

EXPAND OPEN SPACE AND TRAILS

8

OVERVIEW

Most people tend to perceive “open space” as any land that is not built upon. However, this definition includes land that is in private ownership and subject to future development. Thus, it is important to realize that all the land in Madison that is *perceived* as “open space” is not, in fact, *preserved* as open space. For purposes of the Plan of Conservation & Development, open space is defined as land that is dedicated to open space uses.

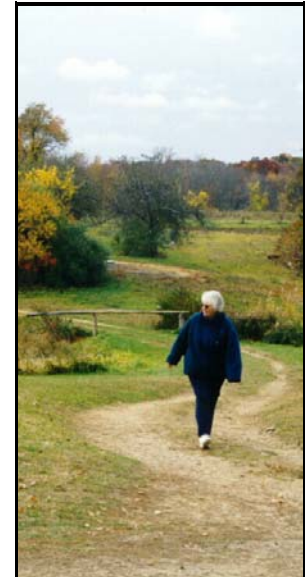
Madison is fortunate to have some significant open space resources. These include:

- Hammonasset State Park - considered by many to be the “jewel” in the State park system,
- Cockaponsett State Forest,
- South Central Regional Water Authority lands used for watershed protection,
- the various land holdings (and trails) of the Madison Land Conservation Trust, and
- open space properties owned by the Town of Madison (such as the Braemore property and Bauer Park).

Open space, in adequate quantities and appropriate locations, can help:

- protect community character,
- preserve lands for parks and recreational uses,
- conserve important natural resources,
- provide fiscal and economic benefits,
- enhance the quality of life for residents, and
- shape development patterns.

Bauer Farm Trail



Patricia Anderson

***Open space protects
community character
and enhances
the quality of life ...***

Greenbelts and Greenways

A greenbelt is another word for a greenway. A greenway is a corridor of open space that:

- may protect natural resources, preserve scenic landscapes and historical resources or offer opportunities for recreation or non-motorized transportation,
- may connect existing protected areas and provide access to the outdoors,
- may be located along a defining natural feature, such as a waterway, along a man-made corridor, including an unused right-of-way, traditional trail routes or historic barge canals, or
- may be a green space along a highway or around a village.

General Assembly
Public Act 95-335

Provide Additional Open Space and Greenbelts

There can be little doubt that one of the elements of Madison that most appeals to residents and visitors is the amount of “open space.” Madison is fortunate that, in addition to Town efforts at open space protection, a significant amount of open space has been preserved by the State of Connecticut, the Madison Land Conservation Trust, the South Central Regional Water Authority, and other entities.

Still, about 75 percent of residents surveyed felt that the Town should do more to preserve open space in Madison. About 69 percent felt that the Town should have a specific policy to review and acquire waterfront property. Efforts should continue to be devoted to preserving open space in Madison.

Greenbelts

The configuration of the open space system in Madison is as important as the amount of open space. If parcels of open space can be interconnected into a cohesive overall system, a system of “greenbelts”, the value of the open space to residents and the impact on community character grows exponentially.

The major coordinating element in the future conservation and development of Madison should be a comprehensive greenbelt system which interconnects conservation, open space and recreation areas. Such a system should provide a linkage between existing open spaces and protect important resources like streams and wetlands from future development pressures. If open spaces can be connected through trails or other means, they provide:

- increased accessibility for all residents,
- improved wildlife corridors, and
- more opportunities for active or passive use.

Implementation

Madison should continue to preserve open space at the time of development of properties. While residents strongly support preservation of open space, only about 42 percent felt that taxes should be raised to pay for it. About 62 percent felt that the 10 percent open space requirement was sufficient.

The Town of Madison should begin to set aside municipal funds for open space acquisition so that important open space parcels can be purchased and preserved. For example, Section 7-131r of the Connecticut General Statutes allows a municipality to establish a Land Acquisition Fund, funded up to 2 mills annually, to be used for the acquisition of land for open space, recreation, or housing. Unlike other municipal accounts, this fund does not have to be expended in a given fiscal year and can accumulate interest. It can be funded through:

- annual contributions,
- capital campaigns for the acquisition of specific properties, or
- a bond issue.

