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Open Space and Recreation

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
Preserve and enhance the Town's open space system.	Identify opportunities to acquire new open space and permanently protect and preserve existing open space.	Permanently protect existing Town-owned open space with appropriate zoning and conservation restrictions.
Ensure continuation of Wellesley's recreational facilities as major community assets.	Retain Morses Pond as a recreational asset.	Preserve a balance between active and passive recreation.
Continue expansion of the trail system to link open space to town destinations.	Identify opportunities for new trails and enhancement of existing trails.	Support volunteer trail creation and enhancement.

Findings

- Wellesley has seen growth in its youth population over the past fifteen years, with the number of households with children under age 18 increasing from 34% in 1990 to 41% in 2000. Between 1994 and 2004, the school population increased 3.5% a year.
- The use of Wellesley's active and passive recreational areas continues to increase as the Recreation Department and the Natural Resources Commission expand their programs to meet the needs of the current population.
- The Town has made significant strides in the preservation of open space by promoting conservation restrictions and by expanding its trail system.
- Respondents to the Comprehensive Plan survey ranked preservation of existing parks and green spaces for passive recreation as their

highest priority, completion of bike paths and trails to or through all neighborhoods as their third-highest priority, and provision of additional sports fields for active recreation much lower at priority #15.

Key Challenges

- The increased use of Wellesley's passive and active recreation land exerts significant pressure on the Town to maximize usage and improve maintenance of the Town's existing recreational land.
- Wellesley's built-out condition and high property values impede the acquisition of significant amounts of open space.
- Significant open space areas are either held by institutions or are in tax abatement programs that provide limited protection against development.

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION FACTS

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- Wellesley residents value the visual and other benefits they get from privately-held open space.
- There is relatively little open land that is not either owned by institutions or protected in some way.
- Almost 80% of the unprotected open space is under institutional ownership.
- The majority of Town-owned land used for open space or recreational purposes is permanently protected from development under Article 97 of the state constitution, which requires a vote of the legislature and replacement of any protected land used for other purposes. A higher level of protection is available through conservation restrictions.

Protected Open Space (Including Article 97 lands)

- Municipal: 553.9 acres
- State: 123.6 acres
- Wellesley Conservation Council: 36.4 acres
- Private property with conservation restrictions: 48.2 acres

Temporarily Protected Open Space

- Lands in tax abatement programs for forestry (Chapter 61), agriculture (Chapter 61A), or recreation (Chapter 61B): 203.96 acres

Unprotected Government and Institutional Open Space

- Town-owned open space such as school playgrounds: 154.1 acres
- State: 42 acres
- Private institutions (including cemeteries): 213.2

Passive Recreational Opportunities

- 240 acres of passive-use park and conservation land
- 24 miles of marked trails

Active Recreational Facilities and Programs

- 16 neighborhood parks/playgrounds (1-5 acres): 46.5 acres
- 10 playfields (5-15 acres): 100.06 acres
- Swimming beach at Morses Pond (over 20,000 users in 2004)
- Annie F. Warren Recreation Center
- Programs serving over 6,000 people in 2004

Source: Town of Wellesley 1994 Open Space and Recreation Plan; Assessor's Data

A. CURRENT CONDITIONS

Wellesley's 1999 *Open Space and Recreation Plan*, prepared by the Natural Resources Commission (NRC), the 2003 *Town of Wellesley Community Preservation Plan*, prepared by the Community Preservation Committee (CPC), and maps prepared in 2004 for an update to the Open Space and Recreation Plan, provide the basis for the Comprehensive Plan's recommendations for open space and recreation. Additional sources include interviews with Janet Bowser, Natural Resources Commission (NRC) Department Head; Jan Kasetta, director of the Recreation Department; Bob White, member of the Trails Committee; and Meghan Conlon, Town Planner. A public meeting on September 29, 2005 with the participation of members of the NRC and the Recreation Commission as well as members of the public, provided community feedback on challenges and recommendations.

In addition to the environmental protection activities described in the previous chapter, the Natural Resources Commission (NRC), a five-member elected board, sets open space policy and pursues additional preservation of open space through acquisition by the Town or non-profit partners or through conservation restrictions on private land. The NRC also has management responsibility for parks, playgrounds, athletic fields and recreation spaces, acting as the Parks Commission, and it oversees trail management through the Trails Committee, which is a ten-member group that monitors conditions on existing trails and advises the NRC on the potential to expand Town-maintained trails. The Department of Public Works implements parkland and other open space management at the direction of the NRC.

