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Acton Recreation Commission
Meeting Minutes
Room 121
Acton Town Hall
November 18, 2010

Call to Order

Ms. Karen Jarsky, Co-Chair, called meeting to order at 9:40AM. The following attendees were present: Ms. Cathy Fochtman, Recreation Director, Ms. Karen Jarsky, Co-Chair, Ms. Kim Bodnar, Co-Chair, Ms. Betsy Mercier, Commission Member, Ms. Bridget McKeever-Matz, Commission Member.

CPA Liaison

Mr. Roland Bartl and Ms. Fochtman met, and they are adamant that only one person should represent the commission. Another person can stand in to take notes and relay information, but cannot vote. Ms. Fochtman also inquired about being the person, but it's not possible. Ms. Mercier will attend this evening's meeting to explore the possibility of being the Recreation representative to the CPC. We will revisit it at the next meeting and make a decision then.

Playground Fundraising

Ms. Fochtman met with Ms. Jana Cataldo and Town Counsel, Stephen Anderson, to determine how the fundraising can happen, without the fundraising organization taking responsibility or having liability for the equipment. Ms. Cataldo wanted to clarify the requirements for creating a "Friends of Goward Playgrounds" as a corporation vs. a less formal organization. Ms. Bodnar wondered whether she could make it "Friends of Acton Playgrounds" but keep the current focus on Goward, but Ms. Fochtman thought Ms. Cataldo's interest was more short-term. Ms. Jarsky noted that keeping it more narrowly focused might help with fundraising efforts, since there seems to be so much citizen concern about Goward right now. Ms. Cataldo will instruct people to make checks out to "Town of Acton" and she will just be a clearinghouse.

In terms of accessibility, the new playground will need to meet certain requirements, but it will not necessarily have to meet Boundless Playground criteria (which would give full accessibility to children in wheelchairs). The latter would be the thing to strive for.

Ms. Cataldo wondered whether we could put out a design to entice people to donate, because they could see what they were supporting. Ms. Fochtman said that is not a good idea because you can't guarantee that that will be the actual design we will produce. We can put out conceptual designs or suggest that they look at similar playgrounds, but we cannot publicize a specific design.

Letter to Youth Officials

Ms. Fochtman asked for feedback on a letter to Youth Officials asking for their input on the Open Space and Recreation Plan. Ms. Bodnar recommended adding a date by which people should respond – December 15th. Ms. Jarsky offered a few minor edits. Ms. Fochtman will make these changes and distribute the letter.

Open Space and Recreation Plan

- Need an inventory of fields, along with a list of projected needs (how many fields, etc.).
- Ms. Mercier asked whether SB90 is common knowledge among readers of this report, or whether we need to articulate that.
- Ms. Bodnar asked whether we need quantitative analysis of what's been done, etc. For example, Ms. Bodnar mentioned that we should describe how NARA has grown and where we'd like it to be in coming years. We should stay away from hard numbers because we don't need to create goals we may not be able to meet, but should leave it more narrative.
- Ms. Fochtman mentioned that Jen Andersen in the office is looking into creating a master map of NARA.
- Need to mention dog control as a significant issue for Recreation.
- Need to mention CPA as an important funding source for Recreation.
- Ms. Fochtman mentioned we could put detailed information in appendices if we need to.
- Ms. McKeever-Matz would like to see the same level of detail for fields that we have for playground – i.e., what's needed for the fields, costs of rehabilitation, etc. Ms. Jarsky suggested having a chart similar to the chart for playgrounds. Also, Ms. Jarsky would like to see an inventory of our fields, along with information about our needs (number of fields, maintenance issues, etc.).

Next Steps

- Ms. Fochtman will do edits in the document before the next meeting.
- Ms. Bodnar will create shells of charts for us to include, and those will get filled in later.
- Ms. Fochtman will identify places of cross-reference that are not necessary.
- At the next Commission meeting, we will discuss how to proceed with editing/creating the document.

New Business

Our section of the Town Report will need to be revised. Ms. Bodnar volunteered to help revise it this year. We will discuss this in more detail at the next meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 11:00AM.

Section 5B4 – School Playgrounds

4. School Department Land

The Acton-Boxborough Regional School District owns 66.6 acres of land, and the Acton School District controls (the land is under town ownership) 121.77 acres of land. Although there are buildings on almost all of these properties, the school campuses and grounds provide valuable open space.

One parcel of School Department land is not associated with an actual school building and holds value as open space. This parcel is located on Arlington Street, north of Route 2, and is 24.92 acres in size (Town Atlas E-3, Parcel 8). This land was acquired in 1962 as a potential school site, although the soils were unsuitable for construction.

SCHOOL PLAYGROUNDS

Conant School
Gates School
Douglas School
McCarthy-Towne School
Merriam School

LOCATIONS

Taylor Road
Spruce Street
Elm Street
Massachusetts Avenue
Charter Road

Creation of ~~upgrades to existing~~ ^{new} facilities through Intermunicipal Agreements CPA (Community Preservation Act) funding have resulted in:

High School Football Field - Leary Field
Artificial Turf Field ~~installed~~ 2005

Douglas School Basketball Courts - Douglas School 2006

High School Baseball & Tennis Court 2006
Sports Lighting 2007

Intermunicipal agreements between Acton Boxborough Regional School District and the Town of Acton have created expanded recreational opportunities at these facilities for all ^{of the} Acton ~~citizens~~ community, beyond their school usage.

Section 5B5 – Water Based Recreation

5. Water Based Recreation

This section provides a review of the water-based recreation areas in Acton. In the last five years, the major accomplishment in improving water-based recreation was the opening of NARA Park, which includes a 9-acre pond and beach, further described below. Other small water-based recreation areas exist in town.

NARA PARK

NARA Park opened to the public in the spring of 2000. This 40-acre outdoor recreation area is home to 6.5 acres of softball/soccer fields, a 2,000-seat amphitheater, a playground, walking trails, a 500 foot long bathing beach with a swimming area, and a bathhouse complete with snack bar. This area is a hot bed of activity during the summer months. Programs include beach operations, the NARA Youth Summer Program, free outdoor summer concert series, recreation and league sponsored athletic events, and the annual July 4th celebration. NARA Park beach provides the only public swimming area in town and serves over 600 resident families each season. NARA is also home to many special events each year; annual Halloween Costume Contest, Winterfest, Acton Day and Spring Treasure Hunt; sponsored by the Acton Recreation Department. Many individuals and companies also use NARA for large functions and field rentals.

GREAT HILL RECREATION AREA SKATING POND

The pond is a 3/4 acre impoundment created by excavating an old, silted-up farm pond that was reverting into a red maple swamp. Completed in 1986, the pond is used for skating, fishing and wildlife viewing.

MILL POND RECREATION AREA

This half-acre site is located between Main Street and the Fort Pond Brook Mill Pond, above the 1848 stone dam near the site of Faulkner Mills. The site has a half-acre of grass, and is open to the water for fishing and related activities. This area's use is somewhat limited by lack of on-site parking. Also the condition of the privately owned stone dam is an issue. Eventual completion of the ARRT near this site will improve access. This location also houses a pumping facility for Acton's new wastewater treatment system.

ROBBINS MILL POND

This is a man-made impoundment in the Nashoba Brook Conservation Area. The pond, approximately three acres in size, is the site of mill foundations and an earth fill dam that dates back to pre-Colonial times. In 1990, the town, using funds for materials donated by the Acton Conservation Trust, rebuilt the dam extensively. The restored impoundment is suitable for fishing, canoeing, and wildlife study. Additional reconstruction was undertaken in 1995, utilizing an eight-man crew from the Northeastern Correctional Facility in Concord.

GRASSY POND

The boardwalks and trails leading to Grassy Pond, in the Grassy Pond Conservation Area, provide access into the pond for fishing, canoeing and wildlife study. This large pond covers about 20 acres.

ARBORETUM POND

A 4,000 square foot pond was excavated at the Arboretum in 1991. This small pond provides an open water habitat for birds and other wildlife that reside in, or migrate through, the Arboretum.

