

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

INTRODUCTION

Open space is essential to the quality of life within Dunstable and should be viewed as the “green infrastructure” that supports and links the built and natural environments. Open space consists of a network of waterways, wetlands, woodland and forests, parks, conservation lands, and working farms. It provides ecological, social, economic, and health benefits that can be described as follows: ¹

- **Ecological benefits:** Open space provides natural water filtration, drinking water protection, flood and erosion control, wildlife habitat, migration stopovers, and biodiversity. Biodiversity includes genetics, species, ecosystems and ecological processes.
- **Social benefits:** Open space contributes to residents’ quality of life, by providing opportunities for recreational, civic, social and educational interactions. It contributes to community identity and sense of place, by connecting residents to their natural and cultural heritage, and by linking neighborhoods to the larger community.
- **Economic benefits:** Open space is important for attracting and maintaining businesses in a community and a region. Proximity to open space often increases land values, and recreation and leisure activities can make significant economic contributions. In addition, natural processes such as water filtration are much less expensive than engineered alternatives such as water treatment plants.

Open Space and Recreation Goals

- Continue to acquire open space, as opportunities arise and resources allow
- Connect Dunstable’s open space and recreation lands through a network of trails and pathways
- Develop a Town energy plan and policy focused on renewable energy

¹ American Planning Association, “Seven Principles of Green Infrastructure”.

- **Health benefits:** Access to parks, greenways and trails creates recreational opportunities and encourages a physically active lifestyle. Open space helps to ensure clean and safe water supplies and food production resources. It also mitigates air, water and noise pollution.

Dunstable's green infrastructure should be managed and enhanced on an ongoing basis, in order to support natural systems, protect groundwater, minimize flooding, build community, and increase the well-being of its residents. This section of the Master Plan provides an overview of the Town's lands of conservation and recreation interest, and articulates the needs of the community, based on input received during the public input and plan development processes.

HISTORY OF OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLANNING IN DUNSTABLE

Dunstable has been engaged in Open Space and Recreation Planning since the completion of its first Open Space and Recreation Plan in 1976. The 1976 plan described residents' concerns regarding the vulnerability of the town's rural character as a result of future land development. In 1990, the Town formed the Rural Design Study Committee, comprised of representatives from the Board of Selectmen, Historical Commission, Conservation Commission and Planning Board. The Committee hired a consultant to prepare a Rural Landscape and Design Study and to formulate recommendations for revising the town bylaws and regulations.

In 2005, the Town prepared an updated Open Space and Recreation Plan that laid out goals for preserving open space lands, creating recreation opportunities, maintaining the town's agricultural and scenic landscape, and protecting natural resources. The 2005 Plan resulted in the adoption of the Community Preservation Act (CPA), the purchase of Flat Rock Conservation Area, an improved entrance to the Arched Bridge Conservation land, improvements at Blanchard Hill, improved management of several forested conservation parcels, development of a Forest Management Plan for the Flat Rock Hill Conservation Area, and the purchase of the Howard's Brook Conservation Area.

In 2010, the town updated the 2005 Open Space and Recreation Plan. The new Plan stressed the importance of preserving Dunstable's many hilltops, including Blanchard, Drake, Horse, Nuttings and Spectacle Hills. The 2010 Plan also focused on the protection of scenic roads through the preservation of shade trees, stone walls, historic sites, and open fields. The protection of marsh and pond shorelines, preservation of forest lands, and addressing the visual quality of new residential development were also identified as priorities. The Town will update the 2010 Plan over the next several months.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

For purposes of the Master Plan, open space is defined as land that, for the most part, is free of structures. As shown in Table __ below, 4,821.21 acres within Dunstable are classified as open space, of which 3,045.20 acres are considered to be permanently protected. Forty years ago, Dunstable only had 341 acres of Conservation Land, according to the town's *1976 Open Space and Recreation Plan*. By 1998, there were 1,600 acres of permanently protected open space in Dunstable, and by 2010, that number increased to 2,763 acres.²

Table __ : 2017 Open Space Acreage by Ownership/Category

Ownership/Category	Acreage
Commonwealth of Massachusetts	551.31
Town of Dunstable (protected)	1,079.51
Dunstable Rural Land Trust	767.90
Conservation Restrictions	397.44
Water Department Lands	25.28
Cemeteries	28.23
Chapter 61	421.86
Chapter 61A	1,146.07
Chapter 61B	30.44
Institutional, Other Non-profit, Private	50.87
Agricultural Preservation Restrictions	249.04
Other Town-owned (unprotected or protection status unknown)	73.26
Total 4,821.21	