The Wellesley Recreation Commission, a five-member board, sets policy for the Recreation

Department, which organizes programs and classes that take place at the Warren Recreation Center and on Town-owned fields. The Playing Fields Task Force is an advisory group that identifies improvement needs for athletic fields. Because the demand for playing fields creates pressures for the development of expanded athletic fields, the Town and the youth sports organizations work together to ensure maximum usage of playing fields.



The Wellesley Conservation Council (WCC) is a local non-profit organization devoted to acquiring and protecting open space and providing environmental education to Wellesley's citizens. The WCC owns 14 land parcels and holds three conservation restrictions. Some of these environmentally-significant properties are publicly accessible, such as the Guernsey Sanctuary, Pickle Point, the Susan Lee Memorial Sanctuary, Coveside Bank Sanctuary, Cold Spring Brook Sanctuary, and Cronk's Rocky Woodlands. The WCC also works with the Trails Committee to maintain the Guernsey Sanctuary Trail.

Open Space in Wellesley

One-third of Wellesley's total area, 2,267 acres of land and water, has been identified as green open space land, both publicly and privately owned by institutions and large landowners. This number does not include green yards and gardens around residences or landscaped areas around commercial properties. Some of this green open space is permanently protected from development, some is temporarily protected, and some has no protection and could be developed by public or private owners if they wish.



WELLESLEY OPEN SPACE

	OWNERSHIP	ACRES
Permanently Protected	State	123.6
	Municipal	553.9
	Non-Profit	36.4
	Private (conservation restrictions)	48.2
Total Permanent Protection		762.1
Temporarily Protected	Private land under Chapter 61, 61A, or 61B	203.96
Total Limited Protection		203.96
Unprotected	Local Government	154.1
	State Government	42.0
	Private Institutions (including cemeteries)	213.2
Total Unprotected Government and Institutional Open Space		409.3

Source: Wellesley Assessor's Data (2004); Town of Wellesley Community Preservation Plan (2003)

For the purposes of this comprehensive plan update, open space is assigned to protection categories following criteria commonly used throughout Massachusetts for open space planning. Permanently protected land includes land that is restricted by deed from development, including by permanent conservation restriction and by terms of donation to the Town. In addition, lands that fall under Article 97 of the state constitution are also assigned to the category of permanent protection. The NRC takes the more restrictive view that only lands with deed restrictions can be considered permanently protected. Protected open space can be public conservation and parkland, water supply protection land (around wellheads and surface water supplies), conservation land owned by non-profit organizations, and conservation easements placed upon land by private owners. Temporarily protected land restricts development under the state tax abatement programs known as Chapter 61 (Forestry), Chapter 61A (Agriculture), and Chapter 61B (Recreation). Lands enrolled in these programs must meet minimal criteria showing they are used for the specified purposes and receive a tax abatement as long as they are in the program. Large, significant parcels of open space that remain unprotected are primarily in the hands of private institutions. Cemeteries also play a role as open space and are sometimes treated as effectively permanently protected. Although existing grave sites are unlikely to be disturbed, land not yet used for graves may be sold, so the cemeteries are listed in this chapter as unprotected institutional open space.

Appendix B lists the land parcels under various protection categories as well as known private conservation restrictions. An up-to-date listing of all lands of conservation and recreation interest, with more precise details on their protection status, should be prepared as part of the Town's next Open Space and Recreation Plan update.

Protected Open Space

Article 97 of the Amendments to the State Constitution requires that any lands acquired by government for natural resources purposes (including conservation, parks, and water supply protection lands) require a two-thirds roll call vote of the state legislature before they can be disposed of or converted to other uses. The cases in which conversion under Article 97 has been permitted in recent years often involve petition by very built-out communities for use of the land to build or expand schools. School building mandates helped create this problem by creating one-size-fits-all design requirements for sprawling one-story schools with large parking areas. These building mandates were recently revised to allow for more flexibility in designing for local conditions. Article 97 conversions also sometimes occur for roads and other public infrastructure. The vast majority of Article 97 land has remained protected and the constitutional amendment is a very significant obstacle to change of land status.

The legislature will not vote to permit disposition or conversion of municipal lands under Article 97 protection unless petitioned by a municipality. Because Wellesley's existing parks, conservation lands, and water protection lands do not seem to be threatened by a town-wide consensus to attempt to use them for other purposes, they will be treated here as permanently protected lands.



