

**SECTION
7****ANALYSIS OF NEEDS**

The 2007 Orange Open Space and Recreation Plan Update incorporates the inventory of all the natural, scenic, and land-based recreational resources that are available in Town (Section 4), identifies the most important parcels of land that contain these resources (Section 5), and based on the community's general goals (Section 6), makes comparisons between the supply of resources and the demand (Section 7). In the following subsection, a Summary of Natural Resource Protection Needs, the environmental values that have already been addressed in Sections 3, 4 and 5 are summarized. In the Summary of Community's Needs section, the recreation and open space needs of the residents are identified, using the 2002 Master Planning Survey and specific elements of Section 3, Community Setting. Finally, in Management Needs, the obstacles to the effective resolution of these needs are addressed including organizational barriers and the most significant land use conflicts concerning open space and natural resource use.

A. SUMMARY OF NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION NEEDS

Over the past five years, Orange residents and Town officials have worked hard to address the problems associated with poorly planned development by revising their zoning bylaws and by protecting thousands of acres in collaboration with land trusts and state agencies. Still, the threat of development and of poor land use planning continues. The Town needs to continue to focus on revising its tools and working with others to protect the natural resources in Orange for its current and future residents including native plants and animals.

What Orange Residents Value about Natural Resources

Orange residents value and want to protect the quality of public drinking water supplies and ponds, lakes, streams and rivers. As is documented in the 2002 survey results (see Appendix), residents also value wildlife habitat, farmland, forests, and historical landscapes. Unfortunately, the quality of these resources is threatened indirectly through the ways humans use the landscape. New development, if poorly planned, could have a negative impact on both the quality and quantity of all these resources. Following the completion of the 2002 Open Space and Recreation Plan and the 2005 Master Plan, the Town of Orange adopted revisions to their zoning bylaw including Open Space Development.

The purpose of the Open Space Development bylaw is to encourage the permanent preservation of common open space or open land for conservation, agriculture, open space, forestry, wildlife habitat, and passive recreational use which maintains the land in an undeveloped condition. The revised bylaw allows applicants to develop a subdivision or a series of lots with access to an existing, passable public or private way that have smaller areas than allowed based on current zoning. In return for requiring less road frontage and allowing the lots to be clustered nearer to each other than what would be seen in a conventional subdivision, at least 35 percent of the total property's area would be protected from development in perpetuity. This protected open space would not include acreage that is environmentally sensitive like wetlands and steep slopes. The protected open space could be owned by the town, by a homeowners association, by a conservation land trust, or by a private individual.

The surrounding forests and riparian areas in Orange contain resources that residents believe should be protected. According to the 2002 Master Plan Survey, over 55 percent of survey respondents stated that it was important to protect wildlife habitat or water quality values associated with the Millers and Tully Rivers, Lake Mattawa, wetlands, and forested areas. Also, a majority of the respondents felt that it was also vital to protect other natural resources: farmland (61%) and public drinking water supplies (81%).

Fortunately, there is a great degree of connectivity between the permanently protected lands in Orange. A lot has changed in five years thanks to the leadership and vision of Orange landowners and the efforts of regional land trusts like Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust and the New England Forestry Foundation. Now when you look across the hillsides of Orange to the west and north—along Chestnut, Beech, and Temple Hills—many of these forests are protected from development and provide public access. Still, wildlife habitat, the potential for having extended hiking trails, the quality of scenic views and vistas, and the rural character of Orange as a whole will be diminished if future development fragments these landscapes further.

Recent Natural Resource Protection Actions in Orange

The recent revisions to the Town's Zoning Bylaws, which resulted in an increase in the minimum lot size from one acre to two acres in Zone D, the Rural Residential District, resulted in halving the number of new building lots allowed in that district. And with the new Open Space Residential Development bylaw, developers will likely find it much easier to create more compact neighborhoods while protecting nearby open space. Finally, over the past five years, there has been an increase in protected lands of approximately 4,000 acres.

