

ELEMENT ONE : OPEN SPACE AND RESOURCE PROTECTION

Introduction

One of the guiding principles of Executive Order 418 is the protection and preservation of a community's open space lands and natural resources. Responsible community development planning balances residential and commercial development with the need to protect and preserve natural resources for future generations. The Open Space and Resource Protection Chapter of this plan provides a framework for making decisions concerning the preservation of Holland's valuable open space lands and unique natural resources. Holland's Open Space and Resource Protection element consists of two main components: the 2004 Holland Open Space and Recreation Plan and a Land Use Suitability Map.

The Holland Open Space and Recreation Plan is an important component of the Town's initiative to preserve and protect its open space lands and recreational resources. The plan provides both an inventory of the Town's open space and recreation lands and a set of recommendations to preserve and enhance these valuable natural assets. The goals and objectives in the plan reflect the major land preservation priorities expressed by the citizens of Holland. In addition to addressing open space preservation and recreation priorities, the 2004 Holland Open Space and Recreation Plan includes the following:

- An examination of the dense residential development surrounding Hamilton Reservoir and recommendations for preventing further degradation of the reservoir's water quality
- Recommendations for revising the Town's Zoning Bylaw in order to preserve Holland's cultural and natural resources
- An analysis of surface and groundwater resources and recommendations for providing a higher level of protection for these resources

The Land Use Suitability Map identifies natural resources within the Town that require a higher level of protection from current and future development. The map includes strategies developed to provide the additional level of protection these critical resources require. The strategies are designed to preserve and protect critical natural resources while also allowing for future residential and commercial development within the Town. The Land Use Suitability Map also provides a useful "snap shot" of Holland's current level of land development and the Town's capacity for supporting future development.

2004 HOLLAND OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN

SECTION 1: PLAN SUMMARY

Plan Summary

The 2004 Holland Open Space and Recreation Plan is intended to provide guidance to the Town of Holland as it seeks to balance future development with the protection and preservation of its valuable open space lands and recreational resources. The open space and recreation priorities established by the plan were determined by citizens of Holland at a public forum held on November 19, 2003. The plan was developed by the Holland Open Space and Recreation Committee with the assistance of the Office of Geographic Information and Analysis (OGIA) at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Residents of Holland identified the following open space and recreation priorities at the public forum held on November 19, 2003:

- Preserve present and future drinking water supplies
- Preserve the rural character of the Town
- Provide recreational opportunities for residents of the Town
- Provide wildlife habitat
- Preserve natural areas, scenic views, and historic sites
- Protect and manage water resources for recreational use
- Preserve working landscapes (cropland, pasture, forestland, etc.)

The Holland Open Space and Recreation Committee established four main goals for the plan based on the priorities determined by Holland residents:

- Protect present and future water resources
- Provide recreational opportunities for residents
- Provide wildlife habitat
- Preserve the town's rural character, natural areas, scenic views, and historic sites

The 2004 Holland Open Space and Recreation Plan acknowledges the growing development pressures that the Town of Holland is experiencing from both inside and outside of the community. The recommendations offered in this plan are designed to accommodate future development without degrading the quality and integrity of the town's unique natural resources. This plan will serve as a useful resource for protecting and preserving the town's unique natural heritage while planning for future growth within the community.

SECTION 2: INTRODUCTION

Statement of Purpose

Holland's natural resources play an essential role in defining the town's identity. Large tracts of forest, numerous recreational areas, and working landscapes maintain the town's rural character and are a vital component of its local economy. Protecting and preserving Holland's wealth of natural resources is essential if the town is to retain its unique rural heritage and high quality of life standards.

Holland's first Open Space and Recreation Plan, prepared by the Holland Park Commission, was implemented in 1998. The plan identified the following goals as critical in the effort to preserve and protect the town's open space lands and recreational resources:

- Preserve and protect water and land resources
- Preserve Holland's rural character
- Increase access to exiting recreational areas
- Increase recreational opportunities

Despite progress achieved since the implementation of the 1998 Open Space and Recreation Plan, Holland's natural resources continue to experience pressure from forces both inside and outside of the community. Unplanned residential development has consumed prime open space lands and continues to deteriorate the quality of water resources. The negative impact of unplanned residential growth can be seen clearly in the lands surrounding Hamilton Reservoir. The percentage of open space land bordering the Reservoir has been reduced continuously over the decades, leaving only a small fraction of undisturbed open space to protect and preserve the quality of its waters. Dense residential development threatens water quality through bank erosion, sedimentation, household chemical run off, and effluent seepage from malfunctioning septic systems. As economic conditions encourage the conversion of seasonal residences to year-round homes, the threat to water quality will increase.

Pressures on open space and recreational lands from outside of the town include rising land and home values in neighboring communities, rapid residential and commercial development within the region, and a drastic reduction in open space preservation funds due to the State's continuing fiscal crisis. Similar to many small rural communities in Massachusetts, Holland has been affected by the State's economic downturn and budget crisis. During difficult financial times, major town priorities have been forced to compete for limited funds. Although the protection and preservation of natural resources is clearly an important priority of town residents, more immediate concerns such as education and public safety often take precedence over preservation initiatives.

