

Open Space, Recreation, and Natural Resources

Draft Existing Conditions

Introduction

Preservation of Wrentham's open space has been and continues to be of highest priority for Wrentham's residents. The farms and forests are critical to the identity of the Town and a major attraction for people who live and move to Wrentham. However, agricultural lands have been quickly lost to development for the past several decades. Residents are now leading proactive strategies to protect the remaining critical areas of open space in Town to protect the remaining active farms, corridors of wildlife habitat, and large areas of forestland.

The Town of Wrentham adopted an Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) in 2021 prepared by the Wrentham Open Space Committee with assistance from PGC Associates, LLC. The OSRP provides a detailed account of the Town's cultural and geological history, a comprehensive description of all town open space and recreational amenities, along with goals, strategies, and a seven-year action plan to achieve them. This chapter of the Master Plan summarizes and builds from the OSRP.

Quick Facts

- 3,200 acres or about 23% of the land in Wrentham is permanently protected open space
- In addition, there are 1,740 acres of open space with limited protection receiving tax benefits while undeveloped
- Wrentham has the headwaters of four different watersheds: the Blackstone, Charles, Taunton, and Ten Mile Rivers

Key themes/findings

- Big Apple Farm and Cook's Valley Farm are unprotected and vulnerable to development. Proactive land conservation is required in order to find solutions that meet the landowners' needs while also protecting this valuable open space.
- Open space protection is of highest priority to the community, yet there are opportunities to strengthen open space protection. For example, improving the Town's readiness to exercise its right-of-first-refusal to acquire Chapter 61 properties could help protect the more than 1,500 acres that only have limited protection currently.
- Open Space Committee is actively working on a few strategies to protect land, including a ranking system of priority parcels based on natural resources, outreach to property owners on the financial benefits of open space conservation, and building relationships with professional land trusts
- Population growth has been correlated with loss of open space in Wrentham. However, changes in development patterns to encourage a smaller footprint on the land per home, through small multifamily homes, accessory dwelling units, and more development Downtown can allow for growth while still protecting open space.
- Wetlands have enormous value with respect to water quality, because they absorb pollution and retain water to replenish aquifers and manage storm and flood waters. However, development frequently isolates or fragments wetlands. Even if the wetlands are untouched

- Regulations intended to protect water quality including the Watershed Protection District, require relatively large areas of land per home which prevents the development of more walkable neighborhoods.
- The Rice Complex is a new, well-maintained recreational facility that serves Wrentham residents and provides a regional attraction for traveling sports teams and tournaments

Natural resources

Geology, soils, and topography

Geology, soils and topography are significant factors in determining both natural and manmade land uses. They influence the flora and fauna that are attracted to Wrentham, and they help determine the types and extent of development that are feasible within specific areas of Town. Soils are a significant controlling factor in the location of residential housing since there is currently no municipal sewer system and new housing is dependent on soils that can support septic systems, although innovative alternative septic system technologies have increased locational options to some degree.

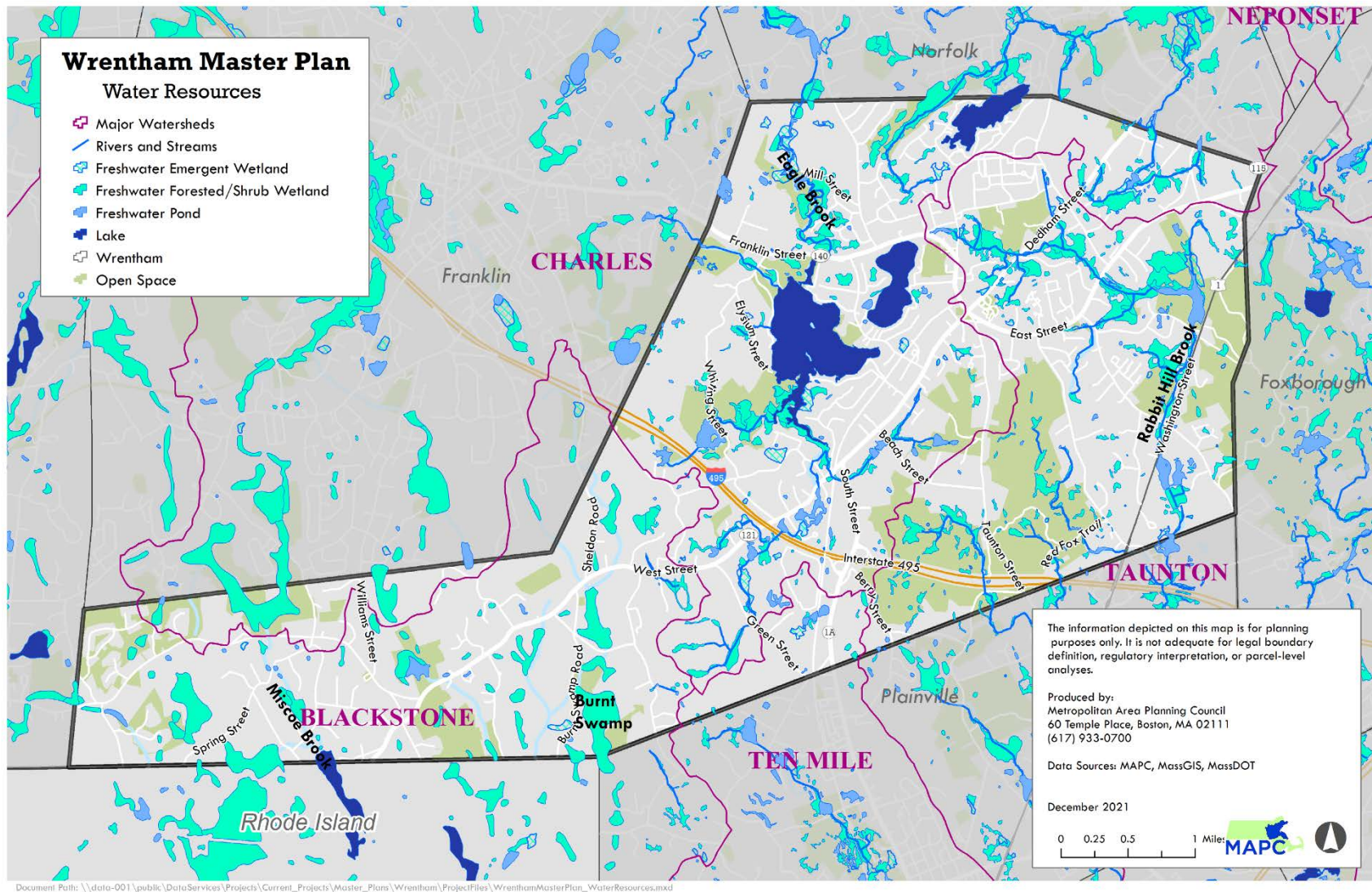
The western portion of Wrentham, west of Cherry Street in Sheldonville, consists principally of glacial till. Till is a poorly sorted mixture of sand, silt, clay, pebbles and boulders. This poor sorting results in an inferior ability to absorb surface waters and transmit ground water; it is the reason many wetlands, poorly drained with few well-defined stream channels, cover Sheldonville. The majority of Wrentham, east of Cherry Street in Sheldonville, consists of glacial outwash consisting of well-sorted sands and gravels that are generally very capable of absorbing surface waters. In these areas, wetlands tend to be less extensive and drainage patterns are better defined. Wetlands and other surface water bodies are the function of elevation and the water table.

