

CHAPTER 5

Open Space and Recreation

*Westport Master Plan * 2004*

5 Open Space and Recreation

5.1 Background

In 1999, the Town's Open Space Committee completed the update of its Open Space Plan. Sections of the plan have been incorporated as the foundation for the Cultural and Historic Resources, Natural Resources, Open Space and Recreation elements of this Updated Master Plan. Westport has a Conservation Commission, Agriculture Commission, Open Space Committee, and Recreation Committee whose efforts contribute to sustaining the quality of life enjoyed by Westport's residents.

With the increased pressure from development, preservation of open space and farmland becomes a critical issue. The Town must assume a more proactive role in facilitating and encouraging agriculture in Westport that will help preserve open space and the Town's rural character.

Protection of areas of environmental importance, especially along river corridors, is important. River corridors offer unique habitat for wildlife and vegetated buffers that help reduce the amount of surface run-off into the rivers. At this time, surface run-off from both point and non-point sources of pollution has permanently closed approximately one quarter of the Town's shellfish beds, and conditionally closed significantly more beds.

To ensure open space, passive recreational opportunities, and protection of the Town's natural resources, the Town needs to pursue the acquisition of conservation easements and lands for passive recreation and educational opportunities.

The Town has actively sought to meet the needs stated above by its actions over the last several years: the acceptance of the Community Preservation Act (CPA), the creation of an Agricultural Commission, and the establishment of an Agricultural/Open Space Preservation Trust Fund, as described in Chapter 1, Section 1.4.

Westport has also taken actions to maximize its purchasing power by considering the purchase of development rights as an alternative to the outright purchase of land. In addition, the local office of the Trustees of Reservations and our own Westport Land Conservation Trust have been active partners with the Town in negotiating deals that leverage funds from other sources, both public and private.

5.2 Goals and Objectives

It is recommended that the Open Space Committee be re-convened to implement the Open Space Plan containing the following goals and objectives.

Goal 1 To improve and sustain land conservation efforts in Westport.

Objectives

- Develop funding and institutional mechanisms for a sustained Town Land Protection Program
- Manage Town lands and resources to better preserve important open space
- Support private and alternative methods for land conservation.
- Increase awareness of the general public to the importance of preserving open space for the future.

Goal 2 To protect Westport's rural landscape.

Objectives

- Support and increase participation in the Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program
- Encourage enrollment in Chapter 61, 61A, 61B, and act on releases
- Amend zoning to better protect and sustain agriculture in Westport
- Encourage sustainable regional agriculture

Goal 3 To protect and restore Westport's water quality and natural resources.

Objectives

- Preserve undeveloped watershed lands in Westport
- Monitor and eliminate sources of pollution to Westport's rivers and streams
- Maintain and restore fish and shellfish resources in the Westport River

Goal 4 To preserve the Quality of Westport's Natural Resources, Groundwater, Wetlands, Wildlife, Wildlife Habitats and Coastal Areas.

Objectives

- Encourage protection of groundwater resources
- Protect wetlands and critical coastal areas bordering wetlands
- Preserve critical wildlife habitats

Goal 5 To provide and enhance indoor and outdoor recreational opportunities for Westport residents of all ages.

Objectives

- Improve town-wide recreational facilities at schools and other town properties
- Provide walking and bicycling areas
- Increase the number of ball fields and "open space" recreational facilities
- Enhance access to recreational facilities for persons with disabilities

5.3 Open Space Issues

The five biggest issues related to Open Space in Westport today are:

- Over development/uncontrolled commercial and residential development
- Increase of Chapter 40B applications
- Preserving the town's rural and historical character
- Increased development and demand for services with proposed commuter rail
- Lack of substantial funds to purchase land.

