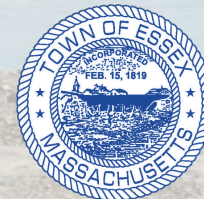


Town of Essex Open Space & Recreation Plan 2026 Update

Open Space Committee Meeting #5

March 16, 2026



Agenda

- Where we are in the process
- Quick project updates
- Community event #2
- Summary of needs + recent accomplishments
- **Workshopping the action plan *****
- Next steps

Would everyone be comfortable with recording today's meeting for note taking purposes?

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



A scenic view of a lake or bay. In the foreground, there is a stone wall on the left and a wooden chair on a small platform. The water is calm and blue. In the background, there is a forested shoreline under a blue sky with scattered white clouds.

Where we are in the process

Timeline

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 – Dec 2025

Task 3. Community Engagement

- Online survey
- Event #1
- Event #2

Oct 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

Timeline – detailed

Event	Date	Outcome
Open Space Committee Mtg #5	March 16	Draft goals + strategies
Community Event #2	April 16	Input on draft goals + strategies
Open Space Committee Mtg #6	April 29 or 30	Revise goals + strategies; start filling in specific actions
Internal Draft (Draft v1) for review by Town + OSC	May 15	
Comments due	May 29	
Open Space Committee Mtg #7	Date TBD	Discuss final revisions
External Draft (Draft v2) for review by the public + official letters of review	June 5	
Comments due	June 19	
Final Draft (Draft v3) for submission to the state	June 30	



