



OPEN SPACE, RECREATION & NATURAL RESOURCES GOALS & RECOMMENDATIONS

This Master Plan (The Plan) is the result of a collaborative process that included the community at large, as well as the Planning Board, representatives of Town Departments and Administration, a Master Plan Advisory Committee and a team of consultants. Various combinations of this group are referred to throughout the report as The Natick 2030+ Team.

Under each goal, recommendations and action items are listed in the order of the time frame in which they might be implemented, based on complexity of implementation and requirements for coordination with other recommendations and actions. The order does not imply priority.

While it is the intent of the Master Plan that all of the recommendations be considered, some of the recommendations represent relatively minor changes to existing procedures and bylaws while others are more ambitious. Recommendations highlighted in green are generally considered to be particularly ambitious because they require actions or cooperation by public entities outside the jurisdiction of Natick (e.g., state agencies or adjacent municipalities) or by private businesses and/or property owners; they require the Town to take on new roles (e.g., establishing and managing a loan program); or they require extensive further analysis.

Recommendations that support sustainability and resiliency are indicated with this leaf icon.



Drawing from an understanding of the existing conditions of Natick's open space and recreation resources, and keeping in mind the identified issues and opportunities, the Natick 2030+ Team worked with residents to develop goals for the preservation, expansion and maintenance of open space and recreation in Natick. Through survey responses, public meetings, and topic-based focus groups, community members helped identify areas of improvement and identify and modify specific recommendations. Those ideas and recommendations are organized by the following agreed upon goals:

- 1. Continue to support, expand and maintain Natick's high quality active and passive open spaces.**
- 2. Increase the number of public connections, perimeter trails and access points to Natick's lakes, rivers and wetlands.**
- 3. Provide a system of walking and bicycle trails that connect Natick's open spaces and provide a way to travel throughout the Town.**
- 4. Preserve and protect Natick's water supply, wildlife, and other natural resources.**
- 5. Increase awareness, appreciation, and use of the Town's open spaces, trails, natural resources, and recreational opportunities through installation of wayfinding and trailheads, provision of updated trail maps, and community engagement efforts.**

The recommendations for achieving these goals are listed on the following pages under each goal heading. Listed next to each recommendation are the primary and support parties responsible for carrying out the recommendations in the years to come. A suggested time frame is also included, associated with the specific actions **(in blue)** of each recommendation. In some cases, a recommendation may require coordination with recommendations from other chapters. In those cases, the icons for the related chapters will appear next to the recommendation. Metrics of progress are also included for recommendations that involve tracking progress over time.



*Scenic overlook at
Lake Cochituate*

GOAL 1

Continue to support, expand and maintain Natick's high quality active and passive open spaces.

R1.1

LEAD



OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
CONSERVATION COMMISSION
PLANNING BOARD

SUPPORT



ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE
OFFICER



ON-GOING



PURSUE STRATEGIES THAT IDENTIFY AND PROTECT MULTI-BENEFIT OPEN SPACES IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN BOTH A HIGH-QUALITY AND HIGH-FUNCTIONING OPEN SPACE NETWORK WITHIN THE TOWN OF NATICK.

As noted earlier in this chapter, the Town of Natick contains a high percentage of open space within its borders and offers a well-balanced distribution of that open space. As development continues, opportunities for large acquisitions of open space will dwindle. The decision to accept additional land to be kept and maintained as open space should be done thoughtfully, avoiding a piecemeal and disjointed approach to acquisition.

The Town should make a concerted effort to prioritize protection of open space based on identified characteristics, with higher priority given to parcels that provide a variety of benefits. Priority characteristics for the Town to consider when expanding the open space network should include:

- + Areas that enhance existing open spaces by creating larger contiguous parcels or connecting existing open space, neighborhoods, trails, or wildlife corridors (See Maps 7.9, 7.10, 7.11).
- + Areas serving as flood hazard buffer zones, surface water buffer zones, and aquifer or wellhead protection zones (See Map 7.12).
- + Priority wildlife corridors, habitats, and environmentally sensitive areas (See Map 7.11).
- + Farm land, fallow land, and other open space that may be made available for farming use by license, lease or deed restriction.
- + Open space in areas of the town currently deficient in open space and recreational facilities (See Maps 7.8 and 7.9).
- + Areas of historic significance.



4-7 YEARS



One way to help focus these priorities is to create a weighted model in a GIS program that specifically emphasizes parcels that meet these criteria. The Mass Audubon MAPPR Tool 2.0 (<https://www.massaudubon.org/our-conservation-work/advocacy/shaping-the-future-of-your-community/current-projects/mappr-project/mappr-tool>) is an example of this type of analysis. The Planning Board and Conservation Commission should work with the GIS Department to utilize the available data, both collected by the Town and as part of this Comprehensive Plan process, to start highlighting these critical areas.

This ambitious recommendation would require detailed analysis, probably conducted by a consultant. The benefit of such an analysis is that it would provide the Town with a systematic analysis that could be used to identify priority open space parcels.



With these priorities in mind, the Town of Natick should continue to pursue protection of privately held open space through acquisition, conservation restrictions, and easements in order to meet the open space needs of the Town as they evolve over time.

Additionally, twenty-seven percent of the current distribution of open space falls under a limited-protection program, which does not ensure permanent status as open space for the Town. The Town should assess these limited-protection parcels if/when their use is proposed to change and assess their value as a permanently protected parcel utilizing the criteria on page 7.38. Mechanisms for ensuring permanent protection include:

- + Acquiring key open space parcels using the FAR Bonus Stabilization Fund.
- + Securing open space easements and deed-restricted POPS (privately owned public space) as part of the permitting review process.
- + Actively encouraging landowners to put land under conservation restrictions.
- + Reviewing the appropriateness of utility easements, “paper” streets, and aqueducts for expanding linear open space connections.
- + Preserving open space held by the Town that is not already protected as open space (such as school athletic fields) through permanent easement or acquisition.
- + Ensuring that new zoning bylaws encourage the setting aside of open space, trail easements, FAR Bonus Stabilization Fund payments, etc.



Finally, the Town should require submission of a digital conservation easement boundary plan as part of the permitting process for any new development. The Town currently keeps a digital database of all properties carrying a conservation easement, however the exact extent of the easements is not always consistently recorded, and any easement obtained as part of the Town’s permitting process is only recorded in hard copy with the deed of the property. Future open space planning efforts would benefit from a digital GIS database that records the full extent of all conservation easements. This would allow for a more consistent tabulation of total area protected and a more coordinated effort to create connections between existing dedicated open space.

R1.2

ACTIVELY EXPLORE OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPAND & ENHANCE THE TOWN’S ACTIVE RECREATION FIELDS AND FACILITIES.



Based on the existing conditions analysis and public input process for this Plan, it was found that the 2016 Natick Master Plan for Parks and Fields recommendations are consistent with the current needs of the Town. **The recommendations of that plan should be prioritized and incorporated into future improvement budgets, with an emphasis on expanding the offerings of rectangular multi-use fields (e.g. fields that can be used for soccer, lacrosse, football, etc.) throughout the town.** Natick’s growing youth and aging populations are placing greater demands on programs and facilities. The fields in Natick are currently used at a rate of more than 150% of their realistic use annually. Following the recommendations of the 2016 Master Plan for Parks and Fields, the Town needs, at a minimum, 10 two-acre rectangular multi-use fields, one full-size baseball field, two

