

SECTION 6: COMMUNITY GOALS

A. Description of Process

The 2021 Palmer Open Space and Recreation Plan has been developed by the Palmer Open Space and Recreation Committee, with technical assistance from Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC). The Committee includes representatives from the Town Council, Conservation Commission, Recreation Department, Planning Board, and the Opacum Land Trust, as well as interested Town residents. The Committee met numerous times throughout the plan development process. These meetings were open to the public and properly posted in accordance with Massachusetts Open Meeting Law. The first meeting of the Palmer open space committee was held on July 15, 2021 and was open to the public, as were subsequent meetings.

The public participation process consisted of the following:

- A public survey that was distributed both online and in paper format during the months of June and July 2021;
- A Visioning Session conducted on September 28, 2021
- Informational items were posted on the Town's website; and
- Media coverage via the regional and local newspaper, and local cable television.

The public survey was available online and in paper format from June 1, 2021 through July 30, 2021. A total of 197 survey responses were received. The survey was made available online through the Town website and Facebook page, and distributed via email and recreation department list serves. Hard copies of the survey were distributed to various locations across town including the 4 local post offices, the Palmer Library, Palmer Senior Center, the Palmer Conservation Commission Office and the Palmer Town Clerks Office/Administrative Building. The Open Space Committee website and Facebook page were also used for survey advertisement and awareness.

The survey asked questions regarding Palmer residents' current recreational activities and their perspective on recreational services, access to open space, scenic resources, protection priorities, and land protection approaches. Palmer residents were asked to provide direct input about what they feel is valuable to the town's open space and recreation opportunities through a survey and visioning session. The survey was based upon the Open Space survey from previous years, with minor additions to address current needs of residents. Using the same survey with only minor additions allowed the Committee to gauge how attitudes have changed over the years regarding these issues, as well as allowed the Committee to gain a better understanding of the actual conservation and recreational needs of the community. A summary of the survey can be found in Appendix B.

The Public Visioning Session took place from 6:30-8 pm on September 28, 2021 at the Palmer Town Hall. There were 18 attendees, including five members of the OSRP

Committee. The session included a review of the purpose and timeline of the OSRP, a summary of the survey responses, and a discussion of the needs and priorities for open space and recreation in Palmer. The following questions were posed for group discussions:

- What are the greatest assets and needs for open space and recreation in Palmer?
- What are the top priorities for open space and recreation improvements?
- How can the community become more involved?
- What are top funding priorities?

The group then split up into smaller discussion groups to focus on the questions above. Attendees chose which group to participate in based on their topic of interest. Notes were taken at all of the small group discussions and these notes are included in Appendix C. The comments and discussion of the Town's needs and priorities for open space and recreation, along with the survey responses, were used to develop the goals, objectives, and action items found in this plan, as well as the analysis of needs in Section 7. A summary of the Public Visioning Session can be found in Appendix C.

The draft OSRP was posted for public comment on the Town website and the PVPC website from January 1, 2022 to January 31, 2022. All public comments have been incorporated into the final draft of the Plan.

B. Statement of Open Space and Recreation Goals

Palmer is comprised of a variety of natural features and environments including major rivers, streams, brooks, ponds, wetlands, aquifer areas, forests, farms, fields, uplands, lowlands, scenic vistas, historic sites, and urban and rural areas. Residents believe it is important that these features, which make Palmer a unique and desirable place in which to live, be protected. The community seeks: to balance sensible development patterns with the protection of open spaces; to provide recreational opportunities for all its citizens; and to preserve its agricultural heritage. It will be important that the public and private sectors work together in making this vision a reality.

Palmer residents value the major elements of the town's character – its rivers, railroads, and historic places. Residents currently feel that Palmer has a wealth of existing recreational facilities and outdoor assets that could be built upon to enhance the town's quality of life and character. Access to its natural resources, such as rivers, and adaptation of its historic assets, such as its railroads and town parks, would provide Palmer with a wider variety of recreational opportunities while providing a more defined sense of place to residents and visitors. Protection of open space is best conducted in a manner that keeps ecological landscapes intact, such as greenways, wildlife corridors, and river corridors. Education and promotion could help Palmer residents realize and take advantage of the amenities right outside their doorstep

The following are major themes identified in the plan:

- Enhance neighborhood parks, playgrounds, and recreational opportunities.
- Protect water resources and promote their appropriate use
- Preserve and manage open space lands, archaeological treasures, and scenic views for conservation and recreational purposes.
- Publicize open space and recreation areas and promote their appropriate use.
- Protect and preserve open space parcels and environmentally sensitive conservation areas.