ARBORETUM BOG BOARDWALK

There is a 100 yard long boardwalk across the quaking bog located at the Arboretum. This boardwalk, which includes an observation bench, allows close study of bog plants and related wildlife. Many elementary classes study the bog and its inhabitants each year during outings hosted by the Natural Resources Department.

WILL'S HOLE BOG BOARDWALK

The boardwalk into Will's Hole, a kettle hole pond and associated quaking bog, provides safe access to the pond for wildlife and plant observation.

ICE HOUSE POND

This is a four-acre impoundment of Nashoba Brook, located on town-owned land at the intersection of Concord Road and Great Road. Since management activities (including yearly draining) related to ice harvesting stopped in the 1950s, the pond was very rapidly filling with floating and emergent vegetation that cut into the recreational potential of the site. In 1995 the pond was de-watered and dredged to restore its value as a boating and fishing area. Because of the proximity of the parking area to the water's edge, this site has the potential for handicapped access for water recreation.

SANDY POND

In 1988, a contractor dredged a two-acre pond located near Sandy Drive (off of School Street) that is located on town conservation land. This impoundment is publicly accessible for fishing and nature study.

Canoe Launch Assabet River?

Section 5B8 – Town Owned Lands (Morrison Farm)

8. Town-Owned Lands

ACTON

Of the various parcels owned by the town, three parcels totaling 44 acres hold value as open space.

The town purchased the 32-acre Morrison Farm in 1997 (funded in large part by a \$1.3 million debt-exclusion override), as General Municipal Property, with plans for turning the open areas into ball fields and placing trails (some of which already exist) in the forested area. This farm was listed in the previous OSRP as one of our top parcels for protection. Refer to Section 9 for a description of the Town's plans to install fields on this property and connect the trail system to the future BFBP.

The Town also owns a two acre parcel and a ten acre parcel, both on Stow Street, that are important to preserve as open space. The smaller parcel would provide a connection to the Town of Stow's conservation land. The larger Stow street parcel is part of the Fort Pond Brook greenbelt and contains much floodplain and wetlands.

CONCORD

The Town of Concord owns 58 acres in Acton; this land abuts Nagog Pond, one of Concord's principal water supplies. This land provides a significant wildlife corridor, greatly contributes to the rural character of that part of Town, and has both active and passive recreation potential. If Concord should ever change its use of this property, Acton should seek to protect this land from development.

Section 5B11 – State Owned Lands (Skateboard Park)

11. State-Owned Lands

The state owns 202 acres of land in Acton, 159 acres of which has been identified as land having high conservation and/or recreation value (see Appendix J). The state-owned land falls into four major categories of open space: land that is part of the Department of Corrections Farm (about 100 acres containing active farm fields), a 16 acre parcel containing the State Police horse barn and fields, parcels that were taken when Route 2 was built but that lie outside of the actual right-of-way, and the Whittier land (25 acres) under the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife.

The Correction Department land is very significant to the town, due to the fact that the open fields abutting Route 2 add a great deal to Acton's rural image. If these lands ever were to be disposed of, the town would consider them as a high priority purchase, as it did when given the opportunity to buy the Route 2 Conservation Area (now the Wetherbee Conservation Area – see Section 5B1 #15) from the state in the early eighties. Part of that parcel is now leased back to the state for agricultural purposes.

The town is now in the process of trying to secure surplus state highway land near Route 2 to develop it into a skateboard park (see Section 5A2).

LAND OWNED BY THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

PLATE	PARCEL	LOCATION	TITLE	ACQUISITION	ACRES
C-5	089	066-070 Harris Street	8181/354	1953	1.40
	090-02	066R Harris Street	10928/156	1965	.50
E-3	081	060R Washington Drive	7866/367	1952	3.98
	085	083R Charter Road	7866/367	1950	3.00
	093	065R Hayward Road	7650/311	1950	4.90
E-4	003	Whittier land - Main Street		1995	25.0
F-3	016	068 Hayward Road	7653/328	1950	1.00
	016-01	068 Hayward Road	7653/328	1950	.33
	090	349R Main Street	unknown	unknown	2.50
G-3	012	332-338 Mass Ave.	12449/652	1973	1.00
G-4	176	099 Mass Ave.	11703/603	1969	2.22
	184	060 Hosmer Street	12717/213	1974	.92
	185	135-139 Mass Ave.	12731/213	1974	.78
	187	105-125 Mass Ave.	unknown	unknown	4.00
	197	070-088 Hosmer Street	7751/053	1951	13.00
	198	092-126 Mass Ave.	unknown	unknown	21.00
	209	058-076 Wetherbee Street	unknown	unknown	16.00
	G-5	095	066R Wetherbee Street	unknown	unknown
096		end Keefe Road	unknown	unknown	1.10
H-3	A38	5 River St. and rear	unknown	unknown	3.00
H-4	005	320-346 School Street	unknown	unknown	42.00
	006	323-347 School Street	unknown	unknown	50.00

Total Acres 202.23

Section 6B – Goal #3, Improved Recreational Opportunities

3. Improve Recreational Opportunities

Clearly, when evaluating the progress made for our three OSR goals from the last plan, the actions taken towards the goal of improving recreation opportunities have met with the most success.

During the last five years, the Land Stewardship Committee, an all-volunteer sub-committee of the Conscom, has completed over 145 projects on the town's conservation lands, resulting in vastly enhanced access to these lands. The LSCom work is described in Section 5.

With respect to active recreation, the Recreation Commission was reactivated in 1996, as was the Recreation Department, headed by Nancy McShea and under the direction of Tom Tidman, Director of Natural Resources. The most dramatic development in this area has been the 1999 opening of NARA Park, a 40-acre community park, located in North Acton. This park, run by the Recreation Department, has been a tremendous success. A complete description is provided in Section 5.

The Recreation Department, over the past five years, has done much more than bring NARA on-line. As reviewed in detail in Section 5, much work has been done in field enhancement at other sites in town and two fields have undergone major renovations.

In the OSR survey, residents were asked to cite the top five recreational facilities most needed in Acton. Bike trails were the overwhelming top preference, followed by conservation areas and hiking/skiing trails. Although athletic fields were not identified as a top priority in the survey, the Recreation Department and the four youth leagues have identified a strong need, discussed in Section 7, for more playing fields.

Section 7B – Summary of Needs (Recreation Needs, including statements from each athletic league, including addition of LAX)

B. Summary of Community's Needs

Section 7B addresses the needs of the community with respect to preservation of open space, focusing on passive and active recreation needs.

Open Space and Recreation “Measurement” Standards

Although we used national standards in the last plan, we feel it is more relevant to measure our “progress” over time by calculating the current ratio of conservation and recreation land to Acton’s population and comparing it to the same ratio for 1996.

As shown in the land chart found at the beginning of Section 5, Acton currently has 1,583 acres of legally protected open space and 63 acres of town-owned recreation land (not protected but containing athletic fields and other infrastructure). In 1995, we had 1,512.5 acres of legally protected open space and 63 acres of recreation land. The increase of 70.5 acres comes from two CRs and three grants or gifts of conservation land made in connection with cluster or subdivision developments. Based on the 2000 census showing our population to be 20,331, Acton’s protected open space ratio is 81 acres per 1,000 residents. In 1996 this ratio would have been 85 acres per 1,000 residents. The decline is due to population increases which have outpaced our ability to preserve a commensurate amount of open space for both conservation and recreation purposes.

In 1995, we had 3.4 acres of recreation space per 1,000 residents. Currently, we have 3.1 acres of recreation space per 1,000 residents. This decline is due to the increased population for the same amount of recreation land (although NARA was not on-line in 1995, that land was part of the recreation land total). The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) standard of 10.5 acres of developed recreation land per 1,000 population, means that Acton should currently have 214 acres of active recreation land in use; as stated previously, this is not a realistic measure for us, as it is unlikely we will ever be able to meet this standard.

