



OPEN SPACE PLAN

COVENTRY
CONSERVATION COMMISSION
2010

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INTRODUCTION

The Open Space Plan was developed by the Coventry Conservation Commission for the purpose of providing town officials, boards and commissions, and the residents of Coventry with a framework by which land use decisions can be made. The primary function of this plan is to distinguish and identify areas that merit various levels of long term protection. The Plan will point out some of the benefits of open space preservation, list some specific objectives, and identify some possible methods of achieving these goals. Also, based on information from our Natural Resources Inventory and open space mapping, recommendations will be made for preservation of specific critical areas

OPEN SPACE DEFINITION

Open Space is land that is preserved or restricted for any of the following purposes (with limited or restricted access to the public):

- Maintains or enhances the conservation of natural, scenic, cultural and historical resources.
- Protects wetlands/watercourses and other bodies of water.
- Protects water supply sources.
- Promotes the conservation of soil and prime farmland.
- Enhances the public value of abutting or neighboring parks, forests, wildlife preserves, natural reservations and sanctuaries and/or other open space.
- Enhances public recreation opportunities.
- Preserves historic and/or culturally significant sites.
- Assists in the promotion of orderly growth and development.

WHY PRESERVE OPEN SPACE IN COVENTRY

Economic Benefits

Protecting open space can produce fiscal and economic benefits to the town of Coventry.

- Increased property values
Properties close to permanently protected open space actually increase in value. This benefits not only the property owner, but the entire town by increasing the grand list.

- Lower taxes
Farm, forest, and open space land provide a town more money in tax dollars than they require in service expenditures. The most recent study in Southern New England indicated that for every dollar of revenue generated by residential development, the equivalent of \$1.14 is required in expenditures (Commonwealth Research Group, Inc. 1995). In contrast, every dollar of revenue generated by lands held in open space requires only \$0.42 in expenditures. Residents who keep their land in open space actually subsidize residential property owners by keeping their taxes lower.
- Improved financial ratings
Communities with sound conservation plans have been shown to actually improve their bond rating. These ratings reflect the fact that unlimited and/or mismanaged growth can make a community extremely expensive to manage and threaten its fiscal health. Good land use planning including open space promotes cost-effective development and avoids potential environmental problems that can be expensive to remedy.
- Lower utilities costs
Land conservation allows nature to recharge groundwater, cleanse our drinking water, prevent soil erosion, and absorb flood waters. It would be costly to do this outside of the natural cycle. Property taxes are protected as well. Imagine the loss of property values if Coventry Lake were to become polluted.
- Business opportunities
Outdoor recreation and tourism are big businesses today. Managed properly, the historic and scenic assets of the town will provide the potential for drawing recreational and tourism dollars to our town.

Natural resource protection

Coventry is known for its wide variety of high quality natural resources. (See Natural Resource Inventory) With a strategic open space protection plan, we can preserve these crucial resources.

- Protect the quality of our water resources – both drinking water and recreational uses.
- Protect natural plant and wildlife resources
- Protect agricultural resources
- Protect woodlands for forestry production resources
- Protect the quality of our air

Quality of life

The future quality of life in Coventry will be significantly influenced by how well we manage the aesthetic features that make our town an attractive place to reside.

Cultural resources and historic settings

By protecting cultural resources, such as historic, educational, and archeological sites, we can ensure that the uniqueness of the town's character is maintained.

Rural character and scenic vistas

To a great extent, Coventry's residential attractiveness can be attributed to its meandering streams and rivers, its scenic farmlands, rolling hills and woodlands, its numerous stone walls, and of course our signature feature – Lake Wangumbaug

Active and passive outdoor recreational opportunities

By preserving appropriate areas, the town can meet the growing need for active and passive activities for residents of all ages.

GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Protect surface and groundwater quality for domestic use, recreational use, and for fish and wildlife habitat.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Prohibit high- risk land uses in critical public water supply watersheds, and aquifer recharge areas.
- Encourage the establishment of riparian corridor protection zones along year round and intermittent streams.
- Initiate a public education program to highlight the importance of watershed protection and water quality issues, including invasive species control. This is particularly crucial in the area around Lake Wangumbaug.

2. Protect forest and wildlife resources

Conserve productive forest tracts in a way that protects native wildlife populations, supports local forest based industry, preserves Coventry's rural character, and supports forest based recreational opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish and preserve wildlife habitat by reducing forest fragmentation and encroachment, promoting conservation-sensitive planning for new development, and connecting existing forested habitat by designating habitat corridors.
- Foster economically viable and environmentally sound forest management practices and habitat protection through education, voluntary action and better land use decision-making by commercial interests, private citizens, and government.
- Make use of SCS soils maps and Natural Resources Survey to identify undeveloped sites in town that are conducive to forest growth and wildlife habitation.

3. Protect unique and critical habitats

RECOMMENDATION

- Protect lands or waters that provide habitat for state endangered or threatened species of plants and animals

4. Protect agricultural resources

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Priority should be given to the protection of prime farmland soil areas. (see Natural Resource Inventory maps)
- Prevent the fragmentation of prime farmland areas
- Require protective buffers on land adjacent to existing farmland
- Actively promote agriculture related business in town.
- Continue tax abatement program for farmers
- Adopt a right-to-farm ordinance

5. Protect land that contributes to character of the town

Scenic areas

Ridgelines, vistas, forest tracts, river/wetland areas, lakes, ponds, and open fields all contribute to the rural and natural attractiveness of the town and should be protected.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Encourage the use of the scenic road ordinance to protect the rural character of some of our town roads.
- Protect lands overlooking viewsheds, particularly those with public access.
- Protect land that contributes to the character of the town, such as lands that provide visual access to natural, historical, and attractive roadside features

Cultural and historic sites

Sites with historic or cultural significance contribute to the character of the town and preserving these assets provides an important link for Coventry residents between the town's past and present.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Enhance the conservation of our local historic, archaeological, and cultural resources by identifying these areas and integrating them into a town-wide cultural resources management plan.
- The State Archeologist should continue to be consulted concerning areas of archeological sensitivity.
- Protect sites connected with historically significant buildings and/or landmarks.
- Strengthen regulations to protect stone walls.

6. Protect lands that provide connections to existing permanently committed open space

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Protect lands providing connections between or abutting properties owned by the state or town, or by land trusts.
- Protect existing or potential greenways, especially along waterways.
- Identify and protect existing wildlife corridors.

7. Create areas for active and passive recreation

Setting aside lands for active and passive recreation is an important quality of life issue for Coventry residents

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Protect lands that abut existing recreational areas
- Taking into consideration geographic locations, protect lands that are conducive to future active or passive recreation
- Promote the establishment of hiking and biking trails for public use.

METHODS OF PROTECTION

- Direct purchase or donation of land
 - State, federal, and private land trusts open space grants
 - Statewide farm preservation programs
- Purchase of Development Rights Program
- Transfer of Development Rights Program
- Land gained through conservation subdivisions
- Conservation Easement agreement between landowner and town or local land trust.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Review the Open Space Fund and seek avenues to adequately fund it.
- Ensure separation of Open Space fund from General Fund to attract donations and build assets through the accumulation of interest.
- Charge a fee in lieu of open space to subdivision developers where there is no appropriate open space to be set aside within the development. This fee would be deposited into the Open Space Fund.
- Provide assistance to private landowners interested in voluntary protection measures.
- Investigate responsible forest management measures as a source of open space funding.
- Maintain and establish subdivision regulations conducive to open space preservation

- Support efforts to create Willimantic River and Hop River Greenways
- Encourage the use of Public Act 490 criteria for open space designation

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The Coventry Conservation Commission – December 2009

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