5.4 Inventory of Open Space

For a town of approximately 33,926 acres⁸, Westport has abundant open space with recreation potential; although, compared to other municipalities in Southeastern Massachusetts, relatively little of it is permanently protected or managed for public use. In Fall River and Dartmouth, for example, 50% and 25% of the municipalities, respectively, are permanently dedicated as open space. Although the Town continues to make excellent progress (see Table 5-1 below), overall only approximately 11% of Westport is under permanent protection. Much of the acreage that is protected benefits the public with respect to environmental and water supply protection, but more open space acreage available with public access for passive recreation is needed. Section 5.6.2 specifically discusses active and passive recreational needs. The Westport Conservation Commission, other government agencies and non-profit organizations, including the Westport Land Conservation Trust and the Trustees of Reservations, collectively protect open spaces in Westport totaling 3,742 acres. Figure 5-1 graphically illustrates protected open space broken down according to the type of ownership or management. Map 5-1 depicts the location of these permanently protected parcels.

Table 5-1. Protected Open Space 1990 - 2003

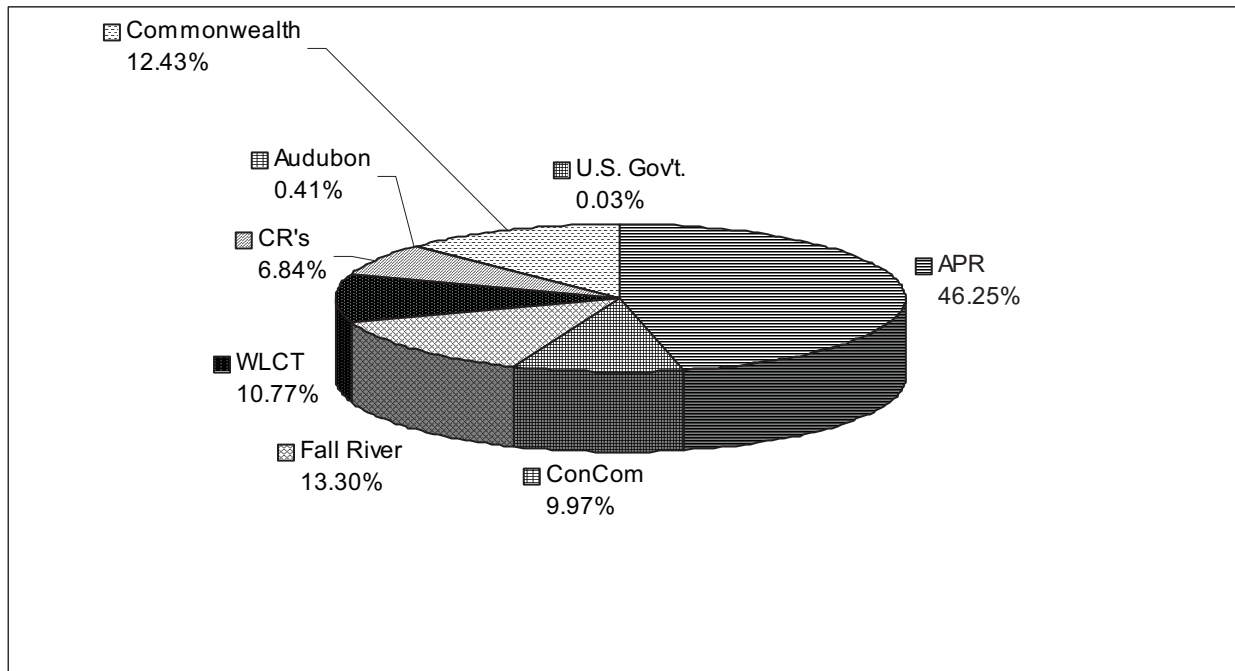
Type	Acreage 1990	Acreage 2003	Percent by Ownership 2003	Percent Change 1990-2003
Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (17 farms as of 2003)	946.0	1,730.7	46.25%	+82.9%
Conservation Commission	138.7	372.9	9.97%	+168.9%
City of Fall River Water Dept. ⁹	497.5	497.5	13.30%	0.0%
Westport Land Conservation Trust	170.0	403.1	10.77%	+137.1%
Conservation Restrictions	65.0	255.8	6.84%	+293.5%
Audubon Society	15.3	15.3	0.41%	0.0%
Commonwealth of Massachusetts ¹⁰	465.3	465.3	12.43%	0.0%
US Government	1.3	1.3	0.03%	0.0%
Total Protected Acreage	2,299.1	3,741.9	100.00	+62.8%

⁸ Approximate acreage, based on conversion from 53.01 sq. miles. Acreages noted are for comparison purposes, not build-out analysis, and may include small water bodies.

