

The year 2012 was one of excitement and action for the Open Space and Recreation Committee because so many volunteers, municipal committee members, residents, clubs, and other membership groups collaborated in implementing the 2009-2016 state-approved Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). Many times these plans sit on a shelf but here in Lancaster, we are all working hard to implement the plan and engage many people in the process. Without the Lancaster 2007 Master Plan and the momentum that came from that, Lancaster would likely not be as far along as it is.

One of the most interesting and optimistic things that we saw occurring this past year was the alignment that came when multiple parties worked together toward the same, shared aims. For example:

- The Town Forest Committee significantly forwarded action items from the OSRP by formally adding town-owned land abutting the Town Forest to its acreage, by surveying the Town Forest in preparation for an updated silviculture and harvesting plan, and by repairing culverts and other Town Forest maintenance;
- The Energy Commission also fast-forwarded progress on plan implementation by completing an ongoing energy analysis report broken down by municipal users and by an interesting slide show on Lancaster's town-owned solar farm;

The Energy Commission also completed the installation of the 500 kW solar array at the former landfill site.

The Energy Commission also initiated and rolled out the Municipal Aggregation program to all residents, allowing the Town to offer a lower electric rate to its residents.

The Energy Commission also conducted several energy efficiency and conservation measures in our municipal facilities, including Town Hall insulation and weatherization and new heating systems at the DPW buildings.

- The Cook Conservation Area Task Force, managed by the Lancaster Friends of the Nashua River, “adopted” this Nashua River Greenway location on Route 70 and led a very successful volunteer effort to clean up the entrance and improve access. Drive by it and you are likely to see cars parked much of the time. Spirited public citizens worked hard on this shared effort and it was a great success. The Lancaster Friends of the Nashua River is currently working with Worcester Polytechnic Institute students in further activities at the Cook Conservation Area. Read about this and their annual (and very successful) River Festival later on in this annual report under community organizations.

- The, Thayer Field Recreation Campus Task Force, an off-shoot of our Open Space and Recreation Committee, made great progress this past year. Susan Smiley, the Task Force leader, will talk about this towards the end of the report. We are so excited that this Recreation Campus is so much closer to happening!
- We made progress in our land protection goals by: completing our GIS mapping of sensitive and important habitats in Lancaster and by numerous landowner engagement activities. We met with the Board of Selectmen to successfully advocate for OSRC review prior to tax title auctions. Town Meeting votes passed to accept a land donation on the Nashua River and to purchase a tract of land abutting the Town Forest;
- Lancaster has become a participant in the newly-formed Montachusett Region Trails Coalition. We now have a seat at the table in becoming part of a regional trails network.

An offshoot of this Coalition is the formation of a local Lancaster Trails & Bike Path Coalition. The goal is to identify, create, connect and maintain a local network of walking trails and bike paths that will ultimately connect to the larger regional trails system. Much more to come in 2013!

- Our Open Space and Recreation Committee joined in the effort to develop Phase I of a “Blue Trail” along the North Nashua River from Jonathan Roberge Veterans Memorial Park on Mechanic Street in Leominster to the future home of the Pellechia Canoe Launch on Route 70 in Lancaster;

The blue trail will add universally-accessible canoe/kayak launches to each of these points to offer mobility-challenged individuals the opportunity to enjoy the North Nashua River. This will be a showcase in our area as there are no existing UA canoe/kayak launches anywhere in the State. We have applied for a grant through the DCR Recreational Trails grant program to fund the planning and construction for these launches.

- Supported a citizen-led effort to convene a public forum in December 2012 to discuss and gather citizen input on the Wekepeke/Bartlett Dam project
- Susan, please add Thayer Field Stuff.....