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# Open Space and Recreation

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## Introduction

As “A Small Town Creating Opportunities for the Future,” few aspects of South Hadley’s community character are as important as its open space, parks and recreation resources. Vital to South Hadley’s quality of life, the Town’s open space and recreation resources help sustain the community’s appeal as well as protecting and conserving its many natural and scenic resources. These resources take many forms, from the conserved land on the ridgelines of the Mount Holyoke Range, to local parks and facilities and the private, undeveloped forest and agricultural lands that contribute to South Hadley’s aesthetic quality and character.

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## Definitions

Two principal themes surfaced during preparation of this Open Space and Recreation Chapter. The first theme is the need to develop an updated overarching vision and plan for open spaces and recreation in South Hadley. The second is the need for greatly enhanced communication and education about open space and recreation resources.

### *Theme I: Developing a Vision and Plan for Open Space and Recreation Resources*

South Hadley has over 3,000 acres of protected land set aside for open space, recreation, and conservation purposes. It boasts several parks and unique resources such as the campus of Mount Holyoke College, the Connecticut River waterfront, and the municipal golf course. However, the responsibility for purchasing, planning for, and managing these resources is distributed across many entities each with a different focus and area of responsibility. This makes it especially important for the Town to develop and work toward an overall vision for its open space and recreation system, and a plan for its long-term stewardship. Creating an overarching vision and plan for all of South Hadley’s parks and open spaces is a major theme stemming from the public involvement and research process for the Comprehensive Plan. This Chapter, its goals, objectives, and Recommended Actions contributes in many important ways toward this overarching vision.

*Theme II: Communicating Information on Open Space and Recreation Resources*

South Hadley’s Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee surveyed residents on their knowledge, use and enjoyment of the Town’s open space and recreation resources. The results of this survey, which are included as Appendix A, tell a compelling story. The overwhelming majority of respondents (95%) considered recreation and open space resources “very important” or “important” and felt that investments should be made in many areas, such as creating walking and hiking trails.

Of the greatest importance to South Hadley’s residents was improved communication about the Town’s open space and recreation resources and improved management of the many resources the Town has. The lack of knowledge and accessible information about these resources was often highlighted with residents citing ‘missing links’ in the Town’s recreation network – or at least a lack of information that would allow them to make greater use of the existing facilities. One survey respondent wrote

*“Wow! I had no idea our town had so many public lands. I would have loved to have gotten a welcome packet highlighting this when we moved here 5 years ago.”*

**Connectivity with Other Chapters:** There is often a good deal of overlap between the different chapters of a comprehensive plan due to the interconnectedness of the various chapters. Therefore, additional information regarding open space and recreation resources is included in Chapter 5, Natural Resources, Chapter 7, Cultural and Historical Resources, and particularly Chapter 9, Municipal Services and Facilities. In selected cases, recommendations in this chapter regarding municipal management of parks and recreation facilities are referred to in Chapter 9 as well.

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**Defining Open Space**

“Open Space” can mean many different things, including natural areas supporting biodiversity and natural functions; water resources; farms, orchards and other ‘working landscapes’; recreational areas and trails; the scenic and visual resource of undeveloped and agricultural lands; and historical resources, including historical views and landscapes. *Open Space*, as defined by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) and the Division of Conservation Services (DCS)<sup>1</sup>, is:

Conservation land, forested land, recreation land, agricultural land, corridor parks, and amenities such as small parks, green buffers along roadways or any open area that is owned by an agency or

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<sup>1</sup> Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA), Open Space and Recreation Planner’s Workbook, 2008.

organization dedicated to conservation. The term can also refer to undeveloped land with particular conservation or recreation interest. This includes vacant lots and brownfields that can be redeveloped into recreation areas.

Taken together, these vital places and environments add up to an invaluable network of lands whose management and planning require foresight, vision, and care.

Another category of open space which is becoming more commonly identified is that of a 'working landscape'. Working Landscape is a general term which is used to refer to working farms and managed forests, or areas of preservation which result in the continued production of some natural resource. While the costs and responsibility of land stewardship fall on the property owner, the benefits of working landscapes often serve larger community goals as well.

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## Defining Recreation

Recreational facilities/areas are those public and private open space areas and indoor facilities designated, managed, or developed specifically for recreational purposes. Often, these facilities and areas are categorized as either "passive recreation areas" or "active recreation areas". Passive Recreation Areas are areas of open space where recreation that has minimal impacts are permitted. Such activities may include walking, fishing, swimming, and environmental education. Conversely, Active Recreation Areas often provide more structured recreational facilities such as playgrounds, fields and courts.

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## Identification of Issues

Through the public gatherings, subcommittee meetings, work of existing local committees and commissions, a sample survey and the comprehensive Heritage Landscape Reconnaissance Report, the following issues were identified:

- Loss of open space
- Maintenance of existing facilities
- Need for more communication about available resources and facilities
- Lack of interconnection of facilities and open spaces
- Visual and physical integrity of the Mount Holyoke Range and Connecticut River
- Access to the Connecticut River for nonmotorized recreation
- Integrated walking and biking paths
- Funding for recreational resources

## Goals

A consolidated and prioritized list of major goals emerged during the development of the Open Space and Recreation Chapter that inform the two major themes of Vision and Communications:

OSR-1	Establish an ongoing, comprehensive, municipal planning process to implement the vision outlined in this Comprehensive Plan and identify trends, opportunities and strategies for meeting future needs.
OSR-2	Improve connectivity between and among the town's open space and recreation areas, adding walking and biking opportunities wherever possible.
OSR-3	Appropriate active use of South Hadley's working landscapes, including farms, forests, and the riverfront.
OSR-4	Protect the visual and physical integrity of the Mount Holyoke Range, while providing appropriate public access.
OSR-5	Provide safe, convenient and well managed access to the river for recreation.
OSR-6	Effective management of the town's parks and recreation facilities.
OSR-7	Integrated communications that provide residents with clear and useful information about all public recreation opportunities, facilities, parks and open spaces.
OSR-8	Address appropriate open space, natural resource and recreation needs on a regional basis by promoting effective relationships and partnerships with regional agencies.

## Open Space Overview

### South Hadley's Open Space and Recreation Lands

Table 4-1 below provides a summary inventory of South Hadley's major open space land resources. As of December 2009, there are approximately 1,960 acres of land in permanently protected open space status, where development is substantially restricted or prohibited. Another 1,330 acres of land are assessed as agricultural, forest, or recreation land which provides limited, temporary protection. Of the permanently protected lands, approximately 1,729 acres are publicly owned.

Approximately 284 of the total 1,960 acres were added in 2008 through acquisition of the Bachelor Brook/Stony Brook Conservation Area. Permanently protected open space now accounts for approximately 16% of all the land in South Hadley<sup>3</sup>. The 2007 Open space and Recreation Plan states that an additional 52 acres have been identified as having either natural resource or recreation potential, though they are not permanently protected.

**Table 4-1  
Summary of Open Space in South Hadley, 2009<sup>3</sup>**

<b>Parcel Description</b>	<b>Number of Parcels</b>	<b>Acreage</b>
<b>Mass. State Agricultural Program Parcels</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>1,516</b>
Chapter 61	2	30
Chapter 61A	51	1,057
Chapter 61B	4	243
APR Program	1	131
Forest Legacy Program	4	100
<b>Conservation Restriction Parcels</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>463.9</b>
Bachelor Brook-Stony Brook area	7	284
Lyman Parcel	1	58.4
Brockway Parcel	3	31.6
FD#2 Dry Brook Well area	3	2.4
D&S Corporation	1	13.8
Browner	3	16.9
Hawkins	1	3
Bagg Pierce	1	28
Valley Land Fund	3	25.8
<b>Private Recreation Parcels</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>32.3+</b>
South Hadley Swim Club	1	10
Redcliff Canoe Club	1	0.6
Mount Holyoke College	4	NA
Western Massachusetts Girl Scout Council	1	21.7
Brunelle's Marina	1	5
McCray's Farm Miniature Golf and Animal Park	2	2
<b>Public and Nonprofit Parcels</b>	<b>Various</b>	<b>1,275.2</b>
Commonwealth of Massachusetts	Various	1,265
Nonprofit Organizations	2	10.2

Source: South Hadley Conservation Commission, May 2010.