Even with these efforts, over 7,000 new building lots could be developed in town. Many of these would be developed along existing roads. Where subdivisions would be approved, many of these could be of a conventional design with lots spread out, roads without connections to each other, and far from village centers and their services.

New home construction along the Town's major roads could also have the result of diminishing the quality of significant historic landscapes and the future use of prime farmland soils. The value of prime agricultural soils is negated once the land is developed. Residents have shared through this open space planning process the desire to protect the best of the remaining active farmland.

Current Natural Resource Issues and Needs

The impacts of global climate change are not lost on Orange residents and town officials. They see there are real needs that relate to how development in the village and in the rural areas can help, not hinder, the ability of the Town to maintain the its rural character and sense of community while promoting energy efficiency. What are the ways the Town can facilitate access to natural areas and greenway areas in town? How can the airport, the existing trail systems, and open space properties be publicized so that they are used more often by locals? How can the town continue to protect forests and farmlands? Many of these needs are very much related. Identifying the best methods for achieving these objectives requires on-the-ground coordination. This is discussed further under Management Needs.

Like many communities in New England, the Town of Orange is experiencing the negative impacts associated with different forms of pollution whose agents have originated from both local and regional sources. Often local residential, commercial, and industrial development can have the result of drastically increasing the amount of runoff. Runoff is the term used to describe the action of precipitation after it has contacted an impervious surface like cement, asphalt, roofs, driveways, lawns, and compacted soil. The more impervious surfaces that exist within a town, the more runoff will occur during a storm event. A result of this runoff is that the rainwater picks up pollutants that include auto-related petro-chemicals, home-based pesticides, fertilizers, pet feces, and chemicals deposited through air pollution, and flushes them into our rivers, streams, and lakes. These pollutants can also leach into our groundwater. Some rainwater naturally permeates the soil to become part of the groundwater flow reaching streams and wetlands, or to become part of the aquifer. As the amount of impervious surfaces increases with new development, less water reaches its natural destination. One example of a runoff-related source of pollution is the municipal salt shed located on the banks of the Millers River. There is much agreement that this shed needs to be relocated so that any runoff can be more easily contained without threatening surface and groundwater.

B. SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY'S NEEDS

Planning for a community's open space and recreation needs must work to satisfy the present population's desires for new facilities, spaces, and services and also interpret and act on the available data to prepare for the future needs of the Orange citizenry.

Access to Recreational Areas

The Orange Ad Hoc Open Space and Recreation Planning Committee considers access to recreational areas an important issue. This includes access to: 1) village parks, 2) ADA accessible recreational resources, 3) trail systems and sidewalks, and 4) rivers and ponds via boat ramps. Rivers and other bodies of water in Orange represent natural and recreational resources for Orange residents that provide exciting destinations, unique travel ways, and opportunities for people with physical disabilities to enjoy the great outdoors.

Parks

Most of land protected in Orange is located within the more rural portions of town. Many of the acres protected are located within a “regional greenway”, which was identified on maps in the earlier Orange Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). However, there is still a lack of open space, parklands, and recreation facilities close to village centers where people live. For example, Packard Pond is privately-owned and managed with restricted public access. Access to the East Branch of the Tully River and the Millers River is limited to three boat launches. There is one small public beach in Town, on the south end of Lake Mattawa.

Population projections made in the 1990s describe increases in both school-aged children and senior citizens during this decade (2000-2010), which indicate a need for pedestrian accessible parks, sports fields, and playgrounds near village centers. The East Main Street – North Main Street area, as well as other densely populated areas of Orange Center, need additional small play lots and flat paved areas for basketball, skating, etc. close to where the children live. Because subdivisions have been developed in both village and regional districts in Orange, one way to increase the number of pocket parks and the connectivity of parks, sidewalks, and trails, is by revising the Town’s Subdivision Rules and Regulations in a manner that requires or encourages these elements through the use of incentives. Playgrounds, basketball courts, paved surfaces for skateboarding, and more wooded and open parkland are some of the resources that are needed. If some of these facilities are provided through the development of future subdivisions, there will need to be a mechanism in place to fund and manage the maintenance of the recreational and open space resources, as these areas may be on private property. One way that this need may be met in the village north of the Millers River is through the planned renovation of Dexter Park School and Recreation Area. This area will include new recreation and sports fields and a new school library with easy access to the general public. Another way to provide additional access to recreational resources is by developing a boat ramp for Lake Rohunta in addition to the state ramp at Eagleville Pond.