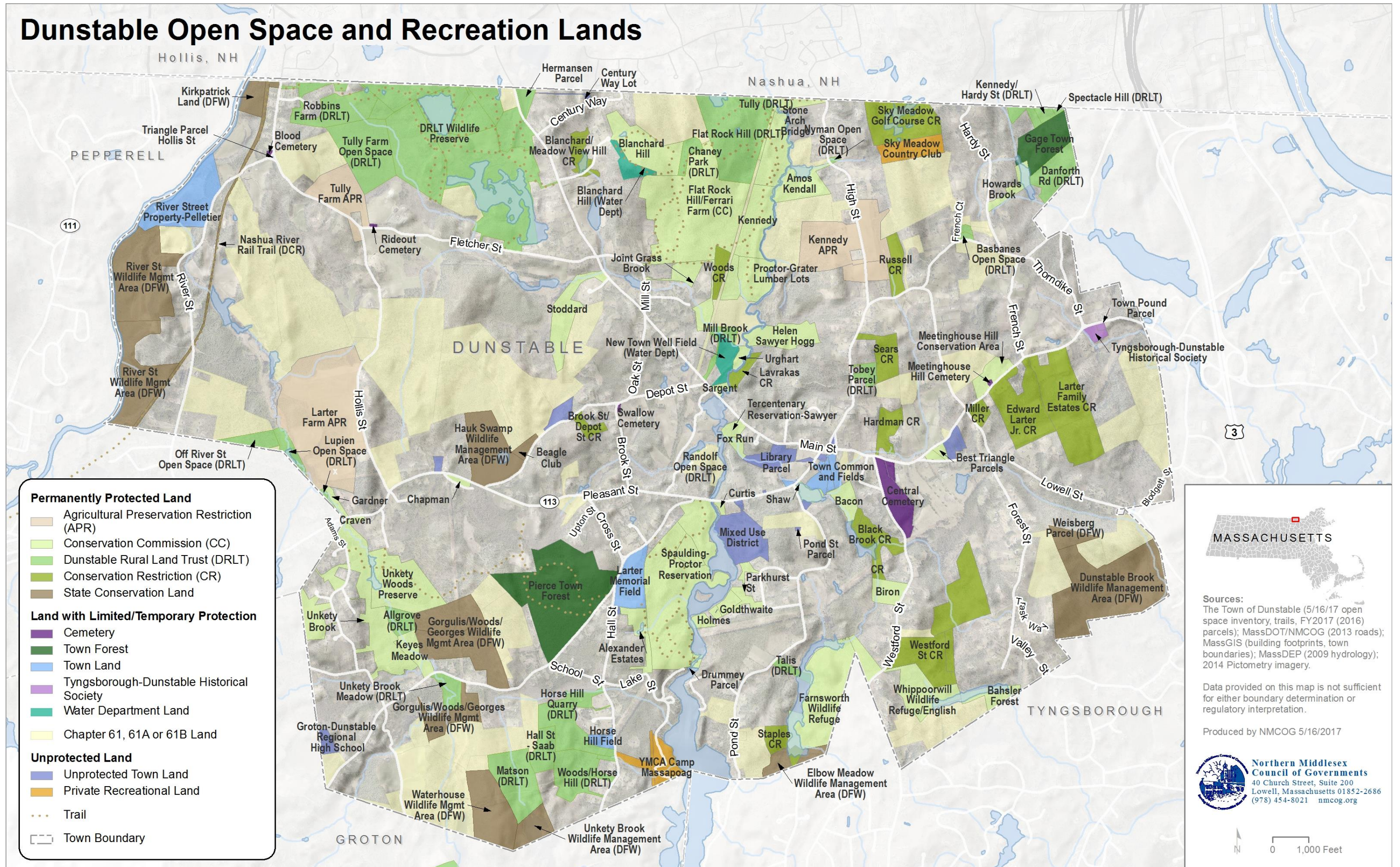
As part of the Master Plan process, NMCOG staff updated the town's inventory of lands of conservation and recreation interest through an analysis of the Assessor's database, with input from town staff and officials, and from the Master Plan Committee. A copy of the complete inventory can be found in Appendix __. The open space and recreation parcels are shown on Map__. Additional information regarding individual properties can be found in the *2010 Dunstable Open Space and Recreation Plan*.

PERMANENTLY PROTECTED OPEN SPACE

Permanently protected lands include state lands and municipal properties subject to Article 97, a conservation restriction or other deed restriction, as well as private properties subject to a conservation restriction, agricultural preservation restriction or deed restriction. Unprotected lands of conservation and recreation interest include those that are held for open space, historic, or recreation purposes, but are not permanently

² Town of Dunstable, *2010 Open Space and Recreation Plan*, p. 75.

Dunstable Open Space and Recreation Lands



protected. Parcels that are under a Chapter 61, 61A or 61B agreement are considered to have limited protection.

Protected open space provides a number of important benefits to the community, including water supply protection, flood prevention, reducing the impacts of climate change, preservation of natural resources and wildlife habitat, creation of recreational opportunities, and retention of rural character.