The Master Plan Update estimates a “most likely” residential build-out of 10,200 units and a total population at build-out of about 29,000 (an increase of about 45% over the latest 2000 figures, although the final build-out is more likely to be 25,000-26,000). In order to preserve our current open space ratio of 81 acres per 1,000 residents, we would need to preserve an additional 702 acres of open space at a build-out population of 29,000. It should be noted that the Morrison Farm, currently in the unprotected category of general municipal property, could be counted towards this goal, if the property was protected and used for conservation and recreation activities. In addition, the 12 acres of town-owned property on Stow Street, discussed in Sections 5A2 and 5B8, could also be counted towards this goal if it is rezoned as conservation land (ARC).

Community needs are discussed below for both passive and active recreation, as well as for handicapped accessibility.

Conservation Needs – Preservation and Passive Recreation

The 1998 Master Plan Update reiterated citizens' desire to maintain the character of the community. The Plan noted that with increasing development activity, the future of our open fields, forested lands, and scenic country roads depends on active preservation efforts. A balanced mixture of homes and businesses clustered in villages and separated by open spaces helps define distinct areas in a community and more efficiently utilizes town resources.

The Master Plan Update conveyed residents' growing concern regarding the rate of residential growth in town and the impact such growth has in the future on the character of the town and the demand for town services (including schools). One goal of the update is to "preserve those elements or features which contribute to Acton's New England town character as a suburban residential community with strong rural and historic roots".

The OSR survey supported the sentiments expressed in the Master Plan Update. Acton's citizens want to preserve open space for conservation needs. In addition, with regards to passive recreation, survey respondents ranked the need for more hiking and skiing trails only second behind their desire for bike paths. Although there is a general sentiment towards preserving more land for conservation, the Town needs to disseminate more information and conduct public outreach about our existing lands.

As can be seen on the Open Space Inventory map in Section 13, conservation lands are located in nearly all sections of town. Our centrally located Acton Arboretum is maintained by the town and Friends of the Acton Arboretum, Inc. which makes it our most "polished" conservation area. The paths are well maintained and marked. There is an adequate parking lot and plenty of benches and picnic tables. As discussed in the Section 504 Self-Evaluation, in the Appendix, the Arboretum has handicapped accessible trails.

We are fortunate to have the LSCoM whose members have been working so diligently over the past five years to improve public access to our other conservation lands. The first five years of LSCoM activity has been primarily focused on infrastructure issues, so that each of the thirteen conservation areas now actively managed has been improved to the same standard. This includes kiosks with map boxes and entrance signs at all major entrances; a rational trail system within each parcel, usually comprising a loop trail with one or more accesses and secondary trails; upgraded maps, based on DGPS data; and blazes on the trails consistently applied throughout the various conservation areas. Trails have been improved, cut, cleared, and provided with boardwalks, bridges, and wood chips, where needed.

A few details of this first five-year program must still be finished, but the next five-year program is already underway. Its primary focus will be outreach. This will include further work on the LSCoM website, publication of a greatly improved Field Guide, increased publicity concerning LSCoM activities, introduction of educational programs

into the schools, town wide projects such as vernal pool certification, and both intra-town connectors between parcels where possible and inter-town connectors to conservation lands in several of the contiguous towns where these lie just across the boundary.

Recreation Needs – Active Recreation

NEED FOR BIKE PATHS – SURVEY RESPONDENTS' TOP PRIORITY

The OSR survey respondents chose bike paths as their top recreation priority. Although Acton is participating in the development of two regional bike paths, the Town currently has no bike paths.

RECREATION DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW OF NEEDS

The development of NARA has fulfilled many active recreation needs and the Recreation Department has made much headway in improving our other existing fields, however, there is still a considerable need for more athletic fields and a need for a source of funds to adequately maintain existing fields (refer to Section 5B3 for a detailed discussion of field problems).

Recreational opportunities need to be broadened to include all age groups and interests as well as meet the demanding growth needs of the youth sport organizations. As the population of Acton increases so does the need for new recreational facilities – currently we are unable to meet these demands. We must plan now for both short term and long term solutions to this growth spurt. Fields are being eliminated at the high school, resulting in overloading of fields that currently get no rest periods. It is inevitable that we will outgrow current resources within the next 1-2 years.

Of highest priority is the need to construct a new lighted football field, a full-size baseball field, and two softball fields. This would help meet the current use needs of Youth Football, Youth Baseball, Youth Softball and Adult Softball Leagues. In addition, fields are needed to meet the ever increasing demands of Youth Soccer and Youth Little League. Additional fields would allow the Recreation Department to rest fields and keep safe playable surfaces on existing fields.

Attention must be given to increasing recreational opportunities for all. Paving walking trails at NARA Park, removing pea stone surfacing at playgrounds, replacing outdated play structures at Great Hill, improving access to Lee House Pond for fishing and improving walking paths at the Morrison Farm would enhance handicapped access to these areas. Adult, senior and toddler recreation need to be addressed in the future. Dedicated space should be provided for activities specific to these unique groups. Care must also be given to meet the increasing needs of the non-league recreation groups; this would include development of a hockey facility, ice hockey rink, figure skating area, lighted basketball courts, and some dedicated indoor space or facility. (Serious consideration should also be given to developing a teen center to meet the recreational needs of this often-overlooked population.)

Danny's Place Youth Center, opened in 2006, is operated by the non profit Danny's Place Youth Services. Jeff & Cindy McCarthy dedicated the center in memory of son Danny, who died at age 16 in a car crash in 2003.

Intention of 2006 School St. IPA project. The full size baseball field, one Little League Softball Field. This project is in hold pending State multi-year lease. at School St.

Elm St. H.S. Lighting

This has not been accomplished.

Structures were removed but not replaced

On a final note, with growth and development also comes the need to provide more natural surroundings and environments. With this in mind future recreational plans should include adequate landscaping and shade structures to ensure both participant and spectator comfort, protection and aesthetic beauty.

ATHLETIC LEAGUE NEEDS

Comments were solicited in 1998 from the major athletic leagues, which represent upwards of 1,200 Acton households, regarding their concerns about the future of the fields. All four leagues expressed a concern that there were only marginally sufficient areas to use presently, and that there would be a need for additional fields in the not too distant future.

In 2001, the Recreation Department asked leagues to submit a statement indicating and justifying the need for more field space in the next five years. Their responses are summarized below.

Acton-Boxborough Youth Soccer - submitted by league president Dave Wilson

“Numbers don’t tell the entire story here. Our registrations are basically flat and have been for a few years in the 1500 to 1700 range, but we still face huge problems for fields. The problems relate to: increasing pressure of adult and club leagues for field requests, the booming lacrosse program, loss of high school fields in the coming 5 years, possible loss of Concord Road in the next 5 years. The School Street lease extension remains a mess/quandary and currently has no standing agreement.”

Acton-Boxborough Youth Softball - submitted by league president Rich Delaney.

“The AB Youth Softball league will have 220 girls and 18 teams this spring (2002). The four softball fields in town (the two Gates fields, Elm Street and NARA) are adequate to meet our needs this spring even when considering that the fields are also used by the school softball teams and the adult recreational softball league. Assuming our program enrollment increases a conservative 5% per year over the next five years, AB Youth Softball will have 280 players and 24 teams five years from now. At that level of enrollment and given the current demand for softball field space from the schools and the adult recreational league, the town would need a fifth softball field to accommodate our peak scheduling needs in the spring season of 2006. The league also makes use of these fields to a lesser extent during our summer and fall seasons.”

Acton-Boxborough Pop Warner Football - submitted by league president Matt Lundberg.

“AB Pop Warner Football supports about 250 kids each season – 170 football players and 80 cheerleaders. Supporting anymore participation than this would require additional fields. We’ve held registration static for three years now, with a growing waiting list each year. We are pretty much restricted to 1 team per age group (5 total) given the field limitations in town. We’d like to expand to 7 teams – 1 each for the three older groups, 2 each for the two youngest. To do this we’d need more space, which I’ve discussed with

the Recreation Department in the past. My goal: identify and develop a multi-use field whose primary purpose is to support Youth Lacrosse in the spring and Pop Warner Football in the fall. Seasons are complementary, both programs are growing, and the field requirements are similar.”

Acton- Boxborough Youth Baseball - submitted by league president Mike Coppolino.

