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Land Conservation in the Presumpscot River Watershed: Vision, Values & Priorities, Appendix D, Municipal Conservation Goals and Activities

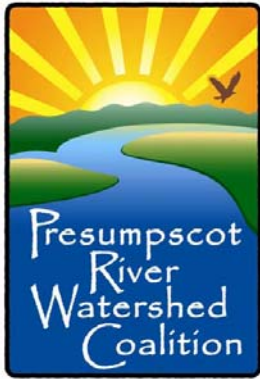
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Land Conservation in the Presumpscot River Watershed: Vision, Values and Priorities

APPENDIX D: Municipal Conservation Goals and Activities

Compiled by Vanessa Levesque, October 2013.

The lower Presumpscot River Watershed includes parts or the entirety of 12 municipalities: Buxton, Cumberland, Falmouth, Gorham, Gray, North Yarmouth, Portland, Raymond, Standish, Westbrook, Windham, and Yarmouth. We incorporated municipal information into the process of identifying conservation values and priorities for the Watershed in several ways including: gathering information from official municipal documents, and, a conducting a survey of municipal representatives. Several Watershed communities actively protect land, and participated directly in the project process at different stages. Falmouth, Portland, and Windham provided representatives to the stakeholder meetings.

We recognized at the project outset that individuals cannot speak on behalf of entire communities, and that some municipalities were not going to be able to directly participate in the project. We therefore sought out supplemental sources of municipal input. We reviewed official town documents to identify locally important places, designated growth zones, and areas that are considered special to the town. Although town documents are snapshots in time, the fact that they go through a formal adoption process provided a concrete starting point for recognizing municipal goals in the identification of conservation vision and values in the Watershed. In addition, we also surveyed planners and other municipal officials in order to understand and document conservation activity in each community. At least one representative from each of the municipalities (except Gray) responded to the survey, providing additional information about current municipal conservation goals and activities. There may be additional municipal priorities that were unwritten, not known by participating staff, or that emerged since we gathered our data.

This appendix provides a summary of the review of municipal documents and of the municipal survey. For more detailed information gathered from the review of municipal documents, please see the full report: Presumpscot River Watershed Land Conservation: Vision, Values & Priorities Municipal Plan Review by Kristel Sheesley, 2011.

Review of Municipal Plans: Summary of Results

Casco Bay Estuary Partnership/University of Southern Maine Muskie School of Public Service Graduate Assistant Kristel Sheesley reviewed comprehensive plan and open space documents for the 12 municipalities that comprise the watershed in order to capture local values and priorities for land protection. These municipal plans were qualitatively assessed for general expressions of conservation visions and values, as well as references to specific land areas and waterways. The review focused on the goals, policies, and implementation strategies listed in the plans. Following are representative findings from each municipality.

The complete report (Sheesley, K. 2011. Presumpscot River Watershed Land Conservation: Vision, Values & Priorities Municipal Plan Review) can be found at the Presumpscot River Watershed Coalition's webpage for this project: <http://www.presumpscotcoalition.org/vvp.html>.

Buxton

Comprehensive Plan 2000

- Several references to preserving open space, rural character, outdoor recreation, and water access;
- Emphasis on preserving agriculture and forest resources in all districts & encouraging cluster developments; creation of multi-use trail system connecting open spaces.

Cumberland

Comprehensive Plan 2009; Open Space Plan 2000

- Strong focus on preserving agricultural and forest land, with detailed action steps, including working with land trusts;
- Strategies include working with land trusts and other municipalities to create a “map that shows parcels that would allow for important trail and open space linkages” and to protect large blocks of land and corridors;
- Town survey shows that residents want open space and water access.

Falmouth

Comprehensive Plan 2000; Open Space Plan 2006

- Strong focus on land preservation, targeting (1) open space resources; (2) trails that connect open space resources, neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces; (3) parcels with high conservation value; (4) large tracts of undeveloped land that provide wildlife habitat, water quality protection, forest products, and recreation;
- Several specific parcels are targeted for preservation in the Open Space Plan;
- Mechanisms to conserve land should be flexible and include: research, education, monetary incentives, tax programs, conservation easements and purchase in fee simple.