TOWN-OWNED LANDS

The Conservation Commission holds 911.32 acres within 43 parcels, as shown in Table __ below. These parcels have been acquired through various means including by gift/donation, acquisition using town budget appropriations, state grants, CPA funding, private funding, and by tax title. Properties held by the Conservation Commission are protected under Article 97 of the state constitution. Article 97 provides that land held for conservation and natural resource purposes may not be transferred, disposed of, or used for other municipal or private purposes without a majority vote of the Board of Selectmen, a two-thirds vote of Town Meeting, a two-thirds roll call vote of both Houses of the State Legislature, and the Governor's signature.

Table __: Land Held by the Dunstable Conservation Commission³

Site Name	Location	Acreage
Alexander Estates	0 Hall St	13.89
Amos Kendall Conservation Area	422 High St	25.16
Bacon Conservation Area	0 Westford St	11.4
Bahsler Forest Conservation Area	580 Forest St	17.78
Best Triangle Parcels	350 and 360 Main St	4.36
Biron Conservation Area	0 Westford St	10
Blanchard Hill Conservation Area	95 Sky Top Ln	39.38
Chapman Conservation Area	0 Pleasant St	1.7
Craven Conservation Area	0 Pleasant St	2.22
Curtis Conservation Area	184 Pleasant St	2.0
Farnsworth Wildlife Refuge	0 Westford St	94.3
Flat Rock Hill/Ferrari Farm (CC)	0 Mill St	148.0
Fox Run Conservation Area	0 Pleasant St	2.14
Gardner Conservation Area	0 Pleasant St	3.0
Goldthwaite Conservation Area	0 Pond St	1.3
Helen Sawyer Hogg Conservation Area	0 High St	27
Holmes Conservation Area	0 Pond St	5.0

³ Some conservation areas are comprised of more than one tax parcel.

Table __ (cont'd): Conservation Areas Held by the Dunstable Conservation Commission

Site Name	Location	Acreage
Howards Brook Conservation Area and CR	73 Hardy St	10.89
Joint Grass Brook Conservation Area	45 Mill St	21.16
Kennedy Conservation Area	0 Main St	17.0
Kennedy Conservation Area	0 High St	33.0
Keyes Meadow Conservation Area	0 Groton St	18.0
Meetinghouse Hill Conservation Area	0 Main Street	13.48
Parkhurst Street Conservation Area	0 Parkhurst Rd	16.58
Proctor-Grater Lumber Lots	0 Mill St	30.0
Sargent Conservation Area	0 Main St	3.0
Shaw Conservation Area	0 Pleasant St	5.0
Spaulding-Proctor Reservation	0 Groton St	94.0
Spaulding-Proctor Reservation	0 Pond St	2.44
Stoddard Conservation Area and CR	934 Main St	32.01
Stone Arch Bridge Conservation Area	0 High St	12.24
Tercentenary Reservation-Sawyer	0 Main St	5.0
Whippoorwill Wildlife Refuge/English	0 Westford St	34.0
Unkety Woods Preserve	65 Woods Ct	62.0
Unkety Brook Conservation Area	89 Adams St	27.04
Unkety Brook Conservation Area	20 Adams St	61.82
Urghart Conservation Area	0 Main St	4.0

Source: NMCOG GIS and Dunstable Assessor database

In addition to the above parcels, the Town also owns the 37-acre Gage Town Forest located on Hardy Street and the 131-acre Pierce Forest located on Groton Street. Other town-owned lands that are unlikely to be developed in the future include the cemeteries (28.23 acres) and Larter Recreation Area (26.3 acres) located on Groton Street. The Dunstable Water Department owns two parcels: Blanchard Hill on Skytop Lane (10.89 acres) and the new town well field located on Main Street (14.39 acres).

State Lands

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts owns fourteen (14) parcels of open space in Dunstable, comprising 545.31 acres within ten (11) conservation/recreation areas. These lands are permanently protected, and most are controlled by the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW), with the exception of the Nashua River Trail right-of-way, which is controlled by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). As shown in Table __ on the following page, the three largest areas include the Dunstable Brook Wildlife Management Area on Lowell Street (125.4 acres), River Street Wildlife Management Area (140.4 acres) on River Street and Chapman Street, and the Grogulis/Woods/Georges Wildlife Management Area on Groton Street (102 acres).

Table __: State-owned Open Space in Dunstable

Conservation Area/Facility	State Agency	Location	Acres
Beagle Club	DFW	275 Depot Street	6.0
Dunstable Brook Wildlife Management Area-Larter	DFW	Lowell Street	125.4
Elbow Meadow Wildlife-Fitch	DFW	Pond Street	12.83
Gorgulis/Woods/Georges Wildlife Management Area	DFW	Groton Street	102.0
Hauk Swamp Wildlife Management Area	DFW	Pleasant Street	55
Kirkpatrick Conservation Area	DFW	Hollis Street	14.97
Nashua River Rail Trail	DCR	Hollis Street	20.2
River Street Wildlife Management Area	DFW	211 River Street/ Chapman Street	140.41
Unkety Brook Wildlife Management Area	DFW	Kemp Street	17.5
Waterhouse Wildlife Management Area	DFW	Kemp Street	47.0
Weisberg Parcel	DFW	Forest Street	10.0