“Enrollment in AB Youth Baseball continues to grow. Over the past three years we’ve seen roughly an 8% increase per annum. Thanks to the Selectmen and Recreation Department the two new-lit fields at 2A/27 have helped considerably. With the addition of one Little League field in Boxborough coming on-line in 2003, we foresee the need for at most 2 additional Little League diamonds to satisfy our needs for the next 3-5 years. This would allow us to increase practice time and occasionally “rest” a field. Our needs are more urgent for a large ball field (90’ base paths) in that over the next 5 years, with construction at the high school and the consistent spring wetness at Jones field, we need at least one additional field as soon as possible, for those 13 and older.”

Add

Handicapped Accessibility

The Section 504 Self-Evaluation, included in the Appendix, details our progress and plans with respect to making more of our conservation and recreation areas handicapped accessible. As an added benefit, handicapped accessible trails also improve accessibility for senior citizens and parents with very young children.

Acton-Boxborough Youth Lacrosse (Boys)

Acton-Boxborough Girl's Lacrosse (Girls)

(see latest Recreation Program for contacts to Sports Leagues)

Section 8 – Objectives associated with Goal #3

3. Improve recreational opportunities

- a) Promote the development of the two regional bike trails planned to run through Acton.
- b) Enhance possibilities for hiking, cross-country skiing, and horseback riding, boating and fishing on conservation lands. Expand public outreach to better inform the public of our available passive recreation opportunities.
- c) Provide additional athletic fields to meet the needs of the town's growing population.
- d) Encourage regional planning with abutting towns in order to create more expansive human (see 3b above) and wildlife (see 2b above) corridors.
- e) Ensure handicapped accessibility is available for recreation activities (e.g. trails, picnicking, spectating at athletic fields, water-based recreation and camping) at both recreation and conservation areas.

Section 9 – Action Plan: Implement the Rec Dept 5-year plan (Action #14); ID sites for future athletic field development (Action #15)

	Implementation Timetable			Meets Objective Number:
	Accomplished as part of current plan	Within 2 years	Within 2 to 5 years	
<i>Action Recommendations</i>				
1. <i>Implement the Recreation Department's five-year plan to improve existing recreation facilities and develop new recreation sites and fields.</i>		x	x	3c, 3a, 3e
2. <i>Identify additional sites for future athletic field development.</i>		x	x	3c

Appendix L – Recreation 5-Year Plan

(Not included with old Plan.)

Section 1 – Plan Summary: Lists initiatives, major accomplishments, and projects underway.

SECTION 1 - PLAN SUMMARY

In the past five years, Acton has implemented many of the action recommendations contained in the previous Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) with the greatest strides made in the areas of active and passive recreation. Although much work remains to improve recreational opportunities in Acton, our biggest challenge in the next five years lies in our ability to preserve Acton's character and to protect the environment, most notably our water supply.

In this plan update, we have reexamined our previous goals and revised our objectives to reflect: the accomplishments of the past five years; the problems we now face; and the needs of residents as expressed in the 1998 Master Plan Update, as well as the 2001 OSRP Survey. Our overall goals remain the same as those set in the last plan:

Goal 1: Preserve the remaining elements of Acton's rural character

Goal 2: Protect the environment

Goal 3: Improve recreational opportunities

The previous OSRP was completed at a time when many Acton residents were feeling the benefits of a booming economy. Approval of funds to develop the North Acton Recreation Area (NARA), and purchase of the Morrison Farm and Boy Scout land all occurred during this time. The growth in school population, and the popularity of sports among young people made recreation a value nearly everyone in Acton could understand and support. For those reasons, the previous OSRP became a powerful document for focusing public efforts on open space and recreation.

Since that time, and in part because of the OSRP, Acton has seen a gratifying increase in its human infrastructure, both in town government and in the many individuals motivated to work together, volunteering their time to improve resources for the town and, in many cases, for the region. In the last five years: Acton has put in place a new Recreation Department and Recreation Commission; the Acton Conservation Trust, a private non-profit organization, has refocused its mission to become a land trust; the Acton Stream Teams have become an active group; and there is an Environmental Manager at the Acton Water District. The Friends of the Acton Arboretum, a private non-profit organization, continues to improve that unique park. One of the busiest and most productive of all groups, the Land Stewardship Committee (LSCoM), a subcommittee of the Conservation Commission, has provided consistent, first-rate management for Acton's conservation lands and has made huge strides in improving public access to these lands.

Overview of Five-Year Action Plan

The growing, powerful public interest in open space and recreation, and the constraints we face in addressing the public's needs, have shaped the actions we recommend in this plan.

As part of this plan, nearly every significant parcel of open space has been reviewed and its value as recreation or open space established. Although this is a huge step forward from the last plan, it is not enough. Aggressive actions must now be taken to preserve these lands, to protect our natural resources, especially our water supply, and to ensure recreational opportunities keep pace with the needs of our growing population.

At present Acton has a town-sponsored Economic Development Committee (EDC) whose mission is to advise the Board of Selectmen on issues related to economic development, but there is no formal town entity charged with the same role for open space protection. This plan presents fifteen specific actions to accomplish our three OSR goals; many of these actions are tied to the creation of a permanent OSR Committee charged with advising the Selectmen and advocating for open space and recreation issues.

Acton's human infrastructure—the dozen or more groups (largely volunteer) working to protect the environment, to maintain open space and its values, and to encourage active and passive recreation—are a formidable resource whose efforts underpin this plan. To keep these groups, the town boards and the general public, informed of the progress in implementing this plan, the OSR Committee should remain active, reporting to the public on a yearly basis gains and losses. In addition, this plan recommends measures the OSR Committee must take to:

- Evaluate open space preservation opportunities and act as an advocate to Town boards
- Serve as an advocate for Acton's farms
- Develop a policy to ensure that the OSR Committee is informed of potential changes of use for prioritized parcels
- Advocate for zoning changes to mitigate and control growth

Despite our OSRP survey results that showed that a majority of residents say they want to protect open space with purchase, if necessary, Acton still has lost major parcels to development. Acton needs alternative ways to purchase or legally protect open space from development. Approval of the Community Preservation Act would help provide a source of funding for ongoing land protection. Should passage of the CPA fail at the November 2002 ballot vote, the OSR Committee must place a high priority on developing other funding options, such as including an annual budget line item for open space and recreation land purchases. In addition, the Committee should work with the Acton Conservation Trust, as well as other area land trusts, in order to further their work in obtaining conservation restrictions on prioritized parcels.

Acton's greatest environmental problem, water, is the frame in which our future will take place. Although summer watering bans have been in place for years, the current water supply will support little new development of any kind, according to Acton's Water

District. A town wide planning effort must be undertaken in the area of water supply protection, and further controls on outdoor summer water use must be implemented as soon as possible.

Acton is like many Massachusetts towns in that industrial activities of previous decades have left an unfortunate legacy of contaminated groundwater. Although Superfund designation of the former W.R. Grace site in South Acton has leveraged a massive cleanup program, contamination of Acton's groundwater remains. Smaller 21E sites have created "hot spots" of soil and water contamination within town and non-point pollution from residential developments has exacerbated eutrophication in Acton's surface water bodies.

Acton's greatest successes in the past five years have been in the area of active and passive recreation. The opening of NARA, the Recreation Department's many field improvements in other parts of town and the Land Stewardship Committee's (LSCom) numerous projects to improve public access to our conservation lands have all contributed to vastly expand Acton's recreational opportunities.

In the next five years, the town's recreation offerings must keep pace with growth in the school population and address the need for bicycle paths and additional hiking/cross-country ski trails preferred by those responding to the Open Space and Recreation Survey. The Recreation Department's five-year plan addresses the need to improve existing recreation facilities and develop new recreation sites and fields. As part of this plan, funds will be sought for the final design and construction of athletic fields at the Morrison Farm. In addition, plans are underway to procure land, finalize design plans and construct the T.J. O'Grady Memorial Skate Park.

Acton is participating in the area's efforts to develop two regional bike paths; the Assabet River Rail Trail (ARRT) and the Bruce N. Freeman Memorial Bicycle Path (BFBP). The Planning Department had submitted an article for the 2002 town meeting to fund Acton's 1.1 mile portion of the ARRT, but due to budget constraints this article was not included on the final warrant. This may be brought up again in 2003. The ARRT is planned as a multi-use recreational rail trail that will pass through the communities of Marlborough, Hudson, Stow, Maynard and Acton, with a terminus adjacent to the South Acton train station.