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<sup>3</sup> The number of acres enrolled in the 61B program can change annually; data are from 2010

It is important to note the difference between publicly-owned parcels and those in conservation restriction. Parcels subject to a conservation restriction generally are prohibited from further development but may continue in private ownership or stewardship. While these restricted parcels will not, for example, be available for conventional housing development, owners typically retain some rights to alter and modify the landscape and its cover. Developing a central, accessible inventory of these conservation restriction documents would be beneficial for use in open space planning and for helping the community to understand the specific level of protection and allowable change that could occur on each parcel.

## Regional Open Space Resources

South Hadley’s undeveloped lands are rich in natural resources and home to many important natural communities including wetlands, forests, working landscapes, scenic landscapes, ponds, rivers, vernal pools, and habitats of rare wildlife. These are linked together with similar resource lands in adjacent communities to form part of the Pioneer Valley’s overall network of wildlife corridors, forest lands, natural communities, and water resources. Table 4-2 below compares South Hadley’s open space resources with the communities that surround it.

**Table 4-2**  
**Open Space Lands in South Hadley and Adjacent Communities**  
 (Includes Forested Land and Wetlands)

Community	Total Land Area (mi <sup>2</sup> )	Percent in Open Space	Approximate Open Space (mi <sup>2</sup> )
Granby	28.1	69.5%	19.5
Hadley	24.7	33.4%	8.2
Ludlow	28.3	64.6%	18.3
Holyoke	22.8	59.2%	13.5
Northampton	35.7	58.3%	20.8
South Hadley	18.5 <sup>5</sup>	56.6%	10.5
Amherst	27.8	54.8%	15.2
Regional Average	24.8	54.0%	13.6
Easthampton	13.6	50.6%	6.9
Chicopee	23.9	38.6%	9.2

Source: MassGIS 1999 Land Use data, see [http://www.mass.gov/dep/service/my\\_comm/mycomm.htm](http://www.mass.gov/dep/service/my_comm/mycomm.htm)

Note: Open Space on this table includes forested land and wetlands, both protected and unprotected. Does not consider Agricultural lands.

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<sup>4</sup> This is also addressed in the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission’s Heritage Landscape Report, prepared in 2009.  
<sup>5</sup> See footnote 6 in Chapter 2.

**Public Parks and Recreation Facilities**

South Hadley has a variety of playgrounds and athletic and recreation facilities as listed in Table 4-3. Approximately 19 percent or 306 acres of the Town’s 1610 acres of publicly owned lands are reserved for active recreational activities. These parcels are managed by the Recreation Commission, School Department and Golf Commission.

**Table 4-3  
Town-Owned Recreation Facilities**

Name	Location	Facilities
Beachgrounds Park	Main Street	Basketball court (1), Playground equipment, Multi-purpose (baseball/softball/soccer/football) fields, 1 lighted (3), Spray park
Bicentennial Canal Park	Canal Street	60’ dock, public river access for non-motorized boating
Buttery Brook Park	123 Willimansett Street	Basketball courts (2), Playground lot (1), Playground equipment, Picnic area (with 2 covered pavilions), Skate park
South Hadley High School	153 Newton Street	Multi-purpose field, lighted (football, soccer, lacrosse) (1), Baseball fields (2), Softball field (1), Running track (1)
Michael E. Smith Middle School	100 Mosier Street	Multi-purpose fields (soccer, lacrosse) (3)
Plains Elementary School	267 Granby Road	Baseball/softball/soccer field (1). Playground areas (3)
Mosier Elementary School	101 Mosier Street	Basketball courts (2), Playground area, Baseball/softball/soccer fields (2)
Center School Field	36 Hadley Street (at Hampshire Christian Academy building)	Baseball/softball/soccer field (1)
Woodlawn School (Council on Aging)	45 Dayton Street	Basketball court (1), Playground area, Baseball/softball/soccer field (1)
Town Farm	Route 47 (Hadley Street)	Athletic fields (soccer and lacrosse), ice rink, picnic area, community garden plots (20)
Ledges Golf Course	18 Mulligan Drive	18-hole golf course, Driving range, Clubhouse, Cross country skiing

Source: South Hadley Open Space and Recreation Plan (2007)

It is important to note that the Recreation Commission is responsible for running and advertising recreation programs; actual maintenance for the parks is the responsibility of the Parks Department, under the Department of Public Works. The exception to this is that the activities at Buttery Brook Park are sponsored by the Friends of Buttery Brook Park under guidance of the Parks Department.

Active-use parcels and playing fields are in heavy demand, leading to a notable lack of facilities and spaces sufficient to meet the needs of the school-age population in South Hadley and the needs of adult leagues. At the present time, there is only one field suitable for men's softball and there is interest in, but little space to support, both a co-ed softball league and a semi-professional men's baseball league.

The parks and recreation facilities in South Hadley Falls bear special mention. As discussed in the Economic Development Chapter of this Plan, with the renovation of the Beachgrounds Park, there is a strong potential to use recreation facilities as a major draw to the Falls and an economic development generator. Discussions are ongoing with Holyoke Gas & Electric (HG & E), the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Massachusetts Historical Commission on the future of the Texon building and development of several riverfront parks. Creation of Lower Riverside Park is part of HG&E's dam licensing mandates from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission while Upper Gatehouse Park (north of the Texon building) is required as mitigation for an earlier demolition of the Texon boiler room. Once the Texon building is demolished, HG&E is expected to be required to develop a park linking Lower Riverside Park to Upper Gatehouse Park. These discussions should reflect and incorporate the open space and recreation planning and visioning principles from this Plan so that these future additions to the Falls further support a sound recreation-based component to redevelopment.

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## **Beachgrounds Park**

Located in the South Hadley Falls area, the Beachgrounds Park is the central focus of many community and neighborhood activities. In 1998, a Playground Committee noted the need to replace aging playground equipment, some of which had been in place for over forty years. The Committee also suggested that the park be redesigned to more fully and safely allow for the variety of activities it offers, which include baseball, softball, basketball, football, and soccer.

In recognition of these needs, the Town has moved forward with a significant upgrade to the facility. In October 2007, the Beachgrounds received a \$500,000 Urban Self-Help Grant to be administered by the Recreation Department for: making the park ADA accessible, walking paths, a river view picnic area, renovated bathrooms, spray park, playground equipment, picnic tables, benches, and other improvements. Renovations to the park were completed in June 2009. The spray park water feature replaced a wading pool that was closed in 2006 and is an important chapter of the redevelopment plan.



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## Canal Park

Canal Park, also known as Bicentennial Canal Park, lies along the old canal bed paralleling the Connecticut River just north of the Holyoke Dam. The first of South Hadley's Riverside Park System, Canal Park was developed as part of our nation's Bicentennial Celebration (1975-1976) and offers public access to the Connecticut River.

The overlook at this park offers breathtaking views of the surrounding mountains and the river. A canoe, kayak, or other non-motorized boat may be launched at the park's 60 foot dock. It has been a favorite fishing spot for years.

This park is significant in its historic context of commemorating and securing the site of the South Hadley Canal. Begun in 1792 by a petition to the Massachusetts General Court; in 1795, the South Hadley Canal became our country's first commercial navigational canal. The Canal was operational until April 1, 1863. The site of the canal is included on the National Record of Historic Places.

Development of this park demonstrates the effective role of the community. Inclusion of the canal on the National Register of Historic Places was achieved through the efforts of several citizens. Similarly, the development of Canal Park was principally the achievement of a group of volunteers who were very interested in the recreational and historical aspects of this site.

