

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

Much progress has been made on implementation of the OSRP in 2015, with large strides being made in the areas of forest land protection, recreational resource development, overall land conservation and land acquisition.

Parcel Protection

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

In 2015, the OSRC continued work 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 OSRC, 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.

In 2015, the Conservation Commission and Lancaster Land Trust completed *Lancaster Town Forest Expansion Phase I*, a collaborative conservation project permanently protecting nearly 18 acres of land (comprised of five Assessor's parcels) adjacent to the Lancaster Town Forest. The Trust purchased the properties with the help of a Conservation Partnership Grant from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, which funded 50% of acquisition costs. The Town contributed the remaining 50% through the Commission's purchase of a Conservation Restriction from the Trust, which was previously approved by voters at the 2014 Annual Town Meeting. The newly protected land will be managed for wildlife habitat, passive recreation, and sustainable forestry. The Commission and OSRC look forward to working with the Lancaster Land Trust on future land conservation projects enlarging the Town Forest and other high priority focus areas as well, such as the Cook Conservation Area.

At the 2015 Annual Town Meeting in May, voters approved the transfer of 7 acres of land (Parcel 2-3, back of Donelle Way) to the Conservation Commission's care and control. This parcel protects important wildlife habitat and the Bow Brook watershed.

In August, the Commission gratefully accepted a generous donation of 1 acre of land on Ponakin Road from the Estate of Eleanor Jarvis. This parcel protects 550 feet of environmentally important riparian frontage along the North Nashua River, and abuts 4.2 acres of existing Conservation Commission land.

In November, the Land Trust gratefully accepted a generous donation of Parcel 18-58 (2.6 acres) and Parcel 18-59 (1.92 acres) from the Bashaw family. These parcels also protect important riparian frontage along the North Nashua River.

Also in November, the Board of Selectmen voted to transfer Parcels 32-17, 32-18 and 32-19 from their care to the Lancaster Town Forest Committee. Approximately 10 acres will be set aside as a memorial to late Eugene Christoph, one of the original members of the OSRC and passionate conservationist. As a member of the Select Board, he had requested that the oak trees in this area be protected, and thus they will now become a memorial to his legacy to the Town. A bench and plaque will be placed in this oak tree grove.

What's New for 2016

Some of the OSRC upcoming activities in 2016 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*