

CHAPTER 9: OPEN SPACE & AGRICULTURE

Chapter Goal

OVERVIEW

Historically an agricultural community, the landscape of Granby has been shaped, tended and preserved by the town's residents who have worked the land and acted as stewards of the businesses, fields, farms and forests for generations. The rural nature and unique beauty of the community provides a special character that cannot be found in surrounding communities.

However, while Granby currently maintains much of its traditional rural character, it is growing and has the potential of becoming a suburb of the neighboring cities of Chicopee, Holyoke, and Springfield. Its proximity to employment opportunities combined with a decline in new agricultural ventures appears to be driving the suburbanization process. Constraints such as steep slopes, particularly on the Holyoke Range, and lack of sewer infrastructure keeps major development at bay; however with new technologies becoming more affordable and available, the town will continue to face new development pressures, especially in subdivision and residential development. Residents and town officials have recognized this, and would like to put into place measures to protect and enhance the remaining agricultural lands and open space.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

For the purposes of this plan, open space is defined as land that is not intensively developed for residential, commercial, or industrial uses. It can be publicly or privately owned, and may include agricultural and forested land, undeveloped riparian areas, scenic lands, public parks and recreation areas, wetlands and water bodies. Open space also varies in its level of protection. It can be permanently protected for conservation purpose, as well as be unprotected, such as private lands enrolled in Chapter 61, 61A, or 61B which, due to low intensity use, add to the quality of open space in Granby.

The presence and arrangement of these spaces contribute to the overall rural character in Granby. Loss of these spaces to development not only influences the community's character, but affects the environmental quality of lands in Granby. Protection of open space in Granby has been a priority of town residents and officials for many years, and this master plan continues these efforts and reflects on past and future strategies.

Agricultural Resources

The existing farms in Granby are similar in size and character to other farming activities in the region. According to the 2007 U.S. Census of Agriculture, the town of Granby has 56 farm operations that provide a variety of agricultural products to the community and the region. Thirty seven (37) farms are under 50-acres and forty seven (47) farms have total sales of less than \$50,000 a year. As a result, these farms have operators who work over 200 days a year off the farm to make additional income. Only two farms in Granby have annual sales of \$250,000 or more.

	Hampden & Hampshire Counties	Granby
Total # of farms	1,219	56
Acres of land in farms	89,597	
# of farms under 50 acres	713	37
Market value of agricultural products sold	\$64,352,000	
Average per Farm	\$52,486	

Source: 2007 Census of Agriculture

The community supports a variety of farms, several of which are regionally recognized. Granby is home to a major Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm, who also sells produce at farm stands and farmers markets. A CSA is an arrangement where individuals buy into the farm at the start of the growing season and in exchange receive a share of the farm’s harvest. Shares are distributed each week throughout the season. There are also several major Pick Your Own operations in Granby that provide fruits, vegetables, nursery stocks and plants.

One of the biggest concerns in farmland protection efforts is the conversion of prime farmland to residential development. Prime farmland is defined and assessed by the United States Department of Agriculture and the Soil Conservation Service as “land best suited to producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oil seed crops”. Prime farmland produces the greatest produce yields with the least amount of economical, physical, and chemical input. In addition to requiring the least amount of input, farming these areas produces the smallest amount of damage to the environment. Prime farmland is a natural resource that once it is lost to development, it cannot be reclaimed.

The Town of Granby has a considerable amount of prime farmland, which constitutes about 35% of all land. There are some large tracts of prime farmland located in the southwest sections of town and in the northwest extending through the central part of town toward the Belchertown border. There is also a large percentage of land area that is not classified as prime farmland but is considered to be of state and local importance to farming. These areas occur around prime farmland, in the central area of town to the Belchertown border. These areas may not be as economically productive as prime farmland, but should be considered for protection.

The Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) Act has been an important tool in preserving prime farmland in Massachusetts. The state enacted legislation offers farmland owners the opportunity to be compensated for the difference between the "fair market value" and the "agricultural value" of their farmland in exchange for a permanent deed restriction that prohibits all non-agricultural development and requires continued agricultural use of the land in perpetuity. As of September 2012 the APR restriction has been used to protect 377 acres of farmland in Granby. In recent years, state funding for the APR program has been reduced, and now requires a 10% match of local funds to APR state funds.

