

Section 7

Analysis of Needs

This Open Space and Recreation Plan identifies several clear open space and recreational needs for the Town of Stow for the coming five years and as it grows toward build out. The highest priority needs are discussed below, however there are additional needs that are addressed in the Action Section of this plan in Section 8.

A. Highest Priority Resource Protection Needs

1. Protection of Priority Parcels identified in this Plan

As part of the process of preparing this Open Space and Recreation Plan, GIS mapping was used to estimate the percentage of land in Stow that has been developed and protected, as well as the amount of land whose fate remains to be determined. This data indicates that approximately 30% of the land in Stow has been developed and approximately 30% of the land has been protected. This leaves the largest percentage of land in town – 40% – as potentially available for development. This high percentage of “remaining” land means both that Stow still has the potential to grow and change significantly. **Stow residents perceive that there is a lot more “open space” in town than has actually been protected. A full 70% of the land in town appears green and open, but less than half of that “perceived open space” has legal protections that ensure that it will remain that way.** Notably this includes many of the orchards, golf courses, and scenic vistas that many town residents know and take for granted. This plan identifies high priority parcels to meet a variety of community needs – maintaining our agricultural land base, water resource protection, wildlife habitat, and scenic views, among others. It also identifies those parcels where development could have the great impact on the build out of Stow. In order to maintain the balance between protected and developed land in town, the Plan calls for protection of one acre for every acre that is developed in the future. This may happen in many ways – through donations of land and conservation restrictions, purchases of land and conservation restrictions, or open space set-asides in development projects. This is as easily determined “metric” to ensure that the town stays on course with the goals of the Plan.

TYPE OF LAND	ACRES	PERCENT OF TOTAL
Protected Lands	3611	32%
Developed Lands	3247	29%
Not Developed and Not Protected	4299	39%
Total Land Area	11157	100%

2. Protection of Stow’s Agricultural Base

The farms of Stow are one of the primary components of the town’s rural character and are an integral part of Stow’s heritage and economy. Agricultural parcels need particular attention for protection because they generally have excellent development potential and are under heavy pressure for conversion to other uses. Much of the farmland is in orchards, which is one of the most threatened types of agriculture in the Commonwealth. The Appendix to the Plan includes a copy of the Commonwealth’s Executive Order designed to protect agricultural lands from conversion to other uses, including a requirement for mitigation whenever a state permit or funding is required for a

development project on land that contains prime agricultural soils. A map of prime farmland in Stow is also contained in Section 4D of this Open Space and Recreation Plan.

3. Protection of Land in the “Underserved Area”

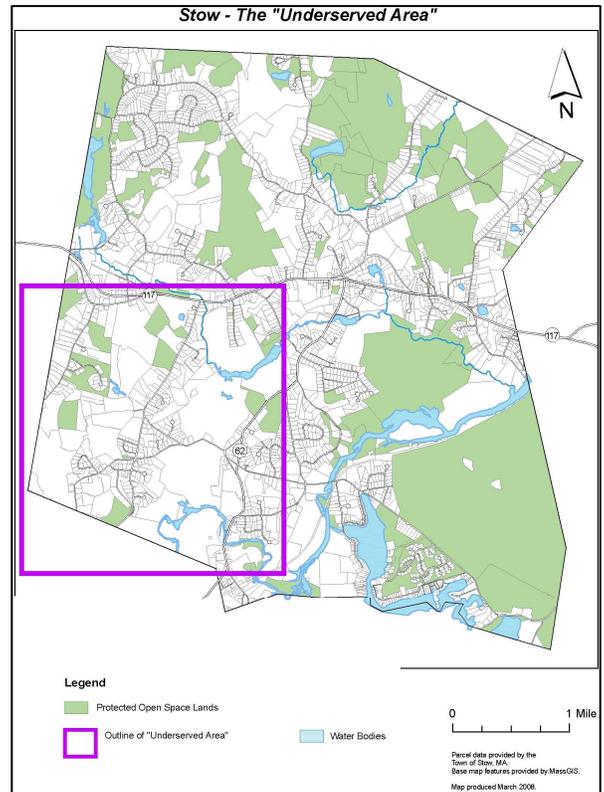
One area of Stow where there is very little land and a high priority for land use change is the Southwest Quadrant of town. In the area west of Hudson Road, there are approximately 600 acres of undeveloped land alone. In addition, several of the town’s large golf courses are located in this area. There is also very little protected land in this area, and there have been several recent large developments. For this reason, the Plan identifies this as an important area for future open space protection – which will hopefully create at least one large open space area as well as connections between protected parcels – enabling this area to connect into Stow’s “Emerald Necklace.”

B. Highest Priority Community Needs

1. Active Recreational Playing Fields

As Stow has continued to grow, it has not added active recreational facilities in more than 10 years, and as a result is experiencing overuse and overcrowding in its active recreational facilities. In particular, the town is in need of additional playing fields for both formally organized soccer, baseball and other sports leagues, as well as for more informal play and pick up games. It is anticipated that this need will continue to become worse as time goes on and the population of the town expands. In 2006-2007 various user groups in town joined together to form Recreation for Stow, and worked collaboratively with the Town’s Recreation Commission and Community Preservation Committee to complete a Recreation Master Plan, that examined the availability and need for recreational fields in Stow. The findings of that report included the following:

- There are virtually no fields in town for use by lacrosse, despite the rapid growth in that sport over the past two years;
- There is no adult baseball field (90 foot diamond) in Town;
- Stow accounts nearly 50% of the players on 50 teams in the Assabet Valley Little League while providing only 12% of the field usage;
- Stow Soccer has 620 participants in 45 teams and is projecting 5% growth in the next five years, forcing them to seek field space in Sudbury and Boxboro;



- Lack of resting has resulted in poor field conditions and deferred maintenance, including potential safety problems.