As noted earlier, the NRC takes the position that no Town-owned park and conservation lands are fully protected and believes that

conservation restrictions should be placed on all park land. However, deed research could find, as is true in a number of communities, that some park lands may have been donated to the Town with restrictions in their deeds limiting the land to park uses. The legal work necessary to place conservation restrictions on all these lands may not be needed. Another way to strengthen the status of all park and conservation land is to ensure that it is zoned "Conservation." Although zoning can be changed by Town Meeting vote, placing all these lands in the Conservation district would create a significant barrier to any attempts to use park lands for other purposes. The NRC can prepare a zoning petition for all these lands.

Town-owned open space falls into two categories: conservation and passive use park land (240 acres) and land covered by water (312 acres). Of the latter category, 186 acres are used as water supply land for the Town.

In addition to the Town, the state Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), owns and manages Charles River Reservation lands in Wellesley and the Town of Needham holds two conservation parcels. The Wellesley Conservation Council, a land protection non-profit, also owns open space. Conservation restrictions on private land are mostly on properties in the Hunnewell Estates Historic District area.

Temporarily Protected Open Space

Two hundred and three privately-owned acres are temporarily protected as open space used for forestry, agriculture, and recreation under the Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B tax abatement programs. Under these programs, owners receive a lower property tax rate as an incentive to maintain the land as open space. Participation is voluntary, and if the land is removed from the program and put on the market, the Town has

the right of first refusal. Although the abated taxes must be paid after a sale, in practice this has proved not to deter marketability in areas with low supply and high land prices. Thus, the Town cannot rely upon statutory tax abatement programs for permanent open space protection.

Unprotected Open Space

The town's unprotected open space includes school recreation areas, undeveloped open space owned by educational institutions, and large private parcels. Wellesley is unusual among suburban Boston communities in the large amount of privately-owned open space in proportion to its population and any change in use of this open space will have a major impact since it contributes greatly to the character of the town. Major unprotected parcels include 43 acres adjacent to Centennial Reservation that are owned by Massachusetts Bay Community College and the "North 40" acreage owned by Wellesley College along Weston Road. According to the build-out study prepared in 2001 by MAPC, existing zoning regulations potentially allow 851 acres of privately-owned open space to be developed into more than 2,200 dwelling units for both academic and single-family residences.

(See Figure 8-I, Protected Open Space; Figure.)

Open Space Funding

Wellesley relies upon Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds, general revenues, and resident contributions to fund open space acquisitions and park improvements. Under the CPA, Wellesley voted to impose a 1% surcharge on property taxes for acquisition or preservation of open space, protection of historic properties, and creation of community housing (permanently affordable housing). The amounts raised through the CPA by the Town are then matched by the state. The Town is required to allocate at least ten percent of the Community Preservation Fund to open space, affordable housing, and his-

toric preservation each fiscal year, but can spend the remaining 70% on any of the three plus recreation. In FY 2003 and 2004, Wellesley generated \$1,071,000, which was matched by the state. Several recent park improvement projects also benefited from substantial private fundraising and donations: Warren Park Playground, Phillips Park Playground, Ouellet Park Playing Fields and Playground, and the Hunnewell Field Tot Lot. In addition, the Town purchased a one-acre parcel adjacent to Rockridge Pond Park with substantial private funding.

Passive Open Space Areas

Centennial Park or Reservation, with 42 acres, is considered the pre-eminent park in Wellesley, as it provides scenic views of Wellesley and neighboring Needham, open meadows, and hiking and nature trails. Fuller Brook Park was the first park in Wellesley, created by land donations starting in 1899. Other publicly-owned passive recreation land includes a 24-mile system of trails, nature conservancies, and ponds. Residents also have access to institutionally-owned open space at local colleges.

TRAILS

Wellesley has an extensive system of trails and paths. The trails provide woodland hiking routes in conservation and park areas.



WELLESLEY TRAIL SYSTEM

TRAIL NAME	LOCATION OF TRAILHEAD	LENGTH OF TRAIL IN MILES
Beard Trail	Beard Way off of Grove Street	1.1
Boulder Brook Reservation Trail	Parking lot on Elmwood Road at Kelly Memorial Park	1.6
Brook Path	Maugus Avenue	2.3
Carisbrooke Reservation Trail	End of Glen Brook Road	0.5
Centennial Reservation Trail	Centennial Park parking lot off of Oakland Street	1.6
Charles River Path	Washington Street at Charles River crossing	2.4
Crosstown Trail	Cochituate Aqueduct on Route 9	5.3
Guernsey Path	Parking area on Winding River Road	2.1
Longfellow Pond Trail	Longfellow Pond parking lot off Oakland Street	0.8
Morses Pond Trail	Turner Road intersection of Crosstown Trail	0.7
Rockridge Pond Trail	Parking area off Hundreds Circle	0.4
WCC Guernsey Sanctuary Trail	Entrance to Guernsey Sanctuary near Winding River Road parking area	0.6
Sudbury Aqueduct Trail	Waban Arches	4.5
TOTAL		23.9

