

SECTION 7 – ANALYSIS OF NEEDS

Foxborough is in the enviable position of having large areas of open space within its borders, rivers running through it and large open bodies of water. Many communities in the same region do not have these outstanding amenities. However, despite these features, Foxborough still has environmental concerns. Ensuring clean drinking water despite possible development near wells, remedying pollution from an industrial past, balancing water quality and access, augmenting recreational facilities and improving connectivity between large open spaces are among Foxborough's priorities.

Since the Town faces serious staffing and financial challenges, it has been difficult to address the diverse needs for conservation land, parks, playgrounds and outdoor sports facilities. Although some progress has been made the past several years to enhance several key sites, it is recognized that more efforts to supplement Town resources are needed.

In the past, the Town has been fortunate to have had the State's assistance in ensuring the protection of critical open spaces via the State's Self Help Program. The Conservation Commission and Recreation Department have been exploring various other income sources including private donations, grants and volunteer fundraising. Working cooperatively, they strive to think outside the box to come up with new and innovative ways to meet the Town's ever-growing needs during these difficult financial times.

A. Summary of Resource Protection Needs

Foxborough residents expressed the needs of the community and what is important to them through public forums (see Sections 2B and 6A) and Open Space and Recreation Surveys conducted in 2004 and 2009. Although the survey size was smaller in 2004 (100 in 2004 compared to 250 in 2009), the priorities remained very much the same. A number of written comments and opinions also were received, both positive and negative. The OSRP Committee collated the responses, categorized them by theme and incorporated them into the results analysis, included in Appendix B.

Ninety-seven percent (97%) of the 2009 Survey respondents indicated they felt it was important to preserve open space, one-half of one percent (.05%) were unsure and two percent (2%) felt it was not important. Seventy percent (70%) would support the Town's acquisition of land for recreation or open space purposes. Given this support, the Town should have a clear set of goals and priorities in place, including the following.

1. Protect Water Supply and Quality to Ensure Adequate Future Water Resources

Use acquisition and regulation to protect both current and potential public water supplies, as well as the town's other water resources, including its wetlands, water bodies and waterways. Pursue efforts to educate the public and to monitor local activities that could have an impact on water quality, to ensure the cooperation of everyone. Encourage the use of earth-friendly ways to landscape with native plant species, maintaining natural vegetated buffer strips along wetlands and water bodies and by landscaping with plants that require less water. Reduce the use of fertilizers and other chemicals, adjacent to wetlands and surface waters where fertilizer-laden runoff can enter these systems via overland flow or stormwater catch basins.

2. Link Open Spaces

Follow an overall scheme intended to create a more complete, coherent open space pattern. Favor the acquisition of conservation areas which extend existing parcels of protected land and acquire natural corridors between significant protected land masses for paths, horse trails and bike ways.

3. Preserve Ecological Examples

Preserve a range of ecological examples including major wetlands, water edge areas, and upland wildlife habitats. Provide public access and opportunities for environmental education in these areas.



4. Protect Significant Natural Features

Significant natural features, including hilltops, steep slopes, major rock outcrops, unusual geological formations, vernal pools, riparian areas and stands of vegetation should be preserved by guiding development away from unique and fragile areas.

5. Maintain Community Character

Implement measures to preserve the open spaces and scenic vistas that give the Town its character. Maintain a balance between developed lands and open space. Enhance the Town's visual character by guiding development to preserve open spaces in environmentally sensitive locations.

6. Assure Storm Safety

Use acquisition and regulation to reduce the threat of natural disaster, such as flood damage, to developed property. Eliminate river drainage bottlenecks to help alleviate flooding, for example, in the Cocasset River area, on Morse Street and Mill Street.

7. Facilitate Open Space Management

For ease of management, plan conservation areas that are at least five acres in size, except under special circumstances where smaller areas are of particular strategic or environmental resource significance.

8. Use Alternative Land Protection Techniques

To secure public access and to protect natural resources, pursue conservation techniques such as deed restrictions or easements and special zoning, as alternatives to acquisition. Encourage private ownership of conservation areas through acquisition by private groups and through public acquisition of less than full fee in land.