Topography in Wrentham includes a number of low hills on the southern boundary of the Town, otherwise the land is flat. The highest elevation in Wrentham is 490 feet above sea level (per the National Geodetic Vertical Datum (NGVD), at Joe's Rock on Bucks Hill. The lowest elevation in Wrentham is 180 feet at the dam on Mirror Lake in the northern section of Wrentham.

Water resources

Watersheds

Wrentham is divided by four different watersheds: the Blackstone, Charles, Taunton, and Ten Mile Rivers, as shown in the following figure. Most of Sheldonville is in the Blackstone watershed, though the northernmost part is in the Charles. The central section of Wrentham is in the Charles, but a small area in the south is in the Ten Mile River watershed. Eastern Wrentham is mostly in the Taunton River watershed, but the northeast corner is in the Charles. The headwaters of tributaries to each of these major rivers, Blackstone River, Charles River, Taunton River, and Ten Mile River, are in Wrentham. Downstream communities in Massachusetts and Rhode Island depend on one or more of these four watersheds for their drinking water supplies.



Surface waters

The three largest bodies of water are Lake Pearl (218 acres), Lake Archer (79 acres), and Mirror Lake (55 acres). All three of these lakes are in the Charles River watershed. Lake Pearl is highly developed around its eastern half. The western half has some development, but the majority is either undeveloped due to wetlands, sparsely developed due to slope factors, or part of the Town's recreational area. Mirror Lake and Lake Archer are nearly surrounded with a high density of single-family homes. Most of these homes were formerly seasonal cottages that have been converted to year-round use. This has created some water quality issues as noted in the Environmental Challenges below. Crocker Pond, an important drinking water resource for Attleboro, is surrounded mostly by conservation land. However, its eastern boundary is adjacent to privately owned business-zoned land along Route 1. A junkyard across the highway contributes its runoff to Crocker Pond.

There are several other small ponds throughout the town. Since Wrentham is at the head of three of its four watersheds, many of these streams and ponds are susceptible to drought and either dry up or are severely depleted during summer dry periods.

Wrentham has a Watershed Protection overlay zoning district to protect land within the watersheds of the Charles and Blackstone Rivers, as well as the Taunton River Sub-Basin. The Watershed Protection District requires lots to have at least 30,000 square feet or $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre (and 22,500 square feet or $\frac{1}{2}$ acre in the R-30 zoning district where lot sizes are $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre) outside of a 100-foot buffer zone around lakes, ponds, and wetlands. This ensures that there is space for development with sufficient distance from water bodies.

Wetlands

Extensive wetlands exist throughout the town with major wetland areas near Burnt Swamp, north and south of Lake Pearl, and Rabbit Hill Brook which flows southward from Crocker Pond. All the tributaries of the streams in Wrentham have wetlands associated with them. The majority are red maple and shrub/scrub wetlands.

Wetlands have enormous value with respect to water quality, because they absorb pollution and retain water to replenish aquifers and manage storm and flood waters. The Wetlands Protection Act affords some open space protection adjacent to wetlands. In the early 1990s, the Wrentham Conservation Commission instituted a local wetlands bylaw in order to further protect Wrentham's natural resources. The Commission further enhanced this bylaw with the April 2000 implementation of a 50-foot "No-Build" buffer zone around wetlands.

However, development frequently isolates or fragments wetlands even if the wetlands are untouched. This fragmentation severely limits the wildlife habitat value, yields little recreational value for people, and, because contaminated runoff from manmade surfaces runs into the wetlands, diminishes the wetlands' ability to remove pollutants and increases storm surges in streams.

