



Morrison Park & Field, East Street



Prout Farm/Clapboardtree Meadow

Charlie Donahue, Paula Jacobson, Brian Gorman as Planning Board Liaison

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

BACKGROUND

Open space and recreation areas are highly valued in Westwood. The Town's open space and recreational facilities provide numerous benefits for the community, including health, social opportunities, climate resiliency, civic engagement, and enjoyment of the beauty of nature, all contributing to the Town's character. During the early stages of the public input process, Westwood residents spoke about open space, natural resources, and recreation facilities as treasured assets that make Westwood truly special.

The visioning session heard a strong desire for a community recreation center and expanding opportunities for active and passive recreation both indoors and outdoors. When asked to identify favorite things about living in Westwood, 47% of the 811 survey responders selected open space and trails. Walking trails, bike paths, and sidewalks were identified in the survey as items residents would like to see increased, chosen by 43%, 42%, and 62% of respondents, respectively. Eighty percent indicated protecting more open space is a high priority and 46% listed providing more recreational facilities for formal activities and organized sports as a "very important" or "important" goal.¹

Massachusetts recognizes the importance of open space and recreation and encourages municipalities to have an Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) updated every seven years. In 2019, the Select Board and Planning Board voted to approve an updated plan for Westwood. The 2019 OSRP was completed by a committee, assisted by a consultant, working collaboratively with the community. A survey was conducted and 809 responders identified the following facilities as the top five priorities for the coming years: ice hockey rink at 39%, trails at 37%, a dog park at 31%, a community center at 30%, and an outdoor swimming facility at 25%.²

The approved 2019 OSRP provides the foundation for this element of the Comprehensive Plan. Natural resources such as water and wildlife are discussed in more detail in the Natural and Cultural Resources section.

A 2018 visioning session and corresponding survey for the Open Space and Recreation Plan found support for improved conservation land management, for universal design to encourage

access and enjoyment by people with disabilities, and for additional recreation facilities, particularly an indoor recreation center. Universal design is a concept that supports features that exceed the minimum accessibility design requirements such as textured surfaces along walks, audio, ropes along trails, and braille on signage, all to accommodate people with a wider range of abilities.

Open Space

Approximately 1,802 acres totaling 25% of 7,155 acres of land in Westwood can be characterized as “open space.” The term “open space” refers to conservation land, forested land, recreation land, agricultural land, corridor parks and amenities such as small parks, green buffers along roadways, or an undeveloped area that is owned by an organization devoted to conservation. The term includes land that is legally protected for conservation or recreational interest, and similar land that is not protected against changes in use or development. Some open space is used for passive activities such as walking and hiking, while others include active recreational uses such as soccer, tennis, or baseball. In this section, the term refers to the broader notion of land that is committed to some degree of passive or active use.

Westwood has 981 acres of protected open space listed in Table X and owned by the Town and private owners, including parcels preserved within open space residential subdivisions. The Westwood Conservation Commission holds the majority of protected lands with 557 acres followed by the Westwood Select Board with 73 acres, mostly Lowell Woods and the Sandy Valley area. Protected land is property that is protected from development through a conservation or deed restriction, or by Article 97 of the Massachusetts Constitution. For the purposes of the Town's OSRP, protected land must have legal protection that includes public ownership and/or conservation restrictions recorded at the Registry of Deeds. Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B land is not classified as protected since the level of protection is more limited. Chapter 61 is the section of state law for forestry or woodlands, Chapter 61A is land used for agriculture, and Chapter 61B land is used for recreation. A significant portion, 821 acres, of Westwood's open space is unprotected with no guarantee that it will remain undeveloped.

Hale accounts for 521 acres of unprotected open space as shown in the below table. Hale is a private non-profit educational institution and a beloved resource for walking, biking, running, and swimming. Many Westwood residents as well as people throughout Greater Boston participate in Hale's year-round educational programs and its popular youth summer camps. However, most residents do not realize that Hale is unprotected land and how vulnerable it is.

