

Falmouth, Maine

# Trails Master Plan

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Prepared by  
The **Falmouth Trails Advisory Committee**

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Falmouth Trails Master Plan

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**Map of Trails in Use as Of September, 2000**

# Introduction

The Trails Master Plan was originally a part of the Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Trails Master Plan, officially adopted by the Town Council in 1996. Many changes have occurred in Falmouth since then, and this year the Town decided to split the original plan into two separate documents. The Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan deals mainly with bikeways, sidewalks, and recreation paths that lie within the right-of-way of Town roads, or within the boundaries of parks, school grounds, and other publicly-owned open spaces. In contrast, the Trails Master Plan deals mainly with the Town-wide system of off-road trails that are located on both public and private property.

Another distinction between the two plans is that the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan deals with facilities that have been improved in some way through construction and engineering practices, such as is typically the case with paved shoulders, sidewalks in urban areas, and graded recreation paths. In contrast, the Trails Master Plan deals mainly with foot paths, old farm roads, and old logging roads in rural areas that do not generally have an improved surface. Such trails are kept open and free of vegetation only because of regular use by hikers, snowmobilers, equestrians, and other recreationists.

One of the factors that makes a separate Trails Master Plan possible is the trail inventory, which was conducted by the Falmouth Trails advisory Committee between October 1999 and September 2000. The existence of the inventory allows the Town to develop policy for this unique resource in a way that was not possible in 1996.

Some things about the Trails Master Plan have not changed since the adoption of the original Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Trails Master Plan. It is still a guide to public policy in making the community more accessible to people using the Town-wide trail network for outdoor recreation. It does not tell people where they can or cannot perform these activities, nor does it limit the rights of property owners who have permitted trails to exist on their land. Instead, it strives to create a framework of understanding in which the public sector in cooperation with user groups and private landowners can work together to preserve trail opportunities throughout the community. In order to achieve this goal, the master planning process attempts to:

- 1) respect the rights of property owners;
- 2) respect the capability and needs of user groups; and,
- 3) preserve a comprehensive system of trails for public use while maintaining the integrity of the natural and manmade environments through which the trails pass.



Figure 1 -- Off-road trails provide unique recreational opportunities.

# Part 1:

# Concepts

## Basic Planning Concepts

### Linkages

Trails link places where people live with open space, and they also link one open space area with another. Because open space is a destination from a transportation point of view, Falmouth's off-road trails can be thought of as another part of the alternative transportation network that includes bikeways, sidewalks, and recreation paths.

### User Groups

People traveling by different means often have different needs for a transportation system. Hikers prefer relatively short trails that are interconnected to form larger networks consisting of loops and shortcuts. Snowmobilers prefer routes that link open spaces on a town-wide and even statewide basis. Equestrians prefer routes that are not obstructed by rocks, boulders, and potholes.

When considered collectively, people traveling in each of these different ways is called a *user group*. The concept of the user group is essential in order to manage the Town-wide trail network efficiently.

## Trail Facilities

### The Town-wide Trail System

There are many miles of off-road trails used for recreation in Falmouth. They are generally not managed by any one group or agency, nor have the landowners in most cases given permission for the public to use them. They follow old logging roads, farm roads, and power lines through forestland, across streams and wetlands, and over rocky hills, giving the public access to Falmouth's open spaces in a way that is not possible by any other means.

The trails form a logical pattern of trunk lines, feeder lines, interconnecting trails and shortcuts. They develop near neighborhoods and population centers and cross to other neighborhoods and population centers. They have developed in a largely spontaneous way, and some of the routes currently in use have probably been used as trails since before settlement times. Current recreational uses on these trails include snowmobiling, ATV riding, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, mountain biking, horseback riding, hunting, hiking, running, berry-picking, and watching wildlife.

Trails were once more extensive in the eastern part of the community than they are now. This was revealed by the Pleasant Hill Study, in which it was demonstrated that about 50% of the trails in this area disappeared as a result of development during the period from 1986 to 1999. In general, the town-wide trail system today is confined to the western and northern portions of the community, where most of the open space in Falmouth remains.

The major threat to the system is land development, primarily in the form of residential subdivisions. Most new subdivisions block at least one trail, and some subdivisions cut off several trails. A secondary threat is posed by posted land, a practice that becomes more common as development in the area increases.