Trails

Anecdotal evidence tells us that people have responded very well to trails that were recently opened for public use in the Chestnut Hill Neighborhood Area. There is interest in linking trail systems on public and privately-owned lands and in finding ways of increasing options for residents to use alternative forms of transportation. One example of trail projects with renewed interest is the development of a set of land and river-based trails along the Millers River Greenway, which would provide for a canoe trail and a bicycle trail between Orange and Athol town centers.

Sidewalks and trails on roads and through wooded areas both for pedestrians and cyclists are very important. By providing access to trails and natural resources here in Orange, people from the region might be inclined to recreate in Orange, which would aid the local economy as well as support the health and well-being of residents of all ages.

Whatever the type of trail, there needs to be an effort to educate trail users. The town could use trail head signs, boxes, and kiosks to communicate smart trail use principles that deal with trail safety and orienteering, communication, emergency preparedness and response, notification, litter and “leave no trace” best practices. Some trail signs could identify which trails could be used by which mode of transportation in which season.

ADA Accessible

People who are physically handicapped are challenged to find conservation lands and spaces that are accessible in Orange. All the lands owned by the Conservation Commission are forests and wetlands, and are inaccessible and without any facilities for the handicapped. There is a need for open spaces and parks that are accessible to the physically handicapped and the elderly. The Riverfront Park is one recreational area that is accessible to the physically handicapped. Another possible improvement would be an accessible entrance and facilities at Lake Mattawa Beach.

C. MANAGEMENT NEEDS

Orange is fortunate to have a great number of organizations interested in the environment and the economy in, and around, Orange. There are a number of state and regional environmental organizations sponsoring land and natural resource protection projects including the New England Forestry Foundation, Mount Grace Conservation Land Trust, the Trustees of Reservations, Massachusetts Audubon Society, Department of Conservation and Recreation, Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, the Department of Agricultural Resources, Harvard University, the US Army Corps of Engineers, the Millers River Greenway Committee, and the Millers River Watershed Council. There are also non-profit groups like the Orange Revitalization Partnership supporting projects like the Millers River Riverfront Park.

There may be a need for the Town to have the ability to facilitate and coordinate the activities that occur within Orange so that they most benefit local residents. An appointed Open Space Committee could be given the responsibilities to act as the liaison to these organizations reporting back to Town officials as necessary. Similarly, if Town officials were kept abreast of these local and regional efforts, there would be more opportunities for cooperation with adjoining towns.

The main management need the Town of Orange is experiencing is the need for the town to be more proactive in planning, which might include the establishment of a planning department. One challenge for Orange and many towns is how to consistently encourage economic development in ways that build opportunities for local businesses to expand, capitalize on the attributes of the North Quabbin region that set it apart from other destinations in Western Massachusetts, and increase the strength and resiliency of the community.

Eco-tourism as promoted through the North Quabbin Woods Program is one avenue that the town could pursue for economic development among small local retail, service, and light manufacturing businesses. The Town could work more closely with the Chamber of Commerce and the New England Forestry Foundation to attract visitors to the Riverfront Park, trail systems, the future Millers River Greenway, various entertainment events at the Town Hall throughout the year, the Orange Municipal Airport and to seasonal events including Starry, Starry Night and the Garlic Festival, and help to identify all of the local businesses which could benefit from these events.

The North Quabbin Region is different from other regions of Western Massachusetts in one critical way which could be better taken advantage of: there are significant tracts of forestland, many of them privately-owned and open to the public. By continuing to support the protection of privately-owned forest and farmland, the Town is helping to retain a landscape that others will seek out for appreciation, recreation, and possibly for relocation. People drawn to the landscapes of Orange may be more willing to support their conservation.