Other unprotected lands include public recreation areas such as Town fields, playgrounds, and school properties as well as private recreation facilities such as Xaverian High School and Chapter 61 Land, which includes the Dedham Country and Polo Club, the Charles Bean farm on Clapboardtree Street, and large properties on Hartford Street. Table X and Map O1 show the protected and unprotected open space and recreation land in Westwood. During the inventory review stage of the Open Space and Recreation Plan and the public engagement process, many of the open space and conservation areas were deemed to be in poor condition.³

The Westwood Land Trust was established as a 501(c)(3) public charity organization in 1999 to preserve open space and natural resources and help retain Westwood's rural character and native wildlife. The Land Trust has permanently protected over 220 acres since its inception. Most of the property is privately owned and protected through conservation restrictions. 50 acres have been conveyed to the Town.⁴

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Table X: Protected and unprotected open space

Westwood Open Space – PROTECTED		
Ownership	Acreage	Percentage of Westwood's Total Land
Conservation Commission	557.27	7.27%
Select Board	72.99	1%
Dedham-Westwood Water District (DWWD)	17.20	.2%
High Ridge Homeowners Association	35.14	.45%
Powisset Estates Homeowners Association	9.61	.12%
Chase Estates Homeowners Association	1.53	.02%
Neponset River Land Holding	17.46	.23%
Westwood Land Trust Owned	4.68	.06%
Private land with Conservation Restrictions	186.7	2.6%
Duncan M. McFarland	27.45	.36%
Groundhog Land Corporation	7.16	.09%
G.D. Fox Meadow, LLC	7.63	.09%
NW Land LLC	26.40	.34%
Gobbi FLP Trust	4.05	.05%
C/S Westview LLC	6.60	.09%
Subtotal	981.87	13.72%
Westwood Open Space & Recreation – UNPROTECTED		
Ownership	Acreage	Percentage of Westwood's Total Land
Hale	521	7.28%
Public Recreation Properties	120.33	1.6%
Private Recreation Properties	82.82	1.1%
Chapter 61 Land	11.23	.15%
Chapter 61A Land	23.53	.30%
Chapter 61B Land	62.06	.8%
Subtotal	820.97	11.47%
TOTAL	1,802.84	25.2%

Recreation

A variety of recreational opportunities exists in Westwood. In this section recreation land refers to areas that are primarily devoted to recreational uses such as man-made facilities including parks and playgrounds, school yards, country clubs and golf courses, picnic areas, and passive recreation areas which may be publicly or privately owned. In this plan, Hale is considered in the open space section above.

In Westwood, public recreational facility management responsibilities are shared between the Recreation Department and the School Department. Maintenance is done by the Department of Public Works. Table X lists the public and private recreation facilities in Town. School properties provide most of the recreational opportunities as fields are often located on school property. Other properties managed by the Recreation Department include Morrison Park, the fields at Sheehan, the School Street Playground, June Street Playground, the Lion's Club Tot Lot, and the indoor swimming pool facility at the high school. In the Open Space and Recreation Plan's inventory of recreation properties, the school and Recreation Commission properties are generally categorized as being in good and excellent condition.⁵ The former Westwood Lodge property at 45 Clapboardtree Street was redeveloped into age-restricted housing as an open space residential development. The open space on the private property is to be maintained by the homeowner's

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association and the multi-purpose playing field was conveyed to the Town for continued recreation use.

Table X: Public and private recreation facilities.

PUBLIC			
Property	Area Acreage	Management Agency	Use
School St. Playground	1.80	Recreation Commission	Baseball, Softball, Playground
Morrison Park	3.76	Recreation Commission	Baseball, Softball, Basketball
June St. Playground	3.08	Recreation Commission	Fields, Playground
Lion's Club Tot Lot	2.29	Recreation Commission	Playground
Sheehan Fields	6.25	Recreation Commission	Baseball
Swimming Pool at High School	NA	Recreation Commission	Swimming Pool
Deerfield School	8.54	School Committee	Baseball, Softball, Basketball, Playground
Hanlon School	8.59	School Committee	Baseball, Softball, Basketball, Playground
Thurston Middle School	17.44	School Committee	Baseball, Softball, Multipurpose Field
Downey School	9.81	School Committee	Baseball, Multipurpose, Basketball, Tennis, Playground
Sheehan School	4.27	School Committee	Baseball, Multipurpose Field, Basketball, Tennis, Playground
Martha Jones School	8.89	School Committee	Baseball, Basketball, Playground
Westwood High School	42.9	School Committee	Baseball, Football, Multipurpose Field, Basketball, Tennis, Outdoor Track, Lacrosse
PRIVATE			
Property	Area Acreage	Management Agency	Use
Former Westwood Lodge, The Green Company	Field Use – 2.8 acres Open Space Area – portion of the 7 acres ⁶	Field – conveyed to Town for Public Recreation, Private HOA for Open Space	Multipurpose Field (soccer, lacrosse)
Norfolk Golf Club	43.96 (full site)	Private Club	Golf, 9-hole course
Xaverian High School	25.97 (full site)	Xaverian Brothers	Baseball, Football, Tennis, Outdoor Track
Life Time Athletic	7.89 (full site)	Life Time Fitness	Pool, Basketball, Fitness

The Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee spent a year developing the 150-page Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) adopted by the Planning Board in 2019 and which serves as the foundation for the following recommended actions.

