

## **SECTION VI: COMMUNITY VISION**

### **6.1 DESCRIPTION OF PROCESS**

The Town of Townsend Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) Committee was formed in April 2010 and was comprised of members representing the following Town boards: Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Historic Commission, Recreation Commission, and Water Commission. Additionally, three Citizens' at Large were selected. The Town's Land Use Coordinator was assigned to assist the Committee in preparation of the Plan and to coordinate all postings in accordance with the Open Meeting Law. Committee members live throughout town and have been residents of the town for a variety of years including some members who had spent their entire lives in Townsend. The committee members represented opposing viewpoints on many of the current issues under discussion in town. The Open Meeting Law ensured that minutes and agendas were posted and special reports and requests for review were made to the existing Town Boards, most frequently to the Board of Selectman.

The first major activity of the Committee to gather public input on the Town's Open Space and Recreation needs was to develop an on-line survey. Throughout the summer of 2010 a survey was developed and refined. It was released on-line in September and many avenues of advertising were utilized. In addition, paper copies were available at the Library, Senior Center and Town Hall for those residents preferring to record their opinion manually.

The survey had eighteen questions. These questions explored opinions about: financing open space acquisition and maintenance; relevance of the 1999 OSRP Goals and Objectives; knowledge and use of existing open space parcels; natural and man-made landscape character of the town; importance of protecting wildlife habitat; the need for, use of, quality of, and improvement to recreation facilities; ways to improve walking and biking in Town; maintenance of facilities including specifying an interest in volunteering; concern and knowledge of protection measures for the Town's water supply; importance of the Town's historic assets; and four questions about the demographics of the people who responded to the survey. Though the survey was multiple choices, most questions included a place for comments. After the survey was completed the information was summarized by the committee and the survey results, the comments and the summaries were posted on the Town's Website. (See Appendix A for the Survey Sample, Survey Results and Survey Comments)

The second major activity of the Committee to gather public input on the Town's Open Space and Recreation needs was a public forum which was held on April 14, 2011. Again, the forum was well advertised through the Town's email list, in the local newspaper, at Town Hall and at the Library. There were 20 people in attendance. The agenda for the meeting included an overview of the OSRP planning, mission and process. This was followed by a review of the survey and the survey results and then the Committee led the participants through a walking tour of the Town by presenting the maps developed for the report. The second half of the Public Forum was a question and answer period where the attendees expressed those goals and objectives important to them. This information was recorded by a committee member and is available on the Town website. (See Appendix D for an agenda, minutes and PowerPoint presentation of the public forum)

### **6.2 STATEMENT OF OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION GOALS**

The overall Open Space and Recreation Goals for the Town of Townsend are:

- To maintain the quality of all surface and subsurface (aquifer) water for the current and future residents of Townsend.

- To retain the natural character and history of Townsend.
- To promote active and passive recreation opportunities for residents.
- To connect existing protected parcels for the enhancement of wildlife habitat and for the recreation needs of residents.

## **SECTION VII: ANALYSIS OF NEEDS**

### **7.1 SUMMARY OF RESOURCE PROTECTION NEEDS**

The Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) Committee identified three Resource Protection Needs. They are:

A. Protection of quality drinking water. Protection of the Town's aquifer for both public and private wells is enhanced by the continued strategic acquisition of key parcels. Additionally, other measures can protect and enhance water quality without purchasing land. These include: maintaining water volume by preventing draw down by requiring hydrologic studies as part of development plans; implementing water conservation and water ban measures; improvements to septic system functioning through more aggressive monitoring by the Board of Health and improved education to homeowners about proper care of their systems; improved surface water quality through low salt districts along state highways and proper maintenance of the stormwater catch basins.

B. Protection, enhancement and improved maintenance of our surfaces water. Strategic acquisition of parcels, especially in conjunction with the State Fisheries and Wildlife's commitment to protect the Squannacook River and its tributaries and supporting the Nashua River Watershed Association's management plan for these waterways are essential. Several of the strategies mentioned under Protection of quality drinking water are also relevant for surface waters. These include improvements to septic system functioning and improved surface water quality. Additional strategies are the control of invasive exotics through public education and outreach and promotion of Low Impact Development (LID) by the Planning Board in review of development projects.