9. Assure Effective Coordination

Many organizations own and/or manage and use open space areas in Foxborough, including several Town agencies, the state government, nonprofit groups, and private foundations. Coordination and cooperative planning can lead to efficient economics between these organizations. In addition, open space planning by adjacent towns and regional and State agencies affects Foxborough. The Town should work cooperatively and maintain open communication with all levels of government to ensure integrated conservation efforts and planning.

10. Be Equitable

Pay for land rights taken. Use open space acquisition to encourage good land use practices and to shape, provide contrast for, and serve community interest.

11. Education

Make use of open space lands and facilities as interpretive opportunities to encourage an appreciation for the community's resources. Maintain continuing outreach and education to provide information to residents about the objectives of the Town's conservation programs. Sponsor and encourage youth participation in conservation efforts.

B. Summary of Community's Needs

1. Provide Adequate Facilities

The total acreage in public parks and other recreation spaces should be adequate to meet residents' needs. Recreation opportunities should not be constrained by a shortage of facilities. Recreation areas should be evenly distributed throughout Town in order to serve each neighborhood, and should be properly maintained.

2. Make Good Use of Scarce Resources

Make possible the wisest use of available resources through cooperative planning and coordination. Do not duplicate or overlap other recreation services in the community or region. Use municipal parks, public buildings, and school plants for multiple purposes on a scheduled basis. Utilize fully all existing facilities, including those, which are private, commercial, and nonprofit. Encourage contributions by volunteers. Upon request, assist community organizations and other interested groups in their recreational efforts.

3. Create a Facility Management Plan

Develop and maintain recreational facilities in accordance with an officially adopted plan. Endeavor to regularly fund capital improvement projects.

4. Town-Wide Map

Many residents were unaware of the locations of town conservation areas. A town-wide map should be created that shows significant open space areas, access points and safe parking areas. In addition, a detailed map of each conservation area that includes trails and natural features should be made available at a kiosk or map box at each access point.

5. Provide Opportunities For All

Provide passive and active recreational opportunities and services for all age groups; to the ill, handicapped, and hospitalized; and to family groups and town organizations. Make recreational opportunities available within the financial abilities of all people.

6. Provide Diverse Programs

Provide a wide array of programs for all ages including the ‘twens, adults and senior citizens.

7. Offer a Range of Activities

Provide a wide range of individual choices and types of activities such as music, arts and crafts, nature and camping, drama, and sports. The recreation program should not be devoted primarily to a single type of activity, such as athletic games and sports.

8. Provide Year-Round Programs

Offer recreation services and opportunities for all 12 months, and for different periods of free time.

9. Encourage Personal Growth

Provide activities of a progressive nature; few people continue to be interested in an activity unless it affords goals or objectives. Offer possibilities for varying degrees of skill, attitudes, aptitudes, and capabilities. Provide outlets for creative expression. Include activities that carry over the leisure skills and interests developed in school.

10. Encourage Social Growth

Furnish outlets for satisfying group activity, enabling people to develop the social qualities, to experience fellowship, and to develop good citizenship.

11. Ensure Safety

Ensure safe and healthful conditions for recreation activity that conform to recognized program standards.

12. Payson Road Facility

The Recreation Department has such a high level of participation in its sports programs (children and adults) that additional space is an issue for both indoor and outdoor activities. The Recreation Department’s goal is to have a fully functional recreational facility which will help alleviate current field space issues and hope to add at least one multi use and lacrosse field. Although development of the Payson Road facility has run into economic barriers, current measures include coordination between town boards to bring this project to completion quickly and efficiently. This site is also being considered as a potential site for an off leash dog park.

C. Management Needs, Potential Change of Use

In addressing the State-mandated *Community Action Statement – Identification of Municipal Needs*, the Conservation Commission and Recreation Department have concluded that the following techniques, combined with an aggressive land-acquisition program, will allow the Town to maintain and improve the small-town, semi rural character and quality of life in Foxborough.