Source: NMCOG GIS and Dunstable Assessor database

CONSERVATION RESTRICTIONS (CR)

A Conservation Restriction is a voluntary and legally binding document through which a land owner agrees to limit the use of his or her property for the purpose of protecting the conservation value of the land. The land owner receives an immediate tax deduction, and the grantee, usually a non-profit or municipal entity, receives assurance that the land will not be developed. There are thirty-three (33) privately-owned, permanently protected parcels, totaling 397.44 acres, subject to a CR, as outlined in Table __ below.

Table __: Conservation Restrictions in Dunstable

Conservation Restrictions	Location	Acreage
Black Brook CR	Westford Street	25.50 (8 parcels)
Blanchard Hill CR	Sky Top Lane	13.36 (10 parcels)
Brook Street/Depot Street CR	98 Brook Street	6.95
Edward Larter Jr. CR	194 Main Street	53.72
Hardman CR	437 Main Street	14.33
Larter Family Estates CR	134 Main Street	75.52
Lavrakas CR	102 High Street	10.40
Miller CR	280 Main Street	4.67
Miller CR	214 Forest Street	2.05
Russell CR	Thorndike Street	14.74
Sears CR	171 High Street	15.00
Sky Meadow Golf Course	Hardy Street	49.27
Staples CR	328 Pond Street	15.06
Westford Street CR	Westford Street	86.87 (4 parcels)
Woods CR	Main Street	10.00
Total		397.44

Source: NMCOG GIS and Dunstable Assessor database

Land Trust Parcels

As shown in Table __ below, the Dunstable Rural Land Trust (DRLT) owns thirty-eight (38) parcels totaling 767.9 acres within Dunstable. The largest land area held by the Trust is the DRLT Wildlife Preserve (323.9 acres) on Main Street and Hollis Streets. The mission of the Dunstable Rural Land Trust is to preserve and protect the rural character of the Town by preserving open spaces. The DRLT also owns land in Groton and Pepperell.

Table __: Dunstable Lands Held by the Dunstable Rural Land Trust

DRLT Properties	Location	Acreage
Allgrove Open Space	Groton Street	15.00
Basbanes Open Space	5 and 15 French Court	4.03 (2 parcels)
Chaney Park	Main Street	8.00
Danforth Road Parcel	Danforth Road	24.10
DRLT Wildlife Preserve	Main Street and Hollis Street	323.91 (9 parcels)
Flat Rock Hill Quarry Open Space	Main Street	86.00
Hall Street (Saab) Open Space	Hall Street	18.00
Hermansen Parcel	Main Street	6.05
Horse Hill Quarry Open Space & CR	Hall Street	38.15
Kennedy/Hardy Street Open Space	Hardy Street	11.87 (3 parcels)
Lupien Open Space	Pleasant Street	6.00
Matson Open Space	Hall Street	45.00
Mil Brook Open Space & CR	721 Main Street	7.24
Nyman Open Space	427 High Street	1.03
Off River Street Open Space	River Street	11.50
Randolph Open Space	Sweets Pond Road	0.16
Robbins Farm Open Space	Robbins Farm Road	36.86
Spectacle Hill	Hardy Street	1.04
Talis Open Space	296 Pond Street	4.70
Tobey Parcel	High Street	6.72
Tully Farm Open Space	Hollis Street	55.59
Tully Open Space	High Street	3.00
Unkety Brook Meadow-McGovern	Groton Street	14.00 (2 parcels)
Woods/Horse Hill Open Space	Hall Street	39.95 (3 parcels)
		Total 767.90

Source: Dunstable Assessor database

AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION RESTRICTIONS

High real estate values have increased pressure to develop what remains of agricultural lands in our communities. These lands are generally clear of forest and have topography well-suited to a variety of land use developments. Furthermore, while communities have a right of first refusal under existing Chapter 61 programs, they often lack the funds to purchase large tracts of valuable open space. Often the result is that farmlands are converted into residential subdivisions at the expense of open space, local agricultural production and community character.

As discussed in the Land Use chapter, nearly 15% of Dunstable's land area is in agricultural use. The Agricultural Preservation (APR) Program is designed to protect productive agricultural lands by establishing permanent deed restrictions, thereby protecting them from any use that might diminish the area's agricultural potential. These deed restrictions are purchased with state funds that can be matched by municipal and federal funding.

In Massachusetts, the Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) Program is a voluntary program intended to offer a non-development alternative to farmers and other owners of "prime" and "state important" agricultural land who are faced with a decision regarding future use and disposition of their farms. Towards this end, the program offers to pay farmland owners the difference between the "fair market value" and the "agricultural value" of their farmland, in exchange for a permanent deed restriction that precludes any use of the property that will have a negative impact on its agricultural viability. As shown in Table __ below, 245.88 acres of land within Dunstable have been protected through the APR program.

