

## V. OPEN SPACE & RECREATION

### BACKGROUND

The preservation of open space and the continued improvement of recreation facilities are very important objectives for the Town of Derry and its citizens. This importance has been reflected in the prominence given to these coupled goals during the citizen participatory process to develop this Master Plan.

The preservation of open land, including open fields, woods, wetlands, farms, and undisturbed wild areas for creatures, is critical to assure that Derry will remain a “livable community” for the next decade and for the generations of Derry residents to come. Open space preservation is inextricably linked to a positive future for other aspects of life in Derry such as a thriving local economy and attractive residential development. Senior business executives and CEOs looking for sites to locate their companies seek, among other things, an attractive place to live as well as work. Availability of nearby, scenic open space, water bodies and woods increases the desirability of real estate and augments its market value. Undeveloped open areas, wetlands and woodlands help assure that groundwater stays clean, in turn providing citizens and businesses with a potable source of drinking water. Trees and vegetation help keep air clean and fresh through the process of photosynthesis, creating oxygen, absorbing the carbon dioxide and other pollutants that are increasing from vehicle emissions; hence making air more breathable. Land kept in agriculture assures a locally-based supply of fresh food and produce for local residents - an increasingly desirable alternative to food trucked from thousands of miles away.

Recreation facilities as well enhance life in a community. Recreation is vital to the physical and mental health and well-being of children, youth, adults, and senior citizens alike. Availability of a range of recreation facilities and opportunities in a community is also one of the features that potential new businesses and households in the range of income brackets consider in making location

decisions.

Derry has devoted substantial efforts to the development of recreation facilities and the preservation of open space and in setting priorities for these efforts in both the 1985 and 1994 Master Plans. Further, the Town undertook a detailed, extensive planning process for recreation and open space that culminated in the development of the 1995 Recreation Master Plan, assisted by William Hoffman, Landscape Architect.

During the 1999-2000 master plan process, a group of citizens and local experts worked over a period of several weeks to develop a specific action plan to carry out the open space and recreation priorities that emerged during the initial Community Visions Workshop. These are reflected in the Implementing Actions section of this Element. On balance, this group affirmed that Derry is “on the right track” in planning for open space and recreation, and that the 1995 Recreation and Open Space Plan continues as an appropriate guide as Derry enters the new millennium. That Plan is incorporated into this Master Plan by reference.

#### *Open Space*

Derry is rapidly losing its open space. The 1995 Recreation/Open Space Plan found that more than half the land area in Derry was undeveloped, but it is apparent from GIS and assessor data tallies of 1997 data that undeveloped land is now *less than half* of the Town’s land area. In particular, agricultural land has been lost to development; all working farms save two are gone. While there is recognition of the importance of economic development to the viability of the town, there also is understanding in the community that this must be balanced with preservation of the community environment. Open space preservation contributes substantially to Derry’s character, and this in turn enhances Derry’s attractiveness as a place to be for new businesses, their employees, and their CEOs.

As illustrated on the Recreation and Open Space Map, much of the remaining open space in Derry is located in the central and eastern sections of the Town. Findings of the 1995 Open Space & Recreation Plan revealed that existing centers of development, or neighborhoods in Derry are in fact surrounded by open space. This finding led to the

strategy, outlined in the 1995 Plan, to focus on maintaining those existing open space areas around core centers, and to target open space parcels that can contribute to open space “buffers” around those core centers. As described in the 1995 Plan, this strategy can:

- create a sense of place for neighborhood areas, thus supporting a goal of the Housing Element of this Plan to more clearly identify and support the differing neighborhood centers of Derry;
- preserve the “sense of well-being”, talked about in psychological studies that occurs when the natural environment is in close proximity to human settlements;
- preserve agricultural land that can provide a source of locally-produced food for present and future generations;
- preserve or enhance real estate values through providing buffers between incompatible land uses;
- preserve habitat, floodplains, steep slopes, and wet areas that play critical roles within the natural eco-system that is essential to life as we know it;
- provide connecting paths and trails to support this natural eco-system both for humans and the other creature members of that ecosystem.

The 1995 Plan contains a detailed, comprehensive inventory of the open, green space in Derry, and identified particular areas for preservation. These land areas fall into three categories:

- Open space for public use and enjoyment
- Open space that is important to natural eco-systems and that offers marginal development suitability
- Farmland and scenic areas that preserve the Town’s agricultural base and heritage

Those priorities are continued in this Master Plan.