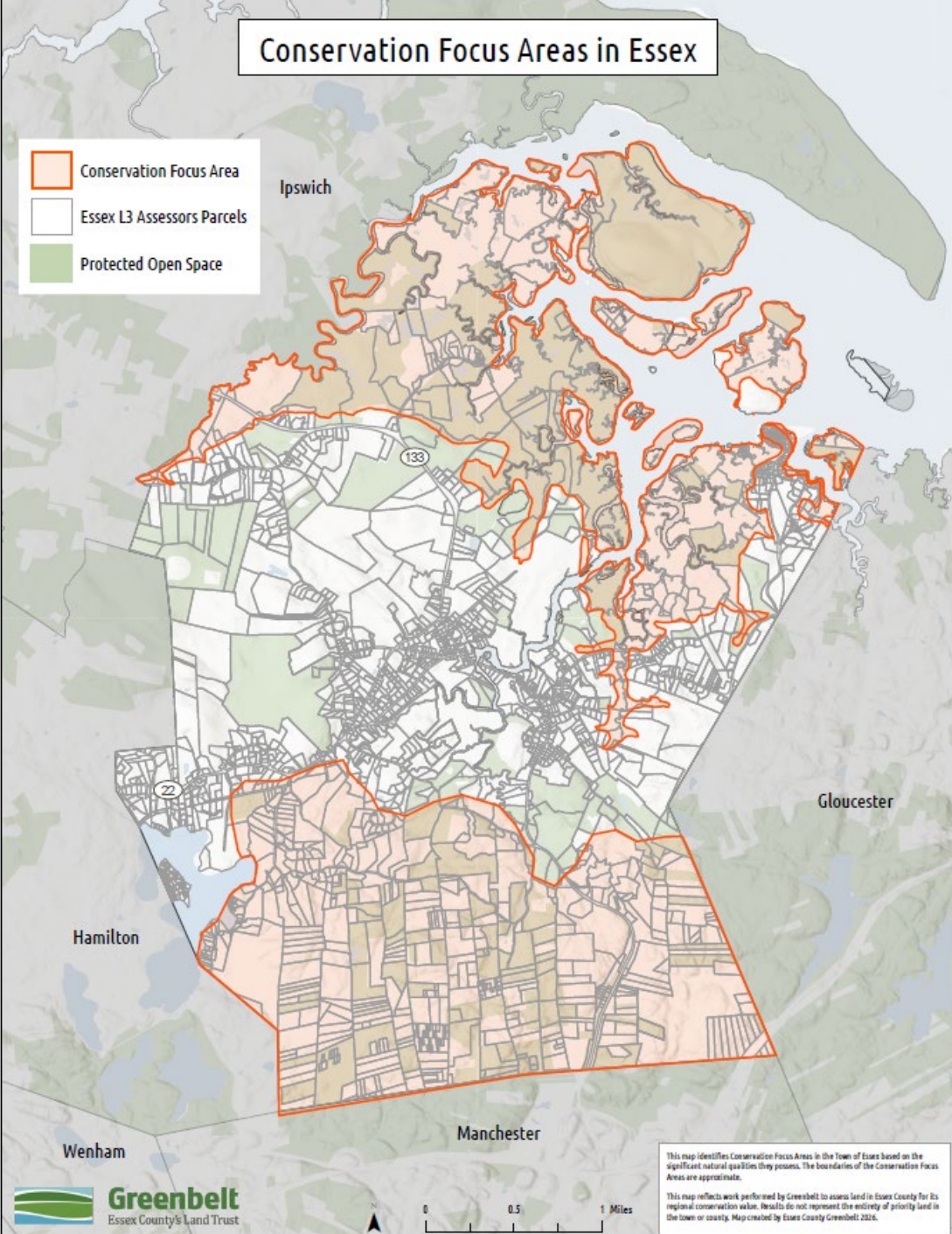
Quick Project Updates

Greenbelt prioritization maps & presentation

Regional recreational research conducted by Town Staff

Conservation Focus Areas in Essex

- Conservation Focus Area
- Essex L3 Assessors Parcels
- Protected Open Space



This map identifies Conservation Focus Areas in the Town of Essex based on the significant natural qualities they possess. The boundaries of the Conservation Focus Areas are approximate.

This map reflects work performed by Greenbelt to assess land in Essex County for its regional conservation value. Results do not represent the entirety of priority land in the town or county. Map created by Essex County Greenbelt 2024.

Maps prepared by ECGA:

- Conservation focus areas
- Coastal flooding prioritization
- Inland flooding prioritization
- Habitat prioritization
- Natural resilience prioritization
- Drinking water prioritization

They have offered to present these maps and answer questions. We will share the maps by email.

We can invite ECGA to join our next committee meeting on **April 29 or 30** and extend the meeting by 30 min - OR find a separate time/day.

What is the committee's preference?

Public Properties Used for Active Recreation Facilities: courts, playgrounds, athletic fields		
Location	Town	Facilities
Coach Field	Manchester	Adjacent to Memorial Elementary School and Regional Middle & High School; field is synthetic turf and has a scoreboard; two tennis courts with sports lighting; parking
Centennial Grove at Chebacco Lake	Essex	Two baseball diamonds and soccer fields
Manchester Essex Regional Middle & High School	Manchester	Indoor gymnasium
Essex Elementary School	Essex	Eagles Nest Playground – run by Essex Parent-Teachers Organization (PTO); parking; ball fields; outdoor basketball hoops and indoor gym managed by MERS Committee.
Masconomo Park	Manchester	One Little League baseball field; playground; gazebo, dock, and pier; parking
Memorial Elementary School	Manchester	Playground; parking
Memorial Park	Essex	Baseball, softball, soccer, 2 tennis courts in poor condition, some parking; site of numerous townwide events: Easter Egg Hunt, Clamfest, Essex Pride Week, Chowder Festival, Essex Farmers' Market, Holiday Parade
Sweeney Field	Manchester	Baseball field, softball field, multi-use rectangular field (which overlaps the softball field); one recently renovated basketball court and one older basketball court; skate park nearby; parking

Nearby On-Road Biking

Name	About
Cape Ann Loop (via Gloucester & Rockport)	scenic coastal ride with ocean views along Cape Ann. A majority of this ride is RT 127. A shorter loop through Cape Ann Woods and along 127 is also available.
Danvers Rail Trail	(≈20 minutes from Essex) Flat, familyfriendly crushedstone trail; Connects to the Border to Boston Trail network. 7.1 miles each way.
Independence Greenway (Peabody)	Paved, smooth, and great for casual riders; 1-6 miles each way, depending on route taken
Border to Boston Trail (regional network)	Longterm project connecting multiple North Shore towns. Several completed segments are within a short drive. 70-mile shared use trail.

