

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

A component of the NEEDHAM COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Prepared for the
Needham Planning Board

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OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

BACKGROUND

Needham's concern for open space and recreation has been reflected in an enviable record of integrated planning involving a breadth of organizations both within and outside of Town government. The latest example of that was the work of the "Open Space Study Working Group" formed by the Selectmen in 2002 to explore best uses for Town-owned land. Another key effort was the completion of the *Town of Needham Conservation-Recreation Open Space Master Plan* in 1998. The documentation of their work enables integration of open space and recreation concerns into the other elements of the Needham Community Development Plan

CONSERVATION-RECREATION OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN

This Plan¹, following the MA Department of Conservation Services format, inventories open space and recreation resources, assesses need, establishes goals, and outlines a five-year action plan. It provides a useful assessment of the resource value of undeveloped lands and of the potential importance of such lands for either development for recreation or for preservation as natural areas.

Among the *Plan's* most important action proposals are these:

- Improvement of Rosemary Lake's water quality through management efforts.
- Improved boating access to the Charles River for canoes and small boats.
- Expansion of the Ridge Hill Reservation and walking trails.
- Pursuing measures with Babson College to ensure access and preserve open space interests for public enjoyment.
- Expand greenbelt areas.
- Advocate for preservation and restoration of the natural state of open lands adjacent to schools.
- Obtain a conservation restriction on Council Rock.
- Develop facility plans for all parks.

¹ Town of Needham, Massachusetts Open Space Committee, Conservation Commission, and Park and Recreation Commission, *Town of Needham Conservation-Recreation Open Space Master Plan*, February, 1998.

OPEN SPACE STUDY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The report of the Open Space Study Working Group records the conclusions of an exemplary process for assessing the potential best use of lands owned by the Town². The group, formed by the Selectmen, comprised representatives from across Town government: Selectmen, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Park and Recreation Commission, School Committee, Finance Committee, supported by the Town Administrator, Planning Director, and School Superintendent.

Using supportive digital technology, the group reviewed 157 identified parcels, considering their legal status (most would require 2/3rds vote of both Town Meeting and the General Court for redesignation), resource qualities, size, and location among other things. With the exception of only two parcels, it was concurred that no change in designation should be even considered in the future for the parcels having uses committed in a way requiring legislative action to undo. Four parcels were identified for potential sale to an abutter, in one instance with a Conservation Easement. Five parcels were designated as having potential for housing (which is the existing use in one case), and two more parcels were designated as appropriate for mixed housing and conservation or recreation use. Four were proposed for transfer to the Conservation Commission and one to the Park and Recreation Commission. No consensus was reached on the remaining two parcels.

The land areas involved are relatively modest in size, and many are sharply limited by geologic or other limitations. However, the process was a success in bringing interests together, and reaching concurrence on how to proceed with 155 out of 157 parcels, reducing the likelihood of narrowly considered decisions being made one by one. Housing, recreation, and conservation all saw their interests not only considered but reflected in concrete recommendations.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER ELEMENTS

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

None of the parcels studied by the Open Space Working Group or identified as priority acquisitions in the *Open Space Plan* had locational or other qualities that suggested their use for intensive development for job- or tax-producing development. The Economic Development element makes no proposals bearing on any of the identified parcels or locations. To the extent that wise decisions on these parcels and locations enhance the Needham quality of life and fiscal soundness they serve the same goals as those of economic development.

TRANSPORTATION

All of the “build” alternatives for the Kendrick Street interchange entail some impact upon wetlands, as discussed in the Transportation element. As indicated there, it is premature to speculate on just how extensive those impacts might be, but none of the areas prominently identified in either of the studies discussed in this element appear to be involved. Reconciling

² (Needham) Open Space Study Working Group memorandum to the Board of Selectmen re “Summary of Findings and Recommendations, December 11, 2003.

open space and other interests in that transportation proposal should not prove determinative in choice among interchange alternatives and none of the alternatives would preclude the success of the open space plans' implementation.

HOUSING

None of the priority actions of the *Conservation-Recreation Open Space Plan* appear to in any substantial way give protection priority to lands that have importance for housing development. The interests of housing were well-represented in the dialog leading to the Open Space Working Group recommendations, and there appears to be no failure to designate for housing use any lands that legitimately belong in that category.

ACTION STRATEGY

The *Conservation-Recreation Open Space Plan* lays out a detailed plan of action, clearly including a sufficiency of good items to maintain progress. At this point that *Plan* requires updating in order to continue to qualify the Town for State and federal funds for conservation and recreation, so undertaking that update is the next key action in that strategy.

