

**Chelmsford Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee**

Town of Chelmsford

50 Billerica Rd. Chelmsford, MA 01824

Meeting Minutes

October 15, 2024

**DRAFT**

**Members Present:**

Karl Bischoff (Conservation Commission)

Peter Spawn (Conservation Commission)

Pat Wojtas (Select Board)

Brian Stripp

David Sperry

Jerry Schmidt

**Members Absent:**

Paul McDougall (Planning Board)

**Others Present:**

Support Staff: David Koonce (Conservation Agent), Christine Clancy (DPW)

NMCOG: Meghan Tenhoff, Michael Asciola

Middlesex Canal Commission (MCC): Doug Chandler

Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC): Robert Klinkhammer

**Proceedings:**

Meeting called to order at 7:00 PM.

The committee voted to approve the September meeting minutes as written. There were 5 votes in favor and one abstention due to a prior absence.

Dave Sperry walked through a presentation that summarized updates to the ADA Appendix. He said we are close to completing the final two artifacts required by the state. Grievance procedures are now going through final review with town counsel, and 28 of 33 ADA self-evaluation forms have been completed. The average form length is 8 pages, so Dave expects the ADA Appendix to add 264 pages to the OSRP when fully complete.

Dave said that we will need to include a 1-2 page summary describing the self-evaluation process and detailing our transition plans. He also provided an example of some typical accessibility issues. In his example, he showed that barrier rocks are often used to discourage all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) from entering open space and recreation areas, but as a result, they also prevent the town from meeting the 36-inch minimum clear tread width requirement at the entrance. In the example shown, Dave explained that we could gain 500 feet of existing accessible path and another 900 feet of scenic path just by giving the barrier rock a small nudge to the side. He said there are many cases like this, where a small amount of effort could yield significant results.

Dave also took a first cut at estimating the project complexity for each location, rating them low, medium, or high in terms of planning, DPW work, volunteer work, and cost. Karl suggested that we update the text to say that the ROI is “too low” for those that had a high complexity rating. Dave also noted that the recreation areas are typically in better shape than other open spaces because many just need basic maintenance. The committee commended Dave on the progress that he has made on the ADA Appendix and also the quality of his presentation.

Meghan introduced the draft of Sections 2 and 3. She read the first paragraph of the “Statement of Purpose” from Section 2 aloud and asked for feedback. The committee was very supportive, and didn’t suggest any immediate changes during this initial read through.

Meghan then moved on to the draft goals and objectives. She summarized our five draft goals for the OSRP, which include: (1) increasing community engagement with open spaces, (2) enhancing accessibility and promoting equity in open space resources, (3) improving climate resilience through strategic land use, (4) maintaining, upgrading, and stewarding Chelmsford’s open spaces, and (5) expanding recreational opportunities and facilities. She then listed some key objectives for each goal, along with supporting actions, focus areas, and interactions with our other goals and objectives.

The committee provided the following initial comments on the draft goals and objectives:

**Objective 1.3: Improve Information through Trail Maps.** The committee suggested going further than just trail maps and discussed the need to find ways to communicate this information to a wider audience.

**Objective 2.1: Expand Accessible Trails and Safety Features.** Under the action section, Peter suggested that we make a distinction between lighting in “open spaces” and lighting in “parks.” The committee agreed that, in the case of lighting, we are talking about “parks.” Under the additional focus section, Dave Sperry and Karl suggested that we “increase accessibility” instead of saying we will “make sure that trails are ADA-compliant.”

**Objective 2.2: Improve Access through Sidewalks and Trail Connections.** Under the action section, Christine pointed out that the DPW currently has a sidewalk master plan, with a 30-year backlog. She said that it prioritizes sidewalks to schools and recreation areas. Jerry suggested that we try to connect sidewalks to other types of open space as well, even if we don’t assign them the same priority. This would help the town to address an often-repeated complaint by residents who say that they have to “drive before they can walk” (on the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail, for example). Solving this problem would also help Chelmsford reduce the volume of cars on the road, carbon emissions, and the need for more impervious asphalt parking that could further exacerbate flooding. It would also support our goal of improving climate resilience.