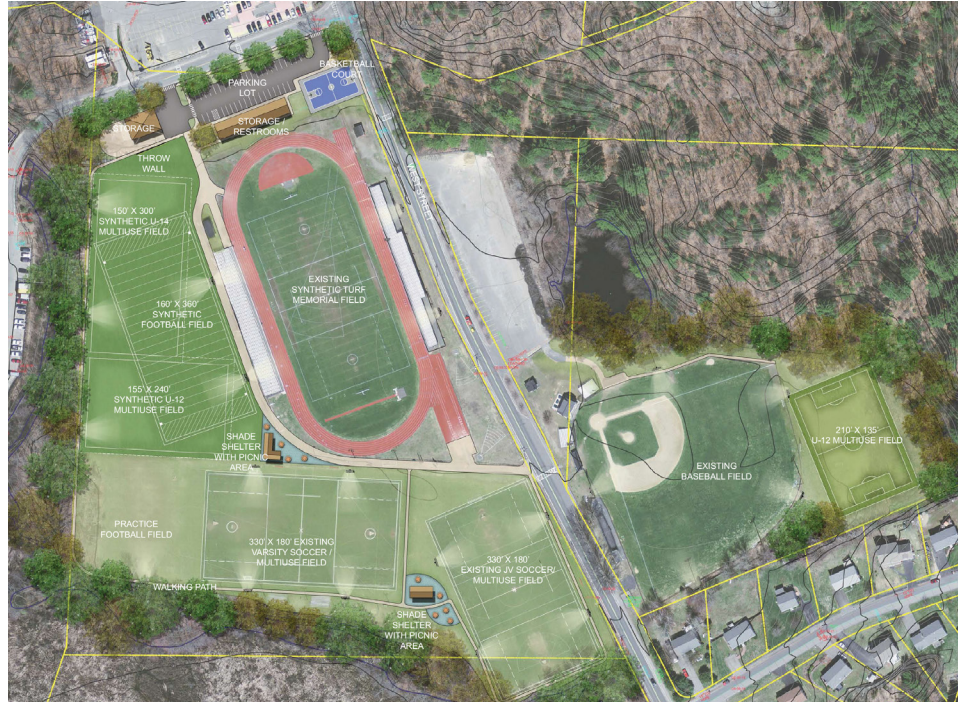
LEAD

RECREATION & PARKS DEPARTMENT

SUPPORT

PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

Proposed Plan for Natick High School South Complex from the 2016 Natick Master Plan for Parks and Fields



tennis courts on the north and west sides of town, at least two lighted basketball courts, and additional play areas in the downtown area.

In addition to expanding the number of fields, there are options the Town can pursue to help extend the use of existing facilities. These options include:

 **1-5 YEARS** 

 **4-7 YEARS** 

 **7-12+ YEARS** 

- + **Evaluate the contribution of fees to maintenance and consider increasing fees assessed to local sports leagues for use of the Town’s playing fields.** Since heavy field use increases maintenance costs, the Town should evaluate whether it is appropriate to fund these higher costs by assessing a higher fee per person to these sports leagues. The downside is that this approach may make the leagues too expensive for some participants.
- + **Add lighting to recreational facilities in order to extend the hours of use where appropriate.** The Recreation Department can provide greater opportunities for field use by installing lights where practical. Lights should be installed in areas that will have low-to-moderate impacts on surrounding properties.
- + **Explore the pros and cons of installing artificial turf athletic fields at appropriate locations.** Artificial turf fields are more expensive to install but less expensive to maintain and can be used almost continually, unlike natural fields that need to be rested.

 **METRIC**

ADD TWO FACILITIES PER YEAR OR MAKE IMPROVEMENTS ANNUALLY TO ALLOW FOR HEAVIER USE OF FIELDS UNTIL FIELD USAGE IS AT OR BELOW INDUSTRY RECOMMENDED USE LEVELS.

R1.3

EXPLORE OPPORTUNITIES TO INCORPORATE A GREATER VARIETY OF OPEN SPACE AND RECREATIONAL OFFERINGS THROUGHOUT TOWN.

LEAD 

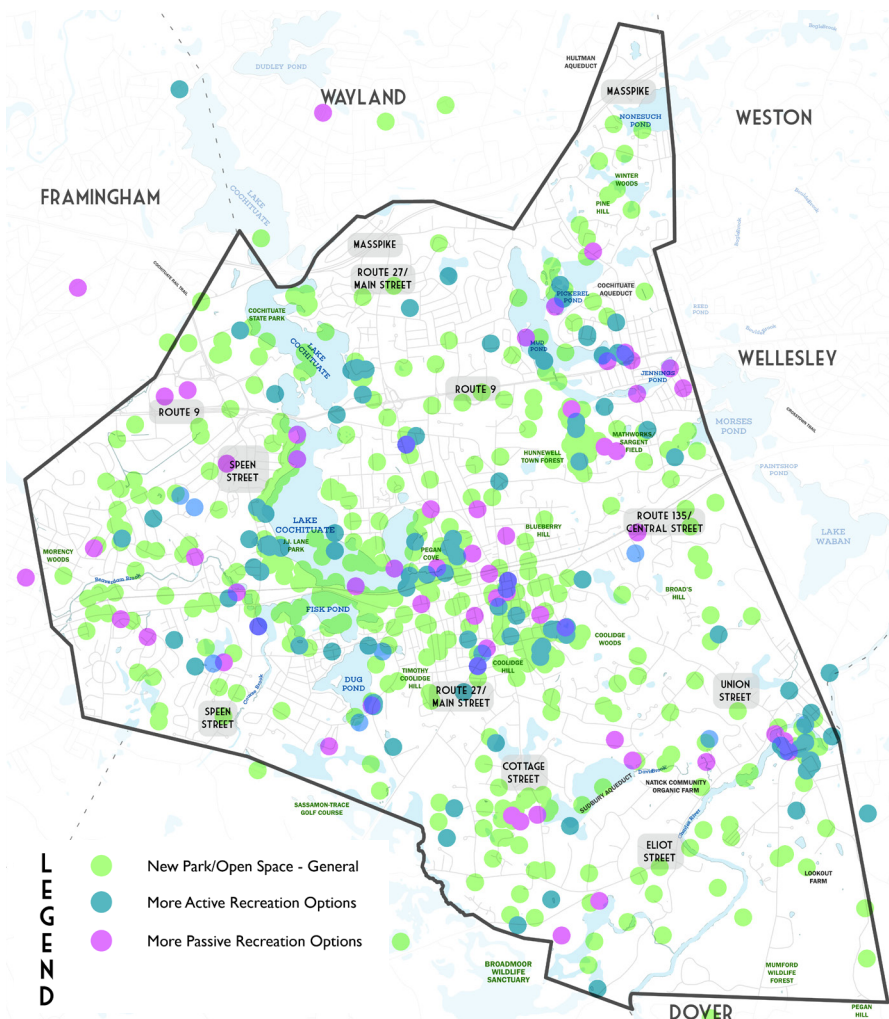
COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
RECREATION & PARKS DEPARTMENT

SUPPORT 

OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Throughout the Natick 2030+ public process, there were a number of recurring requests for expanded offerings, including community gardens, splash pads, a community pool, a dog park, and pocket parks located in and around the Town Center. The Open Space Survey Response Map depicts the general categories and locations of the responses collected through the online survey.

The need for pocket parks around Town Center was commonly brought up during the public process. While small, noncontiguous open space plots can be challenging from a maintenance and upkeep perspective, when located in densely populated areas they help provide needed respite. **Pocket parks should be considered as an option in the Town Center area during review of development proposals and when tax delinquent or parcels that are unusable for other purposes are available for acquisition.**



MAP 7.8 OPEN SPACE SURVEY RESPONSE MAP

1-5 YEARS 

Also as part of the public input portion of the Natick 2030+ process, there were numerous requests for locating a dog park in town. Final plans for the selected site on West Central Street have been approved the Stanton Foundation, the Conservation Commission and the Planning Board. **The Town should continue to work with FIDO to install a dog park.**



1-5 YEARS 

Several of the requested facilities were addressed as recommendations by the 2016 Master Plan for Parks and Fields (Table 7.2) and should be strongly considered for incorporation in future projects. These recommendations include installation or expansion of community gardens at several locations around Town and identified locations for splash pads at two Town parks.

If the demand exists for additional community garden space, the Town could potentially consider another location south of Route 9. However, as this area of Town generally has larger parcels and more access to personal garden space, the need may not be as great. The proposed locations for splash pads would provide access to water recreation on both the east and west sides of Town.



7-12+ YEARS 

Another common request by residents included access to a community pool. **While a community pool may not be feasible for the Town at this time, it may be possible to partner with adjacent towns to help provide this amenity. Specifically, the Town of Wellesley includes plans to develop an indoor aquatic center as part of its Comprehensive Plan, and an opportunity may present itself to develop a partnership to expand access to this amenity to Natick residents.**

The recommendation is ambitious because it is entirely dependent upon the cooperation of the Town of Wellesley. It would, however, result in providing Natick residents with access to a swimming pool without burdening the Town with having to construct, operate and maintain a swimming facility.


COMMUNITY GARDEN	SPLASH PAD
East School	Henry Wilson Park
Lilja Elementary School	Murphy Field
Community Senior Center	
Bennett-Hemenway School	


TABLE 7.2 2016 MASTER PLAN FOR PARKS AND FIELDS PROPOSED LOCATIONS FOR ADDITIONAL AMENITIES



2016 Master Plan Proposed Plan for Henry Wilson Park improvements & splash pad (left) and Murphy Field improvements & splash pad (right).

