

Town of Essex Open Space & Recreation Plan 2026 Update

Open Space Committee Meeting #2
Thursday October 9, 2025, 4pm



Welcome & icebreaker

- What activities are you most excited about for this fall? (Bonus points if it involves open space or recreation!)

Where we are in the process

Task 1. Setting the foundation

Aug – Sept 2025

Task 2. Environmental and Land Analysis

- Regional context
- Population characteristics
- Growth and Development Patterns
- Environmental Inventory
- Conservation & Recreation Land Inventory

Sept – Nov 2025

Task 3. Community Engagement

- Online survey
- Event #1 and #2

Nov 2025 – April 2026

Task 4. Needs Analysis

January – April 2026

Task 5. Draft 10-Year Action Plan

April – May 2026

Task 6. Writing a Plan

June 2026

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- Regional context
- Population characteristics
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- Conservation & Recreation Land Inventory

Task 3. Community Engagement

Nov 2025 – April 2026

- Online survey
- Event #1 and #2

Task 4. Needs Analysis

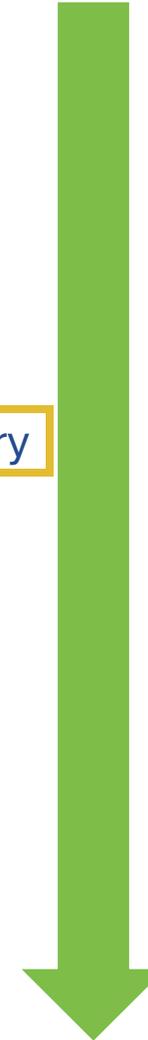
January – April 2026

Task 5. Draft 10-Year Action Plan

April – May 2026

Task 6. Writing a Plan

June 2026



Group agreements

- Listen for understanding, not disagreement
- Consider the opinions and experiences of others
- Bring a spirit of experimentation and creativity
- Take space, make space (take turns speaking, make room for others to speak)
- Speak for yourself and/or the group you represent, not for others

Any modifications?



Agenda

- **Community engagement**
 - Community Engagement (CE) Plan
 - Volunteer sign-up sheet
 - Online survey
 - Clam Fest
- **Open space inventory**
- **Next steps and OSC Meeting #3**

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CE Plan: Goals



Generate awareness
of the OSRP plan and
process



Encourage broad
participation w/ focus on:

- Seniors
- Youth & families w/ kids
- Lower-income households



Make the engagement
process accessible +
creative



Get input on plan
elements that are
otherwise hard to obtain
from other sources (e.g.,
community goals, needs)

→ Develop an OSRP that reflects diverse perspectives in Essex

CE Plan: External engagement

Three main phases of external community engagement:

1

Understand community goals, current conditions, and needs
October 2025 – February 2026

2

Identify and prioritize actions
February – April 2026

3

Receive feedback on the final draft plan
May-June 2026

CE Plan: Committee meetings

Meeting #	Topics covered *
#1 - Sept 2025	Kick-off
#2 – Oct 2025	Prepare for CE Phase 1 + Draft open space inventory
#3 – Nov or Dec 2025	Continue CE Phase 1 + Draft inventory and envtal analysis
#4 – Jan or Feb 2026	Analysis of needs
#5 – March 2026	Brainstorm 10-year action plan + Prepare for CE Phase 2
#6 – April 2026	Finalize the 10-year action plan + Wrap-up CE Phase 2
#7 – May 2026	Final Draft Plan + CE Phase 3

*Subject to change as the project evolves.

How we implement the CE Plan

- The CE Plan lays out tasks for MAPC, Town and OSC
- → **Volunteer sign up sheet for OSC volunteers and friends!**
- We will send you the editable SharePoint link after the meeting. Sign up as you can!

Newspaper article examples

THE WESTFIELD NEWS

Westfield Open Space committee seeks public input through survey

Published: Sep. 17, 2025, 6:00 a.m.



A line of cyclists make their way down the Columbia Greenway Rail Trail during the Mayor's Bike Ride in 2024. (MARC ST. ONGE / THE WESTFIELD NEWS) The Westfield News



By Amy Porter | The Westfield News | aporter@thereminder.com

WESTFIELD — The Open Space and Recreation Advisory Committee has been meeting for the past several months to update a new plan for the City of Westfield, and is now seeking public input.