Despite the significant challenges that will need to be addressed in order to preserve Holland's natural resources for present and future generations, the town possesses several major advantages in terms of open space and recreational land preservation. Most importantly, large expanses of

undeveloped land still exist throughout the town. Since the implementation of the 1998 plan, several large parcels of open space land have been acquired and preserved by regional nonprofit land trusts. Combined with existing open space parcels under protection, these new parcels contribute to the establishment of a continuous land corridor in the western section of town that provides protection for a wide range of wildlife species.

Informed development decisions, in addition to open space preservation efforts, can ensure that an appropriate percentage of undeveloped land is preserved in order to maintain the town's rural character and high quality of life standards. In addition to its wealth of natural resources, the town also possesses a core of dedicated residents who recognize the need for protecting valuable natural resources and who are committed to preserving Holland's unique rural identity and small town atmosphere. The citizens of Holland have observed the results of rapid and unplanned development in adjacent communities and there is a growing awareness that the same negative results could occur in their community without proper planning. This growing awareness can lead to greater participation when official decisions relating to new development and open space land preservation are being debated.

The economic benefits that Holland's natural resources provide for the town are an important incentive for ensuring their present and future protection. Since Holland possesses limited commercial development, residential development constitutes the majority of the town's tax base. The town's numerous working landscapes, such as forestland, recreational areas, and pastureland, provide a consistent and sustainable form of economic development. The numerous seasonal homes surrounding Hamilton Reservoir provide a dependable source of property tax revenue without requiring substantial service costs such as educational expenditures, community services, and infrastructure costs. From an economic standpoint, protecting and preserving the town's natural resources makes sound financial sense.

The 2004 Holland Open Space and Recreation Plan provides a comprehensive inventory of the town's natural, historic, scenic, and water resources. This inventory is essential for developing future open space and recreation goals for the town. The final section of the plan establishes a five-year action plan designed to guide future land preservation and recreation initiatives.

This open space and recreation plan is intended to guide the Town of Holland as it seeks to preserve and protect its valuable open space lands and recreational resources. The preservation and protection goals and objectives in the plan are based on priorities expressed by the citizens of Holland. Informed decision making and an active approach to open space and recreational land preservation will ensure that present and future generations will be able to enjoy Holland's unique rural character and irreplaceable natural heritage for years to come.

Planning Process and Public Participation

In the summer of 2003, the Town of Holland applied to the State to receive funds for planning services made available by Executive Order 418. Upon receiving these funds, the town contracted with the Office of Geographic Information and Analysis (OGIA) at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst to develop a Community Development Plan for the town. During preliminary discussions with town representatives, it was determined that the Holland Open Space and Recreation Plan, which expired in 2002, needed to be updated as part of the community development planning process.

On July 17, 2003, OGIA staff and a member of the Holland Planning Board met to develop a scope of services for the Community Development Plan. Following the approval of the scope of services by the Town of Holland, the State, and the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC), a meeting was convened with representatives of the town to establish an Open Space and Recreation Planning Committee and to acquire town planning documents and background information. Membership on the Committee was open to any resident of Holland interested in serving. The primary objective of the Committee was to work closely with the staff of OGIA to develop the 2004 Holland Open Space and Recreation Plan. Members of the Committee agreed to volunteer their time to locate and provide the necessary data to create the plan, attend progress meetings, provide contact information for OGIA staff, assist in the organizing and publicizing of public forums, and to review and comment on drafts of the plan. Committee meetings were open to the public and Holland residents were encouraged to attend.

In August 2003, the Holland Open Space and Recreation Committee was officially approved and appointed by the town. On September 16, 2003, OGIA staff conducted a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis with members of the Committee to begin identifying the major open space and recreation priorities of Holland residents. Results of the SWOT were intended to provide a basis for discussions at the public forum. On October 16th, the Committee and OGIA staff met to finalize plans for holding and publicizing the public forum. The public forum was held on November 24, 2003 and all residents of Holland were invited to attend. The main objective of the forum was to identify and establish the town's open space and recreation priorities based on citizen input. The Committee convened a meeting on March 18, 2004 to review the results of the public forum and begin formulating goals and objectives relating to the priorities established by town residents. OGIA staff began creating a draft of the 2004 plan based on the goals and objectives developed by the Committee. The 2004 Holland Open Space and Recreation plan is officially an update of the 1998 plan and therefore specific sections that did not require updating (i.e. Geology, Topography, History of the Community, etc.) were excerpted directly from the 1998 plan. All other sections of the plan were updated and based on the new open space and recreation goals established at the public forum on November 24, 2003. In late May, Committee members received a draft of the plan for review. A final draft of the plan, incorporating the corrections and additions recommended by Committee members, was completed on July 5, 2004 and presented to the Committee and town boards for review.