In the Committee's deliberations of how the plan's recommendations might be funded, adoption of the Community Preservation Act (CPA) was identified as a funding source that deserves consideration. The Community Preservation Act is a state law (M.G.L. Chapter 44B) designed as a smart growth tool to encourage municipalities to implement projects for conservation of open space, athletic fields, historical preservation, and affordable housing. As of November 2019, 176 cities and towns have adopted the CPA in the 20 years since the program's creation. Similar

communities that have adopted the CPA are Concord, Needham, Lexington, Acton, Wellesley, Wayland, Carlisle, Holliston, Hopkinton, Millis, and Norwood.

If adopted by the Town, two sources of funds are available for eligible projects. The first is the Community Preservation Fund made up of revenue from a surcharge on residential and/or commercial property taxes. The town may vote a surcharge of up to 3% of the real estate tax, and the first \$100,000 of the assessed property value may be exempted. Most towns have chosen to enact a 1% surcharge. If a given property is taxed \$6,000 a year, the CPA contribution would be an additional \$60 a year. This would generate approximately \$700,000 a year of funding available for CPA projects in Westwood.⁷

A second source of money is the State's Community Preservation Trust Fund which provides matching funds for CPA projects. Fees paid to the Registry of Deeds for recording deeds and plans become available to CPA communities as matching funds for these projects.

A sample of improvements and investments that other towns have made is included in the resource exhibits. Implementation of the CPA requires Town Meeting adoption. Upon adoption, a Community Preservation Committee is established with appointed representatives from the Conservation Commission, Historical Commission, Planning Board, Housing Authority, and Recreation Commission. The Committee would be responsible for setting priorities for funding and recommendations to Town Meeting for individual projects.

Overall, Westwood residents desire improved maintenance and awareness of conservation and open space, and additional recreation facilities, particularly indoor recreation such as a community facility to serve residents. Other desired needs include indoor basketball courts, pickleball, ice skating, indoor track, activities for seniors, and activities not associated with a particular sports organization.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Westwood's overall goals focus on preserving Westwood's character that values protection of open space, sensitive design, passive recreation, and providing high quality active recreation facilities for all residents and visitors.

Objective 1: Protect and enhance Westwood's scenic character.

Objective 2: Increase recreation facilities and programming for residents of all ages to fulfill any unmet or growing demand.

Objective 3: Expand and improve protected open space and conservation land by enhancing maintenance, access, awareness, and use.

STRATEGIC APPROACH

The focus is on balancing the protection of open space and providing recreational opportunities while remaining sensitive to Westwood's treasured community character. To achieve many of these goals, the Town will need to enhance resources and apply creative approaches to protect, acquire, and improve maintenance and awareness of open space areas. To expand and provide additional recreational opportunities to fill unmet and future recreational demands, the Town will need to invest in improvements and maximize current opportunities.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

The following actions are prioritized under each general topic categories related to the above overarching goals and objectives for community character, open space, and recreation followed by an informal order.

Community Character:

- CC1. Encourage all new development to use the Open Space and Residential Development zoning bylaw and Low Impact Development (LID) techniques to protect and preserve open space and natural areas, and reduce impervious surfaces with narrower road widths, and smaller building footprints and lots.
- CC2. Review the Planning Board's rules and regulations for scenic roads under the Scenic Roads Law to incorporate enforcement provisions to adequately protect the Town's designated scenic roads.
- CC3. Protect open space, natural features, and historical buildings that are significant to Westwood by identifying priorities and partnering with entities such as the Westwood Land Trust, Westwood Historical Society, Westwood Historical Commission, Westwood Conservation Commission, and other applicable agencies to combine resources.
- CC4. Encourage shared parking at nearby lots to accommodate visitors to currently undisturbed locations, rather than installing new parking.
- CC5. Increase the usability and attractiveness of trails, conservation land, and open space for seniors and people with disabilities by providing trail maps, promotional material, accessible parking, seating, accessible routes, and by applying universal design principles.
- CC6. Educate the community on the value and benefits of the Community Preservation Act (CPA) and consider the adoption of the CPA as a funding source for open space protection, historic preservation, and outdoor recreation opportunities.