According to the Town's Assessors Office, as of October 2009 approximately 2,709.28 acres of land in Granby are enrolled in the Chapter 61A program. Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 61A is designed to encourage the preservation of the Commonwealth's valuable farmland and promote active agricultural and horticultural land use. The program offers significant local tax benefits to property owners willing to make a long term commitment to farming. In exchange for these benefits, the city or town in which the land is located is given the right to recover some of the tax benefits afforded the owner when the land is removed from the 61A classification and an option to purchase the property should the land be sold or used for any other purpose than to continue raising farm products. While lands enrolled in the 61A program are not under permanent protection, these lands contribute to the town's rural character and open space / greenway network.

In 2006, the town of Granby established an Agricultural Commission. The Commission is a five member town committee that serves as a local voice advocating for farmers, farm businesses, and farm interests.

Activities of this commission include encouraging a diversity of sustainable agricultural undertakings in Granby; promoting agricultural economic opportunities for Granby farmers and landowners; acting as advocates, educators, negotiators and mediators for agricultural and farming issues; developing and facilitating strategies for the preservation of prime agricultural land in the Town; representing the interests of the

Town's agricultural community in town government; encouraging agriculturally based social and community functions for farmers and/or Granby residents such as ; making an annual report to town meeting and submitting a report for inclusion in the Annual town report regarding the activities of the Commission and the state of agriculture in Granby.

Through efforts spearheaded by the Agricultural Commission, a Right-to-Farm bylaw has been approved by the Granby Town Meeting in May 2010. A Right-to-Farm bylaw is a general bylaw that essentially seeks to prevent conflicts between farm operations and town residents, and that provides a dispute resolution process when such conflicts arise. Through the bylaw the town acknowledges that agriculture is an integral activity in Granby, that the citizens have the right to farm, and that the benefits of agricultural activities to the community outweigh the residual factors associated with farming such as noise, odors, dust and fumes. The bylaw encourages the pursuit of agriculture, promotes agriculture-based economics opportunities, and protects farmlands by allowing farming to continue with minimal conflict by disclosing to new property owners the existence of farming activities that might affect the vicinity.

Recently, non-periodic farmers' markets and agricultural exhibits have been organized in Granby, which could become a prelude a more active farming community. Similarly, residents and organic food enthusiasts from around the region manifest their appreciation and support by frequenting several farm stands doing business across town.

Granby residents are proud of their town's agricultural legacy. An overwhelming majority of master plan survey respondents supported many different approaches to preserving Granby's agricultural past and present. Eighty-four percent of respondents believe that preserving farmland is essential to the economic success of Granby and ask the town to encourage "specialized agricultural" businesses (such as farmers markets, organic farms, and farm stands) and adopt strategies to direct new development toward already developed areas. Participants listed "preserving farmland" as one of the top priorities for future funds that may be allocated for development purposes in Granby. A primary component of maintaining the rural character of Granby is preservation of existing farmland and prime soil areas.

Of all survey respondents, 65% favored Farmer's Markets. Other agricultural initiatives that received support included:

- Organic farms – 48%
- Farm stands -- 47%
- Livestock – 35%

- Dairy – 32%
- Nurseries – 32%
- Community Gardens – 29%

PRESERVING OPEN SPACE

Granby is a suburban town that also exhibits the characteristics of a rural community. As described in the Granby Open Space and Recreation Plan “The Town of Granby has managed, via its location and natural constraints to dense development, to retain its New England character during the 200 plus years since its incorporation. It offers respite for professionals commuting to other areas daily as well as retirees looking for quiet sustenance”. As such, the creation and preservation of open space are matters that are of utmost significance to the local government and residents alike.

Situated on the skirts of the Holyoke Mountain Range, Granby’s topography provides part of the protection for the vast open space. In recent years, Conservation Commission and the Planning Board have been actively advocating preservation of open space as an integral part of any development effort in town.

In May 2012, Granby Town Meeting approved the purchase of 148 acres of land surrounding Forge Pond, adding valuable open space and potential recreational property. The Town is in the process of applying for a Land Acquisition grant to receive reimbursement for over 60% of the cost of purchase. Acquisition of this parcel will allow hiking, canoeing, fishing, cross country skiing, and perhaps, limited wilderness camping.

Water Resources

There are two major drainage basins in Granby, divided by a line that runs irregularly from east to west. East of the center of town the line is south of Rt. 202. Three brooks enter Forge Pond with Batchelor Brook providing the most flow. Batchelor Brook enters Granby from Belchertown, and flows into Forge Pond. The two other brooks are Forge Pond Brook and Lampson Brook. Lampson Brook contributes the flow from the Belchertown Wastewater Treatment plant, causing environmental issues in Forge Pond and Aldridge Lake. From Forge Pond, Batchelor Brook flows westward along the northern edges of the central plain, being fed by Ingraham Brook. Batchelor Brook then flows into Aldrich Lake, and continues to South Hadley, through which it connects to the Connecticut River near Brunelle’s Marina. Turkey Hill Brook also flows north into Batchelor Brook, draining the hilly southeast area of town.