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## Buttery Brook Park

Buttery Brook Park, which is supported by the non-profit Friends of Buttery Brook Park ([www.butterybrookpark.org](http://www.butterybrookpark.org)), is on Route 33 just north of Chicopee. Located near several areas of active residential and commercial development, the park was opened over 30 years ago and is an important part of recreation and community activities in South Hadley. The animal feeding area is especially popular, particularly for families with children.

As with many public parks, maintenance and resource issues led to closure of a former state pool. Water quality issues with Buttery Brook limit use of the park's facilities. However, South Hadley's Parks Division has improved maintenance substantially by hiring an employee and setting aside dedicated funds for maintenance. In addition, the Friends of Buttery Brook Park have helped develop plans for revitalization of the Park and carried out different activities and programs to promote use and stewardship of the Park, such as Big Rig Day, Cruise Nights, and Summer Concerts. The "Santa Land" event over a two-week period in December is a combined effort of the DPW Parks staff and the Friends of Buttery Brook Park.

Fundraising efforts by the Friends and work by the DPW are improving conditions and facilities. Much of the financial support for these initiatives comes from rental

fees on the pavilions and picnic tables. Increasing fee-paying use of these facilities is seen as essential to ongoing maintenance and improvements.

At the time of this Plan's writing, a new playground is being built in the center of the park; other planned and ongoing additions and renovations are in the works. Walking trails are being delineated, and a sand volleyball court has been established. The skate park was renovated in 2008 and is widely used by individuals and families. A tennis court facility is planned for the front portion of the park, if supplemental funding is secured from donations, grants and town support. State support is anticipated as well. A \$2 million state bond has been awarded for construction of a spray park, and new restrooms.

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### Woodlawn School (Council on Aging)

On the Woodlawn School site where the Council on Aging is located, a new playground with equipment was installed in 1998 through the efforts of the town's Playground Committee. The Committee examined all the playgrounds in town, documented their findings and designated the Woodlawn site to fill a void.

Woodlawn School does include a basketball court, and recent improvements have been made to the baseball field, including dugouts, sod, a scoreboard, and outfield fencing. However, an ongoing graffiti problem exists, as this site is a convenient cut-through for pedestrians. Improvements also are needed for the playground. Therefore, maintenance and supervision are ongoing needs at this site.

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### Town Farm

The Town Farm on Route 47 (Hadley Street) comprises two athletic fields, which are in very heavy demand and a picnic area. The land abuts the Bachelor Brook/Stony Brook Resource Conservation Area. In 2003, the Town worked with the Marine Corps to have a portion of this site transformed into two athletic fields. The intense use of these fields points to the need for more athletic fields to serve the town's growing demand. Field improvements to address drainage and compaction were recently implemented.

Construction of a community garden area at the Town Farm began in July 2009 and is further discussed in a later section.

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### School District Recreational Facilities

School recreation facilities are an important component of any community's inventory of recreation resources. South Hadley's facilities generally would benefit from greater upkeep and maintenance, but recent improvements have enhanced the condition of several recreation fields and areas. The High School athletic fields were

upgraded and slightly reconfigured as part of the building renovation project completed in 2001. A few years ago a citizens' group formed to help direct and encourage overall improvements in the High School's athletic facilities. Continued improvements through donations and fundraising to the baseball and softball fields at the High School have really helped. A new multi-purpose field was added at the Middle School during the 2001 renovations.

However, South Hadley's track and field facility, located on land adjacent to South Hadley High School, is inadequate. As a result, the Town cannot host certain track and field events that otherwise could take place in South Hadley. At the present time, the High School uses Mount Holyoke College's track and field facilities.

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### The Ledges Golf Course

Among South Hadley's recreation resources is its 18-hole public golf course, The Ledges. Located on a parcel of land that offers impressive views of the Mount Tom Range and is home to many species of wildlife, the parcel was once seen as the likely site of a large-lot residential subdivision similar to one just to its south, were the land not conserved. In 1998, with the assistance of a \$500,000 Urban Self-Help Grant, the town acquired the 244-acre tract west of Alvord Street and adjoining Lower River Road. From 1999 to 2000, the town developed the golf course, including a temporary clubhouse, and in 2007 added a driving range along Alvord Street. In 2008 a permanent clubhouse and restaurant were opened. The town annually appropriates funds to cover the debt service associated with the land purchase and construction of the course.

There is ongoing discussion about future uses for the land that will expand its' benefit to the town without compromising the golf course function. Recommendations have included hiking trails, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and making the clubhouse facility available for these sports and for tourism promotion. South Hadley and the Golf Commission will be charged with weighing the costs and potential revenue associated with introducing additional activities to the golf course and for ensuring widespread community buy-in prior to taking any action.

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### Indoor Recreation Facilities

Indoor recreation facilities in South Hadley are provided as accessory to other facilities or through accessory use of other facilities such as the Town Hall Auditorium (exercise and dance classes) and the Senior Center. An indoor pool is available for public use at the Michael E. Smith Middle School. Several churches also provide indoor recreation facilities.

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## Public Meeting Space & Gathering Facilities

An important corollary to public parks (particularly in New England’s four-season climate) public meeting spaces and gathering facilities represent another type of recreation resource that requires public planning and consideration. Town Hall, Buttery Brook Park, and the Town Common are among the most commonly used outdoor public meeting spaces. The schools, Police Station, Library, Town Hall, Senior Center, and Fire District 1 and 2 buildings also offer indoor public meeting space.

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## South Hadley Conservation Areas

In addition to the active parks, fields, and school recreation facilities, the Town of South Hadley owns and manages a rich array of conservation land totaling approximately 1,200 acres, as shown in Table 4-4. These lands are owned by the town and managed by the Conservation Commission and make up a significant portion of the 1,600 acres of town owned lands. These parcels range in size from three to 284 acres, and many have multiple resource and open space values.

As indicated in Table 4-4, the level of access and use available to the public on these lands varies tremendously. While some have accessible parking areas and public trails, others are less accessible or entirely landlocked. Moreover, many of these parcels are scattered throughout the Town, and without a consistent effort to sign, identify, and map these lands, are overlooked as potential recreation sites. A major theme of this chapter and the Comprehensive Plan as a whole is promoting connections among these important land resources – both physically and through easily accessible information – to enhance the overall quality of life in South Hadley.

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## Private Recreation Facilities and Activities

Private organizations own land used for recreational purposes primarily by their members. In addition to the facilities described elsewhere in this chapter and listed below, there are organizations such as the Western Massachusetts Yacht Club, South Hadley Sportsmen’s Club, and the Orion Farm, which offer private recreation opportunities. Private recreation organizations active in South Hadley include:

- **Brunelle’s Marina** on the Connecticut River is an important center for boating and river recreation in South Hadley.
- The **South Hadley Swim Club** owns a site of approximately 10 acres off Amherst Road. The club’s facilities include an in ground swimming pool, a wading pool, a basketball court, locker rooms, and a covered picnic area. Fee-based membership is open to anyone.

- The **Redcliff Canoe Club**, a private, fee-based membership club, owns a 27,000 SF parcel along Canal Street abutting the Connecticut River. This site is used for boating, swimming, and fishing and has a boat launch ramp on the River.
- **Western Mass Yacht Club** on Cove Island off River Road maintains a dock accessing the Connecticut River.
- **South Hadley Sportsmen's Club** off River Road provides a shooting range and conducts various programs through the year.
- **Orion Farm** is located off Newton Street and includes a horse arena and offers riding classes.
- **McCray's Farm**, located off Alvord Street and River Lodge Road, remains a working farm, but also provides recreational activities in the form of miniature golf, a small animal park, and an ice cream stand.

The above is not inclusive of all private recreational facilities in South Hadley. Other property owners offer a variety of recreational opportunities.

### Mount Holyoke College

Mount Holyoke College has significant open space lands and recreation facilities. These are available to Mount Holyoke College students, faculty, staff, alumnae and invited guests. The College has welcomed town residents to use their facilities including trails and certain buildings.

