

I. Summary

As described in the following Introduction and elsewhere, this 2008 Open Space and Recreation Plan was prepared under the guidance of the Open Space Committee, and draws on prior Open Space Plans and Master Plans, on the work of consultant Katherine Doherty, on the 2005 preliminary Open Space Plan submission by Town Transportation Coordinator David M. Matton, and on the Management Plans for the major riverside holdings prepared by the Audubon Extension Service and other consultants and given to the town by the Natural Resources Trust of Bridgewater

As required by the Guidelines of the Division of Conservation Services, the Plan updates social and environmental data describing the town, examines influences on present growth and development trends, inventories existing protected conservation and recreation areas and facilities and other protected lands and, more importantly, identifies remaining lands of “Conservation and Recreation Interest.” It then examines community goals and needs, and recommends actions to save key resources. Finally, the plan summarizes near-term actions in the Five Year Action Program and reviews handicapped access issues.

The Plan finds that Bridgewater’s major resources include:

- The all encompassing Town River/Matfield River/Taunton River system tying the town together and connecting it to adjacent communities
- The combination of large peripheral Ch. 61 holdings and smaller scattered holdings within and between neighborhoods
- The Town’s remaining agricultural heritage and landscape including some major privately-owned areas now out of production which are along the Taunton River and adjacent to state agricultural holdings
- The present open space and recreational holdings
- Holdings of the Bridgewater Correctional Complex protected under Article 97 of the state Constitution
- The town’s good water resources
- Lake Nippenicket, Carver’s Pond, Skeeter Mill Pond (Flynn’s Pond) and the other water bodies.

Major factors in lost open space and threatened loss of opportunities are:

- Continuing large-lot residential develop with one-acre lots required in the extensive Res. A/B District

- Growth reflecting good highway and commuter rail access and the town's varied amenities
- In limited areas, development made possible by sewerage
- Loss of agriculture to increased land values, diminishing profitability, and zoning which allows intensive non-residential uses on some farmland.

Given these pressures, the purpose of this plan is not to flatly restrict development and growth, but to identify and preserve the specific areas which should be saved due to their value to the community, the ecosystem, and the future needs of the town.

Significant remaining opportunities include:

- Areas in the less-developed parts of town where pockets of open space remain which that could be saved and made permanent neighborhood features giving most residents nearby access to protected open space
- The extensive stream system, with protected major holdings like the Tuckerwood Conservation Area, and the intervening potential holdings and connections including construction of a footbridge from the Town River Landing to the Stiles and Hart Conservation Area.
- Remaining farmland and land with the potential for cultivation
- Lands under Chapter 61, 61A and 61B generally.

Primary recommendations for action in the next five years or implicit in previous discussions are:

Land Use/Agricultural/ Environmental Quality

- Explore means to preserve major remaining agricultural holdings using tools such as Conservation Restrictions, Agricultural Preservation Restrictions, Community Preservation Act funds, and other state resources such as the Farm Viability and Environmental Enhancement programs
- Work with the Planning Board and the Master Plan Implementation Committee to examine the zoning bylaw for possible revisions protecting agricultural land and key landscapes
- Support establishment of an Agricultural Commission to work for adaptation and preservation of local agriculture

- Identify upstream wastewater treatment plant discharges and other activities affecting water quality and flows in the Matfield, Satucket and Taunton Rivers and participate in the ongoing Upper Taunton Basin Wastewater Evaluation Study to improve such conditions.

Wildlife

- Make connections needed for functioning wildlife corridors connecting scattered habitats to give the critical mass and variety of habitat need for species survival and diversity. e.g.. from the Aldrich Road property to the Hockomock Wildlife Management Area and also from the Carver's Pond Conservation Area through town-owned land on Winter and Conant Streets, to the state-owned corridor of land off Flagg Street. The last is protected under Article 97.
- Consider Estimated or Priority habitat value or presence on the BioMap when recommending acquisitions

Open Space

- Begin acquisitions to establishing a greenway along Bridgewater's portions of the Town and Taunton Rivers in cooperation with adjacent riverside communities
- Acquire selected areas around the north end of Carver's Pond to complete a proposed trail system and to protect the shore and a potential Zone II area
- Encourage State expansion of the Bridgewater State Forest, particularly east and north along South Brook or propose its transfer to the Conservation Commission
- Identify and acquire scattered key holdings (whether of not under Ch. 61) near existing and projected development to provide permanent nearby open space for present and future neighborhoods
- Investigate the feasibility of acquiring intervening Ch. 61 land and private parcels to complete a corridor from the Toole Land to the Olde Scotland Links and act on it
- Create a coordinated parkland signage system to improve signage at the Tuckerwood, Wyman Meadow and Wildlands Trust sites and elsewhere where needed
- Acquire a swath of riverside farmland and woodlands from the Halifax line to west of Bedford Street along the Wild and Scenic Taunton River.
- Investigate the possibility of adding adjacent Water Department land and multi-resourced Taylor Farm across the Taunton River in Middleboro to an enlarged multi-community Titicut Conservation Area and act on it if feasible.

Recreation

- Complete planned team sport facilities at Crescent Street and elsewhere
- Make maximum use of the water sports potential of Lake Nippenicket and Carver's Pond and of the Town and Taunton Rivers, particularly by encouraging canoe /kayak/ small boat rental activities, and by restoring /creating sailing/kayaking/canoeing programs at the Lake or Pond
- Improve canoe/kayak launching and landing areas along the rivers as proposed in the various Management Plans
- Build the proposed footbridge from the Town River Landing to the Stiles and Hart Conservation Area
- Maintain and expand the Rainbow's End Playground and restore Jenny Leonard Park and improve its accessibility
- Build on and expand past plans to create a multi-purpose town-wide bicycle system and begin signing it, marking separate lanes where feasible, and building off-road trails, drawing on Safe Routes to School funds and other resources where consistent with other plans
- Develop a town-wide bicycle and pedestrian system which would be required of new development through revision of the Subdivision Rules and Regulations requiring such facilities
- Study and act on potential streamside trails, e.g. along South Brook from Skeeter Mill Pond to the streamside town lands at Hayward and Whitman Streets
- Create a trail from just south of the Vernon Street Chaffee Farm land to Sturtvant's Pond via the Town-owned unbuilt Emerald Lane subdivision and intervening private land if feasible.

Landscape/Historic Preservation

- Review scenic roads identified in past studies and designate the most significant ones for protection as designated Scenic Roads
- Consider expanding the Historic District or creating others.

Implementation

- Examine options for open space maintenance such as expanding and funding the role of the Parklands Stewards and/or creating a larger Parks and Recreation Department
- Systematically develop annual recommendations to the Community Preservation Committee for key acquisitions or improvements, and seek other resources from state and federal programs and non-profit entities
- Keep this plan a living document by updating key data including each Parkland Management Plan, identifying new opportunities, and revising priorities to reflect unfolding needs
- Collaborate with active non-profits and local landowners such as The Nature Conservancy, The Trust for Public Land, The Natural Resources Trust of Bridgewater, and the Wildlands Trust of SE Massachusetts, and with state agencies such as the Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Division of Fish and Wildlife, and the Division of Conservation Services.



The Taunton River

Photo by Laurie Hartrey