Derry has taken some significant steps in preserving

important open space, expressing its support of this important objective. The Town has bonded \$500,000 to purchase Broadview Farm, and also has purchased the Gulf Road property. The Town has earmarked 100 per cent of current use change taxes received for purchase of open space. Further, the Town Council voted to allocate \$50,000 in the Town Capital Improvement Program for open space preservation. Each of these steps is important and significant. At the same time, Derry citizens recognize the importance of increasing these efforts, since open space, farmland, and forested land is diminishing rapidly and once gone, will be gone forever.

#### *Farmland and Agriculture*

Derry’s farms have been an integral part of its character and its heritage, contributing scenic pastoral landscapes as well as a local source of fresh food and produce. As elsewhere throughout New England, farms in Derry are severely threatened, essentially requiring some form of intervention in order for both their pastoral landscapes and farming business to survive. Farming faces threats from weather, insects, an unpredictable market, development, and conflict with neighbors as development brings more and more residences closer to farming activity and its inherent dust, odors, and noise. At the same time, there is a growing awareness of the importance of locally-based food production to life in New England and its economy, as the fragility of the region’s dependence upon food imported from away becomes ever more apparent, coupled with the growing instability of those far-away food sources. As of Derry’s 1985 Master Plan, several farms still existed in Derry – including two dairy farms, several garden farms, orchards, and horse farms. As of the writing of this Plan, two farms remain in Derry.

Preservation of farmland and agricultural activity emerged as a major priority in Derry’s planning process. Derry supports local agriculture through participation in the current use taxation policy. An expanded program of support for preserving agriculture and farmland is outlined in the Implementing Actions section of this Element.

#### *Recreation Facilities*

Derry offers a wide range of recreational facilities for its residents and youth. The Town’s facilities include

14 soccer fields, 17 baseball or softball fields, 6 football fields, 2 ice rinks, 10 playgrounds, 8 tennis courts, and 8 gyms, among other facilities. The 1995 Recreation Master Plan, incorporated by reference in this Master Plan, contains a detailed inventory of all facilities throughout the Town of Derry. The Derry Recreation Department offers a wide array of programs for youth, senior citizens, persons with special needs, as well as its adult population. These programs include summer camp, swimming, cross-country ski clinic, runs, walking programs, trips, a summer concert series, soccer clinics, and holiday events. Derry citizens have much praise for the Town's recreation programs, which are an important part of life in Derry.

Despite these impressive facilities and recreation offerings and no doubt because of the Town's rapid growth of the last three decades, Derry's recreation facilities and department experiences major challenges - dealing with the heavy use of existing facilities, a recreation work load that exceeds the capacity of its staff, greater reliance of volunteers and donations, and continual user requests for more and improved facilities. The facility analysis conducted during the 1995 Recreation Plan indeed found that in several areas, the level of recreation facilities available per unit of population was below commonly-accepted national standards. The 1995 Plan outlines a detailed and specific strategy to improve these facilities, and Derry has made progress on this course since that time. Since 1995, Derry has:

- Developed a skateboard park and pavilion at the Alexander Carr property;
- Developed a beach house pavilion and docks at Gallien's Beach;
- Added to the dock system at Hood Park;
- Irrigated infields at O'Hara Field and Veteran's Field;
- Developed the "Upper Room" near Rider Field as a teen center, senior outreach center, and human service center;
- Purchased Broadview Farm on Young Road in East Derry for development as a park.

Broadview Farm is a unique, multi-use property now being managed by a locally based committee that actively farms portions of the property, maintaining its long agricultural heritage. The farm also offers community gardens, a gardening area for disabled persons, a low-impact camping area, wildlife

viewing, hiking and cross-country trails, and meeting areas for outing and children's groups.

#### *Paths and Greenways*

Derry is continuing its efforts, underway for several years, to develop a system of bike paths and green ways throughout the Town. As described in the 1995 Derry Recreation and Open Space Plan, the bike path system is linking recreation, businesses, schools, and convenience shopping areas within Derry's core. A Pathways Committee has made significant strides towards expanding the bike path system, aided by funding through the federal ISTEA program. At the close of the year 2000, construction will be starting on a four-mile pathways loop connecting downtown locations aided by just under \$1.4 million in federal, state, and other funding sources. A further phase of the project, in the planning stages, are connector routes to neighboring towns, including Auburn and Chester.

#### **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

Derry's goals for open space and recreation over the next several years are to:

- Give high priority to preserving open space in Derry and target Town resources toward this end.
- Preserve farmland; support local agriculture; and increase local food production.
- Increase planned recreation areas for all ages.
- Create more neighborhood parks.
- Complete and expand pathways in Derry.

#### **IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS**

*Overall Open Space Protection:*

- Budget a consistent, stable amount of Town funds annually for open space preservation:
  - Budget \$500,000/year in 2001 and 2002 for acquisition of open space initiatives in progress as of the writing of this Plan.