- The **Orchards Golf Club** was built in the early part of the 20th century by Joseph Skinner and given by him to the College. The College's ownership continues but the management and operation of the club has been contracted to Arnold Palmer Golf, Inc. The golf course is open to members and guests.
- The College's **Athletic Fields and Track** are on land abutting Silver Street and have been made available for South Hadley residents' usage at specific times and under certain conditions. The College recently renovated the fields and track to bring them into compliance with NCAA requirements in 2007. The College has assured the Town that the high school's use of the facilities will be continued.
- Residents of South Hadley are permitted to utilize the path around Upper Lake for walking and running.
- The College has recently completed development of a parcel of land along the Connecticut River and north of Ferry Street as a boathouse and dock, for use by student and community rowing programs. The land was acquired in 2005 from Northeast Utilities, Inc.
- An 18-acre parcel on the Mount Holyoke Range includes a cabin for student use.

Mount Holyoke College has divested ownership of some of its previous land holdings over the past decade. The sale of the Sycamore House to the South Hadley Historical Society is one example of some of the divested properties.

## Western Massachusetts Girl Scout Council

The Western Massachusetts Girl Scout Council owns and operates Camp Lewis Perkins, a 22-acre outdoor facility with frontage on Bachelor Brook and the Old Pearl City Pond lakebed. Facilities at the camp include a lodge, troop cabin, nine small cabins, a maintenance building, tents, latrines, flush toilets, an in ground pool, hiking trails, a playing field, and an outdoor cooking area. During July and August, four to six sessions of week long camp serve 100 campers each. Troop camping is available from October through May, and occasional day events take place during winter. Site use fees are charged. When space permits, the camp is available to groups with missions similar to the Girl Scouts.

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## Farmlands, Community Gardens, and Other Working Landscapes

South Hadley has done very little planning around agricultural use and production, making this an area that is ripe for future planning activities and grant projects. Mapping potential sites for community gardens and conducting an inventory and interviews of local farmers and producers would be important first steps and could be done as part of a sustainability initiative and/or in conjunction with the Agricultural Commission's activities. The Zoning Bylaw also should be evaluated to determine any potential conflict between such activities as farmer's markets, the sale of produce from a property or community gardens.

Communities throughout Massachusetts and New England are beginning to bring together principles of food sustainability planning and open space planning. As part of its sustainability goals, South Hadley will need to begin thinking about its farms, fields, and even pockets of open land in the more densely settled parts of the town as pieces of a working landscape for gardening and food production. The establishment of both a Right-to-Farm Bylaw and an Agricultural Commission at Town Meeting in May 2009 represents a vital start for understanding and supporting the Town's agricultural producers and creating a local food network. In addition, the Selectboard formed a committee in June 2009 to explore the creation of community gardens, which supports this initiative as well. One example in nearby Franklin County is the Western Massachusetts Food Processing Center, operated by the Franklin County Community Development Corporation, offering processing and marketing assistance to agricultural producers in the region.

### Community Gardens

The Town Farm area off Route 47 is the site where a project is underway, led by volunteers, to construct a community garden. Work commenced in July 2009. The GRO.SoHadley (Gardening and Resident Outreach) Committee, appointed by the Selectboard in June, 2009, is overseeing the initial 20 plots with educational

workshops planned for Fall and Winter months. Sustainable and environmentally sound practices are being utilized and gardening for residents of all abilities is being encouraged.

### **McCray's Farm**

Privately owned and operated farms can become integral to a community's portfolio of open space resources. Both visually and economically, local farms may become landmarks and central to a community's sense of identity and place. This is certainly the case with McCray's farm, which is located along Alvord Street. McCray's remains a working farm, but also provides recreational activities in the form of miniature golf, a small animal park, and an ice cream stand. The McCray Farm property offers scenic vistas of both the Mount Tom and Mount Holyoke Ranges. Plans are under way by the owner to put much of the McCray farmland into a Massachusetts Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program.

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**Table 4-4: Conservation Commission Parcels**

Conservation Area	Fig. 4 -1 Parcel ID	Acres	Trail?	Access	Parking	Features
Bachelor Brook	16	62	No	No Access	NO	This wooded 4.7 acre property along Bachelor Brook is landlocked and not accessible without permission of abutting private landowners.
Bachelor Brook - Stony Brook	1	284 acres	Yes	Ferry Street, Route 47	At Town Farm & informal roadside at Rt 47	Includes several large fields maintained as corn and hay fields by local farmer, rest woodland. Acreage includes land north and south of Bachelor Brook off Rt 47, and floodplain forest of Stony Brook on the south side of Ferry Street. A few unmapped trails originate from the Town Farm property and Rt 47.
Bagg-Pierce Wildlife Sanctuary	3	32 acres	Yes	Edgewater Lane	Limited, at entrance	Adjacent to the Connecticut River, this parcel is home to several trails and an old woods road, which traverses the site providing access for wildlife viewing and enjoyment.
Black Stevens	15	62	Yes	High School, Plains School	Yes, at the schools	Easily accessible site, which provides marked walking trails and a forested landscape which includes oaks, maples, paper birch, hemlocks, and wildflower's such as pink lady's slippers as well as the great horned owls.
Bynan	2	162 acres	Yes	New Ludlow Road, Lyman Street, Bartlett Street	Informal roadside	Includes 20 acres for expansion of nearby town landfill, which will return to conservation land after closure and capping. Property consists of dry pitch pine and oak woods, with a few large ponds and many trails. Old wood roads wander throughout the area, facilitating hiking and cross-country skiing.
Carver, Jones, Newton	6, 7, 8	31 acres	Yes	lower River Road	Informal Roadside	These parcels consist of wooded lands along the Connecticut River with incredibly limited access to the river due to wetlands and a high, steep bank along the river that is dominated by hemlocks.
Gormally	13	NA	No	San Souci Drive	Informal roadside	Wet meadow, which is also home to a wildlife habitat, and provides a scenic view to the north.
Hawkins Bird Sanctuary	12	3	No	Silver Street	NO	A wooded property with 2 small streams that cross the property and wetlands throughout, it was designated as a wildlife sanctuary. A recent sewer replacement project opened up a wide path across the middle of the property, which may be used for walking when not too wet.
LeBlanc	9	3.4 acres	No	Brainerd Street	NO	The area is mostly wetland and wooded vegetation.
Mount Holyoke Range	10	~ 348 acres	Yes	State trail network	Off Rt 116, Rt 47 and Lithia Springs Rd.	There are quite a number of parcels on the Mount Holyoke Range that are owned by the town, and many more owned by the state. The Conservation Commission records list 15 properties acquired by the town through purchase and generous donations. Access is along established trails that cross the range.
Popp	14	NA	No	Edgewater Lane	NO	Parcel lies between the Connecticut River and the Bagg-Pierce Wildlife Sanctuary, sharing many of its same characteristics.
Titus Pond	5	3.8 acres	Yes	Route 116	NO	Most of property is the pond; small amount of land surrounding it and wetland behind it. Access is from the sidewalk along Newton Street, with a short trail that provides access to the shoreline for fishing.
Trompke /Stony Brook	11	10.1 acres	No	Mary Lyon Drive	Informal Roadside	A small trail extends down toward the stream, but most of the area is wooded wetland and Stony Brook.
Warner	4	9	Yes	Mosier Street	Roadside only	Area has a path which leads into a wooded honeysuckle grove on a hill, then down to a wet meadow and stream crossed by a boardwalk to an open hayfield



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## Open Space Planning and Stewardship

South Hadley's location and natural resources, and a history of interest in conservation and preservation, have resulted in the acquisition and retention of 1,960 acres of permanently conserved open space. Managing and planning for these lands, and for further acquisitions, requires the combined effort of many different boards and groups, some with overlapping roles and others with different functions. A number of different plans have been prepared, each with a different focus, that represents a wealth of information on the Town's resources, but they need to be brought together in the service of overall open space and community goals.

Another persistent theme from the public engagement process and survey is that people in South Hadley want greater use of their open and recreational spaces, and gathering spaces. Creating walking and hiking networks and other potential gathering places has not been a Town priority with respect to recreation. This Plan highlights the need to begin to align these public desires with the Town's investments. By improving the use of these outstanding resources, South Hadley can also enhance the community's economy, quality of life, environmental and visual quality, and attractiveness to current and new residents alike.