⁹ Includes water area.

¹⁰ Includes only land area of Horseneck Beach Reservation, does not include water area.

Figure 5-1. Percent Protected Open Space Acreage, by Owner/Manager



5.5 Trends in Open Space

Much of Westport's unprotected open space (see Table 5-2, below) includes recreational areas in town, such as public beaches, parks, playgrounds, and other lands that fall under the jurisdiction of the school department, private recreational areas and private lands in the Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B programs, and lands in tax title that may have a future recreational or conservation value. Recently there have been requests to release lands in the Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B programs for residential development.

The Preservation Trust Fund enabling legislation, filed and signed in the fall of 2001, allows the town to borrow up to \$1.5M to purchase land for agriculture and natural resource protection. The Preservation Trust Fund Council should be included in the process of the town's "right of first refusal" on Chapter lands. Map 5-2 depicts the parcels in Chapters 61, 61A, and 61B.

Table 5-2. Unprotected Municipal Land Including Recreational Land

Type	Acreage
Town Forest	28 acres
Town Landings (10 designated public landings)	17.26 acres
Town Cemeteries	120 acres
Tax Title Land	varies
<u>Town Parks:</u>	
Bicentennial Park	12 acres
Community Center Playground	0.5 acres
Head of Westport Playground	2.39 acres
<u>Town/School Facilities:</u>	
Alice B. Macomber School	13 acres
Greenwood Park School lot	3.5 acres
Elementary School/ Middle Schools	37 acres
High School	29.2 acres
Town Beaches	95.9 acres
Total Unprotected Municipal Acreage	>359 acres

5.6 Analysis

5.6.1 Resource Protection Needs

The following statements express Westport's critical needs as identified by the Open Space Committee through the use of resident surveys and a Community Meeting.

5.6.1.1 Farmland needs to be protected.

Farming is one of Westport's major industries. The best approach to ensure that land remains in farming is to ensure that farming remains a viable economic activity. Local efforts to encourage cooperation between farmers and to minimize the negative impacts to farmers from environmental regulations while still protecting the environment are good examples of the type of needed effort. To date, the Department of Food and Agriculture has spent approximately \$7 million to purchase Agriculture Preservation Restrictions (APRs) on 17 farms in Westport. These APRs make up 45% of all the land protected in perpetuity in Westport. However, APRs account for only 4% of Westport's total land area. Continued pursuit of local Agricultural Preservation Restrictions should be strongly encouraged. Protecting Westport's farms equals preservation of the town's rural character.

5.6.1.2. Areas of environmental importance should be protected, especially along the rivers.

Many of the environmentally important and scenic areas (rivers, bay, ponds, and unique features such as critical plant and wildlife habitat areas) are also areas experiencing increasing development pressures. In addition to the visible aspects of the environment that need to be protected, water quality of both the surface water bodies and groundwater needs protection. Both branches of the Westport River have experienced water pollution from both point and non-point sources of pollution. Currently, 23% of the shellfish beds are closed due to bacterial contamination, and another 53% are conditionally or seasonally closed. Westport is without a municipal sewerage treatment plant, so residents rely on private septic systems. In many areas the soils do not properly support these systems and overloading of the systems often occurs. Protection strategies such as

acquiring land, conservation restrictions, and adopting appropriate zoning regulations are important methods to pursue. Options for regulatory protection mechanisms include flexible residential zoning, agricultural district zoning, aquifer protection zoning, a town wetlands bylaw or a water's edge zoning district.

5.6.1.3 Westport needs to actively pursue the acquisition of additional conservation easements and conservation lands for passive recreation and educational uses.

Westport has relatively few conservation areas controlled by the town that are used by town residents. In light of increased development pressures, it is important for the town to prioritize environmentally sensitive and unique lands and pursue methods to obtain the development rights, outright ownership, or protection by a flexible density zoning by-law. This will enable Westport to provide additional recreational/education areas.

5.6.2 Community Needs

Map 5-3 depicts the existing inventory of recreation facilities and lands.