Acton's current five-year plan for the BFBP includes a feasibility study, trail survey, and grant research to position Acton for available funding for construction of the trail. The BFBP is planned as a multi-use rail trail running from Sudbury to Lowell. Acton's portion of this trail, traversing a distance of 4.5 miles, will provide a path running from the Morrison Farm/Ice House Pond in East Acton to NARA Park in North Acton, and will touch points on the Isaac Davis Trail, the Route 2A/27 Little League complex, and the Nashoba Brook Conservation Area.

The LSCOM's five-year plan focuses on public outreach and inter-town trail connections. The plan includes further work on their website, publication of a greatly improved Guide to Conservation Lands, increased publicity concerning LSCOM activities, introduction of educational programs into the schools, some town wide projects such as vernal pool certification, and both intra-town connectors between parcels, where possible, and inter-town connectors to conservation lands in several of the contiguous towns where these lie just across the boundary. Since the OSR Survey respondents placed a high value on hiking paths and cross-country ski trails, funding for the ongoing publication of the Guide is recommended as part of this OSR plan update.

Section 5B3 – Athletic Fields and Town Playgrounds

3. Athletic Fields and Town Playgrounds

Athletic Fields

The Town of Acton provides approximately 29 acres of town-owned athletic fields, in addition to the facilities provided by the local and regional schools that are frequently used for non-school activities. The location, sizes, and most common uses of these fields are shown below. Most areas are suited for a variety of athletic uses, with some areas capable of supporting multiple simultaneous uses. Recreation needs for more athletic fields are discussed in detail in Section 7B. The Recreation Department’s comprehensive five-year plan is presented in Section 9.

Ref. #	Field Name	Acreage	Playground	Field Uses
1.	Jones Field	3	Yes	Baseball/Soccer
2.	Woodlawn Field	2	No	Soccer
3.	Hart Field	2	No	Baseball
4.	MacPherson	1	No	Baseball
5.	Great Hill	2.5	Yes No	Soccer
6.	Elm Street Field	2	Yes	Softball/Football/Tennis/Soccer
7.	2A/27	2	Yes	2 Baseball
8.	School Street	4	No	3 Soccer
9.	Little Great Hill Field	.5	No	Soccer
10.	Goward Field (behind the Library)	1.69	Yes	None
11.	Gardner Field	1.6	Yes	Field closed in 2000 due to lack of parking
12.	NARA	6.5	No Yes	Softball/3 Soccer
	Total Acreage	28.79		

To add: 13. TJ O'Grady Skate Park 14. Robbins Mill Recreation Area

Maintenance of the town athletic fields is the responsibility of the Recreation/Natural Resources Department. Field scheduling is the responsibility of the Recreation Department. In 1999, the town reinstated routine trash removal at the fields. The town provides weekly mowing for the athletic fields and annual aeration. Fields are fertilized using funds accumulated from field reservations or donations from the leagues.

In addition to the athletic league use of fields, many community groups and companies reserve the athletic areas for games and picnics. Athletic fields, and their associated picnic and playground areas, are also intensively used by families and groups of children.

Overview of Field Problems

Jones Field and Great Hill Field are often too wet in the spring to be playable. ~~In 2000 Gardner field was taken offline due to parking issues.~~ ~~Howard, Hart, MacPherson and Little Great Hill fields are all limited in their utility due to their size and geometry.~~ In each case, only certain levels of play are possible. The difficulty of parking near some of the fields makes them less desirable for their targeted age groups as the very young players are required to walk on the side of, or across, busy town streets.

Due to budget restraints, maintenance of athletic fields has become a problem. ~~The town has limited lining of athletic fields, and in recent years the leagues have had to provide their own silt or stone mix and amenities.~~ Youth Soccer also frequently re-sods worn areas of fields. The leagues that use our illuminated fields at Elm Street and 2A/27 provide their own funding for lights.

Field Descriptions

1, JONES FIELD

The focus on Jones Field during the past five years has been to address safety issues. To that end, in 1999, the Recreation Department placed a large safety net between the ball field and playground area to prevent balls hitting children while they are using the play structures. In addition, infield improvements have been made and new bleachers installed to replace the ones that did not meet safety codes.

outside vendors to
- Netting replaced in 2010.
- ABYB infield improvements

2. WOODLAWN FIELD

Woodlawn Field ~~is~~ ^{was} leased under a ten-year agreement (due to expire in 2002) from the Cemetery Commission, and eventually will be used for burial purposes.

The lease was renewed in 2008 for 5 years, to be reviewed in Oct 2012.

This field has undergone some turf maintenance over the past five years in an effort to produce a more stable playing surface. Installation of an irrigation system and resodding of high traffic areas has produced a field that can withstand the daily demands placed upon it. In recent winters the Recreation Department has created two large skating rinks on the field.

Winter skating rinks on the field were discontinued in 2008, due to maintenance issues

3. HART FIELD

During the past five years routine maintenance has taken place at Hart Field.

4. MACPHERSON FIELD

Routine maintenance has been the focus at this field during the past 5 years. In 2001 an emergency call box was placed at this field and major improvements to the roadway leading to the field have been completed. This has allowed for better access to the field for vehicles and pedestrian traffic.

MacPherson received two new dugouts in May 2008, with the support of ABYB and a grant from the Melanoma Foundation. who lead the construction effort with Town support

5. GREAT HILL FIELD AND #9. LITTLE GREAT HILL FIELD

In the past five years the Recreation Department has brought Little Great Hill online and completed a boardwalk connecting this field to the parking lot. Field use was studied and a determination was made to eliminate the Little League field and increase the soccer field area at the Great Hill site. In addition the parking lot was resurfaced.

Routine maintenance. Dog issue

6. ELM STREET FIELD

Elm Street Field has undergone a major renovation project during the past five years. The playground has been repaired, wood safety fiber surfacing has been added and dangerous equipment has either been replaced or removed. The playground was also reoriented to the site to accommodate the addition of a small size soccer field. The tennis court area has been completely redone, including new fencing, court surfacing, new nets and a new practice backboard. The softball field has seen the replacement of backstop and player fencing areas. In addition new bleachers were provided as well as permanent team benches. Some electrical work was also done at this site to ensure the safe use of the field lights.

Funded by 75K Town Meeting 40K Pop 40K Rec Dept

Mosco Field lighting upgrade in 2007, with design following Town bylaws. See Annual Report 2006 for verbiage. Infield upgrades by AASL, removal of aging outfield fence, which was not replaced. Playground status to add routine maintenance items

7. 2A/27 - VETERANS MEMORIAL FIELD

During the past five years the field at 2A/27 has undergone a dramatic renovation process. What once was a soccer/little league field has now turned into a fabulous double Little League complex complete with our own "Green Monster". The renovation of this field included the addition of two Little League fields, lighting, scoreboards, fencing, starting up the irrigation system, seating areas and handicapped access. The space is now a highly utilized area.

Many amenities have been funded by ABYB, - Fencing replaced by ABYB. Infield improvements, scoreboard caps were and funded replacement.

8. SCHOOL STREET

This site contains a heavily used soccer field, although in the past five years little has been done to maintain the field, as the site is under the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Corrections System. This field is on a ten-year lease from the Department of Corrections, in return for that agency's use of 25 acres of the Wetherbee Conservation Land. These fields are difficult to keep in playable condition because the soil is sandy with a gravel base and does not retain water. The proximity of the fields to Acton Water District wells (at 315 School Street and Lawsbrook Road) and an aeration tower restricts the Town or the sports leagues from irrigating the fields. The fields must be "rested" as much as field demand allows in order to retain a minimum amount of vegetation.

A 2006 CPA plan to construct a parking lot and two ball fields was put on hold due to the State's decision to replace ~~discontinue~~ the 10-year lease with an annual lease. At the conclusion of ~~the~~, the multi-~~year~~ year lease option was ~~not~~ reinstated by the state.