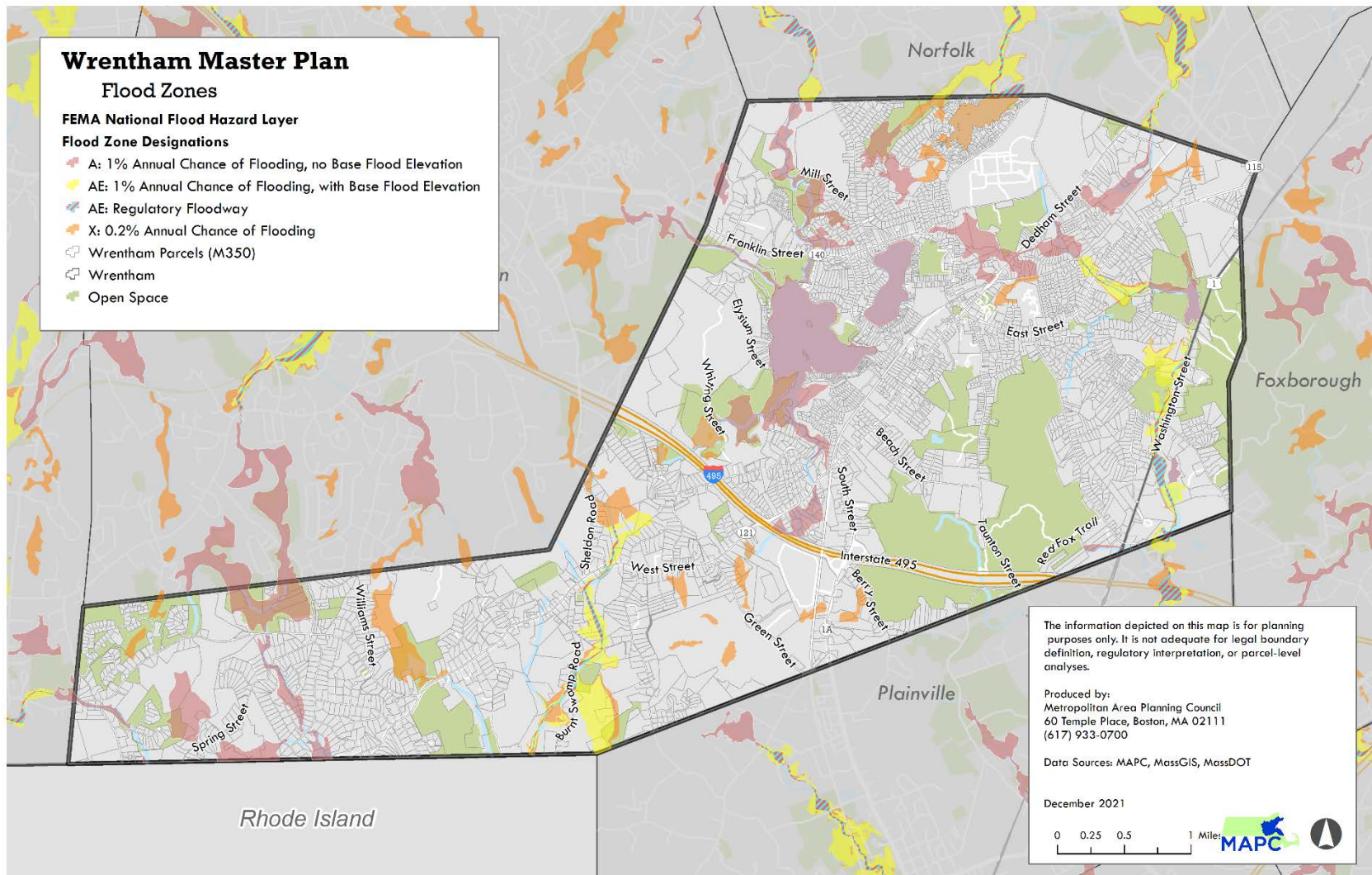
Flood Hazard Areas

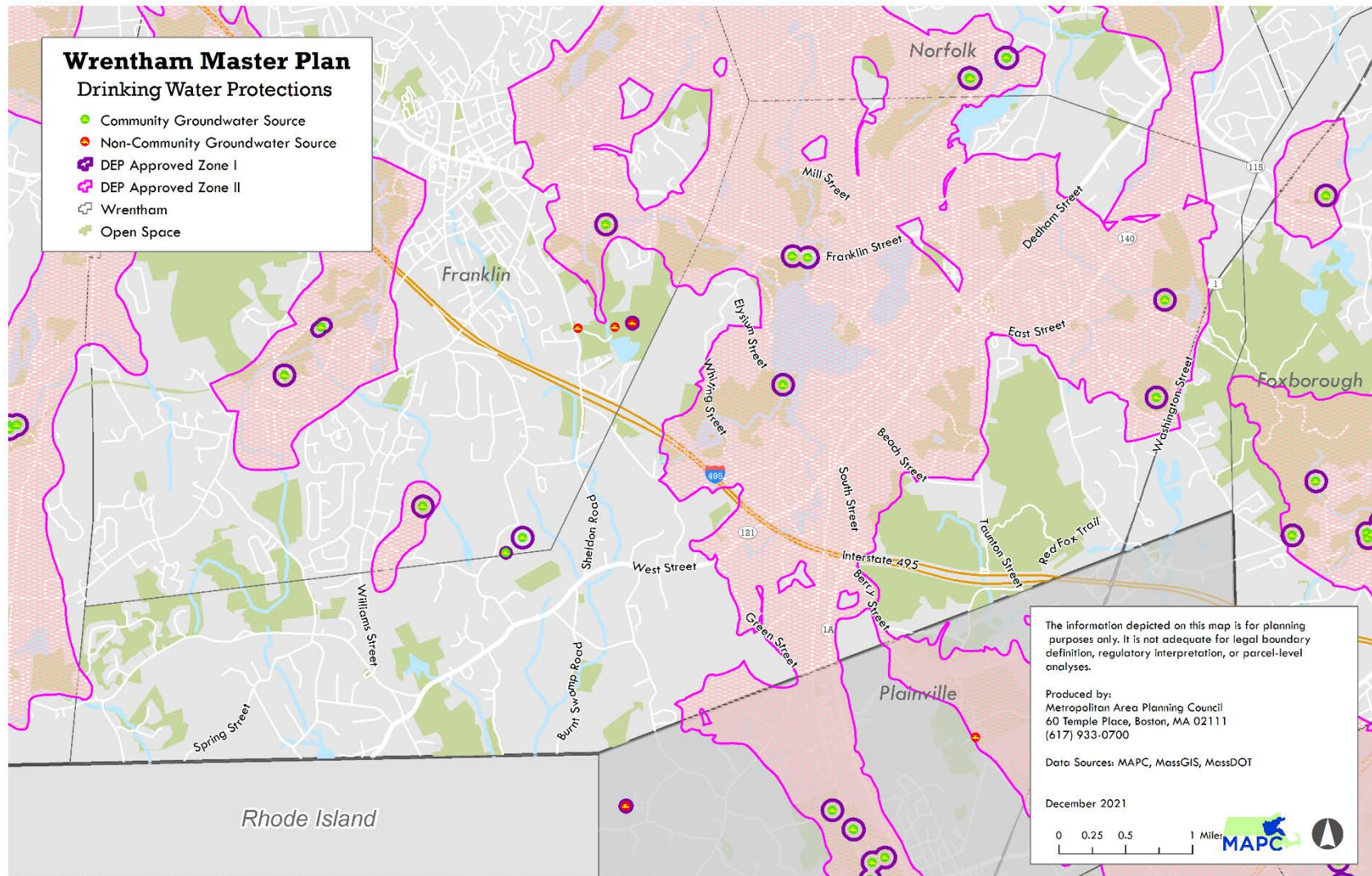
Because Wrentham is at or near the top of its four watersheds, most streams in Town are small and have limited flood zones. Therefore, areas subject to flooding are limited to low, flat areas with poor drainage adjacent to wetlands. The areas with poor drainage are on roadways where storm water infrastructure is outdated, such as near the Town Center, or inadequate, such as on Green Street. The Federal Emergency Management Agency has published Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM) delineating 100 year and 500-year floodplains. The maps were most recently updated July 17, 2012. As shown in the figure below, the primary areas subject to flooding are in the northern section of town along Eagle Brook, Stony Brook and Uncas Brook; the northeast section along Stony Brook; a corridor just east of Lake Archer along Safe Meadow Brook across Routes 1A and 140 to Crocker Pond; the eastern part of town south of Crocker Pond along Route 1 to Rabbit Hill Pond; an area south of Lake Pearl to I-495; and in Sheldonville from just north of Route 121 along Burnt Swamp Brook to Burnt Swamp near the border with Plainville and Cumberland.

