

SECTION 6: COMMUNITY GOALS

A. Description of Process

The 2014 Palmer Open Space and Recreation Plan has been developed by the Palmer Open and Recreation Committee, with technical assistance from Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC). The Committee includes representatives from the Town Council, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Trail Committee, Recreation Department, and the Community Development Department. The Committee met several 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 February 25, 2014 and was open to the public, as were subsequent meetings. All Open Space Committee Public Meeting Notices/Agendas & Minutes are available in Appendix A.

The public participation process consisted of the following:

- Two public meetings: A Visioning Session conducted on May 22, 2014 and a general public meeting to present the draft document conducted on September 2, 2014;
- A written survey that was distributed to each Palmer household as part of the Recreation Department brochure;
- 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 May 1, 2014 through July 1, 2014. A total of 225 survey responses were received. The surveys were not delivered to individual households but were made available online, as well as 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. Additionally, volunteers hand distributed surveys at the local farmers markets, during sport events at Burleigh Park and at the Annual Town Election, held June 10, 2014. Furthermore, a flyer was sent home with students from Old Mill Pond, Converse Middle School and Palmer High School informing students and parent of survey locations.

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 original Open Space survey developed in 1995 with minor additions to address current needs of residents. Using the same survey, with 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. The results of the Community Survey can be found in Appendix B.

The visioning session, which took place from 6-8 pm on May 28, 2014, included a review of the purpose of the open space and recreation plan and a mapping exercise where residents were asked to draw on large maps of the town in order to identify important places for protection and recreation. The mapping exercise conducted at the Public Visioning Session led to an open discussion of Palmer's needs in terms of the systems and investments needed to support or enhance the town's open space and recreation. Analysis of those needs, as well as the comments received through the survey, led to the development of the goals, objectives, and action items found in this plan. A summary of the Visioning Session, the Agenda, handouts, as well as a list of attendees can be found in Appendix C.

The Public Hearing, which took place from 6-8 pm on September 2, 2014 allowed residents, town boards, departments and officials to review the draft plan and supply comments on it. The Public Comment Period was open from August 2, 2014-September 2, 2014. At the close of the comment period, the Committee requested letters of support from various town departments which can be found in Chapter 10.

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 are:

- Preserve sensitive conservation areas and agricultural lands.
- Protect water resources and promote appropriate use of them.

- Preserve and manage open space lands, archaeological treasures, and scenic views for conservation and recreational purposes.
- Protect significant plant and wildlife habitats, endangered organisms, and wildlife corridors.
- Enhance neighborhood parks, playgrounds, and recreational opportunities.