Figure 2 – Trails in Falmouth include a myriad of small footpaths through woods and neighborhoods. New subdivisions like this one cut off or eliminate historic connections to power line easements where trails run for miles.

The Town has participated in trail preservation primarily through the subdivision review process. If the Town is aware of a trail on the property, the Town may ask the developer to retain or relocate the trail voluntarily. Many developers will cooperate, but they usually limit the use of the new trail to foot traffic only, and they frequently place the trail in a wetland that is passable for most people only in winter. In addition, little thought is given to how the relocated trail connects to other trails in the area. The result may be a trail that does not actually fulfill its intended purpose.

### **Trail Inventory**

The Town mapped the town-wide system over a period of a year starting in the fall of 1999, using volunteers and a consultant. Trails were considered part of the Town-wide system if they met all of the following criteria:

- The trail was part of an interconnected network of trails that crossed multiple property boundaries.
- The trail connected to other trails in one or more of the following ways:
  - a) linked two or more trails or trail destinations (trunk line);
  - b) provided access to other trails (feeder); or,
  - c) Provided a shortcut or loop that was obviously intended by users to circumvent obstructions.

- The trail showed signs of significant recreational use, as indicated by a worn path or treadway one to six feet wide where the soils were compacted or eroded, and where vegetation was trampled, sparse or absent. Trails used only in the winter were considered part of the trail network if they showed a similar amount of use in the snow or ice, as indicated by the number of tracks, the width of the trail, and the amount of compaction.

Not all feeder lines and shortcuts were mapped as part of the inventory. Feeder lines were mapped only if they provided access to the trail system from a public road, from a cluster of three or more homes, or from a publicly owned parcel. There are many feeder lines that connect single residences to the trail system that are not shown in the inventory. Although not mapped, these minor feeder lines are important in keeping the system alive and vital.

Shortcuts and connecting trails were mapped when the amount of use they showed, as evidenced by soil compaction and erosion, was similar to the trunk lines that they linked together, or if they provided a logical alternative to the trunk line, should the trunk line be closed.

### **Other Trails in Falmouth**

There are a number of hiking trails in Falmouth that are open to the public that are not part of the Town-wide system. These include such well-known locations as Gilsland Farm and Macworth Island, as well as lesser known sites such as the Town Forest and Pine Grove Park. The Falmouth Conservation Commission has published a trail guide with maps and descriptions of these trails.



Figure 3 – Simple footbridge on a trail through a town forest preserve.

# Part 2:

## Goals and Objectives

### Plan Philosophy

Trails are part of an alternative transportation network that includes bikeways, sidewalks, and recreation paths. They are most valuable when they are part of a network that is truly comprehensive, interconnected, and continuous.

### Goal

Provide access to open space for people traveling for recreational purposes on foot, bicycle, snowmobile, cross-country skis and other ways, realizing that much of the open space is privately owned, and that the Town must help to protect and support the rights of private property owners in order to keep trails open.

### Objectives for Managing the Existing System

- Preserve the existing trail network to the greatest extent possible through cooperative efforts with landowners, developers, and trail organizations.
- Develop alternative routes when trails are severed by development, ensuring that important linkages in the system remain open.
- Maintain the connection between trails and other bicycle and pedestrian facilities, such as public roads, sidewalks, recreation paths, and Nature Preserve trails, in order to maintain the continuity and variety of the alternative transportation network town-wide.

### Objectives for New Trail Development

- Develop trails that link neighborhoods with neighborhoods, neighborhoods with commercial areas, and neighborhoods with schools, parks, and playgrounds, when off-road trails are shorter, more attractive, and more efficient than bikeways and sidewalks.