1. Adoption of the Community Preservation Act

Strategy 3E of *MetroFuture* calls for increased participation in the Community Preservation Act (CPA). The Town should consider adopting the CPA, which is a state law that allows towns in Massachusetts to create a dedicated fund for the preservation of open space and historical resources and for the creation of community housing and outdoor public recreation areas. To date, more than 40 percent (147) of the towns in Massachusetts have adopted the CPA. The CPA’s dedicated fund has two sources:

- a surcharge of one to three percent on local property tax bills and
- an annual disbursement of funds from the State Community Preservation Trust Fund, which distributes funds each October to communities that have adopted the CPA.

The Community can also consider adopting exemptions from the CPA surcharge for:

- the first \$100,000 of taxable value of residential real estate and/or
- low income households and low and moderate income senior households.

Foxborough does not currently have sufficient revenue to easily protect open space through land acquisition or to create additional recreational facilities. Some funding could be used from CPA funds, if passed, while regional land trusts could offer additional assistance for protecting land. The preservation of existing unprotected open space in Foxborough depends on residents organizing and using available opportunities, such as the CPA.

2. Communication and Collaboration; Coordinated Review Process

Effective lines of communication among residents of Foxborough, their local government, and the Commonwealth are needed if any of the open space and recreation goals are to be achieved. Effective education of residents and collaborative partnerships are needed to help realize goals.

Foxborough, like many New England towns, has many planning and leadership committees. The Board of Selectmen, the Planning Board, the Conservation Commission, the Board of Assessors, the Advisory Committee, the Zoning Board of Appeals, the Committee for Disabled Citizens, the Council on Aging and Human Services, the Board of Health, the Board of Recreation, the Board of Water and Sewer Commissioners, the School Committee and the Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee all make important decisions about Foxborough's future.

Long-term planning will require cooperation and collaboration among Town officials in order to guide Foxborough's future of development and green spaces by working to better coordinate the land development review process. This would benefit all Town boards, while at the same time streamlining the permit process for the development community.

3. Develop a Cohesive Strategy to Evaluate Open Space Lands for Sale

- a. Once a communication network between the appropriate Town boards and committees has been established, the Town should follow a review process and standardized criteria for evaluating whether the Town should purchase lands that become available for sale. As the Town cannot purchase all properties that are put up for sale, there should be a formal process to guide the decision making.

Specifically, the ranking system (see Appendix A and subsection b, below) should include key factors in open space protection. The criteria to be used for determining whether or not the town may wish to pursue a land acquisition should include the following:

1. The property is abutting other permanently protected or Town-owned land;
 2. The land is within the water protection district (Zone I or II);
 3. The land is greater than 10 acres;
 4. It contains rare species habitat;
 5. It contains wetland or floodplain;
 6. It contains one or more vernal pools;
 7. The land is located within the Canoe River Area of Critical Environmental Concern;
 8. The land could provide access for hiking, boating, canoeing, fishing or access to a major water body or river;
 9. It contains historical, cultural or archaeological significance;
 10. It contains significant scenic landscapes or vistas;
 11. The land is listed specifically within the current Open Space and Recreation Plan; or
 12. The land is actively used for agricultural purposes.
- b. Parcel Ranking System - When the Town is interested in purchasing a parcel of land, or if it is offered the right of first refusal for a Ch. 61 property (see below), the property should be evaluated and receive one point for each of the 12 criteria listed above.
 - If the property meets greater than six of the criteria, it will be ranked Highest Priority.

- If the property meets a minimum of six of the criteria, it will be ranked as a Priority.
- If the property meets a minimum of three of the criteria, it will be ranked as a Consideration.

A parcel might be ranked as only a Consideration, but could contain other attributes that would warrant a purchase despite a relatively low ranking. The parcel ranking system is simply a tool for determining acquisition which is used to provide a qualitative value to the property and to avoid any appearance of a conflict of interest. It is a method of looking objectively at the benefits of adding a parcel of land to the open space inventory.



4. **Chapter 61, 61A, 61B, Tax Title Lands, Farmlands**

These land classification programs are designed to encourage the preservation and enhancement of open space, including agriculture, recreation and forest lands.

