

Meeting Summary - Public Forum #1

To: Needham OSRP Advisory Group
ATTENDEES: See attached
FROM: Tracy J. Adamski, AICP
DATE: November 17, 2016

On November 16, 2016, the first public forum was held at Powers Hall in Needham Town Hall to discuss the 2017 update to the Needham Open Space & Recreation Plan (OSRP). The purpose of the meeting was to introduce the OSRP update process and the components of an OSRP, review goals and objectives from the 2007 OSRP, and discuss the current state and future goals for open space, recreational facilities, natural resource stewardship, and protection of water resources in Needham. Twenty-nine (29) people attended.

1. Introduction

- Attendees used stickers to “vote” on their favorite open space/recreational facility in Needham, and what brought them to the meeting (see attachments).
 - Attendees identified a wide variety of open space and recreational facilities, geographically spread throughout Needham as their “favorite”
 - The majority (16) attended for open space; 9 attended for recreational facilities; and 4 attended for stewardship of natural resources
- Patty Carey introduced Tracy Adamski, who gave an overview of what an Open Space and Recreation Plan is and its purpose, and the importance of the public process in developing Needham’s Open Space and Recreation Plan Update

2. Overview of OSRP

- Roadmap for prioritizing open space and recreation projects and expenditures
- Pre-Requisite for MA Division of Conservation Services grants
- Importance of and process for public participation

3. Overview of Needham’s Open Space, Population, and Land Use Trends

- 23% of Town is protected “open space”, similar to 2007
- Population has been at the same approximate level for the past few decades, but is projected to decrease; the percentage of population aged 65+ is increasing
- Since 1945, the development of Needham expanded from a densely populated center in the central/eastern part of town; the dense residential population has expanded, and development has increased in the western part of town

4. 2007 Goals and Progress since 2007

- 4 main goals from 2007 OSRP
 - Acquire/protect additional open space
 - Enhance and expand recreational activities
 - Expand access, promote awareness, and support responsible stewardship of Needham’s natural resources
 - Protect water resources
- Examples of progress since 2007: inspiration for moving forward
 - Carol/Brewster land acquisition
 - Integrated Pest Management practices
 - Memorial Park bleachers
 - Dog park & community garden at Nike site

- Trail Master Plan
- Sudbury Aqueduct Trail
- Town Cleanup Days 2x/year
- 21 years of Tree City USA status
- Stormwater best management practices

5. Group Discussion

- Discussion was opened up to the attendees, with a goal of discussing Open Space, Recreational Facilities, Natural Resources, and Water Resources in terms of existing conditions, challenges, funding priorities and ideas going forward

Open Space & Natural Resources

- 2007 goals: acquire & protect open space, preserve unique features
- Hemlock Gorge & Echo Bridge
 - 2007 OSRP: work with Newton to rehabilitate Echo Bridge at Hemlock Gorge
 - Closest thing Needham has to the Grand Canyon
 - Great way for pedestrians and cyclists to get between Newton & Needham
 - Railings on Echo Bridge in disrepair
 - Should keep action item regarding rehabilitation in plan update
- Greendale Greenway
 - Valuable natural area - separates highway from neighborhoods
 - Good place to walk
 - Trees in greenway protect against pollution
 - Both a recreational site and environmental benefit
 - As community grows, need to protect existing open space – private portion of Greendale recently developed
 - Should take opportunities to add additional tracts of land
 - Two attempts at Town Meeting to transfer from Park & Rec to Selectmen have failed – the people have spoken, do not develop
- Maintain existing open space – keep big chunks of land undeveloped
- Ridge Hill underutilized
 - Recent study to determine if existing building worth saving
 - Growing up, played in open meadows
 - Has features unique in Massachusetts
 - Could use as community garden/farm?
 - Environmental education center/meeting space
 - Should try to use meadows in creative way to both preserve the open meadows and attract people there
 - In center of Town – could be community meeting spot
- Examples of open space areas outside of Needham
 - Elm Bank (Natick)
 - Garden in the Woods (Framingham) – grow native wild flowers/plants
 - Easton – Sheep Pasture
 - Wellesley College Arboretum
 - School trips and education
- Town has limited resources
 - Have to measure open space types of projects against other priorities
 - Prioritize Community Preservation Act (CPA) Funds, or consider rescinding to make all projects compete evenly for general funds
 - Cost-benefit analysis – who's using the things that money is currently being spent on, like trails?
 - Should preserve the open space Needham has now
 - Others spoke in favor of the benefits of the CPA

