

Newbury Open Space Committee

2007 Open Space and Recreation Plan Public Input Meeting

Newbury Town Hall
Newbury, MA
May 30, 2007; 7:00 PM

Meeting Minutes

Introduction:

Committee Chair Dan Streeter welcomed all of the meeting attendees and provided a background description of the creation of the Open Space Committee (OSC), its membership, and the mission of the OSC. He further provided a brief description of the reason why the OSC has begun the process of updating the Open Space and Recreation Plan, the contents of the plan, and plan requirements outlined by the state.

Straw Poll

Committee member David Powell presented a number of questions to the attendees in order to get them to begin to think about goals and strategies related to Newbury open space. The results are tabulated below.

- How important is the preservation of farmland?
High 18
Medium 3
Low 0

- How likely are you to support increased density in some areas in exchange for open space in others?
Very Likely 14
Likely 6
Not Likely 0

- Is the town doing enough to maintain and protect its natural resources and wildlife habitat?
Yes 0
Undecided 14
No 9

- Which do you support more - improving/maintaining existing recreation facilities or acquiring conservation lands for recreation?
Improve/maintain 16
Acquire lands 5

- If the choice was between conservation areas and fields for active recreation, which would you support?
Conservation areas 18
Recreation fields 2

- Should Newbury adopt the Community Preservation Act (to provide funding for open space acquisition and facilities improvements)?
Yes 17
Undecided 1
No 2

- What is, or will be in the next five years, Newbury's most pressing open space or recreation need?
a) More protected open space; 15
b) More space for organized recreation; 2
c) More public access to resources (beach, rivers, open space, trails, etc); 5
d) Other (list)

Goals and Objectives

Committee member David Powell walked the audience through a presentation of the five goals established by the OSC for the Open Space Plan Update. He mentioned that while these goals and their related objectives could be revised, many of them are obvious and have been reaffirmed in recent years during other planning processes (Master Plan, etc.).

Goal #1: Protect the Town's Rural Character

- 1-1: Conserve, protect and enhance the Town's strategic open space resources, with a focus on strengthening open space corridors for wildlife habitat and human recreation
- 1-2: Address growth and growth management strategies
- 1-3: Encourage new and continued agricultural uses in Town
- 1-4: Identify and preserve scenic views and historic sites
- 1-5: Protect "special places" in town, i.e., The Upper and Lower Greens, Great Meadow, Parker River mill sites, and others

David Powell described Goal #1 and the five related objectives. Dan Streeter asked the attendees if there was anything missing from this list. One attendee asked if Objective 1-3 would include working with the Triton School District to encourage them to buy school lunch goods from local farms. Dan Streeter mentioned that this was an interesting thought and that the OSC had discussed in detail the possibility of working with area towns to develop a "buy local" campaign. Residents in Newburyport have recently started a similar program. Another attendee asked if the OSC had considered a tree planting program. Committee member Martha Taylor said that this strategy was discussed during the creation of the original Open Space Plan in 2001, but the current OSC thought that this was not a high priority initiative. The attendee mentioned that the Newbury 350th Committee was considering starting such a program.

Goal #2: Protect natural resources, rivers, coastal areas, wetlands, marshland, and wildlife

- 2-1: Protect water supplies (present and future) and their associated watersheds
- 2-2: Protect the rivers and associated marshlands
- 2-3: Protect coastal areas and wetlands

This goal was briefly presented. This was followed by a detailed presentation about "Phragmites and Saltmarsh Restoration" by Committee member Geoff Walker and Eight Towns and a Bay representative Peter Phippen. They described the field mapping project they have undertaken which aims to identify and track the expansion of phragmites and other invasive plant species in the salt water marsh lands of Newbury. Geoff Walker described that one quarter of the Great Marsh (which stretches from Gloucester to Hampton, NH) is located in Newbury. The Great Marsh represents a tremendous environmental and scenic resource in Newbury. This area is under attack by phragmites and other recently introduced invasive species, which are crowding out native marsh plants, like patens. A typical healthy marsh contains about 75% patens. The phragmites have thrived and taken over other areas of the Great Marsh. Salisbury has been particularly hit hard. Expansion of phragmites and other invasives is an indicator of a marsh in transition with a manipulated hydrology. It is thought that the increase in invasives is caused in large part by tidal restriction—man-made structures like the Plum Island Bridge prevent tidal water from filling the marshes adequately.

Geoff and Peter are making trips out to map the extent of invasives in the marsh. They are finishing their catalogue of the Parker River Refuge area. They hope that this information will attract grant funds that can be used to eradicate emergent stands. They are working with the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge to control juvenile phragmites stands and are working to investigate the causes of the emerging strands.

One attendee asked if there is anything one can do to help. Geoff and Peter explained that once phragmites and other invasives take hold in a marsh, they are nearly impossible to remove. Only a coordinated, strategic and expensive marsh restoration program can return the marsh to its original makeup. Sea level rise associated with climate change might, at least initially, help this situation. Cutting and mowing of the marsh can help, but these actions require permits and therefore might be unrealistic for a single landowner to do.