Table __: Agricultural Preservation Restrictions in Dunstable

APR Lands	Location	Acreage
Kennedy APR	High Street	83.45
Tully Farm	Hollis Street	35.43
Larter Farm	Hollis Street	127.00
Total		245.88

Source: Dunstable Assessor database



TULLY FARM

UNPROTECTED LANDS AND LANDS WITH LIMITED PROTECTION

Unprotected and limited protection lands include public lands currently held as open space, historic parcels, cemeteries, schools, parks, or recreation land without legal permanent protection, as well as private parcels with limited or no restrictions on development. Limited protection open space includes land covered by revocable restrictions against development or a change in use. A farm that is under a Chapter 61A agreement is an example of temporarily protected open space. Similarly, school athletic fields, or other open space on school grounds, could be converted to another use and is included within this category.

SCHOOL LANDS

There are 8.08 acres of school property in Dunstable that are not permanently protected. This includes the Swallow Union Elementary School (1.08 acres) located on Main Street, and a portion of the Groton-Dunstable Regional High School (7 acres) located on Groton Street, near the Groton line.

WATER SUPPLY LANDS

Land under the ownership of the Water Department is protected from development while the associated water supply is in use. It is important to note, however, that development of facilities related to water treatment, distribution and maintenance are allowed on these parcels, and should a drinking water source be decommissioned, the land could be sold and developed. One parcel, known as Blanchard Hill and totaling 10.89 acres, is owned by the Dunstable Water Department and classified as having limited protection. The New Town Well Field located at 711 Main Street is also included in the Water Department land holdings and encompasses 14.39 acres.

CEMETERIES

Burial ground and cemeteries are important public spaces that link us with our past. As open space becomes developed in the future, these places will remain as a haven for quiet and reflection. As shown in Table __ below, Dunstable contains 28.23 acres of cemetery lands that are unlikely to be developed in the future. Dunstable's cemeteries contain gravestones, monuments, memorials and tombs that commemorate the lives of many generations of residents, including founding members of the community, soldiers from the Revolutionary War and Civil War, veterans from other wars and conflicts, settlers, farmers and immigrants who helped build the community and the nation.

Table __ : Dunstable Cemeteries

Cemetery	Location	Acreage
Blood Cemetery	Hollis Street	0.34
Swallow Cemetery	Brook Street	0.53
Central Cemetery	Westford Street	26.42
Meetinghouse Cemetery	Main Street	0.43
Rideout Cemetery	Fletcher Street	0.51
Total		28.23

Source: Dunstable Assessors database

OTHER PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LANDS WITH UNPROTECTED OR UNKNOWN STATUS

As shown in Table __ below, there are several town-owned properties, totaling 120.87 acres, that are either unprotected or the protection status is unknown at this time. This includes the Town Common and adjoining fields. In addition, there are two lots, totaling seven acres, that are unprotected and under the ownership of the Tyngsborough-Dunstable Historical Society. The Greater Lowell YMCA also owns and operates Camp Massapoag, which comprises 21.79 acres, and is unprotected from potential future development.

Table __: Other Public and Private Lands with Unprotected or Unknown Status

Parcel Description	Address	Owner	Acreage
Drummey Parcel	0 Lower Dam Way	Town of Dunstable	0.20
Horse Hill Field	203 and 213 Hall Street	Town of Dunstable	6.25
Larter Memorial Field	80 Groton Street	Town of Dunstable	26.30
Old Town Wellfield/Old Town Scales	0 Pleasant Street	Town of Dunstable	1.59
River Street Property-Pelletier	91 River Street	Town of Dunstable	39.00
Town Common and Fields (4 parcels)	Main and Pleasant	Town of Dunstable	15.88
Century Way lot	86 Century Way	Town of Dunstable	2.12
Dump parcels	205, 225, and 245 Depot Street	Town of Dunstable	7.69
Library parcel	588 Main Street	Town of Dunstable	9.70
Pond Street parcel	0 Pond Street	Town of Dunstable	0.40
Triangle parcel	0 Hollis Street	Town of Dunstable	0.30
160 Pleasant Street	160 Pleasant Street	Town of Dunstable	1.01
30 Pond Street	30 Pond Street	Town of Dunstable	1.50
Hall Street property (parcel 13-23)	0 Hall Street	Town of Dunstable	1.24
320 Main Street	320 Main Street	Town of Dunstable	2.41
330 Main Street	330 Main Street	Town of Dunstable	2.19
340 Main Street	340 Main Street	Town of Dunstable	3.09
Camp Massapoag	Hall Street (3 parcels)	Greater Lowell Family YMCA	21.79
Tyngsborough-Dunstable Historical Society schoolhouse	64 Main Street	Tyngsborough-Dunstable Historical Society	1.00
Tyngsborough-Dunstable Historical Society	0 Main Street	Tyngsborough-Dunstable Historical Society	6.00
			149.66
Source: Dunstable Assessor database			



