

Recommendations for revision to Open Space and Recreation Plan Workbook and Requirements

Dramatic impacts to the environment in recent years highlight the need for communities to better address the challenges that they currently face and will face in the near future. While the Commonwealth's Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) Workbook and Requirements materials provide valuable guidance, they don't address a sufficiently broad set of issues or get into enough detail about others. The following are initial thoughts on what it would be helpful to include in an update to the OSRP Workbook and Requirements to ensure that communities have plans that sufficiently address the issues. It will help to identify and obtain input from those whom have an understanding of the issues, or identify plans that address some of the issues:

- 1) **Vulnerability:** More clearly identify environmental vulnerabilities due to climate change and population and development pressures
- 2) **Adaptation:** More clearly identify plans to adapt to changes in the environment and population and address those vulnerabilities
- 3) **Urban Forest and Habitat:** More clearly address the importance of green spaces not part of public open spaces (such as farms, zoning setbacks, etc.) in:
 - a. Maintaining biodiversity by encouraging native species planting and elimination of non-native species,
 - b. Protecting or creating habitat/forage for local or migratory species.
 - c. Elimination of habitat fragmentation (e.g., providing openings between or through yards to allow passage of animals, provision of culverts to allow passage of amphibians and other creatures under roadways, etc.)
 - d. Mitigating climate change through urban forest management
 - e. Providing greenway connections between open spaces
 - f. Providing generous (rather than minimal) habitat buffer areas around open spaces
 - g. Providing environmental protection and minimum wetland and habitat setbacks in bylaws and/or zoning ordinances
 - h. Promoting reduction and/or elimination of use of chemicals which are potentially harmful, and promoting and educating on alternatives with lower or no environmental impact.
- 4) **Green Communities:** As greenhouse gas emissions have an overwhelming impact on all open space, it will help to include:
 - a. Status of obtaining Green Communities certification
 - b. Goals and Plan for energy and waste reduction, increase in recycling
 - c. Sustainability (renewable energy, local agriculture, organic farming, etc.)
 - d. Status of passage of Community Preservation Act, and plans for usage of CPA funds for open space

- 5) **Regional Context and Greenways:** A weakness in the current Open Space and Recreation Plans is lack of regional context, which results in lack of coordination in addressing open space and recreation opportunities. Frequently, recreational facilities or open space are more accessible in a neighboring community, and it is important to acknowledge the regional context. This will help identify and develop partnerships to conserve important open spaces with neighboring communities and to develop and maintain greenways, bike paths, and trails through the region. Thus, the Open Space and Recreation Plans should include a locus map that includes neighboring communities and identifies existing and possible partnerships and regional plans. Also, land outside the municipal borders that are used, owned, or managed by the municipality should be identified.
- 6) **Environmental Justice:** It will help if OSRP better identify and address needs of parts of the community that are underserved, either in access to open space or in access to common types of recreation or in availability of non-motorized transportation routes (sidewalks, bike paths/lanes).
- 7) **Public Health:** As one aspect of having access to open space and recreational areas is for public physical and mental health, and as current social trends are toward diminished outdoor activity, it is appropriate to have some treatment in the OSRP of plans to reverse that trend.