R1.4

LEAD 
 BOARD OF SELECTMEN
 RECREATION & PARKS DEPARTMENT

SUPPORT 
 PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

ENSURE THAT THE MAINTENANCE BUDGETS AND REVENUE STREAMS FOR OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION ARE COMMENSURATE WITH EXPANSION OF OPEN SPACE AREA AND AMENITY OFFERINGS.

The Master Plan for Parks and Fields found a budget shortfall in its assessment of yearly budgets for athletic field maintenance within the Town. Similarly, the Conservation Commission does not have a continual revenue source for maintaining the parcels under their ownership for conservation. Based on an analysis of comparison communities in the Boston region completed for this Plan (Table 7.3), Natick’s current per capita spending on open space is toward the lower end of the spectrum for communities with comparative populations and median household income. Natick residents were fairly evenly split on their response to the question of whether potential budget increases should be spent on expanding open space or improving maintenance of existing open space and recreational amenities.

	PER CAPITA SPENDING	POPULATION	MEDIAN HH INCOME
Lexington (fy2018)	\$62	32,936	\$152,872
Wellesley (fy 2018)	\$59	28,909	\$171,719
Framingham (fy 2017)	\$51	70,743	\$70,706
Melrose (fy 2018)	\$51	27,787	\$87,712
Milton (fy 2018)	\$49	27,351	\$122,516
Natick (fy 2018)	\$44	35,385	\$104,372
Arlington (fy 2017)	\$39	44,408	\$98,103

TABLE 7.3 ANNUAL OPEN SPACE SPENDING FOR COMPARISON COMMUNITIES



ONGOING

It is recommended that the Parks and Open Space budget be revisited regularly upon acquisition of future parcels and expansion of facilities. For active recreation facilities, future maintenance budgets should be adjusted in accordance with industry standards for materials and labor necessary to adequately maintain such facilities. For passive recreation and conservation parcels, dedicated budgets should be provided for trails maintenance, wayfinding, upkeep, invasive species management and ecological health and habitat management. The roles of the Recreation and Parks Department staff and Public Works Department staff should be clearly defined in terms of responsibilities for each of these maintenance activities and dedicated line items should be included within their budgets.



ONGOING

Additionally, the Town should continue to seek other supporting revenue streams and/or maintenance options for its open space and recreational facilities, including developer payments to the FAR Stabilization Fund, maintenance agreements with private owners for POPS (privately owned and maintained public spaces) and federal, state, and private grants like the MetroWest Community Health Care Foundation and the Massachusetts LAND and PARC programs.



OPEN SPACE BUDGETS DEMONSTRATE PER CAPITA SPENDING LEVELS COMMENSURATE WITH COMPARISON COMMUNITIES, REVIEWED ON A THREE YEAR BASIS

GOAL 2

Increase the number of public connections, perimeter trails and access points to Natick's lakes, rivers and wetlands.

R2.1

WORK WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION (DCR) TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF ACCESS POINTS AROUND LAKE COCHITUATE.

LEAD 

PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
MA DEPT. OF CONSERVATION & RECREATION

SUPPORT 

OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Residents voiced strong support for increasing access to the surface water resources with particular interest in Lake Cochituate. While the topography and some of the adjacent private land holdings make it difficult to provide a fully-encircling perimeter path, there are opportunities for additional access points around the Lake.

Continue working with DCR to incorporate a gated connection from the Cochituate Rail Trail to the Cochituate State Park main area. This will provide direct access to the northern segment of the lake during most times of the year. It is important to note that the DCR does limit the total number of visitors to the northern segment of the park during peak summer use in order to maintain responsible capacity levels for park use. The capacity level is maintained through closures to additional visitors once the parking lots are full. DCR extends this policy to walk-in visitors as well; all entrances to the State Park must have the ability to be gate controlled during peak summer days.



1-5 YEARS

 **1-5 YEARS** 

While the topography along Lake Cochituate bordering J.J. Lane Park is too steep to provide a shoreline path, it is possible to install areas for seating and overlooks with direct access from the park. Installation of a footpath connection from J.J. Lane Park to these seating areas would allow for more direct enjoyment of the lake views from an existing adjacent park.

 **4-7 YEARS** 

The Town also should explore opportunities to provide a second connection from the Cochituate Rail Trail directly to the lake. A potential location exists just south of Route 9 where the property widens enough to provide a lookout point or small picnic area adjacent to the Cochituate Rail Trail. Users of the trail will also have access to the Pegan Cove area by way of an at-grade bike trail crossing at Lake Street.

 **4-7 YEARS** 

Additionally, the Master Plan for Parks and Fields recommended a number of trail and amenity upgrades to the Mary Bunker Park and Pegan Cove/Tony Anniballi Memorial Park area. **Accessible kayak launches should also be considered as part of the improvements for these area to help expand boating access for residents of Natick.** Capacity could be controlled through parking access, similar to the process used by the State Park. The Town should work with the DCR and the State Access Board to explore installation of accessible kayak launches in these locations.

 **ON-GOING** 

Finally, the Town should continue to monitor the status of the National Guard site for opportunities to expand open space access around the lake. The National Guard site lies on the shores of Lake Cochituate and could provide a much-needed addition to recreational use of Lake Cochituate. The Cochituate State Park Management Plan urges that, should this property become surplus, the state should make every effort to add it to Cochituate State Park. Should this happen, the Town should work with DCR to expand the Town’s recreational access to the Lake.



Proposed Plan for Mary Bunker Park from the 2016 Master Plan for Parks and Fields

R2.2

LEAD



OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
RECREATION & PARKS DEPARTMENT

SUPPORT



PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT



1-5 YEARS



EXPAND PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE CHARLES RIVER.

The Town can help increase access to the Charles River by both identifying it more formally as a “Blueway” within the Town, and by increasing direct access to the river itself.

Designating the Charles River as a “Blueway” could be accomplished through two primary mechanisms. A more symbolic approach would be to use this designation as a way of branding and highlighting the Charles River as a recreational and environmental asset to the Town. The “Blueway” designation would be publicized on the Town website and on other tourism sites for visitors to the area. Signage and branding could be developed to help recognize the waterway as a recreational corridor similar to other land-based greenways in the area. This approach would help bring attention to the corridor as a valued Town asset, while limiting the amount of regulatory oversight needed for the process.

A regulatory approach to this designation would include additional protections for water quality, standards for regular public access along the Charles River, and ongoing efforts to make all bordering areas to the Charles River open and available to the general public. This approach would require updates to the Town bylaws and development of a review and oversight structure.



4-7 YEARS



Provide kayak launches along the Charles River. To help increase physical access to the Charles River, the Master Plan for Parks and Fields illustrates three potential locations for kayak launches along the Charles River. These locations provide access both above and below the South Natick Dam, and coupled with additional park improvements, would provide easy boating access on the River offered in close proximity to new parking lots.



Proposed Plan for Charles River Kayak Launch Locations from the 2016 Master Plan for Parks and Fields

GOAL 3

Provide a system of walking and bicycle trails that connect Natick’s open spaces and provide a way to travel throughout the Town.



R3.1

LEAD



RECREATION & PARKS DEPARTMENT
PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

SUPPORT



OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
TRAILS COMMITTEE



ONGOING



IMPROVE THE CONNECTIVITY OF THE TOWN’S OPEN AND RECREATIONAL SPACES THROUGH BOTH (1) BETTER CONNECTIONS BETWEEN TRAIL SYSTEMS AND PARKS AND (2) COORDINATED IMPROVEMENTS TO BIKE/PEDESTRIAN TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE.

While nearly ninety percent of the land area of Natick is within one quarter mile of a public open space, less than half of the Town is within a quarter mile of a formal entrance or access point. **Future parcel and easement acquisitions should focus on improving connectivity of the Town’s existing open space when considering new open space opportunities.** Additionally, access to the open and recreation spaces around Town can be improved through both on-street bike/pedestrian infrastructure improvements and off-street trail connections. Map 7.9 illustrates the current condition of open space entrances and connecting roadway networks. Map 7.10 illustrates how expansion of open space and recreation entrances in combination with on and off-street networks could expand direct access to open space to include the entire land area of Natick within a ¼ mile buffer of the access network.

