

# Costs and Value of Open Space and Recreation

## Updated OS&R Plan

The West Boylston Open Space Implementation Committee (OSIC) recently completed the update to the Open Space & Recreation Plan, and received approval from the Mass. Division of Conservation Services. Gaining this approval qualifies the town to be eligible for Federal and State grants and programs to assist with financing open space and recreation projects.

The Updated Plan has also increased local citizens' and public officials' awareness of the benefits of acquiring, preserving and managing open spaces. More than simply land set aside for aesthetic beauty, the Plan describes how open space protection can be done in a fiscally-responsible manner to:

- ensures public health and safety,
- maintains West Boylston's character,
- provides a wide range of recreational opportunities,
- promotes agriculture,
- protects wildlife habitat.

## West Boylston at a Crossroads

The town owns only about 190 acres of land which represents about 2% of the 8,836 acres in town. These lands are owned by the Water District, Parks, Schools, Cemeteries, the library, Historic Society, West Boylston Housing and the landfill area.

The Town must take significant steps in the next decade to **preserve its open space**. Once developed, open space is essentially lost forever. Imagine driving around West Boylston 20 years from now. Will our town be an attractive, affordable place to live and work, or a collection of haphazard urban sprawl? Will it be distinguished by a safe and healthy environment, or a crumbling municipal infrastructure? Will development promote creative, efficient uses of our natural resources, or will it degrade public health, air quality, and cause expensive drinking water? Will there be a sustained connection to the past, and a sense of place for families seeking a quieter alternative...or will that be lost?

## Don't We Need Development?

Some people suggest that the town must bring in more development to provide economic opportunity and jobs, and increase the "tax base". However, the trend is that larger town populations require higher taxes. Why? Development requires town services, i.e. schools, water, sewage treatment, road maintenance, police and fire protection, emergency medical services and trash disposal.

In studies since 1997, on average, residential development required \$1.13 in municipal services for every \$1 of revenue received in property taxes. Farm, forest and open space land required only \$0.29 in services per dollar of revenue.

## Fiscal Costs Associated With Different Land Uses

Land Use Type	For This Much Tax Paid (Revenue Coming In)	Use This Much In Town Services (Costs to Town)
Residential	\$ 1.00	\$ 1.13
Commercial	\$ 1.00	\$ 0.43
Open Space	\$ 1.00	\$ 0.29

Although the OSIC did not analyze data specifically for West Boylston, all these studies found that **residential development typically incurs a net fiscal cost to a town**, while businesses and open spaces provide a positive cash flow.

### **What about all that DCR Land?**

It is noted that the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) owns approximately 3,358 acres, or 38% of the land in town and restricts activities on their property to passive recreation. The limitations typically allow passive recreation, but limit vehicular and animal access. Although no official taxes are paid on its land, the DCR has been making Payments-in-Lieu-of-Taxes (PILOT) to the town since Fiscal Year 1988, as per Chapter 59, S. 5G, of MA General Laws. The annual payment to West Boylston from Fiscal Year 2001 until Fiscal Year 2008 was \$569,752. This year the amount was increased to **\$602,756**. This legislation also requires that the amount cannot be reduced even if assessed values decrease.

### **Town Goals Specified In The Open Space Plan**

#### ***Resource Protection Goals***

1. Protect town water supply.
2. Maintain and improve town open spaces.
3. Protect privately-owned open space and recreation facilities.
4. Establish access to and between open spaces and recreational facilities.
5. Maintain and improve town-owned recreation facilities.
6. Protect streams and ponds in town.
7. Protect special wildlife and botanical areas in town.
8. Protect historical sites in town.
9. Provide access, usage, and fair compensation of state and quasi-state property in town.

#### ***Community Goals***

1. Preserve existing town-owned open space and natural resources.
2. Provide safe pedestrian access to open spaces and recreation areas.
3. Maintain and expand existing passive and active recreational facilities.
4. Maintain and expand open spaces within the densely-developed southern area of town.
5. Create additional town-owned open space.
6. Ensure access to DCR-owned open space parcels in perpetuity.
7. Increase available recreational facilities for very young children and the elderly.
8. Provide areas for swimming and picnicking.
9. Upgrade existing recreational facilities to meet Americans with Disabilities Act requirements.
10. Expand amount of gym and indoor recreational space.
11. Increase parking and provide sanitary facilities at high usage recreation sites.
12. Increase revenue from the House of Corrections and DCR Water Supply Protection.
13. Increase ADA compliance at all Town facilities.

#### ***Town Management Goals***

1. Coordinate town efforts to protect, improve, and expand open space in town.
2. Support efforts for private landowners to retain open space or share use of their property.
3. Prioritize maintenance and expansion of sidewalks and open space.
4. Coordinate town efforts to maintain, improve, and expand recreation facilities in town.
5. Communicate with DCR and House of Corrections regarding opportunities on their properties.
6. Educate town officials and citizens about opportunities and benefits of open space.
7. Implement and enforce land use regulations professionally and consistently.
8. Utilize available Community Preservation funds equitably and responsibly.

The final, approved 2009 Update of the Open Space and Recreation Plan can be viewed on the Town Website at: [http://www.westboylston-ma.gov/Pages/WBoylstonMA\\_OSAC/osac/draftplan](http://www.westboylston-ma.gov/Pages/WBoylstonMA_OSAC/osac/draftplan)

We welcome any and all comments or questions! Please email: [osac@westboylston-ma.gov](mailto:osac@westboylston-ma.gov)