C. Promotion of wildlife habitat underrepresented in town and the linkage of those habitats into a greenway network. Several key parcels have been identified that complete large protected areas and the purchase of these parcels should be promoted. Underrepresented habitats in town are the open fields and farmlands. Promoting Townsend's farm heritage could be accomplished through support of local farmers, development of weekly farm markets and further homeowner education about the importance of this type of wildlife habitat.

### **7.2 SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY'S NEEDS**

The Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) Committee identified five Community Needs. They are:

A. Improved Access to Recreational Lands. Improved access is both physical improvements and improvements in communication and outreach. There is a need to provide parking and safe access along the Squannacook River and at the Harbor Pond for fishing, boating and swimming. Grant funding for these improvements is a viable option. Our communication can be improved on the Town's website where information about our many hiking trails can be posted showing access

points for trails and the entire network within the town. Signage at these access points is needed and so is access for those with disabilities.

B. Enhancement of our three Historic Districts. These three districts have protected status but are in need of restoration, parking and interpretation.

C. Improvement to pedestrian and bicycle mobility through the town and especially to the schools. Opportunities for the development of new sidewalks, widened roadways, and rail trails could be pursued through grant writing.

D. New Neighborhood Recreation Facilities in underserved areas of town. New housing developments should be encouraged during the planning board review process to include tot lots and ball fields within new neighborhoods.

E. Improvement to the quality of Recreation facilities for field sports. Proper maintenance and usage of town owned and school district owned fields is a concern to users and at times is in conflict with environmental protection of these areas. An analysis of Town Recreation User Needs and existing Facilities is proposed so better management and maintenance of these fields can occur.

### **7.3 MANAGEMENT NEEDS, POTENTIAL CHANGE OF USE**

The Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) Committee identified three Resource Management Needs. They are:

A. A review by the town of current Rules, Regulations and Bylaws. Some areas where stringent rules are developed and/or enforced include: Board of Health Septic System Monitoring; Planning Board review of changes to subsurface Hydrology during permitting; State Highway Department conversion to Low Salt usage in critical water supply areas.

B. Develop a maintenance plan for the turf on town and school district fields that is sustainable throughout the year and year to year.

C. Create two new town positions to implement the goals and objectives of the OSRP; a volunteer coordinator to work with the many people interested in helping their town; and a grant writer to pursue funding for the suggested acquisitions, the site improvements, and the outreach programs suggested in the report.

### **7.4 COMMUNITY NEEDS IN RELATION TO SCORP**

According the 2012 Draft Massachusetts SCORP, the location of a home near conservation and recreation areas increases its value in Massachusetts. This is true in Townsend as homes near conservation land sell for approximately 10% more than a home that doesn't. Goal #1 of the SCORP calls for increased availability of all types of trails for recreation. Townsend has plenty of hiking and walking trails, but is lacking in biking trails. In addition, Townsend needs to connect all of our trails to create a town-wide trail system, just as the State would like to do. Goal #2 of the SCORP calls for increased availability of water-based recreation. Townsend has plenty of access to the Squannacook River for fishing and canoeing, but lacks the size of water bodies for bigger boats and power boating. In addition, Townsend does not have many swimming opportunities. Goal #3 of the SCORP calls for investment in recreation/conservation areas close to home for short visits. Townsend's extensive areas of State-owned open space throughout the town allows residents to

hike or walk very close to home. There is also a camping area and many picnic areas in the State parks. Other types of recreation areas are needed in Townsend such as skate parks and bike trails. Goal #4 of the SCORP calls for investment in racially, economically and age diverse neighborhoods. Most of Townsend's neighborhoods are mixed economically and age wise, but there is a lack of racial diversity. There are many activities for the young and middle-aged, but not much for the senior citizen group. There is a senior center for indoor activities, but no outdoor activities except for band concerts on the common, which are passive. As one of our objectives, we would like to build trails from the senior center to the major senior living areas which are relatively close to each other. There are two areas along the Squannacook River that are suitable for handicapped access for fishing, however, none of our trail areas have access for the disabled.

### **SECTION VIII: GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

The following goals and objectives were created from information gathered from the 1999 Draft Open Space Plan, the 2001 Master Plan, the 2004 EO418 Plan, a citizen survey and a public forum.