This section has several purposes:

- Evaluate the amount of recreation land and facilities currently present in Westport
- Identify areas where needs exist today
- Project needs for the year 2008 based on estimated population growth and changing demographics, and
- Compare Westport's current and future resources and needs with those for the Southeastern Massachusetts region as a whole, as described in the *Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan*.

It is important to note that the analysis that follows uses a combination of methods for determining need.

- Existing and proposed recreation facilities were compared with quantitative standards based on population levels. Although this method is broad and subject to criticism because it doesn't reflect local preferences or budgets, it does provide a sense of how Westport's facility inventory compares with generally accepted averages for communities of similar sizes.
- The surveys distributed by the Committee measured perceived need in the general population.
- The Open Space Committee through its own deliberations, a Community Meeting, and through work with the Buzzards Bay Project, developed its own understanding of the town's current and future needs.

When pulled together, these three approaches produced an assessment of need that the Committee feels is subjective enough to reflect Westport's local preferences while being objective enough to give the town a clear sense of whether it is providing services that will keep the town within, or ahead, of service levels expected of municipalities in 2008.

Quantitative Assessment

The current population level (1997) used in this assessment is 13,389 people. The average number of new homes built during the early 1990s was 65 units per year. Assuming 2.7 persons per household and a 65 unit per year growth rate, Westport's population will climb to 15,144 by the year 2008. If one assumes a halving of that rate or

a 33 unit per year pace, Westport's population will rise to 14,280 by the year 2008.¹¹ Given current market conditions, population trends, and the fact that the largest number of building permits approved in recent history occurred in 1998, this level of growth is within the scope of the population projections elsewhere in this Plan, and in all likelihood will become a reality.

In terms of long-term growth, a buildout analysis of the town performed during the 1987 Growth Management Plan indicated that there are 6,200 acres remaining of prime buildable land and 11,000 acres of marginal land. Assuming a 75% buildout rate on the prime land and a 50% rate on the marginal land, this results in 7,067 potential lots. This translates to an additional 20,000 people when the town reaches buildout. For the purposes of this plan, facility needs were assessed only for the next decade. The 1987 Growth Management Plan estimate of an additional 20,000 residents at buildout correlates well with the 24,924 residents estimated by the corrected EOE A Buildout Analysis performed in 2002, which estimate will likely be revised downward as more development occurs and the estimate becomes more constrained by known factors.

5.6.3 Recreational Needs

The National Recreation and Park Association has established a set of standards for assessing how communities compare in providing recreational opportunities to their citizens (See Table 5-3). According to these standards, Westport's largest deficiencies are in bicycle paths, nature and equestrian trails, playgrounds and tot lots, picnic areas, basketball courts, ice arenas, and football fields.

The Town's need for basketball courts and playgrounds was also echoed by residents who responded to the survey. Survey respondents would also like to see the condition of tennis courts, boat ramps, and beach access points upgraded. In a survey question asking residents to comment on which recreational facilities the town needs more of, permanently protected open spaces with public access was the most desirable. Bike paths and nature trails were rated second and third, respectively. The Board of Selectmen has appointed a bike path committee to study the feasibility of creating a multi-purpose path that would connect with neighboring towns that are also discussing such possibilities. When survey respondents were asked if they would have use for a bike path, 66% answered affirmatively. The Bike Path Committee, just recently performed its own survey of 2,000 residents (with 400 responding), and found that 78% of the households responding support development of a bike path in Westport. The Committee is still evaluating survey data to determine the most appropriate location for a path.

¹¹ During plan preparation the 2000 census count of Westport's population was 14,183 and the Town census population for 2003 was 14,584--confirming the higher growth rate estimate.