TOWN COMMON BANDSTAND

CHAPTER 61, 61A AND 61B PROPERTIES

Under Chapters 61, 61A and 61B of the Massachusetts General Laws (M.G.L.), a land owner who has ten (10) contiguous acres being actively used as forest (Chapter 61), or five (5) contiguous acres in active agriculture (Chapter 61A), or five (5) contiguous acres of open space/ recreational land (Chapter 61B), is entitled to certain local tax abatements. These abatements are given in exchange for the property owner retaining the land in its current use as agriculture, forest, recreation or open space. Table _ below lists all parcels classified under Chapters 61, 61A and 61B.

Table _ : Chapter 61, 61A and 61B Parcels

Chapter 61-Forest		
Parcel location	Map Block Lot	Acreage
0 High Street	15-3	48.29
52 French Court	15-42-2	75.58
0 Lowell Street	22-50	22.00
0 Pleasant Street	8-39	12.00
391 Pond Street	14-9	12.99
0 High Street	15-2	5.00
0 Forest Street	23-4	37.00
0 Main Street	10-25	60.00
0 River Street	3-3	1.00
0 Lowell Street	22-1	25.00
0 Pond Street	14-2	25.00
0 Westford Street	19-2	43.00
0 Main Street	21-2	18.00
0 Fletcher Street	5-7	20.00
440 Pond Street	14-2-1	2.00
Total Chapter 61		406.86

Table _ (cont'd): Chapter 61, 61A and 61B Parcels

Chapter 61A-Agriculture		
Parcel location	Map Block Lot	Acreage
0 Pleasant Street	12-40	15.00
0 Hollis Street	1-20	22.00
0 Hollis Street	1-21	23.00
0 Depot Street	11-18B	16.00
0 Main Street	11-18C	17.50
0 Main Street	11-89	12.34
0 Depot Street	12-105	22.55
0 High Street	17-123	6.00
0 Forest Street	17-124	9.43
0 River Street	2-10	15.00
0 River Street	1-4	100.00
0 French Street	21-18	4.00
0 Blodgett Street	21-3	20.00
0 Hollis Street	6-1	8.00
0 Hollis Street	6-2	15.00
0 Hollis Street	6-22	121.00
0 Hollis Street	6-23	10.00
0 Hollis Street	6-3	120.00
0 Depot Street	7-56	82.00
0 Groton Street	8-36	2.05
0 Groton Street	8-37	35.10
0 Groton Street	9-1-1	7.36
0 Kemp Street	9-10	41.00
0 Groton Street	9-11	7.00
0 Groton Street	9-12	15.00
0 Kemp Street	9-13	6.00
265 Depot Street	12-103	67.00
401 Pleasant Street	12-88	5.55
99 Kemp Street	9-8	2.72
0 Kemp Street	9-9	70.00
0 Pleasant Street	12-83	12.00
476 Main Street	17-30	5.06
426 High Street	15-9	11.47
221 Thorndike Street	21-22	24.40
325 Main Street	17-139	1.11
0 Blodgett Street	22-52	12.00
0 Pleasant Street	7-44	17.96
116 Thorndike Street	16-40-1	5.33
94 Forest Street	16-65, 22-86	24.57
0 Pond Street	17-51	16.00
0 Main Street	11-85	22.00
0 River Street	3-1	57.57
0 Groton Street	9-38	9.00
0 Kemp Street	9-21	2.00
0 Kemp Street	9-19	13.00
10 Kemp Street	9-20	5.00
0 Kemp Street	9-17, 9-18	20.00
0 Westford Street	18-6A	5.00
Total Chapter 61A		1161.07

Table _ (cont'd): Chapter 61, 61A and 61B Parcels

Chapter 61B-Recreation		
Parcel location	Map Block Lot	Acreage
1230 Main Street	5-12	6.63
418 Westford Street	19-1	9.56
38 Hardy Street	21-23-3	2.06
27 French Court	16-63-2	2.01
0 Forest Street	23-1	8.00
28 Hardy Street	21-23-2	2.18
		Total Chapter 61B 30.44

Dunstable currently has 1,598.37 acres of private land enrolled in the Chapter 61, 61A and 61B tax abatement programs. Over 74% of this land is in agricultural use and enrolled in the Chapter 61A program. Should the current land owners decide to sell or develop property covered under these programs, the Town of Dunstable will have an opportunity to exercise its right-of-first-refusal, or may alternatively elect to assign this right to a non-profit conservation organization or the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

A land owner who has his property classified under Chapter 61, 61A or 61B, must notify the Chief Elected Official (Board of Selectmen Chairman), the Board of Assessors, the Planning Board, the Conservation Commission, and the State Forester, when all or a portion of the land is being sold or converted to a disqualifying use.