These paths link different parts of Wellesley through open space and, in some segments, on-street routes. The Fuller Brook Path is the most heavily-used trail due to its location near schools and some municipal buildings, and the Crosstown Trail connects the Morses Pond area to the Charles River. The Sudbury Trail runs through the southern part of Wellesley. The Trails Committee would like to use trails to create more water access in Wellesley and to forge more connections with neighboring towns, especially through the Charles River Link, a 15.6-mile regional trail that would ultimately link Wellesley's trails to the Bay Circuit Path and the Charles River Riverwalk. The Trails Committee maintains over 17 map houses along the trails and a web site with trail information, sponsors eight walks in the spring and fall that usually attract 50-80 walkers, and provides volunteer opportunities each year for Boy Scout and Girl Scout projects that improve the trails.

In Chapter 4, Housing and Residential Character, the housing development scenarios for the Grossman's site, the St. James's site, and the Wellesley Motor Inn site suggested the potential for trail connections that could be obtained through development agreements.

(See Figure 8-2, Wellesley Trails.)

Active Open Space and Recreation Facilities

Wellesley has numerous recreational programs for all age groups, and participation in recreational sports has been increasing among children and adults during the past ten years. Many programs are located at the Warren Recreation Building. Wellesley's recreational programs include sports and activities such as summer day camp, cooking, language classes, and hobbies. Between 1996 and 2004, the number of people participating in Recreation Department programs grew from 5,000 to



6,000. In addition, Morses Pond Beach has about 20,000 users per year. Local sports leagues, such as youth soccer, lacrosse, and baseball, also use Wellesley's fields and contribute \$10 per person for field maintenance costs per year.

Private Recreation

Private recreation opportunities in Wellesley include memberships at local gyms and clubs. Users may purchase athletic memberships at businesses such as Boston Sports Club, which offers tennis courts, a skating rink, and indoor and outdoor pools. Memberships are also available at the Wellesley Country Club, which features an 18-hole golf course, a swimming pool, and tennis and platform tennis courts. In addition, it is possible in the near future that the new sports complex at Dana Hall School will open to the public on a fee-per-use basis. User fees for these private facilities generally are expensive. No low-cost private recreational facility exists for family recreation in Wellesley.

(See Figure 8-3, Recreation Resources.)

Management of Park and Recreation Facilities

In addition to the pond restoration program described in the chapter on Natural and Cultural Resources, the NRC is developing the Fuller Brook Park Restoration Master Plan to provide improvements for Wellesley's oldest park. First started in 1899, the 23-acre Fuller Brook Park

contains Wellesley's heaviest-used trail, the Fuller Brook Path. Lack of maintenance over the years has caused the park's infrastructure to deteriorate significantly. The Restoration Master Plan, funded in 2003 by Town Meeting, outlines needed park improvements, including new paths, trees, and landscaping and removing invasive plants. In addition, the restoration plan involves a partnership with the Historical Commission to have the park listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In 2005, the Community Preservation Committee recommended \$4,700 in funding for filing the application. The Restoration Master Plan, which includes the required Cultural Landscape Report, anticipates that National Register listing will make the park eligible for federal and state funds for landscape restoration and improvements. The plan for the Fuller Brook Park restoration is expected to be approved by the NRC in 2006.

Open space used for active recreational programs totals approximately 225 acres of Town-owned land. Some of this land is attached to schools and includes school playgrounds and playing fields. As is the case in many communities, demand for athletic fields is growing as sports programs increase resulting in the need for expanded fields year-round. The Town has a limited number of fields and good turf management requires that they be "rested" to keep them from being overused.

The Playing Fields Task Force (PFTF) was created as an advisory body to the NRC to identify urgently needed improvements and develop a long-range field improvement program. The Task Force has representatives from the NRC, Department of Public Works, Recreation Department, School Department, Wellesley Little League, Wellesley Lacrosse, and Wellesley Soccer Club. Recent playing field improvements have been made at Ouellet Park and Schofield School.

The NRC is implementing an extensive Playground Improvement Master Plan with funding from the Community Preservation Fund, resident groups and individuals, and Town sources. Recent improvements were made to Warren Park, Phillips Park, Ouellet Park, and Hunnewell Field Playground. As improvements are made to Town recreational facilities of all types, they are upgraded to meet Americans with Disabilities Act requirements and modern safety standards.