Table 5-3. Westport Recreation Facilities, Needs and Supply

FACILITY	NPS STANDARD	PUBLIC SUPPLY	PRIVATE SUPPLY	YEAR-ROUND DEMAND, 1997 (Pop. 13,389)	SUMMER DEMAND, 1997 (Pop. 20,070*)	YEAR-ROUND DEMAND, 2008 (Est. Pop. 15,150)	SUMMER DEMAND, 2008 (Est. Pop. 22,000)	COMMENTS
<i>Trails</i>								
Nature/Hiking	(miles) 1 per 2,500	(miles) 4	(miles) 0	(miles) 5.4	(miles) 8	(miles) 6.1	(miles) 8.8	Horseneck Beach State Res., Cherry & Webb
Equestrian	1 per 6,250	0	0	2.1	3.2	2.4	3.5	
Bicycle	1 per 2,000	0	0	6.7	10	7.6	11	
<i>Family Play</i>								
Playgrounds, Tot Lots	(areas) 1 per 1,000	(areas) 5	(areas) 0	(areas) 13.4	(areas) 20	(areas) 15.2	(areas) 22	Macomber School, Elem.. School, Park at Head Landing, Bicentennial Park, Community Center Playground
Skateboarding	No standards available	1	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Bicentennial Park
Rollerblading	No standards available	1	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Bicentennial Park
<i>Picnic Areas</i>								
	1 table per 300	18	0	44.6	66.9	50.5	73.3	Community Center Plgd (4), Senior Center (2), Horseneck State Res.(12)
<i>Court Games</i>								
Tennis	(courts) 1 per 1,500	(courts) 2	(courts) 10	(courts) 8.9	(courts) 13.4	(courts) 10.1	(courts) 14.7	Acoaxet Club (10 private), Middle School (2 public)
Basketball	1 per 1,000	5	2	13.4	20	15.2	22	Public - Macomber High, Middle , and Elem. Schools, Community Ctr Plygd, Head Landing; Private - St. George, Our Lady of Grace

Table 5-3. continued) Westport Recreation Facilities, Needs and Supply

FACILITY	STANDARD	PUBLIC SUPPLY	PRIVATE SUPPLY	YEAR-ROUND DEMAND, 1997 (Pop. 13,389)	SUMMER DEMAND, 1997 (Pop. 20,070*)	YEAR-ROUND DEMAND, 2008 (Est. Pop. 15,150)	SUMMER DEMAND, 2008 (Est. Pop. 22,000)	COMMENTS
<i>Court Games (cont.)</i>								
Volleyball	(courts) 1 per 3,000	6	1	4.5	6.7	5.1	7.3	Public - High, Mid. & Elem. & Macomber Schools, Comm'ty Ctr (2); Private - Our Lady of Grace
<i>Diamond sports</i>								
Baseball/softball	(fields) 1 per 3,000	5	1	4.5	6.7	5.1	7.3	Public - High School (3), mid. school (1), elem. sch. (1), private - Pine Hill Rd.(1)
<i>Ice Arena</i>								
Field Sports	1 per 10,000	0	0	1.3	2	1.5	2.2	
Soccer	(fields) 1 per 10,000	2	0	1.3	2	1.5	2.2	High & Middle Sch.
Football	1 per 20,000	0	0	0.67	1	0.76	1.1	
<i>Golf Course</i>								
NPS Standard	(holes) 18 per 12,500	0	9	1.9	2.9	2.2	3.2	
<i>Swimming</i>								
Pools	(facility) 1 per 20,000	0	2	0.67	1	0.76	1.1	Acoaxet (private) Club
Beaches	50 sq. ft. per person	487.3 acres	13.3 acres	15.4 acres	23 acres	17.4 acres	25.3 acres	Westport Campground (private)
								Public - Horseneck Bch. State Res./Gooseberry, East Bch, Cherry & Webb; Private -Westport Harbor, Elephant Rock, Bakers Beach

The need for equestrian trails came up on a small number of surveys as a “write in” suggestion. The segment of the population involved with horseback riding tends to be a select group, with most people having some sort of facility on their own property for their personal use.

The town has very little public recreational land that is not beach or river-related. Besides the various school sites and the town beaches, there is presently very little additional public land suitable for recreational activities in town. Without town-owned land, options for developing future recreational facilities are few. The schools do have an assortment of facilities, but the schools are not distributed evenly throughout the town. Residents who live in certain areas of town, such as the most southern and northern ends, must drive 5-10 miles to use these facilities.