- Wheel space
 - Skateboard/scooter/bicycle space for kids to learn how to ride
 - Currently doing pop up wheel space
- Cutler Park
 - Aging population in Needham, walking is priority
 - Cutler Park is a gem, popular for walkers and dogs
 - Fallen trees are hazardous, trail maintenance needed
- Rosemary Lake
 - Is combination active and passive recreation
 - Rosemary Lake recreational complex should be a priority
- Ridge Hill and Cutler Park are great
- Streets and open space connections
 - Like that streets are part of open space in Needham
 - Sidewalk network, access to/connections between open spaces is important
 - Easy access to Ridge Hill
 - Connections for walkers and cyclists should be priority
 - Maintenance of sidewalks, winter clearing
 - Sidewalks are open space, especially for older people
 - Access to DeFazio, Ridge Hill could be improved; Should be able to access DeFazio from Great Plain Ave
 - Need better pedestrian/biking access to downtown
 - Need to improve safety with regard to cars, distracted drivers
 - Better lighting
 - Winter maintenance
- Needham trails
 - Should use CPA funds
 - Trails could be better marked, have better kiosks
- Rosemary Woods
 - Good hiking, needs trail maintenance
 - Also has lots of wildlife
 - Shouldn't change recreational use, should keep natural
 - Open space is one of the reasons moved to Needham
- Maintenance should be a funding priority
 - Have to take care of what you have
 - Do trail crews do regular walk-throughs or wait for reports of problems?
 - Should be process for regular/continuing maintenance – cost?
 - Consideration of feasibility to maintain and/or control invasive plants
- Marketing of open spaces
 - Could have Needham checklist/badge system; like a scavenger hunt
 - Like a birding list but for things in Needham like plants, animals, places
 - For schools/education
 - Each trail could have a badge for a family to collect, could be contest
 - Maury would provide wildlife photos
 - Could be part of school curriculum?
 - Can there be a large newspaper ad promoting
 - Could create events or programs to publicize trails and open spaces; Trail walks, special themed nights for families
 - Publicity: wildlife photo show?
 - Can put trails map in phone book?
 - Can give trail maps, history of areas like Ridge Hill to schools?
 - Needham has created nature areas around each school

- Can have an exchange program where each school learns about the nature area at a different school?
 - Can have trails app/info easily available online?
 - Is already an app called All Trails, has all Needham trails info
 - Suggest having themed walks, bike ride routes curated by local businesses
 - Other cities like Boston and London have these, good way to connect businesses to open spaces
 - Have routes that visitors or residents can choose by theme, like summer route with ice cream shops, parks, ponds or skateboarding theme, or routes for bike riding that show local unique features
- Volunteer program to help manage Needham's open spaces
 - Town has trail stewardship program in place– each trail has a steward that walks regularly
 - Foresters are a limited resource and have to prioritize tree maintenance on public ways before can respond to problems identified by stewards
 - Could be future goal to have expanded volunteer program
- Acquisition
 - Should prioritize open space acquisition
 - If don't already have, should create inventory of privately owned large tracts of open space to prioritize for acquisition
 - Town boards do have inventory of private spaces and do acquire when possible
 - Walker-Gordon is a good example of prioritized acquisition
 - Acquisition, acquisition, acquisition
 - Focus on small parcels for pocket parks
- Priority should be management of open spaces
 - Open space = islands in development for wildlife
 - Wildlife supported by Needham open spaces, not just humans
 - Ridge Hill has owls, heron rookery, weasels, coyotes
 - Forest management, invasive species management, nest boxes, controlled burns should be part of strategy and funding

Water Resources

- 2007 goals: minimize contamination of groundwater and surface water, reduce use of pesticides, protect Charles River
- Biggest challenge = public education
 - Stormwater infiltration
- Needham is lucky to have water resources: reservoir, ponds, Charles River
 - Priorities: cleanups, protection, education
 - Potential projects: dredge Rosemary Pond, clean up Walker Pond
 - Try to change perspective on things like lawn care & fertilizer use
- Better access to information for public on things like local plants, what can do on private property with regard to trees, lawns, etc.
- Opportunities within street rights-of-way for more green space
 - Streetscapes, rain gardens
- Resiliency and climate change
 - Understanding water resources led to Army Corps acquiring land for flood storage next to Charles River
 - With changing climate, should consider similar type of land acquisition plan
- Charles River watershed is unique in using natural flood storage instead of manmade impoundments
 - Should prioritize Charles River corridor/buffers for acquisition

- Maybe zoning to prevent lawns next to river? Create setbacks?
- See more wildlife next to Charles than in some National Parks, should keep in good condition
- Challenge is phosphorus loading from road/gasoline runoff
- Charles River is a huge asset to Town
 - Whitewater kayaking slalom gates by Cochran Dam
 - Charles River Peninsula boat ramp, should be more, easier river access
 - Should have Charles River Trail

Recreational Facilities

- 2007 goals: enhance and expand active recreation resources
- Wheel court/park
 - Mobile or pop-up skate/bike/scooter facility
 - Classes for kids
 - Provide safe space to learn; Roads aren't safe place for beginners
- Maintain quality of athletic fields
 - For a long time, have had some of the best fields in the area
 - Parks and fields are a big investment, need to make sure keep up with maintenance to ensure continued high quality
- Double use of parking lots
 - Pollard Middle School parking lot has basketball courts
 - Can add lines and fences, parking time limits to school lots for afternoon, summer use of parking lots as basketball, street hockey courts or half-courts
 - DeFazio needs a basketball court
- Rosemary project may add parking lot lines for basketball, roller hockey/skating
- Need additional field spaces
 - Town has good quality fields, and many of them, but more and younger kids are involved in a wider variety of sports than fields can currently serve
- Claxton Field is underutilized
 - Could redesign, expand to increase use potential
- Dwight Field baseball diamond is also underutilized, is a big open space

Other

- Trash clean up should be funding priority
- Challenges are unleashed dog walking, dog waste bagged but not thrown away
- Can there be a large newspaper ad promoting the survey?