Gorham

Comprehensive Plan 1994

- Many references to developing standards to ensure that development provides open space and recreational facilities;
- Action step: improve public access to Presumpscot River;
- "The [Presumpscot] river presents a good opportunity for coordinated planning for the management of the corridor. The Town should support the creation of an Exploratory River Corridor Committee to determine how much interest there is in working together to explore the uses and preservation of the river."

Gray

Comprehensive Plan 2003

- Many references to an urgent need to preserve open space and other natural resources, with a goal of preserving at least one acre of land for each resident; few specific action steps to achieve this goal;
- Acknowledgement that there is no established mechanism for permanently preserving land.

North Yarmouth

Comprehensive Plan 2003

- Long range goal to preserve 20%-25% of the town as permanent open space;
- Specific parcels targeted for preservation, some of which require coordination with neighboring towns;
- Focus on Royal River corridor and tributaries;
- Acquisition strategies: establish stewardship program, conduct open space inventory, prioritize open space & critical natural resources, contact & negotiate with landowners, fund land preservation through impact fees and appropriations;
- Detailed implementation strategies for developing an interconnected trail system and for conserving wildlife habitat;
- Mentions working with neighboring communities, land trusts, conservation organizations to protect shared resources.

Portland

Comprehensive Plan 2002, updated 2005

- Land conservation is discussed in the context of developing an interconnected system of parks, open spaces, trails, and shore way access points, as well as considering the recreation and open space planning of surrounding communities to link open space resources;
- "Launch a major Presumpscot River conservation plan initiative. The plan would cover water quality, recreation, Riverton Park, Hamlin's Pit, Riverside Golf Course, and development of a greenway trail from Falmouth to Sebago Lake";
- *Green spaces, blue edges: an open space plan for the City of Portland* created in 1994, updated 2001.

Raymond

Comprehensive Plan 2003

- Policy focus is preserving important open space, scenic areas, recreation opportunities, and natural resources; specific strategies for doing so include providing information to landowners on tax programs, identifying and prioritizing valuable open spaces for purchase, and incorporating development regulations like cluster development;
- Land purchases should be targeted according to contribution to protecting rural areas and large tracts of connected open space, such as the Morgan Meadow area;
- Additional goals: provide public access to lakes and ponds, encourage private efforts aimed at establishing a system of trails, identify and protect large contiguous tracts, conserve prime agricultural and forest land.

Standish

Comprehensive Plan 2006

- Preserving open space, farmland, forest resources, and natural habitat are clear priorities, as is providing access to water;
- Mechanisms include working with neighboring municipalities, land trusts, and other groups; promoting taxation and development policies that conserve open space; mapping existing & desired conservation lands, trails, water access points, etc.;
- Promotes regional coordination, esp. regarding preserving inter-municipal habitat areas, wetlands, trail corridors, etc.

Westbrook

Comprehensive Plan 2000; Recreation, Parks, and Open Space Plan 2008

- Central goal: create system of parks and open spaces, connected by trails (that also cross municipal borders);
- Mechanisms: voluntary easements as well as requiring future subdivisions to provide these resources;
- Open Space Plan includes list of specific areas to preserve, proposed trail corridors, and detailed implementation strategy;
- Incorporate preservation of critical habitat and prime agricultural land into the Westbrook Environmental Improvement Corporation program;
- Protect surface water quality, in part through land banking.

Windham

Comprehensive Plan 2003

- Wildlife habitat, woodlands, farmlands and open space are important elements of the town's rural character;
- Land preservation strategies: establish criteria and identify locations for protection, establish a TDR program, work with landowners regarding land preservation, create an open space protection fund, work with local land trusts;
- Many references to protecting water quality, especially in the Presumpscot and Pleasant rivers;

- Establish a greenbelt along length of Black Brook and connections to provide access to New Hampshire;
- Strong argument for regional coordination regarding recreational opportunities, complementary land use regulations, and acquisition of conservation land and open space areas.