In addition to the FEMA flood zones, there are other areas of flooding due to impervious surfaces or changes to the hydrology. Erosion, sedimentation, and chronic flooding are intimately tied together. The general process is that land is stripped of its forest cover and ground cover for development; a large storm event then picks up the soil and deposits it into local streams and ponds. Wrentham has adopted both zoning and general bylaws to regulate earth removal practices that minimize erosion by regulating land clearing and establishing regulations that minimize erosion. See the Energy and Sustainability chapter for more information on inland flooding.

Groundwater and Aquifer Protection

Wrentham is entirely dependent on groundwater for its drinking water supply. Three wells, #2, #3 and #5, are in the Charles River watershed, while wells #4 and #6 are in the Taunton River watershed, as shown in the “Drinking Water Protections” map. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) uses hydro-geologic modeling to delineate wellhead protection areas to protect the recharge area around public water supply groundwater sources. The DEP Approved Zone II, as shown on the map, covers most of Wrentham including the Town Center, Route 1A, Franklin Street, and East Street. The DEP Approved Zone I is intended to protect the immediate area around a public water supply well or wellfield. Zone III is land area beyond the area of Zone II from which surface water and groundwater drain into Zone II. Massachusetts Drinking Water Regulations require municipal controls, which in the case of Wrentham is the Wrentham Aquifer Protection Overlay District, to regulate uses in Zones I, II, and III. The Aquifer Protection District Overlay limits activities such as the amount of a building lot that may be rendered impervious, and prohibits other uses outright, such as landfills and unprotected storage of hazardous materials. Development within the APD which exceeds 15% impervious lot coverage may be allowed only by Planning Board special permit.





Water quality

Water pollution is caused by both discreet (point) sources, such as an industrial outfall, as well as from broad areas of less concentrated pollution (non-point), such as from sewage waste, fertilizers on lawns, and automotive pollutants from roads and parking areas

Given that most homes have septic systems, there is concern that residential subdivisions will impact the drinking water supplies. Septic systems encroaching upon the zones of contribution to municipal wells are a threat as they can discharge nitrogen and other undesirable chemicals into the groundwater. Other wastewater management options that are available to support potential redevelopment considerations include municipal sewer, shared/ cluster wastewater systems, or on-site wastewater treatment plant systems.

Contamination from runoff can be mitigated through the application of Low-Impact Development (LID) principles. The Town complies with the Environmental Protection Agency's National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) and is in the process of complying with EPA's updated Small Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) requirements that went into effect in 2018 to reduce the impact of stormwater on surface and groundwater. These measures will become increasingly important as climate change increases the frequency and intensity of storms.

Vegetation

The predominant vegetation in Wrentham is forest land consisting largely of a mix of hardwood and white pines, although forests have declined in recent decades due to increased development in Wrentham and surrounding towns. According to the University of Massachusetts Resource Mapping Project (see Table 1), the total area of forest declined from 9,095 acres in 1971 to 7,677 in 1999, a loss of 1,418 acres. A 2005 analysis by the Sanborn company used a different methodology and estimated a total of 8,015 acres that year. It is unclear if the difference is due to the different methodology or whether formerly cleared area reverted to forest between 1999 and 2005.

Old fields, typified by a myriad of grasses, goldenrod, and milkweed, are diminishing in number, since natural succession has reclaimed many to a shrub/sapling habitat. Public shade trees represent another important component of vegetation, providing significant benefits including providing cooling during hot summer months, extending the life of street pavement by shading it from the effects of the sun, absorbing stormwater runoff and adding an aesthetic element to the streetscape. See the Energy and Sustainability chapter for more information on extreme heat and cooling strategies. Consequently, Wrentham protects public shade trees by strongly enforcing the Scenic Roads Act and Scenic Roads Bylaw on its 21 designated roads, as well as the Public Shade Tree Act.

The Wrentham Zoning Bylaw also has requirements in the parking regulations for landscaping to reduce the visual impacts of large areas of pavement, improve the overall environment of parking areas by providing areas for shade and heat reduction, and enhancing the overall aesthetic appeal of parking areas.

Fisheries & wildlife

Wetlands and large areas of open space provide habitat for upland game and non-game animals. Deer, raccoon, fox, coyote, opossum and many types of small rodents occupy upland habitats throughout Wrentham. Turkey, woodcock, many reptiles, and several other types of animals also occupy these upland habitats. Fishers, a large relative of the mink, also exist in Wrentham. In wetland habitats muskrat, mink, shellfish, mallards, wood ducks, various herons and other birds are present. Native fish species are most likely non-existent. Despite a formerly aggressive stocking program, the high drought potential shared by all bodies of Town water and recent declines in water quality have either eliminated or made scarce any native fishes. All species of trout and salmon are stocked by the State. Some warm water fishes have become established, notably largemouth bass and sunfish. Lake Archer formerly enjoyed a population of smallmouth bass; unfortunately, these have mostly been supplanted by more aggressive species.