This plan helps guide how the city invests in parks, conservation lands, trails, playgrounds and recreation opportunities over the next ten years. Public feedback will help ensure that the plan reflects what residents value most, whether that's improving existing facilities, creating new spaces for outdoor activities, or protecting the natural areas that make Westfield special.

Tewksbury Launches Survey On Open Space, Recreation Plan

The town is asking residents to weigh in on its plans for open space and recreation.

 Chris Rhatigan, Patch Staff

Posted Tue, Sep 23, 2025 at 11:56 am ET



The town is asking residents to weigh in on its plans for open space and recreation. (Chris Huffaker/Patch)

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Online survey: Purpose

Purpose: Gather input for the OSRP that we otherwise cannot get from other sources.

1. Community goals & priorities
2. How existing resources are used and perceived
3. Barriers, gaps, needs, and improvements in terms of both conversation and recreation

E.g. Which playgrounds need maintenance / improvements?

E.g. What type of sports fields or amenities?

E.g. Where are walking trails missing, or in poor condition?

E.g. Parcels that should be protected as open space?

Revised survey draft (p1)



2026 Open Space and Recreation Plan Update

The Town of Essex is updating its Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) and we need your input!

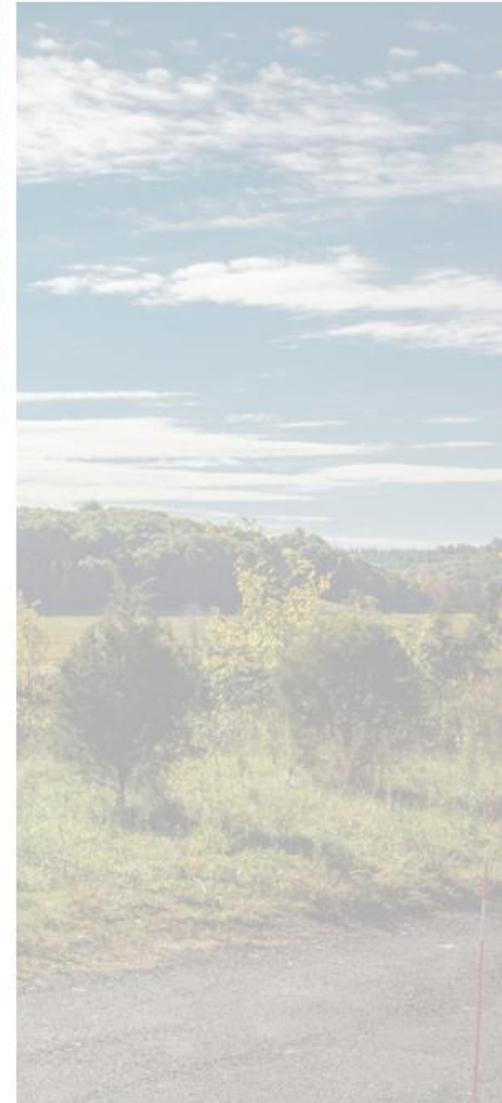
For the purpose of this survey, and the Plan itself, the term 'Open Space' includes all green spaces, woodlands, waterways, parks, and recreational areas, and also refers to undeveloped land with conservation or recreation potential.

We are guided by the Essex Open Space Committee's Mission Statement to **preserve the natural resources of our varied landscapes, especially those with ecological, scenic and/or historic value.** These landscapes are important for public appreciation, recreational enjoyment, undisturbed wildlife habitat and climate resiliency. These are *your* landscapes and we want to know what you think.

Your survey responses will ensure that the things most important to you are reflected in the priorities set forth in this plan.

Once the town has an up-to-date OSRP, we will be eligible to apply for any grant for which a current open space plan is a pre-requisite.

This survey should take no longer than ten minutes to complete and your answers will be automatically saved as you go. Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!



- Revised the intro
- **Note:** Minor text copy edit to the definition of open space, to be consistent with state's definition

Revised survey draft (p2)

How often do you visit or use the following open space and recreation areas?