South Hadley has two plans with a special purpose and role in its open space and recreation planning: the State-approved Open Space and Recreation Plan, or OSRP, most recently approved in 2007; and the newly-published Heritage Landscape Inventory, prepared in early 2009 by the Department of Conservation and Recreation. Each of these plans has a different purpose and focus, and a different public body responsible for its development and implementation. These, and other notable open space and recreation planning documents, are outlined below.

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### 2007 Open Space & Recreation Plan (OSRP)

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts encourages each town to prepare and seek approval of an Open Space and Recreation Plan or "OSRP" every five years. These plans are approved by the Massachusetts Division of Conservation Services (DCS). An approved OSRP makes a community eligible for DCS grant programs that fund open space acquisition and enhancements to recreational facilities.

South Hadley's most recently approved OSRP, entitled "The Range and the River," was approved in 2007 and is valid through 2012. This is the third update to South Hadley's OSRP since the first one was developed and approved in December 1988. The key points from that document are summarized and updated throughout this Chapter of the South Hadley Comprehensive Plan.

The level of effort involved in the OSRP updates has varied. The 2007 OSRP update did not include significant new public outreach, and largely drew upon the concerted and thorough public outreach effort and town-wide survey done in conjunction with the Town's Community Development Plan update in 2003-2004.

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## Heritage Landscape Inventory Program

The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) recently conducted an inventory of South Hadley's Heritage Landscapes<sup>6</sup>. Since the program's inception in 2001, it has blossomed into a critical component of Massachusetts land and community preservation. The program supports the preservation of historical landscape by providing: technical assistance to municipalities, increased awareness of historical landscapes in Massachusetts, publications to educate the public about historical landscapes, and leadership on the preservation of cultural landscapes under the ownership and management of the DCR.

Key information and recommendations from the 2009 Heritage Landscape Reconnaissance Report have been incorporated into this Comprehensive Plan. With respect to open space and recreation planning, it identifies the McCray's Farm, Pearl Street farmland, South Hadley Canal park area, and Mount Holyoke Range as crucial areas for conservation in the context of South Hadley's historic landscapes.

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## Mount Holyoke Range GOALS Plan

The Department of Conservation and Recreation Mount Holyoke Range State Park GOALS Plan was formally adopted in 1987 by the DCR Board. GOALS was established as a means of (1) supplementing DCR's "Long Range Capital Outlay Plan" for specific land acquisition and facilities development, and (2) establishing management objectives and recommendations. Within South Hadley, the following recommendations have been offered:

- Develop a trail system utilizing the existing trail from Route 47 north along Dry Brook to Taylor Notch, and at that point constructing a trail south, across Dry Brook to "hill 721";
- Develop a bikeway extending from the Mount Holyoke College Campus to the existing Hampshire College-to-UMASS bikeway using the abandoned trolley right of way which runs parallel to Route 116 and is most apparent east of the Notch Visitor's Center;
- Continue the DCR policy of purchasing lands along the Mount Holyoke Range within the ultimate acquisition boundary. Parcels located outside the prescribed area will be reviewed for purchase on a willing seller basis. The



<sup>6</sup> <http://www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship/histland/overview.htm>

purpose of such acquisitions will continue to be protection of scenic views of the range.

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## Managing Open Space Lands

The town and state are the key governmental players in managing South Hadley's diverse open space and recreation lands network, but by no means the only ones. Private landowners, notably owners of working landscapes and especially farmers, are also actively engaged in managing open space lands. This section discusses the role and responsibilities of the state, town, and other agencies in acquiring and managing South Hadley's open space lands, and the tools used to do so.

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### Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)

Partnership with the DCR is one of the most important Chapters in South Hadley's overall conservation planning and preservation efforts. The DCR, whose mission is to protect, promote and enhance our common wealth of natural, cultural and recreational resources<sup>7</sup>, is the steward of an extensive state park system. Within South Hadley, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts owns 1,265 acres of land including Skinner State Park and the Mount Holyoke Range State Park. As part of the DCR efforts to plan for development of the two parks, they have established an Ultimate Acquisition Boundary (UAB) which identifies the generalized areas targeted for acquisition (see Map Appendix).

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### Town of South Hadley

In part because South Hadley has such an abundance and variety of open space resources, planning and management is a substantial challenge facing the Town. The Town itself owns a significant amount of open space land (approximately 1,687 acres) under the management of multiple organizations. The Recreation Department and Recreation Commission, Golf Commission, Canal Park Committee, School Department and the Conservation Commission all have management roles and responsibilities for the stewardship of lands in South Hadley. The Parks Division of the DPW is responsible for maintaining town facilities' grounds, athletic fields, School Department grounds, and other parks. This highlights the importance of these resources to the town – but also the need for careful coordination and management towards the community's overall goals.

As noted in the Introduction to this chapter, the most important theme in this Comprehensive Plan for open space and recreation is the need to develop,



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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.mass.gov/dcr/aboutDCR.htm>

communicate, and work towards an over-arching vision for the stewardship of South Hadley's open space and recreational resources. The Comprehensive Plan sets important goals that can help guide each of the involved boards and committees, but also challenges the Town to re-examine and possibly re-structure its efforts in some areas.

#### Conservation Commission<sup>8</sup>

The South Hadley Conservation Commission is responsible for administration of the wetlands laws, including enforcement, and directly charged with the tasks of assisting the public in understanding and following the wetland laws, protecting and managing land for conservation and passive recreation purposes, and promoting the conservation of South Hadley's natural resources. The resources managed by the Conservation Commission are listed in Table 4-4.

#### Planning Board<sup>9</sup>

South Hadley's Planning Board and staff assist the community in efforts to achieve balanced growth, quality development, and preservation of community assets through effective development regulation, zoning, assistance in obtaining funding resources for community projects, and long-term planning. The Planning Board plays a role in the acquisition of conservation lands.

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### Private and Non-Profit Agencies

Lands owned and managed by private and non-profit agencies are an important part of South Hadley's network of open space lands, and the town has the opportunity to partner with several nonprofit organizations active in the preservation of open space in the town and region. Private or non-profit agencies represent a vital complement to the town's purchasing and management roles, greatly expanding the resources and potential options for achieving conservation goals. For example, these organizations can raise funds for conservation through donations, grants or memberships; act as an intermediary with landowners; or buy and hold lands that are important to conserve, but require more rapid action than a public agency can accomplish. Perhaps the most notable example of these important partnerships was the successful partnership between the town and the Trust for Public Land to conserve the Bachelor Brook/Stony Brook Conservation Area, a project that was assisted substantially by Mount Holyoke College.

Other agencies active in land conservation partnerships within the town, or who could help implement provisions of this Plan are The Connecticut River Watershed Council, The Kestrel Trust, Trust for Public Land, Valley Land Fund, Friends of the Mount Holyoke Range, Open Space Institute, and The Trustees of Reservations.



<sup>8</sup> [http://www.southhadley.org/Pages/SouthHadleyMA\\_Consevation/index](http://www.southhadley.org/Pages/SouthHadleyMA_Consevation/index)  
<sup>9</sup> [http://www.southhadley.org/Pages/SouthHadleyMA\\_Planning/board](http://www.southhadley.org/Pages/SouthHadleyMA_Planning/board)

These organizations and their roles are described in more detail in the appendix to this Chapter.

As described in the Municipal Services and Facilities Chapter, many private and public agencies other than the town own and manage open space and recreation lands within South Hadley. In addition to Mount Holyoke College, (perhaps the most visible private landowner) these organizations include the Redcliff Canoe Club, South Hadley Swim Club, South Hadley Sportsmen's Club, Brunelle's Marina, SHELD, Western Massachusetts Girl Scout Council, McCray's Farm, Northeast Utilities, and Holyoke Gas and Electric.