Unfortunately, small towns in high growth areas have found that when a strong housing market drives up the value of land, farm and forest landowners have little incentive to make permanent fixed investments that might increase the productivity of traditional rural land uses but add no market value for potential future development. For this reason, Chapter 61 and Chapter 61A land is particularly vulnerable to development.

RECREATION FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS

The primary recreation goals set forth in the Town's 2010 Open Space and Recreation Plan include the following:

- Provide adequate fields for athletic and other outdoor recreational uses;
- Provide for a public swimming area;
- Assure access to the town's water bodies for fishing and boating; and
- Protect and improve the town's system of trails for foot travel, bicycling, and horseback ridings.

Given the rural nature of the town, the 2010 Plan focuses on making it easier for residents to enjoy the natural environment, thereby fostering a deeper appreciation of conservation and increasing environmental awareness.

Most of Dunstable's outdoor recreation areas are owned and maintained by the Town, the State, or private entities. As outlined previously, the Town is fortunate to have many conservation lands with trail networks. Residents appreciate the trails that exist in Dunstable today, and they are concerned about losing access to trails as new development occurs. The many open space properties in Dunstable offer a variety of passive recreation opportunities, including hiking, jogging, bird watching, mountain biking, horseback riding, and cross-country skiing. The Nashua River Rail Trail provides hiking, bicycling, jogging and horseback riding opportunities for residents. The facility is owned and managed by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation. It extends over eleven miles, from Ayer to Nashua, New Hampshire. Hiking trails on River Street connect the Rail Trail to the Robbins Farm parcels and the DRLT Wildlife Refuge.

Many of the trails would benefit from improvements, such as brush clearing and trail blazing. Improving and promoting these facilities has the potential to attract visitors and generate support for local businesses. Together, the region's visitor attractions comprise a pattern of activities commonly known as eco-tourism, a sector of the tourism industry that capitalizes on access to open space and natural areas. Dunstable could collaborate with businesses, institutions and state agencies with ties to eco-tourism to benefit the local economy.

Dunstable has an informal bridle path network that extends across public and private lands. Most of the system lies on private property, and many of the trails are on old logging roads. Users request permission to use the trails from private property owners. As the town continues to grow, some of the trail network may be lost unless efforts are undertaken to acquire easements from private owners.

Massapoag Pond, Salmon Brook and Unkety Brook are the main fishing areas in Dunstable. The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife stocks these waterbodies annually. Access is available on several conservation areas owned by the Town and the Dunstable Rural Land Trust (DRLT). Winter ice fishing is popular on Lower Massapoag Pond and on the ponds located within the DLRT Wildlife Refuge. Massapoag Pond is the most heavily used waterbody in Dunstable, but there is no public access to the Pond.

Salmon Brook is navigable throughout most of the year, by canoe or small boat. The Nashua River is also navigable, and can be accessed via the boat access/canoe launch on the Fitzpatrick Wildlife parcel. Eating the fish from the Nashua River is not advisable due to high mercury levels.

Town-owned lands used for active recreation are concentrated at the Town Fields located near the Swallow Union School or at the Larter Memorial Recreation Area. The Town Fields contain facilities for baseball, soccer, basketball, and tennis. The area also has a playground.

In 2000, the Town voted to fund construction of the Larter recreational fields and facilities on land donated by the Larter family. The Dunstable Youth Athletic Association (DYAA) also contributed \$10,000 to help the town with the construction of the fields. (The DYAA continues to contribute \$5,000-\$7,000 annually for field maintenance.)

Larter Field opened in 2003 and remains a popular community-gathering place. It is the site of Dunstable's Annual Fire Cracker Road Race, which is held on July 4th each year. Residents use the facility for walking, bicycling, roller blading, running, and sledding during the winter months. The area also contains a playground. The fields are used for youth soccer and other recreational programs. Larter Field abuts one the town's largest conservation areas, the Spaulding Proctor Reservation.

There are two privately owned recreational facilities in Dunstable. Camp Massapoag is located on Massapoag Pond and serves as a summer camp for school-aged children. Operated by the Greater Lowell YMCA, campers enjoy archery, boating, swimming, arts and craft, rock wall climbing, sports, and games.

Established in 1987, Sky Meadow Golf Course is located partly in Dunstable and partly in Nashua, New Hampshire. The 18-hole, par-72 course is privately owned and much of the property in Dunstable is protected through a Conservation Restriction.