	5 or more visits per year	1-4 visits per year	Once every few years	I've never been	I'm unaware of this area
<p>Centennial Grove</p> 	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>Chebacco Lake (accessed via Centennial Grove)</p> 	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>Memorial Park</p> 	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



- This is now the first question in the survey
- Reduced number of options from 7 to 5
- Combined all open spaces into one section (rather than splitting them up by conservation vs recreation areas)
- Added MECT Wilderness Conservation Area
- Added 'White's Hill' to Stavros

Revised survey draft (p3)

How often do you (or your household) partake in water-based active recreation in Essex?
(E.g. boating on Chebacco Lake, kayaking in the Essex River, etc.)

5 or more times per year

1-4 times per year

Only once every few years

Never, but I would like to!

Never, and I am not interested

How often do you (or you household) go for a walk/hike on Essex's walking and hiking trails?

5 or more times per year

1-4 times per year

Only once every few years



- Reduced number of options from 7 to 5

Revised survey draft (p4)

What prevents you from visiting the open space and recreation areas listed in the previous questions? Check all that apply.

Unaware of these areas

Unaware of these sites being publicly accessible

Unaware of trails

The type of recreation programs/facilities I'm most interested in are not offered in Essex

Poor condition of parks or facilities

Not enough time

Not interested in visiting open space

- No changes

Revised survey draft (p5)

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No opinion/ neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Existing open spaces in Essex are effectively protecting the most critical natural resources of the town.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Essex should do more to proactively preserve and conserve additional natural resources in the town.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

- Moved this question to be part of the “Goals and Priorities” section and to come later in the survey
- Rephrased the statements and split them into conservation and recreation; **to discuss**

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No opinion/ neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Existing parks and recreational sites in Essex are meeting my (and my household's) recreation needs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Essex should expand recreational amenities and programming to meet the recreational needs of the community as a whole	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Revised survey draft (p6)

Please rate the importance of the following: 🌿 Environmental Protection

	Very Important	Important	Neutral	Less Important	Not Important
Restore or enhance natural habitats (e.g., wetlands, marshes, forests, wildlife areas)	<input type="radio"/>				
Improve water quality and reduce pollution in rivers, pond, marshes	<input type="radio"/>				
Protect ecologically valuable areas from future development	<input type="radio"/>				
Protect scenic views around Essex	<input type="radio"/>				
Plant more trees along streets and in public parks	<input type="radio"/>				
Other (Please specify): <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>				

- There was ambiguity about item 1 and 3; we recommend keeping them. **To discuss.**
- Added “Protect scenic views”
- Edited “Plant more trees along streets and in public parks”
- Deleted “Strengthen envtla regulations for new development” and “Yard care”
- **Note:** Comment about the benefits of open space for climate resiliency → addressed in the “Education” section

Revised survey draft (p7)

Please rate the importance of the following: 📍 Recreation Facilities and Programming

- No changes

	Very Important	Important	Neutral	Less Important	Not Important
Improve maintenance of existing parks and playing fields	<input type="radio"/>				
Add new recreational facilities (e.g., playground, splash pad, tennis court, community garden)	<input type="radio"/>				
Offer more recreation programs (e.g., youth camps, fitness classes, senior activities)	<input type="radio"/>				
Host more community events (e.g., concerts, festivals)	<input type="radio"/>				
Increase seating, lighting, and restrooms in parks	<input type="radio"/>				
Other (Please specify): <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>				

Revised survey draft (p8)

Please rate the importance of the following: 🚲 Access and Connectivity

	Very Important	Important	Neutral	Less Important	Not Important
Improve signage and wayfinding	<input type="radio"/>				
Better connect parks and open spaces with walking trails	<input type="radio"/>				
Better connect parks and open spaces with bike paths or bike trails	<input type="radio"/>				
Provide public access to rivers and other water bodies	<input type="radio"/>				
Other (Please specify): <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>				

- No changes; we recommend keeping “Provide public access to rivers and other water bodies”
- We do not recommend including a question about parking here; this is better suited to the barriers and needs section
- **To discuss**

Revised survey draft (p9)

