

***Town of Weymouth  
Massachusetts***

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# **Press Release**

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## **State Approves Weymouth's Open Space and Recreation Plan Update**

*The Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs approved the Town's update to its Open Space and Recreation. Weymouth will now be eligible to apply for Division of Conservation Services grants through February 2027.*

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Weymouth, MA – On April 29<sup>th</sup>, the Division of Conservation Services (DCS) approved Weymouth's [Open Space and Recreation Land Use Plan Update](#). DCS is a division within the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) that offers funding to cities, towns, and nonprofit groups so that they can purchase and develop land for conservation or recreation purposes. The Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) was originally approved in 2014 and set to expire in January of 2020. The Town's Department of Planning and Community Development engaged Horsley Witten Group in April of 2019 to complete the update.

The approved plan now will allow the Town to apply for DCS grants through February 2027. The OSRP helps advocate for open space and recreation needs while supporting acquisition, creation, and preservation of the Town's open spaces. The plan is an assessment of where the town is, what it envisions for the future of the spaces, and how to achieve those goals.

"The Open Space and Recreation Plan will not only allow the Town to pursue grant funding to protect and preserve our open and recreational spaces but also serve as the roadmap for our future open space goals and investment in the spaces," **said Mayor Robert L. Hedlund**. "Now, more than ever, we understand the importance of

protecting these spaces, expanding the types of open space and recreation we can offer, and making these spaces available for our Weymouth residents to use and enjoy.”

The Town conducted a robust public process which helped to identify: what lands need to be protected moving forward; types of recreational facilities that are needed; and how existing open space and recreational areas may be improved and maintained in the future.

“Public input was a vital component of the plan and was strongly encouraged,” said **Planning and Community Development Director, Robert Luongo**.

The Town held a kickoff meeting in May of 2019 to solicit feedback from residents and update them as to the purpose of the OSRP update. Approximately 50 people attended and worked in small groups to answer questions about what the Town was doing well in terms of protecting the natural environment and providing recreational opportunities, what the Town could do better to improve existing facilities, and what other opportunities the Town should pursue. The workshop was recorded and broadcast for those who could not attend and follow-up surveys were sent to those in attendance.

In addition, Town Staff and Horsley Witten Group sent a townwide Open Space Survey that received nearly 750 responses. This informed the update and answered many questions that the workshop addressed as well.

Based on the tremendous participation in the community survey, the Town put the draft Action Plan to the public for comment through a survey available from October 7-23, 2019 and received an additional 280 responses.

After collecting public feedback through the development phase, the draft Action Plan was presented to the Town Council at a public hearing. In addition, local committees such as the Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Open Space and Recreation Committee, Community Preservation Committee, and others received presentations and were able to provide feedback on the draft plan.

Mayor Hedlund provided comments and a letter of support for the plan along with various town boards and committees, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (Weymouth’s Regional Planning Agency), and Weymouth’s State legislators. The OSRP Update was submitted to EOEEA in January of 2020 and approved on April 29<sup>th</sup>.

Key highlights of the OSRP Update include the following:

- The Town will continue efforts to identify vulnerability hazards and prioritize recommendations to build resilience. Weymouth is a designated Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Community (2018). The MVP Program assists communities in planning for the impacts of climate change.

- The Town will use the Complete Streets designation (2015) to prioritize walking and biking safety improvements while connecting recreation and open space resources with neighborhoods, schools, commercial areas/village centers, libraries, historic buildings and Town facilities.
- The Town will continue efforts to make open space connections along the Back River Trail. In 2017, the Town developed Osprey Overlook Park. The park is located on the site of the Town's former landfill adjacent to Great Esker Park and has amazing views of the Back River. In addition, the Town received grant funding to complete the Lovell Field pedestrian bridge and provide a connector to the Back River Trail.
- Weymouth will continue to review and update the zoning ordinances with respect to how they relate to recreation and open space. Recent zoning changes (2018), specifically in the village centers and near commuter rail stations, encourages density and connections to recreation and open space amenities for residents.

This plan will allow the Town to pursue grant funding. Recently, Weymouth applied for and received a \$400,000 in PARC funds for King Oak Hill Park and a \$50,000 Recreational Trails Grant for Great Esker Park by having an approved OSRP. It is anticipated the Town can capitalize on similar programs in the future thanks to having an approved, updated plan.

"It is important to note that while the Open Space and Recreation Plan is valid for seven years, the Town realizes that needs and goals can change over seven years," **said Luongo**. "The Town will continue to look at this plan periodically to make changes, through a public process, if necessary."

To view the approved OSRP update, visit:

[https://www.weymouth.ma.us/sites/weymouthma/files/uploads/200407\\_weymouthosrp\\_final\\_wappendices\\_1.pdf](https://www.weymouth.ma.us/sites/weymouthma/files/uploads/200407_weymouthosrp_final_wappendices_1.pdf)

If you have questions on the plan or process, contact the Planning and Community Development Department at 781-340-5015.

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