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## Land Acquisition and Protection Methods

The conserved lands described in Table 4-4 were acquired or protected through a variety of land conservation methods, which are described in the Appendix of this Chapter. While agencies and organizations involved in South Hadley's conservation work have used fee simple acquisition, acquisition of partial rights, and easements, other lands have been acquired through the use of Right of First Refusal, tax title, and donations. For example, many important parcels in South Hadley were owned at one time by a private conservation group. When this group disbanded, titles to the lands were passed on to the Town of South Hadley with permanent conservation restrictions and management by the Conservation Commission. Several Town-owned parcels on the range were transferred this way, along with Titus Pond and the landlocked Bachelor Brook parcel.

The Town's Assessor is well versed in the Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B available tax incentive programs that offer incentives to private landowners for preserving certain aspects of their land:

- Chapter 61 Forest Land Tax Law, for active forest management of at least 10 acres
- Chapter 61A Farm Land Tax Law, which provides favorable treatment of lands of five acres or more in active agricultural or horticultural use
- Chapter 61B Recreational Tax Law, which reduces the assessed value of lands of five acres or more open for natural, wild, open landscape, or certain approved recreational use

For all properties assessed under these programs, each the town has the right of first refusal, which provides the town with the first opportunity to accept or refuse an offer to purchase. This provision lasts for 120 days unless waived by the town. However, it is important to note that protection of these properties is temporary, and the owner may opt out of the program at any time.

The state offers an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program that can be used to permanently protect land in agricultural use. Only one property (a 130.6 acre

tract formerly part of the Cournoyer farm) in South Hadley is currently under the APR program. However, Stephen McCray, who currently owns the existing APR property has applied for an APR for most of the McCray Farm property on Alvord Street.

The Community Preservation Act (CPA) provides a dedicated source of funding for open space preservation, housing, and historical preservation activities. Recreation improvements can also be allowed under a portion of the funding. When communities adopt the CPA, they establish a surcharge on the local real estate tax which may be up to 3%, but could also exempt certain classes or portions of property from the surcharge. As a partner with participating communities, the state provides a partial match to the local funds using fees generated through filings in the Registry of Deeds. However, a local committee determines how to utilize the funds within the parameters set in state law. All of the funds, including the portion provided as a state match can be used to match other grants, including other state grants.

142 of Massachusetts communities have adopted the CPA. Another 78 communities have voted against adoption of the program.

South Hadley explored adoption of the CPA approximately 8-9 years ago. At that time, the exploratory committee felt the Town would not approve the program and recommended further exploration of its application. A new exploration of the program was placed on the ballot in 2008 proposing to establish the surcharge at 3% (the maximum allowed) but to exempt the first \$100,000 of residential value and low-income homeowners. Adoption of the CPA was voted down by a 53% to 47% margin.

Any and all of these methods either have been applied, or have potential application, within South Hadley as pieces of an overall conservation land strategy. Tailoring these strategies and methods to the land ownership and financial situation at hand is key to ensuring ongoing conservation success.

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## South Hadley's Open Space and Recreation Needs

With the wealth of natural resources in South Hadley, outdoor active and passive recreation can become a greater strength for the town. Improving and expanding parks to serve people of all ages was cited repeatedly as a high priority for town residents. Residents believe that South Hadley has great potential for developing an excellent park and recreational system to serve its residents. Successful efforts to revitalize parks, as has been done with The Beachgrounds and Buttery Brook Park, will serve South Hadley in a number of ways. This, in turn, could be capitalized on as [a](#) means of attracting visitors from other parts of the Pioneer Valley and beyond. There is also significant interest in continued preservation of open space, focusing on

the Mount Holyoke Range, Connecticut River, and preservation of working landscapes and farms. Finally, with the recent establishment of the Agricultural Commission and Right-to-Farm Bylaw, South Hadley also has made it a priority to support and protect farming and agricultural operations that are part and parcel of the town's character and history.

This section discusses the particular issues and concerns expressed by the public, staff, commission and committee members, and CPAC in the Comprehensive Plan development process. Key aspects of the Open Space and Recreation network are:

- Parks and recreation areas
- Pathways and connections
- Connecticut River waterfront & Mount Holyoke Range
- Farmland and other working landscapes

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## Parks and Recreation Areas

Parks and recreation facilities play an integral role in a community such as South Hadley, where open space and recreation is a vital component of the Town's character and attractiveness. Recreational facilities, both passive and active, that offer services to a range of users can help attract users of all ages and aid in resident retention by increasing community livability, especially for younger households or households with children.

As part of the Comprehensive Plan process, several community gatherings were conducted to gain input from community members. In addition to information compiled in the public forum, a survey was created and made available on the Comprehensive Plan website which specifically addressed South Hadley's natural resources, open space, parks and recreation facilities.

Surveys for the Comprehensive Plan update again revealed the important communication theme related to basic information on the town's resources; and highlighted the need for more active management and targeted investment in the town's open spaces and especially the parks, to serve the needs of residents and enhance the value of these spaces to the community.

**Parks and Playgrounds:** Improved parks and recreation facilities have been continuously cited as a critical need. Several of the town's parks could be updated, expanded and improved to better suit the community's needs. In addition to the improvement of existing facilities, the need for new facilities has also been identified, particularly with regard to additional athletic facilities, tennis courts and the development of a spray park. The recent Beachgrounds Park renovations have done a great deal to improve the town's parks and playground network, but some improvements, such as the Town Farm athletic fields, still need to be completed. Though state bond monies have been designated for Buttery Brook Park, it may be

some time before the state economy improves enough for the monies to be released. In the meantime, renewed efforts to revitalize the Park must be emphasized.

Both the surveys and public meetings consistently indicated that residents often take their children to better parks located in Granby, Belchertown and Amherst, and that residents tend to be very dissatisfied with the condition of South Hadley’s parks. In addition to buildings and parks, residents participating in the Plan development also raised concerns about the inconsistent availability of sidewalks, the need to maintain and enhance street trees, and the importance of aesthetic enhancement for revitalization of South Hadley Falls. Roadways and sidewalk needs are addressed in Chapter 8, Transportation and Transit.

**Scattered Facilities and Communication Needs:** The scattered nature of the town’s conservation areas, parks and waterways also emerged as a limitation on the open space and recreation experience in town (see Map Appendix). The dispersal of open space, conservation areas and recreational facilities throughout town has the potential benefit of resulting in good access for many of the town residents. Having so many scattered facilities, however, can also be challenging when it comes to maintaining, marketing, and advertising such facilities. Instead of exclusively focusing on a few large parcels, the Town must plan for the continued maintenance and development of diverse spaces. Underutilization of these facilities has been identified as a concern by many residents for the following reasons:

- Lack of advertising and marketing of open space and recreation opportunities/spaces
- Parks are small and scattered, with no place to use as a gathering place
- Lack of opportunities for young children to play
- Poor enforcement of rules and regulations of these areas
- Lack of awareness
- Lack of off-season opportunities

Effective communication of the passive and active recreational opportunities available in South Hadley is critical to the optimization of existing resources. The centralization of this information into one document, brochure or webpage can provide residents and visitors a wealth of easily accessible information. The development of an effective, town-wide communication strategy is identified as a goal in the *Municipal Services and Facilities* Chapter as well as this Chapter, and warrants serious consideration.

**Small Parks and Play Areas:** Increased active recreation areas, as noted in the previous section, have been identified as an important community need. However, in addition to the expansion of the town’s formal playing fields, smaller urban parks are much needed. Often located within a heavily developed residential area, small urban parks often provide free play opportunities for children within a small radius of their dwelling area. Though these areas may not be sufficient to accommodate organized games, they can provide a play space that may house play equipment, or simply



provide a safe, open space for its users. The development of these play areas can often have many positive effects on the greater society such as improved community livability, increased property values, and improved attractiveness and they can add to the charm and character of the town.

