

SECTION 1: PLAN SUMMARY

This plan presents the Town of Palmer's goals and objectives toward preserving and improving the open space and recreational resources of the Town. A Seven-Year Action Plan (see section 9) clearly outlines the specific steps that the Town needs to take in order to actualize the stated goals and objectives.

Palmer has had a rich and varied history, based primarily on its location and transportation systems. The four (4) rivers supported grist, wool, and sawmills beginning in the 18th century, and Palmer sits at the confluence of two major rail lines that stimulated growth from the early 20th century onward. The four separate and distinct villages that make up the Town of Palmer contribute to its economic vitality. Palmer remains proud of its rich heritage and small town character.

The 2014 Palmer Open Space and Recreation Plan is an important component of the Town's initiative to preserve and protect its open space lands and recreational resources. The plan provides both an inventory of the Town's open space and recreation lands and a set of recommendations to preserve and enhance these valuable natural assets. The goals and objectives in the plan reflect the major land preservation priorities expressed by the citizens of Palmer.

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, the regional planning agency, Palmer Conservation Commission and the Palmer Planning Board talked with many town residents, analyzed information from a 2014 survey designed to help establish goals and objectives for the 2014 Open Space and Recreation Plan, and considered the community's natural, historic and recreational resources to determine Palmer's critical open space and recreation needs and the actions required to meet those needs. The community seeks to balance sustainable development patterns with the protection of open spaces and to provide an array of recreational opportunities for all its citizens. The Town believes it is important to preserve both its agricultural and historic resources and to look toward the future through development that contributes to, rather than impacts, community and environmental quality and town open space goals. It is important that both the public and private sectors work together to make this vision a reality.

The following are the important community needs identified in the Plan:

- Protecting Palmer rivers and their buffers; and increasing access to the Rivers
- To better manage conservation lands in Palmer
- Improving park and recreation opportunities; especially for low income and Environmental Justice populations, through routine maintenance and renovations
- Protecting natural resources and preserving Palmer forests;
- Preserving the town important historic buildings
- To better educate citizens on all the Open Space and Recreation areas throughout Palmer.

The primary feedback received from the community through the survey results and public visioning comments is that the community wants the existing parks and

playgrounds improved before the Town pursues new locations for new recreational uses. Top priorities include gaining access to Palmer's four (4) rivers, renovating Burleigh Park and increasing recreational opportunities for families. Community members also expressed concerns about the maintenance of existing parks and open space areas. Maintenance concerns included a greater need for trash pick-up, more trash receptacles/dog waste stations, and trail maintenance. People expressed concern with the amount trash at all recreational facilities/parks and the need for a park specifically for dogs. These community needs were kept as a priority while developing the Seven-Year Action Plan items.

Other goals the community expressed need for in the survey were developing community gardens (especially in low-income and federally designated Environmental Justice areas), enhancing athletic fields, developing public access to the Swift River for hikers and boaters, expanding the community trail networks with connections to other towns and increasing educational opportunities for residents. The town will continue pursuing these goals and creating realistic timeframes for completion.

The survey results also showed that there is increased support for the Community Preservation Act (CPA). In 2014, 77.5% of respondents stated that they would be willing to support Palmer in the adoption of a CPA fee. Since lack of funding is a critical issue for maintaining the existing parks and open space areas, the Town should continue to explore the CPA because of the financial benefits it can bring. Over the next seven years, the Town of Palmer will continue exploring the possibilities of CPA.

There are many challenges the Open Space Committee, along with other Town policy makers, will need to overcome in order to meet the stated plan's action items. Fiscal constraints placed on the Town's budget have made it difficult to make improvements, or, in some cases, to maintain existing protected open space and recreational resources. There are not enough municipal resources to accomplish the goals and objectives. It is important for the Town of Palmer to continuously set priorities and goals, find new resources, pursue partnerships, leverage other funds, and rely on volunteers to make these goals a reality. Residents' demands for quality recreation opportunities and protection of the environment continue to grow as they increase their understanding of the importance of these resources.