

## SECTION 7

### Analysis of Needs

The Shelburne Open Space and Recreation Plan incorporates an inventory of land-based natural, historic, scenic, and recreational resources in town (Section 4), identifies the areas that contain these resources (Section 5), and based on the community's general goals (Section 6), makes comparisons between what exists and what is needed or desired (this section). In the following subsection, A. *Summary of Natural Resource Protection Needs*, the most important environmental issues are highlighted. In B. *Summary of Community's Needs*, the most important needs of the residents are discussed. Finally, in C. *Management Needs*, the obstacles to the effective resolution of these needs are addressed.

#### A. SUMMARY OF NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION NEEDS

The previous sections of this Open Space and Recreation Plan examined the variety of natural and cultural resources that give Shelburne its distinctive rural character. Public input, in the form of survey results, and review by Shelburne Open Space Committee members, provided a basis for discussion as to what resources are of priority concern to residents. This section outlines key natural resource protection needs.

As the climate change trend continues to unfold, the present and potential impacts of climate change on the environment, people, and the local economy are coming into focus in small communities. Local decisions about how land is used and ecosystems are managed will profoundly affect how Shelburne adapts to the challenges of climate change. Opportunities for mitigation and to promote resilience are described throughout this section.

##### ***Areas of Conservation Interest***

According to the 2022 OSRP Community Survey, more than 80% of survey respondents thought it was "very important" to protect clean drinking water, rivers and streams, clean air, ponds and wetlands, wildlife migration corridors, large blocks of forest, pollinator habitat, and preserving scenic views. Specific areas of conservation interest identified by survey respondents included the Patten District, Wilcox Hollow, ridgelines around the village and Route 2, Shingle Hill, the Deerfield River including the Potholes, and existing farmland. Half of survey takers were "very interested" in having the Town recognize indigenous heritage of the land when thinking about open space protection in town.

##### ***Farmland and Forests***

Farmland and forests give Shelburne its rural, small-town feel. Farmland and forests provide multiple public benefits to Shelburne residents. Active farming and forestry support the Town's and the region's economy. The support of local farms affords residents access to fresh

vegetables, fruits, and dairy products, as well as the opportunity to buy forest products grown by neighbors. Shelburne is a hilly town, and it's this topography that provides stunning views of farm fields and forests along hillsides in many areas of town.

A mix of forest, pasture, and hayfields offer different habitat types for mammals, birds, and insects. Large areas of contiguous forest and agricultural areas provide habitat and migration corridors for wildlife. Forest cover allows rainfall to infiltrate slowly into the ground and replenish streams and wetlands over time. Trees provide shade, sequester carbon, and clean the air.

### ***Water Resources***

Shelburne residents value clean drinking water, as well as clean rivers, streams, ponds, and wetlands. Shelburne Falls Fire and Water District owns and protects 297 acres around the drinking water source for Shelburne Falls village residents. The remainder of town relies on private wells for drinking water, and land uses can impact private water supplies. Protecting areas along rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, and wetlands would provide storage for floodwaters, increased flood resilience, benefit habitat, and improve water quality.

## **B. SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY NEEDS**

Over the next seven years covered by this plan, Town boards, committees, and commissions may need to focus on how they can collaboratively and positively impact key community needs given the community's vision of having age and ability-friendly recreation opportunities across town.

In 2017, the Commonwealth completed the Massachusetts Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), an update of the SCORP 2012 five-year plan. SCORPs are developed by individual states to be eligible for federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grants and serve as a tool for states to use in planning for future needs and uses of outdoor resources for public recreation and relaxation. A survey of Massachusetts residents was conducted to assess their desires and needs for outdoor recreation as part of the 2017 SCORP update. Informed by the survey and review of municipal open space and recreation plans, the SCORP identified the top four outdoor recreation goals for the state as: <sup>1</sup>

- Access for underserved populations
- Support of the statewide trails initiative: community-wide trail systems, hiking trails, and multi-use trails
- Increased availability of water-based recreation
- Support of the creation and renovation of neighborhood parks

---

<sup>1</sup> The 2017 Massachusetts SCORP is online at <https://www.mass.gov/files/massachusetts-scorp-2017-for-submission.pdf>. A new SCORP is due out soon.

Interestingly, the statewide top recreation goals reflect much of what Shelburne residents want in Shelburne as reflected in the community survey results.

### ***Recreation Needs***

The top recreational activities that survey respondent households currently participate in or near Shelburne are as follows:

- walking/jogging (78%)
- hiking (77%)
- gardening (73%)
- birdwatching (64%)
- swimming (50%)
- photography (50%)
- forest bathing or relaxation (49%)
- bicycling (46%)
- paddling (45%)

According to the survey respondents, the highest priority for the Town to expand, improve, or create was access to the Deerfield River for swimming, hiking, walking, fishing, floating or boating. The next highest was hiking or walking trails both within the village and in the surrounding hills. Residents also cited a need for more places for children to play, and for picnicking, dog walking, and cross-country skiing. Survey respondents also stated a desire to safely travel to destinations in town without a car.

