

Windham Master Plan Natural, Cultural, Recreation Visioning

Context Questions

What changes are taking place in Windham that impact natural resources and open space, recreation, and cultural and historical resources?

Where are these changes taking place?

How should the Town respond to these changes?

OPEN SPACE

ISSUES

Existing protected open spaces are concentrated in the southeast, northeast, central and southwest portions of the Town in areas that are still largely undeveloped. Additional open space protection efforts should concentrate on these remaining areas and linking existing open space patches.

Farms/farmland

- There are two active farms remaining in Windham, at least two other agricultural properties are still used for hay and livestock grazing.
 - Apple Acres (orchard)
 - Johnson Highland View Farm on Route 111A (multiple crops, livestock, greenhouse, and farmstand)
 - Taylor property at Windham Depot on N. Lowell Rd. (horse pasture)
 - Campbell property (haying)
- All of the remaining agricultural properties are located in the rural zoning district and are taxed according to NH's current use tax rate.
- The Lakeview Farm property will be impacted by the land takings related to the I-95 improvements. Participants expressed interest in maintaining some of this property for its historic and scenic viewscape.

Residential Open Space

- The open space residential overlay district can help protect pockets of open space, but how that open space is used or maintained by the neighborhood is not stipulated other than that the land be permanently protected from development.
- It would be useful to protect some land as untouched natural area and other areas for passive recreational purposes.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

- Acquire land through bond issue
- Undertake an open space / greenspace plan to guide future open space protection efforts and gauge with long-term open space funding needs.

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- Consider possibility of operating a public golf course on existing or future Town-acquired open space, could be a possible revenue source.
- A portion of the Delahunty's Nursery at Route 111/111A junction is expected to be impacted by the I-95 state land takings. There may be an opportunity to acquire a portion of that from the state as Town open space.
- Consider impact fees as a possible way to fund open space acquisition and management.

NATURAL RESOURCES

ISSUES

Water

- There is debate about how sustainable the current water/sewer strategy will be in the future. At present the Town relies on soil based lot zoning to restrict development and does not provide town-wide sewer and water. Concern about the cost of providing a town-wide system and the resulting impact on development.
 - Concern about whether current supply will be adequate for the future, water studies have indicated yes, water quality is a concern, however.
 - Pollution from PCB's, gas stations, MTBE are all potential water quality problems. Other issues are salt and sand from roads. I-93 run-off is a big concern for local water resources. Another key pollution area is run-off from Cobbett's Pond Rd.
 - Fertilizer run-off from private and public lawns is another factor to consider.
 - Lake water quality has been concern – fecal coliform, nutrient loading, salt. Largely a result of conversion of seasonal homes to year-round homes, old failing septic systems, and increasing water recreational uses (summer boat traffic).
 - Lack of Town-sponsored lake water quality monitoring, although Cobbett's Pond Improvement Association (private landowners) does monitor and treat for milfoil.
 - Increased Town regulation on development and use (Conservation Commission) has met with resistance from private landowners.
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RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

- Upgrade stormwater management regulations and improve enforcement.
- Encourage use of natural fertilizers to reduce impacts on water resources – use Town lands as demonstration projects.
- Educate citizens about Best Management Practices.

RECREATION

ISSUES

Trails

- Linking existing walking trails to create a town-wide trail system is a priority.
 - There is an active Rail Trail group in Town.
 - Rockingham Rail Trail (4.1 mile stretch in Windham) is part of the Salem to Concord Rail Trail. There are concerns about trail usage, conflict with ATV's. Current usage policy is to allow multi-use, but no ATVs and restrict snowmobiles to only when there is adequate snow cover. Concern about enforcement and impact on abutting private landowners.
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Athletic Fields

- Demand far exceeds current capacity, Griffin Park helps but will not be sufficient.
 - There needs to be better coordination and management of the recreation program, currently all volunteer run and separate committees oversee each sport.
 - Problem with maintenance and overuse of existing fields. Lack of enforcement to ensure better upkeep and monitor use.
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RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

- Undertake a strategic management plan for the Windham Depot Area to balance new development with the trails effort (creation of a linear park requires coordination with private landowners).
- Consider professional management of the recreation program – add a full-time staff to coordinate, promote and maintain. Provide adequate funding.
- Manage Town and School fields in coordination.
- Consider addition of neighborhood multi-use fields in subdivisions and neighborhood areas that would be maintained by a neighborhood group and available strictly for neighborhood use.
- Develop a recreation master plan.

CULTURAL / HISTORIC RESOURCES

ISSUES

- Privately owned historic homes and buildings need better protection. A cluster of four homes along Route 111 should be a priority to save from potential impacts of road expansion.

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- Mocking Bird Hill cemetery needs better protection/recognition as an historic resource – it's a private family-owned cemetery.
 - Scattered historic foundations are not inventoried or protected from development.
 - Lakeview Farm is an important historic property and scenic landscape and is part of the I-93 land takings.
 - There is little or no Town oversight of historic resources that are not located in one of the Town historic districts.
 - The Town has an historic resources inventory maintained by the HDC/Heritage Commission. The state also undertook an historic inventory as part of the Route 111 mitigation.
 - Searle's Castle may be at risk as the future financial security of the Sisters of Mercy (which owns and maintains it) is under question.
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RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

- Historic resources need to be more of a priority for consideration in development review and permit approval by Planning Board and Board of Adjustment. The inventory should be updated regularly and better referenced by all Town boards and departments.
- Private land owners need to be better informed about historic designations (state and national register listings) as there are misperceptions that this limits their ability to make changes or renovations to their properties.
- Consider scenic roads designation and improve enforcement of this designation (currently one road is designated, but has not been enforced properly).