	Nonprofit Operation	Private Operation
tennis	Cape Ann Platform Tennis Club; Annisquam Yacht Club Sailing & Tennis Program	Essex County Club; Beverly Golf & Tennis Club; Manchester Athletic Club; Annisquam Yacht Club
pickleball	Ipswich Family Y; Beverly YMCA	Essex County Club; Manchester Athletic Club
kayaking, rowing (shell, other) and SUP boarding	Cape Ann Rowing Club; Gordon College Rowing Club	Gordon Rowing Center at Essex has a collegiate program; Cape Ann SUP in Essex
sailing, boating	Essex Bay Sailing Club	Manchester Yacht Club; Annisquam Yacht Club
fishing	n/a	several private charters offering a variety of locations and fishing options within 15 minute radius
golf	n/a	Cape Ann Golf Course; Essex County Club; New Meadows Golf Club; Beverly Golf & Tennis Club
swimming & diving, splash park	Ipswich Family Y; Beverly YMCA; Cape Ann YMCA	Goldfish Swim School; Manchester Athletic Club
basketball	Ipswich Family Y; Manchester-Essex Travel Basketball, Inc. (METB); Beverly YMCA	Essex Sports Center; Danvers Indoor Sports
martial arts	n/a	closest martial arts school is about 5.1 miles away in Beverly Farms
baseball & softball	Manchester Essex Little League (MELL)	Manchester Athletic Club
field hockey, lacrosse, soccer & futsal; volleyball	Manchester Essex Youth Soccer; Essex County Youth Soccer Association (ECYSA); The Essex County Youth Futsal League, Inc. (ECYFL)	Essex Sports Center, Manchester Athletic Club; Manchester Athletic Club; Danvers Indoor Sports
ice hockey & skating	Dorothy Talbot Skating Rink (enterprise fund)	Essex Sports Center; Heads Up Hockey, LLC
flag football & football	North Shore Flag Football, Cape Ann Youth Football (CAYFB) League	n/a
cheerleading & gymnastics	Cape Ann YMCA	Iron Rail Gymnastics Academy, ACE Gymnastics
indoor & outdoor track	Beverly YMCA; Torigian Family Y	Danvers Indoor Sports, Beverly Athletic Club
general fitness programming	Ipswich Family Y; Beverly YMCA; Torigian Family Y; Cape Ann YMCA	There are many private facilities that run yoga and/or provide fitness classes
skiing (downhill & cross-country)	Essex County Club (winter X-country)	many options within a reasonable drive from Essex

A scenic view of a rocky coastline. In the foreground, a wooden chair sits on a stone wall overlooking the ocean. The water is blue, and the sky is a clear, bright blue with scattered white clouds. The background shows a line of trees and a distant shore.

Community Event #2

Community Event #2

- **Purpose** : Get feedback on the draft goals and strategies. What are the community's highest priorities? Did we miss anything important?
- **Date & time**: Thursday April 16, 6:00 - 7:30pm?
- **Format**: Live, virtual community forum
- **Note**: We will also create a short online feedback form for those who aren't able to attend the online event, open until April 30
 - It will only ask a limited set of questions about the draft goals + strategies
 - We can include a link to the presentation recording

Event run-of-show


- Welcome + short ice breaker / polling activity (10 min)
- Presentation by MAPC + Town + Committee (20-25 min)
 - Intro by the Town and the Open Space Committee
 - OSRP 101
 - Findings from the community engagement process
 - Draft goals and strategies
- Interactive activity to get feedback on our draft goals and strategies (30-40 min)
 - Interactive polling activity (e.g. Mentimeter)
 - Another option would be a more interactive whiteboard/sticky note exercise (e.g. Miro). This might require going into breakout rooms.

Host screen



Participant screen




 **Mentimeter**


Short responses are recommended.
You have 200 characters left.

You may submit multiple responses

Submit



What are your main takeaways from the new strategy?



...with the things all the people we need for
S

...excited to see how we can leverage new
data sources/analytics tools to make
smarter, more informed decisions!

How exciting, but this is exciting!

This will be awesome :D

...improve customer relationship with key

I'm excited to see all the changes! I'm
not very confident if we have the
resources to do all this within a short
span of time though

the right direction for us to go

Cross-department change is crucial

...high priority key

ROI will be a big focus, we need to
communicate top level impact to all
stakeholders once a week

Focus on ROI

11 / 29

Press **ENTER** to group resources

Part 2

Instructions: Sort the stakeholders brainstormed above based on how they should be engaged throughout the process.