Demand for More Open Space, Parkland, and Programs

DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

Between 1990 and 2000, the number of Wellesley families with children under age 18 increased 20% from 2,910 to 3,480. In 2000, 41% of all Wellesley households had children under age 18, compared to only 34% in 1990. During the 1990s, the under-5 population grew 5% from 1,565 individuals in 1990 to 1,954 in 2000; the 5-9 population grew 27% from 1,534 in 1990 to 1,953 in 2000; and the 10-14 group increased 30% from 1,387 in 1990 to 1,800 in 2000.

The 1990s also saw a rise in the number of older adults in Wellesley. This can be attributed to the aging of the baby boom generation. The 45-54 category rose from 3,241 residents in 1990 to 3,938 in 2000, a 20% increase. In addition, by 2000, 28% of all households had one member that was 65 or older, and 14% of the population was at least 65. Although the total number of over-65 residents declined from 3,720 in 1990 to 3,710 in 2000, the relative stability of this number suggests that senior citizens wish to remain in Wellesley.

Youth and seniors generally comprise the largest class of park users. Wellesley’s growing youth population generates a need for additional playing fields, playground areas, and rec-

reational programs. Similarly, the aging population needs more adult recreational programs and passive park amenities, such as walking trails. One of the challenges created by these demographic trends is that of balancing the range of needs by park users.



WELLESLEY YOUTH AND OLDER ADULT POPULATION GROWTH, 1990-2000

POPULATION GROUP	1990 TOTAL	2000 TOTAL
Under 5	1,565	1,954
5-9	1,534	1,953
10-14	1,387	1,800
15-19	1,586	2,505
Total Children Age 19 and Under	6,072	8,212
45-54	3,241	3,938
55-59	1,242	1,437
60-64	1,167	1,070
65 and over	3,720	3,710
Total Adults Age 45 and Older	9,370	10,155

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

TRENDS IN RECREATIONAL TASTES AND PARTICIPATION

The past decade has seen a change in the recreational and open space tastes of Americans. Sports activities have expanded from traditional American sports like baseball and football to include other games, such as soccer. In addition, many more children are participating in athletic activities at early ages and several sports

have become multi-seasonal. The demand for passive recreational activities has also grown and the Town Comprehensive Plan survey confirms that residents place a very high priority on the protection of the Town's existing passive open space, and a lower priority on expanding active recreational areas. Moreover, bikeways, trails, and greenways not only provide natural open spaces, but can provide alternative forms of transportation that reduce auto-dependence. All of these trends have affected Wellesley's recreational programs, and the NRC and the Recreation Department anticipate more demand both for active playing fields in all sports seasons and for passive recreation areas.

Balancing Passive and Active Open Space

Wellesley faces the challenge of preserving, expanding, and maintaining open space for passive uses, water quality, and wildlife habitat while meeting increasing requests for active recreational space. Although demand for park facilities and programs may grow, the Town will have to weigh this demand against the environmental benefits that passive open space provides, such as filtration of pollutants, protection of wildlife, environmental education, wetlands and water supply protection, including a very large watershed area, and aesthetic enhancement of the community.

UNPROTECTED LAND

The amount of unprotected open space and its potential for development poses a challenge to Wellesley's future open space plans. Although most of the privately-owned open space is in institutional hands, the possibility exists that this land could be developed as part of college expansion plans. The landscaped grounds of Wellesley College, Massachusetts Bay Community College, and Babson College currently contribute to the green infrastructure of the Town, but nothing guarantees that this open space will be preserved. In addition, the

forest, recreational, and agricultural lands that fall under the Chapter 61 programs have no preservation guarantee. If an owner chooses to discontinue participation in the tax abatement program, his or her acreage will no longer be protected from development. Although the Town has the right of first refusal on these properties when they emerge from tax abatement programs, land costs are very high and it may be difficult for the Town to act quickly enough when the land goes on the market.

The NRC has had some success in encouraging private owners to place conservation restrictions on part of their property. Wellesley College and Babson College, although they may need to build new or expanded buildings in the future, will also wish to preserve the green character of their campuses. The Town needs to continue to be in regular communication with the colleges to make sure that that green character is also preserved at the campus edges with the Town. Massachusetts Bay Community College, as a public college, is in a somewhat different position because the state could decide to sell some college lands. The NRC is talking to Massachusetts Bay Community College officials about protecting this open space, which abuts the Town-owned Centennial Reservation.