Most of the southern half of town drains through Stony Brook and Muddy brook, which join across the town line in Ludlow. Stony Brook then curves northwesterly, crosses the southwest corner of Granby under Rt. 202, and enters South Hadley.

There are two major bodies of water in Granby. Forge Pond, surrounded by extensive wetland areas, is located in the eastern section of town along the Belchertown line. Aldrich Pond lies in the rolling hills to the south of the Mt. Holyoke Range and is bisected by Amherst Road.

These brooks and streams, and the contiguous swampy areas, form the natural storm drainage system of the town. They are the means by which excess stormwater is carried off the land to the larger streams and rivers. As development covers more of the open land with buildings and hard surfacing, the volumes of storm runoff are increased at the same time absorptive land areas are decreased. The absorption capacity of spongy wetlands slows down the runoff and decreases the degree of stream and river flooding.

In 2004, PVPC completed an urban forestry watershed analysis for the Batchelor Brook watershed in Granby using a GIS overlay process developed by the University of Massachusetts-Amherst in cooperation with the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). This assessment tool uses commonly available GIS data to help communities identify key areas of protection for watershed health.

The watershed analysis identified over 5,000 acres of naturalized land in the sub-basin that is a priority for conservation to improve water quality. In addition, the analysis identified 635-acres of developed land for forest restoration and 648-acres for stormwater management in order to mitigate negative effects on water quality in the Batchelor Brook sub-basin.

The planning board received a final copy of the GIS watershed analysis map in December 2005, which was used to identify several properties in Granby that would benefit from a restoration planting in the future.

Sensitive Natural Resources

There are 4,420 acres of Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) BioMap Core Habitat in Granby. The Natural Heritage Program developed the BioMap to identify the areas most in need of protection in order to protect the native biodiversity of the Commonwealth. BioMap focuses primarily on state-listed rare species and exemplary natural communities but also includes the full breadth of the State's biological diversity. The goal of the BioMap is to promote strategic land

protection by producing a map showing areas that, if protected, would provide suitable habitat over the long term for the maximum number of Massachusetts terrestrial and wetland plant and animal species and natural communities. The numerous wetland areas scattered through town have great value for wildlife management and groundwater protection and add to the aesthetic value of the town.

Survey Results

The results of the Master Plan Community Survey show that Granby's citizens are concerned about open space and agricultural resources. The Survey results indicate a clear mandate for the town to take a more proactive role in matters pertaining to open space protection and agricultural resource protection and development. Any loss of remaining agricultural land would produce a negative impact upon the character of the town.

Survey respondents are very supportive of a variety of measures to protect open space in Granby. These include:

- Directing development where infrastructure exists-67%
- Change zoning to allow neighborhood stores -26%
- More sidewalks-32%
- Bike lanes-43%
- Community gardens-37%
- Mixed use zoning in village center-38%

Respondents identified a number of specific properties they want the Town to protect—top properties mentioned include:

- "Any farm land" (by far the most common response)
- Batchelor Brook
- Dufresne Park
- Seminary site
- Brown Ellison
- Ferry Hill
- Holyoke Range

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Goal 1: Protect Granby's agricultural lands for their importance to community identity, food production, open space, habitat, and the local economy.

Strategy 1: Support the Agricultural Commission and publicize its activities.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Select Board & Town Meeting

Resources Needed: a small budget for agriculture-related projects in town

Target Date for Completion: Ongoing

Strategy 2: Encourage local farmers to pursue the possibility of selling their development rights under Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) or Chapter 61A

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Agricultural Commission

Resources Needed: Dept. of Agriculture & NRCS

Target Date for Completion: Ongoing

Strategy 3: Continue to widely publicize existing farms and farm stands with brochures and directional, off-site signage.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Agricultural Commission

Resources Needed: Funding or donations for print costs.

Target Date for Completion: Ongoing

Strategy 4: Organize a periodic farmer's market to create a community gathering space and encourage residents to "buy local".

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Agricultural Commission

Resources Needed: Funding or donations for print costs.

Target Date for Completion: Ongoing

Strategy 5: Determine boundaries of Agricultural Preservation Overlay District and enforce the Open Space Communities zoning standards within the overlay.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Select Board, Board of Assessors

Resources Needed: Funding for software and analysis

Target Date for Completion: 2014

Strategy 6: Acquire farmlands / open space through grants and local appropriation.

