

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION COMMITTEE

The Open Space and Recreation Committee came into being with the approval at the 2008 Town Meeting to fulfill the mission *to advance the goals, objectives and actions of the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan, and to serve as a centralizing forum of this effort.*

Open Space and Recreation Plan

The Committee completed the 2009-2016 Open Space and Recreation Plan and it was formally accepted and approved by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs in May 2010. Members of the Open Space and Recreation Committee partnered with other town committees, boards, non-profit groups (such as the Lancaster Land Trust and the Lancaster Friends of the Nashua River) to make progress with the ambitious 7-year action plan.

The OSRC will re-affirm the goals of the OSRP, and plan the implementation in order to meet these goals, as follows:

- Water supply protection
- Agricultural land protection
- Forest land protection
- Recreational resource development
- Pedestrian connection development
- Overall land conservation and protection
- Land acquisition

As part of this implementation, the OSRC has involved the many stakeholders that are beneficiaries of the plan, including:

- Planning Board
- Conservation Commission
- Board of Selectmen
- Town Forest Committee
- Trail & Bike Way Coalition
- Land Trust
- Friends of the Nashua River/Cook CA
- Commission on Disability
- DPW
- Agricultural Commission
- Recreation Committee
- Thayer Field Campus Committee

Parcel Protection

The Open Space and Recreation Committee also continued to advocate and advise on parcels of interest for land protection.

In 2014, the Open Space Committee worked with the Conservation Commission and Town Forest Committee to assess the conservation value of all privately and publicly owned properties in the Town of Lancaster that are not currently protected from development under the provisions of Article 97 of the Massachusetts State Constitution. Public land is protected under Article 97 if it is under the care and control of the Conservation Commission or a land conservation agency of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, such as the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) or Department of Fish & Game (DFG). Privately owned land receives Article 97 protection when it is placed under a Conservation Restriction held by the Conservation Commission, a State agency such as DCR or DFG, or a non-profit land trust.

The collaboration by the Open Space Committee, Conservation Commission and Town Forest Committee to assess the conservation value for all currently unprotected privately and publicly owned properties resulted in the creation of a comprehensive Parcel Protection List to use as a guide in prioritizing land protection efforts. In particular, very high importance has been given to the expansion of the existing conservation areas in the Town, most notably the Cook Conservation Area and the Lancaster Town Forest.

Voters at the 2014 Annual Town Meeting approved the expenditure of \$60,000 to partner with the Lancaster Land Trust (LLT) to expand the Lancaster Town Forest through the protection of 17.85 acres of adjacent land. LLT will buy the land from the current owners using the proceeds from a Commonwealth of Massachusetts Conservation Partnership Grant, which will reimburse LLT 50% of the land acquisition cost. The funding approved by Town Meeting will go toward the purchase of a Conservation Restriction from LLT, to be held by the Conservation Commission, for the amount not covered by the Conservation Partnership Grant. As part of this project, Annual Town Meeting also approved the transfer to the Conservation Commission's care and control, with the Town Forest Committee's active management, 51.6 acres of existing Town-owned land adjacent to the Lancaster Town Forest. Hopefully, the future will hold many more successful land protection projects accomplished through such public-private partnerships.

Also, in October 2014, Special Town Meeting approved the transfer of two parcels of Town-owned land, 37.6 acres total, to the care and control of the Conservation Commission. The two parcels consist of a portion of the former Durling property on Route 117, and a nearby parcel.

The Conservation Commission also accepted a generous donation of .20 acres of land off of Winsor Road from the Kilbourn family. This parcel is the location of the historically significant Rowlandson Rock, named after Mary Rowlandson, who was held there the first night after being captured by Native Americans in February, 1676, during what is now known as King Phillip's War.

What's New for 2015

Some of the Commission's upcoming activities in 2015 will include the continued conservation of open space properties, maintaining the conservation land throughout the town to provide a rural environment for the residents to enjoy, working with potential developers in seeking permanent conservation easements for path systems, and similar ideas for a variety of other conservation-oriented projects.

The Open Space and Recreation Committee meets on the fourth Wednesday every other month at 6:30 PM at the Lancaster Town Hall. Everyone is welcome to join the Committee for these meetings and public involvement is always encouraged.

The Community Development and Planning Office coordinates all meeting schedules and is open Monday through Thursday, 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM. As always, we welcome citizen's questions, comments or suggestions. Please feel free to contact us at 978-365-3326 x1311 or at npiazza@lancasterma.net. For more information on open space issues in Lancaster, please visit us on the town's web site: www.ci.lancaster.ma.us.

Respectfully submitted,

Noreen Piazza, *Staff Liaison*