patterns of development where they are discernible

GOAL 4: Enhance Grafton's Existing Recreation and Conservation Resources

Objectives:

- ▶ Improve the maintenance of Grafton's active and passive recreation areas and facilities
- ▶ Provide citizens and visitors with information regarding Grafton's recreation/conservation/ cultural/ historic resources
- ▶ Improve access for all age and user groups within the population
- ▶ Support Blackstone Bikeway
- ▶ Plan for year-round, active and passive recreational use of public space
- ▶ Improve fishing, hunting, and trapping opportunities

GOAL 5: Expand Grafton's Recreation and Conservation Resources

Objectives:

- ▶ Identify and target new priority land acquisitions that will connect to existing town recreation and conservation resources.
- ▶ Expand facilities and opportunities into underserved areas to ensure equitable access for all residents
- ▶ Work with boards, organizations and other entities in the Town of Grafton to coordinate conservation efforts
- ▶ Establish an Open Space and Recreation Site Committee to review Town-owned land and prioritize parcels that could be used for conservation and recreation purposes

GOAL 6: Connect Grafton's Recreation and Conservation Resources

Objectives:

- ▶ Improve and expand the system of Town-wide trails to provide a variety of recreational opportunities, such as hiking, jogging, skiing, biking, and horseback riding
- ▶ Improve public access to and connectivity between Grafton's active and passive recreation areas, facilities, conservation lands and points of interest
- ▶ Work with neighboring communities to create inter-municipal connections
- ▶ Secure Green Belt along waterbodies in Grafton

Action Plan

- ▶ 65 action items
 - ▶ Responsibility assigned to one or more boards, committees, departments, or organizations
 - ▶ Timing (ongoing, short-, medium-, or long-term)
 - ▶ Priority (high, medium, or low)
- ▶ 55 of the 65 actions items list more than one responsible party
 - ▶ Responsibilities assigned to various combinations of 17 different boards, committees, departments, and organizations

- ▶ Sample action items on following pages

Selected Action Items, GOAL 1: Preserve and Enhance Grafton's Water Resources

Objective	Action	Responsible Party
1.2 Manage, protect and improve public access to water resources vital for the sustainability of the community	1.2-A Prioritize land acquisitions to protect drinking water supply and surface water resources.	Select Board, Conservation, Grafton Land Trust
1.3 Secure additional protection for groundwater resources	1.3-B Conduct outreach efforts to homeowners and business owners regarding nonpoint source pollution reduction practices.	Conservation, Dept of Public Works
1.4 Protect and restore significant wetland areas	1.4-A Review and update the regulations of the Grafton Wetland Protection Bylaw at regular intervals.	Conservation

Selected Action Items, GOAL 2: Protect and Conserve Grafton's Land Resources

Objective	Action	Responsible Party
2.1 Permanently protect those Town owned open space resources necessary for provision of recreation opportunities and/or preservation of natural/visual/cultural/historic resources	2.1-C Proactively monitor and audit existing conservation lands to prevent encroachment and ensure conservation restrictions are having their intended effect.	Conservation, Grafton Land Trust
2.2 Protect ecologically sensitive lands	2.2-A Prioritize land acquisitions to protect ecologically sensitive lands and establish Open Space Corridors.	Conservation, Grafton Land Trust
2.4 Protect land resources vital for the community	2.4-A Strengthen low impact development {LID} requirement language in town bylaws.	Conservation, Planning

Selected Action Items, GOAL 3: Preserve Grafton's Town Character

Objective	Action	Responsible Party
3.1 Encourage a holistic approach to protecting and preserving Grafton's historic, cultural, scenic landscape resources and other "special places"	3.1-A Work with Town officials to update the Town of Grafton master plan.	Planning, Select Board
3.2 Encourage the use of both Grafton's, the BHC Inc. and Historic Commission's design guidelines	3.2-A Ensure Grafton's design guidelines reflect most up- to-date recommendations of the BVHC, Historic Commission and other local/regional organizations.	Planning
3.3 Encourage the continuation of Grafton's historic patterns of development where they are discernible	3.3-A Explore Zoning Bylaw Amendments and other land use policies and programs that encourage the preservation of the character of Grafton's historic districts.	Planning, Historical Commission

Selected Action Items, GOAL 4: Enhance Existing Recreation & Conservation Resources

Objective	Action	Responsible Party
4.1 Improve the maintenance of Grafton's recreation and conservation areas and facilities	4.1-B Develop a 5-year Capital Improvements plan for all recreation facilities under the Recreation Commission's jurisdiction.	Recreation
4.2 Provide citizens and visitors with information regarding Grafton's recreation/conservation/cultural/ historic resources	4.2-A Improve signage and other wayfinding, identifying the location/access points for all conservation lands that are open to the public.	Conservation, Trails Committee
4.3 Improve access for all age and user groups within the population	4.3-C Increase recreation opportunities for a variety of user groups and special populations including teenagers and handicapped persons.	Conservation, Recreation

Selected Action Items, GOAL 5: Expand Recreation & Conservation Resources

Objective	Action	Responsible Party
5.1 Identify and target new priority land acquisitions that will connect to existing town recreation and conservation resources.	5.1-A Develop priority list of parcels for immediate and future acquisition of land to expand and connect existing resources, based on risk, proximity to existing resources and other factors.	Conservation, Planning, Select Board, Grafton Land Trust
5.2 Expand facilities and opportunities into underserved areas to ensure equitable access for all residents	5.2-C Develop a map or other tool that identifies and prioritizes areas underserved by recreation facilities and other gaps.	Recreation
5.4 Establish an Open Space and Recreation Site Committee to review Town-owned land and prioritize parcels that could be used for conservation and recreation purposes.	5.4-A Work to establish a committee to review Town-owned land for updated uses related to open space and recreation needs. Committee would specifically focus on lands emerging out of Chapter Lands programs.	Conservation, Recreation, Planning, Select Board, Assessors

Selected Action Items, GOAL 6: Connect Recreation & Conservation Resources

Objective	Action	Responsible Party
6.2 Improve public access to and connectivity between Grafton's active and passive recreation areas, facilities, conservation lands and points of interest	6.2-B Develop and maintain up-to-date inventory of sidewalks, including current condition, to promote timely repair and improvement of sidewalk network.	Dept of Public Works, Select Board
6.3 Work with neighboring communities to create inter-municipal connections	6.3-A Cooperate with the development of the Worcester to Providence bikeway.	Select Board, Planning
6.4 Secure Green Belt along waterbodies in Grafton	6.3-B Work with relevant town and regional organizations to develop a map of existing trails and proposed routes and destinations.	Conservation, Planning

Implementation

- ▶ Most implementation work expected to be carried out by existing boards, committees, departments, or organizations
- ▶ New Open Space & Recreation Committee formed in July 2021 to coordinate and oversee implementation
- ▶ OS&R Committee role
 - ▶ Assign primary responsibility for each action item to one board, committee, department, or organization
 - ▶ Monitor implementation progress & report to public