**Maintenance and Facility Planning:** In addition, the following specific recommendations related to open space and recreation continually were cited during the Plan development process. These have been incorporated into the recommendations of the *Municipal Services & Facilities* Chapter of this Plan under Public Buildings and Common Areas:

- Consider reorganization of departments and commissions to create a centralized municipal unit for planning and management of parks and recreation facilities, landscaping and tree maintenance, and volunteers;
- In facilities planning, focus on (1) expanding public access to the river and waterfront for active and passive recreation; and (2) increasing connectivity through the Falls to the foothills of Mount Holyoke, other trail systems, and public transportation.

While the acquisition of new open space can increase the amount of open space in the community, the maintenance and preservation of existing open space is also a topic of concern. Presently, the maintenance and preservation of open space – and enforcement of rules and regulations to protect the integrity and public use of these areas - is constrained, in part, by a combination of funding and resources. For example, there are no funds available to hire stewards to monitor conservation lands or to enforce use rules on public lands. As a result, many of the open space areas are being abused by users or vandalized. Increased enforcement and education of these areas is critical. Education has also been identified as one method to address the community's lack of awareness regarding the importance and significance of wetlands.

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## Pathways and Connections

Closely related to the fragmentation issue is the need for a greater emphasis on, and investment in, the linkages and pathways among recreation and open space areas. There are several opportunities identified in The Plan to do so. In conjunction with other Chapters of this Comprehensive Plan, a concerted effort should be made to improve the connectivity of the open space and recreation network. Consistent with the town's goals to promote more sustainable practices and lead by example, the town should pay particular attention to improving connectivity between these spaces via non-motorized modes of transportation. This can have profound impacts on the transportation network and result in many social benefits as well.

At the same time, it will be important for the town and public to recognize instances where pathways and connections are not appropriate, and lands must be set aside to

protect sensitive habitats and areas that harbor rare species, including parts of Bachelor Brook and the Connecticut River.

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## Connecticut River Waterfront & Mount Holyoke Range

South Hadley is fortunate to be comprised of such a diversity of landscapes. The Connecticut River, Mount Holyoke Range, and agricultural land have been identified as the primary areas of interest to ensure the continued success of conservation and preservation efforts, as well as the development of recreational opportunities in the town.

The **Connecticut River** serves as the western boundary for a large portion of the town, is integral to the character of South Hadley Falls, and presents numerous scenic vistas and recreational opportunities. However, access to the river is severely limited due to constraints with the natural landscape. The steep slope of the riverbank presents many challenges for access to the river. Planning for increased recreation access to not only the Connecticut River, but also local waterways in and through Town, has been cited as a priority consideration.

The **Mount Holyoke Range** is home to a diversity of species and has a long history in the region. In addition to its rich environment, the Mount Holyoke Range provides the visual backdrop for the town, thus setting the stage and contributing significantly to its value. Identified as a heritage landscape, the continued quality of this asset is largely dependent on limited development. Scattered ownership of public and private, protected and unprotected, properties on the Range is a concern.

The development of private parcels along the Range can have a significant impact on the town and its identity and character.

### LEARNING FROM NEIGHBORS

The Town of Falmouth (Massachusetts), located on scenic Cape Cod, relies heavily on a strong tourism population for the continued economic welfare of the Town. Due to its location and ample recreational activities, the Town of Falmouth Chamber of Commerce has developed an extensive Guidebook<sup>1</sup> to help guide visitors and residents alike in and around the Town to its many opportunities and events. The primary objective of the Guidebook is to draw visitors to the town and maximize the use of its resources, aiding in increasing tourism.

<http://www.falmouthchamber.com/documents/FalmouthChamber2008-GuideBook.pdf>

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## Working Landscapes

Working Landscape is a general term which is used to refer to working farms and managed forests, or areas of preservation which result in the continued production of some natural resource. While the costs and responsibility of land stewardship falls on the property owner, the benefits of working landscapes often serve larger community goals as well.

Dwindling agricultural land, mostly as a result of increased development, has many residents concerned. Once the cornerstone of the town's character, local farms have declined in recent years. Agricultural lands have long been identified as having rich, productive soil, which is valuable to the town's natural resources. The loss of this land has negative and potentially adverse consequences for the environment as well as the character of the town.

It should be noted that fruit and vegetable farming are gaining a new foothold in other parts of the Pioneer Valley and could provide new opportunities for profitable farming throughout the region. There is also a history of wine production in the Pioneer Valley that goes back to the 1800s.

The preservation of larger tracts of open space is integral to the identity, health and well-being of the town. While the town has actively and effectively sought to maintain and acquire open space, particularly in the northern sections of the town, acquisition and easement protection is an ongoing process that must be constantly evaluated. The Agricultural Commission and Right-to-Farm Bylaw are important to this goal.

## Open Space and Recreation Recommendations

The following Goals, Objectives, and Recommended Actions inform the overarching themes of OSR Vision/Planning and Communication.

OSR-1	Establish an ongoing, comprehensive, municipal planning process to implement the vision outlined in this Comprehensive Plan and identify trends, opportunities and strategies for meeting future needs.
OSR-2	Improve connectivity between and among the town's open space and recreation areas, adding walking and biking opportunities wherever possible.
OSR-3	Appropriate active use of South Hadley's working landscapes, including farms, forests, and the riverfront.
OSR-4	Protect the visual and physical integrity of the Mount Holyoke Range, while providing appropriate public access.
OSR-5	Provide safe, convenient and well managed access to the river for recreation.
OSR-6	Effective management of the town's parks and recreation facilities.
OSR-7	Integrated communications that provide residents with clear and useful information about all public recreation opportunities, facilities, parks, and open spaces.
OSR-8	Address appropriate open space, natural resource, and recreation needs on a regional basis by promoting effective relationships and partnerships with regional agencies.

**OSR-1: Establish an ongoing, comprehensive, municipal planning process to implement the vision outlined in this Comprehensive Plan and identify trends, opportunities and strategies for meeting future needs.**

**Objective 1-1:** Develop and implement an open space strategy, including acquisition and landscape management, that is compatible with a long-term vision for South Hadley's recreation facilities, parks, community aesthetics, and economic development.

**Recommended Action 1-1-1:** Appoint an open space committee or other integrated commission to support overall land management within South Hadley and to provide an effective liaison with a sustainability committee or task force.

**Recommended Action 1-1-2:** Develop a coordinated vision for the management of South Hadley's open space and recreation lands that is consistent with the plan principles of sustainability, communications, and leading by example.

**Recommended Action 1-1-3:** Incorporate and emphasize future economic development of the Falls area in Open Space, Natural Resource, and Recreation planning and programming.

**Recommended Action 1-1-4:** Utilize coordinated private and public efforts in pursuit of open space conservation projects, natural resource protection, and recreation development initiatives.

**Objective 1-2:** Establish and fund a tree stewardship program.

**Recommended Action 1-2-1:** Establish a tree planting program for public rights of way and land.

**Recommended Action 1-2-2:** Inventory and map Heritage Trees.

**Recommended Action 1-2-3:** Adopt regulations that will ensure preservation of significant specimen trees during and/or after development.

**Recommended Action 1-2-4:** Establish a tree fund and/or landscaping contribution requirement for new development.

**Recommended Action 1-2-5:** Establish a full-time, professional Tree Warden position.

**Objective 1-3:** Develop and implement a long-term vision for community recreation needs.

**Recommended Action 1-3-1:** Develop a coordinated vision for meeting South Hadley's community recreation needs that is consistent with the plan principles of sustainability, communications, and leading by example.

**Recommended Action 1-3-2:** Make the Beachgrounds Park improvement program integral to South Hadley Falls redevelopment efforts.

**Recommended Action 1-3-3:** Create 'pocket park' facilities within the heavily developed neighborhoods.

**Recommended Action 1-2-4:** Coordinate with Mount Holyoke College to identify additional facilities available for public use or rental.

**Objective 1-4:** Plan for new and/or expanded use of facilities that will meet the needs of South Hadley's residents as the town grows and changes.

**Recommended Action 1-4-1:** Initiate planning for a year-round multi-purpose community/recreation center in collaboration with other local agencies.