LARTER FIELD

YOUTH SPORTS PROGRAMS

The Dunstable Youth Athletic Association runs some of the youth sports programs, including a farm league, little league, and youth basketball. There are number of other sports activities that are run jointly by Groton and Dunstable, which naturally evolved from the regional school district. The list of available programs includes the following:

- Groton-Dunstable Youth Basketball
- Groton-Dunstable Softball
- Groton-Dunstable Youth Basketball
- Groton-Dunstable Crusader Basketball Camp
- Groton-Dunstable Youth Football and Cheerleading
- Groton-Dunstable Youth Lacrosse
- Groton-Dunstable Youth Soccer
- Junior Crusader Soccer Camp

LOCAL CAPACITY

Dunstable has several organizations working to preserve open space and enhance recreation within the community. The various Town departments, boards and organizations work together to ensure that these resources are protected for future generations. Joint leadership is important in that each of the parties listed below has a role to play and represents different interest:

- The Dunstable Conservation Commission administers the Massachusetts Wetland Protection Act and the local wetlands bylaw. The Commission also acquires, holds and maintains property on behalf of the Town, in order to protect land and water resources. The Commission has one staff person who administers the permitting process and oversees day-to-day activities.
- The Planning Board is responsible for implementing the Town's Zoning Bylaw and working with developers to ensure that important conservation land and natural resources are protected during the development process.
- The Dunstable Rural Land Trust is a non-profit organization, founded in 1974, which focuses on land preservation in Dunstable. The Trust works with local landowners in an effort to determine appropriate ways to preserve the Town's remaining undeveloped properties and open areas.
- The Recreation Commission oversees the active recreation programs that use town fields, in cooperation with the Groton-Regional School District. The Commission focuses on organized sports for school-aged children.
- The Dunstable Highway Department is responsible for maintaining the town fields.

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Dunstable residents have long valued the Town's open space and recreation resources, and have consistently demonstrated their commitment through actions, such as the approval of local funding for open space acquisition and the adoption of the Community Preservation Act (CPA). As discussed in the Cultural and Natural Resources section, the Community Preservation Act (CPA) provides a source of funding for Open Space Preservation, Historic Preservation and Affordable Housing through a surcharge on the property tax. Dunstable voters have funded the following open space and recreation projects using CPA funds:

- Purchase of Ferrari Farm
- Preservation of the historic Stone Arched Bridge
- Clearing of Blanchard Hill
- Purchase of 10-acre Howard's Brook Conservation Area
- Purchase of 12-acre Best Triangle
- Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) for Tully Farm
- Conservation restriction for the Miller property
- Westford Street Conservation Restriction
- Middle School track improvements.

PUBLIC INPUT

The results of the written survey for the Master Plan indicated that the Town's residents are pleased with the open space and recreation assets in Dunstable, as indicated below:

- Over 60% of the respondents rated the number of recreational facilities and opportunities as excellent or good;
- Approximately 87% of the respondents rated the amount of protected open space as excellent or good;
- 52% of respondents favored acquiring additional open space; and
- 69% of respondents favored protecting additional agricultural lands.

The input received at the March 21, 2017 Visioning Session on Open Space and Recreation indicated that the Town's greatest strengths lie in:

- Accessible open space
- Distinctive, unique, rural character
- Farms
- Salmon Brook

- Community Preservation Funds
- Town Common
- Community support/volunteerism
- Larter Field
- Good Air Quality
- Low level of noise pollution
- Contiguous open space.

The top weaknesses identified by participants included the following:

- The town is not bikeable/walkable
- Lack of athletic facilities for older children/adults
- Limited parking at open space areas
- Tennis courts are not maintained
- Lack of funds for operation and maintenance

The top opportunities identified included:

- Farm-to-Table restaurants
- Connecting trails and safe pathways
- Bed and breakfast establishments
- Walking and biking improvements
- Promoting the farming community
- Creating playing fields next to conservation land
- Community supported agriculture (CSA)
- Eco-tourism
- Trail stewardship

The top threats included:

- Uninformed voters
- Lack of income to support initiatives
- Proposition 2 ½

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Although residents cite open space and rural landscapes as Dunstable's greatest assets, like all small towns, Dunstable will likely not have the funds to buy all of the land its residents would like to save. Should the Town develop a comprehensive resource protection strategy, to assure that limited resources will be used to meet the most important open space needs?
2. Is there a need for additional playing fields? If so, what types of fields are needed and where would they be located?
3. Should the town develop a maintenance and management plan for its conservation and recreation facilities to address such issues as allowed uses and activities, trail and facilities maintenance, and habitat management?
4. Does the Town have formalized process for addressing properties being removed from Chapter 61 status?
5. Should criteria be established for determining which board or commission should be given care and custody of parcels acquired by the Town?
6. Should the Town work toward creating a public swimming facility? If so, where would it be located?
7. How can the town identify and acquire key properties that would provide critical linkages and connectivity between its open space and recreation areas?
8. Is there more the Town could do to engage developers as partners in protecting open space and providing recreation opportunities?
9. Does the Town have an established dialogue with adjacent communities regarding common natural resource/open space protection efforts?
10. The lack of athletic facilities for older children and adults was identified as a weakness during the Visioning Sessions. What types of facilities are needed for these age groups?

11. Limited parking at open space areas was identified as a weakness. Where do you believe additional parking is most needed?

12. Should Dunstable establish an open space and trail stewardship program?