

Boston Globe West

FRAMINGHAM

Report Finds Residents Want Open Space

Among their goals; creating hiking trails and protecting lands

By Jenn Abelson, *Globe Staff Correspondent*, 12/4/2002

More passive recreational opportunities, such as hiking trails, are among residents' top priorities when it comes to open space and recreation planning, according to a draft report released this week.

The Open Space and Recreation Plan, based on comments from more than 200 residents, identifies several major goals, including the creation of natural linkages throughout town and the adoption of a proactive approach to environmental protection.

According to the five-year action plan, the primary focus of Framingham should be to obtain, improve, and make fully accessible a balance between active and passive recreational and conservation resources, while preserving the diversity of the community as a suburban center with a rural quality.

Members of the Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee, who worked on the proposal for the past year, said their plan details a practical approach to the preservation of public and privately owned open space, as well as the development of new and enhancement of existing recreation resources within Framingham.

"It's a very important plan because it shows a very distinct process of identifying and protecting open space," said Mark Goldman, a committee member and liaison to the town Park and Recreation Commission. "It also works very hard to link different places, like Tercentennial Park, with rail trails and turn them into scenic habitats. The plan has a lot of merit."

The proposal, an update to a 1996 plan, is a culmination of ideas and information provided by residents, town officials, fieldwork, past reports, and studies.

According to the draft plan, Framingham should develop a walking and bicycle trail network to link areas - such as downtown and Farm Pond - and create new paths for wildlife. The report also suggests establishing a contiguous green space along the Sudbury River and its tributaries.

Additionally, the proposal calls on town officials to increase recreational opportunities by providing new facilities and making better use of existing ones. The committee recommended investigating land acquisition and protection options - with 125 acres at Eastleigh Farms as the top pick.

Tom Mahoney, chairman of the Open Space and Recreation Committee, said the multimillion-dollar price tag for this land is probably prohibitive for the town, but described it as part of a "wish list."

Facilitating purchases like this is part of the plan's push for adopting a proactive approach to environmental protection. For example, the report suggests that

the Board of Selectmen establish a local trust that will receive a predetermined amount of money each year for the purposes of acquiring open space and recreation land.

In addition, the draft proposal recommends evaluating existing protected open space areas that could be used for passive recreation, which was rated a high priority in recent public surveys. According to the report, Framingham needs to develop a phased approach to using state-owned land, such as reservoirs, for these uses.

Along with recreational activities, the plan calls for preserving open space for habitat protection, historic value, and enhancement of the community. Specifically, the report suggests obtaining land that offers visual and physical access to the river, as well as improving the rural character of the town where appropriate.

"The idea of preserving some of the agricultural heritage of the town's past has become part of the dialogue," said Todd Robecki, a committee member who serves as the liaison to the Historic District Commission.

In addition to providing a road map to guide the town's planning process, the long-term action plan is necessary for securing certain state and federal grants, said Celia O'Brien, a committee member and liaison to the Conservation Commission.

For example, the previous open space report was required component for the town to secure significant state funding to help purchase Wittenborg Woods, as well as nearly \$250,000 for work on the Roosevelt School park.

Garnering state and federal funds for the preservation of open space and recreational activities is especially crucial in light of the town's current fiscal crisis, in which a projected \$4.5 million shortfall looms for next year.

The committee released the draft this week and will accept public comment on it through Jan. 6.

Copies of the report are available at the Memorial Building, the town's libraries, and the Callahan Senior Center. A public hearing will be held on Dec. 16, and the final document will be issued on Jan. 23.

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