NEED FOR LINKAGES

The Town also needs to continue to create linkages between its open space areas and significant town destinations. Linkages promote



safe use of Wellesley’s open space, discourage car usage, and may also serve as animal movement corridors between habitats. Although several natural corridors exist, such as the Fuller Brook Path, and the Cochituate and Sudbury Aqueducts, the Trails Committee continues to look for opportunities to link open space throughout the Town and eventually to the region.

HIGH COST OF OPEN SPACE ACQUISITION AND MAINTENANCE

The rising cost of real estate in Wellesley makes acquisition of new open space difficult. As land values rise, the ability of the Town to purchase more open space decreases. In addition, proximity to existing park areas increases land values and may make expansion of current parks more difficult. For example, the NRC acquired a one-acre parcel of land adjacent to Town-owned parkland on Rockridge Pond for \$700,000 in 2002 with substantial private contributions. Also, Wellesley’s character as a mature suburban community that is substantially built out suggests that few large parcels in single ownership will be available for future purchase. Thus, the real estate market works against expanding the Town’s park system through acquiring new properties for open space.

Open space funding is available under the terms of the Community Preservation Act, and money from the Community Preservation Fund can cover the costs of significant land acquisition or program expansion. Wellesley faces increased maintenance costs associated with heavy use of its playing fields and the Town has recently increased youth sports fees to help cover these costs. Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts help the Trails Committee in maintaining and improving trails. Existing “friends” groups have also raised money for open space and playground improvements.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

Continue to protect and enhance open space in Wellesley.

ACTIONS

- **Ensure that all park and conservation land is placed in the “Conservation” zoning district.** The NRC should identify the lands that need zoning protection and prepare a petition to rezone the lands to Conservation or provide the Planning Board with this information so that the Planning Board can initiate a zoning petition.
- **Continue to seek to expand the trails system through conservation restrictions granted by property owners.** The Trails Committee should continue to determine whether trails are appropriate for land acquired by the NRC through donations or purchase. Paths across small parcels may link with the greater trail system and provide residents with new passive open space opportunities. (A detailed list of Trails Committee priorities can be found in Appendix C.)
- **Continue to identify important open space properties and work with property owners to obtain conservation restrictions.** The NRC should continue to seek donations of conservation easements and restrictions from owners of undeveloped land, particularly where this land lies adjacent to existing protected land. Although easements on some properties may be readily obtained through bequests or gifts, it is important to identify key open space properties and pursue the donation of conservation easements and restrictions on those properties, especially where parcels could provide strategic links for the trails system.
- **Enact mandatory cluster zoning to maximize open space preservation and allow limited development if these properties cannot fully be protected.** Cluster zoning would ensure that a significant portion of the developed

parcel will remain as private open space. This type of zoning would prevent a project from occupying the entire lot; instead, structures and paved areas would be grouped together at a higher density on one portion of the property, thus leaving part of the property as open space. In addition, the Planning Board should require that the Town's open space goals are taken into account when reviewing site plans and should encourage developers to use low-impact design strategies on these parcels.

- **Develop a strategy for placing conservation restrictions on Town-owned park and conservation land.** Because of the time and expense involved in placing conservation restrictions, the NRC should develop a strategy focused on lands that might be most vulnerable. Much of the Town-owned open space is protected under Article 97 and is highly unlikely to be threatened with conversion to other uses.
- **Prepare a detailed inventory of open space resources.** Information on the parcels and protection levels of all open space resources in Wellesley should be prepared and regularly updated to make sure that the Town has a clear understanding of the resources and their status.

Conduct a recreational needs assessment that will reflect collaboration between the Natural Resources Commission and the Recreation Commission/Department.

Wellesley's growing youth and aging populations are placing greater demands on programs and facilities, and Town departments sometimes face competing requests for use of active and passive recreational lands. The NRC and the Recreation Commission should coordinate an inventory and needs assessment that will provide information from which to make decisions regarding active and passive recreational uses.

ACTIONS

- **Coordinate a recreation needs assessment between the Natural Resources Commission, the Recreation Commission, and the Board of Public Works and use the results of this assessment to inform future decisions made by Town departments and commissions.**

Conduct an assessment of existing recreation facilities (active and passive), the impacts of these facilities, and a determination of future recreation needs based on population projections and current demands. The results of the assessment should be used by Town departments as issues arise regarding the need for active and passive recreation space. A current inventory can inform management and use decisions and can aid the NRC, Recreation Commission, Planning Board, and Board of Selectmen in understanding Wellesley's short- and long-term open space and recreation needs.