Information-gathering Sources

- Inspectional Services Dept (should be anonymous) - interview and reporting testimony
- All groups - Board of Health Inspectors
- Assessor's department



Interview - Engagement Objectives:

- MAPC staff will conduct up to 10 interviews with relevant stakeholders.
- Understand the trends in challenges that members of protected classes face seeking housing in Chelsea

- Stakeholder Interviews**
- Chelsea Housing Authority
 - Local landlords/property management companies
 - Housing Families
 - Chelsea Restoration
 - CAPIC
 - Roca
 - Elliot Center
 - Community Land Trust
 - HarborCov
 - Latino Car (North Suffolk Mental Health)
 - City Manager
 - MassHire Program (TND)
 - Chelsea's DEI Officer

Utilities

St. Luke's Food Pantry

Serenata Anyfoot Facility

Direct Resident Outreach / Engagement

- MGH Chelsea Healthcare Center
- Chelsea Black Community (FB group)
- Faith Organizations: St. Rose, AME
- All groups - Market Basket
- Laundromat - families
- Chelsea Eats
- City Life/Urbana - can help with outreach (Spanish speaking community)
- Chelsea Community Connections
- Housing wait lists
- Chelsea Community Garden
- All groups - Market Basket
- Chelsea Police Dept
- East Boston Park
- For Spanish speaking community - hairdressers, faith community (Mikaela has specific ideas)
- HUB (Dan Cortez) and Board of Health Navigators
- Groupworking outdoors

There are several cafes in town that people congregate at where they have conversations on city topics.

All groups - approach with food, music, and conversation rather than brochures and handouts

Outreach: MAPC staff will distribute flyers and questionnaires through community partners and service providers.

Engagement: The MAPC team will identify 3 opportunities to conduct direct engagement, such as tableing at events and conducting questionnaires

The purpose is twofold: first, to meet residents where they are and provide opportunities for informal input and education; second, to invite residents to participate in additional engagement such as focus groups.

Focus Group - Engagement Objectives:

- Hear from residents and non-residents about the experience of seeking housing in Chelsea
- Collect information on the experiences of protected classes that are not captured in quantitative or demographic data

- Focus Groups**
- Direct connections through advisory group members
- Youth, especially high school
- Green Roots
 - CPS (schools)
 - Eco Youth Group/GreenRoots
 - Senior Center
 - Al Huda Society
 - Families in need are always at restaurants parks and Brochures is something people generally throw out
 - Mystic Valley Elder Services (Tracy)
 - First Congregational church
 - Chelsea Kiwanis Club
 - Chelsea Public Library
 - Chelsea Community Connections Coalition
 - Laundromat - families
 - Temple Emmanuel
 - Displacement is an issue for seniors - sites of potential displacement
 - Elder Services for Chelsea/Revere/Winthrop
 - Pine Street Inn (works with veterans in the community)
 - Soldier's Home (events occur here)
 - TND Veteran's Housing (Common Spaces)

Boards and Committee Visits

- Chelsea Youth Commission
- TND has a Steering Housing committee. I can check with Sharon the Community Engagement Director about this group which meet the third Monday of the month.
- Chelsea LGBTQ Coalition
- TND Housing Steering Committee (resident-led)
- Housing Authority Board - Resident Advisory Committee

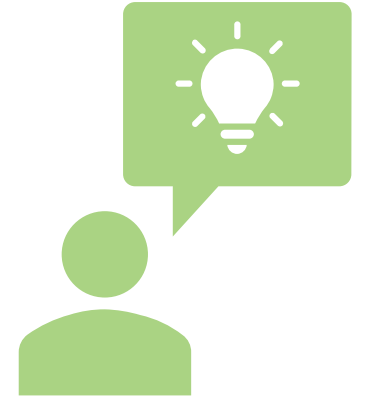
Engagement Objectives:

- MAPC Staff will visit up to three boards, committees, or commissions in Chelsea to discuss fair housing and this plan.
- Hear from the group about their experiences with fair housing and related challenges
- Inform the group about the FHP
- Invite them to spread the word about opportunities to engage



Discussion

- Start time and duration of event?
- Do you have any ideas or suggestions for the interactive activity?
- Which committee members are available to attend? Would you be interested in a particular role?
- Who would be able to help publicize the event and the online feedback form?
- **Next steps: We will share draft materials for your review by April 6**





Recent accomplishments and Needs analysis

Process

1:1
interviews

Event #1
(ClamFest)

Community
survey

Review of
past reports
and studies

Mapping of
existing
conditions

NEEDS ANALYSIS

“Systematic examination of what is needed to achieve the community's goals for conservation and recreation as heard through the public participation process.”

Process



NEEDS ANALYSIS

“Systematic examination of what is needed to achieve the community's goals for conservation and recreation as heard through the public participation process.”

Review of accomplishments since 2016

Process



NEEDS ANALYSIS

“Systematic examination of what is needed to achieve the community's goals for conservation and recreation as heard through the public participation process.”