One attendee commented that a lot has been presented about wetlands. What is being done about upland resources?

Another attendee mentioned that the challenge in Newbury is to get all of the various property owners, including private land trusts, private citizens, state and federal agencies to work together to address these issues that impact large resource areas, like the Great Marsh.

Goal #3: Meet the demand for active recreation

- 3-1: Develop athletic fields at Kent Way site
- 3-2: Evaluate and improve existing recreational facilities
- 3-3: Link active recreation space with passive recreation and other compatible public needs
- 3-4: Identify suitable properties that may be available for purchase, lease, or gift

David Powell and Dan Streeter described how the focus in the next five years should be to build out existing facilities, particularly the Kent Way site in Byfield. Dan mentioned that it is probably unreasonable to expect the Town to purchase new land for active recreation needs.

They also described the high level of usage of the Central Street complex. In times where usage is particularly high, like the recent weekend where the site hosted a youth lacrosse tournament, there is a conflict between active and passive users. Particularly, there was not a place to park if you wanted to use the walking trails.

One attendee asked if we could reuse the old transfer station (capped landfill). Dan and David mentioned how this is a strategy pursued by other municipalities.

Dan asked the attendees if there is a need for more playgrounds for young children. Some saw a conflict between playgrounds (a suburban icon) and a rural landscape. Another attendee mentioned that most families utilize the ample playgrounds in neighboring Newburyport.

Goal #4: Enhance passive recreation opportunities

- 4-1: Provide information to Town residents about available existing resources
- 4-2: Develop new passive recreational opportunities within existing public open space lands
- 4-3: Maintain and enhance existing recreational use of Town roadways
- 4-4: Participate in regional trail planning and development efforts
- 4-5: Improve public access to Plum Island Beach Resources
- 4-6: Increase public access points to rivers and estuaries for watercraft

Goal #4 and the associated objectives were presented by David Powell and Dan Streeter. They described the various initiatives, both locally and regionally, to create trail systems, bike trails, expand public access to Plum Island Beaches and create non-motorized boat launch points.

One attendee expressed concern about the impact on the salt water marshlands caused by additional paddlers. While some limited impact would likely occur, well planned access points can minimize impacts to the marsh.

Goal #5: Continue to actively maintain and enhance open space and recreation resources for all Town residents

- 5-1: Produce a yearly Open Space and Recreation Plan Status Report to the Town
- 5-2: Develop an annual management plan for existing recreational resources
- 5-3: Permanently protect those Town owned open space resources necessary for provision of recreational opportunities and/or preservation of natural/visual/cultural/historic resources
- 5-4: Initiate and support efforts to enact the Community Preservation Act in the Town

Goal #5 was presented. David Powell expressed how there needs to be a means of tracking progress related to open space on a yearly basis. Perhaps an annual report could be issued or a presentation could be provided at the yearly Town meeting.

Straw Poll (Second Time)

Committee member David Powell presented the same straw poll as before to see if opinions have changed over the course of the meeting. The results are tabulated below.

- How important is the preservation of farmland?

High	16
Medium	2
Low	0

- How likely are you to support increased density in some areas in exchange for open space in others ?

Very Likely	15
Likely	5
Not Likely	0

- Is the town doing enough to maintain and protect its natural resources and wildlife habitat?

Yes	0
Undecided	12
No	9

- Which do you support more - improving/maintaining existing recreation facilities or acquiring conservation lands for recreation?

Improve/maintain	11
Acquire lands	7

- If the choice was between conservation areas and fields for active recreation, which would you support?

Conservation areas	20
Recreation fields	1

- Should Newbury adopt the Community Preservation Act (to provide funding for open space acquisition and facilities improvements)?

Yes	20
Undecided	0
No	2

- What is, or will be in the next five years, Newbury's most pressing open space or recreation need?
 - a) More protected open space; 16
 - b) More space for organized recreation; 0
 - c) More public access to resources (beach, rivers, open space, trails, etc); 3
 - d) Other (list)
 - Reduce impacts of artificial light at night (light pollution)
 - Seek regional solutions: new recreation resources, like playgrounds should be shared with other Towns.
 - Increase awareness of drinking water resources
 - Present research related to the economic value of open space. Offer examples from other towns concerning the value of open space and how it helps to reduce the fiscal impacts of growth.
 - Keep in mind the impact open space/wetlands can have on flood protection/mitigation.
 - Identify areas for land swaps or transfer of development rights (related to concentrating development in smart growth areas and away from open space).

Closing

Dan Streater described how the OSC would focus efforts over the course of the next couple of months on strategies to implement the goals and objectives. The next meeting of the OSC would be on June 27th (typically, meetings are held on the fourth Wednesday of the month). All are welcome to attend and contribute to the discussion. Another larger public forum would be planned in the fall (September) to present the strategies.