The Madison Land Conservation Trust, and other private organizations, will continue to play a critical role in the preservation of land in its natural state. The Town should undertake, along with the Land Trust and other open space and conservation organizations, a multi-faceted effort to identify:

- properties for acquisition (an action plan),
- type of acquisition (such as conservation or access easement),
- priorities for acquisition (an action strategy), and
- sources of funds.

The adjacent sidebar suggests possible criteria for the selection of land areas for greenbelts and open space.

Greenbelt Benefits

In addition to protecting Madison's character, a greenbelt open space system will:

- protect important natural, scenic, or other resources,
- allow for a trail system that interconnects different areas,
- contribute to the enjoyment and quality of life for residents, and
- provide for contiguous wildlife habitat and corridors.

Possible Action Plan

1. Protection of, and/or access to;
 - Long Island Sound,
 - Hammonasset River,
 - East River, or
 - important streambelts and watercourses.
2. Adjacency to existing preserved open space.
3. Preservation of non-dedicated open space (such as Camp Laurelwood).
4. Location for more accessible linked trails.
5. Protecting significant views within and at "gateways" to Madison.

Existing Open Space

Booklet #14 in the Workbooks prepared during the planning process contains a map that depicts the location of open space land holdings of:

- the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection
- the Town of Madison,
- the Madison Land Conservation Trust, and
- other entities.

The Workbooks were provided to each member of the Planning Committee and were placed on file at the Town Hall and at the Library.

Recommendations

Greenbelts

1. Interconnect existing open space into a greenbelt system.
2. Encourage the newly-formed Conservation Commission (or another agency), working with other groups, to identify open space priorities, techniques, and possible funding programs.
3. Establish a specific town policy to consider the acquisition of all property that becomes available in identified “open space action areas” (such as those suggested in the sidebar on the preceding page), especially waterfront property, with the long term goal of creating a “shoreway”, or “riverways.”

Implementation

4. Establish an open space acquisition fund.
5. Maintain subdivision regulations that require open space be deeded to the Town, the Land Trust, or other open space organization.
6. Continue to allow payment of fees-in-lieu of open space dedication.
7. Amend subdivision regulations to allow donation of land elsewhere in Madison to meet the open space requirements of a development.
8. To help maintain existing open space resources:
 - pursue State legislation granting towns a priority right to purchase (a first right of refusal) for State Forest land in Madison,
 - consider zoning open space lands into a new “Open Space & Recreation” zone in order to guide present and future use of these properties,
 - consider exercising the priority right to purchase land owned by the South Central Regional Water Authority should the land become available, and
 - consider exercising a priority right to purchase State Forest land should that right become available and if the land should be considered for disposal by the State.

Expand the Existing Trail System

Trails greatly enhance the value of open space and are becoming very popular recreational activities throughout Connecticut.

However, many residents do not realize that Madison already has an extensive network of trails. The Madison Land Conservation Trust has participated in the development of a number of trails throughout the community. What is even more valuable is that they have also published a book describing the location and configuration of trails for the use and enjoyment of Madison residents.

While it would be easy to sit back and enjoy what Madison already has in terms of trails, significant opportunities exist to expand and enhance the trail system that already exists in the community. Madison can have one of the most extensive trail networks in the state. In addition, connections to trails and open space lands in adjacent communities will create opportunities to establish a greenbelt of regional or even state-wide significance.

Recommendations

1. Expand the existing trail network to establish a comprehensive system that interconnects open space areas.
2. Work with the Madison Land Conservation Trust, if necessary, to expand and maintain the local trail network.
3. Work with the State Department of Environmental Protection, the South Central Regional Water Authority, and the Madison Land Conservation Trust to create an overall trail plan on their combined land holdings.
4. Require the identification and consideration of trails as part of any land use application.

Trail Guide

The Madison Land Conservation Trust has published a book entitled "Madison Trails, A Guide To Their Use and Enjoyment."

This excellent guide contains maps and text describing the trails located throughout Madison. Areas where trails are located include Bauer Park, Town Campus, Water Authority lands, and Cockaponsett State Forest.

Copies of the book can be obtained from:

Madison Land Conservation Trust, Inc.
P.O. Box 561
Madison, CT 06443



Open Space Plan
(flip page up)

Encourage Efforts of the Land Trust

The Madison Land Conservation Trust has been very effective in obtaining donations of property as open space, managing and maintaining open space properties, and developing trails. These activities should continue to be supported and encouraged in order to preserve open space in Madison. Public access on land trust properties should continue to be promoted.