Please rate the importance of the following: 📢 Communication and Education

	Very Important	Important	Neutral	Less Important	Not Important
Provide more information about existing parks, trails, and programming (via town website, social media, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>				
Provide more information about how a Conservation Restriction (CR) works	<input type="radio"/>				
Provide more information about wildlife in Essex	<input type="radio"/>				
Provide more information on the health and climate benefits of open space	<input type="radio"/>				
Other (Please specify): <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>				

- Renamed this to be “[Communication and Education](#)”
- Added/consolidated three suggested educational items; **to confirm.**

Revised survey draft (p10)

Please rate the importance of the following: 🌳 Long-term Maintenance & Acquisition

	Very Important	Important	Neutral	Less Important	Not Important
Acquire more land for conservation and natural resource protection	<input type="radio"/>				
Acquire more land for active recreation (e.g., ballfields, playgrounds)	<input type="radio"/>				
Improve long-term maintenance of existing open space and recreation areas	<input type="radio"/>				
Other (Please specify): <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>				

- Slight reorganization and simplification of this section but keeping the questions about potential acquisition; **to discuss**
- **Note:** Asking about the importance of flood protection may be more appropriate for the Town’s MVP/HMP.

Are there any parcels you think the Town should investigate or recommend for permanent protection for either conservation or recreation purposes? Please use the [Essex interactive mapping webpage](#) to find the specific parcel ID, or describe the area as specifically as possible.

Revised survey draft (p11-14)

- No changes to other remaining sections
 - Option to add explanation to scores (p11)
 - Preferred channels of communication (p12)
 - Demographics (p13)
 - Final open-ended questions + thank you (p14)

Agenda

- **Community engagement**
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 - **Clam Fest**
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Clam Fest on October 25

- **Goals:**
 - Spread the word about the OSRP process
 - Encourage people to fill out the survey
 - Get live feedback through activities and informal discussions
- **Staffing:**
 - Evelyne St-Louis, John Cruz, Lindsay Randall (MAPC)
 - If possible: 1-2 OSC volunteers
- **Logistics:**
 - Saturday Oct 25, 11am-4pm; MAPC will set-up before 10am.
 - Memorial Park (back-up rain location: Elementary school)
 - Folding table, tent, and activity materials
- **Activities:**
 - Mapping with sticker dots + post-its
 - “Lobster trap” activity

Flyers



Business card size (3 x 2.5)
Two-sided



Postcard size (4 x 6)
One-sided

Website



www.mapc.ma/essex-osrp

We will add the link to the survey and Clam Fest info once it's ready to publish.

ESSEX OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN

Essex Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP)

The Town of Essex is working with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) to update its Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP).

OSRPs are a tool through which municipalities plan for the future of their conservation and recreation resources. The Town of Essex's previous OSRP was completed in 2016.

The 2026 OSRP update will include goals and action items for the next ten years to preserve and improve parks, open spaces, and recreation resources in Essex.

The Town and MAPC (the Planning Team) together will work with Essex residents and stakeholders to understand the community's needs and priorities in terms of recreation and conservation. Input received from community members will directly inform recommended actions.

Questions? Please contact:

Evelyne St-Louis, Principal Land Use Planner at MAPC, est-louis@mapc.org

Valerie Massard, Essex Town Planner, vmassard@essexma.org

Stay in the Know!

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[Timeline](#)

[Resources](#)

[What is an OSRP?](#)



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Open space inventory

- Detailed inventory of all existing open space and recreation areas in a municipality
- Required by State OSRP Guidebook
- Why prepare it?
 - 1) Document existing conditions
 - 2) Inform the needs analysis and action plan, especially with regards to existing areas that need improvement

Information requested

Table 1:
Town-owned
conservation
and recreation
properties

Table 2:
Public parcels
providing
conservation/
recreation
amenities, but
not held by Con
Comm (other
town, state,
federal, nonprofit)

Table 3:
Permanently
protected
private parcels

(e.g. CR, APR,
WPR, Chap 61,
61A or 61B, or
other major
estates)

Map: Parcel-level map of all sites identified in Tables 1-3

Table 1: Info needed

Table 1: Town-owned conservation and recreation properties

Property Name	Current Use	Recreation Potential	Condition	Public Access	Grant Received	OS_ID
Centennial Grove						
Chebacco Lake						
Conomo Point						
Memorial Park						
[More]						