- **Keep the Open Space and Recreation Plan updated every five years.** Continued collaboration between the NRC and the Recreation Commission should keep the recreation needs/inventory updated, and this relationship should allow the two groups to communicate explicitly about Wellesley's recreation issues and challenges. Ongoing recordkeeping and dialogue will enable the Town to stay current with the Open Space and Recreation Plan and keep Wellesley eligible for grant funding from the State.

Work with institutional partners to protect open space and provide additional recreational facilities.

Three large institutions own most of the remaining unprotected open space in Wellesley. Babson College and Wellesley College, the two private institutions, may build in their open spaces as part of college expansions. Massachusetts Bay Community College, a state-owned entity, may be more likely to sell its open space to a developer. Good communication is

needed with these entities in order to learn development plans early or to negotiate options to protect or purchase institutional open space, and share the college’s recreational facilities.

ACTIONS

- **Establish and maintain relationships with key figures at Massachusetts Bay Community College, Babson College, and Wellesley College** that will provide the NRC and the Trails Committee with information about changes in use of each institution’s current open space properties.
- **Ensure that Town committees and boards communicate with each other regarding potential open space losses.** The NRC and the Trails Committee should ensure that any information received regarding the loss of unprotected open space is shared quickly with the Planning Board.
- **Include the Board of Health in open space and recreation planning discussions.** Since the Board of Health’s mission is to improve the quality of life of the Town’s residents and workers, it should be involved in plans that affect health and the environment.
- **Explore sharing institutional recreational facilities in order to relieve the pressures to overuse the Town’s playing fields.**

Pursue greater connectivity of open spaces on a local and regional level.

Wellesley’s trail system provides excellent links among some of the Town’s open spaces. As the Trails Committee contemplates new projects, it should look to create new connections within town that will provide citizens with more recreational opportunities and alternatives to car travel. In addition, the Trails Committee and the NRC should seek to create regional connections for its open space system.

ACTIONS

- **Continue to refine the trails system by looking at ways to connect major open space areas.** The Trails Committee continues to update its system to maximize connectivity opportunities. This includes not only the activation of new trails (such as the Sudbury Aqueduct), but also the relocation of existing trails (such as the Crosstown Trail) and trail connections to town destinations, train stations, schools, and office areas.
- **Work with other towns and recreation groups to form links to regional trails and open spaces.** Strengthen relationships with neighboring towns and regional recreation groups to work on creating links between Wellesley’s open space system and that of other open space systems in the region. Trails could link to reservations or to existing trails that will provide access to recreation or transportation opportunities in other towns, such as the Riverside T station in Newton or the Massachusetts Bay Circuit Trail.

Seek management options that will allow more productive use of Town-owned and private active recreational space rather than converting passive into active open space.

Wellesley is experiencing some pressure to find more active recreation land to support local private organizational sports. Playing fields are overused, and maintenance of these fields is difficult. In addition, high property values prevent the Town from acquiring new land for recreational facilities. Many residents have asked the Town to convert some of its passive open space into playing fields, but the passive spaces are also used and valued by other residents. Without the prospect of acquisition of new recreational space, the Town must find new management options for its existing active open space.

ACTIONS

- **Evaluate the contribution of fees to maintenance and increase fees assessed to local sports leagues for use of the Town's playing fields if appropriate.** Many sports leagues use Wellesley's playing fields each season, including youth soccer, baseball, and lacrosse. Each of these organizations pays a fee per player per year to the Recreation Department for field maintenance. Since heavy field use increases maintenance costs, the Town should evaluate whether it is appropriate to fund these higher costs by assessing a higher fee per person to these sports leagues.
- **Explore the pros and cons of installing an artificial turf athletic field.** Artificial turf fields are more expensive to install but are less expensive to maintain and can be used almost continually, unlike natural fields that need to be rested.
- **Add lighting to recreational facilities in order to extend the hours of use where appropriate.** The Recreation Department can provide greater opportunities for field use by installing lights where practical. The impact on abutting residents, however, can be a problem. Lights should be installed in areas that will have low-to-moderate impacts on surrounding properties.
- **Continue to investigate the possibility of using local institutional facilities for Town programs with leadership from the Board of Selectmen.** Although the Recreation Department has determined in the past that agreements with local colleges for large-scale facility use would prove too costly, the need for additional recreation space suggests that this alternative be revisited. The Recreation Department currently rents the pool at Wellesley College for water safety classes and Teen Center programs. Good relationships

with the three colleges and Dana Hall School could lead to the Recreation Department being allowed to use institutional facilities for expansion of Town recreation programs. This may be particularly important for swimming programs and access to playing fields. The Board of Selectmen and the Recreation Department should assume a leadership role in negotiating with local institutions to allow the public to use their recreational facilities for a fee. This will involve working with the understanding that users in Town programs will not prevent students and staff of those institutions from using their own facilities. An agreement of this kind may involve higher user fees and a willingness on the Town's part to provide a service in return for this recreational access.