Yarmouth

Comprehensive Plan 2010; Land Stewardship Plan 2007

- Prepare a Green Infrastructure Plan to guide management of open space, conservation land, agricultural and forest land, scenic resources, recreational facilities, water access, etc.;
- Policy: continue to selectively acquire land for public open space, conservation purposes, and especially trails that provide linkages between existing open spaces (especially along Royal River and Cousins River);
- Strategies include amending the Open Space Residential Development Ordinance to allow density bonuses for preserving high-value land and furthering objectives of Green Infrastructure Plan.

Municipal Survey: Summary of Results

We conducted an on-line survey of municipal officials between October and December 2011. The goal of the survey was to help us understand the role that each municipality plays in land conservation. The survey was geared towards municipal staff and official town board volunteers (such as a Conservation Commission) likely to be familiar with land protection in their area. The survey contained 10 questions, and was designed to take 10-15 minutes to complete.

Of the 12 municipalities in the Presumpscot River Watershed, we received responses from representatives of 11 (the number in parentheses indicates the number of respondents from each municipality): Buxton (2), Cumberland (1), Falmouth (3), Gorham (1), North Yarmouth (1), Portland (2), Raymond (2), Standish (1), Westbrook (1), Windham (1), and Yarmouth (1). . We did not receive a response from Gray. Of the sixteen respondents, 5 sat on a conservation or open space committee, 4 were town planners, 2 were town managers, 2 were land stewards, 2 were code enforcement officers, and 1 was a recreation director. The responses to the survey reflect the knowledge of these particular representatives.

Five out of the 11 municipalities that responded (45%) have an open space, natural areas plan, or other document guiding conservation and open spaces: Cumberland Open Space Plan (2000), Greening of Falmouth Plan (2006), Raymond Open Space Plan (2009), Standish Open Space Conservation Lands Maps (date unknown), and Yarmouth Public Access and Recreation Plan (1998). A full 73% (8 out of 11 municipalities) have identified particular places in their region that they would like to protect. Towns with open space plans tend to have identified multiple areas to conserve within their plans.

In addition to identifying particular areas the town is interested in protecting, we asked if the municipality has an ordinance or similar mechanism to promote land conservation. All 11 municipalities identified some mechanism for protecting land, including 8 towns with open space or cluster subdivision ordinances, Gorham's Transfer of Development Rights program, and differential growth caps in Standish.

Seven municipalities in the watershed are sole or partial holders of conservation easements (Cumberland, Falmouth, Gorham, North Yarmouth, Portland, Raymond, and Westbrook), and three municipalities own land on which another entity holds a conservation easement (Falmouth, working with Falmouth Land Trust; Portland, working with Portland Trails; and Yarmouth, working with Royal River Conservation Trust). We were interested in how municipalities and land trusts currently collaborate, and the following table summarizes what we learned in the survey:

In what ways does your municipality work with your local land trust?

1. We are co-holders of a conservation easement	Raymond
2. The land trust holds a conservation easement on town-owned property	Cumberland Falmouth Portland Yarmouth
3. The town holds a conservation easement on land trust owned property	Falmouth
4. We jointly seek funding for land conservation Projects	Cumberland Falmouth Portland Raymond
5. The land trust holds a seat on the conservation commission or other related municipal board	Cumberland Falmouth Portland Yarmouth
6. The land trust and municipality have conducted joint conservation planning	Falmouth Raymond Yarmouth
7. None – our municipality does not work with a local land trust	Buxton Windham – no formal relationship
8. Other (specify)	North Yarmouth – Land trust accepts open space for subdivision approval Portland – close working relations with Land Bank Commission
9. No Response	Gorham Standish Westbrook

In summary, several municipalities in the Watershed are active in identifying and conserving important properties, while all of the municipalities are interested in protecting land through their local ordinances. There may be opportunities in the future to leverage municipal efforts by improving collaboration with local land trusts, where a relationship doesn't currently exist.