Table 1: Info needed

Table 1: Town-owned conservation and recreation properties

Property Name	Current Use	Recreation Potential	Condition	Public Access	Grant Received	OS_ID
Centennial Grove						
Chebacco Lake						
Conomo Point						
Memorial Park						
[More]						

Note: This will require technical info from the assessor database, **and** more qualitative info from the Town and the OSC

Table 2: Info needed

Table 2: Public parcels providing conservation/ recreation amenities, but not held by Con Comm (other town, state, federal, nonprofit)

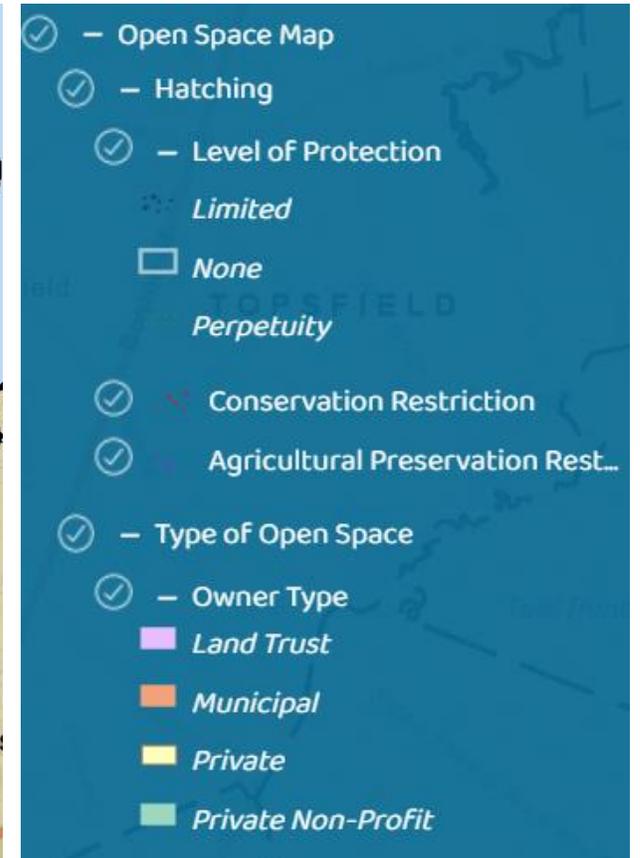
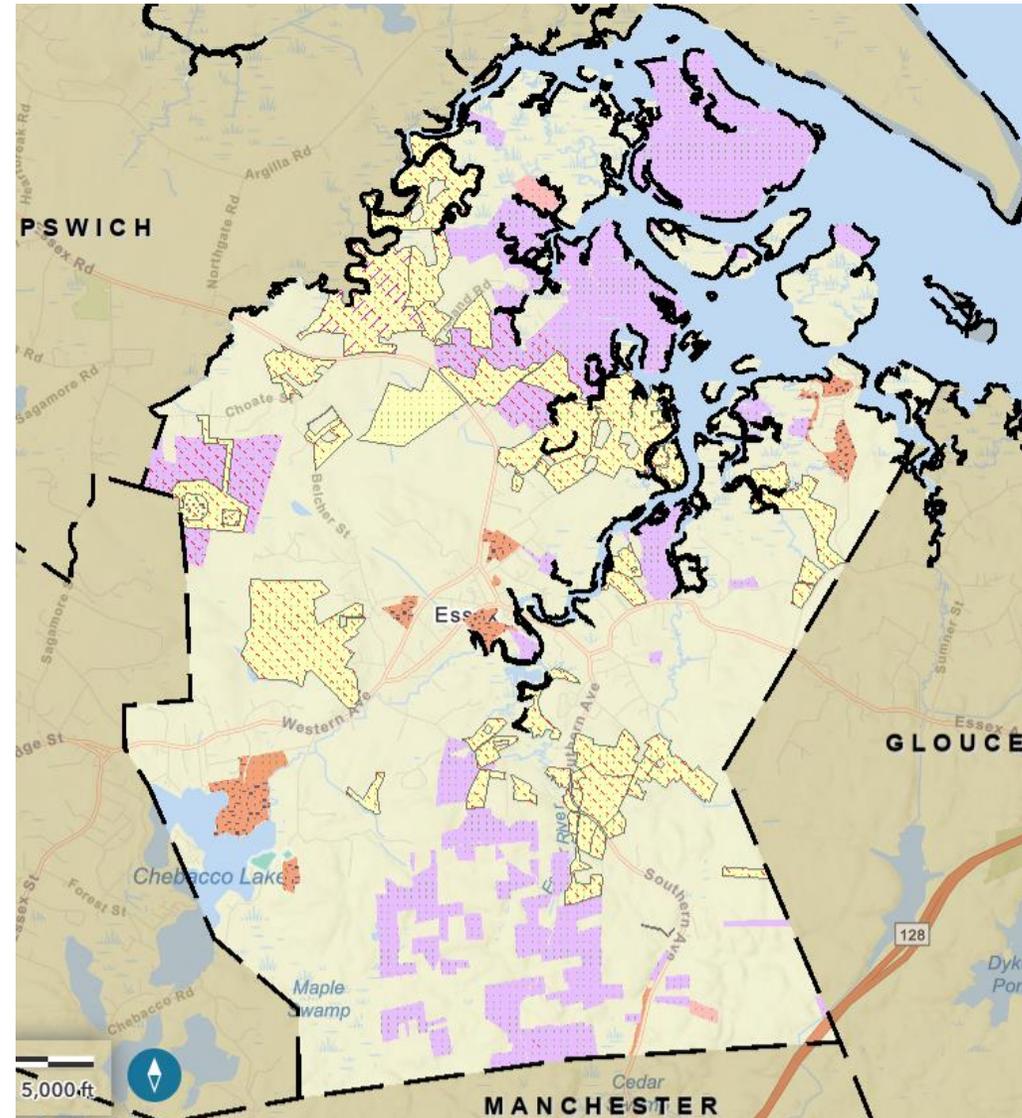
Property Name	Owner	Current Use
Essex Elementary School		
Allyn Cox Reservation		
Warren Woods		
Stavros Reservation		
[More]		