Develop a plan to construct an aquatic facility that will be funded through a public-private partnership.

One of the top recreation needs identified by the Recreation Department is a public aquatic facility that could host competitive swimming and family water activities. It is unrealistic to expect that the Town will be able to acquire a parcel of land that is large enough to accommodate an aquatic center; therefore, a center will have to be placed on current public or private property. An opportunity exists as the Town considers a new high school.

ACTIONS

- **Work with the School Committee to incorporate plans for an aquatic center into the design for a new high-school complex.** The Town should work closely with the School Committee to design an aquatic center that will fit into the school complex and function both as a school athletic facility and as a community recreation center. The design should be sensitive to the needs of school programs, and the Recreation Department should agree

that any programs it will conduct at the new facility will not impede school use.

- **Investigate the potential for a public-private partnership that will drive construction of an aquatic center.** Concord's new aquatic center may provide a model for Wellesley to follow. The Concord Community Swim and Health Center is located on school property and funded through private donations to a 501(c)(3) non-profit entity formed to construct the facility. This facility will include a pool for competitive swimming, a therapy pool, a children's pool, and a diving well, along with a fitness center and community gathering rooms. Concord's aquatic center will be built entirely through private funding (\$9.5 million), and user fees will be set high enough to ensure that the facility will be self-supporting in the future.
- **Locate a dedicated source of revenue for ongoing maintenance and operation.** If Wellesley follows the Concord model, the Town must ensure that it determines how the aquatic center will be operated and how it will secure an ongoing source of funding for operations and maintenance. A large facility such as an aquatic center cannot be funded entirely through tax revenues each year. In order to make sure that it is a community center and not just a school pool, the School Committee should not be responsible for funding operations. A combination of user fees and an endowment may be necessary to provide a stable, continuous funding stream that will not require reduction or elimination of other Recreation Department programs.

Continue to develop recreational programs that will fit the needs of Wellesley's changing population.

As more families with children move to Wellesley, the Recreation Department will experience greater demand for youth programs. These programs include sports and other activi-

ties such as painting, dancing, and cooking. The growth in programs over the last decade also suggests that more programs will be needed for adults and seniors. Although these programs are all fee programs, the Town must make certain that they remain affordable for any lower-income residents.

ACTIONS

- **Continue to offer a wide variety of recreational opportunities that suit the interests of Wellesley residents.** The Recreation Department must ensure that it continues to offer a variety of sports programs as Wellesley's youth population grows. Programs should follow user desires, such as more soccer leagues and swimming opportunities. In addition, the Recreation Department should continue to offer a variety of classes, such as cooking, language classes, and painting, to both children and adults. The Council on Aging must also provide recreation opportunities for seniors. Needs and desires for recreational programs can be measured through yearly user surveys.
- **Seek additional funding for recreation programs from higher user fees and private sources.** The Recreation Department will need to find increased funds for additional programs. One way in which to do this is to charge higher user fees. Youth sports leagues may be assessed higher fees to cover increased costs of field maintenance, and recreation classes offered to children and adults may need to increase registration fees. In addition, non-Wellesley residents who use Town programs should continue to be assessed fees at a higher rate than Wellesley residents. Non-resident fees, though, may need to rise from their current rate of \$5 more than Wellesley residents (\$15 more at Morses Pond Beach). Donations could also be pursued from private businesses and institutions in Wellesley.

- **Ensure that lower-income residents have access to recreational programs by building the current scholarship fund.** The Recreation Department's scholarship fund helps defray the costs of programs for lower-income residents. In 2004, the Recreation Department had approximately \$20,000 in requests for scholarships, particularly for day camp participation. The department asked Wellesley residents for donations to this fund, but only received \$35. As a result, the department appealed to private industry for more funds. This practice should be continued in order to raise money for summer day camp and other program fees. When asking for donations, the Recreation Department should be sure to identify income levels that would qualify a resident to receive a scholarship, along with information on the number of people in Wellesley who could be helped by the program, so that potential donors become more aware of the need in Wellesley.