10. GOWARD PLAYGROUND

In 1993 the Acton Children's Playground Committee, Inc., a citizen's group, successfully raised funds and used town and citizen labor to create a playground geared for ages 1-6 at Goward Field. This was a preliminary response to the Master Plan objective to "provide recreational opportunities for young children." In 1999, surfacing upgrades were made at this playground to improve handicapped access and increase safety.

In late 2010 the multi year lease is

2008 with ~~legislative~~ legislative action In the hands of DCAM and await their approval (Div. of Capital

In the last five years, many renovations have been made to the playground at Goward Field, due in large part, to the library renovation project. In the past five years attempts have been made to provide better handicap access to the play equipment. In addition safety issues concerning outdated equipment and fall zones have been addressed and resolved. The basketball court has also been improved to provide a small play area.

11. GARDNER PLAYGROUND

Over the past five years attempts have been made to improve the access to this neighborhood playground. Due to the popularity of this playground, access issues have become paramount. To address some of the parking concerns, all soccer games and practices were restricted from this field two years ago. In 2001 two new play structures were installed complete with handicapped accessible wood safety fiber surfacing.

Routine Maintenance.

12. NARA FIELDS

Refer to Section 5B5 for a detailed description of all of the amenities at NARA Park. In 1999 the NARA Park fields were brought online. The 6.5 acres of fields contain one softball diamond and two full size soccer fields. Two 500-foot deep bedrock wells were drilled to provide field irrigation. A controlled fertilizer program is used to mitigate fertilizer contamination of the pond and wetlands.

The NARA fields are used quite extensively. On any given Saturday, the two soccer fields are broken down into five or six play areas in order to allow multiple teams to practice simultaneously. The Acton Boxborough Regional High School cross country program also uses the fields in the fall of each year.

Section 5B4 – School Playgrounds

4. School Department Land

The Acton-Boxborough Regional School District owns 66.6 acres of land, and the Acton School District controls (the land is under town ownership) 121.77 acres of land. Although there are buildings on almost all of these properties, the school campuses and grounds provide valuable open space.

One parcel of School Department land is not associated with an actual school building and holds value as open space. This parcel is located on Arlington Street, north of Route 2, and is 24.92 acres in size (Town Atlas E-3, Parcel 8). This land was acquired in 1962 as a potential school site, although the soils were unsuitable for construction.

SCHOOL PLAYGROUNDS

Conant School

Gates School

Douglas School

McCarthy-Towne School

Merriam School

LOCATIONS

Taylor Road

Spruce Street

Elm Street

Massachusetts Avenue

Charter Road

Intermunicipal Agreements

Creation of ~~upgrades to existing~~ ^{new} facilities through CPA (Community Preservation Act) funding have resulted in:

High School Football Field - Leary Field
Artificial Turf Field ~~installed~~ 2005

Douglas School Basketball Courts - Douglas School 2006

High School Baseball & Tennis Court 2006
Sports Lighting 2007

Intermunicipal agreements between Acton Boxborough Regional School District and the Town of Acton have created expanded recreational opportunities at these facilities for all ^{of the} ~~Acton citizens~~ community, beyond their school usage.

Section 5B5 – Water Based Recreation

5. Water Based Recreation

This section provides a review of the water-based recreation areas in Acton. In the last five years, the major accomplishment in improving water-based recreation was the opening of NARA Park, which includes a 9-acre pond and beach, further described below. Other small water-based recreation areas exist in town.

NARA PARK

NARA Park opened to the public in the spring of 2000. This 40-acre outdoor recreation area is home to 6.5 acres of softball/soccer fields, a 2,000-seat amphitheater, a playground, walking trails, a 500 foot long bathing beach with a swimming area, and a bathhouse complete with snack bar. This area is a hot bed of activity during the summer months. Programs include beach operations, the NARA Youth Summer Program, free outdoor summer concert series, recreation and league sponsored athletic events, and the annual July 4th celebration. NARA Park beach provides the only public swimming area in town and serves over 600 resident families each season. NARA is also home to many special events each year; annual Halloween Costume Contest, Winterfest, Acton Day and Spring Treasure Hunt; sponsored by the Acton Recreation Department. Many individuals and companies also use NARA for large functions and field rentals.

GREAT HILL RECREATION AREA SKATING POND

The pond is a 3/4 acre impoundment created by excavating an old, silted-up farm pond that was reverting into a red maple swamp. Completed in 1986, the pond is used for skating, fishing and wildlife viewing.

MILL POND RECREATION AREA

This half-acre site is located between Main Street and the Fort Pond Brook Mill Pond, above the 1848 stone dam near the site of Faulkner Mills. The site has a half-acre of grass, and is open to the water for fishing and related activities. This area's use is somewhat limited by lack of on-site parking. Also the condition of the privately owned stone dam is an issue. Eventual completion of the ARRT near this site will improve access. This location also houses a pumping facility for Acton's new wastewater treatment system.

ROBBINS MILL POND

This is a man-made impoundment in the Nashoba Brook Conservation Area. The pond, approximately three acres in size, is the site of mill foundations and an earth fill dam that dates back to pre-Colonial times. In 1990, the town, using funds for materials donated by the Acton Conservation Trust, rebuilt the dam extensively. The restored impoundment is suitable for fishing, canoeing, and wildlife study. Additional reconstruction was undertaken in 1995, utilizing an eight-man crew from the Northeastern Correctional Facility in Concord.

GRASSY POND

The boardwalks and trails leading to Grassy Pond, in the Grassy Pond Conservation Area, provide access into the pond for fishing, canoeing and wildlife study. This large pond covers about 20 acres.

ARBORETUM POND

A 4,000 square foot pond was excavated at the Arboretum in 1991. This small pond provides an open water habitat for birds and other wildlife that reside in, or migrate through, the Arboretum.

ARBORETUM BOG BOARDWALK

There is a 100 yard long boardwalk across the quaking bog located at the Arboretum. This boardwalk, which includes an observation bench, allows close study of bog plants and related wildlife. Many elementary classes study the bog and its inhabitants each year during outings hosted by the Natural Resources Department.

WILL'S HOLE BOG BOARDWALK

The boardwalk into Will's Hole, a kettle hole pond and associated quaking bog, provides safe access to the pond for wildlife and plant observation.

ICE HOUSE POND

This is a four-acre impoundment of Nashoba Brook, located on town-owned land at the intersection of Concord Road and Great Road. Since management activities (including yearly draining) related to ice harvesting stopped in the 1950s, the pond was very rapidly filling with floating and emergent vegetation that cut into the recreational potential of the site. In 1995 the pond was de-watered and dredged to restore its value as a boating and fishing area. Because of the proximity of the parking area to the water's edge, this site has the potential for handicapped access for water recreation.

SANDY POND

In 1988, a contractor dredged a two-acre pond located near Sandy Drive (off of School Street) that is located on town conservation land. This impoundment is publicly accessible for fishing and nature study.

Canoe Launch Assabet River?

Section 5B8 – Town Owned Lands (Morrison Farm)

8. Town-Owned Lands

ACTON

Of the various parcels owned by the town, three parcels totaling 44 acres hold value as open space.

The town purchased the 32-acre Morrison Farm in 1997 (funded in large part by a \$1.3 million debt-exclusion override), as General Municipal Property, with plans for turning the open areas into ball fields and placing trails (some of which already exist) in the forested area. This farm was listed in the previous OSRP as one of our top parcels for protection. Refer to Section 9 for a description of the Town's plans to install fields on this property and connect the trail system to the future BFBP.

The Town also owns a two acre parcel and a ten acre parcel, both on Stow Street, that are important to preserve as open space. The smaller parcel would provide a connection to the Town of Stow's conservation land. The larger Stow street parcel is part of the Fort Pond Brook greenbelt and contains much floodplain and wetlands.

CONCORD

The Town of Concord owns 58 acres in Acton; this land abuts Nagog Pond, one of Concord's principal water supplies. This land provides a significant wildlife corridor, greatly contributes to the rural character of that part of Town, and has both active and passive recreation potential. If Concord should ever change its use of this property, Acton should seek to protect this land from development.

