



*Dexter Drumlin*

*Photo by Steve Piazza*

## **Section 2. Plan Introduction**

### **2.A. Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this document is to centralize information in one place that informs and identifies the open space and recreation goals and objectives to be met for the Town of Lancaster. The impetus behind updating the 2009 Open Space and Recreation Plan is to make progress on actual implementation.

Lancaster is an attractive town close to Routes 2, I-190 and I-495 and has been growing steadily for the last 15 years. It is Lancaster's aim to shape and guide its growth so that the Town retains its character and identity while fostering the expansion of the tax base and services to all its citizens. The 2007 Master Plan begins by saying "As members of the Lancaster community, notwithstanding our diversity, we are united in wanting our Town to maintain and strengthen the qualities which make it the Town we want." This 2017 Open Space and Recreation Plan states what we have, what we see as the challenges, and what we wish to implement to meet these shared challenges.

And herein lays our challenge, which is to identify the funding sources, tools, collaborators and volunteers to make substantial progress on implementing the goals and objectives identified in this Plan update. Keeping to the mission of our Open Space and Recreation Committee will be critical, which is "to advance the goals, objectives, and implementing actions of the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan and to serve as a centralizing forum for coordination of this effort".

In the seven years since the last update of Lancaster's Open Space and Recreation Plan, the Town has seen major improvements with:

- Moderation of large-scale residential development.
- Improvement of water quality in most of its ponds.
- Moderation of Chapter 61A agricultural land to development.
- More forestland acreage to conservation and into permanent protection.
- An active parcel protection list with regular annual transfer of parcels into permanent protection.
- Improved river protection with increased public awareness.
- Less non-point source pollution and flooding with new stormwater management measures.
- Major improvements in the Town's recreation facilities and resources.
- Better access in our municipal facilities.
- Major improvements in trails and trail programs.
- Opening of the Community and Senior Centers.
- Kick-off of the Nathaniel Thayer Memorial Park project.
- Re-instatement of the Lancaster Farmers Market.
- Increased public education about the Town's recreational and open space opportunities.

These challenges are not unique. Lancaster is a small town with rising costs and limited resources. Most of the tax revenue is based on residential property taxes. What does make Lancaster unique is that it still retains substantial natural capital in the form of it high biodiversity, numerous wetlands, large blocks of contiguous forests, and still plentiful agricultural land. Through the 2009 Open Space and Recreation Plan, the Town has taken numerous steps to protect these resources.

In the past several years, Lancaster has been successful in passing progressive zoning and other general bylaws to meet these goals. There is a need to continue to shape our land use policy so that we can attract and sustain new business development in our community, while balancing the preservation of our scenic vistas, open space, conservation, agricultural and recreational areas, and our rich natural resources and historical structures and landscapes.

Recent changes in our zoning and land use programs include:

- A stronger Flexible Development Bylaw that requires a greater allotment of open space and a mixture of housing types and sizes.
- An Enterprise Zoning District and an Integrated Planning Overlay District (IPOD) which provides greater flexibility in accommodating mixed-use developments, while ensuring careful respect for existing neighborhoods, other developments, and the natural environment.
- Stronger Site Plan Requirements that place more emphasis on stormwater management, parking lot design, landscape design, lighting design, signage requirements and traffic control.
- A local Stormwater Management Bylaw and Regulations that require a stringent control process for the stormwater run-off on new construction and re-development sites.
- An Illicit Discharge Bylaw to eliminate non-stormwater discharges to the municipal storm drain system.
- A Water Withdrawal Bylaw to protect the water quality and volume by prohibiting the withdrawal of water from surface water bodies for private commercial use through pumping or other means.
- A local Wetlands Protection Bylaw and Regulations that places more stringent controls on resource areas such as buffer zones and vernal pools.
- An Agricultural Preservation Bylaw that encourages the pursuit of agriculture, promotes agriculture-based economic opportunities, and protects farmlands by allowing agricultural uses and related activities to function with minimal conflict with abutters and Town agencies.
- An Expedited Permitting Program (Chapter 43D) that allows for more expeditious permitting for new businesses while giving careful consideration to the siting of development in order to preserve and protect areas of critical environmental concern.
- A Green Communities Program whereby the Town receives grant funds to create certain energy efficiency programs, including a requirement that all new construction will minimize its life-cycle cost by utilizing energy efficiency, water conservation, and other renewable or alternative energy technologies.
- Complete Streets designation and Prioritization Plan for improving pedestrian and bicycle mobility by repairing major sidewalks and creating bike lanes.
- A Landfill Re-use Study that recommended re-use for a closed and capped landfill as an alternative energy generation site and a passive recreation area while continuing to protect the Nashua River Greenway and wildlife corridor. A 500 kW municipal solar array was subsequently installed and activated in 2013.

## **2.B. Planning Process and Public Participation**

The gathering of citizen input in support of the 2017 Open Space and Recreation Plan update began in January 2017. The existing Open Space and Recreation Committee started meetings monthly instead of every other month in order to update the plan.

Numerous methods were used to solicit public input, such as:

- In March 2017, a survey was mailed to each residence. The response rate was eight (8) percent and those citizens who listed their names on the survey as interested in recreation and open space matters were contacted individually by the committee.
- In March 2017, a public forum was hosted to explain the Open Space and Recreation Committee's mission and goals, to explain the necessity of the plan, to show how much of the 2009 plan was implemented, and to get additional public input.

Both methods of public input were well advertised and promoted, including into Lancaster's Environmental Justice (EJ) neighborhoods in South Lancaster. Enhanced outreach was intended to ensure that members of our EJ population neighborhoods had sufficient opportunities to participate in the planning and decision making process of our 2017-2024 Open Space and Recreation Plan.

The following is the Public Participation strategy:

### Open Space & Recreation Committee Meetings

- *OSRP Planning Meetings (duly posted per the Open Meeting Law):*
  - January 18, 2017
  - February 22, 2017
  - March 22, 2017
  - April 26, 2017
  - May 24, 2017
  - June 28, 2017
  - July 26, 2017

### Open Space & Recreation Plan Public Forum – March 8, 2017

- Flyer (in appendix)
- Posted/distributed to the following venues on February 15, 2017:
  - Town web site – on the home page and under the Events section
  - Lancaster town newsletter (via e-mail blast)
  - Community Crier newsletter (via e-mail blast)
  - Community TV bulletin board
  - Elementary and Middle School newsletters (via parents listserve)

- Recreation Department Facebook page
- Hardcopy distribution at Town Hall, Library, Community Center, Senior Center, Post Offices
- Electronic signs at Police/Fire Stations

#### Open Space & Recreation Plan Survey

- Survey (in appendix) – mailed on March 27, 2017 with return date of April 28, 2017
- Mailed to 2,895 households with 226 returned (7.8% return rate)
- Results tabulated (in appendix)

Committee members routinely attend other town committee meetings and public hearings. The Open Space and Recreation Committee seeks to collaborate with the Conservation Commission, Agricultural Commission, Historical Commission, Recreation Committee, Trail & Bikeway Coalition, Friends of the Nashua River, Planning Board, Economic Development Team, Council on Disability, and Council on Aging on projects of mutual interest and has attended numerous meetings to further this aim.

Members of the Committee have also communicated with MassWildlife, the Nashua River Watershed Association (NRWA), the MassDEP TMDL project, Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge project manager, and the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) office. The Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) has also assisted with this plan update.