Review of accomplishments since 2016

ACTION PLAN

Accomplishments since 2016

Natural resource protection



Community recreation



Management & governance



Accomplishments since last plan: Natural resource protection



- **Great Marsh:** Major restoration project led by The Trustees to restore natural hydrology of the marsh. Multiple grants (2026 from DEP, 2021 from North American Wetlands Conservation Act, 2019 from National Fish & Wildlife Foundation).
 - Also \$200,000 grant from DEP for culvert work at Island Rd
- **Essex River and river basin:** Dredging of Essex River by US Army Corps of Engineers (\$4.4 million federal grant)
- **Chebacco Lake + Alewife Brook:** Three rounds of state legislative earmarks to assess water levels and water quality. Hamilton also received an earmark for same work. Applied Watershed Sciences LLC (AWS) performed the assessment.
- **Manchester-Essex Woods:** MECT “Save Our Woods” Campaign. Included acquisition of 12 acres off Southern Avenue (2023) and 20 acres off Rocky Hill Road (2024)
- **Sagamore Hill:** Acquisition by MECT of Donovan property (83 ac) in Essex. CPC contribution in 2016. Note that majority of Sagamore Hill area is in Hamilton.
- **Pennoyer parcel:** Acquisition of 90 acres in Essex and Gloucester by ECGA.

Accomplishments since last plan: Natural resource protection



- **Conomo Point:** Seawall replacement – design & assessment grant in 2018, construction replacement in 2021
- **Awarded plans and studies (upcoming)**
 - **MVP 2026:** Upper Castle Neck Salt Marsh Restoration → elimination of the Old Essex Rd causeway and subsequent daylighting of the Castle Neck River
 - **MVP 2.0** Regional Assessment with four other Cape Ann communities
- **Completed plans and studies:**
 - Town of Essex Hazard Mitigation Plan (2025)
 - Town of Essex Strategic Plan 2023-2028
 - Feasibility Study of Elevation of Apple Street (2021) + MPO Study (2025)
 - Great Marsh Coastal Adaption Plan (2017)
 - And more: <https://www.essexma.org/1536/Coastal-Resilience-Resources>

Accomplishments since last plan: Community recreation



- **Memorial Park**
 - Improvements to baseball viewing patio (CPC + donations)
 - Renovation of tennis courts IN PROGRESS (CPC + donations)
- **Centennial Grove**
 - New Folsom Pavillion
 - New ADA-compliant restrooms and bleachers
- **Conomo Point**
 - Riverfront Park improvements, including deck, removable stairs, benches, storage, dock and access ramp in 2017
 - Clammers Beach: New sand installed in 2017
- **Paglia Park**
 - Renovations and new benches after Causeway bridge work

Accomplishments since last plan: Community recreation



- **Access to Essex River @ Town Landing**
 - In 2025, the Town issued a lottery for 10 seasonal permits for non-residents. Likely to issue another lottery for 2026.
 - New railings installed in 2017
- **Essex River Cultural District (Essex River Walkway)**
 - Downtown Placemaking Plan (2023)
 - Brochures, maps, website updates
- **Youth programming**
 - Expanded contract with YMCA, also renewed for 2023-2028. Includes summer camp at Centennial Grove + youth and adult enrichment programs on a year-round basis + after-school programming at Essex Elementary
 - Essex Library has taken on more programming for kids
 - Manchester Rec is open to Essex kids, but transportation can be an issue

Accomplishments since last plan: Management & governance



- Ongoing relationship with the nonprofit land trusts
- Expanded partnership and contract with the YMCA (see prior slide)
- [What else? Did we miss anything?]

Summary of needs

Natural resource protection

What actions must be taken to keep land, water, air, and wildlife healthy?



Community recreation

What are the outdoor recreation needs of your residents?



Management & governance

What management or governance structure is needed to implement the Action Plan?



Summary of needs: Natural resource protection



1. Protect and restore key natural resource areas, including:

- **Great Marsh** – issues of salt marsh restoration & management
- **Essex River & Estuary**– issues of excessive sedimentation; flooding
- **Chebacco Lake and Alewife Brook** – issues of watershed quality and quantity for both human water supplies and biodiversity. Siltation and sedimentation, toxic algae blooms, beaver dam water stoppage and poor summertime lake flushing, maintenance of the historic alewife fish run.
- **Manchester-Essex Woods** – issues of ongoing forest protection; clarity over management & governance
- **Certified vernal pools**

2. Pursue strategic and high priority expansion of conservation lands to achieve overlapping climate resiliency and biodiversity goals

3. Protect key scenic landscapes and viewsheds

4. Protect key farmland of importance

Summary of needs: Community recreation



1. Maintenance of existing active recreational assets:

- Memorial Park
 - Existing tennis courts in need of repair and maintenance (IN PROCESS)
 - Existing playground in need of investment or improvement
 - Site of former public safety building could be better utilized
- Centennial Grove:
 - Existing amenities need improvement and ongoing maintenance.
 - Need for better access for residents – sense that this is an underutilized resources both in terms of availability in the summer and parking access.
- Conomo Point: Need for easier resident access for boating and swimming.