Section 5B11 – State Owned Lands (Skateboard Park)

11. State-Owned Lands

The state owns 202 acres of land in Acton, 159 acres of which has been identified as land having high conservation and/or recreation value (see Appendix J). The state-owned land falls into four major categories of open space: land that is part of the Department of Corrections Farm (about 100 acres containing active farm fields), a 16 acre parcel containing the State Police horse barn and fields, parcels that were taken when Route 2 was built but that lie outside of the actual right-of-way, and the Whittier land (25 acres) under the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife.

The Correction Department land is very significant to the town, due to the fact that the open fields abutting Route 2 add a great deal to Acton's rural image. If these lands ever were to be disposed of, the town would consider them as a high priority purchase, as it did when given the opportunity to buy the Route 2 Conservation Area (now the Wetherbee Conservation Area – see Section 5B1 #15) from the state in the early eighties. Part of that parcel is now leased back to the state for agricultural purposes.

The town is now in the process of trying to secure surplus state highway land near Route 2 to develop it into a skateboard park (see Section 5A2).

LAND OWNED BY THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

PLATE	PARCEL	LOCATION	TITLE	ACQUISITION	ACRES
C-5	089	066-070 Harris Street	8181/354	1953	1.40
	090-02	066R Harris Street	10928/156	1965	.50
E-3	081	060R Washington Drive	7866/367	1952	3.98
	085	083R Charter Road	7866/367	1950	3.00
	093	065R Hayward Road	7650/311	1950	4.90
E-4	003	Whittier land - Main Street		1995	25.0
F-3	016	068 Hayward Road	7653/328	1950	1.00
	016-01	068 Hayward Road	7653/328	1950	.33
	090	349R Main Street	unknown	unknown	2.50
G-3	012	332-338 Mass Ave.	12449/652	1973	1.00
G-4	176	099 Mass Ave.	11703/603	1969	2.22
	184	060 Hosmer Street	12717/213	1974	.92
	185	135-139 Mass Ave.	12731/213	1974	.78
	187	105-125 Mass Ave.	unknown	unknown	4.00
	197	070-088 Hosmer Street	7751/053	1951	13.00
	198	092-126 Mass Ave.	unknown	unknown	21.00
	209	058-076 Wetherbee Street	unknown	unknown	16.00
G-5	095	066R Wetherbee Street	unknown	unknown	4.60
	096	end Keefe Road	unknown	unknown	1.10
H-3	A38	5 River St. and rear	unknown	unknown	3.00
H-4	005	320-346 School Street	unknown	unknown	42.00
	006	323-347 School Street	unknown	unknown	50.00

Total Acres 202.23

Section 6B – Goal #3, Improved Recreational Opportunities

3. Improve Recreational Opportunities

Clearly, when evaluating the progress made for our three OSR goals from the last plan, the actions taken towards the goal of improving recreation opportunities have met with the most success.

During the last five years, the Land Stewardship Committee, an all-volunteer sub-committee of the Conscom, has completed over 145 projects on the town's conservation lands, resulting in vastly enhanced access to these lands. The LSCom work is described in Section 5.

With respect to active recreation, the Recreation Commission was reactivated in 1996, as was the Recreation Department, headed by Nancy McShea and under the direction of Tom Tidman, Director of Natural Resources. The most dramatic development in this area has been the 1999 opening of NARA Park, a 40-acre community park, located in North Acton. This park, run by the Recreation Department, has been a tremendous success. A complete description is provided in Section 5.

The Recreation Department, over the past five years, has done much more than bring NARA on-line. As reviewed in detail in Section 5, much work has been done in field enhancement at other sites in town and two fields have undergone major renovations.

In the OSR survey, residents were asked to cite the top five recreational facilities most needed in Acton. Bike trails were the overwhelming top preference, followed by conservation areas and hiking/skiing trails. Although athletic fields were not identified as a top priority in the survey, the Recreation Department and the four youth leagues have identified a strong need, discussed in Section 7, for more playing fields.

Section 7B – Summary of Needs (Recreation Needs, including statements from each athletic league, including addition of LAX)

B. Summary of Community's Needs

Section 7B addresses the needs of the community with respect to preservation of open space, focusing on passive and active recreation needs.

Open Space and Recreation “Measurement” Standards

Although we used national standards in the last plan, we feel it is more relevant to measure our “progress” over time by calculating the current ratio of conservation and recreation land to Acton’s population and comparing it to the same ratio for 1996.

As shown in the land chart found at the beginning of Section 5, Acton currently has 1,583 acres of legally protected open space and 63 acres of town-owned recreation land (not protected but containing athletic fields and other infrastructure). In 1995, we had 1,512.5 acres of legally protected open space and 63 acres of recreation land. The increase of 70.5 acres comes from two CRs and three grants or gifts of conservation land made in connection with cluster or subdivision developments. Based on the 2000 census showing our population to be 20,331, Acton’s protected open space ratio is 81 acres per 1,000 residents. In 1996 this ratio would have been 85 acres per 1,000 residents. The decline is due to population increases which have outpaced our ability to preserve a commensurate amount of open space for both conservation and recreation purposes.

In 1995, we had 3.4 acres of recreation space per 1,000 residents. Currently, we have 3.1 acres of recreation space per 1,000 residents. This decline is due to the increased population for the same amount of recreation land (although NARA was not on-line in 1995, that land was part of the recreation land total). The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) standard of 10.5 acres of developed recreation land per 1,000 population, means that Acton should currently have 214 acres of active recreation land in use; as stated previously, this is not a realistic measure for us, as it is unlikely we will ever be able to meet this standard.

The Master Plan Update estimates a “most likely” residential build-out of 10,200 units and a total population at build-out of about 29,000 (an increase of about 45% over the latest 2000 figures, although the final build-out is more likely to be 25,000-26,000). In order to preserve our current open space ratio of 81 acres per 1,000 residents, we would need to preserve an additional 702 acres of open space at a build-out population of 29,000. It should be noted that the Morrison Farm, currently in the unprotected category of general municipal property, could be counted towards this goal, if the property was protected and used for conservation and recreation activities. In addition, the 12 acres of town-owned property on Stow Street, discussed in Sections 5A2 and 5B8, could also be counted towards this goal if it is rezoned as conservation land (ARC).

Community needs are discussed below for both passive and active recreation, as well as for handicapped accessibility.

Conservation Needs – Preservation and Passive Recreation

The 1998 Master Plan Update reiterated citizens' desire to maintain the character of the community. The Plan noted that with increasing development activity, the future of our open fields, forested lands, and scenic country roads depends on active preservation efforts. A balanced mixture of homes and businesses clustered in villages and separated by open spaces helps define distinct areas in a community and more efficiently utilizes town resources.

The Master Plan Update conveyed residents' growing concern regarding the rate of residential growth in town and the impact such growth has in the future on the character of the town and the demand for town services (including schools). One goal of the update is to "preserve those elements or features which contribute to Acton's New England town character as a suburban residential community with strong rural and historic roots".

The OSR survey supported the sentiments expressed in the Master Plan Update. Acton's citizens want to preserve open space for conservation needs. In addition, with regards to passive recreation, survey respondents ranked the need for more hiking and skiing trails only second behind their desire for bike paths. Although there is a general sentiment towards preserving more land for conservation, the Town needs to disseminate more information and conduct public outreach about our existing lands.

As can be seen on the Open Space Inventory map in Section 13, conservation lands are located in nearly all sections of town. Our centrally located Acton Arboretum is maintained by the town and Friends of the Acton Arboretum, Inc. which makes it our most "polished" conservation area. The paths are well maintained and marked. There is an adequate parking lot and plenty of benches and picnic tables. As discussed in the Section 504 Self-Evaluation, in the Appendix, the Arboretum has handicapped accessible trails.

We are fortunate to have the LSCoM whose members have been working so diligently over the past five years to improve public access to our other conservation lands. The first five years of LSCoM activity has been primarily focused on infrastructure issues, so that each of the thirteen conservation areas now actively managed has been improved to the same standard. This includes kiosks with map boxes and entrance signs at all major entrances; a rational trail system within each parcel, usually comprising a loop trail with one or more accesses and secondary trails; upgraded maps, based on DGPS data; and blazes on the trails consistently applied throughout the various conservation areas. Trails have been improved, cut, cleared, and provided with boardwalks, bridges, and wood chips, where needed.