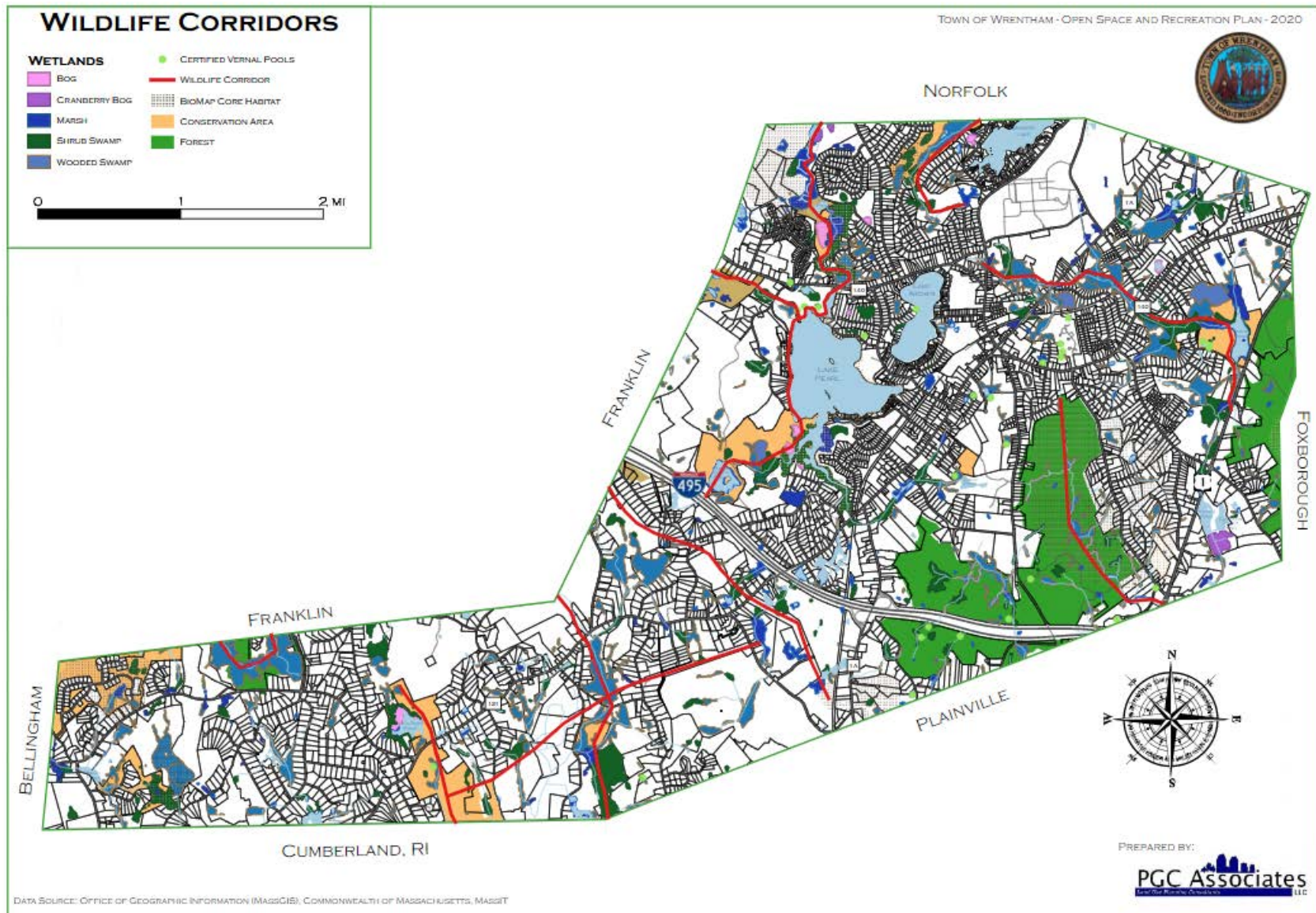
Rare species

There are nine rare and endangered species in Wrentham as identified by the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program of the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MDFW), including reptiles, fish, amphibians, plants, and a bird.¹ The Common Names for the nine species include Blanding's Turtle, Bridle Shiner (fish), Eastern Box Turtle, Eastern Pondmussel, Long-leaved Bluet (plant), Marbled Salamander, Peregrine Falcon, Philadelphia Panicgrass (plant), and Toothcup (plant).

Migration corridors

Wildlife corridors provide migratory routes for animals that enhance their habitat and encourage biodiversity. Corridors in Wrentham are primarily located along the streams. This is due, in part, to the Wetlands Protection Act and Rivers Protection Act which have served to limit development near these resources. Roadways and development along them tend to fragment habitat areas, thus limiting migration and reducing habitat. Of particular note, the I-495 corridor splits Wrentham roughly in half. Nevertheless, there are some important wildlife corridors within Wrentham that connect with abutting towns shown in red in the image below from the *2021 Open Space and Recreation Plan*.