Table 3: Info needed

Table 3: Permanently protected private parcels (e.g. CR, APR, WPR, Chap 61, 61A or 61B, or other major estates) *i.e., not owned by nonprofits*

Property Name	Owner	Current Use
Bothways Farm		
Castle Neck River Property		
Cape Ann Golf Course		
[More]		

Map of all open space sites



<https://www.axisgis.com/EssexMA/>

Challenges – Data Matching

- **There are three datasets that need to be merged:**
 - The open space table that is part of the OSRP
 - The GIS dataset that is maintained regularly
 - Other open space in neither dataset that needs to be added

In some cases, a parcel appears on the GIS dataset but not the table, and vice versa.

Our goal is that everything is updated, and the necessary datasets contain the same data so future OSRP updates will be easier.

Challenges – Data Gaps

- **There are two types of gaps that need addressing in the data.**
 1. Where data was “consolidated”. What should have been many rows in the OSRP data table were often consolidated into a single row and identified as “other public parcels”. Our goal is to explicitly label them.
 2. Gaps in the data columns, such as the condition of an open space parcel, grants received that support it, use and potential, etc.

Process and next steps

- **MAPC + Town** to work together to reconcile the 2016 OSRP inventory, the Town's newer 2024 shapefile, and any new additions since then.
- **We may ask for the Committee's input on Table 1:**
 - Current Use
 - Recreation Potential
 - Condition
 - Public Access

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Next steps

MAPC / Town of Essex



Keep developing the land inventory and environmental analysis; share drafts at OSC Mtg #3



Launch the survey and final prep for Clam Fest



Prepare for OSC Meeting #3 (**first week of December?**)

Open Space Committee

- Volunteer using the sign-up sheet (we will send the link)
- Spread the word about the online survey

Thank you!

Valerie Massard, Town of Essex - vmassard@essexma.org

Evelyne St-Louis, MAPC - est-louis@mapc.org

John Cruz, MAPC - jcruz@mapc.org