Until recently, for those youngsters who are not involved with a school sports team, there were few recreational opportunities, athletic or otherwise, particularly during the school year. The newly formed Community Center Committee at the Earle School Community Center is working to provide recreational and organized activities for all ages. The center will provide after-school programs, activities, and act as a meeting place for children. However, there is still a need for play areas for preschoolers. Except for the jungle gyms and playgrounds at the elementary school and the Community Center playground, the other play areas available for preschoolers are in considerably poor condition.

At this time, the Community Center staff is addressing the need for organized activities or facilities for adults. Currently, there are privately owned and operated softball fields located on Pine Hill Road, available for adult recreational opportunities. The northern end of Westport is still in need of more recreational facilities.

There is another important perspective to take in the analysis of this data. Private facilities play a large role in Westport's recreation supply. Of the 91 active recreation and conservation sites inventoried for this Plan, 59 are in private ownership (this includes the categories of Chapter 61B, private recreation, and private conservation land.) In times of limited public funds and high liability insurance costs for towns, private provision of recreation services can play an important role in the overall recreation picture.

There are pros and cons to this situation.

The positive aspects for the larger private sector role in recreation and open space provision include the continuation of tax payments to the town, maintenance costs are borne by the private sector, and improvements can be made outside of the political process.

The negative aspects to this situation include potential limited access based on ability to pay, no guarantee of permanence, and the higher costs associated with private ownership versus public ownership.

5.6.4 Regional Recreation and Open Space Needs

The Massachusetts Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), which was written in 1988 and updated in 1993, looked at open space and recreation needs all across Massachusetts and determined that the five major policies of most importance to the Southeastern Region, of which Westport is a part, were:

1. Development and expansion of recreation facilities
2. Maintenance of recreation facilities

3. Acquisition and protection of water supply areas
4. Acquisition and protection of recreation areas
5. Acquisition and protection of conservation areas.

The SCORP identified the following specific needs for the southeastern Massachusetts region:

1. Developing and expanding water-based recreation facilities,
2. Acquisition and protection of wildlife habitats and scenic areas,
3. Development and expansion of handicapped access, and
4. Development of trail corridors.

Westport plays an important role in providing beach access and camping experiences for the Southeastern Region. The 650,000 cars that visit Horseneck State Beach Reservation each season clearly indicate the regional role that this facility plays. The town's campsites, numbering over 100, also meet a need much greater than for Westport alone.

When reviewing the recreational objectives for this region and comparing them with Westport's own needs and the limitations identified in this study, several points stand out. First, in terms of expanding water-based recreation facilities, there is little opportunity for the state to expand Horseneck Beach without losing the town's beach areas. Additionally, the area is already seeing the impacts of an increased visitor population at Horseneck Beach: litter, vandalism, habitat disturbance (piping plover) and unsafe conditions for residents using the beach during the after hours. Therefore, this plan does not recommend expanding Westport's ocean-based activities.

Westport is also blessed with the two branches of the Westport River. Expanding water-based recreation activities could also mean providing more access to the rivers. Again, however, the town is seeing the impacts of over-use in some areas and additional access should be approached with caution. Boat pollution, crowded waterways and habitat disturbance are all common problems. Currently, there are several landings along the rivers, but almost all of them have either insufficient parking spaces, are in poor condition, or are not well known among townspeople. The Open Space and Recreation survey found that some Westport residents are not satisfied with the access they have to the water or the condition of town beaches and landings. The condition of these access points needs to be addressed, however, this Plan recommends only modest efforts to increase river access. The rivers are too fragile an ecosystem to open them to great increases in use. In general, Westport should be concentrating on providing more land-based recreational facilities and protecting the environments of the bay and rivers rather than expanding the general public's access to those resources.

The next two regional needs (wildlife and scenic resource protection, and handicapped access improvements) both mesh well with Westport's objectives. For information on handicapped access, please see the section on Special User Needs on the following page.

Westport has placed and will continue to place emphasis on protection of the natural environment. A good example of where this type of policy overlaps with economic development interests is in shell- and fin-fishing. Hundreds of acres of Westport shellfish beds have been closed due to contamination (see map of Shellfish Bed Status in the Environmental Problems section in the Westport Open Space Plan of 1999). Environmental protection and remedies of point and non-point pollution will clean up shellfish beds and open up significant economic opportunities for residents. The same is true of pollution prevention efforts for the bay where the fishing industry is slowly declining. Rather than opening up harbor space for more recreational watercraft and thus placing additional pressure on working fishing vessels, the town should be working to provide an ongoing, affordable harbor for the town's fishing operations.