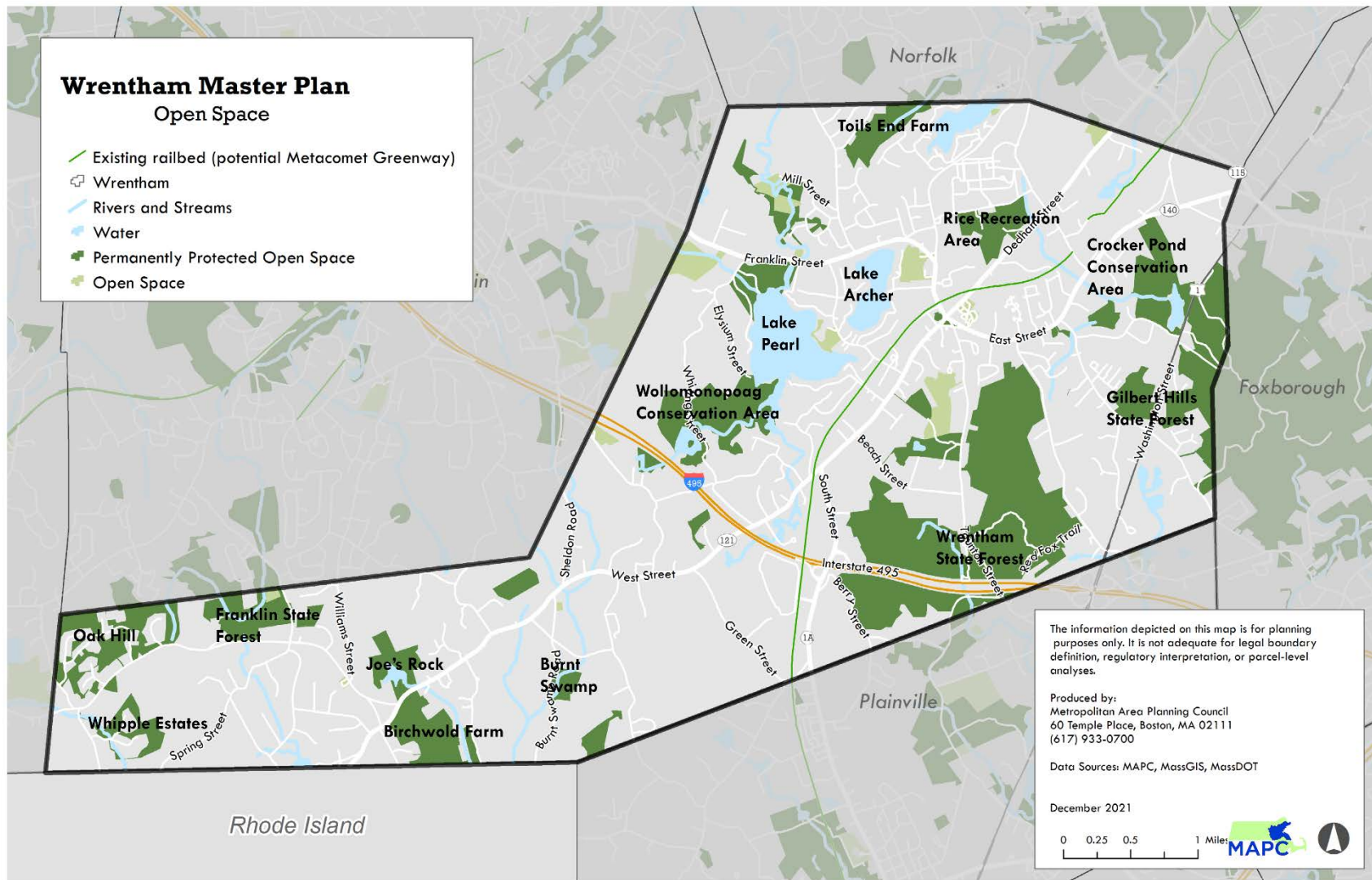
¹ For more information, see the *2021 Open Space and Recreation Plan*
<<https://wrentham.ma.us/files/Wrentham%20Website%20Files/Open%20Space%20Committee/Wrentham%20OSRP%20Final%20Report%203-27-2021%20.pdf>>



Open space

Conservation lands are typically undeveloped parcels that are entirely undisturbed or are used by the public for low-impact passive recreation such as hiking, biking, fishing, and wildlife viewing. Depending on the type of land, conservation parcels can provide natural habitats for both plants and wildlife, help to replenish and protect aquifers, reduce and absorb storm water runoff, or protection natural or cultural resources like farmland. Open space can be owned by government agencies, non-profits, or private landowners and can be protected in perpetuity or for a certain number of years. The following map shows the protected and recreational open space in Wrentham.

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Public open space

Approximately 3,400 acres of land in Wrentham are currently dedicated to public or semi-public open space in State Forests and municipal land.

State and Federal Open Space

Wrentham is fortunate to have access to three Massachusetts state forests: F. Gilbert Hills State Forest, Wrentham State Forest, and Franklin State Forest. Over one third of the public open space in Wrentham is part of the State Forest system. They are open to the public for hiking, biking, and cross-country skiing, and are maintained by the Department of Conservation and Recreation. Wrentham State Forest and F. Gilbert Hills State Forest (which is largely located in Foxborough) also offer access to the Warner Trail, a hiking trail maintained by the Appalachian Mountain Club that can be hiked north to Sharon or south to Diamond Hill. The Commonwealth also owns the Wrentham Developmental Center, much of which is fairgrounds and open space. Other governmental open space includes land along Miscoe Brook in West Wrentham owned by the United States Army Corps of Engineers for its Charles River Watershed Natural Valley Storage Area.

Table: State and Federal Protected Open Space	
Name	Acres
Wrentham State Forest	1,024
F. Gilbert Hills State Forest	256
Franklin State Forest	82
Charles River Natural Valley Storage Area	23

Municipal Open Space

There are 910 acres of municipal open space, including land owned by the Town and the Wrentham Conservation Commission. The largest areas of open space and those that have parking areas are listed in the table below.

Table: Municipal Open Space				
Name	Address	Acres	Jurisdiction	Facilities
Wollomonopoag Conservation Area	230 Elysium Street	200	Conservation Commission	Parking, kiosk, trail
Birchwood Farm Conservation Area	1499 West Street	124	Conservation Commission	Parking, kiosk, trails, picnic tables
The Preserve at Oak Hill Conservation Area	60 Luke Street 2490 Oak Hill Ave 2490 West Street	100		
Homer Croker Pond Conservation Area	200 Washington Street	93	Conservation Commission	Parking, kiosk, trails, picnic tables
Toils End Farm	40 Maple Hill Road 239 Forest Grove Ave 2 Farrington Ave	78		
Joe's Rock Conservation Area	1498-1508 West Street	71	Conservation Commission	Parking, kiosk, trails, picnic tables

Table: Municipal Open Space				
Knuckup Hill	120 Taunton Street	58	Recreation Commission	Trails
Wampanoag Estates	Conservation Area	56		
Whipple Estates Conservation Area	1 Hales Pond Lane	53		
Burnt Swamp Conservation Area	203 Burnt Swamp Road	38		
Eagle Brook: Craig Meadow and Oxbow Meadow	708 Franklin Street R and 130 Mill Street	25	Conservation Commission	Parking, trails

Water Department Open Space

The Wrentham Water Department also owns 250 acres of land for water quality protection, along Franklin, Thurston, Taunton, South, and Elysium Streets.

