

WESTON OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN 2016 UPDATE

Public Participation Report

**Anne Capra
Conservation Works LLC**

March 5, 2016

Public Participation Process

The Town of Weston Conservation Department subcontracted with Conservation Works LLC to conduct outreach to the community during the 2016 update to the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan. Several outreach strategies including a survey and two visioning sessions were utilized to determine what the citizens of Weston value, and issues or problems that need to be addressed to improve their use and enjoyment of open space and recreational resources in the community.

Community Visioning Sessions

Two public visioning sessions were held to gather further feedback from residents on Monday, January 25th from 7-8:30PM at the Community Center, and Sunday, February 7th from 2-3:30PM at the Public Library. Over forty residents attended the two sessions combined and talked about the places that make Weston special for them, and any issues or conflicts that they experience at these places. This discussion was facilitated through breakout groups in which residents worked through a series of questions about the places they live work and play, what is special to them about Weston, any issues or conflicts they experience at these places, and what is needed to improve or protect open space and recreation in Weston. Each group reported their thoughts back to the full group, with the final exchange of thoughts and ideas recorded on flip charts at the front of the room.

In general, the discussion at the two meetings mirrored the survey responses. Residents cherish the open spaces in Weston for a mix of passive and active recreational uses. Many residents expressed that they had moved to Weston because of its rural aesthetic, abundant parks and natural areas with trails, and a strong athletic program in the schools. The extensive trail network is widely used, although there isn't consensus about the aesthetic that it should be managed to such as wider cleared paths versus tighter, "wilder" single track. Opinions on this varied depending on how one used the trail, i.e. mountain biking versus walking. Signage at trailheads and on trails was also important to folks, but again, the amount and purpose of the signage varied depending on how one used the trail and how frequently. Many residents expressed great concern about the prevalence of ticks and poison ivy and wondered about management options for both on trails and on other park landscapes including open fields (either mowed or as meadow). Concerns about the safety on on-road cycling was expressed at both meetings due to how narrow many roads are.

Some concern about the future of the ball fields in town was expressed at both meetings. Many of the ball fields used for youth athletics as well as other activities may not be permanently protected from development. This is of great concern to some residents who expressed a desire to seek action to protect these facilities from development, particularly at Cherry and Czarnowski Fields and Cat Rock.

Concerns about overuse, particularly by dog walkers, and its effect on the health and aesthetic of parks and trails was also expressed. The town of Weston currently has forty commercial dog walker licenses issued. Pet waste has been an

issue at Cat Rock and the reservoir. Residents suggested establishing better guidelines for dogs in parks and on the bike trail

Public Survey

A public survey was conducted from November 15, 2015 to January 15, 2016 and received 420 responses, or 11% of households (one response per household requested). The survey was available online via Survey Monkey, and in hard copy available at the Weston Town Hall, Weston Public Library, the Brooks School Apartments, and the Weston Community Center. The survey gathered information about the places residents enjoyed, what types of activities they did at the places they frequented, what activities they would like to do more of, improvements that could be made to better serve residents, and how important it was to acquire additional land for certain purposes. The following is a summary of the survey results. The complete set of responses is provided below.

Responses indicated that residents primarily use open spaces in Weston for passive recreation including walking, enjoying the serenity or a quiet space, and dog walking as the top three responses. Use of natural areas for transportation ranked fourth, followed by active recreation uses including running, on-road biking, and outdoor swimming. These uses correspond well to the top five favorite open spaces, parks, recreation facilities, or natural areas which are (in order of rank): the Town Green, Land's Sake Farm Stand, Cat Rock, Weston Reservoir, and the Weston Community Pool.

Residents would like to see facilities and/or opportunities for active recreation improved or expanded for off-road biking; canoeing, kayaking or SUP-boarding; on-road biking; and ice skating/ice hockey. Enjoying serenity or a quiet place ranked fourth in the list of options to improve upon. The top three reasons given for what prevents residents from doing more of the activities they enjoy are: they don't have the time, they don't know where or how to do it in Weston, and they are concerned about ticks.