The methodology for developing these proposed improvements focused on a number of priorities:

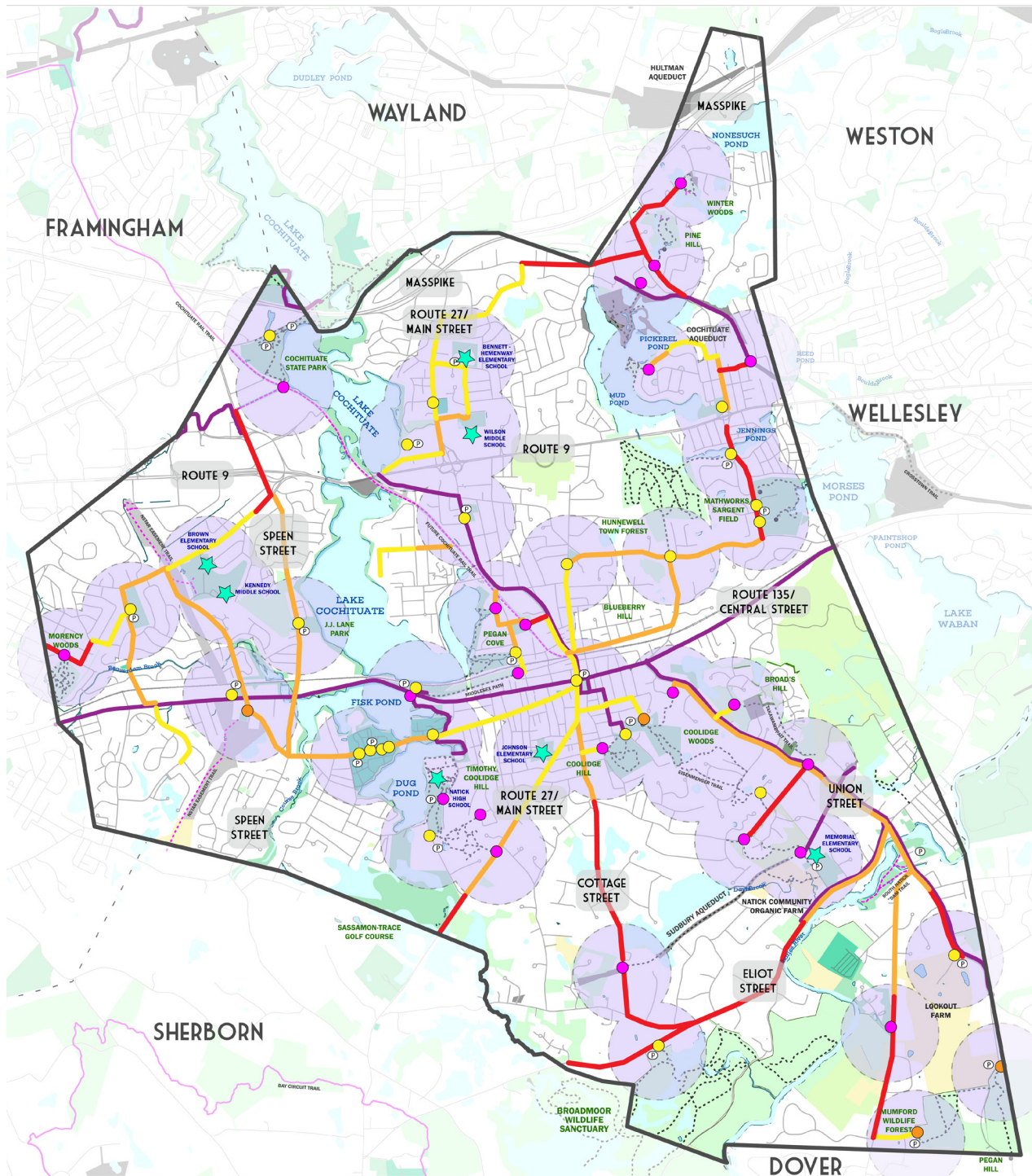
1. Connecting existing open space and recreation as much as possible to take full advantage of existing resources.
2. Creating connective loops throughout the Town that utilize a diverse system of networks including existing and future on-street sidewalks and bike lanes and off-street trail networks.
3. Expanding the number of well-marked entrances to all open spaces, parks, and trails. The locations shown on Map 7.10 include recommended locations submitted by Town residents as part of the online map survey completed during the public input phase of this process.
4. Utilizing existing protected lands and conservation/utility easements as much as possible for future locations of trail connections. These connections are intentionally displayed as generalized routes to suggest appropriate locations, but not specific trail routes. Detailed trail routes should be formalized as part of future acquisition and design projects.

As displayed in Map 7.10, the final result is a system of inner and outer loops that provides direct access to the Town’s existing open space network for nearly one hundred percent of the residents living within the Town of Natick. **The Town should work to improve and expand the open space access points shown on Figure 7.10. On-street improvements to the overall open space connectivity should be incorporated into town infrastructure improvements; bike and pedestrian improvements should be included as roadway improvement projects are completed along the routes shown.**



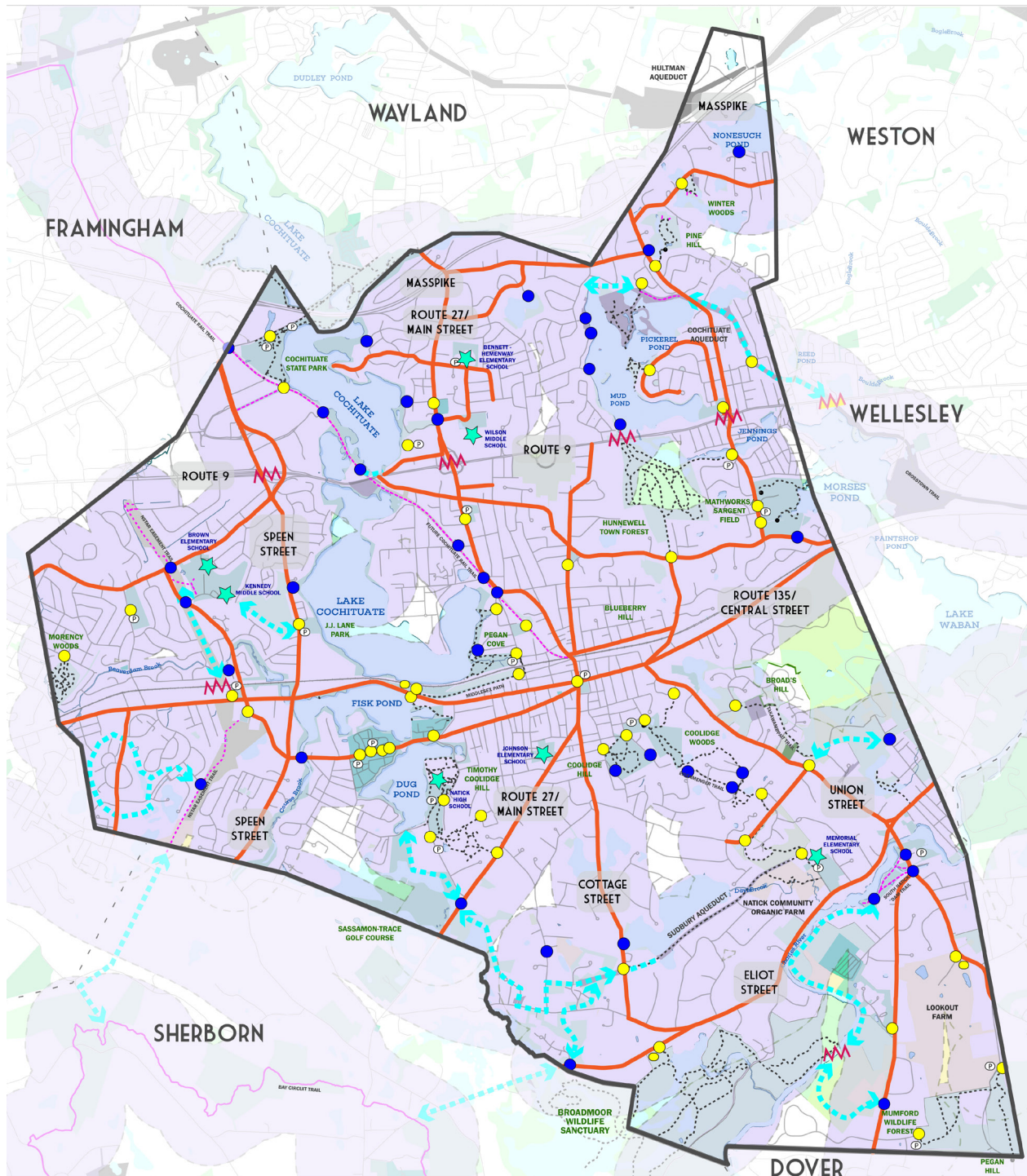
ONGOING





MAP 7.9 EXISTING OPEN SPACE AND CONNECTIONS NETWORK

- LEGEND**
- | | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|--|
| EXISTING FEATURES | OPEN SPACE TYPE | TRAILS | BIKE/PED INFRASTRUCTURE (PRIORITY ROUTES) |
| | Recreation | Main Trail | Existing Sidewalk Both Sides |
| | Conservation | Informal Trail | Existing Sidewalk One Side |
| | Historical/Cultural | Well Marked Entrance | No Existing Sidewalk |
| | Agriculture | Marked Entrance | Existing Bike Lane |
| | Utility | Unmarked Entrance | |
| | Water | | |
| | Parking | | |
| | School | | |
| | | | 1/4 mile access buffer |



