

**Chelmsford Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee**

Town of Chelmsford  
50 Billerica Rd. Chelmsford, MA 01824

Meeting Minutes  
September 17, 2024

**DRAFT**

**Members Present:**

Karl Bischoff (Conservation Commission)  
Peter Spawn (Conservation Commission)  
Brian Stripp  
David Sperry  
Jerry Schmidt

**Members Absent:**

Pat Wojtas (Select Board)  
Paul McDougall (Planning Board)

**Others Present:**

Support Staff: David Koonce (Conservation Agent), Christine Clancy (DPW)  
NMCOG: Meghan Tenhoff, Michael Asciola  
Chelmsford Commission on Disabilities: Joanne Stanway, Katrina Schmidt, Matt Pellegrino  
North Chelmsford Water District: Paul Pires and Aurora Bas

**Proceedings:**

Meeting called to order at 7:00 PM.

Dave Sperry prepared slides on the ADA Appendix status. He said that there are four key artifacts/documents required by the state: (1) Designation of ADA Coordinator – Status: now in hand; (2) Grievance Procedures – Status: does not exist, currently being drafted; (3) Public Notification Requirements – Status: now in hand; and (4) Participation of Individuals or Organizations with Disabilities – Status: In process. Self-evaluations are being prepared with the assistance of Vincent Vignaly and the Chelmsford Commission on Disabilities (CCOD).

Dave Sperry explained that the OSRP ADA self-evaluation instructions are geared toward recreation facilities, not open spaces. He said that the ADA does not regulate hiking trails, but other organizations do. Massachusetts state trail grant programs require us to use the Forest Service Trail Accessibility Guidelines (FSTAG) established in 2013, which follow ADA for facilities but defines usability guidelines for trails and nature spaces.

Dave Sperry said that Vince Vignaly recommends that we use ADA requirements to evaluate parking, indoor spaces, picnic areas, game or play areas, playgrounds, boat docks, fishing facilities, pools, and beaches; and we use FSTAG requirements to evaluate paths from the parking lot, trailheads, Outdoor Recreation Access Routes (ORAR), trails (5 different classes), viewing sites, and trail amenities. The committee voted to approve this recommendation.

Dave said that newer or recently designed/renovated sites, such as Roberts field and Varney Park, typically only need minor or seasonal maintenance/fixes. Older sites, such as Southwell and Strawberry Field may need more extensive transition plans. Some sites will require consulting assistance from specialized organizations to achieve the best user experience from an accessibility perspective. All trailhead signage needs to be updated in accordance with the new guidelines. He said that trails on several sites are very close to meeting ORAR requirements, and estimated that we could bring them into compliance with less than 40 hours of volunteer labor. Some areas, such as Thanksgiving Forest and Oak Hill, will require significant funding to achieve basic accessibility.

Dave explained that many simpler sites have been visited and OSRP ADA Self-evaluation forms have been completed. Some sites were on hold awaiting a decision from the OSRP committee on which rules to use to evaluate hiking trails. However, since the committee approved FSTAG for trails during today's meeting, the hold will be lifted.

Michael Asciola said he received confirmation that our self-assessment needs to be approved in order to get the OSRP approved.

The committee agreed that we can now close out Task 2.

Brian thanked members of the North Chelmsford Water District for attending the meeting.

Meghan provided a brief overview of the survey results. She said that she only removed surveys that had no questions answered. Partially complete surveys were included. She noted that 86% of people completed survey after opening it. The results show that the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail is highly appreciated. Transportation was noted as a key barrier to the use of open space. Our lowest response came from Area 4, but there are also no parks there. Response from Area 1 was high due to the large number of residents and also our EJ Zone outreach efforts.

Peter noted that the survey respondents don't necessarily view open space the same way that the committee does, especially with respect to types and usage.

Michael observed that people consistently say that they don't know what open space and recreation opportunities are available in Chelmsford. Meghan and Jerry noted that shelter staff had requested printed information that could be posted on their bulletin boards. Peter asked the committee to consider how far the OSRP should go toward defining specific solutions.

Meghan observed that community requests and interests seem to fall into 5 general categories, or "buckets." She posted each bucket on the wall and included some initial goals in each. Then, committee members were encouraged to add additional goals to each bucket. Finally, when each list of goals was complete, members were asked to vote on the top two goals in each bucket. Michael then re-ordered each list so the goals that received the highest support appear at the top. The results are shown below.

### Increase Engagement

1. Trail maps: online and on-site master list of sites that cross-reference activities available at sites.
2. Public Education: watershed, habitat, wildlife, carbon values
  - a. Develop programs (regular events and activities) guided hikes
  - b. Post events/activities at community spaces
  - c. CCTV
3. Communications about open space and recreation already in the town, signage
  - Interpretive signage
  - Community feedback loops
  - Conservation commission: standing agenda item to talk about this

### Enhance Accessibility and Promote Equity

1. Prioritize neighborhoods lacking OSR amenities – acquisition and upgrades
2. Sidewalks/ interconnection to improve accessibility and usage
3. Wayfinding signage
4. Targeted engagement
5. Accessible Trails
  - Bicycle safety

### Improve Climate Resilience (physical and social)

1. Prioritize land conservation and restoration in flood-prone areas
  - a. Biodiversity
2. Adaptation (shade canopy, splash pads, pool)
3. Community events
4. Education on value of open space
5. Green infrastructure
  - Fire danger
  - More trees
  - Potential incorporation of open space in ongoing and future watershed studies

### Maintain, Upgrade, and Steward

1. Develop operation and maintenance plans (more detailed and inclusive than what exists; where to fish)
2. Safe trails and recreation facilities
  - a. Lighting
  - b. ADA improvements
3. Allow the public to feel included to foster a sense of pride and personal responsibility
4. Restrooms
5. Outdoor furniture and amenities (Benches and shelters)- areas for groups to meet and enjoy
6. Interpretive signage
7. Wayfinding signage
  - OS inventory maintenance

Offer expansive recreation opportunities and facilities

1. Programming and events and communication
  2. Flexible community open space
  3. Playgrounds, splash pads
  4. Pool
  5. Adequate facilities to support demand – basketball, pickleball, splash pad
- Prioritizing uses
  - Indoor recreation facility

An ice cream social will be held on September 18<sup>th</sup> at the Chelmsford Elks Club. Peter encouraged committee members to come, mingle, and share ideas. He pointed out that reducing flooding and other aspects of climate change could be more attainable than other objectives, such as reducing traffic or increasing affordable housing. Doors will open at 5:30 PM, and the presentation will begin at 6:00 PM.

Meghan asked if the team has been able to define Task 3 at this point. Michael said we have not, but expects the next task to emerge from what was presented tonight.

The committee voted to approve of the August meeting minutes as written.

Public Comment: None.

Meeting adjourned at 8:05 PM.

**Next Meetings:**

Tuesday, October 15, 2024 at 7:00 PM

Tuesday, November 19, 2024 at 7:00 PM