Of the top five improvements considered important for the town to pursue, more trails, better trail markers, and better signage at trailheads made the top five, and more trails for off-road biking ranked seventh. Better control of invasive species and forest pests, and more opportunities for teens ranked second and third. The majority of respondents (39%) thought all age groups are well-served by Weston's organized recreational opportunities, but 30% believed teenagers age 13-18 are underserved, followed by people over age fifty.

Based on a ranking of the importance of various characteristics, future land protection efforts should preserve forests, open meadows, land that preserves the scenic and rural character, brooks and ponds, and trail connections. Some of the most popular parcels residents want the Town to investigate purchasing or permanently protecting include Case Estates, Cat Rock area, Land Sake's Farm, Burt Field, and the Champion Center. Of the 152 responses to this questions, 32 (21%) said no additional parcels should be purchased or permanently protected.

Last, the survey asked if residents had any recommendations for how Weston should work with DCR and Eversource to improve the Wayside Trail greenway. Of the 219 responses to this question, most favored creating a bike/walking path, although opinions varied from paving it to not paving and leaving it more natural.

Summary of Results from Weston's Open Space and Recreation Plan Survey

Survey period: November 15, 2015 – January 15, 2016

420 Responses

11% of Weston households

Q1. What are your family's five favorite open spaces, parks, recreational facilities, or natural areas in Weston?

| | |
|---|-------|
| 1. Town Green | 62.1% |
| 2. Land's Sake Farm Stand / 40 Acre Field | 49.5% |
| 3. Cat Rock / 80 Acres | 47.1% |
| 4. Weston Reservoir | 37.6% |
| 5. Weston Community Pool | 28.1% |
| 6. Sports Fields | 24.8% |
| 7. Jericho Town Forest | 20.7% |
| 8. Other: wide range of responses | 20.2% |
| 9. Burchard Park | 18.6% |
| 10. College Pond | 18.3% |

"Other" responses:

All trails

Doublet Hill Highland Forest Burt Field

Small trails in neighborhoods, behind Regis, near Case, near Gun Club Lane

Lamson land next to Town Hall

Kendal Green conservation tract

Sunday Woods Hemlock Pond Cherry Brook

Q2. Please list all of the ways you and your family members have used Weston's open spaces, parks, recreational facilities, or natural areas in the past year, and which activities you would like to do (or do more of) if the facilities and opportunities in Weston were better.

Did in past year:

1. Walking
2. Enjoy serenity / a quiet space
3. Dog walking
4. Traveling to school, work, shopping, friends & Running
5. Running
6. Biking (on-road)
7. Swimming (outdoor)
8. Sledding
9. Pick your own fruits and vegetables
10. Cross country skiing
11. 10 Bird watching

Would like to do (or do more of) if the facilities/opportunities in Weston were better:

1. Biking (off-road)
2. Canoeing, kayaking, or SUP-boarding
3. Biking (on-road)
4. Enjoying serenity/a quiet place
5. Ice skating/ice hockey AND cross-country skiing

6. Pick your own fruits and vegetables
7. Children's playgrounds
8. Swimming (outdoor)
9. Swimming (indoor) AND archery AND sledding
10. Traveling to work, school, friends

Q3. What prevents you from doing more of the activities listed in question 2?

| | |
|--|--------|
| 1. I don't have the time | 40.33% |
| 2. I don't know where or how to do this in | 30.52% |
| 3. I am concerned about ticks | 27.79% |
| 4. Other reasons: | 20.71% |
| 5. There are not adequate opportunities in | 17.71% |
| 6. I don't have a good map | 15.53% |
| 7. I am concerned about safety | 13.08% |
| 8. The facility/site is not convenient for me to | 12.26% |
| 9. I don't have family or friends who will join me | 11.44% |
| 10. The facility/site is unappealing | 9.54% |

"Other" responses:

- Better indoor swimming facility
- More outdoor swimming options
- More trails for mountain biking
- Concerns about safety for on-road biking
- Some concerns about congestion at large recreational facilities

Q4. Select up to 5 improvements you consider important for the Town to pursue.