LEGEND

- EXISTING FEATURES**
- OPEN SPACE TYPE**
- Recreation
 - Conservation
 - Historical/Cultural
 - Agriculture
 - Utility
 - Water
 - P Parking
 - ★ School

- TRAILS**
- ⋯ Main Trail
 - ⋯ Informal Trail
 - Existing Entrance

- PROPOSED FEATURES**
- Priority Bike/Ped Route
 - ⋯ Future Trail Link
 - Proposed Entrance
 - M Protected or Elevated Bike/Ped Crossing
 - 1/4 mile access buffer

MAP 7.10 PROPOSED FUTURE OPEN SPACE AND CONNECTIONS NETWORK



INCREASE TRAIL CONNECTIVITY AND PARK ENTRANCES INCREMENTALLY TO ACHIEVE IMPROVED ACCESS COVERAGE. REVIEW EVERY TWO YEARS.

R3.2

RE-INSTATE THE TRAILS COMMITTEE AND COMBINE OVERLAPPING COMMITTEES

LEAD

TRAILS COMMITTEE

SUPPORT

OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

During discussions with residents and Town representatives, the status of the Trails Committee was unclear; the Committee appeared to be relatively inactive currently. **In order to better pursue the proposed expansion plans, it is recommended that the Trails Committee be formally reinstated with a clear chair and co-chair identified. Also, it may be advisable to create a single Trails Oversight Committee from the existing committees that cover projects related to the trails, including the Trails Maintenance Committee, Cochituate Rail Trail Advisory Committee and the Friends of Natick Trails.**

1-5 YEARS

GOAL 4

Preserve and protect Natick’s water supply, wildlife, and other natural resources.

R4.1

PRIORITIZE PROTECTION FOR PARCELS THAT SERVE AS WILDLIFE HABITAT, WILDLIFE CORRIDORS, OR WATER QUALITY PROTECTION.

LEAD

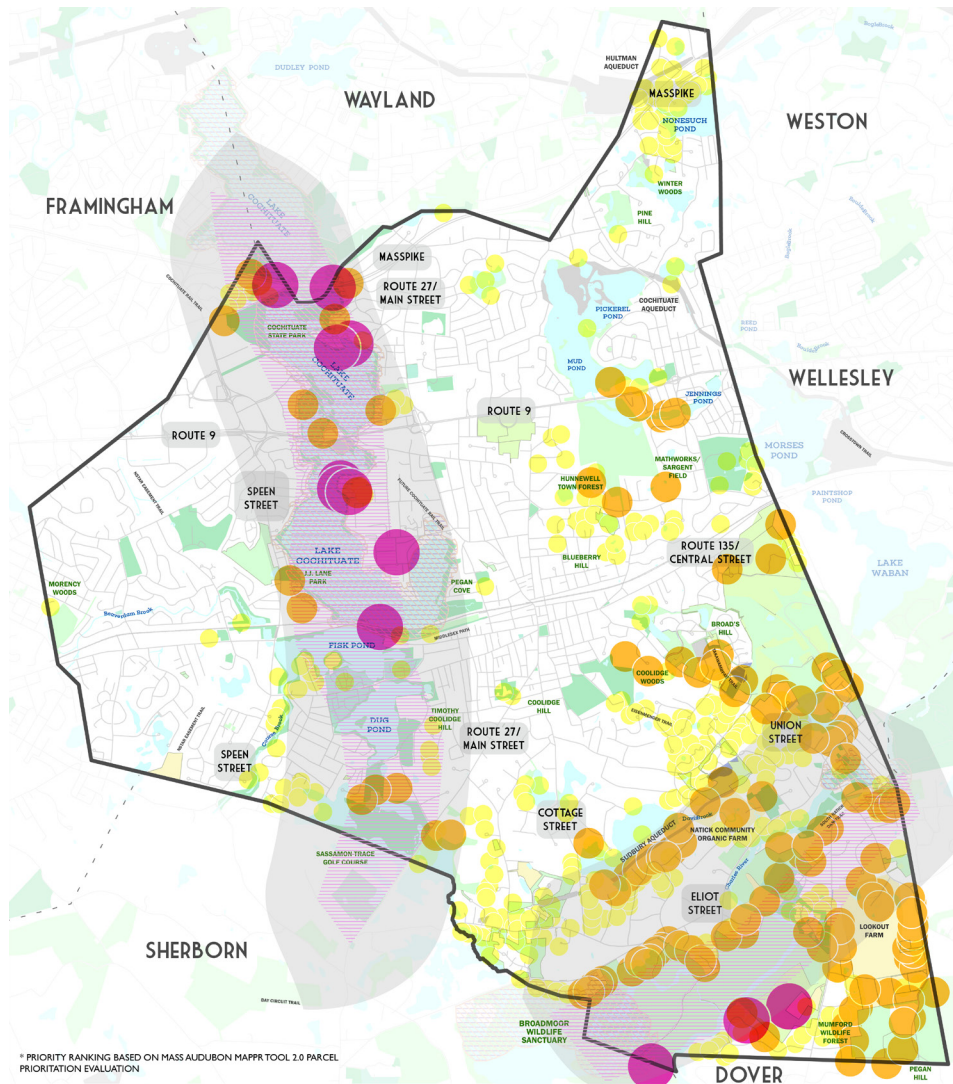
OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
CONSERVATION COMMISSION
PLANNING BOARD

SUPPORT

ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE OFFICER

The diagrams on the following pages illustrate the priority zones mentioned above. Map 7.11 illustrates priority wildlife protection corridors as identified through the Mass Audubon and The Nature Conservancy MAPPR (Mapping and Prioritizing Parcels for Resilience) Program. The diagram depicts the general locations for the highest ranked parcels (3-9) as determined by the MAPPR online tool and highlights corridors with a high density of high priority parcels. The parcels have been prioritized under the MAPPR Balanced Model, which combines weighted values for criteria covering attributes for resilience, critical linkages, core habitats, critical natural landscapes, parcel size, block size, adjacency to existing protection, and under-represented ecological settings. Taken as a whole, the map helps identify regions of the Town that are of particular importance with regard to protecting wildlife habitat and migration corridors.

Map 7.12 illustrates existing protection zones for floodplain buffers, surface water buffers, aquifers and zone II wellheads. These areas are already protected by various local, state and federal regulations. Taken as a whole, the areas shown on the map are also high priority areas for implementation of stormwater low-impact development strategies and green infrastructure projects.