The Town is currently moving forward to identify and develop suitable sites for recreational fields and has recently just acquired the “Snow” property off of Old Bolton Road, which is expected to be developed to help alleviate the need for recreational fields (a portion of the land will also be maintained in active agricultural use). However, the Town will need to continue to identify and acquire suitable sites to meet the town’s active recreational needs, and to secure sufficient funds for field development. The following specific needs have been identified in the Recreation Master Plan to meet current needs:

1. Additional three or four multi-purpose Fields.

With an immediate need to remedy a deficit for soccer fields.

- Need: 1 full size soccer field, 1-2 small size, 1 multi-purpose.

New sports such as lacrosse may become popular. A multi-purpose field would allow this use. An extra field could also be used to spell an existing field for a ‘rest’ to allow for necessary short and long term maintenance.

Sites for these fields are currently being explored and include the Snow Property off Old Bolton Road, an expansion of the current facilities at Pine Bluffs, and Crow Island, along the Assabet River.

2. Additional Baseball Field

- Need – 1 Baseball field.

Baseball teams are limited to the field at Center School and the Hale School adjacent to the Middle School. During anticipated school facility renovation and construction at the Center Campus, this access will be reduced. Baseball practice and play is being restricted by the lack of fields.

3. Upgrade of Tennis Facilities

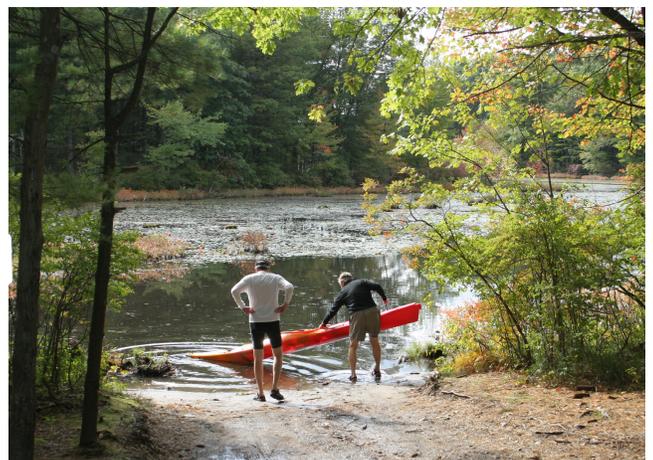
Dependent on Center-Hale School expansion/update, the Tennis Courts could be either relocated or upgraded. If the current 2 courts are maintained at their present location, the fencing will require replacement.

2. Water Access

A second recreational need that has been identified is enhanced access to both the Assabet River and Lake Boon.

- Need – Improved canoe landing and access to the Assabet River at Sudbury Road

Currently there is informal canoe/kayak access at this site. But the site is degraded – including visible erosion to the river front, there is no formal signage or bounds marks, no usage rules, and private land is being used without formal permission as a landing and for parking. This usage should be formalized and improved.



- Need – update to existing boat ramp at Lake Boon on Sudbury Road.

Suggest formalized ownership/control, improvements to signage/parking, and possibly a invasive species inspection program.

The town's short term recreational needs are summarized below:

Need	Detail	Notes
11v11 Soccer Field	Full Size Soccer Field	Current deficit in fields
6v6 or 8v8 Soccer Fields (2)	Soccer Fields	Current deficit in fields
Multi-Use Athletic Field	Use by softball, lacrosse, soccer as required	An additional field.
Baseball Field	Dedicated Baseball field	Needed for current teams/use.
Tennis Courts	Update or replacement of current courts	Dependent on Center-Hale school plans.
Water Access	Add Assabet Canoe landing.	Opportunity to utilize an asset to the town.

3. Completion of Assabet River Rail Trail

The Assabet River Rail Trail is an effort to complete a 12.5 mile multi-use recreational trail that will pass through the communities of Marlborough, Hudson, Stow, Maynard and Acton, primarily using an abandoned rail bed of the former Marlborough Branch RR, which was active between 1853 and 1980. While sections of the trail are now open and receiving significant use, a large gap remains between Route 62 on the Stow/Hudson line, heading east through Stow to Maynard. A clear priority is to identify potential routes to bridge this gap, allowing the trail to pass through Stow. Additional information about the status of the Assabet River Rail Trail can be found on their web site at <http://www.arrtinc.org/>.

4. Completion of Stow's "Emerald Necklace"

The Stow Conservation Trust is actively working with the Town and private landowners to complete the first phase of Stow's "Emerald Necklace" – a walking path network that will connect both private and public conservation areas. Several hikes have been done in recent years to demonstrate the feasibility of this network, with just a few missing links identified that are in need of protection. Once the Necklace is complete, the Trust should consider identifying a loop that could connect the Southwest Quadrant of Stow; however this will be a long-term endeavor.