A few details of this first five-year program must still be finished, but the next five-year program is already underway. Its primary focus will be outreach. This will include further work on the LSCoM website, publication of a greatly improved Field Guide, increased publicity concerning LSCoM activities, introduction of educational programs

into the schools, town wide projects such as vernal pool certification, and both intra-town connectors between parcels where possible and inter-town connectors to conservation lands in several of the contiguous towns where these lie just across the boundary.

Recreation Needs – Active Recreation

NEED FOR BIKE PATHS – SURVEY RESPONDENTS’ TOP PRIORITY

The OSR survey respondents chose bike paths as their top recreation priority. Although Acton is participating in the development of two regional bike paths, the Town currently has no bike paths.

RECREATION DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW OF NEEDS

The development of NARA has fulfilled many active recreation needs and the Recreation Department has made much headway in improving our other existing fields, however, there is still a considerable need for more athletic fields and a need for a source of funds to adequately maintain existing fields (refer to Section 5B3 for a detailed discussion of field problems).

Recreational opportunities need to be broadened to include all age groups and interests as well as meet the demanding growth needs of the youth sport organizations. As the population of Acton increases so does the need for new recreational facilities – currently we are unable to meet these demands. We must plan now for both short term and long term solutions to this growth spurt. Fields are being eliminated at the high school, resulting in overloading of fields that currently get no rest periods. It is inevitable that we will outgrow current resources within the next 1-2 years.

Of highest priority is the need to construct a new lighted football field, a full-size baseball field, and two softball fields. This would help meet the current use needs of Youth Football, Youth Baseball, Youth Softball and Adult Softball Leagues. In addition, fields are needed to meet the ever increasing demands of Youth Soccer and Youth Little League. Additional fields would allow the Recreation Department to rest fields and keep safe playable surfaces on existing fields.

Attention must be given to increasing recreational opportunities for all. Paving walking trails at NARA Park, removing pea stone surfacing at playgrounds, replacing outdated play structures at Great Hill, improving access to lee House Pond for fishing and improving walking paths at the Morrison Farm would enhance handicapped access to these areas. Adult, senior and toddler recreation need to be addressed in the future. Dedicated space should be provided for activities specific to these unique groups. Care must also be given to meet the increasing needs of the non-league recreation groups; this would include development of a hockey facility, ice hockey rink, figure skating area, lighted basketball courts, and some dedicated indoor space or facility. [Serious consideration should also be given to developing a teen center to meet the recreational needs of this often-overlooked population.]

Intention of 2006 School St. IPA project. The full size baseball field, one Little League Softball Field. This project is in hold pending State Multiyear lease. at School St.

Elm St. H.S. Lighting

completed This has not been accomplished.

Structures were removed but not replaced

Danny's Place Youth Center, opened in 2006, is ~~non-profit~~ operated by the non profit Danny's Place Youth Services. Jeff & Cindy McCarthy dedicated the center in memory of son Danny, who died at age 16 in a car crash in 2000.

On a final note, with growth and development also comes the need to provide more natural surroundings and environments. With this in mind future recreational plans should include adequate landscaping and shade structures to ensure both participant and spectator comfort, protection and aesthetic beauty.

ATHLETIC LEAGUE NEEDS

Comments were solicited in 1998 from the major athletic leagues, which represent upwards of 1,200 Acton households, regarding their concerns about the future of the fields. All four leagues expressed a concern that there were only marginally sufficient areas to use presently, and that there would be a need for additional fields in the not too distant future.

In 2001, the Recreation Department asked leagues to submit a statement indicating and justifying the need for more field space in the next five years. Their responses are summarized below.

Acton-Boxborough Youth Soccer - submitted by league president Dave Wilson

“Numbers don’t tell the entire story here. Our registrations are basically flat and have been for a few years in the 1500 to 1700 range, but we still face huge problems for fields. The problems relate to: increasing pressure of adult and club leagues for field requests, the booming lacrosse program, loss of high school fields in the coming 5 years, possible loss of Concord Road in the next 5 years. The School Street lease extension remains a mess/quandary and currently has no standing agreement.”

Acton-Boxborough Youth Softball - submitted by league president Rich Delaney.

“The AB Youth Softball league will have 220 girls and 18 teams this spring (2002). The four softball fields in town (the two Gates fields, Elm Street and NARA) are adequate to meet our needs this spring even when considering that the fields are also used by the school softball teams and the adult recreational softball league. Assuming our program enrollment increases a conservative 5% per year over the next five years, AB Youth Softball will have 280 players and 24 teams five years from now. At that level of enrollment and given the current demand for softball field space from the schools and the adult recreational league, the town would need a fifth softball field to accommodate our peak scheduling needs in the spring season of 2006. The league also makes use of these fields to a lesser extent during our summer and fall seasons.”

Acton-Boxborough Pop Warner Football - submitted by league president Matt Lundberg.

“AB Pop Warner Football supports about 250 kids each season – 170 football players and 80 cheerleaders. Supporting anymore participation than this would require additional fields. We’ve held registration static for three years now, with a growing waiting list each year. We are pretty much restricted to 1 team per age group (5 total) given the field limitations in town. We’d like to expand to 7 teams – 1 each for the three older groups, 2 each for the two youngest. To do this we’d need more space, which I’ve discussed with

the Recreation Department in the past. My goal: identify and develop a multi-use field whose primary purpose is to support Youth Lacrosse in the spring and Pop Warner Football in the fall. Seasons are complementary, both programs are growing, and the field requirements are similar.”

Acton-Boxborough Youth Baseball - submitted by league president Mike Coppolino.

“Enrollment in AB Youth Baseball continues to grow. Over the past three years we’ve seen roughly an 8% increase per annum. Thanks to the Selectmen and Recreation Department the two new-lit fields at 2A/27 have helped considerably. With the addition of one Little League field in Boxborough coming on-line in 2003, we foresee the need for at most 2 additional Little League diamonds to satisfy our needs for the next 3-5 years. This would allow us to increase practice time and occasionally “rest” a field. Our needs are more urgent for a large ball field (90’ base paths) in that over the next 5 years, with construction at the high school and the consistent spring wetness at Jones field, we need at least one additional field as soon as possible, for those 13 and older.”

Add

Handicapped Accessibility

The Section 504 Self-Evaluation, included in the Appendix, details our progress and plans with respect to making more of our conservation and recreation areas handicapped accessible. As an added benefit, handicapped accessible trails also improve accessibility for senior citizens and parents with very young children.

Acton-Boxborough Youth Lacrosse (Boys)
Acton-Boxborough Girl's Lacrosse (Girls)

(see latest Recreation Program for contacts to Sports Leagues)

Section 8 – Objectives associated with Goal #3

3. Improve recreational opportunities

- a) Promote the development of the two regional bike trails planned to run through Acton.
- b) Enhance possibilities for hiking, cross-country skiing, and horseback riding, boating and fishing on conservation lands. Expand public outreach to better inform the public of our available passive recreation opportunities.
- c) Provide additional athletic fields to meet the needs of the town's growing population.
- d) Encourage regional planning with abutting towns in order to create more expansive human (see 3b above) and wildlife (see 2b above) corridors.
- e) Ensure handicapped accessibility is available for recreation activities (e.g. trails, picnicking, spectating at athletic fields, water-based recreation and camping) at both recreation and conservation areas.

Section 9 – Action Plan: Implement the Rec Dept 5-year plan (Action #14); ID sites for future athletic field development (Action #15)

	Implementation Timetable			Meets Objective Number:
	Accomplished as part of current plan	Within 2 years	Within 2 to 5 years	
<i>Action Recommendations</i>				
1. <i>Implement the Recreation Department's five-year plan to improve existing recreation facilities and develop new recreation sites and fields.</i>		x	x	3c, 3a, 3e
2. <i>Identify additional sites for future athletic field development.</i>		x	x	3c

Appendix L – Recreation 5-Year Plan

(Not included with old Plan.)