| | |
|---|--------|
| 1. More trails for walking, running, cross country skiing | 35.52% |
| 2. Better control of invasive species and forest pests | 28.21% |
| 3. More opportunities for teen activities | 26.20% |
| 4. Better trail markers on conservation trails | 25.94% |
| 5. Better signage at conservation trailheads | 22.92% |
| 6. Better maintenance of scenic meadows and stone | 21.41% |
| 7. More trails for off-road biking | 21.41% |
| 8. Other | 21.41% |
| 9. Better boardwalks on wet trail sections | 20.91% |
| 10. More indoor recreation facilities | 16.88% |

"Other" responses:

- Preservation of trees and woods
- Pruning trees at Case House
- Better/more sidewalks
- Elementary school playgrounds
- More/better signage
- Enforcing easements
- Dredge and improve College Pond
- Turf soccer field
- Better neighborhood parks
- Lots say "no need for more" or "Already do a good job"

Q5. What age groups, if any, do you feel are underserved by Weston’s organized recreational opportunities?

| | |
|--------------------------------|--------|
| All age groups are well-served | 38.87% |
| 13-18 | 29.58% |
| 50-59 | 15.49% |
| 60-69 | 14.65% |
| 70+ | 13.52% |
| 40-49 | 12.96% |
| 19-29 | 12.68% |
| 6-12 | 10.70% |
| 0-5 | 9.30% |
| 30-39 | 7.04% |

Q6. How important is it for the Town to acquire additional land to preserve the following?

Ranked by weighted average

| | |
|------|--|
| 4.04 | Forests |
| 4.03 | Open meadows |
| 4.01 | Land that preserves scenic and rural character |
| 3.96 | Brooks and ponds |
| 3.92 | Trail connections |
| 3.87 | Wildlife and native plant habitat |
| 3.86 | Wildlife corridors |
| 3.79 | Land that connects other protected open space |
| 3.67 | Scenic views from roads |
| 3.63 | Land with cultural and historic significance |
| 3.48 | Wetlands |
| 3.41 | Stone walls on field edges |
| 3.29 | Land for future recreational facilities |
| 3.08 | Land suitable for agriculture |
| 2.84 | Land used for traveling to work, school, shopping, etc |

Q7. Are there any parcels of land you think the Town should investigate purchasing or permanently protecting for new conservation and recreation land?

- Case Estates
 - Cat Rock area
 - Land’s Sake Farm
 - Burt Field / Gail Road
 - Campion Center
 - Gun Club Lane/land
 - Brooks School
 - Green Power Farm
- Of the 152 responses, 32 responses said “no” or “none”

Q8. Please list any areas in Weston where you would like to see more trails connecting open space areas to roads or other conservation or recreation facilities/sites.

- Abandoned rail tracks
- Safer crossing at Route 20
- Cat Rock

Sidewalks on: Rte 117, Conant Road, from Main Street to the library; Glenn Road to Wellesley Street;
Winter Street
Between Meadowbrook Road and Windsor Way
Schools

Q9. In 2011 the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) acquired a 99-year lease for the "Wayside Trail", the abandoned Mass Central rail line that runs from Berlin through Weston to Waltham. DCR would like to work with local communities to enhance recreational opportunities for this open space. (Eversource will continue to do some maintenance to provide access to their power lines.) Do you have any recommendations for if and how Weston should work with DCR and Eversource to improve this "greenway"?

219 responses

Create bike/walking path(s); some favor paved, some favor not paved and more natural path
Preserve old train station as a snack bar/bike shop
Landscaping for wildlife
Restore tunnel under Conant Road
Adequate parking

Q10. Members of household in following ranges

| Age Range | Response Count |
|-----------|----------------|
| 50-59 | 232 |
| 13-18 | 220 |
| 6-12 | 181 |
| 40-49 | 173 |
| 19-29 | 162 |
| 0-5 | 141 |
| 60-69 | 138 |
| 70+ | 127 |
| 30-39 | 101 |

Q11. How long have you been using Weston's open spaces, parks, recreational facilities, or natural areas?

| | |
|------------|-------|
| 0-1 year | 1.9% |
| 2-5 years | 13.9% |
| 6-15 years | 27.2% |
| 16+ years | 57.0% |

Q12. Any thoughts or suggestions?

Maintaining the current landscape/aesthetic of the town through thoughtful planning was the most recorded type of response.