Private open space and tools for protection

Agricultural Land

The laws of the Commonwealth set forth two important programs designed to protect agricultural and horticultural lands.

The Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program is a voluntary program in which the Commonwealth agrees to pay the owner of agricultural land the difference between the land's fair market value and its agricultural value in exchange for a permanent deed restriction that prohibits any use of the property that could harm its agricultural viability. As of this date, no land in Wrentham is enrolled in the APR Program.

While the APR program provides permanent protection to agricultural land, Chapter 61A provides temporary protection but is used more often. The Chapter 61A program empowers municipalities with a right-of-first refusal to purchase properties enrolled in the program when a sale or change of use is proposed by the landowner. In exchange, landowners enjoy reduced property taxes. There are 850 acres of Chapter 61A land in Wrentham.

Forested Land

There are programs to encourage the protection of forested land, similar to the Chapter 61A program for agricultural land. Chapter 61 subjects a participating landowner to a ten-year active forest-management commitment in exchange for a reduction in property taxes. Nearly 200 acres of land in Wrentham are enrolled in the Commonwealth's Chapter 61 program, most of which is in the eastern portion of town where bedrock exposure complicates agriculture or development.

The Commonwealth's Chapter 61B program provides similar benefits to those offered under Chapters 61 and 61A but is applicable to wildlife or recreation lands with a minimum size of five acres. The Chapter 61B program requires annual resubmittal of an application but does not require a ten-year forest management plan. Over 400 acres of Chapter 61B lands are in Wrentham. Most of that land is forested, with the exception of Franklin Country Club. Some of the Chapter 61B, such as the Wrentham Anglers Club, Franklin Rod & Gun Club, and Wrentham Sportsman's Association, may be accessed by membership to the organizations.

Conservation Restrictions

Conservation restrictions offer an additional tool for agricultural or forestland open space protection. Property rights can be understood as a bundle of rights. With a conservation restriction, the right to develop land has been transferred (by sale or donation) to a land conservation organization, such as a land trust or a public agency. However, the land remains in private ownership and can be used for agriculture or passive recreation, and the conservation restriction can be written to permit construction of homes for family members. There are many forms of conservation restrictions, some permanent and some with defined time limits. Public access may be permitted but is not required. There are 164 acres of land in Wrentham protected with a conservation restriction, most of which is part of an Open Space Development such as Eaglebrook Village or Wolloff Estates.

Open Space Preservation Development

Wrentham's Open Space Preservation Development (OSPD) Bylaw was enacted in 1993 to provide flexibility for developers in exchange for the permanent protection of open space. Over 300 acres of open space have been protected under the OSPD to date, most of which is protected through conservation restrictions. Additionally, the development patterns that the bylaw has produced have saved the Town substantial sums of money in infrastructure maintenance, while protecting significant open space without direct cost. However, as noted in the Housing and Land Use and Zoning chapters, there are concerns about the effectiveness of the OSPD Bylaw. Several OSPD subdivisions have protected land along the perimeter of the subdivision, rather than the land with the greatest natural resources or a more substantial area of usable open space for passive recreation.

Unprotected Open Space

There are several significant areas of open space in Wrentham that remain unprotected, including The Big Apple, Cooks Valley Farm, and Wrentham Development Center. Some of the key privately-owned tracts of unprotected open space noted in the OSRP are listed below.

Table: Unprotected Open Space			
Site Name	Location	Acres	Description
Wrentham Development Center	Emerald Street	700	Farmland
The Big Apple	Arnold Street – Otis Street	192	Farmland
Hagopian (formerly known as Red Bird Farm)	Taunton and Beach Streets	70+	Forest
Snow Property	East Street and Vine Streets	70	Forest
Cooks Valley Farm	West Street	38	Farmland and forest
Stahl Property	Everett Street	30	Forest

The Open Space Committee is actively working to protect more open space. The most recent land purchase for open space protection was at the Wrentham Development Center for the Rice Field Complex, which includes sports fields and buildings, as well as undeveloped open space. Prior to that, the Town worked with the Wrentham Water District to purchase Wollomonopoag, south of the lakes, for protection of the Town's water supply. In addition, the town has acquired open space from the Planning Board's approval of Open Space Residential Developments, such as Oak Hill and Whipple Estates.

One of the biggest challenges to protecting open space in Wrentham is the limited time the Town has to exercise its right-of-first-refusal when a property in Chapter 61, 61A, or 61B is for sale. Therefore, to better prepare for these opportunities for land protection, the Open Space Committee has developed criteria to rank parcels based on their natural resource value. This will help the Town prioritize parcels for more efficient and responsive action if they go up for sale. In addition, the Open Space Committee applied for and received a Sweatt Fund grant of approximately \$3,000 to do outreach to landowners with Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B land to inform them of the financial benefits of keeping their land undeveloped.

In addition, the Community Preservation Committee, which administers the Community Preservation Act funds, has reached out to Wildlands Trust to learn more and pursue potential opportunities to partner with the land trust on open space protection. Wildlands Trust is a non-profit organization dedicated to conserving land and preserving the natural heritage of Southeastern Massachusetts. Wildlands conserves land in a few different ways. It has an acquisition program through which it purchases and protects properties for watershed and farmland protection, and it also partners with municipalities on using the municipality's Community Preservation Act funding for open space protection. Working with a land trust offers great opportunity for being more responsive when Chapter 61 parcels are for sale, as well as being proactive in protecting key resources, including farmland.

Recreation

Most of Wrentham's Recreation Commission properties are located at two facilities: the William A Rice Recreation Area and the Sweatt Athletic Complex, both of which are well-maintained. The Rice facility, includes over eighty acres of playing fields and courts that serve Wrentham residents, as well as provide a regional attraction for traveling sports teams and tournaments. The Sweatt Complex is a sixty-acre site on the south side of Downtown shared with a few school buildings and the Fiske Library that also offers connectivity with the Trout Pond and Knuckup Hill open spaces parcels. In addition, Sweatt Beach, managed by the Recreation Commission offers lake access for swimming and boating. Finally, the Town Common and Sweatt Memorial Park provide important gathering places for the community right in the heart of Downtown.