They offer significant local tax benefits to property owners who are willing to make a long-term commitment to land preservation. In exchange for these benefits, the town is given the right to recover some of the land owner's tax benefits if the land is going to be removed from Ch. 61 by giving them the option to purchase the property (right of first refusal) within 120 days after a bona fide offer to purchase has been received by the owner.

A "right of first refusal" is an agreement by an owner to offer a property to a specified individual or organization at the same price and terms as those in a future bona fide offer to purchase received by the owner.

Frequent communication between the Board of Selectmen, Conservation Commission, Assessor's and Treasurer's offices should be encouraged to ensure that appropriate Town officials are notified in a timely fashion when tax title land, lands taxed under Chapter 61, 61A or 61B or farmlands are available for purchase to ensure the Town's 120-day right of first refusal.

5. **Land Management**

Town-owned land management will be very important if a town-wide system of greenway corridors and paths is to be created and maintained. Handling trail maintenance, dealing with use and abuse, and negotiating with landowners for access across private land are just a few of the many situations needing direct management.

Open space decisions need to have a cohesive structure to ensure that the vision of green space in Foxborough is a priority. A unified management system will help Foxborough to reach its goals for water quality, recreation opportunities, and green connectivity. By adopting the Open Space and Recreation Plan, Foxborough will have a cohesive vision to guide the town toward its open space and recreation goals.

6. **Increase Residents' Awareness of the Town's Open Space and Recreational Assets**

A majority of the 2009 survey respondents reported that they were not aware of the complete range of Foxborough's open space and recreation assets, including the location of these areas. The Town needs to develop strategies to educate residents about their local assets.

One way to increase residents' awareness of the Town's open spaces is through Friends Groups that can assist both the Conservation Commission and the Recreation Department by developing hiking trails and trail maps, promoting outdoor activities, working to help maintain town-owned open spaces, and acting as watchdogs to monitor open space properties for vandalism. All of this can be accomplished without stressing the Town's budget through Friends Groups.

7. **Specific Needs of the Conservation Commission and Recreation Department**

The following lists were created by the Conservation Commission and Recreation Department:

- Staffing Needs
 - (1) Full-time Conservation Manager

- b. Resolve Conflicts of Use Issues
 - (a) Siting of Dog Park
 - (b) Illegal use of motorized vehicles on Town land
 - (c) Excessive noise
 - (d) Nuisance odors
 - (e) Trash/unauthorized dumping
 - (f) Land maintenance
- c. Property Rental Issues
 - (a) Conservation rental homes (4)
 - (b) Recreation Department rental home (log cabin)
 - (c) Rental procedures and forms needed (i.e. RFP, lease, usage rules, etc.)



A more specific breakdown of the above needs is included in the Seven Year Action Plan (Section 9). (Most of these areas were not pertinent to survey questions other than water/resource protection issues and availability of recreation facilities.)

8. Comparison of SCORP's Southeastern Region to Foxborough Survey Results

The Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), *Massachusetts Outdoors 2006*, update of the SCORP 2000, five-year plan, was developed to enable the State to be eligible for federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grants. This plan can be found online at: www.mass.gov/eea/docs/eea/dcs/massoutdoor2006.pdf

The SCORP survey, although worded differently than Foxborough's survey, determined that the Southeastern Region's (Foxborough's region) most popular individual activities and percents are:

Swimming	60%
Sightseeing, tours and events	57%
Walking	57%
Playground activities	38%
Fishing	34%
Hiking	33%
Golfing	24%
Watching wildlife/nature study	22%
Biking	10-20%
Skiing	10-20%
Boating and canoeing	10-20%

Foxborough's survey, in comparison, asked respondents to indicate the need for the following types of recreational facilities; the assumption might be that these are the most popular activities in Foxborough:

Playgrounds	52%
Hiking	52%
Cross country skiing	49%
Boating and sailing	42%
Biking Trails	36%
Public swimming areas	34%
Kayaking and canoeing	34%

And prioritized the five main recreational needs as follows:

Conservation areas	46%
Public access to water	44%
Bike trails	42%
Swimming pool	39%
Hiking and skiing trails	33%