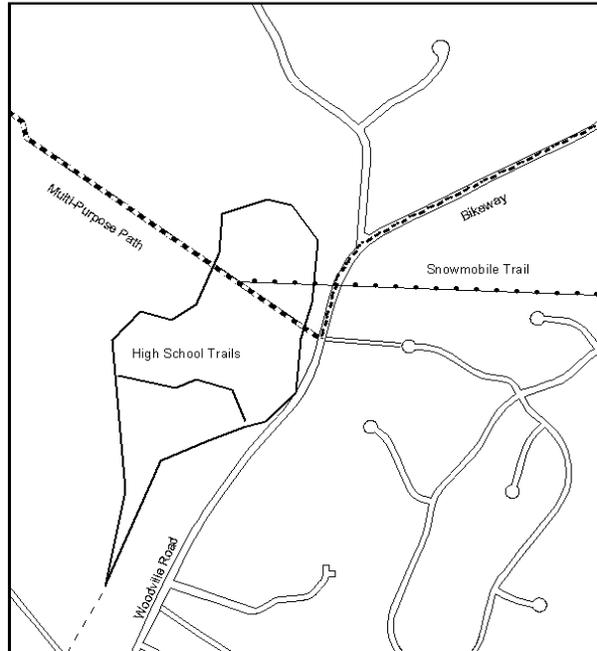


Figure 4 - The master plan calls for interconnection between different facility types.

# Part 3:

## Recommendations

1. Develop policies and procedures for preserving and managing the Town-wide trail system as a resource of community value and significance through a partnership among private and public landowners, the public, trail maintenance organizations, and the Town.
2. Develop a trail management program under the oversight of the trail partnership described above that will protect public and private property from erosion, littering, noise, dust, trespassing and other undesirable effects of trail use so that landowners remain willing to keep trails open.
3. Use information provided by the trail inventory to set priorities for trail preservation and maintenance, and to plan trail relocations as necessary so that important linkages are maintained and the trail system as a whole remains viable.
4. Locate new trails and realign old trails as necessary to take advantage of natural and cultural features that add interest to the trail experience and that are capable of sustaining trail use without degradation of soils, plant life, or private property. Avoid areas that by their nature cause erosion, hazards, or misuse, such as wetlands, ravines, steep slopes, dead ends, busy road crossings and road crossings where visibility is limited.
5. Include the preservation of the Town-wide trail system in all of the Town's land use planning programs, including the regional master planning process, development review, and land acquisition, in order to ensure that Town plans and policies are coordinated with the work of the trail partnership.

# Part 4:

# Implementation

## Introduction

The key to the implementation of the Master Plan is the Advisory Committee. Although an advisory committee can be organized and appointed in various ways, the committee currently in operation was appointed as a subcommittee of the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC) in January of 1998. It consists of five members representing individuals with knowledge and experience in grassroots public participation, as well as outdoor recreation interests. The Falmouth Trails Advisory Committee (FTAC), as the subcommittee has come to be called, has been instrumental in providing oversight, advocacy, and education on behalf of the policies recommended in the Master Plan.

## Advisory Committee

### Membership

The Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee appoints the Falmouth Trails Advisory Committee as a subcommittee to work on implementation of Trails Master Plan. The members are solicited for the job on the basis of their knowledge and experience of the issues involved and a willingness to work on their own initiative, even if staff support is not always available. Because the purpose of FTAC is to oversee implementation of an approved plan, a large and diverse committee is not considered necessary or helpful. This approach has proven to be successful since the first FTAC members were appointed in 1998.

### Duties, Authority and Reporting

FTAC is responsible for reporting to the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee regularly regarding its activities. FTAC is empowered by CPAC to gather information, to make recommendations, to coordinate with landowners, user groups, consultants and Town staff, and to hold meetings to gather comments from the public on Master Plan projects. CPAC expects FTAC to oversee the implementation of the Master Plan and to report on the progress of projects related to the Master Plan.

FTAC should prepare progress reports and action plans on a periodic basis, as needed, but at least once annually. Progress reports should include an assessment of the success of current projects, the adequacy of funding, work remaining to be done, and recommendations for improvements to the program. Action plans should outline the projects that FTAC should undertake in the following year to further implement the Master Plan. It should include a description of the projects to be accomplished and a budget for accomplishing the work. The budget should be based on an estimate of the time and expenses needed to hire various consultants to assist FTAC and town staff perform research, develop plans and cost estimates, and perform other tasks necessary to implement the Master Plan.

In order to obtain this information and to stimulate the development of new or existing programs, FTAC is expected to coordinate with Town staff, especially the Directors of Planning, Public Works, and Parks and Community Programs. FTAC should also coordinate with consultants

who may be already working on Master Plan projects, or who have been hired to assist FTAC prepare its recommendations.

**Meetings**

FTAC shall hold regular meetings. All meetings of FTAC are open to the public. FTAC may solicit public comment and increase public participation by holding special meetings in which particular residents and constituency groups affected by Master Plan projects are invited.