Recommendations

1. Continue to encourage the significant efforts of the Madison Land Conservation Trust .
2. Consider amending subdivision regulations to require that applicants obtain a letter from the Madison Land Conservation Trust about the location and configuration of open space proposed as part of the subdivision and other recommendations prior to:
 - closing the public hearing on an application, or
 - acting on an application.



Expand Coastal Access Opportunities

While Madison has several areas that provide public access to the shore (such as Hammonasset State Park), other areas with potential for some degree of public access should also be explored. This includes street ends and other areas appropriate for neighborhood and community access to Long Island Sound and other coastal areas.

Another area for consideration is whether and how to provide access from Long Island Sound to Madison for boaters. This may include recreational docking facilities at East Wharf or West Wharf.

Recommendations

1. Acquire and open up additional public access opportunities to Long Island Sound, the Hammonasset River, and the East River.
2. Charge the Conservation Committee (or other entity) with evaluating and recommending appropriate measures for each coastal access point.
3. Develop a map showing appropriate access points.
4. Consider implementing a signage plan to identify coastal access points.
5. Consider whether and how to provide access from Long Island Sound to Madison for boaters.

Retain Undeveloped Land

Since “perceived” open space also includes undeveloped land, encouraging the retention of undeveloped land will help to maintain community character. One way to encourage this is the Public Act 490 program which helps to reduce development pressure by assessing land as farm, forest, or open space, reducing the tax burden on those parcels and makes such land more affordable to own.

About 35 percent of all land in Madison currently participates in the PA-490 program. Forest lands, which are designated by the assessor, are the largest category of PA-490 lands due to the holdings of the Regional Water Authority. Farm lands, which are also designated by the assessor, are much less extensive. The open space assessment is based on criteria established by the Planning and Zoning Commission (most recently in 1997) and adopted by the legislative body (Town Meeting in Madison).

Potential Coastal Access

The following street ends and other locations have the potential to provide additional or improved public access to coastal areas:

- Route 1 at the Hammonasset River,
- Cottage Road,
- Route 1 at East River,
- Old Boston Post Road,
- Ridgewood Avenue,
- Neck Road,
- Island Avenue,
- Middle Beach Road,
- Seaview Avenue at Fence Creek,
- Waterbury Avenue,
- Webster Point Road,
- Neptune Avenue, and
- Pent Road.

Assistance with coastal access signage is available from CTDEP-OLISP, if desired.

PA-490 Policies

Madison has had a Public Act 490 policy since the late 1960s. The current open space assessment strategy was adopted by the Planning and Zoning Commission on June 19, 1997.

The date of the Town Meeting adoption as required under CGS Section 12-107e was August 5, 1997.

In that policy, the areas recommended for preservation as areas of open space included:

1. *All privately owned areas:*
 - *designated as "wetlands" pursuant to the Connecticut General Statutes.*
 - *with an elevation of not more than ten feet above mean high water as shown on USGS Maps.*
 - *within 1000 feet of the centerlines of the Hammonasset River, East River, Neck River, and Bailey Creek.*
 - *owned separately from any adjoining land and having an area of not less than ten acres.*
2. *All other privately owned areas used for one of the following purposes:*
 - *watershed area for any water company,*
 - *airport,*
 - *golf course,*
 - *beach or recreation areas,*
 - *any area noted as open space on an approved subdivision,*
 - *areas within 1000 ft. of an existing or proposed public well area.*
3. *Greenbelt areas:*
 - *which will link existing clusters of open space,*
 - *along waterways.*

The policy goes on to state that the following areas shall be excluded from the above areas:

- All land in a commercial or industrial district.
- All building lots in an approved subdivision.
- All land upon which any building or structure is located, at least to the extent of the minimum lot size for the district.

These criteria should be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure their continued relevance and intended effect. If adjusted, the revised program should be adopted by Town Meeting.

While the PA-490 program does not result in permanent open space preservation, it does reduce the local property tax burden as a reason that property might be developed in the future and promotes land ownership strategies that enhance the perception of open space in Madison.

Recommendations

1. Maintain the open space assessment policy in order to promote the retention of undeveloped land in residential zones.