**Recommended Action 1-4-2:** Based on recreation surveys and open space/park plans and vision, evaluate the need and best locations for additional athletic fields, tennis courts, and an indoor pool.

**Objective 1-5:** Promote utilization of small spaces for open space and recreation uses, such as pocket parks, gardens, or community agriculture.

**Recommended Action 1-5-1:** Inventory vacant and under-utilized spaces, especially publicly owned spaces, for their potential to be used as parks or gardens.

**Recommended Action 1-5-2:** Develop a technical assistance relationship with UMass and others regarding community supported agriculture and/or community gardening to expand neighborhood use of park and open spaces.

**Objective 1-6:** Effective implementation of community strategy for meeting open space and recreation acquisition and facility priorities.

**Recommended Action 1-6-1:** Evaluate lands acquired through Tax Title foreclosure for their conservation and recreation benefit.

**Recommended Action 1-6-2:** Create a dedicated funding source for implementation of Open Space and Recreation priorities, including adoption of the Community Preservation Act.

**OSR-2: Improve connectivity between and among the Town's open space and recreation areas, adding walking and biking opportunities wherever possible.**

**Objective 2-1:** Make enhanced connectivity a key element of coordinated open space and recreation planning.

**Recommended Action 2-1-1:** Work to achieve local and regional connectivity as new bike lanes and walking paths are developed.

**Recommended Action 2-1-2:** Work to achieve connectivity between walking and hiking trails, playgrounds, and key conservation areas suitable for passive recreation.

**Objective 2-2:** Provide neighborhood parks and gathering spaces connected by paths and sidewalks.

**Recommended Action 2-2-1:** Create a GIS-based inventory of neighborhood parks or under-utilized lands and their proximity to residential areas and pathways, to identify potential areas for small parks and sidewalk or path linkages.

*Recommended Action 2-2-2:* Amend local bylaws and regulations to include requirements for parks and path or sidewalk connections to be included in new residential or mixed-use developments.

**OSR-3: Appropriate active use of South Hadley's working landscapes, including farms, forests, and the riverfront.**

**Objective 3-1:** Continue outreach to property owners, farmers, and foresters to find opportunities for conservation that accomplish public and private goals.

*Recommended Action 3-1-1:* Utilize grants and partnerships to continue to accomplish its open space conservation goals.

*Recommended Action 3-1-2:* Identify parcels and property owners located in valuable landscapes.

*Recommended Action 3-1-3:* Provide accurate information to property owners that support conservation goals and individual and community educational initiatives.

**Objective 3-2:** Support the Agricultural Commission and encourage appropriate use of Chapter 61 and 61A filings along with APR opportunities.

*Recommended Action 3-2-1:* Provide staffing support for the Agricultural Commission.

*Recommended Action 3-2-2:* Enhance the Agricultural Commission web page on the Town's website and include access to information regarding the Chapter 61 and 61A and APR programs.

**OSR-4: Protect the visual and physical integrity of the Mount Holyoke Range, while providing appropriate public access.**

**Objective 4-1:** Gain a full understanding of the existing level of protection and the potential actions that could affect the visual and environmental quality of the Range.

*Recommended Action 4-1-1:* Research and map the current status of easements, state ownership, and private ownership of parcels within the Mount Holyoke Range.

*Recommended Action 4-1-2:* Identify parcels that lie within the Ultimate Acquisition Boundary outlined by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

*Recommended Action 4-1-3:* Identify priority areas for preservation and priority conservation funding.

**Recommended Action 4-1-4:** Identify economic development activities which are compatible with the character of the Pearl Street corridor (as described in the Land Use and Community Design chapter) and areas which would be appropriate for such activities.

**Objective 4-2:** If development activity is proposed on the Mount Holyoke Range, ensure it will not detract from the historic visual character and environmental function of the Range.

**Recommended Action 4-2-1:** Identify environmentally sensitive parcels of land that may be vulnerable (i.e. are not permanently protected) to development activity that lie within the Mount Holyoke Range.

**Recommended Action 4-2-2:** Initiate activities to permanently protect parcels which are environmentally sensitive and vulnerable to development.

**Recommended Action 4-2-3:** Continue efforts and partnerships to permanently protect lands in the Mount Holyoke Range.

**Recommended Action 4-2-4:** Explore designation of the Mount Holyoke Range as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

**OSR-5: Provide safe, convenient and well managed access to the river for recreation.**

**Objective 5-1:** Maximize recreational access to, and use opportunity for, the Connecticut River consistent with protecting water quality, and wildlife values.

**Recommended Action 5-1-1:** Evaluate and identify new or expanded access opportunities.

**Recommended Action 5-1-2:** Provide information on access and availability of boat launches and access points that are suitable for public use.

**Recommended Action 5-1-3:** Increase safety of these facilities by properly maintaining water safety signage and lighting.

**Recommended Action 5-1-4:** Ensure that all recreation areas have effective solid waste management.



**OSR-6: Effective management of the town's parks and recreation facilities.**

**Objective 6-1:** (also in Municipal Services & Facilities): Manage all of the town's parks and recreation facilities in a coordinated manner that supports a strategic vision for these resources.

*Recommended Action 6-1-1:* Set measurable goals and investment targets for improving all parks and recreation areas, and improving overall management of recreational facilities.

*Recommended Action 6-1-2:* In conjunction with a strong public management program, explore ways to add volunteer efforts to support park and open space maintenance and stewardship, such as fundraising, gardening and maintenance, and education and outreach projects.

*Recommended Action 6-1-3:* Plan for and improve the efficiency and financial stability of The Ledges Golf Course, potentially including expanded non-golfing uses such as wintertime cross-country skiing and other wintertime activities/events.

*Recommended Action 6-1-4:* Improve utilization of the Town Common for community events.

*Recommended Action 6-1-5:* Municipal oversight and coordination of planning, maintenance, volunteer work, and expansion efforts for all recreation facilities and activities currently managed by the DPW, Recreation Commission, and other entities.

**OSR-7: Integrated communications that provide residents with clear and useful information about all public recreation opportunities, facilities, parks, and open spaces.**

**Objective 7-1:** Improve and distribute information resources on parks and recreation both for internal planning and management, and for public use.

*Recommended Action 7-1-1:* Develop a comprehensive catalogue of open space resources, and make the information available on line in a user-friendly format; however, any such resource must clearly state access limitations (such as which facilities are open to public use, which have provisions for public trails and access, and which are private and/or have sensitive habitat considerations).

*Recommended Action 7-1-2:* Develop meaningful and effective information delivery methods (such as the town's website and community access television) to ensure that town residents and visitors are aware of and can easily find and use the town's network of parks, trails, and publicly accessible open lands.

**Recommended Action 7-1-3:** Improve information delivery and customer service on recreation and open space resources by “cross-training” town hall staff on recreation and open space planning, maintenance, and resources.

**Recommended Action 7-1-4:** Identify broadly knowledgeable “gatekeepers” who have a marketing and information mindset who can field inquiries, assess information needs, make connections across departments, and collect information for the town’s website and other information delivery vehicles.

**Recommended Action 7-1-5:** Create a communications committee of knowledgeable community members to provide expertise and guidance and to share, aggregate, and deliver information to the public.

**Recommended Action 7-1-6:** Disseminate information regarding the community’s open space and recreation resources and needs (including Mount Holyoke College and other community institutions).

**OSR-8: Address appropriate open space, natural resource, and recreation needs on a regional basis by promoting effective relationships and partnerships with regional agencies.**

**Objective 8-1:** Ensure that South Hadley’s plans and goals are communicated to and coordinated with those of adjacent towns and regional agencies.

**Recommended Action 8-1-1:** Share plans for natural resources, open space and recreation with neighboring communities, community institutions/organizations, and appropriate regional entities.

**Recommended Action 8-1-2:** Set up liaison activities with neighboring communities and community institutions/organizations.

**Objective 8-2:** To connect South Hadley’s recreation and conservation efforts to those in other adjacent communities wherever possible.

**Recommended Action 8-2-1:** Identify potential linkage opportunities with other communities and share this information with neighboring communities.