**Objective 3.1: Prioritize Land Conservation in Climate-Vulnerable Areas.** Under the action section, Meghan asked if the DPW can provide data on areas that have a history of flooding.

Objective 3.3: Use Open Spaces for Sustainable Food Production and Farmland Preservation. Under the action section, Meghan suggested that we prioritize “productive” farmland preservation.

Objective 4.1: Develop Comprehensive Maintenance Plans. Under the action section, Dave Sperry suggested that we replace “ADA improvements” with “accessibility improvements.” Peter suggested that the actions include “land management plans.” Under the interaction section, Christine said that trails and sidewalks and trails should be accessible “where feasible.” David Koonce said that comprehensive management and maintenance plans would be needed.

Objective 4.2: Upgrade Facilities for Improved Safety and Comfort. Under the action section, instead of saying that we will “install” new lighting, Christine recommended that we say we will “explore opportunities for” new lighting. Jerry said that since benches are a recurring theme, and have been mentioned by multiple groups, including shelter personnel, maybe we should solicit input from residents on where they are needed most. Meghan suggested we also observe how people gather to determine where benches might be needed. Dave Sperry recommended “trash cans” as well, and there was some discussion about how we would handle pickup and maintenance.

Objective 5.1: Develop Flexible Multi-Use Open Spaces. The committee discussed the example of cricket being played on some of the existing recreation fields. However, the process of getting permission to use the fields is unclear. Jerry suggested that we make that information available to residents if we want to maximize our use of existing resources. That way, any new funding can be directed toward needs that aren’t already being met.

Objective 5.2: Prioritize Development of Playgrounds, Pools and Sport Facilities. Under the action section, Christine suggested that instead of saying we will “build” new playgrounds, we say that we will “investigate opportunities for building” new playgrounds.

Objective 5.3: Install Adequate Supporting Amenities: Under the action section, Karl suggested we say “highly desirable” amenities instead of “essential” amenities.

Assignment to the Committee (due on Tuesday, October 22):

Meghan asked the committee to go through goals and objectives, dig into the actions and interactions, and also think about how it might be funded. Also review Sections 2 & 3 and provide comments and suggestions. Email your feedback to Meghan by 10/22.

Christine asked if Meghan could provide some examples of the types of actions we are talking about. Meghan said she will send examples from Arlington to Karl, and Karl will forward them to the entire group. The committee also discussed developing a timeline for when each action would start. Peter said he would try to develop additional actions as requested. David Koonce advocated for striking a balance, so that we do not “overcomplicate it.”

**Public Comment:**

Doug Chandler, from the Middlesex Canal Commission (MCC), and Robert Klinkhammer, from the Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) asked the OSRP Committee to support an initiative to extend the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) beyond its official end at Cross Point Towers to connect with other segments of the 230-mile Bay Circuit Trail (BCT), such as Billerica's Yankee Doodle Trail (to Boston and Duxbury) and the Vandenburg Esplanade at the Rourke Bridge (completing crescent to Newburyport). Several local trail representatives have formed the Friends of Regional Towpaths and Trails (FORTT) to eliminate the short gaps that separate many local trails. The proposed path would include Canal Street from the Billerica line at Brick Kiln Road to Riverneck Road, then under the Connector and over Route 3 by bike lane, then cut through MassDOT and town properties to meet the BFRT at its tunnel under 495.

Karl asked Doug to forward his presentation via email so he can distribute it to the entire OSRP committee for review.

Peter asked if we can get all OSRP meeting minutes posted to website now that they have been approved. David Koonce said we can expect that to happen shortly.

David Koonce said he will try to reserve the McCarthy Conference Room at the Chelmsford Public Library for our next meeting. He will send an update to the committee when a location has been confirmed.

Meeting adjourned at 8:20 PM.

**Next Meetings:**

Tuesday, November 19, 2024 at 7:00 PM – Location TBD