Expansion of trail corridors has been discussed during the course of creating this Plan. There are differing views on this subject, but this Plan is proposing the following policy:

Trails that link residential areas to commercial areas or link park areas to park areas or that provide safe recreational use for specific population groups, such as the elderly, should be encouraged by the town and supported financially when possible. The Town of Westport need not financially support trails through natural areas; however, town policy should encourage private owners to develop or allow such trail systems through their properties.

In summary, Westport's open space objectives of protecting the rural and natural environment mesh well with the region's needs (groundwater protection was one of the main needs cited by rural communities across the state.) Residents also feel that Horseneck State Beach Reservation is currently providing a major regional recreation facility and that rather than encourage the state to expand this facility, the town should work to provide expanded access to natural areas for its own population on its own land.

5.6.5 Special User Needs

As of the 1990 U.S. Census, Westport is reported as having 549 mobility or self-care limitation persons in town, which when compared to the town population in 1990 (13,852 people), represented 4.0% of the population. Census 2000 reports 1,328 persons with a physical or self-care disability in the total population of 14,183, which represents 9.4% of the Town's population, a two-fold increase over the 1990 rate of disability. According to the Southeastern Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD) *Fact Book*, mobility or self-care limitation refers to those people that have had a health condition that lasted for 6 or more months and which made it difficult to take care of their personal needs. In addition to these people, Westport is also home to 615 people (4.4% of the population) on work disability, and 283 persons (2.0% of the population) who are prevented from working due to their medical conditions.

In 1990 the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was federally adopted, placing strict regulations on schools, businesses, industry and government to meet compliance guidelines set forth to ensure that no person shall be discriminated against based on a physical disability. As part of the process to create this Plan, each and every town conservation or recreation facility has undergone an evaluation for accessibility according to the guidelines set forth by ADA. Inspections were performed by former Conservation Agent, Chris Capone, with assistance from Sarah J. Moran, a member of the disabled community.

Recently, the Board of Selectmen appointed a seven-member Recreation Department and a Community Center Committee. Their role is to oversee recreational opportunities for residents of all ages and abilities. Westport has only one Town owned and managed playground, Community Center Playground. This playground was just recently constructed and is in complete compliance with ADA Section 504 requirements. The two town beaches, East Beach and West Beach do not meet ADA regulations and transition plans to remediate these areas can be found in the Appendix of the 1999 Open Space Plan.

All parcels of land under the jurisdiction of the Conservation Commission exist in a natural undeveloped state, as either forestland or wetlands. No facilities of any kind exist on any of these sites. It is the intent of the Conservation Commission to preserve these areas in their natural

condition; therefore, evaluations for these areas and recommendations for their remedies have been omitted.

5.7 Implementation/Action Plan

The following are the actions recommended by the Open Space Committee for each goal.

Note: The Open Space Report 1999 page 239 – page 252, details the specific town boards and related committees that would address each objective.

Goal 1- To improve and sustain land conservation efforts in Westport.

Recommended Actions

- Work closely with the Preservation Trust Council to allocate funds for purchase of open space and resource areas.
- Perform a build-out analysis of the entire town.
- Dedicate money received from sale of town surplus or tax title lands to Conservation fund for land acquisition.
- Make maximum use of state and private funds and programs to protect open space.
- Tax title lands should be critiqued annually by Open Space Committee, Conservation Commission
- Permanently protect historic and land conservation values of the Town Farm through the use of Historic, Agricultural and Conservation Restrictions.
- Encourage development of a village open space in the Central Village Business District through acquisition of lands.
- Encourage Town partnerships with private land conservation groups.
- Encourage private neighborhood land planning associations.
- Encourage preservation of lands of historic value through permanent Historic Restrictions.
- Encourage “Ag in the Classroom” for schools programs.
- Open Space Committee shall meet annually with town boards to review Open Space implementation plan.
- Open Space Committee shall provide information on open space matters to the local press in order to educate the public.