**Goal A:** Maintain high quality drinking waters both now and in the future for the residents of Townsend.

**Objectives:**

1. Protect private wells from contamination and drawdown.
2. Improve septic systems.
3. Develop water conservation and water ban bylaw.
4. Investigate instituting low salt areas in critical water supply areas.
5. Educate residents on the water cycle and how they get their drinking water.
6. Acquire parcels within Zones I and II that become available.

**Goal B:** Ensure the quality, vibrancy, and continued usage of the Squannacook River and its tributaries.

**Objectives:**

1. Improve public access to Squannacook River for fishing, canoeing, picnicking, etc.
2. Improve beach areas for swimming.
3. Protect land abutting Squannacook River.
4. Protect Squannacook from excessive road salt and sand.
5. Reduce/prevent contaminated stormwater from entering waterways.
6. Keep River and tributaries clear of trash and debris.
7. Assist the Nashua River Watershed Association in accomplishing the goals and priorities set by *The 2020 Plan*.

**Goal C:** Protect and maintain the quality of all surface waters in Townsend, including wetlands.

**Objectives:**

1. Investigate grant opportunities for management of invasive species in Harbor Pond.
2. Review location of storm drains and outfalls on Rt. 119 and request State Highway Department to remedy any issues discovered regarding stormwater contaminating surface waters.
3. Review Planning Board regulations to ensure Low Impact Development techniques are evaluated by developers when planning for subdivisions to reduce/prevent contaminated stormwater from entering waterways.

**Goal D:** Retain the natural character and natural heritage of Townsend.

**Objectives:**

1. Develop three “village areas” in the 3 historic districts and parking for same.
2. Develop replanting and maintenance plan for the Common to preserve its character.
3. Consider project to bury utilities in historic districts.
4. Protect vernal pools by certifying all located in public areas and purchasing strategic parcel(s) which contain these important wildlife habitats.
5. Improve pedestrian mobility around town. (see Goal F)
6. Protect and maintain farm land.
7. Encourage formation of a “Pretty Committee” to oversee areas of town-owned properties that can be beautified.

**Goal E:** Provide increased access to state and town owned lands deemed to hold a conservation value.

**Objectives:**

1. Increase public access to Harbor Pond.
2. Publicize trails and parking for open space.
3. Maintain existing access points.

**Goal F:** Develop and maintain active recreation facilities and maintain conservation lands.

**Objectives:**

1. Develop Volunteer Coordinator position for maintenance of recreation and conservation lands.
2. Improve safe walking and biking around town.
3. Evaluate and inventory town-owned properties suitable for recreation opportunities, including a recreation center.
4. Develop recreation facilities for all ages of residents.
5. Encourage developers to include land for recreation or construct recreation facilities in subdivisions.
6. Update recreation and conservation facilities to comply with ADA requirements.
7. Investigate need for winter sports facilities in town.
8. Pursue unknown owner parcels to add to town’s protected parcels.

**Goal G:** Establish a linked system of open space/recreation available to all town residents.

**Objectives:**

1. Protect wildlife habitat corridors and encourage linking of habitat areas.
2. Link trail systems together.
3. Purchase strategic parcel(s) to protect Old Meetinghouse Park from fragmentation.
4. Link municipal buildings and properties via trails.
5. Build up monies in the Conservation Land Fund for strategic parcel purchase.
6. Improve access to scenic areas of Townsend.

**Goal H:** Improve the school/town relationship with regard to recreation facility usage and maintenance.

**Objectives:**

1. Develop school/town committee to address field usage issues.
2. Investigate how other schools/towns collaborate (ie Pepperell).

**Goal I:** Provide information to the public regarding recreation facilities and open space.

**Objectives:**

1. Develop map of public parking areas where there is access to the Squannacook River.

2. Educate the community about the importance of protecting wildlife habitat.
3. Develop a page on Town's website devoted to open space and recreation.

**Goal J:** Generate revenue from recreation facilities and open space to offset loss of tax monies.

**Objectives:**

1. Investigate logging of town properties.
2. Reevaluate sale of unusable town properties.
3. Investigate adopting the Community Preservation Act to support open space, affordable housing, historic assets and recreation.
4. Publicize need for benefactors for development of recreation facilities.
5. Hire a town grant writer to benefit all departments and committees.