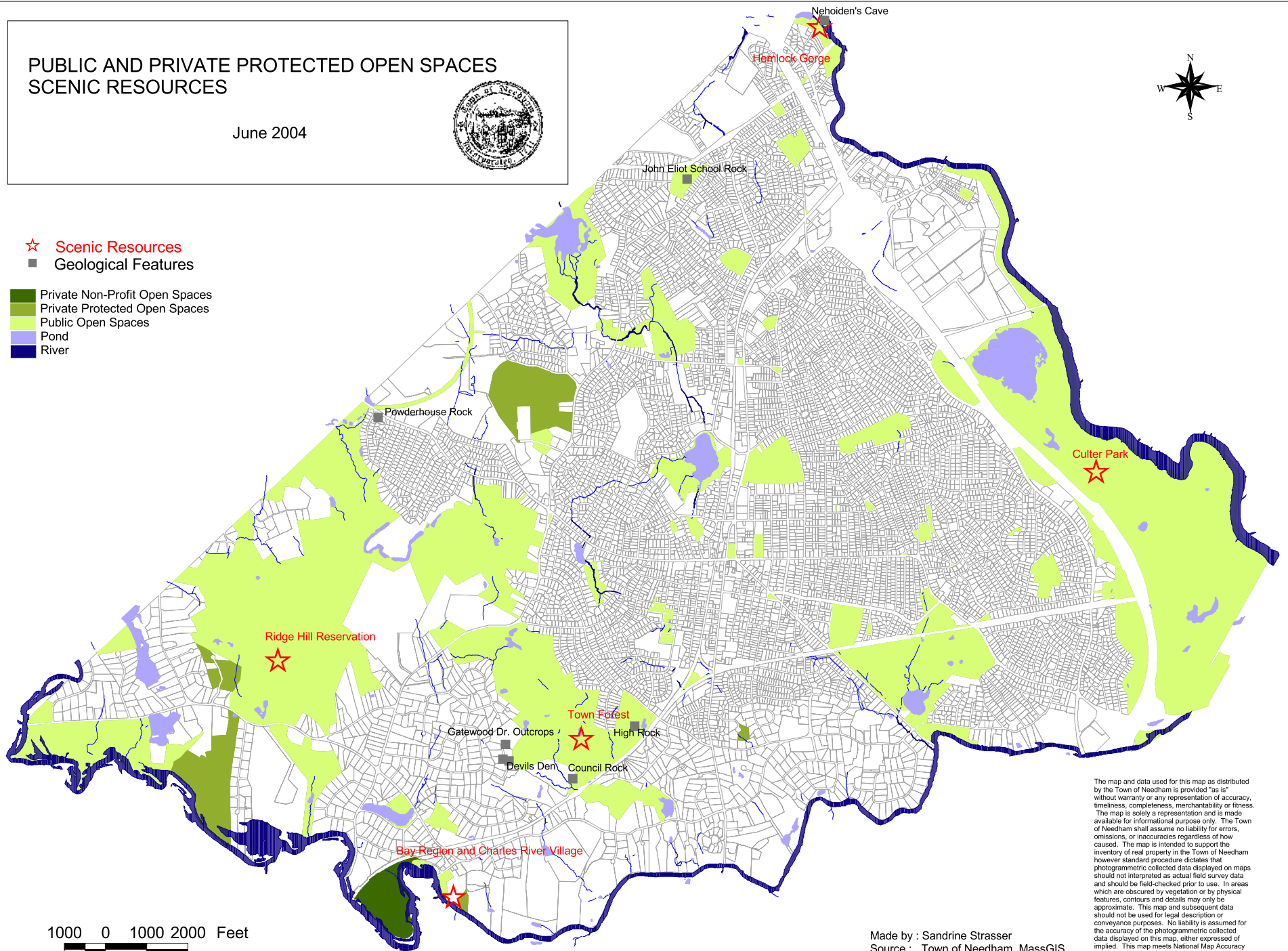
PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PROTECTED OPEN SPACES SCENIC RESOURCES

June 2004



- ☆ Scenic Resources
- Geological Features

- Private Non-Profit Open Spaces
- Private Protected Open Spaces
- Public Open Spaces
- Pond
- River



1000 0 1000 2000 Feet

Made by : Sandrine Strasser
Source : Town of Needham, MassGIS

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