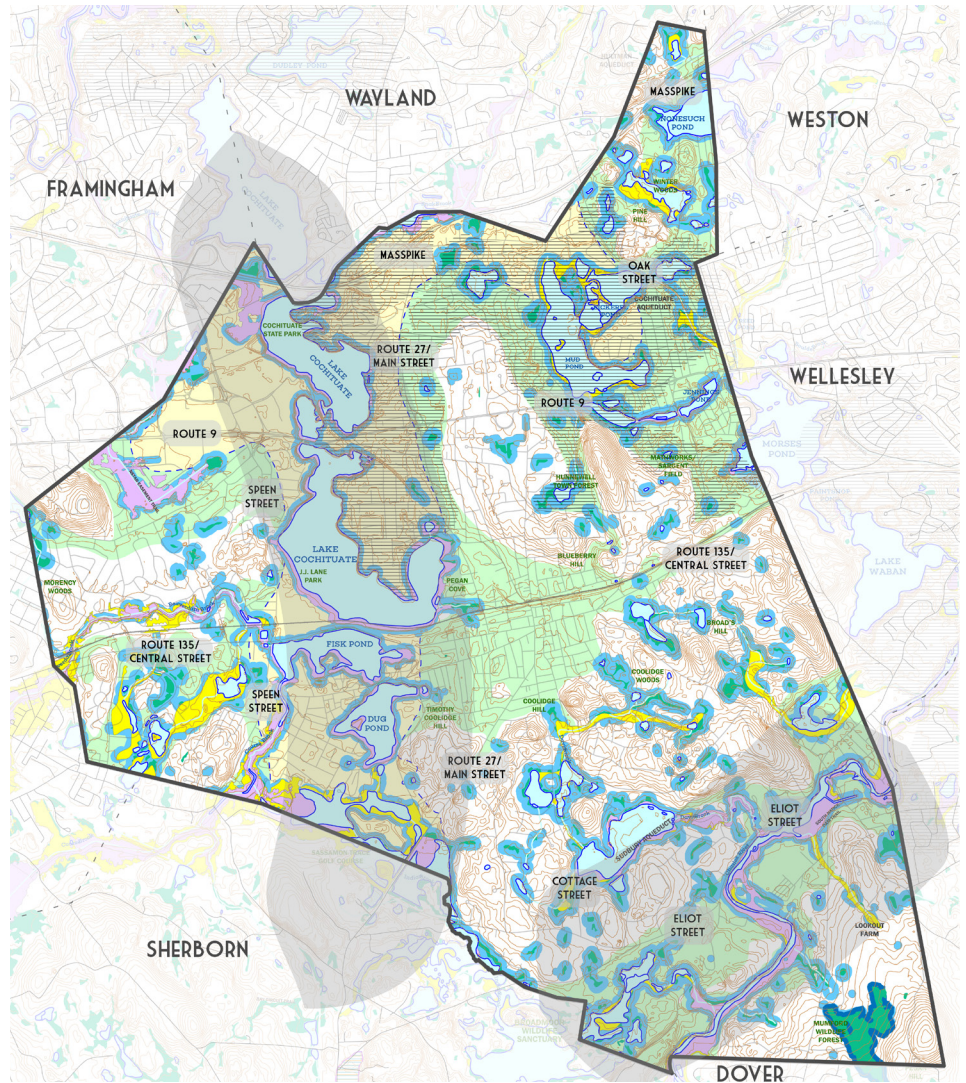


MAP 7.11 PRIORITY WILDLIFE CORRIDOR PROTECTION

- L
E
G
E
N
D**
- High Priority Parcel*
 - Mid Priority Parcel*
 - Baseline Priority Parcel*
 - High Priority Wildlife Corridor - >.5 mi width
 - Multi-Priority Open Space Corridor

Further discussion of priority open space network parcels and recreational parcels are discussed in recommendations 1.1 & 3.1. **The gray corridors depicted on Maps 7.11 & 7.12 help identify zones that would produce multiple benefits for the open space network as a whole and should be utilized for ranking open space importance when the Town is considering future open space parcel acquisitions (should land become available) or making conservation recommendations as part of the review process for development proposals.**





MAP 7.12 PRIORITY WATER RESOURCE PROTECTION

- LEGEND**
- Surface Water
 - Wetland
 - 100' Buffer Zone
 - 100 Year Floodplain
 - 500 Year Floodplain
 - Aquifer
 - Aquifer Recharge Zone
 - Zone II Wellhead Protection Areas
 - Elevation Contour (3m interval)
 - Multi-Priority Open Space Corridor

R4.2

1-5 YEARS

UPDATE THE AQUIFER PROTECTION OVERLAY DISTRICT BYLAW

The Town should update the Aquifer Protection Overlay District Bylaw. The Community and Economic Development Department is currently heading up this effort and a draft of the update is being reviewed. The update will need to be approved by Town Meeting. The proposed revisions modernize definitions, terms, requirements, and thresholds.

 **4-7 YEARS**  **R4.3**

LEAD 
 CONSERVATION COMMISSION

SUPPORT 
 MA DEPT. OF CONSERVATION & RECREATION
 MA DEPT. OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

IMPLEMENT APPROPRIATE TOTAL MAXIMUM DAILY LOADS (TMDL) FOR LAKE COCHITUATE

As mentioned in Existing Conditions, Lake Cochituate is listed as an impaired water body but does not have a TMDL in place. A TMDL is a regulatory term in the U.S. Clean Water Act describing a plan for restoring impaired waters that identifies the maximum amount of a pollutant that a body of water can receive while still meeting water quality standards. The Conservation Commission is currently working with the DCR to establish a better picture of appropriate TMDLs for Lake Cochituate. **A final TMDL report for the lake should be compiled and corrective action should be taken to move this water body off the list of impaired waters.**

R4.4

LEAD 
 PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

SUPPORT 
 SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE

IMPLEMENT GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS ON TOWN PROPERTY.

The Town should implement pilot projects for green infrastructure, low-impact design and increased biodiversity on Town properties within the priority natural resource protection zones. Teaching by example can go a long way towards encouraging residents and property owners to begin implementing strategies that protect natural resources on their own property. The Town should actively seek to incorporate green infrastructure strategies such as disconnecting roof leaders from storm drains, installing rain barrels, incorporating bioswales or installing green roofs in areas that have been identified as water resource protection priority zones. Similarly, incorporation of more natural landscapes like no-mow lawns, meadows, pollinator gardens and successional growth areas will help connect otherwise isolated open space parcels as part of a larger wildlife corridor network. *The Conservation Commission is currently working in conjunction with the Public Works Department to implement several stormwater BMP (Best Management Practices) projects on Town-owned land. The designs are in place but construction funding has not yet been allocated.*

 **4-7 YEARS** 

R4.5

LEAD 
 SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE
 BUILDING DEPARTMENT

SUPPORT 
 PLANNING BOARD
 CONSERVATION COMMISSION

ACTIVELY ENCOURAGE PROTECTION OF THE PRIORITY NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION AREAS THROUGH IMPLEMENTATION OF GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE ON PRIVATE PROPERTY AND THROUGH LEGAL AND/OR ZONING MEASURES.

The Town should develop and provide informational pamphlets and lists of recommended green infrastructure strategies, native/natural landscaping strategies, and organic maintenance practices to all projects seeking a permit within the priority zones shown on Maps 7.11 and 7.12. The Town has the opportunity to provide informational resources on many of the strategies it is trying to encourage at the time of permitting. The Flood Plain Overlay District, the Aquifer Protection Overlay District, the Wetland Bylaw and the Stormwater Management Bylaw all provide opportunities to provide best practice information and encourage construction practices that achieve a higher standard of natural resource protection. Any and all construction of building or structures within these zones that requires a town permit should receive this information.

 **1-5 YEARS** 



1-5 YEARS



The Town could also encourage protection of the priority natural resource protection zones by providing property owners with information regarding Massachusetts General Law Chapter 61A: Assessment and Taxation of Agricultural and Horticultural Land, which allows a reduced tax rate for properties being used for agricultural and horticultural purposes and Chapter 61B which allows a reduced tax rate for properties being used for recreational purposes. Creating a Conservation Zoning District could also be explored.

R4.6

EXTEND THE FLOOD PLAIN OVERLAY DISTRICT PROTECTIONS IN ORDER TO ACCOUNT FOR FUTURE CLIMATIC CHANGES AND RESULTING INCREASED IMPACT ZONES.

LEAD



NATICK GIS DEPARTMENT
TOWN BOARD OF SELECTMEN
PLANNING BOARD

SUPPORT



CONSERVATION COMMISSION
SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE
FEMA REGIONAL OFFICE

The precise climatic conditions Natick will see in the future is unknown, but predictions for the Northeast include more precipitation events and more intense storms as the climate changes. **In order to track the effect of these changes over time, the Town could provide a crowd-sourced website for flood reporting in order to better document the areas of Town that will need increased flood protection in the coming decades.** While FEMA Flood Maps provide a baseline for flood protection policies and regulation, on-the-ground data and tracking can be more useful for understanding Town and neighborhood-level hazard areas. A crowd-sourced website that allows residents and land owners to report flood prone areas and damage would help the Town track how the flood boundary changes over time. This type of website could help inform where future extensions of the flood plain overlay district are needed for flood protection.