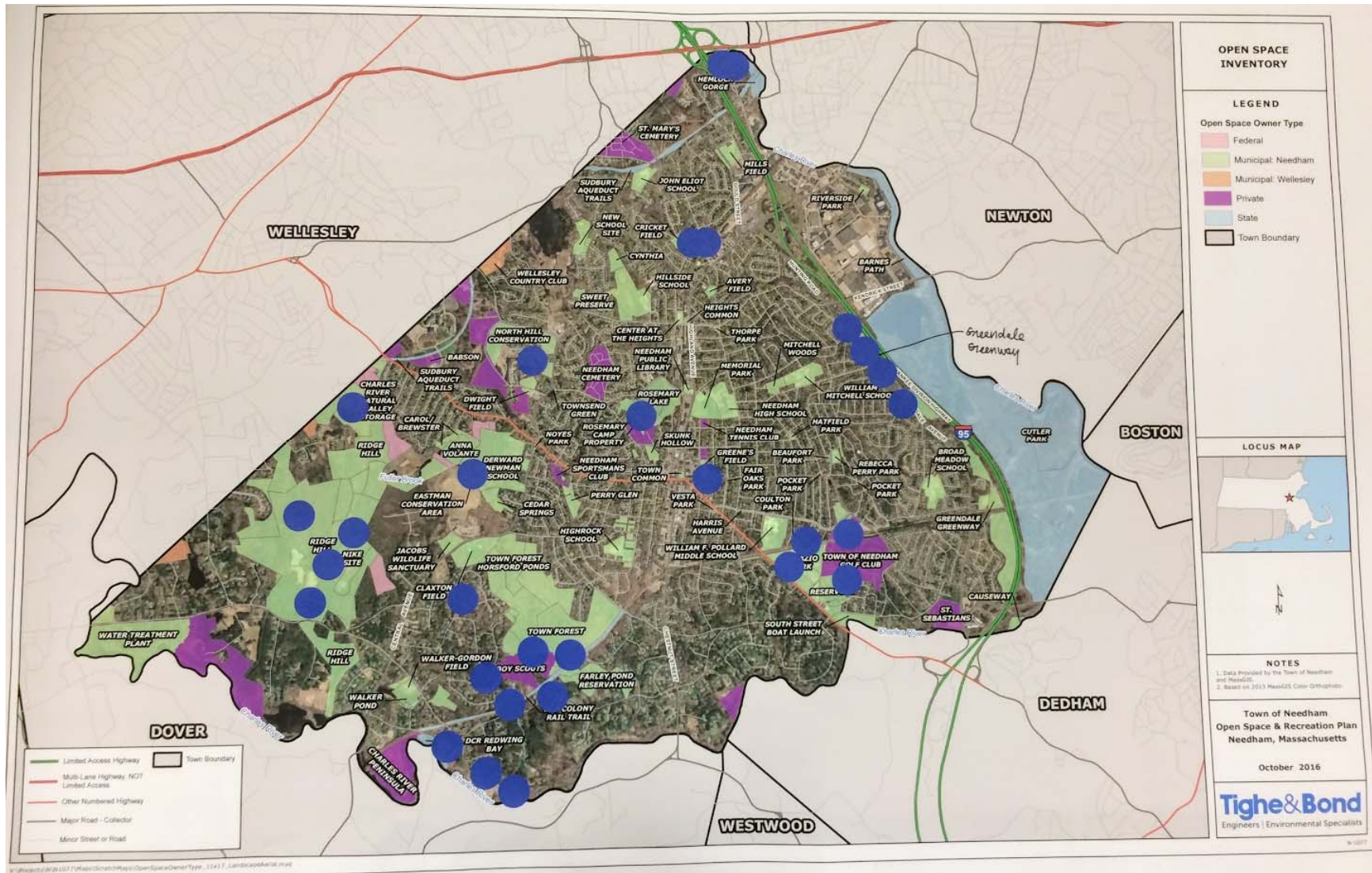
6. Next Steps & Schedule

- Next Committee Meeting – December 7th
- Survey – responses needed by December 31st
- Second Public Forum – early 2017, date and location TBD

7. Closing Remarks

- Matt Varrell thanked attendees for their participation, and requested that residents send open space and recreation thoughts and ideas to himself or Patty to inform the OSRP update process – it should be as representative as possible of the goals of the Town of Needham for the next five years.

Please direct questions or comments to Patty Carey (pcarey@needhamma.gov) or Matt Varrell (mvarrell@needhamma.gov).



What Brought You Here Today?