Goal 2 To protect Westport’s rural landscape.

Recommended Actions

- Promote farmers’ applications to the MA DFA and APR programs.
- Appropriate funds to the APR fund at the Annual Town Meeting.
- Allow town APR fund to be used for acquisition and resale of important farmlands released from Chapter 61A.
- Encourage private landowners to enroll in the tax deferral programs (Chapter 61, 61A, 61B).
- Authorize Chapter 61 and 61B roll-back taxes collected by the town be dedicated to the Conservation Fund and 61A roll-back taxes to the APR fund.
- Develop town policy to encourage town’s rights of first refusal for Chapter 61 and 61A lands to a qualified Land Trust or similar organization.
- Study the possibility of amending zoning bylaw to create separate Agricultural Districts.
- Participate in regional planning to support agricultural economic development.
- Promote agricultural green belts in SE Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

- Match new farmers with existing agricultural lands.

Goal 3 To protect and restore Westport's water quality and natural resources.

Recommended Actions

- Support efforts to acquire private lands surrounding the Copicut Reservoir to protect drinking water supplies.
- Focus conservation spending on lands or restrictions directly along the river corridor, its tributary streams and ponds.
- Improve onsite wastewater treatment and explore alternative systems to help landowners upgrade from cesspools and malfunctioning septic systems. Encourage betterment programs.
- Encourage the agricultural community to address agricultural runoff.
- Encourage the Town to apply for state funding to assist with stormwater remedying projects, particularly those that would improve water quality for shellfishing and swimming.
- Continue water quality monitoring to identify problem areas and to evaluate remedial projects.
- Restore the dam and fishway at the Head of Westport to extend spawning area for anadromous fish, such as herring and shad.
- Support Town and private shellfish restoration projects for quahogs, scallops, and oysters.

Goal 4 To preserve the Quality of Westport's Natural Resources, Groundwater, Wetlands, Wildlife, Wildlife Habitats and Coastal Areas.

Recommended Actions

- Educate residents living in the Aquifer Protection Districts to the existing Aquifer Bylaw.
- Increase minimum lot sizes in the Aquifer Protection Districts.
- Discourage the development of industries that generate, use or store hazardous materials that may contaminate local water supplies.
- Protect land over aquifers by purchase or conservation restrictions.
- Protect these sensitive areas either by purchase or conservation restriction.
- Encourage public acquisition of dwellings and buildable lots in the coastal velocity zone and barrier beaches; and maintain parcels as publicly accessible open space.
- Ensure existing dune re-vegetation/fertilization program.
- Implement a wetlands bylaw to increase protection of buffer zones.
- Acquire and permanently protect parcels that "link" protected lands that create open space greenbelts and wildlife corridors.
- Acquire lands identified in the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) for conservation. Expand NHESP inventory efforts.

Goal 5 To provide and enhance indoor and outdoor recreational opportunities for Westport residents of all ages.

Recommended Actions

- Encourage acquisition of land for use by seasonal fairs and festivals.
- Recycle land fill for town park.
- Re-study Rock Street Park for recreational uses.
- Study town land at Head for passive recreation.

- Study school facilities and town properties for long-term need and recreational facilities such as a swimming pool and ice rink.
- Encourage recreational plans for the Macomber School and abutting Bicentennial Park.
- Place bike racks at town beaches.
- Encourage multipurpose recreational paths on existing and future town and private conservation lands.
- Encourage a feasibility study for a multipurpose trail, using the east portion of the Rte.88 layout, and creation of an additional parking lot in the Rte. 6 area for trail users.
- Encourage creation of a public golf course.
- Encourage more ball fields.
- Encourage more soccer fields.
- Improve parking lots for handicapped citizens.
- Improve handicapped access to all town facilities.
- Study feasibility of providing seasonal boardwalks at East and Cherry & Webb Beaches.

NOTES

For the complete Action Plan for Open Space and Recreation, please refer to Chapter 12, Action Plan, Section 12.3 Open Space and Recreation.

During the Public Meeting in February 2002, a resident asked for better bicycle and pedestrian access to the beaches. In addition, a letter was received in response to the Westport Forum article supporting a bike path near the beaches.

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