1-5 YEARS



This recommendation is ambitious because it would involve the cooperation of numerous residents and would require someone to consolidate and verify the information submitted. The resulting benefit would be the Town's access to more up to date, locally nuanced information than the Town receives from the state.



4-7 YEARS



Another option in the future may be to extend the review of the Flood Plain Overlay District to include review requirements for the FEMA 500-year flood plain areas. Two potential options for how the Town can approach extending this review include:

1. Amending the Flood Plain Overlay District requirements to require all new construction of buildings and structures within the 500-year flood plain area to submit a flood resiliency checklist, documenting the flood protection methods that have been utilized in the design of the project. Potential options may include elevated floor plates, deployable flood-proofing, floodable ground floor, unoccupied first floor, or elevated mechanicals and utilities. **This checklist would be for review purposes only as a way of encouraging developers to consider these types of flood-proofing options within this zone.**
2. Amending the Flood Plain Overlay District to require all new construction of buildings and structures within the 500-year Flood Plain Area be elevated to the 500-year flood elevation and be designed and constructed to resist the effects of flood hazards and flood loads for the 500-year design storm. This is the more

restrictive option and should only be pursued in consultation with the Regional Federal Emergency Management Agency, structural engineers licensed in the state of Massachusetts and familiar with FEMA flood plain models, and appropriate legal counsel.

This second option is ambitious because it would require coordination with FEMA and legal counsel regarding the ability to extend the boundaries and requirements for construction within the Flood Plain Overlay District. The benefit would be the resulting enhanced flood protection.

R4.7

INCLUDE ALL WATER RESOURCE JURISDICTIONAL LAYERS ON THE NATICK GIS MAP WEBSITE AND USE LAYER NAMING CONSISTENT WITH THE TOWN BYLAWS.

LEAD 

NATICK GIS DEPARTMENT

SUPPORT 

PLANNING BOARD

 **1-5 YEARS** 

The Town should add the boundary layers for the Aquifer Protection Overlay District, Flood Plain Overlay District, and Wetlands Buffer Zone to the online Town GIS Map Website. Residents are increasingly expecting clear and readily accessible information from their Town governments. Providing online mapping resources is an excellent step towards clarifying jurisdictional boundaries for permitting in an easily accessible format. All jurisdictional boundaries that are defined in Town Bylaws should be readily accessed online, including those that specifically affect open space and environmental protection. The above listed boundaries should be included on the Town GIS Map to help citizens better understand the permitting requirements of their location.

It should be noted that not all of these boundaries are fixed and may need to be updated from time to time. Additionally, for layers like the Wetlands Buffer Zone, there may be unmapped wetlands in Town that are not captured in the online GIS map. These data gaps should be clearly explained on the website to alert users to their responsibilities regarding permitting requirements. Additional information, such as links to descriptions of identifying characteristics for wetlands and Town contact information for those looking to obtain further information, should be provided.


GOAL 5

Increase awareness, appreciation, and use of the Town’s open spaces, trails, natural resources, and recreational opportunities through installation of wayfinding and trailheads, provision of updated trail maps, and community engagement efforts.

 **R5.1**

UTILIZE MULTIPLE OUTLETS FOR PUBLICIZING THE OPEN SPACE, TRAILS AND NATURAL RESOURCES IN TOWN.

ON-GOING 

LEAD 

NATICK GIS DEPARTMENT
OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

SUPPORT 

MAPC
NATICK SCHOOLS

The Town should continue to develop and maintain up-to-date, town-wide open space and trail maps and provide them both in digital online and print formats. Maps should be made available on both the Town’s official website and on the GIS Map website portal for the Town of Natick. In many cases, the open space and trails are part of larger networks, or parcels that span Town borders. Maps and depictions of these open spaces and trails should also provide information about the larger networks that these spaces connect to outside of Town boundaries.

As a way to help generate these maps, the Trails Committee should reach out to the schools to help coordinate mapping of the trails with earth science curriculum offered. GPS (global positioning system) software and applications have become increasingly user friendly and engaging younger students in identifying and mapping trails around Town will help garner a lasting appreciation for the Town’s natural settings.

   **R5.2**

4-7 YEARS 

LEAD 

COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

SUPPORT 








OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
TRAILS COMMITTEE
HISTORIC COMMISSION








DEVELOP A CONSISTENT SYSTEM OF WAYFINDING THAT CONNECTS OPEN SPACES, TRAIL NETWORKS, TRANSPORTATION RESOURCES, AND CULTURAL AMENITIES THROUGHOUT THE TOWN.







Developing wayfinding and signage that is consistent helps define an overall character and identity for the Town. Formalizing entry points and connections helps orient both residents and visitors as they make their way throughout Town. Developing a hierarchy and thematic signage system that incorporates multiple Town resources will help communicate the interconnected nature of the various elements. Through the use of thematic signage, parks and civic and cultural resources will be better identified as Town destinations, while trails, sidewalks, bike lanes and roads will be more strongly associated with an overall connectivity network for the Town.

















Example of city wayfinding system







Goal	Recommendation	Action Step	Lead Responsibility	Support Responsibility	Time Frame	Metric	Coordination
<p>Goal 1: Continue to support, expand and maintain Natick's high quality active and passive open spaces.</p>	<p>R1.1: Pursue strategies that identify and protect multi-benefit open spaces in order to maintain both a high-quality and high-functioning open space network within the Town of Natick.</p>	<p>Make a concerted effort to prioritize protection of open space based on identified characteristics, with higher priority given to parcels that provide a variety of benefits.</p> 	<p>Open Space Advisory Committee Conservation Commission Planning Board</p>	<p>Environmental Compliance Officer</p>	<p>ON-GOING</p>		
		<p>Create a weighted model in GIS that specifically emphasized parcels that meet prioritized criteria.</p> 	<p>Open Space Advisory Committee Conservation Commission Planning Board</p>	<p>Environmental Compliance Officer</p>	<p>4-7 YEARS</p>		
		<p>Continue to pursue protection of privately held open space through acquisition, conservation restrictions, and easements in order to meet the open space needs of the Town as they evolve over time.</p> 	<p>Open Space Advisory Committee Conservation Commission Planning Board</p>	<p>Environmental Compliance Officer</p>	<p>ON-GOING</p>		
		<p>Require submission of a digital conservation easement boundary plan as part of the permitting process for any new development.</p> 	<p>Conservation Commission Planning Board</p>	<p>Environmental Compliance Officer</p>	<p>1-5 YEARS</p>		
	<p>R1.2: Actively explore opportunities to expand & enhance the Town's active recreation fields and facilities.</p>	<p>Prioritize the recommendations of the 2016 Natick Master Plan for Parks and Fields and incorporate them into future improvement budgets, with an emphasis on expanding the offerings of rectangular multi-use fields throughout town.</p> 	<p>Recreation & Parks Department</p>	<p>Public Works Department</p>	<p>ON-GOING</p>	<p>Add two facilities per year or make improvements annually to allow for heavier use of fields until field usage is at or below industry recommended use levels.</p>	
		<p>Evaluate the contribution of fees to maintenance and consider increasing fees assessed to local sports leagues for use of the Town's playing fields.</p> 	<p>Recreation & Parks Department</p>	<p>Public Works Department</p>	<p>1-5 YEARS</p>		

Goal	Recommendation	Action Step	Lead Responsibility	Support Responsibility	Time Frame	Metric	Coordination
		Add lighting to recreational facilities in order to extend the hours of use where appropriate. 	Recreation & Parks Department	Public Works Department	4-7 YEARS		
		Explore the pros and cons of installing artificial turf athletic fields at appropriate locations.	Recreation & Parks Department	Public Works Department	7-12+ YEARS		
	R1.3: Explore opportunities to incorporate a greater variety of open space and recreational offerings throughout Town.	Consider pocket parks as an option in the Town Center area during review of development proposals and when tax delinquent or parcels that are unusable for other purposes are available for acquisition. 	Community & Economic Development Department Recreation & Parks Department	Open Space Advisory Committee	ON-GOING		
		Continue to work with FIDO of Natick, Inc. to approve a dog park location within the town boundary. 	Recreation & Parks Department	Open Space Advisory Committee Board of Selectmen	1-5 YEARS		
		Install or expand offerings of community gardens and splash pads as per the 2016 Natick Master Plan for Parks and Fields recommendations. 	Recreation & Parks Department	Open Space Advisory Committee Board of Selectmen	1-5 YEARS		
		Evaluate feasibility for the Town to partner with adjacent towns to help provide a community pool amenity to Natick residents. 	Recreation & Parks Department	Open Space Advisory Committee Board of Selectmen	7-12+ YEARS		
	R1.4: Ensure that the maintenance budgets and revenue streams for open space and recreation are commensurate with expansion of open space area and amenity offerings.	Revisit the Parks and Open Space budget upon acquisition of future parcels and expansion of facilities. 	Board of Selectmen Recreation & Parks Department	Public Works Department	ON-GOING	Open Space budgets demonstrate per capita spending levels commensurate with comparison communities, reviewed on a three year basis.	