Consider borrowing funds and repaying these over time if this is necessary.

- In future years, budget 1 per cent of the Town budget for open space preservation.
- Continue to allocate 100 per cent of current use change tax – a non-renewable fund source once land is taken out of current use - for open space preservation, above and beyond that recommended 1 per cent budget allocation.
- Improve the ability of Town regulations and policies to protect Derry’s natural, cultural, and historic resources.  
*[Also in Land Use Element].*
- Identify opportunities to create more green space in the Downtown, such as areas for acquisition, incentives for private development, regulatory mechanisms.  
*[Also in Land Use Element].*
- Identify opportunities for improved protection of existing trees and other natural resources in Town regulations and policies.
  - Consider inclusion of tree protection in site plan review regulations.*[Also in Land Use Element].*

*Farmland and Agriculture Preservation:*

- Increase local food production; support local agricultural activities; and preserve existing farmland through:
  - Seeking the lowest current use tax rate for agriculture in the allowable range for active farmers.
  - Seeking donation or acquisition of development rights through conservation easements on agricultural land and land with prime agricultural soils that prohibits development but allows agricultural activities.
  - Encouraging organic agriculture that uses no chemicals, and other agriculture that follows best management practices that minimize

use of chemicals, odors, noise, and dust to occur anywhere in town through:

-- Identifying and removing obstacles to home-based businesses associated with agriculture. These include revising zoning regulations to:

- \* Define a working farm
- \* Allowing roadside farm stands
- \* Ease parking requirements for roadside stands and farmers’ markets
- \* Easing signage requirements for roadside farm stands

- Consider creating an agriculture district that gives preference to agricultural preservation. This might include:
  - Requiring clustering of new units on soils least suitable to agriculture;
  - Protecting remaining agricultural land by deed restriction;
  - Requiring buffers to separate residential and agricultural areas.
- Develop and adopt measures to minimize conflicts between agriculture and residences, giving preference to agriculture that is organically grown, or that adopts best management practices according to a known and reputable source.
- Plan and create open space buffers around farms as part of Derry’s overall open space preservation strategy;
- Establish a right-to-farm ordinance that lends protection to farmers that use organic farming methods or best management practices. This ordinance would:
  - Clarify best management practices for noise, odor, dust, manure treatment ,use of chemical fertilizer or pesticides;
  - Establish protection for farmers who employ these practices against nuisance suits in accordance with RSA 432:33.

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- Encourage horse farms and agriculture for personal use.

- Acquiring nine-acre parcel with pond on Meadowbrook Road for a small neighborhood park.
- Placing signs on all Town-owned parks and public conservation lands.
- Encouraging private neighborhood groups to assist with acquisition and construction of neighborhoods parks;

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*Recreation:*

- Create and improve more neighborhood parks through:
  - Developing neighborhood parks for each Derry neighborhood as identified in the 1995 Recreation and Open Space Master Plan. These neighborhoods include:
    - Northwest Derry – Scobie Pond area
    - North Central Derry – Adams Pond area
    - Central Derry – Hampstead Road/Oleson Road area
    - South Central Derry – Ezekiel Pond area
    - Southwest Derry – lower Fordway area
    - Island Pond – western watershed
    - East Derry – Morrison and Sheldon Road areas
  - Using Town-owned land for neighborhood parks and facilities in the following locations:
    - a playground and ball fields in Northeast Derry – Scobie Pond Road or Wildwood road sites
    - a picnic area, pavilion, and hiking trail on Shephard land – East Derry Road and Pond Road
    - a mini-park or ballfield at Weber forest corner – Drew Road and Jackman Road location
    - a picnic area and mountain bike park – Bowers Road adjacent to the pathways old BM railroad bed.
    - a small park on Town land in extreme Southwest Corner.

- Develop public beach and public access to Island Pond., through measures such as the following:
  - A “swap” with private owners – Town acceptance and maintenance of private roads for boat launch and parking area.

*Improving recreation to enhance economic development:*

- Enlist support from nature groups, farm organizations, the Audubon Society in potential for development of nature parks, petting zoos, and an aquarium in Derry.
- Investigate the potential for development of an 18-hole golf course in Derry that could offer incentive golf memberships to incoming businesses.
- Explore possibilities for attracting riding schools and/or riding camps to Derry, using its available nature trails.
- Offer horse and buggy rides through scenic areas of Derry to promote tourism and feature its historic “Nutfield” heritage.  
*[Also in Economic Development Element]*

**APPENDIX**

A. “Growth Background: Derry and Neighbors”, August 14, 2000.

**REFERENCED MATERIALS**

Derry Recreation Master Plan, November, 1995,

April 2, 2001