Table: Recreation Facilities				
Name	Address	Acres	Jurisdiction	Facilities
Sweatt Athletic Complex	120 Taunton Street	58	Recreation Commission	Baseball/softball fields, batting cages, picnic shelter, concessions stand and rest rooms, tot lot, parking, trails
William A. Rice Athletic Complex	54 Emerald Street	80	Recreation Commission	Baseball/softball fields, basketball courts, multi-use fields, beach volleyball courts, batting cages, administrative/restroom facility, parking.
Sweatt Beach and Boat Landing	715 Franklin Street	77	Department of Public Works	Beach, dock, picnic area, volleyball, bathhouse, kayak and paddleboard rentals
Sweatt Memorial Park	3 Franklin Park	1	Recreation Commission	Tennis courts, lighting, picnic area, paths, benches
Town Common	5 Common Street	2		Benches, paths, gazebo, monuments

The Rice Complex, Sweatt Complex, and Sweatt Beach are heavily used and well-maintained. However, the Recreation Director has noted the need for funding to continue maintenance of the recreation facilities and to fund staff positions that support these valuable assets to the community. In addition, he noted that the Rice Complex is only about 70% complete, with a walking path, turf fields, and potential additional facilities still underway.

Residents greatly value the Town Common but would like to see improvements and more programming at the park. And, although the volunteer Landscaping Committee has invested time and resources in beautifying Sweatt Park, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to provide safe outdoor

space for socializing and picnics, it remains underutilized. Improved pedestrian access to the Town Common and visibility of Sweatt Park may attract more users.

Trails

There are walking trails throughout the public open space areas. In addition, the Warner Trail, a regional hiking trail, passes through Wrentham as it runs from Sharon to Cumberland, Rhode Island. It runs through Gilbert Hills State Forest then Wrentham State Forest and along the abandoned Old Colony rail bed near the Premium Outlets. There is also an active effort led by volunteers to develop the full length of the old rail bed into a 17-mile rail trail extending from Walpole to North Attleboro.² The Metacomet Greenway, as it is called, would provide recreation opportunities, as well as safe and pleasant walking and biking connections between destinations in Town. See the Transportation chapter for more information about the Metacomet Greenway.

Community engagement

As part of the OSRP planning process, residents had the opportunity to participate in a survey focused on open space and recreation. The majority of responders ranked Wrentham's recreation facilities as good or excellent. The survey respondents were also asked to rank a list of recreation items, indicating those considered to be a priority. The top five recreation items identified as priorities by survey responders are:

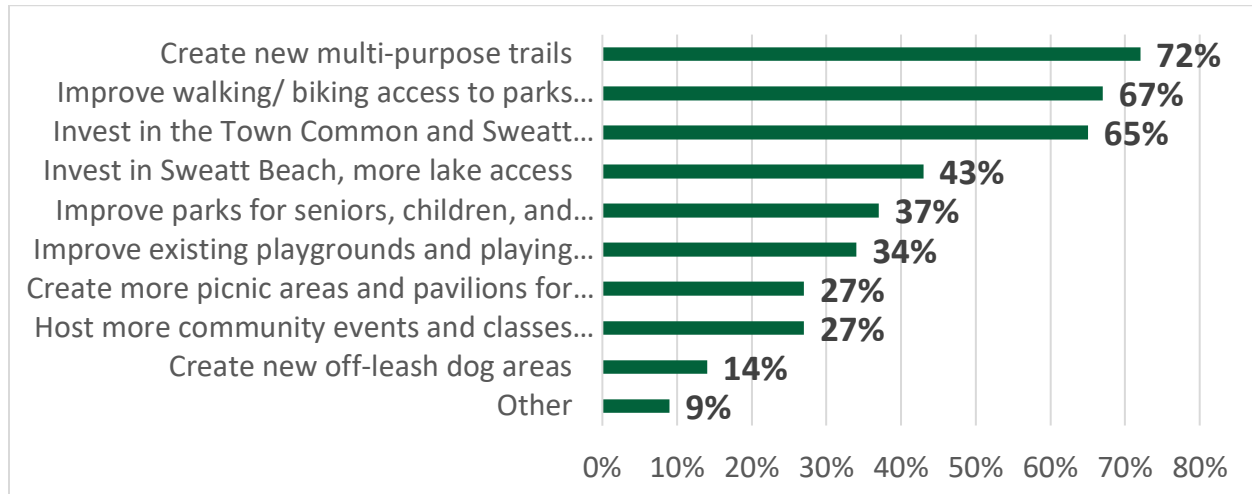
- Children's playgrounds
- Bike trails
- Conservation areas
- Hiking trails
- Town Common

In addition, residents had the opportunity to participate in a public forum on October 29, 2019. At the forum, residents expressed interest in biking, between neighborhoods and Downtown, as well as between Rice Athletic Complex and Downtown. See the Transportation chapter for more community support for bike access throughout Town, and strategies to address this need. In addition, residents expressed the need for programs for older residents without children, especially at the Rice Athletic Complex. The Recreation Commission and Director of Recreation were asked about needs from their perspective as the primary provider of recreation services in Wrentham, as part of the OSRP planning process. Among the general needs they identified are the following: improve handicapped accessibility, create walking paths at recreation sites, work with Open Space Committee to create hiking and bike trails, install landscaping and hardscaping materials for recreation sites, find new revenue sources for maintenance and continued growth of recreation facilities, develop programs and activities to increase involvement of community residents, and create and manage interactive events for residents of all ages. Another concern noted during the OSRP planning process was management of recreation facilities. For example, Sweatt Park is under the jurisdiction of the Board of Selectmen rather than the Recreation Commission. Similarly, the Town Common is not under the jurisdiction of the Recreation Commission, yet the Commission hosts 12 Concerts on the Common, as well as "Wrentham Day" and the Wrentham "Wroad Wrace" each September.

² For more information: <https://metacometgreenway.org/>

The Phase II Community Survey conducted in November-December 2021, included several questions focused on open space, recreation, and natural resources.

Survey respondents were asked to choose up to 5 responses with the results below, answering: **Over the next 10 years, what are the most important goals for recreation?**



Similarly, respondents were asked to choose up to 3 responses with results below, answering: **Over the next 10 years, what are the most important goals for open space?**