Goal	Recommendation	Action Step	Lead Responsibility	Support Responsibility	Time Frame	Metric	Coordination
		Continue to seek other supporting revenue streams and/or maintenance options for its open space and recreational facilities, including developer payments to the FAR Stabilization Fund, maintenance agreements with private owners for POPS (privately owned and maintained public spaces) and federal, state, and private grants like the MetroWest Community Health Care Foundation and the Massachusetts LAND and PARC programs. 	Board of Selectmen Recreation & Parks Department	Public Works Department	ON-GOING		
Goal 2: Increase the number of public connections, perimeter trails and access points to Natick's lakes, rivers and wetlands.	R2.1: Work with the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to increase the number of access points around Lake Cochituate.	Continue working with DCR to incorporate a gated connection from the Cochituate Rail Trail to the Cochituate State Park main area. 	Public Works Department MA Department of Conservation and Recreation	Open Space Advisory Committee	1-5 YEARS		
		Install areas for seating and overlooks adjacent to Lake Cochituate with direct access from J.J. Lane Park. 	Public Works Department MA Department of Conservation and Recreation	Open Space Advisory Committee	1-5 YEARS		
		Explore opportunities to provide a second connection from the Cochituate Rail Trail directly to the lake. 	Public Works Department MA Department of Conservation and Recreation	Open Space Advisory Committee	4-7 YEARS		
		Consider accessible kayak launches as part of the improvements for parks around Lake Cochituate to help expand boating access for residents of Natick. 	Public Works Department MA Department of Conservation and Recreation	Open Space Advisory Committee	4-7 YEARS		

Goal	Recommendation	Action Step	Lead Responsibility	Support Responsibility	Time Frame	Metric	Coordination
		Continue to monitor the status of the National Guard site for opportunities to expand open space access around the lake. 	Public Works Department MA Department of Conservation and Recreation	Open Space Advisory Committee	ON-GOING		
	R2.2: Expand public access to the Charles River.	Designate the Charles River as a "Blueway." 	Open Space Advisory Committee Recreation & Parks Department	Public Works Department	1-5 YEARS		
		Provide kayak launches along the Charles River as per the 2016 Natick Master Plan for Parks and Fields. 	Open Space Advisory Committee Recreation & Parks Department	Public Works Department	4-7 YEARS		
Goal 3: Provide a system of walking and bicycle trails that connect Natick's open spaces and provide a way to travel throughout the Town.	R3.1: Improve the connectivity of the Town's open and recreational spaces through both (1) better connections between trail systems and parks and (2) coordinated improvements to bike/pedestrian transportation infrastructure. 	Focus future parcel and easement acquisitions on improving connectivity of the Town's existing open space.	Recreation & Parks Department Public Works Department	Open Space Advisory Committee Trails Committee	ON-GOING		Transportation
		Work to improve and expand the open space access points shown on Figure 7.3. On-street improvements to the overall open space connectivity should be incorporated into town infrastructure improvements; bike and pedestrian improvements should be included as roadway improvement projects are completed along the routes shown. 	Recreation & Parks Department Public Works Department	Open Space Advisory Committee Trails Committee	ON-GOING	Increase trail connectivity and park entrances incrementally to achieve improved access coverage, review every two years.	Transportation
	R3.2: Re-instate the Trails Committee and combine overlapping committees. 	Formally reinstate the Trails Committee with a clear chair and co-chair lead identified. Create a single Trails Oversight Committee from the existing committees that cover projects related to trails.	Trails Committee	Open Space Advisory Committee	1-5 YEARS		

Goal	Recommendation	Action Step	Lead Responsibility	Support Responsibility	Time Frame	Metric	Coordination
<p>Goal 4: Preserve and protect Natick's water supply, wildlife, and other natural resources.</p>	<p>R4.1: Prioritize parcels for protection that serve as wildlife habitat, wildlife corridors or water quality protection.</p>	<p>Prioritize corridors depicted on Maps 7.11 & 7.12 that would produce multiple benefits for the open space network as a whole. Rank open space importance when the Town is considering future open space parcel acquisitions or making conservation recommendations as part of the review process for development proposals.</p> 	<p>Open Space Advisory Committee Conservation Commission Planning Board</p>	<p>Environmental Compliance Officer</p>	<p>ON-GOING</p>		
	<p>R4.2: Update the Aquifer Protection Overlay District Bylaw.</p>	<p>Update the Aquifer Protection Overlay District Bylaw.</p> 	<p>Conservation Commission Planning Board Open Space Advisory Committee</p>	<p>Environmental Compliance Officer</p>	<p>1-5 YEARS</p>		
	<p>R4.3: Implement appropriate Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) for Lake Cochituate.</p>	<p>A final TMDL report for the lake should be compiled and corrective action should be taken to move this water body off the list of impaired waters.</p> 	<p>Conservation Commission</p>	<p>MA Department of Conservation and Recreation MA Department of Environmental Protection</p>	<p>4-7 YEARS</p>		
	<p>R4.4: Implement green infrastructure improvements on town property.</p>	<p>Implement pilot projects for green infrastructure, low-impact design and increased biodiversity on Town properties within the priority natural resource protection zones.</p> 	<p>Public Works Department</p>	<p>Sustainability Committee</p>	<p>4-7 YEARS</p>		
	<p>R4.5: Actively encourage protection of the priority natural resource Protection areas through implementation of green infrastructure on private property.</p>	<p>Develop and provide informational pamphlets and lists of recommended green infrastructure strategies, native/natural landscaping strategies, and organic maintenance practices to all projects seeking a permit within the priority zones.</p> 	<p>Building Department Sustainability Committee</p>	<p>Conservation Commission Planning Board</p>	<p>1-5 YEARS</p>		
		<p>Provide property owners with information regarding MA Chapter 61A&B which allow a reduced tax rate for properties for agricultural, horticultural, or recreational purposes.</p> 	<p>Building Department Sustainability Committee</p>	<p>Conservation Commission Planning Board</p>	<p>1-5 YEARS</p>		

Goal	Recommendation	Action Step	Lead Responsibility	Support Responsibility	Time Frame	Metric	Coordination
	R4.6: Extend the Flood Plain Overlay District protections in order to account for future climatic changes and resulting increased impact zones.	Provide a crowd-sourced website for flood reporting in order to better document the areas of Town that will need increased flood protection in the coming decades. 	Natick GIS Dept Board of Selectmen Planning Board	Conservation Commission Sustainability Committee FEMA Regional Office	1-5 YEARS		
		Extend the review of flood plain overlay district to include review requirements for the FEMA 500-year flood plain areas. 	Board of Selectmen Planning Board	Conservation Commission Sustainability Committee FEMA Regional Office	4-7 YEARS		
	R4.7: Include all water resource jurisdictional layers on the natick GIS Map website and use layer naming consistent with the town bylaws.	Add the boundary layers for the Aquifer Protection Overlay District, Flood Plain Overlay District, and Wetlands Buffer Zone to the online Town GIS Map Website. 	Natick GIS Dept	Planning Board	1-5 YEARS		
Goal 5: Increase awareness, appreciation, and use of the Town's open spaces, trails, natural resources, and recreational opportunities through installation of wayfinding and trailheads, provision of updated trail maps, and community engagement efforts.	R5.1: Utilize multiple outlets for publicizing the open space, trails, and natural resources in Town.	Continue to develop and maintain up-to-date, town-wide open space and trail maps and provide them both in digital online and print formats. 	Natick GIS Dept Open Space Advisory Committee	MAPC Natick Schools	ON-GOING		Economic Development
	R5.2: Develop a consistent system of wayfinding that connects open spaces, trail networks, transportation resources, and cultural amenities throughout the town. 	Develop wayfinding and signage that is consistent helps define an overall character and identity for the Town.	Community & Economic Development	Open Space Advisory Committee Trails Committee Historic Commission	4-7 YEARS		Economic Development Historic & Cultural Resources Land Use