

Chelmsford Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee
Town of Chelmsford
50 Billerica Rd. Chelmsford, MA 01824
Meeting Minutes
December 17, 2024

DRAFT
Rev B

Members Present:

Karl Bischoff (Conservation Commission)
Peter Spawn (Conservation Commission)
Pat Wojtas (Select Board)
David Sperry
Brian Stripp
Jerry Schmidt

Members Absent:

Paul McDougall (Planning Board)

Others Present:

Support Staff: David Koonce (Conservation Agent), Christine Clancy (DPW)
NMCOG: Meghan Tenhoff, Michael Asciola

Proceedings:

Meeting called to order at 7:00 PM.

The committee voted to approve the November meeting minutes as written with one abstention due to a prior absence.

Michael shared the latest schedule. Key dates are as follows:

- **Dec 20** – Final comments due from OSRP & Staff by 9:00 AM.
- **Dec 23** – Draft out on town website for public comment.
- **Jan 9** – Public Forum will be held on Zoom from 4:00 – 5:30 PM. Michael will make a presentation at the beginning of the meeting to showcase the OSRP draft and solicit comments. All OSRP committee members encouraged to attend if possible.
- **Jan 13** – Public comments due to David Koonce by 4:00 PM via email or in person.
- **Jan 14** – Presentation to Conservation Commission at 6:30 PM in Town Hall.
- **Jan 22** – Presentation to Planning Board at 6:30 PM in Town Hall.
- **Jan 27** – Presentation to Select Board at 6:00 PM in Town Hall.
- **TBD** – Deliver final plan to DCS; submission date depends on board approval.

Peter suggested that we prepare a comment spreadsheet for public input and he requested that it include instructions for accessing and saving documents on Google Drive. Mike said he would take that action.

Meghan reviewed Section 9: Five-Year Action Plan. She explained that responsible parties and initiation priorities have now been added. Karl said that the list of responsible parties should only include town entities.

Michael said that most of the comments that he has received so far haven't required a lot of discussion and are now being incorporated. He said wildlife corridors have not been mapped. Peter suggested making the map a future action in the project. David Koonce said a wildlife corridor description is required, but a map is not.

Peter also suggested that we also analyze watersheds to identify critical areas. He said that most of our open space is near watersheds and is critically important. Michael said he will update actions under Objective 2.1 to say, "Utilize watershed analyses..."

Michael said there were several comments about erosion. Meghan indicated that the issue along the Merrimack was addressed in 2021. She reached out to the Merrimack Watershed Council, but they had nothing to add. Christine said School Street has a minor issue that doesn't rise to the same level of concern. Varney Beach at Freeman Lake also experiences erosion during high intensity rain and poses a risk to retaining walls. She said she would help Meghan develop the text in Section 4.

Peter said there are a couple of actions related to preserving farmland, but pointed out that most of Chelmsford's remaining farms are used for growing hay, not food production which seems to be the focus of the OSRP actions. David Koonce believes that the plan should include the possibility of converting land being used for other purposes into farm land. Michael and Meghan said that the goal is no net loss of farm land. Peter likes idea of focusing this OSRP action on food production.

Meghan described updates to the Equity Analysis Map. She presented data that showed that Chelmsford's Environmental Justice (EJ) Zones fall significantly short of the town average in terms of percentage of open space and walkable access to open space. She pointed out that the Southeast and Southwest EJ Block Groups are particularly noteworthy.

The Southeast EJ Block Group has only 0.2% of its area dedicated to open space and provides only 16% of residents with walkable access. Similarly, the Southwest EJ Block Group has only 7.9% of its area dedicated to open space and provides only 6% of residents with walkable access. These two zones fall significantly short of the remaining town, which has 8.6% of its area dedicated to open space and provides 21% of residents with walkable access.

Jerry agreed that the new map and EJ Block data do a much better job of conveying the challenges that residents in these two zones face. He said that they present a compelling case for adding sidewalks along the full length of Turnpike Road, Mill Road, and Littleton Road. Since large portions of these EJ zones are already fully developed and there are so few remaining opportunities to create open space, adding sidewalks seems like an obvious solution. Sidewalks that are strategically placed along some key, high traffic roads would allow many more residents in the Southeast and Southwest EJ Blocks to safely access the Russell Mill and Lime Quarry reservations and the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail. Christine agreed, and she said that adding a

sidewalk on Turnpike Road between Golden Cove and Warren Avenue is already in the plan. However, adding a sidewalk to Mill Road may be more difficult because it will require three bridges that will cost upwards of \$750k each.

Peter said that we might do well to concentrate our tree planting efforts in EJ zones that have a low percentage of total area dedicated to open space.

Public Comment:

Iva Mooney said she was glad to hear more about watershed issue. She said, "I fell in love with the cranberry bog, but I see some friction between Chelmsford and Carlisle." She thinks we need some way to monitor the weak points to ensure dams and culverts are up to date. She believes that better oversight could prevent a lot of ecological problems. Karl said, "Message received." He said that the committee recognizes that the wetland areas all connected. He agreed that there are opportunities to improve monitoring. Peter assured her that her concern is addressed in plan. He explained that the implementation committee will develop a land management plan and Carlisle will be invited to contribute. He also pointed out that more than half of land in watershed is already protected.

Iva Mooney also asked about the upcoming public forum: "If public brings forth a good idea, can it really be incorporated into plan?" Meghan said that the key objective of the meeting is to talk about goals, objectives, and actions. The town sincerely welcomes and encourages public input. Ideas should be submitted to the committee for review, and they will be included in the plan if approved. David Koonce added that the input should be submitted in writing.

Meeting adjourned at 8:07 PM.

Next Meeting:

None.