2. Maintenance of existing passive recreational assets:

- Trail management was generally mentioned as an issue.
- Centennial Grove specifically mentioned as needing better trail management

Summary of needs: Community recreation



3. Improved access to water resources

- Need for easier access to Essex River, especially Town Landing
- Need for easier access to Conomo Point - especially for boat access
- Need for easier access to Chebacco Lake

4. Desire for new active recreational assets:

- Soccer and pickleball most frequently mentioned
- Splash pads and playgrounds also mentioned for kids

5. Desire for more recreation & programming for specific age groups:

- Youth programming; athletic fields
- Senior programming; various needs depending on age group of seniors

6. Need for bicycle infrastructure

- Better bike path access generally noted as lacking in all of Essex. Most frequently mentioned was connection to Manchester via Southern Ave + access to Conomo Point

Summary of needs: Management & governance



1. Need for greater education and awareness of the community

- Lack of awareness of existing open space resources (some parks are especially less well known, such as Stavros or Warren Weld)
- Need for education about the *value* of open space -- for tourism, climate resiliency, etc.
- Need for education about part of Essex that are not developable

2. Need for more coordinated and proactive maintenance of existing open space

- Lack of clarity re: Conservation Commission ownership of land. Need for detailed surveyor work to identify location of tax title land owned by Con Comm.
- Lack of capacity for management of Town-owned open spaces – DPW, Town Administrator
- Need for more proactive land management: Annual assessment of accessible town-owned open space - walk the bounds, check for encroachment or issues.
- Collaboration with other major landowners – especially nonprofit land trusts.

Summary of needs: Management & governance



3. Need for a more proactive approach to future land conservation

- Need for a more proactive approach to highest priority land for conservation given competing goals in the Town.

4. Need for better ongoing administration open space inventory related data

- Need for ongoing updates to the tabular and spatial database of the Essex open space inventory as parcels are acquired or uses changes.

A scenic view of a rocky coastline. In the foreground, a wooden chair sits on a small, elevated stone platform overlooking a body of water. The water is a deep blue, and the sky is a lighter blue with scattered white clouds. The background shows a distant shoreline with trees and a field.

Workshopping the Action Plan

Action Plan

Goals

→ Strategies

→ Actions

Timeline

Funding

Party responsible

Action Plan

Goals

→ Strategies

→ Actions



Focus for today

Timeline

Funding



Focus for OSC Meeting #6

Party responsible

Discussion

- What are the highest priority goals and/or strategies for the 2026 OSRP?



Goals from 2016

- **Goal A.** Protect and preserve Essex's open spaces
- **Goal B.** Support and improve recreational opportunities and access to open spaces for all Essex citizens
- **Goal C.** Improve public education and awareness of the unique nature of Essex's natural resources and challenges to preservation
- **Goal D.** Strengthen the Town of Essex's capacity for preserving and protecting open space strategically and proactively

- **Do we want to carry forward these goals into the 2026 Plan?**
- **Is there anything we should ADD, EDIT, or REMOVE?**

Strategies from 2016

- **Do we want to carry these strategies forward into the new plan? Is there anything we should ADD, EDIT, or REMOVE?**
- [See separate Excel document]

A scenic view of a rocky coastline. In the foreground, a wooden chair sits on a stone wall overlooking a blue bay. The water is calm, and the sky is filled with soft, white clouds. The background shows a line of trees and a distant shore.

Next Steps

Next steps

- **MAPC & Town**
 - Prep for Event #2 + draft materials for review due by April 6
 - Advertise Event #2 by posting on project & Town website
 - Draft the written deliverable – first draft due May 15
- **Open Space Committee**
 - Help us advertise Event #2
 - Attend + volunteer at Event #2 on April 16
 - **Pick a date for Open Space Committee Meeting #6: April 29 or 30?
Extend to 2 hours to invite Greenbelt?**
 - Continue to think about the Action Plan – not just Goals and Strategies, but also specific Action Items.



Thank you!

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John Cruz, MAPC - jcruz@mapc.org