As discussed in Section 3, Shelburne's population is aging. By 2040, it is projected that almost a third of the Town's population will be over the age of 65, compared to 20 percent currently. Walking paths, safe sidewalks, community gathering locations (pocket parks) and exercise facilities for seniors are an identified need, while also expanding offerings for young people. Public bathrooms in Shelburne Falls were a high priority for survey respondents.

### ***Expanding Public Access***

According to the Survey, residents in town love observing nature, photographing nature, and walking in nature. Shelburne residents value and respect that much of the land in town is privately owned. While not wanting to overreach, survey respondents overwhelmingly expressed a need for greater public access to open space and natural areas. In one of the open-ended questions in the public survey (question 5), almost a quarter of responses (46) mentioned the word "access." This was a common theme throughout the survey.

There are currently few locations along the Deerfield River that are publicly accessible in town, and many favorite places, such as the Potholes, where residents formerly accessed the Deerfield River, have been closed to the public. Shelburne residents, particularly those in the village who do not own large tracts of land, desperately want access to the Deerfield River and forested areas in Shelburne. There is a strong desire for more trails throughout town and in and out of

the village. The survey identified the interest in a system of non-vehicular connections throughout town, whether on bicycle or on foot.

The Shelburne side of Shelburne Falls village is an environmental justice community. As such, the Town should consider the health and wellbeing benefits for village residents that would result from expanded access to green space and outdoor recreation.

### ***Community Connections***

Shelburne is a tight-knit community that enjoys places to meet and get to know community members. The Cowell Gymnasium is a well-loved recreational resource that offers several indoor and outdoor activities for multiple ages at an affordable price or is free. Despite drawing visitors from around the world, Shelburne residents are also frequent visitors and users of the Bridge of Flowers, taking in its bounty, with the backdrop of the river and hills in the background. The Bridge of Flowers will be closed for repairs in 2024, and this will present challenges in the coming year. Residents want more places to meet to sit and talk, to exercise together outside, and to enjoy the natural resources of Shelburne. They recognize the potential that open access places can get overcrowded, and this would need to be balanced or considered during any planning process.

### ***Shelburne's Rural Character***

The rural part of Shelburne is known for its scenic agricultural landscapes and forested hills that descend to the Deerfield River. The village of Shelburne Falls is the town's downtown, with dense neighborhoods and historic commercial buildings, surrounded by views of the river and of surrounding hills. Residents support maintaining a vibrant, livable village center, as well as commercial and industrial growth along Route 112 towards Colrain and along parts of Route 2.

These desires are reflected in the survey responses and feedback received during the public forum. In Question 1 of the Survey, an overwhelming majority of respondents (87%) felt that preserving the rural and agricultural character of Shelburne is 'very important'. Residents tied this to climate change resilience and carbon sequestration in Question 4.

## **C. SUMMARY OF MANAGEMENT NEEDS**

This section addresses opportunities for improvement in the ways open space and recreation areas are managed and maintained in the Town of Shelburne.

### ***Town-Wide Cooperation***

There is a high degree of interest in open space and recreation in Shelburne. Shelburne has active Open Space and Recreation Committees, with communication and representation across these two committees. Shelburne passed the Community Preservation Act by vote in November 2022 and at Annual Town Meeting in 2023, and is forming a Community Preservation Committee (CPC) represented across interests and boards. The Open Space Committee and the

Recreation Committee will have representatives on the Community Preservation Committee when formed. The CPC will then formulate a plan, and, with a 3% property tax surcharge and funds from the Commonwealth's Trust Fund there will soon be a funding source for preserving land and recreation projects. This is an exciting opportunity for the town.

Shelburne has a Land Evaluation Policy and workbook for lands covered by Chapter 61. The Town may be interested in using this updated OSRP, its maps, and the survey results to review and update their Land Evaluation Workbook and Shelburne's procedure for notification of right-of-first refusal when Chapter 61 lands are up for sale.<sup>2</sup> The Open Space Committee can articulate qualities in parcels that would rank high and determine ways that the Town could be responsive in deciding whether and how to purchase lands of conservation interest, or to cede their right-of-first-refusal with a land conservation organization.

The key to successful implementation of this plan will reside in communication among town boards and the willingness of private landowners and the public to participate in ways that bring projects of high value to fruition.

#### ***Remove Barriers to Recreation Development***

Survey responses consistently indicated a very high interest in more trails in Shelburne that are accessible to the public. However, the Towns' zoning bylaw requires a special permit through the zoning board of appeals for any municipal or nonprofit trail in town. This unusual requirement in a zoning bylaw serves as an effective barrier to trail creation. The Planning Board is exploring the purpose of this provision in the bylaw, and either eliminate it or modify it.

Shelburne residents express a desire for the town to continue to grow, have a vibrant economy, and be a good place to raise children and get old. This Open Space and Recreation Plan update is an opportunity for the town to reflect on locations where new development can take place and what parts of town should be left "as is" or preserved.

---

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.townofshelburne.com/files/Chap\\_61\\_Review\\_Procedure.pdf](https://www.townofshelburne.com/files/Chap_61_Review_Procedure.pdf)