Create local appropriation fund for open space acquisition through the adoption of the Community Preservation Act and establishment of an "Agricultural Fund" that would set aside local funds for APR match money and purchase of Chapter 61A lands.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Select Board, Town Meeting

Resources Needed: Funding for acquisition(s)

Target Date for Completion: Ongoing

Strategy 7: Support Town Farms through incentives.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Agricultural Commission, Selectboard

Resources Needed: Suspension of excise tax on agricultural farm tractors; eliminate farm animal tax (record keeping found to cost more than tax money brought into the town)

Target Date for Completion: Completed Spring 2012

Strategy 8: Create educational programs for farmers.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Agricultural Commission

Resources Needed: Manure management; grants, education in classroom, etc.

Target Date for Completion Ongoing

Goal 2: Protect ground and surface water resources in order to maintain water quality, preserve wetland areas, provide wildlife habitat and passive recreational opportunities, and minimize potential adverse environmental effects on these areas resulting from development encroachment.

Strategy 1: Conduct a public outreach campaign about the need to improve water quality and protect public water supply areas.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Conservation Commission, Selectboard, Town Administrator,

Resources Needed: Volunteer time, funding for publicity

Target Date for Completion: Ongoing

Strategy 2: Monitor water quality at sample stations located at Forge Pond and Batchelor Brook.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Conservation Commission, Board of Health

Resources Needed: Volunteer time, funds for testing

Target Date for Completion: Ongoing

Strategy 3: Establish “reduced salt” areas on a greater network of roads in Granby, prioritizing areas with sensitive habitat.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Conservation Commission, Highway Department

Resources Needed: Resource time, funds for planning

Target Date for Completion: Ongoing

Strategy 4: Work with landowners to restore and re-vegetate parcels identified through the 2004 Urban Forestry Watershed GIS analysis.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Conservation Commission, Town Administrator

Resources Needed: Resource time, funds for the outreach program

Target Date for Completion: Ongoing

Goal 3: Recognize, preserve, and encourage the connectivity of wildlife and plant habitats and corridors/greenways, critical natural resources areas, and agricultural lands.

Strategy 1: Follow the recommendations of the 2005 Open Space and Recreation Plan and support the preservation of ecological linkages and wildlife corridors.

Continue to pursue greenbelts around Batchelor Brook, Stony Brook, Turkey Hill Brook and Ingraham Brook via Conservation Restrictions, APR and outright purchase, at the rate of 50 acres a year.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Conservation Commission, Planning Board

Resources Needed: Funds for technical assistance

Target Date for Completion: Ongoing

Strategy 2: Provide inter-connections from large contiguous tracts of open space to more populated areas, with trails for people and corridors for wildlife.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Conservation Commission, Planning Board

Resources Needed: Funds for technical assistance and planning

Target Date for Completion: Ongoing

Goal 4: Ensure that future development is sited so that minimal adverse environmental and aesthetic impacts occur and the character of Granby is maintained.

Strategy 1: Adopt an Environmental Impact Analysis (EIA) requirement as part of the subdivision application process.

Determine the threshold (number of units; number of acres) that would require an EIA as part of the application process.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Conservation Commission, Planning Board

Resources Needed: Funds for technical assistance and planning

Target Date for Completion: Ongoing

Strategy 2: Adopt a Ridgeline Protection Overlay District zoning bylaw to provide maximum restrictions on development proposed for areas with severe limitation, such as the Holyoke Range.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Planning Board

Resources Needed: Funds for technical assistance

Target Date for Completion: 2014

Strategy 3: Require the preservation of open areas and trees in all new commercial development proposals and projects.

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Conservation Commission, Planning Board

Resources Needed: Funds for publicity and community outreach

Target Date for Completion: Ongoing

Strategy 4: Continue the town efforts in a community urban forestry program and take the Urban and Community Forestry Rapid Assessment Worksheet available through the Department of Conservation and Recreation to assess future needs.

In 2004, the town of Granby received a grant from the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation to conduct an urban forestry watershed analysis and adopt tree preservation standards for the town's subdivision regulations. The town can continue these efforts by providing mature tree care in the public ways, have mechanisms to protect existing canopy, and plant new trees.

The Urban and Community Forestry Rapid Assessment Worksheet is located online at <http://www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship/forestry/urban/assessCheck.pdf>

Action Steps

Responsible Party: Conservation Commission, Town Administrator, Selectboard

Resources Needed: Volunteer time, funds for technical assistance

Target Date for Completion: Ongoing