Recreation:

- RE1. Prioritize developing a new multi-purpose indoor recreation community center to serve the community's growing need for dedicated recreation space and programming such as basketball courts, an indoor track, and full-size gymnasium for residents of all ages and abilities.
- RE2. Identify properties which might be available to serve unmet recreational needs, including surplus or unused Town owned property.
- RE3. Evaluate the feasibility of an indoor ice-skating facility in Westwood and/or partner with other entities to share a facility. Examine options for a portable refrigeration system for outdoor recreational ice-skating.
- RE4. Expand the use of existing recreation fields and facilities by implementing use and maintenance plans.
- RE5. Expand outdoor recreation facilities by creating more multipurpose fields and installing field lighting for optimal usage, possibly at the Thurston Middle School.

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- RE6. Increase recreational opportunities and programs for adults and seniors, including pickleball courts.
- RE7. Incorporate universal design into all recreation facilities, playgrounds, and fields, providing parking, seating, accessible routes, and accessible gender-neutral rest rooms.

Open Space:

- OS1. Incorporate universal design with rope guides at trails, benches at resting areas, large print and braille signage, and wheelchair accessible surfaces at feasible locations to allow all visitors to experience outdoor areas.
- OS2. Prepare Management Plans for the maintenance and management of each conservation area.
- OS3. Increase awareness and encourage use of Westwood's open space and conservation areas through an informative mobile application (App), the Town's website, social media, the Westwood Community Trails Program, the schools, the Charles River Watershed Association, and the Neponset River Watershed Association.
- OS4. Land acquisition should focus on areas contiguous to existing protected property to provide connectivity to open space. The space around Lyman's Pond in Rice Reservation could be developed for walking around the pond, stocked for fishing, skating in the winter, and include benches for relaxing.
- OS5. Collaborate with Hale to permanently protect its open space and recreational land by acquiring a conservation restriction on this land.
- OS6. Continue to encourage the donation of open space or conservation restrictions by private landowners.
- OS7. Actively pursue grants, donations, and funding to assist with open space acquisition, conservation access, and improvements. Establish a fund for open space acquisition.

RESOURCES

Open Space and Recreation Plan, Prepared by Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee, Adopted by Planning Board February 26, 2019.

Open Space and Recreation Survey, Survey Monkey, 809 Responders, Open November 2017 to March 2018.

Comprehensive Plan Survey, Survey Monkey, 811 Responders, Open March 20 to April 17, 2019.

Comprehensive Plan Vision Session Report, June 19, 2019.

Map OR1: Open Space and Recreation Land, Westwood 2019.

Westwood Land Trust Protected Properties Descriptions, February 20, 2019.

Community Preservation Act Supporting Documentation.

Registry of Deeds, Norfolk County CPA Surcharges 2017 and 2018.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Question 13 of the Westwood Comprehensive Plan Community Survey, Survey Monkey, Spring 2019 (811 Survey Responses).
- ² Question 6 of the Open Space and Recreation Plan Survey, Survey Monkey, December 2017 – March 2018.
- ³ Open Space and Recreation Plan 2019, Westwood, Massachusetts, Adopted by Planning Board February 26, 2019, Table 12 - Protected Open Space Parcel Inventory, Pages 43-51.
- ⁴ Westwood Land Trust Protected Properties Descriptions, February 20, 2019.
- ⁵ Open Space and Recreation Plan 2019, Westwood, Massachusetts, Adopted by Planning Board February 26, 2019, Table 14 - Public Recreation Properties, Pages 53-55.
- ⁶ The Open Space & Field Area at 45 Clapboardtree Street, formerly the Westwood Lodge, is currently under construction by the Green Company and categorized as private recreation but will become 2.8 acres of public recreation use and the remaining open space will become protected open space managed by the future Homeowners Association, anticipated fall 2020.
- ⁷ CPA Tax Background, Total Tax Collections Estimates FY19 Chart, Residential \$563k & Commercial \$181K, Page 3.