



**Land Management and Acquisitions Committee (LMAC)
Town Council Update for January 11, 2021**

In its 2019-2020 work plan, the Town Council charged LMAC to implement the Open Space Plan, adopted by the Council in 2018. In July 2019, LMAC presented to the Council a recommended implementation strategy and the Council directed LMAC to work on the recommendations as submitted. A review of those work plan items (in order of priority) is below. The ordinance language governing LMAC is attached.

1. **Improvement of the existing Geographical Information System (GIS) framework** – This project includes the collection of accurate GPS data for all trails and trail related infrastructure. This will increase accuracy of information and efficiencies in maintaining records, organizing work and communicating with the public. This task will remain a top priority concurrent with all other tasks until implemented. With the support of the Information Technology Department and the Town’s GIS consultant Spatial Alternatives a data dictionary has been developed. A data collection test has been conducted and it is expected that all properties will be inventoried by June 2021.
2. **Develop a comprehensive trail management plan** – While this task was not specifically addressed in the 2018 Open Space Plan, trail management and protection are mentioned. LMAC identified it as a top priority as the town does not have a trail management plan for its approximate 50 miles of trails. The development of a comprehensive policy for management of existing trails and development of new trails is crucial for the success of the recreational component of the open space program. This plan is still under development. Many current issues relating to trails during this past year have been used to develop policy. It is anticipated that this will be completed by June 2021.
3. **Review and update the Open Space Rating Guides used by LMAC in evaluating potential acquisition and trail properties** – This task was elevated in importance due to several properties coming before LMAC for consideration for purchase. This task is complete.
4. **Develop and/or update land management plans for all open space properties.** –There are currently fifteen conserved lands that have management plans. Of these, two were updated in 2011, one in 2012, nine in 2013 and the remaining three in 2017. All need to be updated to be integrated with the new Terrestrial Invasives Management and Control Plan developed in 2018 in conjunction with the Sustainability Coordinator, the 2018 Open Space Plan and the new Trail Management Plan. All plans are being reviewed with regard to management policies and goals. The management plan for Pine Grove Preserve has recently been updated as well. It is anticipated that several more will be updated by June 2021.
5. **Improve the ongoing efforts of staff and LMAC by developing a communication and outreach strategy to appropriately apprise/the public of open space.** – Current efforts need to be reviewed and expanded to meet the goals of the Open Space Plan. This effort should be in collaboration with the general Council commitment to public outreach and communication. This task has not been started.

COMMITTEE HIGHLIGHTS:

Successes

1. Field Days - LMAC has participated in several field days over the last year. This provides an opportunity for committee members to gain personal knowledge of properties, be more familiar with the work required to maintain and improve properties and participate in outdoor activities. Projects this past year have included trimming at River Point Conservation Area, building a new trail section in North Falmouth Community Forest and improving trails in Pine Grove Preserve.
2. Volunteer Support – Staff have worked to engage new members of the community and trail users to help with property and trail maintenance and improvements. This support is vital to the program as there is always more work to be done than staff time. This year two Eagle Scout Projects were supported, one in North Falmouth Community Forest to provide a trail connection and a second in River Point Conservation Area and Hadlock Community Forest beta testing a trail conditions survey. Both projects have added value to the program. In addition, new stewards have been added for several properties. Members of the biking community are particularly active and have donated weeks of time to provide safer trail options in several sections of trails where topography provides a challenge for multi-use trails. The Hayfield section of Blackstrap Hill Community Forest now has a foot traffic only trail, a downhill bike only trail and a multi-use trail that climbs the hill from Hurricane Road to Blackstrap Road. In North Falmouth Community Forest, Poplar Ridge now has two trails, one for foot traffic and uphill bike traffic and one for downhill bikes only. This improves the user experience for all users, making travel safer and more enjoyable.
3. Trail closure – COVID made establishing and maintaining both trail closures and parking area closures difficult. With staff and the help of the Parks Division and Police Departments, the Hurricane Road and Blackstrap Road parking areas were well managed.

Challenges

1. COVID – While the management of COVID related issues was a success, it was extremely time consuming for staff. It also appears to be a catalyst for increased use by all user groups, which has also increased user inquiries.
2. Staffing – The FY21 budget included an increase of staffing to 44 hours a week with time to be allocated to two part time positions, the Open Space Manager and a Stewardship and Outreach Coordinator (SOC). The SOC was filled temporarily from January to August 2020 but was vacated as the individual accepted a position elsewhere. Due to spending freezes that position was not filled. This has resulted in the program staffing to be reduced to 15 hours a week and over-taxing volunteers. With limited staff, work plan task completion has slowed.

DIV. II-2-3-II. LAND MANAGEMENT AND ACQUISITION COMMITTEE

Sec. 2-136. Creation and statement of purpose.

- a. The town council does hereby establish a land management and acquisition committee (LMAC).
- b. Land management and acquisition shall include acquisition planning and evaluation, managing the town's designated open space and conservation lands including all accessory uses, trails and facilities. Management and oversight shall be accomplished in ways that provide benefits to the community, including recreation, outdoor education, protection of water quality, providing high quality wildlife habitat, and forestry management in a manner consistent with current town ordinances and best professional land management practices.
- c. Nothing in Sec. 2-136— Sec. 2-139 shall be construed to conflict with or usurp any duties, powers, or functions of the parks and community programs department nor the powers and duties heretofore conferred upon the town tree warden.

Sec. 2-137. Appointment, terms, officers.

- a. The town council shall appoint a standing committee of five (5) members made up of five (5) citizens of the town to serve without pay for three (3) year terms. And further, the LMAC should include citizens with an interest and/or experience in land management, conservation and recreation, such interest and experience could include but not be limited to: members or former members of the conservation commission; the town land trust; trail and land maintenance volunteers; trail recreational use clubs or organizations; forestry management professionals; biologists; ecologists; and real estate professionals.

In addition, the town land trust executive director shall serve as ex-officio member.

- b. The parks and community programs director and/or designee(s) will provide staff support to the committee.
- c. The initial standing committee shall consist of one (1) member appointed for one (1) year, two (2) members appointed for two (2) years and two (2) members appointed for three (3) years. Thereafter members shall be appointed for periods of three (3) years.
- d. The committee shall annually choose one (1) of its own members to serve as chair.
- e. The town council, at its annual organizational meeting, shall appoint a council liaison to this committee.

Sec. 2-138. Meetings, reports.

Meetings are to be called by the chair. It is the responsibility of land management committee to report as needed to the town council. It is further the duty of the committee to prepare an annual report, periodic work plan and budget requests, as needed, to the town council for its review and approval.

Sec. 2-139. Powers and duties.

LMAC shall advise on matters related to the management of the town's designated open space and conservation lands and further shall:

1. Develop procedures for how conservation land and associated facilities are created, acquired, managed and maintained in accordance with town ordinances.
2. Provide advisory assistance to the town council for matters pertaining to the acquisition and management of conservation lands, including but not limited to policy and ordinance development and land use.
3. Create management plans for each designated conservation property owned by the town.
4. Produce information and guidance for the public regarding trails, land, and public facilities in the town.
5. Recommend funding levels for the acquisition of new properties and for the management of existing properties.